


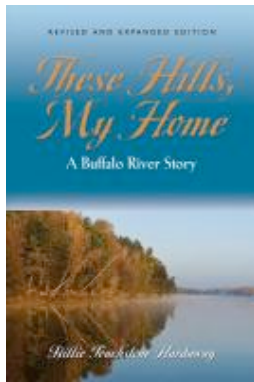
REVISED AND EXPANDED EDITION

These Hills, My Home

A Buffalo River Story



Billie Touchstone Hardaway



A timeless book about a river and its people, so well and lovingly written that its interwoven fact and legend has that special quality of good storytelling. The now famous Buffalo River is one of the last free-flowing rivers in America. The book will appeal to all who are drawn by the magic of the river - the nature lover, canoeist and backpacker - and certainly to those with an historical interest in the region.

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Second Edition

II

IN THE BEGINNING...

So and no otherwise — so and no otherwise — Hillmen desire their hills!
— Rudyard Kipling

Abraham Villines, the illustrious progenitor of all the Newton County Villines, was born about 1772. He, like his biblical namesake, was the patriarch of his clan.

The surname “Villines” (also spelled Verline, Verlain, Velines, Veline, and Vallian) is very likely French Huguenot (French protestants of the 16th and 17th century) origin. They immigrated to America about 1700, settling first in Virginia and then going on to North Carolina.

The Villines in North Carolina were wealthy tobacco farmers. However, an economic depression struck the area, due either to a drought or a tax burden — the record does not say, except that their lands were placed in receivership.

Abraham knew they could not bear up under the adversity of their lands being confiscated, and so he and his family settled up the estate in North Carolina and moved to Tennessee.

He began to hear romantic rumors from some of his adventurous Tennessee kinspeople who had gone to northwest Arkansas on a two year expedition. The hunters eventually camped on a big flat rock which covered several hundred feet near the Buffalo River. Such a rock exists on Sneed Creek in Newton County (called “Rocky Bottom”) where some of the Villines later settled. The hunters’ story is that they stayed a week on the rock, survived an attack by a panther, hunted to their hearts content and hurried back to Tennessee to bring their families to this unspoiled paradise. Abraham gave serious thought to the stories brought back by his Tennessee relatives before making the decision to come to Arkansas. Then, in about the year 1837, he led his people to Arkansas. It has been told time and again that the Villines caravan was the richest ever to come to Arkansas. One

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cannot say this positively, since they had experienced devastation of their property rights. But it can be said with certainty that the caravan must have been very rich indeed in feverish anticipation, hopes and desires for a better way of life. And then, perhaps they were able to retain many of their material possessions.

The caravan included many ox drawn wagons, heavily laden with household furnishings and supplies to see them through their first winter, beef cattle, milk cows and poultry in hand made crates. Geese were tolled with corn from the aprons of young girls.

It is believed that families other than Villines were in that same caravan since the Census Records reveal their presence in Carroll County (later Newton County) in 1840 and that they had come from North Carolina and Tennessee.

The slaves had been sold; that is, all except one. Piety (called Pied by some) remained with the Villines until her death. She had been a wedding gift to Hezekiah and Elizabeth Penn Villines from Abraham when she was only ten years old. Before the end of her life, she contributed much to that family above and beyond the call of duty of a freed slave.

Elizabeth offered Piety her freedom before the trip south but Piety, then about twenty years of age, cried and begged to stay with them. It has been related many times how she was never considered a slave, but rather a companion to Elizabeth who helped with the children's care and the housework. As the story goes, Elizabeth and Piety had an agreement as they grew older; that if one or the other were unable to care for herself, they would care for each other. And apparently, they did this. It was Elizabeth who finally became feeble and senile and Aunt Piety, out of love and the promise, who took care of her until her death.

The family built a small house for Aunt Piety near the road so she could pass her last days sitting on the porch watching the goings and comings of those she had loved and for whom she had cared for more than fifty years.

Abraham knew he would not need slaves in the new and mountainous country and legend has it that he had never been comfortable owning human chattels anyway. He and his large family could work the patches and small cleared fields without the help of slaves.

With Abraham was his bride of a few years, Martha. His first wife and mother of his children, Nancy McKissack Villines, had died and her estate settled years before. Martha might have been Nancy's sister. Abraham and Martha, both in their later years, did not have children.

