

Sandwiching in History
Joseph W. House, Sr., House
2126 S. Arch Street, Little Rock
December 5, 2014
By: Rachel Silva



Intro

Hi, my name is Rachel Silva, and I work for the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program. Thank you for coming, and welcome to the “Sandwiching in History” tour of the Joseph House House! I’d like to thank Doug Melkovitz and Lee Fleming for allowing us to tour their beautiful home.

This tour is worth 1 hour of HSW continuing education credit through the American Institute of Architects. Please see me after the tour if you’re interested.

Located in the Governor’s Mansion Historic District (National Register-listed 1978), the Joseph House House was built about 1892 and is an example of a transitional Queen Anne with a Colonial Revival-style front porch.

House Family History

Joseph Warren House, Sr., was born on June 12, 1847, in Hardeman County, Tennessee, to A. B. House and his wife, Eliza Wilkes House. In 1858 the House family moved from Tennessee to White County, Arkansas, and took up farming. In 1863, although he was only 16 years old, Joseph House enlisted in the Confederate Army. After the war, he returned to White County and studied law under an attorney at the town of West Point, which is located on the west bank of the Little Red River about nine miles from Searcy. House was admitted to the bar in 1869 and practiced law at Searcy. In 1871 he was elected to represent White County in the General Assembly and helped draft Arkansas's fifth and current constitution during the convention of 1874. In 1874-1875 House served as state senator, representing White and Faulkner counties.

House moved to Little Rock in 1885 and practiced law, serving as U.S. District Attorney for the Eastern District of Arkansas during the first and second administrations of President Grover Cleveland (1885-1889 and 1893-1897). He practiced law with his nephew, Menefee House, in the firm of House & House, and later with D. H. Cantrell in the firm of House & Cantrell, but practiced independently for the majority of his career. In 1906-1907 House served as president of the Arkansas Bar Association.

In 1882 Joseph House married Ina Dowdy of Memphis, Tennessee, and the couple had five children: Arline (1883), Joseph, Jr. (1885), Mary (1887), Ina (1889), and Archie (1892). Arline married Alfred M. Lund, a civil engineer with the Little Rock firm of Lund & Hill. Joseph, Jr., married Julia Clarke, daughter of James P. Clarke, who was the 18th governor of Arkansas and a U.S. senator. And Mary became Mrs. Horace G. Mitchell; Mitchell was president of Democrat Printing & Lithographing Company. Ina may have married after 1951, but as of then, she was in her early 60s and single. Archie House lived to be 100 and never married.

According to Dallas Herndon's *Centennial History of Arkansas*, published in 1922, Joseph W. House, Sr., was affectionately called the "Grand Old Man of Arkansas" and was known throughout the state for his "simple and unpretentious manner, a

keen sense of humor, a kindly, sympathetic interest in all children, marked chivalry toward women and the highest sense of personal honor.” He was regarded as the “old-fashioned, ideal southern gentleman.”

Joseph House, Sr., died on March 10, 1926, at his home after a brief illness. He was 78 years old. The funeral was held in the family residence at 2126 S. Arch, with burial at Roselawn Memorial Park. His honorary pallbearers included Charles L. Thompson, George B. Rose, Charles H. Brough, and Joseph T. Robinson.

History of the House at 2126 S. Arch

When Joseph House moved to Little Rock in 1885, he lived at 501 Arch and later, 1506 Arch. About 1892 the home at 2126 S. Arch was constructed for the House family. The home generally adheres to the Queen Anne style with its irregular form, asymmetrical facade, multiple porches, and fish-scale shingles in the front gable end; however, the front porch represents a transition to the Colonial Revival style, which was becoming popular in Little Rock by the 1890s.

According to the 1900 Census, Joseph, Sr., Ina, and all five of their children were living here at 2126 Arch Street, along with two servants, Rebecca and James.

By 1910, daughter Mary had moved out of her parents' house. The 1910 Census showed the rest of the children at home, along with Joseph House's brother-in-law, J. F. Dowdy, and two servants, Ida Craig and Ramsey Smith.

By 1920, son Joseph, Jr. and daughter Ina had also moved out of the house. By that time, occupants were Joseph, Sr.; his wife, Ina; son, Archie; daughter, Arline House Lund and her husband, Alfred Lund; and a servant named Blanche.

Joseph House, Sr., died in 1926, and his widow, Ina D. House, remained at 2126 Arch Street. By 1930, Ina House lived here with her children Arline, Ina, and Archie, as well as a maid named Maggie and a cook named Frances.

By 1935, Archie House had moved to Pulaski Heights and later lived further to the west on Hwy. 10. But his mother, Ina D. House, remained in the family home with her daughter, Ina, until the elder's death on January 6, 1940, at the age of 79. Her funeral was held at 2126 Arch, and she was buried at Roselawn.

After the death of Ina D. House in 1940, her heirs used the family home on Arch Street as a rental property. The 1940 City Directory listed Frederick McCann and his wife, Marie, at the address. McCann worked as a salesman for Arkansas Hatcheries. By 1950, the home was rented to three different couples in a boarding house-type arrangement.

