

Sandwiching in History
Thomas M. Clifton House
1423 S. Summit Street, Little Rock
November 6, 2015
By Rachel Silva



Intro

Good afternoon, my name is Rachel Silva, and I work for the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program. Welcome to the “Sandwiching in History” tour of the Clifton House. I’d like to thank Tim and Vanessa McKuin for allowing us to tour their beautiful home!

This tour is worth one hour of HSW continuing education credit through the American Institute of Architects. Please see me after the tour if you’re interested.

The Thomas M. Clifton House was built about 1901 and exhibits elements of the Colonial Revival and Craftsman styles of architecture. It is a contributing resource in the Central High School Neighborhood Historic District, which was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1996.

Central High Neighborhood/Centennial Addition

Little Rock's Central High School neighborhood, originally called the West End, is largely defined by a momentous event that occurred 80 years after the property was platted for development. The Centennial Addition, named in honor of our country's centennial celebration (1776-1876) and the largest addition in the neighborhood, was platted in 1877. Historically, the Central High neighborhood was called the West End because the area was literally at the western edge of the city.

Only a few scattered homes existed in the West End until the mid-to-late 1890s, when significant construction began. However, Little Rock residents were enticed to visit the West End beginning on May 16, 1885, when the Little Rock Street Railway Company opened West End Park at the end of its Ninth Street Line. The Ninth Street Line was one of four lines in the streetcar system. It began at 15th and Chester, ran west on 15th to High (or MLK), and then turned north on High to 14th (or Daisy Bates), where a branch of the line extended six blocks to the west, where it reached West End Park. The main line continued to the north on High and went east on 9th Street back toward downtown, thus the name "Ninth Street Line."

Interestingly, several of the various streetcar companies' officers—men like H. G. Allis, H. P. Bradford, Howard Adams, W. B. Worthen, and John B. Jones—later became involved with the residential development of the West End. West End Park provided a much-needed recreational site for the city's residents, and its presence also encouraged people to ride to the end of the line and look around, where land would soon be available for sale.

West End Park covered six blocks from 14th (Daisy Bates) to 16th, and from Park to Jones. The densely wooded park boasted a large pavilion for dancing, refreshment stands, a bicycle track, roller coaster, and a lake for boating. Admission to the park was usually 25 cents for adults and 15 cents for children. From all accounts in the *Arkansas Gazette*, West End Park was a hit as soon as it opened. The park was

especially popular on Sunday afternoons, when music was provided by the Little Rock Band. During the heat of the summer, the streetcar company promised to keep the park open late for “the accommodation of those who wish to pass the hot nights out in the suburbs.”

The first amateur baseball games were played at West End Park in 1893. In 1894 a baseball field and grandstand were built on the west side of the park. This became the home field for the Little Rock Baseball Association and later, the city’s first minor league baseball team, the Little Rock Travelers. West End Park’s field was also used for major league spring training camps. The grandstand was rebuilt in 1915 and named after Judge William Kavanaugh, who died in February of that year. Kavanaugh had been president of the Southern League since 1903 and was a strong supporter of the Little Rock Travelers. Kavanaugh Field was the home of the Travelers until 1932, when Ray Winder Field opened. Quigley Stadium, built in 1936 by the WPA, now occupies the site of Kavanaugh Field.

After the streetcar company opened Forest Park in Pulaski Heights in 1904, it sold West End Park to the City of Little Rock. The sale was negotiated in 1907 for \$30,000, which the City finally paid in 1913. However, the park grounds outside the stadium were rarely used after 1912, and were no longer maintained. In 1922 a portion of the park grounds was reestablished as Civitan Park, which only lasted a few years because in 1927 the new Little Rock Senior High School was built on the east side of the former West End Park property. Park Street, so named because it was the park’s eastern boundary, serves as a reminder of the area’s past.

Real estate developers began advertising residential lots for sale in the 1890s, and most homes in the neighborhood were built between 1900 and 1930. Although the streetcar line had slightly changed its route by 1913, it still offered excellent service to the West End. According to the *Arkansas Gazette*, the Little Rock Railway and Electric Company’s 15th Street Line “traversed the southwest portion of the city, passing through the most fashionable residential district.”

