

Walks through History
Fishback Neighborhood Historic District, Fort Smith
Begin at the corner of S. Greenwood Ave. & Reeder St.
June 15, 2013
By: Rachel Silva



1121 Adelaide



1112 Adelaide



2700 Block of Reeder St.

Intro

Hi, my name is Rachel Silva, and I work for the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, which is one of 7 agencies in the Department of Arkansas Heritage. Thank you for coming, and welcome to the “Walks through History” tour of the Fishback Neighborhood Historic District! I’d like to thank a few folks for helping me with the tour—

First of all, many thanks go to our tour co-sponsors, the Fort Smith Museum of History and the Fort Smith Historical Society.

The Fishback Neighborhood for hosting us;

Gary & Jo Ann Campbell, Dale & Vicki Newton, David & Caron Roberts, and Tonya & Bob Bateman for allowing us to tour their homes and providing bottled water;

And Jo Ann Campbell, David Roberts, Leisa Gramlich, and Joe Wasson for their help with the history of the neighborhood.

The Fishback Neighborhood Historic District was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2010 for its wonderful collection of early-to-mid-20th century architectural styles, ranging from Period Revivals to Craftsman to Ranch. The district is roughly bounded by Rogers, Greenwood, Dodson, and 31st Street and

contains a total of 93 buildings, of which 68 (or 73%) contribute to the historic significance of the district.

Brief History of Fort Smith

The United States government established a military fort in 1817 at the convergence of the Arkansas and Poteau Rivers on a bluff called Belle Point. The fort was constructed to protect the western border of the U.S. from potential Native American attacks, and it was named after General Thomas A. Smith, the departmental commander who ordered the fort's construction. When Indian tribes were forced to leave their ancestral homelands east of the Mississippi River and move to Indian Territory, Fort Smith's primary mission was to keep the peace between newly arriving tribes and the area's older tribes.

Captain John Rogers arrived at Fort Smith in 1822 to trade with the garrison, trappers, and Native Americans. Rogers was instrumental in the development of Fort Smith. He worked to get the military post relocated to Fort Smith after it had moved to Fort Gibson in Indian Territory (moved in 1824 to I.T. & back to Ft. Smith in 1836). Rogers worked to promote Fort Smith as a jumping off point for forty-niners during the California Gold Rush. Because John Rogers is generally considered the founding father of Fort Smith, one of the main thoroughfares in town is named Rogers Ave. in his honor (this was previously known as the Little Rock Rd. because it follows the path of the old military road from Memphis to Little Rock to Fort Smith & Fort Gibson; created in the 1820s to expedite Indian removal).

After the Civil War, Sebastian County was divided into 2 judicial districts so that it had two county seats—one in Ft. Smith and one in Greenwood. In 1871 the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Arkansas moved from Van Buren to Ft. Smith and at that time had jurisdiction over western Arkansas and Indian Territory, encompassing more than 74,000 square miles. Infamous "Hanging Judge" Isaac C. Parker (served as judge from 1875-1896) sentenced 160 offenders

to death during his tenure. Interestingly, Judge Parker was opposed to capital punishment.

From 1880 to 1910, Fort Smith experienced significant commercial and industrial growth as a result of the railroad (LR & Ft. Smith RR arrived in VB in 1879?), the discovery of natural gas in the region (1887), and the first electric streetcar (1893). From 1880 to 1910, Ft. Smith experienced a huge increase in population, going from a city of about 3,000 in 1880 to a city of almost 24,000 in 1910. With this growth came suburban development to the south and east of the downtown area.

Fishback Neighborhood Historic District

The district's northern boundary, Rogers Avenue, formerly the Little Rock Road, has been an important transportation artery since it was laid out as a military road in the 1820s. Much of this area was open farmland in the 19th and early 20th centuries, and this particular neighborhood takes its name from early landowner William Meade Fishback. A native Virginian, Fishback taught school and studied law in his home state before moving to Springfield, Illinois, in 1857, where he was admitted to the bar. While practicing law in Illinois, Fishback had limited dealings with Abraham Lincoln. In 1858 the young lawyer moved to Sebastian County and settled in Greenwood, where he partnered with Judge Solomon F. Clark. Fishback was a unionist during the Civil War and served as a delegate to Arkansas's first and second secession conventions (where he voted against, and later for, secession—after Fort Sumter). Still a unionist at heart, Fishback moved to Missouri during the Civil War and took an oath of allegiance to the Union. During those years, he worked as editor of the *St. Louis Democrat*.

