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"THIS OLD BOOK"

The Civil War Diary of  
Mrs. Mary Sale Edmondson  
Of Phillips County, Arkansas

Edited By

R. P. Baker, Archivist  
Arkansas History Commission  
1972

PART VI

PREFACE

The vast majority of Civil War diaries which have come down to this present time are those of the soldier himself. They give a thrilling account of the battlefield, the campfire, and the march, but usually little else. This diary is different. It is an account of a different kind of battlefield, the home front in the South. But it is no less a story of privation, destruction, and bravery.

This is the diary of a very literate southern gentlewoman. It reflects her interests in the welfare of her home, her husband, and children, and her Negro slaves. In it is captured the essence of a way of life rapidly being destroyed forever by Yankee Soldiers. Gone were the gracious ways, the leisurely civilization and finally, life itself.

INTRODUCTION

MARY FRANCES SALE EDMONDSON was born November 16, 1816, in Amherst County, Virginia, the eldest

of the eight children born to the Reverend Alexander F. and Sarah Crenshaw Sale. In 1821 the family emigrated with a large group of their fellow Virginians to Lawrence County, Alabama and settled near the county seat of Moulton. Here they made their home for a number of years.

In 1848 Mary's brother, John B., a lawyer by profession and the fifth County Court Judge of Lawrence County, "was seized by a desire to try a new Country." and removed to Aberdeen, Mississippi. It was no doubt through her brother's new friends and acquaintances that Mary met a widower from Pontonoc County, Mississippi, Dr. Albert G. Edmondson. Dr. Edmondson's first wife was Caroline Pinson, and they were the parents of three children: William, Mary E., and Caroline L. The first Mrs. Edmondson died about 1848 or 1849.

Dr. Edmondson and Miss Sale were married in Mississippi on May 23, 1854. Their first child, Alexander, was born April 20, 1855, but died eight days later. Their second child, John Albert, was born on May 23, 1856.

In 1857, Dr. Edmondson, his father-in-law, Alexander Sale, and two of his brothers-in-law, William and Melville Sale, joined the great American move westward. Choosing Phillips County, Arkansas as their new home, they settled northeast of Walnut Corner. Here they bought over one thousand acres of land in the Blackfoot or Central neighborhood, along Spring Creek Road. William named his plantation Grammedi, and the home shared by Dr. Edmondson and the rest of the Sale family was called Holly Grove. Some of the other families which made up this neighborhood were those of: Judge John T. Jones, George R. Johnson, Richard Ford, Thomas and John Gist, Joseph Green, Arthur Robinson, Richard Anselm Blount, Amos Jarman, James Cook Alexander Graves, Warren and Jack Smizer, Dr. T. R. Welch,



F. H. Dade and David Threlkeld.

On September 20, 1858, Mrs. Edmondson's third child, Sarah Susannah, or Sallie, was born - only to die on June 24, 1860, ironically the same day as the birth of her fourth and last child, Louise Titus, or Lou. Mrs. Edmondson died on February 7, 1865, after several months of illness. Dr. Edmondson died in Phillips County in 1885.

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#### DIARY

February 16, 1864, Tuesday. My beloved mother's birthday. Oh, that we could hear from her. We fear the desolating foe has reached her place of refuge so dearly found.<sup>1</sup> The latter part of this month we killed a beef--had a very poor turnout of tallow--I sent five of my neighbors pieces.

I commenced a little Sunday School with my own children and those of my neighbors who are near enough to walk. Oh, may God own and bless my weak endeavor to do some little work in His cause at this eleventh hour--for I know unless he helps me, my labor is vain.

March 6, 1864, Sunday. An inclement day--yet some of my Sunday scholars came, with two new ones. The Blounts, Mrs. Annie Swan and her sister, Miss Sue Johnson, drove over in the afternoon. I omitted to mention that Carrie and Albert were started to school to Miss Sue on the 22nd of the month. It is the first experience of a school room and teacher from home that Albert has ever had. I hope and trust he may be pleased as well as profited by the change.

March 7, 1864, Monday. Sleet and snow--still snowing.

March 8, 1864, Tuesday. Still snowing--our potatoes bedded out. Within the last five or six weeks we have heard that brother Will was a prisoner in Helena. We do not credit it after sifting the report and learning all we could of it. Hutchinson<sup>2</sup> was taken to town and released on registering his name, as an enemy to the Lincoln government--he brings reports of the Federal intentions toward us--that are very distressing. They purpose to retaliate in kind, on rebel citizens for all that the Confederate soldiers do, and we hear they (the Confederates) have orders to break up (the) so called government plantations;<sup>3</sup> which they will surely attempt. We cannot help it, or help ourselves, and must endure what we cannot cure. God be merciful to us and our little ones, and soften the hearts of those who lay waste of our homes.

March 10, 1864, Thursday. (The) children lost three days from school. I heard most of their lessons though, and sent them off again this morning. Put my beef in pickle and put down our hams this week--that is Dick did the latter (our first killing); we scarcely expect to keep our food or clothing if the present state of things continues. Dr. found some of our stray cattle yesterday--been lost a year or more, I believe.

