

# The Newsletter of the Arkansas Historical Association

Vol. 40 No. 2 (March 2025)

Editor: Brian Irby

## Order in the Court!



The AHA will hold its 84<sup>th</sup> annual conference in Fort Smith, April 10-12. This year's conference focuses on the theme of "Law and Justice in Arkansas," and perhaps no other place in the state reflects that theme better than Fort Smith.

Established as a U.S. military outpost in late 1817 to keep peace between the Osage and Cherokee nations, the town that developed around the fort became a seat of law and justice and the headquarters for the United States Marshals operating against outlaws. In 1871, the Western District Court moved from Van Buren to Fort Smith, with Judge Isaac C. Parker taking the bench in 1875. The U.S. Army continued to use the greater Fort Smith area as a military base in the twentieth century, with Fort Chaffee serving as a training base for the Army's armored divisions during World War II. German prisoners of war also were housed at Fort Chaffee. Throughout its history, Fort Smith also has served as a hub for migrants, from nineteenth-century settlers heading west to twentieth-century Vietnamese and Cuban refugees.

Conference attendees are invited to an opening reception at the Fort Smith National Historic Site on Thursday evening from 6 to 7:30 p.m. Registration for the conference and all sessions will be held in the historic Fort Smith Bakery District, originally established in 1921 as the Shipley Baking Company. The Bakery District is located at 70 South 7<sup>th</sup> Street and is within walking distance of the conference hotel. Conference attendees can reserve a room at the rate of \$110 per night at the conference hotel through the AHA website or by calling the Marriott Courtyard Fort Smith Downtown. The block of rooms available at the conference rate is limited, so book early!



Residential Street, Fort Smith, circa  
1910

A pre-conference workshop, led by genealogist and historian Angela Walton-Raji, will be held on Thursday, April 10, from 1-3:30 p.m. in the Fort Smith Public Library Community Room. The workshop's theme is, "Bringing Peace to the Frontier: Lost Genealogy of Western Arkansas." Registration for the workshop is separate from conference registration, and both may be accomplished

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online at the [Arkansas Historical Association website](https://arkhistorical.org/).



Thirty-seven speakers will present at twelve concurrent sessions this year, on topics ranging from Arkansas Post to Arkansas's infamous prison system. AHA President Rachel Patton will preside over the Friday business meeting and luncheon, at which Catherine Foreman Gray, Historian and Preservation Office of the Cherokee Nation will present on "Jurisdictional Conflict in Indian Territory: Nineteenth Century Tribal and Federal Relationships." Following the luncheon, conference attendees can choose between two local tours.

On Friday evening, April 11, conference attendees

are invited to attend a reception and banquet at the U.S. Marshals Museum at 789 Riverfront Drive in Fort Smith. Conference-goers will have a special after-hours opportunity to tour the museum, which opened in July 2023; and President Rachel Patton will present the AHA annual awards following the dinner. Conference activities will conclude on Saturday following a 12:30 luncheon, at which investigative journalist and author Mara Leveritt will present the keynote address, "There's Always a Backstory." Leveritt covered crime, police, courts, and prisons in Arkansas for more than 30 years.

Conference attendees also will have an opportunity to view the Arkansas State Archives' traveling exhibit, "We the People': Constitutions of the State of Arkansas," which will be on display in the Bakery District lobby throughout the conference.



Frisco Depot, Fort Smith, circa 1930

On Friday, one of the tours will depart, by bus, to Van Buren to visit the 1838-built Drennen-Scott House, a building linked to the Trail of Tears, the Underground Railroad, and the Civil War. Now owned and maintained by the University of Arkansas-Fort Smith, the house was continuously occupied by the Drennen family until 2005. Tom Wing, Director of the House and Assistant Professor of History at the University of Arkansas—Fort Smith, will lead this tour.

The other tour will focus on two historic churches and a cemetery in Fort Smith, and participants will carpool. It will be led by UAFS Professor Steve Kite, UAMS Historical Research Center Director Tim Nutt, and area historian Erin Langford. The stops will include Immaculate Conception Catholic Church, located at the head of Garrison Avenue. Built in 1898-1899, the Gothic Revival-style church replaced an earlier wood frame church that was damaged in the 1898 tornado. The parish was originally established in the late 1840s as St. Patrick's to minister to Fort Smith's burgeoning Irish immigrant population. The log building constructed at the time was the city's first Catholic church. Today, Immaculate Conception is one of three Catholic parishes in Fort Smith. Another stop on the tour will be the First Lutheran Church. The history of the parish begins around 1843, when six German Lutheran families from Saxony settled a few miles south of Fort Smith. Eventually, more immigrants arrived and the parish was established in 1852. The current church was dedicated in 1904. The tour will wrap up at Oak Cemetery, Fort Smith's oldest cemetery. The oldest monument dates to 1842, the same year Fort Smith was incorporated as a city. The cemetery is the resting place of nearly thirty outlaws hanged by "Hanging Judge" Isaac C. Parker, John Rogers (the founder of Fort Smith), Gov. William Fishback, fifteen Fort Smith mayors, and over 100 Confederate soldiers. Whichever tour is chosen, attendees are guaranteed to learn more about different aspects of Western Arkansas history.

