

Walks through History
Russellville Downtown Historic District
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Intro

Hi, my name is Rachel Silva, and I work for the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, which is an agency of the Department of Arkansas Heritage. Welcome to the Walks through History tour of the Russellville Downtown Historic District! Before we get started, I'd like to introduce and thank Betsy McGuire and Danya Day of Main Street Russellville for their help with the tour. Also, I'd like to thank Russellville Mayor Bill Eaton for showing me through the newly renovated city hall building, which you will get to see today as well. And last but not least, thank David Vance for sharing his wealth of knowledge about downtown Russellville with me.

The Russellville Downtown Historic District was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1996 for its association with the commercial development of Russellville and its collection of late 19th and early 20th century commercial-style architecture. The district was amended in 2006 to reflect some renovation and restoration efforts within the district boundary, whereby buildings were changed from NC to C. The district also contains 2 buildings individually listed on the National Register—the Missouri-Pacific Depot and the Riggs-Hamilton American Legion Post. The Russellville Masonic Temple is also IL on the NR, but it is just beyond the southern boundary of the district. However, we will tour that building today (city hall). [There are 22 National Register-listed properties in Russellville.]

Brief History of Russellville

Pope County was created in 1829 and was named after Arkansas's 3rd territorial governor, John Pope. During his term as governor, Pope planned the construction of the Old State House in Little Rock. The first Pope County seat was located at Scotia, a settlement below the mouth of Big Piney Creek on the north side of the Arkansas River. The county seat was temporarily moved to Dwight Mission, which was a Protestant mission on the Cherokee reservation near present-day Russellville. The seat of government was then moved to Norristown (along the AR River) and in 1841 to Dover.

Meanwhile, Russellville developed as a settlement along the east-west route between Little Rock and Fort Smith. In 1835 Dr. Thomas Russell arrived in Russellville from Illinois and purchased the first home constructed in the settlement. In 1847 Jacob L. Shinn returned home from the Mexican War and established the first general store in the village. Sometime after this, local residents debated naming their settlement after Russell because he owned the first house or after Shinn because he owned the first store. They chose Russell, and thus named the village Russellville. Russellville incorporated as a town on June 7, 1870.

In 1873 the Little Rock and Fort Smith Railroad was completed through Russellville instead of Dover as originally planned. Russellville grew because of its location along the rail line, and in March 1887 Russellville became the new Pope County seat. In 1888 a two-story, brick, Romanesque-style courthouse with a central tower was constructed on the site of the current Pope County Courthouse (built in 1931). By the late 19th century, Russellville residents engaged in subsistence farming, grew cotton or livestock, harvested timber, and had jobs in the coal mining industry, among other things.

A disastrous fire in January 1906 destroyed more than 20 downtown buildings and caused \$250,000 in damages. The impacted buildings were located along two blocks of Main Street and one block of N. Commerce St. However, most of the buildings were rebuilt within 6 months, and the replacement buildings were constructed with brick (many of the destroyed buildings were originally wood-frame). So the industrious businessmen of Russellville quickly rebounded from the setback and emerged even stronger than before. In 1908 a sidewalk improvement district was formed and concrete sidewalks laid over most of the town.

In 1909 the Second District Agricultural School, one of four agricultural schools established by the Arkansas State Legislature, was located in Russellville. The other schools were located in Jonesboro (Arkansas State University), Magnolia (Southern Arkansas University), and Monticello (University of Arkansas at

Monticello). In 1925 the Second District School was renamed Arkansas Polytechnic College and in 1976 became Arkansas Tech University. ATU is a major employer in Russellville and has an enrollment of about 10,000 students.

The construction of Interstate 40 beginning in the late 1950s (and completed through Pope County in September 1968) dramatically increased the traffic of people and goods through Russellville and contributed to the area's continued growth. Dardanelle Lock and Dam No. 10, part of the McClellan-Kerr Arkansas River Navigation System, was started in 1957 and completed in 1969 to reduce flooding, improve transportation, generate hydroelectric power, and provide recreational opportunities. Lake Dardanelle was created by the dam and in place by 1965 with the creation of Lake Dardanelle State Park the following year. Arkansas's only operational nuclear power plant, Arkansas Nuclear One, is located a few miles west of Russellville and started operating in 1974. Nuclear One supplies more than half of the electricity used by more than 600,000 Entergy customers.

