

CROSS COUNTY HISTORY

Cross Co. Historical Society: From Vol.5-No.1-Winter 2010

By Jimmie Sadler James

Cross County, Arkansas traces its beginning to an act of the General Assembly, passed 15 November, 1862, entitled, "An Act to Establish the County of Cross." The county was taken out of Poinsett, Crittenden and St. Francis counties. Cross County is bounded on the north by Poinsett, on the east by Crittenden, on the south by St. Francis, and on the west by Woodruff and Jackson counties. Cross County is divided into twelve townships: Hickory Ridge, Mitchell, Coldwater, Twist, Brushy Lake, Searcy, Tyronza, Fair Oaks, Ellis, Bedford, Wynne, and Smith. Cross County was named for Col. David C. Cross, an officer of the Confederate Army who came to the area in the 1840s. Eventually, he was to own 85,000 acres of land, making him a wealthy man and the most extensive landowner in the county. Col. Cross died August 21, 1874, at the home of his friend, William Perry Wilkins, and is buried in the Wilkins family cemetery, south of Wynne. There have been five county seats. The town of Wittsburg was designated as the first county seat, but due to Union forces patrolling the area during the Civil War, county business could not be conducted there. Three commissioners were chosen to decide where the county seat should be located. April 18, 1863, they chose Pineville as the county seat. Dr. B. D. McClaran was the first County Clerk. No courthouse was erected at Pineville. Dr. McClaran lived near Pineville and the county's business was conducted in his home. In May, 1865, commissioners met at Pineville and selected the town of Cleburne as the next county seat. Cleburne, named after Patrick R. Cleburne, a Confederate general from Helena, Arkansas, who had been Col. Cross's commander in the Civil War, was located in the center of the county. Col. Cross deeded the center block in the town containing 3/5 acre to the county on which to build a courthouse. His residence on the site was used as a temporary courthouse. The county seat was at Cleburne from 1865 to 1868. As early as 1866, petitions had been circulated asking that the seat be changed to Wittsburg. In June 1868, three locating commissioners were elected, and in October 1868, they selected Wittsburg, by now a thriving river port, as the next county seat. Wittsburg was the county seat from 1868 to 1884. In 1882, when the Helena branch of the Iron Mountain and Southern n Railroad was completed, Wittsburg began to decline. Steam trains were replacing steamboats. Many business and professional people were moving to Vanndale, which was located on the new railroad. An election was held, and in 1884, Vanndale was declared the next county seat. The first (brick) courthouse was built there in 1888. Meanwhile, the town of Wynne, south of Vanndale, was growing. Wynne started in 1882 when a train derailed, leaving one boxcar without wheels and off the tracks. The boxcar was placed upright and designated Wynne Station in compliment to Capt. Jessie Watkins Wynne, a veteran of the Civil War and a prominent businessman and banker of Forrest City, Arkansas. Wynne was formally incorporated May 28, 1888. In July, 1903, a petition was presented to the county court, asking that an election be held to move the county seat from Vanndale to Wynne. Wynne won the election and has remained the county seat of Cross County, Arkansas.