

***Erasing Boundaries:
The Forgotten History of Territorial Lawrence County
in the Trans-Mississippi West 1815-1836***



Lawrence County's 1815 Footprint on the Ozarks Region

**Courtesy of Steve Saunders, Imboden, Arkansas;
and OzarksWatch, Missouri State University, Springfield, Missouri.**



Rice-Upshaw House: Courtesy Joan L. Gould - Examples of Historic Documents from Regional Archives

*“The advantage of local studies...is the wealth of detail they can provide...
By getting to know these people intimately, scholars can better understand
what motivated them and interpret their behavior with more confidence.
They can flush out local stories to provide insights denied them
when taking the longer view of events.”*

Daniel E. Sutherland, Ph.D.
Department of History, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville
Guerrillas, Unionists & Violence on the Confederate Homefront, 7.
(Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1999)

About the Project

Introduction

In the opening years of the nineteenth century the founding families of Lawrence County transformed a vast upland wilderness then known as the White River Country into one of the richest agricultural regions of the trans-Mississippi West. Their lives were not simple, and neither is their history. Their experiences, contributions, and legacies have not been well documented in the history of America’s westward expansion.

For the past three decades a coalition of local researchers has worked to better understand and document the history of this region’s first phase of American settlement by stepping back in time to explore their social, cultural, economic, and political worlds. A deeper plunge into this largely forgotten past has allowed us to “flush out,” to borrow historian Daniel Sutherland’s words, new insights into their lives.

Our coalition of researchers includes Dr. Blake Perkins of Lynn, Arkansas; Joan L. Gould of Fayetteville, Arkansas; Steve Saunders of Imboden, Arkansas; and Robert A. Myers of St. Louis, Missouri. Perkins and Gould are serving as editors for the project.

Our research begins with the settlement of the vast White River Country of present-day northern Arkansas and southern Missouri in 1800. It incorporates the formal organization of Lawrence County by the U.S. government of Missouri Territory on January 15, 1815 and extends through 1836, the close of the territorial governance of Arkansas.

The genesis of Lawrence County

Robert A. Myers provides a summary of Lawrence County at its conception. Following the Treaty of Fort Osage in 1808 in which the Osage ceded approximately 50,000 square miles of tribal territory to the United States, American migrants began pouring into the White River Country. Created in 1815 within the Missouri Territory from the western three-quarters of New Madrid County, the boundaries of Lawrence County adjoined New Madrid County to the east, Cape Girardeau County to the north, the remaining Osage tribal lands to the west, and Arkansas County to the south and southeast. Lawrence County initially encompassed more than 21,000 square miles (nearly 13.5 million acres), an area the size of Ireland. Four years after its creation, on July 4, 1819, the majority of Lawrence County was included in newly created Arkansas Territory, though its portions north of the 36° 30' were included in the new state of Missouri. As an important ancestral hearth of early American settlement west of the Mississippi River, the story of territorial-era Lawrence County is significant to both Arkansas and Missouri history. Known as a “mother county,” the geographic area comprising the original Lawrence County takes in all or an appreciable part of the following 42 modern counties:

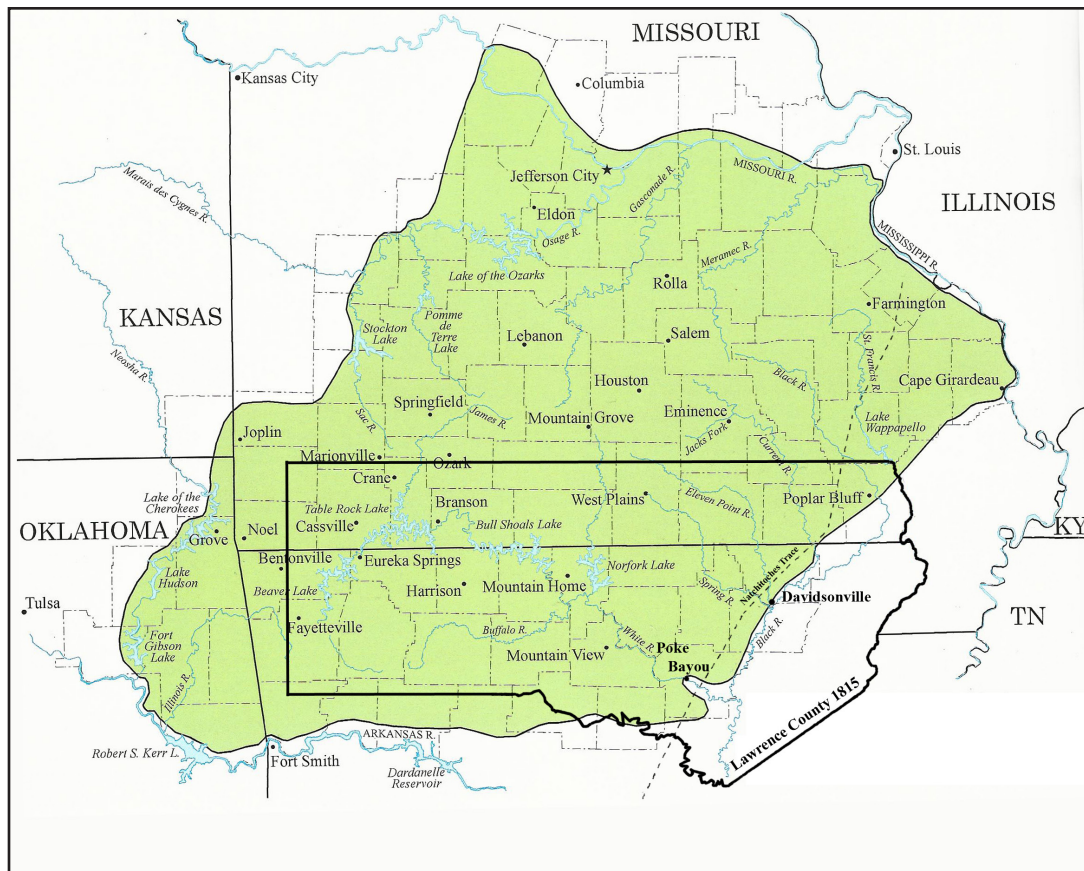
Missouri counties

Wayne, Butler, Carter, Ripley, Shannon, Oregon, Howell, Douglas, Ozark, Christian, Taney, Stone, Lawrence, Barry, Jasper, Newton, and McDonald

Arkansas counties

Clay, Greene, Craighead, Poinsett, Cross, Woodruff, Jackson, Lawrence, Randolph, Sharp, Independence, White, Cleburne, Stone, Izard, Fulton, Baxter, Marion, Searcy, Newton, Boone, Madison, Carroll, Washington, and Benton

Unfortunately, as governmental divisions carved up the original land mass – two territories moving toward statehood and new counties created with new seats of justice - the history of the “mother county’s” settlement period largely faded into the shadows. Missouri history is now virtually silent about old Lawrence County, seemingly because it ceased to exist as part of Missouri after July 3, 1819. Though Arkansas history recognizes Lawrence County as a northern gateway for the state, it tends to under-appreciate Lawrence’s pre-1819 existence and often marginalizes its significance in territorial-era accounts that focus more closely on the Arkansas River Valley.



