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Corrales, N. M.
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Marvell
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WISCONSIN TROOPS AT HELENA: IX

The following account is from Margaret Brobst Roth, ed., WELL MARY: CIVIL WAR LETTERS OF A WISCONSIN VOLUNTEER (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press; c 1960 by the Regents of the University of Wisconsin), pp. 23-35, and is printed here by permission of the University of Wisconsin Press.

The letters in this account were written by Private John F. Brobst of the 25th Wisconsin Infantry Regiment to Mary Englesby. She was in her early teens and the young soldier was a friend of her family. They corresponded during the years of the war and when the war ended and he returned home, they were married.

At Vicksburg, Private Brobst's regiment was a part of Montgomery's Brigade, Kimball's Division, 16th Army Corps (General Washburn), Army of the Tennessee, under General Ulysses S. Grant

*

CHAPTER TWO

November 1863-January 1864

"A dreary lonesome life"

The seige of Vicksburg was over, and on that glorious Fourth of July it looked to Grant's troops as though the war would soon be over too. They would not have believed that two more years of fighting and hardship would be endured before the Confederacy could be forced to surrender. But Vicksburg was an important victory, a turning point in the western campaign. After the fall of Port Hudson a few days later, the entire Mississippi River could be controlled by the Union forces. The outcome of the war

was at this point already decided, but few realized the lengths to which the Confederacy would go for the slightest chance of turning the tide.

During that month of July, 1863, in Mississippi, the Twenty-fifth Wisconsin suffered its worst ordeal of illness, as one by one every soldier in the regiment contracted malaria or dysentery. On the twentieth of July, five hundred men lay sick, and not more than one hundred were fit for duty. Malaria was called "the ague," typhoid was "swamp fever," and dysentery "the quickstep"; many of the men were unaware of the causes or nature of their sickness. By the end of the war, the deaths from these diseases would far outnumber the deaths from battle wounds.¹

In July and August of 1863, the entire regiment was sent up the Mississippi River to Helena, Arkansas, to remain until the following February, being detailed as Provost Guard of the Post.

During the winter months of the Civil War, the fighting often came to a standstill, as long marches and camping in the open were hampered by the slush, rain, and mud of the southern winter. Whenever possible the troops were housed in semipermanent barracks or huts, and were occupied mainly with drilling, in anticipation of the renewed action that would inevitably come with spring weather.

On the western front, many of the Union troops had their winter quarters in towns along the Mississippi River, an important supply route. Helena, Arkansas, was such a town, and it was here that the Twenty-fifth Wisconsin spent the winter of 1863-64. Living conditions for the

¹ See Wiley, *The Life of Billy Yank*, p. 124; Campbell, *Wisconsin in Three Centuries*, III, 286.

troops were somewhat improved, and cooler weather brought considerable relief from the sickness which had plagued the regiment all summer. As their health returned, so did the enthusiasm of the boys from Wisconsin, and they willingly went about their tedious routine of picket duty and drilling, with an occasional scouting detail to search for rebels.

Soldiering seemed easier now that they had the hang of it. Although thoughts of home and families were still uppermost in the minds of these volunteers, they were resigned to serving out their three years if necessary. John Brobst and his Gilmanton friends were beginning to realize that the war was not yet won, and that preparations were being made for an extensive campaign in the South in the spring. Meanwhile, they made the most of their leisure time, knowing that they would soon be on the move again.

[Helena, Arkansas
November, 1863]

[*Beginning of letter missing.*]

I have commenced this letter the 29th of November and shall give you a diary of the many things that transpire every day in camp life as they will no doubt be interesting to you.

I shall commence on the 28th of November as I have just returned from a scout that we had on that day. Orders came at 4 o'clock in the afternoon for fifty men to march with two days rations of provisions and by 5 o'clock we

were on the steamer "Cheek" and by daylight next morning we landed opposite island No. 65. There we disembarked and took our course due west. After going some 5 miles we found a camp where there had been some guerrillas but they had gone, so seven of us started in advance of the main body and soon surrounded a plantation. Myself and another one went in to see what they had in the house and we found something very nice. There sat three birds that we call guerrillas. One of them was smoking his pipe. We demanded a surrender immediately. Two of them gave themselves up, the other started off on the run. We sent two messengers of death after him, which soon brought him, too. He fell but was not hit, raised up, raised his hands over his head, a surrender. He said he fell so as not to have us shoot any more. The two balls came too close for comfort.

They had each a double barrel shot gun and each a horse and saddle. These with about 25 chickens were all our prisoners, but we being very cruel and hard-hearted we showed no quarters for the hens, but slaughtered them without mercy. The next that fell in our hands was a steady old cow, who not thinking any harm, was shot down, dressed, and put in the wagon. The next was three very fine hogs who fared a similar fate. Now our time was at an end. We had to go back to the main body and let some others take the advance. They captured 5 prisoners and quite a number of hogs, chickens, geese, turkeys, sweet potatoes, etc. We then came back, re-embarked, and started for camp with 8 prisoners, 11 horses, and 8 shot-guns besides our other booty. This ends up this scout. Nothing more passes of any note except camp tricks for several days.

Dec. the 4th. Another call for scouts, one day's rations, the best marksmen in the regt. Something afloat we think. We get ready, now comes a guide. He is a loyal southerner driven inside of our lines. He starts off, we follow him. He soon deploys us in the woods as skirmishers, and now we advance. Presently, we hear a rustling in the leaves, and now we see them surrounded, can't get away, but must surrender—19 guerrillas, the very ones that destroyed our guide's property and drove him in our lines. He has revenge. They are all prisoners of war. Now our fun is played out. We must go back to camp and await the next order.

Dec. the 9th. Here comes the expected call. Another scout, one day's rations, then we are off for some more fun. We go on the steamer "Bell Memphis," and up the river we go to the mouth of the St. Francis River, then up that river. This time I have to stay back and let others have the best of the fun. They hunt all day but find nothing. Our rations all gone but must stay another day without any food, but we will have some in the morning when we find a plantation.

A party of boys have gone ahead. They get all around the first house before they are seen. They find 7 guerrillas in the house waiting for their breakfast. Our boys eat their meal for them and take them prisoners with their horses, and we start back and have landed safe on the banks of the Mississippi at Helena. This tells you all the exploits up to the present time. We will see what more will happen before I hear from you.

Dec. the 16th. Another scout, but I did not go with them.

