

CHAPTER XVIII

ROADS OF CRAWFORD COUNTY

The Overland Mail Route Or Butterfield Stage Route

As gold had been discovered in California, it became necessary for some faster method of traveling between the east and west than by the covered wagon, often drawn by oxen, or by horseback.

The residents of California and Arkansas and Missouri petitioned Congress to provide some faster method of traveling.

In the early part of 1857 Congress authorized and subsidized a Stage line from the Missouri River to the Pacific coast.

On July 2nd, 1857 Postmaster General A. V. Brown awarded the contract to a company headed by John Butterfield of Utica, New York, associated with him were W. B. Dinsmore, Alexander Holland, William F. Fargo, later the founder of Fargo's express, James Gardiner, M. L. Kenyon, and B. F. Cheney, all of New York, and Hamilton Spencer of Bloomington, Illinois.

Congress gave the company a year to plan the line. This was spent in surveying and locating stations every ten or twenty miles. This route passed through Missouri, Arkansas, Indian Territory, Texas, Southern New Mexico and Arizona, to California and up the coast to San Francisco.

A subsidy which some authorities say was \$600,000 and others \$450,000, was voted by Congress.

The contract called for a semi-weekly mail between St. Louis and San Francisco.

This route was about 3,000 miles long, the 1,200 horses were divided among the various stations. The company used also some 600 mules and 1,750 men.

The first Overland Mail left Saint Louis on the morning of September 16, 1858, arriving at Springfield on the 17, Fayetteville the 18, and from there down the old wire road to Van Buren where it crossed the river and on to

Fort Smith where it arrived on the 19th where a big celebration was given, then on to San Francisco which it reached about twenty days later.

Only one passenger made the entire western trip, a correspondent for the New York Herald.

On October 6th, the east bound Mail Coach passed through Van Buren and on its arrival at St. Louis, John Butterfield sent the following message to President Buchanan: "Mail arrived at Saint Louis from San Francisco in 23 days and four hours." The contract called for twenty-five days between the two points. There had been some controversy that the route was too long.

This route did not prove very satisfactory as it only lasted about two years when the Pony Express, and the War Between the States usurped and abolished the line.

Let us come a little nearer home. If there were stations every ten or twenty miles apart there must have been at least two in Crawford county besides Van Buren, the old Swearingen home on the wire road near Cove City, was the last before arriving at Van Buren. Where was the other one located?

Let us imagine the stage coming down Log Town Hill, the horses in full gallop and the driver with his long snake-like whip urging them on, as he starts down the hill he blows his horn to notify the hotel proprietor to have the meal on the table, down Main street he comes with a dash, turns the corner on to Water street draws up at the hotel with a flourish. The passengers alight and enter the dining room. I am not certain whether the proprietor was Mr. George Gross or Mr. John Bostick.

After a short rest the passengers enter the stage, cross the Arkansas on a ferry boat and continue their journey.

At this ferry crossing the Mary Fuller Percival Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution has erected a marker, commemorating the first trip by stage coach, over this route in 1858.

* * *

Crawford County Court
August 2, 1834.

On motion Ordered by the Court that William Duval, David Pevyhouse, Ransom Moore, Andrew Lester and John Rogers be appointed reviewers to mark and lay off a road commencing at Fort Smith and running thence the nearest and the best way to Ransom Moore's ferry, one half mile above the Mouth of Lee's Creek to cross the Arkansas River as said ferry, thence to the lower ford on Lee's Creek, and thence the nearest and best way so as to intersect a road at or near the forks of the road leading to Drages Mill in Fayetteville and report at the next Court.

A. M. McLean, Clerk.

(A copy)

(A true copy from the Original)

R. C. S. Brown, C. C. A. T.

* * *

Judge Jesse Turner submitted, at the request of Mrs. Allen, some very interesting data which is as follows:

In Burr's Collection for 1838 there is a map of Arkansas made up from surveyors' notes gathered between 1830 and 1839.

From Batesville a road ran northwest through Tecumseh to Pine Bayou then to Izard, then to Johnson, Yellville, Crooked Creek, Sevierville and Richland to Fayetteville thence through Cane Hill to Vineyard (now Evansville) and to Van Buren. (See *Pioneers and Makers of Arkansas*, Shinn Vol. 1, pp. 150-2.)

