

# Boonville's Co-Founder Died In Duel With Thomas Hart Benton

The Historical Society of Howard and Cooper counties have planned a series of sketches dealing with the history of this region which will appear in this paper from time to time. We sincerely hope that those among our readers who have in their possession old family letters, diaries, business journals, photographs, old songs or remembered anecdotes, will notify us about them. Contributors, subject to the approval of the Society, are invited for this column.—Charles van Ravenwaay, president.

Some years ago we found in an old book store in St. Louis a copy of the St. Louis Missouri Gazette published during the latter part of September, 1817.

Written in a neat, small hand on a corner of the upper margin was the note—as nearly as we can recall—"Contains notice of my son's death," and signed, J. B. C. Lucas.

The note might have been more honestly stated, "The account of how Thomas H. Benton murdered my son," for Charles Lucas had offended the vanity of Benton, and the latter had relentlessly driven Lucas into the duel which resulted in his death.

The abrupt end of a promising career on Bloody Island at St. Louis, has a close tie with the history of Boonville, for Charles Lucas was one of the co-founders of the city.

His associate, Asa Morgan, about whom very little is known, seems to have been a sort of frontier adventurer who somehow attached himself to Lucas.

Charles Lucas was a member of one of the most distinguished families in Missouri history. His father, J. B. C. Lucas, a native of France, had come to this country in 1784 on the invitation of Benjamin Franklin whom he had met while Franklin was the American representative at Paris.

Lucas first settled in Pittsburgh, and came to St. Louis in 1802, where he soon became prominent. His son Charles was educated in Pennsylvania, and after his return to St. Louis, began to study law. When the war of 1812 broke out, he volunteered for service, but ill-health cut short his military career. In the spring of 1814, Charles was admitted to the bar and in the fall of that year he was elected to the Territorial Legislature. About two

years later he was appointed United States Attorney for the District of Missouri. It was while holding this office that he had his duel with Benton.

The incident grew out of a court room argument which Benton's vanity would not permit to be forgotten. Demanding satisfaction for the imagined insult, he hounded Lucas until the latter agreed to meet him in a duel.

At the first meeting Lucas was severely wounded, but Benton declared his "honor had not yet been satisfied," and demanded another meeting.

Lucas agreed and after his recovery the two met again. This time, Benton's aim was more accurate, and he shot Lucas near the heart. Lucas fell, mortally wounded, and soon died.

According to the opinion of his own, and of later periods, Benton's conduct could not be justified. It was murder, however, shielded at the time by ideas of "Gentlemanly conduct."

Scarcely two months before Lucas was shot by Benton, Boonville had been laid out and the plat filed by the "proprietors" of the new town. Their adventure was a speculative one; towns were being platted at every likely site within the state; christened with impressive names, and advertised in glowing terms. Some of these slowly prospered, others collapsed when the current of trade and development moved in other directions.

Boonville, in 1817, was as much a gamble as many others, yet the nucleus for future growth was suggested by the tiny settlement which had grown up about the Cole fort.

After the organization of Cooper county in 1818, Morgan, and the Lucas heirs, donated 50 acres in the new town to the county in return for selecting the village as the county seat. Included in the grant was the lot for the public square, bounded by Main, High, Sixth and Court Streets, a portion of which is now occupied by the Courthouse.

Many years ago lots on the east side were sold and are now occupied by residences. It would be interesting to know by what manipulation of the terms of the original deed the county was able to sell land given it, in perpetuity, for public use.

## In Memoriam

In memory of John H. Smith, who passed away July 28, 1923.  
"I can not say and I will not say  
That he is dead—he is just away.  
With a cheery smile and a wave of  
his hand  
He has wandered into an unknown  
land,  
And left us dreaming of how very  
fair  
It needs must be since he lingers  
there.  
And we, oh we who lovingly yearn  
For the old time step and the glad  
return  
Think of him faring on, as dear  
In the love of there as the love of  
here.  
Think of him still as the same,  
we say  
He is not dead, he is just away."  
Sadly missed by wife and  
daughters.