

A HISTORY OF POTTESVILLE, ARKANSAS

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It is common knowledge that the English settlement of our country was done generally in an east to west direction. Beginning in Jamestown, Virginia, in 1607, our forefathers moved westward for some 250 years, slowly rolling the frontier back with their guns and plows. Settlement was slow but steady, and the state of Arkansas had to wait its turn for the axes, plows, and hoes.

Let us look at a few of the important early events in Arkansas as the westward expansion into the state continued: The creation of the "District of Arkansas" by the Territorial Legislature of Louisiana in 1806, in 1808 the appointment of the first civil officers for the district, on June 4, 1812, the creation by an act of Congress of the Missouri Territory, which included Arkansas. The following year "Arkansas County" (Arkansas) was created by the Missouri Legislature. On March 2, 1819, President Monroe approved an act creating the Territory of Arkansas. The first Territorial Legislature met at Arkansas Post on July 28, 1819. The first steamboat to stop at Arkansas Post was the Comet, which paid a call there on April 1, 1820. On March 22, 1822, the steamboat Eagle arrived at Little Rock.¹

Meanwhile, the tide of people moving into Arkansas was

¹Historical Report of the Secretary of the State, 1958, pp. 59-60.

continuing. Among these immigrants was one Kirkbride Potts, the founder of the town of Pottsville, who arrived in the area in 1828.

On March 17, 1897, twenty-seven people at Potts Station, Arkansas, filed a request with the Circuit Clerk at the County Seat in Russellville, Arkansas, that their town be incorporated. This petition was legally filed on March 20, 1897. James Potts, A. H. Boggess, and J. H. Oates were appointed to act as agents in prosecuting the petition on their behalf.²

What had happened in what was to be the town of Pottsville in the years before 1897? It is an interesting story. Though a great deal of it is missing in the period of 1828-1851, we can piece enough together to get a partial picture of the activities and beginnings of the growth of what may be called a lively settlement.

In 1828 this was an area of woods, cane brakes and tall grasses. In an interview in 1936 with a reporter, Mr. Johnny Redmond related:

In 1860 the dense woodland covered all but a small part of the country that sweeps down from Crow Mountain, overlooking Pottsville, and southward to the Arkansas River. Dense and dark, the woods held many terrors to him as a small boy, in the days before the railroad, when stage coaches came up and down the Old Military Road between Fort Smith and Little Rock.³

In an article written by Lois Hurley, Mrs. James Potts observed,

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Pope County Circuit Clerk's Record Book, D. D. (Pope County, Arkansas), pp. 172-173.

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The Weekly Tribune, Russellville, Arkansas, July 16, 1936.

"cattle and hogs roamed the woods which were covered with grass waist high and acorns in abundance."⁴

The town now known as Pottsville, Arkansas, has had at least three other names. It was first known as Potts Station. It is still referred to quite frequently as "Galley Creek" or "Galla Creek." Galla is an old Indian word. The name "Galley Creek" was attached to the railroad depot because the water stored there for use in the early day locomotives came from Galla Creek, some 200 yards east of the station. During this same time, before 1897, the small town located about 100 yards west of the depot was known as Potts Station. These names were confusing to the people and sometimes caused a mix-up in the shipment of goods. This confusion went on, however, until the name on the depot was changed to correspond with the name of the town.⁵

The first character to play on this real-life stage was Kirkbride Potts, once described by Mrs. E. B. Falls as, ". . . a brusque intellectual person--a Yankee through and through."⁶ In 1936 Mrs. Falls was the only woman old enough to remember him.

⁴ The Courier-Democrat, Russellville, Arkansas, June 29, 1931.

⁵ This information was acquired in an interview with Mr. Roy Falls on June 8, 1961. Mr. Falls was born at Pottsville and spent many years in business there. This interview cited hereafter as: Interview with Mr. Roy Falls.

⁶ The Weekly Tribune, Russellville, Arkansas, July 16, 1936.

Mr. Potts had arrived in the area where was to be located Pottsville, Arkansas, in 1828, one year before Pope County was organized. Originally a native of New Jersey, Mr. Potts left in 1820 and moved to Missouri via Pennsylvania. The exact date he left Missouri is not known, but he was in Arkansas in 1828, when he married Miss Permella Logan, (another source spelled her name, Pamela) a native of Wayne County, Missouri.⁷

Perhaps Mr. Potts came to Arkansas, established a dwelling on some land he had homesteaded, and returned to Missouri for his bride. At any rate, he did homestead a large tract of land on the present Pottsville site. He paid the going price of twenty-five cents per acre for the land.⁸

The first site on which Mr. Potts built was approximately three-quarters of a mile northeast of the present business location of the town. At the foot of Crow Mountain and near a bluff on the east side of Galla Creek, this house was erected on land that now belongs to Mr. George Jones. The Potts family lived here for twenty-five years before moving across the creek to the present

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Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Western Arkansas,
(Chicago, Illinois: The Southern Publishing Company, 1891), pp. 193-271.

