

HISTORY OF WASHINGTON COUNTY

Prairie Grove, Arkansas

Shiloh Museum - 1989

One the emigrant of 1829 was the Reverend Andrew "Uncle Buck" Buchanan, a minister of the Cumberland Presbyterian Church. In the early spring of 1829, Uncle Buck and family and two "man servants" left Warren County, Kentucky, and took passage on a little boat, the "Traveler." At the mouth of the Cumberland River they transferred to the "Daniel Boone," which carried them to the mouth of the White River in southeastern Arkansas Territory. The family then traveled up the Arkansas River to Little Rock on the "James O'Hare," and then on the "Facility" to Frog Bayou, Crawford County. Here the family remained for a short time.

Uncle Buck and his two slaves went to Cane Hill where three of his brothers were living. Here he was told of a good place to settle six to seven miles east where there was a large spring at what would become the center of Prairie Grove.

According to the account written by Colonel James P. Neal, Sr., "He was much pleased with the prospect, but another old pioneer named Tom Wagnon, known as a great hunter, had while hunting for elk and bear found this spring and laid claim upon it. He had made some improvements such as cutting down a post-oak tree and burning a hole in the top of the stump in which to pound the corn of which he made his daily bread.

Uncle Buck told Thomas Wagnon that "he would like to make his home beside that flowing fountain of clear cold water. The old hunter very generously offered to be neighborly and courteous to strangers, especially to a preacher, and told him that he would take his pony and gun and look over the adjacent hills and valleys and if he could find another spring not claimed by anyone else, he would let him have his improvements. He shouldered his old flintlock gun and started out. After two days search, [he] returned saying he had found another spring that would answer his purpose and that if Uncle Buck would come to his new home when he got settled down and preach two good sermons, he would let him have the claim on the spring. The spring and branch were alive with small fish, and the surrounding country abounded with birds and prairie chickens." With the site selected, the rest of the family came up from Frog Bayou. The family arrived at Marrs' Creek on September 5, 1829. The Buchanans were accompanied to the new homestead by friends and relatives from Cane Hill. Isaac Marrs, an earlier settler, took the Buchanan newcomers to a place "where there were some ashes, part of a backlog and some chunks, an old face-camp and a dilapidated camp-lamp. 'Here,' he said, 'I kindled the first camp fire and built the first face-camp that was ever made in this valley by a white man.'"

A picnic was spread, and later there was a religious service. "Uncle Buck got out his Bible and hymn book and proceeded to talk to the assembled crowd. His talk was mostly about their old friends and neighbors. During the singing they all shook hands around; then prayer was offered; blessings were asked, and the little group of pioneers was dismissed."

Rev. Buchanan established a church and school soon thereafter.

HISTORY OF WASHINGTON COUNTY

Prairie Grove, Arkansas

Shiloh Museum - 1989

In Flashback for April 1952 Walter Lemke wrote that Andrew Buchanan was "one of the greatest of the pioneer preachers. He preached all over northwest Arkansas and southern Missouri, as an itinerant circuit rider.

In his will he left all of the land that Prairie Grove now occupies to Cane Hill College. "The spring around which the Buchanans settled is today located in Mock Park on Prairie Grove's main street, which appropriately is named Buchanan Street.

On December 7, 1862, some Union and Confederate troops fought near Prairie Grove. More than 300 men died in -this fierce battle, some 1600 were wounded, and another 600 were counted as missing. The losses were roughly equal for each side, and both claimed victory.

The Prairie Grove post office was established in July 1867, with Abraham Price as the first postmaster. The town of Prairie Grove was established in 1871 by the stepson of Andrew Buchanan, Col. James P. Neal, who built the first store there. Rogers and Baggett opened a blacksmith and wagon shop in the next year, and they and McPhetridge built a steam powered flour mill in 1876. A plat of the town was made in 1875, then streets and lots, were laid out on a grid in 1877. Prairie Grove was incorporated July 9, 1888, and by the next the People's Party as an alternative to the regular national parties.