Missouri-Pacific Depot (IL on NR 6/11/92)

The LR & Ft. Smith RR was completed through Russellville in 1873, and the first depot was built in 1880. The railroad was later the St. Louis, Iron Mountain & Southern RR, the Missouri-Pacific RR, and now Union Pacific RR. It was a wood-frame structure and was located west of the current depot site so that it did not block Denver Street (then River St.). A freight depot was built to the east of Denver & C Street (then Banker's Row, Bunker's Row, and Maple) and was surrounded by timber and cotton platforms. Construction on the current depot began in 1916. The 1880 passenger depot was moved and later demolished.

When the Iron Mountain RR built the 1916 depot, there was controversy over closing River Street and over the location of the white waiting room inside the depot. The railroad company finally appeased the local residents by making the Russellville depot larger than the Conway depot, which was already completed, and by placing the white waiting room on the eastern end of the depot so it would be closer to the business district. The depot was in use by 1917 as troops mustered into service here during World War I. The RR also became Mo-Pac in 1917.

Passenger train service ended in Russellville in 1960, but freight and maintenance functions continued at the depot until it was acquired by the City of Russellville in 1999 and rehabilitated by Friends of the Depot, a committee of Main Street Russellville. The depot was restored to its original appearance, maintaining the

Mediterranean style popular for railroad depots in the early 20th century. The depot is city-owned and is maintained by Main Street Russellville, which is housed inside the depot.

Depot Park (across C Street from Depot)

In the late 19th and early 20th century, there was a 2-story boarding house on this site. Later this was the location of a restaurant called the Depot Café.

Denver Street going south

Denver Street was originally called River Street because the street led down to a ferry crossing on the AR River (near the old site of Norristown). Russellville street names were changed in 1930 by the Lions Club. All north-south streets east of Arkansas Ave. are named after eastern U.S. cities (in alphabetical order, going east), and all north-south streets west of Arkansas Ave. are named after western U.S. cities (in alphabetical order, going west). All east-west streets north of Main St. are named with letters of the alphabet, while all east-west streets south of Main St. are numbered. [This does not necessarily apply to newer streets or new housing developments in the city.]

217 N. Denver—C

Built ca. 1948 and housed the Howe/Milsap Grocery Store.

Riggs-Hamilton American Legion Post No. 20 (IL on NR 8/15/94)

A large 2-story, wood-frame hotel was located on this corner in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It was called the White House or White House Hotel and was operated by Mr. and Mrs. Henry White and later by Mrs. White's son, Edd Bernard. It catered especially to the drummers (salesmen) coming off the train.

The Riggs-Hamilton American Legion Post No. 20 was built between 1934 and 1936 with help from the Works Progress Administration (WPA). It was built with native stone designed in a giraffe pattern and features false half-timbering in the front gable end and exposed rafter tails. The building also features concrete medallions with the crests of the American Legion and American Legion Ladies Auxiliary above the front doors. The building was constructed at a cost of \$6,000 and the lot was donated by Mr. and Mrs. A. J. Mathews in honor of Mrs. Mathews's brothers, William R. Davis of North Little Rock and Virgil H. Davis of

Searcy, and her brother-in-law, Wallace E. Blackburn of Forrest City, all of whom served overseas with the American Expeditionary Force (A.E.F.) during World War I. The Riggs-Hamilton post was named in honor of Samuel L. Riggs and Ed Hamilton, two Pope County men killed in France during WWI.

Parking lot to south of American Legion—Carquest parking lot

The NW corner of Denver and B streets was occupied by the 3-story, brick Palace Hotel. It was built in 1896 by James M. Lucker and faced east. It had 32 large sleeping rooms and a dining room for 38 people.

The west side of this block was occupied by Luker, Davis & Co. Planing Mill and Wagon Works, J. J. Shoptaw Lumber Yard, and later by Dyke Lumber Company.

If you look through the parking lot to the southwest, you'll see the back of the 500 Building facing Main Street. This building was constructed in 1926 and housed the Hotel Pearson.

East side of Denver—the crepe myrtle is the city tree, and these were planted by Main Street Russellville.

W. J. White Building on NE corner of Denver & B—C (B Street was Russell St.)

Constructed in 1924 by prominent Russellville merchant, banker, and postmaster William Jackson "Bud" White. Bud White owned a general merchandise store and several blocks of downtown. You'll see the White name on other buildings today. This building housed stores and restaurants, and by 1946, there was a hotel on the second floor.

SE corner of Denver & B—C—Opal Mae's

Built ca. 1910. Housed offices, restaurants, dry cleaning shops, barbers, etc. on the lower floor, and by 1929 the Como Hotel was on the second floor. In 1946 it was called the Deluxe Hotel.

104-106 Denver—NC (Hamilton Building)

The Hamilton Building was constructed in 1958. It was NC because of its age at the time of the survey—not quite 50 years old at that time. It would be C today if re-evaluated.

