Reuben Rice’s
1820s - 1840s Rural Trading Center

**PREPARED FOR**
Black River Technical College  
Pocahontas & Paragould, Arkansas

**PREPARED BY**
Preservation Matters  
Joan L. Gould: Historic Research  
Randy L. Tipton: Layout  
In association with  
Jameson Architects, P.A.

Copyrighted 2011

**PHOTOGRAPH CREDITS**
Tommy Jameson  
Ronnie Walker  
Lou Wehmer  
Randy L. Tipton  
Joan L. Gould

FOR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES ONLY – NOT FOR PUBLICATION

Funded in part by grants from Arkansas Natural & Cultural Resources Council
Lydia of the Valley

...Lydia said this place was known for miles and miles and people passing through knew their way by the ancient old tree that stood just a short distance from the old house...[the] old tree served as a landmark and road guide for travelers passing through in the long ago.

...The...[Rice family] built several houses on their land that, as years went on, have been destroyed with only the old chimney’s rocks to mark the places.

Melissa Ozella Miller Upshaw
Rural trading centers in early Arkansas were not unique. The fact that structures and documentation of trade at Reuben Rice’s 1820s-1840s rural trading center have survived is unique.

As described previously, architectural and archeological analysis revealed that the existing log structure interpreted presently as the Rice-Upshaw House was originally a one-story structure with a floor plan consistent with its possible use as a ‘shop’ or loom house. Further support for this conclusion comes from historical research. Coupled with the existence of the over-sized granary, the historic Rice site and its function within the Eleven Point River Valley in the early-nineteenth century is being viewed in a broader perspective.
A legal case filed in the Lawrence County Court of Common Pleas in 1821 established that Reuben Rice was not only an early merchant in territorial Arkansas; as a known talented blacksmith and carpenter the case confirms him as an artisan as well. In 1820 John S. Callahan commissioned the following items from Reuben Rice:

- Blacksmith tools
- Iron and steel bars
- Plow molds
- Fur hat
- Chest
- ‘Drab’ cloth (an expensive and heavy weight overcoat fabric)

Callahan failed to pay and in 1821 Reuben Rice sued Callahan. The damages were set by the court as $1,000.

The existence of Reuben Rice’s 1820s – 1840s rural trading center, known simply as Reuben Rice’s, is well documented in official records as are the types of trading activities. Such trading centers were numerous in early-nineteenth century Arkansas. At the present time, research in Arkansas has not revealed other documented rural trading centers of this antebellum time period that include surviving structures making the existence of Reuben Rice’s a unique (one-of-a-kind) historical site.

Official records document that Reuben Rice was trading outside of the Eleven Point River Valley as early as 1820. Arriving in a previously unsettled region in 1812, Rice obviously proceeded to build with intent. He may have been trading blacksmithing services very soon after his arrival in the valley. The artifacts and period material culture produced by either Reuben or his sons, who as adults located on land adjoining or near their father, speak to the skills that placed them in a position to trade in both services and products of their own manufacture.

...this place was known for miles and miles...

Melissa Ozella Miller Upshaw
The above account from the Randolph County estate records of wheelwright Benjamin Jones shows Jones’ 1835 purchase of one barrel of tar and one rope from fellow Davidson Township resident, John D. Justice. It is not known if Justice made the rope but that is a possibility as hemp, the most common source for rope-making, was noted to have been grown by local farmers. Benjamin’s credit is listed according to the value of items he ‘bartered’ or traded for the tar and rope – 4 chairs (which Jones likely made), 5 “wheel whirls,” whiskey, and one wheel. The balanced owed to Justice at the time of Benjamin Jones’s death in 1842 was $2.00. Benjamin Jones also filled a custom order for a flax wheel from gunsmith James Bellah; the source is Bellah’s 1827 estate papers in Lawrence County Loose Probate Records.
When the first Anglo American settlers arrived in the Eleven Point River Valley they, as well perhaps as their African American slaves, already possessed the skills necessary to establish farmsteads and trade. Just where and how they acquired these skills is unknown. It can be assumed that their kinfolk were responsible for much of their training. But, as Johanna Miller Lewis points out in *Artisans in the North Carolina Backcountry*, in the North Carolina backcountry boys as young as eight were apprenticed to learn skills such as blacksmithing and carpentry. From the finely crafted extant examples of log structures and material culture to the court records, personal family accounts and historic photographs documenting items Davidson Township residents manufactured, many of these first-comers can be considered artisans according to the definitions of the term today. It may never be known for certain whether they learned their trades from family or from apprenticeships.

The 1821 legal case filed in the Lawrence County, Arkansas Territory Court of Common Pleas confirming Reuben Rice as a country merchant who traded in items produced by his own hand is one of the first official records of the artisan skills possessed by residents of Davidson Township. Reuben, and the other yeoman farmers settling in the Eleven point River Valley, came from a culture that celebrated and encouraged artisan's and craftsmen's skills. In order to understand that culture it is necessary to understand the times in which Reuben Rice, William Looney, and other residents of what became Davidson Township had grown up.
Even prior to the Revolutionary War parts of what became western North Carolina and eastern Tennessee were incorporated into the Watauga Settlement. Several ancestors of William Looney were among the earliest Anglo American frontiersmen in this area that for centuries past had been the hunting grounds for the Cherokee Indians. Within a few short years this area passed from wilderness to the Watauga Settlement, the Watauga Association in 1772; and then in 1777 was enlarged and renamed Washington County extending North Carolina to the Mississippi River. Numerous county divisions were made while the area of east Tennessee was yet a part of North Carolina: Sullivan, 1779; Greene, 1773; Davidson, 1783; Hawkins and Sumner, 1786. By 1785 the population the area that would become western North Carolina and Tennessee had increased to the point that residents petitioned the U. S. government to create what would have been the first new state to be established apart from the original thirteen colonies. This new state was to be called Franklin.

The provisions of the Franklin legislature concerning its currency have, according to historian J.G.M. Ramsey, been the source of much merriment and pleasantry as they included an extensive listing of articles that were, at that time, convertible into specie at prices designated by their law; and all at a lower scale of depreciation than the issue of many banks of the time. The following clause was included in the law levying a tax for the support of the government:

Be it enacted, That it shall and may be lawful for the aforesaid land tax, and all free polls, to be paid in the following manner: Good flax linen, ten hundred, at three shillings and six pence per yard; nine hundred, at three shillings; eight hundred, two shillings two shillings and nine pence; seven hundred, two shillings and six pence; six hundred, two shillings; tow linen, one shilling and nine pence; linsey, three shillings, and woolen and cotton linen, three shillings and six pence per yard; good clean beaver shin, six shillings; cased otter skins, six shillings; uncased ditto, five shillings; rackon and fox skins, one shilling and three pence; woolen cloth, at ten shillings per yard; bacon, well cured, six pence per pound; good, clean tallow, six pence per pound; good, clean beeswax, one shilling per pound; good distilled rye whiskey, at two shillings and six pence per gallon; good peach or apple brandy, at three shillings per gallon; good country made sugar, at one shilling per pound; deer skins, the pattern, six shillings; good, neat and well managed tobacco, fit to be prized, that may pass inspection, the hundred, fifteen shillings and so on in proportion for a greater or less quantity.

And all the salaries and allowances hereby made, shall be paid by any treasurer, sheriff, or collector of public taxes, to any person entitled to the same, to be paid in specific articles as collected; and at the rates allowed by the state for the same; or in current money of the State of Franklin.
The salaries and services of the officers of the state - ranging from Governor John Sevier’s at two hundred pounds annually to those of members of the Council of State at six shillings per day – were to be paid in mink skins.

