9 UNIQUE ARKANSAS PLACE NAMES YOU MIGHT NOT KNOW ABOUT

Whether you're a born-and-raised Arkansan, have lived here for 30 plus years, or recently arrived to the Natural State, this place we call home has a rich, diverse, and fascinating history.

And for the past 17 years the staff of the CALS Encyclopedia of Arkansas has tried to make sure that the story of this place is documented in an accessible digital format.

This free resource has almost everything you might want to know about the 25th state. And the EOA staff are in the habit of finding the most unique of those stories to tell.

The Encyclopedia of Arkansas launched in 2006 with 700 entries and 900 pieces of media.
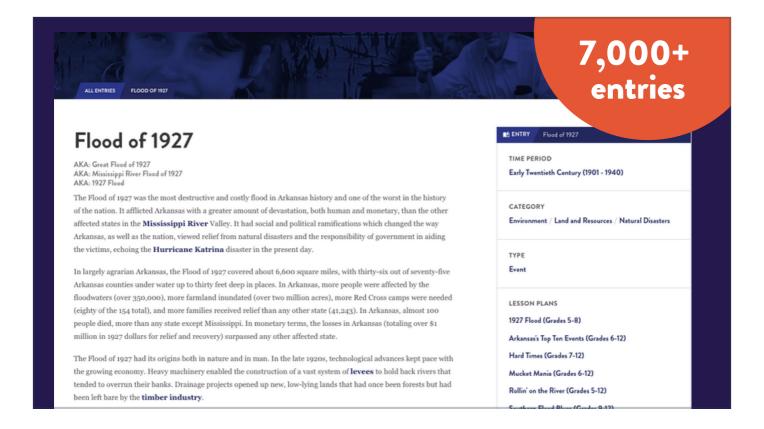
In 2019 we switched platforms from the original proprietary site to a newly designed WordPress site.

And then in August 2022 we undertook a further redesign of the home page, search function, and user experience features.

You can stop by the EOA for tidbits like THIS DAY IN ARKANSAS HISTORY and PHOTO OF THE DAY...

As well as to see trending entries and what's been newly added or updated. (and here's a hint, we are updating all the time).

More than 7,000 entries

Often compared to Wikipedia

Peer review process and staff-edited entries

Anyone can write for the EOA, but all entries are reviewed by other scholars, fact checked, and edited for grammar and spelling.

- **EVERY incorporated community**
- **Government officials**
- **Civil rights organizations from NAACP to CLOB**
- **EVERY military action including the smallest skirmishes**
- **Wildlife, flowers, plants**

WE HAVE ENTRIES ON ...

Every incorporated community and hundreds of unincorporated ones, and we're always seeking more

ENTRIES ON
Government officials, including those who served in Congress, Arkansas constitutional officers, individual state legislators, and even significant sheriffs, mayors, and county judges

Civil rights organizations from the national level, such as the NAACP, to the local level, such as CLOB (Council for Liberation of Blacks)

Military events from the Civil War, ranging from major battles (Pea Ridge) down to small local skirmishes; if someone in blue and someone in gray met in the woods between 1861 and 1865 we probably have an entry documenting it.

AND THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT - birds, fish, mammals but also fungi, lichens, ferns, jellyfishes

AND WE ARE ALWAYS DEVELOPING MORE...
Developing entries on every film set or filmed in Arkansas, as well as every book, television show, and even individual episodes set in the state (Search: X-Files)
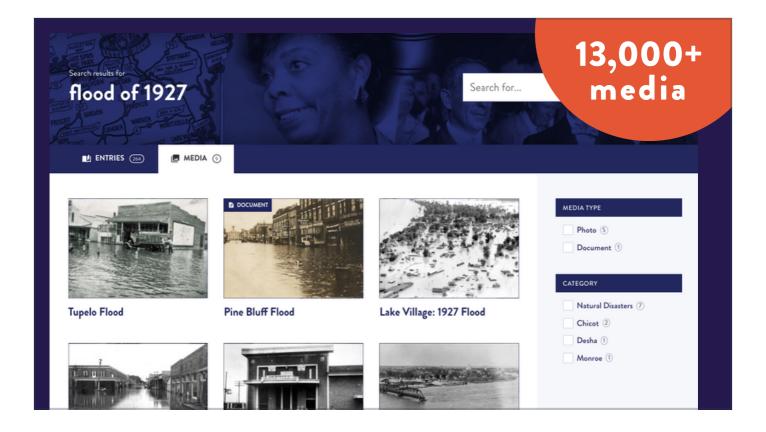
Produced by a public library

