

# Cypress Lumbering In Antebellum Arkansas

by Don C. Bragg

These swamps are overgrown with mammoth trees, chiefly the cypress and cottonwood, which flourish and attain a gigantic size in the rich, alluvial soil. These huge monarchs of the swamps stand in solemn grandeur, imparting a feeling of awe as their tall branches leisurely sway to and forth in the wind. These majestic trees, in the language of Walter Scott, are the antiquities of the country, and tell of other centuries. (Graham 397-398)

## Introduction

Preacher William Graham's arduous crossing of the Mississippi River floodplain between Memphis and Little Rock in 1844 was not without its charms, as the quote above clearly shows. Prior to the Civil War, the imposing virgin forests of eastern Arkansas had both frustrated and amazed travelers, including German adventurer Frederick Gerstaecker and writer Thomas Bangs Thorpe. It is indeed remarkable that today, as motorists speed along the paved highways that embrace the Mississippi River Delta, how few trees appear on the horizon. Rather, seemingly endless fields of cotton, rice, corn, soybeans, and other crops have transformed this once dense forest into one of the premier agricultural regions of the United States, with over 80,000 farms producing more than \$8 billion worth of commodities annually (Gardner and Nolan 82).

The lands of the Delta were a mix of crops and timber when Spanish explorer Hernando de Soto and his army crossed the Mississippi River under threat of attack by the Native American inhabitants of eastern Arkansas. After the collapse of the Mississippian culture

during the following decades, the Delta landscapes returned to forest. Vegetation completely obscured the once extensive Indian croplands by the time the next set of Europeans probed the area in the late 1600s. Over a century of limited European colonialism in the lower Mississippi River gave way to American control by 1803, followed quickly by the removal of the last remaining tribes. From the 1810 census,

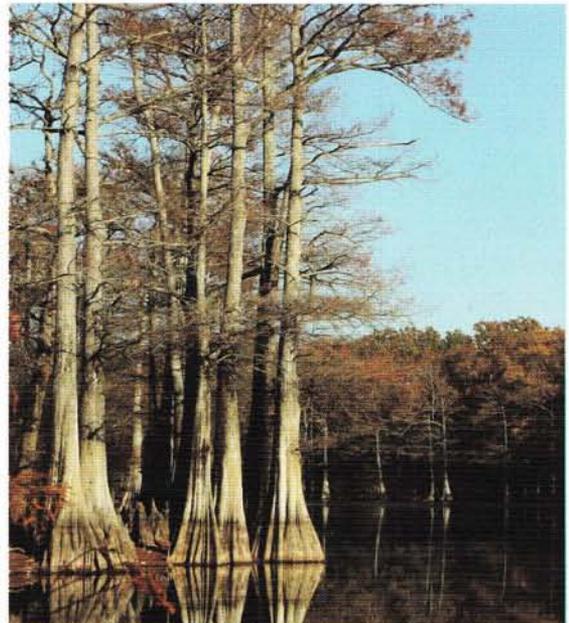


Fig. 1. Their soon-to-be cast leaves turned a bright orange in the fall sun, baldcypress (*Taxodium distichum*) encircle this lake in the White River National Wildlife Refuge in eastern Arkansas.

Photograph by Don C. Bragg.

which estimated just over 1,000 persons in Arkansas, the population of the region greatly expanded to over 435,000 by 1860. More Arkansans meant more resources were needed, and the growth of nearby urban centers at New Orleans, Memphis, and St. Louis also added to

the demands. The forests of Arkansas were exploited for that exact purpose, and some of the first large-scale commercial enterprises in the lower Mississippi River Valley were, in fact, lumber operations targeting the “wood everlasting”: baldcypress.

