ECONOMIC CONDITIONS IN ANTE-BELLUM ARKANSAS: 1850-1861

By
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Life in the ante-bellum South has been overcast by such a glow of romance and imagination that all reality has been lost. In this chimerical world all Southerners were slave-owners, aristocrats, and dashing cavaliers who lived in stately mansions presided over by fragile, jasmine-scented ladies. But the South was no glamorous world. Arkansas, on the edge of the frontier, one step ahead of the Indians, was certainly not. It was a new, empty country that was part of the great expanding West as well, but otherwise like any other place in rural America except for conditions of weather, the presence of a large number of Negro slaves, and its ideal of a way of life.

It was peopled by struggling Americans anxious to get ahead like the sturdy pioneer who wrote that: "all the efforts of my life have been to better my own and my neighbors' condition and to get a home comfortably and securely fixed." Men like Judge Brown of Camden, Arkansas, had left Kentucky for Tennessee and then for Arkansas because my ambition... want of funds to make a start in life otherwise than by the exercise of my brain and the thought of bringing the family into notice which has lain in obscurity for ages past in every branch... have led me to settle in a new, uncouth country and there... to wait with patience for

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**Miss Elliot H. Fletcher Papers, Letter of Thomas Blackmore, Oscoda, Mississippi County, December 19, 1856. (Courtesy of Mr. W.D. Bazeell, Little Rock, Arkansas.)

what is out of reach of exertion.2 The inhabitants of Arkansas were men on the "make" and they had the strength, the independence, and the recklessness to transform the wilderness into a place of civilization. With a parcel of land, a few slaves, and the promise of large returns from cotton, they hoped to get ahead.

The majority of them, in fact over two times as many of them, were engaged in agriculture as over against those in other occupations.3 They were neither large owners of land nor slaves but small independent holders cultivating an average of 1.46 acres of land into 1850.4 In spite of the ease with which land could be acquired in Arkansas under the Homestead and Swamp Land Acts, the 39,004 farms in actual cultivation in 1860, 28,583 of them were less than 100 acres although the average size farm had increased by that time to 246 acres.5

Furthermore, out of the total 40,775 male persons in all occupations at the beginning of the decade only 95 could be considered planters, while 28,838 were farmers. The number of planters, however, increased four and one-half times during the decade while the farmer group doubled. Obviously, Arkansas was not only growing in population but the fame of her cotton lands, reputed to yield on the average "a bale to an acre and from 2,000 to 2,200 pounds of cotton seed," was also spreading throughout the South.6

The same trend that was evident in the size of farms was present in the number and growth of slaveholders. At the beginning of the decade there were 5,999 owners of slaves of which the majority 4,699 to be specific, held from

*Miss Judge John Brown, Daybook, September 13, 1821, August 20, 1822. (Courtesy of Mr. Sam Hays, Little Rock, Arkansas.)


1. Total males in all occupations 1850 1860
   Farmers 41,715 45,013
   Planters 28,838 48,475
   Overseers 55 458
   Farm laborers not specified 3,350
   Total agriculture 69,223 109,117
   Total in other activities 25,440 55,047


4. "Arkansas True Democrat, June 23, 1851."
one to ten slaves. Out of the total number of owners, only 19 possessed over 100 slaves and two over 200, and not one person in the state owned over that number. By 1860, however, the total number of owners had risen to 11,481 but the majority remained holders of less than ten slaves although 59 persons had acquired over 100 but less than 200, six over this number but less than 300, and one person in the state then owned over 500 slaves. The number of slave holders had almost doubled by the close of the decade and so had the number of owners of less than ten slaves but the greatest rise had been in the group that held over 50, for here the number almost trebled. This increase was the outgrowth of the expansion in the Cotton Kingdom and the movement of planters from other areas to Arkansas in search of fresh lands. An example of this was General Gideon Pillow of Mexican War fame, who moved from Tennessee to Helena in eastern Arkansas where he worked 165 slaves on part of the 6,818 acres of land that he owned.

