

**Walks through History
Piggott, Arkansas
Begin at the Piggott Post Office, 119 North Third Street
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By: Amy Milliken
Based on a previous script by Rachel Silva**



Hello, welcome to Piggott, AR. My name is Amy Milliken and I like to thank you for joining us on the “Walks Through History” tour of historic downtown Piggott. A couple of things I need to tell you before we get started...

First, the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program is a Registered Provider with The American Institute of Architects Continuing Education Systems and this session is registered with the AIA for continuing education credit. Credit earned for completion of this program will be reported to AIA Records for AIA members. If you are here today and want your AIA credit, please see me after the tour.

Second, I would like to acknowledge the contributions of Rachel Patton, Shelle Stormoe, Mark Christ and countless others for the information I will be passing on to you today. For those of you in the know, these tours are usually the responsibility of AHPP’s Preservation Coordinator but I am AHPP’s Education Outreach Coordinator. My job consists of traveling to schools around the state and working with 3rd to 12th grade students & teachers, usually. Therefore, it is important to note that I was only able to pull this tour script together with the help of the many historians at AHPP ☺ with that being said, let’s begin...

So, how could we not start this tour without mention of Piggott’s most widely known, or perhaps most infamous person of note, Ernest Hemingway. He was once quoted in Esquire magazine

that other than Paris, France, there was nowhere he'd rather be except, "Piggott, Arkansas in the fall."

Indeed Ernest Hemingway spent a good bit of time here in Piggott from 1927 to 1940 during his marriage to Pauline Pfeiffer daughter of Paul and Mary Pfeiffer.

However, before we get into the Pfeiffer's, I am going to give you a quick overview of Piggott's history. Piggott is the eastern district county seat for Clay County. Clay County is one of several counties in Arkansas with dual county seats. In 1891, the citizens of the county voted to move the eastern county seat from Boydsville to Piggott. Boydsville was and still is located on a beautiful spot south of here on Crowley's Ridge but, at the time, it did not have ready access to the railroad, which was essential to a community's economic growth. However, there was another county seat even before Boydsville....

The first county seat was located in Corning. Unfortunately, Corning proved to be a very difficult trip for the residents of the eastern part of the county because they had to cross the Black River and Cache River bottoms. In fact, many months of the year saw the swamps as simply impassable. For this reason, the county seat was changed to Boydsville and the removal of the courthouse occurred in 1877. Of course, solving this problem for the people of eastern Clay County, did nothing but create problems for the residents of western Clay County. Therefore, western county residents petitioned the legislature and the county was then granted the right to have two county seats. Anyone want to take a guess what location was chosen? That's right, Corning. In 1881, Corning was named the western district seat.

Clay County was originally Clayton County and was formed in 1873. For whom Clayton County was named is unknown but there are two men widely accepted as top possibilities, John M. Clayton and Powell Clayton. However, the Clayton Co. namesake is a moot point since the county was renamed in 1875 to honor Henry Clay. Henry Clay was the ninth Secretary of State, the founder and leader of the Whig Party, responsible for the Missouri Compromise and a gifted orator, among many other talents.

Though it is hard to believe now, when founded in 1882 Piggott was a largely wooded area with small farms scattered throughout the area. Actually, the first town established with the name of Piggott was not here in this location at all. The town located here was Huston. Now, the original Piggott was named after a man who settled near here, Dr. James A. Piggott, and successfully brought in the first post office in 1873.

At this location was the town of Huston, named for Dr. Sam Huston. As with so many towns in Arkansas, and across the nation, the arrival of the railroad caused local populations and even whole towns to move. In this case, the town of Piggott moved to the town of Huston (at this location) bringing along its post office and name in the process.

Though it had a post office, Piggott was not counted in the census until 1900 and had 597 residents. However, by 1910, the population had doubled reaching to over a thousand people and over 2 thousand by 1920. The flood of 1927, followed by several years of drought, and then

the depression caused an exodus of farmers and residents from the area. By the time this beautiful building was constructed the population was back below 2000 residents.

Post Office

This post office was constructed in 1937. Previously the site of a residence, early in the 20th century, and later a gasoline station, the site was at least the third Post Office building in Piggott. Of the two previous, one was located on the west side of the square about a half block down and on Main Street about one and a half blocks east.

Louis A Simon designed the building and it was completed in 1937. The building is a simplified Colonial Revival style.

