

The William Edward Woodruff House

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The Woodruff House at 1017 East Eighth Street in Little Rock (National Register-listed 3/21/1989) is significant for its association with William E. Woodruff, founder and longtime editor of the *Arkansas Gazette*, and because it is one of the few antebellum homes remaining in the capital city. William Edward Woodruff was born on December 24, 1795, in Long Island, New York, the first-born child of Nathaniel and Hannah Clarke Woodruff. After her husband's untimely death, Hannah Woodruff apprenticed her 14-year-old son, William, to Alden Spooner, a printer from Sag Harbor.¹

In 1818 Woodruff, then a journeyman printer, traveled to Louisville, Kentucky, and then to Nashville, Tennessee, where he accepted a job from Thomas G. Bradford, owner of *The Clarion and Tennessee State Gazette*. But after the U.S. Congress created Arkansas Territory in March 1819, Woodruff left Nashville for Arkansas Post, hoping to establish the first newspaper and secure an appointment as official government printer. Before leaving Tennessee, Woodruff purchased a used wooden Ramage press, type, paper, ink, and other supplies for his new business. On November 20, 1819, Woodruff published the first issue of the *Arkansas Gazette* from his two-room cabin at Arkansas Post, making it Arkansas's first newspaper. In 1820 Woodruff was named official printer of the territory, and the following year he published the first printed book in Arkansas, *Laws of the Territory of Arkansas*. In 1821 Little Rock became the new territorial capital, and Woodruff relocated his newspaper and printing business, publishing the first issue of the *Gazette* from Little Rock on December 29, 1821.²

¹ William E. Woodruff was the first of five sons. His father, Nathaniel Woodruff, succumbed to pneumonia. Quapaw Quarter Association, "William E. Woodruff House," QQA File; Margaret Ross, *Arkansas Gazette: The Early Years, 1819-1866* (Little Rock: Arkansas Gazette Foundation, 1969): 3-6; Mary L. Kwas, "William Edward Woodruff (1795-1885)," Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture; Internet, accessed 15 August 2011, available from <http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?search=1&entryID=2533>.

² Ross, *Arkansas Gazette*, 11-43; Ted J. Smith, "William Edward Woodruff," in *Arkansas Biography: A Collection of Notable Lives*, Nancy A. Williams, ed. (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2000): 314-315; Kwas, "William Edward Woodruff," Encyclopedia of Arkansas; Donna Lampkin Stephens, "Arkansas Gazette,"

The first *Gazette* office in Little Rock was a one-room log building located at the southwest corner of Cherry (now Second) and Louisiana streets. In January 1824 Woodruff moved the newspaper into a new two-story, brick building near the southwest corner of Cherry (Second) and Cumberland streets.³ Woodruff established a successful business as an agent for non-resident owners of military lands in Arkansas Territory, and the additional revenue enabled him to construct a two-story, brick building at the northeast corner of Markham and Scott streets. In March 1827 he moved the *Gazette*, as well as his book business and land agency, into the building. While he was a bachelor, Woodruff and his apprentices lived in the various newspaper offices.⁴ Then on November 14, 1827, Woodruff married Jane Eliza Mills, the niece of Isaac and Maria Watkins. The Woodruff family lived in the building at Markham and Scott streets until the early 1850s.⁵

By 1850 downtown Little Rock had grown considerably and so had the Woodruff family. William and Jane Eliza Woodruff had eleven children, eight of whom survived to adulthood.

Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture; Internet, accessed 15 August 2011, available from <http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=2344>.

³ The two-story, brick *Gazette* office was later owned by William Field, who likely built a two-story, wood-frame addition on the east side of the brick building sometime in the 1830s. The enlarged structure served as Field's home and later as a boarding house. Sometime in the 1870s the front wall of the brick portion collapsed and was rebuilt with late 19th century-style segmental arched window openings and no front door (because patrons used the corner entrance on the wood-frame building to the east). On November 16, 1881, a fire damaged the upper story of the wood-frame building and it was repaired. In 1939 pioneering preservationist Louise Loughborough founded the Arkansas Territorial Capitol Restoration Commission to save the historic buildings on Block 32 of the Original City of Little Rock, which included the former *Gazette* office and Field House. With the help of architect Max Mayer, Loughborough documented the existing structures and made plans to interpret Arkansas's frontier history. But due to incomplete research, the 1824 brick *Gazette* office was demolished, and the Commission instead preserved a two-room outbuilding (possibly a kitchen) and one story of the Field House. In 2001 the Arkansas Territorial Restoration became Historic Arkansas Museum (HAM). HAM reconstructed the 1824 *Gazette* office based on historical research, Max Mayer's drawings, and archeological evidence. The reconstructed office was completed in 2010.

⁴ During his first few years in Little Rock, Woodruff also boarded with his neighbors, Dr. Matthew Cunningham and his wife, Eliza, and Chester and Mary Ashley. Ross, *Arkansas Gazette*, 12, 43, 53-55, 72.

