

STANDING IN AWE AT PORTUGUESE POINT -- WONDERING, "WHAT IS HER STORY?"

by Angie Alexander

The magnificent view of Portuguese Point awaits drivers who are heading into Dixon through northeast Pulaski County on Highway 28. Just around the bend, after winding up a steep hill from the Gasconade River, you'll begin to notice this huge drop-off (about 250 feet's worth) with the river and farmland below.

As local residents, we drive by Portuguese Point perhaps taking it a bit for granted -- in that we don't take time to indulge ourselves.

My family has hiked down its ridge, floated on the river there, and camped on the gravel bar below -- which is by a place on the river called "Twin Rock" -- a spot that carries many Alexander fishing tales and fun memories. Mary Jones said she and her brother, William "Foots" Liesman, hiked the Point and floated the river there at least two times a week in their youth. They hid their canoe for when they could return for the next joy ride. A relative of mine also recalled that there was a hang-out called "Gibbonsville" atop that area in the early 1940's that was owned by Bill Gibbons.

Despite being familiar with this piece of ground, I haven't known very much about Portuguese Point's history. When I started



Vintage postcard - that reads "Portuguese Point is located on Route 28 leading to Dixon, MO a short drive north of U.S. Highway 66 near Devil's Elbow." Submitted

asking about it, folks said, "Any who would know are already gone by now." Sources, such as Frank Weber's "Place Names of Six South Central Counties of Missouri." M.A. thesis, University of Missouri-Columbia, 1938, cites the point was named for Portuguese settlers in the area. Another source, Benita Jones (a great-great granddaughter of local settlers), said in her 2002 interview with The Dixon Pilot, that the family of John Smith purchased the land in 1866. She said they were part Cherokee Indian, but claimed to be Portuguese for trade and other reasons.

The report also said the Smith's had five children and had come by covered wagon to Missouri from Kentucky in 1858. They also raised nine grandchildren, after the death of their parents, and took in a nephew and his two children. John Smith also served in the Confederate Army and, after retiring from the battlefield, he was captured by bushwhackers and hanged from a tree. Thankfully, Smith's fellow companion cut him down after the bushwhackers left, and spared his life. John Smith later died on August 22, 1922, and is buried in Sheppard Cemetery near Dixon.



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