

Walks through History
Shaheen-Goodfellow Weekend Cottage or “Stoneflower”
704 Stony Ridge Rd.
Heber Springs
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By: Rachel Silva



Intro

Hi, my name is Rachel Silva, and I work for the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program. Welcome to the Walks through History tour of the Shaheen-Goodfellow Weekend Cottage or “Stoneflower!” I’d like to thank Bob Mosesso and his sister, Lynn Mosesso, for allowing us to tour the property today. Also, I need to thank Charles Stuart and Dr. Mickey Barnett with the Cleburne County Historical Society for their help gathering information about Eden Isle.

Greers Ferry Dam & Lake

The flow of the Little Red River was uncontrolled during the first half of the 20th century, which resulted in almost yearly flooding and compounded flooding problems further downstream along the White River. Beginning in 1916, efforts were made to construct a dam on the Little Red River to provide flood control. After years of failed projects, Congress passed the Flood Control Act in 1938, authorizing the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to build dams on most of the country’s free-flowing rivers. North Arkansas’s White River basin, which includes the Little Red River, was among the chosen waterways.

Shortly after the passage of the Flood Control Act, engineers began surveying the White River and its tributaries for locations to build a series of high, concrete dams. Several locations were selected, and in 1944, the first of five dams that would eventually be built in the White River basin was completed at Norfolk. The Norfolk Dam was followed by the Bull Shoals Dam in 1951 and Table Rock Dam in 1959. In 1960 construction began simultaneously on the Beaver and Greers Ferry dams. Greers Ferry Dam, named after a ferry operated on the Little Red River near the dam site, was completed in 1962 and was dedicated on October 3, 1963, by President John F. Kennedy, in what would be his one of his last major public appearances before his assassination. The concrete dam measures 1,704 feet in length and stands 243 feet above the streambed of the Little Red River. It cost \$46.5 million and created a reservoir of between 30,000 and 40,000 acres, depending on water level, and over 340 miles of shoreline in Cleburne and Van Buren counties. The dam's primary function is flood control, but it also serves as a hydroelectric power plant. Greers Ferry Lake, created as a result of the dam, is a popular recreational destination.

Arkansans in High Places

It was no coincidence that Arkansas got funding for all of these flood control projects—the dynamic trio of Senator John McClellan, Senator J. William Fulbright, and Representative Wilbur Mills chaired some of the most important committees in the U.S. Congress during this time period. McClellan, a U.S. Senator from 1942 to 1977 (longer than any other Arkansan), was the Chair of the Committee on Appropriations and ranked second in seniority when he died in 1977. Fulbright was a U.S. Senator from 1944 to 1974 and chaired the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Mills, a U.S. Representative from 1939 to 1977, was the longest-serving chairman of the House Ways & Means Committee (writes policies on Social Security, Medicare, and other social service programs).

These powerful Arkansans also made the resort community of Eden Isle a reality for businessman Herbert L. Thomas, Sr.

Herbert L. Thomas, Sr.

Herbert Leon Thomas, Sr., was born in the Ashley County community of Lone Prairie on February 14, 1899. Times were hard when Thomas was a child, and insurance impressed him as a business that could withstand periods of economic decline. So in 1923 he started the Mutual Assessment Company, and by 1925 the

company had gained more than 10,000 policy owners, mostly from small towns in Arkansas. Things were going well, so Thomas incorporated the First Pyramid Life Insurance Company of America. The company headquarters were in one room of the Southern Trust Building at the SE corner of 2nd and Center streets in downtown Little Rock. First Pyramid continued to grow, and in 1937 the company purchased the entire Southern Trust Building and renamed it the Pyramid Life Building. The company remained in this location until spring 1980, when First Pyramid moved to a building in west LR. However, the old Southern Trust Building at 2nd & Center is still called Pyramid Place today.

In 1977 First Pyramid achieved a milestone when its policies swelled to comprise more than \$1 billion of insurance. By 1982 the company was licensed to operate in 25 states, owned 3 subsidiaries (Eden Isle Enterprises, First Pyramid Mortgage Company, and Computronics, Inc.), and had assets in excess of \$100 million.

In addition to his work at First Pyramid, Herbert Thomas wore several other hats. Thomas was Chairman of the Little Rock Municipal Water Commission from 1937-40 and Chairman of the State Highway Audit Commission from 1951-53. He chaired the Senior Advisory Committee of the State Chamber of Commerce and while in this position, helped form the First Arkansas Development Finance Corporation, a nonprofit charged with financing industrial expansion in Arkansas. While serving on the Advisory Council for the Small Business Administration, Thomas appeared before the U.S. Senate Committee on Banking and Currency to promote passage of the Small Business Investment Act of 1958.

