

CHAPTER 6

MID-1800's

ARKANSAS STATEHOOD

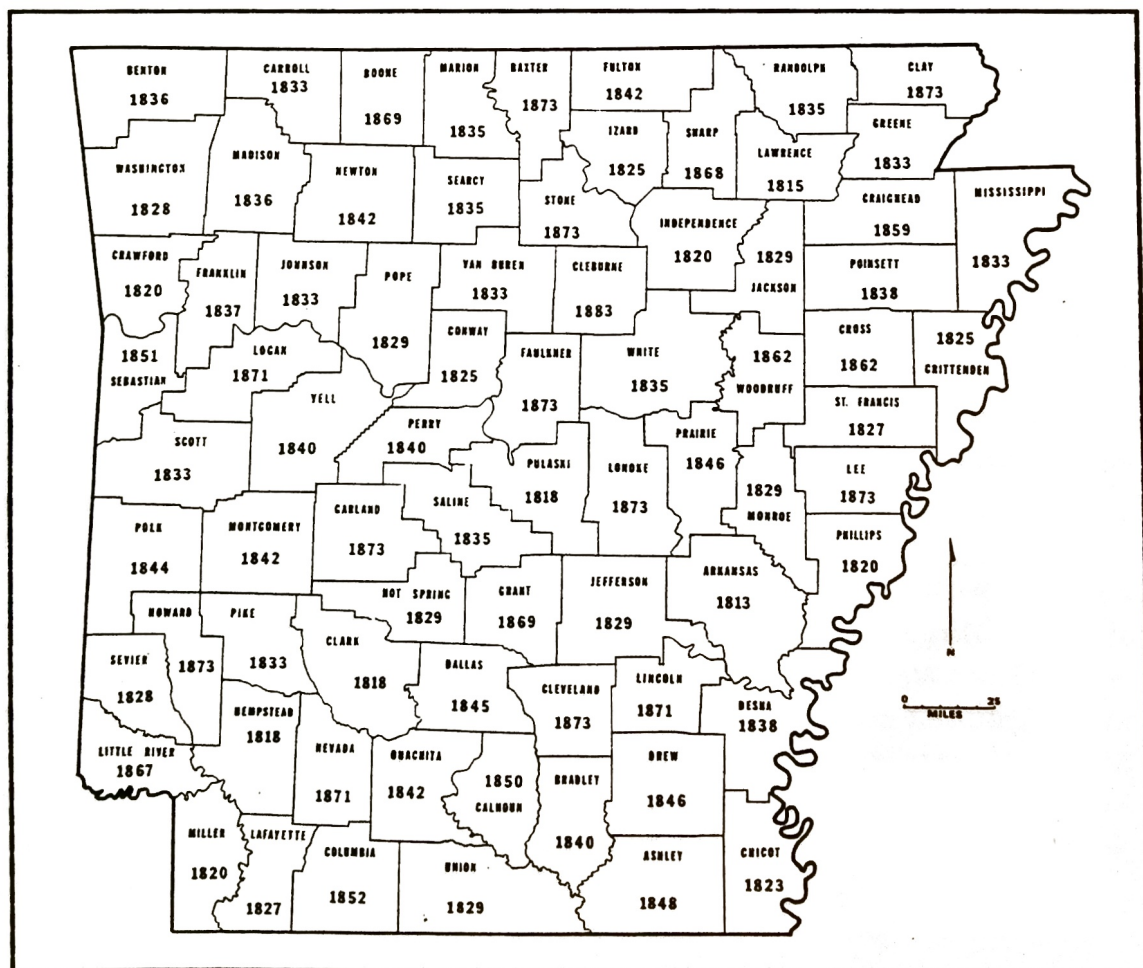
In 1819, Arkansas became a territory. The Arkansas territorial government first met in Arkansas Post, but moved to Little Rock in 1821.



When Arkansas was admitted as the twenty-fifth state in June of 1836, it barely met the required minimum of 50,000 people. The Indians or Blacks were not counted. The northern states objected to Arkansas's statehood. Michigan was trying for statehood at the same time. Congress compromised and gave both territories statehood; one a slavery state and one a state without slavery.



BIRTH DATES OF ARKANSAS COUNTIES





ANTEBELLUM ARKANSAS

By the 1850's Arkansas had over 200,000 people. This era was called the antebellum period, meaning before the Civil War. At that time, England had many clothing factories and needed to buy cotton. The price was good. Arkansas had an abundance of productive land that could grow cotton. First the land must be cleared of timber and brush. Also, growing cotton required an enormous amount of labor. With Black slaves, both of these needs could be met.

The farmers rapidly poured into this new state. Some brought slaves with them. Others found land first and then bought slaves. A good example of a booming farming community was Washington in Hempstead County. It was in the midst of rich, rolling prairie, well suited for farming. Grain could be grown here. Much grain was needed to feed work animals as well as people. Water wheels turned the grinding mills. They were sometimes called "grist mills." Grains, such as wheat or corn, could be turned into flour for feeding large families. In 1860, Arkansas had 97 grist mills.

WATER WHEEL TURNS GRIST MILL



Peace and prosperity prevailed in Arkansas in the 1850's. The Indian wars had ended. Many of the Indians remaining in Arkansas had received the Lord Jesus Christ into their lives and were very good citizens. Many of the Black slaves were also becoming Christians. Arkansas was prospering spiritually as well as economically.