From an interview with J. B. Vinsant of Van Buren, whose distinct recollections carry him back some sixty years, I gather that, at that early day four roads converged at Van Buren.

First Road: This road ran on the north side of the Arkansas River from Little Rock, through Dover, Clarksville and Ozark to Van Buren. The general direction was south-east-northwest.

Second Road: This road a few miles from Van Buren, struck Frog Bayou (Clear Creek), thence it followed the creek up about as far as the present town of Mountainburg. Here it began to move out of the valley to higher ground and crossed the crest of the mountain (Boston)

about where Winslow now stands. Thence proceeding towards Huntsville, Madison County. At the Cannon Tan yard about twelve miles from Huntsville, the road forked, one road leading to Huntsville, and the other to Fayetteville. The general direction of this road was little east of north.

Third Road: This road went from Van Buren over "Log Town Hili" through "Log Town", thence through Dripping Springs and Cedarville, thence to Cove City (on Lee's Creek), thence through Strickler (near the foot of the southern slope of Boston Mountains), thence over the crest of the mountain through "Hog Eye", thence fifteen miles further to Fayetteville.

The general direction of this road was north and south. It was known (and is known to this day) as the "Old Wire Road," from the circumstance that the first line of telegraph to Van Buren (that from St. Louis) was strung along it.

It was also the route taken by the Butterfield stage line prior to the Civil War, and was the road travelled by the freighters and others enroute from Van Buren to Springfield, Missouri, and all that section of country.

The "Old Wire Road" was much the most important road running out of Van Buren in those days.

There were at least two roads branching off the old Wire Road. One of these left the main road at Cedarville, thence working northwest it reached Natural Dam, from whence it reached Evansville (the Old Vineyard). This is probably the one referred to by Shinn.

The second road branching from the Wire road, left the main road at the Old Babb House near the mountain fork of Lee's Creek. This was a mountain road, passing through Barker's Gap of the Boston Mountain, thence to Cane Hill.

All these roads are still in existence and, on the whole, are in much better condition than in the early days.

Fourth Road: The road connecting Fort Smith and Van Buren. It started on the south bank of the Arkansas River, not far from where the Frisco bridge now stands;

thence in nearly a straight line, to Sixth street, (old Van Buren) in Fort Smith.

(From the Fort Smith Herald Elevator published a number of years ago.)

* * *

**Yankee's Impression of Ozarks in 1860
Is Revealed in Letter**

Contained in Booklet Giving Correspondence of Hiram
S. Rumfield, Treasurer of Overland Mail at
Fort Smith, Received at Library

A Yankee's impression of life in northwest Arkansas during the wild and wooly days of 1860 just before the outbreak of the Civil war is contained in a series of letters written by an Overland mail agent and preserved by the American Antiquarian Society.

A copy of the booklet containing the correspondence of Hiram S. Rumfield, assistant treasurer of the Overland Mail Company, with his wife in the East, has been received at the Little Rock Public Library. Most of the letters deal with his experiences in Utah, but three of them are written from Fort Smith, and shed picturesque light upon activities to that section of the state 70 years ago.

In the first letter of the collection, Mr. Rumfield describes his journey to Fort Smith through Missouri, a state which he found characterized then by a "general and almost unvarying aspect of indolence, ignorance and shiftlessness."

Describes Ozark Region

But when he reaches the Ozark mountain region of Arkansas, the story he tells is different:

"Springs abound in these mountains. The water boils up through a mass of broken white flint stone and is incomparably excellent. No filtered rain water cooled with northern ice would I prefer to a draught fresh from these pure sparkling springs of the wild Ozarks, when drank beneath the impenetrable canopy of foliage that shields them from the rays of the Southern sun.

"Traveling along day and night through this solitary

region we at length came to Fayetteville—a lovely town in Arkansas, 110 miles from Springfield, and 60 miles from this place (Fort Smith). The town reposes upon the mountain tops, and is handsomely shaded by deep files of trees that line the streets on either hand.

“It contains a courthouse, several churches and many fine private residences. From the steps of the courthouse I there witnessed the sale of a slave boy—a spectacle that was indeed grating to my feelings.

