

MONROE MEETS MISSOURI



Jeff Adams photo

Fueled with Boone County ham and red-eye gravy, Chancellor Haskell Monroe and his wife, Jo, began a summer journey to meet Missourians and see the state. In 100-degree August heat, the couple toured Missouri in a new van given them as a going-away present by friends at the University of

Texas at El Paso, where Monroe was president before becoming Mizzou chancellor July 13.

They learned to pronounce town names like Versailles (Ver-sales, not Ver-sigh) and Auxvasse (Aw-vauz, not Ox-vossy). Then there were Arab, Hayti and Qulin. Willow Springs. Mountain Grove. Van Buren. Advance. Nevada. Caruthersville. Cabool. Excello. Fair Play. Economy. Faucett. "Feeling that we had to draw the line somewhere, we did not go down to Braggadocio, although that certainly is a splendid name for a Missouri town," Monroe says.

But he did talk with a number of folk in a number of places, starting with the 42nd annual Boone County Fair ham breakfast in Columbia. "Obviously it is a grand affair because more than 800 tickets were sold," Monroe observes. "As one would expect in Missouri, old friends, some of whom were linked by generations of association and marriage, were exchanging pleasantries. I, a newcomer from Texas, felt very refreshed by the pleasant greeting I received from many."

From town to town, Monroe also was gratified to hear generally good comments about the University from alumni, many of whom had generations of Mizzou graduates in their families. In sum, they said: "It ain't broke."

"A number of friends feel the University has been on a plateau, certainly not a decline, but on a plateau, and is ready now to move up to a higher level—on a par with such institutions as California-Berkeley, Wisconsin-Madison, Minnesota, Penn State, Michigan and Florida."

In Poplar Bluff, "Alumni had a feeling that the University was attracting good students. All were obviously proud of having attended Mizzou. As I have learned with most observers, however, they were disappointed with the manner in which the football ticket policy had been modified a few years ago. Apparently that scar will be visible for all of us for a good while to come."

Over in Odessa, alumni are anticipating the University's sesquicentennial, which will be celebrated in 1989. Another big crop of outstanding students from their area is ready to usher in the next 150 years, Monroe says.

In Kennett, Mizzou graduates are confident that the University is strong, but its achievements are not fully understood. Another alumnus, from Sikeston, "is unyielding in his insistence that the University serve the people of the state. I suspect he is on the forefront of those who want the University of Missouri-Columbia to set the pace for the rest of the state. Like each of the other individuals we chatted with on our venture, he is obviously proud of his alma mater."

The Monroes also met some Missourians who had never set foot on the Campus. In Doniphan, they dropped in on craftsmen making hickory ax and hammer handles. After paying \$4 for two handles for his father, a cabinet maker, Monroe identified himself as Mizzou's chancellor.

"That in Jefferson City?"

"No, the capital is in Jefferson City."

"Oh, St. Louis?"

"Well, the University has a campus there, but the original University is in Columbia. Tell me, is there anything the University can do for you?"

"Can't think of anything."

Monroe left the town chuckling. "I wonder," he said to his wife, "what he would have done if I told him I had a petition I wanted him to sign saying our \$32,000 average faculty salary is too low. Imagine what he would have done with that ax handle!"

Near another small town, Seymour, the Monroes saw how important education is to one Amish community. After visiting with a family selling bent hickory rockers, they returned to the paved road two miles away. "At that intersection at least a dozen Amish elders with their straw hats, the older men bearded, the young ones clean shaven, were hard at work building the new school."

Contrasting the Amish's simple lifestyle was bustling Kansas City, which Monroe had not visited in 20 years. "We looked forward to a day in this great city that I have almost looked upon as a capital of the plains," he says. At the Country Club Plaza, the Monroes "experienced the joy of a marvelously well-managed shopping area." They also browsed through a flea market near the Kemper Center

and later toured other parts of the city.

"For me, a highlight was the opportunity to view the most imposing structures of the University of Missouri-Kansas City, where [Chancellor] George Russell and his dedicated faculty have obviously established themselves as the keys to the intellectual present and economic future of the greater Kansas City area," Monroe says.

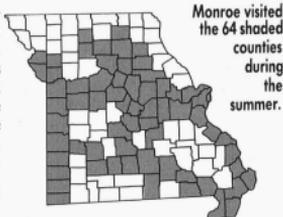
Across the state, Monroe has visited the Gateway to the West many times as a member of the board of directors of the Southwestern Bell Corp. in St. Louis. He has served on the board since 1982.

The state's agricultural economy was apparent in the Bootheel, "where it is impossible not to be struck by the vastness of the agricultural productivity. One wonders how all the soybean products can be used, yet the acreage continues to grow."

St. Genevieve offered another expansive view. "I wonder how many pioneers might have gazed in that direction 200 years ago and dreamed of the new land that might await them. After all, Missourians went all the way to the Pacific to the Northwest down the Santa Fe Trail to San Diego during the Mexican War. What is it that made Missourians so venturesome, so curious, so full of energy?"

