

Sandwiching in History Tour

Dr. Charles H. Kennedy House

6 Edenwood Lane, North Little Rock

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By Mason Toms



Happy Friday everyone, my name is Mason Toms and I work at the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program which is a division of the Department of Arkansas Heritage. Thank you for coming and welcome to the Dr. Charles H. Kennedy House. Today's tour is worth one hour of HSW continuing education credit through the American Institute of Architects. Please see me after the tour if you are interested.

Built in 1964, the Dr. Charles H. Kennedy House is a unique example of the combination of Frank Lloyd Wright's Organic architecture with the European Modernist designs of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe by Fayetteville architect Warren Segraves.

North Little Rock/Indian Hills

The town of Argenta was platted in 1866 on the north shore of the Arkansas River by Thomas Newton, Sr., across the river from the town of Little Rock. The name Argenta was derived from the Latin for silver, argentum, which was a reference to the Kellogg Lead and Silver Mines that were located about 10 miles north of the town. In the 1880s Argenta was closer to a frontier settlement than a twin city to the state's capital. The intersection of several major rail lines, and the mills and factories that accompanied them, brought many workers to the area, but they were of a rough sort. Numerous saloons and houses of ill repute were common in the town, and there was no official governance, which led to a reputation of lawlessness and immorality. It is during this time that some say the term "dogtown" was created as a reference to this working-class population and their poor behavior. Others say that the term was created when the town of North Little Rock was officially created. It was part of an elaborate scheme by William Faucette to gain control of Argenta from Little Rock, which had annexed Argenta as its 8th ward in 1890 without giving the residents of Argenta a voice in the matter. Step one in his plan was completed in 1901 when the town of North Little Rock was created just north of Argenta. Step two came in 1903 when Faucette crafted the Walnut Ridge-Hoxie Bill and introduced it into the state legislature, which allowed any two towns within a mile of each other to merge, if agreed upon by both towns through popular vote. The problem was that Little Rock supporters were not aware of the statewide implication of

the bill. After the bill was passed Argenta was annexed into North Little Rock, and the new city was simply called North Little Rock. In 1906 the new city decided to change its name to Argenta, but that name was changed back to North Little Rock in 1917. As the story goes, Little Rock was none too pleased with this legislative sleight of hand, so in retaliation Little Rock citizens would commonly release their stray dogs into the area just across the river. However, there is not any concrete evidence to confirm either of these origins, but they do make a good story.

What is known is that the city continued its growth through the early twentieth century. The city tended to always expand to the north because it was bounded on the west by a large hill, commonly known as “Big Rock” and a swampy, marshy area to the east, commonly called “Dark Hollow.” In 1921 Justin Matthews platted the Park Hill development on a high area just north of the city. As Park Hill expanded throughout the 1920s, Matthews began plans for a new development to the north of it called Lakewood. Though the lakes and at least one park, the site now known as the Old Mill, were completed in the late 1930s, the outbreak of World War II delayed much further development. However, in the mid-1950s development in Lakewood took off due in large part to the opening of the Air Force Base, which originally had no on-base housing. The early 1960s saw another surge to the north with the development of the area of Lakewood north of McCain and the creation of the Indian Hills Subdivision by Winrock Enterprises. Winrock Enterprises was created in 1955 by Wintrop Rockefeller and some of his business associates as a for-profit enterprise that was meant to increase the economic potential of Arkansas. Eventually the company would become the largest land developer and home builder in the state.

The land that is now Indian Hills was originally owned by the railroad. The City of North Little Rock deeded about 640 acres to the railroad in an area that was well outside of the town. In the 1940s the land was given to the Catholic Church, which used part of it to establish the Immaculate Conception Catholic Church in 1949. In 1958 Winrock Enterprises purchased 550 of the acres from the Catholic Church for the purpose of creating a new development, Indian Hills. Winrock Enterprises hired the Dallas, TX, firm of Phillips, Proctor, Bowers & Associates to develop a master plan for the land. The proposed design would include a shopping center, elementary school, churches, lakes and recreation areas, and single and multi-family housing areas. Though the plan was little more than a draft, the city approved the design and in 1962 the city officially expanded its boundaries to include Indian Hills. Within the single family residential areas development was done in phases of 30 or so lots at a time. It was on an oddly shaped, trapezoidal lot in the first area of development, which surrounded the lakes, where Dr. Charles Kennedy decided to build a new house for his family that would be designed by his college friend and former fraternity brother Warren Segraves.

