

# Big Spring Autumn



**Bonnie Stepenoff**

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# Contents

Drawings by Bryan Culpepper . . . . .	viii
Acknowledgments . . . . .	ix
Introduction . . . . .	xi
The Hills . . . . .	1
Part 1: Groundwork . . . . .	3
Part 2: Autumn at Big Spring . . . . .	83
Epilogue . . . . .	137
About the Author . . . . .	143
Index . . . . .	145

# Drawings by Bryan Culpepper

Common Post Oak Tree, 3; Big Spring CCC Gatehouse (or Entrance Station), 20; CCC's Big Spring Dining Lodge, 30; Logging Virgin Pine in the Ozarks, 38; Canoeing on the Current River, 53; Big Spring Slough Trail, 57; Eastern Wild Turkey, 71; Groundhog, 79; Common Sycamore Tree, 83; Loading Logs on a Mule Drawn Wagon, 96; Camping on Current River, 106; Eastern Collared Lizard, 116; Swainson's Warbler's Nest in Giant Cane, 119; Hickory Leaves, 127; Common Ash Tree, 137.

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The poem entitled “The Hills” was previously published in *Bellowing Ark* 23, no. 2 (March/April 2007).

# Introduction

What kind of book did I set out to write? Mostly, I wanted to write a truthful one. What is this book about? The short answer is that it is about Big Spring, which is a spectacular place near the Current River in the Missouri Ozarks. Of course, there are lots of books about the Ozarks, and there are even some books about the Current River. The one that comes to mind is Leonard Hall's *Stars Upstream* (first published in 1958). I like that book very much, but I am not Leonard Hall and so my take on things is different from his.

In order to give my take on things, I had to reveal a lot about myself and where I came from. I did not grow up in the Ozarks, but in another set of hills in northeastern Pennsylvania, where there is great beauty, but also great poverty. In my mind, I knew that this book had to deal with both the beauty and the sorrow of life in the hills.

This book began as a journal I kept during the fall of 2002, while I worked on a historical study of the old state park constructed in the 1930s by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) at Big Spring. I did my work under the auspices of the National Park Service (NPS), the federal agency that manages the former state park, which has now become part of the Ozark National Scenic Riverways. At the end of the season, I submitted a well-documented report on the cultural resources in the Depression-era park and I took home a collection of hand-written essays recording my personal thoughts. These essays became the core of the book. I edited them for grammar, spelling, and clarity, but I did not substantially change them. In order to place these

essays in context, I added a series of reflections on my life before that autumn at Big Spring.

Not much happened to me during that season. I had a lot of time to think, and in that sense a great deal happened to me. Since I am a historian, I spent a lot of time thinking about the past, but I also paid a lot of attention to current events and the people I talked to every day and the landscape around me. That landscape got into my mind and will not go away.

Although there are a few references at the end of the book, this is not meant to be an exhaustive study of any particular topic. Whenever I asserted a fact, I tried to verify it, and when I drew upon other people's work, I tried to give credit. A lot of people's work influenced me, and I probably have not given sufficient credit to everyone. For any oversights, I am very sorry. Readers who have an interest in a thoroughly footnoted study of Big Spring State Park should read my report, which was published by the NPS in 2003. Mainly, in writing this book, I followed my own train of thought wherever it led me day by day, and I tried very hard to tell the truth.

## About the Author

Bonnie Stepenoff is professor of history at Southeast Missouri State University. She is the author of three books: *From French Community to Missouri Town: Ste. Genevieve in the Nineteenth Century* (2006), *Thad Snow: A Life of Social Reform in the Missouri Bootheel* (2003), and *Their Fathers' Daughters: Silk Mill Workers in Northeastern Pennsylvania* (1999).



# Index

Nos. in *italic* are drawings.

