

Walks through History
Ozark Courthouse Square Historic District
Begin at the Franklin County Courthouse, 211 W. Commercial
August 9, 2014
By: Rachel Silva



Intro

Good morning, my name is Rachel Silva, and I work for the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program. Thank you for coming, and welcome to the “Walks through History” tour of downtown Ozark! I’d like to thank Main Street Ozark for co-sponsoring the tour, and I’d like to thank Sandy Key, Jimmy Bearden, and Ruth Hoffman for their help with the tour.

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

The Ozark Courthouse Square Historic District was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2002 and includes the courthouse and commercial buildings around the courthouse square, as well as the 300 block of W. Commercial and half of the 100 block of N. Second Street. We will see other National Register-listed buildings today, including the Methodist Church, County Jail, and Railroad Depot.

Brief History of Ozark

Franklin County was formed in 1837 from part of Crawford County and was named after statesman Benjamin Franklin. The Arkansas River bisects the county, creating two distinctive geographic regions with mountains to the north and flat river valley to the south. Ozark, which took its name from the French words “Aux Arc” in reference to a large bend in the Arkansas River near the town site, became the Franklin County seat in 1837 and served as an important stop for river traffic between Little Rock and Fort Smith. In 1885 a second judicial district was established south of the Arkansas River at Charleston. The Little Rock & Fort Smith Railroad came through Ozark in 1876, prompting residential and commercial development. Downtown Ozark contains several buildings constructed with native limestone because it was a readily available building material, and it was less likely to burn.

Individual Properties

Franklin County Courthouse, Northern District (NR-listed 9/22/1995)—
Ozark’s first courthouse was completed in 1840 on the northwest corner of the town square and was a one-story, wood-frame building. Prior to the construction of the first courthouse, court was held in a small, log schoolhouse. Population growth in the 1840s necessitated the construction of a new courthouse, which was completed in 1851 in the center of the square. This two-story, brick courthouse was used as a fortification by Federal troops during the Civil War. Confederate soldiers later captured the Federal troops’ supplies and burned the courthouse. The third courthouse, completed in 1871, was similar to its predecessor and served the county until the summer of 1904, when it was demolished to make way for a new building.

Construction of the fourth courthouse began in August 1904 and was completed in July 1905. The building was designed by Little Rock architect Frank W. Gibb in the Renaissance Revival style and featured a six-story clock tower at the northwest corner, three-story tower with open arcade at the northeast corner,

arched second story windows, and a classically-inspired portico at the front entrance. E. L. Koonce of Warren was the contractor.

On Monday, January 10, 1944, during a freezing rain, the courthouse was extensively damaged by a fire believed to have started in a flue coming from the stove in the Farm Security Administration office. The second story was completely gutted and the roof destroyed, but the ground floor remained essentially intact except for some damage to the circuit clerk's office. In February 1944 Fayetteville architect T. Ewing Shelton was hired to draw plans for the building's reconstruction. Tom Eads of Fayetteville was contractor. The reconstructed courthouse opened in September 1945. The bottom of the building is the 1904-05 construction, while the top (from the second belt course up) is the 1944-45 reconstruction. The towers were shortened and simplified, the roof was made flat with a cast-concrete parapet, the second story windows were made square, and the entrance portico was removed. In 1983 the multi-pane windows from the 1940s reconstruction were replaced.

West side of square (S. 3rd), going north from Main

113-115 S. 3rd (Truth Tabernacle)—

Built ca. 1905 and had three storefronts. In 1909 (from south to north) the building housed R. H. Strong's Hardware Store (which had previously been located on the north side of the square), a furniture store, and boots & shoe store. By the 1920s, the building was divided into just two storefronts. The south end of the building was the Ozark Theater (run by the Waycasters), and the north end of the building (white portion) was a café, then OTASCO (Oklahoma Tire & Supply Co.), then a flower shop. The building has a new brick and metal façade.