Found “Wild Scenery”

“From Fayetteville to Van Buren, the point where the Arkansas river is first reached, the road lies through high and rugged mountains, the wild scenery of which is occasionally diversified by valleys covered with corn, many of which are in the form of an oblong circle and of one or two thousand acres in extent. No one who has never passed over this road can form any idea of its bold and rugged aspect. It winds along the mountain sides over a surface covered with masses of broken rocks, and frequently runs in fearful proximity to precipitious ravines of unknown depth. Over such a route as this the coaches of the mail company are driven with fearful rapidity. The horses are seldom permitted to walk even when traversing the steepest and most tortuous hills, and when drove at their utmost speed, which is generally the case, the stage reels from side to side like a storm tossed bark, and the din of the heavily ironed wheels in constant contact with the flinty rock, is truly appalling. The man who can pass over this route a passenger in one of the Overland mail coaches, without experiencing feelings of mingled terror and astonishment, must certainly be oblivious to every consideration of personal safety.

“Yet, with all these indications of danger and recklessness, accidents rarely occur, and since the Mail company has been established, not a single life has been lost on this part of the route. The coaches are built expressly with reference to rough service— and none but the most reliable and experienced drivers are placed upon the mountain district. The horses are of the most powerful

description to be found, and when once thoroughly trained to the service, perform the laborious run with apparent pleasure and delight.

"Although my letter is already extended beyond the limits originally intended I must not conclude without saying something more in relation to this place. I must say that I have been very agreeably disappointed in whatever pertains to the town and the inhabitants thereof. Stores well stocked with goods of every quality and description to be found in the older towns of the Northern states, are numerous. One establishment in the large three-story brick block across the street contains more goods than can be found at Sullivan's.

"Drug stores there are two; one of which is handsomely fitted and furnished, and contains as large a stock as any concern of the kind I have yet seen in Cleveland. There is a bonnet and dressmaking establishment where everything in that line of business is got up agreeably to the latest Eastern styles and patterns.

"The general appearance of the town is rather prepossessing to the stranger than otherwise. There are three churches of moderate architectural pretensions, and a female seminary of fine external appearance and which is said to be well conducted and liberally sustained. There are several hotels in the place. That at which we board is said to be the best kept, and affords accommodations with which I am tolerably well satisfied. The only drawback consists in the fact that the rooms, being large, contain two or more beds each and accordingly no one can get a room for his exclusive use.

"The servants, of which there is a large number for a house no larger than the City hotel, are all slaves. They seem to perform their respective duties with alacrity, and not so importunate for an occasional quarter as their brothers of the North. Slaves are numerously held in and about the town and are universally full blooded blacks. Indeed I do not remember having seen a single mulatto since I came into Arkansas. As free "niggers" are not permitted to live in this state every colored person met with is presumptively a slave.

Many Indians on Street

"Indians of various tribes (or nations as they are here called) are seen in large numbers about the streets every day. They come into town from the Territory usually at an early hour in the morning, and spend the day loafing among the various whiskey shops fronting on the river. At night they return home as peaceably as they came and no one but themselves seems the worse of their coming—the rum sellers certainly not. They generally ride good horses, and many of them are men of property and hold slaves. Everywhere in the Territory the sale of ardent spirits is peremptorily prohibited which accounts for the regularity of their visits to this place. All along the western border of this state the whites derive a lucrative business at the expense of the 'poor Indian,' whose proverbial appetite for strong drink leads him into the wildest excesses.

"I came into the possession of the keys of the office yesterday—the duties are neither arduous nor perplexing so far as I can judge from the brief experience I have had. A word or two in relation to the climate. We have had pretty warm weather since my arrival here, but it does not enervate the system to the extent that the same degree of heat in the North causes us to feel. Owing to some atmospheric peculiarity it is almost impossible to contract a cold. I have slept with the windows open in a strong current of air without experiencing the slightest ill effects therefrom. This, you know I could never do in Ohio without endangering my health. I have heard nothing from you since I left home. I shall be grievously disappointed if I do not get a letter by Sunday's mail. Do not fail to write to me as often as you can as you can readily imagine how anxious I am to hear from you. I hope that you will soon become reconciled to our brief separation and if things go on as I now have reason to expect, we will try our fortunes for a time at least—if Providence has so ordered—in this handsome little city, situated upon the border of civilization. In the meantime be of good courage."