When Little Rock fell to Federal forces in September 1863, Union General J. M. Schofield ordered Fishback to form the Third Infantry Regiment there, but he instead founded a unionist newspaper called *The Unconditional Union*. As an advisor to Arkansas's loyalist state government, Fishback was instrumental to the writing of the state constitution of 1864, sometimes called the "Fishback

constitution.” After the war, he returned to Fort Smith and enjoyed a successful law practice. On April 4, 1867, he married Mary Adelaide Miller of Fort Smith, the orphaned daughter of Joseph Miller, a local merchant who had been robbed and murdered on a Mississippi River steamboat in 1850. About 1868, William and Adelaide Fishback built a Greek Revival-style house on top of a hill southeast of the intersection of the Little Rock and Greenwood roads. The couple had 6 children, 5 of whom reached adulthood: Louis, Bertha, William, Herbert, and Mary.

Fishback represented Sebastian County in the constitutional convention of 1874 and was elected to the state legislature in 1876 and 1878. During this time period, he advocated for the repudiation of “unjust” state debt, namely debt incurred from pre-Civil War credit problems and railroad and levee bonds (which he believed did not produce tangible benefits for the people of Arkansas). Fishback soon embraced the nickname “The Great Repudiator,” and finally got validation in 1879 when the legislature approved the Fishback Amendment, which prohibited the legislature from paying on those three types of state debt. Adelaide Fishback died on December 6, 1882, and Fishback never remarried.

In 1892 Fishback was elected to serve one term as Governor of Arkansas (1893-1895). Strangely, Fishback was fairly ineffective as governor because of his adherence to the idea of limited government. Instead of interacting with the legislature, Fishback focused his energy on the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair and the creation of an exhibition that would dispel notions of Arkansas as a backward, hillbilly wilderness. After his term as governor, Fishback returned to Fort Smith and resumed his law practice. He suffered a stroke in early February 1903 and died in his sleep on February 9, 1903. After his death, Fishback’s heirs subdivided his property for residential development as the city expanded to the southeast at the turn of the 20th century.

The hill on which the Fishback home was located was subdivided in 1910 as the Meade Addition, and Adelaide Avenue, named after Fishback’s wife, was the main street with large, 50-foot wide lots on either side. The addition originally included

the Fishback House, which stood at 1120 Adelaide until the mid-20th century (not sure about the date or what happened, but gone by 1972 for sure, and according to Sanborn maps, it's gone by 1950). A portion of the house at 2801 Reeder Street may have been built in the early 1950s on the back portion of the old Fishback House lot. Later additions were built on the house about 1979.

George C. Reeder's home was south of the Fishback property. In 1911 Reeder subdivided his land. The Reeder Place Addition included 26 lots along Reeder St. and Dodson Ave. (one block to the south). Over the next decade, the entire neighborhood was platted into residential lots. By the late 1920s, almost all of the lots west of 30th Street were developed, but the lots down the hill east of 30th were not developed until after World War II and contain Ranch-style houses (they are also included in the district boundary).

Most of the houses in the Fishback Neighborhood were built between 1904 and 1930. The Horace Franklin Rogers House at 2900 Rogers Ave. was built in 1904 and is the oldest house in the district. It was individually listed on the NR in 1979. Historically, the Fishback neighborhood appealed to the city's middle and upper-class residents.

Reeder Street, going east

Reeder Street developed in the 1920s, and most of the houses on the west end of Reeder are designed in the Craftsman style. But there are a few exceptions to the Craftsman style on this part of the street, including the house at 2711 Reeder. The block bounded by Reeder, Greenwood, Herbert, and May was platted in 1922 as the Eloise Addition.

2711 Reeder—Home of Gary & Jo Ann Campbell. May see the first floor interior. House built in 1923 by lumberman Arthur H. Scoggin. Before he built this house, Mr. Scoggin lived at 1108 Adelaide. Scoggin built other spec houses in Mena and Nashville, Arkansas, and probably other towns in the western part of the state. He remained here for a short time, and then the house was purchased by the

Williams family. Marshall and Eva Yantis were the third owners. Marshall Yantis was the co-founder of a Fort Smith auto part supply company called The Automotive, Inc., as well as director of Merchants National Bank. He helped organize the Community Chest (forerunner to the Chamber of Commerce) and the Fort Smith Boys Club. Gary and Jo Ann Campbell bought the house in 1972. It is designed in the Colonial Revival style with some Spanish Revival-style details, featuring a symmetrical façade with multi-pane windows (some set into recessed arches), a front portico topped by a wrought-iron balustrade, a smooth stucco façade, and paired brackets under the eaves.

