

**Walks through History
Downtown Texarkana
Begin at U.S. Post Office & Courthouse
May 19, 2012
By: Rachel Silva**



Intro

Hi, my name is Rachel Silva, and I work for the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, which is one of 7 agencies in the Department of Arkansas Heritage. Our agency works to document and preserve Arkansas's historic and cultural resources. Welcome to the Walks through History tour of Historic Downtown Texarkana! I'd like to thank Nita Fran Hutcheson, executive director of Main Street Texarkana, and Dr. Beverly Rowe for their help with the tour. Dr. Rowe and her students have done a tremendous amount of research on the buildings in downtown Texarkana, and their work was invaluable to me as I prepared for the tour. Today we'll walk down State Line Avenue to Union Station, discussing the architecture and former occupants of the buildings, and then work our way back here. You will then have the option to walk or drive over to the Arkansas Municipal Auditorium (Texarkana Municipal Building, built 1927-1930; National Register-listed 2004), where Beth Johnson will give us a short tour.

History of Texarkana

Miller County was first established on April 1, 1820, by the Arkansas Territorial Legislature and was named after Arkansas's first territorial governor, James Miller (1819-1825). It included most of present-day Miller County as well as parts of 11

different counties in Texas. This was problematic because most of east Texas was under Mexican control at that time. In 1836 Texas declared its independence from Mexico, leading Arkansas to abolish the first Miller County in 1838. In December 1874 Miller County was recreated from part of Lafayette County, and Texarkana was named the county seat. In 1873 the Cairo & Fulton Railroad met the Texas & Pacific Railroad at the Arkansas-Texas border. Texarkana, a combination of the words Texas, Arkansas, and Louisiana, was established at the junction of the railroad lines. In 1873 and 1874 the railroad companies divided the land into lots and blocks; the Texas & Pacific owned and platted the Texas side, while the Cairo & Fulton owned and platted the Arkansas side. Texarkana, TX, was incorporated in 1873, followed in 1880 by Texarkana, AR. State Line Avenue, the towns' main street, is the boundary between Arkansas and Texas. Colonel Rollin W. Rodgers secured a 50-foot wide strip of land from each railroad company in order to make State Line Avenue 100 feet wide. State Line Ave. runs north and south through town, but the railroad companies platted the blocks in a grid, starting at the railroad tracks, which run southwest to northeast, and because of this, there are several unique angled blocks along State Line Ave. In the early 20th century, Texarkana was served by as many as 9 railroad companies, which transported people and shipped the area's agricultural and timber products around the country. The two cities have separate municipal governments but often work together. [Texarkana, TX, is larger than Texarkana, AR. Texas side population is about 36,500, while the Arkansas side population is about 30,000.]

U.S. Post Office and Courthouse (NR-listed 2000)

In 1893 a Romanesque-style, red brick building was constructed on this site to serve as a post office and courthouse for both towns. "Old Red" sat on a square block along with the Central Christian Church and five large homes. But in 1925, Congressman Otis Wingo secured funding for the renovation of Old Red. By 1930 the federal government decided to demolish Old Red and the other buildings on the block to build a larger post office and courthouse. And the traffic pattern was changed so vehicles drove around the courthouse like a roundabout.

Completed in 1933, the Texarkana U.S. Post Office and Courthouse is the only building of its type situated in two states. It was designed by the local architectural firm of Witt, Seibert, and Halsey in association with the firm of Perkins, Chatten, and Hammond of Chicago. The firms worked under the guidance of James A. Wetmore, supervising architect for the treasury department. The building is Neoclassical in style with four Ionic columns, a projecting cornice with dentils, the use of rusticated stone on the first level, and entrance doors set in deep stone

archways. The building's foundation is made of Texas pink granite, while the walls are Arkansas limestone, truly representing both states.

World War I Monument—located in Sheppard Park just to the west of the post office and courthouse building. Erected in 1936 by the Texarkana Memorial Unit, a group of women, to honor and memorialize citizens of Bowie County, Texas, and Miller County, Arkansas, who served and died in WWI. Part of the monument text reads, “They and their comrades fought not for selfish gain nor for one foot of added territory but for the highest ideal ever upheld by man—the peace of the world.”

