

**Sandwiching in History
Albert Pike Hotel
701 Scott Street, Little Rock
July 7, 2017
By Revis Edmonds**



Good afternoon, my name is Revis Edmonds, and I work for the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, an agency of the Department of Arkansas Heritage.

Thank you for coming, and welcome to the “Sandwiching in History” tour of Little Rock’s historic Albert Pike Hotel. I’d like to thank Cassandra Spencer-Cole, the manager of the Albert Pike for graciously extending her hospitality in allowing us to tour this amazing piece of Little Rock’s history!

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 Albert Pike Hotel was designed by George R. Mann and Eugene John Stern in the Spanish Revival style, which emerged in the early 20th century based on the Spanish Colonial architecture of the Spanish colonization of the Americas.¹

The Panama-California Exposition of 1915 in San Diego highlighted the work of architect Bertram Goodhue. This event is credited with giving the style national exposure. Mainly prominent in California and Florida, the Spanish Colonial Revival movement enjoyed its greatest popularity between 1915 and 1931.² This particularly came when returning soldiers from World War I sought to design their homes after those they had seen in Europe.³

Although it was completed in 1929 just before the stock market crash and the onset of the Great Depression, the Albert Pike Hotel's ornate interior spaces reflect the extravagance of the Roaring Twenties. The hotel cost approximately \$1,000,000 (\$14,118,830 today) to construct. The building was placed on the National Register of Historic Places on November 21, 1978.

Before the Albert Pike Hotel was built, the home of Robert Crittenden was located on this site (built in 1827 and torn down in 1920). Robert Crittenden was the first secretary and acting governor of the Arkansas Territory. He came to Arkansas Post in 1819 from his home in Kentucky, and he served as interim governor for about 9 months until the actual appointed governor, James Miller, arrived in

¹ Charles Witsell Jr., "George Richard Mann (1856–1939)." *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture* <http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=2117>

² "Santa Barbara, California: Spanish Colonial Revival Architecture." *Tripoto* https://www.tripoto.com/loc/Santa_Barbara2C_California/architectural_style-spanish_colonial_revival_architecture/background

³ Ralph S. Wilcox, *A Reference Guide to the Architectural Styles of Arkansas*, 18.

Arkansas. During that time, Crittenden established a powerful political machine and even had a hand in deciding to move the territorial capitol from Arkansas Post to Little Rock. In 1831, the federal government granted to the territory ten sections of land, which the territory was to sell to raise money for public buildings. Crittenden convinced the territorial legislature to authorize a trade of his home, which could become a public building, for the ten sections; however, Governor John Pope vetoed the legislative authorization for the exchange. Within a few months, the ten sections were sold for approximately \$30,000, and Crittenden sold his home for \$6,700. His organization held forth until President Andrew Jackson removed Crittenden as Secretary in 1829. After Crittenden's death in 1934, Albert Pike assumed the titular leadership of what would become the Whig Party in Arkansas.

Also, you will notice the Albert Pike Memorial Temple across the street. It was completed in 1924, and it was also designed by George R. Mann and Eugene John Stern. This Masonic temple was built to house the expanding membership of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry in Arkansas during the early twentieth century. The Masonic Temple was named after Albert Pike because he helped to form the Grand Chapter of Arkansas and served as its Grand High Priest from 1853-54. He was also associated with the Scottish Rite of Masons and was elected grand commander of the Supreme Council for the Southern jurisdiction of the U.S. in 1859, which meant that he served as the administrator for the states west of the Mississippi River and south of the Ohio River. He held this position until his death in 1891. In addition to his association

with the Masons, Albert Pike was a colorful and pivotal figure in Arkansas history. He was a lawyer, writer, poet, served in the Mexican-American and Civil Wars, and he represented the Creek and Choctaw tribes in treaty disputes with the U.S. government. The Creek and Cherokee regiments he led in the Civil War were allied with the Confederacy.

George Richard Mann, the architect who helped design both of these buildings, was a Mason himself, and he likely had something to do with naming the hotel after Albert Pike. Mann was commissioned to design the State Capitol Building; but he did not actually complete it because of political conflicts with governors, most notably Jeff Davis (as the building was under construction from 1899-1915). Mann's other notable works in Little Rock include the Southern Trust Building, the Boyle Building, the Blass Department Store, the *Gazette* Building, the addition to the Pulaski County Courthouse, and Mann also help design Little Rock Central High School (along with Eugene J. Stern, John Parks Almand, George H. Wittenberg, and Lawson L. Delony).

