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STEVENS & SONS

HISTORY OF VAN BUREN COUNTY, ARKANSAS

1892

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HISTORY OF VAN BUREN COUNTY,
ARKANSAS

By

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1935

Submitted to the Department of History
Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the degree of
Master of Arts

1948

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PREFACE

This thesis is written in partial fulfillment for a master's degree on the advice of Dr. Thomas H. Reynolds, head of the history department, Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College, Stillwater.

It is the result of much research and many conferences and interviews with people in Van Buren County, many of whom have lived in the county for almost three quarters of a century. There has been very little written about the county. The author has attempted to cover the economic, cultural, social, and political development of the county.

Grateful acknowledgment is made to Mrs. Mabel C. Garner, Assistant, Department of Archives, History Commission, Little Rock, Arkansas, for locating materials; R. C. Thomas, Damascus, Arkansas, who has been invaluable in locating and securing materials and making possible interviews with the settlers; Dr. George E. Lewis, professor of history, Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College, Stillwater, for his valuable suggestions and criticisms in writing the manuscript; Dr. LeRoy H. Fischer and Dr. Norbert R. Mahnken, professors of history, Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College, Stillwater, for their suggestions; and all others who gave helpful information. Without the combined efforts of these persons it would have been impossible to have written this thesis.

In appreciation for his great help and his untiring efforts in

making this possible, the author dedicates this thesis, History of Van Buren County, Arkansas, to her father, R. C. Thomas, Damascus, Arkansas.

HISTORY OF VAN BUREN COUNTY, ARKANSAS

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Location of Van Buren County

CHAPTER I

LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION

Located in the north central part of the state, sixty miles north of Little Rock, state capital of Arkansas, and about seventy miles from the geographical center of the state, is Van Buren County. It lies between 35° and 36° north latitude and between 92° and 93° west longitude. It is bounded on the north by Searcy and Stone Counties, on the east by Cleburne, on the south by Faulkner and Conway Counties, and on the west by Pope County. The county contains more than seven hundred square miles of territory and a population of about fourteen thousand. All the people speak the English language. Only twenty foreign born whites, representing eleven countries, inhabit the county: England, one; Scotland, one; Erie, two; Sweden, one; Germany, four; Poland, four; Austria, one; Hungary, two; Russia (U.S.S.R.), two; Syria, one; and Canada, one.¹

The territory now occupied by Van Buren County was acquired by the United States in 1803 as a part of the Louisiana Purchase. In 1805 the Territory of Louisiana was organized, the lower portion of the area forming the District of New Madrid. In the following year the lower portion of New Madrid was cut off to form a

¹Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940, Population (Washington: United States Printing Office, 1943), 451.

new tract called District of Arkansas. Six years later, 1812, the District of Arkansas was incorporated into the newly established Territory of Missouri. In 1819 the Territory of Arkansas was created.

In 1833, the territorial legislature of Arkansas created a new county which was named for Martin Van Buren, then Vice-President of the United States. The thirteenth county created in the State of Arkansas, Van Buren was formed out of the territory taken from the counties of IZARD, Conway, and Independence.² Boundaries were first defined November 4, 1846, after which time a part of the county was attached to Pope County. The boundary between Searcy and Van Buren Counties was defined January 12, 1853, while the one between Pope and Van Buren was fixed four years later.³ A part of the county was taken to form part of Stone County in 1873. Cleburne, the last county of the Arkansas counties formed, was created February 20, 1883, out of the territory taken from the counties of Van Buren, Independence, and White, with Van Buren contributing some three hundred square miles.⁴

The county was first divided into seventeen townships: Cadion, Craig, Davis, Giles, Griggs, Hartsugg, Holly, Liberty, Mountain, Peter Creek, Piney, Red River, Sugar Leaf, Turkey Creek,

²Fay A. Hempstead, A Pictorial History of Arkansas (St. Louis and New York: N. C. Thompson Publishing Company, 1890), 1006.

³Biographical and Historical Memories of Northwest Arkansas (Chicago, Nashville, and St. Louis: The Goodspeed Publishing Company, 1889), 91.

⁴Acts of Arkansas for the Year 1883 (Little Rock: Mitchell and Bettis, 1883), Act XXVI, p. 39.

Union, Valley, and Washington.⁵ In 1880 Giles, Mountain, Peter Creek, Piney, Sugar Loaf, and Valley townships and part of Cadron township were taken to form Cleburne County.⁶ Cargile, Choctaw, Cleveland, Culpepper, and Sulphur Springs were formed in 1890.⁷ Then, later, in 1906, Barnett township was organized from part of Bradley, and in the same year Bloodworth was formed from part of Union.⁸ Today the county consists of the following townships: Archey Valley, Barnett, Bradley, Cadron, Cargile, Choctaw, Cleveland, Craig, Culpepper, Davis, Griggs, Grove, Hartsugg, Holly, Liberty, Linn Creek, Mountain, Red River, Sulphur Springs, Union Washington, Wheeler, and White Oak.⁹

When the county was created, the temporary seat of justice was at the house of Obadiah Marsh, a pioneer settler, until the permanent county seat should be selected. In the following year commissioners chosen for that purpose selected a settlement called Bloomington, on Little Red River, about eight miles east of the present town of Clinton. There the county seat remained until 1844, when it was removed to Clinton, its present location.¹⁰

⁵Ninth Census of the United States, 1870 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1872), 124.

⁶Eleventh Census of the United States, 1890 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1895), 68.

⁷Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900 (Washington: United States Census Office, 1902), 74.

⁸Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1913), 106.

⁹Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1943), I, 479.

¹⁰Hempstead, op. cit., 1006.

Clinton was founded by George Counts in 1842. It was formerly a Cherokee Indian village. It is of interest to note that Clinton was founded on the same day as Chicago, Illinois.¹¹ Located a little east of the geographical center of the county, on the upper forks of the Little Red River, it has admirable drainage and is one of the best watered sections of the county. On the north it is protected by a high bluff, or range of foothills, which rises from the bottom land along the river in a gentle slope. Clinton lies at the base of Evans Mountain. On the right is a succession of ranges dominating and overlapping each other in the order given: Hunter's Range, Salt Springs Mountain, and Miller's Mountain. On the left is a northern division of the Clinton group: Pine Mountain Range, Devil Fork Range, and a range unknown by name.¹² In one of the state newspapers the following description of the mountains around Clinton is given:

Beyond the mountains against which Clinton is backed in the landscape a rounded ridge rises to view known as Bald Knob, the effect of which on the lower plain is so contract to view at this end, as on a higher plain Miller's Point and the unknown range contract the view in the distance. The order of the contraction of the immediate landscape is Bald Knob overlapped on the left by Gullom's Point and this in turn by Pine Mountain. On the right it is the southern division of the Clinton group overlapping Bald Knob and the first thrown on the background of Salt Springs Mountain. In the interval overlapping Bald Knob the stately head of the great Tonawanda or Sugar Loaf, thirty miles away, rises clearly upon the scene.¹³

¹¹This information was given in a letter written to the Clinton Chamber of Commerce, May 3, 1946, by Sam A. Leath, former resident of northern Arkansas.

¹²"Sunrise from Mount Evans," Weekly Gazette, Sept. 16, 1886.

¹³ibid.

The climate is pleasant and invigorating. Only in a few instances has the mercury fallen below zero in winter, and for only brief periods has it risen above 110° in summer. Being located in the heart of the Ozark system of the state, it is upon a crest of mountain tops that divide the waters of the Arkansas from those of the White River and its tributaries.¹⁴

There is evidence in this section to show that it was inhabited by a pre-historic people of the Indian race long before it was settled by the whites. Many arrows, tools, skeletons, and other relics have been found, and there are still Indian mounds scattered over the county. Numerous flint arrowheads and large spearheads have been found in widely scattered areas of the county at various times. These findings indicate that it was a very desirable camping site for the Indians. In the Indian Rock House, located three miles from Shirley and just three quarters of a mile off State Highway 16, have been found many Indian relics. Bushels of arrowheads, Indian hammers, tomahawks, and other implements have been uncovered in and around the Rock House. Perhaps the most interesting archaeological specimen found in the county is a plow made of stone. In addition, two whole pottery vessels were dug up in the cave and are on display at the University of Arkansas, along with other mementos, belonging to George Johnson, owner and keeper of the cave. Chief Gold Eagle of Anadarko, Oklahoma, who is a Cherokee, and his wife, Princess Red Fawn, visited the huge cave a few years ago and interpreted some of the Cherokee signs and also

¹⁴Weekly Gazette, September 9, 1886.

signs made by other members of the five civilized tribes. There were those that pre-dated, he said, the knowledge of any living man, Indian or white.¹⁵ Two complete skeletons and many bones of Indians buried in the huge cave have been found. It is believed by many that the cave was an assembly chapel, or a place of ritual and worship for the Indians. The Shirley Advocate says that, although some Indian legends carved upon the walls may have been placed there long before, the real history of the Indian Rock House and of Arkansas began with the visit of Hernando De Soto searching for the legendary Fountain of Youth in 1542.¹⁶ In this same year he visited the Rock House, tasted of the waters of the many springs in the cave and nearby, and concluded that he had not yet found that which he sought. The huge cave is a hundred feet wide and thirty-nine feet high at the mouth, and one hundred feet deep. Under this huge rock are ten thousand square feet of floor space.

More than Indian lore is connected with the cave. The story is told of a traveler who was following a trail near the Rock House at nightfall. He was met by a stranger whom he asked about a place to stay or camp. The stranger informed him there was no cabin for miles but said that he was with a party of hunters camped in a huge cave nearby. The stranger led the traveler to the place where he was well fed and treated as a guest by the several men present. Next morning, when he started to leave, a man detached himself from the group and accompanied the traveler to the trail which was some

¹⁵Shirley Advocate, July 25, 1940 (clipping in Arkansas Archives).

¹⁶Ibid.

distance away. After they reached the trail the stranger asked the traveler, "What would you do if you were to meet Jesse James?" The traveler said he would treat him as he would any other man. "Then you can tell those you meet tomorrow you slept with Jesse James," the stranger said as he turned back toward the Rock House.¹⁷

Inside the huge cave, which, from the mouth, has the appearance of the Natural Bridge, there is a small cave at the back. Inside this smaller cave there are three springs within fourteen feet of each other which have three distinctly different waters. One spring, the largest, has the same water found at Eureka Springs, eighty miles northwest and on the Arkansas-Missouri state line. The second spring has a mineral iron water, while the third is as soft as any rain that ever fell. The mouths of these springs are so close that a man can jump from the edge of the bowl of one to the other. And peculiar is the fact that none of these particular waters are found at Heber Springs, twenty miles away in Cleburne County, where there are several mineral springs. But one is exactly the same as the spring waters near Eureka Springs, four times that distance.¹⁸

Outside the cave are found many peculiar formations, seldom seen elsewhere in Arkansas or in other parts of the country other than the Bad Lands of the West or the Grand Canyon. The colors of these formations are peculiar and varied and are well worth a visit. Iron and silica sands are found everywhere, but the iron is in such

¹⁷Joe E. Eaton, Interview, Aug. 21, 1947.

