

Sandwiching in History Tour  
St. Luke's United Methodist Church  
6401 W. 32<sup>nd</sup> Street, Little Rock, AR  
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By Mason Toms



Hello everyone, my name is Mason Toms and I work at the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, which is a division of the Department of Arkansas Heritage. Thank you for coming and welcome to St. Luke's United Methodist Church. For the architects in the room, this tour is worth one hour of AIA Continuing Education Credit. If you are interested in that, see me after the talk and I will be more than happy to assist you.

Constructed between 1955 and 1968, St. Luke's United Methodist Church was one of the first churches constructed in the Broadmoor area and is the oldest continually operating church in the Broadmoor area.

### **The Area**

The area of the city, now called Midtown, was originally well outside of the city limits of Little Rock. It was not until 1943 that this area was even near the city, but even then, the city ended at Harrison Street, which is about eleven blocks away from here. By the mid-1940s, the city limit had moved four blocks closer here but still ended at Fillmore Street. It would not be until the mid-1950s that this area would be included within the boundaries of the City of Little Rock. Back in those days University Avenue was called Hayes Street and was a gravel road. Much of this area was the private hunting grounds of the very influential Rebsamen family. Surrounding that were scattered farms and simple houses. Things began to change for the area when Little Rock Junior College, now UA Little Rock, moved to their present location in 1947, onto a plot land donated by the Rebsamen family to the Little Rock School District for the purposes of creating a college. In 1957, Little Rock Junior College became Little Rock University so the city decided to rename Hayes Street to University Street in 1959. Shortly thereafter, the city embarked on a massive public improvement project on University Street. The road was widened to four lanes with a median and they added mercury lights from Markham to Colonel Glenn. When this project was completed in 1961, the street was renamed University Avenue. The numerous bright lights down the street led people to nickname University Avenue as the "Great White Way," a common nickname for newly and overly lit streets during the period.

Just to set Broadmoor in context, 1954 was the year of the Brown vs. Board of Education ruling by the Supreme Court, which would lead to the dramatic events at Central High in 1957. It was also the year that Marilyn Monroe married Joe DeMaggio and the songs “Rock around the Clock” and “Shake, Rattle and Roll” by Bill Haley and the Comets hit the charts. Elvis had just started recording his first songs at Sun Studio in Memphis. The movies “Seven Brides for Seven Brothers” and “White Christmas” premiered. Also, “I Love Lucy”, “The Jackie Gleason Show”, and “Dragnet” are the most popular shows on TV, which you could watch while you enjoyed your newly introduced “TV Dinner”.

In late 1953, Hayes Street was a gravel road that traveled through heavily wooded areas west and south of the city limits of Little Rock. The recent creation of Little Rock Junior College had put the area sights of local builders as being ripe for residential and commercial development. Since the new college occupied only the eastern half of the former Rebsamen Hunting Estate, the western half remained untouched. That is until it caught the eye of Little Rock businessman and developer Elbert Fausett.

Some Arkansas developers got their names in the paper on a regular basis, but none more often than Elbert Lion Fausett. He started out as a Ford dealer, was a car collector and racer, legislator, publisher-printer and used-car salesman before becoming a nationally-known builder. Fausett was the first realtor to utilize extensive advertising in the form of print, radio, bus benches and billboards. Among the state’s most prolific developers, by 1954 he had built 12 subdivisions and had branched into Faulkner and

Saline counties. Fausett's most ambitious residential development was Broadmoor in Little Rock.

Mr. and Mrs. Elbert Fausett of Fausett Realty purchased the property on the west side of Hayes Street that would become the Broadmoor development in 1953 from Raymond Rebsamen. The purchased acreage included a lake, trees, and the Rebsamen hunting lodge, which would become the Broadmoor Clubhouse. Construction on the first houses started on June 6, 1953, along Lakeshore Drive. Prices for the new homes ranged from \$11,500 to \$21,600 and square footage ranged between 1,100 and 1,400. According to neighborhood historians, the first four families to move into the neighborhood were the Bates family at 29 Lakeshore, the Spilman Family at 34, the Speights family at 36, and the Tate family at 38. These families had moved into their homes by the end of 1953 and the area streets were still gravel. By September of 1954, one year after its opening advertisements, there were 100 families living in the area. These families included the Fausetts as well, who lived in a sprawling 4,000 square foot house constructed on three lots at 56 Lakeshore.

