

DRAFT as of
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Economic Depression & Illness Force a Move

August 1932 had been a hot and dry month all over the State of Arkansas. Even with all the windows down in Nelson Thearl’s fast and spacious 1929 Buick sedan, Pat Neal was sweaty and thirsty in its back seat; the wind rushing in on him from both sides made it bearable. In the front passenger seat with Nelson was Pat’s long-time friend, Will Griffin.¹

Pat Neal had been lost in thought since he and his friends left the little village of New Liberty, Arkansas, in the extreme northeast corner of Arkansas, three hundred miles from Pat’s home in Crossroads. Usually Nelson’s car was intended for “business purposes” only—you see he was a ‘bootlegger’ who transported illegal liquor during the time of Prohibition.²

This long trip was an important one to Pat; it was to a place he’d never been. The party was

scouting out a place for Pat and his family to start a new life—and a chance for Pat’s wife, Annie, to perhaps get well and stay that way. Pat felt sure Annie wouldn’t survive a third bout of typhoid fever.

Pat wondered how Annie and the family were doing back at Crossroads. Annie had been feeling better in recent weeks but it was decided that Nelson’s wife, “Cousin Alice” as she was called, intended to stay with Annie and the kids all the time the men were gone. Annie and Alice Thearl were very good friends.

The country was in a deep depression, and Pat knew he wasn’t the only one looking to better his chances among all the bad situations he and his countrymen were enduring. Pat looked at his problems, not with despair, but with renewed hope; at New Liberty, Pat quickly saw that all the land there, so near from the Mississippi, was

perfect for growing cotton. It was the best he had ever seen; the land, once cleared, would be so much easier to work, than the land back at his home in the Red River Valley.

Pat was excited to report back to Annie that arrangements had been made with a Mississippi



A 1929 Buick sedan similar to the one in which Pat Neal road with his friends, Nelson Thearl and Will Griffin.

1 In her 1999 recollections of southwest Arkansas, Pat Neal’s oldest daughter, Ina, tells of this trip being made by the three friends in preparation for her family leaving southwest Arkansas for good.

2 Prohibition in the United States was a nationwide constitutional ban on the sale, production, importation, and transportation of alcoholic beverages that remained in place from 1920 to 1933. To ‘bootleg’ To make, sell, or transport (alcoholic liquor) for sale illegally.



At left, Alice Thearl and her son, Harold, in the 1940s. Alice's husband, Nelson, died in 1936 and was buried at Bright Star Cemetery near the school that the Neal girls first attended at Crossroads. The older Neal girls remember "Cousin Alice" very fondly as being a great friend and aide to their mother.

County land tenant, a Mr. Hunter Crook, who had a farm near New Liberty. A house on the Crook farm would be ready for the Neals to move in once Pat's own cotton crop was picked. The cotton farmer had agreed to hold his cotton crop for Pat and his family to pick and earn money that would allow them to get by during the winter of 1932-33.

Pat saw an immediate opportunity for his family to sharecrop³ temporarily to get through the next year and then have a great chance for a land tenancy. Land ownership wasn't so much on his mind—but land tenancy was. It would be a decent way for his family to get by and the best chance a cotton farmer had if he didn't own land of his own.