According to the hotel's National Register nomination, the floor plan is U-shaped and has two main wings eight stories in height which extend above the first two floors. Eugene Stern designed the two eight-story wings are connected on the east side by a ten-story section. There are two towers on the east side of the building that made house elevator machinery. The north and south elevations as well as the front façade of the wings are capped by decorative pediments that extend above the roofline. In keeping with the Spanish Revival style of the structure, decorated stone pediments extend above the roof line in the center of

each wing. The cloister type porch graces the main entries which are flanked by triple arched leaded-glass windows.⁴

The roof is covered in the original red tiles. A set of three multi-paned arched windows with decorative cast stone surrounds is centered between two lobby entrances. Decorative brackets and pendants adorn the eave above the arched windows, and two terra cotta shields with the initials “A.P.” are set into the brick above the doors. You will find images of these shields all over the building. The remaining first floor windows and doors have cast stone surrounds with some detailing. All of the windows from the third floor up have been replaced.

In the late 1950s a two-story addition was built on the south side of the hotel. The bottom floor is called Buffington Hall and serves as storage for Catering Creations, which is a catering company that operates out of the Albert Pike Hotel. The Lanai Suites are above Buffington Hall. The rooms in this addition were patterned after the original Holiday Inn room model. The windows and doors on the upper floor were once all glass. A diamond-shaped swimming pool and a fountain were built in this grassy area in the 1950s as well, but they have since been filled in.⁵

A two-story parking garage was constructed just to the east of the hotel building in 1929. It had a 100-car capacity and features cast stone detailing around the vehicle entrance with the words “Albert Pike Garage” engraved above the door. It

⁴ National Register of Historic Places nomination, “Albert Pike Hotel.”
<http://www.arkansaspreservation.com/National-Register-Listings/PDF/PU3228.nr.pdf>

⁵ Site visit and statement by Cassandra Spencer-Cole, June 9, 2017.

still has the original multi-pane hopper windows, but it was tuck-pointed and had some coping replaced in 1986.

The Albert Pike Hotel was operated by the Southwest Hotels Group, and then it was purchased by the Second Baptist Church in December 1971, upon which it became a residential facility. The church sought to “provide a family retirement community that was happy and uplifting.”⁶ In 1976, the hotel received a Section 231 loan from the Department of Housing and Urban Development for infrastructure improvements.⁷ The building was sold to the Albert Pike Residents Hotel, Ltd. in 1986 (a group of investors from Jonesboro, of which Phillip Jones became a partner in 1996), which continued upgrades to its interior, including restoration of the North Lounge in 1994.⁸ It provides a common activities room, television lounge, post office boxes, and library. In May 2013, BSR Trust of Little Rock and Montgomery, Alabama, completed the purchase on the 130-unit apartment building. Empire Corp. of Knoxville, Tennessee, was hired to perform further renovations to the property. The bottom floor of the building is rented out for special events, and Catering Creations operates out of the restaurant area, which also serves as a dining hall for the current residents.⁹ Regular events are held to inform residents of health and community services available in the area, as well as weekly bingo, monthly birthday parties, special occasion events, and holiday parties. The upper floors are rented out as apartments. There are 132

⁶ “Welcome to the Historic Albert Pike Residence Hotel located downtown Little Rock, Arkansas.” Ledic Realty Company <http://www.albert-pike.com/>

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ George Waldon, “Albert Pike Apartments Acquired for \$3.6M (Real Deals).” Arkansas Business, August 5, 2013.

⁹ Site visit and statement by Cassandra Spencer-Cole, June 9, 2017.

apartments upstairs, most of them being 1-bedroom and efficiency apartments with a few 2-bedroom units available. Now called the Albert Pike Residence Hotel, it is an independent living housing community providing rental assistance for the elderly (62 years and older) and people with disabilities through the HUD Project-based Section 8 and the Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) programs.¹⁰ There are currently 122 residents at the Albert Pike.¹¹

North Lobby

The interior of the first two floors is almost entirely original, with the exception of a few things on the mezzanine level that were destroyed in two fires (October 2007 and February 2008). The wood paneled ceilings in the north lobby area feature diamond-shaped projections. The brass-paneled elevator doors bear the Albert Pike shield design in each panel and are surrounded by glazed tile. The letter box and mail chute were also originally installed in the hotel, although the mail chute has been inoperable for many years. The shield design also appears in the stained glass window above the door to the parking garage. This design was replicated for use on building signage in 2000-2001. Both elevators were replaced in 1995, but the doors are original. The first and second floors have water fountains with glazed tile surrounds recessed in the wall, which are all originals. Probably the largest renovation up to this time has been the addition of a new power plant in the basement in January 2008.¹²

¹⁰ "Welcome to the Historic Albert Pike Residence Hotel located downtown Little Rock, Arkansas."

