

Walks through History
Perryville Commercial Historic District
Begin at the Perry County Historical Museum,
408 W. Main Street, Perryville
April 9, 2016
By Rachel Silva



Intro

Good morning, my name is Rachel Silva, and I work for the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program. Thank you for coming, and welcome to the “Walks through History” tour of the Perryville Commercial Historic District. I’d like to thank the Perry County Historical and Genealogical Society for co-sponsoring the tour, and I’d especially like to recognize Buford and Lynda Suffridge for their help!

This tour is worth two HSW continuing education credits through the American Institute of Architects. Please see me after the tour if you’re interested.

The Perryville Commercial Historic District was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on January 26, 2012. The district consists of buildings around the courthouse square as well as a couple just off the square on Main and Pine streets. The district is significant for its association with the commercial and governmental history of Perry County and also includes two properties individually listed in the National Register—the Perry County Courthouse and the Perryville American Legion Hut (now the Perry County Historical Museum).

Brief History of Perryville

Perry County was created by the Arkansas Legislature on December 18, 1840, from part of Conway County. Located in central Perry County, Perryville became the county seat because of its location near the Fourche La Fave River. The county and town were named in honor of celebrated American naval commander Oliver Hazard Perry, a hero in the Battle of Lake Erie during the War of 1812.

Interestingly, Commodore Perry had no known connection to this area. There are, however, at least ten Perry counties in the United States, including counties in Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, Missouri, and Tennessee. It is likely that the name was brought by early settlers who were familiar with another Perry County.

Platted before 1850, “Old Perryville” was located near the Fourche La Fave River because the river was the primary means of transporting people and goods. But after the Civil War, a new courthouse was built about three-quarters of a mile north of the river, and the population gradually moved in that direction to “New Perryville,” which is the present town site. Perryville incorporated in 1878. Because of its mountainous terrain, Perry County was never a huge cotton-producing county, but it did produce some. The main industry was timber.

Although Perryville was bypassed by the railroad, the town’s location along Highway 10 and its status as the county seat helped it to remain the commercial center of Perry County. The first bridge across the Fourche La Fave River at Perryville was completed in 1901, and it was replaced with the current river bridge in 1939-1940. Perryville currently has a population of just under 1,500 people.

Individual Properties

Start at the Perryville American Legion Hut, 408 W. Main.

Perryville American Legion Hut (NR-listed 9/5/1990)—

Built about 1935, the Perryville American Legion Hut is the best example of Rustic-style architecture in Perryville. Rustic-style buildings were constructed with local materials and blended in with the surrounding environment. The style was very popular in the 1930s as New Deal agencies constructed recreational facilities in parks and forests. The stone building also features elements of the Tudor Revival style with its steeply pitched roof, prominent front-facing cross-gable, and half-timbering.

The American Legion Building was constructed with the help of the Civil Works Administration, a short-lived New Deal agency created to provide manual labor jobs during the harsh winter of 1933-1934. The CWA was disbanded at the end of March 1934. Although the Legion Hut was not completed when the CWA stopped providing labor, the building's construction wouldn't have been possible without the agency's initial contributions.

Howard Simon, an artist and illustrator from New York who from 1926 to 1936 was married to Arkansas author Charlie May Simon, had a hand in the building's design. Howard Simon's 1970 book *Cabin on a Ridge* is an autobiographical account of the five years (1930-1935) he spent living in a cabin near Hollis in Perry County. According to the book, Simon was approached by a gentleman named Mike Campbell, who worked as an engineer for the state, about designing an American Legion Building and painting a mural to go inside it. Simon was paid \$30 a week while he worked on the design and mural.

Simon noted that the Legion Building would be located near the courthouse at the county seat. He sketched the building's front doors and called for them to be made of oak with hammered iron hinges and hardware. Simon found a mechanic and a blacksmith who worked together to make the door hardware based on his drawings. The hinges were hand-crafted from Model T Ford axles. Simon's mural depicted a battle scene from World War I and originally hung above the fireplace (mural is no longer there).