They had a good time. All here safe but one man in Co. E. He got wounded in the knee but not very severe. They got a number of prisoners.

Dec. the 25th, Christmas Day. Another scout. I am one of the number. We go up the St. Francis River. We have a good time. We kill a nice fat turkey and make a secesh woman cook it. She said she would not do it at first, but we scared her so that she cooked the turkey, and we had a good Christmas. We got 22 prisoners this time, 30 horses and some other things such as we always get, but we had a fine time. I hope you had as good a time. [*Rest of letter missing.*]

[*Beginning of letter missing.*]

I have been taking opium for some time to prepare for the shake² and I think with the best of care and plenty of opium I will survive the shake with little or no effect on the brain.

Oh, how I wish the cruel thoughts were over, gone and passed from remembrance, but I have always heard the road of true love was rough, and if we had stayed away from them hills and mountains at Vicksburg the road of my love would have been smooth as glass, but it was always my luck to be led in some scrape and then left to get out the best that I could. Uncle Sam is to blame. He did it all, but I have forgave him all.

So you think that picture does not look natural. Well,

²A combination of drugs and quinine was the usual prescription during the Civil War for soldiers suffering from malaria.

I will agree with you there but it was the best that they could take and then I broke two or three machines looking in them to get that picture taken. But I will get a better one taken the first chance I have and send to you. But you must not show it to your aunt, will you.

Well, I wish I was up there to go a hare hunting with your father and uncle, but that will not be until the war is over. I do not think I shall try to go home until I can stay there for good. Tell your father if he don't write to me I shan't chase deer for him when I get back again. A soldier's life is a dreary, lonesome life, yet a stranger might come in camp and see them and go off and think them perfectly happy with their lot, but when they think of home the name is sweet. We live well. We go out and borrow a chicken or two, nights. My partner and me stew them up and have general feasts all to ourselves. My respects to that aunt of yours and all of your folks and yourself. Hoping this will find you all well and the request of an early answer, I will close. Direct to Helena, Ark., and the regt., Co., etc.

Yours truly, goodbye for the present from a friend.

JFB/MEE

Helena, Ark., Jan. the 19th/64

Dear respected Friend Mary,

It was with great pleasure that I received your ever-welcome letter and devoured the contents, as a hungry lion devours his prey. I was glad to hear of your good health. My health is good as usual and hope when this

comes to hand it will find you still enjoying the same blessing.

Your letter was written before Christmas and New Year so you would not tell me how you did enjoy yourself, but I hope you had a gay and happy time and I wish you a happy New Year all this year and for the next forty to come. I spent my holidays real soldier fashion. Lots of fun, but when I came to sit down and sum it all up it did not amount to but very little. What little it did amount to was just the sum of an 0.

I had written an answer to your letter before I received it, and I guess you will be sick of letters by the time that you get through reading it, for it covers a quarter section of paper, besides some that I have here that it don't cover. If you are fond of long letters and not much news I can supply you very well I think.

William Anderson,³ the tall slim young man that you danced the polkey with up at the mill, is dead. He died the 22nd of December. He was a good soldier, much loved and respected in the Co. We miss him greatly, but of such is the trials of war, and the clever as well as others must go when it is their unlucky fate.

You say you wish we were all at home. Well, so do I, but we cannot be yet, and not for some time to come. The best prospects are that we will have the pleasure of serving our time out. And then again, if we were to come home, I fear that you would soon get tired of us, for we would be so full of that old gent—I forget what they do call him now, but he is the chief proprietor of that dark

³ Private William E. Anderson, Durand, Wisconsin, Company G, 25th Wisconsin Infantry Regiment. He died of disease on December 28, 1863, Cairo, Illinois, according to the Wisconsin Roster.

region that the preacher tells us about, the one that coaxes the sinners in, then locks the door and loses the key, and leaves the poor sinner in the limbos.

I wish I could have been up there to run and head off the deer for your father when he was out on that hunt of his. I have run so much since I have been in the army that I think I could do better than I did two years ago. But you must not think we run from the rebs. No indeed, I should sacrifice my last relation first but not my sweet self. Brave, am I not?

We have some very cold weather here for this country. Those that live here say that it is very uncommon for this country. There have been several frozen to death here. And it is snowing here today, but the snow is not more than two inches deep, but the mud is about two feet deep under that. This is a fact about the mud.

I am on camp guard today and how I wish that the good Angel would come with the good tidings of great joy, and that is peace. Soft peace, not piece of bread, for we have had plenty of that ever since we left Madison, but peace, harmony, tranquillity, and the marriage of the opposite parties, that would be glad tidings of great joy in reality.

There has about half of our regt. gone off on a fifteen day scout. They have been gone seven days and we have got marching orders for Mobile and will have to leave before they get back, and that will look wild and my heart flutters as bad as a stage dancer's foot when he is cutting pigeon wings.

Our orders may [be] countermanded, and I hope they will for it is very bad moving now, the mud is so deep. But if they say Go, we will have to trot just like a rich man's dog only we can't trot under the bed.

Jan. 20th. Well, our orders this morning are to be ready to march for the Rio Grand, away down in Mexico. We have all given up all hopes of our getting back to Wisconsin again. Oh, when I set out to go to war I left this world behind me. We will probably camp somewhere in Texas until spring, then here goes to see who is bullet proof. We are all glad that we are going and would feel disappointed if we did not go, for we are all ready to start.

We start tomorrow if the overruling Providence is willing. I will probably have a chance to see my brother and Thomas Stewart as well as many others that I shall be glad to see. They are all down there somewhere.

Oh well, [here] goes for that painful subject again. Poor me and poor you! What shall we do? Well, I know what we can do, but I shan't tell you yet. But here I am pining away something as you are, all because we have been disappointed in our love affairs, but fate has it so and we can't help ourselves.

I believe this is all the news that I can think of, only that I have drawn a new two-story hat today, and am proud as can be. Imagine myself at home and bowing very low to get in somebody's door. Oh, here he is—well there, if that don't beat the lousy grayback rebs—that young man that ate the filapean⁴ with you at the mill, the one that you asked me what that or who that fool was, that you had never seen him. Well, of course, you can't remember him so I will have to tell you who I mean. It is Chauncey

⁴ Philopena, or filopena, is a social game in which each of two persons eats one of the two halves of the kernel of a nut. The one who is last to say "philopena," or some other word agreed upon, must pay a forfeit. John Brobst mentions the game several times.

