

Sandwiching in History
Faucette Bros. Bank Building
(Now the Argenta Community Theater)
405 Main Street, NLR
November 2, 2012
By: Rachel Silva



Intro

Hi, my name is Rachel Silva, and I work for the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program. Welcome to the Sandwiching in History tour of the Faucette Brothers Bank Building! I'd like to thank the Argenta Community Theater and Trey Woodruff for allowing us to tour the building today. And I'd like to thank the staff of the NLR History Commission—Sandra Taylor Smith and Cary and Monty Bradburn—for their help gathering information about this building.

The Faucette Brothers Bank Building was built in 1900 and is a contributing resource in the Argenta Historic District, which was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1993 (amended several times, with the latest boundary expansion done in 2007). The district is roughly bounded by Melrose Circle and 9th Street on the north, N. Broadway on the west, W. 4th Street and Broadway on the south, and Poplar Street on the east.

Argenta History

The City of North Little Rock was called Argenta in its early days of settlement. Thomas Willoughby Newton, Sr., owned a large tract of farmland in this area and served as president of the Southwest & Arkansas Mining Company. Beginning in the late 1840s, Newton's mining company extracted silver and lead from the Kellogg Mine, which was located about 10 miles north of Argenta. In 1866 Thomas Newton's son, Colonel Robert C. Newton, named the newly platted town Argenta because of the silver his father had mined at "Kellogg diggings" (argentum is the Latin word for silver).

Argenta thrived because of the railroad industry. The Memphis & Little Rock Railway was the first operating railroad in Arkansas, and it ran east-west from Memphis to Argenta. The Memphis & Little Rock (which later became the Rock Island) crossed the Little Rock & Fort Smith Railway (later merged with Iron Mountain) at the M & LR Depot on 4th Street between Poplar and Magnolia streets, and the St. Louis, Iron Mountain, and Southern Railroad (became Missouri Pacific in 1917) ran along the northern and western edges of Argenta, and crossed the Arkansas River at the Baring Cross Bridge (completed 1873). The Iron Mountain railroad shops were west of Argenta in Baring Cross (current Union Pacific shops), and the M & LR shops were on the north side of 4th Street between Olive and Locust streets. Many residents of Argenta were employed by the railroad in some capacity.

Downtown buildings housed a variety of stores (general, dry goods, drug, grocery, meat market, etc.), restaurants, hotels, boarding houses, and saloons. Argenta was a rough town—it had no municipal government in the early days, so it was considered virtually lawless. In fact, the *Arkansas Gazette* often condemned Argenta, calling the town "a deserving candidate for a shower of brimstone." [AG 6/2/1877] Another *Gazette* article from November 25, 1880, insisted that Argenta "should be either incorporated or attached to Little Rock. Each train brings a number of tramps and disreputable characters to the place, who should not be tolerated in any community, but unless some means are taken to police the town

they can carry things with a high head and go unpunished.” Gambling was also commonplace in Argenta, leading the *Gazette* to dub Argenta the “crap shooting center of Arkansas.” [AG 9/1/1889]

Argenta residents recognized these problems, and in 1890, the citizens of Argenta filed a petition to incorporate as a city of the first class. However, this attempt was quashed by Little Rock, when it claimed Argenta as its 8th Ward. 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. But Little Rock provided Argenta (8th Ward of LR) with very few city services in return for its taxes, so a plot was hatched to regain Argenta’s independence. William C. Faucette (prominent businessman, 8th Ward alderman, and 1st 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. At a glance, the bill was written to allow the northeast Arkansas towns of Hoxie and Walnut Ridge to consolidate, which they later did. But the bill would also allow the new town of North Little Rock, which had been incorporated in 1901 just to the north of LR’s 8th Ward (Argenta), to annex the 8th Ward in 1904. So 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 (at the urging of James P. Faucette, who thought it would make property values increase because of the city’s association with LR).

