

Arkadelphia's City Meat Market

Back in 1866, the City of Arkadelphia embarked upon what would be considered to be quite an unusual enterprise for city government today---ownership and supervision of a meat market. The site for the operation was the south side of Clinton Street, at Seventh. The little-known story of this City Market is revealed in the minutes of the Arkadelphia City Council beginning in 1866 into the early 1870s.

The venture first began when J.L. Witherspoon sold the land for the market to the City in 1866 for five dollars. According to City Council minutes, on June 6 of that year, Sam Callaway proposed to construct and operate an "up-to-date meat emporium" and then recover his capital outlay through free rent. His proposal was approved. However, the market apparently did not go as well as had been anticipated. In April of 1867, Callaway transferred his interests to William Matheny, who in turn, transferred his investment to R.A. Stafford. Part of the deal was a requirement by the city to "clean up the market house."

Stafford was granted the title of "Superintendent of the Market." He appeared to have been a bit more successful at the enterprise, always promptly paying his rent to the city. However, two years later, S.W. Murphy took over. Soon though, the City Council again advertised for proposals. Sam Callaway, who originated the whole concept, submitted a bid of five dollars a month, but the high bid of \$12.50 per month was offered by W.C. and M.P. Adams. The Adams took over in April of 1870, but remained for only four months.

About a year passed before the city passed a market regulation called the "Slaughterhouse Ordinance" and again asked for proposals. This time, Sam Callaway's brother, W.H. "Big Bill" Callaway, offered a whopping \$17.50 per month and was made "Superintendent." By 1873, Robert Wilson was in charge and his rent stood at ten dollars a month. Apparently, the whole enterprise became somewhat of a nuisance to the city government officials and was eventually discontinued.

As an interesting part of local lore connected to the City Market, in 1962 local historian Farrar Newberry wrote that at the rear of the market house was a bell, which the city purchased for twenty-five dollars in 1869. The butcher rang the bell whenever a beef was brought from the slaughterhouse to the market, so people could purchase the freshest meat for their next meal. The bell could be heard all over town. Then, when the city went out of the meat business, the bell was used as a fire alarm until about 1930. According to Newberry, "The sound of the old market-firebell is an eerie memory, as it wakened the people in the middle of the night, and made every kid in town beg his parents for permission to go to the burning store or dwelling. I think I would easily recognize its tone if it were to ring tonight." Eventually, the bell was given to the Chamber of Commerce to summon members to special or called meetings. Newberry also stated that some believed the bell was later given to Ouachita College and placed outside the school's dining hall to summon students to their meals. The bell's final destination remains unknown.

