

**Walks through History
Historic Arkansas City
Begin at Desha County Courthouse
Saturday, October 15, 2011
By: Rachel Silva**



Intro

Hi, my name is Rachel Silva, and I work for the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program. Welcome to the Walks through History tour of Historic Arkansas City! I'd like to thank the Desha County Historical Society for serving as the tour's co-sponsor and for hosting the Meet and Greet Brunch this morning. And I'd especially like to recognize Helen Pennington of the historical society; the Arkansas City Red Hat Society, who served the brunch; AR City MayorCarolyn Blissett, who prepared the food; and last but not least, Desha County Judge Mark McElroy for all his efforts to preserve the history of AR City.

Today we'll see several properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places as we walk around town. And at the end of the walking tour, you are invited to follow me in your vehicle to the Mound Cemetery, which is a little less than a mile from the courthouse.

History of Desha County & Arkansas City

Soon after Arkansas became a state in 1836, the state legislature created Desha County on December 12, 1838, from parts of Arkansas and Chicot counties. The new county was named for Captain Benjamin Desha, who served in the War of 1812 and the Kentucky Legislature before moving to Arkansas in 1824 as the Collector of U.S. Moneys. Wellington Landing was designated the first county seat, but in 1841 commissioners moved the county government to Bellville, now known as Red Fork. Just two years later the county government again relocated, this time to Napoleon, at the confluence of the Arkansas and Mississippi rivers.¹

After Napoleon became the county seat of Desha County in 1843, it rapidly transformed into the political and economic center of the region. The town had a post office by 1837, and in 1839 the Second General Assembly of Arkansas chartered a railroad to connect Napoleon to Little Rock (though the line was never completed). In 1837 the United States surgeon general chose Napoleon as the site for one of three marine hospitals along the Mississippi River. The rough and rowdy town reached its peak between 1850 and 1860, when it claimed as many as 2,000 residents. Unfortunately, the Mississippi River, which elevated the importance of Napoleon, also caused its demise. By the mid-1860s, the town began to slowly crumble, house-by-house, into the Mississippi River. Due to the terrible erosion, the county government was moved in 1874 to Watson.²

After just five years in Watson, the county government moved once again in 1879, this time to its current location in Arkansas City. Although white settlers farmed this area beginning in the early 1830s, Arkansas City did not obtain a post office until 1872, a year before its incorporation on September 12, 1873. Originally a part of Chicot County, Arkansas City became a part of Desha County on February 10, 1879, and was voted the new county seat in September of that year.³

County leaders located the seat of government at Arkansas City because, by the late 1870s, it had become an important transportation hub in Desha County. The community had a natural steamboat landing and became an important stop for

¹ Edythe Hobson, "Captain Ben Desha," *Programs of the Desha County Historical Society* (1980): 12-14; Schexnayder, "Desha County," *Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture*.

² Teske, "Napoleon," *Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture*.

³ Paula Reaves, "Arkansas City," *Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture*, accessed 23 October 2010; available from <http://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?search=1&entryID=875>; *The Goodspeed Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Southern Arkansas* (Chicago: Goodspeed Publishing Co., 1890): 998, 1001, 1003, 1009.

steamboats prior to the Civil War. It was also one of the earliest port cities in the county to gain access to the railroad. The Little Rock, Pine Bluff & New Orleans Railroad Company, organized around 1870, built the first railroad through Desha County.

Beginning the line at Chicot City on the banks of the Mississippi River, construction crews reached Pine Bluff in 1874. Traffic on the line was interrupted every year between 1874 and 1876 by flooding along the stretch nearest to Chicot City. So in 1878 the Little Rock, Mississippi River & Texas Railroad, as the company was then called, relocated the Mississippi River terminus to Arkansas City. This brought unprecedented prosperity to the community.⁴

The arrival of the railroad transformed Arkansas City from a sleepy town of 503 people in 1880 to a bustling economic center of 1,485 people by 1910. By 1890, according to *The Goodspeed Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Southern Arkansas*, the town boasted:

...about forty business houses, large and small; a cotton compress, with a capital of \$60,000; the plant of the Desha Lumber & Planing Company, with a capital of \$500,000; a planing-mill, with a capital of \$18,000; an opera house with a seating capacity of 400; an elevator, several cotton-gins and two hotels.⁵