Haney Building at 100 N. Denver—C

Constructed in 1926 by Dr. Haney. He was a general practitioner and operated a clinic and hospital out of this building. [It is labeled “Haney Hospital” on the Sanborn maps.] Dr. Haney treated all kinds of ailments and even did dental work. Black patients were treated in the basement. From 1993 to 2004 this was the Main Street Russellville office.

Central Presbyterian Church—C

The Central Presbyterian Church (then called the Cumberland Presbyterian Church) purchased the lot at the NW corner of Main & Denver in 1899 and built a brick church there. The first services were held in July 1900 in this building. But on January 1, 1908, a fire started in the Buck Hotel just to the north of the church, destroying both buildings. The congregation decided to rebuild immediately on the foundations of the burned building. By December 1908 they occupied a new church on the same site. In 1925 the church built a new sanctuary to the west of the 1908 building and remodeled the entire façade to reflect a combination of the Gothic Revival and Craftsman styles. The church has built various additions to the back of the building over the years, and the newest addition was constructed to the north of the church within the last 10 years.

Cross Main Street and look back at N side

312-316 W. Main—NC (now Sportscene)

Constructed in 1912. It has been covered in stucco—the building looked like the gray building just to the east originally. You can see part of the cast concrete panel in the upper façade reading, “McKinnon 1912.” The eastern portion of Sportscene was originally part of the gray building (McKinnon Building). The red building just east of Joshua’s Jewelers was built after the fire of 1906 and was completed by 1909. The 4 buildings to the west of it (Sportscene is really 2 buildings or storefronts) were built in 1912. In 1913 these storefronts were occupied by restaurants, confectionaries, clothing stores, and pool halls. And the second story of the first 3 storefronts was occupied by the Flo-Roy Hotel. By 1919 the Flo-Roy Hotel was only located in the upper floor of the corner storefront (above

Sportscene). [The small building just to the west of Lindley Drug Store is an enclosed alley probably built in the mid-1930s.]

In the 1950s Safeway was on the NE corner of Denver & Main.

Shinn Building at SE corner of Main & Denver—C—stand in empty lot to east of building so we can see ghost signs.

Jacob L. Shinn built this brick building in 1875 to serve as a general merchandise store. He moved his older wood-frame store building to the back of the lot near his house (near the current site of the Old Post Office—current Federal Building). Recall that Mr. Shinn built the first general store in Russellville. And the Shinn Building is the oldest building standing in Russellville today. It was operated as a general store with a dentist office upstairs. After Shinn's death in 1899, the store closed. In 1900 the telephone company occupied a portion of the upstairs of the Shinn Building and later expanded into the rest of the upstairs where it remained until 1958. Opening in 1910, the Russellville Electric Theater was located in the western portion of the Shinn Building, and by 1913 the eastern portion was occupied by the Twice-a-week Record printing shop (newspaper). In the 1920s a filling station was located in the western storefront with a drive-thru on the corner. The gas station was removed in 1943 and the corner rebricked and enclosed as it was originally. In 1930 Arkansas Power & Light opened their offices in the building and remained until 1965.

By the late 20th century, the Shinn Building was covered with stucco and the windows boarded. It was in really bad shape. The building was rehabbed in 1996 and the stucco removed. Now it looks great. Notice the bolts next to the second story windows where the shutters used to be—tool to prevent the spread of fires.

Ghost sign on building's east side reads, "McArthur and Henry Meat Market. Selz Royal Shoe \$3.50. Twice a Week Record." The building also has cast iron storefront components manufactured by T. R. Pullis out of St. Louis.

Empty lot to east of Shinn Building

This was the site of an air dome theater, where patrons paid to walk through a small brick building containing a ticket window, concession stand, and projector room. This building was not very deep, and once you walked through it, you came out into an open air courtyard, where you sat down to watch a movie. A separate brick structure was built at the rear of the lot and had the screen on it (like a drive-

in, but you walked in). Then a 2-story building was constructed here about 1915 and housed the Wilson Theatre, Community Theatre, and later the Ritz Theatre. No longer extant.

Point to intersection of Denver & Main—in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, there was a public well with a pump and open trough in the middle of the intersection of Denver & Main and at Commerce & Main. There was also a bandstand at the intersection of Commerce & Main.

Back to S. Denver Street

Old Post Office (Federal Building)—C

Built in 1925 to serve as a U.S. Post Office. James A. Wetmore was the supervising architect. The Colonial Revival-style building housed Russellville's post office until 1963. Now it is a Federal Building.

At 2nd Street, take a left (go west) and head toward the Masonic Temple (city hall). Second Street was formerly David Street.