400 Block of Main Street

The 400 block of Main Street would have looked very different in the late 19th century. First of all, the street was called Newton Avenue, in honor of Thomas W. Newton, Sr., until 1904, when it was changed to Main Street. The Memphis & Little Rock Railroad came into Argenta from the east along 4th Street, and then the tracks forked west of the depot, with one branch going north up Main Street to the Little Rock Oil & Compress Company (which occupied the land that is now

Melrose Circle), and the other branch curving slightly to the northwest as it continued toward the Iron Mountain Railroad north of the Baring Cross Bridge. So the Memphis & LR tracks used to run diagonally through the 400 blocks of Main, Maple, and Orange streets, cut right through the intersection of 5th & Willow, and continued northwest to the Iron Mountain. But the Rock Island RR Bridge was built in 1899, making it unnecessary for the M & LR line to cut through the neighborhood to the Baring Cross Bridge, so that western portion of the line was abandoned.

So, the Memphis & LR tracks came through the parking lot, crossed Main Street, and continued through an opening between the Faucette Brothers Bank Building and the Street Building. The three 1-story buildings on the west side of the 400 block were constructed in the 1920s—409 Main (Malnick Bldg.; Max & Julia Malnick's shoe shop until at least 1933) was built in 1921, 411 Main was built in 1927 (McPherson's Furniture; also sold stereos and records), and the building at 413-415 Main was built in 1928 by George Donaghey, who was Arkansas's 22nd governor (1909-1913). Notice how the 1890 Faucette Building originally faced east toward the oncoming RR traffic and the depot (now the back of the building is the front). [Faucette Bldg. was a saloon, restaurant, boarding house, and hotel.]

In 1904 the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific RR (previously the Memphis & LR RR) leased (and later sold) land on the east side of the 400 block between the RR tracks and 5th 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. 4th 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 Rock Island freight depot was located in the area east of the 1890 Faucette Building (freight depot torn down about 1960), and the passenger depot is still standing at E. 4th 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 first M&LR was sold to the Memphis and Little Rock Railway Company in December 1873. It was again sold to a second Memphis and Little Rock Railroad Company in 1877. Then in 1887, it was sold to the Little Rock and Memphis Railroad Company. ***Between 1892 and 1897, the LR & Memphis RR built a new passenger depot in Argenta just north of the 1890 Faucette Building. The ca. 1895 LR & M depot does not appear on the 1913 Sanborn map, but the Rock Island's new freight depot is already in place nearby.***In April 1897, the Mississippi River washed out forty miles of track on the eastern division of the railroad. Though operations continued via the St. Louis, Iron Mountain and Southern Railroad, the cost of rebuilding was simply too great a burden, and the railroad was sold at foreclosure on October 25, 1898, to the Choctaw and Memphis Railroad Company for only \$325,000. The Choctaw and Memphis was in turn sold to the Choctaw, Oklahoma, and Gulf Railroad Company—nicknamed the Choctaw Route—in 1900. The Choctaw Route was purchased in 1902 by the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railway Company (which went bankrupt in the late 1970s; most of the track was taken up in the 1980s).]

Faucette Brothers

The Faucette brothers--William C. and James P.--were instrumental figures in the development of North Little Rock. William Chesley "Bill" Faucette was born on August 13, 1865, in Pope Station, Mississippi, and was the fourth child (and first son) of James Beard Faucette and his wife, Eliza Jane Hubbard Faucette. The Faucette family moved to Fort Worth, TX, in 1878, and then returned to Arkansas in 1880, living in Searcy, Dover, and Russellville. About 1883 William C. Faucette moved to Argenta and worked for the Little Rock & Fort Smith Railroad. In 1886 Bill Faucette married Lillie Dea Hallows of Argenta. Sadly, she died on February 7, 1887, soon after giving birth to a son who died a few months later. Bill Faucette never remarried.

William Faucette's younger brother, James Peter "Jim" Faucette, was born on September 28, 1867, in Pope Station, MS, and was the fifth child (and second son) of James and Eliza Faucette. In 1885 James P. Faucette moved to Argenta to join his older brother, William. Like his brother, Bill, Jim Faucette worked for the LR & Ft. Smith Railroad.

