

PHILLIPS COUNTY
HISTORICAL QUARTERLY

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LEST WE FORGET

by

Mrs. Minna B. Parmelee
Dallas, Texas

In 1929, fifty years ago, our nation experienced the worst depression ever known. For a decade the entire nation struggled to recover, but conditions were so bad that private charitable organizations and local governments soon ran out of money. Arkansas people began looking to the Federal Government for help. President Hoover who happened to be in office when the depression struck became very unpopular. Of course many citizens blamed conditions on the President. However, in 1932, Arkansas voters helped elect Franklin D. Roosevelt, the Democrat candidate for President, who promised the people a "NEW DEAL."

The New Deal provided direct relief grants and set up agencies to conduct work relief programs. The Civil Works Administration (CWA) was the first program.

The Government made each State Civil Engineer's Office responsible for appointing competent Civil Engineers in each county of his State to carry out the Government programs.

Arkansas State Engineer, Captain Limerick, called L. R. Parmelee and said, "Ray, I have a job for you. You won't like it but you will have to do it." He then explained what his responsibilities would be in carrying out the Civil Works Administration in Phillips County. He, with other engineers throughout the State, attended a meeting in Little Rock, the purpose of which was to explain in detail plans for each county. They were to prepare projects which would put as many unemployed to work as possible.

Among the first was a project to gravel every country road in Phillips County. This entailed deciding on priorities, in conference with the County Judge, figuring the yards of gravel and number of man-hours necessary to complete the project. When approved by the Little Rock Office, projects were returned to the county for execution. That is when business began to pick up and hundreds of men were provided employment.

The next thing Mr. Parmelee was faced with was to assemble an office force. He first employed Mrs. E. B. Fletcher (writer of this article), a well-known legal secretary who was recommended by John Sheffield, a prominent Helena attorney. Then he selected Albright Horn as Bookkeeper and later added Stuart Faulkner and Gover Knight. Later as gravel shipments began arriving he hired W. E. Kinman of Lexa, a retired railroad man who became very valuable in keeping up gravel shipments. He really did a terrific job.

An Employment Office was a necessity for men to register for work. J. W. Dennison, former Mayor of West Helena, was put in charge of this office. He soon had routine office procedures moving smoothly.

The first projects approved provided employment for hundreds of men preparing roadbeds and spreading gravel on all dirt roads in Phillips County. Other projects provided for much needed drainage ditches. Among the foremen and timekeepers were J. D. Mays, former Sheriff of Phillips County, Robert Tschabold, a successful farmer, also Fred Inebnit and others. It was a great day for everyone when so many were working who had been without employment for months.

Of course "Payday" had to be taken care of. A Disbursing Office was set up with E. S. Dudley, a local insurance man in charge. Among those employed in this office were: Florence Van Briggie,

Wilma Haggard, Dan McDonald, Joe Hornor, Clyde Wade and Jean Hoffard.

Since this first Program was set up, providing for both labor and materials, projects were provided to repair all public buildings in Phillips County--every schoolhouse, city hall, library and the Courthouse. One of the outstanding accomplishments was the replacing of the splintery, wide board, floors of the old Jefferson School with beautiful hardwood flooring. These projects provided employment for painters, carpenters, plumbers and brickmasons.

In spite of all of the above activities there were still residents of Phillips County unable to perform such labor, but were in dire need of help (there was no relief program then). To meet their needs a Commissary was set up on Arkansas Street in Helena and Jimmie Clopton was made Supervisor of this phase of the work. He served in a very efficient manner to the end of the Program.

In order to render an impartial service to the needy by this Commissary, a Casework Department was set up. Mrs. Albert Sanders was selected to head this work, and Mrs. Mary Duke Bradford became the Chief Clerk. Later Mrs. Sanders was replaced by Mrs. Margaret Hays of Little Rock. Among the Caseworkers employed were: Mrs. Edith Bain, Miss Carolyn Hornor, Miss Martha Lillian Conditt, Mrs. Carrie Mae Craig, Mrs. Alma Akers, Mrs. Mary Sayle, Edmund Wilson, Miss Mary Virginia Hudson, Mrs. Neva Durham and Mrs. Elsie Ward. These rendered a valuable service visiting the needy and disabled, and seeing that they received the necessary assistance.

A Sewing Room was set up to furnish employment to more women and served to relieve the financial pressure on their families during those trying times. During this time the farmers of the county were not forgotten. A Rural Rehabilitation Program provided assistance to all according to

their needs. Foster Fitzhugh and Nig Enlow were appointed Supervisors to carry out this work. Their secretary was Miss Martha Matthews. Their office adjoined Mr. Parmelee's upstairs over the old City Hall. Although everyone was piled up with work, one amusing and interesting incident comes to my mind. Mr. Parmelee had ordered a copy of a popular song which came in his mail. He called Martha in, and while standing across the counter from each other, they began singing the song, he in his wonderful tenor voice and she in her beautiful soprano voice. They sang "When I Grow Too Old To Dream." Instead of a "coffee break" they took a "song break."

When the bounteous crops of the summer of 1934 began to come in and there was practically no market for vegetables, Canning Centers were set up throughout the county, with pressure cookers and other necessary items furnished by the government. I can recall only two who served as Supervisors of a Canning Center, and they were Mrs. Webster of Marvell and Mrs. Fred Williams of West Helena.

In planning projects it was Mr. Parmelee's policy to consult with community leaders. One who stands out in my memory was Mrs. Eliza Miller who was an outstanding leader of her race and highly respected by everyone. She was always ready to lend assistance where needed.

The second program was known as the Emergency Relief Administration (ERA) which was started in late 1934. Under this program the local communities were required to furnish a certain part of the materials used in approved projects. Among the most outstanding projects undertaken was the building of the local Airport in West Helena.

