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The Helena train ferry appears on the front cover. See newspaper article on Page 40. Photograph from collection of Ivey Gladin.

INDIANA TROOPS AT HELENA: Part II

These letters written home by Gilbert H. Denny, 18th Indiana Infantry Regiment, are used here by permission of the Indiana Historical Society at Indianapolis.

Helena Arkansas July the 14th 62

Dear father

I take this lesure time to rite you a fuv lines to let you no that I am well as comon general and hope that this will find you all the same. Well we hav had another long march. We left baitsvill the 30th of June and hav bin marching ever since. We landed here yesturday and are in camp on the Mississippi River. We had a march of 227 miles from baitsvill part of the time we had half rations and part of the time now we dun 4 days on what we could jahawk.

We hav saw the hardest time yet on this march. Our roads was blockaded for miles and we would hav to stop and cut out a new road and the rebels would be killing our pickets while we was at work. There was one battel on the way down here. There was 2 regiments of Texian rangers attacked our advance guard. Tha killed and wounded 40 of our men and our men killed and wounded 200 of them and I guess the rest of them has not quit running yet.

Well father I had bad news to tell you. We have lost the best man in our company that is Euclid Nicholson. He was taken prisoner at baitsvill on the 24 of June while out on a pass in the country after John Smith was guarding a house. I herd from him twist but nothing of importanc. James Fleener ses tell you that he is all right and you must send him a few lines to him next leter.

Well I must close. Rite often for I cant git to giv my best respects to all and tell them that I

am rite side up with the forked end down.

Gilbert Denny to Morris Denny.

*

The picture on the front of the envelope of the second letter is of a woman holding a sword in her left hand, and a book entitled "Union Forever and Ever" in her right hand. She is sitting on a globe signifying the world, and her name is United States of America. The envelope has a 3¢ stamp on it and is directed to Mr. Morris Denny, Kossuth, Washington County, Indiana. The first page of the stationery shows three U. S. Gunboats attacking the Rebel Forts. Imprinted under the picture is a paragraph from the RICHMOND DISPATCH of February 21, 1862, telling of the great success of the enemy's gunboats on the rebel land batteries.

August 8th Helena Ark.

Dear father and mother

It is with the gretest of pleasure that I take this presant opertunity of writing to convince (?) you that I am well and hope this ma find you the same. I recceved a leter from you this morning and was glad to here from you. The letter was daited the 31st of July. I have rote you a leter since we came here. I sent to you for som post-age stamps.

You said you wanted to know whether I was vaxcinated or not. I was not. Something else. Euclid Nicholson has got back. He was exchanged. He was at little Rock in close confinement but was as well treated as could be expected.

There is nothing of importance going on here. There is some 25 gun Boats and trans ports here tha are continually runing the River to keep rebels from crossing over inn to Arkansas. The boys are getting so hard tha dont cair much whether the war is ended or not. We get plenty of peaches apels and every

thing else that is necessary for a soldier.

Give my best respects to all and tell them that I am fat eager (?) and sassy and the best man in company G and if they don't believe it just volunteer and come out as a recruit and they will see right soon.

Your son till death.

Gilbert Denny. M. Denny.

*

The scene depicted on the first page of the stationery is of life in camp, showing six soldiers doing housekeeping tasks, and it is entitled "Home, Sweet Home."

Helena Ark. August 16th/62

Dear Father

With the greatest pleasure I embrace the pleasant opportunity by writing you a few more lines informing you that I am enjoying good health hoping may reach and find you and the rest of folks and connections in good health.

We are still at Helena and we don't know when we will leave. Our army here is in good health considering the season. But the main cause of health is that we are well supplied with provision and clothing and also have spring water. I forgot to state that I rec'd a letter yesterday with some postage stamps. I was very glad to hear from home. I have been on a Scout and just got back. I went with 40 others. We went on a boat 25 miles up the Mississippi. We went to intercept a company of Cessh but we was a few hours too late. They had made their escape. But we took a large amount of cotton some mules and some bacon and returned to Camp last night.

We have had no fight here since we came here. Some 75 or 80 of our men had a fight on the St Francis River and got whipt but there was five Cessh to one of our men. We may have a fight at Vicksburg or Little Rock. But I don't believe that there will be

many more Big Battles.

Company G is enjoying fine health and as fat as Bears. Yesterday our Brigade was reviewed by Brigadier General Benton. Benton is a hozier and was with the three months volunteers in Virginia as Col. of the 8th Indiana. The army here under Gen Curtis is about 35000 strong. Curtis's headquarters here are in General Hindman's the Cessh general's house. Hindman's army is at Little Rock and about starved out.

Write whether they have commenced drafting in old Hozier or not. Tell all the Boys to come and join our Company. We want about 60 men to fill out our quota. We have plenty to eat and but little to do. Write as soon as you get this.

Gilbert Denny to Morris T. Denny.

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A large flag is pictured on the left side of the envelope, entitled "Union Forever."

Helena Arkansas August the 24 62.

Dear father

As it has been sometime since I received a letter from you I will write a few lines to let you know that I am well and the rest of the boys and hope this may come to hand and find you all with the rest of the friends all well. The health is increasing in the vicinity of Helena. There is no news of importance.

Some of the troops are leaving here. We are building a fort here. There is 6 pieces of artillery here for it from 32 to 64 pounders. The Negroes are doing the work while we lay in the shade and drill. We are drilling McClelland (?) drill and are the brigade drill regiment at or about here. We drill 2 hours Battalion each morning. Company drill in the afternoon. Dress parade at 6 o'clock pm and of a Sunday morning. Every man has to come out for inspection with clean clothes shoes blacked and look like he was out of the band box.

There was a Boat sank the other da between here an memphis. There was 40 drowned. I herd there was a draft took place in Ind the 18th of the present month. I hope that is so for there is some secesh an traitors back thair that will liv under the goverment but wont support it and tha must la close or take to the woods when wee git back that is so aiding or asisting the South wont do no longe by word or deed.

I recieved a letter from Bob Brouse ? and Bill Thompson the other da. They was well. No more at presant. Rite soon.

G H Dennys parents.

Give these buttons to Flanders.

*

Helena Ark August 29th '62

Dear father

I am happy to sa to you that I am well and hope this ma com to hand an find you all the same. The helth of the Boys is good as could be expected. Well pap I haint had a letter for 2 weeks from you but i will continue to write.

Lieutenant Howel got back here this morning. We wer glad to see him for we had no company Comander except fur the orderly and corporals. We have Batalion Drill 2 hours each da. There was a skirmish at old town this morning. I think we could here the canon very plain. Old town is about 20 miles below here. Our fleet hav gon down thair. Our men captured som 12000 stand of arms on the Yazoo River the other da. The Rebels report General popes army cut all to peaces. The papers of the 25th sa that Gen Segal has captured 2000 prisners in Virginia.

There is one recruiting ofiser gon home to recruit for this Regt. Tell the Boys now is the time to come out and fill up this company that we want the company filled with Boys that we no. Tell Frank Early to come out here if he gos attall. Daniel S. Place will bee at Salem rite soon and tell me whoo has gon that I know. I will close as I am looking

for a letter from you and then I will rite again.

Gilbert H. Denny to Morris T. Denny.

