

# LIFE, LEISURE, AND HARDSHIP ALONG THE BUFFALO

Historic Resources Study  
Buffalo National River

Theodore Catton  
Principal Investigator



Midwest Region  
National Park Service  
Omaha, Nebraska

2008



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## INTRODUCTION

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In a region of winding rivers and streams, the Buffalo River cuts one of the most tortuous paths of all. Deeply entrenched in the Ozark plateau, looping back and forth between sheer rock bluffs and densely forested hillsides, it meanders for 150 miles across a straight-line distance of less than 60 miles, from the Boston Mountains in northwest Arkansas to its confluence with the White River in north central Arkansas. Along its course it is fed by numerous tributaries. Navigable only by skiff or canoe through most of the summer and fall, the Buffalo River runs fast and high in late winter and spring and turns into a raging torrent after a rainstorm at any time of year. In places the valley broadens out and is filled by rich alluvial soil.

Buffalo National River was authorized by Congress in 1972 for the purpose of preserving this scenic river in a free-flowing condition. The boundaries of Buffalo National River hew fairly close to the river valley. Exceptions include two tributary drainages of Cecil Cove and Richland Valley and some extensive uplands on the upper and lower river that are contained in the Ponca and Lower Buffalo Wilderness Areas respectively. The land base includes about 2,000 acres that were incorporated from two former state parks and about 2,000 acres that were transferred from the adjoining Ozark National Forest in addition to some 90,000 acres of former private holdings, which includes 5,000 acres in private ownership under conservation easements.

Within this spaghetti-shaped park is found an abundance of historic resources. A substantial portion are houses, barns, and other farm outbuildings, reflecting the agricultural heritage of the area. Among dozens of country churches and schools that once dotted the valley, the Erbie Church and Cold Springs School are two that survive in good condition. Approximately half of the listed structures are part of a historic district in Boxley Valley. Another large grouping is associated with the rural community of Erbie. Many historic structures are ensconced in woods and are seldom seen by park visitors. Others are highly visible and amply interpreted. Perhaps the most outstanding historic resource in the national river is the Parker-Hickman Farmstead, which dates to before the Civil War.

Buffalo National River contains abundant historic resources that relate to other historic themes besides the area's agricultural heritage. The Rush Historic District includes dozens of mine and mill ruins, standing structures, and landscape elements that reflect the area's mining history. During its heyday around 1915 the area had a working population in the thousands of people; today visitors can walk an interpretive trail past ruins and a few remaining standing structures that evoke images of that earlier time. Another notable historic resource is the complex of buildings associated with the former Buffalo River State Park. These buildings were mostly built by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and the complex is a fine example of government rustic architecture and state park planning from the CCC era. Other historic resources found in the park include cemeteries, foundations, and the remains of old roads, ferry crossings, and additional mine workings. The National Park Service's List of Classified Structures (LCS), updated

for Buffalo National River in 2006, lists a total of 290 historic buildings and structures. Of these, 210 are listed on the National Register of Historic Places (either individually or as contributing elements in historic districts) and 64 have been determined eligible for listing. Another four are categorized as “ineligible – managed as resource.”

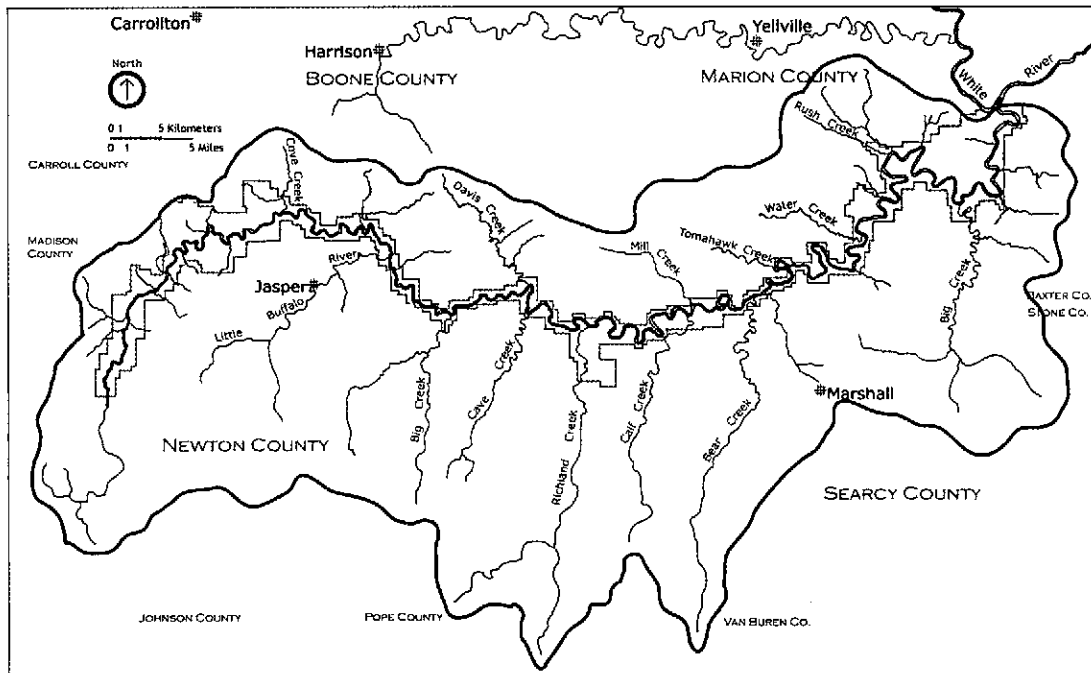
Other cultural resources include caves that produced saltpeter for the Confederate Army during the Civil War, and innumerable “bluff shelters” (caves and overhangs) inhabited at one time or another by prehistoric American Indian peoples. The Buffalo River valley has a rich prehistory, and archeologists have recorded some 600 archeological sites within the park to date.

The primary purpose of this historic resource study is to develop the history of the Buffalo River valley so as to assist the National Park Service in identifying, evaluating, and managing historic resources found within the park. The study focuses on historic resources, or what is called the *built environment*, but it seeks to integrate the story of the built environment with the political, social, and economic history of the area. For example, this study discusses country schools because they were once an important part of the built environment of the valley; but rather than merely chronicling when these schools were built and abandoned, it talks about educational life in the valley and state education reform movements that affected valley schools. This is called *historical context*. In order to assess any historic resource’s significance it is crucial to understand its historical context.

One component of historical context is geography. In developing historical contexts for local history, geography is a crucial reference point. This study makes frequent reference to the three counties that make up most of the Buffalo River watershed: Newton County, Searcy County, and Marion County. The Buffalo River spans these three counties in roughly equal thirds, with the upper portion of the river lying in Newton County, the middle section in Searcy County, and the lower part in Marion County. (A small portion of the lower watershed, together with a sliver of Buffalo National River, are within Baxter County.) The three adjoining counties lie approximately in the center of a 20-county area referred to in this study as both northwest Arkansas and the Arkansas Ozarks. The Arkansas Ozarks, in turn, refers to that portion of the whole Ozark region lying within the state of Arkansas. The geographic area known as the Ozarks or Ozark region encompasses the entire area of uplift in southern Missouri, northwest Arkansas, northeast Oklahoma, and the extreme southeast corner of Kansas. Finally, the historic resource study makes frequent reference to the South, which is generally defined as the eleven states of the Confederacy together with the four border states of Delaware, Maryland, Kentucky, and Missouri.

The history of the Buffalo River follows the main contours of Arkansas and Southern history. The first five chapters of this historic resource study are essentially chronological, with chapter breaks corresponding to the major fault lines in the history of the state and region. The first chapter treats Indian prehistory down to the period of Indian-white contact, which commenced with the DeSoto expedition of 1539-42. The second chapter describes the historical experience of different Indian tribes whose

territory at one time or another included the Buffalo River valley. This chapter spans from the colonial era to the climax of Indian removal in the 1830s. The third chapter, which overlaps the second in chronology, discusses European and American exploration from De Soto to Henry Schoolcraft's expedition in 1819, and the fur trade that lasted through the 1820s. The fourth chapter covers American settlement and the expansion of slavery in the region, roughly from the 1830s to 1860. The fifth chapter focuses on the Civil War experience in the Buffalo River valley.



Map 1: Buffalo River Watershed and Buffalo National River

The remaining five chapters of this study are more topical although they still generally follow in this chronological vein. Chapter Six discusses agriculture and industry from 1865 to 1930. Chapter Seven treats community development over this same time span. Chapter Eight addresses government intervention in the form of conservation, drought and unemployment relief, and agricultural adjustment during the crucial decade of the 1930s. Chapter Nine covers out-migration and population replacement in the postwar era, as well as changes in agriculture to 1972. Finally, Chapter Ten looks at tourism, outdoor recreation, and the movement to preserve the Buffalo River as a free-flowing stream.

This historic resource study features a variety of historical actors ranging from prehistoric peoples to twentieth-century federal agencies, from African-American slaves to modern-day tourists and outdoor enthusiasts. But one social group holds center stage through most of the Buffalo River story: the nineteenth-century settlers and their twentieth-century descendants, a people variously described as Southern highlanders, hill farmers, and Southern plain folk. These inhabitants of the Buffalo River valley possessed cultural traditions with an emphasis on kinship, religion, folk arts, and backwoods skills

that were a complement to the seasonal rhythms of their farm-based economy. The strong persistence of these cultural norms within a geographic area continually swept by larger outside influences constitutes one of the major themes of Buffalo River history.

Numerous writers on the Ozarks have remarked on the ethnic homogeneity of the pioneer communities that took root in the early to mid-nineteenth century and the persistence of that ethnic homogeneity well into the twentieth century. The settlement pattern in the Buffalo River valley mirrored the larger pattern of the Ozarks. An overwhelming majority of settlers in the Buffalo River came from the southern Appalachians. A surprising number of those came from east Tennessee. They were predominantly of Scots-Irish or English extraction and followers of one of the revivalist Protestant denominations, especially Baptist and Methodist. Ozark frontier culture was largely a transplant of the “Southern backwoods” culture that had formed in the southern Appalachians during the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries – so much so that historians sometimes refer to the Ozarks and the southern Appalachians together as the “Highland South.” This is not to say that the population in the Buffalo River valley was entirely ethnically homogenous – there was a small population of African-Americans before and after slavery, for example – but it is to say that the valley and the surrounding region had far less ethnic or racial diversity than most other places in the United States. This was true as early as the 1840s, when northern states began to receive large numbers of German and Irish immigrants, and it became even more pronounced in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as American cities absorbed the “new immigration” of eastern and southern Europeans. These vast migrations hardly penetrated the Ozarks, so that by 1930, outsider accounts of the “friendly Ozarks” typically dwelt on the unusual ethnic homogeneity of the population, even describing it as a survival of an older America. The strong Celtic strain in the population had a profound influence on agricultural practices, social institutions, and communities. This in turn shaped the architecture of buildings and cultural landscapes that were made in and around them.

Ozark studies also frequently point to the hilly topography of the region as a determining factor in making it a culturally distinctive region. Geographic determinism was especially influential in early twentieth-century descriptions of this regional subculture. Some observers reasoned that the hilly topography of the Ozark region, being in such stark contrast to the flat lowlands extending for hundreds of miles on all sides of it, tended to discourage trade between Ozark peoples and the outside, producing cultural conservatism. Interestingly, this theory was first put forward in the 1920s to explain Ozark prehistory: it was suggested that an “Ozark bluff dweller” culture, which revolved around hunting and gathering, survived in isolation from the increasingly farming-based Indian cultures that developed in the Mississippi Valley and on the southern plains. Although the Ozark bluff dweller concept has since become discredited, it had an analogue in the way social commentators in the 1920s and 1930s looked at contemporary Ozark residents. Concerned about the poverty they saw on Ozark farms, these commentators suggested that the region’s depressed socio-economic conditions stemmed from geographic isolation, especially the region’s dearth of good roads. This theme of geographic isolation was expounded by numerous writers from various academic



perspectives. Folklorist Vance Randolph, cultural geographer Carl O. Sauer, artist Thomas Hart Benton, journalist Charles Morrow Wilson, sociologist W. O. Cralle, agricultural economist Conrad H. Hammar, and others described different aspects of Ozark life starting from the common premise that the area was geographically isolated. All of these writers were critical of the perceived poverty in the hill farmers' way of life; however, their opinions differed over whether hill farmers would by and large thrive or suffer as they became more connected to modern influences.

Historians in the late twentieth century have taken care not to overstate the theme of geographic isolation and its corollaries of cultural conservatism and rural poverty. Historians who have studied agrarian political movements in the decades after the Civil War, for example, have revealed that a great many southern farmers were politically sophisticated and forward looking; indeed, some of the political movements that gave rise to Southern populism in the late nineteenth century began in Arkansas, and Buffalo River farmers participated in those movements. Or to take another example, historians who have examined Southern progressivism in the early twentieth century do not accept the views of commentators of the 1920s and 1930s who construed Southern farmer opposition to the good roads movement as unenlightened. Rather, historians find that when Southern farmers opposed public road levies in the early twentieth century they were acting in reasonable self-interest as they bore a disproportionate share of the tax burden while urban-based businesses reaped the greatest reward from road improvement. Again, these insights apply to the actions of Buffalo River farmers as well as other farmers in the South. Most importantly, perhaps, modern accounts recognize that the Ozarks' twentieth-century reputation as an economically depressed region is culturally loaded and does not necessarily reflect a sense of deprivation on the part of the indigenous culture. Indeed, some maintain that the hill farmers' lower material living standards in the early and mid-twentieth century were substantially a matter of choice as the hill farmers had other priorities.

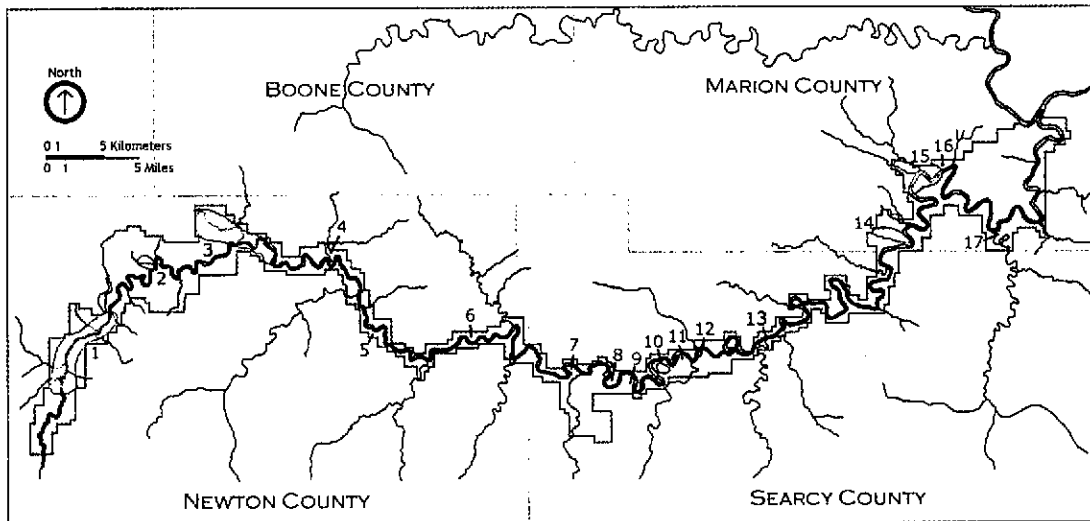
Historians Lynn Morrow and Linda Myers-Phinney, co-authors of *Shepherd of the Hills: Tourism Transforms the Ozarks, 1880s – 1930s* (1999), go so far as to suggest that much of the commentary on Southern "hillbillies" and Southern backwoods culture in the 1920s and 1930s was imposed on those people and places by "Yankee culture," which Morrow and Myers-Phinney describe as suburban, market-based, and consumer-oriented. "Rural people," these historians contend, "came to be seen as peculiar in the face of booming industrialism" (p. 199). Increasingly, Morrow and Myers-Phinney contend, commentators in the 1920s and 1930s selected themes and details of Southern hill-country life that reinforced negative stereotypes about "hillbillies." The tourist industry, in these authors' view, played a large role in constructing what they call an "Arcadian myth" around the Ozarks.

Environmental history offers yet another perspective on what made the area culturally distinctive. In particular, the perspective of environmental history sheds light on one of the important features of the Buffalo River story: how the land was settled and used over time. Many aspects of agricultural land use, including methods of land clearing, types of crops grown, use of woodlands, and forms of land tenure, labor, and

technology, changed markedly. Antebellum farming practices were adapted to frontier conditions in which labor was scarce and land was abundant. After the Civil War, farming practices gradually changed in response to a changing land-labor ratio as well as the development of new markets, technology, and other influences. Beginning in the early twentieth century, agricultural experts and other commentators increasingly questioned whether contemporary farm practices were less than optimal or even environmentally sustainable. While these observations were yet another instance of negative critiquing by the dominant culture, inhabitants along the Buffalo River nonetheless did face mounting economic and environmental challenges to their farming way of life. Even as the resident population showed a strong tendency toward cultural persistence, its overall numbers dwindled as hundreds of individuals left their farms – some relocating to nearby towns and others scattering to different parts of the country. Out-migration began around World War I, temporarily slowed during the Great Depression, and reached floodtide after World War II. The matter of what caused this large out-migration is an important element of the story.

This study builds on considerable historical research previously undertaken and compiled by the National Park Service for Buffalo National River. In particular, long time park historian Suzanne Rogers has prepared numerous historical reports and assembled primary and secondary source material from oral histories, census records, county courthouses, local historical societies, and other area and regional depositories. Her research material is archived at Buffalo National River headquarters. In addition to Rogers' own research, various research files or copies from three historians, Dwight T. Pitcaithley, James J. Johnston, and Kenneth L. Smith, are also housed at the park.

Many cultural properties in Buffalo National River are discussed in reports that were prepared specifically for the management of those properties, and these reports also provided useful background for this study. In particular, considerable historical material is contained in reports on the Parker-Hickman Farmstead, Rush Historic District, Boxley Valley, and Tyler Bend. A complete listing may be found in the bibliography. In addition, many cultural properties are treated in a recent study by Thomason and Associates titled "Buffalo National River Theme Identification Context Studies and Property Evaluations." Together with the LCS, the Thomason study was an invaluable source for providing an overview of existing historic resources within the park. Additional research for this study was done at local and regional libraries, the Arkansas Historical Commission, the National Archives, and in a federal government documents repository library (at the University of Montana). U.S. Census data were used extensively and are abstracted in several tables throughout the report. Census data were gleaned for Marion, Newton, and Searcy counties, whose land areas roughly coincide with the Buffalo River watershed. This study makes extensive use of secondary sources to place Buffalo River history in a wider context. Works that were particularly helpful included Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (1992); Charles S. Bolton, *Arkansas 1800-1860: Remote and Restless* (1998); Thomas A. DeBlack, *With Fire and Sword: Arkansas, 1861-1874* (2003); and Brooks Blevins, *Hill Folks: A History of Arkansas Ozarkers and Their Image* (2002).



Map 2. Historic Resources on the List of Classified Structures  
Numbers in parentheses indicate number of structures

1. Boxley Valley

- Whiteley School
- Doy Edgmon (5)
- J. T. Edgmon (6)
- Troy Fowler (6)
- Marion Edgmon (5)
- A. F. Casey (8)
- Arvel and Elsie Casey (8)
- Orphea Duty (9)
- J. L. Villines (4)
- Boxley Mill (3)
- Lieu Duty (7)
- Frank Scroggins (4)
- Audie Ramsey (2)
- R. Hezekiah Villines (4)
- Joe S. Villines House
- Sam Clark (2)
- Waymon Villines (2)
- Jess Shroll Barn
- William Villines (3)
- Arrington Creek (4)
- Beaver Jim Villines (7)
- Junior Fowler Farmhouse
- Clyde and Nellie Villines (8)
- Pickle Edgmon (3)
- Jeff Villines Corn Crib
- Henry Villines (2)
- Old Villines Place (3)
- Robert Villines (5)
- Fultz/Seamon (3)
- Eubank (4)
- Dennis Villines Old House
- Hall Property Rock Shelter
- Pleas Guthrie (3)
- Marion Hurley (3)
- Old Boxley Bridge Abutments
- Boxley Valley House
- Villines Cemetery
- Whiteley Cemetery

2. Sneeds Creek

- Eva Barnes Henderson (4)
- Evans-White (2)

3. Erbie District

- Rulus Jones (3)
- Parker-Hickman (9)
- Cherry Grove Cemetery
- Jones Cemetery
- Young Cemetery
- Adair Cemetery
- McFadin Cemetery
- Shake Roof Cabin
- Erbie Church
- Huchingson Spring
- J. W. Farmer (5)
- John Reavis House

4. Shaddox Cabin

- Luther Arnold (2)

5. Collins Cemetery

- Arnold Cemetery

6. Morris Cemetery

- Old Arnold House

7. Nars Cemetery

- Old Arnold Cemetery

8. Christy and Lawrence Cemetery

- South of Cemetery (3)

9. Slay Cemetery

10. Arnold Bend

- Brown School

- Luther Arnold (2)

- Arnold Cemetery

- Old Arnold House

- Old Arnold Cemetery

- South of Cemetery (3)

11. Valentine and Mollie Williams House

- CCC Lodge

- CCC Housekeeping Cabins (6)

- CCC Pavilion

- CCC Infrastructure (10)

- Duplexes (4)

- Concession Building

- Historic Water Tank

- Water and Sewer System

- Concrete Water Tank

15. Rush

- Monte Cristo Mine (4)
- Silver Hollow Mine

Rush (cont.)

- Ore Wagon Road
- New Town Road
- White Eagle Mine (3)
- Morning Star Mine (12)
- Ben Carney Mine
- Capps Mine (2)
- McIntosh Mine (5)
- Edith Mine and Mill (2)
- Red Cloud Mine and Mill (2)
- Lonnie Boy Mine
- Taylor-Medley General Store
- Storekeeper's House No. 1
- Kastning House No. 3
- Brantley House Ruin
- Wash House No. 4
- Bundy House No. 5
- Rush Smelter
- Rush Blacksmith Shop
- Hicks General Store Ruin
- Rush Creek Road
- Livery Ruins
- Yellow Rose Mine and Mill (2)
- Clabber Tunnels
- Clabber Field Mine Shaft
- Lonnie Boy Pump House
- Rush Railroad Grade
- Clabber Creek Roadbeds
- McIntosh Hotel
- Monte Cristo Mine (3)
- Chase-Mulholland Store Ruin
- Hicks Hotel Flowerbeds
- Hicks Hotel Bldg Foundation
- Pop Campbell House Site
- Hillside Prospects and Digs
- Courthouse Retaining Wall
- Raby House Ruins

16. Laffoon Cemetery

- Cold Springs School

17. Cold Springs School



Figure 1. View from Buffalo Point. *NPS 1960s collection, Buffalo National River.*

## CHAPTER ONE

### PREHISTORY

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When archeologists first began to investigate prehistoric cultures in the Ozarks in the early twentieth century, their efforts focused on well-preserved artifacts found in numerous caves or “bluff dwellings” that dotted the karst topography of northern Arkansas and southern Missouri. The numerous cave sites included many located within the present boundaries of Buffalo National River. Imagining that the cave sites were year-round habitations and centers of a “bluff dwellers culture,” these early archeologists posited that the mountainous terrain had inhibited trade and intercourse between the bluff dwellers and their lowland neighbors. Artifacts recovered from the cave sites seemed to provide evidence of a hunter-gatherer culture that was resistant to outside influences – a “cultural refugium.” More recent archeology has reinterpreted the cave sites as seasonal camps or “bluff shelters” rather than “bluff dwellings.” This reinterpretation has followed from the discovery of habitation sites along ridge tops and terraces at many locations in the Ozarks and notably at Erbie and Rush within Buffalo National River. The extent to which prehistoric culture groups in the Ozarks communicated with cultures in the wider region has been a central concern of Ozark archeology over the past century, with the evidence pointing increasingly toward an interpretation that the cultural sequence in places like the Buffalo River valley essentially paralleled that of the surrounding region.

This chapter provides a chronological overview of prehistory in the Buffalo River valley and the Ozark region generally. It describes the standard culture sequence for eastern North America – from Paleoindian through Archaic, Woodland, and Mississippian – as these commonly understood periods of cultural development pertain to the Buffalo River valley and the Ozarks. At the same time, the chapter offers a historical overview of archeology in the area, from the bluff dweller concept propounded in the early twentieth century to recent work on the rise of cultural complexity. Over the course of the past century, much of the prehistoric archeology in the area has addressed the question of whether or not the upland environment caused significant cultural divergence from culture groups living on the surrounding lowland plains. To what extent did trade networks penetrate the Ozark region? When and where did prehistoric peoples in the Ozarks shift from nomadic to sedentary life ways? Whether nomadic or sedentary, were such groups in communication with culture groups outside? These questions speak to the supposed geographic isolation of the Ozarks, an interpretive theme that continues into the historic period.

#### EARLIEST INHABITANTS

About 14,000 years ago the Ozark region was home to mastodon, ground sloth, giant beaver, bear, and deer, but no human beings. The hills were darkly robed in a conifer forest of spruce, pine, and fir. The Ozarks lay on the southern margins of the boreal forest, but that was slowly changing. As the great ice sheet in the north retreated,

cold air masses over the middle of the continent weakened and warm air masses flowed northward from the Gulf of Mexico with increasing frequency, bringing higher temperatures and more precipitation to the Ozarks. As the climate changed, deciduous tree species such as black ash and hornbeam invaded decadent stands of spruce and jack pine. By about 12,500 years ago, deciduous forest had largely replaced conifer forest in the Ozarks. Yet still another 2,500 years would pass before the oak and hickory forest that is familiar today became established.<sup>1</sup> Some time in this period of forest transformation, perhaps 12,000 years ago, human beings came to inhabit the hills.

Known as Paleoindians, these earliest arrivals employed a variety of stone tools for killing and harvesting big game animals. Evidence of their occupation of the Ozarks comes from various isolated finds in the region, including Clovis points found in Newton, Logan, and Baxter counties. The distinctive Clovis point is lanceolate in shape (meaning it tapers to a point) and fluted at the basal end where the point was inserted into a spear shaft. Named "Clovis" for the site of its discovery in New Mexico, this type of projectile point is diagnostic of an advance in stone tool making that occurred throughout North America in the late Pleistocene age.<sup>2</sup>

Paleoindians hunted mammoth, mastodon, and other species of megafauna that became extinct at the end of the Pleistocene age. For many years archeologists believed that Clovis culture revolved around the hunting of big game animals. Since mammoths and mastodons roamed in large herds across open grasslands and did not occur in abundance in forested habitat such as was found in the Ozarks, it seemed improbable that Clovis peoples would have penetrated the mountainous Ozark region where they would have been unlikely to find large numbers of their favored big game. As archeologists have accumulated more evidence from archaeological sites, however, it has become clear that Paleoindians possessed a more diversified hunting and gathering culture than previously thought. Adapted to local environments, the subsistence base of Paleoindians included the capture of small game and the harvest of nuts and berries as well as the slaughter of big game animals. Moreover, the discovery of thousands of Clovis points all over the continent has led archeologists to reassess Paleoindians in another way. Once associated primarily with the western United States, it now seems that Paleoindian peoples, expanded southward and eastward from their ancestral origins in Beringia to populate nearly all sections of North America by the end of the Pleistocene. For these reasons, archeologists now interpret the discovery of Clovis-like specimens in the Ozarks as evidence of Paleoindian occupation. Archeologist John P. Newton speculates that these early hunters ventured into the Ozarks in pursuit of whitetail deer and nuts and berries, possibly using the abundant caves and bluff shelters for winter habitations.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Paul A. Delcourt, Hazel R. Delcourt, Dan F. Morse and Phyllis A. Morse, "History, Evolution, and Organization of Vegetation and Human Culture," *Biodiversity of the Southeastern United States* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1993), 58.

<sup>2</sup> James A. Scholtz, "A Summary of Prehistory in Northwest Arkansas," *The Arkansas Archeologist: Bulletin of the Arkansas Archeological Society*, 10 (1969), 52-53.

<sup>3</sup> John P. Newton, "Paleo-Indian in the Arkansas Ozarks: A Preliminary Statement," *The Arkansas Archeologist: Bulletin of the Arkansas Archeological Society*, 16-18 (1975-1977), 85-92.

Elmo Ingenthron, author of *Indians of the Ozark Plateau* (1970), places the first appearance of “Early Man” in the Ozarks cautiously at 9,000 to 12,000 years ago. For Ingenthron, it is a matter of curiosity whether these Ozark dwellers hunted mammoths and other great beasts of the Pleistocene before these animals disappeared. He reports that chipped stone tools were found in association with fossil remains of a mastodon on the northern edge of the Ozarks in Missouri by a fossil hunter, Albrecht G. Koch, in 1840. Koch sold the artifacts to the Royal Museum of the University of Berlin, where more than a century later they were analyzed and dated at 7850 B.C. plus or minus 500 years. Ingenthron postulates that as the climate grew warmer and drier at the end of the Pleistocene, dooming the giant mammals to extinction, they persisted longer in the Ozarks and Mississippi Valley, which were subject to moist Gulf winds, than they did in the more arid West. Thus, it is likely that Paleoindians hunted these animals in the Ozarks prior to their extinction.

Still, the Ozarks lay at the margins of the Paleoindians’ vast domain. “Early Man only sparsely inhabited the Ozark Plateau,” Ingenthron concludes. “His numbers were few and his campsites were far apart. There is little or no evidence of permanent occupation.”<sup>4</sup> Thirty-five years after Ingenthron’s assessment, the archeological evidence of human occupation in the Ozarks in the Paleoindian Period remains thin. Most of it comes from isolated artifacts found in surface litter or caves rather than embedded in the ground. No Paleoindian sites have been excavated. This contrasts with the next stage in human cultural evolution in North America, known as the Dalton or Proto-Archaic, for which archeologists find substantial evidence of an established human presence throughout the Ozarks.<sup>5</sup>



Figure 2. Indian Rock House. Prehistoric American Indians occupied this well-known cave and dozens of other caves both large and small throughout the Buffalo River valley. *Caven Clark photo, Buffalo National River.*

Proto-Archaic refers to a transitional stage of cultural evolution between Paleolithic and Archaic, when peoples in the southeastern United States adopted more diversified hunting and gathering economies. Their subsistence came to focus on white-tailed deer, small animals, fish, and birds, and their toolkit changed accordingly. This stage is generally dated 8000 B.C. to 7000 B.C., and in the Ozark region is amply revealed in the archeological record by way of the Dalton spear point. Archeologist James A. Scholtz describes this stone tool as a lanceolate spear point

<sup>4</sup> Elmo Ingenthron, *Indians of the Ozark Plateau* (Point Lookout, Missouri: The School of the Ozarks Press, 1970), 16-17.

<sup>5</sup> Jay T. Sturdevant, William J. Hunt, Jr., and Caven P. Clark, *Archeological Inventory of the 2004 Prescribed Burn Units, Newton and Searcy Counties, Buffalo National River, Arkansas* (Lincoln, Nebraska: United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Midwest Archeological Center, 2005), 4.

whose smooth and concave base is often well thinned by the bifacial removal of several flakes.<sup>6</sup> At the Packard Site on the western edge of the Ozarks (in Oklahoma), which was excavated in the early 1960s, points of this type were associated with a hearth. The scorched hearth permitted carbon 14 dating, yielding a relatively firm date for this site of 7450 B.C.<sup>7</sup> Other Dalton sites have been found in a variety of upland and lowland settings throughout the Ozarks, suggesting that the human population in the Ozarks expanded and became more settled in seasonal camps during this transitional stage. It is also likely that the size of hunting and gathering groups began to increase as people became more proficient in exploiting seeds, nuts, and fruits.<sup>8</sup> Archeologists Dan F. Morse and Phyllis A. Morse, writing about the Central Mississippi Valley due east of the Ozarks, refer to the "Dalton efflorescence" and state "there is little doubt that Dalton represents a base out of which the Archaic developed in the southeastern United States." In addition to modifying their subsistence base, Dalton-stage peoples developed the adz for woodcraft and cobble tools for grinding vegetables, engaged in trade, lived in permanent settlements, and buried their dead in cemeteries.<sup>9</sup>

## ARCHAIC PEOPLES

Archeologists use the term Archaic in reference to the long expanse of time from the end of the Pleistocene to the beginning of farming and pottery in North America, a period of several thousand years when regional cultures, adapting to their respective environments, developed increasingly sophisticated forms of subsistence and social organization. In the Ozarks, as in eastern North America generally, the Archaic period dates from 7000 B.C. to 1000 B.C., at which time the Archaic culture was superseded by the Woodland culture.<sup>10</sup>

Archaic peoples in the Ozarks made seasonal rounds in which they hunted small game animals, fished in the rivers and streams, and gathered wild foods. They camped for extended periods where food sources were most abundant, and returned to the same camp or seasonal village sites year after year. Archaic peoples developed a more diverse material culture than their Paleoindian forebears. A significant new weapon was the atlatl, or spear thrower. This device consisted of a shaft about twenty inches in length with a handle on one end for grasping and a spur on the other end designed to hold the dart or spear in place. The hunter hurled the spear while keeping hold of the atlatl. This weapon added to the speed and distance of the missile.<sup>11</sup> Other new tools not known by

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<sup>6</sup> Scholtz, "A Summary of Prehistory in Northwest Arkansas," 53.

<sup>7</sup> Newton, "Paleo-Indian in the Arkansas Ozarks," 85.

<sup>8</sup> Milton D. Rafferty, *The Ozarks: Land and Life* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980), 32.

<sup>9</sup> Dan F. Morse and Phyllis A. Morse, *Archaeology of the Central Mississippi Valley* (New York: Academic Press, 1983), 71.

<sup>10</sup> Dates are approximate and not definitive. Rafferty, *op. cit.*, gives dates of 7000 B.C. to 1000 B.C. Ingenthron, *op. cit.*, does not differentiate Proto Archaic from Archaic and gives dates of 8000 B.C. to 1000 B.C. Daniel Wolfman of the Arkansas Archeological Survey dates the Archaic Stage from 8000 B.C. to 500 B.C. in "Archeological Inventory of the Buffalo National River," Report prepared for the National Park Service, Southwest Region and the Arkansas Archeological Survey, July 1974, 14.

<sup>11</sup> Ingenthron, *Indians of the Ozark Plateau*, 19-20.



Paleoindians included the axe for chopping wood and the celt for grinding or milling seeds. In their semi-sedentary life, Archaic peoples fashioned other objects useful around camp such as baskets, sandals, and twined fiber bags. Such perishable artifacts as these have been recovered from bluff shelters along the Buffalo River.<sup>12</sup>

Within the Buffalo River drainage prehistoric sites dating from the archaic period are especially numerous around Erbie. It has been suggested that these sites may reflect a peak of prehistoric occupation along the Buffalo River.<sup>13</sup>

Little is known about the types of dwellings built by Archaic peoples. Ingenthron speculates on the basis of what is known about later cultures that they might have built thatched brush or mat and mud dwellings on open ground.<sup>14</sup> Some Ozark dwellers made use of caves or rock shelters. The first Ozark bluff dwelling known to archeologists was discovered by Dr. Charles Peabody in McDonald County, Missouri, in 1903.<sup>15</sup> Subsequent archeological investigations by M. R. Harrington in 1923, which he published in an article the following year and treated at book length many years later in 1960, brought the bluff dwellings wider attention. Harrington argued that the bluff dwellings were semi-permanent residences, but most archeologists today believe they were probably occupied only seasonally or used as food surplus storage sites.<sup>16</sup>

## WOODLAND CULTURE AND THE BLUFF DWELLER CONCEPT

Beginning about 1000 B.C., the inhabitants of eastern North America developed a farming culture known as Woodland. Farming led to more permanent village sites and stimulated other cultural changes such as the introduction of pottery, the expansion of trade networks, and the making of burial mounds. Nevertheless, Woodland peoples seem to have adopted farming slowly, adding it to their mixed economy of hunting and gathering only on a marginal basis until about A.D. 400. Indeed, there is evidence that peoples in eastern North America cultivated crops in a limited way as early as the late Archaic stage. In the Ozarks, remains of domesticated squash and gourds that are presumed to date from the late Archaic stage have been found in dry bluff shelters.<sup>17</sup>

Commencing in the fifth century A.D., the cultivation of maize spread rapidly and the human population increased. Archeologists debate whether Woodland peoples acquired agriculture from Mexico, where it had already existed for a few thousand years, or whether they developed it themselves. Archeological evidence that Woodland peoples

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<sup>12</sup> Wolfman, "Archeological Inventory of the Buffalo National River," 15; Sturdevant et al., *Archeological Inventory of the 2004 Prescribed Burn Units*, 4.

<sup>13</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, *Development Plan, Cultural Landscape Report, Erbie, Buffalo National River, Arkansas* (Denver: USDI, National Park Service, 1986), 8.

<sup>14</sup> Ingenthron, *Indians of the Ozark Plateau*, 20.

<sup>15</sup> Vance Randolph, *The Ozarks: An American Survival of Primitive Society* (New York: The Vanguard Press, 1931), 6.

<sup>16</sup> James A. Brown, *Prehistoric Southern Ozark Marginality: A Myth Exposed* (Columbia: Missouri Archeological Society, Inc., 1984), 51.

<sup>17</sup> Sturdevant et al., "Archeological Inventory of the 2004 Prescribed Burn Units," 4.

cultivated crops that were native to the eastern United States, such as sunflower and pigweed, lends support to the theory of indigenous development of agriculture. Archeologist Daniel Wolfman, in his archeological inventory of Buffalo National River, notes that the vegetable remains found in bluff shelters in the Ozarks “has played an important role in some of these discussions” as the vegetable remains provide “strong evidence for the cultivation of some of these native eastern species.”<sup>18</sup>

For a long time archeologists interpreted the bluff dwelling sites as evidence of a distinctive “Ozark bluff dweller” culture. The concept of a unique culture originated with Harrington in his seminal paper of 1924, and was further developed by Samuel C. Dellinger and others.<sup>19</sup> Between 1928 and 1934, the University of Arkansas Museum conducted archeological investigations at 57 bluff shelters in northwest Arkansas. Later analysis of the material gathered in these excavations suggested that the bluff dwellers subsisted largely on deer meat, with bison, bear, elk, and raccoon contributing lesser but significant portions to their diet. According to these studies, the Ozark bluff dwellers were sophisticated weavers of baskets, cradles, clothes, mats, and fish nets. And in addition to weapons and tools made of stone, they produced many articles out of bone and antler. But they made limited use of pottery. What ceramics they had was tempered by grit (sand was mixed with clay to strengthen it). Their pottery was thicker and less decorative than other Woodland pottery, and it was limited to three principal forms: a bowl, a beaker, and an urn.<sup>20</sup>

The bluff dweller concept held that the bluff dwellers lived in isolation in the rugged Ozark hills, scarcely participating in the expanding trade networks and emergent farm-based societies of the Woodland culture. Resistant to change, they represented a “cultural enclave” of Archaic peoples who clung to an earlier way of life. The bluff dwellers lived principally by the hunt, supplemented their diet with wild plants and fish, and practiced a limited amount of farming. Harrington’s bluff-dweller concept gradually gained a strong following, even as most archeologists came to support a general evolutionary model in which widely dispersed human populations acquired new cultural attributes more or less synchronously.<sup>21</sup>

Harrington described a bluff-dweller culture that seemingly flourished for many hundreds of years and then abruptly ended when a “top-layer culture” succeeded it. The “top-layer culture” referred to the upper-most strata in the bluff dweller sites, which exhibited a variety of imported cultural elements dating from a later time period. Harrington posited that the Ozark bluff dweller culture persisted throughout the Woodland stage, remaining impervious to the socially complex cultures that developed in the Mississippi Valley in the late Woodland stage, until the bluff dwellers were finally driven out and replaced by another group. Archeologists have speculated about the cause

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<sup>18</sup> Wolfman, “Archeological Inventory of the Buffalo National River,” 16.

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Dellinger’s article on baby cradles recovered from bluff shelters in Arkansas, which he noted bore much resemblance to forms found among prehistoric peoples in the Southwest. S.C. Dellinger, “Baby Cradles of the Ozark Bluff Dwellers,” *American Antiquity*, 1, no. 3 (January 1936): 197-214.

<sup>20</sup> Ingenthron, *Indians of the Ozark Plateau*, 31-42.

<sup>21</sup> Brown, *Prehistoric Southern Ozark Marginality*, 32.

of their demise, suggesting that it might have been due to climate change or that they were driven out by hostile tribes equipped with bow and arrow. Other archeologists have tried to integrate the bluff dweller culture into the wider culture sequence of eastern North America, suggesting that Harrington's "top-layer culture" is equivalent to the Mississippian stage that commenced about A.D. 700.<sup>22</sup>

A key facet of the bluff dweller concept is the theory that the culture was uniquely resistant to outside influence. The idea has enjoyed popular as well as scholarly appeal. In his book *Indians of the Ozark Plateau*, Ingenthron accepted Harrington's hypothesis uncritically, stating that the bluff dwellers were "immune to the cultural developments...of other people living on the periphery of their domain." Ingenthron attributed their isolation to the "geographical barriers of the rugged terrain in which they lived."<sup>23</sup>

Twenty years after Harrington's synthesis and ten years after Ingenthron's book, the Ozark bluff dweller concept came to be disputed. During the 1970s, the rapid growth of contract archeology (spurred by environmental laws that called for cultural resource



Figure 3. Typical bluff shelter in Buffalo National River. Most bluff shelters are not large. This shelter, like many, has been looted by pot hunters. *Caven Clark photo, Buffalo National River.*

management) generated a wealth of new archeological data. The number of archeological sites in the Ozarks increased several fold. Far from focusing on caves and rock shelters as previous archeological investigations had done, the new sites occurred on ridge tops, hillslope benches, upland plateaus, and stream beds – that is, wherever archeological sites happened to lie in the path of modern development. Studies by Mark J. Lynott, James E. Price, and others in Ozark National Scenic Riverways, Ozark National Forest, Buffalo National River, and

other locales pointed to an emergent Mississippian tradition in the Ozarks coincident with its appearance in the Mississippi Valley. In the mid-1970s, Price synthesized this work and proposed a revised cultural sequence for the region, based largely on the development of shell-tempered ceramic technology at sites along the eastern Ozark border.<sup>24</sup> In 1982, Mark L. Raab reinforced this revisionist interpretation. Surveying the results of a decade of contract archeology in the Ozarks, Raab commented that the long-held view of the Ozarks as a "moribund backwater of prehistoric cultural development"

<sup>22</sup> Ingenthron, *Indians of the Ozark Plateau*, 44-45; Wolfman, "Archeological Inventory of the Buffalo National River," 18-19.

<sup>23</sup> Ingenthron, *Indians of the Ozark Plateau*, 44.

<sup>24</sup> Mark J. Lynott, "An Interpretation of Late Prehistoric Cultural Developments in the Eastern Ozarks," *Theory, Method, and Practice in Modern Archaeology*, edited by Robert J. Jeske and Douglas K. Charles (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2003), 197.

needed to be reassessed. Characterization of the bluff dwellers as hunter-gatherers who possessed an essentially Archaic culture was “increasingly dubious.” In light of new archeological finds, Raab suggested, it was better to approach the Ozarks archeological record as a reflection of “adaptations to the region’s biophysical resources.”<sup>25</sup>

Two years after the publication of Raab’s essay, the bluff dweller concept sustained a book-length assault by archeologist James A. Brown in *Prehistoric Southern Ozark Marginality: A Myth Exposed*. Brown assailed the concept both from the standpoint of theory and evidence. The Ozark bluff dweller concept was an example of “geographical barrier theory,” Brown wrote. Borrowing a term from ecology, he likened this theoretical survival of an essentially Archaic way of life in the Ozarks to a “cultural refugium.” Brown found this survival implausible. Southeastern cultural systems in the Woodland stage were easily adaptable to highland and lowland environments; Woodland peoples had the technology and the knowledge of agriculture to occupy a variety of habitats without strain. Brown looked at climate factors such as the length of the growing season and the frequency of drought in the Ozark highlands. With a growing season of more than six months, these limitations could not have inhibited the spread of agriculture. Similarly he considered topography and the challenges of moving through such rugged terrain. These factors were easily offset by the diversity of Ozark settings available for human settlement. It was inconceivable to Brown that the geography of the Ozarks could present a barrier to cultural diffusion.<sup>26</sup>

Brown next examined the archeological evidence for a “cultural refugium.” With the advantage of much new archeological data drawn from hundreds of sites throughout the Ozarks, Brown proposed a concordant cultural sequence in all parts of the Ozark region that saw the beginning of pottery production in the middle Woodland stage, the introduction of hoe technology about the same time, and the appearance of maize cultivation soon after that. Extending his analysis into the Mississippian stage (or “top layer” in Harrington’s scheme) Brown found evidence that the material culture of the Mississippians, notably arrow points and shell-tempered pottery, penetrated into the core of the Ozarks about the same time that it reached the periphery. In Brown’s view, this further undermined the plausibility of a “cultural refugium.”<sup>27</sup>

Brown proposed a new way of looking at the bluff dwellings or “shelters” as he preferred to call them. They were base camps for specialized foraging activities, ancillary to main settlement areas. They were generally used for storage and sometimes for bird trapping. In retrospect, Brown suggested, the bluff dweller concept would never have gained support if it had not been for the extraordinary record of perishable artifacts that were recovered from these sites. In fact, the inhabitants possessed a culture not too different from other contemporary Woodland and Mississippian peoples.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Mark L. Raab, “Expanding Prehistory in the Arkansas Ozarks,” in *Arkansas Archeology in Review*, edited by Neal L. Trubowitz and Marvin D. Jeter, Arkansas Archeological Survey Research Series 15 (Fayetteville: Arkansas Archeological Survey, 1982), 233-234.

<sup>26</sup> Brown, *Prehistoric Southern Ozark Marginality*, 3-4.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 32-50.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

Recent archeological work in Buffalo National River has tended to corroborate Brown's argument that the bluff shelters do not indicate the presence of a cultural refugium in the Ozarks. However, the precise role of the bluff shelters remains largely speculative and archeologists continue to search for definitive answers.

## MISSISSIPPIAN CULTURE AND THE QUESTION OF CULTURAL DIFFUSION

While the concept of an Archaic cultural persistence in the Ozarks has been pretty well discredited, the idea that Ozark peoples were less than fully engaged with cultural advances outside of the Ozark region continues to hold some appeal. This is in part because of archeological interest in prehistoric mounds and the notable absence of mounds in the Ozarks. The archeological record in Buffalo National River includes abundant examples of shell-tempered pottery and small arrow points, demonstrating that Mississippian culture made inroads into the area in some form or another. Yet occupation sites along the Buffalo that were contemporaneous with Mississippian sites outside the region show no evidence of formal areas for disposal of the dead and no evidence of mound building. Inasmuch as elaborate mortuary sites and mound-building are interpreted as evidence of cultural complexity, the absence of these features in the Ozarks provokes lingering questions about these prehistoric Ozark dwellers' relationship to neighboring peoples.

Prehistoric mounds in the Mississippi and Ohio valleys and the Southeast have long excited interest. The mounds show wide variation in size, shape, material, and purpose. There are effigy mounds, burial mounds, great mounds for civic ceremonies, and shell mounds that may be little more than rubbish heaps. The Great Serpent Mound in southern Ohio, which loops back and forth in the form of a snake, is the largest effigy earthwork in the world. Nearer the Ozarks, the Toltec Mounds in the Arkansas River lowland have yielded evidence of an emergent Mississippian culture dating from the eighth century, while the Gibson site, near the eastern edge of the Ozarks by the Black River (about 70 miles east of Buffalo National River) features multiple mounds and appears to have been a regional capital in the Mississippian stage.<sup>29</sup> Other mounds are also found around the edges of the Ozark escarpment.

While mound-building reached a climax in the Mississippian stage, it began much earlier. There were two outstanding periods of mound building. The first of these occurred in the middle Woodland stage, approximately A.D. 0 to 400. This cultural phase found its richest expression in the Hopewell mound complex in the Ohio Valley. Mound sites contemporary with the Hopewell mounds are found east of the Ozarks in the lower White River and St. Francis River valleys. Artifacts recovered from Hopewell and elsewhere provide evidence of extensive trade networks reaching as far as Lake Superior, North Dakota, Wyoming, Florida, and the southern Appalachians. This first

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<sup>29</sup> Martha Ann Rolingson, "The Toltec Mounds Site: A Ceremonial Center in the Arkansas River Lowland," in Bruce D. Smith, editor, *The Mississippian Emergence* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990), 27; Morse and Morse, *Archaeology of the Central Mississippi Valley*, 299.

efflorescence of mound building waned in the late Woodland stage, approximately A.D. 400 to 700, probably as a result of increased warfare. The second outstanding period of mound building occurred in what is called the Mississippian stage. Mississippian culture is also divided into early, middle, and late substages, and reached its highest expression about A.D. 1200 to 1500. Apparently already in decline when Europeans first encountered it, Mississippian culture was severely disrupted by European contact and the devastation wrought by introduced diseases. The late Mississippian substage overlaps with early European contact, when the archeological record merges with an initially very thin historical record left by Spanish and French explorers.<sup>30</sup>

Archeologists long argued that big mounds were evidence of complex social systems. According to the public architecture theory, construction of monumental structures must have required expenditures of energy beyond the capacity of individuals or families living in tribal, egalitarian societies. It required mass labor and political organization typical of ranked societies.<sup>31</sup> These notions came under scrutiny when new discoveries in the 1990s revealed that some large shell and earthen mounds were much older than previously thought – dating back some 5000 years to the Archaic stage. This meant one of two things: either that Archaic mound builders had developed hierarchical social systems, or that monumental architecture was not by itself evidence of social and political hierarchy. Whichever way the analysis led, it involved revolutionary new thinking about the archeology of the Southeast.<sup>32</sup>

Archeologist James A. Brown, who so effectively demolished the Ozark bluff dweller concept, published a seminal article in 1985 on the emergence of cultural complexity in the Mississippi Valley. He suggested a number of indicators for recognizing hierarchically-organized prehistoric societies: permanent habitations, food storage facilities, domesticated plants, cemeteries, and interregional trade. He posited that complexity developed when a people began to follow a sedentary way of life for at least part of the year. A necessary condition was the ability to produce a food surplus. Agriculture, he argued, was not a necessary condition but rather seemed to be an indirect consequence of sedentism.<sup>33</sup>

The thrust of Brown's argument was to push the emergence of cultural complexity farther back in time. Archeologists once assumed that sedentary farming economies were usually necessary for the development of hereditary chiefdoms and stratified societies (though there were rare exceptions, such as the fishing peoples of the Pacific Northwest). Through the work of Brown and others, archeologists now recognize that Archaic hunting and gathering communities were capable of developing cultural

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<sup>30</sup> Wolfman, "Archeological Inventory of the Buffalo National River," 15-18.

<sup>31</sup> Michael Russo, "Measuring Shell Rings for Social Inequality," in Jon L. Gibson and Philip J. Carr, editors, *Signs of Power: The Rise of Cultural Complexity in the Southeast* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004), 26.

<sup>32</sup> David G. Anderson, "Archaic Mounds and the Archaeology of Southeastern Tribal Societies," in Gibson and Carr, editors, *Signs of Power*, 270.

<sup>33</sup> Richard W. Jefferies, "Regional-Scale Interaction Networks and the Emergence of Cultural Complexity along the Northern Margins of the Southeast," in Gibson and Carr, editors, *Signs of Power*, 71.

complexity too. Archeologists now suggest that the tribe was probably a common form of social organization from at least the middle Archaic stage, when mounds first appeared, and that hereditary chiefdom societies came to prominence in many parts of the Southeast by the late Woodland or early Mississippian stage, when the great temple mounds arose.<sup>34</sup>

The great ceremonial mounds and walled cities of the Mississippian stage are associated with the rise of chiefdoms. Morse and Morse, writing about Central Mississippi Valley archeology, describe the Mississippian chiefdom organization as based on agriculture and characterized by permanent (year round) settlements. Usually the population was dispersed in farmsteads and villages around a preeminent village or administrative center. "Farmsteads and hamlets related to villages, which in turn related to a paramount village. Redistribution and storage of surplus took place at the administrative centers. There were large pyramidal mounds arranged around open squares in the major villages."<sup>35</sup>

The question confronting Ozark archeology is to what extent, if any, prehistoric Ozark dwellers participated in the extended trade networks and ceremonial centers of the mound builders. As recently as 1974, archeologist Daniel Wolfman supported the longstanding view that the Ozarks, or at least its core area, formed a cultural backwater largely removed from outside developments. "The Arkansas Ozarks were marginal to the main Woodland stage developments," he wrote in his inventory of the archeology of Buffalo National River. "Burial mounds were never introduced into this region and pottery was not used in great quantity." As for the Mississippian culture, "in most of the Arkansas Ozarks this stage is thus far recognized only in a shift to shell-tempered pottery and the almost complete replacement of large spear points by the smaller arrow points."<sup>36</sup> Newer finds, however, have begun to challenge this view.

In 1979, the Arkansas Archeological Survey conducted a cultural resource inventory and assessment at Pine Mountain Lake on Lee Creek, Crawford County. (This site is about 50 miles west of Buffalo National River). Lee Creek drains the western slope of the Boston Mountains and flows southward, crossing back and forth over the Oklahoma state line before joining the Arkansas River between Fort Smith and Van Buren. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers proposed to build a dam near the head of the creek in the Boston Mountains. The project area encompassed 89 hectares of floodplain and terraces bordered by steep slopes of shale, siltstone, and sandstone. In places these slopes are eroded to form bluff overhangs. At the time of the cultural resource inventory and assessment these bluffs were already known to contain prehistoric shelters. The resulting field tests featured 15 bluff shelters and two lowland sites, making it one of the more intensively studied areas in the Ozarks.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Anderson, "Archaic Mounds and the Archaeology of Southeastern Tribal Societies," 270.

<sup>35</sup> Morse and Morse, *Archaeology of the Central Mississippi Valley*, 212-213.

<sup>36</sup> Wolfman, "Archeological Inventory of the Buffalo National River," 17-18.

<sup>37</sup> Neal L. Trubowitz, "Caddoan Settlements in the Arkansas Ozarks: The Upper Lee Creek Valley," *Midcontinent Journal of Archaeology*, 8, no. 2, (1983), 198-201.

Archeologist Neal L. Trubowitz, the principal investigator of the site, found evidence of a mixed economy of farming, hunting, and gathering. He identified the artifacts as Caddoan, a cultural tradition that showed many of the same traits as Mississippian and occupied an area west of the Mississippi Valley in Arkansas and eastern Oklahoma. The site is located about 15 miles upstream from the Parris Mound (a Caddoan site dated to A.D. 1000-1250) and approximately 50-60 miles from the Spiro and Cavanaugh Mounds (also Caddoan, dated to A.D. 1250-1400). Trubowitz suggests that the Caddoan settlements in the Upper Lee Creek valley “appear to be outlying farming communities associated with the Parris or Cavanaugh ceremonial centers downstream, through which the farmers were connected to the larger Caddoan interaction centered on the Spiro site.”<sup>38</sup> This is consistent with other descriptions of Caddoan culture, which describe an economic base of horticulture and wild food collection, a ranked social system, and a widely dispersed settlement pattern of farmsteads and hamlets loosely networked into religious or political centers.<sup>39</sup>

Trubowitz concludes his article on the Lee Creek site with another refutation of the Ozark bluff dweller concept. “The accumulating data indicate that the upper Lee



Figure 4. Representative artifacts found in Buffalo National River: reproduction of a late prehistoric shell-tempered pot found in Fitton Cave, grinding stone, prehistoric corn cobs, cobble tools, projectile point. *Caven Clark photo, Buffalo National River.*

Creek valley was anything but a backward area. Caddoan farmers penetrated the southern Ozarks and were able to adapt to local conditions with a mixed economy of horticulture, hunting, and gathering. The view that the bluff dwellers were Indians who led an Archaic lifestyle will not hold true on the south side of the Arkansas Ozarks.” Trubowitz goes on to list other sites along the southern Ozarks fringe that provide corroborating evidence of Caddoan occupation.<sup>40</sup> The Lee Creek site may be near enough to the Buffalo River to be instructive, or it may not. Adherents to the view that the Ozarks formed a cultural backwater generally contend that prehistoric inhabitants at the edge of the Ozark escarpment had

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 199.

<sup>39</sup> Ann M. Early, “Caddoan Settlement Systems in the Ouchita River Basin,” in Trubowitz and Jeter, *Arkansas Archeology in Review*, 200. See also James A. Brown, Robert E. Bell, and Don G. Wyckoff, “Caddoan Settlement Patterns in the Arkansas River Drainage,” in Bruce D. Smith, ed., *Mississippian Settlement Patterns* (New York: Academic Press, 1978), 169-200.

<sup>40</sup> Trubowitz, “Caddoan Settlements in the Arkansas Ozarks,” 201.



frequent contact with the outside and only those inhabitants of the core areas did not. The Lee Creek site is not within this core area.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, two sites within the Buffalo National River provided further evidence that the Ozark region was not as isolated as archeologists once believed. The first site was located in the Erbie area on the upper Buffalo River; the second was located in the Rush area on the lower Buffalo River. These two investigations, headed by Robert H. Lafferty III and George Sabo III respectively, yielded new evidence of Woodland and Mississippian influence even in this core area of the Ozark highlands. Both sites contained middens, hearths, and post molds indicating the size and arrangement of permanent dwelling structures. In the case of the latter site, the post molds were radiocarbon-dated to the Middle or Late Woodland periods, and the assemblage of artifacts showed clear evidence of an “Emergent Mississippian” cultural presence.<sup>41</sup>

The Rush area archeological site was particularly significant because it contained evidence of continuous habitation from the Dalton-Early Archaic period to the Middle to Late Woodland period, an unusually long time span, and the upper strata of this cultural sequence revealed evidence of a gradual shift to a sedentary settlement pattern. The primary findings of the archeological investigation were that the site had been occupied as a year-round settlement by a sedentary community with a subsistence economy based on hunting, gathering, and domesticated plant production, including maize. Sabo compared the site to five other late prehistoric sites in the Ozarks and the Central Mississippi Valley. He concluded that cultural developments in the region during the Woodland to Mississippian transition were produced by “multilineal processes influenced mainly by local ecological circumstances and independent sociocultural factors” which resulted in “regionally distinctive variations on a larger Mississippian cultural theme.” He found that Ozark dwellers in the late prehistoric period were “active participants in these processes.”<sup>42</sup> The archeological investigations at Erbie and Rush appeared to offer confirmation of the idea that the Ozark region was not particularly isolated from cultural developments in the Mississippi Valley.

## SUMMARY

Prehistoric peoples probably moved into the Ozarks as early as 12,000 years ago and inhabited the area continuously thereafter. They exploited the variety of lowland and highland environments that they found on the Ozark Plateau, and utilized the numerous

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<sup>41</sup> Randall L. Guendling, George Sabo III, Margaret J. Guccione, Sandra L. Dunavan, and Susan L. Scott, *Archeological Investigations at 3MR80-Area D in the Rush Development Area, Buffalo National River, Arkansas*, vol. 2, Professional Papers No. 50 (Santa Fe: Southwest Cultural Resources Center, 1992), 84-87, 159-160.

<sup>42</sup> George Sabo III, Randall L. Guendling, W. Fredrick Limp, Margaret J. Guccione, Susan L. Scott, Gayle J. Fritz, and Pamela A. Smith, *Archeological Investigations at 3MR80-Area D in the Rush Development Area, Buffalo National River, Arkansas*, vol. 1, Professional Papers No. 38 (Santa Fe: Southwest Cultural Resources Center, 1990), 319-328.

caves and overhanging bluffs for shelter and storage facilities. The so-called “bluff dwellings” or “bluff shelters” attracted early archeological interest, in part because the dry conditions found in some caves preserved a rich archeological record of perishable basketry and other fiber-based artifacts and in part because archeologists considered them the permanent dwelling places of a unique “Ozark bluff dweller” culture. The hallmark of this culture was that it appeared resistant to change; it was thought that the Ozark bluff dwellers persisted in following a largely Archaic way of life that revolved around hunting and gathering while peoples in the Mississippi lowlands adopted farming, extensive trade, and complex social organizations. Subsequent archeological investigations have largely disproved this concept, replacing it with the view that Ozark dwellers participated in cultural stages that occurred broadly throughout the Mississippi and Ohio valleys and Southeast. This reinterpretation is based substantially on the cumulative evidence from numerous contract archeology studies. It places much emphasis on the appearance and distribution of shell-tempered pottery. The extent to which Ozark dwellers in late prehistoric times participated in large trade networks or ceremonial gatherings outside the Ozarks remains unclear.

## CHAPTER TWO

# AMERICAN INDIANS IN THE HISTORIC PERIOD

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The Arkansas Ozark region was a prized hunting ground for several American Indian tribes. The mountain country supported an abundance of bears, beavers, deer, and other animals, which the Indians hunted principally for the commercial value of their hides and furs. They transported the hides and furs by canoe out of the Ozarks, trading them to French, Spanish, English, and Americans who operated trading posts downstream in the Mississippi and Arkansas valleys. In exchange for hides and furs the Indians obtained knives, kettles, guns, traps, blankets, and other goods that enriched their material culture, as well as baneful quantities of liquor.

The European and American presence in the area provides a written record of these tribes, but the historical records shed very little light on Indian use of the Buffalo River valley or other specific locations within the Arkansas Ozarks in this period. Historical records primarily document habitations rather than hunting activities and these habitations were located some distance away: in southern Missouri, northeastern Oklahoma, and the Arkansas and White River valleys in Arkansas. This chapter provides an overview of what is known about Indian settlement patterns in a wide area around the Ozarks, from which it is possible to conjecture about Indian use in and around Buffalo National River.

The history of American Indians in the Ozarks can be divided into three phases. In the first phase, the Quapaw nation appears to have had tenuous control of the Arkansas Ozarks as a hinterland to its main settlement area, which centered in the lower Arkansas and White River valleys. During this phase the Quapaw became established trading partners with the French at Arkansas Post (near the confluence of the Arkansas and Mississippi rivers), from which hunting parties ranged into the Ozark region. In the second phase, which commenced around 1700, the Osage tribe pushed into the Arkansas Ozarks from the north and east and claimed the area for themselves. The warlike Osage secured a dominant place in the fur trade over all other tribes in the region, including the Wichita, Kansa, Caddo, and Pawnee, as well as the Quapaw. In the third phase, which primarily spanned the first third of the nineteenth century, various groups of Indians in the eastern United States broke with their tribes and migrated westward in search of new lands that were far removed from American settlement. The largest contingent of these immigrants were Cherokee, while smaller numbers came from the Shawnee, Delaware, and other tribes. These groups established farmsteads in the major river valleys bordering the Ozarks on the south and east, only entering the hill country on seasonal hunting and trapping expeditions. The hunting activity nevertheless brought them into conflict with the Osage. The third phase was a time of incessant hostilities between the immigrant Indians and the Osage. The intertribal conflict was increasingly conditioned by white-Indian relations, including trade, treaties, and missionary efforts, all under the aegis of the United States government.

## THE QUAPAW

The Quapaw nation had not yet formed in 1541 when the De Soto expedition crossed the Mississippi River into Arkansas. The central Mississippi Valley and lower Arkansas River valley – the Quapaw’s homeland in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries – were then home to several thousand people who belonged to a number of warring provinces or chiefdoms. The De Soto expedition gave these provinces the names Casqui, Pacaha, Quigate, and Coligua. Pacaha, the capital of the most powerful chiefdom, was said to contain 500 apartment houses, and the entire city was surrounded by a palisade and a wide moat that connected to the Mississippi River. The records of the De Soto expedition, although vague and contradictory, provide a unique glimpse of late Mississippian culture before these peoples were decimated by Old World diseases that rampaged through the native population in the expedition’s wake. When the area was next visited by Europeans more than 130 years later, the cities and provinces described by De Soto no longer existed.<sup>1</sup>

Some archeologists believe that remnants of these shattered Mississippian chiefdoms coalesced in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries to form the Quapaw tribe. Archeologists have recorded a number of major village sites, house cluster sites, and even hunting station sites as “Quapaw phase,” meaning that they exhibit consistent styles of pottery and architectural features that identify them as late Mississippian. The largest of the village sites include temple mounds. The village sites are located in the Arkansas River valley from its mouth to above Little Rock. Possible Quapaw phase hunting stations are located south of the river.<sup>2</sup> Some archeologists suggest that the Quapaw whom the French found living in villages near the confluence of the Arkansas and Mississippi rivers were descended from the Pacaha (or Capaha, thus “Quapaw”) of De Soto’s account.

Most historians, however, believe that the Quapaw arrived in the area only in the early to mid-seventeenth century and quickly took advantage of an environment rich in resources and practically depopulated since the time of De Soto. This view meshes with the Quapaw’s oral tradition that their people came from the Ohio River valley. Legend describes how the tribe came to a great river shrouded in mist, and while most of the tribe crossed and went upstream, a splinter group became separated from the rest and drifted downstream. Linguistically, the Quapaw are among the Dhegian-Siouan speaking peoples who include the Kansa, Omaha, Ponca, and Osage tribes. The name “Quapaw” (Ugákhpa) is translated as “those going downstream” or “with the current” and distinguishes the Quapaw from their erstwhile kinsmen who went upstream on the Missouri River.<sup>3</sup>

The French called the Quapaw “Akansa,” after the Algonquin word for them, from which is derived “Arkansas.” The earliest report of them is by Father Jacques

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<sup>1</sup> Morse and Morse, *Archaeology of the Central Mississippi Valley*, 311.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 300.

<sup>3</sup> W. David Baird, *The Quapaw Indians: A History of the Downstream People* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980), 6-8.

Marquette and Louis Jolliet, who traveled by canoe down the Mississippi River from Canada in 1673 as far as a large Indian village called “Akamsea.” The Quapaw welcomed the French and informed them of eight more villages of their kinsmen downstream. But Marquette and Jolliet did not go farther; they returned northward.<sup>4</sup>

Nine years later in 1682 another French explorer, René-Robert de la Salle, journeyed down the Mississippi River to its mouth. La Salle encountered two other villages of the “Akansa” and learned about a fourth Akansa village called Osotouy, located on the Arkansas River. In 1686, Henri de Tonty, one of La Salle’s lieutenants, came up the Mississippi River from the Gulf Coast and founded Arkansas Post at this village. The following year, a member of La Salle’s second expedition by the name of Joutel visited one of the “Accancea” villages. Joutel described a large apartment house made of cedar or cypress that stood on a mound. Some of the houses in the village were inhabited by up to 200 people. The French explorers’ accounts, combined with the archeological record, suggest that the Quapaw at the end of the seventeenth century, though living in the shadows of the old chiefdoms, were still quite numerous compared to what would become of them.<sup>5</sup>



Figure 5. Marquette and Quapaw. *Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture website, Central Arkansas Public Library System.*

In 1698, the Quapaw were struck by a devastating epidemic. One of the Quapaw’s four principal villages was reduced to a population of about 100 people. According to a French missionary who visited the stricken village two years later, all the children and nearly all the women had died, and the surviving men were too weak to hunt. The Quapaw suffered less severe epidemics in 1721, 1748, 1752, 1777, and 1781, and there were probably others. One historian of the Quapaw, Morris S. Arnold, estimates that the population of the Quapaw tribe declined from perhaps 8,000-10,000 in 1673 to about 700-800 at the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>6</sup>

Against this backdrop of demographic catastrophe, the Quapaw made a firm and lasting alliance with the French. The Quapaw habitations increasingly centered at Arkansas Post. The Quapaw men of warrior age fought with the French against the Chickasaw and Choctaw, who were located east of the Mississippi and were allied with the British, and the Quapaw women often married French traders and soldiers who

<sup>4</sup> Morse and Morse, *Archaeology of the Central Mississippi Valley* 316.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 317-318.

<sup>6</sup> Morris S. Arnold, *The Rumble of a Distant Drum: The Quapaws and Old World Newcomers, 1673-1804* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2000), 151-154.

occupied Arkansas Post. Indeed, after several generations of intermarriage, the French, Quapaw, and mixed-blood residents of Arkansas Post were virtually indistinguishable; all the men went away on the hunt for half the year and joined in many Quapaw cultural forms at the post in the other half of the year.<sup>7</sup>

Despite their dwindling numbers, the Quapaw occupied a strategic place in France's bid for empire in North America. Not only did they form a line of defense on the Mississippi Valley against the British and their allied tribes, but they also controlled the gateway to Spanish possessions far upstream on the upper Arkansas and Red rivers. Even after France lost the lower Mississippi Valley to Spain in 1763, the Quapaw continued to favor French traders over their new Spanish governors in New Orleans. In the period of Spanish dominion from 1763 to 1803, the Quapaw refused to submit to a Spanish monopoly and went on trading with people of French citizenship as well as peddlers of English extraction who came from South Carolina.<sup>8</sup>

By 1805, the Quapaw were reduced to fewer than 300 warriors. This was the population estimate of William B. Treat, an agent of the United States government who arrived in that year to manage Arkansas Trading House. The trading house was the third such government agency established on the west side of the Mississippi River, and by setting up these "factories," as they were called, the United States sought to control commerce with the Indians in the newly acquired Louisiana Territory. But at first the United States was no more successful than Spain in this regard; the Arkansas Trading House lasted just five years and then closed as private traders were always willing to give the Indians higher prices for hides and furs than the government agent was authorized to do.

Soon after his arrival, Treat reported that the Quapaw, as well as neighboring Chickasaw and Choctaw, were already in the service of private traders. One company named Morgan and Bright was preeminent in the area. Morgan and Bright's practice was to choose one reliable hunter and provide him with as much as \$10,000 worth of goods on credit. That individual would then organize a party of 10 or 20 or more other hunters who would go out on a lengthy hunt. Treat noted that the Chickasaw and Choctaw had replaced the Quapaw as the favored hunters in the area; the Chickasaw and Choctaw would go out for four to six months, whereas the Quapaw normally went for just a few weeks at a time. Treat wrote that these Indians hunted north of the Arkansas River and west of the St. Francis River, "and so far north west as occasionally to fall in with the Osage." Encounters with the Osage were invariably hostile and sometimes deadly.<sup>9</sup>

Some of the Indians with whom Treat dealt at Arkansas Trading Post hunted in the Buffalo River valley. This is known from a detailed description of the White River and its tributaries prepared by Treat, which he pieced together using information received from Indians. Unfortunately, it is unclear whether Treat's Indian informants in this case

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<sup>7</sup> Arnold, *The Rumble of a Distant Drum*, 143-144.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 50-60.

<sup>9</sup> William B. Treat to Henry Dearborn, Secretary of War, November 15, 1805, *Letter Book of the Arkansas Trading House 1805-1810*, National Archives Microfilm Publication M142, (M142), Roll 1.

were Quapaw, Chickasaw, or Choctaw. The report, dated June (1806), may be the first description of the Buffalo River committed to writing. Even though it is filtered through Treat's tangled prose, it is a reflection of Indian geographic knowledge.

Twenty miles above this fork, from the south west comes in that of Buffaloes the mouth of which is two hundred feet across. It is neither deep nor clear as are the others, but agreeable to Indian information sufficiently extensive that its source is found in the neighborhood of other springs passing of[f] in a contrary direction, connecting themselves with the waters of the Arkansa[s].<sup>10</sup>

The United States government's effort to regulate commerce with the western Indian tribes belied the new nation's larger interest, which was to obtain the Indians' allegiance and ultimately to wrest control of their land. The United States government wanted to remove Indian tribes located east of the Mississippi to a permanent Indian frontier west of the Mississippi. In 1818, the Quapaw agreed to a treaty with the United States by which the tribe ceded an enormous tract bounded by the Arkansas and South Canadian rivers on the north, the Red River on the south, and the Mississippi River on the east (the west boundary was ill-defined). In return for the land cession, the Quapaw received a small reservation on the lower Arkansas River, annuities, and the perpetual right to hunt in the ceded territory.<sup>11</sup>

The land cession language in the treaty with the Quapaw of 1818 included an obscure reference that has particular significance for Buffalo National River. In addition to the area that was bounded by three major rivers and depicted on a map, this section of the treaty stipulated that the Quapaw relinquished any claims to an undefined area north of the Arkansas River.<sup>12</sup> This was an acknowledgement that the Quapaw had once dominated the Ozark region, though they clearly did not dominate the area any longer. If Quapaw hunters still went to the Buffalo River valley at all in 1818 they did so at their own peril because the fearsome Osage claimed the hunting territory as their own.

Believing they were secure in their new reservation, the Quapaw did not have long to enjoy it. American settlers were already taking farms along the Arkansas River, and in 1819 Arkansas Territory was organized. The citizens of the new territory demanded that the national policy of Indian removal apply to Arkansas Territory as well as the states. By 1824, the federal government had begun the anguishing process of removing the Quapaw tribe to Indian Territory (Oklahoma).

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<sup>10</sup> "A Description of White River (sent to the Hon. The Secretary of War in June [1806]), M142, Roll 1.

<sup>11</sup> Baird, *The Quapaw Indians*, 57.

<sup>12</sup> Charles J. Kappler, *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*, vol. 2 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904), 160.

## THE OSAGE

The Osage were another Dhegian-Siouan speaking tribe who originated in the forested, lower Ohio River valley. Pushed westward by hostile eastern tribes, the Osage established a new homeland in the mid-seventeenth century in what is now southwest Missouri. Here the Osage had the advantage of living on the edge of the woodland and prairie environments, where they maintained some of their old ways of horticulture and adopted some new ways of living by the chase. Moreover, the Osage occupied a strategic location for trade between the French and Spanish, acquiring iron and guns from the former and horses from the latter. Still pressed by hostile tribes from the east and north, the Osage steadily expanded their territory to the west and south at the expense of other native tribes. They became aggressive hunters, traders, and raiders. They raided Wichita and Caddo villages as far south as the Red River, taking captives whom they traded as slaves to the Spanish. They became a fearsome tribe, even as they cultivated a strong friendship with the French.<sup>13</sup>

The Osage tribe grew more populous and thrived as it increased its domain. By the late eighteenth century the tribe numbered perhaps 5,000, including 1,000 warriors. Although the Osage people controlled a vast area, their winter villages were clustered in just a few locations on the Osage River. In the bottom lands nearby the villages they grew crops of corn, beans, and pumpkins, which they planted in April and gave one hoeing before they departed on the summer hunt in May. About August they returned to harvest the crops, some of which they cached for winter, and then they left again for the fall hunt. Returning again in about late December, they stayed in the village for two to three months before setting out on the spring hunt. On this hunt they sought beaver and bear for the value of their furs and hides, and they carried these animal products to trading posts, and then returned to the village for the spring planting. Such was the usual subsistence cycle of the Osage, augmented here and there by the gathering of wild foods and raiding expeditions.<sup>14</sup>

In spite of their economic prosperity, however, the Osage faced growing pressures at the end of the eighteenth century. The Osage's aggressive ways earned them the enmity of surrounding tribes, including plains tribes to their west such as the Kiowa, Comanche, and Pawnee, who became armed with guns. The Osage's raiding undermined Spanish authority over southern plains tribes, prompting the Spanish to make repeated gestures to unite the tribes in a war against the Osage. There were other perils attending the tribe's economic prosperity. The fur trade and raiding presented new opportunities for individuals to gain wealth and prestige, which eroded the traditional leadership structure of the tribe. Under the influence of Spanish and French intrigue, the tribe splintered. The splinter group, followers of a headman named Clermont, moved their

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<sup>13</sup> Willard H. Rollings, *The Osage: An Ethnohistorical Study of Hegemony on the Prairie-Plains* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1992), 5-7; James B. Christianson, "The Early Osage – 'The Ishmaelites of the Savages,'" *Kansas History*, 11, no. 1 (Spring 1988), 3-6.

<sup>14</sup> Jedidiah Morse, *A Report to the Secretary of War of the United States on Indian Affairs [1822]* (Reprint, St. Clair Shores, Michigan: Scholarly Press, Inc.: 1972), 205-206.



winter village to the lower Verdigris River in what is now northeast Oklahoma. This so-called “Arkansas band” of Osage soon came to outnumber the parent group.<sup>15</sup>

The Osage were still the most powerful tribe in the region at the time of the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, but the advent of American dominion over the territory challenged the Osage in decisive new ways. The United States government wanted the



Figure 6. Osage warrior painted by Julien Fevret de Saint-Mermin in the early 1800s. *Texas Beyond History* website, University of Texas, Austin.

Osage to share their vast hunting grounds with eastern Indians who were displaced by white settlement in Georgia, Tennessee, Kentucky, and Ohio. In increasing numbers, emigrant groups of Cherokee, Chickasaw, Delaware, and Shawnee left their homelands in the eastern states and settled along the Arkansas and White River valleys, where they encroached on the Osage’s hunting grounds. White settlers also began to trickle into these valleys. The United States government sought to establish peaceful relations between the Osage tribe and the new groups, nominally recognizing the Osage’s superior right to hunt in the area. However, when any members of the Osage tribe committed depredations against the intruders, the United States government treated these incidents as hostile acts by the whole tribe. Using such acts as a pretense for withholding its support and

protection of the tribe, the United States government allowed and even encouraged further encroachment on the Osage’s hunting grounds by eastern tribes and white settlers alike. As retaliatory raids back and forth between the Osage and the intruders went on virtually unchecked by the United States, the Osage steadily lost ground to the swelling population of Cherokee and allied Indians. The decline of the powerful Osage tribe occurred over a relatively brief span of about thirty years, and by the early 1830s this tribe had been pushed out of the Ozarks.<sup>16</sup>

As with the Quapaw, few historical records exist that provide specific details on Osage use or occupancy of the Arkansas Ozarks, let alone a specific place such as the Buffalo River valley. What is known about the Osage in the Ozarks comes from the written accounts of fur traders and explorers. Historian Willard Rollings, examining the records of the Arkansas Trading House for 1806-07, deduced that the Osage hunted in the Ozarks prolifically. Rollings computed that in the span of one year the Osage brought \$20,000 worth of furs, “a remarkable quantity,” down the Arkansas River. Assuming an average selling price of \$1.50 to \$2.00 per bear skin and \$.40 per deer hide, Rollings explains, this statistic reflects a harvest of thousands of animals.<sup>17</sup> Nor was this the whole extent of it, for the Osage also carried furs northward out of the Ozarks to Fort

<sup>15</sup> Rollings, *The Osage* 10-11; Christianson, “The Early Osage,” 6-7.

<sup>16</sup> Rollings, *The Osage*, 257-267.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 217-219.

Clark on the Missouri River. A member of the Lewis and Clark expedition in 1804 reported seeing “one perogue Loaded with Bare Skins and Beav and Deer Skins from the osoge village.”<sup>18</sup>

The Osage hunted in the Ozarks for months at a time, moving camp from place to place and using waterways to transport their bountiful harvest of hides and furs to the trading posts. But they continued to concentrate at a few locations during the winter months. In 1813, George Sibley, the trader or “factor” at Fort Osage near present-day Kansas City described how the Osage tribe was distributed in three bands. The Great Osage, numbering about 400 families, had village sites on the Osage and Neosho rivers. The Little Osage, with about 250 families, lived farther north on the Neosho River and nearer the fort. Clermont’s band, also called the Arkansas band, had about 600 families and dwelt on the Verdigris River. It was this band, according to Sibley, who refused to give up the country north of the Arkansas River. In 1820, Sibley responded to an inquiry by the eminent geographer Jedidiah Morse about this latter group: “Of the ‘Chaneers’ or Arkansas tribe of Osages, I need say nothing, because they do not resort here to trade. I have always rated that tribe as about an equal half of all the Osages. They hunt chiefly in the Arkansaw and White Rivers, and their waters.”<sup>19</sup> Although Sibley admitted to limited knowledge about this band’s seasonal rounds, he seemed to think that they hunted on the tributaries of the White River, which probably included the Buffalo.

The United States made no less than six ratified treaties with the Osage from 1808 to 1825. Three of these agreements were little more than pronouncements of peace with little real effect. The other three involved land cessions by the Osage and various commitments by the United States in return. By the Treaty of November 10, 1808, the tribe relinquished all of the land between the Missouri and Arkansas rivers as far west as a line running due south of Fort Clark, or about 25 miles east of the present-day Kansas-Missouri state line south of Kansas City. This vast tract included all but the western fringe of the Arkansas Ozarks. Within this area the Osage could hunt in accustomed places and any tribe “in amity with the United States” could not hunt there. However, the United States held the right to assign portions of the tract as hunting grounds for other tribes whenever the United States thought it was appropriate to do so. In return for the land cession, the Osage tribe was to obtain a trading post (Fort Clark), blacksmith, mill, farm implements, and annuities.<sup>20</sup> Clermont’s band did not participate in this treaty or recognize it as legitimate; nevertheless, the land cession made in the name of the Great and Little Osage nations encouraged settlement of the Arkansas and White River valleys.

Clermont and his band continued to contest ownership of the Arkansas Ozarks even as the United States made another cession agreement with the Great and Little Osage. By the Treaty of September 25, 1818, representatives of the Great and Little Osage bands agreed to cede all of the land in Missouri and Arkansas west of the previous

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<sup>18</sup> Charles Floyd quoted in Paul Schullery, *Lewis and Clark Among the Grizzlies: Legend and Legacy in the American West* (Guilford, Connecticut: Falcon, 2002), 13.

<sup>19</sup> George Sibley quoted in Morse, *A Report to the Secretary of War of the United States on Indian Affairs*, 204.

<sup>20</sup> Kappler, *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*, vol. 2, 95-96.

cession. Finally, in the Treaty of June 2, 1825, Osage tribal leaders made a third cession, ceding all land between the Kansas River and the Red River as far west as a line drawn south from the headwaters of the Kansas River. Clermont joined in this treaty, which reaffirmed the cessions made in previous treaties that he had not been a party to. Within the ceded area the United States reserved a tract that would become known as the Osage Reservation.<sup>21</sup>

Embattled and impoverished, the Osage had little choice but to move to the reservation in Indian Territory (Oklahoma) and accept the federal government's proffered material assistance and protection. Still, the transition to reservation life was gradual and many tribal members continued to hunt in the Ozarks. Probably they still hunted in the Buffalo River valley; certainly they hunted as far away as the White River, sometimes with fatal consequences. In the spring of 1826, for example, five tribal members went to visit an unnamed settlement on the White River and were murdered despite their peaceful intentions. When word of the killings reached the reservation, an avenging party of Osage returned to this settlement and killed many of its inhabitants.<sup>22</sup>

The federal government sought to make the Osage into sedentary farmers but harsh conditions on the reservation would not allow it. For example, the United States employed a government farmer at the Osage Agency to teach the Indians about white methods of farming, but the farmer merely farmed for himself and when tribal members tried to gather corn from his field in January that he had failed to harvest in the fall he complained to the government that the Indians were stealing his crop, for which the government compensated him \$2 per bushel. Meanwhile, the Osage planted crops in their accustomed manner along the river bottoms, leaving them untended whenever they departed on their summer, fall, and spring hunts.<sup>23</sup>

Gradually the Osage ceased hunting in the Arkansas Ozarks. Rollings estimates that the tribe finally abandoned their old hunting ground in the early 1830s after Congress passed the Indian Removal Act of 1830 and more emigrant Indians arrived in the area. Opposed by Cherokee and other Indians, the Ozarks had become too dangerous for them. Instead they went west and hunted buffalo on the plains.<sup>24</sup>

## THE CHEROKEE

The Cherokee who lived in southeast Missouri and Arkansas from the 1780s through the 1820s are often called "emigrants" or "pioneers," not the usual appellation given to Indians on the frontier. This is because they parted with the main body of the Cherokee tribe, left their homeland in the southern Appalachians, and traveled to the west in search of new lands remote from the pressures of encroaching white settlement.

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<sup>21</sup> Kappler, *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*, vol. 2, 167-168, 217-218.

<sup>22</sup> John F. Hanitranik to James Barbour, Secretary of War, May 25, 1826, National Archives Microfilm Publication M234, *Letters Received by the Office of Indian Affairs 1824-81* (M234), Roll 631.

<sup>23</sup> B. Finley, Missionary to the Osage, to James Barbour, Secretary of War, April 7, 1826, M234, Roll 631.

<sup>24</sup> Rollings, *The Osage*, 267.

Moreover, when they arrived in their new home they established farmsteads that looked and functioned about the same as white farmsteads in the region. Still, the Cherokee migration into southeast Missouri and Arkansas was a distinctive Indian movement that differed in marked ways from the simultaneous movement of white settlers into the region. Emigration was a collective action taken by many groups of tribal members. More importantly, it was a political choice couched within Indian-white relations. With the United States government bent on removing the Cherokee (and other eastern tribes) to the west of the Mississippi River, emigration seemed like an act of liberation to some, an act of capitulation to others. Once established west of the Mississippi River, the Cherokee emigrants were treated by the United States government as a western branch of the Cherokee Nation; indeed, the United States government tried to persuade the remaining Cherokee to follow them there. The history of the Cherokee in Arkansas is complicated because these emigrants continued to be affected by the internal politics and external pressures besetting the main body of the Cherokee Nation in the southern Appalachians.

The Cherokee tribe was divided in the Revolutionary War, a portion siding with the Americans and another portion with the British. The pro-British faction suffered the destruction of their homes and fled to Chickamauga Creek, where their settlements became known as the Lower Towns. These Cherokee were distinguished from the pro-American or Patriot faction in the Upper Towns. In 1782, the people of the Lower Towns relocated to the Tennessee River, where they were joined by many Loyalist refugees. After the Revolutionary War, these Cherokee of the Lower Towns continued to resist American subjugation and with their Creek allies fought numerous small engagements with white settlers on the Tennessee frontier. In 1785, the tribe made peace with the United States in the Treaty of Hopewell. This precipitated the first emigration to the west as a small contingent of Cherokee refused to accept the treaty and departed down the Tennessee, Ohio, and Mississippi rivers to Spanish Louisiana. Settling on the upper St. Francis River in what is now the southeast corner of Missouri, these Cherokee remained in contact with the tribe and were joined by a trickle of other Cherokee emigrants over the next two decades. The largest influx in this early period occurred in 1796, when a man named Connetoo and a band of followers arrived on the St. Francis River.<sup>25</sup> William Treat, the factor at Arkansas Trading House, estimated there were 600 Cherokee living along that river in 1806.<sup>26</sup>

Meanwhile, factionalism within the tribe continued to prompt more emigration. A chief named Little Turkey managed to unite the tribe tenuously in the late 1790s but the Upper and Lower Towns still held separate councils. In 1805 and 1806, leaders of the Lower Towns took bribes from a United States agent for their support of land cessions. When the Upper Town chiefs learned of this betrayal, a group of them murdered one of the chiefs of the Lower Towns, a man named Doublehead. In response, the Lower Town chiefs threatened to make an agreement with the United States to exchange all of their

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<sup>25</sup> Robert A. Myers, "Cherokee Pioneers in Arkansas: The St. Francis Years, 1785-1813," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, 61, no. 2 (Summer 1997): 130-134. Connetoo also went by the name John Hill and was probably either a mixed blood or a white man adopted into the tribe.

<sup>26</sup> Rollings, *The Osage*, 236-237.

part of the Cherokee lands for an equivalent tract in the west. This constituted the tribe's first removal crisis.<sup>27</sup>

In May 1808, President Thomas Jefferson received a delegation of Cherokee from the Upper and Lower Towns and listened to a recitation of the tribe's grievances and internal differences. In a second communication in January 1809, Jefferson stated that the United States government was a "friend of both parties" – supportive of those who would stay and live by tilling the soil and those who would go west and continue to live by the hunt. Regarding the latter, Jefferson encouraged them to send an exploring party to the Louisiana Territory to decide upon a suitable place on the Arkansas or White rivers where they might relocate. Jefferson promised that the government would then arrange for a reservation of land there proportional to the amount of land that the tribe would cede in the east and the number of emigrants located in the west.<sup>28</sup>

The promise of a reservation in the west was enough to trigger a much larger emigration – perhaps 1100 people during the next two years.<sup>29</sup> One documented emigrant party was that of the Bowl and his 63 followers. In January 1810, the United States issued the Bowl a passport to lead his group down the Tennessee River in a dozen canoes and one flatboat. According to the passport, the Bowl intended to settle on either the Arkansas or White rivers. The Bowl was implicated with other chiefs in the bribery scandal of 1805 and may have feared the same fate as Doublehead if he remained in the Lower Towns. In any case, he stayed in Arkansas just a few years and then went to Spanish Texas.<sup>30</sup>

The Cherokee who lived along the St. Francis River were farmers and hunters. They grew corn and raised cattle and hogs. Some owned slaves or operated stores. They dressed in homespun clothes in more or less the style of their white neighbors and dwelt in houses of vernacular American design. They hunted deer and buffalo and other game, and their hunting excursions probably took them as far west as the Buffalo River. By 1811, the Cherokee emigrants could boast to their kinsmen back home that they had plenty to eat in their new home and were prospering there. But the anticipated sanctuary from white settlers still eluded them. Hundreds of whites were squatting on lands that they had settled, and bad men were stealing their livestock and committing other depredations against them. The whites, for their part, petitioned the secretary of war for protection from the Cherokee after one individual was murdered and disemboweled in an apparent highway robbery.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> William G. McLoughlin, *Cherokees and Missionaries, 1789-1839* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 31.