In order to obtain approval of a project to build a swimming pool it was necessary that a certain acreage should be made available with clear title. In order to meet this requirement a number of prominent business men banded together, raised

the funds and organized the Recreation Park Association and Swimming Pool. The Government then matched funds for its construction. A Supervisor had to be appointed to carry out this large project and Mr. Parmelee appointed Robert Otis, a very fine Civil Engineer, to take charge.

There are many who have forgotten the terrible drouth of the summer of 1935 when fields were parched, no grain could be grown and countless large cattle raisers were facing bankruptcy. The Government stepped in and had these cattle shipped to Phillips County where grazing was plentiful. A large acreage was made available in the southern part of Phillips County, fences were put up quickly and other necessary facilities were provided by the Government to care for these cattle. This project also came under Mr. Parmelee's supervision, so he appointed J. W. Keesee to take charge of the work there.

Because of the efficiency of President Roosevelt's New Deal program, our country was staging a remarkable 'come back' and states and counties became financially able to share the expense of further assistance from the Government. The Works Progress Administration (WPA) was then set up by Congress. Under this program much larger and more expensive projects were set up. The most outstanding in our community was the building of the Helena Hospital. The acreage was donated to the County by Mrs. R. L. Brooks. This program gave assistance to Phillips County on a much larger scale than either of the previous ones with the communities furnishing a still greater portion of the cost.

People who did not live through the Depression will never have the same vision of the greatness of our Country and its Government in caring where there was such dire need. Many may find it difficult to believe the things that could be told about the hardships and needs of all classes of people--

people who had been influential business and professional men and all classes found themselves on one level--NEED.

My grandmother taught me that some good comes out of every hardship and that was quite evident for everyone practically became his 'brother's keeper,' and their experience created a closer relationship than anything else could have. AND, Phillips County came through the Depression and subsequent ordeals, with a greater understanding of life than many had ever known.

Mrs. Fletcher kept a daily journal in 1935 from the vantage point of the administrative office, and noted down what progress was made in establishing and directing the government programs. She mentioned the swimming pool with its lighting system, development of the new Recreation Park, the airport, the search for a site to locate a 'Rural Community' at Old Town Lake. In April, 1935, as recorded in the journal, Helena re-entered professional baseball, defeating Clarksdale on that date at the new Park. On July 4, a barbeque was sponsored by Helena business men at the Park, drawing an estimated 15,000 people. This journal is very interesting to read and it must be unique--at least in this area.

*

MEMBERSHIP ROSTER, 1979-1980

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 Helena
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 Helena
 Memphis, Tenn.
 Helena
 Helena
 Nashville, Tenn.
 Memphis, Tenn.
 Helena
 N. Sacramento, Cal.
 N. Sacramento, Cal.
 New Orleans, La.
 Marvell
 Marvell
 Marvell
 Marvell
 Elaine
 Marvell
 Lexa
 West Memphis, Ark.
 Houston, Texas
 West Helena
 Helena
 West Helena
 Helena
 West Helena
 Trenton, Mo.
 Marvell
 Coulterville, Calif.
 Okmulgee, Okla.
 Pine Bluff, Ark.
 Pine Bluff, Ark.
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 Elaine
 Elaine
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 Helena
 West Helena
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 Marvell
 Marvell
 Little Rock, Ark.
 Helena
 Marvell
 Little Rock, Ark.
 Helena
 Poplar Grove
 Helena
 Marianna, Ark.
 Helena
 Helena
 Helena
 Heber Springs, Ark.
 Helena
 Pine Bluff, Ark.
 Little Rock, Ark.
 Helena
 West Memphis, Ark.
 Helena
 Helena
 Helena
 Pullman, Wash.
 Durant, Okla.
 Little Rock, Ark.
 Chestnut Hill, Mass.
 Helena
 West Helena
 Denton, Texas
 West Helena
 Helena
 Little Rock, Ark.
 Marvell
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 Berkeley, Calif.
 Daleville, Ala.
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 Midland, Texas
 West Helena
 Helena
 Helena
 Dermott, Ark.
 Helena
 Holly Grove, Ark.
 Overland Park, Kans.
 Helena
 Helena
 Helena
 Memphis, Tenn.
 Clarksdale, Miss.
 Memphis, Tenn.
 Norcross, Ga.
 Fort Worth, Texas
 Elaine
 West Helena
 West Helena
 West Helena
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 Helena
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 Elaine
 Helena
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 Helena
 Elaine
 West Helena
 West Helena
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 Helena
 West Helena
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 Moraga, Calif.
 Los Alamitos, Cal.
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 Elaine
 Helena
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 Helena
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 Helena
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*Sustaining Member

EARLY HELENA

It is thought that this article was written in the early years of this century by Viola Rightor (Mrs. George Walker), whose life-span was 1874-1919.

In the early days of our little city the most flourishing portion was River St.--since caved in, and Carolina St. (Missouri St.).

An Aunt of mine who has watched Helena's growth since childhood and treasures up many storeys and anecdotes of its first citizens told her by her mother, gives me this picture of the Helena of over fifty years ago.

Standing on Fort Curtis now occupied by the residences of Mr. Wooten and Mr. Fitzpatrick is a little Catholic Church--which was built by Mr. Phillips, a plain but pretty frame structure.

Bivins Block on River St. contained the Bivin Bakery and the office of the "Helena Herald" the first paper established here, edited by Mr. Jno. Steel of St. Louis. On River St. also were two other merchantile establishments, one owned by Col. Moore, the other by Hornor and Bailey.

Judge Hanks' father was the first to own a store, and the first two story frame house was put up by Capt. Joel Craig (my great grandfather), who brought it ready made from the North and had it set up by northern carpenters after its arrival.

On River St. was the old Arkansas Hotel, owned by Mr. Hornor. Later in its dilapidated state, it came to be known as Cobweb Hall.