In 1957 the home was sold out of the Joseph House family and purchased by Virgil G. Bailey and his wife, Ethel. Bailey worked in the construction industry. Virgil Bailey died in 1975, and his widow, Ethel Bailey, continued to live in the house until the mid-1990s. During the 40 years that the Bailey family owned the house (1957 to about 1997), it served as their residence as well as a boarding house. At some point, the front porch was enclosed to provide additional living space.

About 1997 the house was purchased by Dr. Kevin Collins and his wife, Nancy. Collins did a major rehab on the house, including the removal of siding to expose the original weatherboard exterior, reopening the front porch, and rebuilding the back section of the house to raise the height of the second floor and add an additional 5 feet to the rear of the structure. Collins restored as much interior millwork as possible, but he had to replicate a good portion of it, including trim and spindles on the staircase. Collins also built the 3-car garage, which sits at the southwest corner of the property. Historically, the carriage house/garage was located at the northwest corner of the back yard.

The house was damaged by the 1999 tornado that devastated the neighborhood, and some parts of the rehab work had to be redone. The chimneys were damaged by the tornado and were not built back to their original height.

Doug Melkovitz and Lee Fleming bought the House House in 2012 and installed a new roof and HVAC system with the help of the state historic rehabilitation tax credit.

After analyzing the footprint of the house on Sanborn fire insurance maps from 1913, 1939, and 1950, the exterior of the home has changed very little. A small side porch or stoop was added on the south side of the house sometime between 1913 and 1939, and also during that time, a portion of the north side porch was enclosed to create additional restrooms.

Interior Details

- 4,500 square feet
- 4 bedroom/4 bathroom
- Original oak floors in front part of house
- Ornate newel post on staircase
- Original mantles in entry, parlor, dining room, and library (now office)
- The house originally had two sets of pocket doors, but only one set is still visible/operational
- See evidence of the call button in the floor of the dining room (used to summon the help)
- Butler's pantry was in area between dining room and current TV room, which was part of the old kitchen
- The present-day kitchen is the new part of the house (that was rebuilt by Collins)
- The house has lots of antique fixtures, but they are not original to the home
- Pergola and deck on north side of house built by Doug & Lee

The Children of Joseph W. House, Sr.

I've already mentioned the children of Joseph House, Sr., but I wanted to give you a little more information about a couple of them because they were well-known Little Rock residents in their own right (and lived for many years in this house...Archie didn't move out of his parents' house until he was 40). But in order to avoid confusion about who actually built the house, I saved this part for the end of my talk.

Joseph House, Sr., and his wife, Ina, had two sons—Joseph House, Jr., and Archie House, both of whom grew up to be prominent attorneys like their father. Born in 1885, Joseph, Jr., was a graduate of Little Rock High School, the University of Arkansas, and Columbia Law School. He was a partner in the Little Rock firm of House, Moses & Holmes (with C. Hamilton Moses and Willis H. Holmes) until his death in 1954. This law firm later became House, Holmes, Butler & Jewell.

Archie was the youngest of the five House children. He was born on June 29, 1892, and died on June 30, 1992, the day after his 100th birthday. He served as a Little Rock municipal judge and Pulaski County circuit judge. He resigned from the bench in 1925 to join the Rose, Cantrell & Loughborough firm, which later became the Rose Law Firm. House represented the Little Rock School District for 6 years—during the integration crisis at Central High School. He was a proponent of the Blossom Plan, named after Superintendent Virgil Blossom, which outlined a very gradual integration of schools starting at the high school level.

In her book *Turn Away Thy Son: Little Rock, The Crisis That Shocked The Nation*, Elizabeth Jacoway described Archie House as a paternalistic gentleman who epitomized the views of the Little Rock establishment in the late 1950s. She wrote, "Archie House was an institution in Little Rock, a central figure in the downtown establishment, a welcome and sought-after guest in the city's leading social circles, a somewhat eccentric, lovable old bachelor with one of the best law practices in town...In his one hundredth year, he continued to dress in coat and tie even in the nursing home."

Archie House served as president of the Arkansas Bar Association and president of the board of trustees of the Little Rock Public Library. In fact, he was instrumental in getting the library millage passed in the 1940s and even left money to the library in his will, which is now one of their endowments. By all accounts, Archie House was quite a character. Back in his early days, he was a member and president of the Boathouse, which was Little Rock's rowing club. As part of the athletic events on Labor Day 1919, Archie House participated in the high jump. He and another man climbed down the free bridge (old Main Street Bridge) to a platform built out against one of the stone piers, 60 feet above the river, and jumped. Archie did a back flip on his way down.

Ina House, daughter of Joseph, Sr., worked as a stenographer and secretary for the Reconstruction Finance Corporation during the 1930s and '40s. In the early 1920s, she founded the Business and Professional Women's Club in Little Rock. I get the feeling that she was a pretty progressive lady.

Saturday, December 13—tour at the Taylor House (1846 log dog-trot on Bayou Bartholomew near Monticello), 11 a.m.

Next Sandwiching tour is Friday, January 9 at Little Rock Fire Station No. 2, 1201 S. Commerce, noon.