

Sandwiching in History
Dr. and Mrs. Frank O. Rogers House
400 West 18th Street, LR
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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 Rogers House! I'd like to introduce and thank the owner of the house, Todd Raney, for allowing us to be here today. The Rogers House was built in 1914 for Dr. Frank O. Rogers and his wife, Emma Tillar Rogers. The home was designed by well-known Arkansas architect Charles L. Thompson, who designed several houses in the Governor's Mansion HD. In addition to being a part of the Governor's Mansion HD, the Rogers House was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1982 as part of the Charles Thompson Thematic Group, which included examples of his work from around the state.

Governor's Mansion HD

The Governor's Mansion Historic District was listed on the National Register in 1978. The district has been amended several times to expand the boundaries to their current positions, which are roughly W. 13th St. on the north, S. Louisiana on the east, Roosevelt Rd. on the south, and S. Chester on the west. The Governor's Mansion HD is the 2nd oldest surviving residential neighborhood in LR, with the oldest being the MacArthur Park HD. The Governor's Mansion HD straddles the southern boundary of the Original City of Little Rock, which was 18th Street (or

Wright Ave.). [Original City plat filed in 1822; bounded by AR River, Quapaw Line (or Commerce St.), Wright Ave., and Pulaski St.]

For the most part, the Governor's Mansion neighborhood catered to middle and upper middle class white families after the completion of the Memphis & LR Railroad in 1871. The Arkansas Governor's Mansion, located at 1800 Center Street, is the focal point of the district. Even though the Governor's Mansion was not completed until 1950, the land on which it stands figures prominently in the history of Little Rock.

The Quapaw Tribe ceded the 6 ½ acre plot to the U.S. Government in 1818, and it was then given to the State of Arkansas in 1836. In 1838, the land was deeded to Senator Chester Ashley and later became part of the estates of Roswell Beebe and James M. Curran. No structures stood on the land until Arkansas's last Territorial Governor, William Savin Fulton, built his retirement home "Rosewood" there about 1840. Sadly, Fulton died in 1844 while sleeping in the asphyxiating fumes of a freshly painted room at "Rosewood." Fulton's widow sold part of the property in 1869 to the State of Arkansas for the establishment of the Arkansas School for the Blind. "Rosewood" was eventually torn down and replaced by buildings for the Blind Institute, which, in turn, were demolished in 1948 to make way for the new Arkansas Governor's Mansion. The Arkansas State Legislature created a Governor's Mansion Commission in 1947 to secure a site for the official home of the state's governor. The commission chose the site at 1800 Center, and the mansion was completed in 1950. Sid McMath was the first governor to live there.

Charles Louis Thompson

Charles L. Thompson (1868-1959) created the most influential architectural firm in Arkansas during the early 20th Century. Thompson's firm designed a wide variety of building types, including personal residences, churches, commercial buildings, and courthouses. The firm also mastered a vast array of architectural styles and was well-known for combining different styles. The firm designed more than 2,000 buildings, and hundreds of those remain in Arkansas today.

Charles L. Thompson was born in November 1868 in Danville, Illinois, the third of James C. and Henrietta Lightner Thompson's seven children. When Thompson was 14, he and his 6 siblings were orphaned. The children moved in with relatives in Indiana, and Charles went to work at a mill. During his extra time, he worked as a draftsman for an architect named Hunt. Eventually, he sought employment elsewhere, and advertised his services in a lumber journal. He received job offers

from New York, New Orleans, and Little Rock. He chose LR because it was “the farthest in the wilderness,” and offered the most opportunity for his architectural practice. In 1886 Thompson began work for LR architect Benjamin J. Bartlett, and in 1888 he became a full partner in the firm. In 1890 Bartlett left for Mississippi and the firm became known as Charles L. Thompson, Architect and Superintendent. Throughout the next several decades, Thompson worked by himself and with a variety of partners. Many homes in the Governor’s Mansion HD were designed or modified by Thompson or his firm. Thompson retired in 1938. He died in 1959 at the age of 91.

[The firm continues to operate today under the name of Cromwell Architects Engineers, Inc., named in honor of Edwin B. Cromwell, Charles Thompson’s son-in-law, who was a part of the firm from 1941 until his retirement in 1984. Cromwell died in 2001. The firm is one of the oldest architectural firms in the nation.]

Architecture

The Rogers House exhibits Thompson’s ability to flawlessly blend architectural styles. In this case, he used a combination of the Classical Revival and Craftsman styles. Classical elements include the symmetrical façade, a monumental front entrance crowned by a two-story portico with fluted Ionic columns, a dentiled cornice, balustrades supported by scroll brackets, and decorative panels with a garland motif above the first floor windows.

However, the home really leans more toward the Craftsman style with its exposed rafter tails, casement and double-hung, multi-pane windows, gabled dormers with triangular knee braces, and the use of mixed materials on the exterior, including brick, wood, tile, and stucco. The interior of the house also reflects the Craftsman style.

Interior:

Craftsman elements—exposed wood beams on the ceiling, built-in shelves by the front door, built-in bench on landing, and especially the stairway—all of these things show the influence of human craftsmanship.

Former Occupants

Dr. Frank O. Rogers, a Little Rock physician for more than 30 years, and his wife, Emma, built the house in 1914 for \$25,000 and lived here until Dr. Rogers's death in 1939. Then the home was purchased by Dr. Tena Murphy, a chiropractor who used the house as her residence and professional office. Dr. Murphy also rented out rooms upstairs.

