

“Shelbina Democrat”
Shelbina, Missouri
July 28, 1926

General U. S. Grant had his first active experiment in the Civil War on the Overland Trail, where it crosses Salt River, in Shelby County. He was there with a few companies of soldiers guarding the bridge. All the country around was intensely southern in sympathy, and many leading men left home to escape imprisonment. Colonel Grant sent messages, telling the fugitives to return to their homes, (the late Jas. V. Cox, who lived on a large farm near Hunnewell was one.) When they were back, he invited them to his camp, and they became the best of friends. It was while Grant was stationed at Salt River an incident occurred to which he referred in some detail in his Memoirs. “General” Tom Harris, a Confederate leader, was reported to be in camp near Florida, the Monroe County town where Mark Twain was born. Of course it was Grant's duty to gather Harris in, if he could, so he took his men and set out to meet the enemy. It was the commander' first engagement, at least he thought it would be the first, in that war, and he confessed to a little “excitement” as he climbed the hill which overlooked the enemy's camp. But when the boys in blue reached the top, there were no “rebels” in sight, skedaddled probably. Grant said that experience taught him that the “enemy might be as much scared at me as I was at him.”

Mark Twain, then a Hannibal printer, took service under Harris, and was out with him on one or two expeditions. When Grant became President and Mark Twain a famous writer, the two men met and were thereafter fast friends. The author of Tom Sawyer, who knew all about Grant's expedition to Florida, spoke of it to President Grant.

“We had set out to capture you, General,” he said, “but I'm awful glad we changed our minds. What would have happened to this country if we had taken you prisoner.”

Some of the most graphic pages of American history were written along the Overland Trail. It was the artery of a great nation awakening into the full measure of its virility. Along its sinuous way journeyed men not afraid to do and die. It carried them to the Great Adventure, and made them stronger and better citizens if they lived, and if the other alternative was at the end of the trail, it taught them to meet it with a smile.

The descendants of these men of the trail were among those in the forefront with the colors on the fields of France, and as they sires had never retreated, neither did they.