

Smuggling Salt In the Sixties!

In a History of Sharp County That He Wrote, the
Late Charles W. Shaver of Evening Shade
Described a Trip to New Madrid, Mo.,
By Ox Wagon After Salt.

By CARUTH S. MOORE. *Woyette March 1936*

Many stories have been told of the difficulties the people of the South had in obtaining salt during the Civil war. It was contraband. Much of the supply that found its way into Arkansas came from points on the Mississippi—Memphis, New Madrid or Cape Girardeau, Mo.

When the able-bodied men went off to fight there was no one left to make the trips after it except old or disabled men, women and boys too young to enlist in the army.

One chapter of the history of Sharp county that was written by the late Charles W. Shaver of Evening Shade is devoted to telling how, in 1864, he headed an expedition of ox wagons to New Madrid to buy salt.

Mr. Shaver, then 27, had been an invalid since he was 14, crippled to the degree that he had to get about in a wheel chair. But being handicapped meant nothing to him, either on the salt expedition, or in the many other activities in which he participated during his long lifetime.

He practically educated himself, and later helped to run the business of his father, John Wesley Shaver, a pioneer merchant and fur buyer at Evening Shade. Mr. Shaver established his own business a short time later. He married Miss Susan Penner, built his own home, and reared a family. For 12 years he was county treasurer, was business manager and treasurer of the Sharp County Telephone Company for a number of years, and was recording steward of the Evening Shade Methodist church for more than 50 years. He served as commissioner of accounts of Sharp county, a position no longer existing, until old age forced him to retire. He died at the age of 84. The brick house he built still stands, just back of the present courthouse, and is occupied by his son, O. C. Shaver, and family.

In his history of the county, Mr. Shaver relates an incident that occurred shortly before he made his salt expedition, which shows just how scarce salt was. This follows, in part:

"In the year 1863, we were without salt. None was to be had in this part of the country for love or money. My father told me to be on the lookout for some. If a long trip had to be made for it, it would fall to my lot to go, for my mother could not make such a trip. (It would not have been safe for my father to go, as he might be taken prisoner. My brothers, Carroll Neely, were too young to go.

"Accordingly, I made my arrangements to go to Batesville, our nearest trading point, to try to find salt. I got a youthful friend of mine, Jesse McCaleb, who was here on a visit to his brother, Col. James H. McCaleb and family, to go with me.

"We went on horseback to the home of Major Sims, some 10 miles north of Batesville, and stopped there for the night. (He was afterwards a member of Congress from Missouri. His descendants live today near here at the community of Simstown.) I knew that Major Sims was well acquainted with the country and with every man in Batesville. I asked him to give me what information he could as to where I might be able to find salt. He replied that he knew of none, and that he had himself tried and failed to find any. He requested me if I found any to let him know.

"We left the major the next morning and went into Batesville. I interviewed every merchant there, but failed to find what we wanted. Finally, on the third day, a friend told me he believed an old man by the name of Robert Smith had some hidden away. I soon found him. He was frightened that the fact that he had salt hidden was known, it being danger-

ous to possess contraband. But I promised him that I would protect him if he would let me have two sacks. Then I asked what it was worth. 'Twenty dollars a sack,' was the reply. 'Not Confederate money, but gold.'

"I paid Smith \$40 in gold for the two sacks, and told him Major Sims would come and get it the next day. 'No,' he said, 'Tell him to come at 10 o'clock tomorrow night. Let him come in the back way with as little noise as possible. I will be waiting.' Accordingly I gave Major Sims these instructions. He and his Negro, Dan, went to Smith's at the hour set, secured the salt, and returned home. They hid it under his wife's bed, having reached home just before daylight. I went home, and sent after our share the next night. We then removed the salt from the sack, and hid it in small packages about the house. We often hid our money and provisions in this way. Corn and meat would be hidden in the woods to keep the Federals and the 'Jayhawkers,' as we called our own people who had turned over to the other side, from taking them. It was a common joke in those days that 'the skin was worn off the meat and the shucks off the corn from moving them so much.' Even in those trying times the spirit of the South had not broken, and a sense of humor was often evident."

The trip to New Madrid came, Mr. Shaver wrote in his history, after inquiry had been made and several persons found who expressed a desire to make the journey. Describing this expedition, Mr. Shaver wrote:

"Near the last of October [1863] we determined to quit eating our chicken and fresh meat without salt, if it were at all possible to find any. Warner Metcalf and I rigged up one ox wagon for the trip; James Adair, John London and Mrs. Col. McCaleb furnished a wagon and yoke of oxen; Mrs. Ad Hamilton furnished another outfit; and when we came to Smithville, Lawrence county, on our way, we fell in with Charles English and two women from upper Spring river. There we were joined by Col. Bill Adams, whose descendants live today in Independence county; Mrs. Bettie Holt and Miss Frankie Holt. Another old couple, man and wife, joined us later. These furnished us much amusement on our trip with their quarrels and subsequent 'making up.'

