

## Chapter Eight

### Norfolk—The Oldest Continually Settled Spot in the County

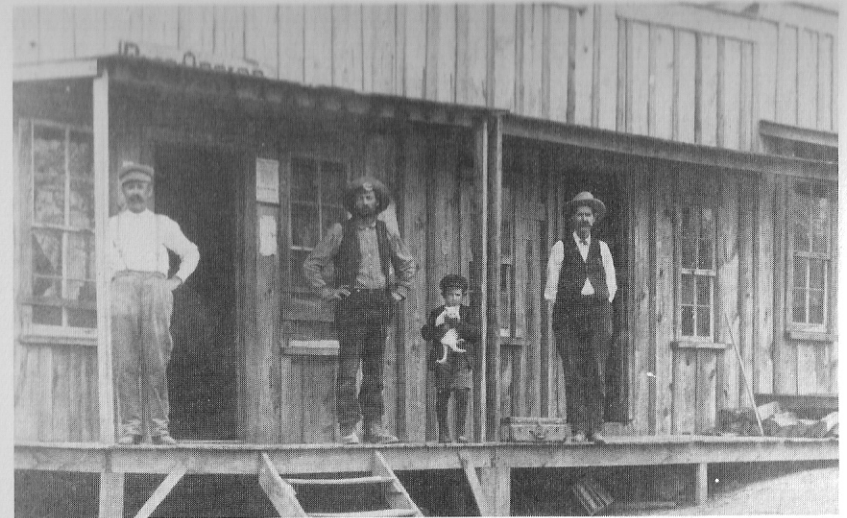
There has been a settlement at the mouth of the Great North Fork of the White River for 162 years—first as Liberty, then Devero, and finally Norfolk. And it is virtually impossible to separate the history of this settlement from the Wolf House, the rivers and the railroad.

In our chapter on the Wolf House we learned about early day life at Liberty, that thriving village known all up and down the White and Mississippi Rivers—all the way to New Orleans, and even across the ocean to Europe—as the “jumping off place” for inland bound settlers. After the opening of the military roads, Liberty slowly began to lose some of its prominence, but it remained a busy river port as long as the great steamboats plied the White River.

With the coming of the railroad, the age-old settlement became a real town. It had always been a popular trading center, even after the Wolf family sold their business interests. J. T. Tracy, Sr., had operated a store in the Wolf House, later Sam South and his son, Jerry, were in business there.

With the coming of the ribbons of steel, many new industries, businesses and gracious homes sprang up and the town was called Devero, in honor of the handsome, French railroad engineer, Devereaux. Devero was the timber and tie center of the county, timber from all over the Buffalo, White and Northfork River basins were floated down river and shipped from the depot at Norfolk. Bill Colson built the first new store. F. L. and Will Chastain were in the cedar business and also opened up a store about 1900. William Hogan came from Randolph County in 1900 to buy ties for the railroad and purchased the store from Colson. Soon Sid Hitcheson bought the Chastain store. Other stores were opened—a butcher shop, barber shop, bank and post office. F. L. Chastain and Charley Blevins owned the town site and in 1907 a plat was made for the incorporation of the town and the name was changed to Norfolk.

Many of the first businesses were false front stores—like the western boom towns. Later brick and stone buildings replaced the temporary stores.



*Dodge City, Kansas: Tombstone, Arizona, or Virginia City, Nevada? No, Norfolk, Arkansas—the forerunner of today's shopping centers. This line of businesses, known as four brothers because of the four center peaks over the entrances to each business house, was constructed during the building of the railroad in 1903. From Left to Right: Shelt Cockrum, Postmaster: Unknown, Rudolph Conley and his pet kitten, Snowball, and “Uncle Tate Conley, Merchant. Note: Reward poster tacked on the front of Post Office Building.*



*Norfolk young folks posed on the Norfolk Ferry for the “Kodak” in 1915. From Left to Right: Lawrence Smallwood, Edith Stone, Nancy Hamilton, Flossie Smith, Lois Rogers, Cleve Soplin, Myrtle Cunningham, Ed Fountain, Griffin Arnold, Cecil Torrence, Bill Lackey, Elsie Crafton, Roy Watson, and Ora Lee Raymond.*

Women's Lib sit up and take notice—the first two bankers at Norfolk were Nancy Matthews and Mable Luther, two lovely career girls who took their places, without question or favors, in the world of men.

