



Van Buren, Arkansas Historic Preservation Plan 2009



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Chapter One: The Case for Preservation Planning

Preservation Planning

Over the past two decades communities across the country have found that an increased emphasis on the preservation of their architectural and historic resources results in a healthier environment, economic growth, and an enhanced quality of life in general. To guide historic preservation efforts, many cities have completed plans to assist policy makers and community leaders with the complex issues involving historic resources. In 2008, the City of Van Buren commissioned Nashville, Tennessee preservation planning company Thomason and Associates to complete this preservation plan for similar reasons. Chapter One provides a brief description of why so many communities have found historic preservation valuable and briefly lists Van Buren's particular preservation objectives. Chapter Two details Van Buren's historic development, and Chapter Three discusses past preservation efforts. Chapter Four describes state and national preservation programs, and Chapter Five suggests ways that Van Buren might use these programs and local initiatives to achieve its particular preservation goals.

Historic Preservation Helps Protect the Environment

Reusing existing buildings and infrastructure instead of developing outlying land and building new suburbs has many benefits. It makes good use of the energy already expended by continuing to use the earlier construction and materials and by saving the energy that would be used to create new materials, transport them to Van Buren, and construct them. Additional energy savings happen because the denser population patterns of historic downtowns and neighborhoods minimize the need to drive, which means less gasoline and oil burned and less harmful emissions put into the air. It also conserves existing habitat and avoids damage to watersheds caused through polluted runoff from increased paving and lawn and pesticide chemicals.

Historic Preservation Provides Economic Growth

The results of a two-year study, completed in 2006 by the Center for Urban Policy Research at the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, found that historic preservation has a tremendous impact on Arkansas's economy. Historic Preservation adds \$970 million and 23,321 jobs to Arkansas's economy each year!

The Economy of Preservation

- Tourism to historic or cultural sites yearly supports 21,552 Arkansas jobs, adds \$318.8 million to the income of Arkansas families, and generates \$73.8 million in state and local tax revenue.
- Historic rehabilitation yearly supports 1,523 Arkansas jobs, adds \$40.9 million to the income of Arkansas families, and generates \$3.3 million in state and local taxes.
- State preservation grants yearly support 85 Arkansas jobs, add \$2.3 million to the income of Arkansas families, and return \$100,000 in state and local taxes.
- From 2000-2006, the Federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit investment supported 767 Arkansas jobs, added \$22.4 million to the income of Arkansas families, and generated \$1.1 million in state and local tax revenue.
- An Arkansas State Rehabilitation Tax Credit will support one Arkansas job for every \$12,000-\$12,500 of state investment and return \$2.19-\$2.22 in income to Arkansas families and 17.7 - 18.5 cents in state and local taxes for each \$1

Historic Preservation Fosters Community Identity

Preserving a community's historic landscapes and buildings fosters a unique sense of community identity. In regional centers across the country, waterways fostered settlement-era commerce and railway lines enabled late-19th-century growth in popular architectural styles; these and other national themes and the physical rivers, depots, and downtowns that remain connect Van Buren's development to the broader story of national development. The particular form, materials, detailing, and location of the properties like the Citizens Bank building, however, are completely unique to Van Buren. Shopping malls and industrial parks are easily mimicked, but the embodiment of national historical themes found in Van Buren's geography and architecture can only be found in preserved historic locations, and its particular historic buildings and landscapes are utterly unique.

Chapter One: The Case for Preservation Planning



Any town can build a shopping mall, but the artistry of Van Buren's Citizens Bank building is difficult to replicate. The relationship between Van Buren's historic buildings and landscapes and its unique development can not be replaced or created anywhere else.

Historic Resources and Preservation Objectives

Van Buren is known for its well-preserved turn-of-the-century commercial landscape, listed in the National Register of Historic Places as the Van Buren Historic District. The district has attracted the attention of the National Park Service, who used it in 1980 as a topic for one of its Preservation Case Studies; media producers, who used it as a backdrop for *Frank and Jesse, Biloxi Blues*, and *The Blue and the Gray*; and conference goers like the members of the Arkansas Arts Council, who made Van Buren's King Opera House the site of their quarterly meeting last fall. The combined efforts of private citizens, organizations, and city government have resulted in the preservation of this resource, which generates economic benefits and defines Van Buren as a unique community with a sense of individual identity. Though work on the district's preservation has created a strong preservation constituency, many in Van Buren remain unaware of the benefits and mechanisms of historic preservation, despite the important financial and cultural role it plays locally.

While it is the most recognized, the Van Buren Historic District is not the only historic resource in the city. Seven houses, three commemorative properties, one church, and one public building are also listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Van Buren possesses additional unlisted collections of historic architecture and landscapes and an important historic relationship to the Arkansas River that forms its southern boundary. Identifying, preserving, and promoting these resources promises to benefit both the local economy and culture.

The intent of this plan is to communicate the City of Van Buren's objectives for historic preservation and recommend actions to assist in achieving them. Particular objectives include:

1. Heighten public and governmental awareness of the benefits and mechanisms of preservation
2. Fully utilize existing incentives for preservation
3. Comprehensively identify local historic resources
4. Revitalize Van Buren's historic residential neighborhoods
5. Continue to promote and protect the Van Buren Historic District
6. Create and promote a comprehensive experience for heritage tourists

Chapter Two: Historical and Architectural Development

Geography and Early Residents

Van Buren is the county seat of Crawford County, an Ozark county in northwestern Arkansas situated between the Boston Mountains and Arkansas River Valley with a 2000 population of 53,247 people. People first came to the location of Crawford County ca. 12,000 BC; Indian people likely related to the Osage, Quapaw, Wichita, Tunica, or Caddo tribes established an agricultural society there between 900 and 1600 AD. As new settlers began forcing Cherokee residents out of their homes in the Southern Appalachians between the 1780s and 1820s, many Cherokee people migrated west into modern-day Arkansas. Early Cherokee settlements were in the eastern part of the state, but the New Madrid Earthquakes of 1811 – 1812 and prophetic interpretations of them resulted in many Cherokee people moving further west, where they established farms and commercial operations along the Arkansas River and clashed with Osage hunters and incoming United States settlers.



This mural, in a Van Buren park, demonstrates the central role that the Arkansas River has long played in this area.

Conflicting Claims

Conflicting claims by Cherokee, Osage, and United States groups dominated the dynamic of early Crawford County. United States citizen Thomas Martin claimed modern-day Van Buren, by then largely controlled by Cherokee residents, in 1814. The United States military established neighboring Fort Smith in 1817 in an attempt to regulate conflict between Cherokee and Osage groups. Though the area became Crawford County in 1820, much of it remained Indian territory until the 1828 Treaty of Washington, which resulted in the cession of Arkansas lands to the United States and the relocation of most Cherokee residents to Indian Territory in Oklahoma.

Van Buren's Beginnings

The establishment of Van Buren was part of this early 19th-century conflict between United States, Cherokee, and Osage people. In the 1820s, Revolutionary War veteran James Phillips and his sons Thomas Phillips and Daniel David Phillips owned the area on the Arkansas River that became Van Buren, called at that time Phillips Landing. The Phillips family established the first local business enterprises: a fuel depot and wood yard for steamboats and a post office named for Secretary of State Martin Van Buren.

Before pre-fabricated building supplies were readily available, residents used techniques passed first hand from



The Albert Pike School House, Photo Courtesy of Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville

Chapter Two: Historical and Architectural Development

builder to builder and local materials to construct their houses and buildings. In Arkansas, vernacular buildings usually used logs and a linear one-room-deep plan with exterior chimneys. The Albert Pike Schoolhouse, moved from its original site to the grounds of the Crawford County Courthouse, was used in the 1830s.

Van Buren became a prosperous regional center during the decades before the Civil War. Two Tennessee businessmen, John Drennen and David A. Thomason, established a nearby ferry and bought the Phillips property in 1836. Drennen became post master, arranged for a land survey and street platting, and eventually donated land for the construction of a county courthouse. In 1838, Van Buren became the Crawford County seat, and the town incorporated in 1845. Van Buren became a shipping center for northwestern Arkansas and Indian Territory to the west. Steamboats brought goods from New Orleans and Cincinnati, and exported local products. Ultimately, steamboats also affected communication and homogeneity, connected every resident on or near a stream to the larger world. Any factory goods Arkansas consumed between the 1830s and 1880s traveled part of the way by steamboat, and many farmers or manufacturers relied on steamboats to ship their cotton, corn, livestock, wool, bricks, lumber, or logs to markets. Smugglers transported whiskey through Van Buren into Cherokee land, bypassing military interference. New commercial establishments in the late 1840s included a storage warehouse, a flourmill, and a mineral bathhouse, and the city constructed a wood-and-rock wharf to promote shipping and business. Founders began the *Arkansas Intelligencer* newspaper, with distribution in western Arkansas, in 1842, and telegraph and stagecoach service included Crawford County by the late 1850s. The California Goldrush of 1849 brought a huge influx of both travelers to California and new residents. Van Buren's population doubled, and 3,000 emigrants passed through and did business in Van Buren. Van Buren's population during those decades was diverse. Its selection as the county seat indicates that some residents held political clout, while its strategic location on the Arkansas River and bordering Cherokee lands drew some wealthy citizens and enabled the enrichment of others.



The Drennen Family Plot in the Fairview Cemetery



Steamboats at Des Arc, in Central Arkansas, ca. 1860, Photo Courtesy Arkansas History Commission

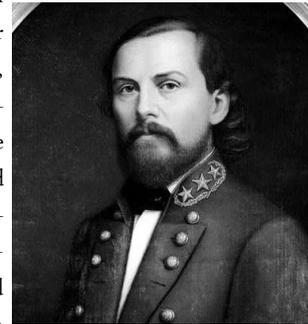
The institution of slavery affected the life of every resident in Arkansas, if not directly, then through participation in the broader economic system and politics. Enslaved and free African Americans came to what became Arkansas with European American explorers and, later, settlers. As across the state, slavery existed in Crawford County. By the time the town was an established community in 1840, slaves constituted 14 percent of the county's total 4,266 residents. As the population grew, the percentage of slaves decreased slightly, to 12 percent in 1850 and 11 percent in 1860. Slave owners in western Arkansas typically held small numbers of slaves; particularly in rural areas, this often ensured close contact and similar conditions between slaves and owners. Slaves in a more urban setting like Van Buren often had more opportunities to establish an African American community life somewhat separate from the white power structure. Though roughly one in four white Arkansans either owned slaves or lived in a family that owned slaves, slave-holding interests exerted a powerful hold on state politics. When states seceded and war began following the 1860 election of Abraham Lincoln, Arkansas eventually left the United States and joined the war on the Confederate side.

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Civil War

The Civil War touched life in Van Buren through military action, occupation, changing racial demographics and status, and a lack of civil authority. While many wealthy planters in the southeastern part of the state strongly supported a pro-slavery political agenda at the expense of continued union, most of Arkansas's free residents supported both slavery and a peaceful resolution of the question that included a continued union with the rest of the United States. Like in many upper southern states, Arkansas voters initially rejected the prospect of secession following the election of Abraham Lincoln, but joined the Confederate States after fighting began at Fort Sumter. A significant minority of free Arkansans concentrated in the northern and northwestern parts of the state continued to oppose secession and challenged Confederate authority throughout the war.

Confederate governance of the area around Van Buren lasted about a year and a half, from spring of 1861 until the end of 1862. United States and Confederate forces fought two major battles in northwestern Arkansas in the spring of 1862. War quickly broke down civil authority, with harsh consequences for the civilian population. In the summer of 1862, Confederate leadership appointed Brigadier General Thomas Hindman to command the Military District of the Trans-Mississippi, which constituted the state of Arkansas. Hindman declared martial law and took other measures to control the situation in the state; however, he also authorized the organization and use of guerrilla partisan rangers. Though some rangers were legitimate guerrilla fighters, many rangers were often essentially armed bandits legitimized by Hindman's actions, and they wreaked havoc on civilians of all political persuasions. In December of 1862, the partisan rangers gathered in nearby Fort Smith. The same month, both armies twice marched the length of the county and back. United States occupation of Van Buren and the surrounding area began at the end of 1862.



Brigadier General Thomas Hindman ca. 1863, Photo Courtesy Arkansas History

The federal occupation that began at the end of 1862 affected residents differently. Damage to civic life included the destruction of



Artist's Rendition of African American Troops in Little Rock, Published May 19, 1866 in *Harper's Weekly*

the local printing press and courthouse records. Economic harm came through the destruction of three steamboats, a ferry, 15,000 bushels of corn, and a cotton factory. For Confederate loyalists, the occupation was a disaster. Aside from the economic impact of the destruction, Union troops took 100 prisoners. For area African American residents, the occupation brought a measure of security, and newly free people flocked to the Riverside community near Van Buren. Encampments of this sort often included hastily constructed residences and poor nutritional and sanitary conditions. They also became recruitment centers for soldiers in the new United States Colored Troops and Colored Cavalry units authorized on January 1, 1863 by the Emancipation Proclamation. One of the earliest community actions of Riverside's residents was one typical of newly free black communities; residents built a church which remains in Van Buren as one of the earliest black churches west of the Mississippi River.

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Arkansas formed a new state government loyal to the United States in January of 1864, though military operations continued in many parts of the state until fall of that year. Much of Arkansas was, by that time, what one resident described as “a state of perfect anarchy.” In the years following the war, outlaws roamed Van Buren and the surrounding area taking what they pleased and making quick escapes beyond United States jurisdiction into Indian Territory. Nearby Fort Smith housed Federal forces employed in contesting this trend across rural western Arkansas.

Late-19th- and Early-20th-Century Growth

After war and Reconstruction, changes in transportation affected life in Van Buren. Across the state, railroads constructed during the mid-19th century sped development, strengthened market economies, spread technological distribution, and brought in new residents. The most significant phase of railway development occurred between 1874 and 1880; the first train came into Van Buren in 1876. The town became a late-19th- and early-20th-century junction of the St. Louis and San Francisco Railway; the Little Rock and Fort Smith Railway; and the St. Louis, Iron Mountain and Southern Railway, a branch of the Missouri Pacific Railroad system. A passenger railroad route connected Van Buren to Fayetteville and Rogers in the 1880s. Builders constructed the Frisco Passenger Depot in 1901. The railroad connections fostered the county’s existing agricultural character; in 1898, farmers shipped a new aggregate sum of \$687,000 of berries, fruits, melons, potatoes, soybeans, and cotton to markets outside Crawford County. Railroads also fostered demand for local lumber, and residents processed local forests into ties and sold them to railroad companies. River traffic continued to make heavy use of the Van Buren landing and ferry system. The Van Buren-Fort Smith Free Bridge, the first bridge to connect those two points across the Arkansas River, was also built in the early 1900s.



