

Sandwiching In History Tour

Sappington-Reinman House, 1609 Center Street, Little Rock, Arkansas

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Introduction

Good afternoon, my name is Callie Williams, Education and Outreach Coordinator for the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program. Welcome to the August 2020 Sandwiching in History tour of the Sappington-Reinman House in downtown Little Rock. This house was originally built in the 1880s as a two-story Queen Anne style home. One of the earliest residents was Colonel George Washington Sappington a well-known lawyer and real-estate developer. This house was transformed into a Classical Revival style home around 1911 and in later decades, the second floor of the home was lost during a large fire. After the fire and while owned by Louis Reinman, the house was remodeled into single story Craftsman style residence.

Downtown Little Rock

What is known today as the Governor's Mansion Historic District in downtown Little Rock, Arkansas, was originally located along the southern edge of the original plat of the City of Little Rock. Throughout the early and mid-1800s, the city of little rock grew toward the south and east, with new residential areas spreading as the city's population continued to grow. After the

Civil War, the population of Little Rock grew from just over 3,500 in 1860 to over 12,000 in 1870 a nearly 4-fold increase.¹ As the city grew toward the south, several new churches and civic institutions were built along with new residential areas. One major institution was the Arkansas School for the Blind, which was moved from Arkadelphia to Little Rock in 1868. The school was located on property at the then end of Center Street, at the intersection of 18th and Center Street. In 1885, a large new brick building with a striking central tower topped by a tall faceted dome was started, with additional adjacent building built in following years. This large building, with its distinctive tower would serve as a landmark at the end of Center Street for many decades. This property would continue to be the home of the Arkansas school for the blind until the late 1930s, when the school was moved to west of the city to make way for a new Arkansas Governor's mansion. By the 1880s, the blocks surrounding the School for the Blind started to fill with new large high-style residences. This included a new house for Colonel George Washington Sappington along Center Street, just a block and a half south of the School for the Blind campus.

George Washington Sappington was born in Charleston, Virginia, and eventually moved to Florida at age 19 due to poor health. It was thought that he had consumption; however, he soon recovered and settled in Florida. He met his first wife, Winnifred B. Croom, while living in Florida and the two were married in April of 1851.² The couple would have one surviving child, Richard Bryan Sappington in 1852. Sadly, Winnifred Sappington died in 1856 after contracting cholera on a trip to Atlanta, Georgia. By 1860, G. W. Sappington and his young son were living near Gaines Landing in Franklin Township of Chicot County, Arkansas, where he was noted as a local planter with a relatively large land holding.³ George Sappington had purchased a plantation along the Mississippi River adjacent to property owned by Mrs. Virenda Pendleton, a widow.⁴ In October of 1865, Mrs. Virenda Alatheia *Gaines* Pendleton became the next Mrs. Sappington after she and G. W. Sappington were married in Chicot County.⁵ The couple, along with Virenda's daughter Aletha Early Pendleton and George's son Richard Sappington as well as George's sister Kate Sappington, would continue to live Chicot County until 1885.

In the 1860 Federal Slave Census, both Virenda Pendleton and George Sappington are noted as slave holders, with 114 people held in slavery on the two plantations, ranging in age from 4 to 65. When Virenda and George married in 1865, those people they held in bondage would have been already been officially emancipated during the course of the Civil War. In the 1880 census, only two black servants, named Amanda Hills (Hill) and John Whitey are documented as living

¹ James W. Bell, "Little Rock (Pulaski County)," Encyclopedia of Arkansas, Central Arkansas Library System, 6 August 2020, <https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/entries/little-rock-970/>.

² Ancestry.com, *Florida, County Marriage Records, 1823-1982* [database on-line].

³ U.S. Census Data, 1860.

⁴ Info summarized from "Arkansas Families: Glimpses of Yesterday Columns from the Arkansas Gazette" by Lucy Marion Reaves, Copyright 1995, 2000. Information found at findagrave.com

⁵ Ancestry.com, *Arkansas, County Marriages Index, 1837-1957* [database on-line].

with the Sappington family and several black families are noted in the surrounding area working as farmers. These local black families were most likely sharecroppers who worked farms on the land owned by the local white families.

At some point either before or during the Civil War, George Sappington became known as Colonel Sappington, although it is unclear how he earned the title Colonel. A few surviving military letters from the Civil War period note that he was referred to as Colonel Sappington during and possibly before the war, but it appears he was not serving for either side.⁶ Rather he seemed to be in business providing supplies. After the Civil War, Sappington helped to promote the need for levees along the Mississippi as well as promoted the growth of various railroads throughout southeast Arkansas in addition to his work as a planter.