"We went to Pochontas, where we expected to cross Black river. But the ferry boat had been destroyed, and we had to turn back and go to Powhatan to cross. Here we decided to go to New Madrid, although some of the party wished to go to Memphis. We traveled easily and pleasantly enough till we got to the St. Francis river valley, east of Crowley's Ridge.

"Here some 'Jayhawkers' came upon us, and took from me a 450-pound bale of cotton, which I could have sold for 95 cents a pound in New Madrid. Two of their men got into our wagon, and threw the bale to the ground, bidding us go on our way. This we were glad to do, before they molested us further.

"Coming to the river just at night, we camped in a farmer's pumpkin house. There was no ferry here, so we secured a 20-foot canoe, or 'pirogue.' We would unload the wagons, swim the oxen across, then balance the wagon on the boat and float it across. We camped that night on the other bank of the river. Some of the party had brought a dressed hog, from which we made our supper.

"During the night a wolf, no doubt attracted by the odor of the pork, got into the sage, or 'sedge' grass, as we called it, between our camp and the river, and howled hideously. Andy Metcalf had a dog with him. This dog evidently had never heard a wolf howl before. He was dis-



The late Charles W. Shaver of Evening Shade, who told about his salt trip in his history of Sharp county.

turbed, but was afraid. He went a short way into the grass, and came back in double-quick time, yelping every breath. We could hear the wolf's teeth snap as he pursued his canineship. The wolf would come to within some 20 feet of the camp, then retreat. Whereupon the dog would run after him again. The wolf would, in turn, chase the dog back to camp. This continued most of the night. It disturbed me very little, as I had heard wolves howl around our home in Poinsett county. (We had lived there before we came to Sharp county.)

"Once the wolves formed a ring around our house and howled until my mother fired a gun out between the logs. We had fresh meat in the house at that time. At another time my father was carrying a quarter of beef before him on a horse. It was dark, and he was traveling through dense woods. Wolves tried several times to pull the beef from the horse. My father merely kicked at them, and 'histed' the meat higher.

"We were now in Dunklin county, Missouri. We crossed the south part of Grand Prairie here, and crossed Little river five miles north of Hornersville. This stream was about a foot deep and 20 yards wide. That evening we bought two hogs and skinned them. They were the only skinned hogs I ever saw. We came now to the Mississippi river at Gayoso, county site of Pemiscot county, and went on to Point Pleasant, 10 miles from New Madrid. Here Charles English and the women with him left us, and we saw them no more.

"Woodard and Jackson had a cotton gin here. We stopped and had our cotton rebaled, in order that if anyone asked us where the cotton came from we could reply, 'From Woodard and Jackson.' If we had said the cotton came from Arkansas it might have been confiscated. While we were here we had Mr. Woodard get us one barrel and one sack of salt and five pounds of gunpowder from New Madrid. We were allowed to take only 12 1-2 pounds of salt each, and no gunpowder, through the Federal lines.

"After we got some salt through the Federal lines, and had our cotton rebaled, we went into town. The cotton sold for 95 cents a pound. I had a cotton bed that I put in one of the bales and sold. We then returned to Point Pleasant, while Colonel Adams stopped with a friend.

"We got into camp about dark. It was cloudy and threatening looking. The men had fed the oxen and the women were cooking supper. Suddenly there came a volley of shots and a crowd of 'Jayhawkers' entered our camp. They continued to fire their guns, being careful not to hit us. Nevertheless, it was disconcerting. With oaths, they commanded us to stand still. This we did. Some of their party stood guard, while others presented pistols at our heads and demanded our money.

"When one of the 'jayhawkers' placed a pistol against Andy Metcalf's head, the latter hastily handed over his wallet, and turned his pockets wrong side out to convince him that he had no more. Warner Metcalf had hidden his money that afternoon in the fold of his trousers at the foot, so he handed the renegade his purse with very little money in it. The man accordingly struck him on the cheek with his pistol, fracturing the bone. Warner at once snatched his roll from its hiding place and handed it to the 'Jayhawker.'

"John London was with his oxen in the dark when the shooting began. He lay down and stayed there until the robbers left.

