



McNutt's store

S. R. "Rush" McNutt

Samuel Ralston McNutt was born in 1853 in Mississippi and moved to Clark County in 1865. The McNutt family settled in the Palestine community, about ten miles west of Arkadelphia. S.R. McNutt grew up amidst difficult financial circumstances, but came to be one of the county's most successful businessmen.

As a very young man, S.R. McNutt became his family's chief support---his father died following an long illness, and as the oldest of seven children, McNutt was forced to work on the farm. There was little time for education or fun. Early on, he realized the value of saving money for the future. Legend has it that the first dollar he ever made came from gathering 100 bundles of fodder, and that he saved all of it. As a teenager, he traversed the countryside peddling knives, thimbles, scissors, and other small items, always carefully watching over his income in hopes of starting his own business someday. Then, at age twenty, he got a job in an Arkadelphia store as a clerk.

After working and saving for another year, he opened a grocery store at the northeast corner of Seventh and Main streets with an investment of about \$650. He had immediate success and expanded his stock to cater to farmers, selling implements and other farm-related items. As business improved, McNutt began to buy and sell cotton.

McNutt's enterprises grew. People came to know him as "Rush," apparently because he always seemed to be in a hurry. According to historian Farrar Newberry, McNutt's motto was "Do all of today's work and as much of tomorrow's as you can, today." Rush even named one of his horses "Lightning." Rush McNutt enjoyed his nickname, and was rarely referred to in any other way by acquaintances.

But, with his high energy level, Rush looked for even more ways to engage in the community's business affairs. S.R. McNutt and others saw the need for a bank for Arkadelphia and Clark County. A previous effort in the town had failed earlier. But, with McNutt as the president of the new institution for about twenty years after the time of its founding (1884), Elk Horn Bank proved to be a successful venture. A few years later, Rush and others established the Arkadelphia Cotton Mill on the banks of the Ouachita River. McNutt also purchased a ranch in Nebraska with a herd of over 1,000 cattle. His brother ran the ranch. After the discovery of oil in Texas, Rush and others decided to drill for oil in Clark County. But, that effort did not prove fruitful, and the wells came up dry.

McNutt's mercantile store enjoyed continued success, and his downtown holdings grew until he owned the entire block between Main, Seventh, Clinton, and Eighth streets. People came from miles around to do business at the store.

S.R. "Rush" McNutt died in 1905 after a bout with tuberculosis. He was buried in the eastern portion of Rose Hill Cemetery in Arkadelphia, overlooking the business section of the town in which he spent most of his life.