

Sandwiching in History
Charles/Christz Youngblood House
320 W. 18th Street, North Little Rock
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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 Youngblood House. I’d like to thank Mr. Jim West for allowing us to tour his beautiful home today. I’d also like to recognize several individuals who helped me (and Mr. West) prepare for today’s tour—Ms. Daphne Williamson, Ed and Ida Jane Uekman, Danny Youngblood, and last but not least, the staff of the NLR History Commission.

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 diggings” (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 streets, 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 streets. Many residents of Argenta were employed by the railroad in some capacity.

Downtown buildings housed a variety of stores (general, dry goods, drug, grocery, meat market, etc.), 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 just to the north of LR's 8th Ward (Argenta), to annex the 8th Ward in 1904.

In 1906, NLR changed its name back to Argenta. It remained so until 1917, when it was changed back 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).

The area immediately north of the Iron Mountain tracks was known as North Argenta, and it was also commonly referred to as Clendenin Hill. In 1849 Judge John J. Clendenin bought about 160 acres in this area starting around 13th and Main streets. Clendenin moved to Arkansas in 1836 as private secretary to Governor James S. Conway and served as state attorney general and circuit judge before winning election to the Arkansas Supreme Court in 1866. He is believed to have built a log house near the site of the former Clendenin School at 13th and Main. Early city directories list the Youngblood residence at Clendenin Hill. Italian immigrant Louis D. Cassinelli settled in the North Argenta area in the late 19th century and soon operated a store at the corner of 18th and Orange streets. Interestingly, the NLR Town Council actually met in the back of Cassinelli's store in 1904 as they awaited the state supreme court ruling in the NLR annexation case. The Youngblood House was built in the Cassinelli Addition, which encompassed lots on either side of the railroad tracks from 15th to 21st Street (the Cassinelli House is located at 301 W. 18th; current home of Tracy Steele).

Youngblood House

Youngblood Brothers & Charles/Minnie Youngblood

German immigrants Charles Youngblood (b. 4/21/1854) and his younger brothers, Christian (went by "Christz") and Gus, came to the United States in the early 1880s and eventually made their way to Blackville (present-day Blackwell) in Conway County, Arkansas (between Russellville and Morrilton). The Youngbloods operated a farm in Blackwell but soon decided to relocate to Argenta (what is now downtown North Little Rock). The Little Rock & Fort Smith Railroad passed through Blackwell on its journey west, and it is likely that the Youngblood brothers heard about business opportunities in Argenta from railroad employees and passengers as the trains passed through their community. Charles Youngblood and Minnie Zinn were married in Conway County on December 28, 1891. After arriving in Argenta, Charles

and his wife, Minnie, lived in an earlier house on this site. The couple had three children—Lena, Ida, and Chris B. Youngblood.

Charles Youngblood owned and operated a saloon at 924 Newton Avenue (now Main Street) in Argenta. His brothers, Christz and Gus, assisted him in the saloon business.

[Photo of Charles and Christz in front of saloon, ca. 1895. And photo of Minnie.]

The St. Louis, Iron Mountain & Southern Railroad tracks came into Argenta along the path of modern-day 11th Street and curved down to the southwest toward the Baring Cross Bridge after crossing the Little Rock & Fort Smith Railroad near 11th and Maple. The intersection of the LR & Fort Smith and the Iron Mountain railroads was known as the Fort Smith Crossing. A steel and wood viaduct was first constructed in 1906-1907 over the Iron Mountain tracks near the Fort Smith Crossing. In 1927 a longer viaduct made out of steel and concrete was constructed to span the tracks. In the early twentieth century, about half a dozen saloons and at least two or three hotels were located under the viaduct, obviously catering to railroad men. A small depot was built just to the southeast of the Ft. Smith Crossing as well. The original Youngblood Saloon would have been located under the present-day viaduct.

