

**Walks through History
Downtown Van Buren:
Drennen-Scott Historic Site, Van Buren Historic District & Fairview
Cemetery
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By: Rachel Silva**



Intro

Hi, my name is Rachel Silva, and I work for the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, an agency of the Department of Arkansas Heritage. Welcome to the Walks through History tour of Downtown Van Buren! Today we have a very full schedule. We'll start here at the Drennen-Scott Historic Site, ride the bus down to the courthouse and walk through the commercial district, and then board the bus again to head up to Fairview Cemetery.

Before we get started, I want to thank several people for their help with the tour: Maryl Koeth, Director of the Van Buren Advertising & Promotion Commission (who could not be here today); Tom Wing, Director of the Drennen-Scott Historic Site and Assistant Professor of History at UAFS; Vickie Davis, Chair of the VB Historic District Commission & provider of school bus transportation; Dwight Hopkins, local historian and Vice-Chair of the VB Historic District Commission; and last but not least, Randy Smith, award-winning cemetery preservation advocate and coordinator of Fairview Cemetery's Tales of the Crypt program.

Early History of Van Buren

Crawford County was created in 1820 by Arkansas's Territorial Legislature and was named in honor of William Harris Crawford of Georgia, then-U.S. Secretary of the Treasury. Around 1818 or 1819 Thomas Martin claimed squatter's rights to the present-day site of Van Buren. In the late 1820s, Revolutionary War veteran James Phillips arrived with his two sons, Thomas and David (sometimes called Daniel). The Phillips family established a wood yard to provide fuel for steamboats on the Arkansas River. This turned out to be a very lucrative business, and the site became known as Phillips Landing. In 1830 Thomas and David Phillips purchased Mr. Martin's rights to the land. The following year a post office was established at Phillips Landing, and the U.S. Postal Service named the office "Van Buren" after Martin Van Buren, then-Secretary of State under President Andrew Jackson (and later President of the U.S. from 1837 to 1841). Consequently, the settlement was soon known as Van Buren, instead of Phillips Landing.

In 1836, the year of Arkansas's statehood, the Phillips brothers sold the site of Van Buren to John Drennen and his brother-in-law, David Thompson, for \$11,000. Drennen and Thompson surveyed and platted the town of Van Buren and donated Block 14 of the Original Town of Van Buren for the construction of a courthouse. In 1838 this donation secured Van Buren's position as the Crawford County seat. David Thompson died unexpectedly in September 1838, leaving his business partner and town co-founder, John Drennen, one of the most wealthy and prominent residents of Van Buren.

Due to steamboat traffic on the Arkansas River, Van Buren became an important commercial center, providing goods to northwest Arkansas and Indian Territory. Van Buren incorporated in 1845. During the California Gold Rush of 1849, Van Buren was a popular jumping off point for prospectors traveling west. After the Gold Rush, there was a need for a means to transport mail, supplies, and people to the West Coast in a timely manner. In 1858 John Butterfield's Butterfield Overland Express, a stagecoach route which ran from St. Louis to Springfield, down through Fayetteville to Van Buren and Ft. Smith, and southwesterly to California, reached Van Buren for the first time. [The Butterfield Express operated until 1861, when it was put out of business by the Pony Express, Western Union's transcontinental telegraph line, and railroads.]

The Little Rock & Fort Smith Railroad reached Van Buren in 1876, followed by the St. Louis & San Francisco or "Frisco" Railroad in 1882. In 1886 the Frisco Bridge over the Arkansas River at Van Buren opened (and was rebuilt in 1913-

1914 to carry heavier rail traffic; second bridge repaired after damage from 1943 flood; also retrofitted with new lift span ca. 1970 to comply with regulations of the McClellan-Kerr Arkansas River Navigation System).

By 1892 a “Union” depot, serving both the Little Rock & Ft. Smith and Frisco railroads was built on S. 2nd St. between Main and Webster. The Frisco built a separate freight depot near Main & Cane Hill. The 1890s also brought Van Buren’s first water works and electric light plant.