Broadmoor was publicized as the largest subdivision in the state from 1953 to 1955. Fausett's addition was also advertised as the only one with "year 'round air conditioned homes" and central heating, which was a national first. What made it unique and all the more relevant to mid-century home buyers was that Fausett offered 18 plans, later expanded to 24 to accommodate the terrain and all were built in the new Ranch style. Broadmoor was built utilizing on-site prefabrication methods in shops set up at the addition. Specialized workmen operated a metal shop and a cabinet shop where all woodwork was completed then applied in complete sections. A mill on

Broadmoor Drive allowed workmen to pre-cut sections then take them to lots for construction. Broadmoor also had its own roofing supply and decking yard. Using this process crews could complete one house within one or two weeks, saving Fausett money. It was also noted in early newspaper accounts that houses were sited on the lots to allow for as many trees as possible to be retained during the building of the neighborhood.

There were also several model homes built, including one at 2800 S. University Avenue that was known as the “X-Ray House” due to its use of cut away walls that allowed potential buyers views of the insulation, heating and cooling systems and general “inner workings” of the house.

One of the more unique features of the Broadmoor Development that set it apart from many other developments of the time in the country was that it was designed to be a complete community within itself. When the area was originally planned spaces were set aside for parks, churches, schools, and a shopping center. Justin Matthews made similar allotments when he laid out the Lakewood area; however, it was the inclusion and Fausett’s development of an adjacent shopping center that made Broadmoor stand out. As we mentioned earlier, when this area was first created there was not much around it. It was therefore necessary for Fausett to provide all of the conveniences that homebuyers could find closer to the heart of the city in his new neighborhood just outside of it. However, there was another amenity provided by Mr. Fausett that was nationally unique to Broadmoor, other than year round air-conditioning, the Broadmoor Kindergarten.

The Broadmoor Kindergarten Building, located a block east of here, was the first childcare facility built by a developer as part of a new residential subdivision in the country. Completed in 1955 and designed by Little Rock architect Richard Groh and W.F. Hibbard, the structure was a one-of-a-kind, “fire-proof” building that featured radiant heating floors, a “year round” air-conditioning system, and an attached teacher’s residence. However, when a new elementary was constructed in 1959; the Kindergarten Building was no longer needed. The property was sold that same year to University Baptist Church, which would later become Lakeshore Baptist Church. The church still owns the building but leases it to another church for Sunday use.

By 1955, over 350 homes in Broadmoor were finished, which surpassed Fausett’s expectations. Although initially projecting 700 homes, the final total was only 553 homes constructed when the last home was completed in 1957. That same year Broadmoor was annexed into the City of Little Rock. When Fausett was through with it, Broadmoor covered 190 acres, and had seven miles of paved road. In 1959, the Broadmoor Shopping Center along University Avenue was opened and included a Piggly Wiggly, Ben Franklins, Toyland, Walgreens Drugs and a few others smaller shops. In later years, the commercial developments along University Avenue would be blamed in part for the decline in the downtown commercial areas.

### **Congregation of St. Luke’s**

The congregation known today was St. Luke’s United Methodist Church was originally organized in 1831 when a group began to meet in a government building on Second Street. In 1845, the Methodist Episcopal Church nationally split over the issue

of slavery and became known as Methodist Episcopal Church North and South. This congregation sided with the South. After the Civil War, the congregation moved to the Girls' School Hall on Main Street and became known as the Main Street Methodist Episcopal Church. In the early 1870s, they constructed a new building for themselves between Third and Fourth Streets on Main. However, the congregation could not handle the cost of the structure and had to sell the property. In 1901, they built a second building at corner of Fourteenth and Scott streets in Little Rock. Though no longer on Main Street, the congregation kept the name Main Street Methodist Episcopal Church South. In 1939, the Methodist Episcopal Churches North and South reunited into a single fellowship. That same year Main Street Methodist Episcopal Church South changed their name to the Scott Street Methodist Church. The congregation remained at that location under that name until 1954 when the Little Rock Methodist Conference decided that there needed to be a new church built on the western edge of the city. Under the leadership of Rev. David M. Hankins, the members of Scott Street Methodist Church volunteered to move their congregation to the newly built Broadmoor addition of the city.

