

Welcome to the upper Mississippi Delta Region. Thousands of years ago Native Americans lived in this area. The fertile soil, bountiful wildlife, and comfortable climate attracted people to the region. From initial small settlements, populations grew and many villages were founded along the local rivers. The villages were surrounded by fields of corn, beans, and other crops. Archeologists have identified more than 75 Native American village sites in Jackson County. We don't know what the earliest Native Americans called themselves, but later tribes who lived in or passed through the area included the Osage, the Quapaw, and the Cherokee."

The rivers also brought Europeans to this edge of civilization in the early 1800's. Trappers used the 600 mile long White River as a water road. In 1822 trappers Obediah Cartwright and his friend Leauteau camped at Jack's Creek on the Black River just north of where it joins the White River.

EARLY SETTLEMENT

Five years later, a young man whose family was from Kentucky, Abraham Ruddell Jr., staked a claim here and built a grist mill. Pioneers began to settle, clearing fields and building farms. Abraham Ruddell sold his mill and land claim to Townsend Dickenson who sold the property in 1834 to Captain Thomas Todd Tunstall.

Captain Tunstall had recently arrived in Batesville from Kentucky on the *William Parsons*, which was the second sternwheel to ply the White River. He bought the property for \$2,000, established a riverport for his 116 ton capacity sternwheeler and platted the town.



CAPTAIN THOMAS TODD TUNSTALL
Grandfather of Jacksonport

GROWTH

Raising cotton, horses and 12 children, Thomas Todd Tunstall made Jacks Port the last main stop on the White River. Nine packets could tie up at his dock at one time. His eldest son William opened the Tunstall Tavern and warehouses in 1840. Goods were unloaded here and transported up both rivers on smaller upriver crafts. Exports at this time were timber, cotton, corn, hides and bear grease.

The Tavern became a base for Tunstall's business enterprises, a political meeting place and the social center for the area. Captain Thomas Tunstall built a home on Dota Creek, about 5 miles up the Black River. He called it Paroquet Landing. His race horses were known state-wide for their speed and breed-

ing. Many settlers poured into the area. Most were well educated people mainly from the Eastern seaboard. They were lawyers, doctors, teachers and businessmen. Soon Jacks Port had almost 1000 people living here. The town was known throughout the lower Mississippi Valley for its gracious hospitality. There was an active Shakespeare Club, dances, fall bear hunts, and the private schools rivaled Little Rock's. Some of the larger boats that docked held up to 200 passengers; they traveled upriver this far on honeymoons, business trips, house parties and on their way westward.

In 1853, the Jackson County seat was moved to what was now being called Jacksonport. The first newspaper, called the Weekly News, was printed in 1852. The same year William Tunstall, Captain Tunstall's eldest son, donated eight acres for the courthouse.

CIVIL WAR

In 1861 Arkansas seceded from the Union when President Lincoln called for 75,000 troops to "stop the Southern insurrection." Captain Alexander Corbin Pickett assembled 120 Jackson County men into the Jackson Guards. The community rallied to support their men and boys. Margaret Logan Robinson bought silk in Memphis for a flag; Mrs. Densford made the stars, and all the ladies, young and old, worked on it. The flag was presented with sad farewells on May 5, 1861. The Jackson Guards headed toward Memphis on the *Mary Patterson*, with Captain Morgan Patterson at the helm.

Within a year the fight came to Jackson County. The Union Army was at Batesville heading in this direction. They met resistance at Litchfield on Village Creek, but marched in and set up Camp Tucker on the west bank of the mouth of the Black River. At one time there were 5,429 Union soldiers in the camp. In June, Jacksonport was recaptured by the Confederate Army.

Civilians were also having a difficult time. Besides the soldiers, they had to contend with Bushwackers (Confederate guerrilla soldiers) and Jayhawkers (Union guerrilla soldiers.) These men had no respect for military or civil law, personal rights of property or human suffering. They caused many soldiers to desert their winter quarters to return to northern Arkansas to protect their homes and families. Many families left their home and went further west for safety.

When the Union Army passed through areas, many blacks joined the union army to fight for freedom.

SURRENDER

On June 5, 1865, Confederate General Jeff Thompson, "Swampfox of the Confederacy," surrendered over 6,000 troops to Lt. Colonel C.W. Davis at the Jacksonport steamboat landing. After four years of struggle, with five different generals holding power over the town, military rule ended. The citizens were free to re-establish civilian government and move forward.

