

Walks through History
Jasper Commercial Historic District
Begin at the Newton County Library, south of town on Hwy. 7 (Stone St.)
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By: Rachel Silva



Intro

Good morning, my name is Rachel Silva, and I work for the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, which is a state agency of the Department of Arkansas Heritage. Thank you for coming, and welcome to the “Walks through History” tour of downtown Jasper! I’d like to thank the Newton County Library for co-sponsoring the tour, and I’d like to thank Teresa Hayes, Sarah Long, and Crystal Magie (“Ma-gee”) with the library and Joseph and Janet Morgan with the Arkansas House Inn & Café for their help.

For any architects in the audience, this tour is worth 2 hours of HSW continuing education credit through the American Institute of Architects. See me after the tour if you’re interested.

The Jasper Commercial Historic District was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2010 and encompasses the historic commercial core of Jasper (courthouse square and surrounding streets). The Newton County Courthouse and Newton County Jail were individually listed in the National Register in 1994, and they are also included in the historic district boundary. Finally, the Gould Jones Reservoir was listed in the National Register in 1998.

Brief History of Jasper

Newton County was created in 1842 from part of Carroll County. By the early 1840s, Jasper was established as a trading post along the Little Buffalo River, then known as Hudson's Fork of the Buffalo River. Jasper became the Newton County seat in 1843. The origin of the town's name is uncertain, but one popular story says that postmaster John M. Ross picked the name after comparing a local rock formation to jasper, one of twelve precious stones referred to in the Book of Revelation.

Jasper became a boomtown in the late nineteenth century as a result of the timber industry. Sawmills processed the area's plentiful oak and cedar trees (used to make stave bolts for barrels as well as pencils) and employed hundreds of men. The Jasper Commercial Historic District is anchored by the WPA-built Newton County Courthouse and features several distinctive rough-cut stone buildings. Because of its location near the Buffalo National River, Jasper's economy relies heavily on tourism. Outdoor enthusiasts and elk watchers visit the town each year.

Interesting facts—Arkansas contributed a stone for the Washington Monument, and it came from near present-day Marble Falls in Newton County.

Newton County's population in 1900 was about 12,500, but it is currently only 8,500.

Newton County has never had a mile of railroad track constructed through it, and there are no stoplights in the county either.

Individual Resources

Newton County Library & Gould Jones Reservoir—

The present-day site of the Newton County Library was occupied in the 1940s by a tomato canning factory. Alvin Phillips and Ernie Nicholson owned the canning factory, which provided jobs for about 30 women who peeled tomatoes as well as several tomato farmers, pickers, and haulers. The women were paid 10 cents for

peeling enough tomatoes to fill a 5-gallon bucket, and the fastest peelers could fill 25 buckets a day, earning \$2.50. About 1942 local builder Gould Jones constructed a small reservoir to the north of the factory to supply water for the canning operation. A few years later, about 1946, Mr. Jones built a larger reservoir out of concrete and brick to supply water for the factory and the residents of Jasper. This structure still stands today just to the south of the library. Jones engineered a system in which water was pumped (one-cylinder motor pump) to the reservoir from a spring located north of the courthouse. This represented the first water service in Jasper.

The canning factory was later closed by the Arkansas Department of Health, and after 1955, when Hwy. 7 was paved from Pelsor to Jasper, water was provided to Jasper residents by the Arkansas Soil and Water Conservation Service. So the Jones Reservoir provided water for Jasper residents for about 10 years.

Gould Jones—

Charles Gould Jones was born on April 6, 1887, near Pruitt (Newton County) on the Buffalo River. He died on March 6, 1972, just one month shy of his 85th birthday. Jones spent his entire life in Newton County with the exception of 13 years in Elmwood (Boone County). Gould Jones operated a gristmill, blacksmith and machine shop, and garage in Jasper. In the early 20th century, he constructed several buildings and structures using a distinctive blend of native stone, brick, and concrete. We will see a lot of his work today.

Reservoir—

The roof of the reservoir forms a cone with a slight pitch to it. The centerpiece of the roof is a truck wheel rim. According to Guy Bennett, who hauled rocks for Gould Jones and later became Newton County Sheriff (1959-1965), everyone told Jones that he'd have to make the roof of the reservoir flat, but he found a way to raise it. Bennett said, "Gould Jones could do anything with steel, a fork, and an anvil." The library put a raised wood floor in the bottom of the reservoir to keep items in storage off of the damp floor.

