

**Sandwiching in History
Trapnall Hall
423 East Capitol Avenue, Little Rock
February 3, 2017
By Revis Edmonds**



Intro

Good afternoon, my name is Revis Edmonds, and I work for the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, which is an agency of the Department of Arkansas Heritage. We are proud to sponsor this series of tours of our historic sites in the Little Rock metro area and all over Arkansas.

Thank you all for coming, and welcome to our second “Sandwiching in History” tour for 2017 of Trapnall Hall. I’d like to thank Bill Gatewood, Director of the Old State House Museum, and Abigail Howe, the director of Trapnall Hall, for allowing us to tour this amazingly beautiful home that has been such an important part of the history and development of Little Rock!

One of the most beautiful antebellum homes in Arkansas, Trapnall Hall was built in 1843 in the Greek Revival style of architecture and was once the home of Frederic and Martha Trapnall. No one knows who the home’s architect was, but we do know that it was one of the few brick houses in Little Rock at the time that it was built.

The home has served since 1976, when it was acquired by the state from the Junior League of Little Rock, as the official receiving hall for the state’s governor, and can be rented by the public for special events.

The Greek Revival Style and Trapnall Hall

The Greek Revival was an architectural movement of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, predominantly in Northern Europe and the United States. A product of Hellenism, which is the study or imitation of ancient Greek culture, it may be looked upon as the last phase in the development of Neoclassical architecture. The term was first used by Charles Robert Cockerell, a noted nineteenth-century English architect, archaeologist, and writer, in a lecture he gave as Professor of Architecture to the Royal Academy of Arts in London in 1842.

With a newfound access to Greece, archaeologist-architects of the period studied the Doric and Ionic orders. In each country it touched, the style was looked on as the expression of local nationalism and civic virtue, and freedom from the lax detail and frivolity that was thought to characterize the architecture of France and Italy, which were two countries where the style never really took hold. This was especially the case in Britain, Germany and the United States, where the idiom was regarded as being free from ecclesiastical and aristocratic associations. Greek Revival architecture took a different course in a number of countries, lasting until the Civil War in America, and even later in Scotland. Thomas Jefferson owned a copy of the first volume of *The Antiquities of Athens*, and though he never practiced in the style Jefferson was to prove instrumental in introducing Greek Revival architecture to the United States. Trapnall Hall followed in that tradition, similar to the home of the late Territorial Secretary Robert Crittenden, which was used as a Governor's residence in the later territorial years.

Trapnall Hall is a one-story, five bay main structure with one side wing plus a three bay portico centered on the main structure with a closed-in shed-roofed extension across the rear of the main structure and across the rear of the side wing. Originally the house had only an open rear "piazza", which is Italian for "porch," as it was called in 1843, across the rear of the main house and connecting the corner of the side wing. A separate kitchen building was located directly behind this side wing. The front portico has four classical wooden columns that usher visitors in through huge paneled cypress front doors leading into the fourteen foot wide entrance hall that runs for the entirety of the home's length.

Trapnall Hall's simple Greek Revival style is the key to its architectural significance. The significance lies in its proportions and the simple but extremely elegant detailing. All of the door and window openings come to exactly the same height above the floor and each are trimmed on the inside with matching architraves (lintels or beams that rest on the capitals of columns, or in this case, the design is incorporated into the window and door frames) with corner blocks. Each window opening has a recess to the floor with the area under the window itself that is beautifully paneled to match the paneling of the doors. The center hall with its 10 foot high double doors opening one into each of the four main

rooms exactly opposite the original wood burning fireplaces situated on the outside walls is perfectly symmetrical and therefore exceptionally elegant. The center hall is 14 feet wide with 14 foot ceilings. Each of the four original rooms are exactly 20 feet square with 14 feet ceilings. The original dining room measured 18 by 19 feet with a 14 foot ceiling. All of the original windows are 4 feet wide and 7 feet high. Although some alterations have been made to Trapnall Hall for present day use, it has lost none of its original proportions or the impression given by the simple but elegant detailing, and the house is truly an antebellum showplace.

