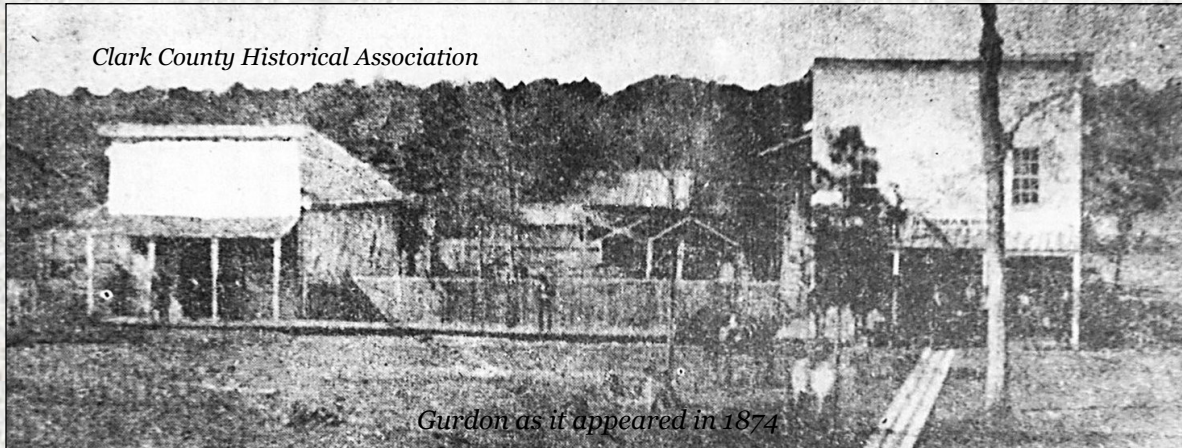


Gurdon



Gurdon got its real start as a town when the first railroad first came through the region in the early 1870s. The forest products industry has always played a significant role in the town's economy.

When the Cairo and Fulton Railroad decided to establish a stop at the site, the place needed a name. One local legend tells that it was named for one of the railroad right-of-way surveyors, Gurdon Cunningham. While Cunningham may have surveyed the railroad right-of-way, Dan Joslyn and Silas Miller surveyed the Gurdon townsite. Streets there still bear their names today. The little town they platted grew quickly, creating a need for improved communication, so a post office was established in 1876.

Growth was sufficient that in 1880, citizens filed a petition to incorporate the town. When Methodist minister Rev. Joseph Nicholson arrived in Gurdon in 1881, he found a "thriving town of about 500 people. There were three large saloons and gambling dens and ten large lumber mills in the area but no church organization or religious influence of any kind except a Sunday School being held in the one-room school house." In 1883, people of all denominations came together and built a church building for use by all. Later, the various groups build their own individual houses of worship.

The forest products industry has always been important in the Gurdon economy. In fact, the St. Louis Mill and Wood Cutter Company was among the first businesses in the town. It was the parent company of the Gurdon Lumber Company. The company's commissary was located in a two-story building across from the railroad depot, and was built in 1886. A mill pond served as a focal point for the duration of its operation in Gurdon.

Gurdon's first newspaper was the *Gurdon Advocate*. A short-lived paper, it was published during the 1880s. Then, Ithey Nash began printing a paper in 1890. His widow continued publication after Nash's death, calling it *The Widow's Mite* and also *The Cannon Ball*. Mrs. Nash leased her business to Scott Harris, who renamed the paper, *The Gurdon Times*. The *Times* continued to publish into the twenty-first century.

When most people hear the name "Gurdon" they immediately think of the Gurdon Light, probably the best-known and longest-lived mysterious event in all of southwest Arkansas. According to witnesses, on many nights a peculiar glow appears along the path of the former railroad track about four miles north of Gurdon, not far from Interstate 30. The light sways back and forth across where the train once traveled, one to three feet above the ground. This phenomenon—commonly known as the Gurdon Light—has been the source of much discussion and speculation since the 1930s. Local legend says that the murder of railroad section foreman Will McClain explains the light's source. For decades, many visited the site to try to see the eerie phenomenon. Then the media transformed this local legend into a national mystery when NBC aired a segment about the Gurdon Light on its "Unsolved Mysteries" series in 1994.