Frisco Railroad Engine in Neighboring Fort Smith ca. 1920, Photo Courtesy of Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville

Van Buren’s position along these transportation networks contributed to its late-19th- and early-20th-century economic and cultural growth. By the 1890s, Van Buren boasted banks, realtors, lawyers, photographers, a variety of other businesses, schools, a public water system, an ice-and-coal company, and an electrical power plant. Coal and natural gas became significant exports and sources

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of cheap local power by the 1920s. Cultural, as well as commercial, institutions also flourished. Citizens made heavy use of the newly built Murta Opera House, which burned in 1897. Founders dedicated the King Opera House in 1901; it became the town movie theater in the 1920s and remains today as an important downtown site. As the only major city in the county, Van Buren remained a regional center for commerce and entertainment.

Railroad construction also brought new ethnic and religious influences to western Arkansas. The anti-Catholic policy of German Chancellor Otto Von Bismarck sparked a migration of German Catholics to Pennsylvania and the northeastern section of the United States. The Little Rock and Fort Smith Railway began recruiting these new settlers for employees, offering land grants and housing as incentives. Swiss and German immigrants established St. Joseph's Colony east of Van Buren in Conway, Faulker, and Pope Counties in 1878, but the new settlers impacted cultural and architectural development all along the Arkansas River Valley.

Van Buren's later-19th and early-20th-century railroad-based growth dramatically affected its built environment. Many of the commercial and residential buildings remaining in town demonstrate styles prevalent during that period.



These buildings at 119 Fayetteville Road, 627 Main Street, and 108 South 10th Street are but a few examples of the varied historic architectural styles present in Van Buren.

The Gothic Revival style, popular nationally from ca. 1840 – 1880, relied on Medieval aesthetics and originated as a choice for large English country houses before becoming popular in the United States. Common Gothic Revival features are steeply pitched roofs, often with crossed gables with decorated vergeboards; walls extending into the gable without interruption by eaves or trim; pointed-arched windows which extend into the gables; and one-story porches. The style became hugely popular in this country when noted architectural and social critic Andrew Jackson Downing began referencing it in his pattern books. Its popularity declined after the Civil War, though it enjoyed something of a rebound when critic John Ruskin championed it during the 1870s. It remained largely a rural style, and was also thought particularly appropriate for churches.



These houses, at 522 South 7th Street and 420 Drennen Street, show several Gothic Revival features.

The Italianate style, often used from ca. 1840 – 1885, represented the continued popularity of classical precedents and drew inspiration from Italian farmhouses with their characteristic square towers. Italianate buildings typically have more than one story; low-

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pitched roofs, sometimes with overhanging eaves; and tall narrow windows; and sometimes include square towers. Window crowns and cornice moldings were near-universal embellishments, and were often paired with otherwise-austere exterior surfaces. Andrew Jackson Downing also helped to popularize this style until it overshadowed its rival, the Gothic Revival style, in the 1860s. After the depression in the 1870s, the Queen Anne style eclipsed the Italianate style.



The house at 121 North 13th Street demonstrates all of the Italianate features mentioned above.



The tower and its Mansard form on the house at 518 North 24th Street are Second Empire features.

The Second Empire style, used from ca. 1855 – 1885, was different from its contemporaries, the Gothic Revival and Italianate styles, in that it looked to modern influences for inspiration instead of to historical precedents. Typical features include Mansard roofs, dormer windows, molded cornices, and decorative brackets. It was a popular choice for new buildings and rehabilitation projects partially because of the spacious attics its Mansard roofs enabled, and was so common during the presidency of Ulysses Grant that it was facetiously called the General Grant style. Its popularity was short lived, though, waning with the depression of 1873.

The Queen Anne style, frequently used from ca. 1880 – 1910, was very popular across the country during the Victorian era. It has many variations, but is usually associated with a complex, irregularly shaped roof and a variety of surface materials such as shingles, wood siding, brick, and stone. Towers and turrets were often present, as well as bay windows and large one-story front and side porches.



These houses, at 504 South 6th Street and in the 200 block of North 3rd Street, are typical examples of the Queen Anne style in Van Buren.

Romanesque commercial and public buildings that mimicked European models were frequently built in the middle of the 19th century. The American architect H. H. Richardson developed the style in a way that heightened the individuality and artistry of

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the buildings that employed it and made it a somewhat frequent choice for residential buildings, also. Romanesque buildings have round-topped arches over windows, porch supports, and entrances; masonry walls, often with rough-textured blocks; asymmetry; and, often, towers.



Both of these Main Street buildings, at 415 and 623, show Romanesque influences through their masonry construction, arched openings, and asymmetry.

The Colonial Revival style, frequently used from ca. 1895 – 1955, is based on the earlier Georgian and Federal styles. Buildings in this style typically have rectangular plans and symmetrical facades. The roof may be gabled or hipped. The details are classically inspired, and entry porticos are common. Windows have small panes like in earlier styles, but their proportions are often more horizontal and the first floor may contain paired or triple windows. Doorways contain various elements like sidelites, fanlites, pediments, and columns or pilasters.



These houses, at 123 North 15th Street and 415 Webster Street, use the Colonial Revival style.

Neoclassical buildings were constructed from ca. 1895 – 1950, and were dominated by their full-height porches with roofs supported by classical columns, often with Ionic or Corinthian capitals. Their facades generally have symmetrically balanced windows and a central entrance. The classical theme and monumentality of the style grew popular across the country following the influential 1893 World's Columbian Exposition, and reflected also the popularity of characteristics of the preceding Georgian, Federal, Classical Revival, and Greek Revival styles.

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The house at 17 South 15th Street displays the Neoclassical style.



This Tudor house is at the corner of Elm and 15th Streets.

The Tudor Revival style, built from ca. 1890 – 1940, borrowed from several late Medieval English prototypes and mixed them freely. Typical features included steep front gables, decorative half-timbering, masonry exteriors, tall narrow windows often placed in groups and with multiple panes, and massive chimneys often with chimney pots. Over the decades of its popularity, the style became increasingly simplified and popular.

Craftsman buildings were constructed from ca. 1905 – 1930 and often have low-pitched gabled roofs with a wide eave overhang, and typically feature exposed rafters, decorative beams or braces, full- or partial-width porches, and tapered posts on brick piers. Designers sometimes used the Craftsman style for American Foursquares and often used it for Bungalows, which were generally one-story houses with full-width porches and open interior floor plans. Bungalows developed in California, and quickly spread across the country as a popular design choice for small houses.



The Craftsman style was a popular choice for train depots, and Van Buren's was no exception. Builders also used the Craftsman style on the house at 1121 Cherry Street.



Disaster, Recovery Efforts, and World War Two

Life in Van Buren changed dramatically during the late 1920s and 1930s. A devastating 1927 flood left Van Buren's business district under six feet of water and destroyed boats, houses, barns, warehouses, businesses, and their contents, as well as railroad infrastructure. The Great Depression harmed the lumber and agricultural industries particularly and local business generally. Many Van Buren residents migrated to California in hopes of finding work. The Civilian Conservation Corps, a significant part of President Roosevelt's Works Progress Administration (WPA), which restored and developed public and private lands and provided occupations and income for out-of-work Arkansans, employed 260 people in road building and forest reclamation in and around nearby Lock. Another branch of the WPA constructed the Lake Fort Smith Dam near Mountainsburg, which encouraged the development of an adjoining public park. Seemingly contradictorily, tourism became a potent social and economic force during the

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Great Depression. Automobile ownership increased and encouraged travel, sightseeing, and consumption. The Boston Mountains became another important local attraction, encouraging the construction there of motels and gift shops.

Art Moderne was a frequently used style for commercial and public buildings constructed from ca. 1920 - 1940. Buildings in this style typically have smooth exterior surfaces, flat roofs, horizontal grooves or lines in their walls, and asymmetrical facades. Art Moderne gained popularity alongside innovations in transportation, and its streamlined appearance referenced the fast-moving ships, airplanes, and automobiles that developed contemporaneously to it.



Many public buildings, like the Van Buren Post Office, were influenced by the Art Moderne style.

National trends continued to affect Van Buren's economic and social life in the 1940s through the United States' entry into World War Two. About 2,829 soldiers from Crawford County deployed as part of the war effort, further diminishing the local population. War-related activities and infrastructure contributed to the local landscape. The United Service Organizations (USO) opened a center downtown late in 1941. In 1942, Van Buren became the host of Camp Johnson, quickly renamed Camp Jesse Turner, a unique 35-acre military railway training camp constructed on Pickett Hill in the eastern section of town. In 1943, the Missouri Pacific Railroad formed a Negro Women's Labor Battalion.

Recent Development

After World War Two, industry became a defining characteristic of Van Buren. Geography continued to contribute heavily to events, as the city's crossroads position along railways, waterways, and roadways encouraged development there. The McClellan-Kerr Arkansas River Navigation System, authorized in 1946 and opened in 1971, established flood control and cheaper transportation on the Arkansas River. Towboat and barge traffic continued to access Crawford County at Van Buren's James W. Trimble Lock and Dam. The individual farms that previously defined the area shifted to corporate farms, and local manufacturing and processing gave way to national and international operations. Tyson Foods Inc. and Simmons Foods Inc. were key late-20th-century contributors to Van Buren's landscape and economy. A 135-acre city park, Arkansas's first port authority, Interstate 540, a promotional downtown merchant's association, and a water-supply project from lower Lee Creek were all important developments from the second half of the 20th century. Van Buren's population decline reversed, soaring from 8,373 in 1970 to 18,986 in 2000. Over the same years, the county population more than doubled.

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Manufacturing, food processing, and medicine are current sustaining industries in Van Buren. A few small-scale crop and livestock farms remain, but large commercial dairy and soybean farms are the agricultural norm and significantly impact the local economy. The Van Buren School District is another major employer.

Tourism, frequently based on the historic resources in and around Van Buren, also continues to be a force in the area. As an industry, tourism constituted 5.3% of the Arkansas economy in 2003. For comparison purposes, the following industries are included: agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, 3.2%; construction (construction of buildings, heavy and civil engineering construction, and specialty trade contractors), 4.5%; manufacturing of durable goods, 9.6%; food manufacturing production, 3.8%; and truck transportation, 2.7%. In Van Buren, the Main Street Historic District's restored buildings, antique stores, River Valley Museum, vintage excursion train, and King Opera House draw local and out-of-town visitors. The Fairview Cemetery offers public programs that draw a largely local audience to the site. The University of Arkansas in Fayetteville and the Arkansas Department of Heritage purchased the home of Van Buren founder John Drennen in 2005 for use as a public museum and history and historic preservation laboratory, and the River Valley Museum is another Van Buren attraction. The overall historic landscapes and individual historic resources present in Van Buren are poised to contribute even further to local economic development and identity.

Chapter Three: Past Preservation Efforts

Local efforts to preserve and promote Van Buren's historic assets began in the late 1960s, and focused on its commercial downtown. Initial programs emphasized rehabilitation and restoration of the building facades of Van Buren's Main Street. Since then, other action and documents have brought attention to the outstanding collection of historic buildings that constitute Van Buren's downtown. The first of these, the Main Street Historic District Van Buren, Arkansas Restoration/Redevelopment Plan, was completed in 1978. The National Park Service published the Main Street Historic District as one of its Preservation Case Studies in 1980. In 2005, the City of Van Buren published the Van Buren Historic District Van Buren, Arkansas Design Guidelines. Listings of properties in the National Register of Historic Places, preservation organizations, and public programming have brought attention to additional Van Buren historic resources.

Economic Development through Urban Improvement and Historic Preservation: Early Steps

The central business district formed an Urban Renewal Commission in 1968. It prepared a plan for Van Buren in 1972. In 1976, the City Council appointed a Historic District Commission, which nominated the Main Street Historic District to the National Register of Historic Places as one of its first acts. A Historic District Ordinance followed in 1977, which created a local historic district with the same boundary as the National Register district. The same year, the Commission adopted guidelines based on Department of Interior standards to determine appropriate treatment for district buildings and features. It also quickly instituted a program of matching grants for façade restorations on district buildings.

Main Street Historic District Van Buren, Arkansas Restoration/Redevelopment Plan

The end result of the 1972 plan and the process of consultant review that followed was the 1978 Restoration and Redevelopment Plan. This document's introduction states that Van Buren was "experiencing a radical change in the composition and influence of their Central Business District and nearby fringe area." It cited the nomination of the Main Street Historic District to the National Register of Historic Places as an initial step toward reversing the decline of downtown. The Plan adopted an 11-point approach to present activities, mechanisms, and responsible groups and individuals to further revitalization and preservation, and several of its suggestions had recently been or were quickly implemented. Priority strategy elements included:

1. Improve traffic patterns within the Central Business District through improvements to perimeter streets.
2. Provide off-street parking on perimeter streets.
3. Nominate the Main Street corridor to the National Register of Historic Places.
4. Establish local historic district, pursuant to the Arkansas Historic Districts Act, section 4, paragraph 19-5004.
5. Restore facades on Main Street to their original appearances.
6. Acquire and renovate the King Opera House as an attraction for tourists and residents.
7. Acquire and restore the Frisco Depot for use as a chamber of commerce and tourist information center.
8. Improve the streetscape of Main Street by replacing existing street lights with appropriate turn-of-the-century fixtures, removing the existing asphalt to expose the underlying brick street, and replacing the previously removed trolley on Main Street.
9. Improve adjacent residential neighborhoods.
10. Facilitate development and promotion of the downtown through a coordinated effort of property owners, businesses, and government entities.
11. Redevelop the Arkansas Riverfront area, at the end of Main Street, as an attraction for tourists and residents.