¹⁸Joe E. Eaton, Interview, Aug. 21, 1947.

small quantities that it would not pay to mine it. Nearby is a yellow okra bed from which paint can be mixed without any other process than stirring the proper ingredients together. Nearby, also, is the clay, of the silica sand type, which has been used in finishing oak floors of armories and other state buildings all over the United States. The floors of the Little Rock, Arkansas, High School gymnasium and other oak floors of that structure were finished with it. They withstood eight years of hard wear before it was necessary to refinish them. The fine grains fill the oak to 1/16 inch and give it an iron-like surface with a high polish.¹⁹

The following are the principal minerals which are found in Van Buren County: gas, shale, sandstone, black marble (in extreme northern part), and other limestone. Except for a small area in the extreme southern part, the surface of the county consists entirely of sandstones and shale of the Atoka formation. This formation has produced gas in the western part of the Arkansas River Valley. This gas occurs under favorable structural conditions, which are, for the most part, axes of folds or "anticlines." There are six of these anticlines known to exist in Van Buren County, of which there has been a record made. Shale and sandstone beds make up the major portions of the surface of the county. The shale can be used for making shale brick and is used for this purpose in Sebastian County. Sandstone is valuable as a building stone and is the source of crushed rock for aggregate and rock metal.²⁰

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰File of Geological Survey of Arkansas, State Capitol, Little Rock.

The iron ores of the county are mostly in the neighborhood of Clinton, Choctaw, and Bee Branch, and other places in the central and southern parts of the county. They are all either ferruginous sandstones of no commercial value as sources of iron, or else carbonate ores of too low a grade and too limited quantity to be used.²¹

The settlement of Choctaw is on Choctaw Creek, about six miles southeast of Clinton. Choctaw Creek is a small stream flowing east into the Little Red River. The divide between the two streams is composed of a long ridge capped with sandstone. This rock is often deeply stained with iron, and frequently small bunches and layers of brown hematite, an inch or more in thickness, occur through it. These deposits are too poor in quality and the quantity is too small to be of any value. The rusty sandstone is often mistaken for iron ore, and leads to false impression as to the quantity of the latter. Such materials occur in many places on the divide between the Little Red River and Choctaw Creek, especially on the farm of a Mr. McGruder, one mile north of Choctaw.²²

The following analysis of the Arkansas Geological Survey, shows the composition of the ore from the McGruder farm:

Analysis of the iron ore from the McGruder tract,
Van Buren County:

Iron24.40
Silica40.44
Phosphorus	0.276
Sulphur	0.178
Manganese	a little ²³

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid.

This analysis shows the ores to be too low in iron content and too high in silica to be of any commercial value. Similar deposits are to be found in many other places in the county south of Choctaw, especially in the neighborhood of Bee Branch and Damascus. Lick Mountain is a high hill about six miles south of Clinton and on the north side of Choctaw Creek. On the south side of the hill numerous flat lenticular masses of carbonate of spathic iron ore occur. They are scattered over the slope for a vertical height of about sixty feet, or for a distance up and down the slope of about a hundred yards. The iron ore masses are from one to twelve inches in diameter and from one to three inches in thickness. They are generally coated with a brown crust on the outside, due to oxidation of the ore, while inside, the drab color of the spathic ore is preserved. By weathering, the ore masses have been freed from dark gray shale in which they were originally imbedded. Others can often be seen still in place in the shale. They are too few in quantity and too poor in quality to be of any value. The following analysis shows the composition of the Lick Mountain iron ore:

Iron	20.98
Silica	13.78
Phosphorus	0.524
Sulphur	0.123
Maganese	a little ²⁴

This analysis shows that the ore contains too little iron to be of any value, while the percentage of silica and phosphorus are also high compared with the amount of iron.

Analysis thus indicates that the minerals of the county are

²⁴Arkansas Geological Survey, annual report, 1892, I.

practically worthless. That fact alone would prevent her from becoming an industrial section.

There are several mineral springs in the county. Choctaw Spring is located one and a half mile south of Choctaw. Water issues from crevices of flat rock and is cold, clear, and soft, and comes from the south side of the long slope. The discharge of the spring is three gallons per minute. The elevation is approximately four hundred and ninety-seven feet. Sugar Leaf Springs are situated about three miles southeast of Sugar Leaf Mountains. There are several fine springs of mineral content. White Sulphur Spring and Price's Spring have about the same mineral content. There is also a good chalybeate spring in this location. The elevation is approximately one thousand feet.²⁵

The following is an analysis of the Sugar Leaf Springs: free sulphuretted hydrogen, bicarbonate of lime, chloride of sodium, and chloride of magnesium.²⁶

The springs of the county have been used for no purpose other than the drinking of the water for certain ailments by the residents of the county. There would seem to be no reason why these springs cannot be used and developed as health resorts. Eureka Springs, previously mentioned, is a health resort, and one of the springs in the Rock House has the same content as one there.

Coal has been mined on a small scale five miles north of

²⁵Field Records of the Division of Geology, State Capitol, Little Rock, Ark. (1937), 129.

²⁶Arkansas Geological Survey, unpublished report of a geological survey (1857-1858), 2.

Morganton on the road to Higden. It has been used locally for such purposes as the smelting of iron. Lack of transportation has prevented the development of the coal deposits.

For those who find fishing, camping, and swimming a form of recreation, there are several streams in the county: North and South Fork of Little Red River; Archie's Fork of Red River; Choctaw Creek; Point Remove Creek; North and South Cadron Creek; Hartsugg Creek; and Pee Dee Creek.

A portion of the Ozark National Forest is in the southwest corner of the county. It comprises an aggregate of 25,625 acres of forest. This land is owned and operated by the Federal Government through the agency of the United States Forest Service with headquarters at Russellville, Arkansas. There are 17,592 acres of forest in unpatented lands, that is, lands which are still a part of the public domain.²⁷ There are three game preserves in the county. Greasy Valley Preserve occupies all the southeast part of the county south of Little Red River and east of the Choctaw-Shirley road and south and east of United States Highway 65. Red River Preserve occupies all of the northeast part of the county that is north of Little Red River and east of United States Highway 65. Gulf Mountain includes all the territory west of United States Highway 65. These game preserves were established in conjunction with the government foresters. The purposes of these preserves are to protect the timber from forest fires and to protect the wild game from illegal hunting.²⁸

²⁷Lawson N. Anderson, Assistant Forester Management, to author, June 30, 1948.

²⁸R. C. Thomas, Interview, June 1, 1948.

CHAPTER II

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Van Buren County contains seven hundred square miles and 456,960 acres of land. Practically all of this land is good either for agriculture, grazing, or lumbering. The Little Red River runs through the county on its southeast course to the White River. Along this river and its tributaries are rich bottom lands. The soil is fertile and produces well the usual crops of cotton, corn, and grains. The last census report showed a population which averaged a little more than 17.5 persons per square mile. During the early years of the county each family raised all the food it needed. Little was exported owing to the difficulties of transportation and the lack of a surplus. The crops usually consisted of corn, tobacco, wheat, oats, potatoes, and some cotton.¹ At that time cattle were raised on the range and were consumed locally. By degrees the building of the railroad and the opening of the highways aided the marketing of cattle and farm products. Today livestock brings good prices at the weekly auctions held at Clinton. The southeastern part of the county is particularly favored by nature for the growing of grains. Fruits, berries, and truck crops produce well anywhere in the county.

¹Compendium of the Enumeration of the Inhabitants and Statistics of the United States, 1840 (Washington: Thomas Allen, 1841), 324. Hereafter cited as Compendium of Sixth Congress, 1840.

A majority of the people of Van Buren County are still engaged in agriculture. The agricultural report for 1940 shows that 78.9 per cent of the population is farm population;² however, the entire county population is classed as rural for no town has a population large enough to be classed as urban. In 1930 there were 2,184 farms with 3,692 people engaged in farming. In 1940 there were 2,028 farms which averaged 124.2 acres; but according to the 1945 report there were 1,892 farms which averaged 111.7 acres.³ Most of them are operated by the owner on the family unit basis. Only 18.4 per cent of the farms are operated by tenants. As shown by the reports, there has been a decrease in the number of farms. It must be remembered that a great number of farmers were employed in essential industries during World War II. But there has been a tendency for many to leave the farm and work at public jobs in order to earn more money.

From the start of a purely agricultural economy that came with the permanent home makers, cotton was important in Van Buren County. As early as 1840 there were 8,951 pounds of cotton gathered.⁴ Because of the difficulty in procuring food supplies, each planter had to be as self-sufficing as possible. For many years cotton was

²Sixteenth Census of the United States, Agriculture, 1940 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1942), I, Pt. 5, p. 29.

³United States Census of Agriculture, 1945, Van Buren County, Arkansas, Agriculture; Farms, Farm Characteristics, and Value of Farm Products Census of 1945 and 1940 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1946), I.

Hereafter cited as United States Census of Agriculture, 1945, Agriculture.

⁴Compendium of Sixth Congress, 1840, 324.

the main money crop; however, it is fast declining in relative importance. In 1946 there were 5,300 acres of cotton under cultivation with a yield of 2,680 bales.⁵

The continuous growing of cotton took the best plant food from the soil. However, in recent years most of the farm land has been terraced, and other soil conservation methods have been practiced. A Civilian Conservation Corps Camp was established at Damascus in 1933 and continued for six years. During the time of its existence terraces were made, pastures were planted, check dams to prevent further washing of the soil were made, and pine seedlings and black locusts were planted to hold the moisture. It was then that farmers first realized the importance of farming scientifically in order to make a better living and to conserve the soil.

There has been much interest in gardens in recent years. Most of the farmers in the county are attempting to grow an abundant supply of vegetables for table use during the season as well as a sufficient supply to preserve for winter use. Practically every family has a pressure cooker and in ordinary years cans several hundred jars of fruits, meats, and vegetables. For a number of years canning kitchens were maintained in almost every community. There is one at Clinton, but it is under the operation and supervision of the State Training School. Recently a frozen food locker was installed at Clinton.