Conscious of the importance of education for financial growth, Thomas served on the University of Arkansas's Board of Trustees from 1943-51. He was instrumental in the admission of the first black student to the University of Arkansas School of Law in 1948 (Silas H. Hunt). Thomas was also involved in banking—he acquired City National Bank of Ft. Smith in the mid-1950s as well as Citizens Bank of Booneville in 1963.

Although he never ran for political office himself, Thomas was heavily involved in politics. He had a very close relationship with J. William Fulbright and headed his initial Senate campaign after convincing Fulbright to run for an office higher than Arkansas's governorship. Furthermore, Thomas figured prominently in President John F. Kennedy's 1963 visit to Heber Springs for the dedication of Greers Ferry Dam and Lake.

And Thomas was also interested in real estate...in 1961 he purchased 500 acres of land near Heber Springs for the development of a resort community called Eden Isle.

Eden Isle

As I told you before, the plans for Greers Ferry Dam had been in the works for years before the structure was actually built. After the Flood Control Act was passed in 1938, engineers started surveying for the proposed dam. But the dam wasn't actually completed until 1962...so in the meantime, people had been buying up large chunks of bottomland in hopes that they could sell it to the government at a profit or end up with lakefront property (after the completion of a dam). After so many years, most individuals gave up on these notions and sold out. Plus, for those wanting lakefront property, it was a gamble to buy land around the proposed dam site because no one knew exactly where the lake would be or what the water level would be...until Herbert Thomas came along...

Thomas knew Rep. Mills and Senators McClellan and Fulbright and was able to find out the location of the lake and its water level, so he knew exactly which land to purchase and when to purchase it.

Thomas bought property historically owned by the Estes family and known as "Estes Hill." It was also the first location of the Heber Springs Airport, so some people referred to it as the "old airport."

Because no private entity can own an island in a Corps of Engineers-controlled lake, Thomas had to build a causeway that would always stay above the lake level so that Eden Isle would not technically be classified as an island. And Thomas had to construct this causeway before the lake was filled because he wouldn't have been allowed to build a causeway in a Corps of Engineers lake either. This all lends support to the fact that Mr. Thomas knew exactly what the water levels would be ahead of time, which took major political clout on his part. It is also rumored that the height of the dam was adjusted to make the water level just right for Thomas's real estate development.

After the lake was filled, Eden Isle ended up being about 400 acres in size because some of the land was submerged or located just beyond the causeway on the Heber Springs side.

Thomas immediately began selling lots on his “island paradise” of Eden Isle and in 1962 constructed the Red Apple Inn and restaurant. The Inn actually opened for business in 1963 but burned to the ground in 1964 after a fire started in the kitchen. The Inn was rebuilt using the same boulder foundation and in 1965 reopened for business. No expense was spared on Eden Isle—fourteen miles of roads were paved throughout the development and then covered with dirt and gravel to blend in with the natural surroundings. The Island had all utilities—water, sewage, electricity, telephone, and postal service. In addition, there was a beautiful 9-hole golf course, swimming pool, tennis courts, and a private marina. Lots initially sold for \$3,000 and up, and homes sold for \$12,000 and up. In 1965 developers estimated that a retiree would need to have an income of \$400 a month to live comfortably on Eden Isle.

Planning and construction restrictions were to be enforced by a community corporation, so that homes would blend into the landscape. Houses were supposed to be relatively small and employ native stone, wood, and glass construction with a tile roof. First Pyramid provided an architect and maintained a full-time engineer and construction force. The developers also hired full-time landscape architects to ensure that native trees and plants were protected and that yards were attractive, yet low-maintenance for individual homeowners.

Herbert and his wife, Ruby, were very involved in the actual construction of homes and management of the restaurant at the Red Apple Inn. The Red Apple Inn consistently enjoyed high national ratings for food, lodging, and service. People knew the area because of the Red Apple Inn—not because of Greers Ferry Lake or Heber Springs. In 1978 the Red Apple Executive Conference Center opened in a new addition to the Red Apple Inn and accommodated groups of up to 120 people.

In 1980 Thomas resigned as CEO and Chairman of the Board of First Pyramid Life Insurance Co. of America. He focused on the development of Eden Isle from that point until his death in March 1982 at the age of 83. Thomas’s 3-story Eden Isle home, called “Northwinds,” still stands today. Although property owners no longer adhere to construction restrictions today, most homes are constructed with at least some attempt to blend into their surroundings. And times have changed—some homes on Eden Isle now sell for \$2 million (and up). However, Eden Isle remains a quiet, upscale resort community in the foothills of the Ozarks, just as Herbert Thomas envisioned it.