¹¹ Site visit and statement by Cassandra Spencer-Cole, June 9, 2017.

¹² Site visit and statement by Cassandra Spencer-Cole, June 9, 2017.

Main Lobby

The floors are covered with mosaic tile. As I mentioned earlier, there have been a couple of recent fires in the building. The most recent, in January 2008, was actually on the mezzanine level, but as a result, the main lobby room suffered extensive smoke damage to the ceiling and walls, which had to be repainted. Fortunately, the historic paint colors have been maintained. You'll notice the beautiful coffered ceiling (sunken panels) with octagon-shaped panels surrounded by small diamond-shaped panels with pendants. The multi-colored designs on the ceiling panels were hand stenciled using separate stencils for each design. This was all re-stenciled between February and May, 2008. The fire detection and sprinkler system were updated in 1999-2000, so the fire was put out quickly.

The light fixtures in the main lobby are original and feature unique shapes as well as red and blue glass. The use of arches throughout the room and the wrought iron gate leading to the restaurant are characteristics of the Spanish Revival style. The central columns, of which I presume are stone, are octagon-shaped to echo the coffered ceiling, and the capitals have fan and floral-shaped moldings to complement the designs on the ceiling as well. You can see that glazed tile is used throughout the building as a decorative door surround under the mezzanine. ADA-compliant ramps were added in this lobby and outside the restaurant in 1995.¹³ The divots in the floor are from a glass partition that has

¹³ Site visit and statement by Cassandra Spencer-Cole, June 9, 2017.

been removed. You can see how the partition looked in a photograph that can be observed on the mezzanine level.

Restaurant

This is the main office of Catering Creations, which hosts functions here at the Albert Pike, and they deliver to other locations. The wood ceiling in this room has exposed beams and the same type of intricate stenciling as the lobby ceiling. The stenciling was touched up in 2002 after water damage was repaired, and the original chandeliers were taken down to be cleaned and restored that same year. This room has central octagon-shaped columns and some pilasters on the north wall with floral designs on the capitals. Arch-shaped designs adorn the north wall. The south wall has had the windows replaced with stationary glass and sliding doors. This was probably done after the Lanai Suites and pool were added to allow visitors access to that area. A commercial kitchen was added in 2003-04.

Mezzanine

The mezzanine's carpet was replaced in April-May 2008 with this William Morris red trellis carpet made by Karastan, who has partnered with the National Trust for Historic Preservation to create a line of patterned carpet designs inspired by the architecture, interiors, and gardens of historic sites across the country. The area had to be repainted due to fire damage, and the Schonbek chandeliers (they have been making crystal chandeliers since 1870) in the mezzanine are new as of 2008.

The Mirror Room has its original leaded glass door and crystal chandeliers, and is rented for meetings and sometimes parties.

The bridal suite on the second floor was originally created to give brides a private space to prepare for their weddings (previously they had used the Mirror Room and had to hide if they came out on the mezzanine to use the restroom). It was a one-bedroom and one-bathroom apartment on the second floor, but is now used for private events. You can also see that the residential floors lack the extravagance of the lower two floors. However, floors 3-10 were re-wallpapered, repainted, and retiled in 2000-01 to give the hallways some color, as they had previously been all white, creating an institutional appearance.

The Albert Pike Hotel reflects a time of spending, speculation, and naïve economic optimism before the Great Depression. The hotel's status as a contemporary structure was short-lived, for the coming of the depression in the 1930s soon gave it the aura of a monument to the past.

The Arkansas Historic Preservation Program noted in its National Register nomination: "The main significance of the Albert Pike Hotel lies not in the site on which it stands nor in the man for whom it was named; rather the real significance lies in its vivid reflections of a bygone time and an architecture appropriate for that time. The Albert Pike was built in the year of the great crash, but as near as the crash and depression were, the time was still the Roaring Twenties when the hotel was built. It was still a time of spending, speculation and

naïve economic optimism. The lavishness of the hotel's architecture is a kind of social art reflecting that time of high living so soon to end."¹⁴

Thank you all for coming today! Please join us for our next Sandwiching in History tour of 2017 on Friday August 4 at Acme Brick at 301 South Victory Street in Little Rock. We will begin at noon. Hope to see you at both of these and our future tours this year! Also, if you're hankering for a road trip, join us in Downtown Searcy next Saturday July 15 as we walk through the history of their historic downtown. We will begin at the White County Courthouse at 11 AM.

And just a reminder, if you are dining out after the tour, be sure to patronize our locally owned establishments. You'll love the taste, and you're building a better Little Rock!

¹⁴ Rex Nelson, "Albert Pike Hotel." *The Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture*
<http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=8149>