

CHAPTER XI

FEDERAL COURTS

On March 2, 1819 when the Territory of Arkansas was formed, a Superior Court was created with Jurisdiction over matters involving the Federal Constitution. The first Territorial seat of Government was at Arkansas Post, and later at Little Rock.

The Federal powers of the Arkansas Superior Court were, more definitely defined by an act of Congress on April 17, 1828, which provided for additional Compensation for the Judges who handled Federal matters in addition to their other court duties.

The district court sat only at Little Rock until the State was divided into Eastern and Western District by the act of March 3, 1851, which specified that "the Counties of Benton, Washington, Crawford, Scott, Polk, Franklin, Johnson, Madison, and Carroll, and all that part of the Indian Country lying within the present judicial district of Arkansas shall constitute a new Judicial district, to be styled the Western District of Arkansas." The act provided for two terms of court to be held yearly at the town of Van Buren.

Later acts altered the boundary of the Western district by the addition of new counties within its respective Jurisdiction.

United States District Court was first held at Van Buren, in the Lower Story of the County Court House, May 1854. Judge Daniel Ringo presiding and Alexander McLean was clerk. The act creating the Western district provided for its appointment of a clerk for the Western District but leaving the two districts to be presided over by one Judge. In May, 1861, Judge Ringo resigned and records were turned over to clerk, John B. Ogden, and Court ceased for the period of the War between the States. Records were held by Judge Ogden until February, 1863, when a raid was made on Van Buren by a company of

Federal Soldiers and Records destroyed. Namely, records from 1855 to 1860.

Chief causes during the years of this record were, Larceny, introducing spirituous liquors, into the Indian Nation, bribery, contempt of court, assault with intent to kill, mail robbery, murder and negro stealing.

The first term of Federal Court after the War between the States was held May, 1866. And the last term held at Van Buren was November 1870, the list of grand jurors serving at this term were:

Name of Jurors	County
1. Josiah Harrell	Crawford
2. John F. Lane	Polk
3. Felix Eubanks	Madison
4. L. D. Jesmyeir (not certain)	Washington
5. W. R. Belding	Carroll
6. George W. Damson	Franklin
7. Pleasant W. Hamblen	Franklin
8. Isaac N. Lane	Polk
9. Jacob Yoes	Washington
10. R. J. Appleton	Sevier
11. James D. Harston	Benton
12. James Worthington	Benton
13. William J. Neal	Crawford
14. John Johnson	Madison
15. John M. Martin	Scott
16. James R. Leofferry	Johnson
17. Elisha Meers	Johnson
18. Moses Bell	Sebastian
19. James B. Stephens	Sebastian
20. Matt P. McCrary	Little River
21. M. W. Sockny	Sevier
22. Charles Dye	Washington
23. Arnold O'Brine	Crawford

By an act of March 3, 1871, the place of holding court in the Western District was changed to Fort Smith, and the office of Judge was created. The first term at Fort Smith was begun the second Monday in May, 1871, with Judge William Story, presiding. It was the largest Crim-

inal Court in the World and had jurisdiction over Western Arkansas, and the five civilized tribes of the Indian Territory.

The above information was furnished by Judge R. S. Wilson and Judge C. M. Wofford, obtained from records of the Federal Courts.