Cotton brought a good price. Although slavery was an evil that needed correction, farmers were making money using slave labor. Some of the slave owners were good to their slaves. Others abused them in terrible ways. The abolition of slavery was often a topic of lively discussion.

Many homes built during this time still stand today and are called antebellum homes. They stand as a monument to the culture of that time. Those who lived in the mountain country of northwest Arkansas lived a much different life-style. Although there were some exceptions, the majority of these people had more of a subsistence economy. This means they lived mostly on food and materials that they produced on their own land. For many, this was a poor standard of living. However, if they had a Christian home, they were very rich in love, joy and hope. These things make for a more abundant life than all the luxuries that money can buy.

CIVIL WAR

Catastrophe struck Arkansas in 1861. The Civil War changed every person in Arkansas before it was over in 1865. The southern states of North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas, Virginia, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Florida, Tennessee, and Arkansas had much in common. They were all cotton-farming, slave-holding states. Most of the cotton and some tobacco was shipped to Europe. The northern states were constantly trying to tax the cotton and the imports from Europe into the South. They also opposed their stand on slavery. As a result of this constant disagreement, these southern states finally formed their own government. They were called, "The Confederate States of America." Other names included the Confederates, Rebels, or just "The South."

The border states of Missouri, Kentucky, West Virginia, and Maryland tried to remain independent and stay out of the war. Twenty-three northern states stood against these eleven southern states in the long war.

Most of the West was not involved. The northern states were also called the Union, Federals, or sometimes "Yankees."

England and France both had clothing mills and depended on cotton from the South. At first they were on the side of the Confederates, but when slavery became an issue they were divided in their support of the South.

The major theme that drove the southerners was the violation of their states' rights. Confederates were against federal intrusion into the self government of each individual state. They considered this a violation of the Constitution.

The Civil War had been going on for about two years before President Lincoln issued his Emancipation Proclamation freeing the Black slaves. The southern slaves were set free in hopes they would turn on their owners and start a Black revolution. This did not occur. Many slaves were loyal to their masters.

There were several Civil War battles fought in Arkansas. In the spring of 1862, Confederate forces were forced out of southwest Missouri and into northwest Arkansas. This led to the three-day battle at Pea Ridge, Arkansas. Over 26,000 men fought in this battle; around 388 were killed. Other major battles in the state were: Prairie Grove near Fayetteville; Arkansas Post; Poison Springs in Ouachita County; Little Rock; Jenkins Ferry in Hot Springs County; Marks Mill in Bradley County; and Helena in Phillips County.

"Guerrilla forces" were active in Missouri all during the war. These unusual soldiers were partly supplied from Arkansas. Guerrilla groups would hide in the woods and do sneak attacks on Union transportation and communication facilities. Sometimes they raided civilian communities that were helping the federal troops.

More Americans died in the Civil War than in all America's other wars combined. About 618,000 men died in four years of fighting. The war ended in 1865, but there was much bitterness left in the hearts of people. This bitterness continued for another fifty years, and for a few people it continued even longer.

RECONSTRUCTION

On April 9, 1865, the North and South signed a peace treaty and the war ended. President Lincoln was killed six days later. Lincoln was in favor of "binding the wounds" and allowing the South to rebuild in freedom. He urged the North to have "malice toward none" with "charity for all." Vice President Andrew Johnson was not so kind. Now, as President, Johnson began a sad period of oppression on the southern states. The next President, Ulysses S. Grant, created even more problems for the South. He had been a Northern Civil War general, and was elected President after Johnson finished Lincoln's term. Grant's term of office was one of vengeance toward the south.

In late 1865, Arkansas was under total army control. The Federal Government established the Freedman's Bureau. The purpose of this bureau was to help the Black people make the big change from slavery to citizenship. Orphanages, hospitals, and schools were established. As with most government bureaucracies, there was corruption. The politicians received most of the money, and the state of Arkansas was left with the debt.

The Union government sent "carpetbaggers" to rule over the local governments. They traveled often and used luggage made from carpet-like material, thus the term "carpetbaggers." Sometimes these traveling government agents would appoint to government positions ex-slaves who could neither read nor write. These Blacks, who knew nothing about business or government, were used by the carpetbaggers for their own selfish purposes. The unknowing Blacks became puppets for corruption. The carpetbaggers borrowed money on the state and then pocketed the money. This caused some of the southern states to become deeply in debt.

Arkansas was in severe poverty after the war. Their Confederate money was worthless. The North imposed high taxes. It was with great difficulty that farmers began to plant a few crops. It was hard to get enough money even to buy seed. Big plantations were divided into smaller farms and rented to sharecroppers. Sharecropping became a way of life in Arkansas until recent years.

KKK

There was much violence after the war, and very little law and order. Citizens organized into groups and made their own laws. One of these groups was the Ku Klux Klan. The KKK developed into an evil organization. President Grant sent the army to stop the Klan. This only pushed the Klan into more secrecy. The organization is still in operation in Arkansas.

RAILROAD BUILDING

The first railroad in Arkansas was between Little Rock and Memphis. By 1858, track was laid from Hopefield to the St. Francis River. Four years later a second link was completed from the White River to Little Rock. Railroading boomed after the Civil War. By 1874, trains were running diagonally across Arkansas from the northeast corner to the southwest corner. In the same year, the Little Rock and Ft. Smith completed its line to the Oklahoma border. By the end of the 1870's there were 822 miles of railroad track in Arkansas.

Freight could not be hauled as economically over rail as by boat. Railroads prospered most by hauling freight and passengers to places in Arkansas that were not accessible by boat.