Texarkana Confederate Monument—erected in 1918 after Captain James T. Rosborough, a local Civil War veteran, spearheaded the construction of a monument to honor Confederate veterans as well as their mothers. The marble figures were carved in Italy, and the base and canopy were made by Allen Monuments of Texarkana. The monument text reads, “O great Confederate Mothers. We would paint your names on monuments that men may read them as the years go by and tribute pay to you, who bore and nurtured hero sons and gave them solace on that darkest day, when they came home, with broken swords and guns!”

West side of State Line Avenue going south—walk on the east side of the street (Arkansas side)

St. James Episcopal Church—the congregation of St. James Episcopal Church was organized between 1876 and 1878 and constructed a church on land donated by the Texas & Pacific Railroad. By 1893 they needed a bigger building, so the church constructed a wood-frame Gothic Revival-style building on this site at the corner of Olive & W. 5th. In 1927 a new brick Gothic Revival-style church was built and incorporated part of the 1893 building. So what you see today dates from 1927. Excellent example of the Gothic Revival style with its corner turret topped by a tall spire, pointed arch (lancet) windows, and steeply pitched roof with stone-capped parapets.

Anderson Insurance Building at 409-411 State Line—built in the 1930s and designed by the architectural firm of Witt, Seibert, and Halsey. Has an interesting Craftsman-style tile awning. The building was constructed by Leslie Anderson to house Anderson Insurance Company. It later housed physicians' offices and the office for Economy Gas Company. Boy Scout dances were also held on the second floor of the building. The building remained in the Anderson family until 2000,

when it was sold to St. James Episcopal Church, which renovated the building in 2003 to serve as its parish center.

First Methodist Church—the congregation of the First Methodist Church was organized in 1874 and met in a building at the corner of 6th and Olive. By 1876 the church felt that it was too far from the center of Texarkana, so Col. F. M. Henry donated a site at the corner of State Line and 4th. A wood-frame church was built here in 1878 and served the congregation until 1903, when a \$50,000 brick church was constructed on this corner. The current church building was constructed in 1959 and is another good example of Gothic Revival-style architecture in downtown Texarkana.

Cross 4th Street

Rialto-Harrell Building—In February 1889 Benjamin Foreman organized the Interstate Land and Building Company, and in 1902 his company began construction of the Rialto Building. The building features a unique staggered design and includes some Classical detailing in its projecting cornice with dentils and entrances set into recessed arches. Throughout its history, the building has had a variety of occupants. It originally housed a dressmaker, apartments, and a real estate office. By 1920 the building was listed as The Rialto and offered furnished rooms for rent. In the early 1930s it became known as the Clinic Building because it housed a variety of shops and offices on the first floor and the Texarkana Medical & Surgical Clinic on the second and third floors. By the 1950s it was known as the Medical Arts Building because the Medical Arts Pharmacy was located there. Physicians Noble Daniel and William Harrell were involved with the Medical Arts Pharmacy, and in the 1960s and 70s, the building was called the Daniel-Harrell Clinic Building. The building remains in the Harrell family today.

Hotel Grim—In the early part of the twentieth century, before the Hotel Grim was constructed, there was an Airdome Theater on the north end of this triangular block. Airdome Theaters were set up to work like a drive-in theater, but you walked in instead. And instead of watching a movie on a screen, you watched live performances on a stage. In the early 1920s, a group of Texarkana businessmen put together a plan to construct an elegant hotel that would serve train passengers and important visitors. William Rhoads Grim, president of Texarkana National Bank and director of the Kansas City Southern Railroad, died while the hotel was still in the planning stages. So the hotel committee named the building in his honor. The Hotel Grim was built in 1924 and 1925, opening on July 15, 1925. The 8-story hotel was designed by the Little Rock firm of George R. Mann and Eugene John

Stern and featured an exterior of stone, brick, and stucco and a roof of Spanish tile. The hotel is shaped in a “V” to best fit on the triangular lot. It contained 250 guest rooms, an elaborately decorated lobby, a dining room, coffee shop, palm court, and roof garden. Due to the decline of passenger rail service and the construction of motels close to Interstate 30, the Hotel Grim closed in October 1990. The hotel still has its sign on the roof, reading, “Hotel Grim.”