Lawrence County's 1815 Footprint on the Ozarks Region

Steve Saunders overlaid Lawrence County boundaries on a regional map produced by Emilie Burke and Jim Coombs, Maps & GIS Unit, Missouri State University.

Courtesy of Steve Saunders, Imboden, Arkansas;
and *OzarksWatch*, Missouri State University, Springfield, Missouri.

Erasing Boundaries means just that...erasing boundaries

Confronting the many misunderstandings of Lawrence County's territorial period largely determines the framework for our project. Our challenge has been to chronologically organize scholarly research that brings the early-nineteenth century world into sharper focus and, ultimately, interpret the county's far-reaching history with greater accuracy.

Historical understanding of earlier time periods is often impeded by both physical and psychological boundaries built by humans and governments. Guided by a philosophy of "erasing boundaries," this project's researchers have been working for years to open new windows on Lawrence County's territorial history from scattered fragments of primary sources discovered in archives and other repositories throughout the United States. Piecing together and making sense of this research has been a longtime collaborative effort in which many 'new discoveries' have surfaced and fresh historical perspectives have continually evolved.



Shuttered window
Rice- Upshaw House
Courtesy Randy L. Tipton

Foundations of the project

Starting in 1829-30, when the seat of justice for Lawrence moved from Davidsonville to Jackson, the thousands of extant territorial documents were relocated numerous times to different courthouse vaults and archives. Over the past two centuries a cadre of volunteers has diligently labored to preserve them. Our *Erasing Boundaries* project is dedicated to these volunteers, some whose names are known to us while others remain unknown. We commend their devoted efforts that made this project possible.

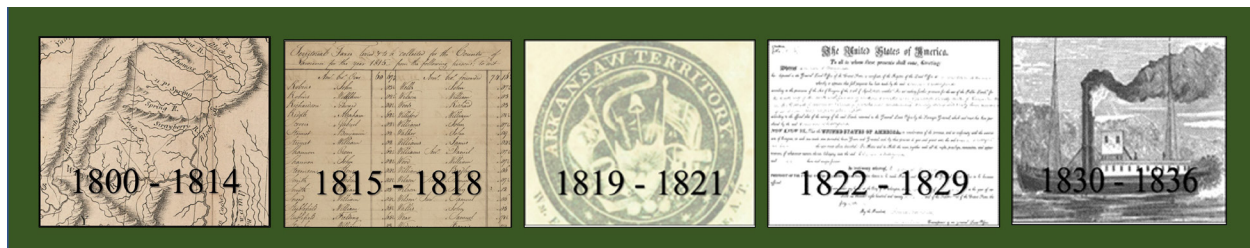
In 2011 the primary group of Lawrence County records found a permanent home under the care of certified professional archivists when the Northeast Arkansas Regional Archives (NEARA), opened to the public in a purpose-built building within Powhatan Historic State Park in Powhatan, Arkansas. NEARA is a division of the Arkansas State Archives located in Little Rock, Arkansas.

Although the resulting Lawrence County history is extensive, only a small portion of our overall research for the project has been included on the website. One of the foundations has been formed from research essays submitted for The NEARA Award for Exemplary Archival Research competition sponsored by the Arkansas Historical Association. The award is funded by the family of Eugene Sloan (1892-1981), a Jonesboro lawyer who was born in Powhatan, Lawrence County. Members of the Sloan family were frontier founders of Lawrence County. The award was established in 2013 to honor Lawrence County Historical Society volunteers who saved the territorial records when the Lawrence County seat at Powhatan was abandoned in 1963. The volunteers lobbied many long years for the establishment of the regional archives, a branch of the Arkansas State Archives.



In addition to The NEARA Award submissions, research articles contributed by our coalition of researchers in regional and state publications have been mined and incorporated into the project's narrative content. Numerous historic maps, along with original land surveys conducted by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management's General Land Office, provide important perspectives on the period. Various state-sponsored multi-discipline modern studies provide documentary evidence along with additional resource suggestions to encourage educators, students, parents and the interested public to learn more about the significance of this region in early American history.

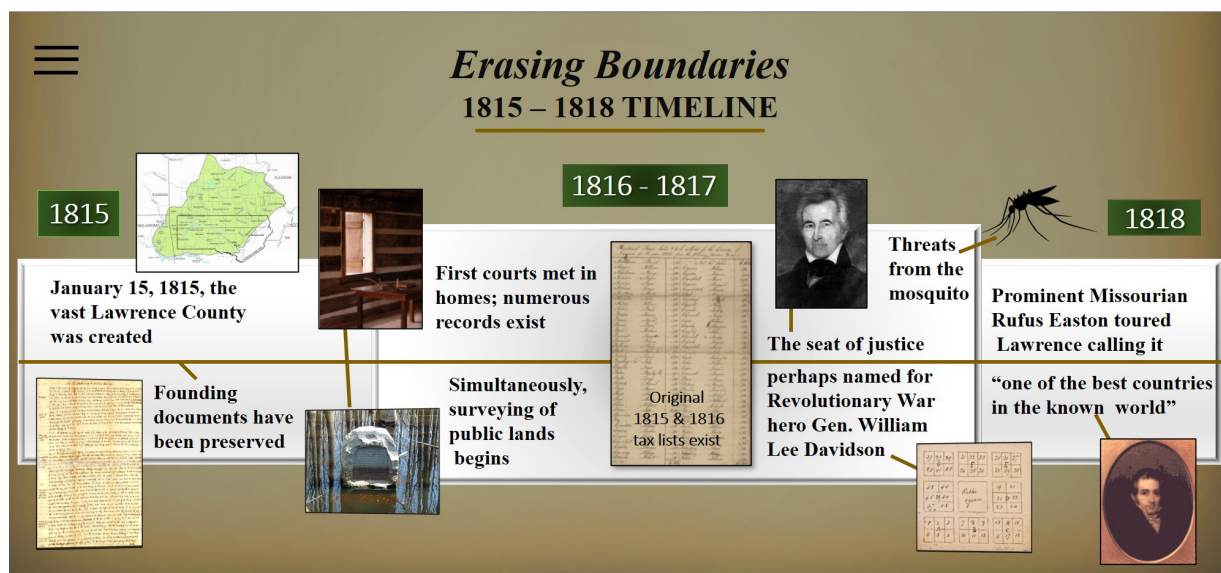
Funding for the project has been provided by generous donations from local historical organizations and private individuals, including many descendants from Lawrence County's founding families.