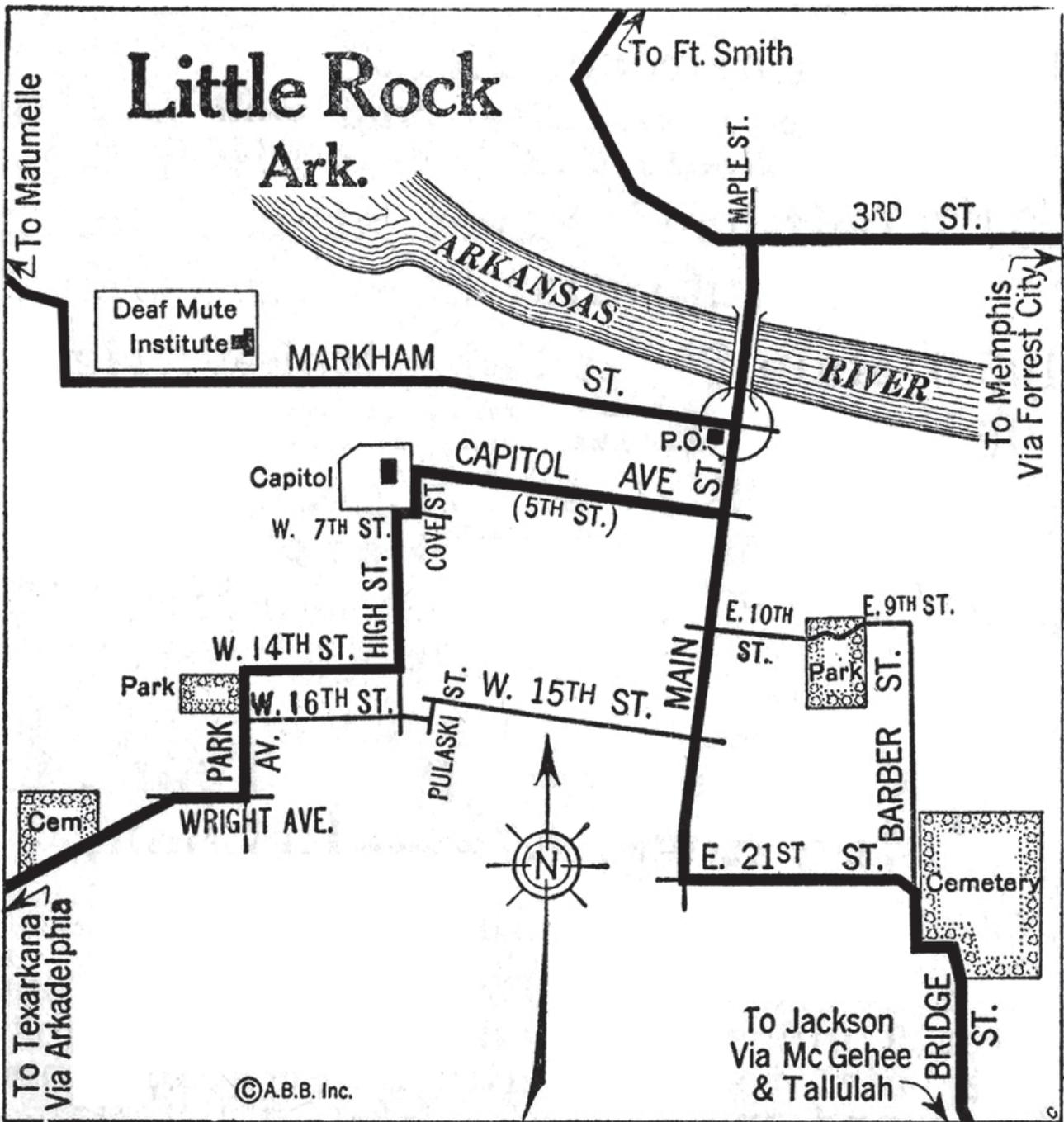
Although Pat's friends were talking non-stop in the front seat of Nelson's car, Pat was not trying to be part of the conversation. Pat couldn't hear them for the wind, and that was just as well. He had so much on his mind.

During the summer, the Griffin Brothers, Will and John, had convinced Pat to withhold one half of the proceeds from Pat's upcoming fall cotton crop from the Washington State Bank where Pat had mortgaged the farm for over \$500 to pay for Annie's medical bills. Pat and the Griffins were realized that even the Bank's situation was as bad as Pat's. Banks were failing all over the country, and if Washington State Bank went bankrupt, Pat would lose his farm to the creditors of the bank anyway.

Land values had plummeted all over the country since the stock market crash of 1929;⁴ Pat's

³ The terms sharecropper, land tenant and land owner had specific meanings all the Mississippi in northeast Arkansas and southeast Missouri. The role of the sharecropper was to provide labor and was paid whenever it was provided. A sharecropper family would be assigned a shack or small house in which to live between picking or chopping seasons. A land tenant in essence rented the use of the land from the land owner. The owner would provide a house and a barn on the farm for the land tenant to use. The land tenant was responsible for planting, raising, tending and picking a crop using his own mules and farm implements. The cotton crop profit (after sharecropper and day laborer costs were deducted) was then split between the land tenant and land owner.

⁴ The start of the Great Depression is often thought of as October 29, 1929, "Black Tuesday" when the U.S. Stock Market crashed. Herbert Hoover was the U.S. President. What would number in the thousands, bank failures across the country began in September 1930 and increased throughout 1931. Economic conditions worsened throughout 1932 leading to the defeat of the Republican Hoover by a Democrat, Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR), as President on November 8, 1932. FDR was inaugurated as President on March 4, 1933, and immediately he declared a "Bank Holiday" from March 6-10 whereby all banks closed



Above, a 1930s map of Little Rock. In 1932, Pat Neal and his companions drove in from the southwest corner of this map on U.S. Highway 67 & 70. They drove past the State Capitol, then went east on Capitol Ave. to Main Street before turning north and crossing the Arkansas River on the Main Street Bridge.



Above: Little Rock's Main Street Bridge crossed the Arkansas River; it was Little Rock's only way to drive over the river during the 1930s. The bridge was built in 1926 and remained until 1974 when it was replaced by a new one.

County to Benton where it joined U.S. Highway 70 and then continued on to Little Rock. Then the highway would pass right by the State Capitol before it crossed the Arkansas River.