Library—

The Newton County Library started in the 1960s and was located in the courthouse. In the mid-to-late 1970s, the library moved to a room in city hall. The Friends of the Library group was organized in 1991, and in 1994 the old county shop building was converted into the library. The shop building was concrete block and had two garage doors (one opening was made into the current entrance and the other was closed up). New window openings and windows were added and a veneer of board-and-batten siding was put on top of the concrete block. A gabled porte-cochere was built and supported by rock columns. The transformation was completed in October 1994.

If you don't know, the Newton County Library offers 2 free programs for adults each month. They also have a writers' group, artists' group, book club, and children's programs.

Walk north on Hwy. 7 (Stone Street)

West side

Jones Service Station (218 S. Stone)—

Jones Service Station was built in 1933 by Gould Jones. It was a Conoco station and offered full tire and lube service (the building immediately to the north was also part of the operation). The station building itself featured Jones's distinctive mixed masonry technique with flagstone, buff brick, and rubble masonry infill on the exterior walls. The station also has a tile roof, which was unique in Jasper. By 1950, it was called Roy and Bill's Station and sold Lion Oil products. Notice the pressed tin ceiling under the porte-cochere. The gas pumps used to sit on the island on either side of the columns.

Church of Christ (214 S. Stone)—

The ca. 1935 Church of Christ building was constructed by Gould Jones and features a diamond-shaped section of small stones with a truck wheel rim in the center on its upper front façade. The covered walkways off the central portico were added later.

East side of Hwy. 7

Jim Vaughan Esso Service Station (203 S. Stone)—

The small building just north of Sharon K's Café used to be the Jim Vaughan Esso Service Station. Mr. Vaughan owned one of the first cars in Jasper (Model T Ford) and operated the first light plant, which furnished electricity for Jasper. The station had a large, gabled porch that extended almost to the highway (it has been removed).

An auto garage was located between the Esso Station and the Christian Church and later served as the county barn.

Christian Church (201 S. Stone)—

Not sure about year of construction (early 20th century). Likely wood or stone under a stucco veneer.

East on Church Street (south side of courthouse square)

Newton County Bank; now Bank of the Ozarks (100 E. Church)—

The Newton County Bank occupied the 1894 B. F. Ruble Building at the southwest corner of Stone and Church streets until this building was completed in 1964-67. The orange brick building was designed in 1964 by internationally-known Arkansas architect E. Fay Jones, who was best known for designing Thorncrown Chapel in Eureka Springs (which was built in 1980 and was designated by the AIA as the 4th-best building of the 20th century). Jones designed the new bank building for the Nance family. The building features subtle Jones trademarks like the vertical battens along the cornice, and some interior furniture appears to be original and designed by Jones. [Was the east side of the bank building a later addition? The brick is a slightly different color.]

J. S. Hudson's Cold Cash Store was located on this site from the early 20th century until 1964, when it was demolished to make way for the bank building. Hudson did not sell on credit, thus the name "cash store."

Rock wall—

Not sure what was here, but there are rock walls like this all over town.

Angel Works Thrift Store/Revenue Office (Southeast corner of Church & Spring)—
Historic building with mid-1970s aggregate veneer. This was the location of the
Newton County Co-op and was later Christiansen Funeral Home. The revenue
office has been here since at least the early 1980s. Special services bought the
building in 2007.

North on Spring Street (East side of courthouse square)

Buffalo Theater (200 N. Spring)—

The Buffalo Theater Building was constructed in 1916 and housed a mercantile (at
one time run by a Mr. Moten). The walls of the building are locally-quarried,
rough-cut limestone blocks. In 1941 Jimmy Gilbert opened the Gilbert Theater in
the building, and in 1952 Don Jones changed the name to Buffalo Theater. About
1960 Roy Raulston purchased the theater, and the theater closed in 1989. The
building housed the Spice O' Life Bakery for about 15 years and then sat vacant
for a few years. It was recently purchased by local people who wanted to revive
the theater. After much hard work, the Buffalo Theater reopened on March 29,
2014. Free entertainment will be offered in the building on Saturday afternoons,
and Saturday evening entertainment will cost a nominal fee. The building will also
be used as a meeting space for local groups, and a solar-powered AM Radio
station (KUBF) is also planned.

