

# Frenchport, Arkansas

*From an article by Gertrude Moore that appeared in the OCHS Quarterly, Vol 22, No 1, September 1990.*

Sometime between 1848 and 1851, French families named Fogle, Peveto, Pedron and Portier left France for New Orleans, Louisiana. Once there they arranged for tent covered rafts, loaded their belonging and left for Camden, Arkansas. About seven miles below Camden they ran into a log jam and had to settle at Frenchport (hence its name). Another account I read said the families landed at Pedron's Landing and were accompanied by two French families named LaBeaf and Marois. Victor Pedron later acquired land which had a large lake (Pedron's Lake) formed because the Ouachita River had changed its course several years before. Frenchport became the first permanent settlement according to one account. The French trappers, hunters and traders established friendly relations with Indians in Ouachita County.

Steamboats from New Orleans stopped at Frenchport to load cotton and unload staples of flour, coffee, sugar, etc., even furniture, anything one cared to have shipped. There was a big warehouse there. Farmers from as far away as Mt. Holly (Union County) brought their cotton to sell or ship to New Orleans. They traveled in caravans, as many as 12 to 15 wagons. They depended on each other to get up the almost impassible hills. It would take two or three teams of mules or horses to pull one wagon-load of cotton at times. When they arrived at the river they had an option of selling to buyers on the spot or taking it themselves to New Orleans where they could get a higher price – plus they got free passage if they accompanied their cotton. While there the farmer could buy supplies and return home on the next ship.

White Hall, a landing above Frenchport, was a favorite picnic and camping place. Families would go and spend several nights. The ferry there crossed into Locust Bayou in Calhoun County. Many arrowheads were found around here. Down the river below Frenchport, an Indian mound (Boons Mound) is at Blue Beach and perhaps had a house on it, maybe the dwelling of the chief. Another mound, Pawpaw, is located at Spoon Camp. It got its name because paw paws grown on top of it. Dr. Frank Schambach of Southern Arkansas University at Magnolia directed a dig in the mound and discovered interesting artifacts. A grooved axe was found and it was determined that it was used about 4690 B.C. Lignite coal is found at Spoon Camp but has never been mined. There was once a school at Frenchport. Even though the school terms were only three or four months and students could not go beyond the eighth grade, Frenchporters believed in an education.

The Frenchport community has made a contribution to the military. They sent men to fight in the Civil War, World War I and World War II. Theron Pedron caught a mini cannon ball in his jaw during the Civil War. Captain McMahan, another Civil War veteran, suffered the same injury as Mr. Pedron. He gave the land for the McMahan Chapel, a Methodist church that stood where the roads fork, with Louann to the right and Smackover to the left. We practiced integration. An ex-slave, Uncle Sonnie, his wife Aunt Lizzie, their son Walsh, and his wife, Lizzie, attended worship services. My grandpa, J. M. Moore, had a grocery store just behind McMahan's Chapel. Peter Fogle ran a store north of Moore's Grocery. His son, A. N. Fogle, later ran it. N. H. Milner, my grandpa, had a store about two miles from Frenchport. My daddy was partners with Van Gladden and Ritchie Morgan in Cullendale, J. B. Moore Grocery.

About 1910, Captain John T. Burkett, a retired river boat captain, had a gin on the Louann road. His home still stands. We were lucky to have Dr. Henry Plunkett in Elliott. He even made house calls on his horse or in his buggy. He was a great uncle of Chancery Judge Charles E. Plunkett of Camden.

The nearest post offices were Elliott, Kirkland and Louann. Frenchport now has city water and electricity provided by REA (circa 1990). For years before that natural gas had become a luxury. A volunteer fire department exists now.

*Author Gertrude Moore, a native of Frenchport, was a retired school teacher and former President of the Ouachita County Historical Society. She gave this history at the society's quarterly meeting in March 1990.*