North of the river, U.S. Highway 67 and 70 split with U.S. Highway 70 heading directly east toward Memphis. That was the road that Nelson would have used. But before getting to the Mississippi River at Memphis, Nelson would turn his car north on old U.S. Highway 61 toward St. Louis. New Liberty was right on that highway just south of Blytheville and the Missouri-Arkansas line.⁵

The sun had already set as Nelson rolled into North Little Rock from the northeast heading for the Main Street Bridge that crossed the Arkansas River into North Little Rock. It was starting to turn dark. Nelson declared that they were about half way home.

High up on the north side of the river, one could look across it and see the Arkansas State Capitol building. On the trip up, Pat took note of this imposing building that he had heard so much about but never seen. Finally finished in 1915, the building was in all the newspapers that Pat read back when it was finished, and his brothers had seen it as they went to Little Rock for deployment with the armed service during the Great World War.

Two days before, it had been daylight when the three passed the building; but this second time held a big surprise for Pat. By this time in the evening, the dome of the Capitol was awash in floodlights giving the structure an even grander appearance. Pat was still staring out the window in awe and didn't notice that Nelson had pulled into a little tourist cabin place close to the river. He knew they were going straight through to Crossroads, and wondered what Nelson was up to—why they were stopping?

"Pat, get out—I want you to meet someone," Nelson hollared.

Pat followed Nelson into the little office of the establishment. The lady inside glanced at them and quickly disappeared out the back only to be replaced by a man, the obvious owner of the tourist

farm was now worth less than he owed on it, and even if it were worth more, no one had money to buy it at any price. Every time he thought about it, Pat's heart hurt in a way he couldn't avoid—he was about to walk away from the farm that had been so good to Pat and Annie.

Passing Through Little Rock

On the way up to and now on the way back from New Liberty, Pat was amazed by the smooth paved roads of the national highway system. It had been started in 1926 and the three would stay on it all the way. U.S. Highway 67 went all the way from Hempstead

and only those found solvent would be allowed to reopen.

⁵ Pieces of the three highways, U.S. 67, U.S. 70 and U.S. 61, still exist today. However, all three highways were replaced as thoroughfares in the 1960s by the Interstate Highway System.



Above, the Arkansas State Capitol completed in 1915 looking west toward the setting sun.



Established in 1926, U.S. Highway 67 runs from Presidio TX on the Mexico border near El Paso to a northern terminus in east central Iowa at Sabula. In Arkansas, U.S. 67 passed through Texarkana, Hope, Arkadelphia. At Little Rock, the highway heads north toward Poplar Bluff MO. A section of highway at Newport AR was dubbed the "Rock & Roll Highway" in 2009.

cabin business. The man started to speak but Nelson quickly but courteously cut him off.

"I want you to meet my good friend, Pat Neal, from down where I'm from. He's one of those farmers I've been telling you about who is getting the short end of the stick on all this economic business. Going to have to give up his place and relocate clear at the other end of the state."

Pat shook hands with the man and the two of them exchanged their "how-do-you-dos." Then the owner and Nelson sidled off and spoke with each other in hushed tones. After a couple of minutes they were done and the man approached Pat with a big smile.

"Hear you and your family will be coming through here in October on your way up to the northeast. This will be a real good place for your family and your truck driver to spend the night. Just come in here, and I'll have two cabins ready for you and your driver—no charge."

The owner slapped Pat on the back before returning to Nelson.

Pat eyes widened and his jaw dropped. He did his best to muster up a thank you. Immediately, Pat knew his good luck. In the evening of their trip, Annie and the girls could stand exactly where he was, and look over at that floodlit Capitol dome, so majestic and grand. That would really provide everyone a treat for an otherwise difficult and stressful trip.

When Nelson had finished his business with the owner, the three went to load up the car to continue their trip. They were planning to drive into the night and arrive at Crossroads in the early morning hours.

Will said, "Pat, you're so taken by that Capitol, you sit up



Originally commissioned in 1926, U.S. Highway 70 ran from Beaufort, North Carolina, on the east to Holbrook, Arizona, on the west. In Arkansas, the road ran from DeQueen AR in the west side, through Hot Springs and then Little Rock. East of Little Rock, the highway went through Forrest City and then on to West Memphis and Memphis Tennessee.

front where you can see better; I think I'll stretch out in the back and sleep a bit." Pat was quite appreciative of that idea.

As the party pulled out of the tourist camp, Nelson explained to Pat that the camp owner was a customer for his bootleg whiskey. Part of his private discussion with Nelson had to do with details about the next delivery Nelson would be bringing the man. The bootlegging business was changing. The nation's attitudes toward alcohol were changing greatly, and there was lots of speculation about not "if" but "when" Prohibition would be ended.⁶

The Thearl car was back on U.S. 67 & 70 traveling west; it had traveled just a few blocks when Pat noticed a sign that pointed left to go to Texarkana. That would be where they wanted to go. Thearl made the turn and headed toward Little Rock's Main Street Bridge. If a person missed that turn he would be headed toward Fort Smith with no chance to cross the Arkansas River except to turn around and come back to the bridge.