Baldcypress (*Taxodium distichum*) is a large, slow-growing gymnosperm that thrives in saturated soil conditions better than almost any other tree species in the southeastern United States (Mattoon 1-3). While technically not a true cypress (those are in the genus *Cupressus*, not *Taxodium*), baldcypress is in the cypress family (*Cupressaceae*) and has the distinction of being the longest-lived and most volumetric tree in eastern North America: some individual specimens of cypress can live to over 1,500 years old and have produced over 50,000 board feet of lumber, or enough to construct over a dozen small, three bedroom homes. Baldcypress has a number of unique attributes. For example, it is a deciduous conifer, meaning that it sheds all of its fine, frond-like needles at the end of every growing season (Fig. 1). Almost always found growing in standing water under natural conditions, baldcypress possesses a solid anchoring system of a prominently buttressed lower bole and strong, widely spreading roots from which knobby protrusions called “knees” extend upward (Fig. 2). This architecture means the cypress is rarely blown over by the wind, even those generated by strong hurricanes (Mattoon 38).

Prehistoric Native Americans had discov-

ered one of its other key properties: baldcypress produces some of the most decay resistant of woods, which they used to their advantage in the construction of dugout canoes. It is likely that the thousands of Indians who menaced de Soto’s crossing of the Mississippi River did so from large canoes made of seasoned baldcypress logs carved with stone tools and fire. In 1542, De Soto’s men were also probably the first Europeans to use baldcypress in Arkansas when they erected a large cross on a mound in an Indian village named Casqui, which is probably



Fig. 2. While this collection of cypress “knees” exposed by low water conditions on the White River National Wildlife Refuge is relatively short, these unique features can grow to over 6 feet tall in some old-growth forests. Photograph by Don C. Bragg.

the Parkin Site in Cross County, Arkansas (Mitchem 87). According to one of the expedition’s chroniclers, Luys Hernandez de Biedma, de Soto ordered the construction of the cross from two “pine” trees (de Biedma 27-28). Given that the de Soto expedition had only recently entered

the state from their crossing of the Mississippi River south of modern-day Memphis, they would not have encountered lands in Arkansas populated by true pine trees--the nearest would have been shortleaf pine (*Pinus echinata*) growing on Crowley’s Ridge perhaps 10 miles to the west of Casqui (Mitchem 92). Rather, given that the cross was probably erected from local trees, it seems much more likely that the conifer used for this effort was baldcypress, which would have been found along the St. Francis River flowing past Casqui (Mitchem 92).

Contrary to the speculation of some,<sup>1</sup> it is improbable that de Soto’s men constructed barges or rafts of baldcypress when they crossed the Mississippi: the freshly cut wood of living

cypress trees is actually heavier than water (Table 1), and would thus sink unless properly seasoned. Baldcypress is also not particularly common along the banks of large rivers like the Mississippi, being more prominent in backwater sloughs, oxbow lakes, and small stream channels. The natural levees along the river south of modern-day Memphis, Tennessee, from which de Soto's expedition staged their raft building efforts would have been dominated by large eastern cottonwoods (*Populus deltoides*), silver maples (*Acer saccharinum*), boxelders (*Acer negundo*), American sycamores (*Platanus occidentalis*), and black willows (*Salix nigra*), all of which float even when their wood is green and would have provided a more accessible, more easily worked, and more buoyant material from which to construct their boats.<sup>2</sup>

With its useful wood and widespread distribution (baldcypress is virtually the only conifer species occurring over 29,000,000 acres of the Mississippi River Delta), it is not surprising that the story of the cutting of baldcypress in antebellum Arkansas is a complicated one (Putnam and Bull 66-70). Cypress lumbering in this region affected many persons and had a wide geographic and economic impact. In addition to helping to develop remote and often inaccessible portions of Arkansas before the Civil War, baldcypress supported local farmers and industry, while exports of its wood supplied national and international interests, especially in the Caribbean. Unfortunately, this premium came at a heavy price, leading one of Arkansas's most impressive natural resources to near ruin.