The State of Franklin and its laws represent the formative period of American society forged in the Appalachian Mountains (then called the Alleghenies) out of what had recently been the hunting lands of the ancient Cherokee tribes. Anglo Americans, some with their African American slaves, residing in this area experienced the simple wants of new communities. In addition to Franklin, other state governments of the period confined their exchanges to the bartering of one commodity or product for another....declaring that there could be little use for money. Ramsey points out that at this time in the backcountry settlements money did not constitute wealth; in fact, it was scarcely the representative of it. He further states:

On the frontier, his is the wealthiest man, not who owns the largest amount of wild lands, while thousands of acres around him are vacant and unappropriated; or who has money to lend, which no one near him wishes or needs to borrow; but he whose guns and traps furnish the most peltries, who owns the largest flocks and herds, and whose cribs and barns are the fullest, and whose household fabrics are the most abundant. In a new settlement, these are wealth, and constitute its standard.

Indeed, commodities and products had served as legal tender for decades past in the governments of Maryland, Virginia, and the Carolinas. In 1656 musket balls, full bore, were exchanged at the rate of a farthing apiece.

It was in the midst of this cultural perspective that future Davidson Township residents grew to adulthood. It was this perspective that shaped the primary focus of their education; it came not from the classroom but from their family and neighbors that they learned the skills that were practical for survival and prosperity. Some had achieved a functional academic training probably in the home. Many were illiterate throughout their lifetime but were none-the-less productive citizens. Almost all of them and/or their ancestors had participated in instituting the rapidly-changing American county, territory, and state governments.

These backcountry common folk arrived in the Eleven Point River Valley instilled with a sense of civic duty and knowledge of how to handle business affairs – governmental and personal. The one documented trading center in the antebellum years in Davidson Township was known simply as Reuben Rice’s. Yet estate records, the primarily source in absence of local newspapers, diaries, or letters from the time period, document numerous farmers in the township who possessed artisan skills and traded products of those skills, or items manufactured from crops raised. The farmers established non-contiguous farmsteads along either bank of the Eleven Point River and, in time to come, sons often owned land contiguous with the fathers. It seems that traveling the distance of ten to fifteen miles between farms of fellow artisans to obtain items of necessity was of no consequence. This practice of settlement spoke to past traditions.

John Sevier, hero of the Revolutionary War Battle of King’s Mountain, a founder and the only governor of the short-lived State of Franklin, also served as the first governor of the State of Tennessee, established in 1796. For the last twenty-five years of Sevier’s life he lived at Marble Springs, shown above, outside of Knoxville. For the majority of the six terms Sevier served as governor of Tennessee he commuted from this humble log home to the capitol in Knoxville to conduct official business. At the time of his death he was still producing fine linen in the loom house and whiskey at his distillery at Marble Springs. Regular militia musters were also held here. Sevier died while on a surveying trip and was buried on his beloved homestead. In 1889 his body was relocated to Knoxville. Today Marble Springs is restored as a museum and is open to the public. Photograph courtesy of the Museum of Appalachia, Norris, Tennessee.
Standing on its original site on Reuben’s original land purchase is what is considered to have possibly been Reuben Rice’s ‘shop’ — a common name for a small country store. It was donated in 2006 to BRTC’s Project REACH by Rice descendants.

A revealing view of Randolph County in the 1830s

German scientist George Engelmann, traveling on the Military Road through northeast Arkansas in 1837, was waylaid due to spring rains that caused severe flooding at the Fourche du Mas River located less than ten miles to the east of Reuben Rice’s. From Engelmann’s misfortune arose a description of several colorful 1830s local residents along with details of their lifestyles and cultural practices. More importantly, Engelmann provides a description of a rural shop, or country store, common to the region and similar to the modern-day discoveries made at Reuben Rice’s.

Dr. George Engelmann was turning his misfortunate delay into an opportunity to write a letter recounting his trip since leaving St. Louis on March 3rd in a vehicle comparable to a small present-day ‘pick-up’ truck. He had considered traveling by water but the wait for a steamboat at the mouth of the Arkansas for travel up that stream could take weeks. He had too much baggage to go by horseback. The alternative was this one-horse wagon called a Dearborn:

*I found little fault with the wagon: it is small and light; however, it has wide axles and wheels with hubs no more than four or five inches thick and spokes hardly an inch thick, and the small box mounted on six wooden springboards, on which a seat has been attached with six other wood springboards, which can be covered during rain. The whole thing has just enough room for two people and a trunk...*

Engelmann followed the roads that had been established as a mail route from St. Louis into Arkansas. The route took him through Valle’s Mines, Farmington, Mine la Motte, Frederickstown, and Greenville. Greenville, the county seat of Wayne County, was the new town name for Bettis Ferry on the St. Francis River. Dr. Elijah Bettis, Sr. who established Bettis Ferry was among the first wave of American settlers caught up in the mania to move west of the Mississippi. Dr. Bettis was the father of Ransom Bettis, who by the time of Engelmann’s stop-over, was located at his homestead on the Black River.

The post road followed by Engelmann had taken on the name of ‘Red River Road’ since it had been followed by so many Missouri migrants who had followed Stephen F. Austin to the Texas settlement established by his father Moses Austin. Near the ferry crossing on the Current River the Red River Road joined with the Military Road as it continued diagonally across what had just become Randolph County, Arkansas Territory in 1835.
On March 12th Engelmann reports, “...we crossed the border into Arkansas, which we recognize by marks cut in a tree, and a quarter mile from there we crossed the Current River, a beautiful clear stream, which although bigger than the Black, is a tributary to it...” The marks cut in trees, called blazes, were used in the day to mark boundaries and roadways. The blazes at the Current River on the boundary between Missouri and Arkansas were cut in 1824 by Deputy Surveyor Nathan Boone, son of Daniel Boone.

On the southern bank of the Current Engelmann found “a beautiful farmstead with well-built dwelling and various outbuildings and broad fields on both sides of the river.” Even the earliest mortgage and sale deeds by William Hix, who had established the Current River ferry in the first decade of the 1800s, had included “improvements.” It is most likely that the farmstead Engelmann admired was the same one established by Hix himself and possibly improved by the next long-term owners, Thomas S. and John Rodney. The present owner denoted by Engelmann was Dr. Peyton Robinson Pitman who had only occupied the property at the ferry site for less than a decade by the time of Engelmann’s visit in 1837.

Engelmann recorded that Pitman had lived “here” for twenty-five years. Either Pitman had not made himself clear or Engelmann had made an assumption about Pitman’s residence at the ferry site. Pitman’s arrival in the area did extend back for twenty-five years but he had previously resided on the Fourche du Mas where he had served as postmaster.

Engelmann noted that when he and his companion had crossed the Current March 12th it was a “sour rainy day.” As they proceeded on the 13th they met a postman who informed them that there was a small river ahead where the bridge had been torn loose and could only be crossed by swimming. The bridge he referenced was the first of two wooden bridges constructed on the Fourche du Mas where the Military Road crossed.

The men inquired as to the best lodging and “we were directed...to David Plott’s...” Engelmann made a mistake in identifying Plott as “David.” His description of Plott’s location, noted as Plott’s farm, and Plott’s role as a country merchant match those of Daniel Plott. While waiting for the waters of the river to recede, Engelmann, taking advantage of the delay, recorded not only his travels up to that time but also the scenes that were unfolding around him on Plott’s farm leaving a valued record of everyday life in Randolph County in the late 1830s.