"By this time my 'dander' was up. When the robber presented his gun and demanded my money, I refused. I had a two-dollar bill in my best pocket. He saw this and snatched it. He demanded more, but I defied him still. He then struck me on the head with his pistol, inflicting a deep wound. From this the blood gushed over my face and shoulders. The women of the party began to scream and cry, thinking I was badly hurt.

"The robber continued to curse and demand my money. I was really mad now. I told him that I was an invalid and over 200 miles from home. I said, 'You may kill me, but I will not give you the money I have.' (I had about \$60 sewed up in my clothes.) I know he could not find this, and I did not think he would be so base as to kill me. He gave it up as a bad job, and left me sitting by the campfire.

"Jim Adair had secured some whiskey in New Madrid, and was 'feeling it' when it came his turn. He cursed his 'Jayhawker,' and told him that he had no money. Getting so close to the robber that he stood breast to breast with him, he looked him square in the eye, and talking every breath, he removed his purse from his trousers pocket and put it in his bosom. Then Jim invited the man, calling him several choice terms, to put his hand in his pocket and see for himself that there was no money there. The fellow, looking somewhat abashed, did so. I think he knew Jim had got the best of him, but could not figure out how.

"Then the thieves proceeded to search our wagons, taking what they wished of our belongings. Next morning we found some of them where they had been dropped.

"We were told that these robbers were Missouri state militia who had been discharged. All that we saw had on blue uniforms. We recalled that a number of such looking fellows had stood around in the stores in New Madrid. They had doubtless observed us there, and followed us to our camp.

"We were now on our way home. We

(Continued on Page 12.)

traveled slowly, with but little incident. We camped that night on the bank of the river. It had rained, and the river was fast rising. The next morning as we were going around a short bend in the road, being still on the bank of the river, we heard a fearful crash. Looking back, we saw that 75 yards behind us some 50 feet of the road over which we had just passed, had caved into the river. If this had happened only a few short minutes before, it would have been the last of us and our precious salt.

"Traveling on, we came to within a mile of Gayoso, where we stopped to buy corn. After the corn had been sacked, and Warner Metcalf was putting it into our wagon, the farmer came to me and said, 'I don't know who you folks are, nor where you are going. But there is a Federal gunboat anchored in the river just below the mouth of the slough at Gayoso. There are 100 soldiers on it. You and your wagons are likely to be searched. If any contrabands are found, they will confiscate your goods, and maybe hold your prisoners indefinitely. We thanked him for his warning, and drove on.

"We did not feel the best in the world. All of us had more or less contraband goods, which we did not have permission to bring through the lines. We had the gunpowder hidden inside the featherbed which my mother had thought necessary for me to bring with me. There was no road around the place. We had to go forward to reach home. But we were to be delivered from the dilemma in a way unforeseen.

"There was a very deep slough at the north edge of town, bridged by a self-supporting wooden bridge. The bridge was in the shape of the roof of a house, floored with logs split in two pieces, with the split side turned down. This made a very rough floor for the bridge, something like a corduroy road.

"Making a turn in the road we saw the gunboat. She lay anchored just below the bridge. To make it worse for us, some 50 or 60 soldiers lay sunning themselves on the sage grass. We expected nothing else but that they would rush out and capture us.

"Now Colonel Adams had a very bad boil on his knee. In fact, he was unable to walk. He had two yoke of oxen to his wagon, fat and spirited animals. The woman who was driving them could not make them go on the bridge. Some of the men went to her assistance. Now an ox is a slow moving beast, but when it runs away, it really runs away. The four oxen took a mutual notion to run, and run they did.

"The wagon bumped across the rough flooring of the bridge. Colonel Adams' sore knee was knocked and bumped against the bed. He opened his mouth and began to swear as loud as he could yell. He was an accomplished 'swearer,' and this time he used his ability to the fullest. He cursed the oxen, he cursed the wagon, he cursed the bridge, he gave all 'Yankees' their full share, referring to all Blue-coats in picked terms, as if the soldiers who rose to a sitting posture below us and craned their necks to hear, were in some way responsible for his hurts. He cursed until we were half a mile from the town. It did not take us long to traverse the distance, for the other oxen, excited by the tumult, ran pell mell after the colonel's wagon. Never Roman charioteer took so wild a ride. It was, in a measure, a triumph, also! To be on the safe side, however, we traveled until after dark that night.