Well, what exactly is Colonial Revival style? Colonial Revival is one of the longest-lived architectural styles in America. It has its roots in the Classical Revival movement of the early to middle 1800s. Although it is a style that is seen in modern buildings, its period dates roughly from 1880 to 1955.

Key points of the style are a focus on symmetry; although, buildings and homes of asymmetrical style are not commonly found. A decorative pediment with sidelights and a fanlight often accentuates the main door. The façade is balanced and the windows are double hung with multiple pane glazing in each.

Before this post office was complete, the U.S. Treasury Department sought permission to have a mural installed. In December 1937, they received permission to use extra construction funds to have a mural painted. Superintendent Ed Rowan contacted Lowell Houser to design and paint the mural in Piggott. The decision to ask Houser was based on previous work he had done in the Ames, Iowa, post office. In 1938, when Houser was approached for this commission, he was working as an art professor at San Diego State College. Houser originally estimated that it would only take him six months to complete the mural; in actuality, it took almost a whole year to provide even a sketch.

The Mural “Airmail”

This is the mural “Airmail” and it is just one of sixteen post office murals remaining today in Arkansas. As I mentioned before, Lowell Houser was commissioned for this project. He provided a sketch for a mural entitled “The Forest Give Way To The Fields” and it focused on Piggott’s history as both a lumber community and a newly emerging farming community. By 1940, Houser had not yet begun work on the mural and sent a letter in June asking for more time, in which Superintendent Rowan replied by nullifying the contract.

Rowan then hired fellow Iowan Dan Rhodes to design and paint the mural. Rhodes completed the design seen here, entitled “Airmail”. He intended to show the streamlined power and efficiency of the postal system. Rhodes felt that the airmail service was most important to smaller, rural communities. Interestingly, the airplane he chose to highlight that service was the

very modern, very successful Douglas DC-3, an airplane seldom seen in Northeast Arkansas airports.

Rhodes completed the mural in early spring of 1941.

3rd Street / West Side of the Square

In the early 1900s this block was an early commercial block. A 1908 Sanborn Map (explain Sanborn Maps, if needed) shows there were four buildings here on the corner, all were stores, save the fourth which was also the post office. The remaining block was residential with a large house in the middle of the block.

Across the street on the corner of third and main was the county jail.

The block changed substantially by 1915. New commercial buildings were in place where the old frame structures had been. The jail was moved over to 2nd south of Court. The Post Office was on Main closer to Front Street.

The third building on the block was a one story Opera and Movie House.

Gas Station

Let's look closely at the gas station here on the corner of 3rd and Court. As I mentioned, the post office was previously the site of a gas station. So, if I had to guess, the government paid the owner of the gas station to move to a new location and the post office was then built on that site. This portion of the block had always been empty and available and, today, it is still a prominent location. Just like many gas stations of the time, this station was built in the style called Art Moderne, and I think it's wonderful that they kept the structures architectural integrity.

Smooth, rounded corners and a very streamlined design characterize Art Moderne. Often times, the buildings are stucco to further highlight the streamlined design. They feature vertical accent elements of aluminum or stainless steel; yet, here the only modern element is the customer waiting room and awning. The garage area reflects a design very similar to the rest of the square.

Buildings on Court/South Side Square

This corner has been a commercial corner for over 100 years now. Like the buildings on 3rd street, these began as wood frame, single story shops. By 1915, a building similar to this was on this corner. Unfortunately, I have not been able to discover when this building was built; however, this architecture is indicative of the commercial architecture of the period.

You will notice many of the same elements on buildings all around the square. Early twentieth century commercial architecture, for the most part, is very utilitarian. In most of Arkansas's small towns, there are very few pure examples of any one style of architecture applied commercially.

Indicative of early 1900-1920 commercial architecture is the inset door, the large single pane display windows and the large windowed doors. The awning is not original, nor period. The stepped pediment at the top and the decorative brick coping serve a dual purpose: decorative element offering some level of sophistication and a vertical element providing the illusion of a taller building.

Buildings on 2nd Street / Eastern District Courthouse

As I mentioned earlier, Clay County has two courthouses. In the early 1960s the county decided to build two modern courthouses to replace the 1890s courthouses.

The winning architects were the firm of Donnellan-Porterfield of Poplar Bluff, MO. They happen to be the same architects of the First Baptist Church, built 1963, over on x and x streets.