230 countries

EVERY continent

Used by government agencies and officials, students, media, genealogists, historians (local and national)

Users have come from every continent (including Antarctica) and more than 230 countries.

Over 175,000 users per month

AND DO WE HAVE MEDIA…

We have worked with archives, libraries, museums, and universities around the state and the country to make sure that the EOA has visual images to illustrate our entries.

BUT THERE IS ALWAYS MORE TO FIND…

We rely on everyday citizens to help us locate photos.

Shakespeare famously wrote, in Romeo and Juliet, "What's in a name? That which we call a rose, by any other word would smell as sweet." But the fact is that the name of a place can sometimes tell you a lot about the people who settled there and why. For example, the names of places in Arkansas speak to different waves of European settlement, the arrival of industries, the rise of railroads, and so much more. We'll explore some of that here.

Caddo Gap Monument

Ouachita

NUMBER 1

Indigenous peoples are still commemorated in Arkansas names, but only a handful. The Caddo are remembered in the Caddo River and a couple of towns, such as Caddo Gap (Montgomery County).

Several individuals—including Saracen, Osceola, and Pocahontas—are remembered in place names, but only the first had any connection to Arkansas.

And the word Ouachita is found in the names of a county, a river, and a mountain range.

Ouachita [O-U-A-C-H-I-T-A] is the French spelling of a Native American word that is pronounced "Washita" and supposedly denoted good hunting or a river of many fish.

Generic names like Indian Bay (Monroe County) or simply made-up words like Etowah (Mississippi County) are prevalent.
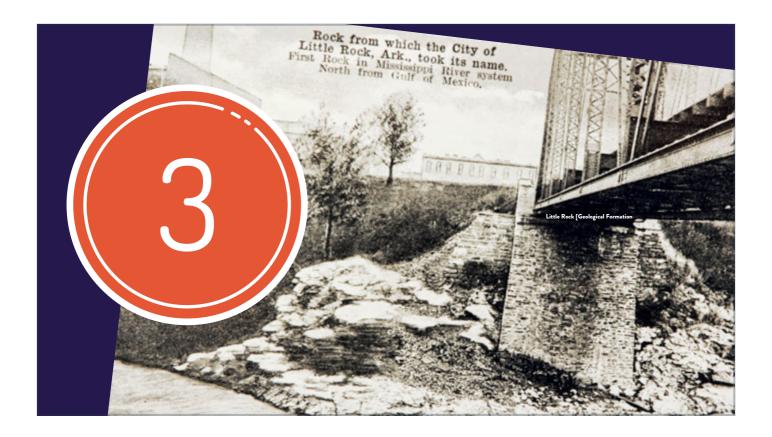
Marquette-Joliet Expedition

NUMBER 2

Since French missionaries and trappers were among the first Europeans in Arkansas, it is not surprising that many of the oldest names in the state have French roots.

The word "Arkansas" itself, while not French, is the complicated result of French speakers trying to spell out the name of the indigenous Quapaw as enunciated to those Frenchmen by other indigenous peoples.

In contrast, the word "Ozarks" has had a simpler, gentler history, formed as it is by the French word "aux" along with a shortened form of the longer "Arkansas."

Many rivers and creeks have, in some form, held on to names given to them by early French traders, such as the L'Anguille and the Boeuf Rivers.

Rock from which the City of
Little Rock, Ark., took its name.
First Rock in Mississippi River system
North from Gulf of Mexico.

Little Rock [Geological Formation

NUMBER 3

As settlers from the eastern states moved into Arkansas, they displaced the French trappers and the indigenous peoples, and places received names that we know today.

