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## The Civil War and Reconstruction in Mississippi County: The Story of Sans Souci Plantation

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The Civil War and Reconstruction in Mississippi County: The Story of Sans Souci Plantation

A thesis submitted as partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Masters of Arts in History

by

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## **Abstract**

“The Civil War and Reconstruction in Mississippi County: The Story of Sans Souci Plantation” examines Sans Souci plantation in northeast Arkansas and the McGavock-Grider family who lived there as a microcosm of the establishment of other plantations in the Arkansas delta. From the settlement of the plantation in the 1830s to the end of Reconstruction, Sans Souci closely resembles what life was like for other planters and their families in what was then the frontier. John Harding McGavock and his wife Georgia saw their planter status rise throughout the 1850s, but as the Civil War came to Mississippi County, the family faced turmoil and loss. Despite the hardships brought by war, the family was able to rebound during Reconstruction, as they retained over 3,000 acres of prime delta land, continuing their prominent position in the county. Their story is one small piece of Mississippi County’s Civil War and Reconstruction history, but it is nonetheless important to putting together a more complete picture of what life was like for Arkansans in the delta in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

## **Acknowledgements**

First and foremost, resounding thanks to Jeannie Whyne. Her constant willingness to push me to do my best work is a trait that the best teachers possess, and this project would most certainly not be finished if it were not for her. She's the one who handed me a faded copy of "Young Couple Comes West to Establish Home" when I was a freshman, thus beginning my long journey with Sans Souci and the McGavock family. Her passion for Mississippi County and the Delta is at a level that I can only hope to reach. Thank you for your patience and for your devotion to your students.

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My fellow history teachers and my students also deserve a shout out here. I am lucky that I work with people who are passionate about history, and I am lucky to have students who teach me how to constantly question. They keep me on my toes and argue with me daily, and they encouraged me to finish this project.

Lastly, I absolutely have to thank my parents. They are the ones who instilled in me a deep passion for history. I would not trade our family vacations to museums and battlefields for anything in this world. As the daughter of a Mississippi County native, I have to give my daddy a little extra hug, as it was his old stomping grounds that inspired my love for Osceola. I knew Sans Souci before I even began this journey, all because of our trips to the river. I am so blessed to be your daughter.

## Table of Contents

I. Introduction	1
II. Chapter One: The Beginning	6
III. Chapter Two: Civil War	24
IV. Chapter Three: Reconstruction	46
V. Conclusion	66
VI. Figures and charts	71
VII. Bibliography	77

## Introduction

Tucked under the boot heel of Missouri, Mississippi County is the most northeast corner of Arkansas to touch the Mississippi River. Today, it is a landscape marked by a combination of agriculture and industry, but that is a far cry from what would have met the area's earliest settlers. Acquired by the United States as part of the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, the Mississippi River and the swampy land that traced it would become home to trappers, traders, and pioneers all seeking to move westward. The river itself had long been the road that drew people to Arkansas – young men seeking prosperity and prominent eastern politicians and planters seeking to expand their hand holdings. One of these men was John Harding, which is where the story of Sans Souci plantation begins.

John Harding, a wealthy planter in Nashville, Tennessee, purchased land in the Arkansas swamps and began clearing land for farming. Through an extended kinship network, John, and later his grandson John Harding McGavock, established what would become one of the largest and most successful plantations in Mississippi County. Prominent families like the Harding's fit in well with Donald McNeilly's narrative in *The Old South Frontier: Cotton Plantations and the Formation of Arkansas Society*. McNeilly argues that family connections helped create the planters of frontier Arkansas, and the web of Harding's, McGavock's, and Grundy's that settled in southern Mississippi County are no exception.<sup>1</sup> The story of Sans Souci plantation and the family who lived there is comparable to the establishment of other plantations across the Arkansas delta. The focus of this thesis, however, is on Sans Souci after John Harding McGavock arrived there in the late 1840's.

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<sup>1</sup> Donald McNeilly, *The Old South Frontier: Cotton Plantations and the Formation of Arkansas Society, 1819-1861*, (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2000), 68.

At first glance, the story of Sans Souci seems to be a genealogical project. Therein lies its difficulty. Tracing family trees shows the large number of extended family members who settled across Mississippi County throughout the 1800's, and it is easy to become lost in the slew of names, birth and death dates, and intermarriages. Genealogy websites, however, have proven to be some of the most useful sources because of the serious attention of family members in keeping track of dates.

Family histories and personal stories are another great source for projects such as this, but impartial stories of what happened at Sans Souci have been few and far between, which makes turning a genealogical project into a historical narrative even more difficult. The most "complete" story of Sans Souci is "Young Couple Comes West to Establish Home" by Josephine Grider Jacobs: it traces the entire story of the founding of Sans Souci to the burning of the plantation house. It is nearly twenty pages of detailed descriptions of the house itself, wedding parties, family relationships, and more. It is problematic for many reasons, the first being that it was written by a granddaughter of John Harding McGavock and Georgia Moore McGavock, the founders of Sans Souci plantation.<sup>2</sup> Josephine was a creative writer, who published poems and short stories in local newspapers in Mississippi County and Memphis. She wrote longer stories called *Maid of the Mississippi*, the story of her mother's life, and *Marse John Goes to War*, the story of her brother. Her stories, including "Young Couple Comes West," do have roots in the truth, as she would have grown up hearing stories of her family, but her stories are undoubtedly embellishments of the truth. Another problem with this source is the time period in which it was written. It was published in the 1930's, when the tone for interpreting Reconstruction was set by the Dunning School, which favored the stories of unreconstructed rebels and was simply the

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<sup>2</sup> Josephine Grider Jacobs, "Young Couple Comes West to Establish Home," *Blytheville Courier News*, July 1, 1936.



justification of institutionalized racism for many white Southerners.<sup>3</sup> Despite its obvious flaws, it includes quotes from letters between Georgia McGavock and her family and friends in Mississippi and Tennessee that give a real glimpse into what was happening at Sans Souci before and during the Civil War. These quotes were the jumping off point for the hunt for full copies of those letters and for the Official Records of the Civil War.

Mississippi County saw no major battles during the Civil War, but the skirmishes, raids, and guerilla fights that happened there had a major impact on the lives of its citizens. Local leaders were able to put together two companies, but by the end of 1862, the county had fallen victim to guerilla violence and lawlessness from both Union and Confederate soldiers, as well as bands of men who swore allegiance to neither side. Daniel Sutherland's *A Savage Conflict: The Decisive Role of Guerrillas in the American Civil War* explains that guerilla warfare was the war for many Arkansans, and Mississippi County was no exception. John H. McGavock had fallen ill and died in 1861, and his family would feel the effects of the war the most, as Union troops moved in and out of the county and took over their home. Letters between Georgia and her family members across the river express worry over the war itself and of loss of family members.<sup>4</sup>

“Young Couple Comes West” also hints at what life was like at Sans Souci during Reconstruction. What has inarguably been a great source for researching many Southern families during Reconstruction is the records of the Southern Claims Commission. Created by Congress in 1870, the SCC allowed Southerners, both white and black, to file claims to be compensated for property that had been damaged or taken by Union troops during the Civil War.

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<sup>3</sup> John David Smith and J. Vincent Lowery, eds., *The Dunning School: Historians, Race, and the Meaning of Reconstruction* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> “Letters to Georgia M. McGavock.” Microfilm. National Society of the Dames of America in Tennessee. Vanderbilt University.

Letters from the claimants and interviews with family, friends, and even former slaves were used as testimonies to a claimant's loyalty during the war. Most of the people who were hired to hear and process claims were local authorities, as is the case of Georgia Erwin (McGavock).<sup>5</sup> One of the men who signed her claim was Charles Bowen, a former-Confederate and known leader of the county's Ku Klux Klan; it is likely that Bowen would feel no problem with "lying to a Yankee" in order to help Georgia receive compensation. Obvious problems aside, the SCC letters and depositions themselves are invaluable. The interviews of Daniel Thompson and Ransom Simms are some of the only records that include the full names of any of the McGavock's fifty-seven slaves and what happened to them during and after the Civil War. They give a more accurate picture of the travels of Georgia and her daughter back and forth between Sans Souci and Columbus, Mississippi, and how well the family recovered from the war.

What stands out as a serious disadvantage for putting together this story is the lack of historical record of the African Americans who worked at Sans Souci. As stated previously, two interviews with former slaves provide some insight into the lives of those who worked on the plantation, but without any other first-person accounts, much of the blanks have had to be filled in with larger historical narratives. *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Antebellum South* by Kenneth Stampp discusses the profitability of slavery for planters in the South and also how slave owners on the frontier would have interacted with their slaves.<sup>6</sup> George Lankford's *Bearing Witness: Memories of Arkansas Slavery from the 1930s WPA Collections* provides first-hand accounts of life for slaves in what was the frontier, and it can be inferred that the slaves at

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<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Nitschke Hicks, "The Southern Claims Commission: A Little Known Source of Genealogical Information," *The CLF Newsletter* (November 1996): 11-12.

<sup>6</sup> Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Antebellum South*, New York: Vintage Books, 1989.

Sans Souci fit into their narrative.<sup>7</sup> Another place where the African-American perspective is severely lacking is in the accounts of the Black Hawk War of 1872, in which the residents of Sans Souci played a role.<sup>8</sup> The newspapers and interviews about the racial and political violence in Mississippi County during Reconstruction are one-sided, so it has been left to researchers to fill in the blanks where they can.

The focus of this story ends in 1874, and, as such, only a small portion of it is devoted to the McGavock and Grider families after Reconstruction. While it seemed at first glance that the family had financially rebounded after the Civil War, a deeper look into court cases involving Susan John Grider (McGavock), her husband (William Henry Grider), and her daughters show deep financial issues that undoubtedly caused tensions that lasted well into the early 1900's.

Because the plantation house itself burned down in 1922 and because the roads to where the house once stood are today blocked by industry, there is no "home base" for researchers to seek out. The descendants of Sans Souci are spread across the country and have looked to other people to help them research their own family's history. Despite the difficulty of putting together the story of a singular family, it is well worth it in the end, when the story of what life was like on the Mississippi River begins to take shape.

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<sup>7</sup> George E. Lankford, *Bearing Witness: Memories of Arkansas Slavery from the 1930s WPA Collections* (Fayetteville, Arkansas: The University of Arkansas Press, 2003).

<sup>8</sup> This is not to be confused with the 1832 conflict in Illinois between the Sac and Fox Indians under the leadership of Chief Black Hawk and the United States. It is not known why the conflict in Osceola, Arkansas, was titled the "Black Hawk War."

## Chapter One The Beginning

When 22-year-old John Harding McGavock arrived the swamps in northeast Arkansas in the late 1840's, he was met with what was still a vastly untamed frontier. The recent law school graduate had been sent to oversee his grandfather's land holdings. His grandfather, John Harding, who established and owned Belle Meade Plantation in Nashville, Tennessee, made a trip down the Cumberland, Ohio, and Mississippi Rivers on a skiff in the early years of the 1800s. In 1832, Harding, along with three other Nashville residents – Felix Grundy and two of his sons-in-law, John Bass and Jacob McGavock – purchased several large tracts of land in Arkansas along the Mississippi River. Felix Grundy was a political powerhouse; he had been a member of both the U.S. House of Representatives and the Senate, and he was close to Andrew Jackson and Martin Van Buren. Harding, though not a politician, was a skilled farmer and businessman. The power and influence of the family and its extended members would cross the Mississippi River into northeast Arkansas. Grundy and Harding, like the thousands of other pioneers who were drawn to the rich delta soils of Arkansas, thought the country, though still swampy and untamed, held promise and prosperity.<sup>9</sup> Their 23,000-acre purchase – which included land in Pecan Point, Shawnee Village, Dickinson's Mill, and parts of Island 35 – would prove to be a profitable venture for the men and their extended families.<sup>10</sup>

John Harding McGavock, who had been raised in Nashville, was destined to play an important role in the development of Sans Souci plantation. He graduated from the University of Nashville – which would later become a part of Vanderbilt University – in 1845, and then from

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<sup>9</sup> Donald McNeilly, *The Old South Frontier*, 33.

<sup>10</sup>*Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Northeast Arkansas*, (Chicago: Goodspeed Publishers, 1889), 528.

Harvard in 1847.<sup>11</sup> After he graduated, his grandfather offered him the chance oversee the clearing and potential expansion of his land.<sup>12</sup> The young McGavock was like many other young men moving to Arkansas in the 1800's – most were compelled by a desire for land and the promise of a better life.<sup>13</sup> John was impressed with the land he saw, and he immediately went to work to enlarge the acreage owned by the Harding family. He maintained his official residence in Nashville but spent most of each year in Mississippi County.

Throughout the 1850's, other members of the Harding and McGavock families settled in southern Mississippi County, forming a larger family community of cousins and in-laws. Randall McGavock, a cousin, bought land adjoining that of the Harding family. Edward J. McGavock, the son of Jacob McGavock and the grandson of Felix Grundy, and his wife Ella moved to Pecan Point. His sister, Anna, and her husband, Judge Henry Dickenson, took the plantation at Dickenson Hills. Dr. Frank McGavock, another grandson of Felix Grundy, owned the plantation at Shawnee Village, and Frank Young McGavock, another cousin, owned the McGavock plantation at Nodena.<sup>14</sup> The network of the extended McGavock family in Mississippi County was not atypical. While many men became landowners and planters through

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<sup>11</sup> *Quinquennial Catalogue of the Law School of Harvard University, 1817-1899* (Cambridge, MA., Harvard Law School, 1900), 87.

<sup>12</sup> *Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Northeast Arkansas*, 531.

<sup>13</sup> McNeilly, *The Old South Frontier*, 33.

<sup>14</sup> Jacobs, "Young Couple Comes West to Establish Home," 2. See Figure 1, page 69.

investments in cotton and land speculation, family connections allowed for venturing young men to become landowners.<sup>15</sup>

John kept in close touch with his family in Tennessee about the goings on in Mississippi County. On February 27, 1853, he wrote to his uncle, William G. Harding of Nashville, giving a glimpse into how the young McGavock spent his days. He boasted of the beauty of Mississippi County, calling it "...the prettiest country I ever saw in the Valley..." but flooding of the Mississippi River was a constant fear. While his neighbors fought the rising waters, John said his land seemed secured; the wood yard he operated was remaining successful. He also expressed his loneliness: "I still remain a lone and dreary bachelor – with no sweet smiles to welcome me home or tender caresses to smooth my departure..."<sup>16</sup> His bachelorhood, however, would not last long.

On December 1, 1853, John married a young woman named Georgia A. Moore from Columbus, Mississippi.<sup>17</sup> Though the circumstances of their short courtship are unknown, descriptions of their wedding showed it to be a social event that was not to be missed. More than two hundred guests – most of whom were extended family members of the bride – attended the ceremony at the Presbyterian Church in the bride's hometown. The lavish reception featured a wedding cake in the shape of the Tennessee capitol building in Nashville, made by the bride

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<sup>15</sup> McNeilly, *The Old South Frontier*, 68; John H. McGavock's future brother-in-law, Clarence Moore, would take advantage of the family connection, expressing to Georgia in an 1859 letter that he wanted land and requesting that John keep him in mind if he knew of any (from Clarence Moore to Georgia M. McGavock, August 23, 1859, "Letters to Georgia M. McGavock," Microfilm, National Society of the Colonial Dames of America in Tennessee, Vanderbilt University.). Clarence Moore would later become a well-known judge and wealthy farmer at Chickasawba in northern Mississippi County.

<sup>16</sup> John H. McGavock to William G. Harding, February 27, 1853, Harding and Jackson Family Papers, Series 1, Folder 4, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

<sup>17</sup> See Figure 2, page 70.

herself, in honor of the groom's hometown. The newlyweds received many gifts, including silver candlesticks and Bohemian glass finger bowls, but perhaps the most generous gift came from the groom's grandfather.<sup>18</sup> He gave them several thousand acres in Mississippi County, the same land the young groom had been overseeing for six years. Family members reported in Goodspeed's *Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Northeast Arkansas* that the gift was 10,000 acres, but tax records establish the actual amount to be closer to 3,000 acres.<sup>19</sup> John and Georgia spent Christmas of 1853 with the groom's family at Cliff Lawn, his family's estate located four miles outside of Nashville, and on February 1, 1854, they left for their new home four miles south of Osceola, Arkansas. The young groom had already spent years living in the frontier of Mississippi County, but the life that awaited the young bride would prove to be a far cry from the lifestyle to which she was accustomed.

The journey to their new home took them by boat to Camden, Tennessee, then by overland stagecoach to Memphis. From Memphis, they boarded a steamboat and began the forty-mile float upriver to their new home. Georgia took her personal maid, Margaret, with her to accompany her on their trip across the Mississippi River. The thick Arkansas swamp land had begun to be cleared, and like other new planters in the Arkansas frontier, the new family lived in a small cabin on the river until the completion of their larger house. John was twenty-nine years old and Georgia only twenty when they arrived at the homestead, which they named "Sans Souci," meaning "without care" in French.<sup>20</sup> Construction of the plantation house at Sans Souci was completed later in 1854.

