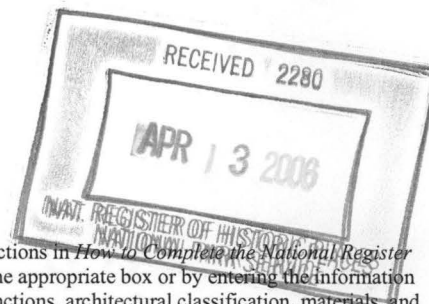


**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.



1. Name of Property

historic name Blytheville Commercial Historic District

other names/site number	MS0002-MS0015, MS0017-MS0022, MS0024-MS0028, MS0030-MS0037, MS0039-MS0046, MS0066-MS0067, MS0069-MS0070, MS0073-MS0074, MS0077-MS0078, MS0084, MS0087, MS0267-MS0269, MS0271-MS0276, MS0279-MS0294
-------------------------	--

2. Location

street & number	Main Street between 5 th and Franklin Streets, Ash Street between 5 th and 2 nd Streets.	<input type="checkbox"/> not for publication
-----------------	---	--

city or town Blytheville ☐ vicinity

```
state    Arkansas      code    AR    county    Mississippi    code    093    zip code    72316
```

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☒ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set for in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☒ locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.) / /

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date/

Arkansas Historic Preservation Program

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. (☐ See Continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date _____

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- ☒ entered in the National Register.
☐ See continuation sheet
- ☐ determined eligible for the National Register.
☐ See continuation sheet
- ☐ determined not eligible for the National Register.
- ☐ removed from the National Register.
- ☐ other, (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Signature of the Keeper *Edson H. Beall* Date of Action *5.24.06*

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- ☒ private
☒ public-local
☐ public-State
☐ public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

- ☐ building(s)
☒ district
☐ site
☐ structure
☐ object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
39	33	buildings
		sites
		structures
	3	objects
39	36	Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

Number of Contributing resources previously listed
in the National Register

1 (MS0034)

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/TRADE

DOMESTIC/hotel

RELIGION/religious facility

RECREATION AND CULTURE/theater

GOVERNMENT

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/TRADE

RELIGION/religious facility

RECREATION AND CULTURE/theater

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS/

Classical Revival/Mission/Spanish Colonial Revival

MODERN MOVEMENT/Moderne/Art Deco

OTHER/20th Century Commercial Architecture

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE

walls BRICK/STUCCO/METAL/WOOD

roof ASPHALT/METAL

other

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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Section number 7 Page 1

SUMMARY

The Blytheville Commercial Historic District is the heart of Blytheville, Arkansas. The town is one of two county seats in Mississippi County, Arkansas, in the northeast corner of the state. One building within the district boundaries has been previously listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The 1938 Kress Building (NR Listed 07-13-1997) at 210 W. Main Street is centrally located in the district. There are seventy-five other resources (seventy-two buildings and three objects) within the boundaries of this district. Of these remaining buildings 52% (thirty-nine total) maintain a high level of integrity and contribute to the district. There are thirty-three buildings and three objects representing 48% of the overall district that are non-contributing. The period of significance for this district is broad because development in Blytheville happened in three separate phases. The buildings in this district represent each of these periods which cover the years of 1890-1956. There are only nine buildings and three objects (16%) in the district built after 1956. The Blytheville Commercial Historic District is a strong continuous collection of late nineteenth century and early twentieth century commercial buildings.

ELABORATION

The oldest remaining buildings in Blytheville's Commercial Historic District date to 1890. Organization and development of a Main Street did not begin until the 1880s. The first period of construction in Blytheville includes the buildings dating to 1890 up until 1919. This period of development reflects the years that Blytheville was growing as a lumber town mainly sending their supplies north to Chicago as that city recovered from the Great Fire of 1871. The second period of development includes buildings constructed between 1920 and 1939. When the lumber supply began to dwindle in the late teens Blytheville sustained itself by using the newly bare land for crops. Cotton was the major crop in the area. This new industry in the area brought different types of businesses and a growth in permanent population. Buildings dating from this time are reflective of resulting social trends and agriculture needs. The final period of development for Blytheville includes buildings constructed between 1940 and 1956. This period has the smallest number of buildings but is nonetheless significant to the history of the town. In 1942 Eaker Air Force Base opened for operation in Blytheville. This brought an entirely new population to the town and proved to be a significant part of its economic base throughout the next fifty years.

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1890-1919

The architecture of downtown Blytheville in the first period of its development can be described as plain traditional commercial architecture. These brick buildings vary between one and two stories in height and feature rectangular plans. The building at 200-204 W. Main Street (MS0032, non-contributing) is the exception to the rectangular plan standard. This building was constructed in 1901. While it is not the oldest remaining building in Blytheville, it is seen as the anchor around which downtown developed. Historically known as the Kirby-Heath Building, it is a one story building with a beveled corner at the intersection of Main and 2nd Streets. The majority of the buildings dating to this period of construction are in this block of Main Street between 2nd Street and 3rd Street and the block between 3rd Street and Broadway. In fact, 74% (twenty-three total) of the buildings in this two block section date from 1890-1919. However, the two oldest buildings in the district are in the two blocks west of the Kirby-Heath Building. The building at 112 W. Main Street (MS0030, non-contributing) and 106 E. Main Street (MS0028, contributing) both date to c. 1890. Many of these buildings originally functioned to serve the needs of an impermanent population. There were several hotels, boarding houses, theatres, and general stores. However, some buildings and businesses reflect the wealth of this early community. Hubbard and Hoke furniture opened in 1906 in their own building at 401 W. Main Street (MS0002, non-contributing). The business has continuously operated out of this location for 100 years.