<sup>28</sup> Thomas Jefferson to Deputies of the upper and lower towns, January 9, 1809, in *The New American State Papers, Indian Affairs*, vol. 6 (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1972), 201; Charles C. Royce, "The Cherokee Nation of Indians," *Fifth Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution 1883-84* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1887), 203-204.

<sup>29</sup> McLoughlin, *Cherokees and Missionaries*, 31.

<sup>30</sup> Myers, "Cherokee Pioneers in Arkansas," 137. Myers explains how the Bowl was erroneously linked with the Muscle Shoals Massacre of 1794 in an account of 1869. As a result, historians have mistakenly placed the Bowl and his followers on the Arkansas River in 1796.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 152-153.

In 1812, the Cherokee on the St. Francis River suddenly left. A major factor in their departure seems to have been the occurrence of three massive earthquakes that shook the St. Francis River valley in the winter of 1811-1812. Sparse documentation suggests that the earthquakes led to flooding, which wiped out many farmsteads though with few reported deaths. Many Cherokee took the earthquakes as a doomsday sign or even the work of Tecumseh, a Shawnee leader who had been warning Indians up and down the Mississippi Valley about the need to renounce non-Indian cultural influences and return to the old ways. In June 1812, a Cherokee prophet named the Swan, claiming to have been visited by a messenger of the Great Spirit, warned of more disaster if the people remained on the St. Francis River. An American naturalist, Louis Bringier, witnessed the Swan make a speech in the Cherokee settlement of Crowtown. Reporting on the event five years later, Bringier stated that the prophecy so rattled the Cherokee that in two or three months the place was abandoned. Leaving their farms and cattle behind, the Cherokee moved west to the White and Arkansas rivers. According to Bringier, those who went to the White River soon moved onward to the Arkansas.<sup>32</sup>

In the Arkansas River valley the Cherokee found fertile land for farming and relative seclusion from white settlers. They had also situated themselves on a main route to buffalo country (by continuing up the Arkansas River), and nearer to good hunting grounds in the Ozarks, which they could approach by any number of routes leading north from the Arkansas River valley. However, these beneficial features brought them into further conflict with the Osage. Partly to assist them in making peace with the Osage, the United States government appointed an agent, William H. Lovely, to the western Cherokee. Lovely took up residence at the site of an old Osage settlement, in the midst of a fifty-acre plum orchard, in July 1813.<sup>33</sup> Lovely died four years later, his efforts to bring peace having mostly fallen short, and in January 1818 the United States established an army cantonment near the Lovely residence in a further attempt to end hostilities between the two tribes. The cantonment soon went by the name Fort Smith.<sup>34</sup>

A few years after the Cherokee arrived on the Arkansas River, they were joined by yet another wave of emigrants from the tribal homeland in the southern Appalachians. Once again, the emigrant wave was precipitated by a political crisis in the east. In September 1816 and June 1817, Major General Andrew Jackson and other United States officials met with a cabal of Cherokee chiefs. Using threats and bribery they obtained two treaties with devastating consequences for the Cherokee Nation. In the first, the Cherokee ceded 2.2 million acres in Tennessee. In the second, the Cherokee ceded additional lands in Tennessee, Georgia, and Alabama. The United States pledged to establish a reservation for the Cherokee in Arkansas between the White and Arkansas rivers, matching the ceded area acre for acre. Treaty annuities were to be divided

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 154-155; L. Bringier, "Notices of the Geology, Mineralogy, Topography, Productions, and Aboriginal Inhabitants of the Regions around the Mississippi and its confluent waters," *American Journal of Science and Arts* 3 (1821): 41.

<sup>33</sup> Grant Foreman, *Indians and Pioneers: The Story of the American Southwest before 1830* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1930), 38-39.

<sup>34</sup> Foreman, *Indians and Pioneers*, 57.

proportionally between the eastern and western Cherokee based on a census to be taken of both populations one year hence. This gave eastern Cherokee an opportunity to move west and be enumerated in their new home. Ostensibly the latter treaty was supposed to fulfill the terms that President Jefferson had presented so benignly in 1809, but in reality it involved coercive measures that plunged the tribe into another removal crisis.<sup>35</sup>

With so much riding on the population split between eastern and western Cherokee, the numbers were soon in dispute. The Cherokee council maintained that no more than 3,000 to 3,500 of their tribesmen were in Arkansas or enrolled to go there, and that 12,000 to 13,000 would remain in the east. Tennessee Governor Joseph McMinn reported that 5,291 Cherokee resided in Arkansas or were enrolled to go, leaving about 10,000 Cherokee in the east. The Cherokee finally accepted the United States government's figures as a basis for apportioning tribal annuities.<sup>36</sup>

Meanwhile, hundreds, perhaps thousands, of Cherokee who at first enrolled to emigrate later refused to leave. The United States agent, Return J. Meigs, responding to official pressure, registered many more people than were willing to make the journey. The trip to Arkansas took from 60 to 70 days and was fraught with danger. White settlers were known to plunder the eastern Indians as they made their way west. The flatboats that the United States government contracted for their voyage down the Tennessee, Ohio, and Mississippi rivers were sometimes leaky and rotten. Emigrant parties had been known to run out of provisions along the way.<sup>37</sup>

The new emigration strengthened the western Cherokee's standing in relation to the Osage, but they still faced incessant attacks by that powerful tribe. After Lovely's death in February 1817, and before the arrival of an army garrison at Fort Smith on December 25 of that year, the Cherokee determined to take matters into their own hands. Holding councils with other Indian groups in the region, Cherokee chiefs Tahlonteskee and Takatoka persuaded them to join in a war of extermination against the Osage. They raised an army of about 600 men, composed of Cherokee, Shawnee, Delaware, Quapaw, and eleven white settlers and advanced up the Arkansas and Grand rivers (in what is today northeast Oklahoma) toward the main village of Clermont's band of Osage. Here the emigrant army employed a ruse, luring one Osage chief into a trap and killing him. But when the emigrant army reached the Osage village they found that the men had deserted it. Some accounts state that the Osage men of warrior age were away hunting and the women, children, and old men were left in the village; others state that the warriors fled to the hills and the women, children, and old men hid in a cave. The accounts agree that the emigrant army slaughtered the 90 to 96 defenseless Osage people whom they found, and then burned the village.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Kappler, *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*, vol. 2, 133-134, 140-144; McLoughlin, *Cherokees and Missionaries*, 107-108.

<sup>36</sup> McLoughlin, *Cherokees and Missionaries*, 120.

<sup>37</sup> Foreman, *Indians and Pioneers*, 75.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 57-59; Bringier, "Notices," 33; Thomas Nuttall, *A Journal of Travels into the Arkansas Territory*, in Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *Early Western Travels 1748-1846*, Vol. 13 (Cleveland: Reprint [1821]: 1904-08): 191-192.

Following this bloody demonstration, the western Cherokee addressed a memorial to Secretary of War John Calhoun requesting that they be recognized as a separate people. One month later they sent a delegation to Washington to demand the reservation that had been promised in the treaty of 1817. On orders from Washington, Governor William Clark sought peace between the Osage and the Cherokee and persuaded their chiefs to convene with him in St. Louis in September 1818, where they agreed to a truce. The Osage chiefs signed a treaty by which they ceded an area between their villages on the Verdigris River and the Cherokee settlements on the Arkansas River (roughly the area along the present-day Arkansas-Oklahoma state line north of Fort Smith) – a buffer zone that was intended to give the Cherokee the outlet to the buffalo country that they desired. United States officials insisted that the Osage cession was necessary before they could act on the Cherokee reservation.<sup>39</sup>

The Cherokee reservation – encompassing the whole Buffalo River valley and much of the Arkansas Ozarks – emerged by degrees over the next seven years. As stipulated in the 1817 treaty, the eastern boundary was to start at Point Remove, or Budwell's old place, on the Arkansas River, and follow a straight line in a northeast direction to Chataunga Mountain, or the hill above Shield's Ferry, on the White River. After one failed effort, the General Land Office accomplished this survey in 1819, clearing the way for the removal of white squatters on the Cherokee side of the line between the Arkansas and White rivers. But the western limits of the reservation were left undetermined to allow more time for eastern Cherokee to remove to the west, because the reservation was to include enough area to match further cessions in the east "acre for acre" and provide a quantity of land in "just proportion" to the number of emigrants. Recognizing the open-ended and unsatisfactory nature of this arrangement, the eastern Cherokee made another cession by treaty in 1819 "in final adjustment" of the terms contained in the 1817 treaty.<sup>40</sup> Still the United States was dilatory in closing the western boundary of the Cherokee reservation in Arkansas. In 1824, the General Land Office ran a provisional line between the Arkansas and White rivers but the Cherokee rejected it, stating in a letter to President James Monroe that the line omitted valuable land in the Arkansas Valley and would cast them "from their farms and houses to rugged and dreary mountains."<sup>41</sup> In 1825, the government ran another provisional line from Table Rock Bluff on the Arkansas River in a northeast direction to the mouth of the Little North Fork on the White River.<sup>42</sup>

The Cherokee used most of the reservation for hunting grounds, but a few Cherokee resided in the remote hills in preference to the more traveled Arkansas and White River valleys. Historian Dwight T. Pitcaithley finds evidence in early land survey

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<sup>39</sup> Royce, "The Cherokee Nation of Indians," 222; Kappler, *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*, vol. 2, 167-168.

<sup>40</sup> U.S. House, *Memorial of John Rogers, Principal Chief*, 28<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1844, H. Doc. 235, 6; Kappler, *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*, vol. 2, 177-181.

<sup>41</sup> Letter quoted in Dwight T. Pitcaithley, *Let the River Be: A History of the Ozark's Buffalo River* (Santa Fe: Southwest Cultural Resources Center, National Park Service, 1987), 7.

<sup>42</sup> Royce, "The Cherokee Nation of Indians," 245, 251.



records of a Cherokee village located on Bear Creek in southwestern Searcy County in 1829. Notes from a subsequent survey in 1834 stated that whites were living on Bear Creek and “cultivating the land which had been improved by the Indians.”<sup>43</sup> There are vague reports that a large Cherokee village called Sequatchie occupied the edge of the Buffalo River at the mouth of Spring Creek. But historian James J. Johnston’s research in Cherokee records suggests there was no such village and that it is confused with the Bear Creek settlement.<sup>44</sup> In addition to these two specific locations, some accounts refer to Cherokee living on or near the upper Buffalo River. These accounts mostly come from oral traditions passed down by some of the earliest white settlers, many of whom were married to Cherokee. For example, Newton County historian Walter Lackey states that John Brisco and his Cherokee wife Nancy settled on the upper Buffalo in 1825 when many Cherokee still lived in the Buffalo River drainage.<sup>45</sup>

Travelers’ accounts provide a fuller impression of Cherokee settlements along the Arkansas River, where most of the population appears to have concentrated. Thomas Nuttall, a naturalist who journeyed up the Arkansas River in 1819, described how the Cherokee farms, upon his coming to Point Remove on the eastern boundary of the reservation, formed a continuous line on both banks of the river. Their cabins and farms were “thickly scattered.” Their houses were “decently furnished,” their farms “well fenced and stocked with cattle.” Nuttall reckoned that the more prosperous Cherokee owned property worth several thousand dollars. The first Cherokee village going up the Arkansas River was called the Galley and consisted of about a dozen families. Nuttall reported that the inhabitants dressed in a blend of native and European styles, and that their house architecture and furniture were imitative of the whites.<sup>46</sup>

Another account was given by Edwin James, a member of explorer Stephen Long’s expedition in 1820. The expedition stayed at the house of Chief Tom Graves in a village located at Rocky Bayou. James wrote in his journal: “His house, as well as many we passed before we arrived at it, is constructed like those of the white settlers, and like them surrounded with enclosed fields of corn, cotton, sweet potatoes, etc. with cribs, sheds, droves of swine, flocks of geese, and all the usual accompaniments of a thriving settlement.” Traveling from west to east down the Arkansas River, the Long expedition struck Chief Takatoka’s small village on the Illinois Bayou and then turned northward, going overland from the head of the Illinois Bayou to the upper drainage of the Little Red River. Crossing these uplands the party passed by “two or three scattered plantations of Cherokee.”<sup>47</sup> Possibly one or more of these habitations was the same as the Cherokee village on Bear Creek recorded by the General Land Office surveyor in 1829.

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<sup>43</sup> Pitcaithley, *Let the River Be*, 7.

<sup>44</sup> George E. Lankford, “Shawnee Convergence: Immigrant Indians in the Ozarks,” *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, 58, no. 4 (Winter 1999): 400-401.

<sup>45</sup> Walter Lackey, *History of Newton County, Arkansas* (Point Lookout, Missouri: School of the Ozarks Press, 1950), 56.

<sup>46</sup> Thomas Nuttall, “A Journal of Travels into the Arkansas Territory,” in Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *Early Western Travels, 1748-1846*, vol. 13 (Cleveland: Reprint (1821): 1904-08). 170-174.

<sup>47</sup> Edwin James, “Account of an Expedition from Pittsburgh to the Rocky Mountains Performed in the Years 1819, 1820,” [1823], in Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *Early Western Travels*, vol. 14 (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1966), 17, 23-24.

Chief Takatoka, who had been a respected headman in the east, served as the western Cherokee's principal chief until the arrival of Chief Tahlonteskee in 1817, whereupon Takatoka reluctantly acknowledged the tribal leadership of Tahlonteskee. Tahlonteskee died within a year, and John Jolly took his place by reason of lineal descent. In 1824, the western Cherokee adopted a written constitution and code of laws. Their government was separated into three branches, with the executive branch headed by a principal chief and an assistant principal chief. John Jolly became principal chief, and Takatoka assistant principal chief.<sup>48</sup> Even before the western Cherokee adopted a written constitution, they maintained law and order among their people by employing a mounted police force. These "regulators" were composed of three bands of light horse, each numbering ten men and led by a captain. The captain also served as a judge in determining an arrested person's guilt or innocence, and when a white man was arrested and found guilty he was turned over to white authorities for punishment.<sup>49</sup>

Four missionaries traveled up the Arkansas River to the Cherokee settlements in 1820. Chief Takatoka opposed them, thinking that they were agents of the United States who wanted to make peace between the Cherokee and the Osage. But Chief John Jolly welcomed the missionaries, inviting them to select a site for a school. The missionaries established Dwight Mission on the west bank of the Illinois Bayou about five miles from its mouth. The setting was described as "a gentle eminence, covered with a growth of

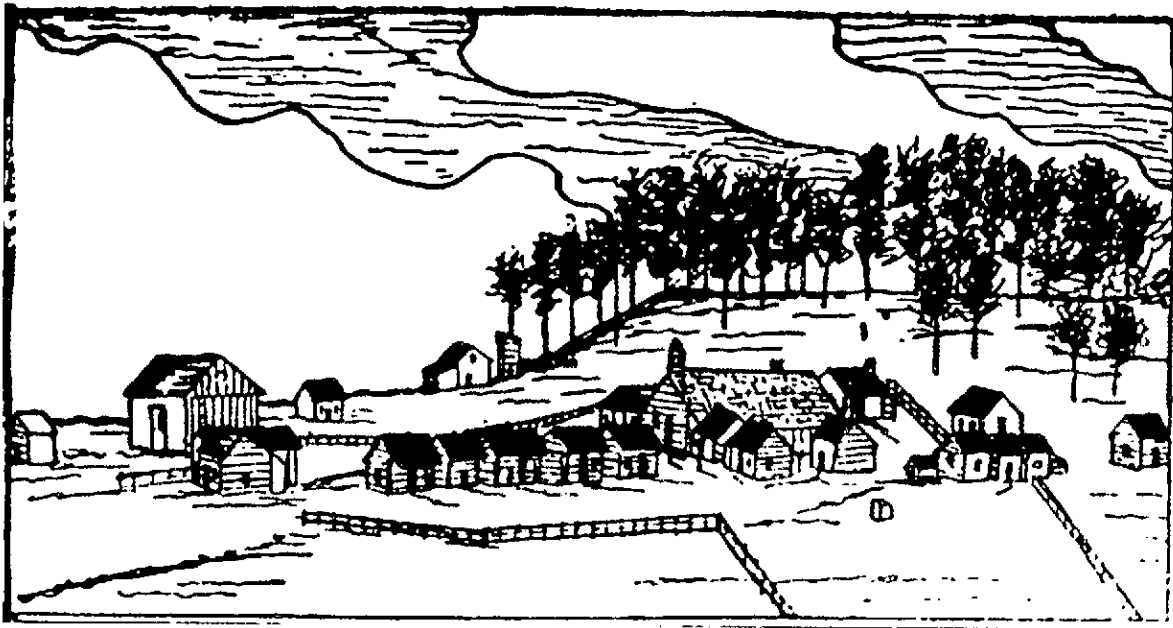


Figure 7. Artist's sketch of Dwight Mission, near present-day Russellville. *Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture website, Central Arkansas Public Library System.*

<sup>48</sup> U.S. House, *Memorial of John Rogers, Principal Chief*, 7.

<sup>49</sup> James, "Account of an Expedition," 22; Morse, *A Report to the Secretary of War of the United States on Indian Affairs*, 255.

oak and pine. At the foot of the eminence issues a large spring of pure water.”<sup>50</sup> By 1824, the mission included a church, school, children’s dormitory, dining hall, several cabins for the missionaries and their families, grist mill, saw mill, smokehouse, and carpentry shop. There was a cemetery on a hill nearby. The site of Dwight Mission was inundated by Lake Dardanelle, but the cemetery still stands above the reservoir.<sup>51</sup>

The war between the Cherokee and the Osage continued after they made peace in 1818. Indeed, as the Cherokee delegation was returning from St. Louis it encountered a party of Osage near the White River and stole 40 horses. In the event four horses were killed and three wounded, which the Osage took as an act of war.<sup>52</sup> The incident was notable in that it occurred east of the Cherokee reservation, somewhere in the vicinity of Batesville. As the enmity of the two tribes persisted through the 1820s, the Cherokee increasingly carried the fighting into Osage territory. Sometimes the Osage sent war parties down the Arkansas River as far as Fort Smith. Fighting in the Ozarks was less well documented. Cherokee and Osage feared one another when they hunted in the Ozarks, but these clashes were not recorded.

The Cherokee eventually succumbed to the same pressures from white settlement that drove the Quapaw and Osage out of Arkansas Territory. Citizens of the territory deplored the United States government’s action in creating a Cherokee reservation. They claimed that the land held valuable mineral deposits and should not be reserved for Indians. In 1828, the national council of the western Cherokee sent a delegation to Washington to discuss grievances, but it specifically withheld authorization for the delegates to agree to any land cession. Contrary to its instructions and authority, the delegation signed the Treaty of May 6, 1828, whereby the western Cherokee surrendered all their land in Arkansas in exchange for 7 million acres in Indian Territory (Oklahoma). The treaty was disavowed by the tribe’s national council, but ratified by the United States Senate and proclaimed by President Andrew Jackson. The treaty gave the emigrants 14 months to vacate the area. Subsequently it became apparent that the lands pledged to the Cherokee in Indian Territory overlapped with lands pledged to the Creek tribe by another treaty. Consequently, the western Cherokee were made to accept a further agreement, February 14, 1833, embodying a modified description of their new territory.<sup>53</sup>

Little is known about the gradual movement of Cherokee out of Arkansas. It seems to have occurred over a long duration, perhaps 1828 to 1835. Their migration was eclipsed by the larger, longer, and more traumatic movement of Cherokee out of the southern Appalachians in 1838 known as the “Trail of Tears.” Suffering terrible privations on this forced westward journey, thousands of Cherokee died enroute. One detachment of 1,090 Cherokee took a route that dipped into Arkansas north of Batesville, went up the White River to Cotter, and then up Crooked Creek through Yellville. From

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<sup>50</sup> Foreman, *Indians and Pioneers*, 93.

<sup>51</sup> Hester A. Davis, “The Cherokees in Arkansas,” (pamphlet), no date, historical files, Buffalo National River, Harrison, Arkansas [hereafter BNR].

<sup>52</sup> Foreman, *Indians and Pioneers*, 83.

<sup>53</sup> Royce, “The Cherokee Nation of Indians,” 247-250; Kappler, *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties*, vol. 2, 288-292, 385-388.

there the route continued west through present-day Alpena, Huntsville, and Fayetteville, where it joined the more commonly used northern route. Like other routes composing the Trail of Tears, this route was named for the leader of the expedition, John Benge, a mixed-blood Cherokee. At Yellville the Benge route comes within about 15 miles of Buffalo National River.<sup>54</sup> Other routes went north or south of the Arkansas Ozarks. When Congress authorized the Trail of Tears National Historic Trail in 1986, there was insufficient historical information on this route to include it in the designation. The National Park Service nonetheless proposed to interpret the Benge route in its initial management plan for the Trail of Tears National Historic Trail. In 2006, Congress authorized a new feasibility study and the National Park Service made the study and held public hearings in Arkansas and other affected states in 2007.



Figure 8. Trail of Tears. Painting by Robert Lindneux, 1942. *Public Broadcasting System website.*

Yellville was a young settlement in 1838. It began as a trading post on the edge of a Shawnee village, which may have numbered about 300 occupants and was known to the whites as Shawneetown. The traders gave this settlement the name Yellville at the request of Arkansas' first state governor, Archibald Yell.<sup>55</sup> Local tradition holds that a

<sup>54</sup> National Park Service, *Comprehensive Management and Use Plan, Trail of Tears National Historic Trail*, (Denver: National Park Service, Denver Service Center, 1992), 20.

<sup>55</sup> Historic Genealogical Society of Marion County Arkansas, "Shawneetown (Marion County) Arkansas," typescript, May 13, 1995, historical files, BNR; *Mountain Echo* (Yellville), April 6, 1995. According to the Genealogical Society's typescript, the Shawnee settled in the area about 1820, having migrated from

number of Shawnee persisted in the area in 1838, and when Benge's complement of Cherokee exiles came to town an unknown number of them quit the march and melted into the Indian community.<sup>56</sup>

When the eastern and western Cherokee were finally reunited in their new homeland in Indian Territory they were divided into three parties. The eastern Cherokee were bitterly divided between the "Treaty" or "Ridge" party, followers of Major Ridge, his brother John, Elias Boudinot, and his brother Stand Watie, who had consented to removal west of the Mississippi River in the Treaty of New Echota of 1835; and the "Government" or "Ross" party, supporters of Principal Chief John Ross, who had opposed that divisive and fateful treaty. The western Cherokee, uprooted from Arkansas but nonetheless first on the ground in the Indian Territory, were called the "old settler" party. These party divisions would shape Cherokee politics for decades to come.<sup>57</sup>

## OTHER EMIGRANT INDIANS

Emigrant Indians from other eastern tribes also settled in Arkansas in the second and third decades of the nineteenth century. The two most significant groups in point of numbers were the Delaware and Shawnee, while others included the Kickapoo, Peoria, Miami, Wea, Piankeshaw, Michigamea, and Muskogee. Groups of Delaware and Shawnee moved to northwest Arkansas between about 1818 and 1821 and formed settlements on the upper White River just north of today's Buffalo National River. Though not as numerous as the Cherokee in all of northwest Arkansas, they were locally more conspicuous.<sup>58</sup>

The Delaware tribe originally inhabited the area along the Delaware River and Delaware Bay in what is now Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware, and Maryland. In 1818, the tribe was forced to cede its remaining lands and remove east of the Mississippi River. While most of the tribe emigrated to what is now eastern Kansas, a portion entered northwest Arkansas. Henry Schoolcraft did not note the presence of Delaware Indians when he explored the upper White River country in the winter of 1818-19, but the Delaware villages were shown on a map accompanying his published journal in 1821. The map placed them along the river's east bank where the river bends southward, about 15 miles below Buffalo City.<sup>59</sup>

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Ohio by way of Missouri. In addition to Shawneetown there were two other villages: "Little Shawnee Town" located about a mile southwest on Crooked Creek, and "Upper Shawnee Town" located near the mouth of Clear Creek.

<sup>56</sup> Suzie Rogers, conversation with author, December 15, 2005.

<sup>57</sup> Royce, "The Cherokee Nation of Indians," 293.

<sup>58</sup> George E. Lankford, "Shawnee Convergence: Immigrant Indians in the Ozarks," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, 58, no. 4 (Winter 1999), 392.

<sup>59</sup> Henry R. Schoolcraft, *Journal of a Tour into the Interior of Missouri and Arkansas...* (London: Printed for Sir Richard Phillips & Co., 1821).

The Shawnee tribe was, like the Delaware, an eastern woodland tribe. Although by the late eighteenth century the tribe was centered in the Ohio Valley, it comprised five named bands, each with its own distinctive history and traditions, and these bands were widely scattered from Pennsylvania to Georgia. Considered one of the most hostile eastern tribes to expansion of the new American nation, the Shawnee produced the famous leaders Tecumseh and his twin brother Tenskwatawa ("The Prophet"), who inspired a pan-Indian rebellion against the United States during the War of 1812. After the rebellion was crushed, the defeated Shawnee were induced to remove to a land grant on the west side of the Mississippi River near Cape Girardeau, Missouri. Gradually, beginning in about 1815, some of the Shawnee who had removed to this grant chose to emigrate farther west. It is not known precisely when the Shawnee settled on Crooked Creek, just north of Buffalo National River, but it appears to have been some time between 1817 (when Shawnee and Delaware warriors first joined with Cherokee in a war against the Osage) and 1820.<sup>60</sup>

The Shawnee presence in the area is mentioned in few documents of the period, but it has been described by numerous local historians over the years. Historian George E. Lankford has assembled and analyzed this evidence in a recent article. Lankford verifies the central role of Shawnee leader Quatawapea, also known as John Lewis, in founding the Shawnee emigrant community. Lewis, once a close political associate of Tecumseh, broke with Tecumseh in 1813 and sided with the United States. Lewis communicated with the western Cherokee when they were looking for allies against the Osage, and in the years following he sought to establish a separate Shawnee nation in the Ozarks parallel to the separate Cherokee nation located there. But Lewis was unable to draw sizable numbers of followers. A treaty with the Shawnee and Delaware in 1832 called for the removal of their tribal members out of Arkansas. The treaty provided cash inducements for them to remove to Kansas. Even so, historian Lankford observes, the Arkansas Shawnee dispersed in different directions, with some going to Texas and some to Kansas.<sup>61</sup> Lankford suggests the probability that all the Arkansas Shawnee had left Arkansas by 1833, although this contradicts other accounts that mention Shawnee still living in the area when the name of the main village was changed to Yellville (1835) and during the Trail of Tears (1838).

## AMERICAN INDIANS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

American Indian peoples developed lifeways that were well adapted to the environments in which they lived. In the Ozarks, they exploited a variety of terrestrial and aquatic resources, utilized the diversity of plant life found in highland and lowland microclimates, and practiced agriculture in bottomlands where rich soil and long growing seasons produced the most favorable results. In living close to nature, Indian peoples also modified the environments in which they lived. If the Buffalo River valley of

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<sup>60</sup> Lankford, "Shawnee Convergence," 404-407.

<sup>61</sup> Lankford, "Shawnee Convergence," 410-413.

aboriginal times bore the footprint of humankind far less profoundly than it does today, it was nevertheless an anthropogenic or culturally-shaped landscape.

Probably the most significant impact that aboriginal Indians had upon the environment was their use of fire. Indians burned forests and grasslands to rejuvenate plant growth and increase the food supply for deer and other animals, which in turn created a more abundant supply of game for the hunt. They set fire to forest underbrush to clear the forest floor and make the hunting of deer easier. They used wildfire to drive animals from one area to another. Indians also used fire to stimulate the forest production of nuts, seeds, and berries for their own consumption.<sup>62</sup>

While use of fire in pre-Columbian times is mostly a matter of conjecture, Indian burning practices are well documented in the historical literature. When Europeans arrived in North America they found forest clearings that were the result of annual or semi-annual burning in order to preserve good conditions for hunting. Explorers and fur traders reported on the frequency of fire and smoke in their wilderness travels. Settlers, living in wooded areas recently dispossessed of their Indian inhabitants, noted the increase in underbrush, and travelers recorded those settlers' impressions. G. W. Featherstonaugh, traveling through the highlands of east Tennessee in 1834, commented that "The white men...having driven the Indians out, the underwood is beginning to spring up thick as the settlers say in comparison to its ancient state."<sup>63</sup>

Indian burning had more effect in some environments than in others, depending on human population density, the relative frequency of lightning-caused "natural" fires, climate and topography, and other factors. Wherever fires of human origin predominated, Indians produced what ecologists term an "anthropogenic fire regime." In such environments humans largely determined how often a forest burned and began anew the process of ecological succession. The Ozark region, according to ecologists R. P. Guyette, R. M. Muzika, and D. C. Dey, constitutes one such environment. In modern times, lightning-caused fires represent less than one percent of all wildfires, and it is likely that in prehistoric times lightning-caused fires were rare also. By studying fire-scarred trees in oak-pine forests of the upper Current and Jack Fork River watersheds in the Missouri Ozarks, these three ecologists compiled a dendrochronological fire history and compared it to changing human population densities in the area over a span of three and a half centuries. They found that Indian burning was relatively light compared to the anthropogenic fire regimes that developed under the influence of Euro-American occupation (an average of 12 percent of acreage burned annually in the period 1680-1850, compared to 38 percent in the period 1851-1890 and 29 percent in the period 1891-1940). The authors found this pattern to be primarily a function of human population density. In other words, even though Indians were culturally disposed to do intentional burning, they set fewer fires than non-Indians because they were far less numerous.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Shepard Krech III, *The Ecological Indian: Myth and History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), 103-107.

<sup>63</sup> G. W. Featherstonaugh, *Excursion Through the Slave States* (New York: Negro University Press and Greenwood Publishing Corporation, reprint, 1968), 50.

<sup>64</sup> R. P. Guyette, R. M. Muzika, and D. C. Dey, "Dynamics of an Anthropogenic Fire Regime," *Ecosystems* 5, no. 5 (2002), 472-286.

Agriculture was another way in which aboriginal Indians reshaped the landscape. In the Mississippian period, they cultivated extensive land areas. Maize is a high energy grain that rapidly exhausts soil fertility unless the soil is renewed by spreading manure or by lying fallow for lengthy periods, so Indians mainly planted corn in bottomlands where alluvial soils were replenished by flooding. The spread of agriculture led to population expansion, especially along major rivers. When Indian populations drastically declined as a result of European-introduced diseases, most of the Indians' extensive corn fields were abandoned. As these areas reverted to a wild state, they provided fertile ground for the rapid growth of early and mid-successional lowland vegetation, especially cane.

When European and American explorers first came upon these areas, they described vast canebrakes occupying the broad, alluvial floodplains of the major river valleys. In 1820, Stephen H. Long found the lower Arkansas River valley "generally clad with rich forests and luxuriant cane brakes," which the settlers had to clear for their plantations.<sup>65</sup> As ecologists Steven G. Platt and Christopher G. Brantley note, these European and American observers failed to realize that the primeval wilderness they thought they were encountering was "actually 200-year-old regrowth in a formerly extensively modified environment." Indeed, even as the abandoned corn fields were overtaken by canebrakes the Indians regularly burned the cane, presumably because the stands of cane attracted bison herds, and regular burning maintained the bison herds.<sup>66</sup> Smaller but still plentiful canebrakes occurred in the Ozarks, perhaps a telltale sign of abandoned agricultural fields or Indian burning in those locations as well. As late as 1845, surveyors of the General Land Office recorded frequent "cane pastures" in their survey notes as they ran township and section lines crisscrossing the Buffalo River valley.<sup>67</sup> Extensive livestock grazing and farming would eventually eradicate all but a scattering of canebrakes in the Southeast.

It is possible that rapid growth of canebrakes, following on the heels of declining Indian agriculture, was an important factor in the coming of the American bison, which was not known in the Southeast before about A.D. 1500. The range of this animal reached its maximum extent about A.D. 1700. One student of the American bison, E. O. Rostlund, argues that this species was unable to expand into the Southeast prior to this period because the herds could not run the gauntlet of Indian hunters in the Mississippi Valley. But when the Indian population declined and the extensive fields of corn turned to cane the situation changed. Then the combination of reduced hunting pressure and increased forage made it possible for the bison to expand into the Southeast – for the short span of a few centuries.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Stephen H. Long, "A General Description of the Country Traversed by the Exploring Expedition," in Reuben Gold Thwaites, editor, *Early Western Travels*, vol. 4 (New York, AMS Press Inc., 1966), 128.

<sup>66</sup> Steven G. Platt and Christopher G. Brantley, "Canebrakes: An Ecological and Historical Perspective," *Castanea*, 62 (March 1997), 8-13.

<sup>67</sup> U.S. General Land Office, survey notes, 1845, historical files, Buffalo National River, *passim*.

<sup>68</sup> E. O. Rostlund, "The Geographic Range of the Historic Bison in the Southeast," *Annals Association American Geographers* 50 (1960): 407.



Hernando De Soto reported bison in Arkansas in 1542. During the 1700s, bison were hunted up the Arkansas and Red River valleys and the hides were shipped from Arkansas Post. At that time bison herds roamed over the prairies, canebrakes, and open woodlands along the Arkansas, Red, Saline, and St. Francis rivers. By the early nineteenth century they were confined mostly to southern and eastern Arkansas. The last large herd of bison in Arkansas was slaughtered for market in the Saline River bottoms in 1808. Small numbers of bison may have persisted in open woods and prairies in the Ozarks beyond that date, but they were not found in large herds. A few bison were reported in the Bayou DeView and Cache River bottoms as late as 1837.<sup>69</sup>

## SUMMARY

The Shawnee villages on Crooked Creek were rare examples of American Indian settlement in the Arkansas Ozarks. While it is possible that Shawnee or Cherokee villages were located on the Buffalo River at some time in the historic period, it seems more likely that the Indian population of the valley was reduced to a few farms on the upper river where racially mixed families persisted in the face of new white settlement. In any case, Indians frequented the area on hunting trips. Tribes claimed the area as their exclusive territory because they needed hunting grounds for their survival. They regarded the wild Ozark hill country as an indispensable resource, and they fought one another for control of it. If Indian use of the area left few lasting impressions on the environment, it was real and visible at the time. More characteristic of the Indian presence than Shawneetown was the cultural feature recorded by Henry Schoolcraft in his exploration of the White River in 1818 when he fell upon "the Osage trace, a horse path beaten by the Osages in their hunting excursions along the river."<sup>70</sup> Such evidence of the Indian presence in the Ozarks was probably as ubiquitous in Schoolcraft's time as it is invisible to us today.

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<sup>69</sup> John A. Sealander, *A Guide to Arkansas Mammals* (Conway, Arkansas: River Road Press, 1979), 15-16.

<sup>70</sup> Schoolcraft, *Journal of a Tour into the Interior of Missouri and Arkansas*, 52.



Figure 9. "Stalking Buffalo, Arkansas." Painting by George Catlin, 1846-48. *Smithsonian American Art Museum website.*

## CHAPTER THREE

# EURO-AMERICAN EXPLORATION AND THE FUR TRADE

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The Buffalo River valley, together with all of Arkansas, was part of the province known as Louisiana that the French explorer La Salle claimed for France in 1682. The territory was conveyed from France to Spain in 1763, briefly reclaimed for France by the emperor Napoleon, and finally sold to the United States as part of the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. While French and Spanish dominion scarcely affected the Buffalo River valley, the westward expansion of the United States across the Mississippi River was decidedly different. The advent of American rule in what became Arkansas was followed by a rising tide of white settlement, expulsion of the area's Indian occupants, and expansion of American slavery, which soon after 1803 became fatefully tied to the Cotton South. Exploration and the fur trade set the stage for these developments.

### EXPLORATION

In 1539 the Spanish explorer and conquistador, Hernando De Soto, debarked at Tampa Bay, Florida and proceeded on a lengthy march, crossing the Mississippi River into present-day Arkansas two years later. A veteran of Pizarro's conquest of Peru, De Soto was in search of native cities and gold. Geographer Carl O. Sauer wrote that the De Soto expedition was "remarkable in the annals of colonialism for the shameless manner in which it announced its objective as unlimited plunder."<sup>1</sup> It is now known that De Soto's plundering did not extend to the Buffalo River; however, his expedition marks the beginning of recorded history in the wider region.

The route taken by De Soto has long been debated by scholars. There are five original accounts of the expedition (three written by participants, a fourth based on interviews with participants made decades after the event, and a fifth that only survives as a fragment and does not pertain to Arkansas). Experts have examined these sources in conjunction with archeological and ethnographic evidence, but wide variations of interpretation as to the route still exist. The Smithsonian Institution commissioned an exhaustive study in 1937 in an effort to establish the route of the De Soto expedition prior to the commemoration of its 400-year-anniversary. Led by the eminent ethnographer John R. Swanton, the commission's report was considered definitive for a time but has since been challenged by newer archeological findings. It seems clear to modern scholars that the De Soto expedition passed well to the east and south of the Buffalo River watershed on its way to Texas; indeed, it missed the whole Ozark Plateau.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the Ozarks have a rich lore about buried treasure and other leavings by the conquistadors.

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<sup>1</sup> Carl O. Sauer, *Sixteenth Century North America: The Land and the People as seen by the Europeans* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 157.

<sup>2</sup> Jeffrey M. Mitchem, "The Expedition of Hernando De Soto in Sixteenth Century Arkansas," pamphlet, Parkin Archeological State Park, revised May 2000, historical files, Buffalo National River.

Probably the first Europeans to explore the Arkansas Ozarks were Canadian fur traders or *couriers du bois*, but they generally produced few written records and little is known about their activity specifically in the Ozark region. In 1793, during the period of Spanish dominion of the area, a land grant was made to Joseph Vallière, commandant of Arkansas Post. The land grant encompassed about 20 miles on each side of the White River from the mouth of the Buffalo River (*Rio Cibolos*) to its source. Presumably the Spanish name was translated from the French, or perhaps the Indian, name for the river. Although the land grant was never surveyed by Spanish officials nor occupied by Vallière, it appears to have been the first recording of the Buffalo River in a written document.<sup>3</sup>

After the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, Americans began to explore the Trans-Mississippi West. Two famous expeditions of the Army's Corps of Topographical Engineers skirted the edge of the Arkansas Ozarks. The first was that of Lieutenant Zebulon Pike in 1806-07; the second was that of Major Stephen H. Long in 1819-20. Starting in St. Louis, Pike headed west to explore the upper valley of the Arkansas River to its headwaters in the Rocky Mountains. When he struck the Arkansas River in what is now Kansas, he sent a detachment of his party downriver. The detachment was under the command of Lieutenant James B. Wilkinson, son of General James Wilkinson, the governor of Louisiana Territory. After completing his survey, Lieutenant Wilkinson forwarded his report and charts to Pike. The information was incorporated with Pike's own charts in a map prepared under Pike's direction by Anthony Nau. The map (1810) depicted a vast area extending from the Mississippi River on the east to the middle reaches of the Arkansas and Kansas rivers on the west, and from the Platte River on the north to the Red River on the south. Nearly in the center of this large scale map the Buffalo River was drawn as a tributary on the upper White River and labeled "Buffaloe Fork." This is believed to be the first depiction of the river on a map. "While it is unlikely that Wilkinson visited the region of the Buffalo himself," writes Pitcaithley, "it is apparent that he learned of the river and its name from settlers he encountered along the Arkansas."<sup>4</sup>

In 1819-20, Major Stephen H. Long ascended the Platte and South Platte rivers to the Rocky Mountains and returned east by way of the Arkansas River. When the Long expedition reached Little Rock, it went overland by way of the Little Red River to the White River. Edwin James was a scientist who accompanied Long, and in his account of the expedition he stated that the "small group of mountains" through which they passed in the lower Arkansas River valley was given the name "Ozark Mountains" by Long.<sup>5</sup> Presumably Long appropriated this name from local usage. Various origins of the term "Ozark" have been suggested; probably the most accepted one is that it derives from the

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<sup>3</sup> William Neville Collier, "Ozark and Vicinity in the Nineteenth Century," *White River Historical Quarterly* 2, no. 2 (Summer/Fall 1967): 21.

<sup>4</sup> Dwight T. Pitcaithley, "Settlement of the Arkansas Ozarks: The Buffalo River Valley," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, 37, no. 3 (1978): 206.

<sup>5</sup> James, "Account of an Expedition from Pittsburgh to the Rocky Mountains Performed in the Years 1819, 1820," 216.

French *Aux-Arcs*, a contraction of *aux Arkansas* (“to the Arkansas,” or “to Arkansas Post”).<sup>6</sup>

Shortly before the Long expedition passed down the Arkansas River valley, an English-born naturalist named Thomas Nuttall traveled up the valley in the opposite direction. Nuttall was already known for his extensive botanical surveys in the United States before he embarked on his Trans-Mississippi expedition in the fall of 1818. Starting in Philadelphia, Nuttall journeyed down the Ohio and Mississippi rivers to Arkansas Post and passed up the river valley in the early spring of 1819. Although he did not explore the uplands bordering the valley, his journal provides a valuable source on the mix of white and Cherokee settlements sprinkled along the Arkansas River at that time.<sup>7</sup>

The most descriptive account of an exploration of the Ozarks was that of Henry R. Schoolcraft, who journeyed through the region in 1818-19 and subsequently prepared his journal for publication. Schoolcraft was also the only explorer to observe for himself the Buffalo River, though he did not ascend it. Schoolcraft started in Potosi, Missouri, accompanied by just one man, Levi Pettibone, and a single packhorse between them. Cutting overland between the Current and the White rivers (still in southern Missouri), Schoolcraft made the interesting observation that they passed several Indian camps which appeared to have been deserted for three or four years – “the first traces of savage life” that they had seen since starting out. He believed that the Osage had retreated from their hunting grounds in this part of Missouri out of fear of neighboring tribes.<sup>8</sup>

By November 1818, Schoolcraft and Pettibone were lost in the wilds of southern Missouri, out of food and ammunition, and struggling through dense canebrakes along the White River. Intersecting a horse path, they decided to take it one way, then turned around after three miles and took it the other. In a desperate situation, they were fortunate to encounter a man on horseback, the first human being they had seen in twenty days. The horseman led Schoolcraft and Pettibone to his one-room cabin on the Great North Fork of the White River, where he dwelt with his wife and children. In the course of their brief stay, Schoolcraft learned that the man was a fugitive of the law and that he now lived by hunting and trapping. His children were dressed entirely in deerskins. From this place, Schoolcraft and Pettibone headed west in the hope of striking a hunter settlement on the upper White River. Getting lost again, they came upon another cabin belonging to a hunter named McGary who had several acres under cultivation. McGary told them that traders came up the White River in keelboats and large canoes to trade with the several trappers who lived at Sugar Loaf Prairie.<sup>9</sup>

They found Sugar Loaf Prairie to consist of four families spread over a distance of eight miles. These people, though they raised small crops, were semi-nomadic, moving

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<sup>6</sup> Rafferty, *The Ozarks: Land and Life*, 4n.

<sup>7</sup> Nuttall, “A Journal of Travels into the Arkansas Territory.”

<sup>8</sup> Henry R. Schoolcraft, *Journal of a Tour into the Interior of Missouri and Arkansas...* (London: Printed for Sir Richard Phillips & Co., 1821), 25.

<sup>9</sup> Schoolcraft, *Journal of a Tour into the Interior of Missouri and Arkansas...*, 24-34.

from camp to camp in pursuit of game. Their only contact with the outside was to travel downriver occasionally as far as the junction with the Black River to trade skins. To Schoolcraft, they were living “like savages.” They were said to be the highest settlement on the White River except for two families at the mouth of Beaver Creek. Schoolcraft and Pettibone proceeded up the White River to this farthest hamlet, which they found occupied by two families named Holt and Fisher, with whom they stayed for several days. After passing Christmas and New Years Day in the headwaters of the White, they started down river in a canoe. Twenty miles below McGary’s place they came to Bull Shoals. Schoolcraft reported that there was a canoe path through these rapids but it was difficult to follow. At one point their canoe was pinned against a rock and it was only through great effort, standing waist-deep in the chilling water, that they were able to dislodge it and continue on their way. At the next cabin, the home of August Friend, they were pleased to find shelter and a warm fire.<sup>10</sup>

Friend told them that recently he had been held captive by the Osage for several weeks. Although the Osage had confiscated his beaver traps, they had treated him well and let him go. From Friend’s place they proceeded to the place of Zadock Lee, the first Yankee they had yet encountered, and then to the home of Jacob Yochem. At this place they were still an estimated 35 miles above the junction with the Great North Fork and 20 miles above the mouth of the Buffalo River. The next day they proceeded down to the “Buffalo Shoals” where the Buffalo flows into the White. Schoolcraft reported that the Buffalo River, according to his informants, was a large stream about 180 miles long, and that the region was “much resorted to by hunters” as it had an abundance of game. He did not venture up the stream, but described the shoals as a “most formidable obstacle to navigation” of the White River. The local people told him that keel boats and steam boats plied the White River as far as this point and that the shoals blocked upriver passage of all craft of more than eight tons.<sup>11</sup>

Schoolcraft spent a day at the mouth of the Great North Fork, fifteen miles below the Buffalo, botanizing and investigating the geology. Here, too, was a cabin belonging to a hunter named Matney. From this point, Schoolcraft and his companion continued down the White River to the Mississippi.<sup>12</sup> Schoolcraft provided an early written account of the Buffalo River and was the last explorer to travel the Ozarks when the hill country still remained largely unsettled.

## THE FUR TRADE

Euro-Americans entered Arkansas in search of animal furs and skins as early as the seventeenth century, and the fur trade played a significant part in the early exploration

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 39-52, 69-70.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 71-72; see also Henry R. Schoolcraft, *Information Respecting the History, Condition and Prospects of the Indian Tribes of the United States: Collected and Prepared Under the Direction of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Per Act of Congress of March 3d, 1847*, vol. 3 (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo & Company, 1853), 315.

<sup>12</sup> Schoolcraft, *Journal of a Tour into the Interior of Missouri and Arkansas...*, 73-79.

and settlement of the territory. As in other parts of North America, the fur trade developed in response to international markets, with pelts being shipped over vast distances ultimately to be turned into hats and other articles of clothing in Europe and Asia. The fur trade in the Arkansas Ozarks developed in three stages. In the first stage, Indians were the sole hunters in the area while Euro-Americans built and occupied trading posts and established a system of river transport for bringing trade goods in and taking furs out. The trading posts were located a considerable distance from the Arkansas Ozarks and the river transport system extended only as far as the posts. In the second stage, Euro-Americans engaged in hunting expeditions along with Indians, sometimes operating as one unit (in the case of the French) and sometimes operating separately from Indians (in the case of the Americans). In this stage, Euro-Americans entered the Buffalo River drainage as transient hunters. In the third stage, independent hunters established semi-permanent or permanent residences in the area. They hunted for subsistence as well as for the fur trade, and sometimes they grew a little corn and other crops to supplement their diet of meat.

Although beaver pelts – the principal article of the North American fur trade – were taken in Arkansas, the climate was too warm to make Arkansas a rich fur producing area. Rather, the territory became renowned for its production of bear and bison skins. Bison were plentiful in the eighteenth century in the Arkansas River valley and in the low-lying country along the St. Francis and lower White rivers. Bison were hunted not only for their hides and meat, but for the tallow rendered from their fat. This tallow was used in making soap, candles, and caulking for boats. Bears seem to have been abundant throughout Arkansas well into the nineteenth century. Similarly to bison, bears were valued for the oil extracted from their fat.<sup>13</sup>

The French initiated the fur trade in Arkansas when they established Arkansas Post on the Arkansas River about fifty miles above its confluence with the Mississippi. First occupied in 1686, it was abandoned and reoccupied at a new location a decade or two after the founding of New Orleans (in 1718), and grew into a sizable community of about 100 residents in 1763, the largest European settlement in the Mississippi Valley between New Orleans and St. Louis. By then it was notorious as a refuge for “vagabonds and bankrupts” – a motley crew of French *coureur du bois* (traders) and *voyageurs* (boatmen) who had fled to this remote frontier location to avoid their creditors.<sup>14</sup> Much later, in 1813, the U.S. Indian agent William H. Lovely described this rough community thus:

I am here without a cent, and among the worst banditi; all the white folks, a few excepted, have made their escape to this country guilty of the most horrid crimes and are now depredating on the Osages and other tribes, taking off 30 horses at a time, which will show the necessity of giving

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<sup>13</sup> Arnold, *The Rumble of a Distant Drum*, 35-39.

<sup>14</sup> Boyd W. Johnson, *The Arkansas Frontier* (n.p. 1957), 23-25; Arnold, *The Rumble of a Distant Drum*, 44.

some protection to this place, the most valuable as to soil and valuable minerals that belong to the [Louisiana] Purchase in all the country.<sup>15</sup>

The lawlessness found at Arkansas Post sounded a theme that would later be applied to fur trading communities located in the Ozarks, both on the Arkansas River above Little Rock and on the upper White River.

The French who lived at Arkansas Post and their male mixed-blood offspring generally organized one or two hunting trips each year, and no doubt included the Buffalo River watershed in their hunting rounds. A few English traders from the southern colonies appeared in Arkansas in the mid-eighteenth century, and Americans began making trips into the area some time thereafter. When the English-born naturalist Thomas Nuttall traveled up the Arkansas River in 1819, he met a pair of fur traders, Captain Nathaniel Prior and one Mr. Richards, descending with a cargo of furs and skins obtained from Osage hunters.<sup>16</sup>

One original account of an American hunting expedition survives from about 1809. Colonel John Shaw, accompanied by two men, commenced in Cape Girardeau County, Missouri, on the headwaters of the St. Francis River and proceeded due west. The party spent the fall of 1809 and all of the following year hunting in what is now eastern Kansas, southwest Missouri, and northwest Arkansas, and collected 50 beaver and otter skins, 300 bear skins, and 800 gallons of bear oil. They managed to get their load of commodities down the White River by canoe, only to learn upon their arrival in New Orleans in 1812 that the United States, on the brink of war with Great Britain, had instituted a trade embargo that prevented them from selling the skins and oil for anything more than a pitiful fraction of their market value. Shaw does not mention the Buffalo River by name in his account but it is likely his party hunted there.<sup>17</sup>

It was not long after Shaw's expedition that some American hunters began to make semi-permanent camps along the upper White River. A man named Dan Wilson and his three sons reportedly built a cabin at Rock Bayou about 1810. They were soon joined by Dick and Bob Bean, who opened a blacksmith shop and trading post, forming the first "shadow of a town."<sup>18</sup> John Wells and his wife and children stuck with their hunting camp even after they were repeatedly robbed by Osage in 1814, 1815, and 1818. Other hunters with camps on the upper White River included Elijah and Abraham Eastwood, James and William H. McMurtry, and Peter and August Friend. It is not known whether these individuals were as ensconced in the Ozarks as the Wells family, who, according to Schoolcraft, were year-round residents living off the country much like Indians.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Lovely quoted in Foreman, *Indians and Pioneers*, 39-40.

<sup>16</sup> Nuttall, "A Journal of Travels into the Arkansas Territory," 138-139.

<sup>17</sup> Colonel John Shaw, "Shaw's Narrative," *Wisconsin State Historical Society Collections*, vol. 2 (1903), 201-202.

<sup>18</sup> A. C. Jeffery, *Historical and Biographical Sketches of the Early Settlement of White River Together with a History of Izard County*, edited by Dale Hanks (Batesville, Arkansas: Guard-Record, Inc., 1973), 3-4.

<sup>19</sup> Freeman, *Indians and Pioneers*, 53.



The naturalist Thomas Nuttall described similar hunter-settlers inhabiting the Arkansas River valley. These men principally made their livelihood as market hunters, though they also might own a few head of livestock and raise a little corn and cotton for their own use. Some had crude tanneries in which they prepared the skins for market, and they shipped their buffalo hides and tallow to New Orleans. Nuttall commented that many of them were renegades from justice with “the worst moral character imaginable.” Indeed, after the establishment of Fort Smith in 1817 some of them found it necessary to leave the country and flee toward San Antonio in Spanish territory.<sup>20</sup>

For these individuals and families, it became possible to settle in the Ozark region because traders began to come up the rivers on a regular basis. Schoolcraft saw one such trader’s boat at the mouth of the Great North Fork of the White River in 1819, and provided a good description of the boat and the trade that existed at that time:

There is now a keel-boat lying here, which ascended a few weeks ago on a trading voyage among the hunters and farmers. It is a boat of 30 tons berthen, built at Pittsburgh, and decked and painted off in the neat and convenient style of the generality of Ohio and Mississippi boats of her class, but is prevented from going higher by the Buffalo Shoals. The articles brought up in it, for the purposes of exchange, were chiefly flour, salt, and whiskey, with some coffee, calico, and a few smaller articles. In return, beaver, deer, otter, bear, and raccoon skins, bear’s bacon, fresh pork, and beef, in the gross, venison, bees-wax, honey, and buffalo beef, are taken. From the rates of exchange noticed, I concluded a trading voyage on this stream is attended with immense profit.<sup>21</sup>

The role of Arkansas in the North American fur trade largely ended when the bison, bear, and beaver populations were hunted out in the 1820s. Bison were reportedly seen on Crooked Creek in 1842, but by then they were well on the road to extirpation in Arkansas.<sup>22</sup> Bears and beavers survived in smaller numbers while the fur trade moved westward to more plentiful hunting grounds.

## SUMMARY

Explorers put the Buffalo River on their maps although they did not actually explore the Buffalo River valley. A land grant from the Spanish crown to the French fur trader Joseph Vallière in 1793 alluded to it. The American explorer Zebulon Pike put it on his map of the region in 1810. Notable explorations and descriptions of the surrounding region included Henry Schoolcraft’s exploration of the Ozarks in 1818-19, Thomas Nuttall’s journey up the Arkansas River in 1819, and Stephen Long’s expedition

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<sup>20</sup> Nuttall quoted in Freeman, *Indians and Pioneers*, 164.

<sup>21</sup> Schoolcraft, *Journal of a Tour into the Interior of Missouri and Arkansas...*, 72-73.

<sup>22</sup> James F. Keefe and Lynn Morrow, editors, *The White River Chronicles of S. C. Turnbo* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1994), 78.

of 1819-20. These explorers increased public knowledge of the region but not the Buffalo River itself, which was known only to fur traders and early settlers until the 1830s.

Fur traders probably did visit the Buffalo River much earlier although they did not leave any historical records of it. Despite its southern latitude, the region around the Buffalo River was valued in the North American fur trade for its abundance of beaver, bison, and bear. As the populations of these animals were reduced, the fur trade moved westward. However, not all hunters and trappers left the area, some electing to stay and adopt a mixed farming and hunting way of life. The fur trade constitutes a time of transition from the era of exploration to the advent of American settlement, as fur hunters increasingly made itinerant homes and brought families into the area.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### MIGRATION, SETTLEMENT, AND SLAVERY

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After the arrival of the first few settlers in the Buffalo River valley in the 1820s, the pace of settlement quickened with each new decade. Despite the area's rugged topography, which made transportation difficult, the Ozark upland environment appealed to many settlers who were looking for something similar to the upland environment of the southern Appalachian mountains they left behind. Arkansas gained statehood in 1836, and the Buffalo River valley was partitioned among three counties over the next six years. (The three counties were Newton, Searcy, and Marion, while upland portions of the Buffalo River watershed barely extended into what is today Pope, Van Buren, Madison, Boone, Baxter, and Stone counties.) By the 1850s, small farms dotted the bottomland and terraces along the Buffalo River and its tributary creeks.

The Buffalo River valley grew up with the new state. However, the people who settled the Buffalo River valley brought few slaves into the area, while in the state as a whole the slave population expanded rapidly under the influence of cotton agriculture. The few slaves who were brought into the valley lived in close proximity to their masters on remote farms, virtually cut off from the slave culture forming on Arkansas's large plantations. Meanwhile, white settlers along the Buffalo shared a way of life that centered around family, farm, and rural community and differed in vital respects from the way of life of Arkansas' new planter class.

#### MIGRATION

In the late fall of 1837, a train of covered wagons drawn by ox teams jostled up the faint wagon road that ran alongside the Buffalo River and came to a halt at the mouth of Bear Creek. Six families from Tennessee, the Campbells, Taylors, Robertsons, Drewerys, Turners, and Cashes, thought they had found good farmland and the end of their journey in the rich bottomlands at this location on the Buffalo. But after they had set up camp and begun to explore the neighborhood for home sites their group leader, Colonel John Campbell, spied some driftwood fifteen feet up in the branches of a tree. Fearful of malaria in a place that saw such flooding, they pulled up stakes, continued around two more bends in the river, and angled up the next tributary stream, Calf Creek. A few miles up the creek Colonel Campbell, walking in front of the train, found a bear wallow. Reckoning from this sign that the ground was well-watered even when the creek ran dry, he suggested that they look around the area for home sites. After some investigation the party agreed that the valley showed good prospects for raising crops and running livestock. So began a new pioneer community in the Buffalo River drainage.<sup>1</sup>

The Campbell party was in many ways typical of the people who settled the Buffalo in the four decades preceding the Civil War. Colonel Campbell was of Scots-

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<sup>1</sup> Mrs. J. N. Bromley, "Colorful Colonel Campbell," *Arkansas Gazette*, August 29, 1937.

Irish descent; his wife Ann (Blassingame) Campbell was of English extraction. The rest of the party was also of Scots-Irish and English stock, as were most of the people who settled the Ozark highlands in this period. The families who composed the Campbell party were already associated by ties of blood, marriage, or neighborly proximity before they emigrated from Tennessee, and in their new homes on Calf Creek they “mixed and mingled, married and intermarried,” becoming even more interwoven than before. As native Tennesseans they were also typical: the majority of settlers in the Arkansas Ozarks hailed from the mountainous eastern third of that state, and most others came from neighboring highland districts in Kentucky, Virginia, North Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama.<sup>2</sup>

The eminent geographer Carl O. Sauer, a native Missourian, wrote sympathetically about Ozark pioneers early in his career. Noting their mixture of Celtic and Anglo-Saxon roots and common experience in the Appalachian South, he characterized them as “woodland farmers, hunters, and raisers of livestock in combination, skilled with axe and rifle.” They were, he wrote, “the backwoodsmen who brought and developed the American frontier way of life.”<sup>3</sup>

Historian John Solomon Otto has described the settlement of the Ozarks as part of a much larger migration of “southern plainfolk.” While Otto notes that mountain farmers of the southern Appalachians sought a similar upland environment in the Ozarks, he argues that the truly defining characteristic of this great migration was the people’s adaptation to a forest environment, and more specifically the environment of the southern pine woods, which extended from the piedmont westward across the southern Appalachians and the Gulf Plain as far as east Texas. The southern yeoman farmer exploited this environment by a combination of herding and farming, with methods peculiarly adapted to low population density and a high degree of self-reliance. The pattern included well-wooded lands such as the Ozarks where hardwoods rather than pine typified the forest cover.<sup>4</sup>

Cultural historian Grady McWhiney has traced the origins of southern plainfolk herding practices to northern Britain and Ireland. He finds that Scots-Irish and northern British immigrants adapted their traditional Celtic practices to establish a distinctive herding and farming way of life in the piedmont and mountain areas of the mid-Atlantic colonies, and that this southern backwoods culture then spread southwestward along the lines that Otto describes. McWhiney argues that even the English immigrants who peopled the southern backwoods were largely from the Celtic parts of northern and

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<sup>2</sup> Russel L. Gerlach, “The Ozark Scotch-Irish: The Subconscious Persistence of an Ethnic Culture,” *Pioneer America Society Transactions*, 7 (1984): 47-57. In Marion County, the number of settlers from Tennessee ran as high as 75 percent, according to Marian and Lester Burnes, *Early Days of Marion County, Arkansas* (Ozark, Missouri: Dogwood Print., 1992), 4. For the origins by state of early settlers in Newton County, see Lackey, *History of Newton County, Arkansas*, 49-57.

<sup>3</sup> Carl O. Sauer, “Homestead and Community on the Middle Border,” in *Land and Life: A Selection from the Writings of Carl Ortwin Sauer*, edited by John Leighly (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), 33-34.

<sup>4</sup> John Solomon Otto, “The Migration of the Southern Plain Folk: An Interdisciplinary Synthesis,” *The Journal of Southern History*, 51, no. 2 (May 1985).

western England, in contrast with those Englishmen who emigrated to New England who were of Anglo-Saxon origin. This crucial distinction gave rise to pronounced cultural differences between northerners and southerners, McWhiney contends, that were still evident at the time of the Civil War.<sup>5</sup>

Ozarks historian Brooks Blevins states that an examination of census records of northwest Arkansas counties reveals that most settlers came from locations in the South that were at a similar latitude or shared common physiographical characteristics with the place they settled. The most mountainous county, Newton County, attracted many people from the southern Appalachians. The Ozarks, Blevin writes, inherited the Celtic ethnicity of the upper southern backcountry. "Pioneer settlers possessed a homogeneity rarely witnessed west of the Mississippi."<sup>6</sup>

Arkansas historian Charles S. Bolton, assimilating these different interpretations of the southern plainfolk migration, finds the wellspring of Ozark settlement in the earlier migration of peoples from Scotland, Northern Ireland, and England to the American colonies in the mid-eighteenth century. These immigrants, finding the tidewater areas increasingly crowded in the decades before the American Revolution, moved inland to inhabit the piedmont and highland parts of the southern colonies. In this environment they began to form a distinctive backcountry society composed of small farmers and artisans. During the American Revolution many of these backcountry folk moved farther west into Kentucky and Tennessee. By 1800, Bolton observes, some seven percent of the United States population lived west of the Appalachian Mountains.<sup>7</sup>

After the United States acquired the Louisiana Territory in 1803, more Americans began to push across the Mississippi River into the newly acquired territory. The growth of settlement was faster in what would become Missouri than it was farther south in what would become Arkansas. Settlers occupied the rich bottomlands along the Mississippi, Arkansas, and White River valleys, but they faced obstacles in the Quapaw tribe's reluctance to cede lands on the lower Arkansas River and later in the reservation established for the western Cherokee farther upriver. The pace of settlement quickened after the War of 1812, however. Fort Smith was established in 1817, and the Quapaw ceded most of their territory the following year.<sup>8</sup> In 1819, the English naturalist Thomas Nuttall described a long series of tiny settlements consisting of a few families each extending up the Arkansas River from its mouth to beyond Little Rock. "The inhabitants were just beginning to plough for cotton," he noted.<sup>9</sup>

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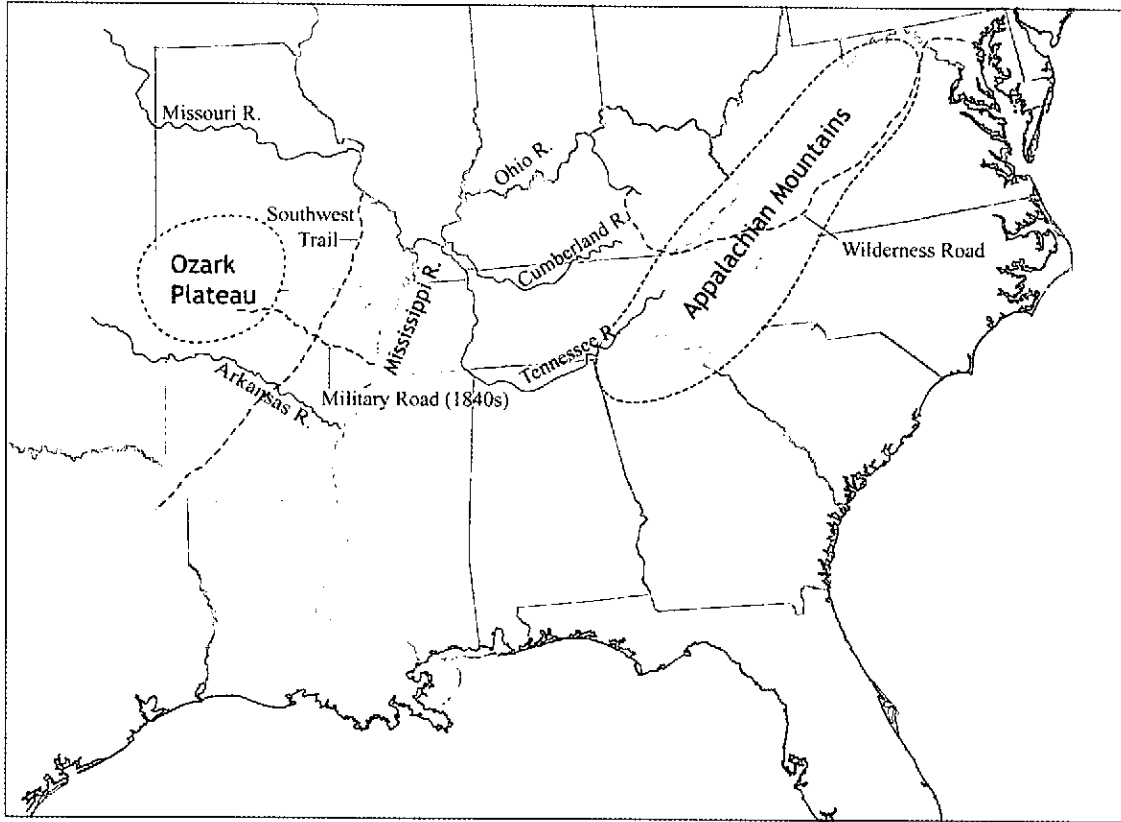
<sup>5</sup> Grady McWhiney, *Cracker Culture: Celtic Ways in the Old South* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1988).

<sup>6</sup> Brooks Blevins, *Hill Folks: A History of Arkansas Ozarkers and their Image* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 19-20.

<sup>7</sup> Charles S. Bolton, *Arkansas 1800-1860: Remote and Restless* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1998), 1-2.

<sup>8</sup> Cardinal L. Goodwin, "Early Exploration and Settlement of Missouri and Arkansas," *Missouri Historical Review*, 14 (April - July 1920): 400-401; Foreman, *Indians and Pioneers*, 159-174.

<sup>9</sup> Nuttall, "Journal of Travels into Arkansas Territory," 168.



Map 3. Routes taken by Southern Highlanders from the Appalachian to the Ozarks. State and territorial boundaries in 1830.

Settlers entered Arkansas Territory by two major migration routes. The first was directly from the east by way of the Mississippi Valley, the second was through a kind of back door from southern Missouri. As Bolton observes, Arkansas's geographic location in the Mississippi Valley was one reason that settlement of Arkansas Territory lagged behind that of its neighboring states, Missouri and Louisiana. Missouri had a major river port in the city of St. Louis, and Louisiana revolved around New Orleans, but there was nothing to compare with these population centers along the whole length of the Mississippi River in between. The Tennessee and Ohio rivers, funnels of westward migration, poured people into the Mississippi Valley at a point well north of Arkansas. As a result, many settlers entered Arkansas by way of Missouri, coming down the eastern fringe of the dissected Ozark Plateau rather than by the more obvious route up the Arkansas River valley. This alternative route, known as the Southwest Trail, led from St. Genevieve, Missouri to Texas, passing through the upper White River valley and striking the Little Red River en route to Little Rock, where it crossed the Arkansas River.<sup>10</sup> Most settlers entering the Buffalo River country in the 1820s and 1830s came by way of this route. By the 1840s, wagon trains commonly came via a military road from Memphis to Batesville.<sup>11</sup> From Batesville, a wagon road led westward through Yellville and

<sup>10</sup> Bolton, *Arkansas 1800-1860: Remote and Restless*, 4-5.

<sup>11</sup> "David Barnett Family History," undated typescript, Buffalo National River historical files, Harrison.

Carrollton to Fayetteville. Yellville and Carrollton were then the major towns in the Buffalo River area.<sup>12</sup>

The pioneers used various modes of transport to get to the Buffalo River. Some came by river boat up the White, others by pack horse or wagon train. As the numbers of settlers increased, wagon caravans became more common. Wagon trains usually traveled in the fall months when temperatures were more comfortable, insects were not obnoxious, creek crossings were easier, and road surfaces were hard. A late fall or early winter arrival in the Ozarks also had the advantage of allowing time to build a cabin and clear a patch in time for spring planting.<sup>13</sup>

Local oral tradition suggests that a significant number of families who were in the vanguard of white settlement contained Cherokee family members with first- or second-hand knowledge about the Buffalo River valley. Certainly there was much movement back and forth through the region by eastern and western Cherokee. Family genealogies from the upper Buffalo River area often refer to Cherokee or Indian bloodlines dating back to this period, and although the stories are difficult to verify – often these mixed Cherokee-white families found it necessary to conceal or deny their tribal connections during the period of Cherokee removal in the 1830s and after – they do have plausibility. Local historian Walter Lackey wrote that many early settlers of Newton County had married eastern Cherokee in Tennessee, and as eastern Cherokee migrated to Arkansas these couples joined the Indian caravans or followed them there. An intriguing example of this pattern is found in the family history of Samuel Whiteley, an early settler in the upper Buffalo. Samuel was married to Lucy Maynard, reputedly a full-blood Cherokee, in Warren County, Tennessee in 1816. He moved with his wife and in-laws to Alabama in about 1823 or 1824, and then to Arkansas in 1830. Having served in the army in the War of 1812, Samuel Whiteley applied for bounty land in Arkansas Territory. A recent and well-researched family history suggests that Lucy's Cherokee relatives may have provided the inducement for Samuel and Lucy to migrate to Arkansas.<sup>14</sup>

A history of Carroll County, which once included Newton County and is located just north of Buffalo National River, offers other examples of early settlers' connections to the Cherokee tribe. David Williams, a white man, resided at what is now the town of

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<sup>12</sup> Suzanne D. Rogers, *Parker-Hickman Farmstead Buffalo National River, Arkansas* (Harrison: National Park Service, Buffalo National River, 1987), 32.

<sup>13</sup> Robert B. Walz, "Migration into Arkansas, 1820-1880: Incentives and Means of Travel," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, 17 (Winter 1958): 314.

<sup>14</sup> The source goes on to acknowledge a piece of contradictory evidence left by Sam and Lucy's son Isaac, which all but states that Lucy was white, not Cherokee, and does not support a connection to western Cherokee already living in the Buffalo River valley. "My mother... was raised right amongst the Indians in Tennessee. I suppose she lived with the tribe for she frequently saw the Indians. My mother left Tennessee in 1830. She came to Arkansas then. No Indians came with her that I ever heard of. I don't remember her saying that there were any Indians here when she came here." Perhaps at the time that Isaac related his mother's story the family did not wish to acknowledge its Cherokee ancestry; on the other hand it may be that the later generation was overreaching the facts when it did claim Cherokee ancestry. See E. Derl Williams, compiler, *Family History of Williams – Eaton – McBroom – Whiteley and Related Lines* (n.p., 1991), 415-418; Isaac Whiteley quoted on 418.

Osage. Williams's son married a Cherokee, and the Williams family moved from Osage to the upper Buffalo River when David Williams decided that "his hunting grounds had become too narrow." This suggests that the Cherokee marriage brought with it a hunting territory on the Buffalo. Louis Russell, reputedly of English and Cherokee descent, arrived in 1822 and made his home on Yocum Creek about 20 miles north of the Buffalo River. Other early families of Carroll County who were of English and Cherokee descent included the Blevins and Meeks.<sup>15</sup>

Possibly the first white settler on the upper Buffalo was John Brisco, who made a home below what became Erbie in 1825. His wife Nancy was reputedly part Indian. James P. Spring and his Indian wife Pocohontas took up land nearby a few years later. In the late 1820s the Cherokee who were living along the Buffalo began to depart as more white settlers began to arrive.<sup>16</sup> There are few references to white-Indian marriages among the families who settled the Ozarks in the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s.

In the 1830s, immigration to the Buffalo River gained tempo as it did throughout Arkansas. Indeed, the whole westward movement of the nation quickened. The editor of the *Arkansas Advocate*, a Little Rock newspaper, wrote appreciatively of the trend. "Not only is every steam-boat crowded with cabin and deck passengers, but the roads also are lined with wagons, conveying families to the Eden of Arkansas."<sup>17</sup> A territorial census in 1833 recorded a population of 40,660 – one third again the number reported in the census of 1830.<sup>18</sup> Faced with burgeoning demand for land sales, the United States government opened new branches of the General Land Office at Fayetteville and Washington, Arkansas in 1832, and Helena, Arkansas in 1834. In the year of Arkansas statehood (1836), the land offices sold nearly a million acres of land.<sup>19</sup>

## SETTLEMENT

Attempting to keep abreast of the settlers' frontier, the General Land Office initiated public land surveys in northwest Arkansas as early as 1824, but most of the surveying was limited to township and range lines until the mid-1840s. Apparently a start was made on surveying section lines in Township 17 North, Range 19 West (surrounding the present-day village of Western Grove, just north of the Buffalo River) in 1830. The plat for that township, according to historian Walter Lackey, recorded Indian trails traversing what was called Marshall Prairie, but gave no indications of white settlement.<sup>20</sup> A federal land surveyor remarked in his field notes in 1834 that settlers along Richland Creek were anxious to have the surveys completed so that they could

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<sup>15</sup> O. Klute Braswell, *History of Carroll County, Arkansas* (Berryville, Arkansas: Braswell Printing Co., 196-?), 335.

<sup>16</sup> Lackey, *A History of Newton County*, 62-63.

<sup>17</sup> Bolton, *Arkansas 1800-1860: Remote and Restless*, 17.

<sup>18</sup> Pitcaithley, *Let the River Be*, 24.

<sup>19</sup> Bolton, *Arkansas 1800-1860: Remote and Restless*, 15.

<sup>20</sup> Lackey, *History of Newton County*, 64.



purchase their farms – indicating that settlement in that area was already well established.<sup>21</sup>

All of the section lines overlapping what is now Buffalo National River were surveyed in the years 1842 to 1847. These plats provide a fairly good bird's eye view of agriculture along the river in that period. Fields were drawn roughly to scale on each map together with the Buffalo River and tributary creeks. The plats indicate that the most densely settled area was along the middle Buffalo from Mount Hersey to Calf Creek. Though less dense than in the middle section, farms also appeared at fairly regular intervals on the upper Buffalo from Boxley Valley to what is now Pruitt Ranger Station, and on the lower Buffalo from about Toney Bend to Middle Creek. There was perhaps about as much total acreage in cleared fields on the Buffalo's tributary creeks as along the river. The creek drainages with the most agricultural use were Calf Creek, Richland Creek, Cave Creek, Big Creek, and the Little Buffalo River.<sup>22</sup>

While running the section lines the surveyors made field notes, which provide additional information on how the landscape appeared in this period. In Boxley Valley, a comparatively broad area of bottomland in the upper Buffalo, the surveyor noted Samuel Whiteley's farm house and cane pasture fence at 46.50 and 62 chains respectively while running north on the line between sections 22 and 23. The field notes also mention dwellings and other buildings, usually in conjunction with similar notations on the plats. For example, the Casey farm is described in both the field notes and on the plat as being about three miles north of the Whiteley farm in Boxley Valley. Likewise, a school house is documented as having stood about one fifth of a mile north of Casey's mill.<sup>23</sup>

The survey notes also indicate the type of forest that was present in the mid-1840s. The surveyors had keen eyes for the many species of tree and underbrush. White oak was common along the upper Buffalo, as was black oak, red oak, hickory, and ash. Some white oak measured 30 inches in diameter. Other species included beach, cherry, gum, walnut, pine, cedar, and Spanish oak. Understory plants frequently included spicewood, pawpaw, and cane. Often the surveyors made the notation, "Land poor stony and broken unfit for cultivation."<sup>24</sup>

Historians John Solomon Otto and Augustus Marion Burns III argue that the traditional agricultural practices employed by Ozark subsistence farmers in the antebellum period were developed by the Scots-Irish colonists who settled in the Alleghenies and the southern Appalachians during the eighteenth century. In Scotland and Ireland the Scots-Irish had practiced a type of land rotation known as "outfield farming" in which a field would be cultivated for three to five years and then fallowed for six to ten years. In the forested environment of eastern North America, the Scots-Irish imitated the farming technique used by the Delaware and other tribes of Indians, in which

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<sup>21</sup> Suzanne D. Rogers, *Historic Resources of the Tyler Bend Development Area* (National Park Service, Buffalo National River, Arkansas, 1987), 5.

<sup>22</sup> U.S. General Land Office, Survey plats, Arkansas Historical Commission, Little Rock.

<sup>23</sup> U.S. General Land Office, Survey notes, historical files, BNR. Transcriptions available in pdf.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

a patch of forest was cleared and cultivated for one or two years only, and then allowed to revert to forest. The Indians taught the Scots-Irish how to girdle trees to create forest clearings, and they introduced them to Indian corn. The Scots-Irish, for their part, integrated livestock grazing into this system of forest-based agriculture. Moreover, the Scots-Irish assimilated the concept of private property into their form of woodland farming, and unlike the Delawares they did not limit their planting to creek and river bottoms, but cultivated upland slopes as well. Thus, the farming techniques that settlers brought to the Ozark region in the antebellum period were a blend of British and Native American traditions. As these farmers called their clearings “patches,” their system of agriculture has sometimes been termed “patch farming.” The system was well-suited to poor soil conditions and broken terrain as long as the farming population was sparse and there was plenty of land.<sup>25</sup>

Coming from the highlands of the southern Appalachians, the settlers were undaunted by the poor soil and broken terrain found along the Buffalo. Their agricultural practice was well-adapted to this environment. As historians Otto and Burns have shown, a typical settler in the Arkansas highlands cleared and cultivated about 20 acres at a time. This was about as much acreage as a man needed to support a family and it took about as much labor as a man wanted to expend; if the farmer had a number of older children to work and feed then he might clear more.<sup>26</sup> He made his clearing or patch by felling, burning, girdling, and poisoning the trees. (Girdling involved killing the tree by notching a ring around the trunk to restrict the flow of life-giving sap to the branches; poisoning was done by applying arsenic and lye to exposed limbs.<sup>27</sup>) The clearings or patches, also known as “deadenings,” did not look anything like the neat, geometric fields seen in modern American farming. Rather, the clearings were filled with stumps and dead trees, with curvilinear row crops planted around them. With the light farm tools in use, stumps were no serious obstacle to plowing or threshing. Nor were dead trees a problem as long as they let in sunlight; left standing, they could be felled and chopped up for firewood at the farmer’s convenience. Generally the farmer got one or two good crops from the land and then made and planted a new clearing. When no longer cultivated the land was said to be “resting,” that is, the farmer would allow it to lie fallow for ten to twenty years before planting it again. During this time livestock would range on it and manure it, and the forest would begin to regenerate, both of these things tending to restore the soil. Eventually the old field would revert to forest and then it might be cleared all over again.<sup>28</sup>

Since the agricultural practice depended on field rotation, a highlands subsistence farm needed a lot more acreage than was planted in any given year in order to sustain itself. Once settlers began to arrive in the Buffalo River valley it was not long before the best lands were taken. Like the Campbell party that arrived in the Buffalo River valley in

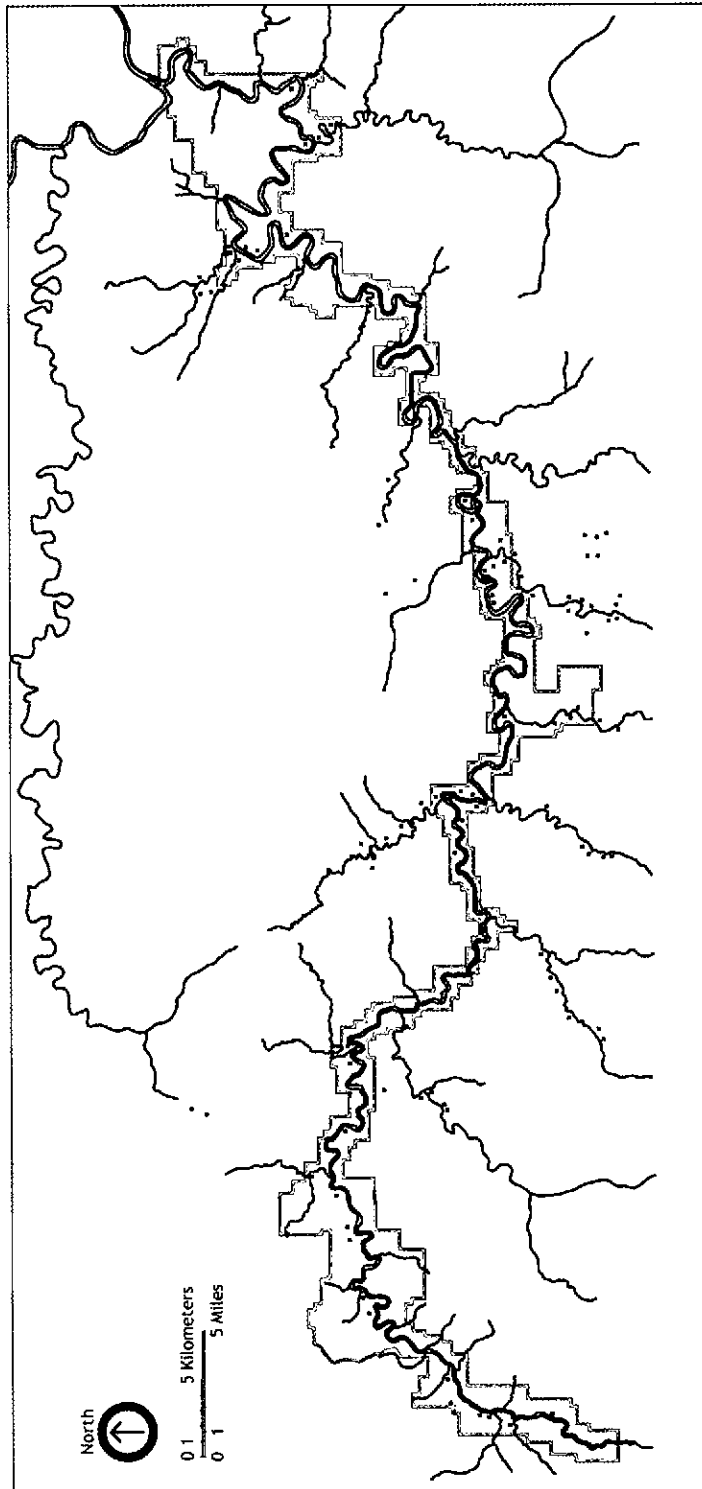
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<sup>25</sup> Otto and Burns, “Traditional Agricultural Practices in the Arkansas Highlands,” 180.

<sup>26</sup> Beth Herrington, *Tomahawk Tales* (Tahlequah, Oklahoma: East Central Baptist Press, 1981), 4.

<sup>27</sup> John Solomon Otto and Augustus Marion Burns III, “Traditional Agricultural Practices in the Arkansas Highlands,” *Journal of American Folklore*, 94, no. 372 (1981), 173.

<sup>28</sup> J. S. Otto and N. E. Anderson, “Slash-and-Burn Cultivation in the Highlands South: A Problem in Comparative Agricultural History,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 24, no. 1 (1982), 133-135.



Map 4. Settlement along the Buffalo River and tributaries, 1843-1848. Each dot represents a field shown on GLO plats.

1836, most settlers coming into the country looked for land that was well-drained yet still contained a good amount of fertile, alluvial soil. Terraces and bottomlands were preferable, as long as they were not malarial. Most settlers, like the Campbell party, staked their ground at the mouths of tributary creeks. These lands were in finite supply. Perhaps as early as the 1850s, settlers in the Buffalo River valley began to feel the same population pressure and land hunger that had caused many of them to leave farms in the southern Appalachians ten or twenty years earlier.

The settlement pattern on the lower Buffalo at the mouth of Big Creek illustrates the challenges that the settlers confronted in this rugged terrain. In 1843, John Avey arrived in this area with his wife, five sons, two daughters-in-law, and one grandchild. By 1845, the Avey clan had cleared three 20-acre fields, each of which occupied a separate area of terrace. Altogether, the area at the confluence of Big Creek and the Buffalo River contained about 200 acres of terrace and 400 acres of bottomland; everything else in the four-square-mile area was sheer bluff or steep hillside. Thus, the three fields represented about ten percent of the tillable land – the limit of what the area could sustain if fields were to be allowed to rest for nine years out of ten. Even though the Avey clan was the first group of settlers to arrive in this section, they had scant room for neighbors.

By 1850, the three Avey households had split into four. In the seven years since their arrival, the family patriarch and his wife Jane had given birth to two daughters; John Jr. and his wife Sarah had had four more children; Andrew and his wife Harriet had acquired three children; and Peter had taken a wife, Mary Jane, who gave birth to a son. John Avey's third and fifth sons, Daniel and Jacob, now lived with Andrew and the parents respectively.

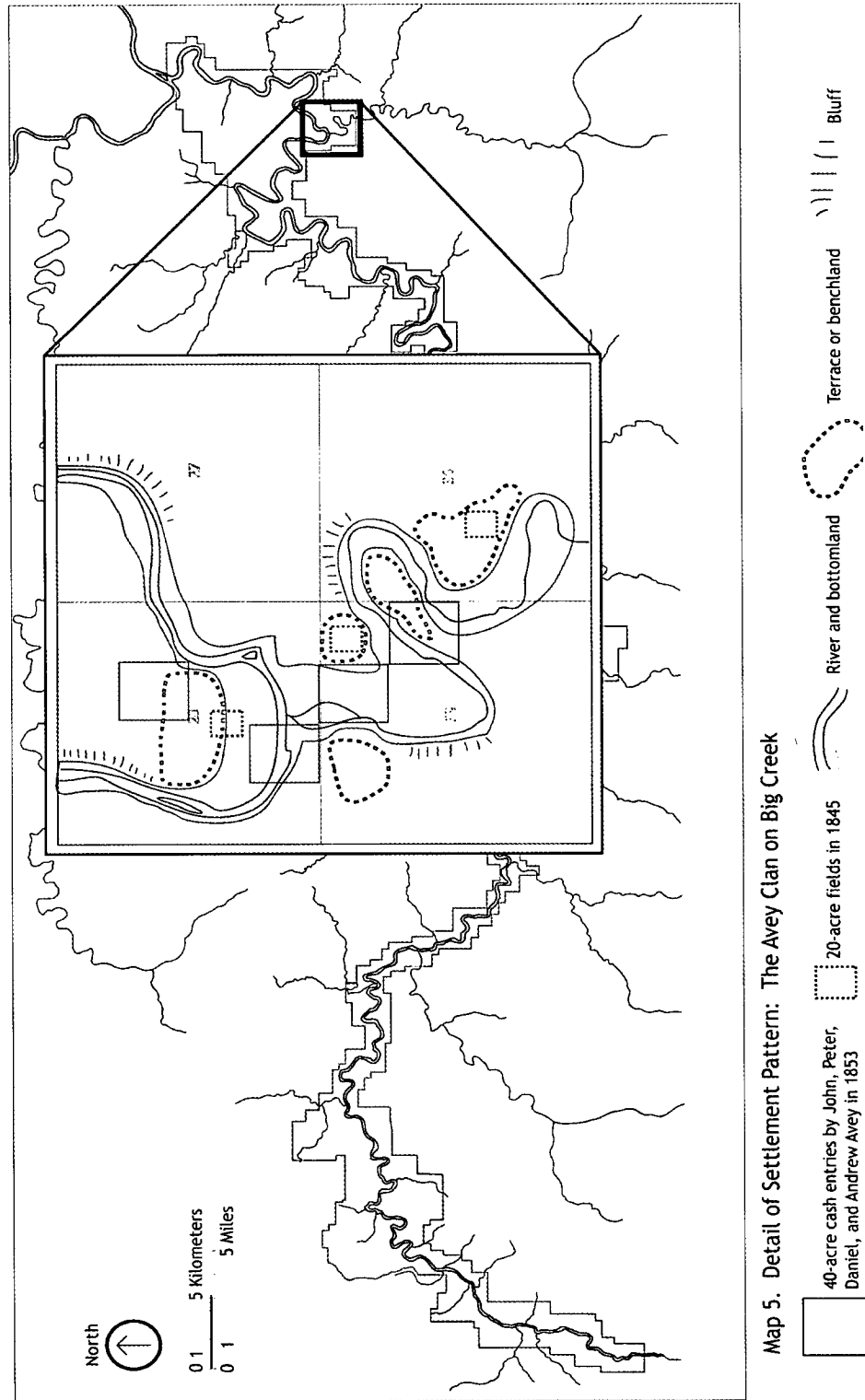
In the following decade, the Avey clan continued to expand as additional settlers arrived in the area. In 1853, the four oldest sons acquired title to 40 acres each, mostly in bottomland along Big Creek.<sup>29</sup> Evidently it was not enough; by the end of the decade only two of the four Avey households remained. The census of agriculture for 1860 recorded that John Avey had 47 acres of improved and 173 acres of unimproved land on which he produced 2500 bushels of corn. His livestock consisted of 4 horses, 6 mules, 4 milk cows, 4 oxen, 15 beef cattle, and 100 hogs. His son Peter Avey had 20 acres of improved and 44 acres of unimproved land and produced 650 bushels of corn that year. Peter Avey's livestock consisted of 5 horses, 2 mules, 4 milk cows, 2 oxen, 11 beef cattle, and 50 hogs. The same census listed eight other farmers in Buffalo Township.<sup>30</sup>

The population pressure was not as acute in other sections of the Buffalo River valley where more bottomland was available. Richland Creek meanders north through a broad, flat valley and joins the Buffalo roughly at its midpoint as it flows through Searcy

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<sup>29</sup> "Some Marion County, Arkansas, Early Landholders taken from a large ledger kept by Benjamin Franklin Fee (1850-1937), Yellville attorney and Marion County judge, 1902-1906," Marion County Library, Yellville.