Once across the bridge, the highway veered right on Capitol Avenue. At the Capitol building, the highway skirted around the edge of the capitol grounds before heading out to the southwest toward home.

Pat was glued next to the car window on the Capitol side trying to take in all the information he could gather. He was making mental notes because he wanted to be a tour guide to Annie and the girls on their upcoming trip to New Liberty; he had hopes they would marvel at it like he was doing.

"I need to ask Ina and Lois to get those state history books back from school," Pat thought. Pat had read the books when they had them home before but he wanted to re-read them especially about the State Capitol Building.

As they passed the building and headed away from it, Pat looked over his right shoulder for as long as the floodlit building was still in sight. Then he settled in for what he thought would be a long ride. Pat didn't know how fast Nelson was going, but it was the fastest he'd ever traveled. It didn't seem like anytime before the passed the Hempstead County line.

The Neal Evacuation

During the Great Depression, people having to vacate an area were said to "evacuate" it. People would have "evacuation sales" to part with goods they couldn't take with them. To get prepared for their evacuation to northeast Arkansas, Pat and Annie had to work harder than ever. They had to get their cotton crop in and settle all their affairs in southwest Arkansas.

⁶ On March 22, 1933, President Franklin Roosevelt signed into law the Cullen-Harrison Act, legalizing beer with an alcohol content of 3.2% (by weight) and wine of a similarly low alcohol content. On December 5, 1933, ratification of the Twenty-first Amendment repealed the Eighteenth Amendment. However, United States federal law still prohibits the manufacture of distilled spirits without meeting numerous licensing requirements that make it impractical to produce spirits for personal beverage use.



The Blues Highway When originally completed, U.S. Highway 61 ran from the U.S.-Canadian border north of Duluth Minnesota to New Orleans, Louisiana. Because the highway runs through both New Orleans and Memphis, it has been dubbed "The Blues Highway." From the south, the highway enters Arkansas from West Memphis and then up through Blytheville before entering the Missouri Bootheel. New Liberty, AR was on the highway just south of Blytheville.



During the Great Depression, people having to leave their homes were "evacuating" and they had evacuation sales like this sign advertises.

The furniture, clothing and supplies that they wanted to take were decided on and put in order. They were hoping to start the move before mid-October to get up to New Liberty and pick Mr. Crook's cotton.

Thirteen-year-old Ina and eleven-year-old Lois worked like they never had before. With a little bit of coaxing and mind games, one could get eight-year-old Margaret to do more work than she caused. Little Wesley, almost six, took to work naturally, and did all he could.

Once the cotton crop was almost in, Pat set to renting a truck and driver to move all their stuff. When the truck was hired, Pat and Annie saw an immediate problem—they could not take all the nice things they had collected over their years at the Crossroads farm. Even if there were room on the truck, they realized that the sharecropper shack they were headed for wouldn't hold much. So, lots of things had to be left at Crossroads with friends and relatives.⁷

Trip to New Liberty

On that early October morning, the Neal family all loaded in the truck with their things for the trip to New Liberty. As the truck stopped at the end of the Neal's drive, Pat and Annie look edback one last time at the home they were leaving. Then the truck pulled out to begin a two-day, three-hundred mile trip to New Liberty, Arkansas. Pat and Annie, reminisced about their 1919 moving trip from Ouachita County to Crossroads. This moving truck was a sight more comfortable than the mule drawn wagons they used for their first, and this new highway system on roads was unbelievably superior to the old county roads.

The excitement of the adventure ahead kept the three older Neal children from noticing the jousting they were taking back in the bed of the moving truck. Although they were securely placed in the truck, they had no way of communicating with the truck driver, their parents and little Wesley all seated in the cab up front. If they needed anything, they'd just have to wait until the truck stopped along the way.

The Neal moving party arrived on the outskirts of Little Rock in the late afternoon. At the Capitol grounds, Pat asked the truck driver to stop at the curb. Pat got out and went back to the girls to

⁷ According to Ina (Neal) Bryeans' recollections, a beautiful marble-top dresser had to be left. It went to the widow of George Rosenbaum for whom Pat had once worked. Among the many other items Ina remembered being left were a coffee grinder and a wash pot. The truck was loaded with a table and chairs, the sewing machine, bedding and household items.

make sure they were able to see the Capitol. Climbing back in the front seat, Pat then asked the truck driver to make a circle on the streets all around the Capitol before veering off to Main Street and the Main Street Bridge they would cross to reach the tourist camp.