Offenhauser Building—The Offenhauser Building is located on an island bounded by 3rd, State Line, and Pine streets. It was built in 1879 and is thought to be Texarkana’s first (or maybe oldest remaining?) brick building. The original building housed First National Bank, also known as Hake Bank, after the owner, W. H. Hake. Sometime in the 1880s, Hake sold the building to William A. Kelsey and Frederick William Offenhauser, who used it to house their insurance firm, Kelsey & Offenhauser. The building has been modified over the years, but you can still see some of its Romanesque-style features like the corner turret and the outlines of arched openings on the first level (the building’s first floor was wrapped by a loggia with rounded arch openings—loggia is like an open gallery or corridor—it still remains open on the north side!!). The building remained in the Offenhauser family until they donated it to the Texarkana Museums System in December 1970 (on sign) or the 1980s (in Dr. Rowe’s booklet)?? It is now the Texarkana Museum of Regional History and Wilbur Smith Archival Library.

Texarkana National Bank—In the late 19th century, this corner was home to Longinotti’s New Palace Saloon, and sometime between 1900 and 1906, the building was sold to Bruce Christopher and Edward F. Burk, who operated Boyd’s Drug Store here in a 2-story brick building. In 1916 Texarkana National Bank purchased the corner lot and demolished the Boyd’s Drug Store building to make way for a new 8-story brick and stone building. The original bank building was very tall and narrow (it was only as wide as the first two sets of windows, looking at the front of the building). The building featured beautiful Classical-style detailing with arched door openings, cast-stone detailing, and a projecting cornice with dentils. Between 1926 and 1928, the bank expanded to the west by taking two commercial buildings on W. Broad and building up to match the rest of the building (the bay of 3 windows was the newer portion of the building). At this point, many local businessmen rented office space in the upper floors of the bank building. In 2000 Texarkana National Bank became part of Hibernia Bank, which later merged with Capitol One. At some point, the beautifully detailed façade was covered with smooth metal, stone, and synthetic panels. Most of the building’s upper floors are now vacant.

Bi-State Criminal Justice Building—Historically, State Line Avenue ran all the way down to Front Street and Union Station. When you got off the train at the station, you could look northward on State Line and see the post office & courthouse building. However, about 1980 the Bi-State Justice Building was constructed in the middle of State Line Avenue to allow for jurisdiction in both Arkansas and Texas. A block of commercial buildings along W. Broad was demolished, and a smaller irregular block at the northeast corner of Front and State Line was also completely covered by the new building. The Bi-State Justice Building houses over 20 city, county, and state judicial and law enforcement agencies, has special jurisdiction in both states, and is the only facility of this type in the world.

Continue down Pine Street to Pine & Front

Parking lot at the NE corner of Pine & Front—site of the Huckins House Hotel, which later became the Hotel Savoy. In 1887 Joseph Huckins, who came to Texarkana in 1880 and had extensive experience in the hotel business, constructed the 4-story Huckins House Hotel on this corner. The hotel had a dining room and shops on the first floor (newsstand, cigar shop, barber & beauty shops, and a laundry) and rooms on the upper floors. Huckins soon left Texarkana to manage another of his family's hotels in Oklahoma City and left Huckins House under the management of his two sons. Later it was managed by Joseph Huckins' brother, Paul. In 1923 Huckins House had 150 rooms, 50 of which had a private bath. Rooms with private bath rented for \$2.00 per night, and rooms without a bath rented for \$1.50. By 1940 the hotel name changed to Hotel Savoy, run by L. Sol Feinberg. The Hotel Savoy was demolished in the late 1970s or around 1980 to make a parking lot for the new Bi-State Justice Building.