- Abbey, Edward, 65–66  
African-Americans, 114, 121. *See also*  
sharecroppers; Whitfield, Owen  
Alabama, 114  
Allentown, PA, 22–23  
Alley Mill, 80–81  
Alley Spring, 70, 80–81  
Anderson, Leo, 43–44  
Apollinaris Spring at Yellowstone  
National Park, 48  
Arkansas, 39, 43, 56, 74, 114  
Atlantic City, NJ, 21–22  
Audubon, John James, 58
- Barnard College, 24–26  
Beckman, H. C., 18, 19  
Berry, Wendell, 67, 125, 141–42n17  
Bethlehem, PA, 23–24  
*Bethlehem Globe-Times*, 24  
Bethlehem Steel, 9, 23  
Big Piney River, 35  
Big Spring, xi, xii, 66, 68  
as natural and cultural landscape,  
45–48, 108  
descriptions of, 17, 63–64, 117, 119,  
128, 133–34  
history of, 17–19, 43, 45, 69–72  
ownership of, 68, 118–20, 132–33  
Spring Branch of, 42 61–62, 116  
Big Spring Slough Trail, 57, 58  
Big Spring State Park, xii, 16, 19–20,  
20, 30  
architecture in, 37, 44  
dining lodge in 30–31, 50  
history of, 70–71, 76–77, 115–16  
*See also* Civilian Conservation Corps  
birds, 52, 71, 119, 111  
in Michigan, 34–35  
in Ohio, 27  
in Ozarks, 36, 41, 42, 51, 58, 60, 75,  
85, 117–18, 120  
in Pennsylvania, 118  
*See also* quail; turkey; woodpeckers  
Blake, Donald A., 37  
Blake, William, 125  
Bollinger, Walter, 100  
Brady, Erica, 56, 141n15  
Bridge, Josiah, 18
- Bunker Hill Beagle Club, 103  
Burrows, E. R. “Rip,” 20  
Burrows, George, 19–21, 30, 93, 128–29  
Butler County, MO, 115
- Callaway County, MO, 51  
Cape Girardeau, MO, 5, 17, 58–59, 106,  
109, 124, 126, 128, 129  
description of, 110–12  
Carnegie, Andrew, 142n33  
Carter County, MO, 17–18, 77, 100, 121  
Chavez, Cesar, 63  
Chubb Hollow, 116  
Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), xi,  
39, 41, 58, 99, 115–16  
altering the natural landscape, 45–  
48, 61–62  
buildings constructed by, 30–31,  
76–77  
camp life of, 16–17, 87–88, 107  
locally employed men in, 43–44  
segregation in, 106  
Clampett, Jed, 122–23, 129  
Clark National Forest, 7  
Cleveland, OH, 113–14  
Columbia, MO, 52, 94  
Columbia University, 25  
Columbus, OH, 26–29  
conservation movement in Missouri, 7,  
77–78  
convict labor, 99, 101  
cotton  
growing, 114–15  
picking, 74–75, 77  
Cotton House, 41  
Courtois Hills, 74  
cowboys, 122  
coyotes, 19, 85, 88–89, 121  
Cronon, William, 141–42n17  
Culpepper, Bryan, 92–93, 100–101, 116,  
117–18, 123, 125–26, 128  
as interpreter at Big Spring, 30,  
52–54, 58, 115  
list of drawings, viii  
Culpepper, Renata, 92, 101, 116, 126  
as authority on CCC, 16–17, 107, 115  
as observer of nature, 51, 86  
as Ozarks woman, 97, 109–10, 118,  
128

