

**Arkansas Historic Preservation Program  
Walks Through History  
Tour of Downtown Searcy  
July 15, 2017  
By: Revis Edmonds**



**Good morning, my name is Revis Edmonds, and I work for the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, an agency of the Department of Arkansas Heritage. Welcome to our third “Walks through History” tour of 2017 of the Hope Historic Commercial District. I’d like to thank the White County Historical Society and Main Street Searcy for co-sponsoring the tour, and I especially want to recognize Bill Leach of WCHS and Amy Burton of Main Street Searcy for their help. I also want to recognize our new statewide co-sponsor, the Arkansas Humanities Council, for their assistance in helping us promote this series.**

**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.**

## About Searcy and White County

White County is the second largest county in land area in the state. It was established on October 23, 1835. No one is certain where the name came from, but there are two theories; one is that the county was named for the White River; the other is that the county was named for Senator Hugh L. White of Tennessee.

Near the center of the county, a community had developed around the White Sulphur Springs. On November 23, 1837, the legislature designated this community the county seat and named it in honor of frontier lawyer and Judge Richard Searcy of Batesville. Various legal challenges resulted in years of wrangling over the ownership of the Searcy courthouse site, but were finally decided by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1851 in Searcy's favor. In 1850 Israel Merrick Moore, a Pennsylvania Quaker, surveyed the town site and named the streets as named in Philadelphia. He donated land for churches, Spring Park, and the court square. Businesses developed and private schools were started. Searcy was incorporated on August 6, 1851.

When Arkansas seceded from the Union, White County sent eight companies of men for the Southern cause. The most significant action in the area occurred when a detachment of the Twelfth Texas Cavalry and local troops attacked a Union foraging party east of Searcy on May 19, 1862.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Raymond Lee Muncy, *Searcy, Arkansas: A Frontier Town Grows Up With America* (Searcy, Arkansas: Harding Press, 1976):47.

According to Scott Akridge of the White County Historical Society, the most significant event to occur in the county during Reconstruction was the construction of the St. Louis, Iron Mountain, and Southern Railroad (earlier called the Cairo and Fulton) in 1872.<sup>2</sup> The railroad bypassed the county seat of Searcy to the east by several miles, but still ushered in a new era of commerce in the county. The timber industry became the largest single employer.<sup>3</sup> Violence also reared its head in the county during Reconstruction, when the Ku Klux Klan established a group that included some of White County's most notable citizens at the time, and efforts of Governor Powell Clayton against the Klan came to little.

From 1890 to 1950, White County was the center of strawberry production in the United States.<sup>4</sup> During the Depression, Yarnell's Ice Cream began in 1933 when Ray Yarnell bought Southwest Dairy Products, originally founded by Ben Grisham. Yarnell's Ice Cream was Searcy's most notable industry until it abruptly ceased operations in 2011, but was purchased in 2012 by Schulze and Burch Biscuit Co. and relaunched in April 2012.

After the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor in 1941, White County citizens participated in the war effort in a variety of ways. The total number of enlistees is not known but the names of 142 White County residents who died during World War II are listed on the granite memorial on the courthouse lawn.

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<sup>2</sup> "White County." Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture  
<http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=814>

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

In 1885, James J. Baugh purchased the *Des Arc Citizen*, and four years later, he moved its operations to Searcy under the name *White County Citizen*; it was later renamed the *Daily Citizen*. The programs of the New Deal in the 1930s reached Searcy: the Works Progress Administration (WPA) built a city hall and the American Legion Hut.

During the 1960s, industries began to locate in Searcy. Today, the largest single employer in the county is Wal-Mart, which operates one store and two regional distribution centers in Searcy. Other large employers include Eaton, Bryce, and Land O' Frost.

Harding College was founded in Morrilton (Conway County) in 1924 and moved to Searcy in 1934. This Church of Christ–affiliated institution became a university in 1979 and is today the largest private higher education campus in Arkansas with more than 6,000 students.<sup>5</sup> In 1966, Foothills Vocational-Technical School opened; in 2003, it became the Searcy campus of Arkansas State University.

