

The Times of Arkansas: First Contact until Statehood, and Beyond

1541: Spanish conqueror Hernando De Soto leads the first European expedition into Arkansas, likely crossing the Mississippi near Commerce Landing, south of Memphis. **1673:** Jesuit Father Jacques Marquette and Louis Jolliet, a trader, travel south on the Mississippi River, intent on missionizing and exploring. In July 1674 they turn back north, having reached the Quapaw villages of “Akansae” or “Kappa” near the confluence of the Arkansas and Mississippi rivers. **1682:** Rene Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle claims the Mississippi valley for King Louis XIV of France, dubbing the country “Louisiana.” In February, La Salle’s party pauses near present-day Memphis to build Fort Prud’homme, then continues south to the mouth of the river. **1686:** La Poste d’Arkansas (Arkansas Post) is established by La Salle’s lieutenant, Italian mercenary soldier Henri de Tonty, as a trading post. **1699:** Arkansas Post is abandoned, due to sluggish business.

1700: French Catholic missionaries arrive in present-day Arkansas to convert local Natives to Christianity; most Natives continue their prior observances despite these efforts. **1717:** Scottish land speculator John Law recruits French settlers for a projected colony to be built in the wilds of present-day Arkansas. Law promises a life of ease, due to deposits of gold and silver. Law is granted 87,000 acres of land near the Quapaw villages. **1721:** Seventy or eighty *engagés*, or workmen, recruited by John Law, arrive at Arkansas Post, only to discover it long abandoned. Welcomed by local Quapaws, the settlers stay despite finding no gold or silver. **1722:** Adventurer Bernard de la Harpe travels up the Arkansas River seeking precious metals. He finds none but his journal describes the area of present-day Little Rock. **1731:** Louisiana, including present-day Arkansas, becomes a royal colony of France. **1738:** French regulars, militia and Quapaw and Choctaw allies begin a two-year campaign against the Chickasaw, who threaten travelers and residents alike. **1740:** Cotton culture is introduced in the Mississippi valley by Pierre de Bienville, governor of Louisiana. **1753:** The Seven Years’ or “French and Indian” War, breaks out in Europe, pitting France against England. **1762:** The Treaty of Fontainebleau (Paris) concludes the Seven Years’ War; as part of the treaty, France cedes most of its North American possessions to England; a separate, secret treaty gives parts of Louisiana west of the Mississippi to Spain. **1779:** After several previous relocations, Arkansas Post moves once more to the *Ecores Rouges* (Red Bluffs) site where it remains today. **1783:** In April, Arkansas Post is attacked by a small force of Chickasaws and Englishmen led by trader James Colbert. The small Spanish garrison, commanded by Capitan Balthasar de Villiers, counterattacks and routs Colbert’s forces. **1795:** The Treaty of Madrid confirms the right of United States citizens to navigate on the Mississippi River and to ship through the Spanish-held port of New Orleans. **1797:** Campo del Esperanza, or Field of Hope, is established in present-day Marion County, opposite Memphis. It serves as a Spanish naval outpost and defense against Chickasaw raiding.

1800: On October 1, French and Spanish diplomats sign the secret Treaty of San Ildefonso, which returns Louisiana to French control. **1801:** In June 15, Juan Manuel del Salcedo arrives in New Orleans to take up his duties as the last Spanish governor of Louisiana, unaware that France now owns the province. **1803:** American diplomats James Monroe and Robert Livingston negotiate to purchase New Orleans, to ensure continued American shipping rights. The French government offers them all of Louisiana, at a negotiated price of fifteen million

dollars. By this purchase, present-day Arkansas becomes part of the United States. **1804:** On March 24, President Thomas Jefferson approves an Act of Congress dividing the newly-acquired former French colony into two parts: the Territory of Orleans and the District of Louisiana (which includes present-day Arkansas). **1804:** At the behest of President Jefferson, William Hunter and George Dunbar explore the southern portion of the District of Louisiana, ascending the Ouachita River as far as “the Valley of the Vapors”—today’s Hot Springs. **1806:** The southern part of the New Madrid district of Louisiana Territory is split off and named “District of Arkansas.” The district will not have civil officers until 1808. **1810:** A special U.S. Census of Arkansas reveals over 1,000 persons living in the district, not including Native Americans.