It is unknown whether George Sappington commissioned or simply purchased a speculatively built house when he moved to Center Street in Little Rock in the mid-1880s. He and his family are noted in City Directories for the City of Little Rock living in the house on Center Street as early as 1886.⁷ Although he had training as a lawyer, George Sappington worked for many years as a real estate developer and an insurance agent, both in southeast Arkansas and in Little Rock. By 1887, he ran the G. W. Sappington & Company a real estate firm with an office on West Markham Street in downtown Little Rock. He often advertised various properties across the city for sale or rent in the local newspapers and had interest in many pieces of property across the county.

This earliest house on the property on Center Street was built as a wood framed residence with exterior wood siding in the then popular Queen-Anne style, now sometimes referred to as the Victorian Style. Unfortunately, only one partial photograph of the house is known to exist, showing a small portion of the corner of the house that was captured in an early image of the Ragland House next door.

In 1899, just a few weeks before Christmas, a small but dangerous fire in the house was reported in the local newspaper.⁸ Fortunately, it appeared that the fire did not severely damage the structure of the house. In 1903, George Sappington's second wife Virenda passed away after a long illness.⁹ George Sappington would continue to live in the home until his death in January of 1906. He had been working as normal the day before, but was taken suddenly ill and died at home in his sleep.¹⁰ After the death of George Sappington, the house was left as part of his

⁶ <http://www.civilwar.com/official-record/937-little-rock-part-ii/180617-1144-series-i-volume-xxii-ii-serial-33-little-rock-part-ii.html>.

⁷ Little Rock City Directories, 1886 – 1890. Note: The house number of the property changes from over the years including 1602, 1603, 1609, and 1611 depending on the year.

⁸ *Daily Arkansas Gazette*, 5 December 1899, p 5.

⁹ *Arkansas Democrat*, 18 August 1903, p 8, obit.

¹⁰ *Daily Arkansas Gazette*, 26 January 1906, p 2.

estate, and passed from his surviving sister Ellen Douglass to his granddaughter Winnie Bess Sappington in early 1906.

In October of 1907, Richard Sappington, George Sappington's only child passed away. Richard Sappington had worked for many years as a railroad conductor in southeast Arkansas, then served as a United States Marshal before working for the Little Rock Street Railway Company. Shortly after her father Richard's death, Winnie Bess Sappington married William Sexton Rawlings in November of 1907.¹¹ The couple would live at her father's house along 9th Street. From 1906 through 1911, the Sappington House on Center Street appears from surviving records to have been offered for sale several times and may have served periodically as a rental property.

In late 1911, Mr. and Mrs. Rawlings sold the house on Center Street to Mr. Louis Reinman who quickly hired W. D. Holtzman Jr. to prepare plans for a full remodel of the property. This may have been needed as the house was thought to have been damaged by fire yet again in 1910 or 1911. Mr. Holtzman was a prolific builder in Arkansas, including building several houses along the 500 block of 9th Street as well as the Desha County Courthouse which had been designed by Rome Harding in 1899. Holtzman seems to have been a competent designer as well as a building contractor. His plans for the renovations to the old Colonel Sappington house on Center Street included modernizing the home with new "Colonial Style" additions such as a large two-story classical porch supported by three tall columns with composite capitals, replacing what was likely an asymmetrical Queen Anne style front porch.¹² Also, the front yard was enclosed with brick retaining walls with exaggerated brick corner posts topped with ornamental stonework featuring stone spheres nestled in square brackets. A tall porte-cochere, or early form of a carport, was added to the side of the house. On the interior, the basement was "fitted up" most likely to make it suitable for maid's quarters or rental space. Also, the front parlor and dining room were renovated with interior wood ornamentation and large archways as well as a new front stairway and a den space with a massive new fireplace. This renovation may have also been when the large ornamental fireplace surround and mantle was added in the front parlor space. There was also a two-story garage with a servant's quarters above added at the rear of the property during this time.

Louis Reinman had arrived in Little Rock in ca. 1875 at a young age after moving to the United States from Germany with his family. He lived with his mother, father, and several siblings in the family home at 8th and Scott Streets for several years.¹³ Soon after arriving in Little Rock, he started a livery and stable business in partnership with his father, known as Reinman & Son. Louis Reinman soon built a good reputation for his business sense and ability to handle horses and mules, his riding ability was even noted in the local paper as he was often seen riding down

¹¹ "Weddings," *Daily Arkansas Gazette*, 10 Nov 1907, p 18.

