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Manchester once included most of Dallas County

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CLARK COUNTY CHRONICLES

Manchester once included most of Dallas County

By Wendy Richter
for the Siftings

The Manchester community of Clark County traces its history back to the county's earliest days. When locals speak of "Manchester" today, they are usually referring to a general area in Clark County south and east of the Ouachita River. Manchester Township was first established in 1838, and at the time, it included practically all of present-day Dallas County, plus an area northeast of the Saline River, less an almost equal part south and west of the Saline. Manchester appeared as a town on an 1860 map in the northeastern part of Township 8 South and Range 18 West. Today, the Manchester community is officially a part of Cad-do Township.

Indians were quite active in the area, particularly along the Ouachita River, prior to the arrival of Europeans. A 1720 French map shows the Ouachita as flowing into the "Rouge" (Red) River,

indicating that the French had indeed explored the region. Many modern-day names reflect a French influence — names such as L'Eau Frais, Cassa Masso, Tulip, Terre Noire and Saline.

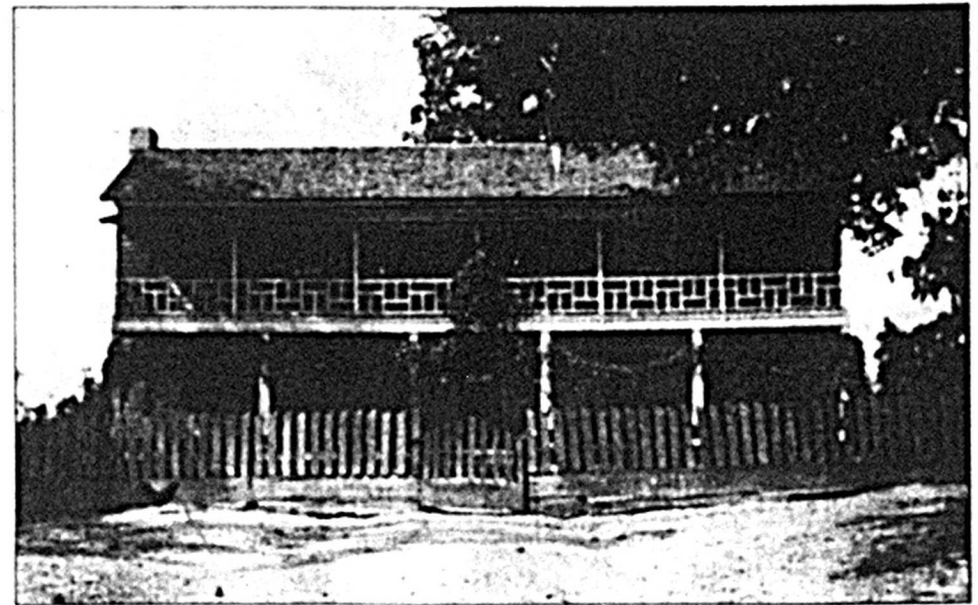
All of what is now Arkansas became a part of the United States following the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. By 1822, area lands had been surveyed, and settlers began filtering into Clark County. After statehood in 1836, even more people arrived. Early residents included the Hudson, Strong, Gray, Russell, Rucks, Holt, McCargo, Langley, Owens, McDonald, Smith, Tatum, Littlejohn and Holloway families. Land speculators such as the Somerville Land Company acquired huge tracts of land in eastern Clark County. Among the speculators from Tennessee who stayed on as permanent residents were John Brown, Thomas Hudson, Joseph Gray and N.K. Jones.

With the increases in

population came the establishment of Manchester Township in 1838. Citizens cleared land, built homes, churches and roads. The new land turned out to be extremely good for growing cotton, and the Ouachita River offered a convenient means of transportation to markets.

But the Civil War changed everything. The war devastated the area, not only on a personal level, but also within the economy: lives were lost, land values plummeted, possessions were ruined and personal property values declined to almost nothing.

Following the war, the Reconstruction Era proved to be especially difficult for Manchester. The old system of farming no longer existed — freedmen had no land to farm, and landowners had no money with which to hire labor. The introduction of sharecropping helped, but a shortage of animals made that difficult as well. Smaller farms became the norm. Even with the



COURTESY OF THE CLARK COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

The Nathan Strong family was one of the earliest residents of the Manchester area, moving to the area in 1837. This image shows the old Strong family home.

area's economic decline, a post office was established at Manchester in 1880. But just a few years later, in 1903, the Dalark Post Office took over service to the area. Later, that office closed, and today, mail for most residents goes through Arkadelphia.

Significant migration out of Manchester into more urban areas occurred in the first half of

the twentieth century. In contrast to the antebellum years and the success with cotton, as of 1980, only 223 acres of cotton were under cultivation in Clark County east of the Ouachita River. Few of those farmers pursued their work on a full-time basis. Today, most Manchester residents are employed elsewhere, and commute to

nearby towns for work.

For additional information 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).