March 25, 1864, Friday. My dear brother's birthday. Oh Mell, I wish I knew where you are now, and if I shall ever see you again! May God guard and keep you is my constant prayer. On the fifteenth of this month the Federal elections were held in Helena, for state officers.<sup>4</sup> I hear that not one of the newly made loyal citizens went in to vote. I don't know how our master will deal with them for it; it will not at all effect the election though, as the officers designated are appointed by military authority. I suppose they



have some object in view by going through the mockery of an election--but I don't pretend to fathom the depth of their iniquity. (Maj.) Carmicheal's scout passed on Tuesday--only two called up here looking for soldiers--found none of course. Mahala has succeeded very poorly with the soap-making. I have had seven dozen excellent tallow candles moulded. The spring has been so very cold and dry that my garden is doing very poorly--none of the first planting of seeds have come up to do any good--I have replanted the most of them. (I) have set only forth-eight eggs this month; from the middle of January until now, (I) have collected about five hundred in all, and I suppose the negroes and dogs got at least a fifth of what have been laid. I think that is doing pretty well for thirty hens. (Yes indeed it was! Aunt Sue). Mollie Johnson<sup>5</sup> sick today--has been for several days--too sick for Miss Sue (Johnson) to teach--so Carrie and Albert are at home. I am sorry for I think they are doing well at school and both evidence an interest in their studies.

Our Sunday School has been in operation several weeks--it works pretty well and would do better if the children could be more punctual. Sent Carrie to Mrs. Johnson's this morning with a letter for Lieut. Swan to take to William--had intended going myself but Albert had a chill--and Dr. has gone to see Mr. (R. B.) Macon; he (Dr.) has bought Lou a doll--the first that was bought for her; she is much pleased with it. I have dressed it in a handsome striped basque, and she is named "Mildred Macon."

This day (March 25) one year ago Melville ate his birthday dinner with us. Oh how glad we were to see him! It had been nearly a year since he had spent two short weeks with us--then by no means recovered from an attack of pneumonia which

had nearly proved fatal. Since then he has made that terrible Kentucky campaign with Bragg's (forces) and had two of his fingers shot off at the Battle of Perryville--been honorably discharged by Gen. Cleburne in consequence, and has been from Oct. until March in getting home having stopped with our relation in E. Tennessee, and in Louisiana expecting to have met our parents there--but found only Lizzie (Anna Elizabeth Sale). He brought us (a) letter from Annah (Susanah Sale Jones) and several useful gifts that my dear, thoughtful sister always finds opportunities to send. She had also fitted Melville out (with) a supply of summer clothing--and Lizzie had sent what Mell could bring to Will. Oh, those were pleasant hours, though clouded with apprehension for Mell. The full Creeks, on which all the bridges had been burned, was some protection to us then from the Yankees--and the children and negroes kept a constant watch--even Lou would picket the gate. Then we had our beloved father and mother with us--and our good and lovely May (Mary) who was a true and dutiful daughter to me-- Oh how I miss the darling--my two brothers Will and Mell--and our dear faithful old (slave) Diddy--as well as our other true hearted, noble, upright servant Davy--her brother! Now alas! they are all gone. Papa, Mollie, Diddy buried in Louisiana; Davy buried here, not far from my little Sallie. Melville is, we know not where in Georgia perhaps, if living--and William...may be in La. Our darling long suffering mother, if alive, (is) in La. also--and from all we can learn in feeble health--and on the eve of suffering from another over-running of the Yankee Army. Oh my God, shorten these terrible days--and sustain those who trust in Thee!

March 27, 1864, Sunday. Mrs. (R. A.) Blount and Mrs. (David) Threlkeld dined with me--Jack Smizer<sup>6</sup> also called in.



We endeavored to keep a fast--praying that the captivity of our country might be turned away. I have not, during the past weeks, felt that comfort and trust, that zeal for holiness, which I had previously been able to exercise--the fault has been my own I know--May God help me to remove it. Albert has lost another week through sickness. I have had repeated attacks, and do not recover sprightliness of mind or body. I have prayed fervently of late, and with a small degree of faith--I might be indulged in these dreary days with tidings from my dear mother and sister, and from my brothers, sons, and nephew in the army on the other side of the Mississippi. (Dear May! (Mrs. Edmondson's nickname) Her mental burden was even greater than her physical one--heavy and unaccustomed as that was and increasing pressure on both mind and body. (Aunt Sue.)

April 19, 1864, Tuesday. Last night my heart was made to rejoice at the reception of letters from my two dear and far distant brothers, John and Melville. Shall we not trust Thee, Oh Father! Shall we not feel that Thou carest for us! We cry to Thee for help and Thou helpest us--our hearts ask Thee for the comfort of tidings from our loved one in peril and Thou causest them to come to us when least looking for them! I will record my gratitude to Thee for Thy loving kindness that my children may be let to put their trust in Thee when I am dust. (The underscoring, dear Louise, is mine except under the last Thee! Oh, may her yearning, motherly effort to awaken faith in God, and implant it in the hearts of her darlings be successful! Aunt Sue.) These precious letters were begun in Feb. and finished the 6th of March--reached us the 18th of April. Now if we could hear from our dearest mother and sister, who are, we understand, beleaguered by the foe, and from son William and brother William, our cup would run over. Oh, Father, if it not be contrary to Thy will bring

us to meet again on earth, we beg! (Alas! we never met the dear supplicate again--here on earth. May we meet her and other loved ones--and that company whom no man can number on the shining shore beyond the flood, hereafter! (Aunt Sue).

