

Sandwiching in History
All Souls Church
4701 Walkers Corner Road, Scott
July 1, 2016
By Rachel Silva



Intro

Good afternoon, 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 All Souls Church. Before we get started, I’d like to thank a few people for their help with the tour—Joan Dietz, Don Campbell, Rev. Ward Rudolph, and George West.

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.

Built in 1906, All Souls Church was designed in the Gothic Revival style by well-known Little Rock architect Charles L. Thompson. The church was constructed to serve the planter families within a 10-to-15-mile radius of Scott, who realized that they were too few in number to support a church of each denomination. All Souls

remains an interdenominational church today and is truly the backbone of this community. The church was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1977.

Brief History of Scott

Located about 13 miles southeast of Little Rock, the Scott area attracted early settlers who wanted to farm the rich bottomland along the Arkansas River. William Scott emigrated from Kentucky in the early 19th century, and his son, Conoway Scott, was born here in 1815. By 1862 the Scott family owned 2,000 acres, 10 slaves, and other property valued at almost \$38,000 (equal to almost \$911,000 today). Conoway Scott died in 1866 just before the birth of his son, Conoway Scott, Jr. The Scott family owned the Elmhurst Plantation on the north side of Old River Lake. Interestingly, the Scott community has several oxbow lakes, formed over the years as the Arkansas River changed course. Located about two miles southwest of here, Old River Lake is one of these oxbow lakes.

In 1881-1882, James Paramore, owner of the St. Louis Compress Company, built the narrow gauge Texas & St. Louis Railroad through Arkansas from Texarkana to St. Francis (Clay County). The railroad went into receivership in 1884 and was renamed the St. Louis, Arkansas & Texas Railway. In 1886-1887, with Sam Fordyce as its new president, the railroad converted its line to standard gauge and constructed branch lines to increase business. The Little Rock Branch was a 43-mile section from Altheimer (Jefferson County) to Argenta (present-day North Little Rock), passing through Sherrill, England, Keo, Toltec, Scott, and Baucum. In 1891 the railroad's name was changed yet again to the St. Louis Southwestern Railway. Because it connected St. Louis to the cotton producing regions of Arkansas and northeastern Texas, the line was nicknamed the Cotton Belt.

The Cotton Belt line crossed Conoway Scott's landholdings, so that stop became known as "Scott's Station" or "Scott's Crossing." The completion of the branch line in 1887 initiated a shift in focus from the Arkansas River to the railroad, as the primary mode of transportation changed from river to rail. The town's name was

later shortened to “Scott,” although some residents still called it “Scott’s” in the 1940s and ‘50s. By the turn of the 20th century, a thriving community dominated by cotton plantations was well established. As the cotton farms grew in size and number, merchants opened several general stores.

The 1906-1907 Arkansas Gazetteer reported a population of 100 at Scott, along with six general stores under the ownership of A. L. Alexander, W. P. Dortch, A. W. Hicks, J. M. Nix & Son, Conoway Scott, and G. W. Templeton, respectively. Mr. Alexander also operated a cotton gin.

All Souls Church

The history of All Souls Church really goes back to 1880, when the Old Liberty Church was erected on the north side of Scott Bayou near the present-day intersection of the Upper Steele Bend Road and Col. Maynard Road. The Liberty Church was affiliated with the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. A cemetery, later referred to as All Souls Rest, was located across the Upper Steele Bend Road from the church and contained the graves of some early settlers and church members. For almost 25 years, the Liberty Church was the religious center of the community. However, because the congregation consisted of planters and their families who came from quite a distance over bad—sometimes impassable—roads, the church closed right after the turn of the 20th century.

After a few years of having no place to worship and holding Sunday School classes in private homes, the women of Scott took matters into their own hands. In October 1905, a community-wide Sunday School started meeting at the Old Liberty Church, but a more central location was necessary. Arthur and Otelia Alexander donated an old store building located on the present site of the eyrie for this purpose. The Sunday School started out with 17 members but increased to 80 within the first six months. On the first week of June 1906, the first issue of the weekly Scott’s Sunday School News was published and distributed to 50 people at the Alexander General Store in Scott. Advertisers were secured to cover the expense of paper and printing. One year later, the publication paid for itself

and had a \$100 surplus, which was invested in the Sunday School program. The Sunday School then boasted a membership of more than 100.

