

General Information on Pulaski County

Pulaski County was established by the Missouri territorial legislature on December 15, 1818. The third county to be organized in what would be the state of Arkansas, it was named for Casimir Pulaski, a Polish nobleman who fought in the American war for independence. Six other counties in the United States are also named for Count Pulaski.



Prior to being organized as a unit of the United States, Pulaski County was the home of the "Plum Bayou People". These original settlers were distinguished for their mound building and evidence of their civilization can be seen at Toltec Mounds State Park- some 15 miles east of North Little Rock.

Sometime after 1500 the Quapaw Indians moved into the lower Arkansas River valley. Although their permanent villages were southeast of the current county boundaries, Quapaw Tribesmen controlled a large portion of the county for hunting grounds until 1824.

During the Quapaw period, French explorers traveled the Arkansas River and named two of the county's most important landmarks- "point of rocks", now called Little Rock, and "big rock", also known as French rock, located two miles upstream from Little Rock. The French also identified the site of today's Pinnacle Mountain and the Maumelle River.

Tradition suggests that the individual settlers may have lived in the county in the late 18th century. However, permanent Anglo-American settlement did not begin in the county until 1807 when the John and Jacob Pyeatt families settled at Crystal Hill. New settlers arrived slowly. As late as 1820 Pulaski County had fewer than 2,000 inhabitants. Despite the small population, the Territorial Legislature designated Cadron, a fur trapping post on the Arkansas River, as the seat of government for the county. That same year, the United States Postal Service established post offices at Cadron and Crystal Hill. But the most significant change for the county came in 1821 when the territorial capitol was moved from Arkansas Post to Little Rock. County offices also moved from Cadron to Little Rock at that time. Except for a two-year period (1863-1865) in the Civil War when the capitol was moved to Washington in Hempstead County, Little Rock has remained the center of state and county government.

For almost a decade, county government was housed in a log structure in downtown Little Rock. That building was condemned in 1832 and the county was forced to rent space in a private home for over a year. When the 1833 county officials made arrangements to use part of the State House for office space. This agreement continued for almost 50 years before the expanding needs of state government forced Pulaski officials to vacate the State House building in 1883. County leaders began almost immediately to make plans for building a permanent court house for county offices. A site was selected at Second and Spring Streets and construction was completed in 1889.

The new court house was constructed of Fourche Mountain granite and cost \$80,000. In 1914, a shortage of office space forced authorities to build an annex to the original building. In 1979, renovation on both structures began and continued as funds became available.

Politics have always been an important part of the county's history – at city, county, state, and federal levels. Since being organized in 1818, the county's day-to-day administration has been directed by a "county judge". More than thirty men have served as judge. Policy decisions are made by a quorum court. At one time, the court had over 400 members and was one of the largest elected bodies in the world. The court was reduced to its current size of 15 members by Amendment 55 to the state constitution.

In the 20th century, the county became the financial and industrial center of the state and also serves as the hub for the state's transportation system. The Little Rock Air Force Base, opening in Jacksonville in 1955, is part of a world-wide supply and communication program.

Education is also an important part of the county. In addition to hosting the Arkansas Department of Education and the Department of Higher Education, Pulaski County has five institutions of higher learning. These include the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, Philander Smith College, Arkansas College, and Shorter College.

By the 1980's Pulaski County's 731 square miles had been filled with more than 360,000 residents – a density of almost 500 people per square mile. Three of the state's ten largest cities are located in the county. By the year 2000, population in the county is projected to reach over 400,000, approximately 15% of the state's total.

Early History

On December 15, 1818, Pulaski County was taken from Arkansas County by an act of the Legislature of Missouri Territory. Pulaski County became the third county of what was soon to become Arkansas Territory. The Polish patriot, Count Casimir Pulaski, who lost his life for America in the Revolutionary War, is the namesake of this and six other counties in the United States.

By 1824, Pulaski County has seen two county seats and several county officials. Edmund Hogan, a former officer of the United States Army, was appointed justice of the peace by the acting Governor of the Missouri Territory for the several townships of Pulaski County on December 18, 1818. Later in the month, Samuel McHenry received the appointment as Judge of the Court of Common Pleas, and Lemuel Currin was appointed sheriff.

Robert C. Oden became the first county clerk and Jacob Pyeatt, the first coroner. In Judge of 1820, the new Legislature of Arkansas Territory, then located at Arkansas Post, named Cadron as the county seat. Post offices were established at Cadron and Crystal Hill in 1820, but when the seat of Territorial Government moved to Little Rock in 1821, the county seat followed, leaving Cadron to wither away in a few decades.

