

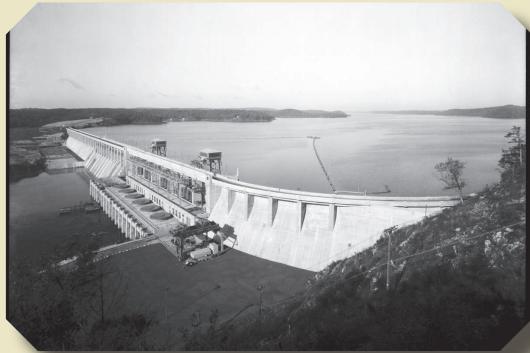
History of Dogpatch

The **Lake of the Ozarks** story began 1931 when the floodgates of Bagnell Dam first cut off the Osage River. During dam construction, the area that would become the Bagnell Dam Strip was largely empty. Temporary towns or “tent cities” to house the thousands of construction workers for the project were built at the foot of the dam. Businesses opened to provide places to eat and to buy clothes and groceries.

When the dam was complete, the need for the towns disappeared, but some business people moved to the west end thus beginning Lake Ozark and the Strip.



• Walt Tietmeyer



• Bagnell Dam in 1931
(photo courtesy of Amren UE)

Sixteen years later in 1947 Walt Tietmeyer came to the lake after WWII. Starting with nothing, he created the original Dogpatch, which began as a gas station and tourist stop. It had a restaurant and sold Ozarks souvenirs to the travelers, most of whom were just discovering the area.

When Dogpatch first opened, the Lake was a common honeymoon destination for people in post-WWII Missouri. It was close to home and relatively inexpensive. Lake of the Ozarks quickly earned the moniker “Play-



- Dogpatch as it first looked in the '40s

Page, Dogpatch's current owner. Through these years a visit to Dogpatch became an integral part of the experience.

The store bears the name of a fictional town in Al Capp's comic about Appalachian hillbillies *Li'l Abner*, and over the years Tietmeyer developed the shop into an area themed around the mythical Ozark mountain pioneer lifestyle. The store took much of

ground of the Middle West." The store's popularity grew along with the lake's.

The area was booming, and the honeymooners often returned with their kids for family vacations. "We are now in the fourth generation," says Mike



- Lake travelers in a Model T

its inspiration from Ozarks culture in the days before the dam. Some of the attractions included piano playing chickens, talking outhouses, a snake pit and even a lion at one point.

Figures and mannequins decorated in backwoods outfits depicted rustic scenes, while stuffed wild animals were set in front of forest backdrops. However, any reference to *Li'l Abner* or *Daisy Mae* was squelched by



- Inside the Dogpatch restaurant



- A display featuring the “hillbilly” life

despite this small hurdle, by the '50s and '60s the store had become a well known tourist attraction with thousands of visitors annually.

Today the store is a symbol for the area. The bright orange sign and series of colorful flags invite visitors in from the sidewalk. The moment they push past the glass doors they're inundated by the sights and sounds. A tinkling player piano clangs a cheery tune while a rainbow of souvenirs and curious displays unfolds before them. A few steps farther and they are greeted by Grandpa's welcoming “howdy.”

The people who have explored the Strip know Dogpatch is a Lake of the Ozarks tradition. It is the longest continually operated store at the Lake. It's a place where parents whose own mom and pop brought them here during their childhood are now bringing their kids.

Capp's legal team. In 1968 Capp licensed a theme park called Dogpatch U.S.A. located between Jasper and Harrison, Arkansas, but no license was available to Tietmeyer. Mentioning anything from the *Li'l Abner* comic strip other than the name Dogpatch would breach the copyright. De-



- Dogpatch today

The store has survived changing owners, moving to a new building, and even the brief legal battle about the rights to its name, but through everything it has remained an essential part of the lake landscape. It owes its longevity to two things. First, it is always expanding its selection of unique gifts has visitors returning again and again to explore. Second, it's full of curiosities like the flying Indian canoe and life-size toy tiger. The 10,000 sq. ft. store often provides an afternoon of entertainment for tourists and locals alike.

Owner Mike Page works hard to create the entertaining atmosphere. "Our goal is to make it as much about fun as it is a shopping experience," he says. He describes Dogpatch as a nostalgic escape, a place where one can step back in time.



- Antique player piano



- Old-fashioned candy

Page bought the store in 1993, and he has attempted to draw from and revise the old traditions. "Our time frame is in the early 20th century," he says.

Today the store is filled with reminders of the past. Old fashioned stick candy, kettle corn, hillbilly gifts and novelties, and books on hillbilly lore are a few examples.

Beyond the nostalgia, the maze-like store has numerous departments and sections. It sells home décor, posters and artwork, toys and novelties, and lots of souvenirs.

Page says the unique experience the store provides is the reason for its success in recent years. "You try to make your store so appealing they've just got to take a little of your store home with them," Page says.