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St. Joseph’s Orphanage Early 1900s

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Message from the Editor

During World War I, not long after Camp Pike began training Dough Boys, a group decided to build a community adjacent to the post to take advantage of the thousands of young men who might want to spend their money and take a little R&R. Laura Whitehead takes us on the journey of how the community of Belmont was built and how it served the soldiers. This issue of the Arkansas Military History Journal also includes a pictorial covering the POW camp located at Camp Robinson in WWII. Instead of his usual featured artifact article, which he even provided while he was deployed, LTC Matthew Anderson writes about the new weapons conservation lab at the Arkansas National Guard Museum. Finally, the illustration on this page is a caricature of COL Grover Cleveland Graham, who was the commander at Camp Robinson during WWII. During his time as commander, between 1941 and 1947, COL Graham kept a scrapbook, which was recently donated by his granddaughter and her husband, Susan Wright Wilson and Dean Wilson. Although very fragile, the scrapbook is an exciting addition to the Museum collection!

Dr. Raymond Screws
Editor/Arkansas National Guard Museum Director
501-212-5215; raymond.d.screws.nfg@mail.mil
Right outside the old Camp Pike Gate a historic three story building rests on a hill, with the inscription “ST. JOSEPH’S HOME” in a stone arch. An orphanage was the longest and best known use of this building, but its brief time as a hotel during WWI was equally memorable. In some shape or form, this building has been occupied and in operation since it first opened its doors in 1910. The town of Belmont, which developed around the Hotel Belmont, was an important chapter in North Little Rock’s history and the city’s relationship with the United States Army and National Guard. Capitalizing on the construction of Camp Pike and the population influx it brought, The Hotel Belmont brought with it speculation and development which attracted some of the best entertainment of the time, as well as luxurious accommodations earning it the distinction of being one of the best hotels for officers in the country.
The same characteristics that attracted Father John Morris to purchase land and build the eighty room orphanage drew the eye of the Federal Government.\textsuperscript{2} Perched atop of what was locally known as Belmont Hill, the orphanage enjoyed some of the best views of the city and the Arkansas River. St. Joseph’s occupies a large plot held by the Catholic Diocese, originally seven hundred and twenty acres, with the current holding at about seventy three acres.\textsuperscript{3} Three hundred acres of the orphanage were devoted to farm use, and would have been in production at the time the government began talking to the Bishop.\textsuperscript{4} Overall, this section of Levy had yet to go through any major developments, save a few farms and homesteads. As such it retained the beautiful Arkansas landscapes that still draws tourists. The building was finished in 1910 and designed for the Church by the architect Charles L. Thompson for an estimated grand total of $150,000.00.\textsuperscript{5} The recent construction of the orphanage made the building a practical choice for an officer’s hotel. The Army wouldn’t have any aging infrastructure or repairs to worry about, and would have little initial investment to adapt the space. Accounting for inflation, St. Joseph’s construction bill of $\$3,859,377.55 ensured that it was not only solidly built, but offered modern comforts and technologies which would ensure the running of the church sponsored charity.\textsuperscript{6} Money invested in the framework and systems in building ensured a higher standard of living in the orphanage. The twin water tanks in the attic, which are still there but no longer in use, guaranteed the building a reliable water supply. St. Joseph’s also operated a self-contained electrical plant, ensuring that the building remained powered when others around went dark.\textsuperscript{7} The heavy use of brick and stone work was incorporated into advertisements for the hotel as creating a “fire proof” effect. When com-
pared to the wood framed and constructed buildings normally built in the early 1900’s, the heavy use of masonry did grant an extra degree of protection.

The promise of an in-house bakery and commercially equipped kitchen, large dining facilities, and laundry made the hotel an attractive choice and reassured the government that the building would be able to serve its patrons at a level expected by officers and their families.

HOTEL BELMONT ERA

In 1917, the United States Government approached Bishop Morris to request the use of the orphanage’s building for a Hotel. The close proximity of the building to Camp Pike can be seen in many of the historic photos showing the surrounding landscape. *The Guardian*, a Catholic newspaper, reports that the Bishop volunteered the use of the building, as an act of patriotic duty to his country. Bishop Morris, the Benedictine Nuns, and the children relocated to another Church owned property at 24th and Gaines Street. They remained at the Pulaski Heights College Building in Little Rock for the duration of the war, and were able to return thereafter.

