

Pate Newton

Early Settlers' Personal History Questionnaire, WPA

Interviewed by Lucian F. Petway Johnson County, Ark. April 9, 1941.

Transcribed by Andrea E. Cantrell, University of Arkansas Libraries, 2003. [See transcriber's notes](#)

1. Early settler's name  
Pate Newton. (Colored)
2. Address  
Clarksville, Arkansas
3. Present occupation (most of the old timers are now retired).  
Retired.
4. Previous occupation or occupations.  
Farm hand; slave; railway section laborer; stone mason; well digger and  
servent[sic].
5. Date of birth.  
May 1853. Day unknown.
6. Place of birth.  
Johnsonville, Johnson County, Arkansas. (Now Hagerville)
7. Married? To whom? When? Where?  
Married; (twice) 3-10-1870 and sometime in 1880. Johnsonville, Arkansas.  
Clarksville, Arkansas. First wife, Mary Lee; Second, Rachel Hervey.
8. [Skipped on questionnaire form]
9. If an immigrant give particulars. City and country of derivation, name of ship on which  
arrived, etc.  
Native
10. How long has the individual resided in Arkansas?  
87 years
11. If not a native tell of the voyage to Arkansas. Boat? Wagon train? etc.  
[no answer]
12. Why did the individual come to Arkansas?  
[no answer]
13. Get details of construction of early homes. (In the southern and southeastern parts of the  
state chimneys were frequently built of clay and split wood or trimmed branches due to  
the scarcity of stone and the lack of brick kilns. Some of the more pretentious houses were  
built with brick imported up the rivers. In the northwestern part of the state stone houses  
occurred much more frequently. Pay particular attention to these and similar regional  
differences.)  
Has not alone seen clay and wood chimneys, but built them. Earliest homes  
remembered was erected from home hewed logs. They contained no windows,  
shutters being used (wooden). Door latches was home made of the sliding bolt  
type. All were made from wood, a number of these latches which was made of  
hickory are still in service in Johnson County. Some have been in use 80 or  
more years. Puncheon floors.
14. What form of lighting was used in the early days? Pine knots? Tallow dips? Candles  
poured at home? Oil or fat lamps? etc.

Pine knots; tallow dips and candles. Candles was poured and molded at home. A manufactured mold which completed (12) twelve candles at each pouring was owned by this slaves master.

15. When were electric lights first used in your community?  
[no answer]
16. What kind of fuel was used? (This was wood in most parts of the state, of course, because it was plentiful and convenient, but in some of the western counties coal may have appeared early.)

All homes used wood for heating and cooking. The blacksmiths used a high grade soft non-clinging coal mined in the western part of county. (Interviewers note--this coal is known as the "Philpott" coal and is mined in Lee Township, Range 25 W., Townships 9 and 10 North. This is adjacent to the old stage line "wire" road, so named because it carried the first telegraph wires from St. Louis south. This road was also the stage route. In 1840 a traveler from the east discovered this coal which lies near the surface (overburden 6 to 30 feet) and is easily mined by stripping overburden. It is considered the finest blacksmith coal in the United States.)

17. What kinds of food did the early settlers have? Were fish and game depended upon for the meat supply? Was game plentiful? What kinds?

Beef, pork, mutton, goat, fowls and poultry; abundant[sic] game could be slain with stones; wild game included deer, turkey, bear, pigeons, doves, prairie[sic] chickens, o'possum, coon, rabbit, wild hogs, and guienna[sic] pigs, other wild animals included beaver, panther, mink, muskrat, and wild cats.

Mr. Newton killed the first beaver he ever seen with an old time one-eyed hoe; he was six (6) or seven (7) years of age at the time. His owner sold the pelt for \$5.00 giving the money to the boy who had never before seen so much money.

18. What kinds of clothes were worn and how manufactured?

Practically all clothing was home woven; slaves (women & children) carded and spun wool and cotton using homemade carders and locally made looms. Mr. Newton was grown before he had worn factory made garments and apparel other than shoes. All wool and cotton was raised on farm.

