



**ARKANSAS HISTORIC
PRESERVATION PROGRAM**

**Sandwiching in History Tour
Isaac Homard House
1217 W. 3rd Street, Little Rock**

February 2, 2024

By Ashley Sides

Special thanks to: Kyle Ludwig / Ludwig Law Firm and Laura Winning



*The Isaac Homard House
Photo by Ashley Sides, 2023*

Welcome and Intro

ASHLEY SIDES:

Hello everybody! Welcome to the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program's first Sandwiching in History tour of the 2024 season. And welcome to the historic Isaac Homard House. My name is Ashley Sides. I'm the preservation outreach coordinator for the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, and it's my pleasure to introduce you to this icon of West Third Street.

You may have driven by this striking property for years and wondered what it looks like inside. You might have seen it a few years ago looking pitiful after it suffered major damage from a fire. Thankfully, this beautiful house has been fully repaired and continues to stand as a piece of twentieth-century history.

I want to thank the building's owner, Kyle Ludwig with the Ludwig Law Firm, for graciously allowing us to tour this property. And I want to thank Laura Winning of Whodunit Holdings, LLC, the former owner and the one who undertook the rehabilitation project, for being willing to tell us about the process of getting this house to look like it does today.

First, I'll go over the history and the architecture of the Homard House, then Laura and Kyle will tell us about their experiences with the property, and finally Amy Jones will tell us about the role of the Capitol Zoning District Commission and how it works with property owners to help preserve the historic fabric of this district. And then we'll get to look around at the house. There's a great view of the Capitol from the back room upstairs!

History of the Homard House

As is traditional, this house is named for its original owner. Isaac Homard and Nellie Van Campen were from Ohio. They married in 1890 and shortly after moved to Little Rock. By 1893, Isaac was working as a machinist for the Iron Mountain Railway. In 1895, they had a son, whom they named Benjamin Van Campen Homard (or some variation of that). He usually went by Van.

It was an exciting time to live in Little Rock. They called it the Gilded Age. The city was in the midst of a population and development boom that had started after the Civil War. Railroads were expanding throughout the state, bringing in commerce. New neighborhoods were being developed. Tram service provided a modern alternative to horse-and-buggy, especially when electric streetcars replaced mule-drawn cars in 1891. Electric utility service, cobblestone pavement, and a city sewer system were still new innovations less than a decade old when the Homards arrived in Little Rock.

The city was outgrowing some of its earlier facilities, and as the twentieth century opened, a flurry of new building took place. Offices downtown, like the Old Post Office, City Hall, and the Pulaski County Courthouse were being expanded or replaced with bigger and better ones. Commercial buildings were coming into a new era of glory with Little Rock's first skyscrapers. Over here in the vicinity of where we are now, a beautiful new brick Union Station replaced the earlier wooden train depot. And most notable of all, between 1899 and 1915, a grand new state capitol building was slowly coming into being.

The blocks around Union Station, where Isaac Homard must have worked, were inhabited by a high concentration of railroad employees and businesses that served them. The district was known as Railroad Call, because when a train was expected, the railroad would send messengers around to call the crew members in. The Homard family lived in various homes in the blocks around the station over the years.

In 1902, they began construction on this new house on Third Street, in what it would seem was quickly becoming an attractive location. Mere blocks away no longer stood the state penitentiary, but rather the construction site of the new Arkansas State Capitol. Meanwhile, as the Homards' house and the State Capitol were being built, Third Street went from being a dead end at the railroad tracks to being a gateway to westward expansion when the viaduct was built over the tracks. Streetcar service was even extended out across the viaduct to Pulaski Heights, which was still an independent village at the time.

The Homards are thought to have hired architect Charles L. Thompson to design the house. Thompson was one of the most prominent and prolific architects in Little Rock in the early 20th century. Isaac left the details to Nellie. She had expensive taste and big dreams, but Isaac—who by now was an engineer with the Iron Mountain Railway—did not have the income to support what she had in mind. The plans had to be downsized multiple times. Three stories became two. The full basement with a wine cellar became a partial basement. And costs were apparently cut in other ways as well. The large one-over-one glass panes on the east elevation, for example, would have been pricey. Using smaller panes in a twelve-over-one configuration on the west elevation could have offered some savings. Still, it was an expensive house and they struggled to pay the mortgage.

The house is said to have been completed in 1905, and the Homards probably moved in shortly after, although the city directory gives an adjacent address until 1907 or 1908.¹ Apparently, they had moved next door to 1213 W. 3rd (to a house that no longer exists) around 1903 to supervise the construction.

