

**Sandwiching in History
Pulaski Heights United Methodist Church
4823 Woodlawn Drive, Little Rock
January 5, 2017
By Revis Edmonds**



Intro

Good afternoon, my name is Revis Edmonds, and I work for the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, which is an agency of the Department of Arkansas Heritage.

Thank you all for coming, and welcome to our first “Sandwiching in History” tour for 2017 of Pulaski Heights United Methodist Church. I’d like to thank Rev. Britt Skarda, the Senior Pastor and Church Administrator Trent Hubbard for allowing us to tour this amazingly beautiful house of worship!

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

About Pulaski Heights/Hillcrest

Pulaski Heights United Methodist Church is part of the Hillcrest Historic District, which was added to the National Register on December 12, 1990. Hillcrest is located about one mile Northwest of Little Rock’s downtown business district. It is often referred to as the Hillcrest Historic District by the people that live there. It is the lower, southern section of the Pulaski Heights neighborhood. Hillcrest is often thought of as the "heart of Little Rock," as it is located almost directly in the

center of Little Rock and was arguably the first fully established suburb in Little Rock, and among the first of its kind of neighborhoods in Arkansas. The Hillcrest Historic District includes the former town hall building, and one of the oldest educational institutions in Arkansas—Mount St. Mary Academy—a girls' Catholic school. Hillcrest contains some of Little Rock's most historic construction in both commercial and residential areas. Additionally, part of Hillcrest overlooks Allsopp Park, a major city park situated between Hillcrest on the south side and the corporate/design-oriented Riverdale neighborhood to its north.

Pulaski Heights marked the beginning of Little Rock's expansion to the west, a shift that has showed no signs of slowing as the city continues to grow. Until the arrival of streetcar lines from Little Rock in 1903, the area existed as a mostly uninhabited, wooded stretch. Since purchasing an initial 800 acres in 1891, Michigan lawyers H.F. Auten and Edgar E. Moss had been eagerly awaiting the streetcars' arrival. When electric-powered lines began to run up Prospect Avenue (now Kavanaugh Boulevard), Pulaski Heights' development was off and running. In just a couple of years Pulaski Heights grew from fewer than a dozen families to a town of more than 300 by the time it was incorporated on Aug. 1, 1905.

Sidewalks, schools, churches and businesses, including a newspaper, quickly followed as Pulaski Heights, touting its natural, outdoor beauty, attracted homebuyers of many different income levels. Considered Little Rock's first suburb, Pulaski Heights lasted as an independent community until 1916, when the town, seeing the advantages that included a fire station, voted to become Little Rock's Ninth ward. Hillcrest and the Heights would go on to become the distinct but attractive neighborhoods they are today while collectively continuing to draw new residents.

In 1908 Mount St. Mary's Academy and Convent moved from Louisiana Street to a 10-acre site in what would become Hillcrest and, at the same time, ceased instruction for boys and changed its name to Mount St. Mary Academy. Founded in 1851, the academy continues to educate young women and stands as the oldest educational institution in continuous operation in Arkansas. Little Rock's Catholic High School for Boys was founded in 1930 and sits just across University Avenue, the Heights' western border. In 1913 what is now Pulaski Heights Middle School was established and in 1916 St. John's Seminary/Little Rock College moved to North Tyler Street in the Heights. Closed in 1967, the seminary campus became the site of the St. John Catholic Center and is the administrative headquarters of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Little Rock.

The area in Hillcrest was chosen for its elevation, which makes Knoop Park ideal for today's joggers and cyclists and, with its view of downtown and the Arkansas River, it also is ideal for fireworks watching during Riverfest and Pops on the River.

Hillcrest is also home to 150-acre Allsopp Park, which was dedicated in 1931 and named for resident Frederick Allsopp — a native of England and the one-time business manager of the Arkansas Gazette — who urged the city of Little Rock to acquire and develop the ravines near his home.

All that remains of the park's suspension footbridge (built in 1906 to allow Hillcrest Addition residents easier access to the Kavanaugh streetcar stop) are the concrete piers, but Allsopp Park still holds a softball field, tennis/basketball courts, mountain bike trails, a pavilion and playground.

The Heights is home to the exclusive Country Club of Little Rock and its 18-hole golf course. Built in 1902, it is the oldest country club west of the Mississippi and boasts an elite membership, many of whom are descendants of the original members and among some of the most powerful and influential people in our city and state. As governor of Arkansas, former President Bill Clinton had an honorary membership at the Country Club of Little Rock.

The most famous person to actually grow up in Pulaski Heights was Helen Gurley Brown, founder of *Cosmopolitan* magazine and author of "Sex and the Single Girl." Her father, Ira Marvin Gurley, was a former Game and Fish Commissioner who also served in the Arkansas House of Representatives until his death in an elevator accident in 1932. Brown's family moved to their Monroe Street home in Hillcrest in 1932 from Green Forest when she was 10.