<sup>30</sup> U.S. Census Office, *Agriculture of the United States in 1860*, Roll 15, Arkansas Historical Commission, Little Rock.



County. The entire Richland Valley bottom contains deep, rich alluvial soil. The area attracted many settlers, and the farms at Richland were not only more spacious, they were also more prosperous. While the 10 farms in Buffalo Township reported a total value of \$4,450 in 1860, the 39 farms enumerated in Richland posted a total value of \$35,350. Whereas the average farm in Buffalo Township had a value of \$445, the average Richland farm was worth more than twice as much. James H. Love had a typical small farm with a cash value of \$300. In 1860, he owned two horses, one milk cow, one beef cow, and fifty hogs, and he produced 400 bushels of corn and 25 bushels of sweet potatoes. Joseph Rea had a typical middle-sized farm with a cash value of \$1000. Rea had a number of horses, cows, and sheep in addition to 30 hogs, and his farm produced 1200 bushels of corn and 80 bushels of wheat. John M. Hensley was among the wealthiest farmers in the region with extensive landholdings on Bear Creek as well as a farm in Richland. In 1860, he reported on his Richland farm a total of eleven horses, four mules, nearly 100 cows, and 200 hogs, as well as two dozen sheep and oxen. His crop yield included 3500 bushels of corn and 500 bushels of oats.<sup>31</sup>

While John M. Hensley dabbled in land speculation, amassing some 1600 acres by the Civil War, many other farmers along the Buffalo never acquired title to their own farms. The Preemption Act of 1841 entitled settlers to have first right to purchase public land if they could prove that they had been living (“squatting”) on the land. Some Buffalo River farmers took advantage of the law and acquired patent to their land, paying \$1.25 per acre and making a trip to the General Land Office at Batesville to enter their claim. Most settlers, however, did not bother. One reason so many settlers never obtained title was to avoid paying taxes on their land. Historian Robert B. Walz analyzed tax lists of 1850 for Van Buren County, Arkansas and determined that only a little more than one percent of land was owned and taxed. Some land may have been owned and not taxed (not reported), but in Walz’s view the numbers indicated that a large if indeterminate amount of public land was occupied by squatters.<sup>32</sup> Historian Dwight T. Pitcaithley examined tax records for 55 families known to have occupied land in the Buffalo River watershed in the 1840s. Of the 55, only 14 ever obtained title.<sup>33</sup>

Land purchases increased in the 1850s. The Graduation Act of 1854 authorized the government to sell public land at a discounted rate, based on how long it had been offered for sale. Starting at the standard rate of \$1.25 per acre, the sale price was supposed to drop in a graduated manner and if still unsold after thirty years the land could be advertised for 12 ½ cents per acre. In practice, an enormous amount of public land was sold for just 12 ½ cents or less, a great deal of it to land speculators. Some 18.3 million acres were sold in Alabama, Arkansas, and Missouri. The Graduation Act led to

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<sup>31</sup> U.S. Census Office, *Agriculture of the United States in 1850*, Roll 4, Arkansas Historical Commission, Little Rock.

<sup>32</sup> Walz, “Migration into Arkansas,” 322-323.

<sup>33</sup> Pitcaithley, *Let the River Be*, 29.

a land boom in some parts of the Ozarks. The law seems to have produced only a modest up-tick in the number of land entries in the Buffalo River valley.<sup>34</sup>

The typical antebellum farmer along the Buffalo planted most of his field in corn and grew much smaller quantities of other cereals, cotton, and tobacco – all for home use. He generally had a horse, mule, or ox; a milk cow; and some other livestock: beef cattle, pigs, sheep, or some combination of all three. He fenced his field with a “worm fence” made with eight-foot rails generally split from oak trees. As these fences were needed to keep free-ranging livestock out of the field, a sufficient fence was said to be “bull strong and pig tight.” The family dwelling was usually a four-sided log cabin with a lean-to kitchen added later. The logs were hewn on two sides and held firm by notches in the ends. Cracks between the logs were filled with red clay mortar or a mixture of clay and lime. The floors were made of split logs. Rafters were set against a ridgepole and held in place by wooden pins. There was usually a fireplace on the north wall and doors in the east and west walls. Doors were generally handmade with wooden hinges and latches. The walls might be covered with clapboards split from white or red oak, and the roof might be made of the same material. Even the houses with wood siding were rarely painted.<sup>35</sup>



Figure 10. Parker-Hickman House. *Thomason and Associates photo, National Park Service.*

The single-pen floor plan was most common and a whole family might live in a single room measuring no more than 16 by 16 feet. Sometimes two cabins would be built side by side – one for cooking and eating and the other for living and sleeping. Variations on this theme were the double-pen cabin (a single-story, two-room building with a common wall separating the two rooms), the saddle-bag (a single-story, two-room building with a central chimney and fireplaces facing into both rooms), and the dog-trot (a single- or double-story

building with two pens sharing one continuous roof and separated by an open breezeway).<sup>36</sup>

The Parker-Hickman Farmstead, which constitutes perhaps the most noteworthy historic resource in Buffalo National River, dates from well before the Civil War.

<sup>34</sup> Donald L. Stevens, *A Homeland and A Hinterland: The Current and Jacks Fork Riverways* (Omaha: National Park Service, 1991), 42-44. Land entry data were examined for three locations along the Buffalo River valley: Erbie, Richland, and Big Creek.

<sup>35</sup> Herrington, *Tomahawk Tales*, 3-4; WPA Personal History interview with Wesley Dozier, Yellville, February 24, 1939, WPA No. 150, University of Arkansas Special Collections, Fayetteville.

<sup>36</sup> Herrington, *Tomahawk Tales*, 4; Kenneth Story, “Introduction: The Cultural Landscape of Arkansas in 1860,” in *Rugged and Sublime: The Civil War in Arkansas* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1994), xix.

Dendrochronology tests have dated the log portion of the house to the late 1840s. The original, ground-floor portion is a single-pen structure made of hand-hewn cedar logs with a central chimney. In the historic structures report on this building, historian Suzanne D. Rogers states:

The original builder was a person skilled in carpentry. The loft rafters are fixed with wooden pegs. The original ceiling was hand-planed and beaded for tongue and groove installation. A curved end-plate piece on each corner of the original exterior walls attests to a pride in workmanship. The log walls are joined with the type of dove tailing refined in North Carolina to effectively shed rainwater.<sup>37</sup>

This house was inhabited until 1978 and underwent stabilization in 1984.

Furnishings in the Ozark frontier home were spare. There might be a stove and small dish safe in one corner and a table and chairs in another. A high bed might stand against another wall with a trundle bed for children tucked underneath. Furniture was often built from split timbers fastened by wooden pins.<sup>38</sup>

Buffalo River farmers used simple tools: a weeding hoe, a grubbing hoe, and a single shovel plow yoked to an ox. Farmers cut wheat by hand with a cradle. The farmer's wife usually had a spinning wheel and a wooden loom for making homespun from sheep's wool and cotton, and her kitchenware probably consisted of an iron dutch oven, skillet, black pot, and tea kettle. Women washed clothes by soaking them in a tub, laying them on a flat rock, and beating them with a paddle.<sup>39</sup>

Travelogues were a popular literary form in the first half of the nineteenth century, and Southern manners were the subject of numerous books and stories written to entertain the curious. Travel descriptions of the South also focused on the "peculiar institution" (slavery), especially as anti-slavery sentiment grew stronger in the North. Unfortunately, no travelogues exist that describe Buffalo River settlement in this period. The closest historians have is the travelogue of G. W. Featherstonhaugh, who journeyed through the South with his son in 1834-1835 and wrote about it in *Excursion Through the Slave States*. Featherstonhaugh found himself quite out of his gentele element as he traveled with his son through the upper White River valley, north of the Buffalo. Like some other early visitors to the Ozark frontier, Featherstonhaugh was appalled by the primitive and lawless character of some of the people whom they encountered. Indeed, he saved some of his harshest invective for various settlers who hosted them in the Arkansas Ozarks. There was a "judge" a mile from the White River "living in one of the most dirty and unprovided holes we had yet got into, in addition to which his children

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<sup>37</sup> Suzanne D. Rogers, *Parker-Hickman Farmstead Historic Structures Report*, (Harrison, Arkansas: National Park Service, Buffalo National River, 1987), 9.

<sup>38</sup> Herrington, *Tomahawk Tales*, 4; WPA Personal History interview with Wesley Dozier, Yellville, February 24, 1939, WPA No. 150, University of Arkansas Special Collections, Fayetteville.

<sup>39</sup> *Arkansas Gazette*, August 29, 1937.



and himself were just recovering from the malaria.”<sup>40</sup> Near the military road through the White River valley they stayed a night with a man named Hornby, “a squalid, half-negro looking piratical ruffian from Louisiana, living in a wretched, filthy cabin, with a wife to match, and a caliban-looking negress and her two children, who were his slaves.” Featherstonhaugh went on to describe the evening meal in their crowded one-room cabin. “Some bits of filthy fried pork, and a detestable beverage they were pleased to call coffee, were set on a broken, dirty table, at which, by the light of a nasty little tin lamp, into which Madame Hornby, after helping herself to the pork, poured some of its grease, we all *tutti quanti*, sat on two lame benches.”<sup>41</sup> Featherstonhaugh’s account probably highlighted the more extreme examples of squalor while conveying to the reader that they were typical of the region.<sup>42</sup>

As the Arkansas Ozarks grew more populated, community buildings such as one-room schools and county courthouses began to appear among the settler homes. The first courthouse in Searcy County was a log structure in the village of Lebanon. The building housed the county jail, and county business was conducted at the nearby house of James Eagan until a more substantial courthouse was built in 1842. The county seat moved from Lebanon to Raccoon Springs and then to Burrowsville (later renamed Marshall) in 1856.<sup>43</sup>

Population growth also brought new political divisions. In 1835 the Arkansas territorial legislature established Searcy County from the western half of Izard County. The new county began on the west bank of the White River and encompassed the eastern half of the Buffalo River watershed. It was renamed Marion County in 1836, and the county seat was established at Yellville, formerly Shawneetown, recently renamed after the Arkansas governor Archibald Yell. In 1838, Marion County was partitioned into two counties, with the southern portion resurrecting the old name of Searcy County. To the west, Newton County was created from the southeast portion of Carroll County in 1842 and included the western half of the Buffalo River watershed. In the state law creating Newton County, it was provided that the county seat would be established at the house of John Bellah on the Little Buffalo River. The next year the county seat was permanently established at the village of Jasper, a few miles down river.<sup>44</sup>

As the region grew in population, so did the amount of commerce occurring between this frontier and the more settled parts of the nation. Buffalo River farmers still subsisted essentially on what they grew themselves in the 1840s and 1850s. But increasingly they produced a little surplus grain, which they might trade in town for a few

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<sup>40</sup> G. W. Featherstonhaugh, *Excursion Through the Slave States* (Reprint, New York: Negro University Press and Greenwood Publishing Corporation, 1968), 89.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>42</sup> See Grady McWhiney, *Cracker Culture: Celtic Ways in the Old South* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1988), for a definitive analysis of antebellum travel literature and what it reveals about southern culture.

<sup>43</sup> Waldo E. Fowler, “History of the Wyatt Family and Richland Creek,” bound typescript at Boone County Library, Harrison, 2.

<sup>44</sup> Pitcaithley, *Let the River Be*, 24-25.

manufactured goods shipped from the East, or they might drive some of their cattle to a larger market town such as Springfield, Missouri, or Little Rock, Arkansas, and sell the livestock for cash.<sup>45</sup> In this emerging market economy, grist mills played a role not only in grinding the farmer's grain into flour for his own household consumption, but also in offering a convenient outlet for his surplus. Grist mills began to appear in the Buffalo River valley and became more numerous over time. In Boxley Valley, Abner Casey built a watermill around 1840. Samuel Whiteley bought the mill a few years later.<sup>46</sup> At the time of the Civil War, the community of farms in Boxley Valley was known as Whiteley's Mill. Considerably modified after the Civil War, this mill is included among the buildings in the Boxley Valley Historic District now listed on the National Register of Historic Places.<sup>47</sup>

The three counties that shared the Buffalo River watershed posted impressive population gains in the 1850 and 1860 censuses. During the 1840s, Searcy County grew by 111.4 percent, just below the growth rate for the whole state, while Marion County grew at 74.2 percent. During the 1850s, Searcy and Marion counties grew by 166.3 percent and 168.3 percent respectively, while Newton County grew by 93 percent. Meanwhile, the state's overall growth rate was 107.5 percent. In terms of numbers of people, the three counties had a combined population of nearly 15,000 in 1860, of which a few thousand resided in the Buffalo River watershed. Meanwhile, in the state as a whole, the population stood at 435,450 in 1860. By the end of the antebellum period, the settlement of the Ozark region displayed both similarities to and differences from the rapid growth of the rest of the state. It was similar inasmuch as the white population came mostly from other southern states and included a disproportional number of young people and new arrivals. It was different from other parts of Arkansas where population and economic growth were marked by an expansion of cotton agriculture and an influx of slaves.<sup>48</sup>

## SLAVERY

Slavery existed as a legal institution in Arkansas when the area was under the control of both France and Spain and it continued undisturbed when the United States acquired the Louisiana Territory in 1803. It was affirmed by Congress in 1819 when Arkansas became a separate territory, and reaffirmed by the Missouri Compromise one year later, which held that slavery would be allowed in the proposed state of Missouri and prohibited in the rest of the Louisiana Purchase north of latitude 36° 30' (Missouri's southern border). In 1836, Arkansas entered the Union as a slave state, paired with newly admitted Michigan, a free state, thereby maintaining the balance of power between northern and southern states in the U.S. Senate. Due to the geographic position of

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<sup>45</sup> Mary Frances Harrell, ed., *History and Folklore of Searcy County, Arkansas* (Harrison, Arkansas: New Leaf Press, Inc., 1977), 95.

<sup>46</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, *Land Use Plan, Cultural Landscape Report, Boxley Valley, Buffalo National River, Arkansas* (Denver: USDI, National Park Service, 1985), 19-21.

<sup>47</sup> It is now known as Boxley Mill. See also Chapter Six.

<sup>48</sup> Pitcaithley, *Let the River Be*, 26-27.

Arkansas south of the Missouri Compromise line, together with the growing importance of sectionalism in American politics, Arkansas emerged as part of the Slave South.

As Arkansas developed, however, the institution of slavery took a firm hold in some parts of the state and not in others. The population of slaves in the state grew from 19,935 in 1840 to 111,115 in 1860. Slaves represented about 20 percent of the total population in Arkansas in 1840 and about 25 percent of the population twenty years later. Meanwhile, slaves were found only in small numbers in the north central and northwestern counties. The census of 1840 recorded just 39 slaves in Marion County and 3 in Searcy County. Ten years later the number of slaves in Marion, Searcy, and Newton counties totaled 202, or just over 3 percent of the total population of those counties. In 1860, the number of slaves in the three counties stood at 378, or about 2.5 percent of the total population in the area. Other northwest Arkansas counties showed similar population trends. Slavery remained a marginal institution in the northwestern part of Arkansas even as it was expanding vigorously in other parts of the state.<sup>49</sup>

The majority of people in the northwest Arkansas counties did not support slavery. Their dislike for slavery stemmed primarily from their suspicion of the planter class, who exercised increasing power over the politics of the state. In the state constitutional convention in 1836, delegates from the northwestern part of the territory were lukewarm to articles in the constitution that protected the institution of slavery. They were particularly insistent that slaves should not be counted in determining representation in the state legislature. When they lost on these points to the planter class, the northwestern delegates came to oppose the movement for statehood but were defeated on that score, too.<sup>50</sup>

The expansion of slavery in Arkansas was tied to the growth of the cotton industry. In the early decades of the nineteenth century the center of cotton production had moved steadily westward from the Atlantic seaboard to the fertile regions of Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana. When Arkansas achieved statehood there were already large cotton plantations established in the lower Arkansas Valley and the Mississippi Valley. Production of cotton in Arkansas increased from 6 million pounds in 1840 to 26 million pounds in 1850. While the state's cotton crop was small compared to those of neighboring Mississippi and Louisiana, the rate of expansion was impressive. During the same period the number of slaves in the state grew by 136 percent – the fastest growth rate of any state. By 1860, one in every five white people in Arkansas was a slave owner or a member of a slave-owning family.<sup>51</sup>

In his classic study, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South*, Kenneth M. Stampp emphasized the variety of forms that the master-slave relationship took. An important element in Stampp's analysis was the size of the slaveholding, for the experience of a field hand on a large cotton plantation tended to contrast with the

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 26.

<sup>50</sup> Clyde W. Cathey, "Slavery in Arkansas," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, 3 (Spring 1944), 66-68.

<sup>51</sup> Thomas A. DeBlack, *With Fire and Sword: Arkansas, 1861-1874* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2003), 1-2.

experience of a solitary slave owned by a hill farmer, for example. Similarly, the owner of a large slaveholding who hired overseers to manage his slave gangs tended to treat his slaves differently than the owner of one or two slaves who worked alongside his bondsmen and often shared a cabin with them. Historical studies of slavery in the American South have tended to highlight the cotton plantation, as this is where the best records were kept. By contrast, little is known about the character of slavery in the southern backcountry because so few records of it exist.<sup>52</sup>

Historian Philip V. Scarpino made a study of slavery in Callaway County, Missouri, where slaveholdings were generally small, averaging 4.8 slaves per master in 1850. He examined slaveholder estate records as well as census records in an effort to deduce how masters treated their slaves and how they thought about slavery. Scarpino drew two main conclusions: first, it appeared that masters regarded their slaves as both property and people, but the property interest took priority and humane treatment of slaves was measured. Second, slaveholders were more self-aggrandizing than their non-slaveholder neighbors, and even as they toiled side by side on their farms with their slaves they made slavery work for them as a profitable system of forced labor.<sup>53</sup> Although Callaway County differed from Marion, Searcy, and Newton counties in the antebellum era in significant ways – situated on the Mississippi River, it had greater agricultural potential than the three mountain counties – it was similar in the small size of slaveholdings. By comparison, the average slaveholding in the three Arkansas counties was just three slaves per master in 1850.

For data on Arkansas slaveholdings one can turn to the half-century-old work of historian Robert B. Walz, who compiled figures on slaveholdings by county from the 1850 manuscript census returns. From Walz's table one finds that among nearly 6,000 slaveholders in Arkansas in 1850, nearly one in four owned just one slave. Toward the other end of the spectrum, a mere one in twenty slaveholders owned twenty or more slaves. At the extreme end of the spectrum, just nineteen slaveholders in Arkansas owned from 100 to 249 slaves each. From the slave's standpoint, meanwhile, the plantation was a much more common setting for the institution of slavery. Not quite half the slave population in Arkansas was part of a slaveholding of twenty or more slaves, and one in twenty slaves in Arkansas in 1850 lived on one of those nineteen very large plantations. In contrast to the experience of the master class, it was the rare slave – about one in thirty – who lived alone with a slave-owning family.<sup>54</sup>

The relatively small slave population in Marion, Searcy, and Newton counties did not exhibit this same type of distribution. In 1850, there were no slaveholdings of twenty or more.<sup>55</sup> By 1860, there was just one slaveholding of that size among the three

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<sup>52</sup> Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South* (New York: Vantage Books, 1956).

<sup>53</sup> Philip V. Scarpino, "Slavery in Callaway County, Missouri: 1845-1855 Part II," *Missouri Historical Review*, 71 (April 1977): 274.

<sup>54</sup> Robert B. Walz, "Arkansas Slaveholdings and Slaveholders in 1850," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, 12 (Spring 1953), 47.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 44-46.

counties: a man named D. L. Dodd owned 35 slaves and a large property north of Yellville.<sup>56</sup> With the possible exception of Dodd, slaveholders in these counties probably did not count themselves among the planter class. The few hundred slaves, meanwhile, belonged to relatively small slaveholdings and many lived alone with their masters. Data extracted from Walz's table and then aggregated for the three counties covering the Buffalo River watershed show that nearly half of the area's slaves and more than three-quarters of the area's slave owners belonged to households of just one slave or from two to four slaves. Often, in the case of multiple slaves, this was a single female and her offspring.

TABLE 1. SLAVES IN MARION, SEARCY, AND NEWTON COUNTIES, 1850 (SOURCE: WALZ)

	SIZE OF SLAVEHOLDINGS				TOTAL
	1	2-4	5-9	10-19	
NUMBER OF SLAVEHOLDERS	27	24	13	2	66
NUMBER OF SLAVES	27	71	76	28	202

Historians suggest that the slave who lived with the hill farmer was somewhat better off than the slave who belonged to a planter. Because of the intimacy of working and living conditions on the family farm, the farmer was more apt to work his slave no harder than he worked himself, keep his slave clothed in about the same manner as his own humble attire, and feed and shelter his slave as he fed and sheltered his own family. By contrast, the field hand on a plantation had to work "from day clean to first dark" under the watchful eye of an overseer who was paid to get the most possible labor out of the slave gang. Plantation slaves lived in separate slave quarters and received substandard food and clothing. (This is evident, for example, in the advertising of two standards of groceries in Arkansas newspapers.)<sup>57</sup> The health care for slaves varied widely, but slave mortality rates were especially high in the pestilential Arkansas bottomlands.<sup>58</sup> Of course, not all slaves in large slaveholdings were field hands; some served in the big house or were skilled artisans such as blacksmiths and carpenters. Sometimes slaves were hired out for their particular skills.

If the slave who lived with the hill farmer was often materially better off than the slave who belonged to a planter, the latter had the advantage of a large slave community close at hand. The plantation slave community provided the comforts of family and friends, a shared religion and folklore, and the rare holiday celebration.<sup>59</sup> Scholars of slavery have long thought that the life of a small-farm slave, by contrast, could be exceedingly lonely, particularly when the slave owner was insensitive to keeping slave families together as often happened.

<sup>56</sup> U.S. Census Office. *Slave Schedules – Arkansas, 1860 Census*. M 653, Roll 5, Arkansas History Commission.

<sup>57</sup> Cathey, "Slavery in Arkansas," 84-90.

<sup>58</sup> Stamp, *The Peculiar Institution*, 299.

<sup>59</sup> See John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Ante-Bellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972).

Recently, historian Diane Mutti Burke has revised this view of farm-community slave life with her study of slavery in Missouri. By examining Civil War pension files of ex-slave Union soldiers and oral history interviews with former slaves made in the 1930s, Mutti Burke has shown that a “vibrant cross-farm slave community” existed in which slaves formed friendships, romantic attachments, and marriages with slaves on nearby farms through work frolics, church services, and other social gatherings. Mutti Burke estimates that 57 percent of marriages among the slave population in Missouri involved partners on separate farms. Slaves sought opportunities to seek marriage partners and to maintain family bonds, and slaveholders generally could not afford to keep their slaves in isolation.<sup>60</sup>

A few sparse accounts survive of individual blacks who lived in slavery in the Buffalo River valley before the Civil War, and it is notable that these stories have remained in the oral tradition of the white slaveholder families who persisted in the area. A bit more about these individuals may be gleaned from the slave schedules in the census. What little is known about their personal circumstances can be viewed in the wider context of slavery in Arkansas and the antebellum South to form a limited view of slave life on the Buffalo.

Anthony was born about 1840 and was still a boy when he was sold at a slave auction in Yellville to John M. Hensley of Bear Creek Township in Searcy County. His new master was the largest slaveholder in Searcy County with five slaves in 1850 and fifteen slaves ten years later. Hensley evidently bought and sold slaves as investments, because in 1850 he owned an adult male (age 45), an adult female (age 28), two young boys (ages 5 and 3), and an infant female; and a decade later he owned two different adult males (ages 60 and 35), a different adult female (age 27) and a dozen children who ranged in age from 17 to 1 year old. Despite the instability found in this slaveholding, Anthony was close enough to his master to acquire skill in horsemanship. Later he would train and race Hensley’s horses on the race track at Richland.

In 1848, Hensley gave Anthony to his daughter Louisa as a wedding gift. Still a young boy at the time, Anthony was “raised” by William and Louisa Wyatt, according to Erd W. Cole (who was born in 1884 and knew Anthony as a grown man still living in the valley).<sup>61</sup> Although he was listed as the property of William Wyatt in the census of 1860, Anthony evidently maintained a good relationship with his former master, John M. Hensley. He accompanied him when Hensley joined the 7<sup>th</sup> Arkansas Cavalry during the Civil War. Family tradition holds that in one battle Hensley’s horse was shot out from under him and Anthony rode into the fighting and took Hensley out on horseback.<sup>62</sup> In

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<sup>60</sup> Diane Mutti Burke, “Slave Neighbors: Missouri’s Slave Communities, 1821-1865,” paper presented at the 48<sup>th</sup> Missouri Valley History Conference, March 3-5, 2005, Omaha, Nebraska. Cited with permission by the author.

<sup>61</sup> Erd W. Cole interview by James J. Johnston, no date, in Waldo E. Fowler, “History of the Wyatt Family and Richland Creek,” bound typescript at Boone County Library, Harrison.

<sup>62</sup> Harrell, ed., *History and Folklore of Searcy County, Arkansas*, 295.

the 1870 census, Anthony is listed as part of the Wyatt household and his full name is given as “Anthony Hensley.”<sup>63</sup>

When Hensley gave his slave Anthony to his daughter and son-in-law for a wedding gift, he also presented them with a five-year-old girl named Parthena. The story is told that Hensley instructed his daughter Louisa to be good to the slave girl because she was Louisa’s half sister. In the censuses of 1850 and 1860, Parthena was described as “mulatto.” The Hensley-Wyatt family history does not indicate who was Parthena’s mother, but it does record that Hensley and his wife Mary May emigrated from Tennessee to the Buffalo River in 1841 with two slaves named Payton and Nannie, who were an inheritance from Hensley’s father. Parthena was born in 1843 or 1844. When she was about 17 years old, Parthena had a child by her second master, William Wyatt. The child, named Newton, was born into slavery about 1862. Parthena also had a daughter Lucinda, born about 1865. Interestingly in 1870 the census taker recorded the surnames of Parthena and her two children as Wyatt, not Hensley. They still resided in the Wyatt household.<sup>64</sup>

The salient points in the stories of Anthony Hensley and Parthena Wyatt are that they lived in close quarters with their masters and that they remained in the Wyatt



Figure 11. Parthena Wyatt later in life. Sara Jo Fendley collection, Buffalo National River.

household after emancipation. In the case of Parthena, that continuity allowed her to maintain enduring relationships with both her half-sister Louisa and her children. If her sexual relations with William Wyatt were not necessarily consensual, the relationship was at least open and did not drive her away from the Wyatt family when slavery ended.<sup>65</sup>

Piety or “Aunt Pity” Villines was the slave of Hezekiah and Elizabeth Villines. Brought into the area as a young girl, she was part of the community of Boxley Valley. Villines family tradition holds that Piety was considered a companion to Elizabeth rather than a slave, and that the two women promised to care for each other in old age. Although Piety and her firstborn son Tim were listed as a separate household in the census of 1870, Piety apparently remained close with her former owner. Piety died on July 4, 1884, at

<sup>63</sup> *Newton County Historical Society Newsletter*, 14, no. 3 (Fall 1998): 20.

<sup>64</sup> James J. Johnston, “Slaves in Searcy and Newton Counties,” *Searcy County Ancestor Information Exchange*, 7, no. 1 (June 1997): 16; U.S. Census Office, *Slave Schedules – Arkansas, 1850 Census*, M 432, Roll 32, Arkansas History Commission; U.S. Census Office, *Slave Schedules – Arkansas*, M 653, Roll 54, Arkansas History Commission; *Newton County Historical Society Newsletter*, 14, no. 3 (Fall 1998): 20; *Newton County Historical Society Newsletter*, 14, no. 2 (Summer 1998), 14-15.

<sup>65</sup> It should be noted that Parthena did not have a long relationship with her mother. Not only was she given to the Wyatts at age 5, evidently her mother either died or was sold when she was a child. The only woman in Hensley’s slaveholding in 1850 who might have been Parthena’s mother was no longer in Hensley’s slaveholding in 1860.

the age of 68, and was buried in the same family burial plot with Elizabeth. Her son Tim remained in Newton County until his death and was buried with his family in Beechwood Cemetery near Ponca.<sup>66</sup>

Census records hint that a few other former slaves elected to stay in the Buffalo River watershed after emancipation. The 1870 census listed one Rachel Holder, a 40-year-old black woman, as head of household, together with her eight children who ranged in age from 21 years to 7 months. Of these children, four or five were old enough to have been counted in the 1860 census's slave schedule. The 1860 census did not record the names of slaves, but it listed nine slaves belonging to a Joseph Holder in Bear Creek Township. From these data one might suppose that Rachel Holder and her older children were the former slaves of Joseph Holder, and that they chose to stay in the area after their emancipation, albeit starting their own household.<sup>67</sup> In another example, the Laffoon family history states that an emancipated slave named "Uncle Dale Bob" chose to remain with his elderly mistress on the lower Buffalo.<sup>68</sup>

Other slaves in the Buffalo River valley left the area after they were freed, which could lead to the inference that their former situations under slavery were more repellant than, for example, Anthony Hensley's. How many slaves were in the valley at the end of slavery cannot be stated with certainty, but the slave schedule in the 1860 census provides the basis for a reasonable estimate. In 1860 there were four slaves in the Buffalo Township of Marion County who probably resided on the river. Two slaves were listed in Richland Township, Searcy County, and it can be stated that these two were Anthony Hensley and Parthena Wyatt. Two slaves were listed in Van Buren Township, Newton County, and it may be assumed that these two were Piety and Timothy Villines. Two slaves were listed in Tomahawk Township, one belonging to Abner Hall and one to William Price. Finally, there were a total of 70 slaves listed among slaveholders residing in Bear Creek and Calf Creek townships, Searcy County. The population in these two townships was strung along the creek bottoms and extended to the towns of Lebanon and Burrowsville (Marshall) some ten to fifteen miles south of the Buffalo River. Thus, there may have been as many as 80 slaves in the Buffalo River watershed in 1860, and perhaps as many as 8 to 10 slaves situated on farms located on or near the river itself.<sup>69</sup>

Arkansas had one of the smallest populations of free blacks of any southern state, and probably no free blacks lived in the Buffalo River valley in the antebellum period. A few free blacks did live on the White River not far from Buffalo National River. Historian Billy D. Higgins has researched the lives and experiences of free blacks on the White River. There was David Hall, a free black from Tennessee, who settled with his wife on the White River about seven miles below the Little North Fork. He obtained fee

<sup>66</sup> National Park Service, "Black History Month," by Suzie Rogers, February 2, 1989; Johnston, "Slaves in Searcy and Newton Counties," 12-15.

<sup>67</sup> 1860 and 1870 census data abstracted in Johnston, "Slaves in Searcy and Newton Counties," 12-15. It is uncertain if the Holder family lived in or outside the current boundary of Buffalo National River.

<sup>68</sup> Harrell, ed., *History and Folklore*, 54-55.

<sup>69</sup> U.S. Census Office, *Slave Schedules – Arkansas*, M 653, Roll 54, Arkansas History Commission.



patent to his land in 1848 and made a living by selling deer hides and whiskey to traders on the White River. Eventually David Hall was patriarch to a large community of free black families living in the vicinity, including six families by the name of Hall. In the censuses of 1830, 1840, and 1850 these families were listed as "mulattos," a term sometimes used to indicate free blacks. There was Peter Caulder, born in South Carolina in 1795, the son of a free black farmer, who served in the army in the War of 1812 and afterwards re-enlisted and was stationed at Fort Smith. In the 1820s, he was sent to the White River country to observe the movements of Cherokee and locate mineral deposits. After leaving the army, he moved to the Little North Fork area and married Eliza Hall, a member of the Hall clan.<sup>70</sup> In addition to the free blacks of Marion County described by Higgins, there was Sarah Pullman, born in Tennessee in 1804, who came to the upper White River drainage in 1828 according to Newton County historian Walter Lackey. Lackey indicates that Pullman was the mother of six mulatto children, all born in Osage Township, just west of Buffalo National River. In 1850, he states, they were the only free blacks in Newton County.<sup>71</sup>

Free blacks lived precariously in antebellum Arkansas. The state legislature frequently considered bills to enslave free blacks or force them out of the state. In 1838 it enacted legislation restricting free blacks from entering the state, although the law was unenforceable. Calls to expel free blacks from the state gained force during the 1850s, and the legislature passed a law in 1859 that prohibited free blacks to remain in the state after January 1, 1860. This law appears to have had the desired effect as most free blacks fled the state. The 1860 census enumerated only 144 free blacks in the entire state, while the population in Marion County fell from 129 in 1850 to just 8 people ten years later.<sup>72</sup>

## SUMMARY

A large proportion of Buffalo River valley residents migrated to the area from the southern Appalachian highlands. Like the white population in the southern Appalachian highlands, they were predominantly of English and Scots-Irish extraction. By the time of the Civil War, the people of the Buffalo River valley, together with inhabitants of the whole Ozark region and the southern Appalachian areas of east Tennessee, northern Georgia and Alabama, and the western arms of Virginia and North Carolina, formed a distinctive American subculture known as the "Highland South."

The outstanding example of a surviving pioneer farm from this era is the Parker-Hickman farm house, which contains original elements from the antebellum period. Other physical traces of this era can be found in the crumbling remains of chimneys and

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<sup>70</sup> Billy D. Higgins, "The Origins and Fate of the Marion County Free Black Community," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, 54, no. 4 (Winter 1995): 427-443; Billy D. Higgins, "Caulder, Peter," in *Arkansas Biography: A Collection of Notable Lives*, edited by Nancy A. Williams (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2000), 57-58.

<sup>71</sup> Lackey, *History of Newton County, Arkansas*, 60-61.

<sup>72</sup> Ira Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974), 136, 372-373; Pitcaithley, "Settlement of the Arkansas Ozarks," 221.

foundations and cemetery headstones. Although little physical evidence of the early settlement period in the Buffalo River valley is extant in Buffalo National River today, the period of Euro-American exploration and settlement created cultural landscape patterns that would persist long afterward. The land became thickly settled by small farms, which were concentrated along river and creek bottoms. The rural population gave rise to small, relatively isolated communities based around farming. Forms of agriculture were oriented mainly to subsistence rather than participation in a wider market economy, and revolved around the cultivation of vegetables and grains (especially corn), and the raising of livestock (mostly cattle and hogs) by open range grazing in the surrounding forest.

The few African-Americans who inhabited the Buffalo River valley in the antebellum period were enslaved to small farmers and lived in isolation from the slave community that formed on large southern plantations, but who may have been able to form relationships with other slaves on nearby farms. Stories have been passed down about individual African-Americans who maintained ties with the area and their erstwhile white families after emancipation. These stories must be considered with care as they only hint at the complexities and hardships of slave life in the Buffalo River valley.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SECESSION AND CIVIL WAR

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The Civil War forms a divide in the history of the Buffalo River just as it constitutes a profound break in the course of southern history. Few regions in the country suffered the blight of guerilla warfare as intensely as did the highland counties in northwest Arkansas. At war's end, the land bore the ravages of four years of fighting: abandoned farms and fields, burned-out homes, cemeteries filled with whole families that had been destroyed by bandits, caves-turned-homes for frightened refugees, roads overgrown by brush and blocked by fallen timber. A distraught resident of Marion County reported in February 1865 that several counties in northern Arkansas were "almost depopulated."<sup>1</sup>

The people of the Buffalo River valley were deeply divided in their sympathies when the war began. A large number of residents – perhaps a majority in some areas – were "Unionist." But Unionism meant different things to different people, and for many it was, at least initially, a desire to sit out a war that they felt no stake in. By the end of 1861 it was clear that no one could choose neutrality in this war. The armies of North and South swept back and forth across Arkansas and southern Missouri, spinning off small units of armed fighting men who, returning to their home counties, were a confounding mix of scout, home guard, and deserter. Both sides levied troops in the area, and their efforts to turn out recruits (or stymie those efforts by their opponents) grew increasingly desperate and brutal.

Two primary factors were responsible for making the war experience what it became in the Buffalo River valley. First, the population was approximately evenly divided between those who would support the Confederacy and those who would not. Second, the state was not a vital interest to either side; Union strategy in the West focused on control of the Mississippi Valley, and Confederate strategy in the West was to treat the Trans-Mississippi Department as expendable. Neither side committed the troop levels needed to secure this region from enemy action. And so the civilian population was left to suffer a simmering guerilla campaign that lasted through most of the war.

Buffalo National River contains a number of historic resources associated with the Civil War period. Several caves in the area were mined for saltpeter by Confederate forces for Confederate munitions production. There were numerous skirmishes fought in the area. Many family cemeteries hold the graves of soldier and citizen victims of the Civil War with headstones bearing faint and poignant inscriptions.

This chapter is in four sections. The first section discusses the secession crisis and peace movement along the Buffalo River in 1860-61. The second section describes the military campaigns in Arkansas and Missouri that made the Buffalo River region such a no-man's-land for much of the war. The third section describes the Buffalo River's

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<sup>1</sup> James W. Orr, Representative of Marion County, to Governor of Arkansas, February 21, 1865, *Official Records of the War of the Rebellion* (hereafter cited as *OR*), series 1, vol. 48, part 1, 931-932.

salt peter mines and their role in the war. The fourth and final section discusses the guerrilla war experience in the area.

Throughout this chapter frequent reference is made to “northwest Arkansas.” For people who lived along the Buffalo River, secession and war deepened their identification with their state and made the Arkansas-Missouri line a frontier between nations. At the same time, secession and war tended to isolate the people of the Buffalo River – and their fellow Arkansans in neighboring counties – from their compatriots in other parts of the state. Unionism ran strong not only along the Buffalo but elsewhere in Newton, Searcy, and Marion counties and also in Benton, Washington, Madison, Carroll, Fulton, and Izard counties – the whole double tier of counties that stretched from the northwest corner of Arkansas eastward to the White River valley. For this period in the history of the Buffalo River, northwest Arkansas is a more meaningful regional context than the Ozark plateau.

## SECESSION

The Unionism that became so manifest in northwest Arkansas during the Civil War had its roots in national and state politics prior to the war. As North and South grew increasingly estranged over the slavery question in the decades leading to the Civil War, the white population in the highland counties of northwest Arkansas registered little interest in the issue. Most of the settlers in the region were born and bred southerners and shared an innate sympathy for “southern rights,” but few of them owned slaves and therefore they did not feel moved to defend slavery. The growth of slavery and large cotton plantations in the southern and lowland parts of the state only reinforced these farmers’ sense that planters were coalescing too much power in the state and that their own interests were not aligned with the planters’ interests.

The slavery question and other sectional differences gave rise to new political parties in the 1850s, notably the Republican Party, which managed to unite northern “free soil” farmers, abolitionists, and business interests. With broad appeal in the North and no support in the South, the Republican Party nominated Abraham Lincoln for president in 1860. The Democratic Party, meanwhile, splintered into northern and southern factions, with the northern wing fielding Stephen Douglas and the southern wing choosing John C. Breckinridge. The Constitutional Union Party, composed mostly of former members of the defunct Whig Party, nominated John Bell of Tennessee. With the vote divided among four candidates, Lincoln was able to win a majority of the electoral votes and the presidency even though the Republican Party was anathema to southern voters. Lincoln’s election provoked a secession crisis that ultimately led to war.

Given their indifference toward the slavery issue, one might expect that the people along the Buffalo would have voted for John Bell, the candidate of compromise. However, the vote in the northwest Arkansas counties went solidly for John C. Breckinridge, the candidate of the southern wing of the divided Democratic Party, while the planters and business owners in the lowland counties of Arkansas voted

predominantly for Bell. “It may seem strange that the candidate most identified with slavery and states’ rights found such great support in northwestern Arkansas, where slavery was least developed,” writes historian Thomas A. DeBlack. “But that part of the state had always been staunchly Democratic, and the best explanation may be that those voters were more influenced by party loyalty than by the overheated rhetoric about slavery.”<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the pattern was repeated elsewhere across the South; non-slaveholding white southerners turned out for the Democratic Party not because it was pro-slavery but because they saw it as the party of Andrew Jackson and the common man.



Map 6. Process of Secession. Numbers indicate the order in which states seceded.

The tumultuous election of 1860 was also pivotal at the state level. In the 1850s the Democratic Party dominated Arkansas politics to such a degree that leading state Democrats were known as the “Family” or “Dynasty.” But in 1860, two prominent Arkansas Democrats led an insurgency against the Dynasty and Arkansas voters responded. The first to open the breach was Congressman Thomas C. Hindman, a planter from Helena, Arkansas, whose gift for oratory soon won him a popular following. The second was Henry Rector, a planter from Saline County, who announced in May 1860 his candidacy for governor as an Independent Democrat. Rector defeated Senator Robert Ward Johnson in the governor’s race, ending the Dynasty’s control of Arkansas politics. Hindman and Rector were successful with Arkansas voters because they portrayed themselves as the true representatives of the party of Andrew Jackson and the common man, while contending that Johnson and the Dynasty were corrupt and narrowly represented the privileged. It was local, not national, issues that separated the two candidates. While Johnson was the more vociferously pro-slavery of the two candidates, Rector, too, insisted on the rights of southerners to expand slavery into the territories and to secede from the Union if conditions demanded it. When the gubernatorial ballots were

<sup>2</sup> DeBlack, *With Fire and Sword: Arkansas, 1861-1874*, 18.

counted in August 1860, Rector carried the northwest counties by similar slim margins to those registered in other parts of the state.<sup>3</sup>

After the election of Abraham Lincoln, most Arkansans were probably inclined to agree with the former Whig Party leader, Albert Pike, who argued that the Republican Party's triumph did not by itself signify a need for secession. But Governor Rector, taking office on November 15, soon sounded a more alarmist note in his inaugural address, while Congressman Hindman and Senator Johnson speaking from their respective seats in Congress were even more combative. After South Carolina became the first southern state to withdraw from the Union in December, these two former political foes closed ranks and issued a joint call for a state convention to consider secession. Petitions both for and against a secession convention flooded the state legislature, and on January 15, 1861 the state legislature passed a measure calling for voters to decide, in a special election on February 18, whether or not to call a convention and to elect delegates.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, between January 9 and February 1, six more southern states joined South Carolina in pulling out of the Union. Each of these states, too, had called a convention to decide on secession.

The election brought forward candidates who were either "secessionist" or "Unionist." But the Unionist position was complicated. In the first place, most Unionist candidates appealed to voters to vote against calling the convention, but also to choose a Unionist delegate in the event that a majority of voters favored calling the convention; therefore, they practically had to define themselves as an obstructionist minority. Moreover, Unionists were of different shadings. Most were "conditional Unionists," meaning that they would oppose secession up to a point, provided that northern and southern politicians were able to construct a satisfactory compromise. Much rarer were "unconditional Unionists," or those who wanted to preserve the Union even if it would jeopardize the future of slavery.<sup>5</sup>

Underscoring the complexity of the Unionist position, state citizens voted in favor of holding a secession convention by nearly two to one, but a majority of the delegates they elected to the convention were opposed to secession. Slaveholders were disproportionately well represented. Although only one in five Arkansans was a slaveholder, 47 out of 77 of the men elected to the secession convention owned slaves, and 17 of them had large holdings of 20 or more slaves. Predictably, the larger slaveholders leaned toward secession while the men of more modest means tended to oppose it. Delegates representing the less wealthy counties of northwest Arkansas were the most staunchly opposed to secession. Delegates elected David Walker of Fayetteville, Washington County, a former Whig and conservative, to serve as president of the convention. After a week of debate, secessionists introduced a motion for the convention to pass an ordinance of secession that would go into effect only upon ratification by another statewide ballot initiative. This tentative measure was rejected by

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 10-15.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 18-20.

<sup>5</sup> James M. Woods, *Rebellion and Realignment: Arkansas's Road to Secession* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1987), 151.

a narrow majority of 39 to 35. Finally near the end of March the convention adjourned with a plan to reconvene after another statewide balloting on August 5 on the question of "cooperation" or "secession."<sup>6</sup>

In April the political situation changed dramatically. First, South Carolina's attempt to blockade Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor, and President Lincoln's decision to reinforce it, seemed to confirm for many southerners that the southern states could not expect compromise from the new Republican administration in Washington. Then, after Confederate forces fired on Fort Sumter and Lincoln resolved to raise a federal army to put down the "rebellion," secessionist feeling intensified. The president's call for troops, including 780 volunteers from the state of Arkansas, seemed to auger a strategy of coercion, not cooperation, for wavering southern states. Governor Rector defied the president's request for troops, and more, he seized federal arsenals at Fort Smith and Little Rock and allowed Confederate artillery to be placed in Helena to control the Mississippi. The Fort Sumter crisis redefined the political equation. As Virginia became the first state in the Upper South to secede, and as the seceded states began to form a Confederate government, it now seemed that Arkansas must either stay in the Union or join the Confederacy.<sup>7</sup>

It fell to David Walker, the president of the secession convention, to summon the delegates back into session. A strong Unionist before the Fort Sumter crisis, Walker remained doubtful toward the secessionist movement but could not ignore the shift in popular sentiment. He worried that without direction by the state convention, the eastern and southern portions of the state might secede independently. Therefore he recalled the delegates to Little Rock on May 6. A vote was taken that day and all but five delegates voted in favor of secession. Four of the five dissenting votes were from highland counties in northwest Arkansas. After this vote, Walker called upon the five dissenters to change their votes so that the wires might "carry the news to all the world that Arkansas stands as a unit against coercion." Four of the five consented to change their vote; the fifth, Isaac Murphy of Madison County, an Ozark mountain farmer, steadfastly refused. "I have cast my vote after mature reflection, and have duly considered the consequences, and I cannot conscientiously change it," he boldly stated. "I therefore vote no!"<sup>8</sup>

One of the four dissenters who agreed to change his vote was John Campbell of Searcy County. After the convention concluded its business, Campbell returned to his home on Calf Creek (several miles south of the Buffalo River) to find that many people in the area were upset with his vote for secession. Campbell was a prominent citizen of the county in 1861; he had served as county judge from 1840 to 1842 and was twice elected to the state legislature as a Whig. In 1860 he owned a farm of 240 acres (80 acres improved and 160 acres unimproved), and produced a thousand bushels of corn. He was neither a slaveholder nor a cotton farmer. When Campbell learned of the reports that he

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<sup>6</sup> Ralph Wooster, "The Arkansas Secession Convention," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 12 (Summer 1954): 182-183.

<sup>7</sup> Woods, *Rebellion and Realignment*, 153-155; James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 282.

<sup>8</sup> Walker and Murphy quoted in Woods, *Rebellion and Realignment*, 159-160.

had “turned Secessionists, turned traitor, and played the (Devil) generally,” he wrote a lengthy letter of explanation to Neal Walters of Eureka Springs. In this letter Campbell stated that he was the last delegate to agree to change his vote and did so only because he “did not wish to make Searcy County the pillige [sic] ground for the Desperadoes both North and South” – a remarkably prescient thought. Campbell and the other three men who changed their votes insisted they were voting for “revolution” not secession, which they believed to be unconstitutional. Campbell held to this principle even when the other three dissenters subsequently recanted in a signed statement inserted into the *Journal of the Convention*. “I never signed the devlish [sic] instrument,” Campbell wrote of that statement. He described subsequent war measures taken by the convention that he had opposed, and insisted “My love for the Constitution and old union glows in my Bosome with as much fervor as ever; and I still have a lingering prospect that we will get back; when the storm fury and when the passions of men are subdued.”<sup>9</sup>

Campbell’s letter is significant not only for what it says about Campbell but also what it reveals about his fellow citizens in Searcy County. Campbell was an educated farmer and it cannot be known how closely his opinions resembled those of other settlers in the Buffalo River region. Certainly his actions at the convention and his remarks afterwards reflect a thoughtful and nuanced blend of local, state, and national interests, and as the people’s delegate his views must have resonated with their own. Campbell’s ideas are in contrast to the image of the Ozark mountain farmer living in such isolation that his political views were strictly parochial. Vance Randolph, for example, wrote that the highland farmers “took very little interest in the rumors of war which reached their isolated settlements. The typical Ozarker in those days was concerned solely with local affairs.”<sup>10</sup> To the contrary, one finds numerous instances of Ozark dwellers writing of their commitment to the “old Constitution,” the “old Union,” or the “old flag,” in similar terms to Campbell.

But historians have also erred by reading too much devotion to the Union cause into the actions of northern Arkansas people who were interested mainly in trying to stay out of the conflict. In the fall of 1861, some Ozark dwellers formed secret societies aimed at resisting Confederate authority. These shadowy organizations went by various names: the Home Protection Society, the Home Guard, the Pro Bono Publico Society, the Peace Society. Although each group was autonomous, they seem to have shared a set of secret signs and oaths of allegiance. As historian Dwight T. Pitcaithley observes, the aims of these groups were never made clear and likely evinced defense rather than neutrality.<sup>11</sup> The constitution of one such peace organization declared that its sole purpose was for members “to combine together for the mutual protection of themselves and their families and their property.” A citizen of Fulton County who was under arrest when he testified before a military board about his group stated that “the object of the society was for keeping down mobs, and protecting our property from being destroyed.” Another prisoner from Fulton County said “this institution was to be a peace society,

<sup>9</sup> James J. Johnston, ed., “Letter of John Campbell, Unionist,” *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, 29 (Summer 1970), 176-182; quotations from letter on 181.

<sup>10</sup> Randolph, *The Ozarks: An American Survival of Primitive Society*, 18.

<sup>11</sup> Pitcaithley, *Let the River Be*, 41.



unconnected with Lincoln's army." One individual testified that he "would not fight [the] enemy" unless Arkansas was invaded.<sup>12</sup>

The peace society was spread by word of mouth. Members took an oath and learned secret signals in order to join. Fathers recruited their sons; neighbor recruited neighbor. Sometimes several people were sworn in at one gathering, which might occur in a member's house or at a predetermined spot in the country. Meetings were small to avoid attracting attention. Oaths of allegiance and constitutions were put in writing and passed from group to group in spite of the danger involved in these transmittals. Some people claimed that the organization was brought down from the North, but there is no evidence to support this.<sup>13</sup>

Interest in the peace society quickened in the face of Confederate recruitment efforts. On November 17, 1861, in Clinton, Van Buren County, six men were arrested when they revealed the existence of the peace society. As Confederate authorities began making additional arrests, word was spread among peace society members and a party of members led by Fulton County's state representative J. J. Ware fled to Missouri to join the Union army. This provoked Confederate sympathizers, who were fearful that a conspiracy was afoot, to take up arms and go in search of conspirators. County officials called the armed citizens "scouting parties," but to the people who were arrested they appeared as a mob. Similar events unfolded at the same time in Searcy County. Some 27 men were put in chains and marched to Little Rock to stand trial for conspiracy.<sup>14</sup>

Unionists in Searcy County were not to be cowed into submission easily. On November 25, David C. Ruff, a farmer in Calf Creek Township, held a mass meeting of Unionists at his home. Some 30 to 40 people attended, and a resolution was read aloud and approved which deplored the actions of Confederate officials in marching the prisoners to Little Rock.<sup>15</sup>

On November 28, Governor Rector wrote to President Jefferson Davis about the "conspiracy" discovered in the northern part of his state. He believed the conspirators' intentions were to join the northern army if it should get into Arkansas. The same day, the governor wrote to officials in Searcy and Izard counties directing them to call out the militia and "proceed to arrest all men in your county who profess friendship for the Lincoln government – or who harbor or support others arousing hostility to the Confederate States or the State of Arkansas." After making the arrests the militia was to

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<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Ted R. Worley, "Documents Relating to the Arkansas Peace Society of 1861," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, 17 (Spring 1958), 87, 98, 99, 101.

<sup>13</sup> Worley, "Documents Relating to the Arkansas Peace Society of 1861," 99-101.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 86; DeBlack, *With Fire and Sword: Arkansas, 1861-1874*, 30; Henry M. Rector to Jefferson Davis, November 28, 1861, *OR*, series 1, vol. 8, part 1, 699.

<sup>15</sup> A. W. Bishop, *Loyalty on the Frontier* (St. Louis: A. P. Studley & Company, 1863), 134; Luther E. Warren, *Yellar Rag Boys: The Arkansas Peace Society of 1861 and other events in Northern Arkansas, 1861 to 1865*, edited by Sandra L. Weaver, Amy M. Cranford, and Bernard L. Cranford, Jr. (Marshall, Arkansas: Sandra L. Weaver, 1993), 2-3.

march these prisoners to Little Rock “where they will be dealt with, as enemies of their country.”

In Searcy County, this grim assignment fell to the reluctant Colonel Sam Leslie, commander of the Searcy County militia (45<sup>th</sup> Regiment Arkansas Militia). He called out the militia company by company, one in each township, to question suspected members of the peace society and make arrests. Many peace society members fled their homes; others surrendered themselves. Leslie’s command covered the portion of Searcy County south of the Buffalo River, while Captain John R. H. Scott, commanding a battalion of the Pope County Volunteer Cavalry, canvassed the area north of the Buffalo River in Marion, Searcy, Newton, and Carroll counties. Altogether the Confederate forces arrested 100 more men. The prisoners were temporarily jailed in the old log courthouse in Burrowsville (Marshall), the jail at Clinton, and at Camp Culloden, Carroll County (now Boone County). In early December, Leslie shackled the men in pairs and marched them more than 90 miles to the state capital. There they were joined by more prisoners arriving from Fulton and Van Buren counties.<sup>16</sup>

Governor Rector addressed the prisoners in person, stating that he was giving each man the choice of volunteering to fight for the Confederacy or standing trial for treason. If they chose the latter, he told them, he was confident they would be found guilty and hanged. All but fifteen of the men chose to join the Confederate army. Ironically, the fifteen who refused to enlist were never indicted. Many of the men who did enlist deserted at the first opportunity, and some of these men eventually got themselves to Rolla, Missouri to join the Union army. One such Unionist was John W. Morris, the son-in-law of John Campbell of Calf Creek Township.<sup>17</sup>

At least one peace society member lived on the Buffalo River and his name is preserved in the park development at Tyler Bend. Peter Adams Tyler was born in Lawrence County, Arkansas in 1823. He was ten years old when his parents, Baker and Agnes Adams Tyler, moved to the Buffalo River valley. In 1850, his farmstead was in Tomahawk Township and it consisted of 8 acres improved and 30 acres unimproved with a value of \$250. A few years before the war he purchased two 40-acre tracts from John M. Hensley on a bend of the Buffalo River later named Tyler Bend. He secured another 40-acre tract from the United States, which his father occupied. At the time of his arrest he was just shy of 38 years old.<sup>18</sup>

Tyler was initiated into the peace society in mid-November, shortly before the secret society was exposed. D. Jamison, a resident of Calf Creek Township, and another

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<sup>16</sup> Pitcaithley, *Let the River Be*, 43; DeBlack, *With Fire and Sword: Arkansas, 1861-1874*, 30-31; Bishop, *Loyalty on the Frontier*, 128-129. Information about the Searcy County Militia and the Pope County Volunteer Cavalry was provided by James J. Johnston to the author.

<sup>17</sup> Pitcaithley, *Let the River Be*, 43; DeBlack, *With Fire and Sword: Arkansas, 1861-1874*, 30-31; Bishop, *Loyalty on the Frontier*, 128-129.

<sup>18</sup> James K. Tyler, “Peter Adams Tyler,” 1990, typescript in historical files, BNR; Suzanne D. Rogers, “Historic Resources of the Tyler Bend Development Area,” Harrison, Arkansas: National Park Service, Buffalo National River, 1987, 9-10.

man named Long, explained to Tyler what the peace society was about. According to Tyler's testimony made after his arrest, Jamison and Long described it as a "home protection" society whose only purpose was to protect family, friends, and property. Jamison said that it came from the North and was spreading all over the South. "I then told him," Tyler later testified, "I was no northern man...what I have is here." But satisfied that the society was for home protection, Tyler took the oath. Two other men, Samuel Grinder and Josiah Lane, took the oath with him. Then Jamison explained a number of secret signs to them. When approaching another member in the dark a member was to hoot like an owl and the other was to answer with a howl like a wolf. When coming to a society meeting in the evening a member was supposed to say, "It is a very dark night," to which the host would reply, "Not so dark as it will be in the morning." You could tell the house of a peace society member if the owner hung a piece of yellow ribbon, calico, or flannel on his door. (This sign led to the term "Yaller Rag Boys.") After he was initiated, Tyler visited many of his neighbors (perhaps in company with Jamison or Long) and swore them in. Three or four weeks later, after his arrest, he listed by name as many of these men as he could remember – 32 in all.<sup>19</sup>

On December 18 Tyler was captured by Scott's Volunteer Cavalry and taken to Camp Culloden, Carroll County for questioning. It was there that he testified about his involvement in the peace society, giving a long statement to Justice of the Peace Kelly Featherston. At the end of his testimony Tyler reiterated, "I told Jamison I was not no northern man...all I had was here. I told him I did not like the oath...he said there was nothing wrong about it & he did not want any thing said about it, wanted it secret not to tell any body of it although it was all over the South or something to this amount." After taking down Tyler's testimony, the justice of the peace ordered that he be taken under guard to Little Rock and surrendered to the governor.<sup>20</sup>

Tyler was among the men who enlisted in the Confederate army rather than stand trial. With other peace society members he became a soldier in the 18<sup>th</sup> Arkansas Infantry Regiment, a unit that was quickly sent across the Mississippi River to join in the defense of western Tennessee. On January 17, 1862, Tyler wrote a letter to his family, which survived through the years and was recently given to the National Park Service by Tyler's descendants. "We have very disheartening news," Tyler wrote from camp near Bowling Green, Kentucky. "This morning they say hear that the Union is a gradeel stronger than us and that we are surrounded on all sides by them."<sup>21</sup> That was the last his family heard from him. It seems that his kin were never notified of his death, and for Tyler's descendants who have researched the family history, the circumstances of his death remain a mystery. Perhaps he died of an unspecified illness that was bothering him when he wrote the letter, or perhaps he caught the measles that he mentioned had just appeared in his company. Or possibly he was killed in the Battle of Shiloh three months later. The 18<sup>th</sup> Arkansas took heavy losses in the fighting that day, and the regimental officers might have been too overwhelmed to inform all the families of the dead.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Tyler quoted in Worley, "Documents Relating to the Arkansas Peace Society of 1861," 94-96.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 96.

<sup>21</sup> Peter Tyler to Dear Wife and Children, January 17, 1862, original letter in archives, BNR.

<sup>22</sup> Tyler, "Peter Adams Tyler."

## MILITARY CAMPAIGNS

The two largest Civil War battles fought on Arkansas soil both occurred in the northwest corner of the state, at Pea Ridge and Prairie Grove, located about fifty miles northwest and west of Buffalo National River respectively. Northwest Arkansas had strategic importance primarily as a linchpin for Union control of both Missouri and the Indian Territory. Once the Confederate army could no longer seriously threaten Missouri, then all of Arkansas and the whole Trans-Mississippi theatre faded into the background of Union and Confederate grand strategy. But this only transformed the fighting from a conventional conflict between organized armies into what historian Robert R. Mackey has called “a brutal guerilla struggle that involved all levels of Arkansas society.”<sup>23</sup> In the latter phases of the war, the rugged Buffalo River drainage became the scene of numerous skirmishes between Union cavalry scouts and Rebel guerilla bands. Less frequent but also prevalent were small actions between Confederate cavalry units and “Mountain Feds” or Union guerilla fighters.



Figure 12. Battle of Pea Ridge. *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, 1866.

Missouri was an early prize for Confederate ambitions, a border state with tenuous allegiance to the Union and the most populous state west of the Mississippi River. Major General Sterling Price, a former governor of Missouri, led a Rebel army into southwest Missouri in 1861, repelling a Union army at the battle of Wilson's Creek in August. But the hard-fought battle was costly

for both sides, and though Price captured and held Springfield through the winter of 1861-62, he was compelled to fall back into northern Arkansas in the spring.<sup>24</sup>

Taking command of the Union army in Missouri, Brigadier General Samuel R. Curtis invaded northern Arkansas in February 1862 with 10,000 men. The Confederate army that confronted him was more than twice as large and included 1,000 Cherokee. At Pea Ridge, the Confederate commander, Major General Earl Van Dorn, tried to surprise the Union army with his superior force but in the ensuing battle (March 7-8) the Union army held the high ground and was victorious. Van Dorn was ordered to withdraw from Arkansas and reinforce Confederate defenses east of the Mississippi.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Robert R. Mackey, “Bushwhackers, Provosts, and Tories: The Guerilla War in Arkansas,” *Guerillas, Unionists, and Violence on the Confederate Home Front*, edited by Daniel E. Sutherland (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1999), 171.

<sup>24</sup> Rafferty, *The Ozarks: Land and Life*, 85-86.

<sup>25</sup> Stephen B. Oates, *Confederate Cavalry West of the River* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1961), 37.

Governor Rector complained to President Davis that Arkansas was now practically undefended. He warned that the state might secede from the Confederacy and negotiate a separate peace if it did not receive military support. In response, Davis appointed Major General Thomas C. Hindman, the former Arkansas congressman, commander of the Trans-Mississippi Department and gave him the task of raising a new army. With fanatical determination, Hindman began a vigorous push for conscripts, sending enrolling officers into all parts of the state including the counties of northwest Arkansas where citizens were still reeling from the destruction of the peace society. Hindman declared his intention to organize an army "to drive out the enemy or to perish in the attempt."<sup>26</sup>

One of Hindman's measures was to issue General Order Number 17, a directive aimed at the formation of guerilla units in enemy occupied areas. Called "partisan rangers," these units were to operate independently of the organized army and tie down Federal troops. The sanctioning of guerilla warfare would be of huge consequence for the Buffalo River area. But Hindman took other drastic measures as well. He declared martial law, established military-run factories, executed deserters, and ordered that cotton and other property should be burned rather than fall into enemy hands. Although these harsh measures prevented the Union army from taking Little Rock in the summer of 1862, they were too much for many citizens of the state who demanded his ouster. By July, President Davis was forced to remove him from the command and reorganize the department.<sup>27</sup>

Meanwhile, Curtis had led his northern army down the White River to Batesville in April from which he threatened to march on the capital. Instead he continued down the White River to Helena, where Curtis made his headquarters on Hindman's plantation and freed Hindman's slaves. On this march, the Union army was joined by growing numbers of runaway slaves, who received "free papers" as contraband of war, and in this way obtained their freedom months before Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation.<sup>28</sup>

The new Confederate commander of the Trans-Mississippi Department was Major General Theophilis Holmes. He put Hindman in charge of the Arkansas district. The passionate and aggressive Hindman soon had his forces in northwest Arkansas, threatening an invasion of southern Missouri. Union forces there were divided between two commanders, Brigadier General James Blunt and Brigadier General Francis J. Herron. Hindman conceived an attack on one force before the two forces could unite. But as the armies maneuvered, Blunt and Herron were able to form a junction for the decisive battle of Prairie Grove (December 7, 1862). The two sides traded bloody frontal assaults and suffered heavy casualties. Although the battle was tactically a draw, it was strategically decisive in ending Confederate hopes of taking Missouri.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Quoted in Oates, *Confederate Cavalry West of the River*, 38.

<sup>27</sup> DeBlack, *With Fire and Sword: Arkansas, 1861-1874*, 61.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 60-61.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 64-72.

During the first half of 1863, there was a lull in campaigning in Arkansas as the Federal army focused its energy on the capture of Vicksburg. When Vicksburg fell in early July, it signaled control of the Mississippi by the North and the first major accomplishment in the North's grand strategy of splitting the South into pieces. Arkansas was now cut off from the Confederacy east of the Mississippi. In the months following, the Federal army exploited this success by turning against the state's weak remaining defenses. Overall command of Union forces in Arkansas now went to Major General Frederick Steele. Steele called for a two-pronged invasion. Starting with his own army in Helena he marched westward. A second force under Blunt at Fort Gibson, Indian Territory, marched eastward. In September 1863, Steele took Little Rock and Blunt occupied Fort Smith.<sup>30</sup> With the removal of the Confederate government from the state capital the way was clear to establish a Unionist government and commence reconstruction. In January 1864, eligible voters in Arkansas elected Isaac Murphy, the staunch opponent of secession, as their new governor.<sup>31</sup>

But with the major military campaigns in Virginia, Tennessee, and Georgia still underway the North could only commit a minimal number of troops to occupy the conquered southern state. Remnants of the Confederate army remained at large in Arkansas. Indeed, in the early fall of 1864 the three ranking Confederate commanders in Arkansas – Brigadier Generals Sterling Price, John Marmaduke, and Joseph O. Shelby – were able to scrape together enough troops for one last raid into Missouri. After that ill-fated adventure the southern army was forced to fall back into a defensive stand in the southwest part of the state along the line of the Ouchita Mountains. Yet even in 1865 Union forces in Arkansas were too thinly scattered to go on the offensive and both sides could only await the outcome of events east of the Mississippi.<sup>32</sup>

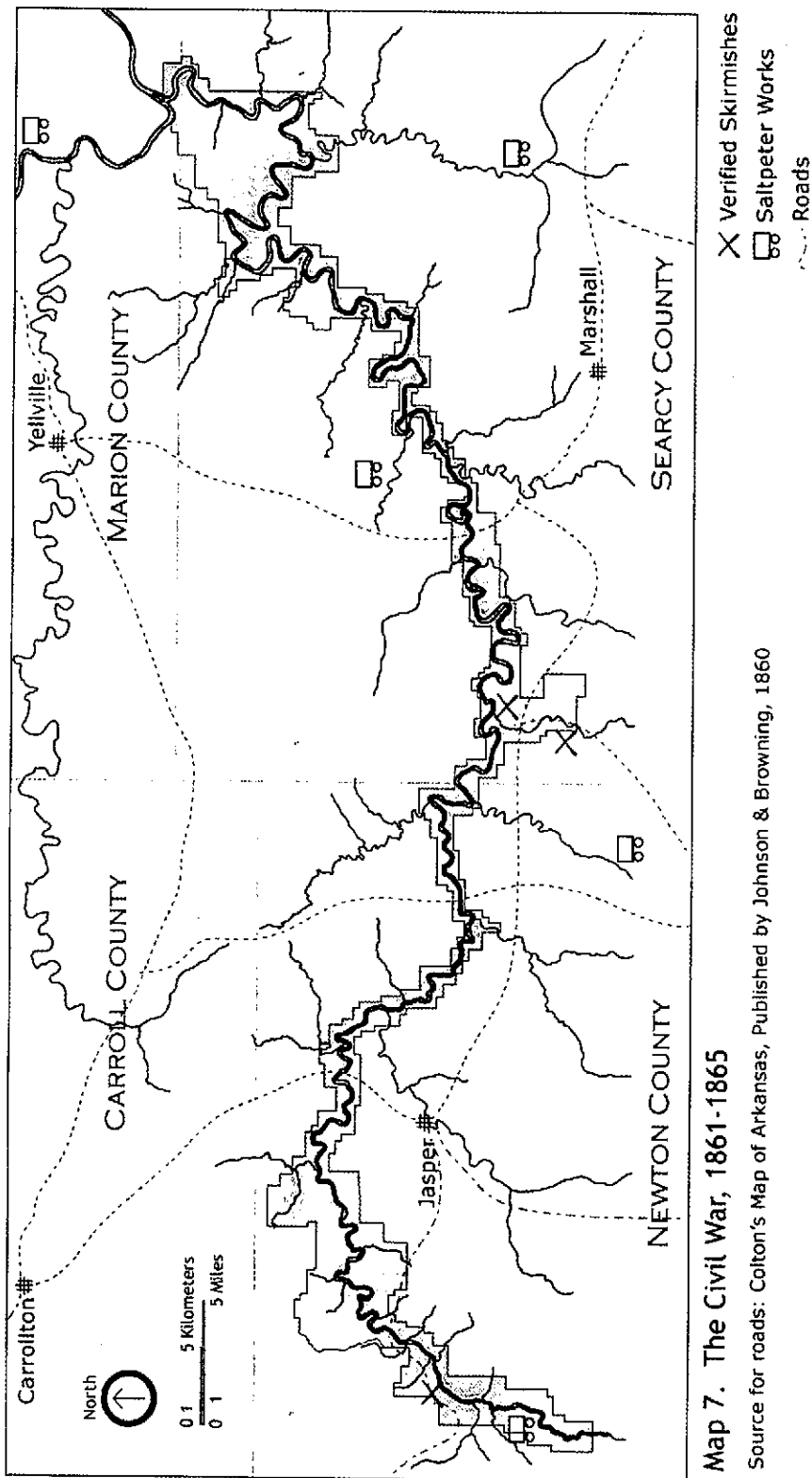
While the northern and southern armies largely skirted around the edges of the Ozarks and dueled over Arkansas as a sideshow, this is not to say that no fighting occurred in the Buffalo River valley. To the contrary, the fighting in this little corner of the embattled Confederacy was especially fitful and prolonged. It was characterized by small engagements of a few dozen or a few hundred men on each side. It was a cavalryman's war. Troops were nearly always mounted, and skirmishes were usually hit-and-run affairs with one side having the advantage of surprise and the other side the advantage of numbers. Troops generally marched into and out of the area along one of three main roads – a north-south road that led from Yellville to Lebanon (near present-day Snowball) and then onward to Burrowsville (Marshall) and Clinton; an east-west road that led from Huntsville to Jasper and then to Point Peter, from which point it followed the Buffalo River valley to Lebanon; and another north-south road that started south at Point Peter, went up Richland Creek, and over the mountains to Russellville. By following these roads the cavalry troops not only had greater mobility but also wider visibility. Guerilla bands, meanwhile, concealed themselves in the hollows at the upper end of creek drainages and on the well-timbered mountainsides. Not surprisingly,

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<sup>30</sup> Carl H. Moneyhon, *The Impact of the Civil War and Reconstruction on Arkansas: Persistence in the Midst of Ruin* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994), 124-127.

<sup>31</sup> DeBlack, *With Fire and Sword: Arkansas, 1861-1874*, 105.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 124-131, 136.



skirmishes most often took place where the roads descended from the ridge tops to the valley bottoms – on Richland Creek and along the Buffalo River from Point Peter to Lebanon.<sup>33</sup>

The Confederate cavalryman Jo Shelby was the highest ranking officer of either side to enter the area, and he did so on three separate occasions. In January 1863, Shelby led a force of about 1600 men on an expedition northward over the Boston Mountains to Yellville and Dubuque (on the Missouri border). En route, on January 3, Shelby and his men camped on the Buffalo River. Nearby, probably on the previous day, Shelby's command surprised a band of Union guerillas numbering from 60 to 100 men and killed 27.<sup>34</sup>

Shelby returned to the area in October 1863 during a 41-day, 1500-mile raid through northern Arkansas and western Missouri. On this expedition Shelby had about 600 men comprised of detachments from three regiments and two artillery pieces. Starting from south of the Arkansas River he went north by way of the towns of Ozark and Bentonville and got as far north as the Missouri River in western Missouri. On his return south, Federal troops stationed in Fayetteville attempted to intercept him. "A scout I sent from my camp to Huntsville, distant 14 miles, brought me the first intelligence of their advance," Shelby reported. "I retired slowly before them, and they as slowly followed, never urgent in their pressure until we arrived at the foot of the Buffalo Mountains, where they made a weak charge, easily repulsed."<sup>35</sup> It is not clear exactly where this skirmish occurred. A map of Shelby's route accompanying his lengthy report in the *War of the Rebellion Official Records* shows that he took the road from Kingston over the mountains to the upper Buffalo and thence in a southeasterly direction through Newton County. Possibly the foot of the Buffalo Mountains refers to the Boxley Valley.

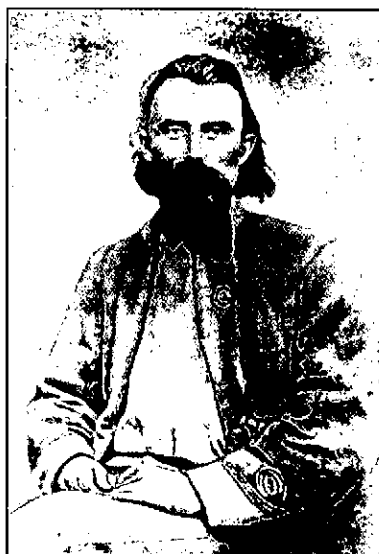


Figure 13. General Jo Shelby. *Buffalo National River*.

Shelby returned to the Buffalo a third and last time in May 1864. Combing the country for recruits in preparation for Price's final raid into Missouri, he was appalled by

<sup>33</sup> For the road system in the Civil War era, see Colton's Map of Arkansas (Johnson & Browning, 1860) and photocopy of Civil War era map of northern Arkansas accompanying excerpts from *OR* in Dwight Pitcaithley files, BNR.

<sup>34</sup> Report of Major G. W. C. Bennett, MacDonald's Missouri Cavalry, January 29, 1863, and J. S. Marmaduke, Brigadier General, to Colonel R. C. Newton, February 1, 1863, *OR*, series 1, vol. 12, part 1, 196, 208.

<sup>35</sup> Jo O. Shelby, Colonel to Major L. A. McLean, November 16, 1863, *OR*, series 1, vol. 22, part 1, 677.



the starving condition of the country. He noted the lack of forage, and lamented that his horses were “unshod, unfed, worn out, and must have rest.”<sup>36</sup> He raised just 300 recruits.

By 1864, the main Rebel army presence in the area consisted of irregular units. Each unit consisted of a few hundred men and an elected officer. Although these units operated independently from one another and were not under the command of the Confederate army, they were a deadly menace to Union forces. Union commanders worried that the Rebel irregulars would combine into a single, effective fighting force and come out of the mountains to raid and disrupt Union supply lines. It was largely in order to keep these irregular units dispersed that the Union army began making frequent scouts into the Buffalo River valley and surrounding country in December 1863. The Union forces averaged about one patrol a month through 1864. These dangerous missions fell mainly to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Arkansas (Union) Cavalry, which was organized at the beginning of 1864 under the command of Colonel John E. Phelps. Phelps and his junior officers respected the fighting capability of the irregular Rebel units, calling them “regiments” and identifying them by the names of their leaders: Colonels Love, Freeman, McRae, and Jackman.<sup>37</sup>

Captain John I. Worthington led the first of these patrols with a scant force of 112 men of the First Arkansas (Union) Cavalry and one howitzer. His orders were to scout the counties of Carroll, Marion, and Searcy, going by way of Carrollton and Yellville and returning by way of the Buffalo. At about noon on Christmas Day, 1863, his command was attacked while camped on the Buffalo near the mouth of Richland Creek. The Rebels began by attacking a Union foraging party that had gone to Richland Creek (presumably to help themselves to farm produce found there). Several of the men in the foraging party were taken prisoner and the lieutenant in charge was shot in the thigh as the remainder of the party came scurrying back with the Rebels on their heels. Worthington’s men formed a line, as did the Rebels, and the two sides exchanged fire for the next several hours. In mid-afternoon, the Rebels waved a flag of truce and proposed a suspension of hostilities until morning so that both sides could tend to the wounded and bury their dead. Worthington refused but granted a truce of an hour and a half. At that point, the Rebels had lost nine killed and five wounded; the Federals had lost six killed and seven or eight wounded. As night began to fall, about 200 Rebels rushed the Union line in an attempt to capture the howitzer. The officer in charge of the howitzer, a Lieutenant Thompson, loaded it with shot and fired among the enemy when they got within 30 yards, killing several and causing the rest to fall back.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Jo O. Shelby, Brigadier General to Lieutenant Colonel J. F. Bolton, May 31, 1864, *OR*, series 1, vol. 34, part 1, 925.

<sup>37</sup> Wiley Britton, *The Civil War on the Border: A Narrative of Operations in Missouri, Kansas, Arkansas and the Indian Territory during the Years 1861-1862 Based Upon the Official Reports of the Federal Commanders Lyon, Sigel, Sturgis, Fremont, Halleck, Curtis, Schofield, Blunt, Herron, and Totten, and of the Confederate Commanders McCulloch, Price, Van Dorn, Hindman, Marmaduke, and Shelby* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1890), 331-334.

<sup>38</sup> Warren, *Yellar Rag Boys*, 37, 45. Warren states (p.37): “From the Adjutant General’s report, I note these Federals were killed at Richland: Randolph L. Homesly, John B. Crawford, John Forehand, Thomas W. Hubbard, Jesse M. Rose, and Isaac Watkins.



Figure 14. Richland Valley. View south from the Nars. Photo by author.

Shortly after this repulse, Worthington learned from a prisoner something about the Rebel forces he was fighting. It seemed he was engaged with the remnant command of a Captain Marshall, whom he had attacked two days earlier on the road to Yellville, now reinforced by a Major Gunning with 200 men from Yellville and by Colonel Freeman with 500 men from IZARD County. He understood that Marshall and Gunning and their men were encamped within a mile below his camp (on the Buffalo), and that Freeman's command was encamped "about 2 ½ miles above" (on Richland Creek), and that the two forces intended to coordinate an attack at daybreak.<sup>39</sup> Worthington, therefore, decided he must attack the smaller of the two forces before they could combine. About 8 o'clock on Christmas night he attacked Gunning's men, and in a sharp fight that lasted ten or fifteen minutes his men routed the enemy, killing 14 and wounding 30 or 40. Worthington then escaped back to Fayetteville with his own battered and tired force rather than face off against Freeman's command. "After hard fighting," his superior officer reported approvingly, "our boys succeeded in cutting their way out, and retreated in good order."<sup>40</sup>

While the officers' reports are vague as to the precise geographic location of the skirmish sites, later accounts provide a few more details. In *Yellar Rag Boys*, Luther E. Warren states that small trees in the old Wasson field marked the graves of fallen Federal soldiers.<sup>41</sup> From Goodspeed's *A Reminiscent History of the Ozark Region* comes information that Zach T. Wasson had a substantial farm at Point Peter, that his sympathies lay with the Confederacy, and that his place was once "a Confederate camp

<sup>39</sup> Captain John I. Worthington to Major T. J. Hunt, January 8, 1864, *OR*, series 1, vol. 22, part 1, 780-781.

<sup>40</sup> T. J. Hunt, Major, to Brigadier-General John E. Sanborn, January 1, 1864, *OR*, series 1, vol. 22, part 1, 913-914.

<sup>41</sup> Warren, *Yellar Rag Boys*, 37, 45.

for one-half mile up and down the valley.”<sup>42</sup> It seems plausible that Worthington was encamped on the Buffalo near today’s Woolum, that his foraging party was surprised by Freeman’s command at the Wasson farm at Point Peter, that there was a running fight back to the Federal camp at Woolum, and that Freeman moved his camp on Christmas Day to Point Peter, thereby blocking Worthington’s route of escape over the road from Point Peter to Cave Creek. Not able to find his way upstream along the Buffalo in the night, Worthington then had to make his retreat in the opposite direction, first routing Gunning out of his camp at the mouth of Jamison Creek, less than a mile downstream from his own camp.

On returning to headquarters, Worthington reported the strength of the enemy as about 800 and thought he had encountered the combined forces of Love and Freeman. Brigadier General John B. Sanborn then wrote to Colonel Phelps, requesting that he send a “pretty heavy force” into the mountains as far as Richland Creek in order to disperse the Rebels. In view of the January weather, he added, this was a request not an order.<sup>43</sup> Phelps obliged. Commanding the 2<sup>nd</sup> Arkansas (Union) Cavalry, he marched to Richland Creek; then he split his forces and took one column over the mountain road connecting Point Peter and Cave Creek and from there over Judea Mountains to Big Creek and the upper Buffalo beyond Jasper, while the other column traveled by another route, meeting up again at Bellefonte, north of the Buffalo.<sup>44</sup> Meanwhile, Phelps was supported by simultaneous scouts made by Captain Charles Galloway commanding the 1<sup>st</sup> Arkansas (Union) Cavalry and Captain W. C. Human commanding the 8<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Missouri State Militia. After Phelps and the others returned, Sanborn reported that these combined patrols had succeeded in driving the Confederates “back across the Arkansas River” with 70 of the enemy captured and 200 killed. Explaining the importance of clearing the mountains of the Rebel forces, Sanborn reported: “Izard, Searcy, Newton, and Carroll counties are, and for nearly a year have been, the great rendezvous of base of operations for all bands of guerillas and murderers that infest this section of the state.”<sup>45</sup>

During the spring of 1864 the Union forces sought to tighten their grip on the area further. A garrison was established in Yellville. Small skirmishes were fought with Colonel Love’s men on the Buffalo River and with unidentified guerillas along the White River from Yellville to Buffalo City. At the other end of the Buffalo River, in April, a Union cavalry squadron attacked a large camp of Rebel guerillas near Whiteley’s Mill (Boxley Mill). The Rebel force was led by Captain John Cecil, a Buffalo River native. Cecil had been warned of the Federals’ approach and got his men into a battle line. One

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<sup>42</sup> Goodspeed (compiler), *A Reminiscent History of the Ozark Region* (Chicago: Goodspeed Brothers, Publishers, 1894), 78.

<sup>43</sup> Brigadier General John B. Sanborn to Lieutenant John E. Phelps, January 4, 1864, *OR*, series 1, vol. 34, part 1, 21-22.

<sup>44</sup> Lieutenant John E. Phelps to Brigadier General John B. Sanborn, February 16, 1864, *OR*, series 1, vol. 34, part 1, 93.

<sup>45</sup> Brigadier General John B. Sanborn to Major General W. S. Rosecrans, February 19, 1864, *OR*, series 1, vol. 34, part 1, 86-87.

very young witness, James Villines, later remembered that the battle took place at a crossroads where the Duty store once stood.<sup>46</sup>

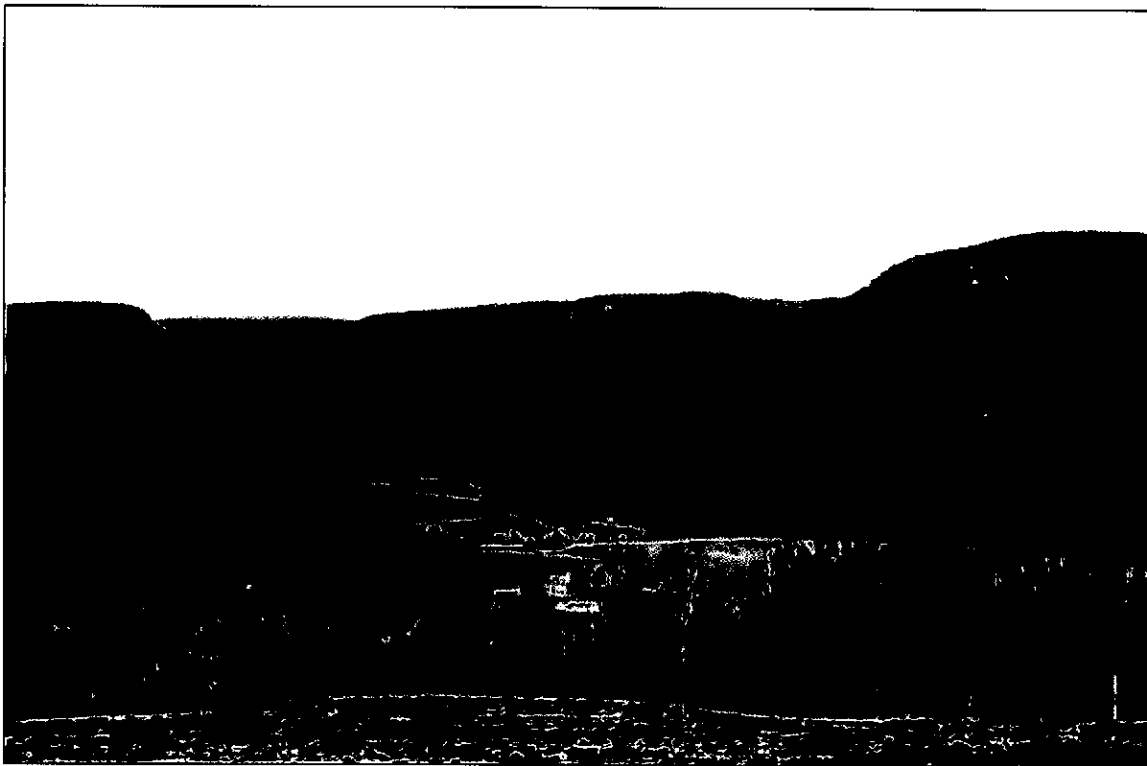


Figure 15. Boxley Valley. View west. *Buffalo National River*.

This fight was unusual in that the guerillas greatly outnumbered the Federals: three separate guerilla bands had recently combined forces and numbered about 250 men, while the Union cavalry troop numbered just 50. But the Union side was led by a brave and determined officer identified only as Captain Orr. According to the official report by his superior officer:

The enemy had been warned of the approach of Captain Orr, and had formed to receive him. They were partly mounted and partly dismounted. Captain Orr dashed into their camp and twice broke their line of cavalry. After a fire of musketry of about two hours' duration, the ammunition being nearly exhausted, Captain Orr withdrew, with the loss of Privates John H. Murry, Company F, killed, and Obed W. Patty, Company I, missing. Private Gustavus Bishop of Company C, was wounded. The man missing had his horse shot dead under him, and is probably a prisoner, if not killed. The loss of the enemy has not been ascertained, beyond 1 wounded.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>46</sup>Lackey, *History of Newton County, Arkansas*, 142.

<sup>47</sup>James A. Melton, Major, 2<sup>nd</sup> Arkansas (Union) Cavalry to Brigadier General J. B. Sanborn, April 10, 1864, *OR*, series I, vol. 34, part I, 871.

The last large skirmishes in the Buffalo River drainage occurred on May 3 and 5, 1864, once again at Richland Creek. On the morning of May 3, a Union supply train was detained on the north bank of the Buffalo River near today's Woolum, waiting for the swollen river to go down following a hard rain. The supply train belonged to Colonel Phelps' 2<sup>nd</sup> Arkansas, and was under the command of a Lieutenant Garner, whose cavalry escort of 100 men were about evenly divided on either side of the river, with the advance guard clumped on the Richland side under the command of a Lieutenant Hester, and the main body of the escort strung out on the north side with the two dozen wagons. The train was in a vulnerable spot, but the officers were resting easy as none of the Unionist families in the neighborhood whom they had questioned were aware of any Rebel forces nearby.<sup>48</sup>

Just a few miles to the east, however, Colonel Sidney D. Jackman was encamped on Calf Creek with 100 handpicked Rebel volunteers. Jackman was on a mission for Shelby to gain recruits for Shelby's cavalry brigade. A Baptist preacher before the war, Jackman was known for his unusual skill at recruiting (he had even taken Yankee prisoners and induced them to change sides). That morning a woman rode into camp with the information that a Union supply train was held up at the Buffalo River crossing – an easy target for the Rebel soldiers. Jackman reportedly exhorted his men with the remark that sixty of them could whip five hundred Federals. Then they went to the top of Point Peter Mountain to take a look. From there they could see the wagons down by Richland Creek, and it was decided to make an attack.<sup>49</sup>

In the official report of the skirmish made by Colonel Phelps, the Federal troops were taken by surprise. But in an account written years later by one of Jackman's men, Private George T. Maddox, the Federals saw them coming and formed a line in a field about forty yards beyond a fence, which the Rebels would have to come over to attack them. According to Maddox, the Federals fired on the Rebels ineffectually as the Rebels formed a line at the bottom of the mountain road, and then Colonel Jackman ordered his men to charge. Surprisingly, not one soldier or his mount was hurt as they broke down the fence and charged into the Union line.

Maddox wrote that the two sides engaged in hand-to-hand fighting, and that the Rebels came out on top:

Not a man in the Federal lines broke ranks until we clubbed guns with them. I must admit no men on earth ever stood braver than they. It looked like perfect manslaughter. We must have killed several of them with the

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<sup>48</sup> John E. Phelps, Colonel to Brigadier General J. B. Sanborn, May 10, 1864, *OR*, series 1, vol. 34, part 1, 909.

