

**Arkansas Historic Preservation Program
“Walks Through History”
Tour of Historic Downtown Brinkley
Begin at the Central Delta Depot Museum, 100 W. Cypress Street
November 12, 2016
By Revis Edmonds**



Intro

Good morning, my name is Revis Edmonds, and I work for the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program. Welcome to the “Walks through History” tour of Downtown Brinkley. I’d like to thank the Central Delta Depot Museum for co-sponsoring the tour, and I especially want to recognize Bill Sayger of the Museum for his help.

For any architects in the audience, this tour is worth 2 hours of HSW continuing education credit through the American Institute of Architects. See me after the tour if you’re interested.

There are a total of eight Brinkley properties on the National Register of Historic Places. During our walking tour, we will talk about seven NR-listed buildings.

Brief History of Brinkley

Brinkley is the most populous city in Monroe County, Arkansas. Located within the Arkansas Delta, Brinkley was founded as a railroad town in 1872. The city has historically been transportation and agricultural center in the region, more recently developing a reputation for outdoor recreation and the ivory billed woodpecker, discovered by Gene Sparling in 2004.¹ It was thought to be extinct 60 years earlier. In recent years, there have been efforts to capitalize economically on the woodpecker, such as one motel changing its name to "The Ivory-Billed Inn," a local barbershop offering an "ivory-billed" haircut (which was a variation of the Mohawk complete with red tinting), and Gene's Restaurant and Barbecue, who offered an "ivory-billed burger" and an "ivory-billed salad" on its menu. Two of the people who rediscovered the ivory-billed woodpecker's wrote a children's book which mentioned Gene's. Located halfway between Little Rock, Arkansas and Memphis, Tennessee, the city has used the slogan "We'll Meet You Half-Way" in some of its advertising campaigns.²

In 1852, a land grant for the construction of rail lines was given to the Little Rock and Memphis Railroad Company, led by Robert Campbell Brinkley as its President.³ Brinkley, born in North Carolina, lived in Memphis and for many years served as the President of Planters Bank of Memphis.

Between 1852 and 1869, the settlement was called "Lick Skillet." When the day's work was completed, the railroad construction crew, mostly all immigrants from neighboring towns, cooked their supper over an open fire and returned to their homes when the last "skillet was licked."⁴ The name is the inspiration for the Lick Skillet Railroad Work Station Historic District, which was added to the National Register on June 1, 1992. The construction of the rail lines between Little Rock and Memphis marked the beginnings of Brinkley, which is situated in the northern part of the county. It was laid out in the winter of 1869 on railroad-owned land. A petition was granted to incorporate Brinkley on August 6, 1872, and the original charter was filed with the Secretary of State on August 21, 1872. The Texas and St. Louis Railway was built through Brinkley in 1882.

Duck hunting is a major source of income for the city during the months of November, December, and January, due to rice fields flooded for the winter. Located on the Mississippi Flyway, ducks are numerous throughout the region as

¹ Central Delta Depot Museum, Information Sheet.

² Zoe Klift, Kerry Kraus, Kat Robinson, Jill Rohrbach, and Kim Williams, "Great Escapes on Highway 70." *Arkansas Wild*, May 9, 2012, 35.

³ Brinkley (Monroe County). " *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture* <http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=941>

⁴ "Born and Raised in in the South: Brinkley, Arkansas." <http://lrc4940.blogspot.com/2008/09/brinkley-ar.html>

people from around the country come to Brinkley to go on guided hunts throughout the entire season.

Some notable residents of Brinkley through its history include Dorathy Allen, the first woman elected to the Arkansas Senate (1963-75); Al Bell, best known as having been an executive and co-owner of Stax Records; Jerry Eckwood, former Arkansas Razorbacks football player and running back for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers; John Handcox, a Great Depression-era tenant farmer and union advocate renowned for his politically charged songs and poetry during the Great Tenant Farmers Strike of 1935; Louis Jordan, a jazz and early rock & roll musician; Sheffield Nelson, former President and CEO of Arkansas Louisiana Gas Company (ARKLA), Attorney and twice Republican nominee for Governor; and Tommy Robinson, a former Pulaski County Sheriff, 2nd District Congressman, and Gubernatorial candidate.

