

Sandwiching in History
Pulaski Heights Baptist Church
2200 Kavanaugh Blvd., Little Rock
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By: Rachel Silva



Original Sanctuary & Education Building, ca. 1939



Original Sanctuary & 1951 Sanctuary, 2013

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 Pulaski Heights Baptist Church! I’d like to thank Pulaski Heights Baptist for allowing us to tour their beautiful church, and I especially want to recognize Edwina Mann, Rev. Jim Munns, and Arrall Austin for their help with today’s presentation.

Pulaski Heights Baptist Church is located in the Hillcrest Historic District, which was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1990 with a 1992 amendment. The district is roughly bounded by Markham on the south, Woodrow on the east, N. Lookout on the north, and Harrison on the west.

The congregation of PHBC just celebrated its centennial anniversary during the weekend of August 23-25. However, the church’s physical plant has evolved over

time to include the buildings we see today (in other words, the entire church complex is not 100 years old).

Pulaski Heights

Little Rock incorporated as a town in 1831 and as a city in 1835. The Original City of Little Rock was bounded on the north by the Arkansas River, on the east by the Quapaw Line (roughly modern-day Commerce Street), on the south by Wright Avenue, and on the west by Pulaski Street. After the Civil War, Little Rock experienced rapid population growth and a significant building boom. Additions were platted immediately to the south, east, and west of the Original City. In 1871 the Memphis & Little Rock Railroad became the first operating railroad in the state. Just two years later, the Cairo & Fulton line was completed to Little Rock, bringing the first train from St. Louis. The railroads brought added prosperity, but the nationwide financial panic of 1873 slowed residential and economic development. Between 1874 and 1876, no additions were platted. Although Little Rock didn't grow much in the 1870s, between 1880 and 1890 the city's population exhibited a 97 percent increase (from 13,138 to 25,874).

The city continued to grow at an impressive rate and eventually had to move further westward into the foothills of the Ouachita Mountains. By the 1890s much of the flat delta land immediately surrounding the Original City was subdivided and developed. The city couldn't expand to the north because of the Arkansas River, couldn't go east because of the river's floodplain downstream, and couldn't go south because of Fourche Bayou. Thus, Little Rock's unique geographical situation, coupled with the extension of the streetcar line in the early twentieth century, created the opportunity for the city's first real suburb in the hilly region northwest of downtown.

In January 1890 Henry Franklin Auten and Edgar Eugene Moss, attorneys from St. Johns, Michigan, arrived in Little Rock. Auten and Moss opened a law office in Little Rock and investigated the potential for real estate development. After securing contributions from Michigan and Little Rock investors, in 1891 Auten and

Moss incorporated the Pulaski Heights Land Company in order to purchase 800 acres west of downtown Little Rock. In November 1892 the first ten blocks of the Pulaski Heights Addition were platted, but the lack of a good transportation route plagued developers, and only eight families built homes there in the 1890s.

In the fall of 1903, the Little Rock Traction and Electric Railway Company sent the first streetcars into Pulaski Heights. From downtown Little Rock, streetcar lines headed west on both Markham and Capitol and then turned onto Victory Street, where they converged and turned west on Third to head to the Heights. The streetcar line continued west on Third until it became W. Markham and then veered off on Prospect Avenue (now Kavanaugh Blvd.) at Stiff's Station (so named because it was a streetcar stop for the residents of the Stiff Addition). Prospect Ave./Kavanaugh Blvd. meandered through the neighborhood following the path of least resistance to avoid steep grades for the streetcars. With easier access provided by the streetcar line, lots sold quickly and new additions were platted in the Heights.

[The first Pulaski Heights Addition encompassed 10 blocks along Prospect Avenue (now Kavanaugh) between Lee and Hillcrest. The eastern boundary was Oak Street, and the western boundary was Walnut (platted 1892). The western boundary was extended in 1904 to Harrison Street.]

By 1903 the Country Club of Little Rock purchased its current site at the far northeastern edge of Pulaski Heights and boasted 125 members as well as a \$12,000 clubhouse, golf course, and tennis courts. The following year, the Mountain Park Land Company leased a 160-acre tract bounded by Hays Street (now University), Prospect Avenue (now Kavanaugh), Taylor Street, and undeveloped forest to the streetcar company for the construction of a park at the western end of the streetcar line. Forest Park contained an auditorium, bandstand, carnival rides, dance hall, and gardens.

Pulaski Heights developers used the streetcar, country club, and park as advertising points to attract prospective buyers, and it worked. Lots sold quickly in the Heights, and in order to finance public improvements—namely the paving of

streets and sidewalk construction—on August 1, 1905, the Town of Pulaski Heights was incorporated with a population of between 300 and 400 people. Interestingly, the Town of Pulaski Heights was bounded by Lee Avenue, McKinley St., Brentwood St., and the Arkansas River. This explains why most north-south streets jog at Lee Avenue—streets north of Lee were part of Pulaski Heights, and streets south of Lee were part of Little Rock. And originally, street names were different on either side of Lee, but some consistency was established after 1916. So although many people consider the area between Lee and Markham to be part of the Hillcrest/Heights neighborhood, it was never part of the original Pulaski Heights.