*

The envelope has written across it above the name and address of Morris T. Denny, "Soldiers Letter, H. D. Washburn, Col., 18th Regt. Ind. Vols." The first page of stationery pictures an angel sitting on a cloud which resembles the U. S. flag, and in her hand is a streaming banner inscribed, "The Union Now Henceforth & For Ever Amen!"

Helena Sept. the 18th 62

Dear Father & Mother

I write you these few lines to let you know that I am not very well at this time. But I sincerely desire that this will reach and find you all well. I have had the flux for 5 or six days but now I am some better. About half of our Company have had them. But none have died and all are about well again. I am nearly well today.

Nearly all of the regt has gone down the river on a Scout. 30 went from our Company which leaves none but the sick ones here. They will be gone 6 or 8 days. Our Brigade went. They will be very apt to bring some cotton negroes and perhaps a few Cesesh when they come. We will be paid off in about eight or ten days and I will send some money home.

I recd a letter from you a few days ago Dated the 5th of this month. Write how the Drafting Business succeeds and whether the Draft will take any of the Cesesh such as logans pewghs Joe Dennys Boys or Dave Hamiltons Henry Nicholsons or any of the Southern Sympathizers. All is quiet here and has been ever since we have been here. The news from Virginia is conflicting.

The Cesesh cant take this place without 100000 well Disciplined and well armed men. Excuse these few lines and expect more next time.

Gilbert H. Denny to Morris T. Denny

*

Helena Ark September the 26th 1862

Dear father & mother

I take the present opportunity of writing you a few lines to inform you that I am not very well though on the mend. I hope this may find you all well and harty. We are a going to leav here tomorrow morning for som un known point but I suppose towards Baitsville. But I dont like to Back track. I am abel to go if tha will hall my things and that will be don.

I thought I would write a few lines and let you know for I dont no when I will hav an other chanc. I would like to go on South and be a cleaning them out. We ma go to little Rock from here. There is no telling whar.

No more at presant. Rite soon and often. Send me a few postag stamps if you pleas and it ant to much trouble.

No more. Remain your son till deth.

G H Denny
M T Denny

*

Helena Ark Sept the 30th 62

Dear father and mother sister and brother

I take the presant oportunity of writing you a fiew lines to inform you that I am well at presant and hope this ma come to hand an find you the same and as I was not very well the last letter that I rote you will all be some what uneasy until you here from me again an this leavs me as well and harty as comon. I rote in my last letter that wee had marching orders an was to march the next morning but did not go then. We have marching orders now hav to

be redy to march at a moments "warning." We canot tell whar or how. I herd that General Curtis has ordered the paymaster not to com down here.

We ma go up the River. The helth is improving now in the Army. I hav not time to rit now an I must help cook. Rite soon as you can an often as you can an I will do the same. I remain yours til deth.

G H Denny
Morris T. Denny

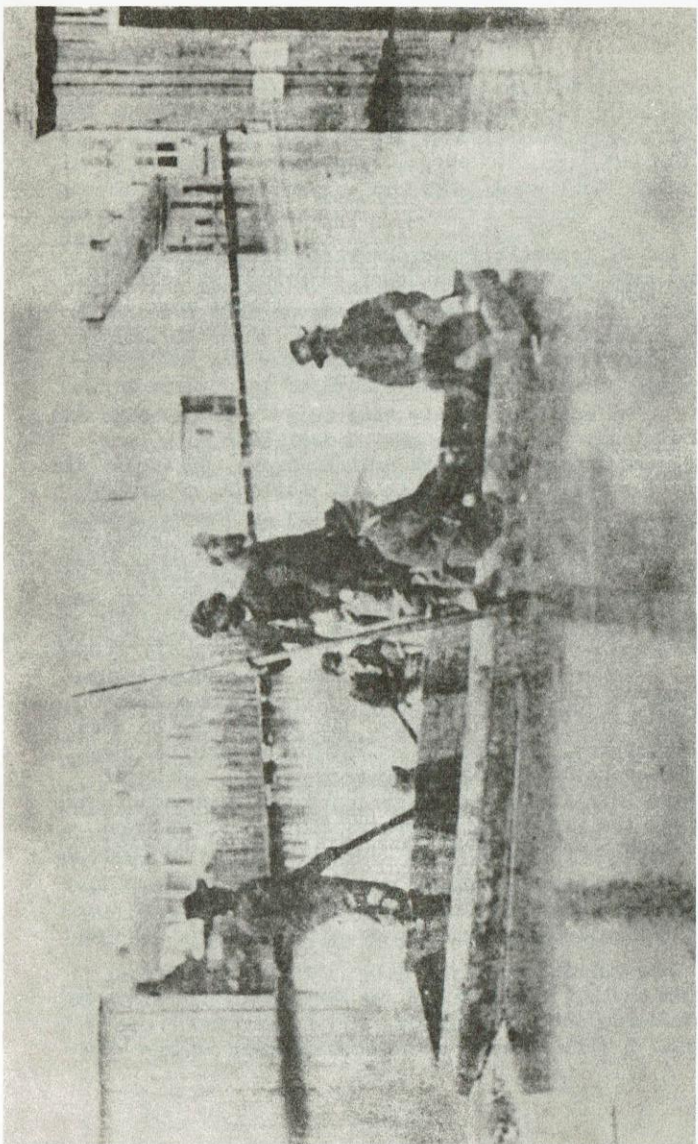
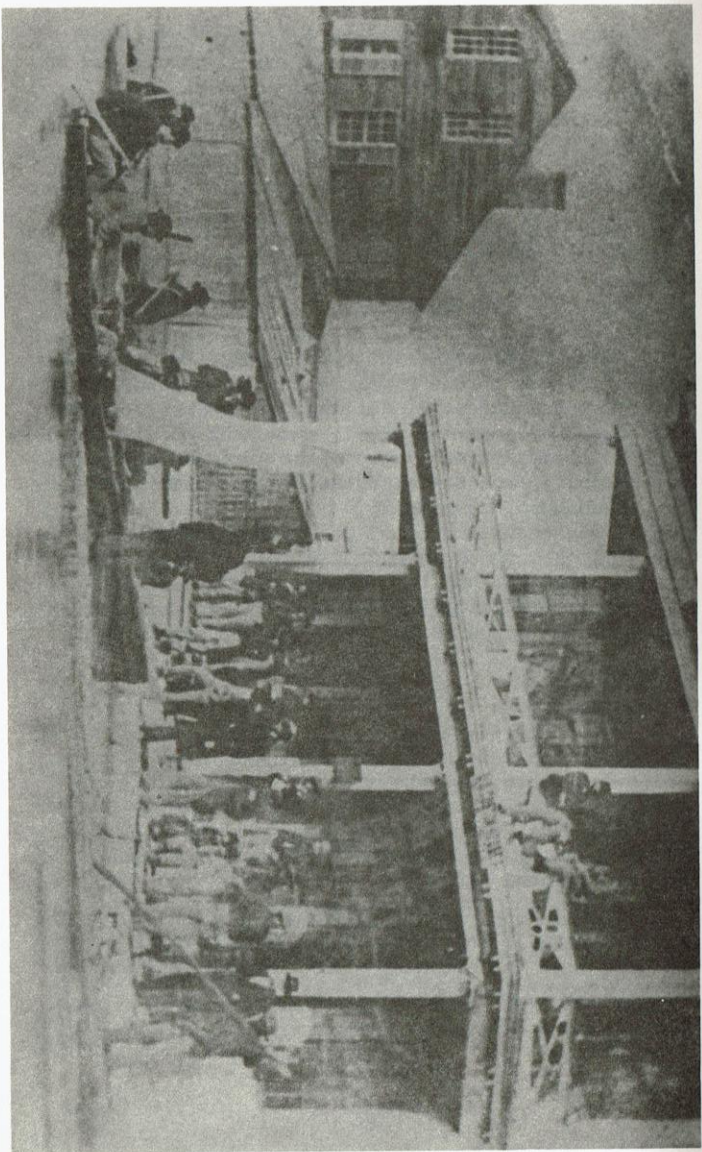
The OFFICIAL RECORDS, in listing the organization of troops in the Department of the Missouri, Major General Samuel R. Curtis, U. S. Army, commanding, dated December 31, 1862, show that the 18th Indiana Infantry Regiment was in the Army of Southeastern Missouri, 1st Division, 2nd Brigade, Colonel Henry D. Washburn, commanding.