A new Frisco passenger depot was built in 1901-1902 at the corner of Main & Fayetteville Rd. (Hwy. 59)—still extant. In 1906 the LR & Ft. Smith RR became the St. Louis, Iron Mountain & Southern. Main Street was first paved in 1908. About 1910 a new Iron Mountain passenger depot was built at the intersection of S. 2nd & Broad (later Broadway) streets. In 1917 the Iron Mountain became Missouri Pacific or “Mo-Pac.”

[In 1912 the Van Buren-Fort Smith Free Bridge was constructed over the AR River to handle the streetcar, private vehicles, and pedestrians. It ran across the river at Jefferson Street. But between 1969 and 1971, the Free Bridge was removed and replaced with the current Broadway (Hwy. 64) Bridge to comply with regulations of the McClellan-Kerr AR River Navigation System. At this time, the 1910 Mo-Pac Depot was demolished. The bridge piers on the VB side are located on the former site of the Mo-Pac Depot.]

Because of its location near river, rail, and highway transportation, Van Buren continues to serve as an important shipping center today. Keep in mind that at one time, John Drennen owned all of the land that we’ll be on today. We start at his home, move on to the commercial district, which he donated/sold lots for, and end at Fairview Cemetery, land which he donated to the city for a public cemetery and his final resting place.

Drennen-Scott House (National Register-listed w/ local significance 8/10/1971 & upgraded to national significance in 2005).

Tom Wing, Director of Drennen-Scott Historic Site

D-S will be open today until 5:00 p.m. if you would like to return this afternoon for a complete tour.

Van Buren Historic District (NR-listed 4/30/1976)

Shibley & Wood Grocery Company Building, SW corner of Main & S. 3rd

Built ca. 1890 to house the wholesale grocery business of Civil War veteran William Henry Harrison Shibley and H. C. Wood. According to the 1898 edition of *Headlight Flashes*, published to promote Van Buren because it was located on the Frisco RR line, Shibley & Wood kept 5 traveling representatives on the road at all times, covering towns within a 100-mile radius of VB. The company carried good quality merchandise and had a reputation for honest dealings. Between 1904 and 1909 this became the Ft. Smith Wholesale Grocery Co., and it remained a grocery warehouse until at least 1930. By 1948 it was a furniture factory. Retains its original pressed metal cornice reading "Shibley & Wood."

Crawford County Courthouse

Built in 1841-1842. From Spring 1851 to Spring 1871, the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Arkansas was located at Van Buren and held court in the Crawford Co. Courthouse (district court moved to Ft. Smith in March 1871). Crawford County Courthouse burned on March 23, 1877, shortly after midnight. Fire thought to be arson; someone was trying to avoid prosecution for a crime. In 1877, with the courthouse in ruins, Alma tried to take the county seat from VB; however, people voted to keep it in VB. Courthouse was rebuilt in 1878 using the original four exterior walls, which were still intact. The clock tower replaced an original cupola. Kept the original Italianate-style design with hood molding over the windows and paired brackets at the cornice.

In 1905 side wings and portico added to building. A second addition to the rear of the original courthouse was done in 1940 at the cost of \$98,000, and housed a new county jail facility.

Old Crawford County Jail

Built 1892. Served as jail until 1940 when addition w/ jail built onto rear of courthouse. Was later used as county government office space.

Albert Pike Schoolhouse

Built about 1820 and originally stood about one mile east of VB off Kibler Road. Well-known Arkansas poet, writer, lawyer, Mason, and Mexican War and Civil

War veteran Albert Pike taught school in this building in 1832. Additions were put on original one-room building and it served as a private residence. In 1936 Mrs. Maude Henderson purchased the building and had it moved to a location on Hwy. 71 north of Mountainburg, where it was restored and opened as the Albert Pike Museum. In 1974 it was relocated to the grounds of the Crawford Co. Courthouse.

Confederate Monument (NR-listed 4/26/1996)

Italian marble monument erected in 1899 by the Mary Lee Chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy to honor fallen Confederate soldiers. Monument is topped by Confederate soldier holding a rifle and shielding his eyes from the sun. Inscription reads: 1899 / FURLED BUT NOT FORGOTTEN / 1861 C.S.A. 1865. / ERECTED BY THE / MARY LEE CHAPTER / UNITED DAUGHTERS / OF THE / CONFEDERACY.

