

Lexington Observer

Lexington—The 89er City—The Friendliest In The U.S.A

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So now we know how the West was won! So said 92-year-old-cousin, Bessie Upchurch Starbuck, as she looked at Eunice McSwain Upchurch in this photo. She just may have a point! This delightful undated picture shows Eunice and husband Patrick Bogan Upchurch. After Patrick died, Eunice moved to Cleveland County and lived with daughter Mary Katherine Upchurch Skinner until her death in 1897. She is buried in Mt. Zion Cemetery.

Author's Note: The following is the first in a series of articles depicting the migration of several families from North Carolina into, eventually, Cleveland County, Oklahoma. This excerpt is from my book, *Davenport and Upchurches: The Roads Converge*.

Westward Ho!

By Moe D. Cox

Several families in the Lexington area have pioneer roots of which they can be quite proud. The Upchurches, Skinners, Millsaps, and Lowders, to

name a few, didn't always live in Oklahoma. Their ancestors and relatives actually hail from back east.

It's the mid-1850s and there is talk filtering back to

folks in North Carolina about the gold fields in California where a person can become rich overnight! Go west, young man, go west! There

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is fame and fortune to be found. Not only is there gold, but there is also land. Lots of land. Free land. Families began heading out on wagon trains. It seems two of the Upchurch brothers were restless and thought this venture sounded just right to them, too.

Patrick Bogan Upchurch and his brother William Allen sold their land and purchased wagons, teams, and supplies. Sometime in 1859, they left their homeland and headed westward. Legend has it that they were bound for the California gold fields.

Most likely they didn't leave North Carolina until May as they had to wait for prairie grass along the way to grow tall enough to provide food for their livestock. They loaded tools and

equipment they would need along the way and for when they arrived at their new place of residence. A family of four needed at least 500 pounds of food to make a thousand-mile journey. Plus they would need a couple months' rations when they reached their destination. It would be several months before crops could be planted and provide food. In the case of my Upchurches, they were a family with nine children, so most likely had two or three wagons to carry everything.

Wagons were so heavily loaded with supplies that family members who were able, had to walk. Teams of horses or mules pulled the loads. Several wagons joined in the mission forming a wagon train, traveling from sunrise to just before dusk. Beans, bacon, and bread cooked over campfires, was their mainstay. Occasionally if they were lucky,

they feasted on fresh buffalo or other wild game. Nights were spent with the wagons circled tightly so the cattle and other livestock wouldn't wander away.

Wagon trains averaged in the neighborhood of eighteen miles a day, and it was about 900 miles from their Tennessee home to Conway County, Arkansas. With those statistics, it would have taken about two months, allowing for times they couldn't travel due to weather or other problems. What a horridly long trip, especially with nine children ranging from infant to twenty-ish. They were true pioneers, and one can almost picture their journey from having watched movies of the old wagon trains moving westward.

They most likely reached Arkansas in early July and, according to that old family legend, *They got as far as Arkansas where their wagon*

broke down so there they remained. Whatever the case may be or for whatever reason, they did end up in Conway County. Free land was just waiting to be claimed; so they claimed it. Tents provided shelter, while meals were cooked outdoors. Thankfully it was summertime, so they could work from sunup to sundown. Cabins started going up all over the countryside. Then barns and outbuildings. They cleared the fields and quickly planted what few crops would make before fall and winter set in. Over the ensuing years, their farms took shape from dense brush and thickets to rolling meadows of crops and cattle.

We're not sure just how many different families made the trek from North Carolina, but we do know that land patents reflect there were Upchurches, Skinners, Lowthers, Millsaps, Perrines, and many others within a few miles of one another. It makes sense that friends would have traveled with the brothers and their families. The small children grew into adults and began marrying. Naturally they found spouses amongst their own friends and neighbors. Skinners married Upchurches. Upchurches married Millsaps. Millsaps married Skinners. And my great-grandfather, Charles Upchurch married a Perrine. Children were born and families grew.

For nearly thirty years they enjoyed living in the Ozarks, but then came the day it was time to move on.

To be continued.