Individual Properties

1. 100 West Cypress - Central Delta Depot Museum (Union Station)

Brinkley, which is located midway between Memphis, Tennessee, and Little Rock, and it was ideally situated at the crossing of the Memphis and Little Rock Railroad, later known as the the Rock Island, which was completed in 1871, along with the Texas and St. Louis Railroad (later the Cotton Belt), in 1882. Brinkley rapidly became a regional shipping center for cotton and timber products and a major point of transfer for rail passengers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁵

On July 7, 1911, the Arkansas Railroad Commission, in response to a petition by the citizens of Brinkley, ordered the Rock Island to construct a new, \$25,000 brick union station. In spite of the passenger traffic on the Rock Island, Missouri Pacific, and Cotton Belt had outgrowing the existing station, the new station would be essentially the same size as the station it replaced. In return for the city's agreement to allow the Rock Island to build "a small and less expensive station," the railroad promised to build umbrella sheds along the platform. The brick train station originally opened on September 16, 1912, and by that time its cost had increased to \$35,000.⁶ Its wing design and size, with freight rooms at each end of the building, made it the most impressive of the Rock Island stations between Memphis and Little Rock.⁷

A little over a week later, on September 25, the new station "In a good town on a great trunk line" hosted the "Roosevelt Special," a special train which carried Former President Theodore Roosevelt, running on a third-party

⁵ National Register of Historic Places nomination, "Lick Skillet Railroad Work Station Historic District." <http://www.arkansaspreservation.com/National-Register-Listings/PDF/MO0127.nr.pdf>

⁶ "New Union Station Being Pushed to Completion," *Brinklev Argus*, February 9, 1912, 1.

⁷ National Register of Historic Places nomination, "Lick Skillet Railroad Work Station Historic District."

ticket, on a campaign tour from Memphis to Little Rock. Before a crowd of about 500, Roosevelt "began a little speech in advocacy of the Progressive ("Bull Moose") Party movement, but before he had hardly begun, the special had to pull out."⁸

The Union Station is designed in the Mediterranean Revival style and features such signature elements of the style as a red, ceramic tile roof, a raised, stepped brick parapet at the gable ends that is finished with concrete coping, and segmental arched windows with concrete keystones. The splayed plan forms a rough "V", with the two single-story freight sections each placed parallel to its respective railroad line and flanking the central, one-and-one-half story section set on a diagonal relative to the intersecting railroad tracks.

The unusual ground plan of Union Station was dictated by the depot's location at the junction of the tracks of the CRI&P (Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad) and the St. Louis-Southwestern Railroad, or Cotton Belt. The depot also functioned as a union station but due to the lines' convergence, its facilities were leased by the CRI&P to the Cotton Belt and the Missouri Pacific. Another depot handled larger freight shipments. By 1912, the Cotton Belt had also completed a new frame freight depot south of the Union Station.

The interior retains virtually all of its original detail. Of particular note are the paneled wood doors with transoms, the brick dado, and molded plaster capitals at the upper corners of the tall openings between rooms, and the milled picture and corner moldings.⁹

(Walk west on West Cypress and turn right on N. New Orleans Avenue; walk one block)

2. 127 West Cedar – Rusher Hotel (Great Southern Hotel)

The Rusher Hotel, also known as the Great Southern Hotel, was built in 1915 near the Brinkley Square in order to serve the Brinkley Union Station.¹⁰ and was built in the Spanish Colonial Revival style, marked by the prodigious use of smooth plaster (stucco) wall and chimney finishes, low-pitched clay tile, shed, or flat roofs, and terracotta or cast concrete ornaments. Other characteristics typically include small porches or balconies, Roman or semi-circular arcades and fenestration, wood

⁸ National Register of Historic Places nomination, "Lick Skillet Railroad Work Station Historic District."