BATTLES / OAK HILL / AUG. 10, 1861. / ELK HORN / MARCH 6 TO 8, 1862. / PRAIRIE GROVE / DEC. 7, 1862. / CAPT. S. CHURCHILL CLARKE / MISSOURI BATTERY NO. 2 / KILLED AT ELK HORN. / MARCH 6, 1862, / AGED 20 YEARS.

THE CONFEDERATE STATES OF AMERICA: 22 FEBRUARY 1862 / DEO VINDICE / HE WINS THE MOST WHO HONOR SAVES / SUCCESS IS NOT THE TEST. RYAN. / FATE DENIED THEM VICTORY, BUT / CROWNED THEM WITH GLORIOUS IMMORTALITY.

TO OUR / BELOVED / CONFEDERATE / DEAD. / ARKANSAS / TEXAS / LOUISIANA / MISSOURI / INDIAN TERRITORY.

The monument was originally placed in Fairview Cemetery over the grave of Capt. S. Churchill Clarke, who was killed at Elk Horn at the age of 20. His brother was one of the project's biggest donors and requested this be done. In August 1906 the monument was relocated to the courthouse grounds at the request of the Sons of the Confederacy.

Hebe Fountain

Hebe, Greek goddess of youth and cupbearer to the gods (thus her position holding a pitcher), was a popular stock statue used in late 19th and early 20th century gardens and landscaping. The original Hebe statue and fountain was installed on the courthouse grounds in 1908 by the Women's Village Improvement Society. In

recent years (dedication in 2003), the Women's League of Van Buren raised money to replace the original Hebe statue and restore what was left of the fountain.

300 block, Main St., north side (across from courthouse)

In early 20th century, this block was occupied by a large livery stable (later an auto garage) and the Van Buren Bottling Works. Now site of new jail facility (built 1991).

Going Northeast along Main Street toward Frisco Depot...

400 Block, Main St.

Notice many buildings in this block (both sides of street) with cast-iron storefront components stamped "Van Buren Foundry 1895." The VB Foundry & Machine Shop was located at the NE corner of Water & Washington streets by 1892.

402 Main

This corner long occupied by a hotel—1886, Collins Hotel; Tallman House, 1904; Hotel Rosa, 1909; New Commercial Hotel, 1914; Commercial Hotel, 1922. Hotel buildings demolished in late 1920s. Current building constructed ca. 1940 and was the Rhodes Chevrolet dealership.

412-418 Main; row of 4 identical storefronts

Built in late 1890s. Storefronts housed a variety of businesses, including a tailor, confectionary, undertaker, plumbing company, etc. Interesting brickwork on parapet—feature a peaked (or raised) parapet with brick corbelling.

411 Main

Fire Department (1909)

413 Main

Post Office from about 1904 to 1910, when it moved to 500 Main.

415 Main

Built ca. 1895. Housed the Farmers Hotel upstairs and 2 retail spaces downstairs. Upstairs access was provided by a central stairway. Front façade partially collapsed and was rebuilt prior to 1985.

King Opera House

Built 1891. Known as the Wallace Block. Purchased by H. P. King in 1898. In 1901 King opened the building as an opera house. The interior was again remodeled ca. 1905 to accommodate a larger auditorium with balcony. From the 1920s to the 1940s, movies were shown at the old opera house. The building currently operates as a stage theater.

*500 Block, Main St.—point out stone curbing along Main Street**500 Main*

Post office located here from about 1910 until 1936, when new (and current) Van Buren Post Office built on S. 7th Street. The 1936 Post Office is listed on the NR of HP (8/14/1998) because it contained a mural financed by the U.S. Treasury Department's Section on Fine Arts, which put Depression-era artists to work. The VB Post Office on S. 7th also has interesting cast-concrete detailing on its exterior featuring airplane propellers (only other one I have seen like this is in Magnolia, AR).

510, 512, 514 Main

Built ca. 1895. Elaborate brickwork on 510 Main's upper façade. Has VB Foundry columns. Housed part of the Merrill Bros. Meat Market. 512 Main appears to be an enclosed alley, but the building also dates to about 1895. Was a barber shop at one time before becoming part of the Merrill Bros. Meat Market. 514 Main has interesting arched façade with a recessed storefront. This was also part of the Merrill Bros. Meat Market.

