

**Sandwiching in History**  
**Rozelle-Murphy House**  
**1301 Scott Street, Little Rock**  
**September 5, 2014**  
**By: Rachel Silva**



### **Intro**

Good afternoon, my name is Rachel Silva, and I work for the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program. Thank you for coming, and welcome to the “Sandwiching in History” tour of the Rozelle-Murphy House. I’d like to thank John Emerson, Scott Poynter, and everyone at Emerson Poynter for allowing us to tour their offices today. And I’d also like to thank Don Curdie and his mother, June Watkins Gardner, for sharing information about their family and the house. June was born in 1924 in the Rozelle-Murphy House.

For any architects in the audience, 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.

Located in the MacArthur Park Historic District (National Register-listed 7/25/1977), the Rozelle-Murphy House was built in 1887 as a 1 ½-story, Queen Anne-style home. Over the years, the house was enlarged with Craftsman-style

additions, and the original front porch was replaced with a Colonial Revival-style portico.

## **Occupant History**

### *Rozelle*

This house was built in 1887 by George F. Rozelle, owner of the Rozelle Brokerage and Commercial Company located on East Markham Street. Prior to building this house, Rozelle lived in a house at the northwest corner of 13<sup>th</sup> and Scott (1222 Scott), catty-corner from here. The Rozelle-Murphy House was constructed on 2 ½ lots and was originally a much smaller house. Designed in the Queen Anne style with a corner turret, the red brick home featured a wrap-around porch supported by turned wooden posts.

Rozelle lost the house to foreclosure in 1895, and the property was acquired by W. B. Worthen and his wife, Mollie. Rozelle leased the house from Worthen for about a year, and then in 1897 the George W. Murphy family moved into 1301 Scott under a similar lease arrangement.

### *Murphy*

Colonel Murphy, as he was known, was a very interesting character. George Washington Murphy was born on January 8, 1841, at Huntington, Tennessee, and lived there until May 1861, when he enlisted at the outbreak of the Civil War in the first Confederate company organized in his county. Murphy was wounded during the battles of Shiloh, Murfreesboro, and Harrisburg (first two in Tennessee and Harrisburg near Tupelo, Mississippi). Murphy suffered an injury to his right leg in 1864 at Harrisburg which permanently disqualified him from active service, but he remained with the Confederate forces until the end of the war.

In the fall of 1865 Murphy rode horseback from Memphis to Hamburg, Ashley County, Arkansas, where he studied law under local attorney W. D. Moore. He

was admitted to the bar in 1866 at Warren, Bradley County, Arkansas, and practiced law at Hamburg until 1877. Murphy then moved to Hot Springs, where he practiced with James B. Wood and E. W. Rector. He moved to Little Rock in 1890 and partnered with Thomas B. Martin in the firm of Martin and Murphy and later joined T. M. Mehaffy in the firm of Murphy and Mehaffy. The latter firm was dissolved when Col. Murphy was elected attorney general; he served in that capacity from 1901 to 1905.

Murphy was a successful criminal attorney and was known for being very dramatic in the courtroom. A local circuit court judge called Murphy “invincible in jury trials.” You’ll recall that Col. Murphy badly injured his leg during the Civil War. Well, he often exaggerated his limp to gain sympathy for his clients from the jury. Murphy also had a trick pocket watch, which he would open at a strategic moment during a trial. The inner workings of the watch would fly all over the courtroom, naturally drawing the jury’s attention away from the prosecutor’s summation while Murphy scrambled about the room gathering the pieces.

In 1912 Murphy ran for governor on the Progressive party ticket, but Joseph Taylor Robinson won in a landslide (he ran against Joe T. Robinson (Dem) and Andrew Roland (Repub)). Col. Murphy was senior partner in the firm of Murphy, McHaney & Dunaway until his death on October 11, 1920, after a short illness. He was 79. His funeral service was held in the family home at 1301 Scott Street, and his body was sent to Hot Springs for burial.

Rewind to 1897, when the Murphy family started leasing this house...