As you can probably imagine, the Youngbloods did well in the saloon business. After Charles Youngblood's house burned in 1898, he contracted for the construction of the present home in 1899 for \$2,810 (there was later a court case disputing this amount, and the house actually ended up costing \$2,400). The Youngblood House was built to face west toward the railroad tracks because 18th Street had not yet been extended through the Cassinelli Subdivision. The Youngblood House faced a double-track, which was on grade with the house (at some point, the track was cut down to a lower grade), and as you will hear in a minute, it was common for people to walk along the tracks. And keep in mind that in 1890, Argenta's northern city limit was drawn between present-day 18th and 19th streets, and even in 1900, the "mid-city" neighborhood (North Argenta) was not densely developed. The 1900 Census showed Charles and Minnie Youngblood living here with their three children and Charles' brothers, Christz and Gus.

[Photos of west side of house, ca. 1900.]

We'll talk about changes to the home's exterior in a minute.

Death of Charles Youngblood

Tragically, on December 25, 1900, at about 7:40 p.m., Charles Youngblood was hit by a train and killed as he was walking home from his shift at the saloon. You see, the Youngblood brothers always walked along the track to get home from the saloon because it was faster than going around on Newton Avenue, and it was considered to be an easier walk (gives you some idea of how rough Newton Avenue was at that time ☺). The *Arkansas Gazette* ran a front-page story the following day, and I'll read you portions of that article.

From "Charles Youngblood Killed by Engine," *Arkansas Gazette*, 26 December 1900, p. 1:

"Charles Youngblood, the well-known North Side saloon keeper, was instantly killed by an engine near the Fort Smith crossing on the North Side about 7:40 last night and Charles B. Wellington was badly injured. The men were walking on the track en route to their homes when struck. Youngblood was caught under the wheels and dragged about 100 yards, his body being horribly mangled, while Wellington was thrown down the embankment and in that manner escaped death...

the place where the accident occurred is about 100 yards north of the Fort Smith crossing...

When the brothers [Charles and Christz] changed watches last evening at 7 o'clock in about half an hour Charley Youngblood started for his home, accompanied by Charles Wellington, who lives a few doors from the Youngblood residence. Wellington had been drinking and was said to be staggering, but Youngblood was perfectly sober, as was shown by his remark to William Adler shortly before starting home, when he said: "Bill, this is one Christmas I have kept strictly sober." The two men left the saloon at 7:30 and nothing more was seen of them until someone came running into the place fifteen minutes later and told that an engine had run them down and that Charley was dead. Chris at once went to the place and found his brother's body lying beside the track at the end of the "Y," almost an unrecognizable mass of flesh and bones. Wellington was back down the track lying in the coal dust at the side of the track, groaning in an agonizing manner...

[Wellington had a broken leg, fractured ribs, and a sprained wrist, but he would recover.]

no whistle was blown or bell rung [to alert the men]...

The engine [Iron Mountain No. 674] had just come in from up the Fort Smith road...They were taking it to the round house, and to get on the main line had to back up past the "Y." As there was no light on the rear end the two men probably did not know the engine was coming until too late to escape...

[Youngblood] was carrying a shotgun and all that was found of it was the steel part of the breech... (also an indication of the saloon business and the neighborhood at that time)

[Youngblood's wife and children] were at a Christmas tree at the church [St. Patrick's Catholic Church, which would have been located at 7th and Cypress at that time] when the accident occurred and the news was broken to them by Chris Youngblood. They were sent home in a hack and the festivities ended at once...

It was thought last night that Youngblood was killed while saving his friend's life."

On the day following the accident, coroner J. S. Adamson assembled a jury of 12 men and 4 witnesses to determine the cause of Youngblood's death. After hearing testimony from the two agents aboard the train, the jury found the Iron Mountain Railroad liable for Youngblood's death due to the negligence of its employees. The engine had been running backwards at about 6 miles per hour, and the employees had failed to properly alert the pedestrians.