Evolutionary TIMELINES provide clarity

There has been no attempt to include in their entirety all of the articles, family histories, and other research studies, for this would be an overwhelming and impossible task. Dr. Blake Perkins and Joan L. Gould have mined, edited, and selectively arranged information from these materials into, as much as possible, TIMELINE divisions for the sake of clarity and historical comprehension. The TIMELINES reveal how events shaped the complex history and evolutionary development of territorial Lawrence County. Chronological arrangement especially aids in clarifying the often confusing change of U.S. governance, from its founding as part of Missouri Territory from 1815 to 1819 and its inclusion in Arkansas Territory from 1819 to 1836. Numerous travelers passed through Lawrence during the territorial period and recorded their first-hand impressions of the place and its people. The project editors have included many of their observations and accounts within appropriate timeline divisions. For example, in the 1815 – 1818 TIMELINE readers can learn more about prominent Missourian Rufus Easton, who toured Lawrence County in 1817 and declared it to be “one of the best countries in the known world.”

Example below is one of five TIMELINE divisions for territorial Lawrence County history:



Embracing the modern world

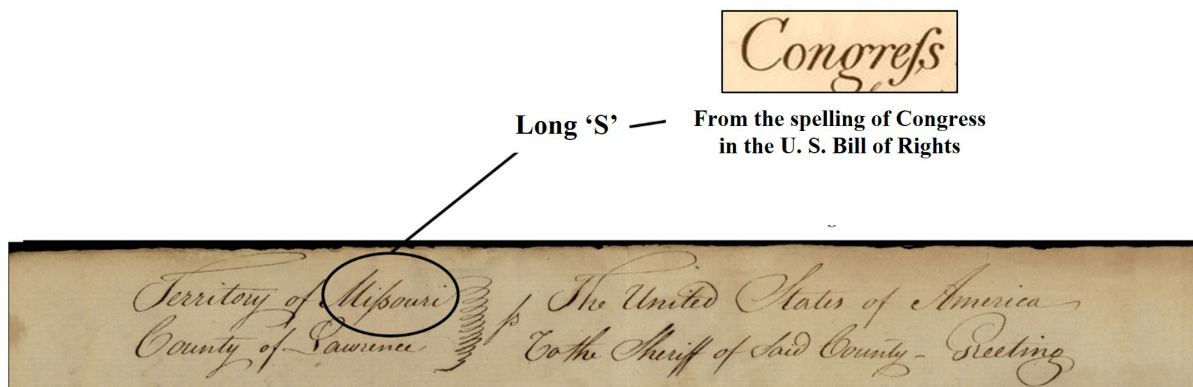
Twenty-first-century technology opens access to digital archives, complete with powerful search engines, enable us to connect with resources previously restricted by time, travel, and expense. Supporting documentation from national archives – Library of Congress, Bureau of Land Management, and a wealth of historic newspapers, to name only a few examples - can be accessed now like never before.]

Thus, *Erasing Boundaries* researchers determined that publishing in a digital format via the World Wide Web will enable outreach to a virtually unlimited audience, as well as being more readily accessible to hearing/visually/physically-challenged individuals. This digital format, more so than publishing in print, also enables hyperlinking and weaving together historic events and modern studies with actual primary sources that tell those stories.

An abbreviated version of the more comprehensive website will be developed for use on smart phones and other hand-held devices. This abbreviated version will provide links to the main website for more detailed accounts and sources.

Challenges for reading historical documents

Reading early-nineteenth century documents, while highly rewarding, can be a challenge. For example, use of the long 's' is found in numerous early Lawrence County documents, which was common for centuries in handwriting. The long 's' (ſ) is an archaic form of the lower case letter 's' and usually preceded a short 's' either in the middle or at the end of a word. Two excellent examples of the use of the long 's' are found in the spelling of 'Congress' in the U. S. Bill of Rights and 'Missouri' in the Lawrence County document produced in the beautiful handwriting of Lewis de Mun, the first Lawrence County Clerk.



Probate records present additional challenges. Probate records are court records created after an individual's death that relate to a court's decisions regarding the distribution of the estate to the heirs or creditors and the care of dependents. Such records open windows to better understand everyday life and, especially for Lawrence County, underscore the 'middling' status of most of the earliest white settlers. Over 2,460 probate records for the territorial period of Lawrence County are preserved at the Northeast Arkansas Regional Archives (NEARA) with over 36 cubic feet of documents. Dozens of these records with inventories of personal property have been carefully reviewed by *Erasing Boundaries* researchers. Probate inventories frequently included spinning wheels and looms for making cloth, shoemaking tools, plows, books, and a host of other items that speak to the socioeconomics of many early settler families with property.

Probate records frequently include terminology that is unfamiliar in today's world yet was common in the everyday language of early settlers. The *Erasing Boundaries* website makes generous use of sidebars for definitions to aid the reader. Pewter was a common part of the

tableware of ‘middling’ families and as such is listed on numerous territorial period probate inventories. We found “Dirt pots” translates to pottery pots made from clay; hackles were used to comb the fibers of the flax plant, just one of the numerous steps in making linen; and piggins fashioned by a cooper served numerous functions for both the housewife and the farmer.



The above examples illustrate material culture common to families of territorial Lawrence County. The mocha decorated sherd of pottery, second from left, was found by archeologists at the Rice-Upshaw House and represents, along with the pewter, far left, items from outside markets. The lead shot mold, also found at the Rice-Upshaw House, was hand-crafted by a Rice blacksmith. Hackles and piggins, right above, were usually locally-produced by skilled farmers.

Basic questions – who, what, when, where, and why

In the early years of the 19th century, Lawrence County was the ‘new country’ offering American families opportunities for pursuing hopeful futures or escaping unfortunate pasts. Territorial-era records bring out long forgotten names and places while shedding light on the relevance of certain events of the era that have heretofore been lost in the annals of history. Unfortunately, as we attempt to understand the world of early American settlers, we often find that these records do not always provide adequate details to capture societal and technological changes over time. Thus, we have employed some explanations of cultural contrasts when deemed necessary. We also use historically period-specific paintings, drawings, and sketches for illustration, such as work by 19th century Missouri artist and politician George Caleb Bingham. Obviously, actual photographs did not come into use until well after the county’s territorial era.



George Caleb Bingham (1811 – 1879), one of America’s most noted artists of the 19th century, captured cattle grazing along the bank of a stream that represents the open range for livestock, a part of the agricultural heritage of territorial Lawrence County.

Providing a framework for future studies

Within each TIMELINE, *Erasing Boundaries* editors have added TAGS to highlight both famous and not-so-famous individuals and events. These highlighted topics are intended to inform interactive readers of Lawrence County's broader impact on trans-Mississippi settlement history.

