

Walks through History
Mt. Sequoyah Retreat & Conference Center
150 NW Skyline Drive, Fayetteville
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By: Rachel Silva



Intro

Hi, my name is Rachel Silva, and I work for the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, which is one of seven agencies in the Department of Arkansas Heritage. Thank you for coming, and welcome to the “Walks through History” tour of Mount Sequoyah! I’d like to thank the staff at Mt. Sequoyah for allowing us to tour the grounds today, and I’d especially like to recognize CEO Abby Foster, marketing director Ann Catherine Jouett, and operations director Ben Butler. Also, many thanks to the Fayetteville Historic District Commission for co-sponsoring the tour (Gary Coover, chairman of the HDC).

Mount Sequoyah’s 32-acre campus contains more than 50 buildings and structures dating from the 1920s to the 1980s, with the majority of construction occurring between 1924 and 1965. The Mount Sequoyah Retreat & Conference Center, originally called the Western Methodist Assembly, continues to serve as the meeting place for the South Central Jurisdiction, which today includes Methodists from Arkansas, Kansas, Louisiana, Missouri, Nebraska, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas. And Mt. Sequoyah’s meeting and lodging facilities are available for rent to secular groups as well.

History of Fayetteville and Mt. Sequoyah

Washington County and Fayetteville

Washington County was created by Arkansas's territorial legislature on October 17, 1828, from the easternmost part of Lovely County (named after U.S. Government Agent to the Western Cherokee William L. Lovely), which had formally been established the previous year and most of which was actually in modern-day Oklahoma. Washington County was named in honor of George Washington, the first president of the United States. The town of Washington Courthouse was designated the county seat, but in 1829 the town's name was changed to Fayetteville to avoid confusion with the southwest Arkansas town of Washington (Hempstead County). Because two county commissioners had come from Fayetteville, Tennessee, they petitioned the postmaster general to use the name of their hometown.

After the tumultuous years of the Civil War, Fayetteville emerged as an economic and educational center in Washington County and Arkansas. In 1871 Washington County proposed a \$100,000 bond issue, and Fayetteville voters approved an additional \$30,000, for the construction of a state college. This bid secured the location of the Arkansas Industrial University, which held its first classes in Fayetteville on January 22, 1872. In 1899 the school's name was formally changed to the University of Arkansas.

The completion of the St. Louis & San Francisco Railroad through Fayetteville in the early 1880s bolstered the local economy by providing a reliable means of transportation and an easier method of shipping goods to larger markets. The first passenger train arrived in Fayetteville on June 8, 1881, drawing a crowd of 10,000 people. The county's vast resources of hardwood timber and fruit, as well as the area's visual appeal to tourists, ushered in an era of prosperity and growth. In 1886 the Washington County Telephone Company was formed, and just two years later, the Fayetteville Electric Light and Power Company provided residents with electricity. The population of Fayetteville doubled between 1880 and 1900,

increasing from 1,788 to 4,061. The population boom spurred development beyond the original city plat.

Methodism

A Methodist church was first established in Fayetteville in the mid-1830s; however, Methodism had been in Arkansas for about two decades prior to that. Methodism came to Arkansas about 1815 when the Tennessee Conference established the Spring River Circuit, which covered the watersheds of the Little Red, Spring, Strawberry, and White rivers in northeast Arkansas. Initially, two preachers rode the circuit, serving about 90 members.

The Methodist denomination had several splits in the 19th century, whereby groups split off to form separate congregations with slightly different beliefs. But the largest and most divisive split in the Methodist Church happened in 1844 over the issue of slavery. The Methodist Episcopal Church, South supported slavery, while the Methodist Episcopal Church (North) did not. Most Methodist Episcopal (North) churches in Arkansas ceased worship until Reconstruction (there was one in Fayetteville from 1866 to 1874, when it disbanded due to poor finances). Even after the Civil War, Arkansas Methodists were segregated in two separate conferences within the state. The Uniting Conference of 1939 joined the Methodist Episcopal Church, South and Methodist Episcopal Church (North) to form the Methodist Church. However, the Methodist Church remained racially segregated by annual conferences until 1972. The United Methodist Church was created in 1968 when the Methodist Church joined with the Evangelical United Brethren Church.

