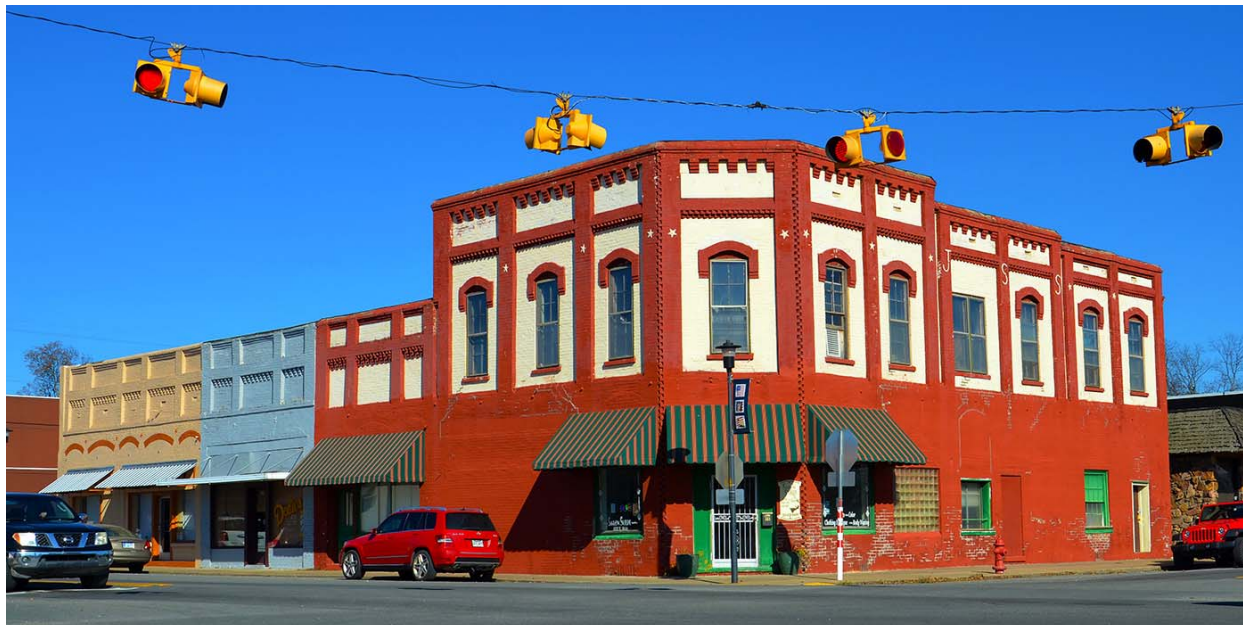


**Walks through History  
Downtown Beebe  
May 12, 2018  
By: Amy Milliken**



Hello, my name is Amy Milliken and I like to thank you for joining us on the Walks Through History Tour of Historic Downtown Beebe. A couple of things I need to tell you before we get started...

First, the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program is a Registered Provider with The American Institute of Architects Continuing Education Systems and this session is registered with the AIA for continuing education credit. Credit earned for completion of this program will be reported to AIA Records for AIA members. If you are here today and want your AIA credit, please see me after the tour.

*(constituents wanting AIA credit must send me an email with their name, contact information and AIA number included in the message)*

Second, I would like to acknowledge the contributions of Rachel Silva, Shelle Stormoe and countless others for the information I will be passing on to you today. I am AHPP's Education Outreach Coordinator and I usually work with 3<sup>rd</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade students in schools around the state. I was only able to pull this tour script together with the help of the many historians at AHPP ☺ With that being said, let's begin...

**The lot we are currently standing in was originally a wagon yard but we'll circle back around to that at the end of the tour. We're going to begin our tour with a...**

### **Brief History of Beebe**

Created by Arkansas's territorial legislature in 1835, White County was formed from parts of Independence, Jackson, and Pulaski Counties. White County might be named after the White River, which runs along the county's eastern boundary, or it could be named after Senator Hugh L. White of Tennessee, who was a Whig party candidate for president in 1836. Beebe grew up along the intersection of the St. Louis, Iron Mountain & Southern Railroad and the Des Arc Road, which is now Hwy. 31 (Main St.). The first train stopped at the Des Arc Road in 1872 to acquire wood and water to power its steam engine, and—as was typical during the heyday of the railroad—a settlement grew around the train stop. Prior to the arrival of the railroad, the most substantial settlement nearby was Stoney Point, and many of those people moved closer to the railroad crossing, which was named Beebe Station in honor of Roswell Beebe.

