

Walks through History
Lake Village CHD
April 9, 2011
By: Rachel Silva



Intersection of Main & Court streets, looking north (1908)



Same block (2011)

Intro

Hi, my name is Rachel Silva, and I work for the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program. Welcome to the Walks through History tour of the Lake Village Commercial Historic District! The district was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in March 2011 for its association with the commercial development of Lake Village and for its collection of early 20th century commercial-style architecture.

Thank the Lake Village Chamber of Commerce for co-sponsoring the tour and providing water/cookies. Also thank Connee Luttrell, Lynn Brogdon, Linda Haddock, David Gillison, and Libby Borgognoni for their help gathering information for the tour.

Lakeport—tell them about tour after lunch and thank Blake Wintory for opening the house today.

Explain the National Register—at least 50 years old, retains integrity, and significant under one or more of the criteria.

How to get a commercial district listed—have at least 51% of the properties within the boundary “contributing” to the historic significance of the district, meaning

they meet the NR criteria. Boundaries for the district are roughly Lakeshore Dr. on the east, Jackson St. on the north, Chicot St. on the west, and Church St. on the south. Total of 39 resources—23 contributing, 12 non-contributing, and 4 individually listed on the NR (Chicot County Courthouse, Confederate Monument, Tushek Building & Lake Village Post Office).

History of Lake Village

Chicot County was formed on October 25, 1823, from part of Arkansas County. Residents chose the French and Spanish settlement of Villemont, named after former Arkansas Post commander Don Carlos De Villemont who died in 1823, as their first seat of government. However, Villemont was no match for the Mississippi River. The turbulent muddy water began to eat away the land underpinning the town, so in 1838, the county seat moved to Columbia, a small settlement a few miles down river. Columbia quickly grew to fill the needs of a county seat and a new courthouse and jail were constructed. Tragically, in 1855, Columbia met the same watery fate as Villemont, and the citizens were forced to move their government once again. This time they chose Masona, a location about 15 miles west of the river. But Masona proved to be too far from the MS River, which was an important transportation and trade route. After just 2 years, the county seat moved to its 4th and final location. Lake Village became the county seat in 1857. A brick courthouse and jail were built that same year on the banks of Lake Chicot.

Lake Chicot is the largest natural oxbow lake in the U.S. and was formed when the MS River changed course in the mid-14th century. The lake and the county were named after a French word meaning “stump” or “snag” because there was so much submerged timber in the lake.

Because the southern end of Lake Chicot was close to the MS River, goods could easily be shipped straight to the county seat. The rich bottomlands around Lake Village were well suited to growing cotton. By the mid-19th century, the plantation economy was alive and well in Chicot County. The 1850 census showed 145 white families who owned 3,984 slaves. The slave-to-white ratio in the county was higher than any other county in the state.

The Civil War brought great change to the economic structure of Chicot County. Without inexpensive slave labor, the old ways of planting, harvesting, and maintaining a plantation were too costly. The once-powerful plantation owners were pushed out or forced to find another way to make a profit.

Sunnyside Plantation owner Austin Corbin came up with a unique solution to the labor shortage problem. Corbin negotiated with the mayor of Rome to have Italian immigrants farm his plantation. Each family received 12.5 acres of land at a cost \$2,000 to be paid from the profits of cotton crops. The first 98 families reached Sunnyside in 1895. Another 72 families arrived in 1897 and smaller groups of Italian families followed in subsequent years. Cotton production in Chicot County reached an all time high in 1898. But many of the Italian settlers became disheartened when Austin Corbin died and the new manager of his holdings reneged on the original contracts. Interest rates and rents were raised above what most of the Italian families could pay, following the sharecropper model used in many parts of the Mississippi Delta. At the insistence of the Italian government, the U.S. government intervened on behalf of the immigrants. Released from their contracts and in the wake of several years of increasing malaria deaths, forty Italian families picked up and moved to the drier and cooler mountains of northwest Arkansas to establish Tontitown in Washington County. Other Italian families moved to Mississippi and Missouri but a number remained in the Chicot County area and bought new land or started new business interests in Lake Village. The effect of the Italian influence can be seen in every aspect of the history of Lake Village from banking, commerce, and agriculture to religion.

