

Traces of the Past

After the Collier family sold their homestead the land was used to raise cattle and grow hay. Plans were underway for a dam downriver, which would have resulted in total inundation of some of the oldest buildings in the river valley and a lake view from later structures like the Collier Homestead. The project was halted, however, and in 1972, Buffalo National River established instead.

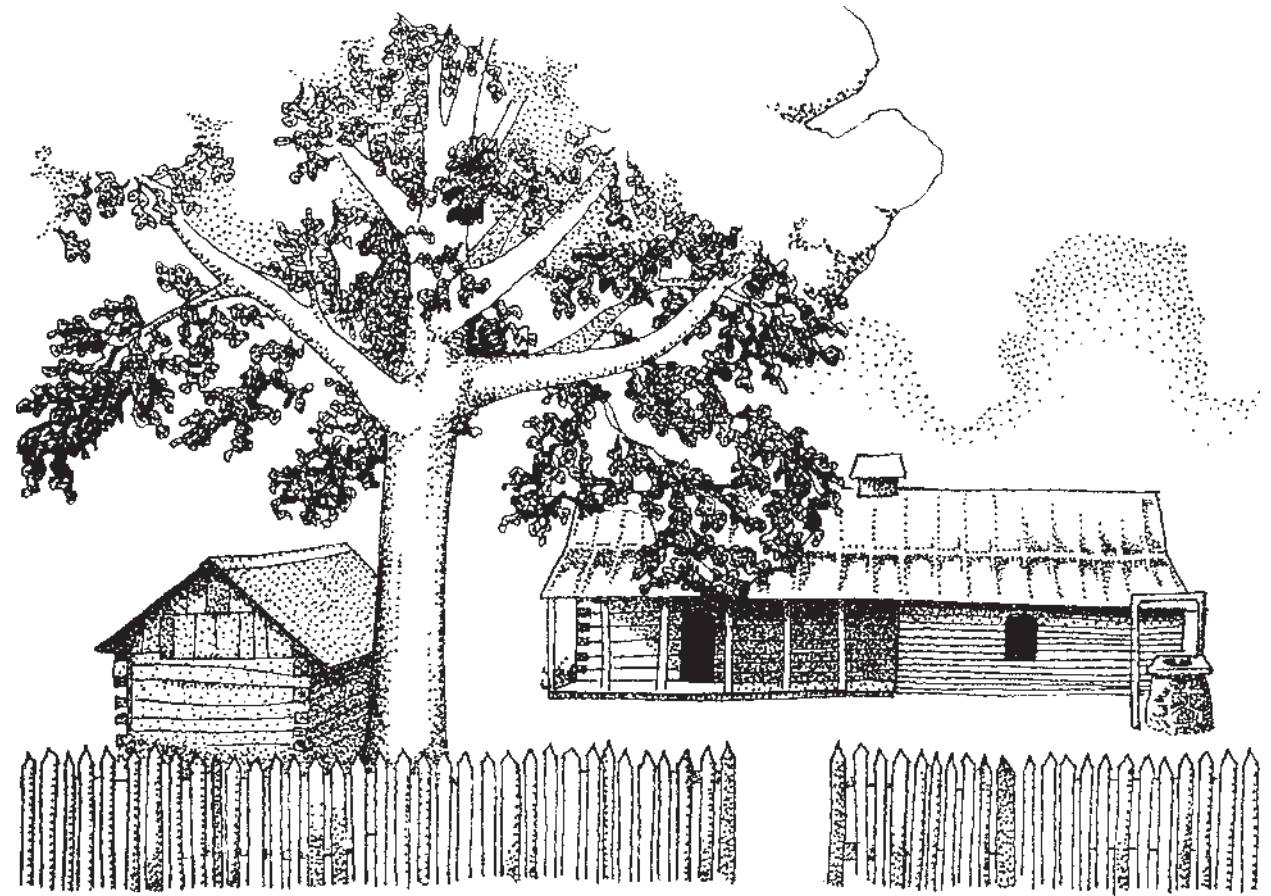
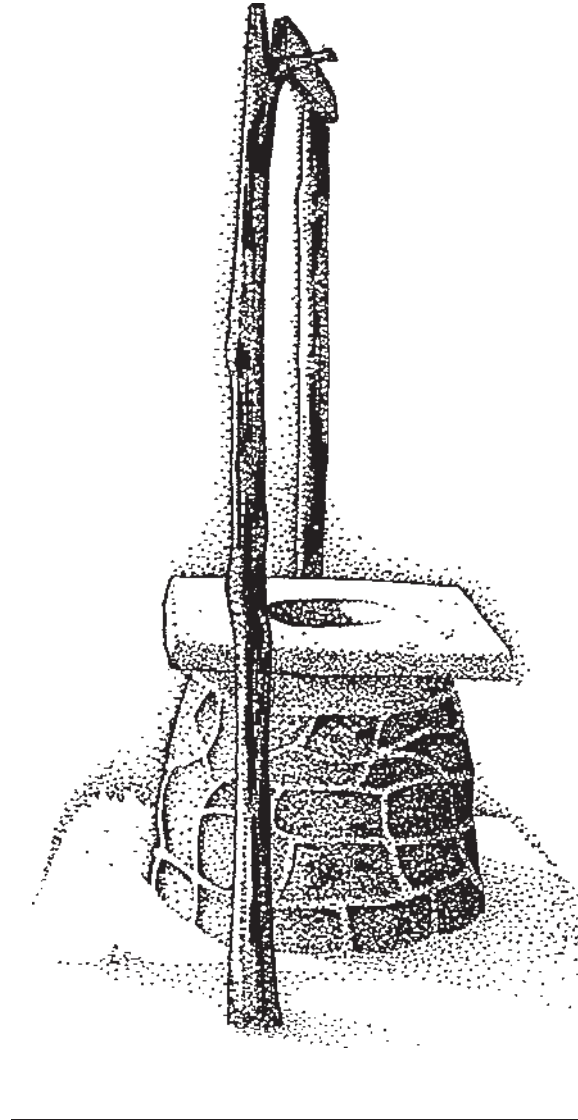
When the National Park Service purchased the land in 1978, the Collier buildings were tiny forgotten islands, hidden in a sea of vegetation. Restoration efforts began on the old home site: a portion of the fence that surrounds the house was rebuilt from materials hewn by hand; native grasses were sown in areas surrounding the trailhead to replace varieties grown for cattle feed; and, plants were transplanted around the house, descendants from Mrs. Collier's original gardens. In addition, a trail leading up to and beyond the homestead has been leveled for wheelchair accessibility.

