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# Ashby's building used by Freedmen's Bureau



**By Wendy Richter**  
For the Siftings

The years following the Civil War were tumultuous times in the South as people began to adjust to a new way of life.

To assist in that effort, the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands—commonly called the Freedmen's Bureau—began work in Arkansas in June of 1865. In the state, the federal agency helped a population of approximately 110,000 African Americans.

According to records, seventy-nine local agents served in thirty-six places in Arkansas from 1865 to 1869. Offices were set up in places of significant black population, including Arkadelphia. Today, the original records of the

Freedmen's Bureau's Arkansas offices are housed at the National Archives in Washington, D.C.

The Freedmen's Bureau Arkadelphia field office operated from the former Ashby store, located Main Street between Third and Fourth streets. John M. Ashby had purchased the property from J.E.M. Barkman in 1857 and J.H. O'Baugh built a store for Ashby about a year later.

O'Baugh was a brick mason, and intended for the structure to last—its brick walls were eighteen inches thick, and its woodwork hand-hewn. Since the new building was constructed for business purposes, there was no yard—it stood flush with the sidewalk that ran in front of it. Ashby operated his business as a grocery store with a harness shop upstairs. It is not clear whether this is the same venture as that of a "shoemaker" mentioned in 1865 Freedmen's Bureau records as "occupying a small part of the house."

John Ashby was killed in 1864 while serving in



IMAGE COURTESY OF THE CLARK COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

**The former Ashby store building (also the Freedmen's Bureau's Arkadelphia Field Office) served as a residence during the twentieth century.**

the Civil War; his wife continued to live in Arkadelphia. After their store's use by the Freedmen's Bureau in the late 1860s, the building served as a saloon, and then a

hotel and restaurant, before becoming a residence in 1901. A substantial frame section was added to the south end in the 1940s. The building was torn down in the early

1970s.

For additional information about Clark County history, visit or contact the Clark County Historical Museum ([www.clark-countyhistory.org](http://www.clark-countyhistory.org) or (870)

230-1360) or the Clark County Historical Association's Archives at the Ouachita Baptist University Library ([www.obu.edu/archives](http://www.obu.edu/archives) or (870) 245-5332).