

Arkadelphia Timeline

by Wayne McAfee

- 1800 – 1815** The first permanent European/American settlers arrived in the area. The first settlement was called “Blakelytown” or “Blakely’s Bluff” for blacksmith Adam Blakely; or “Hemphill Settlement” for John Hemphill, who extracted/manufactured salt east of the Ouachita River.
- 1818** Clark County was established on December 15, becoming one of five counties in existence at the time Arkansas Territory was created in 1819.
- 1836** Arkansas became the twenty-fifth state of the United States.
- 1838** “Arkadelphia” was introduced as the new name of the Blakelytown settlement.
- 1842** The county seat of Clark County moved to Arkadelphia from Greenville, effective January 1, 1843.
- 1850** The town’s first newspaper, the *Arkadelphia Sentinel*, was published by Robert L. Pigues.
- 1857** Arkadelphia became an incorporated town.
- 1859** The Arkadelphia Female College was incorporated.
- 1861** Arkansas seceded from the United States, making Arkadelphia a part of the Confederacy.
- 1862** Attorney Harris Flanagin of Arkadelphia became Governor of Arkansas.
- 1864** Union troops under General Frederick Steele stopped in Arkadelphia during the federals’ unsuccessful Camden Expedition/Red River Campaign, which later included battles at Prairie D’Ane, Poison Spring, Marks’ Mills, and Jenkins’ Ferry. Confederate General Sterling Price’s forces departed Arkadelphia, leaving behind the cannon that now sits on the Library lawn.
- 1868** Arkansas, including Arkadelphia, was readmitted to the Union, beginning “Reconstruction.”
- 1868** Arkadelphia’s *Southern Standard* newspaper was established by J.W. Gaulding and Adam Clark.
- 1868 -- 1874** Carpetbaggers and scalawags took charge of political affairs in Arkadelphia, carrying out the directives of President Ulysses S. Grant and Governors Powell Clayton and Elisha Baxter.
- 1870** The telegraph reached Arkadelphia.
- 1870** Arkadelphia’s population reached 974. Little Rock, the state’s largest city, stood at 12,375.

1870 The first free school opened in Arkadelphia. After a year, students numbered 185.

1871 A Grand Jury included five black jurors, making it the first “mixed” jury in Clark County.

1871 A “Board of Commerce” or “Chamber of Commerce” was established with D. J. McDonald as president, Thomas A. Heard as vice-president, and Dr. C. A. Gantt as treasurer.

1872 A fire destroyed much of the town’s business district, which then centered at Fourth and Main. Among the structures lost were the Spence Hotel; stores of R. E. Reames, Stuart & Greene, C. C. Scott, A. A. Anderson, Thomas Parks; the gun shop of Leo Braun; some law offices; and two vacant buildings.

1873 The first railroad reached Arkadelphia--the Cairo & Fulton. With the railroad came an influx of new businesses, businessmen, entrepreneurs, opportunists, and crooks. Arkadelphia enjoyed a boom for a time. Among the young businessmen were Marks M. Cohn with his brothers Abe and Morris. They opened grocery stores and saloons. M. M. Cohn’s grocery-saloon was on the southeast corner of Sixth and Main.

1873 The first bank opened in Arkadelphia. The Clark County Bank, owned by R. Beauchamp, lasted only a few years, its demise hastened by investments in silver mines which didn’t pan out.

1874 The first of the town’s so-called “opera houses” was built by Sheriff George Grayson on the southwest corner of Main and Fourth and later became “Wilson’s Opera House.” Two others, Gresham’s and Cook’s, came later.

1878 The first telephone line was installed and ran between Parks’ store and Dr. Wilder’s warehouse. “Conversation, singing, and music on harp and cornet were transmitted and plainly heard.”

1881 A local option vote established Arkadelphia as a “dry town.”

1881 With the closing of his “Cotton Exchange” saloon, M. M. Cohn left Arkadelphia for Little Rock, where he started the well-known and long-lived M. M. Cohn Company.

1881 Several dedicated telephone lines were installed: Dr. John R. Dale connected his office in Stuart & Bros. Drug Store with his residence; Flave Carpenter linked his livery stable to the railroad depot; and Thomas Stuart ran one between his drugstore and his residence.

