Benjamin Franklin “Ben” Atkinson VETERAN

BIRTH 1837

Arkansas, USA

DEATH 22 Sep 1905 (aged 67–68)

Fort Smith, Sebastian County, Arkansas, USA

BURIAL Forest Park Cemetery

Fort Smith, Sebastian County, Ar

Parents

John Cape Atkinson

Susan Fleming Atkinson

Spouse Nannie E. Wharton Atkinson

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Born 1837, Benjamin Franklin Atkinson was the son of John C. Atkinson. John Atkinson was established in the hardware business in Fort Smith in June 1843. His business probably helped to outfit many of the wagon trains headed west during the Gold Rush and antebellum period. Ben Atkinson was a student of John Carnall before being sent away from Fort Smith for further schooling. Sometime in his late teens he entered the hardware business with his father.

During the Civil War, Ben Atkinson joined the Confederate army, receiving an appointment to the rank of captain. After promotion to colonel, he was given command of a regiment of conscripts who deserted and left him without a command.

On his death, Sophia Kannady recollected of Ben Atkinson. "I cannot help laughing at the plight in which I saw him at one time, and it should have been a time when everything should have been serious to us all." Kannady was one of a party of citizens fleeing Fort Smith following its seizure by Union forces during the Civil War. While stopped in Waldron, Kannady said Atkinson rode in "ragged, shoeless and bareheaded." His uniform, shoes and horses had been taken by the enemy. However, they had given him the donkey he rode in on. Kannady said a doctor there gave him a pair of "coarse rawhide shoes" that he was as proud of "as if they had been patent leather."

Atkinson worked with his father in the hardware business and at the death of father became partner in it with Henry and Conrad Treisch. The hardware business was located variously on Front Street, an avenue fronting the Arkansas River, Second Street and a corner of Sixth Street. In addition to selling general hardware, the Atkinson business dominated the tinware trade for the region. In 1884, it incorporated as Atkinson Hardware Company and by 1890 was located at 623 Garrison Avenue where the Stephens Building stands today. Atkinson-Williams Hardware Company became the name of the company in 1900 with B.F. Atkinson's son, Ben P. Atkinson elected president and Buck Williams as vice president and manager.

Atkinson was also one of the organizers of the American National Bank, serving as president for six years until retiring. (He was replaced by William Blair in 1897 whose home also is on the tour.) He also was a Mason, a member of the Knights of Honor and grand commander of the Knights Templar.

The Daily News Record mourned the loss "one of the most polished gentleman of Fort Smith" at his death on Sept. 23, 1905. His funeral was held in his home on North Seventh Street. In addition to his son, he was survived by his wife, Nannie, whom he married in Cincinnati shortly after the war, and a daughter, Nannie.