



Ferguson Has a History Museum

Ferguson has a Historical Society and a History Museum. We encourage any people reading this article to join in the conversation or become a member. Contact information is at the bottom of this article.

For the next several months our articles will steer away from places to people. The History House has a wonderful book, "History of Ferguson"-compiled by the Ferguson-Florissant School District. In it are many oral histories told by early residents of Ferguson. We are going to take a look at some of the stories told by these people. There is a note of caution, some language used may no longer be appropriate or is confusing. If needed, we will make corrections in *italics*. We will also be editing the stories for length – you can note this by a series of . . . So – enjoy these stories of Ferguson’s past.

Our featured story-teller for this month is Henry Behle – as told in 1972. “I want to talk about the history of Ferguson. It’s been my hometown all my life.” *Here Mr. Behle begins telling the story of one of Ferguson’s early doctors.* “Dr. Hereford . . there was a man from Florissant stranded in Ferguson one night. He went to Dr. Hereford and told him that his wife was seriously ill and if he would come out to Florissant to see her. . . He hooked up his horse and buggy, hopped in and took off for Florissant. . . he said a night call would be \$3.00. . . When they got to the man’s house in Florissant, the fellow got out of the buggy and handed the doctor \$3.00 and said ‘my wife is not sick’ I could not figure out any



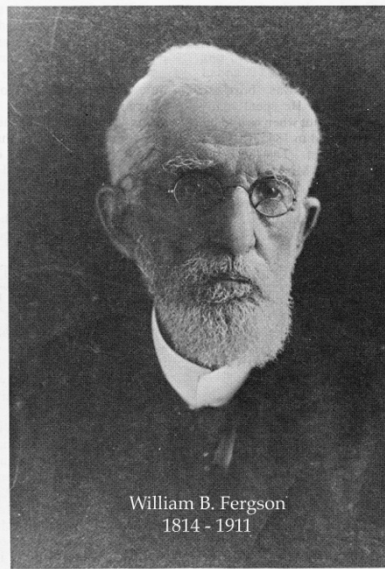
other way how to get to Florissant that night.” *Cab service was not available in early Ferguson.*



Jesse James

In a second story - “Some of the older men told me this story. There was an elderly lady . . .by the name of Mrs. Drew. . . at that time Jesse James came through *the* neighborhood and he happened to stop at the lady’s house. The lady complained to Jesse James that she was going to lose her home. Jesse said, ‘Oh, I wouldn’t let anything like that happen to you’. ‘How much money do you need?’ And she said \$800.00. He put his hand in his pocket and drew out a roll of bills, counted out

\$800.00 in cold cash and he said to the lady, 'I'll give you this money – all I want you to do is to let the man know to be here tomorrow before noon as you had his money for him and when he comes, be sure that he signs the note paid and gives you a receipt for the cash money.' The lady did what Jesse said . . . the man showed up . . . He gave her a receipt . . . and started out for home. Jesse James waited for him and held him up and took the \$800.00 away from him. *This is the only story I have heard of Jesse James being in the Ferguson area as Jesse was mainly a mid-Missouri to western Missouri person. Remember, these are stories. Jesse died in 1882 – so this encounter had to be early in Ferguson History. Jesse was often remembered as a "Robin Hood" – one who took from the rich and gave to the poor. This "Robin Hood" story was pure fiction – We now know how Jesse gave to the poor and took from the rich.*



Mr. Behle next talks quite a bit about Mr. Ferguson, namesake of the city. "The road to drive south of Ferguson was known as the Old Florissant Road years ago. It went down through the farms . . . and winding around to avoid the hills . . . and across the Moline Creek onto Elizabeth Avenue then to Washing Avenue known as the Old Florissant Road. That was the very same road Mr. Ferguson traveled in his covered wagon with his bride when he came from Ohio. He traveled the Old Florissant Road into Ferguson and landed about where J. C. Adam's home is now." Next time you head north past the old Universal Match Factory and under the railroad bridge along Elizabeth – take a look to your right and you will see the area where Ferguson actually began.

Finally, Mr. Behle tells a little more about Ferguson's beginnings and his family relationship. "When the Civil War was over and the men returned, Mr. Ferguson built a large house on Darst Road and made living quarters for my father – then there was three families living in Ferguson at that time . . . Mr. Ferguson got an engineer and laid out the streets in Ferguson and by that time the railroad was in operation and he was ready to start a city. He built small houses all along Florissant Road and along Adams Avenue – sold them, rented them – just to get a population in Ferguson. . . St. Louis wealthy. . . built 8-10 room two story home sites. . . and had to have a horse and buggy for transportation. Most of them had a cow as they could not buy milk in the stores and they had a yard man to take care of the vegetable garden, the lawn and the livestock. By 1894 it was incorporated as a city and showed that it made progress very fast." There may have been more than three residents – we do not know the year Mr. Behle is referring to as he is obviously not yet born in this story.

Next month we will feature some additional memories by early residents of Ferguson.

These Stories come from documents in the Ferguson Historical Society archives.

Membership in the Ferguson Historical Society is open to anyone – the price is \$20.00 to \$50.00 a year. If you are interested in joining or have any suggestions, questions, or items to donate to the Ferguson Historical Society, please contact Jerry Benner at fjbenner@mindspring.com. You are also welcome to visit the History Museum at 1064 Smith (behind the Community Center) by e-mailing the above address. Note: we will need to schedule a date for you, so ask well in advance.

“The Ferguson Historical Society is dedicated to preserving and promoting the history of Ferguson Missouri. Membership is open to all sharing our interest.”