**Roswell Beebe** was the President of the Cairo and Fulton Railroad Company, which sought to establish a railroad line from St. Louis to Little Rock and then south into Texas. The State of Arkansas did charter the Cairo and Fulton RR to build the line in 1853, but the Civil War would interrupt the construction plans. After the Civil War, construction slowly resumed, but by this time the Cairo and Fulton RR was absorbed into the St. Louis, Iron Mountain & Southern Railroad Company (so it was actually the first RR to come through Beebe). Sadly, Roswell Beebe died in 1856, only three years after becoming President of the RR company, so he never saw his dream come to fruition.

The town of Beebe dropped the “Station” part and was formally incorporated on May 4, 1875. By 1890, the town had several businesses that included various stores, hotels & boarding houses, meat markets, a blacksmith & wagon shop, a gristmill, cotton gin, livery stables and even a photo gallery. The White County Bank was also located in Beebe, along with two churches (white & black segregated churches), a public school for whites, five physicians, one dentist, and two weekly newspapers as well.

By 1897, Beebe had five churches total...a Baptist, Christian & Presbyterian, a Methodist Episcopal Church and a Methodist Episcopal Church South. The town also had two separate sawmills and at least two cotton gins.

Beebe got electricity around 1904, provided by a gasoline-powered generator. At night, the chugging of the gasoline engine was heard throughout the town. However, the electricity was not on all the time ~ different areas of town received electricity only on specific days, and always shut off at 9:00 pm or 10:00 pm.

The farms around Beebe produced a staggering amount of strawberries in the early twentieth century. Beebe had a Strawberry Festival that lasted for a whole week, and everyone who came through town got a free half pint of strawberry ice cream. Unfortunately, downtown Beebe is no longer the thriving commercial center that it once was, this is due to the Hwy. 367 and Hwy. 67/167 bypasses. However, with its good stock of historic buildings, Beebe has the potential to become a unique attraction for residents. The distinctive character of historic districts sets this town apart from the monotony found in countless towns across the country and the “Everywhere, U.S.A.” feeling you get from driving past endless rows of chain restaurants and strip malls.

### **We’re now going to make our way to Main Street where I’m going to tell you about Sanborn Maps...**

I wanted to take a minute to briefly explain how historical information is acquired. **Sanborn maps** are a tool used by many historians to figure out the history of a building. Originally, Sanborn maps were created to assess fire insurance liability in urbanized areas of the United States. The maps include detailed information about buildings in approximately 12,000 US towns and cities, including Beebe, AR. The maps are invaluable since they documented changes in the built environment of American cities over a great many decades. So, you can see how they are highly useful for historical research, planning, preservation, sociological studies and researching genealogy and urban geography. Much of the information used in this tour was collected over the years by those updating Sanborn Maps and keeping them current. So that is how we knew the vacant lot we just left was once a wagon yard and how I am able to share with you the history of this building...

**Powell Building:** The Powell Building was constructed circa 1885 and is named after one of its later occupants, Mr. R.V. Powell. It was built by J.W. Mason. The building has housed a grocery, a drug store, a general store, farm implement store, poultry and produce shop, and a fraternal lodge met on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor (1924). The upstairs was often rented out to doctors, dentists, and lawyers during these years. For many years, there was wagon storage available directly behind the building as well. R.V. Powell moved into this building in 1918-19 and remodeled the store by moving the external stairway to the inside the building. He wanted people to be forced to walk through his store on their way upstairs. He operated a general

mercantile out of the building, catering to the farmers' every need. He showed his shrewd business skills once again when he held a contest to see who could bring in the heaviest weight of catalogs (Sears & Roebuck or Montgomery Ward) for a prize. He wanted people to purchase items from his store rather than ordering them from a catalog.

This building is a good example of late nineteenth century standard commercial architecture with its high-style elaborations on a vernacular structure. The recessed brick panels and window surrounds, decorative vents and brick corbelling, hood molding over the 2<sup>nd</sup> story windows, and transom windows give this building an Italianate influence. At one time, this building had a two-story front porch; the bricked-in opening on the second floor was a door to the second level at one time. Listed on the NR in 1991 as part of the "Historic and Architectural Resources of White County, Arkansas" Multiple Property Listing.

