Arkansas Post

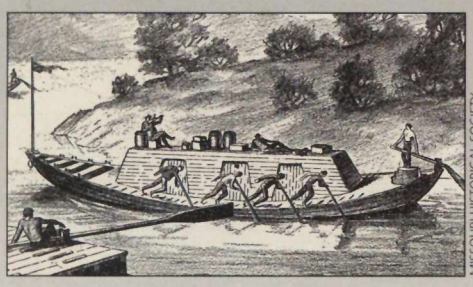
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

National Memorial
Arkansas

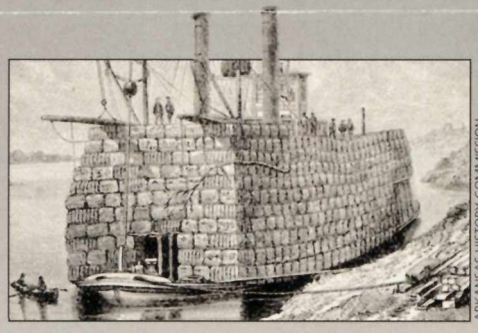


ABOVE—NPS / KEN LAFFAL (QUAPAW ROBE REPRODUCTION BY ARDINA MOORE)

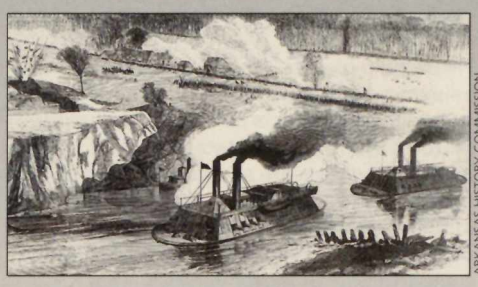
By the late 1600s European powers were racing to carve up the New World. In 1686 the French moved south from the St. Lawrence Valley to establish the first European settlement in the lower Mississippi Valley. Arkansas Post was to be a staging point for Mississippi River trade between New France and the 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.



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Exploration and Settlement

1682 French explorer Robert Cavelier, sieur de La Salle, grants land along the Arkansas River to Henri de Tonti. Four years later Tonti establishes a trading post there near the Quapaw village of Osotouy. Quapaw and French become allies; Quapaw protect the French from other Native American 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 The post is abandoned owing to a glut in beaver pelts and British competition. In 1721 the post is reestablished with a French military garrison. Nearby settlers grow some crops, but most continue a seminomadic hunting and trapping life. Flooding and Chickasaw raids in 1749 force the post to move upriver. After war with England begins, the post moves downriver, nine miles from the Mississippi, to protect French river convoys.

1763 France cedes west Louisiana (most of present-day central United States) and New Orleans to Spain after French and Indian War (1756–63). Spain develops fur trade along river routes (*above*) and forms 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 attack the fort but are driven back by the Spanish and Quapaw.

Early 1800s

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

1803–19 Arkansas Post is part of Louisiana. The US government opens a trading post in 1805 but cannot compete with private traders. The 1810 population is about 500, mostly French, and includes enslaved and free African Americans. By 1817 the hunting and trapping culture gives way to a farming 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 build between the French and growing numbers of American farmers. Washington Irving notes 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 area population falls to 114 by 1830. A visitor notes the town's "forlorn and desolate appearance."

1824 United States forces Quapaw to relocate.

1830s With the availability of prime land, enslaved labor, and transportation, Arkansas Post thrives as a center of cotton production and a major river port (*above*). By the 1840s the boom subsides. 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 US Army forces get uncomfortably close to Little Rock, Confederates build earthwork forts along the Arkansas River to defend the capital. Fort Hindman (*see map on other side*) 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 Federal supply lines, Gen. John McClernand brings 30,000 infantry upriver, supported by Rear Adm. David Porter's gunboat fleet. On January 10 they attack. Gunboats (*above*) keep up heavy fire on the fort as the infantry pushes back Confederate front-line troops. The next day Federal gunboats destroy the fort's big guns, then loft exploding shells over the fort. Shrapnel rains down on the trenches, taking a toll: By late afternoon white flags begin going up. Confederates—60 killed and 80 wounded, with 4,971 taken prisoner. Federals—134 killed, 898 wounded, and 29 missing.

Post-Civil War The town never recovers from the shelling. River traffic declines as 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 a half mile away from the river.

Found at Arkansas Post: brass button (European) and key from Montgomery's Tavern, ca. 1820.



NPS / KEN LAFFAL

Exploring Arkansas Post

Please help us preserve the park for your enjoyment and for future generations.
• Federal law protects all cultural and natural features in the park. • Metal detectors are prohibited. • Pets are allowed on trails but must be leashed. • Alcohol is not permitted in the visitor center area. Open containers of alcohol are prohibited in the passenger compartments of motor vehicles. • For firearms regulations check the park website.



This water cistern was a focus of life in the town of Arkansas Post in the 1800s.



Lotus, also known as yancopin, abound in the park's quiet waters. Watch for blooms in late summer.



Post Bayou harbors a rich variety of animal and plant species.

About Your Visit

In 1960 Congress designated Arkansas Post a national memorial. It preserves parts of the town from the 1800s and the approximate site of two trading and military posts from the 1700s.

Getting Here
The park is on AR 169, 9 miles south of Gillett via US 165 and about 17 miles northeast of Dumas via US 165.

Seeing the Park
Start at the visitor center for information, exhibits, a film, and bookstore. Visitor center open daily 8:30 am to 5 pm except Thanksgiving, December 25, and January 1. Grounds open daily until dark. Exhibits along the trails explain historic areas.

Accessibility
We strive to make facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. For information go to the visitor center, ask a ranger, call, or check the park website.

Water Activities
Swimming is prohibited due to shallow water and soft river and lake bottoms. • Fishing is allowed only with a state license; all state regulations apply. • Launching, beaching, or landing any vessel is prohibited except in an emergency.

For Your Safety
Pets must be leashed at all times. • Stay on trails to avoid ticks, chiggers, and poison ivy. • Wear protective clothing and insect repellent. • Alligators and three species of poisonous snakes live here: water moccasin (cottonmouth), copperhead, and pygmy rattlesnake. Watch where you put your hands and feet.

Emergencies call 911

More Information
Arkansas Post
National Memorial
1741 Old Post Rd.
Gillett, AR 72055
870-548-2207
www.nps.gov/arpo

Arkansas Post National Memorial is one of over 400 parks in the National Park System. Learn about national parks at www.nps.gov.

National Park Foundation
Join the park community.
www.nationalparks.org

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Discover Nature

Arkansas Post lies in the Mississippi Delta region of the state. Over the past 300 years, natural forces and human intervention have greatly changed the area. 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.

Today the park protects a variety of native plants and trees like cypress, pecan, and lotus. An Osage orange tree near the visitor center is one of the largest of its species in the state. As you explore the park, listen for songbirds. Watch for deer, turkey, alligator, and our resident pair of bald eagles. In fall and winter you will see flocks of migrating ducks and geese. Enjoy the sights and sounds in this place of natural beauty.



ALL PHOTOS
NPS / KEN LAFFAL