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<sup>18</sup> Jacobs, "Young Couple Comes West to Establish Home," 2.

<sup>19</sup> Mississippi County, Arkansas, Tax Records for 1859 (Arkansas Historical Commission: Little Rock, Arkansas).

<sup>20</sup> Jacobs, "Young Couple Comes West to Establish Home," 2.

Frontier plantations in their earliest stages in the Arkansas delta were smaller than those in the east, and the plantation homes themselves were even less grandiose.<sup>21</sup> The house at Sans Souci, even though it was not like stereotypical plantation houses of the Deep South, was quite impressive nonetheless. The house faced east and was located about one-half mile from the Mississippi River.<sup>22</sup> Erected with slave labor, the house was built completely from hand-sawed wood that came from the heavily-wooded Sans Souci land, and was put together with wooden pegs. The two-story house measured seventy-four feet wide and fifty-four feet deep, which made it a large house – close to four thousand square feet.<sup>23</sup> The porch that decorated the front of the home was twelve feet wide and ran the full length of the house. Sans Souci had a large second-floor balcony on the south side of the house, but there was not a balcony on the second floor of the north side. The pillars of the porch were made of swamp cypress, stripped of its bark and painted. Each room was finished in a different kind of wood and then named for the wood. There was a room in black walnut, one in sassafras, another in red gum, and one in ash. The lawn of the house was over two hundred yards deep and contained oak, elm, walnut, maple, and box elder trees.<sup>24</sup> There was a large flower garden by the house, and ornamental shrubbery completed the landscape. As John Vlach suggests in *Back of the Big House*, it was built to be imposing and to establish prominence and station. Nothing like it had ever been seen in the northeastern Arkansas swamps.<sup>25</sup>

Underwriting the imposing structure was wealth generated by the expansion of the cotton economy which, as Sven Beckert suggests, had become a kind of empire, and plantations like

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<sup>21</sup> McNeilly, *The Old South Frontier*, 18.

<sup>22</sup> *Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Northeast Arkansas*, 505.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> See Figure 3, page 71.

<sup>25</sup> John Michael Vlach, *Back of the Big House: the Architecture of Plantation Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).



those spreading into the trans-Mississippi west were important links in that empire.<sup>26</sup> The Arkansas frontier lagged behind its neighbor states in growth and development, largely because the delta swamps were a challenge. The difficulty of clearing the densely-wooded forests and preparing land for cultivation explains the county's slower start. Because the area was heavily forested, planters used the forced labor of their slaves to cut the trees to make way for plantation agriculture. As the timber business grew and other white settlers arrived, many in Osceola and in the surrounding areas made their living cutting and selling wood. Charles Bowen, whose family had moved to the county a few years before and who would play an important role in Mississippi County's Civil War and political history, moved to the Plum Point settlement on the Mississippi River sometime around 1835. He recalled in his autobiography that he and his family kept a wood yard on the river, where they sold wood to steamboats for \$2 to \$3 per cord. John mentioned in his 1853 letter to his uncle that he also ran a wood yard on the river.<sup>27</sup> The timber from the plantation at Sans Souci was valuable as steamboat fuel, but wood was cut and sold for cordwood or for lumber, and the newly cleared fields were planted in cotton, corn, and oats.

Henry Stanley, a visitor to a Saline County plantation in 1860, described in detail the process by which timber was cleared for cotton fields. Trees had to be chopped down with axes and then chopped into pieces small enough to move. After removing the smaller logs, tree stumps had to be removed, and the land leveled, if needed. Once the land was cleared, cotton could be planted. Newly-cleared ground usually continued to sprout new natural growth, so it constantly had to be removed, and it took a few years before a new cotton field was even and completely cleared.<sup>28</sup> Other crops, such as corn, were planted as well, either before or after the

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<sup>26</sup> Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014).

<sup>27</sup> John H. McGavock to William G. Harding, February 27, 1853.

<sup>28</sup> McNeilly, *The Old South Frontier*, 124, 127.

cotton, so there would be no interference with the crops. By 1860, only about twenty percent of farmland acreage in Arkansas was cleared for farming; the other eighty percent was still timberland. Individual plantations in Arkansas typically contained these same percentages of cleared land and timberland. The cleared acreage on the average plantation in Arkansas was around sixty acres, but Sans Souci followed the trend of larger plantations in Chicot and Phillips Counties, with only several hundred acres cleared out of the three thousand.<sup>29</sup>

The several thousand acres of Sans Souci that surrounded the home and buildings were largely wooded. With the help of slave labor, McGavock began clearing several hundred acres in order to plant cotton. Cotton was the cash crop and the priority of the plantation; other crops, such as corn, were planted as well. The McGavocks grew Black Rattler cotton, a variety that seemed to grow well in the swampy areas of northeast Arkansas. In addition to their large cotton crop, the McGavocks kept a large herd of cattle.

Mark Twain, describing the juxtaposition of homes and the Mississippi River, wrote, “the broad river, lying between the two rows, becomes a sort of spacious street.”<sup>30</sup> The Mississippi River was vital to the success of the towns that dotted the land along the riverbanks, and its importance cannot be understated in the success of the plantation at Sans Souci. Mississippi County’s and Sans Souci’s cotton culture grew, and Osceola, the county seat, became a key port. Steamboats made regular stops up and down the river. Cotton was “king” in the delta counties along the Mississippi River, and Mississippi County was just beginning to develop as a cotton producer.

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<sup>29</sup> Carl H. Moneyhon, “The Impact of the Civil War in Arkansas: The Mississippi County River Plantation Counties,” *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 51, No. 2 (Summer, 1992), 107.

<sup>30</sup> Mark Twain, *Life on the Mississippi* (Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1883), 287.

Cotton production in Arkansas increased as land was cleared for the growth of cotton, particularly in the boom years of the 1850s, when its prices escalated. In 1850, there were only 65,344 bales of cotton produced in the state. By 1860, that number had reached 367,393. In 1850, Mississippi County produced 455 bales of cotton, that number increasing to 1,244 by 1860.<sup>31</sup> The number of Arkansans who had reached planter status increased rapidly throughout the 1850s, largely due to cotton.<sup>32</sup> The number of farms doubled, the average size of a farm increased by sixty percent, and the total cash value of farms in Arkansas increased by sixty percent. The number of slaves and slaveholders in the state more than doubled, and the number of slaves increased from 47,100 to 111,115.<sup>33</sup> Sans Souci, again, followed this trend. By 1859, the McGavocks owned fifty-seven slaves valued at \$28,500, thirty-five horses and mules valued at \$4,125, and two hundred head of cattle, valued at \$1,600. The total value of their taxable property in 1859 was \$47,015; when adjusted to 2010 dollar value, the amount is over one million dollars.<sup>34</sup> By 1860, the McGavocks were in the top three percent of slaveowners in Arkansas. With fifty-seven slaves, Sans Souci plantation was well above the slaveholdings average for the state.

The few existing records of the slaves who worked at Sans Souci make no mention of what their lives may have been like with the McGavocks. It can be inferred, however, that their lives were typical of other slaves in the Arkansas frontier. The staples of the slave diet were cornmeal, meat, and molasses; these essentials were supplemented by fresh vegetables during growing season. Many planters operated grist mills on their plantations to grind corn, sometimes also taking care of the grinding operations for smaller farmers. Henry Tuner, a slave from the

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<sup>31</sup> McNeilly, *The Old South Frontier*, 126.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>34</sup> Mississippi County, Arkansas, Tax Records for 1859.

Turner Plantation in Phillips County, remembered that “wheat was ground into flour and corn into meal in mills with stone burrs” that were powered by horses and mules that walked on wooden treadmills.<sup>35</sup> This corn meal was baked and eaten as cornbread, corn mush, or corn pone. If the amount of corn grown on the plantation was insufficient, meal was purchased by the barrel. Meat came in the form of cured pork, wild game and fish, and even turtles. Scott Bond, a slave who lived on plantations in Mississippi, Tennessee, and Arkansas, recalled slaves catching a turtle so big it had to be pulled out of the water with a mule; when dressed, the turtle weighed 148 pounds.<sup>36</sup> Sans Souci had a similar occurrence – John found an enormous turtle at the landing on the river, and he dragged it out of the water with chains. The McGavocks used the turtle shell, which measured about four feet by three and a half feet, for a baby cradle.<sup>37</sup> Molasses, the third major ingredient of slave diets, was produced in large amounts in Arkansas. Arkansas produced more molasses than any other Southern slave state.<sup>38</sup>

Accounts from individual slaves show that though their treatment by owners might differ, they were generally fed an adequate diet and particularly because they could supplement their diets with what they hunted and trapped in the swamps of Mississippi County. Lois Young, a slave on a small farm in Phillips County, said slave rations were “seven pounds meat and one peck meal and one quart ‘lasses, and no more” per week.<sup>39</sup> Sweetie Ivory Wagoner, another Arkansas slave, recalled that their eating was “done together in a long house made of rough brick” and that they had plenty of beef or pork, corn pone, and other vegetables.<sup>40</sup> Many slaves

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<sup>35</sup> Lankford, *Bearing Witness*, 290.

<sup>36</sup> Orville Taylor, *Negro Slavery in Arkansas* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1958), 133. Scott Bond would become a prominent landowner after the Civil War.

<sup>37</sup> Jacobs, “Young Couple Comes West to Establish Home,” 4.

<sup>38</sup> Taylor, *Negro Slavery in Arkansas*, 137.

<sup>39</sup> Lankford, *Bearing Witness*, 297.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 22, 294, 283, 251.

on small farms ate the same food as their white owners. Dock Wilborn, a slave from Marvell, stated that they were given the same food as the master's family and that the food was prepared in the same kitchens. Another slave on a small farm at Holly Grove, Solomon Lambert, said that they "et up at the house in the kitchen. We eat at the darkey houses. It make no difference – one house clean as the other."

Most slaves were fed an adequate amount of food, because the amount of physical labor they performed required a certain level of nutrition. Few slaves reported that they were not fed. Negative comments in the narratives in *Bearing Witness* about food given to slaves largely had to do with the manner in which the slaves were fed. Mary Estes Peters, a slave who lived in Missouri and Arkansas, said that food for slaves was poured into troughs and eaten with "...an old wooden spoon or something" and that all the slaves ate out of the same dishes or troughs. She said "the wouldn't let the slaves eat out of the things they et out of" and that their masters "fed them just like they would hogs." Another slave, Willis Winn from Hope, recalled eating at a long wood trough, "...full of plenty of grub. We used buffalo and fish bones for spoons." The majority of slave owners were very aware of the dollar amount they had invested in slaves, and malnourishment of slaves lowered their production and their worth.<sup>41</sup>

Slave labor was necessary to the functioning of the plantation economy but it was also a significant investment and usually represented about half the capital investment of the typical planter.<sup>42</sup> The dollar value of a slave varied, depending on age, gender, physical fitness or childbearing status, and skill level. A prime worker was usually a young male in his late teens or twenties. A slave who was a skilled craftsman, such as a bricklayer, blacksmith, or carpenter, was worth about seventy-five percent more than a field worker. Young boys and girls and older

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<sup>41</sup> Stamp, *The Peculiar Institution*, 280.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 386.

slaves were worth approximately half, and infants were worth about ten percent of that value. In Arkansas, slave prices rose about forty percent from 1850 to 1860. An 1860 appraisal of the estate of Junius Craig, owner of the Bellvue and Yelow Bayou Plantations in Chicot County, gives a fairly accurate picture of 1860 slave prices in Arkansas. A man who would work in the fields was worth approximately \$1,500, and skilled artisans were worth \$2,500. Childbearing age women were worth about \$1,200, and children and older slaves brought between \$500 and \$800.<sup>43</sup> To more closely understand the financial worth that slaves represented to their owners, a prime field hand would be worth close to \$36,000 in 2010 dollars. Slave owners were not the only people to pay attention to the value of slaves – slaves were also aware of their worth in terms of dollar value. Solomon Lambert stated that “foe Moster died, I was 9 years old (in 1859), I heard him say I valued at \$500.”<sup>44</sup> Solomon was also aware of the prices slaves brought on the auction block. He said the “...prices of slaves run from \$1,000 to \$2,000 for grown to middle age...\$1,600 was a slow bid.”<sup>45</sup> Boston Blackwell, a slave that was moved from Georgia to Arkansas, witnessed a slave auction at Memphis on his way to Jefferson County, Arkansas. He recalled, “I heerd a woman – a breeding woman, bid off for \$1,500. They always brought good money.”<sup>46</sup> For planters like the McGavocks, slavery was profitable.

The sale of cotton, timber, and other crops made planters like the McGavocks wealthier, and they spent money on their homes and furnishings. The steamboat from Memphis stopped twice per week at the Sans Souci landing to deliver goods, as well as pick up shipments. Steamboats could make trips in days that had previously taken weeks to make – trips from Louisville, Kentucky, to New Orleans took only four days. By the 1850s, Osceola, Arkansas,

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<sup>43</sup> Taylor, *Negro Slavery in Arkansas*, 77, 78, 79.

<sup>44</sup> Lankford, *Bearing Witness*, 249.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 251.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

had become a key port, and steamers made regular stops there as they traveled up and down the Mississippi. The steamer *Osceola Belle* delivered mail, packages, and passengers to Osceola twice per week.<sup>47</sup> The *City of Osceola* steamer operated between Memphis and St. Louis.<sup>48</sup> By the late 1850s, when the McGavocks traveled up and down the river, steamboats had evolved into the “floating palaces,” which were huge passenger packets elaborately designed to cater to wealthy travelers. The main cabin might be up to three hundred feet long, with stained-glass windows, crystal chandeliers, plush furniture, and Belgian carpets.<sup>49</sup> The daytime provided passengers with a well-stocked bar, a library, and lounge chairs on deck; at night passengers could stay in twelve-foot square rooms with real beds. Steamboats delivered Georgia McGavock’s books, her rosewood piano, a carved parlor set, and several fine pieces of mahogany furniture from Columbus.<sup>50</sup> Access to the river provided the young McGavock family with a gateway to the culture to which they were accustomed, making life more bearable in what was then a frontier.

Despite the arrival of material comforts from east of the Mississippi River, Georgia found herself struggling to get accustomed to her new life. It is probable that Georgia spent her days like other frontier plantation mistresses; wives of other planters in Arkansas worked alongside their husbands, dealing with family and household matters. The success of the plantation was a partnership between all involved.<sup>51</sup> The tremendous responsibility of establishing a plantation, however, did not stop the desire to remain connected to life back home. Letters from her mother,

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<sup>47</sup> J.G. Andrews, “Steamer *Osceola Belle* for Ashport and Osceola,” *The Daily Memphis Avalanche*, May 24, 1877.

<sup>48</sup> “Osceola Times Records Birth of City in 1875,” *Osceola Times*, September 14, 2000.

<sup>49</sup> Nick Bakalar, *Down the Mississippi*, (Pleasantville, New York: The Readers Digest Association, Inc., 1995), 29.

<sup>50</sup> Jacobs, “Young Couple Comes West to Establish Home,” 5.

<sup>51</sup> McNeilly, *The Old South Frontier*, 64, 65.

Eliza Moore in Columbus, Mississippi, express sympathy of “being confined in Arkansas.”<sup>52</sup>

Georgia was separated from both her family and friends and no doubt had to find a new support network of other women: letters from other family members imply a close relationship between Georgia and her extended family in Mississippi County. Because of their separation from their families and because of the nineteenth-century mindset of the privacy of women’s health, women on the Arkansas frontier had to turn to each other for support and medical advice, especially when it came to childbearing.<sup>53</sup>

John and Georgia welcomed their first child, Lida Carey McGavock, on September 27, 1854, but she lived less than two months, dying on November 15, 1854. The next year, a son, John Harding McGavock Jr., was born on September 30. Two more children were born to John and Georgia: Susan John McGavock on May 23, 1857, and Joseph M. McGavock in 1859.

Infant and maternal mortality in the Arkansas delta, especially in the newly-settled areas like that of northeast Arkansas, was high. Mortality rates for new mothers in Arkansas were twice as high as mortality rates in other states. Women of child-bearing age gave birth on a fairly regular schedule, with a delivery every two or three years.<sup>54</sup> Women depended largely on midwives for assistance with birth, and midwives depended on a combination of primitive knowledge and superstition to tend to the birth. Cynthia Jones, a slave on Simpson Dabney’s plantation around Pine Bluff, told the story of how she became a midwife:

When I was twenty-one they had me fixed up for a midwife. Old Dr. Clark was the one to start me. I never went to school a minute in my life but the doctors would read to me out of their doctor books till I could get a license. I got so I could read print till my eyes

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<sup>52</sup> Eliza Moore to Georgia McGavock, February 21, 1859, “Letters to Georgia M. McGavock,” Microfilm, National Society of the Colonial Dames of America in Tennessee, Vanderbilt University.

