

Tanyard Creek

In years gone by, tanning yards were located all over Benton County. The tanning yards would buy cow hides and other animal hides, including raccoons and possums, from hunters and farmers, to make leather which they in turn sold to manufacturers of shoes and other leather products.

According to Wikipedia, “tanning is the process of treating skins of animals to produce leather....Traditionally, tanning used tannin, an acidic chemical compound from which the tanning process draws its name (tannin is in turn named after an old German word for oak or fir trees, from which the compound was derived).”

Sometime in the first couple of decades of the 1900's, a tanning yard was set up on the bluff above where Lake Windsor is now located in Bella Vista. According to a 1903 map at the Bella Vista Historical Museum, the creek running through that valley was called Cedar Valley Creek. At some point, the name was changed to Tanyard Creek because of the tanning yard. Long time resident Ralph Squires, who moved to this area in the 1930's and lived some of his childhood years at the homesite which is still visible on the Tanyard Creek nature trail, always knew the creek as Tanyard Creek, so its name was evidently changed sometime after the publication of the 1903 map, prior to the 1930's.

Tanyard Creek now comes out of Lake Windsor and makes its way north to join Sugar Creek alongside the 14th green of the Bella Vista Country Club golf course. Joining it, flowing down from Lake Avalon, is another creek which in 1965, when Cooper opened Bella Vista Village, was called Sturgeon Creek, after a Sturgeon family who lived on a farm in Tanyard Hollow in the early 1950's. At some point, it was also known as Sunshine Creek, according to trail signs along the Tanyard Creek nature trail. Now it is referred to as the Avalon Branch.

There were a number of farms located in the area, where the nature trail and Lake Windsor are now located. Some of the other family names were Bertschy, Edwards, Howard, Casey, Lawson, Kirkham, Coleman, Coon, McMillan, Clark, and Cox. They carried their drinking water from the creek, and stored their milk and butter in the caves to keep it cold. They raised livestock, including cows, pigs, and chickens, and planted crops to sell or to feed their livestock.

In 1991, a nature trail was started along the Avalon and Tanyard creeks. The March 13, 1991, Weekly Vista published a picture of volunteers Dave Wiemer and Larry Kinsey starting to work on the trail. Other workers pictured or named in that issue were Glen Stockman, Bob Sterrett, George Mank, Bob Steigleman, Ray Hostetler, and Allan Harrington. Initially, the trail was spearheaded by the local VFW post and the Welcome Wagon Club, with financial assistance from the POA, but over the years volunteers from all over Bella Vista, alongside POA employees, have worked hard to maintain and upgrade the trail. Major work had to be done following the August 2013 flood. Now when you take a hike on the Tanyard Creek trail, remember to appreciate the efforts of all those people while you enjoy the beautiful scenery, but also reflect on the history of the area, on those families who lived on the farms in Tanyard Hollow, and those who operated the tanning yard.



Virginia Jackson Squires, at about age 1, stands in front of her parents' house, with the Pete Howard farm visible in the background. Pete Howard later sold his farm to Cooper for the site of the Bella Vista Country Club. The Jackson house stood at the present day corner of 340 and Chelsea, at the bottom of the bluff on top of which Concordia now stands. In those days, the road was down alongside the creek, so the Jackson place had more space below the bluff than what is visible now. The hillside at the far left in the picture would be about where Cooper Road climbs the hill today.



This meadow alongside the Tanyard Creek trail was formerly part of a Tanyard Hollow farm.



Along the Tanyard Creek trail, the creek now called Avalon Branch, formerly called Sturgeon Creek or Sunshine Creek, comes in from Lake Avalon on the right, and joins Tanyard Creek coming from Lake Windsor. The Lake Windsor dam can be seen in the background.