***“It’s easy to forget history happens at every level of society.
We spend so much time focusing on
presidents, generals, celebrities, and entrepreneurs
that we forget about the ordinary people.
There’s plenty of treasure in your own backyard
if you know where to look.”***

**Taylor Harbin
NEARA Archival Assistant**

Our research and historical interpretation efforts have been years in the making. It became apparent early on that rushing the project to completion would be an impossible (and irresponsible) task. As our work with primary sources and improved understanding of the period evolved over time, significant details and incredible connections in this history have surfaced. To point out but one example, we only recently opened a probate file from NEARA in Powhatan that exposed a wealth of fascinating information on early commercial activity in Lawrence County. Specifically, these estate records not only connect Missouri and Arkansas territorial history but unexpectedly identify the region's earliest documented potter who, after two centuries, emerged out of the shadows. We were ecstatic!

But the time has come to move out of the ‘stacks’!

Indeed, as passionate researchers constantly making new discoveries, we often struggle to move out of the ‘stacks’ of research and on to the phase of distilling and publishing our findings to a broader audience. Our efforts - *Erasing Boundaries: The Forgotten History of Territorial Lawrence County in the Trans-Mississippi West, 1815-1836* – should, therefore, be viewed as merely a beginning. Further research will always beckon future scholars, and we hope this project encourages a new wave of historical exploration into Territorial Lawrence County's forgotten past.



Extraction from 1816 John Melish Map; Courtesy of the Missouri State Archives

“...one of the best countries in the known world.”

Rufus Easton
Missouri Gazette,
 July 26, 1817, page 2, column 3

Opening Windows on the Past: A Preview

The *Erasing Boundaries* website, rich in images of documents, historic maps, and material culture, illuminates more than simply the identities of founding families, governmental officials, and historic events of Lawrence County. It opens windows on the character, everyday lives, and legacies of the people who, as noted Missouri politician Rufus Easton pointed out in 1817, made this region of the trans-Mississippi West into “one of the best countries in the known world.”

American settlers and their toolkit of skills

The majority of the region’s first American settlers had pushed westward from the Appalachian uplands. They chose a similar setting in which to plant their roots - an uplands region commonly known then as the White River Country.

When American families first crossed the Mississippi River, the uplands they settled were not yet popularly identified as the “Ozarks.” John Melish’s 1816 Map highlights the ancient land route

originally developed by Native Americans called the Natchitoches Trace, which passed through the rich fertile river valleys of the White River Country. Melish, a Scottish mapmaker, produced some of the most accurate maps in early America. His map is but one of many featured on the *Erasing Boundaries* website.

Small numbers of French settlers had advanced into the White River County in the late eighteenth century, when the broader Louisiana Territory remained part of the Spanish Empire and then Napoleon's France from 1800-1803. These French settlers were followed by a rush of American migrants after the United States' Louisiana Purchase and the 1808 Treaty of Fort Osage. The vast majority of these Americans were yeoman farmers who had moved westward from the Appalachian uplands through Kentucky and Tennessee over the past decades, though a few came from other parts of the U.S. back east, including New England. Many were of Scots-Irish, German, and English ancestry. Some of these Euro-Americans had inter-married with Native Americans. Some Native American groups from back east, including Cherokees, Shawnees, and Delawares, resided in the region as well, having been pushed out by U.S. expansion from ancestral homelands east of the Mississippi. Several American settlers brought enslaved blacks to the region, descendants of an array of African ethnic groups and heirs to distinctive African-American cultures that had evolved over the past two centuries. Among the region's first black settlers were also a very small number of free African Americans. All contributed to remarkable ethnic and cultural diversity and the syncretic development of early Lawrence County society and culture.

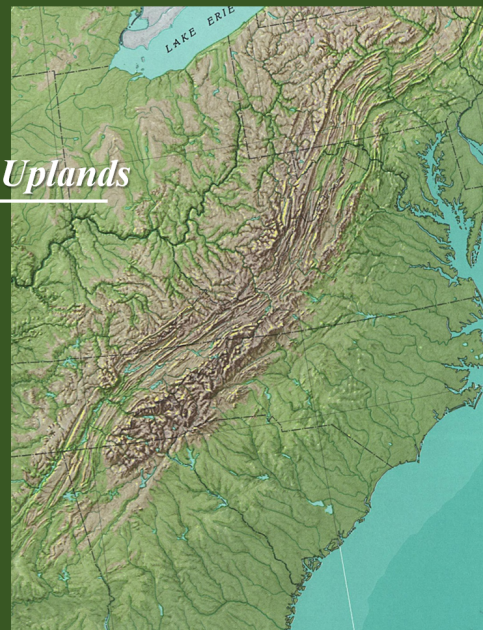


**Extraction from John Melish 1816 Map;
Courtesy of the Missouri State Archives.**

John Melish's 1816 map depicts the ancient the Natchitoches Trace winding its way through the eastern White River Country. The trace, named for the Caddo-speaking Natchitoches Indians, was mostly a foot-path that led from the mouth of the Missouri River to the Red River Valley. The map documents the trace crossing the Black, Current, Thomas Fork, Eleven Point, Strawberry, White, Little Red, and St. Francis rivers in what had become Lawrence County in 1815. Over time, local names associated with routes along the original trace changed many times, often differing on either side of the boundary separating the governmental divisions of Missouri and Arkansas.



White River Uplands



Appalachian Uplands

From the early eighteenth century onward backcountry farmers have chosen to settle in upland foothills that provide excellent range for livestock.

From 2017 presentation
Cultivating Life: Agricultural History of Northeast Arkansas
 Sponsored by the Arkansas State Archives

A rage to move

It was the pre-historic trace and the White River, a major tributary of the Mississippi River, that carried early settlers to the riches of the White River uplands. Henry M. Brackenridge, a St. Louis lawyer, wrote in the spring of 1810 that many American families had “removed” southward to the “White River country,” noting “there seems to be a rage amongst the frontier men for emigrating to that quarter. The most favorable reports are made of it.”* By January 15, 1815, the swelling population in the region justified the political creation of Lawrence County by the territorial Missouri General Assembly in St. Louis.

What inspired these American families with a rage to move to the White River Country? One compelling draw was the upland hills and valleys that provided excellent range for their livestock herding and small farming practices. A combination of abundant forests and relatively rich lands in the narrow creek and river valleys proved ideal for the skills and cultures that many migrant’s brought with them from Appalachia back east. Another attractive feature of the region was its numerous spring-fed rivers and streams that flowed freely throughout the region. These waterways, celebrated still today for their natural beauty, made the region rather unique in the trans-Mississippi West, reminding many American settlers of the Appalachian uplands from which they had come.

* Henry M. Brackenridge, *Views of Louisiana; Together With a Journal of a Voyage Up the Missouri River, in 1811* (Pittsburgh: Cramer, Spear and Richbaum, 1814) 29, 67, 69, 84, 116, 130.