19. Were there any interesting customs or incidents connected with early courtships? Was bundling ever practiced? (It is highly improbable but possible.) Were charivaries (usually pronounced 'shivaree' in Arkansas and the lower Mississippi Valley territory) frequent?

Bundling unknown; charivaries prevalent from earliest memory; horseback riding was the means of reaching your girl when she lived in a place inaccessible to buggy or cart; if roads was passable the buggy and cart was used. Masters of slaves encouraged early marriages and large families as each colored child represented a value in excess of any other product of the plantation.

20. Compare some early food, clothing, etc. prices with those of today. (Since staples were usually bought in barrels, hogsheads, bushels, and similar large units, present prices will have to be quoted on the same basis.)<sup>1</sup>

<u>Early day price</u>	<u>Commodity</u>	<u>Today's price</u>
3 to 5¢ per dozen	eggs	17 ½ ¢ per doz.
3 to 4 ¢ per cut	dressed hogs	14 ¢ per cut
2 to 5 dollars each	live hogs	7.50 per cut
\$1.00 each with the mother free	pigs (6 wks. old)	\$3.00 to 5.00 each

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<sup>1</sup>Abbreviations used in these lists include cwt. for hundred weight, bbl. for barrel, lb. for pound,, bu. for bushel, and pr. for pair. No date is specified for the "Early day price."

\$2.00 per cwt.	dressed beef	14 ¢ per lb.
1 ¢ per lb.	beef hides	9 ¢ per lb.
\$5.00 per cwt.	salt	\$1.50 per cwt.
\$5.00 per bbl	wheat flour	\$5.00 per bbl
10 ¢ per bu.	corn	60 ¢ per bu.
3 to 9 ¢ yard	cotton goods	8 ½ ¢ to 35 ¢ yard
\$2.50 pr.	shoes	\$2.00 to \$20.00[pr]
10 ¢ pr.	hose	25 ¢ to \$2.50 pr.

21. What were some of the incidents pertaining to the sharing of food and other supplies in times of common need?  
 In adversity the entire community shared with and cared for the unfortunates; neighbors did the cooking, housework, farming, etc., in sickness; when buildings destroyed by fires, storm, etc., neighbors hued logs for replacing property and on given days a "raising" day was held. The neighbors all appeared on this day - - the womenfolk with food to be prepared for the men who with their own tools, set about to replace the destroyed building of their unfortunate neighbor. A prime requisite on these occasions was an ample supply of hard liquors and a sumptuos[sic] feed. Buildings was usually completed within the day and a "barn dance" held on the new premises the same evening to commemorate the event.
22. What were some early cultivated crops? Domesticated animals? (For instance, when did tomatoes cease to be known as 'Love Apples,' regarded as poisonous? When moved from the flower garden to the vegetable garden?)  
 Early crops was about the same as today, vegetable and grain seed was preserved from year to year. Tobacco was grown extensively in Johnson County prior to turn of present century. Herbs such as sage, dill, catnip, mint, hoarhound, mullen[sic], etc. was grown in the home garden. Tomatoes was always known and grown as a vegetable. Shallots was the leading onion. Oxen was used in farm work.
23. What were early farm implements? Any homemade? If purchased, where? Prices?  
 Yokes for oxen was homemade. Woodwork of early plows was made in the home shop. Double shovels and bull tongue plows was factory made and about the only farming implements used other than hand tools. Plows was purchased from plow factory located in Clarksville, the county seat. Prices ranged from \$2.50 to \$7.50 for plows.
24. What were early industries in the community?  
 Plow factory; iron foundry; water power grist mills; flour mill; brick kilns and saw mills.
25. What were some native wild plants used as food or for flower gardens? (For example: mullein, sassafras roots, sweet gum resin, sun-flower seed, paw-paws, sumac berries, poke salad-- or salet, or salud. There are stories told of various food substitutes used during the Civil War and Reconstruction periods. These might supply interesting sidelights.)  
 "Mullen" boiled with sugar syrup for coughs, asthma, and tuberculous[sic].  
 "Sassafras tea" for blood conditioning; general tonic.  
 Resin in salves and on violin bows (sweet gum). Powdered to stop bleeding.  
 Sunflower seed in cough syrups. Boiled to thick mass, a poultice for burns.  
 Poke was used in the following manner--young shoots as a food; berries as a dye and in a wine for rheumatism. Roots in liniment.  
 Parched corn was used as a substitute for coffee; may apple, jimpsion, burdock, etc. used in medicines.  
 Wild cress, garlic, grapes, muscadimes[sic], huckleberries, paw paws, plums,