### Baldcypress in Early America

The decay- and insect-resistance of old-growth baldcypress wood was particularly appealing in the warm, humid areas in and around the Gulf of Mexico, especially to agricultural in-

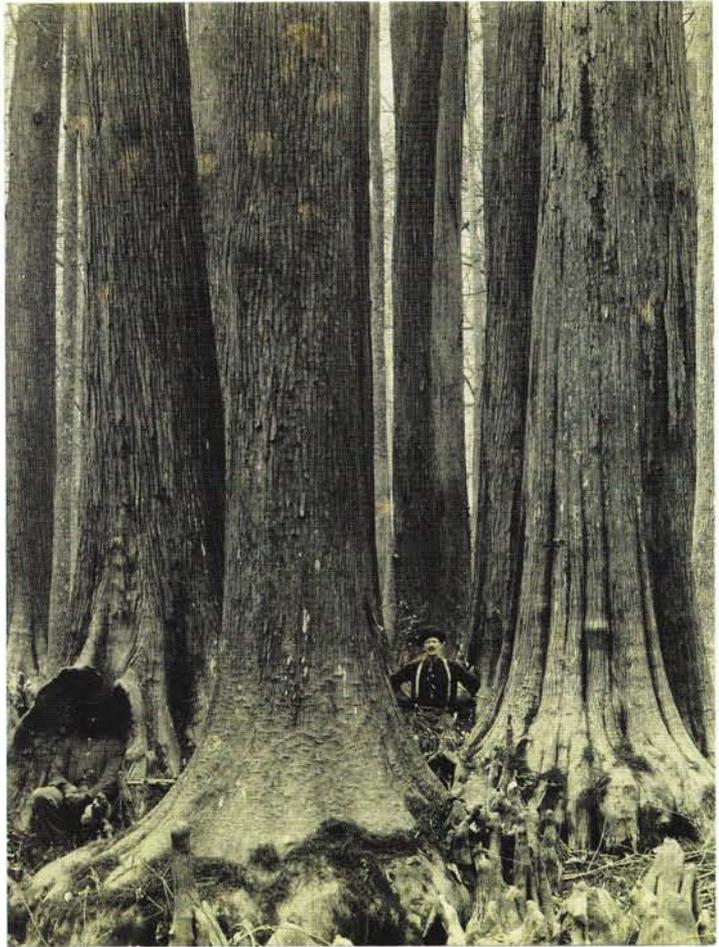


Fig. 3. An example of impressive baldcypress timber from Ashley County, Arkansas, prior to the lumbering of this virgin stand (circa 1900). Photograph courtesy of the Forest History Society, originally taken by Sidney V. Streator for the trade journal *American Lumberman*.

terests. Baldcypress has long been sawn into boards and timbers, providing an important source of cash income to early residents of the Gulf Coast and lower Mississippi River Delta. In addition to construction materials, baldcypress wood was favored for roof shingles, posts and pilings, boats of all sizes, water tanks, caskets, ballast logs, sugar crates, furniture and appliances, amongst other uses.<sup>3</sup> The French settlers along the Gulf Coast quickly recognized its durability and ease of working, even though it proved a logistical challenge to extract from the wetlands it grew in (Moore, "Cypress Lumber Industry of Lower Mississippi" 28-29). Even-

tually, the French learned how to girdle cypress during the fall when the trees had lower moisture content (29). Girdling involved the removal of a strip of bark completed around the stem by lumberjacks standing in small, flat-bottomed boats or on springboards wedged into the base of the tree. This action killed the baldcypress, which would immediately begin to lose water ("season"). According to W. R. Mattoon, girdled cypress timber seasoned for 6-12 months before felling resulted in 95% of cypress logs floating, instead of 10-20% that may have otherwise done so (Mattoon 12). Eventually, the seasoned trees were felled and delimbed and then left until spring floodwaters could be used to float them to downstream sawmills.

By the 1720s, the logistics of the commercial lumbering of baldcypress were worked out and a lucrative trade between the Gulf region and the West Indies developed. As Moore has shown, New Orleans and other parts of the French Gulf colonies enjoyed a number of decades of economic growth from this industry ("Cypress Lumber Industry of the Lower Mississippi" 30-37). Spanish jurisdiction over the region following the French and Indian War in the mid-1700s witnessed the continuation of the cypress lumber industry, although by this time many of the more readily accessible cypress groves near the major mill centers had been depleted (37-45). By the time Americans controlled the Mississippi River in 1803, cypress lumbering had declined sharply (46).

The industry was to reemerge over the next century as lumber operations emerged to supply the growing American markets. However,



Fig. 4. Strands of Spanish moss (*Tillandsia usneoides*) draped over baldcypress along the banks of Lake Enterprise in Ashley County, Arkansas.