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This information was acquired in an interview with Mrs. V. A. Johnson on June 10, 1961. Mrs. Johnson is a granddaughter of Kirkbride Potts. This interview cited hereafter as: Interview with Mrs. V. A. Johnson.

location of the historic Potts' house. While living at the first location, Mr. Potts had used slave labor to cut timber and haul it to Mill Creek to be sawed for use in his new home. Some materials for the house were shipped there. The bricks for the chimneys for the nine fireplaces were made at the house location. Mr. Potts started work on this house seven years before it was completed.⁹

In the meantime, Mr. Potts was busy making trips to California. Some sources say he made two trips, some say three. One account states that he went to look for gold in 1849, but all sources agree that about 1850 he made two trips to drive herds of cattle to California.¹⁰

A Pope County history reveals that several other people from the county also went to California at this time. Surely Mr. Potts must have been a member of one of these groups. It is reasonable to assume that he would not have made two or three trips alone.¹¹

Mr. Potts was the Indian Agent for this region. He traded with Indians and also operated the Butterfield Stage Station and the United States Post Office. His station was an overnight stopping place for the passengers enroute from Little Rock to Fort Smith.

⁹
Ibid.

¹⁰
Ibid.

¹¹
Arkansas Valley Historical Papers, "Early Pope County History," Number 4, October, 1954, p. 3.

Arkansas.¹²

Late one afternoon about 1857, as Mr. Potts was sitting on his porch, he heard the rumble of wagons. When they came into sight, he noticed that they carried Indians who were being removed to the Indian Territory in Oklahoma. When the Indians arrived, the interpreters asked permission to spend the night at the Potts' place. Permission was granted and the Indians stayed in a large stockade which had been built for protection of animals. This stockade and a large barn were located on a hill about forty yards southeast of the present Potts' house and near the house built by Mr. Will Rankin, now occupied by A. H. Jones.

This group of Indians carried gold paid them by the government for their lands from which they were being removed. The gold was carried in small, round, barrel-type containers that were placed on Mr. Potts' porch while the Indian guides discussed with him the arrangements for spending the night. One of Mr. Potts' small sons lay face down across the barrel on his stomach and began rolling slowly back and forth. Reportedly, this caused the Indians to burst into laughter.¹³

It is difficult to establish the identify of the second family to

¹² Interview with Mrs. V. A. Johnson.

¹³ Ibid.

come into this community. However, the United States Census of 1840 shows "Galley" Township as having the following settlers:

Banks, R. T. (1839)	Gilmore, Daniel (1839)
Barnett, Isom	Gold, Emily
Robertson, Wm. W.	Hamilton, David
Boyer, John	Logan, R. R. A. (1839)
Camel, John	Menefee, James (1838)
Canaday, G. W.	Miller, F.
Carr, G. W.	Perow, Joseph
Carter, G. W. (1839)	Perow, Joseph, Jr.
Carter, Wm.	Potts, Kirkbride (1836) (1838)
Clark, Aaron (1839) (1840)	Rose, H. P. (1838)
Clark, Joseph (1836)	Smith, Samuel E.
Gage, David	Smith, Wily ¹⁴

The years indicate when the land was bought.

Not shown as a part of the census, but shown as buyers of land, were Joseph Potts, 1838 and George Rushing, 1844.

Oddly enough, many of these names have all but disappeared in this community. There is a Gold Creek, perhaps named for Emily Gold, four or five miles southeast of Pottsville. Possibly many of the others moved westward in search of greener pastures. It is known that several people went to California about 1849.

In 1850, Daniel Gilmore owned and operated a steam-powered cotton factory, employing nine women who annually produced 22,500 pounds of cotton thread. Wages in the cotton factory were five dollars per month. One A. V. A. Clark operated the largest sawmill

¹⁴Arkansas Valley Historical Papers, "Early Pope County History," (Unpublished), No. 6, March, 1955, p. 2.

in Pope County in 1850, employing twenty-five people.¹⁵

It is interesting to note that Kirkbride Potts was not found at home by the census taker in 1850. This was during the gold rush and Mr. Potts was in California. The Potts' house, however, was a busy place. His wife, Mrs. Permellia Potts and her children, Joseph, Joshua, Mary, Richard, Thomas, James and John, were there. The oldest son, Kirkbride, Jr., was married and had established his own home. Living in his home was Ann Potts, possibly the twin sister of Joshua.¹⁶

Although not a resident of the village at Potts Station, Mrs. Persis Lovely certainly was one of the earliest settlers in the vicinity. In the home of Kirkbride Potts on January 18, 1842, Mrs. Lovely died at the age of seventy-one. She was born Persis Brown in Middleton, Connecticut, in 1770.¹⁷

Her husband, Major Lewis Lovely, was born in Dublin, Ireland, and came to America before the Revolution. He had moved to Pope County before 1815 and was serving as the United States Indian Agent on the Illinois Bayou ten miles west of Potts Station. In a letter written to President Madison in September 1815, Major

¹⁵ Ted Worley, "Pope County One Hundred Years Ago," Arkansas Historical Quarterly, XIII, No. 2 (Summer, 1954), p. 201.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 203.