May 8, 1864, Sunday. Oh I have been so disappointed in not being able to send dear Mell the few things he has asked for, and so little trouble to get them--and they would have pleased Mell so much and saved him so much money! Dr. rode and rode four days but could get no tidings of the messenger (who brought the letters) except that he would not return, and then just as he starts back, we learn through a friend, that he is gone--after sending a man over for the letters, but he was afraid to come here, and we could not know he was in reach of us. I am so disappointed. Two attacks of illness for me in April--both quite sharp--one lasting over a week the other several days--my health is decidedly bad; never had so backward a garden; this spring is unprecedentedly cold and dry. During the latter part of this month or the first of May the Yankees have been driven from the Red and Washita Rivers 7--and my mother and Louisiana friends have been rescued from their barbarians this time. (It was at this time that your aunt Lizzie (Anna Elizabeth Sale) helped me pack our household goods--so as to fall (back) by wagons and carriage to western Texas under James Jones' escort, if our soldiers under Ben Taylor and E. Kirby Smith were defeated by Union Gen. Banks beyond Mansfield--dear bro. Marion was then with us--not yet made bishop--and (sic) times, who accompanied Eunice and me when--Banks having been driven back, he carried food and clothing to our dear overrun kindred, Mrs. S. Porter's family--the husband and father being in prison in New Orleans. (Aunt Sue)

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# FOOT NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Federal troops under General Banks were trying to capture the Red River Valley in Louisiana and Texas.

<sup>2</sup> See "Susan Cook Diary" for March 9, 1864, Phillips County Historical Quarterly, Volume 4, No. 2, December, 1965, page 38.

<sup>3</sup> Abandoned plantations were being acquired by Federal forces and being leased to loyal citizens. Ex-slaves were hired at fixed rates to work these plantations. For a full treatment of this subject see "The Leased Plantations Below Helena", by Dale P. Kirkman, Phillips County Historical Quarterly, Volume 4, No. 3, March, 1966, pages 8 ff.

<sup>4</sup> See "Cook Diary", March 18, 1864.

<sup>5</sup> Mollie was probably Mary E. Johnson.

<sup>6</sup> The brother of Joseph Warren Smizer.

Alfred Smizer	49	Miss.
Catherine Smizer	33	Tenn.
William Smizer	6	Tenn.
John Smizer	47	Tenn.

Household No. 432, 1860 U. S. Census, Planters Township, Phillips County, Arkansas.

<sup>7</sup> For a full description of the Red River Campaign see Ledwell H. Johnson's, Red River Campaign (Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore, 1958.)

## EARLY SETTLERS OF BARTON PHILLIPS COUNTY, ARKANSAS PART ONE, Continued by James V. Belsha

The following letters are a continuation of the correspondence between the writer of this article and Henry Winbourne Cook of Los Angeles, California, the first letter having been published in the June, 1973 issue.

Please make corrections in that issue:

Page 31, in "School District No. 4 Enumeration", "Sawan (Swon?)" should be "Swan (Swon?)".

Page 38, in the last paragraph, next to last sentence should read, "My father, Benjamin Lafayette Belsha, was born at North Creek in 1866 -- Not 1886. (see last sentence, page 32.)

Los Angeles, California  
June 16, 1970

Mr. J. V. Belsha  
Phoenix, Arizona

Dear Mr. Belsha:

Your letter of June 9th is the most interesting letter I have had in many days, and I certainly do admire you for showing such great interest in getting information about where early members of your family were buried. Of course, many of the people you mention in your letter were pottering around on this old earth long before my time



to start pottering around---which was 1880.

Moses Lane was not with us very long after I got old enough to begin knowing folks, but I can see him now just as well as when I first began seeing him clerking in Mr. Jim Belsha's store, which was our post office and when being sent into the store to get the mail, there was Mr. Moses Lane to get the mail for me. As I remember him he was quite a distinguished looking well dressed gentleman wearing a Prince Albert type coat, and over his left shoulder was always a rather large soft material reddish colored handkerchief with bright red border, and occasionally he would rather automatically with his right hand reach for that trusty old weapon and give it a few swings across his face. I was told, when I asked my parents about why he swang the old weapon across his face as he did, that it was to shoo the gnats and flies away from him. I never have to this day figured out why they bothered him and not everybody else. Guess I was not old enough to remember anything being said about him passing on into the next world.

Of course, Mr. Belsha and the Jot-Un-Down Store was part of my life until I left that part of the country to start pottering around in the world on my own, which was in 1899 when I took charge of the operation of the general merchandise store at Lexa, Arkansas, for Mr. George Warfield. I was there for three years, and then went to Forrest City as cashier for the Swift & Company Cotton Seed Oil Mill. Was there ten years and transferred to their mill in Pine Bluff where I was for five years. So with me getting away from the Barton surrounding, I pretty well lost track of things in that section of the country.

Mr. Tom Wallace had quite a nice country home on his section of land, and in two or three nice

little cottages on his place lived different members of the Lane family until their deaths, which was when I was quite a small boy, but I was about sixteen or seventeen when Mr. Wallace passed on. I was with my father, Mr. Belsha and a few others when Mr. Wallace was buried in the Cemetery at old Central Church and as I remember it was a little to the front of the church, and about thirty or forty feet to the right as you went towards the church building. There were no grave markers anywhere near that spot. I think that was the last time I was ever at the church.

