

The ^{Arkansas} Entry



Newsletter of the
Encyclopedia of Arkansas Project

Information Revolution on the Horizon

by Mike Polston, Staff Historian

I believe my educational experience in Arkansas history makes me an oddity in the state. As a student I studied Arkansas history in the 5th, 7th, and 12th grades and as a college undergraduate. I also have taught Arkansas history at the secondary and post-secondary level for fifteen years. I seriously doubt there are many others who can claim to have studied Arkansas history in a formal setting more than myself.

However, recent generations of students have begun to more closely follow the path I took. Much of that is the result of a state law passed in 1997; students are now required to study Arkansas history at every grade level before junior high. Before they complete their secondary education, they must also take a semester-length course in our state's history. The teaching requirement is a start, but much remains to be done before our educators have the tools they need to effectively teach this subject. Help is on the way.

I remember only one resource ever being used in the classroom when I was a student – a dull and dusty textbook. I don't recall any additional outside resources being used. Why was this the case? Perhaps the teacher couldn't introduce additional resources, or maybe none were readily available.

When I became an Arkansas history teacher many years later, I discovered that the answer was most likely the lack of material. I struggled to find resources to help me make the classes more interesting. I wanted history to come alive for my students. I wanted them to learn about their community and their state. It wasn't an easy job.

During the past few years, some of that void has been filled with the publication of Arkansas materials. As a result, many more resources are easily obtained. But so much more work must be done to help teachers bring the history of Arkansas to new students. As the new staff historian at the Encyclopedia of Arkansas, I have an opportunity to be part of one of the most

important projects in the history of the state dealing with the dissemination of information about Arkansas and its people. Education is at the heart of the Encyclopedia's mission. We want to make sure that accurate information is readily available to Arkansas teachers and students.

The launching of the *Encyclopedia* in May 2006 will be the beginning of a five-year explosion of accurate Arkansas history

information on the web. Any person, regardless of his or her location, will have at the click of a mouse a wealth of information that, in the past, has not been readily available. For the first time, students will be able to easily access information on just about any Arkansas topic. As a former teacher, I see all kinds of ways to use the *Encyclopedia* as a teaching and research tool. Teachers will be able to access information to customize their lesson plans. Students will no longer have to tell their teachers that they could not complete their report, project, or oral presentation because they could not find the needed information.

I firmly believe that the first step to retaining talented young professionals in the future is to educate today's children

on the state's history and culture. It is the important first step in building their sense of pride and desire to remain in their home state. These students are Internet savvy, and an online tool will be of great benefit to them.

It will take time before we can assess the true impact the *Encyclopedia* will have on the state's students, but perhaps this next generation will begin to realize that their home state matters. I'm confident our teachers will embrace this new tool and use it to find creative ways to engage their students.

So mark your calendar for May 2006. The launch of the *Encyclopedia of Arkansas History & Culture* website will mark the beginning of a revolution in the teaching of Arkansas history. ■



Mike Polston was an Arkansas history buff even in 1963 as a student at Williford public schools in Sharp County.

Coordinator's Column

Jill
Curran



As we go about the work of creating the *Encyclopedia of Arkansas*, our focus is on Arkansas students and teachers at all levels and how to

benefit them the most. But the *Encyclopedia* is already helping those students who are involved in its creation right now, be they fact checkers, interns, authors, or volunteers.

We have two new student interns this semester and our second graduate assistant, Teresa Lauderdale. Teresa is a student in the Public History program at UALR, and we are fortunate enough to have 20 hours of her time and expertise each week. Teresa is a self-described “history nut,” and her favorite parts of her job are working with the Butler Center’s outstanding staff to access its vast collection of Arkansas materials and getting to go into the Center’s “forbidden room” (closed stacks) where they keep the goodies! Her career plans center around museum collections and their interpretation, especially as they relate to education.

Our interns this semester are Juli Burrow and Jamie Metrailler. Juli is a senior history major at Hendrix College in Conway. This summer she worked on the project “Arkansas Methodism: An Oral History.” Juli grew up in Augusta (Woodruff County) and Searcy (White County), and she plans to pursue a career in archival work after she graduates.

Jamie, a native of Little Rock, is working toward his Masters in Public History at UALR. His past projects include an ethnographic study of “The Women of the Ozarks.” He has a variety of interests within Arkansas history and culture and plans to pursue a career in public history.