Mount Sequoyah

Camping and outdoor services were the norm for early Methodists, as circuit rider preachers often delivered sermons in campgrounds and brush arbors for people in the surrounding area, who would travel long distances to hear the spoken word. Although the camping tradition was originally born out of necessity,

Methodists continued to see the benefit of large, annual gatherings for fellowship and worship in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The “Chautauqua Movement,” which was started by Methodists in 1874 with the New York Chautauqua Assembly on Chautauqua Lake in New York, emphasized adult education, entertainment, and cultural offerings in an outdoor setting (everything from lectures, sermons, and political speeches to musical acts and vaudeville). Chautauquas became very popular, with some held at permanent facilities and others traveling around the country on a circuit. Methodist assembly grounds combined the traditional worship service, camping, and Chautauqua-type entertainment to create meaningful training and enrichment programs during warm weather months.

In 1913 the Methodist Episcopal Church, South established an assembly ground at Lake Junaluska near Asheville, North Carolina. So most major training events and annual assemblies for southern Methodists took place in North Carolina, making it difficult for those living west of the Mississippi River to attend. In 1920 a group of Methodists pushed for an assembly ground west of the Mississippi, and the annual conferences of the area appointed 30 commissioners led by Dr. Alexander Copeland Millar to choose a site somewhere in Missouri, Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, or Texas. Although several cities expressed interest in the new assembly, Fayetteville won out.

The commissioners favored Fayetteville in part for its “invigorating summer climate,” “freedom from all the distractions of a metropolitan center,” and proximity to the University of Arkansas as well as the City’s generous offer of 400 acres on what was then called East Mountain, \$35,000 for initial building costs, construction of a road to the mountaintop, and the extension of utility lines. The city’s offer helped to lift Fayetteville above other possible locations like Siloam Springs, Rogers, Mt. Magazine, Mena, and Neosho, Missouri. A March 16, 1922, article in the *Fayetteville Daily Democrat* excitedly proclaimed, “The decision of the commissioners representing Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Missouri reached at Fort Smith last evening between 11:30 o’clock and midnight was telephoned here immediately and by midnight the entire town had been

made aware of it by the ringing of bells, which rivaled the Armistice signing celebration.”

The charter for the Western Methodist Assembly was approved on August 17, 1922, and East Mountain was renamed Mount Sequoyah in honor of the Cherokee leader Sequoyah, who created the Cherokee language alphabet. The name “Sequoyah” was chosen by Mrs. Elizabeth Harwood Millar, the wife of Dr. A. C. Millar, who helped to choose the site at Fayetteville and later served as president of the Methodist Assembly and editor of the *Arkansas Methodist*. In her letter to the board of trustees, Mrs. Millar likened Sequoyah to Moses, saying he “led his people from their Eastern home and established friendly relations with the Cherokee here in Arkansas and ... doubtless tented upon the very spot we have chosen, which was a favorite camping ground for Indians.”

But there was much work to do before the Western Methodist Assembly could officially open its doors. According to the *Arkansas Gazette*, “With the exception of an old but well preserved farmhouse and a few small worn fields, the only improvements, the site was mostly tangled undergrowth and virgin forest.” The Methodist Assembly hired the landscape architectural firm of Hare & Hare from Kansas City, Missouri, to design the overall layout of the grounds. [The firm was hired in 1922-24, 1926, 1959, and 1961. It is uncertain how many of their plans were actually carried out, but maps from their files reflect the basic design adopted for Mt. Sequoyah.] To assist with the initial effort to beautify the grounds, in 1922 Harry E. Ware and his wife, Stella Williams Ware, donated maple trees to Mt. Sequoyah. [Mr. Ware was a successful fruit farmer in northwest Arkansas. The maple trees were dug up in Madison County and transplanted at Mt. Sequoyah. A plaque to commemorate their act of kindness is located next to the Cottage Circle gazebo.]