George Murphy and his wife, Sallie Haltom Murphy, had six children who all lived in the house at 1301 Scott Street. They were:

- Grace Murphy (8/26/1870—10/1/1940)
- Elizabeth “Bessie” Murphy Armistead (8/11/1877—5/23/1964)
- Sarah “Sadie” Murphy Blakeslee (2/15/1881—3/27/1976)
- Jennie Murphy (11/22/1885—8/23/1938)

- Samuel Murphy (October 1887--?? Pre-1920)
- Leone Murphy Cooper (1/28/1890—3/9/1963)

Sallie Murphy died in 1901 after a prolonged illness. Col. Murphy never remarried.

In 1904 Murphy bought the house from W. B. Worthen for \$9,500. Sometime between 1904 and 1913 (maybe in 1911?), Murphy added a few rooms to the northeast corner of the original house. After George Murphy's death in 1920, his heirs sold the property in 1921 to Thomas R. Smallwood.

### *Smallwood*

A native of Frederick, Maryland, Thomas Radford Smallwood moved to Little Rock in 1873 and worked as an independent fire insurance adjustor. In 1921 he married Blanche Mivelaz, and the couple purchased the Rozelle-Murphy House for \$13,500. Tom Smallwood spent \$40,000 to \$45,000 on an extensive remodeling of the home. He hired Little Rock architect William Dill to supervise the project. A 2-story, Craftsman-style addition was added to the south side of the house and contained a solarium with a sleeping porch above it. A small porch on the north side of the house was enclosed with windows. The biggest change—the home's large attic space was combined with several dormer additions on the roof to create an entire second floor. So the grand staircase and mezzanine area date to about 1921. Smallwood also hired Little Rock artist Ben Brantley to apply stenciling and painted decoration to the frieze of interior walls. [Brantley lived at 501 E. 8<sup>th</sup> Street. He was a successful painter and hung around with the likes of Adrian Brewer, Charlie May Simon, and John Gould Fletcher.] About 1927 Smallwood removed the original wooden front porch and replaced it with an uncovered brick and concrete patio with a Colonial Revival-style portico at the front entrance.

One might ask, "Why all this remodeling for two people?" Tom Smallwood didn't marry until he was about 60 years old, and he wanted to be surrounded by his new family. So he moved four generations of his wife's family into the Rozelle-

Murphy House. Blanche Mivelaz Smallwood's father, Frank Mivelaz, was born in Switzerland to French parents. They were from Alsace-Lorraine, France. Frank Mivelaz came to the United States in 1852 and arrived in Arkansas in 1888. So you had the following people living in the house at one time (total of 9):

- Frank and Katherine Mivelaz (June Watkins Gardner's great-grandparents);
- Tom and Blanche Smallwood, who owned the house (Blanche was the daughter of Frank and Katherine Mivelaz and great-aunt to June);
- Aimee Mivelaz (daughter of Frank and Katherine; also Blanche's sister and June's great-aunt);
- John and Miriam Watkins (Miriam was the granddaughter of Frank and Katherine Mivelaz and mother of June);
- And Miriam and June Watkins (daughters of John and Miriam Watkins).

And a garage with living quarters was located in the southeast corner of the yard and that's where "the help" lived. The Smallwood-Mivelaz-Watkins family had two people who worked for them, Reola Spencer and a man named Parker.

1928 was a difficult year for the family, especially for Blanche Smallwood. Tom Smallwood died on October 12, 1928, at his home. He was only 68 years old. Then Frank Mivelaz died one month later on November 11, 1928. So Blanche lost her husband and her father within one month of each other.

Several members of the Mivelaz family were in the restaurant and hotel business in Little Rock. In 1893 Louis "Louie" Mivelaz, a brother of Frank Mivelaz, was president of the Mivelaz Hotel Company, proprietors of the Capital Hotel. At that time, Frank Mivelaz was a chef at the Capital Hotel. Frank later became part-owner of the Capital Hotel. [Louie Mivelaz died during the 1918 flu epidemic.] In 1915 Aimee Mivelaz, daughter of Frank Mivelaz, owned and operated the Mivelaz Café at 117 N. Victory Street.

