

**Sandwiching in History
Melrose Place Addition
108 Melrose Circle, NLR
November 5, 2010
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 Melrose Place Addition! I'd like to thank Tommy and Linda Goza for allowing us to tour their home as well as the staff of the NLR History Commission for their help gathering information for the tour.

History of Argenta

The City of North Little Rock was called Argenta in its early days of settlement (the town of Argenta was surveyed & platted in 1866). The area was called Argenta because of the silver that was found at the nearby Kellogg mine (argentum is the Latin word for silver). The City of Argenta developed around the railroad. 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 Railway crossed the Little Rock & Fort Smith Railway in the middle of Argenta, and the St. Louis, Iron Mountain & Southern Railroad ran along the edge of town.

Because the railroads brought travelers to Argenta, the most common businesses catered to people from out-of-town. There were hotels, boarding houses, saloons, gambling houses, brothels, and restaurants downtown. Argenta was a rough town—it had no government in the early days, so it was virtually lawless. There

were no paved streets, and this side of the Arkansas River flooded often, so some streets stayed under water for weeks because there was no city-wide drainage system.

In 1890, the citizens of Argenta filed a petition to incorporate as a city of the first class. However, seeing this, the City of Little Rock annexed the town of Argenta despite the protests of Argenta residents. 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. However, Little Rock did not provide Argenta (8th Ward of LR) with many city services, so a plot was hatched to regain Argenta's independence. William Faucette (prominent businessman 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. The bill was supposedly written to allow the NE Arkansas towns of Hoxie and Walnut Ridge to consolidate, which they later did. However, the bill would also allow the town of North Little Rock (which had been incorporated just to the north of LR's 8th Ward—AKA Argenta—in 1901) to annex the 8th Ward of Little Rock (formerly Argenta) in 1904. This is how Argenta regained her independence from Little Rock.

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

Argenta Historic District (NR-listed in 1993; amended several times, with final boundary expansion done in 2007)

The Argenta Historic 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 the railroad tracks on the east side of Main Street form the eastern boundary. The majority of development in the district occurred between 1900 and 1940, and the residential area of the district contains vernacular (local interpretation) examples of the Craftsman, English Revival, and Colonial Revival styles.

Melrose Circle was part of the original historic district listed on the NR in 1993, but since that time, several houses on Melrose Circle have been rehabbed and added as contributing properties in the district (including this one at 108 Melrose Circle).

Northwestern corner of Argenta (land where Melrose Place Addition is now located)

In the mid-1800s this land was owned by early Little Rock settlers Chester Ashley and Isaac Watkins. Beginning in 1880 the northwestern corner of Argenta—west of Main (then Newton Ave.), north of 8th (then Giles), and south of the Iron Mountain RR tracks—was used for industrial purposes, mainly cotton oil companies. In 1880 the land was purchased by the Arkansas Manufacturing Company, then became the Little Rock Oil & Compress Company in 1882, the Arkansas Cotton Oil Company in 1891, the Union Seed & Fertilizer Company in 1914, the American Cotton Oil Company in 1920, and the Temple Cotton Oil Company in 1923. In 1924 the Temple Cotton Oil Company sold a 15-acre tract of land to Ike and Stella Kempner (of Kempner’s Department Store on Main Street in LR; demolished in 2009). That same year, the Kempners sold the land to Twin City Bank, setting the stage for residential development.

[Temple Cotton Oil Company continued to have a large operation north of 9th Street between Main & Orange for many years, manufacturing cotton seed oil, feed, and fertilizer. By 1957 the company name changed to the Olin-Mathieson Chemical Corporation—Temple Division but remained in the same location. The company moved from this location sometime in the early 1960s.]

Melrose Place Addition

The Melrose Place Addition to the City of NLR is a 15-acre tract of land platted and subdivided by Twin City Bank in 1924. Home construction in the Addition was under the direction of the Justin Matthews Company. Melrose Place Addition was advertised as “the last piece of close-in acreage that will ever be sub-divided.” The lots were also desirable because they were within walking distance of the downtown business districts of both NLR and LR. As an added bonus, the Addition was within walking distance of Union Station and conveniently located near the Cotton Belt and Missouri-Pacific Railroad shops and yards.

Since this was an irregular-shaped piece of land, the developers cleverly made the most of the situation by curving the main street to make it a circle, Melrose Circle. The main circular street was bisected by Melrose Divide. 77 lots were initially offered for sale with prices ranging from \$650 to \$1,650 per lot. Paved streets, curbs, and sidewalks were provided throughout the Addition, as was an elaborate storm drainage system. The development was restricted to residential property, so potential homeowners wouldn’t have to worry about “business houses or filling stations.” In addition to all of these perks, all of the lots backing up to the outside of the circle originally featured a solid board fence at the rear of the lot—and the developers were very proud of this fact.

The 1924 *Arkansas Gazette* advertisement even offered buyers an “absolute guarantee against a decline in value” on their lot. You had to pay \$25 above the list price for the lot, and then if you wanted to sell your lot after 2 years, a local bank would give you the purchase price for it.

When the subdivision opened in 1924, 5 spec houses were under construction: 112 Melrose Circle (just north of Linda), 144 Melrose Cir., 181 Melrose Cir., 206 Melrose Cir., and 230 Melrose Cir. Just one year later in 1925, there were a total of 28 houses in the Melrose Place Addition. By 1928 an additional 21 houses were built, bringing the total to 49. And by 1930, there were 54 houses in the Addition.