Regardless of the growth in the number of slave holders, Arkansas certainly did not conform to any stereotyped pattern of the South because it was not the home of large owners of land or slaves but rather of small independent farmers who had a few slaves to help them in the arduous task of getting ahead.

Yet not all persons in Arkansas were engaged in farming. Some were lawyers, doctors, editors, school teachers, ministers, and merchants; and some few were engaged in mining and manufacturing. Most of the professional people, especially the lawyers and doctors, acquired land and a few slaves to enhance their dignity and status in the community.

And some few of them eventually secured rather substantial holdings of both and no doubt derived the bulk of their incomes from farming rather than from the practice of their professions.

Opportunity was on the frontier for the lawyer and the physician as well as for the man without skill. The number of lawyers grew so rapidly that one editor complained that they increased "daily" and that soon a "famine was apprehended." Another bemoaned the state of affairs by declaring that:

In every portion of the country law, medicine and the mercantile professions are being crowded with petitfoggers, quacks and traders, while the redundant refuse material furnishes a large supply for the manufacture of politicians, patriots, and other public functionaries.

Western men generally distrusted lawyers yet this professional group continued to multiply. It remained, of course, only a small percentage of the population. The need for spring tonics and the great amount of chills and fevers among the inhabitants helped to swell the number of physicians but their number remained small throughout the decade.

The rate and growth in the number of school teachers was about the same as that for the physicians. The teaching profession was merely a spring board for ambitious men who hoped in time to become either lawyers with a probable career in politics or planters. There were a few men, however, who were teachers from choice. For the most part, they were clergymen who combined ministering to the soul with enlightening the mind.

Shrewd "Yankee-mit-neg" traders and clever Southerners realized that there was a lucrative trade to be exploited in the principal towns, especially at Little Rock and in the northwestern part of the state. On the frontier, the United States government maintained forts and troops. Specie

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*Eighth Census Report, Agriculture, p. 248.

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*Memphis Daily Appeal and Enquirer (quoted from the Arkansas Whig), January 15, 1852, Arkansas State Gazette and Democrat, May 18, 1859.

*Seventh Census Report, Table 2, p. 553; Eighth Census Report, Population, Table 6, p. 21.

*Memphis Weekly Appeal, June 6, 1869; Tax List of Phillips County, 1869 (Arkansas History Archives, Little Rock).
was to be found among the soldiers garrisoned there as well as among the Indians. In addition, a rather brisk trade developed at Van Buren and Fort Smith during the rush to California when thousands of westward bound emigrants passed through the state at these points. In view of the increasing population in the state, the growth of trade opportunities in the home market and the need for supplies for the emigrants who traveled over the southern route to California, it was normal for the merchant class to exhibit an increase—an actual rise from 567 to 1,296 by the close of the decade.13 Like the lawyer and the physician many merchants combined farming with their business and acquired a few slaves and homesteaded land for future investment.

Only a small per cent of Arkansans were engaged in mining and manufacturing. The state did, however, have the distinction of being the second in the United States in amount of manganese mined.14 Between 1850 and 1852, in the region of Batesville Colonel Matthew Martin and his partner shipped out by way of the White and Black Rivers small quantities of this ore.15

Generally, mining companies were operated by non-residents in cooperation with a few citizens of the state. The Arkansas Mining, Manufacturing and Chemical Company; the Louisville and Arkansas Mining and Marble Company; the Crystal State Improvement Company; the Cincinnati and Little Rock Slate Company were examples of citizens of Memphis, New Orleans, Louisville, Philadelphia, and Cincinnati combining to operate mining enterprises.16 In the latter case, because of fraud perpetrated by some of the Memphis owners, the company failed but not before a Little Rock merchant had covered the roof of his store with the slate quarried from the company's mine.17