Today, the Collier Homestead provides one of the many glimpses into the past that is visible up hollows, atop ridges, and along the river corridor. Each structure and scene is being preserved for its historic value – testimony to the dreams and persistence of families determined to make a new life in the Ozarks.



Collier Homestead

BUFFALO NATIONAL RIVER



An Opportunity

The Homestead Act of 1862 offered settlers the opportunity of a lifetime – title to their own property in exchange for improvements to the land. In the Ozarks, fertile acreage along creeks and rivers was settled first, while vacant pockets of less desirable land lay unclaimed atop slopes and ridges. As time passed and populations grew, these islands of public land disappeared as well. Solomon “Sod” Collier and his family were among the many 20th century settlers who lay claim to these remnants as foundations for a new life.

The Colliers left Kentucky one cold February day in 1928 and headed west for Arkansas on advice of Sod's brother. Sod and his wife, Ida Mae, and four of their seven children caravanned along with family in a pickup truck. Those who didn't fit in the cab of the truck huddled together in the bed, covered by only a tarp. After a week of traveling the Colliers finally arrived at their destination. At the time Sod carried but fifteen cents in his pocket, but held out much hope for their future in this new land.



Realizing the Dream

Within three years of their arrival in the area, the Collier family's dreams began to become a reality. Sod secured a forty-acre tract of land at Tyler Bend and began making the improvements that were required to obtain a homestead patent. While a storage shed served as the family's first shelter, a house soon took shape amidst a clearing. The land was cultivated and fenced, and outbuildings, including barns and a smokehouse, were constructed. A paling fence (today a replica) was built around the yard, serving to keep animals out rather than in. By 1937, Sod Collier and his family had improved the land enough to become its rightful owners, thus becoming some of the last settlers in the river valley to acquire land under the 1862 Homestead Act.