The location identified by Engelmann corresponds with the land records for the eighty acres Plott had patented in 1823. As a merchant he had established himself along the Military Road to take advantage of the trading opportunities. 1822 was the first date when Rice, Plott, William Looney or any other area residents could file on land that many of them had already occupied for several decades. They had to wait for the American government to complete surveys of government lands before they could file for title to the land. Land claims filed in 1822 were confirmed by the Government Land Office in Washington City (Washington, D. C.) in 1823.
The GLO survey maps, right, for Townships 20, Ranges 1 East and 1 West show the close proximity of Daniel Plott's settlement (marked in red on the right top) on the Fouche du Mas River (Range 1 East) and Reuben Rice's (marked in red on the left top) less than 10 miles to the west (Range 1 West). Each square within the township boundaries equals one square mile.

...Fourche Dumas, or Fourche du Mas, or heaven's knows what...

1821 - New Muster Ground

In 1837 German scientist George Engelmann had expressed his challenges with the name of the river where he was halted due to heavy rains. On Friday, May 18, 1821 a young surveyor from Virginia, James Brown Campbell, recorded the name of the same river in his diary as Paushee De Man. Campbell was heading to the White River. He had crossed the Current River on the 17th and noted a town by the name of Currington laid out on the south side of the river. The bridge across the Fourche...or heaven's knows what...river had yet to be built in 1821 when Campbell arrived and he had to cross in his canoe. Just past the river he noted the new muster ground. About 1 mile from the river he leaves the Davidsonville road and takes the first right hand road through hilly broken country to next settlement, the Widow Black's, at Eleven Point River.

Source: Campbell, James Brown. Across the Wide Missouri: The Diary of a Journey from Virginia to Missouri in 1819 and Back Again in 1822, with a Description of the City of Cincinnati. THE BORGO PRESS, 2007.

Land records do not clarify just where on Plott's eighty acres his dwelling was located but as Engelmann tells the story:

A half mile before us flowed the oft-mentioned river, Fourche Dumas, or Fourche du Mas, or heavens knows what, since it was supposedly named after an old French fur trader, the first white man to have been in this part of the country. Three or four groups of travelers were assembled at the river, all of them stopped by the swollen stream; one wagon tried to ford the river, overturning in the strong current, and the animals and harness and part of the gear could only be saved with great efforts. Now the travelers are trying to build a ferry, by cobbling together some boards onto an existing canoe and a second one that they are fashioning out of wood.

Engelmann provides a detailed description of Plott’s farm, which undoubtedly varied little from the well-established yeoman farms of the Eleven Point River Valley, including those of Reuben Rice and William Looney:

With nothing more than an open mind, a healthy body, and a hardworking wife, he built himself a nice farm, one of the nicest I’ve seen on the trip. He owns a
good house, a mill, a still, and a machine to separate the cotton fibers from the seeds, or 'cotton gin,' or merely gin (probably a corruption of engine); additionally he has some nice horses, cows, and pigs, and keeps a small shop. Besides that he is a good hunter; and in order to be a gracious host, he shot a deer in the woods, and tells us that besides numerous bears and wolves, he has shot more than a thousand deer. In earlier times he would shoot as many as six or seven in a day.

Plott’s description of the wildlife, along with numerous additional references to the plentiful game of the time, gives support to the area’s earliest settlement by a French fur trader.

Well informed, intelligent, industrious people

Engelmann spoke of the people he met in Randolph County in general. He wrote that future readers of his notes must “refrain from thinking he was in the midst of a settlement of ignorant backwoodsmen.” He noted that the contrary was true, the settlers were well informed and intelligent, industrious people. And, at a time when photography had yet to be invented and portrait painting was generally reserved for the wealthy and influential, Engelmann created a visual image of Daniel Plott, a man undoubtedly known to most of the residents of Randolph County; he was definitely well acquainted with his fellow country merchant Reuben Rice and fellow political leader William Looney. These men had together provided securities and administration for neighbors’ estates as well as leading political and governmental affairs. Engelmann states:

Our friend Plott is really quite an original; I wish I could give you a more accurate picture of this lively, humorous, crooked-legged little man, with his hooked nose between sparkling gray eyes. His wife says he would be ugly, but then he is so ‘smart’ – that can hardly be translated; sharp, capable, and witty is what one usually says as a grand compliment to a man no matter what position he has in life. And Plott is certainly smart. Light of heart, talkative, well-schooled, he enjoys sharing his knowledge, but also enjoys learning and acquiring new knowledge.

Since the residents of Randolph County were providing material for Engelmann’s letter, he elaborated on Plott’s personal history, much of which matched that of his neighbors – mostly second and third generation Americans who had migrated to the Spanish lands from western North Carolina and eastern Tennessee; some by the way of Kentucky. Plott was born in North Carolina where his parents, immigrants from Germany who had landed in Pennsylvania, had relocated prior to the Revolutionary War. His "restless spirit drove him to the Spanish land" where he mined lead.
According to Engelmann, Plott "palled around with other German's on the White Water River near Cape Girardeau. He married there and then came to the Fourche du Mas area about 1817. It was almost certain that he was acquainted with the Rodney family of German ancestry who lived only a few miles away at the Current River ferry site on the Military Road during most of the 1820s. The patriarch, Martin Rodney, had lived and owned a mill near the German settlement on the White Water River that became known as Dutchtown. A number of other Randolph County residents had also resided on the White Water reinforcing the decades, if not lifetime, "connections" of many local founding families.

Two of the local residents stopping at Plott’s awaiting the waters of the Fourche to recede became subjects for Engelmann. One was a colonel of the militia but had not long before been a lieutenant of a division of volunteers on the Indiana border during the War of 1812. The colonel demanded that everyone have a drink – perhaps a ritual courtesy that undoubtedly helped to secure his highly valued political appointment at the head of the militia. Then along came a local doctor known as the most learned man of the region who proceeded to astound the gathering with his knowledge of Latin (even though Engelmann was aware of a considerable number of mistakes). The doctor was of Irish extraction and been in the area for fifteen years.

"...capable of everything..."

Dr. Engelmann declared that Daniel Plott was like most American farmers, "...capable of everything..." This same description was echoed by an 1835 observer passing through rural Kentucky who said...

The farmer...makes almost every thing that he uses. Besides clearing the land, building houses, and making fences, he stocks his own plough, mends his own wagon, makes his ox-yokes and harness, and learns to supply nearly all his wants from the forest. The tables, bedsteads, and seats in his house, are of his own rude workmanship...There are thousands scattered over the west, who continue, to this day, to make all the shoes that are worn in their families. They universally raise cotton, and often cultivate, also hemp, and flax; the spinning-wheel and the loom, are common articles of furniture; and the whole farming and hunting population, are clad in fabrics of household manufacture.

Not only did Anglo American settlers like Daniel Plott and Reuben Rice fit this description but so did many of the enslaved African Americans of Randolph County. Much of the industry of the early nineteenth century in Randolph County, as elsewhere in the region, was the result of slave labor without due credit ever being recognized. At least Engelmann gave a nod to the role
of women in the rural culture when he mentioned Plott’s “hardworking wife.”