509-511 Main

Built ca. 1895. Housed a cobbler and ladies' furnishings business as well as a barber and pool hall in the other storefront. Was historically occupied by C. K. Ingeberg Books & Stationery, which also sold musical instruments, wall paper, and

products of the American Tobacco Company. Notice original cast-iron columns on storefront (not columns on awning).

Interesting to note that 519-523 Main (1-story building with glass awning) was originally two separate buildings. 519 was a 3-story building (still see cast-iron columns) and 521-523 was a 2-story building. Upper stories removed and new façade added in mid-20th century (probably 1960s w/ more modern awning).

522 Main (metal slipcover)

Look back and see ghost sign on side of 522 Main reading “Bryan Cash Grocery.” The Bryans also operated a barber shop in the building.

600 Block, Main St. (most significant block architecturally)

601-603 Main

Built ca. 1880. Housed F. G. Kerr’s Drug Store and the Steward Shoe Company on the first floor with doctor’s offices on the second floor. Has exterior stairway, pressed metal cornice, and hood molding over 2nd story windows.

600-604 Main, Anheuser-Busch Building

Built ca. 1900. By about 1895 there was an Anheuser-Busch Beer Depot located on N. 5th Street behind the King Opera House. The operation later moved to this location on Main Street. Notice the unique “A” and eagle trademark on the front façade.

610 Main, Edmondson Building, 1895

Built in 1895. See elaborate pressed metal cornice above storefront AND pressed metal ceiling on the awning itself. This building was home to Edmondson & Britt Grocers for many years.

605-607 Main

Built about 1915. Interesting because it is not Victorian in style like most of the other buildings in this block. Housed George Miller’s Confectionery.

612 Main

Built about 1896. Housed the Boston Store, which sold dry goods, boots & shoes, clothing, and carpets. Notice the terra cotta cornice and patterned detailing on the front façade.

614-616-618 Main

Excellent examples of the Italianate style in a commercial district with pressed metal cornices and hood molding over second story windows. Buildings date from the 1870s with the exception of the two easternmost (lefthand side) windows on 616. As originally constructed, 614 was 4 windows wide. There was a small space, and then 618 was constructed. Ca. 1890 the small space was infilled with a building and the façade designed to match the other two—and a small portion of 614 was merged with the new infill building (to create the current 3 windows on both 614 and 616). 614 was Faber Grocery Store, 616 was Van Buren Hardware Company, and 618 was Pape & Son Dry Goods.

627 Main, Citizen's Bank, 1886

Built in 1886 to house Citizen's Bank (before the building at 624 Main was completed in 1905). Beautiful building with corbelling and peaked parapet with finials. A telephone exchange was located on the second floor from 1898 until 1930, and the third floor was a lodge hall. After the bank moved across the street, the first floor of this building was occupied by a jeweler.

633 Main, Crawford County Bank, 1889

Built in 1889 to house Crawford County Bank. Beautiful Queen Anne-style building with a corner turret, elaborate terra cotta and brick detailing, and patterned slate shingles on the third floor. The Crawford County Bank was the first to open in Van Buren after the Civil War (established in another building in 1882). Third floor was lodge hall for International Order of Odd Fellows.

624 Main, Citizen's Bank, 1905

Built in 1905 for Citizen's Bank, which had been located across the street previously. Distinctive building with chamfered corner entrance and arched window and door openings with stained glass transoms (or fanlights). Also

beautiful use of rusticated stone in the arches. In recent memory, this building housed Palace Drug Store.

700 Block, Main St.

Look south down S. 7th Street to see 1936-37 U.S. Post Office.

701 Main, Wood Building, 1887

Built in 1887, likely by H. C. Wood or his brother, Jesse Wood, who went into the grocery business together as Wood Bros. and later partnered with W. H. H. Shibley in the Shibley & Wood Grocery Company (back in the 200 block of Main). This building at 701 Main was occupied by the Southmayd-Wood Dry Goods Company and later the Southmayd-Miller Dry Goods Co., which sold dry goods, boots & shoes, clothing, carpets, etc. Italianate-style pressed metal cornice and hood molding on building. The cast-iron columns were made by Ketchum Iron Co. of Ft. Smith.