Spring Park is part of a system that includes Berryhill, Yancey, and Riverside parks; all offer recreation facilities, picnic areas, and green space.

Searcy has many famous former residents. Dandridge McRae, a native of Alabama, led Confederate forces during the Red River campaign. Stephen Brundidge Jr. served in Congress from 1897- 1909. John E. Miller practiced law in Searcy from 1912 until his election to Congress in 1930, became a senator after the death of Senator Joe T. Robinson, and was named U.S. District Judge in 1941.

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<sup>5</sup> "White County."

Preacher Roe, a baseball pitcher for the St. Louis Cardinals in the 1940s and 1950s, attended Harding on a baseball scholarship. Mike Beebe represented White County in the Senate from 1983 to 2003, and then served as Attorney General and for two terms as Governor.

1. **Searcy Confederate Monument- 300 North Spruce**

The Searcy Confederate Monument stands on the grounds of the White County Courthouse in Searcy.<sup>6</sup> It is a marble statue, depicting a Confederate Army soldier, standing at rest with his rifle resting on the ground. The statue is about six feet in height, and is mounted on a granite base that is 16 feet tall and six feet square.<sup>7</sup> The base is inscribed in commemoration of White County's soldiers who served in the Confederate Army, and was placed in 1917 and was funded through a subscription campaign. The effort was spearheaded by the local chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy under the leadership of Mrs. Richard Willis, who considered the effort the association's proudest moment. The monument was unveiled after an enthusiastic reunion of the surviving Confederate veterans in nearby Spring Park.<sup>8</sup> In the dedication, the 100<sup>th</sup> Psalm was read by the widow of General Dandridge McRae, and the dedication speech was delivered by Congressman Stephen Brundidge, who voiced approval of the South's prewar stand, but expressed his love

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<sup>6</sup> "White County."

<sup>7</sup> National Register of Historic Places Nomination, "Searcy Confederate Monument," April 26, 1996.

<http://www.arkansaspreservation.com/National-Register-Listings/PDF/WH2320S.nr.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Muncy, *Searcy, Arkansas*, 160.

for the Union and called for unity as America was about to enter World War I.<sup>9</sup>

The only other Confederate monuments in Arkansas that were funded by subscription were at Washington (Hempstead County) and Jacksonport (Jackson County).<sup>10</sup>

The Searcy Confederate Monument was listed on the National Register on April 26, 1996.

## 2. White County Courthouse- 300 North Spruce

The White County Courthouse was built in 1871 is said to be the oldest functional courthouse in Arkansas and has an elaborate clock tower that resembles the Liberty Bell and dates back to 1855. It is a two story structure, built out of stone and brick, with a hip roof capped by an elaborate cupola with clock faces in its bowed roof. The building is roughly H shaped, with wings at the sides that project slightly to the front and rear. The ground floor is faced in dressed stone, while the upper floor is finished in brick. Entrance is made through an arcade of rounded arches, which support a Greek pedimented temple projection that has four fluted Corinthian columns. The courthouse was built in 1871 and enlarged by the addition of the wings in 1912.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Muncy, *Searcy, Arkansas*, 185.

<sup>10</sup> Mark K. Christ, "Washington Confederate Monument." *Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture*  
<http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=8421>

<sup>11</sup> National Register of Historic Places Nomination, "White County Courthouse." August 3, 1977.  
<http://www.arkansaspreservation.com/National-Register-Listings/PDF/WH0025.nr.pdf>

In the summer of 1880, James B. Weaver of Iowa, the Greenback Party candidate for President, spoke at the courthouse square in a time where political appearances of this kind were common.<sup>12</sup>

Repairs were conducted by the Civil Works Administration in 1933. A fire in the courthouse some years ago necessitated extensive repair, and the courtroom was restored to its original 19th century look with hardwood flooring and oak benches.<sup>13</sup> The entire courthouse is outlined in lights and comes alive in December each year when the Christmas “Festival of Lights” is observed.<sup>14</sup>

The White County Courthouse was placed on the National Register on August 3, 1977.

(Proceed west on Arch Street.)