Fieldstone was hauled to the site. Pine, white oak, cedar, and black walnut trees were used to make the building's window and door frames, roof, ceiling, and doors. In the end, the federal government kicked in about \$2,500, mostly for labor, and another \$2,000 was given by the community, mostly in native materials (\$4,500 is equal to almost \$78,000 in 2016).

In the mid-20th century, the Legion Hut became Teen Town, a popular hangout for teenagers. The building later housed a restaurant. Since 2005, the old American Legion Building has been the Perry County Historical Museum. The building was restored with the help of a grant from the AHPP—roof and interior work. Another interesting detail—the chandelier inside the Legion Hut was made from a Curtiss “Jenny” engine that came out of a plane at Camp Chaffee.

403 W. Main (Loyra’s Barber Shop; southwest corner of Main & Plum; C)—
A wood-frame building on this site housed the *Perry County News*. The wood-frame building was demolished in the 1950s to make way for the present concrete block structure, which originally housed the post office and later, Walter Hamilton’s barber shop (Hamilton had his shop in other locations before this one).

West side of square; Plum Street, going north.

Old Perry County Branch Library (U of A Cooperative Extension Service; NC-roof)—

This brick building was constructed by Buford J. Suffridge, Sr., (Buford’s dad, who owned a lumber company in Perryville and also worked as a building contractor) to house the Perry County Branch Library. The library had previously been located in private homes and the Legion Hut. This building was dedicated on Sunday, December 3, 1961, and Winthrop Rockefeller was the principal speaker. He addressed the crowd in the Perryville High School Cafeteria. Immediately following Rockefeller’s speech, a ribbon-cutting ceremony was held at the library, supervised by Mrs. Merlin Moore, chair of the State Library Commission. The library remained in this building until 1993, when the Max Milam Library was completed at 609 Aplin Street.

Vacant lot—an auto garage was located on this site.

113 N. Plum (H. L. Kimbrough Building; NC-second story removed within last 20 years)—

This building was constructed in 1949 by H. L. Kimbrough. The building was originally two stories tall and featured ornamental concrete block on the lower floor and wood-frame construction on the upper floor. Kimbrough operated the 20-room Hotel Kim upstairs, while Kim's Café and a shoe repair shop occupied the ground floor. Kim's Café seated 24 at tables and 20 at stools around its horseshoe-shaped counter. By 1955, Mr. Sapp operated a rest home called Perryville Rest Haven in the building. The Western Auto store was later here. Chick Williams bought the Kimbrough Building in the mid-1990s and removed the second story, maybe after it was damaged during a storm. Since then, it has been a series of antique and resale shops.

412 Aplin (Church of Christ; not in district)—

The Perryville Church of Christ constructed its first building on this site in 1919-1920. The white, wood-frame building housed the congregation until the mid-1960s, when the present church was completed.

Perry County Courthouse (NR-listed 7/6/1976)—

When Perry County was created in 1840, the temporary seat of government was established at the home of John L. Houston in "Old Town" or "Old Perryville," which was south of present-day Perryville close to the Fouché La Fave River. In 1841 John Houston and John Greathouse donated land for the construction of a log courthouse. This building was 16 feet square and served as the courthouse until 1850, when it was burned during a feud between the Lively and McCool families. A second log building was constructed and remained in use until 1872, when a wood-frame courthouse was built on land donated by John L. W. Mathews about a half mile from the original courthouse site. This courthouse didn't last long—it was destroyed by fire in May 1874.

A fourth courthouse was built to replace this one. It, too, was destroyed by fire on December 20, 1881, most likely in an effort to destroy records related to the trial of William L. Payton and James Isom, who had been accused of murdering *Fourche Valley Times* editor and Republican J. L. W. Mathews. Mathews was shot and killed at his newspaper office, then-located at the southwest corner of Main and Plum streets (site of Loyra's barber shop), on July 21, 1881, during a brief

period of violence that stemmed from political differences. The lawless summer of 1881 has been called the Perry County War. The Quapaw Guards were called from Little Rock to restore order.