The house was large, and the Homard family was small. Van married in 1916 and moved out around that time. Isaac and Nellie took in boarders; there were two young ladies lodging there in 1920 at least.

¹ The 1906 Little Rock City Directory listing still has them at 1213 W. 3rd, and the 1907 directory listing gives their address as 1215 W. 3rd, before the 1908 directory finally has them at 1217 W. 3rd. The 1215 address may have been an anomaly, as there does not seem to have been a house with that address, so it's possible that the 1907 directory reflects the Homards already living in their new house, later designated 1217. Perhaps there was mixed information about the address in the first couple of years after the house was initially built.

Nellie passed away in 1926 at the age of 57. She had lived here about 20 years. Van, now in his 30s, had gotten divorced the year before, and he moved back into the home with his father, and that's how they closed out the 1920s.

Around 1930, Van married a woman named Josie, and Isaac moved to the house next door and transferred the title of this house to his son. It may have been at this time that Isaac married again, to a woman named Zadie at Tuckerman in Jackson County, but he continued to call the adjacent house at 1213 W. 3rd his home until around 1935, and then he lived at Tuckerman. Isaac was a railroad man to the end; he died of diabetes at the Missouri Pacific Hospital in Little Rock in 1941.

Although Van and Josie continued to live at 1217 W. 3rd until at least 1944, they were listed as renters in the 1940 census. They are said to have lost ownership of the home to foreclosure during the Great Depression.

The house was bought by Thomas and Nell Spain. Thomas was a fellow locomotive engineer at MoPac; he probably knew Isaac. It may be reading too much into it, but it's tempting to think that the Spains, who lived in North Little Rock, bought this house in order to let the Homards continue living there.

After Van and Josie moved out in the mid-1940s, the Spains did make this their home and lived here into the mid-1950s, while continuing to lodge boarders upstairs. The second story was divided into several apartments, and in the postwar period, there was a great demand for housing, especially by railroad workers and soldiers' families stationed near Little Rock. Thomas Spain died in 1955. Nell Spain lost the house to foreclosure, and it was bought in 1956 by Andrew and Lillian Hanks. Nell moved to 16th Street and the Hankses moved into this house at 1217 W. 3rd.

Andrew, at age 78, and Lillian, aged 47, had been married to each other for 9 years, each having been previously married. They were raising Lillian's 16-year-old son, William, from her previous marriage. Andrew and Lillian operated the White Kitchen Café during the 1950s and 1960s, which was located for much of that time in the Terminal Hotel at the corner of West Markham and Victory Street, right across from Union Station.

Andrew Hanks died in 1968 at the age of 90. The Navy Department helped pay the mortgage on the house because Andrew had been a veteran. Lillian continued to live in this house for another four decades, until her death in 2007. Think about that: this was Lillian Hanks's home for 51 years. Her son, William, then lived here until selling it in 2015.

If you lived around here then, you may remember what this house looked like in 2015. Windows boarded up, soot marks streaking the walls and eaves above the windows and back

porch. In December 2013, the house had suffered a devastating fire. Thought to have been sparked by faulty wiring, the fire severely damaged the rear two-story porch along with surface areas throughout the interior —walls, ceilings, wood features. The back rooms were essentially gutted. Anything that wasn't charred was coated in soot.

The City of Little Rock cited the property owner in June 2014. It was put up for sale but couldn't find a buyer at the listed price point. In December 2014, the city issued a warning notice to repair the house or demolish it. Thankfully, in April 2015, after the asking price was cut in half, the Homard House was finally sold to someone who could still see a future for it.

Laura Winning with Whodunit Holdings is that person, and in a minute, she's going to tell us about the challenging process of restoring this beautiful house. It was a labor of love. But before I turn it over to her, I'd like us to take a few minutes to take a closer look at the architecture and better appreciate what we have here.

Let's step out to the front yard.

Architecture

The Isaac Homard House was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2017 with local significance for its architecture. It is an excellent example of the Neoclassical style in Little Rock.

The turn of the century saw a rise in the popularity of the Classical Revival style. Little Rock has a few other similar houses dating to this period. The Gibb-Alzheimer House on Arch Street, which is a contemporary with the Homard House, has a similar profile with a full-façade, colonnaded porch at the street-facing gable end. Arkansas was also represented at the 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis by an elaborate Neoclassical building. Charles L. Thompson, who is thought to have designed the Homard House, designed another house in 1908 on Arch Street called the Marshall House that has a similar two-story, Greek-temple-like porch.