By the middle of the decade, Arkansas was anxious to ascertain the extent of its mineral wealth. A noted Philadelphia geologist was employed to make a geological survey of the state.18 At the same time encouragement was given to residents and non-residents who wished to develop mines. Special praise was accorded to one company of "energetic, wealthy, St. Louis merchants" who had the "means and the good intentions" to mine zinc along Mill Creek in Lawrence County eight miles from Batesville.19 The greatest interest, however, was manifested in the establishment of iron works by a citizen of the state, Alfred Bevens, who in 1857 was operating "two fires and two water wheels to turn out from 1,000 to 1,500 pounds of iron ore a day."20 Although a considerable number of companies were chartered during the decade most of them failed and the few attempts to mine lead, coal, and marble were short lived.21 Absentee ownership was not present in manufacturing since the efforts to establish factories were undertaken and financed by citizens of the state. As early as 1848 in Van Buren at the office of John Ogden, lawyer-merchant, subscriptions were solicited for funds to establish a cotton spinning factory that materialized four years later when a charter was granted by the legislature.22 Similar factories were established in Arkadelphia by the Barkman brothers and in Benton County in the northern portion of the state by certain merchants and planters.23 The most successful cotton factory, however, was that of the Arkansas Manufacturing Company located on the Little Missouri River and jointly owned by Henry Merrill of Georgia and John Mallock of Arkansas. This factory was equipped, according to contemporary reports, with machinery adequate enough to turn out "50 bunches of 250 pounds of spun yarn a
day. Notwithstanding the fact that this output was probably exaggerated, the factory did manufacture yarn, thread, and other articles until the Civil War.

The mercantile house of Phillip Pennywit of Van Buren operated a "steam flouring mill" that produced "excellent flour" throughout 1859. Other mills were operated at Batesville and Little Rock. In addition to the usual blacksmith, carriage, and repair shops a business in "fur, deer skins, beef hides, beeswax, and tallow" was conducted by a mercantile firm in Van Buren in connection with its regular business. In spite of these efforts at industrialization, Arkansas was an agricultural world peopled by small independent farmers.

PART II
Economic Problems: 1850-1861

The major economic problems of the people in Arkansas grew out of their needs in a frontier country and out of their principal economic endeavors. The settlers were older than their environment, having come from more mature areas with certain standards and values which they wished to reproduce in their new home. To accomplish this it was necessary for them to have land cheap, fresh lands; then, to be able to derive a surplus from that land in order to buy what they needed; and finally, to secure markets that would take what they had to sell. Therefore, the major economic problems were the acquisition of land, getting a surplus from the land, and finding a way to market.

The acquisition of land itself was not difficult in Arkansas since there was more of it than settlers, and, moreover, the legislature had facilitated procurement by passing liberal laws. A few persons, mostly people with money, encountered some difficulties in their efforts to purchase land because of the confusion in land titles, but most of these men journeyed on to Texas rather than suffer under this disadvantage. So the most serious problem associated with land was that of absentee ownership.

During the early forties speculators had come to Arkansas and bought up large tracts of land which they withheld from sale. A resident of Natchez, Mississippi, was believed to own from 75 to 100 sections of land in eastern Arkansas. Non-resident ownership was resented by inhabitants because they believed that "the soil belonged to those who resided on it" and because absentee owners received the benefits from improvements without aiding in them. Various proposals were advanced by the members of the legislature and other state officials during 1852 to force these owners to reside on their land or sell it at current prices but no satisfactory solution was reached and thereafter the matter was dropped.