Vacant lot (Roy L. Garner Memorial Park)—

Site of Ozark's first three-story building, constructed about 1920. In 1924 it housed the post office on the first floor, telephone exchange on the second floor, and Masonic Lodge on the third floor. In 1926 the post office relocated to the John Davidson Building in the 100 block of N. 2nd Street, and the First National

Bank opened in the first floor of the three-story building (First National closed in 1933). By the mid-twentieth century, this was known as the Taylor Building. Dow Pledger's barber shop was on the first floor (followed by Oscar Davis's barber shop), law offices on second floor, and the telephone exchange on the third floor. The building was condemned and demolished sometime in the 1990s.

107 S. 3rd (Adams Abstract)—

Built ca. 1910 using native limestone. Housed a barber and tailor in the front and a restaurant in the back. Labeled "office" on later Sanborn maps. Has been Adams Abstract for many years.

105 S. 3rd—

Constructed ca. 1908 by local builder Claude Talley and housed E. W. Blackburn's Drug Store in the early twentieth century. By the mid-20th century, this was Elsey Harris's store. He sold buggy supplies, leather goods, and shoes. Mr. Harris also had a location on West Commercial.

103 S. 3rd (Morgan's)—

Built in 1925 out of brick and stone (currently has a metal slipcover). The building also has an entrance on W. Commercial. Built by Finis E. Stockton (see name in tile at entrance). By the mid-20th century, this was Coley's Dry Goods.

101 S. 3rd (Taylor's Barber Shop)—

Built in 1897 as a 2-story brick building and housed brothers C. W. and Roy Bell's Confectionery. There was also a printing company on the second floor. The building was two-story until the mid-to-late 1970s, when the building was damaged by fire, and the upper story was removed. Cagle's Barber Shop was later in this building. Notice the original cast-iron storefront columns and kick-plate, stamped "Ketcham Iron Co., Fort Smith, Ark." Building currently has a metal slipcover.

300 block of W. Commercial, going west from 3rd (north side of the street)

300 W. Commercial (Chamber of Commerce/Visitor Center/Main Street Ozark/Film Commission)—

Built ca. 1885 to house J. F. Maxey Hardware, which by the 1920s became Charles E. Matthews Hardware. Nice commercial building with Italianate-style arched second story windows, decorative brick corbelling, and a peaked parapet.

302 W. Commercial—

Built ca. 1885 with Italianate-style hood molding above arched second story windows and zig-zag patterned brickwork at the cornice. In the early years, the first floor housed a general store, dry goods and clothing store, and then a grocery, while the second floor was a town hall with a stage. The local YMCA also used the second floor for boxing and basketball from the time it was organized in 1885 until 1910. In the late 1910s the first floor of the building became the headquarters of Company G (later Company K), Arkansas National Guard. The national guardsmen also used the second floor gymnasium. Ozark High School basketball games were played in the upstairs gymnasium until 1927, when a new high school with its own gym was completed. The Ben Franklin 5 & 10 was later located in the first floor (Faber Tyler owned the local Ben Franklin store).

304 (or 306?) W. Commercial—

Built ca. 1885 and has Italianate-style detailing. The first floor of this building is connected to the building next door at 302 W. Commercial via an inside doorway. The gymnasium goes across the upstairs of both buildings. In about 1920, the first floor of this building was occupied by W. L. Haskew's Dry Goods, Shoes, Groceries, and Feed. It was later a clothing store.

308 W. Commercial (W. S. Garner Building)—

Built ca. 1885 and originally had four large arched windows on the second floor. The front façade was re-bricked in the 1940s. In the early years, this was a general store, a meat market & grocery, and a hardware store. By 1924, it was an auto garage with a 28-car capacity and had a gas pump on the sidewalk out front. It

later became Herbert Matthews's Hardware Store (first floor) with physicians' offices upstairs (Dr. Gibbons and Dr. Long).

310 W. Commercial (Edward Jones)—

Built ca. 1885 and originally had three large arched windows on the second floor. The façade was re-bricked in the 1940s. In the early years, this was a general store, grocery, and boots & shoes & clothing store. It was later Dryer's Shoe Store, owned by David Dryer.

