

✦ - THE NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF ARROW ROCK - ✦

HISTORIC ARROW ROCK

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SHARING THE MISSOURI LEGACY

FRIENDS FOR 76 YEARS

TOM

BILL
aka - BUZZY

**Tom Hall and Bill True:
Arrow Rock Lifelong Friends**

The historic Huston Tavern was leased to Bill True's mother. They moved in when he was just two years old. "My mother leased the tavern from the DAR, the Daughters of the American Revolution," True recalled. "We lived upstairs, my sister, myself and my mother. It was then required that the operator live on site. Mom had recently been divorced and was looking for some way to avoid sending us to babysitters."

Tom Hall's parents, Dr. Tom and Virginia (Buckner) Hall, were from nearby Marshall and had many relatives in Arrow Rock. "We visited them frequently, but stayed here at the Tavern," Hall said, "so being about Bill's age, we got acquainted. I got to know Bill and his sister Jackie; we were playmates at that time. There was very little traffic in Arrow Rock and there was no interstate highway, so we just ran all over town like it was a big playground."

After football games, people from Kansas City driving back from MU would stop, have dinner and stay at the Huston Tavern. "The Tavern hosted everybody from the governor and the director of the State parks to other well-known people, such as the president of the University of Missouri," Hall said. "Many people from Marshall and nearby towns would come just to have a delicious dinner." With the tavern busy, there was plenty of hard work to do.

“There were two or three women that worked in the kitchen, as they had done for years.” True said, “I don’t know, but I’d say they fried thousands of chickens. I washed more dishes than you can put in that building.” Bill lived at the Tavern more than 10 years, and though the work was hard, there was still plenty of time to explore. “That left me free to have fun with Bill and his sister Jackie.” Hall said, “There were other kids in town, black and white, we all kind of played together. There was no playground, but the whole town was a playground and a park.” Bill’s now wife Jennifer True related stories of Buzzy’s and Tommy’s early life. “They had the run of the town. He told me about going over the bluff and playing in the caves on the other side.” Jennifer said, how his mother would threaten him with certain death if he was playing in the caves because of how dangerous it was. Having survived the caves, the young daredevils would walk on top of the stone wall by Main Street’s sidewalk. “Bill would get started at the top and run on the top of the wall all the way down to the end.” Jennifer said, “if you look on the other side of that wall it’s a pretty good drop.” When it snowed, Buzzy, Tommy and the other kids would sled through town between the historic houses and down the deserted streets. “They would get on their sleds at the top of the hill” Jennifer said, “and go down the street, around the corner on their sleds ...to the spring!” Bill added. “That was a

hell of a ride all the way to the end, way over a mile!”

Hall’s parents were very interested in Arrow Rock history. They were talking with some of the longtime residents when a plan took shape. “It was then, in 1959, that our historic preservation organization, the Friends of Arrow Rock was founded.” Hall said, “my parents and many others were asking how we could preserve and restore this place we call the most historic spot in Missouri?”

True was educated in Saline County, attending eight years of grade school in the Arrow Rock schoolhouse, then Marshall High School and Missouri Valley College. “Loved it here,” True said. This led True and first wife Bobbie to build their home on a burned-out lot directly across the street from the Huston Tavern. They took great pains to make sure the construction was historically accurate. “We were very proud of it because Bill and Bobby built it to look exactly as it had before it burned down about 1910.” Hall said. “The Trues used old brick for the construction to keep it as close to the original building as possible.

“Well, that’s what we do here. If we didn’t enjoy history and preservation we would never be here, it’s just part of what we do,” True said, looking at Hall. “He’s one of the best in the state at keeping us historically accurate. He’s just so knowledgeable and he enjoys research. He loves to take notes;

he’s just good at it.” And keeping Arrow Rock’s buildings as authentic as possible is a mission neither of the men take lightly. “We have a board of architectural review (BAR) which is a committee of the town government.” Tom said. “You must get approval from the BAR to change the appearance of any building.”

