



## **Barth-Hempfling House**

**507 Main Street, North Little Rock**

Good afternoon, my name is Mark Christ, the poor man's Rachel Silva, and I work for the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program. Welcome to the "Sandwiching in History" tour of the Barth-Hempfling House. I'd like to thank Sandra Taylor Smith, Director of the NLR History Commission, Gary Clements of Clements and Associates Architects, and Jim Pfeiffer for their help with today's tour. This tour is worth one hour of HSW continuing

education credit through the American Institute of Architects. Please see me after the tour if you're interested.

Before I get too far along, the next Sandwiching in History tour will visit Idlewild Park at Cedar Street and Idlewild in North Little Rock on October 7.

### Argenta History

The City of North Little Rock was called Argenta in its early days of settlement. Thomas Willoughby Newton, Sr., owned a large tract of farmland in this area and served as president of the Southwest & Arkansas Mining Company. Beginning in the late 1840s, Newton's mining company extracted silver and lead from the Kellogg Mine, which was located about 10 miles north of the river. In 1866 Thomas Newton's son, Colonel Robert C. Newton, named the newly platted town on the north bank of the Arkansas River "Argenta" because of the silver his father had mined at "Kellogg diggings" (argentum is the Latin word for silver).

Argenta thrived because of the railroad industry. The Memphis & Little Rock and the Little Rock & Fort Smith railroads intersected in the middle of Argenta. And the St. Louis, Iron Mountain, and Southern Railroad ran along the northern edge of Argenta and curved to the southwest, where it crossed the Arkansas River at the Baring Cross Bridge. The Iron Mountain railroad shops were on the west side of Argenta (where the UP shops are today), and the M & LR shops were on the north side of 4th Street between Olive and Locust. So, many residents of Argenta were employed by the railroad in some capacity. Argenta was a rough town—it had no municipal government in the early days and was considered virtually lawless. In fact, the Arkansas Gazette often condemned Argenta, calling the town “a deserving candidate for a shower of brimstone.” [AG 6/2/1877] Another Gazette article from November 25, 1880, insisted that Argenta “should be either incorporated or attached to Little Rock. Each train brings a number of tramps and disreputable characters to the place, who should not be tolerated in any community...” Gambling was also commonplace in Argenta, leading the Gazette to dub Argenta the “crap shooting center of Arkansas.” [AG 9/1/1889] Argenta residents recognized these problems, and in 1890, they filed a petition to incorporate as a city of the first class. However, this

attempt was quashed by Little Rock, when it forcibly annexed Argenta, making it the 8th Ward of Little Rock.

Little Rock provided Argenta with few city services in return for its taxes, so a plot was hatched to regain Argenta's independence. Prominent north side businessman William C. Faucette worked with state legislators to pass the Hoxie-Walnut Ridge Bill in 1903, allowing municipalities, or portions thereof, within a mile of one another to consolidate, if residents in both locations approved it at the polls. At first glance, it appears that the bill was written to allow the northeast Arkansas towns of Hoxie and Walnut Ridge to consolidate, which they later did. But the bill would also allow the adjacent town of North Little Rock, which had been incorporated in 1901 just north of the viaduct in today's Mid-City neighborhood, to turn around and annex the 8th Ward in the summer of 1903. Little Rock appealed the annexation, but on February 6, 1904, the Arkansas Supreme Court upheld the Hoxie-Walnut Ridge Bill and the annexation vote. Argenta was free at last.

Residents of the new city, which was officially North Little Rock until 1906 when it was changed back to Argenta, almost unanimously elected William C. "Bill" Faucette as the first mayor. The city's eight-member council met for the first time on April 11, 1904, on the second floor of the 1895 fire

station at 506 Main Street. A newly remodeled space above the fire station served as City Hall from 1904 to 1915, when the new City Hall at 300 Main was completed.

### Barth-Hempfling House

Our story begins in Baden Baden, Germany, in 1879, when the Adolph Barth family decided to emigrate to the United States. When they arrived at New York, land speculators were waiting on the dock to sell property to the new immigrants, and the Barths purchased property in Lonoke where they raised cattle but, to quote Anna Hempfling, “it was the most God-forsaken place” so they moved to Argenta in 1883 after the death of the elder Barth.