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There is controversy as to the route they took. Some think they came through Alabama, crossing the great river with much effort and loss of some of their possessions; others say they travelled through Tennessee, down through Missouri and then through Old Carrollton and over the mountains to the Buffalo River area. The latter seems more likely since it is believed that Hezekiah and his family joined the Villines caravan as it came through Missouri.

Abraham's children, though grown and some married with families, came with their father to this "new land." They were: Hezekiah (married to Elizabeth Penn), Hosea, age 16, Nathaniel, age 20, Virginia, age 21 and Copeland, age 13. Another son, William, remained in North Carolina, where he was a slave dealer, and during the Civil War, a Confederate Officer.

Abraham and his unmarried children and Martha settled on Buffalo under "Big Bluff." Across the river was a good spring of water gushing from beneath giant beechnut trees which grew abundantly along the river. Above the spring was a grassy knoll which provided an excellent site for a house, where it would be safe from the unpredictable river in flood stage. Hezekiah and the others moved on up the river near the mouth of Running Creek, settling in choice locations.

A young man by the name of John Penn was also in the caravan. It is believed this was Elizabeth's brother.

It has been related that the first winter was spent in a tent with an open end for a fireplace. A "tent" was then built of slabs or boards set on end, fastened at the top with wooden pins against poles or logs resting on four forks or posts sunk into the ground.

The nearest grist mill was near Rogers, Arkansas and when Hezekiah went to the mill, the trip took several days. Elizabeth would sit up all night to keep the wild animals from entering the tent.

The old home place where Abraham and his family first settled fell to the youngest son, Copeland, who lived there and raised twelve children. He was the grandfather of Frank Villnes of this book. Copeland married Jincy Reeves.

The scenery which greeted the weary, anxious travelers must indeed have been a sight to behold, so beautiful and untouched were the canyons, caves and coves, the rugged, steep hills reaching skyward from the Buffalo River which was to be the very lifeline of the little caravan and their many descendants to come after them.

The Buffalo carved through the mountains over eons of time and produced rich, fertile valleys. Cedar trees, big around as three men, rose

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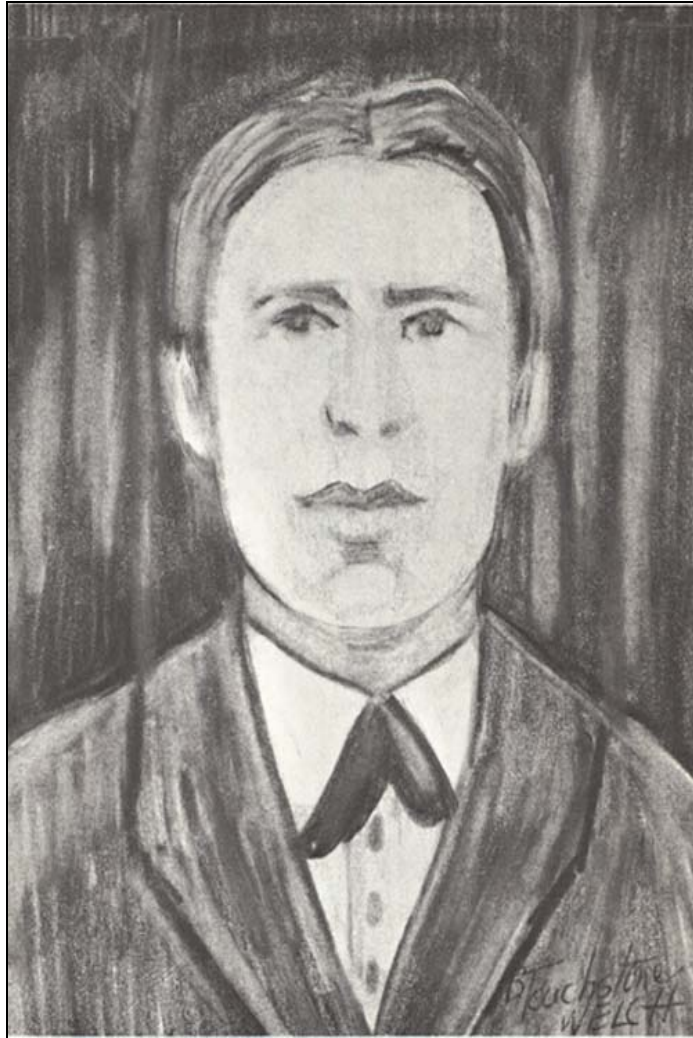
majestically from the river's banks and cane brakes. Game of every kind abounded and Abraham knew he had made a wise decision. And like the Abraham before him, he thanked his Maker for the paradise which greeted them and for the safe journey.