The residences were chiefly log cabins. Our beautiful Evergreen Cemetery was the site of the Davis Thompson homestead. At Eureka Springs (Sulphur Springs Road) stood a double log cabin, the

home of my grandparents, -Mr. and Mrs. Nicholas Rightor, and across the creek was a large saw mill and brick kiln, also his property. Where Clopton's store now is, Dr. Green built a frame house which afterwards became the Hargraves home, and just east of this was the old Helena bank.

The fire which destroyed the Solomons residence about a year ago, destroyed the last of the old land marks for it was Judge Hornor's home for many years. (SW corner of Market and Ohio Sts.)

Mr. Phillips homestead was built of logs and is especially interesting to me as it was here that the first meeting of my grandparents took place. Miss Minerva Craig was invited to take tea with the Phillips family. Mr. Nicholas Rightor, then a government surveyor who was surveying the county, was one of the party. Cupid was an unexpected guest, while they drank their tea and ate mush and milk from wooden spoons and bowls.

Such was Helena before the war. Slowly but steadily she progressed, and when the first sullen rumors of war were heard, Helena citizens echoed them loudly, left their homes to join the ranks of the southern army, and little Helena itself played an important part in the struggle.

Two companies were organized here, the Yell Rifles, commanded by Patrick Cleburne who enlisted as a private but eventually rose to the rank of Major General, and the Phillips Guards composed of the young men of the city.

Among Helena men who were promoted to the rank of officers during the war were--Gen. Cleburne, killed at Franklin, Tenn., Gen. Hindman, Gen. Pillow, Gen. Tappan, Gen. Govan, Gen. Polk, Capt. Barlow, Major King, Chief Commissary of Trans-Miss. Dep., Major Moore, Chief Commissary of Cleburne's Dep., Capt. C. L. Moore, and Capt. Lambert, killed at Shiloh.

The battle of Helena has made the place historic. It occurred on July 4, 1863 and was a serious disaster to the Confederates. The place was garrisoned by Gen. Curtis and strongly fortified. Gen. Theophilus H. Holmes, the Confederate commander, conceived the idea of taking the place, and put his army in motion from their camp near Little Rock for that purpose.

Hempstead in his history thus describes the battle.

"After a laborious and toilsome march across the country, Gen. Holmes appeared before the place late on the 3rd and the next morning the attack was made. Bloockers Battery engaged the Federals at a place called Ft. Curtis where they were subjected to a tremendous fire, as also from the heavy guns of the gunboats in the river. The main attack was made against the line of breastworks farther to the north.

In order to reach them it was necessary for the men to crawl through abatis work more than half a mile, subjected to a destructive fire from volleys of musketry and from individual sharpshooters. They suffered heavily, and lost many men, but gallantly and resolutely pushed on past the abatis and made a grand rush for the breastworks. Sweeping like an avalanche up to the hill tops, and over the line of works they poured a destructive fire on the broken ranks of the Federals who fled before them.

But though a lodgement had thus been made in the works it was impossible to hold it. The Federal line reformed and came back with a determined effort, driving back the Confederates and retaking the works they had lost. The engagement began at 7 in the morning and closed at noon. The fort is still called Confederate fort and is the highest point around Helena.

Fagan's Brigade suffered heavy losses fighting from daylight to eleven o'clock in the day. They pushed their way through the fallen timbers and through the ravines, and attacked the works, driving the Federals from one line of rifle pits to another, until they took refuge in the fort on Hindmans Hill. The fire from this fort was most destructive and thinned the ranks of the Confederates every minute.

The day was extremely hot and sultry, the men were exhausted and after making unsuccessful efforts to storm the fort, were ordered by Gen. Holmes to withdraw from the field."

When the Phillips Guards enlisted there was an entertainment given them by the young ladies of Helena at the Baptist Church. The idea carried out was their reception by the seceding states. Each state was represented by a young lady, Miss Emma Rightor, now Mrs. Morris of Kentucky, representing Arkansas. She presented the Guards with a silk flag made by the girls. It was received by Capt. Barlow. At the unveiling of the Confederate Monument in 1892, this same flag was raised and waved in the air by a daughter of Mrs. Morris.

The Federals took possession of all houses they desired to use, and made their headquarters at Gen. Hindman's home, Gen. Tappan's, Mr. Bob Moore's then owned by Mr. Arthur Thompson, and our residence.

The Presbyterian and Baptist Churches were used as hospitals, and both churches are now suing the government for damages done, and expect to receive payment. The Federals cleared the trees from the hills, and since then they have been gullied and washed away until the old forts are scarcely recognizable.

The Ladies Memorial Association has interred the remains of all the Confederate soldiers in the Confederate Cemetery, and erected a handsome monument to their honor, and a shaft to Cleburne's

memory. To see a picture of the Helena of today you must go with me to the summit of Confederate fort and take a birds eye view of the town.

Away down South --the smoke of two cotton seed oil mills, 3 lumber mills, 2 cotton gins and compresses, an ice factory, a box factory, a canning factory, a cotton batting factory, rises and loses itself in the clouds.

The U. S. flag floats above a splendid opera house. Electric lights, 3 railroads, many steamers, and street railways give a modern air, and many handsome and attractive business buildings of brick and elegant private residences, give it a thriving prosperous look.

The spiritual welfare of the inhabitants is looked after, Baptists, Catholics, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, and Methodists having each a house of worship. A fine public school, a high school for girls, another for boys, a kindergarten, Catholic convent, and two negro public schools, show that intellectual needs are considered and provided for.

The Womans Library Association has erected a handsome Library building and have several thousand well selected volumes, while the town boasts of one progressive literary club--Pacaha, called after the Indian name of the city.

The Kings Daughters have in charge the poor of the city. Other organizations are the Ridge City Club, Young Ladies German, Ladies Social Club, and the Glee Club, all active groups.

*

DR. CHARLES E. NASH

This is a sketch of Dr. Nash, from BIOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL MEMOIRS OF CENTRAL ARKANSAS, published by the Goodspeed Publishing Co. of Chicago, Nashville, and St. Louis, 1889, Pages 489-90, "Pulaski County."

