

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Little Rock's Restoration

In Little Rock, Arkansas, we visited the Territorial Capitol Restoration, a tour of which gave us much insight into the proper manner of preserving, restoring, and furnishing period buildings. The Restoration is owned by the state and operated by a commission composed of six persons. There is a small charge for admission and postal cards of both interior and exterior views are sold. The tour of the several homes and the old capitol, all in the Restoration area, is conducted by a hostess who certainly is a gracious and well-informed guide.

The Territorial Capitol Restoration recalls the spirited days of Arkansas' pre-statehood era, when courageous pioneers were opening the new South and West, building for its future. A well-arranged folder with which we were presented said "The deeds of those brave men and women are enduring in Arkansas history and may be likened to the massive cypress timbers that have supported the structures for more than a century."

The hostess informed us that with the restoration -of these buildings Little Rock has become a "City of Three Capitols." The others are the present capitol and the beautiful old State House.

This restoration was made possible and financed by an Act of the Legislature in 1939, which created a commission to have charge of the project and appropriated funds to purchase the grounds and contribute to the restoration work. Patriotic individuals and businessmen made voluntary contributions. The work on the project began in the fall of 1939 and was completed in 1941.

We were told by the hostess that the materials in the buildings were found to be in excellent condition, all the bricks were the old original handmade ones and that the 23 chimneys are all as they were originally and are especially good in their proportions.

The commission made extensive and careful research of the history and conditions of the time, not only in restoring the buildings as they were, but in securing, authentic furnishings for each of them. Some of the curtains were obtained from England, where the looms still make the fabrics of that early period. One could not but admire the cleanliness of the many rooms and the

successful attempt at making them appear to be alive, instead of having the appearance of a dead museum.

The capitol group began with the meeting place of the last Territorial Legislature. October 5 to November 16, 1835. The building was built in 1820 and remodeled in 1854. It is constructed of large hand-hewn oak logs covered with red heart hand-beaded oak logs, covered with red heart cypress siding. All the hand-made old furniture is authentic throughout all the buildings.

The territorial home of Lieutenant C.F.M Noland, who was officially delegated to deliver the first Constitution of the State of Arkansas to Washington, making the trip on horseback, was visited. The interesting feature of the house, which is characteristic of the early homes of the South, is the wide veranda across the back of the house, overlooking the beautifully kept garden which contains flowers and shrubs of the period and a small formally planted plot featuring a border of phlox from the original plants at Vernon planted at the instruction of General George Washington.

Lieutenant Noland's office, his bedroom and other rooms of the house were visited and enjoyed, and the furniture admired.

Visited next was the Woodruff Group, built in 1824 by William E. Woodruff, founder of the Arkansas Gazette, oldest newspaper west of the Mississippi River, originally published at Arkansas Post. When the Capitol moved from the post to Little Rock, William Woodruff followed with his small press, and four years later he built his house and office. The original press is on exhibit.

This residence and print shop are the oldest houses in the territorial group, and one of the most interesting. There is an outside kitchen and six chimneys, making the buildings most interesting. In this house many pieces of the original Woodruff furniture were pointed out to us, including a baby bed, medicine chest, and a table made of cedar from a tree that grew "on little rock (Petit Roche) that readily gave a good place name to the settlement, as it was the first rock to be seen by the early French explorers on their journey from the Gulf up the Mississippi and Arkansas rivers in 1722," according to our folder.

The Conway House is the last in the group. This house was put together with white oak pegs. With its original hand-carved manties and doors and well-proportioned rooms, is a fine example of the charm and comfort of

the smaller southern homes of the period. It was the first residence of Elias N. Conway, who was the fifth governor of the State of Arkansas, and served for a longer period than, any other governor, 1852 to 1860.