Local papers begin reporting in 1917 the intentions of The Belmont Development Company to establish a “cantonment city.” The *Daily Arkansas Gazette*
ran an article on August 26th, 1917 which indicates 320 acres were earmarked for lease and development. St. Joseph’s building is said to have some interior remodeling work done by Frank W Gibb & Co. Architects, to outfit it for hotel service. Some exterior landscaping, and the addition of a terrace and southern portico were ordered as well. Lawrence V. Sheridan was employed by The Belmont Development Company to plan out the city of Belmont, the same man who was previously used to lay out Camp Pike.11
Belmont became the center of the social world surrounding Camp Pike as it filled with incoming officers and their families, as well as vacationers and the large staff needed to run the hotel. It remained the Hotel Belmont for 3 years, finishing service in 1920. The decision to build the Officer’s Club headquarters near the hotel increased the traffic to and promoted the idea of the space as a social destination for parties and dinners. Having a dance floor which was claimed to be “larger than any in Little Rock” probably helped a bit. Many holiday parties, balls, and celebrations were hosted by both the hotel and the club providing entertainment for both troops and civilians.

The Social listings in Little Rock newspapers between 1917 and 1922 highlight visits from out of state officers, their wives and relatives, or popular or prominent civilians listed as staying or visiting the hotel. The Officer’s Club officially opened December 31st, 1917 with a roll book listing around one thousand two hundred officers and a limited space for civilian members. A significant club member was Mrs. S. D. Sturgis who was married to Maj. Gen. Samuel D Sturgis. Sturgis commanded the 87th Division of the National Army during WWI. Unfortunately in January off 1919, the
club building burned and was reported as a complete loss.\(^{15}\) The destruction of the club building doesn’t seem to have detracted from Belmont’s ability to entertain for the remaining year of the hotel’s service. The hotel and other businesses continued to serve as a source of fun and entertainment.

An indication of the hotel’s reputation is found in a newspaper serial titled *The Lion’s Mouse* which ran in the Daily Arkansas Gazette in 1919.\(^{16}\) The serial mentions the hotel as the lodging for one of the characters, implying that the hotel had become part of the cultural landscape. People in North Little Rock and beyond would have known about the hotel much as they would have known about the Capital Hotel or the Arlington Hotel. Belmont was much more than an updated officer’s billeting, it was a destination.

**BELMONT BOOMTOWN**

Belmont was designed and built to be a destination from the start, and to rival the entertainment, style,
and comfort anything Little Rock could offer. It was envisioned as a source of clean entertainment, lacking the less tasteful vices of alcohol, gambling and other dangerous activities. The city grew in a very deliberate way, unlike the organic sprawling of slow developments or additions over time. For example, streets were laid out to work with the rise and fall of the terrain, as opposed to a more traditional grid of right angles which reduced the need for large scale land leveling before construction started.17

Belmont earned the nickname as “Little Rock’s Coney Island” through the pool halls, skating rink, movie and live action theater, ice cream and candy shop, cigar shop, Ball Park, department store, gift and souvenir shop, and cafes.18 The two department stores belonged to the Pfeifer Brothers who already owned a large department store downtown on Main Street and a jewelry store. Pfeifers would have been a highly recognizable name and company for those in the Little Rock area, signaling quality and a degree of Opening a store in Belmont offered Pfeifers an opportunity to test a new satellite location, and granted the new city the reputation of an older, familiar brand. The Pfeifer brothers’ stores lasted until the 1960’s when it was purchased by the Dillard's Corporation. Details about other businesses remain vague, with the type or simply an owner mentioned in passing in records or newspaper articles. It is likely though with further research, more information can be uncovered.

