

LA GAZETTE HELVETIQUE

THE NEWSLETTER OF MUSEE DE VENOGÉ, INC.

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No.2

IN EXPLANATION

LA GAZETTE HELVETIQUE (the Helvetian or Swiss Newspaper), is the official newsletter of Musee de Venoge (Museum of Venoge). The French adjective 'helvetique' refers to the Latin name for Switzerland (Helvetia) in use for more than 2000 years. Rhyming with "antique" it is easier for English speakers to pronounce than its synonym "Suisse". In 1802 the settlers of New Switzerland in the south eastern corner of Indiana territory, renamed Indian Creek "Venoge" after a small river in the grape growing region of European Switzerland.

RURAL HERITAGE TOUR

October 13-14

Venoge &

Thiebaut Farmstead



Thiebaut Farmstead, on Hwy 56, 3 miles W of Vevay open to the public for the first time during the Rural Heritage Tour

Join us on Saturday and Sunday to once again step back in time and enjoy the arts, food and culture of the past. This year Venoge and the Switzerland County Historical Society will present a joint event. The Society's newly restored Thiebaut Farmstead will be open for the first time to the public. The joint tour is a first. Compare and contrast the two ways of living...1820 and 1860.



At Venoge, Melodee Stepleton will demonstrate spinning while Ella Thompson watches. During the Rural Heritage Tour, join in sewing a small quilt, learn a bit about home herbal remedies from Lisa Newlin or walk in Venoge's kitchen garden.



Saturday 10-5
Sunday 12-5

No admission cost
Donations appreciated

Follow the RURAL HERITAGE signs to Venoge and the Thiebaut Farmstead.

Call 812-593-5726 or 812 427-3560 for more information



The new outdoor bake oven at Venoge ready for use during the Rural Heritage Tour.

The New Madrid Earthquakes of 1811-12

J. Dubbeld

The year of 1811 began ominously and did not improve. Spring floods in the Ohio and Mississippi valleys were worse than usual. The trouble at sea with Great Britain continued as well as the embargo, and goods were piling up on wharves in U.S. ports. In September, a brilliant comet, a sign always considered with foreboding, appeared and shone nightly until early in 1812. Residents of the Ohio and Mississippi valleys were plagued with fevers all autumn. In November, President James Madison called Congress a month early and recommended that the country prepare for hostilities. In December, furious storms swept the coast from Hatteras to Newfoundland and a fire in a Richmond, Virginia, theater took 70 lives, including that of Virginia's governor. Then the early morning hours of December 16, people were awakened by the first earthquake of a series of tremors that composed the largest burst of seismic energy in American history.

The New Madrid Seismic Zone (See Figure 1.) was the site of over 2000 shocks over a span of 5 months. While seismologists disagree on the exact magnitude, five of these shocks occurring from December 1811 through February 1812 ranged from 7.8 to 8.4 on the Richter Scale. Over 5000 square miles of disrupted land in Missouri, Tennessee, Kentucky and Arkansas still show the visible signs of faults, sand blows, landslides and sunken lands created during the 1811-12 earthquakes. The soft river sediments in the Midwest tend to amplify the intensity of seismic waves. (Think of how jello moves when its bowl is shaken.) As a result, shocks from the 1811-12 New Madrid quakes were felt as far away as the East Coast, Canada, Mexico and Cuba. In Washington, D.C. the December 1811 quakes shook doors and windows and woke persons from their sleep. In Columbia, South Carolina, the same shock caused plaster to fall and students at the South Carolina College rapidly left their sleeping chambers. Many newspapers of the time contained accounts of local effects of the quake activity.

The effect of the series of earthquakes in Switzerland County was recorded by Perret Dufour as follows:

"In 1811 severe shocks of earthquake were frequent—the same shocks no doubt which were so violent along the Mississippi river and Caused the opening and sinking of the earth at and about New

Madrid. On one night while the mail carrier was staying at the house of John Frances Dufour, his horse was tied to the end of the cabin. In the night the shocks were so severe that the inmates of the cabin were awakened, not knowing what caused it. At first they thought Indians had surrounded the house and were trying to get into it—but hearing no noise, they thought it might possibly be the horse rubbing against the cabin. In the morning feeling the house shake looking out of the window to the south west the trees were seen to be swaying to and fro, as though the wind was blowing but it was quite still then it was ascertained that it was an earthquake. The shocks were felt at intervals for two or three days." 1

The impact of the shock waves at the epicenter areas of the quakes would make any Hollywood disaster movie envious. Huge fissures really did open and close, sometimes splitting huge trees in two. The shaking of the ground caused the groundwater to come to the surface (liquefaction) and a mixture of sand, water and lignite would shoot several feet into the air. Some of these sand blows measured up to 500 feet in diameter. During the December 16, 1811 quakes, the land under the Missouri settlement of Little Prairie began to sink so rapidly that the last residents to evacuate were wading through waist deep water. Huge sections of the banks along the Mississippi River collapsed, causing the relocation of the settlement of New Madrid, Missouri and the loss of several keelboats that had been anchored for the night. An uplifting of land during the February 7, 1812 quake caused the Mississippi River in that region to flow backwards for a time and created temporary waterfalls. Some existing islands in the Mississippi River disappeared overnight; and in other sections of the river, new islands appeared. Nature's special effects seemed surreal to the settlers in the area.