The **Craftsman** style of architecture was inspired by the 19th century English Arts & Crafts movement and our nation's desire to create a uniquely American art form. The style is a celebration of human craftsmanship and planning. In the early 20th century, the Craftsman style was popularized in several magazines, including *House Beautiful*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Architectural Record*, and of course, Gustav Stickley's publication, *Craftsman Magazine*. Characteristics of the style include widely overhanging eaves, exposed rafter tails, triangular knee braces (or brackets), outdoor living areas (porches), and ribbons of windows to provide as much natural light as possible. The exterior of a Craftsman house often features a mixture of materials (wood, stucco, and stone), and earth tones are used to further integrate the house with its environment.

2704 Reeder (south side of street)—built about 1922. Great example of the Craftsman style with a porch supported by tapered columns on massive, square porch supports, exposed rafter tails, false half-timbering in the gable ends, mixture of materials, and windows with Craftsman-style pane arrangement.

2710 Reeder (Craftsman; wood shingle & rock)—built about 1923. Interesting Craftsman-style house with original wood shingle and rock veneer.

2714 Reeder (white brick)—built ca. 1923. Craftsman style with two front-facing gable projections and exposed rafter tails. Early occupants were Rev. Samuel and Mary Buckner. He was the pastor at First Christian Church.

2716 Reeder (red brick Craftsman)—built ca. 1923. Nice Craftsman with tapered columns on square bases, exposed rafter tails, and stucco in gable ends.

North side of Reeder—2719 Reeder (yellow brick Craftsman)—built ca. 1926. Craftsman style home with some Tudor Revival-style details (rounded arch door and window openings).

2725 Reeder—Dale & Vicki Newton. We may see first floor interior. Built in 1926. Craftsman-style house with widely overhanging eaves, triangular knee braces and false half-timbering in the gable ends, and a full front porch supported by massive brick columns and tapered wood columns on heavy brick piers.

2718 Reeder—south side of street—ca. 1970 mansard roof apartment building. Non-contributing.

2726 Reeder—yellow stucco Tudor Revival—built about 1926 in the Tudor Revival style of architecture with a side-gabled roof with two front-facing cross gables, a stucco façade with false half-timbering, and a front door set in a rounded arch opening.

2801 Reeder—north side of street—may be near site of old Fishback House. The 1950 Sanborn map shows an empty lot on this corner with a 2-story ancillary structure at the back of the lot near May Avenue. I believe that the Fishback House was gone much earlier than originally thought, and that the western portion of 2801 Reeder was built ca. 1950. It has a large, multi-pane picture window that looks like it was made in the late 1940s or early 50s. The eastern side of the house is newer, though. The old Fishback House would have faced east on Adelaide.

2804 Reeder—south side of street—ca. 1955 infill construction on a previously undeveloped lot. Ranch style with central bay window.

2810 Reeder—built ca. 1924. Craftsman style with triangular knee braces in the east and west gable ends, and the northeastern corner of the house was originally an open porch with a square, brick support at the corner (it has been enclosed).

2814 Reeder—built ca. 1926. Good example of the Colonial Revival style with a symmetrical façade (with exception of sleeping porch on east side), an accentuated front entrance with pilasters, sidelights, and an arched fanlight transom window. The house also has multi-pane windows with shutters. The eastern porch was originally an open-air sleeping porch.

Adelaide, going north

Adelaide Avenue was the main street through Meade's Addition, which was platted in 1910 and had larger lots. Homes on Adelaide first appeared in the 1912-1913 Fort Smith City Directory. But even by 1950, the Sanborn maps didn't include any houses on the east side of Adelaide or going down the hill toward 31st. Houses were here by then, but they didn't expand the map coverage.

1121 Adelaide—Built ca. 1927. Designed in the Tudor Revival style with distinctive skintled brick exterior and original wood door set inside a Tudor-style arch. In the 1940 Census, the house was occupied by Gordon L. Richardson, his wife, Edith, and their two children. Richardson was the proprietor of a furniture factory. House also served as an Episcopal parsonage. Father Kutait (Ku—tae) lived here and later bought it from the church.

1112 Adelaide (west side of street)—built about 1927. Colonial Revival-style house with multi-pane windows with shutters and paneled door set in a segmental arch opening.