- haws, honey, and persimmons used as food.
26. Relate interesting incidents of the early days. Tell of childhood impressions and memories. Tell of group activities such as house raisings and warmings, quilting bees, corn huskings, brush arbor meetings, dances, games, socials, hunts and game drives, hog killing, sorghum making, play parties, and the like. Compare early farm and town life with that of today. Tell any experiences relating to the Indians, their customs and habits.

Can remember the California Gold Rush of 1849 when five (5) of his owners sons made this journey to the west as members of an immigrant train; all returned to Johnson County.<sup>2</sup> In celebration of their homecoming remembers a big festival at the home; abundant[sic] foods, drinks and entertainment for several days. In his boyhood farmers raised and preserved their own seed. Roads would be impassable for a part of year making trips to county seat infrequent. Farmers in those days had a years supply of necessities such as food, fuel, clothing and feed for stock--todays farmers buy as needed which makes them dependent on cash crops -- which makes the chief difference of yesterdays farmer and todays, security and freedom from debt and insecurity and indebtness[sic]. Also according to Mr. Newton, the early day farmer was happier and more contented. There was no automobiles, shows, grocery stores, ready made clothing shops, etc., to temp[sic] him. He worked harder but was healthier, more self reliant and his diversifications cost far less.

Free range permitted unlimited ownership of hogs and cattle. Abundant[sic] oak timber afforded mast for the hogs and thousands of acres of idle land supplied feed for the cattle. Stock on open ranges were identified by marks and brands. Each fall cattle buyers using sheppard[sic] dogs for herders would come through the country buying the surplus cattle. These buyers would start from the northern part of county, working south to the boat landing at Spadra on the Arkansas River and later, to the railroad towns of Knoxville, Lamar, (Cabin Creek), Clarksville, Spadra, Hartman and Coal Hill. The railroad being located in the southern part of county in the river valley.

Hogs were seldom shipped, as every landowner would have a large number of pigs for slaughter each winter, a central abattoir would be constructed for the community and on given days the neighbors would meet for butchering. The slaves under supervision of owners would go into the forrest[sic], locate and drive the animals to the slaughtering place. Large casks, tubs, and barrels was used for "scalding." Water was heated by placing hot stones in the water that had been poured into vats. Some would not stun hogs as they claimed the meat would be superior if pig was merely stabbed and permitted to bleed to death. Others would stun with axe and some shot the animals. "Intrals" (the guts) was placed in tubs and the slave women would then set to work removing the fat for rendering into lard. The "chittlings" (stomach) was the favorite part of the carcass according to the Negro mammies. Bread, coffee, dishes, etc., were brought along and at meal time the "melts," livers and tenderloins would be barbecued[sic] over the live embers. Plenty of hard liquor and home grown tobacco was available and a general good time had

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<sup>2</sup>Because of the chronology question here (Newton has stated he was born in 1853), I checked the lists of emigrating companies and other groups who left for the gold fields 1849 through 1854 provided in Priscilla McArthur's *Arkansas and the Gold Rush* (Little Rock: August House, 1986) pages 226-235. I found no corroboration, though these lists are admittedly incomplete.

by all including the children who converted the bladders into excellent, almost indestructable[sic], balloons. The next phase was resumed in the home where the carcasses was cut into hams, "middlings," (bacon) shoulders, and sausage meat. Salt was applied to all cuts except the sausage meat and after "curing" for six (6) weeks in the dry salt bed the meat was washed, placed in the home made smoke house and smoked continuously[sic] with the smoke of burning hickory and corn cobs for from two (2) to four (4) weeks. Lard was rendered and sausage made. All spices used in sausage was grown in the home garden. They consisted of sage, black pepper, thyme and red pepper. Salt was sometimes taken from smoke houses earthen floor.