"The next day we were obliged to travel through swamps. Sleet was falling so hard that we could hardly see our way. We traveled in every direction of the compass, going around holes and logs. By dark we had come to a little hard ground, where we could camp. We drank water out of the wagon ruts, rolled up in our blankets, and were soon asleep. During the night I was awakened by snow falling in my face. The next morning we were covered up in snow.

"Arriving at Little river, we were obliged to pay a man who knew the stream \$2 to pilot us across. Much rain had put the river out of its banks, and strangers could not tell where the ford was safe. To get to the river, we had first to cross a slough 50 yards wide. The men had to wade through this and break the ice for the oxen. The beasts were not anxious to go into it, but, with much shouting and

whipping on the part of their drivers, were finally prevailed upon to do so.

"Our man had us halt at the bank of the river, while he went ahead on a horse to see if the crossing was safe. He said he would come back and pilot us. We stood and anxiously watched him ride into the water. He went forward for a time, then suddenly man and beast disappeared from our sight beneath the surface of the water. He rose at once to the top of the water, and called to us that he would swim to the other side. Then, he said, he would send a man with a boat for us.

"As the fellow disappeared from sight on the opposite side of the river, Andy Metcalf, evidently feeling helpless to cross, and disgusted with the whole trip, slapped his thigh with his hands, and said, 'O, I'll never see Betsy again! I'll never see Betsy again!' Betsy was his wife at home, and two very good old people they were.

"Just at sundown a man came to us in a 12-foot canoe, but we told him to return the next morning to row us across. We were forced to camp that night on the icy island between the river and the slough.

"In the morning, in preparing to cross the river, we took everything from the wagons that we wanted to keep dry, tied the wagon bed to the axletree, hooked three yokes of oxen to the wagon, placed one man in the wagon, and two in the boat to guide the oxen and keep the wagon from hanging up on cypress 'knees,' as well as to run the boat. After they had got our wagons and camping outfits over, they took the woman and me across. It took all day, but we camped that night on the other bank of the river.

"We crossed the Grand Prairie the next day, and found the roads good until we came to the St. Francis river bottoms. The latter river was swollen from rain, but we were fortunate in finding two 20-foot pirogues to cross in. The men tied the boats together, but far enough apart to put the two wagon wheels on the right side in one boat, and the opposite ones in the other boat. Thus the wagons were carried across, without the necessity of unloading them. As usual, we had to swim our oxen across.

"We were now back in Arkansas. That day we traveled some 10 miles through water from three to 18 inches deep with no visible road except the open way through the timber. We stayed over night on Crowley's Ridge in the home of our mutual friend, Mr. Johnson. He was a clock peddler who has since sold clocks all over Sharp county. The women in our party had access to Mrs. Johnson's cabbage 'hill.' This we enjoyed very much.

"The next day we left Mr. Johnson's, dreading Cache river. When we had left home it was only a foot deep. Now it was 10 feet deep and 75 yards wide. We were at a loss as to what to do. A woman in a nearby farmhouse told us that there was an old raft in the woods above there which had been used the winter before.

"We found the raft, which was in fairly good condition. After repairing it a little, we were ready to try it. All the heavy articles were taken out of the wagons, which were then driven as far into the water as was safe. Next the oxen were loosed and made to swim across. After this our men got into the water, and lifted a wagon on to the raft. This was then poled and paddled across. The process was repeated until all were across.

"We had four very courageous women in our party. They stood ready in every difficulty to do their part.

"It was now near sundown, and we had to camp there on the river. This was on P. K. Lester's farm, on the west side of the river. After supper we joined in the common chorus of 'Home, Sweet Home.'

"We were now in Lawrence county, our home county. Even this near home, our troubles were not yet at an end. One of the oxen to the wagon belonging to Warner Metcalf and myself had given out and could not go on. We managed to drive him a mile or so to the home of Mr. Lester. We told Mr. Lester of our difficulty, and asked him if we could hire his oxen and a Negro man to drive us on to old Walnut Ridge. This was about 12 miles away, and all the road covered with mud and water. He was willing to help us, and ordered his Negro to unhitch our oxen and put his own to our wagon. He told us to drive on, while he would mount his horse and come after us.

"I told him that we would pay him for his team before we left him. He answered,

'Wait a minute.' He then went into the house, returning with a quart cup in his hand. He asked if we had been after salt. Upon our answer in the affirmative, he asked for the cup to be filled with salt. This we readily gave him. He expressed himself as amply repaid for his trouble.

"We spent five weeks and four days on this trip. I slept on a feather bed two nights during this time, and under a roof some five nights. When I left home I weighed 75 pounds, and when I returned I weighed 95.

"I never taste salt but that I think of my 'salt trip.'"