With Arrow Rock’s famous tavern drawing people to the town, Hall gives this building credit for his and True’s lifelong friendship. “It was only natural that Bill and I would be friends.” Hall said, “We’ve stayed in touch over the years, we’ve gone to college, and we’ve had careers and wonderful marriages.” True and Hall encourage people to join the Friends of Arrow Rock. When you join, you’re a supporter, you’re a friend.” Hall said, “Send money; it’s tax deductible



Tom Hall and Bill True an Arrow Rock lifelong friendship

and we are responsible for 13 buildings here.” “It’s expensive to maintain 13 buildings year after year.” True added, “We just have to keep them from falling down.”

J. HUSTON TAVERN REIMAGINED

Leslie Huston opened the doors of the Tavern recently to look at restoration work being done for its reopening. “The Tavern has the designation as the

oldest continuously operating restaurant west of the Mississippi.” When the Friends of Arrow Rock gave the Tavern concession back to the State in February, Huston stated, “there were a group of us that couldn’t stand the

thought of losing the Tavern as a restaurant in the village. I was very fortunate to have a group of individuals that all brought an important skillset to the table. Our board is one of the reasons the Tavern will continue on successfully.”

Huston knows a lot about the Tavern’s history from her husband’s family. “Nick’s great-great-grandfather, Judge Joseph Huston, was the original builder and owner of the Tavern, it had several owners over the years until Nettie Dickson purchased it in the early 1900s.” Dickson opened a chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) and in 1923 she and some of her DAR sisters convinced the State to purchase it. The Tavern was actually the first purchase with state park funding for the state of Missouri.”

“The state has been phenomenal to work with. They are very supportive of our work to keep the Tavern serving locals and visitors.”

Before the Civil War there were 1,000 residents in Arrow Rock and then after the Civil War the railroad came to Marshall,” Huston said, “the river started changing course and Arrow Rock’s population slowly dwindled.”

Arrow Rock draws many tourists each year to see the historic buildings and the hand-laid stone gutters. Every production at the Lyceum Theatre is a potential meal crowd. “The theater helps tremendously.” Huston said, “It has 416 seats and during theater season that’s a lot of built-in guests that come and want to eat lunch or dinner.”

“We want the Tavern to become a destination restaurant again.” Huston said, “we really want to breathe new life into the Tavern and create an experience for people unlike anything else. We have a unique opportunity to provide not only a wonderful meal, but also an experience of living history. We want to do that by honoring the history that’s here.” Huston said, “The entire village is a National Historic Landmark, we want people to come, experience the village, visit the Tavern and have a nice meal.”

“We’ve chosen all historic paint colors, and much of our artwork will give a nod to the different parts of history that are so rich here.” Huston said, “We wanted to give the Tavern a fresh new palette. And make it more inviting so that when you come in, you look around and think, “Gosh, I could really spend some time here.” Buffets are being planned for a quicker service during peak times.

“We plan to create a menu that honors the tradition of fried chicken in the Tavern, but also maybe a little bit of a trail menu,” Huston said, “what could it have been like to feed the people on the Santa Fe Trail? We plan to honor the Native American history that’s so important to Arrow Rock and the African American history that’s very important as well.”



To make a reservation visit Hustontavern.com or call 660-837-3200.



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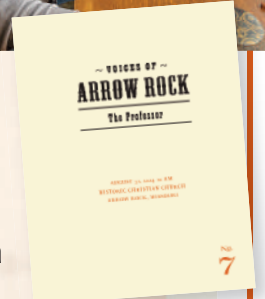
THE PROFESSOR

VOICES OF ARROW ROCK

Michael Kateman is the creator and producer of *Voices of Arrow Rock*, a series of readers theatre plays in an expansive project that brings to life lesser-known citizens of Arrow Rock's past. "It began as a part of the Missouri 2021 bicentennial commemoration." Kateman said, "I submitted a proposal to do programming in Arrow Rock, and the Friends of Arrow Rock and the Arrow Rock Lyceum Theatre joined as sponsors. The premise is that *Voices* brings to life marginalized stories from Arrow Rock's past. For each of the plays, Kateman commissions different playwrights from across the country. "We've worked with playwrights from Kansas City, Louisville, and New York." Kateman said, "The actors have come primarily from Kansas City to perform the pieces." The hour-long program has some introductory remarks, the performance, and then a talk back with the audience, the cast and the playwright.