A bank, a local post office branch, and a depot for the Missouri Pacific Rail Road were just a few of the city services in Belmont. The Army National Bank Branch was the only known bank in Belmont. It opened in 1918 and closed in 1919 based on news advertisements and announcements. A branch of The Lutheran Brotherhood occupied the small building afterwards.19 The Post Office and rail depot appear to have been housed in the same building, which is said to have been behind the Hotel Belmont. Much like the Army National Bank, the post office and rail station closed within a few years. An October 20, 1920 newspaper article says the Missouri Pacific Railroad claimed the reason for the closure was that “the salary of the agent exceeds [the] entire receipts of office.”20
Another hotel amenity was an available stable and an auto garage for patrons. Judge Asher ordered the use of convicts and hired help to improve the roads leading up to and surrounding the hotel. The population spike demanded improvements to accommodate it and the road work served to help attract local automobile owners to the area. The news in North Little Rock support the idea of locals and guests of the hotel testing their car’s abilities around the curves and hills surrounding Belmont. Accounts of auto accidents would indicate perhaps sometimes not very successfully. 21

Soldiers had their choice of cantonment dining, but also the use of three cafes, as well as the dining facility at the hotel. The Belmont Café, Clark’s Café, and the American Café are all part of the known restaurants in Belmont. The Hotel owned and operated a large restaurant with weekly Sunday dinners featuring multiple courses, all for the tidy sum of one dollar. The dining facilities served the general public and soldiers from Camp Pike, and were also frequented by the staff that lived as boarders in the Hotel. Many socialites’ or officer’s dinner parties, dances, and celebrations were held at the Hotel Belmont during its short life which took advantage of the dining space and resources. For those that wished to venture to Little Rock and beyond for food or fun, a bus service to the train station, Camp Pike, and North Little Rock aided in their travels. Over time, the flow of traffic slowed, with less soldiers and locals filtering out of Belmont than in. 22 The exact location of some stores and shops have been lost, but others such as the baseball field and the Army National Bank we are able to estimate with a degree of accuracy. Using Lidar, an aerial photography tool that uses radar to create images of the earth’s topography with reduced vegetation cover, to scan the landscape and terrain as well as historic records and imagery, it is possible to create a map which show the known locations of buildings and our best estimates of others.
DECLINE, CLOSURE AND THE RETURN OF ST. JOSEPH’S ORPHANAGE

The end of the war signaled the decline for the city of Belmont. Over the course of a few years, the entertainment hub of Belmont opened and closed. The decrease in troops training at Camp Pike meant a sharp decline in income and population both on post and off. Business models which were based on capitalizing on the war time conditions failed to thrive in peace time, and as such, the effects were quickly felt in Belmont. Theaters, cafes, stores, and other features of the landscape shut their doors for service within a few years, yielding the area to farming once again.

Bishop Morris, the Benedictine Nuns, and the children returned in the summer of 1921. The Officer’s club which previously burnt was never rebuilt. It is unknown how fast or exactly when the other buildings were removed, reused, or rotted away. The speed at which the hotel and surrounding city grew does not seem to have created many lasting remnants. The planned roads were never fully completed or have become overgrown, lost, or shifted. Building foundations are equally obscured by vegetation or decay. Further investigations of land and tax records, archival resources, or local accounts and memories could hold clues which would reveal the true extent and placement of the city of Belmont. St. Joseph’s was able to return and continue the work of the orphanage for another half century. Any improvements made by the Army and the Belmont Development Co. do not seem to have hindered Bishop Morris’s charity works.
BUILDING TODAY
The St. Joseph’s Center currently holds a lease for the Hotel Belmont building from the Catholic Diocese. Over the years, this property has been an orphanage, a hotel, a day-care, and is currently a multi-use space. The one hundred and eleven year old building retains much of its original character and features, but needs modernization and rehabilitation similar to other historic buildings constructed during this time. In 1974, the building was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in recognition of its significance to the contributions to the history of Levy and Camp Pike. The St. Joseph’s Center works to keep the doors open as well as raise awareness of the value and history of the building, how it helped shape life at Camp Pike and Levy during the First World War, and how it can continue to serve the city of North Little Rock.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Laura Whitehead is an assistant in cultural resources under the leadership of the Camp Robinson Environmental Team. She works closely with Deanna Holdcraft who is the Cultural Resource Manager, which provides archeology services for Camp Robinson.
REFERENCES


*Photo: Unknown, Dining Room at St. Joseph’s Orphanage, 1934, Print, The Guardian, October 20th, 1934.*


9 Ibid.

*Photo: Unknown, Pipeline Instillation, Print, AR ARNG CRM photo archive.*

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11 Ibid.