E. Fay Jones & Stoneflower

E. Fay Jones designed this house for landscape architects Bob Shaheen and Curt Goodfellow, who built roads and designed the golf course on Eden Isle. Developer Herbert Thomas offered the men a lot in the new resort community in exchange for their professional services. After Shaheen and Goodfellow secured the land in 1963, the two men decided to pool their limited resources and construct a weekend cottage that both families could share. In order to reduce construction costs, the two men provided boulders and 2x4 boards salvaged from other construction projects on Eden Isle. They also contributed physical labor, lifting stones into place for site and foundation construction. They hired architect Fay Jones to construct a house under a tight budget of \$6,000 to \$8,000.

E. Fay Jones was born on January 31, 1921, in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, to Euine Fay and Candy Louise (Alston) Jones. His family moved to Little Rock and eventually settled in the oil boom town of El Dorado in the late 1920s. His parents operated a restaurant there, which quickly made the young Jones realize that he wanted to get into another line of work. Even as a child, Jones's teachers recognized his "artistic talent." By the time he was in high school, Jones had constructed an elaborate tree house out of construction salvage and discarded fruit crates. However, Jones did not connect art with construction until 1938, when he saw a short film at the Rialto Theater in El Dorado on the design of Frank Lloyd Wright's SC Johnson Wax headquarters building in Racine, Wisconsin. This film inspired Jones to be an architect.

Jones graduated from high school in 1938 and because the University of Arkansas only offered two or three architecture classes at the time, he entered the U of A civil engineering program. Jones attended the University of Arkansas for about three years, but in the summer of 1941, he joined the Navy. Jones met his future wife, Mary Elizabeth "Gus" Knox, just before joining the Navy, and the couple married in San Francisco in 1943. Jones was sent to the South Pacific Theater during World War II and flew dive bombers and torpedo bombers. After his discharge from the Navy in 1945, Jones entered the new architecture program at the University of Arkansas (UA actually hired architect John G. Williams to start the program in 1946) with the help of the G.I. Bill. In 1950 he became one of the program's first five graduates.

Jones first met his hero, Frank Lloyd Wright, in 1949 at the Shamrock Hotel in Houston. The American Institute of Architects (AIA) was awarding Wright with its highest honor, the Gold Medal, and Jones, Professor John Williams, and two

architecture students had taken a field trip to Houston with hopes of seeing Wright. Jones and his friends bumped into Wright as he was sneaking out of an AIA cocktail party. Jones and his friends plastered themselves against a wall to let Wright walk past them, but he saw their fright and came over to introduce himself. After that, Wright showed Jones around the new hotel and discussed its architecture for thirty minutes.

After receiving his degree in architecture from the University of Arkansas, Jones accepted a fellowship and graduate teaching assistantship at Rice University in Houston, where he taught architecture and some philosophy courses. Jones became fascinated with the work of architect Bruce Goff, who headed the architecture program at the University of Oklahoma, so he drove through Norman, Oklahoma, on his way home from a trip to Fayetteville. Jones met Goff that day, and shortly after receiving his master's degree, Jones received a job offer from Goff. Jones taught architecture at the University of Oklahoma from 1951-53, and even late in his life, Jones recalled that he "had never been at a school where there was such tremendous talent...It was the most artistic, exciting work I have seen to this day. It was an exhilarating time." Bruce Goff's invitation to a small faculty dinner party with Frank Lloyd Wright ultimately landed Jones an apprenticeship with Wright during the summer of 1953. Although Jones's later work was strongly influenced by Wright and Goff, he managed to create his own unique style by adhering to the basic principles taught by these two architects, rather than trying to imitate their work.

After the apprenticeship, Jones followed Frank Lloyd Wright's advice to return to Arkansas, and Jones accepted a teaching position in the architecture program at the University of Arkansas in the fall of 1953. Jones started a small architectural practice in Fayetteville that same year, and the Ozark hills proved to be the perfect setting for his work. Jones was very dedicated to his teaching position, and it kept him on his toes in private practice. According to Jones, "You felt the pressure of living up to your students' expectations. You get to practice what you preach, so to speak. I don't know how a guy could be luckier than that." Jones chaired the Department of Architecture from 1966-74 and served as the first dean of the School of Architecture from 1974-76. He became professor emeritus in 1988 and received an honorary doctorate in 1990. The American Institute of Architects awarded Jones its highest honor, the Gold Medal, in 1990 for his "exquisite architecture of gentle beauty and quiet dignity that celebrates the land and embraces the American spirit...he embodies everything that architecture can and should be." In 2009 the U of A School of Architecture was named after Fay Jones.