The Historic Old Wire Road

A movement is said to be on foot to make an improved highway of the "Wire Road," which was the trail in the early days from St. Louis, Mo., to Texas. This portion of Arkansas will be much interested in the proposition, as this road ran through the east end of Benton county and passed through the present site of Rogers. To many of the old settlers here this road is yet known as the "Old Wire Road," and it ran south from the famous Pea Ridge battlefield, through the little towns of Bridgewater and Avoca and on through the present town of Rogers and on down to Cross Hollows and to Fayetteville.

This road was laid out long before the Civil war by the government and was known at that early time as the "State Road." Nearly all of the immigration to the Southwest passed over this road in the early days, and became the line of march for the conflicting forces during the Civil war. Texas cattle were driven north in great herds over this road, and it became one of the best known highways of the great Southwest. —Rogers Democrat

* * *

The "Old Wire Road" was a prominent factor in the early days of Van Buren and the one thoroughfare leading north from the city is still known by that name to the very northern boundary of the county. This road's first objective point out of St. Louis was Van Buren, owing to the fact that it was the most available and nearest point at which the Arkansas river could be reached and crossed and it was over this road that the first stage line to Southern California was established. The first telegraph line from St. Louis to Van Buren, Fort Smith and the Southwest was built along this road and it was from this telegraph line that it acquired the name "Wire Road."

The "Wire Road" entered Van Buren along what is now known as Fayetteville street and then to the ferry landing along what is now Main street, the principal business street of the city. At that time Van Buren was a river town and all of the business houses stood on the bank of the Arkansas river, and it was over the "Wire

Road" that freighters hauled much freight, brought to Van Buren by boat, as far as Springfield, Mo.

—Taken from Van Buren Daily Argus, Oct. 2, 1910

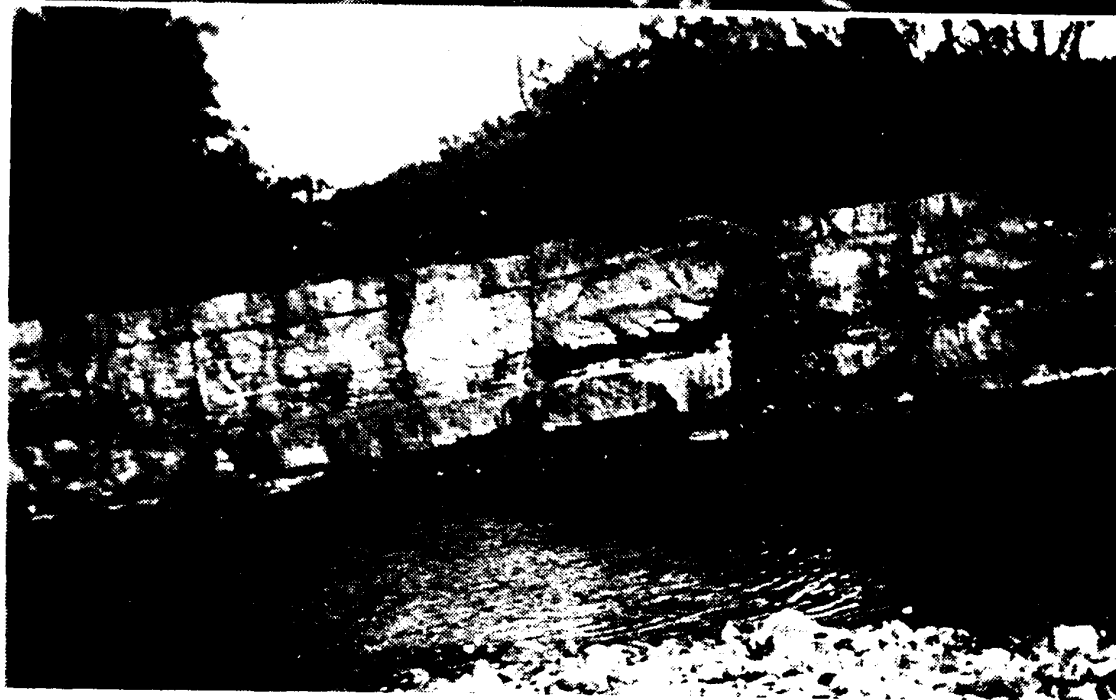
* * *

A Sketch of the Old Wire Road Copied by the
Mary Fuller Percival Chapter, D.A.R.
Van Buren, Arkansas