Dr. Charles H. Kennedy

Dr. Charles H. Kennedy was born in Ruston, Louisiana, in 1921 but was raised in Smackover, Arkansas, where his father was a family doctor. Kennedy said that he always admired his father and following his father's footsteps was always his desire. After high school he enrolled at Louisiana Tech, in his birth town of Ruston, to study pre-med. However, shortly after, he heeded the call for service to his country and enlisted in the U.S. Navy Hospital Corp during the Second World War. The following three years Kennedy worked on transport vessels in the South Pacific caring for

wounded soldiers. When he returned from the war in 1946, he married his high school sweetheart from Smackover, Margaret Bass. Shortly after Kennedy enrolled at the University of Arkansas Medical School where he graduated from in 1951. In 1953 he opened his first clinic in North Little Rock at the corner of D Street and J.F.K. Boulevard where he was a general physician. In 1968 Kennedy moved to a new clinic at 3115 J.F.K. Boulevard where he stayed until he retired in 1996. Kennedy's medical practice spanned 43 years during which time Kennedy was much loved in the community. He never charged police officers, clergy, employees, or employee's children for services. He would also wave charges to patients that were in need of care but could not afford it. Kennedy gave his time as the team physician for the North Little Rock High School Athletic Program and for the North Little Rock Boys Club Boxing Program. It was said that the most remarkable thing about Dr. Kennedy was that he kept himself abreast of graduations, weddings, and promotions of his patients and that he continued to do house calls until his retirement. Unfortunately Dr. Kennedy passed away in 1997 at the age of 76.

Warren Segraves

Warren Dennis Segraves was born on November 7, 1924, in Oskaloosa, Kansas, to Samuel P. and Velma D. Segraves. By 1930 the Segraves family moved to Fayetteville, Arkansas, where he would spend the rest of his childhood. After graduating from Fayetteville High School in 1943, Segraves enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Corps, and served his country during World War II, eventually obtaining the rank of Captain. After the war Segraves returned to Fayetteville and married his high school sweetheart, Rhea Ash, on February 26, 1946. That fall Segraves enrolled at the University of

Arkansas where he studied Engineering. However, in 1948 Segraves changed his major from Engineering to the newly formed Architecture program, which was created by John Williams roughly two years prior. After he graduated in 1953 Segraves moved to Little Rock to work for the notable firm of Swaim & Allen for a year and a half before moving to Madisonville, Kentucky, to work for the firm of Ashby & Bond for another two years. In 1956 he returned to Arkansas to work for the Fort Smith firm of Mott, Mobley & Horstman before returning to Fayetteville in late 1957 to open his own practice.

Over the following twenty years Warren Segraves created some of the most iconic Modernist buildings in the Northwest Arkansas region, such as the former Roberta Fulbright Public Library in 1962 and the Southwestern Electric & Power Company Building in 1968. These two buildings feature Segraves signature black steel columns and beams with large spans of glass, design features that were inspired by the work of prominent Modernist architects such as Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Craig Ellwood. That being said, later in his career Segraves integrated elements of Brutalist architecture into his designs, as seen on the John Paul Hammerschmidt Federal Building from 1972. Warren Segraves was a prolific architect in Northwest Arkansas, designing several public buildings, churches, and houses from Alma to Bella Vista. However, the Kennedy House is one of only two houses and four buildings total designed by Segraves in Central Arkansas. The other three buildings are the Cazort-Johnson Clinic at the southwest corner of S. Cedar and W. Capital in Little Rock, a house for Walls Trimble in the Foxcroft area of Little Rock, and a clinic for Dr. Hundley at the intersection of S. Cross and W. Capital in Little Rock, which is now home to the Arkansas Chamber of Commerce and has been altered.

Despite all indications that Segraves's career was on a continual rise, it was cut tragically short by a heart attack in 1978 while he was vacationing in Florida. However, the built legacy he left behind is a strong testament to the expertise and creativity he possessed as an architect.

The Architecture

The Kennedy Residence was completed in 1964 and is a unique example of a combination of Structuralist Modern and Organic Modern architecture in a residential setting. Structuralist Modernism, as the name suggests, was a type of Mid-Century Modern architecture in which the load-bearing components of the building were highlighted and celebrated instead of being hidden behind walls or covered in ornament. The style's creator and architectural champion was the German architect and Father of Modernism, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. His ideas on how Modern buildings should be designed are best seen in his design for the Barcelona Pavilion in Barcelona, Spain, in 1929 and in his design for the Farnsworth House in Plano, Illinois, from 1951. Organic Modernism was the Mid-Century Modern architectural style that was based on the work of famed American architect, Frank Lloyd Wright. Wright's work stressed the importance of blending with the natural landscape both in design forms and materials. Structural Modernist architecture stands in stark contrast to Organic Modernism and is generally regarded as being at opposite ends of the Modernist architecture spectrum. However, in the Kennedy House Segraves managed to blend the two together into a cohesive and elegant design.

