

ECONOMIC GROWTH AS A RESULT OF TOURISM IN
THE BRANSON/LAKES AREA OF MISSOURI
1980 - 1993

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PREFACE

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Adventurous and curious men and women have always had an urge to travel, to see what is around the next corner, over the next hill, across the next ocean, and even on the next planet. Out of this universal interest has arisen the tourist industry, now one of the world's major businesses. It consists of providing food, lodging, transportation, entertainment, and related services for travelers.

Physical Geography

Tourism in the Ozark Mountain region of southwestern Missouri, northern Arkansas, and eastern Oklahoma dates back to the early part of this century. According to Milton Rafferty, in The Ozarks: Land and Life, one of the first attractions for vacationers in the Ozarks was the fishing on clear, spring-fed rivers and streams, and taking float trips. The White River was one of the best float-fishing streams, but today its shoals and pools have been inundated by waters from several large lakes (199-200).

Hunting for deer, turkeys, and other wild game was popular with early settlers, and continues to be so today. Through the efforts of the U.S. Forest Service, wildlife populations have been restored from the low ebb of the 1930s (204).

The region's physical geography, including rivers, lakes, forests, hills, and hollows, has always attracted those who love the outdoors (Figure 1).

Source: The Ozarks: Land and Life (13)

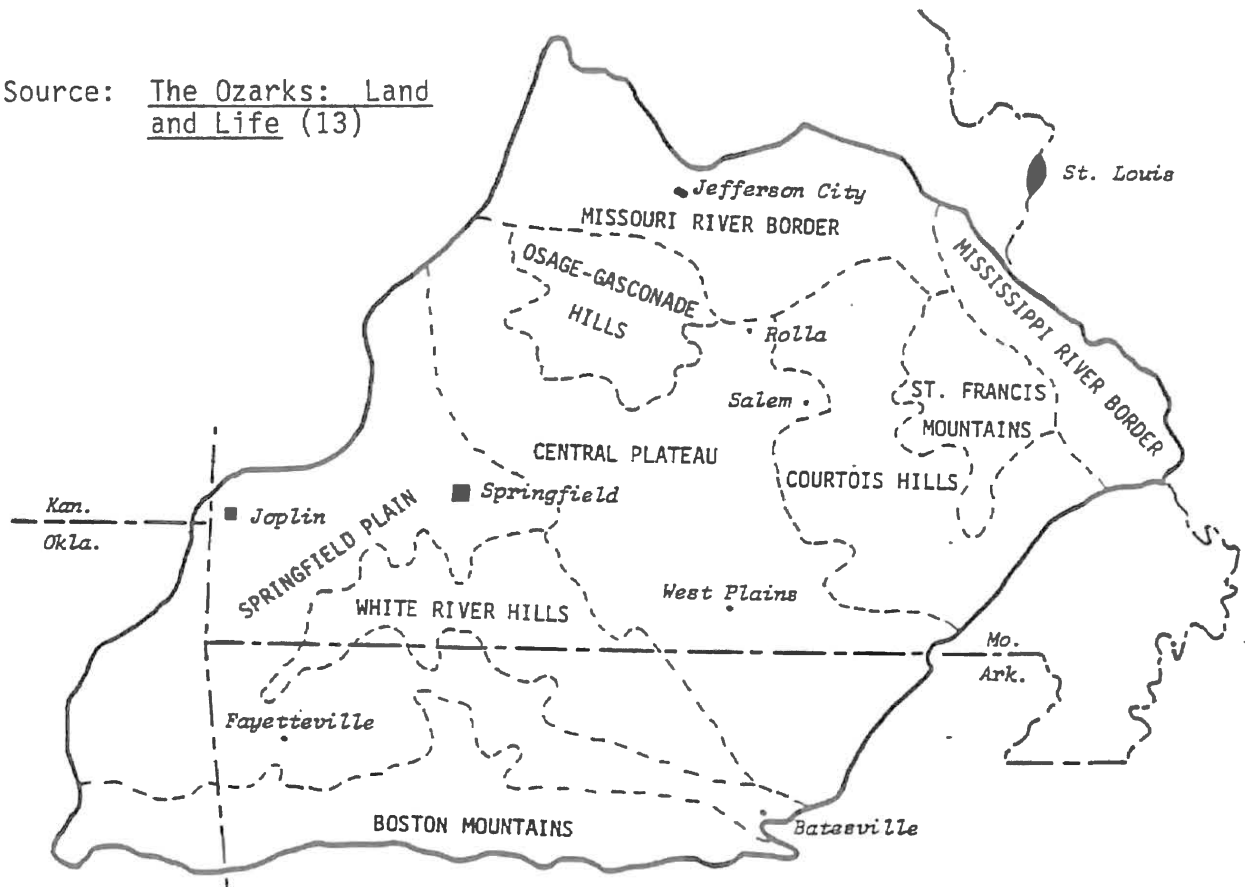


Figure 1: Geographic Regions of the Ozarks

Tom Aley, Director of the Ozark Underground Laboratory, a research facility near Protem dedicated to the study of groundwater hydrology and methods of protecting water quality, says the term, "Ozark Mountains" is somewhat of a misnomer:

. . . the Ozarks region does not have high mountains, just deep valleys . . . the region is a plateau which has been dissected and eroded by countless streams, creating a land of valleys, rolling hills, and winding ridge tops. Springfield, where the terrain is relatively flat, lies atop remaining portions of the plateau: Stone and Taney Counties are in the dissected portions, cut by numerous streams.

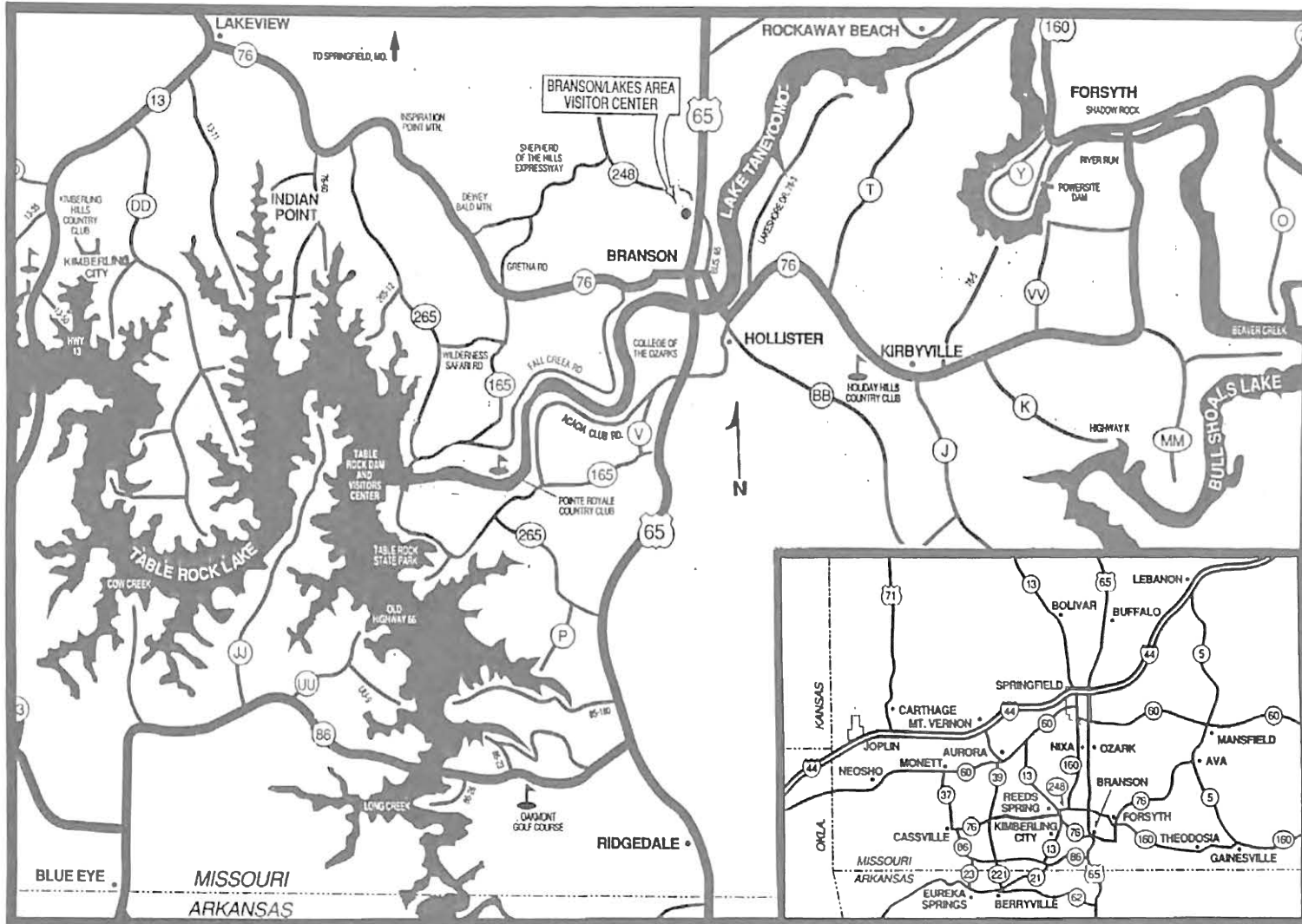
If the Ozark region were to be described geologically with one phrase, it might best be called "The Land of Hollow Hills." Beneath both the hills and valleys lie extensive cave systems . . . (Ozark Mountain Country 88)

Such a cave system is Marvel Cave which lies beneath Silver Dollar City. The WPA Guide to 1930s Missouri pointed out that Marvel Cave was one of the largest limestone caverns in the state, and that a walking trip through the ten miles of passageways that had then been explored took nine hours or so (486). The building of the dams discussed in Chapter IV of this paper, created lakes with great potential for water-based recreation, and helped the small towns in the Branson/Lakes area to develop as resorts. The WPA Guide mentioned above had this entry about Branson:

Branson . . . (723 alt., 1,011 pop.) on Lake Taneycomo, is predominantly a resort town. Tourist and fishing camps, hotels, and boat docks line the shaded lakeshore. The business district is filled with cafes, taverns, drug stores, and novelty shops . . . (486).

Branson, Missouri is in the central part of the region which is familiarly called the Branson/Lakes area, or Ozark Mountain Country (Figure 2). Based on the author's computations, it is within a day's drive of roughly sixty-five million people. U.S. Interstate Highway 44 is the principal

BRANSON/LAKES AREA



Source: Branson Lakes Chamber of Commerce

Figure 2. Branson/Lakes Area Map

road into the region, and it runs through Springfield, thirty-six miles north of Branson. A circle drawn on a U.S. map with a 600-mile radius from Branson encompasses all or almost all of eight states: Missouri, Iowa, Illinois, Arkansas, Kansas, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Oklahoma. It includes large parts of: Indiana, Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, Nebraska, and Texas. (Figure 3) Visitors come mainly from the Midwest and South, from the forests, farms, and small towns where country music's roots go deepest.

Human/Cultural Geography .

Indians (Native Americans) were the first inhabitants of the Ozarks. Eventually, all Indian tribes were removed from the upper White River Valley, but many Indians remained behind, hiding out in the hills. Quite often they intermarried with whites, and descendants of early families in the area have discovered they have some Indian ancestry (Ozark Mountain Country 143.) By 1840, the Indians were gone and the region was opened up to further white settlement (146).

In the popular history, Ozark Mountain Country, this account is given of the first settlers:

The story of Ozark Mountain Country is also a story of a people and their culture and values. To a great extent, the area was once defined by its isolation. It comes as no surprise then that the folklore and traditional music of the region has its origins deep in antiquity. The Ozark hills were settled by yeoman farmers who moved into the area from the mountains of the Carolinas, Tennessee, and Kentucky - individuals who were themselves descendants of farmers from Scotland, England and Ireland (103).

