

**Sandwiching in History
Faucette-Cook Building
421-423-425 Main Street, NLR
December 13, 2013
By: Rachel Silva**



Intro

Hi, 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 Faucette-Cook Building! Before we get started, I’d like to thank a few people for their help with today’s tour.

John Chandler for allowing us to tour his building;

Will Choate with the Argenta UMC, Brian and Eric Isaac with the Ristorante Capeo, Greg & Annamary Thompson and Ann Rogers with Greg Thompson Fine Art, and Mike Russell with Mike Russell Photography for opening their spaces;

And the wonderful staff of the NLR History Commission for their help with research on the building.

The Faucette-Cook Building was built in 1895 and is located in the Argenta Historic District, which was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1993 (amended several times, with the latest boundary expansion done in 2007).

[The district is roughly bounded by Melrose Circle and 9th Street on the north, N. Broadway on the west, W. 4th Street and Broadway on the south, and Poplar Street on the east.]

Argenta History

The City of North Little Rock was called Argenta in its early days of settlement. Thomas Willoughby Newton, Sr., owned a large tract of farmland in this area and served as president of the Southwest & Arkansas Mining Company. Beginning in the late 1840s, Newton's mining company extracted silver and lead from the Kellogg Mine, which was located about 10 miles north of Argenta. In 1866 Thomas Newton's son, Colonel Robert C. Newton, named the newly platted town Argenta because of the silver his father had mined at "Kellogg diggins" (argentum is the Latin word for silver).

Argenta thrived because of the railroad industry. The Memphis & Little Rock Railway was the first operating railroad in Arkansas, and it ran east-west from Memphis to Argenta. The Memphis & Little Rock (which later became the Rock Island) crossed the Little Rock & Fort Smith Railway (later merged with Iron Mountain) at the M & LR Depot on 4th Street between Poplar and Magnolia, and the St. Louis, Iron Mountain, and Southern Railroad (became Missouri Pacific in 1917 and currently Union Pacific) came into Argenta along the path of what would be 11th Street and curved to the southwest, where it crossed the Arkansas River at the Baring Cross Bridge (completed 1873). The Iron Mountain railroad shops were west of Argenta in Baring Cross (current Union Pacific shops), and the M & LR shops were on the north side of 4th Street between Olive and Locust. Many residents of Argenta were employed by the railroad in some capacity.

Downtown buildings housed a variety of stores, restaurants, hotels, boarding houses, and saloons. Argenta was a rough town—it had no municipal government in the early days, so it was considered virtually lawless. In fact, the Arkansas Gazette often condemned Argenta, calling the town "a deserving candidate for a shower of brimstone." [AG 6/2/1877] Another Gazette article from November 25,

1880, insisted that Argenta “should be either incorporated or attached to Little Rock. Each train brings a number of tramps and disreputable characters to the place, who should not be tolerated in any community, but unless some means are taken to police the town they can carry things with a high head and go unpunished.” Gambling was also commonplace in Argenta, leading the Gazette to dub Argenta the “crap shooting center of Arkansas.” [AG 9/1/1889]

Argenta residents recognized these problems, and in 1890, the citizens of Argenta filed a petition to incorporate as a city of the first class. However, this attempt was quashed by Little Rock, when it claimed Argenta as its 8th Ward. Referencing a law that excluded voters in the targeted annexation area, the City of Little Rock laid a territorial claim on Argenta in order to increase its tax base. But Little Rock provided Argenta (8th Ward of LR) with very few city services in return for its taxes, so a plot was hatched to regain Argenta’s independence. William C. Faucette (prominent businessman, 8th Ward alderman, and 1st mayor of NLR) worked with three state legislators to get the Hoxie-Walnut Ridge Bill signed in 1903, allowing cities within a mile of one another to consolidate if the residents of both cities approved it at the polls. At a glance, the bill was written to allow the northeast Arkansas towns of Hoxie and Walnut Ridge to consolidate, which they later did. But the bill would also allow the new town of North Little Rock, which had been incorporated in 1901, to turn around and annex the 8th Ward in 1904, freeing Argenta from LR’s grasp.

In 1906, NLR changed its name back to Argenta. It remained so until 1917, when it was changed to NLR (at the urging of James P. Faucette, who thought it would make property values increase because of the city’s association with LR).

400 Block of Main Street

The 400 block of Main Street looked very different around the turn of the 20th century. At that time, this wasn’t called Main St.—it was called Newton Ave. in honor of Thomas Willoughby Newton, Sr., whose heirs platted the town of Argenta in 1866 on his farmland (in 1904 the street name was changed to Main).

The tracks of the Memphis & Little Rock Railroad ran right through the parking lot on the east side of this block, crossed Main Street, and came through this side of the block where the 1-story buildings are located between the Street Building and the Faucette Brothers Bank Building. In 1904 the Chicago, Rock Island & Southern, which by that time had acquired the Memphis & LR, donated land at the southeast corner of 5th & Main to the city for a public park. The park remained there until 1931-32 when the post office was built.

The Rock Island moved operations over to LR in 1910 and closed the rail yard on E. 4th Street, so there wasn't much need for this section of track. As a concession to Argenta, the Rock Island built passenger and freight depots on the north side of the river in 1913. The freight depot was located in the parking lot across the street (torn down about 1960), and the passenger depot is still standing at E. 4th and Hazel streets. By 1914 most of the RR tracks that crossed Main Street and continued west through the neighborhood were pulled up, making the freight depot the end of the line.