Early sorghum mills would move from plantation to plantation and was usually community owned. Grower was required to "strip" cane, furnish fuel and containers. There was small demand for "sorghum" the bulk being used in the home.

Group hunting was prevelant[sic] and included the stalking of bear, panther and fox. There being annual fox races. Small and edible game was seldom hunted in groups.

An annual "Brush Arbor" meeting (in fact two (2). One for white folks and one (1) for the colored) (Revival) was held after crops was "laid by. Dances and "play parties" was weekly events. All quilts was "homemade" which called for frequent "bees." Corn husking was unknown.

When Mr. Newton moved to Clarksville ("the county seat") there was no electric lights; no automobiles; no paved streets, roads or highways. No cafes. No soda fountains. (Drug stores sold drugs in those days) No picture show. No natural gas. Today he enjoys each of these comforters.

27. Tell of early methods of combating forest fires, town or building fires.  
Forrest[sic] fires was fired against. Town and building fires was combatted by "bucket brigades."
28. Get origin of place and thing names such as hills, valleys, rivers, sloughs, bayous, plants, animals, etc.  
"Wild Cat Nob" large hill said to be thickly populated by wild cats, 1860-70.  
"Pine Creek" in the mountainous section of county that in those days contained much pine, thus "Piney" Creek  
"Big Danger" high bluff, very steep wall – an Indian said, "Big Danger."
29. Tell of early taverns, hotels, boarding houses, stagecoach stations, boat landings, etc.  
Stage coach stations remembered are St. James Hotel, Clarksville, Bordens Corner and Garrett home (Shady Grove).  
Earliest tavern remembered, St. James, Clarksville.  
Boat landings – Spadra Bluff; Knoxville Bend; Morrisons Bluff; Pattersons Bluff, and Roseville.
30. Tell of early schools.  
Did not attend school.
31. Name of teacher?  
Did not attend school.
33. How were funds provided? Tuition? How much? Was payment made in kind?  
Did not attend school.
34. School books used? Title? Author? (Many of the old plantations maintained tutors either for individual families or groups of families. Sometimes 'school' was conducted on the premises for darkies'[sic] youngsters. Check on such information.)  
Did not attend school.
35. What constituted the reading matter of the early settlers? Books? Magazines?

- Newspapers? Get titles and authors.  
The Bible; Websters Dictionary. Nothing further known.
36. Where was the first telegraph station in the community? When established?  
Clarksville, sometime in 1860s.
  37. Tell of the early "Horse cars." When were trolley cars substituted? When buses?  
Never used.
  38. When and where was the first automobile seen?  
Clarksville – 1908. Homemade by Cull Johnson, Coal Hill, Ark.
  39. When and where was the first train seen?  
Clarksville – sometime in 1870s or early 80s. Small Wood burner engine–wooden coaches–1 baggage–2 passenger.
  40. When and where was the first airplane seen?  
Clarksville. 1918. Small open cockpit.
  41. When did automotive busses[sic] begin interurban operation? (Give descriptions on the five foregoing.)  
No interurban busses other than school busses.
  42. Early theatrical performances? Local people? Traveling stock companies?  
Had home talent shows for various benefits. Traveling stock companies played county seat (Clarksville). His owner would take his family in to town to see shows—one of the slaves driving.
  43. Tell of any important local celebration in memory of any individual or event.  
Annual Peach Festivals. County Fairs.  
The slaying of Judge Meers by Sid Wallace.<sup>3</sup>  
The hanging of Sid Wallace.  
The slaying of sheriff John Powers, the counties most popular peace officer by bandits who had, or were robbing, the Johnson County Bank<sup>4</sup> and the subsequent hanging of two (2) of the three (3) participating bandits. Mr. Newton was in the same block on the night of this robbery and heard the shots. They frightened him and he ran home not knowing the bank had been robbed or the sheriff slain. The officer with his deputy Joe B. King had sleeping quarters over the bank. The blasting of safe aroused them. Running down stairway they encountered bandits who opened fire, fatally wounding sherriff[sic]. Two of the robbers was caught and hung. The third, John Dunn, the leader of gang and slayer of Powers was never captured. A few years ago a man suspected of being the fugitive was arrested in a western state and returned to Johnson County; the State was unable to identify prisoner and subsequently released.  
Lynching of two Negro men accused of raping white women; one was hung on Spadra Creek, Clarksville and the other at Spadra. [See note for question 48 below.]