About Frederic Trapnall

Frederic William Trapnall was a Kentucky native born in 1807 in Harrodsburg, a town in Mercer County in the central part of the state. His parents, Dr. Phillip and Nancy Casey Trapnall, were descended from the village of Pilton, which is near Glastonbury, in Somerset County, England. His great-grandfather emigrated from Staffordshire, and he and Frederic's grandfather were farmers in Baltimore County, Maryland. Frederic's father, Phillip, studied medicine at the University of Pennsylvania, and practiced at Hagerstown for two years. He was one of the founders of the Medical and Chirurgical Society of Maryland in 1799. He moved to Harrodsburg and set up his practice there in 1800. Like his son in Arkansas, he would serve in the state legislature and was a local leader in the Whig Party, establishing friendships with Henry Clay and John Pope, the future territorial Governor of Arkansas.

Frederic received his primary school education at Fry's Academy in Mercer. He apprenticed in law with a firm in Springfield, and was elected to the Kentucky House of Representatives in 1834. A future Arkansan, William Conway, also served in the Kentucky House with Trapnall. While in Springfield, Trapnall met Martha Francis Cocke, and they were married on November 1, 1836, on the bride's sixteenth birthday. Shortly afterward, the newlyweds made the trek to settle in Little Rock. Mrs. Trapnall had several social and family connections in Arkansas's capital city, most prominently Elizabeth Trotter Pope, the daughter of Arkansas's territorial governor, John Pope, and her oldest sister, Mary Ann Cocke, who married Daniel Ringo, Arkansas's first chief justice. The Trapnall side of the family had notable connections as well; Frederic Trapnall's younger brother, Philip, who was a junior partner in family's law firm of Trapnall and Cocke, married Sallie Faulkner, the eldest daughter of Colonel Sandford Faulkner of "Arkansas Traveler" fame.

Frederic Trapnall was one of the most popular lawyers of his time. Had he not died at the age of 46 he probably would have become one of the political leaders of Arkansas and likely would have posed a serious challenge to the power of the dominant political faction known as "The Family." He was active in the Whig Party and several Whig Party events were held at Trapnall Hall. Frederic and

Martha Trapnall were also active in the formation of the Episcopal Church in Arkansas, much as they had been in Kentucky. He was one of the first vestrymen (a member of his local church's vestry, or leading body) of Christ Episcopal Church and helped lead efforts in its construction at Fifth and Scott Streets. Trapnall's financial contribution made up almost one fourth of the cost of the original church's construction. The church was destroyed by fire after lightning struck the bell tower in 1873. Trapnall died at Monticello on July 4, 1853, while campaigning for a seat in Congress. In his campaign he enlisted the aid of Albert Pike, who was considered at that time the leader of the Whig Party in Arkansas. Pike once described Trapnall "in appearance every inch a nobleman, of bright, keen, quick, intellect, gracefully eloquent, whose proper place was in the halls of Congress."

Frederic Trapnall built this home on what was described as "a gently sloping site of twelve lots which he purchased from W. W. Stevenson on June 12, 1843." The area at that time was known as the Stevenson Addition to the Original City of Little Rock. The western boundary of the line was called the Quapaw Line, which bounded the land that was ceded to the Quapaws in 1816. In the Trapnall Hall history from 1981, it's stated that "the oversize block purchased by Trapnall is one of only three blocks in Little Rock history that has never been given a block number." There is no indication at present that this status has changed after consulting with the City Manager's office. To this day, its legal description is still "Trapnall Block." This land was included in a 1,000 acre grant from the federal government to the Arkansas Territory in 1833. The money realized from the sale of the land was to be used for construction of a courthouse and jail, and is also believed to be the source of the money that built the Old State House. At the time of its construction, Trapnall Hall (or Trapnall Place, as it was called at the time) was one of only a few large brick homes in Little Rock. Trapnall's tract of land ran due east from the home to the Arkansas River, and one could see directly to the river from the home in Trapnall's day.