Cooke.⁵ He just came along with a package of letters that he has been writing, one of them held up so I could see the backing, and can I believe my eyes? Yes, I can. It was Miss Mary E. Englesby, Gilmanton, Buffalo Co., Wis. Have you ever received it? Of course not. Well, I am in an awful hurry. If I was going to get married to some of them girls that I have disappointed tomorrow I could not be in any more of a fluster, for it is "Do this," "Do that." "Get this ready to load on the wagon." "Get forty rounds of cartridges in your box." "Clean up your gun for inspection." And then my new clothes that I have drawn, I must take time to admire them. With my best wishes, I shall have to close.

The Gilmanton boys are all well. Thompson Pratt is in the Pioneer Corps.⁶ He is not with the Co. now. Write soon and often. I will write as often as I can.

We will not be where we can send our letters off at all times and you must not think that I deem them not worth answering if you should not get an answer to all of them. My respects to all you see fit to give and to yourself. Excuse poor writing for I have a poor place to write and am in a great hurry. Direct as I last told you. Yours truly, goodbye for the present.

I remain as your faithful friend,

John F. Brobst M. E. E.

⁵ Private Chauncey H. Cooke, Gilmanton, Wisconsin, Company G, 25th Wisconsin Infantry Regiment.

⁶ Similar to engineers, mainly engaged in building roads and bridges.

CHAPTER THREE

February 1864-April 1864

"We say it's all for the Union"

After many a wild rumor and false start, the Twenty-fifth Wisconsin finally left their winter quarters at Helena, Arkansas, on the first day of February, 1864. They were not going to Mobile or Mexico, or out east to help the Army of the Potomac. They were to travel by steamer down the Mississippi River to Vicksburg. There they would join General Sherman, who was planning a deep thrust into the state of Mississippi. Their target was to be a little southern town called Meridian, which was an im-

portant link in the South's supply line. General Sherman's intention was to destroy the town's railroad junction, and to burn or confiscate the supplies and ammunition stored in Meridian. The success of such an expedition would be not only an important military victory, but also a severe blow to the morale of the entire Confederacy.

The Twenty-fifth Wisconsin Volunteers were ready to move. They had not been told where they were heading, but it could not have mattered less, for they were tired of staying in one place. The winter months in Helena had been long and tedious; even a rough and muddy march would be a welcome diversion. If they should have to fight a few battles along the way, at least they would be contributing more to the Union cause than by the mere performance of guard duty.

Private John Brobst was with his company when it left Helena on February 1, apparently having recovered from the recurring attacks of malaria which had troubled him for months. His treatment had been the usual one prescribed by the army doctors, a cure-all combination of drugs and quinine. It had done the trick, at least for the time being. Right now nothing serious was bothering John. At times he did wonder whether he would ever get home again, but it seemed futile to speculate on that question.

MODOC

by

Margie I. Mills

There is no town, no post office, no church, no school, no landing now; Modoc is only a state of mind, located in Tappan Township, Phillips County, Arkansas; lying between Elaine on the west and the Mississippi River on the east, but beloved by all who do now or have lived there. Most of the facts here stated are the combined memories of old timers who live in or adjacent to the territory, from records in family Bibles, diaries, and land deeds.

In the beginning, the householders acquired land fronting the river; there were no roads or railroads; the only means of transportation was by water; first flat and keel boats and later by steamboats.¹ Francis Decker came, with his family, from Alsace-Lorraine, during the reign of one of the Napoleons, via Millhausen, Indiana. He arrived in Arkansas in 1843 and patented Island 62, the highest spot in the vicinity. This island, approximately seven miles long, was separated from the mainland by a chute, and was obtained from the U. S. Land Office in Helena, Arkansas. The only access was by skiff or barge.

His son, Christian Decker, married Josephine Heigel, who had come from Hamburg, Germany, at age eleven. Their children were: Fannie, birth and death unknown; Peter, who married Agnes Decker in 1871, died without issue; Henry Lawrence, married Samantha Hemmingway in 1885. Their children were: Walter, 1886-1891, was drowned; Jesse, married Retha Calhoun, had two children who died at birth. He later became a well known Methodist minister. Mary married E. L. Baldwin and had two children, Dan, who married Ann Hurst, had two children, Dan

Hurst and Thomas Richard; Doris married W. F. Pannell and had one son, Patrick. Maud married Thomas C. Littlejohn, had two children, Cornelia, and Thomas C., Jr., who married Sue Curtis. They had three children, Nancy, Mark, and Barbara Bertha, 1893-1897, died of spinal meningitis at age four. Cornelia L. married John Wolfe, had Richard Baldwin, who married Helen Fowler.

Later, Josephine Decker married John R. McGuire, of Modoc Landing, who had a store, was postmaster, and operated Modoc Landing. She was postmaster there in 1893. They moved to Helena and died there. The Deckers had intermarried with the Twittys: Edward Twitty married Samantha Hemmingway Decker. Their children were: Rose Twitty, who married Thomas H. Weir, had no children; Joe Twitty married Beulah Cox, no children; Horace, 1901-1922, drowned at age twenty-one; Cornelia Twitty married John Knox, no children, now lives in Oklahoma City, Okla.

This family was the only one who went through the Civil War as the remainder of the territory was unsettled at the time. Not much more was learned of this prosperous family except that they dealt in buying and selling land, had a store, farmed, and had a sawmill, which was located on the north end of the island. During the war, the Yankee gunboats went up and down the river and would shell Island 62. Josephine Decker would send the children and the horses back into the timber for safety. Once when the island was raided, she hid between the mattress and the feather bed and watched the enemy ransack the house, steal the meat, and burn the smokehouse. They failed to get the silver, which was hidden in the well.