But Frank's daughter, Blanche Mivelaz Smallwood, was probably the most enterprising cook in the family. In the 1930s during the Great Depression, Blanche

and her sister, Aimee, opened a small French restaurant in part of the Rozelle-Murphy House. It was called the Mivelaz Tea Room and was accessed through the door on the north side of the house. By 1940, Blanche had opened the Alamo Plaza Grill at 3200 Roosevelt Road. It was next to the Alamo Plaza Hotel Courts. Blanche ran the restaurant for 18 years.

In 1942 the Smallwood-Mivelaz-Watkins family moved to 1722 Broadway, and Blanche Smallwood sold the Rozelle-Murphy House to Mrs. Mary Nelson, who lived here with her son and daughter-in-law and also rented rooms. In 1953 Dixie Life and Accident Insurance Company bought the house and used it for offices. Dixie remained in the house until 1967. The home sat vacant for a few years, and then in 1970 it was purchased by Thomas Baxley, who restored the house and put his insurance business, Baxley and Associates, here. In the mid-1970s (by 1975), Jon Brittenum bought the property to house Brittenum & Associates, investment services.

Brittenum & Associates hired Little Rock architect F. Eugene Withrow in 1977 to design an addition to the southeast corner of the house. The second story addition is supported by large, brick columns. You'll easily spot it when you walk around the outside of the house. Withrow may have also done a couple more dormer additions on the north and east sides of the house.

From the mid-1980s to present, the house has provided office space for many different people, including psychologists, psychiatrists, attorneys, physicians, and calligraphers.

The Emerson Poynter law firm bought the house in February 2013 and did six months of remodeling (Gene Levy, architect). The firm moved into the house in July 2013.

## Interesting Details

June Watkins Gardner and her sister, Miriam Watkins, were born in the house in the 1920s. June remembered having a pony and chickens in the back yard.

George W. Murphy's daughters, Sarah and Elizabeth, were each married in the first floor "tower room" of the house (both weddings in 1903). Sarah married Harry Blakeslee, and Elizabeth married Henry Marshall Armistead.

June's sister, Miriam Watkins, married Bob Cook (of Cook Auto) in the house a few decades later.

The house has an area of more than 7,000 square feet.

Features original windows (some with wavy glass), oak floors, crown molding (in places), and wrought-iron fence outside.

Mantles and light fixtures are not original. New faux pressed tin and corrugated metal ceilings in some rooms.

House was not painted white originally. It was red brick.

First floor rooms—

John's office (SW corner)—Family parlor

John's second office—Formal parlor, door leading to solarium/sun porch

Bedrooms and an office were in the southeast corner of first floor.

Kitchen in back (east) side of house.

Breakfast room in northeast corner.

Scott's office—Dining room, with pocket doors leading into the front room (NW; now Will's office).

The "tower room" (now Will Crowder's office) was also called the "courting parlor" by the Murphy family. George Murphy's daughters (he had 5 of them)

would visit with their beaus in the tower area while a chaperone watched from the larger room.

When the QQA announced that the Rozelle-Murphy House would be featured on the Spring Tour in 1978, June's mother, Miriam Watkins, heard about it and contacted the QQA to share information about her family's time in the house. Her memories of Tom Smallwood's renovations totally changed what had been written about the house in the past. People thought that George Murphy made the changes, when he did not. Plus, Miriam let the QQA copy a few images of the home's interior in 1939, providing a look at the original room layout and use as well as the beautiful stenciling on the walls. And now, fast forward to 2014, Don Curdie and his mother, June Watkins Gardner, heard about this tour and contacted me with additional biographical information about the Mivelaz-Smallwood-Watkins family and shared photos of the home's exterior. That is really cool!

The Welsbach gas lamps on the front porch are not original to the house. Old photos of the porch after it was replaced in the 1920s do not show the lights on the posts. Also, those lamps were manufactured to be street lights. Although they may date to the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they were put on the porch much later.

Questions?

Next tour is Oct. 3 at the Gus Lane House, 3617 Ridge Road, NLR.