Hezekiah, for some time had suffered from a cough which made him ill and very weak. But he felt that with the arrival to their new home he would be better. Then, too, he remembered that "Hezekiah" was a Hebrew name meaning "God Strengthens." But, for his own reasons, God did not strengthen Hezekiah and, though in his forties, he was laid to rest. There was grieving but life went on. The Villines clan settled in, constructing sturdy log cabins and clearing plots for farming. And they multiplied!

The year 1860 was a good one for the county and following is an agricultural report showing the productivity. There were now five hundred fifty-nine households in Newton County, and a goodly percentage of them had the name Villines.

Children born to Hezekiah and Elizabeth Penn Villines:

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Artist's conception of Jefferson Villines, son of Hezekiah and Elizabeth Penn Villines, taken from an old tin type photograph (before Civil War)

NAME	BORN	MARRIED TO
Addison	11-23-1827	Lucy Reeves (first) Amanda Black (second)

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William	About 1828	Rebecca Cecil
Nancy	3-1-1829	Sam Edgmon
Jefferson	About 1832	Margaret Keeton
Joel (Joe)	About 1835	Sarah Edgmon
Robert	4-21-1837	Matilda Whitely
Francis (Frank)	About 1839	Josie Basham

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Nancy Villines Edgmon, wife of Som Edgmon and only daughter of very early settlers, Hezekiah and Elizabeth Penn Villines.

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AGRICULTURAL CENSUS INFORMATION FOR NEWTON COUNTY,
ARKANSAS

— June 1, 1860

VALUE OF FARMS \$200,000

Number of Horses 1,265

Asses and Mules 129

Milch Cows 1,079

Working Oxen 805

Other Cattle 1,725

Sheep 1,844

Swine 9,804

VALUE OF LIVESTOCK \$171,729

Bushels of Wheat 8,716

Bushels of Rye 1,401

Bushels of Indian com 193,157

Bushels of Oats 6,050

Pounds of Tobacco 17,452

Bales of ginned cotton (400#each) 6

Pounds of wool 4,958

Bushels of Irish Potatoes 3,393

Bushels of Sweet Potatoes 3,551

Pounds of Barley 50

Pounds of butter 31,853

Pounds of cheese 63

Tons of Hay 26

Pounds of Flax 240

Pounds of Flax Seed 7

Pounds of Maple Sugar 599

Gallons Sorghum Molasses 3,109

Pounds Beeswax 2,073

Pounds of Honey 27,098

Value of Manufacture, homemade \$14,843

Value of Animals slaughtered \$27,944

In 1850 there were 17, 758 farms in Arkansas In 1860 there was 30,094
farms in Arkansas

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1860 — There were eleven slaveholders in Newton County for a total of 24 slaves; Madison County had 82 slaveholders — 296 slaves; Carroll had 84 slaveholders with 330 slaves; Searcy County had 20 slaveholders with 92 slaves and Yell County had 149 slaveholders with 968 slaves

* * ❖ * ❖ * ❖ ❖

Total for Arkansas in 1860 -1,149 slaveholders with 111,115 slaves

Total for Arkansas in 1850 — there were 5,999 slaveholders

Total population NEWTON COUNTY, ARKANSAS 3,369 (free) —559 families

Only one church in Newton County in 1860

2 in Searcy County; 30 in Carroll County and 4 in Madison County.

United States Census for the Year 1840 — Carroll County, Arkansas, Van Buren Township.

The following families represent the first people to enter the upper Buffalo River area. When Newton County was carved out of Carroll County in 1842, this area then became Van Buren Township, Newton County, Arkansas.

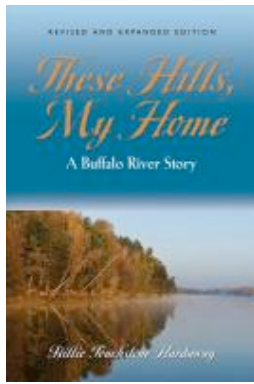
HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD

Reeves, William Reeves, John Reeves, Terrell Frazier, Rich Clark, Samuel Austin, David Clark, William Sams, B. C.

Penn, John Villines, Hezekiah

1840

Farmer, David Harp, Sampson Keith, William B. Villines, Abraham Davis, Isham Harp, Samuel Harp, Ichabod Harp, William



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