1920-1939

The buildings in Blytheville dating from the second period in its construction reflect the stability and prosperity of the town. Businesses represented on Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps produced in 1921 and 1928 display multiple stores carrying dry goods, jewelry, hardware, drugstores, and specialty markets. The majority of construction during this period was on the two blocks east of 2nd Street. The blocks between 2nd and 1st Street and 1st and Franklin Streets on Main Street currently have fourteen buildings dating to this period representing 57% of the total buildings on these two blocks. This period also saw construction of buildings along Ash Street to the south of Main Street. Originally Ash Street rivaled Main Street in the number and types of buildings, but in recent years many have been lost to deterioration and neglect. This district includes buildings along Ash

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Street between 5th Street and 2nd Street. Of those remaining structures 88% were built between 1920 and 1939.

Prosperity in Blytheville during this period can also be measured by the greater variety of high style architecture constructed in these years. While many buildings of this period also reflect standard twentieth century commercial design, there are several buildings with distinct architectural styles. The Kress Building (NR Listed 07-13-1997) is a wonderful example of the Art Deco Style. The First National Bank Building at 201 W. Main Street (MS0015, contributing) is an example of high style neoclassical architecture with two complete facades. The front façade faces Main Street while the east façade fronts 2nd Street.

Another corner building with two fully designed facades is the Ingram Apartment Building at 101 E. Main Street (MS0074, contributing). This building, constructed in 1926, has a Mediterranean influence as it features a short mansard with green barrel tiles, mosaic tile in the arches above several windows, and small balconies on the second story. The building was named for its architect, Ingram, who was based in Conway, Arkansas, and was requested for this job. It was originally a high-end office and apartment building. In 1929 an addition was built on the rear of the building which complements the style and proportions of the original structure.

This period also included modern updates to some of the older buildings on Main Street. In 1937 the building at 200-204 W. Main Street (MS0032, non-contributing) was remodeled using Carrara glass. Ivory and black glass accents on the building's exterior transformed the style of the building so that it was more reflective of the Art Moderne style popular in the 1930s. On the other side of the street the buildings at 217-221 W. Main Street (MS0009) received a similar makeover, presumably around the same time. There is still some black Carrara glass visible on the building currently at 208 W. Main Street (MS0033) which was once part of the building at 200-204 W. Main Street and was part of the 1937 remodel. The building at 217-221 W. Main Street has much of its Carrara glass façade in tact.

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1940-1956

There were only five buildings constructed in the boundaries of the Blytheville Commercial Historic District in the years between 1940 and 1956. While it was not a greatly significant period in the architectural development of downtown Blytheville the buildings constructed at this time are distinct from those of the preceding years. Three of these buildings were all built by Tom Little who went on to be mayor of Blytheville. The building at the corner of 5th and Main Street (MS0282, contributing) and the building directly behind it facing 5th Street (MS0087, contributing) were both built by Tom Little in 1947. He also built 122-126 W. Main Street (MS0267) after a building in the same location burned. It was designed by local architect U.S. Branson and operated as the Tom Little Hardware Store. These three buildings as well as the other two buildings constructed in this period are all built of buff colored brick, rather than red brick used on all other brick buildings in downtown Blytheville. The building at 114-116 W. Main Street (MS0291, contributing) was built c. 1940. It is two-stories tall and has metal frame divided light windows. Similar windows are used in the two Tom Little Buildings along 5th Street. The buildings of this period all have similar distinct design that set them apart from those built earlier.

1957-Present

Few buildings have been constructed within the boundaries of this district in the last fifty years. There are only nine total buildings and three objects which represent 16% of the overall district. Four of these buildings are plain traditional infill where older buildings were lost either to neglect or fire. The most distinct building dating from this time period is the Farmer's Bank building constructed in 1968 (MS0292, non-contributing). This building was conceived along with an urban redevelopment plan created for Blytheville in the late 1960s. The bank took the place of almost an entire block of early twentieth century commercial buildings on the 400 block on the north side of Main Street. It is a two-story building with International Style influences. The exterior is clad in large concrete panels with large exposed aggregate. Unlike the side-by-side commercial buildings along everywhere else on Main Street, this building has a deep setback from the street and open space on all four sides. This building interrupts the continuity of the

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remainder of the district and stands alone as a bold reminder of changing practices in city planning throughout the twentieth century.

INTEGRITY

With 52% of resources contributing the integrity of the Blytheville Commercial Historic District it has a strong visual connection to its period of significance. Interruptions in this district can be directly related to two events. In the late 1960s an urban redevelopment plan was conceived for and partially implemented in Blytheville. This plan called for alterations to facades on every building facing Main Street between 5th and Franklin Streets. This plan also called for the serpentine street pattern on Main Street between 5th and Franklin. These changes were meant to enhance the shopping experience on Blytheville's Main Street. Much of this plan was successfully implemented and many remnants of it are visible today. Aluminum slipcover facades are still in place among many of the buildings on Main Street. These buildings comprise most of the non-contributing structures within the district. Several years later a second effort at changing the look of Main Street buildings was undertaken. Three buildings on Blytheville's Main Street have wood-shingle clad mansard roofs attached over their facades which obscure the building's original design. These buildings also add to the non-contributing count in this district. Several buildings on Main Street that once had aluminum facades have removed them in recent years for various reasons. This has helped to restore much of the architectural integrity and continuity of the district.