Norfolk was the scene of the first moving picture filmed in Baxter County. In 1927 the Geographic Photography Company of Hollywood, under the direction of Raymond Wells, moved their studio and stars to Norfolk to film a Civil War drama, "Souls Aflame," based on the sixth commandment, "Thou Shalt Not Kill." The first feminine lead is remembered as a sweet, pretty girl, who soon developed a severe case of poison ivy and had to be replaced by an older girl—who had let Hollywood go to her head.

Only the main characters were brought from Hollywood, all the other roles were filled by local residents who were paid \$1.50 per day—a silver dollar and a silver fifty cent piece. Most of the filming took place around the Wolf House, at Galatia, and on the rivers. Part of the crew stayed at the town hotel, owned by Quinby and Hattie Swearingin. The girls boarded with Mrs. Bernice Warren, others stayed in various homes in Norfolk. Needless to add, when "Souls Aflame" first showed at the Lyric Theater in Norfolk, it played to a packed house of nervous "actors," anxious to see how they came across on the screen.

Norfolk was the home base of Melvin and Luna Finley who had a traveling show. First, members of the family put on a stage and magical show, later Melvin operated the Lyric theater at Norfolk where he showed on weekends and traveled all over north Arkansas through the week, showing movies at schools, churches—any empty building.

Much of the social life of Norfolk centered around the depot and the town pump. Crowds gathered everytime a train came in. Then they would wait at the Post Office until the mail was put up. Walking along the railroad tracks was a favorite Sunday afternoon sport. Also picnicking at the rock quarry and going "kodaking." The town hotel was the finest building in Norfolk and was also a favorite gathering place for the young folks.

June 17, 1937 was a big day in the history of Norfolk. The \$110,916.00 Suspended Truss Type steel bridge, rising seventy feet above the Northfork River was dedicated. The bridge, which gives an unrestricted view up Northfork River, is 533 feet long and 24 feet wide. It was made possible by a certain per cent of Federal Road money that was set aside for dangerous railroad crossings. Judge R. M. Ruthven saw the possibility of getting the bridge by these means and began working on this angle in 1935. Prior to the bridge construction, cars and wagons had crossed Northfork River on a current powered ferry established by Colson in 1902. F. F. Pierce later bought the ferry and ran it until 1916 when it was taken over by S. J. Hutcheson who operated it until the bridge was completed. Mountain Home boys who dated girls at Calico Rock recall that Hutcheson didn't like to



*A successful float trip putting in at Norfolk before 1935. Note ferry in background.*



*One Sunday afternoon in the summer of 1915 this group of Norfolk young folks accompanied Joe Martin to the Pumphouse (located near the Railroad Bridge) and kept him company while he pumped full the wooden water tank used to water the coal burning engines of the Missouri Pacific Railroad. From Left to Right, Back Row: Lee Ellis, Myrtle Cunningham Crawford, Tate Baker, Edna Scroggens Barker, Harrison Langston, Charlie Martin and Joe Martin.*

*Second Row: Ethel Cunningham, Lois Rogers, Audith Gilliland, Alene Cunningham Skaggs, Rudolph Conley.*

*Third Row: Ora Lee Raymond, Frank Langston, Mae Watley Spencer, Lois Wolf, Jack Bonner, Myrtle Torrance and Roy Stone.*

