

## CHAPTER IV

### COLUMBUS AND VAN BUREN

In the early days of this section of the county when troops were stationed at Fort Smith, steamboats would ascend the river, whenever the depths would permit, loaded with troops or provisions for those stationed at the fort.

The first steamboat as yet known, was the Robert Thompson, commanded by Capt. Dohrman, which made several trips during the early part of 1822. Wood being the fuel used by boats, it was necessary for wood yards to be established at certain distances along the banks of the river to supply the boats with fuel. The Phillips family came here during the later part of the 1820's and established such a one. The Phillips family consisted presumably of the father, James Phillips—the Revolutionary soldier, who died in 1831, and his two sons, Thomas and David, (or Daniel). It is presumed that James Phillips was buried near the southwest corner of North 5th Street, where a cemetery in the early days was located. No other records have been found of any other members of the family. The boat landing took the name of this family.

When the Phillips family arrived here, the land bordering the river was claimed by Thomas Martin, a squatter, who tradition says, was the first white man to settle here. That honor is also given to Mr. Boyd. Just where Martin located is not known, but very likely near the river.

Very soon after their arrival, Thomas and David, (or Daniel), Phillips bought the land from Martin, and legalized their claim.

When the post office was established here, March 30, 1831, Thomas Phillips was appointed postmaster and served until sometime during the latter part of 1836. The post office department named the office for Martin Van Buren, then Secretary of State under President Andrew Jackson. The settlement soon became known by the name of the post office.

The history concerning the Phillips family before their arrival here is very meager. Not even the state from which they emigrated to Arkansas is known. Thomas Phillips was married to Miss Amanda Miller, daughter of William Miller of Van Buren, August 9, 1834. He was one of the commissioners appointed to sell the lots in the town of Whitsontown, which had been selected as the county-seat of Crawford county. This sale was to take place July 15, 1836. No record has been found where the sale ever took place for in the early part of the same year, he was advertising lots for sale at Van Buren.

A small settlement known as Columbus, only one mile south of Van Buren, on the north bank of the river, was closely allied to Van Buren, during the early days. So far no record has been found of who were the first settlers at Columbus; nor when they arrived. Was it in existence when the post office was established at Van Buren, or was it settled later? These are questions that we could ask ourselves without having a reply, as those who could answer these questions have passed away. The first definite information as far as learned is when Mr. Edward Cunningham removed his mercantile establishment from Van Buren to Columbus in 1832, and arranged for a patent ferry across the river. No further information of the place until the later part of 1835, when the Arkansas Gazette speaks of "Columbus Survived" and that John Henry and Company will occupy the building by Edward Cunningham's Mercantile Establishment, and that they will attend to receiving and forwarding goods and selling produce on commission. They also advertised a large supply of dry goods and groceries, also a ferry and the "best of ferrymen," thus securing trade from the south of the river. This partnership of John Henry, David Thompson, and John Drennen continued in business there until September, 1836, when it was dissolved. Mr. John Drennen continued in business at the old stand.

Thompson and Drennen lived at Columbus until 1837, when they moved to Van Buren.

There was a Jockey Club in Crawford County in

1836, and presumably sooner. Some of the officers must have lived at Columbus as the meeting was called there February 22, 1836, for the purpose of making all arrangements for the coming races, appointing proper officers and fixing rules of the course. The writer has not been able to obtain more information in regard to Columbus nor who lived there except Messers Henry, Thompson, Drennen, and Cunningham. It seems that Columbus and Van-Buren were rival settlements and that Van Buren proved the successful one.

Feeling that a description of Van Buren as this early date will be interesting, the following is taken from the Arkansas Gazette, April, 1836.

"The town of Van Buren, Arkansas, is situated in Crawford county on the left bank of the Arkansas River, about 550 miles from the Mississippi River, by the course of the river and a few miles from the Indian boundary line. The immediate situation is picturesque and pleasing to the eye, easily approachable by the roads, usually elevated for a distance on the margin of the river, indeed a portion of the townsite is high and commanding eminence, with an abundant and never failing supply of the most palatable and purest water."