Christz & Minnie Youngblood

On January 4, 1901, Minnie Zinn Youngblood sold her deceased husband's saloon and its contents to his brother, Christz Youngblood, for \$1,192.95. Then on July 3, 1901, Christz Youngblood married his brother's widow, Minnie Z. Youngblood. He was 36, and she was 30. Christz and Minnie had one son, Charles Alexander Youngblood (b. 4/24/1905). [This makes it a little confusing—because the Youngblood brothers named children after each other.] Christz and Minnie raised their four children (total from both marriages) in this house. [Youngblood brother, Gus, later moved to Fort Smith, and another brother, Louis, apparently disowned his family after an argument.]

Christz Youngblood continued to operate the Youngblood Saloon at 924 Main St. until about 1905, when he moved the business to 723 Main Street (the southwest corner of 8th & Main). [It is possible that he relocated due to the construction of the first viaduct in 1906-07.]

[Photo of Christz in front of saloon at 924 Main & interior photo of saloon.]

In 1916 Christz sold the saloon and decided to make a living growing and selling vegetables to area grocery stores and to people in the nearby Military Heights neighborhood (present-day site of the I-30/I-40 split). At the time, the Youngbloods owned pretty much the whole south side of the 300 block of W. 18th Street, so Christz had plenty of room to grow vegetables in his own back yard.

He later sold lots right along 18th Street for the construction of 4 homes (300, 312, 314-316, and 318 W. 18th). However, the Youngblood House still has a huge, park-like back yard that stretches behind the next four lots to the east. Early on, the Youngblood House had an address of 1720 Railroad Avenue. Railroad Avenue ran parallel to the LR & Ft. Smith tracks on the east side all the way into Levy [was renamed Percy Machin after the civil servant's death in 1968; Machin served as NLR city clerk (1916-1918), NLR city treasurer (1929-1939), and NLR city clerk (1939-death in 1968).] The home's address later changed to 1720 W. 18th, and in 1910 became 320 W. 18th. 18th Street was not extended all the way to Railroad Avenue until about 1910. After that time, the Youngbloods built an entrance on the north side of the house and wrapped the porch around to that side, providing access along 18th Street.

The Children of Minnie Youngblood

Lena Youngblood—married Raymond Fischer, who started Fischer Honey in NLR (20th and Poplar).

Ida Youngblood—died in December 1917 during the influenza epidemic.

Chris B. Youngblood—married Clara Kornmeyer and built the red brick house at 300 W. 18th. Chris B. worked as a switchman for the MoPac Railroad. He was Danny Youngblood's grandfather.

Charles A. Youngblood—the only child of Christz and Minnie. Married Johnnie Johnson and remained in the big house to care for his parents. Charley and Johnnie had one child—Ida Jane Youngblood Uekman. Charley A. was a NLR fireman from 1935 until 1953 and was a Navy veteran of World War II. His wife, Johnnie, worked in the LR Cotton Exchange cafeteria at 2nd and Scott in LR and later at Fischer Honey Company.

Four Generations—One House PLUS Apartments

When Charley A. Youngblood married Johnnie Johnson in 1928, Christz and Minnie insisted that there was plenty of room for them in the big house, so they stayed there. Minnie Youngblood died in 1930. She suffered from “dropsy” or severe edema (in her case, from diabetes).

Christz Youngblood would stay in the house until his death on December 29, 1952, at the age of 88. Charley A. and Johnnie raised their only child, Ida Jane (born 1931), in the house. When Charley A. Youngblood left for the Navy in September 1942, the family converted the upstairs of the house into apartments. There were two efficiency apartments on the east side and one larger apartment on the west side of the second story. They had some long-term tenants, including Jasper and Pauline Phillips, who rented the west apartment for 30 years and Esther Shepherd, who rented one of the eastern apartments for 20 years.

When Ida Jane Youngblood married Edward Thomas Uekman in 1950, he moved in with her family at 320 W. 18th. Ed Uekman worked as a beekeeper for Fischer Honey, and Ida Jane worked as office manager for Doctors Elmer, Peter, and Robert Ritchie. And the Uekmans raised their two children, Edward Charles “Sandy” and Daniel Paul “Danny” Uekman, in the house as well.