*

C. E. NASH, M. D. In recording the names of the faithful practioners of medicine in this locality, that of C. E. Nash will always be given a prominent and enviable position. There are two ways to gain a reputation, one by the influence of friends, and the other by individual application and true worth. The latter applies to Dr. Nash, who has certainly reached the top round of the ladder in that most noble of all professions. He is a native of Missouri, and was born in St. Louis in 1826.

His father, John T. Nash, was born, reared and educated in Virginia, and graduated with honorable distinction from a medical college of that State. He was exceptionally well read and delivered many lectures that received favorable comment in the Jefferson Medical College of Philadelphia, Penn. In 1812 he moved to the State of Missouri, and although wealthy, he became an active medical practioner simply for the love of the science.

He owned a valuable plantation near old Jamestown, and also possessed considerable land on which the site of St. Louis is now situated. Reverses overtook him while in the zenith of prosperity, and he was compelled to resign all his property, his lands being sold at 10 cents per acre. He sold his wedding suit, and even lacked \$15 of paying his debts; his death occurring while in the prime of life, and when about forty-five years of age, one hundred miles from home and during a visit to a patient.

His demise was deeply lamented by his many warm friends.

His wife, Anna (Bland) Nash, was born in Prince Edward County, Va., of Scotch origin, her father having emigrated to America at an early day. She was a cousin of Robert Lee's mother, also being closely related to John B. Randolph, and a number of the old families of the Old Dominion. Hon. Richard Bland, of Missouri, is a very near relative of Dr. Nash, the subject of this sketch.

Mrs. Nash was left destitute with four children to care for, and nobly did she perform the duties imposed upon her. Dr. C. E. Nash was her third son, and at his home in Alabama she died, in 1863, at the age of seventy-two years, the Doctor at that time having charge of a hospital in that State.

C. E. Nash's early youth was spent with his brother-in-law, Robert A. Watkins, with whom he made his home after attaining his eighth year. His early educational advantages were excellent, as Mr. Watkins was the first secretary of the State of Arkansas, holding the position four years, and thus favored the Doctor with an excellent knowledge of business affairs in his office. The records of that time are in his handwriting, and his instructions were received from Mr. Watkins and Gov. Conway.

Having had a desire to study medicine, he entered the drug store of Dr. R. L. Dodge with the intention of making that science a study, and after becoming thoroughly prepared became a student at the University of St. Louis, from which institution he was graduated in 1849 as a regularly qualified physician. The remainder of the year, and until 1858 he practiced in Helena, Ark., and at the same time attended to his plantation in Mississippi, just across the river. Upon this he moved in the last-named year, keeping up his practice on the west side of the river in the meantime.

During the war he had charge of the Confederate Marine Hospital, located at Selma, Ala., but after the cessation of hostilities and upon returning home he found all the buildings and fences on his plantation a complete wreck. He borrowed money, paid off debts that he had contracted before the war, and continued to manage this farm until 1882, when he sustained heavy losses from overflow.

In 1884 he returned to Helena, and in 1886 settled in Little Rock, where he is now following his profession. Dr. Nash's residence is situated on Scott Street, and besides that he owns considerable property in Helena.

He was first married to Miss Mary Frances Epps, who was born in North Carolina, and died in 1880 at the age of fifty-one years, having borne eight children: John T., Alexander E. and Charles E., all deceased, the first two dying at home and the latter in Memphis, Tenn., of yellow fever. The daughters are Mary E. (wife of William B. Lindsey), Anna, Virginia, Shirley (deceased) and Sarah E.

His second wife was Miss Fannie Mosley, who was born in Georgia. She is the daughter of Capt. Mosley, who was a well-known and prominent citizen of Jackson, Miss. Mrs. Nash and her sister Mary organized and successfully conducted a female college at Jackson, Miss., for a number of years. They are ladies of culture and refinement, and were very popular as teachers as well as favorites in society, as they now are.

Dr. Nash, on his paternal side, is a relative of Francis Nash, of Revolutionary fame, and related to Francis Nash, a soldier in the War of 1812, and also to Judge Nash, of North Carolina. The Doctor is, as he well deserves to be, a popular gentleman and physician, and those who are fortunate enough to secure his services when necessary realize that his coming means the alleviation of their suffering.

In social circles he is equally popular, always being surrounded by an attentive and appreciative company, who thoroughly enjoy his sparkling wit, interesting episodes and brilliant repartee.

*

In the 1890s, Dr. Nash was living in Little Rock, and it was at this time that he wrote several books. Probably the best known of his books is entitled BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES OF GENERAL PAT CLEBURNE AND GENERAL T. C. HINDMAN, Little Rock, 1898. Other books that he wrote, and this is an incomplete list, are: HISTORIC AND HUMEROUS SKETCHES OF THE DONKEY, HORSE AND BICYCLE, Little Rock, 1896; SOUTHERN STORIES, Little Rock, 1900; PIONEERS OF ARKANSAS 1822 to 1840 WITH REMINISCENCES, Little Rock. The following pages are extracted from this last named book.

*

Pages 16 through 19. I will mention another occurrence. In the year 1836 the real estate bank was chartered, and in 1837, Henry L. Biscoe was elected president of the branch bank at Helena. It became necessary to send a large amount of this currency from the mother bank at Little Rock to the branches. We had no mail conveyance in those days, except by mail boy, pony and saddlebags, and the country was infected with the Murrell and Stuart gang, who were killing and robbing travelers for their horses and money. The officers of the bank concluded it would be unsafe to send this money by a man, lest some of these fellows might be in Little Rock and learn of their intention.