Many people are familiar with the stories of the Huston and Lawless families, the artist George Caleb Bingham, and Dr. Sappington's quinine cures. "But we don't hear a lot from women," Kateman said, "We haven't heard much from enslaved persons, and we don't hear from native peoples." The *Voices of Arrow Rock* reader's theater series will provide fresh stories about real historical citizens, artistically embellished where necessary to add a deeper and more complex understanding of history." Kateman realized one day as a teenager when looking at the hand-laid stone gutters in town that there might be more to the history than was being told. "I knew the story from childhood about how these men dug deep. The gutters remain, having withstood 100 plus years as a great storm water system." Kateman said, "But wait, the physical labor, people owned these men.' It was an enlightening moment in a lot of ways."

"My commitment is to continue to tell stories until Arrow Rock's Bicentennial in 2029," Kateman said. "We will produce two episodes a year and then publish an anthology that includes all 18 scripts and the historical research on which the stories are based." *Voices of Arrow Rock* explores a more complete view of Arrow Rock's history. "I think there has been a commitment from the Friends of Arrow Rock to go down that path and tell full stories." Kateman said, "Brown's Chapel was the Freewill Baptist Church and one of the two black schools in town after emancipation. That's been restored and is preserved by the Friends of Arrow Rock. They saved the black Masonic Lodge and that's now the African American museum."



Past episodes of *Voices of Arrow Rock* may be viewed on the Friends of Arrow Rock YouTube channel. In your search engine, type "voices of arrow rock YouTube" or scan the QR code.





Sandy Selby is the author of *Arrow Rock Ink: A river town's first century told through newspapers, business records and correspondence.*

During a presentation and book signing at the Arrow Rock Visitor Center, Selby said she wasn't even thinking of writing a book two years ago, but during one of her informative ghost tours of Arrow Rock last October, folklore professor Dr. Clare Schmidt asked if she had read a book called *Wisconsin Death Trip*. "It is a cult classic and features a lot of vintage photos taken by one particular photographer in this particular region of Wisconsin and then the text is all just little bits and pieces from the newspaper," Selby said. "I thought, we could do something similar here in Arrow Rock. We've got a lot of newspaper stuff, but I don't want it to be quite that depressing." Selby's book is a wonderful look back at Arrow Rock's daily life as told in newspapers.

"I loved Arrow Rock from the first time I visited it," Selby said. "I just felt at home here. It's such an important place in Missouri history and the history of the settlement of the West."

Selby said she also loved researching at the State Historical Society of Missouri, but it was too distant for the multiple trips she would have to make researching her book, so she turned to Newspapers.com, an online resource that includes SHSMO's digital newspaper archive. Selby estimates she looked at 20,000 pages of newspapers over seven months and ended up with a book a lot bigger than in-

tended. "But I kept cutting and cutting and finally decided this material is what I want in the book."

Selby related newspaper articles discussing the many railroads that planned to connect Arrow Rock by rail, but never did. "I always thought that there was one railroad that just thought about coming here and didn't," Selby said. "It was actually more than a dozen." In 1866 the Northern Missouri railroad, changed later to the Louisiana and Missouri River railroad, had plans to build a route to service Arrow Rock. "They decided that Boonville would be a better crossing," Selby said, "so Arrow Rock was out of the picture." Artist George Caleb Bingham was a big advocate who came and spoke to the community and tried to rally support for the railroad, but it didn't happen. "More railroads considered coming to Arrow Rock in 1882," Selby said, "and, in fact, Congress passed a bill to build a bridge. They were going to build a bridge here and then nothing." Several railroads planned to come through Arrow Rock, but the deals always fell through. "In 1910 Congress passed another appropriation to build a bridge at Arrow Rock. Do you see a bridge?" Selby asked rhetorically. In 1910 a man named Judge Nevins decided to build the Saint Louis and Kansas City Railway and got a lot of support from all over the state. "He raised a lot of money for the effort, they did surveys, they hired a contractor," Selby said, "They laid out

