

CHAPTER XXII

FIRSTS IN CRAWFORD COUNTY

1819—First house to be built was the one by a Mr. Boyd for the squatter, Thomas Martin, who claimed much of the land on which Van Buren now is located.

1823, May 6—First mail route into original Crawford County was from Little Rock to Crawford Old Court House. The mail route was extended to Van Buren on March 30, 1831, when the Van Buren post office was established at Phillips' Landing. A post office had been established at Mulberry, June 15, 1830. Thomas Moore was the first postmaster at Mulberry, and on March 7, 1832, a post office was established at Lee's Creek. Thomas Shannon served as first postmaster.

1836—First grist-mill and saw mill operated by William Steward near the present community of Lancaster, north of Alma.

1838, May 1—The first trade caravan for Chihuahua, Mexico, left Van Buren. The expedition was fitted out by Pickett and Gregg. It carried an assorted stock of merchandise. Forty U. S. Dragons met the caravan, 150 miles west of Fort Gibson, and acted as guards through the Indian County. The distance from Van Buren via Santa Fe to Chihuahua was 1,100 miles. This event marked a new era for west Arkansas.

About 1838—The first sewing machine was given a Mrs. Houck, by her uncle, Phillip Pennywit, to make sacks for his grist mill, which was located on Washington Street, now North Seventh.

1838, Feb. 24—On February 24, 1838, Governor Conway approved an act authorizing a fourth branch of the Arkansas Real Estate Bank to be located at Van Buren, Crawford County, and the issuance of \$500,000 in bonds for its capitol. The stockholders of this branch mortgaged to the state 79,601 acres of land, valued at \$751,850.

In 1856 18 persons in Crawford County were listed as subscribers to the Real Estate Bank of the State of Ar-

kansas, most of them owning 300 shares.

1840—First church, Union Church, located at Van Buren.

1840—First bakery, "The Old Established Bakery" which was operated by Leonard Wilhalf in Van Buren.

1856-1857—The first telegraph line extended from Saint Louis, and came over what is now Fayetteville Street, and down Main Street to the Ferry.

1852—A library was established in Van Buren, sometime before 1852, as old records of that year show the following contributions to the library fund: Jesse Turner, B. W. Taylor, George Austin, John Foster, William Walker, John Henry, C. B. Bishop, M. C. Woodson, Henry Wilcox, John B. Luce, Henry W. Harwood, John Drennen, S. N. Hollis, George Gross, John Eno, Alfred Wallace, W. D. Wescot, George Newland, William Houser, John B. Ogden, all of Van Buren; J. M. Marshall, James Mathew, J. T. Cockorane, Henry Powell, William Powell, all of Cincinnati, Ohio; John B. Cronine, New York; A. Morrell, Texas.

1841-42—The first Court House to be erected in Crawford County at Van Buren.

1942, Feb.—The first newspaper in Crawford County was published. It was called the Arkansas Intelligencer, and was published at Van Buren until September, 1859.

1856 or 1857—The old Wire Road dates back to 1856 or 1857, when a single telegraph wire was fastened along to trees. A man on horseback was kept on the road continually to keep the wires in repairs. The wire road followed the telegraph line from St. Louis to Van Buren. The line was destroyed by both Federal and Confederate troops during the War Between the States. Joe Scott, a Confederate soldier, said he knew the line was cut, because he was one of the Confederate soldiers assigned to that job.

1860—There was a cotton mill in Van Buren. It was located near the banks of the Arkansas River between Main Street and what is now Webster Street. It burned the latter part of 1861 or 1862.

1876, April—The first railroad, Little Rock and Fort

Smith, entered the County, east of Mulberry and crossed the entire county. The first train to enter the county came over this road in June, 1876, and ran into the city of Van Buren June 14, 1876.

1879—Robert S. Hynes established a tobacco factory at Van Buren. He engaged in the manufacture of tobacco until 1884, when he closed out his factory, and purchased the Crawford County Bank.

1867, Feb. 7—The first public school in the county was opened, at Van Buren.