Most of the houses in the Melrose Place Addition are small Craftsman bungalows with a front-facing gable roof and partial-width front porch supported by square brick piers. The homes are different variations of the same basic plan—some with porches on the opposite sides of the front façade. Most of the houses were of wood-frame construction, but a few were originally brick. The house at 113 Melrose Circle was originally wood-frame, and ca. 1945 the mixed-masonry veneer was added.

Out of the original 54 Craftsman bungalows in “the Circle,” as it is known, 51 remain today.

- ❖ The house at 104 Melrose Circle (just south of Linda) was demolished, and there was a vacant lot here for a time before the current house was constructed in 2005. The property owner worked closely with the NLR HDC to make the house blend in with the architectural character of the neighborhood.
- ❖ The house at 144 Melrose Circle (next to the park) was demolished, and a small, Ranch-style house was built on the site ca. 1960.
- ❖ The house at 145 Melrose Circle (located on a pie-shaped lot on the left-hand side as you turn the corner toward the park) was demolished, and the lot is currently vacant.

As you can see, because so many of the original Craftsman houses remain, Melrose Circle has a very intact historic streetscape.

Melrose Park:

Melrose Park is located on the northern edge of the Addition and although these lots were purchased by the railroad and never developed, the land was informally

used as a football practice field for North Little Rock High School before the current high school building was constructed at 22nd and Main in 1929 (Argenta High School was at the SW corner of 4th & Willow; after new high school constructed, the building became 4th St. Junior High; was razed during Urban Renewal in 1976).

In the mid-1990s, the Union Pacific RR agreed to lease the property to the City of NLR for use as a city park, and playground equipment was added. The City of NLR maintains the park.

Two other interesting buildings located nearby, but not technically part of the Melrose Place Addition...are the Leonard Building and Melrose Grocery Store.

Leonard Building:

The Leonard Building, located at 810 Willow, was built ca. 1935 by Leonard and Fannie Bleidt, on the rear portion of their lot (their house was at 319 W. 8th St. on the NE corner of 8th & Willow). It was constructed as a 4-unit apartment building. Leonard G. Bleidt and his brother, Peter, owned Bleidt Brothers Ice Company at 817 W. 3rd St. in NLR.

Melrose Grocery Store:

The Melrose Grocery Store (Margo's Deli) at 807-809 Willow was originally constructed as a wood-frame store sometime between 1913 and 1939 (maybe ca. 1930 after Melrose Circle developed). A brick veneer was added to the building around 1950. The Melrose Grocery Store catered to neighborhood residents, hiring local boys to deliver groceries to patrons.

108 Melrose Circle

The house at 108 Melrose Circle was built about 1925 and is a good example of a Craftsman bungalow with a front-gabled roof, widely overhanging eaves with triangular knee braces, exposed rafter tails, a front porch supported by massive, square columns extending below the porch floor, and four-over-one, wood-frame windows.

In 1926 the house was occupied by Cloyd P. Newby and his wife, Irene. Mr. Newby was employed as a boilermaker. By 1942 Raymond G. Sandusky and his wife, Alice, lived here. The house was a single-family residence until the 1970s,

when it was converted into three rental units. The house suffered deterioration and alterations as numerous additions were constructed to the rear of the house to accommodate the rental units. Many of the houses in the neighborhood were converted to rental units in the 1970s and 1980s as crime became a larger problem in downtown NLR/LR. By the early 1990s this house was condemned and slated for demolition because one of the rear additions had partially collapsed, making the house uninhabitable.

The Argenta CDC purchased the house in 1994 and rehabbed it in 1995. Michelle Martin briefly occupied the house after it was rehabbed, and then it was purchased by Theresa Dowell. Ms. Dowell built the detached garage in 1998 on the same site as the original garage. Matt and Allison Klucher purchased the house next, and Tommy and Linda Goza bought it in Spring 2007. In 1999 the house was part of an amendment to the Argenta Historic District NR nomination, making it a contributing property.

Interior Details:

Still has some plaster walls along with new sheet rock

Collapsing shed additions removed from rear of house, and then new addition constructed to rear, including an extra bedroom, bathroom, laundry area, and kitchen expansion.

New crown molding around living room ceiling

Most window/door trim is original

All original wood-frame windows with storm windows

Original hardwood floors under laminate and carpet?

Built-in bookshelves by fireplace are new, but constructed to resemble Craftsman-style built-in shelving

Two front doors—most houses on the Circle have them—one was office or formal parlor entry/could have been a room to rent out to railroad workers passing through town

Argenta CDC

Since 1992 the Argenta Community Development Corporation has acquired and restored 87 properties in the neighborhood. Thirty-one of these are single family homes and duplexes rented to low-to-moderate income families. In 2002 the CDC completed Argenta Square, a 56-unit apartment complex at the southwest corner of 7th & Maple, providing apartments for low-to-moderate income households.

Other houses on the Circle to see:

104 Melrose: new construction in 2005

116 Melrose: “Eyebrow” house; slightly different design

113 Melrose: ca. 1945 mixed masonry veneer

134 Melrose: ca. 1960 Ranch-style house constructed on site of former bungalow

185 Melrose: English Revival-style influence; older home, not sure why it is different

230 Melrose: slightly different Craftsman-style plan

105 Melrose Divide: Ringer House; different style in neighborhood, originally had an open terrace with small gable roof over front door

117 Melrose Divide: Henry J. Palffy House; built 1927 for Henry J. and Ethel Palffy. Henry was an electrician with the Missouri-Pacific Railroad, while Ethel was a teacher at Little Rock’s Kramer School (on Sherman). Henry died in 1933, but Ethel continued to live here until her death in the mid-1980s.