The tourist camp owner remembered Pat right off, and it didn't take long for them all to be assigned a cabin—one for the Neal family and one for the truck driver. Pat looked at Annie and all the children; he could see their minds seemed to be in a fog from all they had seen in just the short time they had been in the state's biggest city.



Above, Arkansas State Capitol at night.

After they had fixed and eaten their supper; things were arranged in the cabin for all six to sleep. Quilts and bedding were placed on the floor to make pallets for the girls; Pat, Annie and Wesley got the single small bed in the room.

Pat deliberately kept everyone busy until it had turned dark. Then he said, "Let's all go outside and see what Little Rock looks like of a night." As they all filed out, Pat heard at least a couple of gasps once the flood lights on the Capitol dome across the river caught their eyes.

"Daddy!" Lois squealed. "Look at the Capitol! What a sight." Others chimed in with their own impressions of awe.

The family stayed out in front of their cabin for quite a while before finally retiring. Then when the younger two, Margaret and Wesley, were asleep, Pat, Annie, and the older girls snuck out again.

As they sat on some old chairs on the cabin lawn, Pat said to Annie, "You know, Annie girl, when I saw that Capitol lit up earlier this summer, something inside me said 'Pat, everything will be alright.' The Capitol over there represents hope that this country will get back on its feet again. We just need to get you well, and we need some good land to farm; then we can live and raise these kids up and get them on their way."

All of a sudden, Ina yelled out and pointed across the river, "The Capitol, it's gone!" Pat and Annie looked toward where the Capitol was supposed to be and saw that the flood lights had been turned off.

Pat chuckled and said, "Well, I wondered if anyone had sense enough to turn off those lights and not let them run all night—guess they do." Pat would like to have known the time but he didn't own a watch. Still he knew they all had to get to bed and get a good rest. The party would need an early start the next morning if they were to reach New Liberty and their new home before dark.

Arrival in New Liberty

Ina took another look at the sunlit Capitol dome before the family all pulled out of the tourist camp on its way to New Liberty. It was a long but pleasant trek as they headed east toward Memphis on U.S. Highway 70. Just before they got to the Mississippi River and Memphis, the highway intersected with U.S. Highway 61. They headed north on U.S. Highway 61 to the family's new home.

At the next rest stop, Ina's father explained to the girls that the mighty Mississippi River was just a few miles east of the road on which they were traveling.

While still having reservations about the new life she was headed toward, Ina had been impressed with the new things she had been seeing along the way. Now, close to New Liberty, Ina noted how perfectly flat the land was—one could see for a long ways. Before climbing back in the truck, she noted how sandy and loose the dirt was; she was able to dig around in it with her bare feet. Noting this, Ina's dad came over and explained how rich the soil was from all the flooding of the Mississippi.

"Ina girl, if I can get some that has been cleared, I can easily put in crops and they will grow in that dirt. Now here's the rub—lots of the land has never been cleared, and that's hard, back-breaking work to get trees cut down and their stumps burned or pulled out. But, we'll do it, by gum, won't we girl?"

When the truck passed a sign saying Burdette, Pat knew they were close. New Liberty, which had a church, store and partially built cotton gin, would be just a few miles more. Once they got there, Pat had the driver to stop at the store and everyone got out to stretch their legs. Annie looked around and said "where's the school house." Pat shrugged and mumbled something about having to work on that.

Pat went in the store a moment and returned to say that the Crook farm was on the country road that led off to the right about a mile—but that wasn't all he learned. The Crooks had to be gone for a couple of days, and the store keeper gave directions to a couple of sharecropper houses on the Crook place with instructions to take the one not yet occupied. Apparently the other sharecropper hired by Mr. Crook had already arrived with his family and had gotten first pick.

Everyone piled back in the truck and in just moments, they arrived at two small shacks sitting side-by-side on the north side of the dirt road. The truck pulled into the drive between the houses; as



The above photo of the New Liberty store was taken in the 1970s. In the background was the cotton gin. Both of the structures, however, were built in the 1940s to replace those that were at New Liberty when the Neal family moved in in 1932.



*Above, Pat & Annie with Three of Their Four Children in New Liberty Arkansas.
Back Row: Nemon Wesley "Pat" Neal and Annie Lois Evans Neal
Front Row: Lois Neal, Samuel Wesley Neal, Ina Louise Neal*

The above photo was taken at New Liberty in 1932 or 1933. Two of the Neal girls, Lois and Margaret, remember that the picture was take at the house of the McCorkles, the other sharecropper family. The photographer was one of the McCorkle girls. Reportedly, the Neal family had been to church or to a funeral that day. Note that Margaret, at her choice, was not in the photo, and also, note that Wesley has a sucker in his hand.

Pat got out he was soon greeted by the head of the other family—a Mr. McCorkle. The two men talked for quite a little bit and then Pat walked by to the truck.

