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MIGRATION INTO ARKANSAS, 1820-1880: INCENTIVES AND MEANS OF TRAVEL

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Magnolia, Arkansas

A. WHY PEOPLE MIGRATED TO ARKANSAS

The settlement of Arkansas, 1820-1880, was only a part of a larger contemporary movement—the westward spread of the population of the United States over almost half a continent. The reasons why people moved to Arkansas are as varied as the causes of the westward movement itself, among them being discontent with economic opportunities at home, the desire to join relatives and friends who had gone on before, a contagious spirit of adventure, and above all the desire for cheap, fresh land.

In a letter of December 18, 1848, Mrs. Louisa J. Harley, then of Red Banks, Marshall County, Mississippi, explained to her sister in Virginia why she and her husband, along with their six children and nine slaves, were about to move to Arkansas:

Mr. Harley has some idea of going over the great Mississippi river where he can get more land cheaper than he can here, he has just Sold out his farm, he met with an old South Carolinian who gave him 10 dollars per acre with the liberty of making a crop this year on it, we are to give possession the 1st of January next . . . Arkansas is holding out the stron[g]est inducements to emagrants[.] She is giving one quarter Section of land to heads of famileys & one quarter to each child[.] We would be intitled to Seven quarters, Basil [apparently a close relative] is trying to sell if he does it is likely we will all move to Arkansas this comeing winter or spring . . . the lands in this Country are very high [so] we think it would be to our interest to go where they are cheaper as our family is getting so large numbering 17 black and white . . . the vast amount of land in the Mississippi valley holds out

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strong inducements to those who are enterprising and want good lands . . .¹

The free land which Mrs. Harley mentions was made available by the Arkansas "Donation Law" of 1840, under which actual settlers could obtain tax-forfeited lands "in return for the payment of taxes in the future." Arkansas thus began giving land to settlers more than two decades earlier than did the federal government. The Arkansas law as amended in 1850 permitted a family as many 160-acre plots as there were members of the immediate family, regardless of age or sex.² By contrast the United States Homestead Act of 1862 offered quarter sections only to the family head and to each other person twenty-one years of age or over. The Arkansas donation act gained widespread attention, bringing letters of inquiry from as far away as Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Georgia.³

Actually there was not enough tax-forfeited land to meet all demands. Immigrants could, however, obtain other state lands at bargain prices and on credit if desired. (The opportunity to purchase land on terms was doubtless attractive to many of the early settlers of Arkansas because the federal government had, it will be remembered, discontinued its credit arrangements in 1820.) Over the years, some one-third of the total acreage in Arkansas was relinquished to the state government by the United States Congress for the promotion of various projects within the state.⁴ Certain categories of this land remained on sale throughout most of the mid-nineteenth century. In 1841, Arkansas received 500,000 acres for various internal improvements; this carefully

¹Mrs. Harley to Miss America A. Thompson, Seven Mile Ford, Smythe County, Va. The original MS is in the possession of Martha Trusten Holder, 2100 Arch Street, Little Rock, Ark., a descendant of the letterwriter. The Harleys moved to Princeton, Dallas County, Arkansas, and were later joined there by several families of relatives.

²The original law is in *Arkansas Acts*, 1841, pp. 60-62; for amendments, see *ibid.*, 1843, pp. 45-46; *ibid.*, 1851, pp. 38-39; and *ibid.*, 1855, p. 229. The requirements concerning residence on, and improvement of, donated lands were exceedingly lax.

³See the index to the L. C. Gulley Collection of State Papers in Arkansas History Commission, *Bulletin of Information*, No. 2 (Little Rock, 1912), 27-29.

⁴See Benjamin H. Hibbard, *A History of the Public Land Policies* ([1924]; reprint, New York, 1939), 264, 275, 344-345; and, Dallas T. Herndon, "Annals of Arkansas," (7 typewritten vols., Archives, Arkansas History Commission, Little Rock, Ark., 1940), VI, 116-117.