In 1915 I was in Pine Bluff and came home to be with my father about a week during his last illness. I thought his funeral would be held in the old church where he had been steward for thirty-two years, and really kept the church going all those years. I was told at that time the building was so decayed that it wasn't safe to have service in it so it was held in his home and his body buried in the old family cemetery that his father started about 1860 when his six year old son died. His father bought the section #35 in 1856 and raised his family of four girls and two boys there. In the cemetery there are now about thirty graves. My sister Frances, at 97, was the last one buried there in 1964. I am very delighted that I put \$1,000.00 in my niece's husband's Building and Loan Association with agreement that the interest will always be used for the upkeep of the dear little cemetery. A fine boy and his parents live where our old six bedroom house used to be, and he has been keeping grass well mown for several years, and my half sister and her married daughter, Mrs. Faust, who live in Helena, keep an eye on things. The Fausts have four children, and the Faust Saw Mill there, so I guess there will be some of them around for quite some time.



Getting back to the Belsha family, of course I knew the first Mrs. Belsha quite well up to the time of her death. (This means the first wife of James L. Belsha. JVB). She was rather on the portly side and such a pretty lady. When mother caught the train going to Helena she always passed the time with Mrs. Belsha in the home until the train came, and I was also there part of the time. Their daughter was in school with us, but being older than I was finished school and was married to Mr. Ernest McMurry, who clerked for Mr. Belsha for a few years. (This was Catharine Bell Belsha. JVB). He was made station agent at Marvell for some years, and I think was afterwards agent in Marianna. My sister taught many years in Marianna, and in visiting with her from Forrest City she sometimes spoke of Mrs. McMurry and what a fine musician she was. I was told she got mail order instructions and learned to play piano and organ all by herself. Wars and hard times may bring fine blood down for a time, but that old evidence of class will pop out sooner or later.

I remember when Mr. Belsha married the second time and Della Slate was in school with us until she got married before I graduated. (She married Ed Walker. JVB). After finishing school at Barton School I rode six miles to the Poplar Grove School every day until I knew enough in the books to last me up to this time.

Since being out here in this mess of people for forty-five years of my lifetime, I have often thought how fortunate the Belshas, Lanes, and Wallaces were to have lived so quietly in nice little homes within walking distance of each other for the Sunday afternoon visits, and Christmas gatherings. When rather a small boy my mother used to go over to the Wallaces some Sunday afternoons and let me go along to play with a nephew

that was living with them and going to our school when he got old enough. They all sat out in the shade of the trees in the back yard and had a good time talking about everything interesting to them. I remember once they gave us a big bucket of scuppernongs (grapes, JVB) from a big vine in their back yard.

Of course I knew Miss Dora Belsha quite well as she would be at the picnicks and fish fries that took place during those gay old summers of the "Gay Nineties", when we were selling cotton for five cents per pound. Us Old Southerners had plenty to eat, but money and fine clothes were both far from us. There were eleven of us in the family, but we had a good garden, 150 sheep, 18 or 20 hogs, lots of chickens, turkeys, geese and ducks so our table was always loaded. Kill a lamb every Tuesday during the July-August-September days. With no ice in those days we gave a leg or two to some who didn't have too much. Brother Patterson, pastor of the little church on the corner had three or four young ones that enjoyed our surplus more than anyone. About last time I was down in that part of the country--1960--visiting with the Oscar McGrew family, Louise, the oldest Patterson daughter told us in conversation that "every time we saw your mother stopping at our gate we all ran out to see what she was bringing us."

I don't know whether you are going to get anything out of my efforts to tell you what I remember of things so far in the past, but if you would write to Mrs. C. M. Warfield, % "The Heritage", Helena, Arkansas, she would probably give you the address of Mrs. Mary Gist Sayle who is part of the Warfield family and looks after the family plot at the old cemetery at Central Church, and all the Warfield family is buried there from days be-



fore I was born. They were a big help to my father in keeping the old church going from soon after "The Surrender" till about 1906 or 1907.

Well, young man, it was very refreshing to me to be hearing from someone taking me so far back into the good old days of long ago, and if there is anything I can do to help you, I will be glad to hear from you again. With a background like you have, I am sure you are a leading man in some good old fundamental church and looking forward to some day being again with all the fine folks we have been talking about in this letter, and if you are ever in this part of the country, hope you will drop in to visit with us a bit.

Yours most respectfully,

Henry W. Cook

Phoenix, Arizona  
July 13, 1970

Mr. Henry W. Cook  
Los Angeles, California

Dear Mr. Cook:-

Thank you so much for your most interesting letter of June 16, 1970. I am so glad to know that there is someone sufficiently interested in the happenings of the time covered by your reminiscences about the Belshas, Lanes, Wallaces and McMurrays, and who is willing to share them with me and our several families, friends and acquaintances. Unless you have objection to it, I am going to offer both your letter and mine, with a few

comments of my own as a preamble, to the Phillips County Historical Society for publication in the quarterly Magazine.

Your comments on Uncle Moses Lane and his red kerchief which he used to combat flies and gnats were particularly interesting. While I never knew him, he having passed away September 20, 1891, some years before my advent into this world, I have seen others who carried such a weapon against the heat, humidity, and insects. I am told Uncle Mose was a great student of the bible and could quote it verbatim, Book, Chapter and verse. From your description, I am sure I would have liked him very much. Too bad his life was cut short before age 50. He was born June 15, 1841, according to my records. Probably some mosquitos got to him?