Delegates to the Railroad Convention at Alma on July 4, 1873:

Crawford County—Hon. Jesse Turner, L. C. White, A. J. Brown, R. S. Roberts, P. R. Johnson, George Austin, Jno. Matlock, W. J. Alexander, M. T. Luck, T. M. McGee, J. M. Farrow, A. J. Ward, B. P. Renfro, A. H. Carson, T. J. Britton, Jno. Austin, A. N. Callahan, J. S. Gross, C. Ribling, C. Brunne, J. G. Reevey, H. C. Hagman, P. Clusterman, W. W. Orrick, J. A. Dibrell, J. M. Baxter, George Thayer, D. Michael, L. W. Davis, Jas. Scott, D. C. Williams, W. A. Britton, J. L. Dunham, H. Brownfield, N. F. Cornelius, W. J. Johnson, D. W. Moore, J. W. Stratton, J. J. Burrow, J. B. Collins, H. Pernot, J. D. Jeems James, H. T. Tomlinson, M. Lynch, G. Wilcox, Jno. C. Laytte, A. C. Scrimsher, L. Southmayd, E. J. Pernot, Frank Stewart (Col.), R. G. Pearson, E. G. Whitesides, R. T. Thurston, E. Wall, H. C. Ribard, H. C. Roberts, J. P. Hall, A. G. Coomer, J. J. Warren, W. L. Taylor.

This convention was probably held for the purpose of planning the completion of the Fort Smith-Little Rock Railroad, now a branch of the Missouri-Pacific, and is one of the first railroad conventions, if not the first.

1877, Feb.—The Van Buren Canning Company was organized by a number of stockholders. The factory had a capacity of 10,000 cans daily. The company began business with \$7,000 paid in but in 1888 its stock was increased to \$15,000. The first annual dividend was 20%. The first officers were: President, W. H. H. Shibley; Vice President, F. R. McKibben; Secretary and Treasurer, R. S. Hynes; directors, including the foregoing, A. Smith, Jesse

Turner Jr., J. J. Warren and D. W. Moore. The superintendent of the factory was Samuel Sheets.

1876—The first depot agent at Alma was George Weaver. A box car served as the first depot. This was soon after the Little Rock and Fort Smith Railway was completed to Van Buren in 1876.

1880—The Frisco railroad completed a bridge across the Arkansas River at Van Buren, and a Frisco train was the first to cross over.

1880—In 1880 the first telephone service was given in Van Buren by one line terminating into Fort Smith giving service for 5 or 6 telephones in Van Buren. The connections for these telephones was in John Dink's Jewelry Store and later moved to Dr. Johnson's Drug Store. Dr. Johnson was manager and Wallace Dougherty was lineman.

In 1886 a telephone exchange was established by the Pan Electric Company and was located in Joe Rea's cotton office.

Mrs. Hodge was local manager and operator. George Tilles of Fort Smith had charge of the Pan Company.

The first Bell exchange was located at 515 Main Street. The early operators were Miss Mabel Martin, Miss O'Bryan, Mrs. Dougherty and Miss Edna Deering. Mr. George Hood of Fort Smith was manager. Mr. Wallace Dougherty was lineman.

About 1900 the Southwestern Bell Telephone Company bought the exchange from the Pan Electric Company and moved the switchboard to 621½ Main Street, the present quarters. There were about 150 telephones connected to the switchboard at that time. John Arline was lineman.

In 1907 a common battery Western Electric Company No. 9 switchboard was installed in the present location and the outside plant was changed from magneto to common battery service at that time. This switchboard, with additions, is still in service.

Some of the operators who worked for the Bell Company in 1914 were Misses Bessie Stockton, Bessie James, Mary Smets, Melinda Blackburn, Mrs. Sue Wha-

len and Mrs. Kate Rainwater.

Information furnished by Mrs. Melinda Albin and Mr. Charles B. Williams of Van Buren, both being pioneer members of George F. Durant's Chapter No. 11.