Soon after the initial shock, several individuals kept records of subsequent earthquake activity. Jared Broods, a Louisville engineer and surveyor, set up a series of pendulums to detect horizontal earth motion and a system of springs to detect vertical movement. Between December 16, 1811 and March 15, 1812, Brooks counted a total of 1,874 shocks. Of that number, he classified 8 as violent, 10 as very severe, and 35 as moderate but alarming. At Cincinnati a pendulum was set up in a front window so spectators could view the almost continual vibrations during the five months of peak activity.

Among people directly affected by the New Madrid earthquakes were several of historic note. John James Audubon, the famous naturalist and artist, and his wife Lucy owned a small store in Henderson, Kentucky at that time and noted that several items had been shaken off shelves during the December tremors and that it took most of a day to clean up afterwards. At the time of the January 23 earthquake, Audubon was about 18 miles east of New Madrid. A few minutes before that quake occurred, his horse stopped suddenly, moaned and refused to move. Shortly afterwards, all the bushes and trees in the area began to sway and Audubon observed the ground rise and fall as the shock waves passed by. This was the quake that caused two huge sand blows that dammed up Reelfoot Creek to create Tennessee's Reelfoot Lake where you can still see the stumps of cypress trees that were submerged in 1812.

The February 7th earthquake happened five days before Abraham Lincoln's third birthday. His parents, Tom and Lucy Lincoln, at that time had a farm at Knob Creek 40 miles south of Louisville. Tom Lincoln's journal noted that the chimney on their log cabin had been damaged, the table was moved, and several items had fallen off shelves. Even at this early age, Abraham Lincoln's life was already eventful.

Daniel and Rebecca Boone had just completed their new stone house just west of St. Louis in 1810. Already weakened by the earthquakes in December and January, their house came close to collapsing during the February 7th tremor. Its two-foot-thick walls shifted and cracked, and its solid oak beams and floor joists were wrenched apart. Their house was repaired, but some of the earthquake damage is still visible today.

The New Orleans, the first steamboat to float the Ohio and Mississippi, was launched from Pittsburgh on October 20, 1811. Nicholas Roosevelt, great-uncle of Theodore Roosevelt, had been selected to captain the New Orleans on its maiden voyage and was accompanied by his wife, Lydia Latrobe Roosevelt, and their young daughter Rosetta. Lydia gave birth to Henry Latrobe Roosevelt while the New Orleans made port in Louisville to wait for river levels to rise high enough to allow the boat passage over the Falls of the Ohio. The New Orleans was anchored near the present day location of Owensboro, Kentucky when the December 16th earthquakes hit. The shock waves caused the vessel to lurch and everyone on board was awakened. As the New Orleans continued downstream, huge chunks of freshly fallen river bank and swaying trees were observed. The decision was made that it would be safer to tie up on