Department of the Interior Preservation Case Study

The Department of the Interior's publication Main Street Historic District, Van Buren, Arkansas: Using HCRS Grant-in-Aid Funds for Storefront Rehabilitation/Restoration Within a Districtwide Plan demonstrated the national interest in Van Buren's historic resources and in its efforts to link them to economic development. The publication's first section detailed previous preservation efforts and the process followed to achieve them. Photographs and a map illustrate the district and provide examples of

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ongoing façade rehabilitation work.

Van Buren Historic District Van Buren, Arkansas Design Guidelines

The 2005 Van Buren Historic District Van Buren, Arkansas Design Guidelines replaced the 1977 guidelines as a common basis for making decisions about exterior changes to buildings within the Van Buren Historic District. As before, they were based on the standards set by the Department of the Interior. The guidelines were designed to provide the city of Van Buren with a basis for making informed, consistent decisions necessary to maintain the historical integrity of the district and provide a range of treatment options for common design issues. They include sections entitled: Introduction, Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, Local Ordinance Historical District, Philosophy of Design Guidelines, Review Process, Design Goals for the Van Buren Historic District, Historical Overview of Van Buren, General Character of Historic Van Buren, and Architecture of Historic Van Buren, followed by guidelines for existing buildings, additions to existing buildings, and new construction.

National Register of Historic Places Listings

The National Register of Historic Places is the country's official list of properties that are significant in local, state, or national history. It is maintained by the National Park Service and expanded through nominations by individuals, organizations, state and local governments, and federal agencies. Several benefits accompany National Register listing. Listing typically generates feelings of community pride, can promote the development of stewardship ethics as well as increase property values, and enables owners of listed properties to access significant state and federal tax benefits as part of rehabilitation projects. Inclusion on the National Register also requires that federal undertakings take steps to mitigate harmful effects.

Included in the National Register as individual or district listings are several Van Buren properties. These are:

Dr. Charles Fox Brown House, 420 Drennen Street, listed in 1978.

The one-story brick house has five bays and an ell-shaped plan, and was constructed in 1867. It is significant both for its expression of the architectural transition in popularity between the Greek Revival style and Victorian eclecticism and as a rare extant example of the combination homes and medical offices used by 19th-century Arkansas doctors.



Dr. Charles Fox Brown House

Bryan House, 105 Fayetteville Street, listed in 1978.

This two-story house, often referred to as the Rebecca Wilcox Bryan Home, was built in 1886; its exterior includes heavy Victorian detailing and dominant bay windows. Its particular significance lies in its architectural merit and its connection to politician William Jennings Bryan.



Bryan House

Chapter Three: Past Preservation Efforts

Bob Burns House, 821 Jefferson Street, listed in 1976.

Alex Lacey, a Van Buren merchant, built the two-story frame house in 1885 and operated a small millinery shop on the property. The Burn family, including six year old Bob Burn, moved to the house in 1896. Bob and his older brother Farrar played with local bands and invented the bazooka, an instrument constructed of two iron pipes and a whiskey funnel, before Bob became a famous radio and movie star with the stage name Bob Burns. His step mother, Kate Smeltzer Burn, opened a gift shop in the house during the height of his fame; the house is now a private residence.



Bob Burns House

Clarke-Harrell-Burson House, 603 Parkview Street, listed in 1991.

Workers built the house ca. 1841 for its original tenant, District of Columbia native George W. Clarke. Clarke moved to Arkansas in 1832 and became the editor of the Van Buren, Arkansas *Intelligencer*, the first Arkansas newspaper published west of Little Rock, in 1844. Later tenants included John Harrell, one of the first Methodist preachers to work in the Van Buren and Fort Smith area, and Edmund F. Burson, a United States Civil War veteran and dentist from Illinois. The house is particularly significant for its association with George W. Clarke; as an example of a 19th-century vernacular Greek Revival house and as the first frame house built in Logtown, at that time exclusively comprised of log houses; and as an archeological site with the potential to reveal information about 19th-century regional subsistence farming.



Clarke-Harrell-Burson House

Drennen-Scott Home, Drennen Reserve on North Third Street, listed in 1971.

Colonel John Drennen, a founder of Van Buren, built the one-story central-hall log house in 1836 on a hill above town, and later added symmetrical side wings. Husband and wife John and Emily Drennen exemplify the mobility of so much of the early-19th-century American population. John moved from his birthplace in Pennsylvania to Missouri, where the two met and married. They traveled together to Nashville, Little Rock, and Columbus before operating a landing at Phillips Point, which John Drennen and his brother in law David Thompson renamed Van Buren. Drennen also became a member of the first Arkansas House of Representatives, helped design the town's first plat, and was instrumental in designating Van Buren as the Crawford County seat. The house remained in the Drennen family until 2005, when University of Arkansas Fort Smith purchased it for use as an interpretive center and preservation lab.



Drennen-Scott Home

Chapter Three: Past Preservation Efforts

Joseph Starr Dunham House, 418 Broadway at listing, now at 401 Drennen, listed in 1976.

Workers built the two-story ell-shaped house ca. 1870 in the Gothic Revival style. It is a two-story gabled building with arched windows, gabled bays, a one-story porch, and wooden and iron ornamentation.



Joseph Starr Dunham House

Fairview Cemetery, Poplar Street at its intersection with Highway 59, listed in 2005.

John Drennen donated 10 acres of land for the cemetery's official formation in 1846, though burials began there in 1816. It is dotted with cedar and oak trees, and its alleyways and narrow drives illustrate Victorian preferences for ornate landscape design, as do the stone columns, urns, obelisks, monuments, and tablets found throughout the place. Buried there are prominent settlers, judges, and politicians; slaves; and Confederate soldiers. Fairview Cemetery is significant for its association with people influential in the settlement of Van Buren and Crawford County and for its display of funerary architecture.



Fairview Cemetery

Fairview Cemetery, Confederate Section, southwest of the intersection of McKibben and 10th Streets, listed in 1996.

After the Civil War began, the City of Van Buren established a plot in Fairview Cemetery for the bodies of Confederate soldiers. Approximately 100 bodies were interred there during the war, and approximately 350, most of unknown identity from Arkansas, Texas, Louisiana, Missouri, and the Indian Territory, were moved there following the war. Simple marble stones mark the interments. As in most Confederate burials grounds, the local women's commemorative organization, in this case, the Mary Lee Chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, were responsible for the plot. The Chapter erected a marble Confederate soldier statue in 1899, at a time when chapters across the southeast were engaged in similar efforts. Also in a pattern seen across the southeast, the local men's commemorative organization, in Van Buren the Sons of the Confederacy, successfully advocated that the seat of local political power, the county courthouse, was a more appropriate location than the mournful cemetery for Confederate commemoration. The Sons had the statue relocated in 1906, and the Daughters replaced the statue with a "slab with proper inscriptions" ca. 1910.



Fairview Cemetery, Confederate Section

Chapter Three: Past Preservation Efforts

Mount Olive Church, intersection of Lafayette and Knox Streets, listed in 1976.

The brick Gothic Revival building was constructed in 1889. On its façade is a large three-part Gothic Revival window. The building also has a hipped bell tower. Much of its interior, including the narrow wooden planks covering the ceiling and the wide pine boards on the floor, retains its original appearance. The interior focal point is a round stained-glass window in the apse. The church building is particularly significant because of its Gothic Revival architecture and its traditional importance to Van Buren's African American community.



Mount Olive Church

Van Buren Confederate Monument, courthouse lawn facing Main Street, listed in 1996.

The monument was moved from the Fairview Cemetery, where it was originally placed in 1899, to the courthouse lawn in 1906. As in most Confederate burials grounds, the local women's commemorative organization, in this case, the Mary Lee Chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, were responsible for the plot. The Chapter erected the marble Confederate soldier statue at a time when chapters across the southeast were engaged in similar efforts. Also in a pattern seen across the southeast, the local men's commemorative organization, in Van Buren the Sons of the Confederacy, successfully advocated that the seat of local political power, the county courthouse, was a more appropriate location than the cemetery for Confederate commemoration. The statue has remained in place at the courthouse since 1906.



Van Buren Confederate Monument

Chapter Three: Past Preservation Efforts

Van Buren Historic District, Main Street between Cain Hill Street and the Arkansas River, listed in 1976.

The district includes approximately 20 buildings constructed between 1880 and 1900, and spans six blocks of the commercial center of Van Buren. The ca. 1900 one-and-a-half-story brick railroad depot with a clay-tiled hipped roof with wide brackets is included at the north end of the district. Many of the district buildings owe their construction to the prosperity that followed the coming of a railroad line to Van Buren. Five other buildings are also particularly noteworthy. In 1889, workers built the brick three-story Crawford County Bank; it has a corner turret and scalloped surface shingles and rounded pilasters. Next to the County Bank is the second Citizens Bank building; it was also constructed in 1889 and has a central pediment and corbelling. The first home of Citizens Bank is also in the district; it was built in 1887 and has a corner entry and arched window heads with alternating cut and cast stone. One of the few remaining Arkansas beer depots is the two-story rectangular building in the district constructed ca. 1890 with a terra cotta Anheuser Busch crest in its front parapet. The county courthouse is constructed of walls built ca. 1840 which survived an 1876 fire to become the basis of a ca. 1890 replacement courthouse with two side wings, a three-story clock tower, paired brackets, a paneled frieze, and a Neoclassical portico with Doric columns.



Van Buren Historic District

Van Buren Post Office, 22 South Seventh Street, listed in 1998. Work began on the building in late 1936 and was completed several months later. Included in the plans was a 12-by-five-foot space above the postmaster's door for a mural funded by the United States Treasury Department's Section on Fine Arts. The Section commissioned Taos artist Edward B. Rowan to design the mural, and he took the early settlers of Arkansas as a theme for his mural, entitled *The Chosen Site*. The post

office building is particularly significant because of its connection to the Section on Fine Arts and its efforts to employ Depression-era artists and place art in post offices around the country.



Van Buren Post Office

Wilhauf House, 109 North Third Street, rear, listed in 1974.

Ca. 1838, German immigrant Leonard Wilhauf completed the one-story log Wilhauf House. It had a gabled roof and two rooms, each with a chimney and fireplace, separated by an open central hallway. In 1847, Wilhauf or his employees gave the house a Greek Revival style by adding a portico with posts, horizontal board siding, and two rear rooms and altering the roof's pitch. Around the same time, Wilhauf opened the first bakery in Crawford County. The Wilhauf House's longevity has made it an important Van Buren landmark, and it is particularly significant as one of only a few remaining vernacular early-19th-century Arkansas houses.

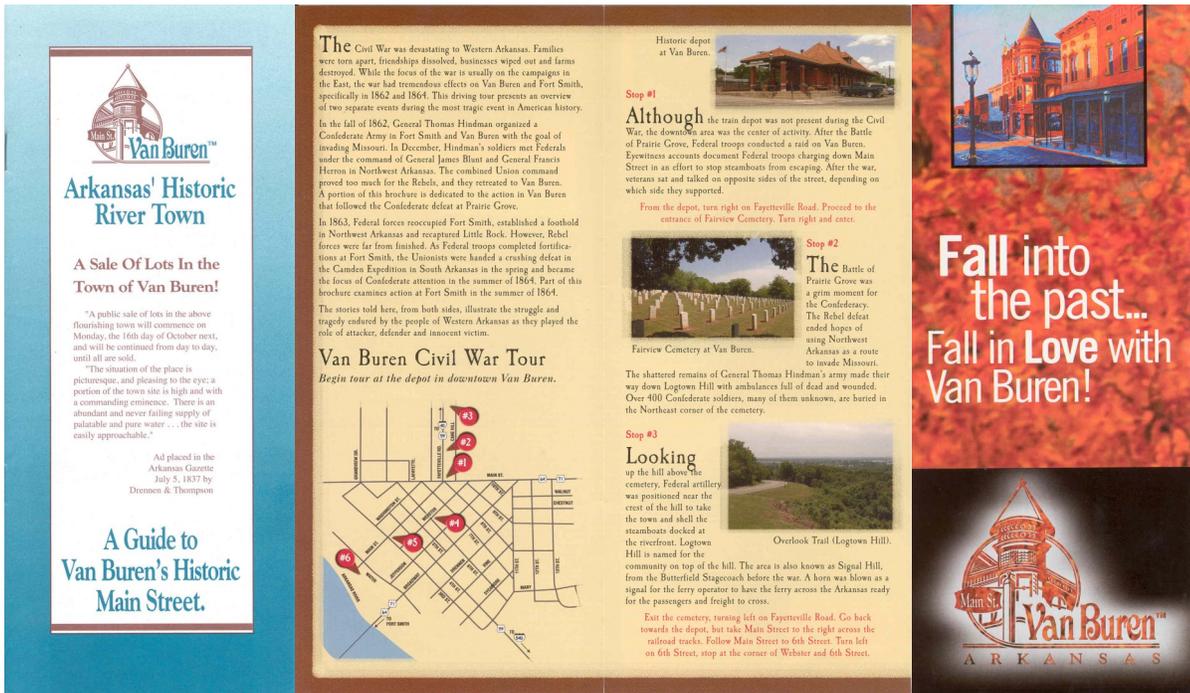


Wilhauf House

Chapter Three: Past Preservation Efforts

Programming and Promotion

Notable efforts to promote and interpret Van Buren's historic sites exist. The Van Buren Advertising and Promotion Commission's *Fall into the past... Fall in Love with Van Buren* brochure is a nicely produced source of information about Van Buren's main attractions. Its *A Guide to Van Buren's Historic Main Street* is a useful tool for tourists interested in locating and learning about the Van Buren Historic District, while *The Civil War in Western Arkansas*, a collaborative effort between the Commission, the Fort Smith Arkansas Convention and Visitors Bureau, and the Arkansas Civil War Heritage Trail, helps visitors interested in the Civil War locate and learn about nearby sites of interest. The Commission also maintains an excellent website that directs visitors and residents to local and regional attractions, outdoor adventure, lodging, dining, help, group travel, history, and events. The Old Frisco Train Station includes the River Valley Museum. The commanding Drennen-Scott House is now owned by the University of Arkansas, Fort Smith and operated as a laboratory for students engaged in restoring the 150-year-old home and exploring its connections to one of Van Buren's founding families, The Trail of Tears, the Underground Railroad, and the Civil War. The University is developing plans to open the laboratory from time to time and plans more elaborate tours in the future.



Tours and brochures promote Van Buren and help visitors and residents connect to its past.