selected land was offered to the public at \$1.25 per acre, payable in one to five years with annual interest at six per cent.⁵ In 1843, the state began disposal of over 930,000 acres, comprising the sixteenth section of each township, which the federal government had set aside for common school purposes. School land was first offered in forty-acre plots at "not less than \$2 per acre" with credit up to ten years; in 1850 the price on some of the unsold school land was reduced to \$1.25 per acre.⁶ The greatest land bargain ever made available by the state of Arkansas, however, was the 7,686,335 acres of "swamp and overflow" land which Congress began confirming to the state for reclamation in 1850. Arkansas gained title to a greater acreage of such land than did any other state in the Mississippi basin save Louisiana, and according to an authority much of it "was not in any sense swampy or subject to overflow."⁷ By May 25, 1859, less than nine years after the first of the swamp land had been patented to Arkansas, 3,691,753 acres had been disposed of—an area exceeding one-tenth of the state's entire surface.⁸ A considerable part of that acreage was used to redeem land script issued at a par value of fifty cents per acre to finance levee construction. Shrewd farm-seekers might procure bottom lands simply by constructing levees to protect those lands from future overflows, and receive as a bonus thereon a ten-year exemption from state taxation.⁹ Much of the levee work was done by contractors who then sold their unlocated script on the open market, some of it selling for as little as twenty cents per acre during 1854.¹⁰

⁵Arkansas Commission of Immigration and State Lands, *Natural Resources of the State of Arkansas* (Little Rock, 1869), 24.

⁶The original authorization for the disposal of school land is in *Arkansas Acts*, 1843, pp. 130-139; for amendments, see *ibid.*, 1851, pp. 39-40; and *ibid.*, 1859, pp. 148-149. Interest on the unpaid balance of the purchase price of school lands was eight per cent, payable semi-annually in advance.

⁷Hibbard, *History of the Public Land Policies*, 275, 278.

⁸Herndon, "Annals of Arkansas," VI, 117.

⁹*Ibid.*, V, 273; and, Robert W. Harrison and Walter M. Kollmorgen, "Land Reclamation in Arkansas Under the Stamp Land Grant of 1850," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, VI (Winter, 1947), 369-418, esp. 374. The latter article is an excellent account of the disposal of Arkansas swamp lands.

¹⁰Herndon, "Annals of Arkansas," VI, 61. During late 1854 or early 1855, E. N. Davis, then of Holly Springs, Mississippi, purchased 10,200 acres of Arkansas "bottom lands" at nineteen cents per acre. Ulrich B. Phillips, *Life and Labor in the Old South* (Boston, 1939), 102. Though one cannot be certain, it is probable that Davis purchased script with which to patent his land. One immigrant who bought twelve hundred acres of Arkansas lowlands early in 1853 made a crop that year worth twice the price of the land. *Ibid.*, 103.

In 1869 the Arkansas Commission of Immigration and State Lands was advertising 2,000,000 acres of this land at seventy-five cents per acre if within six miles of a navigable stream, and fifty cents if farther away.¹¹

Many of the immigrants to Arkansas, 1820-1880, secured land directly from the United States government. (It will be recalled that only a few of the cis-Mississippi states, whence the bulk of Arkansas immigrants to 1880 came, contained public land. The lack of a public domain in Tennessee may help to explain why that state ranked first as a source of migration into Arkansas to 1880.)¹² Under the federal land law of 1832, known on the frontier as the "poor man's friend," settlers could buy as little as forty acres, which at the minimum price of \$1.25 per acre would cost only sixty dollars. The Graduation Act of 1854, to which 14,212,610 acres of federal holdings in Arkansas were subject, reduced the minimum price to one dollar per acre after the land had been for sale ten years and made further reductions to twelve and one-half cents for land unpurchased after thirty years.¹³ Also during the ante-bellum period, nearly 1,500,000 acres of public land in Arkansas passed into private ownership through the location of military bounty warrants.¹⁴

The first of what eventually totaled 2,562,162 acres of railroad lands¹⁵ were placed on the market on the eve of the Civil War. Congress made the initial grant of this acreage to the state in 1853, but there was considerable delay in the location of right-of-way, and hence in the final selection of land. The state eventually transferred the land, comprising alternate sections six miles deep on either side of the right-of-way, to various railroad companies, which in turn offered it to the public. Probably little of it was sold, however, until the post-bellum period.¹⁶

¹¹*Natural Resources of the State of Arkansas*, 23.

¹²Robert B. Walz, "Migration into Arkansas, 1834-1880" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, The University of Texas, 1958), 247, 275.

¹³Hibbard, *History of the Public Land Policies*, 302; nationally, land sold under this act at an average of thirty-two cents per acre.

¹⁴Such warrants were used to promote enlistments in the War of 1812 and the Mexican War. Between 1847 and 1856, Congress granted 160-acre bonuses to veterans of all United States wars, or their heirs. Much of this acreage fell into the hands of speculators. *Ibid.*, 119-121; Herndon, "Annals of Arkansas," VI, 117.

¹⁵Hibbard, *History of the Public Land Policies*, 264.