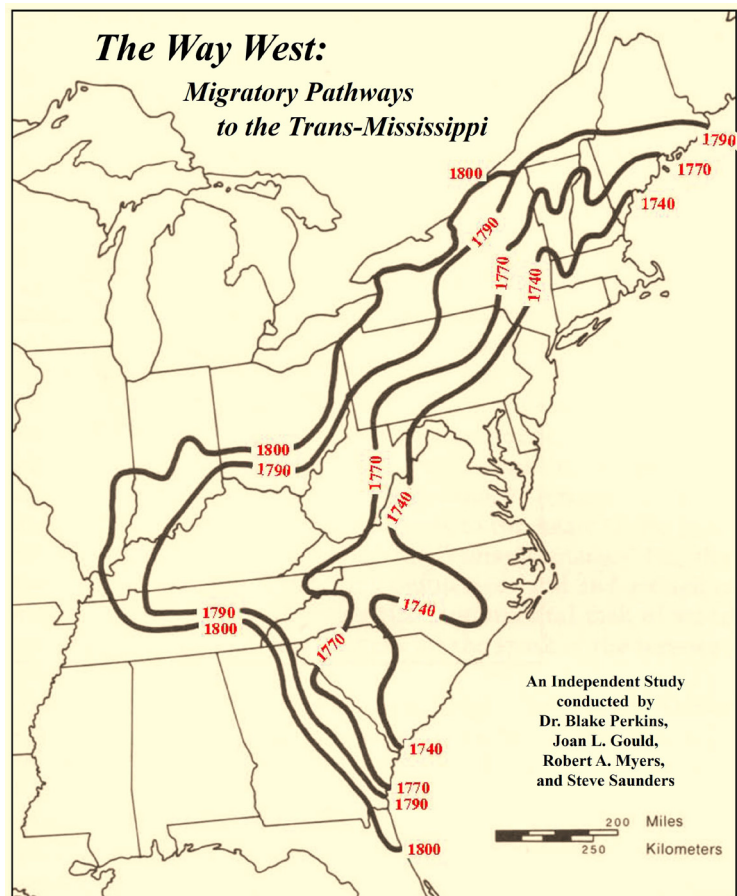
Families and their ‘connections’

Since ancient times, migrations have typically involved groups of people moving together for mutual support. The same held true for the founding American families of Lawrence County. In fact, our research reveals that the majority of these families migrated in kinship groups from one American frontier region to another, often for multiple generations, before crossing the Mississippi River and arriving to settle in Lawrence County.

As we gathered individual family histories over past decades, we shared these findings with one another and soon realized that the founding families of Lawrence County had incredible stories with great significance to the broader narratives of American history. This research contributes new findings and perspectives to historians’ longtime efforts to better understand the character, settlement patterns, and impacts of migrant agriculturalists as they moved west from the Atlantic coast in the early nineteenth century. We quickly recognized that zooming in on this region’s settlement history adds a great deal the broader story of early American history.

Many of Lawrence County’s earliest American settlers and their descendants had been part of opening nearly every new western frontier since colonial times. Most were ‘middling’ land-owners who represented Thomas Jefferson’s ideal of the independent yeoman farmer. Some of Lawrence County’s older settlers had served the Patriot cause during the Revolutionary War. Long imagined as backwoods simpletons isolated from the broader currents of American history, the region’s early-19th century settlers have too often been misunderstood and under-studied. This website intends to help reconsider and hopefully correct many of these misconceptions.

Our research includes an in-depth independent study titled “The Way West: Migratory Pathways to the Trans-Mississippi,” which will be included under the website’s 1800 – 1814 TIMELINE as a downloadable PDF.

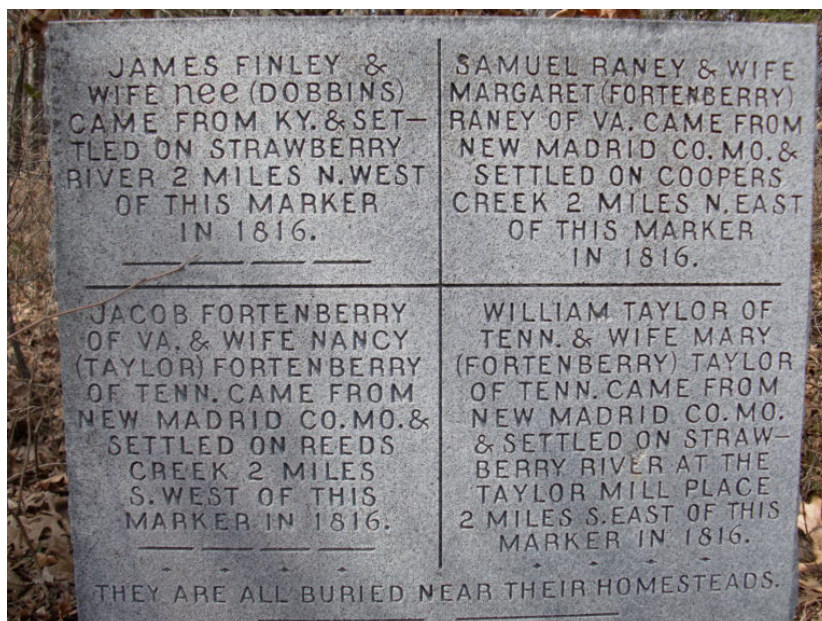


***“I have had in my mind, as many of us do,
the single ox cart heading out into the great unknown.”***

**Christopher Baker
Descendant of Elisha Baker**

One example from “The Way West” provides new insights for Christopher Baker of Columbia, Missouri, a descendent of early settler Elisha Baker. Elisha had been a signer of the 1796 State Constitution of Tennessee, and several of his family members were listed on the 1815 & 1816 Lawrence County Tax Lists. Baker and his family initially moved to Spanish Louisiana in the late eighteenth century from the Holston River Valley in Tennessee. Christopher Baker always imagined that his early kinfolk had traveled west alone as individualistic pioneers and without specific plans and simply wound up in Lawrence County. As we researched his family history with him, he came to view his ancestors’ adventures in an entirely new light; now he can follow them and their inter-connected neighbors westward from the Appalachians to Missouri’s Bellevue Valley, where they and multiple neighbors embraced what Henry M. Brackenridge had called the “rage to move” to the White River Country. Among the Bellevue Valley families claiming land pre-emptions in Lawrence County were Baker, Davis, Janes, Job, Ottery, Reed, Rickman, and Sloan.

Another significant example of better understanding the history of group migration and settlement is the 1930s commemorative stone marker standing near the Strawberry River near present-day Jesup and Smithville. The marker honors the inter-connected families of James Finley, Samuel Raney, Jacob Fortenberry, and William Taylor. An inscription at the top of the stone reads: “Dedicated to the memory of the four below named pioneer families by their descendants...” and declares that all are buried near their homesteads.



Photographs courtesy of John Fortenberry, Maxine Fortenberry, The Fortenberry family in Arkansas: A review of the history and legacy of six generations. J. and M. Fortenberry (January 1, 1997).