The early 20th century brought a time of growth and development in Lake Village beginning with the arrival of the Memphis, Helena, and Louisiana Railroad in 1903. The new railroad depot anchored the west end of Main Street (then called Wheat St.), six blocks from Lake Chicot. Prior to the railroad, the business district of Lake Village was largely confined to two blocks along the lake front on either side of the courthouse. Telephone service was established in 1900. In 1910 the city completed a city water works system and laid concrete sidewalks in both the business and residential districts. Main Street was paved in 1912 and the city's first sewage system installed.

Lake Chicot provided recreational opportunities like fishing and boating for the entire region. Fishermen came from all over the country to fish in Lake Village, known as the "Home of the Black Bass." Hotels were built in Lake Village to accommodate tourists. Highway 65, the first U.S. highway in Arkansas, followed Lakeshore Drive through Lake Village in 1918. Two years later this became the first "all weather" road in Arkansas, bringing in more visitors. Lake Village continued to grow throughout the 1920s.

However, the Flood of 1927 devastated Lake Village. Railroad service and roads into Lake Village were closed. Crops were destroyed and farmland damaged. Downtown Lake Village was flooded. Temporary scaffolding and elevated sidewalks were constructed to get customers into the businesses along Main Street. Everyone was forced to move about by boat or pole raft. An unforeseen but lasting result of the flood was not apparent until the water receded. The once crystal-clear Lake Chicot was muddy and polluted with sediment deposited by the raging Mississippi River and the run-off of flooded areas. The flood had killed or dislocated much of the abundant game that had once surrounded Lake Village and began to effect the fish population.

Then the Great Depression hit, and all across the South, farmers left rural areas in search of work in bigger cities. Lake Village eventually recovered from the economic depression, with diversified farming methods and crop rotation, the first Greenville-Lake Village Bridge over the MS River was completed in September 1940 (replacing the 12-car ferry), the creation of Lake Chicot State Park in 1957, and the construction of a pumping station and diversion dams in 1977 to drain silt and pollutants away from Lake Chicot. By the late 1980s, the water quality was much improved and the lake was restocked with fish, bringing back tourists.

The new Greenville-Lake Village Bridge opened in 2010 and is the longest cable-stayed bridge on the Mississippi River, providing access to MS and casino gambling. Although Hwy. 65 now bypasses scenic downtown Lake Village and many storefronts are empty, the city has great potential for heritage tourism and economic revitalization.

Chicot County Courthouse (IL on NR 2/1/2006)

In 1907 the fifty-year-old courthouse (built in 1857) was demolished to make way for a new buff-brick Classical Revival-style structure. This courthouse (and the one before it) faced east toward Lake Chicot. The 1907 courthouse burned and was replaced in 1956 by the existing courthouse. The current courthouse was designed by Texas architect Herbert Voelker in the Art Deco style. Elements of the style include the building's boxy shape, flat roof with concrete coping, vertical emphasis provided by the concrete casing around the 2nd and 3rd story windows, decorative cast-concrete scrollwork above the front and side entrances, and the iron grille on the transom window above the front door.

Confederate Monument (IL on NR 5/3/1996)

The white marble sculpture was erected in 1910 by two chapters of the United Daughters of the Confederacy from Chicot County. It cost \$3,000. The monument depicts a Confederate soldier in mid-stride holding his rifle in his right hand and a bed roll over his left shoulder. One side of the base is missing a cannon barrel, which used to be part of a fountain around the base of the monument. The front (or west) side bears the inscription: “1861-1865 CSA / TO THE CONFEDERATE SOLDIERS OF CHICOT / COUNTY, THE RECORD OF WHOSE SUBLIME / SELF SACRIFICE AND UNDYING DEVOTION / IS THE PROUD HERITAGE / OF A LOYAL POSTERITY.”

The east side of the base says: “ERECTED BY THE / CAPTAIN McCONNELL / AND / GEORGE K. CRACRAFT / CHAPTERS, U.D.C. / A.D. 1910 / AND CHICOT COUNTY,” followed by “WE CARE NOT WHENCE / THEY CAME, / DEAR, IN LIFELESS CLAY / WHETHER UNKNOWN OR KNOWN TO FAME / THEIR CAUSE AND COUNTRY STILL THE SAME / THEY DIED AND WORE THE GRAY. / FATHER RYAN.”