Indeed, the industrious habitants of 1830s Randolph County did not differ significantly from the majority of rural Arkansans. Their landscape was covered with log structures that they, often with the help of neighboring white and black families, had constructed from the products of the forests surrounding them. Their “tables, bedsteads, and seats in (their) houses” were of their manufacture; but “rude workmanship” was not the standard among many of the craftsmen of Davidson Township if extant Rice and Looney examples are any indication. Local Davidson Township farmers possessed a variety of skills that met the needs of not just their own families but also for of residents of the Eleven Point River Valley and beyond – i.e. Reuben Rice’s custom order in 1820 for John S. Callahan, William Looney’s 1500 gallons of apple brandy produced annually, Ezekiel Rice could repair, if not make, guns, and Samuel McIlroy was a hatter known throughout a “fifty-mile” area. The simple, vernacular styling of farmers’ material culture may have been unfamiliar to the traveler making his way through rural Kentucky, but simplicity should not be mistaken for lack of quality craftsmanship.

Description of a country merchant’s ‘shop’

Engelmann noted that with Plott’s personality he “knows how to harness both horses and men” which made him a “capable trader.” Engelmann makes it clear that Plott’s “small shop” for trade goods was separate from his dwelling. He further describes a mercantile business that appears to match the known history of Reuben Rice’s.

According to John Rice’s probate records his outstanding notes for credit accounts were primarily for local Davidson Township neighbors. Yet a list of the items sold at Plott’s, as recorded by Engelmann, does not vary significantly from those sold by the Rice family. Plott does not appear to have been a blacksmith nor did he appear to handle smith-produced items such as nails, plow shares (molds) or wagon parts as the Rice family did.

Of Plott’s shop, Engelmann stated he opened it whenever strangers or customers came by, which in the case of Plott’s location on the Military Road, happened usually every day. There may have been fewer customers at Reuben Rice’s since he was located on perhaps a less traveled road.

Opening a shop only when customers came by was practiced even by the French country merchants west of the Mississippi in the days prior to American ownership. Merchandise was not displayed but rather kept in chests or trunks under lock and key. The chests or trunks provided an enclosed environment to keep merchandise clean and reduced the effects of fluctuating seasonal environments. Sometimes the merchandise was kept in the merchant’s dwelling or in small separate shops like Engelmann described.

Even merchants who did an extensive business like Louis Lorimier the Spanish Land

Above is an 1790s North Carolina country merchant’s shop that is relocated to Hart’s Square in the central part of the state. This common form of log construction used for a rural shop would not have an unfamiliar sight to Reuben Rice throughout his years in North Carolina and in Tennessee.

The structure constructed by Reuben Rice in 1828 features an extant interior log wall partition integral to original construction. The partition creates a small secondary room adjoining the larger main room. The small room features auger-hole patterns indicating that pegs were inserted into the holes with boards laid on the pegs to create shelving. No further evidence other than the auger-hole pattern remains. However, by applying the architectural principal that form follows function, the shelving that is considered to have been a feature of this untypical space may well have been designed to hold trunks or chests for merchandise. This function fits with the known practices for a country shop or store as has been noted.
Political Scene in 1836

On July 2, 1836, two days prior to the vote in the U.S. Congress establishing statehood for Arkansas, a political meeting was held at Daniel Plott's home. The purpose was to determine who would gain Randolph County’s support as the first state governor and U.S. congressional representative. The account of the meeting at Plott’s was covered in the July 12, 1836 issue of the *Arkansas Gazette* with a title of ‘Randolph County Democratic Nominations.’ A committee of nine persons was appointed to draw up resolutions expressing the candidates of choice. Edward McDonald was appointed as chairman of the group and Joseph Vanbibber secretary. McDonald had served as the president of the legislative council when the Territory of Arkansas was first created and was obviously well connected politically throughout the state. The committee appointed included Plott and William Looney. The committee supported James S. Conway for governor and Archibald Yell as representative in Congress. They also expressed appreciation to A. H. Sevier for his zeal in representing the citizens of Arkansas as the present delegate to congress in their quest for statehood.

There would be little doubt why these men of Randolph County, especially William Looney, would support Sevier and Conway. Ambrose H. Sevier was the grand-nephew of John Sevier who had served these men and their ancestors in so many leadership roles during the formative years of initial settlement in the Appalachian Mountains. William Looney was old enough to remember when John Sevier spent the night in his family home on Big Creek in Hawkins County. James Sevier Conway whose families came from Greene County, Tennessee, was a cousin of Ambrose Sevier’s.

Commandant and founder of Cape Girardeau did not keep an open shop with regular hours. Lorimier’s extensive 1812 estate records indicate that he kept his merchandise in locked trunks in which merchandise was separated generally by category – textiles, hardware, etc. Lorimier’s store was known far and wide during the Spanish and early American years of occupation. Located on the banks of the Mississippi, Lorimier had painted the store red to attract attention. It worked and Lorimier profited greatly.

Among other merchants in the Cape Girardeau area were the Byrds who had migrated from the Holston Valley of east Tennessee. Their shop was located on what became known as Byrd’s Creek in the midst of numerous “connections” who had migrated with them from the Holston Valley. Their trade business was much less extensive than Lorimier’s. However, they too profited. Many of the earliest settlers in what was to become Randolph County initially had to travel out of the region to secure some necessities such as salt which did not occur naturally in the area. It is likely that many did their trading with the Byrd’s since many of their “connections” were also part of the Byrd’s Creek settlement. This would have been particularly true for William Looney since Coleman Stubblefield, along with Coleman’s brother Fielding, and William’s cousin Joseph Looney had all been located at Byrd’s prior to 1815.

A more regional trading post was Buckskull at Hix’s Ferry. It was located on the north side of the Current River and was noted by historians up until the Civil War. Little detailed information has been recorded but the name undoubtedly came from the skull of a buck deer being mounted on or near the trading post. Like Lorimier’s efforts to call attention to his ‘Red House,’ Buckskull used a similar advertising technique that was easily identifiable; more importantly for both businesses, even the illiterate among the population could make the connections with their establishments.

A merchant’s shop as the community gathering place

In addition to selling whiskey like the Rice family and brandy like William Looney, Engelmann mentions that Plott gave samples of his peach brandy, highly praised by Plott, to the men while he flattered the women...

“...so that no one can resist him. His shop is the center of the entire neighborhood, as such shops are everywhere in this country; already for half an hour it has been swarming with visitors...

With the numerous mentions of the trading center established by Reuben Rice, it is likely that the name it bore was as documented – simply “Reuben Rice’s.” Reuben Rice’s served as headquarters for road-building crews and a number of elections for both Lawrence and Randolph Counties suggesting that in the 1830s it, like Plott’s on the Fourche River, was probably a “center
of the entire neighborhood” on the Eleven Point River.

As with many gatherings of men of that day, talk usually turned to the last war with the British (War of 1812), the Indians, and in particular at Plott’s Engelmann included the “Battle on the Horseshoe” (the 1814 Battle of Horseshoe Bend was the decisive battle in the Creek War in Alabama) where the colonel, one of Engelmann’s colorful subjects, had fought. Indeed, a number of the residents of Randolph County had also fought in the Revolutionary War, including William Stubblefield and Edward Hudson who resided on the Eleven Point River. Samuel McIlroy and Joseph fought in the War of 1812; Looney was an Ensign in The Fourth Regiment of Cape Girardeau County under Stephen Byrd’s command.

