

# Charles Gallihar and an 1852 Murder Trial

Samuel Davis Callaway was born in Clark County shortly after his family's arrival in the area in 1818. In his old age, he described some of the memorable people and events from the county's past in his series of articles published as "Early Reminiscences of Clark County." The series appeared in the *Gurdon Times* in the early 1900s. In doing so, Callaway left us one of the few eyewitness accounts of early nineteenth-century Clark County available today.

Callaway wrote of things he believed to be important in revealing this region's pioneer history. His description of a killing and subsequent trial not only illustrates the frontier nature of early Arkansas society, but also offers some insight into the personality of one of Clark County's earliest citizens, Abner Hignight. Interestingly, future Arkansas governor Harris Flanagin served as a defense attorney at the trial.

Abner Hignight moved to the area shortly after the beginning of the nineteenth century. According to family legend, Hignight traveled southwest from Missouri into Arkansas along the primitive path later called the Southwest Trail or Military Road. Hignight eventually settled along that road, about two miles west of Hollywood. In 1823, after the U.S. land office opened in Washington (Hempstead County) he acquired land on the east side of the Terre Noir Creek where the road from Hollywood to Antoine crosses the stream today. It is believed that he built a sizable log home there shortly thereafter and lived in it for the rest of his life.

Here's how Callaway described the deadly incident that occurred over 170 years ago and Hignight's role in capturing the perpetrator: *"In December 1852, Charles Gallihar killed John Billingsley (a preacher, but of what persuasion, I have forgot), in the lane of the old Gallihar place on the Military Road, about eighteen miles west of Arkadelphia, by striking him (Billingsley) on the head with his rifle gun, which broke his skull, from which he died in about three hours.*

*"Old Doc, whose real name I have forgotten, but was known by the name of Sequatsia Valley, and I helped him dress the wound, but our man was dead by the time we finished dressing the wound.*

*"Gallihar took to the woods and was thought to be gone, but old Abner Hignite said he was satisfied that he was merely hiding out and he could find him, so the sheriff, W.C. Randle, went with a posse and summoned Hignite to go with them. Gallihar had been hid out about two weeks, and Hignite tracked him up in three hours and compelled him to surrender, though Gallihar was considered a very desperate character, he knew Hignite was as cool and brave as Julius Caesar.*

*"He was brought to town and put in jail, and after several attempts to release him by writ of habeas corpus, he was eventually allowed to bail. The grand jury found a bill against him for murder, and when the trial came off, H. Flanagin and George Conway defended Gallihar and Warren prosecuted him.*

*"There was one man for clearing Gallihar and eleven for hanging him; and the sureties fought the bond for two or three years and finally got off by paying the costs, they proving that Gallihar was dead, in Texas. One man swore he saw his grave. He may have seen his grave, but Gallihar was not in it, nor did he fill a grave for over ten years, as he was living when our unpleasantness began in 1861, and that was the last I heard of Charles Gallihar. Abner Hignite, who tracked and captured Gallihar, was one of the very first settlers in Clark County, having come here in 1808 or 1809. He was a great curiosity to those who did not know him. He was a rough diamond of the first water."*