Lakeshore Hotel

Not part of district, but very significant in the history of Lake Village. Built about 1910 by local contractor Albert Simms, the hotel served tourists and visitors who came to enjoy fishing and other recreational activities on Lake Chicot. Local residents held many community activities here, such as dances, banquets, and in the 1960s, the Lakeshore Hotel hosted an Easter fashion show where local folks would model clothes from Epstein’s, the Friendly Store, and Mansour’s. Little girls would model Easter dresses with their mothers or groups of friends would model together.

The hotel was converted into apartments in 1986 and the brick building was stuccoed.

Dixie Queen Dairy Bar

Not in district—built about 1935 as a filling station. Later became the Dixie Queen Dairy Bar, a popular hangout for Lake Village youth in its heyday.

First Baptist Church

Church was built about 1935 to replace its previous building at the NE corner of S. Court & Church streets. The congregation was located on Church Street by 1908.

When they moved to this building on Lakeshore Dr., the library moved into the old church. It was called Gatewood Memorial Library. The building was demolished in the 1960s. Site is currently the “new” library. But this is why the street just one block south of Main was named Church Street. Gocher’s Funeral Home & Flower Shop (later moved to the 100 block of Main) was located just to the north of the church on Lakeshore Drive.

Amphitheater

There used to be a large public double-decker dock on the site of the amphitheater, and it was the only dock (as opposed to today, when there are docks up and down Lakeshore Dr.).

Gaines Cafeteria

Just to the south of the amphitheater, there used to be a restaurant on the lake side of Lakeshore Dr. It was called Gaines Cafeteria, and the building sat on stilts out over the lake.

100 Block of Main Street (formerly known as Wheat...Church St. was Barley, Jackson St. was Oat, and Washington St. was Rye...). The N-S streets were A, B, C, etc. as you went west away from the courthouse, so Court St. was first called A Street. Sanborn Fire Insurance maps indicate that these were arbitrary street names, and it is uncertain whether they were actually used. A 1908 photograph is labeled “Main Street” so the current street name was in use by that time.

102-112 S. Lakeshore Dr. (on SW corner of Lakeshore & Main) –NC

By about 1925, this corner was home to Gaines Chevrolet Dealership. It originally consisted of a drive-through filling station on the corner attached to the building at 103 Main. After World War II, the dealership became a filling station and garage with a 12-car capacity (was Esso Service Station). At some point, the filling station portion was demolished, and the current building was constructed about 1965.

103 Main—NC

Built about 1925 as part of the original Chevy Dealership. Features nice brick detailing on the upper façade—dentiled cornice and inset cast-concrete diamond-shaped pieces. Non-contributing because of the built-up metal roof.

107 Main—C

Built about 1935. Matches the brick façade on 103 Main, but this building has been painted white.

109 Main—C

Built about 1927—when it was first constructed, there were empty lots to the east and west of this building. It housed Mr. Trice’s attorney’s office. Has a unique shaped parapet above the brick storefront.

111-113 Main—C

Built ca. 1929. Simple commercial-style building with decorative vents and a tile-capped parapet. By the mid-1930s, the storefront at 111 Main housed the Lake Haven Café. It later became Sammy Gocher’s Lake Village Flower Shop. The storefront at 113 Main housed a dry cleaning business and later Ed Price’s Law Office. Before this building was here, there was a livery stable on this site from at least 1908 until the early 1920s.

115 Main—C

Built ca. 1929. Housed Hampton’s Cotton Buyers.

117 Main—C

Built ca. 1906. Has nice brick corbelling and a clipped corner entrance with a cast-iron column. This building has housed a variety of things, including a restaurant, bank, Pinkus Brothers Liquor Store (operated by Jewish family from Dermott), and Sam Epstein’s Plantation Office (office for the whole Epstein operation—department store, farm, gin, etc.).

100 block of S. Court—C (Behind Epstein’s Office)

Built ca. 1953 as extension of Epstein’s Office.