The West End was a solid, middle-class neighborhood. The cost of homes in the early 20th century ranged from \$2,000 or less for a modest, wood-frame home to between \$5,000 and \$7,000 for a two-story home on Summit, Marshall, Wolfe, or Battery streets. These property values remained stable until at least the mid-20th century. A 1940 real estate survey indicated that property values in the West End were similar to those in Pulaski Heights, with the exception of the highest bracket—homes valued at more than \$20,000—which were only found in exclusive additions of the Heights, like Edgehill and Prospect Terrace.

Clifton House

From at least the mid-1880s until about 1900, Summit Street was called W. Spring Street. According to the 1897-98 Little Rock City Directory, W. Spring Street was undeveloped between 14th (Daisy Bates) and 17th streets. With the exception of the houses at 1410 and 1414 Summit, homes in the 1400 block were built between about 1899 and 1905. The first house on the block was the ca. 1899 Martin A. Sharp House at 1422 S. Summit.

Architecture

Built about 1901, the Clifton House exhibits elements of the two most common architectural styles in the Central High School Neighborhood Historic District—Colonial Revival and Craftsman. The Colonial Revival style was popular in Arkansas during the late 19th and early 20th centuries and sought to revive elements of American Colonial architecture along the eastern seaboard. The most obvious Colonial Revival characteristic on the Clifton House is its front porch.

The Craftsman style emphasized human handiwork (or craftsmanship), rather than mass production. The style was popular in Arkansas during the first half of the 20th century. Characteristics of the Craftsman style on the Clifton House include the exposed rafter tails and triangular knee braces under the front-facing gable eave.

Clifton family and later occupants

The Clifton House is located on block 19, lot 6 in the Centennial Addition to the City of Little Rock. Thomas M. Clifton and his family moved into the house soon after its completion. Missouri native Thomas Monroe Clifton was born in 1855. He married Hulda May Sheppard on October 6, 1888, at Carthage, Missouri. Thomas and Hulda May Clifton had two children: a son, Thomas Henry Clifton (b. 1891, d. 2 October 1928), who died in 1928 at age 37; and a daughter, Rachel Mabelle Clifton (b. 4 November 1904, d. 9 November 1904), who was born November 4, 1904, and died just five days later.

By the 1890s, the Cliftons lived on W. 15th Street in Baring Cross (NLR), where Thomas worked as a wheelwright and carpenter. About 1901 the Cliftons moved to 1423 S. Summit and Thomas soon got a job in the Choctaw, Oklahoma & Gulf Railroad shops (became the Rock Island Railroad; he could hop on a train and ride it south of town to the Rock Island Roundhouse at 29th and Barber).

In 1903 prominent businessman Warren E. Lenon was elected mayor of Little Rock. Lenon, who lived at the southwest corner of 16th and Summit, recruited his neighbor, Thomas Clifton, to serve as a sergeant in the Little Rock Police Department. Clifton rose through the ranks and by 1907 became a captain. When Mayor Lenon retired in 1908 to devote more time to his business interests, Clifton also retired from the police force. Interestingly, during the administration of another progressive mayor, Charles Taylor, Clifton returned and served as police captain for another six years. Mayor Taylor ran for office on a platform to modernize city services, improve public health, and reduce crime. During his administration, he cracked down on saloons, prostitution, and gambling. So I'd bet that Thomas Clifton was also a progressive, reform-minded individual; or he was just tough as nails.

After his second stint with the Little Rock Police Department, Clifton became a special agent for the Missouri Pacific Railroad. Railroad special agents were like railroad police, responsible for protecting the company's personnel, property,

passengers, and cargo. In 1920 Clifton bought the house at 2915 S. Summit, which was a one-story, Colonial Revival-style house built about 1910. Thomas and Hulda May Clifton moved to 2915 Summit. Their son, Thomas Henry Clifton, who had been an electrician, auto mechanic, and fireman, and daughter-in-law, Margaret, remained at 1423 Summit.