312 W. Commercial (A+ Insurance)—

Built ca. 1910 and housed a general store. The façade has been re-bricked. This was later Hansel McElroy's Grocery.

318 W. Commercial—

From about 1890 until 1910, a two-story house was located on the northeast corner of 4th and Commercial. It was known as the Rountree Boarding House and later, the City Hotel. The native limestone building was constructed about 1920 to house an auto dealership and garage with a 50-car capacity as well as the town's fire department. This was Anderson Ford, which later became Anderson-Whitson Ford and then Holly Ford. Notice the pressed tin ceiling in the open corner area.

NW corner of 4th & Commercial (Priority Bank)—There was an Esso filling station on this site by 1924. It was later a DX station?

Dari-Delite has been around since the 1940s in the same location.

SW corner of 4th & Commercial—By the 1920s, this block was the Dyke Brothers Lumber Yard, and an earlier building on this corner was a lumber shed. The current concrete block building is newer and housed City Lumber Company.

Point down to Methodist Church at SW corner of 5th & Commercial—

First Methodist Episcopal Church, South (NR-listed 9/4/1992)—The congregation of the First Methodist Episcopal Church, South was organized in 1853 in Ozark. An

early church building was burned during the Civil War, and the congregation disbanded. The Methodist congregation was reorganized in 1871, and in 1876 a wood-frame church was built at the southwest corner of 5th and Commercial. In 1909 the wood-frame church was demolished to make way for a new limestone building, designed in the Gothic Revival style by architect A. Klingensmith. Ozark resident Claude Talley was contractor. The church was dedicated in November 1912. An education annex was built in 1957 on the west side of the church.

300 block of W. Commercial, west to east (south side of the street)

317 or 319 W. Commercial (cut limestone)—

Built ca. 1910 using native limestone. The building was constructed with a stage at the back for live performances and was a movie theater by the 1920s. Known locally as the old opera house, the building was partially destroyed by fire in the mid-20th century. The remaining limestone walls were temporarily used as an animal enclosure for the city dog pound.

315 W. Commercial (purple/maroon)—

Built ca. 1925 on site of old print shop. This building housed Crumpacker's Grocery, and was later a tractor supply business.

313 W. Commercial (blue stucco)—

Built ca. 1920 on site of old blacksmith shop. This was the original location of Elsey Harris Harness, Saddles & Vehicles. He probably operated in the earlier building on this site and also built the current structure. "Harris" appears in the tile at the entrance. He later moved his store around the corner to 105 S. 3rd. Cronch Meat Market & Processing was later located here at 313 W. Commercial, followed by another location of Dryer's Shoes (Dryer's had two locations operating at the same time).

311 W. Commercial (Southern Grill)—

Built ca. 1905 and may have originally been a storage area for Elsey Harris's harness and buggy parts. It was labeled "harness repository" on early Sanborn

maps. In the mid-20th century, it was Floyd Crain's Model Café. The building retains its original cast-iron storefront columns.

307-309 W. Commercial (glass block)—

Built ca. 1905 using native limestone. In 1909 it housed a hay, grocery, and harness shop. It was later a flour and feed store. In the mid-20th century, it was Jake's Barber Shop (location of an altercation in which the local sheriff was killed about 1940).

305 W. Commercial (limestone with dentils)—

Built ca. 1905 using native limestone. Features small stone finials and a dentil course at the cornice. In the early 20th century, this was a grocery and meat market. This was later King's Café and then a clothing store.

303 W. Commercial (side entrance to Morgan's Fashions)—

Built ca. 1905 using native limestone and later connected to Coley's Dry Goods (Morgan's Fashions) Building. This was a confectionery and a tailor in the early 20th century and later became Mack McKinn's Shoe Shop.

301 W. Commercial (back of Bell Bros. Confectionery Building/Taylor's Barber Shop)—

This was the back of Bell Bros. Confectionery in the early 20th century. By the mid-20th century, it was the Modern Beauty Shop.