<sup>53</sup> Conevery Bolton, “‘A Sister’s Consolations’: Women, Health, and Community in Early Arkansas, 1810-1860,” *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 50, No. 3 (Autumn, 1991), 274.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 285.



got so bad. Old Dr. Clark was the one who learned me most and since he died I ain't never had a doctor mess with me. In fifteen years I had 299 babies on record right there in Rison. That's where I fixed up at – under five doctors.<sup>55</sup>

Physician-assisted births, rare at the time, were not any better. Male physicians and midwives alike routinely used dirty hands, dirty instruments, and unsanitary practices during medical procedures. Puerperal fever, also known as “milk fever or “childbirth fever,” was an infection of the birth canal or birth wound that took the lives of many women in the Arkansas delta. Georgia herself suffered from “milk leg,” which is the swelling of the legs after childbirth<sup>56</sup> Blood poisoning and infection of both infant and mother were common, and death usually took place within days of birth. The science of medicine in 1850 was largely a non-science; sterilization, germs, and antibiotics were in the future. Women's health, especially that which concerned reproduction, was not discussed openly, certainly not between men and women, and operated at a very rudimentary level. Only one of the children born to Georgia survived to adulthood, a common and tragic experience shared by many women living in the swampy Arkansas delta.<sup>57</sup>

The Mississippi River, while vital to the success of the plantation, was as much an enemy as it was friend. The river flooded on a regular basis, at least during every spring, with water rolling over everything in its path. The conversion of so much timberland into agricultural land and the building of dikes and levees added to the flooding problem because the natural pattern of the river had been disturbed. Efforts to drain swamps began before the Civil War and were largely built by individuals or consortiums of individuals. In 1850, Congress passed an act that donated land for states to build levees, but it is not entirely clear how many levees were actually constructed from the sale of these lands. Arkansas received 8.6 million acres, but most of the

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<sup>55</sup> Lankford, *Bearing Witness*, 119, 130.

<sup>56</sup> Eliza Moore to Georgia McGavock, February 21, 1859.

<sup>57</sup> Bolton, “A Sister's Consolations,” 287.

levees constructed as a result of this legislation were destroyed during the Civil War and during times of heavy flooding.<sup>58</sup> There was no official levee program during the period Sans Souci was being established; before the war, levees were built by slaves using homemade tools.<sup>59</sup> John McGavock and his neighbors agreed to build and maintain a private levee connecting their plantations in hopes that a continuous levee would be more effective against the Mississippi.<sup>60</sup> What they built would hardly be thought of as a levee today; it was little more than a small dam between the river and the land, but it managed to keep some of the flooding under control. The early levees themselves were plagued with seepage problems – sand boils and ruptures on the landside of levees. When water pressure underneath the levee became greater than the pressure extended downward from the levee itself, the water came through the land side as sand boils and seepage.<sup>61</sup>

In the spring of 1859, John and Georgia were walking along the levee, watching the rising water of the spring floods. John noticed seepage in the levee that quickly became a large leak, which soon turned into an even bigger hole in the levee. John, Sans Souci slaves, and others battled the flood waters and levee leaks for days. The flood crisis for Sans Souci soon passed, but John's health was in jeopardy from battling the waters of the Mississippi. By early summer, John was most probably suffering from malaria which was endemic in the area.

Malaria, typhoid, cholera, and dysentery were feared diseases associated with the area along the river, with its periodic overflows and pools of water that remained as flooding receded. There

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<sup>58</sup> Jeannie Whayne, "The Making of a Post- Civil War Plantation System," *The Southern Elite and Social Change* (Fayetteville, Arkansas: University of Arkansas Press, 2002), 97.

<sup>59</sup> Mabel F. Edrington, *History of Mississippi County* (Ocala, Florida: Ocala Star Banner, 1962), 63.

<sup>60</sup> Jacobs, "Young Couple Comes West to Establish Home," 6.

<sup>61</sup> Charles R. Kolb, "Geologic Control of Sand Boils Along the Mississippi River Levees," National Technical Information Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, August 1975. <http://www.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a014274.pdf>.

was good reason to fear the deadly group of diseases. Life expectancy in 1850 was less than half of what it is today; white males could expect to live about 38 years, while white females could expect to live about 40.5 years. Arkansas mortality statistics for 1850 show that nearly half of the 1,197 deaths in that year were attributed to the aforementioned diseases. The number one cause of death for whites in 1850 was malaria; for slaves it was cholera. The actual cause and mode of transmission for cholera, which is spread through water and food contaminated with human waste, would not be discovered until 1880. Physicians in the period before the Civil War thought cholera originated from “miasms,” or poisons, that originated from decaying matter and sick or dead people. At the time, the disease was believed to be transmitted by the wind, which carried the “poison” through the air, allowing unsuspecting people to contract the disease. An 1849 pamphlet published by Dr. Samuel Cartwright of New Orleans, “The Pathology and Treatment of Cholera,” offered a treatment for the disease. The doctor claimed that a combination of mustard plaster applications, bleeding, and large doses of pepper, calomel, gum camphor, gum Arabic, and calcined charcoal would induce sweating, and would, in turn, cure cholera.<sup>62</sup>

Physicians of the time believed that fever itself was a disease, rather than a symptom, and that there were different types of fevers that could “blend” and kill a patient. “Fever and ague,” or malaria, was a disease associated with tropical environments. Physicians also believed that there was a close relationship between the human body and the surrounding landscape. Part of the medical curriculum in the mid-nineteenth century was “medical topography,” or the study of geographic locations and the diseases they produced. Physicians learned about such subjects as temperature, altitude, water quality, sunlight, rainfall, the time of fish runs, and weather and their

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<sup>62</sup> Taylor, *Negro Slavery in Arkansas*, 158.

effects on the human body. The program for medical students consisted largely of reading and lectures on a combination of environmental studies and medical writings. In 1850-1854, physician Daniel Drake wrote *Principle Diseases of the Interior of North America*, a multi-volume discourse on medical topography and the Mississippi Valley.<sup>63</sup> In this he states that scientists made the connection between malaria and low-lying wet lands, and they linked the draining of swamps with a decline in malaria. Only a handful of physicians suspected that there was any connection between insect bites and malaria. Malaria was believed to “sink” into hot, moist, low grounds because of its weight and be absorbed into bodies of water; humans would then contract malaria because of contact with poisoned water. An 1863 lecture to medical students at Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia by Dr. Samuel H. Dickson warned medical students of the dangers of drinking water in the areas associated with malaria and of living in the northern and eastern sides of swamps. He also warned of the dangers of the wind carrying malaria across the swamps and about malaria sinking into hot, wet grounds. A lecture on typhoid by Dr. Dickson contained instructions to only allow one patient to a room to avoid concentration of typhoid poison in the air or trapped in hair or clothing.<sup>64</sup>

John never recovered from the spring incident with the floodwaters; he contracted fever and chills and was forced to stay in bed, incapacitated. Letters from Georgia’s mother, Eliza, express concern at his poor health. Sometime between May and September, 1859, John went to his family’s estate in Cliff Lawn, Tennessee, as an attempt to escape swampy Mississippi County and to seek healing treatments at White Sulphur Springs. Family letters show that John was still

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<sup>63</sup> Linda Nash, “Finishing Nature: Harmonizing Bodies and Environments in Late-Nineteenth-Century California,” *Environmental History*, January 2003.

<sup>64</sup> Suzanne Shultz, “The Medical Education of William Brooks Bigler (1863),” *Annals of Internal Medicine* 129 (1998), 426-430.

at Cliff Lawn in November of 1860 and that he continued to suffer from fever and chills.<sup>65</sup> Mrs. Moore, Georgia's mother, wrote to her daughter, stating that she hoped "a change of scenery [would] bring about a change in his condition for the better." John's time at Cliff Lawn, away from Sans Souci, did not help him recover. His lungs became infected, and he died in Nashville on April 12, 1861, at the age of thirty six.<sup>66</sup> The loss of her husband was not the only tragedy Georgia was forced to endure. She also suffered the death of her youngest child, Joseph M., in 1861, the second of their four children to die. Life for the widowed Georgia McGavock and her two children, John Harding and Susan John, would prove to be even more difficult as the Civil War came to Mississippi County.

Acquisition, settlement, and prosperity of Arkansas delta plantations required a great deal of capital, time, and tremendous physical effort on the part of all involved, and the story of Sans Souci plantation follows this trend. Pioneer families struggled, suffering deprivation and isolation in order to put down roots in a new place, all in the hopes of adventure and expansion of wealth. The young McGavocks did find financial success, but the family's trials were far from over.

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<sup>65</sup> Letters from various family members and friends to Georgia McGavock, "Letters to Georgia M. McGavock."

<sup>66</sup> Jacobs, "Young Couple Comes West to Establish Home," 7.

## Chapter Two Civil War

War fever ran high in Mississippi County, Arkansas, when the Civil War began in 1861. Excitement and talk of war dominated everything and everyone in the small towns located around the county. Local leaders immediately put together two companies of men for the Confederacy, the Fletcher Rifles and the Osceola Hornets, whose soldiers signaled the significant support Mississippi County gave to the new government. Although no major battles were fought in Mississippi County, many skirmishes, predatory raids, and guerilla fights occurred there, and considerable instability prevailed. Rich and poor alike suffered greatly during the war years, with plantation owners, business owners, small farmers, poor whites, and African Americans all subjected to similar degradations and losses. Most of the 3,985 inhabitants in the county in 1860 would have a family member or close friend in service to the South.<sup>67</sup> Although the arrival of Union troops along the county's Mississippi River border meant potential freedom for slaves, they continued to face severe deprivation, whether inside or outside of Union lines. Residents of the county lived their lives in fear of being captured or killed or having their property stolen or destroyed.<sup>68</sup> John H. McGavock died of his ailments the same day that Confederate troops began firing on Fort Sumter, and his young family would face the hardships that the Civil War brought to the county.

As Southern states began to secede from the Union and as the time for talk of secession in Arkansas came nearer, the state remained geographically and economically divided. Life in Mississippi County and the rest of northeast Arkansas was much like that of southeastern Arkansas, where livelihood depended on farming, but many of the residents in the northwestern

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<sup>67</sup> Mississippi County, Arkansas, Census Records for 1860 (Arkansas Historical Commission: Little Rock, Arkansas).

<sup>68</sup> *Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Northeast Arkansas*, 457.

counties, whose economies did not rely on row crops and slave labor, harbored strong Unionist feelings. On March 4, 1861, a state convention was held in Little Rock to decide if Arkansas would secede; when the convention ended on March 21, delegates opposed to secession had shown their strength against secessionist sentiment, and the decision had been made to put the matter of secession to a vote of the people – a vote slated to take place in August. Long before the people could decide for themselves, however, fate took the state along another course.

Three days after the Confederates fired on Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861, President Abraham Lincoln called for 75,000 troops to subjugate the seceded states. Within only a few days, 100,000 men answered his call, but few, if any, were from Arkansas, although eventually about 15,000 would serve the Union. The secession convention was called back into session, and this time the outcome was very different. On May 6, 1861, the delegates voted again, with five votes against secession. The chair of the session, David Walker, wanted a unanimous vote for secession, and after a second vote, only one man, Isaac Murphy of Madison County, voted against secession. Following quickly on the heels of this vote, Mississippi County leaders raised and readied 300 soldiers for Confederate service. Arkansas enrolled 21,500 troops during the first year of the war; by war's end, Arkansas had sent 60,000 men to aid the Confederacy and close to 15,000 to help the Union, including 5,000 African Americans. Mississippi County's 300 soldiers were less than two percent of Arkansas' contribution to the Confederacy during the first year of the war, but those 300 men were nearly eight percent of the county's population of 3,985.<sup>69</sup>

The desire to support the cause quickly spread throughout most of Arkansas, and the number of young men who wanted to join the Confederate army far outnumbered the arms and

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<sup>69</sup> Bobby Roberts and Carl Moneyhon, *Portraits of Conflict* (Fayetteville, Arkansas: The University of Arkansas Press, 1987), 15

supplies that were available to them. Southerners believed that they were superior soldiers and that the war would be over quickly, and they wanted to be part of the adventure while there was still a chance. Local units formed with no regard for official status from the Confederacy and adopted names that showed their confidence, enthusiasm, and desire to fight: the “Tyronza Rebels,” “Camden Knights,” “Polk County Invincibles,” and the “Muddy Bayou Heroes” were only a few of the Arkansas companies that rallied for the Confederacy. It was evident in the early months of the war that protection of the border between north and south was vital, and for many Arkansans, that meant that any problems in Missouri could extend into their own state. Defense of home and family took precedence over other issues.<sup>70</sup>

When prominent Mississippi County men began the call for volunteers, they found many willing to serve. In June 1861, Elliot Fletcher and Dr. Frank McGavock, John H. McGavock’s cousin, traveled to each corner of the county in search of volunteers, and by June 18, they had gathered at least forty-five men for service in the company they were forming. Despite their support for the cause, drama ensued when it came time to elect officers of the company. At the hour when the men were set to vote, Dr. McGavock arrived drunk at the meeting, but was nonetheless elected captain, while Fletcher was voted 1<sup>st</sup> Lieutenant. The twenty-five men who had volunteered with Fletcher, however, were upset by McGavock’s election, and after some heated discussion that lasted late into the night, the company disbanded.<sup>71</sup> After the meeting, Fletcher’s men promised that if he could reform the company, they would vote him captain. When he did just that, the twenty-one-year-old Elliot Fletcher was placed in command of the

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<sup>70</sup> Daniel Sutherland, *A Savage Conflict: The Decisive Role of Guerillas in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 43.

<sup>71</sup> “The Civil War Letters of Captain Elliot H. Fletcher of Mill Bayou, Mississippi County, Arkansas, July to December, 1861.” Ed. James H. Atkinson (Little Rock, Ark: Pulaski County Historical Society, 1963), 36.



“Fletcher Rifles.” His younger brother, fifteen-year-old Thomas, served as sergeant under his command. Only twelve days later, Fletcher was given notice to be in Memphis with at least sixty-eight men, ready to serve the Confederacy.<sup>72</sup> By July 19, 1861, the “Fletcher Rifles” were in Memphis receiving their first orders.<sup>73</sup> In the first months of the war, the Fletcher Rifles were sent to Fort Pillow – a Confederate fort about 60 miles north of Memphis – and then down the Mississippi River to Helena, where they traveled up the White River and on to camp near the Arkansas-Missouri Line. “We are beginning to realize that we are soldiers,” Fletcher wrote to his father, as he and dozens of young Mississippi County men settled into camp on the Missouri border.<sup>74</sup>

Mississippi County’s second company was commanded by Captain Charles Bowen, another prominent county citizen. Born in Jackson County, Tennessee, Bowen was the son of John and Jennie Crawford Bowen, Virginia natives who had settled in Tennessee. His mother died, and in 1828, fourteen-year-old Charles and the remaining family moved to Barfield Point in Mississippi County. Charles worked with his father on the Mississippi River, trading, running flatboats, and cutting wood to sell to the steamboats that traveled up and down the Mississippi. When his father returned to Tennessee, Charles remained in Mississippi County. Bowen continued to work on the river, running a trading boat up and down the Mississippi, selling “anything a man wanted” from the boats. In his memoirs, Bowen talks about his life on the river, calling people who worked on the river “the roughest in the world.”<sup>75</sup> Before he was the commanding officer of the Osceola Hornets, Bowen served as a deputy sheriff from 1842-1848

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<sup>72</sup> Atkinson, “The Civil War Letters of Captain Fletcher,” 37.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>75</sup> “Captain Bowen Tells of Early Days in Mississippi County,” *The Delta Historical Review*, Fall 1996, 7.

under his older brother, John.<sup>76</sup> At the end of his brother's term in 1848, Charles was elected Mississippi County sheriff, where he served from 1848 until he "threw the office away and went to War."<sup>77</sup> The "Osceola Hornets," as Bowen's men were known, were mustered into service at Memphis, Tennessee, on August 10, 1861, as part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Confederate Infantry. Early in the war, they operated largely along the Mississippi River. They were assigned as Company G of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Confederate Infantry, then transferred as Company I of the 9<sup>th</sup> Arkansas Infantry in May 1862.<sup>78</sup>

Southerners viewed the war in 1861 with a sense of adventure and romance, and even as problems began to arise in Missouri, Arkansas seemed safe against any immediate fighting.<sup>79</sup> Letters from Captain Fletcher to his father expressed this belief – his men were in "glorious spirits" and that "Providence" was on the side of the Confederacy. The Confederate victory at First Manassas on July 21, 1861, reinforced the belief in the South that it would be a short war, and like Captain Fletcher's men, most Southerners arrived at the end of the year with high hopes.