“Well, Mr. McCorkle there is going to be a good neighbor. We’re all going to bunk with them in their house tonight. It seems the house left for us has had chickens in it, and we’re going to have to give it a real scrubbing!” Then he turned to the truck driver and gave instructions to back up the truck so things could be unloaded up close to the porch.

The plan was to stack things all together and put a tarp over them. When that was all done, the driver was thanked and he headed his way back to southeast Arkansas.

Below, a present-day aerial view of New Liberty in Mississippi County AR. New Liberty was located about half way between Blytheville and Burdette AR. The New Liberty store and cotton gin was located at point “A” below. The Crook farm and the sharecropper shacks in which the Neal and McCorkle families lived were located near point “B.”

The Cleaning Job Never Forgotten

In their later memories about the 1932 move to New Liberty, both Ina and Lois would recall the hard scrubbing they all had to do the next day to make that house livable. Even beyond the next day, this temporary house required continued scrubbing to keep down the smell. But the Neals were soon set up in their new home, and all including little Wesley headed to Mr. Crook’s cotton fields to pick along side the McCorkles.

When the cotton picking had just about run out, Pat was employed to work on helping finish New Liberty’s cotton gin. Although having carpenter skills, Pat was now 54 years old and not used to nailing and sawing boards. When he came home of a night, his body was sore and it was still aching when he got up until he could work around and get the soreness out.





Above, Mississippi County, AR cotton field in the 1930s

New Deal A'comin'

Day was about to break over the horizon to the east on Wednesday morning, November 9, 1932; it was the day after the country voted for a new President. Hunter Crook looked out the kitchen window and saw what had become a familiar sight—Mr. Neal, as everyone called him, was walking spryly toward his back door. The two of them had fallen into a habit—early morning coffee on the Crook's back porch listening to the news out of Memphis on a radio that Crook had sitting in the window sill.

“Mornin' Hunter”

“Same to ya'll, Mista Neal”, Hunter drawled with this pronounced southern Mississippi accent. “Big news on that he'ah radio. New De-ya is comin'. We done put that Hoova fella on a raft and sent him down the rivaw.”

Pat Neal was happy that morning. He had gotten to vote down at the church building the previous day, and although it was too early to be on the news, Franklin D. Roosevelt had won the U.S. Presidency in a landslide—final tallies would show over 85% of Arkansans had voted for him. FDR was going to get a chance to put in the “New Deal” he was promising.

“Hunter, what do you hope this New Deal will do for you?”

“Well, Mista Neal, ya'll know that I rent this land—I'm about to turn 43 yeh old—nevva owned my own land before like you did. Su-ya like to see the economy get better and maybe find some way to buy this place. And Mista Neal, you ain't meant to stay ah sharecroppuh, you got too much know-haw for it.

“Mista Neal, this New De-ya ought to have a way for you to get back on you-ah feet, plantin', tendin' and bringin' in you'ah own crops. Been talkin' to Mista' Aycock down the road. They's land ownaws lookin' foh good solid cotton growaws to work they'aw land—not that many people around with the know-haw you have about cotton.”

Pat Neal couldn't hide his smile because he sure liked what he was hearing. He wanted to work around New Liberty helping with the cotton gin construction and other things throughout the winter but come crop planting time, he sure was wishing to be doing his own work.

“Well, Annie and I are trying to hold onto as much of our earnings as we can. Before spring, I'd like to find a cheap wagon and a couple of mules. Man down at the store has been looking out for me but it's kind of early to buy. Those mules would just be extra mouths to feed until time for me to put them to work.



Newspaper headline from March 6, 1933, calling for all the nation's banks to close for four days after which only the financially stable banks would be allowed to reopen. The Washington State Bank did not reopen.



Above, the cotton gin in New Liberty, AR, photographed in the 1990s. This gin was built in the 1940s to replace the earlier gin that Mr. Neal helped build in 1932-33. That gin reportedly burned.

“Thanks for telling me about Mr. Aycock; when I see him, I’ll ask for some information about how I could find a land owner wanting a tenant like me.

“Oh, changing subjects a minute, my oldest girl has finished the eighth grade but the other three need to get back in school—in fact my little Wesley hasn’t even started but needs to. Any thoughts on that?”

Hunter Crook smiled, “Already been talkin’ to the wife ‘bout it. Guess you know the closest school is down at Burdette, two mile south. They’s a bus comes through New Liberty, and your kids can get on with ours and go down thea-ya.”

Pat got all excited. Funny, he had been so busy, this was the first time he had even thought about school for the kids. “Can’t wait to tell Annie; she’s been fretting about that since the day we arrived. Oh, and she’s so happy—that girl caught a few fish out of that ditch over there. She sure loves to do that, and they were a treat fried up last night. Oh, know how I told you her health was pretty poorly down there in the southwest? We can already tell she’s better up here.”

