

### **First White Families**

One of the pioneers of Washington County's old Cane Hill settlement recalled the history of that time for an article published in the Fayetteville Democrat more than a century ago. "The first families came to Washington County in 1826," stated the Reverend John Buchanan, "before the Treaty was made giving white people the right to settle in what is now Washington County. There were six families: John Alexander, two McGarrah families, two Simpsons, and one Shannon. Their settlement being a trespass upon the Indians, a command of U. S. soldiers was sent from Fort Gibson to order them off. This was done in August 1826. The settlers had each a small field of corn growing, all of which the dragoons cut down with their swords. After the soldiers returned to the fort, the families gathered up and shocked the green corn and remained at their new homes."

And now, with treaties made, white settlers poured in to establish claims in the new land. Newspapers of the time reported how people were moving "to the flourishing settlements on the headwaters of the Illinois which embrace one of the finest bodies of land in the western country, watered by springs." Among these settlements were Cane Hill and Washington Court House (soon renamed Fayetteville).

The Latta's were scouting the country, too, preparing for their mov to Vineyard.

As the Reverend John Buchanan observed, "The line was established between this county and the Indian country, and the county was settled up rapidly."

### **Cane Hill Settlers**

By comparison with the plebeian canoe of William, "daddy, mammy, and Jack" McGarrah, the advent of the Cane Hill settlers of 1827 and 1828 seems almost aristocratic. Important details of this early settlement were published by the Washington County Historical Society in two bulletins, "The Pyeatt's and the Carnahan's of Old Cane Hill" by the Reverend Alfred E. Carnahan and Susan C. Cruse and "Early Settlers of Cane Hill" by Ellen E. Richardson.

Alfred Carnahan traced the trail of Cane Hill all the way back to a time shortly after the Revolutionary War. "Two men," he stated, "went from Charleston, South Carolina, to 'spy out' the Cumberland country, near or on the line between Kentucky and Tennessee. On returning they organized an emigrant train, with Charleston as the rendezvous. There were 156 wagons in the train. Among the family names were; Buchanan, Carnahan, Pyeatt, Shannon, Billingsley, White, Blair, Newton, Porter, Preston, Rankin, Marrs, and most likely, Morrow, Tennant, Pylant, Garvin, and Maxwell."

Several of these families, including Pyeatts and Carnahans, left Logan county. Only later-when land was deleted from Washington County and given to Benton, Madison, and Carroll Counties-would the McGarrah land is in the northeastern part of the county. As of February 9, 1829, mail to the new county government was being sent to "Washington Court House" (Washington honored the late President and Revolutionary War general), but the name was soon changed to Fayetteville. Fayetteville was probably chosen for a town in Tennessee that had been the home of several of the county's pioneers.

The Cumberland Presbyterians had tremendous influence in the early days of the county. According to Chris Catalfamo-Serio's study. The Effects of the Civil War on Ozark Culture, the reason the denomination "made so much a headway so early, especially in the Cane Hill area, was because the first great clans of settlers that came there, including the Buchanans, were circuit-riding preachers who spread the Cumberland Presbyterian faith throughout the area after establishing it at Cane Hill."

Prior even to the establishment of the county, the Reverend Guilford Pylant and James Buchanan scouted this area ahead of the Cane Hillers of 1827. In 1828 the Cane Hill Cumberland Presbyterian Church was organized with

services held in a log school house. Catalfamo-Serio quotes from a description of the Cane Hill church during the 1850s given by Rosetta Cooper: "By rigid custom the women of the congregation sat on one side, the men on the other. I blush to chronicle the fact that our fathers and brothers . . . did not hesitate to chew tobacco during the service, and the filthy accumulation of much spitting seems now a thing incredible. The pulpit was a queer round boxed up affair. Three ministers could sit with ease inside and only one head and face were visible when seated. When standing, only the breast could be seen above the cushion on which the Bible rested."

### **Justice at Cane Hill, 1839**

"Violence is not pleasant to contemplate" wrote W. J. Lemke in the January 1956 Flashback, "Yet Washington County owes its existence to pioneers who had a stern code and carried both a Bible and a gun, so, when violence came, and murder, the pioneers took it into their own hands, and enforced it even to the end of a rope."