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Resource #	Address	Current Occupant	Map ID #	C or NC
MS0066	422 W. Ash Street	Unknown	1	C
MS0067	418-420 W. Ash Street	Unknown	2	C
MS0273	416 W. Ash Street	Unknown	3	C
MS0069	324 W. Ash Street	Vacant	4	C
MS0271	312 W. Ash Street	R.L. Miller Inc.	5	C
MS0070	312 W. Ash Street	R.L. Miller Inc.	6	C
MS0073	218 W. Ash Street	H&H Business Machines	7	C
MS0279	125 S. 2 nd Street	KLCN/KHLS	8	C
MS0282	419-431 W. Main Street	Tom Little Building	9	C
MS0283	413-415 W. Main Street	Unknown	10	NC
MS0002	401-411 W. Main Street	Hubbard & Hoke Furniture	11	NC
MS0003	325 W. Main Street	G.Q. Fashions	12	C
MS0272	319 W. Main Street	B.R. Kids	13	NC
MS0004	313-317 W. Main Street	Unknown	14	NC
MS0005	311 W. Main Street	Fondren & Sons Hardware	15	NC
MS0284	307 W. Main Street	Halsell's	16	NC
MS0006	301 W. Main Street	Christian World	17	NC
MS0007	303 W. Main Street	Christian World	18	NC
MS0008	223 W. Main Street	Vacant	19	C
MS0009	217 W. Main Street	Vacant	20	C
MS0010	215 W. Main Street	Rick's TV Service	21	C
MS0011	213 W. Main Street	The Cupboard	22	C
MS0012	211 W. Main Street	Russell's Appliances, LLC	23	C
MS0013	209 W. Main Street	Insurance agent	24	C
MS0014	203 W. Main Street	Russell's Sales, LLC	25	C
MS0015	201 W. Main Street	Formerly First National Bank	26	C
MS0017	113 W. Main Street	Vacant	27	C
MS0018	111 W. Main Street	Vacant	28	NC
MS0019	109 W. Main Street	Vacant	29	C

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MS0285	101 W. Main Street	Treasure Jewelers	30	NC
MS0074	101 E. Main Street	Formerly Ingram Apts.	31	C
MS0020	105 E. Main Street	Vacant	32	C
MS0021	109 E. Main Street	Vacant	33	NC
MS0022	117 E. Main Street	Blytheville Cleaning Services	34	NC
MS0286	131 E. Main Street	Tony's Place	35	C
MS0288	134-138 E. Main Street	Roger Massey's	36	NC
MS0289	130 E. Main Street	Mitchell's Variety	37	C
MS0290	122-126 E. Main Street	Heath	38	NC
MS0024	118 E. Main Street	Seymore Hardware	39	NC
MS0025	114 E. Main Street	Unknwon	40	C
MS0026	112 E. Main Street	First Church of the Nazarene	41	NC
MS0027	108 E. Main Street	Vacant	42	NC
MS0028	106 E. Main Street	Vacant	43	C
MS0269	104 E. Main Street	Blytheville Acad. of Cosmetology	44	NC
MS0030	112 W. Main Street	Terry's Sales & Rentals	45	NC
MS0291	114-116 W. Main Street	Vacant	46	C
MS0031	118 W. Main Street	Oberst Building	47	C
MS0267	122 W. Main Street	Blytheville Food Pantry	48	C
MS0268	130 W. Main Street	The Learning Stop	49	NC
MS0032	200-204 W. Main Street	Vacant	50	NC
MS0033	208 W. Main Street	Vacant	51	C
MS0034	212 W. Main Street	Main St. Office & Museum	52	IL
MS0035	216 W. Main Street	New York Store	53	C
MS0036	222 W. Main Street	Formerly J.C. Penney's/ Vacant	54	NC
MS0037	224 W. Main Street	Post Impressions	55	C
MS0039	300 W. Main Street	Hallmark Gold Crown	56	C
MS0040	306 W. Main Street	Ritz Civic Center	57	C
MS0041	308 W. Main Street	Unknown	58	NC
MS0042	312 W. Main Street	Westbrooks	59	NC
MS0043	310 W. Main Street	Burge's Shoes	60	C
MS0044	316 W. Main Street	That Bookstore in Blytheville	61	C

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MS0045	318 W. Main Street	Vacant	62	NC
MS0046	322 W. Main Street	Day's	63	NC
MS0292	400 W. Main Street	Farmer's Bank	64	NC
MS0293	420-422 W. Main Street	Multiple businesses	65	NC
MS0280	121 S. 2 nd Street	Blytheville T.V. Cable	66	C
MS0281	115-117 S. 2 nd Street	Unknown	67	NC
MS0078	103 S. 3 rd Street	Vacant	68	NC
MS0084	118 S. Broadway	Print Shop	69	C
MS0087	108-110 S. 5 th Street	Vacant	70	C
MS0077	103 N. 2 nd Street	Heath Building	71	NC
MS0287	141 E. Main Street	B&J Refrigeration	72	NC
MS0294	418 S. 5 th Street	Unknown	73	NC
MS0274	W. Main and 5 th Street	Blytheville Arch #1	74	NC
MS0275	E. Main and Franklin	Blytheville Arch #3	75	NC
MS0276	W. Main and 2nd Street	Blytheville Arch #2	76	NC

Chart Reference:

C - Contributing

NC - Non-Contributing

IL - Individually Listed

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SKETCH MAP



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Looking west down West Main Street at the intersection of 2nd Street and West Main Street, circa 1908.

Blytheville Commercial Historic District
Name of Property

Mississippi County, Arkansas
County and State

United States Department of the Interior
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Looking east down West Main Street from the 5th Street and West Main Street Intersection, circa 1920s.