For the past few years cucumbers and green string beans have

⁵County Data Book, Bureau of the Census Document, A Supplement to the Statistical Abstract of the United States (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1947), 72.

been grown for commercial purposes. For awhile they were transported to a cannery in the northern part of the state. There was so much interest shown that a cannery has been built in the county. Reports show that farmers received much more for these crops per acre than for cotton. For the year 1945 the value of vegetables sold was \$18,599, which was almost ten times the value of those sold only five years before.⁶ The Oxford Canning Factory, located at Clinton, opened April 20, 1946. Large numbers of acres of vegetables are grown for use there. At present only tomatoes and green cut beans are canned, but the plant is expanding to include sweet potatoes, black-eyed peas, cucumbers, and turnip greens in the immediate future. It is hoped that these new facilities will be ready for the 1949 harvest. The factory employs seventy-five persons. It serves several counties, including Searcy, Stone, Cleburne, and Van Buren.⁷ Farmers have come to realize that they make more money from their vegetables than from the traditional crop of cotton.

They have also come to realize that dependence upon several sources of income affords a weekly pay check, rather than a yearly one as cotton provides. Cattle-raising, both beef and dairy, has become an important business. In recent years farmers have introduced high grade cattle. A good many of the animals are either registered or are subject to registry. Many farmers of the county are interested in securing and keeping better producing cows.

⁶United States Census of Agriculture, 1945, Agriculture, 2.

⁷Walter Patterson, Secretary of Oxford Canning Factory, Interview, June 3, 1948.

Many are striving to produce better pastures. In 1945 six hundred eighty-two farms reported sales from dairy products, totaling \$83,521, which was nearly three times the value of the same product for the year 1940.⁸ Since 1945 there has probably been an even greater increase. Better markets are available. A better grade of cream is produced. Daily milk and cream routes were established to collect and transport the dairy products to a cream factory near Russellville, Arkansas, to a creamery at Conway, Arkansas, or to local cream testing stations. Many household bills have been paid with the cream and milk checks and often items of clothing have been bought. No longer do the farmers have to depend upon an outside market for their dairy products. The McKnight Dairy Product Company was opened at Clinton, September 25, 1947.⁹ It offers a fine outlet to dairy producers of the county. The plant uses on the average 17,347 pounds of milk a day in the making of cheese. Twenty hoops of Cheddar cheese, varying in weight from sixty-nine to eighty pounds, are produced a day. The factory employs eight full-time workers at the plant and eleven route-men who make daily routes to transport the milk to the factory. The skimmed milk is returned to the farmers for feed for chickens and hogs. Most of the cheese is sold to the Cudahy Packing Company, Neosha, Missouri, but some has been trucked as far distant as Pennsylvania. The factory is privately owned by local citizens.¹⁰

⁸United States Census of Agriculture, 1945, Agriculture, 2.

⁹Fairy McKnight, sister of owner and employee at the factory, Interview, June 3, 1948.

¹⁰Fairy McKnight, Interview, June 3, 1948.

Practically every farm has sufficient hogs for home meat, and many have some for the market. There is a great demand for hogs at the weekly auction where buyers are attracted from neighboring counties and adjoining states. Thus the farmers know that there will be a ready market for their surplus livestock. For the past few years the price has been unusually good. In 1945 the value of hogs was \$39,785.¹¹ In 1940 the value was only \$20,924.¹²

In the northwestern part of the county there are some sheep and goats. In 1945 the value of sheep and lambs in the county was only \$1,677, and the value of goats and kids was \$2,774.¹³ In 1840 there were only seven hundred and sixty-seven pounds of wool produced in the county.¹⁴ Of course, that was during the time when wool cloth was made by hand.

A number of farmers have built stock ponds which they are stocking with fish.

Lumbering is an important industry in the county. The short leaf yellow pine, white oak, hickory, ash, sweet gum, black gum, and sycamore are the principal trees found in the county. There are at least a dozen sawmills and planers scattered throughout the county.¹⁵ The earlier use of lumber was for cross ties, but now

¹¹United States Census of Agriculture: 1945, Arkansas, Statistics for Counties (Washington: United States Printing Office, 1946), 109.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Compendium of Sixth Congress, 1840, 326.

¹⁵Industrial Directory of the State of Arkansas, compiled by the Planning Commission and the Agriculture and Industry Division (Little Rock: Arkansas Resources and Development Commission, 1946), 66.

lumber for the construction of buildings is in great demand. Poles and posts are produced also. Along the highways in and around Clinton can be seen sawmills which are good examples of what the county is doing in this industry. For a number of years throughout the timbered sections of the county the cutting of railroad ties from both hardwood and pine constituted one of the principal activities. Usually the ties were cut on contract. Local labor got out the material for the contractor who assembled the ties at railroad points where delivery was made to the railroad.

There are numerous other activities that the people engage in for a living in Van Buren County. Molasses, or syrup, is manufactured from both sorghum and ribbon cane. Production is at local mills that are of the old-fashioned type. The syrup is canned and sold mainly to local residents or tourists. Frank Stripling, who lives about four miles north of Bee Branch on United States Highway 65, is probably the best known molasses maker in the country. It is not uncommon for him to receive orders from other states. There are three broom factories in the county. Some have been in operation for several years. Most of the corn is imported from northern states; however, at different times in the past, large acreages have been produced locally. The brooms are made in small, hand-operated factories. Three or four dozen brooms a day are considered a good day's work. Both the ordinary family size and the whisk broom are made. Sales are made to local citizens and to merchants in nearby towns. Brooms made in this manner are considered much better than those ordinarily seen in a store.¹⁶ There is a

¹⁶R. C. Thomas, Interview, June 1, 1948. Mr. Thomas has a factory and manufactures a few hundred brooms each year.

broom handle factory at Clinton operated by Shelly George.¹⁷

The first method used in crushing corn and wheat was with the pestle. Soon the iron hand mill was brought from the East. Later the water mills were located on the larger streams. The first water mills that pioneer settlers can recall were located at Dr. R. M. Hunter's home on Choctaw Creek and on Cadron Creek in the east part of the county. As early as 1840 there were seven gristmills in the county.¹⁸ About the year 1890 J. S. Winningham established a gin and gristmill near a big spring where is now Formosa.¹⁹ Wheat and corn were also taken to Hartwick Mill which was in Faulkner County. There are several gristmills in the county today, notably at Bee Branch, Clinton, Gravestown, and Shirley.

There were no extensive tanneries in the county's early history, but nearly all settlements had one or more men who could and did tan hides with oak bark. The process took three or four months. A. J. Leonard of New Home, near Clinton, was noted as a tanner.²⁰ Leonard also had a small carding factory. Another was run by Charles Middleton at Quitman, then in Van Buren County.

There has been great change in trade and commerce. If production exceeded the needs of the family and of the community during the early years, the farmers took their products to nearby towns. As early as 1840 there were five stores in the county, either dry

¹⁷Industrial Directory of the State of Arkansas, op. cit., 66.

¹⁸Compendium of Sixth Congress, 1840, 324.

¹⁹W. E. Halbrook, Interview, June 3, 1948.

²⁰R. C. Thomas, Interview, June 4, 1948.

goods or grocery.²¹ Dr. S. B. Thornburg, Jerry Seanlan, and Gilbert Cottrell were the first merchants as far as the oldest settlers could remember.²² Products were taken to Searcy, Louisburg, near Morrilton, and Little Rock. Often from eight to twelve days were required for the trip to Little Rock, a distance of seventy miles from the center of the county. Until automobiles came into practical use farmers made annual trips to Conway, Morrilton, and Little Rock, taking their products and buying their necessities. Since the suspension of railway service, all produce is trucked to Van Buren County and also the northern counties that no longer have access to a railroad. Along United States Highway 65 there is a constant stream of heavily-loaded trucks carrying produce to market.

The earliest roads were mere trails or Indian paths from one water hole or spring to another. They could hardly be traveled by wagon or cart. But now practically every part of the county is served by a United States, state, county, or local road. They enable the farmers to get their produce to market. Transportation had its legal beginning in Van Buren County in 1851 when the General Assembly granted James J. Barrens of Van Buren County and Page Hatchell of Searcy County a charter to establish a "good and substantial turnpike road" across Clinton Mountain, commencing at Clinton and ending at the house of Page Hatchell. The distance was eighteen miles. These men were required to keep the road in order under penalty of the law and were permitted to erect a toll gate

²¹Compendium of Sixth Congress, 1840, 325.

²²R. C. Thomas, to author, June 22, 1948.

and charge a rate of toll specified by the act.²³

At the end of the Reconstruction period there were no state roads in Arkansas. As a result the cost of road construction was met by the county. The Arkansas Constitution of 1874 provided that "the county courts shall have exclusive jurisdiction in all matters relating to county taxes, roads, bridges, ferries, and disbursement of money of county purposes, and every other case that may be necessary to the internal improvement and local concerns of the respective counties."²⁴ The counties were forbidden by the state constitution to borrow for these purposes. A property tax was depended upon for the construction and repair of roads.²⁵ The county court did not require the full constitutional limit of five mills on the dollar for all purposes; it could levy a county tax on all taxable property in the county of not more than three mills on the dollar.²⁶ All able-bodied men between the ages of eighteen and forty-five were required to work on the public highways within their respective townships not more than five days per annum. In lieu of the labor each person had to pay one dollar for each day that he was required to work on the road. In 1904 the road levy per hundred dollars of property was thirty cents. The county court could order and compel

²³Acts of the General Assembly of Arkansas, 1836-1939 (Little Rock: Park-Harper Publishing Company, 1939), 312.

²⁴Constitution of Arkansas, 1874 (Little Rock: Mitchell and Bettis, 1874), Art. 7, Sec. 28.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶W. W. Mansfield, A Digest of the Statutes of Arkansas (Little Rock: Mitchell and Bettis, 1884), p. 1149, sec. 5912.

prisoners to work on the roads, bridges, and on any public improvement in the county. The grand jury also had the duty to inquire into conditions of the roads, or parts of the roads, in each district assigned to an overseer.²⁷ This arrangement was unsatisfactory because of the failure of the counties to compel the payment of a road tax or to enforce work upon the roads. Soon, however, modes of transportation changed. The coming of the automobile brought a demand for good roads and for other agencies than the county be allowed to build highways. The authority to borrow, of course, was the key to the situation. The legislature of 1917 sought to meet the problem by the passage of an act permitting the formation of local road improvement districts.²⁸ The same body called into being the first state-wide revenue for road improvement by establishing a five dollar license for each motor vehicle.