where the depot was going to be." Then Judge Nevins went to France to talk to investors and stayed in France. "About every six months, Selby said, "We would get a letter here that said, 'Oh, things are moving slowly, it's just how the French do things, but everything's fine.' Six months later it was found Judge Nevins and his associates were indicted for mail fraud. "A big story happened in 1872, when there was a fire started at the Gilpin Saloon," Selby said, "it was a two-story building, the saloon was on the second floor and there was a set of stairs that went to the back of the building. That's where the fire started, and well, it was intentionally set." Arson was confirmed soon when more fires broke out across town. A detective was brought in from St. Louis who discovered the culprits were three men whose motive was to own the only saloon in town. "Apparently, John Sweeney, was combative or unpopular because they really took their wrath out on him," Selby



said. "It was January, and they marched him down to the river. According to the newspaper, the temperature was about 15 below zero." The group found a hole in the ice and dipped Sweeney in the frigid, swirling river. "They hauled him up, 'Are you gonna confess? No?' dipped him back down three times." Selby said, "He would not confess, so they marched him back to town." Sweeney finally confessed when confronted with his partner who had already confessed. "They hanged John Sweeney that night, this is what the *Missouri Republican* in Saint Louis reported. It's kind of a strange, almost admiring look at this arsonist." Selby read, "It is doubtful if ever there is a more solemn or more formal execution at the hands of the law than was that of John Sweeney." By all accounts Sweeney faced swift justice in a hanging tree and faced it bravely. Newspaper accounts read: "The noose was thrown around his neck, not causing the trembling of a hair upon his head," Selby read, "closing scene, the dropping of the curtain, just as the gray streaks of dawn penciled the horizon."

Other columnists, reporters and editors made their marks on history as they recorded early Arrow Rock in print. "R.L. Sandidge had an interesting style; he brought some of that poetic storytelling to even the most mundane stories," Selby said. In 1891 he says Mrs. Nat Townsend, while eating dinner last Saturday, had the misfortune to get a bone fastened in her throat which was removed by Dr. Wagner,

and he said Miss Tilda Moehle is enjoying the luxury of a boil on her hand." At one point Arrow Rock had five doctors, but they could only do so much because they didn't have antibiotics. Many turned to patent medicines for relief from their ailments. Selby said, "A lot of these patent medicines came along that promised you robust health, you just had to buy this \$0.25 bottle, and you were going to be well again." Most of the snake-oil cures were a big waste of money, but not all. "Here in Arrow Rock, we had a doctor who created a medicine that actually worked," Selby said, "Dr. Sappington's Anti-Fever Pills treated and cured malaria."

Life in Arrow Rock was difficult, but the townspeople forged ahead with goodwill. Newspaper editor Bascom Diggs wrote: "Do your very best to improve things, start with yourself, your home, your town, your schools, your churches, your business, yes everything. There is no limit to the work nor to what you might accomplish." Selby said there is much more to the people of Arrow Rock than she had room for in her book. Hearing the words written about them in *Arrow Rock Ink* shows what wonderful, brave people they were.

"Life was hard, and not only did they persevere, but they found joy and enthusiasm and shared what they had," Selby said. "They were impressive people. When we look back, sure we will disagree on politics and things that progressed in our way of thinking, but I have a great admiration for their character and their fortitude."



To purchase a copy of the book, contact the Friends of Arrow Rock Museum and Gift Shop at 660-837-3231.



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