Cousin Kate (Belsha) McMurry followed the description you gave of her mother Betty, wife of Uncle Jim Belsha; that is, "on the portly side and such a pretty lady." She was an excellent pianist and for many years taught piano to large classes in Marianna and later in Little Rock, where she died in January, 1929. She and her husband, Edward Ernest McMurry were almost double first cousins, his mother having been Texas Ann Sherrod, daughter of Ruth (Jenkins) Belsha Sherrod, who was almost mother of Columbus Shackelford Belsha, (my grandfather, and James L. Belsha, by her first marriage to Zachariah Belsha, my great grandfather, in Waterloo, Lauderdale County, Alabama. The Sherrod family was a large and influential family in that state, Benjamin Sherrod being one who was quite wealthy and may have been the father of T. J. Sherrod, who married Ruth Belsha. We know nothing of the Sherrods except the foregoing, as our parents told us nothing of them, even though the children of Ruth were



relatives of the half blood.

Aunt Dora (Belsha) Terry died in Los Angeles October 10, 1963, at the age of about 96 years. My father, Benjamin Lafayette Belsha, died in Phoenix April 11, 1956, just three weeks short of 90 years of age, so judging by those standards, maybe I am a young man, as you called me in your letter--thanks for that compliment also. Yes, we have remained members of a "good old fundamental" religion, having brought our membership with us from Arkansas to the First Southern Baptist Church of Phoenix, though I have not aspired to leadership therein. For about the last half of my 40 years of employment with Phoenix Title and Trust Company, (Now Transamerica Title Insurance Company), my employment required much travel, and I just couldn't know when I would be in town, so others had to do the work I no doubt would have done in the church and my Masonic Lodge. Both my grandfather and Uncle Jim Belsha were Masons, as well as Baptists, which was the reason that at first I thought Central was a Baptist Church, until I learned different.

Sunday, May 17, 1970, I visited the Barton Baptist Church, which I was told was originally Methodist, and must have been something of a successor to Central Church. After the services I had a most interesting conversation with several members who remembered something of our family. Some names you may remember were Leifer, McChesney, Kloene, Bloesch, and Von Kanel. I believe the younger Mrs. Bloesch told me her husband's family (Von Kanel) were old timers. The church has recently published a Directory which contains a short history of the church, the first paragraph of which reads:

"The ground for Barton Church was given

by Tom and Julia Wallace on December 30, 1889, and Mr. Jim Bush, the father of Jim Bush who now lives in Helena gave the building. The building had previously been used for a school. The whole building was moved to this location, and it was dedicated as a Union Church on April 3rd, 1890."

I well remember the old church building, which was rather close to the east-west road from Marvell to Helena, and there was a tremendously large tree, oak I believe, whose limbs extended completely across the road to Helena.

In my research for historical facts relating to our several families, I have had occasion to run the federal census films (at the Mormon Genealogical Library here at Mesa, Arizona--18 miles east of Phoenix) for the years 1830 through 1880 and in so doing, in the 1880 census of Phillips County, Arkansas, Spring Creek Township, I have found the following:

No. 68: Cook, R. J., age 40, born Mississippi; Lucie F., age 35, born Mississippi; Fannie, age 12; Jannie L., age 8; Jennie C., age 5; James R., age 3; and Henry W., 3/12, all born in Arkansas; and Nannie L. Cook, age 32, sister of R. J., and Jennie H. Cook, age 28, sister of R. J.

The reason I am interested in the Cook families is the fact that Virgil G. Cooke of Cypert, Arkansas, married Ida M. Spain, daughter of Christopher Columbus Spain and Melissa Browning Spain; Melissa Browning was a sister, I am told, of Thomas Jefferson Browning, my grandfather, so Ida M. Spain Cooke was a first cousin of my mother, Annie Belle Browning. Sarah Pearse Belsha (called Minnie), daughter of my great Uncle Jim Belsha of Barton, married Charles B. Spain, and



I am searching for any information available on Charles B. Spain, who was some kind of a relative of Christopher Columbus Spain, to assist in completing my Browning family record and to pass the Spain information on to my two cousins, James N. Spaine and Edward M. Spaine. They have no knowledge whatever of their grandfather and his predecessors in the Spain family. After the death of their father and mother (she died August 26, 1900 and he died some time before) Uncle Jim Belsha and his daughter, Kate McMurry took the two boys and raised them. They had a sister, Betty, died young. Charles B. Spain is said to have owned a cotton gin for a time, but indications are it belonged to Christopher Columbus Spain and Charles B. was manager of it for a time. Christopher Columbus Spain owned land in the Trenton area and is said to have been responsible in getting the post office at Coffee Creek. Anything you can tell me about the Spain and Browning families, also Virgil Cooke's family will be appreciated.

Thanks again for your interesting letter, and you may be sure I will drop by for a visit with you next time I am in Los Angeles.