Russellville Masonic Temple—IL on NR 6/1/05

Built in 1926-1927 by Russellville Lodge No. 274, the Masonic Temple historically housed city offices and other businesses on the first floor and the Masonic Temple on the second floor. The building cost about \$40,000 to construct, and Haralson and Nelson of Ft. Smith were the architects. The first floor occupants included Russellville City Hall, the fire station (large arched windows on north side were originally openings for fire trucks), the Chamber of Commerce, Smith-Tucker Candy Company, Vance Electric Company, and Dr. A. J. Caisson, dentist. From 1927 to 1943 the City of Russellville rented space on the first floor from the Masons, but in 1943 the City purchased the building, and then the Masons paid rent to the City of Russellville. The fire department moved next door (to the east) in 1977 when a new fire station was completed for them. The city police department, including a small jail, moved out of the Masonic Temple about 1980, and relocated to N. El Paso.

The City received a grant from the AHPP to re-install historically appropriate windows that had previously been removed. This made the building eligible for the National Register. The building has recently undergone an extensive renovation project, and now Russellville City Hall will occupy the entire building.

Mayor Bill Eaton will tell us about the project and give us a tour.

Refreshments served at City Hall—thank Mayor Eaton and Main Street Russellville.

Walk east on 2nd Street & cut through bank drive-thru to get to Burris Park at SW corner of Main & Arkansas Ave. (Hwy. 7 and before that, Oak Street).

Burris Memorial Plaza

A memorial to the 6 Russellville residents who died in an airplane crash in LR on June 1, 1999. The Burris family donated the land for the plaza. The six benches and 6 sections of the pergola represent those who lost their lives. Main Street Russellville does the upkeep and pays the utilities.

Historically, there were 2 buildings on the site of this memorial park. The building at the SW corner of Main & Arkansas Ave. was occupied by Taylor Tire Company and also housed a filling station. Vance Title Company was located to the west of Taylor Tire Co. for 52 years before moving across Main Street to its current location. [The building currently occupied by Burris Office Products on Arkansas Avenue was a Ford Motor Company.]

Pope County Courthouse—C

Built in 1931 to replace the 1888 Romanesque-style courthouse on the same site. Designed in the Art Deco style by LR architect H. Ray Burks. He designed several Art Deco-style courthouses in Arkansas (for example, the Arkansas County Courthouse, Southern District, in DeWitt). This courthouse originally had a flat roof, true to the Art Deco style. It was later replaced by the current hipped roof.

Main Street going west

105-107-109 W. Main—C (going west)

105 W. Main—Martin Building, 1910. Housed a second hand store, soft drink warehouse, and by the mid-20th century Crow Burlingame Auto Parts.

107 W. Main—W. P. F. Building, 1910 (W. P. Ferguson). Housed a restaurant and an undertaker in the early 20th century.

109 W. Main—R. L. Jenkins, 1915. Housed a bank.

Boulder Street was Torrence Street. Cross Boulder.

South side of Main Street between Boulder and Commerce—The Bank of America Building was constructed in 1980 to house the Peoples Bank and Trust Company. Historic buildings used to line this entire block, most notably the 3-story, Queen Anne-style building on the southeast corner of Main & Commerce. It was built ca. 1895 for the Peoples Exchange Bank (later the Peoples Bank and Trust Co.) and featured a beautiful corner turret. The post office was located in the rear portion of this building. It is no longer extant. [There was a fire in the bank building in 1936, and it lost its 3rd story.]

North side of Main, going west from courthouse

200 W. Main—NC

Built 1911. Housed a grocery store and then was Campbell's Drug Store by the 1930s. The upstairs was used as the headquarters for the Ozark National Forest when the office relocated from Ft. Smith. Dr. Don Harkey's dentist office was upstairs in the 1950s.

204 W. Main—NC (Vance Title)

Was originally two 2-story buildings constructed in 1891. The east building was rock and the west building was brick. The east building was the first stone building constructed in Russellville, and you can still see the stone at the back of the building. The east side (right) was Tate and Peeler's General Store, and the west side (left) was Love and Roy's Hardware. It is now home to Vance Title Co., which has been operated since 1906 by the Vance family in Russellville (3 generations—Will David Vance, Alfred Vance, and now David Vance) and occupied about 6 different locations downtown, including its current building.

208 & 212 W. Main—NC (two 1-story buildings—Rendezvous & River Valley Martial Arts)

Built ca. 1900. NC because of slipcover and façade alterations. Kroger was located in both of these 1-story buildings. Then Sterling moved into these buildings, and

Kroger moved to a location in the parking lot behind Regions Bank and faced south toward the Methodist church.

