



Guitar Street as it was in the mid-1800s was painted by Columbia artist Tom Watson for Farm and Home Savings Association.

The Way Mizzou Was Won

"Columbia . . . the county seat of Boone County . . . has nine stores, two taverns, four grogshops, and but one meetinghouse," wrote Elijah P. Lovejoy, a Presbyterian minister and editor of the *St. Louis Observer*, after a visit in 1834.

"Thus you see, Bacchus has four temples — and I know not how many domestic altars — and God but one, in Columbia."

His description gives no hint of the thriving frontier town that, along with the rest of Boone County, produced a bid only five years later of \$117,921.75 to win the location of the University of Missouri within its boundaries.

By the end of the 1830s, Columbia boasted eight dry goods stores, a book store, two drug shops, three blacksmiths, one chair factory, three cabinet makers, two wagon makers, two tinnors, one halter, three saddlers and three tailor shops. There were a brickyard, grist mills and 11 tanneries.

Artist George Caleb Bingham was painting portraits of prominent citizens in his little studio on Guitar Street. And there were many who demanded his services. The community had almost a dozen lawyers, seven doctors and a dentist.

One wonders how many "domestic altars" Bacchus could have had in a town where 300 men had "taken the pledge" and were members of the temperance society. The convictions of the citizenry about the evils of drink did not, however, prevent Boone County from ranking second in the state in the production of alcoholic beverages. In 1840, the county bottled 64,680 gallons of the devil's brew.

The county also ranked first in production of maple sugar, provided half the state's total tobacco crop and helped make the state second in the nation in hemp growing.

Agriculture and livestock breeding — jacks

and jennets had been imported and were becoming known as Missouri Mules — were important to Boone County's prosperity, but Columbia's location was the key to its wealth.

Columbia, in the words of one historian, "sat astride the path of empire." Broadway — 100 feet wide — was a part of Boon's Lick Trail. And if you were going West from St. Louis, to either California or Oregon, you took Boon's Lick Trail.

The parade down Broadway insured customers for Columbia's businesses, which expanded to meet the demand. In 1834, the editor of Columbia's newspaper marveled, "Never within our recollection has there been such an influx of emigrants as are now, and have for some weeks, been passing through this place to the more western part of the state. There appears to be an almost unbroken line of wagons, carts, carriages, cattle, slaves, etc."

In exchange for merchandise, storekeepers accepted tobacco, pork, mules, cotton, feathers, jeans, linsey, socks, venison hams, honey, beeswax, tallow and dressed deer skins. The Missouri River nearby provided a route for shipping such goods back to St. Louis and on down the Mississippi to New Orleans. Profits from such trade were substantial.

The early Columbians were not interested only in making money, however. They also had a strong sense of civic duty and pride and an abiding belief in education.

Ten acres had been set aside when Columbia was laid out by the land syndicate on the condition that the state university be built on them.

The conviction that the university should be in Columbia was not shared by other mid-Missouri counties. The state legislature spent more than a decade considering the problems of setting up a university. At the top of the list were money and site selection.

Taken for granted was the central location. Other desirable site characteristics included reasonable transportation to the rest of the state, a healthful climate, a good water supply, a growing population aware of the advantages of higher education and a college to serve as the nucleus of the state institution.

Columbia qualified on all counts except the last and quickly set about creating Columbia College. The citizens donated funds for its impressive brick building, which opened its doors in 1834.

Bills to found the university were proposed, but died in the legislature until 1838. Fayette offered Howard College as a site. Not to be outdone, James S. Rollins, a young lawyer from Boone County making his first appearance in the House, offered Columbia College.

At this point, a contest was devised. Six of the centrally located counties were to present offers of subscriptions in money and real estate. The site had to be a tract of at least 40 acres within two miles of a county seat. The competitors were the counties of Boone, Callaway, Cooper, Howard, Saline and Cole.

Quickly, a mass meeting was called in Columbia to select a committee to raise the funds. William Jewell, whose fortune also founded the college named for him at Liberty, was chairman and William Woodson was secretary.

The committee of 10 was given the power to draw up an assessment list against the residents of the county. In Boone County lived 13,361 persons: 5,504 white males, 5,025 white females, 3,008 slaves and 32 free blacks.