Meanwhile, inspired by the success of the Sunday School, planters from 15 miles around decided to organize a community church and adopted the Apostles' Creed as their doctrine. Ministers from the Baptist, Christian, Episcopal, Methodist and Presbyterian faiths would share the pulpit, preaching on a rotating schedule. This was quite progressive and also pragmatic, for they were too few in number to support churches of each denomination. The lot where the church now stands was given by Conoway Scott. Charles N. Alexander was so impressed with the Sunday School that he donated building materials for a new church.

Construction of Present Church, 1906

Little Rock architect Charles L. Thompson designed the present church using elements of the Gothic and Tudor Revival styles. The building's scale is appropriate for its rural setting. Gothic Revival elements include the church's steeply pitched roof and pointed arch stained-glass windows, while half-timbering in the gable ends and slightly flared eaves are reminiscent of the Tudor Revival style.

In case you don't know, Charles Thompson came to Little Rock in 1886 from Indiana and worked for architect Benjamin Bartlett. After Bartlett moved to Mississippi in 1890, Thompson had a series of partners. Thompson built a very successful architectural practice, designing hundreds of buildings in Arkansas, including churches, homes, and public buildings. The firm continues today as Cromwell Architects Engineers.

To me, the most unique aspect of the church's construction is the use of ornamental concrete block on its exterior walls. Ornamental concrete block was a popular building material in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It was touted as being inexpensive, durable, and fireproof. Hand-tamped units for producing concrete blocks could be purchased through Sears and Roebuck. Interchangeable

panels would produce blocks with different surfaces, including rock face or flat with beveled edges. In this case, rock face blocks were used on most of the wall surfaces, along with flat with beveled edge around the windows and plain block on the buttresses.

The cornerstone was laid on Wednesday, June 27, 1906. George Leifer was the builder. The first service in the new church was held on January 13, 1907, and Rev. Forney Hutchinson, a Methodist, preached the first sermon. Organized in 1905, the Ladies' Aid Society has been instrumental in the life of the church. One of its first tasks was to name the church. Blanche Alexander (Mrs. Charles N. Alexander) submitted the suggestion "All Souls" based on the first part of Ezekiel 18:4, which reads, "Behold, all souls are mine." Upon the church's completion, the Ladies' Aid Society paid \$600 in cash (equal to almost \$16,000 today) for the pews, pulpit, and pulpit chairs.

The stained-glass windows are original to the church. In order to give the young people of the congregation a feeling of ownership in the new building, the children's Sunday School class, called "The Church Mice," had a penny drive to raise money for the stained-glass window of the Good Shepherd in the rear wall of the church.

The ministers at All Souls rotated each week from 1907 to 1934, when the congregation called Ralph Echert, a young ministerial student from Oberlin College in Ohio, to pastor the church for the summer months. That fall, M. L. Gillespie, a Presbyterian minister, came to pastor All Souls. He wrote the church's constitution, which was adopted January 14, 1935. Mr. Gillespie was only at All Souls for a short time. Since his departure in 1935, All Souls has been served by 11 pastors from the Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian faiths. The current pastor is Rev. Ward Rudolph (Presbyterian).

Funny story—something that I would have done in church when I was a kid—a former pastor at All Souls had the habit of using the same two adjectives in his

sermons—marvelous and amazing. Some of the church youth used to sit at the back of the sanctuary and count how many times that he said those words.

It was in the late 1930s that All Souls got its Hicks pipe organ. Scott native Lucille Blann West Swann served as pianist and later, organist, at All Souls Church from the time she was 14 years old until she was 87. Lucille died in 2008 at the age of 93. She was George West's mother. George kindly allowed me to borrow a copy of his mother's scrapbook about Scott and All Souls Church. It is here today if you would like to see it after the tour.

The sanctuary was remodeled in 1948, at the urging of church member Margaret McCain Campbell (Don Campbell's mother) in preparation for her daughter's wedding. Three panels depicting an Easter scene were located just below the Good Shepherd window—those were covered up during the remodel. The chimney on the right side of the back wall is original. A false chimney was added on the left side of the wall during the remodel to make things symmetrical. The cherry-colored carpet was added in 1948. The church's pine floors were previously exposed with a carpet runner down the center aisle. And I believe that the pew cushions were also added at that time.