<sup>49</sup> Geo. T. Maddox, *Hard Trials and Tribulations of an Old Confederate Soldier*, (Van Buren: Argus, 1897), 44. On Jackman's recruiting efforts, see "Monroe County & the Civil War," [www.rootsweb.com/~momonroe/1863events.htm](http://www.rootsweb.com/~momonroe/1863events.htm), n.d. (March 17, 2006). Maddox states that Jackman was camped on Bear Creek and that they went over Bear Mountain to Richland Creek, but this cannot be correct. He describes only one intervening ridge and states that the distance from the top of the mountain to the wagon train was about two and a half miles.

butts of our guns and pistols. It was the most terrible sight I ever beheld, for the length of time and number of men engaged. Jackman's men killed forty-one almost in one pile, and had only two wounded.<sup>50</sup>

Colonel Phelps, whose informants probably observed what happened from afar (a few of Hester's men escaped and hid in the forest until Phelps picked them up two days later – it was probably they who reported to Phelps what happened), thought his men had been slaughtered in an unfair fight:

Almost surrounded, with only one way of escape, they fought as long as they could, and only gave up the contest against the superior numbers of the rebels when Lieutenant Hester and 38 men lay prostrate on the field....How many and who were murdered after they had fallen, perhaps will never be known. It is not possible that they all fell dead; they were slaughtered.<sup>51</sup>

Some of the local residents watched the skirmish and told their impressions of what happened many years later. John Tate was a boy of sixteen and watched the skirmish from a neighboring field. His son Tom Tate recited the story to Searcy County historian James J. Johnston in 1970 when Tom was ninety-one. In this version, the skirmish occurred in a pawpaw thicket down below the Robertson place at the mouth of Dry Creek. (If accurate, this places the skirmish site just outside the park boundary.) John Tate saw one side line up on the west bank of Dry Creek in a sweet gum grove, and the opposing side line up on the east bank. He remembered that the bark was shot off the sweet gums.<sup>52</sup> Mollie Brumley, a teenage girl, watched the skirmish from the Cole house. She wrote years later that after it was over the women "buried the Federal dead in blankets." She remembered 39 killed, "a frightful loss considering the small number engaged."<sup>53</sup>

After killing most of the advance guard and driving the rest of the Union force from the field, Jackman's men pillaged the wagons for food. Then they burned the wagons and slaughtered all 144 mules, shooting them one by one. They could not possibly take the mules with them, Jackman insisted to his men, nor could they let them fall back into the Federals' hands.<sup>54</sup>

The various details recorded in official after-battle reports and in accounts by witnesses years after the event present troubling inconsistencies should an effort be made

<sup>50</sup> Maddox, *Hard Trials and Tribulations of an Old Confederate Soldier*, 45.

<sup>51</sup> John E. Phelps, Colonel to Brigadier General J. B. Sanborn, May 10, 1864, *OR*, series 1, vol. 34, part 1, 909.

<sup>52</sup> Tom A. Tate interview by James J. Johnston, October 22, 1970, historical files, BNR. Note that Maddox corroborates Tate on a key point: Maddox states that four or five Federals were killed right in front of the Robertson house (p. 46).

<sup>53</sup> Mollie E. Williams, *A Thrilling Romance of the Civil War: Forty-two Days in Search of a Missing Husband* (1902; Reprint, 1992), 21-22.

<sup>54</sup> Maddox, *Hard Trials and Tribulations of an Old Confederate Soldier*, 46.

to locate precisely where the May 3 skirmish took place. Most likely, it seems, the skirmish took place at the foot of Point Peter Mountain where the road came down to the valley, and this is probably where the Hall cemetery is located today. Although this interpretation would seem to be refuted by references to the Dry Creek area, it seems likely that accounts based on memory confused the skirmish of May 3 with that of May 5, which did occur on Dry Creek.

The night of May 3 Jackman's men made camp in a hollow on Dry Creek and during the next day they were joined by three separate guerilla bands, each about 75 men strong. Jackman expected a retaliatory action by Colonel Phelps as soon as the Union commander learned of what happened, and he wanted Phelps to attack him here in this hollow, where the terrain would favor the Rebels. When Phelps did not show, Jackman grew impatient and sent the three guerilla bands out to look for him with the plan that whoever encountered Phelps would lead him back into Jackman's trap.<sup>55</sup>

Phelps was encamped at Bellefonte. As soon as he learned of the disaster he started out with 100 men and marched them through the night, determined to hunt down Jackman in his camp. Phelps reached Jackman's camp on the morning of May 5. The Rebels were entrenched and had a strong natural defensive position, but the Federals had the advantage of surprise as none of the three guerilla bands had returned and the men were relaxed in camp, their horses unsaddled, Jackman having decided that Phelps would not pursue after all. Phelps got his men on three sides of the camp, his left and right wings creeping dismounted over the rough side slopes of the hollow, and then ordered his center to charge. The Rebels fell back but were able to form a line. Phelps ordered a second charge, and Jackman's men broke and ran. But they were able to escape with their horses up the steep mountainside without losing a man. Phelps' troops, having marched through the night, were too exhausted to chase them.<sup>56</sup>

Mollie (Brumley) Williams wrote years later that Jackman's camp was on Dry Creek (the same creek where Tom Tate indicated the skirmish occurred). There is a hollow about a mile up the creek that fits the description. She was going to visit her husband in Jackman's unit when the Federals attacked. If her romantic tale is to be accepted as all unembellished fact, Mollie saw two Rebel and Yankee soldiers square off with pistols at short range, and the Yankee soldier fall from his horse mortally wounded. "With the aid of two other women," she wrote, "I managed to carry the wounded Federal into the house and we laid him tenderly on a hastily improvised couch and did all we could to alleviate his suffering, while the heavy firing on the outside told us that the bloody tragedy was being continued with relentless fury."<sup>57</sup> This soldier soon died from internal bleeding. The story contradicts Phelps' report, which states his losses were seven wounded but does not mention any men killed.

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 47.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 47-48; John E. Phelps, Colonel to Brigadier General J. B. Sanborn, May 10, 1864, *OR*, series I, vol. 34, part 1, 909.

<sup>57</sup> Williams, *A Thrilling Romance of the Civil War*, 23.

The site of the May 5 skirmish is located on private land just outside the southern boundary of Buffalo National River. The hollow from which Dry Creek emerges is now a forested thicket, and whatever earthworks were thrown up around the Rebel camp have long since disappeared under the effects of plant growth and decay, heavy rains, and erosion by the creek. As for the beautiful Richland Valley landscape, the vast floodplain is covered by hayfields and dotted by an occasional shade tree and gives the appearance of a fertile agricultural area as it was in the Civil War era. However, it might be well for the present-day observer who wants to imagine what the valley looked like during the Civil War to keep in mind that Richland Valley farmers practiced a different form of agriculture then. Rather than the expanse of hayfields one sees today, the valley was a mix of corn and cotton patches and woodlots, and it was sprinkled with more farm houses than one sees today.

### SALTPETER WORKS

The Buffalo River valley offered one significant natural resource for the Confederate war effort: potassium nitrate, also called niter or saltpeter. This substance could be mixed with sulphur and charcoal to make gunpowder. Naturally occurring potassium nitrate was known to occur in cave earth, where nitrogen-rich bat guano mixed with clay on the cave floor to form the mineral.<sup>58</sup> The Confederate government began systematically mining its saltpeter caves, which were found in most abundance in a limestone belt running through the Upper South from Arkansas to western Virginia.<sup>59</sup>

Confederate forces extracted saltpeter from numerous caves located within the Buffalo River drainage. For all practical purposes the saltpeter mined in northern Arkansas needed to be refined at the source so that it could be shipped by wagon and riverboat to powder mills where the powder was converted to gunpowder. Probably all of the saltpeter works in the area consisted of both a mine (cave) and an adjacent refining works. In some cases refining works may have been located in the cave for concealment. Oral traditions refer to half a dozen or more saltpeter caves or works in the area during the Civil War and most of these are confirmed by physical remains or official reports in military records. One was located within the present boundaries of Buffalo National River on the side of Cave Mountain above the Boxley Valley.<sup>60</sup> Other saltpeter works were located on tributaries of the Buffalo (Cave Creek, Tomahawk Creek, and Big Creek) and on the White River near Yellville.

The Confederate government was slow to recognize the importance of saltpeter to the war effort. On April 8, 1861, Major Josiah Gorgas was appointed chief of ordnance for the Confederacy; however, unlike his Union counterpart he did not control a separate bureau of the national government but rather served as an officer in the Corps of Artillery. By 1862, Gorgas found that his staff could not handle the task of identifying

<sup>58</sup> Kenneth L. Smith, "The Seven Kettles," *Little Rock Arkansas Gazette*, November 29, 1959.

<sup>59</sup> Major I. M. St. John, Niter and Mining Bureau to Secretary of War G. W. Randolph, *OR*, series 4, volume 2, part 1, 26-28.

<sup>60</sup> Suzanne D. Rogers, "Civil War Activities and Sites," 1995, historical files, BNR.



and exploiting the Confederacy's widely scattered sources of potassium nitrate and other strategic minerals, and so he recommended to the War Department that a separate bureau should be created to oversee the production of those vital resources. As a result, the Nitre and Mining Bureau was organized in April 1862. Under the capable command of Major Isaac M. St. John, this bureau became one of the most powerful bureaus in the Confederate government, with authority to impress ironworks and lead mines as well as saltpeter caves, and to requisition slave labor. As the supply of saltpeter was limited and vulnerable (the resources were located primarily in areas that were already falling into enemy hands), the Nitre and Mining Bureau went to great lengths to find new sources and stimulate production. Its improvisation even extended to the making of artificial niter beds in several parts of the Confederacy where citizens were asked to bring scrapings of bat guano from their attics and cellars, and finally to contribute casks of their own urine, which were mixed with clay earth in the gigantic beds to create the mineral.<sup>61</sup>

In its first three months of operation, the Nitre and Mining Bureau more than tripled the production of saltpeter throughout the Confederacy. It did so by a combination of discovering new sources, providing incentives for private enterprise to develop known sources, and investing directly in government works. Arkansas seems to have furnished a considerable percentage of the saltpeter used by the Confederacy in the first year of the war, but when the Nitre and Mining Bureau looked for ways to expand production after April 1862 it mainly looked to states located east of the Mississippi River. The saltpeter works in northern Arkansas were too remote to be a good risk for the government. Nevertheless, three agents of the Nitre and Mining Bureau were dispatched to Arkansas in August 1862 "to have work resumed in the very valuable caves of upper Arkansas as soon as accessible." Their mission also extended to Texas, where they would attempt to arrange for regular shipments of saltpeter from Mexico.<sup>62</sup>

What became of these three agents' efforts in the Ozarks is not known. Business records of the saltpeter works are non-existent. What is known about the works comes mainly from physical evidence and oral tradition. Decades after the Civil War, large iron kettles and pumps could still be found in scattered locations around where the saltpeter manufacturing plants were known to have once stood, and old veterans told of working in the plants or mining saltpeter in the caves. A third source of information on the saltpeter works comes from a few military reports made by Union officers who were sent out on raids with the specific aim of destroying them. The most pointed raids on saltpeter works in the area occurred from November 1862 to January 1863, which suggests that Rebel efforts to exploit this resource did indeed intensify in the fall of 1862, eventually coming to the attention of the Union commanders.

From official reports it is evident that Union raids in the winter of 1862-63 resulted in the destruction of saltpeter works on the White River near Yellville and on the

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<sup>61</sup> Frank E. Vandiver, "Makeshifts of Confederate Ordnance," *Journal of Southern History*, 17, no. 2 (May 1951), 180-181, 187-188; "The Nitre and Mining Bureau of the Confederacy," (n.d.) <<http://www.dougaustin.com/~toml/pdf/niter.pdf>> (March 16, 2006).

<sup>62</sup> Major I. M. St. John, Nitre and Mining Bureau to Secretary of War G. W. Randolph, *OR*, series 4, volume 2, part 1, 29.

upper Buffalo near Boxley. According to oral tradition saltpeter works located on Cave Creek in Searcy County were also destroyed in this period, and the same were described as “ruins” by a Union scout in February 1864. But the Union raids apparently did not put an end to the production of saltpeter in the area. More saltpeter works located on Tomahawk Creek were not discovered by Union troops until March 1864, and another facility on Big Creek does not seem to appear anywhere in the military records and may have gone undetected. At least three other saltpeter caves were reportedly used as hideouts during the war but it is not clear whether they ever produced appreciable quantities of saltpeter.

The total amount of saltpeter produced in the area cannot have been large. In the case of the saltpeter works near Boxley, one shipment of refined niter amounting to a “large tonnage” was delivered by wagon to a landing on the Arkansas River, only to be seized at that place by Union forces shortly after the works themselves were destroyed.<sup>63</sup> The plant located on the White River near Yellville reportedly was preparing to make a shipment in the next few days when it was destroyed.<sup>64</sup> Even if Union forces were unable to stop all production of saltpeter in the Arkansas Ozarks, they severely inhibited it. Arkansas produced 17,000 pounds of niter in the period before May 1, 1862, and it is unlikely that the short-lived saltpeter works in the Buffalo River area were able to boost production much higher than that. The state’s production was soon dwarfed by the vigorous efforts made elsewhere in the Confederacy, which yielded a total production of 1,735,000 pounds of niter by September 1864, and eventually involved mining operations in 250 caves.<sup>65</sup>

The saltpeter works on the White River near Yellville were established about 1862. The cave and plant were located on the west bank of the river a few miles above Mooney’s ferry. In November 1862, Brigadier General F. J. Herron ordered an expedition be made against Yellville for the purpose of destroying these works. Accordingly Colonel D. Wickersham left Springfield, Missouri in command of three companies of cavalry, returning five days later after covering 250 miles. According to official reports the raid resulted in the destruction of the saltpeter works at Dubuque (a town located where the White River crossed the Missouri border, now under Bull Shoals Lake) and near Yellville; the burning of an arsenal and storehouses in Yellville; the capture of 60 prisoners and 100 horses; and the disruption of a Confederate field hospital.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> “Cave in the Ozarks Furnished Powder for the Southern Army,” *Arkansas Central Leader* (McCroy, Arkansas), May 15, 1930.

<sup>64</sup> Milton Burgh, Captain, Commanding Expedition to Major James H. Steger, December 15, 1862, and Brigadier General E. B. Brown to Major General Samuel R. Curtis, December 18, 1862, letters transcribed by Arthur F. Freeman and reproduced in “14<sup>th</sup> Missouri State Militia Volunteer Cavalry,” 2006, <<http://art55usmo.home.mindspring.com/14thMO14.htm>> (March 15, 2006).

<sup>65</sup> Major I. M. St. John, Niter and Mining Bureau to Secretary of War G. W. Randolph, *OR*, series 4, volume 2, part 1, 29; “The Nitre and Mining Bureau of the Confederacy,” (n.d.) <<http://www.dougaustin.com/~toml/pdf/niter.pdf>> (March 16, 2006).

<sup>66</sup> F. J. Herron, Brigadier General, to Major General Samuel R. Curtis, November 29, 1862, *OR*, series 1, vol. 22, part 1, 794.

However, the saltpeter works near Yellville were not completely destroyed (if indeed they were attacked at all) as the Rebels soon had them back in full operation. A scout was made into the area one month later by Captain Milton Burgh, commanding a contingent of the 14<sup>th</sup> Missouri State Militia Cavalry, and upon capturing and questioning a couple of Rebels he learned that the saltpeter works were in full production. At noon on December 11, Burgh and his men surprised 23 Rebels who were having their dinner in the saltpeter cave and took them prisoner without firing a shot. He then ordered his men to destroy the saltpeter works. This time the official report described the destroyed works in detail: "5 buildings, 1 engine, 26 large kettles, 6 tanks, blacksmiths' and carpenters' shops and tools, \$6,000 worth of saltpeter, packed, which was to have been moved in two days." The scouting party returned with a total of 42 prisoners together with 500 barrels of jerked beef and other winter provisions. It was estimated that the Confederate government had invested \$30,000 in the operation.<sup>67</sup>

George Foster was a member of the small Rebel force assigned to the works in 1862. He talked about the operation when he was an aging veteran in Mountain Home in the early 1920s, and his information was distilled in an article in the *Arkansas Central Leader* a few years after his death.

The old Saltpeter cave was a huge opening in the earth full of red clay that was strongly impregnated with saltpeter. This clay was mined and dumped into a battery of gigantic hoppers, much like the hoppers the old time housewives used for the manufacture of home-made soap.

A small stream of water passed slowly through each hopper, picked up the saltpeter in solution as it passed through the clay. After this water passed through the clay in the hoppers, it was run into the huge caldrons and boiled or evaporated, the saltpeter accumulating as a solid in the bottom of the caldrons after all water had been boiled off. It was then put through a refining process, and was ready to use.

A crude lead smelter was also operated in the vicinity and refined lead produced. The product of these plants was sent down the White river to its mouth, and on down the Mississippi to New Orleans, where it was worked up into badly needed ammunition.<sup>68</sup>

The saltpeter works on the upper Buffalo were located near Cave Mountain Cave (also known as Bat Cave) about one mile south of Boxley. The operation began as the private enterprise of William Bennett, "an adventurous character from Denison, Tex.," who had entered a number of mineral claims in the area before the war. He was aware that the cave contained earth that was rich in nitrate. Probably in 1862 Bennett responded to advertisements by the Nitre and Mining Bureau and negotiated an arrangement with

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<sup>67</sup> Milton Burgh, Captain, Commanding Expedition to Major James H. Steger, December 15, 1862, and Brigadier General E. B. Brown to Major General Samuel R. Curtis, December 18, 1862, letters transcribed by Arthur F. Freeman and reproduced in "14<sup>th</sup> Missouri State Militia Volunteer Cavalry," 2006, <<http://art55usmo.home.mindspring.com/14thMO14.htm>> (March 15, 2006).

<sup>68</sup> "Cave in the Ozarks Furnished Powder for the Southern Army," *Arkansas Central Leader* (McCroy, Arkansas), May 15, 1930.

the Confederate government.<sup>69</sup> By January 1863, a force of 20 men was employed at the works under the command of a Confederate army officer. On the afternoon of January 10, this force was taken by surprise and surrendered to Union cavalry troops under the command of Major Joseph W. Caldwell. The Confederate officer in charge and two other men were cutting timber in the nearby wood and escaped. Caldwell's men fired the buildings and remained at the facility for six hours, making a thorough wreck of it. Caldwell described the facility in his report:

The buildings, fourteen in number, very extensive, entirely new and of good workmanship, together with two steam-engines, three boilers, seven large kettles, weighing, according to the bill for the same, found on the premises, 800 pounds each, besides half a ton of saltpeter, a large fire-proof iron safe (Hall's patent), three Concord wagons, two carts, and all the appurtenances of a first-class establishment of this character, were completely destroyed by fire and otherwise.<sup>70</sup>

Possibly the largest saltpeter works in the area were located on Cave Creek about five miles south of the Buffalo River near the present town of Bass. The saltpeter cave was later known as Thompson's Cave after the landowner, Granville Thompson. The ruins of the saltpeter works were still in evidence on the Thompson property in the early twentieth century. In 1937, a huge iron pump was discovered at the mouth of the cave by a team of archeologists. At that time, area residents said that the heavy equipment had been manufactured in New Orleans and shipped by steamboat up the Mississippi and Arkansas rivers to Norristown (near Russellville) and freighted over the mountains by wagon. They also reported that the plant was built in 1862 and destroyed in 1863. According to tradition, the plant employed 100 men, including 40 slaves brought from Virginia.<sup>71</sup> During an extended scouting expedition in February 1864, Lieutenant John E. Phelps, commanding the 2<sup>nd</sup> Arkansas (Union) Cavalry, made his camp at this site "about the ruins of the saltpeter works of the Southern Confederacy."<sup>72</sup>

References to other saltpeter works are sketchier. Searcy County historian James J. Johnston mentions a saltpeter cave on the Buffalo River at "Cane Island." It is thought that this was near the L. A. Potter farm, formerly the Henley farm, on the north side of the river. One old timer recounted that in the 1930s there was some evidence of saltpeter

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<sup>69</sup> Bennett's role is described in the *Arkansas Central Leader* (McCroy, Arkansas), May 15, 1930, but the story contains several details that are erroneous. It states that Bennett negotiated an arrangement with General (John C.) Pemberton, in command of the defense of New Orleans, and that Pemberton told Bennett the saltpeter was essential for the city's defense. It goes on to say that "Pemberton surrendered at New Orleans in July 1864 a few weeks after the Federals destroyed the Bennett works." In fact, New Orleans fell in April 1862 and Pemberton surrendered *Vicksburg* in July 1863. The saltpeter works were destroyed in *January* 1863. See "Cave in the Ozarks Furnished Powder for the Southern Army," *Arkansas Central Leader* (McCroy, Arkansas), May 15, 1930.

<sup>70</sup> J. W. Caldwell, Major First Iowa Cavalry to Brigadier General F. J. Herron, January 13, 1863, *OR*, series 1, vol. 22, part 1, 214.

<sup>71</sup> "Unusual Relic is Discovered by Tech Group," *Southwest Times Record*, August 15, 1937.

<sup>72</sup> John E. Phelps, Lieutenant, 3<sup>rd</sup> U.S. Cavalry to Brigadier General John B. Sanborn, February 16, 1864, *OR*, series 1, vol. 34, part 1, 93.

works on the Henley farm in the form of hewn timbers and some graves from the Civil War. According to another account in the *Marshall Republican*, one Jim Bratton worked in the saltpeter cave and recalled that the powder had been shipped to Arkadelphia.<sup>73</sup>



Figure 16. Man with kettle from saltpeter works. *Buffalo National River*.

Historian Johnston also mentions saltpeter works located at the confluence of Short Creek and Big Creek. Ken Smith, in his researches on the Buffalo River, encountered a report that one of the kettles from the Short Creek saltpeter works had found its way to the farm of Jesse Griffin about five miles south of Leslie. The kettle was said to measure 72 inches by 39 inches (the same dimensions cited by Jim Bratton in the *Marshall Republican* for a different kettle and works).<sup>74</sup>

Saltpeter works were also located somewhere in the Tomahawk Creek drainage. A Union army report refers to an expedition by Captain Samuel E. Turner with 109 men of the Sixth Cavalry, Missouri State Militia, and Sixth Provisional Enrolled Missouri Militia, which marched from Yellville to the Buffalo River in March 1864.

“Came in contact with numerous small squads of guerillas; destroyed some extensive saltpeter-works on Tomahawk Mountains; found a large amount of stolen property concealed in caves.”<sup>75</sup>

J. C. Love, the grandson of J. H. Love, told of another source of saltpeter in the area. In a letter to Searcy County historian Johnston in 1963, Love wrote that the bluff above the Buffalo River across from his family’s old place was known as Saltpeter Cave Bluff, and that the Rebels got saltpeter out of it.<sup>76</sup>

Finally, there are stories about saltpeter caves being used as places of refuge. A story in the *Mountain Wave* in 1962 stated that during the Civil War old men and boys sometimes hid from marauding bands of deserters in a saltpeter cave on Spring Creek near Big Flat and at Berch Minick Cave northeast of Big Flat.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>73</sup> “Saltpeter Caves in Searcy County, and on Cave Creek in Newton County from Searcy County, Arkansas, During the Civil War, by James J. Johnston,” typed notes, no date, historical files. BNR.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.* The typed notes include a parenthetical note by K. L. S.

<sup>75</sup> Abstract of Record of Events on return of the District of Southwest Missouri for March 1864, *OR*, series 1, vol. 34, part 1, 640.

<sup>76</sup> “Saltpeter Caves in Searcy County, and on Cave Creek in Newton County from Searcy County, Arkansas, During the Civil War, by James J. Johnston,” typed notes, no date, historical files, BNR

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

## THE GUERRILLA WAR

Mollie (Brumley) Williams was a love-stricken young farm girl of Richland in May 1862 when her sweetheart and future husband, Valentine H. Williams, joined the southern army. In her memoir she described the “roll of drum and shrill notes of fife” calling the men to service at the “recruiting grounds.” Although Mollie Williams’ account is sentimental and colored by memory, it gives us a sense of time and place at this location in Buffalo National River. Possessed by “the spirit of the hour,” the young girl went with her neighbors in Richland Township to encourage the young men to enlist. “We were persuaded that our homes were about to be invaded by a foreign host, and for the time being every idea of a common country was utterly obliterated from our excited minds,” she wrote. “As I stood on the outskirts of the assembled crowd I for the first time in my life heard the swelling, all-conquering notes of ‘Dixie,’ and it seemed to come to all as a patriotic inspiration, and when the last lingering note had died away the men, responsive to the call for volunteers, took their place in line. They seemed to be possessed of one idea—‘To live and die in Dixie.’”<sup>78</sup>

In the first flush of excitement for the new Confederacy many young Arkansas men rushed to volunteer for the southern army. Relatives and neighbors banded together to form companies and marched off to the nearest recruitment center to be mustered into service. In Searcy County, the first company of volunteers formed in Campbell Township and the men were sworn in at Yellville on July 17, 1861. A second company of Searcy County men from Tomahawk and Richland townships formed under the leadership of Captain James H. Love, and these recruits were sworn in at Yellville on August 5, 1861. As the war was still new and unknown to them, these volunteers were motivated as much by a spirit of adventure as they were by southern patriotism. Not everyone joined of his own volition. One private in Love’s company later stated, “I had my choice to go with Co. K, 14<sup>th</sup> Arkansas, or look up a limb to be hanged on.”<sup>79</sup> Both companies from Searcy County were assigned to the 14<sup>th</sup> Arkansas Infantry Regiment and fought in the battle of Pea Ridge the following March.

After the Confederate army withdrew from northwest Arkansas in the spring of 1862, the state’s recruiting efforts intensified. In the mountain counties of northern Arkansas, where Unionist sentiment was strong, recruiting efforts were aimed not just at encouraging enlistments but at suppressing Unionist dissent. When the Rebels held a recruiting drive such as the one Mollie Williams described in Richland, anyone who failed to turn out and show his patriotism might be given “personal notice.” Any man of

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<sup>78</sup> Williams, *A Thrilling Romance of the Civil War*, 9. According to local historian James J. Johnston, the recruiting grounds were at Richland, where Williams and eight other men enlisted on May 25, 1862, being assigned to Captain Beal Gaither’s Company D, 27<sup>th</sup> Arkansas Infantry (James J. Johnston, “Mollie Williams,” typescript, no date, given from Johnston to author, 3).

<sup>79</sup> James J. Johnston, “Searcy County Men in the Civil War: Union and Confederate; A Compilation of Muster Rolls,” typescript in the Searcy County Library, Marshall, Arkansas, 2001, 9.

military age who was reluctant to enroll was suspected of being a Unionist and might thereby subject his family to surveillance, insult, and abuse by his neighbors.<sup>80</sup>

Numerous farmers who lived along the Buffalo experienced such treatment in the early months of the war. Some had experiences similar to Thomas Willhite, an Ozark farmer and Unionist, whose story was presented along with other stories of Arkansas Unionists in *Loyalty on the Frontier*, a book of propaganda that was initiated shortly after the battle of Pea Ridge and published in 1863. Willhite recalled how his neighbor in Cove Creek Township (Washington County) raised a Confederate flag and called on his fellow men to rally beneath it. Refusing this summons, Willhite stayed at home and continued to work his farm. But wary of arrest, he took to wearing a brace of pistols day and night and slinging a rifle over his back when he plowed his field and propping the rifle against his bedstead when he went to bed. On several occasions he had to warn Rebels away from his home, and once he had a standoff with some Rebels who threatened to arrest him at the local grist mill. In November 1861, Willhite harvested his crop, hauled 100 bushels of corn to a mountain cave under cover of night, and proceeded to live in the cave with his horse through the winter, occasionally making clandestine visits to his home in the valley. In the spring, he made his way to Springfield, Missouri and enlisted in the Union army.<sup>81</sup>

Some Unionists who eluded Confederate authorities by hiding in the hills eventually banded together to form guerrilla units known as "Mountain Feds." In Searcy County a group of these Mountain Feds skirmished with Brigadier General Jo Shelby on the Buffalo River on January 3, 1863. At that time they numbered from 60 to 100. The official report on the skirmish by Brigadier General John S. Marmaduke stated that a large number were killed and 27 captured. "The vigor with which [Shelby's] troops attacked and pursued those scoundrels terrified them, and broke up, for a time at least, the lawless bands in this part of the mountains."<sup>82</sup> According to local tradition, the captives were tried by courts martial and executed, January 3, 1863, at Margaret White Spring on the Buffalo.<sup>83</sup>

In the Ozarks there was no clear line to distinguish where recruiting by the state left off and recruiting for guerrilla warfare began. In April 1862, the Confederate government passed the Partisan Ranger Act, authorizing the use of irregular units to harass the enemy, and Major General Van Dorn became the first Confederate leader to recruit guerrillas in Arkansas. But Van Dorn did no more than provide a measure of legitimacy to the dozens of small bands of deserters who stayed behind to defend their homes as the Confederate army withdrew from northern Arkansas. In June, when Major General Hindman took command of the Confederacy's Trans-Mississippi Department, he

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<sup>80</sup> Kenneth C. Barnes, "The Williams Clan: Mountain Farmers and Union Fighters in North Central Arkansas," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 52 (Autumn 1993), 294.

<sup>81</sup> A. W. Bishop, *Loyalty on the Frontier* (St. Louis: A. P. Studley & Company, 1863), 89-95.

<sup>82</sup> J.S. Marmaduke, Brigadier General, to Colonel R. C. Newton, Chief of Staff, First Corps, Trans-Mississippi Department, February 1, 1863, *OR*, series 1, vol. 12, part 1, 196.

<sup>83</sup> Searcy County Historical Society (Marshall), "The Arkansas Civil War Peace Society Trail," pamphlet, no date.

issued an order that actively encouraged the formation of guerrilla bands or “independent companies.” The minimal requirements for such companies were that they would number at least ten men, have a captain who would be responsible for the men’s good conduct, and that the captain would report to Hindman’s headquarters from time to time. The new companies were to elect their own captains and provide their own weapons and equipment.<sup>84</sup>

The change from regular to irregular units is illustrated by the wartime career of Captain James H. Love of Tomahawk Township, Searcy County and his band of followers. By the summer of 1862 these men in Company K, 14<sup>th</sup> Arkansas Infantry found themselves encamped in Saltillo, Mississippi, far from home. Captain Love, suffering from pulmonary trouble and an old stab wound, resigned his commission on July 18, 1862 and returned to Searcy County. The next month, as their one-year terms of enlistment expired, more than a score of Love’s men left the army and followed him home. These men were listed as deserters and a \$30 reward was offered for their capture, but none returned to the regiment. The following February, Love persuaded many of these same individuals to re-enlist under his command, this time in Company C, 7<sup>th</sup> Arkansas Cavalry. Stationed at Fort Smith, Love again returned home on sick leave in August 1863, and again his departure precipitated a mass desertion of 50 out of 61 men in his company, who followed on his heels to Searcy County. Sometime thereafter, Love formed a company of irregulars, presumably composed of many of the same individuals who had enlisted with him previously in the Confederate army. This was the guerrilla band that joined Colonel Jackman’s command and attacked a Federal supply train at Richland in May 1864.<sup>85</sup>

A similar devolution from regular to irregular fighting units occurred on the Union side. In Newton County a guerrilla band led by James R. Vanderpool sought to thwart Confederate recruiting efforts and often provided intelligence to Federal scouts operating in the county. In May 1863, a Rebel force raided Jasper in an effort to capture Vanderpool. Warned of the raid, the guerrilla leader escaped and continued to annoy Confederate forces through the end of the war.<sup>86</sup> Farther south in the Ozarks, the story of one irregular unit, the Williams Clan of Conway County has been researched by historian Kenneth C. Barnes. Jeff Williams, a Unionist, led forty compatriots to Batesville in 1862 to enlist in the Federal army. But after six months of service the men were dispirited because their unit was not operating anywhere near their homes, which remained under Confederate control. The Federal commander Brigadier General Steele, faced with desertion by his Conway County soldiers, issued special orders on September 15, 1863

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<sup>84</sup> Daniel E. Sutherland, “Guerrillas: The Real War in Arkansas,” in *Civil War Arkansas: Beyond Battles and Leaders*, edited by Anne J. Bailey and Daniel E. Sutherland (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2000), 135.

<sup>85</sup> Harrell, ed., *History and Folklore*, 96. When Love’s men were listed as deserters at Fort Smith the officer entered in the report sympathetically, “This company hant ben in no fite sense the Poin Bluff fite. These men [w]hom I reported deserted is in the north of the Arkansas River with Captain Love fitin the federals ever chanse tha get.” (James J. Johnston, “Along the Buffalo,” *The Ozarks Mountaineer*, July 1970).

<sup>86</sup> Pitcaithley, *Let the River Be*, 47.



authorizing Union men of Conway County to form a company for purposes of protecting their homes and families against Rebel guerrillas. For the next eighteen months, Williams captained “a ragtag independent company” whose principal aim was to defend the civilian population against the growing number of Rebel guerrillas roving about Conway County. The Williams Clan’s chief foe was a Rebel guerrilla band led by Colonel Allen R. Witt. In February 1865, Witt’s men trapped Williams alone in his house and shot him dead on his doorstep. Williams’ son Nathan took command of the company for the remainder of the war.<sup>87</sup>

Historians of the Civil War gave guerrilla warfare relatively little attention until the 1980s. In recent years historians have treated the subject in numerous articles, books, and anthologies.<sup>88</sup> Historian Daniel E. Sutherland argues that guerrilla warfare was the paramount military activity in Arkansas, forming the context for most of the fighting, terror, and suffering. Guerrilla warfare was present throughout the South, but Arkansas and Missouri were perhaps more heavily impacted than any other states. Certainly the northern counties of Arkansas saw the most sustained guerrilla activity found anywhere. As the war progressed, irregular units operated more and more independently from army command. Guerrilla fighters were fiercely loyal to their captains and resisted efforts to combine their force with other guerrilla bands or join regular units. As one Rebel guerrilla explained his decision to serve in an irregular unit, “I wanted to get out where I could have it more lively; where I could fight if I wanted to, or run if I so desired; I wanted to be my own general.”<sup>89</sup>

As guerrilla bands became more aggressive in requisitioning horses and supplies from the civilian population, more ruthless in their acts of vengeance, and more remote from army command, their deeds grew to resemble armed banditry. The people who suffered at the hands of these guerrilla bands nevertheless consistently identified them by their allegiance to the Union or Confederate cause, no matter how tenuous their allegiance was. And the guerrillas generally did prey on one side of the civilian population or the other, if only to provide themselves a shred of legitimacy. If they targeted southern sympathizers, they were called “jayhawkers.” If they victimized Unionists, they were called “bushwhackers.” Many army officers expressed dismay at being unable to distinguish irregular units from mere bands of outlaws. Confederate Brigadier General Jo Shelby lamented the state of affairs in May 1864, after passing through the Boston Mountains from Clarksville to White River in another search for recruits. “The condition of this country is pitiable in the extreme; Confederate soldiers in nothing save the name, robbers, and jayhawkers have vied with the Federals in plundering, devouring, and wasting the substance of loyal Southerners,” he wrote. “The

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<sup>87</sup> Barnes, “The Williams Clan,” 304-310.

<sup>88</sup> See for example, Daniel E. Sutherland, editor, *Guerrillas, Unionists, and Violence on the Confederate Home Front* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1999), and especially the chapter by Robert R. Mackey, “Bushwhackers, Provosts, and Tories: The Guerrilla War in Arkansas” 171-185. Also see Stephen V. Ash, *When the Yankees Came: Conflict and Chaos in the Occupied South, 1861-1865* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

<sup>89</sup> George T. Maddox quoted in Sutherland, “Guerrillas: The Real War in Arkansas,” 136.

condition of the so-called Confederate forces here was horrible...no organization, no concentration, no discipline, no law, no leader, no anything."<sup>90</sup>

These criminal elements probably included a mix of deserters and draft evaders from the war's outset. Their main interest was in sitting out the rest of the war. Other than their desire to avoid combat, the only thing that distinguished jayhawkers and bushwhackers from guerrillas was the bandits' greater callousness toward life and property. Some jayhawkers and bushwhackers were local men who had fled their homes; others came from outside. Jayhawkers, in particular, were often accused of being "foreigners" from Missouri.<sup>91</sup>

Most of the atrocities that occurred along the Buffalo in the Civil War were blamed on jayhawkers or bushwhackers rather than guerrillas. Many families suffered killings, robberies, and terror at the hands of these brigands. Their stories were passed down from generation to generation, and some eventually got into print in local newspapers or were recorded in oral history interviews – the two main sources of documentation for these events of nearly a century and a half ago. At a few locations in Buffalo National River, weathered gravestones offer further mute testimony and corroborating evidence of these little known atrocities.<sup>92</sup>

Often it is the small details in these stories that render them so poignant and compelling. Young John Cole was a member of Love's company. When the company was camped near Yellville, Cole received sick leave to visit his folks in Richland. Near the family home, he and another boy were surprised by jayhawkers. They ran for their horses and the other boy escaped but "John Cole could not get the bit into his horse's mouth and was captured." The jayhawkers then took their prisoner to the Cole home where the boy's mother pleaded for his life. His captors said they would not kill him; but they took him up Horn Mountain and killed him anyway. "They tied him to a tree and shot seven bullet holes through him," according to one account, "...set

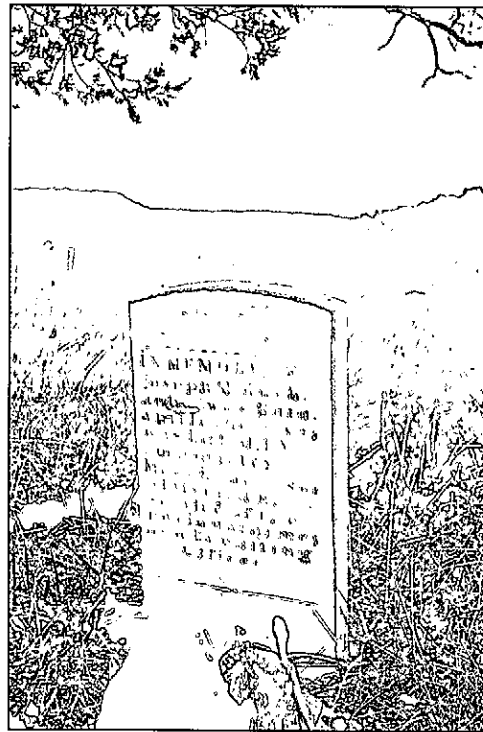


Figure 17. This gravestone in Cherry Grove cemetery reads: "IN MEMORY OF JOSEPH M. BUCHANAN, WAS BORN APRIL THE 9, 1827, WAS KILLED BY CONFEDERATES MARCH THE 5, 1864 WHILST IN THE SERVICE OF THE NATIONAL ARMY AS A RECRUITING OFFICER." Photo by author.

<sup>90</sup> Brigadier General Jo O. Shelby to Lieutenant Colonel J. F. Belton, May 31, 1864, *OR*, Series 1, Vol. 34, Part 1, 925.

<sup>91</sup> Pitcaithley, *Let the River Be*, 45-47.

<sup>92</sup> Local and family histories also present these stories, usually based on newspaper sources that were in turn based on family accounts. In one instance, however, the family history cites contemporary evidence: three testimonials given in order to secure a widow's pension for the wife of a victim of bushwhackers.

him up a straddle of a stump, took all his clothes except his drawers, and left,” according to another. Eliza Cash, a resident of Cave Creek, found Cole and helped carry his body down the mountain. Afterwards Love’s men captured the jayhawkers and hanged the whole bunch. By the latter account, Love’s men found some of the jayhawkers wearing Cole’s clothes – proof of their guilt.<sup>93</sup>



Figure 18. Cherry Grove cemetery, Erbie. Photo by author.

The residents in Richland were frequently terrorized by brigands, who were apparently drawn to that community by the quantity of crops and livestock to be stolen. Mollie Williams recalled how jayhawkers ransacked her family’s home and then set fire to it. She stood in the yard with her mother-in-law and watched helplessly as it burned, being told they would be killed if they tried to save the house or any of their belongings. Mrs. Cole of Richland, wanting to be safe from jayhawkers after the loss of her son, took a wounded Union soldier into her home. Brigands of a Confederate orientation discovered the convalescing soldier and hanged him. Then, in a further instance of blind vengeance, Unionist ruffians learned of the murder and burned Mrs. Cole’s house for retribution.<sup>94</sup> Mary Ann Cash, another Richland woman, hid her children in the chimneys of her house during these raids. She was murdered by bushwhackers in 1864 and buried in the family cemetery (about one mile south of the Buffalo National River boundary).<sup>95</sup>

The outlaw gangs seemingly grew more desperate and cruel as the land became stripped nearly bare of crops and livestock and the civilian population had less and less to yield when the outlaws tried to steal from them. Sam Whiteley, the old pioneer at Boxley, survived the skirmish at Whiteley’s Mill only to be killed by jayhawkers one month later (in October 1864) when he refused to tell them where he was hiding his gold. According to one account, the frustrated brigands then proceeded to the Casey farm,

<sup>93</sup> Harrell, ed., *History and Folklore*, 26; James J. Johnston, “J. C. Love recalls hearing of his father, and of Civil War times,” undated transcript, Buffalo National River historical files. J. C. Love, grandson of J. H. Love, refers to the location of Cole’s murder as Horn Mountain. Harrell gives the location as “Eagle Mountain” and notes that a trail came from Cave Creek over the mountain to Upper Richland. The USGS Quadrangle map shows this as Horn Mountain.

<sup>94</sup> Williams, *A Thrilling Romance of the Civil War*, 30-32.

<sup>95</sup> Liles, *Old Folks Talking*, 403.

murdered Abner Casey and his father, and burned the house. Abner Casey's widow and children lived in a cave until the end of the war.<sup>96</sup>

Sometimes significant variations arose in the retelling of these stories. The so-called Harp Massacre is a case in point. According to one version, several Harp men (a father and sons and perhaps a nephew), who were in the Union army, had killed a cow and were having a barbecue in a peach orchard. Their presence had been betrayed to the Rebels by a man named Dan Johnson, and after the Harps went to sleep they were attacked and killed in their camp. In another version, there were just two Harps, William and his son, and both were wounded in the attack. The Rebels took the wounded men to William's house, where they said to his wife, "Tell him goodbye because we're going to kill him." Then they slit his throat and left. When they were gone William's wife took her son to a cave to treat his wound, but he died there. In a third version, seven Union scouts were camped on the Buffalo River. Samuel R. Harp (William's son) and a man named Cooper were among the party. When they had bedded down for the night Cooper suddenly bolted upright having seen a vision of a rattlesnake coming out of the campfire. "Boys," he said, "that is a sign we'd better not stay here tonight." His companions laughed it off, so he left by himself and camped a mile downstream. By and by, Cooper heard gunfire. When he got up in the morning he was alarmed to see no campfire smoke, and he found the six other scouts shot to death in their beds. These three versions were compiled by a descendent of William Harp and published in *Newton County Family History* in 1992.<sup>97</sup> Interestingly, none of these versions make use of primary documents – affidavits filed with the county courthouse on behalf of the widow in 1866 – which were collected and transcribed by another William Harp descendant about 1981. In these affidavits, the date of the killings is given as September 15, 1864, the names of the victims are listed as William Harp and three sons (Samuel, Elijah, and Marion), and the place of the killings is identified as the Buffalo River.<sup>98</sup> Two Harp gravestones stand in the Shaddox cemetery near Pruitt. The inscriptions on the gravestones say that the Harps were killed rather than died.

Searcy County historian James J. Johnston has collected and studied the plethora of "jayhawker stories" in this part of the Ozarks and argues that they are an important kind of folklore that aided families and communities in the healing process after the war. Johnston observes that there is a formula to the jayhawker stories: the brigands come; they demand food, livestock, or money; often they torture one or more of the victims to extort information; sometimes they commit murder; generally they pillage or burn and then depart. In these stories they never commit rape. Johnston suggests that this is probably accurate, and if the brigands did commit rape, social mores would not have allowed the fact to be passed down in oral tradition as "rape was considered a much less

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<sup>96</sup> Derl E. Williams, compiler, *Williams – Eaton – McBroom – Whiteley and Related Lines* (Published by the author, 1991), 426.

<sup>97</sup> Thomas Niswonger, editor, *Newton County Family History* (Jasper, Arkansas: Newton County Historical Society, 1992): 101-102.

<sup>98</sup> Mildred Frances Lander Roden, "Harp Families," typescript in the Newton County Library, 1981. But an "Uncle Lige" Harp was living in Cecil Cove in 1918. See discussion of the Cecil Cove Slacker Gang in Chapter Six.

acceptable offense than murder, which was a common method for settling a quarrel.” Moreover, the stories almost never identify the brigands by name. In Johnston’s view this is because the jayhawker stories were not crafted to open old wounds or create new animosities, but rather to share the lingering hurt of these Civil War atrocities, which blighted so many lives. Instead of naming names, the brigands (whether they are jayhawkers or bushwhackers) are vilified collectively. “No stories besides the jayhawker narratives depend so much upon the narrator for a characterization of who is good and who is bad,” Johnston observes.<sup>99</sup>

In addition to jayhawker stories, many residents along the Buffalo who lived through the Civil War passed down stories of how they outwitted or evaded the predatory gangs. Women learned not to cook except under cover of darkness as they knew that the telltale sign of chimney smoke would bring the brigands knocking for food. Families hid their valuable possessions outside the home; one woman buried her china in the garden plot. Often people resorted to caves for hiding places. Mollie Williams described how she hid in the mountains with her soldier husband while caring for his bullet wound. First they went to a house in a secluded cove and when they no longer felt secure there they went to a mountain glen where they camped out for a few weeks until he was able to return to his unit.<sup>100</sup>

One woman made the best of the divided allegiances within her immediate family to persuade ruffians on both sides of the conflict to leave her alone. When confronted by jayhawkers, she stated that her folks were from Tennessee and her father was a Yankee. When threatened by bushwhackers, she told them that her husband’s folks were from Mississippi and he was a Rebel. These arguments worked as she always got the bandits to leave without stealing her cow.<sup>101</sup>

Ozark dwellers long remembered the Civil War as a time of hunger as well as terror. Sarah J. Baker Lewis was twenty years old in 1861. In her later years she would tell of how her family’s house was the only one left standing on Tomahawk Creek at the end of the war; all the others had been burned. Food was so scarce that she and her mother and sisters and brothers would walk to Bear Creek to obtain shell corn from their kinfolk and carry it back home, wading the Buffalo River in both directions. Her mother would parch the corn and ration a few kernels to each child. Somehow they were able to conceal one cow and calf till the end of the war.<sup>102</sup>

Many people probably hid their livestock in the woods away from their farms. In the seven northwest counties of Marion, Searcy, Newton, Carroll, Madison, Benton, and Washington in Civil War Arkansas, total numbers of livestock were reduced by two-

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<sup>99</sup> James J. Johnston, “Jayhawker Stories: Historical Lore in the Arkansas Ozarks,” *Midsouth Folklore*, 4, no. 1 (Spring 1976): 3-9.

<sup>100</sup> Williams, *A Thrilling Romance of the Civil War*, 19-21.

<sup>101</sup> Harrell, ed, *History and Folklore*, 50.

<sup>102</sup> James J. Johnston, “Noah Barnett recalls hearing of Civil War times on Tomahawk Creek,” undated typescript, historical files, BNR.

thirds by the end of the war.<sup>103</sup> With the losses of horses, mules, and oxen, as well as the frequent absence of men, plowing was made difficult, and many fields were neglected or abandoned. When people did manage to harvest a corn crop or other staple, the crib might be raided or burned. Roads were also in a sorry state; not maintained for the duration of the war, they were blocked by deadfall and grown up with bushes.<sup>104</sup>

Amidst such ruin the civilian population showed amazing resourcefulness. In the spring of 1865, people began to dig up dirt floors in all the smoke houses in the country and mine the dirt for salt. Since meat had been salted and hung up to dry in these abandoned outbuildings, and the salty brine had dripped onto the smoke house floors, these places now provided a source of salt. The dirt was put in hoppers, water was poured on it, and the salty drippings were boiled down to produce salt.<sup>105</sup>

Faced with terror and starvation, many families fled their homes and became refugees. Confederate families began leaving the area after the battle of Prairie Grove. Unionist families started leaving after the Union forces withdrew from Fayetteville in the summer of 1863. Confederate families fled first to Fort Smith, then farther south when Union troops occupied Fort Smith. Unionist refugees went to Springfield, Missouri. One person reported that the refugee families passing through Fayetteville were "a filthy, miserable lousy pack of women and children...in a state of starvation."<sup>106</sup>

Not all of the dislocation was out-migration. Newton County actually drew refugees as it was relatively remote from fighting. The male population in the county rose nine percent during the war.<sup>107</sup> One refugee who appeared in Searcy County was George W. Wells, a nine-year-old boy who had been orphaned by the war and had walked by himself all the way from Tennessee. Adopted by the William Wyatt family of Richland, he would later be married at Point Peter and would raise ten children.<sup>108</sup>

Northwest Arkansas was the scene of a controversial military experiment in the closing months of the war. Refugee families with Unionist sympathies were invited to return to these desolated counties and resume farming operations under the protection of "home guards." In this way the military hoped to increase food production in the region, as food supplies were so depressed by war conditions that it was difficult to feed troops and horses. The main proponent of this scheme was Colonel M. La Rue Harrison, who established a pilot "post colony" in the vicinity of his garrison at Fayetteville in the summer of 1864, and initiated several other colony farms in the winter of 1864-65. Skeptics of the program suspected that the returning farmers were expropriating lands belonging to absent Rebel families. But Harrison insisted that the colony farms were merely re-establishing families on their former lands by providing them the necessary

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<sup>103</sup> Carl H. Moneyhon, *The Impact of the Civil War and Reconstruction on Arkansas*, 135.

<sup>104</sup> Williams, *A Thrilling Romance of the Civil War*, 40.

<sup>105</sup> "WPA Personal History interview with Wesley Dozier, Yellville, February 24, 1939, WPA No. 150, University of Arkansas Special Collections, Fayetteville.

<sup>106</sup> Moneyhon, *The Impact of the Civil War*, 133.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>108</sup> Harrell, ed., *History and Folklore*, 87; *Mountain Wave* (Marshall), February 16, 1989.

security from Rebel guerrillas. By the end of the war Harrison either established or planned 17 colonies: 2 in Benton County, 4 in Madison County, and 11 in Washington County. He expected to enroll 1200 men (each enrollee had to swear allegiance to the Union) and estimated that some 15,000 acres would be cultivated under the program. Governor Isaac Murphy requested that the program be extended to Carroll, Marion, Newton, and Searcy counties, but Harrison answered that he did not have sufficient troops for it.<sup>109</sup>

The war brought about the collapse of slavery in Arkansas, profoundly changing the lives of the Buffalo River valley's few bondsmen. Census returns do not convey the precise number of slaves who were resident along the Buffalo in 1860, but the numbers were certainly small. In all of Marion County there were 271 slaves, 4 of whom were owned by people in Buffalo Township (along the lower Buffalo River). In Searcy County the 1860 census lists 78 slaves, including 2 in Tomahawk Township and 2 in Richland Township. But from other sources it is evident that the 1860 census missed at least one additional slave, perhaps two, in Richland. In Newton County there were just 24 slaves. There were a few large slaveholdings nearby the river valley. D. L. Dodd of Marion County, whose plantation was north of Yellville, owned 35 slaves in 1860. John M. Hensley lived on Bear Creek with 15 slaves and in all there were 30 slaves in Searcy County's Bear Creek Township – a community with close ties to the population along the Buffalo.<sup>110</sup>

Slaves in northern Arkansas began to flee their masters and seek cover with the invading Union army as early as the summer of 1862, when Major-General Curtis marched to Helena. Six months before the Emancipation Proclamation, Curtis was already prepared to give these runaways “free papers” rather than return them to their owners. One such paper stated:

Jerry White, a colored man, formerly a slave, having by direction of his owner been engaged in rebel service, is hereby confiscated as being contraband of war, and not being needed in the public service, is permitted to pass the pickets of the command northward, and is forever emancipated from his master, who permitted him to assist in attempting to break up the government and laws of the country.

By command of  
Major-General Curtis<sup>111</sup>

Many slaves stayed with their masters until the end of the war, and some former slaves chose to remain in the same place even after they had gained their freedom. There were myriad reasons to run away or leave, and myriad reasons for staying put. The three or four slaves who were owned by William Wyatt of Richland in 1860 all elected to remain in the Wyatt household, as evidenced by the 1870 census. Although one can only

<sup>109</sup> Colonel M. La Rue Harrison to Isaac Murphy, Governor of Arkansas, March 15, 1865, *OR*, Series 1, Vol. 48, Part 1, 1177-1178; Hughes, “Wartime Gristmill Destruction,” 179-183.

<sup>110</sup> 1860 Census, Slave Schedules—Arkansas, M653, Roll 54.

<sup>111</sup> Quoted in DeBlack, *With Fire and Sword*, 61.

guess their reasons, bonds of family probably played a role. Among these five individuals Anthony Hensley was 25 years old in 1865 and had lived with the Wyatt family since childhood; Parthena Wyatt was 22, the mother of Newton Wyatt, age 5, who was sired by her former master, William Wyatt, and Lucinda, an infant. Anthony and Parthena had both been given to the Wyatts by William's father-in-law, John M. Hensley, who indeed was Parthena's father. Thus, Parthena was the half sister of William's wife as well as the mother of William's child. (In addition to these individuals the Wyatt household in 1865 included George Wells, the adopted white orphan boy from Tennessee, and it probably included another young black man, Zachariah Hendrix, who would be listed in the 1870 census.)<sup>112</sup>

At least two other slaves on the Buffalo River remained with their former owners after the war. One man, identified as "Uncle Dale Bob" by a descendant of the slave-owning Laffoon family on the lower Buffalo, reportedly declared at the war's end that he would remain with his old mistress until she died. She was so feeble that he had to carry her back and forth from her bed to the fireside.<sup>113</sup> The second individual was Piety Villines of Boxley Valley. According to family tradition she remained close to her former owner, Elizabeth Villines, until she passed away and they were buried in the same family cemetery.<sup>114</sup>

Despite these heartwarming stories of undying loyalty between former slave and master, historians such as Leon F. Litwack (*Been in the Storm So Long*) remind us that former slaves' motivations were complex and conflicted even in the best of circumstances. Carl H. Moneyhon puts it more bluntly. "Flight to the Yankees ended slavery. It also brought about the collapse of white paternalism. Whites believed that they had been good masters, yet when the Federals came, well-treated slaves left as quickly as others." Moneyhon goes on to observe that whites, feeling betrayed, "readily abandoned the paternalistic ideal, and in its place emerged only an unameliorated racism."<sup>115</sup> Along with the ravages of war, people along the Buffalo River were faced with the bitter legacy of slavery as they looked to an uncertain future.

## SUMMARY

The Civil War was a cataclysmic experience for the people of the Buffalo River valley and became seared in their cultural memory. Owing to the valley's location in a region that was politically divided and militarily of no compelling strategic interest to either North or South, it fell prey to a prolonged period of guerrilla warfare and lawlessness that took the greatest toll on the civilian population.

<sup>112</sup> *Newton County Historical Society Newsletter*, 14, no. 3 (Fall 1998): 20.

<sup>113</sup> Harrell, ed., *History and Folklore*, 55-56.

<sup>114</sup> National Park Service, "Black History Month," by Suzie Rogers, February 2, 1989, historical files, BNR. The 1870 census lists Piety Villines in a separate household with her son Tim.

<sup>115</sup> Moneyhon, *The Impact of the Civil War and Reconstruction on Arkansas*, 140. See also Leon F. Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (New York: Knopf, 1979).



Two periods of the Civil War were particularly memorable in the experience of people inhabiting the Buffalo River valley. The first was the period following secession, when Confederate authorities crushed organized Unionist descent in the area. The second was the period from December 1863 to May 1864 when Union forces made a concerted effort to scatter Confederate guerrilla units and skirmishes were fought at Whiteley's Mill and Richland Valley.

The most significant physical remains of the Civil War era are the existence of several saltpeter caves where rebels were known to have mined saltpeter for the Confederate war effort. Although these saltpeter works were minor in the overall production of saltpeter by the Confederacy, they were targets for Union cavalry raids and were mostly destroyed in the course of the war. Other significant remains include the many graves and headstones of Civil War victims and the skirmish sites at Whiteley's Mill and Richland Valley.

During this study consideration was given to preparing a National Register nomination for the skirmish sites in Richland Valley. Such a nomination, if prepared in the future, will face a challenge in justifying site boundaries based on what information is available about the precise locations where the skirmishes were fought. It appears fairly certain that the skirmishes fought on December 25, 1863, May 3, 1864, and May 5, 1864 occurred between Point Peter and Woolum, near the Hall cemetery, and at the mouth of Dry Creek respectively. The valley retains an overall bucolic feeling that it had in the Civil War era, but the agricultural crops and settlement pattern have changed significantly. A possible alternative is a National Register nomination that addresses Civil War themes for the entire Buffalo National River.



Figure 19. Eoff brothers on a freight wagon. *Joan Hobbs collection, Buffalo National River.*

## CHAPTER SIX

### AGRICULTURE AND INDUSTRY, 1865-1930

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From the Reconstruction Era through the end of the nineteenth century and on into the early twentieth century the economy of the Buffalo River valley revolved around farming and herding, just as it had before the Civil War, and it is the agrarian landscape features of the extended period from 1865 to 1930 that are most represented in Buffalo National River today. In this agricultural economy the family farm remained the basic unit of production, and for a fair portion of the population the agricultural way of life passed from generation to generation. Yet despite those underlying continuities, the economy was transformed over this span of years from a predominantly subsistence-based to a predominantly market-based economy. To be sure, the economy was never wholly one or the other, but always a mix of the two. Farmers traded for market goods in small quantities before the Civil War, and farmers still grew crops and livestock for their own domestic consumption in 1930, but by and large farmers moved more and more into the market economy. In the process, they supplemented the growing of corn and other grains with "cash crops," notably cotton and fruit.

Growing produce for the market, Buffalo River farmers went slowly into debt. They purchased seed and livestock on credit in order to grow these new crops, and they used their cash income to acquire more market commodities such as shoes, magazines, home furnishings, appliances, and gas-powered vehicles and farm equipment. As the market price of cotton and other agricultural commodities declined throughout this period, farmers' debts mounted and they grew increasingly dependent on their creditors. One signal index of the farmers' growing dependency was found in the rate of farm tenancy. Whereas Buffalo River farmers overwhelmingly worked their own land in the antebellum period, more and more sold a portion or all of their farms in the succeeding decades. By 1930, census records show, less than half of all farms in Marion, Searcy, and Newton counties were fully owned by their operators.

Buffalo River farmers sought to offset their mounting indebtedness by taking wage jobs or doing piece work in addition to operating their own farms. They hired out to other farmers, worked in mines, took jobs in the lumbering industry, made ties for the railroad, produced and sold moonshine illicitly, and found other sources of income to augment their farm earnings. In a way, these diverse pursuits in the market economy were merely an extension of the diverse activities of farming, herding, hunting, and fishing that had formed the basis of their subsistence economy in earlier times, especially as they continued to engage in those subsistence activities. But in this long period of transition from a subsistence- to a market-based economy, Buffalo River farmers saw their economic position grow more and more precarious. The changing economy brought increased interdependency between farmers and local townspeople, who were often the farmers' creditors or who provided social services that the farmers needed. New social divisions developed between creditors and debtors, landowners and tenants, townspeople and farmers, even as the population of the Buffalo River valley remained relatively

homogenous ethnically. These societal strains were common across the South, and the Buffalo River was not immune to them.

The transition to a market economy also entailed a growing interdependency between the local economy and larger economic forces in the region, the nation, and the world. Cotton produced by Buffalo River farmers, for example, fetched lower and lower prices because Southern cotton competed in the world market with cotton grown in India, Egypt, and other countries around the world. Despite the fact that the Buffalo River valley was at the fringes of the true Cotton South, economic forces that beset the Cotton South were also in play here. The coming of the railroad was key in bringing the Buffalo River valley into greater involvement with outside markets. Railroads entering the area set the stage for exploitation of timber and mineral resources. In the 1880s and 1890s, railroads, logging, and mining emerged as the area's three major industries in addition to agriculture. Many of these new enterprises were financed by northern investment capital.

This chapter examines the growth and development of the following industries: farming, railroads, mining, logging, and hunting and fishing. In addition to tracing each industry's effects on everyday life along the Buffalo River, attention is given to the effects of these industries on the natural and built environments. Buffalo National River possesses a variety of historic resources associated with this chapter's theme, including numerous farmsteads, buildings, and landscape features dating from the period, numerous mine and mill ruins, and physical evidence of the former railroad.

There are two significant regional contexts for this chapter: the Ozarks and the South. The Ozarks form a significant regional context because the climate and topography of the Ozarks produced a distinctive pattern of natural resource exploitation. At the same time, much of the restructuring of economic relationships between land, labor, and capital that occurred in the Buffalo River valley in this period reflects larger patterns of change that occurred throughout the South. It is important to consider in what ways Buffalo River farmers could identify with economic and social changes that were happening in these wider geographical contexts and in what ways their experience differed. Finally, it should be noted that this chapter uses census data for the three main counties along the Buffalo to make generalized statements about conditions in the Buffalo River valley.

## FARMING

Myriad factors contributed to gradual though sweeping changes in agricultural patterns along the Buffalo River in this period. These factors included population pressure on the land base, the introduction of a new farm labor system, a reorientation to crops grown for market, and mechanization. With the exception of population pressure, these changes were more muted in the Buffalo River valley than in many other parts of the South; nevertheless, changes in agriculture here mirrored changes occurring elsewhere in the region. At the same time, other agricultural patterns continued much as they had before the Civil War. In particular, Buffalo River farmers preserved such folk

arts as the making of sorghum molasses and moonshine, and they herded and raised livestock much the same way as they had before the Civil War.

In the decades following the Civil War, hundreds of families moved into the Buffalo River valley in search of land to farm. These new settlers mostly came from other parts of the South and were part of a continuing westward migration of Southern plain folk to the area that had commenced in the 1820s. As late as the 1870s they were still arriving in wagon trains.<sup>1</sup> The Ozarks were still considered a part of the frontier, a place where vacant lands were available to the homesteader, even though the only remaining unclaimed lands were found on rugged hillsides and ridge tops. Many newcomers settled on these marginal lands with the hope of acquiring good farm land from their neighbors as the land was vacated.

These newcomers faced a challenging situation. Crops could be raised most reliably in rich alluvial soils that were well-watered in summer. In the Buffalo River watershed these soils were confined to select places along the river and its tributaries, and the good agricultural lands were already taken up.

Newcomers had to stake their homestead claims on hillsides and on the rolling prairies between drainages. Soil was comparatively thin and rocky and crops could easily become parched during hot summers. The crop yields were small at best and vulnerable to drought.



Figure 20. Men working hay with horse-powered thresher on Amer farm near Osage, Newton County, 1920. *Wally Waits/Eva Taylor collection, Shiloh Museum. Neg. S-85-56NI.*

Emil Ficht recalled how his family sowed corn on its hilltop farm near Kingston (a few miles west of Boxley) at the turn of the century. “We would plant the corn in rows about 30 inches apart and the hills about two feet apart,” he wrote. “We couldn’t plant it thick as we had to give it plenty of room. Otherwise unless we got plenty of rain during the growing season it would burn up.”<sup>2</sup> Such marginal conditions fed a land hunger. The Ficht family began with 160 acres, and when the Ficht’s neighbor moved to town they bought the neighbor’s property for \$300, giving them a half section. Ideally, a hill farm would include land with a variety of slopes and facings so that adverse weather would not effect all the crops equally.

<sup>1</sup> Walz, “Migration in Arkansas, 1820-1880,” 323.

<sup>2</sup> “Former County Resident Recalls Growing Up At Turn of Century,” *Newton County Times*, February 2, 1988.

As the hillsides and ridge tops filled up with farms, the additional population on the land made a difference for farmers already settled in the river valley. As described in Chapter Four, the first generation of white farmers in the Buffalo River valley practiced a form of subsistence farming that involved field rotation and “forest fallowing,” or letting a field revert to forest for a decade or more before cropping it again. The agricultural system was adapted to low population density. This “field-forest farming,” or “patch farming” as it has also been called, worked well when the farmer had plenty of land and could move his patch from place to place every couple of years. But the method had problems when the population increased. The greater population density forced farmers to clear and cultivate more of the hillsides. Whereas bottomlands had the benefit of being flooded by silt-bearing spring freshets and could yield two or more crops before the soil had to be rested, on hillsides the nutrient-poor soil generally yielded only one good crop before it had to be rested. Moreover, the forest did not regenerate as quickly on hillsides as it did on bottomlands, particularly when cattle and hogs were allowed to graze in the area. As a result, more soil was lost to erosion and farming conditions began to deteriorate.<sup>3</sup>

Another factor that underlay changes in agricultural patterns was not specific to the Buffalo or the Ozarks but characterized all of southern agriculture after the Civil War: the new farm labor system. A basic problem for southern farmers after the Civil War, to paraphrase agricultural historian David B. Danbom, was to join landless labor with laborless land.<sup>4</sup> The problem was starkest in the cotton belt, where freed slaves who had worked the cotton plantations formed a population of landless farmers while the plantation owners who still controlled the land had no labor force to work the land. Out of this situation developed the system of sharecropping whereby farm laborers lived on the plantation, planted and harvested the crop for the owner, and earned a share of the crop in lieu of wages. Although there was less need for sharecropping in a place such as the Buffalo River valley where the family farm still defined the typical farm unit, sharecropping nevertheless appeared there. The reason it appeared along the Buffalo was that Arkansas, together with other states of the South, enacted laws aimed at getting the old plantations back into production and these state laws affected farm owners and laborers in all parts of the state including areas where farms were small and cotton was only a marginal cash crop. Still, sharecropping was rare along the Buffalo. Much more common was the related practice of tenant farming for crop rent.

Arkansas law made crucial distinctions between sharecroppers and farm tenants. A “cropper” was a laborer who had practically no rights in the land he occupied and no title to the crop he made other than a laborer’s lien on the crop for wages. A cropper furnished only his labor while the landowner furnished the seed, tools, and horsepower as well as the land. A farm tenant or “renter,” by contrast, had legal possession of the land

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<sup>3</sup> Otto and Burns, “Traditional Agricultural Practices in the Arkansas Highlands,” 183-185.

<sup>4</sup> Danbom, *Born in the Country*, 124.

and generally controlled the farm operations. A renter furnished his own seed, tools, and horsepower while the landowner provided only the land.<sup>5</sup>

While the courts upheld these distinctions uniformly across the state, other features of the farm tenancy system varied according to local custom. In Searcy County, it was customary for the cropper to produce the whole crop and divide the value of the harvest on a fifty-fifty basis with the landowner. The renter, meanwhile, paid a portion of the crop to the landowner as "crop rent," and in Searcy County the amount was a standard one-third of the corn crop and one-fourth of the cotton crop. Typically the renter harvested only his own share of the corn but picked all of the cotton, dividing the proceeds from this cash crop with the owner at the time of sale. Some farm tenants paid cash rent instead of crop rent, but in the South's cash-poor economy in the latter part of the nineteenth century this arrangement was less common.<sup>6</sup>

The new farm labor system took hold unevenly in different parts of the Buffalo River valley. Along the upper and lower Buffalo, in the more mountainous sections of Newton and Marion counties, it had little effect; most farms continued to be owner-operated. In the middle section, from Richland Valley to Tyler Bend, tenant farming was much more prevalent. At least one farm, the Cash farm, employed sharecroppers. James Monroe Cash owned land at Cash Bend and Richland Valley and he had a number of sharecroppers working for him in the early 1900s. According to the oral history of two descendants, his labor force may have numbered around twenty men, most or all of whom lived on the north side of the river in a community called Shady Grove. Some of these hands had their own hill farms and worked on Cash's land to supplement their own farm income. A few of these sharecroppers made it their whole livelihood. These people were generally furnished a home, garden, and milk cow, together with 40 acres and a team of mules. The Cash farm was one of very few large cotton farms along the Buffalo.<sup>7</sup>

In Arkansas and across the South, the farm tenancy system formed an "agricultural ladder," providing a path of upward mobility and therefore an incentive system for farm labor. Starting on the lowest rung, a farm laborer could theoretically ascend the ladder from cropper to renter to owner. In reality, there was mobility both up and down the ladder and as early as the 1880s agricultural economists began to pay close attention to farm tenancy rates to assess how farmers were doing. Rising farm tenancy rates were seen as an indication of slipping farm income and increasing farmer indebtedness. Moreover, studies showed that tenant-operated farms were not as

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<sup>5</sup> Erling D. Solberg, *The Legal Aspects of Farm Tenancy in Arkansas*, Arkansas Experiment Station Bulletin 468 (Fayetteville, Arkansas: U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1947), 13-14.

<sup>6</sup> Orville J. McInturff, "The Evolution of Searcy County's Economy," *Mountain Wave* (Marshall), May 23, 1974.

<sup>7</sup> Jim Tilley, interview by Jill Gentry White, July 27, 1995; Lee Ann (Cash) Williams, interview by Suzanne D. Rogers, August 23, 1995.

productive as owner-operated farms over the long run, because tenant farmers had less incentive to practice soil conservation.<sup>8</sup>

Buffalo River farmers moved up and down this agricultural ladder just as their counterparts did elsewhere in Arkansas and the South, but again the pattern varied on different sections of the river with changes in farm ownership and tenancy being more pronounced in the middle section of the valley through Searcy County. The upwardly mobile Valentine and Mollie Williams moved from their Buffalo River farm to St. Joe in 1887 so that they could put their children in school. With the rent from their farm they opened a hotel in town.<sup>9</sup> Another upwardly mobile farmer, Jim Ferguson, turned over some of his farm above Tyler Bend to renters who grew cotton as a cash crop as well as corn for their own needs. Buck Turney, Ferguson's neighbor across the river, also put up some of his land for rent and worked the rest of it himself. "He had a whole bunch of hoe hands and he worked a lot of cotton every year," Harvey L. Grinder remembered. "What he'd rent out he would have them put in cotton."<sup>10</sup> While these individuals improved their situations by renting out, other farmers moved down the economic ladder, becoming renters themselves as they sank into debt. Farm tenancy rates in the region rose, though not as much as they did in the state as a whole. By one account, the proportion of farms operated by tenants in the Arkansas Ozarks climbed from 20.3 percent in 1880 to 35.3 percent in 1930, while in the state as a whole the proportion of tenant-operated farms went from 30.9 percent in 1880 to 63.0 percent in 1930.<sup>11</sup> A higher rate of farm tenancy also emerged along the middle Buffalo compared to its upper section, as reflected in census data covering Searcy and Newton counties. In 1930, 41.9 percent of all farms in Searcy County were tenant-operated, while the proportion was just 30.8 percent in Newton County.<sup>12</sup>

Besides population growth and the new farm labor system, a third important change in the agricultural pattern along the Buffalo River involved the move to market crops, beginning with cotton. As with tenant farming, the extent of cotton farming was uneven along the Buffalo and more pronounced in Searcy County than elsewhere. Even in Searcy County, farmers did not go into cotton farming as extensively as they did in the eight counties that comprise the eastern portion of the Arkansas Ozarks. Furthermore, it must be recognized that the entire Arkansas Ozarks region remained on the fringes of the Cotton South. Nonetheless, the drive to grow cotton for a "cash crop" made inroads

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<sup>8</sup> Lee J. Alston and Kyle D. Kauffman, "Agricultural Chutes and Ladders: New Estimates of Sharecroppers and 'True Tenants' in the South, 1900-1920," *Journal of Economic History* 57, no. 2 (June 1997), 465-475; Jeremy Atack, "Tenants and Yeoman in the Nineteenth Century," *Agricultural History*, 62, no. 3 (Summer 1988), 6-9; Thomas C. McCormick, "Recent Increases of Farm Tenancy in Arkansas," *Southwestern Social Science Quarterly* 15, no. 1 (June 1934), 64-66.

<sup>9</sup> Williams, *A Thrilling Romance of the Civil War*, 80-81.

<sup>10</sup> Harvey L. Grinder and Howard Hensley, interview by Suzanne D. Rogers, September 24, 1986.

<sup>11</sup> J. Charlton, *The Social Aspects of Farm Ownership and Tenancy in the Arkansas Ozarks*, Arkansas Experiment Station Bulletin 471 (Fayetteville: U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1947), 3.

<sup>12</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930*, Vol. 2, Part 2 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1932). The proportion in Marion County was 39.8 percent, but farm tenancy within Buffalo Township in Marion County was probably not that high.



everywhere along the Buffalo River in this period, even as farmers continued to devote the lion's share of their land to raising corn and hogs.

The center of cotton agriculture in the Buffalo River watershed was Richland Valley, where no fewer than four cotton gins were in operation from Eula to Point Peter in the 1890s.<sup>13</sup> But cotton appeared along all sections of the river valley. Gertrude Studyvin, a resident of Boxley, remembered that "at one time everybody grew cotton....They grew it for market....It was their money crop in the fall. Some people would have a great big field and some a small one."<sup>14</sup> Beth Herrington, a resident of Tomahawk Township in Searcy County averred, "Cotton was the cash crop for buying winter shoes and clothes and paying the small taxes. Corn was raised for home consumption."<sup>15</sup> George Laffoon recalled that his family, who lived near the mouth of Cedar Creek on the lower Buffalo, "grew cotton, corn, and cattle." Each year's cotton crop fetched about \$300, Laffoon recollected. The Laffoon family hauled their product by wagon to Yellville, where George Laffoon's father sold it "right there on the yard to the buyer."<sup>16</sup> Nadine Goodall, a former resident of Rush, reported that there were cotton fields across the river from the mining town when she was a girl. This farm belonged to one Dave Setzer.<sup>17</sup>



Figure 21. Cotton gin at Marble Falls. Built around 1890, it replaced a mill that burned in the 1880s. *Historical collection, Newton County Library.*

As was the case on farms throughout the upland South, Buffalo River farmers turned only a portion of their land over to cotton while continuing to grow their staple crop of corn on most of their cultivated acres. "The first thing you had to grow [was] feed for your animals and feed for your families," explained Jim Tilley, grandson of James Monroe Cash. "It was really a scratch and go to make much money raising cotton but that was a cash crop. Then they'd grow corn to feed their animals, and oats, and maybe stuff like that. They would grow corn for their families."<sup>18</sup> This has been called the "safety first" approach and it was a traditional agricultural practice that Buffalo River farmers had inherited from their forebears in the Appalachians. Farmers gave most of their time, labor, and acreage to growing their own cereals and then they cultivated a few acres of cotton or surplus corn for sale.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Harrell, ed., *History and Folklore of Searcy County, Arkansas*, 29.

<sup>14</sup> Gertrude Studyvin and Ruth Armer, interview by Dwight Pitcaithley, August 15, 1974.

<sup>15</sup> Herrington, *Tomahawk Tales*, 4.

<sup>16</sup> George Laffoon, interview by Bob Schelhouse, August 10, 1978.

<sup>17</sup> Nadine Goodall, Mabel Duhan, and John and Betty Wirth, interview by Suzanne D. Rogers, March 26, 1985.

<sup>18</sup> Tilley interview.

<sup>19</sup> Otto, "Traditional Agricultural Practices in the Arkansas Highlands," 184.

Even this limited amount of cotton farming signaled important changes in agricultural life along the Buffalo because it reflected farmers' growing participation in a market economy. Before the Civil War, only miniscule cotton crops were grown along the Buffalo and very little of the product was sold to buyers; mostly it was used on the farm for homespun. The first gins did not appear in the area until the 1870s. In the next decade, cotton agriculture took hold in certain areas along the Buffalo, such as Richland Valley. In all of Newton, Searcy, and Marion counties in 1880, the amount of acres planted in cotton totaled a third of all acres planted in corn.

TABLE 2. SIZE OF CROPS IN MARION, SEARCY, AND NEWTON COUNTIES, IN ACRES, 1880<sup>20</sup>

	MARION COUNTY	SEARCY COUNTY	NEWTON COUNTY
TILLED LAND	28,673	28,581	24,333
PLANTED IN COTTON	7,116	4,320	2,602
PLANTED IN CORN	13,034	14,399	12,217
PLANTED IN OATS	1,985	1,901	1,906
PLANTED IN WHEAT	2,494	3,085	2,241
COTTON/CORN RATIO – 1:3			

This 1:3 cotton/corn ratio compared to a 2:3 cotton/corn ratio in Georgia's upcountry in this same period, a region in which yeoman farmers were swept most dramatically into the "vortex of the cotton economy," according to historian Stephen Hahn.<sup>21</sup> The allure of cotton agriculture was that it brought the best financial return of any farm crop that Southern farmers could produce. The crop was difficult to grow, laborious to harvest, and exhausting for the soil, but the cash incentive overwhelmed those drawbacks, even as cotton prices tumbled year after year, battered by overproduction in the South and competition from other producer nations in the world market.<sup>22</sup>

Farmers in the Buffalo River valley had two main sources of credit that could help them turn to cotton farming. The first source of credit for the farmer was the country store. Sometimes the store furnished seed and tools to the farmer before spring planting, or even supplied his other needs while the cotton crop was growing, then the store collected on the debt when the farmer harvested and sold his crop. This was called the "crop lien system" or "furnishing system." It became prevalent throughout the South. The crop lien system involved a trusting relationship between the farmer and the store owner, as many farmers could not read or write. Along the middle Buffalo, farmers participated in the crop lien system through B. F. Henley & Sons, an outfit with stores in

<sup>20</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Census Office, *Report on Cotton Production in the United States* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1884), 89, 93.

<sup>21</sup> Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850-1890* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 4. For data corresponding to the data in Table 2 below, see Table 4.1 on page 143.

<sup>22</sup> For a comparative history of the move to cotton in the Lower South, see Robert F. Pace, "Abandoning Self-Sufficiency: Corn in the Lower South, 1849-1869," *Southern Studies* 4, no. 3 (Fall 1993): 271-293, especially 284-285.

St. Joe, Woolum, and Duff. The company's main store in St. Joe was said to be the largest general store in northern Arkansas during the 1920s.<sup>23</sup>

The farmer's second source of credit was the cotton gin. When cotton gins began to appear in the valley the operators of the gins would sometimes process a farmer's load of cotton for a share of the crop. This followed the traditional practice whereby the operator of a grist mill charged a small toll for milling a load of grain. Alternatively, the operator of the cotton gin would buy the farmer's whole lot and take all of the baled cotton to market himself. Frank Mays was a "cotton buyer" on the middle Buffalo at Mount Hersey. "During the ginning season," his son Armon remembered, "we would each evening load three bales of cotton on each wagon." As a single bale weighed 500 pounds, this was as much as a team could haul up the steep road leading out of Mount Hersey. They took the product to Pindall, where the depot agent wrote them a receipt. The trip was repeated every day, three bales at a time, for weeks on end. Mays employed several hands during the ginning season.<sup>24</sup>



Figure 22. Mr. and Mrs. George "Brit" Keaton and son Roy tended the Ponca General Store, ca. 1925. Robert Shroll collection, Buffalo National River.

Cotton farming along the Buffalo River peaked in the 1880s and then it slowly waned. The total number of acres planted in cotton in Newton, Searcy, and Marion counties diminished about ten percent from 1880 to 1910, although a telling decline in

<sup>23</sup> Harrell, ed., *History and Folklore of Searcy County, Arkansas*, 293-294.

<sup>24</sup> Armon T. Mays, "Early Life in Mt. Hersey Along the Buffalo," *Newton County Historical Society Newsletter* 14, no. 3 (1998): 24.

cotton production per acre dropped the total harvest by a further increment.<sup>25</sup> By the turn of the century, agricultural experiment stations were demonstrating the need for crop rotation to conserve soil nutrients, and were encouraging farmers at the margins of the cotton economy to grow other crops instead.<sup>26</sup> Buffalo River farmers finally turned away from the cotton market after the First World War.<sup>27</sup>

Meanwhile, Buffalo River farmers had already begun to grow other crops for the market besides cotton. Beginning in the 1880s many apple orchards were planted in the area. Commencing in the 1890s strawberries and blackberries were common, too. Ozark fruit growers got their produce to market on the St. Louis and San Francisco Railroad, which was built from Springfield, Missouri to Fort Smith, Arkansas in 1881.<sup>28</sup> In the long run fruit growers did not do well. Lacking expertise in grading and marketing the fruit, burdened by high freight rates, and hurt by late spring frosts, most of these enterprises did not last through the 1930s.<sup>29</sup>

One fruit that flourished was the tomato. Tomato growing and canning developed into a significant regional industry in this era. Many tomato crops were started because they could be grown in between orchard tree saplings until the orchards began producing fruit. Tomatoes grew so successfully that in time they became known as the “red gold of the Ozarks.” With the development of railroads and the advent of canning as a preferred method of preserving and mass-marketing fruit and vegetables, small tomato canneries appeared all over the Ozarks. Historian Tom Dicke has distinguished two types of canners in the Ozarks: small commercial packers who processed one or two crops and who made packing their main business, and farmers who dabbled in canning as a sideline.<sup>30</sup> A tomato canning factory had a short run in the Boxley Valley during the late 1930s and early 1940s.<sup>31</sup> The small tomato canneries in the Ozarks faded away after World War II, squeezed out of the market by large canneries located in other parts of the nation. As the canneries vanished, tomato farming declined.

Buffalo River farmers also grew corn for the market. As the population density peaked around the turn of the century, farmers grew corn in “every little patch that someone wasn’t living in,” one valley resident remembered.<sup>32</sup> “Everybody in this country had big fields of corn,” another resident recalled. “We had to get that corn in

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<sup>25</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Census Office, *Report on Cotton Production in the United States* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1884), 89, 93; U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910, Agriculture*, Vol. 6 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1913).

<sup>26</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, “Diversified Farming in the Cotton Belt,” *Yearbook of the Department of Agriculture* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1906), 193-212; Danborn, *Born in the Country*, 128-129.

<sup>27</sup> Studyvin and Armer interview.

<sup>28</sup> Blevins, *Hill Folks*, 42.

<sup>29</sup> McInturff, “The Evolution of Searcy County’s Economy.”

<sup>30</sup> Tom Dicke, “Red Gold of the Ozarks: The Rise and Decline of Tomato Canning, 1885-1955,” *Agricultural History*, 79, no. 1 (Winter 2005), 8.

<sup>31</sup> *Newton County Historical Society Newsletter*, 14, no. 1 (Spring 1998), n.p.

<sup>32</sup> Goodall interview.

cribs and sometimes we would have three big buildings as big as this [house] full of corn.”<sup>33</sup> This was more corn than a farm unit needed to feed family and livestock; much of it was being sold in the market. The acreage devoted to corn in Newton, Searcy, and Marion counties reached its greatest extent around 1910. At that time it aggregated 69,378 acres, or about twelve acres per farm. Thereafter the size of the corn crop declined, probably due to the fact that many farmers went to work in the mining or timber industries and put less time into farming.

A fourth change in agricultural practice in this period involved a gradual move toward mechanization. In the nineteenth century, Buffalo River farmers harvested grain using either the hand-held cradle (similar to a scythe) or the horse-drawn mowing machine. In the early 1900s, mechanical reapers made their appearance in the valley. Once the grain was cut, either by hand or mechanical reaper, it was bundled and bound together in “shocks.” The shocks were then hauled to a threshing machine, which separated the grain’s seed head from the plant stems. The first threshing machine employed in the area was called the “Groundhog” thresher. It was powered by a horse on a treadmill. The horse pulled a staff that turned a crank that drove the threshing machine. The threshed grain spewed out one end into a wagon box while the straw shot out of a funnel in another direction. It took a crew to operate the thresher, with one man throwing the bundles of grain off the wagon, another feeding the bundles into the thresher, others shoveling the grain from the wagon into the granary, and other men baling the straw.<sup>34</sup>

Mechanization occurred first on the larger farms because it required an economy of scale. While big farmers used machines and employed a number of hired hands, small farmers continued to sow and harvest their crops using hand tools and by working alone or with the help of their family.<sup>35</sup>

On some farms, old ways persisted past the turn of the century. In the early 1900s, many hill farmers still cultivated their corn crops with the hand hoe. The farmer plowed the earth using a small walking plow with a single shear known as a Georgia stock. This plow had to be maneuvered behind a single mule. After the ground was broken the farmer used a one-way turning plow pulled by a two-horse team. This was a labor intensive process and, as in the antebellum era, it could take a whole family’s efforts to cultivate twenty acres.<sup>36</sup>



Figure 23. Boxley Mill. Carroll County Heritage Center collection, Shiloh Museum.

<sup>33</sup> Studyvin and Henderson interview.

<sup>34</sup> Searcy County Retired Teachers Association, *Searcy County Arkansas: A History of Searcy County Arkansas and its People*, 21.

<sup>35</sup> McInturff, “The Evolution of Searcy County’s Economy,” and “Threshing Crew at Canaan,” *Mountain Wave* (Marshall, Arkansas), July 22, 2004.

<sup>36</sup> “Former County Resident Recalls Growing Up At Turn of Century.”

Small farmers also continued to grow sorghum cane, from which they made molasses. The technology involved in making molasses hardly changed. The cut stalks of green cane were fed into a cane press or sorghum mill, which was generally powered by a horse walking in a circle and hitched to the mill by a long pole. Juice from the crushed cane would run into a barrel or tub, from which it was piped to a long, shallow, cooking pan. The pan was placed over a furnace or rock fire place in which a slow hickory fire burned. As the liquid boiled, a greenish scum would rise to the surface and be skimmed off. The remainder was poured into cooling pans and then into barrels. Some sorghum mills produced molasses for local consumption only; some made a product that was sold in nearby towns or cities.<sup>37</sup>

One of several successful producers of molasses on the Buffalo River was George Laffoon. The Laffoon family lived on the lower Buffalo below Rush. George Laffoon had a 12-foot-long pan, which he moved from place to place, wherever people harvested cane, erecting a furnace of rock and clay and a press at each location. He would operate the sorghum mill from sunrise to sundown sometimes for days on end. The operation would employ four or five people. Often children were employed in skimming the scum off the molasses as it collected in the pan.<sup>38</sup>

Frank Villines, a resident on the upper Buffalo, had a sorghum mill near Kyles Landing. His half brother Bill Villines recalled how the cane was hauled by wagon to a shed on Villines' farm where it was spread out in a loft to dry. Later it was fed into the press. Bill Villines recalled the day his two-year old son fell into the tub of molasses. "He was reaching over in the pan after we set it out and run the sorghum all out of that one partition. We always had a cross bar in that pan.... He fell in there and I'll never forget seeing the molasses stuck on the side of his head. It got cold the molasses did on that side." When Bill Villines related this story in 1988, the foundations of the sorghum mill and Frank Villines' house were still evident.<sup>39</sup>

Some Buffalo River farmers resorted to the risky business of producing and selling illicit corn whiskey, or moonshine. It had long been a common practice in the upland South to use a part of the corn crop to make this beverage for domestic use. Around the end of the nineteenth century, moonshine became an Ozark hill farmer's export. A major impetus for the industry was the federal tax on whiskey, which drove up prices and created an economic opportunity for the illicit distiller. By the 1890s, when the tax rose to \$1.10 per gallon, dozens of tiny illicit stills were tucked away in hidden vales throughout the Ozarks, remote from federal revenue agents. The industry flourished in the early twentieth century. During the Prohibition era, the money to be made in moonshine went even higher, but so did the risks involved. After Prohibition the industry declined.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Randolph, *The Ozarks*, 64-65; "Grandpap's A-Makin'," *Atlantic Monthly*, 162 (October 1938), 551-552.

<sup>38</sup> Ware Laffoon interview by Suzanne Rogers, May 14, 1986.

<sup>39</sup> Bill Villines interview by Suzanne Rogers and Jim Liles, March 14, 1988.

<sup>40</sup> Randolph, *The Ozarks*, 225; Charles Morrow Wilson, *Backwoods America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1934), 167.

To make moonshine, the distiller started with a mixture of coarsely ground corn meal, corn sugar, and water, called “mash.” This substance was fermented for four to ten days, after which the resulting “beer” was poured into a tank in the still and slowly boiled over a furnace. The liquid would be distilled two and three times and then run through a charcoal filter to complete the process. As the distilling occurred, spirit vapors and steam would pass through a spiral copper tube called a “worm.” This coil was surrounded by a jacket through which cold water circulated, causing the vapors in the worm to condense and trickle down into the receiving jug. The worm’s copper coils gave the moonshine still its distinctive appearance. The still and furnace were usually housed in a shed, well-camouflaged with underbrush. Nearby the shed there was often a wood platform for the “night watch” or “fireman” stationed there to tend the furnace for the duration of the distilling process, which could last up to three days.<sup>41</sup>



Figure 24. This moonshine operation was housed in a cave with a shed built against the cave entrance. *Newton County Times* collection, *Shiloh Museum*, Neg. S-88-234N21.

These stills were sometimes hidden in caves, more often along small creeks. A revenue agent described the target of a raid in southern Newton County in 1907. After an arduous trip on horseback from Harrison through Jasper and Parthenon to Deer, then on foot up an unnamed creek, the team of four law enforcers found the wildcat still after dark on the second day:

<sup>41</sup> Wilson, *Backwoods America*, 166.