The county is traversed by one of the main thoroughfares of the nation. United States Highway 65 runs from the northwestern to the southeastern part of Arkansas by way of Little Rock. It crosses the county connecting practically all the towns of the county and going through Dennard, Botkinburg, Clinton, Bee Branch, and Damascus. The drive through the northern part of the county is a scenic one. Highway 65 was first routed through the county in 1916. The present road was laid out in 1927. The next year it was graded and drained. The black topping was done in 1934, the state furnishing all the

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Fiscal Survey of Arkansas, 1940. Prepared by the Arkansas State Highway Department (Arkansas State Highway Commission, 1940), 115.

money. State Highway 16 enters the county in the northwestern part and intersects United States Highway 65 at Clinton. From there it goes in a north eastwardly direction and enters Cleburne County on its way to Heber Springs. State Highway 95 enters the southwestern part of the county and goes in a northeasternly direction and joins United States Highway 65 at Clinton. State Highway 9 enters at the northeastern corner and runs in a southwesternly direction to join Highway 65 at Clinton. State Highway 110 crosses the northeastern corner of the county.²⁹

The county has been without a railroad since September, 1946. Probably no railroad had more "ups and downs" than the Missouri and North Arkansas Railroad. It ran northwest from Helena in the eastern part of the state to Joplin, Missouri, a distance of three hundred and fifty-nine miles. The railroad dates its beginning from 1881, when St. Louis capitalists constructed a line twelve miles from Seligman, Missouri, to Beaver, Arkansas.³⁰ At Seligman it connected with the St. Louis and San Francisco. It was then known as the Missouri and Arkansas. About the same time the Eureka Springs Company was incorporated to build a line from Eureka Springs to Beaver. This road was promoted by Powell Calton, who was president of the company for several years. In 1882 these two short lines were consolidated and a movement was started for the continuance of the road eastward. Traffic relations were established with the

²⁹Van Buren County Arkansas, Map prepared by Arkansas State Highway Commission, United States Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Public Roads.

³⁰David Y. Thomas, Arkansas and Its People, A History, 1541-1930 (New York: The American Historical Society, Inc., 1930), 434.

St. Louis and San Francisco, but the president of the latter company died and his successor refused to accept the agreement, which put a stop to further extension. In 1899 a new company was formed and, after several years' delay, construction was commenced. The road was completed to Leslie in 1902. Financial difficulties soon arose, and in 1905 the road was sold under a receivership. After a few months it was reorganized and the name was changed to Missouri and North Arkansas. In 1909 through traffic was established between Helena, Arkansas, and Joplin, Missouri. Within two years the road was again in the hands of the receiver. An experienced railroad man was selected for the position, and the United States court authorized the issue of receiver's certificates to the amount of three million dollars. About two-thirds of the certificates were issued. Then new shops were built at Harrison, and efforts were made to place the road on a paying basis. When the United States entered the First World War, the Government took over the operation of the railroads, the Missouri and North Arkansas included. When government control ended in 1920, the troubles of the company revived. A strike of employees occurred in the spring of 1921. Much sabotage took place. Property was destroyed. One man was hanged. On the last day of July the road suspended operation and did not open until May, 1922. The road served the transportation needs of the northeastern fourth of the county until September, 1946, when it suspended operation again. Efforts to reopen it have been in vain.³¹

³¹Herndon, op. cit., 526.

Pioneer Van Buren County was not without postal service. The earliest route was described by a contemporary newspaper in these words:

A mail route has been ordered to be put into operation from Batesville to the Court House of Van Buren County, and will be carried once in two weeks. The route will extend from Batesville, by Van Buren County Court House and Glass, to Dwight. The postmaster at Batesville, to whom the key for opening the mail has been sent, is directed to have this mail carried for the present. Russell Bates is appointed postmaster, and the office is called "Clinton."³²

This early route provided for the distribution of mail at the county seat and at Kendall, now Edgemont. Abe Turney was one of the first carriers.³³ As communities were built other post offices were established. Before the century ended they were found in all sections of the county. The following is a list of the earliest post offices of the county:

Bee Branch	1868
Brown's	1836
Clinton . Russell Bates, postmaster .	1834
Eglantine	1868
Kinderhook T. R. Willis, postmaster . .	1837
" re-established	1840
Liberty Springs	1870
Meadows . Abner H. Smith, postmaster .	1851
Middletown W. B. Sullivan, postmaster .	1848
" discontinued	1848
Quitman . . Jesse Witt, postmaster . .	1848 ³⁴

³²Letter to the Editor, Arkansas Gazette, January 21, 1834.

³³R. C. Thomas, Interview, December 31, 1947.

³⁴Post Offices in Arkansas, May, 1940, Prepared by Works Projects Administration, sponsored by Arkansas History Commission, Dallas Herndon, Executive Secretary. Information obtained from state newspapers.

In the late 1830's the first post office in the northeastern part of the county was established near Owl's fork of Little Red River, near the present town of Shirley. It was named Middle Settlement because it was in the middle of three settlements. B. R. Eaton was acting postmaster for William Gipson. The receipts for the first quarter were only sixty-five cents, which stand in marked contrast with the receipts for a similar period for a post office today. This post office was an important factor in the rapid settlement of this part of the county. It also helped to create the rural village of Settlement which was a thriving business section until 1909 when the first railroad was built and to establish Shirley. The growth of postal receipts was heavy in 1918. J. E. Eaton was appointed postmaster at Shirley and served for two years and nine months. During that time \$65,000 passed through the office.³⁵

Dr. Thomas H. Jones established the post office at Scotland about 1892.³⁶

About the year 1890 Asa Robertson, who had secured a pension with back pay as a Union soldier, established a little store near a big spring where is now Formosa. He circulated a petition for the establishment of a post office. He suggested the name of Spring City. The Federal Post Office Department objected to the name for the reason that at that time the Star Route from Clinton to Plummerville had the Springfield Post Office to serve. It was feared that there would be confusion in the mails due to the similarity in

³⁵J. E. Eaton, Interview, August 17, 1947.

³⁶W. E. Halbrook, Interview, June 3, 1948.

names. The Federal Post Office Department suggested the name "Formosa" which appealed to Uncle Asa, and it was thus named.³⁷

The first telephones in Van Buren County were installed in 1907. A man by the name of Rich established a telephone line from Everton, Arkansas, where he lived, to Clinton. The next year he secured liberal donations from the settlers and extended it via Choctaw and Bee Branch. He later sold it to the Grahams, who still own and operate the local telephone system.³⁸

The odd formations of the land have caused geologists to study and make surveys for oil in different parts of the county. There have been many interested people to look over oil possibilities. Greasy Valley, in the southeastern part of the county, got its name from the fact that there is a greasy scum on most of the many springs and water holes in the valley. Efforts to bring in oil have been made but have been unsuccessful. An oil test well was put down near Scotland in 1924 by a local company. It was said to be a dry hole. In the 1920's one was started at Bee Branch, but the depression of 1929 came and the well was never completed. This one was promoted by Dr. James Martin, a native of the county and a resident of Bee Branch. In the fall of 1944 an oil test well was put down one mile north of Morganton. It was sponsored by the Lion Oil Company. Drilling continued for forty-three thousand feet, but it, too, was reported to be only a dry hole and was abandoned.

³⁷W. E. Halbrook, Interview, June 3, 1948.

³⁸R. C. Thomas and W. E. Halbrook, Interview together, June 3, 1948.

A. J. McCollum of Ripley County, Tennessee, organized the first bank in the county in 1900. It had a capital of \$5,000, and the deposits two years later ran between \$25,000 and \$26,00.³⁹ The Clinton Bank closed during the depression and did not reopen. There were small banks at Shirley and Scotland, but they passed out of existence with the depression. A branch bank of the Clbourne County Bank was maintained in Clinton for a number of years following the depression.

Early in the year 1947 a bank was organized at Clinton with \$50,000 capital. July 1, 1947 the deposits amounted to \$1,162,000.⁴⁰

Although the census report for 1945 shows that only three hundred and sixty-two of the 1,878 farms have electricity, the number is probably double that now.⁴¹ During the past two years materials have been available, and there has been an extensive program underway to provide every farm home with electricity. On the average there is almost a radio per family.⁴² Almost without exception the farm families of Van Buren County enjoy about the same conveniences and luxuries as those found in any other rural section of the country. A spirit of friendliness and hospitality prevails, the equal of which is seldom found to exist anywhere.

³⁹J. W. Hatchett, Interview, August 21, 1947. Mr. Hatchett was county sheriff at that time.

⁴⁰Official Bank statement issued July 1, 1947.

⁴¹United States Census of Agriculture, 1945, Agriculture, 2.

⁴²Ibid.

CHAPTER III

CULTURAL AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

The earliest settlers of Van Buren County came primarily from the eastern and southern states during the first half of the nineteenth century. These states sent some of their distinguished and prosperous citizens to this part of the country. Trappers and adventurers who were the first to come to Arkansas went back to their homes with favorable reports of the new land. With their relatives and friends they returned to settle Arkansas. Among the first settlers may be mentioned the Boones, Bradfords, Bradleys, Davises, Faulkersons, Graves, Harrisons, Hatchetts, Hules, Hunters, Jennings, Lays, Martins, McAlisters, Pattersons, Rhodes, Rowletts, Stobaughs, and Turneys.¹ They braved many dangers while on their trek to their new homes. When these people decided to move they usually disposed of land and everything but clothing, bedding, guns, cooking utensils, and such implements as would be needed in felling the forests and tilling the soil of the new country. There were no roads through the wilderness of trees and underbrush, and the pioneer, with compass and ax, rode horseback ahead of his train of wagons and blazed the trail. They were often compelled to camp for days

¹The result of a series of interviews:

D. B. Cellums, June 5, 1948; Charley Culpepper, August 21, 1947; Garner Fraser, August 21, 1947; J. W. Hatchett, August 21, 1947; Dr. R. M. Hunter, June 1, 1948; Pete Pate, August 22, 1947; and R. C. Thomas, August 23, 1947.

on the bank of some swollen stream waiting for the water to subside so they could pass. After a desired location had been reached settlements were usually made near a spring or along a river.

The cultural and social development of a new country are so contemporaneous, so interlocked, and so interdependent that they can conveniently be treated under one heading.

The first settlers lived a life that did not demand a formal education. Moreover, they were so few in numbers and so scattered that educational institutions of any kind were out of the question. It was only in the 1850's that schools became a part of the intellectual life of the county. Often permanent settlers came in parties, bringing the teacher and preacher with them. Frequently the two were the same.