### 3. Bank of Searcy- 301 North Spruce

The Bank of Searcy is a two-story buff brick structure that has an entrance flanked by Doric columns supporting a segmented arch. The building has other vernacular elements of the Classical Revival, including segmented-arch window bays on the facade facing Arch Avenue. It was built in 1906, following a fire that destroyed many of the buildings on the west side of the courthouse square.

Its main or east elevation is dominated by two Doric columns that flank the storefront. The original ground floor of this elevation has been completely altered; none of the original fabric remains. The second floor of the east

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<sup>12</sup> Muncy, *Searcy, Arkansas*, 98.

<sup>13</sup> “White County History.” <https://www.whitecountyar.org/history>

<sup>14</sup> “Ibid.

elevation, however, still has the original one-over-one double-hung wood sash ribbon windows, capped by a corbelled brick segmented arch.

According to the National Register nomination, “The Bank of Searcy first came into being on June 15, 1904, when William Watkins opened the doors of the new bank. At first it was only open for business on alternate days and had a capital structure of just \$15,000 (\$396,264 today). By October of the same year he bank began to be open on a daily basis. Shortly thereafter a large fire destroyed all of the buildings on the west side of the court Square. The Searcy Bank was forced to move temporarily across the street while the present building was constructed.”<sup>15</sup> Within three years of its opening, the bank had doubled its original capital structure. During the Great Depression, President T.A. Watkins pledged his personal assets to the bank to in the wake of the failure of Union Bank and Trust, the White County Bank, and the Citizens Bank of Bradford.<sup>16</sup>

On July 1, 1961, the National Banking association accepted it into its organization and changed the name to the First National Bank. It was later acquired by Regions Bank. The building now houses the law office of Mark Derrick.

The Bank of Searcy was placed on the National Register on September 5, 1991.

#### **4. Searcy Post Office (Wilbur D. Mills Courts Building)-301 West Arch**

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<sup>15</sup> National Register of Historic Places Nomination, “Bank of Searcy.” September 5, 1991.  
<http://www.arkansaspreservation.com/National-Register-Listings/PDF/WH2014.nr.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> Muncy, *Searcy, Arkansas*, 266.

Searcy Post Office is a two story brick building with Renaissance Revival styling. The central bays of its main facade are articulated by paneled Corinthian pilasters, with large two-story windows flanking a two-story entrance, all set in recessed segmented-arch openings. The shallow hipped roof has elongated eaves with large brackets. The building was designed by Oscar Wenderoth and built in 1914, and is the only high-style Renaissance Revival building in White County. Post Office buildings were extremely rare for towns the size of Searcy, as most communities of less than 3,000 people at time were mostly served by a mail cage at the back of a mercantile store. It was through the efforts of Congressman Stephen Brundidge that Searcy became the exception to the rule. It was built at a cost of \$40,000 (\$978,096 today) in 1914 and remained in use as a post office until the mid-1970s.<sup>17</sup>

The large, imposing structure has a rectangular, two-story floor plan and was built of reinforced concrete. The building underwent a \$250,000 expansion in 1959 with a rear (south) addition, also constructed of reinforced concrete, which housed two mail work rooms and office space.<sup>18</sup> New glass and aluminum double doors on the front (north) elevation replaced the original set, and the original two-over-two sash windows were removed and replaced with eight-over-eight and one-over-one double hung sash windows. Two original iron lamp posts flank the entry sidewalk.

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<sup>17</sup> National Register of Historic Places Nomination, "Searcy Post Office," July 20, 1992.  
<http://www.arkansaspreservation.com/National-Register-Listings/PDF/WH0037.nr.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

The Searcy Post Office now serves as a courts building and was listed on the National Register on July 20, 1992. It is now called the Wilbur D. Mills Courts Building, honoring the longtime Congressman from Arkansas who was a native of White County.

(Proceed West on Arch Street, then turn left on to North Elm.)

5. Trinity Episcopal Church- 200 North Elm

Trinity Episcopal Church is a single story brick building, built in the English parish church style in 1902. The building is linked by a small connector to a 1935 parish house. It is White County's only church of this style. Its main facade has buttressed corners, and a large lancet-arched window at the center, with the main entrance set recessed in a projecting gabled section to its left.

