



How Arkadelphia Became the County Seat of Clark County

Historically, the county seat is the place where most citizens came into direct contact with government, whether it be to assess personal property, pay real estate taxes, obtain a marriage license, record a deed, file a lawsuit, report for jury duty, or register to vote. Serving in that capacity, the centerpiece of Clark County government has been its county courthouse.

Prior to the days of a permanent courthouse structure, the county seat moved around to several different locations. Beginning in 1819, county business was conducted at the home of pioneer Jacob Barkman, along the Military Road and west of the Caddo River, not far from what is now Caddo Valley. After that, a number of places served briefly in that capacity: Crittenden, on the Terre Noire and Military Road at the home of Adam Stroud, about one mile east of present-day Hollywood; Biscoeville, near the confluence of the Caddo River and DeGray Creek, not far up the Caddo from Barkman's home; and then again at Adam Stroud's place, where it remained until 1830.

At that time, the county accepted an offer by Moses Collins to donate thirty acres of land along the Military Road about three miles west of Stroud's place as a site for a county seat. There, at Greenville, Collins operated the county's first cotton gin-grist mill-sawmill with water power generated from Terre Noire Creek. The county built a courthouse and jail at Greenville. The courthouse was twenty-foot square, and the jail only fifteen feet square. Both were made of logs.

Local legend claims that Greenville was forced to give up the county seat because of a political stunt that transpired in 1842. The story goes that Arkadelphia citizens sponsored a picnic and a large crowd gathered in the little village. After the crowd enjoyed a big meal—which incidentally included alcoholic beverages for many—an orator extolled the virtues of Arkadelphia, emphasizing the town's central location within the county and the advantages of its location along the Ouachita River. He boldly asked for a vote to make Arkadelphia the county seat. The crowd expressed its pleasure with a great deal of shouting and cheering. Conveniently for Arkadelphia, there were not enough Greenville citizens and supporters present to speak up in opposition to the proposal. As a result of this display of popular opinion in favor of Arkadelphia, officials decided to move the county seat from Greenville to Arkadelphia.

So, in 1842 Arkadelphia became the permanent location of the county seat, and two years after that, a courthouse was constructed to house governmental operations. Greenville faded into oblivion, and today, there are no visible remains of the Greenville community or the county government's structures there. In Arkadelphia, though, the 1840s structure survived the tumultuous years of the Civil War, and during Reconstruction large columns were added to the building. That courthouse (shown above) served Clark County until the current facility replaced it at the same site in 1899.