Readily accessible resources such as the baldcypress growing in these lakes helped to settle much of the Mississippi River Delta in Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi. Photograph by Don C. Bragg.

decades of colonialism and new-found American demand had taken their toll on the cypress groves along the Gulf Coast and lower Mississippi River. For example, an early account reported that

[s]uch being the character of the primitive forests of Louisiana and Mississippi, with respect to the quantity of cypress timber, it must be obvious that much of this wood has already been exhausted; and as it is of very slow growth, the day cannot be very distant when it will altogether fail to furnish a sufficient supply for the markets of the above named states. (Dickeson and Brown 15)

This is a remarkable statement given that one of its authors, Andrew Brown, was a prominent cypress sawmill owner, and had directly contributed to its decline. Lumbermen were increasingly driven to more remote sources of cypress and over much of the next century, commercial lumbering of baldcypress spread to other parts of the Mississippi River Valley and Florida (Horn 117-123).

Table 1.

Weight and floatability of a fixed volume of green and dried wood from common Arkansas tree species. Under most conditions, one cubic foot of water weighs about 62 pounds; anything denser than that will sink.<sup>a</sup> Green density is for a freshly cut tree (varying moisture content, but probably about 100%, or half the weight of the piece of wood), while dry density is at about 12% moisture content.

Tree species	Green density		Dry density	
	(pounds/ft <sup>3</sup> )	Float?	(pounds/ft <sup>3</sup> )	Float?
Baldcypress ( <i>Taxodium distichum</i> )	63	no	32	yes
Loblolly pine ( <i>Pinus taeda</i> )	60	yes	33	yes
Shortleaf pine ( <i>Pinus echinata</i> )	58	yes	33	yes
Eastern redcedar ( <i>Juniperus virginiana</i> )	42	yes	29	yes
Eastern cottonwood ( <i>Populus deltoides</i> )	58	yes	28	yes
Black willow ( <i>Salix nigra</i> )	61	yes	27	yes
Silver maple ( <i>Acer saccharinum</i> )	52	yes	31	yes
Boxelder ( <i>Acer negundo</i> )	55	yes	29	yes
American sycamore ( <i>Platanus occidentalis</i> )	58	yes	32	yes
White oak ( <i>Quercus alba</i> )	72	no	45	yes
Sweet pecan ( <i>Carya illinoensis</i> )	72	no	43	yes
Shagbark hickory ( <i>Carya ovata</i> )	74	no	43	yes

Source: Miles, Patrick D. and W. Brad Smith; *Specific Gravity and Other Properties of Wood and Bark for 156 Tree Species Found in North America*; USDA Forest Service Research Note NRS-38; 13-16; 2009; Print.

<sup>a</sup>One cubic foot of pure water at 39.2° F is maximally dense, weighing 62.4 pounds. Warmer or cooler water is slightly less dense, and under most temperate environmental conditions water weighs about 62 pounds per cubic foot.

## Cypress Lumbering in Antebellum Arkansas

Little baldcypress was used in Arkansas prior to the 1803 Louisiana Purchase--the region was just too remote and thinly populated. Throughout much of the antebellum period, local use of cypress was limited largely to the construction of structures; a number of these can still be found in the state, preserved by the durability of the wood of the baldcypress. The Plum Bayou Log House at the Historic Arkansas Museum in downtown Little Rock and the Wiggins Cabin in Crossett (prior to an unfortunate electrical fire in 2002) are examples of homes constructed of baldcypress that survived since the 1830s. According to Caleb Langtree, then chairman of the state's Agricultural Bureau, Arkansas land was more valued when it included a cypress "brake" (a forested pond or slough, usually formed from a cut-off river meander) because of the value of its timber for construction of homes and implements (Langtree 70).