¹⁶Herndon, "Annals of Arkansas", V, 300; and *ibid.*, VI, 88, 92.

In June, 1866, Congress provided that all remaining public land in Arkansas should be reserved from sale and subject to entry only under a modification of the Homestead Act of 1862, entries being restricted to eighty acres for a period of two years, and ex-Confederates being excluded from homesteading until 1867.¹⁷ This policy remained in effect until 1876, after which time public land in Arkansas, which was by no means yet exhausted, could be secured either by purchase or homesteading. It is of course probable that the choicest public acreage in Arkansas had been claimed well before the homestead act became operative; the land had, after all, been for sale for many years prior to the Civil War, and presumably most had been offered under the Act of 1854 at considerably less than \$1.25 per acre.

Immigrants at any period could, of course, purchase land from speculators or from private owners who had improved their holdings. It was not uncommon in the 1850's for well-to-do newcomers to Arkansas to pay as high as forty dollars per acre for improved land located near navigable streams.

Although they could obtain title to land in Arkansas in such a variety of ways, many ante-bellum immigrants became squatters. It may even be that the opportunity of temporarily using public land free of rent and taxes was precisely what attracted some families to Arkansas. In any event, the various federal preemption laws promoted squatting on the public domain by giving actual settlers on unsurveyed tracts the first right of purchasing 160 acres at the minimum price once the land was offered for sale. Thus the *Arkansas Gazette* of June 1, 1831, stated that for several weeks past persons from various parts of Central Arkansas had "thronged" the United States Land Office in Little Rock in order to meet the deadline set by the Act of 1830 for squatters to "prove up" their claims.¹⁸ Arkansas tax policy also encouraged squatting, the territorial legislature of 1835, for instance, providing a specific

¹⁷This act also applied to the other four public land states of the South, namely Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, and Mississippi; see Paul W. Gates, "Federal Land Policy in the South, 1866-1888," *Journal of Southern History*, VI (August, 1940), 307-308.

¹⁸Quoted in Herndon, "Annals of Arkansas," III, 100.

tax exemption for houses built by settlers on the public lands.¹⁹ An analysis of the Van Buren County tax list of 1850 made by Ted R. Worley indicates the extent to which squatting was then prevalent in a presumably typical highland county. With 448 free families in the county in 1850,²⁰ and 300 persons assessed for the poll tax, the property tax list shows only sixty-four landowners rendering a mere 8,659 acres of farmland and nineteen city lots for taxation.²¹ Since a conservative estimate of the area of Van Buren County in 1850 is 748,800 acres, it appears that taxes were being paid on little more than one per cent of the land in the county. No doubt more than this, perhaps much more, had passed into private ownership and should have paid taxes, but the inescapable main conclusions are that most of the inhabited lands of the county were still in the public domain and that squatting was the rule rather than the exception in the Arkansas hills during ante-bellum years. There is also evidence that squatting was not confined to the hill country, for in March, 1854, the United States Congress passed a special act for the relief of those squatters who had located on lands which were being granted to Arkansas for railroad construction.²²

After December, 1852, Arkansas also had a very liberal homestead exemption law, by which a homestead up to 160 acres occupied by a householder or his heirs was exempt from sale or execution save for non-payment of taxes or for debts contracted prior to the passage of the act.²³ That the homestead exemption policy was adopted in part to attract immigrants is suggested by the boast of the Commissioner of Immigration and State Lands in 1869

¹⁹*Arkansas Gazette*, November 3, 1835 (quoted in Herndon, "Annals of Arkansas," IV, 249).

²⁰Seventh Census, 1850, either *The Seventh Census of the United States: 1850* . . . (Washington, 1853), 547, or *Statistical View of the United States . . . Being a Compendium of the Seventh Census* (compiled by J. D. B. DeBow; Washington, 1854), 194-195, 200-201.

²¹Mr. Worley is Executive Secretary of the Arkansas History Commission, Little Rock, Ark.; the tax list is in the Commission's Archives. Worley also noted that the sixty-four landowners were concentrated along the valley of the Little Red River, while the distribution of families by townships in the manuscript returns of the Census of 1850 indicates that the free population was rather evenly scattered over the county.

²²Herndon, "Annals of Arkansas," VI, 2.

²³The original law is in *Arkansas Acts*, 1853, p. 9; it was subsequently altered several times.

that the exemption then in effect was "more liberal than that of any other State in the Union"²⁴

In addition to the attractions of Arkansas already cited, one final point about the state deserves mention. It is widely held by historians of the westward movement that migrants tended to seek a new home in an environment which resembled as closely as possible the one they had just left. If this be true, immigrants to Arkansas had a good chance of finding a new home to their liking, for the state is unusually varied in soil, terrain, and forest covering.