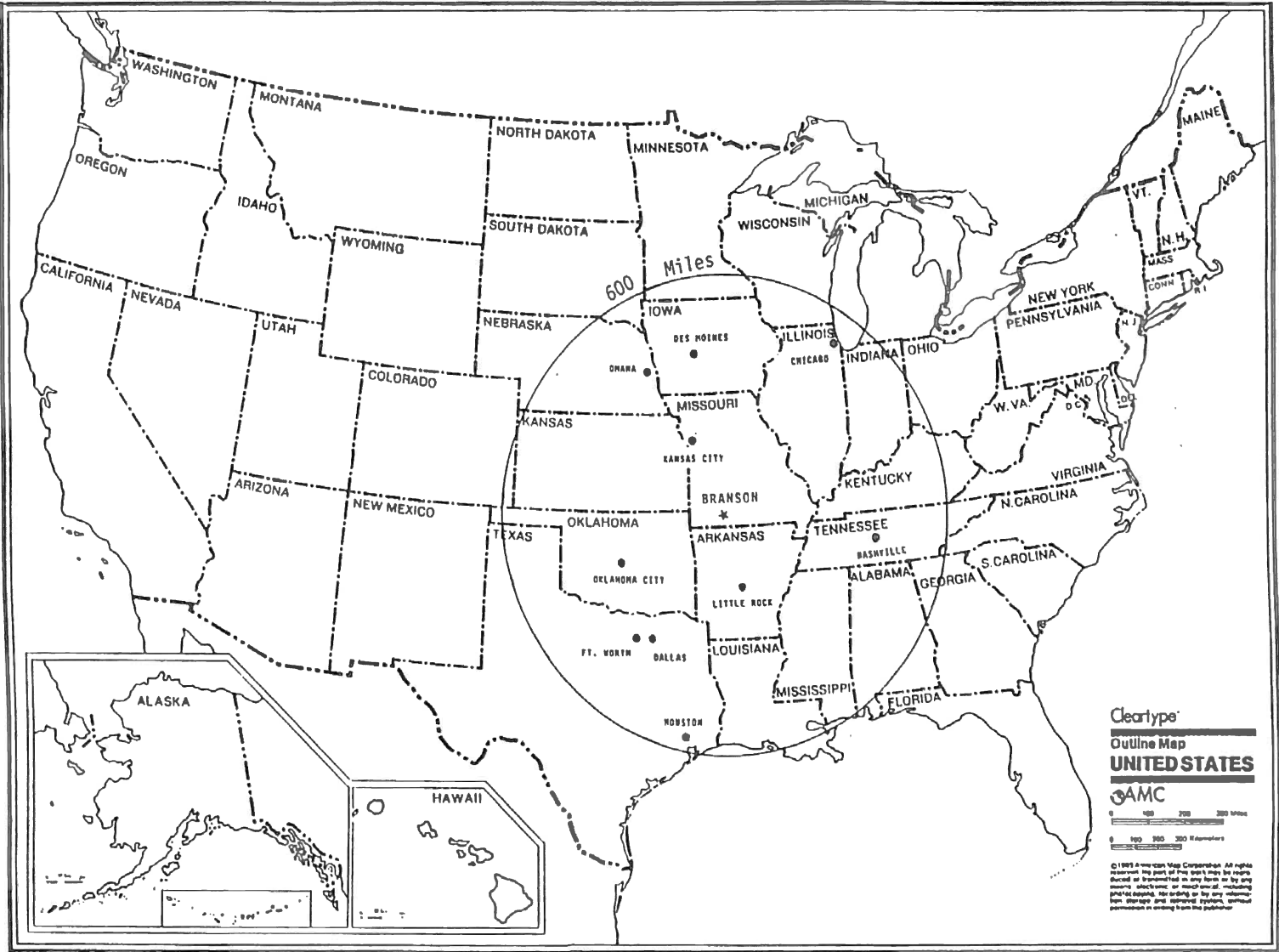


Figure 3. U.S. Mileage Map

. . . many newcomers arrived with a musical instrument tucked among their belongings, a fiddle, a mouth harp (harmonica), sometimes even a pump organ (103).

This musical heritage is the foundation on which Branson's current music theatre industry is built.

Another facet of the Ozarks' cultural base is handicrafts which have been a traditional drawing-card to the area. For thirty-one years, Silver Dollar City has welcomed craftspeople to the National Crafts Festival during part of September and October. The craft colony at Silver Dollar City began in 1963 when an Arkansas woodcarver, Pete Engler, started working there (New York Times, 7/12/92). In 1986, along Highway 76 West, Engler built a replica of his grandfather's general store and renovated a 40,000 square foot warehouse now occupied by shops selling everything from skillet bottoms painted with *country scenes to custom-made fishing rods.*

At Mutton Hollow, near the western end of Highway 76 West's entertainment strip, almost twenty artisans demonstrate their skills. Handmade wares are sold there, along with such regional treats as fried pork rinds, apple butter, honey, and home-made candy. Other smaller arts and crafts shops are in the hills around Branson.

In the old part of Branson, fronting Lake Taneycomo, the flavor of an early Ozark village survives where the settlement began around the turn of the century. The Sammy Lane excursion boat, operated by the Lane Line which started in 1916 as a mail boat service, cruises on the lake from late April until mid-October.

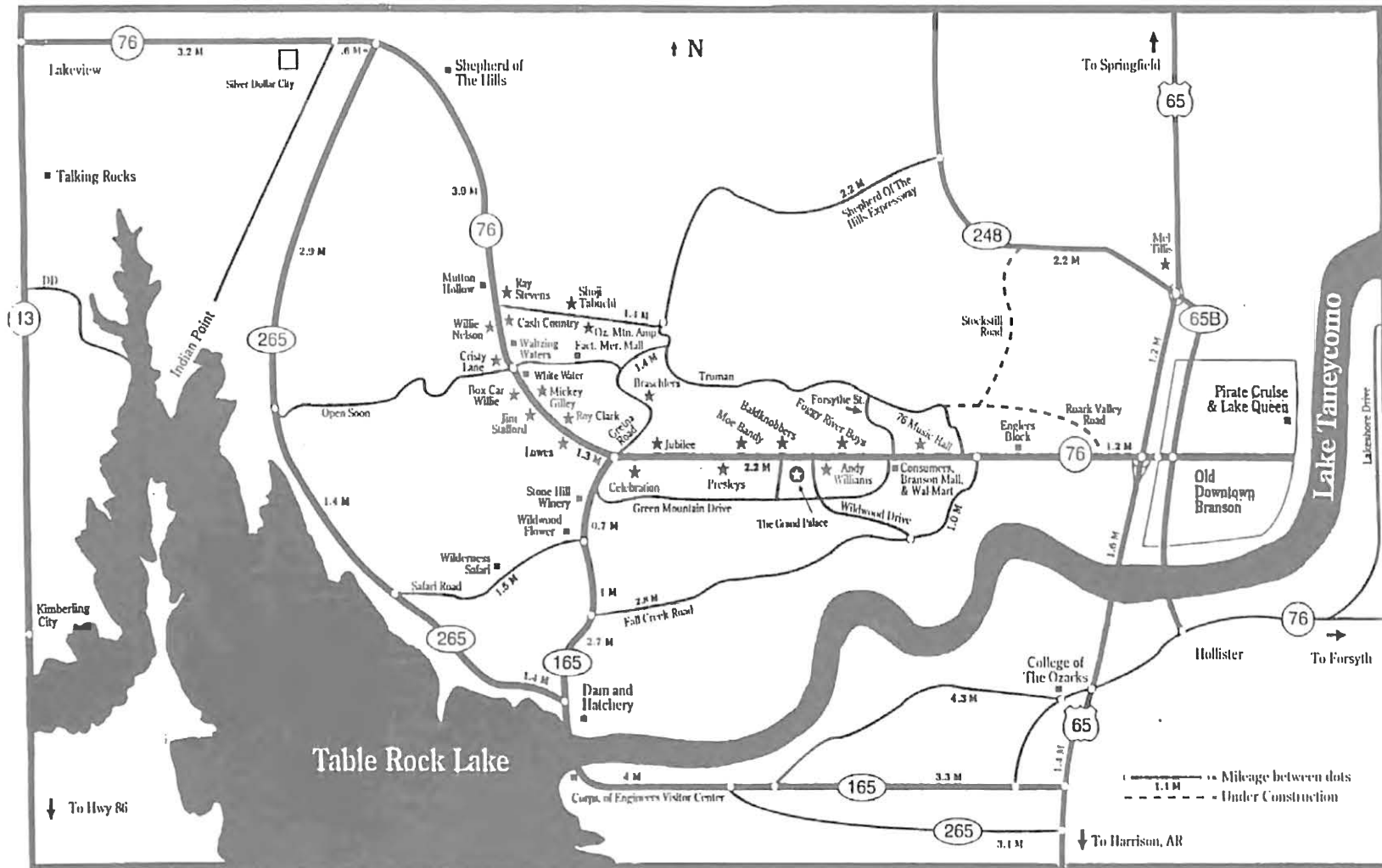
Economic Geography

Tourism in the Ozarks has been an important factor in the region's economy for many years. The latest, and greatest, impetus to its growth came in December, 1991, when the CBS television program, 60 Minutes, featured the entertainment industry of the town in one of its programs. The messages of the segment were: (1) Branson was becoming a country music mecca, and (2) there were jobs to be had there. Both points registered with the viewing audience, and the number of visitors (both tourists and people looking for work) swelled from a little over four million in 1991 to almost five million in 1992. Although these visitors were welcome they strained the ability of the town to care for them.

Branson, with a population of 3,706 (1990 U.S. Census, up from 2,550 in 1980), is situated west of U.S. Highway 65 which runs north to Springfield. The "Strip," a five-mile stretch of Missouri Highway 76 where the music theatres are located, lies west of Highway 65 (Figure 4). It is compared to a miniature Las Vegas with neon signs lighting the night and vehicles driving bumper to bumper in season. Highway 76W was recently widened to three lanes (maximum possible) and that helped, but traffic is still in gridlock during the good weather season.

The tourist season which used to be the three summer months with a lapover into May and September, has been extended, and in 1993, will run from March through December. Tourists arrive mostly by automobile, pickup truck, camper,

Branson



Adapted from Silver Dollar City promotional material

Figure 4. Branson and West Highway 76

van, and tourist bus. The nearest airport is thirty-six miles away in Springfield, so those flying in must rent a car to travel on to Branson. According to Kay Baker, Executive Secretary to the Director of Aviation at Springfield Regional Airport, the number of deplaning passengers arriving in Springfield grew from 127,934 in 1980, to 267,937 in 1992. Although this growth cannot be attributed solely to tourists headed for Branson, it is a safe assumption that they form a major part.

In the summer, most of the tourists are families coming to enjoy the lakes and the beautiful Ozark Mountain scenery as well as the entertainment offered along the Strip. The emphasis in Branson is on "family entertainment." Even though both Stone and Taney Counties have numerous establishments that sell liquor, (116 primary establishments for Taney County, 97 for Stone - Missouri Liquor Control Board in Jefferson City) there is little evidence of it in the area.

The music shows, which feature mostly, but not entirely, country and western performers, are a mix of vocal and instrumental music, humor, and bright, sparkly costumes with not an off-color or suggestive word or lyric. Most of the shows are professionally produced and well done. The "down-home" friendliness of the performers (some of whom are available for autographs during intermission) adds a special dimension to the ambience of the place.

The indoor and outdoor theatres together could seat over 56,000 people in 1992, and that number will rise to over 60,000 in 1993. Opening in 1993, are new theatres which will star Wayne Newton and Tony Orlando. They will join Roy Clark,

Mel Tillis, Loretta Lynn, Mickey Gilley, Box Car Willie, Andy Williams, and other popular, but less well-known performers. Shoji Tabuchi, a Japanese violinist, provides one of the most popular shows in Branson, but he is unknown outside the area. As a child, Shoji took violin lessons, but was not inspired to a musical career until he heard Roy Acuff play on a visit to Japan, whereupon Shoji fell in love with country fiddling (Ozark Mountain Country 47).

In addition to the music shows along the Strip, there are numerous amusement havens for children, offering miniature golf, bumper cars, kiddie rides, skating rinks, and video games. There are also three theme parks nearby: Silver Dollar City, Shepherd of the Hills Homestead and Outdoor Theatre, and Mutton Hollow Craft and Entertainment Village.

In spite of the boom, a vacation in the Branson/Lakes area is relatively inexpensive. A recent study by the Missouri Department of Tourism found that the cost of a Branson area vacation (transportation, lodging, admissions, and other expenses) is only \$54.72 to \$66.54 per person, per day. Music show tickets sell from \$7.50 to \$25 with most in the \$15 range. With over 11,000 lodging rooms available and about 6,000 campground spaces, there is something for every pocketbook. The area has almost 22,000 restaurant seats and most of them are fast-food or chain outlets.

After school begins in the fall, the majority of tourists seem to be retirees who come individually and by tour bus. Fountain Head Tours, a Branson travel agency, brought 1,200 busloads of people to Branson in 1992. Retirees are also

coming there to live. They like the low cost of living, recreational opportunities, and the relaxed lifestyle.

Demographic data were unavailable. Although it was the author's understanding that Silver Dollar City collects such data, upon request they did not wish to share it. As a casual observer, the author perceived the majority of visitors as:

- families
- retirees
- mostly from within Missouri, surrounding states, and the upper Midwest (car tags)
- probably with incomes from \$12,000 to \$50,000 a year
- of the Caucasian race

CHAPTER II

PURPOSE OF STUDY

It is highly unusual for a small Ozark town of 3,706 residents to present nationally known entertainers in music shows and to attract several million visitors each year. Since tourism is necessarily based on both the physical and cultural geography of a place, I was very curious to investigate the Branson phenomenon. I wanted to find out:

- What is the attraction? Is it just music shows or scenery or what?
- How does such a small town accommodate so many visitors?
- What problems does the influx of visitors cause for the local populace?
- How long has this been going on, and how long will it last?

Hypotheses

The primary hypotheses are:

1. Tourism has become the major factor in the economic and population growth of the Branson/Lakes area in recent years.
2. This growth has affected the resident population in both positive and negative ways.

Scope

This study is concerned not only with the town of Branson, Missouri, but also with the surrounding Lakes Area, which encompasses Table Rock, Taneycomo, and Bull Shoals Lakes. These cover a large part of Branson's home county of Taney, and the county adjoining Taney on the west, which is Stone (Figure 5).

Economic statistics are for the two counties in their entireties. The boundaries for tourist statistics, such as numbers of visitors, lodging and entertainment are (Figure 5):

North - Reeds Spring to Rockaway Beach

South - Missouri/Arkansas state line

East - Forsyth to Branson to Missouri/Arkansas
state line

West - Highway 13 to Reeds Spring

The time period covered is 1980 - 1993. The reason this time period was chosen is because 1980 is the beginning of the decade preceding the opening of Roy Clark's Celebrity Theatre in 1983, which started the current boom. The ending date is the current year, 1993, because most indicators show this should be the biggest year yet for the Branson/Lakes area.