Opening a new frontier was “...a horrendously difficult task”

Living history enactor, educator, and author Gerry Barker, shown below at The Rice-Upshaw Restoration Site (near Dalton, Randolph County, Arkansas), interprets the ‘toolkit of skills’ early American settlers possessed that enabled them to quickly transform the region into a significant American agricultural seedbed. Their history played out along the narrow but fertile valleys of the numerous spring-fed rivers. This “toolkit of skills,” as Barker points out, prepared American settlers—black and white, men, women, and children—for “...a horrendously difficult task.” The legacies of their labors persist, despite constant change, in the region today.

Photograph courtesy of Tommy Jameson, AIA, preservation architect, Little Rock, Arkansas.

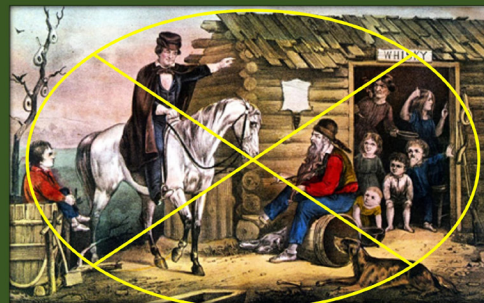


Material culture with a story to tell

Chasing migrants’ ancestral roots reveals that these American first-comers were often third or even fourth generation landowners of ‘middling’ social status, far from possessing great wealth but neither were they the poor ‘squatters’ often depicted in stereotypical accounts and imagery. Many were experienced military leaders, a number had served as state and local government officials, and most had been trained by their forefathers and mothers in the skills of productive farming, craftsmanship, and trade.



The Arkansas Traveller



The Arkansas Traveller

Currier and Ives 1870 adaptation of “The Traveller and the Squatter”
by Arkansas artist Edward Payson Washbourne

From 2017 presentation

Cultivating Life: Agricultural History of Northeast Arkansas
Sponsored by the Arkansas State Archives

The Reuben Rice family loom, shown right, according to local tradition, arrived in the White River Country in an 1812 wagon-train of interconnected families from Tennessee's Holston River Valley. Dendrochronologist Dr. David Stahle, director of the University of Arkansas Tree-Ring Laboratory, confirmed that the hand-crafted loom parts were made of wood that was not native to Arkansas. A portion of the Rice settlement site, along with the loom and other items of frontier material culture, were donated to Black River Technical College by the James Upshaw family, who are descendants of early settlers Reuben and Lydia Rice.

**Photography courtesy of Ronnie Walker,
Black River Technical College**



Davidsonville – The legendary seat of justice

Though short-lived, Lawrence County's original seat of justice, Davidsonville, nonetheless played an outsized role in shaping the history of early American settlement in the region.

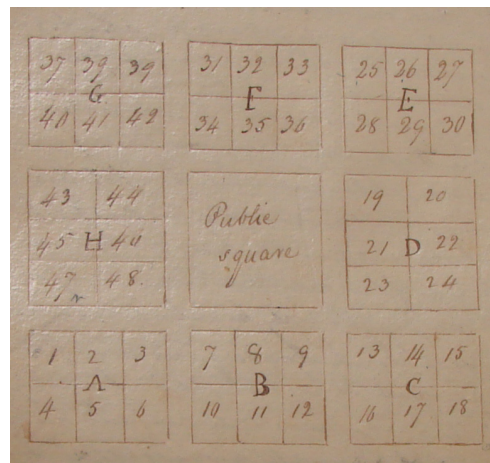
Erasing Boundaries details the town's development and significant events that breathed life into the early territorial period.



Many of the early attorneys who served in the county's government and courts – i.e. Charles S. Hempstead, Jason Chamberlain, Richard Searcy, and Townsend Dickinson – played influential roles more broadly in both Missouri and Arkansas history. Our research brings their early careers out of the shadows and places them in historical context as leading influences in America's expansion in the trans-Mississippi West.

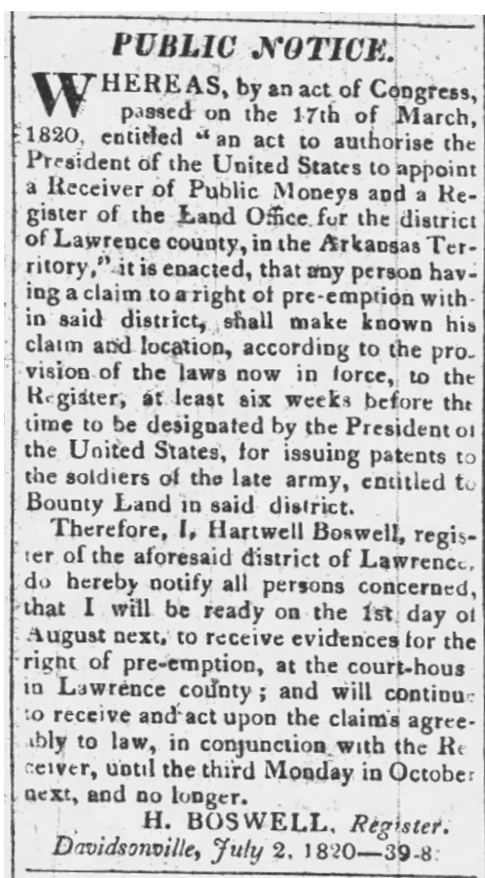
Townsend Dickinson, ca. 1835, one of three original justices of the Arkansas Supreme Court.
Portrait courtesy of the Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture.

**Davidsonville town plat;
Lawrence County Deed Book B, p. 80;
Lawrence County Courthouse,
Walnut Ridge, Arkansas**



Land records – relevant to all time periods

The General Land Office records available on the U. S. Department of Interior Bureau of Land Management website provide a wealth of information for both the historian and genealogist. The website has been of particular assistance to *Erasing Boundaries* researchers in confirming the settlement patterns of the first-comers who spread out along the fertile valleys of the principal waterways of the White River Country.



The Arkansas Gazette,
Arkansas (Arkansas Territory),
September 2, 1820, p. 4, col. 2:
<https://www.newspapers.com/>

