

**Sandwiching in History**  
**Dr. Albert G. McGill House**  
**2209 S. Battery, LR**  
**July 6, 2012**  
**By: Rachel Silva**



## **Intro**

Hi, my name is Rachel Silva, and I work for the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program. Welcome to the Sandwiching in History tour of the Dr. Albert G. McGill House! I'd like to thank Sheila Miles for allowing us to tour her beautiful home today.

## **Central High Neighborhood**

The McGill House was built in 1922-1923 and is a contributing resource in the Central High School Neighborhood Historic District, which was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1996 for its association with the westward expansion of Little Rock, the 1957 Central High School desegregation crisis, and its eclectic blend of architectural styles. [The district is roughly bounded by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Drive on the east, Thayer Avenue on the west, W. 12th Street on the north, and Roosevelt Road on the south. A 2012 amendment reevaluated the district and added the area bounded by MLK, W. 17<sup>th</sup>, Wright Ave., Summit, and Battery.]

The oldest structure in the historic district was built about 1870 when a carpetbagger lawyer (Radical Republicans after Civil War; Union supporters or Northerners who came to the defeated South) named Milton L. Rice built an imposing Gothic Revival-style house, known as Oak Grove, on 12 acres west of the Little Rock city limits (today at 2015 Battery Street). Rice was also a state senator and president of the Cairo & Fulton Railroad. In the 1870s and 1880s this area was vastly undeveloped, and Rice's neighbors included Orin Sheldon's dairy operation (near 21st St. between Battery and Summit), West End Park (current site of Central High School--park originally developed by streetcar operators to entice riders; today there is a West End Park at 36th and Potter in SW LR), and open fields and forest. In fact, the 1890 *Guide to Little Rock* described the area west of the city limits as "a capital place for a picnic and big enough for half the families of town to go at once without disturbing each other."

The neighborhood was known as the West End before its association with Central High School (built 1927), with the majority of development taking place between 1900-1914 and after World War I between 1920-1930. The largest addition within the district boundary is the Centennial Addition, which is to the north of us (17th & Battery is at the center of the addition) and was platted in 1877. However, the three blocks of Battery St. between 22nd and Roosevelt Rd. (where we are now) made up the P. K. Roots subdivision of the Oak Terrace Addition.

About 1895, lumberman and real estate developer H. A. Bowman purchased the Rice House at 2015 Battery. In 1897 Bowman subdivided the 12 acres around his new home to create the Oak Terrace Addition to the City of Little Rock. Oak Terrace included the 1900-2400 blocks (6 blocks) of Battery Street. This addition was intended to cater to a wealthier clientele in the otherwise working-class neighborhood. One of the original features of the addition was a central "flower garden" or lawn (this exists today as the median/boulevard section of Battery Street just to the north of us). Oak Terrace also had strict construction guidelines—for instance, "no owner to erect a building less than 2 stories in height" or costing less than \$3,000, and there were rules about where your house should sit on the lot as well. As I said earlier, the three blocks of Battery between

22nd and 25th (Roosevelt) streets made up the P. K. Roots subdivision within Oak Terrace.

Philander K. Roots (known as P. K.; b. 1838-d. 1921) was a civil engineer (worked for the Cairo & Fulton RR, which later became the St. Louis, Iron Mountain & Southern RR), a banker (managed the First National Bank of Fort Smith and First National Bank of LR), and he made large investments in property (thus the name of this subdivision). Notably, he was also the older brother of Col. Logan H. Roots, who was a Union officer in the Civil War and a tireless promoter of the state of AR after settling here in the mid-1860s. In 1892, Logan Roots negotiated the property trade in which the Feds gave the Arsenal Bldg. grounds (MacArthur Park) to the City of LR for a city park, and the State of AR gave 1,000 acres in NLR to the feds for a military post (Fort Roots).

### *Racial & Economic Mix*

The West End was historically a racially and economically mixed neighborhood, albeit there were more whites than blacks. Residents had a vast range of occupations--African Americans worked as clergymen, barbers, chauffeurs, mail carriers and clerks, cooks, and maids; and some white neighbors were similarly employed while others were lawyers, doctors, dentists, teachers, and businessmen. Few rental units were available, and the home ownership rate was high. A 1940 Housing Study reported that property values in the West End were similar to the Heights and Hillcrest neighborhoods ranging from \$2,000 - \$20,000 and that most West End residents lived in their homes for at least 10 years.

### **Architecture**

The most popular architectural styles in the Central High neighborhood are Colonial Revival and Craftsman, and this house is a good example of the Craftsman style. Craftsman houses were designed to give the impression of human craftsmanship and were built to be practical and livable. The McGill House features a red tapestry brick veneer, exposed rafter tails, exposed beams and

rough-textured stucco in the gable ends, banks of casement windows, and a shed-roof porte-cochere.