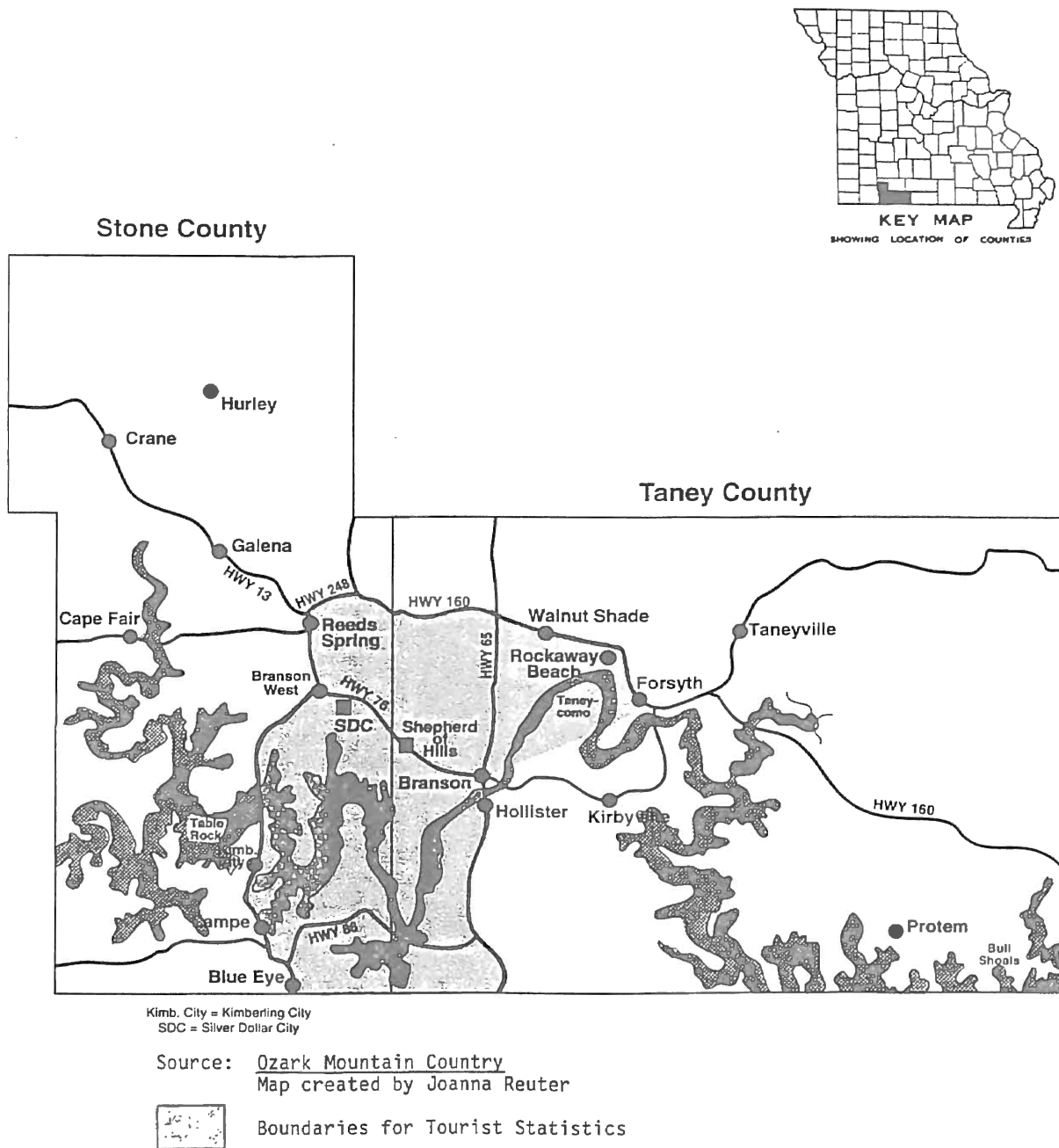


Figure 5. Map of Study Area - Stone and Taney Counties, Missouri

Methodology

Beginning my study with field work, I visited Branson for several days the first part of December, 1992 and attended four of the music shows. En route, I stopped at Southwest Missouri State University in Springfield to interview Dr. Milton Rafferty, an Ozarks scholar and author. I also stopped by the office of the Springfield Business Journal to talk with the staff and obtain copies of their paper which has covered Branson's economic success.

In Branson, the Branson/Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce provided me their business packet of information, as did the Ozark Marketing Council. Interviews were held with these local residents:

- Martha Hoy, Managing Editor of the Branson Daily News
- Mary Ann Hartman, co-owner of Fountain Head Tours
- Larry and Dorothy Price, pioneer residents of the area
- Kevin Keith, Project Manager of the Ozark Mountain Highroad Project for the Missouri Highway and Transportation Department.

In the following weeks, additional information about the tourist "boom" was provided by mail from these sources:

- Ron Pugh, at Country Music Foundation in Nashville, sent copies of their clipping file on Branson.
- Jim Zing at Missouri Highway and Transportation's Planning Division in Jefferson City sent two maps of the Branson area.

- Tom Keohan, Business and Industry Specialist, with the University of Missouri Extension Office in Forsyth, sent tables of per capita income for Taney and Stone County citizens for the period, 1960 - 1990.
- Missouri Department of Public Safety in Jefferson City sent crime statistics for Taney and Stone Counties for the 1980 - 1991 period.
- Ron Wylie, Reference Librarian at the College of the Ozarks library supplied names of contacts for City Directories of the Branson-Hollister-Forsyth area.
- Michael Glenn, Local History Librarian at the Springfield - Greene County Library, sent listings of publications about the Branson/Lakes area.
- Missouri Division of Employment in Jefferson City sent unemployment statistics for the two counties.
- Taney County financial information was provided by County Clerk, Ronald Houseman. Except for taxes, records were only available for the past three years.
- Branson City Clerk, Sandra Williams, related Branson city sales tax figures by telephone.

The narrative, graphs, maps, analysis, and conclusions in this study were developed using the data outlined. In addition, I subscribed to the local newspaper, the Branson Daily News.

A review of relevant literature about tourism, its effect on host communities, and the history of the Branson/Lakes region is included in Chapter III.

CHAPTER III

LITERATURE REVIEW

Only in the past twenty or so years has tourism emerged as a subject of serious geographic study. Even though the linkage of physical geography, place, and culture seems obvious, geographers have largely bypassed the subject until recently.

General Works on Tourism

X According to Milton Rafferty, in his 1993 Geography of World Tourism, tourism has become the world's biggest civilian industry with worldwide sales of some \$2 trillion in 1988. It is the largest employer in almost every country, accounting for one of every sixteen jobs worldwide. His comment that "environmental problems are especially obvious when large numbers of tourists descend on tourist areas developed in once pristine rural settings," (4) perfectly describes the Ozarks Mountain region situation.

John Jakle presented his book, The Tourist, as an argument for renewed scholarly interest in tourism. He observed that tourism is a nearly universal behavior in advanced, industrialized societies, and is a significant means by which modern people assess their world. The chapter titled, "The Region as an Attraction," is applicable to my study. In it he quotes

Thomas Hart Benton (a native Missourian) who wrote, after a 1934 visit to the Arkansas Ozarks:

Towns, even those on the main arteries of travel, where the garage, the filling station and soda fountain have found their place, are yet full of the rustic and frequently dilapidated spirit of America's yesterday. But the automobile has come, and with it passable roads, and an influx from the modern world bringing its load of new ways, beliefs, and habits.

Today, almost sixty years later, tourists are still interested in regional identities, and the personality of the Ozarks remains colorful and engaging.

X Philip Pearce defines tourism as the loosely interrelated amalgam of industries which arise from the movement of people, and their stay in various destinations outside their home area, in his book, The Social Psychology of Tourist Behavior. He points out that geographers have highlighted the regional and spatial imbalances which accompany tourism, and also see its influence on landscape morphology and town design as part of their interest area. A balanced appraisal of tourist impact on the environment must also stress the beneficial effects of tourist interest and money in conserving, restoring and rescuing tourist sites.

In Kenneth Johnson's article, "Origin of Tourism in the Catskill Mountains," he points out that the proximity of the Catskills to major population centers of the East Coast stimulated interest in the region. In like manner, the Ozark Mountain region is strategically located to attract tourists from the central, midwestern, and southern parts of the U.S.

James Shortridge makes the case that popular novels were a major determinant of American place images in the period between 1800 and 1950, in "The Concept of the Place-Defining Novel in American Popular Culture." This seems to be true in the case of Harold Bell Wright's Shepherd of the Hills. Wright caught the spirit of the hill people of the Ozarks and added to the idea of the Ozarks as a vernacular region. The novel was widely read and helped initiate tourism in the area as people came to see the setting of the book located in the Mutton Hollow area, just west of Branson.

Effects of Tourism on Host Communities

In "The Consequences of Forty Years of Tourism Growth," Carlton Van Doren and Sam Lollar confirm that since the middle 1950s, leisure and travel have become a major part of the national lifestyle. Travel is no longer just the privilege of the wealthy. There has been a democratization of travel. The computer has revolutionized the travel industry. A new and more imaginative era began in 1955 when Disneyland became a new kind of attraction, a "theme park." Quality of life issues relative to the travel industry's growth are increasing. Citizens in some locales have already questioned developments catering to the leisure travel industry on the basis of human physical impact. Their contention, that community issues will be abuse of the environment and expenditure of public money, is exactly what is happening in Branson, Missouri today.

Garrett Eckbo, in his article, "The Landscape of Tourism," defines the landscape of tourism as the result of the impact of

mass travel of urban dwellers, in search of variety, relaxation, recreation, or a nostalgic quest for family, ethnic, or cultural roots. This mass movement of groups and individuals has a profound, and often devastating, effect on existing natural, agricultural, or resident cultural landscapes.

According to John Fraser Hart in a study of "Resort Areas in Wisconsin," most resort areas seem to share a common problem of disagreement about the rate and character of the development that should be permitted in the area. Individuals at the extreme ends of the spectrum have been caricatured as "gangplankers" and "bulldozers." The gangplankers want to keep everyone else out, to preserve the area precisely as it was when they first saw it, and to bring all development to an immediate halt. At the other extreme, the bulldozers think that anything that brings money into the community is good, and they want to develop everything, the sooner the better.

Local people do not unanimously favor development. A small local business that has been run by members of the same family for two or three generations may be seriously threatened if a large national chain opens a local unit. Many local people have become disenchanted with exploitation by outside developers who see only the chance to make a quick buck and get out, and they are more favorably inclined toward those who elect to become permanent residents.

In Dean MacCannell's book, The Tourist - a New Theory of the Leisure Class, he points out that social structures developed for tourism have the capacity to service populations which are larger than the resident population. This applies

directly to the situation in Branson, where the small town of 3,706 people received almost five million visitors in 1992. MacCannell interprets such figures as a sign that modern social structure, through the institutionalization of tourism, is naturally adapting itself to the problem of "overpopulation." He observes that tourists believe sightseeing to be a leisure activity, and fun, even when it requires more effort and organization than many jobs.

Tourist-industry jobs in the small town of Sedona, Arizona are examined in the article, "Job-Rich but Housing-Poor: The Dilemma of a Western Amenity Town," by Patricia Gover, K. Z. McHugh, and Denis Leclerc. Sedona, which is framed by a beautiful red-rock setting just outside Oak Creek Canyon in central Arizona, is about two hours north of Phoenix. It has become a desirable destination for affluent retirees and creative people who are escaping urban areas to live in a small town with unusual amenities. Most jobs in Sedona are based on the tourist industry and since they are service-related jobs, pay is low. This creates a problem for those workers who want to live in Sedona where the cost of housing is relatively high. The authors investigated issues of housing affordability in Sedona, and workers commuting from surrounding small towns. Branson is experiencing the same kinds of problems.

In Tourism: A Community Approach, Peter Murphy's vision of tourism is one in which the tourist industry works toward community goals in return for the community's support. He suggests that tourism should be conceived of as a renewable resource, subjected to the same strains of overuse and degradation as

forests, air, and water. The goal of this approach is to use amenities in a non-degradational, low-stress fashion to avoid a loss of the values that made it appealing.

According to Murphy, to attain this goal, planners must examine four components that together compose tourism: characteristics of environment and accessibility, commercial and economic considerations, social and cultural issues, and the managerial framework. He argues that one element has been neglected in tourism planning and it is the needs and desires of the local residents in communities affected by tourism.

Early Tourism and Industry

The upper White River Valley has been inhabited by man, at least intermittently, for some 10,000 to 12,000 years, according to Elmo Ingenthron in The Land of Taney: A History of an Ozark Commonwealth. Remnants of Indian village sites are numerous along the river and its many tributaries. The Spanish explorers, upon entering the White River valley, were impressed by the white, foaming waters of its many shoals, and named it the Rio Blanco (White River). Settlers living along its flood plains had to contend with periodic floods of catastrophic dimension such as the ones that occurred in February, 1884, and March, 1890.

Logging was one of the earliest industries along the White River. In 1870, the first steam engine of the St. Louis and San Francisco Railroad arrived at Springfield, and in the next fifty years thousands of railroad ties were cut by farmers, floated to collection points such as the waterfront near Roark

Creek on the White River and from there, either loaded on freight wagons and hauled to Springfield or lashed into rafts and guided downstream to the nearest railroad.

The Branson postoffice and store were established near the mouth of Roark Creek in 1882, by its namesake, a young schoolteacher and storekeeper, Reuben S. Branson. Kathleen Van Buskirk, one of the authors of Ozark Mountain Country, describes the founding of Branson in 1903:

During the next four years ten new industries came to Branson's waterfront: a cedar factory, wagon factory, foundry and machine works, wood products factory, box factory, a mill where wood veneer was made, a spoke factory, a tie and timber yard, a feed and flour warehouse, and a cannery. (154)

At its incorporation on April 1, 1912, Branson had 1,200 inhabitants.