About 1911 the Pulaski Heights Land Company published a pamphlet called “Beautiful Pulaski Heights,” which listed amenities like the streetcar, parks, country club, waterworks, sewer, proximity to three state institutions (the state capitol, state hospital, and deaf school), Pulaski Heights school, electricity, river views, healthy living, and pure air and water. The pamphlet made strong appeals to readers, asking them, “Why live in the slums of the city or in the miasma of the flats when you can own a home on the Heights for half the cost?” The promotional material concluded with a list of eighteen reasons to invest in Pulaski Heights. Number sixteen read, “Because you are not a chump.”

However, the success of Pulaski Heights contributed to its demise as a town. In 1916 the quickly expanding, and largely affluent, suburb was annexed by Little Rock. As promised before consolidation, Little Rock constructed a fire station in the Heights and also installed fire hydrants and street lights. Between 1920 and 1930, nine additions were platted in the Heights, securing its status as one of Little Rock’s premier neighborhoods.

Prospect Avenue was renamed Kavanaugh Blvd. in 1936 in honor of William Marmaduke Kavanaugh, who served as managing editor of the *Arkansas Gazette*, Pulaski County Sheriff, Pulaski County Judge, briefly as U.S. Senator (after death of Jeff Davis), and was heavily involved in civic, political, and social affairs. While

-serving as judge (ca. 1900), Kavanaugh supported the county's construction of a road to Pulaski Heights, greatly aiding the area's development.

Allsopp Park—In 1906 a suspension footbridge was built across the south ravine of Allsopp Park to provide the residents of the Hillcrest Addition (one of many additions throughout the Heights—platted in 1906—finger-shaped area bounded by Hillcrest Ave. and North and South Lookout Road) with easier access to a streetcar stop on Kavanaugh. All that remains are the concrete bridge piers.

And only in fairly recent memory (30-odd years) did people refer to the oldest section of Pulaski Heights as “Hillcrest” after the nearby Hillcrest Addition.

In 1925 newspaperman, book collector, and bookstore owner Frederick William Allsopp built a house that overlooked the ravine south of the Hillcrest Addition. In 1927, probably after some encouragement from Allsopp, the City of Little Rock acquired the undeveloped ravines in Pulaski Heights for use as a public park (150 acres). In 1931 Allsopp commissioned landscape architect John Nolen from Cambridge, Massachusetts, to design a master plan for the park. However, Nolen lacked detailed knowledge of the area's topography, so his plan could not be implemented on the steep hillsides and ravines. Allsopp Park was named in honor of Fred Allsopp and was dedicated in 1931 (Allsopp died in 1946).

The Pulaski Heights streetcar stopped running in 1947. I've been told that the site of the parking lot behind PHBC was just a hill with a steep grade down into Allsopp Park. In the late 1950s, the City pulled up the streetcar tracks and brick street pavers along Kavanaugh and dumped them behind the church to raise the grade. The parking lot was paved on top of the in-fill material and is owned by the City for access to Allsopp Park, but the church helps maintain the lot.

History of PHBC

About 1906 a Congregational Church building was constructed on the north side of Prospect Avenue (Kavanaugh) between Cedar and Elm streets. Mrs. H. F. Auten, wife of Pulaski Heights developer Henry Franklin Auten, was a member of

the Congregational Church and had a considerable influence on the building's design. She was very impressed by Classical architecture on a trip to Europe and insisted that the church building reflect that style. The Congregational Church building also served as a meeting place for the Pulaski Heights Town Council and as a town assembly hall in the early years (before the Morgan Smith Building was constructed at Kavanaugh & Beechwood in 1915?).

On February 23, 1912, the Pulaski Heights Baptist Ladies' Aid Society was organized by Mrs. C. L. Durrett, Mrs. C. B. Maxwell, Mrs. A. Westbrook, and Mrs. T. G. McKenzie with the goal of starting a Baptist church in the Heights. Bible study and prayer meetings were held in the members' homes, and the women sold aprons and other items to raise money for their cause. By May they invited the secretary of the Baptist State Mission Board to meet with them. A committee was soon formed to look at possible lots for purchase. A down payment of \$70, raised by the Ladies' Society, was made for three lots on Prospect (Kavanaugh) between Rose and Walnut. On August 7, 1913, Dr. John T. Christian, secretary of the Arkansas State Mission Board assisted the ladies and called a meeting of people interested in establishing a Baptist church in the area. They assembled in the Congregational Church building. Soon after their meeting, the Congregational Church building and an adjacent gymnasium were offered for sale, and the Baptist group purchased the property for \$24,000 with the help of a \$4,000 loan from the State Mission Board. On August 30, 1913, the Pulaski Heights Baptist Church was organized with 45 charter members. Dr. E. P. J. Garrott was the first pastor.

