

**William E. Woodruff House**  
**1017 E. 8<sup>th</sup> St., Little Rock**  
**Sandwiching in History, July 6, 2018**



Hello, my name is David Collins and I am a graduate assistant at the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program.

Welcome to the Sandwiching in History tour of the William E. Woodruff House. It's a pleasure to see so many of you here today. The Quapaw Quarter Association made this tour possible, and we'd like to thank them for giving us all this opportunity. I'd also personally like to acknowledge Patricia

Blick with QQA, who helped me a great deal in preparing the tour and who is taking time away from a family trip to be here.

This house and the area surrounding it were once part of the estate of William Edward Woodruff, an integral figure in the development of Little Rock and Arkansas itself. Woodruff was born in Long Island, New York in 1795 and spent his early years there as the oldest of five brothers. His father died when he was around twelve years old, so William soon had to begin learning a trade. When he was fourteen, his mother secured him an apprenticeship with a printer from Sag Harbor, New York, named Alden Spooner. His apprenticeship ended in 1816, and he began his printing career in New York as a journeyman. In 1818, he adventured out to Kentucky and then to Tennessee, briefly working for the *Clarion and Tennessee State Gazette*.

Once Arkansas Territory was created in 1819, Woodruff bought some printing materials and moved to Arkansas Post. It was there that he published the first *Arkansas Gazette* in November of 1819, and he continued his work there until November of 1821, when Little Rock became the capital of the

Arkansas Territory. Woodruff promptly moved to Little Rock, which at the time was not yet a legitimate city. He began publishing the *Gazette* there in December of 1821.

Woodruff truly originated the publication business in Arkansas. His *Gazette* was not only the first newspaper in Arkansas, but it essentially was the entire press in Arkansas Territory for almost a decade since his move to Little Rock. He also produced the first book to be printed in Arkansas called *Laws of the Territory of Arkansas*. For the next three decades in Little Rock, Woodruff established himself as an imposing presence in the city. After printing from a modest log cabin for two years, he moved the offices of the *Gazette* in 1824 to a small brick building at the corner of 2<sup>nd</sup> and Cumberland Streets. A few months before his marriage to Jane Eliza Mills in 1827, he moved the offices again to a larger brick building that he had built near the corner of Markham and Scott Streets. For a time, that building served as both a publishing office and a residence for Woodruff's family and employees. All of Woodruff's eleven children were born in that house between 1828 and 1850.

During his nearly three decades in that house is when Woodruff developed his great influence throughout the city and state. In publishing and in practice, he became active in local and state politics. The *Gazette* itself was founded as a Democratic paper and regularly criticized political adversaries. Woodruff also fostered a beneficial relationship with Chester Ashley, a landowner and attorney who was certainly one of the most influential people in Arkansas during his time. Woodruff also at times held minor offices, including being the first Arkansas State Treasurer. His ventures outside the printing business contributed to his esteem in Little Rock. He established the first library in Arkansas in 1843 and kept multiple businesses, including a land agency he started in 1823.

Still, he's best known for being the founder of the *Gazette*, which he only controlled fully during his early years in Little Rock. He initially sold the paper in 1838 and sporadically regained control of it through various means until he sold it for the final time in March of 1853, the same month the Woodruff family moved into this home.

By the time Woodruff began building this house in spring of 1852, downtown Little Rock had grown into a busy city, which in Woodruff's words had "all the amusements and recreations of an old and settled community." At the time, this location was far enough outside the city to hold a farmstead, yet close enough for Woodruff to stay involved in the affairs of Little Rock. The original plot of land he purchased was around 25 acres, bordered by 7<sup>th</sup> St. to the north, College St. to the east, 9<sup>th</sup> St. to the south, and Rector St. to the west. The house was built originally facing south toward 9<sup>th</sup> Street. The primary builder was a prominent brick mason of Little Rock named John Robins, who used local materials and had bricks made onsite.

The home was built in the Greek Revival style, complete with a portico and columns on the front entrance, which again was originally on the south façade. Adding to the prestige of the home was a circular carriage drive in the large front lawn and a curving walnut staircase inside that accessed all three floors. The original plan of the building included ten rooms with central hallways on the first and second floors. The four large rooms on the bottom floor each had a fireplace and were used as double parlors, a library, and a temporary dining room.

Shortly after the Woodruffs moved in, an addition was built on the northwest corner of the house—extending north—to provide a proper dining area with a kitchen and pantry. The family bedrooms were all upstairs. Every room had a fireplace, and the house had at least four chimneys on each corner of the house. Woodruff spent around \$9,000 dollars total on the construction.

The grounds of the home held all the things consistent with a small farmstead. An orchard was planted to the west of the front lawn and a garden was planted to the east of the house. Livestock grounds—including a barn, stables, pigpens, chicken yards, and a tool shed—were located to the north of the garden. Slave quarters were also present to the north of the house. Woodruff was indeed a slaveholder and a supporter of the Confederacy. By 1860, he held fourteen slaves on his property.

