

Chidester, Arkansas

An Influx of railroads was also a factor in the creation of towns where the citizens of Ouachita County would find their homes. One of those railroads was the "Iron Mountain Railroad," which would become known as the Missouri Pacific. In 1880, a new area of settlement was laid out by that railroad and T. J. Smith. Smith owned the land that would become a population center named Chidester.

The new town itself was laid out by the railroad, and they constructed a siding track area and a nice depot where people could wait to board passenger trains. Trains began to stop in the new town, but prior to that transportation from town had been by a stagecoach, which was owned and operated by Jim Chidester. Chidester himself lived in Camden in a historic home that now houses the Ouachita County historical Society. The new town adopted the Chidester name.

R. H. Holleman opened the first store in town, and it stood on the corner of what is today Martin Street and Highway 24. K. A. Martin followed suit as he opened the second store in the same locale. The first Chidester Post Office was in the home of Ben Green, on the corner of what is today Benton Street and Highway 57.

The first school was actually two miles west of town, and it was built in 1884. The first church erected in town was the Methodist Church, and it was organized in 1881 by people the community needed a church. The Bethesda Baptist church was also in the area in that T. J. Smith, who was a Baptist himself, gave four acres of land for the church and a cemetery sometime around 1865.

As people began to move into the new community, a name that would become very familiar with the history of Chidester developed. W. N. Rushing moved into establish Rushing and Company, a general merchandise store. It was owned by W. N., A. S., and W. E. Rushing. Warner Rushing was an early school teacher there. The Chidester hardware followed with M. G. McGill as its proprietor; however, Dr. W. A. Purifoy and James Henry Pickett were also associates. The bank of Chidester was organized in 1909 by W. G. Rushing, with Joseph S. Pharr as its first president, Dr. W. A. Purifoy served as vice-president, and W. G. Rushing was the cashier. The first mayor of the community was Charles Henry Farr.

Telephone service arrived in 1906 when W. G. Rushing was granted a franchise for an exchange. Arkansas Power & Light began furnishing electricity in 1928, and natural gas with the Arkansas Louisiana Gas Company came in 1955.