B. HOW THEY TRAVELED

Because the roads leading into Arkansas until the late 1820's and early 1830's were little more than Indian paths or cleared traces, a majority of the earliest immigrants to Arkansas doubtless came by water. The concentration of the sparse population along navigable streams as late as 1830 attests to this dependence upon water transportation for immigrating as well as for marketing produce.²⁵ During the early 1830's the United States Congress made several appropriations for improving navigation within Arkansas, one project being to clear the heavily used Arkansas River of snags. In 1838 the famed Captain Henry Shreve finally cut a passage through the Red River raft, making Southwest Arkansas accessible by water.²⁶ By mid-century there were available to immigrants some 3,000 miles of navigable Arkansas waterways, which during high stage gave fairly close access to all parts of the state except the hilly west central and the mountainous northwestern areas.²⁷

²⁴*Natural Resources of the State of Arkansas*, 23; this pamphlet, which gave prospective immigrants a glowing summary of the resources of Arkansas, was widely circulated both in this country and in Germany.

²⁵Maps showing population densities in Arkansas in 1830 may be found in either Charles O. Paullin, *Atlas of the Historical Geography of the United States*, edited by John K. Wright (Washington, 1932), Plate 76-F; or Tenth Census, 1880, Vol. [I], *Statistics of the Population* . . . (Washington, 1883), xvi.

²⁶Dallas T. Herndon, *Annals of Arkansas*, 1947 (4 vols., Hopkinsville, Ky., 1947), I, 382; and Henry F. White, "The Economic and Social Development of Arkansas Prior to 1836" (unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, The University of Texas, 1931), 227-231. It will be recalled that Congress also financed Shreve's work.

²⁷A pamphlet distributed by the Arkansas Commission of Immigration and State Lands, entitled *Natural Resources of the State of Arkansas*, 5-6, estimated that in

Before steamboats began ascending the rivers of Arkansas (and only the Arkansas and White Rivers appear to have had regular service until the late 1830's), those immigrants who traveled to the interior by water were dependent upon the flatboat, the dugout, and the keelboat. The flatboat, while suitable for descending such rivers as the Ohio and the Mississippi, was quite unwieldy for poling up the rivers of Arkansas, all of which flow generally southeasterly.²⁸ The dugout, on the other hand, was quite maneuverable, but could carry only a very limited cargo. Immigrant families seem to have favored the keelboat because it combined the best features of the other two types of craft, being a shallow draft vessel of considerable capacity which could be poled or towed upstream with relative speed.²⁹ Arkansas newspapers in commenting on the arrival of immigrant parties by keelboat often described them as being "well provided with necessities." A keelboat which stopped at Fulton, Arkansas, early in 1842, en route up the Red River to Texas, had "about 30 families" aboard.³⁰

The voyage of an immigrant family by keelboat up the Arkansas River in the spring of 1821 is described in the manuscript diary of Maria (Mrs. Isaac) Watkins. The Watkins family, consisting of father, mother, and four children, traveled by steamboat from Louisville, Kentucky, to the mouth of the White River, thence by keelboat up the Arkansas River to Little Rock:

Arrived at the mouth of the White River, on
Wednesday 7 day of Febuary, We staid at Ezrie Petty

1869 there were over 3,000 miles of navigable waterways within the state, serving forty-three of the then sixty-one counties. Probably all of that mileage was usable long before the Civil War. For a recent map of the navigable waterways in Arkansas showing clearly which areas in Western Arkansas have never been accessible by water, see the *Progress of the Arkansas State Planning Board* (Little Rock, 1936), Plate 11.

²⁸A few immigrant families nevertheless, did pole flatboats up such rivers as the Arkansas, the Red, the Ouachita, and the Little Missouri. See John B. Mason, "Early Immigration to Arkansas" (unpublished M. A. thesis, Louisiana State University, 1942), 42, 46, 57-58. Mason's study, mainly a chronicle of pioneering settlement, effectively utilizes newspaper files, travel accounts, Arkansas state histories, published biographical and historical memoirs, and printed United States government documents.

²⁹Keelboats running freight on the meandering Arkansas River between Little Rock and the mouth of the White River usually made the round trip of about 500 miles in two or three weeks (see Herndon, *Annals of Arkansas*, 1947, I, 379).