After Arkansas seceded in May of 1861, Woodruff's support led him to volunteer for the Confederate Army at the age of sixty-five. After having fought in Missouri, he returned home, where he would try to defend Little Rock from an enclosing Union

force. By September of 1863, Union troops controlled the city. In 1864, Union general Frederick Steele banished Woodruff from Little Rock due to his sympathies. Steele then seized Woodruff's estate, using it as a headquarters and a temporary military hospital.

When the war ended, Woodruff and his family moved back into the house. In June of 1873, Woodruff divided his 25 acres into lots for the city of Little Rock, but he and Jane continued to live in this house. Throughout Reconstruction and until his death, Woodruff continued to have a hand in Little Rock politics. His son bought the *Gazette* in the summer of 1866, and he undoubtedly had an influence in its publication. He helped negotiate debates in the State Legislature and even provided arms for Elisha Baxter in his violent struggle to retain governorship. He also strongly opposed suffrage for newly free African Americans, and it was reflected in the pages of the *Gazette*.

William Woodruff died on June 19<sup>th</sup> 1885 and was buried in Mt. Holly Cemetery. Jane Eliza Woodruff died in 1887, but it remained in the family under the care of their son Alden until

1891, when it was sold. During the 1890s, the interior was “modernized” and many decorative features were renovated, including the staircases and some of the fireplace mantels.

The new owners completed the current north-facing configuration of the house around 1900, eliminating the south portico and enclosing the door space with three wood-frame windows. Within the first few years of the new century, the ell extension on the northwest corner was removed. A large semi-circular porch and balustrade was constructed around the new double-door north entrance as well as the gabled dormer with arched windows.

By the early 1920s the semi-circular porch had been replaced by the rectangular porch that exists today. The interior of the home was redesigned as a multiple-residence space and specifically served to lodge single young women who came to Little Rock for work. It was called the “Cottage Home for Girls” and it was divided into twelve bedrooms, each of which could house multiple residents. Women who lived there were charged around \$5.00 per week, which included two meals every day.

The home served the same purpose throughout the 1930s, but the name was changed to the “Colonial Club for Business Girls”. The building continued to serve as a family-owned boarding house until around 1980. It was owned and kept by Callie Talley and her husband. During their time as owners, the building had 12 apartments (4 units on each floor), the walls were covered in wallpaper, and the central hall was covered with wood paneling around 1963. Beginning in the 1980s, John Karolson purchased the house and it became “Karolson Manor Apartments”. Karolson purchased the building directly to the east of the house in 1987 after it was condemned by the city. He made plans to save it and turn it into an extension of Karolson Manor with six new units, but ultimately the building was demolished. In the late 1990s, all but one of the chimneys were removed after sustaining damage during a storm.

Until 2005, the Woodruff House continued to be used as an apartment building with fourteen units available. In 2005, a room on the first floor of the south side caught fire and the house has since been vacant, although the essential structure is still intact.

Since the house was vacated, it sustained almost a decade of natural and man-made degradation, though efforts have already been made to secure the integrity of the building. Many historic windowpanes were broken out, which has allowed water damage to occur. More damage has occurred due to the deteriorated state of the dormer addition on the north side of the house. Copper pipes, bathroom fixtures, and even a historic mantelpiece were all stolen at various points. The unwanted materials were often scattered around the house.

The need to preserve or repurpose the Woodruff House is derived from the antebellum nature of the house and many of its features. As you tour the building, you might pay attention to the original 1850s elements including some of the bedroom fireplace mantels, the plaster walls and baseboards inside the apartment closets, and even the pilasters on the south façade that were part of the original entry way.

The most recent history of the building has been focused in this need to preserve it. In 2008, WER architects inspected the house and composed a Condition Assessment Report, which

detailed how best to support the structure and save the house. In 2013, the Quapaw Quarter Association, the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, Preserve Arkansas, and the City of Little Rock all formed a consortium to determine how to fund the effort to save the house. Ultimately, in 2014, the QQA purchased the structure and about 14,000 square feet of land surrounding it. In 2015, the city of Little Rock put up the chain link fence and boarded up openings in order to further secure the house. In 2016, AHPP granted over \$72,000 to Little Rock for selective demolition and stabilization projects. Finally, in 2016, QQA replaced the roof and provided for some structural stabilization.

The Woodruff House has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places since March 21, 1989, but it has endured intense deterioration. However, the recent efforts have revitalized hope for preserving the structure and, in effect, its historical value.

Again, thank you all so much for attending the July tour of the William Woodruff House. As you tour, you may venture around the home or brave the interior. We ask that you please avoid

any areas that are blocked off inside the house. There is water available. Finally, we hope you'll join us on our next Sandwiching in History tour on Friday, August 3 at the National Old Line Building located at 501 Woodlane St. in Little Rock.  
Thanks!