This time it took a few years to replace the courthouse. In 1888 the fifth and present courthouse was built by John Edwin Oliver for \$4,000. Oliver used local clay to make the bricks. The 1888 courthouse is the oldest building in the commercial historic district. The building has been enlarged over the years (point out brick seams on west side and front/back elevation). A 2-story addition was built on the west side of the front façade ca. 1900, turning the original square building into an “L” shape. The open part of the “L” was filled in sometime between 1914 and 1924. The east wing (1-story) was built by Buford J. Suffridge, Sr., in 1959, and the west wing (1-story) was built by H. L. Kimbrough in 1961. The west wing was designed by Hot Springs architect Irven Granger McDaniel and included a fireproof vault for county records.

In 1948 toilets and running water were added to the courthouse, and air conditioning was added in 1957. In 1962 the red brick courthouse was painted white, and green shutters were added. The Perry County Courthouse has received several grants from the AHPP, most recently in 2011 for foundation stabilization.

North side of square; Aplin Street, going east.

316 A&B Aplin (Lovell Appraisal Group; NC-siding & carport)—

In the early 20th century, this corner was occupied by a two-story, wood-frame house that served as a boarding house and later, the home of local physician, Dr. Reiff.

The current building was here by the mid-20th century, and one unit housed Marilu Browne’s beauty shop in the 1950s and ‘60s.

312 Aplin (Suds Gallery; C)—

This building was constructed in 1949 by Autry Tarvin to house his grocery store. Tarvin’s Grocery had previously been located in the Fourche Theater Building on Main Street. Tarvin used Breeko Blocks to construct his new building. Breeko Blocks were glazed, fired clay building blocks patented and manufactured by the

Breko Block & Tile Company of Nashville, Tennessee. Tarvin's Grocery sold fresh vegetables and meats, cattle feed and farm goods, clothing, fabric, boots, and shoes. At one time, the store offered a promotion where customers who purchased two pairs of overalls received a free pocket knife. In the early 1960s, the Tarvins sold the building to Othel "Chick" and Grace Padgett, who opened a laundromat there. The building remained a laundromat under several owners until 2009, when Al Garrett, Jr., bought the building and opened Suds Gallery.

Gravel lot east of Tarvin's Grocery Building (not in district)—

- A stone building just east of Tarvin's Grocery (Suds) housed a beer parlor until World War II, when Perry County went dry (all of the men were gone to war ☺). The building later became the post office.
- To the east of the post office was a narrow, wood-frame building that housed John Brown's Pool Hall from the late 1940s until the early 1970s (John Brown sold the pool hall to Lewis McGrew in the mid-1960s). The building was demolished after it was used in the filming of a movie scene in which a police car crashed through the side and front of it—the movie was called *The Great Lester Boggs* (also called *The Hard Heads*), released in 1974.
- The building at the northwest corner of Aplin & Pine housed a few businesses over the years, including Earl Bowen's Grocery (1940s), a service station and garage, and a Ford dealership.

Cross Aplin and continue north on Pine—none of this is in district.

Northeast corner Aplin & Pine—

Historically, Gil Cranford's house and a grocery store occupied this corner. Cranford's house faced Pine.

The Perryville Public School—later, Perryville High School—a two-story, brick building constructed in 1916-1917, sat closer to 4th Street between Pine and Magnolia on part of the area now occupied by First Baptist Church. A gymnasium

was built in 1928 south of the school. The school originally housed all 12 grades. In 1947-1948, a new elementary school was built two blocks to the northwest. After the elementary was completed, the lower grades were moved there, and the old two-story school became Perryville High School for grades 7 through 12. A junior high building for 7th and 8th graders was completed in 1956 near the elementary school. The high school remained on this site until 1963, when a new high school was completed off of Hwy. 60 East/Houston Ave. (the 1963 high school has been replaced with a newer building). The old high school was demolished in the early 1960s to make way for the First Baptist Church, which was built in 1964-1965.