According to the church's history, Trinity was first consecrated in 1900 and their first building was destroyed by fire in 1902. It occurred a week before Easter Sunday and the First Presbyterian Church insisted that Trinity use their building for Easter services.<sup>19</sup> The reconstruction was assisted by a financial donation from St. Thomas Parish Church in New York City, and the rebuilt church was named St. Thomas and consecrated on St. Thomas Day, December 21, 1905. In 1912, Pastor Lee Heaton was responsible for organizing Searcy's first Boy Scout troop through the church. In 1931, the

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<sup>19</sup> Trinity Episcopal Church, "Our Church: Brief History." <http://trinitysearcy.org/our-church/>

troop and the church took the lead in a program to clean up the litter and waste throughout Searcy.<sup>20</sup>

Although thankful for the financial assistance of St. Thomas Parish Church in rebuilding their place of worship, the church later voted to return to the original name. The Diocesan Convention of 1940 agreed to allow the church to be renamed Trinity Episcopal Mission, and it became Trinity Parish Church at the 108th Diocesan Convention in 1980. On July 23, 1992, the Church house was selected to appear on the National Register of Historic Places, and in 2005 was added to the registry of Historic Episcopal Churches in the United States.<sup>21</sup>

(Go left on to Market and make the block back to Arch, and proceed east to Spring.)

#### 6. Robertson Drugstore- Spring and Arch Street

The Robertson Drugstore is a two story brick structure with basically vernacular style. It was built about 1860, and is the city's only commercial building to survive from before the Civil War. It was the home to the city's first drugstore, and is the oldest commercial building in White County. Robertson Drugstore was built by Stephen Brundidge, Sr., a Searcy bricklayer who migrated to the area from Alabama. With his portable brickmaking machine and oven he built several other buildings in the area. Each one of the bricks was made from river bank clay which was carted to the site, then shaped and baked, according to Raymond Muncy in *Searcy*,

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<sup>20</sup> Muncy, *Searcy, Arkansas*, 302.

<sup>21</sup> Trinity Episcopal Church, "Our Church: Brief History."

*Arkansas: A Frontier Town Grows up with America.*<sup>22</sup> His son, Stephen Jr. was District 6 Congressman from 1897- 1909. The exterior of the store is also notable for its ironwork designs, which were created by Mesker Brothers. You will see their work stamped throughout the front of the building. Next door is Stott's Drug Store, which has been in continuous operation since 1927.

His store offered not only the usual drugs and elixirs found in drugstores of the day but other items as well. Robertson had the only glass-cutter in town and he also sold household supplies such as oil, paints, and window panes. Robertson was also important for his role in the development of the community. In 1871, he was selected to be the Public Grounds Committee Chairman, which was responsible for regulating the use, upkeep, and growth of Spring Park which was a popular bathing area and mineral spring. He was also Secretary of the Searcy Branch Railroad which was responsible for the construction of a wooden, horse-drawn, rail line which connected Searcy with the Cairo & Fulton Railroad. The business operated until 1960, and the building now houses Quattlebaum's Music Store.

A 1920 edition of the *Bulletin of Pharmacy* described the store thusly: "Established in 1860, Robertson's Mammoth Drug Store, Searcy, Arkansas, is one of the largest and most prosperous pharmacies in the state. In the death of Dr. P.A. Robertson, the founder, Searcy loses a public-spirited citizen possessed of sterling qualities."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Muncy, *Searcy, Arkansas*,

<sup>23</sup> "Obituary: P.A. Robertson." *Bulletin of Pharmacy*, August, 1920: 6.

Also, if you will notice the street work going on Spring, the paving bricks have been revealed, which, according to Bill Leach, are the originals dating back to 1917.

Robertson Drugstore was placed on the National Register on September 13, 1991.

(Proceed South on Spring.)

#### 7. Mayfair Hotel- 101 North Spring

The Mayfair Hotel is an L-shaped two story brick building, with Spanish Revival styling. It has a hip roof with stepped wall dormers and exposed rafter ends in the eaves and a corner tower with a similar stepped parapet. Built in 1924, it is the only historically non-residential Spanish Revival building in White County. It replaced the Gill House, which had been purchased by May Dale Smith.<sup>24</sup> It was a hotel that had stood at that site since 1882.<sup>25</sup> It has been converted into a multiunit apartment house.