**Now we're going to make our way down Main Street, towards the Methodist church, and talk a little bit about these buildings...**

**Buildings to west of the Powell Building:** The buildings to the west of the Powell Building (demolished 10 or so years back) were constructed between 1924 and 1933. However, there were various other buildings occupying this site prior to the 1933 constructions. The building closest to the Powell Building (which is now an empty lot) housed the Beebe News, the next building housed Fisher Barber Shop (you can still see the mosaic tile floor that was inside the barber shop), and there was a building on the site of Don's Auto Parts that housed W.L. Westbrook's Beebe Hardware Store (he had an undertaking parlor in the rear of the building & displayed caskets in the front window). There's a story about Mr. Westbrook's daughter, Margaret, and her best friend, Mildred Jarvis, lying in the caskets by the front display windows when Mr. Westbrook was out of town. Apparently, both the girls and passersby would get a good laugh out of this! Westbrook's building burned around 1969.

Barber Shop tile—barber shop had 3 barber chairs and 2 pool tables in the back.

**Main St. where Beebe Cleaners is now:** The building on the left side was built circa 1929 and housed an auto repair shop. By 1931, Johnson's Garage had taken over the auto repair shop and even added a filling station to the premises. The building on the right is located where the garage had their car jack.

**Let's stop here to discuss the next couple building...**

### **Corner of Main & College:**

**Point out area where Beebe First United Methodist Church is now.** The current building constructed in 2001 was to replace a building that dated back to 1949. However, there has been a Methodist church continuously located on this corner since the first Sanborn map in 1897.

You can also see the Laws-Jarvis House from this corner. White County Judge J.P. Laws built the house in 1880. Mrs. Callie Johnson purchased the home in 1902 and lived there until her death in 1945. Mrs. Johnson's daughter, Nell, and her husband Ben Jarvis then moved into the house. Ben Jarvis was the mayor of Beebe for 29 years. Tracy Lightfoot renovated the home in recent years. The Laws-Jarvis House is a good example of the Greek Revival style with its symmetrical façade, pediment portico and entryway surrounded by transom and sidelights. The house was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1992.

### **We're now going to cross over to the Starnes Building across the street ...**

FYI, many of the original street names in Beebe changed over the years. The original street names were in honor of prominent early residents and railroad officials when the town was platted. For instance, we are currently at the corner of Main & College but, originally, College was named Essex Street, after the Secretary of the St. Louis, Iron Mountain & Southern Railroad.

**Laws Building (later called Starnes Building):** Frank Laws built The Laws Building on the eastern corner of Main and College (Essex) circa 1878. It was a large two-story, L-shaped building with a wrap around porch. Beebe's first public school was located inside this building from 1882-1898. From at least 1904-1909, there was a harness and machinery shop inside the building, it was a feed and grain store by 1911, in 1918 there were tenements on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, it housed an auto repair and cleaning and pressing shop by 1924, and the building burned circa 1928. At some point, there was a silent movie theater in the building, and W.L. Westbrook had an undertaking parlor on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor. The current red brick Craftsman style building was constructed in 1938 as the Westbrook Funeral Home.

**The small bricked portion was an open alley until the Mills Coop (which now occupies the red brick building next door) created a passage to connect them to the other building for extra office space.**

**Red brick building by parking lot:** This building did house a blacksmith shop in 1909. It was thought that this building was once a carriage shop, but I found no

evidence to support that fact. It was used for cotton seed storage in 1918 before becoming Bob Olmstead's Racket Store in 1923. Mr. Olmstead actually started the Racket Store in the Staggs-Huffaker Building (Main & Illinois) in the 1910s. When the store moved, Bob tried changing the name to Olmstead & Sons but the people never made the change. The Racket Store sold dry goods, but no produce.

**Small building with wood shingles on upper façade:** This was Williams Funeral Home, the Kent Westbrook beer joint, and several different cafes.

**Red Brick Building with 3 storefronts:** There was a fire in the middle section circa 1932 that destroyed the far right portion, so that part has been rebuilt. You can see a slight difference in the brick on the right hand storefront. The far right portion housed a feed store circa 1927 and a Kroger store in the early 1950s (it closed in 1954-55). There was a restaurant in the middle portion in the 1930s and later Giles 5 and Dime.

### **Cross Illinois St. (used to be called Cleveland)...**

**Staggs-Huffaker Building:** The Staggs-Huffaker Building was constructed circa 1880 and is another good example of the late nineteenth century standard commercial style with high-style details like a recessed corner, elevated central parapet, decorative vents and brick corbelling, and slightly arched window openings on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor. It has housed a variety of businesses over the years, including a restaurant and furniture store (1897); a stationary shop (1904); a millinery, theatre, and racket store (1909); and a hardware and dry goods store (1918). The building is named after Ray Huffaker and his cousin, Paul Staggs, who operated a hardware store out of the building. Listed on the NR in 1991 as part of the "Historic and Architectural Resources of White County, Arkansas" Multiple Property Listing.