Walk to east on 4th

115 4th (Home Economics Building)—

The Craftsman-style Home Economics Building was constructed in 1937-1938 by the National Youth Administration in cooperation with the Perryville Special School District. The stone building housed home economics classes for girls.

Smith-Hughes Building, facing Hwy. 10—

The Smith-Hughes Building was constructed in 1935 by the WPA. It is called the Smith-Hughes Building because it was built with federal funds provided through the Smith-Hughes National Vocational Education Act of 1917, which encouraged the teaching of vocational skills for students preparing for work on a farm. In the 1950s, this was the band building and superintendent's office.

The Laundry Room at Hwy. 10 & 3rd—

This concrete block building with new red brick façade was constructed in 1950 to serve as the high school agriculture building.

Walk between the Smith-Hughes Building and Laundromat.

Porter's Steakhouse—

Constructed in 1950 to be the high school cafeteria, known to students as the “slop shop.”

Walk back to Pine Street and cross Aplin.

East side of square; Pine Street, going south.

116 Pine (Roland’s Drug; NC-age)—

An earlier building on this site housed Roy Brown’s Mercantile. The Roland’s Drug Building was constructed in 1974.

110 Pine (Perryville Abstract; C)—

A white wood-frame building, built ca. 1909, occupied this site until 1957, when it was demolished to make way for the current brick structure. The older building on this site housed the Tom Pitts Confectionery, a café, Lock Wallace’s Grocery, and various other stores before its demolition. The brick building was constructed in 1958 and housed Harry and Marjorie Van Dalsem’s abstract office.

108 Pine (Roman brick façade; C)—

This stone commercial building was constructed in the 1930s, and in 1961 the building was updated with a new Roman brick façade. In the late 1930s, the building housed C. A. Black’s Grocery, and by the 1950s, it was Walter Paul’s Woodmen of the World office. In 1957 the building was leased by Mr. and Mrs. J. C. McClain for a shoe and clothing store. In 1961 it became the offices of Thomas Jones, abstractor, and Billy Bland Sorrels, attorney. In more recent memory, this was the Perry County District Clerk’s office.

Flewellen Building (C)—

The Flewellen Building was constructed in 1939 by Claude Flewellen to replace an earlier wood-frame building that had been a Chevrolet dealership and later, the Rainbow Theater. The Rainbow Theater opened in the previous building on this site in 1938 and was operated by two gentlemen from Ola. In March 1939 Claude Flewellen demolished the wood-frame building and constructed this mixed-

masonry building in its place. He reopened a theater in this location later that year and called it the New Theater. According to the *Perry County News*, the New Theater was “the only movie house in the county” and was “well equipped with a cooling system and comfortable seats.” Flewellen changed the name back to the Rainbow Theater in the 1940s. He later operated a skating rink in the building. In 1958 this became the Perryville Variety Store.

The Flewellen Building features a mixture of native stone and buff brick (mixed-masonry) as well as whimsical decoration above the arched front entrance. If you look closely, you’ll see the ends of multi-colored glass bottles embedded in the masonry.

Corner portion of Flewellen Building (Daylight Donuts)—

In the late 1930s and very early 1940s, this was Moore’s Meat Market. From about 1943 to 1981, this was Leonard Lee Lovell’s barber shop. Mr. Lovell and Carroll Bull were barbers there. The building was later Mrs. Ruby Taylor’s realty office. The mirror that hung in Leonard Lovell’s barber shop is now in the Perry County Historical Museum above the mantle.

Walk east on Main.

Flewellen House—right behind Daylight Donuts. The Flewellen family lived here, right behind their commercial building.

204-206-208 Main (Fourche Theater/Perryville Drug/Grocery; C)—

This entire ornamental concrete block building was constructed ca. 1945 by Dr. Stanley Gutowski.

208 Main (2-story): From about 1945 until the mid-to-late 1950s, this was the Fourche Theater. The ticket window is now covered by the “Head of Class” sign. The theater’s business declined due to the growing popularity of in-home television sets. After the theater closed, this part of the building housed Perryville Hardware.

