

Dunbar Expedition stopped in Clark County

Public invited to attend program on expedition today

By Wendy Richter

For the Siftings

In 1804, a cadre of explorers left Natchez, Mississippi, seeking to learn more about the Ouachita River and the celebrated hot springs of the Ouachitas at the request of President Thomas Jefferson. William Dunbar and George Hunter of Philadelphia led the excursion up the Ouachita, constituting the first American investigation of its new Louisiana Territory. Their reports pertaining to the river's environs provide some of the earliest descriptions of the Ouachita River region, including the area that would become Clark County.

A special program hosted by the Clark County



William Dunbar

COURTESY OF OUACHITA
BAPTIST UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES

Historical Association on Jan. 5 will feature Dr. Trey Berry, President of Southern Arkansas University, as he discusses the long-term significance of the expedition's findings.

In October 1804, Dunbar and Hunter's group of 19 men left Mississippi and began their journey

toward what is now Arkansas. The Ouachita River region had long been inhabited by Indians in addition to European hunters, trappers, traders and explorers. Dunbar and Hunter recorded descriptions of their surroundings as they traveled up the river. The party spent Nov. 28 and 29 in the vicinity of present-day Arkadelphia, describing the area around Arkadelphia as "beautiful" and "unspoiled." And, the scientists took some time to examine the salt springs here before moving on toward Hot Springs, their final destination.

After spending several weeks studying the hot springs, Dunbar and Hunter began the return

trip home on Jan. 8, 1805. The ascent of the Ouachita had taken 50 days, but the descent took less than half that. As the men traveled back through present-day Clark County, they met a group of Indians who may have been Quapaw. Hunter described them as "Indians from the river Arkansa." By the end of the month, all had returned to Natchez.

In the following weeks, William Dunbar and George Hunter prepared the reports of their journey for President Thomas Jefferson. Dunbar's report made it to the president more than a year before Lewis and Clark returned from their trip into the Northwest. While the

CCC

Continued from Page 2

men were certainly not the first people to travel the waters of the Ouachita, they were indeed the first Americans to complete a scientific mapping of the river and its tributaries.

A very special program hosted by the Clark County Historical Association will revisit the findings of the Dunbar and Hunter expedition. Dr. Trey Berry, the recognized expert on the expedition, will be the speaker. Berry is the President of Southern Arkansas University, former Professor of History and Director of the Center for Regional Studies at Ouachita Baptist University, and a Past President of the Clark County Historical Association. Berry authored a book about the expedition, "The Forgotten Expedition, 1804-1805: The Louisiana Pur-

chase Journals of Dunbar and Hunter," and also appeared in the award-winning documentary, "The Forgotten Expedition."

The public is invited to attend the program, which begins at noon, Tuesday, Jan. 5, at Western Sizzlin' in Arkadelphia. Dunbar's ink pen, eyeglasses, compass, and other artifacts, together with the journal he carried up the Ouachita River in 1804, are preserved today by the Ouachita Baptist University Archives in Arkadelphia and will be displayed as a part of the program.

For additional information about Clark County history, visit or contact the Clark County Historical Museum at the train depot (www.clarkcountyhitory.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).