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Evolution of local post office

Wendy Bradley Richter

Arkansas State Archives, wendy.richter@arkansas.gov

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Clark County Chronicles: Evolution of local post office

By Wendy Richter

At this time of year, many people begin to make preparations to send or receive packages by mail during the holiday season. Today, relatively few homes or businesses fail to receive some sort of communication each day the United States Postal Service operates. But, many don't stop to think about the improvements that have taken place in that service through the years.

Prior to the availability of the telegraph, telephone, radio, television, or the internet, mail provided the only means of communication between different locales. And, in the United States, early on, the mail system proved to be primitive, slow, and unpredictable. But, as the new nation grew and expanded, so did its mail system. As American settlers moved west, occupying new lands, their commerce and communication needs required dependable, affordable mail service. One of the places served by the nation's postal service was Arkansas Territory.

As opportunities grew in the new Arkansas Territory established in 1819, postal service began to meet the ever-increasing demands of settlers. Beginning in 1817, Davidsonville, in Lawrence County, became the site of Arkansas's first post office. It was served once a month by a man on horseback who traveled from Monroe, Louisiana, via Arkansas Post, and then to

St. Louis. A few weeks after Davidsonville, Arkansas Post joined the ranks of official mail service points, and became the Territory's second post office.

It often proved difficult for post riders to maintain regular schedules over their wilderness routes. In sparsely settled country, accidents involving horses occurred frequently, and flooded streams often caused delays. Complaints about service appeared from time to time in area newspapers. For example, in 1820, Arkansas Post was without mail for five weeks. Little Rock had no mail from the east for several months in 1823. In 1836, noted Arkansan Albert Pike observed that sending mail quarterly "by balloon or snag-boat" would be an improvement!

In addition to bad weather and poor road conditions, other reasons caused delayed delivery or lost mail. In fact, even by 1872 after many improvements in transportation, observations about issues with mail service were to be found in area newspapers. In September of that year, an Arkadelphia newspaper reported a theft: "We understand the mail from this place [Arkadelphia] to Little Rock was robbed on Friday night of last week, somewhere between Midway and Rockport. The driver and two or three others, we learn, have been arrested as being concerned in the robbery. The strap was cut and all the registered letters taken out and rifled of their contents, but

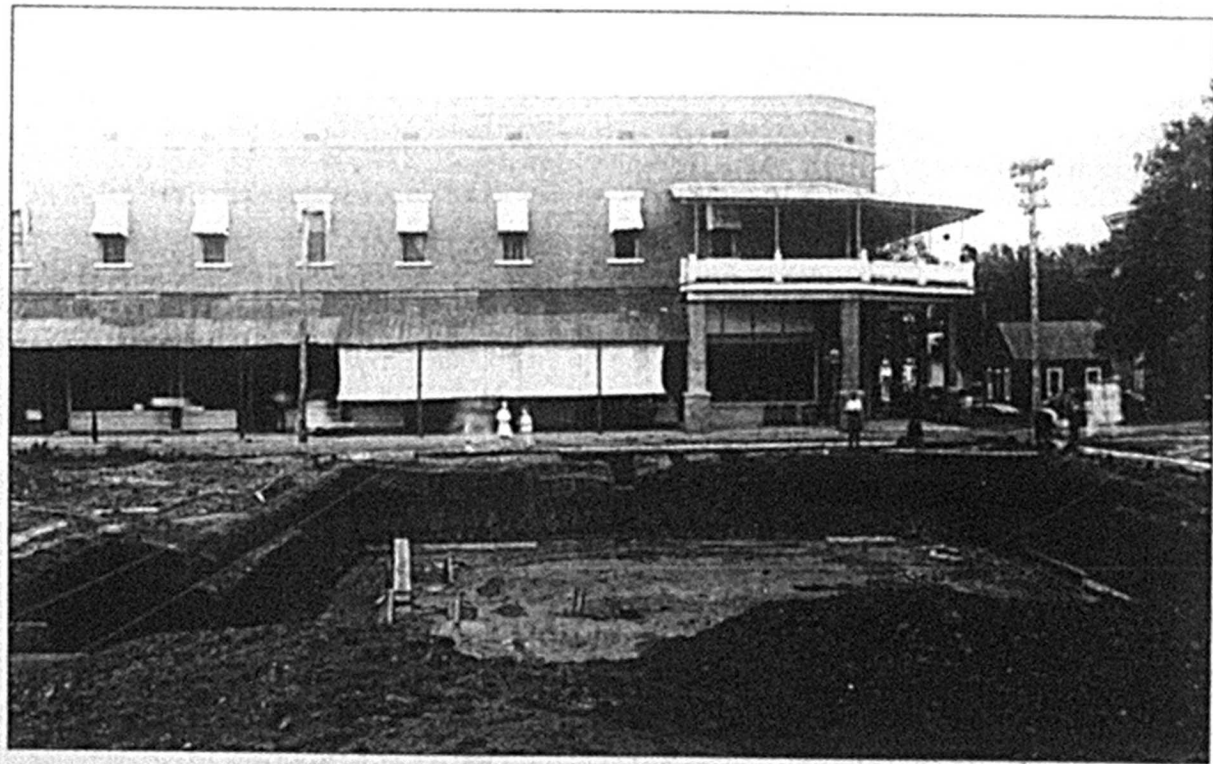


IMAGE COURTESY OF CLARK COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

Construction began on a new Arkadelphia Post Office in 1916. The building is now Southwest Sporting Goods. In the background, the iconic Caddo Hotel stands across the street. Just a few years old at the time of this photo, the Caddo's brick exterior had not yet been painted. The change to its distinctive white color did not occur until the mid-1930s. The Caddo burned in 1989.

fortunately, we are informed, there were but two in the bag."

Clark County's post offices have a fascinating history and add much to what is known about various communities—for example, many once-bustling communities have faded into obscurity as population shifts and modernization occurred, all illustrated by establishment and discontinuation of post offices. Among Clark County's earliest post offices were Alpine (1849); Amity (1848); Anvill (1850); Arkadel-

phia (1843); Beech Creek (1852); Biscoeville (1820s); Clear Springs (1856); DeGray (1856); Franklin Settlement (1827); Greenville (1830); Hickory Grove (1854); Highway (1850s); Hollywood (1860); McNeely Ridge (1857); Missouri (1846); Okolona (1858); Raymond (1835); Rome (1851); Rossville (1854); Terre Noir (1846); Vei (1854); and Wolf Creek (1821).

The Clark County Historical Association's forthcoming 2016 Clark County Historical Journal

includes an article which describes postal service in early Arkansas, and particularly post offices and mail service in Clark County. For information about how to get your copy of the Journal or to inquire about other Clark County history matters, visit or contact the Clark County Historical Museum (www.clark-countyhistory.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).