¹² "To Remodel Old Residence," *Daily Arkansas Gazette*, 31 December 1911, Sunday, p 11.

¹³ "Death of Estimable Lady," *Daily Arkansas Gazette*, 27 November 1888, p 3.

Markham Street.¹⁴ By the early 1900s, he owned and operated several livery stables, many in partnership with other firms or businessmen, and a built a large business that provided mules wholesale to local farmers as well as to various international clients including the British and French governments.

Reinman's first mule barn was located at 3rd and Louisiana Streets. However, after several years in business tensions developed between Reinman and the owners of businesses located just one block over along Main Street. The business owners complained of the smell and noise associated with the mules and the issues caused when large numbers of mules were moved in or out of the stables. Eventually, Reinman was forced to move his wholesale mule business to North Little Rock along East Washington Avenue. According to his nephew, Fred Selz, who was interviewed by the Voices of Arkansas project about his work with mules in Arkansas, Louis Reinman was a well known and well respected horse and mule dealer in Arkansas and made a good living through his retail and wholesale businesses. Reinman ran several large livery businesses, including the Reinman & Wolfort stables and wholesale business, with Mr. Louis Wolfort.¹⁵ Reinman provided mules locally to farmers as well as to national and international buyers, including providing 3,800 mules to the British government for use during the Boer War in South Africa and sometimes selling over 100 mules a week to the British government for use in Europe during WWI. Reinman was also aware of the ongoing decline in the horse and livery stable business during the early 20th century due to the introduction and quick adoption of the automobile. By 1918, the Reinman & Wolfort business offered automobile and truck sales and services alongside their horses and mules.

Louis Reinman lived in the home with his family from 1911 until the late 1940s. His first wife, Helen Alston Reinman, whom he married in 1906 passed away in the family home on Center Street January of 1920.¹⁶ By 1925, Louis Reinman had remarried to Ms. Josephine Loeb. The couple continued to live at the house on Center Street for the next two decades.

During the late 1920s, another large fire destroyed much of the original second story of the house. After the fire, the roof was reconstructed at a lower height, which still allowed for some limited living space on the second floor. This new roof, however, drastically changed the exterior appearance of the house. In addition, new brick and stonework was added to the exterior of the house, transforming it to a more Craftsman Style appearance, which was popular at the time. Today, the house maintains this 1930s appearance, although the house's interior core is actually older than the two houses to the north. Josephine Reinman passed away in March of

¹⁴ *Arkansas Democrat*, 6 September 1889. Carolyn Gray LeMaster, *A Corner of the Tapestry*, p 124.

¹⁵ *Daily Arkansas Gazette*, 2 August 1915, p 6.

¹⁶ *Daily Arkansas Gazette*, 23 January 1920, p 16.

1940, and by the late 1940s, Louis Reiman moved to the Marion Hotel where his care was directed by his sister.¹⁷ He passed away at over 90s year of age in early 1951.

After being sold by Mr. Reinman in the late 1940s, the home then went through a succession of several owners, with the basements and sometimes upstairs rented out for additional income. In 1978, this house was listed in the National Register of Historic Places as a contributing resource in the Governor's Mansion Historic District. The house was most recently purchased by Mrs. and Mrs. Burkett (check), who have undertaken several large renovation and restoration projects at the property, including installing new HVAC units, a new roof, additional foundation support, a new upstairs configuration, as well as installing a new grand front staircase to replace the lost original front staircase. During their renovations, the Burketts found remnants of original painted plaster work and evidence of the original staircase as well as remnants of early tilework from what would have been an upstairs bathroom. The Burketts continue to work on their new home, with additional projects planned to continue to maintain the house as an interesting and important historic home in downtown Little Rock.

Thank you for joining us today. More information on all of the sites listed in the National Register of Historic Places in Arkansas can be found on the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program's website at arkansaspreservation.com. You can also check out videos of past tours on our YouTube Channel (Arkansas Preservation).

Our next Sandwiching in History tour will be of the Boyle Park Pavilion in Little Rock. This tour will take place as a virtual tour, premiering on our Facebook page on Friday, September 4th at Noon. Please check our Facebook page and our website at arkansaspreservation.com for the most up to date information on our tours and programs. We will continue to provide Virtual Tours until it is safe to return to in person tours in the future.

¹⁷ Interview with Fred Selz (Selz_960708), "Voices of Arkansas Project," Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Central Arkansas Library System, July 1996.

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