Except for a brief period during the Civil War, when state government was removed to Washington, Hempstead County, Pulaski County has seen every session of the Legislature since 1821. The "Brooks-Baxter War," the 1874 dispute over the governorship during reconstruction, was centered in the County.



Pulaski County Court Houses

In Little Rock, a log structure served as the court house until 1832, when its condition demanded the removal of county offices to a rented brick house. When the State House was completed, County authorities were permitted to move their offices and court house there. In 1882, the General Assembly passed a bill requiring the County to vacate the east wing; when the County hesitated, the State took legal action. A Chancery Court opinion calling for removal was upheld by the Arkansas Supreme Court in November, 1883, and the County moved out.

Rented houses had to serve the County until construction of the Pulaski County Court House at Second and Spring Streets was completed in 1889. The handsome building, made of native Fourche Mountain granite, cost \$80,000 to construct. In 1914, an addition to the Court House provided much needed space and one of the most impressive interiors of any public structure in the State. Under the supervision of County Judge William E. Beaumont, the Court House began undergoing extensive restoration in 1979.

The Land

Pulaski County sits in the center of the state where the rich costal plain and Arkansas River delta meet the foothills of the Ouachita Mountains.

Before European settlement, American Indians inhabited the area. The last of these tribes was the Quapaw, who lost claim to the land in 1824 when about half of the Quapaw purchase was added to Pulaski County.

The original boundaries of Pulaski County took in a large part of central and western Arkansas, stretching into modern-day Oklahoma.

As growth in population demanded the formation of new counties, Pulaski County found itself trimmed to 731 square miles by 1873, a fraction of its original area.

Growth

The County's population has consistently increased along with that of Little Rock, the state's largest city. In 1820, the county held 1,921 people, while Little Rock had fewer than one hundred. By 1830, 2,395 people lived in the County and 527 in Little Rock. The County population numbered 63,179 in 1900, and the city 38,307. In 1970, population totals were 287,189 for the county and 132,483 for the city.

The County is the financial center of the State, the hub of the state's transportation system and the center for industry. The University of Arkansas has its Medical Science Campus, Little Rock Campus, a brand of the Law School, and the Graduate Institute of Technology in the county. The county is also home to three private

black colleges – Shorter, Philander Smith and Arkansas Baptist. The Little Rock Air Force Base officially opened in Jacksonville on October 9, 1955.

Major settlement did not begin on the north side of the Arkansas River across from Little Rock until the railroad reached there in 1860. The names DeCantillon and Huntersville and finally Argenta were dropped when the community settled on the name of North Little Rock. By 1970, North Little Rock had grown to a city of 60,040 people. Other incorporated towns or large unincorporated communities in the county are Alexander, Cammack Village, Jacksonville, and Sherwood.

A Brief History of Little Rock

In 1541, Hernando de Soto became the first white man to cross into the Arkansas territory. It is thought he camped near Little Rock, already a popular site among the Indians. 150 years passed before another white man came this way. In 1686, Henry de Tonti founded a trading center, Arkansas Post, the oldest French settlement on the Mississippi River.

In 1722 Bernard de la Harpe is said to have come up the Arkansas River in a canoe. Legend has it that as he came up the river, he saw the first outcropping of rock since he left the Mississippi and named it “the little rock”. The larger cliffs a little further upstream he named Big Rock. Today, there is still a Big Rock Township in North Little Rock.

The “little rock” was a landmark for many years before La Harpe came, however, because this part of the Arkansas River was easy to “ford” most of the year, and was an established trail for Indians and early travelers.

In 1803, Arkansas came into the U.S. as part of the Louisiana Purchase. When Louisiana joined the Union as a state in 1812, Arkansas became part of Missouri Territory. Before Missouri joined the U.S. in 1819, this area formed Arkansas Territory. A governing group met at Arkansas Post to determine the capital of the new territory. The group agreed that the capital needed to be centrally located. Two sites were mentioned: the “point of rocks” and Cadron area, near what is now Conway. One group of the Territorial Legislators removed Cadron from consideration and named Little Rock as the location.

The location of Little Rock, where the plains meet the hills, the natural ford of the river, and the location of the Southwest Trail to Louisiana and Texas were reasons for the selection. Also, the bluff protected the settlement from flooding by the Arkansas River, the second largest of the Mississippi River tributaries.