On July 4, 1883, the surviving founders and makers of Washington County gathered at Prairie Grove Battlefield for a day of festivity in their honor. A reporter for the Fayetteville Democrat (July 5, 1883) wrote, "In spite of the great dust and heat" 5,000 people crowded "every bus, carriage, vehicle and horse" to get there. "The platform was attractively decorated with flags, banners and the products of Washington County. On the right of the platform sat the choir, consisting of fifty beautiful young ladies of Prairie Grove and Viney Grove under the leadership of Prof. Dolgarouki. The Bentonville band delighted the people with new selections."

In the late 1890s, these men gathered with their bicycles at Old Spring Park (now Mock Park) in Prairie Grove. Colonel J. P. Neal got things started promptly at 9:30 that morning. The old settlers were seated in the front, commencing with those who'd come prior to 1830. In an eloquent tone, Colonel Neal welcomed the crowd, including among the welcomes this one, appropriated on a hot July day: "I welcome you to our cold, pure water that is brewed by the hand of the Almighty away down in the mellow earth. He then explained the purpose of the picnic. "We have met today to tell of the early settlement of this county, to recount our early reminiscences, to make a record from which the historian may write the true history of the county.

The official historian of the picnic was J. H. Van Hoose, who spoke for a half hour (part of his speech was printed in the Democrat, July 12, 1883). Among other things, he stated, "one can but contrast this gathering, with its band of music, its fluttering flags and eager faces, with another,

which mingled together two flags, with shouts loud and fierce. It was brother to brother in the death grip. Thank God that time has gone.

Of course, speech-making wasn't for everyone. The reporter noted, there were several 'merry-go-rounds', 'Jenny Linds', or other kinds of 'fuzzy-guzzy' nuisances on the grounds where the rustic youths and maidens did gaily glide round and round ." And sometimes the words of some old pioneer, speaking to the crowd in the days before microphones, were virtually drowned by vendors: "Here's your ice cold lemonade, made in the shade."

The Ozark and Cherokee Central Railway brought a significant boost to Prairie Grove and the entire Illinois River Valley. This line connected the Frisco rail lines in Fayetteville, Arkansas, and Okmulgee, Oklahoma and on August 22, 1901 the first train arrived in Prairie Grove. Hundreds of cars of apples, strawberries, and other products were hauled from the area before the tracks were removed, and the train station at Prairie-Grove was torn down in 1942.

Growth of Prairie Grove centered around Mock Spring, which met the town's water needs for many years. Mock Spring and Mock Park are named for Dr. Will H. Mock, who purchased this land in 1901. He removed the buildings from it, then had soil hauled in and trees planted. Dr. Mock encouraged public use of this park while he owned it, then in 1963 he donated it to the city of Prairie Grove.

In 1908 the Daughters of the Confederacy purchased nine acres near the center of the Prairie Grove battlefield, and Battlefield Park was established. Several organizations have made improvements at the park over the years. Several buildings have been moved onto park property, and Hindman Hall Museum was completed in 1965. The parks itself has also been expanded, and now exceed 100 acres.

Every Labor Day weekend Battlefield Park is the scene for the Clothesline Fair, featuring booths of handmade arts and crafts. The first full weekend in every other December a battle re-enactment and authentic Civil War encampments are held at the park. In 1982 the park and surrounding area were used as scenes for the TV miniseries The Blue and the Gray. A short distance west of Prairie Grove is the 32-acre Prairie Grove industrial park.

Bob Kidd Creek, Hollow, and Lake (near Prairie Grove): It bears the name of a black man who lived there.

Kinship in Prairie Grove area

A study by University of Arkansas graduate student Mark Hackbarth of the effect of kinship on land choice in Washington County during the 1830-1850 era showed that settling near kin was more important than settling on the very best available land. He looked at the Prairie Grove area,

and especially at several extended families including four Billingsleys, 16 Buchanans, three Lawrences, nine Marrs, several Pettigrews and Rutherfords. Families which seemed to have no local kin in the study area included families headed by John P. Click, James W. Corney, Timothy Culp, Anthony Dickey, William Morton, John Onton, and Hugh Trueman.