Sincerely and respectfully,

James V. Belsha

Los Angeles, California  
July 23, 1970

Mr. James V. Belsha  
Phoenix, Arizona

Dear Mr. Belsha:-

Replying to yours of July 13; It gives me

great pleasure to know that my information in regard to what you wanted to know about members of your family was useful to you. Of course, if you want to have my letter run in Phillips County Quarterly, it will be alright with me.\*\*\*

I don't remember whether I mentioned it in my letter, but when we buried Mr. Tom Wallace, Mr. Belsha, after the grave had been filled and shaped properly and we were turning to go to our horses and return home, asked if someone would not offer up a little prayer. I know, as usual, I was so proud of my father as he prayed quite a lengthy prayer. He was called upon quite often to pray upon certain occasions, and to ask the blessing before meals sometimes. It is a mighty pleasant memory to me to this day that not once did he ever fail to respond to the call. We always had family prayers at home every night without fail, and a chapter was read in the Bible. What a different world this would be today if every family did likewise.

In regard to the Spain family, when quite a lad I slightly knew, Charley Spain, and remember when he married Minnie Belsha. After his death she lived in a home Mr. Belsha built for her and her two boys there in Barton. They were still quite small when I left that part of the country in 1900.

If you would write to Mrs. E. G. Green, 926 Park Avenue, West Helena, Arkansas, she may be able to tell you something about the Virgil Cooke family, as she was a Miss Davidson, and raised in Marvell. Two Sundays a month Brother Pasley, of Forrest City, preached in the Baptist Church at Rehoboth, up in the Vineyard neighborhood. Unless the weather was mighty bad, Mr. Belsha with his very fine horse, Major, were on their way to Rehoboth between nine and ten o'clock. He would come



to our Sunday School at the little church Mr. Bush gave us, but never came to hear our Christian minister, Brother T. F. Patterson preach.

Most Sincerely,

Henry W. Cook.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

#### NOTES

With the June issue members received the lovely Historic Helena and West Helena booklet courtesy Phillips County Chamber of Commerce who gave them to the Historical Society for that purpose. With this issue you are receiving another bonus which you will treasure. Mrs. Thomas Faust asked the First Federal Savings & Loan Association to give each member a copy of their beautiful pictorial history of Helena. This they graciously consented to do.

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The Historic Tour during Serendipity Week was a huge success. Over 300 people went on the tour which had a delightful culmination in the form of a tea at historic Estevan Hall, Mrs. F. W. Schatz hostess.

#### THE EXPLOITS OF GENERAL JO. O. SHELBY IN PHILLIPS COUNTY

by J. M. Massey

Jo. O. Shelby was the only Confederate general who never surrendered. He was said to have been the best cavalry general of the South. He raised a brigade of cavalry in Missouri, taught them a slashing frontier style of fighting, led them on incredible raids against the Federal forces, raids which eventually brought his Iron Brigade to Phillips County.

When Confederate forces made an appeal for help at Corinth, Mississippi, Jo. Shelby, then a captain in the Missouri State Guard, led his dismounted company to the damp, miry trenches around Corinth. Upon the retreat of General Beauregard's army from Corinth, Shelby's company was the last to leave the battle-scarred town.

On the 10th of June, 1862, Shelby was commissioned by the Confederate Secretary of War to raise a cavalry regiment and ordered to proceed to Missouri for that purpose. With every town along the Mississippi River, except Vicksburg and Port Hudson, in the hands of the Federals, Shelby decided to run the gantlet at Helena, Arkansas. Upon reaching the river opposite Helena he found it well guarded by Federal forces, perhaps more so than he had expected. "One grim iron-clad lay at the Helena Wharf and another was anchored half-mile above."

With danger lurking ahead and plans to be made, Shelby made preparation to camp on the



Mississippi side, concealed beneath the virgin trees until darkness would conceal his movements. He called for volunteers to paddle a skiff in his possession across the river above Helena, reconnoiter, and report back to him before daybreak. The scouts returned at midnight bringing news that the town's people were friendly and arrangements were made to ferry the company across in a large flatboat.

Major Edwards described their wonderful reception by the town's citizens.

No more sleep until the Rubison had been passed, which was accomplished safely about sunrise, and the good and beautiful Helena girls welcomed the hungry soldiers with smiles and eyes as bright as the sunlight which flashes on steel. After a magnificent breakfast, washed down by copious goblets of champagne, although probably such a thing as champagne for breakfast had never been thought of before in Helena. Captain Shelby set about maturing his plans.

After this gracious reception of southern hospitality at one of the local plantations, Shelby skirted the strongly guarded roads leading from Helena to start a long weary trip to Missouri. Little did Shelby realize upon his first visit to Helena that he would be seriously wounded in the forthcoming battle for the town.

Shelby raised a regiment of cavalry in four days at Waverly, Missouri. Within a short time the raw recruits were locked in battle for their baptism of fire and death. Sometime shortly after their first engagement, Shelby received his commission as

colonel.

In the autumn of 1862, Shelby's regiment was placed under command of General John S. Marmaduke, a young and gallant Missourian who had won his spurs amid the gloom and glory of Shiloh, and who had recently arrived in the Trans-Mississippi Department, and was ordered by General Hindman to assume command of all the cavalry and go at once to the front. It was under Marmaduke that Shelby was to serve at the Battle of Helena.

Shelby, the young Kentuckian, commanded his men with a firm hand. His men idolized him. He led them in pitched battles with forces many times their size in Arkansas, as well as in his adopted state, Missouri.