Sod Collier with his prize Kentucky Wonder pole beans

Everyday Life

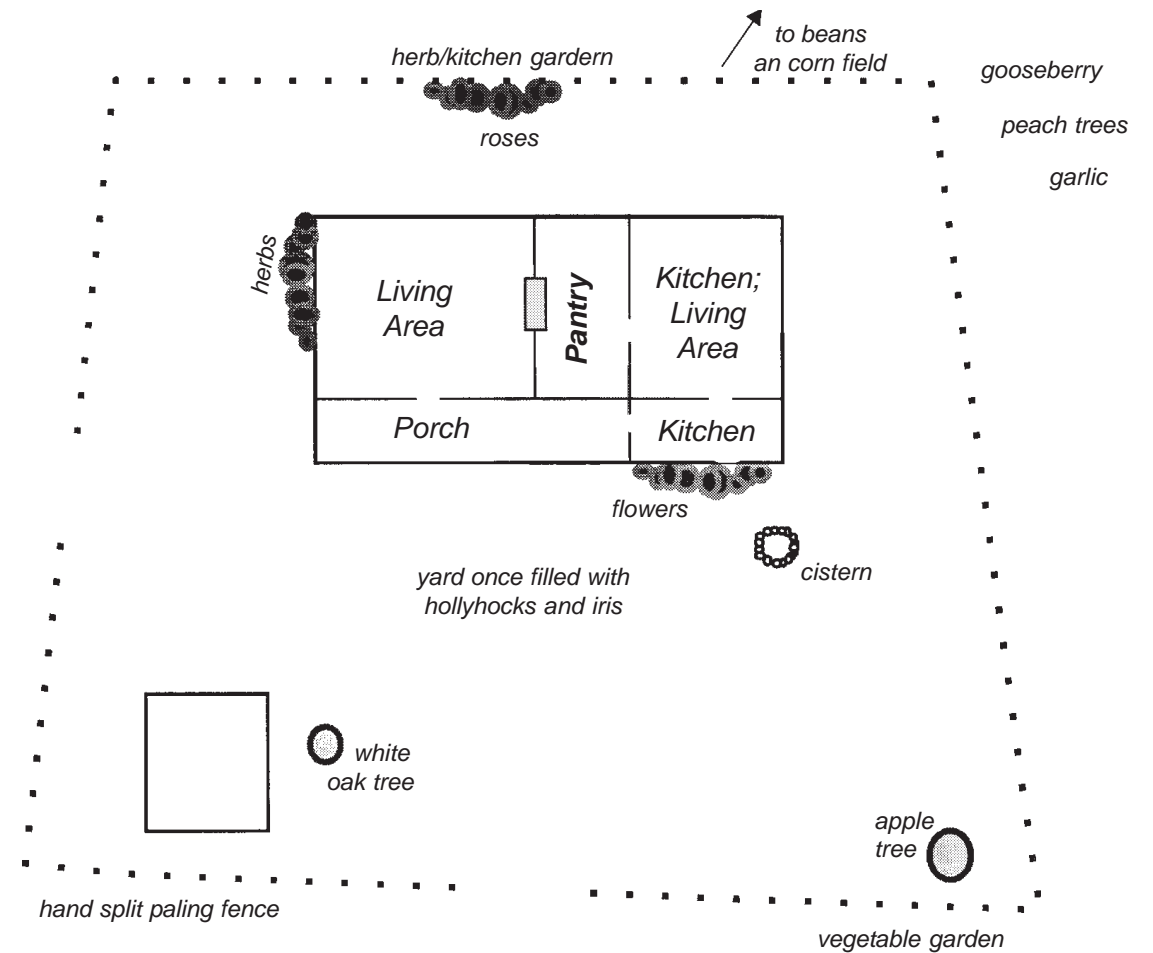
The family led a farming life. Hogs and cattle were raised for meat; corn, oats, cane, apples, peaches, and other garden produce were grown and canned to keep the pantry stocked thorough even the hardest winter. An avid gardener, Mrs. Collier was knowledgeable about the medicinal value of plants – those that caught her eye often became part of her ample garden.

Sod spent his spare time hunting, fishing, and acting as a river guide on the Buffalo for anglers in search of that "perfect spot". Together the Colliers lived a simple life on their small farm, with no electricity or indoor plumbing until 1961.



Sod and Ida Mae Collier on their farm

Layout of Collier Homestead Grounds



The National Park Service wishes to thank the Collier family for their assistance in sharing photos, time and memories. We also acknowledge the efforts of the volunteers and park staff who donated much time towards restoration of the homesite.