Charley A. Youngblood died in 1980, and his widow, Johnnie, died in 1981.

Ed and Ida Jane Uekman sold the house in 1989 to Ivan Bell. Mr. Bell added the back porch, converted the dining room window into a door, and put vinyl siding on the house. Jim and Peggy West purchased the house on May 1, 1997 (Peggy deceased now).

House Specs

With the exception of the vinyl siding, which obscures the original wood siding (which was always painted white, not yellow), the biggest alterations to the house involve the porch. If you look closely at the old photos of the west side of the house, you will see that the porch originally spanned the west façade only. The supports were square wooden piers with slightly tapered Ionic columns above, and there was a wooden balustrade. Also notice the dentil molding under the eaves on the porch. Sometime after 18th Street was extended to the west

(so maybe 1910 to 1915), the porch was wrapped around the north side of the house to provide for a main entrance along the street. Photos from this time period show that the supports were changed to square brick piers topped by square wooden columns with Ionic capitals. The dentil molding was continued around the north side of the house (and you can still see a little bit of it today). The massive square brick porch supports were installed sometime before the early 1930s, but part of the wooden balustrade was retained for some time. The Uekmans removed it (west side of porch).

House originally had a slate roof—was replaced with synthetic shingles as early as the 1970s.

Back porch on east side of house—door into kitchen now...this area was originally open-air and was enclosed with lattice work. There was a cistern in the basement below that porch, and a pump in that back room was used to wash up.

Originally a fanlight-shaped window on the second-story west porch—opening was changed to accommodate a large fan for air circulation (added by Uekmans).

Spindlework in west gable end, second story porch on west side

Dining room door (on south side of house) was originally a window

Widow's walk

Interior Features—

Southern pine woodwork throughout

Pocket doors

Original light fixtures in some downstairs rooms (kerosene lamps)

Transom windows

Saloon mirror—from one of the Youngblood saloons (you can see it in the old photo)

Kitchen—beadboard wainscoting and new Pergo floor

Basement is accessed through door in downstairs bathroom

Reconfiguration of staircase—done by Uekmans in the early 1960s. You originally walked into the west door of the house and had to walk further into the room before turning right to go up the stairs. There was a landing, and you turned to go up again.

Ghost story—Ed and Ida Jane Uekman’s son, Danny, saw a ghost in the house when he was a young man. Saw a man with a long, pointy beard standing at the foot of his bed, and the man came around and sat down on the bed. Danny ran downstairs and refused to go up for awhile. Years later, Danny saw the man’s photo in the attic of the house—it was some relative of theirs. Ed Uekman also saw the ghost walking through the kitchen one night.

Outbuildings—new garage constructed by Mr. West. Old wash house/well house.

Extras:

321 W. 18th (now vacant lot on corner across from house)—constructed in 1927 to serve as a grocery store. It was listed in the 1928 city directory as the I. I. Shannon Grocery, run by Isaac I. Shannon and his wife, Lillie, who lived upstairs in the building. By the early 1940s, the building housed the Sunset Inn Restaurant, and Grace Hanson lived upstairs. In the early 1950s, it was a restaurant operated by John and Myrtle Wallis with two apartments upstairs. And beginning in the 1960s, it was a beer joint called Cancun. By the late 1990s, the building was considered an eyesore (and a place for criminal activity) in the neighborhood and was demolished in 2001. To my knowledge, it was never owned by the Youngbloods.

Red brick house at 300 W. 18th—Diana Alexander (Danny’s sister). Built 1923 by Chris B. and Clara Youngblood.

Rock house at 312 W. 18th—Danny Youngblood. Built 1929-1930. Home of U. E. Moore, who served as NLR alderman (late 1920s), NLR police chief (beginning in 1929), and NLR mayor (1931-1937).

Next tour is May 3 at the Farmer-Brooks House at 623 Orange St. in NLR. Part of the AR Preservation Conference!!