In June, 1863, General Holmes then in command of the Trans-Mississippi Department, pressured by increasing demands for action to relieve Federal pressure on Vicksburg by a diversionary attack on Helena, was willing to brave an attack on the well fortified city. On June 16, therefore, Holmes journeyed to Jacksonport to confer with Marmaduke, Shelby, and Price. At Jacksonport, Holmes outlined his plans. Three Confederate divisions, rendezvousing at Clarendon on June 26, would move by divergent roads and attack Helena at daylight on the Fourth of July. Price would attack from the west, Fagan from the south, and the brigade of Marmaduke and Shelby, together with that of Walker, from the north.

On the 28th of June, 1863, Shelby's brigade was in motion for Helena. The entire country between Jacksonport and the Mississippi River was one vast lagoon, streaked with rapidly flowing streams and bottomless bayous. On the line of travel were the White River, Caney Creek, and the black gumbo bottoms of Bayou de View to cross.



On June 30, 1863, Colonel Shelby received a communique from General Marmaduke directing him to approach Helena VIA La Grange road, and encamp on it 5 to 10 miles from Helena. In a return communique Shelby states,

Your dispatch was received 8 miles to the front of La Grange. The command was halted and camped immediately after reception of the order. I have a chain of pickets from the Spring Creek Road to the Saint Francis River, which covers the whole of my front, and my left flank is covered front and rear by my own pickets. I have the river road from Helena to Saint Francis well guarded. My command is some miles in advance of General Holmes. My pickets on the right connect with the pickets of General Holmes. My pickets on Sterling Road are in 3 miles of Helena. I have an infantry picket covering my front.

General Holmes' plan of attack was excellent, and would have been successful but for the indifference of some and the ignorance of others. The success of the attack on Helena depended absolutely on perfect coordination. Every Confederate unit must strike simultaneously at daylight, every rifle pit of the enemy must be carried, every gun silenced, and the defenders driven back into the town upon their main fortification, Fort Curtis. This was a square citadel or redoubt in the center of town bristling with crossed spikes and manned by no fewer than twenty siege guns, pointing in all directions. Seldom has a Confederate army been given a rougher assignment than the assault on Helena.

Shelby was to move with General Marmaduke and take Rightor Hill on the north of town. Shelby, leading his brigade, struck a heavy blockade about two miles north from the town, through which he was forced to cut his way that the artillery might not be left behind - he being the only commander taking guns into action. The narrow ridge running almost up to Fort Salomon (the breast-work of defence on Rightor Hill) became so pointed and sharp as he advanced, that the cannon wheels could not rest upon its summit, and bounded halfway down its sides at every discharge.

At sunrise the fog lifted and Shelby's guns commanded by Lieutenant Dick Collins, banged away at everything in sight, including an iron-clad escorting a large steamer loaded with Federal troops. Shelby's action brought the Federal artillery alive. From the town a splendid six-gun battery ran out and took position in the plain below to silence Collins' guns. The iron-clad shelled him all day, and Fort Salomon plied its busy Parrotts (rifled artillery pieces) almost beyond endurance.

It was a mess, a bloody, unholy mess, but the Confederate soldiers in their ranks, as always, covered himself (sic) with glory. For twelve solid hours in the tanglefoot of the felled logs, (the Union forces had felled trees across roads to check the advance of Confederate forces) the deep ravines, the impossible gullies, the rifle pits, the blazing artillery, the thunder of the heavy guns from Fort Curtis, and the barricaded streets of Helena itself, the boys from Missouri, Texas, and Arkansas fought like the swamp tigers they had become.

The Confederates were driven back in the end be-



cause the attack was not coordinated and because the Federals could concentrate their fire always on the rebels' weak points.

Colonel Shelby, braving death as if holding a charmed life, and having two horses killed under him (during this attack) at last received a dreadful wound that shattered his wrist, plowed through his arm, and caused intolerable agony.

The Confederates began a painful retreat. Collins' battery was in danger, its horses killed, its wheels bullet-rent and riddled. Scarcely able to sit his horse, his wound still bleeding freely, Shelby dashed down the ranks of his brigade shouting: "Volunteers to save the battery. Shelby's brigade never lost a battery, and with God's help it never shall!" Fifty volunteers brought the weapons to safety, although fifteen of the brave men lost their lives in this daring feat.

In a statement of General Marmaduke, Colonel Shelby's artillery fired more rounds than Colonel Brooks' and Colonel Dobbins' together. Colonel Shelby, seriously wounded, was unable to turn in a report of his action at Helena. From the bloody attack upon Helena, Shelby's brigade moved slowly back to Jacksonport.

In September, 1863, Shelby made a daring foray into Missouri. On October 12th, he headed for the town of Marshall, pursued by Union forces commanded by General Brown. In the battle at Marshall, Shelby had a horse killed under him, and he carried his arm in a sling still suffering from a wound received at Helena, Arkansas, the previous 4th of July. Shelby left Major Shanks' regiment at the bridge across Salt Fork, (on the outskirts of Marshall) ordered him to destroy it and hold Brown in check. Vastly outnumbered, Shanks was forced to retreat.

My rifled gun had again become useless. The trail, which was shivered by a cannon shot at Helena, broke off short, and left it unmanageable. I determined to save it, if possible, and had it fixed up, under a hot fire, with poles; but in crossing a deep ravine it hopelessly gave way in which condition it was well spiked and left.