The Kennedy House features the black structural steel frame and the visually evident grid that were the tell-tale elements of Segraves's work and standard hallmarks of the Structuralist Modern Style. However, it is the grid that makes the Kennedy Residence so unique. Segraves chose to use a triangular grid in place of the typical square grid, in the design. A combination of six of these triangles creates a hexagon, which is the most common shape found in the house and is seen in everything from the custom light fixtures to the hearth tile to the bathroom showers. This unusual grid system led to the house's more popular moniker, the Honeycomb House. The inspiration for this remarkable design likely came from a seemingly unlikely source, Frank Lloyd Wright. Given that in most of Segraves's work he chose the Mies van der Rohe approach to Modernism, it may appear unlikely that he would take inspiration from basically the opposite end of the Modernist spectrum. However, John Williams, founder of the architecture program at the University of Arkansas, exposed all of the students of the program to the various forms of Modernist design, but special importance was placed on the work of Frank Lloyd Wright. Though Wright is more known for his rectilinear designs, he did branch out into other forms on several occasions. Starting in the late 1930s with the Hanna House (1937) and continuing into the mid-1950s, Wright used a hexagon based plan on multiple designs. Given the heavy coverage in architectural publications that Wright's designs commonly received at the time, it is very likely that Segraves came across the hexagonal plans while still a student. This was evidenced by a design Segraves created for a "Nursery School" while a student which has a hexagonal plan and a much stronger Wrightian feel to it than his known designs. This student design is also the only other design by Segraves that we are aware of

where he used a hexagonal plan. Due to the hexagonal grid the plan of the house is roughly described as a boomerang with three pavilions at the three main points, one for the family room, one for the living spaces, and one for the master bedroom. This V-shape was also a common form in the Frank Lloyd Wright hexagonal designs, as seen in the plans of the 1937 Hanna House in Stanford, CA, and in the 1939 Bazett House in Hillsboro, CA. Further evidence that Wright was the impetus of the Kennedy Residence's design is seen in the detailing of the eaves and fascia on the house. There is a stylized dentil design on the fascia that is similar to elements seen in many Wrightian designs. Also, the eaves are much deeper on the Kennedy Residence than most of Segraves's other designs, almost forming a wrap-around porch. The carport is another element that was common in Wrightian designs. Wright felt that garages only invited clutter, much like attics which the Kennedy House also lacks. As a cool little fun-fact, Frank Lloyd Wright is actually credited with the creation of the term carport, which first appeared on the 1936 plan for the Jacobs House in Madison, WI.

There are two possibilities as to why Segraves might have chosen to adopt these Wrightian characteristics in this design. The first and simplest is that Kennedy liked the work of Wright but wanted his friend to design the house. The second possibility is that perhaps Kennedy saw one of Segraves hexagonal plans while they were students at the university and asked if Segraves could create a design for him like those. Either way the combination was likely requested specifically by the client, since this is the only known built project of Segraves to exhibit these elements. In the Kennedy Residence, Segraves managed to combine aspects of both Mies van der Rohe and Wright to create a design that embraced both ends of the Modernist spectrum while still not appearing to

be out of place in the larger body of his work. It was this innovative design approach that created the high level of architectural significance for the house and led to the house being placed on the National Register of Historic Places in September of 2017.

Segraves designed a number of custom elements for the Kennedys in the house. Dr. Kennedy was an avid outdoorsman and enjoyed camping, hunting, and fishing in his free time. As such Segraves designed a custom gun case and fishing rod storage area in the hall leading to the Family Room pavilion. Another interesting element in the house is the double-sided fireplace in the Living Pavilion which was done so that no matter where you were in the pavilion you could always see the fire. One of the more bizarre features of the house is the matching his and hers master bathrooms. The matching bathrooms obviously is not the bizarre part, instead it is the very large sunken tub/shower combo that raises eyebrows. One last feature I would like to point out before you explore is the apex windows in the bedroom wing hall. These windows, which are made of two sheets of glass that meet at a butt joint, were modeled off of similar windows that Segraves used in the foyer addition of his own home in Fayetteville in 1963, and were designed to capture the most natural light possible.

I hope you have enjoyed today's tour. Feel free to explore the house and yard; however, we do ask that you not go down to the lake. The site is quite steep in that area and could be dangerous for some. The next Sandwiching in History will be on May 4th at Lake Nixon at 18500 Cooper Orbit Road in Little Rock, and please join us for our next Walks Through History Tour tomorrow, April 14th in the beautiful Columbia Street Historic District in Helena-West Helena, AR. Thank you for coming and have a great weekend.