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<sup>3</sup>Elisha Mears [sic] "was on the bench as Circuit Judge just after the Civil War, in the days of reconstruction, when he was shot and killed from the roadside by an unknown person." Ella Molloy Langford *History of Johnson County* (Clarksville, Ark., Ella M. Langford, 1921):174-175. Newspaper accounts of his murder and of the hanging of Sid Wallace are available in the *Daily Arkansas Gazette* on August 29, 1873 (page 4, column 2), March 14, 1874 (page 4, column 3), and March 15, 1874 (page 1, column 3).

<sup>4</sup>This event is confirmed in the *Arkansas Gazette*, February 6, 1902 (page 1, columns 6 and 7).

44. Does the individual recall any early historical character such as Sam Houston, Col. James Bowie, former President Zachery[sic] Taylor, the James boys, etc.?  
Nothing on this.
45. Tell of any duels. Where were they fought? By whom? Why?  
Nothing on this.
46. Tell of any feuds. Who was involved? Where? Why?  
Wallace-Meers fued[sic] involving political and Civil War differences; Wallaces alleged mistreatment by Republican and northerners migrating to south at close of Civil War. Sid Wallace killed Judge (county) Meers and for the crime, was hung.
47. Tell of any early tombstone inscriptions. Where?  
Nothing on this.  
(Interviewers note—have information on monument bearing inscription “1797” in Lee Cemetery, two miles north of Clarksville. Will verify later.)
48. Tell of any bank robberies, stage holdups, executions of horse thieves or other impromptu executions, including lynchings. Give details.
- 1) Robbery of Johnson County Bank on the night of February 5<sup>th</sup> 1902. Name of Bandits:  
George Durham  
John P. Dunn  
Fred Underwood  
Jim Wallace.  
Mr. Newton was out on a drunk this night and was in one hundred feet of bank when safe was blown. Paid no attention to blast but later when Sheriff John Powers and under-sheriff Joe B. King who was sleeping above bank and had been awakened by blast appeared and engaged the robbers in gun battle, Mr. Newton thinking they was shooting at him, quickly retreated to the home of Dr. Robinson where he was employed. In the melee Sheriff Powers was fatally injured. Mr. Newton did not know of murder and robbery until following day.
  - 2) Witnessed the lynching of two Negroes accused of raping white women. One was hung from a tree on the banks of Spadra Creek in Clarksville (1880) the other at the town of Spadra (1881). Both Negroes was dead before being hung as they were dragged several hundred feet. The names of victims cannot be recalled.<sup>5</sup>
49. Tell of Civil War days, giving the fullest detail possible.  
Was a Private in Colonel Bashams regiment which saw service in 1863 at Marks Mill located on the Arkansas, Texas and Louisiana borders.<sup>6</sup> No injuries. Froze while on horses back and was rescued by one of his owners sons, Henry Newton. Did not suffer from hunger as the members of regiment would slaughter cattle and hogs. One Texan caught them cleaning one of his pigs and they had to chip in and pay for animal.