On May 27, 1864, Shelby was appointed Confederate commander north of the Arkansas River. Shelby, an aggressive commander, began immediately to plan daring raids against the enemy. One of the best known incidents of Shelby's career occurred in June, 1864, the capture by cavalry and artillery of the Federal iron-clad Queen City at Clarendon, Arkansas, on the lower White River. General Shelby sent his prisoners from the Queen City, including Captain Hickey (Captain of the Queen City) to Fort Curtis, in Helena, where they were paroled.

In June, Shelby determined to strike a blow more daring than any other. Clustering all above and below Helena were innumerable United States Government plantations and Shelby determined to wipe them out clean. For this task he sent Colonel Gordon whose orders read somehow this: "Find Colonel Dobbins, report to him, and united, both of you will strike simultaneously the United States Government plantations in the neighborhood of Helena." Gordon found Dobbins near the little town of Trenton.

Susan Cook in her diary reports that on June 27, Colonel Dobbins was at Trenton with his regiment. On July 27, Colonel Dobbins was at Spring Creek going toward Helena. It is surmised they were going to destroy the government farms. On August 1, Colonel Dobbins had gone down to destroy



the Yankee farms at the river.

So thoroughly did Colonels Dobbins and Gordon complete their assignment that there was little left in their line of march to show how prosperous had been the occupation, by the Federals, of this lovely land. Tired from incessant destruction, and having in fact not much more work to do, Gordon gathered up his regiment and marched back in sight of Helena, bearing to Shelby's camp hundreds of negroes, mules, wagons, and enormous amounts of clothing and supplies. Thus ended Shelby's exploits in Phillips County. Shelby evidently made many local friends.

The following letter is from a Helena newspaper, preserved in a scrapbook kept by the late Mrs. Andrew Coolidge and now in the possession of her daughter, Mrs. Mary E. Coolidge Miles. It concerns an invitation which was sent to General Shelby to attend the dedication of the Confederate movement in the Confederate Cemetery, Helena, Arkansas, on May 25, 1892.

Adrian, Mo., May 22, 1892

John J. Hornor, Esq.:

Your very fine favor was duly received - my intention was to avail myself of the kind invitation, not only at your hands but likewise of President Barlow and Mrs. W. E. Moore, secretary of the Pat Cleburne Monument Association. If there is a people on earth that I feel attached to it is those of your state. I was with her in her great struggle for "Constitutional rights" and should events of the future require her again to resort to arms to vindicate her honor and rights, I being alive will join her gallant sons in her vindication.

Do you know there is hardly a path in your

state, hardly a ford to a stream that I did not know. Hardly a county but I had many acquaintances in; and now my great desire is to traverse your grand old state once more before I am called off. I will do it too. I am devoid of language to express my feelings of appreciation and affection for the people who resided there at that time. To die without making an effort to see those who have been spared, I shall never consent to do so.

Helena, God bless Helena. Yes, I have been there not only in daylight, but in the night. The last time I made the effort I failed, as you well know. We could (the Confederate army) and should have whipped the Yankees on that day. We had the men, the men had the courage, the men were determined to take the enemy or die in the effort. No battlefield ever presented a better or more courageous, or more patriotic or determined body of men than those who marched under our glorious flag on that eventful and unfortunate day. Had we been properly handled we would have forced the surrender of the enemy or driven them into your grand river. The fault was with the commander, not the men.

Ambitious leaders often injure their cause more than the enemy, and the battle of "Helena" was an illustration to those who participated. Now then, my dear Hornor, I will state what I should have mentioned first. Some weeks since my wife dislocated her shoulder. I delayed writing to you, Mr. Barlow and Mrs. Moore, in hopes all the time she would recover, thereby enabling me to join you on the occasion referred to. To my great regret she is not well enough for me to leave. She was banished during the war when quite young from the fact of being my wife, and it more than behooves me to care for her my best, for what she has undergone for me in the past. I will be with you sometime in the future, sure. Forget



you, you say, never; as you will find out sometime.

Now, Hornor, see Mr. Barlow and dear Mrs. Moore, and thank them for me and tell them my excuse for not being able to be with them on the Holy occasion. My heart and spirits are with you, and I rejoice to know the efforts of our noble women in your section have been crowned with success in honoring the noble dead, who fell in defense of the rights of the best people of God's Creation.

God bless you.

Your friend,

Jo. O. Shelby

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#### NOTES

The Phillips County Foundation for Historic Preservation, Inc., has acquired the old Almer store building on Columbia Street. Money gotten through the untiring efforts of a few has been matched by federal funds. The old landmark was about to meet the same end as Sacred Heart Academy and was saved by a last ditch stand. Exciting plans are in the making for this charming old store building.

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For those members who could not be here to help us celebrate the 300th anniversary of the Mississippi River trip of Father Marquette and Louis Jolliet, let us tell you that it was a most gratifying experience for those who worked long and hard to make it something to remember for all. Of course, the highlight was the arrival of the men who re-enacted the trip. They charmed us all. They were so carried away with the role they were playing that their infectious joy touched everyone. From the re-dedication of the stately Marquette statue on Oakland to the landing of the Marquette party, through the magnificent field mass with the melodious voices of the Hendrix choir carrying out across the mighty Mississippi, to the public reception, the entire celebration was a complete success.

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