According to the Lawrence County Deed Book B (1817–1825) Fielding Stubblefield, Coleman Stubblefield, Michael Stubblefield, and Reuben Rice purchased the preemption right for the following property from Jacob Buchanan on March 8, 1822 for $300.00: NE ¼ Section 9, Township 21N, Range 2W and the SW ¼ Section 3, Township 21N, R2W. The transaction was attested to May 16, 1822 by Charles Hatcher before Spencer Crouch, Justice of the Peace (pp. 377, 378). On January 3, 1823 the same property was sold back to Jacob Buchanan by the same Stubblefield brothers and Reuben Rice for the same price. This transaction was acknowledged by Robert Mc Williams on January 4, 1823 before Henry Sanford, Justice of the Peace (pp. 391, 392).

This land on the Eleven Point River near the Missouri state boundary line has featured several generations of mills including one known as Buchanan’s Mill. According to Randolph County Court records it was also known as Standly’s Mills prior to 1850. The reason for the turn around in sale of this property in 1822–23 is not known. Was there a mill already established at this site prior to the purchase? The higher than usual purchase price of $300 would perhaps indicate the possibility. Did the Stubblefields and Reuben Rice operate the mill during their few months of ownership? As noted in the Lawrence County Probate Bonds for 1815 – 1835 Jacob Buchanan (Buchannon) died prior to May 3, 1831 when Mary Buchanan and Jacob Pevehouse filed a bond as administrators of his estate. Had he operated a mill at the above indicated location for those years?

In the 1840s William Mitchell operated a mill further south on the Eleven Point River on or near the property of Isham F. Alcorn. John Rice’s probate records of 1846 lists millstones as part of his personal property. Did the Rice family have a horse mill at their trading center? Several horse mills were noted to be in operation in the Lawrence and Randolph County histories. A further study of the milling industry in the early years of Davidson Township is merited.
Function of the one-story Rice structure

With the numerous historical confirmations that Reuben Rice was a country merchant and also produced fine textiles, the considered function of the earliest form of the Rice structure was perhaps as a loom house or rural store – or a combination of both. Loom houses were commonly found on early plantations and small farms in the eighteenth and nineteenth century in the eastern ‘backcountry’ regions of Virginia and the Carolinas which eventually included the states of Kentucky and Tennessee. On small farms weaving was typically performed in a room of the dwelling house or in a separate structure reversed for that function. Among the existing historic log structures in eastern Tennessee are several known to have served as loom houses. From this research it can be determined that the Rice family was very familiar with separate structures created to house looms and textile production activities. Family accounts, historic photographs, preserved textiles, and textile production equipment all from the nineteenth century indicate that several generations of the Rice family continued textile production even after the Civil War.

Manufacture of cloth for clothing and other household needs was a common and well documented function of early-nineteenth century cultural practices in Arkansas. Probate inventories and historic records for early settlers in the Eleven Point River Valley indicate that many raised flax to produce linen cloth, sheep to produce wool cloth, and cotton for cotton cloth. Though many produced yarns for cloth, fewer families had looms for weaving. Those with looms often produced woven cloth for neighboring families and the cloth, thusly, became an item of bartering value. Warren R. Hofstra, writing in The Planting of New Virginia, provides a significant study of the economic value of weaving in Virginia. He points out the laborious process involved with the production of linen cloth particularly and that spinning households were supplying linen yarn to weaving households in a ratio of two or three to one (page 212).

The weaving of more complicated textile products such as coverlets (blanket or bed cover) was certainly not common for every family in the pre-territorial and territorial period of Arkansas settlement. Production and weaving of linen with complex designs such as the pattern of the ‘overshot’ coverlet proudly displayed in the historic photograph of a descendant of Reuben Rice’s strongly supports the consideration that at least part of the function of the Rice structure was for the commercial production of textiles. This coverlet is considered by family to have been woven on the loom that has now been donated to Project REACH using yarns produced by the family.
Rice’s spring... 
a place of much resort for invalids from this and the adjoining counties

Dr. David Dale Owen, 1858

According to the 1858 report of noted geologist Dr. David Dale Owen, Rice’s spring was a popular resort bringing local and regional travelers to historic Davidson Township. Even in early historic records Rice’s spring was called Warm Springs, establishing the reason Owen was drawn to the site. Centered on several springs of temperate water, William Littleton Rice, Reuben’s second son (born ca. 1803), established a distillery, tavern, and store at the site in the late 1830s. [See Rice family land ownership map following pages.]

Dr. Owen, whose portrait is shown below, included the report shown to the left in his First Report of a Geological Reconnoissance of the Northern Counties of Arkansas Made During the Years 1857 and 1858. He indicated that it was a very unfavorable time to visit the site due to heavy spring rains that had diluted the spring water with fresh water.

In 1837 William L. Rice, son of Reuben and Lydia Rice born ca. 1803, was granted a license by the Randolph County Court to operate a tavern northeast of his father’s trading center on land William patented in 1838. In addition to the site of William’s settlement being referred to as Warm Springs and Owen’s reference to Rice’s spring, the site was also referred to in early sources as Medical Springs. William’s tavern was a combination hotel, store, and dram shop. He also had a distillery at the site.

While a resident of Davidson Township William L. Rice served as a justice of the peace under Lawrence County and taught a subscription school. William was one of the associate justices when Randolph County was formed in 1835 and when Pocahontas was selected as the seat of justice with his father, Reuben, serving as one of the first county commissioners. William also served as county treasurer from 1846 to 1852. As a Justice of the Peace in 1839 he heard the sworn testimony of his younger brother Ezekiel who also was serving as a Justice of the Peace for Randolph County.

An original copy of the first geological survey of northern Arkansas counties conducted in 1857 – 58 by Dr. David Dale Owen (1807 – 1860) is preserved at the Arkansas Geological Commission in Little Rock. Owen was already a noted American geologist when he was appointed as State Geologist for Arkansas in 1857. What Owen referred to as Rice’s spring was the commercial enterprise established by Reuben Rice’s son William Littleton Rice; it was one of a very few sites in Randolph County that he identified specifically. On February 4, 1859 Governor Elias N. Conway commissioned Owen to produce a full report of his surveys and his first report of northern counties was incorporated into his second report published in 1860. Each report included drawings Owen made of significant geological features throughout the state. Those drawings and a biographical sketch of Owen can be viewed at the website of Professor Clark Kimberling, University of Evansville, Evansville, Indiana.


David Dale Owen - Smithsonian Institution Archives, RU 7177, George P. Merrill Collection
William married first Elizabeth McWilliams. Neither the exact date of their marriage nor the date of her death is known. Following Elizabeth’s death he married Rebecca Mansker on February 27, 1842. She was born in 1806; the daughter of long hunter George Mansker, Sr, brother of Kasper Mansker. Rebecca spent her young childhood years at the nationally known Mansker’s Station settlement in Middle Tennessee before her family migrated to what became Randolph County. The senior George Mansker established a homestead near the present-day town of Supply. Reuben Rice was a security for George, Senior’s estate in 1823 and also later for George, Junior’s estate.

The warm springs had encouraged visitors since its inception. By the early 1850s, according to his estate records, William was in the process of relocating bath houses just prior to his death in 1853. It is likely that these bathhouses were of log construction but no records about the early ‘resort’ have surfaced.

The settlement continued to grow following the visit of State Geologist Owen and by the 1870s the Dalton family had constructed a forty-room hotel at the site.