Blytheville Commercial Historic District
Name of Property

Mississippi County, Arkansas
County and State

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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South side of West Main Street's 300 Block, looking southeast, circa 1920s.

Blytheville Commercial Historic District
Name of Property

Mississippi County, Arkansas
County and State

United States Department of the Interior
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A Blytheville parade during the prosperous 1920s. Looking east down West Main Street from the West Main Street and 5th Street intersection. Most of the buildings in this photograph were razed in the 1960s as part of the urban redevelopment plan. They were replaced with The Farmer's Bank (MS0292, non-contributing), 1968.

Blytheville Commercial Historic District
Name of Property

Mississippi County, Arkansas
County and State

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Ingram Apartment Building (MS0074, contributing) at 101 E. Main Street, under construction in 1926.

8. Statement of Significance**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- ☐ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ **B** removed from its original location.
- ☐ **C** birthplace or grave of a historical figure of outstanding importance.
- ☐ **D** a cemetery.
- ☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ **F** a commemorative property
- ☐ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Levels of Significance (local, state, national)

local

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

COMMERCE

Period of Significance

1890-1956

Significant Dates

1890-1956

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked)**Cultural Affiliation** (Complete if Criterion D is marked)**Architect/Builder**

U.S. Branson, Ingram

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ Previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State Agency
- ☐ Federal Agency
- ☐ Local Government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other

Name of repository: _____

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SUMMARY

The Blytheville Commercial Historic District is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under **Criterion A** for its association with early development in Blytheville and **Criterion C** for its assortment and quality of 20th Century commercial structures. The district is being nominated with **local significance**. Blytheville's Commercial Historic District represents the development of the town through its peak in the 1950s. Its period of significance spans from 1890-1956.

ELABORATION

Present day Blytheville sits in Mississippi County, Arkansas, in the northeast corner of the state. Blytheville is less than ten miles from both the Missouri state line to the north and Tennessee to the east. The county is naturally isolated by its location. The St. Francis River runs near its western border, while the Mississippi River is the eastern border.³ The land near the St. Francis River is now a Wildlife Management Area and is referred to as the St. Francis Sunken Lands. In the days of early settlement in Mississippi County this swampy area protected Mississippi County from development and preserved a great stock of cypress and hardwood trees.⁴

Osceola was the biggest town in Mississippi County during its early history. Osceola sits on the banks of the Mississippi River and was a thriving town with excellent farmland and a population of approximately 1,000 by 1878. Osceola is about twenty miles south of Blytheville and was the second most important port town on the Mississippi River behind nearby Memphis, Tennessee.⁵ Blytheville developed much slower than Osceola because it was not as naturally poised for settlement.

Without the efforts of one active citizen the city of Blytheville may never have existed. Reverend H.T. Blythe is arguably the most important person in the development of this community. According to the most comprehensive history of Blytheville in print, *Reverend H.T. Blythe and the Downtown He Founded*, Reverend Blythe and the town of Blytheville "were thought of as one and the same."⁶ Reverend Blythe was born Henry Thomas Blythe to John and Elizabeth Cobb Blythe of Southampton County, Virginia, on October 27, 1816. Ten years later they moved to Henry County, Tennessee. Reverend Blythe lived in Henry County until he reached eighteen. He then moved between Mississippi and Tennessee before settling in Arkansas in 1853. He first lived on a sixty-acre farm in near present day Armored (east of Blytheville in Mississippi County).⁷

³ *The Goodspeed Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Northeastern Arkansas*. Southern Historical Press: Easley, South Carolina. 1978. (Reprinted from an original 1891 edition in the O.C. Bailey Library, Hendrix College, Conway, Arkansas), 446.

⁴ Abbott, Jonathan and Marcy Thompson. *Reverend H.T. Blythe and the Downtown He Founded*. Quality Printing, Inc., Blytheville, Arkansas. 1991, 14.

⁵ *The Goodspeed Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Northeastern Arkansas*, 453.

⁶ Abbott, 7.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

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Reverend Blythe became licensed to preach in 1862 while living in Arkansas. He was a Methodist Episcopal preacher and served as pastor at the Sycamore School House. Methodists originally began meeting at the Sycamore School House in 1853; however, Methodist teachings are documented in the area as early as 1838.⁸ As pastor of the Sycamore School House, Reverend Blythe secured a great deal of power in the area.

The Mississippi County Court held proceedings in the Sycamore School House after a first turn in the Osceola Presbyterian Church in 1866. Blythe weighed a heavy hand on anything happening within the Sycamore School House so his political influence only grew stronger when the court utilized the building.⁹

By 1868 Reverend Blythe owned 136 acres in present day Blytheville. In 1873 he built a house for himself at the present day intersection of Franklin and Walnut Streets.¹⁰ By this time development in the area was rampant due to growing needs for lumber. The growing settlement at Blytheville was named for its most influential citizen. The town was organized and named Blythesville in 1878 (the 's' was dropped several years later). At this time the community had a population of 200. In 1879 it got a post office which was run by Reverend Blythe.¹¹ In 1881 Reverend Blythe began selling of pieces of the land he owned in Blytheville. One of the first sales was to A.J. Wilson on May 16, 1881.¹² Many land sales followed and the new property owners began building downtown Blytheville on the land that Reverend Blythe originally owned.

Reverend Blythe lived in Mississippi County before the area began to grow. He was somewhat unsuspecting when the area in which he lived began to grow due to lumber needs. As mentioned earlier, Mississippi County had several thousand acres of untouched forest due to its isolated location. In 1871 the Great Chicago Fire destroyed much of the city of Chicago. Efforts to rebuild extended to Arkansas as land speculators tapped into the resources of the state's rural areas. Land in northeast Arkansas was inexpensive and the need for lumber was so great that it was an obvious choice to harvest trees in this area.¹³ Thus, the Great Chicago Fire had a direct impact on the initial development of Mississippi County and Blytheville in particular.