1882, Nov. 11—The Arkansas Gazette announced on November 11, 1882, that the Frisco railroad had been completed to Van Buren, and a train trip "from Van Buren to St. Louis took a day and a half.

1882, April—The Crawford County Bank opened in April, 1882, as a private bank, by William Viickery. Its capital stock was then \$30,000.

1883, Nov. 11—The Crawford County Court ordered that within a radius of three miles from Van Buren Presbyterian Church no liquor could be sold after that date.

1884-85—The first public school building erected on the site of where the city hall now stands in Van Buren. Prof. Frank Colburn, first principal and Miss Margaret Wood, assistant.

1886—Citizen's Bank of Van Buren was organized May 1, 1886, as a stock company under the State law. B. J. Brown was president.

1889, July—The Knights of Pythias Lodge No. 54, was organized at Alma in July, 1889, by G. N. Given, of Fort Smith. Nineteen charter members composed the membership.

There were three Volunteers from this organization of World War I. They were E. I. Bailey, Hugh Lewers Farris, and W. P. Hamer.

The first contribution from any lodge sent to the sufferers in the earthquake in San Francisco, years ago, was sent from the Alma Chapter of the Knights of Pythias.

1891, April 22—Mr. M. V. (Matt) Wallace, of Van Buren, was the first conductor to cross over the Missouri Pacific (Iron Mountain) bridge at Fort Smith.

1893—First Water Works was in Van Buren. The water was secured from Lee's Creek about 5 miles west of Van Buren where the pump station was located.

1897, July 25—First electric lights. It is not known who operated the system, but on March 3, 1901, J. E.

Powers purchased the Electric Light and Power Co., which he operated until November 1, 1905, when the Fort Smith Light and Traction Company purchased the rights of the Van Buren Fuel and Light Company, and operated the local station until September, 1906. The line equipment of Van Buren was rebuilt and service supplied from the Fort Smith station by means of a 6,600-volt Transmission line through a sub-marine cable across the river. This cable was destroyed by the high rise of the river in 1908 and was replaced by aerial transmissions on steel towers.

The above information from November 1, 1905, was furnished from the files of the Oklahoma Gas and Electric Company, Fort Smith, Arkansas.

1902—First rural route out of Van Buren started in the year of 1902. Mr. R. Pesterfield was the carrier over route 1, which went through Bond Special Community.

1902—Mulberry Bank organized in 1902. This was the first bank organized there. Henry A. Beneux was president, David T. Bryan was cashier.

1902—The Bank of Alma was organized in 1902 with Jake Yoes, President, and Tom Black, Cashier.

On September 15, 1909, the Commercial Bank of Alma was organized with J. M. Cole, President; J. T. Richards, Vice President; and O. B. Ragon, Cashier.

On May 30, 1930, the Bank of Alma, and the Commercial Bank merged with J. M. Cole, President; J. Fred Alexander, Vice President; W. D. Patton, Cashier; and Reeves L. Bolling, assistant cashier.

1904—L. S. Lewers was the first rural mail carrier, going out from the Alma post office, over route No. 1. The route went south, through part of the Arkansas River bottoms. The late Joe Ford succeeded Mr. Lewers in 1905.

Ford said he carried hot rock, and sometimes a lantern to keep his feet warm on sub-zero days. Mr. Ford said: "Many times I had to get out, after going through heavy bottom lands and gouge the mud from the wheels of my mail cart. I have seen the wheels as round as silver dollars." Said Mr. Ford: "Often the mud accumulated on

the wheels of his mail cart so that it became too heavy for my horse to pull." In order to be ready for such emergencies, Mr. Ford said he carried a stick in his cart.

The trip over this route took all day and many days ran on into the nights. Now the same route can be gone over in 3 or 4 hours, with the mail delivered from a car.

1907—A cotton compress was located at Van Buren, with a storage capacity of 6,000 bales of cotton. It was located near the Missouri Pacific yards. During 1916-17, 28,000 bales of cotton were compressed.