Among the color drawings geologist David Dale Owen included in his reports of geological surveys of Arkansas is one depicting Sugar Loaf Mountain in Searcy County. Disappointingly, Owen did not produce a drawing during his 1858 visit to what he called a resort at Rice’s spring. However, several of his mid-nineteenth century drawings, like the one above, depicted ‘rail-and-rider’ fences surrounding farmsteads. The present-day ‘rail-and-rider’ fence enclosing the restored Rice-Upshaw House and outbuildings marks also the site of Reuben Rice’s, Davidson Township 1820s – 1840s rural trading center. Thomas Blackman Rice purchased this site from his father Reuben in 1845. Thomas died on September 16, 1857. Following his death, his brother Ezekiel (administrator of Thomas’ estate) paid Robert Teel $2.00, see document above right, for helping to harvest Thomas’ wheat crop and $.75 for making 150 rails for fencing. The cost of the present-day fencing was somewhat more!
1816 Road

When the Anglo American and African American pioneers first arrived in the valley there were no roads. In 1816 Reuben served, along with William Looney, as a commissioner for one of the first public roads created in the region. The road linked the then seat of justice, Davidsonville, with the only mill (assumed to be a grist mill) on the Eleven Point River forty miles distant. The course of the road led past Reuben’s land.

From 1815–1819 the area designated as Davidson Township was part of Lawrence County, Missouri Territory. The township extended to the region of present-day Thomasville, Missouri. In 1819, when Arkansas Territory was created, the boundary between Missouri and Arkansas territories reduced the size of the township leaving many inter-connected families separated. Trading accounts from Davidson Township show that trade established with upper Eleven Point River Valley residents prior to territorial divisions continued throughout the 1800 – 1860 study period.

Reuben Rice and William Looney served as commissioners

The petition of sundry Inhabitants of this County for a road to be laid out on the most direct and best Route from the mouth of Frederick’s Fork of Eleven Points to the town of Lawrence which is granted by the court. Reuben Rice Jester Cox William Looney Thomas Crabtree & William Ingram were appointed commissioners thereof

Source: June 24, 1816 Lawrence County, Missouri Territory Circuit Court Records Book A.
The creation of Arkansas Territory in 1819 left Davidson Township with the approximate boundaries shown in the maps on this page. From 1819 to 1835 Davidson Township was in the boundaries of Lawrence County, Arkansas Territory.

Once Randolph County was created in 1835, the roadway was altered to connect with Pocahontas, the new seat of justice and river port on the Black River. By the mid-1840s it became known as the Thomasville Road connecting Pocahontas with the trading / postal center at Thomasville, Missouri. Today numerous remnants of that road exist making it one of the earliest identifiable roads in the state of Arkansas. State Highway 93 replicates part of the route leading travelers to the now restored Rice-Upshaw House and the site of Reuben Rice’s 1820s – 1840s rural trading center.
Reuben had carefully chosen the land on which he settled. It extended west to a stable fording place on the river. Another road, that he undoubtedly created, provided access from this ford to his trading center. He expanded his land holdings to the west side of the river when a public road on that side was improved in 1842, see Randolph County Court record above. Reuben and the other residents of the valley understood well that commerce drives road building.
Reuben Rice’s intent is revealed in both his land purchases and sales.

It was not until 1815 when the original government surveys for 1803 Louisiana Purchase lands was undertaken by the General Land Office of United States government. Congress ordered that surveying of a north-south line to be called the Fifth Principle Meridian be the first priority. It is from that boundary line that all other surveys were made. The point from which the first survey began is now a National Historic Landmark located in the Louisiana Purchase State Park near Brinkley, Arkansas.

http://www.arkansasstateparks.com/louisianapurchase/

The fact that the Fifth Principle Meridian passes through the river valleys of what eventually became Randolph County meant that a portion of these lands were among the first to be surveyed. Range 1 West, as indicated in Reuben Rice’s land records, was the western boundary of the Fifth Principle Meridian. The original General Land Office surveys (referred to in general as GLOS) can be viewed and downloaded online at http://www.glorecords.blm.gov

It was not until 1822 when the first area land office was open for business in Batesville. That was the first opportunity for numerous residents like Reuben Rice and William Looney to file for government land patents in spite of the fact that they may have resided on their land and made many improvements a decade or more earlier. Once patents were filed in Batesville, area residents had to wait until the next year, 1823, for their patents to be registered and recorded. Once this was completed the United States government issued a patent deed printed on sheepskin and signed by the president. These are treasured family artifacts today.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Date Purchased</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NW Section 6, T. 20 N, R. 1W</td>
<td>December 12, 1823</td>
<td>BLM Records</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>137.6 acres</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note: Sold to Thomas Blackman Rice 1845</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NE Section 1, T. 20 N, R. 2 W</td>
<td>December 12, 1823</td>
<td>BLM Records</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>144.38 acres</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note: Sold to Thomas Blackman Rice 1845</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE Section 1, T. 20 N, R. 2 W</td>
<td>June 23, 1836</td>
<td>BLM Records</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>93.81 acres</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note: Sold to Thomas Blackman Rice 1845</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NW Section 7, T. 20 N, R. 1 W</td>
<td>August 16, 1838</td>
<td>BLM Records</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81.21 acres</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note: Sold to Thomas Blackman Rice 1845</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SESW Section 31, T. 21 N, R. 1 W</td>
<td>July 10, 1844</td>
<td>Randolph County Deed Book 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 acres</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note: Sold 13.5 acres to Thomas Blackman Rice 1845</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SW Section 36, T. 21 N, R. 2 W</td>
<td>July 10, 1844</td>
<td>Randolph County Deed Book 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.21 acres</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SW Section 36, T. 21 N, R. 2 W</td>
<td>July 10, 1844</td>
<td>Randolph County Deed Book 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>131.4 acres</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Soon after he purchased the property (1844) where present-day Dalton is located, Reuben Rice sold the same property to his son Ezekiel. Dalton was not established until the late-1870s but remains as the only rural trading center within the current Davidson Township boundaries.
Documenting Trade at Reuben Rice’s

On this and the following page is a summary of items sold at Rice’s trading center. Pages following these provide the sourcing for this summary list.

Not all items sold at Reuben Rice’s were produced by the Rice family. Textiles were among the items Reuben and/or his sons imported to the trading center known as Reuben Rice’s. For the terms of this study, importing is referring to items brought into the Eleven Point River Valley in contrast to items produced or procured locally. Whether Reuben Rice and/or his sons made trips to regional trading centers to procure merchandise like Cape Girardeau or New Orleans is unknown. Prior to 1815 wholesale houses for merchandise were also established also at Byrd’s Settlement and Bettis’s Ferry (later Greenville) where known earlier ‘connections’ from the Holston River Valley were located. Just when more local wholesale distributors where first established is not certain but the advent of steamboat transportation gave rise to wholesalers being established at both Pocahontas and Powhatan at least by the late 1830s.

Using the list of active accounts found in John Rice’s probate records following his death in 1846, a list of imported merchandise traded at Reuben Rice’s can be determined in part. Since these records apparently cover a very limited time period and it is known that the trading center referred to as Reuben Rice’s existed for approximately two decades, the full extent of merchandise traded at this location can never be known. Yet it can be assumed that the following staple items were undoubtedly made available to the people of Davidson Township at Reuben Rice’s throughout most of two decades.