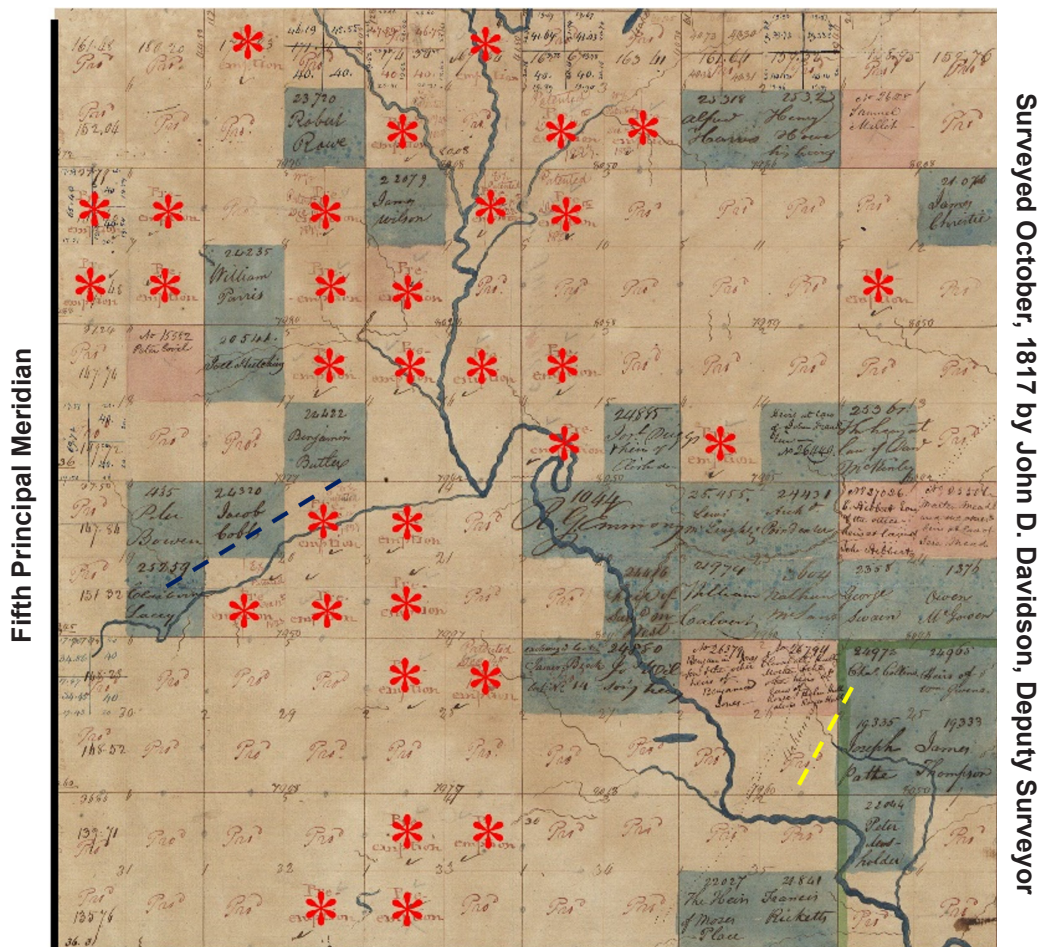
The process of surveying public lands of the 1803 Louisiana Purchase territory began in 1815, coinciding with the formation of Lawrence County. Once the earliest surveys were completed, the U. S. government awarded thousands of acres in Military Bounty Land Grants to eligible veterans for their service in the War of 1812. The government was also anxious to recoup the cost of the Louisiana Purchase through the sale of land to private individuals.

Surveyors Prospect K. Robbins and Joseph C. Brown were commissioned in 1815 to establish a starting point for all subsequent surveys. This starting point is preserved as a National Historic Landmark at the juncture of present-day Lee, Monroe, and Phillips counties in Arkansas. The team led by Robbins traveled north from the mouth of the Arkansas River, while Brown's team traveled west from the mouth of the St. Francis River. On October 27, 1815 Robbins' team crossed the east-west line laid down by Brown's team, formally establishing the Fifth Principal Meridian.*

Robbins continued marking the Fifth Principal Meridian northward, passing through the most populated regions of territorial Lawrence County. Robbins was followed by a swarm of government-appointed surveyors. From their field notes General Land Office plat maps (GLOs) were produced establishing the basis for legal descriptions

of townships, ranges, and sections. Between August and October of 1820 individuals who had settled land prior to April 12, 1814 could register their claims – called pre-emptions - at the Lawrence Land Office in Davidsonville, see announcement above. Following the registration of pre-emptions cartographers in Washington, D.C. marked the pre-emptions on township plat maps. As a result the county's earliest GLO plat maps document pre-emptions as well as Military Bounties, providing insightful glimpses into the earliest American settlement patterns in the county.

*Louisiana Purchase Historic State Park https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louisiana_Purchase_Historic_State_Park



Township 20 North and Range 1 East

The GLO plat map, above, illustrates how *Erasing Boundaries* editors use the earliest land surveys to chart Lawrence County settlements, based on pre-emption claims, Military Bounties, and early roadways. This one six-square-mile township, bisected by Thomas Fork River (aka Fouche de Maw), documents thirty-two pre-April 12, 1814 land claims, marked with red asterisks. The yellow dotted line identifies the federally-funded post-road known as the Arkansas Road.* The ancient Natchitoches Trace passed through the northern sections of this township. Although the Trace, indicated by a blue dotted line, was not marked on the original plat map, Lawrence County court records confirm it passed by the pre-emptions of Gabriel Seaver in the Northwest $\frac{1}{4}$ of Section 10 and William Russell in Section 20.** The settlement was known as a rural trading center called Columbia. Court and probate records confirm that both Seaver and Russell were farmers and distillers of whiskey while Russell also owned a saw and grist mill.***

* The post office in Davidsonville was established in June 1817. Clarence Edwin Carter, comp. & ed., *The Territorial Papers of the United States*, Vol. XX, The Territory of Arkansas, 1825 – 1829, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office), 489.

** Marion Stark Craig, comp., *Early Lawrence County Records 1817-1830* (Conway, Ark.: Arkansas Research, 1995), 2; Land patents: <https://glorerecords.blm.gov/search/>

*** Lawrence County Probate Records: Gabriel Seaver, MSNE,0054 _ B25_F1926; William Russell, MSNE,0054 _ B25_F1888, Northeast Arkansas Regional Archives, Powhatan, Arkansas.

Probate records open windows

Estate inventories frequently provide exciting and unexpected discoveries! Adam Ritchey and his brother-in-law David Lister were likely the county's first physicians and practiced out of Davidsonville. Previously in local histories, Ritchey had been identified only as Davidsonville's postmaster and a Commissioner of the Courthouse and Jail. In the "Articles of agreement" for their medical practice, which was composed on March 1, 1817, Ritchey was identified as a "Surgeon and Doctor of Medicine," with he and Lister jointly owning the "...Medicines and shop..." in Davidsonville.

Lister's death in 1818 resulted in a rare and lengthy listing of the medicines and medical books they possessed and employed on the frontier. Equally unexpected and rare was the listing in these probate records of religious books owned by Lister, reflecting the strong connections the Ritchey and Lister families had with the Presbyterian faith since their arrival in America in the early 1700s.

