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NATHANIEL PHILBROOK AND HIS ESTATE

by

Ted R. Worley

Among the New Englanders who came to Arkansas Territory with James Miller, first governor, was Nathaniel Philbrook of New Hampshire.¹ Miller, as ex-officio superintendent of Indian affairs, appointed Philbrook sub-agent to the Osages on the waters of the Arkansas. Philbrook appears to have had some knowledge of the Osage language. He certainly assumed a role of importance as intermediary between the quarreling Cherokees and Osages and the United States government.²

Early in 1820 Governor Miller and his sub-agent to the Osages traveled from Arkansas Post to the Cadron on a mission of pacification. On this trip Miller, and perhaps Philbrook also, first saw the site of Little Rock and Crystal Hill, where Miller later lived. Perhaps the sub-agent sized up the prospects for Indian trade, in which he was engaged, and looked over certain tracts of land in which he was interested. The enterprising Yankee had come to the wilderness well supplied with money as several documents later presented will show. He also brought with him, or acquired shortly after his arrival in Arkansas, an interest in New Madrid certificates, among which certain ones (Numbers 8, 15, 156 and 264) had been located at the site of Little Rock. On these locations, representing 1,120 acres, the town was laid out in 1821.³ Dispute over title immediately arose between those holding New Madrid locations and those holding by virtue of preemption. The matter was temporarily settled by the Superior Court of Arkansas, which held in June, 1821, in favor of the preemption titles. Little Rock inhabitants, who held by virtue of New Madrid certificates, found suddenly they were living on land they did not own. They blew up their houses with gunpowder or moved them off to new locations. William Russell, who was chief claimant under preemption titles, found that he now owned a town site without inhabitants. Being an astute man, he knew when he was whipped, and he proceeded to compromise.

Philbrook's name, together with those of Chester Ashley, James DeBaun, Henry Elliott and Elias Austin Elliott, were signed November 22, 1821 to a deed transferring whatever title