His son Adolf purchased Lots 1, 2 and 3 of Block 6 in the Clendennin Addition around 1886. Property tax records show that owner Nathan Brown made major improvements in 1887-8 and others were made by new owner Adolf Barth in 1889-90, so the Barth-Hempfling House probably constructed around 1887. Barth lived there with his mother Theressia and sisters Stephania and Pauline; another sister, Emilie, may have already been married and moved to Little Rock. When they purchased the house it stood

in a cornfield, with the nearest other residences being located by the Arkansas River.

Adolf ran a butcher shop on Avonia Street north of Newton Street (modern Main Street), where John A. Hempfling worked for him as a delivery driver. Adolf also owned another building, which he rented as a store. Adolf Barth died on July 24, 1898, and his sister Stephania took over the business. She soon married John Hempfling and their daughter Anna was born in the house on January 15, 1899. They closed the butcher shop and John began working in the nearby railroad machine shops.

The house must have been pretty crowded. The 1900 U.S. census shows John, Stephania and Anna Hempfling, sister Pauline Barth, Stephania's mother Theressia Barth and John's mother Wilhelmine Hempfling all living in the Barth-Hempfling House.

Theressia died in 1906 and left Pauline all of the contents of her bedroom and Lot 3, Block 6, Clendennin's Addition while Stephania Hempfling received her writing desk and Lot 2. The third daughter, Emilie Rinke, received \$533. Wilhelmine died sometime between 1900 and the next census

in 1910 and Pauline remained in the household until her death on March 26, 1928.

John A. Hempfling also had roots in Germany. His father, also named John, was born in 1833 in Bavaria, and by 1870 he was an Ohio saloon keeper living with his wife Frances, and children Louisa, John Lewis and Katie. By 1880 they had moved to Pope County, Arkansas, where the elder John farmed. By that time they had three more children – John A., Caroline and August. It must have been confusing to have three people named John living in the same household. Either way, John A. eventually found his way to Argenta, where he first worked in Adolf Barth's butcher shop before taking a job as a machinist at Argenta's railroad shops. His World War I draft registration says he was short and stout with blue eyes and light hair.

One of the enduring legends surrounding the Barth-Hempfling House is that they sold whiskey from a cellar at the rear of the house during Prohibition. While archeologist Skip Stewart-Abernathy concluded that it was just a root cellar, Anna Hempfling insisted to Jim Pfeiffer that it was for stashing liquor, period.

Stephania died on August 13, 1940, and John died on March 11, 1948.

Anna Hempfling never married. She worked for 35 years as a secretary for the state Employment Security Division, also volunteering for the Veterans Administration Hospital and the United Service Organization. She lived in the house where she was born until moving to Little Rock around 1985. She died in Little Rock on September 9, 1987.

Anna decided to put the house on the market in the mid-1980s, and Gene Pfeiffer made an offer on it contingent to its being listed on the National Register of Historic Places, which happened on October 16, 1986. If you will remember, though, Argenta was still a rough town in the 1980s and early 1990s and he was unable to find a tenant after rehabilitating the building with the aid of the federal historic preservation tax credit. Mr. Pfeiffer can be credited as a major contributor to the renaissance of North Little Rock by first investing in a historic property in old Argenta, and then by letting the North Little Rock History Commission and Historic District Commission, Main Street Argenta and the Argenta Community Development Corporation use the building as free office space between



1992 and 1999. Since then, it has been the offices of Clements and Associates, Architects.

A bit about the house itself – the Barth-Hempfling House is designed in a vernacular interpretation of the Queen Ann style of architecture, as evidenced by the jig-sawn brackets and decorative trim. The L-shaped building has a 6 by 18-foot entrance hall flanked by four 18 by 18 rooms – including the one that Anna Hempfling was born in – with a 16 by 18 and 13 by 18 room in the rear wing. The ceilings are 11 feet high. A kitchen was added to the building around 1916 and the back porch was enclosed at an unknown date.

The Barth-Hempfling House is the second oldest building in North Little Rock.