When Carl Sauer, who was an eminent geographer as well as a Missouri native, wrote the following in his 1920 book, The Geography of the Ozark Highland of Missouri, he could have been forecasting the music theatre-related "boom" of the 1980s and early 1990s:

The Ozark Highland will never possess the wealth nor the population of adjoining districts. It is quite incorrect, however, to consider it doomed perpetually to poverty and sparse settlement . . . (234). The Ozarks possess opportunities, as yet but poorly recognized, which ultimately will bring the region into much better repute than it has at present. (235)

Cultural and historical aspects of the people of the Ozarks are described in Vance Randolph's book, The Ozarks - An American Survival of Primitive Society, published in 1931. In

those days the Ozark hills were isolated and the people's lives bounded by the distance they could walk or ride a horse. This fascinating account tells about the "hillbillies" social customs, dialect, superstitions, folk music, whiskey-making, fishing stories, and treasure-seekers. Randolph described the typical Ozark hillman as almost insanely jealous of his independence and personal liberty; as unused to continuous labor; and unable to take orders or endure any sort of discipline. Randolph viewed these people with affection and wrote that the Ozark hills produced extraordinary men and women, whose passing closed one of the most romantic and colorful chapters in our history.

E. Joan Wilson Miller defined the region through the use of folktales and folk speech, supported by evidence from other sources in "The Ozark Culture Region as Revealed by Traditional Materials." She found that although neither poverty nor isolation was absolute, low levels of technical competence, too few natural resources, and too many babies reduced the white, Anglo-Saxon hill people in the Ozarks to an economic level from which it was hard to escape (68). The dominant economic unit was the family farm, and the people were almost self-sufficient save for buying coffee and tobacco at the store and going after the doctor when conditions required his expertise. The family had a strong sense of kinship and often, "kin-folks" would live in the same heavily wooded, steep-sided valley. "Isolation was only relative. Travelers rode by; they were welcomed, lodged for the night, and fed from the family's supplies" (75). Even though change was resisted, modern technology brought in dams,

electricity, paved roads and consolidated schools. Tourists now flock to the region and the hillmen get a "bang" out of telling them tall tales.

Stephen Jett's article, "Culture and Tourism in the Navajo Country," discusses the creation of the Southwest-Indian image, the role of cultural attractions and their "packaging" in drawing tourists, and briefly assesses the physical, economic, and cultural effects of tourism. The Ozarks have a distinctive image which is used in advertising the vacation possibilities of the region. Several years ago, that image was one of backward hill people, popularly known as hillbillies, who lived in partially inaccessible hill country, a place of poor roads, hills and hollows. Today, the image of the hill-billy still exists, but the attractions of country/bluegrass music and outdoor recreation are far more important.

In his 1980 book, The Ozarks: Land and Life, Milton Rafferty writes about the geographic regions of the Ozarks, their weather and climate, historical settlement, transportation, communication, mining, agriculture, tourism, and the cultural landscape. He says that in the years before the Civil War the first Ozark settlers shared a common heritage with most of their fellow countrymen in the rural United States. Dancing and "frisking together" were discouraged, as were gaming, cock-fighting, and horse racing. Hunting and fishing were very popular, as were camp meetings and the usual church services. This moral tone has lasted until the present time with the emphasis on "family" entertainment in Ozark Mountain Country.

In Rafferty's book, The Ozarks Outdoors, he discusses the distinctive cultural landscape that retains much of the past, the rurality, and the Upper South hill-country heritage which combine to produce the popular imagery of Ozark cultural idiosyncrasies. These include clinging to the traditional technologies, a disdain for city life and education, a suspicion of outsiders, and conservative politics. The Ozarker's uncommon sense of place is another distinctive cultural trait.

One of Rafferty's conclusions is that for many years the Ozarks were a backwater area affected only marginally by growth and development in the rest of the country. Today, when scenery, water, and recreational potential are increasingly valuable resources, the Ozarks are experiencing rapid growth and development, and are in a region whose time has come.

Ozark Mountain Country, a popular history of Stone and Taney Counties, tells of modern and historic tourist destinations. The book provides an overview of the hard life experienced by the early settlers, which still exists today in some of the pockets of poverty in the area. The book narrates a thread of violence running through Ozark life. One of the most interesting criminal elements was the "Baldknobbers," a group of men which began as vigilantes in the lawless days of the late 1800s, and became more corrupt than the people they were pursuing. The Baldknobbers appeared in The Shepherd of the Hills, and their name was taken by one of the earliest country music groups around Branson. The group still performs today, although with mostly new members.

CHAPTER IV

HISTORY OF TOURISM IN OZARK MOUNTAIN COUNTRY

Although tourism accelerated in the Ozarks in the 1980s, it had been part of the economic base of the region for many years. Ingethron wrote that the building of the railroad brought unprecedented prosperity to the people of the White River country after the first train passed over the completed line on New Year's Day, 1906 (274). Many people from outside the region came on the excursion trains to see the picturesque area for the first time. This gave birth to an infant tourist industry, which grew to be greater than all other businesses combined, and added substantially to the economic well-being of the local people (278).

Shortly after the beginning of the railroad, Wright's book, The Shepherd of the Hills, attracted those curious to see the Mutton Hollow/Roark Valley area which was the setting of the popular novel. (This book served the same purpose of catalyst in the first decade of the twentieth century as the 60 Minutes television program did in the last.) Visitors came by train, disembarking at the old depot at Hollister. They usually stayed at tourist camps, as hotels were scarce. The White River, which drew tourists coming to fish, swim, and enjoy the rugged, scenic beauty of the Ozarks, was a wild river given to disastrous floods.

The first dam on the White, the Powersite Dam near Forsyth, was constructed for the generation of electricity. At its completion in 1913, a section of the White River was turned into Lake Taneycomo. Within the next few years, Joplin, Springfield, Monett, Carthage, and other communities were electrified by the generators of Powersite Dam (Ingenthron 288).

This dam was not without controversy, and when the regional power company, Empire District Electric, sought to construct a second, much higher dam, it was unsuccessful. Due to public opposition, lack of financing, and uncertainty about where such a dam should be located, work was never begun (Ozark Mountain Country 59). However, repeated flood damage, made worse by farming practices, finally forced a taming of the White River. In late 1941, Congress approved a four-dam, \$134 million, flood control and hydroelectric dam power project for the upper part of the river. After the initial dam was built in Arkansas, the second dam, Bull Shoals, was completed in 1951, and it backed up the river 75 miles to the base of Powersite Dam. People expected immediate flood protection, but when heavy rains fell, a single dam could not retain the runoff from 12,000 square miles so flooding continued. After many delays, the next dam, Table Rock, was finally completed in 1958, and it did provide relief from repeated severe flooding along the White River (59-62).

With the formation of Table Rock Lake, Lake Taneycomo was transformed into a cold water compound. Taneycomo's waters came from the bottom of Table Rock, and its temperature was fifty-five degrees all year (Ozark Mountain Country 62). This

temperature discouraged swimmers and skiers from using Taneycomo as they had in the past, and water recreation shifted to Table Rock Lake. The Missouri Department of Conservation discovered that Taneycomo's cold water provided an ideal climate for trout so the lake was stocked. Both Bull Shoals and Table Rock Lakes developed fine reputations for boating and water sports, and anglers found them to be outstanding sources for bass, crappie, and other panfish. Taneycomo's trout flourished, and the three lakes attracted nationwide attention from fishing enthusiasts.

The decade of the 1960s began the modern era of tourism in the Branson/Lakes region. As related in Ozark Mountain Country, two families operated businesses which became the core of family entertainment there.

Silver Dollar City, built by Hugo and Mary Herschend, was an old-time Ozarks village attraction built atop the long-popular Marvel Cave, about ten miles from Branson on West 76. It offered an 1880s steam train ride, country shops, crafts, and music (11-22). In 1969, the Beverly Hillbillies television show filmed segments at Silver Dollar City (38).

A few miles east of Silver Dollar City, Dr. Bruce Trimble and his wife, Mary, opened an outdoor pageant based on The Shepherd of the Hills. It was located on the site where the models for Harold Bell Wright's characters lived. The pageant grew into the nation's most popular outdoor historical drama, and a theme park was developed on the old homestead's acreage (23-35).

The origins of the music business in Branson began with family country music shows according to James D. Lancaster Jr. and Robert McGill, writing in Ozark Mountain Country. The first country music show was the Baldknobbers, begun in 1959, by the Mabe brothers. They played on Friday and Saturday nights in the fifty seat basement room of what is now the Branson Community Center. When audiences grew, they moved to a larger auditorium upstairs (36). During the early years the members of the Baldknobbers maintained full-time jobs to support themselves. Today, the Baldknobbers are the longest continuously running show in Branson. They will mark their thirty-fifth season in 1993 (38).

The Presley family show was the second, but they were the first to build on Highway 76, in 1967. In the early 1960s, they entertained in a cave near Kimberling City in Stone County, called Herman Mead's Underground Theater, since it was owned by Mr. Mead. The Presleys performed every night of the week during the summer months, but kept their daytime jobs in the early years. Today, they perform in their expanded theatre which seats 2,000 (38-39).

The third group on the Branson music scene was the Foggy River Boys who had organized in the Joplin, Missouri area in 1967. This group's members came from a background of quartet music. In 1971, they opened their first theatre in Kimberling City and moved to Highway 76 in 1974 (39).

The fourth show to move to the Branson area was the Plummer family who came from southeastern Missouri in 1973. They per-

formed in Branson until November, 1990, when they sold their theatre to national entertainer, Moe Bandy (40).

In 1976, Bob Mabe left the Baldknobbers and built an 1,800 seat theatre called Bob-o-Links Country Hoedown on the Strip. The Bob-o-Links were the first to have full-time dancers on the stage (40).

Between 1977 and 1980, the Branson/Lakes area presented only these five shows. The groups worked together to promote their shows and to let people in Missouri and the surrounding states know that Branson was a good place to come for lively, family-oriented entertainment. They also began inviting nationally known entertainers to perform (40).

Lancaster and McGill consider 1981 the year that major change began in the Branson/Lakes area:

. . . That was the year the movie, Urban Cowboy, was released by Hollywood . . . Young Americans, caught in a country craze, began wearing cowboy hats and boots, listening to country music, and going to country music shows . . . (40).

Tourism development began in earnest, and the most dynamic growth was in the music industry.

Chronology

The following chronology was taken from the Branson/Lakes Chamber of Commerce publication, Slip Away to Branson and the Lakes Area, 1992.

- 1981 - The Wilkinson Brothers Theatre, Hee Haw Theatre, and Starlite Theatre were completed. The structures are now the Box Car Willie Theatre, Mickey Gilley's Family Theatre, and the Christy Lane Theatre.
- Presleys' Mountain Music Jubilee was expanded to 2,000 seats, making it the largest theatre in Branson.
 - The Lowe family opened a music show on Indian Point near Silver Dollar City.
- 1983 - The Roy Clark Celebrity Theatre, the first to be linked permanently to a widely-known entertainer opened.
- Silver Dollar City opened the 3,500 seat Echo Hollow Amphitheatre for evening music shows.
 - Swiss Villa Amphitheatre, featuring well-known performers for guest appearances, opened near Lampe. Seating capacity was about 7,500.
- 1984 - The Sons of the Pioneers began regular performances at Lowe's Theatre, and moved to the Foggy River Boys' Theatre in 1986.
- The Braschler Music Show was established on Indian Point in the Lowe's former theatre.

- 1985 - Musicland USA opened with the Lester family on Gretna Road, just off West 76.
- 1986 - Ozark Mountain Amphitheatre, with a seating capacity of about 8,500, opened on the Shepherd of the Hills Freeway near West 76.
- The Lowe Sisters of Lowe's Theatre became the first of Branson's entertainers to appear on the Grand Ole Opry. In 1987, they appeared on TNN's Nashville Now.
 - Sons of the Pioneers were named to the Grammy Hall of Fame.
- 1987 - Box Car Willie, famed "hobo" performer and member of the Grand Ole Opry, bought a theatre and performed in Branson on a permanent basis.
- ABC's Good Morning, America, uplinked from Silver Dollar City, and Presleys' Mountain Music Jubilee and the Baldknobbers performed for a nationwide television audience.
- 1988 - A resort complex called, "Roy Clark's Lodge of the Ozarks," was developed adjacent to the Roy Clark Celebrity Theatre.
- Several music shows, as well as Silver Dollar City and Shepherd of the Hills, stayed open into November and December for the first Ozark Mountain Christmas.

- 1989 - Japanese violinist and entertainer, Shoji Tabuchi, opened a music show.
- Internationally known recording artist, Christy Lane, bought and began performing regularly at the Starlite Theatre.
 - Danny Davis and the Nashville Brass established themselves at Country Music World.
- 1990 - Mel Tillis moved to Branson and opened the Mel Tillis Ozark Theatre on West 76 in Shoji Tabuchi's former location.
- Shoji Tabuchi built and moved into a new theatre on Shepherd of the Hills Freeway.
 - Mickey Gilley opened Mickey Gilley's Family Theatre in the former Country Music World Theatre.
 - 76 Music Hall became the first theatre to offer three different shows daily.
- 1991 - Ray Stevens opened the Ray Stevens Theatre.
- Moe Bandy opened Moe Bandy's Americana Theatre
 - Jim Stafford became the featured performer at Stars of the Ozarks Theatre.
 - Construction began on the 4,000 seat Grand Palace on West 76, built by the owners of Silver Dollar City.
- 1992 - Mel Tillis opened his new theatre on U.S. Highway 65 at the northern edge of Branson.

- 1992 - The Grand Palace opened with celebrity hosts, Louise Mandrell and Glen Campbell.
- Andy Williams opened his Moon River Theatre
 - Willie Nelson performed in the theatre vacated by Mel Tillis
 - Lowe's Theatre featured performances by nationally known stars: Loretta Lynn, George Jones, Waylon Jennings, Tammy Wynette, and Conway Twitty.
 - Osmond Family Theatre opened.
 - Blackwood Quartet relocated from the Jubilee to the new Memory Lane Theatre.
 - Kenny Rogers announced he had formed a partnership with Silver Dollar City owners, and they plan to invest \$100 million in the area in the next ten years.
- 1993 - Wayne Newton opened his new 3,000 seat theatre
- Tony Orlando will open his Yellow Ribbon Theatre in the summer.

