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Beirne had sawmill, grist mill in 1880

By Wendy Richter

For the Siftings

The town of Beirne was founded in 1880 by James Lewis Beirne from Grafton, Illinois. Beirne established a sawmill as well as a Methodist church, at which he served as the first minister. By the end of that year, a railroad depot had been completed, and Beirne's sawmill and grist mill became operational. People of the surrounding area considered Beirne to be among the rail's best shipping points.

Postal service began in the community in 1880, and town founder James L. Beirne became postmaster. Others to serve include James Williams, Robert Bigadike, Olive Robinson, John Overton, Nellie Levins, Zona Levins, Dora Shepherd, and Hilda Joy Otwell.

The small village grew. James L. Beirne's daughter and son-in-law came to the tiny village in 1881, and built a planing mill and store on 800 acres of land. In that same year, a correspondent to the Southern Standard newspaper, writing under the name of "Zebedee Beelzebub," proclaimed that Beirne enjoyed daily mail service and had two sawmills. Meetings were held to establish some sort of lumber commission, and rumors floated about a plank or tram road to

nearby Okolona.

Arkadelphia Southern Standard described Beirne in 1897: "The town is situated in a rich farming country, about 20 miles southwest from this place on the Iron Mountain Railroad. It is being settled up with a good class of emigrants from Indiana. The Yeager Brothers have just put in an operation and have in good running

order an extensive mill, and saw lumber exclusively for manufacturing all kinds of furniture, which is quite an addition to the place. F.M. White also owns a mill which is doing a good business. Our old friend A.W. Cagle has charge of the mill. Mr. White also has a neat little drug store. J.G. Clark is one

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IMAGE COURTESY OF THE CLARK COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION
The former Beirne School building, shown here in 1992, was the educational landmark for the community for many years.

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little drug store. J.G. Clark is one of the successful and enterprising men of the place. He is not only one of the largest merchants, but a successful farmer also, and has furnished quite a number of farmers with supplies this year. This year he planted over a hundred acres of oats which will yield from 15 to 20 bushels to the acre. G.W. Cobbs & Company do a general grocery business. The post office is located in his building and our friend Capt. J.L. Beirne, the founder of the town has been postmaster for twenty years and is still in charge. Beirne has a good hotel, kept by Mrs. J.D. Robertson. There are two churches, Methodist and Baptist, with good memberships. The public school is in charge of Miss Daisy Johnson of this city. She has about forty pupils, and her patrons are highly pleased with

her." In about 1915, a brick school building was constructed. Among those known to have taught there are John Bledsoe, Leonard Weaver, Mr. Owens, Earnest Acuff, Mrs. Lava Nelson, and Maude Welch.

Through the years, timber products continued to be the foundation of the community's economy. The Yeager and Hartley Mill was built in 1882, burned in 1899, and rebuilt. It was then sold to the Pennsylvania Lumber Company. The Acme Handle Mill operated at Beirne for about 12 years. The Beirne Lumber Company was formed by James G. Clark's interests and their large mill began operations in 1932, managed by Dallas H. Dalton. The mill employed hundreds of men, and as a result, many families moved to the area during the Depression in search of jobs there. The mill was purchased by the Cabe brothers of the Gurdon Lumber Company in 1939. The company also

bought the brick school building for use as the mill's office. In 1974, International Paper Company purchased the Gurdon Lumber Company from the Cabe family. Then, International Paper sold the Beirne mill to Anthony Timberlands.

For additional infor-

mation about Clark County history, visit or contact the Clark County Historical Museum (www.clarkcountyhistory.org or 230-1360) or the Clark County Historical Association's Archives at the Ouachita Baptist University Library (www.obu.edu/archives or 245-5332).

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