The Wire Road was the trail of early days from Saint Louis to Texas. It was laid out long before the War between the States by the government and known as the State Road. There were at least two roads branching off the Old Wire Road, said J. Frank Weaver, in a talk at a meeting of the Martha Baker Thurman Chapter D.A.R. of Fort Smith. The old Wire Road was the most important road running out of Van Buren in ante-bellum days and had received its name because the first telegraph line from St. Louis to Van Buren was strung along that way, one branch left the main line at Cedarville, going northward, it reached Natural Dam with which it connected with the Evansville Road (The Old Vineyard). The second road going out from the old Wire Road, the main road at the old Babb home near Mountain Fork on Lee's Creek. This was a mountain road passing through Barker's Gap of Boston Mountains, then to Cane Hill. It is said all these roads are in existence and on the whole are not in much better condition than in the early day, said Mr. Weaver.

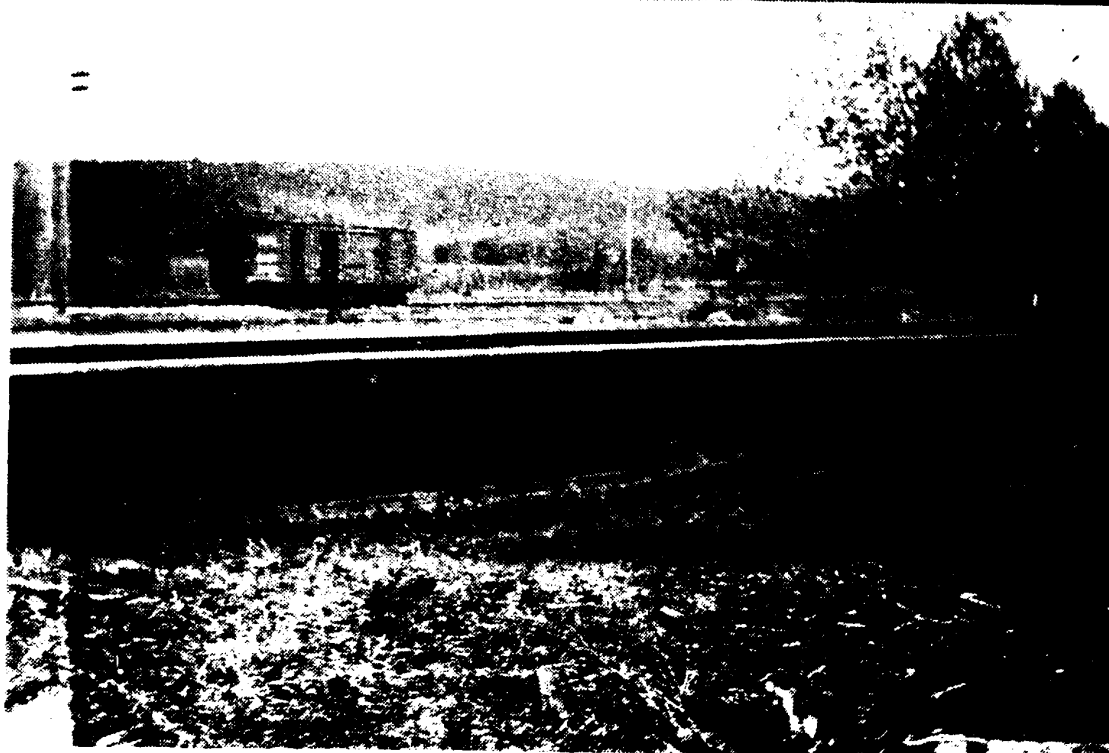
This must have been written about 1920 if not before, the good road work was done in Crawford county.