The gymnasium, which was located to the north (behind) the church building, and the swimming pool, which was located just to the east of the church, were open to the public. A 1917 PHBC newsletter advertised 20 swim sessions for \$1.50 with separate hours for male and female bathers.

In 1935 the church purchased the lot to the west of the sanctuary for an education building, which opened in 1939. The buff brick education building was designed by the Little Rock architectural firm of Erhart & Eichenbaum in a restrained version of the Colonial Revival style with a symmetrical façade, multi-

pane windows, and a simple parapet at the front entrance. The education building housed the pastor's office and an administrative area on the top floor (street level) and four Sunday School classrooms on the first floor (below grade).

In April 1942 Dr. W. Harold Hicks became pastor of PHBC, and under his leadership, the church grew and planned to construct a new sanctuary. However, these plans were delayed until after World War II. In 1947 a special meeting was called to decide whether the church should remain at the same location or build at another site. The congregation decided to stay at the same location and purchased the lot at the northwest corner of Kavanaugh and Cedar (as you can see from the Sanborn maps, a house was located on that site until about 1940).

On January 1, 1950, ground was broken for a new sanctuary. It was completed in 1951 at an estimated cost of \$400,000 (including the site, building, and furnishings). The new building was designed by the Little Rock architectural firm of McAninch & Mahnker in the Colonial Revival style featuring a triangular pediment with dentils at the cornice supported by four fluted, Ionic columns and a smaller front door surround crowned by a broken pediment. The sanctuary's east and west elevations feature large, arched windows with keystones. The original church building later became a recreation building, with the old sanctuary converted into a gymnasium and the lower floor used as a small dining area for the day school.

For several years after the completion of the 1951 sanctuary, the Chambers-Cobb House at 2208 Kavanaugh (see Sanborn) was located in between the church's new and old buildings. Miss Erle Chambers and her mother were early arrivals to the Heights and probably built their home about 1903. It was later occupied by an elderly widow named Nellie Cobb and her four adult children—Clara, Clifton, Anna, and Marian. In 1954 the youngest daughter, Marian Cobb, sold the property to the church for \$22,500.

In 1963 the church made plans to construct a 3-story addition to connect the 1951 building to the original sanctuary and education building. The new education

addition, which included dining and recreation rooms, was completed in 1967 and was designed by Little Rock architect (and church member) Scott Farrell (another version says Ginocchio-Cromwell & Associates??). In 1968 the PHBC Day School was founded and occupied the 1939 education building.

In 1988 church members Leon and Frances Fields purchased the building across the street at Woodlawn and Kavanaugh, which had previously housed Dr. John McCullough Smith's clinic, and donated it to the church. Now known as the Fields Center, it was first used to house the Singles Ministry program and currently houses families of hospitalized patients who need a temporary local residence.

The most recent renovations to the PHBC complex were completed in 1993 and included some renovations to the sanctuary and Hicks Hall (dining room), as well as alterations to the 1960s education building, including the elevator, atrium, and prayer room (and this required them to extend the front façade of that addition toward Kavanaugh). The 1990s renovation was done by the Little Rock architectural firm of Lewis, Odom, Elliott, and Studer (Studer was a church member).

In 1996 Dr. Randy Hyde became pastor of PHBC and continues to lead the church. One of the church's new outreach ministries is the Hillcrest Farmer's Market, which started in 2011 with the help of a grant from the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. The market is open year-round on Saturday mornings (inside when it's cold), and the fall/winter hours are 8:00 a.m. until noon.

The present physical plant consists of five buildings: the 1951 sanctuary, office, and classroom building; the 1960s education/fellowship hall building; the recreation building (the old sanctuary); the children's building/day school (the 1939 education building); and the Fields Center across the street.

A couple weekends ago, Pulaski Heights Baptist Church celebrated its centennial anniversary and remains the only church on Kavanaugh.

Details

- 1951 sanctuary originally had a slate roof, which was replaced in 2011 with metal. The steeple has a copper roof.
- Cobalt glass in 1951 sanctuary windows
- The two recessed arches on the west side wall were originally windows, but the matching arches on the east side were never open (maybe to prevent bright light from shining in on the pulpit on a Sunday morning??).
- Original plaster work and barrel ceiling in sanctuary
- They did a renovation of the sanctuary in 1967-68 and added a moveable pulpit and chancel rail, two Colonial Williamsburg reproduction chandeliers as well as reproduction wall sconces, and installed glass panels in the vestibule doors (so you wouldn't get hit in the face with a door).
- The pipe organ was installed in 1967 and is manufactured by Kasavant Bros. out of St. Hysinth, Quebec, Canada. The organ was built in Canada according to the church's specifications, then dismantled and every piece numbered and shipped to LR, where the technicians reassembled it on site.
- Just replastered the front arches to allow for A/V and redid the mural behind the baptistery—tile Apostle's Cross.

Questions?

Next tour is October 4 at Lakewood Park in NLR.

- Go out through vestibule and head downstairs...
- Hicks Hall (dining room named after Rev. Hicks in 1987; he served as pastor from 1942 until 1971)