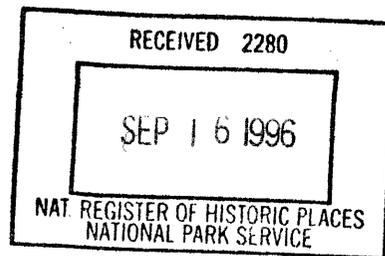


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Multiple Property Documentation Form



This form is for use in documenting multiple property groups relating to one or several historic contexts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900-a). Type all entries.

**A. Name of Multiple Property Listing**

Historic Resources of West Helena, Arkansas, 1900-1945

**B. Associated Historic Contexts**

History of West Helena, Arkansas

**C. Geographical Data**

Legal boundaries of the City of West Helena, Arkansas

See continuation sheet

**D. Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this documentation form meets the National Register documentation standards and sets forth requirements for the listing of related properties consistent with the National Register criteria. This submission meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60 and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Planning and Evaluation.

See accompanying cover letter

Signature of certifying official

Date

Arkansas Historic Preservation Program

State or Federal agency and bureau

I, hereby, certify that this multiple property documentation form has been approved by the National Register as a basis for evaluating related properties for listing in the National Register.

[Signature]  
Signature of the Keeper of the National Register

10/31/94  
Date

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## HISTORY OF WEST HELENA, ARKANSAS

### I. Introduction

The early twentieth century industrial city of West Helena, Arkansas -- located to the west and north of the historic antebellum Mississippi River city of Helena -- owes its inception to the vast tracts of bottomland hardwoods that surrounded this heretofore sparsely populated area, and to the fact that Helena's own industrial growth during the late nineteenth century necessitated the development of adjacent manufacturing sites. However, the greatest factor in the growth of West Helena as a vital and prosperous community was the arrival of the Missouri & North Arkansas Railroad (M&NA) in 1909. This rail line connected West Helena and its products with a national and international market that gave this community the means to develop its own identity as an important industrial center in eastern Arkansas.

### II. Early History

Helena's history as a Mississippi River port city -- particularly during the antebellum period -- has overshadowed its role during the late nineteenth century as an important regional hub for the timber industry that burgeoned in this part of Arkansas after the Civil War, especially with the arrival of the railroads. Whole sections of eastern Arkansas were literally covered with a variety of bottomland hardwoods that had heretofore been virtually inaccessible to commercial development and exploitation. The successful construction of railroad lines through these areas during the last quarter of the nineteenth century provided the first reliable and effective means of transporting the raw timber from the forests and to the mills where it could be processed into a variety of products.

Lumber mills and yards to warehouse and process the hardwood logs were initially built in Helena proper along a strip located to the south of the city that ran parallel to the river itself; however the growth of these industries soon filled all the available space within the city, and the continued demand required the selection of another site onto which this industry could expand. The first attempt to spread industry to the west of Helena occurred in the community of Barton (located approximately ten miles west of Helena) in 1900 with the construction of the Premier Cotton Mill. Workers were imported from North Carolina to work in this mill, but for reasons unrecorded these workers soon became dissatisfied and left. The mill remained in operation for some years, but the inability to retain skilled labor forced it to cease operations.

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It was the arrival of the final leg of the Missouri & North Arkansas Railroad that proved the impetus for a second attempt to develop the area located immediately to the west of Crowley's Ridge into a new townsite. A farming concern known as the Clopton plantation was located approximately three miles northwest of Helena and was the closest level ground; it contained approximately 2,300 acres. Owned by the Clopton family from 1853 until 1902, Hoggart Clopton sold it that year to Mrs. Helen M. Wortham, who in turn sold it to a Mr. James R. Bush in 1907. It was he who sold it for just under \$40,000 to the two speculators who would prove to be the founding fathers of West Helena as such, Mr. Edward Chaffin Hornor, the president of the Bank of Helena, and his cousin, John Sidney Hornor.