Rufus Arbaugh's Drug Store; later Thurman's Rexall Drug (202 N. Spring)—

Built ca. 1910 with native, rough-cut limestone. Housed Rufus Arbaugh's Drug
Store and later became Thurman's Rexall Drug Store.

Chamber of Commerce and Spring Street Arts (204-206 N. Spring)—

Built ca. 1945 by Gould Jones to replace earlier limestone building that looked
similar to the theater and drug store buildings. The previous building on the site
of 204 N. Spring housed the Newton County Times in the early 20th century. These

1940s storefronts featured tan-colored glazed brick on the upper façade with a pattern created by black glazed brick and red brick in header courses (small end of the brick facing out). The upper façade of 206 N. Spring has been painted.

Vacant lot at the southeast corner of Spring & Court—

This lot was occupied by the two-story, wood-frame Murray Hotel. The hotel had a full-length, two-story front porch. When was it demolished?

Newton County Courthouse—

The Newton County Courthouse was built in 1939-1942 to replace the 1902 courthouse, which was destroyed by fire in 1938. The new courthouse was constructed with Works Progress Administration labor and built with locally-quarried limestone. Like many courthouses from this era, the Newton County Courthouse features some restrained Art Deco-style details in the cast-stone above the front door (zig-zags, geometric patterns). The building retains its original metal-frame hopper windows. See WPA plaque on façade. The WPA was part of President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal, which consisted of programs to put people to work during the Great Depression.

East on Hwy. 7 (Court St.)

Gould Jones Building, 1947; now Emma's Museum of Junk (north side of Court St.)—

Built in 1947 by Gould Jones using glazed brick, regular brick, and red flagstones. It housed the Gilbert Pool Hall on the west (left) side and possibly the revenue office on the other side.

Gorden's Motel (now the Gordon Motel)—

Gorden's Motel was here by the 1950s and possibly earlier. After Hwy. 7 was paved from Pelsor to Jasper, tourism increased in the Newton County seat. A 1950s postcard for Gorden's Motel advertised the following: "Tile baths, panel ray heat, box springs & inner spring mattresses. 'Cleanliness' is our motto."

Office portion of Gordon Motel—possibly a later addition to Gordon’s Motel.
Later brick and window design on this building.

Parkway Motel (sign says Little Buffalo Outfitters now)—

The 2-story, wood-frame Commercial Hotel was located on the site of the current Parkway Motel from about 1906 until it was demolished in 1956. The Commercial Hotel had 17 rooms for rent and was a prominent landmark in Jasper. The Parkway Motel was built in the late 1950s on the vacant lot.

Riverview Motel & 1904 Folk Victorian House—

The house was built in 1904 and features 7 gabled dormers with bargeboard or “gingerbread trim.” The house was situated to get the best view of the Little Buffalo River. The wrap-around porch is supported by tapered wood columns on stacked limestone piers. The Riverview Motel was likely built in the 1960s adjacent to the house.

Bridge over the Little Buffalo River—

In 1925 a 2-span, steel, through-truss bridge was completed over the Little Buffalo River at Jasper, greatly improving travel. The current concrete bridge was completed in 1975 to replace the old steel bridge.

West on Hwy. 7 (Court Street)

Cross to the north side of the highway

Arkansas House Inn & Café (Boardwalk Café)—

In the early 20th century, Gould Jones built a fully functioning water wheel and stone retaining wall in the branch near the Little Buffalo River at Jasper. I’m not sure if this wheel had anything to do with his reservoir and water system, or if it powered his gristmill or machine shop???

Jones built the Dairy Diner in 1950 near his water wheel. The original Dairy Diner was heavily damaged by fire and partially rebuilt. It is now the Boardwalk Café (part of the Arkansas House Inn & Café). The restaurant serves organic, locally-sourced food.

The mill stones from the gristmill at Marble Falls are in front of the restaurant in the flower beds.

Arkansas House Garden—See cottage built by Gould Jones ca. 1945. Notice that his technique had changed from his earlier designs. In later projects, Jones artistically arranged rocks in cement molds to create blocks, which were easier to stack and build with than traditional uncut stone masonry. He no longer had to adjust to the irregularities of each stone, and he could easily make patterns.

A captive black bear named Coco was kept in a building between the Arkansas House Inn and the Boardwalk Café. The bear is now at Turpentine Creek in Eureka Springs.