Many people are not fans of the modern style. Although I am not overly fond of the modern style, I am learning to appreciate it more. This building is classically modern style and one of the better examples of the modern architecture in Piggott. We will see some other examples but this is a great example of the International Style here in Piggott.

The International Style was largely the result of the Bauhaus (BO-HOUSE) movement in Germany. From what I understand, the Bauhaus movement could be a several hour lecture; however, since my knowledge of the movement is limited, today you'll be getting the cliff notes version. It began in 1919, lasted until 1933 and its most prominent architect is Ludwig Mies van der Rho. A style that took modernization and industrial esthetic to a new level, the movement rejected emotion and embraced standardization. People often refer to it as minimalism, and like the beloved Art Deco and Beaux Arts styles, the surfaces are smooth.

Bauhaus design is box like and often designed as squares with strongly horizontal emphasis. Openings often seem punched as if made on a machine. True International Style buildings feature modern materials and include metal accents.

We can see all of those features here with the Clay County courthouse. The building is strongly horizontal with a massing that is much wider than tall. The dark brick is laid in a stretcher bond to achieve minimal decorative effect and to accent the smoothness. The only decoration are smooth concrete vertical elements, painted white, and the concrete arches also painted white.

The western district courthouse in Corning is of the same design.

Buildings in middle of block on 2nd Street

These two buildings are of no particular style yet they have decorative elements that make them stand out on this block. They are simply early twentieth century architecture with many of the same features as the building on Court Street. However, the mason or architect designed them with a slight Mission Revival influence.

The Mission Revival Style of architecture was common between the years 1895 and 1920. The Spanish Colonial Revival carried on after and, understandably, the two styles are easily confused. The true style was stucco; however it was often stone or brick, outside of California, but the important effect was to be smooth like stucco.

The curved pediment and the prominent castellation's on these buildings are reminiscent of the Mission Revival Style. Additionally the brickwork on the upper part of the building is indicative of a more high style building with the American Common Bond and the Basket on Edge inlay.

Silas Pest Company

This building is not on the National Register of Historic Places even though they had a plaque installed saying they are. I'd like to point out that it's not illegal to do this, but it is a little like selling watered-down milk as skim.

This building was originally home to the Piggott Banner. Noah House started the Banner in 1891. The building burned about 1995 and was rebuilt by A. C. Silas who added the bay windows and front porch/awning. Inside and on the exterior are many of the appertences of the Excelsior Hotel in Little Rock.

Nevertheless, there are some very interesting features of the building to point out. As you can see, this building has the decorative brick cornice as other buildings on the square and it also has the stepped pediment. The early structural metal beams often carried decoration and many are quite beautiful. Some would describe these decorative metal beams as being in the Italianate Style. These were very common reaching their peak about 1890.

The Cotton Gin

For many communities in Arkansas, the cotton gin was the heart of the community. Across the street and over the tracks, where those sheds are, stood the Bertig Gin Company. To show how important cotton was to Piggott's economy during the post timber period, the Bertig Gin was one of two gins in Piggott. The Bertig Gin Company was the oldest, having built their first gin in Piggott in 1900. The Pfeiffer Gin was built next a few blocks to the north and east.

The Train Depot

The St. Louis Southwestern Depot here in Piggott is an identical twin to the Cotton Belt Depot in Coy, Arkansas, and was most likely built between 1900 and 1915. This building has an architectural style called Stick. The Stick style features wide overhanging eaves that are open to expose the rafters. The building originally had a much larger freight portion, almost twice the size of the current depot.

Both the St. Louis Southwestern Railroad and the Butler County Railroad, at one time, served Piggott. Later, the Cotton Belt was built through Piggott as the Texas & St. Louis Railway. In 1881, construction began and, in 1882, the segment through Piggott was completed.

The Butler County Railroad had a depot and freight station here on the south side of Court Street. The Brooklyn Cooperage Company of Poplar Bluff, MO, chartered the Butler County Railroad in 1900. A standard gauge line terminated in the north at Poplar Bluff, MO, and on the south at Kennett, MO. It was originally the St. Louis, Kennett, and Southeastern Railroad. The mill (at one point the largest in America) closed in 1927 and the railroad sold to the St. Louis & San Francisco Railway, commonly known as Frisco, and remained into the 1950s. Locals nicknamed the passenger train the Moose because of the distinctive single chime horn.

