

CAVERNA

If you go south on Highway 71 from Missouri into Bella Vista, you pass a sign that says "Caverna" just before you get to the traffic light at Macadoodles. If you have wondered what that sign refers to, please keep reading...

According to Judge J.A. Sturges in 1897, *"Caverna is located near the Arkansas line on Little Sugar creek, and has a water mill and store. This has been a mill site for the last fifty years or more. The water power is fine and capable of running more than ten times the machinery it now operates....There are numerous caves in this vicinity, some quite extensive, and the name was derived from them."*

(Source: http://librarymail.org/genehist/sturgesbookv2_2.pdf)

Dr. George Phillips, who played a major role with the Bella Vista Historical Society in its early days, wrote the following article about Caverna (also known as "Cavernie" by the locals), which was published in the Weekly Vista on August 15, 1978.

Caverna changes from bustling community to ghost town

The next time you travel on Highway 71 across the Arkansas-Missouri line, look to the east of the road just as you cross Little Sugar Creek, (where) the once important little village of Caverna (once stood).

White Rock Prairie, the earliest settlement in the area...was granted a post office in 1854....(In) 1876, the office was moved (three miles south) to the site on Sugar Creek and the name changed to Caverna....The probability is that the new place took its name from the fact that there is a prominent cave in the area, to the east....

It is known that owners of the flour mill there (had) a dam across Sugar Creek in that location....There was a sort of ferry boat or raft which was pulled back and forth cross the creek by means of ropes and pulleys....The flour mill (owner)...ran a local bridge which he personally owned...the toll was 24 cents per vehicle.

The Missouri State Gazetteer...says that the population of Caverna was 50 in 1876 and that it was on the stage line from Neosho to Bentonville with mail delivered

three times a week....Businesses (included a) hotel, flour mills, store, wagon maker and blacksmith....

The Gazetteer lists the population as 30 in 1883...(and) for 1889-1890 gives the population as 50....In 1898, the Gazetteer shows the population as 35, with the following business places...postmaster, blacksmith, flour mill, constable, livestock, gardener, farmer....

The last postmaster at Caverna was Elisha H. Sooter, appointed as of May 22, 1900. The post office was discontinued on October 22, 1906, as a result of the organization of the "county-wide rural delivery system" in Benton County, Arkansas, and mail was brought in by carrier from Hiwasse, AR.

The mill burned...thought to be after 1900....The general store continued in operation until 1920, although the village dwindled rapidly after 1900...there were only two or three families living in Caverna by 1920.

The Caverna post office was the mailing address for most of the early settlers in the present Bella Vista area from the period roughly 1876 to 1897, when the Rago post office was established (in what later became in the Metfield area of Bella Vista)....And thus we have the story of a typical country village....

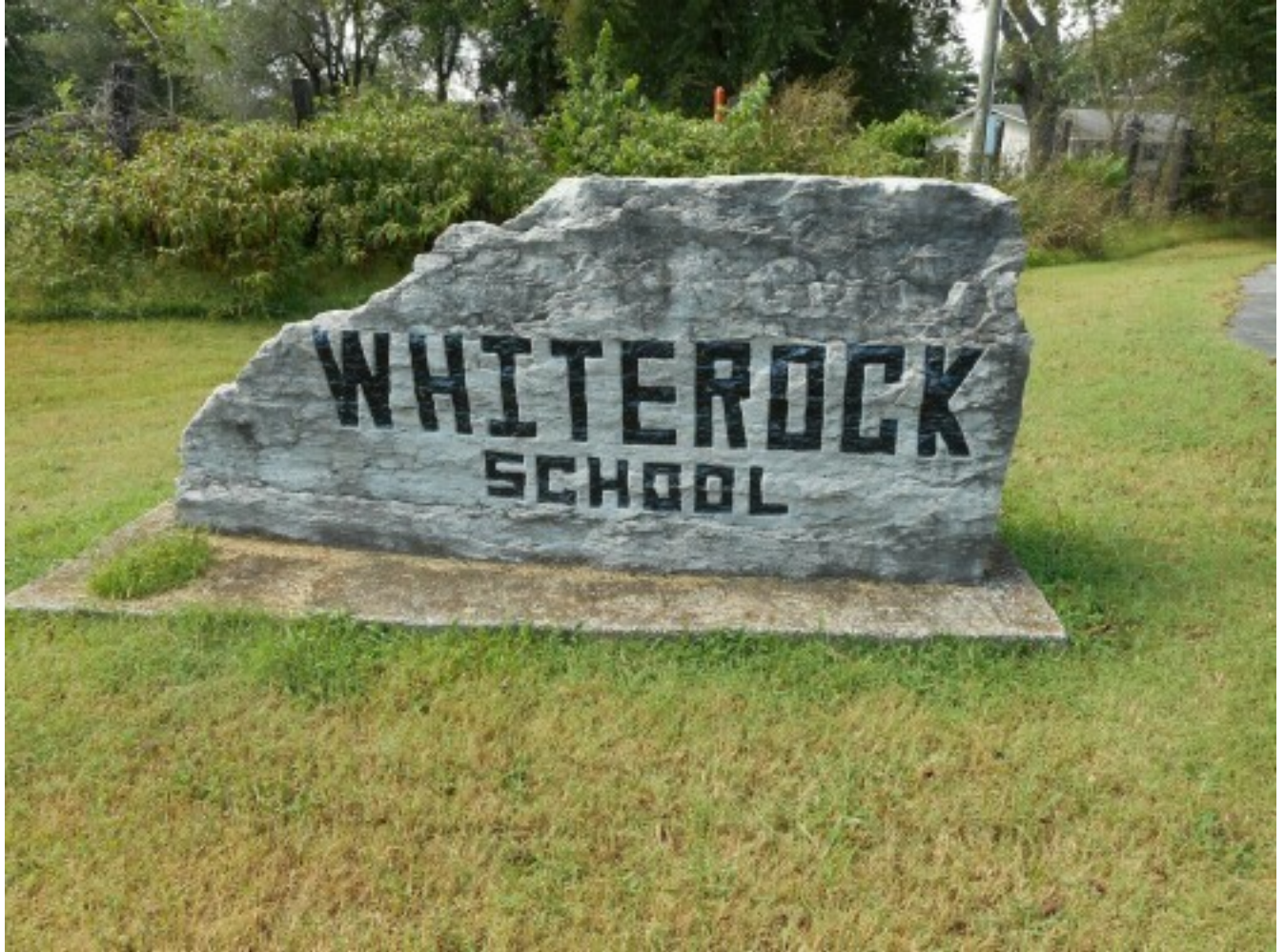
All photos courtesy of Xyta Lucas



The Caverna sign is visible as one travels south on Highway 71 toward Macadoodles not far north of the Arkansas state line.



The Jane Cemetery is located on Highway 90 just east of Jane, Missouri, and contains the graves of a number of former Caverna residents, including members of the Davenport and Slinkard families, who owned flour mills in Caverna.



White Rock Prairie was thought to be the first white settlement in the area, and James T. Davenport became its postmaster in 1854. The post office was moved in 1876 three miles south and the name was changed to Caverna. The school in Jane, Missouri, still carries the name of White Rock. It is located on Highway 90 just east of Jane, across the highway from the Jane Cemetery.



Several pieces of concrete and pipe laying along the north shore of Little Sugar Creek on the east side of Highway 71 are still visible, left over from either the old flour mill or the bridge that crossed the creek in Caverna.