The hotel's L-shaped, two-story plan originally housed fifty rooms and a full basement. A twenty-one-room annex was added to the building in 1929, just before the stock market crashed. The next alterations took place twenty years later in 1950, at which time each guest room received its own

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<sup>24</sup> Barbara S. Duncan, "Gill Hotel existed where the Mayfair is now. What happened to it?" *Active Rain Blogspot*, November 9, 2014. <http://activerain.com/blogsviw/4533057/gill-hotel-existed-where-the-mayfair-is-now---what-happened-to-it->

<sup>25</sup> Franklin Allen Latimer, "Arkansas's Historic Hotels." *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* (52, Autumn 2003), 322.

bath, the kitchen was modernized, and the Terrace and Rose Rooms were added.<sup>26</sup>

In 1927, the Mayfair became the longtime meeting place for the Searcy Chamber of Commerce banquets; it was often said that the Mayfair venue was the place where the Chamber's largest growth period took place in its early years. The dining room also housed numerous banquets hosted by Harding College and its predecessor, Galloway College. When the dining room was expanded to hold over 300 guests in 1950, a special "Kiwanis Room" was set aside to commemorate the twenty-five years that the club had met there. In the late 1920s, the Mayfair was listed in the two most popular restaurant guides of the period, both published by food producer Duncan Hines: *Guide to Good Eating* and *Adventures in Good Cooking*. The Mayfair was the only Arkansas venue listed in *Adventures in Good Cooking*, which was considered a prestigious mark of distinction for any hotel at that time. Roy Park, an American media executive and entrepreneur best known for creating the Duncan Hines brand of packaged food products, listed the hotel in his publication, *This is the South*, and praised its "unforgettable grated sweet potato pudding."<sup>27</sup>

Major League baseball outfielder Ty Cobb was the Mayfair's most famous guest, staying there in 1924. Other notable guests that have graced the rooms of the Mayfair have been opera singer Gladys Swarthout, syndicated newspaper columnist Drew Pearson, members of the Rothschild family,

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<sup>26</sup> National Register of Historic Places Nomination, "Mayfair Hotel." September 5, 1991.  
<http://www.arkansaspreservation.com/National-Register-Listings/PDF/WH2027.nr.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> Muncy, *Searcy, Arkansas*, 257-58.

French classical pianist and conductor Philippe Entremont, and Senators John L. McClellan and J. William Fulbright.<sup>28</sup>

The Mayfair was added to the National Register on September 5, 1991.

(Go back North on Spring, then turn right and proceed West on Arch to Main.)

#### 8. First United Methodist Church- 304 North Main

First United Methodist Church is a large single-story brick structure, with a front-facing gable and square tower projecting from the front. It has English Gothic massing with Late Victorian decorative elements, including buttressing, lancet-arch stained-glass windows, and a main entrance with a stained-glass lancet transom. The church was organized in 1836 just before statehood, and was built in 1872, and is the only example of English Gothic architecture in White County.<sup>29</sup>

The land the church was built on dated back to an act passed by Congress in 1812 setting aside two million acres between the St. Francis and Arkansas as bounty for men who served in the War of 1812. 160 acre tracts were chosen by lots by the veterans themselves, and FUMC's current site was part of a lot drawn by Alan McVey, who sold it to Israel Moore in 1845 for \$1,215. He sold several parcels that led to the development of the current downtown business district and donated to current FUMC property for the future establishment of a Methodist Church. After the completion of

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<sup>28</sup> Muncy, *Searcy, Arkansas*, 369.

<sup>29</sup> National Register of Historic Places Nomination, "First United Methodist Church," July 12, 1992.  
<http://www.arkansaspreservation.com/National-Register-Listings/PDF/WH0036.nr.pdf>

the White County Courthouse, workers began construction on the new FUMC and completed it in late 1872.