206 Main: Perryville Drug Store, run by Dr. Stanley Gutowski.

204 Main: Grocery store, run by Dr. Gutowski.

After the theater closed, all three businesses in the building were known as “Stanley Stores.”

Lot at northeast corner of Main & Magnolia—

This is the site of the 1907 First Baptist Church building, which was a two-story, wood-frame building that the church shared with the Masonic lodge. A stone (mixed-masonry) church was built in 1936 on the same site. And the current First Baptist Church was built in 1964-65.

Lot at southeast corner of Main & Magnolia—

This is the site of the ca. 1915 Evergreen Hotel, owned by J. R. and Rachel Myers, which faced Main Street. The magnolia trees sat in front of the hotel. Buford J. Suffridge, Sr., demolished the hotel in the 1940s and built three identical houses on that block, two of which are still standing. The house in the middle of the block belonged to Marilu Browne, and she had her beauty shop here before moving it to the Aplin Street location.

205 W. Main (offices of district clerk, judge, and prosecuting attorney; not in district)—

This is the Harry Van Dalsem House. It was moved here in the mid-to-late 1920s from Bigelow (the boards were numbered and the house reassembled at Perryville). The Fourche River Lumber Company at Bigelow had exhausted its timber resources in the area by about 1920 and closed. After the closure of the lumber mills, the town’s population was reduced by almost 50 percent. I imagine that there were lots of empty houses left behind...

Harry Van Dalsem was a prominent Perryville businessman, banker, and abstractor.

213-215 Main (Shelter Insurance/Los Alamos Mexican Restaurant; C)—

An earlier building on this site, probably constructed in the 1930s, housed Harry Van Dalsem’s Grocery. The Bank of Plainview had a counter (or window) inside the building. The Perry County Bank was chartered in 1946 and initially operated here from the old Bank of Plainview window.

Van Dalsem built the present building in 1961, bringing Mid-Century Modern design to the courthouse square. The building was designed by Hot Springs architect I. Granger McDaniel and featured two distinct sections. The eastern (left) section (213) had a flat roof and built-in brick planters. It was intended to serve as office space and was initially the Perryville Abstract Company, run by Van Dalsem (1961). Interestingly, the old bank vault is still in this part of the building—they had to build the current building around the old vault.

The western section (215) was designed to be a large grocery store and had a low-pitched, gabled roof with exposed beams. In 1960 Howard Paul and his wife, Dollie, purchased Van Dalsem's Grocery. When this building was completed in 1961, the grocery store moved into the western section. The grand opening of Paul's Market took place on August 12, 1961. Paul's Market was Perryville's first supermarket and boasted plenty of parking, wide isles, and push-carts for self-service shopping.

Howard "Buddy" Paul, Jr., took over the store in 1980 and ran it until 1985. From 1986 to 1988, Buddy and Brenda Paul operated the B & P Deli here.

Walk south on Pine.

Vacant lot behind the Mexican restaurant—there was a small frame building here that housed the post office in the mid-1940s.

112-114-116 Pine (Van Dalsem Building; NC-roof)—

Constructed by Harry E. Van Dalsem in 1941 to serve as an office building. Mixed-masonry. The first occupants were the Farm Security Administration, warehouse space for Van Dalsem's Grocery, the draft office, and the AAA (American Automobile Association) office. By 1949, the Home Furniture Store was located in this building.

Point to southeast corner of A Street and Pine—

The ca. 1930 buff brick, Craftsman-style house surrounded by a stone wall belonged to Sanford Taylor. Taylor made his money by providing loans to people

who couldn't get a traditional loan at the bank. He charged maximum interest and required more than enough collateral in the event that they couldn't pay him back. He also had auctions. [Was he also a county judge?] Sanford Taylor died in 1951, and the house was later acquired by the City of Perryville. At one point, the mayor's office was located in the house. You could also pay your water bill there. The property is still owned by the city. Notice the historical marker about the City of Perryville (1976), public tennis court, basketball court, and the Perryville Fire Department (behind the house). The grassy area next to the house was a city park, where many people played horseshoes.