- Current River, 18, 20, 30, 43, 46–47, 75, 120  
 boats on, 52–53  
 descriptions of, xi, 6–7, 69  
 floating on, 55–58  
 plan to dam, 99–100  
 state parks along, 70  
 valley of, 66–67
- Cusick, Samuel (Aunt Cuse), 20
- Davis Creek, 18
- Davis, Robert (Dr.), 6–7
- deer, 19, 74, 78, 103
- disabilities, people with, 30, 53, 116–17, 128
- dogs, 103–6
- dolomite, 19, 43
- Doniphan, MO, 70, 99
- Downey, Floyd, 47
- ecology, 68, 72–73, 78–79
- Eden, Garden of, 90–91
- Eminence, MO, 18, 80
- England, 38, 121, 131
- environmentalism, 129–31
- Erhardt, Peggy, 27–29, 124
- Eureka Springs, AR, 43
- Evans, Blodwyn, 97
- Fabian, 21–22
- Falwell, Jerry, 113
- Farmer, Shirley Whitfield, 115
- fishing, 33
- floating on Ozark rivers, 36–37, 53–54, 55–58, 62–63, 70
- floods, 6, 58, 92, 110–11
- forest ranger, 137–39
- forests, 73–74. *See also* logging; trees
- garden, as metaphor, 63, 90–91
- Gasconade River, 35–36
- “Gospel of Wealth,” 130, 142n33
- Gossett, Maureen, 92
- Gossett, Mike, 61–62, 92, 121, 128
- Great Depression, xi, 43–44, 74–75, 77, 94, 115
- Greer Spring, 137–39
- groundhog, 41, 79
- guns, 103–5
- Hadley, Herbert S. (MO governor), 70
- Hall, Leonard, xi, 7
- Hartsburg, MO, 61
- Hazelton, J. S., 47
- Hill, Hamner, 17
- Hill Street, 7, 10, 98. *See also* Pennsylvania, childhood in
- hillbillies, 122–23, 129, 131
- hills, 1, 86–87, 91–92, 97, 120
- Hinchey, N. S., 18, 19
- historic preservation, 125
- House, Scott, 121
- Houston, MO, 35
- Hunt, Claude, 72
- hunting and trapping, 56, 103–6, 141n15
- Ickes, Harold, 78
- Indians. *See* Native Americans
- industry, 95–96, 121, 132
- ironweed, 58–59
- Jacoby, Karl, 141n15
- Jaeger, Joe, 98–100
- Jefferson City, MO, 52, 98, 100
- johnboats, 53, 70
- Kansas City, MO, 127
- Karel, John, 68
- labor unions, 9, 22, 115
- ladybugs, 123–24
- Lake of the Ozarks State Park, 99
- Landing, The, 6. *See also* Rose Cliff Hotel
- landscape  
 altering the natural, 45–49, 62–64  
 as part of human history, 66–67, 78–80  
 and personal memories, 5–6
- LeClair, Linda, 25
- Lehigh Canal, 33
- Lehigh River, 32–33
- Leopold, Aldo, 68, 70
- Lilly, Diana, 76, 127
- Little Dixie Lake, 51
- log cabins, 38
- logging, 38, 37–38, 69–70, 96, 97
- mayflies, 124
- McClelland, Linda Flint, 48
- McJimsey, E. Reade, 132–33
- McJimsey, Lowell D., 132–33
- Mercantile, The (restaurant), 61, 92, 101, 121
- metal buildings, 40–41
- Michigan, 33–35
- Mill Creek, 18
- Miller, Angela (Angie), 41–42, 68, 118, 128, 132

- mills, 62, 69, 80–81. *See also* Alley Mill
- Mississippi (state), 114
- Mississippi River, 124  
     at Cape Girardeau, 110–12
- Mississippians, 121
- Missouri (state), xi, 37, 39, 51–52, 70, 122
- Missouri Bootheel, 114–15
- Missouri Department of Conservation, 35, 92
- Missouri Game and Fish Commission, 45, 70–71
- Missouri Lumber and Mining Company, 70, 132–33
- Missouri River, 61
- Missouri State Parks, 62, 70, 98–99.  
     *See also* Big Spring State Park;  
     Lake of the Ozarks State Park  
*Monkey Wrench Gang*, 65–66
- museums, 19–20, 92–93, 94–95, 128, 130
- National Park Service (NPS), ix, xii, 30, 41, 65, 80, 126, 135  
     altering the natural landscape, 48  
     as owners of Big Spring, 16, 71, 118–19  
     and Ozark National Scenic Riverways, xi, 56, 100
- Native Americans, 121–23
- natural history, 66
- nature  
     as a free gift, 89–90  
     to be used or preserved, 99–100
- Nelson, Willie, 109
- New Deal, 38, 78, 107
- New York City, 24–26, 64, 71, 103. *See also* September 11, 2001; World Trade Centers
- Nin, Anaïs, 108
- Nodaway County, MO, 132
- North Sea, 49–50
- Oakley, Gene, PhD, 121
- Odetta, 24–25
- Ohio State University, 26–29
- Omaha, NE, 126
- Ozark National Scenic Riverways, xi, 17, 56, 89, 100
- Ozark rock masonry architecture, 39–40
- Ozarks, xi, 17, 18, 20, 35, 37, 38–40, 43, 45, 92, 93, 139  
     autumn in, 58, 100, 120–21, 124, 125–27  
     described, 6–7, 117  
     poverty in, 86–87  
     tourism and travel in, 69, 93–97  
     way of life, 75, 109–10, 116–17, 125
- Parkville, MO, 93
- Partney House, 50–51, 58, 64, 73, 85, 101–2, 126
- Partney, Oren, 64, 77
- Pennsylvania, 118, 135  
     childhood in, xi, 7–16, 31–33, 59–60, 85, 91–92, 98  
     hills in, 1, 97  
     hunting in, 104  
     industry in, 95–96  
     tourism in, 95–96
- Perkins, Frances, 107
- Philadelphia, PA, 98
- Pigeon River, 33–35
- Pike Creek, 18, 20
- Pocahontas, MO, 86, 124
- Poconos, 103
- poverty, 86–88, 91, 98, 121–23, 129, 130–31
- predators, 104. *See also* wolves
- Price, Acel, 74–75, 77
- Price, James (Doc, Jim), ix, 30, 41, 66, 87, 121, 126, 128  
     as authority on CCC, 16–17, 45–46, 115–16  
     as Ozarks native, 74, 109–10, 117, 125
- progress, 110
- quail, 20–21
- quilting, 76
- railroads, 70, 132–33
- Reagan, Pat, 64–65
- Reynolds County, MO, 69
- Ripley County, MO, 75
- rivers, 91. *See also* individual rivers
- rock masonry. *See* Ozark rock masonry architecture
- Roosevelt, Franklin and Eleanor, 115
- Rose Cliff Hotel, 7, 19. *See also* Landing, The
- Round Spring, 70
- St. Louis, MO, 20, 43, 114, 115
- St. Louis Globe*, 46
- Sawyer, John, 132–33
- Sawyer, Nannie M., 132–33
- Scheveningen, The Netherlands, 49–50
- Schoolcraft, Henry Rowe, 69
- Scott, Josiah L., 132–33
- Scott, Mary, 132–33
- Scott, Rachel, 132–33