School buildings, like all early buildings, were of hewn logs with the cracks left open in the summer for ventilation and daubed with mud in the winter to keep out the cold. Almost without exception, the typical school buildings were one room affairs with puncheon floor, benches, and writing desks. Puncheons were made from logs, split open and hewn smooth on the split side. In making seats of this type, two holes were bored with a large auger in each end of the split log and into these pegs were driven legs. Writing desks were made of extra wide puncheons laid on long pegs driven into the wall. Schools have evolved from this type to modern structures. With a population of 1,518 in 1840, there were four primary or common schools with a total of ninety-five pupils. Of the whole population in 1840 there were one hundred and fifty-four white

persons twenty years of age who could not read and write.²

One of the earliest schools in the county was at Bloomington, the first county seat, which no longer exists. Established in the 1850's it was a subscription school. Subscription rates in the early schools were usually on a flat one dollar per month basis, payable in money or almost anything that the people had to spare, such as eggs, chickens, or anything the teacher could either use or sell or exchange. There were no required qualifications for teachers then. Anyone with sufficient knowledge could teach the "three R's," which made up the curriculum of the pioneer school.³

Captain James H. Fraser taught the first school in the Scotland vicinity, so far as is known. Opened in the year 1870, the school was on a tuition basis, and the teacher just "boarded 'round" with the parents of the pupils. The log house was at the present site of the Foster Cemetery, and was known as the Sway Back School.⁴

In the annual report of the Circuit Superintendent of the Fourth Judicial District of which Van Buren County was a part is an interesting letter which shows the efforts made to get schools started:

In Van Buren County, November 14, 1870, there are 2,277 persons between the ages of five and twenty-one years. Out of this number, there are some in new districts that were not organized sufficiently soon for school this year. A few are in

²Compendium of the Enumeration of the Inhabitants and Statistics of the United States, Population, Wealth, and Resources of the County (Washington: Thomas Allen, 1841), 323.

³R. C. Thomas, Interview, June 2, 1948.

⁴W. E. Halbrook, Interview, June 1, 1948. Mr. Halbrook has been a leader in educational circles in both the county and the state, and he is recognized as an authority on the subject of schools.

attendance at private schools; some are so scattered among the mountains that they are out of reach of all schools; others are kept at home by parents opposed to popular education, and there are still other parents opposed to any education at all.

Our school law is so formed that it is left optional with the people whether they organize in school districts or not, but after they are once organized, the Superintendent can have schools in spite of all opposition. For this reason I have devoted much of my time to the work of organization which, with perhaps the exception of Van Buren County, is quite complete.⁵

There were three school buildings erected before 1869 with a value of one hundred and fifty dollars for all. Five were erected during that year with the same value. Then in 1870 there were twelve with a value of two thousand and five hundred dollars.⁶ For the year 1873 there were twenty-five teachers employed in the county and six hundred and fifty-nine pupils enrolled. The total salary of the teachers for the year was \$1,921.25.⁷

Among the first school teachers in the county was Hodge Rayburn. In 1874 Rayburn came to Arkansas from Georgia. He lived the remainder of his life in the community of Liberty Springs, some eight miles west of the present town of Scotland. During this time he taught grade school at Liberty Springs.⁸

Miss Sarah Woolverton, mother of W. E. Halbrook, who was later a leading educator of the county and state, finished a term of school begun by a young man teacher in the 1870's. The school was

⁵Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction for the Two Years Ending September 30, 1870 (Little Rock: State Department of Education), 65.

⁶Ibid., 49.

⁷Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, for the Year Ending September 30, 1873 (Little Rock: Little Rock Printing and Publishing Company, Printers, 1874), 64.

⁸W. E. Halbrook, Interview, June 3, 1948.

a log house, standing about three hundred yards west of Mrs. Doll Fain's, near South Side. She boarded with Nathaniel Geer, county examiner and the first elected one of the county. This was School District No. 2 of the county. The school built later, in 1874, by the district was known as Steele's Chapel. This was probably the first school in Greasy Valley.⁹

The standard books used until about 1890 were McGuffey's Reader, Webster's Blue Back Speller, and Ray's Third Part Arithmetic. A graded school was unknown during these earlier years. There was no promotion from one grade to another. The ability to spell certain words or perform certain operations in arithmetic determined the educational achievement of the pupil and the right to pursue advanced work.¹⁰

Usually there were from two to three months of school in summer. Until about 1885, when stoves came into general use, schools that maintained winter terms had huge fireplaces on one side. After that time, it was not uncommon for three-month terms to be held in winter, thus making a total of five or six months a year of schooling.

Dr. R. M. Hunter of Choctaw told the writer that an early school was located one mile west of the present site of Clinton at Gum Springs. The date of its existence could not be found. The teacher taught for "one chicken per pupil", with the idea of going into the poultry business. But the undertaking was a failure when

⁹W. E. Halbrook, Interview, June 3, 1948.

¹⁰R. C. Thomas, Interview, December 30, 1947.

all but one boy took roosters.¹¹

Much interest was manifested in the early schools of the county, as indicated in the report of the county examiner in 1882:

The public school interest in Van Buren County has been steadily increasing during the past two years. We find a larger attendance in the public school reported. The special school tax is carried by larger majorities.

We are gratified at the fact that the people are beginning to realize the importance of education, and are doing all they can for the prosperity of the free-school system. They are becoming tired of "cheap" teachers, and most of them want first class teachers--teachers whom they know to be competent to fill the positions to which they aspire.

The directors are doing more for the schools this year than ever before, yet some are still negligent in making their reports as explicit as they could, or should do.¹²

The Clinton Male and Female Academy was organized about 1880 by a number of local citizens which included the following trustees or owners: Dr. S. B. Thornburg, James H. Fraser, J. W. Pate, Hartwell Greeson, and Zack Thompson. In 1902 the Clinton School Board leased the building from the stock holders for a period of three years and reroofed it. In 1903 the building burned, but, with the insurance that was collected, it was rebuilt. Then the property was deeded to the school district and became known as the Clinton High School. For some time it was the only high school within a radius of fifty miles, and for that reason there were many boarding students who came not only from that county but from four or five adjoining ones. D. L. Petty, W. D. Carroll, and T. L. Cox were the earliest principals. Classes in reading, writing, arithmetic,

¹¹Dr. R. M. Hunter, Interview, June 3, 1948.

¹²Report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction of the State of Arkansas for the Year Ending June 30, 1882 (Little Rock: Mitchell and Bettis, State Printers, 1882), 121.

spelling, grammar, physiology, and sometimes history and geography were taught.¹³

The Eglantine Academy, located at Old Eglantine, about ten miles east of Clinton on the Little Red River, was in operation from 1892 to 1896. This was a three teacher school with D. C. Sibley as principal. The building burned and the school was discontinued. Dr. Henry Huie, prominent doctor of the county for many years, attended school there.¹⁴

One of the earliest accredited schools of the county was the Choctaw High School established about 1900 with W. E. Halbrook as principal. It was a boarding school and was recognized by leading educators of the state as being one of good standing. Continuing for more than thirty years, it was attended by a majority of the high school students of the county during that period. During the 1930's, when the state put into effect an extended reorganization and consolidation program, the district was consolidated with Clinton. Since that time only a grade school has been maintained at Choctaw.

In 1892 the Scotland Academy was founded by H. H. Allen. For the next four years this school turned out many of the leading teachers for the rural schools of the county. In 1896 the building burned and was not rebuilt. Leading citizens of that community, including Frank Hawkins, Perry Dean, and Andy Jones, got their schooling there. Summer normals for teachers, lasting sometimes for as

¹³Garner Fraser, Interview, August 20, 1947.

¹⁴R. C. Thomas, Interview, December 31, 1947.

long as thirty days, were held there.¹⁵

The State Vocational Training School, located at Clinton, the county seat, was provided for by Act 145 of the 1927 General Assembly.¹⁶ The act provided that the state be divided into four districts, with two schools in each district. It placed Van Buren County in the First District. The schools had to be located at least twenty miles from any established, rated high school. Communities that were interested were required to bid for the location of a school. Clinton offered to construct the main building and to furnish the ninety acre tract of land on which the school is now located. Only two schools have been established, Clinton and Huntsville. Anyone who is eligible to attend high school may attend the State Vocational School. The work done by the school at present is pretty much the same work that is sponsored by other high schools of the state, with special emphasis being placed on the vocational side. This is true because of lack of funds to expand into broader fields. The school gets its support from the appropriation made by the General Assembly. Students are transported from as far distant as twenty-five miles. Many different methods are employed to secure transportation for the isolated students in the northwestern part of the county. Although the school owns four busses, private cars and local busses of the communities from which the pupils are transported are also used. This is the most modernly

¹⁵D. B. Collums, Interview, June 5, 1948.

¹⁶Acts of Arkansas for the Year 1927 (Little Rock: Parke-Harper Publishing Company, 1927), Act 145.

equipped school in the county. Equipped for and used by citizens of the community and adjoining ones, it has a modern hatchery, canning kitchen, and school farm stocked with purebred hogs and cattle. At present an educational program for veterans is in operation. Classes in business mathematics, salesmanship, automobile mechanics, agriculture, and public speaking are held under the direction of trained teachers. Senior home economics students at Arkansas State Teachers College, Conway, Arkansas, under the direction of the local home economics teacher and supervisor of the college, do practice teaching in that field there. Students get much varied experience in real life situations, because the period of training lasts for six or nine weeks.¹⁷

The only institution of higher learning ever to be established in the county was Quitman College. Quitman, now in Cleburne County, was a part of Van Buren County until 1883. The college was founded by Reverend G. W. Stewart in 1870. The following year it was turned over to the Arkansas Methodist Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. The college was first conducted in a small frame house located on the site of the present Quitman Methodist Church. Later a large commodious building was constructed, and during the last years of its existence a brick building was provided.¹⁸ For many years it had a successful career and educated many outstanding men. In erecting the last building the college had an experience

¹⁷Sidney B. Walker, Superintendent of the State Vocational Training School, Clinton, Interviews, August 22, 1947 and June 3, 1948.

¹⁸D. B. Collums, Interview, June 5, 1948.

common in educational history—a mortgage was executed, foreclosure proceedings followed, the building fell into private hands, and in 1896 the college passed out of existence. Among the presidents were Peter A. Moses, J. A. Peebles, Jerome Haralson, Sidney H. Babcock, O. H. Tucker, and Frank Barrett.

The minutes of the trustees of the Quitman College from 1895 to 1898 were for many years in the possession of William T. Hancock of Quitman. The records prior to that date seem to have been lost. No complete file of the catalog can be found, but isolated copies can be located here and there. The records of the Arkansas Conference during the last quarter of the century throw light upon the relation of the church to the college.¹⁹

Many prominent ministers went out from this college. Probably the most outstanding one was J. M. Cantrell, later district superintendent, who left the state during the early part of this century and went to Oklahoma.

At the present time there are thirty-five school districts and 2,494 school pupils in the county. Of these only fifty-two are colored. Twenty-nine districts have no high schools or junior high schools, but the pupils are transported to the high schools of the county which are located at Clinton, Shirley, South Side, Scotland, and Formosa. Many more educational advantages are afforded under this plan than if each community had a high school. A larger

¹⁹Publication of the Arkansas Historical Association (Fayetteville: John Hugh Reynolds, 1906), I, 148.