And now as we stood and looked at each other, our faces wet with sweat, our feet sore, our limbs already tired, our hearts beating with anxiety (not fear), we could hear nothing in that lonesome place but the splashing of a little waterfall far down the dismal vale. This, we had understood, was the spot where the Devil had been engaging in his nefarious business, and on we went, now in the bed of the creek, over boulders and brush and through the water until at last we drew near the little waterfall. There we saw a huge rock, almost square, and as large as a house, lying right in the bed of the creek, allowing a passageway for the water on the east side, and here was the waterfall pouring down a bluff almost ten feet high, the water coming from a spring above the bluff and from under the mountain. As we passed between the huge rock on our right and the sparkling water on our left, we caught sight of a roof just south of the rock, which proved to be the stillhouse, but there was no light, only a few coals of fire that had been deserted.<sup>42</sup>

The moonshine industry added to the Ozark farmers' mistrust of outsiders and often strained relations between neighbors. During Prohibition the tensions mounted. The price of moonshine soared to \$20 per gallon, which led to heightened competition and violence between distillers. Law enforcement paid as much as \$30 for tips leading to the arrest of moonshiners. "This was a lot of money back then," one old moonshiner stated. "Some stills were turned in by neighbors. We called them 'snitches.' They didn't stay in the neighborhood very long after snitching, I tell you."<sup>43</sup>

Vance Randolph, writing about Ozark folk life, was sympathetic toward the moonshiner in the Prohibition era. "It is mighty hard for a man to work from daylight to dark, hoeing corn which sells for seventy-five cents a bushel, or cutting stovewood at one dollar and fifty cents a cord, when he knows that a few weeks of distilling will keep his whole family in comparative luxury all winter." Randolph suggested that the high price of moonshine was not the only problem. With the development of paved roads and a tourist industry in the Ozarks, it became a simple matter for the moonshiner to take his product to the summer resorts where the tourist would buy it for \$5 to \$6 per quart.<sup>44</sup>

While moonshine and sorghum molasses were two traditional agricultural products that received a lot of attention for their local color, perhaps the most significant holdover from nineteenth-century agricultural practices was open-range livestock herding. Buffalo River farmers generally had a number of hogs and cattle, and they might raise sheep, goats, and poultry as well. Hogs and cattle took little effort to raise, as they were allowed to range freely on the land and could subsist on natural forage throughout the year. Hogs fed on acorns and other forest mast and were little troubled by predators, since panthers and wolves were practically hunted out in the Ozarks by this

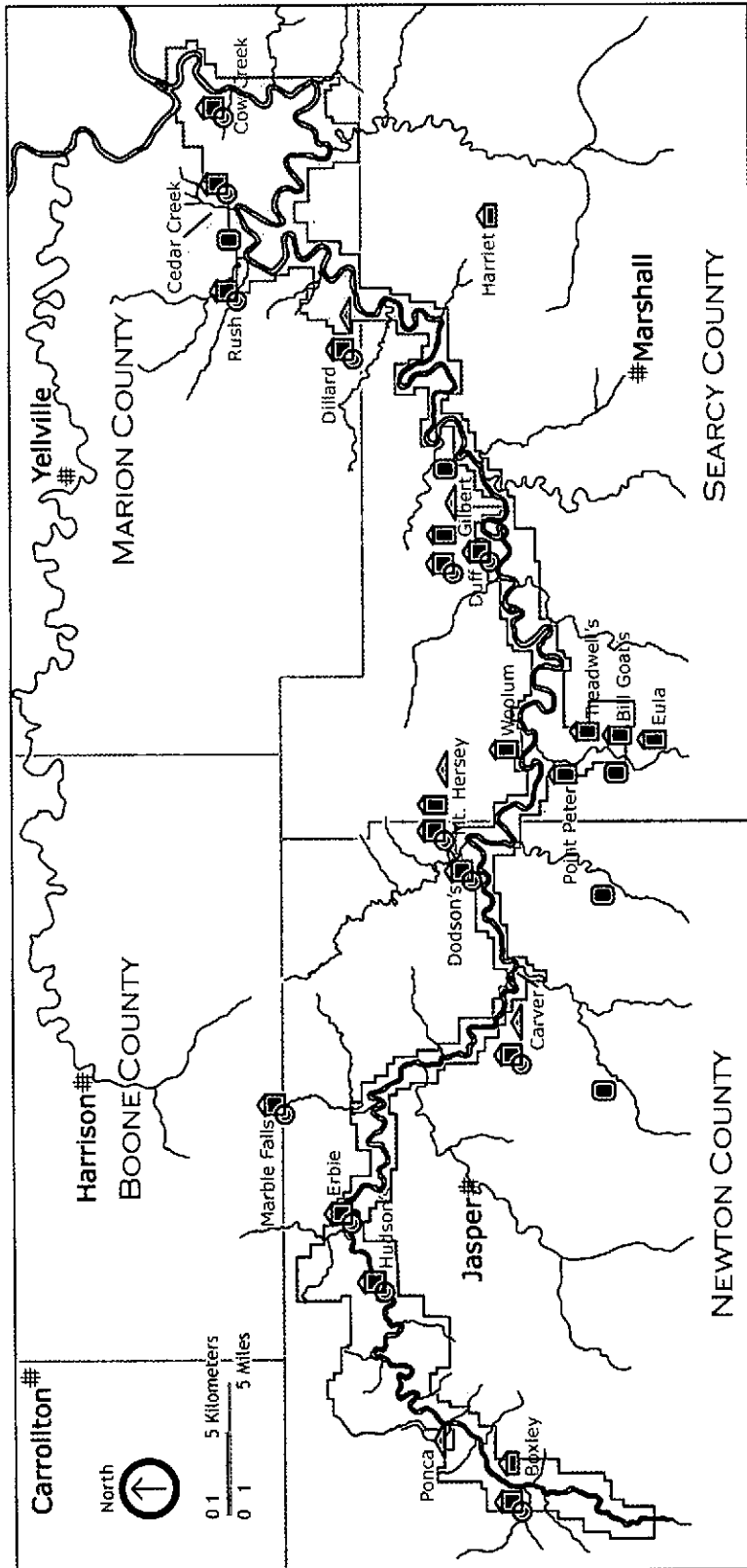
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<sup>42</sup> Isaac Stapleton, *Moonshiners in Arkansas* (Independence, Missouri: Zion's Printing and Publishing Company, 1948), 50-51.

<sup>43</sup> Jeannette Morgan, "An Old Ozark Moonshiner Tells All," *The Ozark Mountaineer*, (November/December 1993), 51.

<sup>44</sup> Randolph, *The Ozarks*, 225-226.





Map 8. Industry, 1865-1920  
 Note: the processing facilities shown are based on disparate sources and do not reflect all of the facilities present in the valley.

time. Cattle got by on forest graze with occasional supplements of corn and salt. To ensure a good growth of grass in the forest, Buffalo River farmers regularly set fire to the forest under-story, or created “deadenings” by girdling all the trees in an area. In the fall, the cattle were rounded up and sorted according to each owner’s mark and driven to market. Hogs were sold in the market, too, but more often they were consumed locally.<sup>45</sup>

Two oldtimers who grew up along the middle Buffalo remembered that their families ran hogs on mast and that these animals, though practically feral, were “fat as can be.” In the fall of the year before the hogs’ owners planned to butcher them, they would “throw out a little grain to them” and “get them tamed.” Then the family would build a little corral and lure the hogs into it with some more grain, so that they could be kept and fattened until butchering time.<sup>46</sup>

Generally hogs were butchered in the winter and the meat was cured for year-round consumption. “You killed hogs in the winter time and ground it up and rendered it out and cured the shoulders, the hams, and what they called the middlings, what we would call bacon,” Tilley explained. “The rest of it was either rendered or ground up and made out of sausage.” Cattle were butchered much less often than hogs as there was no way to preserve beef that was not eaten immediately. Without refrigeration, beef quickly spoiled.<sup>47</sup>

Open-range herding in the Ozarks was an agricultural practice that had been passed down from generation to generation. Its roots ran back more than a century to when Ozark farmers’ ancestors had lived in the Appalachians, and farther still to their Celtic forebears’ livestock herding practices in northern Britain and Ireland. It was adapted to conditions of low population density in the hardwood forest environment of the South. As the Buffalo River valley became densely settled and logging companies moved into the area, open-range herding persisted in the area even in the face of environmental changes that made the practice more and more precarious. By the 1920s and 1930s, conservationists would be calling for modern forms of range management to protect the environment from overgrazing and soil erosion. The conservationists’ critique prefigured a wholesale conversion from open-range livestock herding to dairy farming and cattle ranching after World War II. These developments in stock raising are discussed in subsequent chapters.

## RAILROADS

Improvements in transportation, particularly the coming of railroads, had a profound effect on life along the Buffalo. Most importantly, Buffalo River farmers used transportation to get their farm products to market, and as their means of transportation improved so too did farmers’ opportunities to participate in the larger market. Better

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<sup>45</sup> Otto, “Traditional Agricultural Practices in the Arkansas Highlands,” 186.

<sup>46</sup> Grinder and Hensley interview.

<sup>47</sup> Tilley interview.

transportation also improved the lives of Buffalo River farmers by giving them reliable, year-round access to a wide variety of services.

Before the coming of railroads, some people used the river to get their surpluses and cash crops to market. William Skelton Mays, whose farm was near Grinders' Ferry, put his baled cotton on a raft each fall and floated it down the lower Buffalo River and the White River to Batesville.<sup>48</sup> Still others teamed up to make cattle drives to Little Rock.<sup>49</sup> Farmers also sold their produce to peddlers, who traveled from farm to farm buying produce, which they hauled to Little Rock over wagon roads and sold for a small profit. Cotton, apples, and even eggs were taken to market this way before the coming of the railroads.<sup>50</sup>

Prior to the advent of railroad transportation, farmers also shipped their surplus produce north over rugged wagon roads to a railhead at Springfield, Missouri, and south to a river landing at Russellville. Historian Dwight T. Pitcaithley has described the latter effort:

On a cold January morning in 1880, around 200 wagons congregated near the mouth of Richland Creek in Searcy County and began a slow trek up that creek across the Boston Mountains to Russellville on the Arkansas River. The wagon train arrived less than two weeks [later] after negotiating eighty miles of winding Ozark roads. By the time of its arrival, the train had grown to include 300 wagons and stretched over a distance of fourteen miles.<sup>51</sup>

Such a large, collective effort showed the growing attraction of the market and the desire for better transportation by members of this formerly frontier society on the Buffalo. With the development of railroads, Buffalo River farmers finally acquired much greater opportunities to enter the market and sell their produce for cash, as railroads transported their grain, cotton, and livestock to distant places. Likewise, railroads gave farmers the opportunity to acquire labor-saving farm equipment and household appliances that were manufactured far from where they lived, since these things could be shipped much more cheaply than in the past. When the farm population entered the market economy, local townspeople prospered from it. Towns vied with one another to get a railroad connection, because a town situated on a railroad line attracted local commerce. Once a town had a railroad connection the town had secured its position as a market place for the surrounding farm population. Reciprocally, when a town was bypassed by a new railroad line it could spell doom for the town.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Mays, "Armon Mays Remembers the Buffalo as a River of Commerce."

<sup>49</sup> Russel L. Gerlach, "The Ozark Scotch-Irish: The Subconscious Persistence of an Ethnic Culture," *Pioneer America Society Transactions*, 7 (1984): 51.

<sup>50</sup> McInturff, "The Evolution of Searcy County's Economy."

<sup>51</sup> Pitcaithley, *Let the River Be*, 57-58.

<sup>52</sup> Ayers, *The Promise of the New South*, 7.

Railroads not only stimulated local commerce by shipping farm produce out of an area and bringing cheaper manufactured goods into an area, they were also major industries in their own right. The construction and operation of a railroad involved a large work force. Railroad construction camps sometimes evolved into permanent towns, as in the case of Gilbert, and railroad operations entailed the formation of administrative nodes at frequent points along the line, such as the section headquarters that developed in Harrison.<sup>53</sup> Railroads also purchased large quantities of farm produce to feed its construction camps, spent capital in acquiring land and rights-of-way, and consumed enormous quantities of raw materials, including steel, coal, and wood.

The 1880s and 1890s were decades of energetic railroad construction in the South. Southern state governments, recognizing railroad development as the key to economic growth, lured railroad companies with incentives of low taxes and minimal regulation. Many Ozark towns and counties, in their eagerness to be on a railroad line, issued bonds to railroad companies for the construction of new lines.<sup>54</sup> By 1890, nine out of ten southerners lived in a county served by a railroad line.<sup>55</sup> However, none of the three counties overlapping the Buffalo River drainage was served by a railroad until after 1900. Indeed, while the St. Louis & San Francisco (Frisco) line skirted the region on the north and west, and lines of the future Missouri Pacific bordered the region on the south and east, the Arkansas Ozarks by and large remained “an island without rail transportation.”<sup>56</sup> Eventually the Buffalo River was traversed by a single railroad, first known as the St. Louis & North Arkansas, later known as the Missouri & North Arkansas. Built across the Buffalo’s watershed in 1902-03, the coming of this railroad was a signal event for the local farming population, area towns, and the nearby mining and timber industries.

The line owed its origin to the small Eureka Springs Railway Company, chartered in 1882, which built a nineteen-mile line from Beaver to Eureka Springs. The purpose of the line was to access the budding tourist resort of Eureka Springs, then acquiring renown as a place of healing waters and grand hotels. Completion of the railroad into the mountain fastness surrounding Eureka Springs was something of an engineering feat, and commerce on the line soon surpassed expectations as the railroad transported not only passenger tourists to and from the resort but also significant quantities of lumber, cotton, salt, and livestock produced in the nearby mountains. Over the next decade the success of this railroad inspired citizens of Carroll, Boone, and Searcy counties to clamor for an extension of the line further into the Arkansas Ozarks. They finally achieved their goal when capitalists in Little Rock, St. Louis, and New York formed a company to build a railroad as far as Harrison. The line would tie into the Frisco line at Beaver just as the Eureka Springs Railway line did. In 1899, the company received a charter from the

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<sup>53</sup> Work Projects Administration, *The WPA Guide to 1930s Arkansas, Compiled by Workers of the Writers' Program of the Work Projects Administration in the State of Arkansas*, 269.

<sup>54</sup> Rafferty, *The Ozarks: Land and Life*, 99-101.

<sup>55</sup> Ayers, *The Promise of the New South*, 9.

<sup>56</sup> Donald Campbell, “A Study of Some Factors Contributing to the Petition for Abandonment by the Missouri and Arkansas Railroad in September 1946,” *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, 8, no. 4 (Winter 1949), 269.

Arkansas Railroad Commission, which required that it complete the line within six years or risk forfeiting its charter.<sup>57</sup> Within a year of its incorporation the company bought the Eureka Springs Railway and in another year it had built to Harrison and was entertaining plans to extend the line well beyond to Leslie in Searcy County.

A final survey of the route from Harrison to Leslie was made in the summer of 1901 under the direction of B. J. Dawley of Beaver, Arkansas. The route ran from Harrison through Bellefonte, then cut across several ridges to St. Joe, where it followed Dry Creek down to the Buffalo River. From there it followed the north bank of the Buffalo about a mile, crossed the river at Grinder's Ferry, and ran up Brush Creek about twelve miles to Marshall, from which it descended on a light grade to Leslie. The rough topography on the south side of the Buffalo was especially challenging, as described in a letter written by one of the survey engineers:

We spent weeks trying to get a line from the Buffalo River crossing...to the top of the Boston Mountains south of Marshall. We ran back lines down every hill and draw in that country. Finally we tried Brushy Creek, which runs into Buffalo River just below the proposed crossing, and were able to secure 1.75% maximum grade with compensation for curvature. The preliminary line had already been run ahead of us and somebody had made a ten foot mistake in the wrong direction on the levels. This caused the cut below Marshall to be deeper than planned.<sup>58</sup>

Clearing and grading of the Harrison to Leslie extension began in the fall of 1901, and track-laying was commenced in March 1902, all under contract with the Allegheny Improvement Company. As construction proceeded south of St. Joe in the summer of 1902, the company began to encounter financial difficulties. Rising construction costs in the rugged terrain of the Buffalo River watershed posed one problem; simultaneously, the company faced excessively high costs while improving its line north of Eureka Springs. Against this worrisome backdrop, construction of the railroad bridge across the Buffalo River was achingly slow. Material for the concrete piers had to be hauled to the site by wagon. Through the winter of 1902-03, local residents watched the progress of construction crews on the triple-span bridge. Finally the bridge was completed and operations were commenced from Seligman (north of Harrison) to Leslie in 1903.<sup>59</sup>

Just upstream from the river crossing there was a camp for the construction crew working on the bridge. The railroad decided that the camp would be a new town, and it named the community Gilbert after Charles W. Gilbert, Secretary-Treasurer of the Allegheny Improvement Company. Gilbert soon had a depot, a Y-shaped siding for turning around locomotives (while the bridge was under construction), another siding for

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<sup>57</sup> Clifton E. Hull, *Shortline Railroads of Arkansas* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1969), 48-51.

<sup>58</sup> Letter of Carlos Kirkpatrick to W. A. Spalding quoted in James R. Fair, Jr., *The North Arkansas Line: The Story of the Missouri & North Arkansas Railroad* (Berkeley, California: Howell-North Books, 1969), 44.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 47-52.

sawmill operations, an ore dock, a coal bin, and a section house for hand car, flat car, and tools.<sup>60</sup>

Although the St. Louis & North Arkansas Railroad established regular service to Leslie in 1903, it was unable to turn a profit on its mountain railroad. In 1906, the company was foreclosed and taken into receivership by the Missouri & North Arkansas Railroad. The new management team immediately set its sights on extending the line to Helena, Arkansas, on the Mississippi River. That extension was completed at the end of 1908.<sup>61</sup>

The railroad's financial prospects temporarily brightened during the early years of World War I. The war in Europe caused the price of zinc to double, which spurred interest in zinc mines along the Buffalo. The Missouri & North Arkansas announced plans to build a spur line from Gilbert to Rush, a boom town at the center of the Rush mining district. The line was to follow the Buffalo River on its 14-mile meandering course between the two towns. Company officials asserted that the line would not be expensive to build, as the route would not require any tunnels, cuts, or bridges. But further investigation showed that the grade would require considerable work to make it stand up to the Buffalo's erosive force at flood stage. Furthermore, the company faced possible competition from the north: the state granted a charter for a narrow gauge railroad from Yellville to Rush. For these reasons the anticipated rail connection was never built.<sup>62</sup>

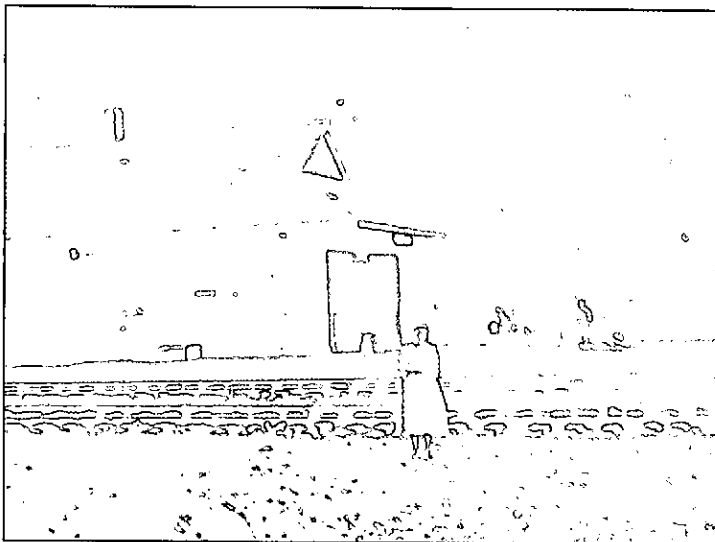


Figure 25. Railroad depot at Gilbert. Ben Fruehauf collection, Buffalo National River.

By the end of World War I the railroad's fortunes had reversed. Across the nation, railroads were hard pressed to meet the demands of war mobilization in 1917-18. In a determined effort to avert a transportation crisis, the federal government took control of the railroads, including the Missouri & North Arkansas, on January 1, 1918. During the period of government operation, which lasted until March 1920, workers on the Missouri & North Arkansas line received pay increases to bring their wages on par with workers' wages on connecting lines, while the line was operated at a loss. After the government relinquished control, the owners found that the only

<sup>60</sup> Searcy County Retired Teachers Association, *Searcy County Arkansas*, 21; Fair, *The North Arkansas Line*, 47.

<sup>61</sup> Hull, *Shortline Railroads of Arkansas*, 53-71.

<sup>62</sup> Fair, *The North Arkansas Line*, 117-119.

effective way to cut operating expenses and keep the company solvent was to reduce workers' wages. Workers did not accept the wage cuts and organized a strike at the beginning of 1921. The strike was prolonged and bitter, with the owners attempting to operate the line using scab labor and the strikers resorting to acts of sabotage against the railroad.<sup>63</sup>

What made this labor strike unusual was that citizens in Carroll, Boone, and Searcy counties acted against the strikers as though the strikers were damaging their own property. Historian Clifford Hull has described the "peculiar" relationship between the railroad and the local people:

The railroad had been built for them, and they had taken a personal interest in it from the beginning. They had pleaded for it, prayed for it, worked for it, paid for it. They owned no stock in it, they had bought no bonds; instead, they had made what cash donations they could afford, however meager they may have been, and when the rails crossed a hillside farm or valley meadow owned by one of these struggling men of the hill country, right-of-way was freely given. Each man gave as much as he was able.<sup>64</sup>

Anti-strike sentiment was strongest in Harrison, where 150 prominent citizens formed a Citizens Protective League. Hundreds of farmers and townspeople along the line assisted the league in guarding the railroad against saboteurs. Acts of sabotage were widespread, although none was recorded specifically within what is now Buffalo National River. Bridges were set afire near Alpena and Pindall. A station house in Bellefonte was damaged from a dynamite blast. Elsewhere switches were turned, spikes were removed, and bearings were destroyed with emery dust. By January 1923, the Citizens Protective League reported no less than 23 acts of arson and several arrests.<sup>65</sup>

Anti-strike leaders formed an ad hoc tribunal known as the "Committee of Twelve" and appointed "squad leaders" to lead search parties, round up strikers and strike sympathizers, and bring them before the committee. Ostensibly the hearings were aimed at stopping depredations on the railroad, but its real effect was to drive strikers out of the community. In the course of this week-long operation, one striker by the name of E.C. Gregor was hauled into jail after a "squad" broke into his house and found a can of emery dust. That night Gregor was seized by masked men and in the morning his body was found hanging from a railroad bridge outside of Harrison. On the same night of Gregor's murder, a mob broke into the labor union headquarters, hauled furniture and papers into the street, and made a bonfire. These actions effectively broke the strike. A commission

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<sup>63</sup> Campbell, "A Study of Some Factors Contributing to the Petition for Abandonment of the Missouri and North Arkansas," 274-275.

<sup>64</sup> Hull, *Shortline Railroads of Arkansas*, 52.

<sup>65</sup> Orville Thrasher Gooden, *The Missouri and North Arkansas Railroad Strike* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1926), 58.

was appointed by the governor to investigate these occurrences, but the commission made its report without identifying any responsible individuals.<sup>66</sup>

Even after the strike was ended and regular service was restored, however, the Missouri & North Arkansas struggled to survive. Its locomotives, rolling stock, and track were in poor condition. The expansion of roads and trucking made the railroad obsolete. In 1927 the company was again in receivership, and in 1935 the railroad was foreclosed upon and purchased for a mere \$350,000, and its name changed to Missouri & Arkansas Railroad.<sup>67</sup>

## MINING

The Buffalo River valley lay within a region long known to contain lead and zinc ores. In the eighteenth century, the French made sporadic efforts to develop lead mines in what is now southeast Missouri. Moses Austin of Virginia established a year-round lead mining industry there on a land grant he obtained from the Spanish government in 1798. Henry R. Schoolcraft, in his journey through southern Missouri and Arkansas in 1818-19, confirmed that the lead region extended into northern Arkansas based on observations of lead ore outcroppings at Bull Shoals in present-day Marion County and on the Strawberry River in what is now Lawrence County. G. W. Featherstonaugh investigated the same features on his travels through the country in 1834-35. He reported that the lead deposits in southern Missouri and northern Arkansas could be “relied on for countless ages as a source of national wealth.”<sup>68</sup>

While the lead deposits in southern Missouri would prove to be enormously rich – in southwest Missouri they formed part of the Tri-State mining region (with northeast Oklahoma and southeast Kansas) that would dominate lead and zinc production in the United States from the late nineteenth through most of the twentieth century – the deposits in northern Arkansas were relatively small and irregular. They were found primarily in three areas: around Zinc and Dodd City in the northern parts of Boone and Marion counties, along the Strawberry River in Sharp and Lawrence counties, and in the Buffalo River drainage from Buffalo City all the way to Boxley. Lead and zinc mining in northern Arkansas occurred in the shadow of the huge workings centered farther west at Joplin, Missouri. The industry never attained the magnitude that its promoters hoped for, but it nevertheless was a factor in the coming of the railroad and the growth of logging in the region.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Campbell, “A Study of Some Factors Contributing to the Petition for Abandonment by the Missouri and Arkansas Railroad in September 1946,” 279.

<sup>67</sup> William D. Baker, *Historic Railroad Depots of Arkansas, 1870-1940* (Little Rock: Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, n.d.), 14. Today, railroad depots at Bellefonte (built in 1901), St. Joe (1913), and Leslie (ca. 1925) have been placed on the National Register of Historic Places (see pp. 18-21).

<sup>68</sup> Featherstonaugh quoted in Dwight Pitcaithley, “Zinc and Lead Mining Along the Buffalo River,” *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, 37, no. 4 (1978), 295.

<sup>69</sup> For the relative size of the industry compared to the Tri-State district and United States production, see U.S. Geological Survey, *Mineral Resources of the United States*, annual reports. For the industry’s local economic impacts, see Pitcaithley, “Zinc and Lead Mining Along the Buffalo River,” 300-303.



Mining of lead ore in Arkansas began in the early 1850s around Lead Hill in northern Boone County. Lead became a critical resource for the munitions industry in the Civil War. Consequently a number of lead mines were opened in the region during the Civil War. The most notable lead mines of this vintage were on the upper White River and in the upper Cave Creek drainage within the Buffalo River watershed. The one on the White was combined with saltpeter works that Union forces destroyed in 1863, while the two mines in the Buffalo watershed were the Bald Hill and Confederate, which Confederate forces operated in 1864. These two mines were located within about one half mile of each other about six miles south of Buffalo National River. One mine located within the park area, the Bennett property near Boxley, reportedly produced a small amount of lead during the Civil War.<sup>70</sup>

While the war stimulated demand for lead, commercial uses of zinc remained limited. Mining of zinc ore, the more common of the two minerals in northern Arkansas, began tentatively in Sharp County in 1857. However, it was not until the end of the nineteenth century that zinc became a valuable product in many industrial processes and

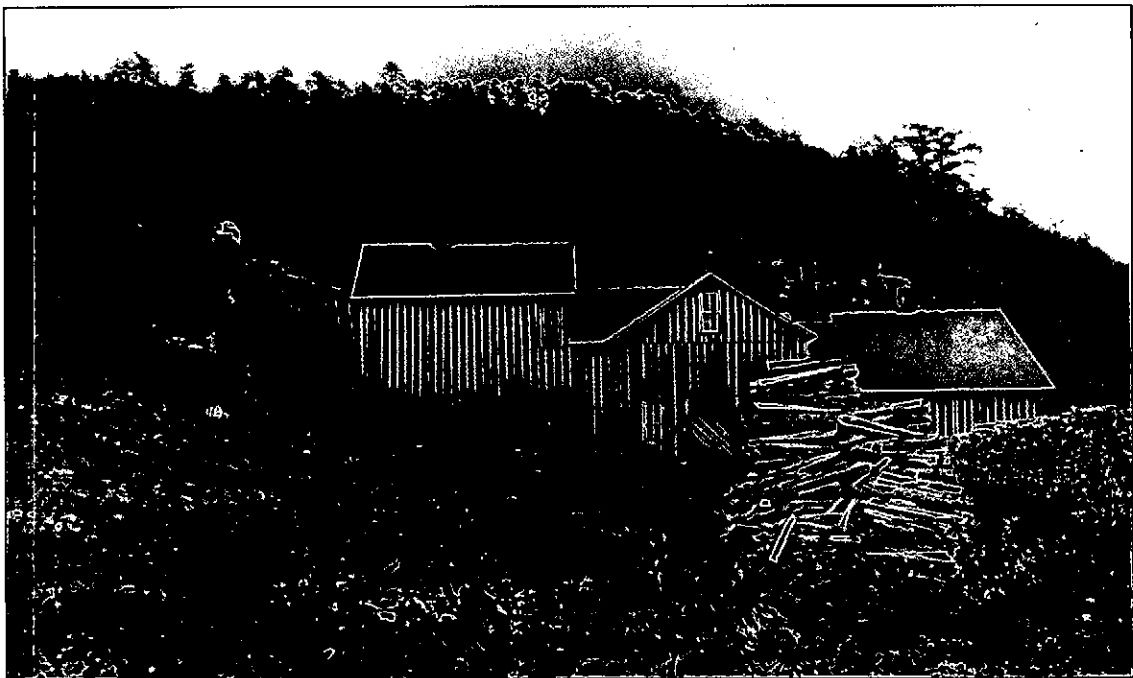


Figure 26. Morning Star Mill in Rush, ca. 1900. USGS collection, Buffalo National River.

the price of zinc reached levels to make zinc mining attractive. This precipitated the most significant type of mining activity along the Buffalo, which centered at Rush and lasted from about 1880 to 1940, with a boom occurring around the time of World War I. Edwin McKnight, a government geologist, estimated that 26,000 tons of concentrates came from

<sup>70</sup> Otto Ruhl, "Past and Present of Zinc Mining in Arkansas," *Mining and Engineering World*, 35 (August 26, 1911), 376; McKnight, *Zinc and Lead Deposits of Northern Arkansas*, 4, 155, 164-168.

the Rush Creek district. This made the Rush Creek district by far the largest producer in northern Arkansas.<sup>71</sup>

The Morning Star was the original mine in this area. John Wolfer, an old prospector in the area, located the deposit around 1880, and developed the claim with the help of local residents J. H. McCabe and Ben and Al Setzer. When an assay showed promising amounts of silver, the prospectors recruited two smelter men to build a smelter. Built in 1886, this small rock building is the oldest structure in the Rush Historic District. Modeled after a lime kiln with its charcoal furnace and sand mold on the floor for the molten silver to run into, it was designed to burn off the zinc carbonate as there was no market for zinc at the time. In the test run the charcoal fire succeeded in burning off the zinc – the men stood back to watch “beautiful rainbows playing in the air over the blast” – but no silver was to be found.<sup>72</sup>

Nevertheless, the owners found an investor, George Chase of Fayetteville, who steadily developed the property through the early 1890s. In 1893, a large sample of zinc ore was sent by wagon and train all the way to Chicago to be exhibited in the Chicago



Figure 27. Milling industry in Rush, 1918. *Engineering and Mining Journal*, 1918.

World’s Fair. The property was finally sold to a mining and milling company. The Morning Star Mining Company erected a 50-ton mill in 1898 and had 13 men working in the mine. Still, during its first decade and a half of operation there were numerous shut downs and slow downs in response to uneven market demand and high transportation costs. The Morning Star mine produced several hundred tons each year during the First World War and then fell back into intermittent production again. After

1917, the company combined production figures for this mine with the Capps and Ben Carney mines; production for all three dropped to 205 tons in 1927 and 160 tons in 1928 and then ceased.<sup>73</sup> Hopeful that the mine would someday be profitable again, the company maintained a caretaker at the property until the 1960s.<sup>74</sup> The Morning Star mill burned in 1940.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>71</sup> McKnight, *Zinc and Lead Deposits of Northern Arkansas*, 197-198; Suzanne D. Rogers, “Rush Historic District,” National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, 1987, Section 7, p. 1.

<sup>72</sup> Tom Shiras, “Early Days in North Arkansas Zinc District: Zinc Carbonate First Taken for Silver Ore and Smelter Erected on Morning Star Property,” *Engineering and Mining Journal*, 110 (July 24, 1920), 165; Suzanne D. Rogers, “Rush Historic Structures Report,” 1985, p. 3, Buffalo National River, Harrison, Arkansas.

<sup>73</sup> McKnight, *Zinc and Lead Deposits of Northern Arkansas*, 202. For the mill construction date and a fuller description of the mill property and operations, see Rogers, “Rush Historic Structures Report,” 39.

<sup>74</sup> Rogers, “Rush Historic District,” 5-6.

<sup>75</sup> “Mill at Rush Burns; Loss \$125,000,” *Little Rock Arkansas Gazette*, February 15, 1940.

The Capps mine was located half way up the hill on the northeast side of Rush Creek about one half mile below the town of Rush. The operation began in 1915 and ore was carried by tram around the hill for a distance of one quarter mile to the Morning Star mill. It produced 1,200 tons in three years before its production was lumped with the Morning Star and Ben Carney mines. This mine eventually became connected by underground workings to the McIntosh mine.<sup>76</sup>

The McIntosh, adjacent to the Capps on the southeast, was developed in two levels, 30 feet apart. During the period of peak production in 1916-1917 the mine was operated by the J. C. Shepherd Mining Company, which extracted 417 tons of concentrates in two years. J. C. Shepherd had operated a silver mine in Mexico and came to Rush from Washington, D.C. He acquired four leases and two mills in the Rush mining district. Soon known as a local character, he was said to have a pair of tame wolves for pets. The McIntosh mine was revived in the late 1930s and early 1940s, at which time it was operated by J. A. Lower of Wichita, Kansas under a sublease and the owner was McIntosh Zinc Mining Company of Lynn, Massachusetts.<sup>77</sup>

The White Eagle mine and mill occupied a flat on the left bank of the Buffalo River just below the mouth of Rush Creek. The mine was entered through a shaft at the foot of the hillside and through a tunnel into the hill about 100 feet above the collar of the shaft. The mill stood on the flat about 40 feet above low-water level of the Buffalo. The mine was shipping ore by 1887 and continued producing through the boom years of 1915-1916.<sup>78</sup>

The Edith and Yellow Rose mines were two adjacent properties located at the corners of Sections 10, 11, 14, and 15 in Township 17 North, Range 15 West. There was litigation over the exact location of the section corner and the lines were resurveyed and the corner was moved, bringing it about 100 feet southwest of the Edith shaft. On the Yellow Rose property the ore deposit was nearer the surface and the workings were mostly accessed through a big open cut. Underground the two mines were continuous. Both properties had mills, and both mines produced more than 2,000 tons of concentrates each during the First World War.<sup>79</sup>

The Red Cloud mine was located on the opposite side of the Buffalo River from Rush in the NW ¼ of Section 14 and was developed through a main tunnel and four separate openings to the surface. From 1909 to 1913, the Red Cloud Zinc Company produced 2,681 tons of concentrates, milled on the property. In 1915 and early 1916, the Gertrude Mining Company operated the mine and had it processed in the Morning Star

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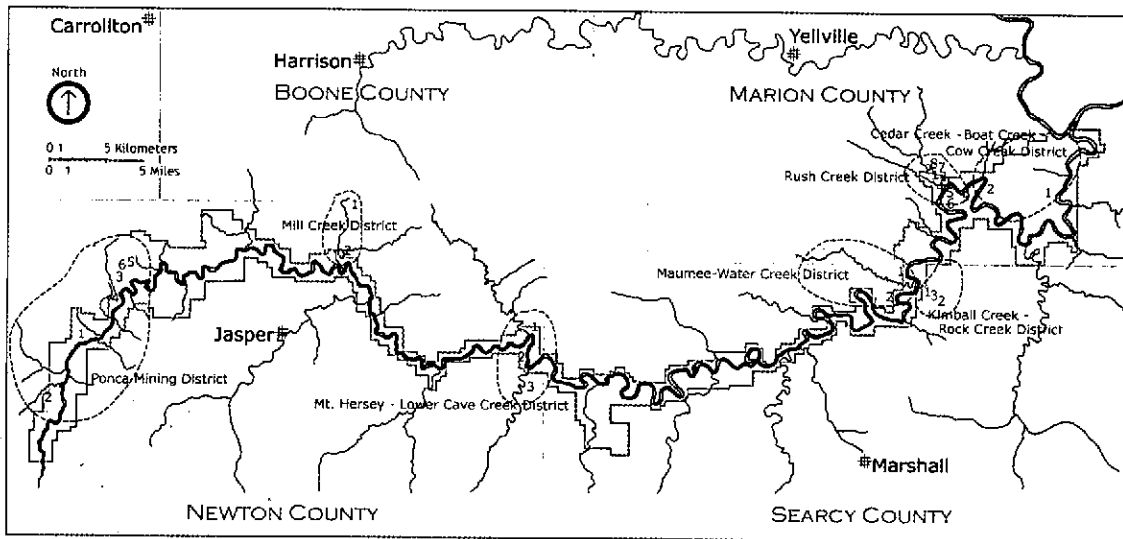
<sup>76</sup> McKnight, *Zinc and Lead Deposits of Northern Arkansas*, 204-205.

<sup>77</sup> "The Rush Zinc District," *Engineering and Mining Journal*, 101 (March 1, 1916), 485; "50-Ton Mill Completed at McIntosh," *Little Rock Arkansas Gazette*, August 24, 1941; Suzanne D. Rogers, comments to author, August 23, 2007.

<sup>78</sup> McKnight, *Zinc and Lead Deposits of Northern Arkansas* 206-207; Rogers, "Rush Historic District," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, 1987, Section 7, p. 22.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, 207.

mill. In 1916 and 1917, the J. C. Shepherd Mining Company operated the mine. The Red Cloud mill processed ore from the Silver Hollow mine from 1915 to 1917.<sup>80</sup>



Map 9. Mines and Mining Districts

<b>Ponca Mining District</b>	<b>Mill Creek District</b>	<b>Mount Hersey - Lower Cave Creek District</b>	<b>Rush Mining District</b>
1. Bennett	1. Marble City	1. Old Granby	1. Morning Star
2. Peck	2. Canton	2. Yount	2. Capps
3. Kilgore		3. Belle of Wichita	3. McIntosh
4. Bonanza			4. White Earth
5. Chimney Rock			5. Edith & Yellow Rose
6. Brewer			6. Red Cloud
<b>Maumee - Water Creek District</b>	<b>Kimball Creek - Rock Creek District</b>	<b>Cedar Creek - Boat Creek - Cow Creek District</b>	7. Philadelphia
1. Commercial	1. Churchill	1. Bonanza	8. Monte Cristo
2. Jackpot	2. Mays & Redwine	2. Ormeara	9. Silver Hollow
	3. Evening Star		

Two rich mines, the Philadelphia and the Monte Cristo, were located on Clabber Creek. The Philadelphia was located about one half mile from the Buffalo River and about 160 feet above the creek bed on the northeast side of the creek. There was a mill at the site, and the mine produced more than 3000 tons of concentrates during World War I. The Monte Cristo was about 70 feet above the creek bed on the southwest side of the creek. It produced nearly 2,000 tons of concentrates. Ore from this mine was carried by aerial tram across the creek to the Philadelphia mill. The mill lay in ruins in 1935.<sup>81</sup>

The Silver Hollow mine, one of the largest in the Rush district, was located across the Buffalo River and about two miles downstream from Rush Creek in a bluff. This mine was developed sometime before 1900 and had a long run from 1900 to 1907 followed by renewed production during the war years. During its periods of production the mine supported a separate community known as Keystone.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 211.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 214-216.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 216-221; Rogers, "Rush Historic District," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, 1987, Section 7, p. 23.

Such a concentration of rich mines created a lot of excitement. “Companies sprang up in a night, claims were taken up, and lands bought and sold on every hand,” mining industry journalist Otto Ruhl wrote. “It was an era of mill building. They were built on hillsides and in valleys, seemingly regardless of whether there was any ore in sight or not.” The heavy machinery for milling ore had to be brought up the White River by steamboat and hauled over mountain roads by wagon. Often the cost of transportation for bringing mill equipment to the site was more than the cost of the equipment itself. Sometimes the mills operated for just a few years and then were abandoned.<sup>83</sup>

Lack of affordable transportation impeded the mining industry in the area. The mining companies at Rush attempted to take ore concentrates down the Buffalo River by barge. A number of ore barges got hung up in rapids, spilling their valuable contents into the river. Reaching Buffalo City was not the end of the ordeal; there were steamboat wrecks on the upper White. The trip by wagon was not much better; the steep, rocky, twisting roads leading in and out of the drainage were slowing at best, impassable or perilous in bad weather.<sup>84</sup>

The coming of railroads to the region improved the situation only a little, because the rail lines were still maddeningly far from the mines. To the west of the Buffalo River drainage the Fayetteville and Little Rock Railroad built its spur line to Pettigrew in 1897, but it dead-ended there and mostly took timber, not ore, out of that location.<sup>85</sup> In 1903, the St. Louis and North Arkansas Railroad completed its line from Harrison to Marshall, crossing the river at Gilbert. Two years later the Missouri Pacific Railroad built its line up the White River from Batesville to Springfield, establishing a railroad depot across the White River from Buffalo City. These two railroad lines through the Arkansas Ozarks, welcome as they were, left a broad swath of hill country in between. Most of the mining districts along the Buffalo were in this area. Even after the coming of the railroads, ore had to be hauled by wagon to railheads at Gilbert, Yellville, or Buffalo Station.



Figure 28. Miners with headlamps at entrance of Baker Mine. R. W. Shroll collection, Shiloh Museum.

<sup>83</sup> Ruhl, “Past and Present of Zinc Mining in Arkansas,” 376.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> Clifton E. Hull, *Shortline Railroads of Arkansas* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1969), 351.

The mining boom extended far up the Buffalo River. In the upper Buffalo, the oldest mine was the Bennett mine. Located on a ridge between the Buffalo River and Clark Creek, it consisted of several shafts and one or more of these shafts at the south end of this group was worked for lead as early as the Civil War. In 1889, a lead smelter was reportedly built on Clark Creek, and from 1889 to 1891 the mine produced 100 tons of zinc ore, which was shipped by wagon to Madison County and then by rail to the Weir City Zinc Company in St. Paul, Arkansas. Later, during World War I, the mine produced about 2,000 tons of ore concentrates and free ore, with the concentrating done by hand jigs.<sup>86</sup>

An Oklahoma mining company founded Ponca in 1903. It bought the Idaho mine, which it renamed the Ponca City mine, developing the property by several tunnels, open cuts, and shafts located high on the slope of Adds Creek about a quarter mile west of Ponca (just outside Buffalo National River).<sup>87</sup> Lesser mines, prospects, and mining districts were located the whole length of the Buffalo.

The mining industry in northern Arkansas rode a speculative bubble in anticipation of the railroads and when the anticipated branch lines out into the mining districts did not materialize the mining industry contracted. Most mines and mills were idled from about 1905 to 1915. But there was still one thing that could overcome high transportation costs and that was higher zinc prices. World War I created the conditions for the region's second and most significant mining boom. Germany and Austro-Hungary were large producers of zinc. Britain's naval blockade of the Central Powers resulted in a shortage of zinc around the world. These events on the world stage had pronounced effects in the Buffalo River valley. As zinc prices shot up, mines and mills reopened and somnolent mining prospects attracted new investors. Rush was transformed into a roaring mining camp. New areas such as the Maumee-Water Creek district east of Tomahawk suddenly burst to life. Boarding houses filled up with miners in such tucked away hamlets as Mount Hersey and Cow Creek.

After the war ended zinc prices fell and mining activity subsided quickly. Most mines and mills in the Buffalo River valley shut down by 1918. Proven mines, particularly the rich ones located around Rush, kept operating for a few more years. By 1924, these too were idle. The Morning Star mine and mill in Rush reopened in 1928 and closed permanently in 1931. The collapse of the mining industry had repercussions for farmers and townspeople in the area. The rural population had begun to decline in the second decade of the twentieth century and the trend intensified in the 1920s. The population of Searcy County fell by 24 percent from 1920 to 1930.<sup>88</sup> By 1931, the *Arkansas Gazette* could write wistfully about Rush as though it were a frontier ghost

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<sup>86</sup> McKnight, *Zinc and Lead Deposits of Northern Arkansas*, 161; John C. Branner, *Annual Report of the Geological Survey of Arkansas for 1892*, vol. 5 (Little Rock: Thompson Lith. and Ptg. Co., 1900), 149-150.

<sup>87</sup> Branner, *Annual Report of the Geological Survey of Arkansas for 1892*, 151-153.

<sup>88</sup> McKnight, *Zinc and Lead Deposits of Northern Arkansas*, 202; Pitcaithley, "Zinc and Lead Mining Along the Buffalo River," 303-305.

town, though in fact some people would continue to reside there and work the mines with hand tools through the Depression decade.<sup>89</sup>

The Second World War brought a faint echo of the boom during the First World War. Production of zinc in northern Arkansas went from practically nothing to a few hundred tons per year (a paltry amount but enough to stir interest). Most of the output came from the Big Hurricane mine near St. Joe, which the Hurricane Mining Company and later the Grimmitt Construction Company developed through open pit mining. A few mines and mills within the present Buffalo National River were reactivated in this period, notably the Edith mine and mill near Rush, the McIntosh mine at Rush (where a new mill was built in 1941), the Silver Hollow mine across the river from Rush, and the Bonanza, Brewer, Chimney Rock, and Ponca mines near the town of Ponca. It seems that mining activity mostly ceased after 1945. The U.S. Bureau of Mines, which reports on domestic and foreign mineral production by type of mineral and by area on a yearly basis, last mentioned small lots of zinc ore coming from the mines at Ponca and Rush in 1951.<sup>90</sup> A final effort to reactivate the mines was made in the late 1950s when a processing mill was brought to Rush and some development work was done in mines along Clabber Creek.<sup>91</sup>

The mining era left many lasting impressions on the landscape in the form of mine tunnels, shafts, and open cuts; mill ruins; mill tailing and piles of waste rock; and deserted buildings such as those still standing at Rush. The Rush Historic District, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, features a number of intact buildings as well as numerous foundations and piers of former mills, mines, mine ruins, and roadbeds associated with the mining district.

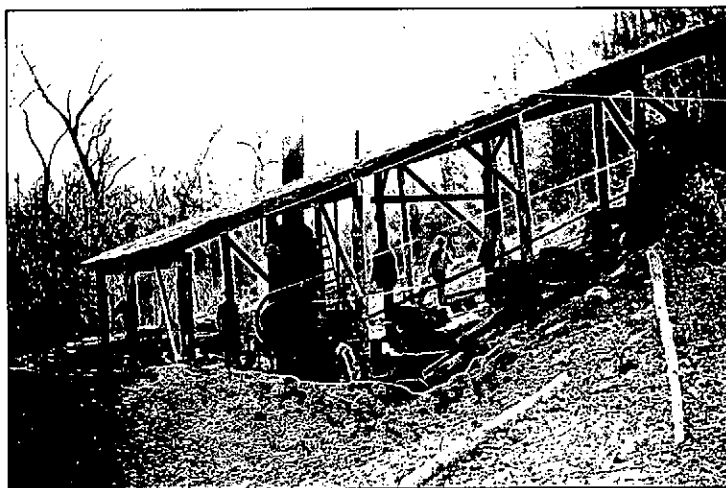


Figure 29. Mine on Panther Creek, 1916. Dwight Pitcaithley collection, Buffalo National River.

<sup>89</sup> "The Rush is Over," *Little Rock Arkansas Gazette*, November 29, 1931; Fred Dirst, interview by Chuck Brooks, January 15, 1976.

<sup>90</sup> USDI, Bureau of Mines, *Minerals Yearbook 1941* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1943), 270; USDI, Bureau of Mines, *Minerals Yearbook 1942* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1944), 265; USDI, Bureau of Mines, *Minerals Yearbook 1945* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1947), 293; USDI, Bureau of Mines, *Minerals Yearbook 1951* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1954), 1524.

<sup>91</sup> Rogers, "Rush Historic District," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, 1987, Section 7, p. 6.

## TIMBERING

The growth of railroads had an enormous influence on the nineteenth-century timbering industry, which had a pattern of exhausting the timber resource in a given region, pulling up stakes, and moving to another region as soon as railroad expansion made new supplies of timber available. Railroads provided transportation for logs and lumber, thereby facilitating the movement of logging operations into new areas. The growth of railroads in the Midwest led to logging operations in the Missouri Ozarks as early as the 1870s. Along the Niangua River in central Missouri in the late 1870s and early 1880s a number of logging contractors worked for the Missouri Pacific Railroad producing cross ties.<sup>92</sup>

Railroad development stimulated the timbering industry in the Arkansas Ozarks in two phases: first, when a railroad was built to Batesville in 1882, making it worthwhile to float logs down the Buffalo and White rivers to that railhead; and second, when railroads were finally built into the Arkansas Ozarks between 1897 and 1903. Timbering operations along the Buffalo reached a climax in the period 1903-1909 but would continue into the 1920s.

When the logging era began the Buffalo River drainage contained an abundance of red cedar. The stands of cedar, known as cedar brakes, occurred mostly on hill slopes flanking either side of the Buffalo River. Since these cedar brakes grew on steep terrain in flinty soil, farmers had avoided them and the land was mostly unclaimed public domain. It was not practical to log these trees and haul the logs great distances over rough wagon roads, but most of these trees could be felled within a reasonable distance of the river and hauled to the river edge. From there they could be floated down river.<sup>93</sup> The first such log drives may have started as soon as the railroad reached Batesville in 1882. Although the early log drives are not well documented, a survey report on the Buffalo River published in 1897 stated that logging had been occurring along the river for "about fifteen years" – which suggests that logging began about 1882.<sup>94</sup> In 1884, two years after the railroad reached Batesville, entrepreneur Charles Robertson Handford established a cedar yard and sawmill in that town, announcing that he would buy cedar logs at the river bank to make into telegraph poles, railway piling, fence posts, and shingles. Handford had a huge cable strung across the White River to catch log rafts as they came downstream. Accepting Handford's offer, farmers cut down trees along the Buffalo, made the logs into rafts, and floated the rafts down river to Handford's yard, returning home on foot.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Lela Cole, "The Early Tie Industry along the Niangua River," *Missouri Historical Review* 48 (Fall 1953): 264-272.

<sup>93</sup> Daniel Boone Lackey, "Cutting and Floating Red Cedar Logs in North Arkansas," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, 19 (Winter 1960), 363.

<sup>94</sup> U.S. House, *Survey of Buffalo Fork of White River, Arkansas*, 54<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2d sess., 1897, House Doc. 207 (Serial 3524), 5.

<sup>95</sup> Smith, *Buffalo River Handbook*, 97.



In 1889, two Searcy County men named John H. Cross and John Yarbrough built a raft of cedar logs and hired a raft pilot to guide the raft to Batesville. Cross and Yarbrough formed a partnership, with Cross supplying a yoke of oxen for hauling the logs to water and Yarbrough supplying the timber on land he owned between Richland and Cave creeks. They cut the timber in the fall and winter and constructed the raft on a river bar, awaiting high water in the spring. An eight-foot by ten-foot square area of the raft was covered by oak plank for a tent platform, and lanterns were hung front and back for nighttime running lights. There were two oarsmen at each end of the raft, each manning a long oak plank oar mounted on a staff.<sup>96</sup>

Logging operations in the early years were small scale and were conducted where the logs could be most easily transported to the river. The men felled trees on top of bluffs where the logs could be skidded or rolled to the edge and dropped off of overhanging cliffs into the river. They cut down trees wherever there was an existing wagon road and the logs could be hauled by wagon to the river. Finally they worked those areas in between bluffs and wagon roads where the logs could be dragged by horse team to “tie slides” and pushed down embankments to the riverbed. By the end of the century most of the cedar near the river had been logged while most of the forest in the rest of the drainage had hardly been touched.<sup>97</sup>



Figure 30. Huge oak log harvested in upper Buffalo River watershed. *Kettron Faddis collection, Buffalo National River.*

When the railroad was built across the river at Gilbert in 1903 it opened the second phase in the Buffalo River’s logging era. The Eagle Pencil Company of New York initiated large-scale logging operations in the Buffalo River drainage. It built a mill at Gilbert for producing seven-inch long cedar slats for its pencil factory in New York. It hired local men to work in the woods cutting down trees and to work on the river floating the logs to the mill.<sup>98</sup> The logging operation alone employed dozens of men. In one large cedar brake

known as the Simmons tract the company employed a crew of thirty men for seven months.<sup>99</sup>

The timber workers earned about one dollar a day working from sunrise to sundown. Compared to farm earnings, this was good money. It was seasonal work (mostly winter and spring) so the labor pool consisted substantially of local men who

<sup>96</sup> Orville J. McInturff, “Floating Timber Down the Buffalo – 1890s,” *Mountain Wave* (Marshall), May 25, 1972.

<sup>97</sup> McInturff, “Floating Timber Down the Buffalo – 1890s”; U.S. House, *Survey of Buffalo Fork of White River, Arkansas*, 5.

<sup>98</sup> Smith, *Buffalo River Handbook*, 97.

<sup>99</sup> Lackey, “Cutting and Floating Red Cedar Logs,” 362.

were working for supplemental income. Working long hours usually many miles from home, the men ate and slept in company-furnished tent camps. Daniel Boone Lackey, a Newton County farm boy, was just sixteen years old when he was hired. His job was to supply the tree cutters and haulers with drinking water and to trim branches off the felled trees to prepare them for hauling. He was called a “snaker” as his job was to prepare each log so that it could be “snaked” or skidded either to a wagon or directly to the river. Skidding was mostly done by mule team, sometimes by hand.<sup>100</sup>

Occasionally Lackey’s job entailed skidding, too, and he recalled how dangerous the work could be:

How well I remember a place near the left bank of Big Buffalo River near ex-sheriff Bill Green’s place. The foreman, knowing how hazardous this job would be, asked his brother, J. L. (Shorty) Henderson, and me to take our “snake mules” and go around the side of the mountain where we could reach some logs that had been cut in a gulch. The only way the logs could be reached by wagon was for us to “snake” them to a bluff, unhitch our mules and roll the logs over the bluff. At the point where we unhitched our mules it was very steep. One evening about quitting time, my “snake” mule, “Going Joe” (he got his name by being so tall and stepping so far), started a log rolling over and over before I had time to unhitch him. Had it not been for a tree stopping the log, I would have had to draw another “snake” mule. Every broken hamstring [sic] or any other equipment which had been in use had to be turned in for replacement. Shorty said, “Daniel Boone, what would you have done if that log had carried “Old Joty” over the bluff?” I told him that I would have gone down and taken the harness off, cut his left ear off, the one with a nick out, turned in the ear, and asked to be given “Old Blue.”<sup>101</sup>

As hazardous as working in the woods could be, working on the river was more so. Recognizing this, the Eagle Pencil Company paid key men on the river two dollars per day or twice the wage of timber cutters and haulers. Floats usually occurred in the spring and sometimes in the fall. In preparation for a float, supply boats were stocked with tents and provisions. Floats varied in length according to the distance covered, with the log rafts generally traveling about three miles per day. The longest recorded float started at Boxley and took twenty-two days. The men occasionally worked from boats to dislodge log jams in deep water, but more often they waded or swam. Men could go the whole distance without ever getting their clothes dry. The supply boat and cook ran ahead of the rafts and had meals prepared when the crew arrived at noon and at evening camp.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 363.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, 364-365.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 366-367.

Log rafts were built two ways. Some pilots preferred to have the logs arranged in the same direction as the current and some preferred to have them sideways to the current. In the former arrangement the raft was better able to withstand a head-on collision but was less sturdy when the raft bumped alongside a sandbar or bluff. Log rafts had to be assembled when the river was falling. The falling water level pulled the logs into the center of the stream. Conversely, if logs were pushed into the river when the river was rising, then the surging waters would push the logs against the banks. Sometimes the rafts included walnut as well as red cedar. The walnut had to be interspersed with the red cedar as it was too dense to float by itself.<sup>103</sup>

The Eagle Pencil Company had a boom across the river at Gilbert. The boom would hold the logs until they could be removed from the river one by one by a mechanical device. This device consisted of a long revolving chain with cleat-like claws



Figure 31. Floating ties on the Buffalo, ca. 1890s. Stella Mason collection, Buffalo National River.

that hooked each log and pulled it to the yard. Yard men rolled each log off the carrier and stacked it in a pile. The logs were cut to even twelve-foot lengths, and would later be fed through the mill, turning them into slats for shipment on the railroad to the company's pencil factory.<sup>104</sup>

The Eagle Pencil Company employed several hundred men and boys in some phase of the work from 1903 to 1909. When the timber was gone the company moved on. A report on the Arkansas wood products industry by the U.S. Forest Service in 1912

<sup>103</sup> McInturff, "Floating Timber Down the Buffalo – 1890s"; Lackey, "Cutting and Floating Red Cedar Logs," 366; Hardaway, *These Hills My Home*, 37.

<sup>104</sup> Lackey, "Cutting and Floating Red Cedar Logs," 369.

noted that the state's supply of red cedar was practically gone. "It was once abundant, but the demand for poles, posts, woodenware, and pencils has nearly exhausted the supply." The Forest Service gave the amount of red cedar "consumed annually in Arkansas" – that is, fed through manufacturing plants – as a trifling 12,000 board feet measure, all of which came from outside the state. Meanwhile, Arkansas still had vast quantities of other commercial timber including pine and white oak. Indeed, Arkansas ranked in the top three or four states in 1912 in total lumber output.<sup>105</sup> White oak was harvested in the Buffalo River drainage, and although it did not engender the kind of large company operation that red cedar had, white oak nevertheless sustained the timbering industry in the area for several more years.<sup>106</sup>

As early as the 1890s, white oak was being made into railroad cross ties, and the cross ties were floated down the Buffalo and White rivers in large batches known as "tie strings."<sup>107</sup> Tie hackers cut down white oaks and hewed the logs into standard size ties with broad axes. This could be solitary work, and a good tie hacker could produce eight to ten ties in a day.<sup>108</sup> Floating the ties, on the other hand, was most often a company operation as the ties would become scrambled during the trip. After the arrival of the railroad in 1903 several companies bought ties at Gilbert, including T. J. Moss Tie Company, Western Tie and Timber Company, and the St. Louis and North Arkansas Railroad.<sup>109</sup>

White oak was also used in making barrel staves and heading. The wood was especially favored for the production of tight barrels used in packaging alcoholic beverages. The Pure Food Law of 1905 led to a sharp demand for white oak barrels by manufacturers of beer, wine, and spirits, which in turn produced a spike in white oak stave production in the South, especially in Arkansas, where production more than doubled in one year. In 1906, Arkansas overtook Kentucky as the leading producer of tight cooperage stock.<sup>110</sup>

Portable stave mills appeared at several locations in the Buffalo River drainage. Erd W. Cole remembered that the stave mill on Richland Creek (near Eula) employed a horse-powered buckler. This piece of machinery had "some knives fixed up in it and a trough, and they would pick up these stave bolts and set them with them knives." The staves were hauled by wagon to St. Joe and sometimes there would be a string of wagons a quarter mile long going down the valley.<sup>111</sup>

<sup>105</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Wood-Using Industries and National Forests in Arkansas*, Forest Service Bulletin No. 106 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1912), 5-11 (quotation on 11).

<sup>106</sup> Lee Davenport interview by Eve Smith, July 29, 1982.

<sup>107</sup> Harrell, ed., *History and Folklore*, 57.

<sup>108</sup> Smith, *Buffalo River Handbook*, 98.

<sup>109</sup> McInturff, "Floating Timber Down the Buffalo – 1890s."

<sup>110</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Production of Tight Cooperage Stock in 1906*, Forest Service Circular 125 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1907), 3-12.

<sup>111</sup> Harrell, ed., *History and Folklore*, 32.

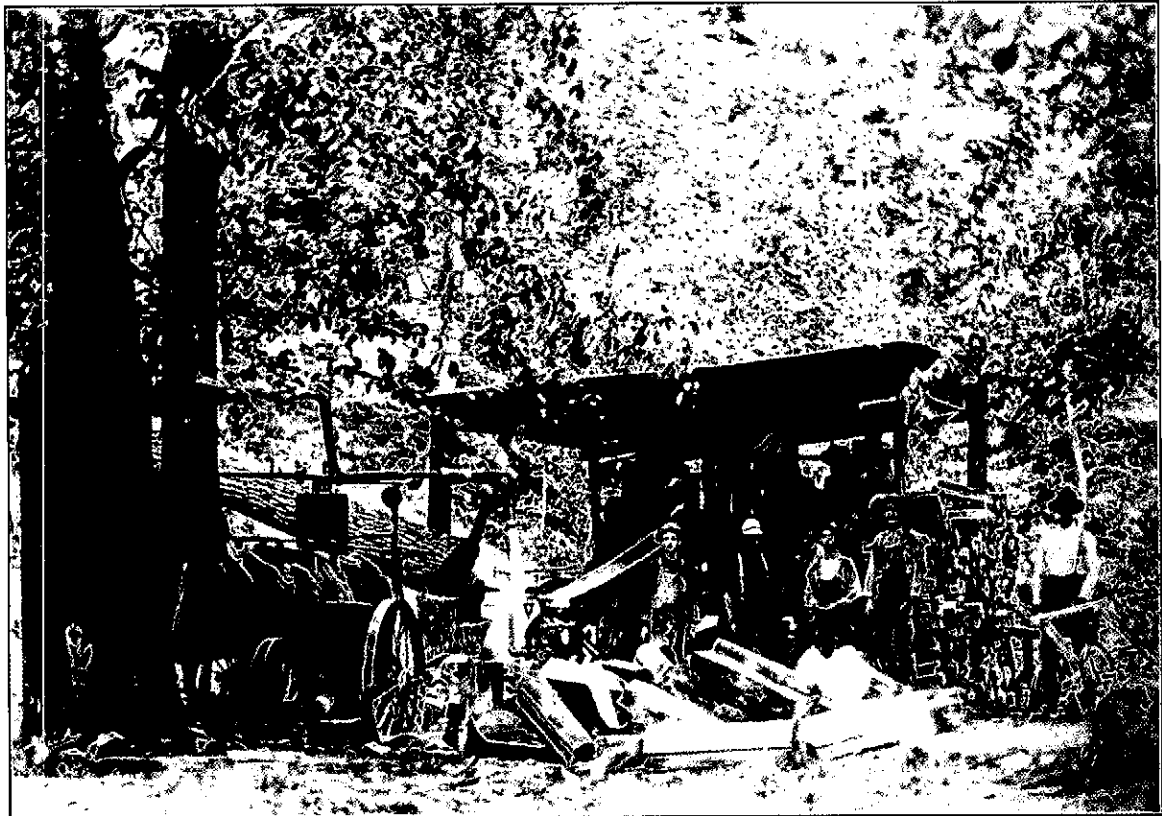


Figure 32. Stave mill, Newton County. E. R. Speer photo, Janice Hull collection, Shiloh Museum. Neg. S-97-2N26.

The mill on Beckham Creek was near Murray. The mill employed several men and women who lived in a tent camp by the mill. Children played around the camp. Ruby (Norton) Watson was eight years old when her parents worked at the mill. Her mother, Mattie Norton, worked as a “stave catcher,” receiving the rough staves off the green chain and placing them on a table where an “edger” would edge them. She also made lunches for the timber cutters and haulers who worked in the woods. Ruby’s uncle also worked in the camp as a blacksmith, keeping the horses and mules shod and repairing the metal-rim tires on the wagon wheels.<sup>112</sup>

Stave mill operators were notoriously wasteful. The specialty product that they were producing provided the only economic justification for logging the white oak in such remote locations. Other white oak wood products simply did not pay for the cost of getting the timber out. Consequently only the best material was taken to the mill. Often a third or more of each tree was left to rot on the ground.<sup>113</sup>

In 1912, the national forests in Arkansas supported 35 small operators, including those who produced white-oak barrel staves and heading. The Forest Service commented on the latter, “The cutting of high-grade oak cooperage is the most distinctive industry on

<sup>112</sup> Ruby Watson, “Hickory Grove,” *Newton County Times*, October 21, 1995.

<sup>113</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Wood-Using Industries and National Forests in Arkansas*, 34.

this Forest.” The portable mill operators produced “rough-sawed staves,” hauled them to the railroad, and sold them to finishing mills or middlemen.<sup>114</sup>

Some farmers made commercial wood products on their own property and sold them to lumberyards or finishing mills. Joe Villines had a steam-powered sawmill on his farm in the Boxley Valley. He produced black-walnut lumber and hauled it by the wagon load over the mountain to Pettigrew, where he sold it to the lumberyard. The hardwood was used in making furniture.<sup>115</sup>

One further stimulus for timbering came from the local lead and zinc mining industry. Local sawmills provided all the lumber for timbering the mines. In addition, a great deal of wood was used in building the town of Rush. One writer described Rush as a “pine board town.”<sup>116</sup> The concentrating mills were powered by wood-burning furnaces, and during the mining industry’s boom times, Rush’s mills alone consumed altogether about fifty cords of wood per day in the winter. Local farmers supplied most of this cordwood for one dollar per cord and fifteen cents per hundredweight for hauling. The forest around Rush was heavily logged to meet the demand of the local mining industry.<sup>117</sup>

Nearly two decades of logging along the Buffalo River left some areas denuded. With the tree canopy removed, loss of soil through water erosion increased in places where soils were already vulnerable from excessive livestock grazing. These impacts compounded the effects of soil nutrient depletion that resulted when farmers raised crops, especially cotton and corn, year after year in the same areas without adequate field rotation. Although local residents appreciated the timbering industry for the influx of “cedar money” that it brought to the area, it also contributed to the region’s growing environmental impoverishment.

## HUNTING AND FISHING

Among their various other economic pursuits, Buffalo River farmers still hunted and fished in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Traditionally, hunting formed an important part of the southern uplands economy as deer especially were a plentiful source of food for the family farm unit. In this period of transition from a subsistence- to a market-based economy, game and fish constituted a diminishing resource. Deforestation and competition from livestock were two factors that contributed to wildlife decline, but probably the most significant factor was that the animal populations were over-hunted by the growing human population in the area.

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<sup>114</sup> William B. Greeley, “National Forest Timber for the Small Operator,” in *Yearbook of the United States Department of Agriculture* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1913), 410.

<sup>115</sup> Smith, *Buffalo River Handbook*, 97.

<sup>116</sup> “The Rush is Over,” *Little Rock Arkansas Gazette*, November 29, 1931.

<sup>117</sup> Pitcaithley, *Let the River Be*, 84-85.

Hunting was one economic activity in which the market had long made a significant mark. Bear oil, buffalo hides, beaver pelts, and deer hides were all products of hunting that made their way from the Ozarks to distant markets in earlier times. By 1870, bison had long since disappeared and bear and deer were too scarce to be marketable, but fur bearers could still be found in numbers. The fur trade lingered in the Buffalo River valley through the turn of the century and indeed trapping continues to the present day. James Villines of Ponca trapped beaver, mink, and otter in the Buffalo River drainage and sold the pelts to fur buyers who came into the valley. He had such a reputation as a successful trapper that he got the nickname "Beaver Jim." His son, William also did some trapping until the animals grew too scarce in the early twentieth century. Beaver Jim's grandson, Ross Villines, remembered how his grandfather caught them. "Had big ol' number four traps. He set 'em. Catch 'em where they didn't drown. Said that throw water on 'im with his tail when he ride up to get 'em in the boat and nearly drowned him throwing water with their tail."<sup>118</sup> These three generations of Villines all lived in a log cabin that was built in the mid-nineteenth century and is preserved in Boxley Valley as the Beaver Jim Cabin.

Buffalo River farmers still hunted deer for the meat in the late nineteenth century. By the 1920s, it was very rare to find a deer. They also hunted wild hogs as some hogs became too feral to coax back to the farm. In addition they hunted small mammals such as squirrel, raccoon, and possum, and game birds including wild turkey. Hunting was done with dogs, and a good hunting dog was a highly prized animal.<sup>119</sup>

This period saw a sweeping change in hunting on a nationwide level as urban-based sportsmen entered the field. Sport hunters formed clubs both at the local and national level and worked to raise public concern about the decline of wildlife populations all over the United States. In the eastern states where public land was scarce, local sportsmen's clubs sometimes acquired large leases on which they exercised exclusive hunting privileges. Often these private hunting preserves were located on cutover lands owned by lumbering companies. No such arrangement developed in the Buffalo River watershed; however, sportsmen's clubs based in St. Louis and Kansas City organized fishing trips on the Buffalo River by the 1920s, if not earlier. Also, a few sportsmen built recreational-use cabins in the area. In 1936, an attorney from Fayetteville named Bernal Seamster and his friends built a two-room log building on a low bluff about a half mile below Hemmed-in-Hollow. The men called it the Clubhouse and used it for a weekend retreat. Sometimes they literally hunted and fished from the cabin's front porch, which hung over the river. After a few years the men quit using the cabin and soon afterward it burned. A chimney and stone piers still mark the site.<sup>120</sup>

Sportsmen's groups in Little Rock and elsewhere in the state lobbied Arkansas's lawmakers to pass measures to protect the state's fish and game. Arkansas enacted its first game law in 1915. The law established the Arkansas State Game and Fish

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<sup>118</sup> Ross Villines, interview by Brian Jones, October 1978, Harpers Ferry Center.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Smith, *Buffalo River Handbook*, 171.

Commission, which had powers to regulate hunting and fishing by setting bag limits, seasons, and permissible methods. As badly as these laws were needed in order to restore healthy wildlife populations, they intruded on the traditional hunting and fishing patterns of the mountain farmers. In the early days of wildlife conservation, law enforcement faced an enormous challenge in attaining public acceptance of fish and game laws, as rural people in particular wanted to continue hunting and fishing without restriction as they had in the past. State game and fish commissions were usually poorly funded as well. The Arkansas law allowed the commission to appoint game wardens, but in 1915 a warden's pay was a paltry \$80 per month and the warden had to provide his own transportation. Moreover, the warden did not have the power to arrest violators; he had to be accompanied by a peace officer to apprehend someone for breaking the law. Even when a violator was caught and prosecuted in court, the violator stood a good chance of being acquitted by a jury that shared the violator's disdain for the law. Under the circumstances, the state made slow progress in educating the public on the need for restrictions. For example, the law permitted hunting with dogs as long as the hunter obtained a license. Game remained scarce from over-hunting.<sup>121</sup>

To focus law enforcement efforts in smaller areas and make it more effective, game refuges were established. The first game refuges in Arkansas were created in 1926 on the Ozark National Forest. Two were near Mountain View and two were near Russellville. These refuges were patrolled by rangers of the U.S. Forest Service who were deputized by the state to serve as wardens in those areas. These four were followed by more than a dozen game refuges created on state and private lands under an act of 1927; however, none of the refuges were in Newton, Searcy, or Marion counties. By 1945 there were a total of nine federal game refuges and 27 state big-game refuges in Arkansas encompassing more than a million acres altogether. At first the state stocked the refuges with deer from North Carolina, Texas, and Wisconsin; later it trapped deer on refuges within the state and moved them to other parts of the state. A major source of deer in this later period was the Sylamore district on the Ozark National Forest in Stone County, where some 2,500 deer were trapped and moved by 1950.<sup>122</sup>

The game refuge system was necessary when deer populations were dangerously low and law enforcement was weak, but the refuge system eventually became obsolete. Studies in the 1960s revealed that the refuges were overstocked and turning into starving grounds. The trees in these areas were being "highlined" – their branches eaten bare to the height that a deer could reach while standing on its hind legs. Instead of producing an increase in the herd that spilled out into surrounding areas, the refuges were becoming population sinks. Thus, in the 1960s the refuges were phased out. Some were converted into "wildlife management areas" (WMAs) where hunting was allowed under special regulations. The former Livingston and Barkshed game refuges in the Sylamore district

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<sup>121</sup> Forest Supervisor to District Forester, December 6, 1918, File Ozark Allowances 1919, Box 69, Division of Range Management General Correspondence 1905-52, RG 95, NA II; "Act 124 of 1915: A Conservation Commission is Created," *Arkansas Game and Fish*, 6, no. 3 (Summer 1974), 17-18.

<sup>122</sup> Jay Kaffka, "The Refuge System: An Obsolete Necessity," *Arkansas Game and Fish*, 9, no. 4 (Winter 1977), 14-15; Theodore Catton, "From Game Refuges to Ecosystem Assessments: Wildlife Management on the Western National Forests," *Journal of the West*, 38, no. 4 (October 1999), 36.



of the Ozark National Forest were combined into the Sylamore WMA.<sup>123</sup> Today the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission maintains two WMAs bordering Buffalo National River. These are the Gene Rush WMA in the vicinity of Carver and Mt. Hersey and the Loafer's Glory WMA near Cozahome.



Figure 33. Local resident, Jesse Shroll with fish caught in the Buffalo River. *Buffalo National River*.

Fishing also saw considerable change after the turn of the century. Buffalo River farmers took fish from the river using a variety of “pioneer” methods that were later banned by conservation laws. From low bluffs alongside the river they would attract fish to the surface with a lure of some kind and shoot the fish with muzzle loaders. Another method for bringing fish to the surface was to fill a hole with crushed walnut hulls. Sometimes dynamite was used to kill many fish at once. Farmers also used their oxen to haul boulders and timbers into the riverbed and construct fish traps. These obstructions were built on shoals during low water. Built in the shape of a V, they would funnel the fish coming downstream through a narrow spillway into a confined area, where they could be caught in huge numbers.<sup>124</sup> As fish conservation laws gradually became enforced these practices disappeared.

Fresh-water mussels constituted a commercial fishery on both the White and Buffalo rivers. In the early twentieth century the White River ranked as one of the “principal seats” of the mussel fishery in the United States.<sup>125</sup> The Buffalo River drew interest as an extension of that fishery; however, the mussel beds in the Buffalo River were neither as large nor as productive as the White’s, and this industry, too, was marginal. A report of an investigation of the mussel fishery on the Buffalo by the U.S. Bureau of Fisheries made in 1910 provides a good window on the industry at that time. The investigating team encountered four separate parties hunting for pearls in the month of July. Three were composed of local farmers and one was a single, professional pearl hunter.<sup>126</sup>

Although fresh-water mussels had long been exploited as a source of pearls, the commercial fishery did not take off until manufacturing industries began to find a variety of uses for mussel shell. The most significant shell product was pearl buttons, made for use in the garment industry. The manufacturing of shell buttons began in 1891, and the

<sup>123</sup> Kaffka, “The Refuge System: An Obsolete Necessity,” 16.

<sup>124</sup> Robert and Erta Hickman, interview by Suzanne D. Rogers, March 21, 1984.

<sup>125</sup> Robert E. Coker, *Fresh-Water Mussels and Mussel Industries of the United States*, Bureau of Fisheries Bulletin No. 36 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1919), 39.

<sup>126</sup> S. E. Meek and H. Walton Clark, *The Mussels of the Big Buffalo Fork of White River, Arkansas*, Bureau of Fisheries Document No. 759 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1912), 3-20.

harvest of fresh-water mussel shells grew in relation to the button industry. The commercial fishery started in Iowa and spread from there up and down the Mississippi Valley. By 1919, mussel fisheries were pursued in nineteen states in the Midwest and South.<sup>127</sup>

There were several methods used in taking mussels. By far the most common was the crowfoot bar. Operating from a boat – usually an ordinary john boat – the method was to fasten the crowfoot bar at both ends with rope, lower it onto the riverbed at the upstream end of the mussel bed perpendicular to the riverbank, and tow it behind the boat in a snagging action. Small hooks on the crowfoot bar would snag the mussels. A bed would be worked over several times in this way.<sup>128</sup> This method was not practical on the Buffalo River because in some places the river current was too strong and in other places the mussel beds were too rocky. Other tools employed from a boat were forks, tongs, and dip nets. These, too, were not practical on the Buffalo River. More than five percent of all mussel shells were taken by hand, and this was the method in use on the Buffalo River.<sup>129</sup>

In the government report on the Buffalo River fishery made in 1910 the authors described the method employed by two of the parties they met on the river. In the first instance, three men were pearl hunting in a bed situated on coarse gravel about one-half mile below Gilbert. The bed was about two feet under water. The men “were sitting on the bottom and digging the shells up with their hands. Each shell was opened at once, and if no pearl was found it was dropped and another one taken, every portion of the bed being examined.” In the case of the professional pearl hunter, his method was to swim to the bottom of a pool, about five feet in depth, holding a bag of shells to weigh him down, and to search for shells as long as he could hold his breath. He had been working the bed in this way for a week and had collected about ten bushels of shells.<sup>130</sup>

The investigation in 1910 described twenty-six beds from Boxley Valley to approximately the mouth of Big Creek in Marion County. (At this place there was a torrential rain, the river rose five feet overnight, and the survey had to be discontinued.) The investigators reported that the beds all along the river had all been “very thoroughly worked annually for the past few years by pearl hunters.” It seems that one purpose of the survey was to help determine whether pearl hunting was depleting the resource. All of the local people who were interviewed insisted that the mussel beds replenished themselves from year to year, but the investigators appeared to think otherwise. Other fresh-water mussel fisheries had been exhausted; that was one reason why the industry had expanded into new territories. One way in which the mussel beds in the upper Buffalo were especially vulnerable was that they were exposed to free-ranging hogs. “During the low water the hogs eat all that they are able to obtain, and are, no doubt,

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<sup>127</sup> Coker, *Fresh-Water Mussels and Mussel Industries of the United States*, 38-40.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 59; Meek and Clark, *The Mussels of the Big Buffalo Fork of White River, Arkansas*, 8-10.

<sup>130</sup> Meek and Clark, *The Mussels of the Big Buffalo Fork of White River, Arkansas*, 9.

partially responsible for the depletion of many beds in the upper course of the stream," the report stated.<sup>131</sup>

Commercial harvests of finfish on the Buffalo River were limited because the river was not navigable for commercial fishing boats. Commercial fishing of finfish did occur on the upper White River. The industry was concentrated on the lower White River through most of this period, however, as "buy-boats" based in Rosedale, Mississippi, made regular trips about seventy-five miles up the river from its mouth twice weekly in the 1920s.<sup>132</sup> Later, commercial harvesting moved to the upper White River, probably reaching peak levels in the 1940s before the river was dammed. At that time, seine fishermen caught buffalo fish that ranged in size from 20 to 50 pounds. One crew of seine fishermen harvested 346,000 pounds of buffalo fish in a single month. It was reported that the White River fishery yielded 20 million pounds of fish in 20 months.<sup>133</sup>

In the 1920s and 1930s, the Buffalo River began to support a small amount of recreational fishing, which provided a new economic opportunity for river guides. One of the first guides on the Buffalo was a man named Homer Smith. Born in Timbo, Arkansas in 1902, he was known as the best guide on the Buffalo and one of the best in the Ozarks. Smith took clients on float trips during the 1920s and 1930s. Smith's clients mostly came

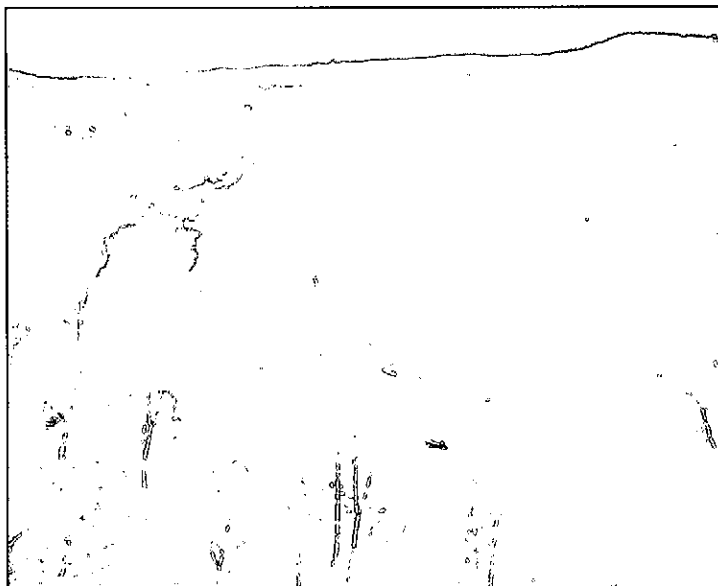


Figure 34. Canoe on Buffalo River. Harold Alexander collection.

from Kansas City and St. Louis. Generally he offered an all-day float trip with a hot lunch cooked over a campfire on a sandbar midway through the float. It was not unusual for his clients to catch 40 or 50 fish in a day.<sup>134</sup> Higher on the river Frank Hammons of Pruitt had a river float business. Usually his clients began at Big Creek and floated to the U.S. Highway 65 bridge – a two-day float with an overnight camp at Woolum. His guides earned two dollars per day plus tips.<sup>135</sup>

<sup>131</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>132</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Fisheries, *Fishing Industry of the United States, 1923*, by Oscar E. Sette, Bureau of Fisheries Document 976 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1925), 214.

<sup>133</sup> Bill Mathis, "The Rise and Decline of Commercial Fishing on the White River," *Arkansas Game and Fish*, 3, no. 1 (Spring 1970): 2-4.

<sup>134</sup> S. Wyatt III, "Manestown," *Mountain Wave* (Marshall, Arkansas), April 15, 1993; Willmering, "Pioneering in the Ozarks," 8, 74.

<sup>135</sup> S. Wyatt III, "Manestown," *Mountain Wave* (Marshall, Arkansas), October 20, 1994.

Other guides who were not local to the Buffalo River entered the business as well in the 1930s. These men offered a wide choice of float trips on the Buffalo, the upper White, and the North Fork. The Swearingen brothers and Jack Bonner were guides based in Norfolk. George Fee lived in Cotter and Bill Wilson resided in Yellville. These river guides furnished boats and camping outfits and in turn employed other guides. They offered trips from one day to two or three weeks in length.<sup>136</sup>

Not all people who floated the Buffalo in this era employed a guide service. Dr. Neil Compton, the physician who would later lead the citizen effort to preserve the Buffalo as a free-flowing stream, made his first trip on the Buffalo as a teenager in the company of Methodist minister Stan Hayden and his son Owen. In the summer of 1932 this party of three from Bentonville, Arkansas, bought a 20-foot john boat from local resident Claude Rainbolt, which they put in the river at the U.S. Highway 65 bridge. When they reached their take out at Dillard's Ferry (now the site of the Highway 14 bridge), they simply left the boat on the bank for someone else's use. Compton later recalled that this method of one-time use of a watercraft was standard practice at the time.<sup>137</sup>



Figure 35. Newell Stricklen putting up hay, ca. 1935. Robert Hickman collection, Buffalo National River.

<sup>136</sup> Arkansas Bureau of Mines, Manufactures, and Agriculture, "The Arkansas Ozarks" (Little Rock: Arkansas Bureau of Mines, Manufactures, and Agriculture, 1932): 20.

<sup>137</sup> Neil Compton, *The Battle for the Buffalo River: A Twentieth-Century Conservation Crisis in the Ozarks* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1992), 35-38; George Wells, "Behind the Buffalo," *Pine Bluff Commercial*, February 13, 1972.

## SUMMARY

After the Civil War, the predominantly subsistence-based economy of Buffalo River settlers gradually turned into a mixed economy of subsistence- and market-oriented activities. Farmers continued to plant most of their cultivated land in corn while they planted some of their acreage in cotton, which became their “cash crop.” The amount of cotton cultivation varied from very small acreages on typical hill farms in Newton County to at least one large operation employing perhaps twenty sharecroppers that was located in Searcy County. Market crops, together with new systems of land tenure and farm labor, provided a path of upward mobility for some farmers but these developments also made life more precarious for many others. Hundreds of Buffalo River farmers, valuing their independence and traditional way of life, maintained themselves on small family farms in the midst of these sweeping changes. Increasingly strapped for cash, these farmers readily took jobs in new industries that came into the area, especially mining and logging, while continuing their traditional ways of farming, herding, hunting, and fishing.

Buffalo National River has a multitude of historic resources associated with these themes. Boxley Valley holds a trove of houses, barns, and community buildings associated with this agricultural way of life from the 1870s through the 1920s. On the upper Buffalo at Sneeds Creek; the Eva Barnes Henderson farm is an example of a hardscrabble farm nestled in steep hill country where elements of a subsistence way of life persisted long into the twentieth century. Erbie, once a rural community of associated farms and crossroads hamlet, and soon to be nominated as a rural historic district, reflects spatial relationships between farms characteristic of the constricted geography found in this area of the Buffalo River.

The development of economic stratification among farms is reflected in two neighboring historic properties along the middle Buffalo River at Cash Bend and Arnold Bend. The Williams-Cash farm features a large two-story house that was built in the late nineteenth century by the prosperous Valentine and Mollie Williams family. In the twentieth century this farm was owned by the Cash family, and sharecroppers worked part of the land. A few miles below Cash Bend at Arnold Bend, the Arnold farm has a pair of standing frame houses and outbuildings that are characteristic of the small family farm. Both these historic properties are in settings that convey a strong sense of place as they occupy terraces bordering wide horseshoe bends of the Buffalo River.

The mining industry is evidenced in Buffalo National River by the Rush Historic District, a National Register-listed property, which contains more than 40 buildings, structures, and sites. At the heart of the historic district lies the Morning Star mine and mill and a row of buildings in the old town of Rush. The National Park Service has developed this popular site with an interpretive trail that takes the visitor past the Morning Star mill and a number of mines.

The railroad was a significant industrial addition to the agrarian landscape, and surviving physical features include piers and other ruins where the railroad crossed the

Buffalo River. Sections of the railroad grade on either side of the river are still detectable as well. The old railroad grade from Yellville to Rush, which never progressed beyond a grade, is entered in the National Register of Historic Places as part of the Rush Historic District.



Figure 36. Baptism in Buffalo River near Duff. *Buffalo National River.*

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, 1865-1930

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Patterns of community development along the Buffalo River were characteristic of patterns that occurred broadly across the South in the period from 1865 to 1930. The underlying factor in community development was rural population growth. While the rural population in the Northeast and large parts of the Midwest declined as people moved to cities, the rural population in the South kept increasing. The increase was driven in part by migration, in part by high birth rates. In the 1880s, North and South were roughly equal in rural population density; fifty years later the South had twice the rural population density of the North.<sup>1</sup>

The three main counties along the Buffalo River all experienced significant population growth in the period 1865 to 1900. In the 1870s, Marion County recovered the population it had lost during the Civil War and added two thousand more people, for an overall growth rate during the decade of 98 percent. In the 1880s, Searcy County saw the most rapid growth of the three counties. In the 1890s, it was the turn of Newton County; while this county had been the least populous of the three before the Civil War, it experienced the highest sustained rate of growth and pulled even with Marion and Searcy counties by the end of the nineteenth century. By 1900, the three counties had a combined total population of 35,903 people – compared to 14,597 in 1860.<sup>2</sup> Even more impressively, the population of the three counties was greater in 1900 than it would be one hundred years later in 2000. The population leveled out through the first two decades of the twentieth century, the high birth rate matched by out-migration.

While the region remained overwhelmingly rural, it was nevertheless becoming transformed by the development of villages and crossroads hamlets. Such villages as Jasper, Marshall, St. Joe, and Yellville became service centers for the surrounding farm population and shipping points for moving farm produce to markets. Harrison became the largest town in the area with the coming of the railroad. Gilbert sprang to life where the railroad crossed the Buffalo. The mining town of Rush boomed at the time of the First World War, attracting by some estimates more than two thousand residents, most of whom were wageworkers. The boom town of Rush and the many villages were the most conspicuous result of the New South's changing economy, an economy in which industry and capital now reigned over agriculture and landed wealth.

Even these rural communities, far removed from the centers of financial power, reflected the different values and shifts of wealth in the New South. Rural communities along the Buffalo usually clustered around a grist mill, a general store, and a post office. In the new cash-driven economy, the miller became a middle man between the farmer and the outside market, and as farm produce prices fell the relationship was often strained. Similarly, the country store keeper came to occupy an ambivalent role in the

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<sup>1</sup> Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 198.

<sup>2</sup> Census data are abstracted in Pitcaithley, *Let the River Be*, 57.

life of the rural community. While some store keepers extended credit to struggling farm families, others aroused farmers' resentment by marking up prices. Often the store keeper was also the postmaster and as such he drew a small government salary at the same time that the postal service drew customers to his store. These evolving circumstances formed the ingredients of class division that placed the farmer increasingly at a disadvantage even within his own rural society.

This chapter is in six sections. The first section on roads highlights changes and continuity in the transportation system in the Buffalo River valley. The second section on hamlets and towns describes four categories of rural community in the Buffalo River watershed and provides brief descriptions of about fifteen distinct communities. The third and fourth sections concern religion and education, respectively. The fifth section discusses the small African-American population that entered and departed the Buffalo River valley in this era. Finally, the sixth section describes the political life of Buffalo River farmers from 1865 to 1930.

This chapter integrates local sources and information specific to the Buffalo with secondary sources and contextual history concerning the New South, Arkansas, and the Ozarks, as well as Marion, Searcy, and Newton counties. While trying to steer clear of overgeneralizations, this chapter argues that community development along the Buffalo River in the period 1865-1930 is appropriately understood as a process that shared many features with the surrounding region. Despite its relative geographic isolation in the heart of the Ozarks, the Buffalo River valley did not differ in any marked way from patterns of rural community development occurring around it.

