

June Easley of Pea Ridge was just five years old when her grandfather, Wilson Brown, died, but she still remembers him and his big house named "Rago" which he built in what is now the Metfield area of Bella Vista. Here is Part 1 of a two part story about Wilson Brown and Rago.

Wilson Brown was born in 1865 near Ontario, Canada, and moved to Kansas as a child. He met Ava Robinson, a native of Benton County, Arkansas, in school in the Garnett/Greeley area of eastern Kansas, where they both received teaching certificates. Following their marriage, he became a traveling salesman, selling cooking and heating stoves. In 1893, they moved to Arkansas and homesteaded 160 acres several miles east of what later became the Lake Bella Vista summer resort. Wilson's brother Harmon came down from Kansas to help build a log cabin for the family. Wilson's wife had grown up in what was viewed as a modern home with wool rugs on the floor, so when they moved here, her parents gave her a wool rug for her new home. With a dirt floor in the cabin and no door, the wool rug instead became the door covering.

It took Brown three years to build the "big house," which he named Rago (after a small town he liked in south central Kansas). The house, built facing what is now Ettington Drive on the hill above Euston Road, had living quarters on the south half of the first floor, with a small store and an area for mail on the north half, bedrooms on the second floor, and the attic with sleeping space as the third floor. With eight children, a large house was necessary. At times the family also provided room and board for school teachers at the nearby Summit School (for which he is reported to have donated the land), and Mrs. Brown's mother lived with them for several years prior to her death. Brown sold a variety of merchandise in the store, from groceries to shoes, including the Buster Brown brand, and named one of his sons Buster after the shoe.

Brown applied for and was appointed Postmaster on September 20, 1897, serving an area population of 97. The post office was discontinued in 1906 when rural mail services were centralized in Bentonville, but Brown continued to operate his store for a number of years. At the very top of the house, he put a cupola, a convenient spot from which to watch for the stagecoach's arrival. There are no official records listing Rago as a stagecoach stop (it certainly wasn't part of the famous Butterfield Trail stagecoach route that existed only prior to the Civil War), but long time residents of this area have grown up with stories about the Rago Stagecoach Stop. After the Civil War and into the 1880's, mail was delivered by stagecoach, but when the railroad came to Benton County, mail was reported to have been delivered by "mail hacks" or buggies from the railways. Perhaps some kind of stagecoach was still used to deliver mail to Rago, however. (Part 2 to follow next month.)