The population of Mississippi County doubled in the 1870s.¹⁴ The Chicago Mill and Lumber Company did not arrive in Blytheville until the early 1900s, but the lumber industry rapidly grew with the birth of several small lumber and land companies in the area. Rail lines were put in to help move the lumber out of the county and as a result Mississippi County was no longer the isolated parcel that it had once been. In 1901 Blytheville was awarded the privilege of its own courthouse. The growing and active population of

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 9.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ *The Goodspeed Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Northeastern Arkansas*, 453.

¹² Abbott, 10.

¹³ Ibid., 14.

¹⁴ *The Goodspeed Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Northeastern Arkansas*, 459.

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Blytheville complained about the inconvenience of traveling to Osceola for court affairs. As a result the county held an election for the location of a new courthouse. Blytheville won the honor and has served as a dual county seat ever since.

The boomtown effect Blytheville experienced as a result of the lumber needs up north began to fade at the turn of the century. When much of the lumber supply was depleted the citizens of Mississippi County had to find another way to drive their economy as well as a use for the bare land. Farmers were attracted to the area and agriculture became the new base of the economy. Farmland was advertised with 'no money down' and proved to be an attractive offer.¹⁵ This change was a turning point in the development of the area. During the lumber years much of the business in Blytheville concentrated on entertainment and facilitating temporary lifestyles. There were pool halls, rooming houses, big city businessmen, and 'questionable ladies.'¹⁶ Blytheville also had its share of theatres to entertain its early settlers. The Ritz Theatre (MS0040, contributing) has served the citizens of Blytheville since it was constructed c.1915 as the Gem Theatre (the name was changed in 1925 when due to a change in ownership). The citizens who later moved to the area for farming purposes had long term plans to stay in Blytheville. They also needed goods and supplies. As a result businesses and social infrastructure began to take hold.

Beginning in the 1920s, many of the new buildings on Main Street in Blytheville were reflective of the change in industry as well as the population. The development of farming (mostly cotton at the time) meant that the population was tied to the land and therefore permanent. Blytheville was central to the farming industry in Mississippi County. The shops on Main Street catered to the farming community. There were many dry goods stores, seed stores, and hardware stores. In addition, churches, drug stores, and grocery stores sprang up in and around Main Street to service the residents. Cotton proved to be highly profitable to the small community of Blytheville. At one time there were five cotton gins in Blytheville.¹⁷ The population and economy of the area steadily developed. More elaborate buildings such as the Ingram Apartment building (MS0074, contributing), the Kress Building (NR Listed 07-13-1997), and the First National Bank Building (MS0015, contributing) were all built during this period and are lasting signs of the wealth of the community during these years.

Blytheville thrived through the 1920s and 1930s. The next big event in Blytheville was the arrival of an Army airfield on June 10, 1942. This was used as a flying school through the end of World War II. The airfield closed in October of 1945 and housed military records for ten years. Blytheville Air Force Base opened at this site on July 15, 1955 and became home to the 461st Bombardment Wing from Hill Air Force Base in Utah. The base became home to the 4229th Air Base Squadron in April 1958 until the 97th Bombardment Wing took over in 1959. The base was well integrated into the community at Blytheville and

¹⁵ Abbott, 15.

¹⁶ Ibid., 14.

¹⁷ Abbott, Jonathan. Interview with the author. Blytheville, Arkansas. January 25, 2006.

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was partially responsible for a large population increase during this part of the century. In the 1950s Blytheville's population exceeded 50,000 people. Local residents describe this as a time when all of Main Street was bustling with people and businesses. There were several department stores along Main Street, including Kress, J.C. Penney's, and Graber's. They described Saturday as a day when residents would always park their cars in the same spot and the entire community would be on Main Street shopping and socializing well into the evening.¹⁸ In addition, Main Street boasted every kind of business including an ice cream shop, bakeries, pool halls, banks, hardware, jewelry, clothing, grocery, theatres, and a radio station (KLCN). The citizens of Blytheville were privy to some world class entertainment during these prosperous years. KLCN in Blytheville is one of the oldest radio stations in Arkansas and broadcast the first radio performance of Mississippi County native Johnny Cash (from Dyess, Arkansas).¹⁹ The Ritz Theatre was played host to performances by Roy Rogers and Dale Evans. Dale Evans spent much of her teen years in Mississippi County and often returned for performances.²⁰ In addition to these entertainers, Elvis Presley performed on Main Street in the early days of his career.²¹

Although Main Street was developing as a center of activity in Blytheville it was primarily serving the white population. Blytheville had a significant African-American population as well. Ash Street developed as the equivalent to Main Street for the African-Americans in Blytheville. Saturday was an equally busy day on Ash Street which boasted the same variety of businesses. There were grocery stores, pool halls, and even a theatre to cater to Blytheville's African-American population. This was a welcome spot for the African-American citizens as they experienced segregation in many establishments on Main Street. The Ritz Theatre (MS0074) had a separate entrance leading to a separate balcony for its African-American patrons.