All three students are researching for the *Encyclopedia*. Their first assignment was to fact check over 100 dates in Arkansas history that will be in our upcoming 2006 calendar. (To order your calendar, see page five.) When I asked

Juli to comment on her internship experience so far, she replied, “My research skills have improved, and now I find myself seeking that one lost fact instead of doing my homework.”

With apologies to Juli’s current professors, I can say without reservation that being an *Encyclopedia* intern or graduate assistant is a beneficial “hands-on” experience. I encourage interested students to apply in the future. The deadline for spring internship applications is November 11. To print an application form, go to our website—www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net—and follow the link on the main page.



Left to right: Jamie Metrailler, Teresa Lauderdale, and Juli Burrow.

I’m especially pleased that Teresa, Juli, and Jamie all plan to stay in Arkansas after they complete their degrees. For myself and so many others, it took leaving Arkansas to appreciate its rich heritage and beauty and to know we belonged here. It’s my hope that as more and more students learn about our great state through the *Encyclopedia*, they, too, will want to stay and keep their roots here in Arkansas, in their own soil. ■

Spring Internships with the Encyclopedia

Open to undergraduate and graduate students. Deadline for applications is November 11. For more information and to print an application form, go to www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/student_participation.php.

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Want to know more about the Encyclopedia?

Be sure to visit our website at www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net to learn more about the Encyclopedia’s history and ways to get involved.

Become a fact checker for the Encyclopedia

The *Encyclopedia of Arkansas History & Culture* is seeking volunteer fact checkers. Volunteers receive training on how to fact check entries.

For more information or to sign up, contact Mike Polston at mpolston@encyclopediaofarkansas.net or (501) 918-3055.

The Arkansas Entry

is the quarterly newsletter of the Encyclopedia of Arkansas History & Culture Project.

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Senior Editor's Column

Nathania Sawyer



Here's a quick quiz for you. I'm sure you have heard the statement, "The *Arkansas Gazette* was the oldest newspaper west of the Mississippi." What do those words really mean? Don't read any further until you have your answer in mind.

Over the past few months, I've asked that question to many of my friends and co-workers. Some said it means the *Gazette* was published for a longer period of time than any other newspaper west of the Mississippi; others thought it meant the *Gazette* was the first newspaper published west of the Mississippi.

At some point early this year, I was digging in the Butler Center's archive and came across the *Arkansas Gazette Almanac and Encyclopedia* from 1896. It included a section on the history of the newspaper that reads: "The *Arkansas Gazette* is the second oldest newspaper published west of the Mississippi River, and is the oldest which has had a continuous existence to the present time with the same name." I was intrigued. I had always equated "oldest" with "first."

The publisher of the 1900 almanac

and encyclopedia stated, "Published continuously under the same name, the *Arkansas Gazette* is the oldest newspaper printed in the Trans-Mississippi country."

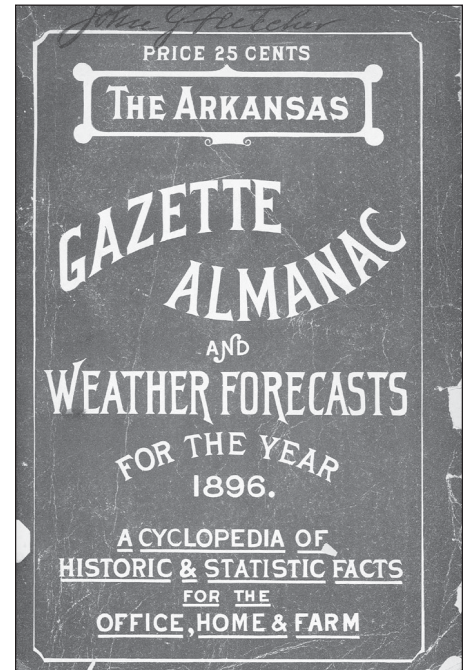
I know I have to tread carefully here because the memory of the *Gazette* is dear to many people, and it is something of a sacred cow. However, the reality is, as Michael Dougan points out in *Community Diaries: Arkansas Newspapering, 1918–2002*, many newspapers existed in states west of the Mississippi before the *Arkansas Gazette* began publishing.

Somewhere in the quoting, re quoting, condensing, editing, rewriting, and rephrasing, what began as a dubious promotional tagline became a potentially misleading mantra. Closer examination of the 1896 statement leads me to think that not only were there newspapers that started publishing before the *Gazette*, but also that some newspapers that were still in existence (albeit with name changes) had been around longer.