- Scott, William B., 132–33  
 September 11, 2001, 64–65, 71–72, 73.  
*See also* New York City; World Trade Centers
- Shannon County, MO, 7
- sharecroppers, 114–15
- Sherwood Forest, 37
- Sikeston, MO, 114
- Slatington, PA, 24, 32, 91, 103, 134–35.  
*See also* Pennsylvania, childhood in
- Smith, Janet, 62–64, 124–25
- Smith, Kathy, 65
- snakes, 19, 102
- Snow, Thad, 7, 19, 20, 115
- Southeast Missouri State University (SEMO), ix, 17, 86, 121
- spiders, 102
- springs of Missouri, 18, 42, 43, 62, 80.  
*See also* individual springs
- squirrels, 126
- Stepenoff, Hannah, 52–54, 58, 118, 127
- Stepenoff, Jerry, 52–54
- Stoddard County, MO, 114
- stone masons, 39, 43. *See also* Ozark rock masonry architecture
- Sycamore Creek, 18
- Theory of the Leisure Class*, 129–130
- Toklas, Alice B., 120
- tourism, 45, 81, 93–97, 133
- Towner, Father Bob, 89
- trees, 3, 58, 73–74, 83, 116, 120, 127, 137  
 in autumn, 85–86, 100–101, 125, 126, 127  
*See also* forests; logging
- turkey, 70–71, 71
- turtles, 19
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 99–100
- U.S. Forest Service, 100. *See also* forest ranger
- Van Buren, MO, 20, 30, 43, 58, 63, 70, 92, 114, 128  
 description of, 6–7  
 social problems in, 5, 86–87
- Van Buren Current Local*, 17, 19
- Van Buren Light and Power Co., 45
- Veblen, Thorstein, 129–30
- violence, 71–73
- War of the Worlds*, 131
- Wales, 38, 97
- Wallin, W. L., 17, 69
- Walnutport, PA, 32
- wealth, 130–31
- Wells, H. G., 131
- West Burlington, IA, 29, 124
- Western Electric, 22
- White River, 36–37, 56
- Whitfield, Owen, 115
- wilderness, 67–68, 78–80, 141–42n17
- wildlife, 41, 56, 70–71, 72–73. *See also*  
 birds; coyotes; deer; goundhog; predators; quail; snakes; spiders; squirrels; turkey; wolves; woodpeckers
- wildness, 37, 125, 129
- Witt, R. B., 93–94
- wolves, 37, 73, 75, 77  
 extinction of, 88, 90
- women, 75–76, 107–8, 127–28  
 during the Great Depression, 106–7  
 in the outdoors, 101–6  
 in the Ozarks, 97, 109–10, 118  
*See also* Culpepper, Renata, as Ozarks woman; quilting; yodeling
- woodpeckers, 60
- Works Progress Administration (WPA), 106–7, 113
- World Trade Centers, 66, 71. *See also* New York City; September 11, 2001
- Worster, Donald, 88
- Wright, Samantha, 54, 61, 103, 118, 127, 135
- Yellowstone National Park, 48
- yodeling, 97
- Yosemite National Park, 48
- Young, Faron, 51–52
- Young, Richard, 86