The old wrought iron fence in front of the church was manufactured by the Springfield Architectural Iron Works of Springfield, Ohio, and probably dates to the 1880s. It was donated to the church in the 1940s by Cornelia "Corny" Witsell Terry, a good friend of Virginia Alexander's. Virginia was planning to do some landscaping around the church and eyrie, and Mrs. Terry was interested in helping because her father, Rev. William P. Witsell, who served as rector of Christ Episcopal Church from 1927 to 1947, had preached several sermons at All Souls during the years before the church had a permanent pastor (for those of you who know Charles Witsell, this was his grandfather). The old fence had been removed from its original location and was stacked behind Terry Dairy Company. It was rescued and reinstalled at All Souls Church.

The scripture panels in the sanctuary were installed in the 1950s or '60s. The altar rail and choir pews were made by local woodworker M. K. Hodge.

Steeple—

The church never had a steeple until 1968, when the current one was built in memory of John Pemberton McRae, Jr., who was tragically killed in a car accident when he was about 19 years old (1947-1966). He was the great-grandson of Molly Pemberton, who helped start the Sunday School at All Souls.

Eyrie—

The old Alexander Store, which had been used to house the Sunday School, was remodeled by the Ladies' Aid Society in 1910 at the cost of \$10,000. In 1923 an addition was built, making the building an L-shape. This was necessary because the Sunday School enrollment had reached 358 by 1923. The addition was then called the E. P. Steele Annex in honor of Mrs. Elizabeth Steele, affectionately known as "Miss E," for her dedication to the Sunday School program. Miss E was responsible for naming the Sunday School building "the eyrie," meaning an eagle's nest (where the young are taught). She was the longtime Sunday School superintendent and instituted the graded system of classes. The old eyrie was remodeled in the mid-1950s by the Little Rock architectural firm of McAninch and Mahnker.

By the late 1970s, the eyrie was again in need of repair, and the congregation was divided over whether to restore the old building or demolish it to make way for a new structure. The congregation voted in 1977 to demolish the old eyrie, but a faction called "Friends of the Eyrie" formed in opposition, stating that the vote wasn't announced in advance, several teenagers voted, and proxy votes were not counted. They filed a lawsuit against the church to try and halt demolition. In July 1978, Pulaski Chancellor Murray O. Reed ruled that the church vote was legal, and the eyrie could be torn down. It was partially demolished by Ernest Brooks of NLR, who also served as contractor for the new building. Some of the board-and-batten cypress siding was salvaged for use on the present structure, which was modeled somewhat after the original eyrie. At least part of the eyrie was moved

to a location near Pinnacle Mountain. The present eyrie was built in 1978 at the cost of \$150,000. It was dedicated on Sunday, May 6, 1979.

Kirkholm—

In the early years, the church rented houses in Scott for the ministers and their families, and even bought an old building, moved it just south of the church, and converted it into a house. In 1961 funds for the construction and maintenance of a pastor's residence were provided by the Kirk Estate, under the direction of William Bevis, Jr. Completed in 1962, the house was called "Kirkholm" because the Kirk family donated money for its construction and because "Kirk" means church in the Scottish culture. Dr. James Workman and his family were the first to live in the Kirkholm. They moved in on February 14, 1962.

Interesting pastors—

All Souls has had some interesting/infamous characters as pastors over the years, including James K. "Uncle Mac" MacKrell (pastor at All Souls from 1936-39) and Wesley Pruden, Sr. (pastor at All Souls from 1942-47). Uncle Mac and his wife, affectionately called "Aunt Bess," were well loved at All Souls. He was a radio evangelist and quite a storyteller, and in 1948 Uncle Mac ran in the Democratic primary for governor. Sid McMath won, but Uncle Mac came in third.

Wesley Pruden pastored at All Souls during the 1940s and later became infamous for his role as the chaplain and president of the racist Capital Citizens' Council during the desegregation of Central High School.

And on a much lighter note, All Souls pastor Billy Pierce (1972-88) had a memorable quote that I'd like to share with you today. He often began his morning message by saying, "Come with me, and let us pitch our mental tents by the Sea of Galilee."

Conclusion—

All Souls Church is still interdenominational. As I mentioned earlier, Ward Rudolph is the pastor. The average attendance at Sunday morning church service is 80, and the Sunday School averages 70 each week. All Souls Church has meant so much to

so many in Scott and the surrounding area. It is truly the backbone of this community.

Mention the scrapbook again.

****Next tour is Friday, August 5 at the Helen Keller Memorial Building at the Arkansas School for the Blind.**