By the 1820s, commercial cypress lumbering was occurring in Arkansas, primarily along the major rivers in the eastern and southern portions of the state (Fig. 3). For example, General Land Office (GLO) Deputy Surveyor Nicholas Rightor reported a "Mr. Henness" cutting a raft of cypress logs in 1827 at the confluence of the Saline and Ouachita Rivers (in Ashley County) to float to mills in Louisiana (Bragg 180). The spread of cypress lumbering in Arkansas reflected its decline near the major milling centers of New Orleans and Natchez, Mississippi. Yet the rapid growth of New Orleans and other southern cities greatly increased the demand for cypress lumber, enough so that pioneering lumbermen such as Brown expanded their sawmill capacity repeatedly (Moore, "Simon Gray, Riverman" 473; Eisterhold 88-89). Floating cypress to distant mills rather than sawing these trees into boards on-site was long-held practice by that time, and was considered quite lucrative (Dibbell et al. 403; Langtree 70).

Individual cypress trees, once felled and delimbed, were known as a "tier" and were often cut into 10-foot lengths of logs held together ("spliced") by poles and strong pins into a "crib," and a number of cribs secured together became a raft ("Forest Life and Forest Trees" 602). On the wide Mississippi, these rafts may have been assembled from many hundreds of cypress logs, although on the smaller Arkansas rivers 50 to 500 logs were more likely ("Forest Life and Forest Trees" 602; Moore, *Andrew Brown and Cypress Lumbering* 74).

A number of early observers decried the wasteful practices of cypress lumbermen. According to Henry Bry, a long-time resident of the Monroe, Louisiana area, along the overflow of the Ouachita River in northern Louisiana and southern Arkansas,

[there was] an immense forest of cypress, that most valuable timber of the South; they have been unsparingly cut down and rafted down to New Orleans for a market. Thousands of trees are found there, which have been cut for years, and left, when the river did not rise enough to float them out of the overflow; or because they are of that kind of cypress which sinks, commonly called black cypress; its specific gravity being greater than that of water. Their waste is the more to be regretted, as cypress trees are not spontaneously reproduced in the swamps as other trees are in the forest. (Bry 229)

Contrary to what Bry may have thought, this cypress was not necessarily abandoned; sometimes years passed between flood events capable of floating these massive logs out of the shallow swamps and bayous. There was a period of drought in the mid-1840s, for example, that sharply reduced the number of cypress logs that could be rafted to New Orleans. High flood waters along the Arkansas River in 1847 helped end this timber "famine" (Moore, "Cypress Lumber Industry of the Lower Mississippi" 57).

Politics, race, and economics were ever-present in the antebellum cypress lumbering. Syl-

vanus Phillips, who settled along the Arkansas side of the Mississippi River in the late 1790s, wrote a letter in 1822 to Samuel C. Roane complaining:

[why do] so many Yankees come so many hundred miles to cut the cypress in this country and raft it off to the low country . . . in large quantities cutting down whole cypress swamps that is worth from 25 to 100 dollars per acre . . . verry [sic] large quantities cut and to my knowledge thousands of logs of the prime of the [cypress] timber lies now rotting [sic] in the swamp, Cut by foreigners who would get first into a swamp and to secure themselves the whole and keep others out would cut down large quantities of trees with out even cutting [sic] the top or doing any thing more they have then sometimes taken large rafts sometimes small ones and sometimes none atall [sic] leaving allways [sic] large quantities to rot. . . . (Carter 456-457)

Phillips's comments on "Yankees" coming to the area to cut the cypress may give a misleading impression on the diversity of those involved. Many of the lumberjacks and river rafters who toiled in these swamps were actually slaves hired from local plantations (Moore, "Simon Gray, Riverman" 472; Eisterhold 81-83). Some of these slaves were accorded a degree of freedom that was almost unprecedented. One such individual, Simon Gray, was permitted by his sawmill-operating owner to captain rafts and flatboats of sawn cypress lumber from Natchez, Mississippi to New Orleans and beyond without a white overseer (Moore, "Simon Gray,

Riverman" 472-484). Indeed, Gray was in charge of up to a dozen men on some trips, some of which were white employees of the lumber company (474-475). Gray had also accumulated enough personal wealth to afford almost \$1000 of unsupervised treatments at Hot Springs, Arkansas during 1858 and 1859 for the ailments (such as malaria and rheumatism) so common to the lumbermen and river rafters of this era (481-482). Though not every slave that worked in cypress lumbering would have been accommodated as well as Gray and some of his comrades, the nature of the business meant that their oversight was far less strict than on plantations (482-483).