Mt. Sequoyah officially opened in the summer of 1923, and by that time, “the recent waste lands had become spots of beauty. The city had already built a highway to the grounds, and also a shorter scenic pathway to the summit. City utilities were connected with the tract. Buildings included the original farmhouse

which became the superintendent's home, office, cafeteria, two dormitories, porter's lodge and 22 cottages."

In order to raise additional funds for Mt. Sequoyah, lots around the edge of the assembly grounds were sold for residential development beginning in the 1920s. Lots were marketed to people for the construction of small cottages and vacation homes with a view. I'll talk more about this later...

As a result of this and other fundraising efforts in the mid-20th century, more buildings were constructed on the Mt. Sequoyah campus. We will talk about most of the buildings individually as we walk.

After the Uniting Conference of 1939, the South Central Jurisdiction of the Methodist Church acquired the property. Mt. Sequoyah expanded its programs to serve the eight states in the jurisdiction—Arkansas, Kansas, Louisiana, Missouri, Nebraska, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas. And today, Mt. Sequoyah continues to serve as a retreat and conference center, not only for the South Central Jurisdiction—which contains about 1.8 million United Methodists—but for secular groups as well. In addition to meeting space and dining facilities, Mt. Sequoyah offers a variety of comfortable overnight accommodations (300 beds available, counting Millar Lodge).

Individual Resources

Parker Hall—

With the exception of Young Lodge, a former farmhouse on the west side of the campus that predates the founding of the Western Methodist Assembly, Parker Hall is the oldest surviving building at Mt. Sequoyah. Originally called Epworth Hall, it was built in 1924 with funds raised by the Epworth Leagues of Texas, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Missouri, and Louisiana. The Epworth League was a Methodist organization for young adults (and still exists). Notice the Epworth League emblem reading "All for Christ" on the building's façade. After the death of Rev. Fitzgerald S. Parker in 1936, the building was renamed in his honor. Rev.

Parker served as general secretary of the Epworth League, authored numerous Epworth League pamphlets and articles, and served as editor of the *Epworth Era*, the organization's official publication in the South (published in Nashville, TN). [Epworth Leagues within the Methodist Episcopal Church, North subscribed to the *Epworth Herald* out of Chicago.]

The building was designed by the Fayetteville architectural firm of Ratliff & Bird, who also designed the National Register-listed Villa Rosa at 617 W. Lafayette Street. [Villa Rosa was built in 1924 for noted Italian-American poet Rosa Marinoni.]

Parker Hall contains a grand hall, kitchen, and parlor on the first floor and sleeping quarters and bathrooms on the second floor.

Cokesbury Bookstore—

Built in 1962 as the Cokesbury Bookstore. Mid-century modern building with a plate glass front and a gabled roof cantilevered over the front façade to create an open front porch. In the 1990s, the bookstore became a gift shop. Now the building is used for meetings, and it houses shadow boxes with items of historical interest for each decade beginning in the 1920s.

Louisiana Friendship Plaza—

Built in 2008 by Louisiana volunteers to thank Mount Sequoyah for housing Hurricane Katrina and Rita victims.

Clapp Auditorium—

The originally open-air auditorium with stone columns was built in 1939 and named after its chief benefactor, Sarah A. Clapp. The cross-gabled section at the south end of the building is the stage. About 1960 the openings were enclosed with orange brick and picture windows to match other facility upgrades on the campus. The folks at Mt. Sequoyah hope to eventually replace the brick in-fill with plate glass to give the auditorium a more open feel.

Bailey Center—

Built in 1989 to serve as a meeting and conference center. Named in honor of Olin C. Bailey, a large donor?? There is an Olin C. Bailey Library at Hendrix College in Conway, too (built 1994).

Waddell Bell Tower—

Built in 1989 to recognize the service of Mt. Sequoyah director Rev. Donald Waddell and his wife, Constance (he was director from 1984-1989).