100 Block of N. Court St., so named b/c of the courthouse

The first courthouse and jail in Lake Village were built in 1857—the courthouse faced the lake and probably sat in the middle of the current courthouse parking lot. The jail was built behind the courthouse. Both of these buildings were demolished in 1907 to make way for the second courthouse. The land where the jail was located was opened up as a street and aptly named Court Street. The 100 block of N. Court St. was known as the Old Jail Square. By 1908, a new county jail was built at the SE corner of Main & Duval (on the site of the sheriff’s office today).

202-210 Main (NW corner of Main & N. Court); John Tushek Building (IL on NR 8/5/1993)

Built in 1906 by Austro-Hungarian immigrant John Tushek. Good example of a 2-story commercial-style building with Classical details like hood molding on the windows, projecting cornices, and decorative medallions. Notice “Tushek” in the parapet. Tushek’s jewelry business was in the back storefront facing Main, and his display cabinets are still there. Mr. Tushek also “checked eyes”—he examined Libby Borgognoni’s eyes for the first time when she was in the 9th grade. Dr. Easterling had an office here, Carneal Warfield had a law office upstairs (before moving over to another office on Main St.), and Sam Epstein’s Department Store was located in the front portion of the building before it moved down to 205 Main Street. Epstein was a Russian Jewish immigrant who owned thousands of acres in Lake Village. He ran a successful plantation (and purchased Lakeport in the 1920s), a large cotton gin, and a department store.

The Tushek Building was donated to the City of Lake Village, and it will be renovated to serve as the municipal building (housing all city offices in one place). The city has received grants from both the USDA and Entergy for the restoration project (\$780,000 or more). The architect is Aaron Ruby—the building will be LEED certified after the restoration.

105 N. Court—NC

Built ca. 1915. Was Wilson’s City Drug Store and had a soda fountain. NC b/c of large awning.

107 N. Court—NC

Built ca. 1915. Was A. N. Rankin Dry Goods. NC b/c of large awning. Prior to the construction of these three storefronts about 1915, there was a 2-story building at 107-111 Court.

111 N. Court—C

Built ca. 1915 on site of previous 2-story building. This building is contributing b/c all of its upper façade is visible with brick corbelling and decorative vents. The transom windows are also uncovered. This was Mrs. Rita Connerly's 5 & 10 cent store.

113 & 117 N. Court—NC

The buildings at 113 and 117 N. Court are both NC b/c they were built in the late 1950s or early 60s and have had alterations; for instance, the building at 117 has the built-up metal roof and large awning. Remember, this was the old jail square, but the jail was demolished in 1907 and relocated down Main St. After the jail was torn down here, there were two one-story buildings on this end of the block. By 1917 these buildings were gone and the lots were empty. The 1928 Sanborn map shows a 20-foot long and 12" wide brick wall in this location. I don't think it was a remnant of the old jail; I think it was part of the party wall for those old commercial buildings or newly constructed for some unknown purpose in the 1920s.

NW corner of N. Court & Jackson (not in district)

Buff brick building was built about 1925 and housed the Ford Dealership until the early 1970s.

NE corner of N. Court & Jackson (not in district)

This was the site of a movie theater—there was a theater in the building on this corner off and on beginning in 1908. In more recent memory, it was the New Theater, which was part of the Wren Theater chain and operated by Margaret and Clem Follis in the 1950s (building no longer extant).

200 Block of Main Street

201 Main St.—NC

The Bank of Lake Village was built ca. 1927 and features a two-story Classical portico supported by fluted Doric columns. The newer addition to the west side was completed in 1995 and was designed to match the original structure. Before

the addition was built, the law offices of David Gillison, Sr., and Carneal Warfield were located just west of the bank.

Behind Bank of Lake Village (but no longer extant): There was a 2-story house right behind the Bank of Lake Village, and on the SW corner of S. Court & Church streets, there was a 2-story hotel. It was built ca. 1908. It was called the Blake House, Jeter House, Kinkade House, Morgan Hotel, and Granny Cornell's Hotel (which served a delicious family-style lunch).

