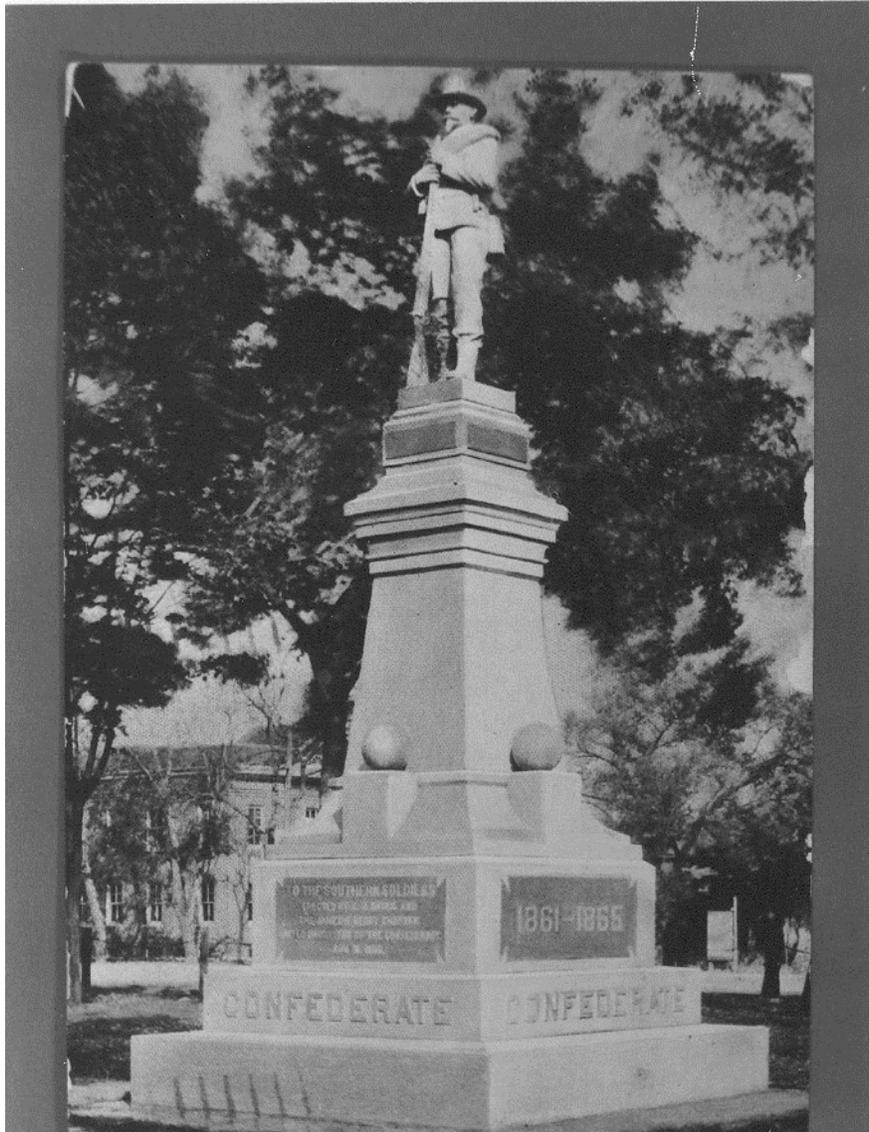


Photo of the Month

Confederate Soldier Memorial
by Emilee Dehmer, intern

Confederate Monument
Bentonville, Arkansas
Neg: 14113
Rogers Historical Museum



When walking through the downtown square in Bentonville, it is hard not to notice the large statue that stands in the middle of the park. Upon closer inspection one will notice that the tall figure represents the Confederate soldiers of the Civil War.

