

## **Slide 1 Intro**

### **Slide 2 – School at Arkadelphia**

The Arkansas School for the Blind has been here on Markham since 1939 but it has a very long history in the state.

The first organized effort in Arkansas to educate the blind was based in Clarksville in 1850. blind Methodist minister James Chaplain attempted to provide for the education of blind children but this only lasted four or five months because he received no assistance and little financial support.

By 1859 a more successful effort at instituting a blind school emerged in Arkadelphia. Blind Baptist minister Reverend Haucke gained the support of several prominent men in town who called a public meeting in 1858 to form an association.

The group launched the Arkansas Institute for the Education of the Blind with five students. The institute was incorporated by legislative act and the men of the association were named trustees with Haucke as superintendent; however there was no financial assistance provided.

So The institute rented a private home on the current grounds of Ouachita Baptist University in the location of the present north dormitory.

a private subscription of \$1,600 provided the only funds until a legislative appropriation came through in 1861.

At that point Reverend Haucke resigned and Professor Otis Patten from the Kentucky Institute for the Blind took over. Patten's emphasis was that the school should not be thought of as an asylum but rather, in his words, a place where all blind children could lead lives of joyous activity and usefulness.

AT this point the enrollment was 3 students but by the first biennial report in 1860 there were 10 students being offered a curriculum that included typical classes in grammar, reading and math as well as limited music instruction.

Girls were also instructed in sewing, knitting and bead work while the boys learned to make mattresses, brushes and cork brooms

Of course by 1863 the situation became unstable in Arkadelphia because of the Civil War.

Before the war appropriations from the state were paid in gold but it was not sufficient to purchase provisions during the war and paper money had depreciated. The institute was able to hold on until September of 1863 because they had a monopoly on the broom trade and they had enough bead wire to make more than 1,000 brooms until that time.

In September Price's army fell back to Arkadelphia and the State Treasury moved to Washington, which meant the school was further cut off from means of state support.

They only had 200\$ of Confederate money left to buy supplies for the winter, beef prices had risen because it was needed for the soldiers and groceries purchased before the war were giving out.

At that point the trustees were authorized to close the school and send students home.

After the war institution furniture and other property was sold to settle debts and by 1867 they had reopened with Patten as superintendent. The 1868 biennial report of the institute states that at that time the State of Arkansas bought the residence of Dr. James K. Rogers in Arkadelphia and the institute briefly moved from the original home they had occupied.

The school suffered from overcrowding and insufficient facilities, but This was only a portion of the issues with the institute. Patten advocated to the General Assembly that the school be moved to Little Rock because many did not know where Arkadelphia was and it was extremely difficult to get there. Roads were rough and The Ouachita River provided access only at certain times of the year.

He reported that it took nearly a month to get blind students to the school from other counties by ox wagon. The area was so rough they had to walk for miles. there was nowhere to lodge so they had to camp in the woods.

One third of the pupils stayed at the school during vacation because no one could send for them and it was unlikely they could get back. Those students who went home said they gave up hope of returning until the school moved to Little Rock.

Using his powers of persuasion, Patten reported to the legislature that various Arkansas steamers offered to take pupils to Little Rock for free or at reduced fares, as did the Memphis and LR Railroad.

Hearing his pleas, in July, 1868 the legislature passed an Act approving the move of the institute to Little Rock.

The grounds in Arkadelphia were sold and all proceeds were used for the rental and purchase of property in the area of 18<sup>th</sup> and Spring sts.

In November 1868, Patten and 30 pupils took a few textbooks and some equipment to their new home.

### **Slide 3 Rosewood**

The trustees rented the home of Mrs. William Fulton called Rosewood, located one mile south of the State House and purchased 7 acres from her for future growth. It was described as being situated at the top of a rise on Center Street with the Capitol buildings in full view at one end and connected to it by a one mile avenue with sidewalks for the use of the students.

In keeping with the resistance to references to the school as an asylum, The campus was built for self-sufficiency with the ability to keep livestock, raise a garden and instruct the children in low-level maintenance labor.

**Slide 4 brick building**

In 1869 Major Samuel McCormick was contracted to build a three story brick building with mansard roof. The campus consisted of that building and four temporary wood buildings.

In 1877 the legislature passed an act to change the name of the school to the Arkansas School for the Blind.