Efforts to promote and interpret the Fairview Cemetery are particularly exemplary. The Fairview Cemetery Board, River Valley Museum of Van Buren, University of Arkansas Fort Smith, and Arkansas Historic Preservation Program (AHPP) have all promoted the preservation of this local historic site. The River Valley Museum printed *A Walking Tour of Fairview Cemetery: Van Buren, Arkansas*, by Randy Smith, to guide and inform cemetery visitors. The Fairview Cemetery Board collects donations to support the restoration of cemetery monuments. University of Arkansas Fort Smith history professor Tom Wing and his students use living history techniques to tell stories about the individuals buried in the cemetery and Van Buren's development during the annual Tales of the Crypt fundraiser, which is also supported by the Fairview Cemetery Board, the City of Van Buren, the Van Buren Historical Commission, and the Van Buren Advertising and Promotion Commission. The AHPP provided a \$10,000 grant for restoration and conservation of a notable monument within the cemetery. Coverage of these programs and projects in the Press Argus-Courier has helped raise public awareness about local historic resources and preservation.

Chapter Four: State and National Preservation Programs

Multiple state and national incentives exist to aide and encourage owners who wish to improve their Van Buren properties. Many incentives are financial, providing tax credits or grants, while a few provide services. All types of incentives allow owners to enhance their investments while adding to the overall revitalization of Van Buren. Eligibility for the various programs depends on property type and other factors. Following are some of the key programs.

National Register of Historic Places

The National Register of Historic Places is the official list of the nation's historic places worthy of preservation. Authorized by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 and administered by the National Park Service, the National Register of Historic Places is part of a national program to coordinate and support public and private efforts to identify, evaluate, and protect America's historic and archeological resources. Listing in the National Register makes a public statement about the property's significance and opens access to several important financial incentive opportunities.

To be eligible for listing in the Register, a property must meet the National Register Criteria for Evaluation. Key criteria include being old enough to be considered historic (generally at least 50 years old); retaining much of its historic appearance; and being associated with events, activities, or developments that were important in the past, with the lives of people who were important in the past, with significant architectural history, landscape history, or engineering achievements, or having the potential to yield information about the past through archeological investigation. Owners, organizations, or governments may nominate properties to the National Register by completing the form and required documentation and forwarding them to the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program (AHPP). The AHPP reviews the material and, if it is complete and the property is eligible, forwards it to the National Park Service for further review and listing.

National Register listing places no obligations on private property owners. There are no restrictions on the use, treatment, transfer, or disposition of private property. National Register listing does not lead to public acquisition or require public access. A property will not be listed if, for individual properties, the owner objects, or for districts, a majority of property owners object. National Register listing does not automatically invoke local historic district zoning or local landmark designation.

Listing in the National Register of Historic Places provides formal recognition of a property's historical, architectural, or archeological significance based on national standards used by every state. Listed properties become part of the National Register Archives, a public, searchable database that provides a wealth of research information. Listing encourages preservation of historic resources by documenting a property's historic significance. Listing also providing opportunities for specific preservation incentives, such as: federal preservation grants for planning and rehabilitation, federal and state rehabilitation tax credits for income-producing buildings, preservation easements to nonprofit organizations, and international Building Code fire and life safety code alternatives. Through involvement from the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, listing provides a mechanism to mitigate damage when a federal agency project may affect historic properties. Owners may celebrate their listing by ordering a bronze plaque that distinguishes their property.

Website: <http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/>

Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentives Program

The Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentives are very significant programs. The AHPP serves as the state liaison between the property owners and the National Park Service, the federal agency that administers the Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentives program.

One program offers a 20% federal tax credit for certified rehabilitations of income-producing buildings listed on or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The rehabilitation must occur in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, which ensures that properties retain their historic and architectural character. The 20% tax credit is

Chapter Four: State and National Preservation Programs

often used in conjunction with federal Low-Income Housing Tax Credits to create affordable housing within rehabilitated historic buildings.

A 10% tax credit is also available for buildings constructed before 1936 but not listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register. The buildings must be income producing and non residential.

The Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentives program also provides a straight-line depreciation period of 27.5 years for residential property and 31.5 years for nonresidential property for the depreciable basis of the rehabilitated building reduced by the amount of the tax credit claimed.

Website: <http://www.nps.gov/history/hps/tps/tax/index.htm>

Arkansas Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit

This program allows for a credit on state income taxes equal to 25% of the total qualified rehabilitation expenses, in excess of \$10,000 annually, incurred by the property owner to complete a certified rehabilitation. It applies to both commercial and residential properties. To qualify, properties must be listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or Arkansas Register of Historic Places, be certified as a contributing element of a National Register Historic District, or be certified as historic by a city or county preservation commission. The program is administered by the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program.

Website: <http://www.arkansaspreservation.org/>

Conservation Easements

Historic property owners can also benefit from federal tax deductions through donation of a conservation easement on their structure or site. An easement is a voluntary transfer of some of the rights inherent in property ownership, which allow donors to retain ownership and possession of a historic property while granting a government agency such as the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program (AHPP) or qualified non-profit organization the authority to protect the historic, cultural, architectural, or archaeological characteristics of the property. In granting an easement, owners still keep their essential interest in the property, except for the rights given away in the easement document. Owners can use their remaining interest as they see fit; they may live in, sell, or give away the property subject only to the terms of the easement. Many donors enter such an agreement to ensure that their property will be permanently protected from willful destruction, demolition, dismantling, or other inappropriate treatment while at the same time realizing certain tax benefits that accompany such a donation. Since easements reflect the wishes of the grantor, the property will be protected regardless of who the future owners may be. The value of the easement, as determined by a qualified appraisal, can be claimed as a charitable-donation deduction from taxable income. In order to be eligible for the tax deduction from an easement held by the AHPP, the property must be listed in the National Register of Historic Places individually or as a component of a National Register historic district.

Website: <http://www.arkansaspreservation.org/preservation-services/conservation-easements/>

Historic Preservation Restoration Grant

Two Historic Preservation Restoration Grant options are available for rehabilitation of historic structures in Arkansas. Grants of up to 10,000 dollars are available to the owners of properties that are listed on the Arkansas Register of Historic Places and/or identified as a non-contributing structure in a National Register District, if the grant project will make the property eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places and the owner follows through with the National Register listing process. Grants at a minimum of 10,000 dollars are available to the owners of properties that are listed on the National Register of Historic Places and owned by a not-for-profit organization or a municipality. Recipients of this latter category must donate a conservation easement on the property for which the grant is awarded. Both categories of grants require a 50% cash match (i.e. a \$10,000 grant would require at least a \$5,000 cash match). Applications can be made for only one grant in one Historic Preservation Restoration Grant category per grant cycle. Preference will be given to projects that are not eligible for other Arkansas Historic Preservation

Chapter Four: State and National Preservation Programs

Program (AHPP) grant programs. The AHPP and the City of Van Buren recently partnered through this program to restore the Wallace children's monument in the Fairview Cemetery.

Website: <http://www.arkansaspreservation.org/preservation-services/grant-programs/>

Certified Local Government Grants

Van Buren is one of 14 Arkansas communities with a Certified Local Government (CLG), making it eligible for grants from the federal Historic Preservation Fund. The grants can be used for a variety of local historic preservation projects, including architectural surveys of historic sites or districts, preparation of nominations for the National Register of Historic Places, development of educational materials for historic property owners, and rehabilitation of local historic structures. CLG grants are often used to provide training and support to local historic district commissions.

Website: <http://www.arkansaspreservation.org/preservation-services/grant-programs/>

Preserve America

Preserve America is a presidential initiative begun in 2003 that encourages and supports community efforts to preserve and enjoy the United States' cultural and natural heritage. Benefits of designation include White House recognition; eligibility to apply for Preserve America grants; a certificate of recognition; a Preserve America Community road sign; authorization to use the Preserve America logo on signs, flags, banners, and promotional materials; listing in a web-based Preserve America Community directory; inclusion in national and regional press releases; official notification of designation to state tourism offices and visitors bureaus; and enhanced community visibility and pride. Van Buren was recently designated a Preserve America community.

Preserve America grants are designed to support a variety of activities related to heritage tourism and innovative approaches to the use of historic properties as educational and economic assets. These grants are intended to complement the bricks and mortar grants available under the Save America's Treasures program, and fund research and documentation, interpretation and education, planning, marketing, and training. Eligible recipients for these matching (50/50) grants include State Historic Preservation Officers, Tribal Historic Preservation Officers, designated Preserve America Communities, and Certified Local Governments that are applying for Preserve America Community designation. Individual grants range from \$20,000 to \$150,000.

Website: <http://www.preserveamerica.gov/>

Community Development Block Grants

Congress created the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program in 1974 to assist low and moderate-income families, for the prevention and elimination of slums or blight, and to address other urgent community development needs. Eligible activities under the CDBG program include the construction of water and wastewater systems, childcare facilities, senior citizen centers, public health facilities, and multi-purpose community centers. In addition, funds are provided for fire protection improvements and for economic development pursuits whose primary focus is the creation of jobs for low- and moderate-income families. Funding for CDBG grants come from the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, and are administered by the Arkansas Economic Development Commission. To be eligible for this funding, the project must meet one of the national objectives or at least 51% of the persons benefiting from the project must have low to moderate incomes.

Website: <http://arkansasedc.com/business-development/grants.aspx?id=1139>

Save America's Treasures

The Save America's Treasures program includes the following projects: an educational outreach program focusing on American history, preservation, and conservation; the identification of Save America's Treasures Official Projects; a national campaign to generate support and resources that are at risk of being lost; and a national public awareness campaign, including visits to historic sites, an interactive website, media outreach, and other special projects.

Chapter Four: State and National Preservation Programs

Since its creation in 1999, the Save America's Treasures program has provided \$265 million for preservation of historic properties and cultural artifacts. Grants are awarded to federal, state, local, and tribal government entities and nonprofit organizations and require a dollar-to-dollar non-federal match. The minimum grant request for historic property projects is \$125,000, federal share, and the maximum grant request for all projects is \$700,000 federal share.

Website: www.nps.gov/history/hps/treasures

Tax Increment Financing

Tax increment financing is a way for local governments to fund redevelopment projects such as physical improvements to historic areas, development incentives such as grants or loans, and administrative costs. In November 2000, voters approved an amendment to the Arkansas Constitution that enables local governments to issue bonds or notes to finance improvements in a redevelopment district. The bonds will be paid back from the increased tax revenue generated as a result of the improvements. A redevelopment district must be in an area that is considered blighted, deteriorated, or underdeveloped.

Website: <http://www.arkansasedc.com/business-development/financing/tax-increment-financing.aspx>

TEA-21

Transportation enhancements funding is administered by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). Ten percent of Federal Surface Transportation Program funds are set aside to fund transportation enhancement projects in 12 categories. This has opened up a huge new source of funding for preservation, since these categories include purchase of easements on historic properties, rehabilitation of historic buildings, landscaping in historic areas, archeological planning and research, and scenic or historic highway programs. Projects must relate to surface transportation. Between 1992 and 2005, more than \$7.1 billion in transportation enhancements money was made available and over \$1.1 billion was used for historical and archeological projects, making transportation enhancement funding one of the largest pools of federal money for historic preservation. Funding is allocated through state transportation departments; in Arkansas, this is the Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department. In Van Buren, TEA-21 funds could be used for historic preservation activities such as driving tour brochures, way finding exhibits, and connecting historic sites via urban trails.

Website: www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/te/index.htm

Cemetery Preservation

The Arkansas Historic Preservation Program (AHPP) offers a number of services and materials to assist individuals and groups in the preservation of historic cemeteries. Most materials and services are either free or available for a small charge. These include: National Register of Historic Places nomination packets; National Register nominations and survey documentation; Grave Concerns: A Preservation Manual for Historic Cemeteries in Arkansas; Tales of the Crypt: A Living History Project for the Preservation of Arkansas's Historic Cemeteries; individual technical assistance on preservation issues, educational projects, and related concerns; technical assistance brochures on stained glass, cast iron and other materials in a historic cemetery; workshops on cemetery-related topics for classrooms, cemetery caretakers, historical societies, civic organizations and other interested groups; speakers; walking tours (The AHPP offers a series of walking tours that focus on a variety of historic sites. Some of these tours are directed at cemeteries around the state.); and lesson plans on historic cemeteries for schools, scout groups, church groups, and other related organizations.

Website: <http://www.arkansaspreservation.org/preservation-services/cemetery-preservation/>

Documentary Media Grants

Documentary Media Grants are available to individuals and public, private, and non-profit organizations for documentary projects that: explore and interpret unique aspects of Arkansas's cultural and architectural history and bring Arkansas's cultural and architectural histories to both traditional and new audiences using a combination of film, broadcast and web media. Documentary Media Grants require a one to two match; for every two dollars awarded by the AHPP, the applicant must provide at least one dollar

Chapter Four: State and National Preservation Programs

in cash or in in-kind contributions.

Website: <http://www.arkansaspreservation.org/preservation-services/grant-programs/>

Youth Education

One of the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program (AHPP)'s priorities is to instill a preservation ethic in Arkansas's young people. In school, students learn about historic sites such as the White House and the Great Wall of China, but little focus has been directed to the historic sites and buildings that surround Arkansas students on a daily basis. Every Arkansas community possesses landmark structures and sites that make excellent teaching tools. AHPP youth education programs include: A Historic Moment in Arkansas on Radio Disney, free classroom presentations, lesson plans, Preserve our Past Art Invitational, Home for History Traveling Trunk, and Heritage Month Grants. Crawford County Schools has partnered with the AHPP to bring some of these programs to local schools, including the Central Middle School in Van Buren.

Website: <http://www.arkansaspreservation.org/preservation-services/youth-education/>

The Corporation for National and Community Service, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and the National Park Service formally presented the concept of involving youth in historic preservation through service-learning initiatives at the 2008 National Trust for Historic Preservation conference. For both students, teachers, and community partners, engaging in historic preservation efforts through a service-learning model brings home the importance of such efforts, and reinforces historical education by allowing all those involved to actively participate in resource conservation and protection.