North side of square, going west to east (W. Commercial)

220 W. Commercial (Mainard Attorney-at-law)—

Built in 1899 in the Queen Anne style. This building originally had a second-story bay window with a cone-shaped roof (looked like a mini-turret). It was attached to the corner of the building where the recessed balcony is today. Notice the original pressed metal cornice with decorative garland panels. This building was constructed to house the Arkansas Valley Bank, which failed in 1929. In 1937 the Bank of Ozark was organized and moved into this building. The Home Telephone

Company's office was located upstairs in the bank building in the early 20th century.

On January 13, 1904, a fire destroyed several buildings at the eastern end of the 200 block of W. Commercial, including George Russell's Clothing, R. H. Strong's Hardware, Ona Hill's barber shop, J. W. McLaughlin's harness shop, W.W. Mansfield's law office, Richardson Bros. warehouse, and Mrs. Mattie Smith's boarding house (around the corner on N. 2nd Street). The rest of the block was saved by tearing the roof off of the post office, which was located near the middle of the block at that time. This fire prompted the city council to adopt a very restrictive building and fire code for future construction. After the fire, new buildings were constructed, and the block was soon filled with one- and two-story brick buildings.

However, on February 14, 1926, Les McPherson robbed the Wakefield & Company Dry Goods store, which was in the middle of the block, and set the building on fire to cover his crime. The entire north side of the square burned, except for the Arkansas Valley Bank Building on the west end. Businesses lost included the People's Bank (which had a beautiful building with a corner tower on the far east end of the block), Democrat-Enterprise newspaper, Myers-Powell Barber Shop, Blue-White Bakery, Burns Bros. Confectionery, J. C. Wakefield & Co. Dry Goods, Jeffers Bros. Grocery, F. I. Gosnell Drug Store, J. T. Greer Furniture & Undertaking Goods, Palace Drug Store, the Star Store (grocery and dry goods), and the office of Dr. W. H. Gibbons, L. A. Williams (attorney), Miller Millinery Shop, and W. C. Conaster Insurance. So the yellow brick buildings you see today were all built in 1926 after the fire. When we go over to N. 2nd Street, you can see that they were able to salvage some of the old brick walls at the rear of the buildings and incorporate them into the newer structures.

218? W. Commercial (2-story)—

Mid-20th century--Floyd Hanna's hardware and auto parts (called Ozark Tire & Supply).

216? W. Commercial (book store; 3 bays wide)—
Mid-20th century--Greer's Furniture Store

214 W. Commercial (Daylight Donuts)—
Anderson Grocery, then Bob Burns Grocery, and later Banger's Café

212 W. Commercial—
Wakefield's Clothing

210 W. Commercial (Nicole's)—
Burns Drug

208 W. Commercial (Weatherly's Jewelry)—
Barber shop, then Staten Jewelry, then Weatherly's Jewelry

204 W. Commercial (Personal Touch)—
Counts Rexall Drug and later Holliman's Drug

200-202 W. Commercial (Ozark Realty)—
1904 to 1926-location of People's Bank; then OG&E office (Oklahoma Gas & Electric); has been Ozark Realty since the 1970s.

100 block of N. 2nd

Yellow brick building at NE corner 2nd & Commercial—

This was originally a stone building that faced west onto N. 2nd Street, constructed about 1905, and housed George W. Russell's Clothing, Shoes & Hats after his other building was destroyed in the 1904 fire. The 1932 Sanborn map shows it with stone walls and no roof, so it may have been affected by the 1926 fire.

Regardless, the building was re-bricked and oriented to face W. Commercial, maybe in the mid-20th century. In the late 1940s and 1950s, it housed Dr. C. C. Long's office (physician) & Dr. Clark's dental office, then it was Turner's law office,

and then a photo shop. Notice the old cast-iron column from the original storefront on N. 2nd.

102 N. 2nd—

Built ca. 1925 and features minimal brick detailing and recessed panels on the upper façade. Mid-20th century-Arkansas Western Gas Company and later a dress shop.