1811: On December 16, the New Madrid earthquake strikes, rendering many homeless and causing land subsidence along the Mississippi. **1812:** On May 6, President James Madison approves an act setting aside six million acres of land to be surveyed, divided and used as bounty lands for soldiers enlisting to fight the British invasion, or to be given to those displaced by the New Madrid earthquake. Approximately one-third of the bounty lands are in the present-day boundaries of Arkansas. **1812:** On June 4 Missouri Territory, including Arkansas, is created by Congress. **1813:** “Arkansas County” is created by the Missouri Legislature. **1815:** President James Madison orders a survey of the Louisiana District in order to divide and distribute military bounty lands. Surveyors Prospect K. Robbins and Joseph Brown establish the principal meridian and baseline for subsequent surveys of Louisiana Purchase lands beginning on October 27, at an initial point located in a headwater swamp where present-day Lee, Monroe and Phillips Counties intersect. Arkansas, still part of Missouri territory, is divided into two counties: Lawrence, north of the Arkansas River, and Arkansas, mostly south of the stream. **1817:** Arkansas’ first post office is sited at Davidsonville, in Lawrence County. The Cherokee are given lands in northwest Arkansas in exchange for their home lands in Georgia and Tennessee. Fort Smith is established at Belle Point, on the Arkansas River. **1818:** Three new counties (Clark, Hempstead and Pulaski) are carved from Arkansas County. The Quapaw are persuaded to give much of their land south of the Arkansas to the United States. **1819:** On March 2, President James Monroe signs an Act of Congress creating the Territory of Arkansas. On July 28, the first Territorial Legislature meets at Arkansas Post. On November 20, William Woodruff publishes the first edition of the *Arkansas Gazette*, also at Arkansas Post. **1820:** On February 7, the first elected Territorial General Assembly meets at Arkansas Post. In March, Amos Wheeler opens a post office at Little Rock. On April 20, the “Comet,” first steam packet to travel up the Lower Arkansas River, ties up at Arkansas Post. In October, General Andrew Jackson signs a treaty with the Choctaw nation, granting the Choctaw lands in western Arkansas.

1821: Books promoting the beauty and potential of Arkansas are published by explorers Henry Schoolcraft and Thomas Nuttall. On June 1 the territorial government, seeking higher ground for a home, moves from Arkansas Post to Little Rock. **1822:** The steam packet “Eagle” reaches Little Rock on March 22, the first steam vessel to reach that far. **1824:** The Quapaw are forced to cede their remaining lands south of the Arkansas River to the United States. **1826:** A smallpox epidemic, one of many, reaches Arkansas. Arkansas’ first steam-powered sawmill opens in Helena. **1828:** A post road between Little Rock and Memphis is under construction; the Cherokee are persuaded to give up their northwest Arkansas lands

and to move further west. **1832:** Author Washington Irving visits Arkansas Post; it will inspire his essay, "The Creole Village." Of its inhabitants Irving notes: "The almighty dollar, that great object of universal devotion throughout our land, seems to have no genuine devotees in these peculiar villages." **1833:** A new "courthouse" for the territory, to become the first state capitol, is under construction in Little Rock. **1835:** On November 12, Tennessee politician David Crockett pauses in Little Rock, while traveling to Texas on business. **1836:** Arkansas becomes the twenty-fifth state of the Union on June 15; James Conway is elected its first governor.

1838: A steam-powered ferry begins operation at Little Rock. **1840:** The Federal government begins construction of its Arsenal in Little Rock. **1846:** Congress declares war on the Republic of Mexico; Arkansas raises a regiment of volunteer cavalry, commanded by War of 1812 veteran Archibald Yell. **1847:** On February 23, Arkansas troops participate in the battle of Buena Vista. Faced by a larger Mexican force, the Arkansas troops break and run until rallied by Yell, who is killed in the action. **1853:** Arkansas' first railroad, the Arkansas Central, is chartered by the Legislature. **1858:** Sandford Faulkner's comic dialogue, "The Arkansas Traveler," is first published. **1859:** The School for The Blind is authorized by the Assembly. **1861:** On May 20, Arkansas is admitted to the Confederate States of America. Its loyalties divided, Arkansas will send some 50,000 troops into the Confederate army, and another 15,000 into Union forces. **1862:** The battles of Pea Ridge (March) and Prairie Grove (December) are fought, both ending in Union victories. **1863:** Federal troops occupy all of Arkansas except for the southwest portion, where the Confederate state government maintains its capital at Washington until the war's end. **1864:** Teenaged Confederate agent David O. Dodd is executed by Federal authorities for spying. **1865:** The Unionist government at Little Rock becomes the sole constituted authority for the state on May 26. Reconstruction begins for Arkansas, during which the state will revise its constitution twice (in 1868 and again in 1874).