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ "Great Southern Hotel." *Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture*

<http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=3744>

casement or tall, double-hung windows, canvas awnings, and decorative iron trim. ¹¹

It is a three story brick building, whose main entrance originally faced the railroad, but was reoriented to the street facade after the railroad declined in importance. Located at the junction of Brinkley's West Cypress and North New Orleans Streets, the Hotel Rusher faces the abandoned grade of the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad. The three story, load bearing brick hotel presents a U-plan which is interrupted only by a slightly recessed central section of the facade and a one-story kitchen attached to the rear elevation.

The facade, or north elevation, is level with the Rock Island's raised grade, a testament to flooding which plagued railroad builders along the second division from DeValls Bluff to Madison. A barely recessed center divides the facade into three equal sections. The central one-third contains no doors. Its lower floor is sheltered by a one story three bay flat-roofed wooden porch supported by slender, square brick columns. Three wide show windows light the former hotel dining room. Each window is composed of two large stationary panes, surmounted by three twelve lite casement windows. The second and third floors of the central facade have identical rows of four fifteen-over-one double-hung windows, while each vertical row of windows is flanked by a stacked brick header course. In the lower floor of the western on-third of the facade, four central show windows, composed of two large stationary panes with a transom of three twelve lite casement windows, is bounded by two entries in the former restaurant. Both have double wooden doors with full glass panels, sidelight and transoms of a central twenty-four lite casement window bordered by small six lite casement windows.

With the abandonment of passenger service by the Rock Island Line, the importance of the facade as the hotel entrance was diminished. The east elevation now serves as the entry. This elevation, as well as the south and west elevations, rise slightly above ground level because of the raised railroad grade which the facade accommodated. A two story front porch identical to those on the facade shelters the first two stories on the northern one half of the elevation. The lobby entry projects slightly on the east elevation and many of its features repeat those of the facade. Centered in the first floor level are double doors with sidelights and a three piece transom of a central twenty-four lite casement window and two secondary six lite casement windows.

With its frontage on the Rock Island tracks and its location adjacent to the Rock Island's Union Passenger Depot, the Rusher was bound inseparably

¹¹ "Spanish Colonial Revival Style architecture." *Paris Ceramics*
<http://parisceramics.com/index.php/glossary/view/gl199180>

to the fate of the railroad in Brinkley. Following World War II, with the proliferation of automobiles and the refinement of the much deferred highway system in Arkansas, passenger service on all rail lines declined and was eventually abandoned. The once prosperous Rock Island system was especially hard hit and finally declared bankruptcy by 1970. With the removal of the Rock Island rails, the Rusher faced a vacant grade and the flow of patrons from Union Depot ceased. In the 1960s, a local businessman acquired the hotel and renamed it the Malmar. A portion of its third floor was converted to apartments, and a pool hall, barbershop, liquor store, and bar were installed in the lobby and dining room. In 1981, a new set of owners restored the again renamed Great Southern Hotel's first floor lobby, restaurant, and guest rooms. The Great Southern closed decades ago, but the building lives on as home to Low's Bridal & Formal store.

(Walk back south on N. New Orleans Avenue and cross the street.)