It is hard to know if Phillips's claims of financial loss are realistic: it would depend on the yield of the stand being cut and the ever-fluctuating price of timber. His grievance is not for the removal of the timber but rather the loss of land sale revenue and the depreciation of property values, as most of this timber was stolen from the public domain. Land ownership and



Fig. 5. The spread of the railroad across the state of Arkansas after the Civil War led to even more rapid lumbering of cypress. This image of "fine" cypress logs from southern Arkansas was taken in the early 1900s by Sidney V. Streator for *American Lumberman* and is courtesy of the Forest History Society.

how it influenced economic and political development was thoroughly intertwined with Arkansas society throughout the antebellum period, and held particular sway over the operations of the cypress lumber industry.

### Cypress Lumbering and Antebellum Land Policy

As previously mentioned, Phillips's letter to Roane was significant because of the legal and political implications of cypress lumbering in Arkansas during this period. Antebellum land policy was a hodge-podge of colonial and federal rules and regulations, and often ignored by the settlers most affected by them. Over the centuries, Spanish, French, and British governments had made generous land grants to encourage settlement of their colonies, and these policies reached even the remote landscapes of Arkansas. Most famously, the Baron de Bastrop claimed over 880,000 acres granted from Spain for lands in northeastern Louisiana and southeastern Arkansas (Gates 185). Because overland transportation of goods was almost non-existent during the colonial period, many of these land grants were made along the major waterways of the region. Additionally, the fertile lands along the rivers and streams further attracted settlers, most of whom intended to farm their lands. These floodplains typically had an abundance of baldcypress (Fig. 4), so those that controlled them had ready access to this source of building materials and supplemental revenue.<sup>4</sup>

The Louisiana Purchase introduced the American approach to land division and distribution and led to a lengthy process of claim settlement from those asserting preexisting rights (Gates 184-187). For instance, land title claims associated with the Bastrop grant were not completely adjudicated until the 1850s (Gates 197). Outside of this process, there were almost no legal means for citizens to acquire title to their Arkansas property prior to the establishment of federal control over the land, a multi-step process unto itself. First, the federal government

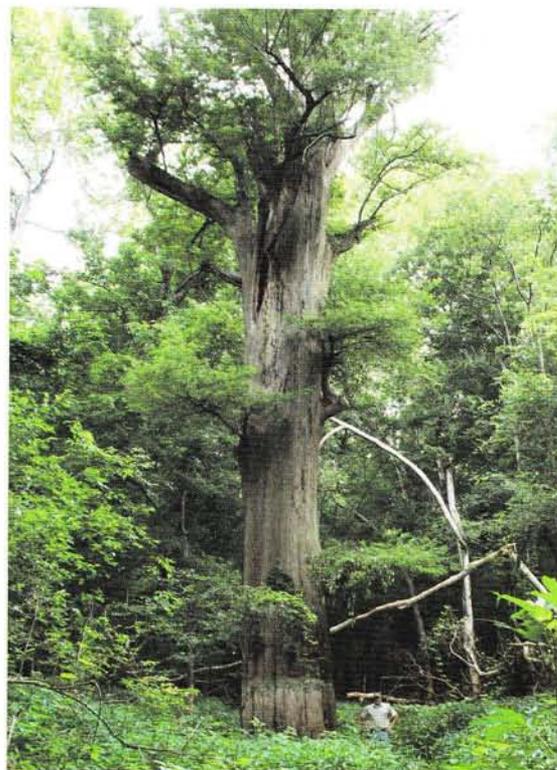


Fig. 6. One of the ancient baldcypress that survived the lumbering of the past because of its hollow trunk. This impressive specimen grows on private property near Des Arc, Arkansas.

Photograph by Don C. Bragg.

worked to formally extinguish Native American land claims via treaties, some of which were not finalized in Arkansas Territory until the mid-1830s. Second, the GLO needed to complete the boundary line surveys and establish the basis for legal designations of individual parcels of land. Third, the interested landowner would then have to file a claim or “patent” the property with the local land office, which would ascertain the clarity of title, the validity of the claim, and any payment needed to secure the property.