In 1888 the brothers quit their railroad jobs to pursue other interests. They leased and operated the Arlington Hotel at the northeast corner of 4th & Magnolia streets, just across the tracks from the Memphis & LR depot. Then in 1890, they purchased a lot at the northeast corner of 4th & Main and constructed the Faucette Building, which housed a saloon and restaurant downstairs and a boarding house/hotel upstairs (this building had the first electric lights in Argenta).

After Little Rock annexed Argenta, William C. Faucette was elected in 1893 to the LR City Council as an alderman from the 8th Ward. He resigned from the council in 1896, citing LR's failure to provide adequate fire equipment and police protection on the north side of the river. William and James Faucette organized the North Little Rock Ice and Electric Company in 1896 and the Faucette Brothers Bank in 1901 (became Twin City Bank in 1904). Both brothers were involved in the scheme to regain Argenta's independence from Little Rock. In April 1904 William C. Faucette became the first mayor of NLR and was reelected twice. He resigned his post as mayor in April 1909, but in September 1910, Faucette was chosen to fill the unexpired term of Edward A. Ramsey, who had also resigned. William Faucette was elected to the Arkansas House of Representatives in late 1910, so in February 1911, he resigned again. William C. Faucette had a heart condition and received treatment at several medical facilities before his death on January 19, 1914, in Battle Creek, Michigan. He is buried, along with his wife and son, in Oakland Cemetery in Little Rock. At the time of his death, William C. Faucette was regarded as the father of Argenta.

James P. Faucette was appointed to fill his brother's unexpired term as NLR mayor in 1911 and served until 1917. During his second term as mayor, the North Little

Rock City Hall at Main & Broadway was constructed (1914-1915), fulfilling a dream of his late brother, Bill Faucette. James P. Faucette served as president of Twin City Bank as well as the Rose City Cotton Oil Company (by 1906), and he lived upstairs in the Faucette Brothers Bank Building until 1906, when the bank moved out of the building. Jim Faucette and his brother, Bill, were friends of real estate developer Justin Matthews, and they, too, bought and sold residential and commercial properties. About 1912, Jim Faucette built two houses at the southeast corner of 4th & Willow (316 & 320 W. 4th). The house at 320 was for his family (no longer extant; victim of urban renewal in 1970s), while the house at 316 (NR-listed 1978) was built as a rental property and was sold in 1918 to John Farmer, an engineer for the Missouri Pacific Railroad. Jim Faucette's home at 320 W. 4th was right across Willow Street from the Argenta High School, and Faucette was president of the school board. Under J. P. Faucette's watch, sewer and drainage systems were created and city streets were paved. Faucette suffered a stroke in late 1914 and sought medical treatment in Hot Springs as well as Long Beach, California. Jim Faucette and his wife, Emma May Hogins Faucette, and their two daughters later moved to California and remained there until Emma Faucette's death in 1936, when they returned to Arkansas. J. P. Faucette died on January 12, 1956, and is buried in Oakland Cemetery in Little Rock.

Faucette Bros. Bank Building

The Faucette Brothers Bank Building was constructed in 1900 and housed the Faucette Brothers Bank as well as Frank L. Balmat's barber shop. The Faucette brothers also operated their real estate business in this building, and Mayor William C. Faucette had his office here in 1906.

Faucette Brothers Bank incorporated as Twin City Bank on April 23, 1904, and immediately had a very special relationship with North Little Rock. The City of NLR had bargained away its 1903 revenue to get the 8th Ward (Argenta) back from Little Rock, so there was no money to pay bills or salaries. So the Faucette Bros. Bank, later Twin City Bank, bank-rolled the City of NLR until it was able to raise enough money to sustain itself. In addition, the Faucette brothers sold their

electric plant to the city in 1906 for \$50,000 in IOUs, which the city later repaid with profits from electric sales (this was the beginning of the NLR Electric Dept.).

There were two apartments upstairs in the building, one of which was occupied by bank president J. P. Faucette, until Twin City Bank moved out of the building in late 1906. Twin City Bank was briefly located at 320 Main before moving into its new building at the northwest corner of 2nd & Main in 1907 (in 1975 TCB constructed the 10-story US Bank Building).