See Figures 6 and 7 for 1992 and 1993 schedules of live entertainment in the Branson/Lakes area.

Some performers, such as Box Car Willie, moved to Branson to get off the road and spend more time with their families (Ozark Mountain Country 42). Mel Tillis, who makes Branson his summer home, likes the fishing and Freddy Fender likes the Ozarks and the relaxed lifestyle (Springfield News Leader 4/4/90).

1992 LIVE ENTERTAINMENT

BRANSON/LAKES AREA

Theater	Seating Capacity	
Andy Williams Moon River Theatre	2,000	
Baldknobbers	1,700	
Box Car Willie Theatre	901	
Braschler Music Show	720	
Buck Trent Dinner Theatre	420	
Campbell's Ozark Country Jubilee	900	
Bob Nichols' Ozark Morning Show		
Blackwood Singers		
Osmond Family Theatre	1,500	
Branson's Variety Theater	720	
Danny Davis & the Nashville Brass		
Branson Sweethearts		
Branson's New Second Generation		
Jimmy Tittle & Storm		
Cristy Lane Theatre	1,300	
Shower of Stars		
Foggy River Boys	1,021	
Sons of the Pioneers		
The Grand Palace	4,000	
Jim Stafford Theatre	818	
Branson Gospel Hour		
Johnny Cash Theatre (Opening to be announced)	2,500	
Jimmie Rodgers Honeycomb Family Theatre	700	
Lowe's Music Theatre	1,255	
Mel Tillis Theatre	2,100	
Memory Lane Theatre	500	
Blackwoods Quartet		
Jim Owen		
Eddie Cash		
Elvis-A-Rama		
Mickey Gilley's Family Theatre	970	
Moe Bandy's Americana Theatre	950	
Presleys' Mountain Music Theatre	2,000	
Ray Stevens Theatre	2,011	
Roy Clark's Celebrity Theatre	1,000	
Jennifer in the Morning		
76 Music Hall: Memory Makers	550	
Al Brumley Jr. Show		
Down Home Country Music Show		
Texas Gold Minors		
Sunday Gospel Jubilee		
Shoji Tabuchi Theatre	2,000	
Texans at Kirkwood Theatre	800	
John Paul Cody at Waltzing Waters	220	
Willie Nelson's Ozark Theatre	1,455	
Merle Haggard		
Mac Wiseman		
AMPHITHEATERS		
Branson Brothers		
at Silver Dollar City's Echo Hollow Amphitheatre	4,000	
Ozark Mountain Amphitheatre	8,500	
Swiss Villa Amphitheatre (Opening to be announced)	7,500	
THEME PARKS		
Mutton Hollow Craft & Entertainment Village (theme park)		
Cedar Mountain Music Hall	300	
Mutton Hollow Revue Dinner Theatre	700	
Shepherd of the Hills Homestead		
Blackwood Singers		
John Wesley and the New Riders of the Old Trail		
Silver Dollar City		
The Silver Dollar Saloon		
Danny Eakin		
Hoodown! At the Playhouse		
Horse Creek in the Valley Theatre		
John & Jan Corbin		
The River Rats		
Priority Gospel Quartet		
The Cajun Connection		
D.J. McIntosh		
PAGEANT		
Shepherd of the Hills Outdoor Theatre		
TOTALS		
Indoor theaters:	27	
Indoor theater seats:	36,011	
(One theater unopened, 2,500 seats)		
Amphitheaters:	3	
Amphitheater seats:	20,000	
One amphitheater closed (7,500 seats)		
Combined theaters:	30	
Combined seats:	56,011	
Music shows at (open) indoor theaters:	44	
Music shows at theme parks:	13	

Source: Branson/Lakes Chamber of Commerce

Figure 6. 1992 Live Entertainment

1993 LIVE ENTERTAINMENT

BRANSON/LAKES AREA

INDOOR THEATERS (32)	SEATING CAPACITY	SHOWS
Baldknobbers	1,700	1
Moe Bandy's Americana Theatre	950	1
Box Car Willie Theatre	901	1
Branson's Variety Theatre <i>Branson's Second Generation</i> <i>Branson Now Band</i> <i>Showcase of the Stars</i>	720	3
Braschler Music Show <i>Sons of the Pioneers</i>	720	2
Campbell's Ozark Country Jubilee <i>Bob Nichols' Ozark Morning Show</i>	900	2
Eddie Cash Show at Old Owen Theatre	275	1
Roy Clark's Celebrity Theatre <i>Jennifer in the Morning</i>	1,000	2
John Davidson Live (formerly Jim Stafford Theatre)	700	1
Five Star Theatre (formerly Johnny Cash Theatre) (TBA)	2,000	1
Foggy River Boys Theatre (TBA)	1,021	1
Mickey Gilley's Family Theatre <i>Conway Twitty</i>	970	2
The Grand Palace	4,000	1
John Paul Cody at Waltzing Waters	256	1
Kirkwood Theatre (TBA)	800	1
Cristy Lane Theatre <i>Blondes, Blondes, Blondes</i> <i>Ferlin Husky Show</i>	1,300	3
Loretta Lynn's Ozark Theatre <i>Albert E. Brumley, Jr. Show</i> <i>Dino Kartsonakis (Nov.-Dec.)</i>	1,455	3
Memory Lane Theatre <i>Blackwoods Quartet</i> <i>Texans</i> <i>Back in Time</i>	500	3
Wayne Newton Theatre	3,000	1
Tony Oriando's Yellow Ribbon Theatre	2,000	1
Osmond Family Theatre	1,700	1
Presleys' Mountain Music Theatre	2,000	1
Jimmie Rodgers Honeycomb Family Theatre (TBA)	700	1

	SEATING CAPACITY	SHOWS
76 Music Hall <i>Memory Makers</i> <i>Brumley Show</i> <i>Down Home Country Music</i> <i>Texas Gold Minors</i> <i>Sunday Gospel Jubilee</i>	550	5
Jim Stafford Theatre (formerly Lowes Theatre) <i>Barbara Fairchild</i>	1,100	2
Ray Stevens Theatre	2,011	1
Shoji Tabuchi Theatre	2,000	1
Mel Tillis Theatre <i>Marie Osmond</i>	2,100	2
Buck Trent Breakfast Theatre	400	1
Andy Williams Moon River Theatre	2,000	1
Bobby Vinton's Blue Velvet Theatre	1,300	1
DINNER THEATERS		
Roy Clark's Celebrity Theatre (above)		
Pump Boys and Dinettes	600	1
Buck Trent Breakfast Theatre (above)		
TOTAL	41,629 SEATS	50 SHOWS
AMPHITHEATERS		
Branson Brothers at Silver Dollar City's Echo Hollow	4,000	1
Ozark Mountain Amphitheatre	8,500	
Swiss Villa Amphitheatre	7,500	
TOTAL	61,629 SEATS	51 SHOWS
THEME PARKS (MUSIC SHOWS)		
Mutton Hollow Craft & Entertainment Village <i>Cedar Mountain Music Hall</i> <i>Mutton Hollow Revue Dinner Theatre</i>	300 500	2
Shepherd of the Hills Homestead and Outdoor Theatre <i>Amphitheater (historical drama)</i> <i>The Parlor</i>	1842 100	1
Silver Dollar City <i>Silver Dollar Saloon</i> <i>Danny Eakin</i> <i>Hoedown</i> <i>Horse Creek</i> <i>John and Jan Corbin</i> <i>River Flats</i> <i>Priority Gospel Quartet</i> <i>Cajun Connection</i> <i>D.J. McIntosh</i>		9
TOTAL	64,371 SEATS	63 SHOWS

Source: Branson/Lakes Chamber of Commerce

Figure 7. 1993 Live Entertainment

CHAPTER V

EFFECTS OF TOURISM

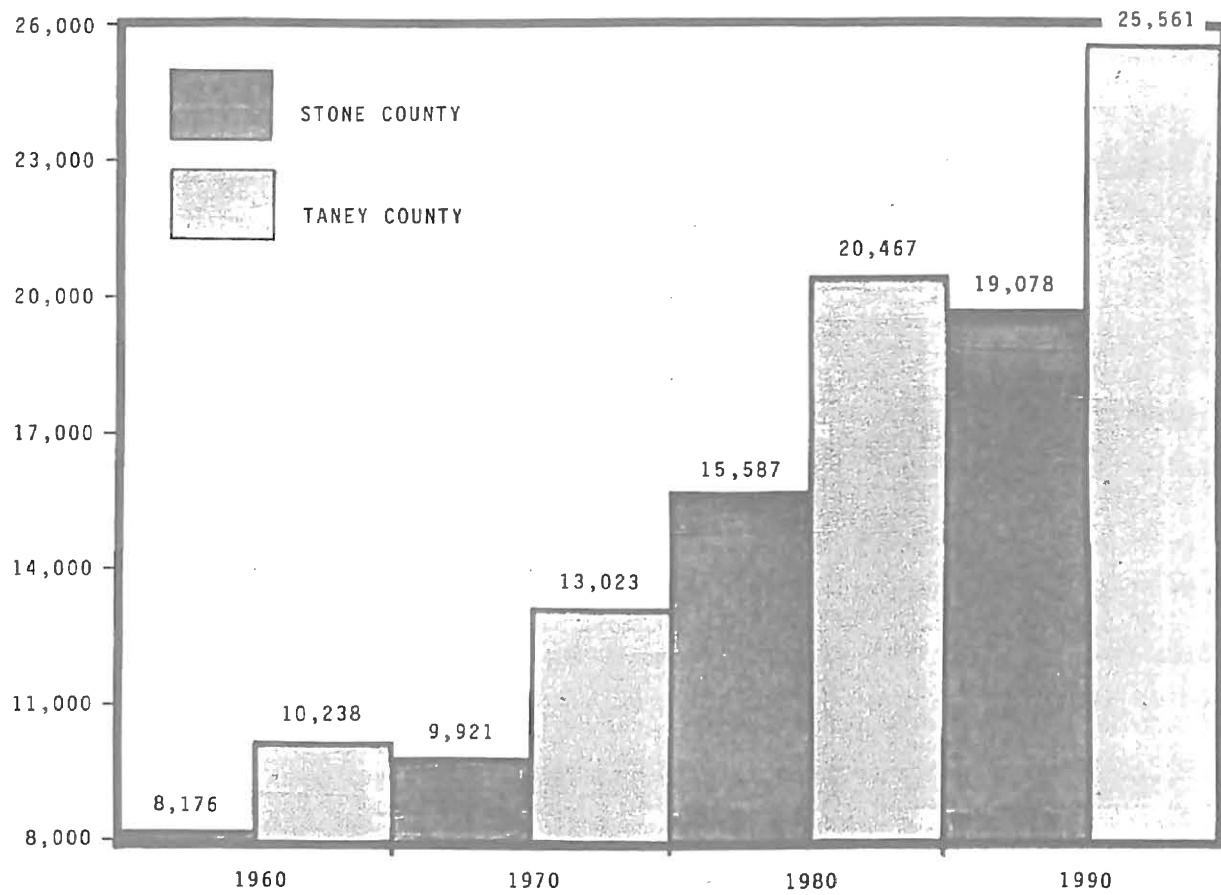
Positive Effects

In Taney County, the resident population has grown from 10,238 in 1960, to 25,561 in 1990, an increase of 150 percent in a thirty-year period. From 1980 to 1990, the growth was 25 percent. Comparable figures for Stone County, are 8,176 in 1960, and 19,078 in 1990, an increase of 133 percent over thirty years, and 22.4 percent from 1980 to 1990 (Figure 8).

This growth has occurred largely as a result of the music theatre business in the Branson/Lakes area. Martha Hoy, Managing Editor of the Branson Daily News, said that ten years ago, the area had high unemployment rates, much poverty, and a three-month tourist season. Businesses pooled their efforts in the Ozark Marketing Council and began working to attract new industry. They have been successful. In 1992, the Branson/Lakes area had a nine-month season and more jobs.

Per capita income has risen in both Taney and Stone Counties. In 1981, the average income of a Taney County citizen was \$8,681. In 1990, it was \$14,949 - an increase of 72 percent over nine years. In Stone County, 1981 showed \$8,212 per capita, and \$13,285 in 1990, an increase of 61.8 percent (Figure 9).

