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CCHA to highlight county's earliest and distinctive citizens

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CCHA to highlight county's earliest and distinctive citizens

By Wendy Richter
For the Siftings

Later this month, the Clark County Historical Association will present a living history program featuring some of Clark County's earliest and most distinctive citizens. Among the characters making appearances will be "Abner Hignight," portrayed by Meeks Etchieson; "Jacob Barkman," portrayed by Bob Thompson; "Rebecca Barkman," by Charlotte Jeffers; and "George W. Featherstonhaugh," by Steve Hennagin. The public is invited to meet these and other historical figures by attending the free living history event to be held at the historic Rosedale Plantation Barn on Old Military Road beginning at 2:00 p.m., Sunday, October 30.

Abner Hignight moved to the area shortly after the beginning of the nineteenth century. According to legend, Hignight traveled southwest from Missouri into Arkansas along the primitive path that was later called the Southwest Trail or Military Road. Hignight eventually settled along that road, about two miles west of Hollywood. In 1823, after the U.S. land office opened in Washington, Arkansas, he acquired land on the Terre Noir Creek where the road from Hollywood to Antoine crosses the stream today. It is believed that he built a sizable log home there shortly thereafter and lived in it for the rest of his life. Hignight served on Clark County's first grand jury, with court held at the home of fellow pioneer Jacob Barkman. Court records indicate that Hignight played an active role in the area's initial development, since he was also appointed to "lay out a road from Barkman's by James Bryan's store to Jacob Wells' and from the Terre Noir to the Little Missouri River." According to Hignight's son, Abner advanced the area's develop-

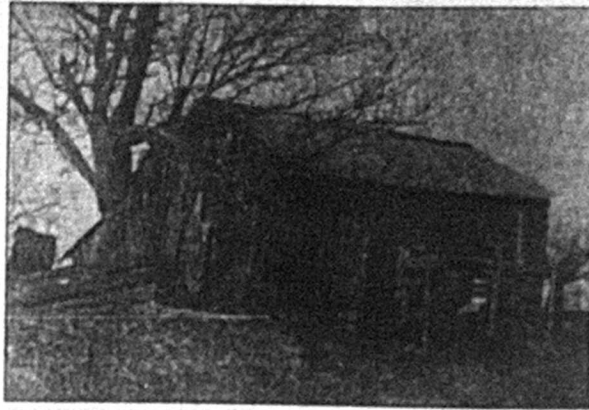


Image is of the Abner Hignight place. The structure was torn down sometime in the 1950s. COURTESY OF THE CLARK COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

ment in other ways as well. For example, he brought the first seed corn to Clark County from Louisiana. As time went on, Abner Hignight became "moderately prosperous" as he amassed almost 300 acres. Among his holdings was a field which contained a large salt lick, which provided salt for the farm's cows. Previously, buffalo frequented the place. Perhaps that is what drew Hignight to the location, for he was best known as a buffalo and bear hunter.

One man who met Hignight was George William Featherstonhaugh, who visited Arkansas and Clark County in the early 1830s. Featherstonhaugh actually spent a night at the Hignight home, and described Abner's preparations for a bear hunt: "His dress consisted of a hunting jacket and leggings made of skins tanned by himself. He had a cap made of skin, a girdle around his waist, in which were stuck his hatchet and butcher knife, and a rifle weighing sixteen pounds

on his shoulder. He used two pack horses to carry Indian corn for their subsistence and some necessary articles for himself, and to bring back the returns of his hunting. The most important part of his retinue consisted of eight dogs which he valued very highly and especially the older ones, on account of their great sagacity and prudence." His appearance and personality must have been quite striking, for another man, writing in 1904 about Hignight, described him as "a great curiosity to those who did not know him," and "a rough diamond of the first water."

For additional information about the living history program on October 30 or other Clark County history matters, 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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