

Arrow Rock's African American History: A Fact Sheet

At the beginning of the Civil War in 1860, Saline County had a population of 10,000 whites and 5,000 blacks, or about 1/3 African American. 1880 is the first census that lists Arrow Rock separately. So, 15 years after Emancipation the population of Arrow Rock was 305 and 77 were blacks, or 25%. Of that amount, a little more than half were living in households headed by whites.

By 1900, 1/3 of the population was African American and all 27 households were headed by blacks; they no longer lived in white households. Many owned their own homes.

Thus, we see a progression from being slaves in white households, to being free men and women still living in white households, to being free men and women living in their own homes and working as farm laborers and domestic help in the homes of whites.

The economy of rural America changed in the 1930s and 40s with the Depression and the mechanization of farming. The combination of these two events drove African Americans to cities for jobs and once large rural populations of African Americans dwindled.

Today Arrow Rock only has a population of 70 with one African American resident.

Brown's Chapel Freewill Baptist Church and Early School, c. 1871



The first African American church built in Arrow Rock following Emancipation was Brown's Chapel. (Emancipation for Missouri slaves happened Jan. 22, 1865). We also believe this building served as the first school. The original portion of the building was approximately three-fourths the size of the main church you see today, and it was located just a few blocks north of here.

We know the church was being built in 1869 because we have a letter from James Milton Turner, an African American whose job it was to see that schools would be built for blacks once they were free. He visited Arrow Rock in November 1869. Progress was slow because Mr. Wilhelm, the representative from the white school board, said Arrow Rock had not received the money they should have. He indicated the blacks were building a church, and the whites would provide money from their own fund to help. Turner called on the blacks to complete the church quickly and to hold Wilhelm to his word.

In 1870 the census listed 66 blacks attending school. Students were of all ages, many older than usual elementary age, because this was the first opportunity for education. Early teachers were Albert Spears, John Thomas Trigg, and Harrison Green.

In 1871, Wm. B. and Mary Sappington deeded land to the "Ruling Deacons in the Colored Baptist Church of Arrow Rock... upon which the said Baptists have a new church erected and

completed.” It seems to indicate the Sappingtons had agreed to turn over the property to the deacons if and when they erected a church. In 1883, the church was moved to this site by Zack Bush using a team of mules.

In 1892, the whites were building a new school and materials from the old school were used to construct a new school for the blacks on the north end of Third Street. There is still a structure standing on that site, probably the third school building built there. Currently it is a private residence.

The Brown’s Chapel Freewill Baptist Church remained an active congregation until the early 1980s, adding two additions through the years. In the 1920s the church hosted Association Meetings that would last a whole week with as many as 300 in attendance. You can imagine the windows open, the food tables laden, and the hospitality of Arrow Rock residents opening their homes to visitors.

An historian of African American culture has described black churches as “the mother of our culture, the champion of our freedom, and the hallmark of our civilization.”

An A.M.E. (African Methodist Episcopal) church was also started around 1870. It was located on Second Street on the road going to the bottoms. It no longer stands.



Brown Lodge No. 22 of A.F. & A.M., c. 1881 (Ancient Free & Accepted Masons) (Black Masonic Lodge)

The land was deeded for this building in 1881, again by Wm. B. Sappington, but evidence indicates the Lodge was formed at least by 1878. The Black Masonic Lodge was started by a freed black man, Prince Hall, in Boston in the late 1700s. Membership in the lodge created associations with freedom and noble ideals of fellowship. Lodges served practical purposes such as providing for funeral expenses and care of orphan children. They also promoted moral living. Lodges were a source of social activity for members and the downstairs may have been used for such functions or perhaps rented out.

The lodge disbanded in 1931. Many people remember it as a tavern and barbecue place in the 1940s.

Other Black Lodges in Arrow Rock:

- Odd Fellows (1890), building was located on Main Street [Blk.13, Lot49] across from Tavern, moved to lot across from Bill Lovin’s home, no longer standing. [Blk.20, Lot70]
- Sherman or Lincoln Lodge (1896), just north of Sue Stubb’s cabin, no longer standing. [Blk.29, Lot 104]
- United Brothers of Friendship (rented space in Sherman Lodge and Odd Fellows Lodge).

Most lodges also had chapters for the women and youth.

Prairie Park (Private residence, available for tour through the Friends of Arrow Rock \$8 per person for groups of 8 or more.)

Prairie Park Plantation, 1845-49 home of William B. Sappington, consisted of 600 acres with 23 enslaved African-Americans producing food crops of corn, wheat, oats, and potatoes, and hemp as a cash crop. His livestock included 400 sheep, 250 pigs, and less than 20 each of horses, mules, oxen, milk cows, and other cattle. In 1856 and 1858 Dr. John Sappington and Erasmus (his brother) died respectively. With their deaths, William's plantation increased his land holdings to 2,300 acres in 1860 worth \$41,000 with 38 enslaved African Americans producing a similar variety of crops and livestock. One dramatic increase was in hemp production, changing from 4 tons in 1850 to 17 tons in 1860. This was not entirely unexpected as Missouri became the largest hemp producing state in that same year.