A great deal of river traffic passed through Arkansas City, bringing goods as well as visitors. Some of the most frequent and well-remembered visitors were the *Kate Adams*, a passenger and cargo ship also known as the “Loving Kate” and “Bigfoot Kate” Adams (because of her speed); the large towboat *Sprague*; and the *Sadie Lee*, a small riverboat that ran between Memphis and Vicksburg. In fact, many of the streets in Arkansas City were named after various riverboats (Kate Adams, Sprague, Delta Queen, Sadie Lee, Morning Star, and Natchez). The town was originally platted parallel and perpendicular to the MS River levee, with Front Street running parallel to the levee and then subsequent parallel streets numbered 1st through 6th Avenue. Streets perpendicular to the levee were numbered 1st through 14th Street beginning with the street between the courthouse and the old high school (now President St.). Sometime after 1932 the street names were changed.

⁴ C.C. Stuart, “Arkansas City and Its History,” *Programs of the Desha County Historical Society* (1979): 34-36; *Goodspeed*, 1001.

⁵ *Goodspeed*, 1003.

Arkansas City continued to prosper until the devastating Mississippi River Flood of 1927, which rerouted the Mississippi River one mile east of the town's levee and effectively ended its importance as a commercial center.

The Flood of 1927

Located on the banks of the Mississippi River, just downstream from its confluence with the Arkansas and White rivers, Arkansas City is geographically predisposed to flooding. For centuries waters from the rivers have escaped their banks, depositing nutrient-rich silt on the surrounding plain to create fertile farmland.

One of the worst disasters in American history, the Flood of 1927, affected Arkansas City more than any other catastrophe. It began in the spring of 1927, when the upper Mississippi River swelled from early snow melt in Canada. Rain in the upper Midwest and South further exacerbated the situation, causing water in the Mississippi to back up into its tributaries. The resulting floods covered hundreds of thousands of acres in Oklahoma, Arkansas, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, and Tennessee. The Red Cross estimated the total death toll from the flood at 246, while approximately 750,000 Americans found themselves without food, water, clothing, or work. Damage from the disaster, in addition to relief, recovery, and lost productivity, cost the nation an estimated \$1 billion.⁶

The effects of the Flood of 1927 were particularly devastating and far-reaching in Arkansas City. As rains fell in April, residents anxiously watched the waters of the Mississippi River rise higher and higher against the city's levee. Then, on April 27, 1927, the levee broke at Mound Landing, Mississippi, just across the river from Arkansas City. Cheers erupted from the Arkansas side of the river as the break on the river's eastern shore lessened the pressure on the western levee. The celebration was short-lived, however, because later that day there was a break along the Arkansas River levee at Pendleton. Water gushed from the breach, slowly spreading south to Arkansas City where it began to flood the streets shortly after noon on April 28.⁷

⁶ Nancy Hendricks, "Flood of 1927," Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture, accessed 23 October 2010; available from <http://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=356>.

⁷ Clara Saeler, "Flood of '27 Changed Course of Many Lives," *Dumas Clarion*, 14 July 2004, p. 6C; Hendricks, "Flood of 1927," Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture.

No one in Arkansas City was spared from the devastation. The floodwater quickly rose to unprecedented levels, finally cresting at sixty feet and covering the entire city in five to thirty feet of water. As residents fled to the top of the levee and the upper floors of the downtown buildings, newly-buried coffins floated to the surface and had to be taken to McGehee for identification. Citizens built a tent city on the levee and converted boxcars from the Missouri Pacific Railroad Company into makeshift dining cars and washrooms. A floating bridge was built to the upper levels of the Thane Bank Building and the Riverview Hotel where other residents took refuge. The Red Cross fed and sheltered the town's 1,500 residents until the waters finally receded in August 1927. Nearly the entire town had to be rebuilt.⁸

In an attempt to prevent a similar disaster in the future, the community increased the height of the levees, but this effort could not save Arkansas City from the drought and economic depression that soon followed. By 1950 the town lost population every decade, and the 2010 census recorded just 366 people in Arkansas City. The town's economy is rooted in agriculture but has good potential for heritage tourism.

