

Graysonia once a thriving community

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For the Siftings

The town of Graysonia in western Clark County once boasted of a population of about 1,000 people, but today, can no longer be found on area maps. The story of its rise and fall parallels that of many southern timber company towns which no longer exist.

Graysonia was established soon after William Grayson and Nelson McLeod became the principal stockholders in the Arkadelphia Lumber Company and renamed the company Grayson-McLeod Lumber Company. The company operated the sawmilling community of Daleville, located across the Ouachita River from Arkadelphia, but by 1907, the company had depleted the timber supply in the Daleville area, and needed to make a change — either extend its railroad to transport timber to the mill, or move the entire operation to a new location, closer to other forest resources. They decided to move the mill, and chose a site on the west side of the Antoine River, in Township 7 South, Range 23 West. The new town was named for the company's president.

At the beginning, 350 people lived and/or worked in the company town, which later grew to about 1,000 residents. One man described Graysonia this way: "The town of Graysonia, where nearly 800 people lived alongside the mill, within a broad bend of the Antoine River, had nearly 200 houses, three hotels or boarding houses, a post office, and an ice plant capable of producing 25 tons of ice a day." The town also sported a drug store, a large commissary, a confectionary with pool hall, a barbershop, a school, and a church.

Residents enjoyed many conveniences. Each house had a faucet, and the company provided distilled water for drinking; water from the faucets came straight from the river. Everyone in town received free electricity supplied by a generator on the engine that ran the sawmill. At night, a steam generator provided power for lighting. The Graysonia post office opened in 1907, and it was located on the hill near the Mountain View Hotel.

With production of about 150,000 board feet per day, the Graysonia mill was among the largest lumber manufacturing



IMAGE COURTESY OF THE CLARK COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

Graysonia was once a thriving part of Clark County and even was host to a sawmill, ice plant and a Civilian Conservation Corps camp.

plants in the South. By 1924, the Grayson-McLeod Lumber Company had been renamed the Ozan-Graysonia Lumber Company. It closed its mill in Prescott, leaving the company only with its Graysonia facility.

In 1931, the economic downturn of the Depression combined with a dwindling supply of timber to cause the Graysonia mill to close. However, after the mill stopped operating, the planer mill con-

tinued on for two more years, processing the logs in the mill pond and in storage.

In 1930, cinnabar had been discovered in the area. The company drove tunnels into a nearby mountain and found ore there. The mill's closure seemed to be a blessing in disguise, for the Arkansas Quicksilver Company of Prescott brought its smelting operation to Graysonia. The first shipment of Arkansas mercury left

Graysonia in April of 1932. In a few years, though, cinnabar operations slowed and people began to move away. Then, in the late 1930s, the federal government established a Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camp at Graysonia.

By 1950, Graysonia's population had declined to one — and that individual was a man who apparently camped in and around the area. The post office closed on Nov. 19, 1950,

and mail was routed to Alpine. Today, only a few pieces of concrete remain as tangible reminders of the town of Graysonia.

For additional 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).