³⁰*Arkansas Gazette*, March 2, 1842, quoting the "last issue" of the *Washington* (Ark.) *Telegraph*.

[?] who was very hospitable, showed us all the kindness possible, I met with a widow woman very clever [.] She appeared to sympathize with me in leaving Dear friends behind and coming to this wilderness of Sorrow.—We set out from Mr Pilty's [sic] mouth of White River on Tewsday evening 13th of February—arived at the Post of Arkansas on Sunday evening. Stayed at Judge Hambletons till Monday evening and had our Boat repaired. . . . proceeded on our way to the Rock [obviously, Little Rock] very slowly I found sticking up in the keel boat [on] which we ascended the river, the first Tract I ever saw (The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain). It was blessed to my **comfort and benediction**—On our way my son George Claibourn fell overboard, and remained quite sick and very pale during the day at last we have arrived at Little Rock on Sunday evening 11 day of March 1821. O the disappointment to me only one house and a few cabins, but 2 decent families—from the exposure of the Boat I was sick several days.³¹

The first steamboat to penetrate any considerable distance into Arkansas was the *Eagle*, which ascended the Arkansas River to a point well over one-hundred miles above Little Rock in March, 1822. Steamboats soon came into common use on the Arkansas River, and by 1840 they were operating on all the major rivers of the state.³² For awhile the steamer apparently supplemented rather than displaced the keelboat as a means of migrating by water into Arkansas. Some parties of the 1830's and 1840's arrived at Little Rock in keelboats towed by steamboats, though this arrangement ordinarily was used to transport freight rather than passengers. Around 1840 newspaper accounts of immigration by keelboat were decreasing in number and those of immigration by steamer were commonplace, suggesting that the steamboat gradually supplanted the keelboat. Steamboat traffic remained at a high level

³¹Archives, Arkansas History Commission, Little Rock, Ark. The spelling and punctuation of the original diary have been copied as closely as possible. Mrs. Watkins' apparent foreboding about the move to Arkansas was justified. One son died shortly after arrival, her husband was assassinated in 1827, and a daughter died in 1828; however, the son who tumbled from the keelboat survived and played an important role in the public affairs of early Arkansas.

³²Herndon, *Annals of Arkansas*, 1947, I, 379-382; and, Walter Moffatt, "Transportation in Arkansas, 1819-1840," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, XV (Autumn, 1956), 194-201.

during most of the ante-bellum period. A prolonged drouth in the early 1850's did all but suspend navigation on the Arkansas and Ouachita Rivers for "four or five years,"³³ but traffic soon recovered. Landings at Little Rock, for example, numbered 263 in the 1857-1858 season and 317 in 1858-1859.³⁴ After a presumptive severe fall during the Civil War steamboating revived for a short time, but by the mid-1870's competition from railroads, the silting of channels, and falling water levels in some of the streams were again curtailing the traffic.³⁵

It is difficult to determine what the magnitude of immigration by steamboat actually was. Newspaper accounts of immigration by that method are often as indefinite concerning numbers as this excerpt from the *Arkansas Advocate* of April 1, 1836: "The *Mount Pleasant* arrived Monday morning last with full freight and crowded with passengers, emigrants to this place [Little Rock] and other parts of the Territory, among whom were several families."³⁶ The issue of that paper of May 6, 1836, gives a partial breakdown of a passenger list: "The Steamboat *Arkansas* arrived here today from New Orleans with 100 cabin, 95 deck passengers and 125 tons freight."³⁷ Even when the passenger totals are given, it is seldom possible to separate the immigrants from the other passengers.³⁸ An authority on steamboating in Arkansas, commenting upon the arrival of the *Odessa* at Little Rock in April, 1841, with 130 Tennessee and Georgia emigrants aboard, states: "The arrival of such a large party of emigrants was something of an event, although there was nothing new about the arrival of smaller

³³*Arkansas Gazette*, October 21, 1856; and *Ouachita Herald* (Camden, Ark.), March 3, 1857 (both quoted in Herndon, "Annals of Arkansas," VI, 57, 68). The *Gazette* of October 7, 1853, reported the Arkansas River "still in fine navigable order for birch canoes," and the October 21 issue commented that the river was "hardly navigable for a big cat-fish" (see *ibid.*, V, 308, 309). It is probable that all the rivers in the state were similarly affected.

³⁴The steamboat season, by reckoning of Little Rock newspapers, was from November 1 through June 30 (see Herndon, "Annals of Arkansas," VI, 120).