The Missouri & North Arkansas Railroad began as the St. Louis & North Arkansas Railroad and was granted its first charter by the Arkansas Railroad Commission on May 17, 1899. Originally conceived as a connector line between the resort community of Eureka Springs and Harrison, the commercial and political center of Boone County, the railroad continuously lost money during its first years of operation, losing as much as \$30,000 in 1906 alone. In that year it was re-organized as the Missouri & North Arkansas Railroad and almost immediately negotiated a contract to construct a line south from Harrison to Searcy, and from there to Helena. Construction on the Helena-Brinkley branch of the line was begun in June of 1907 and completed by March of 1909, with regular passenger and freight service between its northern terminus in Neosho, Missouri and Helena commencing the next month.\* Though the Missouri & North Arkansas was probably the most expensive railroad to build in the history of the state - - and in spite of the fact that its performance record was frequently erratic and seldom dependable (even earning the M&NA the derisive sobriquet "May Never Arrive") -- the railroad continued operation throughout the first half of the twentieth century in one form or another, and remained an important factor in the growth of the areas it served, particularly through its role as the chief transport for freight of all kinds.

The Hornors hired Major C. H. Purvis, a civil engineer from Helena, to lay out the new town; he completed his survey and map on March 28, 1910. Industrial sites of about ten acres each were located along the east side of the M&NA tracks (now the location of the divided four-lane that is State Highway 49), with a later spur track from the St. Louis, Iron Mountain and Southern (later Missouri-Pacific) line to the southwest extending northeast and through the heart of these sites. The original plan for the city included specific zoning requirements for water,

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\*It is interesting to note that the news of the actual construction of the final leg of the railroad to Helena -- and the Mississippi River -- set off a boom in land speculation all along the route of the proposed line; West Helena was no exception.

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sewer, and other utilities. A wide street on the eastern edge of the industrial sites was called Sebastian Street (which now serves as the principal vehicular access into the commercial downtown of West Helena). The main east-west street through the center of the downtown was -- and remains today -- Plaza Avenue. This route also separated the two white residential areas located on the east side of the tracks into north and south neighborhoods; the blacks lived to the west thereof. Plaza Street was noteworthy for its expansive width, measuring 117 feet; it was also significant for its median, which provided the right-of-way for the "interurban" track, the above-ground trolley car that would connect West Helena with Helena.

E. C. and J. S. Hornor purchased the Helena Street & Interurban Railroad Co. in August of 1909 for approximately \$4,600, which at that time probably included little more than the franchise to operate a streetcar line. The Interurban Railroad Company was incorporated by the Hornors in October of that same year, and they immediately began construction to extend the line between Cherry and Porter Streets in Helena to the end of Plaza Avenue in West Helena; it was extended to South Biscoe Street and Washington Street, respectively, a few years thereafter, and this line became the main connection between the two cities for years. The streetcar line was popular both for basic passenger transportation and for cool, outdoor recreation on hot summer evenings. However, the "Interurban," as it came to be known, was never the sole means for circulating between the two communities; there had been, and continued to be, at least three overland roads that connected Helena to West Helena, though in the first decades of the twentieth century they remained rough and unpaved.

West Helena grew rapidly thereafter, annexing new land to the city by 1913, and adding six new wood working mills by this time. An amusement park, a theater, a bandstand and a zoo were among the recreational improvements of which the city could boast. By 1917, 90 citizens petitioned the community to incorporate, which it did in June of that year. Mr. J. W. Dennison was the first mayor. By 1920 it could boast of 6,000 residents.

### III. The Boom Years

E. C. and J. S. Hornor formed their own company -- the West Helena Consolidated Company - - to manage their wood processing industries, but they were by no means the only industrial owners who prospered here. By the middle of the century's second decade, West Helena could boast of such enterprises as the J. W. Dennison Sawmill (now the site of the Faust Mill), owned by the city's first mayor; the National Cooperage and Shelly Stave Co., makers of slack barrel staves; Buckeye Veneer; Superior Chair Co.; Helena Veneer Co., manufacturers of veneers for furniture; Ong Chair Co.; Southwest Wagon Co.; Penrod-Jurdon, also makers of wood veneers;

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Pekin Cooperage and Stave Co., manufacturers of both tight and slack barrels (tight barrels would not leak and were usually reserved for transporting liquids; slack barrels were used for transporting cured meat, among other things); Arkansas Veneer Co., making both furniture veneers and egg cases; and the Chicago Mill and Lumber Co., which made boxes and crates of all sorts, and which remains in operation to this day.