Martha Trapnall survived her husband by a little over eight years. She became well known as the lady who tossed a bouquet of flowers from the balcony of the old House Chamber to Isaac Murphy, who was the only "no" vote in the final vote of the secession convention on May 6, 1861. She accepted the result, however, and worked to support the men going off to war. She died at Grand Lake in Chicot County on January 9, 1862. The Trapnalls' only son, Richard Philip, died in infancy on June 9, 1841. Their only surviving daughter, Mary Ringo Trapnall, who was born at Trapnall hall on May 7, 1852, died less than two years after her mother on August 27, 1863. The family is buried in Mount Holly Cemetery.

The Post-Trapnall Era

As the last of Frederic and Martha Trapnall's surviving children, upon her death the estate passed to three unmarried uncles: Benjamin, George, and William, with George being appointed attorney-in-fact (a person who is authorized to perform

business-related transactions on behalf of someone else, as in power of attorney) by Chancery Court. It was not placed in Probate until after the Civil War, and a fire in December 1864 caused extensive damage to several downtown properties owned by the Trapnall brothers. In the first few years after the war, the house seemed to disappear from all records, neither being on a list of buildings used by Union troops, nor on any list of lands classified as abandoned by the Freedmen's Bureau. Various assumptions included that Benjamin either rented it for a time or left it vacant. It only reappeared in the real estate records of 1869.

After William Trapnall died in 1867, George and Benjamin were left as heirs, and they sold several parts of Trapnall Block over the next two years. None of these involved the residence. They sold the home in November 1871 to Aylett Taylor. Benjamin practiced law in Little Rock until 1872, when he returned to Harrodsburg, Kentucky, where he died two years later. William had died five years earlier. The home passed through several owners before becoming a rental property and falling into disrepair. It was purchased by Dr. C.R. Shinault in 1904 and he built an office on the east side of the house that became home to his medical practice. The home was severely damaged by a fire in 1916 and some changes were made in the home during the restoration. Most notable was the lowering of the ceilings by three feet, which necessitated the removal of the brass gas chandeliers ("Gasoliers") which were blackened by fire. They were stored in the attic, untouched, until 1963. They are the chandeliers that you find in the two front parlors today on the north side of the building. You will notice the tabs that were used to turn on the gas are still under each globe. These two parlors served as bedrooms when the Trapnalls lived here and the plainer, more simply designed fireplace mantles were part of the bedrooms at that time. The more ornate fireplace mantles are found in the present-day dining room which had been divided into two rooms in the Trapnall era.

The Taylor-Junior League Era, and Beyond

After Dr. Shinault's death, his widow sold the property in 1928 to a V.C. Johnson, who intended to demolish it. Julia Prewitt Taylor, the widow of Dr. Charles Minor Taylor, purchased the home in January 1929 in order to prevent its destruction. Dr. Taylor was a prominent Little Rock physician and planter who originally hailed from Clark County, Kentucky. Taylor was Surgeon General of the Trans-Mississippi Department in the Confederate States Army during the Civil War. Julia Taylor was his second wife, thirty-four years his junior. In addition to his medical practice, he owned a large plantation at South Bend in Lincoln County. Julia's portrait is at the west end of the dining room opposite her husband's, which hangs on the east end. After his death in 1905, Julia Taylor remained active in community welfare work through her active involvement with the Junior League of Little Rock. Julia Taylor specified in the agreement to purchase the home that it should always be used for community welfare work. Thus, Trapnall Hall was purchased by Julia Taylor for the Junior League as a memorial to her husband. In order to raise the initial funds for the Junior League's work through the house,

the organization sponsored the March 24, 1929 edition of the *Arkansas Gazette*. All profits from that special edition were to go to the Junior League to assist in “equipping its new home.” Junior League Members were featured in the edition’s ads, modeling under headlines reading, “The Junior Leaguer Comes to Cohn’s for her Clothes,” and “Junior League Members approve Frigidaire for Health, Convenience, Economy, Silent Operation.”