Dr. Watkins said to me, "Charley don't you want to see your mother?" With a happy countenance I instantly replied, "Yes." This I think was in August. He said, "you must go to Colonel Thomas W. Newton, and he will give you a pair of saddlebags,

containing a large amount of money, which you are to take to Helena and deliver to Colonel Biscoe." (Note: Henry L. Biscoe's second and third wives were Charles Nash's sisters.) I did as directed, Colonel Newton throwing the saddlebags across the horse, which had been secured for the journey. As I left he charged me to make a pillow at night of the saddlebags.

It was then about 3 o'clock in the afternoon, and I reached Percival's about dusk, took supper, had my horse fed, then started through the lonely prairie at night, to travel a distance of 40 miles before reaching another house, and this was a stand kept by Pyburne, 10 miles beyond the eastern border of the prairie.

As this was the season for the historic prairie fly to make his attack on all four footed beasts, that were caught within the limits of this prairie in the daytime, all travelers were compelled to pass through it after night, when these deadly insects had gone into night quarters. I passed through this prairie without seeing a living animal or a dead man, and arrived at Pyburne's as the chickens were crowing for day. After having my horse taken and getting breakfast, I threw the precious saddlebags across my shoulders, went to my room to rest until evening.

Late in the afternoon I started, as I had to cross White River at the mouth of Cache, before dark and spend the night with the ferryman on the opposite side. I could go no further than this, as there was not a house where you could stop until reaching old man Jack Bowie's (the inventor of the famous bowie knife), 5 miles from Helena. I was shown my bedroom by the host, but before parting with me pointed to the blood that stained the logs, telling me that a man had been killed in that room the night before, but remarked to me: "Don't you be scared boy, they won't hurt you."

As I had ridden 50 miles, 40 of them in the night, had slept only six hours out of twenty-four, I was worn out muscle, nerve and brain. I fell asleep fearing no evil and did not awake until I was called to breakfast, which consisted of coffee, fried bear steak, stewed venison, and corn bread.

It was 50 miles from there to Helena by cow-path road. I arrived at Bowie's after dusk, had my horse fed, and rode into Helena, arriving about 10 o'clock that night at the little log cabin, hidden by Crowley's Ridge on the western side, the place where now stands the beautiful Roman Catholic Seminary. It seemed that Colonel Biscoe was looking for me, as he expressed no surprise at my untimely arrival.

When it was made known to my mother, that I had been entrusted with such a large amount of money, and being well acquainted with the difficulties and dangers of the way, she first turned pale, then became quite angry with my brother-in-law for compelling one so young to make this hazardous trip; but the pleasure of seeing me soon banished all unpleasantness.

This trip of 100 miles was made by a boy not then 14 years old, in less than forty hours. Here I pause and take a long breath and ask myself the question: "What would you take to make the trip over the Iron Mountain Railroad?" Answer: "If I did, I would take out an accident policy for double the amount."

*

During the last few years, applications were made for several buildings in Helena to be placed on the National Register of Historic Places. In the course of gathering information, some interesting facts turned up about the Barlow house at 917 Ohio Street.

It is thought that this house was built in the 1850s by Dr. Nash shortly before his marriage. It was probably in this house that Patrick Cleburne lived with the Nash family for a number of years, as mentioned in Nash's book, CLEBURNE AND HINDMAN.

A few years after the Civil War, Captain Barlow bought the house, and it had other owners between the Nash and Barlow families. Some of this information that was gathered for the Register applications, turned up the fact that the Nash homestead in the 1870s was approximately where St. Cyprian's Catholic Church stands now on Holly Street, the site known as "Rightor Terrace" at that time.

Nash and Bart Lindsey are descendants of Dr. Charles E. Nash.

*

PHILLIPS COUNTY LEVEES

by

Mrs. Margie I. Mills
Elaine

When you step on the gas and drive over a levee, most people never give a second thought, but it didn't come with the river, and hasn't always been there. The credibility gap, between the under thirty group and those who experienced it, is tremendous. The recounting of this story may possibly cause the new generation to appreciate the hardships endured by their forefathers.

Since Hernando De Soto first gazed upon the terrible flood in the Spring of 1541, the Mississippi and its tributaries repeated the performance many times. Inhabitants fled repeatedly from the natural disasters which destroyed life and property and swept away their dreams. As the population increased, settlers crossed the river and established farms only to have them destroyed and the crops ruined. Man will not submit to such indignities and by 1717, at New Orleans, he started to fight back by building local embankments to protect his own.²

These were not very substantial levees, constructed primarily of banked up dirt and sandbags, usually by the owner and his slaves. So long as the opposite side of the river remained open, this method was adequate; water rushed over the opposite banks and lost its fury as it spread over the lowlands. The overflows occurred annually and the water collected in catchment basins, which was nature's way of providing reservoirs.

Phillips County might have remained livable

had not the upper reaches if the river been confined by levees which caused the crest of the water to rise until local efforts were broken and washed away. The valleys of the Mississippi and its many tributaries were visited yearly by floods that inundated cities and farmlands. There were 24 such calamities between 1799 to 1864, followed by 23 more, year on year. Man had his fiercest fight as he matched wits with nature in an endeavor to save his land from flood and famine. He poured manpower, mules, machinery and money into the effort while sending representatives to Congress with one thought in mind, "Conquer the river." He succeeded in getting the first survey from St. Louis to New Orleans in 1821.

Before 1850, when floods came, white man and Negroes worked side by side with spades, topping levees with sandbags, pushing wheelbarrows, building tight board fences inside the levee crown to keep lapping waves from breaking over. In heat or cold, slaving men, sweating animals worked through the years; miles of huge, fort-like levees were built higher and higher. These held five or six years but broke when the water rose high enough.

By this backbreaking work they kept the water back if they could, if they were lucky. Often after days of toil the water won, causing the tired men to drop their tools and flee for life. Convict labor was utilized; trustees with guns and bloodhounds guarded the imperiled levees, to protect and prevent cranks from dynamiting or cutting the levees to protect their own property at the expense of others. Then they helplessly waited for water to recede so they could build more levees for later floods to conquer. The people of Arkansas were long in learning that the best soil in the state was to be found in the alluvial lands along the Mississippi, Arkansas, White, St. Francis and Ouachita Rivers.

