

History and Naming of Rolla, Missouri...

The first early settlers came to Rolla, Missouri in 1818, building along the river banks, and doing a little farming. **Thomas James** bought a tract of land from the Federal Government at Maramec Spring in St. James, about 12 miles southeast of Rolla, and built the first Iron Works in the area.

Pioneer **John Webber**, built the first house within the present city limits of Rolla in 1844. In 1845 **Lt. James Abert** started the first railroad reconnaissance survey. He later became the first professor of Civil Engineering at the Missouri School of Mines (founded in 1870), now known as Missouri University of Science and Technology. **Edmund Ward Bishop**, who is called the founder of Rolla, was originally a railroad contractor in New York. He came to this part of the country in 1853 with the job of building the Frisco Branch of the Southwest Railroad. In 1857, because of an urgent demand, Phelps County was created by legislative action on Nov. 13, 1857, from a portion of Pulaski, Maries and Crawford counties. A special commission was appointed to select the site for a county seat, with instructions to locate the site on the mail line of the railroad as near the center of the county as possible. Mr. Bishop then offered a tract of 50 acres for the “westerners” wanting the name Rolla, and the “easterners” wanting the name Dillon, so the General Assembly did not declare Rolla to be the official county seat until January 25, 1861.

In 1858 Rolla was officially surveyed and laid out, and was officially named. Mr. Bishop wanted to call it Phelps Center, as his house was located in the center of the county. John Webber preferred the name Hardscrabble. George Coppedge, another original settler, and formerly of North Carolina, favored “Raleigh” after his home town. The others agreed with Coppedge on the condition that it need not have “that silly spelling,” but should be spelled “ROLLA”.

In 1958 Rolla was officially designated a Third Class City under the Missouri Statutes with a Mayor-City Council form of government. The then 8-member City Council has grown to the present-day 12-member City Council, representing 6 Wards (two members representing each Ward).

In 2001 Rolla was ranked as one of the top 100 Best Small Towns in the U.S. by Norm Crampton, author of *100 Best Small Towns in the U.S.*, and continues to be included in numerous national publications and polls as the ‘best of’ places to live, work and play.

Strategically located at the junction of Interstate 44, State Route 63 and Missouri Highway 72, Rolla sits at an elevation of 1,140 feet in the Meramec Valley Region of the Ozark Mountains. With a population of over 18,000, Rolla is the hub for education, health care, the performing arts, research and technology, transportation, retail, dining, and recreation in South Central Missouri.

The quality of life enjoyed by residents and visitors alike makes Rolla an inviting place to live, work and play! Thanks for being part of Rolla’s Sesquicentennial Kick-Off and 150th Birthday Celebration, and this historic milestone today, Tuesday, January 25, 2011!