TRYING TO REBUILD

During the war, the tax money set aside for the Courthouse was used to help the families of soldiers. After the war, taxes were again set aside to begin construction. Lieutenant Colonel John Adams Schnable was in charge of the project. He also built Spring Mill in Independence County and the Salado Creek Bridge. (Colonel Schnable claimed to be Captain of the Guard that hanged John Brown at Harpers Ferry, Virginia in 1859.) The massive courthouse was finally finished in 1872 at a cost of \$80,000. Outside, it boasted a black walnut paneled, triple seated privy which was talked about state-wide.

About 1870, the Iron Mountain and Southern Railroad petitioned Jacksonport for a land grant to be used for sidetracks and a depot. It would cost the town \$25,000. Leading citizens decided to vote against the railroad, thinking they would put it through anyway. They were wrong; the tracks were laid three and one half miles down the White River and Newport began to grow.

In February 1882 a fire burned 12 Jacksonport businesses and homes, and a few months later a flood washed away many more.

The once bustling town experienced one more boost of prosperity. In the late 1890's pearls were discovered in the rivers. The Indians had worn the beads for as long as could be remembered. They were worth much more to white men and many locals made thousands of dollars pearl hunting. A button factory was opened in Newport, and locals provided the mussel shells. Pearls are still a profitable industry in Jackson County. Though buttons are no longer made from them, the shells

are cleaned and used for "plugs" in the cultured pearl industry. The few pearls found today demand competitive prices in a global market.

Soon Jacksonport's boom was over. The county seat was moved to Newport in 1892. The courthouse stood empty for a while then was used as a public school. Soon the grand building slipped into obscurity. It was home to a cotton gin, a poorhouse, a granary and finally wild animals. The abandoned shell that was once the County's most impressive building stood desolate in the middle of an overgrown field in the center of a dying town. Scavenged of its rare windows and hand fitted doors, stripped of all worthy metals, the sad edifice was only worthy of scornful glances.

In 1962 the newly formed Jackson County Historical Society purchased the Jacksonport Courthouse, the "oldest public building in Jackson County." Donations from all over the county were put toward the purchase and refurbishing. Local families contributed money for materials. Many talented craftsmen donated their time to fit the new doors and windows, run electrical wire and refine the stately old building. Donations of 1800's artifacts came pouring in, many from established local families.

In 1963 the Arkansas Legislature designated the Museum/Courthouse a State Park. Governor Orval E. Faubus dedicated the building in 1965.

Jacksonport, AR sustained damage from a tornado March 1st, 1997. The Courthouse and Mary Woods No. 2 were closed until March 2002. Governor Mike Huckabee participated in the grand re-opening ceremony May 14, 2002.



Eason's Drug Store and Saddle Shop - ca. 1860's

Front cover

Robert E. Lee Saloon
Jacksonport Street Scene - ca. 1873



JACKSONPORT STATE PARK

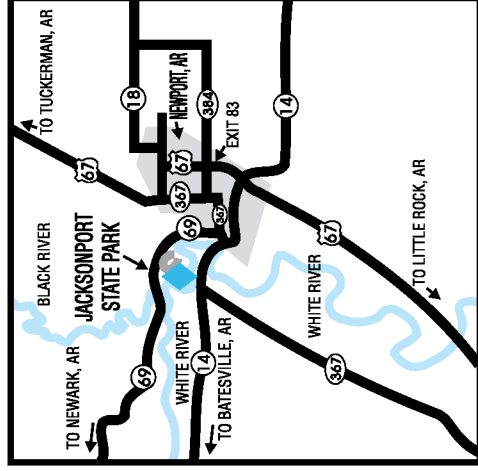
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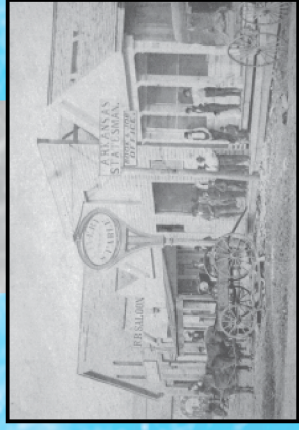
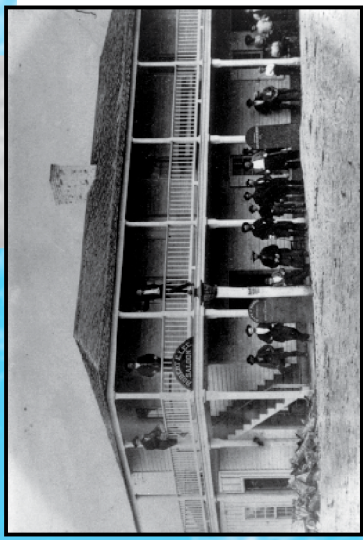
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Jacksonport Settlement History



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