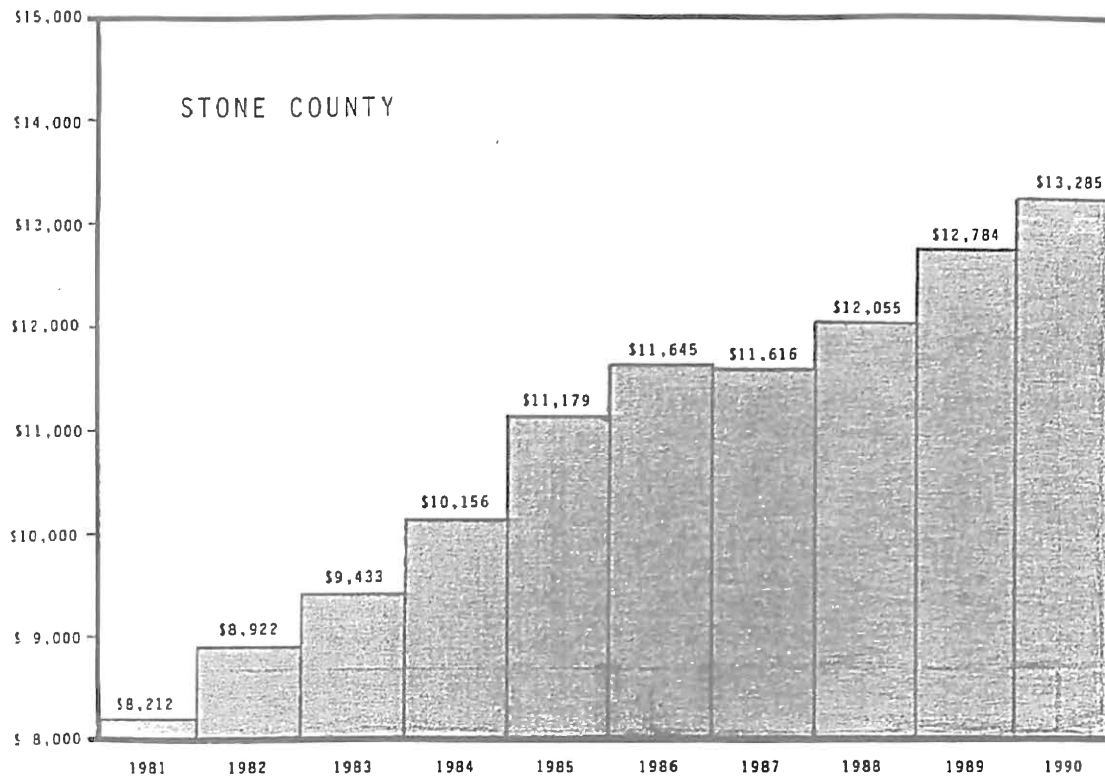
TOTAL RESIDENT POPULATION 1960 - 1990
Stone and Taney Counties, Missouri



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Figure 8. Total Resident Population 1960 - 1990
Stone and Taney Counties, Missouri

Per Capita Personal Income for Missouri Counties



Source: Stat. Section, College of Bus. & Public Admin., Univ. of Mo.

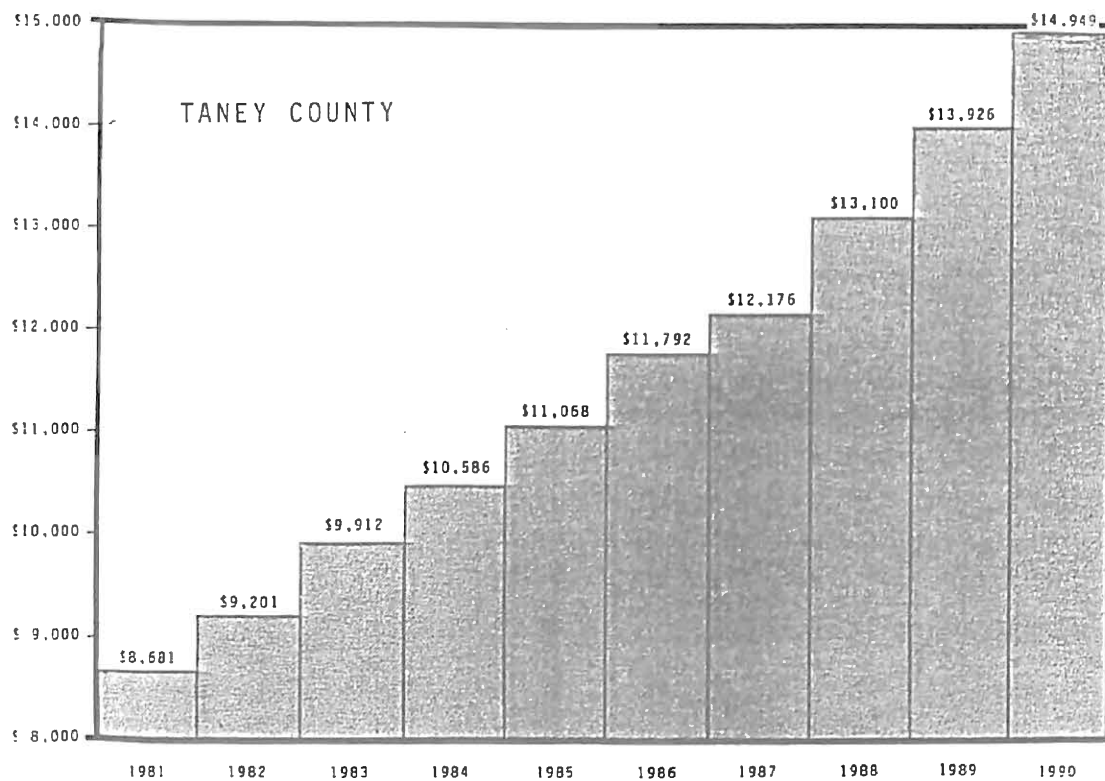


Figure 9. Per Capita Income - Stone and Taney Counties

The Branson/Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce estimated expenditures by visitors at more than \$625 million in 1992. According to the Chamber, when "new dollars" come into an area they have a multiplier effect. Economists estimate that the total economic impact is 2.5 times greater than direct expenditures. Therefore, a more complete picture of the economic impact of tourism in the Branson/Lakes area is probably around \$1.5 billion annually.

Beginning in 1986, the Ozark Marketing Council retained Stephens and Associates, a consulting firm from Springfield, Missouri, to research the number of visitors to the Branson/Lakes area on a more-or-less annual basis. The methodology used by the consultants is to contact motels, resorts, and campgrounds in a specified area (Page 15) daily during several strategically timed ten-day periods throughout the travel season. On the average, ninety percent respond. The experience reported in these ten days is used to generate an estimate for the entire month.

In 1986, there were 3,086,667 visitors to the Branson/Lakes area. This number increased by 497,845 people or 16.1 percent in 1987. No information was gathered in 1988. In 1989, 3,768,270 tourists came and in 1990, 3,986,664 visited, resulting in a 5.8 percent increase. An even larger percentage gain was shown in 1991, when 4,299,052 came and that percentage was 7.8. Greatest numerical growth occurred in 1992, when almost five million people visited the area. This was an increase of 657,637 tourists, or 15.3 percent over the previous year (Table I).

TABLE I
VISITORS TO BRANSON/LAKES AREA
1986 - 1992

Year	Visitors
1986	3,086,667
1987	3,584,512
1988	N/A
1989	3,768,270
1990	3,986,664
1991	4,299,052
1992	4,956,689

Source: Ozark Marketing Council

Although no statistics were kept of the number of visitors to the Branson/Lakes area prior to 1986, by Stephens and Associates or a similar group, the U.S. Corps of Engineers has kept records of visitors to its lake and dam facilities for many years. Table II shows the number of visitors to both Bull Shoals and Table Rock Lakes from 1980 - 1992.

TABLE II
VISITORS TO BULL SHOALS AND TABLE ROCK LAKES
1980 - 1992

Year	Bull Shoals	Table Rock
1980	4,560,000	6,046,000
1981	4,460,000	6,199,000
1982	4,136,000	6,670,000
1983	4,248,000	6,679,000
1984	4,454,000	6,270,000
1985	3,892,000	6,041,000
1986	4,612,000	6,030,000
1987	5,205,000	6,457,000
1988	5,384,000	6,811,000
1989	4,634,000*	6,397,000*
1990	4,318,000	5,927,000
1991	4,714,000	6,102,000
1992	3,458,000**	8,924,000**

*New survey technique used

**New computer program used

Source: U.S. Corps of Engineers

These figures indicate the number of visitors to Bull Shoals and Table Rock Lakes was more or less constant from 1980 to 1991, with relatively small changes from year to year. In 1992, the Corps started using a new computer program to

count visitors. This captured a 36.3 percent decrease at Bull Shoals, and a 91 percent increase at Table Rock. The decrease of 1,256,000 visitors at Bull Shoals was more than offset by the increase of 2,822,000 at Table Rock. Even allowing for the differences caused by the new technology, these figures support Stephens and Associates' findings that many more visitors came to the Branson/Lakes area in 1992, than previously.

The Corps of Engineers' data documents the fact that Branson area lakes attracted tourists in large numbers during the 1980s. When the numbers of visitors to the lakes are compared with the numbers of visitors to the Branson/Lakes area, two things seem evident:

- (1) Many people who visit the lakes do not also visit Branson and the music theatres. For example, in 1986, slightly more than three million visited the Branson area while 4.6 million visited Bull Shoals and 6 million visited Table Rock. Obviously, some of these people visited all three places and were counted more than once.
- (2) The jump of 2.8 million visitors to Table Rock from 1991 to 1992, coincides with an increase of 650,000 for the same period to the Branson area. The decrease in the number of visitors to Bull Shoals may indicate more are going to Table Rock to be nearer the entertainment in Branson.

In addition to the number of visitors, Stephens and Associates gather information on the number of available lodging rooms, restaurant seats, campground sites, and theatre

seats. Data for these are shown in Table III for a ten-year period, 1982 - 1992. As one would expect, all categories showed tremendous growth.

TABLE III
SURVEY TOTALS BY YEAR

Year	Lodging Rooms	Campground Sites	Restaurant Seats	Indoor Theatre Seats
1982	6,124	3,235	12,107	13,829
1983	6,621	3,323	13,176	16,124
1984	7,038	3,308	14,112	17,082
1985	7,339	3,313	14,087	18,299
1986	7,681	5,569*	16,182	17,602
1987	8,041	5,564	16,319	17,702
1988	8,104	5,694	16,511	18,258
1989	8,514	5,821	17,433	18,861
1990	9,089	5,925	18,532	21,111
1991	9,720	6,073	19,657	22,788
1992	11,132	6,073	21,782	32,791

*Beginning in 1986, total includes Time-Share Campgrounds
Source: Ozark Marketing Council

- The number of hotel/motel rooms has increased from 6,124 in 1982, to 11,132 in 1992, or 81.8 percent.
- The number of campground sites has increased from 3,235 to 6,073, or 87.8 percent
- The number of restaurant seats has increased from 12,107 to 21,782, or 79.9 percent.
- The number of indoor theatre seats has increased from 13,829 to 32,791, or 137.1 percent.

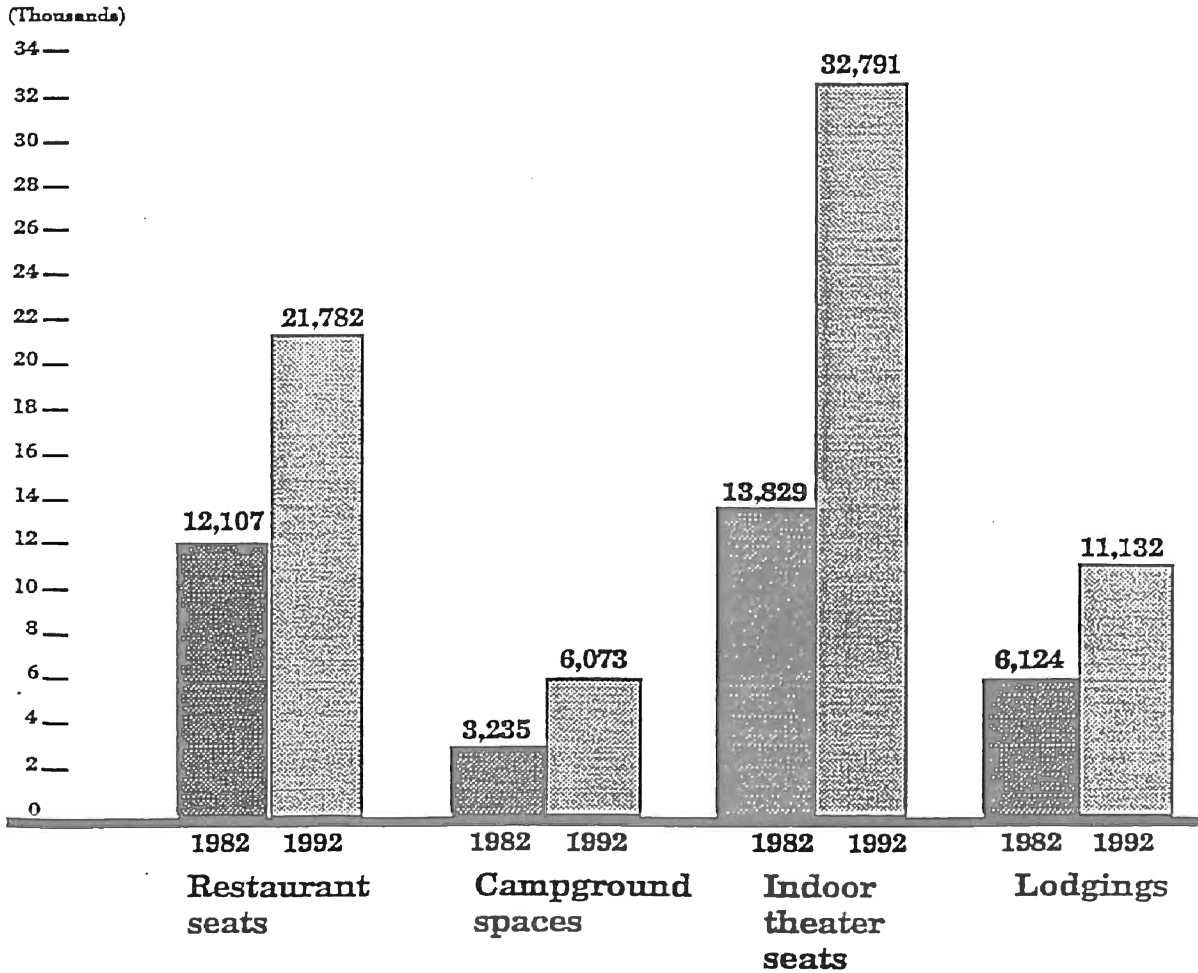
See Figure 10 for graphic comparisons.