1884 The Elk Horn Bank was established in Rush McNutt’s store.

1886 Ouachita Baptist College (now University) was established.

1888 Citizens’ Bank was established.

- 1888** Arkadelphia Cotton Mills, also called Ouachita Cotton Mills, was established on the north side of Caddo Street near the Ouachita River.
- 1890** Arkadelphia Methodist College (now Henderson State University) was established.
- 1890** The *Arkadelphia Record*, a Methodist paper for blacks, began publication, with Rev. W. H. Williams of the A.M.E. Church as editor.
- 1890** John Wilson opened a package saloon and sold his entire stock in three days.
- 1890** Ouachita Baptist College was advertised as Arkansas's largest college, having a faculty of fifteen.
- 1891** The town's first telephone system was installed by J.W. Wilson, William Gerig, and Albert Crow, with thirty original subscribers.
- 1891** Electric lights were turned on for the first time.
- 1891** Water and sewer systems were established.
- 1891** Arkadelphia's first "juke box" played at E.M. Hall's drugstore using one of Edison's phonographs.
- 1891** Draughon's Practical Business College opened a branch which later became Arkadelphia Practical Business College. In 1896 it merged with the Business Department of Arkadelphia Methodist College.
- 1893** Dr. John R. Dale established a "sanitarium," the first place in town where patients could stay for medical care.
- 1896** The *Siftings Herald* newspaper was created by a merger of two papers, the *Siftings* and the *Herald*.
- 1897** Arkadelphia was referred to as the "Athens of Arkansas" for its number of educational institutions, which included five colleges: Ouachita Baptist College, Arkadelphia Methodist College, Shorter (or Bethel) Methodist College, Arkadelphia Baptist College, and Presbyterian Industrial School. The latter three black schools were established in the 1890s.
- 1899** A new courthouse was built, designed by architect Charles Thompson of Little Rock.
- 1900** Arkadelphia's population reached 2,739.
- 1900** The Adams brothers built a flour mill on land provided by the City. Called the Arkadelphia Milling Company, by 1918 the operation claimed to be the largest manufacturing enterprise in Arkansas.

- 1901** The first girls' basketball game to be played in town took place between two teams of Arkadelphia Methodist College girls and ended with a score of ten goals to seven.
- 1901** An ice plant was built near the railroad depot.
- 1903** The first automobile appeared on city streets, arriving from Hot Springs. It was the first to be seen by many Arkadelphians.
- 1905** William Jennings Bryan spoke at Ouachita Baptist College.
- 1906** Carry Nation spent several days in town.
- 1907** The first Henderson-Ouachita football was played, with Henderson winning 22-6. Arkadelphia Methodist College had become Henderson College in 1904.
- 1908** The town's first movie theater opened. It was called the "Electric Theater" and featured "life-size moving pictures." Also, the first outdoor "Air Dome" theater was built by George Grayson for summer use.
- 1908** C.C. Henderson became the first Clark County resident to bring his automobile to town.
- 1908** Henderson College played the University of Arkansas in football, losing by a score of 51-0.
- 1909** Outlaw Cole Younger spoke at the Gresham Opera House/Theater about his time with Quantrill's Raiders, his fourteen years as an outlaw, and his twenty-five years in prison.
- 1909** Ouachita Baptist College played the University of Arkansas in football, losing by a score of 55-0.
- 1910** W. L. Foedra opened the first automobile garage in town.
- 1910** Dr. Hutchinson drove his auto from Little Rock to Arkadelphia in seven hours.
- 1910** Arkadelphia's population reached 2,745.
- 1911** Citizens' Bank became a "national" bank, the town's first.
- 1911** Merchants and Planters Bank was established.
- 1911** United Oil Mills built a cottonseed mill near the depot.
- 1912** Construction began on the Caddo Hotel and it opened in 1913.

1912 A city ordinance required automobile drivers to sound a warning and give signals at every corner, and drive on the right side of the street. Cars had to have lights, a muffler, and a license.

1912 The town's first automobile agency was Arkadelphia Hardware Company, which sold Ford cars.

1912 The City of Arkadelphia purchased twenty-seven acres of land just east of Wilson Cemetery from C. C. Henderson and R. B. F. Key for use as a city park. Foster Hall on the Henderson State University campus was later built on the site of Wilson Cemetery.

