

The Birth of Paragould

By Kelley Huffman

The only city in the world with its unique name, Paragould's nomenclature comes from its storied history. A nod to the two railroad presidents whose railroads intersected in the town, the name Para-Gould is a marriage of their last names – James Paramore and Jay Gould. It is said Mr. Gould objected to having his name relegated to the last symbol, as he considered himself first in railroading and didn't want to be associated with Paramore. As a result he refused to use the name on his schedules and instead used the local name of Parmley, or "the Crossing." After some confusion from the community having two names, the hyphen was dropped from Para-Gould and the capital G became lower case and the name Paragould was adopted and used by both railroads.

"The virgin timber provided the catalyst for the growth and the railroads provided the needed transportation of the timber or its products to the markets," according to a compiled history of Paragould. Paragould began as a manufacturing town and had more than 40 sawmills, underscoring the importance of the timber industry to the area. Because of the flourishing timber industry and ready transportation via rail, a

series of boomtowns was created, connected by railroad. The new town itself was created out of the surrounding timber, as well as woodmaking jobs and manufacturing plants.

According to "History of Greene County Arkansas," the town of Paragould was incorporated March 3, 1883. Because of its phenomenal growth as it acquired settlers from Kentucky, Tennessee and Mississippi, on October 6, 1884, the voters of Greene County elected to move the county seat from Gainesville to Paragould. A new courthouse was built in Paragould in 1887. Paragould experienced the majority of its growth during this period, as many of Gainesville's citizens moved to the new county seat.



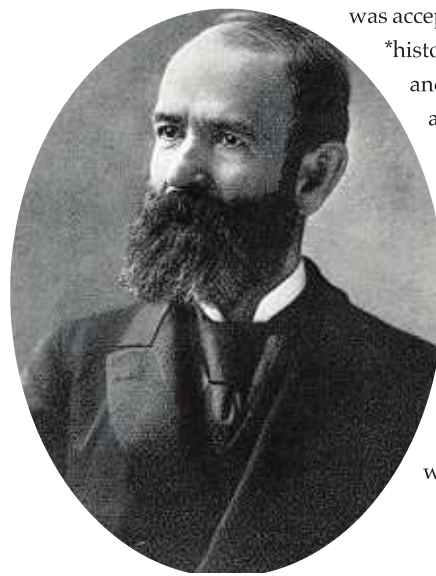
The center of the town was the Main Street crossing of the railroads. The first businesses in Paragould developed on the east side of Pruet street facing the tracks on a street known as Front Street, which no longer exists. "Pruet street became the primary commercial street of the new town. Pruet Street was named after the

family on whose land the new town was founded. There was no doubt in the original name of the street. Somewhere along the way someone changed the spelling from Pruet to Pruet and the change was accepted, adopted and continues in use to this day," the history continues. The name Pruet comes from Willis and Charles Pruet, who came to Paragould in 1860 and are considered among the "Fathers of the Ridge."

Growth of Paragould happened quickly. In 1883 The Methodists founded the first church in the new city, with the Catholic, Baptist and Christian churches following suit within two years. The first school opened around this time, and electric lights were installed on streets and in homes in 1891, according to "History." The telephone was in homes five years later, and the streets were paved about 1912. ♦



J.W. Paramore



Jay Gould

Art provided by Loviatta House