*Photo: Unknown, Belmont Development Company Advertisement, 1917, Arkansas Democrat September 1st, 1917 p 3.*

*Photo:* Unknown, WWI Officer’s Club Building, *Print, AR ARNG CRM photo archives.*

13 “Open Club December 31 New Year’s Eve is Date Set By Board of Directors” *Daily Arkansas Gazette* (Little Rock, Arkansas), Nov 28th, 1917, p 3.

14 Ibid.


*Photo Right:* “Mrs. Sturgis Chairman” *Daily Arkansas Gazette* (Little Rock, Arkansas) May 26th, 1918, p3.

15 “Belmont Club is Destroyed by Fire” *Daily Arkansas Gazette* (Little Rock, Arkansas) Jan 14th, 1919, p3., “Officer’s Club at Belmont is Burned” *Arkansas Democrat* (Little Rock, Arkansas) Jan 13th, 1919, p 1.


*Photo:* “Belmont Club is Destroyed by Fire” *Daily Arkansas Gazette* (Little Rock, Arkansas) Jan 14th, 1919, p 3.

17 “Cantonment City to be Erected.” *Daily Arkansas Gazette* (Little Rock, Arkansas), August 26, 1917.

*Photo:* *Daily Arkansas Gazette* (Little Rock, Arkansas) March 9th, 1918, p 11.

18 “Little Rock Indeed Fortunate in Having Such a Hotel as The Belmont at Camp Pike” *Arkansas Democrat* (Little Rock, Arkansas) Aug 31st, 1918, p 36.

*Photo:* Unknown, Camp Pike Entrance, *Print, AR ARNG CRM photo archives.*


21 *The Daily Arkansas Gazette* and *Arkansas Democrat* report accidents on at least two occasions: 11.29.1917 and 9.22.1919.

*Photo:* *Daily Arkansas Gazette* (Little Rock, Arkansas) Feb 16th, 1919, p 5.

22 *Photo:* Unknown, Camp Pike & Belmont Panorama, *Print, AR ARNG CRM photo archives.*


On Camp Joseph T. Robinson was one of 142 major German POW sites in the US. The peak month for enemy POWs in America was in May 1945, with 425,871 captured soldiers, and 371,683 were Germans. Most POWs in the United States were from Germany. Besides those from Hitler’s army, there might have been a few Italians at Camp Robinson as well.

Other major POW sites in Arkansas were at Pine Bluff Arsenal, Camp Chaffee, Camp Dermott, Camp Monticello, and Camp Jerome, where one of the two Japanese Internment Camps was located. The Camp Robinson site is located in the current TA-03 and consisted of 300 acres. It was the most important POW camp in Arkansas. The Camp Robinson POW site housed around 3,000 to 4,000 German soldiers, many captured in North Africa as part of Rommel’s Army. Camp Robinson was also the administrative center for several POW work camps in the central and southern area of the State, which housed an additional 7,000 POWs.

The Arkansas National Guard Museum Foundation is attempting to create an interpretive heritage trail at the POW site.

PHOTOS

Left: POW driving a tractor at a POW work farm.

Right: POWs working on a POW work farm.
Building Milo Stocks

Planting Onions

POWs returning from work detail, Camp Robinson

Soccer game among POWs, might be at Camp Robinson

POW Workers on a Horse

POWs returning from work detail, Camp Robinson
POW Funeral at Camp Robinson

POWs attending church. Most preachers were from the German Military

Camp Robinson held competitions for decorative gardens.