This was the Methodist parsonage for many years. One of the home's notable occupants was Dr. Fred Roebuck, who served as pastor at First Methodist Church in Ft. Smith for at least 20 years. It was owned by the Methodist Church until 1970, when it was purchased by the Inman family.

1108 Adelaide—built ca. 1940. Craftsman-style house with 5-over-1 windows, multi-pane picture window, and triangular knee braces in the gable ends. House built by Sam & Virginia Baker. They planted the pine trees. Sam Baker saved “Ward’s field,” the de facto neighborhood park at the northwest corner of Adelaide and Herbert, from commercial development (the lot now has a house on it). Asa Hutchinson later lived here. [A. H. Scoggin is listed at 1108 Adelaide in 1921-22, but I think this may have been an earlier structure on this site. 1108 Adelaide is not listed at all in the 1940 Census.]

1109 Adelaide (east side of street)—built about 1927 in the Tudor Revival style with an asymmetrical façade, multiple front-facing cross gables, a stucco veneer, and ribbons of casement windows.

The 1940 Census showed Dr. Sidney J. Wolfermann living here with his wife, Elizabeth, and two daughters. Dr. Wolfermann was a prominent physician and surgeon in Fort Smith with offices in the First National Bank building.

[Wolfermann’s daughter, Elizabeth Wolfermann Hauptert, taught math at Northside High School.]

1105 Adelaide—white Colonial Revival; east side of street—built ca. 1927.

Colonial Revival—main bay is set forward and is symmetrical with an accentuated front entrance and multi-pane windows with shutters. The former sleeping porch is slightly set back on the north side of the house.

The 1940 Census lists the occupant as James A. Ward, Jr. No occupation listed.

From the 1940s until about 1960, Ken Booth and his wife, who was a Ward, lived here.

Since before 1972, Paul and Kay Gean have lived here. He is an attorney.

1100 Adelaide—yellow and brown Tudor—built in 1921 for Buck Williams, the owner of Fort Smith Wagon Company (which later sold to the John Deere Plow Company) and Williams Hardware. The house was later occupied by the Meeks family who owned the Coca-Cola Bottling Company in Fort Smith. The house is an excellent example of the Tudor Revival style with front-facing cross gables, false

half-timbering, and a steeply pitched roof. Recently expanded south sleeping porch.

1007 Adelaide—green Craftsman cottage—David & Caron Roberts—we may see interior.

1005 Adelaide—2-story white Colonial Revival—Tonya & Bob Bateman—we may see first floor interior.

The houses at 1007 and 1005 Adelaide go together—the house at 1005 was built in 1905 by Wilbur T. Cate, a dentist with his office in the Merchants National Bank Building. It is a Colonial Revival-style house with a brick first floor and frame second floor. Notice that the frame upper floor is slightly flared out as it meets the first floor brick—decorative detail. The front portico is crowned by a triangular pediment, and decorative brackets are placed under the eaves.

The house at 1007 Adelaide was built in 1911-1912 to serve as a guest cottage for the house at 1005. It was originally much smaller—just one bedroom, one bath, living room, and kitchen. Additions were built onto the cottage on the south and east sides about 1929.

Dr. Cate was the foster-father of local attorney Harry P. Dailey, who lived at 1007 Adelaide. Dr. Cate and Mr. Dailey switched houses in the early 1920s (they have already switched in the 1921-22 city directory). Dr. Cate and his wife were probably downsizing, while Dailey had a wife and daughter (she would have been a small infant or about to be born when they switched, based on her age in the 1940 census).

By 1940, Judge Heartsell Ragan and his wife and son lived at 1007 Adelaide.

The Cates-Dailey House at 1005 Adelaide has a working elevator inside. Also note the old carriage house behind 1005—has the old hay loft doors upstairs.

1004 Adelaide—brown stucco—built ca. 1915. Craftsman/Tudor Revival mix. In 1921-22, the house belonged to Roy M. Johnston and his wife, Bessie. Mr. Johnston worked for the Morris-Morton Drug Company.

1000 Adelaide—red brick 4-square—built ca. 1912. American Foursquare with brick quoins, a hipped roof dormer, and an oval window with keystones. This house first shows up in the city directory in 1912-13. It was the home of Ivor D. Thomas, banker, broker, and real estate agent with offices in the American National Bank Building. By 1921-22, the house was occupied by H. Temple Tucker and his wife, May. Mr. Tucker was the president-treasurer of Tucker Duck & Rubber Company.