Pat thought a moment about the flood lit Capitol dome—he felt like it really was an omen of better time for the Neal family.

No Looking Back, Just Forward

Before Roosevelt took office on March 4, 1933, Pat and Annie were already getting all kinds of legal papers from the Washington State Bank threatening foreclosure on the Neal farm at Crossroads. But they knew the bank really didn’t want the place back—what could they do with it if they had it.”

On March 6, 1933, newly elected President Franklin Roosevelt, declared a “bank holiday” to separate the unsafe banks from those that were on solid footing. One that would not be allowed to re-open was the Washington State Bank where Pat and Annie had borrowed on their place in the amount of \$500.

The bank closure meant that Federal bank regulators were brought in to liquidate any assets of the bankrupt Washington State Bank. In a controversial move, the regulators foreclosed on all farmers behind on payments. Whether their decision would have been different had Pat and Annie still been living there is an unanswered question. But for Pat Neal, that was a moot point—Annie’s frequent illnesses down there left him no option to stay and see how it played out.

After publication in local newspapers and an appropriate waiting period, Pat and Annie’s 40-acre farm at Crossroads was sold at auction on the courthouse steps at Washington on September 19, 1933. With no one else having money, the Federal Land Bank of St. Louis was the winning bidder, paying \$500 for the place. The Neal farm then became just another footnote in the history of the family.

Land Tenancy Opportunity Near Gosnell AR⁸

Early spring rolled around and opportunity knocked for the wiry little man everyone called “Mr. Neal.” Aycock did know of people looking for good land tenants—in fact, Pat had some choices. To help him travel around to make a choice, 52-year old Aycock sold Pat two decent mules, and the cotton gin owner gave Pat a broken down wagon that Pat repaired until it was solid enough to carry any load he wished.

Pat set out to look at some of the places he’d heard of; one one of the trips, he met with the owner of 40 acres on the outskirts of Gosnell AR about three miles to the northwest of New Liberty. The land had been mostly cleared and ready for the plow to break ground for a cotton patch and for a vegetable garden. While the little shot-gun house and the barn on the place weren’t much, he knew Annie would love it—especially since the place was walking distance of the Gosnell Schools, and it even had a high school were Ina could start again.



Example of a “shot-gun” house like that the Neal family had near Gosnell AR. This house was in Dyess, AR, about 30 miles southwest of Gosnell.

So in less than a year after leaving Crossroads, the Neals were about to load up their wagon and

8 Wesley remembers that the house was a shotgun house with the bedroom in front, the living room in the middle and the kitchen at the rear. He remembers that there were woods there, and he saw oxen pulling logs in front of the house. One ox was pulling one log by itself. Others were several oxen together pulling a load of more than one log. Wesley remembers a bobcat coming out of the woods and jumping on the house roof. His dad had a rifle there; and he traded it for a shotgun later that was kept at the farm in Pemiscot county.



Above is a current aerial view of Gosnell AR, a northwest suburb of Blytheville AR.

Point "A" is the location of land on which Mr. Neal was a tenant from 1933-36. It was on the southwest corner of Moody St. (Ark. Hwy 181) and McGaughey Rd. Pat and Annie's son, Wayne, was born in the "shot-gun" house there on February 25, 1936. Wayne's older siblings had memories of the old store/post office located at Point "B" on the map. In fact, at the time, this spot was the center of old Gosnell. The large expanse of structures on the right side of the photo would have been open fields at that time. Eaker Air Force Base was built on this land in 1942 after the Neal family had left for Missouri.

Point "C" is still the location of the Gosnell Public Schools, and it was on this land that the four older Neal children would have attended--including Ina would have gone to school. None of the school buildings from the 1930s exist today.

Point "D" is the present home of Pat and Annie's oldest daughter, Ina (Neal) Bryeans. After graduation from Deering High School in 1939, Ina came to Blytheville AR to work; she met Lacy Bryeans, a resident of Gosnell and married him in 1940. They purchase a small house at this location. Lacy, a carpenter, helped build Eaker Air Force Base being constructed across the road from their home at Point "D".

move the short distance to Gosnell. Again they left a lot of newfound friends at New Liberty, but this was a big chance for the family to get back on top again.

The refurbished wagon was easier to load on this trip to Gosnell. The Neals hadn't accumulated anything more since they unloaded the Crossroads truck. Still it did take two trips—one to move the household items, the children and some chickens; the second trip to bring the farm tools that Pat had gathered including a plow that Mr. Aycock threw in with the mules and enough seed he got from the gin to put out 20 acres of cotton.