**Beebe Pawn Shop:** The Beebe Pawn Shop used to have an upper portion that made it the same height as the two-story building on the corner, but when it was the Firestone Store in the 1950s, a fire destroyed a portion of the building, and they were only able to salvage what is left today. It probably had Italianate detailing like the building on the corner with hood molding over the windows—the brickwork looks like it's a match. Some of the businesses that occupied these building locations after 1918 include a grocery, clothing store, furniture and undertaking, and a feed store.

**New Building:** The Wilbur D. Mills Educational Coop was built about 15 years ago. The remainder of the block from the alley to Illinois St. was occupied by the Bank Building and a row of two-story brick commercial buildings by the 1930s.

**Beebe Jail:** Jail is located behind Beebe Pawn Shop—turn on Illinois and go behind row of buildings to find it. The two-room jail was built in 1934. It was listed on the NR in 1991.

Rock building by Beebe Jail was a grocery.

Two-story white house that you can see from rock building was a boarding house called the Rice House. Now called the Forte House?

**Citizen's Bank:** A one-story bank building with a recessed corner entrance was under construction in 1909. It housed an unknown bank in 1915 before becoming the Citizen's Bank in 1917. The old bank building was demolished in 1962 and a new bank building was built. [Before the Educational Coop occupied this building, it was home to the Citizen's Bank in 2001.] Tom Abington owned the bank, and he didn't mind the old men who sat outside his bank and whittled on the benches because he thought they provided security. The two Italianate-inspired buildings to the left of the bank building (where two-story portion of coop is now) housed the Rucker & Price Bargain Store (grocery) and L.V. Hanna Dry Goods & Clothing.

**Classic Creations Outlet (light colored brick) and Coast to Coast:** A row of four commercial buildings shows up on the Sanborn maps in the same configuration at this location from 1897 to 1933. The Coast to Coast building is obviously a newer construction (1960s-70s), but Classic Creations may date to the late nineteenth century. There was another building to the left of Coast to Coast (it was demolished sometime after 2001) and it appeared to be quite old as well. It housed the Fair Store. Historically, there were many types of businesses in these four buildings, including a feed store, dry goods store, drug store, general store, grocery store, and hardware store.

**Direct Computer Services:** The alley has always been there. The Direct Computer Services building was probably constructed around 1909. The same building appears on that site from 1909-1933 on the Sanborn map. The original building is still there, but the façade has been partially refaced with new brick. The storefronts on this building have been home to a millinery and furniture store, a pool hall, and various stores. In recent memory, the right side housed Arkansas

Power & Light and the left side had a diner. Shorty Small got his start cooking here at Bill's Café in the 1940s. Shorty then opened a café around the corner. Bruce Anderson built Cajun's Wharf in Little Rock and started the restaurant chain Shorty Small's after dining at Shorty's restaurant in Beebe.

**Brick building with 3 storefronts (has Dodie's Beauty Shop in it):** The row of buildings from Dodie's to the alley had a dry goods store, grocery, drug store, barber, millinery, and a jeweler in the early 1900s. You can still see the arched window detailing below the recessed brick panels on this building, but the window and storefront configuration has been altered. There was a two-story building to the left of this one, but it was demolished in the last 10-12 years. It had a metal façade on its upper floors that was ordered from Sears and Roebuck. The Busy Store, a chain out of Little Rock, occupied this building, followed by Powell & Co. (operated by R.V. Powell of Powell Building; was this his first store location?). It was also a pool hall.

### **Cross Center (used to be Front St.) and look back at J.S. Smith Building...**

**J.S. Smith Building:** Jim Smith constructed this building in 1891, and it still bears his initials "J. S. S." on the side elevation. Smith was one of the early settlers who relocated from Stoney Point to Beebe Station in the early 1870s. He was a civil engineer, so he surveyed Beebe's first streets. He made himself one of the richest men in Beebe through real estate, farming, and banking. This building has housed numerous doctors' and dentists' offices, the Beebe Library, and the White County Bank, which went under in 1931 at the onset of the Great Depression. The building features high-style elements like brick corbelling at the cornice, recessed brick panels, hood molding over the 2<sup>nd</sup> story windows, and a recessed corner entrance.