³⁵An account of the decline of steamboating on the Arkansas River is given in Herndon, *Annals of Arkansas*, 1947, I, 381.

³⁶Quoted in Herndon, "Annals of Arkansas," V, 3.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 5.

³⁸Moffatt, "Transportation in Arkansas, 1819-1840," *Ark. Hist. Quar.*, XV, 195-198, cites evidence that through 1832, at least, "passengers continued to consist mostly of immigrants to the Territory." But it seems highly unlikely that this condition persisted indefinitely.

groups of prospective settlers.”³⁹ There is reason to suspect, therefore, that the actual magnitude of immigration by water was far less than the volume of steamboat traffic might seem to indicate.

Judging from newspaper accounts, the annual immigration by water was usually heaviest during February through May when migrants could not only take advantage of the late winter and spring rises on the rivers but could also reach their new homes by crop planting time. Not infrequently, however, boat passengers were stranded by low water and forced to complete their journeys on land. Low water forced Hiram Whittington, an immigrant from Massachusetts who arrived at the mouth of the White River by steamboat in April, 1827, to travel thence to Little Rock “sometimes in a dugout and then afoot.”⁴⁰ In other cases, immigrants shifted from water to land because they desired to settle at a place which lay inland from a navigable stream. The Colin McRae family, which migrated from Alabama to south central Arkansas in 1843, traveled on water by way of Mobile and New Orleans, thence up the Red and Ouachita Rivers to within twenty miles of their destination. Then the McRaes, accompanied by several slave families, cut a road through virgin forest, transporting their supplies in covered wagons.⁴¹

Though it was easier to travel on water than on land in Arkansas until at least 1840,⁴² by no means all of the pioneer settlers came by boat. One of the earliest recorded wagon migrations into Arkansas was made in 1818 by the Benedict family, who set out from New Madrid, Missouri. Having reached Batesville, Arkansas, they crossed the White River on a ferry described as “two canoes, lashed together with a few split clapboards laid across.” Southwest of

³⁹Herndon, “Annals of Arkansas,” V, 109.

⁴⁰Hiram Whittington, Little Rock, Arkansas Territory, to his brother Granville Whittington in Massachusetts, April 21, 1827, typewritten copy, Archives, *Arkansas History Commission*, Little Rock, Ark. Hiram secured employment with the *Arkansas Gazette* and later induced Granville to follow him to Arkansas.

⁴¹Samuel H. Chester, *Pioneer Days in Arkansas* (Richmond, Va., [1927]), 11, 16. The McRaes founded Mt. Holly Colony in present Union County; within two years of its establishment six other families joined the colony, most coming by invitation.

⁴²Moffatt, “Transportation in Arkansas, 1819-1840,” *Ark. Hist. Quar.*, XV, 187-194, esp. 194.

Batesville a part of the "road" had to be chopped out, and the Benedicts finally abandoned their wagon at the Little Red River, completing their journey on foot.⁴³ By the early 1820's overland immigration was apparently commonplace, for the *Arkansas Gazette*, commenting November 26, 1822, on migration from Missouri into the Fort Smith area, stated that the roads in that neighborhood were "literally swarming" with immigrants.⁴⁴

Fortunately for those who chose to immigrate by wagon or ox-cart, Arkansas roads were improved slightly over the years. The first marked improvement came in the 1820's when the United States Congress, to facilitate Indian removals and frontier defense, provided for the construction of a crude military road from Memphis into the Indian Territory. Opened to Little Rock by late 1827, it was extended through Fort Smith the following year. In the early 1830's a second military road was completed from the southern Missouri boundary through Little Rock to Fulton, on the Red River, with connections leading thence westward into the Indian Territory and southeastward into Louisiana. The crudeness of the north-south road is reflected in an advertisement calling for bids on that section nearest the Missouri boundary:

The road to be opened 16 feet wide and entirely cleared; all brush and saplings 6 inches in diameter to be cut even with the ground; all trees between 6 and 12 inches in diameter, within 4 inches of the ground; and all trees over 12 inches within 8 inches of the grounds; *the stumps to be well trimmed.*⁴⁵

The Memphis to Little Rock road, a key link in one of the most direct routes into the Southwest, proved to be insufficiently drained and bridged to withstand heavy travel. In the early 1830's Congress appropriated over \$200,000 for an all-weather road from Memphis to Little Rock, but the middle section was still unfinished when exhaustion of

⁴³Russell W. Benedict, "Story of an Early Settlement in Central Arkansas," ed. by Ted R. Worley, *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, X (Summer, 1951), 123, 125.