Some early settlements latched on to natural features, such as Little Rock (Pulaski County) and Pine Bluff (Jefferson County). Across the state are countless communities labeled Oak Grove or Cedar Grove, for example.

Sometimes, you get natural features mixed in with a bit of French. Galley Rock in Pope County is a two-mile shale bluff that rises almost forty feet high on the north bank of the Arkansas River, just northwest of Petit Jean Mountain.

Although no recorded evidence exists, some historians believe the modern name Galley Rock originated from the French word "galets" (pebbles) and that the rocky outcrop may have been called Galets de Rocher by the French traders, roughly translated as "rock of pebbles."

Count Pulaski

NUMBER 4

Eventually, as counties were laid out, they were named almost entirely for men famous in the area (Thomas Drew for Drew County) or the nation (President Thomas Jefferson, Count Casimir Pulaski). Towns took their names from early settlers (such as Williford).

In many settlements, the local general store also served as the post office, and often the store owner/postmaster/postmistress would select his—or her (as with Story)—own name for the post office and town (as with Blytheville). Sometimes the postmaster might pick the name of his wife (Hattieville) or daughter (Loulyma).

A story of particular interest relates to Craighead County and its county seat of Jonesboro. After being elected to the state legislature, William Jones proposed, in the 1858 legislative session, the creation of a new county in northeastern Arkansas, offering to relinquish land in his own district of Poinsett County and suggesting that Greene and Mississippi counties do the same. The proposal called for the new county to incorporate land from the area represented by Jones's fellow state senator Thomas Craighead, who strongly opposed the idea. At a time when Craighead was allegedly absent from the Senate chamber, the vote was taken, and the bill to create the new county was passed. The victorious Jones proposed that the county be named for Craighead—some say as a joke, others say as a gesture of goodwill. Craighead in turn proposed that the new county seat would be named for Jones, though some sources say it was named for Jones by its grateful citizens.

NUMBER 5

Through most of the nineteenth century, Arkansas remained largely rural, with relatively few towns and a small population. It was not until the final decades of the nineteenth century, as railroads began to crisscross the state and established stations that turned into towns, that some of the most interesting place names emerged.

Railroads required stations, and locomotives required stops for wood and water. As surveyors located these stations, the names they bequeathed were often those of railroad executives—the neighboring towns of Rison (Cleveland County) and Fordyce (Dallas County) were named for Civil War enemies turned friendly railroad competitors. Certainly the most interesting case in this regard is the town of Paragould (Greene County): Set at the intersection of railroads belonging to J. W. Paramore and Jay Gould, the town opted to combine the names rather than choose between them. An elegant solution, to be sure, but one that pleased neither tycoon. The citizens of Corning (Clay County) picked the name of a friend of Gould, hoping it would lead to Gould sending business their way. Alas, they received no consideration from Gould and were never even visited by the ungrateful Corning. Sometimes, the surveying engineers named stations for themselves (as with Pettigrew and Kelso) or for a worker who lost his life in the construction of the railroad, as with Hatfield (Polk County). The engineers themselves were folk heroes of a sort, and the popular Gus Knobel is now famous, or at least his name lives on in a Clay County town.

Coal Miners Memorial, Greenwood

NUMBER 6
There are a number of places in Arkansas whose names relate to resource extraction, especially mining. The town of Argenta, now North Little Rock, takes its name from some small-scale silver mining that occurred in central Arkansas (the French word argent meaning silver).

Lead and zinc mining in the Ozarks gave rise to names like Lead Hill and the rather uncreative Zinc. Can you guess what they mined at Coal Hill in Johnson County? But that was not the only coal-related name, as the Sebastian County town of Bonanza arose from a significant coal find there.

The town of Bauxite in Saline County drew its name from the locally mined Bauxite, but the town of Bauxippi in Crittenden County was a shipping point for the mineral, taking its name from a combination of Bauxite and Mississippi River. Sometimes, town names speak to crops grown in the area, as with Peach Orchard, Cherry Valley, and Cotton Plant.