Desha County Courthouse (NR-listed 7/12/1976)

The Desha County Courthouse was built in 1900 (but I have also seen accounts saying 1896) at the cost of \$23,370 and replaced an earlier 1-story courthouse on the same site (built about 1880 on land donated by Mr. & Mrs. John W. Dickinson). The current courthouse was designed by Little Rock architect Thomas Harding (nomination says Rome Harding?) in the Romanesque Revival style, featuring a corner turret and rounded arch window and door openings. The building was restored in 2005 using the Twin Rivers Architecture firm. The 2nd story courtroom is the building's best interior feature.

And there's a few ghost stories about the courthouse...

According to Judge McElroy, while the courthouse was under construction, an innocent man was hung nearby for committing arson. His name was Willard, and he haunts the courthouse, probably to torment those who wrongfully convicted him. The judge has heard footsteps on the staircase when he was alone in the building, and he's even heard high heels walking down the tile hallway late at night (now, this may not be the ghost of Willard). When the spirit seekers group

⁸ Agnes W. Ross, "Bayou Bartholomew Had Come to Town," *Dumas Clarion*, 14 July 2004, p. 7C; "Flood Recollections," *Programs of the Desha County Historical Society* (1976): 57; Saeler, "Flood of '27 Changed Course of Many Lives," 14 July 2004.

was here, along with about 40 local folks and reporters, sparklers came down from the jury box in the courtroom and floated around the top of the room. Everyone saw it. One of the spirit seekers felt the presence of a ghost named Ben in the courthouse; it could be the ghost of Ben Desha. In addition, the clock in the clock tower has never worked correctly, even after it was repaired. It rang 13 times one night and would skip an hour ahead...maybe the work of ghosts.

Jail

I already told you about an 1880 courthouse on this site (no longer extant). Sometime in the early 1880s, a small county jail and sheriff's dwelling/office were constructed just to the east of the old courthouse. Presumably when the new courthouse was built in 1900, this new brick jail was built to replace the earlier one. The 1903 Sanborn map shows the new courthouse, this jail building, and gallows to the east of the courthouse. The front portion of the jail building was used as the office, while the rear portion held prisoners. The gallows were gone by 1917 (the last legal hanging in AR took place in 1914 in Paris, Logan County).

White outhouse

Constructed about 1915 to serve as an outhouse. One end may have been white and the other colored, but it could also have been male and female. The colored outhouse could have been totally separate.

Arkansas City High School (NR-listed 10/4/1984)

Arkansas City High School was built in 1910 to replace an earlier 1-room, wood-frame schoolhouse located at the SW corner of Robert S. Moore Ave. & Natchez St. (on site of current AR City Baptist Church). The old schoolhouse was built before 1886 and housed grades 1-8 until 1909. Then students moved to the new "High School," which actually housed grades 1-12 at one time. Meanwhile, the old wooden schoolhouse became the home of the Baptist church until the congregation built their current sanctuary in 1957. The old school building later served as a school auditorium (the Ben Desha Auditorium) and was moved to its current location at the SE corner of Hwy. 4 (Sprague) & Delta Queen, where it is now home to the Mt. Zion congregation.

But as for this building, it was designed by Arkansas architect Clyde A. Ferrell, who designed several similar Colonial Revival-style school buildings throughout the state, as well as the Cleburne, Stone, and Montgomery County courthouses.

This school was the home of the Arkansas City River Rats until the new high school was built out on Hwy. 4. This building had been vacant for at least 20 years and was about to be condemned in 2003 when the county decided to restore it. Once it was finished, it temporarily served as the courthouse until the actual courthouse was restored. Now it is the Desha County Courthouse Annex and houses the sheriff's, assessor's, and collector's offices as well as a courtroom upstairs.

John H. Johnson House

John Harold Johnson was born Johnny Johnson on January 19, 1918, in Arkansas City. Johnson, a 3rd generation descendant of slaves, spent his boyhood in AR City, but since he couldn't get more than an 8th grade education here, he and his mother moved to Chicago, IL, where he graduated from high school. In 1941 Johnson married Eunice Walker, and the couple built an empire called Johnson Publishing Company. JPC founded and still publishes both *Ebony* and *Jet* magazines, has its own cosmetic line for people of color called Fashion Fair Cosmetics, and produces the Ebony Fashion Fair, the largest traveling fashion show in the world. John H. Johnson died in 2005, and his widow, Eunice, died in 2010. Their daughter, Linda Johnson Rice, now serves as CEO of Johnson Publishing Company.