1868: Ku Klux Klan violence leads to thirteen counties being placed under martial law. **1872:** The Arkansas Industrial University, a land-grant school, opens in Fayetteville. **1874:** Reconstruction ends for Arkansas with a month-long civil war of its own. Republicans Elijah Baxter and Joseph Brooks each claim the governorship; ultimately, President Ulysses Grant recognizes Baxter as the lawful governor. **1877:** President Grant signs an act establishing the Hot Springs Reservation (today's Hot Springs National Park). **1883:** The Mosaic Templars, an African-American fraternal order, is founded in Little Rock; it will ultimately spread to twenty-six states. **1888:** Bauxite, an ore of aluminum, is first mined in Saline county. **1891:** The Separate Coach Law, segregating blacks and whites on trains and trams, is enacted. This is Arkansas' first "Jim Crow" law. **1894:** Arkansas' first night base ball game is played under arc lights in Little Rock's West End Park. **1898:** Two Arkansas regiments of infantry are mustered into service for the war against Spain. **1900:** The cornerstone for the new state capitol is laid on November 27 on the former grounds of the state penitentiary overlooking downtown Little Rock. By the end of this year, forty-two Arkansas counties will have banned liquor sales.

1903: *On A Slow Train Through Arkansas* is published. A collection of hillbilly and racial humor with little connection to Arkansas realities, it nevertheless contributes to popular perception of Arkansas as an eccentric, ignorant rural backwater. Although there are only fifty automobiles in the entire state, their owners form the Arkansas Good Roads Association to

promote route construction, repair and maintenance. **1906:** Diamonds are discovered in Pike County, the first such deposit to be found in the United States. **1907:** Arkansas coal mines produce more than 2,750,000 tons. **1910:** William Jennings Bryan visits Arkansas to promote the initiative and referendum. **1915:** Arkansas' General Assembly passes a statewide prohibition of liquor sales and manufacture. The state Capitol is completed. **1917:** Arkansans muster in for service during the First World War; approximately 72,000, including African-Americans and women, will serve. Some 2,000 will die, most from disease and accidents. **1919:** A race riot erupts in Elaine (Phillips County) in October. Between 30 and 100 deaths result; the riot leads to an investigation, convened by Governor Charles Brough, of the issues dividing black and white Arkansans.

1921: Oil is discovered near Smackover. **1922:** Radio station WOK goes on the air, broadcasting from Pine Bluff. **1925:** The state Supreme Court rules in *Brickhouse v. Hill* that Amendments 7, 8 and 9 (initiative and referendum, woman suffrage and an enlarged Supreme Court) are all in effect. **1927:** Floods scour farmlands and cities along the Mississippi. **1928:** Arkansas has over 8,700 miles of roads, one-fourth of them paved. Forty-six counties feature some paved roads; two counties have no improved roads at all. **1931:** By the end of this year, nearly half the Arkansas businesses operating in 1929 are closed, including 192 banks. **1932:** Mrs. Hattie Caraway, named in 1931 to fill out the Senate term of her deceased husband, wins a term on her own in November, the first woman elected to the United States Senate. **1936:** The Waterbury Clock Company opens a facility in Little Rock; later renamed US Time and, finally, Timex, the facility will be the last remaining American manufactory of wrist watches by the time it closes in 2001. **1939:** The Magnet Cove Barium Corporation begins mining in Saline County. By 1941 the mines produce a high-grade barite powder for the nation's oil industry. Louise Loughborough, a Little Rock socialite and civic leader, begins the task of preserving vintage structures in the heart of the city slated for demolition. Her efforts will lead to the opening, in 1941, of the Arkansas Territorial Capitol Restoration, known today as the Historic Arkansas Museum.

1941: After the attack on Pearl Harbor, Arkansans flock to recruiting stations to join the war effort. Some 200,000 Arkansans will serve; 4611 will die in service. **1942:** Fort Smith native William Darby is given the job of training the Army's Ranger Battalion, elite fighters for the toughest assignments. Darby's Rangers see their first action in North Africa in late 1942, then in Sicily and Italy in 1943. Darby dies in action in 1945. **1942:** Internment camps for West Coast Japanese-Americans are established near Jerome and Rohwer. **1944:** J. William Fulbright is elected to the United States Senate. **1946:** In an early round of the "GI Revolt," decorated former Marine Sidney P. McMath runs against the Hot Springs political machine for Garland County prosecuting attorney and wins. **1948:** Sid McMath is elected governor on a reform platform. Although hampered in some efforts, McMath places African-Americans on state boards for the first time since Reconstruction, promotes highway construction and encourages industrial siting in Arkansas. **1953:** The Hot Springs Bathers baseball team signs Negro League stars Jim and Leander Tugerson, the first African-Americans to play professional ball in Arkansas. The team is evicted from the Cotton States league, then readmitted after the Tugersons are declared ineligible to play. **1955:** Orval Faubus is elected governor. Winthrop Rockefeller, veteran and grandson of John D. Rockefeller, is tapped to head the Arkansas Industrial Development Commission. **1957:** The Little Rock school desegregation brings

international attention to the American civil rights movement and to the divided community of Little Rock. **1958:** Little Rock high schools are closed for the academic year while political and social controversy over desegregation continues. **1964:** Winthrop Rockefeller is the Republican gubernatorial nominee but loses to Orval Faubus. Rockefeller promises to try again.