From the District of St. Louis, dated March 19, 1863, Major General John C. Davidson reported that the 18th Indiana had left the St. Louis District to join Major General Grant's army. It is assumed that the 18th participated in the battle for Vicksburg.

The only way to go up the streets and alleys of Helena in the late spring of 1864 was by boat. The following photograph shows civilians and military personnel at the U. S. Custom House (formerly Skinner's Tavern), with the Hargraves home on the left. These buildings were on the site of the present Helena National Bank.

The second photograph was made at Helena in the spring of 1865, showing soldiers making their way by boat through the streets. The pictures are from the University of Arkansas Library.

*



HISTORY

by

Polk W. Agee
Memphis, Tennessee

My father's ancestors were French Huguenots and came to the United States from France in the early 1700s. His family settled in Alabama near Selma. He moved to Helena, Arkansas, when he was 18 years old to work in the Phillips County Bank, then controlled by his cousin, Lycurgus Lucy.

My mother's family came from North Carolina and Louisiana. My grandfather, Cadwallader Polk, was wounded in the battle of Prairie Grove, Arkansas, after just being in the battle of Shiloh. My grandmother, Caroline Lowry, was living in Camden after their plantation home in Louisiana had been shelled by the Yankee gunboats. She was nursing the wounded in that area, both Union and Confederate soldiers. Among them was my grandfather. This started a romance, they were married, and I am one of the results.

In writing of my early life in Helena, it enables me to write about some of the old families who were the backbone of Helena, the Polks, the Hornors, the Tappans, the Pillows, the Moores, the Coolidges, the Govans, the Barlows and many others. Many of these families intermarried and their descendants are among the present citizens of Helena. I could go on at length enumerating, but it would be quite lengthy.

The Pillows, Polks and Lowrys had plantations and homes near what is now West Helena, in fact one of the railroad stations was named Pillow's Station.

Starting my early life at 1027 Pecan Street from birth takes in a lot of periods in my life. So, beginning with my parents, Christopher and Annie Agee, I will attempt to do them justice in my

writing.

My mother was a very capable and lovely lady, and was practically the head of the Polk clan in Helena. All of her brothers and sisters would come to her with their problems to get her advice. She had a strong sense of righteousness that formed her character. She was active in all church work and taught a Sunday School class for many years in St. John's Episcopal Church. She was president of one of the church guilds, and was active in obtaining money for the first Helena Hospital. I remember a roller skating rink that she originated in a vacant building on Ohio Street for the benefit of the hospital. Her Sunday School pupils to this day state what a wonderful teacher she was.

My father was a man who had the love and respect from everyone that knew him. He started to work at eighteen years old in the Phillips County Bank and worked his way up to president of the First National Bank of Helena. He taught a Sunday School class in St. John's Episcopal Church, and was vestryman and treasurer of the church for 26 years. He was also treasurer of the Helena Hospital Association for many years, and administrator for several estates. He was a man who ran the extra mile many times.

Living with us was Aunt Clea, who was a lovable and most generous person. A mutual love grew between us when I was a little fellow, and at times I took advantage of her generosity, especially if I saw for sale a baseball mitt, bat, or other equipment. My birthday is in September, which was almost the end of the baseball season, but I would suggest that she give me my birthday present in June. However, in September she gave me another one. I think she was completely aware of the racket I was pulling.

I feel that I am extremely fortunate to have had such wonderful parents, and the good things that have happened to me I can attribute to the love and training that they gave me.

Now, here I start at the age of five going to the Hill Side School for one year beginning to experience some of the outside worlds. At six I started to attend the Jefferson Public School in Helena, from there on my experiences were many.

My early life at 1027 Pecan Street was filled with many happy days. Living at that time near Walker Levee I would see the overflow water from the Mississippi River come over the levee north of town and inundate the whole north area to the hills.

At these times the older families, the Rightors, the Bennetts, Porters and Walkers, who lived in the flooded area, would move their household goods and furniture upstairs if the water got very high. A friend of mine built a canvas canoe and kept it at my home, and we paddled this canoe many miles over the flood water.

In the rear of our home the Jacks owned one-half block of land extending back of our home, consisting of a house, a barn and an orchard which was directly in the rear of our house. Needless to say, they did not harvest much of the fruit, as the Graves family next door with its six children and myself contributed to the devastation of many apples, pears, and peaches.

I knew many of the Jacks family. Betty Jacks married Mr. J. B. Lyle, a building contractor. They had two children, James and Thelma Lyle who owned a groundhog. This weather prophet was very popular to us, especially looking for his shadow on groundhog day.

The Graves family next door was a 6 to 1 deal against me, but regardless of any disagreements we had, we remained staunch friends. One episode in our association was the testing of a 32 rifle which Fred, the oldest son, had obtained by saving so many tobacco coupons. The day we tested it out was a very hot day. We were shooting at pigeons on the roof of

Lyle's barn, which was in direct line with the house of Mr. Buchanan, which was situated on a hill. After a few shots we saw a man running towards us and shouting, "For God's sake boys stop shooting, one of your bullets has gone through my dining room window and nearly hit the cook." Of course this really scared us to death as we had been shooting a 22 calibre rifle and did not realize the power of a 32.

Our house at 1027 Pecan Street was only a few blocks from our baseball diamond which was located just over Walker Levee. At that time I was the catcher on our team, but my home duties and chores occurred on Saturday, which was our day for baseball games. When the boys on the team would come by our house on the way to the baseball diamond they would accuse me of pulling the Tom Sawyer stunt on them. Nevertheless, as they needed me on the team, they would often pitch in and help me get through with my work.

About six blocks from the baseball diamond there was a tract of land owned by the C. R. Coolidge Estate where they had many circus performances. All of us boys would go to the circus grounds when they were erecting the tents and bringing in the animals. The elephants were very thirsty animals and required many gallons of water that had to be obtained from a water hydrant about four blocks away. The elephant trainer offered us tickets to the circus if we would bring water for the elephants. That appealed to us, but two gallon buckets full of water became mighty heavy, and before I was through I wished all of the elephants back to Africa. Now here comes the rip off--we were through delivering water and asked for our tickets but they gave us pink lemonade instead. This really made us mad, so we were determined to see the circus. As the performance was about to start two of us would try to get under the tent which brought the guard running to us, the rest of us would then crawl under. Repeating this strategy all of us saw the show.