The old Johnson House in Arkansas City was located at the corner of Hwy. 4 (Delta Queen) and Weatherwood, and the original intention was to move it to this site and restore it. However, the house fell apart during the move, so it was reconstructed (a replica) based on the architect's measurements from the original house. The house has 4 rooms and is filled with period furnishings (none of these items actually belonged to the Johnson family). There is a 1927 calendar hanging on the wall (survived the flood).

St. Clement's Episcopal Church

St. Clement's Episcopal Church was built in 1901 and represents a vernacular interpretation of the Gothic Revival style of architecture with its steeply pitched roof and pointed arch windows. The side addition on the church is an old barracks from the Rohwer Relocation Center, one of 2 internment camps built in Arkansas during World War II to house Japanese Americans from the West Coast (the other camp was at Jerome). Briefly explain Rohwer—after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, the U.S. was swept with anti-Japanese hysteria. The U.S. Government forced all Japanese Americans to sell or leave their possessions and move to one of 10 relocation centers nationwide (the two Arkansas centers

were, by far, the easternmost locations). Most of these people were loyal American citizens but were held against their will until the end of WWII. The Rohwer Camp closed on November 30, 1945, and the buildings were offered as surplus or abandoned. Many buildings were moved and reused for other purposes, including this old barracks. The museum is now housed inside the barracks portion. The Episcopal congregation has not met here for about 25 or 30 years, but a special Christmas candlelight service is still held here regularly.

Stuff in museum—everything from Native American pottery to African-American death masks to AR City High School letterman's jackets.

Walk up to Morning Star and proceed to St. John Missionary Baptist Church at the corner of Morning Star & Capitol.

St. John Missionary Baptist Church (Arkansas Register-listed 12/3/2003)

The St. John Missionary Baptist Church was founded in 1877 by Reverend John Smith and provided African-American residents with a place to worship. The church was originally located in a building on Kate Adams Ave. between President & Avalon streets, but destruction from the Flood of 1927 forced the congregation to construct a new church. So in 1930 they built the current church building on Morning Star Street. Historically, St. John's played a large role in the African-American community and was one of the largest churches in AR City. When John H. Johnson lived in AR City, he attended this church. In the 1940s some members started a singing group called the Hayes Harmonizers, and the group was broadcast on local radio stations in McGehee and Greenville, MS. The church was listed on the Arkansas Register instead of the National Register because the windows have been replaced and the window openings slightly altered. Currently the congregation is quite small and meets in the homes of various members.

Go down Capitol toward the levee.

Corner of Capitol & Robert S. Moore Ave.—Dickinson-Moore House (NR-listed 2/1/2011)

The Dickinson-Moore House was built about 1915 (the sidewalk tour brochure says 1911) and is a good example of a Craftsman-style house adapted to withstand high flood waters with its 5-foot foundation. The house was built by the prominent Colonel J. W. Dickinson family, who lived here for about 10 years. Dickinson was a planter and attorney and donated the land for the Desha County Courthouse.

Then in the mid-1920s Arthur Preston (A. P.) Price and his wife, Emma Jean Safford Price, purchased the house. They brought with them their daughter, Dorothy Elizabeth Price, who was born in 1910. This house survived the Flood of 1927, even though only a tip of the house was visible. In 1930 Dorothy Price went to work in Desha County Sheriff Howard L. Clayton's office where she met her future husband, Robert Smith Moore.

Moore was born in 1908 in Dumas and went on to attend Ouachita Baptist University in Arkadelphia, where he was a talented athlete. Then he returned to Desha County and went to work for the sheriff's office. He married Dorothy Price in 1938, and the couple moved into this house with Dorothy's parents. After the birth of their first child, Dorothy Lee, the home became too crowded and the Prices moved out, leaving Robert and Dorothy Moore and their family in the house. The couple lived here for the duration of their marriage.