TEXTILE ITEMS – IMPORTED

Calico
Drab – may have been imported or woven by Rice family members
Fine Muslin
Thread
Indigo – a dye for cloth

STAPLES – often referred to in store ledgers as ‘sundry items’ or ‘sundries’

Sugar - sugar would have been in a solid cone shape form and probably kept under lock and key as it was a very expensive item at the time.
Coffee – sold as beans and not ground
Paper
Combs – combs could have been imported or hand-crafted by Rice family members
Lead – may have been imported in part but lead was also found locally in Davidson Township
Steel
Powder

Archeological excavations at the Rice House uncovered the above fragment of Mocha ware pottery, a type of pottery imported primarily from England and popular in the American market until the mid-1900s. Whether this type of household item was sold by the Rice family or it was part of their personal household items is not known. Presently, no list exists to indicate that the Rice family sold an extensive array of fancy items.
Wagon tires
Bells – Bells were in common demand with free-ranging livestock and were simple for a blacksmith to make. It can be assumed that the Rice family made the bells that appear on trade accounts.

MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS

Whiskey – John Rice’s inventory at the time of his death in 1846 confirms the Rice’s had a distillery located at or near Reuben Rice’s.
Corn – Corn was an important commodity for the Rice family not only for barter from or sale to patrons but to supply their whiskey distillery.
Tobacco – grown by the Rice family
Shaving soap – John Rice’s inventory listed barrels of shaving soap; his active accounts at the time of his death have numerous listings for purchase of soap. This should be considered to be the shaving soap made without the lye that used used in ordinary laundry soap. Laundry soap was a common item made by practically every household.

This small finely crafted hand-made shot mold was uncovered at the Rice - Upshaw House during restoration. It is considered to have been hand-forged by the Rice family. Lead for making the shot was found locally but whether that local supply was sufficient to supply all the needs of the families of Davidson Township is undetermined. It is very probable that the supply was not great enough to supply the needs of blacksmiths like the Rice family who produced numerous hand-forged items for sale.
Reuben Rice had evidently dispersed his personal property among his heirs prior to his death in 1850 – 51 as there is no record of a will or estate administration. But the estate inventories of his sons who died as adults in Randolph County all reveal whip saws, cross-cut saws, a variety of axes including broad axes, foot adzes, augers, chisels, planes, and all the implements required for log construction. Ezekiel Rice is documented as making some of the same tools mentioned above for his brothers and neighbors. He made and repaired plows and other farming implements. His blacksmith tools sold at his estate sale in 1876 for $20.00. It can be stated emphatically that Ezekiel Rice made a significant contribution to the settlement of the Eleven Point River Valley with his blacksmithing trade.

But the Rice family carpentry skills are as evident in the material culture found during restoration or passed from generation to generation among their descendants. The remaining examples include simple utilitarian wooden artifacts for textile production and furnishings for their homes. Like other documented furniture produced in the valley, the extant Rice furniture, like the rope bed with rope-tightening ‘key’ shown on this page, is made from local walnut.

Surviving in the log structure interpreted as the 1840s Rice-Upshaw House is a rare and finely-crafted wooden ratcheted lock on the door of an under-stair closet. The cog-wheel has not been recovered but the remaining parts of the lock reveal fine craftsmanship and may possibly be associated with the late-1820s initial construction. Early rural merchants Reuben Rice and his sons are documented to have sold items that they would have secured in locked storage.
Just how early Reuben Rice had established a trading center in Davidson Township is undocumented but an 1821 case he filed in the Lawrence County Court of Commons Pleas establishes that he was trading by 1820. In 1828 he constructed a one-story building that is considered to have been used for storing and/or selling merchandise. The structure could also have served as a loom house for the fine textiles the Rice family produced from flax (linen fabric), cotton, and wool. An existing loom and spinning wheel considered to have been brought with the family in 1812 from Tennessee may have been hand-crafted by Rice family artisans as they were fine carpenters as well.

Three views of a loom shuttle, left, found in the Rice - Upshaw House during restoration.
While the photographs above were taken in the early twentieth century it can be seen that the Faust family living in the Appalachian Mountains never changed their habits of dress or hand-production of textiles. These rare glimpses into cultural practices of the past were provided through the courtesy of John Rice Irwin, founder and director of the Museum of Appalachia, Norris, Tennessee. The Rice textile production in the early 19th century would have been conducted in similar fashion.

Hand-crafted textile production artifacts used by the Rice family and donated to Black River Technical College by their descendants, Jean Upshaw and family.
John Rice – Merchant

1846 John Rice Probate
Cash accounts

Family land records confirm that Reuben’s sons John (born ca. 1800) and Ezekiel (born 1806) did have land adjoining their father’s. Both were apparently active in the commercial enterprises at Reuben Rice’s. Estate records for John, who died in 1846, include cash accounts that list the items purchased or bartered for by local residents. John’s estate also included stills and still tubs indicating that he was the producer of the whiskey sold at the trading center. The list of his 1846 cash accounts is included here and on following pages.

John Rice 1846 Estate Inventory
Among the items listed in John Rice’s cash accounts in 1846 are staples like coffee and sugar along with indigo dye for fabrics. Indigo produces a dark blue color much favored in the early-nineteenth century. Sugar was not sold loose but rather molded into cones, as shown below. It was an expensive item and probably kept locked in a secured place. The amount of sugar purchased by Spencer Breeden, one of the early settlers living near the Rice family, on April 28, 1846 indicates that only a small amount of a cone of sugar was cut off and probably sold by weight.

As mentioned previously, the lead listed in the accounts may have been procured within Davidson Township. The tobacco and whiskey were products likely produced by the Rice family. Clinton Stubblefield, among others listed to the left, lived in Missouri showing trade continuing across the state line. Clinton (born ca. 1806) was the first child of Fielding Stubblefield and likely born to Fielding’s first wife, a daughter of Elisha Baker. Clinton may have been born while Fielding resided in the Bellevue Valley prior to relocating to the Eleven Point Valley.
The list of John Rice’s cash accounts to the right includes additional residents of Missouri. Mary Ann Bellah is the only female listed on the 1846 accounts but, since this is a small sampling over the years the trading center was in existence, there may have been others. In addition to indigo Miss Bellah purchased thread. The fact that she had an individual account in her own name indicates she may have been a single woman working as a seamstress producing clothing by order and not just for her family.

Although this listing is recorded as “cash accounts’ owed to John Rice, the means of payment very likely was not cash. Customers regularly ‘bartered’ or traded for goods and services. Several Davidson township account record credits for items bartered. The basket of eggs shown below reflects typical items for bartering. Practically all estate inventories for the yeoman farmers of the township list chickens, ducks, and geese that provided not only food, feathers for pillows and ‘feather-ticks’ (modern-day comforters), but eggs for bartering for necessities not produced on the farm.

John Rice 1846 Estate Inventory
Shadrack Nettles, listed on the accounts at the left, lived on the boundary line that in 1846 separated what had become the states of Arkansas and Missouri (same boundary demarcation that separated the territories). But Nettles’ family had settled the land prior to the existence of any boundary.

Shadrack’s account reveals he purchased sugar that amounted to 62 ½ cents. In 1846 fractions of a coin were still in use for currency.
Numerous accounts owed to Ezekiel Rice for blacksmithing services have appeared in estate records for residents of Davidson Township. One of the earliest extant records is shown to the right for the year 1832. Ezekiel, born in 1806, would have been only six years old when the family arrived in the Eleven Point River Valley. It is assumed that he learned his blacksmithing trade from his father, Reuben. Children as young as eight are recorded in 18th and 19th records as being apprenticed to learn a trade. Ezekiel was undoubtedly started at his blacksmithing trade at least by age eight by working at small tasks and progressing to the more complicated. As substantiated by the account to the right, the accounts on following pages, and the examples of the hand-forged items found by archeologists, below, the Rice family met community needs for shoeing oxen and horses, nails, bolts, axes, hammers, hinges, bells, tools (farming and wood-working), and, as noted, “speers” (spears) for fishing in the rivers and streams. Examples of hand-forged items found by archeologists and construction workers at the Rice-Upshaw House are shown below.