⁵ In 1840 the *Gazette* moved to a location on the south side of Markham between Main and Scott streets, and the building at the corner of Markham and Scott was used solely as the Woodruff family's residence. Ross, *Arkansas Gazette*, 72, 83; F. Hampton Roy, Sr., and Charles Witsell, Jr., with Cheryl Griffith Nichols, *How We Lived: Little Rock as an American City* (Little Rock: August House, 1984): 84-85; Jane Georgine Woodruff, "A Pioneer Childhood in Little Rock," *Arkansas Gazette*, 7 November 1931, Part II, p. 14; Jane Georgine Woodruff, "When W. E. Woodruff Built a New Home," *Arkansas Gazette*, 7 November 1931, Part II, p. 11.

Woodruff sought an area in the country where he could have a small farm and his children could play, so he bought about 25 acres east of downtown Little Rock. His land was roughly bounded by Rector, College, Seventh, and Ninth streets.⁶ In the spring of 1852 Woodruff hired local builder John Robins and his son, Louper, to construct a large, 2 ½-story house facing south on East Ninth Street.⁷ The house was built with locally-made bricks and likely had a one-story Greek Revival-style front porch.⁸ The Woodruff family moved into the new home in March 1853, and a few months later an “ell” was added onto the northwest corner of the house for a pantry, dining room, and kitchen. The house was set far back from Ninth Street and had a circular carriage drive.⁹

According to Woodruff’s daughter, Jane Georgine Woodruff, a 40-foot hallway ran the length of the house with two large rooms on either side of the hallway. A curving stairway provided access to all levels. Every room in the house had a large fireplace, and the family usually burned 100 cords of wood each winter. As mentioned above, the house originally faced the “Sunny South” and had double parlors on the east side of the first floor and a library or “father’s room” and a temporary dining room on the west side of the first floor.¹⁰ The bedrooms were upstairs. The Woodruff House was truly an urban farmstead, complete with an orchard,

⁶ In 1852 the area east of the Quapaw Line (close to modern-day Commerce Street) was very sparsely populated. The majority of the land was not yet platted and streets did not run through the large tracts. Woodruff’s move to the country also coincided with his retirement from the newspaper business, which he announced in 1853. As editor of the *Gazette*, Woodruff felt political pressure from day one. And he, himself, held several political offices as well, including Little Rock town councilman (1833), town treasurer (1834), territorial auditor (1834), state treasurer (1836), and Little Rock postmaster (1845). Wilson S. Dornblaser, “How Little Rock Grew,” *Arkansas Gazette*, 7 November 1931, Section 4, p. 1-3; Smith, “William Edward Woodruff,” 314.

⁷ When the original city plat was filed in 1822, modern-day 9th Street was called Hazel Street. In 1870 the city council passed an ordinance changing the east-west street names south of Markham to numbers, starting with 2nd Street, so Hazel then became 9th Street. However, Jane Georgine Woodruff remembered East 9th as Watkins Street because it led down a hill to the home of Dr. Robert A. Watkins. Stella Payne Crow, “Naming the Streets of Little Rock,” *Arkansas Democrat*, 8 July 1949, p. 10-11; Woodruff, “When W. E. Woodruff Built a New Home.”

⁸ Only one photograph of the house in this configuration is known to exist, and the front façade is mostly blocked by trees.

⁹ Woodruff, “When W. E. Woodruff Built a New Home;” Woodruff, “A Pioneer Childhood in Little Rock;” Quapaw Quarter Association, “William E. Woodruff House.”

¹⁰ Woodruff, “When W. E. Woodruff Built a New Home.”

gardens, stables, servants' houses, and open pasture. The orchard was on the west side of the front yard and supplied a plentiful amount of fruit. A 2-acre vegetable, fruit, and flower garden was on the east side of the house with a grape arbor and bee hives in the center. The horse lot was just north of the garden, along with the barn and stables, pig pens, and tool shed. A carriage house, poultry yard, and other outbuildings were located in the back yard as well (north side of the house; now the front yard). The servants' houses were located on the north side of the house and faced south, each equipped with a large fireplace. The remainder of the acreage was open pasture and forest.¹¹ The Woodruff family's nearest neighbor was Dr. Robert A. Watkins, who lived about half a mile southeast of them. Wolves frequently preyed on Dr. Watkins's sheep at night. The Woodruffs could "hear the wolves howl at night, a very dismal and alarming sound."¹² In addition to Jane Georgine Woodruff's recollections, in the early 1920s Josie Clendennin Royston remembered a laundry house built over a brick cistern to the west of the Woodruff House (the cistern is still extant).¹³

After Little Rock fell to Union forces on September 10, 1863, Federal troops took possession of the land surrounding William Woodruff's house. During the Federal occupation Woodruff, an ardent supporter of the Confederacy, wrote a letter to a friend that was intercepted by the Union army. On March 10, 1864, General Frederick Steele banished Woodruff from Little Rock and took charge of his home. But Jane Eliza Woodruff and her daughters were allowed to occupy two rooms in the house for a few months before seeking shelter with friends. While in possession of the Union army, the Woodruff House served as officers' headquarters as well as a

¹¹ Woodruff, "When W. E. Woodruff Built a New Home."