The three 1-story buildings on the west side of the 400 block were constructed in the 1920s—409 Main (HDMS Architects & Interior Designers) was built in 1921, 411 Main (Starving Artist Café) was built in 1927, and the building at 413-415 Main (empty storefront & Sidetracks Bar) was built in 1928 by George Donaghey, who was Arkansas's 22nd governor (1909-1913).

Faucette-Cook Building

The Street Building next door was originally constructed between 1889 and 1892 by pharmacist George M. Street (who worked at Humphrey's Drug at 4th & Main) and housed Lamberson Hardware (W. H. Lamberson) and Sibeck Grocery (John B. Sibeck). According to the *Arkansas Gazette*, on January 10, 1895, a fire was started by a tramp sleeping in the hayloft of Mrs. VanAustin's cornbarn, which was located behind Lamberson's storeroom and next to Sibeck's hay and horse barn. This fire caused some damage to the Street Building.

Meanwhile, brothers William C. and James P. Faucette and road contractor Marcus D. L. Cook had plans to construct “a magnificent 2-story brick [building]” at the southwest corner of 5th & Main (just north of the Street Building). Local architect J. W. Gaskill was hired to design the Faucette-Cook Building and a new façade for the Street Building, which would extend its front wall toward the street and create uniform fronts for the two buildings. Work on the two buildings commenced at the same time. Ground was broken for the Faucette-Cook Building in late February 1895, and by mid-March, the old front of the Street Building was torn down. By mid-April, the *Arkansas Gazette* reported that the cornice for the Street and Faucette-Cook buildings had arrived. The buildings featured Italianate –style details like an elaborate pressed metal cornice with paired brackets and hood molding above the second story windows. In 1929 stucco was applied to the original brick façade of the Faucette-Cook Building.

The Faucette brothers, William and James, were prominent Argenta businessmen and the first and third mayors of North Little Rock, respectively. Marcus D. L. Cook was a road contractor and in 1895 was awarded the contract to grade 5th and 6th streets east of Main. Cook and his brothers also operated a livery stable at 5th & Poplar.

The Faucette-Cook Building was initially occupied by the U.S. Post Office (421) and the Sibeck Grocery store (423) on the first floor, and the second floor was dedicated as a public hall, which according to the *Arkansas Gazette*, provided “a thing greatly needed, and will lack nothing to make it a first-class entertainment hall.” In 1898 the Sibeck Grocery store shared the 423 storefront with watchmaker Reuben Jordan. And occupying the 421 storefront with the post office were Ramsey and Hoing confectionery, Windecker & Korte meat market, and Dr. A. R. Horell. In the early 1900s, Robbins Drug Store moved into the old Sibeck space for a few years (423). By 1906 the city directory began listing three storefront addresses—421, 423, and 425.

Many different businesses have operated in the building over the years, including furniture stores, drug stores, a plumbing company, a sheet metal works, liquor

store, appliance dealer, realtor's and attorney's offices, Army surplus store, and a florist, among others. Two long-term occupants were the Argenta Garbage Company, which was at 421 Main from about 1910 until the mid-1940s, and Howard's Laundry & Dry Cleaners, which was at 425 Main from the late 1930s until the mid-1950s.

And several fraternal organizations used the second floor as a meeting hall, including the Fraternal Order of Eagles, the American Organization of United Workmen, the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks, and the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Rehab of the F-C Building

The Faucette-Cook Building sat mostly vacant and run-down during the 1980s and 1990s. The Cook family sold the building in 1998 to Bob and Ginger Wortham, who hoped to restore the building and put a deli and bakery on the first floor and rent the upstairs for receptions and parties. However, they were not able to swing the deal financially, and the building was sold to Gary Clayton. By the time Clayton bought the building, it was in a severely deteriorated state. In 2002 the Faucette-Cook Building was saved by enforcing the minimum maintenance rules established by the NLR Historic District Commission. The City's Code Enforcement Dept. took Clayton to court for failure to maintain the building. Just after Clayton began the rehab work, the entire back wall of the building collapsed, so it was very close to falling down.

Clayton completed the exterior rehabilitation work, and John Chandler bought the building in 2004. Chandler did the interior rehab work, and the building currently houses the Argenta United Methodist Church, Ristorante Capeo, Greg Thompson Fine Art, and Mike Russell Photography.

Important Details

- Cook, Faucette, and Clayton (2002) nameplates along the top of the east and north elevations
- “Cook” in the threshold plate of this storefront
- Original cast-iron storefront columns
- Corner upstairs balcony was uncovered during the 2002 rehab—surprise
- Ghost sign in Argenta UMC—Bloch Bros. Tobacco Company out of Wheeling, West Virginia. Advertised their famous Mail Pouch chewing & smoking tobacco. This product was sold in the Sibeck Grocery store when it was located next door at 419 Main. This would have been an exterior wall at that time and an ideal place for an advertisement.
- Original pressed tin ceiling upstairs; manufactured by the W. F. Norman Corp. of Nevada, Missouri. Intricate motif with garlands and cameos in each corner. W. F. Norman is still in business and continues to stamp ceiling panels one at a time with antique rope-drop hammers (they reproduced some panels for this building during the rehab).
- 1914 photo of the Argenta Elks standing in front of the building
- Before & after photos--In 1972 North Little Rock’s Main Street was converted into a one-way street going north in order to alleviate traffic congestion (see the “Do not enter” sign hanging above the intersection in the before photo). In December 1999 Main Street was turned back into a two-way street, allowing easier access to downtown buildings and encouraging people to spend more time in Argenta.

Next tour is January 10 at St. Andrew’s Cathedral in downtown LR at 12:30 p.m. to avoid conflict with the noon Mass.

Happy Holidays!