Elizabeth Taylor, the daughter of Charles and Julia Taylor, was chair of the Junior League’s committee on the Taylor Memorial. She later served as President of the National Junior League and lived in Scott. Elizabeth Taylor’s portrait may be found in the Bride’s Room adjacent to the current dining room. That room served as the dining room when the Trapnall family lived there. Next to Elizabeth Taylor’s portrait is a handmade table runner that was produced by the Needlepoint Guild and depicts nine Arkansas agricultural products: peaches, pine, apples, rice, cotton, tomatoes, soybeans, strawberries, lined on both sides by blackberries. The Thompson, Sanders, and Ginocchio architectural firm (founded by Charles L. Thompson now continued as Cromwell Architects Engineers, Inc.) donated its services on the restoration of the interior. The architects did not attempt any alterations to the exterior while seeking to “evolve plans which preserve the original colonial lines of the exterior while the inside is designed to meet modern welfare requirements.” The name the building was given for Junior League purposes was the Doctor Charles M. Taylor Memorial. The renovations were completed just before the Stock Market Crash of 1929 and the Great Depression consumed the Arkansas and national economy.

In 1963, the Junior League initiated a major restoration of Trapnall Hall, which was returned to its original splendor by Cromwell Architects Engineers. Among other improvements, the gasoliers that had been stored in the attic were retrieved and restored, being placed in the current parlor area. They were manufactured by Cornelius and Baker in Philadelphia about 1850. Little Rock did not have piped natural gas until the eve of the Civil War in 1860, but individual homes of wealthier citizens often had their own personal coal gas generators.

During the 1963 renovation, the goal was to return Trapnall Hall to its original condition. It was one of the first homes in the area to be restored. From the center are four main doorways, one into each of the four original rooms, two on either side of the center hall. These doorways are double and you will notice that they extend to the same height as the windows in the house which are exactly the same height as the transom over the front and rear center doors. All the post-Trapnall additions were removed, leaving again the basic symmetrical design of the home. The only non-original addition is the catering rooms and the kitchen across the rear of the house, which was once a sun porch. The sun porch was enclosed around the turn of the twentieth century. You will notice that the doors entering that area are surrounded by the same transoms that surround the front entrance.

When you exit the kitchen and catering room to the rear, you will enter the garden, which was given in memory of Charles Minor Taylor III, the grandson of Charles and Julia Taylor and a Marine private who was killed in action on November 21, 1967 in Quang Nam Province, Vietnam, and whose name is honored on Panel 30E, Row 60 of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. Upon entering the garden, you will notice in the center a symbol on the center of the walkway is a rock depiction of the shield from the Taylors' family coat of arms that are mounted at the top of both gates leading into the garden. The coat of arms on the rear wall is the Taylor family crest. The greenery along the walls does not resemble the original; in fact, it was originally adorned in cherry laurels which were lost in a 1912 winter storm and were not replanted.

The current assembly/dining room once served as two spaces separated by a pocket door: one half served as a law office for Frederic Trapnall, and the other half was a parlor and reception area. The portrait of the home that hangs at the rear of that room depicts the home with the aforementioned additions before they were removed. The two hall and assembly room chandeliers were moved out of the dining room during the 1963 renovation. They were purchased in New Orleans and were installed in the house by the Junior League sometime in the 1930s.

The exterior, which was red brick until after the 1963 renovation, was painted white sometime afterward, although it is not certain what year it was done. In succeeding years, after the property was deeded to the state, the exterior experienced one more change; it was painted in a buff color in 1983, which still exists today.

Thank you all for coming today! Please join us for our next Sandwiching in History tour of 2017 on Friday March 3 at the Old Central Fire Station at 506 Main Street in North Little Rock. We will begin at Noon. Also, the next Saturday, March 11, you're invited to our kickoff Walks Through History tour of 2017 in Historic Downtown Jonesboro starting at the Frierson House (once home to Governor Francis Cherry) at 1112 South Main Street at 11 AM. Hope to see you at both of these and our future tours this year!

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!