An inventory of the goods and Chattels
of David Lister Dec^d this second day of March 1818

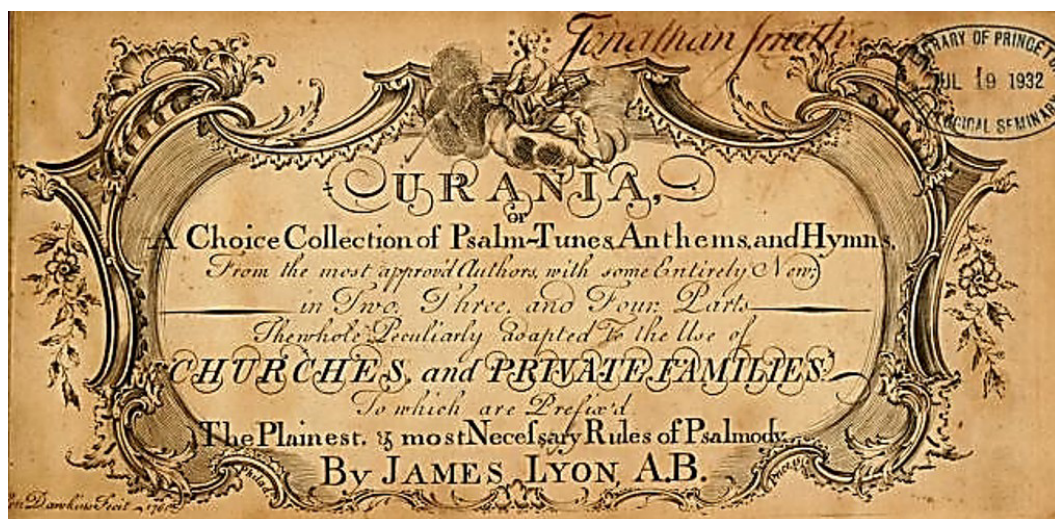
to one table and five chairs	\$6.25
to two beds and one bedstead and two firmities	4.00
to eight spoons and six plates and five knives	6.00
to one Coffey Mill	3.00
to Crockery ware	7.00
to one Razor and Latharing box	1.00
to one flat large	4.00
to one flat middle size	2.00
to one flat	1.00
to one oven	3.00
to one skillet	2.00
to one flat iron	1.00
to one flat iron	1.00
to one Lantern	1.50
to one Coffey pot	0.75
to Coopers ware 3 pails and one churn	1.62 1/2
two slays and one set of harness	1.50
one painted digh	7.00
two spaw axes	2.00
One falling axe	2.50
One bell and collar	0.75
One killing hoe	1.50
One check reel	2.00
One small wheel	2.50
One small trunk	3.50
One large do	6.00
One cotton wheel	3.00
Two pair cotton ^{chairs} and one pair of wool chairs	2.00
Two pair wool do	1.00
One pair wool leathers	0.50
One canoe adze	1.00

170 77 1/2

1818 partial list the
personal property of
David Lister, deceased:
Lawrence County Probate
Records_ MSNE_B23_F1263;
Northeast Arkansas Regional
Archives, Powhatan, Arkansas

Books - 1 bible	and not over	170.17
Psalm & hymn		2.00
Fourfold state		1.00
Thomas's practice & pocket conspectus		10.00
Marshall on Sanctification		10.00
Experiences		1.00
Lyon's Magazine and music book		0.75

Source: Extraction from the 1818 personal property inventory of David Lister, deceased:
Lawrence County Probate Records_ MSNE_B23_F1263;
Northeast Arkansas Regional Archives, Powhatan, Arkansas



The extraction from David Lister's personal property inventory, above, lists "Lyon's Magazine and music book." Composer James Lyon (1723 – 1794) produced the above *Urania, or A Choice Collection of Psalm-Tunes, Anthems and Hymns* in 1761. It was widely distributed around the world with one copy in the possession of David Lister of Davidsonville.

Image courtesy of <https://library.princeton.edu/jameslyon/exhibit/1761.html>

The excerpt above from David Lister's personal property inventory, lists "Lyon's Magazine and Music Book." Composer James Lyon (1723 – 1794) produced the above *Urania, or A Choice Collection of Psalm-Tunes, Anthems and Hymns* in 1761. It was widely distributed around the world with one copy in the possession of David Lister of Davidsonville. Image courtesy of <https://library.princeton.edu/jameslyon/exhibit/1761.html>

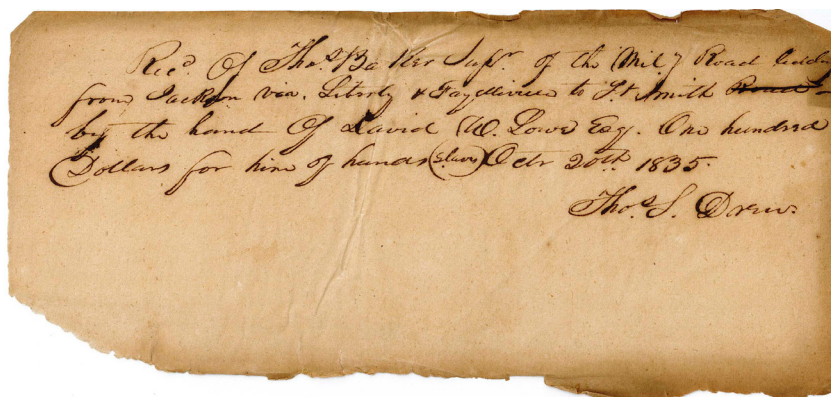
Closing out the territorial era

The 1830s, the last years of the territorial period, held drama and significance of their own right. A new seat of justice, Jackson, was erected in what had been an open field and there was held a murder trial, a hanging, and all the business of a county. Today it has reverted to an open field and its significance known only to a few local residents.

This was a period of industrial change for the people of the county. Steamboats plying the White and Black rivers provided access to goods imported from far-off trading centers plus easier travel for residents and easier transport of local agricultural products to distant markets.

Lawrence County founders were now scattered throughout the American southwest and playing parts on broader stages. At home a few folks were playing significant roles in national events. The federal government was constructing new roads and improving old roads for the purpose of removing Native American peoples from their eastern lands to what was to be their new places of residence beyond Arkansas's western border. Two branches of these 'military roads' wound through Lawrence County. With minimum words, a four-line note found in the archival records at NEARA, documents the role Lawrence County individuals played in the construction of one of these roadways. Thomas Baker, a son of Elisha Baker who signed the Constitution of the State of Tennessee in 1796, served as a superintendent of one branch and enslaved African Americans of Thomas S. Drew were hired as construction workers. They were building what has become known as the Trail of Tears.

Drew went on to become the third governor of Arkansas from 1844 - 1849. Most unfortunately, the role of black enslaved workers has been over-looked in this national saga but now records from territorial Lawrence County can bring their important role to the forefront.



Transcription:

*Recd. (Received) of Thos. (Thomas) Baker Supr. (Superintendent) of the Military Road leading from Jackson via Liberty & Fayetteville to Ft. Smith Road – by the hand of David W. Lowe, Esq. (Esquire) * One hundred Dollars for the hire of hands (slaves) Octr (October) 20th 1835.*

Thos. (Thomas) S. Drew

- David W. Lowe was the Lawrence County Clerk

Sources: <https://digitalheritage.arkansas.gov/exhibits-online-vault-images/57/>;
<https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/entries/thomas-stevenson-drew-100/>