NUMBER 7

In the significant work of deciding on a name, some towns struggled to come up with a name that would be acceptable to the U.S. Post Office. Unwilling to allow two towns with the same name within one state, it returned many proposals and requested another name. In their haste, a few towns thereby seized at the names of products on the shelves of the store/post office (Saddle) or words shouted out in jest (Apt). Kingsland was the third try of the desperate residents of what would be Johnny Cash's birthplace. And the national post office comes in for a good deal of blame in garbling the written applications, so that Snow Hall became Snowball, and Nauphlet became Norphlet.

The Saline County community of Congo offers an object lesson in the randomness of names. A post office was established in 1893 at the home of longtime resident Henry H. McCray, a Confederate veteran. In the first few applications for the post office, each name was rejected by the U.S. Postal Service in Washington DC. McCray's daughter, Flora, listened intently to the frustration created by the denials of post office names. She had recently studied Africa in school and offered the name "Congo" to her father, who immediately supplied that name on the next application, which was accepted. Decades later, a newspaper noted the irony of there being no people of African descent in the town of Congo.

Salado Post Office

NUMBER 8

In eastern Scott County located on Highway 80, Blue Ball was established in 1873 along Dutch Creek. Blue Ball's name, according to local stories, originated from resident Salina Millard, who awoke on a cold morning and noticed how the mountain directly in front of her house looked like a large blue ball. Is this true? It seems an odd story to base a name upon.

The community of Salado in Independence County has a local story that offers an explanation of what might be a French name. The most colorful account of town's name stems from the oft-told tale of how a young woman named Sally was washing clothes in a creek when a deer suddenly appeared. She attacked the deer with a battling stick and brought home a doe for supper, hence "Sally killed a doe," or "Sallydoe." Most likely, however, the name is of Spanish or French origin. The French term "sal d'eau," roughly translated as "salty water," appears on early maps of the region. The town derives its name from nearby Salado Creek, which was originally called Bayou Saladore. The name Salado is pronounced with each "a" being short as in "salad," unlike its counterpart in Texas.

The settlement of Monkey Run in Baxter County reportedly came into existence with the establishment of the nearby Pilgrim's Rest Baptist Church in 1872. A name change came sometime shortly after its founding as Pilgrim's Rest. At least three versions of the story regarding the name change exist, though all concern a local storekeeper. One story relates that a group of young boys playing around the store abruptly awakened the storekeeper, who chased the boys away while yelling "watch them monkeys run." A second version states that the boys were

referring to the storekeeper in saying, "Make the old monkey run and chase us." The third version concerns the shopkeeper and his young sweetheart. The story goes that he had to frequently restock his store because he showered her with so many gifts. Locals referred to his many trips to obtain new merchandise by saying, "There goes the old monkey on his run." Who knows if any of these stories are true.

Oil Trough Bottoms

NUMBER 9

The town of Oil Trough is located twelve miles southeast of Batesville in the southeastern part of Independence County. It is located southwest of the White River, in a rich area of bottomlands known as the Oil Trough Bottoms. Above the bottoms is the Oil Trough Ridge, composed of black limestone that the Goodspeed history of the area (1889) described as "capable of a superior polish."

Beginning around 1800, the area was a favorite hunting ground for French frontiersmen. The large stands of cane along the river were a perfect hiding place for game, including bear; the limestone cliffs nearby provided the bears with a perfect place for their dens. Indeed, legend has it that the area was named for the wooden troughs used by hunters to store their bear oil. Some accounts indicate that the bear oil was placed in the troughs and then floated downstream as far as New Orleans, Louisiana, for use in cooking, cosmetics, hair dressing, and tanning leather.

The name was changed to Oil Trough in 1849. Although the Oil Trough Bottoms area was flat, and the Goodspeed history of the area described it as "not subject to overflow," this would not prove to be the case. It has been susceptible to frequent flooding, most notably in 1867, 1882, and 1915, when an August tropical storm stalled in the area and caused evacuations and the loss of all of the year's crops.

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QUESTIONS

This is just the tip of the iceberg. The CALS Encyclopedia of Arkansas is a rabbit hole I encourage you to jump down. No matter what you are interested in, Arkansas has it--and the EOA is where you can start looking.