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Planners of this year's conference are Lisa Speer, conference chair, Tom Wing, local arrangements chair, Tim Nutt, program chair, and Scott Tomlin, technology coordinator.

We are looking forward to one of our best-ever conferences and seeing you in Fort Smith!

## Y'all Come Out:



### ARKANSAS HISTORIC PRESERVATION PROGRAM

Kocourek who promoted Czech and Slovak immigration to the town.

**The Arkansas Historic Preservation Program** is pleased to announce its spring Sandwiching in History series. The series allows the public to tour historic sites in Arkansas and learn about the site's rich history. The tour will be led by Ashley Sides, Preservation Outreach Coordinator, who does meticulous research on Sandwiching in History sites. Tours typically take place at noon on the first Friday of the month. It is an excellent way to spend a lunch hour. In March, attendees will tour the Cherry-Luter Estate in North Little Rock. In April, the program will travel to Hazen for a tour of the Kocourek and Son Hardware Store established by Bohemian immigrant John



### ARKANSAS State Archives

The **Arkansas State Archives** will hold its spring symposium on April 26. The event, titled *Lost Utopias: The Search for Arkansas's Vanished Tourist Attractions*, will be held at the MacArthur Military Museum from 12 PM to 4 PM and will feature talks on staff from the Shiloh Museum for Ozark History on Monte Ne; ASA staff member Jane Wilkerson will discuss the history of Dogpatch USA; Michael Schwarz of Abandoned Arkansas will present on Hot Springs' forgotten attractions; Revis Edmonds will give a presentation on Arkla Village; and State Historian David Ware will discuss the history of Arkansas tourism to its natural springs. The event is free to the public.



### BUTLER CENTER FOR ARKANSAS STUDIES

The Central Arkansas Library System Butler Center for Arkansas Studies is announcing topics for its Legacies and Lunch series. The series is a free monthly program highlighting stories from Arkansas history. On April 2, the series will feature Dr. Marta Cieslak who will discuss Commonwealth College; May 7<sup>th</sup>'s program will feature Dr. Cane West who will discuss the history of Hot Springs; and on June 4, Phoenix Smithey and Dr. K Adele Okoli will give a lecture titled, "For Constance and Ada: Snail Methods of Queer Archival Praxis." Bring your lunch, the Butler Center will provide drinks and cookies.

If you cannot attend in person, you can participate virtually by registering for the webinar on the Butler Center's website at <https://cals.click/RobertsEvents>.



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An interesting project is underway in Prairie County to document the history of Slovaktown (now simply called Slovak), a town founded in 1894 by Slovak immigrants. The descendants of the original settlers have worked to preserve the history and legacy of the small community. In 2023, they founded UpRooted Media to create a documentary about the town. When completed, the documentary will feature interviews, historic images of the town, and music from Slovakian-American musicians to bring the rich story of the town to life. To learn more about this interesting project, visit [www.uprooted-media.com](http://www.uprooted-media.com).

## *Look Here!*



Finally, as spring arrives in Arkansas, our students long for the upcoming summer. This interesting photograph from the Arkansas State Archives shows a group of children at Lake Dick dutifully studying in class. During the 1930s, the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration established a resettlement community at Lake Dick in Jefferson County as part of the New Deal. The Farm Security Administration purchased farmland and helped settle as many as eighty farm families there. The community boasted a school that educated the resettled children, giving them a sense of normalcy in such a difficult time.

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**Finally, we offer the same request made in World War II-era issues of the *AHQ*:** *"If you think it tolerable, speak kindly about it to your friends and invite them to join the Association."*



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Join the Arkansas Historical Association and receive four issues of the *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* per year, as well as the Association's newsletter for the following rates:

Individual, one year for \$25; Individual, two years for \$45;

Family, one year for \$35; Family, two years for \$55;

Foreign, one year for \$35; Student, one year for \$15;

Contributing, one year for \$55; Sustaining, one year for \$100;

Supporting, one year for \$200;

Life Membership for \$500 (payable over three years)

Permanent Membership for \$1,000 (payable over five years)

Renewal and new memberships can be paid online;  
visit the AHA website [arkansashistoricalassociation.org](http://arkansashistoricalassociation.org).

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