

Freedmen's Bureau



Clark County Historical Association



The years following the Civil War were tumultuous times in the South as people adjusted to a new way of life following years of devastating conflict. To assist in that effort, the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands--commonly called the Freedmen's Bureau--began work in Arkansas in June of 1865. Local agents served in Arkansas from 1865 to 1869, with offices set up in places of significant black population, including Arkadelphia.

The Freedmen's Bureau Arkadelphia field office operated from the former Ashby store, located on Main Street between Third and Fourth streets. John M. Ashby purchased the property from J.E.M. Barkman in 1857 and J.H. O'Baugh built a store for Ashby about a year later. O'Baugh was a brick mason and intended for the structure to last---its brick walls were eighteen inches thick, and its woodwork hand-hewn. Since the new building was constructed for business purposes, there was no yard---it stood flush with the sidewalk that ran in front of it.

Ashby operated his business as a grocery store with a harness shop upstairs. John Ashby was killed in 1864 while serving in the Civil War; his wife continued to live in Arkadelphia. After their store's use by the Freedmen's Bureau in the late 1860s, the building served a variety of purposes before becoming a residence in 1901. A substantial frame section was added to the south end in the 1940s. The building was torn down in the early 1970s.

One Brick Building, situated on Johnson Street between Triggs and Moore Streets, last owned by John M. Ashby, killed in rebel service, for Office.



Freedmen's Bureau Marker Near Fourth and Main, Arkadelphia

Here, during Reconstruction years, were the offices of the Freedmen's Bureau. The building was, at different times, used as a harness shop, grocery store, barber shop, and a saloon, and for many years was a residence. This marker was placed in 1963 by the Arkadelphia Chamber of Commerce.