Website: http://www.servicelearning.org/instant_info/historic_preservation/index.php

Main Street Arkansas

Main Street Arkansas is a program of the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program (AHPP), an agency of the Department of Arkansas Heritage. The Historic Preservation Alliance of Arkansas is the private non-profit sponsor, and the Arkansas Department of Economic Development provides assistance through the Main Street Arkansas Advisory Board. The Main Street Arkansas program's association with the National Main Street Center, a resource facility set up by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, provides access to the very best consulting and training services available for downtown revitalization. The National Main Street Center provides a network, much like the network that Main Street Arkansas provides for local Main Street programs, for more than 40 states and more than 1,000 communities participating in the Main Street Four Point Approach to the downtown revitalization. Main Street Arkansas also offers membership in the Arkansas Downtown Network (ADN) to provide downtown revitalization assistance to communities that are not certified Main Street cities. Among the services ADN cities receive are access to Main Street Arkansas's quarterly training meetings, organizational assistance, limited technical assistance from Main Street staff members, and access to the Main Street resource center.

Model Business Grants are available through program managers of active, local Main Street Arkansas programs seeking to revitalize their historic commercial districts through design improvements, organization, economic restructuring and promotions. They provide matching funds for improvements of a local business that then serves as an example for other downtown businesses. Grant funds must be used to address all three of the following areas: facade renovations developed with Main Street Arkansas architectural designers, interior renovation, and small business assistance to provide guidance on running a business in today's chain-dominated retail environment. Van Buren is not currently a Main Street community.

Website: <http://www.arkansaspreservation.org/main-street/mission/mission.asp>

Other Grant-Making Institutions

Fairview Cemetery has received funding from the A&P Commission to assist with restoration, and other local or regional businesses are also potential funding sources. Other major grant-making or finding programs include: the Foundation Center, Grants.gov, the MetLife Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, National Trust for Historic Preservation, Save Our History, and the Southern Arts Foundation.

Chapter Five: Suggested Local Preservation Action

Introduction

The Arkansas River along its southern border, the trains still running through town and utilizing the 1901 depot, and the state and federal highways that meet in Van Buren all testify to the historic travel networks that contributed so heavily to its development. The Victorian commercial buildings lining Main Street continue to draw the attention of people with an interest in historic architecture and several of its neighborhoods boast impressive collections of domestic architecture from the mid-19th to mid-20th centuries; both demonstrate the prosperity that resulted from Van Buren's geography and the efforts of its citizens.

Past preservation efforts provide a helpful basis for further efforts to protect and promote these historic resources. The Historic District Commission, established in 1976, serves in an important oversight role, acts as a promoter of preserving the Van Buren Historic District, and is poised to take a larger role in promoting preservation elsewhere in the town. Participation in national programs like Preserve America help to promote historic assets and Van Buren generally and to provide options for funding, and successful application for Arkansas Historic Preservation Program grants like the one used to restore a monument in the Fairview Cemetery also help to fund preservation projects. National Register listings, of which Van Buren has several, can help build community pride and interest in historic resources, and are the first step to accessing additional financial incentives.

Van Buren has also taken steps to attract participants in an important aspect of the tourism industry: heritage tourists. Heritage tourists are people who intentionally vacation at historic and cultural sites. They often stay in bed and breakfasts or local inns, tour historic downtowns, and visit local museums and other sites unique to a particular area, and they spend more money and stay longer than other types of travelers. Heritage tourism is one of the fastest growing aspects of the tourism field, and Van Buren should continue to market its resources, network regionally, and participate in state promotional and incentive programs to take advantage of the heritage tourism trend.

Van Buren could build on its strong start to preservation and the national and state assistance available in several ways. Van Buren lacks comprehensive awareness of its historic resources, and an effort to fully document them could provide better awareness, a preservation rationale, and an increased ability to protect them. Many in the community remain uninformed about the benefits of historic preservation in general and the affects of listing in the National Register of Historic Places in particular; public education efforts could assist with this problem. The Historic District Commission would like to better promote and protect the Van Buren Historic District; an examination of particular sticking points in the guidelines' content or process will allow these problems to be addressed. The physical degradation or loss of historic character in neighborhoods occurs through decay and demolition, inappropriate alterations, and incompatible new construction, and can be addressed by developing and using incentive and enforcement programs to protect neighborhood character. Promoting Van Buren's historic resources in conjunction with other regional cultural and environmental assets will help to further develop the economic potential of heritage tourism.

Particular objectives and actions by which to achieve them will assist the City of Van Buren and its residents to better care for and utilize Van Buren's historic resources. Following is a list of objectives, and the remainder of this chapter suggests actions by which to achieve them. Though many actions serve multiple objectives, they are grouped with the objective they most strongly support.

Preservation Objectives

1. Heighten public and governmental awareness of the benefits and mechanisms of preservation
2. Fully utilize existing incentives for preservation
3. Comprehensively identify local historic resources
4. Revitalize Van Buren's historic residential neighborhoods
5. Continue to promote and protect the Van Buren Historic District
6. Create and promote a comprehensive experience for heritage tourists

Chapter Five: Suggested Local Preservation Action

Objective One: Heighten Public and Governmental Awareness of Preservation Benefits and Mechanisms

Action: Adopt and Promote a Historic Preservation Awards Program

A historic preservation awards program can help build awareness of historic resources and existing historic preservation efforts, and build enthusiasm for additional efforts. Nashville, Tennessee has a 34-year-old awards program that might be used as a model. Its program is run through the Metropolitan Historical Commission. The Commission accepts public nominations in the following categories: single-family and multi-family residential, commercial buildings, religious properties, engineering and industrial structures, educational and institutional, and infill construction, and uses the judging criteria of architectural merit and/or historical interest, sensitivity to architectural history, creativity in adaptation for contemporary use, soundness of condition, adherence to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, and interiors (except for residential properties). An independent judging committee examines the applications, tours the buildings, and selects winners. Awards are presented at a ceremony and reception in the public library; winners are given a certificate and a bronze plaque with the Commission's logo.

Van Buren might consider running a similar program. The local equivalent of Nashville's Metropolitan Historic Commission is the Van Buren Historic District Commission, though a regional awards program run through a regional preservation non-profit might better promote Van Buren's resources to a regional audience and promote regional cooperation. Categories and procedures should be tailored to local circumstances and determined by the program sponsors, though the universally acknowledged professional criteria established in The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties should have a governing role in these decisions. The awards plaques given help generate public awareness of significant historic properties and preservation efforts. The City of Aurora, Illinois displays their awards program winners on the City's website and in City Hall. Visibility components like awards plaques, media coverage, and public displays should be part of a Van Buren or regional awards program.



An awards program with plaques advertises preservation twice, once through the event and again on the building.

Action: Develop Regular Historic Home Tours



Historic home tours can highlight local rehabilitation projects or satisfy local curiosity about the interiors of historic houses like this one at 410 Drennen Street.

Historic home tours can serve many purposes, including heightening public awareness of historic resources and preservation, generating tourism, and fundraising. Tours are often coordinated through a local preservation nonprofit organization and occur annually, often as part of a particular season like Christmas or spring. Admission is typically charged and the proceeds used for projects of the sponsoring organization. Home tours showcase less-visible preservation efforts by bringing community members and tourists into private homes to hear stories about past residents and events and see current preservation, rehabilitation, and restoration measures at work across their community. Regional planning for shared dates could provide stronger motivation for visiting tourists to come and spend longer in the area. Home tours should be promoted in local media, city and/or tourism websites, and in public locations around town.

Chapter Five: Suggested Local Preservation Action

Objective One: Heighten Public and Governmental Awareness of Preservation Benefits and Mechanisms

Action: Begin a Historic Preservation Themed Service Learning Initiative

Service learning is a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities. As students combine service tasks with structured opportunities that bridge the gap between the classroom and the larger world, they develop practical skills, critical thinking, self esteem, and a sense of civic responsibility which can last a lifetime. By partnering with local schools, preservation organizations and enthusiasts can shape students' ideas about history and the importance of preservation and create a foundation they will carry for their lifetime while meeting real community needs.

Historic preservation takes place in such varied settings that students have opportunities to learn real-world lessons not only in history but also in math, sociology, environmental studies, urban planning, transportation issues, economics, building crafts, and many more disciplines. Service learning is perhaps the best single educational use of heritage resources to directly benefit local communities and build awareness and support for historic preservation.

The Corporation for National and Community Service, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and the National Park Service presented these four projects as models for pairing service learning and historic preservation.

Cherokee Nation, Oklahoma

Students from Pryor High School and Locust Grove Public Schools partnered with the Saline Preservation Association and other community entities to help save one of the only remaining 19th-century Cherokee district courthouses. Students produced a book and a DVD for public distribution and learned about ground-penetrating radar and the differences between historians' and storytellers' approaches to the past.

Caroline County, Maryland

Local preservation group the Friends of Linchester Mill partnered with the Colonel Richardson High School to provide students with a local and national history learning experience paired with labor to help preserve the colonial mill which is one of the oldest, perhaps *the* oldest, free enterprise business in the nation. In year one, students worked on the mill itself, and in year two they worked on a handicapped-accessible interpretive trail. The school's service learning coordinator noted that while the students grew up next to the mill, many had never heard of it before this project, but that "now we hear that kids are taking their parents to visit it."

Washington Court House, Ohio

History students at Washington High School used the National Archives and Records Administration holdings and visits to nearby cemeteries to research and document local veterans that are buried there. In so doing, they tied the national saga to local events, learned that many local Civil War veterans were African American, and brought stories about the local experience back to the community and living memory. They also found out that the Department of Veterans Affairs provides headstones for honorably discharged veterans at no cost, and ordered and installed more than 70 headstones as replacements for deteriorated stones or unmarked plots. The class has since done similar work at a local Catholic cemetery and created a process for students across the country to follow.

Los Angeles, California

The Los Angeles Unified School District certified a program called Community Heritage Tour in which students research important local landmarks and create pamphlets and other outreach efforts to share their findings. For students at Belmont High School, partnered with local group Las Angelitas del Pueblo, "other efforts" included a video, brochure, poster, and website about the landmark Pico House hotel.

Chapter Five: Suggested Local Preservation Action

Objective Two: Comprehensively Identify Local Historic Resources

Action: Conduct a City-Wide Survey of Van Buren’s Historic and Cultural Assets



A cursory survey would record basic information like the present description, location, and estimated dates of construction and alterations for resources like the old jail building. An intensive survey would also conduct research to provide more detailed information about past uses and associated people and events.

Previous survey efforts in Van Buren have been limited and few resources have been intensively surveyed. A city-wide survey of Van Buren’s historic buildings and landscapes is recommended. Individual architectural evaluation and photographs of Van Buren properties constructed before 1960 and a synthesis of them could provide an overview of Van Buren’s historic development, demonstrate associated themes and contexts, assess properties’ National Register eligibility, and provide the city with data about the location and condition of its individual and clustered historic resources. Awareness of historic themes and the locations and conditions of related properties is the first step of any preservation effort, including National Register listing, zoning or design guidelines, and heritage tourism. Defining Van Buren’s significant properties also provides a rationale for their protection. Coverage of the survey and sharing of its results in public locations, on relevant websites, and in local media would also increase public awareness of historic resources and preservation. The historic preservation program at the University of Arkansas, Fort Smith should be considered for the completion of the survey and National Register nominations.

Action: Investigate and Inventory Archaeological Sites

Past events in Van Buren are referenced not only in its buildings and landscapes but also in the ground. Archaeological sites may exist near the surface or be deeply buried. Archaeological study can provide information about land use by different groups both prior to and after the arrival of European American and African American people. Because of its heavy historic and prehistoric use, the riverbank is a particularly important area to consider for archaeological investigation. One study occurred in this area before construction of the pathway, but further and more intense investigations may yield useful findings. Beneath downtown pavement and parking lots are building foundations and deposits which would likely yield artifacts related to Van Buren’s early history. Prior to the installation of municipal water systems, people generally relied upon privies for sanitation and wells and cisterns for potable water. These below ground features were often used as receptacles for household waste, and excavations of them often yield discarded items which illustrate the occupants’ lifestyles.

Archaeological investigations are generally required under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act for projects that utilize federal funds or that require federal permits or licenses such as highway improvements, housing developments, and flood control. However, even when federal funds, permits, or licenses are not involved, city officials should consider what affects projects may have on archaeological resources and consider archaeological investigations or a site background check with the Arkansas State Archaeologist prior to the initiation of construction or other site disturbances. Such investigations would benefit

Van Buren by providing access to information that could otherwise be lost. Van Buren should also consider including the addition of archaeological site protection in future land use plans, zoning, subdivision approvals, and general environmental regulations, particularly for archaeological sites that may be eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.



The riverbank is a potentially rich archaeological site.

Chapter Five: Suggested Local Preservation Action

Objective Two: Comprehensively Identify Local Historic Resources

Action: Partner with Nearby Universities

Many universities see community service as part of their mission, and recognize that practical experiences supplement student learning. Universities also bring together experts in their fields of study. For these reasons, Van Buren should seek to develop partnerships with the relevant departments in the University of Arkansas campuses at Fayetteville, Fort Smith, and Little Rock to help with identification, interpretation, and treatment of historic properties, as well as other preservation-related endeavors.

University of Arkansas, Fayetteville

The School of Architecture houses professional design programs in architecture and landscape architecture. The School's programs include traditional professional and pre-professional degree programs, combining studio design education with innovative teaching in history, theory, technology and urbanism. Architecture students might assist Van Buren with technical projects like assessing and updating the design guidelines and better connecting the Arkansas River, downtown, and residential neighborhoods.

Since 1995, the University of Arkansas Community Design Center (UACDC) has provided award-winning, innovative planning to communities and organizations throughout Arkansas. Using teams of students and professional staff, UACDC prepares multifaceted design solutions that promote economic development, enhanced ecologies and improved public health. The center's work addresses new challenges in affordable housing, urban sprawl, environmental planning and management of regional growth or decline. The UACDC might also be a helpful partner on technical efforts like design guidelines and connecting parts of town.

The Department of History has undergraduate and graduate programs, and many of its faculty and students also participate in area studies like African American Studies and Gender Studies. The program's internship requirement, as well as particular courses like Arkansas and the Southwest, Arkansas in the Nation, and Antebellum America, could offer partnership opportunities.

University of Arkansas, Little Rock

The History Department offers potential partnership opportunities through particular courses, such as The Indian in American History, Environmental History, History of Arkansas, Black History to 1865, Black History since 1865, History Internship, or Seminar in Arkansas History or from its Master of Arts in Public History program, which draws on the basic skills and methods of history and applies them to a public audience through the interpretation, preservation, and management of historical resources.