3. 131-133 West Cypress Street – Gazzola and Vaccaro Building

The Gazzola and Vaccaro Building is a two-story brick structure, with a flat roof fronted by a broad curved parapet. The horizontal banding of windows and decorative elements above are indicators of the Prairie School of design. The Prairie School was a late 19th- and early 20th-century architectural style, most common to the Midwestern United States. The style is usually marked by horizontal lines, flat or hipped roofs with broad overhanging eaves, windows grouped in horizontal bands, integration with the landscape, solid construction, craftsmanship, and discipline in the use of ornament. Horizontal lines were thought to evoke and relate to the native prairie landscape.¹² The term Prairie School was not actually used by these architects to describe themselves (for instance, Marion Mahony used the phrase The Chicago Group); the term was coined by H. Allen Brooks, one of the first architectural historians to write extensively about these architects and their work.¹³

The Prairie School developed in sympathy with the ideals and design aesthetics of the Arts and Crafts Movement begun in the late 19th century in England by John Ruskin, William Morris, and others, and adapted to this country by Frank Lloyd Wright.¹⁴ The Prairie School shared an embrace of handcrafting and craftsman guilds as a reaction against the new assembly line, mass production manufacturing techniques, which they felt created inferior products and dehumanized workers. The building was designed by architect Charles L. Thompson and completed in 1916; I think you all will all agree that it is an imposing presence and is Brinkley's most sophisticated

¹² "The Prairie School." <http://www.prairieschoolarchitecture.com/>

¹³ "H. Allen Brooks." <http://www.pbs.org/wbgriffin/brooks1.htm>

¹⁴ "Frank Lloyd Wright." <http://www.prairieschoolarchitecture.com/frank-lloyd-wright/>

architectural building. This building was listed on the National Register on December 22, 1982. The building itself appears to be very little altered from its original design. As you can see, although a newer cedar-shingled awning was attached to the structure, the original plans did call for a similar styled awning.¹⁵ At the time that the building was placed on the National Register, it was in use as a Sears store, but the Vaccaro family was once prominent in the lumber business in the area.¹⁶

(Walk west on Cypress.)

4. 225-227 West Cypress Street – Monroe County Bank Building

The Monroe County Bank Building is a two story brick building, with brick and stone trim elements. It housed three storefronts on the ground floor, with professional offices and other spaces on the upper floor. It was built about 1889, and its facade was redone in 1909 after suffering extensive damage caused by a tornado. It was constructed in the Prairie School with Craftsman and Colonial Revival influences. The entrance portico is executed in the Classical Revival style, and is the only Classical Revival detail found on the building's exterior. It also features Craftsman style detailing in the pane division and narrow vertically oriented transom windows. The Monroe County Bank was the town's first major bank, and occupied the building until the 1930s. Its upper level also housed Black's Opera House, which was the town's largest performance venue of the time. The structure was placed on the National Register on January 26, 2016.

The Monroe County Bank was founded in May 1889 by Major William Black as the town's first major financial institution. In the 1890 *Goodspeed Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Eastern Arkansas*, the bank is the only business listed by name in what was then a growing business district along Cypress Street. The Monroe County Bank building was completed about 1889. The bank was already considered a thriving business entity by the time of Major Black's death in September 1889.

Major William Black (1836-1889) was a native of Toronto, Canada, who came to Memphis in 1856. He worked at ship carpentering for a time before going into the grocery business. He served in the Confederate Army during the Civil War. He participated in all the battles around Memphis, most notably the Battle of Helena. Soon after the war, he gave up his successful grocery business and went west across the Mississippi River about 65 miles into the Arkansas forests. There, in partnership with John Gunn, he set up a sawmill just south of Brinkley, which was successful and was

¹⁵ National Register of Historic Places nomination, "Gazzola and Vaccaro Building." December 22, 1982.
<http://www.arkansaspreservation.com/National-Register-Listings/PDF/MO0085.nr.pdf>

¹⁶ Statement of Bill Sayger, Central Delta Depot Museum, Site Visit, November 20, 2016.

moved several times before becoming the Brinkley Car Works & Manufacturing Company in 1882. In 1884, he established the Brinkley Lumber Company in Memphis.¹⁷

At his death, Black was a director and stockholder in the Little Rock & Memphis Railroad, was president and principal owner of the Brinkley Car Works & Manufacturing Company, president of the Monroe County Bank, vice-president of the Brinkley Oil Mill Company, and principal owner of the business of T. H. Jackson & Co., “the largest mercantile firm in Eastern Arkansas.”