One of our other games was swimming in the Mississippi River near a grove of switch willows. The banks of the river extended to the base of the levee and the grade was fairly steep. We made mud slides which were sprinkled with river water and really had fun. Coal barges were anchored in this area, and at times we would swim under these barges, which was a foolish thing to do, but by the grace of God we survived.

The champion swimmer in those days was Deadrick Brady, who swam the Mississippi River from the Arkansas to the Mississippi side. He landed about a quarter of a mile off starting line on the Mississippi side as the strong current carried him downstream. This was quite a feat in those days, and is today.

As these incidents come to mind I am writing them down, so they are not in sequence. For about four years I was crucifer of St. John's Episcopal Choir. During that time Miss Jennie Pillow was leading contralto in our choir. She had a beautiful voice and was a charming lady. Dr. Henry Rightor and Miss Jennie were to be married and the choir was to lead the wedding procession down the aisle to the altar. Being the crucifer I led the wedding procession. But on that eventful day I had a scrap with one of my schoolmates, which left me with a beautiful shiner. When I came home from school that afternoon I told my mother I could not lead the choir; but she said, "You got yourself into this situation, so regardless you will have to serve." As I walked down the aisle I tried to hide my eye condition the best I could but I could see the smiles and expressions on the faces of all guests, and believe me, my face was red and I was completely embarrassed.

Being the only child and having several cousins I was naturally with them as much as possible. I can remember my visits with my cousin George Polk. We played ball and hunted together, and generally had a good time. Both of us had chores to do around our homes. One chore that George performed was milking

the family cow. My father wanted me to milk our cow, but that was one I did not learn to do. So, I really said "let George do it." Uncle Will, George's father, had a beautiful chestnut mare, a Tennessee walking horse of the Allen stock. This mare had such an easy gait that you could put a glass of water on a saddle board with water near the top and start the mare off in a walking gait and not spill any of the water.

Nearly all of the boys had a horse or pony. I had two given to me by my grandfather. The first one was too spirited for my young age, so he took that one back and gave me another one about a year later. This one he called a pony, but imagine my surprise when one Saturday one of the hands on his plantation brought this speckled gray horse to me. He was about 14 years old, practically stiff legged. "Old Spec," as we called him, could jump up and down and stay in the same place longer than any other horse I ever saw. However, I would ride Spec with my two little fox terrier dogs trailing behind, this was to the amusement of many friends.

In those days with all the feed for horses and cows that were kept at the homes, rats were very prevalent and traps, poison and dogs were used to exterminate them. One day as I was training my young dog by letting some rats out of the trap the older dog would grab the rat and shake him, throwing him into the air and grabbing him again for the kill. The younger dog tried this method, but the rat was too fast and grabbed the dog by the nose. He was finally dislodged and the young dog learned his lesson and later became a wonderful ratter.

I delivered newspapers, the "Helena World" and the "Bulletin." They were the two local papers at that time. I would get on "Old Spec," start my route and make pretty fast time, except in rainy and snowy weather. One rainy day while on my route, "Old Spec" slipped into a ditch carrying me down with him. Fortunately no injury occurred, but after that I had to

watch him most carefully as his locomotion had become more restricted.

I was approximately five years old when our family physician, Dr. Ellis, bought the first automobile in Helena. I do not remember the name of the auto, but it was a roadster. Before the auto he used a horse and buggy to make his calls and would sometimes take me with him. I would hold his horse while he was making the call. After he bought this auto he one day stopped by my home and asked if I wanted to take a ride with him. Of course this was an opportunity I had not dreamed of. My acceptance of this offer was a spontaneous yes. We started out going north on Pecan Street and had driven almost to Maple Hill Cemetery when the car stopped. There we were, no one knowing about the workings of a car. It ended up with him getting a passing man with a wagon and team to haul us back to town. The dust in the streets and roads at that time of year was almost one foot deep in most places, and the dust clouds would dim the air. Over this particular stretch of road I had watched log teams of four to six yoke of oxen pull a wagon containing one log with a four to five foot diameter. Lumber was quite an industry in Helena.

Hunting and fishing were my chief hobbies when I was eleven years old. I had a gun on one shoulder and a fishing pole on the other. I covered a lot of territory in these young years. The gun I kept out of my mother's view as I knew her thoughts on the subject.

One fishing trip in particular that I took almost ended up in a disaster. One summer I was visiting my uncle, Cad Polk, Jr., at his Old Town plantation. I was fishing in a creek connecting Old Town Lake with another body of water. A broken down bridge across the creek sagged in the middle and a great amount of driftwood had accumulated on the upper side. Fishing at the edge of it I would catch a fish every time I let my bait down. It is sufficient

to say I had a wonderful time and caught about 40 pounds of fish. However, being so occupied, I did not take into consideration the mosquitoes that were biting me. They were so bad that they formed clouds and I would light a newspaper and burn through the clouds. Sounds like a real fish story, but it was an actual fact, for in February of that year I had an attack of malaria fever lasting six weeks. This happened in 1909, the year of my graduation from Jefferson High School. I was afraid that I would not get my diploma as I had two subjects to make up, one year of Latin and algebra.

The Latin I memorized and today I can recite paragraphs of Caesar's war with the Helvetians. As for the fish, I had them packed in ice and came back to Helena on the Kate Adams.

Quail and duck hunting were my favorite sports. I used to hunt quail with a pointer belonging to my uncle, E. M. Polk. This dog was a voracious animal, and when you killed a bird it was a question as to who got there first, you or the dog. He would eat the first bird that you killed. So in order to have some birds for myself, I would feed him the first bird killed. His appetite was satisfied and he would hunt wonderfully.

I hunted many fields around Helena, Marvell and Poplar Grove. One day while hunting in some cut over timber near Marvell, Arkansas, it started snowing. Our old pointer dog Don was working the field over and came to a hollow log partially covered by snow. He came to a point. Thinking it was a rabbit I kicked the log and to my surprise out came a quail. I shot and killed him, another point by Don out came another quail, this became routine for seven straight points and seven dead birds. How is this for a fish story? I can vouch for it being the truth.

My duck hunting started when I was about 12 years old. I hunted on Porter's Lake, Snow Lake, Long Lake and many other places. When we were near

our early teens Frank Garner, Godfrey Merrifield and myself would load up a little red wagon with guns, shells and food and taking turns would pull that wagon approximately three miles and a half to Porter's Lake Club House and spend the night and hunt ducks the next morning, and believe it or not, we generally killed ducks. Those were happy days.

I think of the days of church and other picnics that we had at Storm Creek. Sometimes we would go in buggies, wagons and with a group in what was called an omnibus, a long vehicle having longitudinal seats facing each other and holding about eight people on each side. On our way we would first stop at Big Springs, which ran out of the base of a hill. This stream was cold and crystal clear with gravel and sand bed. We would always enjoy wading in it. Then on to Storm Creek where the picnics were held. All types of sandwiches, potato salad, fried chicken and big galvanized iron tubs of lemonade with squeezed lemons in their peel floating around huge blocks of ice. This now fills me with nostalgia.

During my Sunday School days I had good teachers. My first teacher was Major Hornor, a fine old gentleman. He married an aunt of mine, Mary Bruce. She died a few years later and he married Miss Lyford, who is the mother of the Hornor children. Ed, Joe, Lyford and Tappan were the sons. The daughters were Mary and Hattie.