After Modoc was settled and the levee built, Deckers traded the island to John Crow for land inside the levee. The island is now owned and farmed by Jeff Crow. This place was flooded regularly.²

When the Homestead Act was passed in May, 1862,

there were then two sources of cheap land; to homestead it or buy it from the state. Settlers flocked into this swampy, mosquito infested woodland. Farmers could obtain cheap land by filing, living on the land for five years and improving it, or they could pay the state \$1.25 an acre in lieu of the residence requirements. The land boom lasted from 1862 until 1900.³

According to the Phillips County Historical Quarterly, September, 1966, John McGuire named his place Modoc after the "Modoc War,"⁴ the last Indian uprising in California, in 1883.⁵ However, there were other settlers there at the time as Isaac Williams was named postmaster in 1875. John McGuire, who married Josephine Decker after the deaths of their spouses, succeeded him in 1880. Josephine was named postmaster in 1883.⁶

Sil Jones, from Mississippi, homesteaded what is now known as the Henry Carter farm. His sons were: Horace, Cleave, George, and Ben. He donated the land for the Methodist Church and cemetery, which still bears his name. The cemetery is now a "barr" pit, made during the construction of the 1938 levee. The pile of stones remains a grim reminder of the past.⁷

The Ed Hardens, from Greenville, Mississippi, homesteaded on the west side of the present levee. Pose Harden, his brother, owned forty acres where the hard road crosses the levee, later owned by the late William O. Demoret. He married a Modoc girl, Letitia Murray. Ed and Lizzie Harden homesteaded forty acres in the same area. Another brother, Miles, also homesteaded. His three sons were: Ben, Otto, and Miles. Miles had one son, Jimmy, who inherited his land.⁸

Billy Cox came from St. Louis, Missouri, around 1890, and married Josephine Turner from Turner, Arkansas. He homesteaded eighty acres where Joe Quinn now lives, and purchased the remainder of his

holdings from John McGuire. He had four daughters: Ollie Belle, who married Otto Harden; Beulah married Joe Twitty, from Island 62; Viola married Curtis Myatt; and Nannie married Casey Harris. Mr. Cox became postmaster at Modoc in 1906. He owned a store, ran the landing, and served as postmaster until his death in 1920. Mr. Cox, a thrifty farmer, cleared land for hire. If business got slow, one cleared land or cut timber and rafted it to market. Since they were at the mercy of the river, they used this method as a back-up means of support.

Ollie Belle had children; they are Otto, who married Margaret Leggett of Lubbock, Texas, has three children and lives in Lubbock; Hazel, who married Dan Tillman and had two sons, Harold and Sonny. Viola's children are: Louise, who married Preston Wheeler, lives in Clarendon and has three children, Mary, Virginia, and Juanita; Sarah, who married Al Majors, has two children and lives in Cumberland, Maryland; Roberta married Dutch Feemster, has three children and lives in West Helena; Betty married Sonny Wells, has three children and lives in Alexandria, Louisiana; Chester married Wanda Short, has one son, James, lives in Elaine.⁹ Nannie had one son, Robert Harris, who married Marie Lavre from Greenwood, Arkansas. They have one son and reside in Memphis, Tennessee.

R. D. L. Smythe came from Kosciusko, Mississippi, as a company doctor for the Fair Lumber Company (American Washboard Company). He married Annie Smith from Arkansas and they had one daughter, Annie, who still survives and owns 750 acres of the vast holdings acquired by her father. Joe Twitty farms 52 acres of her land, on both sides of the levee. The other land is in timber. The late William O. Demoret owned part of the remainder.¹⁰

J. W. (Johnny) Klutz, from Mississippi, married Hattie Graham from Turner, Arkansas. He homesteaded where Dewey Klutz and his sister, Mrs. Alma Wheeler,

now own but paid off the residence requirement at \$1.25 per acre. He had nine children, four who died in infancy, and Nora, W. H. (Will), Archie, Alma, and Dewey. He came to Island 62 and sharecropped three years with Mr. Decker, made enough money to pay for his land. He bought between the turnrow at Joe Quinn's and William Demoret's place. In 1896, he went to Memphis and bought the material for his house. He rafted the lumber to Modoc Landing, riding the raft. He hauled the lumber to a clearing, which he had made with an axe, a saw, and a Kaiser blade, and built his own house, four rooms and a hall.

According to Alma, Mrs. Earl Wheeler, her father was a great hunter and was several times chased up trees by bears. He often went hunting early and brought in enough squirrels to fry for breakfast. He not only hunted everything but was an avid fisherman, usually fishing Fish Lake, which lay between Swan Lake and Yellow Bank. He caught perch, trout, and small catfish.¹¹

Dewey stated that his father bought every horse anybody offered for sale, usually keeping about twelve head and as many cows. He raised oxen, which he sold to Jimmy Wood, of Mosby, Arkansas, to use in logging. He got \$25.00 each for them. Eight oxen made a team. They were whitefaced Herefords. Once he bought a fine bull from a farmer at Mellwood, for \$45.00, and brought him upriver on the Kate Adams. He kept the animal about ten years.

He was a thrifty farmer, who butchered a beef every Friday, in the spring and fall and peddled it out, usually receiving 12¢ to 15¢ a pound. He grew corn and cotton and as there was no gin, they hauled each bale to Helena, a two days trip. Dewey also remembered that he rode a mule to Mellwood to court Nora Holtzelaw from Jonesboro. He had met her at Hoop Spur. They married and lived on the homeplace. She had one son, Willie McKinney, who is

now a businessman in the West Helena area.¹²

Will owned land in the same vicinity but the only thing learned about him was that he lost his land by paying taxes on Dewey's land, by mistake, but was able to redeem it. Archie drowned when a young man. Alma married Earl Wheeler in 1913, when she was nineteen. He died with tuberculosis in 1927 at only forty, when Thomas was two months old. Her children were: Mrs. Mattie Young, Camden, one child; Clyde, married Mary Steward, has two children and lives in Wabash; Preston, married Louise Myatt, and was killed in an industrial accident in 1959. He left a wife and three children who live in Clarendon. Mattie married Homer Turnage, has one child, lives in Little Rock. Norris married Eleese Griffith and they have four children: Warren married Reba Wells; Pan married Gaylon Loveless, and has one daughter; Ronnie; Marsha married Dalton Taylor and has one child. Thomas married Helen Chance, has three children. He now lives in Memphis.¹³

Not all residents owned land; John Milligan was a commercial fisherman. D. A. Warfield from Helena, owned property behind the Klutz place. J. A. Aplin was an early settler at Modoc; he had a son, Ben, and two daughters, Effie Quinn and Mrs. Willie Green. His widow, now 95, lives in Rison, Arkansas.¹⁴

Five Negroes owned land in the community; "Doc" Potts had forty acres on Island 62; Alex Brown owned where Joe Twitty lives; some of this land was bought by John Crow. George Jones owned one mile south, which later belonged to William O. Demoret. Nat Ghosten's farm lay on the riverfront; Jim Sterling had the forty north of Klutz's, which is owned by Jake Crow.¹⁵

Richard (Dick) Burke and E. C. Hornor, from Helena, bought 12,000 acres of undeveloped land, fronting the river, extending from where the concrete mixer stood, southward. This was purchased from

the state, around the turn of the century. Mr. Burke married Mrs. Lucy, from Washington County, Mississippi, in 1907. She had three children, a daughter, Jean, and two sons, Walter and Ben. His own son, Joe, died at age twelve.