Blytheville experienced a dramatic decline after its peak in the 1950s. The economy based on cotton and farming could no longer support the needs of its citizens. Generally speaking the causes can be traced to two things. The rise in development of mechanized farming eliminated much of the need for paid laborers on the farm. In addition, on March 1, 1956, the Federal minimum wage increased from \$0.75 to \$1.00. According to local historian Jonathan Abbott, this marked the flight of many Blytheville residents to factory jobs in Illinois and Michigan. Abbott recalls that in the late 1950s the Blytheville Greyhound Bus Station (NR Listed 08-17-1987) was full of residents leaving town with all of their belongings and hopes of a better life.²²

Those remaining in Blytheville faced an uncertain future as the landowners became the primary beneficiaries of farming profits. In the late 1960s Blytheville Mayor Tom Little initiated a program to enhance Main Street in order to improve the shopping experience for Blytheville's remaining population.²³ An initial

¹⁸ Goforth, Jimmy. Interview with the author. Blytheville, Arkansas. January 25, 2006.

¹⁹ Abbott, Interview.

²⁰ Sullivan, Hays. Interview with the author. Blytheville, Arkansas. January 25, 2006.

²¹ Abbott, Interview.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

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proposal called for redesigning the street pattern so that Main Street was no longer a two-lane road with parallel parking along the sides. This new plan affected Main Street between 5th and Franklin (the same length of Main Street included in this district) and called for the street to curve back and forth between the sidewalks with angled parking alternating between the curves. This street pattern was meant to make parking easier, traffic slower, and pedestrians safer. Thru traffic was diverted to Ash Street to the south and Walnut Street to the north. These two streets became one-way streets with Ash running west to east and Walnut running east to west.²⁴ This street plan is still in use today. In addition to the changed street pattern, the plan included alterations to all building façades facing Main Street. This mostly called for the application of aluminum slipcovers and addition of consistent sidewalk width awnings all along Main Street to create a consistent appearance.

Addition of aluminum façades was done in many towns across the country for a variety of reasons. Among these being a way to cater to the pedestrian and make the shopping experience easier and more pleasant. The Blytheville plan was published in April 1969 and stated its objectives as follows: "To establish Downtown Blytheville as the dominant regional economic center in Northeast Arkansas. To create optimum conditions for buying and selling, exchange of ideas, amusement, and cultural interchange in the downtown area."²⁵ The plan also cites the brick façades of downtown buildings as obsolete and calls for updating the building appearances to rid the downtown aesthetic of "disharmony and deterioration."²⁶ It is unknown how much of the plan was actually implemented. Nearly the entire south side of Main Street between Broadway and 3rd Street has its aluminum façades intact. Though this block is non-contributing to the period of significance for the Blytheville Commercial Historic District it is a reminder of the 1960s mentality toward Main Street buildings.

Blytheville's decline in population has continued to the present. Blytheville Air Force Base was renamed Eaker Air Force Base in 1988, but was permanently closed just four years later. On December 15, 1992, the base held a closure ceremony and the facility later began operating as Arkansas Aeroplex and Arkansas International Airport. That same year marked the arrival of a new industry in Blytheville. Nucor Steel opened a plant in nearby Hickman, Arkansas, in 1992. In 1998 they expanded to include a sheet mill as part of the plant. With offices in several towns in Mississippi County (including Blytheville) it has now become one of the largest steel producing areas in the country. The rail, water, and roads that were first used to transport lumber, and later cotton, are continuing to benefit the citizens of Blytheville and Mississippi County as they are now used by the steel industry.

Blytheville's Main Street has always been the heart of the town. Over the years development has moved to the east of Main Street and clustered around I-55 which is a high traffic route between Memphis and St.

²⁴ Manes, Brasseale, Hodges & Associates, Inc. Planning Consultants. *Downtown Blytheville Urban Design Study*. Blytheville, AR: Hawk's, Inc., 1969.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

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Louis. While there are still businesses and tireless efforts to bring business onto Main Street it is difficult to ignore the new development as well as the fact that the population now standing at about 26,000 is a small fraction of what it once was. Blytheville became a Main Street Arkansas town in 1990 and has made an effort restore the active center of business that it once was. There have been setbacks as several notable buildings have been lost in the interim. Two full blocks of Ash Street were razed in the 1990s. Another building lost in the 1990s was the B.A. Lynch Building. It was built in 1926 with Italianate and Mediterranean influences. This was an office building that housed many attorneys and physicians. It was one of only a handful of high style buildings in Blytheville, but was lost apparently due to neglect. Blytheville's long history is still represented in its remaining Main Street and Ash Street structures that comprise the Blytheville Commercial Historic District.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Blytheville Commercial Historic District is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under **Criterion A** for its association with early development in Blytheville and **Criterion C** for its assortment and quality of 20th Century commercial structures. The district is being nominated with **local significance**. Blytheville's Commercial Historic District represents the development of the town through its peak in the 1950s. Its period of significance spans from 1890-1956.

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Jackson, Ken. Interview with the author. Blytheville, Arkansas. January 24 & 25, 2006.

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Manes, Brasseale, Hodges & Associates, Inc. Planning Consultants. *Downtown Blytheville Urban Design Study*. Blytheville, AR: Hawk's, Inc., 1969.

Sullivan, Hays. Interview with the author. Blytheville, Arkansas. January 25, 2006.

Survey files of Mississippi County. Arkansas Historic Preservation Program Archives.

The Goodspeed Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Northeastern Arkansas. Southern Historical Press: Easley, South Carolina. 1978. (Reprinted from an original 1891 edition in the O.C. Bailey Library, Hendrix College, Conway, Arkansas).