One of my teachers was Miss Anna Vineyard. She taught me in high school and also on Sundays. You know that I couldn't get rid of Miss Vineyard, even on Sundays. As a matter of fact, I did not want to get rid of her for she was a good teacher and a wonderful person.

Now that I have gone through my Sunday School education, I will now tell you about my public school teachers.

My first grade primary teacher was Mrs.

Bosworth, approximately 60 years old. She had a great teaching manner for the A, B, Cs, and writing. She was most successful and likeable.

The next grade, the second, was taught by Miss Viola Rightor, sister of Dr. Henry Rightor. In her class we began to take up numbers and reading.

The third grade was taught by Miss Maude Bush, and the subjects of the second grade were continued with reading and history added.

The fourth grade was taught by Miss Ella Kloene, and the subjects of the third grade were higher and more difficult.

At this period in my life my cooperation with the teachers was not so successful. The fifth grade Mrs. Hanly taught. She was a good teacher and quite a disciplinarian. She would use the old pointer and ruler to good effect. We all were at an age in the fifth grade when the boys were all filled with devilment and the girls had a pretty hard time, especially when they wore long plaited hair. Some would come to school as blondes and return home as brunettes, the inkwells in our desks were very prevalent.

I remember one incident that occurred. I was reading a book containing many jokes and humorous stories. I became so absorbed in this book that I forgot I was in school and began laughing out loud, disturbing the whole room. Mrs. Hanly, the teacher, walked up behind me and saw the book. She took it away and put it in her desk, but the damage had been done for everyone's curiosity was aroused about the book. There were three girls who wanted to borrow it, Martha Jackson, Annie Nason and Russell Henderson, who was the daughter of the Methodist minister of Helena. I got the book back and loaned it to the girls, who in turn were reading it and began laughing out loud. It really put me on the spot for several days.

During some of my summer vacations I worked for building contractors and had some unusual experiences.

During one summer in July I was working shingling the roof of Charlie Coolidge's home. The men on the ground were dipping shingles in green creosote stain two-thirds of the way up and passing them up to me. That night I had the skin off of my bottom from raw creosote. Needless to say, I had a very warm night.

Another time we were laying the sub-floor for the first Helena Hospital on Poplar Street. It was in the middle of July and hot as blue blazes. Men were falling out from the heat, and only two of us were left laying sub-floor. I had wet towels around my head but that did not help much. I was trying to stick it out until noon. We ate our lunch on a shed porch of a two room cabin where we kept our tools. So that day I remembered about the wasps' nest in those rooms. The carpenters kept a lot of coal oil for use on their saws. Coal oil had a paralyzing effect on wasps, so during the lunch hour I did a little spraying. The wasps came out in swarms and ran all of us off the job. One wasp got up the pants leg of our foreman, who was a little short Dutchman. I can see him running now. But there was one good thing that came out of this incident. None of us had a sunstroke for things were completely disrupted for the rest of the day.

Getting back to Walker Levee, there were some small hills at the west termination of Walker Levee and the city cut through one of these hills to extend the levee road. This work was done by day labor with pick, shovels and scrapers pulled by mules. But after the earth was loosened up they used the fire hose under city pressure to wash the dirt away. This was an interesting piece of engineering and I enjoyed watching them work.

The main levee in front of Helena was a continual threat. When the water would get high, the levee would seep and at times water would run over the top. When this occurred a wall of dirt filled "croker" sacks was used as a back up. In emergencies such as these the men, women, boys and girls all worked to

save our city.

I can remember the flood of about 1912. With all our efforts we were praying for the safety of Helena. Men and boys were patrolling the levee four to every 300 feet. The women and girls had stations where they served coffee, sandwiches and doughnuts.

Habib Etoch, with his restaurant, set up a stand for central distribution of food and drinks. One night when the levee was in a crucial state a Hoseler, or Fireman, in one of the railroad freight yards had his locomotive whistle hung up causing it to blow continuously. This accident caused quite a panic in the low part of Helena. There was a general exodus to the hills. As serious as this appeared to be, there were humorous incidents where a Negro woman picked up her dog instead of her baby, and some forgetting their clothes and running out into the night in their nightgowns, and other amusing occurrences. These days have passed and the levee around Helena is now secure.

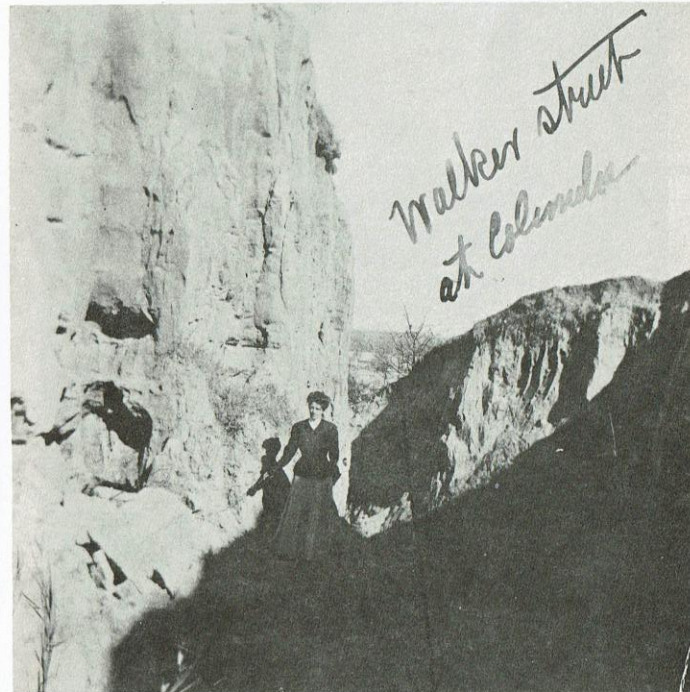
During my university years Colonel and Mrs. John D. Moore lived in our home. Col. Moore was a prominent railroad man for many years, and was then division superintendent of the Missouri Pacific Railroad while in Helena. He had a wonderful personality. During the Civil War he was on the Union side and his brother on the Confederate side. The Union, under his command, captured some Confederate soldiers, among them being his brother. It really placed the Colonel in an awkward position, but what I learned of this episode, his brother escaped.

