

## **Craigs were Pioneers**

*(This Past Perspectives column is a reprint of an article from the Weekly Vista's Bella Vista Proud edition of May 31, 1995, written by resident Ethel Baker.)*

Childhood studies of pioneers included Conestoga wagons in a circle around a huge campfire. There, black iron kettles of stew and dumplings satisfied the needs of families from eastern United States enroute to the Midwest or west coast to start a new life.

We have modern day settlers in Bella Vista. Lola Craig, along with husband Bill and two teenagers, moved here in 1971 from Sarcoxie, MO. The Craigs came to early Bella Vista with two goals in mind. One was to establish a business, the Vista Food Mart, which opened in the summer of 1971. Located in what is now the lower level of Town Center West, store hours were from 7 a.m. to midnight, six days a week that first year. Sunday hours were from 1 to 6 p.m. Winston Carter was part owner.

Opening this store was a boon for Bella Vista shoppers as the nearest markets had been the Walton Family Center and the Phillips Grocery Store down the two-lane Highway 71 to Bentonville. In Old Bella Vista, there was a mixture of houses and one lone business, Keck's Grocery Store, run from a small house.... Bill and Lola...ran their store for nine years.

Bill and Lola's second goal was to join with others to establish the Bella Vista Christian Church (which they did). The lone church up to that point in time was Dug Hill, overlooking the hub of the village....

The village looked very different in the early 1970s compared to what villagers see in 1995. There was no upper level Town Center. That area was undeveloped and full of trees. Jim Thompson and his wife owned the service station.... The beauty parlor and laundromat were behind the station. The Fire Station and Security Office...shared quarters in space about half the size of today's structure. The two offices opened May 1970....

Banking was available in Bentonville at the Bank of Bentonville and Citizens' Bank. In the mid-1960s, mail was handled in a post office almost across from the pavilion on Old Lake Bella Vista.... The mail service was discontinued in the 1970s.

Medical needs were met by Bates Memorial Hospital in Bentonville, established in the early 1940s. Concordia Health Center opened in 1976. The first physician arrived in 1971 to set up an office while Bella Vista Pharmacy, owned by Rex Bedwell, was new in June 1971.

A small building housing a Welcome Office was situated just this side of the Missouri border. The Property Owners Association was located in the Sunset Hotel on the mountain with most of it occupied by Cooper sales offices....

In 1968, the Country Club opened. It was designed by Fay Jones, an understudy of Frank Lloyd Wright.... The clubhouse was the center of activities with golf quickly expanding from its single course. Dancing was available in the evenings, except Mondays.

Dining out in those formative years consisted of Fred's Hickory Inn, Mary Maestri's and Venesian Inn in Tontitown. Hill 'N Dale (on the shores of Lake Bella Vista), a popular spot owned by Dick Moulter, was a cafeteria.... To the west, folks would stop at the "Hiwasse Hilton" for burgers and ice cream concoctions.

It as also at Hill 'N Dale that villagers gathered Friday and Saturday nights for free entertainment upstairs with piano music. Riordan Hall did not appear until 1973. Lakes Ann and Avalon provided fishing for property owners. Campgrounds were available with showers at Sugar Creek....

Movies were shown at the theater across from the library in Bentonville. Paddle boats were free to ride on Old Lake Bella Vista. For swimming, the spring water pool was a delight and it was only a few steps away to play miniature golf. Other activities included saddling up at the stables for riding some of the early trails.... (About the Author: Ethel Baker moved to Bella Vista in June 1991 and was a member of the NWA Writers' Guild.)