Securing a surplus from the land was more difficult for Arkansas than mere acquisition of land or absentee ownership. Physical forces of soil and climate are ever present factors in a farmer's life and condition the success or failure of his crops. Along the fertile river bottoms, Arkansas farmers were threatened annually with overflows, as was one farmer in 1851 who was unable to make payment on his land because he was compelled to be late (in consequence of the annual overflow of the river) in planting of our crops and one of the natural consequences of being late is (everything else being favorable) a short crop... last year we not only had to contend with three successive overflows which continued until the middle of May, but when the water subsided we suffered from a drought of so long a continuance that we made no corn at all that would do to ship or sell...
High water caused breaks in levees, washed off fencing, destroyed cattle and stock, and caused general hardship. On the Hickman plantation along the Mississippi River, high water “covered the garden and yard entirely” and was from “15 to 18 or 30 inches deep” so that “the Negro men have to ply about in little boats to attend to the Horses, Cattle and Hogs, get fire wood.” Such disasters not only destroyed property, interrupted and delayed planting but also rendered the “soil less productive because of the deposits left on the fields.” Droughts, storms, swollen creeks and rivers, waterlogged areas and flood disease gave farmers cause to complain and to believe that Arkansas was no place in which to farm. “I am the most discouraged man alive,” wrote one farmer who swore that he would not stay “in such a country, it is impossible to make a crop of any consequence this year and I am in debt besides.” This farmer had reached the point where he was willing “to sell out and go to some other business than farming” if he could not find “a better place to farm in.” Well-to-do farmers suffered as well as poor ones and those in the southern part of the state did not escape any more than those in the northeastern region along the Mississippi. Judge Brown of Camden complained of damage from storms, of having missed “the harvest rains,” and of being discouraged. He entered in his diary that: “my dissatisfaction with Arkansas has increased. I feel that I am settled and my means invested and lying comparatively dead in the most hopeless portion of the United States.”

Wheat and rye growers in the northwest were not immune from droughts, and snow as late as July. A prosperous farmer in Fayetteville reported bad weather “cold and snow, 12 to 20 inches” and the subsequent loss of “as much as 40 head of pigs” and other stock. Even when there was the prospect of success, disease like rust and blight attacked both cotton and wheat. On the Brown plantation in July, the cotton crop was the “best [he had] ever had” but by October “some 18,000 lbs. of cotton” he had harvested “was] greatly injured by rust so there [was] scarcely any top cotton.” In 1856 and 1859, the wheat crop was considerably damaged by rust and blight and as a result there was a shortage in the home market of bread-stuffs.

Certainly farmers in Arkansas had reasons to believe that they were the pet children of calamity and perhaps, Mark Twain was not far wrong when he characterized Arkansas as caught between “Sudden Death and General Desolation.” Nevertheless in true western fashion, these farmers tried to overcome their handicaps. Diversification, levee construction, and the improvement of agriculture through the establishment of societies were advocated. Farmers were encouraged to make cotton secondary and to “raise first everything necessary for home consumption that soil and climate would produce” and then if there should be a surplus to produce the great white staple. Better strains of wheat and cotton were considered and also the creation of agricultural societies as a means of increasing crop production. One editor, however, in complete disgust advised that Arkansas should cease “laboring to impress the public with the benefits of its superior climate” and recommend to its citizens the establishment of manufactures and trading enterprises.

Of greater interest and concern to Arkansas farmers was the problem of checking overflows. It required time, labor, and money to build a levee and although most men attempted to construct some kind of protection from the high water, their efforts were generally inadequate. When individual effort failed, they looked to the state for relief.

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10 MS, Judge John Brown, Diary, July 11, 1857, October 13, 1857.
11 MS, Judge John Brown, Diary, July 13, 1852, October 12, 1852.
12 MS, Judge, Diary, June 4, 1859.
13 MS, Judge, Diary, June 4, 1859.
14 MS, Judge, Diary, June 4, 1859.
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19 MS, Judge, Diary, June 4, 1859.
20 MS, Judge, Diary, June 4, 1859.
and then to their national government. Each successive legislature and each governor between 1850 and 1860 considered this problem and made recommendations for relief, yet nothing was accomplished. The whole question became tied up with politics and sectional interest within the state and as a result there was more talk than action. The northeastern farmers became particularly incensed over the policy of Governor Elias Conway, who served the state from 1852 to 1860, for his do-nothing policy.