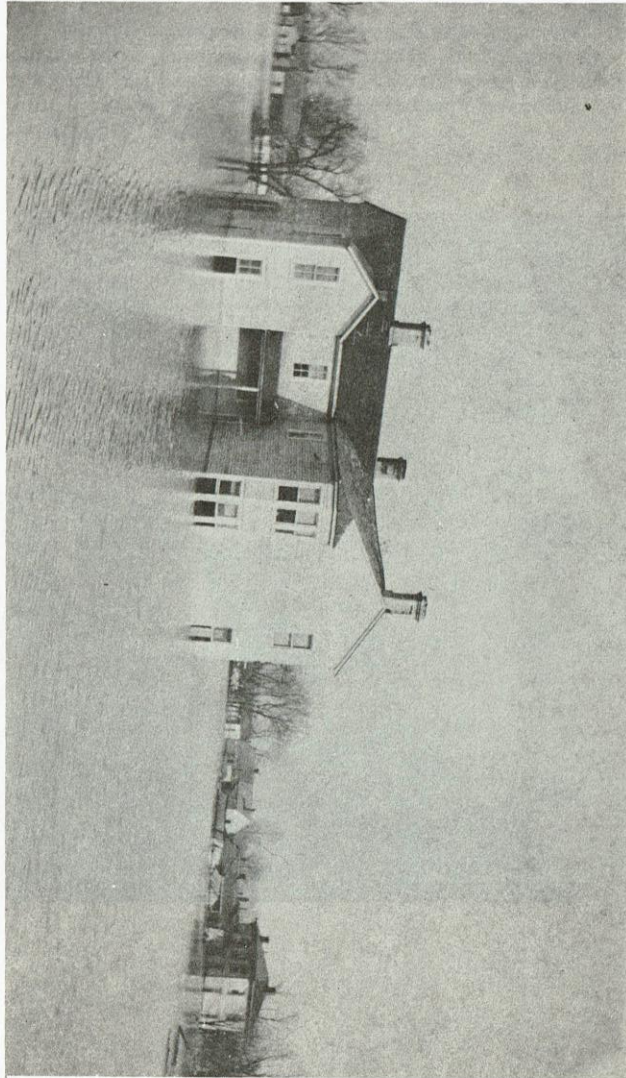
After the Colonel retired he bought a tract of land at Pillow's Station, and I drew the plans for his home on the farm. There was a large porch on the front of his house, and the Colonel would be on the porch when the trains passed by and would wave in the daytime and use a flashlight at night to salute the train crew. They always blew the whistle when they were passing his home.

When I think of all the interesting things that occurred during my boyhood life in Helena, it fills me with pleasure to have lived among such wonderful people, so it makes me reluctant to close this article, but that's the way it is.

The first of the pictures that follow shows where Walker Street was later cut through the hill. The second picture is a view looking north from Walker Street Levee during the high water of 1913. These pictures belong to the Phillips County Library.

*





POW CAMP FROM REAR VIEW

by

Imogene Eakin Teter
Dover, Arkansas

In the late summer of 1941 our family moved into a house located behind what is now Helena Sportswear. We lived on Cleburne Avenue in West Helena, facing the back of the clothing plant. I was a young girl of thirteen that summer.

The Helena Sportswear location was then known as the Phillips County Fairgrounds. The old "Cotton Mill" building was used for exhibits. There were very thick hedges that bordered the back of the grounds.

About 1943, there were crews of men put to work clearing the hedgerow out completely. We couldn't imagine what they were planning to do over there. As soon as the hedges and grounds were cleared of all vegetation, they began building a long, wide building directly behind the larger building. We later learned that it was a quickly constructed Mess Hall.

They then built four sentry posts, one on each corner of the grounds. At the same time a double fence was being put up to securely enclose the grounds. The outer fence was made of barbed wire, curving inward at the top. The inner fence, about three feet from the barbed wire, was regular steel or wire fencing.

By that time we had heard rumors that they were bringing in Japanese POWs. This frightened us terribly, as America was not yet on the offensive in the war with Japan.

Late one afternoon the year I was fifteen, we saw a train stop down at the railroad tracks at the

end of the street. Military Police started unloading the POWs from the train. We could hardly wait to get our first glimpse of them. To our delight and surprise they were not Japanese, but Italian POWs. They ranged in age from about 17 to 25 or 30 years.

The Italian POWs were jolly and happy all the time. Three or four of them had accordians. The place rocked with music and singing when they were allowed in the recreation area that was just across the road from us. One POW was an acrobat and clown all in one. He kept us, the guards, and POWs laughing all the time.

I know for a fact that the prisoners were well fed. Their kitchen door was at the back of the building with a walkway to the Mess Hall. Three times a day we would see them bring huge trays of meat and food to the Mess Hall. In fact at times we were really envious, because due to the war, the civilians were experiencing shortage of meat, sugar and many other things.

Italy surrendered fairly early in the war. I remember how the Italian POWs celebrated all night when they heard that Italy was out of the war. Soon the POWs were preparing to be taken back to their homeland. The night before they were to leave the next morning, they all gathered by the fence in front of my bedroom and played the accordians and sang all night. Many of them had made little handmade gifts and threw them across the fence for me. That was their goodbye to us.

We were now back to the old fear of Japanese POWs being brought in. But in a few days the recreation area was teeming with German prisoners. They were more austere than the Italians. In fact, they were very cold at first, or so it seemed after the happy-go-lucky Italian POWs. The music was gone and they didn't laugh at all. People from all over West Helena would walk by the road in front of our house to look at them. This seemed to anger them no end.

After a week or two they became more adjusted and began playing ball in the recreation area. Soon they were trying to talk to us across the fence. Some of them were able to speak English. They were always accidentally throwing the ball over the fence, so they could get me to throw it back over to them.

They were especially happy when my girl friends would come home with me from school, or on the weekends when there would be four or five girls there at a time. Mother said that every afternoon when she was watching for me to come home from school the POWs would be waiting and watching for me, too.

One day I was lucky enough to get a roll of film (shortage of film, too). We took one picture facing the POW camp and before we could turn around, two MPs came over and took my precious roll of film. They would not allow pictures to be made of the area.

There were two incidents that caused great excitement while prisoners were there. Two POWs tried to escape onetime. Another time a local man shot into the prison area and hit one or two prisoners.

Once when the POWs had been out in the fields working, one of them came back with a little puppy for me. They kept holding the puppy up by the fence and motioning for me to come and get it. We finally persuaded the guard to let me go up to the fence.

As the puppy grew, it was back and forth from the prison camp to our house. My daddy named the dog "Andrew." They were always calling "Andrew, Andrew"!! Sometimes they would tie notes around the dog's neck for me, but they were very difficult to read, and I was never really sure what they said. This also frightened me, because I remembered what had happened about the film.

The little puppy was a grown dog when the war was over and the German prisoners were returned home. We were both sad and lonely when we looked across at the grounds that had once bustled with so much

activity.

We later found that the reason there were no Japanese prisoners brought here was because they preferred to commit hari-cari or suicide rather than be taken prisoner, consequently there were few prisoners taken.

The picture on the next page shows the building used by the prisoner of war camp. From the collection of Ivey Gladin.

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REMEMBRANCES OF THE PRISONER OF WAR CAMP IN
WEST HELENA, ARKANSAS
A Term Paper

by
Kate Faust

Arkansas became the temporary home for almost 23,000 prisoners during World War II.¹ There were three main Prisoner of War camps--Camp Chaffee, Camp Robinson, and Camp Dermott--and thirty branch work camps. There were work camps located at Altheimer, Bassett, Blytheville, Crawfordsville, Dermott, Earle, Elaine, Grady, Harrisburg, Hughes, Jonesboro, Keiser, Knobel, Lake Village, Luxora, Marked Tree, Murfreesboro, Newport, Osceola, Pine Bluff, Russellville, St. Charles, Simsboro, Springdale, Turrell, Stuttgart, Victoria, Walnut Ridge, West Helena, and Wynne.² Twenty-six of these were in the Delta. The camp in West Helena was the first work camp. It set the pattern for the others.³

The two story brick building which was located on the block of land surrounded by First Street, Cleburne Avenue, Sebastian Street, and an alley, housed a cotton and knitting mill which was owned by the Delta Land Company. Around 1940, the Phillips County Fair Association bought this building for \$5,000 and used it for the County Fair for several years both before and after it became a prison camp. No fairs were held during World War II.⁴

During World War II most of the civilians who were able to do farm work were fighting in Europe or the Pacific. This presented a serious labor problem, especially in the South where farm labor was necessary to plant and harvest the crops. A county farm labor committee was formed to help these needs. Five men, Earl Wells, Otis Howe, Jim Countiss, Cash Moody, and Walter Moore, were selected to supervise the

county labor activities.⁵ This committee raised \$5,625 to make repairs and improvements on the Fair building in order to meet army requirements for a prison camp.⁶

The camp was made ready and the prisoners arrived on September 10, 1942.⁷ They came in buses which were supplied by the army.