¹⁷ Arkansas Gazette, February 16, 1842.

Lovely pictured some of the trials of frontier life:

My situation is I can assure you disagreeable living at upwards of three hundred miles from a post office no ways of procuring information but those which are owing to change and those seldom happen. So I may say with propriety that I am entirely secluded from the land of the living surrounded on all side by Indians together with the Worse of White settlers living just below me betweixt whom there are daily disturbances arising and against whom there are no possible means in my power of enforcing any laws.¹⁸

Other parts of the letter reveal that he participated in the American Revolution and ended his career under General Wayne when Cornwallis surrendered.

Major Lovely reports that shortly thereafter he again entered the service of his country. This might have been the beginning of his service as an Indian Agent. Mrs. Lovely remained on Illinois Bayou after her husband's death in 1817. Somehow, she must have found favor with the Indians. When the government drafted a treaty with the Cherokees, giving them a vast tract of land north of the Arkansas River, all whites were ordered to move, but the Indians requested that Mrs. Lovely be allowed to remain. Just when the friendship developed between Mrs. Lovely and the Potts family is in question. At any rate, ten miles or so was probably not considered a long distance when white people were

¹⁷ Arkansas Gazette, February 16, 1842.

¹⁸ Arkansas Valley Historical Papers, "Early Pope County History," (Unpublished), No. 4, October, 1954, p. 2.

so scarce.¹⁹

In 1851 several families from Gaston County, North Carolina, and York County, South Carolina, moved to Pope County and settled in the Galla Creek Community. These were the first of a group of settlers who were to form the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church of Pottsville and Bethany. They were followed about one year later by another group of the same denomination. These families will be discussed in further detail in the church history of Pottsville.²⁰

In 1854 the family of Gregory Sinclair moved to the Pottsville community. Mr. Sinclair was originally a native of County Tyrone, Ireland. He was born near Cookstown on February 1, 1796. His family left Belfast, Ireland, September 19, 1817, and after an unpleasant voyage of six weeks they arrived near Charleston, South Carolina. In 1854 the Sinclair family moved to Pope County where Mr. Sinclair bought a farm near Pottsville. Much of the trip from South Carolina was made by steamboat. The Sinclairs unloaded at old Lewisburg, a river port, about one-half mile south of what is now Morrilton, Arkansas. They were met here by Alex Dickey

¹⁹
Ibid.

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This information was acquired in an interview with Mr. N. H. Bell on June 12, 1961. Mr. Bell was born and reared in Pottsville and has a great knowledge of its history. This interview cited hereafter as: Interview with N. H. Bell.

who had come down by wagon from Pottsville to assist them on the remaining twenty miles of their journey. Mrs. Dickey was Sinclair's sister.²¹

Pope County furnished most of its qualified men to the cause of the South during the Civil War. Accurate records of these men do not exist, but several companies were raised in the county.²²

A complete list of Pottsville people who participated in the Civil War is unavailable. Indications are that several people, including Joseph Potts and his brother, Richard, did serve. Joseph fought in the Battle at Baker's Creek and was captured near Black River. Afterward, as he and his brother were being moved by boat up the river from Memphis, both men jumped overboard in the night and managed to escape and reach home.²³

Federal troops occupied Pottsville for several days in 1864. Dardanelle surrendered in 1864 and Federal troops roamed the area confiscating cattle and livestock. Mrs. Mary Ann Falls, daughter of Gregory Sinclair, recalled that the troops came, told the slaves they were free, took all their horses and mules, and ordered one of the slaves to ride a mule and accompany them.

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The Weekly Tribune, Russellville, Arkansas, July 16, 1936.

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The Courier-Democrat, Russellville, Arkansas, September 3, 1936.

23

The Weekly Tribune, Russellville, Arkansas, July 16, 1936.

For some time after the surrender, night robbers visited frequently. Mrs. Falls remembered that her family was robbed seven times in eighteen months. She said they found money during the first few visits, but that was soon gone. She and her sister, Margaret, buried five-hundred dollars in gold, but evidently someone saw them because it was stolen. At this time the Sinclair family lived about two miles east of Pottsville on the Little Rock to Fort Smith road. John Sinclair, brother of Mrs. Falls, was wounded by a group of these robbers. The bullet remained in his body and bothered him considerably.²⁴

Another story of the post-Civil War period concerns the death of the father of Johnny Redmond. Federal soldiers captured three men when they caught them shelling corn in a barn. The men were taken to Lewisburg. Since there was no officer with the soldiers, they decided to dispose of the three men. Mr. Redmond's father and uncle were hanged on a nearby tree. The other, a young man named Griffin, who was not yet twenty years old, started running away. The troops fired and the boy fell. Griffin crawled back toward the troops and asked them to finish killing him. He was accommodated.²⁵

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Ibid.

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Ibid.