Although the bank was the anchor institution in the building, a pharmacy was located in the eastern space until as late as 1913. One of the drug store proprietors was Noah E. House and his family beginning in 1904. His son, Boyce, later wrote on the family’s experiences in the drugstore, and life in Brinkley as a whole. Mr. House also provided space in his shop for a Russian immigrant who was a watch repairman and spoke little English. J. A. Douglass took over the drug store when the House family left around 1907, and added the town’s first soda fountain.

The upper floor housed Black’s Opera House for a large part of its early years. The town’s only opera house, it was first known through an 1892 handbill. In 1896, the *Brinkley Argus* and the *Brinkley Globe* newspapers ran large print ads for productions at the opera house, and those ads ran regularly until 1909. The operas ran under the management of his son, William Jr., until the building was heavily damaged in the 1909 tornado. Part of the building is still occupied by the bank’s original safe, which is secured to the floor and is so solid that the safe was built around it.¹⁸

Most of the commercial buildings in Brinkley were rebuilt after the storm, but none in the same style as the Monroe County Bank. The second story, which had been nearly destroyed during the tornado, was rebuilt, most likely with its current interior configuration of large hall and smaller rooms. The upper story soon became the home of the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks. The Elks often allowed other civic clubs and organizations to use their club rooms and lodge hall for meetings and special events. Newspapers from the 1920s and 1930s mention the use of the Elks Lodge for various civic events throughout the years. During the 1960s, the club rooms were renovated to house two dentist offices, which continued to use the space for several decades. The building is currently unoccupied and has been for several years.¹⁹

¹⁷ *Goodspeed’s Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Western Arkansas*, (Goodspeed Publishers, 1891), p. 514.

¹⁸ Statement of Bill Sayger, Central Delta Depot Museum, Site Visit.

¹⁹ National Register of Historic Places nomination, “Monroe County Bank Building.” January 26, 2016. <https://www.nps.gov/nr/feature/places/pdfs/15000995.pdf>

(Walk west on Cypress, then turn left on Main and proceed south to Ash and turn right.)

5. 311 W. Ash – Major William Black Family Home

The Major William Black Family Home was constructed in 1895. The house is a masterpiece of Queen Anne Victorian architecture as characterized in its variety of textural usage, its towers and its irregular shape. The only structure of its kind in the area, the Major Black House is one of the most architecturally significant structures in south Arkansas. The property was placed on the National Register on December 12, 1976. Constructed in 1895 by the widow of Major William Black, the architectural considerations alone of the home make it a significant and unusual structure in the Southeastern part of the state. However, aside from all architectural merits is the history of the man who planned the house and whose descendants lived there long after his death.²⁰

In continuing what we were discussing about Major Black at the bank building, Major Black is recognized to be one of the strongest forces in the development of Brinkley and the surrounding area. In early media publications he was sometimes referred to as the "Father of Brinkley." He was given much credit for the early settlement and growth of the city due to his contributions in the areas of commerce and transportation through the railroads and lumber industry. Not only did these businesses supply much needed materials to unsettled southeast Arkansas, but brought many workers and their families into this part of the state.

In 1909 the most destructive tornado in the history of Arkansas up to that time tore through Brinkley, leaving only eight of 1,500 structures in the city still standing. Part of a chimney was blown off on the east side of the Major Black Home, otherwise it escaped serious damage.