The prison camp consisted of a stockade type setup, a two story building surrounded by a barbed wire fence and four guard towers. In front of the main building was a rodeo ring with bleachers, remains of the County Fair. The prisoners' soccer field was also in front of the barracks. The northwest corner of the main building housed the American officers' quarters.⁸

The prison camp was supported by the money which farmers paid in return for labor. When a farmer needed labor, he contacted Mr. Jack Keesee, the liaison officer.⁹ The farmer would then send his truck to pick up his crew, 10 to 50 prisoners, and their guards, and take them to his farm. The prisoners brought their own lunch and worked by the hour. The prisoners were a disappointment in picking cotton. However, they did work well in hay, corn, and truck crops.¹⁰

In Phillips County, the prisoners were considered to be "life savers."¹¹ A local farmer, Mr. Ralph Bunch, said that the German prisoners were the best crew to pull up silage he has ever had.¹² There was at least one experienced farmer who could supervise the others in every crew. The farmers soon let the prisoners do almost everything. They drove tractors and bulldozers, managed rice levees, planted, fertilized, picked the crops, and looked after the livestock.

The Germans were much better workers than the Italians, according to the farmers. The Italians tried to play with the farmer and con him out of work, but the Germans were good, hard workers. The

crewleader set the pattern for the others; when he worked well, they worked well. If a prisoner absolutely refused to work, he was taken back to the camp in a jeep. Somehow the American farmers and the German and Italian prisoners managed to communicate with each other, by use of interpreters and by combining both languages.

In addition to farm work, the prisoners were used to square the Country Club building and set up the golf course.¹³ They also worked on the city streets for a short time. This job didn't last long because of the difficulty in providing adequate guards.

The Italian prisoners who were stationed in West Helena had previously been stationed in England, but due to lack of food there, they were sent to America. They told visitors to the camp that they were in a submarine, headed for Gibraltar, when they were captured. They claimed that they were so close they could see the expressions on the peoples' faces.¹⁴

The Italian prisoners accepted their imprisonment, but they weren't willing to help the American war cause at any cost. They weren't friendly and they didn't work any more than absolutely necessary. In the eyes of the West Helena citizens, they looked like hoboes and were considered low class people.

Among the prisoners there were men of almost every walk of life, including doctors, lawyers, actors, and wood-carvers. These highly talented actors presented programs for the other prisoners and the guards. They built their own stage and set up the whole program by themselves.¹⁵

The wood-carvers made many intricate items out of every splinter of the "high quality, good 2-inch boards" from the bleachers. At Christmas they made a complete nativity scene, Baby Jesus, three Wise Men, shepherds, cows, and all. When asked if they would give the nativity scene away, they replied, "No, the

priest has already blessed it." They did, however, make another set for the inquirer.¹⁶

On special occasions the prisoners played soccer in front of the barracks. On everyday occasions they played games similar to tag and dodge ball.

The Italians also made their own macaroni and received packages from home which contained three to four month old food.¹⁷ They also received letters and packages containing money and gifts from Italy.

The Italians left on the same day that Italy surrendered, September 8, 1943.¹⁸ When they left, they destroyed everything that didn't belong to the army. They held a huge bonfire, destroying their stage and everything else that could possibly be of any use to the Germans.

The Italians left for Monticello in the morning and the Germans came from Little Rock on the same day.¹⁹ The Germans were all big, healthy, strong, young men, the cream of the crop.²⁰ The Germans were considered much better workers and more intelligent than the Italians. However, the Italians were considered to be friendlier.

In May of 1944, two shots were fired into the camp by a local citizen who was thought to have heard bad news about his son in the army. No prisoners were killed, but five German prisoners were injured.²¹ Captain Clifton, the American in charge of the camp, was looking out of his window when the shots were fired. He said that the prisoners fell to the ground and crawled like snakes into the building.²² The whole town talked about the prisoners' reactions when they heard the shots.²³ This was the only violent incident involving prisoners in Arkansas.²⁴

On normal days, after they finished their work, the Germans played soccer like the Italians. They were also interested in wood carving.

There are no exact dates available about when

the Germans left. It is known that they left sometime after Germany surrendered in 1945, however.

Everyone who lived in West Helena during the 1940s and has a good memory seems to have a story concerning the prisoners. Here are several of their stories.

Mrs. Carolyn Cunningham remembers that gasoline was rationed, eliminating Sunday drives. For entertainment, the people of West Helena walked down to the prison camp and watched the prisoners play soccer.²⁵ It was similar to the present day trip to the zoo.

Mr. J. J. White remembers that Earl Wells, Jr. gave his crewleader a wristwatch. When the other prisoners discovered this man with a gift from an American, they accused him of being an American war sympathizer. He was about to be hanged when a guard walked into the barracks. The prisoner slept with the guards that night and was transferred to another camp on the following day.²⁶

Mr. Ralph Bunch remembers when he offered to give the Italian Macheli who was in charge of his crew, anything he needed. The Macheli said that he would really like a suitcase. Mr. Bunch told him that there was a war going on and he couldn't get a suitcase, but he would be glad to have a wooden box made for him. The Macheli gave the dimensions to Mr. Bunch in centimeters and Mr. Bunch took the dimensions in inches. When Mr. Bunch took the 6 feet long box to the prisoner, the Macheli said he thought this man was bringing his coffin.²⁷

Mr. Bunch also remembers the dances which were held for the prison guards. The YWCA girls were taken to the camp and told to dance. These dances were held every Christmas.²⁸

Mr. Tom Faust remembers seeing the prisoners at his father's saw mill, Faust Band Saw Mill. The prisoners came to the mill to get lumber for the

farmers, but while they were there they got lumber scraps to use for shower shoes. Mr. Faust, who spoke fluent German, often talked to the prisoners. After the word got out about the free lumber scraps, all of the prisoners wanted shower shoes.²⁹

Several people remember sitting on their front porches after supper and watching the prisoners ride by in the back of a truck. They also remember listening to the prisoners sing classical folk songs at night.

Several years after the war, a former Italian prisoner of war brought his American wife to Helena. He wanted to show her where he stayed and to introduce her to the kind people who helped him bear his imprisonment.³⁰

Mr. Ralph Bunch received several letters from former German prisoners. They told him of their return to Germany and the location of the other prisoners.³¹

Thirty years after the closing of the Prisoner of War camp, there are few written records or articles about the camp. Few people are left who remember facts, although there is an abundance of people who vaguely remember that there was a Prisoner of War camp in West Helena, Arkansas.

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FOOTNOTES

¹William L. Shea and Merrill R. Pritchett, "The Afrika Korps in Arkansas, 1943-1946," Arkansas Historical Quarterly, (Spring, 1978), 3.

²Ibid., p. 14.