A house like this made a statement. By contrast, nearby blocks of Railroad Call contained humble one-story wood shotgun houses. The Homard House is also wood framed, but is clad with brick veneer, which was not as common at that time in Little Rock.

The front façade is dominated by this two-story, full-front porch with gable roof supported by four two-story columns. They are Roman Doric columns, fluted, with simple bases and capitals, and are made of cypress wood, which makes them extremely precious. The gable end, or pediment, is covered in blue slate and has an elaborate carved wood design featuring lily stalks and an obelisk draped with a wreath.

The front entrance is very ornate. It is flanked by fluted wood pilasters with Ionic capitals topped by a wood pediment decorated with floral motifs, wood moldings, and a keystone. The wood door has thirty-five glass panes and is surrounded by sidelights and a transom that have eight panes each.

The rear elevation used to have a two-story, wood-frame porch that was enclosed by a lattice on the second story. The 2013 fire destroyed that porch. When the house was rehabilitated in 2015-2016, it was converted from a residence into an office building, so that old back porch area was rebuilt as a fully enclosed addition, with a conference room on the second floor that has a great view of the State Capitol. This rear addition occupies the same footprint as the former back porch.

The renovation work done to this house was extensive, and now it is even better shape than before the fire. In 2018, Preserve Arkansas, the nonprofit historic preservation advocacy group, recognized the significance of the rehabilitation work done here with an Award for Excellence in Preservation Through Restoration to Whodunit Holdings, LLC.

Now I'm going to let Whodunit Holdings' Laura Winning tell you what went into this restoration work!

Restoration

LAURA WINNING:

When you look at this great brick, this ironstone brick, it's very unusual. You probably haven't seen it anywhere else. When people come to try to pressure wash it, you're like, "No, you can't do that." They think that's mold.

Now when we were restoring it, we found poorly patched cracks in the masonry, because the house was settling. When you go upstairs, the second door to the right, if you walk across, you'll feel the slope. Well, that's only a minor slope compared to what it was. Because what you don't realize is we did as much work underneath the house—workers were climbing underneath the house to shore this up, including the porch, because when we purchased the house, we were in danger of losing that fourth column, because everything had sunk so much. And we had an estimate for these columns that was about \$18,000 apiece if we had to replace them. They are very solid.

So the previous owners, in all their wisdom, had gone all the way around the house to fill up the cracks from the settling with bathroom grout that was white. It was very beautiful, and very expensive to hand-remove and replace with sanded grout.

And the other things that I would say is when you look at these windows, these are the original windows. We did replace the glass with double-pane glass. This historic house is one of the most energy-efficient you will find. The windows in some historic houses were made to raise up and down. This front window one was not.

As you move in to the first room, the fire started on the back side. What you see is mostly intact from the windows to the hardware. The door hardware had been painted over and then the burn, so when the house sat empty, the people who were vandalizing the house didn't realize what was underneath there. So we had much of the original hardware left. But as I said, the windows, the double-pane glass was replaced. But the windows themselves are the original windows.

The staircases are original, except in areas where the burn was so bad that we had to replicate some of the items. The molding on the outside of this house is not very ornate, but it required us to buy special knives in order to replace it where it needed to.

So as you go in and take a look, understand that across the columns, all of the woodwork in there was removed, and we did a process called walnut blasting. Everything was covered in soot, including all of your wood in the walls and in the attic.

So does anyone know why two-by-fours are called two-by-fours? Exactly—They used to be two-by-fours. If you were to go in the basement, which we're not going to do today, you would find sister woodboards attached to the old wood to reinforce everything so that Kyle Ludwig and them can have heavy furniture and it doesn't come through the floor. However, the walnut blasting—when they blasted the two-by-fours—we still had enough wood so that they look like normal two-by-fours you buy now.

But that's how much they had to walnut blast off of the wood so that you didn't walk in today and smell the smoke. I personally had on a mask. We tried to save the plaster and anything that we could, but the house had batting in the walls. And so even on the pictures where you still see the wallpaper, there was no way to save it, because the house was burning from the inside of the walls out. People say, "Why walnut blasting?" It's less abrasive and less messy than sandblasting.

So when you go in the first room that entire fireplace is the original fireplace with the original tile. It's the only one that is totally original from the house.

The downstairs one, the blue fireplace, that room was really affected by the fire, so we had to use some white tile in the center. And if you look inside the white tile, you'll see that the blue tile doesn't really match up with what's on the fireplace. That's because the fire got so hot, it

burned the glaze on the tile next to the white tile. But we saved everything that we could. And the metal inserts are all the original metal inserts.