The Heights is or has been home to many of the state's CEOs and descendants of the city's first business leaders. By far the most notable event to befall the Pulaski Heights area took place on March 31, 1960 when a B-47 bomber from Little Rock Air Force Base exploded overhead; killing three of the four crewmen aboard while two civilians on the ground were killed by debris and several homes were damaged.

About PHUMC

As Little Rock continued its growth westward, the creation of new neighborhoods created a need for and opportunities to plant new churches. In Pulaski Heights, the first church was planted by the Episcopal Diocese of Arkansas: St. Mark's in the Wilderness on the corner of Woodlawn and Ash Streets in 1905. The Methodist Episcopal Church South selected three areas of the city for long term church development: Capitol View, Pulaski Heights, and White City, which was later known as Forest Park.

Pulaski Heights is first mentioned in the Little Rock conference's appointments in 1907 as a joint charge with Capitol View Methodist Church "to be supplied" with preaching, which I construe as not having a permanent pastor at that point. The next year, the conference minutes refer to an appointment named, "Capitol Mission and Henderson," which was implied to mean Pulaski Heights. A memoir

by Mrs. C.A. Rosenbaum told the story of how a group of Methodist women in the area began to lay the groundwork for a more permanent presence in the neighborhood. The effort rose from their organization of a Ladies' Aid Society in 1909. The Ladies' Aid Society gave rise by 1940 to the formation of the Women's Missionary Society. Also in 1909, Dr. A.C. Millar, the District Superintendent (then called Presiding Elder) of the Little Rock District) negotiated the purchase of two lots on the corner of Woodlawn and Beech Streets from Mrs. Jane Woodruff for \$1,000. An article on the history of Pulaski Heights published in the Centennial issue of *Arkansas Methodist* in 1936 stated that Rev. Millar purchased the lots out of his own pocket.

At the 1911 Little Rock Annual Conference, Rev. Henry Buhler was appointed Pastor of Capitol View, which itself had begun as a mission of First Methodist downtown in 1906. A part of his charge was to meet with Methodists in the rapidly growing Heights area and join with them in church planting efforts. He is all but certain to have met with the Ladies' Aid Society to help guide in the creation of a Sunday School, which, along with the formation of a Ladies' Aid Society, most always came before the organization of a new church. The Sunday School first met at the current site of St. Thomas Reformed Episcopal Church at Woodlawn and Ash in 1912. It is still not totally certain how many charter members the church had at its organization, but it appears that the most accepted was the eleven people who first met with Reverend Buhler. Several other reports during that period put the number as few as 34 and as many as 47. Within a year, the church's membership zoomed to 114. The first media mention of the organization of the church was in the *Arkansas Gazette* on February 4, 1912 (which was reprinted in the "50 Years Ago" column on February 4, 1962) and erroneously as being located at Woodlawn and Elm Streets. The original location was at Beech and Woodlawn, two blocks down the street. Originally the corner was known as Beech and Sixth, but changed when the town of Pulaski Heights annexed to Little Rock in 1917.

On July 21, 1912, the church's original cornerstone was laid "In presence of several hundred people of the suburb," now known as the Hillcrest Historic District. Mrs. J.S. McDonnell gave the church a loan of \$5,000 so construction could begin as soon as possible. On Christmas Eve, 1912, the first service was held on the main level in the new auditorium, and the baptism of Martha Kathryn Brown was the first to be celebrated in the new church. She remained active in the church into the late 1980s. That same year, Rev. Robert Duckworth was the first pastor appointed full time to the church. The building was based on what was called the Akron Plan, which envisioned church plants designed to make the Sunday School a more integral part of the church. Eventually classrooms, a pastor's study, and other rooms on the main and balcony floors were added while the basement contained parlors, rest rooms, serving rooms, a gymnasium and showers. The congregation totally moved into the new structure in early January 1913. In order to cope with continuing Sunday School growth, Hanna Hall, on a vacant lot next to the church, was completed in 1924.

In 1941, the Board of Stewards authorized a celebration to commemorate the 30th Anniversary of the church to be held the following February. The celebration would be marked by a major building fund drive with the slogan, "Thirty Years of Service; Thirty Thousand in Gratitude." The goal was to build a new sanctuary on the corner lot adjacent to the original building, upon which the old church would be remodeled to serve as the educational building. World War II intervened in the form of shortages of building materials and construction manpower, and thus, the "Thirty Years of Service; Thirty Thousand in Gratitude" campaign continued throughout the war years; the fund was over \$50,000 by January 1945. The deteriorating condition of the 1912 building added a sense of urgency to the church's efforts. On September 24, 1945, the church made the decision to purchase three lots on the corner of Woodlawn and Monroe Streets where the new sanctuary was to be constructed. Groundbreaking for the new sanctuary took place on March 13, 1949, and the cornerstone was set on May 14, 1950. As in 1912, the first service in the new sanctuary took place on Christmas Eve, 1950. The original 1912 cornerstone can be found in the welcome center. The old church building was eventually sold in 1953 and converted into apartments, which still stand on Woodlawn two blocks east of the current building.