After the bank moved out, the building housed Balmat's barber shop and the Lovelace ("Loveless") Saloon, run by Spencer H. Lovelace. There is still a "Lovelace" ghost sign painted on the north side of the building, but it is only visible from the attic of the Malnick Building next door. The building was damaged by fire in 1913, and according to the *NLR Times*, it "underwent a general overhauling and now presents a nicer appearance than ever."

By 1923, W. H. Clark's ice cream manufacturing company was located here, followed in 1926 by McPherson Furniture and the offices of G. W. Harrod and William J. Early, physicians. In the late 1920s, it was Mrs. Ella Bowlin's restaurant, Murray K. Hodge's cabinetmaking shop, and the office of Homer L. White, physician. In the 1930s, Leon R. Green's pool hall was here, along with the Argenta Plumbing Company and Mrs. Leila Watkins's restaurant. From at least 1947 until 1962, the building housed NLR Tire & Supply Company. It was briefly Merle Norman Cosmetics in the late 1960s and James Beauty School in the late 60s and early 70s. From the mid-1970s to the early 1990s, it was Schneider's Tailors (which was called Schneider's Uniform Sales & Supplies by the early 90s). Attorney Herman W. Eubanks had an office in the building in the late 80s and early 90s. In the early 1990s, R & R Uniforms was here (and was later called Skaggs Company, VF Uniforms, and Direct Police Supply). The uniform store remained in the building until about 2005.

Building's appearance—The building's appearance has changed over the years as well. By the late 1950s, the red brick façade was painted white. Then in 1966, an

aluminum slipcover was installed to “liven up the appearance” of the building. In the mid-1990s, a storm damaged some of the aluminum panels, exposing the “Faucette 1900” panel. Local historians urged the owners to go ahead and remove the top row of panels, which they did. In 2001, the Historic District Commission issued a certificate of appropriateness for the removal of the remaining non-historic metal panels, repair to the header on the storefront, and the installation of a canvas awning.

The building was vacant for a few years, and then in April 2010, rehab work began on the building to convert it into the Argenta Community Theater, an event and theater space. During the \$2.8 million rehab, a historically appropriate wood and glass storefront was installed, the interior was gutted, the basement was filled in, a 1-story addition was removed from the rear of the building, and a new 2-story addition was constructed to house the theater space. The project was completed in January 2011 under the guidance of Taggert, Foster, Currence & Gray, Architects, and a grand opening celebration was held in February 2011.

Argenta Community Theater

The Argenta Community Theater was founded by Vince Insalaco and Judy Tenenbaum to support Arkansas arts organizations, expose children to the arts, and bring professional actors and dancers to central Arkansas. The rent from the office space upstairs (as well as income generated from some other events; i.e. weddings, receptions, seminars, parties) pays the bills, and then additional income (from ACT productions) goes into a scholarship and grant fund for individuals pursuing a degree in the arts and for start-up assistance for nonprofit arts organizations.

Floor seating—187

Balcony seating—40

Theater has state-of-the-art equipment and can host any type of show or event
Behind stage, there are 3 dressing rooms with bathrooms as well as a small kitchenette area

1st production—Cabaret in July 2012

2nd production will be Jesus Christ Superstar in July 2013

6 private offices in the front portion of the upper story (rent these out)

The theater itself is named in honor of Sally Jane Riggs Insalaco, who was born in NLR in 1948 and went on to become a well-known dancer and performer. She was in the original Broadway productions of Celebration and Hello Dolly!, and was an original cast member in Jesus Christ Superstar in London. She later founded Studio One dance academy in NLR in 1974, and she and husband, Vince, started the Family Entertainment Superstore Co. in 1984, which grew to 50 stores in 3 states (sold in 2002). Sally died in December 2006 after a battle with renal cell cancer.

Thank you! Quiet as we go through building!!

Next tour is Dec. 7 at the Tower Building at 4th & Center streets in LR.