

## THE ANDREW NAVE LETTERS: NEW CHEROKEE SOURCE MATERIAL AT NORTHEASTERN STATE COLLEGE

*By T. L. Ballenger\**

There are many different kinds of history; all kinds are necessary perhaps in order to get a complete picture of the life of certain groups of people or of particular periods of time. But to the writer the most personal, the most living kind of history consists, not of records of rulers and governments or accounts of the so-called notables, but of first-hand records that reveal the real honest-to-goodness every day life of a people in their homes, on their farms, and in their workshops. It is with a small bit of this kind of history that this article deals.

A few years ago some members of the Nave family of Park Hill gave to Northeastern State College an old trunk filled with business accounts, letters, documents and miscellaneous items saved from the records of Andrew Nave who ran a store both at Park Hill and at Tahlequah over a hundred years ago. John Ross, Chief of the Cherokees, also conducted a store at Park Hill, first by himself and then in partnership with his son-in-law, Andrew Nave. Consequently, many of his letters and business accounts are included in this collection.

Andrew Nave married Mrs. Jane Meigs, the daughter of Chief John Ross by his first wife, Quatie. John Ross not only conducted a store by himself at Park Hill but he was also administrator of the estate of his deceased son-in-law, Return Jonathan Meigs. Then Ross and Nave were partners in a store at Park Hill and another at Tahlequah. Nave was active manager of both of these stores. Andrew Nave was killed by Confederate raiders near his home at Park Hill in 1863. This collection of letters includes something like one hundred items bearing the personal signature of John Ross: some of them letters, some orders for merchandise, and some giving brief directions of a business or social nature of one kind or another.

Through pressure of routine duties at the college these documents lay untouched for some time but, during the semester before the writer's retirement from Northeastern, he, together with efficient student help, spent considerable time copying, sorting, classi-

---

\* Dr. T. L. Ballenger is a former contributor to *The Chronicles*, well known in Oklahoma educational circles as the head of History Department of Northeastern State College, Tahlequah, now retired, and as a writer and authority on the history of the Cherokee Nation.—Ed.

ying, and compiling this documentary material into some twelve volumes. The originals, together with a copy, are to be bound and kept for the use of research students, while the copies are to be made available for general student use. They are grouped under such titles as: Business Accounts, Business Letters and Accounts from Van Buren, Mrs. Jane Nave Accounts, Orders and Requests, Social Correspondence, Civil War Letters, John Ross Letters, Indian Affairs, Educational, Historical, and Miscellaneous. Some Cherokee biography, several messages of the chiefs, a few museum relics, many rare stamps and envelopes, and other interesting items are included in the collection. The Cherokee Nation was a part of Arkansas for a time, and we have letters postmarked Ft. Gibson, Arkansas and letters addressed to Tahlequah, Arkansas.

These records throw considerable light on Cherokee affairs from the time of the general removal of the Cherokees to this country in 1839 to the close of the War between the States. They reveal many interesting things about the economic life of the people, their poverty, their standards of living, their dependability, and their methods of transacting business. Some hundred or more personal and social letters portray much concerning the intellectual capacity, as well as the home and social life, of the Naves, the Meigs, and the Rosses. The Meigs family is spread over the whole United States from New England to California, and the Indian branch constitutes no inconsiderable part. Some of these letters were written from Rose Cottage shortly before its destruction by fire during the Civil War. Mrs. Andrew Nave lived in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, for four or five years during the Civil War period to supervise the education of a group of girls of the Nave, Meigs, and Ross families. There are literally hundreds of bills rendered by various business firms of Bethlehem to Mrs. Nave for books and stationery, food, clothing, music lessons, riding lessons, medical attention, jewelry, taxes, and other items. It seems that expenses there were high and war conditions down here around Tahlequah were trying, and Mrs. Nave sometimes found it somewhat difficult to make ends meet.

Many of these papers are straight business accounts showing items of merchandise bought by the people and the prices that prevailed a century ago, for food, clothing, and other items. Life on this early frontier was simple, though there are many evidences of culture and refinement among the people. They also show the wide trading scope of a business firm in Tahlequah at that time. Nave bought goods from large wholesale houses in Ft. Smith, New Orleans, St. Louis, and some even as far away as Philadelphia, New York, and Boston. He also made large purchases from Van Buren, Boonesboro (Cane Hill), Evansville, and Fayetteville, Arkansas, and from Independence and Springfield, Missouri.