Nearly all the emigration passed over this road. Great droves of cattle were driven over it. It became the line of march for the conflicting forces during the Civil War. It became one of the best highways of the great Southwest, and it was from this telegraph that is acquired the name Wire Road. At this time Van Buren was a river town and all the business houses stood on the bank of the river (not all), and it was over the Wire Road that freighters hauled much of the freight that was brought to Van Buren by boat, as far north as Springfield, Missouri.



Two Landmarks In Historic Area . . . Many a turn of meal has been ground at old Arklo mill, on the road to Uniontown, the ruins of which are shown in the top photo.

Below—Natural dam, known far and wide, for its scenic beauty. This natural formation of stone on Mountain fork of Lee Creek can be seen by leaving Highway 59 and driving about 300 yards to the creek 18 miles north of Van Buren.



Epochs in Transportation . . . Top photo the old Swearingen stage stand in the Cove City community. Below, the old turntable in the Frisco yards at Chester.

The old Wire Road was a prominent factor in the early days of Van Buren, the thoroughfare leading north through the city, is still known as the old Wire Road. This road's first objective point was Van Buren, owing to the fact that it was the most available and nearest point that the Arkansas River could be reached and crossed, and it was over this line that the first stage line was established from Saint Louis to California.

* * *

**A Trip from Van Buren, Arkansas to Middletown, Conn.
by Stagecoach, Boat and Train**

My father having died in January, 1861, my mother decided that as soon as her health would permit and arrangements could be made she would return to her parents in Connecticut. There were a great many things to be attended to as the War Between the States had begun. It took much longer to arrange matters than she thought. The Arkansas River was so low that boats could not come to Van Buren, so arrangements had to be made to go by stagecoach.

We left Van Buren at 8:00 o'clock Monday morning, November 24, 1862, by stagecoach for our long journey to Connecticut. I remember hearing her say we would stop at a Mr. Howell's for dinner and I asked her if it was Uncle Maxey's, he being the brother of an aunt by marriage. She said no, but I have no remembrance of stopping there. I think there was one other passenger. I remember passing groups of soldiers.

We reached Ozark, which is forty miles from Van Buren, near supper time. My mother was not strong, and had curvature of the spine. She sent word to Charley Ward, her nephew, who was in camp near there and he came to the hotel to see us. Today you can go from Van Buren to Ozark in less than an hour.

We reached Clarksville about noon. We may have had dinner at William Garrett's stage stand where travelers were cared for and horses changed. This was three miles west of Clarksville. There a Lieutenant joined us. The next town we passed through was Pittsburg on the

Arkansas River, which is one of the forgotten towns. The stagecoach seemed to follow the Arkansas River.

From there we went to Piney Mills. We crossed Piney Creek on a ferry drawn by a rope. Just across the creek and on the bank of the Arkansas River stood a house known as a stagecoach stand where we spent the night at Mr. Porter's. The next morning before we left, I went out among the pines, which were in abundance and from which the place derives its name, and pulled up a few little trees in order to have something to amuse myself with, pretending they were dolls. Being one who was used to romping and playing, I would get very restless sitting all day in the stagecoach.

We left Piney Wednesday morning, reaching Noristown about noon but went two miles further on where we stopped for dinner but I do not remember the food we had for dinner. From there we went on to Louisburg, reaching there about seven o'clock where we had a cup of coffee, the first since leaving home. This was forty-eight miles from Little Rock. We reentered the stagecoach and rode all night over very rough roads. My mother said it was equal to the rocky mountains and the driver went with railroad speed—did not stop for rocks or anything else.

The first night we traveled all night, I remember my mother telling me we came very near being thrown into a lake as one of the horses had blind staggers, but the driver managed to get him out of the harness and put another horse in his place.

Somewhere between Noristown, which was between Dardenelle on the Arkansas river, and Little Rock I remember seeing the cotton fields white with cotton. I suppose the owner of the land had gone to war or he could not find any one to pick the cotton. Another sight, I remember was a stream of water along the road being filled with ducks. The kind that have the blueish green necks. In my mind, I can see the necks now.

We arrived at breakfast stand safe and sound but cold. In an old log cabin in the woods, which did not make a very good appearance, but when we entered an-

other cabin we were agreeably surprised. There was fried chicken, bacon, beef, sweet potatoes and nice white biscuits and coffee. It was the nicest breakfast we had had. After breakfast we started for Little Rock. The road was still very rough. We went as far as a team of four grey horses could travel. We arrived at Little Rock about ten o'clock and stopped at the Anthony House on East Markham Street, kept by Mr. Palmer.