Probably the most noted instance of pioneer justice occurred at Cane Hill. Members of the Wright family had been brutally mutilating and murdered on June 15, 1839. The unbelievable savagery of the crime caused some people to suspect the Indians who lived in the Cherokee Nation only a few miles to the west. A general alarm was raised about an Indian uprising, but when no Indians appeared the minds of the people turned to the finding and punishing the guilty parties. The official enforcement structure was bypassed, Fayetteville was a long journey by horse, and little enforcement was considered too little. Instead, a committee charged with bringing justice to the affair was formed of 36 reputable men in the western section of the county. A company of 100 "light horse" was sent out to scour the country and arrest any suspicious persons. Suspicion finally settled upon a farm laborer and two small farmers. A confession of sorts was obtained, and the three were sentenced to be hung in late July 1839. According to an account written by J. P. Neal, "On the morning of that day about 1,000 people assembled at the scene of the execution. By 10 o'clock, the gallows were surrounded by a mass of surging humanity, white, black and red, all impatient for the exciting event and fearful lest it be postponed. A fervent prayer was offered by the Rev. Andrew Buchanan, and the next instant three writhing forms hung swaying to and fro beneath the gallows tree. "A fourth man was later caught and hanged."

Despite the fact the action was widely supported at the time, in later years it was asserted by some that innocent people had been hanged. According to Neal, "there grew up two distinct parties in Washington County, the one upholding the action of the committee and the other condemning it, and to this day a reference to the Cane Hill tragedy arouses the grey-haired pioneer."

**Happy Hollow** (near Cane Hill): This was the place where black people conducted religious services. The black people of Washington County worshiped here in the years before the civil War, but details are few. Religious meetings were conducted by black people in a locale called Happy Hollow, northeast of Cane Hill, but these seem to date to the post-Civil War era. There were enough black people in the Cane Hill area before the war, however, to suggest there was likely a black congregation there. In 1908 there was a black school, Methodist church, and cemetery on land owned by J. W. Bean on the edge of Lincoln; does this date to Civil War days? Churches where one place black people could exercise freedom during slavery days; it is highly likely that a number of small black congregations existed in those townships where slaves were numerous.

There was a common cemetery at Cane Hill where everyone, black and white, were buried. This seems to have changed sometime after the Plessy V. Ferguson Supreme Court decision of 1896 that legalized "separate but equal" accommodations in public facilities and led to a hardening of racial segregation. Eventually, blacks from Cane Hill, Cincinnati, Summers, and Lincoln were buried in a common cemetery at Lincoln, called the Bean Cemetery. This cemetery is discussed in Flashback, May 1966, p. 32. Dr. Morgan points out that the same processes that caused blacks to abandon Cincinnati were at work in Cane Hill. The black community there declined, with many people moving to Fayetteville. In Fayetteville, black people lived in places in addition to the modern Willow Street

community in the hollow east of the Washington County Courthouse. Prior to 1930 many blacks lived north of North Street and as far north as the 3000 block of North College Avenue. The Willow area probably developed as a black community because of its proximity to the public square and the homes of wealthy white families in what is today the Washington-Willow Historic District. The low-lying land along the stream fed by Big Spring was much more subject to flooding than the higher ground. Its low value made building lots accessible to black people.

**Cane Hill Mill**

On the right branch of the Illinois River, north of the Jordan Creek branch, there was an unnamed mill shown in the survey. Lynch believes this may have been the mill built by Thomas Garvin and later owned by John Truesdale. "This mill was one-quarter mile south and west of Cane Hill, as the survey maps show Cane Hill Settlement approximately a mile and a quarter north of its present site.

The original site of Billingsley Mill, which is commonly remembered as the Cane Hill Mill, is marked with an overshot wheel that is 36 feet in diameter and can still be seen on Jordan Creek along Highway 45 between Cane Hill and Clyde. The survey notes from 1832 calls "Mr. Billingsley's mill...one of the best in the country." According to W. J. Lemke in his November 1961 Flashback article, "The Old Mill at Cane Hill," before the Civil War John R. Pyeatt built a mill north of Cane Hill. Later Pyeatt was joined by William S. Moore. Moore traveled to Cincinnati to purchase new machinery. After Pyeatt's death in 1895, Moore was joined by Walter Buchanan. Around 1902 the mill was moved to a site one mile south of Cane Hill where it continued operations until about the 1930s. This is the site marked today by the old mill wheel. At various times the mill made flour and cornmeal, sawed logs, and carded wool. The numerous photographs of this mill date to when it was the Moore-Buchanan Mill.