University of Arkansas, Fort Smith

The University of Arkansas, Fort Smith offers majors in History and Historical Interpretation. The latter seeks to develop skilled communicators, accomplished researchers, and professional historians able to help the public understand and make connections to historic sites and museums. The University is already involved in preservation work in Van Buren through the Historical Interpretation program's ownership, study, and restoration work on the Drennen-Smith Home and the History program's participation in the Tales of the Crypt program at Fairview Cemetery. Students have completed some preliminary survey work in Van Buren and the program is encouraged to complete the proposed intensive level survey and National Register nomination efforts for the city.

The Arkansas Building Trades Institute was based in Helena for many years and taught historic methods of carpentry and masonry. It has since closed, but there is some interest on the part of the University of Arkansas, Fort Smith in reviving the program. If it is reinstated, it could be another valuable resource for local projects.

The marketing department in the College of Business could be a helpful partner in promoting heritage tourism in Van Buren. Its program offers courses related to consumer psychology and general communication, skills which could be used in partnership with local and regional preservation efforts to market Van Buren to a regional and national audience through emerging media and other tools.

Chapter Five: Suggested Local Preservation Action

Objective Three: Fully Utilize Existing Incentives for Preservation

Action: Encourage the Use of Preservation Easements

A preservation easement is a set of legally binding restrictions voluntarily placed on a property by its owner. Easements are tailored to the property and the owner's wishes, and may include limits on demolition and new construction, obligations regarding rehabilitation or maintenance, the retention of particular landscape features, or prohibitions of subdivision or other types of development. A nonprofit organization or government agency holds the rights and the obligation to enforce the easement provisions. In Arkansas, the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program (AHPP) holds preservation easements and in order to be eligible for the tax deduction, the property must be listed in the National Register of Historic Places individually or as a component of a National Register historic district. Easements provide assurance to conservation-minded owners that their property's historic character will be preserved in perpetuity and are also attractive because they can dramatically minimize property, estate, and inheritance taxes. The Crawford County Courthouse is protected by an easement, and other local properties could also benefit through the easement program. Easements can be promoted by mailing information to owners of National Register properties, through public meetings, or on the Historic District Commission's website.



Properties listed in the National Register of Historic Places, like the King Opera House at 427 Main Street, are eligible for preservation easements.

Action: List Eligible Properties on the National Register of Historic Preservation

Several properties in Van Buren were listed in the 1970s, when local efforts began to take stock of and develop strategies for protecting historic resources. More have been added since as ideas about historic significance have expanded and modernized. More details about the National Register of Historic Places and the related incentive programs are included on page 20 of this plan.

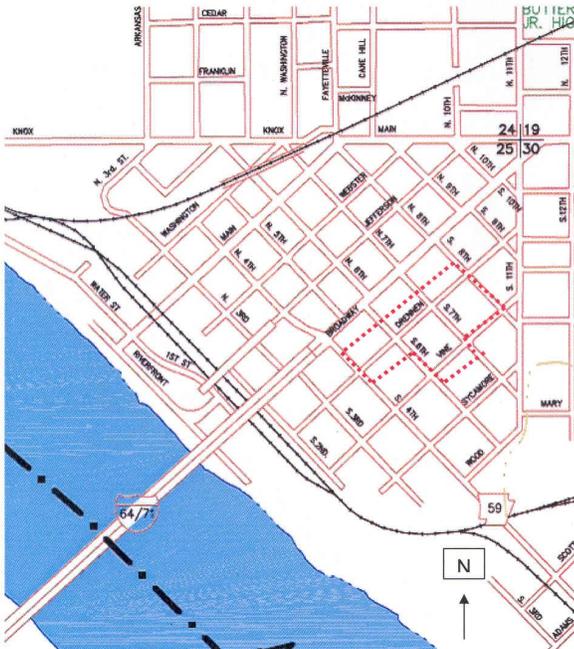
The Van Buren Historic District, along Main Street between the Arkansas River and Cane Hill Street, is Van Buren's most recognized historic district. Fairview Cemetery and its Confederate Section are also historic districts, and the Mount Olivet United Methodist Church, Van Buren Confederate Monument, and Van Buren Post Office are also listed. Though seven houses are listed in the National Register, no residential neighborhoods are listed, though four are potentially eligible and should be nominated. Several additional individual residential and religious properties also appear to be eligible for listing and should be nominated.

When discussing the possibility of National Register listing, it is crucial that owners understand that listing places no restrictions upon them. National Register listing and local zoning ordinances are often confused, which can lead to hesitancy on the part of property owners to have their properties included in the National Register. Prior to initiating a nomination's preparation, property owners should be fully informed about National Register listing through neighborhood meetings and/or information sheets.

Additional National Register listings would have several benefits. Listing is a public statement about a property's significance to local, state, or national history, and is typically a source of pride to the property's owner. Additional listings, then, could help raise the profile of historic resources and preservation within Van Buren, particularly if they are accompanied by local recognition such as coverage in the Press Argus-Courier, posting on the City's website, and/or some sort of display in the courthouse, library, or some other public setting. Listing also makes owners eligible for tax credits in case of rehabilitation, lower tax rates through conservation easements, and grants. These financial incentives provide powerful benefits to owners, in terms of personal expenditures, and to the community, in terms of jobs created and tax revenues generated. On the following pages are descriptions of the neighborhoods for which National Register listing should be pursued.

Chapter Five: Suggested Local Preservation Action

Objective Three: Fully Utilize Existing Incentives for Preservation



Drennen-Vine Streets Historic District

Three blocks of Drennen Street and contiguous portions of South 4th, South 6th, South 7th, and Vine Street are eligible for listing in the National Register as a historic district. The neighborhood meets the criterion for listing for local significance in architecture for its examples of the Colonial Revival, Craftsman, Gothic Revival, and Queen Anne styles. Other criteria, including community planning and development and social history, should also be examined. Included in the eligible area are the National Register-listed Dr. Charles Fox Brown House and Joseph Starr Drennen House.



Many houses in this proposed district retain much of the rich detailing favored by Victorian residents.



This house, at 621 Drennen Street, shows influences from both the Queen Anne and Craftsman styles.



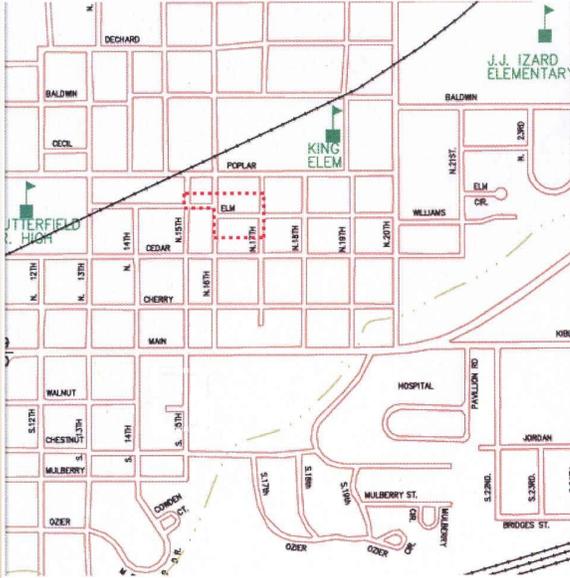
The Dr. Charles Fox Brown House, at 410 Drennen Street, is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.



Listing in the National Register of houses like this one at 722 Drennen would make them eligible for rehabilitation tax credits.

Chapter Five: Suggested Local Preservation Action

Objective Three: Fully Utilize Existing Incentives for Preservation



Elm Street Historic District

Two blocks of Elm Street and contiguous portions of North 15th, North 16th, and North 17th Streets are eligible for listing in the National Register as a historic district. The neighborhood contains examples of the Craftsman and Queen Anne styles of architecture that make it eligible for listing under this criterion. As an established neighborhood, it should also be examined for eligibility under additional criteria, including community planning and development and social history.



This house at 1605 Elm Street was built in the Queen Anne style.



This house at 1604 Elm Street has elements of the Colonial Revival and Craftsman styles.



This established neighborhood has several historic elements like the controlled spacing between houses, distance between houses and street, and regularly placed trees.

Chapter Five: Suggested Local Preservation Action

Objective Three: Fully Utilize Existing Incentives for Preservation



North 13th Street Historic District

North 13th Street between Poplar and just south of Murta Streets and contiguous portions of Dechard, Baldwin, and Cecil Streets is eligible for listing on the National Register as a historic district. Included are houses influenced by the Colonial Revival, Craftsman, Gothic Revival, Italianate, and Queen Anne styles, as well as simple wing-and-gable houses typical of 19th-century residences. The neighborhood should also be examined for eligibility under additional criteria such as community planning and development and social history.



The house at 607 North 13th Street is an intriguing combination of Queen Anne and Craftsman styles.



This building at 500 North 13th retains many of the historic features that define it as a Craftsman house.



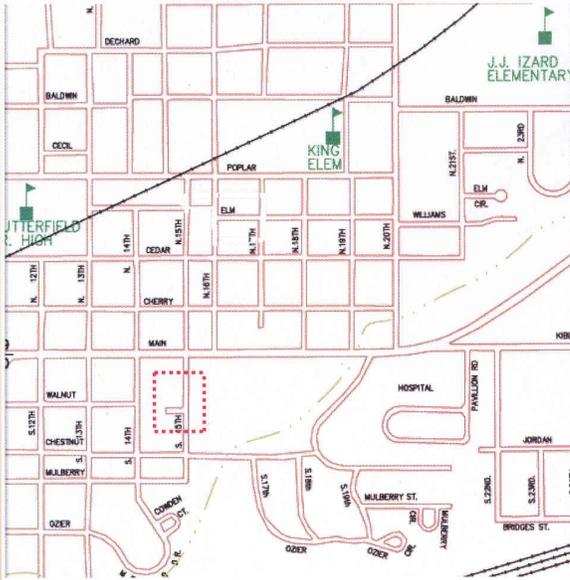
The owners of 413 North 14th Street could use tax credits to rehabilitate their house if it was listed in the National Register of Historic Places.



The landscape of the proposed district has several historic elements, such as the size of lots, position of houses within lots, street placement, and building orientation.

Chapter Five: Suggested Local Preservation Action

Objective Three: Fully Utilize Existing Incentives for Preservation



South 15th Street Historic District

A stretch of South 15th Street between Main and Chestnut Streets is eligible for listing in the National Register as a historic district. Houses here show influences from the Colonial Revival, Craftsman, and Neoclassical styles. The possibility of listing under additional criteria, such as community planning and development and social history, should also be examined.



This house at 11 South 15th Street has a simple, popular square plan and Craftsman-influenced porch elements.



The house at 22 South 15th Street's attention to materials and corner posts show Craftsman influence.



The house above, at 16 South 15th Street, and the one below, at 17 South 15th Street, both have the two-story porticos common to Neoclassical houses and the door surrounds often found on Colonial Revival buildings.



Chapter Five: Suggested Local Preservation Action

Objective Three: Fully Utilize Existing Incentives for Preservation

The following individual residential and religious properties are eligible for listing on the National Register for architectural significance. Any connection the properties have with historic events or people should also be examined to see if they are also eligible for significance under other criteria. Van Buren should also consider a survey of local churches and completing a Multiple Property Documentation Form for churches to create a group context and make nomination easier.



200 block of North 3rd Street



121 North 13th Street



412 South 13th Street



518 North 24th Street



119 Fayetteville Road



415 Webster Street



108 South 10th Street



421 Webster Street

Chapter Five: Suggested Local Preservation Action

Objective Four: Revitalize Historic Residential Neighborhoods

Action: Adopt and Promote Protective Overlays and Ordinance Districts

Aside from the Van Buren Historic District, there are no historic areas in Van Buren protected from demolition or inappropriate new construction. The creation of local ordinance historic districts should be considered for those areas eligible for listing on the National Register. If property owner support does not exist, the use of a lesser overlay such as conservation zoning or a limited application of a local ordinance historic district should be encouraged. Conservation zoning is widely used throughout the country but it has yet to be enacted in Arkansas. This type of zoning only provides review of new buildings, additions to historic properties, and demolition. Even without legislation authorizing conservation zoning, a local historic ordinance district's guidelines could be written that would accomplish this same level of review. Such an overlay would stabilize property values and encourage revitalization. The process of instituting design review districts should include ample time for public meetings and discussion.



Conservation zoning could help protect the historic character of neighborhoods like the one that surrounds the 500 block of North 14th Street.

Action: Adopt and Promote an Urban Homesteading Fund



An urban homesteading program could help address the issue of abandoned homes, such as this one in the 600 block of Drennen Street.

To address the problem of deteriorated and vacant housing in its historic neighborhoods, the City of Van Buren should consider establishing an urban homesteading program. Urban homesteading programs enable cities to buy and renovate vacant and abandoned houses for resale to low- or moderate-income households. Homesteaders must meet certain designated income requirements and are offered a low-interest loan. They must live in and maintain the building for a minimum period of time. Urban homesteading programs have proven their effectiveness in revitalized neighborhoods across the country in communities like Davenport, Iowa. In Richmond, Virginia, problem properties are condemned, acquired by the local government, rehabilitated, and then sold for one dollar plus the cost of rehabilitation.

Houses available through most urban homesteading programs are generally valued from \$75,000 to \$150,000 after rehabilitation. Houses of various sizes are targeted for inclusion in the program. To purchase an urban homestead, most programs require that applicants consist of a family, defined as at least one steadily employed person who is 21 years old or older; have good credit; and

Chapter Five: Suggested Local Preservation Action

Objective Four: Revitalize Historic Residential Neighborhoods

qualify for a low-interest loan. The family must generally also be a first-time homebuyer and own no other real property. According to guidelines established by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the homesteading family can earn no more than 80% of the median family income (based on family size). These programs help to build community pride and identity by maintaining the historic character of a neighborhood and by strengthening residents' commitment to the neighborhood.