They cleared 6,000 acres with local labor, and grew cotton and corn. About 4,000 acres were left, in timber, and the remainder was used by the levee. The cotton and seed were shipped, by water, from Peyton Landing to Helena. Timber was shipped by rail from Hoop Spur, which was owned by the Hornor Estate. This operation ran a store, owned a gin, and blacksmith shop, and operated Peyton Landing. This required seventy families and 150 mules.

They expanded to cattle but the 1912 flood forced them to drive the herd out to higher ground at Lexa. Tick fever hit the herd and 500 head died. Ben Lucy went to school at Helena, went on to college and after a stint in the army, married Susan Keesee Short of Helena. They moved to Modoc in 1922 and continued the operation. They had three children: Richard Burke, killed in action in World War II; Helen, who married Wesley Taylor and lives in Memphis, has three children; Ben Hebron (Bud), is married and lives with his wife Velma and two children in Trussville, Alabama. Mr. Lucy moved to Elaine after the 1927 flood and became postmaster. The farm was sold: J. M. Countiss, Sr. bought 1,500 acres containing the farm headquarters; J. D. Keene bought the 100 acres lying in front of Joe Quinn's home, and some of the land was sold to William O. Demoret.¹⁶

J. M. Countiss, Jr. married Minnie Bookhart of Helena, and they moved there after the 1927 flood. They farmed and raised prizewinning show cattle. Recently the property was purchased by Bruce Byrd, who has rebuilt the homeplace and enlarged the operation.

Sil Jones gave an acre of land to build a white Methodist Church.¹⁷ The Jones cemetery was

adjacent to the church. Traces of the stones can be found but the location is now under water. The small congregation was served by circuit riders, sent out by conference. Visiting preachers, from Mississippi, came and held revivals from time to time. Later Modoc and Mellwood became a charge and shared a minister.¹⁸ When Modoc Church was destroyed by storm, it was never rebuilt. The members transferred to Elaine and the church was discontinued. The Negroes had a larger congregation and worshipped in a Baptist Church, which was also discontinued.

The Methodist Church served as a one teacher school for the white children. The usual enrollment was twelve but at one time it reached eighteen, in all eight grades. Everyone walked to school, including the Decker children from the Island. Mr. Alford was an early teacher as was Miss Annie Biggs, from Rondo, who boarded with the Cox family. Miss Sallie Holtzclaw, from Rondo, later the wife of Dr. Williams, taught there about 1895. Later, R. A. Blount, a relative of the Burkes, from Wheatley, was the teacher. When the building blew away, District #32 became part of Elaine Special School District #30.

The Negro children were taken from the Baptist Church school and a two teacher school was built on land supplied by Ben Lucy at Birch Pasture. There was an attendance of about forty. The teachers commuted daily to Helena by boat. This school was combined with Elaine and became a part of the Elaine Industrial School in 1927.²⁰

Dr. Williams, from Rondo, married Sallie Holtzclaw. He was a horse and buggy doctor in early Modoc and had his office in his home. Dr. D. L. Smythe, a company doctor from Fair Lumber Company, practiced there also.

There was much social activity around early Modoc. Square dances were a favorite pastime. They often danced all afternoon, through the night, and didn't leave until after breakfast. Music was

furnished by guitars and fiddles. Mr. Cox was an old time fiddler. The type of dancing was dubbed "The Modoc Stomp."

Summertime was given over to revival meetings, usually conducted by circuit riders. The revivals drew huge crowds and lasted two weeks or longer. Fish fries and Fourth of July picnics were popular. The day was spent in dancing, pitching washers and horseshoes, and in playing games. The Negroes' summers were given over to revivals after lay-by time.²¹

Modoc had a low levee, called the "potato row," before 1900, built by Irish labor with wheelbarrows. This was sufficient until the 1912 flood. During the flood, the inhabitants sandbagged the levee and stayed in the community even when some of the levee caved off into the river. They lived in tents on top of the levee and watched the water rise to the windows in their houses. The stock were driven to higher ground for safety.²²

About that time, the Levee Board House was built on stakes twelve feet high. Located at the end of the hard road, it was headquarters for the engineers and housed the records. J. N. Moore came to Modoc as an engineer. Walter Monroe and Arthur Wessenberg were two of the earliest engineers. The river flooded again in 1913 and that time the farmers lost some stock and part of the crops. Talk was started to get a higher levee but nothing came of it until 1917. The government agreed to build it and on January 9 a mass meeting was held to arrange the building of half a mile loop to remedy the cave-in at Modoc. Revetments would be built on 23 miles of river to help hold the bank. In 1917 Congress appropriated \$15,000,000 for the project and a map was made.²³

At the same time the community was struggling to get a hard surface road; they had to have a way to get their products to market; river traffic was disappearing. The road had been surveyed and was

under construction when the flood of 1922 occurred. The levee broke again but as the water was only waist deep, it was not considered dangerous as it often got that deep when there was no flood. The roadbed served as a buffer to the water and probably saved the community thousands of dollars.²⁴

It happened again in the spring of 1927, as the workmen watched the places where the breaks occurred before. The water got deeper and deeper and at three o'clock in the morning, the wall could stand no more; huge chunks of bank broke off and swirled away, the men made a break for higher ground, part on foot, some in boats, and a few in a government launch. With this single break, the worst danger was past.

In 1937, the last flood occurred; this time everybody moved out, some to Helena Crossing. According to the Helena World, four hundred men worked on sand boils between Helena and Modoc. If the levee didn't hold, it was agreed that the engineers would blast a hole in the levee and allow water to fan out and cover thousands of acres of farmland, thus saving the people of Helena. Modoc residents didn't think that fair; why save one man's property at the expense of another. Why shouldn't the town take its part of the misery?