104 N. 2nd—

Built ca. 1925. The post office moved here in 1926 and remained until 1959.

106 N. 2nd (Coca-Cola sign)—

Built ca. 1925. Mid-20th century-Lester Sausman's Grocery.

108 N. 2nd—

Built ca. 1965? United Telephone; now Century Link.

110 N. 2nd—

Telephone company's storage warehouse; later Merle Norman

112-114 N. 2nd (Smith Building, 1948)—

Built in 1948. 112-storage? 114-Western Auto, then Kelly Stowe's Laundromat, then Snap's Bar and Pool Hall.

Allied Bank of Ozark—

Historically, there was a boarding house on this site. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, it was Mattie Smith's boarding house, which was destroyed by the 1904 fire. Another building was constructed on the site and was called the Commercial Hotel by 1909. Ozark's fire department was later located next to the hotel (after its location on W. Commercial).

Point to area behind north side of square—site of a stockyard and Wilson's Livery until at least 1924.

109 W. Commercial—

Built ca. 1895 as part of the Conaster-Hill Dry Goods/Seaman's Grocery Building at 100 S. 2nd. Notice the ghost sign on the north side of the building. You can make out the words, "Groceries and Dry Goods and Clothing."

East side of square, going north to south (100 block of S. 2nd)**100 S. 2nd—**

Built ca. 1895 as the Conaster-Hill Dry Goods Store and Seaman's Grocery. It was later Hunt's Department Store, and the southern storefront (on the right) was Parker Jewelry. The building is a great example of late 19th century commercial-style architecture and retains its original storefront elements, including cast-iron columns and a pressed metal cornice.

106 S. 2nd (C & N Electric)—

Built ca. 1930 with new veneer. The north side of the building (left) was Smith's Café, then the Copper Penny Bar, and later C & N Electric, while the south side of the building (right) was Hopkins Beauty Shop.

112 S. 2nd (Bristow Hotel; NR-listed 2/18/1999)—

The Bristow Hotel was constructed in 1909 by local builder J. Friese for George O. Bristow. Bristow first arrived in Ozark in 1903, having spent his previous years in Oklahoma and Texas as a station agent for the railroad. In 1911 Bristow left Ozark but returned in 1944 to make it his home. He remained a citizen of Ozark until his death in 1968 at the age of 102. At some point, a portion of the original hotel lobby was used as the local bus terminal. This area later served as a beauty parlor and retail space. In the 1980s the hotel closed, and the building was converted into apartments. It remained in use as apartments until the mid-1990s, when it was renovated to house a law firm on the first floor, office space on the second floor, and an apartment in the rear ell.

Building at NE corner of S. 2nd & Main—

From at least the 1880s until about 1930, there was a livery stable on this corner. For the majority of its existence, it was operated by John R. and T. M. Davidson. The Davidson Stable and Livery also offered a taxi and freight service, including tourist trips to nearby Manitou Mountain.

By 1932, the livery was gone. A building was constructed on the site of the old livery and housed Western Auto in the early 1960s (after its location on N. 2nd) and later a laundry. The building has a new veneer.

Point to the east on Main—

Constructed between 1924 and 1932, the Ozark Ice Company was located near the current site of the county jail. The building was torn down about 1968.

South side of the square, going east to west (200 block of W. Main)

Parking lot at SW corner S. 2nd & W. Main—

By 1886, a two-story Italianate-style house at the corner served as Speer's Hotel (1886), the Gunter Hotel (1892), and the Commercial Hotel (1897 & 1904). About 1905, a two-story commercial building was constructed just to the west of the old house, and the two structures together became the Haberer ("Harber") Hotel. The hotel was demolished in the 1990s.

207 W. Main (Spectator)—

Built ca. 1930. Ozark's only newspaper today, The Spectator, was founded in 1911 by Reuben H. Burrow, who served as editor and publisher until 1940, when he turned it over to his son, Isham. During World War II, another son, Sadler Burrow, took it over, and Isham again became publisher after the war. In 1967 Orval Faubus and Francis Murray bought the paper. The paper has had a couple owners since then. Bob Bevil now owns it.