928 Adelaide—new house on site of Ward's field—built 2003.

935 Adelaide—Tudor Revival—built in 1924. Was the home of Dr. Everett Moulton and his wife, Juliette. Dr. Moulton was an optometrist (and future generations have carried on that tradition).

927 Adelaide—yellow brick Colonial Revival—built ca. 1930.

924 Adelaide—red brick commercial property—built to serve as a single-family dwelling. It could have been built as early as 1921—the 1921-22 directory has a listing just to the south of the Ward House for H. F. and Miriam Goodnow. Goodnow was president of the Garrison Furniture Company and secretary of the Ward Furniture Company. Has some Colonial Revival-style characteristics. Since at least the early 1970s, this building has been commercial property. This is what prompted neighborhood folks to purchase the empty lot (Ward's field) to protect it from commercial development.

904 Adelaide—Joseph Ward House (Home of Thorsen & Sheila Deal)
Built about 1912 by Joseph Ward. The Neoclassical-style house features a tile roof, a one-story wrap-around porch, and a monumental 2-story portico supported by fluted, Corinthian columns. Joe Ward got his start in the cattle business, but he and his brother, Frank, later bought the Border City Coal Company and changed the name to Border City Ice & Cold Storage Company. They delivered ice to residents of Ft. Smith and surrounding communities. Their company later became Ward Ice Industries and Ward Ice Cream Company. By the

early 1920s, this was the home of James A. Ward, Jr., and his wife, Carmelia. He was the VP and treasurer of Ward Furniture Manufacturing Company. In 1940, it was Harry J. Ward, proprietor of Ward's wholesale and retail ice company.

2900 Rogers—IL (Horace Franklin Rogers House; currently leased by Mike & Becky Leach and used as an event venue & bed & breakfast)

The Horace Franklin Rogers House was built in 1904 and is the oldest home in the Fishback Neighborhood Historic District. The Neoclassical-style house was constructed by prominent Ft. Smith businessman Horace Franklin Rogers, who started out as a surveyor for the St. Louis & San Francisco Railroad. He later owned two coal mines, and in 1892, he married Stella Williams and operated a real estate business and a rock crushing plant in Ft. Smith. Horace and Stella Rogers and their 3 children occupied the house for about 25 years, and then it was purchased by the Krone family. Dr. Ben Cabel later bought the house and had it until the 1980s. The house was listed on the NR in 1979.

Walk back to Herbert and go east to look at the Beverly Place Addition

By 1930, most of the lots on the high ground were developed, but the lots on the slope of the hill going east from Adelaide were wooded and vacant. Construction resumed in this area after World War II. In 1941 the federal government acquired 15,000 acres south of Fort Smith for an army base. Camp Chaffee, later called Fort Chaffee, was activated in 1942. The 6th, 14th, and 16th Armored Divisions trained there, and the base also served as a German prisoner-of-war camp, detaining some 3,000 Germans. During WWII, Fort Smith's population grew from 36,000 to 48,000. This created a housing shortage, and many servicemen rented rooms in homes in the Fishback neighborhood (including at David Roberts' and Jo Ann Campbell's houses).

The Beverley Place subdivision was platted in 1954 by Robert Smith and contained eight 113'-wide lots on Beverley Drive. From the top of the hill (Beverley Dr. and 30th), you can see some good examples of the Ranch style.

Rambling houses with a horizontal focus, usually with a carport or attached garage.

Walk back to Herbert and cross Adelaide. Continue west on Herbert.

Herbert Street is named for Fishback's youngest son, Herbert.

2716 Herbert—Louis F. Fishback House—this house was built about 1905 for Louis F. Fishback, the eldest son of Governor William M. Fishback and Adelaide Miller Fishback. The house was designed in the Colonial Revival style with a porch supported by Doric columns and crowned by a triangular pediment. The wood-frame house has been covered with asbestos siding. It was later home to Hattie Mae Butterfield, a piano teacher. Her son later lived in the house.

2710 Herbert—built ca. 1927. Good example of the Tudor Revival style with front-facing cross gables, a prominent chimney on the front façade, arched window and door openings, and some original leaded glass windows with diamond-shaped panes.

Look down Herbert to see the house at 1008 S. Greenwood (turret)—built in 1929. Romanesque/Tudor Revival combo. Home of Maurice and Edna Bedwell. Mr. Bedwell was the co-owner of Bedwell Coal Company and a prominent neighborhood resident.

Walk back to May Avenue and along Reeder to end at Jo Ann Campbell's.