

10-4-2016

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Recommended Citation

Richter, Wendy Bradley, "County's timber industry emerged in late 1800s" (2016). *Articles*. 170.
<https://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/articles/170>

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County's timber industry emerged in late 1800s

By Wendy Richter
For the Siftings

Throughout the history of the United States, wood has been one of the nation's most useful raw materials. For pioneers of the Clark County area, plenty of timber was available from forested areas and from the clearing of land. In the late 1800s, with growth and expansion of population and improvements in transportation, a great lumber and timber products industry emerged.

Cutting trees and sawing the logs into lumber was an important local enterprise almost from the beginning of the settlement of Arkansas, but the market remained primarily local until after the 1870s. As timber country, the Clark County landscape posed a va-



IMAGE COURTESY CLARK COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

Nine of the Grayson-McLeod Lumber Company's four-mule teams are shown pulling logs out of the woods on eight-wheeled wagons.

riety of difficulties for transporting logs, but railroads could travel the easy grades up the creek valleys and logs could be skidded by mules or hauled on wagons down

the hills to the tracks. The arrival of the railroad meant that for the first time, large-scale cutting and processing of timber could be profitable. Products could be

sold to a national market.

Among the entrepreneurs who seized the opportunity to engage in the forest products industry were William Grayson and Nelson

McLeod. They became principal stockholders in the Arkadelphia Lumber Company and renamed the company Grayson-McLeod Lumber Company. They eventually built a mill and established the town of Graysonia on the west side of the Antoine River. At one time, the company town boasted a population of about 1,000. It had hotels/boarding houses, a post office, an ice plant, a drug store, a large commissary, a barbershop, a school, and a church. An economic downturn in the 1930s

and dwindling timber supplies resulted in the mill's closure and the gradual decline of the community. With a very limited population to serve, the post office closed in 1950.

For additional information about Clark County history, visit or contact the Clark County Historical Museum (www.clarkcountyhitory.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).