The next three buildings were constructed after 1932, and their facades have been altered.

White concrete block building—this was the water department and fire station. They used to back the fire trucks into a little space on the front of the building that is now blocked-in.

Black building (Main Street Lounge)—Horace McKenzie’s Bar & Liquor Store, then Bob’s Lounge (same as Main Street Lounge).

Board-and-batten building—Herman D. Sales Dry Cleaners

Franklin County Assessor’s Office—this is a new building, but it is located on the site of a large, 2-story building that dated from at least 1880. By 1892 the second floor of the old building became the Franklin County Jail, and the jail remained here until 1914, when the limestone jail by the river was completed. The upstairs of this building was then used as a hotel (McIntyre Hotel).

In the mid-20th century, the old building on this corner housed Hopkins Photo Shop and Hopkins Welding Shop.

200 block of S. 3rd (by River Towne BBQ)

Historically, the 200 block of S. 3rd Street was more industrial in nature. There were small warehouses, blacksmith and carpenter shops, gristmills, cotton gins, and planing mills down here. In the late 19th century, the M. F. Greer Cotton Gin was located on the east side of this block (site of current parking lot across from River Towne). And at the same time, Greer had a planing mill (later turned into a gristmill) at the northwest corner of S. 3rd and Water Street (now River Street; mill was on site of present-day Speak Easy). Also at the turn of the 20th century, the Ozark Milling Company (gristmill and flour mill) was located at the southeast corner of S. 3rd and Water Street (where the old jail is today).

From the 1910s until at least the early 1930s, both sides of the 200 block of S. 3rd were used for a big wagon yard. People would park and do their shopping on the square.

In the mid-20th century, the following businesses were located on the west side of this block: Blanche’s Café, Faubus Dry Goods, Jack’s Pool Hall, and a blacksmith

shop (which later became Graham's Body Shop). Arkansas Valley Electric Co-op had a storage facility behind these businesses.

Walk east on River Street to Depot

Try to point out 1931 Ozark-Webb City Bridge over the Arkansas River. The large arch span was added in 1970 after completion of the McClellan-Kerr Arkansas River Navigation System (Ozark-Jeta Taylor Lock & Dam between Ozark and Altus was built 1965-69). The Ozark bridge is one of the few lighted bridges over the Arkansas River.

Franklin County Jail (NR-listed 6/23/1982)—

The Franklin County Jail was built in 1914 by local contractor Claude Talley using native limestone. The jail's design, reminiscent of an impenetrable fortress, features a Roman-style arch at the entrance and a crenelated parapet. In the early 20th century, the one-armed Franklin County Sheriff A. H. "Hub" Sadler and his family lived across the street from the jail and served as jailers, guarding and feeding the prisoners. The jail was in use until 1975, when a new jail was completed. The first floor of the old jail later housed Greg McKenzie's law office (are the upstairs cell blocks still intact?).

Duke's Welding Shop

River View Mini-Mall—was the Franklin County Co-op (Farmer's Cooperative)

NE corner 1st & River (203 S. 1st)—red brick—built ca. 1935. Was a wholesale warehouse of some sort. After that, it was an office for OG&E (Oklahoma Gas & Electric).

Iron Mountain Railroad Depot (NR-listed 6/11/1992)—

The Iron Mountain Railroad Depot was built in 1910-11 to replace an earlier wood-frame depot located further to the east. The Little Rock and Fort Smith Railroad came through Ozark in 1876, and by 1888 there were four passenger

trains daily. By 1909 the Little Rock and Fort Smith had been acquired by the St. Louis, Iron Mountain & Southern Railroad, and a new depot was constructed (present depot). The distinctive native limestone depot features Craftsman-style elements like exposed rafter tails and large, triangular brackets under the eaves. The Iron Mountain Railroad was acquired by Missouri Pacific in 1917 and operates today as Union Pacific.

Go inside Depot Museum for refreshments, courtesy of Main Street Ozark!!