Of frame construction, painted a vivid yellow and white, the house features a variety of textural usage, irregular shape and unusual ornate trim. The house is distinguished by a large round tower on the northeast corner. This tower utilizes decorative brackets, scalloped shingling and rounded glass. The Major Black House is extremely ornate in trim, utilizing an unusual combination of decorative motifs. The interior of the home is a combination of perfectly preserved ornamental latticework, stained glass entry doors, stenciled ceilings, and elaborate fireplace mantels. The staircase is

²⁰ Central Delta Historical Society, "The Historical and Holiday Home Tour: Brinkley and Wheatley, Arkansas." December 3, 2005.

exceptionally beautiful featuring turned balusters, carved posts and a lacing pattern below the handrail.²¹

The Major Black Home stands as a monument to the man who was largely responsible for the growth of Brinkley and the surrounding area. A leading force in the commercial development of Brinkley, Major Black came to be one of Southeast Arkansas's most admired citizens. This in addition to its architectural significance makes the Major Black House a major local landmark.

Another thing I need to mention that the portion of Ash Street where we are standing is part of the section of streets known as the Brinkley Concrete Streets. According to their National Register nomination, they are two-lane concrete streets southwest of the downtown commercial area and were constructed in 1928-29; they currently encompass West Ash Street between Main Street and New York Avenue and New York Avenue between West Ash Street and West Lynn Street. The streets are bordered by concrete curbs and gutters, and each section of concrete measures approximately 14 feet wide and 24 feet long. The nominated section of the streets, for the most part, retains its original 1928-29 concrete pavement except the southernmost portion of New York Avenue in the vicinity of West Lynn Street and West Willow Street, which has been patched with modern concrete, as well as retaining their original width.²²

The prospect of that highway through Brinkley brought excitement to local people but a tug-of-war with Cotton Plant, Des Arc, and Wynne. The Brinkley Argus warned citizens who were advocating for the route "to be wide awake or it will be another one of those failures for our town."²³

With the construction of the Dollarway Road in 1913-1914, it was not long until the use of concrete for road construction came to Monroe County, specifically with the construction of the Bankhead Highway. The Bankhead Highway, which was one of the first transcontinental highways of the 1910s, connected Washington, D.C., with San Diego, California. The highway was named after John Hollis Bankhead, the Alabama senator who sponsored the 1916 Federal Aid Act for highways. The route of the Bankhead Highway in Arkansas, which included Brinkley, became known as Highway A-1 in the early 1920s and then U.S. 70 with the creation of the national highway system in the mid-1920s.

²¹ National Register of Historic Places nomination, "Major William Black Family Home." December 12, 1976. <http://www.arkansaspreservation.com/National-Register-Listings/PDF/MO0082.nr.pdf>

²² National Register of Historic Places nomination, "Brinkley Concrete Streets." January 24, 2017. http://www.arkansaspreservation.com/National-Register-Listings/PDF/MO0184_nr.pdf

²³ "Brinkley Fighting for the Cross State Highway." *Brinkley Argus*, April 6, 1927.

Work on the Bankhead Highway in the Brinkley area began in 1919, and continued up to the Cache River through the early 1920s. With the Bankhead Highway being paved in the Brinkley vicinity and the problems with oiling the city's streets, the seed for paving the streets had been planted. However, it would not be until 1926 that the seed would start to germinate. In April 1926, the first mention of the possibility of paving Brinkley's streets appeared in The *Brinkley Argus*. The actual work on paving Brinkley's streets began in the latter half of November, 1928. Once the work of paving Brinkley's streets began, it apparently went smoothly and was well-received by the city.

Throughout the first part of 1929, work continued on paving Brinkley's streets and by early fall the work was done and the city began making plans for the dedication of the streets. In the August 15, 1929, edition of The *Argus*, it was announced that "Thursday, Sept. 12 is the new date set for the mammoth celebration with which the city of Brinkley will formally open its four miles of newly-paved streets, its brilliant white way through the business section, its model airport and its re-landscaped golf course. The executive committee in charge of the event had originally fixed Sept. 5 as the celebration date, but in deference to a similar affair to be held in Marianna at that time, the local event was postponed a week."