⁴⁴Quoted in Herndon, "Annals of Arkansas," I, 176.

⁴⁵*Arkansas Gazette*, March 27, 1833 (quoted in Herndon, "Annals of Arkansas," IV, 15); the italics are mine. Some portions of the military roads were cleared by work details of the United States Army.

funds halted construction. Congress failed to provide additional appropriations, presumably because federal income fell sharply following the Panic of 1837 and because Arkansas was granted statehood on June 15, 1836. (It will be recalled that both Presidents Jackson and Van Buren opposed federal expenditures for state roads). The general assemblies of territorial Arkansas had not provided money for either road construction or maintenance, and in 1838 the second general assembly of the state threw the burden of road extension and upkeep upon the counties by authorizing them to levy road taxes, payable either in money or in labor at two dollars per day.⁴⁶ Early general assemblies granted numerous charters and charter renewals to private turnpike corporations, but practically no toll roads seem to have materialized. Small wonder that as late as August 22, 1851, the *Fort Smith Herald* complained:

. . . . We have no roads of any kind except a few that are merely cut out and not fit to travel over. It does appear to us that the people of this State manifest more apathy on the improvement of the roads of the State than can be found in any other State of the Union.⁴⁷

Immigrants who traveled by road into Arkansas usually had to cross one or more of the many rivers scattered through the state. Some streams were bridged, many could be forded, but others could be crossed only by ferry. Arkansas seems to have been well supplied with ferries by the 1820's.⁴⁸ The first ones were often flatboats, sometimes nothing more than dugouts lashed together. Later

⁴⁶Arkansas Acts, 1839, p. 16. Most of the county road tax was obviously paid in work, for the United States Census of 1860 reports that Arkansas paid \$83,117 in road taxes that year and further states that \$74,917 of the total tax income was collected in labor. See Eighth Census, vol. [IV], *Statistics of the United States* . . . (Washington, 1866), 511. The counties eventually got a pro-rata share of the proceeds from the sale of the half-million acres of land granted by Congress to Arkansas in 1841 for internal improvements within the State. But not until mid-1853, when Mississippi and Greene Counties commenced a bi-county turnpike, did any major projects financed by pro-rata funds get under way (see Herndon, "Annals of Arkansas," V, 308).

⁴⁷Quoted in Herndon, "Annals of Arkansas," V, 276. A good summary description of early Arkansas roads is Herndon, *Annals of Arkansas*, 1947, I, 373-376.

⁴⁸Because ferry owners were required to secure operating licenses, there is an almost complete listing of Arkansas ferries in the published legislative acts of the Territory of Missouri (1812-1819), the Territory of Arkansas (1819-1836), and of the State of Arkansas (1836 to present).

ferries were advertised as being capable of transporting the "largest and heaviest loaded wagons," and on June 27, 1838, the state's first steam ferry began operation on the Arkansas River at Little Rock.⁴⁹ Among the most vivid eyewitness descriptions of immigration in and through Arkansas in the mid-1800's are newspaper portrayals of ferry scenes. One writer's impression of migrants and their wagons at the White River ferry east of Little Rock is recorded in the *Des Arc Citizen* of November 20, 1858:

For several weeks past long lines of white-covered wagons have been seen wending their way toward the ferry on the opposite side of White river, or spreading their tent-cloths to await their turn in crossing the stream. From early dawn till late at night the ferry-men are bringing over wagons, stock, carriages, buggies; also, negroes and white families composed of all ages, from the prattling babe to the aged sire.

Scenes of this type must have been common in Arkansas during the late fall of 1858, for only four days later the Helena newspaper depicted the crowded condition at the ferry across the Mississippi River at that place:

Wagon after wagon, in an almost continuous line, are now being put across daily from the Mississippi side of the river by the Messrs. Weather's steam ferry boat at this place. The heavy immigration into Arkansas this season is marked for being composed of people who are well-to-do in the way of worldly goods, woolyheads and large families of intelligent looking boys and bright-eyed girls.⁵⁰

The bulk of the immigrants by land apparently chose to travel in the late fall and early winter. This choice of seasons is borne out not only by newspaper accounts such as those quoted just above, but even more forcefully by a toll bridge record of the number of immigrant wagons and carriages which crossed Bayou Meto on the Memphis-Little Rock road during each of the last four months of 1850. The bridge-keeper counted the passage of 98 immigrant vehicles in September, 564 in October, 629 in No-

⁴⁹Herndon, *Annals of Arkansas*, 1947, I, 377.