Parking lot to east of train station at southeast corner of Pine & Front—site of the Railroad YMCA Building. Around the turn of the 20th century, Texarkana had an entertainment district along much of Front and Broad streets known as "Swampoodle." The second floor of nearly every commercial building housed prostitutes and many ground floor establishments housed saloons and gambling halls. Many railroad men frequented the district. So in response to this problem, in 1899 Helen Gould (Shepard), sister of railroad man Jay Gould, organized Texarkana's Railroad Young Men's Christian Association. A massive building was constructed on this site and faced west toward the depot. It included a gymnasium, library, game room, lecture hall, and an area to shower and change clothes. It was open 24 hours a day to accommodate railroad men arriving on the trains at all hours. Gentlemen could join the "Y" for \$5, and in 1924 attendance was listed at

61,250 people. Although it was extremely popular, the Railroad YMCA closed in 1930, and by 1934 the building was extensively altered so that only a small portion of it remained. It was then used by the Missouri Pacific and Texas & Pacific as a trainmaster and railroad yard office. The office was abandoned by the railroad in 1995 and demolished in May 1998.

Union Station—In the 1890s the first Union Station was constructed on this site. It was a red brick building designed in the Romanesque Revival style with turrets and peaked parapets. More than 30 passenger trains stopped at the depot each day. However, rail traffic increased and by the 1920s, local residents demanded a larger, more modern depot. So in 1927 the Texarkana Union Station Trust was established and consisted of four railroad companies that would finance the construction of a new depot—the Cotton Belt (St. Louis & Southwestern), Missouri Pacific, Texas & Pacific, and Kansas City Southern. The Renaissance Revival-style Union Station was designed by A. B. Butterworth and E. M. Tucker and opened on May 12, 1930, with a huge celebration. Texarkana's Union Station had a grand lobby and housed offices for the railroad. It also housed the railway express operation (on the east end of the building) and the Texas-Arkansas Terminal Railway Post Office, which at that time was the largest mail distribution facility in the South (on the west end of the building). Union Station was listed on the National Register in 1978 and a portion of it now serves as an Amtrak station.

Hotel McCartney—at the northeast corner of Front & Main. In 1874 J. V. Davis constructed a wood-frame Cosmopolitan Hotel on this corner right across from the train tracks. By 1887 new owner, William H. McCartney, demolished the wood-frame hotel and constructed a 3-story brick Cosmopolitan Hotel. In 1897 McCartney died, leaving the hotel to his wife, Anna, and his son, William A. McCartney. By 1930 the younger McCartney realized that he would have to construct a larger, more modern hotel if he wanted to compete with the Hotel Grim a few blocks to the north. So he demolished the Cosmopolitan Hotel and built the 10-story Hotel McCartney in its place. The Hotel McCartney was designed by Joseph Finger and was constructed at a cost of \$500,000. It had 125 guest rooms. Between 1930 and 1970, the Hotel McCartney was THE place to hold dances, recitals, conventions, and banquets. However, like the Hotel Grim, the McCartney suffered from the decrease in railroad passenger traffic and the construction of I-30, and closed its doors in the early 1970s.

Jefferson Coffee Shop—building was located on the irregular block where State Line met Front Street (no longer extant, but out behind the Bi-State Justice Building). About 1930 Greek immigrant Thomas Asimos, who had previously

operated the Post Office Café on State Line, built a Romanesque-style building at the northeast corner of State Line and Front streets directly across from the new Union Station. His business was the Jefferson Coffee Shop, which catered to train passengers/travelers. The coffee shop was also a favorite hang-out for locals, who liked to drink coffee, catch up on the gossip, and watch interesting people come in on the trains. Jefferson Coffee Shop was a Texarkana institution from 1930 until 1963, when the building burned.

Point down to Ritchie Grocery Building at NW corner of Front & Olive—Frances William Mullins moved to Texarkana in 1884 to establish the Texas Produce Company, a wholesale produce and grocery business originally located on Main Street. About 1900 Mullins constructed the building at Front & Olive to house his business. Mr. Mullins is credited with revolutionizing the wholesale produce and grocery business by using the railways to make daily shipments of perishable goods to Little Rock, Pine Bluff, and points in Texas. Mullins served as mayor of Texarkana, Arkansas, for two terms between 1896 and 1900, and was also a member of the school board. Mullins died at the age of 67 on September 4, 1917. His brother (or son?), Thomas S. Mullins, then assumed control of the company, but after his death in 1925, the Texas Produce Co. was sold to Ritchie Grocery Co (February 1926).

