CLARK COUNTY CHRONICLES

County seat saw several homes before Arkadelphia

By Wendy Richter
For the Siftings

Clark County was one of the five counties in existence at the time Arkansas became a Territory in 1819. The county's center of government and business activity has traditionally been the county seat. It was the place where early citizens came into direct contact with government, whether it be to assess personal property, pay real estate taxes, obtain a marriage license, or register to vote. Court was held in various places in territorial Clark County, such as the home of pioneer Jacob Barkman, west of the Caddo River, near what is now Caddo Valley. Later, a county seat was established at Greenville, on the Military Road (also known as the Southwest Trail).

The village of Greenville was located approximately fourteen miles west of Arkadelphia. The origin of its name is not known for certain, nor is it known exactly when it became a center for business, but a man named Green Hughes operated a store there as early as 1824. When Greenville became the county seat in 1830, there were about 1,300 people in the entire county. With the removal in 1829 of the area now known as Hot Spring and Garland counties, the geographical center of Clark County shifted southward, bringing about interest in a change in the location of the county seat.

Between 1819 and 1825, court sessions were held at the home of Jacob Barkman. After that, a place called Biscoeville served as the county seat. Biscoeville was approximately two miles up the Caddo River from Barkman's place. Then, the center of Clark County government came to be at the home of Adam Stroud, about one mile east of present-day Hollywood. There it remained until 1830.

The county accepted an offer by Moses Collins to donate thirty acres of land along the Military Road about three miles west of Stroud's place as a site for a county seat. Here, at Greenville, Collins operated the county's first cotton gin-grist mill-sawmill with water power generated from damming Terre Noire Creek. A post office opened in 1830 with Collins as postmaster. Clark County built a courthouse and jail at Greenville. The courthouse was twenty-feet square, and the jail only fifteen-feet square. Both were made of logs.

During court sessions, the little village became crowded with people attending trials and conducting other business. Many prominent Arkansas lawyers of the day represented clients at Greenville, including men such as Albert Pike, Chester Ashley, Robert Crittenden, Grandison Royston, and future Arkansas governor Harris Flanagin.

Local legend has it that Greenville was forced to give up the county seat because of a ruse. In 1842 Arkadelphia citizens sponsored a picnic and a great crowd gathered from the town and surrounding countryside. After the crowd enjoyed a large meal

IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARKANSAS HISTORY COMMISSION

Robert Crittenden represented clients at the Clark County seat in Greenville. Crittenden served as the first Secretary of Arkansas Territory.

— and alcoholic beverages by many — an orator rose to extol the virtues of Arkadelphia. The speaker emphasized the town's central location within the county and the advantages of its location along the Ouachita River. He asked for a vote to make Arkadelphia the county seat. The motion passed with a great deal of shouting. Conveniently for Arkadelphia, there were not enough Greenville citizens present to give adequate voice in opposition to the proposal. As a result of this public display of popular opinion in favor of Arkadelphia, the Quorum Court made the decision to move the county seat from Greenville to Arkadelphia. So, in 1842 Arkadelphia became the permanent location of the Clark County seat, and two years after that, a courthouse was constructed to house governmental operations.

After losing its status as the county seat, Greenville's post office closed in 1843, and the town faded into oblivion. Today, there are no visible remains of the Greenville community or the county government's structures.

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