After the Civil War, the Methodist Church was growing at such a rate that not only a new facility was built, but a new congregation, the Haygood Methodist Church, was established in the 900<sup>th</sup> Block of West Arch Street. In 1936, Haygood merged with FUMC. The church had over 500 members by 1928. The church also began a kindergarten program in the nursery room that started out with fifteen children aged three to six. In 1947, construction of a new educational building was begun with a spade ceremony. The significance of the event was enhanced by the participation of Mrs. J.H. Yarnell and Mrs. T.A. Yarnell in the turning of the soil. Mrs. J.H. Yarnell had become a member of FUMC in 1875, some seventy-five years before, and Mrs. T.A. Yarnell's father, Israel Moore, had originally donated the church's property.<sup>30</sup> Members of FUMC were prominent in the effort to vote full prohibition of liquor in White County in 1956, and the church, through a donation from Blanch E. Johnson, opened a United Methodist Children's Home cottage in Searcy that admitted eight girls and their houseparents in 1973.<sup>31</sup>

First United Methodist Church was added to the National Register on July 12, 1992.

(Proceed North on Main to East Race.)

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<sup>30</sup> Muncy, *Searcy, Arkansas*, 354-55.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* 467.

## 9. Benjamin Clayton Black House- 300 East Race

The Benjamin Clayton Black House was built shortly before the Civil War in 1859 and extensively updated in 1872. It is one of the earliest examples of surviving Queen Anne architecture in the state. Originally a single-story two-room structure, it was expanded by the Black family, adding a third room to the rear and a complete second story, and adorning the building with period woodwork. This is most evident in the two-story front porch, which exhibits ornamental latticework, turned posts, and brackets.<sup>32</sup>

In March, 1866, Captain Black and his wife, the former Polly Rosamond Jones, were married. According to a grandson, it was their honeymoon trip to New Orleans which influenced the Blacks on the architectural style of their future home.

According to the National Register nomination, "...for several years the Blacks lived in the pre-war two-room structure, but in 1872 they began the enlargement that has made their family residence a Searcy landmark. Bill Leach of the White County Historical Society echoed the information in the NR nomination stating that the end of the war and a growing family quickly outstripped the home's original space.<sup>33</sup> By 1874 the two-story white (now yellow) clapboard house was finished; however, eight years later some of the six original porches were rebuilt, and some of the interior walls were replastered."<sup>34</sup> The staircase, said to be the focal point of the house, was

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<sup>32</sup> National Register of Historic Places Nomination, "Benjamin Clayton Black House," November 20, 1974.  
<http://www.arkansaspreservation.com/National-Register-Listings/PDF/WH0027.nr.pdf>

<sup>33</sup> Statement of Bill Leach, White County Historical Society, June 19, 2017.

<sup>34</sup> National Register of Historic Places Nomination, "Benjamin Clayton Black House."

shipped upriver and carefully transported to the Black family home, said Myra Shock, director of the Searcy Arts Council. Remodeling in 1974 created the atmosphere of a Victorian style manor that features intricate woodwork, a large front porch and a second-story veranda. Parts of the flooring and interior walls are believed to be original to the house, while the furnishings were carefully selected to be period correct.

Captain Black gained local fame for his service to the Confederacy during the Civil War. After Federal troops occupied Little Rock, he was commissioned to raise a company, and was elected captain. His company was attached to the 48<sup>th</sup> Arkansas cavalry regiment, and was actively engaged for the remainder of the war, when his regiment surrendered in May 1865 in Searcy.<sup>35</sup>

Following the war, Captain Black entered into business at Searcy and became active in local politics. He was elected Mayor of Searcy and later as White County Sheriff. After serving as Searcy postmaster in the late 1880s, Captain Black returned to the mercantile business. During the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century he served a six-year term on the University Of Arkansas Board Of Trustees.<sup>36</sup> The house has served as home to the Searcy Arts Council since 1999.<sup>37</sup>

The Benjamin Clayton Black House was placed on the National Register on November 20, 1974.

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<sup>35</sup> National Register of Historic Places Nomination, "Benjamin Clayton Black House."

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Searcy.com, "The Searcy Art Gallery at the Black House."