Arkansas House—

Gould Jones built the Arkansas House Hotel in 1933 using a mixture of buff brick, glazed brick, and flagstone. His masterpiece, the shape of Arkansas in stone, is centered on the front façade. The Arkansas House still rents rooms. They have 3 regular rooms, 2 suites, and 2 cabins. Plus the restaurant.

Phillips 66 Service Station—

Service station built by Gould Jones ca. 1930. He used rounded river rocks to construct the main building. It was a Phillips 66 station at one point, but I'm not sure what it started out as.

Walk to Spring Street and go north to the Jail

Newton County Jail (300 N. Spring)—

The Newton County Jail was built in 1902-1903 by the Heilman Construction Company. The company also built the 1902 Newton County Courthouse, which was also constructed with cut limestone. The jail and courthouse were constructed at a total cost of \$9,200 (remember that the 1902 courthouse was destroyed by fire in 1938). The jail was built with rough-cut limestone and featured some elements of the Italianate style with its pronounced cornice and brackets (all made from limestone) and the large segmental arch window opening with keystone on the front façade. Notice the finials on the parapet. The official

capacity of the jail was listed at 4 inmates. This building served as the Newton County Jail until July 2009, when inmates were moved to other facilities in neighboring counties until a new jail could be constructed down the street (finished 2012). The historic jail is now home to the Christian Food Room, which is operated by area churches.

Back to Court Street (Hwy. 7) & walk west

Pearl's Café Building (109 E. Court)—

Pearl's Café opened in 1948. The building was originally one-story with a flat roof. A wide, flat awning extended over the sidewalk and was topped by a neon sign reading "Pearl's Café." The bottom portion of the building is original, with Roman brick below the windows and concrete block above. The building has its original metal-frame picture windows (probably with side casement sashes) and original front door. Pearl's Café was owned by Pearl and Walter Brasel. The café advertised "refrigerated" air, fresh catfish, chicken and dressing, hickory smoked pit bar-b-q, and modern restrooms. By the 1980s, the café was closed and a second story with a front-gabled roof was built on top of the building to house apartments.

Ozark Café (107 E. Court)—

The Ozark Café opened here in 1909. The building is of wood-frame construction with stucco veneer and concrete block added in the 1940s. By the 1930s, the wood-frame façade was covered with corrugated tin and had a tin awning, much like the current awning. Owners in the 1940s "modernized" the building by adding the stucco and concrete block. By the 1950s, it was the Upton Café, run by the Upton family of Jasper. In the mid-20th century, Upton's Café was the Republican gathering place, and Pearl's Café next door was the Democrats' favorite eatery. A mural was painted on the upper part of the façade, and the building has been redecorated in the last few years with the black, red, and white Coca-Cola theme (the mural is still visible).

Brasel Mercantile/Jasper Mercantile/Reeves Dry Goods Building; now the Ozark Café II (105 E. Court)—

Built ca. 1873, the building at 105 E. Court Street is the oldest commercial building on the Jasper Square. It was constructed with rough-cut limestone. Early on, the building housed the Brasel Mercantile and later, the Jasper Mercantile. By the mid-1950s, Carl Reeves operated his dry goods store in the building. It is now overflow seating for the Ozark Café, and the stone was painted black.

101-103 E. Court—

The Fowler Building at 101-103 E. Court was constructed ca. 1950 (two separate storefronts).

Northeast corner of Court & Stone (parking lot)—

This was the site of Keef's Grocery and Market. The two-story, wood-frame building was constructed in the 1860s by R. W. Harrison to serve as a general store for a Mr. Strothers. Frank Keef later had his grocery store in the building. By the 1950s, the Keef's Grocery building was the oldest building in Jasper. It was demolished in the 1960s after the death of Mr. Keef.

South on Stone (Hwy. 7)

Phillips General Store; now Blue Mountain Bakery & Deli (207-209 N. Stone)—

Built in 1905 with cut limestone, this building housed the John M. Phillips General Store fronting on Stone Street and the Jasper Post Office in the one-story section fronting on Court Street. The building was renovated in 2011 to house the Blue Mountain Bakery and Deli, which relocated to Jasper from Pelsor (Pope County).