No one who lived through that flood will ever forget it, nor will they forget the building of the federal levee in 1938. That story has been told so often that most have heard it. But what has not been told was what happened to the community. There was a place for the levee, marked by the surveyors, and that is where it was built, regardless of what farm it ruined or who was left behind the embankment. Dirt needed for the fills was taken out of the ground leaving great gaping ditches, filled with water. Stumps and debris were pushed into the excavations making a fisherman's paradise.

In 1976, the Levee Board House is gone; the

Methodist Church was never rebuilt after the storm, so there was no school; District #32 is part of District #30. The Negro school closed about the same time as did the Baptist Church. Gone are the cotton choppers and pickers, replaced by machinery. Gone are the mules and wagons and teams. Vast cotton acreage is annually planted to soybeans. Tractors operate twenty-four hours per day in farming season, often six or more to a field.

High powered trucks and modern automobiles travel the hard road; Modoc Landing and the Kate Adams are only a memory. The post office closed in 1927; William M. Wright was postmaster in 1921, and Mrs. Lillian L. Estes served from 1926 until the office was discontinued in 1927. Rural carriers from Elaine now serve the patrons.²⁵ William O. Demoret and Bruce Byrd bought out most of the small owners. Some early settlers, the Joe Twittys, Mrs. Alma Wheeler, Dewey Klutz, and the Joe Quinns live there still.

Sleek herds of blooded cattle graze the levees, people from town make gardens, on the sand, behind the levee, and crappie fishermen throng "Stumpy" and the "barr" pits from March until November. Large stands of virgin timber remain but logs are no longer rafted to market. Not much can be seen of the original constructions; a few tombstones still show what was the Jones cemetery; the ones who left treasure the old pictures and tintypes made so long ago, and when they chance to meet friends of yesteryear, they talk over "the good old days."

Note: My appreciation goes to those who remembered when they were younger and were willing to share: Mr. and Mrs. Joe Twitty, Ben Lucy, the late William O. Demoret, Mrs. Ollie Harden, Mrs. Hazel Tillman, Mr. and Mrs. W. F. Pannell, and many others.

FOOTNOTES

1. Dallas T. Herndon, Centennial History of Arkansas, Vol. I (Little Rock: Clarke, 1922), p. 790.
2. From the Decker Family Record, supplied by Mr. and Mrs. W. F. Pannell.
3. Encyclopedia Americana. "Homestead Act." Vol. 14 (Chicago: Americana, 1974), p. 330.
4. Phillips County Historical Quarterly, September, 1966, p. 32.
5. Dictionary of American History, Vol. IV (New York: Scribner's, 1968), p. 4.
6. Records of the Post Office Department.
7. Conversation with B. H. Lucy.
8. Conversation with Mrs. Ollie Belle Harden.
9. Conversation with Mrs. Hazel Tillman.
10. Conversation with Mr. & Mrs. Joe Twitty.
11. Conversation with Mrs. Alma Wheeler.
12. Conversation with Dewey Klutz.
13. Conversation with Mrs. Alma Wheeler.
14. Conversation with Joe Twitty.
15. Conversation with B. H. Lucy.
16. Conversation with B. H. Lucy.
17. Conversation with Mrs. Ollie Belle Harden.
18. James A. Anderson, Centennial History of Methodism in Arkansas (White, 1935), p. 608.
19. Conversation with Mrs. Ollie Belle Harden.
20. Conversation with B. H. Lucy.
21. Conversation with Mrs. Ollie Belle Harden.
22. Conversation with B. H. Lucy.

23. Encyclopedia Americana. "Flood." Vol. XI (Chicago: Americana, 1974), p. 408.
24. Conversation with Dewey Klutz.
25. Records of the Post Office Department.

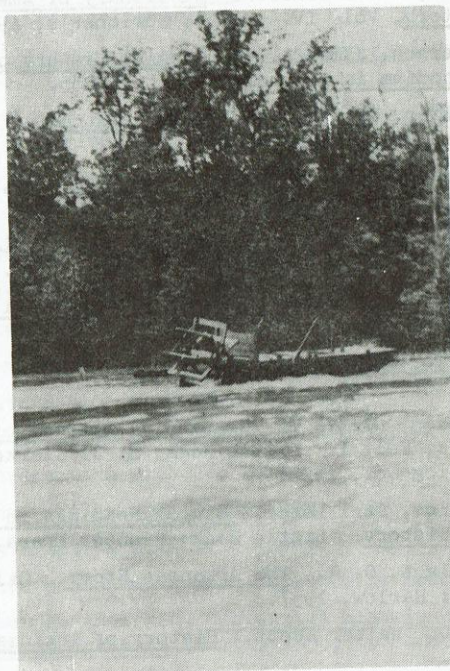
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13. World Book Encyclopedia, Vols. III and X. Chicago: Field, 1973.

Newspapers and Magazines

1. Helena World. Various issues.
2. Phillips County Historical Quarterly. September, 1966.

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RESCUE BARGE 1913

From photo collection of Mrs. Ralph Kyte

THE MAIL

by

Carolyn R. Cunningham

Mama and Papa married in May, 1909, and went to Vineyard (upper) to live for a year. One of the things then so different from today was the mail delivery. A Negro man named Perkins left from old Seelig, located about a mile north of present day Aubrey. Public buildings were scarce then, and in Seelig as in nearly all other country areas, the post office was located in a store. The mail route left Seelig going to Lexa to take mail and pick up.

Perkins drove a mule and an enclosed 2 wheel cart and when he arrived at Vineyard he stopped near my parents' home at Hopkins-Bradley store, in whose lot he kept a spotted horse in a stall at the barn. Six days a week he arrived there, changed the tired animal for a fresh one and left again to make his stop at Tyner post office, located in the Vineyard store.

This community was also known as Vineyard and if it had to be designated, was called lower Vineyard. The two communities were about three miles apart. After departing from Tyner post office he made his way to North Creek for delivery before going on to Lexa, which seemed to be the headquarters for mail on this end of the run. Papa thinks the mail was brought in to old Seelig from Wheatley.

Perhaps Perkins prospered because he discarded his rather crude 2 wheel cart for a fancy, enclosed, far more comfortable buggy. Even though the mail was brought through six days a week, people usually made only scheduled trips to the post office, and that only once or twice a week. Letters were few and far between for most country people, and very exciting when they did arrive, especially if it came from a member of the family whom one saw infrequently.