But the annual floods of these streams

overflowed much of the valuable lands of these acres. The inhabitants, therefore, saw that if these lands were to be brought under cultivation, they would have to be protected from overflow by the construction of levees. The planters of Arkansas were less fortunate than their Louisiana neighbors. They were more recently settled, fewer in number and their state less able financially to afford the expense of levee construction.

The Act of Congress, September 28, 1850, gave to the states of the Mississippi Valley the swamp and overflowed lands, which still remained a part of the public domain; the proceeds from the sale of said lands to be expended by the state in the construction of levees and drains. By this grant the State of Arkansas received about one million acres.

Governor Elias N. Conway was the first governor of the state to emphasize the importance of levees to render the alluvial portion of the state habitable. In 1854, the Swamp Land Commission reported that they had "caused to be leveed and secured from overflow almost the entire portion of the state fronting the Mississippi, and a large portion of Arkansas River and considerable portions elsewhere in the state."⁴

By 1860, over 10,000,000 cubic yards of levee had been constructed at a cost of \$2,500,000 and there was an almost continuous line of levees along the Mississippi on the eastern border of Arkansas. During the War Between the States and the Reconstruction period which followed, little or no attention was paid to building levees or of keeping in repair those already in existence.⁵ "It is hardly necessary to add; that in the State of Arkansas elections were farces.... Railroad and levee bonds were awarded to political partisans while robbery and graft seemed to be endorsed by the reconstruction Republican form of government."⁶

However, on January 2, 1867, the Union State Central Committee issued an address, explanatory of the principles issued by the April Convention, in which they committed the party to the support of internal improvements and pledged National aid in leveeing the overflowed lands of the state.⁷ In 1868, the first session of the legislature enacted a law authorizing the governor to appoint a commissioner of public works and internal improvements, salary \$3,000, with three clerks at \$1,200 each. By another act of March 16, 1869, his jurisdiction was extended to all public levee work within the state.

This act provided that on the application of the majority of the landowners in an area, or any locality who would be benefitted by the construction or repairs of any levee, the commissioner was to have surveys and estimates made and award a contract for the proposed improvement, if he should deem the expenditures "necessary, expedient, and justifiable." Upon the commissioner's certificate that a contractor had completed his work, the auditor of the state was required to issue in payment of the contract price, 30 year, 8% swamp land warrants, receivable in payment for swamp and overflowed land of the district in which the work had been done, at \$1.25 an acre. Interest on the warrants was paid by a tax on the lands benefitted.⁸

To carry out these acts, \$2,500,000 was apportioned. A supplementary act provided for a county board of three reviewers, two appointed by the county court and one by the commission, who should supervise all levee work and report to the commission the increased value of each tract of land benefitted by any levee improvements. The commissioner alone was to assess cost. Payment was required within sixty days after notice under penalty of forfeiture for taxes.

Although Benjamin Thomas was appointed commissioner on October 1, 1868,⁹ no levees were built

before 1869. There were very meager results; only 53 miles of levees were built by 1871. This law was amended on March 21, 1871, when \$3,000,000 of 30 year levee bonds were issued in amounts from \$50 to \$1,000 at 7% interest payable in New York City. These bonds were almost prohibitive but 7% was less than 8%.

By then, the inadequacy of the July 21, 1868, act began to be noticeable. The act provided that any railroad company that should construct a rail bed which should answer the purpose of a levee, should be entitled to receive an amount of the expense of protecting the same land from overflow, which should be determined by the commissioner of public works and internal improvements. Levees were authorized in many places of no practical value or benefit; others were commenced and abandoned. Commissioner Thomas let contracts for six times the usual price. Bonds were issued to the commissioner's friends without regard to requirements of law. In January, 1873, Thomas reported 186 miles of levee built, but did not state what part of the mileage was railroad beds or whether it was local or if it were completed.

The economical state of Arkansas grew worse. S. W. Dorsey, who went to New York to sell the bonds to his "English friends," wrote Governor Hadley "Levees are dead." By March 23, 1871, an act had been unsuccessfully introduced saying "Any law providing for such tax appropriations shall be null and void." In the same year the Arkansas debt had exceeded \$5,000,000. The state had incurred contingent liabilities for railroads and levees and was limited to the amount then reached. On December 1, 1871, sixty more miles of levees were under construction. The railroad companies had built over \$10,000,000 worth of levees under the law. The state was unable to pay and the bonds were worthless by 1874.

In 1874, Article XX from the Constitution of the State of Arkansas, Amendment No. I stated: The General Assembly shall have no power to levy any tax, or make any appropriations to pay for either principal or interest, or any part thereof, of any of the following bonds of the state, or the claims or pretended claims, upon which they may be based, to-wit: Bonds sometimes called "Holford Bonds;" or bonds known as railroad or levee bonds.....and any law providing for any such tax or appropriation shall be null and void."¹⁰

Congress had been slow to act on the problem but did set up The Mississippi Commission at St. Louis in January, 1879, composed of army engineers and civilians. Their job was to control the river as best they could. Congress voted funds to support it.¹¹

Since 1875, taxpayers along the river had been grouped into 28 local levee boards, with headquarters at Memphis. Laconia District, composed of Phillips and Desha Counties, was established April 2, 1891. Each local board had its own problems. About this time several small districts were organized into the Southeast Arkansas District.¹² The Flood Control Commission and The Mississippi River Commission met jointly. The Mississippi River Commission decided where and how levee work should be done. For each \$2.00 spent by the federal government, local districts were obliged to spend \$1.00. This piecemeal building was unsound; a strong federal policy was needed throughout.