**Slide 5 1885 building**

by 1884 Patten was reporting that the sleeping quarters of the boys and the school rooms were merely wooden shells composed of decaying planks and the buildings were complete fire traps. The professor's words that "the School was the oldest of our public institutions but instead of being treated as the first born, it has eaten the bread of orphanage" resonated with the legislature because in 1885 they appropriated money for the construction of permanent buildings.

Architect Benjamin J. Bartlett designed the new four-story brick building with two stories of porches for the Arkansas School for the Blind. It consisted of a large main building with onion domed clock tower and a pair of, two-story dormitory buildings appended to the central section on the north and south.

**Slide 6 up center Street**

The cornerstone was laid on the foundation of the new building by the Grand Lodge of Masons. The Masons marched up Center Street toward a crowd on the front lawn, where Grand master W.H.H. Clayton of Fort Smith officiated as items were placed in a tin box within the cornerstone and dignitaries delivered speeches.

**Slide 7 AA school**

In the late 1890s attention was turned to the care of the state's African American blind. Previously, the state had paid rent for apartments for black children. In 1889 the General Assembly appropriated money for a Two-story building for the

Colored Department of the Blind at 11<sup>th</sup> and Battery Streets with T.R. Ish as principal.

African American students lived and were educated in that building until 1949 when a brick International style building was constructed at 22<sup>nd</sup> and Madison. The building was also utilized to house African American deaf children. The school stood at that corner with alterations until very recently.

In 1965 the school on Markham was integrated and the state's African American blind and deaf children were educated here.

In the meantime the original school for the blind had grown through the years to include several other buildings at the site downtown but as early as 1918 Superintendent Brough was asking for a move to a more appropriate building. In 1921 Superintendent George Thornburgh was suggesting that the blind school be sold to purchase land and modern buildings.

The push for a new school reached an apex in 1937. It was felt that the Blind School was dilapidated and out of touch with the needs of education for the blind. The large building with ungraded floors, winding stairways and hallways were not built with the needs of the blind in mind and it was dangerous for the students.

In that year the legislature appropriated 150,000\$ for a new set of buildings on pastureland at the west end of the grounds for the School for the Deaf on Markham Street. An additional appropriation in 1939 and the use of Works Progress Administration labor and funds provided for the completion of two buildings at the new plant that year.

The original School for the Blind remained empty until the 1947 creation of the Governor's Mansion Commission. The Commission chose the site at 18<sup>th</sup> and Center for construction of the new mansion and the 1885 structure and associated buildings were destroyed.

### **Slide 8 Helen Keller**

The centerpoint of the new Markham Street campus was the Helen Keller Building, designed by H. Ray Burks. A three-story brick Colonial Revival structure housed administration offices, classrooms and an auditorium. Two story wings to the east and west of the central section provided dormitories for girls and boys. The auditorium has since been turned into a conference room and offices.

The building featured a full-height, gabled front porch reached by a split stair, stone drip molds over multi-paned windows, double leaf front door with fan light and sidelights and stone detail panels of primroses. A louvered cupola with clock face topped the building.

The floor plan was graduated so that students could determine when they were passing from the dormitories to the administration building. Water fountains were placed in recesses in the walls and a small slope was built into the floor to tell students when they were approaching the stairs leading to and from the stage.

### **Slide 9 Infirmary**

The flat-roofed, one-story Infirmary to the north of the Helen Keller Building, was also built in the Colonial Revival style with WPA funds in 1939 with a central front door featuring heavy surround and recessed side panels. Double-hung windows featured stone drip molds with keystones and A stone medallion of a caduceus was placed above the front door.

This is one of the buildings you are welcome to tour in addition to the first floor of the Helen Keller Building.

### **Slide 10 Telegraph**

The completion of the first units at the campus was cause for celebration. The Administration building's namesake, Helen Keller was invited to the laying of the cornerstone in the fall of 1939. The Little Rock Lions Club covered all expenses to

bring Ms. Keller and her traveling companion Polly Thompson to Little Rock for the dedication on October 9.

### **Slide 13 dedication**

Helen Keller arrived in Little Rock early, conducted an interview with the newspaper and then retired to her room at the Albert Pike Hotel until just before she was scheduled to speak at 3:30.

The ceremony began at 2:00 and on hand were the Little Rock High School band, school for the blind superintendent, F.E. Davis, Arkansas Governor Carl Bailey, the national head of the WPA, Colonel F.C. Harrington, the state administrator of the WPA Floyd Sharp, and other local dignitaries.