⁵⁰*The State Rights Democrat*, November 24, 1858 (quoted in Herndon, "Annals of Arkansas," VI, 107).

vember, and 248 in December.⁵¹ The reasons for late fall or early winter migration are not hard to deduce. In addition to traveling over comparatively dry roads in cool weather with a minimum of insects,⁵² the migrants could reach their new homes in plenty of time to arrange for the next year's farming activities.

Wagon travel obviously continued to be the basic means of migrating to Arkansas well into the post-bellum period. While at Jackson, Mississippi, in 1873 or early in 1874, Journalist-Traveler Edward King recorded:

At the proper seasons, one sees in the long main street of the town, lines of emigrant wagons, filled with hard-featured men and women bound for Texas or "Arkansaw." These Ishmaels are not looked upon with any special love by the inhabitants who intend to remain in their native state, and are often the subjects of much satire, which they bear good-humoredly.

An artist who accompanied King sketched a migrant group in great detail, showing both bullock and horse-drawn wagons passing through the streets of a town (presumably Jackson) with water casks hanging from the rear axles and children peeking from beneath the wagon sheets. Alongside the wagons walked older children carrying babes, little girls in straw hats and button-top shoes barefoot little boys in homespun trousers held up by suspenders and with the bottoms rolled halfway to the knees, older boys in adult garb carrying driver's whips, women in ankle-length dresses wearing bonnets, and men with full beards, wearing woolen hats, high-topped leather boots, and bandanas about their necks.⁵³

⁵¹Of course, by no means all of the estimated 8,000 migrants who accompanied these vehicles intended to locate in Arkansas, for the Memphis-Little Rock road was also a thoroughfare for movers en route to Texas and other places west or south of Arkansas. Herndon, "Annals of Arkansas," V, 243, 267. For other evidence that migration was at a peak in fall and winter, see Edward King, *The Southern States of North America* (London, 1875), 271; and, Thomas S. Staples, *Reconstruction in Arkansas, 1862-1874* (Columbia University Studies in History, Economics, and Public Law, vol. CIX; New York, 1923), 343.

⁵²Insects in Eastern Arkansas were far more than an annoyance; on occasion the "green-headed horseflies" that flourished in the summer months stung horses to death. Moffat, "Transportation in Arkansas, 1819-1840," *Ark. Hist. Quar.*, XV, 187-188.

⁵³Both the journalist's remarks and the artist's sketch may be found in *Southern States of North America*, 314. For other eyewitness accounts of migration into Arkansas in the 1870's, see Robert Somers, *The Southern States since the War, 1870-1* (London, 1871), 110; and Herndon, "Annals of Arkansas," VII, 191 (quoting an unidentified Arkansas newspaper of May 23, 1878).

The railroads played a relatively minor role in the settlement of Arkansas until near the close of the period under study. While completion to Memphis in April, 1857, of the Western and Atlantic Railroad, which linked the Mississippi with Charleston and Savannah, doubtless induced some migrants to travel as far as Memphis by train and proceed thence westward by other means, there was no through rail connection from Memphis into Central Arkansas until the early 1870's.⁵⁴ The first north-south line through Arkansas belonged to the same years, being opened from St. Louis to North Little Rock by February, 1873, and to the Texas boundary by March, 1874. Journalist Edward King, on tour of Arkansas in 1874, reported that settlers were rapidly filling up the lands five to ten miles back on either side of the newly completed railroads.⁵⁵ In 1876, the Arkansas railroad and land interests, in cooperation with state officials, organized an excursion for newspaper editors and officials of some of the major mid-western cities, the object being to advertise state and railroad lands. Not until after 1890, however, did the railroads stage their greatest promotions of Arkansas land, with local fairs and excursion trains at special rates for actual homeseekers.⁵⁶

⁵⁴That the rail line from the eastern seaboard to Memphis was also used briefly to transport slaves in the late ante-bellum years appears from a statement in the *Memphis Appeal*, January 26, 1858: "From 12 to 15 hundred negroes have been brought over this road to Memphis within the last 30 days. They were owned by planters for [sic] the Atlantic states who have purchased farms in Arkansas and Mississippi." (Quoted in Herndon, "Annals of Arkansas," VI, 96.)

⁵⁵*Southern States of North America*, 280.

⁵⁶Felton D. Freeman, "Immigration to Arkansas," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, VII (Autumn, 1948), 213, 216-217. This article is an excellent summary of the means used by state and private agencies to encourage immigration to Arkansas, 1868-1901.