Empty spot where Palace Hotel and Oil Company stood

For many years, the Palace Hotel was Piggott's finest hotel. Although it had only fourteen rooms, they were of the finest European style. The Palace Hotel was built between the years 1885 and 1900, and was a vernacular Italianate structure with a simplified balustrade on a central porch. The second story windows were framed in arched openings and the first story windows featured large horizontally oriented 02/02 windows.

Surveyed by our office in 1971, the building housed the offices of the Crockett Oil Company.

Sometime during the 1990s, the building was torn down and it's still a vacant lot today.

Main Street

This building on the north side of Main on the west side of the alley was the second post office and the site of the post office prior to the construction of the Post Office Building on 3rd Street.

The building across the street looks strangely like a gas station. In fact, it is very similar in design to the very popular Renaissance Revival style of gasoline station common in the early 1920s. For many years, this design was the standard for the Gulf Oil Company. The front of the building was a large port cochere (PORT CO-SHARE) and between the posts stood two gas pumps, at least. Notice on the west side the two bricked-in openings very much like restrooms.

Some may argue this building is not true Renaissance Revival style. I cannot argue that point. Notice the flat roof with a low profile hipped roof leading to the pediment. In true Renaissance Revival style these would be clay tile not shingles. Also, notice the symmetrical form of the building. The vertical elements on the side are simple, yet attract your eye to the building and give it more of a vertical feel.

Bank of Piggott

E.N Royall and J. K. Browning formed the Bank of Piggott in 1905. Though I do not know for sure, I believe it replaced the Clay County Bank founded in 1897. However, I do know that as early as 1908 there was a bank on this corner. The original bank building was a traditional twentieth century commercial design with very little ornamentation. That building burned in 1924 and was replaced by this building in 1925. Photographs from the 1930s reveal that this building originally had no awning and did have screened windows and doors. The building was the first building of the Piggott State Bank.

The structure is a modified Colonial Revival form. The dentil work along the cornice is indicative of the more academic approach to revival structures. Instead of columns, the architect gave us these pseudo Doric columns on the exterior edges making the entire front of the building into one massive portico. The decorative concrete spandrel adds a touch of elegance and sophistication to what is primarily a simple commercial structure.

Joe and Tracy Cole currently own the building and it houses Piggott's only bed & breakfast, The Inn at Piggott.

The building next door has been a music store, a café and, currently, law offices.

First Presbyterian Church

Originally, this building was a Cumberland Presbyterian Church. The building is considered a Gothic Revival style or Carpenter's Gothic. The Gothic Revival Style was, particularly for religious buildings, a reaction to the perceived hedonism of Greek and Roman cultures. That hedonism as expressed in Greek and Roman Revival architecture was no longer desirable in the middle to late 1800s. Many churches adopted the medieval influenced Gothic Revival style.

This form seen here is a simplified Gothic Revival often referred to as Carpenter's Gothic. Yet, it has true gothic elements. The shaped windows, steeply pitched roofs, decorative bargeboard, and Victorian shingles are all indicative of the Gothic Revival style.

Piggott State Bank Branch

1960s-1970s modern with great roadside sign

Piggott State Bank Building

This building has an interesting mix of modern and colonial revival styles, but has the massing and size of an institutional building. It very much gives the idea of establishment and security. If it was intended to be, it is a poor homage to Louis Sullivan's Northwest Bank in Owatonna, Minnesota. It lacks sufficient vertical height and massing. Secondly, it fails at being a true Colonial Revival, though there perhaps was no attempt at being such. Though the windows are symmetrical and divided into a very common, classical revival 08/12 pattern, the oversized windows on the front are not indicative colonial revival style.

However, modern influences should be taken into account. In this way, one can see the oversized windows to the left and right of the door as over emphasized sidelights and the oversized windows above the door as a modernized fanlight. Although not directly connected with this, but in the mind of any knowledgeable architect, is the work of Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill on the Manufacturer's Trust Building (1954) in Manhattan. This building was all glass and the interior spaces were open and inviting with a large amount of natural light. The

workspaces were open and accessible and it changed the way banks were designed from that point onward.

First United Methodist Church

Designed by E. E. Porterfield. Built 1928 an interesting combination of styles.

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