²⁰Records of the Van Buren County Supervisor, Clinton, Arkansas.

percentage of the high school graduates attend college than in most of the hill counties.

People from this county who have been leaders in education are Dr. Maud Carmachiel, professor of economics at Arkansas State Teachers College, Conway, Arkansas; Marvin Hatchett, professor of biological science at North Eastern State Teachers College, Ada, Oklahoma; W. E. Halbrook, teacher in the high schools of the county for a number of years and for some time connected with the State Department of Education in Arkansas; and J. S. Williams, for a number of years a leader in school administration in Arkansas. All are either still active or have been until recent years.

The closing decades of the last century witnessed the rise of a number of newspapers in the county. Most of them were short lived. The Clinton Banner was one of the first newspapers in the state. Started in 1880 by E. C. Johnson, it was a weekly publication of news and politics. The subscription rate was \$1.50 per year.²¹ It was discontinued in July, 1882. The latter part of that year it was revived by A. W. Rison, but it survived only a few weeks. The property was sold to E. C. Johnson who in turn sold it in 1883 to a Mr. Fraser. In that same year Johnson commenced the publication of the True Democrat at Little Rock. Then came the Clinton Home Talk, started in 1884 by a Mr. Simpson and a Mr. Lawhorn. Shortly thereafter Mr. Lawhorn became sole owner but during that summer sold to H. H. Fieldings. Fieldings soon moved the plant to Harrison, together with the material which he had also purchased.

²¹Miscellaneous Documents of the House of Representatives, 1882-1883 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1884), 204.

The Labourer's Guide commenced publication at Clinton in 1885, with J. W. Mallett as editor. He used the material bought from the suspended Morrilton Republican. A Mr. Burnett and a Mr. Bradley bought the paper from him, but they were succeeded by J. N. Wolff in 1886. The Clinton Democrat was launched in about 1887. J. F. Bradley, one of the owners, sold his interest to J. W. Allen in 1888. Perry C. Bennett, who succeeded to the property, sold it to S. A. Myover February 1, 1891. He continued it for almost ten years.

The present paper, the Van Buren County Democrat, was established April, 1909, by J. F. Fraser. C. B. Oldham joined him as co-partner in May, 1910, and Mr. Fraser retired January 1, 1911. Since that time Mr. Oldham has been sole proprietor, with the exception of a few months when C. B. and H. C. Couch were its publishers.²² About the year 1940 a newspaper man from the North came to Clinton and established a newspaper, the Clinton News, but he continued in business only a few months. The Van Buren County Democrat had such a large circulation that a second newspaper could not financially compete with the long established one. The Log Cabin Democrat, a prominent newspaper of Conway, Arkansas, now owns the Van Buren County Democrat and has charge of publication the last few years. The Boomerang, of Bee Branch, was started by R. E. Bullerson, in May, 1892, but it was discontinued within a short time and was never revived. The Clinton Journal was launched by

²²Fred W. Allsopp, History of the Arkansas Press for a Hundred Years or More (Little Rock: Parke-Harper Publishing Company, 1922), 457-458.

S. A. Myover and J. A. Pate in the summer of 1901, but it did not long survive.²³

There were many difficulties which confronted the early newspapers. Lack of advertising and other patronage were two of the most serious handicaps. There was also a shortage of paper and other materials. Lack of education and professional training were also handicaps. During the period of the earliest newspapers the circulation was seldom more than a few hundred. Today a big majority of the families in the county take the county paper, Van Buren County Democrat, along with daily state papers and weekly and monthly periodicals.

Sparsely scattered over a wide extent of the county, the early settlers could not enjoy all the advantages and conveniences of an older and more densely populated county. Still they did not neglect the moral training of the people. There was never a lack of religious fervor among the pioneers. Scarcely had they become well settled in their new homes than they began to think of a place to worship. At first meetings were held in the home. A little later they were held in log churches in the woods. The church, no matter what faith, was a place to worship. Some years later, probably in the 1870's, the first frame churches were built. The Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, and Christian missionaries early made their advent into this county. Their labors bore abundant fruits in molding, elevating, and giving tone to the moral sentiments of the people.²⁴

²³Ibid.

²⁴Charley Culpepper, Interview, August 22, 1947.

Even after the building of church houses, services were often held during the summer in brush arbors. Revivals lasted for two or three weeks, depending upon interest. Religious fervor ran high and there was much shouting. Distance was no obstacle to attendance. Devout believers often walked seven or eight miles to church. It was not uncommon for wagon loads of people to go ten miles. Of course all the children went to sleep. Special pallets were provided for them on the beds of the wagons. The howling and barking of dogs were common distractions. Before lamps came into general use, fire made from pine knots were used for light in the arbors. First scaffolds of logs and dirt and then the pine knots were put on top of them. In the buildings the candles were used. Some of the laymen usually looked after the fires and kept the candles in readiness.²⁵

The religious field, in particular, has been neglected by students of local history. To trace the organization and growth of churches and to portray statistically the numerical and financial strength of denominational bodies is impossible. The church history has remained to a large degree the province of the denominational historian. Important are the ethical, religious ideals, the willingness to sacrifice, the will to live, all the intangible elements that determine the morale of the people.

The very earliest churches of the county were interdenominational. They were located at Bloomington, Clinton, Greasy Valley,

²⁵R. C. Thomas, Interview, June 1, 1949.

and Upper Choctaw.²⁶

The Methodists established the Spring River Circuit in northeast Arkansas as early as 1815 and placed Reverend Eli Lindsey in charge. This was the first movement toward the establishment of the Methodist Church in what is now the state of Arkansas. The circuit was supplied before the end of the year, and Reverend Lindsey was in charge. He attended the log-rollings, house-raising, and frolics and after the labors and festivities were over would ask permission to say a "few words". Then he would preach a sermon and invite those present to attend regular services at his next appointment. His circuit extended from the Little Red River northward to the Missouri state line. There were no church buildings and he would preach wherever he could find a suitable place. At the close of the year in 1815 he reported a membership of ninety-five in his circuit. It is said that on one occasion while he was preaching some dogs "treed" a bear near the house in which he was conducting services. The Reverend Lindsey paused, listened to the baying of the dogs, and then announced, "This meeting is adjourned in order that the men folks may go out and kill the bear." The bear was soon dispatched, the men returned, and the minister "thanked God for men who could shoot and women who knew how to pray," after which he finished his sermon.²⁷

The life of the circuit rider was an interesting one but one

²⁶Dr. R. M. Hunter and R. C. Thomas, Interviews, June 3, 1948.

²⁷Dallas T. Herndon, Centennial History of Arkansas (Little Rock and Chicago: The S. F. Clarke Publishing Company, 1922), I, 948.

that was certainly full of toil and weariness. Into one side of the saddle bags the minister put his clothes and into the other his Bible and hymn book, and off he went to his appointments. The earliest circuit riders sometimes had as many as twenty-five appointments centering around one of the larger towns. The minister usually preached both day and night services at a community. Early circuit riders, in addition to Reverend Eli Lindsey, were John Wesley Bowden, Baldly Hicks, J. S. Tarlton, John Williams, and Frank Thomas.²⁸ The latter continued as a circuit rider for only a year or two. He became a local preacher. For forty years he was one of the leading ministers in the county.²⁹

The principal Methodist Churches were located at Clinton, Morganton, and Scotland. The outstanding preachers were Reverend Whitenberg, George A. Danley, J. W. Bowden, Frank Thomas, Haywood Hatchett, and W. W. Wood. From a religious standpoint probably the most prominent man of the county was Reverend Wood, who ministered in the county between 1900 and 1947. He was so completely a part of the moral and religious life of the county that there is doubt that the county ever produced a higher type of Christian gentleman who unselfishly rendered more service to the church than did he. He was also an old-fashioned circuit rider for a number of years.

At the present site of the Foster Cemetery was organized a Missionary Baptist Church about 1874. A year later it was moved to

²⁸Pete Pate, Interview, August 21, 1947.

²⁹Mrs. A. E. Thomas, widow of Reverend Frank Thomas, Interview, June 3, 1948.

a new house known as Antioch about two miles west of Scotland. Thomas Nutt was the pastor. The church was moved to Scotland about 1915. Dr. Thomas J. Jones of Scotland, who for years was the leading physician of the Scotland community, was a staunch supporter of the church.³⁰ The Shirley Baptist Church was organized in 1876. It still exists and has a membership of one hundred and fifty. Lexington Baptist Church was organized in 1919 and now has about sixty members. In 1925 the Bee Branch Church was organized, and during the following year Formosa was organized. The Baptist Churches of the county are in the Stone-Van Buren Association.³¹ Leading Baptist preachers have been J. M. Stracener, H. H. Russell, Reverend Denny, Joe Starks, T. C. Ford, Claude Jenkins, and Frank Sims.

A Christian Church was organized at Liberty Springs about 1873. A Dr. Saylor was the first preacher. A Christian Church was also located on Choctaw Creek about this time. Leading Christian ministers were Dr. Snowden, Reverend Watson, and Joe Bradford. There are several Christian churches in the county.

The Methodist, Baptist, and Churches of Christ are the principal churches found in the county today. The following is a record of the church membership according to denomination for the year 1936:

³⁰W. E. Halbrook, Interview, June 3, 1948.

³¹J. E. Rogers to author, April 15, 1948. Mr. Rogers, an educator, is the official historian of the Arkansas Baptist Church. He is writing a history of the Arkansas Baptist Church at present.

Assemblies of God, General Council	50
Southern Baptist	258
Negro Baptist	79
American Baptist Association	273
Churches of Christ	289
Methodist Episcopal Church, South	718
All others	418 ³¹

The social aspects of early pioneer life are also of interest.

The pioneers of the county had much difficulty in providing homes for their families. Wagons were used for shelter until the new homes could be built. Soon the forest was cleared and the trees were converted into log cabins. Boards were split, and a crude mortar was made for the "stick and dirt" chimney. Logs were skinned and dried if the house was to be of round logs. If there were neighbors they were always ready to help "raise" the house and even cover it. The houses were usually of the "saddlebag" shape, that is, one or two rooms on each side of a wide hall. A broad porch, which ran the full length of the two rooms and hall, was built on the front and a low porch to the back of the rooms. The kitchen never formed a part of these homes, but was built apart from the house so as to be safe from fire. The openings between the lots were "chinked" with mud. A broad open fireplace, that would hold logs three or four feet long, was built in each room.