Jones adopted, and expanded upon, Wright's concept of organic architecture, in which "the part is to the whole as the whole is to the part," meaning that buildings should fit with their natural surroundings, and individual structural elements should have a specific purpose in the overall design to avoid unnecessary ornamentation. Jones's background in engineering also became evident in his later designs where integral structural pieces like roof supports also served as decorative elements.

Perhaps Jones's most endearing quality was his attention to detail and desire to keep the scope of his work relatively small in order to excel in his market. Jones did not set out to be a famous architect; rather, he aspired to be very good at what he did, primarily designing houses and ecclesiastical structures. According to Jones, "The house is the one architectural problem that has the most potential for becoming a work of art. It is a building type less encumbered by the many forces that influence nonarchitectural decisions (building committees, realtor logic, complex finance, etc.) and in it all of the purely architectural problems exist." Jones approached each individual project as if it was a series of problems, and his final design would represent solutions to those problems. The different problems encountered on each project made it unlike any other project. Jones's "problems" included things like integrating natural site features, maximizing the amount of interior space, working on a tight budget, and finding a way to use all the materials provided him. When furnishing the interior of a house, Jones believed that "every piece [should] reinforce the basic idea, and lend completion to the whole." Therefore, Jones designed custom light fixtures, furniture, and even dishes for his clients.

Completed in 1965, the Shaheen-Goodfellow Weekend Cottage, better known as "Stoneflower," (National Register-listed 10/30/2002) foreshadowed Jones's design for the building that would bring him international acclaim—Thorncrown Chapel. It was called Stoneflower because the narrow upper story appears to grow out of the larger stone base.

The inspiration for Jones' design of Stoneflower was simple necessity. As I told you earlier, the property owners were trying to build the home under a very tight budget. They wanted something unique, but money was in short supply. When Jones first visited the site, he did not have a specific design in mind. When he arrived, he found a pile of stone the men had gathered and a large number of 2x4s of considerable length (16'). "What are we going to do with all of those 2x4s?" he asked the two owners. They told him they hoped he could use them for the house they wanted to build. Jones knew that there were far more boards than needed for a traditional framing job. So he had to be creative and devise a way to use all of

the lumber provided him. What he finally came up with was the idea for the intersecting beams supporting the ceiling. This was a radical new look in home design, but it allowed him to utilize the great quantity of lumber.

Jones's solution to this design "problem" represented a turning point in his style from a horizontal focus to a vertical focus. He used the stone to create a cave-like lower level, featuring indoor plantings, a stone seating area and coffee table, and a "bathing grotto" with a man-made waterfall as a shower. By making the upper story of the house narrower than the lower story, Jones was able to use fiberglass skylights to fill the gap and provide sunlight for the plants below.

The side walls of the upper level are covered in redwood board-and-batten siding and are devoid of windows to provide privacy from neighbors. The gable ends are glass, and the rear gable end is screened with vertical battens to protect it from stray golf balls. The multi-purpose kitchen, living, and sleeping area is located on the second level and is very tall and narrow. In order to support the upper story's tall walls and high ceiling, Jones used the large quantity of lumber provided him to create a succession of cross braces. A 30-foot deck extends from the upper level toward the lake, creating additional outdoor living and cooking space amidst the treetops. Combining elements of a cave and a tree house, Stoneflower marked the beginning of a theme that Jones would revisit again and again in his subsequent designs.

Jones first used the principle of the "operative opposite" in his design for Stoneflower. Rather than copying the work of his mentor, Frank Lloyd Wright, Jones created his own unique style by taking historical precedents and reinventing them through a reversal of their functions. For instance, at Stoneflower he used the tried-and-true Gothic-style buttressing system and reversed it into interior cross-bracing that would support tall walls with tension on the interior rather than compression from the exterior.