*On Ground: Esta May Raymond Messick and Virgie Gilliland.*

*In Door: Boy unknown and Ora Langston Lackey.*

*Note: All the young ladies have either broad brim hats, umbrellas or both. Milady's complexion was protected from the sun at all times. Note: Jack Bonner and Roy Stone are gallantly holding the umbrellas of the two girls sitting on the ground.*

be awakened after he went to bed, so they would ferry themselves across on the way back home. After the building of the railroad, pedestrians preferred to take the risk of walking across the narrow, long railroad bridge than to wait to be ferried across. Mrs. Ethel Sales recalls walking across the railroad bridge during flood time, when the muddy, murky waters lapped over the railroad ties. After she got across on the Norfolk side, her knees went weak with fright, but she went on to town, did her shopping and recrossed the flooded bridge as there was no other way to get home that night.

In the many years that Hutcheson operated the ferry, there never was a serious accident.

Getting back to the Norfolk Bridge celebration—it was patterned after the Cotter and Henderson Dedications, complete with beauty queens and marching bands. Pearl Ellis of Cotter was the Queen, her attendants were Nancy Katherine Collie, Obleen Hart, Margaret Smith, Beverly Arnold, Mary Mazie and Dixie Marie McClure.

Committee members for the celebration were Jack Bonner, W. M. Finley, W. A. Baker, Dave Torrance, and Quinby Swearingen. The Souvenir Magazine, published by the Shiras Brothers Printing Shop, is dedicated to Judge Ruthven; the contractors, The Vincennes Steel Corp.; The McGeorge Construction Co., who built the approaches to the bridge; The State Highway Department; and the Federal Bureau of Good Roads.

Like the souvenir magazines for Cotter and Henderson Bridges, it contains many congratulations from advertisers all over the county and north Arkansas. Several are noteworthy as signs of the times. Such as Wolf Brothers—Electric Lights, Ice, Cotton Ginners—plants at Mountain Home, Salem and Norfolk. The W.P.A. Office, Mountain Home. The Ozark Amusement Co.—always a good show at the Legion Hut in Mountain Home every Tuesday night. Halbert's Mill, Mountain Home. Grist Mill, Meal and Ground Feeds. Otis Mabrey and Crew, constructing the new school building at Norfolk. The Baxter County Citizen, oldest paper in the County. Subscription, \$1.00 per year. Finley's Film Exchange—dealer in the Best of Talking Pictures. And these two ads—a forerunner of greater times to come: Bonner Boat Line, Norfolk, Arkansas. Float Trips. Northfork, Buffalo and White Rivers. Cotter Boat Company, Don Smith, Manager. Outfitters of Fishing, Hunting and Floating on White, Northfork and Buffalo Rivers.

There were for many years two buildings near Norfolk that almost equal the Wolf House in terms of awe and importance. They were both the "brainstorms" of Frank Pierce, a hardy adventurer from Kansas, who located near Norfolk about 1903. Pierce owned the fine river bottom farm later sold to S. J. Hutcheson. The house Pierce built on the Arkana road had four gables and no eaves, so that it looked like the roof was constantly in danger of tumbling to the ground. The other building was even more unique and unusual. It can best be described as a round barn—just a smaller, log and shingle Astro Dome. The round barn was 102 feet in circumference and 68 feet

high. It took 47,000 hand made shingles to cover the domed roof, which was topped by a belfry type cupola. The barn, which has long since been torn down, had 14 stalls and could house up to a hundred head of cattle.

Norfolk boomed during the building of Norfolk Dam, then returned to the peaceful routine of one of the most beautifully located towns in the world. If you doubt this statement, then climb the fire tower atop Matney Mountain and look down on the beauty of the "toy-like" village across the river. Or stop at the top of "Goat Ridge" on Highway 5 going toward Salesville, and drink in the beautiful view of Northfork River, the two bridges, and a corner of the town.

The ferry from Norfolk to Martin Springs has been replaced by the beautiful new bridge up White River from Norfolk, opening up a new avenue of approach to Norfolk Village, a new settlement of retirement homes across White River from the oldest continued settlement in Baxter County—Liberty, Devero and Norfolk.