## RAILS AND ROADS

Until the early twentieth century, transportation in the Buffalo River valley was mostly by horseback or wagon. The watershed was crisscrossed by a network of wagon roads that communicated between farms, grist mills, cotton gins, and county seats. These roads had materialized without public funding or central planning, having been built by the settlers themselves. Each road first appeared as a path cut through the woods, the tops of stumps cut just low enough to the ground to be cleared by a wagon axle. Repetitious use of the road then wore away and exposed the underlying chert, which made a decent surface on the parallel wheel tracks.<sup>3</sup> General Land Office plats covering the Buffalo River valley in the mid-1840s show few roads, but the settlers' wagon road up the valley was undoubtedly well established by then. Because of the many bluffs, the road forded the river numerous times. When the river was running high, transportation was limited to riding on horseback. In the decades following the Civil War the number of roads probably increased but their quality changed very little.

Rivers and creeks all had to be forded in this era. Charles W. Pierce, a Marion County school teacher, remembered the hardships his family experienced in getting

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<sup>3</sup> Rafferty, *The Ozarks: Land and Life*, 107.



across the Buffalo River when he arrived in the area during the winter of 1871-72. They rode with hired teamsters on “rough trails” over the Boston Mountains and down Cave Creek in heavy rain. As they approached the Buffalo River, a local resident warned them that they should not attempt a river crossing until a few days after the rainstorm. So they loaded their belongings into a deserted house and sent the teamster away, hiring in his place two farmers who were returning with empty wagons from Russellville. After two days had passed, these men went to the river and cut poles to place under the wagon boxes in order to raise them above the water line, chaining the boxes down to keep them from floating away. In this manner the party got safely across just before the rain resumed.<sup>4</sup>

In the 1880s, state laws provided for minimal road maintenance. A law passed in the 1890s authorized the county government to summon able-bodied men between the ages of 18 and 45 to work up to five days each year on clearing, draining, and grading roads, and to appoint district road overseers to organize this work. But in practice, few counties exercised that authority. Counties paid about one dollar per day for this road work, which was known as a labor tax, and few counties wanted to incur the expense. A major reason that the conditions of wagon roads remained such a low priority in the late nineteenth century was that local governments put their resources toward securing railroad connections instead.<sup>5</sup>

After years of anticipation, Buffalo River farmers finally got a nearby railroad



Figure 37. The railroad near the Buffalo River crossing. Ben Fruehauf collection, Buffalo National River.

connection in the early 1900s. The railroad had a huge impact on community development. Community leaders worked assiduously to get their towns on the route of a new railroad, knowing that it could mean life or death for a small community. When the railroad came to Harrison, Arkansas, just north of the Buffalo River valley, the local newspaper ran a beaming headline: “Harrison is a Railroad Town at Last. The Construction Train Laid Yesterday the Steel which Puts Us in Touch with the World.” The people of Harrison celebrated exuberantly with a cannon salute and a

<sup>4</sup> Billie Louise Bentzen & Lee S. Tabor, eds., *Ozark Teacher: Autobiography of Charles W. Pierce, 1866-1955* (Berlin, Massachusetts: B. L. Bentzen and L. S. Tabor, 1995), 12-15.

<sup>5</sup> Christie McLaren, *Arkansas Highway History and Architecture, 1910-1965* (Little Rock: Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, 1999), 4; U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of Public Roads, *Public Roads of Arkansas: Mileage and Expenditures in 1904*, Circular No. 41 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1906), 2; U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of Public Roads, *Public Road Mileage and Revenues in the Southern States, 1914*, Bulletin No. 387 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1917), ii. According to historian Suzanne D. Rogers, road overseers books in the Newton County courthouse show that the county allowed people to do road work in lieu of paying a poll tax.

massive parade. In anticipation of the town's prosperous future, Harrison merchants laid the cornerstone of a new iron and stone building, the ice company increased its production capacity, and the hotel announced it was putting in bathrooms.<sup>6</sup>

Just as a railroad connection could transform a backwater town into a thriving center of commerce, a railroad bypass could doom a community to extinction. Such was the case for Duff, a hamlet on Mill Creek near the middle Buffalo, which railroad survey crews left high and dry when they located the line between Harrison to Marshall a half mile to the east of the town. Duff's leading merchant, store owner William Mays, promptly moved his store and post office to a nearby railroad camp established on the north bank of the Buffalo where the railroad would cross the river. Other residents of Duff soon followed him. While the town of Duff quickly died, the railroad camp grew into the new town of Gilbert, named for one of the railroad's financiers.<sup>7</sup>

The railroad affected the local transportation network by drawing more commerce to those fortunate market towns located along the railroad: Harrison, Gilbert, and Marshall. The roads that led to town were called "farm-to-market" roads, and they carried wagons loaded with corn to the grist mill, or wagons loaded with baled cotton to the cotton gin, or other produce that farmers wanted to sell to the market. They also served as livestock driveways for farmers taking their cattle and hogs to market. The farm-to-market roads formed a diffuse and happenstance network as farms and mills were scattered throughout the area. There was no hierarchical system of federal, state, and county roads as we know today.

At the end of the nineteenth century a nationwide movement was initiated with the aim of improving these farm-to-market roads. The push for "good roads" started with bicyclists in the cities. As bicycles became a practical mode of transport on hard-surfaced city streets in the late nineteenth century, bicyclists were the first to complain about the poor condition of rural roads. In Little Rock, a group of bicyclists enlisted the support of the *Arkansas Gazette* in calling for good roads, and Governor James P. Clarke held the state's first Good Roads Convention. In 1896, Little Rock citizens formed the Good Roads League. After bicyclists initiated the good roads movement, growing numbers of automobile enthusiasts took over the movement in the first decade of the twentieth century.<sup>8</sup>

The Arkansas legislature responded to the good roads movement with modest measures that ultimately led to discord between townspeople and farmers. In 1907, it enacted a law that allowed counties to form local road improvement districts. Counties could form a district when a majority of landowners along a road wanted to do so. Then the county assessed taxes on the property lying adjacent to the road and contracted for the road improvement work. Numerous problems arose with this system. Without centralized planning, road improvements did not proceed in a rational order. Lack of

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<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Ayers, *The Promise of the New South*, 11.

<sup>7</sup> John Heuston, "Gilbert: A Utopian Experiment," *Pack & Paddle* (Spring 1996), 7.

<sup>8</sup> McLaren, *Arkansas Highway History and Architecture, 1910-1965*, 4.

supervision resulted in much expense for little improvement. In poor counties most farmers were reluctant to form road districts for fear of incurring taxes they could not afford, so real progress was limited to a few wealthy counties. In 1913, the state legislature established the Arkansas Highway Commission, and in two years this new body was being audited for misuse and waste of state funds. In an effort to overhaul the system, the state legislature passed the Alexander Road Act in 1916, which liberalized the rules for road districts and public funding of road construction. But the Alexander Road Act only led to more problems. Many land owners were assessed taxes even though the improved roads did not reach their property. Some became saddled with property taxes equal to or exceeding the value of their total farm income. In more than a few cases, land owners were required to pay taxes to two different road districts where district boundaries overlapped.<sup>9</sup>

Such abuses led many Arkansas farmers to oppose road improvements not just at the ballot box but through independent action. When Searcy County contracted for road improvements on the route between Marshall and Harriett in 1916, local farmers stood on the road with shot guns and refused to let surveyors and road workers cross their land. There were instances, too, of sabotage as tractors and other road machinery were blown up with dynamite.<sup>10</sup>

With inadequate means of public funding for road improvements, Arkansas fell behind other states in developing a state highway system. A survey of public road



Figure 38. James Vaughan brought this truck from Russellville to the county fair in Jasper in 1916. Along the way it was feted as the first motorized transport in Newton County. *Dwight Pitcaithley collection, Buffalo National River.*

mileages in each state by the U.S. Office of Public Roads found that Arkansas had the lowest percentage of surfaced roads in the South. A county by county inventory revealed that Searcy County had the third lowest road mileage in the state. Most of Searcy County's 300 miles of road were dirt, while ten miles of road was surfaced with gravel and twenty miles was surfaced with sand-clay.<sup>11</sup> Carl Sauer, a geographer, noted in 1920 that this section of the state was served by two almost separate road systems: one followed the ridge tops and the

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>10</sup> McInturff, "The Evolution of Searcy County's Economy."

<sup>11</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of Public Roads, *Public Road Mileage and Revenues in the Southern States, 1914*, 7, xlviii.

other traced the valley bottoms. The two systems were tenuously joined by “rough and often badly washed side roads.”<sup>12</sup>

Federal highway legislation in 1916 and 1921 provided federal funding assistance for improving rural post roads and highways, but Arkansas was slow to avail itself of these resources.<sup>13</sup> The good roads movement in Arkansas finally turned a corner in 1923. After the federal government threatened to withhold these funds unless Arkansas revamped its state highway department, Governor Thomas McRae called a special session of the General Assembly and got it to pass the necessary legislation. In addition to reconstituting the Arkansas Highway Commission, the Harrelson Road Act of 1923 shifted some of the tax burden for road improvements from rural property owners to road users. Another law in 1927 went further, relieving the property owners of these costs altogether.<sup>14</sup>

Buffalo River farmers saw the fruits of this federally-subsidized state program in the construction of State Highway 7, which ran on a north-south tangent through Harrison and Jasper, crossing the Buffalo at Pruitt. In contrast to earlier road-building efforts in the valley, the state employed steam shovels and other heavy machinery to punch a two-lane highway through the rugged mountains. It was the largest public works project seen in the valley up to that time.<sup>15</sup>

Even when State Highway 7 was opened to the public, however, the reputation of Ozark roads discouraged most outsiders from using them. One party of intrepid automobile tourists in 1926 took twelve hours to drive approximately 120 miles through the Arkansas Ozarks from Dover to Eureka Springs. Nineteen-year-old Evelyn Dodds of Pine Bluff, Arkansas, together with her older sister and mother, headed up State Highway 7 into the hills refusing to heed several people’s warnings not to attempt this newly completed road. The spirited young Dodds was the only driver among the three women. “The ‘hair pin curves’ were a sight to look forward to,” she wrote in her diary, “and when I saw the first one I was almost too excited to go around it.” It appears that no hazards could stop these particular tourists. Although the brakes on their Ford Coupe burned up on the steep descent into Jasper they were able to get them repaired at a garage while they ate lunch at the Murray Hotel. In the afternoon they were waylaid for forty minutes by a blown tire until some helpful strangers happened along to help them change it. “The roads were good except for the rocks,” Dodds commented afterward. “We had a lovely trip.”<sup>16</sup>

Starting in the mid-1920s, the state began to make steady progress in improving its road system, and as roads were improved, so, too, were river crossings. Buffalo River residents were long accustomed to crossing the river at numerous fords. But the

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<sup>12</sup> Sauer, “The Economic Problem of the Ozark Highland,” 224.

<sup>13</sup> Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South*, 256-257.

<sup>14</sup> McLaren, *Arkansas Highway History and Architecture, 1910-1965*, 9-10.

<sup>15</sup> A set of blurry photographs of this project is held in the Newton County Library.

<sup>16</sup> Evelyn Dodds Besom, “Vacationing in the ‘Land of a Million Smiles,’” *OzarksWatch*, 3, no. 4 (Spring 1990): 15.

Buffalo's fluctuating level made the fords inconvenient or even dangerous. A number of small ferry operations existed at different points along the river at various times. These ferries consisted of a heavy cable strung from one side of the river to the other to which a small craft was attached by ropes and pulleys. Most of these ferry operations were sporadic, as traffic was too light to give the ferry operator anything but a small supplemental income. Ferries of this type existed at Woolum, Arnold Bend, the Love Hensley place, below Maumee, and possibly other locations along the river around the turn of the century.<sup>17</sup>

The oldest and longest serving ferry was started by George and John Grinder probably in the 1870s. Located just downstream from the present-day U.S. 65 highway



Figure 39. Old bridge at Pruitt, Buffalo River, ca. 1920. Richard and Melba Holland collection, Shiloh Museum.

bridge at a site since known as Grinder's Ferry, it remained in operation until the bridge was built in 1929. George and John Grinder were both sons of Samuel Grinder, who homesteaded on the river in 1853. The brothers seem to have run the ferry for fifty years or more.<sup>18</sup> There are two different accounts of the ferry's operation and ownership in the 1920s, both given by old timers to historian James Johnston in 1969. According to J. C. Love, Charlie and John Passmore ran a car ferry at this location, loading two cars at a time onto their small ferry and charging 75 cents per car – which made a lucrative business by the standards of the day. But as Noah Barnett recalled, the Grinder brothers sold the ferry to his half brother, A. A. Barnett, who operated it until the bridge was built. In any case, the site was a ferry crossing for fifty years and then a bridge crossing after that.<sup>19</sup>

About the time that the river was spanned by a bridge near Grinder's Ferry, another ferry operation was begun where State 14 now crosses the Buffalo. Another pair of brothers, Ira and Pate Dillard, saw the opportunity in providing ferry service to automobilists who wanted to take a more direct route between Yellville and Marshall. The original ferry was made of pine lumber and was built upside down at the edge of the river so that when completed it was simply turned over into the river. It was about 40

<sup>17</sup> Ken Smith, "Ferries on the Buffalo in Searcy County" and "The Arnold Ferry, upriver from present-day U.S. 65," undated typescript notes from Ken Smith notebook, historical files, BNR.

<sup>18</sup> Rogers, *Historic Resources of the Tyler Bend Development Area*, 24.

<sup>19</sup> Ken Smith, "The Buffalo River Ferry at Present-day U.S. Highway 65," and "Noah Barnett recalls the Grinder Ferry," undated typescript notes from Ken Smith notebook, historical files, BNR. See also Grinder and Hensley interview.

feet long by about 8 feet wide and was designed to take a single row of cars, although it also carried trucks and horse-drawn wagons. This ferry ran until 1959 when the bridge on State 14 opened.<sup>20</sup>

The first road bridge on the Buffalo was built in 1913 between Harrison and Jasper at what became Pruitt. Three years later, a one-lane bridge was built at Carver. Other bridges followed at Boxley (1924), Tyler Bend (1929), and Hasty (1930s).<sup>21</sup>

While the public cost of road improvement tended to heighten divisions between town and country, rural people nonetheless rejoiced over the many advantages that better transportation entailed for daily life. Old-timers still recall the appearance of the first automobile in their community or the first car or truck owned by their family. Better roads enabled people to get better health care and to enjoy more frequent trips to town. As rural school buses came into use, schools were able to lengthen the school day as children no longer faced such long walks to school. Even before the Good Roads Movement of the turn of the century or the rise of the automobile in the 1920s, however, primitive farm-to-market roads served to bring the rural population together. The road network formed a crucial underpinning of community development.

## HAMLETS AND TOWNS

The Buffalo River valley's growing farm population in the late nineteenth century gave rise to a matrix of rural communities that might be grouped into four distinctive categories: crossroads hamlets, river towns, mining towns, and county seats.

Crossroads hamlets were smallest in population (though not necessarily in area) and the most numerous. They were situated where two roads or a road and the river intersected, and they were populated by anywhere from one to a few score families. These crossroads hamlets appeared first in the valleys, but as the population increased they appeared in the upland areas as well. The names of new communities were often suggestive of their upland environments: Rolling Prairie, Mount Judea, Low Gap. Crossroads hamlets were themselves of two distinct varieties. Some of these rural communities, such as Boxley and Erbie, centered around a church and school and embraced a wide area of scattered farmsteads. Others, such as Carver and Woolum, featured some sort of focal point for local commerce such as a grist mill or a ferry crossing and were clustered around that feature. The latter communities tended to be smaller and more ephemeral, but all could be categorized as "crossroads hamlets."

The largest and most established crossroads hamlet in the Buffalo River valley was Boxley. Boxley Valley was well settled by the Civil War. Wagon roads entered the valley from the east and west – roughly where state roads coming from Jasper and

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<sup>20</sup> "Ozark Mountain Folklore," *Mountain Echo* (Yellville, Arkansas), June 2, 1988; "Dillard's Ferry sign up along BNR," *Mountain Echo* (Yellville, Arkansas), May 28, 1998.

<sup>21</sup> Ken Smith, interview by Theodore Catton, June 4, 2006; Smith, *Buffalo River Handbook*, 188-189.

Kingston descend into the valley today – as well as from north and south by way of the Buffalo River valley. Before the 1870s the place was known as Whiteley's, after Sam Whiteley and his grist mill. The water-powered mill stood on Whiteley Creek. In 1870, the mill was rebuilt and enlarged to accommodate the growing farm population. Local resident Robert Villines became the new miller.<sup>22</sup>

The rural community acquired the name Boxley in the 1870s, in honor of William Boxley, a new resident and successful merchant who had moved to the area from Springfield, Missouri. As National Park Service planners noted when they prepared a land use plan and cultural landscape report for Boxley Valley in the early 1980s, the relative prosperity of Boxley in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries became evident in the architecture of houses, barns, and community buildings, which included the Walnut Grove church. The numerous white, two-story houses marked the town as a “style leader and regional center,” while the two-story church, with its belfry, displayed community pride and town culture. The church, also known as Boxley's community building, was “in every sense of the word, a town building.”<sup>23</sup>

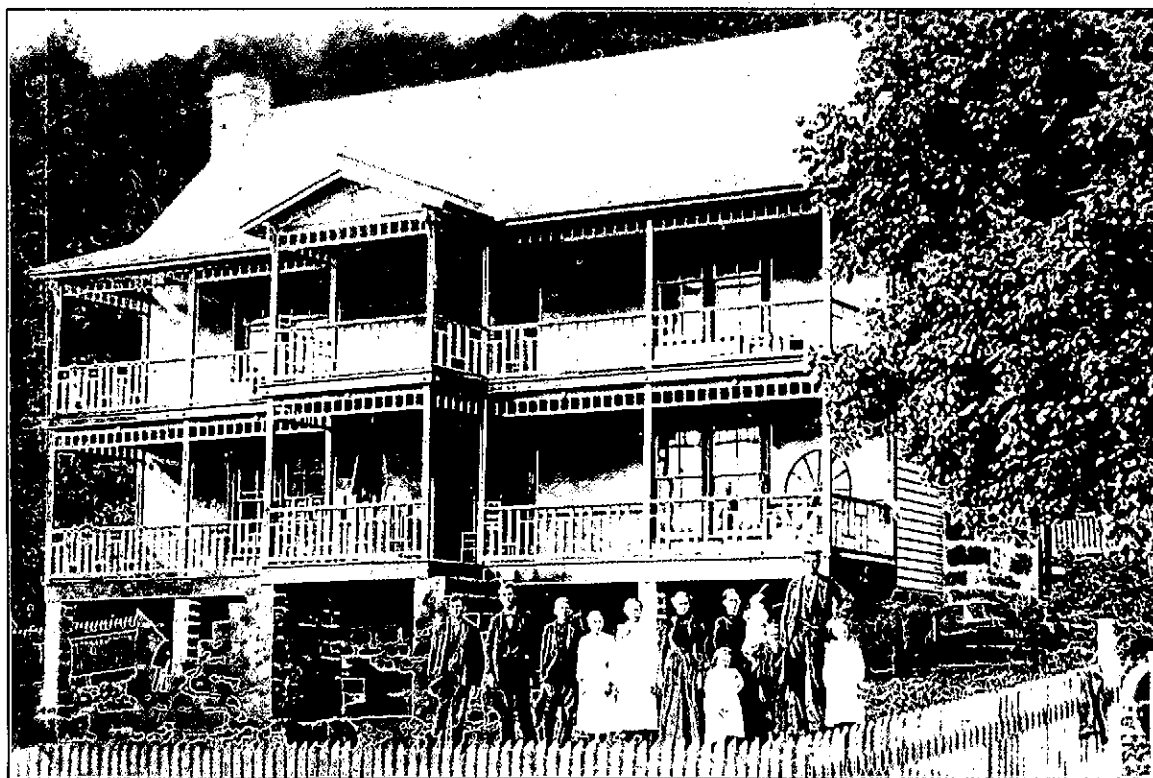


Figure 40. The Francis Marion Edgmon family of Boxley posed for this portrait in front of their new house, ca. 1900. *Nell Flud collection, Buffalo National River.*

A few families grew to prominence in the community. These included the Casey family, whose patriarch Abner Casey built the mill on Whiteley Creek about 1840; the

<sup>22</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, *Land Use Plan Cultural Landscape Report: Boxley Valley, Buffalo National River, Arkansas* (Denver: National Park Service, 1985), 19-21.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 21-22. Quote on p. 22.

Villines family; and the McFerrin/Duty family, which included Ben McFerrin, one of the state's leading education reformers. After 1900, Boxley's population slowly began to dwindle. Nevertheless, valley residents still retained a strong sense of community when the area became part of Buffalo National River, and in the 1980s the National Park Service worked with Boxley's residents to preserve the rural community and the agricultural landscape as living entities within Buffalo National River. Today many houses, barns, and outbuildings, together with the church and mill, are within the Boxley Historic District, a property listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Another notable crossroads hamlet on the Buffalo was Erbie. Located about 12 river miles below Boxley, the many farmsteads that composed this rural community were nestled in a series of "hollows" and "coves" that branch off the narrow and twisting river valley in this section of the Buffalo. The most commodious of these hollows is Cecil Cove. Although the community had a population of perhaps 100 people or more, it went by various names before it became Erbie in 1915. The community had a church, school, and store.<sup>24</sup>

The first settlers in the Erbie area arrived in the 1830s. By the Civil War, farms existed along the river bottom and up the tributary streams. Early settlers included a branch of the Villines family, who settled in Cecil Cove, and John Adair, who claimed six 40-acre tracts about two miles below the mouth of Cecil Creek. Nathaniel Villines and his son George W. Villines, both Methodist preachers, owned adjacent 80-acre tracts in Cecil Cove. Other families who settled in the area by the 1920s included the Hickman, Jones, Farmer, Tinsley, Baker, Henderson, Taylor, Briscoe, Dillon, Massengale, Martin, Harp, Keeton, Reavis, Woodell, Webb, Young, and Barnes families. Many of these families had been in the area for a generation or more, making this community one of the oldest settlements on the Buffalo.<sup>25</sup>

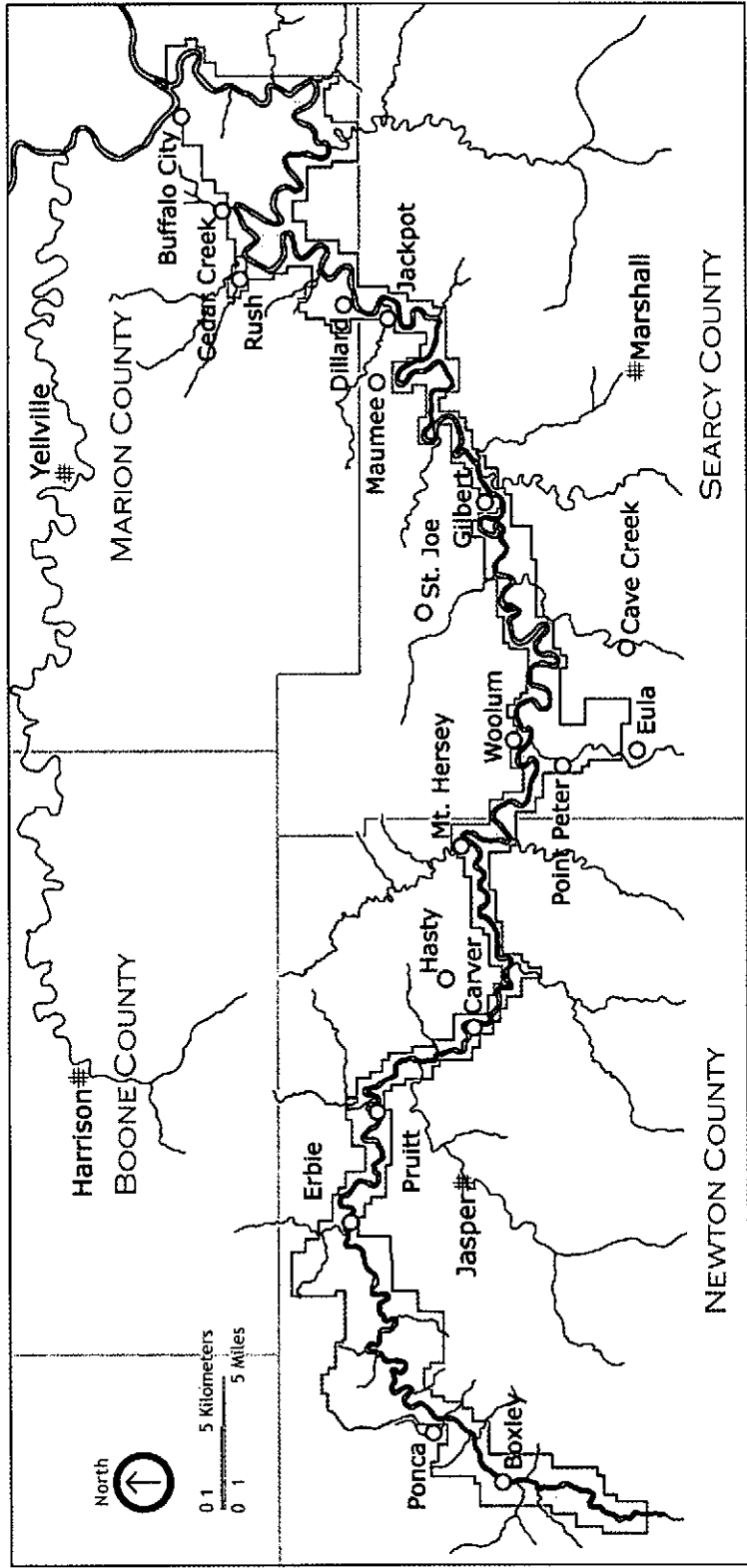
In 1895, George M. Villines applied to the U.S. Post Office Department for a post office to be established on Cecil Creek. He referred to the creek as "Villines Creek" and he proposed "Villines" as the name of the town. Apparently the application was not successful. In 1915, area resident Simon Lawson made a second application, locating the post office 100 yards north of the Buffalo River and proposing the name "Mikey." The request was granted but the name of the town was changed to "Erbie" – presumably after Erbie Green, daughter of the Newton County sheriff, Bill Green. (A postscript to the application stated "As to the name of the office we are not particular, it is the office we want.") Later some people wanted to change the name of the town to "Villines Chapel" but Erbie stuck. The post office was moved to the south side of the Buffalo River in 1928 and back to the north side in 1934. Later postmasters included Jesse J. Hickman

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<sup>24</sup> Robert Hickman, interview notes by Suzie Rogers, 1985.

<sup>25</sup> "Erbie Church – Information for Determination of Eligibility," by Suzie Rogers, August 30, 1993, typescript in historical files, Buffalo National River, Arkansas.





Map 10. Towns and Hamlets along the Buffalo, ca. 1915

and Marion A. Farmer. As late as 1916, the mail was carried on horseback from Jasper through Erbie to Compton.<sup>26</sup>

George W. Villines established the Erbie church in 1896. The original church, which was made of logs, burned down and was replaced with a new building in about 1916.<sup>27</sup> Villines was the church's first preacher. Later the church was served by the Reverend Stevens, a Methodist minister who resided in Harrison and rode his buggy to Erbie each Sunday. Still later it was served by a Baptist preacher named Tom Jones.<sup>28</sup> For many years the church was nondenominational. In 1974, the building was sold to the National Park Service by the Methodist Church and it remains standing today. The church continued to have an active congregation attached to it until 2000, even as the population of Erbie dwindled away.

Some crossroads hamlets were so small that they barely had an identity separate from the surrounding farm country. Point Peter stood at the junction of the road over Horn Mountain and the road down Richland Valley, and the Point Peter school was one of the oldest schools in the area. But the place was perhaps better known as Richland, a name that referred to the whole broad valley from Eula to Woolum. This fertile valley held a considerable farm population from the mid-nineteenth century until the beginning of the twentieth century.

Woolum was a crossroads hamlet of another stripe. It grew up around a handful of enterprises, starting with a saloon that Tom Jackson opened soon after the Civil War, together with a ferry service, and later a grist mill, sawmill, cotton gin, and two stores (one on either side of the river). From the beginning Woolum had a reputation as a rough town. In the early twentieth century it had a sizeable population, which included a doctor and a dentist. Numerous sharecroppers lived there who worked on farms in Richland Valley.<sup>29</sup>

Several crossroads hamlets in the Buffalo River valley formed around mill locations. P. T. Carver's grist mill at the mouth of Big Creek in Newton County gave rise to the hamlet known as Carver. Soon there was a cluster of other enterprises at this place: sorghum mill, sawmill, general store, blacksmith shop, and ferry service. Carver became postmaster of the Carver post office. Below Carver, on Davis Creek about a quarter mile above its confluence with the Buffalo, Frank and Dora Mays had a grist mill and store in what became known as Mount Hersey. Frank Mays' grandson, Armon T. Mays, later

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<sup>26</sup> Thomason and Associates, "Determination of Eligibility, Buffalo National River, Erbie Rural Historic District," August 2004, 48; U.S. Post Office Department, *Reports of Geo. Site Locations*, M1126, Roll 37, Arkansas History Commission; Ruth Wilson, "Ruby Webb Recalls Halcyon Days of Erbie," *Newton County Homestead*, 2, no. 2 (Summer 1980), 18.

<sup>27</sup> "Erbie Church – Information for Determination of Eligibility," Ruth Wilson, "Ruby Webb Recalls Halcyon Days of Erbie," *Newton County Homestead*, 2, no. 2 (Summer 1980), 18.

<sup>28</sup> Wilson, "Ruby Webb Recalls Halcyon Days of Erbie."

<sup>29</sup> Tom A. Tate, interview by James J. Johnston, October 20, 1970; Jim Tilley, interview by Jill Gentry White, July 27, 1995.

recalled that there were five families living at Mount Hersey, all related to one another.<sup>30</sup> Taylor's Mill on upper Calf Creek was another mill location that spawned a hamlet. Built by Captain Ben F. Taylor in 1875, it served the numerous small farms in the upper Calf Creek drainage and farms to the south. In 1890, this community acquired a post office and became known as Blanco.<sup>31</sup>

In at least one instance, a hamlet actually picked up and moved with the mill. In 1868, Steven Still acquired a flood-damaged grist mill on upper Tomahawk Creek and moved it about a mile and a half down the creek. This hamlet became known as Needmore, a name derived from an offhand comment made one day by the miller to a customer, that "I need more" business. After a few years this hamlet consisted of a cotton gin, blacksmith shop, general store and saloon together with residences. In 1892, John W. Still moved the mill and cotton gin a half mile south and across the creek to a new location on the old road between St. Joe and Tomahawk. The next mill owner, W. Newport, added a blacksmith shop and sawmill to the mill complex. The hamlet of Push developed at this location. There was a general store and post office at Push, the latter in service from 1903 to 1914. The hamlet was abandoned about 1918.<sup>32</sup>

Most crossroads hamlets in the Buffalo River valley had a tenuous existence that revolved around one or two key enterprises. Most of these places have long since vanished, although some of their names were revived in recent decades to identify river access points. The two exceptions are Boxley and Erbie. These rural communities persisted for multiple generations and included many established families.

The second community type found in the area was the river town. River towns generally developed on navigable rivers where water-born commerce stimulated a farm-to-market connection. Buffalo City, located on the White River at the mouth of the Buffalo, was a characteristic river town as it owed its existence to navigation on the White River. Gilbert was less characteristic of this type since it owed its origins to the railroad rather than the small amount of farm produce that was rafted down the Buffalo. However, Gilbert grew in importance as the river became a means of transporting railroad ties and cedar logs to market. In its heyday the town was oriented to the river landing as well as the railroad depot, and Gilbert's orientation to the river is still visible today. Many crossroads hamlets along the Buffalo shared this riverfront orientation (often centering on a ford or ferry crossing) but Gilbert was the only community along the Buffalo – other than Buffalo City at the river mouth – that benefited from commerce floating down the river.

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<sup>30</sup> Armon T. Mays, "Early Life in Mt. Hersey Along the Buffalo," *Newton County Historical Society Newsletter*, 14, no. 3 (Fall 1998), 23-24.

<sup>31</sup> *Harrison Daily Times*, May 8, 1992; Harrell, ed., *History and Folklore*, 143; U.S. Post Office Department, *Reports of Geo. Site Locations*, M 1126, Roll 44, Calf Creek – Blanco. Another hamlet, Pruitt, sprung up around tourist services in 1920 and is described in a later chapter.

<sup>32</sup> James J. Johnston, "Needmore and Push," *Ozarks Mountaineer* (April 1971), copy from Ken Smith notebook at historical files, BNR.

Buffalo City was the oldest river town in the area. The town occupied a flat about a mile above the mouth of the Buffalo River. Strategically located by Buffalo Shoals at the head of low-water navigation on the upper White River, the town was a transfer point between small steamboats plying the upper White River and wagon freight coming from Marion County. For decades it teetered on the edge of becoming an important river port for the region. In the fall of 1858, Captain John H. Quisenberry, owner of a steamboat packet, sought to make Buffalo City into a supply center for Marion County. He bought land, marked it off into town lots, and advertised the lots for sale. By the following year, there were encouraging signs of growth. Eleven new families had moved in and built residences. There was a large business house (25 by 100 feet), a steam-powered grist mill, and several commercial buildings along the river front. But Quisenberry was forced to sell his steamboat packet that fall, and two years after that the Civil War dampened commerce on the upper White River. Buffalo City stagnated. After the Civil War the town stood ready to prosper from navigation improvement of the upper White River, but the navigation improvement was slow in coming. In 1891, W. R. Jones, publisher of the *Mountain Echo* in Yellville, had another idea: he sought to interest investors in building a railroad from Springfield, Missouri to Buffalo City. The plans got as far as moving Buffalo City to the opposite bank of the river; then the Panic of 1893 led to the suspension of the railroad scheme.<sup>33</sup>

Buffalo City finally had its heyday in the zinc mining boom during World War I. By then a railroad was completed on the left bank of the White River and most of the town's population lived on that side of the river (where the settlement was known as Buffalo Station). The original town site on the right bank of the river was dominated by a large wagon yard, where wagons brought ore from the Rush mining district to be ferried across the river and shipped on the railroad. Then known as Oredale, the town had two hotels owned by William Wood and William Henry Tripp. It was said that the wagon yard would be filled at mid day with more than 25 wagons while the drivers ate lunch in the hotel before ferrying their cargo to the other side of the river. One of the hotel keepers had nine hacks that transported passengers over the road to Rush and nine crew wagons that hauled ore.<sup>34</sup>

Gilbert started as a railroad construction camp and soon thrived as a combination of railroad depot, market center, and river port. Because the railroad crossed the Buffalo River at Gilbert, it became the destination for log drives down the river. A major purchaser of timber in the Buffalo River drainage was the Eagle Pencil Company of New York. The Eagle Pencil Company built a sawmill at Gilbert and the railroad siding that led to the mill was soon lined with logs to be sent through the mill and stacks of milled lumber to be shipped to the company's main pencil factory in New York. Gilbert also benefited from its railroad connection because there were mines in the area. The Water Creek-Maumee mining district spanned the Marion County-Searcy County line just north

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<sup>33</sup> Duane Huddleston, "Buffalo City – The Death of a Boom Town," *Little Rock Arkansas Gazette*, November 29, 1970.

<sup>34</sup> Z. B. Smith, "Old Times and Families on the Buffalo are Recalled," *Mountain Echo* (Yellville, Arkansas), February 5, 1976; Mary Ann Messick, *History of Baxter County 1873-1973*, Reprint 1973, (Mountain Home, Arkansas: Baxter County Historical Society Sesquicentennial, 1986), 89.

of the Buffalo River and northeast of Gilbert. In the middle of this mining district the town of Maumees perched on top of a hill overlooking Maumees Hollow and the river. Ore from the mining district was hauled by wagon over the road from Maumees to Gilbert. On occasion as many as 100 wagons would be seen in Gilbert bringing ore to the railroad depot.<sup>35</sup>

In 1913, the town of Gilbert was incorporated. At one time the community had four general stores, two cotton gins, a blacksmith shop, a jeweler, a canning factory, and a saloon, as well as other businesses. The town was built close to the river and when the river flooded in 1916 the sawmill and saloon were both destroyed.<sup>36</sup>



Figure 41. Gilbert Hotel. Ben Fruehauf collection, Buffalo National River.

In 1920, Eli Caleb Jordan arrived in Gilbert and purchased land for a town addition. Jordan was a disciple of the Church of Christ and member of a millenarian group called the Incoming Kingdom Missionary Unit. The Illinois-based group wanted to found a utopian colony in Gilbert. The group's leader was a man named John A. Battenfield who claimed to have found the key to the biblical prophecies in Daniel and Revelation. According to Battenfield, the First World War was a harbinger of an even greater world conflagration about to commence between Protestants and Catholics. In preparation for the apocalypse, he wanted to establish colonies of the faithful in small mountain communities. Jordan, a farmer who had made money by the discovery of oil on his Illinois farm, put up the capital for the utopian community's land base. He divided the land into 2-3 acre lots and sold them at cost to incoming members of the group. By January 1921 there were about 70 members residing on the Jordan Addition in Gilbert and by the end of the year the number had doubled.<sup>37</sup>

The group began with an unusual plan for community development. Aiming to withdraw as much as possible from the money economy, the group would build a

<sup>35</sup> Searcy County Retired Teachers Association, *Searcy County Arkansas: A History of Searcy County Arkansas and its People* (Marshall, Arkansas: Searcy County Retired Teachers Association, 1987), 21-22; Edwin T. McKnight, *Zinc and Lead Deposits in Northern Arkansas*, United States Geological Survey Bulletin No. 853 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1935), 182.

<sup>36</sup> Unidentified newspaper clipping (1990), historical files, BNR.

<sup>37</sup> Doris E. Thompson, "History of an Ozark Utopia," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, 14 (Winter 1955), 359-364.

community storehouse, flour mill, and textile mill, and members would share their property and labor. These ideas were difficult to put into practice, however, as members were reluctant to part with their possessions. While these community structures were never built, the group did construct an impressive meeting house that served as both a church and school. This large brownstone building still stands at the edge of the town.<sup>38</sup> The Jordan house is across the street, now occupied by Jordan's elderly son, Ray. According to Ray Jordan, a number of people who belonged to the millenarian group put down roots in the area after Battenfield's prophecy proved wrong, and their strong religiosity had a lasting impact on the communities in which they resided.<sup>39</sup>

The railroad was abandoned in the 1940s and Gilbert faded. From a population of nearly 400 it dwindled to about 50. Unlike many other towns along the Buffalo, however, Gilbert did not vanish. Today the town's economy is oriented to tourism, with canoe rentals, restaurants, and bed and breakfast accommodations being among the town's most visible businesses.

A third community type that developed along the Buffalo was the mining town. While the railroad gave life to the town of Gilbert, mines were the seedbed for towns such as Ponca, Maumee, Jackpot, and Rush. Rush and Ponca both began as crossroads hamlets but were transformed into mining towns. Maumee and Jackpot were two more mining towns that originated around mining activity. Mining towns differed from other rural communities in the fact that they attracted outside capital and labor. Oriented around an industry that was notoriously fickle, they typically followed a boom and bust cycle. They were hard places, populated by company men and transient workers who did not expect to stay very long. With their boarding houses, restaurants, and night life, mining towns brought a touch of the urban scene to a place that was previously devoid of it.

Ponca was established in 1903 as a mining company town. The Ponca City Oklahoma Mining Company bought land on Adds Creek and divided the parcel into town lots. The mining company owned a number of prospects in the Boxley-Ponca mining district and its announcement of the new town began a mining boom in the little valley. Ponca soon became crowded with miners' shacks and cabins in addition to stores, a grist mill, and a grand three-story hotel. The hotel was known as the Miller Hotel and Boarding House. The town attracted wage workers who worked in the nearby lead and zinc mines. Some of the workers came from the mines around Joplin, Missouri. About the time of the First World War, Walter Lackey, Newton County's historian, worked in the mines for \$1.50 per day and had room and board at the Miller Hotel for \$.50 per day.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Thompson, "History of an Ozark Utopia," 365-366. See also Ray Jordan interview by Cindy Adams, August 10, 1995, historical files, BNR.

<sup>39</sup> Thomason, "Buffalo National River Theme Identification Context Studies and Property Evaluations," 74-75.

<sup>40</sup> Lackey, *History of Newton County, Arkansas*, 233-234.

Zinc mines upriver from Rush gave rise to the mining town of Maumee. Located on bench land west of the river, it served a number of mines in the Water Creek-Maumee mining district. The census in 1930 reported that it had a population of 142.<sup>41</sup> East of Maumee, the mining camp of Jackpot occupied one of the most remote town sites in the Buffalo River drainage. The Jackpot mine location was described in a geological bulletin as being on the left bank of the Buffalo fifteen feet above water level in the west half of the southeast quarter of Section 8, Township 16 North, Range 15 West – which suggests that the mine was in a bluff. There was a mill connected with this mine, which produced ore in 1910 and again during the First World War.<sup>42</sup> The community of Jackpot seems to have been located on the hilltop near the end of the road going east out of Maumee. The community applied for a post office in 1909, at which time it claimed a population of 50 plus another 150 strung along the road from Maumee to Jackpot.<sup>43</sup>

By far the biggest boom town in the Buffalo River drainage was Rush, which actually consisted of two separate town sites distinguished as “Old Rush” and “New Town.” Old Rush was located a little more than a mile above the mouth of Rush Creek and was originally a farming community with a water-powered grist mill on the creek. Farmers discovered and prospected the zinc deposits in the area and gradually they attracted the interest of mine investors. Old Rush experienced two periods of most intense excitement, the first from 1898 to 1904 and the second during World War I. In 1898, the Morning Star Mining Company built a 50-ton concentrating mill and began operating the mine and mill ten hours per day, with an average of 13 men in the mine and another crew at the mill. A number of other concentrating mills were established in the area and Old Rush became a tent city as workers poured in to work in the mines and mills.<sup>44</sup>

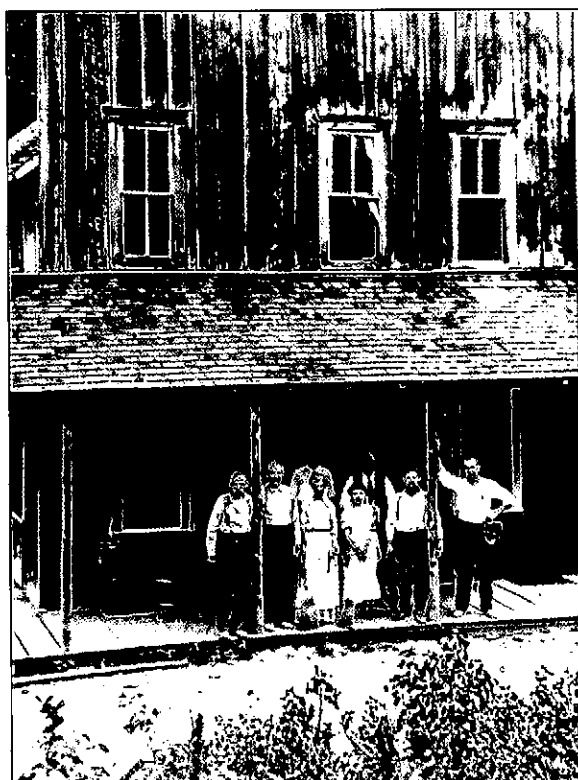


Figure 42. Ponca Hotel, built in 1901, ca. 1914. Robert Shroll collection, Buffalo National River.

<sup>41</sup> “1930 Searcy County Census – Maumee Arkansas,” 2004,

<http://ftp.rootsweb.com/pub/usgenweb/ar/searcy/census/1930/maumee1930.txt> (March 28, 2006).

<sup>42</sup> McKnight, *Zinc and Lead Deposits in Northern Arkansas*, 189. The mine reportedly measured 60 feet wide by 60 feet high by 50 feet deep.

<sup>43</sup> U.S. Post Office Department, *Reports on Geo. Site Locations*, M 1126, Roll 44, Jackpot Mine.

<sup>44</sup> Suzanne D. Rogers, “Rush Historic District National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form,” February 1987, historical files, BNR.

New Town was established along the edge of the Buffalo River just above the mouth of Rush Creek at the time of the Rush mining district's second boom from 1915 to 1919. Mabel Duhan, who was a little girl then, recalled that the two towns ran together, and that people lived on the hillsides as well as along the river bottom. "The people were in tents, shacks, nothing just a ground floor," she stated in a 1985 interview.<sup>45</sup>

Visitors to the town could be appalled by its wilderness setting. A correspondent for the *Engineering and Mining Journal* complained about his hellacious trip from Yellville by coach over a twisting mountain road. "To get to Rush I crossed Rush Creek 43 times and when not in the creek was on the worst road ever, the ground being cut hub-deep and frozen," he wrote. "I walked 3 of the 12 miles." After describing various difficulties posed by the mining district's inaccessibility, the author concluded, "Rush is where wolves swoop down on the farmers raising pigs. The man whose property I went to see had 43 little razorbacks killed the night before I reached there."<sup>46</sup>

An account of Rush's boom years in the *Arkansas Gazette* in 1931 contended that the population in 1915 went as high as 6,000 but this figure is difficult to support. The newspaper story described New Town as a "pine board town" built in haste. Few buildings were placed on solid foundations, thus the physical traces of the town were already hard to discern just a dozen years after the boom ended. When the story in the *Arkansas Gazette* was written New Town was already a ghost town while Old Rush was still holding on with two stores, a hotel, and several residences grouped around the Morning Star mine.<sup>47</sup>



Figure 43. Rush, ca. 1904. George Adams collection, Buffalo National River.

<sup>45</sup> Nadine Goodall, Mabel Duhan, and John and Betty Wirth interview.

<sup>46</sup> "The Rush Zinc District," *Engineering and Mining Journal*, 101 (March 11, 1916), 485.

<sup>47</sup> "The Rush is Over," *Little Rock Arkansas Gazette*, November 29, 1931.



Fred Dirst was a resident of Rush during the Depression decade. Having first arrived there in 1915, Dirst left Rush after the boom years and went to the zinc mines in Oklahoma, then returned to Rush in 1932. One of the town's few residents during this period, he got a lease on the Yellow Rose mine and dug two car loads of ore by hand, which he hauled by wagon to Yellville. Dirst still lived in Rush in the 1960s when recreational canoers began to arrive.<sup>48</sup>

Like most boom towns, the twin mining camps at Rush briefly supported a culture that was urban, working class, and raw. Dirst was a runaway from Kansas City when he arrived in Rush, barefooted, in 1915. Rejoining his father, who worked at the Red Cloud mine, the young Dirst labored in the mines for \$1.50 per day and lived at the Red Cloud Hotel for \$3 per week for room and board, where the featured dish was pinto beans and salt.<sup>49</sup> Workers could afford few frills, and yet when payday arrived the town offered some diversions to make life tolerable. Amidst the incredible air and noise pollution produced by so many wood-burning mills and their heavy ore-crushing machinery, the town was a bustle of restaurants, bakeries, saloons, hotels, and dance halls.

The fourth and final community type composing this matrix of community development in the latter part of the nineteenth century was the county seat. The county seat typically served not only as the hub for local politics, it also functioned as the central marketplace for farms in the area. Four county seats held prominent place in the lives of Buffalo River farmers, although just two of these, Marshall and Jasper, were within the Buffalo River watershed. In Searcy County, the town of Marshall had 350 people at the turn of the century and contained gristmills, a cotton gin, churches, a newspaper, a hotel, doctors, lawyers, grocers, and six general stores as well as the county offices.<sup>50</sup> By 1910, this village was connected to the outside world by railroad, telegraph, and the Wells Fargo & Company Express.<sup>51</sup> In Newton County, the town of Jasper grew from a town of fewer than 50 people before the Civil War to a population of 305 in 1910. In Marion County, Yellville was the seat of government and the market town that served farmers on the lower Buffalo. Finally, Harrison became the county seat of Boone County, which was formed from the eastern portion of Carroll County and the western portion of Marion County in 1869. Although Harrison was not incorporated until 1876, it grew to be the largest town in the four-county area after the arrival of the St. Louis & North Arkansas Railroad in 1901.<sup>52</sup> For many Buffalo River farmers, especially on the middle and upper sections of the river, Harrison became their primary market town.

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<sup>48</sup> Dirst interview.

<sup>49</sup> Dirst interview.

<sup>50</sup> Blevins, *Hill Folks*, 64.

<sup>51</sup> "Rand McNally & Co.'s Indexed County and Township Pocket Map and Shippers Guide of Arkansas," (1915), Pamphlet 8414, Arkansas History Commission.

<sup>52</sup> Work Projects Administration, *The WPA Guide to 1930s Arkansas, Compiled by Workers of the Writers' Program of the Works Projects Administration in the State of Arkansas*, reprint (1941), (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1987), 269. The railroad became the Missouri & North Arkansas Railroad in 1906.

## RELIGION

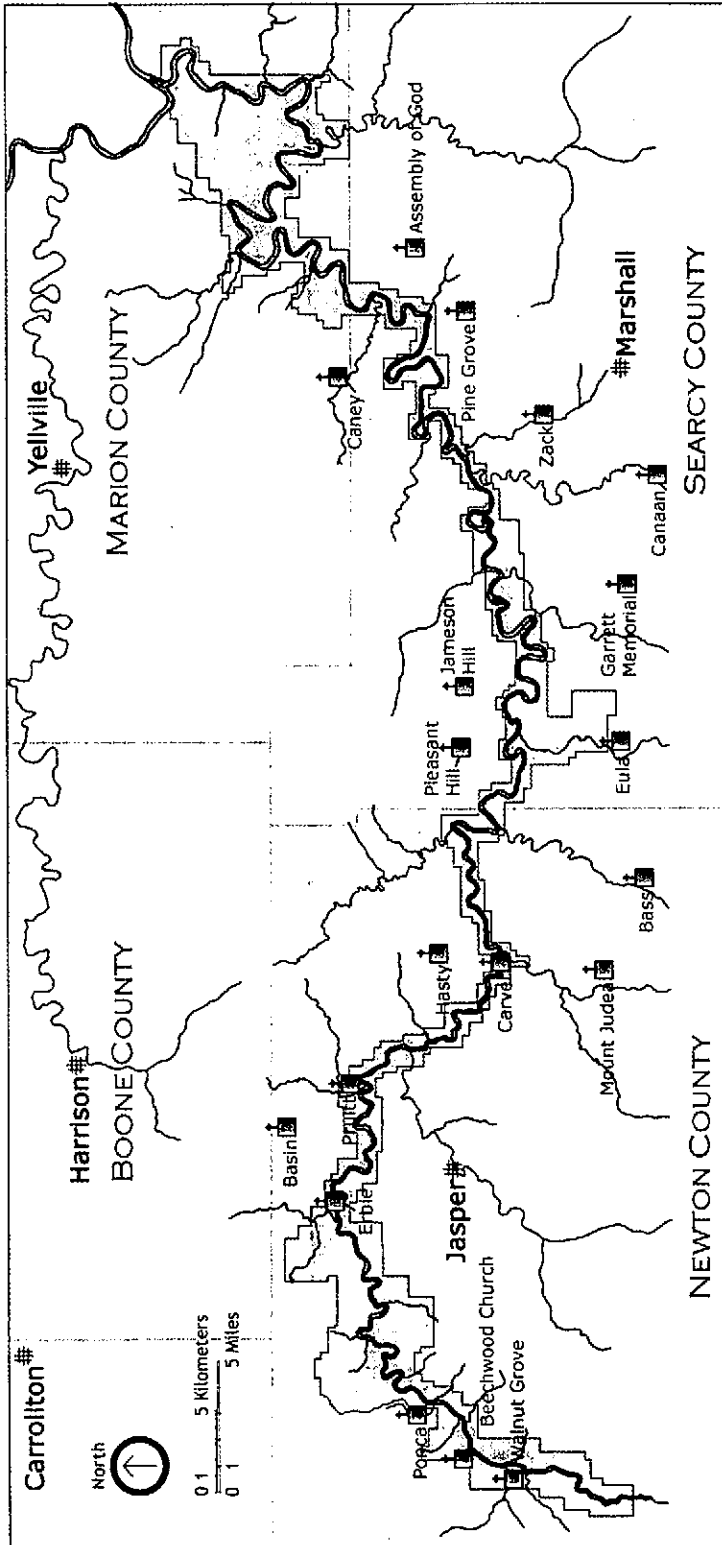
Like so much else of Ozark history and culture, religion in the Ozarks had much in common with religion in the southern Appalachians. Since most early settlers in the Arkansas Ozarks came from the southern Appalachians, they possessed a heritage of frontier Christian revivalism dating back to the beginning of the nineteenth century. Moreover, religious development in the two regions continued to parallel each other as both regions presented similar challenges to organized churches. Indeed, many features of frontier religion that prevailed in the southern Appalachians in the first half of the nineteenth century appeared in the Arkansas Ozarks one or two generations later and even persisted into the twentieth century. These features included camp revival meetings in lieu of weekly church services, a resistance to paid clergy, and weak differentiation between Protestant denominations. For some church organizations, the people who lived in the hill country of northwest Arkansas seemed woefully isolated and difficult to serve.<sup>53</sup>

Church organizations in the eastern states had had these same concerns about people on the southern Appalachian frontier after the American Revolution. Presbyterians, Methodists, and Baptists sent missionaries to the frontier, each with varying degrees of success. Although the Presbyterians strongly supported missionary activity on the frontier they were most interested in Christianizing Indians. Their insistence on an educated clergy limited their appeal among white frontier communities. The Baptist church, by contrast, encouraged preachers to step forward from the ranks of the frontier settlers themselves and to serve their congregations without pay. As a result, the Baptist church spread rapidly on the southern Appalachian frontier. Methodism took yet another road. Like the Presbyterians, Methodists aimed for an educated clergy, but they developed a system of organization that was specially geared for winning converts on the frontier. The Methodists employed circuit riders who traveled by horse around the backcountry holding Methodist "classes" and recruiting new members to the church. The circuit rider returned to each congregation at a regular interval while making his circuit, preaching on whatever day of the week it might be, and a successful circuit rider might have twenty to thirty local units under his supervision. The circuit riders formed a brotherhood, many performing years of hard service as they moved up in the church organization. Supported by the strong centralized organization of the church, circuit riding Methodist preachers could be thrown into regions where other preachers were unable to scratch out a living. Moreover, Methodism's democratic doctrine enjoyed a powerful appeal in the frontier setting. Methodism's teachings that each human being was equal in the eyes of God and fully capable of obtaining his or her salvation through conversion resonated on the frontier where people were rich in independence and poor in wealth.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> James A. Anderson, *Centennial History of Arkansas Methodism: A History of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, in the State of Arkansas, 1815-1935* (Benton, Arkansas: L. B. White Printing Co., 1935), 510.

<sup>54</sup> Alice Felt Tyler, *Freedom's Ferment: Phases of American Social History to 1860* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1944), 33-34.



Map 11. Churches near the Buffalo River. Churches shown here are based on various sources and do not represent all churches. Meetings and services were often held in schools and other structures.

The revivalist movement known as the Second Great Awakening found an effective vehicle in the camp meeting, where fire-and-brimstone preachers could whip large gatherings of believers into a frenzy of repentance and conversion. The first camp meeting was held at Cane Ridge, Kentucky in 1801, and the phenomenon quickly spread throughout the southern Appalachians. Although the wave of religious fervor largely spent itself by 1805, the camp meeting lived on as a religious institution in the southern highlands, and it followed the settlement frontier to the Arkansas Ozarks in the 1830s. In her classic work on antebellum America, historian Alice Felt Tyler described frontier revivalism and the camp meeting this way:

Frontier religion was an intensely individual experience. Its major tenets were these: Before conversion man's soul is shackled by sin; acceptance of religion means freedom from bondage; salvation must come through conversion consciously experienced at a definite time and place. This revivalistic type of Christianity was not created by the frontier, but there it found its natural habitat and ran riot in every extreme of emotion and in primitive abandon. A militant evangelical Protestantism preached by itinerant ministers often as illiterate as those who listened to them was the force that exhilarated, united, and at the same time tamed the frontier. Such a West was ripe for the excitement of the camp meeting and the efforts of the revivalists. So much alone, the frontiersman was peculiarly susceptible to crowd psychology; leading a violent life, he reacted violently to the vigorous preaching of the frontier evangelists. The revival was to him both a social event and an intense religious experience.<sup>55</sup>

Methodist, Baptist and Presbyterian missionaries and circuit riders all made use of camp meetings in Arkansas to recruit converts and revive church membership. The Methodists were first to arrive, entering the field in the early 1830s. In 1836, the Methodist church formed the Arkansas Conference, which included all of Arkansas, part of northern Louisiana, and Indian Territory. Within this large expanse the Methodists fielded 27 circuit riding preachers and 7 preacher apprentices in the first year of the conference. One of the early centers of Methodism in the state was around Batesville, and Methodist preachers are thought to have penetrated to the Buffalo River by the 1840s. Baptist missionaries entered Arkansas shortly after the Methodists and began to establish numerous log churches. One of the earliest churches established in the region was the Crooked Creek Baptist Church founded in 1834 by a congregation of 43 members. The Baptist Home Mission Society of New York City sent missionaries to the Buffalo River area as early as 1838. About 1840, the Baptists came together to form the Buffalo Association, but by 1843 they were dividing into numerous sects, with the Primitive or Hard Shell Baptists and the Missionary Baptists having the largest presence. Along with Methodists and Baptists a large number of Disciples of Christ, also known as Christians or Campbellites, settled in the three counties along the Buffalo. Followers of Alexander Campbell, this sect took doctrinal elements from the Presbyterians, Methodists, and Baptists and aimed to unite all Christians and eliminate denominational

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 35.

schisms. Methodists, Baptists, and Christians were present in the three counties along the Buffalo in approximately equal numbers by the end of the nineteenth century. There were few Presbyterians or other Protestant denominations in the area. And despite Catholicism's long presence in Arkansas dating to the period when it belonged to France and Spain, there were few Catholics in northwest Arkansas at the end of the nineteenth century. Given that the Methodists, Baptists, and Christians had become thoroughly entwined on the southern frontier, the population in the Buffalo River region showed a remarkable degree of homogeneity springing from its roots in the southern Appalachians.<sup>56</sup>

One doctrinal difference that continued to divide the local population in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was the issue of pay for preachers. There was a prevailing sentiment that preachers should not take money for their services and that congregations should not pay their preachers, and in both cases to do so was a sin. Methodist circuit riders were either salaried by the church or were expected to take up collections from their congregations, and so they sometimes incurred the wrath of the local people and would be driven out of the area. One circuit riding preacher by the name of George Pledger was murdered in the Arkansas Ozarks, presumably because he was mistaken for a revenue man scouting for moonshiners. As late as the 1880s, Methodist circuit riders served at considerable personal risk because of the strong belief on the part of many mountain folk that preachers should not work for pay.<sup>57</sup>

Camp meetings, on the other hand, tended to soften differences between the three major Protestant sects. The three leading denominations – Methodists, Baptists, and Christians – cooperated in organizing the revivals and took turns leading the services. People of all denominations attended. Camp revival meetings in the Buffalo River region were typically held in late summer or early fall after the crops were “laid by” and ran for one or two weeks. Services began an hour before noon and went until dark, day after day. Orphea Duty, who was a teenage girl in Boxley around the time of World War I, remembered the camp meetings as a big social time for the young people. She would go each day and return home each night and on Sunday the entire family would attend and the event would climax with a “dinner on the ground.” People brought lanterns and the many lights in camp afforded a magical touch.<sup>58</sup> Octave Thanet, a resident of Little Rock who wrote a piece about her beloved Arkansas for *Atlantic Monthly* in 1891, was similarly awed by the visual effect of so many worshippers bringing lanterns to a country service. “The congregation...brought their own lamps to the evening service,” she wrote,

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<sup>56</sup> Johnson, *The Arkansas Frontier*, 87-89; Thomason and Associates, “Buffalo National River Theme Identification Context Studies and Property Evaluations,” January 2005, BNR, 70-71; Herrington, *Tomahawk Tales*, 6; Rogers, *Parker-Hickman Farmstead, Buffalo National River, Arkansas*, 33, 51; Pitcaithley, *Let the River Be*, 66-67. For the relationship between Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists and Christians, see Walter Brownlow Posey, *Religious Strife on the Southern Frontier*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965).

<sup>57</sup> Anderson, *Centennial History of Arkansas Methodism*, 512-515.

<sup>58</sup> Duty interview.

“and could be seen gathering from afar, a light to the Gentiles, as their steps twinkled over the hills.”<sup>59</sup>

Orphea Duty recalled that revival meetings took place at Osage or on the mountaintop between Osage and Boxley. Typically a camp was situated in a shady grove near a spring or good source of running water. A brush arbor was constructed where the preachers performed services, and temporary bench seating was sometimes erected for the congregation.<sup>60</sup>

Jim Tilley remembered the revival meetings on the middle Buffalo. Camp meetings typically lasted a week. “They would throw up some poles and pile brush on top and they would have a hell of a revival there,” Tilley said. The people who were saved during the week would go to the river for a Sunday baptism, followed by a dinner on the ground.<sup>61</sup>

Baptisms in the Buffalo River became an event in their own right. A favorite location for this event was at Grinder’s Ferry, where the road from Harrison to Marshall met the Buffalo River (now crossed by a highway bridge). At their peak of popularity, the mass baptisms transpired nearly every Sunday and drew crowds of several hundred people. Nearly one hundred people were baptized on one occasion.<sup>62</sup>

While camp meetings and mass baptisms were elements of revivalism that lingered in the Ozarks long after they had disappeared in other parts of the nation, these institutions were seen by contemporaries not as quaint vestiges of the frontier but rather as evidence that organized religion still faced an uphill challenge in the region because the rural population could not (or would not) support paid clergy and regular Sunday church services in the most isolated areas. Although churches were built in numerous locations up and down the Buffalo River valley in the nineteenth century, it remained problematic how often they opened their doors for worship services or Sunday school classes. And perhaps even more troubling to some observers, many of these churches fell upon hard times when the rural population began to decline in the second decade of the twentieth century, causing numerous churches to be abandoned.<sup>63</sup>

“Protestantism is fast dying in the backhills here in northwest Arkansas,” freelance writer Charles Morrow Wilson wrote in 1929. A non-native who had settled in the area, Wilson wrote occasional pieces about life in the Ozarks for national media. He noted that large swaths of countryside had become devoid of church or parson, and he attributed it to rural poverty. A hill farmer’s annual cash income amounted to about \$50 per year and less than that in drought years, he explained. “Without cash, he cannot ‘jar

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<sup>59</sup> Octave Thanet, “Town Life in Arkansas,” *Atlantic Monthly*, 68 (September 1891), 332-340.

<sup>60</sup> Duty interview.

<sup>61</sup> Tilley interview.

<sup>62</sup> Thomason & Associates, “Buffalo National River Theme Identification Context Studies and Property Evaluations,” 73.

<sup>63</sup> W. O. Cralle, “Social Change and Isolation in the Ozark Mountain Region of Missouri,” *American Journal of Sociology*, 41 (January 1936): 443-444.



Figure 44. Baptism at Graveyard Bluff near Jasper, Brother Deathridge baptizing, 1926. Adella Vaughan photo, Dwight Pitcaithley collection, Buffalo National River.

down with a bountiful Sunday's offering.' Parsons cannot stick around on \$20/month and an annual allotment of four pigs, winter's firewood, and a wagon load of corn, so backhills preachers are moving down to easier pickings."<sup>64</sup>

Poverty and isolation formed the context for the growth of new sects in the 1920s and 1930s. The millenarian group which came to Gilbert in the early 1920s has already been mentioned. The group's leader, John A. Battenfield, was a minister in the Christian church. The group selected Gilbert because it was looking for an isolated rural setting where the colony could strive for self-sufficiency. It did not overlook the scenic beauty of the river location. In an early issue of the *Kingdom Harbinger*, which Battenfield's brother published from the group's base in Illinois, the setting for the new colony was described:

The spot...is located along the Buffalo river, a typical mountain stream. On the opposite side of the river from the town a great bluff rises sheer from the water's edge, many feet in height. Under the town is an immense unexplored cave into which Dry Creek, a stream of considerable size, disappears about half a mile above the town, and pours out again below the town.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Charles Morrow Wilson, "Backhill Culture," *The Nation*, 129 (July 17, 1929), 63.

<sup>65</sup> Quoted in Thompson, "History of an Ozark Utopia," 364-365.

After the Gilbert colony was founded, additional colonies were started at Elkton, Oregon and Buffalo Ridge, Virginia.

Citing scripture, Battenfield predicted that a worldwide conflict between Catholics and Protestants would commence in 1923. The *Kingdom Harbinger* frequently pointed to world events (troubles in Ireland, the Zionist movement, the rise of fascism in Italy and Germany) as precursors of the coming struggle. When the fateful year came and went, the colony did not immediately disintegrate. But Battenfield made increasingly fantastic claims, which culminated in his announcement early in 1925 that he would cause a deceased member of the community to be restored to life. On the appointed day wagonloads of spectators came to Gilbert to witness the performance. When the attempt failed, Battenfield explained that God had willed the body to lie entombed for three days. Three days later, a Sunday, people gathered again at the graveyard but Battenfield stayed away. It was announced that he had suffered a nervous breakdown. Shortly thereafter he left Gilbert permanently on a "mission" to Washington, D.C. The millenarian group struggled on with a modified understanding of Battenfield's prophecies, but gradually all but a few members moved away.<sup>66</sup>

Another new group to appear was the Pentecostals, who veered toward highly emotional church services reminiscent of the old revival meetings. Pentecostal preachers followed the injunction to "take neither scrip nor purse," relying instead on gifts of food and other necessities by their parishioners. Sociologist Walter O. Cralle observed that this was an important part of the Pentecostals' appeal. "Bearing in mind that for a long time there was no such thing as a paid ministry in the region, it is natural that many feel that the Pentecostal way, which conforms more closely to the older pattern, is the more holy." The advent of the Pentecostals, Cralle wrote, led to "wholesale defections" from the Methodist, Baptist, and Christian churches. But this was not the only source of trouble for the older churches. Cralle also attributed the churches' problems to changing social expectations as a result of Ozark residents' increasing level of contact with outside influences. Ozark farm families had alternatives to church for social contacts, and they had rising expectations for sermons and music in church. Perhaps most importantly, competition between denominations had led to "excessive church building which took place about the turn of the century, and which led to the rise of too many weak struggling churches."<sup>67</sup>

Few records exist for individual church buildings in the area. Some individual church histories were preserved in the Arkansas Historical Records Survey performed by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in the 1930s and early 1940s. The WPA detailed the history of the Zion's Light Missionary Baptist Church, located in Duff, in 1941. This church was organized in 1889. Before the structure was built, services were held in the Dry Creek School on the property of W. H. Watts between Gilbert and Duff. The school building was razed and another building was erected one mile northwest of the Watts farm. Built in 1895, it was a 40-foot by 70-foot frame building. The church

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 372-373.

<sup>67</sup> Cralle, "Social Change and Isolation in the Ozark Mountain Region of Missouri," 444.



was remodeled in 1910 with the addition of a second story and a bell tower. One story was used as an Old Fellows Hall. This church had a steady membership of about 100 members and was still in use in 1941. The church held baptism ceremonies in the Buffalo River and in nearby Dry Creek.<sup>68</sup>

The Erbie Church is one of few surviving church buildings within the boundaries of Buffalo National River. The church building was erected in 1896. Built on a rock and concrete foundation, it is a frame building with weatherboard siding. For many years the church was also known as Villines Chapel for its first minister, G. W. Villines. Originally a Methodist church, then nondenominational, in 1973 it was owned by the Trustees of the United Methodist Church.<sup>69</sup>

Another surviving church is the Boxley Church, also known as the Walnut Grove Baptist Church and the Boxley Community Building. Built about 1870, it is an imposing two-story structure with a belfry. It served not only for Sunday services but for various other activities in the Boxley community. When Buffalo National River was authorized in 1972, the Walnut Grove Church was more than a century old, still holding services, and perhaps the most impressive historic structure standing in the park. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1983 as part of the Big Buffalo Valley Historic District, the church building was found to be a significant reflection of "town culture, institutions, and community pride."<sup>70</sup> The old Boxley Church is now used as a community building and is not to be confused with the current Boxley Church, which was built in the 1950s. There is also a Beechwood Church and cemetery at the north end of the valley.



Figure 45. Walnut Grove Church, Boxley. *Newton County Library.*

<sup>68</sup> Arkansas Historical Records Survey Church Inventory, June 1941, File 15, Box 415, MS H62, University of Arkansas Library Special Collections.

<sup>69</sup> Mrs. Orbell Farmer, telephone interview notes by Suzie Rogers, February 20, 1997; James W. Kitchen, *Special History Report: Preliminary Survey of Historic Structures Part II, Buffalo National River, Arkansas*, prepared for USDI, National Park Service, Southwest Region by Texas Tech University (Lubbock: Texas Tech University, 1975), 256.

<sup>70</sup> Michael E. Bureman, "National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form, Big Buffalo Valley Historic District," March 1985, Midwest Region Office, Don Stevens files.

## EDUCATION

Seventeen-year-old Marian Burnes had just completed the tenth grade when she got her first job as a school teacher in 1923. The school was located on the south side of the Buffalo River across from Buffalo Point. She rode a horse from Yellville to her interview with the three school directors, all local residents, who agreed to hire her for a three-month term during the winter for \$50 per month. One of the three directors, John Matlock, lived on the south side of the river just down the hill from the schoolhouse and it was his three youngest children who attended the school. For most of the winter Burnes had just the three pupils: Bernice, Bonnie, and Lonnie Matlock, ages twelve, ten, and eight. Burnes boarded with the Matlock family and each day walked up the hill with the children to the schoolhouse which was a small log building with a blackboard made of painted boards nailed to one wall. Burnes and the Matlock children spent much of the school day chopping wood, tending the stove, and fixing the stove pipe, which had an annoying habit of collapsing into the room on the coldest winter days.<sup>71</sup>

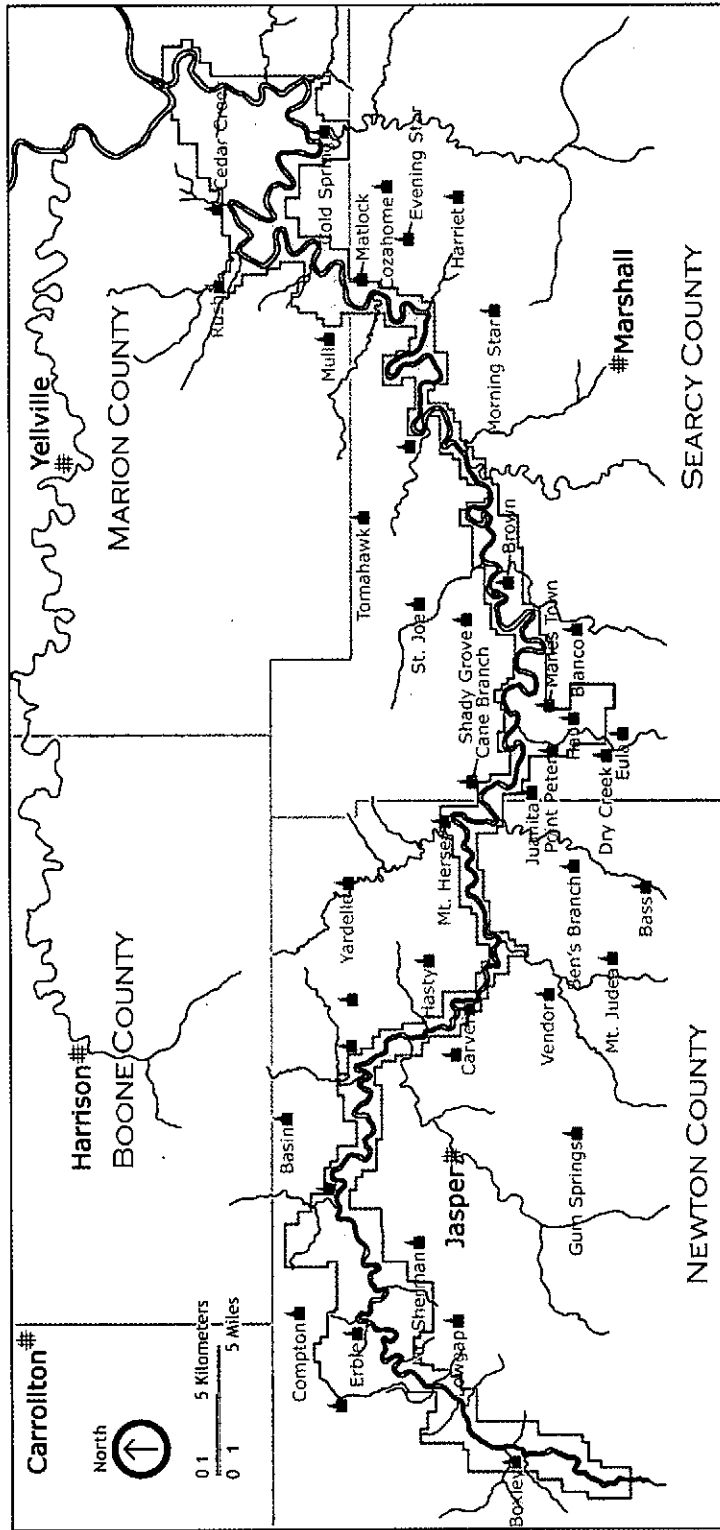
As the example of school teacher Marian Burnes and the Matlock family illustrates, rural Arkansas families prized education but they faced formidable challenges in giving their children educational opportunities. Foremost among these challenges were isolation and poverty – the same problems faced by church congregations. Ultimately rural education depended on state assistance. This presented another challenge as many rural families were reluctant to entrust their children's education to state-directed institutions. The condition of education in the Buffalo River valley evolved in the context of several waves of education reform by the state of Arkansas.

Before the Civil War, southern states generally treated education as a private responsibility. Arkansas's first constitution in 1836 mentioned education and Governor James Conway called for state education funding, but the legislature chose instead to follow the southern pattern of chartering private academies. Typically the legislature chartered an academy for boys followed by a second academy in the same vicinity for girls. The schools were for whites only. The academies were run by a board of private citizens, which controlled school funds, recruited and dismissed teachers, and oversaw student admissions. The academies depended on student tuition and private endowments for their continued funding, so they catered to the wealthy class. Generally the charters called for the academies to admit economically disadvantaged students (with tuition waivers) to the extent that the school's private endowments would allow. By 1861, there were 94 academies throughout Arkansas, but they were clustered in those parts of the state where wealth was concentrated. Marion County had three chartered schools: Bluff Spring Male and Female Academy, Crooked Creek Male Academy, and Mountain Home Male and Female Academy; Newton and Searcy counties had none.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Marian Burnes, "Country school teaching in the early days of Marion County," *Mountain Echo* (Yellville, Arkansas), January 29, 1998.

<sup>72</sup> Clara B. Kennan, "The Birth of Public Schools," in *Arkansas: Colony and State*, edited by Leland Duvall (Little Rock: Rose Publishing Co., 1973), 105-108; Stephen B. Weeks, *History of Public School Education in Arkansas*, U.S. Bureau of Education Bulletin No. 27 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1912), 16-18.



Map 12. Schools near the Buffalo River. Schools shown here are based on various sources and do not represent all schools in the area.

The state began funding public schools in the 1840s, but progress was slow. The public school system was funded entirely by sales of state school lands. Counties with small populations (and little demand for state school lands) received scant revenue. A report by the secretary of state in 1854 claimed that every county had at least one public school and that a quarter of all school age children were enrolled. However, in 1860 there were just four public schools in Newton County and six in Searcy County out of a total of 652 public schools in the entire state.<sup>73</sup>

As neither the elite charter schools nor the few public schools were accessible to most rural families in Arkansas, a third type of school filled the gap. Known as subscription schools, they were built by citizen effort and were funded from year to year entirely by student tuition or family “subscriptions.” Often subscription schools did double duty as churches and community buildings. Subscription schools were the most common type of school along the Buffalo until public schools began to appear in the early twentieth century. Subscription schools were usually made of logs and chinked with mud, with one opening for a door, another opening for a fireplace, and third for a window. Window panes might be glass or simply oiled paper. Often such school houses were built in a single day. In many cases they were built without windows; the only natural light was what came through the doorway when the door was propped open. Usually the subscription schools employed a single “school master” or teacher who was recruited from among the subscribing families. In the early years the teacher was most often male. As likely as not, his only qualification to teach was a basic knowledge of reading, writing, and arithmetic. Supplies were minimal, consisting of little more than a few books such as *McGuffey’s Reader* and *Webster’s Blue Back Speller*. School terms were short and occurred in summer or winter when crops needed the least attention.<sup>74</sup>

For many years this was the only type of school found in the Buffalo River valley. Among the first school houses built in the valley was one that stood about one quarter mile north of the old Point-Peter school on Richland Creek. It was built of hewn oak logs and measured about 18 by 20 feet. The building had no windows, but a log was cut out of the front wall to let in daylight. The building had a rock fireplace and chimney. Hewn logs provided bench seating. The building was used as a church as well as a school. Built prior to the Civil War, it was torn down in the late 1890s.<sup>75</sup>

The first major effort to reform the state’s education system occurred during Reconstruction. In 1866, Governor Isaac Murphy called for a tax-supported free public school system. A former teacher himself, Murphy had supported education reform when he served in the state legislature before the Civil War. During the 1866-67 session the legislature responded to Murphy’s plea by enacting a common school law that provided for free public schools for whites only. This law was rendered unconstitutional when

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<sup>73</sup> Josiah H. Shinn, *History of Education in Arkansas*, U.S. Bureau of Education Circular of Information No. 1 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1900), 19-21.

<sup>74</sup> Elliott West, *Growing Up with the Country: Childhood on the Far Western Frontier* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989), 186-188; Berry, *History of Marion County*, 412; Lackey, *History of Newton County*, 247.

<sup>75</sup> Tate interview.

Arkansas adopted a new state constitution in 1868, and in the following legislative session a law was enacted making free public education available to whites and blacks. However, the 1868 law also formed the basis for segregated schools in Arkansas, a blight that would not be corrected for nearly a century.<sup>76</sup>

People in Searcy County welcomed the public education law. That year, a large contingent of Civil War veterans – some Confederate, some Union – converged on an old army campground near Leslie for a big camp meeting. The former antagonists shook hands and pledged cooperation in rebuilding the community. They lauded the state's commitment to free public schools. Despite these high hopes for the future, however, education reform did not live up to its promise. Marshall would wait until 1898 to get its first free public school. Leslie would wait until 1904.<sup>77</sup>

Tax revenues were too modest to pay for all the schools that Arkansas needed. Indeed, new school construction was financed out of the county treasury, not the state treasury, and counties could only vote levies up to five mills, so it generally took two to



Figure 46. Pupils and teacher posing next to the Cherry Grove School, Erbie. *Newton County Library.*

three years of mill levies to raise enough money for a new school.<sup>78</sup> In 1870, Arkansas had 1,744 public schools – less than a third the number in neighboring Missouri. In 1880, the state had 2,768 schools, but it had fallen further behind Missouri which now had four times as many. Meanwhile, the percentage of school age children in school in

<sup>76</sup> Shinn, *History of Education in Arkansas*, 36-44, 116.

<sup>77</sup> Orville J. McInturff, "The Evolution of Searcy County's Economy," *Mountain Wave* (Marshall, Arkansas), May 23, 1974.

<sup>78</sup> Herrington, *Tomahawk Tales*, 10.

Arkansas fell from 44 percent in 1870 to 41 percent in 1880.<sup>79</sup> During the 1890s, school construction accelerated with a few hundred new schools built each year. In 1894, the number of public schools in Arkansas stood at 3,866. The inventory included high schools in Jasper and Harrison, the latter employing seven white teachers and one black teacher and having an enrollment of 367 white students and 34 black students.<sup>80</sup>

It was in this period from approximately 1870 to 1900 that public schools began to appear in the Buffalo River valley. The rural public schools were little more sophisticated than subscription schools. The first Center Point School dated to this period. Built in 1877, it was a log structure located on the left bank of the Buffalo River near Sneeds Creek (about half way between Ponca and Erbie). It was called Center Point School because it stood at the center of the new school district. One teacher at Center Point taught his students without any books and no other aids than a wall chart. More than a decade and a half later, another teacher at Center Point had no less than 44 pupils in her class whose ages ranged from three to twenty years.<sup>81</sup>

Ben McFerrin moved to Boxley Valley around the turn of the century to teach at the Walnut Grove public school. A progressive, McFerrin was elected to the Arkansas Senate in 1902, where he spearheaded an amendment to the state constitution that allowed voters to raise the millage rate for public school funding.<sup>82</sup> The McFerrin Amendment was adopted in 1906, but voters remained reluctant to increase their mill levies.

In 1909, the state legislature enacted another landmark education reform law. Its three major provisions were compulsory attendance for all children from age eight to sixteen, new agricultural schools, and consolidation of rural school districts. Still, progress was measured. The law exempted 43 out of 74 counties from the compulsory attendance rule. Even in those counties where the rule applied the standard was for each child to attend not less than one-half of the public school term, and the length of term was not stipulated. Meanwhile, the effort toward consolidation (an education reform movement that originated in New England) was slow to gain traction. The law allowed citizens of any rural territory to petition the county court for the creation of a school district with the same rights as schools in an incorporated town. Rather than improving the quality of education by concentrating resources in fewer districts, elected county school boards actually increased the number of school districts slightly over the next decade.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> West, *Growing Up with the Country*, 190-191.

<sup>80</sup> Shinn, *History of Education in Arkansas*, 50, 60-61.

<sup>81</sup> Hardaway, *These Hills My Home*, 116-117; "Center Point School, in the Big Bluff and Hemmed-in-Hollow Neighborhood," typescript (from Ken Smith notebook), July 1974, historical files, BNR.

<sup>82</sup> Liles, *Old Folks Talking*, 138.

<sup>83</sup> Weeks, *History of Public School Education in Arkansas*, 82; Ben F. Johnson III, "'All Thoughtful Citizens': The Arkansas School Reform Movement 1921-1930," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, 46, no. 2 (Summer 1987): 105-132.

By 1920, there were dozens of one-room schools and tiny school districts scattered throughout the Buffalo River drainage. With this proliferation of school houses, most farm families had a school situated within walking distance of their home. In most other respects the one-room country schools were inferior to town schools. Teachers had to teach several grade levels at once under crude conditions. One veteran teacher in the area remembered that the one-room schools were all fairly similar. Simple furnishings consisted of “a small table for the teacher, double seats fastened to the floor, a stove in the center of the room and a recitation bench up front.” Blackboards were usually made of wood boards nailed to the front wall and painted black and there was a box of chalk and rags for erasers.<sup>84</sup>

A study of rural school buildings in Arkansas by the U.S. Bureau of Education found that many schools even lacked chairs and desks. Moreover, the study was critical of the ramshackle appearance of most school houses and the absence of basic toilet facilities. “They do not provide even reasonably well for the physical comfort or welfare of the children who are forced to attend them,” it stated. “Their lack of proper toilet facilities is an offense against childhood and against decent citizenship.”<sup>85</sup> The federal study pointed to other problems besides the school houses. Teachers lacked training and experience and the schools suffered high turnover of teaching staff. This was particularly true in rural schools, where teachers struggled with teaching several grades at once. Indeed, children within each grade level varied widely in age. Fourth graders, for example, were anywhere from five to twenty-one years old. A majority of students were older than they should be for their grade level. Adding to the irregularity, the length of school terms varied greatly from one district to another.<sup>86</sup>

Governor Thomas McRae was elected in 1920 with the promise of “good roads and good schools.” At that time, 25 percent of school children in Arkansas attended school less than 100 days a year. In most rural areas formal education ended after the eighth grade. Total expenditures for public education were \$23 per capita in Arkansas compared to \$64 in Oklahoma and \$59 in Missouri. Under the McRae administration, Arkansas embarked on its most vigorous effort to improve public education yet. The governor’s educational package included better funding, improved school curricula, and a more effective push for consolidation of rural districts. The governor’s overarching goal was to bring rural schools into line with town and city schools – a progressive vision that mirrored school reform movements in other states in this period.<sup>87</sup>

Although the 1920s saw significant change, the reform movement was blunted for two reasons. First, the raising of new state taxes for public education soon alienated the business sector, which complained that rural counties ought to carry more of the tax burden. Second, the reform movement was permeated by progressive ideology that

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<sup>84</sup> Eula Ledbetter, “Teaching school in the old days of Marion County,” *Mountain Echo* (Yellville, Arkansas), February 12, 1998.

<sup>85</sup> USDI, Bureau of Education, *The Public School System of Arkansas*, U.S. Bureau of Education Bulletin No. 10 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1923), 37.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>87</sup> Johnson, “‘All Thoughtful Citizens’: The Arkansas School Reform Movement, 1921-1930,” 105.

tended to denigrate rural culture and values. Specifically, reformers wanted to make education more relevant to children in rural places and at the same time enable these children to “advance beyond the farm.” Many farm families took umbrage, believing that farm life was more virtuous than town and city life. Partly due to the sharp ideological divide that existed between town and country in the 1920s, many rural Arkansas families resisted the push toward consolidation and preferred to keep sending their children to nearby rural schools.<sup>88</sup>

Country schools were often a source of local pride. Many parents were active in the School Improvement Association, a forerunner of the PTA. The local school, like the church, served as a focal point for social life and entertainment. Despite their small size, many rural schools fielded a basketball team, which played against other school teams in the area. Basketball was played on outdoor courts and transportation to the meets was by whatever means could be found – farm truck or horse-drawn wagon – in all kinds of weather.<sup>89</sup>

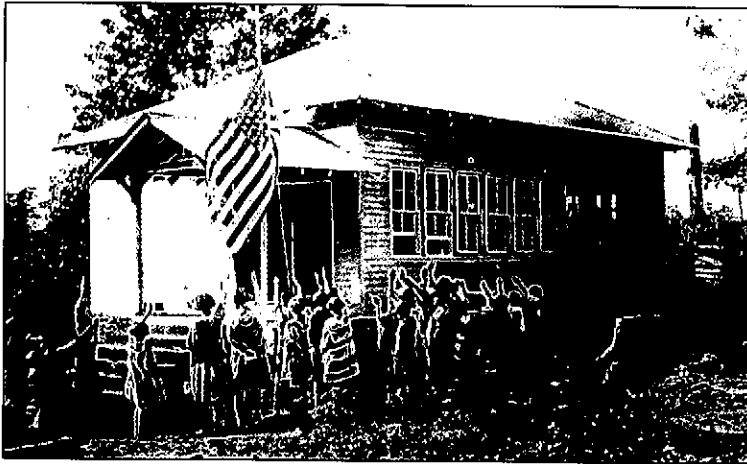


Figure 47. Sherman School, 1911. *Newton County Library.*

By the 1920s, the standard school year was nine months long with a three-month break in July, August, and September. Parents and teachers sometimes went to extra lengths to provide children with a summer school session. Erma Pierce recalled her experience teaching at Cold Springs School (also known as Hepsey School) in the

summer of 1926. She was just eighteen years old and still attending high school in Bruno when she was hired to teach the summer term. She had a teacher’s license although this was not a requirement. To get to her new job she took a train to Buffalo City where someone from Hepsey picked her up and took her over a mountain road to Hepsey. She boarded with a young couple who lived on the north side of the Buffalo River. As the school was on the south side (located a little distance up Big Creek), Pierce had to pole herself across the river each morning and afternoon. She had seven pupils and earned \$60 per month for three months.<sup>90</sup>

Despite the movement toward consolidation of rural school districts, more schools were built in remote areas in the 1930s. These schools were built by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) as part of the federal government’s economic relief effort. The

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 107.

<sup>89</sup> Berry, *History of Marion County*, 428-429.

<sup>90</sup> Erma Pierce, “Teaching a summer school at Hepsey in 1926,” *Mountain Echo* (Yellville, Arkansas), March 19, 1998.



Hepsey School noted above was replaced about 1935 by a Craftsman-style building called Cold Springs School. The building featured structural cut-stone walls, a gable-on-hip roof, and exterior brick chimney. Consistent with the architectural plans for schools that were developed in the 1920s, the building's north elevation contained seven side-by-side windows so as to fill the interior with natural light. This building was put on the National Register of Historic Places in 1992.<sup>91</sup>

The consolidation movement culminated in the closure and abandonment of many rural one-room schoolhouses during the 1940s. Schools along the middle Buffalo that closed in this period included Carver, Mount Hersey, and Hasty schools (all consolidated into Western Grove school district).<sup>92</sup> Schools along the lower Buffalo that shut their doors when districts consolidated in Marion County included Cedar Creek, Bonanza, and Elm Springs.<sup>93</sup> The Rush school closed in the 1950s. Center Point School (not the original one but a newer building located upstream from the mouth of Sneed Creek) remained in use in 1949 and still had school desks in it as late as 1959. During the 1960s the building was used for storing hay. Buffalo River researcher Ken Smith found the building a ruin in 1974. All schools within Buffalo National River were closed by the time of its establishment.<sup>94</sup>



Figure 48. Cold Springs School. Suzanne D. Rogers photo, Buffalo National River.

