

Rome



The community of Rome was settled early in our state's history and sat along the Little Missouri River about six miles from Okolona. Specifically, it was in Section 19, Township 9 South, Range 21 West. By the early 1900s, most referred to the place as "Old Rome." The small Clark County village faded away many years ago, and only a few tangible reminders of its existence remain today.

Among Rome's earliest residents were Joshua Stewart, Albert Dickey, and Newt Noland. Noland established a store in the community, as did Stewart. Stewart served as the town's first postmaster, beginning in 1851. Others to serve as postmaster included Benjamin Bussell, Marcellus McLain, and James Gleghorn. A combination schoolhouse-church-Masonic lodge built in 1858 stood near the Rome Cemetery. Plus, the town also had a saloon! In fact, as of 1882, Rome and Gurdon were the only two places in Clark County where spirituous or malt liquors could be sold under license from the County Court.

Remarkably, in 1870, a steamboat traveled up the Little Missouri River to Rome, according to Arkadelphia's *Southern Standard*: "Great Excitement in Rome---The denizens of the rural but thriving village of Rome, in the western part of the county, were thrown into the most intense excitement a few days since, by the announcement that a steamboat had arrived opposite that place, having come that far up the Little Missouri. As it was the first steamboat that had ever been up that river, of course it created a great sensation, and the people from all the surrounding country flocked to see the novel sight."

The railroad had not yet made it to Clark County, so the potential economic boon resulting from river transportation continued to exist in the minds of area residents. In 1871, the *Southern Standard* reported that "There are two dry goods and one grocery store in Rome, all appearing to be doing a very good business. About one dozen families reside in the place. It is thought that the opening of the navigation of the Little Missouri opposite the place will greatly increase its trade."

Today, two cemeteries survive to attest to Rome's existence. The "Old Rome" Cemetery is about six miles south of Okolona on Highway 51. Its oldest marked grave dates from 1868. The other cemetery is about seven miles south. Its oldest grave is dated 1881. Today, the site of Rome is nothing but a field. Among the last remnants of the community were some concrete steps that led to the Rome Spring further down Highway 51, where many early residents once got their water. The spring's original site was covered over when the highway was widened.