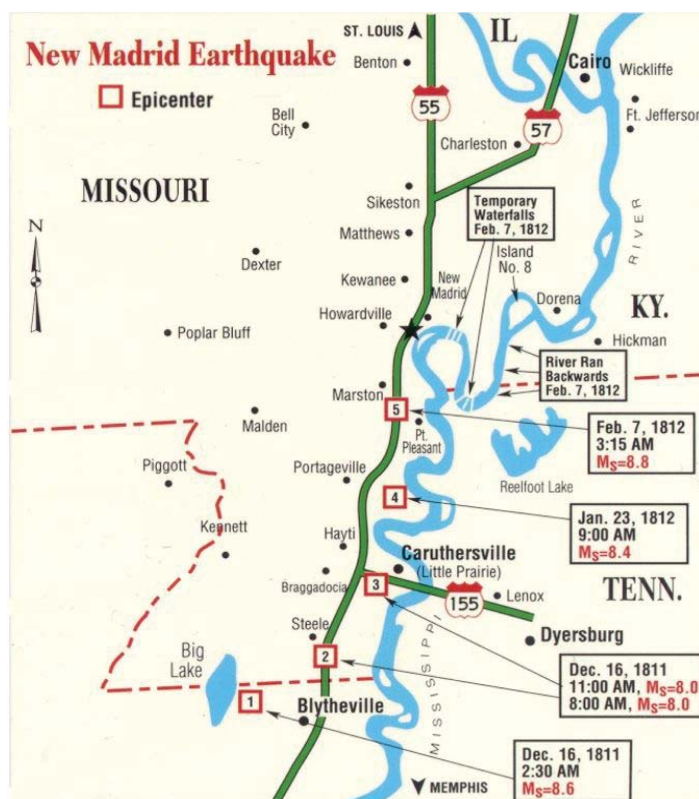


Figure 1

islands at night. However, during the night of December 20-21, the New Orleans was almost pulled under when the island it was tied to disappeared during an aftershock. Adding to their difficulties, the smoke-belching vessel was often blamed by both settlers and Indians as the evil cause of the tremors to the point where the boat was attacked on one occasion. Finally on January 10, 1812 the voyage successfully ended at New Orleans, Louisiana, and the reliability of steam-powered riverboats was established.

The New Madrid earthquakes also had a great impact on Native Americans. In 1808, Tecumseh and his shaman brother Tenskwatawa founded Prophet's Town near the confluence of the Tippecanoe and Wabash Rivers twelve miles northeast of present day Lafayette, Indiana. Prophet's Town became a hub of activity for recruiting Indians to Tenskwatawa's new religion and strengthening Tecumseh's Indian Confederacy. While recruiting in Alabama in October of 1811, Tecumseh declared, "You will know that the Great Spirit has sent me. I leave and go to Detroit. When I arrive there, I will stamp on the ground with my foot and shake down every house in Tuckhabatchee."² Tecumseh arrived in Detroit in mid-December, the houses of Tuckhabatchee collapsed during the December 16th earthquakes, and Tecumseh's reputation as a prophet and leader was firmly established and remained strong until his death in the War of 1812.

The seismic events of 1811-12 left a lasting cultural as well as physical impact on the Midwest—from the tales of the great squirrel migration out of the New Madrid Seismic Zone to the coining of the term “earthquake Christian”. (In 1812 the Methodist Church in the most seriously earthquake affected states had a 50% membership increase, whereas the membership increase for the rest of the nation was less than 1%.) As most of the affected area was sparsely settled frontier at that time, accurate accounts of those events are equally sparse. Today such urban centers as Memphis and St. Louis are located near the heart of the New Madrid Seismic Zone. While it is unlikely that a reoccurrence of the seismic events of 1811-12 are imminent, a similar series of earthquakes will happen again. It makes one wonder what kind of tales will be generated by that future event.

Footnotes:

1. *The Swiss Settlement of Switzerland County, Indiana*. Perret Dufour. P. 82.
2. *The Earthquake America Forgot*. Dr. David Stewart & Dr. Ray Knox P.132

Bibliography:

- Dufour, Perret. *The Swiss Settlement of Switzerland County, Indiana*.
- Fuller, Myron L. (1912) *The New Madrid Earthquake*. Washington Government Printing Office
- Pennick, James Jr. (1976) *The New Madrid Earthquakes of 1811-12*. University of Missouri Press. Columbia, Missouri.
- Stewart, Dr. David & Dr. Ray Knox (1995) *The Earthquake America Forgot*. Guttenberg-Richter Publications. Marble Hill, Missouri.
- Stewart, Dr. David & Dr. Ray Knox (1993) *The Earthquake That Never Went Away*. Guttenberg-Richter Publications. Marble Hill, Missouri.

GARDEN VIEWS: Venoge was pleased to have a visit by the Jefferson County Garden Club in the spring and the Ohio County Garden Club will visit in early October.

DONATIONS GRATEFULLY RECEIVED: From Jerry Wallin, a metal ash rake he made expressly for the bake oven. Six handwoven door towels made by Melodee Stepleton. A long bench and a door towel woven in the 1840's by Bill and Jane Richardson.

VOLUNTEERS: Thanks to Cliff Stookey and Donna Weaver for keeping Venoge open to visitors on Sundays throughout the summer.

To volunteer, donate or for more information about Venoge please write, phone or email:
Venoge, 4569 E. State Road 56, Vevay, IN 47043
dw1836@embarqmail.com 812-593-5726

Regular hours will end at Venoge with the Rural Heritage Tour. It is always open by appointment

Second Floor Open for the Rural Heritage Tour

The second floor of Venoge is nearly complete. Terry Wullenweber finished the plastering in early summer and the window trim and baseboards were installed by John Marsh. Two beds are now in place and with only a few more things the sleeping room will be complete. The storage room furnishing is under way.



Terry putting on the scratch coat of plaster. The final surface was a thin lime coat, painted on, duplicating the original finish.



New stair rail, installed into the original mortise.

A Garden in spite of Drought

The Ann Arundel melons (1731) are now producing after the September rains. The topsetting or



walking onions are getting their second growth and the red calico beans (1790) are producing more than last year.