Still not strong enough, in the great flood in the eighties, the levees broke in 712 places. It had often broken before and since. In points where breaks were likely to occur, the levees were reinforced on the land side by banquettes, designed to add about forty feet to the base and extended to within six or eight feet of the top where it terminated in a level surface from 25 to 40 feet wide.¹³

The overburdened levées of the White River, a tributary of the Mississippi, seldom held. This stream winds through Phillips County and if protected at all from it, the landowners built their own levees at the cost of from \$5.00 to \$15.00 per acre. Each session of the legislature tried to help; the Levee Act which had failed in 1879 and in 1880 did succeed on November 4, 1884, and was adopted.

The Legislature of 1905 was especially active in the organization of levee districts. The management was voted to the levee directors, elected by the property owners of the district. In Phillips County from 1911 to 1937, names like Countiss Cross- ing, Modoc, Knowlton, Mellwood and Westover, were household words. These were places where boils appeared breaking the levees. Deep backwater often prevented sandboils as it relieved the pressure on the levee proper. The water was far too damaging and again the Flood Control Act of October, 1917, was passed, appropriating \$45,000,000 to assist in levee construction. With all the new legislation, the levee law of 1879 remained in force until 1921. Costs remained high, averaging about \$8,000 per mile.¹⁴

Randall Moore came to Elaine as a surveyor employed by Harry Kelley to build a levee and to dig Yellow Bank.¹⁵ In 1917, a levee was sought by the Modoc residents. A map was made and \$15,000,000 was appropriated by the government.¹⁶ When the 1600 miles of levees crumbled and failed the entire length of the Mississippi in 1927, the Arkansas and Mississippi Rivers were combined and placed under the Department of the Army.

On May 15, 1928, Congress authorized the Corps of Engineers to make River Basin studies. The law was amended a number of times. The "308 Surveys" formulated a general plan for flood control. The Commission was delegated the responsibility for preparing topographic maps of the Mississippi Valley

including Arkansas in the area. The same year, the program of Edgar Jadwin, the chief engineer of the U. S. Army, was adopted. Millions were spent in an effort to eliminate dangerous winding channels. Before the U. S. Corps of Engineers were put in charge, the public itself had spent approximately \$292,000,000. The levees constructed under Franklin D. Roosevelt from 1933-1935 were not high enough.

The Flood Control Act, June 22, 1936, was the first time in the history of the United States that a definite policy was established for federal participation in flood control projects. The Corps of Engineers found that no one method was universally applicable. The Corps considered that all practical methods must be considered and used, when appropriate, in developing sound and economical flood control plans.

Of the four methods devised, the construction of levees to hold water off land and to confine it to established channels of discharge, was the primary method used until 1935. But under the provision of the 1936 act, all construction of authorized projects for flood control and other purposes had to be undertaken at federal expense. Responsible local interests were required to furnish lands, easements, and right-of-way for the improvement; to hold and save the U. S. free from damages during construction; and to maintain and operate the works after completion. Subsequent legislation relieved local interests of the responsibility of furnishing the lands, easement and rights-of-way authorizing reservoir projects.

More millions were poured into the project and when the Granddaddy of all floods occurred in 1937, wiping levees out like matchsticks, it spurred the levee forces into further action. However, the White River preliminary survey, at a cost of \$1,000,000, by General Markham, made no mention to protect Phillips County from backwater. The White

River levee reported was included in a ten year plan. In this project, 16 contracts were let; to be a 270 days job. The levee was 6 feet high with a 33 feet base. Local residents were jubilant. Lambrook had actually drowned in 1927. Maybe it could live again.

Then the boom. No more wheelbarrows and scrapers, no more mules and sandbags, but bulldozers and hundreds of men. Surveyors and engineers arrived by the score. Phillips County experienced an economic shot in the arm; there had been no such prosperity since the construction of the Missouri Pacific Railroad.

The nerve center was Elaine. Business boomed, new stores opened, cafes sprang up, saloons and poolrooms flourished. Every house became a boarding house. Any type meal was acceptable. Men slept in shifts while crews worked around the clock.

First, the surveys were made. There the men were handicapped by dense stands of timber and a heavy growth of cane. Millions of boardfeet of timber was destroyed to make way for the dirt movers. Men gave up their farms for a price, a figure set by the barrow pits and ugly scars marred the landscape. Stumps and unburned timber were pushed into the water. Probably unaware at the time, the workmen were setting up wonderful fishing places such as "Stump Hole" and "Mr. Pat's Island."

Contracts were let for 21 miles of levee, 16,500,000 cubic yards of earthwork were involved. Bids in White River backwater reservoir started at milepost 7 to milepost 28, which was from Lakeview to Mellwood. The War Department took bids. Present for the opening of the bids were two men, George Blackburn and J. M. Countiss, Sr., who had worked so many years for it. Land buyers with the cash to buy the land, appeared. Fortunes were shaping up.

Helena constructed a concrete water wall which held, modern levees were built which, to this day, have withstood all pressure, 15 feet high, with a 100 feet base and eight feet across the top. Earth of a better texture was brought from a distance. These structures were built by teams, tractors, graders, wheel and drag scrapers, steam shovels and draglines. In several of the key levee districts, large dragline machines have been constructed at a cost of over \$1,000,000, but they soon pay for themselves in the quality of levees built.

Since then, the homes and places of business have descended from the stilts which protected them; peace of mind became a reality; tracts and highways were secure. Life is pleasant and the future promising. This levee is considered to be one of man's greatest works.

*

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- Footnote 15. Conversation with Randall Moore.

Conversations with: Miss Pearl Knowlton, Arthur Bernard, J. R. Carpenter, Sr., Bob Higgins, and Randall Moore.

In the last issue of the QUARTERLY, September, 1979, credit was not given to Caroline Bird for her sketch of Mrs. Annie Wittenmyer, which we used. It had appeared in FAMILY CIRCLE, January, 1976, Page 59. Mrs. Bird is the author of several books. One is entitled, ENTERPRISING WOMEN, published in 1976, and gives more information on Mrs. Wittenmyer.