## AFRICAN-AMERICANS

African-Americans formed a small minority of the population in the Arkansas Ozarks from the end of the Civil War until the early 1900s, after which they practically vanished from the region until recent decades. In 1880 the census listed 43 blacks in Marion County, 16 in Searcy County, and 5 in Newton County. In 1900 the African-American population stood at 38 in Marion County, 99 in Searcy County, and 7 in Newton County. A few of these individuals were former slaves and their descendants who were native to the area; most, however, were new arrivals from other parts of the South who came to northern Arkansas in search of cheap land.<sup>95</sup> Indeed, the movement

<sup>91</sup> Kenneth Story, "National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form – Cold Springs School," historical files, BNR.

<sup>92</sup> "Western Grove Consolidation History is Traced," *Newton County Times*, March 2, 1995.

<sup>93</sup> Berry, *History of Marion County*, 437.

<sup>94</sup> "Center Point School, in the Big Bluff and Hemmed-in-Hollow Neighborhood," typescript (from Ken Smith notebook), July 1974, historical files, BNR.

<sup>95</sup> Gordon D. Morgan and Peter Kunkel, "Arkansas' Ozark Mountain Blacks: An Introduction," *Phylon*, 34, no. 3 (1973): 283. See also Louis M. Kyriakouides, "'Lookin' For Better All the Time': Rural Migration

of African-Americans into the Ozarks in the late nineteenth century can be viewed as part of the general migration of African-Americans from the Deep South in this period. Probably none belonged to the community of free blacks who lived on the upper White River before the Civil War. It seems likely that the free blacks who resided along the White River in the antebellum period had all fled the state by 1860 to avoid enslavement under the state's drastic expulsion law of 1859.<sup>96</sup>

To the extent that African-American farmers in the Buffalo River drainage had a shared outlook it was shaped by remarkably different circumstances than those of their white neighbors. In the first place their race put them at a disadvantage and even made their lives precarious. Most blacks in the northwest counties of Arkansas owned small parcels of land and in contrast to their landowning white neighbors this circumstance in itself set them apart from the majority of their race in the South, where three-quarters of black farmers were sharecroppers in 1900. Thus, mountain blacks had defied the odds in scraping together enough money to buy land. As historian Ayers observes, black landownership was greatest where the concentration of cotton was lowest and blacks composed a relatively small portion of the population. Most African-Americans living in the northwest counties of Arkansas in the decades after the Civil War had moved there for the economic opportunity of finding cheap land. The land was cheap because it was difficult to farm and was not yet served by railroads.<sup>97</sup>

African-American farmers also possessed certain advantages in outlook compared to white farmers. The black community was not divided against itself by the bitter legacy of the Civil War as were white farmers who had fought on both sides of the conflict. Furthermore, blacks were inured to the meager life of the hill farmer, whereas whites were put on the defensive by middle-class assertions that they were poor, suffered from inferior education, and had been bypassed by social progress. White farmers were individualistic, protective of their independence, and committed to folk values that were often at variance with the dominant culture, while black hill people did not share those perspectives. White farmers saw the rise of the corporate economy as counter to their interests; black farmers if anything perceived the corporate economy as a boon for the slender opportunities it gave them.<sup>98</sup>

One study of mountain blacks in the northwest counties of Arkansas completed more than thirty years ago identified no less than twenty "extinct" black Ozark communities. The authors of the study used evidence of burial grounds to identify these communities but they did not list their locations. The authors made many trips to the hill counties in search of black residents but did not find any. "In many cases there are no whites living who remember when blacks were present in their counties," the authors

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and Urbanization in the South, 1900-1950," in R. Douglas Hirt, *African-American Life in the Rural South 1900-1950* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2003), 13-14.

<sup>96</sup> Higgins, "The Origins and Fate of the Marion County Free Black Community," 440.

<sup>97</sup> Ayers, *The Promise of the New South*, 208.

<sup>98</sup> Morgan and Kunkel, "Arkansas Ozark Mountain Blacks," 285.

wrote in 1973. "Records on them are inaccessible or non-existent, and evidence of black presence in some counties has been purposely destroyed."<sup>99</sup>

The evidence of records destruction extends to Harrison, Boone County, where gaps in the historical files of the Harrison newspaper coincide with two outbreaks of racial violence in 1905 and 1909. Recently two writers in northwest Arkansas produced an award-winning article that pieced together the story of how Harrison's black community was expelled from town in the first decade of the twentieth century. The town had a black population of 115 according to the census of 1900. This was a sizable number in a community with an overall population of 1,501. Black families living in Harrison in the early twentieth century were "hardworking, religious, and family-centered," the authors found, based mostly on census returns. In 1905, mob violence against the black community suddenly erupted after a black man broke into a white residence apparently seeking shelter from cold. Two days after this individual was incarcerated, a mob stormed the jail and seized the prisoner together with another black man in the jail, tied them to trees, and whipped them. The mob then rampaged through the section of Harrison where the black people lived, whipping others and warning all that they must leave town. All but three black families left. Four years later there was a second occurrence of racial violence. A black man was accused of rape by a white woman. Again a mob gathered outside the jail, and this time the prisoner was transferred to the jail in Marshall. Fearful of more mob violence, the remaining families made a hasty departure from Harrison. The accused man was later hanged although the case against him was dubious. One black woman, a house maid, remained in town with her white employers. It is likely that the race rioting in Harrison had a chilling effect for blacks elsewhere in the Ozarks.<sup>100</sup>

Stories were passed down about the Parthena Wyatt family who lived on Richland Creek in this period. These stories present images of a more racially tolerant community on Richland Creek than Harrison was in the 1900s, but it must be born in mind that the stories were told by whites. Parthena Wyatt had two children, Newton and Lucinda, born about 1862 and 1865 respectively. At the time of the 1870 census the mother and children, together with two other black individuals named Anthony Hensley and Zachariah Hendrix, were all listed under the household of William Wyatt, their former owner. Parthena's occupation was given as "House Keep" and the two black men's occupations were given as "Farm Labor." It is not known how long this household arrangement lasted. It is said that Newton Wyatt went to Springfield, Missouri "in search of a wife" about 1883, married a woman named Lucy, and that they had three children who went to school at Point Peter (Richland Creek). One account observes that the Wyatt School was an "integrated school" in the 1890s and 1900s and that Newton Wyatt's children were readily accepted. Newton died while plowing a field in 1914 (at about 52 years of age) and Lucy moved back to Springfield with the children. Lucinda Wyatt, meanwhile, had

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid, 283, 285.

<sup>100</sup> Jacqueline Froelich and David Zimmermann, "Total Eclipse: The Destruction of the African American Community of Harrison, Arkansas, in 1905 and 1909," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, 58, no. 2 (Summer 1999), 131-159; quote on 132. Also see the story of the 1905 and 1909 incidents as reported in *Harrison Daily Times*: George Holcomb, "Racist Image Haunts Town," January 24, 2003.

left the valley in 1887. She married a black man, Ed Cranshaw, who lived in Buffalo City.<sup>101</sup>

Despite the traces of racial tolerance found in the Wyatts' story, the census returns for Searcy County suggest that life for black families in the area was precarious at best. The 1870 census lists four other black families in addition to the Wyatts: the Hamonshear family on Tomahawk Creek, the Walker and Cook families on Calf Creek, and the Holder family on Bear Creek.<sup>102</sup> Four of the five black families were, like Parthena's, single-mother families. Only the Hamonshear household listed both an adult male and an adult female followed by five children. Jane Walker and Cass Cook were ages 32 and 38 respectively and had two young children each. They resided with Martin Dean, a former slaveholder. Apparently these two women chose to remain with their former master. Rachel Holder, age 40, had six sons and two daughters. Her four oldest sons were ages 21, 18, 13, and 10 and all gave their occupations as "Farm Labor." Rachel, it seems, was maintaining a farm as well as a large family with the help of her grown sons.<sup>103</sup>

Further research is needed to determine which if any of the four black families in addition to Parthena Wyatt's family stayed in the area after 1870. According to census returns for 1880, only 16 African-Americans were enumerated in that year, indicating that at most only one or two families besides Parthena's family remained. (Indeed, all but the Wyatt family might have left, with the census count reflecting newcomers.) And according to an article in the *Arkansas Gazette* in 1886 there were just 10 adult African-Americans in Searcy County at that time, and just 3 of these were women.<sup>104</sup> If persistence in the area can be taken as a measure of stability, then the African-American families in the Buffalo River drainage did not enjoy a stable environment.

## AGRARIAN PROTEST

The Civil War cast a long shadow across the political landscape of the Buffalo River. For decades, if not generations, the single most important determinant of a person's political party was whether his or her kin had been secessionist or Unionist during the Civil War. Those who belonged to families who had fought on the Confederate side, or who had been victimized by jayhawkers, voted Democrat. Those whose kin had fought for the Union or who had been victimized by bushwhackers voted

<sup>101</sup> Cole interview; *Newton County Historical Society Newsletter*, 14, no. 2 (Summer 1998), 14.

<sup>102</sup> In addition to the families there were two individuals: Al Casey, a 21-year old farm laborer who resided with R. Phillips on Bear Creek, and Christopher Dean, a 9-year-old boy who lived with B. W. Hensley on Richland Creek. Census return abstracted in *Newton County Historical Society Newsletter*, 14, no. 3 (Fall 1998), 20. In Newton County, Piety Villines lived with her son Tim Villines in Boxley Valley.

<sup>103</sup> Census return abstracted in *Newton County Historical Society Newsletter*, 14, no. 3 (Fall 1998), 19-20. See also Diane Mutti Burke, "'Mah Pappy Belong to a Neighbor': The Effects of Abroad Marriages on Missouri Slave Families," in *Searching for their Places: Women in the South Across Four Centuries*, edited by Thomas H. Appleton, Jr., and Angela Boswell (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2003): 57-78.

<sup>104</sup> *Newton County Historical Society Newsletter*, 14, no. 3 (Fall 1998), 20. For 1886, it cites *Arkansas Gazette*, October 8, 1886, p. 3.

Republican. Families had long memories about atrocities committed during the war and revenge killings were not infrequent in the decades after. This was the stuff of family feuds. The intense emotions surrounding these memories translated into party loyalty. James J. Johnston, a local historian and native of Searcy County, said that the Buffalo River almost formed a divide between predominantly Republican northwest Arkansas and predominantly Democratic southern Arkansas.<sup>105</sup> Ozarks historian Brooks Blevins has commented similarly: "In mountain counties such as Newton and Searcy, the residual effects of antiseccessionism and feuding between bushwhackers and jayhawkers created a strong local two-party system."<sup>106</sup>

And yet, despite those party loyalties that grew out of the Civil War, other complex and powerful forces affected the political behavior of Buffalo River farmers in the latter part of the nineteenth century, prompting many to embrace an agrarian protest movement and consider alternatives to the two-party political system. In this regard their political behavior was similar to other farmers across the South and Midwest in this period. At base, the farmers' protest was concerned with new market forces that were driving them into debt (see Chapter Six). As farmers' debts mounted, they found themselves victims in a widening gulf between urban and rural living standards and values.

In addition to private debt, farmers were burdened by public debt. Counties borrowed money to build new courthouses, finance railroad short lines, and undertake other types of public works. In the Panic of 1873, many Ozark counties became financially crippled and had to raise taxes to meet their obligations. Whichever political party held power in the county, it was blamed for raising taxes. In some instances blame was put on the "Redeemers" or conservative Democrats who had recently wrested control from the Reconstruction governments. In other instances, especially in the mountain counties where Unionism had been strong during the war, blame went to the Republicans who still held power. As the decade wore on it seemed that neither of the two major political parties was answerable to the nation's growing class of debtors. Most numerous among the ranks of debtors were the nation's farmers.

Ozark farmers joined the agrarian populace in other parts of the South and Midwest in search of debt relief. In the 1870s they were drawn to the Granger movement. The Grangers sought to build farm buyers' cooperatives that would shield farmers against unfair commodity pricing. They pushed state legislatures to curb railroad shipping rates. At the end of the decade many Arkansas farmers supported the Greenback Party, whose platform called for repudiation of the state's Reconstruction debt.

In 1882, farmers in northwest Arkansas formed a new political organization called the Brothers of Freedom. The historian of the Brothers of Freedom, Benton E.

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<sup>105</sup> James J. Johnston, interview by Theodore Catton, February 8, 2006.

<sup>106</sup> Blevins, *Hill Folks*, 66.

Henningson, Jr., finds the cradle of this movement to be among those mountain farmers who were newly involved in growing cotton:

Upland farmers...emerged as the most numerous class in the northwest but they were far from being economically secure. Before the Civil War, the northwest's upland farmers either maintained a subsistence existence or they were only partially dependent upon a market economy. In the aftermath of the war, even northwest Arkansas became heavily reliant upon cotton as a cash crop. The spread of cotton in the uplands brought the entire region under the ruinous reign of King Cotton. By the 1880s, the planters in the northwest were not the only ones tied to southern markets. They were "yielding an increasingly large proportion of cotton production to the upland farmer." No longer economically independent, the upland farmers found it difficult to survive in a market economy where cotton prices continued to decline year after year.<sup>107</sup>

Buffalo River farmers who were buying seed on credit from the local mercantile so that they could plant a fourth or a fifth of their tilled acreage in cotton fit squarely into this class of farmers.

Like the Grange, the Brothers of Freedom was made of local chapters or "lodges" whose immediate purpose was to form buyers' co-ops but whose broader aim was to politicize farmers' grievances. The Brothers of Freedom was founded on a political viewpoint. Members believed that the railroads and the banks had taken away the farmers' independence. They saw themselves as victims of declining agricultural commodities markets, and they believed that the state and national governments were indifferent to their plight.<sup>108</sup> The Brothers of Freedom was founded in Johnson County, Arkansas by two men, Isaac McCracken and Marion Farris. McCracken was a Mason, and it may have been due to his influence that the Brothers of Freedom took shape as a secret order with rituals of initiation and membership. The secrecy seems to have been aimed at presenting a united front to the outside. The Brothers of Freedom adopted a Declaration of Principles that was loosely modeled on the Declaration of Independence. Among its features, it called on members to limit what they acquired from store keepers and rely as much as possible on "home supply." This was short of calling for a farmers' boycott of all local merchants, but it reflected the farmers' sense that they were losing ground as they moved away from the subsistence farming of the old days.<sup>109</sup>

In the same year that the Brothers of Freedom formed, farmers in Lonoke and Prairie counties established another farmers' organization, soon known as the Agricultural Wheel. Though less strident than the Brothers of Freedom, the Agricultural Wheel also looked to a farmers' movement to bring fundamental change in state and national politics. Historian Edward Ayers states that they cobbled together a political

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<sup>107</sup> Benton E. Henningson, Jr., "Northwest Arkansas and the Brothers of Freedom: The Roots of a Farmer Movement," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, 34, no. 4 (1975): 307-308.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 310-311.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 319.

philosophy based on “the French physiocrats, the Bible, and other diverse sources.” Meetings often took the form of a debating society. Store keepers and townsmen were not allowed to attend, and no member could be a resident of an incorporated town. In October 1885, at Greenbrier, Arkansas, the Brothers of Freedom and the Agricultural Wheel merged to form the Wheel. Already the Agricultural Wheel had spread to three other states. The combined organization claimed 1105 locals.<sup>110</sup>

Undoubtedly there were locals in the Buffalo River area although little hard evidence of them exists. Evidence of one local, Brothers of Freedom Lodge 236 of Pleasant Grove, Searcy County, is found in a surviving old minute book. The minutes reveal that the lodge attempted to conduct collective bargaining with Taylor’s Mill (on upper Calf Creek) and that it considered establishing its own retail store. After the Brothers of Freedom merged with the Agricultural Wheel, the lodge endorsed a run for a state senate seat by James H. Love of Tomahawk Township. Considering that Love lived near the Buffalo River when he ran for state office on the Wheeler ticket, it would appear likely that other Buffalo area residents would have been active in the movement as well.<sup>111</sup> Farmers who inhabited the Buffalo River valley probably participated in a local chapter similar to Lodge 236 of Pleasant Grove, with regular monthly meetings held in a school or church. Meetings of Lodge 236 began with an opening prayer, followed by discussion about ways to advance the members’ collective interests. Members of this lodge elected delegates to visit other nearby lodges so that the conversations they were having would connect with farmers’ concerns in the wider area.

By 1886 the farmers’ movement had already reached the peak of its success in terms of getting people elected to public office. But in terms of membership it continued to grow. With strength of numbers, the Wheel branched into other activities. It attempted to purchase farming machinery directly from manufacturers and it negotiated with corporations for special rates on equipment. It imitated the earlier Grange in forming farmer cooperatives, distributing literature to the local chapters about how to establish farmer-owned stores. By 1887, the Wheel claimed a half million members.<sup>112</sup>

By then another farmers’ movement was sweeping across the South. The Farmers’ Alliance began in Texas and expanded into Arkansas and eastward to other southern states from 1886 to 1889. The Alliance also built its membership on local chapters or “suballiances.” A cadre of enthusiastic circuit lecturers and newspaper editors helped spread the movement. The Alliance differed from the Wheel in that it was open to women, who composed about a quarter of its membership. But it excluded blacks. Southern black farmers began their own Colored Farmers Alliance. The Alliance found a powerful base of support in Arkansas, particularly in areas such as Marion, Searcy, and Newton counties that had drawn substantial numbers of settlers after the

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<sup>110</sup> Ayers, *The Promise of the New South*, 215.

<sup>111</sup> James J. Johnston, “Brothers of Freedom/Agricultural Wheel Minutes, 1883-1886,” *Searcy County Ancestry Information Exchange*, 14 (n.d.), n.p. (computer file copy provided to author by Johnston).

<sup>112</sup> Ayers, *The Promise of the New South*, 215-216.

Civil War. As these areas had only recently begun producing cotton for the market, there was no old, established wealth in cotton to exercise a conservative influence.<sup>113</sup>

In the Arkansas state election of 1890 the Alliance formed a coalition with the Union-Labor Party, itself a recent confederation of Republicans, Wheelers, and Greenbackers. The gubernatorial candidate of this coalition party polled 44 percent of the vote, but the Democrats were able to hold power. Moreover, the Democrats claimed in the election campaign that the Alliance members were race traitors for admitting blacks into their political coalition. After 1890 the Alliance began to wane and in 1891 it fused with the People's Party, or Populists.<sup>114</sup> Although the Populists mounted a strong challenge to the Democrats and Republicans in the national elections in 1892, they did not do well in Arkansas where race and class divisions and voter intimidation began to work in favor of the sitting Democrats.<sup>115</sup>

By the mid-1890s agrarian protest in Arkansas – and in much of the South – had practically spent itself. After the collapse of the Populist Party in the election of 1896, demagogues began to make their appearance in southern politics, appealing to disenchanted voters (who now had to pay poll taxes months in advance of an election in order to exercise their voting rights). In Arkansas, the new-style politician was exemplified by Jeff Davis, who became popular as the state's attorney general for attacking the trusts. Lashing out at the railroads, the banks, and big politicians, he was elected governor twice after 1900 and ran successfully for the U.S. Senate in 1906.<sup>116</sup>

In the first two decades of the twentieth century the reform impulse shifted from the rural to the urban sector. A new political movement known as Progressivism aimed at instituting democratic reforms in government and implementing a wide range of social reforms such as universal education, public sanitation, prohibition, and the like. Progressives adopted many of the initiatives espoused earlier by the agrarian reform movements, but the Progressive movement placed more emphasis on urban issues and largely drew strength from urban, middle-class people. Southern Progressives joined with their counterparts in the North on many issues; however, they turned a blind eye to the glaring problem of racial inequality in the South and consequently took a limited interest in the plight of poor farmers, many of whom were black sharecroppers. Even as agrarian radicalism subsided in the early twentieth century the farmers' situation did not improve. Indeed, relative to other sectors in American society the farmer continued to lose ground in the first two decades of the twentieth century. When agricultural commodity prices fell at the beginning of the 1920s, the farm sector entered into an economic depression that would persist through the Great Depression. Farmers in northwest Arkansas shared in these regional and national trends, growing increasingly marginalized and politically withdrawn from the rest of society.

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid, 216-237.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid, 244, 252-254.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid, 278-280.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 411-412.



Buffalo River residents did take part in one notable protest in the early twentieth century. When the United States instituted a draft during the First World War, nine young men of Cecil Cove, Newton County refused to report to the local draft board. Instead they formed the “Cecil Cove Slacker Gang” and established a hide-out in a cave at the upper end of the cove, well-stocked with weapons and provisions. The nine young men had strong support from their families and neighbors. Some 36 residents of the cove signed a covenant pledging mutual assistance in resisting authorities. When word got out about the Cecil Cove Slacker Gang, four U.S. marshals, several special investigators, and one army colonel made visits to Newton County but none was able to turn up a single lead as to the gang’s whereabouts. It was rumored that other draft resisters from as far away as Fort Smith and Joplin, Missouri were joining the Cecil Cove Slacker Gang, but this was not true; the gang would not admit members from outside the cove. One fellow from somewhere else in Newton County sought to join the gang and was turned away.<sup>117</sup>



Figure 49. Residents of Cecil Cove. Some of the young men were members of the Slackers Gang. *Bill Baker collection, Buffalo National River.*

According to a local history and reminiscence written by Newton County resident Billie Touchstone Hardaway, Slacker’s Cave was located in the “far reaches of Cecil Cove” and was accessed by a narrow vertical opening that could be concealed with a rock. Inside was a “gigantic cavern” in which the slackers could live for long periods “coming out occasionally for food.”<sup>118</sup> However, this probably exaggerates the

<sup>117</sup> “How the Hill Billies of Cecil Cove Defied Uncle Sam,” *Kansas City Star*, February 19, 1919.

<sup>118</sup> Hardaway, *These Hills My Home*, 124.

importance of the cave. In a lengthy story about the Cecil Cove Slacker Gang published in the *Kansas City Star* in February 1919, the reporter stated that the young men continued to reside at home, resorting to the cave only when a federal official entered the neighborhood. At the time this story was written the exact location of the cave was still held secret.<sup>119</sup>

The draft resistance in Cecil Cove developed into a lengthy standoff between the locals and outside authorities. Officials did not want any bloodshed; on the other hand, they could not ignore the situation, especially as the Cecil Cove Slacker Gang intimidated other individuals in the cove from going to serve in the army. One such individual was young Arlis Jones. When Arlis received draft papers he was urged by his father, mother, and brother, all of whom had signed the covenant, to resist the call and join the Slacker Gang. Knowing that Arlis was ambivalent about the matter, other community members came to the house and prayed that he would refuse to fight. But Arlis decided he must heed the draft call. As he was packing his saddlebag in the morning he received a death threat. Rather than submit to this intimidation, he rode his horse to the home of John Richardson, a so-called “loyal” or war supporter, and from there he was given an armed escort to Jasper where he reported for duty.

Seeking a resolution, federal authorities communicated with the Slacker Gang through intermediaries. The Slacker Gang responded with warnings to federal authorities that they would not surrender without a fight and that an attempt to capture them could be a lethal mistake. Federal authorities issued counter threats that soldiers at Fort Pike might be sent to “clear out” the slackers. Finally the army hinted of amnesty and the gang surrendered to the local sheriff after he agreed to meet the young men by himself at a crossroads near the Newton County-Boone County line and accompany them unarmed to Little Rock. The slackers were placed in custody at Camp Pike where they still remained in February 1919.<sup>120</sup>

The episode revealed a touch of the class division that had given rise to the Brothers of Freedom and other farmer organizations in past decades. Two of the instigators were Socialists, and one of them was quoted by the *Kansas City Star* reporter as declaring that the war was being fought “for them silk hatted fellers up in New York.” But the episode probably had more connection to long festering divisions within the community left by the Civil War. Community resistance to the draft invoked memories of the peace society in 1861 and the bitter strife of the Civil War years. One of the gang’s strongest backers was “Uncle Lige” Harp, whose Unionist father, William Harp, had been killed by Confederates in the Civil War. When Dan Johnson, the man suspected of betraying William Harp to the Confederates in 1864, was murdered around the turn of the century, locals suspected that “Uncle Lige” had settled his old score with him. By forming a covenant to protect the Slacker Gang, these families sent an intimidating message to their neighbors who supported the war. One so-called loyal was told to take his hogs out of the cove. Another man was informed that his yearling hogs

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<sup>119</sup> “How the Hill Billies of Cecil Cove Defied Uncle Sam,” *Kansas City Star*, February 19, 1919.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

could stay in the woods but he had better not. An old Confederate veteran and preacher known as “Uncle Jimmy” Richardson said he was run out of the cove by a gunshot past his ear.<sup>121</sup>

Despite its willingness to use arms in its defense, the Cecil Cove Slacker Gang seems to have been motivated in part by pacifism. George Slape, a signer of the covenant, cited the Bible’s injunction “Thou Shalt not kill,” and told the *Kansas City Star* reporter, “We didn’t want our boys takin’ no body’s life.”<sup>122</sup> But the episode also revealed a deep mistrust of outsiders and outside officialdom in particular. It demonstrated that after a half century of fitful engagement in agrarian protest movements, many farmers along the Buffalo felt alienated from the United States government and American life.

## SUMMARY

Community development was a reflection of the rural farm-based society that formed along the Buffalo. Small towns coalesced around the economic and social institutions that were at the center of farm life: grist mills, cotton gins, country stores, churches, and schools. In some ways, these small communities nurtured cultural values and traditions that were increasingly removed from main currents in American life, especially as the cultural divide between city and country widened after the turn of the century. But in other important ways, the people of the Buffalo River valley were fully engaged in the political, economic, and cultural life of the nation. Drawn into the market economy, notably through the production of cotton, they turned to state and national politics to address what they perceived to be economic injustices perpetrated against them by railroads, banks, and the wealthier classes.

Some of the hamlets and towns that formed along the Buffalo River in the decades following the Civil War have vanished almost without a trace. Others, such as Boxley, Ponca, and Gilbert, persist in the present as living communities, and still others are preserved today as historic districts. The Boxley Valley Historic District contains the largest number of historic buildings, including its nineteenth century church and mill, numerous houses, and associated barns and outbuildings. Erbie has the next largest concentration of farmsteads, including the Parker-Hickman farm, which, together with Erbie’s surviving church and crossroads, offer a strong representation of the Buffalo River’s late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century rural communities. The Rush Historic District features numerous buildings, structures, and sites associated with the mining industry.

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

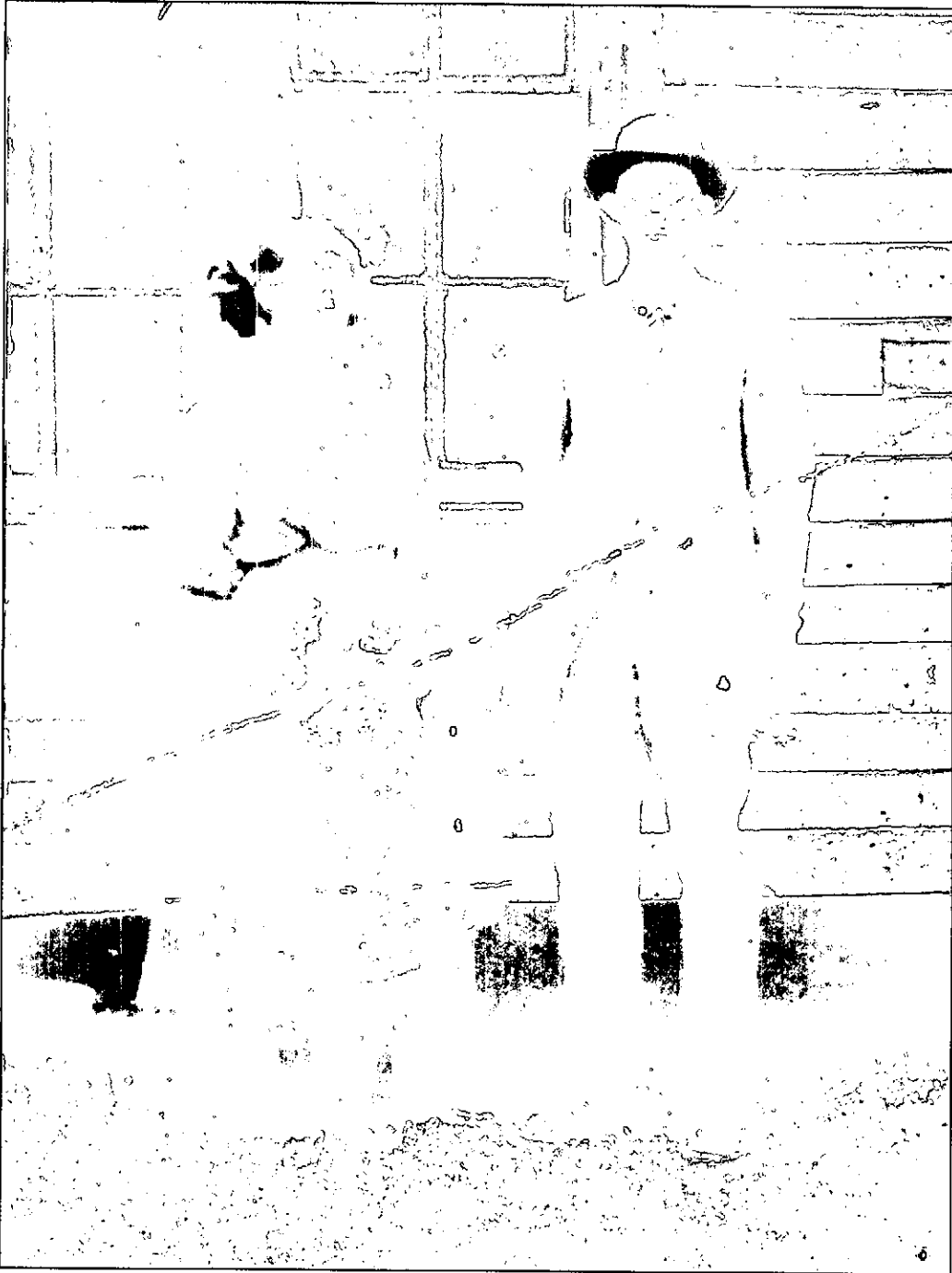


Figure 50. Luther and Ethel Arnold had a farm at Arnold Bend on the Buffalo River. The Arnold house is still standing. *Sara Jo Fendley collection, Buffalo National River.*

## CHAPTER EIGHT

# THE GREAT DEPRESSION AND NEW DEAL, 1930-1942

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Farmers in the Buffalo River valley, like farmers throughout the United States, saw their income steadily decline after World War I. The problem for the agricultural sector of the nation's economy was that growth in consumer demand for farm produce could not keep pace with the rapid growth in production as mechanization, fertilizers, and other improvements made farming more efficient. The result was a steady decline in market values for most agricultural products. The agricultural sector of the nation's economy was already depressed for several years before the Great Depression began in 1929.

The farmers' plight eventually drew various forms of government intervention at the county, state, and federal level. Government intervention in the Arkansas Ozarks began as early as the late nineteenth century with state-sponsored programs to encourage diversified farming and soil conservation. In 1888, Arkansas founded an agricultural experiment station at Fayetteville's Arkansas Industrial University (later the University of Arkansas) and state and county agricultural extension agents began working with farmers to form growers' associations for the purpose of sharing information. With the establishment of the Ozark National Forest in 1907, officers of the U.S. Forest Service began encouraging farmers to abide by Forest Service-issued grazing permits, to respect state fish and game laws, and to assist in the suppression of forest fires on the national forest.

Farmers welcomed some types of government intervention and resisted others. Government officials sometimes misread farmers' acts of resistance. For example, the Forest Service initially paid farmers by the day to help with forest fire suppression but stopped this practice when they perceived an increase in the number of fires. Officials assumed that farmers were setting fires to create work for themselves. This may have been true in some cases, but farmers also set fires to improve grazing conditions for their livestock. Burning the woods was a traditional practice that farmers were loath to abandon, regardless of Forest Service aims.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps the most controversial instance of government intervention in the decades before the Great Depression was the program to control Texas tick fever in cattle. This disease spread throughout the southern cattle industry in the early twentieth century, causing the federal government to place several states, including Arkansas, under federal quarantine. In response, the Agricultural Experiment Station together with the federal Bureau of Animal Industry initiated efforts to eradicate the disease. They worked with farmers to form cattle growers' associations and to treat their animals in dipping vats built specifically for the program. Many Ozark farmers found this program unduly burdensome and resisted it by destroying vats and intimidating the government inspectors; nevertheless, the program largely succeeded. Newton County was among

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, *History of the Ozark and St. Francis National Forests* (Russellville, Arkansas: U.S. Forest Service, 1962), 13.

eight Ozark counties that were released from the federal quarantine in 1914, seven years after the program began.<sup>2</sup>

These early examples of government intervention set the stage for more sweeping government initiatives during the Great Depression. Government intervention in the Depression era included economic relief programs, renewed interest in agricultural reform, and new conservation measures including the development of state parks and federally-funded hydroelectric dams. The new wave of government intervention started during the Hoover administration in the depths of the Great Depression, and broadened under the Roosevelt administration's New Deal.

This chapter focuses on a relatively short time span, the depression decade, because this was a pivotal time in the history of the Buffalo River. Although World War II and the postwar era produced dramatic changes in living standards, land use patterns, and the political culture in the area, the decade of the 1930s may be regarded as transitional. As historian Brooks Blevins has written, "By World War II, the foundation had been laid for a massive transformation and depopulation in the Ozark region. War would provide the impetus for swift and momentous change. In the latter part of the depression, then, the Ozarks stood on the threshold of modernity."<sup>3</sup> This chapter attempts to explain the approach to that threshold.

As in earlier chapters, census data from Newton, Searcy, and Marion counties are used here to describe conditions in the Buffalo River valley. This chapter makes more reference to trends and events at the state and national level than other chapters do, because the Great Depression was a national emergency and people in the Buffalo River valley in the 1930s were influenced by national developments as perhaps no other time in their history since the Civil War.

## EMERGENCY RELIEF AND THE LIVE-AT-HOME PROGRAM

The census of 1930 reported a total of 5,218 farm units in Newton, Searcy, and Marion counties. The average size of these farms was 107 acres – somewhat larger than in the nineteenth century. Of this amount of land, an average of 29 acres were in crops, 28 acres in pasture, 35 acres in forest, and the remaining 15 acres not useable. Each farm unit in the three counties had an average of one horse, one mule, five cattle, four hogs, a flock of chickens, and perhaps a sheep or goat. (The typical farm had somewhat fewer animals than this because about ten percent of farm units in the three counties specialized in dairy farming or stock raising and these farms had considerably more than the average number of livestock.) Nearly a quarter of all farms were described by the census as "general" and about one half were described as "self-sufficing" farms.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Blevins, *Hill Folks*, 95. Marion and Searcy counties were no longer quarantined by this time.

<sup>3</sup> Brooks Blevins, "'In the Land of a Million Smiles': Twentieth-Century America Discovers the Arkansas Ozarks," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, 61, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 5.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930, Agriculture*, Vol. 2, Part 2, 782-784, 1165-1167. Among the total of 5,218 farm units in the three counties

Even the self-sufficing type of farm required a small cash crop to pay taxes and to purchase shoes and other necessities. According to one survey (in 1933) an average family income for five on an Ozark farm was \$45 for one year. Cash savings provided little margin in times of economic adversity. As Ozark freelancer Charles Morrow Wilson noted, "when a lean year comes, or when the roads are washed out by late fall rains, savings melt away like soft snow in April."<sup>5</sup>



Figure 51. Newton County family, ca. 1935. Katie McCoy collection, Shiloh Museum. Neg. S-85-181-55.

Natural disaster accompanied the onset of economic depression in Arkansas. As the nation entered the Great Depression, Arkansas suffered severe drought in 1930-31. The drought was accompanied by a heat wave in which temperatures soared to 113 degrees in some Arkansas counties. Arkansas farmers lost 30 to 50 percent of their crops. Coming on the heels of catastrophic flooding in the Mississippi Valley in 1927 and tornadoes in 1929, the drought plunged Arkansas into its worst year in the depression decade. As famine stalked the land, desperate and angry mobs threatened to riot in Crawfordsville and Lepanto, Arkansas (near West Memphis and Jonesboro, respectively) and a food riot broke out in the town of England, southeast of Little Rock. The economic crisis caused many people to lose faith in their local banks. With panicky citizens rushing to withdraw their savings before the money ran out, 130 banks failed across Arkansas in 1930. As some of these banks held state funds that were to be invested in road building, the bank failures fell hardest on rural counties where road construction jobs were an important source of supplemental income.<sup>6</sup>

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there were 676 farms specializing in cotton but a disproportionate number of these farms (410) were in Marion County and probably most of these farms were located outside the Buffalo River drainage.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Morrow Wilson, "Friendly Days in the Ozarks," *Travel*, 60 (March 1933), 19.

<sup>6</sup> "Stricken Arkansas," *Outlook*, 157 (January 21, 1931), 85; Nan E. Woodruff, "The Failure of Relief During the Arkansas Drought of 1930-1931," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, 39, no. 4 (Winter 1980), 304.

The federal government was slow to respond to the emergency in Arkansas and the relief effort was mostly borne by the Red Cross. Both the Hoover administration and the Red Cross were concerned that in trying to get food and clothing to victims of the drought the aid would find its way instead into the hands of people who were simply out of work, creating expectations of a dole. Planters in Arkansas's Delta area actually obstructed the Red Cross's emergency relief effort in the fall of 1930, fearful that food rations would cause their work force to forego picking the parched and scraggy cotton crop. Once the cotton crop was harvested, however, planters joined with others in demanding aid for starving workers. By the time it ended its emergency relief program in March 1931, the Red Cross claimed it had provided food rations to 180,188 Arkansas families.<sup>7</sup>



Figure 52. Monroe Middleton family, Newton Co, ca. 1935. *Katie McCoy collection, Shiloh Museum. Neg. S-95-181-32.*

While the Red Cross relief effort centered in hardest-hit counties in the Mississippi Valley, volunteer relief workers fanned out into other parts of Arkansas as well. Charles Morrow Wilson reported on his experience serving drought-stricken farm families in the Ozarks in *Outlook* in April 1931. "I encountered hill men, normally of easy circumstances, struggling through the winter barefooted and without coats, but I saw no women who were coatless or unshod," he wrote. "I visited a mountain family who had lived for six weeks on a sole ration of boiled corn rather than beg or accept charity."<sup>8</sup>

Farmers were also hurt by the failing wage economy. The region had already seen the loss of good wage-earning jobs in the mining industry in the 1920s. With the

<sup>7</sup> Woodruff, "The Failure of Relief During the Arkansas Drought of 1930-1931," 305-311.

<sup>8</sup> Charles Morrow Wilson, "Famine in Arkansas," *Outlook*, 157 (April 29, 1931), 595-596.



collapse of the lumber market, wages paid in the timbering industry plummeted. For years the backwoods farmer had produced railroad ties in the winter to bring in a small cash income to supplement what he got for his cash crop, but after 1930 the price for white oak railroad ties dropped from \$1 to ten cents apiece. It took a good woodcutter several hours to hew a single tie. Thus, these men wielded an ax all day for as little as ten to twenty cents in pay. Wagon drivers hauled the ties to the railroad for forty cents per day.<sup>9</sup>

In the absence of meaningful federal support from the Hoover administration, the state of Arkansas took measures to provide economic relief for its citizens. The state began a construction program to build roads, levees, and public buildings at state colleges. By 1931, the number of unemployed was reduced from 230,000 to 120,000.<sup>10</sup> To complement the back-to-work programs, the state launched a “live-at-home” program aimed at making farm families self-sufficient. Led by the state university’s Agricultural Extension Service, the program sought to make farms more diversified and sensitive to soil conservation. The live-at-home campaign promoted a ten-point program to make each Arkansas farm self-sufficient:

1. To raise enough grain and hay to feed all livestock.
2. To produce enough meat to feed the family.
3. To maintain at least one milk cow.
4. To maintain at least 30 laying hens.
5. To provide health insurance by means of a garden plot.
6. To rebuild soil fertility by converting at least one third cotton and corn acreage to legumes and pasture crops.
7. To reduce tilled acreage and to redirect saved labor to terracing and draining.
8. To beautify farm lawns by planting flowers, trees, and shrubs.
9. To plant small orchards that would produce fruit for the family.
10. To maintain a farm household budget.

One historian of Arkansas farming practices in the Depression era has remarked that the live-at-home program “stressed modern soil conservation practices and more efficient food production; yet, in another sense, it urged a return to earlier, simpler farming.”<sup>11</sup> By and large, farm families reverted to pioneer forms of farming – employing simpler technology on fewer tilled acres – because they had no choice. For many backwoods farms along the Buffalo River, the live-at-home program was not so much a return to earlier forms as a continuation of traditional practices.

The back-to-the-land movement of the early 1930s served to arrest a decade of population decline in the 1920s. During the previous decade, the end of the mining boom combined with depressed conditions for agriculture led many residents to leave the region

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<sup>9</sup> Sauer, “The Economic Problem of the Ozark Highlands,” 222; Wilson, “Famine in Arkansas,” 597.

<sup>10</sup> Wilson, “Famine in Arkansas,” 596.

<sup>11</sup> Pamela Webb, “By the Sweat of the Brow: The Back-to-the-Land Movement in Depression Arkansas,” *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, 42, no. 4 (Winter 1983), 338-339.

and seek better opportunities elsewhere. The total number of farms in Newton, Searcy, and Marion counties fell by ten percent from 1920 to 1930, while the total population of the three counties fell by fifteen percent, from 35,943 in 1920 to 30,496 in 1930. Searcy County experienced the biggest drop as its population fell by 24 percent during the decade.<sup>12</sup> The onset of the depression checked this out-migration as urban employment opportunities outside the area receded. A close study of out-migration from the Arkansas Ozarks found that the rate fell to a little over one percent per year during the 1930s, while the population in the region grew slightly due to natural increase.<sup>13</sup>

Besides returning to the farm, another way that Ozark residents coped with hard times was to seek temporary employment out of the area. Some people went away for years, making a new life elsewhere until such time as they could return. Others found work as migrant laborers, leaving and returning to the Buffalo River valley on a seasonal basis. Many people from the Arkansas Ozarks worked on farms in the Midwest each summer and fall, returning south for the winter. Young people were especially apt to go on the road and work as migrant laborers in the 1930s.

The Collier homestead at Tyler Bend, now a historic property of the Buffalo National River, is illustrative of the Depression-era farmstead. Solomon "Sod" Collier was a farmer and occasional coal miner in eastern Kentucky before he migrated with his family to the Arkansas Ozarks in February 1928. His daughter, Barbara Treat,



Figure 53. Sod Collier with his Kentucky wonder beans.  
*Buffalo National River.*

remembered the trip as a "miserable" ordeal, as she spent some eight days sandwiched in Sod's new Ford truck with her brothers and sister, all wrapped in quilts against the cold, the family belongings lashed on the back under bulging tarps, and Sod sometimes stopping the truck to cut down a tree so that he could get his overloaded truck down the narrow mountain road. When they came into Leslie, his daughter recalled, people gathered around because they had never before seen such a large truck. After a few months in Leslie, the Collier family rented a farm near Morning Star, then another place on Bear Creek. While at Bear Creek, Collier found an unclaimed piece of land on a ridge above the Buffalo River, an area now known as Tyler Bend. He cleared the land, built a cabin, and occupied the place with his family in 1932. He proved up on 40 acres in 1937, one of the last parcels in the area to be settled under the Homestead Act.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Pitcaithley, *Let the River Be*, 57.

<sup>13</sup> Charlton, *The Social Aspects of Farm Ownership and Tenancy in the Arkansas Ozarks*, 6.

<sup>14</sup> Barbara Treat and Dewayne Treat, interview by Suzanne Rogers, June 2, 1989, transcript of original audio tape, Buffalo National River, Harrison, Arkansas; Suzanne D. Rogers, Draft, "Sod Collier

Collier built practically the entire house himself, including the chimney. He cut the logs on the property, which he hand-hewed with a broad axe, and he chinked between the logs with clay mud. He installed store-bought window frames; these contained no glass and were covered in the winter by wood shutters. He roofed the structure with oak shingles and built a paling fence around it to keep out his hogs. The cabin had a wood plank floor but no running water or electricity. Collier's wife, Ida Mae, did most of the cooking in a cook stove on the porch. Sod built a cistern next to the house for collecting rainwater off the roof, which saved Ida Mae the work of hauling water from a spring located down hill from their ridge top location.

Sod and Ida Mae Collier practiced the kind of farming – common along the Buffalo – that the live-at-home campaign lauded. In addition to his hogs, which he butchered for domestic consumption, Sod raised from eight to ten cows at a time, and grew corn, oats, beans, pumpkins, turnips, and other vegetables. Sod planted his crops using a single mule and double-shovel hand plow. The soil on this ridge top farm was surprisingly rich. He kept his mule in a pole barn that is no longer standing; other outbuildings that still remain included a smoke house and a crib for storing feed. Ida Mae beautified the property by cultivating rose bushes, hollyhock, and other flowers. The farm provided the Colliers with a meager but satisfactory livelihood, exemplifying the sort of “rugged individualism” that the Hoover administration touted as the nation's bulwark against the depression.<sup>15</sup>

## THE NEW DEAL AND AGRICULTURAL ADJUSTMENT

The Hoover administration's emphasis on self-help alienated a great many Americans, however, and set the stage for an overwhelming Democratic political victory in the elections of 1932. By a wide margin Arkansas citizens helped to elect Democratic presidential candidate Franklin D. Roosevelt, who campaigned on a promise of a “New Deal” between the federal government and the American people. Roosevelt's New Deal, as it developed over the next several years, was a sprawling array of federal programs aimed at restoring confidence in the economy. Components of the New Deal addressed agricultural adjustment, industrial recovery, regional planning, and economic relief. Conservation initiatives were threaded throughout the new programs and agencies: in the Agricultural Adjustment Administration's attention to soil conservation, in the National Recovery Administration's mandate to promote sustained-yield forestry, in the Tennessee Valley Authority's emphasis on watershed planning, and in the work of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), to name a few examples. Perhaps the most important legacy of the New Deal in the Arkansas Ozarks was that it solidified the connection between economic adjustment and environmental restoration. Beginning with efforts by the Agricultural Adjustment Administration (AAA) to change what the farmer produced on

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Development Plan,” Resource Monitoring File, Harrison, Arkansas, National Park Service, Buffalo National River, p. 48.

<sup>15</sup> See the Collier Homestead, Draft Nomination, National Register of Historic Places, Harrison, Arkansas, National Park Service, Buffalo National River.

the land, the New Deal pushed conservation at the same time that it promoted economic recovery.

The AAA took dramatic steps to lower farm production and raise farm prices. During the fall and winter of 1933, the AAA paid farmers to plow up their fields and it employed agents to slaughter livestock that were regarded as inferior or simply surplus. Numerous Buffalo River farmers participated in the agricultural adjustment program, taking federal subsidies to reduce their production. According to historian Brooks Blevins, 382 farmers in Newton County received an average of more than \$1000 each for their participation.<sup>16</sup>

The AAA's efforts were initially directed primarily toward cotton farmers in the South and wheat and hog farmers in the Midwest. By the following summer, however, reduction of cattle herds in drought states, including Arkansas, also came under the purview of the AAA. The Jones-Connally Act of April 7, 1934, together with the Emergency Relief Appropriation Act of June 19, 1934, directed \$250 million toward government purchase of surplus cattle in drought-stricken areas. Fifty counties in Arkansas took advantage of the program, including Searcy County, where farmers sold cattle to the government for \$1 to \$5 per head. Healthy cattle were loaded and shipped by the Federal Surplus Relief Corporation to slaughterhouses or to non-drought states



Figure 54. Mr. Tuttle carried the mail between Harrison, Jasper, and Deer. *Newton County Library.*

<sup>16</sup> Blevins, *Hill Folks*, 113.

where they were put out to pasture again. A stockyard with 27 pens was built in Harrison to serve as a transfer point for the cattle shipments. Condemned cattle, meanwhile, were destroyed on the farm or at a nearby location. One such killing field was located in a sinkhole east of the town of St. Joe. Longtime resident Jim Tilley remembered that untold numbers of cattle were brought there, shot, and covered with lime so that people in the area would not try to salvage the meat.<sup>17</sup>

Another New Deal program that was important in the Buffalo River valley was the Works Progress Administration (WPA), which provided paid work for unemployed men. The WPA put people to work on road construction and other public works projects. The WPA built no fewer than 423 schools in Arkansas, including Cold Springs School in the Buffalo River valley.<sup>18</sup> This building, which is now listed on the National Register of Historic Places, was fairly typical of WPA-built school buildings: Constructed with native cut stone and designed in a Craftsman style, it featured a central main entrance on the front façade and large windows along one side to emit lots of daylight.

The WPA also designed and constructed privies on several farms in the Buffalo River valley, including the J. D. Hickman farm in Erbie and the Mays family farm in the Mt. Hersey area. These WPA-built privies had a unique design that featured ventilation panels on the back and sides.<sup>19</sup> The one on the Hickman farm is preserved as part of the Parker-Hickman Farm Historic District.

Some Ozark farmers were sustained by the WPA and AAA and other New Deal programs, but others, unable to endure the drought and depression, were forced to abandon their homes. Like the Oklahoma farmers who lost everything in the Dust Bowl, these Ozark farmers mostly migrated out of the region. Whole villages were deserted. Country stores and post offices stood empty and windowless. People remarked that as the number of residents dwindled, the number of varmints increased.<sup>20</sup>

## WATER RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

The era of the Great Depression and the New Deal saw a crucial expansion of dam and reservoir projects in the Ozark region, although efforts to tap the Ozarks' rivers for hydroelectric power dated back some years before. As early as 1910, engineering experts considered the potential for generating hydropower from the Buffalo River. W. N. Gladson, a professor of engineering at the University of Arkansas under contract to the Arkansas Geological Survey, surveyed the Buffalo looking for potential dam sites.

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<sup>17</sup> Edwin G. Nourse, Joseph S. Davis, and John D. Black, *Three Years of the Agricultural Adjustment Administration* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1971), 106; U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Adjustment Administration, *Agricultural Adjustment in 1934* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1935), 30-31; Blevins, *Hill Folks*, 113; Tilley interview.

<sup>18</sup> Thomason and Associates, "Buffalo National River Theme Identification Context Studies and Property Evaluations," 84.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>20</sup> Wilson, "Friendly Days in the Ozarks," 18.

Gladson recommended a dam at a site below Buffalo Point now known as Toney Bend. From this point the river turns west and follows a circuitous path for nearly seven miles before returning nearly to the same place a half mile to the northeast. Gladson proposed to bore a tunnel through this narrow neck of intervening high ground. The river would then flow through the tunnel and fall about 40 feet through turbines. Presumably the original river channel would have served as a spillway for the dam and reservoir – a dry bed whenever the tunnel was not filled to capacity.<sup>21</sup>

While Gladson's study was state-sponsored most hydroelectric projects in the Ozarks were built by private industry in these early years. The first completed hydroelectric project in the region was Powersite Dam on the upper White River near Forsyth, Missouri, built in 1911-1913. The dam created Lake Taneycomo. This was followed by Spavinaw Dam, completed in 1924. The reservoir behind this dam served as a water supply for the fast-growing city of Tulsa, Oklahoma, then in the center of an oil boom. Next was Bagnall Dam on the Great Osage River, completed in 1931, forming Lake of the Ozarks in southwest Missouri.<sup>22</sup>

By the late 1920s the Ozarks had become a battleground of litigation over proposed hydroelectric development. State politicians, chambers of commerce, and townspeople mostly lined up on the side of public utility corporations in favor of the dams, while farmers living in the valleys and coves that were to be flooded by impounded rivers bitterly opposed the dams. On the eve of the Great Depression the power companies were poised to move forward, having obtained the necessary court rulings. Numerous projects worth an estimated \$135,000,000 were in the planning stage. The White River Power Company planned to construct eleven dams on the White and Buffalo rivers alone. It was said that hydroelectric dams would generate 600,000 horsepower in the Missouri Ozarks and 900,000 horsepower in the Arkansas Ozarks. This so-called "white coal," boomers predicted, would attract industry and drive up land values in a region desperate for economic growth.<sup>23</sup>

As late as May and June 1930, boosters still talked bravely about the coming economic boom. The *Van Buren County Democrat* reported on May 16, 1930, that the Ozark Reduction Company promised to start construction of a hydroelectric dam on the Buffalo River ten miles east of Jasper by July 1, 1930. The dam would rise more than 100 feet above the riverbed and the reservoir would flood approximately ten square miles, according to the newspaper.<sup>24</sup> Of course, the work was never initiated. An article on the Ozarks in *National Republic* in June predicted that in a few years the hill country would have not only an abundance of cheap power, but also numerous summer resorts

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<sup>21</sup> W. N. Gladson, *Water Powers of Arkansas: A Preliminary Report on White River and some of its Tributaries* (Fayetteville: Arkansas Geological Survey, 1911), 97.

<sup>22</sup> Neil Compton, *The Battle for the Buffalo River: A Twentieth-Century Conservation Crisis in the Ozarks* (University of Arkansas Press, Fayetteville, 1992), 4-6.

<sup>23</sup> William R. Draper, "The Ozarks Go Native," *Outlook and Independent*, 156 (September 10, 1930), 60-62.

<sup>24</sup> *Van Buren County Democrat*, May 16, 1930, quoted in *Searcy County Ancestor Information Exchange*, 11, no. 2 (August 2001), 3.

gracing the shores of its newly created lakes.<sup>25</sup> Instead, amidst growing signs of an economic depression, investors balked, corporations cancelled plans to purchase more electrical power, and the hydroelectric projects were not built.

In the 1930s the initiative for building dams swung from private enterprise to the federal government. The Roosevelt administration gave life to dam proposals through New Deal relief agencies like the Public Works Administration and regional planning entities such as the Tennessee Valley Authority. TVA, a publicly owned utility authorized in May 1933, completed the great dam at Mussel Shoals, Tennessee. Many Ozarkers, including U.S. Representative Clyde Ellis, who championed rural electrification, expected that a regional public utility similar to TVA would be organized to develop hydropower in their region. Instead, federal initiative for dam building passed to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which received an expansive new mandate to build multipurpose dams under the Flood Control Act of 1936. In fact, the act authorized 270 projects, of which no less than 73 were in the White and Arkansas River basins.<sup>26</sup>

The Corps of Engineers wasted no time in preparing plans. A comprehensive plan for dams on the White River and its tributaries, which included the proposed Lone Rock Dam on the Buffalo, was completed by the Memphis District in 1937. The plan became known as the Memphis District plan. In the meantime, the Corps reactivated the Little Rock District, which had been closed since 1921. Thus, the district engineer in Little Rock inherited the Memphis District plan. In the Flood Control Act of 1938, Congress appropriated funds to begin four flood control dams in Arkansas. Two of the four dams were part of the upstream flood control plan for the Arkansas River, a third was on the Black River, and the fourth, Norfolk Dam, was on the upper White River.<sup>27</sup>

The coming of World War II interrupted progress on the flood control dams. However, Norfolk Dam was built during the first years of the war because of the hydroelectric power it would produce for war industries. Water resources development would accelerate after World War II, and those changes are discussed in the next chapter.

## EARLY TOURISM

Tourism came to the Buffalo River valley on a small scale at first. Big investors in tourism sidestepped the area, despite its impressive scenery, for such nearby places as Eureka Springs and Monte Ne (a resort later inundated by the reservoir behind Beaver Dam). However, those larger resorts exerted an indirect effect on the Buffalo River valley as more and more tourists passed through or went exploring on their own. Some resident farmers, especially those who lived on or near the main roads, recognized that tourists could be a source of supplemental income or even a main income to replace what

<sup>25</sup> F. M. Van Natter, "Highlands of the Ozarks," *National Republic*, 18, no. 2 (June 1930), 5-6.

<sup>26</sup> Compton, *The Battle for the Buffalo River*, 8-9; Mary Yeater Rathbun, *Castle on the Rock: The History of the Little Rock District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 1881-1985* (Little Rock: U.S. Army Engineer District, 1990), 51.

<sup>27</sup> Rathbun, *Castle on the Rock*, 57.

they earned on their hardscrabble farms. Thus, paralleling the development of good roads and paved highways, roadside businesses catering to the automobile tourist began to appear in the Buffalo River valley as early as the 1920s and continued to grow through the Great Depression.

Perhaps the earliest such business on the Buffalo River was Frank Hammons's general store, built at the south end of the bridge on Highway 7 about 1923. As auto traffic slowly increased over Highway 7, Hammons added gas pumps, tourist camp, tackle shop for anglers, changing rooms for swimmers, and a dance pavilion to his



Figure 55. Pruitt Ranger Station, the former Pruitt Post Office and general store. Photo taken in 1977. Fred Mang, Jr. collection Buffalo National River.

property. In 1925, Hammons got himself appointed postmaster of a post office located in his store, and the settlement was named Pruitt after Wilshire Pruitt, an early local settler. After the highway bridge was replaced in 1931, Hammons installed a row of tourist cabins on the raised structure of the old bridge, which he called Shady Grove Camp. In 1941, Hammons entered into an agreement with a camp employee, Floyd Walton, to build a new post office building. This building, together with an automotive garage added to the

property in 1955, were adapted for use by the National Park Service for administrative facilities.<sup>28</sup>

Over time the new car culture spawned many types of commercial establishments on the roadside. These roadside businesses aimed to provide essential services and amusement for the passing motorist; as such they were designed to attract attention and offer convenience for a transient customer clientele. Roadside businesses generally featured large and prominent signage, expansive parking areas, and architectural plans that catered to the motorist, such as drive-in restaurants and drive-through gas stations. Roadside businesses were not just limited to the open road but came to dominate the urban setting, too, as commercial “strips” became a ubiquitous feature in towns and cities. Increasingly, automobiles and highways and their attendant infrastructure transformed the American landscape along most road corridors. This process, occurring throughout the United States, was essentially homogenizing; roadside establishments along Arkansas’s highways and by-ways mirrored similar artifacts of car culture in other parts of the nation without displaying much regional distinctiveness.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Kathleen Fitzgerald, Roberta Young, and Suzie Rogers, “Buffalo National River National Park Service Pruitt Ranger Station & Garage, Newton County, Arkansas: History, Function & Significance Prepared for the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program,” January 2008, copy provided to author.

<sup>29</sup> McLaren, *Arkansas Highway History and Architecture, 1910-1965*, 11-12.



When local residents found themselves living adjacent to improved roads or highways, they sometimes converted their homes into country stores and filling stations. To advertise their business to passers-by, these roadside vendors often added exaggerated architectural touches to existing buildings or placed bizarre statuary or other attention-getting devices on the premises. Roadside establishments occasionally displayed regional or historic stereotypes, such as a log-cabin or Indian tepee motif, in order to attract tourists.<sup>30</sup>

Some roadside enterprises on the Buffalo were either built or taken over by newcomers. An early example was Back o' Beyond, a resort near Gilbert constructed by Jack Francis of Kansas City and his wife in about 1925 or 1930. The complex included two log cabins for guests and a wooden staircase that descended the bluff to the river.<sup>31</sup>

Roadside businesses sometimes appealed to the whims as well as the needs of auto tourists. Two miles south of Pruitt on Highway 7, a roadside zoo appeared in the 1930s. The zoo featured wildcats, raccoons, skunks, squirrels, and rattlesnakes, all captured in the nearby woods, as well as monkeys and a bear that the proprietor had purchased from a traveling circus. Typical of the eclectic and improvised character of many such establishments, the complex also boasted a dance hall and grocery store.<sup>32</sup>

Modernization of roads and the spread of car culture also laid the foundation for a type of roadside establishment that was indigenous to the Ozarks: commercial caves. Cave enthusiasts were drawn to the numerous limestone caves in the Ozarks as early as the beginning of the twentieth century, but it was not until the coming of the automobile that enterprising cave owners began to promote their cave properties as tourist attractions. Commercial cave tours



Figure 56. Roadside advertising signs accompanied road improvement. *Newton County Library.*

soon led to such underground developments as fixed ladders, boardwalks, and electric lights, together with accompanying structures at the cave entrance such as ticket booths and curios shops. Commercial cave operators sometimes added to the luster of their caves by hyping folk lore about Spanish gold or hidden loot. Lester Dill, an early cave operator in southern Missouri, was so successful in promoting cave tours that he was nicknamed "The Showman of the Ozarks."<sup>33</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>31</sup> Smith, *Buffalo River Handbook*, 380-381.

<sup>32</sup> Work Projects Administration, *The WPA Guide to 1930s Arkansas*, 296.

<sup>33</sup> Jo Schaper, "Webster's Home Cave" (2003), [http://members/socket.net/~joschaper/webster.html](http://members.socket.net/~joschaper/webster.html) (July 1, 2006). See also "Cultural History," (n.d.) <http://www.missouri.edu/~jad4bc/history.htm> (July 1, 2006).

One of the most popular commercial caves near the Buffalo River was Diamond Cave, located two miles north of Parthenon in Newton County. In 1941, the cave operator offered guided tours that took visitors on a three-hour, four-mile walk past numerous, beautiful, underground formations. On the surface at the cave entrance was a café, overnight cabins, and an old log cabin purportedly built by the cave's discover, Sam Hudson, and moved to the site by truck from Parthenon. Inside the Hudson cabin was a museum crammed with "pioneer relics."<sup>34</sup> Other commercial caves in the area included Ozark Mystery Cave near Marshall, and Hurricane Cave on U.S. Highway 65 near St. Joe. The latter was developed with 700 feet of boardwalk and 20,000 watts of electric lights when NPS officials visited the area in 1963 to consider the establishment of Buffalo National River.<sup>35</sup>

Historian Christie McLaren, author of *Arkansas Highway History and Architecture, 1910-1965*, a study prepared for the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, describes an "excellent example of vernacular design and local craftsmanship" in a complex of motel cabins located on Highway 167 in Cave City, north of Batesville. Built in 1934, the Crystal River Tourist Camp consists of six single-story stone cabins and a central office building situated around a cave entrance. The buildings are made of concrete faced with native stone, which vary in size and shape and are set in ornamental patterns such as crosses and circles. The facings are further decorated with artifacts such as arrowheads and glass shards. The stone ornamentation continues along the rooflines of some of the cabins, and "boldly textured walkways contribute to the organic quality of the complex's overall design," according to McLaren.<sup>36</sup> In fact, this kind of gaudy vernacular design was not representative of roadside enterprises in the Buffalo River valley in the 1930s, but the Crystal River Tourist Camp prefigured similar kinds of developments in the area in the postwar era.

Wartime gas rationing curtailed the volume of tourists who came to the Ozarks in summertime to camp and fish, but road-building in support of the war effort promised to bring more tourists to the Ozarks when the war was over. Among the remote places in the Ozarks that tourists and recreationists would discover after World War II was the Buffalo River, together with its newly developed state park built by the CCC.

## BUFFALO RIVER STATE PARK

The state park movement in Arkansas, as in other states, was a product of the new automobile age. Herbert Evison, executive secretary of the National Conference on State Parks in the 1920s, once said that "the automobile fairly launched the state park movement." Automobile use in the early twentieth century was a huge stimulus for the

<sup>34</sup> Work Projects Administration, *The WPA Guide to 1930s Arkansas*, 296-297.

<sup>35</sup> National Park Service, "Field Investigation Report Suggested Buffalo National River, Arkansas," April 1963, File 31, Box 1, Subseries IV, Series II, Harold E. Alexander Papers, M89-17 University of Central Arkansas Archives, Conway, Arkansas.

<sup>36</sup> McLaren, *Arkansas Highway History and Architecture, 1910-1965*, 15.

tourism industry, and the development of state parks was a way that state governments could support that burgeoning sector of the economy. From its inception, the state park movement melded that economic incentive with two other motives: to preserve nature and to develop public recreation. The movement began in New York and spread to Pennsylvania and the New England states in the early twentieth century. State parks were next developed in Wisconsin, Minnesota, Oregon, and California – all strongholds of Progressivism. A state park was established in Florida in 1916 (the nucleus of what would become Everglades National Park) but the South in general lagged behind in the state park movement owing to the region's poverty, its tradition of limited government, and southerners' idealization of the old plantation as opposed to wild nature.<sup>37</sup>

The creation of the National Park Service (NPS) in 1916 provided another impetus for the development of state parks. The fledgling NPS was inundated with requests by members of Congress to consider constituents' proposals for new national parks. When such proposals had merit but fell short of national park standards, the NPS director could deftly recommend the area for state park designation instead. Stephen Mather, first director of the NPS, began to cultivate the state park movement as a kind of junior partner to the national park system. He organized the National Conference on State Parks to bring greater cohesion to the state park movement and protect the national park system from expanding too quickly and haphazardly. In time the NPS developed a mentoring relationship with state organizations, particularly in the 1930s through the work of the CCC.<sup>38</sup>

The Arkansas state park system followed this pattern of apprenticeship under the NPS. In the early 1920s, Arkansas physician Dr. Thomas William Hardison of Morrilton proposed that Petit Jean Mountain be made a national park. This rockbound prominence overlooking the Arkansas River was inspiring to local residents but not of national park caliber so Mather persuaded Hardison to pursue the establishment of a state park, and in 1923 Arkansas created Petit Jean State Park, the first in the state. Meanwhile, at Mather's invitation, Hardison became active in the National Conference on State Parks and brought the annual meeting to Hot Springs, Arkansas in 1926. The next year, the legislature created a state park system for Arkansas, to which was added Mount Nebo State Park (1928), Arkansas Post (1929), Devil's Den (1933), Crowley's Ridge (1933), Lake Catherine (1935), and Buffalo River (1938).<sup>39</sup>

Historian Ney C. Landrum has written that although the state park movement was nurtured by the NPS through the 1920s it began to unravel as each state pursued its own vision of what a state park system should look like. Then, in the 1930s, the movement began to coalesce again around the unique opportunity presented by the New Deal. State park commissions availed themselves of the planning expertise of the NPS together with federally-sponsored work programs such as the CCC. The result, Landrum argues, was a kind of cloning of NPS-designed development areas in many state parks around the

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<sup>37</sup> Ney C. Landrum, *The State Park Movement in America: A Critical Review* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2004), 27-59, 67-69. Evison quoted on p. xii.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 76-79.

<sup>39</sup> Jim Taylor, "Arkansas State Parks: From Vision to Reality," *Rural Arkansas* (2002), 42.

nation. Notably, NPS landscape architects and planners favored the use of a uniform government-rustic architectural style in all public buildings. Indeed, with extraordinary attention to detail, NPS master plans applied the rustic style to even the most incidental structures such as guardrails, culverts, and drinking fountains. “Applauded by many, perhaps resented by some, vestiges of the national park imprint persist today, especially in the numerous parks developed by the legendary Civilian Conservation Corps,” Landrum writes.<sup>40</sup> Today, CCC-built lodges, cabins, pavilions, and restrooms are prominent features of Petit Jean, Mount Nebo, Devil’s Den, Crowley’s Ridge, and Lake Catherine state parks, as well as the former Buffalo River State Park in Buffalo National River.

To understand how the Arkansas state parks were shaped by the NPS and the CCC it is necessary to describe how the CCC came into existence. President Roosevelt first proposed an economic relief program aimed at putting young men to work on conservation projects during his presidential campaign in 1932. Shortly after taking office, Roosevelt sent a proposal to Congress that led to passage of the Emergency Conservation Work Act on March 31, 1933. The law provided for the enrollment of 300,000 unemployed men in camps. The Labor Department was responsible for recruitment, the War Department was to construct and administer the camps, and the Agriculture and Interior Departments were to develop work projects primarily on the national forests and in the national parks respectively. Roosevelt referred to the organization as the “Civilian Conservation Corps,” and the media and public quickly responded to that appellation. Congress officially designated the organization the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) in 1937.<sup>41</sup>

Enrollees were composed of three groups. The largest group was young men. To be eligible an enrollee in this group had to be between the ages of 18 and 25, unemployed, unmarried, and physically fit. The enrollee also had to represent a family who was on public relief. The enrollee received a salary of \$30 per month, of which \$25 was sent to the man’s family. Enrollment was supposed to occur without discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, or politics; however, CCC camps were soon segregated by race, and Indians were enrolled in an entirely separate division (CCC-ID) administered by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The second group of enrollees was World War I veterans. Although veterans composed just ten percent of the total, it was a veterans’ company that completed much of the work at Buffalo River State Park. The third group was made up of local experienced men or “LEMs” who were recruited for

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<sup>40</sup> Landrum, *The State Park Movement in America*, xiii.

<sup>41</sup> For a general history of the CCC, see John A. Salmond, *The Civilian Conservation Corps, 1933-1942: A New Deal Case Study* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1967). For the NPS’s role, see Harlan D. Unrau and G. Frank Williss, *Administrative History: Expansion of the National Park Service in the 1930s* (Washington: National Park Service, 1983). For details on the CCC in Arkansas, see Angela Albright, Barbara Lindsey-Allen, and Kenneth Story, “Facilities constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps in Arkansas, 1933-1942,” National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form, 1991, Arkansas Historic Preservation Program.

their leadership qualities or knowledge of a particular trade such as carpentry or masonry.<sup>42</sup>

The CCC was organized by companies. A full-strength company had approximately 200 enrollees. Usually each company occupied its own camp. Camp sites were located by the Army with the advice of the Forest Service or the National Park Service. Generally a camp was located near where the work projects were to occur. Depending on the climate and the expected length of stay, camps could consist of canvas tents or wooden barracks. These were placed in one or two neat rows with cinder or gravel paths running between the rows. In addition to the men's quarters, camps included a flagpole and administrative office, officers' barracks, latrines, hospital and infirmary, showers and washroom, kitchen and mess unit, and garage and shop.<sup>43</sup>



Figure 57. CCC crew at rock quarry, Buffalo Point. Wilbur Hiser collection, Buffalo National River.

To enroll so many men, build and administer camps, and coordinate work projects required a national organization with numerous regional and state offices. At the top of the CCC organization was director Robert Fechner, with headquarters in Washington, D.C. The nation was divided into nine districts, with Arkansas being part of the seventh district administered from Omaha, Nebraska. Within Arkansas the CCC had a state office at Little Rock and subdistrict offices at Russellville, Arkadelphia, and El Dorado. The CCC organization even extended to the county level, as it coordinated with county welfare offices to select enrollees.<sup>44</sup>

The CCC did not rush immediately into developing state parks. Most state park commissions lacked development plans, and Arkansas was no exception. In 1933, the four Arkansas state parks then in existence consisted of nothing more than purchased lands. The NPS was requested to supply the missing plans. Conrad L. Wirth, in charge of the NPS Bureau of Planning and State Parks, oversaw state park development planning in cooperation with the states. In Arkansas, this effort was launched in August 1935 with the creation of the "Arkansas Park Service," an interagency team of officials representing the State Park Commission, NPS, and CCC. This public-spirited body was organized by the NPS's CCC liaison officer in Arkansas, Inspector Milton J. McColm, and state employee G. W. L. Armour, superintendent of Boyle Metropolitan Park in Little Rock. It

<sup>42</sup> Albright, et al., "Facilities constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps in Arkansas, 1933-1942," 3.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

met at regular 60-day intervals on Saturdays, with meeting locations alternating between state parks and CCC camps. Often the meetings were well attended by congressmen, state legislators, the governor, and the press. It publicized the state parks with the help of the State Highway Commission.<sup>45</sup>

Under the leadership of the Arkansas Park Service, the NPS and CCC got into position to build the state parks. By the fall of 1937, three state parks were under development: Petit Jean, Devil's Den, and Crowley's Ridge. Boyle Metropolitan Park, though not a state park, was included in the mix. Even as the park lodges and cabins were under construction the public began to visit the state parks in growing numbers. In the summer of 1936 some 45,000 visitors were recorded; in the summer of 1937 the number climbed to 59,000.<sup>46</sup>

Buffalo River State Park came into the Arkansas state park system in 1938. In spite of being a latecomer to the system, the area was quickly integrated into the development program. Within a few months it was receiving the necessary NPS and CCC resources to put it on par with Arkansas's other state parks. The NPS produced a master plan for Buffalo River State Park which was substantially realized with CCC labor before the CCC program ended in 1942. The CCC completed the entrance road and physical plant for the park together with a large multi-unit cabin, six housekeeping cabins, and a picnic area pavilion. While other structures were later added to the state park, the overall development still bears the CCC-era "national park imprint" described by Landrum. Incorporated into Buffalo National River in the early 1970s, the development area now known as Buffalo Point retains much of its original character.<sup>47</sup>

The idea for the park originated with Robert Berry, a former Marion County judge.<sup>48</sup> Under his leadership, citizens of Marion, Searcy, Boone, and Baxter counties formed the Buffalo River State Park Association.<sup>49</sup> In February 1938, this group presented deeds for 840 acres of a projected 5000-acre-area to the State Park Commission, which the commission accepted, thereupon designating the new park. State officials immediately applied to the NPS for help with master planning and the assignment of a CCC company. NPS officials initially balked at the proposal, citing the large amount of land yet to be acquired. As more land was added to the state park, however, the NPS changed its position in March 1938 and recommended reassignment of

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<sup>45</sup> Conference of Arkansas Park Service at Mt. Nebo State Park, September 21, 1935, , Entry 37, Box 131, File 207 Reports, Box 131, Entry 37, Record Group 79 – Records of the National Park Service (RG 79), NA II; Exclusive to Arkansas Gazette, January 25, 1937, File Arkansas, Box 1, Division of Planning and Public Relations – Publicity Materials 1933-42, Entry 64, Record Group 35 – Records of the Civilian Conservation Corps (RG 35), NA II.

<sup>46</sup> National Park Service, News Release, October 28, 1937, File 504 Publications, Box 135, Entry 37, RG 79, NA II.

<sup>47</sup> Buffalo River State Park National Register of Historic Places Inventory – Nomination Form, August 29, 1978, prepared by Jane E. Scott and Dwight T. Pitcaithley with revisions by Sandra Taylor-Smith, historical files, BNR.

<sup>48</sup> Tom Shiras, "Buffalo River State Park," *Arkansas Gazette*, March 15, 1942.

<sup>49</sup> J.B. Ward to Senator Hattie W. Caraway, January 5, 1940, File 601-03.1 Applications for Camps, Box 134, Entry 37, RG 79, NA II.

a CCC company from Crowley's Ridge to Buffalo River. CCC director Robert Fechner promptly approved the NPS request. The plans for Buffalo River received timely support from U.S. Senator John E. Miller of Izard County, Arkansas and U.S. Representative John L. McClellan of Malvern, Arkansas. An advance contingent of CCC Company 4733 was detailed to Buffalo River on May 5, 1938 and the rest of the company relocated there three weeks later.<sup>50</sup>

The men of CCC Company 4733 first tackled the job of constructing a two-mile park road from Highway 14 to the development areas, which were located partly atop a bluff and partly along the river below the bluff. The men began by clearing a right-of-way through the forest, grading the road, and laying hundreds of square yards of sod along the roadway. In typical fashion, the NPS was vigilant that no more trees should be cut



Figure 58. CCC-built cabin at Buffalo River State Park. Myra Reese collection, Buffalo National River.

down than necessary, and under no circumstances should trees be logged for construction material.<sup>51</sup> Rock construction material, on the other hand, was best quarried locally to enhance the organic quality of the park's landscaping features, and sections of roadway were bordered by cut stone retaining walls and guardrails. The quarry for this material was located near a prehistoric Indian rock shelter, and the quarry may be accessed today via the Indian Rock House Trail. "The dynamite charge lines are still visible in the rocks there, as are old road traces used to skid out the rock slabs to the building sites," writes park historian Suzie Rogers.<sup>52</sup> Other infrastructural elements completed at this stage included a five-acre picnic area with running water and an open fire place; underground sewer systems; and stone foundations for the cabins.

The next stage of work began in the summer of 1939 and focused on building construction. By then the NPS master plan was being worked out in detail. A draft of the

<sup>50</sup> Fred T. Johnston, Acting Assistant Director, NPS to John E. Miller, U.S. Senate, February 23, 1938, and Conrad L. Wirth, Assistant Director, NPS to John L. McClellan, U.S. House of Representatives, March 22, 1938, File 601-03.1 Applications for Camps, Box 134, Entry 37, RG 79, NA II; T. W. Lancaster, Project Superintendent to F. B. McConnell, Special Investigator, December 5, 1938, File Arkansas SP-13 Yellville, Box 18, Entry 115, RG 35, NA II.

<sup>51</sup> W. Ward Yeager, Associate Forester, NPS, Technical Comment Forestry [on Master Plan], May 21, 1939, File 504-04 Maps, Box 135, Entry 37, RG 79, NA II.

<sup>52</sup> Suzie Rogers, "CCC Work at Buffalo Points Marks 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary," *Buffalo National River Currents*, 1988.

plan dated May 1, 1939 indicated a number of separate development areas. The “Lodge Area” would be located at the edge of the bluff overlooking the river 500 feet below. The lodge building was to include dining room, lounging room and verandas, kitchen, employee quarters, and perhaps a room for a museum. Adjoining this area, the “Overnight Cabin Area” would consist of eight two-room and two four-room cabins. The lodge and overnight cabins would share a parking area. A short distance away the “Housekeeping Cabin Area” would encompass eighteen smaller cabins. The “Control Group Area” would be on the entrance road and would consist of a park office, check station, convenience store, and service station. The “Picnic Area” was located on the ridge midway from the Control Group to the river access and was to include a pavilion, picnic tables and fireplaces, toilets, water, garbage pits, and parking. Improvements in the “Beach and Boat Area” were to include bathhouse, boathouse, six overnight fishermen’s cabins, a picnic area, and parking. Finally, a “Utilities Group” would include the superintendent’s residence and other employee quarters, garage, workshop, and storage facilities.<sup>53</sup> The location of the utilities group was still undecided. The NPS regional landscape architect advised that the utilities group should be located to the east of the road intersection near the control group. Putting the superintendent’s residence here would ensure better park control.<sup>54</sup>

While CCC Company 4733 went forward with constructing the housekeeping cabins, the NPS began to reconsider the master plan in the fall of 1939. Planners were concerned that it did not jibe with a proposal by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to construct a dam on the Buffalo near its junction with the White River. If the dam were built, the reservoir would perhaps inundate the development area on the river. At this point in time, the reservoir level remained problematic. NPS planners were inclined to revise the master plan so that the park could accommodate the proposed Lone Rock Dam and Reservoir. They did not want to stop work on the upper development areas, but they did suggest that no more work should be done on the lower development areas pending further planning and decisions about the river.<sup>55</sup>

The uncertainty surrounding the dam and the state park continued through 1940. Compounding the uncertainty, Congress had begun to reduce funding of the CCC and the NPS was responding by looking for CCC projects that could be completed or suspended. Despite the CCC’s popularity, it was clear that Roosevelt’s “Tree Army” would be dismantled as the nation moved closer to full economic recovery. Although Congress wanted to wind down the CCC, this did not preclude individual members from intervening with the NPS in support of pet projects. U.S. Senator Hattie W. Caraway and U.S. Representative Clyde T. Ellis soon joined Senator Miller and Representative

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<sup>53</sup> Buffalo River State Park Master Plan Report Outline, May 1, 1939, historical files, BNR.

<sup>54</sup> Regional Landscape Architect, Technical Comment Plans and Design Division [on Master Plan], June 5, 1939, File 504-04 Maps, Box 135, Entry 37, RG 79, NA II.

<sup>55</sup> Acting Regional Director Milton McColm to Director, December 20, 1939, File 504.04 Maps, Box 135, Entry 37, RG 79, NA II.



McClellan in resisting efforts to disband CCC Company 4733 at Buffalo River State Park.<sup>56</sup>

Still the CCC camp was very nearly eliminated. In March 1940, the Roosevelt administration submitted its budget for the CCC, which included termination of 273 CCC camps. When it was learned that the Buffalo Point camp was on the hit list, the NPS, State Parks Director Sam G. Davies, Representative Ellis, and Governor Carl Bailey made a concerted effort to save it. Administration officials relented on condition that the state would agree to acquire more land for the park. The governor finally prevailed on the state legislature to allow a special grant from the state's emergency fund in order to complete the deal.<sup>57</sup>

Nor was this the extent of political involvement in the affairs of the CCC at Buffalo River State Park. Representative Ellis had the project superintendent, T. W. Lancaster, discharged in the spring of 1940 after learning that Lancaster had attended a political rally for his challenger in the Democratic Party primary election. Politicians sometimes alleged that New Deal relief agencies used their influence to win votes for the politicians who supported New Deal relief programs. To appease wary politicians, relief organizations such as the CCC promulgated exceedingly strict rules about how their administrators could participate in political activity. Lancaster protested that he had not broken the rules, but he was ousted anyway. Ralph Wood, a school teacher, was appointed in his place.<sup>58</sup>



Figure 59. Lodge interior. Myra Reese collection, Buffalo National River.

On February 28, 1941, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers held a public hearing on the proposed Lone Rock Dam and Reservoir. Major T. F. Kern, district engineer of the Little Rock District, explained that the Corps favored construction of a gravity dam 2,176 feet long and 237 feet high at its maximum height. The reservoir would rise to a contour elevation of 567 feet above sea level, in which case it would extend as far up the river as the state park. The public hearing brought out opinion against such a large dam

<sup>56</sup> J. B. Ward to Senator Hattie W. Caraway, January 5, 1940, Charles H. Taylor, Assistant Director, CCC to Conrad L. Wirth, NPS, February 9, 1940, Herbert Evison to Caraway, February 12, 1940, and Clyde T. Ellis to Wirth, December 2, 1939, File 601-03.1 Applications for Camps, Box 134, Entry 37, RG 79, NA II.

<sup>57</sup> Buffalo River State Park National Register of Historic Places Inventory – Nomination Form, August 29, 1978, historical files, BNR.

<sup>58</sup> Ralph W. Wood, Project Superintendent to Ambrose W. Briggs, March 11, 1940, File Arkansas SP-13 Yellville, Box 18, Entry 115, RG 79, NA II.

that would jeopardize the park development. According to a CCC report on the meeting, the consensus view was that the Corps should build a lower dam at the Lone Rock Dam site and a second dam at a site above the state park. However, the problem was unresolved and consequently the development of the beach and boating areas was postponed indefinitely.<sup>59</sup>

In the late summer of 1941, CCC Company 4733 was replaced by Company 1781, a group of World War I veterans. The latter company had about 192 men whose average age was 48. Many of them were skilled craftsmen and their ranks included stone masons, carpenters, quarrymen, and miners. This company was transferred from Petit Jean State Park, where it had been constructing a lodge and cabins similar to the buildings in progress at Buffalo River State Park. Indeed, at Petit Jean State Park the men had done award-winning work. With World War II underway and the CCC program rapidly winding down, Company 1781 focused on completing the buildings that were in progress. In March 1942, Company 1781 disbanded and vacated the park.<sup>60</sup>

During nearly four years of occupation, the CCC camp at Buffalo River State Park provided a distinctive and often positive experience for the men who were stationed there. In May 1940, when the camp was occupied by Company 4733, a camp inspector reported on the remarkably high percentage of enrollees who were availing themselves of the educational opportunities at the camp. Each member of the camp's supervisory staff was teaching a class, and classes of all types met four nights per week and for one hour on four mornings per week. Fourteen enrollees were working on their eighth grade certificates. The camp had a library with approximately a thousand books and subscribed to four newspapers.<sup>61</sup> When the young men of Company 4733 moved out and the World War I veterans of Company 1781 took their place, the character of the camp changed a little. Rather than education, there was more emphasis on after-hours recreation: pool, cards, dominoes, checkers, a weekly picture show. A camp inspection report in September 1941 stated that the camp was "thoroughly clean and maintained in proper order." Another camp inspection report in March 1942 noted that a doctor visited the camp three times per week, and a chaplain came twice per month. Camp buildings were in "excellent condition."<sup>62</sup> Continuously occupied from May 1938 to March 1942, this camp had portable wooden buildings with wood stoves. Water came from a well. The camp was located a short distance north of the state park off Highway 14. The site is located a little distance outside the present boundary of Buffalo National River.

Reporter Tom Shiras of the *Arkansas Gazette* visited the state park as the CCC was pulling out. He described the "smooth gravel road" leading into the park, where the

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<sup>59</sup> Inspector Haile, CCC to Regional Director, NPS, March 10, 1941, File 660-05.4 – Reservoirs and Dams, Box 135, Entry 37, RG 79, NA II.

<sup>60</sup> Buffalo River State Park National Register of Historic Places Inventory – Nomination Form, August 29, 1978, historical files, BNR.

<sup>61</sup> CCC Camp Educational Report, May 19, 1940, File Arkansas SP-13 Yellville, Box 18, Entry 115, RG 35, NA II.

<sup>62</sup> Camp Inspection Reports, September 1941 and March 1942, File Arkansas SP-13 Yellville, Box 18, Entry 115, RG 35, NA II.

visitor could find a “paradise.” He celebrated the easy access to an area which was formerly an impenetrable maze of “underbrush and deep gulches.” At the time of his visit the only completed multi-unit cabin, which would thenceforward be known as the lodge, was occupied by a family hired by the state to manage the cabin rentals. The lodge, he wrote, featured a screened porch running its entire length and looking out on the deep river gorge below.<sup>63</sup>

In August 1945, two weeks after the final day of World War II, the state entered a contract with Charles C. Hill, the park’s first caretaker. Hill was to receive fifty percent of net proceeds from cabin rentals (after the cost of utility bills and maintenance) and the state was to receive the other fifty percent. Cabin rates would be set by the director of state parks.<sup>64</sup> Hill served in that office for many years.<sup>65</sup>



Figure 60. Buffalo Point overlook. Myra Reese collection, Buffalo National River.

Public demand for use of the six cabins was strong in the 1950s. Park visitation in 1953 was said to be 25,000. There was discussion of building a larger lodge (as had been contemplated in the master plan) and turning the present lodge into a day-use facility. In the 1960s, four modern cabins were built where the master plan had called for overnight cabins. It was decided that a larger lodge was not necessary but that a campground was a “pressing need.” At the same time, it was suggested that more cabins could eventually be added near the river access. However, the river cabins were never built.<sup>66</sup>

In 1970, the state park celebrated the opening of a new interpretive exhibit located in the park office. The small museum included a model of the Indian Rock House, prehistoric artifacts, and information on the bluff dwellers. L. E. “Buddy” Surles, director of the Parks Division of the State Parks and Tourism Commission, had oversight of the exhibit development.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Shiras, “Buffalo River State Park.”

<sup>64</sup> Contract by and between Charles C. Hill, caretaker and Fred H. Long, director, August 25, 1945, historical files, BNR.

<sup>65</sup> “Let’s Visit Arkansas’ Most Rugged State Park,” *Arkansas Democrat*, date unknown [circa 1953].

<sup>66</sup> “Arkansas State Parks Under 1961 Conditions, A Confidential Report,” prepared by USDI, NPS, for the Arkansas Publicity and Parks Commission, January 1962, historical files, BNR.

<sup>67</sup> Jack Matthews, “Buffalo River State Park,” *Ozark Society Bulletin*, Spring 1971.

When Congress authorized the Buffalo National River in 1972, it provided for two state parks (Buffalo River and Lost Valley) to be incorporated into the land base of this new unit in the national park system. Stan Graves, then superintendent of Buffalo River State Park, assisted in making a smooth transition from state to federal management.<sup>68</sup>

The NPS decided that the entire complex at Buffalo Point should be preserved for its historical interest as well as for the accommodation of visitors. In 1978, the CCC-built cabins, lodge, and picnic pavilion were nominated for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, and further, it was determined that interior renovations could be made to the original six housekeeping cabins in such way as to protect their high degree of historical integrity. Since the renovations were made the cabins have continued to serve their original purpose as overnight visitor accommodations.<sup>69</sup>

Today the complex of historic buildings and landscape design elements at Buffalo Point still convey much of the special relationship that existed between the NPS, the CCC, and the State Park Commission in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Although the master plan was not completely fulfilled – owing to the park’s relatively late start in 1938 and the looming uncertainty of the proposed dam – nevertheless the portion that was completed readily conveys the development concept. The making of this former state park is representative of state park development elsewhere in Arkansas and the nation. As such, it is worth considering this generous assessment by historian Ney Landrum with regard to the state park movement in the United States:

There can be no denying the supreme importance of the CCC program where the state parks are concerned. NPS director Arno Cammerer, even as early as 1935, was crediting the CCC with advancing state parks by fifty years. I would not presume to quantify the CCC’s impact in quite that way, but without doubt the contributions the program made during that exceptional nine-year period, 1933-1942, constitute the greatest defining influence in the history of state parks to date. It would not be an overstatement to say that the CCC is an essential and inseparable part of the state park heritage. That is so not just because of the more than \$300 million spent in building and improving over four hundred parks in forty-two states – nor even because of the hundreds of new park properties the states were able, by hook or by crook, to round up for themselves in order to qualify for CCC camps. The most enduring legacy of the CCC lies in the intrinsic state park culture that germinated, took root, and flourished during that brief period. It is unlikely that such a compressed evolution could have occurred in any other situation, and in that respect

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<sup>68</sup> Suzie Rogers, notes of her conversation with various Arkansas State Parks personnel during Arkansas legislative subcommittee tour sponsored by Arkansas State Parks, May 23, 2001, historical files, BNR.