Physical handicaps growing out of conditions of nature affected not only the farmer's ability to secure a surplus but limited his capacity to produce the necessities of life. Consequently, it was natural that he would demand relief. He wanted relief from debts, reduction of taxes, a flexible currency, and above all a safeguard against the sale of the only thing that he had—his land.

In 1850, a bill was introduced in the Arkansas Senate to exempt homesteads from execution of debts. In subsequent discussions on the bill, various amendments were proposed which ranged from the exemption of 160 acres of land to exemption regardless of the size or value. Although the governor supported the bill, having recommended the passage of such legislation in his annual message, the measure was defeated. In the next session of the General Assembly, however, a similar bill was introduced which the press vigorously supported. After considerable deliberation, this bill was finally passed and homesteads of 160 acres or a town lot were exempted from sale for debts. Some of the well-to-do farmers in the legislature had argued for complete exemption on the assumption that the man of property should be encouraged as well as the poor man and that if such legislation were enacted the credit system would be curtailed.

Despite the fact relief had been extended, the matter did not end with the passage of this law but continued to be an issue with the legislature until 1856. No modification, however, was made in the basic law in spite of the continued agitation. And homestead exemption did not pay other debts. Arkansas farmers wanted credit and relief from all debts.

In November, 1854, a long resolution with a preamble was presented in the House of Representatives praying for the suspension of the collection of all debts until December 25, 1856, because forcible collection of debts was "reducing hundreds of families to penury and want." The resolution was lost but a contemporary resident revealed the hardship of the law when he wrote that: "the policy of the State Prosecution is playing havoc with our citizens and they will be compelled to abate their payments or the Treasury and the State's Attorney will grow rich."

Closely associated with relief from debts was the desire for relief from taxes. All land in Arkansas was subject to a minimum three dollar valuation by the constitution of the state. Where land was less valuable, this provision acted unfairly on the settler but where it was more valuable, the state lost in revenue and the settler gained. Although measures were introduced providing for an amendment of the law, no change was made up to the Civil War and all settlers still continued to pay state taxes on land on this basis. At the same time that efforts were being made to modify this provision, bills were introduced to lower the rate of taxation but instead the rate was raised in 1857 to

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187 Journal of the House of Representatives, 9th Sess., op. cit., p. 357; Arkansas True Democrat, December 16, 1852; January 4, 1853; January 6, 1853; December 7, 1857; Arkansas Whig, February 6, 1853.


190 Ibid., p. 58; MS, Judge John Brown, Diary, April 13, 1855.

one-sixth of one per cent from one-eighth of one per cent.\textsuperscript{24}

The whole matter of relief, whether it was from taxes or sale of homestead, involved the financial structure of the state as well as attitudes on credit and money. The settler in any new region is without money and desires credit in order to purchase the supplies necessary for his existence. Hence, it is to his advantage to have a source of ready credit and money and it is also but natural that he should prefer a flexible currency to "hard money" or specie. Arkansas had sought to provide her citizens with just such an agency at the beginning of her existence as a state but had failed and had been precipitated into debt as well. Citizens were forced to live on "coon skins and peltry" and the bank paper of other states.

Lack of money caused great hardship on all. The merchants of the state were indebted to citizens of other states and the people of the state were in debt to the merchants and whatever money did come into the state soon flowed out to other places like Memphis, New Orleans, Cincinnati, and New York. The only real source of specie was on the frontier where the government troops and the Indians were located. With the critical shortage of money in 1851 that was described as causing "Arkansas to bleed at every pore for the want of money, for the ordinary change to meet the actual demands of society," there was clamor for a "free banking system."\textsuperscript{29} People demanded that provision be made to permit the circulation of small bank notes in order to relieve the situation. At the same time, special interest groups were advocating that bank notes be suspended so as to stabilize the financial system of the state. Thus, a centripetal force was operating in the state to curtail bank notes of small denominations while a centrifugal force was demanding circulation of such notes. Former members of the group were concerned with liquidating the state debt incurred from the establishment of banks in the state, while those of the latter group thought of the hardships that would result from the lack of money and the subsequent difficulty of securing goods. Men of enterprise and means were forced to borrow from their friends or from their commission houses in Memphis and New Orleans on their future cotton crops, and usually at high rates of interest, but the less fortunate ones were driven to barter. One editor characterized the situation by saying that "all sorts of money goes tolerably here" and the only consolation that he could find was that "if a crash should come . . . nobody among us has enough to have laid by any nest egg."\textsuperscript{30} Judge Brown solved his problem by buying and selling "Mexican dollars and Tennessee paper" and sometimes "uncurrent money."\textsuperscript{31}