Action: Adopt and Promote Training for Local Realtors

It is important to have realtors who are knowledgeable about historic building trends and can accurately represent local preservation measures to new buyers. Preservation Dallas offers the historic house specialist seminar, a two-day training class for realtors, in conjunction with the Intown Living Center, a multi-media center which markets Dallas's in-town neighborhoods to people looking for housing. The course includes lectures presented by expert volunteers on residential architectural styles, Dallas architects and their residential work, historic interiors, the evolution of Dallas neighborhoods, what historic and conservation district designation means, and how to research the history of a house. It also includes a half-day bus tour to a number of neighborhoods, and participants receive a copy of the McAlesters' Field Guide to American Houses and A Guide to the Older Neighborhoods of Dallas. If they complete the class, they receive a certificate, permission to use the Preservation Dallas Historic House Specialist logo, a class photo, and a press release. It is offered twice a year and costs \$175 to participate. Preservation Dallas's Catherine Horsey calls it "extraordinarily successful," and points to its strong local orientation as one of its most important aspects. The City of Van Buren could initiate such a program for the Crawford County Board of Realtors, or a regional organization could begin one for Van Buren, Fort Smith, and other participating communities. Such a program, if it included both residential and commercial material, would also support Objective Five: Continue to Promote and Protect the Van Buren Historic District.



Realtors educated about historic building trends and local preservation programs can better inform clients about historic houses such as this one at 422 North 13th Street.

Action: Adopt a Property Maintenance Code

Demolition by neglect, wherein owners allow their properties to deteriorate past their ability to be retained, is a problem and should be addressed. Property Maintenance Codes protect against demolition by neglect by establishing mandatory minimum maintenance standards for properties, insuring that they remain viable. In 2007, Fort Smith adopted the Fort Smith Property Maintenance Code, which is a good model for Van Buren. Key elements for property exteriors include: keeping the exterior in good repair without deterioration, damaged elements, or peeling paint; maintaining structural soundness; maintaining sanitation; preventing the elements and rodents from entering; and keeping plant growth under six inches in height. Interior requirements include: adequate light and ventilation; adequate space; sanitary conditions; electrical, mechanical, and heating equipment capable of providing minimal levels of safety, light, comfort, utility, and convenience; and fire safety systems. Adoption of such a code in Van Buren would help protect neighborhood character and property values, while also improving public health and safety.

Chapter Five: Suggested Local Preservation Action

Objective Four: Revitalize Historic Residential Neighborhoods

Action: Establish and Promote a Revolving Fund

Revolving funds are among the most effective tools for historic preservation, because they require an organization to become directly involved in preservation through the real estate market. Revolving funds can operate as acquisition and resale funds or as lending funds. An acquisition and resale fund typically purchases troubled historic properties, applies preservation restrictions to the property, and resells them to sympathetic purchasers. Lending funds typically make loans on favorable terms to people or groups for the purchase or rehabilitation of historic properties.

Organizations like the Historic Charleston Foundation, Historic Savannah Foundation, Pittsburgh History and Landmarks Foundation, and Historic Galveston Foundation, among others, have used revolving funds to rehabilitate entire neighborhoods of derelict buildings, increasing local tax bases and fostering heritage tourism. The Providence Preservation Society created a highly successful revolving fund in 1980; it uses City of Providence Community Development Block Grants to buy and rehabilitate troubled properties in moderate-income neighborhoods, and then sells them to qualified purchasers with favorable financing. The City of Van Buren could establish a fund exclusively for local use, or a regional nonprofit organization could begin one for shared use by Van Buren, Fort Smith, and other involved communities.

More recently, organizations have started using revolving funds to address community needs like affordable housing and neighborhood diversity. Pittsburgh History and Landmarks has been particularly involved in this trend, using its fund to encourage rehabilitation by and for existing neighborhood residents while minimizing displacement.

Revolving funds are attractive, because they are able to use the same pool of money over and over. One concern voiced by organizations considering starting a revolving fund is a perceived necessity for a large amount of initial capital. This need can be avoided by using options to carry out transactions. Options allow the fund time to find a buyer before making an outright purchase, minimizing risk and expenditures. Because each transaction involves administrative costs, some revolving funds do consistently lose some of their money, and require a level of constant financial replenishment. Revolving funds also require personnel with specific knowledge of real estate, law, and finance.



These before-and-after pictures show a Franklin County, Georgia rehabilitation project accomplished through The Georgia Trust's revolving fund.

Chapter Five: Suggested Local Preservation Action

Objective Five: Continue to Promote and Protect the Van Buren Historic District

Action: Increase the Usability of the Design Guidelines

The City of Van Buren adopted ordinances 7-1977 and 5-1980 with amendment 2-1998 to designate a local historic district in Van Buren and require design review of all changes made to the exteriors of properties in the district. The ordinance protects the historic character of the district by requiring the approval of the Historic District Commission for most exterior changes, new signs, new construction, or demolition. The Design Guidelines are based on the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, which is the national standard for appropriate reuse and treatment of historic buildings. They emphasize preservation over replacement in order to retain historic character and address primarily parts of buildings highly visible from public areas like sidewalks and streets.

Though the guidelines establish a process for design review and issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness for approved projects and fines for work in violation of the ordinance, they could be strengthened. Lax enforcement of the guidelines is another issue. The guidelines introduction suggests that "three years from the date of adoption of the guidelines, and every three years after, the Van Buren Historic District Commission should review the design guidelines and any proposed changes will be available for public comment prior to revision." As part of this review, the Commission should identify existing problems with the guidelines or process and seek to make them more usable. Areas to consider include the content of the guidelines, the process of acquiring a certificate of appropriateness, accessibility of the guidelines to property owners, consistency of use, and preparedness and ongoing training of commissioners.



The Design Guidelines protect the historic character of the Van Buren Historic District, an important element in the town's identity and a draw to tourists.

Chapter Five: Suggested Local Preservation Action

Objective Five: Continue to Promote and Protect the Van Buren Historic District



A Main Street Arkansas program would also focus on the Van Buren Historic District.

Action: Establish a Main Street Arkansas Program or Join the Arkansas Downtown Network

Main Street Arkansas provides technical assistance, design services, and small business consultations to foster economic development in the state's downtown areas. Model Business Grants are available through program managers of local Main Street Arkansas programs seeking to revitalize their historic commercial districts through design improvements, organization, economic restructuring and promotions. Main Street Arkansas also offers membership in the Arkansas Downtown Network (ADN) to provide downtown revitalization assistance to communities that are not certified Main Street cities. Among the services ADN cities receive are access to Main Street Arkansas's quarterly training meetings, organizational assistance, limited technical assistance from Main Street staff members, and access to the Main Street resource center.

The Main Street Arkansas program's association with the National Main Street Center, a resource facility set up by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, provides access to the very best consulting and training services available for downtown revitalization. The Center also provides, for the more than 40 states and more than 1,000 communities participating in the Main Street Four Point Approach to the downtown revitalization, a network much like the network that Main Street Arkansas provides for local Main Street programs.

Action: Adopt and Promote Contractor Training and Licensing

Contractor training programs help both preservationists and contractors. Contractors educated about professional treatment of historic buildings and related issues like energy efficiency will be better able to advise property owners of their options, including rehabilitation options that often make better financial and environmental sense than alternatives, and to carry out the work of rehabilitation. Trained contractors can also use their increased knowledge to promote themselves.



Training would cover the proper treatment of historic materials like the bricks at 711 Main Street.

The City of Aspen and Pitkin County, Colorado offers a historic preservation training program for building contractors through its Historic Preservation Commission. This program provides a useful model for communities interested in establishing their own training programs. Training includes readings in the locally specific Preservation Awareness Program Training Manual, articles by preservation experts, and selections from the National Park Service's Preservation Tech Notes. Following the course, contractors take a certification exam. Certified contractors are then listed on the City's website. The general contractor or superintendent on any job that affects a historic building is required to take the course and receive a historic preservation contractor license before they can pull a building permit. According to the City of Aspen Historic Preservation Officer, the certification process has eliminated many enforcement problems. Such a program could be offered through the Van Buren Historic District Commission or in conjunction with neighboring communities through a regional historic preservation nonprofit organization.

The Arkansas Building Trades Institute taught historic methods of carpentry and masonry. It has since closed, but there is some interest on the part of the University of Arkansas, Fort Smith in reviving the program. If a contractor training program is initiated, Van Buren should coordinate with the University to ensure that available resources are being used.

Chapter Five: Suggested Local Preservation Action

Objective Six: Create and Promote a Comprehensive Heritage Tourism Experience

Action: Maximize Coverage of Historic Resources and Preservation Events

The internet is a crucial tool for most people in planning local activities and travel. It is particularly important to develop Van Buren's web presence, but traditional media like the Times Record and Press Argus-Courier should also be used to promote local historic resources and preservation activities.



The Van Buren Advertising and Promotions Commission's website is a good tool for cultivating heritage tourism.

for heritage and historic and cultural places. Van Buren might consider including this website on promotional materials in order to encourage travelers to post their experiences of Van Buren and western Arkansas, boosting its profile to a national audience.

Partnering with the University of Arkansas, Fort Smith Marketing Department in the College of Business might result in additional ways to promote Van Buren's historic resources to a regional and national audience.

Maximizing coverage of resources and events also assists with Objective One: Heighten Public and Governmental Awareness of Preservation Benefits and Mechanisms. The City of Van Buren and sites like Fairview Cemetery receive healthy press coverage in the Times Record and Press Argus-Courier. Further preservation activities and historic programming should continue to work with these and any other local or regional papers to insure maximum local awareness. Residents often learn of events and activities through public bulletin boards at libraries, courthouses, and other public locations, so these traditional means of advertising meetings, special events, or ongoing activities should not be neglected.

Several attractive, easy-to use websites are partially or entirely devoted to tourism in Van Buren or the surrounding region. They include: the Van Buren Advertising and Promotions Commission's at www.vanburen.org, the Arkansas Department of Parks and Tourism's at http://www.arkansas.com/city-listings/city_detail.aspx?city=Van+Buren, and the Western Arkansas Mountain Frontier's at <http://www.westarkansasatourism.com/>.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation's subsidiary, Heritage Travel, Inc., has begun a new online tool for travelers to share reviews of their experiences at heritage destinations and sites across the country. They hope to use the site, <http://www.gowithpurpose.com/>, to create a dynamic on-line community for people who share a passion



The Press Argus-Courier coverage helps to promote events like the Tales of the Crypt.

Chapter Five: Suggested Local Preservation Action

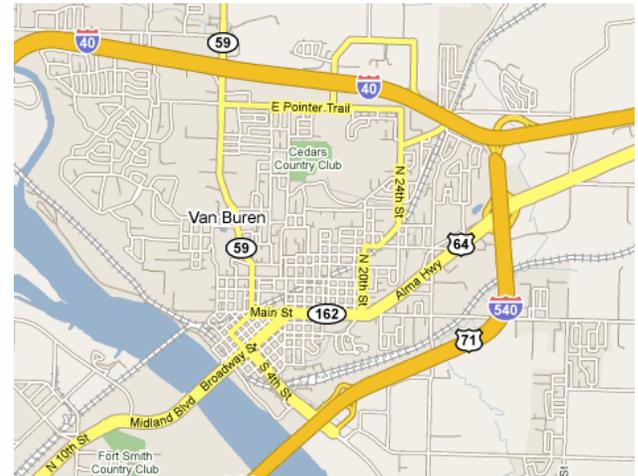
Objective Six: Create and Promote a Comprehensive Heritage Tourism Experience

Action: Develop and Post Signage

Signage is a crucial element for boosting community awareness of historic resources and preservation, and is also critical in fostering heritage tourism. Signs serve both informational and interpretive purposes. Informational signs should be brief and include specific, factual information, while interpretive signs are designed to educate and help visitors or residents make connections with the resource involved. Wayfinding signs, a type of informational sign that provides directions, should be used at key entry points, such as along U.S. 40, U.S. 540/Arkansas 71, Arkansas 64, and Fayetteville Road, and at major in-town intersections to provide notification of and arrows or directions to key historic sites like the Old Frisco Depot, historic districts, Arkansas River and Riverfront Park, Drennen-Scott House, and Fairview Cemetery. Informational signs should also be placed at the main entrances to historic districts to let tourists and residents know that they are entering a significant place. These entry signs should have minimal content, simply stating the name of the district and perhaps including a brief greeting. They should be placed at the main entrances to the districts in highly visible locations.



Wayfinding signs should be brief and easily accessible. This one for Ten Chimneys is a good example.



Signs advertising historic Van Buren should be placed at highway exits or intersections. Within town, directional signs at key intersections should point the way to major attractions.



Examples of Wayfinding Sign Types for Use in Town

Chapter Five: Suggested Local Preservation Action

Objective Six: Create and Promote a Comprehensive Heritage Tourism Experience



Above are examples for welcome signs at the entrances to historic districts. The blue circles show appropriate places for welcome signs to the proposed North 15th Street Historic District. Priority should be given to the busiest locations.

Interpretive signs should be used with particular sites or districts. The National Park Service's Interpretive Development Program defines interpretive writing as writing that "draws from technical, scientific, historical, and cultural sources. Combined with personal experience and style, it evokes an emotional or intellectual response from the reader. It incorporates questioning, dialogue, imagery, or other techniques that create a personal link between the resource and audience. Interpretive writing appeals to a general audience, engenders understanding, and encourages support for resource preservation." Good interpretive signage will help build local constituencies for historic sites and preservation and foster meaningful tourist experiences. Partnerships with university programs could be used to develop sign content and design. The Interpretive Development Program has on-line training in interpretive writing and other relevant areas, and is available at <http://www.nps.gov/idp/interp/index.htm>.



Interpretive signs in Portland, Oregon and Fredericksburg, Virginia

Signs placed by the City of Van Buren, a regional preservation nonprofit organization, or any associated entities should use common materials and design elements like layout, shape, font, and color scheme in order to be quickly and easily recognizable as credible and related to historic sites.

Chapter Five: Suggested Local Preservation Action

Objective Six: Create and Promote a Comprehensive Heritage Tourism Experience

Action: Connect the Arkansas River, Downtown, and Historic Neighborhoods

Area functions in 19th- and 20th-century Arkansas towns were determined by their geography. At one edge of river towns like Van Buren was the riverbank, where industrial and some leisure activities were centered. In Van Buren, the railroad tracks were laid alongside the river, insuring that this area retained its industrial character after railroads replaced rivers as the dominant means of commercial transportation there in the 1870s. A block or two away was downtown and the commercial and cultural center of the community. Beyond downtown, residential neighborhoods spread out. Though the three zones were clearly defined and differentiated, they also existed in close proximity to one another, and developments in one zone affected life in the others. Historic preservation efforts should consider the historical social and physical relationships between each part of town.



