

4-5-2017

History of Okolona and its schools

Wendy Bradley Richter

Arkansas State Archives, wendy.richter@arkansas.gov

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/articles>



Part of the [Public History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Richter, Wendy Bradley, "History of Okolona and its schools" (2017). *Articles*. 193.
<https://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/articles/193>

This News Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Faculty Publications at Scholarly Commons @ Ouachita. It has been accepted for inclusion in Articles by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Commons @ Ouachita. For more information, please contact mortensona@obu.edu.

History of Okolona and its schools

By Wendy Richter
For the Siftings

The town of Okolona in southwestern Clark County was first settled by Americans in the early 1830s when settlers began arriving by covered wagons from Okolona, Mississippi.

These first residents built their homes on low ground northwest of where the railroad depot later stood. After a few years of mud there, however, the small settlement moved to the town's current location on higher ground where the town continued to grow.

Activities common to many rural Arkansas communities transpired. For example, the Masons established a lodge in Okolona in 1857. The post office opened in 1858. In 1875 the Okolona Grange sponsored a neighborhood fair, which may have been the first fair to be held in Clark County. Okolona's first bank opened in 1902. The first train arrived from Smithton and Burtzell in 1885. And, that same year, the Arkansas Messenger (later the Okolona Mes-

senger) began publication. Telephones first served the town in 1904, about the same time that Okolona became an incorporated town.

Along with all of the other activity, education was a priority in the small town. Okolona's first school was a log building, with desks and benches made of hewn logs. In 1859, a two-story academy replaced the log building at the same site, and was known as the Okolona Male and Female Institute. This school advertised tuition prices as ranging from two dollars per month for "First Class Spelling, Reading and Writing," to five dollars per month for "Fourth Class Ancient Languages and Higher Mathematics." This school building was torn down in the 1920s.

In about 1890, Okolona High School was built across town from the original academy. Later, as schools began to consolidate in the mid-twentieth century, Okolona became the center of a geographically large school district. In 1969 Simmons High School (a Rosenwald school built



in Okolona in 1928) and Okolona High School consolidated. However, the town began to fade. The student population also declined, resulting in the school's closure in the 1980s and pupils attending classes in other towns.

The Clark County Historical Association's book, *Clark County, Arkansas: Past and Present*, contains additional photographs and details about Okolona and its schools. To see the book or for more information about Clark County history, 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).