The celebration, on September 12, 1929, was indeed a huge success and it was reported the following week that 8,000 people came to Brinkley for the festivities. Today, the remaining sections of concrete streets along Ash Street and New York Avenue are important remnants of Brinkley's 1920s history. The remaining concrete streets are a reminder of the efforts of Brinkley in the early twentieth century to provide infrastructure for the city's residents and they also illustrate the efforts to provide improved infrastructure for the increased automobile traffic that was developing in the early 1900s. Even today, almost a century later, the Brinkley Concrete Streets provide an important role in transportation in Brinkley, continuing to serve the residents as they did in the 1920s.

(Turn back east on Ash and then turn right, then walk South on Main.)

6. 409 South Main Street – Mount Zion Missionary Baptist Church

Mount Zion Missionary Baptist Church is an unusual red brick example of the traditional front gable house of worship which is typical of turn-of-the-century vernacular religious architecture. Constructed in 1909, its simple rectangular design is augmented by Gothic fenestration and simple brick corbelling, along with a dual-tower-and-arcade treatment of the facade.²⁴

²⁴ National Register of Historic Places nomination, "Mount Zion Missionary Baptist Church." November 4, 1986. <http://www.arkansaspreservation.com/National-Register-Listings/PDF/MO0128.nr.pdf>

Prominent is the arcade, which is a succession of arches, each counter-thrusting the next, supported by columns, piers, or a covered walkway enclosed by a line of such arches on one or both sides. It is a red brick building with front facing gable roof, and a pair of square towers flanking the main structure. The left tower is slightly taller, an intentional element of the design that was maintained when one tower had to be shortened by removal of its belfry. The towers are joined by a three-bay porch sheltering the building's main entrance. The church was built in 1909 for an African-American congregation established in 1886, and has been a major cultural focus for that community ever since.²⁵ It is currently the oldest continuously organized African American congregation in Brinkley.²⁶

The principal elevation of Mount Zion Baptist Church faces west along one of Brinkley's major thoroughfares, U.S. 49 South. The gabled facade is fronted by two square towers of different heights, each of which is accentuated with a one-over-one double-hung window with a fixed arch sash above. The south tower rises to a height nearly equal to that of the gable peak while its counterpart is approximately ten feet shorter, giving the church an asymmetrical facade. Originally the north tower was taller, but deterioration of the belfry walls necessitated removal of the upper part of this tower in 1983. However, asymmetry was maintained by reduction of the north tower to an extent that it became the shorter of the two.

Mount Zion Missionary Baptist Church was added to the National Register on January 24, 2017.

(Proceed back north on Main, then turn right and walk east on Ash.)

7. 203 W. Ash St. – St. John the Baptist Catholic Church

St. John the Baptist Catholic Church was built in 1875 as a wood-frame Gothic Revival structure, but was finished as brick veneer with Classical Revival styling in 1928-29. The congregation was established by a district priest in 1875, and received its first permanent priest in 1886. The building was placed on the National Register on October 2, 1992.

According to the National Register nomination, there were few Catholic families living in Monroe and St. Francis Counties prior to 1870, and thus, missionary priests from Little Rock and Helena attended to their spiritual needs. The resumption of construction on the Little Rock and Memphis Railroad in the late 1860's and the resulting flood of immigrant workers employed by the company spurred the development of numerous towns

²⁵ National Register of Historic Places nomination, "Mount Zion Missionary Baptist Church."

²⁶ Central Delta Historical Society, "The Historical and Holiday Home Tour: Brinkley and Wheatley, Arkansas."

along the path of the railroad.²⁷ The town of Brinkley was laid out in the winter of 1869-70 and in 1869, Discovering that about a dozen Catholic families had settled in Brinkley, Father D.A. Quinn obtained permission from the bishop and constructed a frame church in 1875 and named it in honor of St. John the Baptist.²⁸ Father. Quinn continued to serve congregations in four counties until 1878. The first resident pastor in the Brinkley church, a Reverend McGill, arrived in 1886 and remained until 1892. A parochial school was established shortly after the turn of the century, and a report from Father Jenne to the bishop in 1904 reveals that 27 students were enrolled for the school year. Five years later on March 8, 1909, St. John's was the only church left standing after the catastrophic 1909 tornado. As one of the few buildings in town left intact, St. John's was used as an emergency hospital and morgue, the sisters attended to wait on the sick and injured, and the school was suspended for a time.