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MASTODON TOOTH

From a HELENA WORLD of March, 1933

Tooth of Huge Animal of Past Is Found Here.

Observing what he supposed to be a large white rock imbedded in a fresh car of dirt excavated by the Ward-Hayes steam shovels and dumped on the new levee north of town, Mr. C. S. McConnell, an employee of the company who resides on North Ohio Street, removed the object, and on examination found that it was a tooth from the jaw of a prehistoric animal. It came from Crowleys Ridge on the old Greenfield Quarles property north of the cemeteries at what is now known as the old Polk dairy.

The tooth, now in the WORLD office, is approximately ten inches from bottom of crown to tip of root, and the crown itself, from which a fragment was evidently torn by the steam shovel, measures four by five inches. Remains of the bone that formerly enclosed the tooth are still adhering to it, and exposed cavities are filled with silica. The walls of the crown, looking much like melted glass, are a quarter of an inch thick.

The identity of the ancient animal from which the fragment came is, of course, unknown, but it may have been a mammoth mastodon, or a megatherium, all of which are known to have been herbivorous. Two points of the crown appear to have been broken away in the past, as the edges are worn smooth and the cavities filled with a material resembling silica.

In past years bones of huge extinct animals have been found in the vicinity of Helena, but this is the first tooth to be unearthed. It is believed locally that Crowleys Ridge may contain vast numbers of these prehistoric remains. The Smithsonian

Institution at Washington will be notified of the most recent find. Whether action will be taken is not known.

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The tooth was given to the Phillips County Museum by Mr. McConnell some years ago and is displayed there. A photograph of it follows this article.

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MORE ON MASTODON BONES

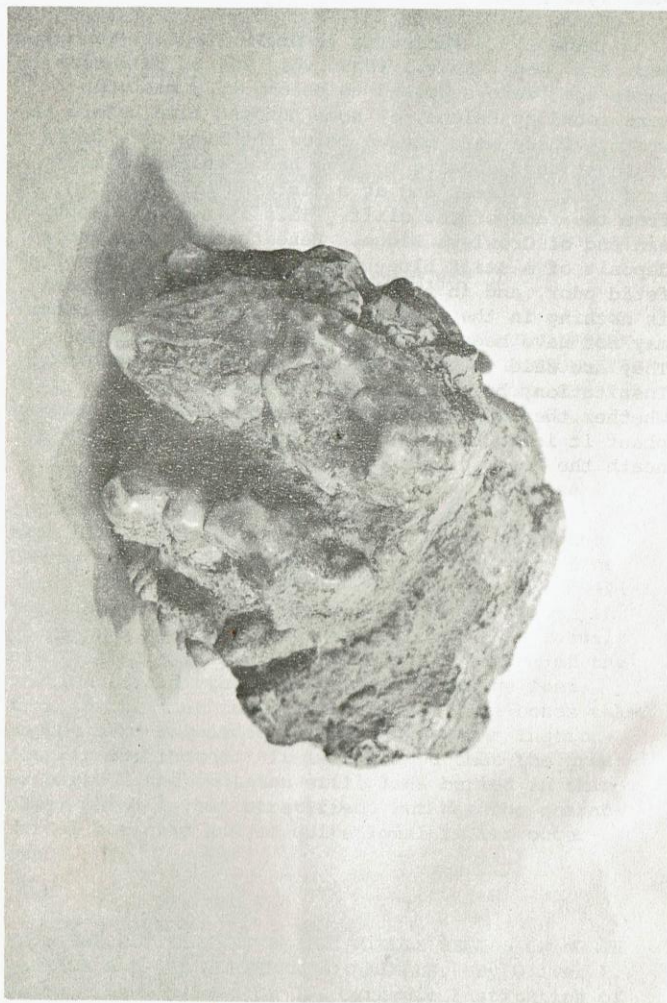
From ANNUAL REPORT OF THE GEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF ARKANSAS FOR 1889. Vol. II. THE GEOLOGY OF CROWLEY'S RIDGE. By R. Ellsworth McCall, M. S. John C. Branner, Ph.D., Little Rock: Woodruff Printing Co., 1891.

Page 39. Vertebrate fossils. The loess is succeeded downwards, at this locality, by a stiff blue black carbonaceous clay, of fetid odor, and having likewise an occasional pocket of very fine sand. This place, which is in the rear of a dwelling, is known in the neighborhood as the place in which some mastodon bones were found. The fossils are said to have been taken from the bottom of the section at a distance of some twenty-five feet from the present face of the cliff. The bones taken out were forwarded to the Smithsonian Institution at Washington. It is believed that the greater part of the skeleton still lies buried in this clay, which is not stratified, but has the character of bog clay and is quite local in its occurrence.

From THE PLEISTOCENE OF THE MIDDLE REGION OF NORTH AMERICA AND ITS VERTEBRATED ANIMALS. By Oliver P. Hayes. Washington, D. C.: Carnegie Institution of

Washington, 1924.

Page 253. According to Dr. R. E. Call (Ann. Rep. Ark. Geol. Surv., 1889, vol. II, p. 39), some bones that were supposed to belong to a mastodon were found at Helena, at some unnoted time before he wrote. These were buried below the base of a cliff of loess that appears to have had a thickness of from 50 to 80 feet and at a distance of 25 feet from the face of the cliff. This is near the southern end of Crowleys Ridge. Beneath the loess was a deposit of a stiff blue-black carbonaceous clay of a fetid odor, and in this clay were the bones. There is nothing in the account to indicate that the bones may not have been those of one of the elephants. They are said to have been sent to the Smithsonian Institution, but the writer has never seen them. Whether they were those of a mastodon or of an elephant it is to be noted that, being in a clay beneath the loess, they antedate the loess.



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