Then in 1960 Dr. Murphy sold the house to the Elizabeth Mitchell Memorial Home for Children. The Mitchell Home's previous location at 920 McGowan Street was in the path of I-30 as it was constructed through downtown Little Rock (McGowan used to run in between Barber and McAlmont—today there is a short street behind the UALR Law School called McGowan, but it does not run along the same path as the old street). The Highway Department paid \$80,000 for the McGowan Street house, and Dr. Tena Murphy reportedly sold the Rogers House for the same amount so the Mitchell Home could afford it.

Elizabeth Mitchell Children's Center

In 1884 the First Presbyterian Church of Little Rock formed the Children's Aid Society in order to find homes for orphans throughout the city. In 1886 the Society reorganized as the Children's Home of LR, and the following year, its mission changed to focus on children who were neglected rather than orphaned. In the late 1880s, the Children's Home was located in a rented cottage on Arch Street and then in a building on the corner of E. Fifth (Capitol) and Commerce streets. In 1907 the Home purchased a house at 920 McGowan Street from Godfrey Scruggs. That same year, the organization changed its name to the Little Rock Orphans' Home.

In 1947 leaders of the Little Rock Community Chest, the forerunner of the United Way, suggested renaming the institution the Elizabeth Mitchell Memorial Home in honor of Sarah Elizabeth Latta Mitchell, who served 34 years as president of the society (1886-1920). When the Mitchell Home was located here, it offered residential and out-patient treatment for children and adolescents with emotional problems. While this house served as the Mitchell Home, as many as 30 children stayed here at the same time.

In 1982 the Mitchell Center moved to a new facility on West 12th Street, and in 1987 it became a branch of the Centers for Youth and Families.

More recent occupants & restoration

In November 1982 Charles and Michelle Ray purchased the Rogers House and began restoration work based on Thompson's original drawings. The Mitchell Center had added some walls to make more bedrooms, reduced the size of door openings, and covered fireplaces with bookcases. But the Cromwell firm did all of these alterations so that they were reversible—they left the original elements underneath.

Donald and Margaret Mattison bought the house in June 1984 and continued restoration work. The Mattisons remained here until 1993, when the house was purchased by John Bangert and John T. Jones, who wanted to use the home as a reception hall. They operated Renaissance Events & Catering here until about 2002 when Todd Raney bought the property.

Today the Rogers House is a private residence and is available for weddings and special events.

More Interior Details

- Over 9,000 square feet
- 9 fireplaces (according to a chimney sweep, there has never been a fire built in the basement fireplace)
- House has a full basement that originally housed a ballroom and men's smoking room. Was originally one open room with a wood floor and steel columns, but it was divided into multiple rooms, including a living area and home theater room, and a painted concrete floor was installed.
- A few original brass & copper light fixtures throughout house (have been rewired & more than 300 prisms replaced). The fixture in the entrance hall is original—when Charles Ray bought the house in 1982, there were only 4 prisms left on the base. He had the rest duplicated in Czechoslovakia and replaced. Sconces on fireplaces with prisms are original.
- Office—Dr. Rogers called this the “reception room”—it was his patient waiting room.
- Study—was originally used as a doctor's office by Dr. Rogers. He also had offices in the Donaghey Building (7th & Main). Due to a large hole in the ceiling, this room had to be completely redone (1980s), and the ceiling mural was recently redone again because of a water leak.
- Piano alcove at the foot of the staircase—notice the photo of Dr. Rogers by the car (dressed in a WWI-era uniform).
- Stained glass windows on landing

- Dining Room—mural above dining room picture rail on the west wall—used to extend all around the room—the mural is signed “Steve L. Cole, 1930.”
- Kitchen—originally divided up into 3 rooms and 2 closets (including a kitchen, breakfast room, and maid’s quarters), but the Ray family removed some walls and made it into a larger space for entertaining. You can still see the difference in the wood floor between the more formal breakfast room (oak floor) and the informal kitchen (pine floor). And there used to be a door from the breakfast room into the dining room (in-filled). Commercial gas range was installed by the Elizabeth Mitchell Children’s Center.
- Palm Court—has original tile floor and casement windows. The windows still have the original pull-down screens. The room used to be plumbed with a water faucet and drain in the middle of the floor so plants could be watered in here.
- Living Room—Rookwood tile mantel—made by the Rookwood Pottery Co. of Cincinnati, Ohio. Tiles were made to order and cost \$1.25 each. One of only 2 Rookwood mantels remaining in AR??? Company started in 1880 and revived again in 2006 (after having closed in the late 1960s), so you can still buy Rookwood tile made with the original molds.
- Carriage house—added guest quarters (apartment & bathroom) in carriage house in 2004.
- Projection on east side of house was a sleeping porch upstairs. It was altered with glass block windows, but Todd put casements back in to match the rest of the windows in the house. He was able to repair and reuse all of the other historic windows!!

Extras:

- ❖ Todd added 3 bathrooms to the house—basement, off of master bedroom, and in carriage house
- ❖ 2003 or 2004—had capitals, bases, and dentil molding on front columns/porch replaced. Actual wood columns were okay—hollow wood columns with steel posts in the middle.
- ❖ Fire escape was installed by the Mitchell Center.
- ❖ Todd installed swimming pool in 2003.
- ❖ Todd added wainscoting in dining room & front office based on the pattern found on the office wall behind the old wallpaper.

Next tour is Friday, June 3 at Johnswood.