SOUTHERN STANDARD
Arkadelphia, Arkansas
Thursday, April 30, 1908

News of Arkansas

Expelled from Helena During War. After an absence of more than 40 years, Mrs. Emma Morris has returned to Helena, which she was forced to leave in her girlhood days because she dared to wear the colors of the flag she loved upon her hat, after the fall and capture of Helena by the Federals in the Civil War.

It was Mrs. Morris, then Miss Emma Rightor, who presented to Capt. J. C. Barlow a silk flag, worked by the ladies of Helena, when he mustered his battery of guns and marched away to the front. She was loyal to the flag which her hands presented, and it was this unwavering devotion, coupled with brilliant daring, that brought on the command which drove her from the city.

Mrs. Morris was presiding at the organ for the Baptist Church on a Sunday following the fall of the city, and she showed her spirit by donning a hat bearing the colors of the Confederacy. A lieutenant from the Federal troops was in attendance at church and after the services he notified the daring young woman that she might consider herself under arrest and requested that she report at headquarters Monday morning. Gen. Buford, who was commanding, upheld his junior officer, and Mrs. Morris was compelled to leave the city.

She went from Arkansas to Kentucky, where she met the young man whom she afterwards married--Benjamin Morris--and in Kentucky she has lived ever since the day that she donned the hat trimmed in the stars and bars of the Confederacy.... Contributed by Mrs. John T. Caldwell, Jr. of Jackson, Miss., great niece of Mrs. Morris.

HELENA WORLD, October 16, 1901

HISTORY OF FIFTY YEARS

For Half A Century Baptist Church Has Existed
In Helena

For fifty years the First Baptist Church has been actively at work in this city, having been organized in Helena half a century ago, and the anniversary was celebrated in fitting style last night, when the past, present and future were discussed in most interesting manner. There was also an appropriate and very enjoyable musical program.

Mr. T. M. Oldham, one of the oldest members of the congregation, rightly had the subject of the church's past, and he gave a most interesting account. His address follows in its entirety:-

On the 12th day of October, 1851, Elder T. S. N. King, John H. Hicks, Spense Hall, Sarah Hall, Sarah C. Hicks, Julia F. King, Elizabeth McPherson, Maria Sivley, Eliza L. Jackson, Mary V. Bumpass, Wm. D. Jones, Elvira J. Jones, Anna T. Hicks, Elizabeth Bostwick, Mary Farland and Lucinda Richards, met in Helena, and after a full and free expression of their views, resolved to keep house for the Lord, whereupon a covenant and an abstract of faith and practice were adopted and Elder J. R. Graves of Nashville, Tenn., and A. W. Elledge of Phillips county, Ark., were requested to act as presbytery on the recognition of the body as a church and the following entry on the church record speaks for itself:-

The brethren assembled this day with the presbytery above named when the covenant and articles of faith were read and having been approved by the presbytery the brethren and sisters heretofore named were duly and solemnly recognized as a church of Jesus Christ, according to the New Testament.

(signed):

J. R. Graves
A. W. Elledge

Thus you will see there were 16 constituent members, only two of whom are now living, and between that time and January 1, 1852, there were added by baptism 20, -only one now living, -and by relation one. These additions do not appear in the minutes, which are not as full as they should be, but they do appear in the roll. On November 1, 1851, a conference was held, and J. R. Graves presided as moderator and Jesse A. Jackson was elected the 1st clerk of this church. By a unanimous resolution the first call for pastor was extended to Elder H. S. Brundy, who declined.

Brothers King and Hall were appointed to draw up rules of decorum, and on November 11th met at the residence of Brother Hicks and held what is entered as the first regular conference. Brother King was moderator and a building committee was appointed and a resolution of thanks adopted to Rev. Mr. Welch and the Presbyterian congregation for the use of their house during the sitting of the late convention and the protracted meeting just closed.

On the 29th, the church met at the residence of W. R. Rightor, when the building committee reported the purchase of a lot to build on, and on the next day, November 30th, met in the court house and Elder John Bateman preached, after which a conference was held, Brother King in the chair, and a unanimous call was extended to Brother Bateman as pastor for the year 1852, at a salary of \$600, which was accepted, thus becoming the first pastor of the church.

At the close of the year the church refused to recall him and the church was without a regular pastor, Brother King voluntarily acting as supply and services being somewhat irregular till September 24, 1853, when by resolution Brother King was requested to act as supply at same salary as former pastor.

Efforts were being made and several calls extended, but without effect, until December 11, 1853, when a letter from Elder R. Jones, of Norfolk, Va., was received, accepting the care of the church, to begin January, 1854, which relation continued until August 4, 1855, when he resigned.

After this various calls were made, but not accepted till February 2, 1856, when the church accepted the proposition of Elder F. M. Freeman to serve the church for \$500 per annum. He was received into the church April 5, 1856, and resigned May 2, 1857. Efforts were made and preachers invited to visit us, and on November 30, 1857, it was unanimously agreed to call Elder W. H. Barksdale of Leighton, Ala., at a salary of \$1000 per annum, which was accepted and he preached his first sermon as pastor on the 4th Sabbath in January, 1858. This relation continued up to the war.

From November 30, 1861, there is no record of any conference till September 18, 1865, when he was again called for another year, at a salary of \$800, and on January 16, 1867, he resigned to take charge of some country churches. Steps were immediately taken to secure a pastor, which resulted in a call to Elder W. D. Mayfield, of South Carolina, at \$800 salary, beginning January, 1868. January, 1870, he was recalled at a salary of \$1000.

On Friday evening, February 17, 1871, our church house was blown down, and on Sunday, the 19th, a few members met in Brother Mayfield's store and started a subscription for the purpose of erecting a new house, and agreed to meet at Brother Taylor's residence the next night, when plans were discussed in reference to the same.

On September 7, 1873, Brother Mayfield notified the church that he would not serve them after January 1st. We were then without a pastor until May 16, 1875, when Brother Murphy became pastor, and in March, 1876, resigned. No pastor then till January

13, 1878, when Brother R. B. White, of Friars Point, was engaged for two Sundays in the month, he serving till May 12, same year, when he resigned, and on May 25 Brother W. A. Clark was requested to act as pastor while holding a series of meetings. On June 17th Brother Clark informed the church that if the mission boards would release him he would accept a call from this church as pastor, and on June 30th did accept, to begin October 1st. On October 23, 1879 he resigned, and a call was immediately extended to Brother R. A. Venable. He was present and presided December 13, and continued to serve until October 31, 1880.