Not long after his move down the street, Thomas M. Clifton died at a local hospital on June 8, 1921, at the age of 66. According to his obituary, Clifton's body was taken to 2915 Summit, and a funeral was held at the family home on the afternoon of June 10, 1921, with burial following at Oakland-Fraternal Cemetery. Clifton was a member of Forest Camp Woodmen of the World and Maple Grove Woodmen Circle No. 2, which were fraternal organizations that provided life insurance benefits. Clifton must have been well-respected, or well-known at the very least, because his obituary in the *Gazette* was accompanied by a large photo, and his obituary made the front page of the *Democrat*. [Clifton does not have a Woodmen of the World grave marker. He is buried near his son and daughter at Oakland-Fraternal Cemetery.]

After the death of Thomas Clifton, the house at 1423 Summit was sold to John Cannon and his wife, Edna. Cannon worked as a mail contractor for the U.S. Government. He, Edna, and their daughter, Mildred, lived here from 1923 until about 1936. By 1937, Cannon used 1423 Summit as a rental property, first leasing it to physician Cadmus M. Brooks and his wife, Jennie, followed by Orville and Addie Farquharson. The next long-term owners of the house were Henry and Lola Harris. Henry worked as an accountant at the Veterans Administration and later as a postal clerk. The Harrises occupied the house from 1949 to 1973.

Beginning in the 1970s, the Clifton House sometimes sat vacant for years at a time between ownership changes. Not surprisingly, the house deteriorated. Fast forward to 2009...

Rehabilitation

Tim and Vanessa McKuin bought the Clifton House in May 2009 and began the process of rehabilitating it. They did some of the work themselves; namely, Tim basically rewired the entire house. The roof had to be completely replaced, but the exterior wood siding was in pretty good shape. And the house retained its original wood-frame windows. In October 2013, Tim and Vanessa hired Donna Thomas Properties and J. Carman, Inc., to finish the rehab, which was done with the help of the state historic rehabilitation tax credit. The state tax credit allows property owners to recoup 25% of the approved costs of rehabilitating a historic building by way of a credit on their state tax liability. In April 2014 Tim and Vanessa moved into the Clifton House.

Details

At some point, a downstairs bathroom was built in a corner of the dining room. This bathroom was removed to restore the original dining room space, and Donna Thomas remilled the missing section of plate rail to match the rest of the room. The current upstairs and downstairs bathrooms were entirely redone; however, the upstairs bathroom contains a new custom-built vanity as well as the old clawfoot tub from the Mandlebaum-Pfeifer House (that was located at 908 Scott until it burned in April 2015).

The opening between the dining room and kitchen was enlarged to allow for better flow between the two spaces. They incorporated the old butler's pantry, which had been converted to the laundry room, into the kitchen. The 1950s-era kitchen was basically gutted and redone.

The house has new ceilings and light fixtures throughout, with the exception of two antique fixtures given to the McKuins by their friends, Ed and Laura Sergeant and Mark and Cheri Nichols.

The house technically has three bedrooms and two bathrooms—they use the downstairs bedroom as their TV room.

The back sun porch was probably enclosed in the 1920s—note the 3-over-1 windows. The rest of the house has 1-over-1 windows.

The garage was probably built about 1930 and was a twin to the garage across the alley to the east. The garage was on the first floor, and the upper floor was living quarters, likely for domestic help.

Nearby Houses

1422 S. Summit—Martin A. Sharp House, ca. 1899 (he was county roads commissioner). Queen Anne.

1501 S. Summit—built ca. 1905.

1910—William Heibach, saloon at 1100 & 1126 W. 7th St.

1920—Henry S. McCleskey, proprietor, New Capital Hotel

1930—William F. Kirby, Associate Justice, AR Supreme Court

Currently being rehabilitated by Darrell and Missy Orvis, who received an Option 1 Historic Preservation Restoration Grant from the AHPP. Option 1 grants are worth up to \$10,000 for properties listed in the Arkansas Register or noncontributing in a National Register historic district if the project will make the property eligible for NR-listing. These are 1:2 matching grants.

1500 S. Battery—Alfred J. Mercer House, 1907 (cashier at Peoples Savings Bank, 122-124 W. 2nd).

Colonial Revival with ancillary structure/dwelling with steeple.

**Next tour is Friday, December 4 at the Albert Pike Memorial Temple, 712 Scott Street, Little Rock.