711 Main, F & AM & KP

Built ca. 1895. Parapet reads Free & Accepted Masons and Knights of Pythias. These fraternal organizations met on the upper floors of the building, which was also known as the Temple Building. The first floor was occupied by a variety of businesses, including the McKinney-Rea Dry Goods Store (by 1898) and a hardware store. The building is missing its original pressed metal parapet and finials (1895 was printed on the missing parapet).

Empty lot & pocket park on south side of 700 block (former site of 714-716-718 Main)

Three buildings on this site were heavily damaged and destroyed by a truck accident in the summer of 1985 (truck coming down “Logtown Hill” or Fayetteville Road and hit buildings). This tragic accident claimed the lives of 9 people.

713-719 Main (now Sisters Gourmet Bistro)

All three buildings were constructed ca. 1895. The buildings at 713 and 715-717 have Mesker cast-iron and pressed metal storefront components (made by the Mesker Bros. Front Builders of St. Louis). In the late 19th century 713 was the H.

C. Johnson Drug Store, and 715-717 (middle building of the three) was H. C. Pernot's Queen's Ware Store (Queen's Ware is cream-colored, glazed earthenware or tableware—first created in 18th century England by Wedgwood—they're still in business and have beautiful china). Pernot also sold lamps, glassware, and picture framing supplies. 719 was historically a Racket Store (variety store).

721-723 Main

Built ca. 1895. Has 5 sides. It housed a bank for many years (which one?), a restaurant, photography studio, and most notably, the offices of the American Railway Express Company. Its original brick façade was stuccoed about 1910. Still retains its limestone porticos with triangular pediments.

812-814 Main

Interesting 2-story building with ocular windows and pressed metal cornice. Central staircase provides access to upper floor from sidewalk. Built about 1910 and housed a grocery business on the first floor (probably professional offices or living quarters upstairs). Does anyone know more?

1901-02 Frisco Depot

Built by St. Louis & San Francisco Railroad in 1901 and 1902. Continued regular passenger service out of depot until at least the late 1960s. Later purchased by the City of VB and restored. Good example of a Mediterranean-style depot, which features a red tile roof, widely overhanging eaves, and triangular knee braces under the eaves.

Fairview Cemetery (NR-listed 6/01/2005)

In 1846 John Drennen donated 10 acres of his land to the City of Van Buren for use as a public cemetery; however, people were buried here much earlier, with the first marked grave dating to 1816. Many of Van Buren's early settlers are buried at Fairview, and the cemetery contains excellent examples of 19th and early 20th century funerary art.

Fairview Cemetery, Confederate Section (NR-listed 12/6/1996)

In 1861 the City of Van Buren donated a plot on which to bury Confederate soldiers who died in VB or whose remains were brought there from regional

battlefields. About 100 Confederate soldiers were buried here during the Civil War and others were reburied after being removed from their battlefield graves. There are about 442 simple marble markers on the lot, ordered by the Mary Lee Chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy from the U.S. Government. Markers faced south (symbolic for Confederate dead; loyal to the Southern cause) and were slightly pointed on the top (to prevent Union soldiers—or anyone, for that matter—from resting on a marker).

Drennen Plot & other items

We'll talk about the Drennen family plot today, which contains white marble monuments set on limestone bases. The large monuments feature urns (immortality), draped urns (mourning), and inverted torches (life extinguished). Some of these monuments have hidden compartments.

Also point out the Wallace Children's Monument (grant from AHPP), restored carriage steps (Norton Arts, 2009), and mystery grave.

Tales of the Crypt, an event where UAFS historical interpretation students portray individuals buried in Fairview Cemetery, started in 2006 and has been extremely successful in raising funds for the cemetery.

Cemetery preservation workshops held in Fairview, and now a total of 134 monuments have been adopted and conservation cleaned.

Fairview Cemetery was included in the AETN documentary *Silent Storytellers* (2010).

Randy Smith has been a funeral director for 32 years. He currently works at Edwards Van-Alma Funeral Home. In 2009 Smith was the recipient of the Historic Preservation Alliance of Arkansas's award for Outstanding Achievement in Preservation Advocacy.

August 2011—lights installed at Fairview Cemetery. Repurposed light poles.