<sup>69</sup> Earl A. Hasselbrock, Regional Director, Southwest Region, NPS to Louis Wall, Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, December 22, 1978, and Wall to Hasselbrock, January 4, 1979, historical files, BNR.

the Civilian Conservation Corps did more than anything else to shape the state park movement as we know it today.<sup>70</sup>

## SUMMARY

The Great Depression and the New Deal formed a watershed in the history of the Buffalo River. Decades of increasingly difficult circumstances for Buffalo River farmers climaxed in the dual crisis of drought and farm commodity price collapse in the years 1930-1935. Many farmers who had once supplemented their farm income with wage work in the mining and timbering industries had to fall back on their farm production alone to meet their needs. For some farmers who had come to produce mostly for the market, hard times forced them to revert to an earlier type of farming that emphasized crop diversity and self-sufficiency. For other farmers the new imperative to emphasize self-sufficiency was not very different from the "safety first" approach that they had traditionally followed. Still, hard times introduced a new set of pressures and some of these people lost their farms. Young people who reached adulthood in the 1930s were especially hard-pressed.

The government intervened to assist farmers and rural communities in restructuring their agricultural economy. Government conservation, which had begun at the turn of the century with the creation of national forests, gained momentum in the 1930s with the development of large hydroelectric dams, soil conservation efforts, and the building of state parks. Tourism also grew during the period. The combined effects of agricultural adjustment, conservation, and tourism were to create a more diversified economy and landscape along the Buffalo and throughout the surrounding region.

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<sup>70</sup> Landrum, *The State Park Movement in America*, 153-154.



Figure 61. Sweethearts. *Robert Shroll collection, Buffalo National River.*

## CHAPTER NINE

### OUT-MIGRATION AND IN-MIGRATION, 1942-1972

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World War II put millions of Americans in motion – to factory jobs in cities, to training camps and battle fronts, to relocation centers, even to resorts for much needed rest and relaxation. For many young men and women who were living on hardscrabble farms in the Ozarks, the war gave them compelling reasons to leave the area and experience something different. Some served in the armed forces; others went to work in war industries located a day or two's bus ride from home where they acquired financial independence and new outlooks. When these young people came home after the war, it was often with the idea of migrating somewhere else when the time was right.

World War II initiated a period of massive out-migration and in-migration for the Buffalo River valley. Thousands of people left the area to escape life on the farm, which seemed increasingly meager and precarious relative to the world outside. Thousands of others moved into the area in search of new lifestyles in a more pastoral environment. Population replacement resulted in many small communities withering away as others grew in size. In general, farms were abandoned while small towns like Harrison gained population. A new wave of back-to-the-land people came to occupy some of the failed farms, but usually their tenure was short-lived. For those longtime farm residents who stayed, meanwhile, the postwar era brought profound changes in the way they farmed and in what crops they produced. The net results for lands that are now within Buffalo National River were dramatic population decline and a reversion of much farmland to forest and brush. Changes in the postwar economy of the Buffalo River valley set the stage for the creation of Buffalo National River.

This chapter is in four sections that address, in order, national defense and dam projects, modern agriculture, out-migration, and in-migration. Since these experiences in the Buffalo River were shared by the Ozark region and indeed the entire South, some references are made to these wider geographic contexts; however, the focus remains on the Buffalo River valley.

#### NATIONAL DEFENSE AND DAM PROJECTS

The warm climate of the South made it an attractive region for Army training camps and airfields, as well as war industries, making the Ozarks a bee hive of national defense projects during World War II. The influx of people to these facilities created new markets for truck farming and other agricultural produce. In some parts of the Ozarks, farmers once again found supplemental wage work doing construction jobs related to war mobilization.<sup>1</sup> Frederick Simpich, a staff writer for *National Geographic Magazine*, who knew the Ozarks from vacation trips to the region in his Illinois boyhood, did a story in 1943 on the transformation taking place there. "Today, riding through this

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<sup>1</sup> Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South*, 694-697, 703-704.

once easygoing, leisure-loving land, I sense a grim new spirit – an all-out effort to win the war,” he wrote. “Hill men who used to work for maybe \$1 a day now get \$1.25 an hour driving graders, scrapers, trucks, and bulldozers. Hundreds of these big yellow-painted road-making machines bore deep, straight trenches through the virgin hills, building yet more and more access roads to Army camps and new factory sites.”<sup>2</sup> While no actual military installations appeared in the Buffalo River valley, the rush of activity in the surrounding region lifted the economy.

The most significant of national defense projects in the Ozarks was Norfolk Dam. The nation needed cheap, abundant electricity with which to produce aluminum and other alloys needed for the manufacture of war materiel. Construction of the dam proceeded apace. In 1943, the Army engineers closed the gates on the White River and water began pooling behind the new dam. In June 1944, the reservoir was full and the dam began producing power. The big dam was 220 feet high and 2,700 feet long. The reservoir, named Norfolk Lake, covered 30,700 acres and had 510 miles of shoreline.<sup>3</sup>

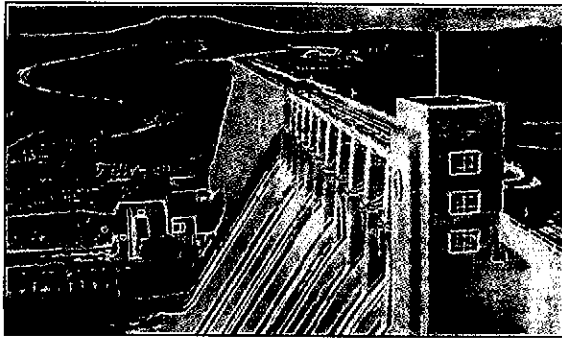


Figure 62. Norfolk Dam. *Oldfamilyphotos.com*.

After World War II, the Army Corps of Engineers proceeded to develop flood control projects in the White River basin that had been studied and put on hold before the war. With the success of Norfolk Dam’s power generating facility, two large multipurpose dams were added to those previously described in the Army Corps of Engineers’ Memphis District plan: Bull Shoals Dam near Mountain Home, Arkansas, and Table Rock Dam near

Branson, Missouri. Bull Shoals Dam was completed in 1951. Bull Shoals Lake was approximately double the size of Norfolk Lake, covering 71,200 surface acres and rimmed by 1050 miles of shoreline. Table Rock Dam was completed in 1958 and the reservoir began to fill that November. Table Rock Lake would have a surface area of 52,300 acres and 850 miles of shoreline.<sup>4</sup> Two more dams were completed by the Army Corps of Engineers in 1964: Greers Ferry Dam on the Little Red River and Beaver Dam on the upper White. Although these two were the last dams built in the Arkansas Ozarks, the Corps still had several more in the planning stage, including a number on the Buffalo River.<sup>5</sup>

The dams signaled the beginning of enormous changes to the culture, economy, and natural landscape of the Ozarks in the postwar era. Many people who lived in the hills saw the dams as a threat to their way of life if not to their very homes. As each dam neared construction stage, the government bought out hundreds of old homesteads that

<sup>2</sup> Frederick Simpich, “Land of a Million Smiles,” *National Geographic Magazine*, 83 (May 1943), 589.

<sup>3</sup> Rathbun, *Castle on the Rock*, 58.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 68, 72-73.

<sup>5</sup> Compton, *The Battle for the Buffalo River*, 20-22.



were to be drowned under the reservoirs. Farmers might believe they received a fair price for their farm, but that did not mollify their fear of what they would do with the money, where they would go, and how they would cope with their loss of place. Some farmers took the government payment and bought other farms in the area; some retired to nearby towns.<sup>6</sup> Often farmers who lived in condemned valleys did not want anything to do with the barren hilltops so they left the region altogether. One journalist wrote disparagingly of this exodus: “They went away, on the money the electric company paid them for their land – which was more cash than they’d ever had before. Some of them bought shiny automobiles and went to California, forgetting that their land – their subsistence – was gone. A lot of these wound up as ‘Okies.’”<sup>7</sup>

While some were victimized by water resource development projects, many others benefited. The dams produced cheap electricity, which attracted industry to the area. Manufacturing jobs increased. The reservoirs were an unexpected boon to tourism, laying a new foundation for tourism after World War II. The dam projects also drew publicity. As tourism grew, so did the number of people interested in having vacation homes and retirement homes in the area. Postwar prosperity increased the popularity of boating and water sports, making the reservoirs magnets for recreation and leisure. Finally, the new hydropower in the region hastened rural electrification. Many farmers acquired electricity in their homes during the 1940s and 1950s.<sup>8</sup>

The large dams practically brought an end to the commercial fishing industry on the upper White River. Discharges of impounded water lowered the river’s temperature,



Figure 63. Lorene (Scroggins) Shroll and husband Robert Shroll posed for this portrait on the old Buffalo River bridge at Boxley shortly before Robert enlisted in the army, 1942. *Robert Shroll collection, Buffalo National River.*

driving out warm-water fish species. Frequent small fluctuations in the river level changed the character of shoal areas, making them less productive food sources for fish. The dams also reduced the frequency and severity of floods, which led to more agricultural land use in the floodplain and more agricultural chemicals being flushed into the river. These environmental changes all but eliminated the commercial fishery downstream from the Buffalo River, replacing it with a sport fishery.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> B. Asbell, “The Vanishing Hillbilly,” *Saturday Evening Post*, 234 (September 23, 1961): 95.

<sup>7</sup> Phil Strong, “The Friendly Ozarks,” *Holiday*, 10 (August 1951): 94.

<sup>8</sup> Rathbun, *Castle on the Rock*, 69.

<sup>9</sup> Bill Mathis, “The Rise and Decline of Commercial Fishing on the White River,” *Arkansas Game and Fish*, 3, no. 1 (Spring 1970): 2-4.

## MODERN AGRICULTURE

Agriculture in the Buffalo River valley changed markedly in the postwar era. A number of influences were at work: out-migration made land available for farm consolidation, better roads and the rise of commercial trucking led to a shift in agricultural markets, and growing prosperity allowed farmers to acquire new technology and embrace farm mechanization.

In the three decades following World War II, more than 3,000 farms in the three-county area were sold, foreclosed upon, or abandoned. The amount of land in farms declined as farmers moved to town or migrated out of the area. In Newton County the total acreage in farms decreased from 170,683 acres in 1945 to 98,638 acres in 1974, a loss of about 42 percent. In Searcy County the total land in farms fell from 230,453 acres to 170,747 acres over the same time span, a drop of 25 percent. In Marion County the total land in farms went from 169,604 acres in 1945 to 132,756 acres in 1974, a drop of 21 percent.<sup>10</sup> A substantial part of the acreage that went out of farms reverted to timber land.

Within the acreage that stayed in farms, there was a significant shift in land use from row crops to cow pasture. According to U.S. census data, the amount of "cropland used only for pasture" approximately doubled in each county from 1945 to 1974. Added to "woodland used for pasture," these two land uses accounted for more than two-thirds of all land in farms.<sup>11</sup>

One farmer's loss was often another farmer's gain as those who stayed in the area added to their land holdings. Some farm families acquired immense holdings; the Cash family in Richland Valley owned several thousand acres. In place of the old pattern of numerous small farms growing a variety of grains, row crops, and livestock, the new pattern was one of larger farms that mostly grew hay and cattle. The average farm size in the three-county area more than doubled from 1945 to 1974, increasing from 126 to 258 acres, but this rise in the average farm size only hinted at the change in agriculture where large land holdings were concerned. In the Richland Valley, for example, the fertile bottomland became one immense sea of hay, interrupted only here and there by a large shade tree.

Farmers converted to hay and cattle production in response to market forces. The single biggest factor altering agricultural markets was the rise of commercial trucking after World War II. The trucking industry joined Ozark farmers to more distant markets. This worked two ways: farmers benefited from lower freight costs because they could sell their produce to more distant buyers; but farmers also suffered from lower freight costs as trucks brought more cheap, processed foods into the area, taking away the farmers' local markets. Long-haul trucks first negatively impacted Ozark farmers by

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<sup>10</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, *U.S. Census of Agriculture: 1945, Vol. 1, Part 23, Arkansas*, 27-31; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *U.S. Census of Agriculture: 1974, Vol. 1, Part 4, Arkansas*, II-1 to II-4.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

causing the demise of local canneries. Although Ozark tomatoes were considered to be a very high grade of tomato, tomato canneries in the Ozarks could not compete against giant canning industries that arose in the Midwest and distributed their products to supermarket chains throughout the central United States. Trucking, in this case, undermined the Ozark farmer as it lowered the cost of distribution and drove local tomato canneries out of business.<sup>12</sup> By 1960, the only significant tomato canneries remaining in the Arkansas Ozarks were centered around Springdale.<sup>13</sup>

Cotton agriculture made its last stand in the Buffalo River valley area about the same time as the tomato canneries. In 1940, the U.S. Census Bureau counted 318 farms in Marion County reporting cotton production, 286 in Searcy County, and 86 in Newton County. By 1959, the number of cotton farms had fallen to 4 in Marion County, 9 in Searcy County, and 3 in Newton County, and in 1964 there were just 120 acres of cotton planted in the three-county area.<sup>14</sup>

Corn, for so many decades the staple crop of Ozark farms, also practically disappeared from the valley in this era. The total acreage planted in corn in the three-county area in 1945 was 22,132 acres. This plunged to 8,338 acres in 1959, on the way to just 354 acres in 1974. The decline of cotton and corn was matched by the expansion of hay production – from 1,495 acres in 1964 to 20,686 acres ten years later.<sup>15</sup>



Figure 64. Agricultural field, Boxley Valley. Many former corn fields in the Buffalo River valley went over to hay production and cow pasture. *Suzie Rogers photo, Buffalo National River.*

Strawberry crops flourished for a short time and then went away. In 1937, 26 farmers came together in Searcy County to form the Flintlock Strawberry Growers Association. Strawberry production spread in the region during World War II, and in 1956 the association claimed 456 members and more than \$1 million in sales. But in the next decade the center of strawberry

<sup>12</sup> Wilson, *The Bodacious Ozarks*, 51.

<sup>13</sup> Dicke, "Red Gold in the Ozarks," 22.

<sup>14</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, *U.S. Census of Agriculture: 1945, Vol. 1, Part 23, Arkansas*, 56-76; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *U.S. Census of Agriculture: 1959, Vol. 1, Part 34, Arkansas*, 203-205; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *U.S. Census of Agriculture: 1964, Vol. 1, Part 34, Arkansas*, 325-327, 332-335, 341-343.

<sup>15</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, *U.S. Census of Agriculture: 1945, Vol. 1, Part 23, Arkansas*, 56-76; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *U.S. Census of Agriculture: 1959, Vol. 1, Part 34, Arkansas*, 203-205; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *U.S. Census of Agriculture: 1974, Vol. 1, Part 4, Arkansas*, II-32 to II-40.

production in Arkansas moved to the eastern edge of the Ozarks in White County.<sup>16</sup>

Instead of corn, cotton, tomatoes, and strawberries, farmers grew more hay to feed their growing herds of cattle, which increased from year to year. By the 1960s, farmers in Searcy County were raising dairy cows as well as beef cattle. Local historian Orville J. McInturff described the conversion to cattle farming in this period as nothing less than a “stampede.”<sup>17</sup>

TABLE 3. COWS AND CALVES, MARION, SEARCY, AND NEWTON COUNTIES, 1945-1974

	MARION	SEARCY	NEWTON
1945	15,102	13,419	11,780
1954	16,387	16,339	14,033
1959	15,300	18,210	12,471
1964	18,517	20,033	13,982
1974	25,774	29,579	19,143

With the rise of cattle ranching and dairying in the Ozarks, a movement arose to end open-range livestock grazing in the region. Although hog farmers had long resisted any fencing of livestock range, they now found themselves outnumbered. The Forest Service supported the movement and served notice that it would trap and remove thousands of hogs that trespassed on the Ozark National Forest. When trapping operations began in 1966, hog farmers responded by setting fires in the woods. For a time, the Forest Service faced the ire of the local populace. After Forest Service rangers trapped and impounded the trespassing hogs, they would return them to the owners only if the owners agreed to pay costs. As many owners refused to claim the hogs, they were then sold at auction. Hog farmers showed their opposition to the Forest Service by frequently shunning these auctions. In the long run, however, hog farmers had to accept enclosure of grazing lands.<sup>18</sup>

Mechanization also played a significant part in the shift from row crops to cattle farming. According to McInturff, the appearance of the bulldozer soon after World War II enabled farmers to clear land more cheaply and quickly and to create stock ponds where high pastures were lacking water for livestock. As a result, some ridge tops and hillsides were brought into use as pasture for the first time. Equally important, the bushhog allowed farmers to rip up each year’s spring growth of weeds from their hayfields for far less effort. “The bushhog is proving to be one of the greatest blessings to ever come to man,” McInturff wrote in 1974. “It enabled the farmer to remove his cramped fingers from around the hoe handle, lift his eyes from the ground and the ‘confounded’ weeds and sprouts, wipe the sweat from his face, and feel like a man!”<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Blevins, *Hills Folks*, 152.

<sup>17</sup> McInturff, “The Evolution of Searcy County’s Economy,” *Mountain Wave* (Marshall), May 23, 1974.

<sup>18</sup> Sharon M. W. Bass, *For the Trees: An Illustrated History of the Ozark-St. Francis National Forests 1908-1978* (Atlanta: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, 1981), 123-124.

<sup>19</sup> McInturff, “The Evolution of Searcy County’s Economy,” *Mountain Wave* (Marshall), May 23, 1974.

Bulldozers, better roads, and the rise of trucking also created new conditions for commercial logging. Farmers sold timber on their property to loggers, who sometimes bulldozed temporary logging roads in order to access remote stands of timber. Logging occurred in this way in Hemmed-in-Hollow and Lost Valley in the early 1960s, much to the dismay of preservationists who were eyeing these areas for potential state park or national park designation. Indeed, renewed logging activity in the 1950s and 1960s was one development that propelled the movement to establish Buffalo National River.<sup>20</sup>

## OUT-MIGRATION

Population decline and replacement were phenomena affecting the whole rural South in the decades following World War II. Although the population trends were obvious they were difficult to measure because out-migration was masked to some extent by in-migration and even more by natural population increase. Indeed, the rural South was long identified as a region of exceptionally high birth rates – so high that it was sometimes called the “seedbed” of the nation. And while the South as a whole exhibited high birth rates compared to the rest of the nation, it was in the remote highland sections such as the Ozarks that birth rates were generally highest of all. Thus, when the farm population in these sections fell, it fell in the face of high birth rates among the population that stayed.<sup>21</sup>

Taking into account these factors, it can be seen that population census figures do not reveal the full extent of farm abandonment in the postwar era. Across the South, the population on farms peaked in the 1920s and declined every year thereafter through the 1950s with the exception of two years: 1932, when cities were in the grip of the worst year of the Depression, and 1946, when the conversion of war industries back to peacetime pursuits and the demobilization of the armed services sent thousands of people back to the farm. At the other extreme, the year that saw the single largest out-migration from Southern farms was 1942, when the lure of military service and wartime factory jobs caused an estimated 1,670,000 more people to leave farms than to arrive on them.<sup>22</sup>



Figure 65. J. J. Hickman in front of his Erbie Store and Post Office, June 1941. Robert Hickman collection, Buffalo National River.

<sup>20</sup> Smith interview.

<sup>21</sup> Homer L. Hitt, “Population Movements in the Southern United States,” *Scientific Monthly*, 82 (May 1956): 241.

<sup>22</sup> Hitt, “Population Movements in the Southern United States,” 242.

The best index of farm population decline in the Buffalo River valley comes from the *U.S. Census of Agriculture*, which counted the number of farms by county, as shown in the following table.<sup>23</sup>

TABLE 4: NUMBER OF FARMS IN MARION, SEARCY, AND NEWTON COUNTIES, 1940-1974

	MARION COUNTY	SEARCY COUNTY	NEWTON COUNTY	TOTAL	PERCENT DECREASE
1940	1,537	1,957	1,926	5,420	
1945	1,261	1,714	1,537	4,512	16.7
1954	993	1,322	1,261	3,576	20.7
1959	733	1,153	958	2,844	20.5
1964	737	1,039	823	2,599	8.6
1969	554	645	475	1,674	35.5
1974	497	594	466	1,557	6.9

The pattern was similar in all three counties. Newton County experienced the greatest overall decline with roughly a quarter the number of farms in 1974 that there had been in 1940. Searcy County started and ended the period with slightly more farms than Newton County, but experienced nearly the same rate of decrease. Marion County lost somewhat fewer farms both in absolute and relative terms, ending the period with roughly a third the number of farms it had in 1940. It should be remembered that these numbers include in-migration and natural increase, so that the rate of farm abandonment was even greater than these numbers show.

People left their farms because they found they could not make a decent living on them. While much of the nation enjoyed newfound prosperity after World War II, farmers did not share in the wealth nearly to the same extent. Farm commodity prices did not rise at the same rate as manufactures and services, and farm incomes remained abysmally low compared to non-farm incomes. By 1960, the median annual income of urban families in the United States stood at \$6,166. By comparison, the median annual income of rural farm families and rural non-farm families nationwide was just \$3,228 and \$4,750 respectively.<sup>24</sup> For Ozark residents the situation was still worse. In Marion County the median annual income of a family was \$2,260; in Searcy County, \$2,066; in Newton County, \$1,666.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, *U.S. Census of Agriculture: 1945, Vol. 1, Part 23, Arkansas*, 27-31; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *U.S. Census of Agriculture: 1954, Vol. 1, Part 23, Arkansas*, 65-67; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *U.S. Census of Agriculture: 1959, Vol. 1, Counties, Part 34, Arkansas*, 140-143; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *U.S. Census of Agriculture: 1964, Vol. 1 Part 34, Arkansas*, 237-239; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *U.S. Census of Agriculture: 1974, Vol. 1, Part 4, Arkansas*, II-1-II-4.

<sup>24</sup> M. L. Upchurch, "Progress in Resolving the Problem of Rural Poverty," *Journal of Farm Economics*, 46 (May 1964): 429-436.

<sup>25</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, *U.S. Census of Population: 1960, Vol. 1, Characteristics of the Population, Part 5, Arkansas* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1963), 5-232-5-234.

Buffalo River farmers fell behind their compatriots in other parts of the nation in other respects besides income. While the rapid adoption of the gas-powered tractor was revolutionizing agriculture in the Midwest, for example, few farmers along the Buffalo were able to afford one. Even though the number of tractors on Ozark farms tripled during World War II, only five percent of Ozark farmers owned a tractor when the postwar era began. This compared to a quarter of farmers nationwide. And cost was not the only impediment to adopting the tractor; the small size of most Ozark farms made that kind of investment impractical. Twenty years later, nearly half of all Ozark farmers still did not own a tractor.<sup>26</sup> Meanwhile, Ozark farmers adopted the automobile much more readily. In 1945, approximately 12 percent of Newton County farms had cars and 12 percent had trucks, while just a decade and a half later, about 40 percent of Newton County farms had cars and 60 percent had trucks. Searcy and Marion county farms followed a similar pattern.<sup>27</sup>

Improvements in housing conditions, notably indoor plumbing and electrical service, also lagged in the Ozarks compared to most other parts of the nation. Only a small fraction of farm houses in the three counties were equipped with running water in 1945. A decade later, 22 percent of farm houses had running water, but in many cases this was limited to cold water running to a kitchen sink; it remained for the house to be furnished with hot water, bathtub or shower, and an indoor toilet.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, a small fraction of homes in Newton, Searcy, and Marion counties had electricity in 1945. Over the next decade three-quarters of homes in Newton County and a higher fraction of homes in Searcy and Marion counties received electricity. Rural electrification came through the efforts of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association under the leadership of former Arkansas congressman Clyde T. Ellis.

Such conditions appeared harsh to most outsiders. Drawing upon a wealth of comparative data collected in the U.S. Census for 1950 and 1960, rural sociologist Hughes H. Spurlock wrote in 1966 that rural housing conditions in the Ozarks were in many ways worse than tenement housing in urban ghettos, even though the latter had received much more attention. "Rural housing, though less clustered for all to see, is as poor in quality as urban housing and in some respects, such as plumbing facilities, rural housing is in much worse condition," Spurlock observed.<sup>29</sup> Even such seemingly objective criteria as number of people per room carried value judgments that did not always square with local attitudes and conditions, however. For example, in the region's warm climate much of the household activity occurred on the porch or outside the house, a circumstance that was not directly comparable with urban housing units or with farm houses located in cooler climates.

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<sup>26</sup> Blevins, *Hill Folks*, 150.

<sup>27</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, *U.S. Census of Agriculture: 1945*, 41-45; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *U.S. Census of Agriculture: 1959*, 173-175.

<sup>28</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, *U.S. Census of Agriculture: 1945*, 41-45; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *U.S. Census of Agriculture: 1954*, 95-98; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *U.S. Census of Housing: 1950*, 4-75-4-78.

<sup>29</sup> Hughes H. Spurlock, *Rural Housing Conditions in the Arkansas, Missouri, and Oklahoma Ozarks*, Arkansas Agricultural Experiment Station, Bulletin 736 (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas, 1966), 11.

Much of the rural poverty found in the Ozarks in the postwar decades related not just to depressed income but to the continuing isolation of farms and rural communities. For some residents, these circumstances were not all bad. Years after the Searcy County hamlet of Snowball faded away, a former resident wrote about it fondly in the *Mountain Wave*:

Early Snowball's isolation was not a hindrance. It was a place, a geographical location – but it wasn't a place that just happened to sit on a map that made it unique or even "Southern." It was the attitude of the people who populated the place, where life was family, home and work. Life was to be lived and hardships shouldered. Residents were a kind of people who toiled with their hands and valued a job well done. If Snowball had a product, it was a feeling of "homeyness."<sup>30</sup>

Still, despite these virtues, many people left. The younger generation, especially, found reason to migrate. Generally they went in search of better living standards. Many of these uprooted people moved into urban ghettos in numerous cities. By the early 1960s, it was estimated that Chicago had a revolving "hillbilly" population of perhaps 30,000. The internal migration increased awareness about the deep poverty still besetting isolated sections of the South.<sup>31</sup>

Experts in farm policy wrestled with how to address the problem of rural poverty in the United States and rural poverty in the South in particular. It was recognized that the farmers' plight stemmed from multiple sources and that often a farmer was burdened by two or more problems working in combination. Farmers lacked capital to invest in modern equipment; they lacked education to organize and manage their farm operations; they might be handicapped by cultural attitudes or motivational issues; and many were faced with physical limitations such as health problems or old age. Rejecting old panaceas such as protective tariffs or commodity price supports with which to buttress the ailing agricultural sector of the economy, farm policy experts came to assume that farmers must adapt to changing conditions by running their farms as businesses.<sup>32</sup> Those who did not adjust had little choice but to abandon their farms and seek wage jobs elsewhere.

Early in his administration, President John F. Kennedy sought and obtained legislation to invest federal funds in certain depressed areas of the nation. Under the Area Redevelopment Act, Kennedy formed the Area Redevelopment Administration in May 1961. The first federal grant under the program went to Marion and Baxter counties for construction of a water tank in connection with the establishment of a new textile factory. The factory was located in Mountain Home. Altogether the water tower and

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<sup>30</sup> Helen Snow to Editor, *Mountain Wave* (Marshall), July 28, 1984.

<sup>31</sup> "Wanna Go Home," *Newsweek*, 62, no. 6 (August 5, 1963): 30.

<sup>32</sup> Roger C. Woodworth, "Solution to the Problem of Low Income in the South: Farm Reorganization," *Journal of Farm Economics*, 39 (December 1957): 1462-70.



factory enterprise represented a \$1,195,000 investment aimed at holding families in the area that might otherwise have migrated out.<sup>33</sup>

Government measures to ease the plight of poor farmers in the South only temporarily stemmed the tide of out-migration. Indeed, the rate of farm abandonment in Newton, Searcy, and Marion counties reached an all-time high between 1964 and 1969, roughly coinciding with the years of President Johnson's War on Poverty. And not just farms but whole rural communities were depopulated. Hamlets situated along the river such as Carver, Mt. Hersey, and Woolum lost all of their inhabitants. The crossroads community of Eula in upper Richland Valley practically ceased to exist. According to a study of rural housing conditions in the Ozarks, the U.S. Census of Housing for 1960 counted a total of 50,749 vacant housing units in the region. As this number was based on a survey of 125 counties in Missouri, Arkansas, and Oklahoma, that figured to an average of 405 vacant buildings per county. More than four-fifths of these housing units were vacant year round, and a quarter – roughly 100 buildings per county – were abandoned.<sup>34</sup>

Population loss in the Buffalo River valley also resulted in abandonment of rural churches. When congregations were reduced to remnants, ministers had to go elsewhere to make a living. Christian leaders bemoaned the decline of farm communities, noting that while the root of the problem lay in the economic plight of farmers, churches could do more to stem the tide. As churches were often the center of a rural community, these critics observed, loss of a church had a demoralizing effect for a struggling community.<sup>35</sup> While churches at Carver and on the bluff opposite Pruitt disappeared, churches serving the communities of Boxley and Erbie survived.<sup>36</sup>



Figure 66. Erbie Church, 1977. Despite depopulation of Erbie, a congregation continued to hold regular services here until 2000. Fred Mang, Jr. collection, Buffalo National River.

Ozarks historian Brooks Blevins notes that depopulation, together with other effects of the changing postwar economy, “deeply altered the fabric of Ozark society and culture.” As farm families pulled up stakes, Blevins writes, “rural communities dwindled, crossroads stores closed their doors and boarded their windows, church rolls shrank, and consolidation closed small country schools.”<sup>37</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Julius Duscha, “Aid for Our Own Undeveloped Areas,” *The Reporter*, 26 (February 1, 1962): 36-39.

<sup>34</sup> Spurlock, *Rural Housing Conditions in the Arkansas, Missouri, and Oklahoma Ozarks*, 11.

<sup>35</sup> “Sectarianism and Paganism in Agriculture,” *Christian Century*, 70 (April 15, 1953): 439-440.

<sup>36</sup> A church symbol appears near Pruitt on the USGS quadrangle map for Jasper, Ark. made in 1967.

<sup>37</sup> Blevins, *Hill Folks*, 179.

## IN-MIGRATION

In the postwar era there was a counter flow of people moving into the Arkansas Ozarks – and into the Buffalo River valley specifically – which was sometimes identified as a second “back-to-the-land” movement. The first back-to-the-land movement, it will be recalled, occurred in the early years of the Great Depression and resulted from a lack of jobs in the cities. The second back-to-the-land movement was motivated not so much by economics as by ideology. Typically the people who took up farming in the region after World War II were making a lifestyle choice, leaving their city jobs and forsaking their urban homes for a preferred life in the country. They tended to idealize what they expected to find in their new endeavor. The qualities they were looking for included a slow pace of life, friendly neighbors, spacious surroundings, and natural beauty – in short, an Arcadia. “Here everyone has space,” wrote one of these new settlers in 1955, “and time, like clear mountain air, is abundant, limitless, inexhaustible.”<sup>38</sup>

Julia McAdoo and her husband, seeking their own Arcadian dream in 1953, bought a tract of land “in the hills of Northern Arkansas.” (It may have been in the Buffalo River valley; her article does not make the location clear.) In an article for *American Mercury*, she extolled the virtuous people whom she had come to call her neighbors.

In these secluded hills where telephones are rare, and roads are bare of traffic, where jobs are few and industry unknown, lives a race, a people, quite different from most. Unimpressed by riches, unafraid of poverty, serene, not humble and not proud. These “hillbillies,” these woodsmen, have no set standard of living, no respect for money, nor fame, nor caste. They know no greed, no envy, no subserviency. These unimpressive men in unimpressive garb, though poor they seem, are immensely rich.<sup>39</sup>

McAdoo went on to give examples of the local people’s pleasure in simple things, humble pride, and extraordinary honesty. She was impressed, too, by how many of her neighbors had once held city jobs or traveled around but had chosen to come back home. Giving clues to the world she had left behind, she wrote: “Life is simple here. There is no need to be on guard, or count the change, or lock the doors.”<sup>40</sup>

The postwar back-to-the-land movement peaked in the 1960s and early 1970s under the influence of the Counterculture. Longtime residents of the Buffalo River valley referred to these newcomers as “hippies.”<sup>41</sup> Indeed, a number of hippie communes formed in the area in the early 1970s. According to historian Timothy Miller, a commune known both as Mulberry Farm and Mulberry School was established in Pettigrew, Madison County. The New Beginnings Community formed in nearby Dutton,

<sup>38</sup> Julia McAdoo, “Where the Poor Are Rich,” *American Mercury*, 81 (September 1955): 87.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>41</sup> Smith interview.

Madison County, in the mid-1970s. Meanwhile, two communes developed near the town of Leslie in southern Searcy County: Indian Camp in the early 1970s and a group called the Leslie Folks a few years later. Farther from the Buffalo River, a commune called Dharma Masa formed in Stone County, Arkansas, while a group known as Edge City took up residence in southern Missouri. The hippie communes were often committed to non-mechanized forms of agriculture, environmentally benign uses of technology, and simple living. They practiced a “voluntary primitivism,” consciously rejecting farm methods and technologies that were seen as insidious causes of the environmental crisis. Some communes strove to preserve nature.<sup>42</sup>

Another important group that contributed to the in-migration was retirees. Retirees were attracted to the Arkansas Ozarks for similar reasons that drew back-to-the-land people to the region: land was relatively cheap, countryside was spacious and pleasing to the eye, and the local people were friendly and trustworthy. The sunny, warm climate of the Ozarks also appealed to the elderly, especially after the invention and spread of air conditioning ameliorated summer heat. In particular, the climate attracted Midwesterners as they were accustomed to humid summers and appreciative of the area’s mild winters. By the 1950s and 1960s, numerous planned retirement communities had taken root in the Arkansas Ozarks such as Cherokee Village Development Community, Horseshoe Bend Development Community, and Bella Vista Village. While none of these impinged on lands that would become part of Buffalo National River, some retirees sought old farmsteads or houses on back roads away from the towns and planned retirement villages. “Midwestern retirees now occupy a permanent position in the Arkansas Ozarks,” historian Brooks Blevins has remarked, “and as more and more filter into the back country away from the planned retirement communities, their influence will be felt even in the most remote rural communities, the communities that have suffered the most from out-migration and agricultural transformation in the years since World War II.”<sup>43</sup>



Figure 67. Robert Hickman, April 1944. Home on furlough for the first time in 34 months, he posed for this photo in front of his chimney. *Robert Hickman collection, Buffalo National River.*

<sup>42</sup> Timothy Miller, *The 60's Communes: Hippies and Beyond* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999), 260-279.

<sup>43</sup> Brooks Blevins, “Retreating to the Hills: Population Replacement in the Arkansas Ozarks,” *Agricultural History*, 74, no. 2 (Spring 2000): 479-488; quote on 488.

Still another group composing the in-migration were native sons and daughters of the Ozarks who had left the region many years earlier. Often they were drawn back to the area by the desire to care of aging parents or to rekindle ties with their larger kin networks and former communities. Sometimes they, too, came in search of an Arcadia, even if it was an Arcadia they recalled from their youths. For decades, the Buffalo River valley and the whole Ozark region had exported a significant number of its young people to other parts of the nation – to work as migrant farm laborers, to toil in factories, to serve in the military, to pursue higher education, and in other pursuits. For those who stayed it was sad to see so many people migrate out of the region, but it was a source of strength and pride to see so many of them come home again.

### SUMMARY

Wartime mobilization of the economy and postwar federal dam projects transformed the Ozark region. The geographic isolation that had long acted to preserve the unique Ozark hill culture was further diminished, and the traditional agrarian way of life of hill farmers was further eroded by the importation of modern conveniences and technology and a changing demographic profile as many people left to take advantage of economic opportunities elsewhere. Out-migration from the Buffalo River valley began in the 1920s, leveled off during the Great Depression, and reached floodtide in the two decades beginning with World War II. In the 1960s and 1970s there was a countertrend of in-migration, which included some people who were intent on finding a simpler way of life in farming or country living; however, overall land use continued to move in the direction of farm abandonment and reversion of agricultural land to woodland. A related change in land use was that row crops yielded almost entirely to hay fields and cattle grazing.

## CHAPTER TEN

### TOURISM AND PRESERVATION, 1942-1972

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On April 18, 1941, 2,500 people gathered beside the Buffalo River in Searcy County for an all-day folk festival. It was said to be the largest gathering the county had ever seen. The chosen site was a natural amphitheater at the base of a bluff called the Rockhouse. The overhanging bluff had long been used as a shelter from stormy weather, as well as a popular place for social gatherings because of its fine acoustics. The event, sponsored by the Arkansas Agricultural Extension Service and the county's 27 home demonstration clubs, had been two years in the making. The event's planners had spent more than a month just planning logistics. A fleet of school buses was used to get the people from their homes to the river bluff. "It was a sight to behold, early that morning," wrote one of the organizers, "to see whole family groups, most of them on foot, collecting at designated places along the highways all over the county where the school buses were to stop to pick up loads and carry them to the festival and back at ten cents a head. All were dressed in their best, for this was to be a day of reunion for many friends and relatives who hadn't seen each other for forty years." The families carried musical instruments, handicrafts, and costumes for use in various dramas. A half dozen women brought their old wedding gowns that were to be modeled by their daughters in a parade and reenactment of an early day wedding. Everyone had baskets of food for a dinner on the ground.<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of the folk festival was to bring the people of Searcy County together for a day of merrymaking, fellowship, and proud celebration of their folk arts and crafts. Moreover, the festival aimed to bring attention to the "worthy traditional expressions" of the people so that their folklife might be "preserved or revived and take their rightful place in the cultural heritage of America."<sup>2</sup> A local newspaperman who covered the event noted that the festival attracted journalists and photographers from national magazines, and that one of these individuals had told him that the pictures would be "more valuable to the Ozarks in publicity than the filming of Jesse James."<sup>3</sup> Organizers hoped to make the folk festival an annual event. Although World War II prevented that from happening, the idea took hold and folk festivals became an important part of the cultural life of the Ozarks – and a major tourism attraction – in the postwar era.

Public interest in folklife had burgeoned during the preceding two decades. Around the time of World War I, much attention was given to preserving "mountain culture" in the southern Appalachians, and this set the stage for the discovery of similar folk traditions in the Ozarks. Horace Kephart's *Our Southern Highlanders* (1913), a romanticized treatment of mountain farmers in the Great Smoky Mountains of North Carolina and Tennessee, became a bestseller. *Century Magazine* ran an article in 1918 with the provocative title, "The Mountaineers: Our Own Lost Tribes." These and other

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<sup>1</sup> June Donahue, "Rural Arkansas Revives Its Folkways," *Recreation*, 35 (February 1942), 668; James J. Johnston, "Searcy County Folk Festival: 1941," *Mid-America Folklore* 17 (Fall 1989): 100-113.

<sup>2</sup> Johnston, "Searcy County Folk Festival: 1941," 102.

<sup>3</sup> Will Rice quoted in Johnston, "Searcy County Folk Festival: 1941," 109.

writings raised consciousness about the backwoods farmers' poverty at the same time that they celebrated their folk ways. It started a debate between interventionists and preservationists about the value and significance of this regional subculture. Interventionists argued that the nation had a responsibility to take steps, in the form of missionary work and educational and economic assistance, to lift the mountaineers out of their poverty and ignorance. Preservationists, on the other hand, pleaded for the Appalachian folk culture to be given respect. In the preservationists' view, the nation would be poorer if it lost the cultural diversity represented in the mountaineers' way of life. A growing number of writers and artists joined the chorus of voices calling for this unique subculture to be left alone.<sup>4</sup>

By the 1930s and 1940s, a similar discussion surrounded folklife in the Ozarks. Vance Randolph's *The Ozarks: An American Survival of Primitive Society* (1931) and Otto Rayburn's *Ozark Country* (1941) voiced the preservationist position, while Charles Morrow Wilson's *Backwoods America* (1934) and Catherine S. Barker's *Yesterday Today: Life in the Ozarks* (1941) leaned toward the interventionist view. However, by the time the broad American public discovered poverty in the Ozarks, the whole nation was coping with the Great Depression. The missionary zeal that had marked the public's response to conditions in the southern Appalachians more than a decade earlier had mostly passed.<sup>5</sup> The folklife revival in the Ozarks became tied to tourism development. The preservationist impulse in the Ozarks was less an opposing force to modernization than it was a handmaiden for it.

While the Ozarks folklife revival gave tourism a thematic structure, modernization of roads provided it with a necessary foundation. This chapter starts with the topic of modern road development. It then proceeds to sections on mass tourism, outdoor recreation, and the movement to preserve the Buffalo River as a free-flowing stream. The salient geographic context for this chapter is the Ozark region, as regionalism formed a key underpinning for public perceptions about the Buffalo River as an attractive place to visit, recreate, and preserve.

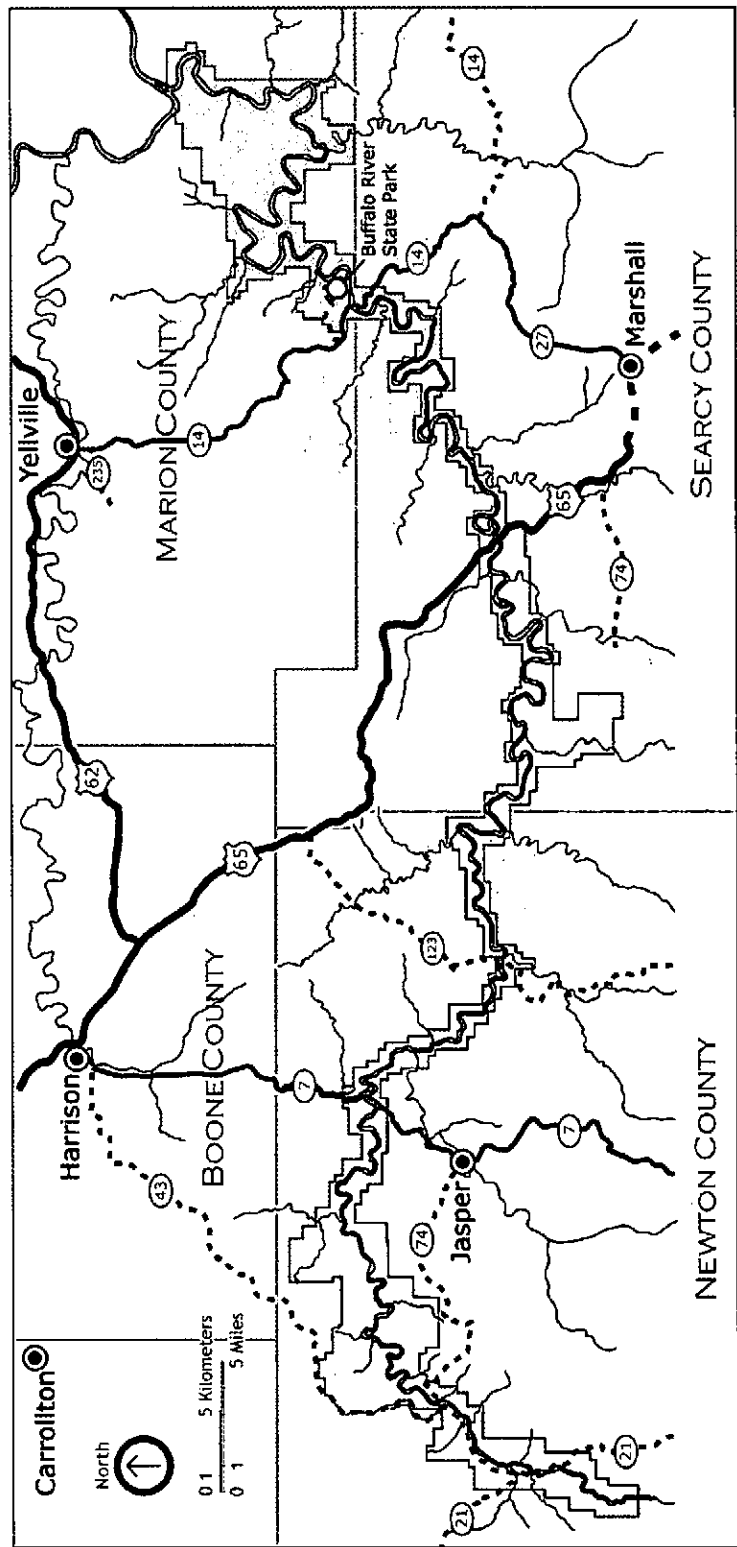
## MODERNIZATION OF ROADS

As noted in Chapter Seven, road improvements in the Arkansas Ozarks were a long time coming. World War II saw an acceleration of a process that had begun many years before. During the war, new roads were built to facilitate movement of men and materiel between army camps and training grounds. During and after the war, construction of big dams on the upper White River led to further heavy road construction. Road engineers experimented in this period with a variety of surfaces short of paving roads with concrete. County road maps produced by the Arkansas State Highway Commission in cooperation with the U.S. Bureau of Public Roads in the 1940s depicted

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<sup>4</sup> Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 428.

<sup>5</sup> Blevins, "In the Land of a Million Smiles," 18.



Map 13. Highways in 1960

the many gradations of road standards that existed up to that time. Roads were classified according to six categories of ascending quality: primitive, unimproved, graded and drained, metal surfaced, bituminous surfaced, and paved. By the end of the 1940s, practically all of the paved roads that traverse the Buffalo River drainage today were surfaced either with gravel or bituminous macadam, but none was yet paved. U.S. 65 was bituminous surfaced while State 7 from Harrison to Jasper and State 14 from Yellville to Marshall were both gravel surfaced. In western Newton County, State 74 from Jasper to Kingston and State 43 from Compton to Boxley were also gravel surfaced. State 123 through Hasty was not surfaced, though it was graded and drained.<sup>6</sup>

In the 1950s, federal and state funding of new highway construction, as well as funding for existing road improvements, increased substantially as the federal government embarked on an interstate highway system and states sought to develop supporting two-lane highways.<sup>7</sup> The decade of the 1950s saw a dramatic reduction in the gap between road standards in the Buffalo River valley and road standards elsewhere in Arkansas. At the beginning of the decade the proportion of roads that were paved grew from 1 percent to 33 percent in the Buffalo River area, compared to an increase from 20 percent to 51 percent statewide.<sup>8</sup> State Highway 7 between Harrison and Jasper was the first road in the Buffalo River valley to be completely paved. It was followed by State Highway 14 between Yellville and Harriett. On the latter, the last remaining gravel section was paved between 1957 and 1961.

Paving of highways led to much greater road use. An economic study of the Buffalo River area economy in 1963 noted that traffic had increased four times faster on this newly paved highway than on comparable highways in the state that were already paved. Much of this new traffic was bound for Buffalo River State Park, which saw a tripling of visitor numbers after the highway was paved. The additional traffic led to a doubling of revenues for business establishments located along the highway. U.S. Highway 65 was still gravel from around Gilbert to Marshall in 1961; it was paved sometime in the 1960s.<sup>9</sup>

At the same time that federal and state highways were being paved, county roads were being graded and surfaced with gravel. While highway construction was decisive in bringing more tourists and commerce, county road improvements were of more

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<sup>6</sup> Arkansas State Highway Commission in cooperation with U.S. Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Public Roads, "General Highway and Transportation Map, Marion County, Arkansas," 1947, "General Highway and Transportation Map, Searcy County, Arkansas," 1947, "General Highway and Transportation Map, Newton County, Arkansas," 1947. University of Arkansas Library Special Collections.

<sup>7</sup> McLaren, *Arkansas Highway History and Architecture, 1910-1965*, 11.

<sup>8</sup> Robert W. Bell, William A. Heffelfinger, and Elbert B. Johnson, "Economic Study of the Proposed Buffalo National River," prepared for National Park Service by Bureau of Business and Economic Research, Industrial Research and Extension Center, College of Business Administration, University of Arkansas, May 1963, Harold E. Alexander Papers, University of Central Arkansas Archives, Conway, Arkansas, p. 22.

<sup>9</sup> Arkansas State Highway Department, *Your State Highway System and its Future* (Little Rock: Arkansas State Highway Department, 1961), 56; Robert W. Bell, William A. Heffelfinger, and Elbert B. Johnson, "Economic Study of the Proposed Buffalo National River," 19-22.



importance to farmers. In 1959, 44 percent of farms in Marion, Searcy, and Newton counties remained five miles or more from an improved road. To get to these isolated farms it was necessary to leave the hard-surfaced or gravel county roads and drive over rough and twisting two-track lanes that were very slow at best. These road conditions prevented rural delivery and inhibited farm residents from leaving home. It was an indication of how oppressive the isolation of such farms could be in the new automobile age that large numbers of them were being abandoned in the 1950s. From 1950 to 1959, the number of farms in Marion, Searcy, and Newton counties served by hard-surfaced or gravel roads increased from 1,228 to 1,283 – a modest 4.4 percent. At the same time, the total number of farms in the three counties fell from 3,562 to 2,178. Nearly 39 percent of farms in 1950 ceased to be farms in the course of the decade.<sup>10</sup>

Social commentators had been observing the effects of modernization of roads on rural life and cultural values in the Ozarks since the 1930s. Usually they regarded these effects with mixed emotions. A common theme running through their commentary was the idea that improved roads brought tourists whose civilized ways introduced a destabilizing element into Ozark life. The earliest and most vociferous critic of the tourist was Vance Randolph, who scoffed at the idea that tourists were bringing helpful wads of cash into the area. Most of the tourists' cash, Randolph noted, went to town merchants, resort owners, and bootleggers. Tourists, Randolph wrote, "take advantage of the mountain man's hospitality, pay him nothing, corrupt his children, and ridicule his picturesque customs and traditions almost to his face."<sup>11</sup> Other commentators followed in this vein. Thomas Hart Benton, the famous landscape artist, who had come to prefer his native Missouri to the cosmopolitan social milieu in New York City and Chicago, asserted in 1934 that many denizens of the Arkansas Ozarks still possessed the "manners and psychologies" of Jacksonian America. "But the automobile has come," he wrote wistfully, "and with it passable roads and an influx from the modern world bringing its load of new ways, beliefs, and habits."<sup>12</sup>

W. O. Cralle, a professor of sociology, attempted to measure the effects of roads and automobiles on farm life in the Ozarks in a systematic fashion. Cralle identified four vectors of modernity that were chiefly responsible for breaking down the historic isolation of Ozark society: good roads, automobiles, radios, and urban daily newspapers. Using census data and records on newspaper circulation, he ranked Ozark counties according to their degree of "isolation" based on those four criteria. He then identified certain social statistics that were indicators of "rural" and "urban" influences. His chief indicators for "rural" influence in a population were a large average family size and a low divorce rate. His chief indicators for "urban" influence in a population were a high homicide rate, high rate of crimes against property, and high divorce rate. Cralle's "rural" attributes correlated strongly with those counties that were most "isolated"

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<sup>10</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of Agriculture: 1959, Vol. 1, Part 34, Arkansas* (Washington: Government Printing Office), 173-175.

<sup>11</sup> Randolph, *The Ozarks*, 300.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Hart Benton, "America's Yesterday in the Ozark Mountains of Arkansas," *Travel*, 63, no. 3 (July 1934), 8.

according to his method of ranking them. Conversely, “urban” attributes such as a high crime rate were most pronounced in those counties that were crossed by hard-surfaced roads. While Cralle’s classification of rural and urban traits may have been skewed by moral judgments, the data correlating these traits with access to good roads, car and radio ownership, and urban daily newspaper readership were evidently compelling. Cralle concluded that the Ozarks could be considered an “internally marginal subculture area whose essential uniqueness is being rapidly lost under the impact of modern civilization.”<sup>13</sup>

This idea that better roads and automobiles were piercing a veil of isolation in the Ozarks persisted in journalistic accounts of the region through the 1940s and 1950s. A writer for *National Geographic Magazine* in 1943 stated that new roads and the influx of motorists were transforming the Ozarks. “Swiftly now,” he wrote, “the Ozarks of song and story are changing. Isolation yields before radio, new roads, and the impact of nearby soldier camps.”<sup>14</sup> Ozark native Charles Morrow Wilson observed in 1959 that some hill folk resented the influence of the automobile even at that late date. More than the railroad, he noted, the automobile was succeeding in “destroying or powerfully undermining even the most stalwart breastworks of isolation.”<sup>15</sup> But travel writer William R. Wilson presented a cheerier picture of social change springing from the modernization of roads. Modern highways together with new manmade lakes had “transformed the Ozarks into an up-to-the-minute vacationland,” he wrote in 1959. “Yesterday’s hillbillies, corn dogs, old-time fiddlers, catfish bakes, and stream baptismal services have become almost as unique today as a pony express rider at a jet pilot’s convention.”<sup>16</sup>

Recent historians have generally affirmed the ideas espoused by journalists and sociologists on the effects of roads and tourism upon Ozark farm families in the middle decades of the twentieth century. Brooks Blevins points to much the same influences – road construction, automobiles, radio, rural electrification – that worked on the region in the 1930s to place it on the “threshold of modernity.” He states that “by World War II, the foundation had been laid for a massive transformation and depopulation in the Ozark region.”<sup>17</sup> Similarly, historians Lynn Morrow and Linda Myers-Phinney essentially agree with contemporary writers that roads, automobiles, and tourism ultimately “transformed” the Ozarks.<sup>18</sup> Howard Lawrence Preston, in *Dirt Roads to Dixie: Accessibility and Modernization in the South, 1885-1935*, focuses on the development of trunk line

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<sup>13</sup> W. O. Cralle, “Social Change and Isolation in the Ozark Mountain Region of Missouri.” *American Journal of Sociology*, 41 (January 1936): 445.

<sup>14</sup> Simpich, “Land of a Million Smiles,” 623.

<sup>15</sup> Charles Morrow Wilson, *The Bodacious Ozarks: True Tales of the Backhills* (New York: Hastings House Publishers, 1959), 176.

<sup>16</sup> William R. Wilson, “It’s Still Summer in the Ozarks,” *Today’s Health* 37 (September 1959): 42.

<sup>17</sup> Blevins, “In the Land of a Million Smiles,” 5.

<sup>18</sup> Lynn Morrow and Linda Myers-Phinney, *Shepherd of the Hills Country: Tourism Transforms the Ozarks, 1880s-1930s* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1999), 191, 199, 202-212.

highways, which he argues were crucial in forging stronger links with the North and raising the standard of living in the South.<sup>19</sup>

## MASS TOURISM

Folk music was the first element of Ozark folklife to attract national attention, as radio broadcasts in the late 1920s and 1930s popularized so-called hillbilly music and “barn dance programs” among a nationwide audience. In the early 1930s, Absie and Abbie Morrison of Searcy County, two well-known Ozark musicians, recorded hit versions of “Dry and Dusty” and “Ozark Waltz” with Victor after a company representative heard them perform in Little Rock. About a decade later, Eldon Britt, who was born James Elton Baker in Zack, Searcy County, became the region’s first commercial country music star.<sup>20</sup> In the 1950s, James Corbitt Morris, a middle-aged school teacher and songwriter of Mountain View, Arkansas, changed his name to Jimmy Driftwood and started his rapid climb to stardom. In 1957, he recorded his first album in Nashville, *Newly Discovered Early American Folk Songs*. Driftwood would soon secure top billing for Ozark musicians in the annual Arkansas Folk Festival held in Mountain View.

Before Ozark folk festivals became mass tourism events, however, tourists were lured to the region in increasing numbers by the Ozarks’ natural attractions, including several new lakes created by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (see Chapter Nine). Norfolk Lake, near Mountain Home, drew tourists in search of water sports and relaxation, while Bull Shoals Lake, in northern Marion County, was popular with anglers. People also came to enjoy the rugged scenery and relatively cool summer temperatures found in the Boston Mountains in the Ozark National Forest. A tourism study in 1953 found that more than 600,000 tourists traveled the 1,122 miles of roads on the national forest and used its 14 public recreation areas.<sup>21</sup> Tourists also visited Arkansas state parks in growing numbers, including Buffalo River State Park, which received 25,000 visitors that same year.

Following the folk festival in Searcy County in 1941 (and two others like it in other counties that same year) the next Ozark folk festival occurred in Eureka Springs in 1948. Although this event did not draw as many tourists as organizers had hoped, the town of Eureka Springs decided to make it an annual event and its popularity steadily grew. Held in October when tourists could also enjoy the region’s autumn colors and amiable climate, the Ozark Folk Festival regularly featured native folklore and music.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Bruce E. Seely, review of *Dirt Roads to Dixie: Accessibility and Modernization in the South, 1885-1935*, by Howard Lawrence Preston, in *Journal of American History*, 80, no. 2 (September 1993): 706-707.

<sup>20</sup> Blevins, “In the Land of a Million Smiles,” 30.

<sup>21</sup> Leslie G. Kennon, “Ozarks: Autumn Playground,” *Travel*, 100 (October 1953): 9.

<sup>22</sup> William R. Wilson, “It’s Still Summer in the Ozarks,” *Today’s Health*, 37 (September 1959): 77.

Mass tourism took hold in the Ozarks in the 1960s. North of Eureka Springs, the town of Branson, Missouri, had been slowly developing a tourism-based economy for many years. In 1960, the resort town began a period of rapid growth as the Baldknobbers Hillbilly Jamboree Show began its second year, the Old Mill Theater started production of "Shepherd of the Hills," the Presley Family opened a second music show, and Silver Dollar City built a theme park.<sup>23</sup> Branson became a leading tourist destination in the Ozarks, fueling resort development in the surrounding region.

Eureka Springs, meanwhile, underwent its own transformation. In 1964, Gerald L. K. Smith, a wealthy minister, anti-Semite, and erstwhile presidential candidate of the Christian Nationalist Party, retired in the community and began work on an ambitious religious theme park. Although the park was never completed according to the original design, the town did acquire an enormous statue, the Christ of the Ozarks, as well as a Passion Play that was staged on a 400-foot reproduction of a street in Old Jerusalem and became the largest outdoor pageant in the nation. These developments revitalized Eureka Springs and caused it to grow into the state's leading tourist destination by 1975.<sup>24</sup>

While Eureka Springs continued to hold the annual Ozark Folk Festival, the town of Mountain View inaugurated the annual Arkansas Folk Festival in April 1963. The original festival was largely the work of the Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service and was expected to feature a craft fair. However, festival organizers enlisted the help of Jimmy Driftwood to develop the festival's music program and to people's surprise the musical event, which featured local artists performing in the high school gymnasium, drew the largest crowd of any part of the festival. In the following years the festival revolved around music and drew larger and larger crowds. By the early 1970s, it had become the state's biggest annual tourist event, attracting as many as 100,000 visitors, which included an eclectic mix of old-timers, vacationing families, motorcycle gangs, and hippies.<sup>25</sup>

The success of the Ozark Folk Festival spurred development of the Ozark Folk Center, a unique state park and "living museum" of folk life. Located near Mountain View, it is the only state park in the nation dedicated to preserving southern mountain folkways. The Ozark Folk Center was developed with the help of federal grants from the Economic Development Administration and the influence of Congressman Wilbur D. Mills. The park was established in 1972 and the \$3.4 million center opened to tourists the following year. Facilities included a music theater, numerous craft shops, a welcome center, a conference center, and a lodge.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> "Branson, Missouri – A Brief History," (n.d.), <http://www.branson-missouri.com/history/asp> (May 2, 2007).

<sup>24</sup> Glen Jeansonne and Michael Gauger, "Gerald Lyman Kenneth Smith (1898-1976)," *Encyclopedia of Arkansas* (November 15, 2006), <http://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=1767> (May 2, 2007).

<sup>25</sup> "A Brief History of the Arkansas Folk Festival," (October 11, 2005), <http://www.lyon.edu/webdata/groups/library/rcol/festival.htm> (May 2, 2007).

<sup>26</sup> Craig Ogilvie, "Ozark Folk Center State Park: A 'Living Museum' of Pioneer Ways" (August 6, 2002), <http://www.ozarkfolkcenter.com/newsroom/display.asp?ID=155> (August 30, 2007).

These three centers of tourism in the Ozarks – Branson, Eureka Springs, and Mountain View – anchored a growing tourism industry that spawned new roadside motels and restaurants throughout the region. The tourism boom in the 1960s produced numerous small enterprises in the Buffalo River valley, including the Buffalo Basin Ranch, situated outside of Jasper, which offered horseback rides and scenic or fishing float trips on the Buffalo River, and a restaurant and float trip business beside U.S. Highway 65, just south of the bridge over the Buffalo, operated by newcomers Fred and Mildred Payne of Texas.<sup>27</sup>

Perhaps the most unusual roadside establishment in the Buffalo River area was Dogpatch, U.S.A., which opened to tourists in 1968. Located at Marble Falls on Highway 7, the 825-acre theme park revolved around the Lil' Abner comic-strip world of backwoods hill folk invented by Al Capp. The complex featured a restored grist mill with overshot waterwheel purportedly based on the original structure built in about 1834, together with numerous replicas of log cabins and stables and an old-fashioned, mule-drawn merry-go-round. Prior to its development as a theme park, the property attracted tourists to its Mystic Cave, renamed Dogpatch Caverns.<sup>28</sup>



Figure 68. Little Switzerland Motel on Hwy 7 near Pruitt. *Ardella Braswell Vaughan collection, Shiloh Museum. Photo S 89-57-23.*

<sup>27</sup> "Buffalo Basin Ranch," pamphlet, n.d., copy in Newton County Library, Jasper, Arkansas; "'Pioneering in the Ozarks,' A Journal by Harry Willmering," 2000, Pamphlet 8673, Arkansas History Commission, 12.

<sup>28</sup> "Crash Construction Program Underway at Dogpatch U.S.A.," *Northwest Arkansas Times* (Fayetteville), February 23, 1968; "Running Dogpatch Not Much Harder Than Running Arkansas, Faubus Says," *Little Rock Arkansas Gazette*, May 4, 1969.

## OUTDOOR RECREATION

While booming resort towns like Eureka Springs and Branson drew throngs of visitors to the Ozarks who were intent on escaping lowland summer heat and enjoying folk music and mineral waters, the Buffalo River valley gradually came to attract another kind of tourist: the outdoor recreationist. Whereas Eureka Springs had boasted a grand hotel since the 1880s, and both it and Branson eventually grew dense with hotels, motels, restaurants, and playhouses, the Buffalo spawned a kind of tourism that was much less capital intensive. People came to the Buffalo primarily to fish and enjoy its scenery. They hired river guides who took them on float trips down the Buffalo and showed them the best fishing holes. Tourist accommodations in the Buffalo River valley consisted of inexpensive commercial campgrounds and roadside motel and cabin complexes. Simple john boats were the most common watercrafts on the river until the 1960s, when aluminum canoes came into use.

As the number of float trips on the Buffalo grew, some local residents saw these recreationists as intruders in their country or even trespassers on their private land. One notorious example of friction occurred in the spring of 1946 or 1947 near Ponca. Some local young men had gotten some sticks of dynamite that they wanted to use in a prank on a newlywed couple. When they found the couple was not at home, they decided to play their prank on a party of river floaters instead, and so they lit and threw their dynamite sticks into the recreationists' camp. As it happened the river guides had prepared the camp ahead of their clients' arrival, and suspecting some kind of trouble from these local men they hid themselves in the brush just prior to the attack. No one was hurt in the explosion.<sup>29</sup>

Longtime Buffalo residents Clyde and Nellie Villines, sensing the future in tourism, built six housekeeping cabins on their property in the late 1940s. The cabins stood in a row behind their new house. The Villines thought their camp would attract tourists from distant places but instead it developed into a local fishing camp for a loyal clientele who were mostly from Harrison and who came down on weekends to fish.<sup>30</sup>

In 1955, the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) built a recreational facility on the south bank of the Buffalo River in Newton County, which it named Camp Orr for Raymond F. Orr, a Scout leader who was instrumental in acquiring the land for it. Camp Orr was the undertaking of the BSA's Westark Area Council, based in Fort Smith and serving nineteen counties in Northwest Arkansas. Camp structures included three cabins, tent platforms, and a trading post. The camp not only served as a staging area for float trips, but also for backpack trips and rock climbing classes. The BSA continues to use and maintain Camp Orr, having celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2005. Today the

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<sup>29</sup> Ted Sare, *Some Recollections of an Ozarks Float Trip Guide* (Marshfield, Missouri: Webster County Printing, 1997), 38.

<sup>30</sup> Suzie Rogers, conversation with author, October 16, 2006.

Westark Area Council boasts that Camp Orr is the only Boy Scout camp completely enclosed within a national park.<sup>31</sup>

Not long after Camp Orr was built, P. W. Yarborough built a horse ranch for Arabian and quarter horses about eight miles upriver from Camp Orr at Steele Creek. Yarborough was a mortgage banker from Kansas City. He began purchasing abandoned farms in the 1950s and eventually had 1,189 acres. He cleared land and erected buildings, calling the place Valley Y Ranch. In 1964, his daughter Sue Anna became on-site manager of the property. In 1975, the National Park Service purchased the horse ranch and removed the hay barn and horse show arena but retained other buildings to be used as park ranger's office, storerooms, and horse stable.<sup>32</sup>

In the 1950s and 1960s, recreational use of the Buffalo River increased substantially. There were a number of factors contributing to the river's new popularity. First, the invention of light and sturdy aluminum canoes made recreational river trips easier and safer, so more people became interested in floating in general. Although the john boat had long served as an adequate craft for fishing trips and scenic floats down the

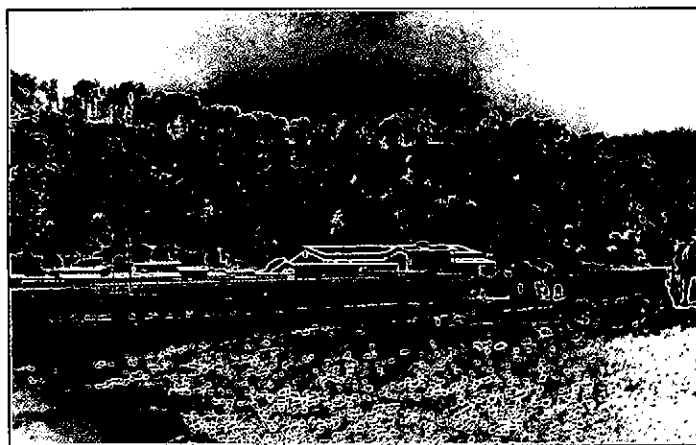


Figure 69. Valley Y Ranch. Dr. Neil Compton collection, Shiloh Museum.

Buffalo, its large size and draft compared to a canoe limited its use to times when the river had a "rise" from recent rains – particularly on the upper river where the most exciting rapids were found. The canoe made the Buffalo, like many other small rivers, more attractive for recreational use.<sup>33</sup> Second, river users began to organize and to advocate for better public access and protection of wild and scenic rivers such as the Buffalo. Third, the conservation battle over the Buffalo generated publicity about the river's charms. Kenneth Smith highlighted the pleasures of canoeing in *Buffalo River Country* (1967), which he wrote in a coffee-table-book format for the express purpose of advertising the river's scenic and recreational values.<sup>34</sup> George B. Hartzog, Jr., director of the National Park Service, wrote an article on the river in 1969 in which he called it "one of the few undammed, unpolluted rivers that we have, and one of the few easily navigable scenic streams running through virtually unpopulated country over most of its course."<sup>35</sup> In 1970, articles on the Buffalo appeared in two popular magazines with huge circulations: *Sports Illustrated* and *National Geographic*. The latter story described the

<sup>31</sup> Smith, *Buffalo River Handbook*, 304; "Camp Orr," (2006) <http://www.westarkbsa.org> (July 2, 2006).

<sup>32</sup> Smith, *Buffalo River Handbook*, 165.

<sup>33</sup> Ken Smith interview; Sare, *Some Recollections of an Ozark Float Trip Guide*, 1.

<sup>34</sup> Kenneth Smith, *The Buffalo River Country* (Fayetteville, Arkansas: The Ozark Society, 1967), 46.

<sup>35</sup> George B. Hartzog, Jr., "Let's Save the Buffalo," *Parks and Recreation*, 4 (August 1969), 12.

multitudes of tourists drawn to the manmade lakes in the Ozarks as well as its natural rivers: "Boats in tow, water skis fastened to car tops, fishing poles trailing from windows, they come to worship the water."<sup>36</sup>

One early Buffalo River canoe guide was Bill Houston. Raised on a farm just south of today's Ozark Campground, Houston learned to float the river in a john boat belonging to Floyd Walton. By the 1960s, Houston was in the canoe rental business and had a shop on leased land in Pruitt. Among his clients was the famous artist, Thomas Hart Benton, who painted scenes on the Buffalo River.<sup>37</sup>



Figure 70. Canoers stop for a rest on one of the many sandbars along the Buffalo, ca. 1960s. Dr. Neil Compton collection, Newton County Library.

With the growth of canoeing, the Shady Grove Camp at Pruitt served as a take out or put in point on the upper Buffalo. Richard Holland, who was raised at the Shady Grove Camp in the 1930s and 1940s, returned to the area after serving in the U.S. Air Force and managed the camp during the 1960s. A fishing guide in his younger years, Holland now shuttled canoers' vehicles. In the meantime, Holland added an automotive

<sup>36</sup> Robert F. Jones, "The Old Man and the River," *Sports Illustrated*, 33 (August 10, 1970), 28; M. W. Edwards, "Through Ozark Hills and Hollows," *National Geographic Magazine*, 138 (November 1970): 667.

<sup>37</sup> Dwain Lair, "Houston spent life guiding on Buffalo," *Harrison Daily Times*, February 23, 2000.



garage to the property. An addition to this building served as a community room for the residents of Pruitt.<sup>38</sup>

## BUFFALO NATIONAL RIVER

The first effort to preserve the natural beauty of the Buffalo River culminated in the establishment of Buffalo River State Park in 1938 on the lower Buffalo (see Chapter Eight). After World War II, preservationists' attention shifted to the upper Buffalo. Glenn "Bud" Green, publicity director for the Arkansas Publicity and Parks Commission, traveled to the upper Buffalo with a *National Geographic Magazine* photographer where they discovered a delightful hollow that Green renamed Lost Valley. In the late 1940s, Green published articles on Lost Valley and Boxley Valley, arguing that the former deserved to be made a national park.<sup>39</sup>

The area gradually became known to hiking enthusiasts. Ken Smith, then a student at the University of Arkansas, found his way there with his friend Hugh Iltis in

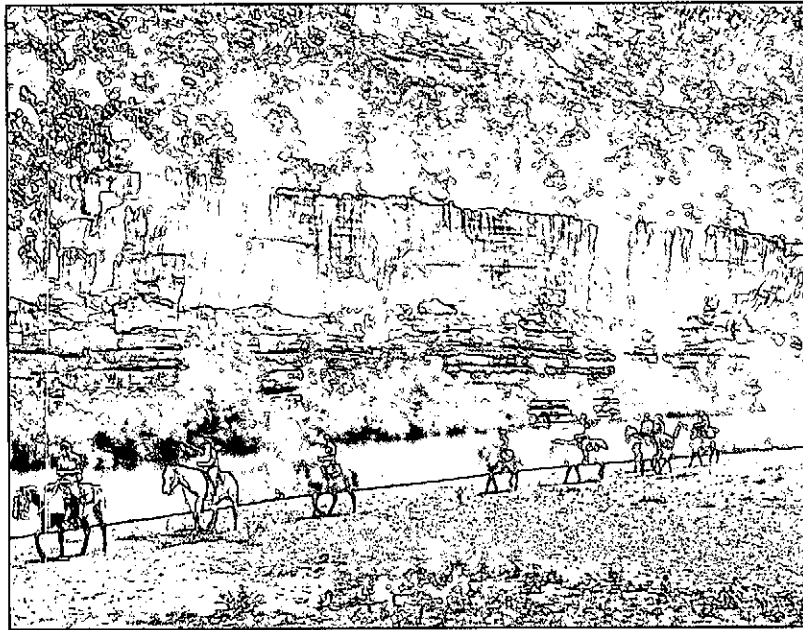


Figure 71. Horseback party along the Buffalo. *Arkansas Parks Commission photo, Harold Alexander collection, Archives, University of Central Arkansas.*

the spring of 1953, parking their car at the house of Orphea Duty, postmaster of Boxley, and hiking as far as the natural bridge in Lost Valley. Smith recalls that his first hike into Lost Valley was a "life-changing experience," making him into a preservationist. Smith went on more excursions to the upper Buffalo with the University of Arkansas hiking club, visiting Hemmed-in-Hollow, Fitton Cave, and Cecil Cove, among other beauty spots. By

the late 1950s, he saw the need to protect Lost Valley from logging and other threats, and he tried to interest the Nature Conservancy in buying land there. The Nature Conservancy put Smith in charge of a committee to save Lost Valley, introducing him to all eight members of the national organization's Arkansas chapter, together with Harold

<sup>38</sup> Kathleen Fitzgerald, Roberta Young, and Suzie Rogers, "Buffalo National River National Park Service Pruitt Ranger Station & Garage, Newton County, Arkansas: History, Function & Significance Prepared for the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program," January 2008, copy provided to author.

<sup>39</sup> Compton, *The Battle for the Buffalo River*, 45.

Alexander, a state wildlife biologist. Through Alexander, Smith was introduced to Dr. Neil Compton, a Bentonville physician who, like Smith, was ardently in favor of preserving the upper Buffalo's scenic charms. When Smith left Arkansas in 1960, Compton took his place at the head of the small movement to preserve land in the upper Buffalo watershed. Efforts to purchase land in Lost Valley would eventually bear fruit with the sale of a 200-acre property to an agent of the State of Arkansas in 1966. The state would promptly establish Lost Valley State Park, adding another 80 acres to its land base the following year.<sup>40</sup>

Meanwhile, in the early 1960s, preservationist interest in the Buffalo once more shifted to another stretch of the river and to a different threat, this one from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The major dam proposals put forward by the Corps involved dam sites near the town of Gilbert and near the mouth of the river, and these were known as the Gilbert Dam and the Lone Rock Dam respectively. Other alternative dam sites were discussed at Carver and lower on the river. The specter of dams on the Buffalo aroused opposition from various fishing clubs and conservation organizations in Arkansas and elsewhere. The Kansas City-based Ozark Wilderness Waterways Club vigorously fought the dam legislation while bringing attention to the recreational values of free-flowing streams throughout the Ozarks, particularly the Buffalo.<sup>41</sup>

While citizen opposition to the dams mounted, most people still saw flood control and hydroelectric development as worthy measures to improve the region's sluggish economy. Senator J. William Fulbright of Arkansas supported the dam legislation in the 1950s. Representative James W. Trimble of Arkansas introduced a bill on January 4, 1961 providing for water development in the White River basin, including the Lone Rock and Gilbert dams on the Buffalo. Citizen activists responded to the legislative proposal and the Corps' hearing by forming the Arkansas Nature Conservancy, whose goal was to obtain national park protection for the middle and lower stretches of the Buffalo River as well as the Lost Valley area around Ponca. While Congressman Trimble would remain a staunch proponent of the dams, Senator Fulbright was persuaded by the grassroots organization to change his position. He wrote a letter to Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall at the end of March 1961 suggesting that the upper Buffalo River and adjoining lands would make a fine national park.<sup>42</sup>

The National Park Service sent a team to investigate the area's suitability for national park status in October 1961. This preliminary reconnaissance added steam to the Kennedy administration's growing commitment to inventory the nation's remaining free-flowing streams which possessed outstanding scenic and recreational values and to

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<sup>40</sup> Smith interview; Smith, *Buffalo River Handbook*, 280.

<sup>41</sup> Elizabeth S. Helfman, *Rivers and Watershed's in America's Future* (New York: David McKay Co., Inc., 1965), 219; John Heuston, "Compton, Neil Ernest," in *Arkansas Biography: A Collection of Notable Lives*, edited by Nancy A. Williams (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2000), 69; Rathbun, *Castle on the Rock*, 76-77.

<sup>42</sup> Pitcaithley, *Let the River Be*, 97; USDI, National Park Service, "Field Investigation Report Suggested Buffalo National River, Arkansas," April 1963, University of Central Arkansas Archives, File 31, Box 31, Subseries IV, Series II, M89-17, Harold E. Alexander Papers, University of Central Arkansas.

protect the finest examples of those streams as river-oriented units in the national park system. The label "national river" had appeared a few years earlier in testimony on behalf of a proposed Ozark Riverways National Monument centered on the Current and Jacks Fork rivers in Missouri. Ted Swem of the National Park Service had suggested that this proposal would be a prototype for other riverine units. The proposal engendered considerable opposition from landowners along the rivers and raised the question of whether a river could be nationalized. In March 1962, Kennedy highlighted the Ozark Riverways proposal in a "Message on Conservation" to Congress, and preservationists were soon in agreement that Congress should be enlisted in designating the "Ozark National Scenic Riverways," so as to establish a precedent for the protection of other rivers. Congress enacted the desired legislation in 1964.<sup>43</sup>

Meanwhile, a conservation battle was being joined over the Buffalo River, with the National Park Service and the Corps of Engineers facing off and citizen-based organizations forming on either side. Local support for the dams centered in Marshall, where businessmen and community leaders anticipated that dam construction would bring an economic boon to the town. These citizens formed the Buffalo River Improvement Association in early 1962. In a pamphlet titled "The Truth About the Buffalo River" the group set forth its vision: a national park on the upper river and hydroelectric development on the middle and lower sections.<sup>44</sup> Preservationists formed the Ozark Society to Save the Buffalo River and elected Dr. Compton its president. As Compton later recalled, he and other activists had been working for some years on the idea of a national park at the upper end of the Buffalo River but the Gilbert Dam proposal inspired them to conceive the effort more broadly so as to protect the whole river.<sup>45</sup> Landowners along the Buffalo formed a third grassroots organization: the Buffalo River Landowners' Association. This group was composed of local residents who were opposed to both the national park proposal and the dam proposal. Many of the group's members were upset by the growing number of canoeists who seemed indifferent toward or ignorant of private property rights along the river. But they were equally if not more offended by the plan to drown the valley in a reservoir. In time the group claimed 365 members who owned a combined total of more than 30,000 acres. Most were farmers or cattle growers. The group's spokesman was Charles McRaven, who lived in a log cabin not far above the Gilbert Dam site. As McRaven explained the group's position: "We are not some outside organization seeking to profit from the destruction of the river, nor are we some outside organization seeking to change the river in any way."<sup>46</sup>

In addition to these three new organizations formed in 1962, the Kansas City-based Ozark Wilderness Waterways Club continued its efforts to preserve the Buffalo. The group's president, Harold Hedges, invited Supreme Court Justice William O.

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<sup>43</sup> Tim Palmer, *Endangered Rivers and the Conservation Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 139; Donald L. Stevens, Jr., *A Homeland and a Hinterland: The Current and Jacks Fork Riverways* (Omaha: National Park Service, 1991), 202; W. H. Elder and S. Jones, "It's Time to Set Aside an Ozark Scenic Riverways," *Audubon Magazine*, 64 (March 1962): 98-99.

<sup>44</sup> Pitcaithley, *Let the River Be*, 98; *Pine Bluff Commercial*, April 20, 1965.

<sup>45</sup> Radine Trees Nehring, "This Doctor Delivered a River," *Ozark Mountaineer*, July-August 1993, 30.

<sup>46</sup> "Battle for the Buffalo," *Pine Bluff Commercial*, April 21, 1965.

Douglas, a lion among preservationists, to canoe down the Buffalo. Accompanied by their wives and an editor of the *Kansas City Star*, the party made a ten-mile float and fishing trip. Hedges could not have found a more prominent and vociferous critic of the Corps of Engineers than Douglas. After the trip, the 63-year-old justice urged that the dam proposal be stopped to protect this “unique stream.”<sup>47</sup>

In April 1963, the National Park Service conducted a second, more thorough investigation of the proposed “Buffalo National River.” The authors reported on it favorably. They wrote that the “clear, cool water is one of the most outstanding and noteworthy attributes of the Buffalo River,” and that it was an excellent stream for



Figure 72. Canoers on Buffalo, ca. 1960s. *Dr. Neil Compton collection, Newton County Library.*

smallmouth bass, a popular sport fish. They stated that terrestrial wildlife was another one of the area’s chief attractions. They noted there were 20 archeological sites in the area. They sketched the valley’s history, giving particular emphasis to Civil War events. The report reinforced the National Park Service in its opposition to the Corps of Engineers. Assessing the effects of the proposed dams, the authors wrote unequivocally: “The building of either the Lone Rock or Gilbert Dams, or both, would so change the

<sup>47</sup> “Douglas Opposes Dam on Buffalo River,” *Arkansas Times* (Fayetteville), April 30, 1962. On Douglas’s efforts for conservation and his strong criticism of the Corps, see Stephen Fox, *The American Conservation Movement: John Muir and His Legacy* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1981), 239-244.

character of the Buffalo that it would no longer be a nationally significant free-flowing river."<sup>48</sup>

A formal proposal to establish Buffalo National River quickly followed from the field investigation. To buttress its proposal the National Park Service contracted with the University of Arkansas to produce an economic study of how a park would affect the local economy. The study claimed that a park, if established and developed in the near term, would likely create 1,500 new jobs and bring \$13,000,000 in tourist dollars to businesses in Newton, Searcy, Boone, Marion, and Baxter counties by 1970.<sup>49</sup>

The Corps of Engineers answered the National Park Service proposal by holding a public hearing on its dam proposal in Marshall in 1964. This was the Corps' second public hearing in Marshall in three years. Dr. Compton and other opponents of the dam duly attended the hearings, though they viewed the hearings as manipulative since the hearings were held in the town where the dam proposal was already well known to have strong local support. "Hearings are always a kangaroo court conducted by this bureau to sell its idea," Compton told a reporter afterward.<sup>50</sup>

The contest over the Buffalo became increasingly polarized. Tim Palmer, author of *Endangered Rivers and the Conservation Movement*, writes,

The Buffalo is one of few cases in which a river controversy broke into violence. Canoeists were shot at after being stopped by trees that had been cut to block their path. Barbed wire was strung across the stream. A fight at a local basketball game was blamed on the Buffalo River issue. When a student chapter of the Ozark Society advertised a "coeducational float," a local sheriff saw a chance to discredit the Ozark group, and he staged a raid to expose his idea of immorality. But instead of finding the canoeists' camp, he stumbled onto an outing of the Landsman's Society – a group of local lawyers and realtors, who were fined for possession of untaxed whiskey.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> USDI, National Park Service, "Field Investigation Report Suggested Buffalo National River, Arkansas," April 1963, File 31, Box 1, Subseries IV, Series II, Harold E. Alexander Papers M89-17, University of Central Arkansas Archives.

<sup>49</sup> "Battle for the Buffalo," *Pine Bluff Commercial*, April 19, 1965; Robert W. Bell, William A. Heffelfinger, and Elbert B. Johnson, "Economic Study of the Proposed Buffalo National River," Prepared for USDI, National Park Service, by Bureau of Business and Economic Research and Industrial Research and Extension Center, College of Business Administration, University of Arkansas, May 1963, File 32, Box 1, Subseries IV, Series II, Harold E. Alexander Papers M89-17, University of Central Arkansas Archives.

<sup>50</sup> George Wells, "Behind the Buffalo," *Pine Bluff Commercial*, February 13, 1972.

<sup>51</sup> Palmer, *Endangered Rivers and the Conservation Movement*, 91.

Slowly public opinion seemed to turn against damming the Buffalo. Preservationists still had a long struggle ahead of them as Congress would not finally enact legislation authorizing the national river until 1972, but the long-running conservation battle appeared to reach a turning point in 1965-1966. First, in December 1965, Governor Orval Faubus swung against the dam proposal. Then, in the congressional elections of 1966, Representative Trimble was defeated in his re-election

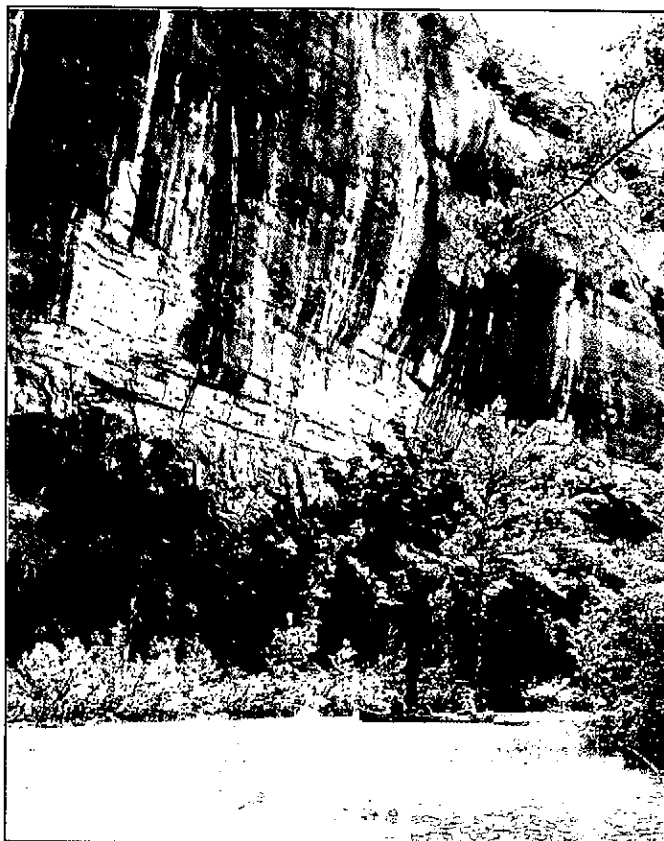


Figure 73. Canoers on the Buffalo. Harold Alexander collection, Archives, University of Central Arkansas.

bid by John Paul Hammerschmidt, a Republican from Harrison. Trimble was the last member in the Arkansas congressional delegation still in favor of the Gilbert Dam, and since the Buffalo River was in Trimble's 3<sup>rd</sup> Congressional District his position on the issue carried weight. Soon after Hammerschmidt took office, he introduced a bill to establish Buffalo National River. Although that bill did not get out of committee, it signaled that the dam proposal was now moribund. On the other hand, the hearings on the bill brought out the fact that landowners along the river did not generally favor a national river either. It took considerable effort by national conservation groups and conservation magazines to bring about congressional approval finally on March 1, 1972.<sup>52</sup>

The law states, "That for the purposes of conserving and interpreting an area containing unique scenic and scientific features, and preserving as a free-flowing stream an important segment of the Buffalo River in Arkansas for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations, the Secretary of the Interior...may establish and administer the Buffalo National River." Special provisions in the law include a prescribed acreage limitation of 95,730 acres, authorization of hunting and fishing as traditional uses of the area, and designation of Boxley Valley, Richland Valley, and Camp Orr as private use zones wherein landowners could opt to maintain their private property and enter into conservation easements with the National Park Service.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Pitcaithley, *Let the River Be*, 101-103; Dr. Neil Compton, interview by Richard McCamant, January 9, 1978, 17.

<sup>53</sup> Suzie Rogers, "Buffalo National River," *Encyclopedia of Arkansas*, May 19, 2008, <http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.com> (June 10, 2008).

In time, Buffalo National River became the state's leading visitor attraction, drawing some 800,000 people annually. Features of the built environment in Buffalo National River that reflect modern National Park Service planning and design include campgrounds, picnic areas, comfort stations, road signage, and a network of hiking and horse trails. The Buffalo Point complex of CCC-built structures was readily absorbed into the park's facilities, serving as guest lodging, ranger station, and personnel housing.

## SUMMARY

In the middle half of the twentieth century car culture swept over the Buffalo River region as it did the rest of the nation. Cars and trucks not only eased the life of farmers, they also brought numbers of tourists into the area, creating new business and job opportunities for local residents. Tourism grew as a consequence of the rising prosperity of the nation, but it also grew in response to local factors such as the paving of highways, the development of tourist services, the attraction of major tourist events such as the Arkansas Folk Festival, and the proximity of major tourist resorts at Branson, Missouri and Eureka Springs. In the Arkansas Ozarks, major road improvements in the 1950s and 1960s finally laid the foundation for a strong tourism economy that continues to grow some fifty years later.

While the tourism economy grew, increasing numbers of people came to appreciate the Buffalo River valley's scenic and recreational values. These people saw the area as part of the nation's wilderness heritage as well as part of their own recreational domain. The new attitudes coalesced in a movement to save the river valley from dams. In 1972, Congress passed a law authorizing the Buffalo National River and preserving the river as a free-flowing stream.

The park preserves 135 miles of the Buffalo River's 150-mile total length together with the aesthetically pleasing natural and cultural landscapes through which the river winds. The park holds a wide array of cultural features, from pioneer homes and family cemeteries to old country school houses and tumble-down ore-processing mills. In Boxley Valley, residents still practice agriculture and maintain a rich community life in what constitutes one of the oldest continuously occupied settlements existing within a national park system unit.



Figure 74. Eva Barnes Henderson at her farm on Sneeds Creek, upper Buffalo River, 1977. "Granny" Henderson came to personify the proud persistence of pioneer lifestyle in the Buffalo River valley. *Benton Linder photo, Arbie Villines collection, Buffalo National River.*



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Baptism in Buffalo River near Duff. *Buffalo National River*

The Audubon returning from  
June 17, 1908 left their horses  
in the Red River in both camps