

**Sandwiching in History  
Street Building  
417-419 Main St., NLR  
June 4, 2010  
By: Rachel Silva**



### **Intro**

Hi, my name is Rachel Silva, and I work for the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program. Welcome to the June Sandwiching in History tour of the Street Building. I'd like to introduce and thank the owners, Larry and Joy Pennington, for allowing us to tour their building. Also need to thank the staff of the NLR History Commission—Sandra Taylor Smith, Cary Bradburn, and Monty Richard—for their help with the tour. The Street Building is a contributing resource in the Argenta Historic District, which was initially listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1993 and then expanded to its current boundaries in 2007.

### **History of Argenta**

The City of North Little Rock was called Argenta in its early days of settlement (the town of Argenta was surveyed & platted in 1866). The area was called Argenta because of the silver that was found at the nearby Kellogg mine (argentum is the Latin word for silver). The City of Argenta developed around the railroad. The Memphis and Little Rock Railway was the first operating railroad in Arkansas, and it ran east-west from Memphis to Argenta. The Memphis and Little Rock Railway crossed the Little Rock and Fort Smith Railway in the middle of Argenta, and the St. Louis, Iron Mountain, and Southern Railroad ran along the edge of town. Because the railroads brought travelers to Argenta, the most common businesses catered to people from out-of-town. There were hotels, boarding houses, saloons, gambling houses, brothels, and restaurants downtown. Argenta

was a rough town—it had no government in the early days, so it was virtually lawless. There were no paved streets, and the sidewalks were made out of wooden planks. This side of the Arkansas River flooded often, and some of the streets stayed under water for weeks because there was no city-wide drainage system.

In 1890, the citizens of Argenta filed a petition to incorporate as a city of the first class. However, seeing this, the City of Little Rock annexed the town of Argenta despite the protests of Argenta residents. Referencing a law that excluded voters in the targeted annexation area, the City of Little Rock laid a territorial claim on Argenta in order to increase its tax base. However, Little Rock did not provide Argenta (8<sup>th</sup> Ward of LR) with many city services in return for their taxes, so a plot was hatched to regain Argenta's independence. William Faucette (prominent businessman and 1<sup>st</sup> mayor of NLR) worked with three state legislators to get the Hoxie-Walnut Ridge bill signed in 1903, allowing cities within a mile of one another to consolidate if the residents of both cities approved it at the polls. The bill was supposedly written to allow the NE Arkansas towns of Hoxie and Walnut Ridge to consolidate, which they later did. However, the bill would also allow the town of North Little Rock (which had been incorporated just to the north of LR's 8<sup>th</sup> Ward—AKA Argenta—in 1901) to annex the 8<sup>th</sup> Ward of Little Rock (formerly Argenta) in 1904. This is how Argenta regained her independence from Little Rock.

In 1906, NLR changed its name back to Argenta. It remained so until 1917, when it was changed back to NLR. Argenta was a booming railroad town in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. By 1915, this was a largely working class neighborhood occupied by local business owners and workers and railroad employees.

The Argenta Historic District currently encompasses the area that represents the city's early residential and commercial development. It is roughly bounded by Melrose Circle and 9<sup>th</sup> Street on the north, N. Broadway on the west, W. 4<sup>th</sup> Street and Broadway on the south, and the railroad tracks on the east side of Main Street form the eastern boundary.

### **400 Block of Main Street**

The Street Building was expanded in 1895, and the present façade was built at that time (same time as the Faucette-Cook Building was constructed next door). The 400 block of Main St. would have looked very different around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At that time, this wasn't Main St.—it was called Newton Ave. in honor of Thomas Willoughby Newton, Sr., who owned a lot of land in this area and was

involved with mining operations at the Kellogg Mine. In fact, his heirs platted the town of Argenta in 1866 on his farmland (the street name changed to Main in 1904).

The tracks of the Memphis & Little Rock Railroad ran right through the parking lot across the street and the area where the 1-story buildings are between the Street Building and the Faucette Brothers Bank Building. Notice how the 1890 Faucette Building originally faced east toward the oncoming RR traffic (now the back of the building is the front). In 1904 the Chicago, Rock Island & Southern RR (previously the Memphis & LR RR) leased (and later sold) land on the east side of the 400 block between the RR tracks and 5<sup>th</sup> St. to the City of Argenta for a public park. The park began with the construction of a bandstand in July 1905, and remained there until 1931-32 when the post office was built.

The Rock Island moved operations over to LR in 1910 and closed the rail yard on E. 4<sup>th</sup> Street, so there wasn't much need for this section of track. But as a concession to Argenta (whose city officials were quite upset about the move), the Rock Island built passenger and freight depots on the north side of the river in 1913. The freight depot was located in the parking lot area across the street (torn down about 1960), and the passenger depot is still standing at E. 4<sup>th</sup> and Hazel streets. By 1914 most of the RR tracks across Main St. and going west were pulled up, making the freight depot the end of the line.

The three 1-story buildings on the west side of the 400 block were constructed in the 1920s—409 Main was built in 1921, 411 Main was built in 1927, and the building at 413-415 Main was built in 1928 by George Donaghey, who was Arkansas's 22<sup>nd</sup> governor (1909-1913).

### **Street Building Constructed**

The Street Building was initially owned by George M. Street, who worked as a pharmacist in Charles J. Humphreys's Drug Store (Humphreys's Drug was the first pharmacy to occupy the Argenta Drug Building at 4<sup>th</sup> & Main; then Hall Drug Store in 1903 and Argenta Drug not there until 1916). Prior to 1895, the building housed Lamberson Hardware and Sibeck Grocery. Then in January 1895, George Street was preparing to expand his building by extending the storefront a distance of 5 feet to the street line and installing an "up-to-date plate glass front." [The Lamberson Hardware Company moved into their new building in the 600 block of Main Street, and Sibeck Grocery moved around before eventually settling at 423 Main in the north half of the Faucette-Cook Building.] Local architect J. W.