Robert Moore quickly became a prominent citizen of Desha County, serving as deputy treasurer, circuit and chancery clerk, and in 1948, the office for which he was best known, Desha County sheriff. He was elected to 13 consecutive terms as sheriff. Tragically, he was killed in a two-car accident on Hwy. 65 just south of Pine Bluff on March 12, 1973. His widow, Dorothy, was appointed to finish out his 13th term as sheriff. Robert S. Moore Avenue in AR City was named in honor of Sheriff Moore after his death. Dorothy Moore later worked as a receptionist for Governor Bill Clinton before returning to this house, where she lived until her death in April 2008 at the age of 97. The couple's son, Robert S. Moore, Jr., is currently the Arkansas state representative from district 12 and serves as speaker of the house.

Arkansas City United Methodist Church

The Arkansas City Methodist Episcopal Church, South, as it was originally called, was built ca. 1880 and faced Kate Adams Avenue. But about 1888 a tornado damaged the building, knocking it off its foundation piers and leaving it slightly turned to the side. So the church was repaired and repositioned to face Capitol Street like it does today. [There are also stories about the tornado completely destroying the first church, and this building being constructed in 1888 to replace the first one.] This is another good example of vernacular Gothic Revival-style architecture.

X. O. Pindall Law Office (NR-listed 5/10/1999)

Xenophon Overton (X. O.) Pindall was born in 1873 in Missouri and came to Desha County with his mother and father during Reconstruction. Pindall later practiced law in AR City and became assistant prosecuting attorney. Before the Dickinson-Moore House was built, X. O. Pindall's home was located on that site and burned. In 1902 and 1904 Pindall was elected to represent Desha County in the Arkansas House of Representatives, but he lost the Democratic nomination for attorney general in 1906. In 1907 Pindall was elected to represent Desha and Drew counties in the AR Senate to fill a vacancy left after the death of Senator Howard Robb. He was then elected president pro tempore of the state senate, which, at that time, was the immediate successor of the governor (there was no elected lieutenant governor in AR until 1926; it was Harvey Parnell). This was extremely important for Pindall's political career because in 1907 John S. Little became the 21st governor of AR. But Little had a history of mental and physical problems, and suffered a complete mental breakdown (had "nervous disorder" and severe depression) shortly after taking office. He never really served as governor—2 days after his inauguration, he disappeared from public view and subsequently went to the Texas gulf coast for an extended period of recuperation. So the Senate president pro tempore John Isaac Moore became acting governor. Well, X. O. Pindall was elected to replace Moore as Senate president, so in effect, Pindall became the acting governor of Arkansas from May 1907 to January 1909. During his tenure as acting governor, Pindall continued to practice law in Arkansas City as well as Little Rock. During his later life, Pindall lived in Little Rock and died in a very peculiar way. In 1935 he fell from a bluff near the Arkansas River, hit his head on some rocks, and fell into a pool of boiling water coming from the steam exhaust drain of a utility company.

This Italianate-style building was constructed about 1888 to serve as Pindall's law office. The building once served as offices for the levee board and also housed the Arkansas City Museum for many years (before it moved to St. Clement's Episcopal Church).

Opera House/Lodge Hall

The opera house/lodge hall was built about 1888 (sometime shortly after 1886; does not appear on 1886 Sanborn map) and housed an opera hall on the first floor and the Knights of Pythias Lodge on the second floor. Then by 1917, the upstairs was a lodge hall and downstairs was a print shop. While the building functioned as an opera house, many traveling troupes of actors stopped here to perform before heading to Little Rock. The building truly had a multitude of uses—it was sometimes used for town meetings, boxing matches (John L. Sullivan in 1891 and

Jack Dempsey in 1924), and for showing silent movies. The building later became home to the local Masonic Lodge and Order of the Eastern Star. Until about 5 years ago, it was the Riverton Lodge 296 Masonic Hall.

The building is currently being restored, and the goal is to have a play here next year (2012).

Old Commercial Buildings on Desota Ave. (3 of which are part of the Arkansas City Commercial Historic District, NR-listed 12/18/1999)

Desota Avenue was formerly called Front Street. This is where all the action took place back in the town's heyday. Commercial buildings were scattered throughout several blocks facing Front Street and the MS River. The most densely developed commercial block (and the only commercial block that was entirely full of buildings) was along Front Street between Sprague and Weatherwood. None of these buildings remain today. We'll get down to that block in a few minutes...

