

Mongo's historic Olde Store cited by U.S. Park Service

Mongo's Olde Store, a child of the rowdy, whisky-tradin' pioneer days, has found respectability in its old age.

The sturdy frame structure, remarkably unchanged since its beginning in the early 1800's, has been placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The title doesn't change things, particularly. It continues to be owned and operated by Mr. and Mrs. C. F. VanBuskirk as an antique and nostalgic browsing center.

The designation by the National Park Service does, however, prohibit any structural changes in the building through federally-funded road-widening or community improvement projects.

The new title also means that the store's colorful history is now a matter of national record. The VanBuskirks were able to supply much of that history from the store's ledgers, many of which are in tact.

Books tell the story

These account books tell a fascinating

story of the area—from the early days of bartering farmgoods, through the Civil War years, the Gay Nineties, the depression years, up to the present.

The owners, who acquired the store in 1963, say the building's integrity, both inside and out, is due largely to the fact that the earlier owners did little to change it.

The exterior has kept its Greek Revival architectural style, which had its American roots in the earliest Hudson River Valley settlers in New York state. The interior, too, has kept its early American character with its old beam and trim work, walnut counters and antique fixtures.

First white settlers

The Olde Store and its first owner played an integral role in the colorful, early history of LaGrange County and its first white settlers. The store dates back to the very first group of pioneers in Springfield Township.

The first of these was John B. Clark, in the autumn of 1830. Clark located on the west bank of Turtle Creek near the center of the township.

In the spring of 1831, L. K. Brownell, a man of some wealth, located a claim and built a dam across the Pigeon River. At the same time he began building a two-story grist-mill.

During that period, two French traders from Fort Wayne established a trading station across the river from the mill. The Frenchmen built up an extensive fur-trading business with the Pottawatomie Indians.

When Brownell realized the market possibilities, he built a large distillery near his mill. He reportedly received great profits selling whiskey to the Indians and settlers. His production in those early days was reported as 30 to 40 gallons per day.

Area drew settlers

The early "Mongoinong" (an Indian word with various interpretations, but most commonly translated as "Big Squaw") settlement attracted a great number of squatters, since the distillery and mill together furnished a good market for grain. Settlers could take their corn to the mill, get it ground, then take it to the distillery where it was exchanged either for a certain amount of whiskey or brewed on shares.

The area had other advantages for settlement. There was a large encampment of Indians across the river from the mill; the mill furnished flour and meal for a large section of the country; there was an abundance of large and excellent fish in the mill pond; wild game and furs of all kinds were brought in by the Indians and white trappers and hunters.

As soon as the mill and distillery opened (some time in 1831), John O'Ferrell, a native of Ireland, moved in and built a small storeroom next to the distillery and stock

