Arkansas Post

National Memorial
Arkansas

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

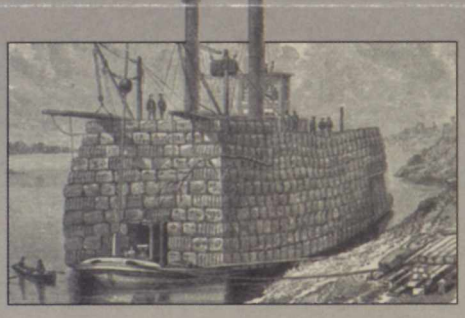


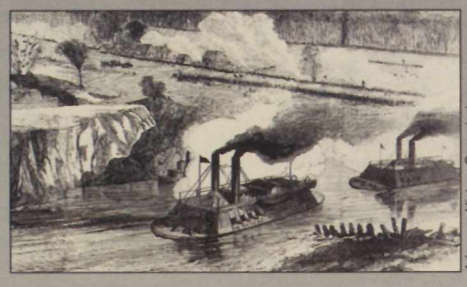
By the late 17th century European powers were racing to carve up the new world. In 1686 the French moved south from the St. Lawrence Valley to plant the first European settlement in the lower Mississippi Valley. Arkansas Post was to be a staging point for Mississippi River trade between New France and the Gulf of Mexico. Over the two centuries of the settlement's life the events surrounding it typified the conflicts and changes that transformed precarious European trading posts and garrisons into new American towns.

Photographs by Ken Laffal. Copy of Quapaw robe made by Ardina Moore.



Missouri Historical Society





Arkansas History Commission

Exploration and Settlement

1682 The French explorer Robert Cavelier, sieur de La Salle, grants to Henri de Tonti land along the Arkansas River. Four years later Tonti establishes a trading post there near the Quapaw village of Osotouy. The Quapaw and French become allies; the Quapaw protect the French from other Indian tribes. In 1687 survivors of La Salle's 1684 expedition reach Arkansas Post: "Looking over to the further side [of the river] we discovered a great cross...and a house built after the French fashion."

1699 By this date the post is abandoned due to a glut in the beaver pelt market and competition from British fur traders. In 1721 the post is reestablished with a French military garrison. Nearby settlers grow some crops, but most continue their semi-nomadic hunting and trapping life. Flooding and Chickasaw raids in 1749 force the post to move upriver. After war with England begins in 1756, the post moves downriver, nine miles from the Mississippi, to help protect French river convoys.

1763 France cedes Louisiana to Spain after the French and Indian War. Spain develops fur trade *(above)* along river routes and an alliance with the Quapaw.

1779 Because of flooding, Spain moves the fort back near the site of the old French settlement, renaming the post Fort Carlos III.

1783 During the American Revolution (in which Spain aids the colonies) James Colbert and a band of British partisans and Chickasaw Indians attack the fort but are driven back by a Spanish and Quapaw counterattack.

Nineteenth-Century Town

1803 France, having regained Louisiana from Spain in 1800, sells the territory to the U.S.

1803-1819 Arkansas Post is part of Louisiana. The U.S. Government opens a trading post in 1805, but cannot compete with private traders. The 1810 population is about 500, mostly French, with some African-American slaves and "free people of color." By 1817 hunting and trapping culture is giving way to a farm economy.

1819 Arkansas Post is named capital of the new Arkansas Territory. *Arkansas Gazette* begins publishing. Log houses join existing French dwellings with high pointed roofs. Naturalist Thomas Nuttall notes: "Blankets...moccasins, and overalls of the same materials, are...the prevailing dress." Tensions grow between the French and growing numbers of American farmers, with Washington Irving noting that the more insular French thought Americans "trouble themselves with cares beyond their horizon and import sorrow thro the newspapers from every point of the compass."

1821 Little Rock becomes the capital, dampening Arkansas Post's economy. The population falls to 114 by 1830. A visitor notes the town's "forlorn and desolate appearance."

1824 U.S. forces the Quapaw to relocate.

1830s With the availability of prime land, slave labor, and transportation, Arkansas Post thrives as a center of cotton production and a major river port *(above)*. By the 1840s the boom subsides, and in 1855 the county seat moves to another site; the town declines.