For more small-town flavor, the couple caught breakfast one morning at Lambert's on the edge of Sikeston. "They advertise throwed rolls, which we later understood are yeast rolls that really are thrown through the air, which helps them in some fashion to spread out," Monroe says. "Our waitress told us that she got hit with them half the time. The meal was certainly what I consider Southern: grits, ham gravy, sausage with just the right amount of pepper seasoning and some truly good cured bacon."

While browsing in an antique shop in Cape Girardeau, the couple chatted



with the owner. When Monroe revealed his job, she exclaimed, "Then God bless you."

In western Missouri, a stop in Butler increased the chancellor's postcard collection. "Thankfully there were a number of cards from Columbia and the University, which more than doubled my previous accumulation of cards from our places of residence." The Dallas native spent 21 years at Texas A&M University before moving to El Paso in 1980.

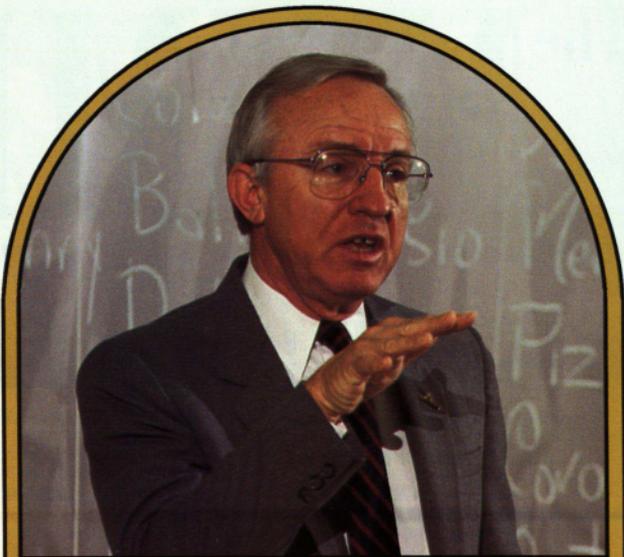
Butler's 19th-century courthouse and brick streets were particularly impressive to Monroe, who's also a brick collector. He saw a handsome example of a restored red-brick building during a visit to Cottey College, a women's junior college in Nevada.

"I was grateful for individuals who realized that the past and things of the past—such as old buildings—can help us to understand more where we have been and where we might be going," Monroe says. His wife, a PEO Sisterhood member, was chairwoman of a Cottey College fund drive last year in El Paso. A philanthropic and educational organization, PEO supports a number of educational projects.

After visiting 64 of Missouri's 114 counties in less than two months, Monroe concludes that, in some ways, the state is a collection of regions. "In Kirksville, there is talk of listening to WHO in Des Moines, Iowa." Likewise, residents of St. Joseph in northwest Missouri are tuned into Omaha, Neb., as well as Kansas City, Kan. In the Bootheel, residents read the *Memphis* (Tenn.) *Commercial Appeal* and talk about competing for students with Arkansas State, Memphis State, Ole Miss and Mississippi State. Tulsa is important to southwest Missouri, and the University of Arkansas is only 30 miles from the Missouri border.

"If this idea of regional concerns is correct, the one unifying element is Missouri. We are centrally located, serve the entire state and we are perhaps more of a unifying factor than any other single element.

"Our students come from all 114 counties. We need more scholarship money to attract even more good students. My inclination always has been that an investment in people is the best investment that can be made for both the future of this institution and of the state." —Carol Hunter □



People are the important items in history, Chancellor Haskell Monroe tells his class.

Jeff Adams photo

GOOD MORNING, PROFESSOR MONROE

Teaching a 7:40 has its advantages, says Chancellor Haskell Monroe. First of all, none of your colleagues is unhappy because you stole a prime class hour. And the students who sign up for those crack-of-dawn lessons really want to be there.

So does Monroe. "I teach this class strictly because I want to," he told students taking his three-hour course, *Survey of American History to 1865*. Though he mentioned he had "another task" on Campus, Monroe did not disclose his primary job. In fact, he introduced himself simply as "Monroe."

The 70 underclassmen must have wondered why television reporters covered their first class session, but few realized the full identity of the professor in the black-and-gold tie and Missouri belt buckle. Monroe also taught a class while serving as president of the University of Texas at El Paso. "The public expects us to be teachers first," he says.

In the classroom, Monroe asks students to toe the line: No smoking, no sleeping, no caps, be on time. Students who miss no more than two classes may drop their lowest test score. Monroe does not grade on the curve. "I assume all of

you are hoping to make an A," he says. "I will give you what you deserve, no more and no less."

He also promises to make history enjoyable. "Often high-school teachers have ruined history in terms of enjoyment by making people memorize dates. The important items in history, to me, are people. People make history, fight battles, create universities, get married, have children, die."

In the course, "We are talking about the history of ourselves," Monroe says. "It is the history of a group of immigrants who came from all over the world to this ground." Most of our ancestors, he continues, were poor financially but rich in hope. "The immigrants were primarily young people—young in years and in ambition." In many cases, he adds, they were going against the grain of society.

"I believe the secret of this nation's success is that we are a nation of immigrants from an unusually wide variety of nations and backgrounds. That variety is our strength," Monroe pauses. "When I say, 'I believe,' it is my opinion and will not be on the test."

The class pays attention anyway. —Carol Hunter