Since that time, the church has grown steadily to a membership of 4,000 plus members. The campus has expanded and been renovated with the addition of the Norma Story Children's Building and the Dr. James B. Argue Christian Life Center, also known as the Great Hall or simply the gym. In 1998, the sanctuary underwent an extensive renovation which included the installation of a 74-rank organ with 4,190 pipes; 20 cast bronze bells with strikers were added to the original four peal bells. The Nixon Disciple Center, parking deck and Columbarium were added in 2005.

Architectural History and Influences

Pulaski Heights United Methodist was built in the English Revival Style of Architecture and the church's subsequent additions were designed to conform to the design of the sanctuary. The Gothic Revival movement emerged in 19th-century England. Its roots were intertwined with deeply philosophical movements associated with a re-awakening of High Church or Anglo-Catholic belief concerned by the growth of religious nonconformism. Ultimately, the "Anglo-Catholicism" tradition of religious belief and style became widespread for its intrinsic appeal in the third quarter of the 19th century. Gothic Revival architecture varied considerably in its faithfulness to both the ornamental style and principles of construction of its medieval original, sometimes amounting to little more than pointed window frames and a few touches of Gothic decoration on a building otherwise on a wholly 19th-century plan and using contemporary materials and construction methods. The Gothic Revival was paralleled and supported by "medievalism", which had its roots in antiquarian concerns with survivals and curiosities. As "industrialisation" progressed, a reaction against machine production and the appearance of factories also grew. Proponents of the

picturesque such as Thomas Carlyle and Augustus Pugin took a critical view of industrial society and portrayed pre-industrial medieval society as a golden age. In the twentieth century, buildings such as churches, schools, colleges and universities were still constructed in the Gothic style (here often known as "Collegiate Gothic" style) which remained popular in England, Canada and in the United States until well into the century.

Changes and alterations to the sanctuary and the overall church plant ensued in succeeding years. The altar in the sanctuary where Reverend J. Kenneth Shamblin preached the first sermon was later removed and replaced by a free standing one in the chancel. In the new sanctuary's early years, members often had to walk from Sunday School either from the Prospect Theater on Beechwood Street or from the old church building for services on Sunday morning. Harold Engstrom, who was a longtime force on several building committees of the church, was the prime mover toward the creation of a new educational wing and what we know today as Shamblin Chapel. Mr. Engstrom recalled in the 75th Anniversary booklet, Profile of a Church," that "the pressure built up for an adequate Sunday School building and a chapel for small weddings and special worship groups. We raised money, drew up plans, refinanced our loan, and built an education building and the Shamblin Chapel." That vision as expressed by Mr. Engstrom would certainly appear to be a fitting extension of the sentiments of another longtime building committee member, Mrs. Herbert Smith, who responded when it appeared that this sanctuary would be beyond the means of the congregation to build, "You business men think churches are built with money. Churches are built with faith!" It could truly be concluded without fear of contradiction that creation of this facility, as well as its continuing progress, is an amazing tribute to faithful members such as Mr. Engstrom and Mrs. Smith, as well as the pastoral leadership from Rev. Duckworth to Rev. Skarda in the present day.

The Norma Story Children's Building was created out of a need to accommodate growing ministries for a growing youth ministry at Pulaski Heights in the 1950s and beyond. The first floor would contain recreational facilities and the second floor would have much needed classroom space. The creation of this youth building is a fitting tribute to Mrs. Story, a member of Pulaski Heights for over four decades who performed ministries for the church's youth ranging from Vacation Bible School, keeping enrollment records, serving as a youth counselor, and coordinating youth events and the church school. The building was renamed in her honor after she passed away in 1987. The building was renovated as part of the "Church Home 2000" project in 2000.

In January 1982, a new sacristy (a room in a church where a minister prepares for a service and where vestments and other things used in worship are kept) was unveiled. It was located in a small room behind the sanctuary. A new set of paraments (the liturgical hangings on and around the altar, as well as the cloths hanging from the pulpit and lectern, as well as the ecclesiastical vestments and

mitres, which are tall headdresses worn by bishops and senior clergy as a symbol of office) were donated that same year. Six kneeling cushions and a wedding cushion that were designed and hand stitched using colors and designs from the stained glass windows were added the following February. The James B. Argue Christian Life Center was completed and opened in October 1986, and its Great Hall became the center of church activities of all kinds. As part of the building's construction, walls were removed from the church library to create a large hallway joining the courtyard of the existing building to the Christian Life Center, which is now the church's main reception area. This area contains stained glass designed by Soo's Stained Glass in North Little Rock. All staff offices are organized on this level as well. The organ that is now used in the Shamblin Chapel was a gift by Carl R. Stout in 1987 in memory of his wife, Ruth.