The church was originally constructed as a rectangular-plan, wood-frame church that reflected a vernacular interpretation of the Gothic Revival style of architecture. The frame walls were brick veneered and a continuous cast-concrete foundation was poured to replace the earlier brick pier foundation. The gable roof form was retained and covered with composition shingles. The original belfry was shortened, and the pointed arch-shaped, wood-slat louvers were replaced with rectangular-shaped, wood louvers decorated with a carved simulated keystone. A dentil course was added underneath the bell cast hipped roof, which retained the cross for a spire. The floor plan was altered by extending the church to accommodate a larger altar. Different-sized anteroms were added at this time on the eastern and western elevations, giving the church an irregular plan.²⁹

A massive, broken-pedimented, double-leaf entrance dominates the front or northern elevation. Fluted pilasters support the broken triangular pediment, which is adorned by dentilling underneath the cornice of the entablature and the boxed cornices of the broken pediment. A pedestal-based cross within the broken pediment crowns the affair. Underneath the broken pediment, the recessed, six-panel wood doors enter into the narthex, which is lighted by a five-pane transom with yellow-tinted, semi-circular arched panes. The familiar dentil course is present here as well and further adds to the classical appearance of the front elevation.

²⁷ National Register of Historic Places nomination, "St. John the Baptist Catholic Church." October 2, 1992. <http://www.arkansaspreservation.com/National-Register-Listings/PDF/MO0112.nr.pdf>

²⁸ Central Delta Historical Society, "The Historical and Holiday Home Tour: Brinkley and Wheatley, Arkansas."

²⁹ National Register of Historic Places nomination, "St. John the Baptist Catholic Church."

Two anteroom projections and the gable end of the main body of the building compose the southern elevation of the church. A single, small, one-over-one window allows light into each anteroom, and the eastern anteroom also contains a small three-pane basement window. The main gable end is blank; however, it is somewhat unusual in that the stucco extends below the boxed cornice returns to the cornice line of the much shorter anterooms. A large, rectangular, recessed panel occupies the center of the expanded stuccoed area.³⁰

The interior of the church has been mostly unaltered since the 1929 renovation; the original plaster ceiling fell in the early 1990s due to age and deterioration. Not only did the ceiling and light fixtures have to be replaced, but also the church pews, many of which were completely crushed by the weight of the ceiling. Otherwise, the narthex, nave, and apse appear as they did in 1929.³¹

The expressive stained-glass windows are a product of the Emil Frei Studio in Munich, Germany before they came to the United States.³² Their appearance is enhanced by dark-stained wood trim on light, cream-colored walls. The central altar, designed by the firm, Chicago Masters, cost \$1500 in 1929 and was presented as a memorial to Major William and Bena Black by their five daughters. The two side altars were also presented at that time.³³

Questions?

Again, on behalf of the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, I want to thank you for joining us and extending the hospitality and welcome of your town on this beautiful Saturday in East Arkansas. If you are able, please join us for our last “Walks Through History” tour of 2016 at Selma, as we explore the amazing architecture and history of the Selma United Methodist Church and the Selma Rosenwald School in Desha County. We begin at 11 AM on Saturday, December 10. Our 2017 tour schedules will also be released within the next few weeks.

If you are dining out for lunch, we encourage you to patronize your local establishments.

³⁰ National Register of Historic Places nomination, “St. John the Baptist Catholic Church.”

³¹ Ibid.

³² “The Early Years: Emil Frei Sr., Artist and Visionaire.”

³³ National Register of Historic Places nomination, “St. John the Baptist Catholic Church.”