A committee was then appointed to obtain a pastor, and on November 4, by resolution, was instructed to telegraph Elder G. W. Reves a call at \$1000 salary, and on December 2 he was present and presided at conference. I find no record of his resignation, but on November 3, 1881, a call was extended to Brother Clark, which was declined, he having accepted the office of state evangelist. On May 22, 1882, Elder T. E. Jasper visited the church and was requested to act as pastor while here, and on June 1st he was called as pastor at a salary of \$60 per month, to begin as soon as he could return.

On October 29 he was received into the church, but when the year was out the church refused to recall, and on October 4, 1883, Brother Burkholder, who had been preaching during the week, was called to the chair and employed by the church to visit Kentucky to secure aid in furnishing our house. In July and August, 1884, Elder Barnett served a few weeks as supply, and on March 13, 1885, Elder Obenchain was employed as supply for 1st and 3rd Sundays in each month, at \$30 per month.

On November 22 Elder R. A. Lee preached two good sermons, after which he was called to the care of the church at a salary of \$1200 or as much as \$1500 if it could be raised. On the 29th he was

present and accepted the call, provided \$75 was given to pay the expense of moving, which was done, and on October 1, 1886, he resigned, to take effect November 1st, but continued to the 15th. On the second day of January, 1887, Elder T. D. Ware was called at a salary of \$700 per annum. On February 11th he accepted the charge, and on May 6, 1888, resigned, to take effect the last of the month, which was accepted by the church, and a committee was appointed to secure a pastor at once.

On August 5th a call was extended to Elder W. H. Barnes, at a salary of \$1000, which was declined, but after some correspondence he accepted the call at \$1200 salary. He served from October, 1888, to the 13th of February, 1891. His resignation was tendered December 1, 1890, when the deacons were instructed to at once take steps to secure a pastor, the result that Elder C. C. Young of Milan, Tenn., was with us on the 16th of February, 1891, and preached for us, after which he was called as pastor at a salary of \$1000, to begin as soon as Brother Barnes vacated the parsonage. Brother Young was admitted to membership March 15, 1891, and on June 1st tendered his resignation, to take effect July 1st.

On September 20, 1891, M. K. Thornton, of Okalona, Miss., was called to the pastorate by unanimous vote, and on October 11th was received into the church. He served as pastor to October 1, 1893. He tendered his resignation July 29th, at which time a committee was appointed to secure a pastor as soon as possible, and on November 12 the committee reported that Elder W. H. Gibony would accept a call at \$1000 per annum, beginning January 1, 1894, which was unanimously accepted by the church.

He was present and presiding in January, and on November 26th tendered his resignation, to take effect January 1, 1895, which was accepted and a committee appointed to obtain a pastor, which resulted in the recommendation of H. C. Rosamond on January 20th, when a unanimous call was extended and accepted,

and he was present and presided February 25, 1895. He served continuously to March 10, 1901, a little over six years.

After considerable correspondence and various visits by preachers we now have our present beloved young pastor, and while we have had some very excellent pastors and preachers, we most earnestly hope and pray that he may excel them all.

Thus you see we have had in the fifty years, nineteen pastors and four supplies, and the church has licensed to preach four, to-wit: on February 14, 1852, Abner Moncell; June 15, 1859, James Enslee, and on June 21, 1868, Cuffle Blake, colored, and on August 31, 1899, our Brother Chas. Anderson. On December 15, 1852, this church, at the request of Mt. Vernon church, ordained to full work of the ministry N. P. Moore, Elders King and Bateman being the presbyters.

We have had on our church roll 882 members, and our present membership is 110 males and 121 females, total, 231.

I will now close by saying we have passed through some very severe trials, especially in reference to our finances and building, and that we are under very great obligations to our Presbyterian and Methodist friends, especially the former, for the use of their houses when we were without, and that by God's abounding mercy we are today in a better condition than we have ever been. I most earnestly pray that the spirit of all grace may so fill our hearts that individually and collectively we will put forth such energy as shall move out of the way any and all obstacles to the success of the Kingdom of our God and His Christ.

Following the historical sketch by Mr. Oldham, brief addresses were made by L. J. Wilkes, who told of the present condition of the church, and Rev. W. H. Sledge, who talked of the future of the

organization.

Mr. Wilkes, in discussing the present of the church, said, in part:-

We see from the history of the church, as given us by Brother Oldham, that God has been with this people, notwithstanding the varied vicissitudes and adverse conditions through which they have passed. There are only two of the original members living; the rest have gone to their reward. Many, through the instrumentality of this church, have been borne into the Kingdom of God, and while the ranks have been decimated by death, I can in my imagination see them tonight standing on the battlements of heaven, rejoicing with us as we celebrate this, our fiftieth anniversary, taking up the sweet melodies of those songs as they float out upon the air, and sounding them back from the angel choir, causing all heaven to reverberate with the praise to Him who has brought us up through many tribulations to this good hour.

We have 231 members, the largest number we have ever had, most of whom are faithful and true to their church and her obligations, special praise being due to the ladies. We have a good Sunday school, though not as large as it should be. The importance of this work, I fear, is very much underestimated by our members. Dr. R. G. Seymour has estimated that 83 per cent. of the additions to our churches come from the Sunday school. If this is true, the Sunday school is a great power for good. When we go over the past history of our Sunday school and see what it has had to contend with, for some years without a church in which to meet, meeting for some time in a room in the old Miles building, then for a time in the court house, with very small attendance, we find we have much for which we ought to be thankful, and for encouragement.

We also have a good B. Y. P. U. with many earnest workers, though not as many as there should be. With reference to the spiritual condition of

the church, I hardly think there ever was, or ever will be a church that lives fully up to the requirements of God, yet I believe we have some as consecrated old men and women, young men and ladies, boys and girls, as you will find anywhere. We have devoted members and liberal members, and God is rewarding their efforts.



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Meetings are held in September, January, and May, on the fourth Sunday in the month, at 3:00 P. M. at the Phillips County Museum.

The Phillips County Historical Society supplies the QUARTERLY to its members. Membership is open to anyone interested in Phillips County history. Annual membership dues are \$5.00 for a regular membership and \$10.00 for a sustaining membership. Single copies of the QUARTERLY are \$1.25. QUARTERLIES are mailed to members. Dues are payable to Mrs. C. M. T. Kirkman, Treasurer, 806 McDonough Street, Helena, Arkansas 72342.

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