Hundreds of attendees took seats on the front lawn as speeches began on the front porch of the Helen Keller Building under gathering storm clouds.

### **Slide 12 cornerstone**

The cornerstone was laid by Grand Master of the Masonic Grand Lodge, C. Eugene Smith and items were placed within.

Rain threatened to break up the ceremony but Governor Bailey pleaded with the audience to stay and a rowdy group of spectators crowded into the auditorium.

Speaking through her interpreter, Ms. Keller appealed not for charity for the blind but for the opportunity to learn useful occupations and asked that the legislature continue to provide appropriations. She took questions and Immediately after the ceremony Ms. Keller left by train for retirement in Connecticut.

### **Slide 13 Industrial Building**

Further construction by The WPA included the 1940 addition of the Industrial Building, A one-story flat roofed brick building with minimal Colonial Revival details, it is used as the maintenance shop for the school today. In 1942, it was expanded with WPA funds to provide room for mattress assembly.

**Slide 14 Jim Hill**

the High School Girl's dormitory today known as the Jim Hill Cottage, also funded by the WPA and designed by architect Tom Harding, was completed in 1942. It was designed in a minimal Colonial Revival configuration, similar to the Industrial Building.

The building is currently used to house new parents of students and the birth to 3 year old program headquarters.

**Slide 15 Confederate Soldiers Home**

Additional construction did not occur until the Confederate Soldier's Home was built at the campus in 1954.

In 1889 the ex-confederate association of Arkansas was formed and a homestead in Sweet Home was purchased to house Civil War veterans, and eventually, widows and daughters of soldiers. In 1890 appropriations were provided for construction of a new home on the site, designed by McAllister and Harper of Little Rock.

**Slide 16 new Confederate home**

The home increasingly deteriorated through the years, becoming infested with bed bugs and posing a fire threat to the residents, so in the 1940s the board of trustees sold bauxite from the property to pay for a new building on the campus of the School for the Blind.

The deal was that the Confederate Home could have the property for its building if it would be turned over to the school when it was no longer needed as a home. In 1954 architectural firm, Trapp, Clippard and Phelps designed the new Confederate Soldier's Home in the Colonial Revival style with full height front porch on the two-story center section and stone drip molds over metal multi-pane double-hung windows. The building featured two, one-story angled wings and heavy stone cornices of modillions.



By 1953 the residents were mostly daughters of Confederate veterans and only a handful of widows. While the new home was being built the remainder of the residents were housed at the hospital at Camp Robinson.

In 1963 so few patients remained that the board transferred the title to the school and those ladies left were placed in nursing homes. At that time, 15 multi-handicapped students received instruction in the building. In 1971 an annex was built to the rear for classrooms.

### **Slide 17 sign.**

An act of the legislature decreed that the sign for the Confederate Soldiers Home, which came from the building at Sweet Home, will forever and eternally be displayed at the campus.

And we are able to tour the first floor of this building today as well.

### **Slide 18 residence, Pruitt**

In 1958 the Superintendent's Residence in the Ranch style and boy's dormitory Pruitt Hall, featuring a recessed entrance and stone screening, were built.

### **Slide 19 Gymnasium**

The original Colonial Revival gymnasium was also built that year, but by 1979 it was destroyed for the new Hartman Gym.

### **Slide 20 Shults House**

The 1970s was another period of growth with the construction of the Neo-Colonial Revival Shults House in 1971, which we are allowed to tour.

Huckabee Hall, originally known as the Guy Smith Building, was built to the west of the Helen Keller Building in 1975. It was built for vocational space and it also housed a boy's dormitory. It was renamed Huckabee Hall in the 1980s. And in 1977 the Woolly Fine Arts Building was constructed to the east of Huckabee Hall.

**Slide 21 lion**

Be sure to take a look at historic photographs and items displayed in the conference room in the Helen Keller Building. Also, note the 1906 pipe organ moved from the original building here to the Fine Arts Building, original masonic cornerstone from the 1885 building in front of Helen Keller, as well as the 1988 lion sculpture by Cathy Ayres Zimmerman and featuring tiles handmade by students, also in front of Helen Keller.

**Slide 22 skating rink**

And lastly, note the roller rink, built for the girls on the east side of Helen Keller, which was turned into an herb garden in 1965, as well as the cemetery in the circle to the east that contains unknown burials of students and perhaps faculty.

**Slide 23 campus**