The Ritchie Grocery Company was organized in Camden, Arkansas, in 1886 and headquartered in El Dorado, Arkansas, by 1903. Founded by J. C. Ritchie and W. W. Brown, Ritchie Grocery Company sold foodstuffs and hay for livestock, “staple and fancy groceries,” as well as hardware and appliances. By 1926 the company operated wholesale grocery stores in Texarkana, El Dorado, Pine Bluff, and Magnolia. Ritchie Grocery operated its Texarkana branch until the mid-1970s. The building was listed on the National Register in 1990 and is the only turn-of-the-century building left on Front Street.

East side of State Line going north

Northeast corner of State Line & Broad—State Bank of Texarkana/State National Bank of Texarkana/State First National Bank/Ben F. Smith Department Store/Landmark Building. In 1896 the State of Arkansas granted a charter to the State Bank of Texarkana, and in 1904, a new charter was given to the bank, making it a “national” bank, so the name changed to State National Bank of Texarkana. The same year, the bank constructed a 5-story building at the NE corner of State Line & Broad streets. Like many of the other multi-story buildings in Texarkana at that time, the new bank featured a combination of brick and rusticated stone. It had prominent arches on the first level and on the top level, with

cast-stone detailing. The building's roofline featured a decorative balustrade. After World War II, the State National Bank opened branch banks in Ashdown and throughout Texarkana. In 1966 the name changed to State First National Bank. The bank's officers soon decided it was time for a new "modern" bank, so on May 1, 1969, ground was broken for the new State Line Plaza, and the 7-story building was completed in 1971.

After the bank moved out of this building, the Ben F. Smith Department Store moved in. Smith's claimed, "If it's the best, it came from Smith's" and "If it's new, it came from Smith's." In the late 1970s, a supper club called Trey's opened on the top floor of the building, offering beautiful views of Texarkana. But in 1981, the supper club burned, causing extensive damage to the building. After 2000, David Potter and David Potter, II, rehabbed the building and turned it into office space. It is now called the Landmark Building.

Parking lot at SE corner of State Line & 3rd—Historically, this whole block was full of brick commercial buildings facing State Line and 3rd. Between 1880 and 1889, Thomas H. Smith and Emanuel M. Bloom opened the Smith & Bloom meat market on this corner. But before 1910, the Texarkana Trust Company acquired the property and demolished the meat market building to construct a 3-story brick building for the bank (address was 226 State Line). By 1920 the building was occupied by Citizens Building & Loan Association and the Andrew Rose Insurance & Loan Company. In the 30s, Harrington Paint & Sign Company was here, and in the 1940s, the building housed the State Line Drug Store. The building's last occupant was a beer parlor called The Buckhorn. Between 1961 and 1963, the buildings on this corner were demolished to make a parking lot.

Foreman Building on island bounded by State Line, 3rd, and Olive—In 1901 Benjamin Foreman, who also built the Rialto Building, constructed a 3-story Italianate-style building on this site. The first floor was rusticated stone with arched window and door openings, while the second and third floor windows were set into segmental arches with hood molding. The building featured a pressed metal cornice with decorative brackets. Foreman Hall was located on the third floor (lodge hall for the Knights of Columbus), the second floor was office space, and the first floor was retail. Foreman died in 1914. In 1949 the upper floors housed the Swann Hotel, followed in 1951 by the Splawn Hotel. On March 10, 1952, a disastrous fire destroyed the two upper floors, but the first floor was salvaged and is still in use today.

Southeast corner of State Line & 4th (where the Regions Bank & plaza is today, but right on the corner)—In the 1870s and 1880s, a small wood-frame building stood

on this corner and housed the Wah Lee Chinese Laundry. As was typical for boom towns (whether due to the steamboat or railroad), Texarkana had several immigrant groups who settled in the region and made homes for themselves. Wah Lee was a Chinese immigrant and operated the laundry business. Clothes were washed out behind the building in large pots and hung on the line to dry. The pressing room was inside the building. Everything seemed kosher until one day in 1885 when Sheriff Dixon and Alderman Sweeney stopped by Wah Lee's looking for an escaped prisoner. They found an opium den in a large lean-to constructed on the back of the building. Nine white men were apprehended inside the opium den, along with Wah Lee, but the Sheriff did not find the prisoner he was searching for.