10. Geographical DataAcreage of Property Approximately 25 acres.**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	<u>16</u>	<u>237631</u>	<u>3979874</u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing
2	<u>16</u>	<u>237629</u>	<u>3979703</u>

3	<u>16</u>	<u>237971</u>	<u>3979695</u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing
4	<u>16</u>	<u>237972</u>	<u>3979748</u>

☒ See continuation sheet**Verbal Boundary Description**

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared Byname/title Elizabeth A. James/National Register Historianorganization Arkansas Historic Preservation Programdate April 6, 2006street & number 1500 Tower Building, 323 Center Streettelephone 501-324-9789city or town Little Rockstate ARzip code 72205**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets**Maps**A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's locationA **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.**Photographs**Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.**Additional items**

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name _____

street & number _____ telephone _____

city or town _____ state _____ zip code _____

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listing. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*)

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P. O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20303.

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ADDITIONAL UTMS:

5. 16 238102 E 3979752 N
6. 16 238101 E 3979732 N
7. 16 238269 E 3979725 N
8. 16 238271 E 3979858 N

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Beginning at a point in the center of North 5th Street at the alley between West Main Street and West Walnut Street, proceed southerly to the intersection of West Ash Street and South 5th Street, thence proceed easterly to a point in the center of the intersection of West Ash Street and South 2nd Street, thence proceed northerly to the alley between West Main Street and West Ash Street, thence proceed easterly to the center of South First Street, thence proceed southerly to the alley between East Main Street and East Ash Street, thence proceed easterly to the center of Franklin Street, thence proceed northerly to the alley between East Main Street and East Walnut Street, thence proceed westerly to the point of beginning.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

This boundary was drawn to include properties in the historic downtown Blytheville commercial area with the greatest density of structures maintaining a high level of historic integrity.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY Blytheville Commercial Historic District
NAME:

MULTIPLE
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: ARKANSAS, Mississippi

DATE RECEIVED: 4/13/06 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 4/26/06
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 5/11/06 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 5/27/06
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 06000421

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N
REQUEST: N SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: N NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

☒ ACCEPT ☐ RETURN ☐ REJECT 5.24.06 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

Entered in the
National Register

RECOM./CRITERIA _____

REVIEWER _____ DISCIPLINE _____

TELEPHONE _____ DATE _____

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N

If a nomination is returned to the nominating authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the NPS.