203 Main St.—C

In the early 1940s, there was a small Phillips filling station on the SE corner of Main & Cokley, and there were three storefronts just to the east of the filling station. The storefront right next to the filling station housed the Majestic Café first. Then these buildings (203 & 205) were constructed about 1952. 203 Main became the Majestic Café at this point.

205 Main St.—NC

Built ca. 1952 as the second location of Epstein's Department Store.

100 Block of N. Cokley

122 N. Cokley—C

Built ca. 1920 and housed Doc Burnham's dental office with Follis Photography upstairs.

126 N. Cokley—C

Built ca. 1947 and housed Dr. Clark's medical office.

SW corner of N. Cokley & Jackson (not in district)

Two-story house built about 1930. By 1943 it was the American Legion Hall.

300 Block of Main

Vacant lot at SW corner of Main & Cokley

Location of Frank Hudson Insurance (often referred to as Claude Ahlor's Insurance b/c he was Mr. Hudson's son-in-law and also worked there) and Hanes Hardware, which sold everything, including caskets. Behind these buildings and going south down Cokley, there was Carlton's Insurance, M. A. Walsworth's Surveying, and then Hal Sessions owned the land at the back of the block.

309-313 Main St.—C

Built ca. 1910 as the Carlton Hotel and then by 1943, it was called the McGehee Hotel. This building later housed Morgan & Lindsey's 5 & 10 cent store.

315 Main St.—C

Built ca. 1910 and was Frank Eberdt's Feed and Seed, which was later purchased by Sam Sampolesi, and it became Sam's Feed and Seed. In the mid-1920s, the post office was located here (before the construction of the current post office in 1938-39).

317 Main St.—NC

Built in 1947. See on parapet "Carnevaletti 1947." This was Bruno Carnevaletti's grocery and liquor store.

321 Main St.—C

Built ca. 1948. Has unique two-story portion recessed from the front of the one-story building. The Yee family owned this building and lived upstairs (some of the Yee family members still live up there). They were Chinese and ran a grocery store (currently own the Yee Food Land and the washeteria). The downstairs portion of this building was Mansour's Shoe Store.

District technically ends at Chicot St.

Going west on Main St. (buildings on south side starting at Chicot)

Plaque on building reads "M. E. Rosenzweig Building 1955." Hunter's Pharmacy, Marvin Lloyd's dentist office, Pitchford Café, McDill's (pronounced MacDeel's) Grocery. Tillman's Grocery was located in a building just west of this one (no longer extant).

Simmons First Bank was built on the site of an old Plymouth Dealership.

Boarded building w/ gabled roof—Jack & George Rhodes Appliance Store

Red brick to east of sheriff's office—Neal Sloan, Sr., Chevrolet Dealership

Sheriff's office is on site of old county jail

Yee Food Land is on the site of an old livery stable/mule barn. They used to have auctions every Saturday and sold mules, horses, and cows.

White service station at end of Main—was Gaston Gibson's service station.

The railroad passenger depot was at the western end of Main St. where Mel's Market is now. The city had plans to use it as city hall, but it burned in the late 1970s.

Turn and head east on Main talking about the north side of the street

On the north side of Main near the depot (across from the extant service station) was Ugo Scucchi's Service Station. He was well-known for his ability to fix anything. Building no longer extant.

George Fell Auto Repair Shop

There is still tile from the front entrance of a building on the big vacant lot—tile says "Sam Epstein." This building housed W. B. Lloyd's Implements—sold John Deere implements. It was later Fessinger's Implements.

Cross Duval St.—Rosa Floriani's Café, the Smokehouse (made BBQ), Pinkus Liquor Store, 2 or 3 Chinese stores like Dave Mah's Grocery (later moved over to Chicot St.), Yee Grocery (was in the buff brick building just east of Bee Hive Fashions), Karam's Dry Goods (Syrian family), Sequorah's Dress Shop, A. B. & Gloria Morara's 5 & 10 cent store, Mrs. Mariam's clothing (Syrian), Wolf Bros. Dept. Store, and Mansour's Dept. Store.

There are so many missing buildings, it's hard to tell what was where...

Cross over Chicot St. & we're back inside the historic district boundary.