However, lumber products were not the only raw materials being processed in West Helena. The young city had also attracted a number of cotton-related industries, including gins, cottonseed oil mills and cotton warehouses. West Helena's cotton processing even came to rival that of Helena itself, the traditional center of the region's cotton industry.

Various other commercial and professional enterprises sprang up to respond to the tremendous growth in the management and labor force required to operate these industries. The small commercial district along Plaza boasted of a few small grocery stores, as well as a meat and vegetable store, a drug store, a feed and hardware store, and a hostelry known as the Commercial Hotel. Though one source claims that there were "no lawyers" in West Helena during those early years, there were at least three doctors. There were also a city judge and a constable. Houses of worship sprang up here also, with the Baptist Church being among the first.

West Helena's dramatic growth and prosperity appears to have increased more gradually during the World War I era and throughout the 1920's, due in large part to the effect of both Prohibition and the introduction of the automobile. Prohibition drastically reduced the demand for barrel staves, causing several of the West Helena mills to close as a result; and the arrival of the automobile and its rubber tires put the wagon factory out of business. Yet the residential districts continued to grow, and not surprisingly, contained the finest architecture to be found in the young city. The influence of the railroad could perhaps be most keenly felt not only in the appearance of contemporaneous popular American architectural styles, but in their appearance so quickly after they were first becoming fashionable in the cities of the East Coast and northern midwest. Two houses on St. Andrew's Terrace (221 and 321 St. Andrew's Terrace) reflect the influence of the Prairie style, an architectural idiom only a few years old by that time, and the Ewart-Faust House at 114 Richmond Hill, though built in 1925, clearly expresses the Spanish Revival style, which was becoming popular throughout the nation at that time. Other good examples exist that reflect the influence of such other national architectural styles as the Craftsman and the Neoclassical.

**IV. The Great Depression and World War II**

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Like most other American communities, West Helena felt its share of the pinch caused by the arrival of the Great Depression in 1929. Several of the original timber-oriented businesses closed, business in general was not good, and as a result new industrial and residential construction largely stopped. Though such businesses as the Chicago Mill Company would survive, many of the original industries in West Helena either ceased operation or drastically re-organized to adapt to the new market conditions.

**V. Conclusions**

Compared to a number of other Arkansas cities, West Helena's period of growth was relatively brief: roughly 1910-1930. However, its dramatic rise to a relatively high level of overall prosperity meant that during those twenty years its citizens would tend to build ambitiously, and with great optimism and purpose. Though West Helena appears to have lost a considerable amount of its historic fabric since the end of World War II -- largely a result of the fact that its industrial base adapted successfully to the American economy in the years since and thus gave the city's citizens the means to remodel and replace -- there remains a core of significant structures of all types that recall the industrial era that continues to define the character of this distinctly twentieth century community.

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**OUTLINE OF ASSOCIATED PROPERTY TYPES**

1. **HIGH-STYLE DWELLINGS**
  2. **INDUSTRIAL BUILDINGS**
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1. **HIGH-STYLE DWELLINGS**

Description:

The high-style dwellings constructed in West Helena between 1900 and 1945 generally reflect the variety of national architectural styles that -- in some form -- permeated even the most rural recesses of the United States during this period. The styles include the Colonial Revival, the Prairie, the Craftsman (including the Bungalow), the Spanish Revival, the English Revival, and various transitional interpretations, including transitional designs combining features from earlier styles and such contemporaneous vernacular building types as the American Foursquare.