1914 The Royal Theater opened, operated by Mr. Belaschke, one door west of its later location. It showed silent films and also had vaudeville acts.

1914 The first football game between black schools was played between Arkadelphia Presbyterian Academy and Arkansas Baptist College of Little Rock. Arkansas Baptist won 13-12.

1914 Harvey Couch was granted a franchise for furnishing electricity to Arkadelphia. He ran a transmission line between Malvern and Arkadelphia, which effectively served as the beginning of Arkansas Power and Light (later Entergy). Couch moved the company's main office from Arkadelphia to Pine Bluff in 1917.

1915 Jan Williams drove from Little Rock to Arkadelphia in his Studebaker in five hours and ten minutes.

1916 City mail delivery began, with Sam Carpenter, postmaster.

1916 The Kansas City Blues professional baseball team held spring training in Arkadelphia, staying for three weeks. They returned to train in 1917 as well.

1917 Arkadelphia celebrated National Registration Day with a grand patriotic parade headed by Sheriff Golden and Mayor Allison, followed by a band and over 200 cars and trucks, with speeches and singing at the courthouse. Men age twenty-one to thirty registered at voting places.

1918 The first airplane landed at Arkadelphia. One of the largest crowds in the city's history assembled to see the plane, "and the people were certainly well-rewarded for their coming for the flying was done as well as any bird could do it." The plane's trip from Arkadelphia to Benton took thirty-seven minutes.

1918 Clark County's first casualty of World War I was George Bell, son of C.A. Bell of Arkadelphia, wounded in battle in France on July 29.

1918 A contingent of John Phillip Sousa's Great Lakes Naval Training Center band played in Arkadelphia.

1919 Both colleges had fine gardens and canned vegetables for winter use.

1919 An influenza epidemic hit Arkadelphia.

1919 Mud at Seventh and Main was “knee deep to a giraffe.”

1920 Dr. W. S. Johnson built the first drive-in service station in Arkadelphia (the sixth in the state) on the northeast corner of Eighth and Clinton. It later became Crow-Burlingame.

1920 The Bankhead Highway from Washington, D. C., to San Diego, California, was routed through Arkadelphia—it came south on Tenth Street to Pine, then turned west on Pine Street toward Okolona, Prescott, and Texarkana.

1920 The Byann Yann chain of grocery stores opened a store in town. As a part of a chain of 151 stores, it closed after a few months when the chain went bankrupt.

1920 Arkadelphia’s population reached 3,311.

1920 Samuel A. Rudisill sold his jewelry store to R. B. Finger. Rudisill had been in business in Arkadelphia for sixty-two years.

1921 Several Arkadelphians listened to music from Illinois on a radio.

1922 Ouachita defeated the University of Arkansas in football, 13-7.

1922 -- 1925 A revival of the Ku Klux Klan took place. In 1922, 105 Knights of the Ku Klux Klan No. 16 paraded down Main Street on their way to the Henderson-Brown College athletic field, where they held a public initiation.

1924 “Eagle” trading stamps were given by several merchants.

1924 To accommodate the increasing number of automobilists passing through Arkadelphia, the City built a free tourist camp at the north edge of town. The camp consisted of five screened cabins.

1925 Sterling Store opened at 623 Main Street.

1925 W. D. Feaster, president of the black Presbyterian Academy since its founding, died.

1925 The City speed limit changed from eight to fifteen miles per hour.

1925 -- 1926 Downtown Arkadelphia streets were paved with cement and asphalt.

1927 The Piggly Wiggly grocery store opened on the southwest corner of Seventh and Clinton streets.

1927 Delamar Chevrolet Company built a new structure at Sixth and Clay streets.

1927 Dr. E. North, head of the Science Department at Ouachita Baptist College, shot the first par (38) on the Arkadelphia Country Club golf course.

1928 The J. C. Penney store opened.

1929 Henderson-Brown College became Henderson State Teachers College.

1929 The Royal Theater started showing "talking" pictures. The first to be shown in Arkadelphia was *Barkers*, starring Milton Sills and Dorothy Mackail.