It was not long into the early months of the war that both the Union and Confederate forces realized the usefulness of Mississippi County, and military action there increased throughout 1861 and 1862. Georgia McGavock was not unmindful of the potential consequences for her family. Osceola, situated in relatively close proximity to Memphis and Fort Pillow (then under Confederate control), was especially appealing to Union authorities intent upon capturing control of the Mississippi River. As the war moved closer to Mississippi County, the threat to Osceola and its inhabitants became apparent. Georgia's cousin, W.H.

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<sup>76</sup> *Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Northeast Arkansas*, 459.

<sup>77</sup> J.L. Gladish, "Captain Bowen Tells of Early Days in Mississippi County," *Blytheville Courier*, October, 19, 1933.

<sup>78</sup> "Captain Bowen Tells of Early Days in Mississippi County," *The Delta Historical Review*, Fall 1996.

<sup>79</sup> Sutherland, *A Savage Conflict*, 41.

Goodwin of Memphis, Tennessee, warned her of impending military action along the Mississippi River. On March 27, 1862, he wrote:

You ask me to tell you the true state of affairs about this place and up the river. . . although we hear every day that Island No. 10 is almost impregnable,<sup>80</sup> and that the enemy have withdrawn their own boats and so forth and so forth, I feel satisfied that our forces will be withdrawn from that point as soon as the fortifications at Fort Pillow. . .are considered secure. . .It will be absolutely necessary to prevent a capture of our entire force on and about the island, now numbering about 2,500. If this takes place (that is, the evacuation of Island 10), it of course leaves the river open down to your place. . .<sup>81</sup>

Soon after Goodwin's letter, on April 8, 1862, the Confederate garrison of forty-five hundred men on Island Number 10, seventy-five miles north of Osceola, surrendered to Union General John Pope's troops after a nearly three-week long bombardment.<sup>82</sup> This left only Fort Pillow between Union troops and Memphis. Fort Pillow, which was located about eight miles downriver from Osceola (on the Tennessee side), was the next objective for the Union army, meaning that the city of Osceola and the people of Mississippi County were bound to see more and more action in the conflict over control of the river.

After the fall of Island No. 10 in April, General Pope planned to lead his troops downstream where they would meet with the main Union fleet, the Western Flotilla, and cross the Mississippi River to the Tennessee side and overtake Fort Pillow. In preparation for this attack on Fort Pillow, Pope ordered thousands of troops to land on the Arkansas shore at Osceola. His plan to attack Fort Pillow, however, was never put into action; his troops were ordered to Pittsburg Landing in Tennessee to reinforce General Ulysses S. Grant at the Battle of Shiloh in Tennessee. Even with Pope's troops moved to Tennessee, the ships of the Western

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<sup>80</sup> See Figure 4, page 72.

<sup>81</sup> William H. Goodwin to Georgia M. McGavock, 27 March 1862, "Letters to Georgia M. McGavock," Microfilm, National Society of the Colonial Dames of America in Tennessee, Vanderbilt University.

<sup>82</sup> Official Records state that the siege of Island 10 lasted from March 15-April 7, 1862.

Flotilla remained and anchored across from Sans Souci landing, assembling to attack Fort Pillow. Flag Officer Charles H. Davis, an accomplished oceanographer, was placed in charge of the Union fleet, and in April his ironclads and boats began a bombardment of Fort Pillow that lasted into May.<sup>83</sup> On May 10, eight vessels of the Confederate River Defense Fleet under Captain James E. Montgomery took Captain Davis and the Western Flotilla by surprise at Plum Point near Sans Souci, just south of Osceola, and attacked the mortar boats bombarding Fort Pillow. In what is called the Battle of Plum Point (or the Battle of Plum Run), there was about an hour of gunfire between the opposing fleets, with only “light casualties on both sides.”<sup>84</sup> The Confederates sank the Federal ironclad *Cincinnati* and badly damaged the *Mound City*, then withdrew to Fort Pillow. Both the *Cincinnati* and the *Mound City* were later raised and towed upriver, where they were repaired and returned to service within a matter of weeks. Though the Confederate gunboats were victorious at the Battle of Plum Point, the Western Flotilla quickly regrouped and proceeded downriver. Confederates evacuated Fort Pillow in June 1862 for fear of being cut off from their own army; Federal forces occupied it immediately and held it for the next two years.<sup>85</sup>

By the middle of 1862, the war had taken on a new meaning for residents of Mississippi County. The sense of adventure and romance was gone; in its place was the knowledge of loss and vulnerability. Disease and sickness had taken the lives of several Mississippi County boys in the first year of the war, and more deaths would follow.<sup>86</sup> On April 6 and 7, the Battle of Shiloh took place in Tennessee, and both the Fletcher Rifles and the Osceola Hornets found themselves

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<sup>83</sup> William L. Shea and Terrence J. Winschel, *Vicksburg is the Key: The Struggle for the Mississippi River* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 9-10.

<sup>84</sup> “Battle of Plum Point Changes History,” *Osceola Times*, May 10, 2007.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> In nearly all of his letters to his father, Elliot Fletcher references sickness and death in his company.

active in the fighting. Captain Charles Bowen stated that he “lost twenty-one men Sunday and Monday at Shiloh.”<sup>87</sup> Captain Bowen himself was wounded in the head by a bullet that, he claimed, passed through and killed Hood Dillingham, a member of the Osceola Hornets. The Fletcher Rifles lost their captain and sergeant in that same battle – both Elliot Fletcher and his younger brother Thomas were killed.<sup>88</sup> In April alone, dozens of Mississippi County’s men had died, and Island No. 10 fell to Pope’s advance down the Mississippi River. In May, news of the victory at Plum Point was heartening, but by June both Fort Pillow and Memphis had fallen into Union hands. The bad news that came to residents of Mississippi County from the battlefields would continue until the war’s end. Attrition was taking a great toll on Confederate troops; death, desertions, and illnesses created holes in the ranks that could not be filled.<sup>89</sup> Confederate units throughout the South, including Mississippi County’s units, were plagued with diminishing numbers, and there were few soldiers available to take the place of those who had died, were captured, got sick, or simply left to return to their families.

Events on the opposite side of Arkansas in the spring of 1862 changed the face of war for Arkansans. The Confederate loss at the Battle of Pea Ridge in northwest Arkansas brought guerilla warfare to the state. As his army retreated through Arkansas, General Van Dorn authorized the formation of partisan companies, which were largely comprised of deserters from

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<sup>87</sup> “Autobiography of Captain Charles Bowen, Osceola Pioneer,” *Osceola Times*, December 25, 1975.

<sup>88</sup> *Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Northeast Arkansas*, 496.

<sup>89</sup> Of the eighty-five men who joined the Osceola Hornets on August 10, 1861, there are only records for fifty-two of them. Of the fifty-two, eight were killed in action, and five were wounded in battle. Two died of sickness, and three were disabled with illness. Another three men were discharged before the end of the war. Nine men were captured and sent to a prison camp, where three of them died. Sixteen men deserted, most in 1863, and twelve of those sixteen were captured and sent to a prison camp, where seven of them joined the Union army. One, Captain Bowen, resigned from service in 1863, and only five stayed in service until the end of the war.

his own army and other militia members and guerillas throughout the state. The Partisan Ranger Act of April 1862 allowed for the formation of “independent companies’ of ten to eighty men each” and created a defensive barrier that hindered the Union advance into Arkansas.<sup>90</sup>

Throughout 1862, both the Union army and the Confederate government would discover how difficult it would be to control guerillas.<sup>91</sup> Mississippi County was no exception. The county was overrun with thugs and bushwhackers from both Confederate and Union armies. Deserters with no allegiance to either side, common murderers and thieves, and misfits joined together and moved around the countryside, preying on local people. Most were not part of any legitimate guerilla force.<sup>92</sup>

While enduring the atrocities of guerillas, residents along the Mississippi River also suffered from cotton raiders. Guerillas who lived along the river were “terrorizing commercial shipping” and confiscating livestock, ammunition, and medicine.<sup>93</sup> In Crittenden County, directly south of Mississippi County, the community of Hopefield (located directly across the river from Memphis) was punished for being a safe haven for rebels. Helena, a town some 120 miles south of Osceola and firmly in Union hands, became a center of black market trade in cotton. In an effort to keep the profits of the cotton trade out of Confederate hands, Union troops regularly went on raids into Arkansas to appropriate cotton from unprotected plantations along the Mississippi, White, and Arkansas Rivers.<sup>94</sup> The Federal naval vessel *Eastport* was used to transport seized and stolen cotton; from February 1862 to March 1864, she assisted in the capture of over fourteen thousand bales, which were worth approximately \$700,000 in 1860 prices and

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<sup>90</sup> Sutherland, *A Savage Conflict*, 65-67.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 125-126.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>94</sup> Carl H. Moneyhon, *The Impact of the Civil War and Reconstruction: Persistence in the Midst of Ruin, 1850-1874* (Fayetteville, University of Arkansas Press, 2002), 87.

\$14 million dollars today.<sup>95</sup> The cotton trade was so profitable that Union officers were accused of spending more time obtaining and trading cotton than fighting the war. Although there is no evidence about the cotton trade in Mississippi County, it is likely that Mississippi County cotton growers became involved in this illicit trade. The Union army confiscated cotton and destroyed livestock, crops, and homes of any family or communities suspected of harboring guerillas or where guerillas attacked – not even families who claimed loyalty to the Union were spared.<sup>96</sup>

By the end of 1862, morale was especially low for many Arkansans – guerillas had taken their horses, guns, and food supplies. Many citizens felt abandoned by the Confederate government, and neither army could was able to subdue the guerillas.<sup>97</sup> Civilians began to tire of the violence, theft, and destruction and offered their loyalty to whichever side could assure aid and order. As the war waged on and guerillas caused more and more problems in Mississippi County, citizens were left to attempt to take care of their own problems. In response to the lawlessness that plagued Mississippi County, Dr. Frank McGavock and other residents of Shawnee Village, in southern Mississippi County, organized the Shawnee Legal Association in 1863. Dr. McGavock, the leader of the group, was appointed judge by both General Stephen Hurlbut of the Union army and Confederate General Sterling Price. The residents of Shawnee Village were required to join the group – when a capital offense was committed, any and all lawbreakers were to be apprehended and turned over to either Federal or Confederate troops. If the offense was minor, the offender was horsewhipped and ordered to leave the county.<sup>98</sup> Despite their efforts, by late 1863, the war in northeast Arkansas was almost entirely characterized by guerrilla warfare.

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<sup>95</sup> Moneyhon, *The Impact of the Civil War and Reconstruction*, 88.

<sup>96</sup> Sutherland, *A Savage Conflict*, 134.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>98</sup> Edrington, *History of Mississippi County*, 115.

On September 7, 1863, U.S. Major Fred R. Poole and two hundred troops from the Second Missouri State Militia Cavalry left Camp Lowry, Missouri, on an expedition to Osceola and Big Lake to determine the strength and location of Confederate and guerrilla forces operating in Mississippi County. When they reached Osceola, Major Poole and his troops met reinforcements from the Twenty-fifth Missouri Infantry under Colonel Chester Harding. Poole's soldiers moved quickly through the timber and swamps of Mississippi County without burden of tents or blankets, and they covered the seven hundred mile journey in 24 days. Major Poole reported that they did not meet Confederate forces of any number, but his troops "killed 13 noted guerrillas, nearly all of whom fought with desperation. . .[and] captured some 26 or 30 others."<sup>99</sup> Guerilla warfare in Arkansas took on a different face by 1864, inspired by a desperate bitterness.<sup>100</sup> After the April 1864 defeat of General Frederick Steele at Camden, the Union army positioned itself in Little Rock, Pine Bluff, DeValls Bluff, Helena, Fort Smith, and Fayetteville, and the Arkansas countryside was open to bandits. Confederate officers like General Joseph Shelby, who was located in the White River area in central Arkansas, used his men to wreak havoc on Federal troops. General Archibald Dobbins operated in and around the Helena area, creating even more problems for Union troops along the Mississippi River. Colonel Solomon G. Kitchen formed Kitchen's Legion in northeast Arkansas, a combination of infantry, cavalry, and artillerymen made up of stragglers from Price's Army. Brigadier General Jeff

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<sup>99</sup> United States War Department, U.S. Record and Pension Office, U.S. War Records Office, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies Series 1 – Volume 22, Part 1*, 616.

<sup>100</sup> Sutherland, *A Savage Conflict*, 210.



Thompson, a cavalry raider nicknamed the “Swamp Fox of Missouri,” took charge of guerrilla troops in northeast Arkansas in 1864.<sup>101</sup>

Reports of guerrilla activity in Mississippi, Dunklin, and Pemiscot Counties in Missouri led federal forces on another expedition to Arkansas in the spring of 1864 to find and destroy enemy camps. U.S. Major John Rabb of the Second Missouri Artillery, headquartered in New Madrid, was assigned to lead the expedition. He believed the men responsible for the trouble in Missouri were groups of guerrillas in Mississippi County operating around Osceola and the Pemiscot Bayou area. Rabb’s plan to move troops into Arkansas was two-pronged: send one group by land to Pemiscot Bayou, some thirty miles north of Osceola, and send another group down the Mississippi River to Osceola, where they would disembark and proceed to Pemiscot Bayou. At 11:00 p.m. on April 5, Rabb and two hundred men of Companies H, I, and K of the Second Missouri Artillery left by the steamer *Silver Moon* on their way to Osceola. The steamer stopped at Barfield’s Point, about twenty miles above Osceola, and Captain W.C.F. Montgomery and one hundred men disembarked with orders to march to the Chickasawba Settlement at Pemiscot Bayou. Major Rabb and the remaining one hundred men landed at Osceola and began a march to a point ten miles below Montgomery’s targeted area. In Rabb’s second move, Captain Valentine Preuitt and members of Companies G, K, and M of the First Missouri Militia Cavalry left New Madrid and, on the morning of April 6, marched into Arkansas towards Pemiscot Bayou.<sup>102</sup>

Rabb’s march out of Osceola was a hard one; the road went through swamp filled with dense cane and timber, and the federals marched in water from one to three feet deep. They

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<sup>101</sup> Doris Land Mueller, *M. Jeff Thompson: Missouri’s Swamp Fox of the Confederacy* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2007).

<sup>102</sup> Official Records, 872-873.

traveled twelve miles on April 6, killing five or six guerrillas they met on the road, then set up camp that night at the home of Mark Walker, a Confederate sympathizer with a son in one of the guerrilla bands. Expecting attack, Rabb stationed seventy-five men of Company K under Lieutenant Winfrey around the Walker house and the remaining twenty-five men under Lieutenant L.J. Phillips about fifty yards from the house. It was cold and raining hard, and Rabb's men were told not to build fires. At 3:00 a.m. on the morning of April 7, Rabb was unexpectedly accosted by a Confederate standing several feet from him who demanded surrender. A gun battle quickly ensued between the federal troops and an estimated one hundred Confederates who were within feet of them. There were a number of casualties on both sides, including Lieutenant Phillips.<sup>103</sup>

The skirmish ended as quickly as it began, and Rabb's troops hastily left the area with prisoners and carrying their wounded on litters; the Confederates also quickly dispersed. Casualties from the Confederate side were unknown. On the evening of April 7, Rabb met up with Montgomery and his men, who had not encountered the enemy during their travels. They marched a few miles above Barfield's Point, and on the morning of April 8, boarded the steamer *Darling* and went back to New Madrid. In his official report, Major Rabb said of the fight:

The question may occur as how they managed to elude the pickets. This can only be answered by the fact that they were thoroughly acquainted with every part of the ground, and it was so dark, and the rain falling in such torrents, that they could neither be seen or heard. One of the sentinels near me did not hear them until I received the summons to surrender.<sup>104</sup>

Meanwhile, Captain Valentine Preuitt's men met Confederate guerrillas forty-five miles into their journey to Arkansas. They killed two guerrillas on April 6, and on the morning of April 7, they crossed the swamp at Little River, ten miles west of Osceola, and came upon a group of

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<sup>103</sup> Official Records, 872-873.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 873-874.

about twenty-five Confederates. They killed twelve and took five prisoners, and the remainder escaped. Confederate Captain Williams was killed, and orders on his body showed Confederate strength in Mississippi County numbered approximately one thousand men, operating under Colonels McGee, Kitchen, Clark, and Freeman. One of the captured orders was signed at a place called Blue Cane, which was a dense canebrake that hid several houses, a store of stolen goods, a distillery, and a large amount of stock. Valentine's men suffered 3 wounded, none killed. By the evening of April 7, Preuitt was back in Missouri.<sup>105</sup>

Periodic raids by the Union army did not stop the activities of the remaining Confederate troops, and guerrilla activity continued in Mississippi County under Colonel Kitchen. On June 9, 1864, Captain Prueitt telegraphed Colonel J.B. Rogers at Cape Girardeau that Kitchen was at Osceola with approximately eight hundred men and their objective was to seize steamers and get supplies. Lieutenant Steele, acting provost-marshal at New Madrid, sent a letter on June 29 to Lieutenant Colonel John Burriss of the Tenth Kansas Volunteers at Cape Girardeau that Kitchen had four hundred men and they were stealing, murdering, and cutting wires, and that the situation was horrible. On July 3, Burriss sent word to General Ewing that he would move all the troops that could be spared into Arkansas on July 5, where he thought Kitchen was with considerable force. Burriss left New Madrid, Missouri, on July 21, 1864, on a scouting expedition through southeast Missouri and northeast Arkansas. He was accompanied by a battalion of the Second Cavalry Missouri State Militia under Lieutenant-Colonel Hiller and a detachment of the First Cavalry Missouri Volunteers under Captain Valentine Preuitt. At Bloomfield, Missouri, they were reinforced by a battalion of the Third Cavalry Missouri State Militia under Major Wilson and a squadron of the Sixth Cavalry Missouri Volunteers. On August 1, the federals reached the

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<sup>105</sup> Official Records, 873-874.

swamps of Big Lake in Mississippi County and met a small group of what Burris referred to as “bushwhackers and thieves.” Burris’ men captured arms, horses, and contraband slaves, then burned five houses before moving on to Osceola through some twenty miles of swamp.<sup>106</sup>

On the afternoon of August 2, 1864, the federal troops reached Osceola, where they came upon the main Confederate force under Captain Charles Bowen and Captain H. M. McVeigh. The Union forces attacked and engaged in what Burris described as a “running fight” for several miles. They killed 7 Confederates and captured 25, including Captain Bowen and Colonel Elliott Fletcher, Sr.<sup>107</sup> No Union casualties were reported, and Burris’ men captured a large number of arms and horses. Captain McVeigh and seventy of his men pursued them but failed to catch them. On August 3, the federals marched back to Pemiscot Bayou and crossed into Missouri. Burris’ official report to Brigadier General Thomas Ewing, the U.S. Commander at Saint Louis, listed 47 Confederates killed (including 1 captain and 3 lieutenants), 57 captured (including 2 captains and 1 lieutenant), and 40 wounded. They captured more than 200 guns, which were destroyed, and 230 horses and mules, which were turned in to the quartermaster. They also emancipated twenty slaves.<sup>108</sup> Burris reported that his men had not carried food for themselves or their animals when they left Missouri, and they had subsisted largely off stolen and captured supplies. He further reported that his expedition had largely cleared the area of Confederates and guerrillas.<sup>109</sup> Captain Bowen was taken to Gratiot Street Prison in St. Louis and remained there

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<sup>106</sup> Official Records, 873-874.

