

# Bearden, Arkansas

*By: Denise and Zettie Link as presented to the Ouachita/Calhoun Genealogical Society at a meeting, 27 July 2003*

Bearden was laid out by the South West Improvement Association (the railroad company) in 1882. It was named in honor of Judge John T. Bearden. The plot embraced both sides of the tract, with Main Street north of the tracks. In 1885 the population was between 250 and 300. Bearden was the seat of Cotton Belt Lumber Co., which employed about 100 men and had a four mill tramway. Timber was the life of Bearden and it was called green gold.

Besides the Cotton Belt Lumber Co., there was the Freeman-Smith Lumber Co., at Millville; Eagle Lumber Co., at Eagle Mills; and Stout Lumber Co. at Thornton. These mills together employed about 2000 men who were also farmers.

In 1889, Dr. T. J. Henry led a movement of businesses south of the track, but the main business area remains north of the tracks.

The first car arrived in July 1882. The first permanent store was opened by E. W. Norman, followed by T. S. Wiginton and W. M. Gatling. In 1889 Jack Oferlee founded the newspaper "The Bearden Banner".

The Merchants and Farmers Club was organized in 1910 with 24 Members who were owners of business. The officers were J. A. Gatling, President, W. B. Sorrells, Vice-President; J. A. McLeod, Secretary; M. D. Walthall, Editor; W. M. Gatling Jr., Treasurer; and B. F. Gray, Chairman of the executive committee.

In 1931 as the old mills were closing out, Anthony Brothers were getting their new mill in operation. In 1926 the band stand was built, in 1975 a tree fell on it. A new gazebo was built and still stands. In 1945 the population was around 5000. 1947 brought Bear Roofing and 1951 brought Home Telephone. There were two doctors, Dr. Mahand and Dr. Rhine, who saw six generations born.

In 1976 Bearden had an estimated weekly payroll of \$95,000 from seven of her home owned industries.

Some of the older settlers were Garland Anthony, the Barners, Beards, Bradleys, Byars, Clemmons, Dillings, Fultz, Gammills and Mosleys. There are five, six and seven generations still living in and around Bearden.