Historically, the levee was much shorter than it is today, and the MS River was just on the other side of the levee. Steamboats docked right on the levee at Kate Adams Landing. Railroad tracks ran parallel to, and just along the edge of, the levee. A roundhouse and railroad machine shops were located southwest of here near the levee. In addition to agriculture, and oftentimes, before farming could really be successful, the timber industry was huge in the early history of Arkansas City. The land had to be cleared of virgin timber and drained before it could be planted with crops. So there were numerous sawmills, planing mills, hoop & stave factories, shingle mills, etc. in Arkansas City. The MS River and its backwater canals were often jammed with floating logs headed for the sawmills. Some of the bigger operations were the Kimball-Lacy Lumber Company and later the Thane Lumber Co. & Sawmill and Grayling Lumber Co. & Sawmill. A railroad passenger & freight depot was built about 1908 near the railroad tracks along Front Street just beyond its intersection with Weatherwood. [The depot was moved to Robert Moore, Jr.'s private residence and houses Peck's Southeast.]

Bell from the *Kate Adams*—displayed on the front porch of the old library building. Was purchased in 1962 from a junkyard in Pine Bluff for \$150 and returned to Arkansas City.

Brown stucco building—built ca. 1925. Barely see Ablewitz & Sons on the parapet. Now part of B & B (or Boggy Bayou) Honey Farm.

1-story red brick building—built ca. 1925. Housed the post office in the 1960s. Also part of the honey business.

2-story Red Star Grocery building (C in the district)—built in 1900 by German immigrant John George Reitzammer. Reitzammer came to the U.S. in 1870 and lived in Cincinnati, OH, and Louisville, KY, before settling in Arkansas City in 1882. He built a wood-frame bakery on Front Street, but it burned. So he built this 2-story brick building instead. This building was continuously occupied by the Reitzammer family and served as a bakery and grocery until Leonard Reitzammer, the youngest son, died in 1979. The building was then sold...to Robert Moore at that time??

2-story Cotham's Drug Store building (C in the district)—also built about 1900. Served many different functions over the years, including grocery & meat market, the post office (by 1917), and later Cotham's Drug Store. This building has cast-iron storefront columns manufactured by the G. L. Mesker & Co. from Evansville, Indiana. Mesker Storefronts: From the late 1880s into the early 20th century, pre-manufactured building components became popular across the U.S. Buyers could order parts from a catalogue and receive their goods by train. The prefabricated building parts were especially popular in small towns, where it might be difficult to find an architect. There were several companies in the Midwest manufacturing these cast iron building components, but the two largest manufacturers were Mesker Brothers Iron Works of St. Louis and the George L. Mesker Co. of Evansville, Indiana. The companies were owned by brothers and competed against each other. Whenever a building is called a "Mesker," it means that the building features some ornamental metal component made by one of the Mesker companies. Mesker components typically have a nameplate at the base of a storefront column. The Illinois Historic Preservation Agency has a project called "Got Mesker" that identifies and documents Mesker buildings across the country.

Empty lot to southwest of buildings—this was the site of the 2-story Commercial Hotel & Saloon. Had various businesses on the first floor like a movie theater, undertaker, drug store, and variety store, with hotel rooms upstairs. Demolished in 1979.

Ramus Brothers Meat Market & Grocery on Sprague Street (C in the district)—2-story concrete construction. Built about 1910. Housed meat market and grocery on first floor and an apartment on second floor.

1 block SW of district facing Desota—former commercial block. Nothing left. The 1896 Romanesque-style Desha Bank & Trust building anchored this corner. It burned in the late 1950s (or early 1960s?). The remainder of this block was filled with drug stores, hardware and dry goods stores, saloons, grocery stores, and a hotel. You can still see the floor tile from the Palace Confectionery.

Back down Desota toward Furr House at corner of Desota & Natchez.