<sup>107</sup> Official Records, Vol. 41, 79.

<sup>108</sup> Official Records, Vol. 41, 80.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 79-81.

two months before he was paroled with another prisoner, John H. Grider, and returned to Osceola.<sup>110</sup>

Not only did Mississippi County residents endure guerilla raids and the seizure of cotton by Union forces and the burning of cotton by Confederate forces. They also faced the loss of their slaves. In March 1862, Georgia's cousin, W.H. Goodwin, wrote to her, "My belief is that wherever in the South the Federal Army penetrates, that the slaves will be materially free. The relation between master and slave will be at an end. . ." <sup>111</sup> Goodwin's belief was on target, as on July 1862, Congress passed the Second Confiscation Act, which declared that slaves were forever free as soon as they crossed Union lines. As news and rumors spread of the Union army's advancement into the South, many slaves began to desert their masters and run towards Union lines and the freedom they believed they would find there.<sup>112</sup> Soon after, on September 22, 1862, President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, which declared freedom for all slaves in Confederate territory still in rebellion as of January 1, 1863.

Some plantation owners, in order to keep their slaves from leaving, tried to compromise with their slaves, either in the form of payment for labor or allowing them a piece of the profit after crops were sold. Along the Mississippi River, slaves followed the Union army as they passed through the surrounding countryside gathering supplies, stealing what they could, and confiscating cotton from plantations. Many slaves fled to Helena to be closer to the Union Army, and some joined the Union Army. William Baltimore of Pine Bluff, a slave who lived on the plantation owned by a Dr. Waters, says he joined the Confederate army as a servant and

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<sup>110</sup> Jacobs, "Young Couple Comes West to Establish Home," 16. John Grider's son, William H. Grider, would later marry Susan McGavock.

<sup>111</sup> Jacobs, "Young Couple Comes West to Establish Home," 9.

<sup>112</sup> Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 69.

served until he was captured by Yankees in 1863. He was taken to Little Rock and sworn in as a Union soldier, and he served with them until he was mustered out on September 16, 1866.

Many slave owners took or sent their slaves to Texas during the war so the slaves would not be taken from them or have the opportunity to leave. Emma Moore, a slave who belonged to Joe Horton of Pine Bluff, recalled, “They sure did take us to Texas durin’ of the War – in a wagon. Stayed down there a long time.” Jeff Burgess, a slave owned by Strathers Burgess of Clarendon, was born in Granville, Texas, while his family was living there; according to Burgess, his family didn’t know they were free until three years after the war was over. One of Newt Titsworth’s slaves, Sweetie Wagoner, stated that, “Everyone got scared when the war come along; the master was afraid someone steal his slaves, so he ups and take us to Texas.”<sup>113</sup> Numerous other slaves remembered living in Texas and returning to Arkansas only when freedom came. Though Georgia McGavock had taken her children and returned to her family’s home in Columbus, Mississippi, it is unknown how many, if any, of Sans Souci’s slaves she took with her. Most of Sans Souci’s slaves were sent to family plantations in Scott County, Mississippi.<sup>114</sup>

Freedom came to slaves at different times, depending on where they lived. Freedom for some occurred as Union troops came through; for others, freedom came as the war ended. In Lee County, the slaves of Dr. Jack Spivy of Marianna did not know about freedom until three or four months after the war ended in 1865. Rosetta Davis, who belonged to Dr. Spivy, said, “Some man come along and said he was going home, the War was over. Some of the hands asked him who win and he told them the Yankees and told them they was free fer as he knowed.

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<sup>113</sup> Lankford, *Bearing Witness*, 15, 22, 182, 243, 269.

<sup>114</sup> Southern Claims Commission, 1871-1880: Consolidated Index of Claims, Deposition of Daniel Thompson, January 23, 1877.

They got to inquiring and found out they done been free.”<sup>115</sup> Reactions to freedom varied from elation and relief to worry and a desire to stay where they were. Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation skillfully added the issue of freeing the slaves to the mission of saving the Union, which gave the war a new dimension. Added to all of the other problems the Confederacy was facing, the Emancipation Proclamation did much to seal the fate of the South.

The military activity in close proximity to Mississippi County had other implications for county residents. The overwhelming numbers of sick and wounded soldiers who needed to be treated and moved caused a logistical nightmare. In 1862, steamboats were outfitted for service as both transport and floating hospitals to handle the thousands of sick and wounded soldiers that needed to be tended and moved. There were 23,741 casualties from the battle of Shiloh; the steamer *City of Memphis* alone transported over 2,200 wounded and sick Union soldiers from Shiloh and Pittsburg Landing. During service from February 18, 1862, through July 16, 1862, *City of Memphis* moved 7,221 Union troops. Over the course of the war, the steamer *D. A. January* moved 23,738 wounded and sick soldiers, with Pittsburg Landing her first trip.<sup>116</sup> Union soldiers were venturing into a region without immunity to certain endemic diseases. Whenever tens of thousands of men gathered together in close environments like military encampments, they were extremely susceptible to disease; measles, dysentery, typhoid, pneumonia, and malaria. Disease rather than wounds was the biggest cause of death for both Confederate and Union troops. Of the approximate 618,000 deaths during the Civil War, only about thirty-five percent of them were due to battle and wounds; the other sixty-five percent were due to disease and sickness. Northeast Arkansas had a hot and humid climate – perfect as a

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<sup>115</sup> Lankford, *Bearing Witness*, 269.

<sup>116</sup> George A. Otis and D.L. Huntington, “Transportation of the Wounded,” *The Medical and Surgical History of the War of the Rebellion Part III Volume II Surgical History* (Washington: Government Printing Office 1883), 974-981.

breeding ground for large mosquito populations, the cause of two of the most deadly diseases, yellow fever and malaria. There were no yellow fever epidemics during the Civil War, but malaria was endemic in Northeast Arkansas. Soldiers suffered from poor diet, polluted water, poor hygiene, and even more from a lack of medical knowledge. Sanitary practices were unknown at the time, and surgery was performed without gloves or protection and bare hands were wiped on any cloth that could be found. The causes of most diseases were still identified largely with climate itself and the poisons that lurked in the air.<sup>117</sup>

Because of the large number of casualties, the use of private homes as field hospitals in the Civil War was a common and necessary occurrence, particularly as more and more wounded soldiers were being transported by boat. After the fall of Fort Pillow, the house at Sans Souci plantation was taken over by General Pope's troops, who used it as a headquarters and a hospital. The landing at Sans Souci and the extensive grounds made the big house a perfect field hospital. The overwhelming number of soldiers needing medical treatment meant that every building in the vicinity of a battlefield or encampment was converted to medical use. Hospitals in towns and cities were ill-equipped to handle the flood of men that needed attention, and the rural South, where most of the action took place, was even less prepared.

Crucial to the functioning of military hospitals was the contribution of women. The movement of women into hospitals as nurses was a new phenomenon, one that was necessary because of the lack of male medical assistants but also worrisome to mid-nineteenth century society. Hospital work was seen by many as improper for women because of their innate delicate and modest nature. Women saw nursing of wounded and sick men as opportunity to contribute to the war effort, however, and ladies' aid societies and relief associations associated

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<sup>117</sup> Shultz, "The Medical Education of William Brooks Bigler."



with nursing and healing sprang up across the South. The majority of female nurses performed duties such as visiting soldiers, washing their faces, writing letters, swatting flies, bringing food and feeding soldiers, and praying with them. Some took nursing much further and dressed wounds, assisted with procedures, and worked in wards, but they were the exception rather than the rule. Georgia McGavock trained to become a nurse in Columbus, Mississippi, under the direction of her brother-in-law, Dr. Malone, and worked in the hospital there.<sup>118</sup>

While Georgia McGavock tended to the sick and wounded in Mississippi, she also played another role in the Confederate war effort. According to Josephine Grider Jacobs in her story, “Young Couple Comes West to Establish Home,” Georgia McGavock not only undertook nurses’ training, but also made the decision to begin smuggling medical supplies to Confederate hospitals and troops. Jacobs asserts that Georgia and her daughter, four-year-old Susan John, made round trips from Memphis to Sans Souci to Columbus and back, carrying medicine, gold, and other supplies sewn in Susan John’s dolls.<sup>119</sup> Though not an everyday occurrence, it was not unheard of for females to smuggle supplies. In late 1863, eighteen-year-old Miss Mattie McSweeny of Fort Smith (Sebastian County) bought needed tin cups and frying pans, attached them to her underwear, and smuggled them to General W.L. Cabell’s Confederate troops as her escort, an unsuspecting federal lieutenant, took her past federal pickets.<sup>120</sup> Hundreds of Confederate women chose to use “women’s weapons but did not play by women’s rules;” in other words, they maintained and used their femininity to further the Cause by more dangerous

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<sup>118</sup> Jacobs, “Young Couple Comes West to Establish Home,” 7.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>120</sup> The United Confederate Veterans of Arkansas, *Confederate Women of Arkansas in the Civil War* (Fayetteville, Arkansas: M & M Press, 1907), 74.

actions, such as smuggling and spying.<sup>121</sup> In Memphis, the smuggling of cotton, medicine, and food became a common occurrence, and though soldiers had been given orders to search everyone for “contraband,” many soldiers were cautious when it came to searching women. The *Memphis Bulletin* told stories of women taking advantage of their large skirts – thick amounts of crinoline proved to be a good hiding place for goods, such as whiskey, boots, military lace, and “other supplies greatly in demand in the Confederacy.” Osceola’s position on the Mississippi River most likely made it an ideal meeting place for smugglers. Officials in Memphis were unable to stop smuggling across the river – goods could be loaded on boats and shipped anywhere, and much-needed cargo could make easy contact with the Confederate armies and guerillas.<sup>122</sup>

Guerrilla warfare, the activities of bushwhackers, an ever-decreasing number of soldiers, and nonexistent supplies could not sustain military action against the Union army in Arkansas. The whole Confederate army was low on men, had no reinforcements, and had no supplies. The Confederacy began to unravel, and on April 9, 1865, Robert E. Lee surrendered his armies in Virginia. Joseph Johnson surrendered his forces in North Carolina on April 26. In Arkansas, Brigadier General Jeff Thompson, who had been operating in the areas of the White and Little Red Rivers, surrendered his Army of the Northern Sub-District of Arkansas on May 11. At the time of surrender, Thompson had 7,454 men, but they only had five hundred guns, three or four hundred canoes, and no food.<sup>123</sup> Colonel Solomon Kitchen surrendered Kitchen’s Legion as a part of Thompson’s army. On June 2, General Kirby Smith surrendered his forces in Arkansas,

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<sup>121</sup> Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 218.

<sup>122</sup> Moneyhon, *The Impact of the Civil War and Reconstruction*, 87.

<sup>123</sup> Roberts and Moneyhon, *Portraits of Conflict*, 189.

and on June 3, General Thomas Dockery surrendered all remaining Arkansas troops. Many men had already deserted; those that were left simply went home.

In Mississippi County, those who had fled their homes returned to find their towns in devastated conditions. Homes had been used as hospitals, and lawns had been used as cemeteries, and some people, like Georgia McGavock, returned home to find bloodstains on her porch, holes in the floors, and dead bodies awaiting burial stored in lumber rooms.<sup>124</sup> The Civil War had wreaked havoc on the lives of all families across the county, and people tried to bring order to their lives, struggling with the many changes that came with Reconstruction.

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<sup>124</sup> Jacobs, "Young Couple Comes West to Establish Home," 11.

### Chapter 3 Reconstruction

Tensions between Democrats and Republicans were at an all-time high after the Civil War. Hoping to gain a strong political following in the South, Republicans worked to extend a hand of cooperation to African Americans, who saw the Republican Party as the party that had given them freedom. Democrats across the South felt threatened by this relationship and feared the loss of their influence in state and local politics. Anger and resentment over the losses suffered during the war and the defeat of the Confederacy also fueled the desire on the part of many whites to keep former slaves in their “place.” As a result, severe violence between the two parties plagued the South.

The period after the Civil War was a “tumultuous and controversial” time, and Arkansas was home to some of the worst racial and political violence in the country.<sup>125</sup> In the fall of 1868, Union General Oliver O. Howard wrote of Arkansas in the “Report on the Condition of the Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States” that attempts to administer justice throughout the state were ineffective and “lawless violence and ruffianism have prevailed to an alarming extent.”<sup>126</sup> With the election of Powell Clayton, a former Union cavalry officer, as governor in 1868, Republicans gained control of the state. To combat the “reign of terror” that stretched across most of Arkansas and the growing violence of the Ku Klux Klan towards African Americans and Republicans, Governor Clayton instituted martial law in ten Arkansas counties, including Mississippi County. Racial and political unrest was rampant in Mississippi County, reflecting the extreme feelings of racial hysteria that were present in the state and demonstrating to all

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<sup>125</sup> Thomas DeBlack, *With Fire and Sword: Arkansas, 1861-1874* (Fayetteville, University of Arkansas Press, 2003), 147.

<sup>126</sup> Report on the Conditions of Affairs in the Insurrectionary States, Index to the Reports of the Committees of the Senate of the United States, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 49<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1861-1889, 21.

people, regardless of race, gender, and political affiliation, that the road to recovery after the Civil War would be a difficult and deadly travel. At Sans Souci, Georgia McGavock was left to pick up the pieces of a life that had been thrown into chaos by the death of her husband and the ravages of war.

Little Rock fell to Union forces in 1863, and under President Abraham Lincoln's lenient Ten Percent Plan, which required that ten percent of eligible voters in 1860 take an oath of loyalty to the United States, the state qualified to be readmitted into the Union by 1864. Recognized by both President Lincoln and later President Johnson, Unionist governor Isaac Murphy and Arkansas' Unionist government began work to promote the state's reconciliation with the Union. When the war ended in May 1865, Confederate governor Harris Flanagan, hoping for continuity and the restoration of civil government, proposed a plan in which all power in the state would be turned over to the Murphy government but would also allow for the recognition of local county officials under the Confederate regime.<sup>127</sup> Though the plan was rejected, it did reflect a desire of many in the state for a quick restoration of peace. As Confederate troops returned home, however, they brought with them opposition to the Murphy government, and by the fall of 1866, amidst violence and hostilities, a growing "Conservative" party was able to make a strong showing in the elections, and Democrats took control of offices held by Unionists.<sup>128</sup> The prewar elite were again in control of the state's new legislature and were rapidly returning to power.