Widely recognized as Jones's masterpiece, Thorncrown Chapel (NR-listed 4/28/2000) was completed in 1980 for retiree Jim Reed, who owned land along U.S. Highway 62 a few miles west of downtown Eureka Springs. Reed often noticed passersby stopping to enjoy the panoramic view of the Ozark Mountains from his property, so he decided to build a chapel to welcome visitors. Reed's desire to preserve the natural beauty of the site melded perfectly with Jones's concept of organic architecture. Building the chapel without disturbing the setting proved to be Jones's toughest challenge. He said, "...heavy earth-moving equipment or massive construction materials could not be used without destroying

the wooded setting; and...the whole design must hinge on not using anything too big for two men to carry along a narrow hillside pathway. This limitation was key to the structural concept.”

Jones solved his problem by constructing a chapel out of southern pine 2x4s, 2x6s, and 2x12s; local fieldstone; and glass. Thorncrown Chapel is exactly twice the size of Stoneflower, measuring 24' x 60' and rising 48' into the air. Fieldstone was used to construct the chapel's low foundation walls and floor, integrating the structure with the rocky hillside. The gray-stained wood cross braces closely match the color of the surrounding tree bark, and Jones's masterful treatment of light and shadow creates the illusion that the chapel roof is open to the trees and sky. In keeping with Jones's idea that “every part and every piece [should]...lend completion to the whole,” he custom-designed everything inside the chapel as well, including the pews, pulpit, door handles, and lanterns.

Jones's Thorncrown Chapel immediately received rave reviews from the architectural community as well as the general public. Thorncrown Chapel brought Jones international acclaim and was recognized in a national survey conducted by the American Institute of Architects in 1991 as the best work of American architecture during the 1980s. Thorncrown Chapel was featured in numerous trade magazines and architecture textbooks beginning in the mid-1980s. Jones's design for Thorncrown Chapel was largely responsible for landing him the AIA Gold Medal in 1990 for his lifetime of achievement. In 2000 members of the AIA elected Thorncrown Chapel as one of the top ten buildings of the 20th century. And as an additional testament to Thorncrown Chapel's popular appeal, 5 million people have visited the chapel since it opened in 1980.

Jones went on to design the Thorncrown Worship Center (Eureka Springs, 1989), Mildred B. Cooper Memorial Chapel (Bella Vista, 1988), Marty Leonard Community Chapel (Fort Worth, TX, 1990), Pinecote Pavilion (Picayune, MS, 1987), Pine Eagle (Wiggins, MS, 1991), and other private residences using variations of the cross-bracing technique first employed at Stoneflower and later perfected at Thorncrown Chapel.

Fay Jones died on August 30, 2004, at his home in Fayetteville. His beautiful buildings stand as a testament to the architect's immense respect for nature, strict attention to detail, and artistic ingenuity.

Other Stoneflower Details

The house has had several different owners over the years, but Bob and Lynn Mosesso bought the house in 2006.

They use the Red Apple Inn as a booking agent, and the house is available as a nightly cottage rental.

When the Mosessos bought the house, it needed some restoration work...

- Refinished wood & repainted exterior

- Rewired some light fixtures

- Removed ivy from much of the exterior rocks

Things to notice:

Natural cooling system designed by Jones whereby glass panes in the eaves are opened with a pulley system to allow cool air from the lower level to circulate up through the living area and escape out the upper windows (there is an open space around the upper level floor to allow air from the first level to come straight up).

No heat except the downstairs fireplace—this was designed to be a summer cottage!

Built-in closets and storage cabinets throughout the house, all custom designed by Jones.

“Bathing grotto” with shower coming out of the rocks, concealed from the garden room by sight lines only.

Corrugated metal ceiling in bathing area

Spiral staircases may not be original—house plans showed a spiral staircase leading up from the garden room and a ladder going up to the sleeping loft.

Upstairs furniture is all moveable, so you can easily change the arrangement depending on the occasion.

All furniture and light fixtures designed by Jones.

The flooring in the sleeping loft is made of 2x4 boards laid on their sides.

The low railing in the sleeping loft was not original—it would have appeared to float above the kitchen.

2 gas “flambeaux” grills out on the deck for outdoor cooking and light. These are attached to the steel deck supports.

Outside:

Flagstone patio, water feature, pergola w/ swing

Newer storage shed built into nook between house and shower area...see the railroad spike with the “37” on it. This nail would have been manufactured in 1937—the railroad labeled their nails so they would know when they needed to be replaced.

FYI: Shaheen and Goodfellow did landscape design work for some of Jones’s other NWA projects. In 1970 Shaheen and Goodfellow received a commission from the City of NLR to create a landscaped area on an empty lot near the William F. Laman Public Library. They recruited Jones to design a pavilion for the site. The resulting Plaza Gazebo was a circular structure supported by hollow, geometric, steel columns, representing the reverse concept of a Roman temple.