Regions Bank site—this was the 1971 State First National Bank Plaza before it became Regions. Prior to this building's construction, the block was occupied by automotive-related businesses and a filling station on the corner. Cargile ("Cargill") Motor Company was located here in the mid-20th century.

The Avenue Hotel—The two-story Avenue Hotel was built in the 1890s by Benjamin Foreman, builder of the Rialto and Foreman buildings, and featured a rusticated brick first floor and smooth brick upper floor. The second floor windows were one-over-one and had stone lintels with keystones (the windows are bricked in, but the original window hardware is still inside the building, and you can vaguely make out the lintels and keystones). The west entrance was at the middle of the building's State Line side and had a portico supported by 3 Ionic columns. An identical portico was located at the south entrance on the building's clipped corner. After its construction, the building's first owner was physician R. H. T. Mann, who had an office in the building until 1924. Historically, the building housed 25 guest rooms with communal baths on the second floor and retail space on the first floor.

418-420 N. State Line (now Trammell Law Firm)—Built in the 1890s by Benjamin Foreman (Rialto & Foreman buildings and Avenue Hotel) and originally had a large portico supported by 3 Ionic columns (no longer extant). Handsome commercial building with rusticated brickwork. The building's first occupant was Russell's Meat Market, and about 1910, the building was home to the Ball-Williamson Grocery Company. By the 1920s, an increasing number of residents owned automobiles, which prompted the creation of auto-related businesses throughout town. The Tri-State Tire Company was located here. But in the 1930s, the building housed the Avenue Cash Grocery (so named because customers could no longer charge their purchases; they had to pay in cash during the Depression). By 1940, one half of the building was Hendrick Printing Company, while the other

half was Brown's Military Shoe Shop and later the Young & Knox Barber Shop. The building was recently rehabbed.

422-424 N. State Line (Gibson's Grocery/Viva's Flowers)—This 2-story building was constructed ca. 1900 and is a good example of early 20th century commercial-style architecture with a clipped corner entry, corbelled brick beltcourse, and brick detailing at the cornice. Traditionally, the building housed retail on the first floor and apartments on the second floor. Its first occupant was Harold Gibson's Grocery, followed in 1910 by Huddleston Brothers Meats & Grocery. In 1920 Greek immigrants James and George Valthe (last name was later Americanized to Vathis) opened a confectionery here (sold candies, cakes, snacks, sandwiches). By 1938, the Texas Floral Company, run by Mrs. Viva Woolsey, was here. Her business was later called Viva's Flowers and remained open here until 2005. The building was recently rehabbed to take it back to its historical appearance—at one point, mansard awnings were installed on the first and second floors, and panels of false half-timbering covered the brick façade.

Walk or drive over to the southeast corner of 3rd & Walnut to see the Arkansas Municipal Auditorium & Beth Johnson.

Texarkana Municipal Building (NR-listed 2004)—By the late 1920s, the City of Texarkana, Arkansas, sought to build a municipal building that would serve four separate functions for its citizens – city hall, fire station, auditorium, and jail. The architectural firm of Witt, Seibert, and Halsey of Texarkana was hired to design the structure, and they used the unusual combination of the Collegiate Gothic and Art Deco styles for the building. Built over a 3-year period by the Stewart McGehee Construction Company beginning in 1927, the first section opened in June 1928, as the municipal auditorium. The jail, city hall, and fire station opened at later dates, with completion in 1930. In the 1940s and 50s, the auditorium was host to several notable acts, including Elvis Presley, Johnny Cash, Roy Orbison, and George Jones. Various renovations were done on the building beginning in the 1960s, and the auditorium closed in the 1970s. In 1977 the auditorium's sloped floor was raised to accommodate additional office space. But work is currently underway to restore the auditorium—Beth Johnson...

Thank you!!