322 Main St.—NC

Built ca. 1958 as First State Bank and then became Simmons First Bank before Simmons built the new building on the south side of Main Street. Before this building was here, there were 4 small storefronts in this space. They housed Mike Floriani's Shoe Shop, a liquor store, Pitchford's Café (b/f it was across the street?), and a beauty shop.

Shell of building

This was the site of Mary Borgognoni's Friendly Store, which was a ladies clothing store (run by Libby Borgognoni's mother-in-law).

316 Main St.—C

Built about 1910. Brick corbelling similar on all of the one-story buildings in the block. Was Idella Smith Grocery.

308-310 Main St.—C

Built about 1910. Used to be two separate businesses in the early days. 310 Main (on left) was the *Chicot Spectator* office. 308 Main (on right) was Rothchild's 10-cent store. The *Chicot Spectator* later occupied both storefronts before moving to its current location on N. Court Street.

306 Main St.—C

Built ca. 1910. Housed B. J. Rankin Dry Goods.

302 Main St.—C

Built ca. 1908 and housed a bank until the early 1940s. Which bank?? The building has nice brick corbelling below the projecting cornice and a beveled corner entrance. The Friendly Store was located here briefly before moving down the block. Then this was Holloway's Drug Store. After Mr. Holloway died, the store was run by Ned and O. B. Mazanti, but they kept the same store name. Ned Mazanti had previously been a pharmacist for Mr. Holloway.

Look down S. Cokley at buildings behind old Epstein's

109 S. Cokley—NC

Built ca. 1949 and was originally constructed to serve as city hall. This was later Scott Dabney's Surveying.

111 S. Cokley—C

Built ca. 1950. Housed O. C. Burnside's attorney's office and Cashion Insurance.

115 S. Cokley—C

Built about 1953. Was location of Arkansas Power & Light.

217 Church St.—C

Built ca. 1945. Was known as the Davis Building at one time. Housed offices of all sorts—attorney, gas company, government office, and insurance. Also had a barber in here at one time. Now Borgognoni Farms Office.

206 S. Cokley—Lake Village Post Office (IL on NR 8/14/1998)

The Lake Village Post Office was built in 1938-39 in the Colonial Revival style and is one of the only buildings in Lake Village with a full basement. The interior features a mural financed through the U.S. Treasury Department's Section on Fine Arts. The mural entitled "Lake Country Wild Life" was painted by New Jersey artist Avery Johnson in 1941.

Old apartment house to south of post office (not in district)

Built ca. 1935. Was the Anna Matthews Apartment House. Ms. Matthews was an icon in Lake Village. Always wore pants and had short hair. Managed the apartments.

An old service station was just to the south of the apartment house (NW corner of Cokley & St. Mary's—now gone).

Back up to Main & north side of 200 block

218-222 Main St.—C

Built ca. 1915. Even though the upper story windows have been replaced, this building retains its original storefronts with wooden bulkheads, recessed doors, and cast-iron columns. 222 Main (left side) was a pool hall run by Habeeb Mansour. 218 Main (right side) was Fort's Grocery.

216 Main St.—C

Built about 1929. Was Mancil's Furniture Store.

212 Main St.—C

Built about 1929. Was McClung's Dry Goods Store.

Extras:

Lindbergh—monument and marker north of downtown on Lakeshore Dr.

In April 1923 a young Charles Lindbergh was forced to land his small airplane on the golf course at the old Lake Village Country Club, just north of town. After making the necessary repairs to his airplane, it was too late in the day to continue his route. The night turned out to be clear with a bright, full moon. In his autobiography, *We*, Lindbergh wrote "it was an ideal night for flying." Charles Lindbergh embarked on the first ever recorded nighttime flight over the skies of Lake Village and the Mississippi River. The flight lasted only thirty minutes but four years later Lindbergh would use the night-flying skills he first learned over Lake Village to complete his famous transcontinental flight across the Atlantic Ocean.

St. Mary's Church dates...

St. Mary's Lady of the Lake Church—current building constructed in 1939.

The nuns' house (to North of church) was built in 1914.

The St. Mary's School was built in 1926.

Homer Hicks's Service Station was at the NW corner of Lakeshore Dr. & St. Mary's—no longer extant.