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<sup>5</sup>A man named Neely was lynched on Spadra Creek *Daily Arkansas Gazette* November 8, 1878 (page 1, column 7), and Charles Jones was hung in the town of Spadra *Daily Arkansas Gazette* November 1, 1881 (page 1, column 8.)

<sup>6</sup>In his Ex-Slave Narrative, Newton said “When the war got so hot my boss was afraid the ‘Feds’ would get us. He sent my mammy to Texas and sent me in the army with Col. Bashom [sic] to take care of his horses. I was about eleven or twelve years old.” Rawick, *The American Slave* (1972) volume 10, pages 216.

50. Tell of any battles, skirmishes, forays, etc., witnessed.  
Witnessed and participated in skirmishes at Marks Mill. Few fatalities.
51. Tell of Reconstruction, the Carpetbaggers, scalawags, etc.  
The only time his owners, (Newtons) ever failed to have plenty was during the Reconstruction period. No trouble was had with carpet baggers but Negroes was kept confined to home during the reign of Ku Klux Klan. No Negroes in neighborhood was molested. Lands which had grown up during the absence of men folks to serve in army was cleaned up and in a few years the family was again prosperous
52. Get all information possible regarding the original Ku Klux Klan or similar organizations.  
Nothing on this.
53. Tell of any participation in the establishment of any religious or fraternal organizations.  
Helped in organization of "United Brothers of Love" a fraternal insurance and benevolent[sic] organization of the Negro race. Was an active participant in organizing St. Johns A. M. E. Church, Clarksville. Moulded[sic] all concrete blocks used in constructing churches edifice.<sup>7</sup>
54. Tell of any military affiliations.  
Private in battalion of Colonel Basham, Civil War, 1863. No other military connections.
55. Tell of any Indian mounds, cliff dwellings, caves, etc., that may be recalled. Get as accurate information as possible regarding artifacts, particularly such things as calendar stones, mortars, pottery, baskets, etc.  
Nothing on this.
56. Tell of any other historic sites.  
1) Low Gap Springs North of his birth place which has been famous as a health resort as far back as he can recall.  
2) Spadra Bluff – a river landing as early as 1800.
57. What is total number of descendants?  
Originally had 13 children. 3 now living. 22 living grandchildren; 12 great grandchildren. Total living descendents[sic], 37.
58. What are names and addresses of sons and daughters?  
Susan May, Clarksville, Ark.  
Jess Newton, Somerdale, Texas  
Lindy Wilson, Clarksville.
59. Name some of the grandchildren and great-grandchildren, if any.  
Susan May, Jim May, Joe Wilson, Clarksville, Ark.  
22 grand, 8 great grand, 1 great-great-great grand child.
60. Tell of any books ,diaries, journals, sketches, or newspaper articles the individual has

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<sup>7</sup>A 1940 history of this church lists Rachel Newton (same name as informant's wife in question 7 above) as Superintendent of the Sunday School and treasurer of the Missionary Society. It also states that the church "of concrete blocks is a very attractive building" and that the "congregation . . . gives credit for its construction to William Perry, Wilson Brown, Tom Clark, Ulysses Newton and Sye Justice." Historical Records Survey. Arkansas Records Inventory Files, 1936-1942. Group H - Church Records, Box 435. Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville. This reference to Ulysses Newton has led me to re-check the 1930 census and 1920 census under that name, without success. Even without corroboration about the different name, I believe this is our informant.

written. Give details.

None.

Miscellaneous:

The outstanding event in this man's memory was the hanging[sic] of the bandits, George Durham and Fred Underwood for the murder of Sheriff John Powers. This event occurred on the 5<sup>th</sup> day of February 1903, in the town of Clarksville exactly one (1) year after Mr. Powers was slain in attempting to capture the desperadoes who had robbed the Johnson County Bank. Mr. Newton states this event brought out the largest gathering of people ever seen in the county.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>*Daily Arkansas Gazette* March 14, 1874 (page 4, column 3) states that Wallace's hanging drew the "largest crowd ever assembled in Johnson County."