The congregation sold their building on Scott Street in 1955 and met in the Army Reserve Building on the campus of Little Rock Junior College, now the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, while they constructed a church on W. 32<sup>nd</sup> Street, on the southern edge of the Broadmoor development. As an interesting side note, the Army Reserve Building, now home to the UALR Facilities Management, was the birthplace of almost every church in Broadmoor. In addition to the congregation of St. Luke's starting there, Good Shepherd Episcopal Church, Lakeshore Baptist Church, and St. Andrew's

Presbyterian Church also met in the building prior to constructing a home of their own in the area.

The new church was officially dedicated on March 4, 1956, under the new name of St. Luke's Methodist Church, and was one of the first churches in the area. The building was officially dedicated by Little Rock Methodist Superintendent Dr. Francis A. Buddin at two services on that Sunday. The building was designed by Little Rock architect Morris Smith and contained a multi-purpose space, which acted as a sanctuary and fellowship hall, and four classrooms. In 1961, the congregation added an additional six classrooms to the south end of the building, which were designed by congregation member David Rippey. However, the ever-growing population of the congregation soon created a need for a new, larger sanctuary space. They wanted a space that fit with the wooded setting of the church grounds but also projected the "modern" sensibilities of the congregation. Under the leadership of Rev. Fred L. Arnold and Rev. Anthony Webster, they hired the Little Rock firm of Cowling & Roark to design a new worship space for them in 1964. Bishop Paul V. Galloway officially dedicated the addition, which included a sanctuary, covered walkway, and bell tower, on May 16, 1965. In 1968, the Methodist Church merged with the Evangelical United Brethren to form the United Methodist Church. That same year, St. Luke's changed its name to St. Luke United Methodist Church, and, in an unrelated event, enclosed a porch to create a small prayer chapel, which was also designed by Fred Perkins.

### **The Architect**

The space we are in today was part of the 1964 addition to the church by the Little Rock firm Cowling & Roark. The firm was founded in 1962 when architectural engineer Price Roark left the notable Little Rock firm of Erhart Eichenbaum Rauch & Blass to join Dan Cowling in creating a new firm. Cowling too had recently left another partnership, one with Morris Smith, which had lasted from 1957 to 1961. It was Cowling's former partnership with Morris Smith that allowed Cowling & Roark to receive the commission to design the additions to St. Luke's. The new partnership between Cowling and Roark was somewhat short lived, only existing from 1962 to 1966; however, in that short time they managed to create some wonderful buildings, such as the one we are in today.

Houston Price Roark was a Little Rock native. After serving in the European Theater during World War II, he returned to the University of Arkansas where he was a part of the first class of the newly created architecture program, alongside Fay Jones, Bob Laser, and Ernie Jacks. However, he transferred his last year to Washington University in St. Louis where he earned his Bachelors of Science in Architectural Engineering in 1949. After graduation, he moved back to Little Rock and went to work for the architectural firm of Erhart and Eichenbaum, which later became Erhart Eichenbaum Rauch & Blass, where he stayed until 1961.

Daniel Campbell Cowling, Jr., was a native of Rogers, AR. He originally started college at Arkansas Polytechnic College in Russellville, now Arkansas Tech., but transferred to the University of Arkansas after two years to study architecture. It is likely that Cowling knew Roark while they were both at the University of Arkansas, as many of the upper classmen would commonly assist in the lessons of lower classmen. Cowling

graduated from the University of Arkansas in 1952. In 1957 he joined Little Rock architect Morris Smith to open the firm of Smith & Cowling. This firm lasted until 1961 when Smith retired.

In 1966, after Cowling and Roark parted ways, Roark founded his own firm at 713 W. 2<sup>nd</sup> Street, taking over the building from the notable firm Trapp Clippard Phelps, which is where you will still find the firm today, though now it is called Roark Perkins Perry Yelvington, or more commonly RPPY.