In spite of the seriousness of the situation, special interest groups and the administration party were able to defeat any measures for relief. By Act of 1855, it became unlawful for any person to put into circulation, sign, countersign, endorse any bill, bond, check, note or ticket of less than a five dollar denomination with the intention to pass such off as currency. Furthermore, any person guilty of violating this act was liable to a heavy fine or imprisonment.\textsuperscript{32} Of course, the law was severely criticized. One editor predicted that "the hard money advocates [would] be so hard pressed they [would] establish a banking system." He was mistaken, however, because instead of yielding to popular demand, a law was passed to make the basic act more effective.\textsuperscript{33}

Such legislation made it extremely difficult for people to pay their debts but it helped the merchants and office holders. The latter, particularly, the sheriffs, land attorneys, and land agents received a portion of all fees collected and by Act of January, 1856, their commissions were not only increased but fee payment were required in specie.\textsuperscript{34} Nonetheless, bills were continually introduced in the legislature to limit the circulation of bank notes to those of higher denominations. In 1856, Representative Venable of Conway County presented a bill to prohibit the circulation

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{24}Ibid., March 27, 1857.  
\textsuperscript{29}Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{30}Ibid., May 6, 1858.  
\textsuperscript{31}Acts Passed at the Eleventh Session of the General Assembly of Arkansas, 1855-1856, p. 58.  
\textsuperscript{32}Acts Passed at the Eleventh Session of the General Assembly, pp. 107-108.  
\textsuperscript{33}Acts Passed at the Eleventh Session of the General Assembly of Arkansas, 1856-1857, p. 16.  
\textsuperscript{34}Acts Passed at the Eleventh Session of the General Assembly, op. cit., p. 28.}
ECONOMIC CONDITIONS, 1850-1861

on. For example, in one year it did not rise enough to permit navigation, and when it did boats were grounded because of snags. Often it required steamboats two days to travel from Little Rock to Arkansas Post on the Mississippi River, an actual distance of thirty-five miles, because of the many stops made on account of snags.

The Red River that supplied the southwestern part of the state was no better for navigation. During 1855, "40,000 bales of cotton" were on the wharf above the rafter in that river for over three weeks and one editor reported that, "not a single bale [had] . . . gone out nor [had] a single barrel of up freight been received by way of the Red River except a wagon load or two hauled from Shreveport."

The same condition existed on the White River and its tributaries in the northern part of the state. Movement for improvement of the White River began in 1848 when its importance was stressed as a way for traders from the up-country to bring their supplies to market at Van Buren or Batesville.

Not only was it difficult to reach the home market but even if farmers succeeded in producing a bumper crop of wheat or cotton there was no way to reach the outside market. Consequently, goods remained piled up on wharves where they were subsequently damaged or so delayed in getting to market that top prices could not be obtained for them. If there had been adequate transportation facilities to market, Arkansas farmers would have enjoyed an enviable position, especially over other grain producing areas because crops matured earlier in Arkansas than in some other areas.

