



Makers of Arkansas History
By John Hugh Reynolds-1905

ROBERT CRITTENDEN.

**Arkansas' First Great Statesman.
1797-1834.**

In our country there are two kinds of government: the federal government at Washington, which regulates in a general way the affairs of the whole United States; and the government in each state or territory, which manages its local affairs. The government of the state is created by the people of the state and is managed by officers elected by citizens of the state. The territorial government is established by the federal government and is managed largely by officers appointed by the President of the United States.

In 1819, by an act of Congress, Arkansas was made into a territory. In carrying out the provision of this act, President Monroe appointed Robert Crittenden secretary of the new Territory. He was only twenty-two years old; but he had already distinguished himself by serving in the War of 1812, between the United States and Great Britain, having enlisted at the age of sixteen. When the army of the United States invaded Canada, he was among the gallant men who fought at Lundy's Lane. His father had served with distinction in the Revolutionary War, reaching the rank of major.

Picture of Robert Crittenden



Like most young men of the day, he had but few educational

advantages. After the war, he studied law in the office of his brother. As we have said, his gifts were recognized by President Monroe, who sent him as territorial secretary to Arkansas Post, the temporary capital of the Territory. Though the Post was over one hundred years old, it was still a mere village of about one hundred people. Mr. Crittenden was called upon to fill an important office, as he was not only secretary but acting governor in the absence of that official. As the newly appointed territorial governor, Colonel James Miller, did not arrive till several months later, the duties of that office at once devolved upon Mr. Crittenden.

His first act was to convene the legislature. This was indeed a peculiar legislature. Today our legislature has two houses, the Senate and the House of Representatives; and each house has many members. But the first legislature of Arkansas had only one house, and, what is still stranger, that house had only four members; Robert Crittenden, Andrew Scott, Charles Jouett, and Robert P. Letcher. Mr. Crittenden was the acting governor, and the other three were the judges of the Superior Court of the Territory. All these officials were appointed by the President of the United States. In this first legislature the people had no voice at all, as they have today. This was the way a territory of the first grade was governed.

Mr. Crittenden was not in office long before he declared Arkansas a territory of the second grade. Let us see how a territory of this grade is governed. It has a legislature of two houses; the lower house is elected by the people, while the upper house is appointed by the President of the United States, from a list of names presented to him by the lower house. The governor, the secretary, and the judges of the Superior Court, however, are appointed by the President, whether the territory is one of the first or of the second grade.

The first legislature was in session only seven days, but in that time it provided Arkansas with a full set of laws. This was done by passing one law which provided that all the laws in use in Missouri should likewise be used in Arkansas. At this session the Territory was divided into two circuits for the administration of justice; and the offices of

auditor and treasurer, at a salary of three hundred dollars each, were created.

Now came the important work of organizing the government and of putting the laws into operation. It was in this connection that Mr. Crittenden rendered Arkansas a great service. Many difficulties confronted him—no roads, no money in the treasury, and only two postoffices in the Territory. Besides, the Quapaw Indians occupied much of the Territory, and great skill in managing them was necessary in order to prevent trouble between them and the whites. It was well that Mr. Crittenden brought to this work of organization a strong body, a vigorous mind, and great energy. He appointed officers for the counties, organized a local and a central government for the Territory, and set things in motion before Governor Miller arrived.

The second legislature convened the following year at Arkansas Post. Its most important measure was the removal of the capital to Little Rock. Since the members from the extreme northwest of Arkansas could not reach Arkansas Post in less than two weeks of hard and dangerous travel, they insisted on a more central location for the capital. Robert Crittenden, Henry Conway, and others encouraged the movement, claiming that the present site of Little Rock was the most suitable place in the Territory for its capital.

There was no capitol building at Arkansas Post; so little trouble was experienced in securing the passage of the bill to remove the government to Little Rock. The new site contained scarcely a building; but as it was near the center of the Territory and on the Arkansas River, it gave promise of becoming a business as well as a political center. A ledge of rocks projected into the river at this point, and the place was named Little Rock, to distinguish it from Big Rock, a larger cliff two or three miles up the river. This was in 1820, and very soon a thriving village sprang up at the capital.

For ten years Mr. Crittenden faithfully served the Territory as secretary, being much of the time also acting governor. The fact is, he was the greatest power in the government of Arkansas during the first ten years of her history. In 1829, he retired from office and began the practice of law. He was a brilliant lawyer, and his fame extended far

beyond the borders of the Territory. He was often employed in important cases in other states.

It was in 1834, while Mr. Crittenden was arguing a case in Vicksburg, Mississippi, that death struck him down, still in the prime of life, only thirty-seven years old. He had just finished one of his most eloquent and masterful arguments of seven hours' length and had sat down exhausted, when the judge called upon him to state again his authorities. But he could not speak. He attempted to rise, staggered, and fell. In the arms of brothers at the bar he was borne out of the court-room to his hotel. There, far from wife and family, this first great statesman of Arkansas passed away. His was an untimely death. He was cut off in the midst of great labors, while a brilliant future lay before him.



ARKANSAS IN 1828.

Mr. Crittenden possessed a bright mind, equal to that of any of the early Arkansans. Those who knew both persons said that he was an abler man than his celebrated brother, John J. Crittenden, who was

one of the nation's most noted statesmen from 1820 to 1861. Mr. Robert Crittenden was a large man, handsome in appearance, attractive in manners, and princely in bearing. He was magnetic and had a sparkling, penetrating eye. Judge Turner, one of Arkansas' strongest lawyers, said of him, "As an orator, he had no equal in the Territory; and, in the judgment of the writer, he has had no equal here since his day." He was noble and generous: he despised fraud and hated dishonor; he did not know fear. The year before his death he found Albert Pike, Arkansas' scholar and poet, teaching a country school in Pope County. He recognized the talent of the young man and at once secured for him the place of assistant editor of the *Advocate*, a paper published at Little Rock. Thus one of the last acts of this noble man's life was to start an obscure but talented youth upon what was to become a remarkable career.