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Ouachita River Frozen at Arkadelphia

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Ouachita River Frozen at Arkadelphia

Severely cold weather visited Clark County many decades ago. The years of 1918 and 1899 included some of the lowest temperatures on record. It was so cold that the Ouachita River froze here in Arkadelphia! Photographs from 1918 illustrate that some area residents seized the rare opportunity to walk across the river.

Interestingly, the *Southern Standard* newspaper had relatively little to say about the extreme temperatures. On January 17, 1918, the paper did, however, recall 1899 as the year of the “big freeze” and characterized current conditions as being the “coldest weather during past week we have had here for eighteen years.” The article’s headline read, “Mother Earth Has Blanket of Snow:”

“During the past week we have experienced real winter weather here, in fact the coldest weather which we have had in many years. Friday night was the very coldest, as on that night the mercury in the thermometers dropped to 10 degrees below zero, though for several days after Friday the figures hovered around zero. The extreme cold weather followed a 7-inch snow which was covering the ground on Friday morning. On Sunday night, however, it became warmer, and with a continual rain the snow was formed into a slush which made it most disagreeable. However, there is plenty of snow on the ground yet.

“While we have had several cold spells this winter, this last spell is perhaps the coldest since the last big freeze in February, 1899, though it was hardly as cold as it was then, nor did it last as long, for then the Ouachita River was frozen over so hard that wagons were hauled across it, while at this time the river was only partially frozen over, though the river is frozen thick enough for skating with safety. Practically all business has been suspended during this week.”