Spencer's General Store; now the Freckled Frog and Harp Real Estate (203-205 N. Stone)—

Built ca. 1910 with river rock. In the mid-20th century, the building housed Dewey and Obie Spencer's general store (mostly groceries), and prior to that, it was Clyde and Alta Gorden's General Store.

Northwest corner of Stone and Church streets; now site of new bank—

In the early 20th century, two wood-frame buildings stood on this corner facing east toward Stone Street (Hwy. 7). A one-story, wood-frame meat market was just south of Spencer's General Store, and a two-story, wood-frame restaurant (and later, grocery) was at the corner.

West on Church Street

B. F. Ruble Building; now Newton County Times (101 W. Church)—

Built in 1894 by Ben F. Ruble and housed the Newton County Bank for most of the 20th century until the bank moved across Stone Street to its new location in the 1960s. Ruble served as Newton County Clerk and was later elected to the state legislature. The building was constructed with native, rough-cut limestone arranged so that the large corner blocks look like quoins (an architectural feature). The stone has been painted, so the difference in each block's size is not as apparent. Notice the panel with "B. F. Ruble 1894" in the upper façade. The building's front door was originally in the middle of the north façade instead of at the corner. The clipped corner entry was added later (perhaps as late as the 1950s, when the bank interior was remodeled with a glass block counter angled to match the clipped corner entrance). The building is now home to the Newton County Times. You can still see the bank vault.

B. F. Ruble Building (1903); now vacant (103 W. Church)—

B. F. Ruble constructed this building in 1903. See the panel on the upper façade. This building was also constructed with limestone and features a decorative, raised parapet with limestone brackets, or dentils, at the cornice. The second story windows are crowned by fanlights with keystones, and the storefront boasts the original limestone columns (the original wooden bulkheads and storefront windows have been replaced with brick and plate glass). This building housed the Continental Auto Company with the Masonic Lodge upstairs.

Hicks Auto Parts (105 W. Church)—

Built ca. 1910 with native cut limestone. What was here historically?

Carroll Electric; now Nelms Gallery (107 W. Church)—

Built in 1950 to house the Carroll Electric Cooperative's Jasper office. The building's simple, asymmetrical design and wide, wrap-around awning are trademarks of mid-century modern architecture.

Walk two blocks west on Church to Mill Street and go north to see the front of the American Legion Hut.

American Legion Hut (401 W. Court)—

The Legion Hut was built ca. 1930 using log construction. Most of the exterior (except a small section on the front porch) has been covered with newer board-and-batten siding. The interior walls are still the original painted logs.

Walk south on Mill to the northwest corner of Mill & Clark

Jasper United Methodist Church—

In 1850 the Methodist Episcopal Church established the Newton Mission at Jasper (prior to that time, the area was served by circuit rider preachers). The current church site was acquired from members Daniel Phillips and his wife, Clarissa Brasel Phillips, in 1889 and a white, wood-frame church constructed. This church building was destroyed by a tornado in 1936. In 1937 the current building was constructed with native stone (H. D. Newell was the pastor; his name is on the cornerstone), and the fellowship hall was added in the 1970s. The parsonage is located just to the west of the sanctuary.

Note the tall, decorative parapet and grapevine mortar on the church building.

Dr. W. A. Bradley House; now the Bradley House Museum & Newton County Historical Society (403 W. Clark)—

Built in 1892 for the Joseph Moss family, the home originally featured a central, 2-story, gabled portico (the central upstairs windows were a door opening originally). After Moss's death, the house was sold in 1905 to Dr. William A. Bradley. Dr. Bradley cared for hundreds of Newton County residents. Since the

late 1980s, the house has been the Bradley House Museum and headquarters for the Newton County Historical Society.

Walk beside Bradley House on Mountain Street

James Chism Chaney House—

Log dog-trot cabin built in the mid-1860s by James Chism Chaney, an early settler at present-day Osage, Carroll County, Arkansas (northwest of Jasper). Part of the house may contain components from the 1840s. The first Chaney House (and possibly this house) served as a post office and a stage stop along the Carrollton to Huntsville stagecoach line. The Chaney House was sold out of the family in 1890. It was listed on the National Register in 1989 but was deteriorating quickly. The NCHS disassembled the house and numbered the pieces in order to reconstruct it. In 1994 the house was reconstructed using as much of the original material as possible.

Walk to South Street. Go east to Stone Street (Hwy. 7) and follow that back to the Newton County Library.