

# Seminary, Arkansas

Seminary was one of the early settlements in Ouachita County. Its name was officially established by the U. S. Post Office Department on January 13, 1852 with the appointment of Riley Manning postmaster, who held the position until July 6, 1866, when the office was discontinued. It was re-established January 10, 1868, with the appointment of Samuel Abercrombie postmaster and continued to operate until October 31, 1905, when it was closed and patrons began being served by a rural route from the Stephens post office. Other postmasters serving were Nat N. Gatlin, 1870; John W. Gunter, 1873; Dixon High, 1874; and Simon Green, the last, who was appointed March 6, 1878.

While official postal records in the National Archives in Washington, D.C. list the founding date of Seminary 1852, ten years after Ouachita County was created, an item in the February 4, 1848 issue of *The Arkansas True Democrat* newspaper disagrees by saying a post office was created in 1848 with the appointment of Allen M. Scott postmaster.

The settlement was located near the connection of the southeast Nevada County line and the northeast Columbia County line, about four miles northwest of present day Stephens, just barely in Ouachita County.

Although information about Seminary is sketchy, the origin of its name is known. It was named after a Christian education school for girls located there and called a seminary. In later years the school became co-educational. T. E. Burris was the last professor teaching at the school. In addition to his teaching duties, Prof. Burris also operated a grist mill and sawmill. Tom D. Thomson operated a general store during the early days of the settlement that dated back to when the post office was established. Seminary is shown on a rare map of Arkansas published in 1855 featuring counties, towns and post offices in the state.

Seminary showed great promise of becoming a permanent settlement until 1882 when the Cotton Belt Railroad completed its rail line and by-passed the community. When Stephens was created the following year, many Seminary merchants and citizens began moving to the "new town" by the railroad, a trend that continued until 1905 and the community had dwindled in size to the point it could no longer support a post office.

The community's cemetery, existing today in dense woods and underbrush, is a repository of historic names of early Ouachita County settlers and contains family remains of Campbell, Gatlin, Gossett, Hall, Hodnett, Holt, Jones, Lary, Manning, Marshall, Meredith, Morgan, Nelson, Parker, Pelky, Polk, Roy, Smith, Tribble, Watkins, Wesson and White. The first burial in the cemetery appears to be on September 4, 1853 for Martha Jane Manning and the last on March 20, 1939 for R. R. Hodnett, a Confederate War veteran serving in Co. C1 GA Reserves. For many years a large oak tree stood in the old cemetery where it was said three men were hanged from one of its limbs for stealing horses and were buried outside the cemetery in unmarked graves. Behind the cemetery are rows of large rocks said to be graves of slaves.

For many years the Seminary African Methodist Episcopal Church was located in front of the old white cemetery, but was moved years ago to a paved road on the outskirts of Stephens and renamed New Seminary A.M.E. Church. It was the last public facility to vacate the old historic grounds of the community. The black Seminary Cemetery is located near the old pioneer white cemetery and is still used for burials today.