

Lilley, Arkansas

Time, in its own inexplicable way, has a way of removing settlements from the landscape that those who created thought would become permanent. Lilley, north of Camden, is an example of that phenomenon. Today, as one drives across a bridge that spans the railroad track on Highway 79, near what is the beginnings of the Harmony Grove community the automobile moves over what was Lilley.

Like numerous other communities in Ouachita County, the industrial needs of the latter part of the 1800s created this community. In 1882, what was then the Texas & St. Louis Railway Company-later known as the "Cotton Belt"-arrived in Camden to provide a far more direct and efficient route to northern industrial markets. At that same time, Samuel W. Fordyce, who was a Trustee with the Southwestern Improvement Association-the land division of the aforementioned railroad company-developed town plants along the railway route that would become the plans for Fordyce, Stephens and Lilley.

Early settlers in the newly created community included James C. Culp, Sr., who was a partner in the Culp & Agee mercantile business. C. S. Black also had a similar business in Lilley. Lowndes E. York was the first postmaster.

However, the life of this community found its center with the William Carlisle Company, the Carlisle Pennal Lumber Company, and the Onalaska Lumber Company.

With the closure of the Onalaska mill, along with the one at Eagle Mills, this community died. Then, the remaining residents were forced to move when the Naval Ammunition Depot (NAD) was established in that area during World War II. What once was, is no more.