For the next three years, Pat and Annie worked the Gosnell farm as their children got educated at the Gosnell Schools. Annie's health continued to improve, and Pat made daily walks to the Gosnell store where he could read the newspapers, get caught up on all the news and learn all the rumors about the New Deal. During this period of renewed health and economic improvement, Wesley remembers that the house was a shotgun house with the bedroom in front, the living room in the middle and the kitchen at the rear. He remembers that there were woods there, and he saw oxen pulling logs in front of the house. One ox was pulling one log by itself. Others were several oxen together pulling a load of more than one log. Wes remembers a bobcat coming out of the woods and jumping on the house roof. His dad had a rifle there; and he traded it for a shotgun later that was kept at the farm in Pemiscot county.

Annie became pregnant. On February 25th, 1936, Annie gave birth to a second son, Wayne. While he became a precious gift of the family, life went on in a kind of flurry as one of the final chapters was about to play out for them. They would soon give up Arkansas as a residence and become Missourians. **NOTE: THE CONCLUSION THAT STARTS HERE WILL LIKELY BE ENTIRELY RE-WRITTEN ONCE WE KNOW MORE ABOUT THE LAND DEAL THAT PAT NEAL MADE WITH THE OLIVER FAMILY IN THE BOOTHEEL.**

Migration to the Bootheel—the Last Frontier

One thing was becoming clear in the year 1935—real opportunities for good land were to be had north of Pat and Annie's Gosnell home in the Bootheel of Missouri. It was considered one of America's last frontiers. Thousands of forested acres of drained swampland were owned by large land holders, and they needed land tenants to take possession of land, clear it and make it productive.

All indications were that the land tenants who took up the challenge and succeeded in the Missouri Bootheel could be in line to buy the land for themselves. The idea resonated with Pat and he proceeded to gather all the information he could about such opportunities.

The R.B. Oliver Land Co. owned large parcels of the land in Pemiscot County, Missouri. Senator Oliver, a Cape Girardeau attorney was an official in the Little River Drainage District that drained the swamps in 19___. Through that position, he came to own thousands of acres—so many acres that he needed land tenants to take care of all of it. Although Oliver died in 192?, his family still



Wayne Neal with his nephew, David Neal, on the place where Wayne was born in 1936.



Above, 2013 photo taken from Google Maps at the corner of Moody St. and McGaughey Rd.. The photo is looking southwest over the land on which Pat Neal held a land tenancy during 1933-36.

managed all of the land, and representatives were out looking for tenants to come into Pemiscot County.

When Pat Neal heard that representatives of the Oliver company were going to be in Gosnell, he decided to go talk to them. After meeting with the men in the winter of 1935, Pat and some others decided to go look at the land. It was then that he first saw the village of Pascola and then was shown an 80-acre parcel of land on what was called drainage ditch 69. The land was overgrown with the native trees of the area. Pat knew immediately that this unbridled area would tax all of his skills and energy, but he sensed that if he succeeded, it would

lead him back to land ownership. With that ownership, he felt he could leave his family with something when he passed on.

After returning from his exploratory trip to Pascola, Pat described it all to Annie, and they decided to accept the (maybe need to say what the Oliver offer was) Oliver offer. So, during the summer and early fall of 1936, Pat went back and forth between Gosnell and his new Pascola farm to clear a portion of the land where he would build a house and a barn.

At the appropriate time that a house would be built and Pat would need milled lumber for that. Family legend says that Pat paid \$300 for enough lumber to build the house. It was green lumber that was not really good for building, but that's how the house was built. Time was of essence. (You may want to explain why time was of the essence) In late fall of 1936, with his mother ailing and near death in southwest Arkansas, Pat reached a point to where he was ready to take his family north.

As Pat firmed up his final plans, he couldn't help feel that losing his farm at Crossroads had been a blessing in disguise—and, in his own mind, his bold choice to walk away from that farm likely saved the life of his wife of 17 years, Annie girl.



Above, Nenon Wesley and Annie
Lois Evans Neal, 1936?

This picture possibly taken around 1936 (Joy's note: Oct 7, 1936, but Wayne would've been only 8 months old) in Arkansas when Grandma Jaimima Adams Neal died (Note: Margie says Mama didn't come to funeral). It had to be a special occasion or Nenon would not have been wearing a suit coat. They would have been living near Pascola, Missouri, at this time and would have traveled back to Arkansas.

Another theory is that the picture was taken around 1944 when Grandma Evans was sick one time. Patsy remembers going to Hayti, getting on the train, had bonbon cookies, went to get a drink, conductor spoke to her, she was scared and went back to Mama. When they arrived, Pat remembers going into the back yard and was scared to go into the house. The picture is reported to have been taken in Hope, Arkansas. I think Mama looks too young here for it to have been 1944 (Margaret doesn't remember).

At right is the historic 1924 arch built over U.S. Highway 61 at the Arkansas-Missouri border just north of Blytheville and Gosnell AR. If Pat and Annie used the highway for their move into Pemiscot County in the Missouri Bootheel, they would have passed under this arch. However, more likely, the family used the country backroads.