Though the church was the commission of Cowling & Roark, Fred Perkins was the project architect. Perkins was born on July 8, 1938, in Carlisle, AR. Like his later employer Dan Cowling, he originally attended college at Arkansas Polytechnic College in Russellville for two years, but transferred in 1958 to the University of Arkansas to study architecture under esteemed Arkansas architect, E. Fay Jones. Jones focused heavily on the works of Frank Lloyd Wright and Wright's Organic Architecture, which Jones saw as being the superior approach to design. This early influence from Jones likely explains the existence of so many Wrightian details and elements in the buildings that Perkins produced. Over summer breaks during college, Perkins would come back to Little Rock and work for Morris Smith and later Dan Cowling. It was because of the relationships that he formed during this time that he went to work for Cowling & Roark once he graduated in 1962. During his time with Cowling & Roark, Perkins found a bit of a niche in church design, having designed at least three churches in the central Arkansas area by 1966. However, the sanctuary at St. Luke's United Methodist was his first ecclesiastical design.

When Cowling and Roark parted ways, Perkins decided to stay with Roark when he opened his new firm at 713 W. 2<sup>nd</sup> Street in Little Rock. Perkins would eventually become Roark's first named partner at the new firm. The firm continued to grow over the years and new partners were added; however, Perkins still goes into the office almost every day and still plays an active role in the firm. Over the years, Perkins designed several other churches around Arkansas. According to Perkins, he must have "designed around 200 churches in the state." Some other designs that you might be familiar with are Faith United Methodist Church on Markham, Jacksonville First Presbyterian Church, Henderson United Methodist Church, the eastern section of Central Church of Christ, Hunter United Methodist Church, and St. James United Methodist Church at 321 Pleasant Valley Drive.

### **The Architecture**

The architecture of St. Luke's United Methodist is an example of Wrightian or Organic Modernism, which was a style of Mid-Century Modern architecture. As the name suggests it takes most of its influence from the works and ideology of Frank Lloyd Wright. This influence is seen in the material choices of stained wood and matching brown brick, as well as the triangular brackets along the eave-line, which are commonly referred to as "Wrightian-Wedges." Despite this being Perkins' first church design, he managed to seamlessly blend the elements and grandeur of traditional Gothic-inspired church design with the materials and stylings of Wright's Organic Architecture. The organization, height, and light of the sanctuary seem to echo the architecture of Gothic cathedrals of Europe. However, these elements were softened by the material choices for the building, such as all of the wood in the sanctuary space, the rusticated stone

retaining walls outside, and warm colors in the stained-glass windows. Additionally, the three large stained-glass windows on the north wall echo design elements seen in more classically designed churches. At the same time they are a simplified version of the type of abstract designs Wright used on his iconic Robie House in Chicago, IL. The shape of the windows also served as the base form for much of the other architectural elements of the space, such as the reredos (raredos), narthex screen, kneeling wall, lectern, and pulpit, all of which were designed by Perkins. This pattern was carried outside in the design of the arcade leading up from the parking area and in the design for the tower, which was added at the same time as the sanctuary.

The overall form of the sanctuary is a nod to the idea that Christians are the fishers-of-men. The series of glue-lam arches mimic the ribs of an upside-down ship's hull. In fact, the term nave, which is the main seating space in a church sanctuary, derives from the Latin term *navis*, meaning "ship." The embedded imagery of the church being a ship became one of the more common themes in Mid-Century church design.

In 1968, Perkins designed a final Wrightian touch to St. Luke's United Methodist in the form of a small prayer room. This tiny space featured a few of Perkins' later signature elements, such as his inverted Y-shaped stained-glass windows and decorative wooden pendants, nod to a traditional Gothic architectural feature.

Feel free to explore this level of the church. If you exit out of the doors near the front of the sanctuary you can visit the other areas of the church without having to brave the cold. Be sure to see the small foyer with its triangular stained-glass windows as well

as the prayer chapel. Across the hall from the prayer chapel is the original sanctuary, which is still used as the fellowship hall.

I hope you have enjoyed today's tour. The next Sandwiching in History will be on February 1, at the Mosaic Templars Grand Temple at 906 S. Broadway in Little Rock, and please join us for our Walks Through History Tour on March 9<sup>th</sup> in historic downtown Piggot. If you have any additional questions, I will be up here as you explore, so feel free to ask. Thank you for coming and have a great weekend.