Ezekiel Rice – Blacksmith

Hand-forged Nail

Hand-forged Cobbler’s Hammer

Hand-forged latch for a chest or trunk shown as found and following treatment by the Arkansas Archeological Survey

Ronnie Walker, BRTC, above, holds an example of a hand-forged arrowhead strap-hinge found at the Rice-Upshaw House. This hinge was used as a pattern for the replicated door and shutter hinges.
Ezekiel Rice had a running account for Edward Hudson, John Rice’s father-in-law, as noted in the account submitted for payment when Edward died in 1845. Among other items made and repaired was one repair on Hudson’s lathe. Hudson, a cooper by trade, had arrived in the valley in 1817 from Smith County, Tennessee. A cooper makes wooden barrels, casks, and tubs. Hudson may well have had a shop in the area of Reuben Rice’s trading center since he was a family ‘connection.’ Hudson, a Revolutionary War veteran, is buried in the Rice cemetery – now called the Upshaw Cemetery. There is more of Edward Hudson’s history under the history of the Militia.
James Bellah – Territorial Gunsmith, Tinsmith, and Blacksmith

Also arriving from Smith County, Tennessee with Hudson in 1817 was a large inter-connected family group of Hudson, Bellah, and Job (Jobe) families. Some of the Job family members had arrived prior to 1815. One of the Smith County migrants was James Bellah, a gunsmith, blacksmith, tinsmith, and carpenter. He left an extensive list of artisan tools when he died in 1827. John Hudson purchased his gunsmith shop which could well have also been located at Rice’s trading center. James Bellah and his kin lived only a few miles northeast of the trading center. The area that stills bears the name of Bellah Hills. James Bellah is, at present, one of the very earliest documented gunsmiths in Arkansas.

James Bellah’s 1827 partial appraisal from estate records
In addition to the artisans and craftsmen at or near Reuben Rice’s, Samuel McIlroy, who lived near the southern end of Davidson Township, was a hatter who was known and had customers throughout a fifty-mile area. Benjamin Jones lived between Rice and McIlroy on the east side of the river and he was a wheelwright and made wagons. In 182— he filled a custom order for a flax wheel for James Bellah. William Spikes, also from Hawkins County, Tennessee like the Rices, Looneys, and Stubblefields, was another wheelwright who lived just east of the Davidson Township line. In his estate records are listed ‘turning tools.’

With the death of Edward Hudson in 1845 and Reuben’s son John in 1846, it appears that Reuben’s trading center was closing, or at least, scaling down. Across the river William Looney, who was producing and selling apple brandy, had also died in 1846.

Around 1845 Ezekiel purchased land from his father where the community of Dalton now is located. Ezekiel may have moved his blacksmith trade to that location on the west side of the river near the newly expanded public road commissioned in 1842.

In 1846 Reuben was seventy years old. He died approximately five years later (ca. 1850 – 51) and is considered to be buried with others of his family in the present-day Upshaw Cemetery next to the extant remnants of his trading center.

Thomas Blackmon Rice, who is credited with expanding the 1828 Rice log structure in the 1840s to serve as a dwelling for his family, died on September 16, 1857. His estate records include a blacksmithing bill to his brother Ezekiel, shown to the right. It does not appear from existing records that he continued trading activities.
On October 16, 1846 Charles Hatcher advertised in the Arkansas State Democrat (Little Rock, AR) a reward of fifty dollars for a horse that had been stolen from him on the 7th of October. In order to collect the reward the mare and thief had to be presented to Hatcher with proof to convict the thief. The reward could be collected at Spring Hill, Randolph County, Arkansas. Hatcher’s advertisement is an indication that trade was focusing at a new location in the mid-1840s. Spring Hill (also referred to as Spring Creek) was a trading center located on or near the Eleven Point River a short distance to the north of Reuben Rice’s. The exact location has not been determined. Hatcher had initially settled near present-day Thomasville, Missouri prior to 1810. He owned lots in Davidsonville where he was a merchant and surveyor. He was named surveyor for the town of Jackson in 1830. Even while maintaining commercial enterprises outside of the township, he had continued to be listed on Davidson Township tax and census records. Just when he established trade at Spring Hill (Spring Creek) is undetermined. An application for a post office was submitted in 1855 but no post master was listed. According to Hatcher’s estate papers he had outstanding notes for inventory sales for traders in Missouri as well as Randolph County. Hatcher died in 1857.

The agricultural census of 1860 lists Benjamin F. Bryan, who owned land near Spring Hill, as a merchant who raised and sold tobacco. Benjamin and Dr. John Wallace Bryan arrived in the valley from Kentucky. Dr. Bryan raised and sold tobacco as well. Both, along with Hatcher, were slave-holders. The relationship, if any, of the two Bryans is undetermined. In 1859 Dr. Bryan was appointed as post-master for Spring Creek. Obviously, the commercial scene in Davidson Township had shifted.

Research of the numerous yeoman farmers / merchants of Davidson Township, some possessing artisan skills and their early-nineteenth century trading activities is on-going. This summary reflects merely the foundations of a broader study.
Articulate men, in general, possess history. Their diaries, letters, speeches, and records of service in governmental positions receive the greatest attention as they are more frequently preserved and more easily accessed by the researcher. But prestigious leaders acting alone could not have peopled America. Recognition for that achievement is shared by such men as Reuben Rice.

Ellen Blalock, former Director of Survivor Affairs at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D. C. visited the REACH sites during restoration. Speaking particularly of the construction of William Looney’s log dogtrot, she aptly observed that *obviously, nothing here is arbitrary.* Indeed, that statement is correct for that structure; but it was likewise true for Reuben Rice’s settlement across the river from Looney. It is apparent that everything - the selection of the land settled, the structures built, the roads created, and the commercial ventures pursued - reveals this yeoman farmer’s purposeful intent.

Reuben Rice, by all accounts, was successful as a merchant and local political leader in spite of the fact that he remained illiterate throughout his lifetime. He attended his son William’s subscription school and advanced from signing his name with an ‘x’ to signing with an ‘R,’ as shown here.

The success of Reuben Rice’s commercial ventures can be measured in a large part by the fact that every successive generation of his descendants who have remained in the Eleven Point River Valley and Randolph County have prospered as farmers and merchants. No portrait of Reuben or any of his children exists. They are given identity by official records and the extant examples of humble items that are products of their skills.

Academic disciplines acting independently would have likely been unsuccessful in exposing the broader significance of Reuben Rice’s 1820s log structures as integral components of a now rare early-nineteenth century rural commercial enterprise. Architectural, archeological, and historical analysis have together substantiated that significance. These rare examples of America’s vernacular architecture speak not only to the entrepreneurial intent of pioneering yeoman farmers / merchants but also to the adaptation of the historic landscape to meet that intent, and the means by which goals of prosperity were achieved.

Lydia Rice Upshaw, through stories passed down and preserved in the writings of Melissa Ozella Miller Upshaw, first informed researchers that *this place was known for miles and miles.*... But even Lydia was unsuspecting of the broader contribution that Reuben Rice’s rural trading center was destined to make for Arkansas’s, indeed, America’s settlement history.