Perhaps the meeting was long. Perhaps there was some disagreement with the proposal to assess residents for the university. The minutes show that a resolution was passed "that it be considered disrespectful to this meeting for any individual to withdraw himself from the same without leave until the meeting shall have been regularly adjourned." A resolution passed later in the day made it a "duty" to meet one's assessment.

The committee members held meetings throughout the county in churches, schoolhouses, "beneath the shade of arching oaks and on mustergrounds." The committee members rode horseback, stopping both at log cabins and at the few brick houses which indicated wealth. The goal of \$50,000 was reached in 10 days. The subscribers numbered 96 on the original lists.

But soon reports from Callaway and Howard indicated that both counties were ahead of Boone in the race and still working hard. So the leaders in Columbia faced the discouraging task of reopening the campaign and reviving enthusiasm.

A mass meeting was set for April 30, but so few people showed up that a committee of five was sent out to bring in all citizens not present. Again the leaders got a committee appointed to reassess the citizens and to inform them if their

pledges were not high enough. A visitor from Fayette wrote a friend, "I have nothing to write about except that the Boys here are very bussing (sic) in getting subscriptions to the University in Columbia and the immediate neighborhood. They have increased their subscriptions nearly double the first amount. You have no idea the exertions they are making."

Edward Camplin was one of three who gave the maximum amount of \$3,000. Much has been made of the fact that he could neither read nor write. However, Camplin was one of the shrewdest and most successful business men in the county. He owned one of the taverns and thousands of acres of farmland. He also was one of the leading private bankers in town.

More than 900 people contributed money or land, better than one in 12 of the total white population of the county of all ages.

Some contributors may have felt great pressure to subscribe large gifts. Some felt sure that their investment would be amply repaid when large numbers of students flocked to the town. Others may have been under the impression that their sons would be able to attend the university at a negligible cost. But whatever their reasons, the citizens were generous.

Stories are told of the Scotch well digger who gave \$5, more than he was ever known to have at one time. Another donor was widow Ann Gentry, mother of 13 children, eight of whom were then living. Six ministers, whose meager salaries were paid irregularly, subscribed. Seven men mortgaged their homes and another had his home sold at auction to pay his \$350 subscription. One man sold his saddle horse. Another sold his cow and then had to borrow one to furnish his family with milk for the winter.

Constable Levi Park, one of the 517 Boone countians who could neither read nor write, gave \$200, and his wife counted it out for him. Farmers Jefferson Garth and Lawrence Bass gave \$3,000 each. A dry goods clerk, who made \$25 a month, gave \$100. Columbia's first confectioner, John Guitar, subscribed \$1,000. James Harris, a young farm boy, subscribed \$100 then paid it with the first money he ever earned. A man who had split rails at \$1 a hundred, gave \$100.

A man who sold apples for a living gave \$50. John Lynch sold his slaves to pay his \$500 subscription. A man who "made his living making and peddling fly brushes gave \$5, and his friends wondered how and where he would ever get that much money."

Thomas Selby, a tavern keeper, "who had enough children to fill his tavern, gave \$400, and his widow finished paying his subscription before she married again," said one historian.

But James Rollins, later called "the Father of the University," seems to have been responsible for the master stroke which won the contest. When the campaign was over, the state commissioners rode in leisurely fashion to each county seat to receive the final bids. Rollins was present at Fayette when Howard County made its offer of \$96,709.50. He was stunned. Howard would win with that bid. Then, he found out that the bid included 200 acres of land purchased for \$30 an acre but submitted at a valuation of \$80.

Rollins jumped on his horse and rode back to Columbia. He called the Boone committee together and it countered by buying 220 acres south and west of the proposed university site from Rollins for \$25 an acre, apparently partly with Rollins' subscription of \$2,000, and submitting the land to the commissioners at a valuation of \$75 an acre.

Only about \$500 of the pledged amount of \$117,921.75 was not paid. An 1849 Board of Curators memo stated, "In their zeal to secure the location of the university in Boone County, many subscribed for more than their ability would have justified them in doing and some were seriously embarrassed in consequence of it. Notwithstanding, most subscriptions were met so promptly, although at a heavy sacrifice, there are perhaps but few parallels of such prompt and faithful payment."

The subscription fund was used to build Academic Hall, the Columns of which still stand in Francis Quadrangle, and a house for the president of the university. But the struggle for financial support was just beginning. Not until 1866 did the state appropriate funds for the University of Missouri — *Anne Baber*

