



The old Gurdon School

Gurdon, Clark County, Arkansas

The town of Gurdon had its true beginnings as a railroad town. After the Cairo and Fulton Railroad decided to establish a stop at the location, the place needed a name. According to local legend, the community was named “Gurdon” for one of the surveyors of the railroad’s right-of-way, Gurdon Cunningham.

Dan Joslyn (also the town’s first mayor) and Silas Miller surveyed the Gurdon townsite. Two streets—Joslyn and Miller—bear their names. Among the area’s pioneer families were those of Brown, Norman, Culp, McAlpine, Moore, Paisley, Davidson, and Kitchens. Later, others arrived as well, including Gage, Harley, Cheatham, Stovall, O’Neal, and Lowe. E.A. Whitmore became the town’s first telegraph operator and also served as mayor.

Population grew quickly, resulting in the need for a post office. The Gurdon Post Office opened in 1876. Among those to have served as postmaster were Cecil Norman, Jacob Applegate, Oscar Joslin, William Gage, John Randall, William Howard, John Edwards, Benjamin Burrell, Robert Gore, John Cuffman, Albert Agee, Fred Price, Dick Jackson, Howard Powell, Irvin Blakely, George Bones, Claxton Steed, Lewis Pruitt, Charles Byron, and Ray Wingfield. In 1880, a petition signed by area residents requested that the town be incorporated.

When Methodist minister Rev. Joseph Nicholson arrived in Gurdon in 1881, he found a “thriving town of about 500 people. There were three large saloons and gambling dens and ten large lumber mills in the area but no church organization or religious influence of any kind except a Sunday School being held in the one-room school house.” In 1883, people of all denominations came together and built a church building for use by all. Later, the various groups build their own individual houses of worship.

The forest products industry has always been important in the Gurdon economy. In fact, the St. Louis Mill and Wood Cutter Company was among the first businesses in the town. It was the parent company of the Gurdon Lumber Company. The company’s commissary was located in a two-story building across from the railroad depot, and was built in 1886. A mill pond served as a focal point for the duration of its operation in Gurdon. Creek water supplied the pond, supplemented by wells.

Gurdon’s first newspaper was the *Gurdon Advocate*. A short-lived paper, it was published during the 1880s. Then, Ithey Nash began printing a paper in 1890. His widow continued publication after Nash’s death, calling it *The Widow’s Mite* and also *The Cannon Ball*. Mrs. Nash leased her business to Scott Harris, who renamed the paper, *The Gurdon Times*.