This was November twenty-seven, the fourth day from Van Buren. There I found a little girl, a little older than myself but who at that time could not walk as she had been playing on a sofa and stuck a needle in her knee.

One day while out on the street, I met a young girl named Carrie Smith, who at one time had lived in Van Buren. Her father, Mr. Eugene Smith was either a steamboat captain or a clerk.

My mother who was a semi-invalid and on account of being very tired and lame from the long trip from Van Buren had to remain there thirteen days in order to take a good rest, at a cost of \$39.00 which being war times was very reasonable.

The night before we left the little girl gave me one or two armless, small china dolls to play with in the stage. As the river was still too low to go by boat, we had to travel by stage again.

We left Little Rock at four o'clock in the morning of December 10, for Napoleon at the mouth of the Arkansas river. This is now one of the ghost towns as it is in the Mississippi river. I do not remember how many passengers were in the stage but I remember a gentleman who had been to Hot Springs for rheumatism. His body servant, a colored man accompanied him. The only event I remember of this trip was stopping for dinner one day at a large house set quite a distance back from the road in a large grove of trees. It must have been the home of a planter, or his family who from necessity was serving meals to persons traveling that way.

Another incident was that as we neared Napoleon one of the passengers teased the colored servant that the

boats we saw were gun boats and they would get him.

We arrived there December 12. The fare for my mother and myself from Little Rock to Napoleon was \$30.00. Distance from Little Rock 140 miles. We remained there until Dec. 17th before a boat passed going to Cairo, Illinois. When it did come it proved to be a Flag of Truce Steamer "White Cloud."

We found a number of exchanged prisoners on the boat. A number of the soldiers were sick and some lying on pallets on the floor of the cabin. I do not remember whether we had our meals in the cabin or in the state room. There were other children on the boat and we played in the cabin and on the deck. When we stopped at Helena, my mother sent for a distant cousin of my father, Mr. Amos Eno, who held some office in the Federal Army. He came down to see us. The next stop I remember was at Memphis. My mother had planned to go up in town to see an own cousin of my father, Judge Henry Smith, as the boat was to lay at the wharf all day, but she awoke in the morning with one of her spells of palpitation of the heart so I spent the day on the boat.

There were several steamboats at the Wharf. Some of which were being loaded with Federal troops to go to Vicksburg for the expected battle. In my mind, I can see them almost as plain now as I could then.

We reached Cairo, Illinois on Monday, December 22nd. My mother was quite sick when we arrived there. I had to call a physician as soon as she arrived at the hotel. The physician was very kind and attentive to her. My mother feeling better, we left there Wednesday morning at two o'clock by train for Chicago where we arrived sometime in the evening.

I remember as we went from the depot to the hotel of seeing Christmas trees all decorated as we passed many of the homes. It was Christmas Eve. The next morning we left by train for Middletown, Connecticut. My grandparents lived two miles from Middletown but the train passed a short distance from the house and as there was a flag station, the train stopped there. We walked to the house as it was only a short distance.

We found my grandmother and Aunt in the yard, watching to see if we had come on the train that had stopped. This was Saturday, December twenty-seven. It had taken us thirty-three days to make a trip that now would take only a few hours. I had been well on the trip but I did not remain so but a few days after arriving at my grandparents home as I had to go to bed with a case of black measles contracted from the sick soldiers on the flag of truce boat.

As I look back now over that trip, I do not see how my mother stood it, but she was never as well as she had been before we left Van Buren, Arkansas.

* * *

Hard Surfaced Road in Crawford County

The first hard surfaced road in Crawford County was a macadamized road, built from Alma to Kibler. The road was begun in the early part of 1915, and completed in 1916. Claude Tally of Ozark was contractor, engineers were Mr. Wonder and Royal. S. M. Denniston, present county judge was overseer of the job.

After the completion of the road, it is said all automobile owners of Alma and surrounding vicinity, went "joy riding" over the new hard surfaced road which was three and one-half miles in length, on Sunday afternoons. The road was often covered with cars, people driving back and forth over the new road.