Presidential Reconstruction enabled Democrats and the planter elite to regain much of their previous power in southern states. President Andrew Johnson's plan, which allowed for the quick restoration of the Southern states back into the Union, included a liberal pardon policy;

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<sup>127</sup> Moneyhon, *The Impact of the Civil War and Reconstruction in Arkansas*, 170.

<sup>128</sup> DeBlack, *With Fire and Sword*, 148-149.

upon taking an oath of loyalty to the Union, ex-Confederates regained their right to vote. By the fall of 1865, many Southern politicians had been pardoned, reelected, and returned to their Congressional seats in Washington D.C. Johnson's liberal Reconstruction plan was unpopular among Congressional Republicans, who wanted harsher punishments for the rebellious Southern states. They also wanted time to develop a Republican constituency, one they imagined might be made up of freedmen and poor whites. They developed their own plan for Reconstruction, which included numerous Reconstruction Acts and the requirement that southern states had to rewrite their constitutions and ratify the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment in order to be readmitted to the Union. With the implementation of Congressional Reconstruction in 1868, the balance of political power in the South shifted from the hands of the Democrats into the hands of the Republicans. When Congress implemented their own plans for Reconstruction, Republicans in Arkansas were able to gain power in the 1868 elections, but the Confederate-dominated General Assembly in Arkansas, as in many other southern states, refused to ratify the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment and gave pensions to Confederate veterans.<sup>129</sup> Since 1865, the Democrats had used violent means to suppress both white and black Republican political participation. Republicans responded in kind, using strategies of intimidation, threat, and fraud to ensure their own victory.<sup>130</sup>

Neither Presidential nor Congressional Reconstruction produced a solid plan to fix the economy of the South. Many Northern politicians believed that a system of free market labor would replace slavery, but few politicians were able to come up with plans to implement those systems.<sup>131</sup> While they understood the necessity of ending the institution of slavery, there was a

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<sup>129</sup> Kenneth Barnes, *Who Killed John Clayton? Political Violence and the Emergence of the New South, 1861-1893* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 22.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>131</sup> Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution: 1863-1877* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1988), 50.

deep need to protect the traditional economic system of the South – the plantation. The continuing of the plantation system meant the maintenance of Northern economy. To prevent the migration of African-Americans into the North, they wanted to keep former slaves working on plantations to ensure the economic success of Northern industries.<sup>132</sup> The cry to keep African Americans trapped in the plantation system was also heard from the Southern white population. According to Howard Rabinowitz in his *Race Relations in the Urban South, 1865-1890*, many white Southerners claimed that African-Americans were better suited for physical labor on land, and the control and care of the South's freedmen would be easier if they remained in the countryside.<sup>133</sup> Whites in both the North and the South believed that former slaves should be kept on plantations not only as a way to deal with the loss of labor that came with emancipation, but also as a way to reinforce systems of control over what was considered an inferior race. Many Northern politicians came to the South chanting the mantra of "40 acres and a mule," while other Reconstruction guarantees of economic, social, and political freedom gave many former slaves hopes that they would be able to own and farm their own land and be economically independent from their former masters. The much-anticipated hopes of land and economic freedom were shattered when they became tied to the same land they had previously worked on as slaves.

The lack of any solid economic plans to help poor whites and African-Americans inhibited mobility. There were, however, some governmental agencies were founded to attempt to help guide the newly freed slaves through economic freedom and to be a "helping hand" to African Americans who found themselves victims of discrimination. Though the Freedmen's

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<sup>132</sup> Foner, *Reconstruction*, 50.

<sup>133</sup> Howard Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South, 1865-1890* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 25.

Bureau was created to help give former slaves a chance for real freedom, its agents were often found to be ineffective. They were under a constant threat of violence from local Ku Klux Klan organizations and of social ostracism from local elites, and many agents who attempted to successfully do their jobs disappeared or were murdered.<sup>134</sup> The failure of Freedmen's Bureau agents to do their job effectively resulted in numerous African Americans facing terrible conditions "...more horrible than the worst stage of slavery."<sup>135</sup>

Throughout the South, organizations of former Confederates emerged to combat the growing influence of Republicans and the increasing political mobilization of African-Americans. Many elite and poor whites alike wanted to maintain the traditional stringent system of white control and to reinforce the belief that African-Americans were inherently inferior to whites. As a means of instituting their political and social control, Ku Klux Klan members used political assassinations and physical abuse, lynchings, and numerous threats to intimidate both Republicans and African-Americans.<sup>136</sup> The rise of the Ku Klux Klan was based around its "traditions of enforcing domination and submission,"<sup>137</sup> and it wanted to institute the maintenance of political influence, economic security, and social traditions. In many Southern states in the Deep South, the Klan emerged as a way for former Confederate elites to ensure their economic security.

In Arkansas the Ku Klux Klan emerged and strengthened under different circumstances. Destruction of their own economic security drove many former Confederate soldiers, who were often young men, to alleviate their anger over their declining lot in life by participating in Klan

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<sup>134</sup> R. Buckelew, "Racial Violence in Arkansas: Lynchings and Mob Rule, 1860-1930," (PhD diss., University of Arkansas, 1999), 20.

<sup>135</sup> Grif Stockley, *Ruled By Race: Black/White Relations in Arkansas from Slavery to the Present* (Fayetteville, Arkansas: The University of Arkansas Press, 2009), 65.

<sup>136</sup> Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet*, 268.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.



activities.<sup>138</sup> Economic security was important to nearly all the planter elite in the state, but the rising strength of the Republican Party, and by extension, the rising strength of African-American political power, was seen as a larger threat. Several parts of the state reported incidents of well-known Republicans and African-Americans who were threatened for engaging in political activities, and Governor Clayton was convinced that "...the doings of the Klan were but Democrat devices to intimidate the Negroes and prevent them from registering and voting."<sup>139</sup>

The attempts of ex-Confederates and white elites to "...disrupt the election process by denying both black voter registration and black voting"<sup>140</sup> reflected the idea of white solidarity in political affairs.<sup>141</sup> In doing so they believed they could maintain their influence in local political affairs. To intimidate Republican and African-American voters, local Democrats often adopted the violent tactics of the Ku Klux Klan,<sup>142</sup> and like the Freedmen's Bureau agents, many registrars were threatened, murdered, or abducted.<sup>143</sup> While traditional Klan tactics included threats, physical abuse, abduction, intimidation, and murder, other tactics were common throughout the state and the rest of the South. The use of arson to destroy buildings was common, and many Republican officials, judges, lawyers, and sympathizers found their homes and offices destroyed and burned to the ground. The destruction of African-American schools and churches was also common – both schools and churches were vital to rural communities throughout the South, and they were sources of education and information for African-

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<sup>138</sup> Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet*, 268.

<sup>139</sup> Powell Clayton, *The Aftermath of the Civil War, in Arkansas* (New York: The Neale Publishing Company, 1915), 56, 61.

<sup>140</sup> Buckelew, 22.

<sup>141</sup> John Graves, *Town and Country: Race Relations in an Urban-Rural Context in Arkansas, 1865-1905* (Fayetteville, Arkansas: The University of Arkansas Press, 1990), 25.

<sup>142</sup> Barnes, *Who Killed John Clayton?*, 27.

<sup>143</sup> Clayton, *The Aftermath of the Civil War*, 51.

Americans alike. By destroying those places, Klan members were able to eliminate the sources of political and economic information that could be considered a possible threat to the community. Eliminating information allowed white elites to maintain intellectual control over African-Americans throughout the South.

It was during this time of political unrest that Georgia McGavock returned to Mississippi County from Columbus, Mississippi, her hometown where she had resided for the majority of the war. When she returned in 1866, she found the plantation at Sans Souci in an economically devastated condition and “entirely stripped of everything.”<sup>144</sup> At only thirty-three years of age, she had already faced not only the deaths of three of her children, but also the death of her husband, John H. McGavock, in 1861.<sup>145</sup> The deprivation and dangers of war could have only added to her heartbreak. When she returned to Sans Souci with her only remaining child, Susan John, she faced the financial losses sustained by the family.

The Civil War had taken a tremendous toll on the McGavocks. A comparison of 1859 and 1867 tax records shows the impact on the assets of the family. According to these records, in 1859, the McGavocks owned \$47,015 in personal property; by 1867, Georgia McGavock owned only \$3,280 in personal property – a decrease of over 90 percent.<sup>146</sup> Like most plantation owners in the South, over half of the McGavocks’ pre-war wealth was in slaves; sixty percent of their assets were in their fifty-seven slaves. The larger web of McGavock family members in southern Mississippi County also suffered extreme losses. Collectively, their wealth was

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<sup>144</sup> Southern Claims Commission, Deposition of Georgia M. Erwin.

<sup>145</sup> At the beginning of the Civil War, Georgia had two living children, Susan John and John Harding. John Harding died as a child sometime during the war, leaving Susan John as Georgia’s only living child as of 1866.

<sup>146</sup> To put this in perspective using today’s dollars, the McGavocks owned nearly \$1,000,000 worth of property in 1859, but by two years after the war, the entirety of their property was worth only \$65,000.

reduced from \$428,720 to \$122,600.<sup>147</sup> Even with the loss of property and monetary wealth, the most important asset of Sans Souci remained intact and in McGavock possession – over three thousand acres of delta land. Land was the basis for economic survival, and for planters, maintaining control of the land meant the political and social control.<sup>148</sup>

Despite the violence and intimidation taking place in Arkansas, the state gained a reputation of being a land of promise and opportunity during the last three decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Plantation owners throughout the delta advertised promises of jobs, higher wages, better working conditions, and an overall better lifestyle in order to bring in labor.<sup>149</sup> Accompanying the expansion of the railroad system and deforestation was the expansion of the plantation system. Labor agents employed by planters were known to describe Arkansas as “a tropical country of soft and balmy air, where cocoanuts, oranges, lemons, and bananas grew” and a place where “...corn and cotton, with little cultivation, grew an enormous yield.”<sup>150</sup> Arkansas saw the fastest growth of African-Americans in the South, as former slaves from Mississippi, Louisiana, and other states in the Deep South moved to Arkansas in hopes of improving their circumstances. An escape to a land with promises of better conditions also meant an escape from the horrible conditions in their own native states.<sup>151</sup> As Steven Hahn claims in his *Nation Under Our Feet*, kinship and community networks played an important role in the social and economic politicization of African Americans. The small number of migrants who came to Arkansas and its neighboring states immediately following the Civil War were a part of those

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<sup>147</sup> Jeannie Whayne, *Delta Empire: Lee Wilson and the Transformation of Agriculture in the New South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2011), 32.

<sup>148</sup> DeBlack, *With Fire and Sword*, 150.; Moneyhon, “The Impact of the Civil War in Arkansas,” 115.

<sup>149</sup> Fon Louise Gordon, *Caste and Class: The Black Experience in Arkansas, 1880-1920* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 1.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-2.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

networks and were no doubt the “eyes and ears of their home communities” and influenced others to move to Arkansas.<sup>152</sup>

Even though the image of Arkansas as a tropical paradise was false, for the rest of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, hundreds of thousands of African American men and women moved to Arkansas seeking a change from poverty and violence that was rampant in their own home states. A few accounts show that migrants chose to sharecrop on land they had once worked as slaves but left for Arkansas because of struggles with former masters.<sup>153</sup> Others came with the desire to buy land, which was critical for economic independence. Virgin land was plentiful in Arkansas, and the Southern Homestead Act opened up nine million acres of land in the state for homesteaders. Those who were able to purchase land could more easily move towards economic independence, but land ownership was an elusive prospect for most of the state’s freedmen.<sup>154</sup> The state’s political culture promoted and encouraged black migration to the state, even as partisan and racial tensions became more pronounced. Members of both parties viewed the movement of African Americans to Arkansas as positive for economic growth.<sup>155</sup>

Upon their arrival into Arkansas, many black migrants worked hard to establish their own identities. Many found that they were able to carve out lives that included some of the opportunities promised, but they still faced unfair conditions and were the victims of exploitation and violence. In the early days of Reconstruction, many planters used a wage system to pay their workers, but cash was in short supply, and for many freedmen, it was too similar to slavery.<sup>156</sup> Over time, sharecropping became the farming arrangement of choice for most planters, and

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<sup>152</sup> Story Matkin-Rawin, ““The Great Negro State of the Country”; Arkansas’s Reconstruction and the Other Great Migration,” *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* (Spring 2013):3, 5.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>154</sup> DeBlack, *With Fire and Sword*, 155.

<sup>155</sup> Matkin-Rawin, “The Great Negro State of the Country,” 4.

<sup>156</sup> DeBlack, *With Fire and Sword*, 150.

initially it gave freedmen hope that they would be able to save enough money to buy their own land. Cash-poor tenants borrowed money for supplies from local merchants, who were often wealthy planters, in turn promising them a lien on the season's crop. High interest rates made it almost impossible to pay back loans, and sharecroppers remained trapped in a cycle of debt and poverty and remained dependent upon planters and merchants. Promises of land redistribution and economic equality for freedmen and women did not hold true in Arkansas or anywhere else in the South. It became apparent in the early days of Reconstruction that the early elite had not been destroyed by the Civil War and that much of the wealth remained in the hands of those who had held it previously.

County residents, both black and white, were attempting to get their lives back in order. While poor whites and former slaves tried to make enough to live day-by-day, the white elite attempted to figure out how to recover lost assets and maintain their economic dominance. With the help of two of her brothers, Clarence and Tom Moore, Georgia worked to bring life back to Sans Souci. The McGavock's slaves had been sent to family plantations in Scott County, Mississippi, by Georgia's brother Clarence in 1862. Of the fifty-seven slaves owned by the McGavocks at the eve of the Civil War, at least two became sharecroppers on the plantation. Daniel, a former slave who had come to Mississippi County around 1841, returned to Sans Souci in 1865, where he rented land from Georgia and worked as a farmer and a blacksmith.<sup>157</sup> Another slave, Ransom Simms, who came to Mississippi County around 1850, rented land at

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<sup>157</sup> Southern Claims Commission, 1871-1880: Consolidated Index of Claims, Deposition of Daniel Thompson, January 23, 1877.

Sans Souci and worked there as well.<sup>158</sup> Letters from Georgia's mother imply that, in Georgia's mind, the plantation was struggling with a bad harvest in the fall of 1866.<sup>159</sup>

Georgia's brother Clarence stayed and helped her run the plantation until 1868, when she married Captain William A. Erwin. Erwin was born sometime around 1840 in Jackson, Mississippi, and according to 1860 census records, was a practicing lawyer in Desha County in southeast Arkansas.<sup>160</sup> The historical record does not detail much of Erwin's life in Desha County, but it is known that he served under General Forrest during the Civil War, and in July of 1864, he took an oath of allegiance in Memphis, Tennessee.<sup>161</sup> At some point in time, he moved to Mississippi County, Arkansas, where he met the widowed Georgia. Their marriage would be marked by the county's violent political and economic turmoil.

In an attempt to regain prewar wealth, planters across the South applied with the Southern Claims Commission for reimbursement of funds for damages accrued to personal property during the Civil War. The Southern Claims Commission, founded in 1870 by the United States government to process property claims for Southern residents, provided a vehicle for planters to obtain lost cash, if they passed the rigid requirements. Local commissioners were appointed to receive, investigate, and make decisions on individual claimants based on two considerations: 1) whether or not the claimant had been loyal to the United States during the war; and 2) whether property belonging to the claimant had been confiscated by the Union army

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<sup>158</sup> Southern Claims Commission, 1871-1880: Consolidated Index of Claims, Deposition of Ransom Simms, April 17, 1875.

<sup>159</sup> Eliza Moore to Georgia McGavock, April 15, 1867, "Letters to Georgia M. McGavock." This letter from Georgia's mother also states that Georgia should not be discouraged by a bad harvest because families all across the South were suffering just as much, if not more.

<sup>160</sup> Desha County, Arkansas, Census Records for 1860, (Arkansas Historical Commission: Little Rock, Arkansas).

<sup>161</sup> "The Amnesty Oaths Taken By Residents of Desha County, AR, Following the End of the Civil War," Desha County Historical Society, Fall 1992.

during the war. Applications were extensive and tedious and had to be completed under oath, and claimants had to provide witnesses who would give validating testimony, also under oath. Most of the questions in the survey contained multiple subsections and dealt with loyalty. The remaining questions dealt with property and were just as multi-faceted as the previous ones. When Southerners applied to the SCC for monetary reimbursement, it was their burden to prove loyalty to the Union during the Civil War, and many Southerners saw no problems with stretching the truth or giving incomplete answers to a Northern bureaucrat in order to receive compensation.<sup>162</sup>

The numbers recorded by the SCC illustrate the wartime wealth of a small number of white planters. Though many applications were not successful (across the South, only 32% of claims were approved) the amount of money awarded to those few people proved they were still in positions of great economic power. According to SCC records, nearly all counties in northeast Arkansas had applicants for compensation. Across twelve of those counties, a total of 157 men and women applied for nearly \$388,531 in reparations.<sup>163</sup>

In Mississippi County, two people, including Georgia M. Erwin, filed claims with the SCC for a total of \$86,155. In 1871, Georgia applied for reimbursement of \$52,615 for “mules, forage, produce, furniture,” and property taken from Sans Souci during the war, as well as for other damages done to the house and grounds, as it had been used as a federal hospital.<sup>164</sup> Her

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<sup>162</sup> Hicks, “The Southern Claims Commission,” 11-12.