This formal process, of course, did not keep settlers from moving into the region, albeit at a slower pace than the promise of clear title would later bring. Because many of the first Americans settled Arkansas territory prior to the completion of one or both steps, technically they were squatters, and it would take later leg-

islation (most notably, the Preemption Act of 1841) to give them a means to acquire legitimate title to the lands they had occupied and improved.<sup>5</sup> Preemption was also, however, used by unscrupulous lumbermen who, if caught in the act of cutting U.S. government-owned timber from the public domain, could file a claim under the Preemption Act and thus escape prosecution (Moore, "Cypress Lumber Industry of the Old Southwest" 219).

An important aspect of federal land policy for most of the nineteenth century was the prohibition of timber harvesting on the public domain. The U.S. government (to varying degrees of effectiveness) sought to limit the removal of trees from unclaimed lands, even going so far as to have the Army enforce government control of important shipbuilding wood from live oaks and cedar along the public domain of the Gulf Coast (Moore, "Cypress Lumber Industry of the Old Southwest" 212-213). After several boondoggles, the U.S. government turned to legal action against some timber thieves. Josiah Meigs, then the commissioner of the GLO, was directed to refer such cases to federal prosecutors. At this time, the U.S. District Attorney for the Arkansas Territory was Samuel C. Roane, the person whom Sylvanus Phillips had written to in 1822 about the theft of timber along the Mississippi and Arkansas Rivers. Roane noted in his official correspondence that hundreds of people in his jurisdiction were involved in timber theft and try as he might, his pursuit of civil litigation against the offenders rarely succeeded, with many cases dismissed by sympathetic local juries and judges (Moore, "Cypress Lumber Industry of the Old Southwest" 214). Meigs's successor as GLO commissioner, John McLean, quickly abandoned litigation as an inefficient use of scarce government resources, and directed Roane to resolve his ongoing efforts promptly and not initiate any new prosecutions (215). This may explain why a docket of 84 cases of "trespass on public land" for the U.S. Superior Court of the District of Arkansas, each listed with debts of \$50,000,

were dismissed en masse by Roane on August 27, 1823 (Carter 539-542).

With this change in strategy, the federal government was running out of options for dealing with the theft of timber of the public domain. For most of those involved, the best solution involved the sale of the lands (or just the timber) via legal means. However, even though the GLO had begun surveying parts of Arkansas as early as 1815, progress was frustratingly slow and little land was made available during the first years. Even those conducting the survey pushed for an acceleration of the process: in 1824 Deputy Surveyor Thomas Mathers suggested the expedited survey and sale of lands along the banks of the major rivers to settlers, as local opinion held "that it is ungenerous in the Government to sue them for cutting the timber before an opportunity [sic] is offered them of purchasing [sic] the Land" (Carter 711). This policy had been suggested a couple years earlier, when Josiah Meigs had instructed William Recor, Surveyor General of the GLO's office in St. Louis, Missouri, to survey riverfront lands in Arkansas likely to sell on account of their timber resources:

[because] depredations are frequently committed on the Public Lands by cutting timber for sale to the Steam Boats, and for other purposes, it is intended to dispose of the timbered lands on the margin of the River at an early day. (Carter 412)

According to Meigs, it was the intention of the federal government to "secure the value of the lands by depriving trespassers of the great convenience of cutting the timber convenient to water transportation" (Carter 412). Timber trespass on the public domain was still a problem in 1828 when Hartwell Boswell and John Redmon of the Batesville, Arkansas, land office petitioned for a quick survey along the Mississippi River because "all the Valuable Timber is daily destroying & in a few years will be totally consumed for the use of Steam Boats and timber for New Orleans . . ." (Carter 702). Boswell and Redmon knew that once surveyed, these

lands would be quickly acquired by those with legitimate claims, and the government would get much needed revenues. Even after these admonitions, the pace of the GLO survey was still slow, with only half of Arkansas completed by 1837 (Stewart 73).