115 Pine (old First United Methodist Church; not in district)—

The Perryville congregation of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, was organized in 1845 at the home of John William Rison and his wife, Harriett Clifton Rison. The Rison House, located at the northwest corner of E and River streets in "Old Perryville," still stands and is listed in the Arkansas Register of Historic Places (listed 12/4/1996). The ca. 1844 log dogtrot cabin with 1950s alterations is the oldest house in Perryville. Portions of the original log structure are clearly visible. The house is still owned by the Rison family and is used as a rental property today.

The Methodist Church occupied a couple buildings at "Old Perryville" until the turn of the 20th century, when the church building was moved to a location three blocks east and three blocks south of the courthouse. A new wood-frame church was built at the same site in 1928. In the late 1930s, the wood-frame church was moved to the northwest corner of Pine and A streets (present location).

About 1950 the wood church was moved back from Pine Street and became an education building. A new buff brick sanctuary was completed in 1951 at the cost of \$8,420.81. The building had a steeple above the easternmost gable on the south side. An education annex was completed in 1974, replacing the building from the 1920s. The present United Methodist Church on Hwy. 10 was completed in 1996.

South side of square; Main Street, going west.

303 Main (Mustang Sally's; C)—

A ca. 1930 wood-frame building on this corner was updated in 1951 with the addition of a builder brick veneer. Rankin's Café, owned by Jess and Pearl Rankin, opened at this site in 1924. The original café burned and was rebuilt in 1930. Several couples operated the café during the 1940s, including Bill and Dimple Taylor, Emmitt and Marie Webber, Percy and Edna Rison, and Bussie and Charlotta Tubbs. In the 1950s, the restaurant was run by Jess and Pearl Rankin's son and daughter-in-law, Cleburne and Ruth Rankin. The restaurant closed in the 1960s, and the building was used as a residence. Cleburne Rankin and his daughter, Linda, later had a flea market in the building. Mustang Sally's opened in 2012 (owned by Calfneck Capital Corp.; Robert Allen & Buddy Metcalf).

Vacant lot at 307 Main (Mustang Sally's patio; NC)—

A white, wood-frame building was on this site until early 2011, when it was demolished. It housed Harry Aymond's barber shop and later, Walter Hamilton's barber shop (1953).

309 Main (Dr. Stanley Gutowski Building; C)—

Dr. Stanley Gutowski built the stone first floor of this building in the 1930s, and in 1941 he added the brick second floor. The east side (left) of the first floor was occupied by the New Deal Hardware and Furniture Company, while the west side was the Perryville Drug Store (drug store moved here after it had been next to Fourche Theater). When the second floor was completed, the furniture department moved upstairs. By the late 1950s, the driver's license office occupied the western storefront.

One owner put nails in the window sill of the eastern storefront to prevent people from sitting and leaning back on the plate glass. They have been cut off, but you can still see them.

313 Main (Calfneck Capital Corp.; NC-extensively altered)—

This building was constructed in 1949 by Buford J. Suffridge, Sr., to replace the two-story C. C. Adams Building that was destroyed by fire in 1948. When it burned, the Adams Building housed Ben Bowen's Grocery and a barber shop and

pool hall owned by Harry Aymond. The east side of the 1949 building was occupied by Stewart's "Your Family Store," which was a clothing store operated by Ken Stewart. The west side (right) housed the Perry County Bank, which moved from the Van Dalsem Grocery Building at 213-215 Main to this location.

Buildings west of Legion Hut if we have time...

410A W. Main—

A red brick jail was built on this site in the late 19th century, probably about the same time as the present courthouse (1888). It was replaced with the current concrete block structure ca. 1945.

The jail was in the concrete block building until the Perry County Sheriff's Department building was constructed at 106 N. Oak—it then became the jail and served as such until the present detention center opened.

After the jail moved out of the concrete block structure, it became the fire department.