### **Northeast on Center Street...**

**Beebe News:** The rock building that houses the Beebe News was constructed to replace an earlier building that burned. Beginning in the late 1890s, there was a grocery on this site, followed by a printing shop for many years. This appears to be at least the third building on this site.

**White building with three storefronts:** This standard commercial style building is on the former site of the Gibson Hotel (1897, 1904) and the Bass Boarding House (1909). The current building does not show up on the maps until 1933. It features decorative vents and brickwork. Point out soldier courses and stretchers.



**Beebe Theater:** The Beebe Theater was constructed circa 1930 as a movie theater. It was the Radio Theater for many years. In the 1950s, you could go to the movie and buy a coke and a popcorn for 20 cents. The door to the left on the first floor was the colored entrance. African Americans sat in the theater balcony. The theater is designed in a restrained version of the Art Deco style. The Beebe Theater was listed on the NR in 1991 as part of the multiple property nomination as well.

**Box Car Grill:** The Box Car Grill building appears on the 1933 map next to the Beebe Theater. It has served as a café for most of its existence.

**Auto Dealership:** The building on the corner was constructed circa 1929 as an auto sales and service company. It was a Ford Dealership before serving as a Laundromat in later years.

### **Cross back over Main Street & notice the ghost sign for W.L. Westbrook Furniture Store...**

**Missouri-Pacific Railroad Depot:** The first railroad depots in Beebe were constructed circa 1872 in the middle of Main Street and blocked through-traffic across the railroad tracks. A passenger depot was on this side of the tracks, and a freight depot was on the opposite side of the tracks. Two large platforms separated the depots. These two depots appear for the last time on the 1909 Sanborn map because the current brick depot building was constructed in 1910 to replace the wood-frame depots. The new depot had a room for baggage, offices, and two waiting rooms. It is an excellent example of the Mediterranean style of architecture that was typically used on early twentieth century railroad depots. The Beebe train depot features widely overhanging eaves with massive L-brackets and a Mission-style parapet on its southeastern elevation (track side). The building's exposed rafter tails are indicative of the Craftsman style as well. The last passenger train ran through Beebe in the early 1950s, but it still picked up the mail at the depot with a mail hook. The depot was listed on the NR in 1979.

### **Buildings opposite of Depot along Center Street...**

In the early 1900s, there were sporadic restaurants and boarding houses along this block and a livery stable was located about two-thirds of the way down the block in 1909. The small light colored brick building at the end of the row was built about 1942. There was a railroad dining car at this location before the building was constructed. This was the location of Shorty Small's Coffee Shop Café. The

old service station on the corner was the Magnolia Service Station (Mobil station). The building was on this corner by at least 1933. The Fina Station is on the site of the Commercial Hotel (1897); the Doss Hotel (1904), which was torn down in 1973. The hotels in Beebe competed for customers, so proximity to the railroad depot was key to good business. The Doss Hotel had a wagon that would wait for salesmen to get off the train and give them a ride to their hotel.

### **Cross Center and turn right down Cypress (used to be Cumberland)...**

The empty lot behind the Beebe Library (old Legion Hut) is the site of the town calaboose (1897, 1904); calaboose still there in 1909, but the majority of that block (including the current library building) was the Frankfort Handle Company. They had two machinery warehouses, several log piles, and a scrap wood pile. The calaboose and handle company were gone by 1918, but there was a small hay and feed warehouse. A wagon yard and blacksmith shop occupied the lot by 1924. The wagon yard still remained in 1933.

### **Go back to Main Street via alley and double back toward RR tracks...**

**Small 1-story concrete block building:** This was a café and then a beauty shop for many years.

**Mini-storage units:** There were restaurants on this corner in the early 1900s and, by 1918, this was the location of an open air movie theater that showed silent films called The Air Dome Theater. You paid your money to get inside the gates and then sat outside to watch the movie. Like a “drive-in,” but you walked in. A dining car was here in the 1920s. There was a filling station located on this corner facing the intersection by 1933.

**Point out sheet metal and wood buildings down Illinois—they were a shoe repair shop and the office of a 1920s newspaper called *The Sentinel*.**

### **Cross over Illinois Street and return to starting point...**

**Empty lot where we started tour:** There was a small printing shop on this lot in 1897; then a different building appears on the site in 1909 housing a barber, restaurant, and meat market; a paint shop, boarding rooms, and a restaurant occupied that building in 1918; and the building are gone by 1924. Before these building were constructed, the large vacant lot was called the “wagon yard” and

farmers would park their team and wagon here while they did their business downtown.