Gaskill designed the Faucette-Cook Building as well as the Street Building expansion in order to create a “uniform front.” The two projects were going on at the same time, and the buildings are very similar in appearance. They were both brick originally, but the Faucette-Cook Building has been stuccoed since the 1920s. [Both Faucette brothers, William and James, had an interest in the Faucette-Cook Building. They were important businessmen and the first and third mayors of NLR, respectively. Marcus D. L. Cook was a contractor and in 1895 was awarded the contract to grade 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> streets in Argenta. Also operated a livery stable behind his building.]

### **Italianate architecture**

The Street Building is a late 19<sup>th</sup> century commercial building with several Italianate style characteristics like the elaborate pressed tin cornice with L-shaped brackets and a raised name plate reading “Street 1895” and the hood molding over the 2<sup>nd</sup> story windows. And in keeping with the commercial-style architecture during that time, the building has decorative vents, recessed brick panels with corbelling, and transom windows under the cloth awnings.

### **Street Building occupants**

By 1898, 417 Main was occupied by Argenta Dry Goods as well as W. J. Duval and J. H. Gallaher, lawyers, and S. R. Bates, physician. George M. Street opened his own drug store in 419 Main, and he and his wife lived upstairs at 419 ½ Main. However, the 1900-1901 city directory lists Mrs. George Street at 419 Main, so Mr. Street had probably died (b/c it wasn't typical to list the wife's name unless she was a widow). Both of the Streets are absent from the 1902 directory, and various individuals occupied the building until 1906 when Elks Lodge No. 1004 occupied the upstairs. The NLR Elks Club was organized in 1905, so this may have been their first location. By 1914, the first floor was occupied by Powell Grocery and Owens & Ricks, undertakers (later Owens Funeral Home, run by R. T. and Judith Owens), while the upper story continued to serve as a meeting hall for the Elks Club. Between 1915 and 1928, the Street Building housed several businesses on its lower floor, including groceries, cabinetmakers, and motorcycle repair shops, and the Elks remained upstairs.

But in 1928, the NLR Boys Club, which started in 1920 when Henry J. Miller, editor of the *Argenta Daily News*, organized a Paper Carriers' Club in the back of his print shop at 312 Main (Reno's Argenta Café), needed a larger meeting place (they were meeting in the basement of City Hall by this time). The Elks Club had

moved to their current location at Poplar and Broadway behind City Hall, so they gave the Boys Club use of their old meeting space in the Street Building. The Boys Club installed a library, equipped a gymnasium, and Mr. Miller (who had given up his print shop to devote all of his time to the Boys Club) moved his printing materials into the building in order to teach the boys about printing and publishing.

By 1933, the Boys Club had outgrown its meeting place in the Street Building. This time the Gordon Gale American Legion Post came to the rescue, trading its building at 14<sup>th</sup> and Orange for the rooms at 419 ½ Main. The American Legion met upstairs in the Street Building until 1945, when the post almost lost its state charter because of illegal gambling allegations. After numerous police raids and arrests, the post moved out of the Street Building with the intent of revamping its image.

The Street building had some long-term occupants from about 1940 up until the late 1970s. Wolff's Photo Shop (Roland D. Wolff was the main local photographer) occupied the 419 storefront in 1939 and stayed until at least 1975. The business became Wolff's gifts in the early 1950s and sold Hallmark cards and collectible coins. Singer Sewing Machines moved into the 417 storefront about 1947 and stayed until at least 1964. Then another sewing machine dealer, the State Sewing Center, occupied the same space from 1971 to about 1980. By the late 1950s, the Street Building was known as the Interstate Life Building because it also housed the Interstate Life & Accident Insurance Company upstairs. Attorneys Byron Bogard and Judith Rogers also had their offices upstairs. By the early 1980s, businesses were beginning to move out of downtown North Little Rock because of the crime rate and a construction boom near McCain Mall, and the Street Building had short-term occupants or sat vacant for many years.

Architect Kip Moore purchased the Street Building in 1973. He restored the building's front façade and the interior of the first floor in 1999. Larry Pennington began renting the downstairs space in 2002 for his commercial photography business. Then Larry and Joy Pennington purchased the entire building in March 2005 and finished out the second floor to serve as their apartment.

The 417 storefront is currently home to Larry's pottery studio, where he makes his own pottery, carries the work of some other local artists, and teaches pottery classes (since 2003) as well as Larry's photography studio in the back. The 419 storefront is currently for lease as office space. Notice the original pressed tin ceilings.

## **Upstairs...**

A portion of the upstairs is occupied by Kip Moore & Associates, Architects and Aaron Ruby & Associates, Architects. The front portion of the upstairs is the Penningtons' apartment. They removed 4 layers of linoleum from the upstairs floors and refinished the original wood floors. Penningtons also installed one-over-one wood-frame windows upstairs to match the historic photographs of the building (multi-pane windows were installed at some point). They also constructed the interior stairs and landings, which lead up to a roof-top patio area. They have been living here since 2006.

From the Penningtons' apartment/roof, you can see construction on the back of the new community theater, which is moving into the old Faucette Brothers Bank Building. And you can also see the new City Grove townhomes, which were just completed last year (used to be old houses facing Maple St., but one burned in 1995 and others demolished in early 2000s to make way for City Grove development).