

Buena Vista, Arkansas

Buena Vista, south of Camden, is one of the oldest communities in Ouachita County. Its name was established by the U. S. Post Office Department with the appointment of Nathan Holley postmaster on April 22, 1857. The office was discontinued June 22, 1866; re-established December 26, 1867 with Jonathan D. Ingram postmaster; discontinued May 17, 1870; re-established April 18, 1873 with J. G. Riley postmaster. The office was permanently discontinued December 27, 1968 with the retirement of postmistress Jewell Graves, who had served since November 30, 1947 and patrons began being served by Camden and Stephens post offices.

Prior to 1857, Buena Vista was known as Venter and Ten Springs, also said to be postal sites. Even though these names are not recorded in official postal records for Ouachita County, they could have existed by those names in Union County before parts of its northwest area were used to create Ouachita County in 1842.

Goodspeed Publishing Co.'s 1890 Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Ouachita County recorded Buena Vista having a post office in the 1840s and Reed & Coleman operating a store before the Civil War. Their report credited the beginning of the "present town" to the Cotton Belt Railroad in 1882 and listed as early merchants: Yarbrough & Ross, John Wright, and Wright & Bro. Goodspeed said Buena Vista was the seat of Reynolds Mill, contained four or five stores, and 150-200 population. Today, remnants of concrete floors and brick walls of old business buildings facing an old road that ran from Camden to the old Seminary community northwest of present-day Stephens during that era, still exist and are securely concealed from easy observation by trees and dense underbrush.

A business directory published in 1900 for Arkansas listed Buena Vista's population at 200, four general stores operated by J. L. Armfield, Ross & Hildebrand, W. F. Ross and J. Wright; a sawmill operated by S. F. Graves and a grist mill and cotton gin operated by J. W. Wright.

Buena Vista United Methodist Church, organized in 1859 as Ten Springs Methodist Episcopal Church, continues to hold regular worship services today. It meets in its original building, modernized over the years in such a manner that prevents it from being considered for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. It and Buena Vista Cemetery are all that remain of the glory days of old Buena Vista. The school consolidated with Stephens in 1949. D. Colman Cross, son of Francis M. and Susan A. Cross, *b.* June 22, 1858, *d.* March 4, 1859, was the cemetery's first interment.

In 1936 the State Forestry Commission built a 100-foot fire lookout tower about a half-mile south of Buena Vista by U. S. Highway 79. The structure no longer exists, but its site has an elevation range of 281 feet and is the highest point in Ouachita County. Perhaps this is why the Spanish phrase *buena vista*, "good view", was chosen as the community's name.

When the Cotton Belt laid out its plan for a hospital, Buena Vista was its first site choice. Unable to purchase land from local private landowners, the railroad moved the site to Pine Bluff.

In April 1960, forest fires raged over parts of Ouachita County. By the time they were brought under control, over eleven-hundred acres had been burned. As the fires neared Buena Vista, residents became fearful it would destroy their small post office building and if that happened, the Post Office Department would close it. Not wanting this to happen, a group of Buena Vista men picked up the small frame building, carried it across the Cotton Belt railroad and left it there. When the fire had burned out on the opposite side of the tracks, they picked the building up and returned it to its official site. The historic two-story Graves family home next door fell victim to the inferno.