Martin Building—

Built in 1956-57 and features a central chapel flanked by classroom wings. The building was named after Methodist Bishop Paul Elliott Martin and his wife, Mildred Fryar Martin. Paul Martin joined the North Texas Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South in 1922 and pastored several churches before his appointment as district superintendent of the Wichita Falls District in Texas. In 1944 Rev. Martin was elected and consecrated a bishop of the Methodist Church by the South Central Jurisdictional Conference. He served the Arkansas-Louisiana Episcopal Area and had his office in downtown Little Rock (723 Center Street). Martin died in 1975.

This building was designed by Fayetteville architect Paul Young, Jr. and features a unique combination of Gothic Revival and Ranch-style influences. The chapel portion (Perkins Chapel) has a front-facing gabled roof with a parapet that has 3 lancet-shaped openings in it (Gothic), while the classroom wings are reminiscent of a rambling Ranch-style house with their horizontal orientation, open porch, and metal-frame windows with awning sashes.

Paul Young, Jr. designed several well-known buildings in Fayetteville during the middle to late 20th century, including Central United Methodist Church on Dickson Street, First Baptist Church at Dickson and College, Bates Elementary at MLK and Buchanan (demolished to make way for the new addition to Fayetteville High School), Fayetteville High School (1953; façade altered), and the U of A Law School Building (1953; façade altered). Young was a member of Central UMC, and he might have done the design work on this building for a reduced amount?? He died in 1996.

****You will notice that many of the buildings feature matching orange brick, which was either used during initial construction in the 1950s and 60s, or it was added at that time as a veneer on an older, wood-frame building. Mt. Sequoyah became a line-item in the budgets of many churches in the 1950s, which allowed for capital improvements. In the early 1960s, the Assembly started a 5-year, \$350,000 project to replace all wooden cottages with “brick year-round accommodations.”**

Kansas Cottage—located more toward the front gate

Nebraska Cottage—to east of Kansas

Cottages constructed ca. 1960 and named for states in the South Central Jurisdiction. Designed in the Ranch style and each have 4 units.

Recreation area—playground, pool, tennis court, volleyball, basketball

Built ca. 1990. The 1923 Hare & Hare landscape plan called for this area to be used as an athletic field.

[Could point out former district superintendent’s house; built 1959.]

Walk to 2nd pavilion and old playground—

This is the highest point on Mt. Sequoyah and the highest elevation in Fayetteville (1,725 feet above sea level).

Point out the Mount Sequoyah Cottages Historic District (NR-listed 8/16/2012), which includes the rock cottages at 808 and 810 East Skyline Drive.

In the early years, the Western Methodist Assembly operated on a very lean budget. The sale of residential lots surrounding the Assembly on Skyline Drive in the mid-1930s helped to support the institution during hard times. In 1936 Rev. Sam Yancey, who was at that time superintendent of the Assembly, purchased 93 lots for \$3,625 in order to support the work being done by the church. Yancey gradually sold his lots to other Methodists and friends for a nominal price. His earliest sales were in 1937, but most of the lots were sold between 1944 and 1950. By doing this, Rev. Yancey considered his purchase price as a donation to the Assembly, and he helped to populate the mountain. The two lots at 808 and

810 East Skyline were sold to Rev. E. J. Reaves and his wife, Florence, on July 12, 1940, for \$1.00 each.

Rev. Reaves and his wife had two cottages built, one for them and the other for rent. They offered cheaper rents for those who helped to do work at their cottage. A classified ad in the *Northwest Arkansas Times* from March 1942 read, "Modern Cottage. Mt. Sequoyah. Reasonable. Take part rent for work next door. Mrs. E. J. Reaves, Skyline Drive." A few cottages were built around Skyline Drive in the 1920s, but the majority of them were constructed in the 1930s and 40s. Most of the original cottages have been extensively altered, but these two retain the most historic integrity.

H. R. Snow House—

Cottages built on Skyline Drive between the 1920s and 1950s were mostly used as vacation or summer homes. However, as time went on, larger homes were built on the mountain to take advantage of the view and became year-round residences. One notable example is the H. R. Snow House, which was designed in 1960-61 by renowned Arkansas architect E. Fay Jones.