The Civil War, 1861-1865, is considered the bloodiest war in American history. Fought all over the nation Arkansas was the site of 17 battles fought in various places across the state. Benton County however was the battleground for the largest battle west of the Mississippi River. Fought on March 6-8, 1862, the Battle of Pea Ridge (or the Battle of Elkhorn as the Confederates knew it) cost the Federals 1,384 men and the Confederates lost approximately 2,000 soldiers. After the war was long over, the people in Benton County who had to endure burned buildings, battles, and the movement of troops throughout the war years decided to honor those brave men, most of which were their own husbands and sons, who had fought and died so valiantly. They wanted to erect a monument in the middle of Bentonville Square.

The monument was erected by the James H. Berry Chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy. James H. Berry fought in the Civil War when he was 21 years of age as a member of the 16th Arkansas Infantry Regiment – he was wounded in 1862 and lost his right leg. Upon returning home he was discouraged by his love's father and was told he would never amount to anything. But Berry would go on to prove him wrong. He became a lawyer in Bentonville, but his political ambitions led him further in life. In 1872 he was elected to the state legislature and became the speaker of the house by 1874. After that, he served as circuit judge from 1878-1882, when he was elected governor. He served as the state's chief executive until 1885. Not quite done as a public servant, Berry was appointed to the United States Senate in 1885 and served in our nation's capital until 1907.

A year later in 1908 the monument would be erected on August 8. The festivities leading up to the unveiling ceremonies were grandiose and involved the entire town. People flocked from all over including Missouri, Oklahoma, and even Texas to participate in the festivities. In fact, so many people came that an extra coach had to be added to the Rogers/Bentonville railway to accommodate all of the visitors. The dedication day events started downtown with songs from the war years including "Dixie" and "Bonnie Blue Flag." After the short gathering people marched down to Park Springs Park and divulged themselves in basket lunches. The fun was far from over, because next came the parade back down to the square. The floats included one with 14 beautiful girls, one representing each state that seceded as well as the border state, one for the "Marshal of the Day" A.J. Bates and many others that put a sense of pride in the peoples' hearts.

The invocation was given by Reverend R.E.L. Bearden and then "Bonnie Blue Flag" was once again sung by a choir. Mrs. W.F. Patton and Miss Ruth Terry spoke some brief words and then pulled the chords on the veil to uncover the 25 foot monument. The Confederate Flag floated in the breeze behind his shoulders and the crowd boisterously cheered. Mrs. Rex Peel then sang a song that was followed by Mr. Breckenridge who was introduced by Senator James Berry. After the festivities had ended and everyone slowly disappeared from the square one figure remained, the Confederate Soldier who would stand atop his base facing the setting sun.

The actual monument was designed by Barney Cott and assembled by the Charles Scott Company of Barry, Vermont for a price of \$2,500. The soldier is 7 feet tall and the entire monument stands 25 feet high. The raised word "Confederate" is on each side of the base. Each side also has different text as follows:

Side One: To The Southern Soldiers. Erected by A.J. Bates and the James H. Berry Chapter United Daughters of the Confederacy Aug. 8, 1908.

Side Two: Their Names are Borne on Honor's Shield. Their Record is with God.

Side 3: They Fought for Home and Fatherland.

Side 4: 1861-1865.

Later a plaque was added that reads: James H. Berry 1841-1913. Soldier and Statesman Beloved of Arkansas. 2nd Lieutenant Co. E. 16th Ark Infantry C.S.A. Legislator- Jurist, Governor of Arkansas, United States Senator. He performed every duty with an eye single to the public welfare and his own unblemished honor. This tablet is placed here by the James H. Berry Chapter, United Daughters of the Confederacy. The Pat Cleburne Camp, Sons of Confederate Veterans and other friends in loving remembrance and appreciation of his noble life and character.

While the south did not win the war and the Union was eventually restored, the Civil War and all those who fought and died, regardless of the side they rallied behind, will be remembered forever. While we were a nation torn in two, the pride in this nation was restored among even some of the most adamant of Confederates. During the unveiling ceremony an American flag was accidently knocked down. As the speaker [Clifton Breckenridge, son of John C. Breckenridge] stooped to restore it to its proper place he said, "We tried our best to pull that flag down but couldn't—and by the eternal no one else ever shall."