<sup>163</sup> Records of the Commissioners of Claims (Southern Claims Commission), 1871-1880: Consolidated Index of Claims, Microcopies of the Records of the National Archives: No. 87, Roll 13, St. Louis Library Collections. See Figure 5, page 73.

<sup>164</sup> Southern Claims Commission, 1871-1880: Consolidated Index of Claims, 77. The file includes application for compensation for ten mules, four thousand bushels of corn, fifty tons of hay, one thousand pounds of bacon, six hundred hogs, four hundred heads of cattle, and fencing for nearly 1,200 acres of land. Neither the “nature of claim” list nor the witness testimonies mention stolen or destroyed cotton.

case was open from 1871 until 1878, but her initial application was “disallowed” because her “loyalty...during the war was not satisfactorily proved.”<sup>165</sup> Over those seven years, testimonies from former slaves, members from the extended McGavock family, other residents of Mississippi County, and Georgia herself were taken in attempts to prove loyalty and to detail destroyed property. If it is true that Southerners applying for reimbursement felt no qualms with omitting information and “lying...to a Yankee,” Georgia’s testimony is an interesting example of that statement.<sup>166</sup> When asked about her location during the war, Georgia answered with ease. When asked about her loyalties and wartime activities, however, her answers were inconsistent; many times, Georgia said that she “couldn’t really say” or “could scarcely recall.” Her file also included a letter in which she sought to clarify answers, out of fear that she would be accused of being untruthful.<sup>167</sup>

After being “disallowed” multiple times, Georgia’s application was later resubmitted and included a co-claimant, Georgia’s daughter, Susan John. Of the applicants from Mississippi County, Georgia and her daughter’s joint claim was the only one met, albeit partially. According to Georgia’s granddaughter, Josephine Grider Jacobs, her claim was not met because she “could not prove loyalty” and because she was “exceedingly active on the Southern side.”<sup>168</sup> It was Susan John’s portion of the claim, however, that was met because her loyalty was “presumed on

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<sup>165</sup> Southern Claims Commission, Georgia M. Erwin file.

<sup>166</sup> It is also interesting to note that Georgia’s deposition was signed by Charles Bowen, former Confederate leader and one organizer of the county’s KKK chapter. Given Bowen’s well-known sympathies for the Confederate cause, it is likely that he took no issue in “lying to a Yankee.”

<sup>167</sup> Southern Claims Commission, 1871-1880: Consolidated Index of Claims, Georgia M. Erwin File, letter statement from Georgia M. Erwin, January 18, 1875.

<sup>168</sup> Jacobs, “Young Couple Comes West to Establish Home,” 14.



account of her tender age during the war.” She was awarded \$1,211.12 for property damage and losses in 1879.<sup>169</sup>

All Arkansans, regardless of class, were victims of the economic devastation brought about by the Civil War. The greatest property loss for wealthy planters was caused by emancipation, but, as Carl Moneyhon states “wealthy individuals survived the war years and maintained control over their property better than their poorer neighbors.” Though the losses of the upper class were much greater, they could afford to lose more. Poorer families across the state had less to begin with, so their financial losses proved much more tragic.<sup>170</sup> In Mississippi County, small farmers fared much worse than the planters, suffering property and wealth losses of 90 to 100 percent.<sup>171</sup>

County-wide economic turmoil was made worse by the rampant racial violence that plagued the state after the Civil War. In 1867, Congress’ Military Reconstruction Acts and the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment had stripped former Confederate officials of their political rights, and a viable Republican Party in the state began to form. With an increase in the number of registered black voters and a diminished number of their own eligible voters, Democrats found themselves vulnerable in the 1868 elections, and by July, Arkansas had been officially readmitted into the Union and Governor Clayton had been inaugurated.<sup>172</sup> Across the state, former Confederates were embittered by the destruction of disfranchisement and threatened by the growing strength of the Republican Party, and many ran to radical groups, most notoriously the Ku Klux Klan, desperate to regain control. Across the state, local chapters of the KKK emerged and

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<sup>169</sup> Southern Claims Commission, 1871-1880: Consolidated Index of Claims, Georgia M. Erwin File, 10. By this time, Susan John was twenty-two and about to be married.

<sup>170</sup> Moneyhon, *The Impact of the Civil War and Reconstruction*, 179, 180, 185.

<sup>171</sup> Whayne, *Delta Empire*, 32.

<sup>172</sup> Moneyhon, *The Impact of the Civil War and Reconstruction*, 250.

strengthened and became the unofficial “military arm” of the Democratic Party. Tom DeBlack states in *With Fire and Sword*, “in Arkansas, as elsewhere in the South, many of the Klan’s leaders and followers were men of some means and influence.”<sup>173</sup> This held true in Mississippi County, where several influential men emerged as leaders of the Klan, including Charles Bowen, H.M. McVeigh, and Captain Erwin (Georgia’s husband), among other individuals. Whatever the goals of the KKK were in the state, it did become clear that the Klan was determined to intimidate freedmen and Republican voters in order to influence the November elections of 1868.

Several incidents of terror were reported in nearly every corner of the state throughout the fall, but eastern counties saw several assaults and assassination attempts of federal and state officials, and the violence in northeast Arkansas was particularly nasty.<sup>174</sup> A Freedman’s Bureau agent in Marion, E.G. Barker, said of Mississippi County, “I have been through the bloody rebellion from the first to the last but with all its horrors I have never seen anything equal to the state of affairs in this county.”<sup>175</sup> Freedmen took extreme risks in exercising their new political rights, and the county’s Freedmen’s Bureau agent was unable to help – Bowen, Erwin, and the KKK were able to dominate the county through terror.<sup>176</sup> As a response to the hostilities and widespread accusations of election fraud from both parties, Governor Clayton ordered the state militia to organize and declared martial law in ten counties (Ashley, Bradley, Columbia, Lafayette, Mississippi, Woodruff, Craighead, Greene, Sevier, and Little River – Conway, Crittenden, Drew, and Fulton counties would later be added to the list). His November 4<sup>th</sup> proclamation claimed that the counties were “in a state of insurrection” and promised “war” on

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<sup>173</sup> DeBlack, *With Fire and Sword*, 178.

<sup>174</sup> Moneyhon, *The Impact of the Civil War and Reconstruction*, 251.; Whayne, *Delta Empire*, 30.

<sup>175</sup> Randy Finley, *From Slavery to Uncertain Freedom: The Freedman’s Bureau in Arkansas, 1865-1869* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1996), 149.

<sup>176</sup> Whayne, *Delta Empire*, 29.

any “unauthorized military organizations.”<sup>177</sup> Clayton held true to this promise, dispersing a state militia to the counties under martial law. A militia made up largely of black Republicans was sent to Mississippi County, under the command of a man named Brewer. The presence of the militia only made tensions in the county worse, and violent clashes between the militia and Klansmen often left “ordinary citizens...caught in the middle” of the chaos.<sup>178</sup> Though martial law ended in 1869 and Governor Clayton was credited with wiping out the KKK across the state, Mississippi County would still see tensions between local white Democrats and Republicans.

Tensions over the struggle for political power in Mississippi County culminated in the 1872 “Black Hawk War.” It was centered around the hotly-contested state representative election between Judge Charles Fitzpatrick, a former Union army officer and Governor Clayton’s appointee to the board of registration, and H.M. McVeigh, a popular local attorney, former Confederate leader, and one of the organizers of the county’s KKK chapter. Fitzpatrick was determined to ensure that freedmen in the county were able to exercise their right to vote, and freedmen were expected to support Fitzpatrick in the fall elections. Attempts were made at forming a Republican party in Mississippi County, but freedmen were the minority of the overall population, and only a few whites identified themselves as Republicans (these were usually Union veterans and newcomers to the county) – an alliance between black and white voters seemed impossible in Mississippi County.<sup>179</sup> Most white residents of Osceola disliked Fitzpatrick, who they considered responsible for “arming former slaves.”<sup>180</sup> The old elite had

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<sup>177</sup> Clayton, *The Impact of the Civil War*, 64.

<sup>178</sup> Whayne, *Delta Empire*, 29.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>180</sup> Remaining racial and political tensions leftover from Reconstruction evidenced themselves in an Editor’s Note from the August 1935 *Osceola Times* article “Saturday night vandals open J.B. Murray grave.” In this article, Fitzpatrick was described as “a carpetbagger...one of the horde who fattened off the Southern people during the Reconstruction days.”

retained their political power in the county, and the KKK, though underground, was still a significant presence and played the pivotal role in the violent turmoil.

Few sources exist to document what happened in the fall of 1872, and those that do exist are contradictory and one-sided. All reports, however, cite tensions over the state legislature elections as the catalyst for the incident. In an August rally, Fitzpatrick had criticized Mississippi County Sheriff, Joseph B. Murray, and when they later met, a heated argument between them led them to draw weapons. Fitzpatrick shot and killed Murray in downtown Osceola. He surrendered himself to Judge Clarence Moore, Georgia's brother, and was released on bail, and when he later came up for trial in October, a large group of armed African Americans gathered in Osceola in order to show their support of Fitzpatrick. The only accounts of what happened next come from the *Arkansas Gazette* (a notoriously anti-Republican newspaper), Charles Bowen, and H.M. McVeigh, and they express a very biased perspective on the events. According to the *Arkansas Gazette*, when Fitzpatrick was released, he heard rumors of threats against him and gathered two hundred African Americans and led them into the streets of Osceola, where they threatened to burn the town.<sup>181</sup>

The next day, about seventy-five armed African American men gathered in Osceola, again threatening to destroy the town, but McVeigh was able to calm the crowd and convinced them to disperse.<sup>182</sup> Bowen and his men, who came from all corners of Mississippi County, organized "in anticipation of trouble" and attacked the group, chasing them into the southern part of the county. Bowen stated that they followed them to the bend at Island 35 and "overtook them down at Shawnee Village in the cane," where they killed a "good number" of African

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<sup>181</sup> "Judge Fitzpatrick of Militia Fame Shoots and Mortally Wounds the Sheriff," *Daily Arkansas Gazette*, September 3, 1872.

<sup>182</sup> According to Charles Bowen, the number was between four and five hundred.

Americans.<sup>183</sup> Bowen claimed that there were eighteen survivors.<sup>184</sup> Survivors of the massacre fled to neighboring counties, as did Fitzpatrick. For days following the incident “wild rumors” circulated throughout southern Mississippi County of Fitzpatrick’s return, and the violence continued, resulting in the capture of anyone else suspected of supporting Fitzpatrick.<sup>185</sup>

One other source that addresses the “Black Hawk War” is Josephine Grider Jacobs’ narrative “Young Couple Comes West to Establish Home.” In it, Jacobs acknowledges the rampant violence in Mississippi County, stating that no man was “safe unless armed.”<sup>186</sup> She places Georgia and Susan John in the middle of the turmoil. According to Jacobs, Captain Erwin was kept away from Sans Souci “with the band of white men who kept order,” often leaving Georgia and Susan John alone at the plantation. She writes that amidst the violence, Susan John left Sans Souci for Osceola in order to find Dr. H.C. Dunavant for an ailing Georgia. While traveling to town on horseback, she was attacked by a group of the black militia who had been sent to Mississippi County, but she escaped through the help of a former slave. Because of this and the “state of things” (alluding to the Black Hawk War), Klansmen became “determined to put a stop to it” and for three days “rode the roads,” shooting everyone who resisted.<sup>187</sup> Jacobs’ story parallels other narratives popular in the 1930’s, including the episode in Margaret Mitchell’s *Gone With the Wind*, in which Scarlett is saved from attack by a former slave and incites a raid on the “shanty towns” in order to ensure the safety of women and children. While the incident on horseback could have roots in the truth, Susan John’s role in the Black Hawk War seems to be an overstatement. Jacobs’ narrative on Sans Souci was written during a time when a

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<sup>183</sup> Gladish, “Captain Bowen Tells of Early Days in Mississippi County.”

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> “Citizens Under Arms at Osceola, Escape of Fitzpatrick, Etc.,” *Daily Arkansas Gazette*, October 16, 1872.

<sup>186</sup> Jacobs, “Young Couple Comes West to Establish Home,” 12.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 13.

pro-Confederate position on race relations in the post-war era was particularly favored by white Southerners.<sup>188</sup>

What is not an overstatement is the implication the Black Hawk War had for Captain Erwin and Georgia. When the dust settled and “order was restored,” federal authorities arrived in Mississippi County to investigate the massacre, and arrest warrants were issued for the men involved, including a \$5,000 bounty for the capture of Captain Erwin.<sup>189</sup> It is unknown if Captain Erwin actively participated in the Black Hawk War, but his involvement with the KKK and the use of Sans Souci as a meeting place connected him directly with the violence.<sup>190</sup> Fearing capture, Captain Erwin and Georgia fled to his sister’s house in Hernando, Mississippi, and then to New Orleans, where they remained until late 1872 or early 1873, when they felt it was safe to return to Mississippi County.<sup>191</sup> They returned to a county where all doubts about the strength of the Democratic Party were gone and where any hopes of forming a viable Republican Party had been squashed.

Discontent with the Clayton administration caused factions in the Republican Party to make “fusion” arrangements with Democrats, and by the elections of 1874, Democrats had regained control of both the legislature and the governorship. In Mississippi County, the white elite had maintained political domination. As Jeannie Wayne notes in *Delta Empire*, the

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<sup>188</sup> “Young Couple Comes West to Establish Home” was published in the 1930’s, when the tone for interpreting Reconstruction was set by Dunning School, which put forth the argument that freedmen were inherently incapable of understanding the consequences of emancipation and that white supremacist groups like the KKK were the purveyors of justice and order. Jacobs’ narrative reflects that sentiment.

<sup>189</sup> “The Osceola Troubles: A Few Additional Facts—Organizing for the Union Leagues, Etc.,” *Daily Arkansas Gazette*, October 23, 1872. Interestingly, a portion of this article claims that Black Hawk War was nothing more than a “sensational canard” and that the only people who were injured were “wounded by the careless handling of firearms.”; Jacobs, “Young Couple Comes West to Establish Home,” 13.

<sup>190</sup> Phil Mullen, “Sans Souci is a Most Historic Plantation,” *Osceola Times*, September 24, 1970.

<sup>191</sup> Jacobs, “Young Couple Comes West to Establish Home,” 13.

election of former Confederates was the “ultimate triumph,” as both H.M McVeigh and Charles Bowen were able to secure election as a state legislator and a county judge, respectively.<sup>192</sup> For Sans Souci, the end of Reconstruction meant a return to normalcy. Georgia and Captain Erwin had retained their elite planter status, and by the end of the 1870’s, they had rebounded financially, purchasing and cultivating more land, increasing their total acreage to four thousand acres.<sup>193</sup> They could even afford to send the then seventeen-year-old Susan John to the Sacred Heart Convent at Maryville, Missouri.<sup>194</sup> The plantation and the family would see many gains and just as many setbacks, but their influence would be felt through the county for decades following Reconstruction.

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<sup>192</sup> Wayne, *Delta Empire*, 31.

<sup>193</sup> Mississippi County, Arkansas, Tax Records for 1881 (Arkansas Historical Commission: Little Rock, Arkansas).

<sup>194</sup> Georgia M. Erwin to Susan John McGavock, May 17, 1874. “Letters to Georgia M. McGavock.”; Jacobs, “Young Couple Comes West to Establish Home,” 14.

## Conclusion

Even through the turmoil the new Erwin family faced during Reconstruction, they continued to grow and prosper, and life at Sans Souci appeared to be on the rebound. In 1878, 21-year-old Susan John, who had come of age at Sans Souci and spent her later teenage years attending school at the Sacred Heart Covent at Marysville (near St. Louis), was introduced to William Henry Grider, a young man from Crittenden County. Grider, who had graduated from Cumberland University in Tennessee, was working with a lawyer in Memphis. The two were married on February 25, 1880, at Sans Souci in a wedding that was called “the social event of the season in Mississippi County.”<sup>195</sup>

The day started with a luncheon for one hundred and fifty guests from St. Louis, Nashville, Memphis, and Arkansas, and ended with a champagne supper and dancing. Guests arrived on horseback or on wagons that traveled down the levee road, and one guest, Mrs. H.C. Dunavant, remembered traveling to the wedding on a small horse, carrying her party clothes in a saddle bag, since the Mississippi County roads were likely muddy and made for messy travel.<sup>196</sup> The old plantation home was elaborately decorated, and Chinese lanterns illuminated the outside grounds. The *Osceola Times* coverage of the wedding said of the festivities “if a big sendoff is indicative of happiness, then our young friends will be happy.”<sup>197</sup> It was estimated that the wedding festivities alone cost nearly \$3,000 (well over \$50,000 in today’s dollars), and the couple spent a long honeymoon traveling from Memphis to Vicksburg to New Orleans and back to Sans Souci. If there was any doubt that the owners of Sans Souci had fully recovered from financial setbacks, the wedding dispelled those doubts.