214 & 216 W. Main—C (Faulkner and Jenkins Buildings)

Both built in 1924. In the early 20th century, buildings on this site housed grocery and clothing stores. The Faulkner Building was a jewelry store (still see Faulkner's in the tile by the door).

220 W. Main—C (Bank of Russellville)

Built in 1906 immediately following the fire. This Romanesque-influenced building housed the Bank of Russellville, and a drug store was located in the eastern portion, facing Main.

From corner of Main & Commerce (previously Jefferson Street), point out Captain R. J. Wilson Building and then cross Main Street to go N on Commerce.

SW corner of Main & Commerce—R. J. Wilson Building—NC

Built in 1882 by Captain R. J. Wilson to house his general merchandise store. The building is thought to be the second brick building constructed in Russellville, and is among the oldest buildings in the district (although it has been altered with a stucco veneer). The first floor was occupied by Wilson's general merchandise store, and county business was conducted on the second floor of this building until the courthouse was completed in 1888. The Wilson Building originally featured more elaborate hood molding over the second story windows and a decorative pressed metal parapet. The building was recently rehabilitated and now has residential units on the upper floor.

Cross Main & go N on Commerce

101-103 N. Commerce—Lindley Drug Store Building—C

Built shortly after the fire of 1906, which destroyed everything in this immediate vicinity (see photo on plaque on this building's south wall). Early on, this building housed a dry goods store, boots and shoes store, and a meat market. The building may have been remodeled in 1928 (based on the year above the front entrance). By 1946 this building housed a bank, and it was later a drug store.

103 A & 105 N. Commerce—C

Kroom's was at 105 N. Commerce before Leflar's occupied 103 A and 105 N. Commerce. Leflar's was a ladies clothing store/department store. It is now located in the Russellville City Mall.

Cast iron storefront columns on 103, 105, 107 N. Commerce say "Russellville Foundry." The foundry was located near the NE corner of El Paso & Parkway.

109 N. Commerce—Beauty College—NC

Was Scott's Dime Store. Then T, G & Y bought out Scott's.

115 N. Commerce—C

Campbell's Shoes moved from Main Street to this building. Then it became Campbell-Thacker Shoes, and finally, Thacker Shoes.

121 N. Commerce—C & D Drug Store—C

Built in 1887 by Dr. William Brooks, who used the drug store primarily as a retail outlet for his patent medicines. He manufactured things like laxative chill tonic, vegetable liver medicine, favorite female prescription, cranium hair food & dandruff care, baby bowel balm, and Brooks Baby Elixir. In 1891 Brooks sold the business to his associate, Louis Hood, a pharmacist from Chicago. The business then became Hood Drug Store. The northern portion of the building has been a drug store since its construction (the other part was a jewelry store). This is the only building in this block that survived the fire of 1906.

SE corner of Commerce & B**118 N. Commerce—Leonard's—C**

Former location of Leonard's Hardware. H. W. Patrick and Jesse F. Leonard established the Patrick-Leonard Hardware & Furniture Store in 1902. Their first store was located at 216 N. Jefferson (now Commerce). The partnership was dissolved in 1914. Mr. Patrick opened a store on Main Street, and the Leonards moved their store to 118-120 N. Commerce and stayed until 1929, when the

furniture part was sold off and the hardware store consolidated into this building (118 N. Commerce). The store was operated by several generations of the Leonard family but is now closed.

Cross B Street

See some original rock curbing by Peter's Family Living.

203 N. Commerce (west side of street)—has columns from Russellville Foundry.

Hole in the west side of the 200 block of N. Commerce—There was a 1-story building with 2 storefronts here that burned. It was the former location of Harkey Shoe Store and later Pennington Shoe Store. Fire destroyed the building, but Ruben Pope's shoe shine stand survived the blaze and is preserved at the depot museum. Pope operated the shoe shine stand in the store from 1940 to 1980.

212 N. Commerce—tallest part of Peter's Family Living—C

Before this building was constructed, there was a livery stable here. In 1886 it was the Oates and Oates Livery, and by 1892 it was the Rankin Oates Livery. The current Italianate-style building was constructed about 1900 and housed Dr. William Brooks's patent medicine manufacturing plant. By 1919 the building housed part of the W. H. Norwood Wholesale Grocery Company, and in 1929 it was the Farris-Walthall Inc. Wholesale Grocery.

215 N. Commerce—J. W. White Building—C

Built in 1930 by J. W. White, brother to W. J. "Bud" White. This was his general merchandise store. The Whites were prominent merchants, bankers, and investors in the coal mining industry.