Civil War and Decline

1861 In May Arkansas joins the Confederacy.

1862 As Union forces get uncomfortably close to Little Rock, the Confederate government builds earthwork forts along the Arkansas River to defend the capital. Fort Hindman at Arkansas Post is 190 feet square, armed with 11 rifled guns and smoothbores. Some 5,000 soldiers are housed at the fort and in nearby huts. They dig rifle pits from the fort to Post Bayou.

1863 With the fort a threat to Union supply lines, Gen. John McClernand brings 30,000 infantry upriver, supported by Rear Adm. David Porter's gunboat fleet. On January 10 they attack, the gunboats *(above)* keeping up heavy fire on the fort as the infantry pushes back the Confederate front line troops. The next day the gunboats put the fort's big guns out of commission, then loft exploding shells over the fort. The shrapnel raining down on the trenches takes its toll: late in the afternoon white flags begin going up. The Confederates lose 60 killed and 80 wounded, with 4,971 taken prisoner. Federals lose 134 killed, 898 wounded, and 29 missing.

Post-Civil War The town never recovers from the shelling, as declining river traffic and railroads undermine its importance as a port. Erosion claims parts of the town, including the fort. The Arkansas changes course in 1912, leaving the post half a mile from the river.



Found at Arkansas Post: brass button of European origin; key from Montgomery's Tavern, c. 1820

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All cultural and natural resources are protected by law in national parks. • The removal of historic artifacts, plants, and animals or their remains from the park is prohibited. • The possession of metal detectors or firearms within the park is prohibited. • All animals are protected by federal law. • Alcohol is not permitted in the visitor center area, and open containers of alcohol are prohibited in the passenger compartments of motor vehicles.



The water cistern, dating to the early 1800s, was a focus of town life in 19th-century Arkansas Post.



Lotus, also known as yancopin, abound in the surrounding waters. *(See also below.)*



Part of the wildlife sanctuary here, Post Bayou harbors a rich variety of animal and plant species.

About Your Visit

After decades of agricultural use, Arkansas Post was named a state park in 1929. In 1964 it was transferred to federal control and designated a national memorial. The site today encompasses some of the 19th-century town and the approximate site of two of the 18th-century trading and military posts. At the visitor center, exhibits and a film help bring alive the park's history. Along the trails, wayside exhibits explain historic areas. A variety of plant and animal life can also be seen.

Water Activities Fishing is permitted; an Arkansas fishing license is required. Check at the visitor center for fishing regulations. Due to fairly shallow water and soft lake and river bottoms, **swimming is prohibited**. The launching, beaching, or landing of any vessel except in an emergency is prohibited.

For Your Safety Keep pets on a leash or otherwise physically restrained. Stay on the trails when walking, especially in spring and summer when ticks, chiggers, and poison ivy are abundant. Mosquitos and biting flies are present in spring and summer; use a repellent or wear protective clothing. There is a healthy population of reptiles, especially snakes. Of the many varieties here, three are poisonous: water moccasin (also called cottonmouth), copperhead, and pigmy rattlesnake.

Administration The park is located on Ark. 169, 7 miles south of Gillett via U.S. 165 and 20 miles northeast of Dumas via U.S. 165.

The visitor center is open daily from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. except Thanksgiving, December 25, and January 1. The grounds are open daily until dark. **Trails, walkways, and buildings are wheelchair-accessible**.

For more information contact: Superintendent, Arkansas Post National Memorial, 1741 Old Post Road, Gillett, AR 72055; 870-548-2207; www.nps.gov/arpo on the Internet.

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The Post's Natural History

Located at the northern edge of the Gulf coastal plain, the Arkansas Post area's native growth ranges from prairie grasses and lowland hardwood forests to wetland marshes nearer the bayous and river. Over the three centuries of Arkansas Post's history, the area has been greatly changed by both natural forces and human intervention. Flooding, erosion, and a natural change in the river's course have altered the site of the old posts and town, as have attempts to improve navigation and control the river with levees, dams, and a canal. It remains a place of great beauty, with deer, turkey, alligator, raccoon, and resident and migratory birds, particularly bald eagles and waterfowl in the fall and winter months.



Photographs by Ken Laffal