In his work, Fay Jones attempted to integrate buildings with the surrounding landscape, incorporate natural materials, and make every element of his design serve a purpose. He was known for custom-designing furniture, fixtures, and even dishes for his clients. Widely regarded as his masterpiece, Thorncrown Chapel was designed in 1980 a few miles west of Eureka Springs on Hwy. 62. Jones died in 2004. The U of A School of Architecture bears his name.

In true Jones fashion, the Snow House is oriented toward the downhill slope rather than the street, in order to take advantage of the view. The low-pitched roof gives the house a horizontal focus, helping it blend in with the surrounding landscape. And the stone chimney serves a decorative, as well as a structural, function. Finally, notice the custom-designed mailbox.

[Gaby & Lotar Schaefer are the current occupants.]

Sunrise Cottage—

3-bedroom house available for rent. The original carport has been enclosed.

Maintenance Shops—

Historically, this area was occupied by an automobile camp. During the 1920s, Mount Sequoyah catered to motor tourists looking for a place to escape the hustle and bustle of the city. In addition to dormitories and cottages, the Methodist Assembly offered sheds for auto-campers' vehicles for 25¢ per day or \$1.50 per week.

It appears that some of the maintenance buildings are old cottages that have been repurposed.

Oaks Cottage—

Ca. 1940s Minimal Traditional-style cottage.

Entrance Gate—

Dates to the 1920s. There was a small "gate lodge" located just outside of the gate on the east side of Wesley Drive. Season tickets for the Methodist Assembly were collected at the gate lodge. All that remains of the structure is the foundation. The gate itself has only been closed one time in recent memory—to keep the media out when Hurricane Katrina victims were housed here.

Information Center—

Built ca. 1970. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Carl Donner, longtime employees of Mt. Sequoyah.

Galloway Dining Hall (Mt. Sequoyah Dining Hall)—

Built in 1963 to serve as the dining hall. It was named in honor of Methodist Bishop Paul V. Galloway and his wife, Elizabeth. Rev. Paul Galloway was ordained in 1931 after graduating from Yale University Divinity School and pastored several churches before becoming bishop in 1960. He served as Bishop of Arkansas and Louisiana. In the 1960s, Bishop Galloway was involved in the integration of the dining rooms at the Arkansas State Capitol and at the University of Arkansas. He died in 1990.

N. Lee and Sallye Cate Administration Building—

Built ca. 1960. N. Lee Cate served as superintendent at Mt. Sequoyah from 1969 until 1984.

Elza-Stephens-Rommel Hall (Wesley Hall)—

Elza-Stephens-Rommel Hall was built in 1927 with funds provided by the Women's Missionary Society. Three women were instrumental to this effort—Mrs. Lexie B. Elza, Mrs. Mary E. Stephens, and Mrs. Elizabeth Rommel—and the building was named in their honor. It was built to serve as a women's dormitory and classroom building, and today it is used for conferences, workshops, and sleeping quarters.

The 4-story building features a Classically-inspired door surround at the entrance, with engaged Doric columns topped by a segmental arch pediment and keystone. Another decorative window surround is situated above the front entrance and is crowned by a triangular pediment (this window went into the second floor chapel).

Building detective—the building originally had 4 balconies—one in each corner tower. The balustrades are no longer extant. Also, when the building was originally constructed, the fourth floor was not finished out. It had a roof and a few structural columns, but the openings either had roll-up canvas flaps or no covering at all. Notice the drains on the front and back sides of the building—these would have drained water off the fourth floor, indicating that it was open to the elements. Also, a historic photo shows the fourth floor without windows. But this was probably considered a design flaw early on, and windows were framed in to enclose the top floor. At some point, the windows were boarded, but the folks at Mt. Sequoyah are currently working to restore the wood window sashes and reopen the fourth floor windows.

According to a 1945 article, Rommel Hall's roof garden could seat 500 people, who could enjoy a 360-degree view of northwest Arkansas. Parties were often held on the fourth floor, and when nothing was going on up there, women hung their laundry to dry in that space.

Go inside—parlor, original wood floors (carpet recently removed), exposed beams, original windows (many with wavy glass), stone fireplace. Lots of original clawfoot tubs, toilets, and sinks. 2nd floor chapel—original wood paneling. Exit through back door.