<http://www.searcy.com/business/9907/Searcy+Art+Gallery>

**(Proceed West on Race.)**

**10. Jesse N. Cypert Law Office- 104 East Race**

The Jesse N. Cypert Law Office is a vernacular single-story brick structure, sharing party walls with its neighbors. The front facade is divided by corbelled brickwork, with a central bay double door on the first floor. There are also windows in the flanking bays, above which are separate vents, and a brick cornice at the top. Built about 1880, this building is a well-preserved local example of the vernacular commercial architecture of the period.

The Jesse N. Cypert Law Office building is now owned by First Security Bank. It housed the Searcy Water Company for a time but is now home to Citizens Abstract Company.<sup>38</sup>

Jesse N. Cypert was a Searcy attorney who had represented White County in the secession convention of 1861 and served as a Major in the Confederate Army and as a delegate to the Constitutional Conventions of 1861, 1864, 1868 and 1874.<sup>39</sup> Cypert moved to Searcy in 1861 and opened his law practice as well as being an editor of the town's newspaper. He was also part of a group of attorneys that laid the groundwork for organizing what is now the Arkansas Bar Association. He also served as Circuit Judge of the First Circuit and was a member of the Searcy Town Council.

The Jesse N. Cypert Law Office was placed on the National Register on July 12, 1992.

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<sup>38</sup> Statement of Bill Leach, White County Historical Society, June 19, 2017.

<sup>39</sup> Muncy, *Searcy, Arkansas*, 73.

(Proceed West on Race.)

**11. Cumberland Presbyterian Church- 100 East Race**

The Cumberland Presbyterian Church is a single-story buff brick Romanesque Revival structure. The building has a cross-gable roof configuration and a square tower at the right front corner. The main entrance is located in the tower in a pointed-arch recess, and has a louvered belfry at the second level below the pyramid roof.

The church was organized July 16, 1850, by Alexander Stevenson and J.A. Wilson, who were ministers from Tennessee, according to Howard Johnson, a Searcy church elder and clerk of session. However, members were an active influence in White County for several years prior to the actual organization. The Cumberland Presbyterians formed the Arkansas Presbytery in 1824 and began to dispatch preachers throughout the then-territory.<sup>40</sup>

On May 28, 1859, the Cumberland Presbytery and the Southern Presbyterians agreed to jointly purchase a lot, building a church at the current location of Spring and Race streets. It was a wooden structure, according to Howard Johnson. This arrangement continued until the Cumberland Presbyterian Church purchased the Southern Presbyterian's interest.<sup>41</sup>

In 1903, the current facility was constructed. Above the front door of the structure are the words "Cumberland Presbyterian Church 1903" etched in

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<sup>40</sup> "Cumberland Presbyterian Church Celebrates 150 Years in Searcy." *Searcy Daily Citizen*, July 16, 2000.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

stained glass. Stained glass windows depicting Bible scripture and imaging "Christ knocking at the door," and "an angel sitting on a tomb," also adorn the sanctuary.<sup>42</sup> Other churches have also used the facility, such as the First Christian Church of Searcy, which was organized November 1, 1906. Cumberland invited the members to use their facilities. Cumberland Presbyterian Church was added to the National Register on June 10, 1992.

(Proceed West on Race.)

## **12. Rialto Theater-100 West Race**

The Rialto Theater has been in continuous operation since it was first constructed in the early 1920's. The theater underwent extensive remodeling in 1940, at which time the present brick and stucco facade and Art Deco style marquee and signage were added to the front elevation. The one-and-a-half story, rectangular floorplan is of brick construction that had been covered with stucco and brick wall material. This smooth wall surface, along with the stepped, vertical projections above the roofline is two of the Art Deco features exhibited by the building. However, its most notable design elements reminiscent of the Art Deco style are the neon-lit marquee and signage spelling out the theater's name. The five-colored, 67-

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<sup>42</sup> Site Visit, June 19, 2017.

foot sign had 300 feet of neon tubing when it was installed in November of 1940, making it the largest neon sign in White County.<sup>43</sup>

The marquee provides a flat-roofed shelter over the building's entrance. The ticket window and two display windows on the front (south) elevation are newer, single-pane stationary windows; the doors allowing access to the interior are also new aluminum and glass models replacing the original six-pane wooden French doors.