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<sup>195</sup> “Married,” *Osceola Times*, February 28, 1880. See Figure 6, page 74.

<sup>196</sup> Jacobs, “Young Couple Comes West to Establish Home,” 16.

<sup>197</sup> “Married,” *Osceola Times*.



Celebrations were short-lived, however, as Captain Erwin died in 1882 in St. Louis at the City Sanitarium. He had been a patient there since 1880, though it is unknown what kind of sickness he had. His new son-in-law, William Grider, took control of the farming at Sans Souci, and over the next few years, increased the cultivated land to nearly 2,000 acres.<sup>198</sup> Grider poured his energy into extending his business interests in the area around Sans Souci – he opened a general store, operated both a gin and sawmill, and served as postmaster at the post office. Grider employed between fifty to one hundred employees in his various business operations.<sup>199</sup> Before their marriage, Susan managed some of the plantation’s business on her own, despite her young age.<sup>200</sup> This area around Sans Souci is still today known as “Grider.”

Susan and William had three children – Georgia Douglas was born on August 2, 1882, Josephine Louise on March 18, 1886, and John McGavock on May, 28 1892. Much of the details of the relationships between family members comes from Josephine’s “Young Couple Comes West to Establish Home.” It sheds a very positive light over the relationships between the family members and also of the financial state of the family and Sans Souci. What is left out, however, is the seemingly tense relationship between William and his two daughters, Georgia and Josephine. Friction existed between family members because of the contents of Susan’s will. By the time of Susan’s death on April 13, 1901, she and William were rich in land but cash poor. She left behind a very large amount of debt that she had accrued with her husband – nearly

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<sup>198</sup> As of March 1886, the property consisted of 5,000 acres.

<sup>199</sup> *Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Northeast Arkansas*, 505.

<sup>200</sup> B.D. Turner, “Grider v. Driver,” *Arkansas Reports: Cases at Law and in Equity Argued and Determined in the Supreme Court of Arkansas*, Vol. 46 (Little Rock: Union Printing Company, 1886). In *Grider v. Driver*, Susan had been accused of not paying interest on farm equipment she had bought and had shipped to Sans Souci.; B.D. Turner, “Stowell and Heinz v. Driver,” *Arkansas Reports: Cases at Law and in Equity Argued and Determined in the Supreme Court of Arkansas*, Vol. 48, (Little Rock: Union Printing Company, 1887). In *Stowell and Heinz v. Grider*, the court found that Susan had accrued debt but had paid it off prior to her marriage to William H. Grider.

\$38,000 (close to \$1,000,000 in today's dollars) to the American Freehold and Mortgage Company and the Delta Cotton Company. Part of Susan's estate was put into a trust for her three children and managed by her husband and her mother, until the youngest child was "of age" or until all of her debts had been paid off.<sup>201</sup> Georgia and Josephine accused their father of not giving them their share of the trust money, claiming that he had done business poorly, and as such, could not possibly pay off the debts the family estate owed and rendering him unable to pay them properly.<sup>202</sup> Whether or not tensions between Grider and his daughters was ever relieved is unknown.

Georgia M. Erwin spent the remainder of her days going between Sans Souci and Memphis, where Susan kept a home. She died on August 15, 1912, no doubt fully aware of the discontent between her son-in-law and her grandchildren. No matter how successful the family, tragedy was never too far away.

The youngest of her grandchildren, John McGavock, or "Mac" as he was known by those closest to him, grew up at Sans Souci, attended school in Memphis but dropped out and married Marguerite Samuels when he was seventeen years old. They had two children, and the young family settled at Sans Souci to farm the plantation that he had inherited from his mother. The lure of World War I in Europe took him from Sans Souci, however, and he joined the Canadian Royal Flying Force as a pilot. He reached the rank of lieutenant, but on June 18, 1918, his plane disappeared in a heavy fog over Armentieres, France, behind German lines. "Mac" was a celebrated war hero and aviator, for whom Grider Field in Pine Bluff was named.

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<sup>201</sup> John McGavock Grider was the youngest child, and this case was not pertaining to him receiving his share of trust money.

<sup>202</sup> "Williamson v. Grider," *Arkansas Reports: Cases at Law and in Equity Argued and Determined in the Supreme Court of Arkansas*, Vol. 97 (Little Rock: Union Printing Company, 1911).

Even after his death, his sisters remained either at Sans Souci or in Memphis. Josephine married William P. Mitchell at the age of 19 on August 29, 1905. She graduated from the Higbee School for Young Ladies in Memphis, Tennessee, and attended the University of Chicago.<sup>203</sup> After his death, she later married Major F.P. Jacobs and lived at Sans Souci. Georgia married Benjamin Williamson, and the two lived in Memphis with their three children. Georgia Erwin, Susan's half-sister, married Hal Wiggs and also moved to Memphis. William H. Grider, who had retired and moved to Memphis, died in 1930.

On Sunday, April 23, 1922, Josephine and her husband went to visit her sister Georgia in Memphis. While they were gone, the fifty-eight-year-old plantation home caught fire and burned to the ground, in spite of the Osceola Fire Department's attempts to put out the blaze.<sup>204</sup> With the old plantation house gone, the family decided not to rebuild on the site, and a majority of the family stayed in Memphis.

The landscape of the delta land that made Sans Souci plantation a grand place has changed greatly since John and Georgia McGavock first arrived in 1853. The Mississippi River has meandered back and forth according to its own wishes, giving and taking land. The river has moved approximately one mile to the west since the home was built, and the plantation acreage itself was divided up among numerous heirs and sold. In Mississippi County today, the name "Sans Souci" refers to a small landing on the Mississippi River where barges load soybeans from area farms. Today, industry is all that stands at Sans Souci – the Plum Point Power Plant, Bunge Grain, Viskase Casing Solutions, and nearby Big River Steel overpower the small monuments

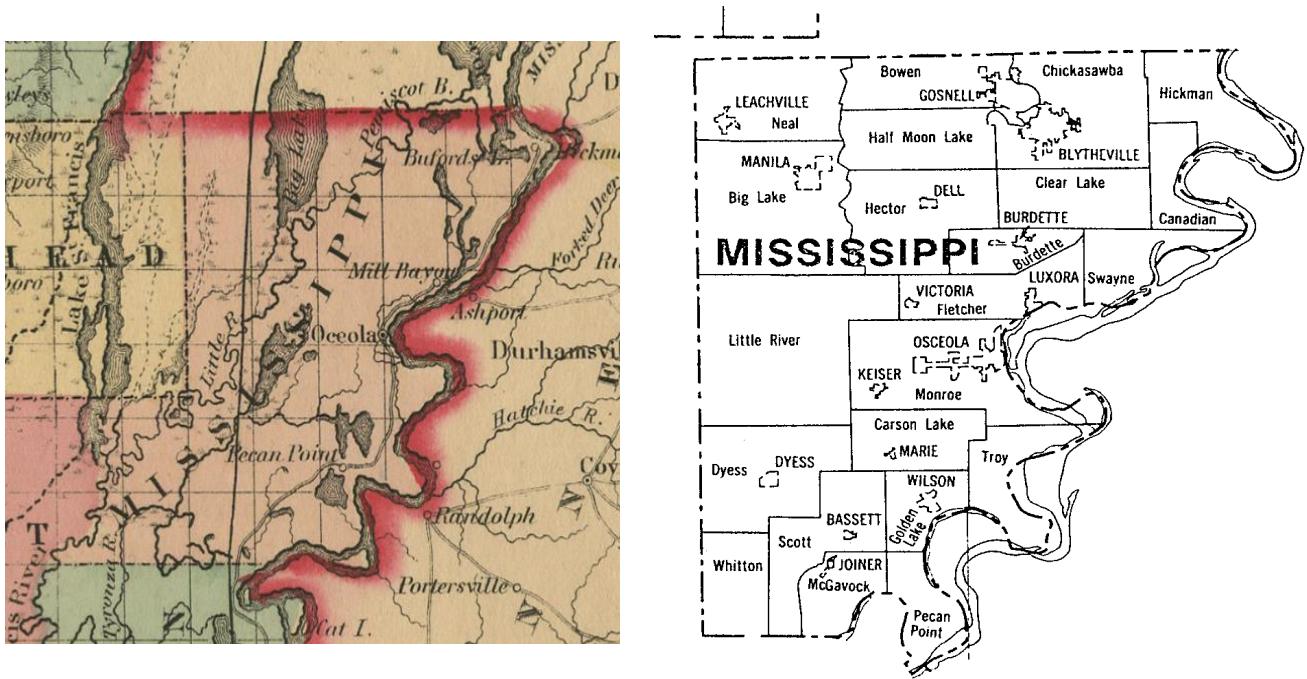
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<sup>203</sup> *The University of Chicago Annual Register, Covering the Academic Year Ending June 30, 1913, with Announcements for the year 1913-1914*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, December 1913), 590.

<sup>204</sup> Mrs. S.S. Semmes, "Historic Home at Sans Souci Burned Sunday," *Osceola Times*, April 28, 1922.

dedicated to the violence that took place there and the lives of a once prominent county family. Studying Sans Souci and the family who owned her helps put together the puzzle of Mississippi County's history. The pieces are varying and fragmented, but searching for the missing ones enriches the study of Arkansas' tumultuous past. While only a small piece, Sans Souci is nonetheless important to those who are looking for a more complete picture of antebellum life along the Mississippi River, the deprivation of the Civil War, and the struggles of Reconstruction in a small river town.

Figure 1: Mississippi County Maps



Map of Mississippi County as it appeared in 1855 (left) and map of Mississippi County townships (right).<sup>205</sup>

<sup>205</sup> 1855 Map of Arkansas, J.H. Colton and Co., New York, from Hearthstone Legacy Publications, 2005; Mississippi County Township Map taken from the “Arkansas GenWeb Project,” Mississippi County Townships, 1998, accessed March 20, 2016, <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~armissi2/twpmmap.htm>.

Figure 2: John H. McGavock and Georgia A. Moore<sup>206</sup>



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<sup>206</sup> Picture of John H. McGavock from Goodspeed's *Historical and Biographical Memoirs of Northeast Arkansas*. A copy of the picture Georgia Moore was given to the author by the Mississippi County Historical Society and is used with permission.

**Figure 3: Sans Souci Plantation House<sup>207</sup>**

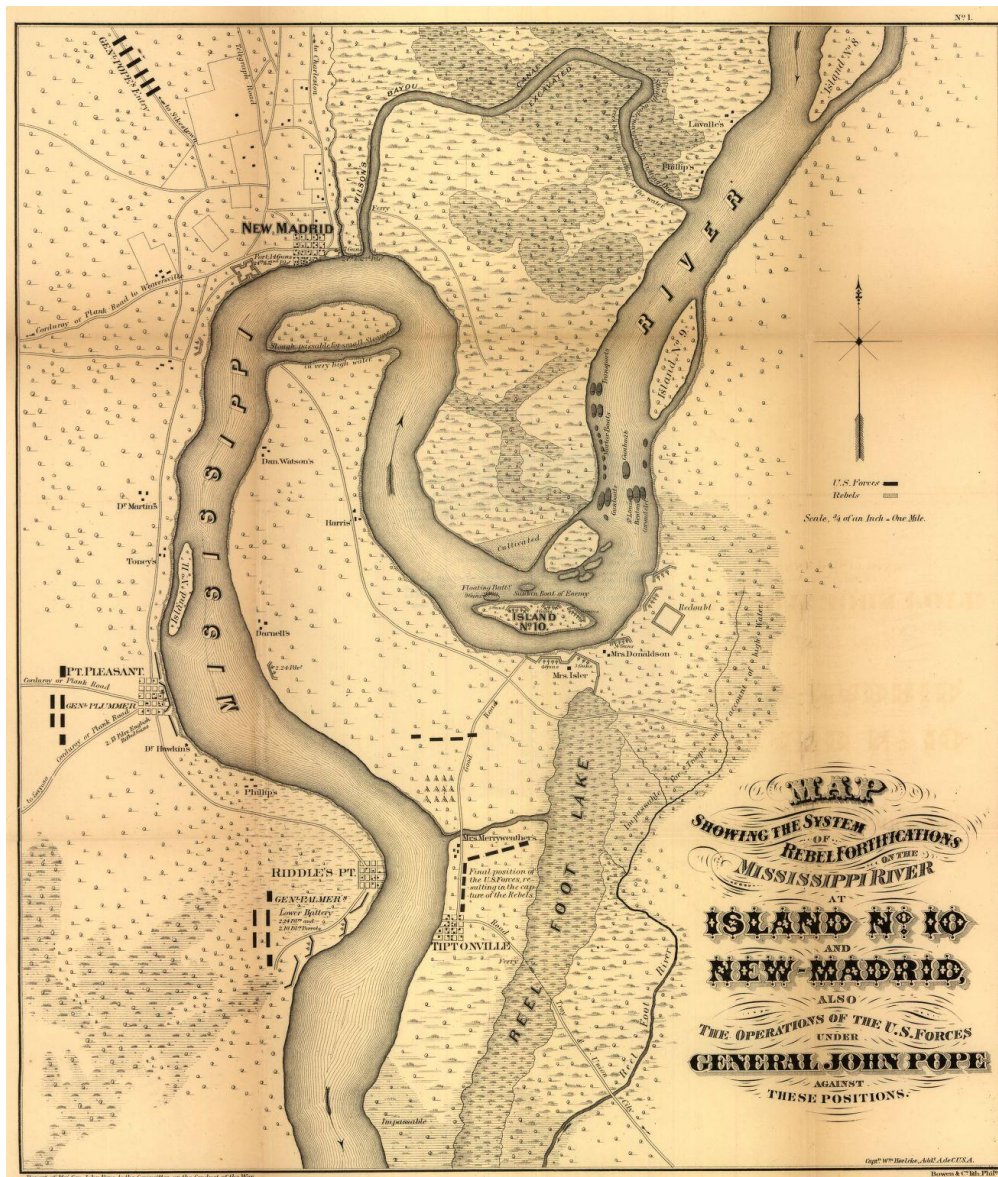


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<sup>207</sup> A copy of the photograph of the Sans Souci plantation house was given to the author by the Mississippi County Historical Society and is used with permission.

**Figure 4: Map of the Mississippi at Island 10<sup>208</sup>**

Island 10 was considered “impregnable” by Confederate forces because of its location on the Mississippi River. It was located in the middle of a tight “S” bend in the river at New Madrid, Missouri, and it could be easily fortified against Federal naval movement down the river. Any vessel moving down the river was forced to slow down and directly face the island.



<sup>208</sup> J.W. Bissell, “Map of the Mississippi at Island no. 10. Showing corrected line of the channel cut by the Engineer Regiment,” Published 1862, Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <http://www.loc.gov/item/99447230/>.



**Figure 5: Southern Claims Commission**

Southern Claims Commission Applications Northeast Arkansas Counties <sup>209</sup>			
County	Number of Applicants	Application Amount	Amount Awarded
Craighead	5	\$ 3,854	\$ 1,115
Crittenden	2	\$ 1,187	\$ 125
Cross	8	\$ 23,480	\$ ----
Greene	1	\$ 474	\$ ----
Independence	35	\$ 31,271	\$ 1,958
Jackson	17	\$ 34,216	\$ 1,015
Lawrence	3	\$ 5,018	\$ ----
Mississippi	3	\$ 86,155	\$ 1,211.12
Randolph	2	\$ 2,681	\$ ----
St. Francis	22	\$ 33,563	\$ 215
White	27	\$ 77,364	\$ 1,978
Woodruff	32	\$ 89,268	\$ 3,835
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>157</b>	<b>\$ 388,531</b>	<b>\$ ----</b>

Looking at the applications received by the Southern Claims Commission shows the amount of devastation caused by the war. Mississippi County had only three applicants but had the second highest dollar amount for compensation requests, showing the wealth present in the county.

Some northeast counties, like Poinsett County, were missing from the claims records.

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<sup>209</sup> Ibid; Southern Claims Commissions Approved Claims, 1871-1880 and Southern Claims Commission Barred and Disallowed Claims, <http://www.fold3.com/browse/34/>. Information from the Southern Claims Commission “Geographical List of Claims” and the records of the Southern Claims Commission online were incomplete and did not contain the full list of approved claims.

**Figure 6: Susan John McGavock and William Henry Grider<sup>210</sup>**



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<sup>210</sup> A copy of the photographs of Susan John McGavock and William Henry Grider were given to the author by the Mississippi County Historical Society and is used with permission.

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