³Interview with J. J. White, Helena National Bank, Helena, Arkansas, April 12, 1978.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

⁶"Narrative Report of County Agent, Phillips County, J. J. White, Agent, December 1, 1942 to December 1, 1943."

⁷Ibid.

⁸Interview with J. J. White.

⁹Telephone interview with Mrs. Susan McCartney, Newport, Arkansas, April 3, 1978.

¹⁰"Narrative Report of County Agent."

¹¹Shea and Pritchett, p. 17.

¹²Interview with Ralph Bunch, West Helena, Arkansas, April 19, 1978.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Interview with J. J. White.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸THE TULSA TRIBUNE, September 8, 1943, p. 1.

¹⁹Interview with J. J. White.

²⁰Interview with Tom Faust, Helena, Arkansas, May 1, 1978.

²¹Provost Marshal General, "Inspection Reports and Weekly and Semi-Monthly Reports, June, 1942 to June, 1946.

²²Interview with J. J. White.

²³Interview with Ralph Bunch.

²⁴Shea and Pritchett, p. 21.

²⁵Interview with Mrs. Carolyn Cunningham, West Helena Library, West Helena, Arkansas, April 21, 1978.

²⁶Interview with J. J. White.

²⁷Interview with Ralph Bunch.

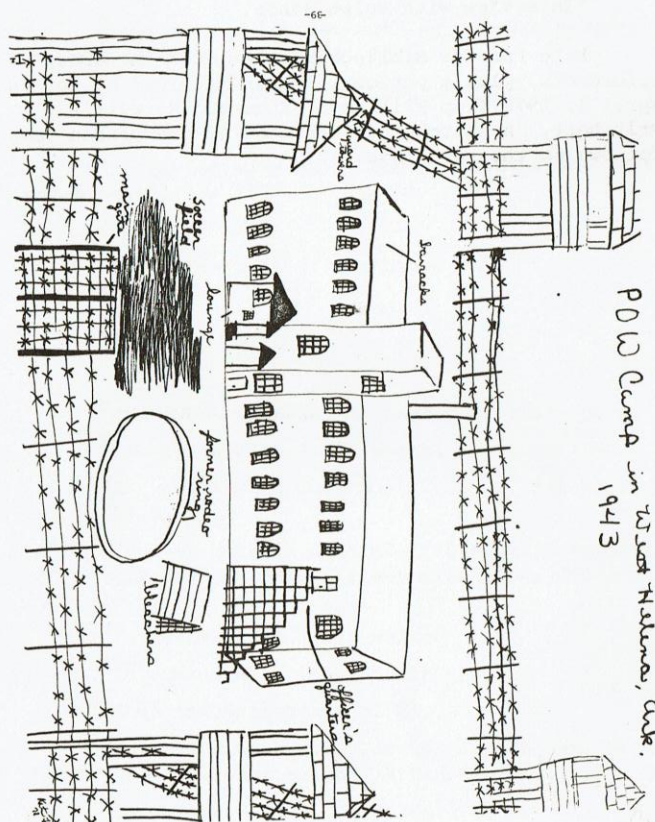
²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Interview with Tom Faust.

³⁰Interview with J. J. White.

³¹Interview with Ralph Bunch.

Kate Faust's Bibliography included the above references, plus a personal letter received by her on April 1, 1978 from William L. Shea and Merrill R. Pritchett. A sketch that she made of the prison camp follows on the next page.



FROM THE HELENA WORLD

November 11, 1923

The L., N. O. & T. Railway: Unique in History,
and Yet a Useful Feeder for the I. C.

Helena enjoys the unique distinction of having a railroad that was built entirely within its city limits. That railroad--with about two and two thirds miles of trackage--is now a part of the Illinois Central System, which comprises a trackage amounting to more than 10,000 miles and serves fourteen states of the Mississippi Valley.

In 1889 the Louisville, New Orleans & Texas Railway Company of Arkansas was incorporated under the general laws of Arkansas. The purpose was to provide terminal facilities in Helena to connect with a transfer to the east bank of the Mississippi River opposite Helena. There was no provision for the extension of the railroad beyond the city limits. It was to be Helena's own railroad, with all of its property entirely within the city limits.

The articles of incorporation dated April 6, 1889, and filed with the Secretary of State of Arkansas, April 24, 1889 read:

"The line of the railroad shall begin at and upon the banks of the Mississippi River, at low water mark in the corporate limits of the city of Helena, and run thence along and upon the streets, alleys and highways of said city, and over and upon private grounds therein and upon public roads and highways and private grounds in Phillips County, for a total length not exceeding five miles of main line."

The depot and tracks of the new railroad were constructed that year in Helena and arrangements were made for the building of an incline for the operation of a transfer across the Mississippi River.

Previous to this time the Louisville, New Orleans & Texas Railway Company, predecessor to the Yazoo & Mississippi Valley Railroad, was extending its lines in Mississippi and Louisiana. In 1888 it came in possession of a narrow gauge road from Glendale, Miss., a point on the Mississippi River opposite Helena, to Clarksdale, Miss., and widened the track to standard gauge. The narrow gauge road was known as the Mobile and North Western Railroad and was thirty-one miles long. It passed through Jonestown, turned west to the present station of Clover Hill and thence followed the present line of the Yazoo & Mississippi Valley to Clarksdale. It was built between 1872 and 1878, possibly with the intention of some day supplying Helena with railway service from the Mississippi side of the river, but no definite action was taken until 1888, when it was acquired by the Louisville, New Orleans & Texas Railway Company for the purpose of giving that road an entrance into Helena.

When the work of widening the gauge was well under way, the Louisville, New Orleans & Texas Railway Company of Arkansas was incorporated and constructed in Helena. It received the traffic that was transferred across the Mississippi River by the Louisville, New Orleans & Texas Railway Company, made the deliveries in Helena and delivered traffic from Helena to the L., N. O. & T. Railway Company for transfer across the river to its lines in Mississippi.

Inclines were constructed at Helena and Trotter's Point, Miss., opposite points on the river, in 1889, and the transfer service was started that year. Since that time the waters of the Mississippi River have completely destroyed the incline at Trotter's Point several times. The transfer had been in operation for about a year when the incline at Trotter's Point was completely destroyed. It was rebuilt promptly, and again it was destroyed by the high water of 1892. A new incline was constructed that year about one-fourth mile downstream. The incline below Trotter's Point withstood high water until 1903, when

it was swept away. It was rebuilt at the same place, only to be destroyed again four years later. Another incline was constructed, and in 1912 it was buried under 6 feet of sand deposited there by high water. The onrush of water the following year completely destroyed all of the transfer facilities at that point, but they were rebuilt when the river began to return to its normal stage.

Between 1893 and 1916, a total of \$71,000 was expended for the restoration of the incline at Trotter's Point, and since the later part of 1919 a total of about \$71,700 has been expended for improvements to the incline there and at Helena in order to supply Helena with adequate transportation service from the east side of the River.

There are now three inclines on the Mississippi side of the river for serving Helena--one at Trotter's Point, another at Glendale and a third at the Mississippi state levee. During the high water of the spring of 1922, the inclines at Trotter's Point and Glendale were not used after March 28 when the river reached a stage of fifty feet, but passenger trains, with very few exceptions, were operated on time over the incline at the state levee. Freight was handled also without delay even though the distance from the incline at the state levee is about two and one-half miles farther from Helena than the incline at Trotter's Point.

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