Additional obstacles were confronted in the use of rivers due to the excessive freight rates charged on them. It was believed that rates were higher on the Arkansas River, for example, than on the Mississippi, the Cumberland or the Ohio. The average cost for freight on the Arkansas River through the state from its mouth at Napoleon ranged from seventy-five cents to one dollar and twenty-five cents per hundred pounds while on the Mississippi from Memphs to New Orleans for the same weight, bacon and flour cost twenty cents and cotton, thirty cents. Prices were not only high but in some parts of the state higher than at others. To illustrate: at Van Buren and Fort Smith at the headwaters of the Arkansas River, freight was from twenty-five to fifty per cent lower than at Fayetteville. Merchants, planters, and citizens of Hempstead County formed an association to boycott and protest against the charges of certain vessels operated by New Orleans captains on the Red River on account of the high freight rates they charged.

Troubles were without end, it seemed, in Arkansas. In addition to the difficulties encountered in transportation, when the rivers were high enough to navigate there were frequent wrecks in which cargoes were lost in transit to market. Because of this hazard, insurance on cargoes was very high. Some enterprising men, however, like Judge Brown, organized insurance companies in the state. Brown's company insured "about half of the cotton being shipped" through Camden by way of the Ouachita River "at 40c per bale." Merchants like Phillip Pennywit in the north not only organized insurance companies but undertook to operate flat boats on the rivers within the state.

Men tried to do things for themselves but the whole problem of a way to market was too big a one to be solved by individual effort, so they demanded internal improvements from the state. Sectional jealousies within the state, however, and the unique political alignments formed by men to cement their position of power forestalled all attempts

*Arkansas True Democrat, July 17, 1855; Arkansas State Gazette and Democrat, April 29, 1854; October 20, 1854.
**Ibid., April 29, 1854.
****Arkansas Intelligencer, February 5, 1858; February 26, 1849; Batesville Enterprise, April 13, 1859.
*****Ms. Judge John Brown, Diary, June 27, 1855.
to secure internal improvements. Every governor during the
decade recommended and gave lip service to works of
internal improvements and during 1856 the issue became
a major one in the gubernatorial campaign. Yet by the
Civil War, the assertion that editor C. C. Dunley made in
1854 was still true: "Arkansas [was] without navigation,
without railroads, deeply in debt and dependent upon her
sister States for not only clothing her people, but for Bread,
Bacon, and Potatoes."

Despite this gloomy state of affairs, men in Arkansas
were of tough fiber and they were optimistic. They
believed that one day their dream of the way they wished to
live would become a reality.

"Arkansas State Gazette and Democrat, August 24, 1854.

LAPILE: A PIONEER COMMUNITY

BY
MRS. ROBERT VAUGHN MONTAGUE CORDELL
El Dorado, Arkansas

Lapile was one of the earlier communities that began to
develop in Union County about the time that Eldorado
became the County Seat in 1842. It was situated in the
southeast corner of the county where virgin pines, age old
oaks and scores of other kinds of trees grew luxuriantly.
The Indians had not long been gone from the area and had
left the stately forests clear of undergrowth. Groups of
deer and other animals could be seen for nearly a quarter
of a mile as they gamboled or roamed about. It was only
after the white man came to settle here and staked off his
claims that the forests fell prey to a rank undergrowth
which formed thickets that changed them into jungle-like
preserves for big game and small.

A Mr. Brown from South Carolina was the first white
man who is known to have permanently settled in this sec-
tion of the county. He came with his wife and children in
1832. There were then no roads other than Indian trails
through the country. The well known Monroe-Ecore Fabre
Trail passed through this district and was no doubt used by
most of the immigrants coming into this locality but it
was probably not wide enough for the covered wagons.

It was usual for the men of a pioneer traveling party
to walk through the woods and cut a road as they went so
that the women might drive the vehicles. In any event
traveling was slow and there were hazards from wild
animals.

The Browns, charting their own path, pushed forward
with fortitude until they found a suitable place to build their
home. The work of building began with the hewing of
logs which served the double purpose of clearing the ground

Mrs. Robert Vaughn Montague Cordell was born in South Carolina. She is
very interested in Union County and has collected much valuable historical infor-
mation about it.