"Spin doctoring" is a new term for an old concept. I believe I'm safe in saying that every person, company, and organization in the state would prefer to present themselves in the best possible light. We shade ourselves with the nuances of lan-

guage. Over time, "posturing" can become "fact."

We hope the *Encyclopedia of Arkansas History & Culture* will be a starting point for clarifying a lot of information about our state. I've already learned that our Capitol building is not a scaled-down model of the Capitol in Washington DC, and that Max Aronson was "Broncho"



1896 Arkansas Gazette Almanac

Billy, not "Bronco" Billy. Who knows what else our authors, reviewers, and fact checkers will uncover as we continue our goal to dig a little deeper and try a little harder to bring Arkansas's history to the public. ■

The *Encyclopedia of Arkansas* Response Form

Yes, I would like to make the *Encyclopedia of Arkansas History & Culture* the definitive reference on all things Arkansas. I would like to help in the following ways:

- | | |
|---|-----------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tax-deductible contribution of \$ _____. | Name _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tax-deductible pledge of \$ _____, payable in installments. Please contact me so we can set up a payment plan. | Address _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I would like to volunteer my time and/or expertise. Please contact me. | City/State/Zip _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Add my name to the <i>Encyclopedia of Arkansas</i> mailing list. | Phone (_____) _____ |
| | Email _____ |

Return to:

Encyclopedia of Arkansas, Central Arkansas Library System, 100 Rock St., Little Rock, AR 72201
or Email: info@encyclopediaofarkansas.net

New Talent on the Team

The Encyclopedia of Arkansas Project is pleased to welcome two new employees: Michael A. Keckhaver as our media editor and Anna Miller Lancaster as our editorial assistant.

Mike Keckhaver brings more than 20 years of graphics design experience to the Encyclopedia Project. He also has expertise in web design and digital photo restoration and retouching. His interest in history began with Russian history, although Arkansas history is quickly becoming his passion. He says, "I'm really excited about being able to apply my technical expertise to the field of history." Mike will be responsible for locating and gathering photos, maps, documents, audio, and video to accompany the *Encyclopedia's* entries.

Anna Lancaster holds a BA in history from the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville. Prior to joining the Encyclopedia Project, she worked as a textbook manager at Indian Book and



Anna Lancaster and Mike Keckhaver

Supply in Jonesboro. As editorial assistant, Anna is responsible for tracking entries through the editorial system and assisting our senior editor with all of the author, reviewer, and fact checker correspondence. "What I like most about the Encyclopedia Project," says Lancaster, "is its practicality. This will be a great resource for teachers and students of Arkansas history in the future and will be easily accessible for everyone."

Please join us in welcoming Mike and Anna to our team. ■

("I Didn't Know That" cont. from page 6)

York office that it was "simply the old story of white people not being able to adjust themselves to the new order of things."

In 1942, McConico gained national attention as secretary of the Arkansas Negro Democratic Association when he was denied a ballot in the Democratic primary. The 1944 primary went much differently; the Democratic Party threw out its "whites only" rule and allowed

blacks to vote if they pledged their loyalty to the Democratic nominees. (The poll tax remained.) According to the *New York Times*, J. H. McConico was "one of the first to appear at the polls." ■

If you would like to be a guest contributor to "I Didn't Know That About Arkansas," please send your suggestion to info@encyclopediaofarkansas.net or call (501)-918-3016.

We're Looking for a Few Good Media

by Mike Keckhaver, Media Editor

The Encyclopedia of Arkansas Project needs your help. We have a talented pool of writers contributing hundreds of articles to the *Encyclopedia*, and their words need to be embellished with pictures, illustrations, maps, documents, snippets of audio, and short film clips. That's where you can help. Go to www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net and click on "Get Involved." Under "Seeking Authors," we have lists of the entries we are currently working on. Each of those entries needs media to accompany it. If you've got an early line recording of Conway Twitty, a picture of an Arkansas peach orchard at the turn of the century, or a brochure announcing the grand opening of the IQ Zoo, we're interested. If you have media that could accompany any of the entries listed on the website, we're interested.