In addition to these logical reasons for choosing Little Rock, there were some people who hoped to get rich from land speculation. Two groups claimed ownership of the area around the little rock. One group had been victims of earthquakes along the New Madrid Fault in 1811-12. Congress offered these people the chance to relocate in Union land. Another group claimed the land for other reasons. Stephen F. Austin was one of the early land speculators. When the second group won the legal right to the land in court, the first group got so angry they actually moved what buildings they could, and destroyed what they could not move! The feud was finally settled when both sides divided the disputed area pretty much in half.

In 1820, there were 12 or 13 white, male residents, 1 frame building and 3 or 4 pine log huts. By 1830, there were 430 permanent citizens, among them doctors and lawyers. By 1835 the town boasted 726 citizens.

On July 4, 1820, the Reverend Cephas Washburn, a Presbyterian minister, preached the first sermon in the area. In 1828, Reverend James Moore founded the First Presbyterian Church, still in existence at 8th and Scott Streets in Little Rock. In July of 1824, a black Baptist minister, the Reverend Silas T. Toncray, from Memphis, directed the building of the first church here. His congregation was composed of both black and white members. The log building was used for both religious and political purposes.

But there were other influences in Little Rock than the church. A favorite pastime was horse racing. The Little Rock Jockey Club was organized in 1834. Since the city was on the edge of the frontier, the reputation for being a rough place was well-deserved. Stabbings and shootings were frequent, and one traveler was shocked to call on the minister and find him wearing a gun! Counterfeiters were a problem and gambling was another favorite pass-time.

The city was very dependent on the river. There were no roads between Little Rock and Memphis. Steamboats were very important to development, although the river was treacherous and low water part of the year made even the river impassable. Since there were no roads, river traffic was the only link to the outside world. Goods and staples were brought upstream and pelts, skins, fur and cotton were taken back down river. Packet boats plied the river when they could.

In 1833, the Little Rock Bridge Company was formed to build a bridge over the river. After six years, a notice was seen cautioning people not to “swing upon or shake” the bridge. Not too long after, this bridge apparently was washed away in one of the frequent floods along the Arkansas.

Finally in 1824, the U.S. Congress appropriated \$15,000 for a road between Little Rock and Memphis. The road opened in 1827. In 1832, a stage route began, running once a week between Little Rock and Arkansas Post. Mail service was awful. It wasn't unusual for mail to take a month to arrive here. In 1836, mail was delivered in a record breaking 14 days. The longest time between deliveries was 35 days.

Some famous people who came to or went through Little Rock include:
Sam Houston, who spent 2 days here in 1829.

Washington Irving stopped over after a trip to the far west in 1832.

Davy Crockett came in November 1835 on his way to Texas.

Albert Pike arrived in 1833, and became a prominent citizen. His home is now the Pike-Fletcher-Terry Mansion, the home of the Arkansas Arts Center's Decorative Arts Museum.

William Woodruff founded the “Arkansas Gazette” in 1819 at Arkansas Post. When Little Rock was named the capital city, Woodruff moved here and published the first issue of the paper from Little Rock on December 21, 1821. It was the oldest, continuously published newspaper west of the Mississippi River. The paper was sold and closed in 1991.

Places that you can go that were here in the 1800's

Buildings in the Arkansas Territorial Restoration, 3rd & Scott

Hinderliter Grog Shop – the oldest house in the city still on its original site. Built in 1820.

Woodruff House – built in 1819, moved to Little Rock in 1824. This house contains a time line of Arkansas history.

Brownley-Noland House – early 1840's.

The Old Arsenal Building – 1836. Now the Museum of Science and History in MacArthur Park, located at 9th and I-30.

The Old State House – 1836. Located in the 200 block of West Markham. The state capitol building from 1836 to 1911, now a museum of Arkansas history.

Pike-Fletcher-Terry Mansion – built in the 1840's. Now the Decorative Arts Museum, this antebellum home is located between 7th and 8th Streets on Rock.

Capital Hotel – 1873. First used as an office building, made into a hotel in 1877. Located at Markham & Louisiana Streets.

Pulaski County Court House – 1880's. Located between Spring and Broadway on 2nd.

St. Edwards Catholic Church – 1884. Located at 7th & Louisiana.

First Lutheran Church – 1887. Located at 8th & Rock.

Kramer School – 1895. Located near MacArthur Park on 8th Street.