### **Former Occupants**

The house first appears in the 1923 LR City Directory, so it was likely built in 1922 or early 1923. The first occupant was Nat M. Harrison, vice president of Beal-Burrow Dry Goods Company at 107-111 E. Markham. Harrison and his wife, Georgia, only lived here for a couple years, and then by 1926, the A. G. McGill family moved into the house. The house is usually referred to as the McGill House because Dr. McGill was the most notable occupant and lived here for a little over 10 years.

Albert Gallatin McGill was born on January 2, 1881, in Ouachita County, Arkansas. In 1902 he graduated from Camden High School and in 1906 received his medical degree from Tulane University in New Orleans. On May 5, 1909, Dr. McGill married Ouachita County native Margaret Pharr. The couple soon moved to Little Rock, where they lived at 1722 W. 9<sup>th</sup> Street (NE corner 9<sup>th</sup> & Wolfe; no longer extant). Albert and Margaret McGill had three children: Margaret, Bernice, and Albert, Jr. Dr. McGill was one of the foremost physicians in Little Rock, and was known as a pioneer in his field. He specialized in radiology, clinical pathology, and electrotherapy. Dr. McGill had offices in the Boyle Building, at St. Luke's Hospital (NW corner of Schiller & 20<sup>th</sup>; no longer extant), and in the Exchange Bank Building before opening the McGill Clinic Building at 505 Rock Street about 1930 (no longer extant).

By 1926 Dr. McGill and his family had moved to 2209 S. Battery. The 1930 census valued the house at \$26,000. Both Dr. and Mrs. McGill were active members of First Presbyterian Church and were involved in community affairs. Dr. McGill was a 32<sup>nd</sup>-degree Mason, and Mrs. McGill was a member of the Order of the Eastern Star, the United Daughters of the Confederacy, and the Women's Christian Temperance Union. Sadly, Margaret McGill died in the family home on April 13, 1933, after a month's illness. She was only 53 years old. Funeral services were

also held in the home, and she was buried at Oakland-Fraternal Cemetery. In 1936 Dr. McGill married Golda Roush Wilder, and the couple moved out of the house at 2209 S. Battery, presumably for a fresh start and because the McGill children were grown by then (relocated to Conway Dr. and later had an address of Route 2, North Little Rock).

Interestingly, I found a portrait of Dr. McGill and a detailed physical description on his World War I draft registration card. He was listed as being of medium height and stout build with gray eyes and black hair. The last question on the form read, "Has person lost arm, leg, hand, eye, or is he obviously physically disqualified?" to which the recorder answered by writing "Stout-----."

The house periodically sat vacant and had a variety of occupants throughout the 1940s. In 1949 Bert L. Drennan and his wife, Lena, moved into the house. The Drennans owned a furniture store on Asher. By the early 1950s, the Drennans started renting out an apartment above the detached garage (no longer extant). The Drennan family remained here until about 1970. By 1975 Robert L. Williams and his wife, Artelia, lived here. Artelia Williams continued to live in the house even after her husband died in the early 1980s. She stayed here until the late 1990s. Although it was never formally listed in a city directory, there was a beauty shop in the front north room of the house at some point (they had put down linoleum on the floor and installed extra sinks for washing hair).

Sheila Miles purchased the house in 2006 and has rehabbed the interior.

### **Interior Details**

- 4,100 square feet
- 5 bedrooms/3.5 baths
- 4 fireplaces (3 downstairs and one upstairs)
- New HVAC, plumbing, electrical
- Original oak floors

- Most plaster walls intact
- Some original crown molding/picture rail and most of the original foot molding
- Interior transoms
- Casement windows with interior screens
- French doors
- Upstairs bathrooms—one with original octagonal tile and one with original subway tile
- Downstairs bathroom—has antique clawfoot tub, but not original to house
- Kitchen—new cabinets and tile; antique fixture but not original to house
- Kitchenette upstairs—probably was original to house because it had a few small built-in cabinets before the rehab
- Originally had a 2-story garage with living quarters upstairs, but no longer extant
- Partial basement with coal chute

Humphrey Radiantfire gas heater—patented in 1916 by the Humphrey Company of Michigan and were very popular in the 1920s.

Issues:

Porte-cochere columns—originally large masonry columns covered in stucco, but have been replaced with wooden columns. Wood is not sufficient to support masonry arch, which is cracking at its juncture with the wall.

South side has reinforcing rods—probably installed to hold the brick veneer on the wood frame.

Mystery pipes—large ones were sewer and water pipes for garage. Smaller pipe by back of house was connected to a downspout and drained somewhere else.

Flashing at roof of bay window and alteration of corner porch above bay window—causes leaking. At some point after 1950, they bumped out the small outdoor sitting area and moved the casement windows. Poor roofing job there.

Water in basement—possibly a spring or the drainage system that was set up for the house originally?? Tied to the underground pipes, which took water from the guttering.

Next tour is August 3 at Gus Blass Wholesale Co. Bldg. at 313-315 Main St. in LR (Porter's).