Log-rollings not only afforded a chance to get some much needed work done, but they were times for fun and enjoyment. The land was cleared, and then the big logs were carried to heaps of burning fires. The women prepared the dinner for the working men. Sometimes as long as two hours were used for the meal. Usually the

³¹Census of Religious Bodies (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1941), I, 722-725.

day's work was followed by a supper at evening and then a frolic which consisted of playing of games and dancing. A jug of whiskey was usually on hand to quench the thirst of the workers and the merry makers. At these dances there were no sheets of music mounted in front of the musicians. They played by ear such songs as "Run Nigger Run" and "Turkey in the Straw".

The old-fashioned candy making or candy-pulling was a frequent means of recreation. After the molasses candy was made, the entire crowd of boys and girls joined in the fun of pulling and twisting the candy. This was followed by biting of candy by couples, a boy and a girl.

Camp meetings were great social gatherings as well as religious occasions. Whole families went, taking their camping outfits, and camped for a week or more around the big spring that was always a prime requisite for the location of a permanent camp ground. Preaching was but part of the activities of such a gathering. The opportunity that was given for social intercourse was among the most important aspects of the camp meeting.

Many settlers can recall the shooting matches, when men met to try their skill with a rifle. The prize was often a quarter of beef. There were five quarters to a beef, the hide and tallow being the fifth prize. Sometimes the match was for money, each marksman putting in "two bits" and the man making the best score took the purse. Matches of this kind did not arouse as much interest as those where the shooting was done for prizes, and were not so well attended. Matches were held in which the contestants shot at a turkey or a mark. Prizes were given the winner. If shooting at a spot

er a mark on a tree the winner got all the lead (bullets) in the tree, but if shooting at a turkey, the winner got the turkey.

In the days of rapid transit one wonders how news ever reached the widely scattered settlements, but somehow the news that there was going to be a barbecue to which everyone was invited soon reached the remotest cabins, not only in the county but often in adjoining counties. The day selected for the occasion was usually the Fourth of July. There were numerous preparations which had to be made for the big event. Long trenches were dug for the barbecuing. The ground was cleared; trees were cut down for seats. Hunters would usually spend the day before the barbecue in the woods killing deer, bear, and wild turkey for the feast. Beoves and hogs were also killed. The trenches were filled with hickory wood and burned all night. People came from miles around for the barbecue. Early on the morning of the momentous day wagons loaded with women and children and with baskets filled with pies, cakes, breads, and other "goodies" that the pioneer wife knew so well how to prepare began to arrive. The sports of the day were shooting at marks with rifles and shot guns, running races, throwing knives, and other exhibitions of skill. The children played ball and marbles. The excellent dinner, the wine, and the good cheer generally put all in a good humor.

The one-room log school house, which typified rural common-school education for most of the nineteenth century, was also the community center. Here church services and sometimes such favorite social gatherings as ciphering, matching, and spelling bees were held. The spelling bees were enjoyed by both the old and the young.

Webster's Blue Back Speller was commonly used. The length and difficulty of the words depended upon the age and size of the contestant. In ciphering Ray's Third Part Arithmetic was used. It was considered a great feat to be the champion speller or cipherer of the community.

Swimming has always been a favorite sport of the younger generation, especially the boys. Little Red River; Archey Creek; Bluff Hole, near Damascus; and Round Hole, near Morganton, are the most commonly used swimming holes.

Hunting has for a long time been a popular sport for men of the county. Rabbit-hunting, squirrel-hunting, and quail-hunting are favorite pastimes for many, but fox-hunting still appeals to some. Several still have their hounds and make the annual fox-huntings near Heber Springs in Cleburne County. Some even go to other counties for fox hunts. Good hounds are considered very valuable by followers of fox hunting.

In more recent years the motion picture has attracted the youth away from earlier sources of entertainment. In every community local talent presents annual plays in which the high school students get training. Every community has its baseball, softball, and basketball teams and clubs which engage in games with other communities. Recreation and entertainment in Van Buren County today is very similar to those found in other parts of the state or in other states.

Furnishings for the early homes were very few. Usually a dining table, split bottom chairs, beds, and a cedar chest were the only household furnishings. The bedsteads were the most unique of

all the pioneer furniture. They were made with only one leg which supported one end of the side and foot boards while the other ends were inserted in auger holes in the walls. Boards were laid across or ropes were woven into the straw mattress, and this completed the pioneer bed. Today one would think this very uninviting, but when the plump feather mattresses were added it was quite comfortable.³²

The early settlers hunted and fished for their food. Meat was an important part of the staple diet which consisted of bread, pork meat, sorghum molasses, milk, and butter. During the first few years, much of the meat was "wild meat" secured by hunting in the forest. Game was plentiful in forests. The hunter could find deer, coon, 'possum, fox, rabbit, and squirrel in abundance to augment his supply of food. He could also sell the hides and in this way increase his slender cash resources. If he was fond of fishing, he might have the choice of a cat, perch, or trout, and, if he desired it, he could have "turtle soup". Meat was much easier to obtain than bread until sufficient time elapsed to enable the settler to clear the ground and plant and harvest a crop. One who provided ample supply of food for his family was considered a good provider.³³

Cotton and wool clothes were made by hand in the home with all members of the family working together. The cotton was picked, separated from the seed by hand, spun into thread on the old-fashioned

³²Mrs. A. E. Thomas, Interview, June 4, 1948.

³³This information is the result of a number of interviews: Mrs. A. E. Thomas, June 2, 1948; R. C. Thomas, June 2, 1948. R. M. Hunter, June 3, 1948; Charley Culpepper, August 21, 1947; Pete Pate, August 21, 1947.

spinning wheel, woven into cloth on the hand loom, and then made into garments for the members of the family. Occasionally one sees "homespun" material in the county at the present time. It was not uncommon in pioneer days for a man to be grown and even married before he got his first ready-made suit, and certainly he was grown before he had one made of material that was not homespun. Shoes were also made in the home. Cow and deer hides were first tanned and then made into shoes, however, the deer hides were used mostly for strings. Caps were made of coon skins and fox hides. Farmers made their bridles, whips, and saddles. Candles, which were the chief source of artificial light, were made of beef tallow in the candle molds. Some of the molds have been preserved and may still be seen at some of the old landmarks of the county, along with other relics of the nineteenth century.³⁴

³⁴R. C. Thomas and Dr. R. M. Hunter, Interviews, both June 3, 1948.

CHAPTER IV

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

When Van Buren County was created in 1833, it was directed that the temporary seat of justice should be at the house of Obadiah Marsh until the county seat should be selected. At Marsh's home the first county officials were selected. They included J. S. Lafferty, judge; P. O. Powell, clerk; N. Daughtery, sheriff; L. Williams, surveyor; and Philip Nail, coroner.¹ They served until the first county election was held, and then they were elected. Judge Lafferty was the county's delegate to the state convention in 1836.²

The first county court house was built at Bloomington in 1836. After the removal of the county seat to Clinton in 1844, a court house was erected there. The present court house, a two-story, native stone building, was built in 1936. The town has been built around the court house, but in recent years the town has been expanding westward. Several business establishments and office buildings are built away from the "court square".

The county was first divided into the following townships:

¹Biennial Report of the Secretary of State of the State of Arkansas, B. B. Chism, Secretary of State (Little Rock: Press Printing Company, 1893), 174.

²Dallas T. Herndon, Centennial History of Arkansas (Little Rock and Chicago: The S. T. Clarke Publishing Company, 1922), I, 228.

Cadion, Craig, Davis, Giles, Griggs, Hartsugg, Holly, Liberty, Mountain, Peter Creek, Piney, Red River, Sugar Leaf, Turkey Creek, Union, Valley and Washington.³ Gradually new townships were formed. Some were taken from other townships and some from other counties. In 1880 Giles, Mountain, Peter Creek, Piney, Sugar Leaf, and Valley townships and part of Cadion township were taken to form Cleburne County.⁴ The townships of Cargile, Choctaw, Cleveland, Culpepper, and Sulphur Springs were formed in 1890.⁵ Then in 1906 Barnett township was organized from part of Bradley, and in the same year Bloodworth was formed from part of Union.⁶ Today the county consists of twenty-three townships, some of which have the same names and areas as the original ones.⁷

The jurisdiction over business affairs of the county is vested in the county courts by authority of the constitution of 1874. It delegates to the court exclusive original jurisdiction in all matters relating to county taxes, roads, bridges, ferries, paupers, and the apprenticeship of minors, and in every other case affecting the internal improvements of the county.⁸ It is authorized to

³Ninth Congress of the United States, 1870 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1872), 124.

⁴Eleventh Census of the United States, 1890 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1895), 68.

⁵Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1902), 74.

⁶Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1913), 106.

⁷Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1943), I, 479.

⁸Constitution of Arkansas, 1874, Art. VII, sec. 28.

build, rebuild, and repair courthouses, jails, hospitals, and other buildings and improvements for the county welfare.⁹ Also it supervises eleemosynary and penal institutions, contracts for the services of the inmates of the prisons, and prescribes rules and regulations governing the conduct and welfare of the inmates of both institutions.

The judicial power of Van Buren County is vested in the circuit, chancery, probate, and the justice of peace courts.¹⁰ The supreme court of state has appellate and supervisory jurisdiction over all the lower courts. The circuit court has jurisdiction in all civil and criminal cases where exclusive jurisdiction is not vested in some other court provided by the constitution. It has appellate jurisdiction and supervisory control over the county court and justice of peace courts.¹¹ In 1903 the chancery courts were established in every county in Arkansas. These courts were vested with exclusive jurisdiction in all matters of equity. The chancery judge is the presiding magistrate of the probate court and determines all probate matters. Appeals are taken directly to the supreme court of the state. The chancery court exercises a limited jurisdiction in civil matters. Justice of peace courts have original jurisdiction in all matters of contract and damage to personal property when the amount of controversy does not exceed \$100, and concurrent jurisdiction with the circuit court in

⁹Ibid., Amendment XVII, secs. 106.

¹⁰Ibid., Art. VII, sec. 1.

¹¹Ibid., Art. VII, secs. 11, 14.

similar matters when the controversy does not exceed the sum of \$300. In felony cases, justices of peace are authorized to sit as examining courts and commit, discharge, or recognize offenders to the court having jurisdiction for further trial.¹² Van Buren County was first in the Sixth Judicial Circuit with Lonoke, Pulaski, Faulkner, and Cleburne. Court was held the third Monday in February and the third Monday in August. Today it is in the Fourteenth Circuit. Other counties in this circuit are Cleburne, Searcy, Boone, Newton, and Marion. The circuit judge is elected for a term of four years. Two terms of court are held in the county seat of each county every year, beginning the first Monday in January and the first Monday in July. Some recent circuit judges have been J. M. Shinn, Jack Holt, Jesse Koone, and Garner Fraser. The last two named are natives of the county, and their decisions have seldom been questioned.¹³

Trial by jury is the constitutional right of all persons charged with criminal offense.¹⁴ The grand jury is usually called into session at each term of circuit court to investigate criminal cases brought before it, and to probe into the official conduct and records of public officials and institutions. It may return indictments and recommend reforms, providing there is compliance with existing laws. After an indictment has been returned by the jury or an information filed by the prosecuting attorney the

¹²Ibid., Art. VII, sec. 40.