POWs in Class, Camp Robinson

POW Camp, Camp Robinson
Over the past twenty years the Arkansas National Guard Museum has amassed an enviable collection of 19th and 20th century martial arms. Most of which are on display. These artifacts are from several nations and show many aspects of the progression of military firearms development. Many represent the American Soldiers who carried them in peacetime and war. In some cases they are weapons captured from the enemy in battle. Each has a story to tell of a time and place in the history of our nation and the Soldiers who carried them. If we are going to continue to tell their story then we must make a determined effort to preserve these artifacts for future generations.

In 2015, the Arkansas National Guard Museum Board noted that several weapons in the collection were beginning to show signs of neglect. Several areas of concern were identified that needed to be addressed. First, flooding in the basement was affecting the ability to control the moisture in the museum. Second, the largest single weapons collection known as the Yeater Collection had been encased in an inaccessible display case. While this provided some level of protection, it prevented the access necessary to perform preventive maintenance and upkeep. Third, there was no means to clean and maintain the weapons properly. Dr. Raymond Screws, the Museum Director and Ms. Erica McGraw, the Museum Assistant set out to address these areas of concern. Through a large two-phase construction process much of the flooding issue was resolved. Next they worked to redesign and have a new display case built. For the final issue, Dr. Screws sought out the Mississippi Armed Forces Museum, which was the only National Guard Museum that has a conservation lab. After visiting, and coordinating with Mr. Glenn Husted, the Collections Manager, a plan was developed and executed to establish a Weapons Artifact Conservation Lab at Camp Robinson in the Museum.

On 24 to 25 January 2019, a class was held at the museum with Mr. Glenn Husted instructing along with his colleague Timothy Broone. In attendance was Mr. Dan Horan, SMSgt Daniel Norwood, Mr. Stephone Keeton, Mr. Glenn Husted, LTC Matthew Anderson, Dr. Raymond Screws, Front: Mr. Dan Horan

Left to right: Timothy Broone, Mr. Robert Fite, SMSgt Daniel Norwood, Mr. Stephone Keeton, Mr. Glenn Husted, LTC Matthew Anderson, Dr. Raymond Screws

Weapons Artifact Conservation Lab
By LTC Matthew W. Anderson

Over the past twenty years the Arkansas National Guard Museum has amassed an enviable collection of 19th and 20th century martial arms. Most of which are on display. These artifacts are from several nations and show many aspects of the progression of military firearms development. Many represent the American Soldiers who carried them in peacetime and war. In some cases they are weapons captured from the enemy in battle. Each has a story to tell of a time and place in the history of our nation and the Soldiers who carried them. If we are going to continue to tell their story then we must make a determined effort to preserve these artifacts for future generations.

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Further research is often needed to understand how to properly disassemble/reassemble the weapon. In many cases we will take it beyond the basic field stripping procedure to ensure every part is inspected, documented and cleaned. In some cases it requires a judgement call to stop when there is risk that further action may cause damage either due to not having proper armorer tools specific to the weapon or due to the age and condition of the parts. We learned that there are two different types of care for museum weapons, they are conservation and restoration. Conservation involves cleaning and encapsulating in wax to preserve it as is. Restoration involves taking further steps to repair broken or damaged areas to return it to its original condition. Restoration must be carefully considered since it may erase some of the history of the weapon. An example would be a battered, beaten and cracked stock may look bad but may be a reflection of the heavy use at the time it was carried or captured.

Since the class, the first team of volunteers began work on the collection starting with several weapons that are not currently on display. Many of these have never been touched since they were turned over to the museum, having dirt, rust, grease, cosmolene, carbon and copper deposits. This has given us an opportunity to refine our processes and skills before we begin to work on more rare and delicate arms. In all we have 278 weapons and accessories to conserve. They range from an early 1800’s flintlock musket to WWII Japanese Type 96 25mm anti-aircraft gun. Each weapon can take from one week to six months depending on the condition and research required. It will be a long process but we have a team of dedicated volunteers determined to get it done.

Top Left & Bottom Right: Volunteer SSG (Ret) Dan Horan working on a 1829 Pomeroy US Rifle.

Bottom Left: MG 08/15 Maxim Machine Gun being worked on by LTC Anderson.