1929 Safeway opened in the Nowlin-Adams-Carr building on Clinton Street.

1929 Stuart's Business College opened with J. N. Stuart as president.

1930 Arkadelphia's population stood at 3,375.

1930 Two miniature golf courses, the "Oaklawn" and the "Arkadelphia" became popular.

1930 Thomas Drug Store had curb service on both Clinton and Sixth streets, offering a variety of sandwiches, ice cream, sodas, and cold drinks.

1930 Clark County's first paved road was completed from the head of Tenth Street to the Caddo River.

1930 The United States experience the worst drought in history. The cotton crop in Clark County came to only one-third of what it had been in 1929. The corn crop declined from 500,000 bushels to 75,000.

1930 Peake High School defeated Texarkana's black high school in football by a score of 98-0.

1930 Two Girl Scout troops were organized.

1931 As a result of the drought and economic depression, some 9,000 people in Clark County received aid from the Red Cross.

1931 A carload of potatoes arrived from Idaho, along with sixteen sacks of onions, three sacks of beans, and two sacks of carrots, for distribution by the Red Cross.

1931 The "Broadway of America" highway from New York to San Diego was routed through Arkadelphia.

1931 Air mail postal service was instituted for Arkadelphia. Stamps were sold locally and the mail was put onto planes at either Little Rock or Texarkana.

1931 School buses ran for the first time in Arkadelphia. Schools at Hollywood, Curtis, and Manchester consolidated with Arkadelphia.

1931 Highway 67 was paved from Little Rock to Texarkana, except for a few gaps.

1931 A new Royal Theater was built after the old one burned. The floor seated 650; the balcony, 250.

1931 Townsend Hospital opened on Caddo Street.

1931 Green's Tourist Court was built at Sixth and Crittenden with nine cottages and seven garages. A Gulf gasoline station stood out front.

1931 A new jail was built at a cost of \$41,308.

1932 A new high school was built at a cost of about \$100,000.

1932 Win Whipple of Arkadelphia High School set a new state record in the broad jump of 23'3". Whipple held the record for decades.

1932 J. S. Cargile, president of Elk Horn Bank, bought 200 pairs of shoes, twenty pairs of pants, and 150 coats from local merchants and gave them to the needy.

1933 The B. W. McCormick Company donated seventy pairs of shoes and 150 pairs of stockings to the Red Cross for needy women and children.

1933 Arkadelphia suffered its first bank robbery. Citizens' Bank was relieved of some \$9,000 by two robbers. One was captured with the money. A month later the same bank was robbed by three men who got \$2,530. One of the robbers carried a machine gun.

1933 Beer went on sale in Arkadelphia for the first time in many years. Four restaurants and several service stations sold it.

1934 A city league was formed to play the new game of softball. Only the catcher and first baseman could wear gloves.

1934 An airport was built by the federal government east of the Ouachita River.

1935 Governor Futrell signed a bill ending Prohibition in Arkansas. Liquor licenses were issued to Heard's Drug Store and Turner's Drug Store. However, the city voted "dry" again and the liquor stores closed on November 16.

1936 The block around the courthouse was paved.

1936 James Garrison Clark died. He was survived by three daughters (Mrs. Robert Rhodes, Mrs. Hugh Ross, Mrs. Dallas Dalton) and one son (Tom Garrison Clark). He owned one of the state's largest timber holdings, milling interests in several places, and banking interests in Little Rock, Gurdon, Prescott, and Arkadelphia.

1937 A traffic light was installed at Tenth and Pine.

1937 Robert "Sleepy" Thomasson resigned as coach at Gurdon High School to become County Examiner.

1937 Murry's Funeral Home moved to the James Garrison Clark residence on Main Street, between Seventh and Eighth.

1938 The City extended its city limits for the first time in over fifty years, increasing the town's population by some 2,000.

1938 The Scout Hut was built. The logs were donated by the Kraft Paper Mill Company through Tom G. Clark. Fifteen boys worked under the supervision of Mr. Bishop, the local N.Y.A. supervisor, to earn money.

1939 Thirty-one C.C.C. enrollees left for camp from Arkadelphia. Local restaurants and grocery stores gave them a farewell dinner.

1939 Will Lee's drug store and the Royal Theater were air-conditioned.