Hubert & Ionia Furr House (NR-listed 2/4/2011)

Hubert Furr was born in 1872 in Tennessee and moved to Arkansas City in 1892. Furr was known as a “hustling Real Estate and Timber Man of Desha County...[and] one of the best informed men as to timber values in the whole country.” Furr purchased valuable timberland, cut the timber to sell for profit, and then sold the cleared land as prime real estate. In 1910 Furr purchased lots 27, 28, and 29, block 7, original town of Arkansas City, from prominent Arkansas City resident Henry Thane. Furr and his wife, Ionia, constructed a Dutch Colonial Revival-style house on the corner lot. Like other local merchants, Lena Lambe and Joe Demarke, Furr decided to use ornamental concrete block on the first floor of his 1 ½-story house. In 1910 there were 3 ornamental concrete block houses in the city limits—the homes of Lena Lambe, Joe Demarke, and Hubert Furr. The Lambe & Demarke firm was a well-respected wholesale and retail liquor distributorship in Arkansas City. Unfortunately, the Lambe and Demarke houses are no longer extant. The Furr House is the only ornamental concrete block home remaining in Arkansas City and was locally known as the “gray stone.” It features “rock face” concrete block, designed to appear like rough-cut stone.

After Mr. Furr’s death in 1945 the house changed hands a few times but by the mid-1950s, this was the home of Ralph W. Inman and his wife, Laura Lee Inman. The Inman family was a well-respected business and farm family in Arkansas City. They operated a restaurant downtown and were active in the community. Inman family descendants remain in the Arkansas City area. Arkansas State Representative Robert S. Moore, Jr., acquired the Furr House in 2006.

Ornamental Concrete Block--

The Furr House is unique because it is the only ornamental concrete block residence in Arkansas City. Ornamental concrete block became a popular building material around the turn of the twentieth century. It could be substituted for any use of stone or brick. Its manufacturers touted it as low cost, insulating, and maintenance free. The blocks could be purchased commercially or molded at the

building site using special equipment and molds purchased from sources such as Sears, Roebuck and Company. Molds for home use could make one block at a time. Different side panels could be substituted in the molds to make different block designs, or to make corner blocks. Ornamental concrete block had become so popular that in 1917, Sears published a separate specialty catalog of concrete block machinery. However, it lost popularity after 1930 due to changes in technology and modernism (or the preference for smooth, sleek surfaces).

Henry Thane House (NR-listed 12/22/1982)

Henry Thane was a central figure in the growth of Arkansas City. Thane, an entrepreneur born in Germany and raised in Metropolis, Illinois, arrived in Arkansas City in 1876 and soon became a lawyer for the Little Rock, Pine Bluff & New Orleans Railroad. He held numerous political offices in the county, including justice of the peace, mayor of Arkansas City, postmaster, and circuit clerk, before becoming a state senator. Owner of a sawmill and lumber company, Thane eventually controlled the Desha County Bank and Trust (the 2-story Romanesque-style building at the corner of Sprague & Desota—no longer extant). Thane's 1919 brick Craftsman house was designed by prominent LR architect Charles L. Thompson on the site of an earlier Thane home. The Thane family had their own cemetery in the back yard. There were several graves in the cemetery because Mrs. Thane was a widow four times, and her children died before her. When the current owners bought the house, the bodies were exhumed and moved.

Walk back up Natchez to courthouse.

Option to drive to Mound Cemetery. Follow Natchez up to Delta Queen. Take a right on Delta Queen. Left on gravel road (Avalon). Follow that all the way out to cemetery. You will pass the St. Andrew's Missionary Baptist Church at 709 Avalon on your way. Cornerstone says 1957.

Mound Cemetery (NR-listed 1/24/2008)

The mound was likely built by Native Americans between 1200 and 1600 A.D. (Mississippian Period). Dr. Edward Palmer of the Smithsonian Institution visited this mound during his 1882 "Mound Survey" and reported finding bones (likely from Native American burials), pottery (from N-A burials), and daub (fired clay structural material). However, by that time, the mound was already being used as a burial ground by white settlers, so this prevented further research into its Native American origins.

Historically, the white or European people were buried on top of the mound or right near its base, while African-American people were buried on the flat land south of the mound. The cemetery is still in use, primarily by African-Americans. It is notable to point out some of the African-American fraternal organizations represented on the markers, including the Knights & Daughters of Tabor, Mosaic Templars of America, and the Royal Circle of Friends.

Extras:

Concrete jail at corner of Kate Adams & Weatherwood does not show up on Sanborn map until 1932. Neither does commercial building next to it. Probably built in the late 1920s.