State sales tax collections for Taney and Stone Counties have followed a similar pattern of phenomenal growth. State sales taxes are based on three percent of gross retail sales. Taney County's state sales tax collections grew from \$4,128,800 in 1980, to \$17,165,554 in 1992, an increase of \$13,036,754 or 315.8 percent. Stone County's state tax collections grew from \$917,500 in 1980, to \$4,677,851 in 1992, an increase of \$3,760,351 or 409.8 percent (Figure 11).

According to Branson City Administrator, Sam Grove, in 1992, the city operated on a total annual budget of about \$20 million (Springfield Business Journal, 10/92). Of this amount, some \$7 - \$8 million was operating budget, and the rest went to capital improvements such as the wastewater treatment facility expansion and road construction. He commented that city sales tax receipts were Branson's largest source of revenue, although income from city property was also significant. Branson city owns the land on which the Roy Clark Theatre and Factory Merchants' Mall are located and receives a portion of tenants' receipts as rent. Income from the property runs about \$800,000

GROWTH: Lodging & Entertainment Branson/Lakes Area of Taney and Stone Counties

	1982	1992 (1991)	Increase
Restaurant seats	12,107	21,782 (19,657)	80%
Campground spaces	3,235	Not counted (6,073)	88%
Indoor theater seats	13,829	32,791 (22,561)	137%
Lodging rooms	6,124	11,132 (9,720)	82%

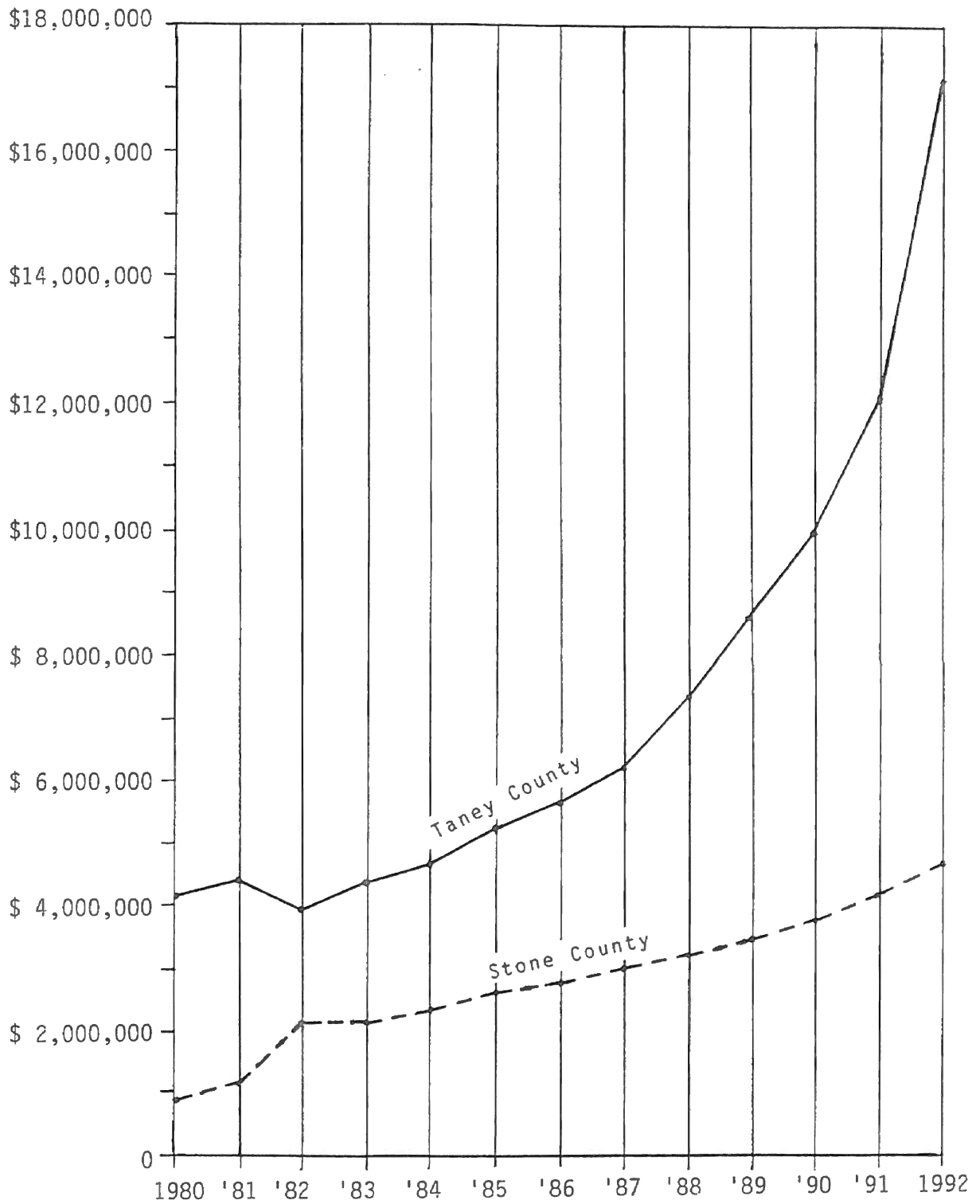


Statistics are compiled by the Ozark Marketing Council, Branson/Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce and other entities.

Figure 10. Growth in Lodging and Entertainment

MISSOURI STATE SALES TAX REVENUES

Taney and Stone Counties



Source of Tax Information: Ozark Marketing Council

Figure 11. Missouri State Sales Tax Revenues
Taney and Stone Counties

per year. The city also owns a 350-unit campground which brings in another \$700,000 annually.

Branson's city sales taxes have increased 881 percent since 1980 (Table IV and Figure 12). The tax rate was one cent until 1992, when one-half cent was added for transportation (roads and bridges).

TABLE IV
BRANSON CITY SALES TAXES
1980 - 1992

Year	Tax Revenues	Year	Tax Revenues
1980	\$ 599,945	1987	\$1,551,732
1981	\$ 694,200	1988	\$1,775,161
1982	\$ 761,559	1989	\$2,076,171
1983	\$ 861,789	1990	\$2,332,171
1984	\$1,225,594	1991	\$2,711,012
1985	\$1,350,646	1992	\$3,940,858
1986	\$1,387,904	1992	\$5,885,164*

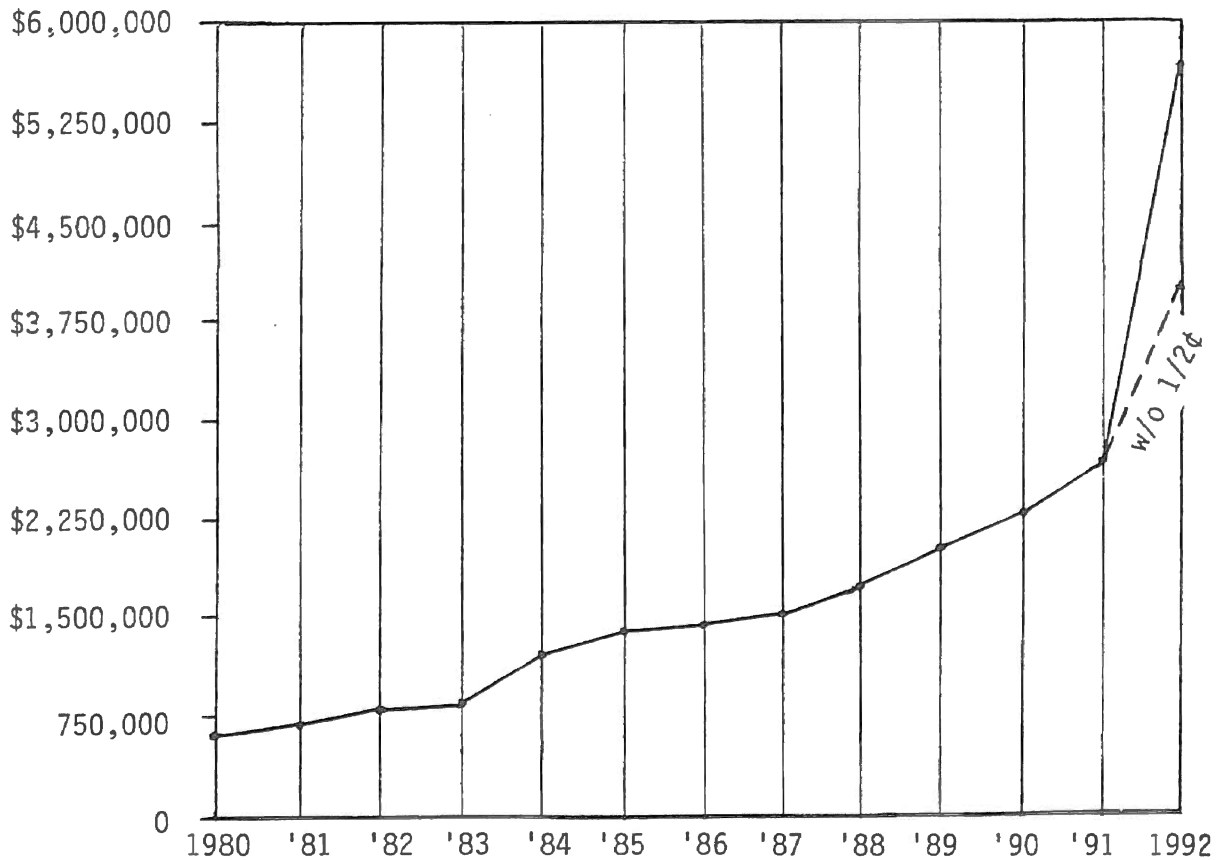
*1/2¢ tax added to previous 1¢ for 1992 total
Tax figures provided by Branson City Clerk

There was a jump in city tax revenues of 42.2 percent between 1983 and 1984, perhaps a result of the opening of the Roy Clark Celebrity Theatre. Two outdoor amphitheatres also

opened in 1983. Then, curiously, between 1985 and 1986, there was very little growth, only 2.8 percent, for no apparent reason. However, 1987 tax collections increased 11.8 percent, and the increase has been fairly consistent since, until 1992, when it jumped again to 45.3 percent from the previous year if the new 1/2¢ tax was not included, and 117.1 percent if it was.

BRANSON CITY SALES TAXES

1980 - 1992



Source of Tax Information: Branson City Clerk

Figure 12. Branson City Sales Taxes

Property values are escalating dramatically. In August, 1991, a 130-acre commercial tract along the Strip was sold out in six months (S.W. Airlines Spirit 93). During that brief period, the 1.5 acre lots' value rose from \$150,000 to as much as \$375,000. In Pointe Royale, where many of the celebrities own homes, the price of an 1,100 square foot, half of a duplex shot up from \$75,000 to \$115,000 in 1992.

Also in 1992, the Taney County Planning Commission approved 1,000 new single-family residential units, over 3,000 new lots and 4,000 condominiums that may be built during 1993, according to Tony Wasson, Taney County Planning and Sewer District Administrator (Branson Daily News 3/12/93). Wasson said that two or three years ago, the growth was within a five-mile radius of the Branson area. Today, it is in a ten to fifteen-mile radius. Housing developments are being built farther out of town, and commercial structures are appearing along major highways.

Negative Effects

Branson's rapid growth in recent years has brought on severe infrastructure and environmental problems. Areas of primary concern are sewers and wastewater treatment facilities, water supply, roads, and affordable housing.

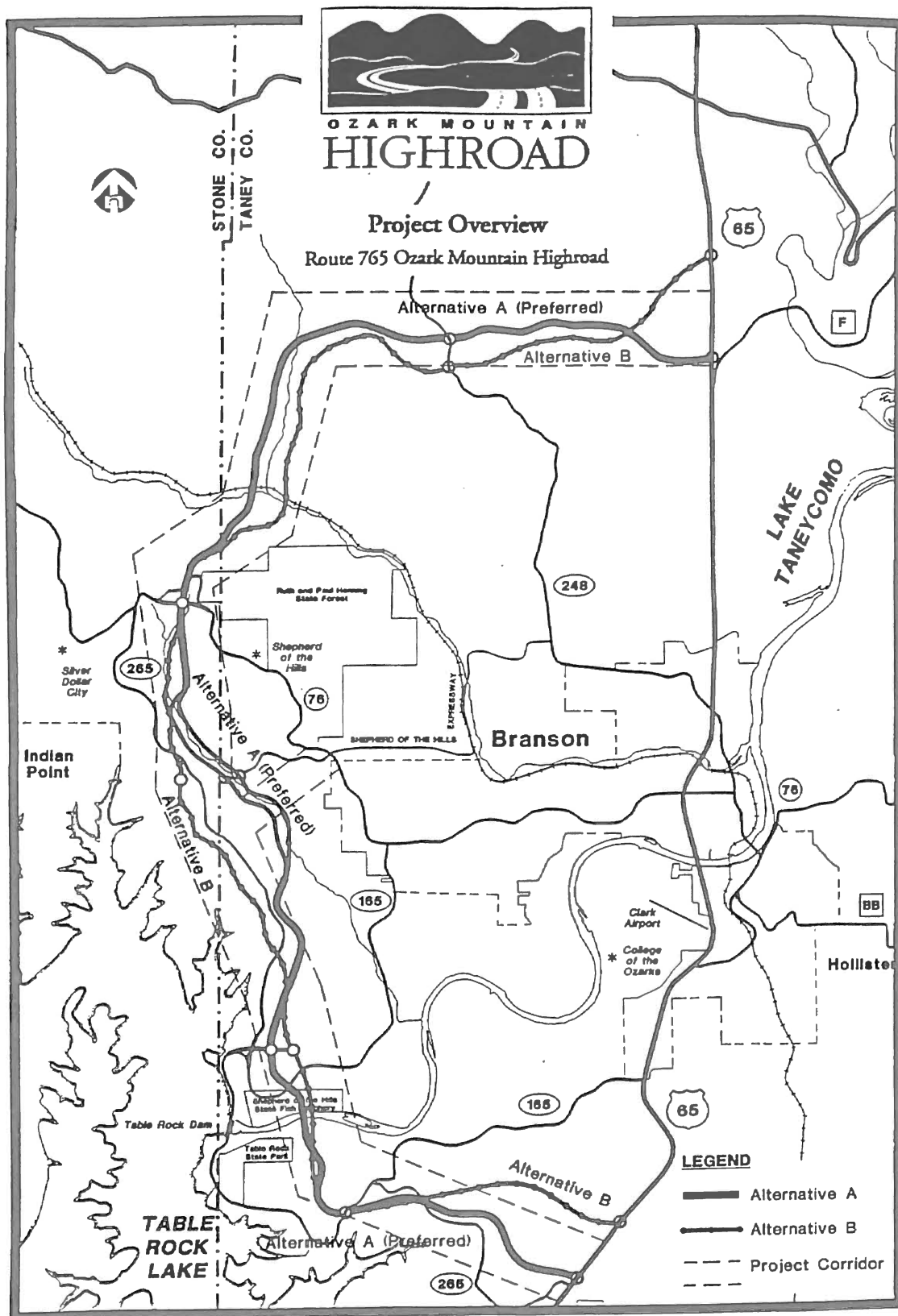
Area governments are taking action to alleviate the problems. In an April 6, 1993, election, Taney County passed a 1/2¢ sales tax earmarked for sewer improvements. Stone County voters approved a 1/2¢ sales tax for roads and bridges in an

election held the same day. Also in Stone County, Kimberling City voters approved a 1/2¢ sales tax for capital improvements which will include expansion of the sewer system. Adequate sewer and wastewater treatment plants will ease environmental concerns about ground water pollution.