BLYTHEVILLE COMMERCIAL HISTORIC DISTRICT

MISSISSIPPI COUNTY, AR

SARAH JAMPOLE

JANUARY 2006

ARKANSAS HISTORIC PRESERVATION PROGRAM

INTERSECTION OF 2ND STREET AND WEST MAIN STREET, FACING EAST

1 of 7



BYTHEVILLE COMMERCIAL HISTORIC DISTRICT

MISSISSIPPI COUNTY, ARKANSAS

SARAH JAMPOLE

JANUARY 2006

ARKANSAS HISTORIC PRESERVATION PROGRAM

INTERSECTION OF BROADWAY AND WEST MAIN STREET, FACING EAST

2 of 7



BLITHEVILLE COMMERCIAL HISTORIC DISTRICT
MISSISSIPPI COUNTY, ARKANSAS

SARAH JAMPOLE

JANUARY 2006

ARKANSAS HISTORIC PRESERVATION PROGRAM

INTERSECTION OF 5TH STREET AND WEST MAIN STREET, FACING EAST
3 of 7



BLITHEVILLE COMMERCIAL HISTORIC DISTRICT
MISSISSIPPI COUNTY, ARKANSAS

SARAH JAMPOLE

JANUARY 2006

ARKANSAS HISTORIC PRESERVATION PROGRAM

INTERSECTION OF 2ND STREET AND WEST MAIN STREET, FACING WEST

4 of 7



BLITHEVILLE COMMERCIAL HISTORIC DISTRICT

MISSISSIPPI COUNTY, ARKANSAS

SARAH JAMPOLE

JANUARY 2006

ARKANSAS HISTORIC PRESERVATION PROGRAM

INTERSECTION OF FRANKLIN STREET AND EAST MAIN STREET,
FACING WEST

5 of 7



BLYTHEVILLE COMMERCIAL HISTORIC DISTRICT
MISSISSIPPI COUNTY, ARKANSAS

SARAH JAMPOLE

MAY 2005

ARKANSAS HISTORIC PRESERVATION PROGRAM

INGRAM APARTMENT BUILDING INTERSECTION OF 1ST STREET AND E. MAIN,
FACING SOUTHEAST

6 of 7



BYTHEVILLE COMMERCIAL HISTORIC DISTRICT

MISSISSIPPI COUNTY, ARKANSAS

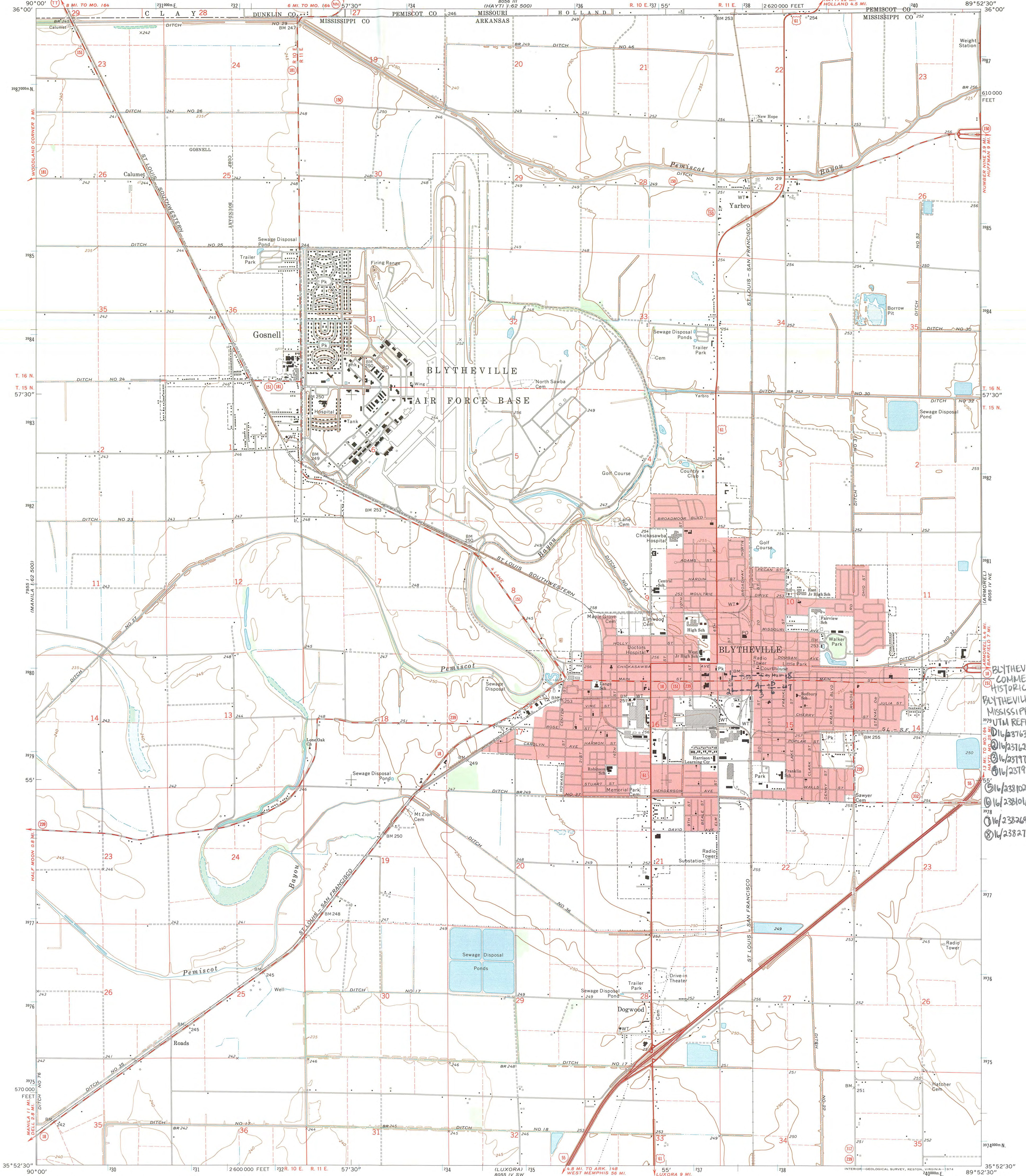
SARAH JAMPOLE

MAY 2005

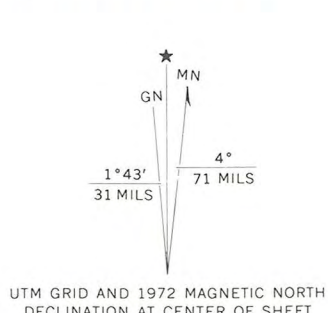
ARKANSAS HISTORIC PRESERVATION PROGRAM

418-422 W. ASH STREET, LOOKING NORTHWEST

7 of 7



Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey
Control by USGS and USC&GS
Topography by photogrammetric methods from aerial
photographs taken 1971. Field checked 1972
Projection and 10,000-foot grid ticks: Arkansas coordinate
system, north zone (Lambert conformal conic)
1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks,
zone 16, shown in blue. 1927 North American datum
Red tint indicates area in which only landmark buildings are shown
Fine red dashed lines indicate selected fence and field lines where
generally visible on aerial photographs. This information is unchecked



SCALE 1:24000
CONTOUR INTERVAL 5 FEET
DATUM IS MEAN SEA LEVEL

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS
FOR SALE BY U. S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, DENVER, COLORADO 80225, OR RESTON, VIRGINIA 22092
ARKANSAS GEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, LITTLE ROCK, ARKANSAS 72201,
AND MISSOURI GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, ROLLA, MISSOURI 65401
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST



ROAD CLASSIFICATION
Primary highway, hard surface
Secondary highway, hard surface
Unimproved road
Interstate Route
U. S. Route
State Route

BLYTHEVILLE, ARK.—MO.
NW 1/4 BLYTHEVILLE 15' QUADRANGLE
N3552.5—W8952.5/7.5

1972

AMS 8055 IV NW—SERIES V884





The Department of Arkansas Heritage

Mike Huckabee, Governor
Cathie Matthews, Director

Arkansas Arts Council

Arkansas Natural Heritage
Commission

Delta Cultural Center

Historic Arkansas Museum

Mosaic Templars
Cultural Center

Old State House Museum



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An Equal Opportunity Employer



April 6, 2006

Dr. Janet Matthews
Chief of Registration
United States Department of the Interior
National Register of Historic Places
National Park Service
8th Floor
1201 Eye Street, NW
Washington, DC 20005



RE: Blytheville Commercial Historic District – Blytheville,
Mississippi County

Dear Dr. Matthews:

We are enclosing for your review the above-referenced nomination. The Arkansas Historic Preservation Program has complied with all applicable nominating procedures and notification requirements in the nomination process.

If you need further information, please call Elizabeth A. James of my staff at (501) 324-9789. Thank you for your cooperation in this matter.

Sincerely,

Cathie Matthews
State Historic Preservation Officer

CM:eaj

Enclosure