¹² Woodruff, "A Pioneer Childhood in Little Rock."

¹³ J. H. Atkinson, ed., "The Old Woodruff Home," *Pulaski County Historical Review* 10, no. 4 (December 1962): 53-55.

military hospital (possibly part of the U.S. military hospital established at nearby St. John's College). Woodruff returned to his home in September 1865.¹⁴

After the Civil War, Woodruff subdivided his landholdings, platting Woodruff's Addition to the City of Little Rock on June 7, 1873. However, deeds for the lots were dated as early as 1866.¹⁵ The Woodruff House then occupied lots 1 and 2 in block 10 of Woodruff's Addition.¹⁶

William Woodruff lived in the house with his wife, Jane Eliza, until his death on June 19, 1885. Woodruff's eldest child, Alden Mills Woodruff, occupied the house from 1886 to 1891, when the home was sold out of the family. About 1900 the orientation of the Woodruff House was reversed to face north on Eighth Street.¹⁷ The original porch on the south side of the house was removed and the original front door opening filled in with a ribbon of three 2-over-2, wood-frame windows.¹⁸ By 1906 a semi-circular porch set on a rectangular base was constructed on the north side of the house. Both levels featured a decorative balustrade. A set of double doors with transoms was situated in the center of the first and second story, providing access to both levels of the front porch. To complete the home's reversal, a gabled dormer with rounded arch windows and a fanlight was added to the center of the north façade.¹⁹

In 1921 the Woodruff House became the Cottage Home for Girls, which provided room and board to out-of-town women working in Little Rock. The Cottage Home had 12 bedrooms,

¹⁴ Witsell Evans Rasco, *Condition Assessment Report for the William E. Woodruff House*, prepared for the Quapaw Quarter Association, 31 January 2008, Appendix B—Historic Descriptions of the House, Outbuildings, and Grounds; Smith, "William Edward Woodruff," 314; Atkinson, ed., "The Old Woodruff Home," 53-55.

¹⁵ Dornblaser, "How Little Rock Grew," 1.

¹⁶ Sanborn Fire Insurance Company, "Little Rock, Ark.," 1913 map; Quapaw Quarter Association, "William E. Woodruff House."

¹⁷ Little Rock city directories indicate that the original address for the Woodruff House was 1014 East 9th Street. The 1900-1901 city directory does not list 1014 E. 9th Street as an address, and it is the first directory to list addresses in the 1000 block of E. 8th Street. This leads one to believe that the Woodruff House was reversed about 1900. The home's street number on 8th Street changed a couple times in the early years, but it has been listed at 1017 E. 8th Street since the 1920s. Kwas, "William Edward Woodruff (1795-1885);" Quapaw Quarter Association, "William E. Woodruff House;" Witsell Evans Rasco, *Condition Assessment Report for the William E. Woodruff House*.

¹⁸ Four brick pilasters are still visible on the home's south façade, indicating the location of the original front porch.

¹⁹ Quapaw Quarter Association, "William E. Woodruff House;" Witsell Evans Rasco, *Condition Assessment Report for William E. Woodruff House*.

each set up to house two or three girls, and provided residents with two hot meals a day. The price ranged from \$4 to \$5.50 per week. By 1924 the semi-circular front porch was replaced by a rectangular porch with a balustrade on the lower level. Perhaps the rectangular porch was added about 1920 when improvements were made for the incoming Cottage Home for Girls. The 1920s-era porch remains on the Woodruff House today, but it is missing the balustrade.²⁰

By 1930 the Woodruff House was the Colonial Club for Business Girls, and it remained a boarding house or apartments until 2005, when the house sustained fire damage. Although no major structural elements failed, the Woodruff House has been vacant since the fire and has deteriorated considerably. Many of the home's first floor windows are broken or boarded, leaving the Woodruff House susceptible to further damage from vandals and the elements. The Woodruff House is currently for sale.

For more information on National Register properties in Arkansas, visit the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program website at www.arkansaspreservation.org.

²⁰ A 1924 article in the *Arkansas Democrat* mentioned recent work on the house, including a new roof and “many other repairs.” The rectangular front porch may have been added at this time. In addition, a large shed dormer was built on the south side of the house, and it was likely added in the 1920s to provide more space on the third floor for boarders. “Heath Chairman G.F.W.C. Addresses State Convention,” *Arkansas Democrat*, 24 February 1924, clipping in the Quapaw Quarter Association file for the William E. Woodruff House.