Farming, gathering and hunting by the Caddo, Quapaw and Osage Indians.

Rivers and trails connected Indians from South America with those in Canada.

**1541** Spanish exploration – Hernando de Soto

**1686** – Henri de Tonti established the first European settlement in the lower Mississippi River Valley – called Poste aux Arkansas. Italian by birth but exploration conducted for France.

**Early 1800s** – Cotton plantations were the life blood of the Arkansas economy. Labor was provided by slaves. Arkansas farms were some of the most productive plantations. Cotton remains a strong cash crop.

**After 1865** – sharecropping and tenant farming were source of labor for cotton plantations. A tenant rented 40 acres and received 3/4ths of the crop. If sharecropper lacked equipment, he only received 50% of the crop.

**After 1865** – Railroad construction replaced rivers as primary means of transportation. Resulted in boom of timber industry, fruit production and development of railroad towns.

**1870** – German-Swiss immigrants brought wine production to Altus region of Arkansas. Founded Post and Wiederkehr vineyards. Chateau Aux Arc is the new kid on the block producing award winning wines. Industry made viable by railroad construction between Little Rock and Fort Smith.

**1870s** the Arkansas Black apple was one of the first produced in the state in an orchard of Mr. Brathwaite in Bentonville. Moth infestations and the great depression eroded the viability of commercial apple orchards.

**1870s** – Timber industry was made viable by railroad construction. Eastern delta hardwoods sawed for lumber. Ozark Mountain pines and hardwoods used for furniture and pallets. South harvest of pine used for lumber, paper and particle board. Replacement planting is common practice today.

**1899** – Tontitown held the first grape festival. Italian immigrants who started at Sunnyside Plantation but followed Father Bandini to Tontitown grew wine and juice grapes.

**Early 1900s** – Rice became a major crop. Arkansas is top rice producing state. Most is marketed through Riceland Foods which is a producer cooperative selling rice to countries around the world.

**1904** – The introduction of the Elberta peach variety made peach growing a viable industry - railroad spurs made transportation possible – while development of refrigerated railroad transportation made shipment to markets possible. At peak production 175 boxcars were shipped from Nashville each day during peak production years. 1952 & 53 late freezes followed early warm spells resulting in destruction of 2/3rd of the crop. States with warmer climates got the contracts. Converted land to cattle or chicken production. Today Arkansas peaches are popular at roadside stands and farmers market that are produced in Clarksville area.

**1916** – John Gibson offered prizes for the largest vegetable and watermelons. Local farmers developed a seed line to try to win the contest. Hugh Laseter grew the first giant watermelon in 1925 – 136 pounds. Originated first watermelon festival in Hope in 1926.

**1919** – Trucking began in Arkansas when Harvey Jones exchanged his two mules and a wagon for a Federal brand truck for his delivery route that served Rogers, Springdale and Fayetteville.

**1920s** – Oil was discovered west of Eldorado as the Bussey #1 came in as a geyser. 1922 discovery of Smackover Pool. More than 1.8 billion barrels of oil have been produced in Arkansas. Contributed to development of companies such as Murphy Oil which is international and now sells gas at Walmart stores.

**1920 to current** – Natural gas was originally a by-product of oil production. Now it is being tapped from the Fayetteville Shale Play which runs roughly along the Arkansas River valley.

**1921** – Peak production of strawberries. Limited transportation meant poor-quality fruit at the stores. When the growing regions of the Arkansas River valley were reached by railroad was the industry viable. Berry business needed railroads, level land, non-rocky soil, plenty of water, and a moderate climate. Industry contributed to tenant farming in White County.

**1930s** – Tyson started transporting chickens to Kansas City and Chicago.

**1938** – Dillard’s department stores were founded by William T. Dillard. The department store is based in Little Rock and has stores in 29 states.

**1940s to 1960s** – Arkansas’ bauxite deposits near Bauxite were the largest commercially exploitable deposits in the nation. Arkansas produced more than 90% of all domestic tonnage mined in 20th century.

**1946** – Passage of the Rivers and Harbors Act authoring the building of the McClellan-Kerr Arkansas River Navigation System. Undertaken by the Army Corp of Engineers, it included hydropower, flood control, recreation, and navigation from Catoosa, Oklahoma to the Mississippi River. Dedicated in 1971.

**1950s** – Soybeans overtook cotton as the major agricultural crop. Six acres of soybeans to every acre of cotton.

**1956** – Citizens of Warren (Bradley County) organized a modest festival to honor the crop which was known as the Bradley pink. Tomato production has dwindled in the recent years. In 1989 they shipped 11,820 tons. Vine ripened Arkansas tomatoes are available at fruit stands and farmers market today.

**1960s** – Building of interstate highways facilitated development of trucking industry along with emergence of poultry industry and retail sales of Walmart. Entrepreneurship of northwest Arkansas resulted in the growth of these industries. J.B Hunt Transport Services based in Lowell began serving the poultry industry in northwest Arkansas. It has grown to become Arkansas’ largest trucking firm.

**1962** – Opening of first Walmart store in Rogers. Walmart changed the face of retail by using economies of scale and computer technologies to provide consumer goods at lower prices. Walmart is now internationals with stores in Europe, Latin America, Africa and Asia.

**1923** – Establishment of the first state park, Petit Jean State Park. Act 172 in 1927 created a seven member State Parks Commission “to select and acquire such areas of the State of Arkansas which, by reason of their natural features, scenic beauty and historical interest, have educational, recreational, health, camping and outdoor life advantages”.

**1972** – The Buffalo River, one of the few remaining unpolluted, free-flowing rivers in the United States, was designated as the first National River.

**November 11, 2011** – Opening of Crystal Bridges Museum of Art in Bentonville, Arkansas. This was a gift to the world from Alice Walton, daughter of Sam Walton.