A contest to come up with a catchy motto for the Rialto was held in 1932, with free tickets offered for the 10 best entrants. The winner turned out to be “The best and coolest retreat is at the corner of Race and Spring Street.” The gimmicky motto perhaps took its inspiration from the cooling system that moviegoers were privileged to enjoy at the Rialto.

Searcy's Little Miss Shirley Temple Contest was held at the Rialto in 1938, and the marquee of the theater was lit up by an additional 3,000-watt spotlight to give the theater more of a Hollywood appearance for the event. The contestants arrived on the scene in new Chevrolets, and each theater patron had an opportunity to vote for his or her favorite “Shirley Temple.”<sup>44</sup>

The “Revive the Rialto” campaign that has produced the marvel you see today is the result of the vision of Main Street Searcy's Amy Burton. When asked about the importance of the Revive the Rialto campaign, Amy said, “The Rialto is an architectural treasure and an important part of White County's heritage. There are so many fond memories associated with the

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<sup>43</sup> National Register of Historic Places Nomination, “Rialto Theater,” September 13, 1991.  
<http://www.arkansaspreservation.com/National-Register-Listings/PDF/WH2018.nr.pdf>

<sup>44</sup> Muncy, *Searcy, Arkansas*, 283.

theater for so many generations. It's a rare accomplishment for a community to still have an historic theater in its downtown district. It's important to restore historically significant properties in the Main Street district as a way to honor our history while preserving it for future generations.”<sup>45</sup>

The Rialto was placed on the National Register on September 13, 1991.

(Proceed West on Race.)

### 13. American Legion Hall- Race and Spruce Streets

The American Legion Hall is a single-story structure, built out of native fieldstone in 1939 with funding support from the Works Progress Administration (WPA). Its main block has a side-facing gable roof, with a projecting flat-roof section in which the entrance is recessed under a rounded archway. The building is typical of rustic-styled buildings constructed by the WPA and other jobs programs of the Great Depression. The structure, which is now used as office space, is located on the Courthouse square on Searcy's main thoroughfare. It is still in good condition and has undergone little alteration since its construction almost seventy years ago.<sup>46</sup>

Two native stone chimneys stand opposite each other on the east and west elevations. The original fenestration consists of nine-over-nine and six-over-six double-hung windows along all elevations. At the front entrance, a

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<sup>45</sup> Searcy.com., "'Revive the Rialto' Campaign Launches to Repair Theater."  
<http://www.searcy.com/node/28160>

<sup>46</sup> National Register of Historic Places Nomination, "American Legion Hall," September 13, 1991.  
<http://www.arkansaspreservation.com/National-Register-Listings/PDF/WH2016.nr.pdf>

one-bay porch has a rounded-arch entry topped with a cast concrete nameplate, and a pair of multi-paned French doors allows access to the interior.<sup>47</sup>

Searcy's American Legion, known as the Armstrong-Caldwell Post No. 106, was organized in January 1920, one year after the national organization was formed in Paris, France. Thirty World War I veterans met for several years at the courthouse until their growing membership necessitated the construction of this Legion hut on the north side of the courthouse square. Today, the organization is active in veterans' relief efforts and sponsorships to Boys State and benevolent programs for children in the community.<sup>48</sup>

The American Legion Hall was placed on the National Register on September 13, 1991.

Again, on behalf of the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, I want to thank you for joining us this beautiful Saturday in Central Arkansas. If you are able, please join us for our next "Walks Through History" tour of 2017 at Siloam Springs, as we explore the amazing architecture and history of the Downtown Siloam Springs Historic District in Benton County. We begin at 11 AM on Saturday, August 12 at the Lakeside Hotel at 119 West University Street.

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<sup>47</sup> National Register of Historic Places Nomination, "American Legion Hall."

<sup>48</sup> Searcy.com, "American Legion Annual Fund Drive." <http://www.searcy.com/node/12043>

**And just a reminder, if you are dining out after the tour, be sure to patronize your locally owned establishments. You'll love the taste, and you're building a better community!**