1966: Winthrop Rockefeller is elected governor. He becomes Arkansas' first Republican governor elected since 1874. **1968:** In a special session in February, the General Assembly passes 67 bills, including a freedom of information act and the state's first general minimum-wage act. In November, Arkansans ratify Amendment 53, authorizing kindergartens in the state's free public schools. **1969:** The University of Arkansas establishes a multi-campus system. **1970:** Dale Bumpers of Charleston is elected governor, promising to rid Arkansas of "the old machine and the money machine." In February, a federal judge declares the Arkansas prison system unconstitutional. **1974:** Dale Bumpers successfully challenges J. William Fulbright in the Democratic primary and wins election to the U.S. Senate. David Pryor of Camden is elected Governor. University of Arkansas Law School professor William J. Clinton loses his race for the Third District Congressional seat. **1975:** Following the end of the Vietnam conflict, significant numbers of Vietnamese immigrants are relocated to Camp Chaffee, near Fort Smith, where many eventually settle. On October 11, Professor William Clinton marries Hillary Rodham. **1976:** Professor Clinton is elected attorney-general, advocating victim compensation, the rights of the elderly, tough ethics laws for public officials, tighter oversight of utilities and opposing the twenty-five-cent pay phone call. **1978:** Attorney-General Bill Clinton is elected governor. **1980:** Arkansas is ranked in the top five states in percentage of population over the age of 65, due to the "Retiree Movement." In May, the Federal government informs Governor Clinton that Camp Chaffee will house 120,000 Cuban "Freedom flotilla" refugees. Bill Clinton is defeated by Frank White, once a Democrat, in his bid for a second term as governor. **1982:** Arkansas' "creation science" law is overturned in Federal District Court; Bill Clinton is re-elected governor.

1983: The Quality Education Act is passed by the General Assembly; education once again becomes a widely-discussed issue within Arkansas. **1984:** Voters approve Amendment 63 giving statewide officials four-year, rather than two-year, terms. Clinton is re-elected governor. **1986:** Clinton again is re-elected, this time for a four-year term. **1988:** The Mississippi Delta Commission is created with the mission of investigating and improving Delta life. **1990:** Governor Clinton wins a fifth term as governor. Latinos are Arkansas' the fastest-growing minority population. Tyson Foods of Springdale is the largest broiler chicken processor in the nation. **1991:** On October 3, Governor Clinton announces he will run for the presidency of the United States. Lt. Governor Jim Guy Tucker becomes acting Governor in Clinton's absence. October 18 sees the last issue of the *Arkansas Gazette*, the "oldest newspaper west of the Mississippi." **1992:** Bill Clinton is elected the 42nd President of the United States. Lieutenant Governor Jim Guy Tucker becomes governor. **1994:** Jim Guy Tucker is elected governor; Sharon Priest is the first woman elected to the office of Arkansas Secretary of State. **1996:** Republican Tim Hutchinson is elected to the U.S. Senate, the first of his party in over 100 years to represent the state in Washington. Governor Tucker resigns his office in July and is succeeded by Republican Lieutenant Governor Mike Huckabee. In November, Bill Clinton wins re-election to the Presidency. **1997:** Ceremonies at Little Rock Central High School mark

the fortieth anniversary of the desegregation crisis. **1998:** Mike Huckabee is elected Governor. **2000:** Arkansas returns a Republican majority in the Presidential vote. **2002:** Bentonville-based Wal-Mart is identified as the world's largest corporation. **2004:** Ivory-billed woodpecker sighting reported. General Wesley Clark runs for President. William J. Clinton Presidential Center and Park opens. **2006:** The Big Dam Bridge opens; it is the longest purpose built pedestrian/cycle bridge in the nation. Arkansas implements the Help America Vote Act, the largest federal election reform act in history. Mike Beebe is elected Governor. **2007:** Little Rock Schools are released from federal supervision, nearly 50 years after President Eisenhower sent troops to escort nine black students into all-white Central High. The Arkansas Travelers of the AA Texas League debut in their new home, the Dickey Stephens Field, on the banks of the Arkansas River in North Little Rock. **2008:** The Northwest Arkansas Naturals of the AA Texas League debut. Hillary Clinton and Mike Huckabee run for President.