Contact me and let me know what media you have. You can call me at 501-918-3019 or send email to mkeckhaver@encyclopediaofarkansas.net any time. We will digitize your originals and return them to you. You'll be helping us assemble one of the most important educational tools our state has ever had. Please look through those old trunks and boxes and give me a call. We anticipate and value your contributions. ■

TELL YOUR ACCOUNTANT IT'S DEDUCTIBLE!



As the year's end approaches, keep in mind that contributions to the Encyclopedia Project are **tax-deductible**.

A gift to the Encyclopedia is a wonderful way to honor a favorite teacher or loved one. Donations made in honor or memory of a special person are welcome. The honoree will receive a letter acknowledging your gift.

Donors of \$100 or more receive an Encyclopedia lapel pin. Donors of \$500 or more also receive their choice of two Butler Center publications. For \$1,000 or more, you will receive all of the books published by the Butler Center.

For more information about giving, call **501-918-3016** or email info@encyclopediaofarkansas.net.

Can you identify these three famous entertainers from Arkansas? (See below.)

Buy the 2006 calendar and learn more about them—plus more than 100 significant (and not-so-significant) dates in Arkansas history.



The Encyclopedia
of Arkansas
History & Culture

2006 Calendar

Answer: Dick Powell, Alan Ladd, and Bob Burns

To order your 2006 *Encyclopedia of Arkansas History & Culture* calendar, send this form with a check to:

Encyclopedia of Arkansas
Central Arkansas Library System
100 Rock St.
Little Rock, AR 72201

Cost of calendars: \$10.00 each + shipping

Shipping charge: \$2.00 for 1 calendar;
FREE shipping for 2 or more

Make checks payable to: Encyclopedia of Arkansas

Enclosed is my payment of \$ _____ . Please mail _____ (quantity) calendar(s) to:

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I would like to receive the Encyclopedia's free quarterly newsletter, *The Arkansas Entry*.

To learn more about the Encyclopedia of Arkansas, visit www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net.

“I Didn’t Know That About Arkansas”

Guest contributor: Blake Wintory

Dr. Blake Wintory is the Director of Research and Interpretation at the Mosaic Templars Cultural Center. He is also a volunteer reviewer, fact checker, and author of three entries for the Encyclopedia.

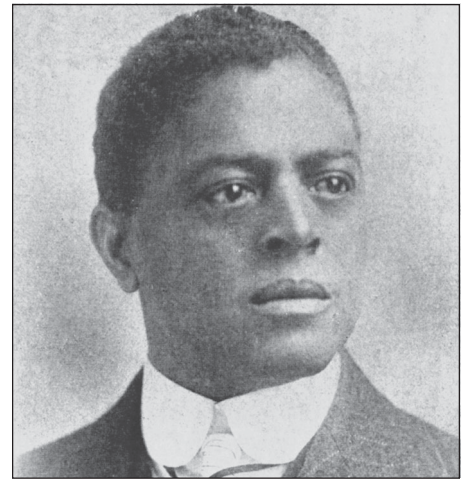
I continue to be surprised at the number of subjects to research and write about in Arkansas’s African-American history. The available historical records can’t tell us everything, especially in African-American history, but there is still much to be learned through research. Recently, I have discovered J. H. McConico (c. 1884–?)—a leader in the Mosaic Templars of America, a businessman, and civil rights pioneer. While the details and dates of his life are sketchy, he is proving to be very interesting.

J. H. McConico was born in Livingston, Alabama around 1884 and

graduated from A&M College in Normal, Alabama. He worked for newspapers in Alabama and Georgia before joining A&M’s faculty. In Little Rock he taught at Arkansas Baptist College, worked at Capital City Bank, and managed Arkansas Mutual Company.

McConico was a member of the Mosaic Templars of America and served as its national auditor. The Templars had strong connections to Booker T. Washington’s National Negro Business League (NNBL). McConico’s 1905 speech before the NNBL, “The Negro Banker and His Struggles,” was published in the *Colored American Magazine*. In 1914, he again addressed the NNBL, this time on “The Business Side of Fraternal Orders.”

McConico also served as president of the Little Rock branch of the National As-



J.H. McConico Courtesy of the Mosaic Templars Cultural Center

sociation for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). In 1918, when cotton prices were high, planters refused to increase wages for blacks even when higher paying jobs were available. To force blacks to work in the fields and as low-paid domestics during World War I, communities like Pine Bluff passed “work or fight” laws. McConico reported to the NAACP’s New

(Cont. on page 4)



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