By the 1840s, the federal government had largely ceased enforcement of timber theft laws on the public domain and adopted a series of legislative fixes to the land disposition problems of the western territories (Moore, "Cypress Lumber Industry of the Old Southwest" 217-219). The Preemption Act of 1841 allowed squatters to acquire (at the minimum price) up to 160 acres of property they had improved once it was surveyed. This was a step towards legitimizing the land claims of many Arkansans, and was followed by the Swamp Land Act of 1850, which transferred millions of acres of flood-prone lands to the states. In the case of the Swamp Land Act, the federal transfer of lands to state governments thus shifted the protection and sale of these properties. Revenues generated when lands were sold by designated states raised funding needed to build levees and drain swamps, making the properties more valuable for development. Under this legislation, Arkansas patented about 8.6 million acres of public domain and quickly put much of this property up for sale for less than a dollar per acre (Harrison and Kollmorgen 415). Large tracts of baldcypress swamps in eastern and southern Arkansas thus became legitimately available for purchase by lumber companies. However, even this fix did not completely halt timber theft, nor did it generate large revenues for state coffers or levee boards (Harrison and Kollmorgen 418).

### Epilogue

By 1850, the public land surveys of Arkansas had been largely completed (Stewart 73), so those wanting to acquire cypress timberlands could do so legally. As the antebellum period in Arkansas drew to a close, men still braved the malarial swamps searching for the wood eternal. The onset of the Civil War did

not stop the lumbering of baldcypress in Arkansas or other parts of the South, but it was greatly curtailed (Moore, *Andrew Brown and Cypress Lumbering* 149-164). After the war, widespread commercial cypress lumbering resumed, with rafts of timber still floated to mills in New Orleans until the turn of the twentieth century (Curry 18-21). However, the expansion of railroads across the state almost completely replaced river log drives during the latter half of the 1800s (Fig. 5). Post-war railroads and steam-powered sawmills brought a level of mechanization never before experienced, and with the decline of the northern pineries, unprecedented cutting of Arkansas forests led to record timber removals well into the 1900s. Nationwide, the annual cypress harvest peaked in 1913 at over one billion board feet (Sternitzke 130).

Although now largely forgotten, cypress lumbering played a key role in the development of antebellum Arkansas. The pursuit of this valuable commodity brought adventurers, land speculators, slaves, lumberjacks, and river rafters to remote portions of the region. Cypress wood helped build the implements and infrastructure of the state, some of which still survive. The wealth generated from cypress lumbering (whether legal or not) supplemented the incomes of many farmers and plantation owners, and contributed to the growth of most Delta towns. One promoter of northern Arkansas was even so bold as to claim "a never failing supply" of cypress in that part of the state ("Northern Arkansas" 302), a statement commonplace during the nineteenth century, but now known to be far from the truth. Even to this day, the near complete removal of baldcypress still continues to shape the nature of many Arkansas landscapes.

The key difference between historical lumbering and the forestry of today is that in the distant past, no regard was given towards ensuring the future forest. Typically, lumbering was the first step in the clearing, drainage, and cropping of the land, so concern about the cy-

press resource seemed unwarranted. Not surprisingly, few ancient baldcypress remain in eastern and southern Arkansas. Yet, one can still travel the tranquil waters of Bayou Bartholomew, the White River, the Saline or Ouachita rivers, and many other Arkansas streams and find giant specimens of cypress (Fig. 6). Almost without exception, these grand trees are hollow shells, spared the lumberman's efforts simply because they were not worth the work to fell. Only a few magnificent stands of untouched old-growth cypress can still be found in the Natural State, preserved by a twist of fate or some act of generosity or far-sighted environmental concern. However, many sloughs and brakes, swamps and channels have dense groves of young cypress poised (hopefully) to renew the grandeur of this species. ▲▼▲

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup>See Dye.

<sup>2</sup>See Mattoon; Putnam and Bull; Tanner; and Hodges.

<sup>3</sup>See Putnam and Bull; Norgress; Moore, "Cypress Lumber Industry of the Lower Mississippi"; and Conner and Toliver.

<sup>4</sup>See Moore, "Cypress Lumber Industry of the Lower Mississippi" and "Cypress Lumber Industry of the Old Southwest."

<sup>5</sup>See Johnson; Moore, "Cypress Lumber Industry of the Old Southwest"; and Bolton.

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