As you move upstairs, you'll see two other different fireplaces. One of those mantels was totally destroyed. We had no pictures. It's the one on the left, the brown fireplace. I called all over the country looking for things from the same time period. That was in a man's barn in Minnesota, and he sent it to us. But I still didn't have any tile. So I talked to a lady that was restoring a house in St. Louis, and the lighter tile near the fireplace insert, she had. But she had a friend who was restoring another house, and she sent me some too. So that's our smorgasbord fireplace, and it turned out to be one of my favorite ones.

The green room, that is the color from the pictures that we had. And that fireplace is modeled off of the blue fireplace downstairs, you'll see the similarity.

The blue one downstairs, part of it is the original fireplace, and part of it we had to build a section to replicate. So I hope you enjoy it.

As you go up the stairs, even on the tops of the columns, you can see the burn marks. And you can know that I personally was in there cleaning up the tiles and everything else. The tiles had been painted over and burned, so we didn't know they were blue!

Every project has unexpected pleasures and nightmares. As life would have it, we're about at the end of the project and I'm breathing a sigh of relief. And the excavators are out there digging, and I'm taking my mom to vote down the street.

And they call me, "Laura, the excavators just hit an antique cistern." And you can Google this in the paper and read about it. And as life would have it, they were having a cistern convention in Little Rock of all places.

And so they all come running to the Homard House with their suits and dresses on to see what we're digging up. And Rachel has many of the glass objects they found. It was actually a very large, beautiful cistern with a very large, beautiful bill for having to excavate everything in it—I think it was 29 dump trucks—in order to get a driveway that you can walk on and that was going to last for a lifetime. And so that's one of those unexpected things that really drove the cost of the house up. There's nothing you can do about it. You have two choices: cry—which I did on the lot behind the house—and finish—which we did. So enjoy the finished product.

The Importance of Historic Preservation

ASHLEY SIDES:

Kyle, can you tell us a little bit about what this house means to you and what interested you in it?

KYLE LUDWIG:

Hey guys, I'm Kyle Ludwig, and I'm blessed to currently own this beautiful house. I leased it for the last five years from Laura Winning and Whodunit Holdings and was able to purchase it from her in the last few months.

So, Laura did such a wonderful job restoring this place that we are able to use it as a law firm, fully functioning, every day. It is one of the most sound buildings that I've ever been in, and that's a huge credit to her. And also, there's a wonderful parking lot here that, long ago—assuming, since they found the cistern in it—that it was another home.

Thankfully, we have that now, so I can have clients and staff able to park here. That is a huge deal, as well as some of the other features of this home. You guys won't see by walking through it because they were able to preserve the historic look of it, but there's really fancy wiring behind all of these walls and everything works magically in this.

And you'll also see exit signs everywhere, you will see recessed lighting in here. It is operated as a commercial building, but it is fully restored as it was originally in 1905.

I want to thank Laura for all the wonderful work she did restoring this place, because without her vision, this place would not be here today.

Thank you all very much for coming.

The Capitol Zoning District Commission

ASHLEY SIDES:

I want you to hear from Amy Jones, who is the director of the Capitol Zoning District Commission. You can tell us about what you are doing.

AMY JONES:

I'm going to be very brief because I know we've all been out here a bit. Hi, I am Amy Jones. I do have the great honor and the great privilege of being the director of Capitol Zoning, which is a part of the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program. We do thank all of you for coming today. Ashley did a wonderful job; Ms. Winning did a wonderful job.

This is why we do what we do, because 100 years ago when this house stood, it was a beautiful part of Little Rock. And now 100 years from now, it's still going to be part of Little Rock. So that is to their credit, and we can share it with our children and grandchildren.

And that is what Capitol Zoning does, too. We are not in a historic district. We are a state government-run organization, so we preserve historical structures through zoning. But because of that reason, we preserve and are responsible for protecting more buildings, more homes than any other historic district in Arkansas. So if you live in the area, if you know Capitol Zoning, if you have questions, my staff and I are always here to help you.

But again, this is a beautiful gem and a big diamond part of the Capitol Zoning—part of this is in the Capitol Area of Capitol Zoning. We also have what we call the Mansion Area, which is across the highway. That is also part of Capitol Zoning. And so I'm just here just to be proud that this is just a beautiful part of our city and I'm very thankful to these people and all the work they did.

Time to Explore the House!

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