Another tax under consideration is a visitor or tourism tax. The ballot for Branson city elections to be held next November (1993), will include a two percent tax on hotels, motels, and attractions, and a .5 percent tax on food and drinks. These taxes are projected to bring in about \$2.5 million. Infrastructure development - primarily sewer expansion and roads - will command 75 percent of the revenue. The other 25 percent will be spent on tourism promotion (Branson Daily News 2/6-8/93). The burden of these taxes will fall on the people who create the demand - the tourists.

The Route 765 Ozark Mountain Highroad is a project proposed to play a key role in improving traffic flow in the Branson area, while maintaining the natural beauty and environmental integrity of Taney and Stone Counties.

This is the description given of the controversial road, in material from the Missouri Highway and Transportation Department. In a recent editorial, Martha Hoy wrote, "There have been few issues which have generated as much local controversy as the Ozark Mountain Highroad." Some people apparently consider it a long-range solution to traffic problems, but others think it is an expensive bypass which will draw business away from West 76 (Branson Daily News 12/9/92). The project has been approved and plans to build it are moving ahead (Fig. 13).



Source: Missouri Highway and Transportation Department

Figure 13. Ozark Mountain Highroad

Hoy went on to say that a survey of visitors who said they would never return to the area indicated traffic was the major reason. The first major alternate route to West 76, the Shepherd of the Hills Freeway, was built by a private developer, Gary Snadon. That road was also feared by the West 76 supporters, but it has not hurt their business. In fact, without it, the traffic situation would be much worse. Other shorter, circulatory roads have been built, but more are needed.

The recent flow of capital into Branson has not translated into a better life for everyone. The wealth has remained mostly at the top, with no middle-class emerging below it. Branson residents who do not own businesses mostly work in service jobs - waiting tables, cleaning motel rooms, selling tickets - jobs that pay only a little better than minimum wage, and even these jobs are not year-round (S.W. Airlines Spirit 93).

The boom in tourism businesses is making finding enough workers difficult, according to Vonda Olson, Office Manager of the Missouri Division of Employment Security in Branson. Job orders in May, 1993, are running 35 percent ahead of job orders for the same time last year, and there are not enough applicants to fill them. Wages are rising slowly. Currently, an unskilled worker can start at \$5-\$6 an hour at least, while a year or two ago, it would have been \$4-\$5 an hour. Many of the jobs are part-time and have no benefits, so some people work double shifts or two jobs.

Unemployment statistics fluctuate wildly. In January, 1993, Olson said the unemployment rate for Taney County was

24 percent. In March, it was 18.9 percent. By July, at the height of the tourist season, it will probably be close to three percent. (In July, 1992, it was 3.5 percent.) Part-time workers may draw partial unemployment payments and work too, so this inflates unemployment rates. As the tourism season lengthens, unemployment should be less of a problem.

One would expect, with the long recession in the rest of the country, that workers would flock to the Branson/Lakes area, and they do, but some leave because they cannot find affordable housing. Many workers commute to Branson from the small nearby communities, and a few commute from Springfield, but to drive that distance daily, wages would have to be good. While the weather is fair enough for construction, some wages would be worth driving from Springfield. In the summer some live in tents or campers, but this is not a permanent solution. Several apartment houses are being built, but those take time.

Since most things are going up in Ozark Mountain Country, the crime rate is no exception. Statistics from the Missouri Department of Public Safety over the past ten years for Stone and Taney Counties, show that property crimes (burglary and theft) have increased most rapidly. Taney County Sheriff Theron Jenkins said demands for law enforcement services are up forty percent over last year (Branson Daily News 3/2/93). He has hired two additional deputies since January, and will add two more in July. The Sheriff's Department includes thirteen patrol deputies, a chief deputy, and an investigator.

In Branson, property crimes have also shown an increase according to Loretta Kenyon, Administrative Assistant to the Police Chief. The Branson Police Department employs thirty-three people, and of these, nineteen are patrol officers. Four full-time patrol officers were added in 1992.

Local residents worry about the impact of "progress" on the environment. A sampling of Letters to the Editor in the Branson Daily News shows their concern. In the December 12, 1992 issue, Dorothy Price wrote:

Little did us old-timers know the upheaval could threaten land that was homesteaded and belonged to the same family for 100 years or so - or that it could forever do away with archaeology sites and land of historical significance. Little did we know that our fragile Ozark environment would have to bite the dust and pay the price to feed the greed of the few and powerful.

Other writers lament over low-paying jobs, lack of affordable housing, homeless people, discharge of sewage into rivers and streams, smog over Branson, and cutting down trees to build roads. Change is rarely easy.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

It is clear that tourism is nothing new in Ozark Mountain Country. What is new, is the enormous number of tourists coming into the area each year. The engine for growth is provided by the entertainment industry, and it is enhanced by the natural beauty of the surrounding countryside. Location is a critical factor, and the Ozarks' strategic setting near the center of the United States could hardly be improved upon.

There seem to have been four pivotal dates in the development of tourism in the Branson/Lakes area. They are:

- (1) 1907 - Publication of The Shepherd of the Hills which brought people into the area to visit the setting of the book
- (2) 1960 - Opening of the Ozark theme park, Silver Dollar City
- (3) 1983 - Roy Clark was the first nationally-known celebrity to locate in Branson
- (4) 1991 - 60 Minutes television show featured Branson and a nationwide audience discovered the area

Two types of tourists come to the Ozarks. The first type, which started coming before the turn of the century, was a nature-seeker. This type came to enjoy the area's physical geography and what nature had to offer: fishing, boating,

swimming, picnicking, hiking, camping, and communing with nature. The nature-seekers also were interested in the folk-culture of the region, a culture that has been transformed by commercial interests, beginning with Silver Dollar City.

The second type of tourist is a commercial-entertainment seeker. Although this type may appreciate the scenery, the big-name entertainment exerts the greatest attraction. The evolution of the kind of tourist coming into the Ozarks parallels societal changes from an agrarian society to a mature, industrial society.

My first hypothesis was that tourism has become the major factor in the economic and population growth of the Branson/Lakes area in recent years. There is no doubt that tourism is the major factor in this growth. The number of visitors has grown from 3,086,667 in 1986, to 4,956,689 in 1992, an increase of 60.6 percent in six years. Per capita income for Taney County, where Branson is located, increased from \$8,681 in 1981, to \$14,949 in 1990, an increase of 72.2 percent in nine years.

From 1980 to 1992, state sales tax collections for Taney County increased 315.8 percent, and for next-door Stone County, 409.8 percent. Branson city tax revenues have increased over eight times since 1980. Property values have ballooned. Tourist accommodations grew by 81.8 percent during the ten-year period from 1982 - 1992, and restaurant and indoor-theatre seats numbers kept pace with increases of 79.9 percent and 137.1 percent, respectively. Population grew 25 percent in Taney County from 1980 - 1990, and 22.4 percent in Stone County.

The record proves Carl Sauer a prophet when he predicted the Ozarks would ultimately progress to greater prosperity. Part of what is bringing more jobs and money into the area is its being in the "Ozark Culture Region," as described by Joan Wilson Miller. John Jakle noted that tourists are interested in regional identities, and the country/mountain music and local handicrafts are only two examples of the cultural heritage that brings visitors to the Branson/Lakes area. The Ozark "hill-billy" marketing theme is very similar to Stephen Jett's description of the Southwest-Indian image used to promote Navajo country. Vance Randolph found the human/cultural geography of the Ozarks colorful and picturesque. Milt Rafferty wrote that the people of the Ozarks have an "uncommon sense of place."

My second hypothesis was that growth has affected the resident population in both positive and negative ways. Whether it is good or bad depends on the outlook and circumstance of each individual.

The positive side of the rapid growth of tourism in Ozark Mountain Country is that there are more jobs and less poverty. Even though many of the jobs are low-wage, they are better than no jobs at all which was often the situation before the boom. The Ozarks region has traditionally been pictured as peopled by hillbillies just eking out a living from hardscrabble farming or making moonshine whiskey in the hills. Although this stereotype was partially true, the inherent scenic beauty of the area was often overlooked. The splendid lakes, forests, mountains, clean air, and friendly people provide a solid basis

for tourism to continue, even if the music theatres lose their luster, which they show no signs of doing.

The negative side of the tourist boom deals mostly with problems of traffic, housing, sewage disposal, and keeping the environment healthy. These are in the process of being addressed, and the resources to finance the solutions are being found. Profits from all the activity need to be distributed more evenly, and as the market works to match supply and demand, hopefully, local salaries will improve. Patricia Gober and her colleagues found a situation of low-paid tourist industry jobs and lack of affordable housing in the small town of Sedona, Arizona that is almost directly comparable to Branson. Even though the crime rate has increased, the Branson/Lakes area is still a safe haven compared to cities, even those no larger than Tulsa. Local inhabitants will, no doubt, become accustomed to the changes, and again hopefully, will keep up the work of being good watchdogs over the environment as they are now doing.

Milton Rafferty commented on environmental problems caused by large numbers of tourists descending on tourist areas in once pristine rural settings, as did Garrett Eckbo. Peter Murphy's idea of the tourist industry working toward community goals is a good one, and the Branson businesses involved in tourism are heavily involved in working on community problems.

Branson has its share of "gangplankers" and "bulldozers" just as John Fraser Hart described them in Wisconsin resort areas. Some citizens in the Branson/Lakes area do not like

the inconvenience and disruption caused by rapid growth, and would like to pull the gangplank up if there were one.

Probably, most Branson citizens would agree that the current growth is a good thing, while they recognize the problems and challenges it has brought with it. However, Ozarkers are survivors, and if past history is an indicator, their lives will be better for the current boom.

Will the Ozarks' good fortune continue? It would be difficult to stop the momentum that continues to build, at least in the near term. Although the logistical problems such as crowded roads, sewage disposal, affordable housing, and lack of workers will cause glitches in the rate of progress, they are a normal result of such rapid growth, and solutions are being found. There is every reason to expect the next decade will be like the past ten years for the people of Ozark Mountain Country - and that is exceptional!

Other researchers in tourism should watch this area of the country closely. Several subjects could be profitably pursued by geographers and others. It would be interesting to have a demographic profile of a cross sample of the millions of tourists coming into the Ozarks. This would be helpful in targeting the correct consumers in marketing strategies, and in designing other attractions for them. If regions or states of origin were identified, advertising could be focused on those places. No doubt, some measure of this has already been done in the Branson area. Silver Dollar City, in particular, seems quite sophisticated in promoting its wares.

Cross-comparisons with other small communities which are experiencing disproportionate numbers of tourists, such as Sedona, Arizona, could be drawn. Such a study might be useful in determining different ways of solving the problems that are common to both places.

Urban and regional planners could use a place like Branson as a case-study of how a small town copes with phenomenal growth. It would be interesting to see what similarities there are between Branson and the oil boomtowns of Texas and Oklahoma, and the mining boomtowns of the West.

Regional geographers such as Milton Rafferty will now have to take into account how the influx of visitors affects the regional fabric of the Ozarks. How do these people impact the folk culture, and the traditional folk or "hillbilly" music of the area? How is the environment being changed? Is it for better or worse? Will outsiders in large numbers change the physical, economic, and cultural landscape forever, or will they be just another chapter in the region's history?

How does Branson as a music center compare with other places known for country music such as Nashville and Austin? Cultural geographers could investigate this from the standpoint of Nashville being the oldest center, Austin being more recent, and Branson being the youngest to grow and prosper by encouraging the development of the music native to the region. One of the most important factors in Branson's success the author believes, is the large amount of "live entertainment" available there. Good live entertainment is hard to find in these days

of television and VCRs in almost every home. As the twentieth century draws to a close, the Ozarks region should provide data for many fascinating studies of the impact of millions of tourists on a relatively undeveloped area.

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