These buildings tend to range from small-scale to relatively large-scale; one- to two-and-one-half story heights are common. The floor plans range from relatively balanced and symmetrical arrangements to asymmetrical and rambling plans. The building materials are chiefly wood frame construction sheathed with weatherboarding, novelty siding, or brick veneer, or brick construction.

Significance:

By definition, all of the high-style dwellings built in West Helena during this period will be eligible under Criterion C, either for the significance of their designs, craftsmanship, or the construction techniques employed in their erection. These buildings generally reflect the breadth of the influence of these early twentieth century styles and the extent of their permeation. Overall, therefore, they are significant by virtue of both their individual design merit and the great extent to which they reveal the influence of these styles throughout the city.

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Registration Requirements:

For a high-style dwelling constructed in West Helena during this period to be considered eligible for the National Register, it must retain over fifty per cent of its original integrity; it must be located either on its original site or on a new one sympathetic to the original site (and only if the building was threatened on its original site); and it must visually convey the impression that it was originally constructed as a dwelling.

**2. INDUSTRIAL BUILDINGS**

Description:

Lumber mills and other lumber-related manufacturing facilities are all that are known to survive of West Helena's historic industries. The extant mills and related facilities were all constructed between 1900 and 1945, with most having been constructed roughly between 1915 and 1925. Though many historic structures have either been replaced or substantially re-built during the non-historic period, some historic buildings and structures are known to remain. These are smaller buildings, typically built to be administrative in function and not themselves the site of actual manufacturing activity. They are typically simple in design, though elements of popular architectural styles may appear.

Though lumber mills and other lumber-related manufacturing facilities are all that are known to survive of West Helena's historic industries, industrial buildings or complexes related to the harvesting and processing of cotton may also remain.

Significance:

Lumber mills and lumber-related manufacturing facilities are generally significant under Criterion A by virtue of their direct association with the lumber industry that was so instrumental in the establishment and growth of West Helena as a community; in fact, West Helena as such may well have never existed without them. Some of these facilities, however, may also be eligible under Criterion C either by virtue of their architectural style or their unique construction as functioning industrial facilities.

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Registration Requirements:

For a lumber mill or lumber-related manufacturing facility in West Helena to be considered eligible for the National Register it must have been constructed between 1900 and 1945, still retain over fifty per cent of its original integrity, and be located on its original site.

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**G. Summary of Identification and Evaluation Methods**

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Discuss the methods used in developing the multiple property listing.

See continuation sheet

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**H. Major Bibliographical References**

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See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional documentation:

- State historic preservation office  
 Other State agency  
 Federal agency

- Local government  
 University  
 Other

Specify repository: \_\_\_\_\_

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**I. Form Prepared By**

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name/title Kenneth Story, National Register Survey Coordinator  
organization Arkansas Historic Preservation Program date 8/29/96  
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The multiple-property listing of historic and architectural resources of West Helena, Arkansas was based on an initial survey of historic structures in the historic core of the city conducted between October, 1993 and February, 1996 by Kenneth Story, National Register/Survey Coordinator at the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program. Story has a B.A. in Fine Arts from Amherst College and an M.A. in Fine Arts (with a concentration in the history of American architecture) from Tufts University.

This initial survey was conducted for the purpose of assembling a sample of National Register-eligible properties to be attached to the multiple property submission cover document and was not intended to constitute a comprehensive survey of the target area; as such, the survey identified six properties that retained sufficient integrity for listing and that qualified under at least one of the four National Register Criteria for listing. Integrity requirements were based on a knowledge of existing properties. The architectural and physical features of the city's surviving properties, derived in part from the survey, were considered in developing the outlines of potential registration requirements.

For each record property, locations were noted on USGS topographical maps; photographs, both black-and-white prints and color slides, were taken of several elevations; computerized inventory forms, complete with plan view drawings, were completed; and research was conducted, including perusals of courthouse records, Sanborn Fire Insurance maps, other primary and secondary resources, and oral histories.

For more information, write the AHPP at 1500 Tower Building, 323 Center Street, Little Rock, AR 72201 or call (501) 324-9880.

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