Cottages—Bishops & Sunset
Built in early 60s. Ranch-style cottages.

Vesper Point—
Outdoor chapel. “Vespers” is an evening prayer service in most Western Christian religions. The stone worship area was built in 1961 with funds from the Wesleyan Service Guild and the Woman’s Society of Christian Service (the WSCS was the precursor to United Methodist Women).

Young Lodge—
Old farmhouse located on the property that became Mt. Sequoyah in 1922. It is a wood-frame I-house, which was a common vernacular house form shaped like a capital “I.” I-houses have a central hall with two rooms upstairs and two rooms downstairs. They are one room deep. This house has a rear addition, and the original wood lap siding has been covered with newer wood siding. They found an 1894 newspaper clipping in the house, so it may date to the late 19th century. This was the Assembly superintendent’s house from the 1920s until 1993, when the current Chief Executive Officer’s residence was built to the northwest of Cottage Circle. Young Lodge was named after Rev. Robert E. Young, superintendent from 1990 to 1995. It is currently used as a residential and meeting facility.

Cross at Overlook Park—
Built in 1935. Lighted cross on a stone base. Great view of downtown Fayetteville. There is a very similar cross at Lake Junaluska in North Carolina. And there has been a problem with young people “parking” at the cross since at least the 1960s.

Asphall House (new house north of cross)—

Ray and Keela Asphall's house was designed by Parko Architects of Fayetteville (Brett and Stacy Park) to blend in with the environment and take advantage of the good view.

Yancey Lodge—

Built ca. 1945 as a wood-frame apartment building with a stone veneer on the first floor. It was named after Rev. Sam Yancey, who served as superintendent from 1927 to 1950, during the "Golden Years" of Mt. Sequoyah. Rev. Yancey was a tireless supporter of the Methodist Assembly and oversaw the construction of several buildings on the mountain. He is the man who bought the residential lots and sold them for \$1 each just to populate the mountain. The sun porch was added about 1994. Today Yancey Lodge is used as residential and meeting space.

Millar Lodge (the bunkhouse)—

Constructed about 1925 to serve as the cafeteria, the building was later named in honor of Dr. A. C. Millar, first president of the Western Methodist Assembly and editor of the *Arkansas Methodist*. The building has been substantially altered from its original Craftsman-style appearance. Today Millar Lodge (the bunkhouse) has a large recreation room, kitchen, and barracks-style accommodations. The rusty beam to the west of Millar Lodge is from the original 1920s water tower, which stood right next to the cafeteria (it was a 50,000-gallon water tank).

Cottage Circle—

This area of the Mt. Sequoyah campus has always been used for tourist cabins and guest cottages. Most of the cottages around the circle were built in the 1930s and 40s, but a few were built in the early 1960s (like Texas, Louisiana, and Arkansas). The older cottages were altered with an orange brick veneer in the early 1960s (to make them "year-round" accommodations and to match new construction on the campus). But there are still two old wood-frame cottages behind Texas Cottage that we can go see in a minute.

Gazebo—see plaque in memory of the Wares, who donated the maple trees in 1922.

Cottages—starting on the west side and going clockwise:

Redbud

Sequoyah

Barnett—after Nels Barnett, dedicated layman

Fooks—after Benjamin Tindall Fooks, the Camden soda pop bottler who patented Grapette in 1939. He gave money to Mt. Sequoyah.

New Mexico—state in the South Central Jurisdiction of the UMC

Walk back behind Texas to see the two old cottages.

Texas—state in the SCJ

Fayetteville

Oklahoma—state in the SCJ

Louisiana—state in the SCJ

Missouri—state in the SCJ

Arkansas—state in the SCJ

Campbell—after Dr. Homer U. Campbell, secretary of the board of trustees from 1931 to 1964.

Kaetzell (“Ket-zell”)—after Rev. E. G. Kaetzell, superintendent from 1959-69.

Maples—trees donated by the Wares in 1922.

Willson— was the Willson Infirmary. Named after the J. M. Willson family, who gave funds and time to Mt. Sequoyah.

Edwards—origin of name?