The Arkansas River, downtown, and residential neighborhoods have strong historical connections in Van Buren.

The original street grid laid out by John Drennen oriented itself to the river, and the river still forms the southern boundary of the town. Yet the river is almost invisible from other parts of town, blocked from view by the Simmons factory. Though the Simmons factory reflects historic trends of using the riverfront area for industrial activities, the factory's size and appearance are not compatible with the area's historic appearance. Efforts to relocate the Simmons operation and connectivity from downtown to the river should be pursued. Clearly defined paths should connect the Van Buren Historic District with the riverfront.



Van Buren's riverfront should remain public and accessible. Interpretation measures should focus on its ecology and past uses, including for transportation and industry. Efforts should be made to relocate the Simmons plant to another part of town and make the riverfront and the Van Buren Historic District visible from and easily accessible to each other.

The increased prosperity brought about by the coming of the railroad and advances in building materials contributed to the development of both the Van Buren Historic District and the residential neighborhoods whose residents supported and operated it. Preferred walking or driving routes between the commercial downtown and the historic residential neighborhoods should be determined and publicized in guides and through signs.

Chapter Five: Suggested Local Preservation Action

Objective Six: Create and Promote a Comprehensive Heritage Tourism Experience

Develop Walking Tours for the City's Historic Neighborhoods

The Van Buren Advertising and Promotion Commission created the brochure A Guide to Van Buren's Historic Main Street to help visitors locate and learn about the Van Buren Historic District and the buildings within it. Self-guided tours of Van Buren's historic residential neighborhoods should be developed to help visitors and locals make connections with these sections of town. Guides, like signage, should include both informational content, such as contact and location information, and interpretive content designed to foster a connection between its audience and the resource.

Local historians or long-time residents could work with the University of Arkansas, Fort Smith history and marketing programs to incorporate oral histories and other local sources with the most up-to-date interpretive techniques to create stand-out brochures; booklets; cassette, cellular phone, or other recorded tours; web-based tours; or other types of guides using digital media or emerging communications technologies. A single driving and walking tour could highlight historic



From A Guide to Van Buren's Historic Main Street

properties throughout town, or district tours could individually interpret sections or Van Buren. The National Park Service's Interpretive Development Program has on-line training in interpretive writing and other relevant areas, and is available at <http://www.nps.gov/idp/interp/index.htm>. As with other promotional efforts, guides should be distributed regionally at historic and cultural sites and visitors centers and available on City and tourism websites.



Additional guided or self-guided tours could promote historic and architectural sites in Van Buren's neighborhoods.

Chapter Five: Suggested Local Preservation Action

Objective Six: Create and Promote a Comprehensive Heritage Tourism Experience

Action: Institute Regular Meetings of Local Organizations

The Van Buren Historic Commission, Van Buren Advertising and Promotion Commission, Van Buren Chamber of Commerce, Old Town Merchants Association, Fairview Cemetery Board, and others are all stakeholders in heritage tourism efforts. They and other relevant groups are encouraged to meet at least annually to prioritize tourism goals and identify sources of funding or partnerships to help accomplish and publicize these goals.

Action: Form a Regional Historic Preservation Nonprofit Organization

The Arkansas Regional Tourist Associations were formed in 1969 to pool marketing resources and create a grassroots organization system for the benefit of tourism. Each region is a nonprofit corporation established for the purpose of encouraging and stimulating tourist travel and vacation business to and within the region. Arkansas's program currently includes twelve Regional Tourist Associations. The Western Arkansas' Mountain Frontier association includes Crawford County, Franklin County, the west side of Logan County, Polk County, Sebastian County, and Scott County. A nonprofit organization devoted to historic preservation could complement these efforts.



Nearby Booneville offers the Arkansas Tuberculosis Sanatorium Historic Site.



Fort Smith National Historic Site is one of neighboring Fort Smith's many attractions.

Nonprofit historic preservation organizations have many benefits. A nonprofit organization can advocate in ways that would be inappropriate for city government. It can also plan and promote common-sense preservation efforts unconstrained by city or county boundaries. In Van Buren, endowed with its own historic resources but also located next to Fort Smith and its abundant and complementary resources, a regional approach to historic preservation and heritage tourism makes economic sense. There are numerous grants and assistance programs through the National Trust and other organizations to assist in the formation and development of historic preservation nonprofits. Such organizations can be all volunteer or have one or more staff members. Some of the roles and responsibilities of such a non-profit could include:

- Fund raising for projects.
- Awards programs
- Advocacy on a regional basis.
- Identifying endangered properties.
- Public education programs.
- Administering a revolving fund program.
- Obtaining grants for rehabilitation projects.
- Purchasing and restoring buildings.



Paris, the Logan County seat, possesses a historic courthouse and town square.

Van Buren, Fort Smith and the surrounding region has impressive historic resources and a regional non-profit organization would assist in their preservation.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

Like communities across the country, Van Buren is looking for ways to improve its economic growth and quality of life. Emphasizing historic resources can assist with both.

The economic benefits of historic preservation in Arkansas were clearly demonstrated in a 2006 study. Heritage tourism, in which tourists travel to visit cultural and historic sites, was then a \$890.6 million industry that supported 21,553 Arkansas jobs annually. Rehabilitation of historic properties added \$40.9 million to the yearly income of Arkansas families and generated \$3.3 million in state and local taxes annually. Downtown revitalization efforts through Main Street Arkansas brought \$7 million in investment and created 187 downtown retail and service jobs each year. The federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit leveraged \$54.3 million and supported 767 Arkansas jobs between 2000 and 2006. Historic Preservation Grant supported projects added \$2.3 million annually to the income of Arkansas workers.

Energy, time, materials, and money are used every time a building is constructed or infrastructure is developed. Continuing to use existing buildings and infrastructure insures that those expenditures are used instead of wasted. Continuing to use existing buildings and neighborhoods avoids some of the detrimental environmental effects of suburban sprawl, including increased traffic patterns, energy consumption, and environmental degradation. Protecting past community investment and community health makes good economic and environmental sense.

Historic resources also contribute deeply to a unique sense of place, and set one community apart from others. The distinctive buildings on Van Buren's Main Street, its geographic relationship to the Arkansas River, the stylized and vernacular houses in its neighborhoods, and the relationship of all of these buildings and landscapes to the events that occurred within them define Van Buren. The sense of place they evoke can draw tourists to town, but can also contribute to a local culture of pride in place which has intangible benefits for community life.

Van Buren is possessed of a unique past and a unique set of historic resources, and several useful preservation efforts exist already in town, including an early Restoration/Redevelopment Plan, several National Register listings, design guidelines for the Van Buren Historic District, grant awards, interpretive tours and programs, and partnerships with the University of Arkansas, Fort Smith. Several other national, state, and local programs could be used in service of further preservation objectives, however. The remaining objectives and suggested actions for meeting them are:

Objective One: Heighten Public and Governmental Awareness of the Benefits and Mechanisms of Preservation

- Action: Adopt and Promote a Historic Preservation Awards Program
- Action: Develop Regular Historic Home Tours
- Action: Begin a Historic Preservation Themed Service Learning Initiative

Objective Two: Comprehensively Identify Local Historic Resources

- Action: Conduct a City-Wide Survey of Van Buren's Historic and Cultural Assets
- Action: Partner with Local Universities

Objective Three: Fully Utilize Existing Incentives for Preservation

- Action: Encourage the Use of Preservation Easements
- Action: List Eligible Properties on the National Register of Historic Places

Objective Four: Revitalize Historic Residential Neighborhoods

- Action: Adopt and Promote a Protective Overlays and Ordinance Districts
- Action: Adopt and Promote an Urban Homesteading Fund
- Action: Adopt and Promote Training for Local Realtors
- Action: Adopt a Property Maintenance Code
- Action: Adopt and Promote a Revolving Fund

Objective Five: Continue to Promote and Protect the Van Buren Historic District

- Action: Increase the Usability of the Design Guidelines
- Action: Establish a Main Street Arkansas Program or Join the Arkansas Downtown Network
- Action: Adopt and Promote Contractor Training

Objective Six: Create and Promote a Comprehensive Heritage Tourism Experience

- Action: Maximize Coverage of Historic Resources and Preservation Events
- Action: Develop and Post Signage
- Action: Connect the Arkansas River, Downtown, and Historic Neighborhoods
- Action: Develop Walking Tours for the City’s Historic Neighborhoods
- Action: Institute Regular Meetings of Local Organizations
- Action: Form a Regional Historic Preservation Nonprofit Association

Pursuing these objectives requires some work, but contributes to a healthier environment and holds the potential to enhance local economic and cultural growth. Using existing buildings and infrastructure saves materials and energy, avoids damage to watersheds, and helps retain existing habitat. Preserving Van Buren’s historic buildings and landscapes can increase incomes, provide job growth, and add tax revenues. Preserving and emphasizing the pedestrian-friendly, human-scaled environment in Van Buren’s historic areas fosters community engagement, and promoting its unique historic resources cultivates community pride. Van Buren’s predominance of historic buildings and landscapes, location in a region with a concentration of related resources, history of preservation efforts, and willingness to further promote and preserve its historic assets all position it well to reap the environmental, economic, and social benefits of preservation.

The National Register of Historic Places

The country's official list of properties significant in local, state, or national history.

The National Register is maintained by the National Park Service and expanded through nominations by individuals, organizations, state and local governments, and federal agencies.

Criteria for Listing in the National Register

- Being old enough to be considered historic (generally at least 50 years old)
- Retaining much of its historic integrity, defined as the survival of physical characteristics including historic: location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association
- Being associated with events, activities, or developments that were important in the past, with the lives of people who were important in the past, with significant architectural history, landscape history, or engineering achievements, or having the potential to yield information about the past through archeological investigation.

Process for Listing in the National Register

- Complete a Determination of Eligibility Form, and forward it to the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program (AHPP).
- If the AHPP determines the property eligible, then complete the National Register form and forward it to the AHPP.
- The AHPP reviews the form at the next meeting of the AHPP's State Review Board.
- If the form and documentation are complete, the AHPP forwards them to the National Park Service (NPS) for further review and listing.

National Register Listing does Not

- Place obligations on private property owners
- Restrict the use, treatment, transfer, or disposition of private property
- Lead to public acquisition
- Require public access
- Automatically invoke local historic district zoning or local landmark designation

A property will not be listed if, for individual properties, the owner objects, or for districts, a majority of property owners object.

Benefits of Listing in the National Register

- Increased community pride
- Increased stewardship ethics
- Increased property values
- Access to state tax benefits for rehabilitation
- Access to federal tax benefits for rehabilitation
- Access to conservation easement program and financial and protective benefits
- Access to grants for planning and rehabilitation
- Access to alternatives for international Building Code
- Documents a property's historic significance
- Requires that federal undertakings attempt to mitigate harmful effects

The Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentives

One of the Federal government's most successful and cost-effective community revitalization programs. The incentives reward private investment in rehabilitating historic properties such as offices, rental housing, and retail stores.

The 20 % Tax Credit

- Jointly administered by the Department of the Interior and the Department of the Treasury in partnership with the State Historic Preservation Officer (in Arkansas, the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, or AHPP)
- Applies to substantial certified rehabilitations of certified structures used for commercial, industrial, agricultural, or rental residential purposes
- Substantial means that, during a 24-month period selected by the taxpayer, rehabilitation expenditures must exceed the greater of \$5,000 or the adjusted basis of the building and its structural components.
- Certified rehabilitation means that it is approved by the National Park Service (NPS) as consistent with the historic character of the property and, if applicable, district.
- Certified structure means a building that is listed in the National Register individually or as a contributing part of a historic district.
- The credit equals 20% of the amount spent in the rehabilitation.

Process

- Apply as soon as possible, preferably before beginning work, and consult with the AHPP as needed.
- Photograph the building inside and outside and wait for NPS approval in writing before beginning work.
- If the building is not listed in the National Register, owners must use the Historic Preservation Certificate Application, Part 1, to request a preliminary determination of significance from the NPS. If judged significant, they must also obtain National Register listing through the AHPP.
- Read and follow the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and the Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings, and consult with the AHPP or the NPS if anything is unclear.
- All owners complete Part 2 of the application, Description of Rehabilitation, and submit it to the AHPP, which forwards it to the NPS with a recommendation.
- Upon request, pay the review fee to the NPS.
- Complete the rehabilitation, and claim the credit on IRS form 3468 for the tax year in which the rehabilitated building is placed into service or once the substantial rehabilitation test has been met for phased projects or projects in which the building remains in service throughout.
- Continue to own the building for five full years after completing the rehabilitation or refund the credit.

The 10% Tax Credit

- Applies to substantial rehabilitations of non-historic buildings placed in service before 1936 used for non-residential purposes (hotels are permissible, but rental or owner-occupied housing is not)
- Must be claimed on IRS form 3468 in the tax year in which the rehabilitated building is placed in service

The Arkansas Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit

Encourages private investment in historic properties in urban and rural Arkansas, generating jobs and stimulating economic development and community revitalization efforts.

The state program provides for a 25% tax credit for rehabilitation expenses for both income-producing and privately owned historic buildings. The program allows a 25% credit on state income taxes for total rehabilitation expenses that are:

Key Elements of the Arkansas Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit

- incurred by the property owner to complete a certified rehabilitation of buildings that are listed or are considered eligible for national, state, or local historic designation
- in excess of \$25,000 annually
- up to \$500,000 for a commercial property
- up to \$100,000 for a residential property

The tax credit can be transferred, sold, or assigned, and any unused tax credit may be carried forward for five consecutive taxable years.

Process

This program is administered by the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program (AHPP) and follows the application process currently used for the federal rehabilitation tax credit.

- Property owners must first shoot photographs showing the current condition of the property and complete an application that details their rehabilitation plans.
- Once approved, property owners complete their work and then submit another set of photographs when they are finished.
- Once the state certifies the rehabilitation, then property owners can claim the credit.

Benefits

In states that have passed similar tax credits, the amount of rehabilitation expenditures on historic buildings has often doubled. Such credits have returned historic properties to municipal tax rolls, generated employment and housing where they are most needed, and leveraged substantial private investment. This trend holds tremendous potential for historic preservation efforts across the state.