Van Buren, Arkansas was first known as Phillips Landing and had its beginning in the late 1820's. Its ability to supply merchan-

dise to interior points, like Tahlequah and Park Hill, depended upon the depth of the Arkansas river, as to whether steam boats could come up from New Orleans or not. Sam C. Hanby, a merchant of Van Buren, wrote Nave, on January 31, 1859, "Bless your Soul nary bag of coffee to be had in V. B. . . . River continues low. Dardanelle is expected up but she cannot bring much freight." On February 14th, he wrote again: "Steamer 'Dardanelle' *sunk* a few days since above Pine Bluffs. A total loss. She had on over 1200 Bags coffee for this place & Ft. Smith. . . . River very low." Almost every business letter from Van Buren has some comment concerning the shipping stage of the Arkansas. Freight rates by wagon from Van Buren to Tahlequah ranged from \$1.00 to \$1.25 per hundred pounds. On August 9, 1861, One Van Buren merchant wrote: "We are not doing much in the way of business and all we see now is Confederate Script or Louisiana Money." In 1862 the Van Buren merchants had to pay about twice as much for goods in the eastern markets in Confederate currency as they would if they paid in gold. Hermann & Wilhelm of Hermannborough (Cane Hill, Arkansas) wrote Mr. Nave: "We are selling superfine branded flour at \$3.75 a sac [*sic*] containing 98 lbs, or if you furnish the sac's 3.75 for 100 lbs." These business letters verify the close relationship that, in many ways, existed between the early settlements in western Arkansas and those of eastern Indian Territory.

The numerous names listed in these accounts almost furnish a census of a considerable part of the Cherokee Nation in this pre-Civil War period. Many of the full blood names, some with peculiar forms of identification, are interesting: such as, Noxe or Star Deer in Water, Polecat Sticker, Bark Flute, Rattlinggourd, Old Mrs. Hair—Conrad's Old Wife, Watty Lucy's Husband, George Baldrige (an Old White headed man), Danl Grasshopper Sister, Tayleeskee ½ Son, Money Stealer, Caty Sleeping Rabbits Wife, Corn Silks, Guess (Wheelwright), The Heirs of the Mouse (Pentioner). During this period Negro slaves were a commodity of merchandise in the Cherokee Nation and a number of these letters deal with their purchase and sale. Merchants from Van Buren and other places wrote to Andy Nave asking him to buy for them a Negro slave of a specified description and price. A lottery company in Wilmington, Delaware is so anxious to expand their business into the Cherokee Nation that they offer Andy Nave free tickets and practically guarantee his winning a large sum of money, if he will only represent them as their agent in Tahlequah.

A number of the John Ross items are orders to Nave on the store for a plow, or for seed wheat, or for cans of oysters, for a loan of money, or for some other small favor. These orders were usually sent by some trusted negro slave. On January 25, 1862, he wrote: "Mr. Andw R. Nave

upon the land and the crops were destroyed before they could be harvested. The Quapaws began to leave their land again. By 1878 all but 35 were living with the Osages.<sup>20</sup>

In 1875 the Indian Territory had received its first resident priest, the Rt. Rev. Isidore Robot of the Benedictine Order. Father Robot had been given jurisdiction over the whole of the Territory by Bishop Fitzgerald of the diocese of Little Rock. He arrived at Atoka on October 12, 1875, and began his duties as missionary to the Indians.<sup>21</sup>

Nine months later the Indian Territory was erected into a Prefecture Apostolic<sup>22</sup> (separated from the diocese of Little Rock) by Pope Pius IX, who, by another decree, appointed Father Robot the First Prefect Apostolic, under date of July 9, 1876.<sup>23</sup>

The Jesuits continued their work among the Quapaws. The new Prefect Apostolic was thankful for the help of the Jesuit missionaries<sup>24</sup> for due to the vastness of the territory (69,000 sq. miles) and the lack of priests, visits could not be made often into the extreme northeastern part where the Quapaw Reserve was located.

The Register of Baptisms shows the following Benedictine Priests attending the Quapaw nation between the dates of 1887 to 1890: Fathers Germanus Guillaume, Hippolite Topet, Hilary Cassal, Ignatius Jean, and Father Richard Rouquier, a secular priest. As early as 1869 however, we find a note in Church records that Mass was often said at Charlie Beaver Black Hawk's home on Spring River by Jesuit missionaries. Reference is made also to the "little Church of St. Mary's of the Quapaws" the location of which has not been definitely established. It is believed by old residents that it was located in the very heart of the Quapaw Reserve near what is now Douthitt, Oklahoma, on the Leander (Jack) Fish allotment. This was a "station" established by the Benedictines. When the Quapaw lands were allotted in 1893, Jack Fish moved into the little Church, which was merely a house with a chapel attached. Consequently, the forty-acre tract where St. Mary's school was located, was set apart for the Catholics.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Vy. Rev. Urban de Hasque, Historian of Diocese of Oklahoma.

<sup>22</sup> Sister M. Ursula, "Thesis," *op. cit.*

<sup>23</sup> A Prefecture Apostolic is the first stage through which a mission country passes before it is confided to a bishop with a designated local see. The Prefect is appointed by the Holy Father and is immediately subject to the Holy See. He may administer Confirmation, confer minor orders, consecrate chalices, etc. When the Prefecture Apostolic has reached a fuller state of development, that is when the number of Catholics have increased, more priests have begun work, churches and charitable institutions erected, then the Prefecture becomes a Vicariate Apostolic, which in turn becomes in time a Diocese under the direction of a Bishop appointed by the Holy See.—*Catholic Encyclopedic Dictionary.*

<sup>24</sup> W. W. Graves, *Autobiography of Rev. E. Bononcini, D.D.*

<sup>25</sup> Personal interview, Mrs. Clara Martin, Picher, Oklahoma, Jan. 10, 1953.