The height of the "Church Home 2000" project was the renovation of the sanctuary beginning in 1998. The project, in which we can take in its benefits today, involved new lights, slate flooring, but even more amazing is the Schantz sanctuary pipe organ, which was originally placed in the sanctuary in 1960. An anonymous donor gave \$500,000 to renovate the organ, which was done by Nichols and Simpson in 2000. It included an increase to 75 from 25 ranks, and a new console, and an increase in pipes at the rear of the sanctuary. It is one of the largest pipe organs in the state at about 4,800 pipes. A nice outdoor complement to the sanctuary's music making capabilities stems from the bell tower that was added to the sanctuary in 1954. However, no bell rang from the tower for over thirty-five years. Chris Wellons, the widow of businessman James Wellons, sought to honor her husband's memory after his death in 1978 by giving an offering in her will to equip the tower with a set bells and accompanying carillon (a set of bells in a tower, played using a keyboard or by an automatic mechanism similar to a piano roll) This process was set in motion after her death in 1989 with the casting of four bronze/tin bells that were each inscribed with "In Loving Memory James Wellons" on one side and "Pulaski Heights United Methodist Church" on the other. The bells, cast in France, took over a year from casting to final delivery and installation at the church. The Cress family carried this project still further in 1999 with a gift that went toward the placement of a matching set of twenty Paccard bells in addition to the original carillon, which was also cast in France.

The most recent projects, as part of the "Join Hands and Build" campaign beginning in 2002 provided a three-story addition of 38,000 square feet to the existing church facility. The design included an elevated parking deck helping to form an entrance motor court in the center of the facility and provide enhanced access as well. The project required extreme sensitivity in response to the concerns of the church's neighbors in the Hillcrest area for maintaining the traditional residential fabric of the area. Because of the nature of the placement of the church plant, maximum use of the church property was essential for the further progress of the ministries of Pulaski Heights. This project was the first

phase of a three-phase master plan that envisioned future additions for congregational gathering and church offices.

Although the project displaced existing surface parking, the addition actually increased the facility parking capacity, while at the same time maintaining a presence that continued to blend with the character of this historic neighborhood. The new addition provided rooms for the expanding children's and youth programs in the Norma Story Building, and a 400-seat multipurpose room, which became known as Wesley Hall, complete with an up-to-date audiovisual system to be used for contemporary worship services. In addition, the project included a labyrinth incorporated into the carpeted floor of the multipurpose room (which is used to facilitate prayer, meditation, spiritual transformation, and/or global spiritual unity) and a columbarium (a room or building with niches for funeral urns to be stored). The labyrinth was the particular vision of Rev. Harriet Akins-Banman, who also took on its care as a personal project. All would become part of the Victor H. Nixon Disciple Center.

The columbarium garden, which you encounter upon exiting vestibule leading into the Norma Story Building, is a wonderful legacy honoring faithful members of Pulaski Heights. Consecrated in September 2005, the garden has three unique features. On the east end of the garden is a cross that was dedicated to Mr. Harold Engstrom, who had been a long time leader in the expansion of the facilities and ministries at Pulaski Heights. Several of the burial urns in the garden are adorned with decorative spiritual ornamentation. But the planners of the columbarium did not forget the memories of faithful members that came before the garden was added; there is a special wall near the front wall of the Norma Story Building with the inscription, "Our Saints, Who Rest Elsewhere, are Here in Spirit forever." Among those who are honored in this section include Mrs. Story as well as Dr. James B. Argue, the church's long time pastor, and his wife, Ann. A special prayer bench was placed there by Kappa Kappa Gamma sorority in memory of Sue Darby Gaston.

The later building additions, totally completed by 2015 as part of the "Forward With Faith" campaign, incorporated the Gothic exterior design of the original sanctuary. The additions utilized brick and cast stone dressings, buttresses, two-centered, three-centered and lancet arches. The Victor H. Nixon Disciple Center, parking deck and columbarium comprised the first church structure in Arkansas to receive Leadership in Energy and Environmental Development (LEED) certification.

Thank you all for coming today! Please join us for our next Sandwiching in History tour of 2017 on Friday February 3 at Trapnall Hall at 725 East Capitol in Little Rock. We will begin at Noon. Hope to see you there! Also, if you're dining out after the tour, be sure to patronize your local establishments. You'll love the taste, and you're building a better Little Rock!