1907—In this year the Iron Works were located at Van Buren with Mr. William Kirchman, owner and operator. The factory was located in that section known as Riverside and engaged in making coal mining cars, some of which were made of wood and some of steel. Also all kinds of mining machinery. The complete product, from crude material, was put out by the factory. The factory closed after Mr. Kirchman's death, July 26, 1945, which occurred as a result of an injury suffered during an overflow of the Arkansas River in 1945, when part of the factory building collapsed, as he attempted to move some of the equipment to higher ground.

1908—First paving, Main Street, during the mayorship of Mr. Henry (Harry) Pernot. During 1910, Districts one, and two were paved, and since that time other paving districts have been formed until today most of the streets of Van Buren are hard surfaced.

1908, July 24—Dedication of the fountain on the Courthouse lawn. Rev. J. W. Thompson of the Trinity Episcopal Church delivered the dedicatory address.

1910-1914—Mr. D. L. Phares was first county agent. He began work under the old Farmers Co-operative Demonstration work and before the enactment of the present Smith-Lever Law, which went into effect in 1914. Some of Mr. Phares' salary was paid by Farmers Cooperative Demonstration funds out of the Washington office, and we presume some was paid by the county.

1910—Miss Agnes Cordingly was the first woman rural mail carrier and went out from Van Buren over

Route 2, either in the year 1910 or 1911.

1912—First street cars. Fort Smith company operated street cars to Van Buren.

1912—First free bridge in Crawford County across the Arkansas River was opened between Van Buren and Fort Smith.

1915—First gas well was located near Kibler.

1917—Mrs. Elizabeth Temple was the first Home Demonstration Agent to work in the county.

1916—The first tuberculosis seals were sold by Miss Clara B. Eno. As the work was so new, only \$10.00 worth was sold.

1918, May 4 and 5th—The first clinic to be held in the county was sponsored by the Village Improvement Club, and was for babies and small children. The doctors of Van Buren gave their time to the project. The children who were born after 1914, were given birth certificates. The Vital Statistics Law went into effect April, 1914.

1919—The first levee to be constructed along the Arkansas River in Crawford County, was in the year 1919. Bonds in the amount of \$175,000 were issued by the land owners to build this levee. The first President of the Crawford County Levee District board was L. H. Southmayd; Secretary was John Moss.

At this time, the United States Government is constructing a larger and higher levee. A. V. Harper is president, and Warren G. Furry is secretary of the board.

1924, Dec. 12—Mrs. J. R. Bell resigned as juvenile officer, of Crawford County.

1929, Nov.—The first woman jurors to ever serve on the petit jury in Crawford County were: Mrs. J. C. Wofford, Rudy; Mrs. J. R. Bell, Mrs. Harry Mitchell, Miss Effie Malone, all of Van Buren; Mrs. G. S. Boggan and Mrs. B. B. Bruce, Alma.

1931, Feb. 26—The Crawford County Council of Parent-Teacher Association was organized. Officers elected: President, Mrs. W. E. Boroughs, Van Buren; Vice President, Mrs. W. E. Bassham, Cedarville; Secretary, Mrs. E. F. Goodwin, Oak Grove; Treasurer, Mrs. S. C. Grant, Mulberry; Corresponding Secretary, Miss Effie

Malone, Van Buren; Historian, J. P. Bingham, Van Buren.

1933-1934—During the Depression years, about 1933 or 1934, a Civilian Conservation Camp was established near Locke, where 260 boys were employed. These boys were mostly from Missouri, and were employed to construct roads in the mountains. They also assisted in furthering timber reclamation. These boys were paid \$30.00 per month, and were required to send \$25.00 to their homes. They were selected from the unemployed group.

Powell Whitfield, a graduate of Columbia University, and a native of Crawford County; and Oakly Murphy were both employed at different times as educational directors of the camp.

1936—Mrs. G. S. Boggan of Alma is the first woman to ever make the race for either a state or county office in Crawford County. She was a candidate for State Representative in the summer of 1936. There were eight men in the race.