¹³Result of a series of inquiries sent out asking for opinions on prominent men of the county.

¹⁴Constitution of Arkansas, 1874, Art., II, sec. 7.

accused is brought to trial by a petit jury.

The finances of the county are handled by a definite correlation of activities of several county officials. The assessor evaluates the properties.¹⁵ The amount of the county levy is set by quorum court which also makes appropriations for the expenses of the county.¹⁶ The county clerk computes the amount of taxes accrued against each item of real and personal property listed on the assessment books. He is the clearing agent as the records pass from officer to officer. The sheriff collects the taxes. The treasurer is the custodian of the funds of the county, township, and school districts. All claims against the county are examined by the county court in proceedings conducted by the county judge before they are approved for payment and the county clerk is directed to issue a warrant, to be paid by the treasurer. Both officers keep a warrant register, upon which they enter a descriptive record of every warrant issued and paid. The county court, through its recording officer, the county clerk, keeps a record of each appropriation, the warrants drawn against, and the balance remaining in each fund. After all transactions have been made by the various officers and records have been completed, they are returned to the clerk to be preserved as a permanent record. The State Comptroller is authorized to employ one chief accountant and other assistants to make an annual audit of the books and accounts of all county and township officials.

¹⁵Ibid., Art. VIII, sec. 46.

¹⁶Ibid., Art. VII, sec. 30.

The earliest courts of Van Buren County were of little importance. The dockets were usually light. Those who had to attend usually went in wagons or carts and camped on the bank of the town branch. Few really serious cases were ever tried in the county. Three men have been convicted of first degree murder. One was hanged at Clinton; one was hanged at Heber Springs, county seat of Cleburne County; and the other was killed by a mob in the county jail when the governor commuted his sentence to life imprisonment. The earliest cases were misdemeanor and civil cases. They never attracted much attention from outside the county.¹⁷

In 1850 Arkansas was divided into two congressional districts with Van Buren County in the First District. Other counties in the district were Benton, Carroll, Conway, Crawford, Crittenden, Franklin, Fulton, Greene, Independence, Izaard, Jackson, Johnson, Lawrence, Madison, Marion, Mississippi, Monroe, Newton, Phillips, Poinsett, Pope, Randolph, St. Francis, Searcy, Washington, and White.¹⁸ In 1861 Arkansas was divided into four districts. Van Buren was still in the second. In 1883 the state was divided into five districts. The Van Buren County was in the Second District. Others were Dorsey, Lincoln, Grant, Jefferson, Arkansas, Monroe, Prairie, Lonoke, Woodruff, White, Faulkner, Conway, Pope, Stone, and Cleburne.¹⁹ Today there are seven districts, and Van Buren is

¹⁷R. C. Thomas, Interview, June 1, 1948. Mr. Thomas witnessed the hanging at Clinton.

¹⁸Herndon, op. cit., 265.

¹⁹W. W. Mansfield, A Digest of the Statutes of Arkansas (Little Rock: Mitchell and Bettis, 1884), p. 578, sec. 2548.

in the Third District. Other counties in this district are Searcy, Baxter, Marion, Boone, Newton, Madison, Carroll, Benton, and Washington. The district has been represented in recent decades by the following men: J. W. Willman, Claud Fuller, Clyde T. Ellis, J. William Fulbright, and J. U. Trimble.²⁰

Law enforcement in Van Buren County has always been strict, especially concerning religious worship and womanhood. Generally speaking, the people are law-abiding and have respect for law. There has been little lawlessness except up in the hills and mountains where "moonshine" has been made for many years.

Van Buren County has always gone overwhelmingly Democratic. Only on three or four occasions have Republicans been elected to county offices, and only two or three Republicans have represented the county in the state legislature. That party usually has some candidates for county offices in the general election. Joab Copeland was a leader of the Republican party for some time following the Civil War. He was referred to as the "Republican Boss."²¹

The carpet baggers ran the government of five or six years after the Civil War. Zachariah B. Jennings did much as a political leader to oust the carpet baggers from power in the county.²² After registration, the Democrats were elected. Before the century ended an agrarian organization known as the Wheel became powerful. It was made up of both Republicans and dissatisfied Democrats.

²⁰D. B. Collins, Interview, June 5, 1948.

²¹R. C. Thomas, Interview, June 2, 1948.

²²J. W. Hatchett, Interview, August 22, 1947.

George Perkins was a leader of the Wheelers, and he held several county offices.

In 1871 the Brooks-Baxter War, between two Republican factions for governor, foisted on the state by congressional reconstruction, forced into the open the many crimes of the Negro-carpenter regime in Arkansas. There were many irregularities in voting in Van Buren County, as well as in other parts of the state. Luke P. Poland, Republican from Vermont, headed a committee from Congress to investigate. Many illegal votes were found in the county.²³ The incident showed the disruption after the war.

This thesis attempts to describe the economic, cultural, social and political development of the county from the formation of the county to the present time. Emphasis has been given to the progress of the county in these various fields. Data were secured from a number of sources, including government and other primary publications, newspapers, interviews, unpublished materials, and other books written about Arkansas.

There has been considerable economic, cultural, social, and political progress in Van Buren County. The economic life of the people of the county has been predominantly agricultural with very few industries. No longer is cotton the main money crop, but a diversification of crops is being practiced. Truck farming and dairying have become important.

The educational progress has been only moderate, due to the

²³D. B. Collins to writer, June 5, 1948. Information was taken from Poland's record of the investigation.

rural character of the county and lack of money and transportation facilities.

Numerous attempts have been made to establish newspapers in the county, but for the most part they have been short-lived. Factors which caused the failures were lack of patronage, shortage of materials, and lack of education and professional training.

There has been progress in the religious training of the county. Churches are maintained in all communities, with the Methodist, Baptist, and Churches of Christ Churches leading in church membership.

The people are supplied today with a greater variety of activities for recreation and entertainment than was true in the early history of the county.

The political growth has kept pace with the schools, churches, and the economic development. The citizens take a great interest in elections. Although the Democrats have a great majority, in a few instances Republicans have been elected, a fact which may be interpreted to mean that the people sometimes vote for the person rather than the party.

The progress of Van Buren County in the future depends largely upon its people, as does any other section of the county. The many new dwellings and business establishments throughout the county are an indication that the people are energetic, ambitious, and rather progressive for a rural section of the state. There are very few people of great wealth, yet there are few who do not have sufficient means to live comfortably. Probably in no part of the country would one find a place where the inhabitants are considered

more nearly equal.

It would appear that Van Buren County is destined to remain agricultural. The most valuable resources of the county are the soil and the timber, and the future progress depends largely on the use of them. With the establishment of factories to preserve truck and dairy products the tendency is to depend more upon truck, dairy and poultry farming.

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Supplies information on agricultural products for the year 1900.

United States Census of Agriculture, 1945. Arkansas, Statistics for Counties. Washington: United States Printing Office, 1946.

Contains the value of farm products for the year 1945.

United States Census of Agriculture, 1945, Van Buren County, Arkansas, Agriculture, Farms, Farm Characteristics, and Value of Farm Products: Censuses of 1945 and 1940. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1946.

Gives comparative information of agricultural products and their prices for the two years.

Other Publications

Mansfield, W. W. A Digest of the Statutes of Arkansas. Little Rock: Mitchell and Bettis, 1884.

Contains facts about the judicial and legislative departments of the county and county taxes for road purposes.

Rand McNally Commercial Atlas and Marketing Guide. Seventy Second Edition. New York, Chicago, and San Francisco, 1941.

Contains maps showing the location of the county and its boundaries.

Unpublished Materials

File Records of the Geological Survey of Arkansas, State Capitol, Little Rock.

Gives names, location, and analysis of springs, and analysis of iron ore in the county.

Records of Clinton Bank, Clinton, Arkansas.

Describes the establishment of present bank, its original capital, and the present deposits.

Records of county clerk of Van Buren County. Office of county clerk, Clinton, Arkansas.

Gives names of present county officials.

Records of Van Buren County Department of Education. Office of County Supervisor, Clinton, Arkansas.

Contains information on schools of the county: number of districts, high schools, and colored enrollment.

Newspapers

Advocate (1835)

Arkansas Democrat (1848)

Arkansas Gazette (1834, 1837, 1840, 1848, 1852, 1868, 1870, 1886, 1889)

Shirley Advocate (1940)

Weekly Gazette (1886)

Newspapers were helpful in giving information about the county and also in verifying information supplied by settlers.

Interviews

August, 1947-1948

On all phases of the early history of Van Buren County interviews with early settlers were of great value. So little has been written about the county that interviews were the only means of securing much of the necessary information.

II. SECONDARY ACCOUNTS

Allsopp, Fred W. History of the Arkansas Free Press for a Hundred Years and More. Little Rock: Parke-Harper Publishing Company, 1922.

Gives information on early and present county newspapers.

Biographical and Historical Memories of Northwest Arkansas. Chicago, Nashville, and St. Louis: The Goodspeed Publishing Company, 1889.

Describes the defining of the county's boundaries in 1853 and again in 1857.

Hempstead, Fay A. A Pictorial History of Arkansas. St. Louis and New York: N. C. Thompson Publishing Company, 1890.

Tells of the formation of the county in 1833 and of the location of the county seat.

Herndon, Dallas T. Centennial History of Arkansas. Little Rock and Chicago: The S. T. Clarke Publishing Company, 1922.

This work gives valuable information about the early circuit riders in Arkansas. It also verifies stories told by the early settlers. In addition, it supplies the name of the county's delegate to the constitutional convention of 1836 and the names of the counties in the early congressional districts.

Inventory of the County Archives of Arkansas. No. 65. Searcy County. Prepared by the Arkansas Historical Records Survey Projects Division of the Professional and Service Projects, Works Project Administration. Little Rock: The Arkansas Historical Records Survey Project, 1940.

Furnished helpful general reading material.

Post Offices in Arkansas. Prepared by the Works Projects Administration, sponsored by Arkansas History Commission. Information obtained from state newspapers, 1940.

Supplied information on earliest postoffices. This was verified in state papers that were examined.

Thomas, David Y. Arkansas and Its People, A History, 1541-1930. New York: The American Historical Society, Inc., 1930.

Contained information on the construction of the railroad.

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