



Rural heritage revival in Waldron

BY CLARA SPIVEY

Participating in and promoting historic preservation efforts can propel a community and local economy forward. Often, rural communities in Arkansas don't have the capacity or resources to restore and revitalize spaces that were once pillars of the community. But this is not the case in Waldron, as the city has seen positive impacts by anchoring a sense of identity in preservation efforts and attracting heritage tourism.

Waldron is rich in local charm, and its hidden natural gems are often unknown to those who don't reside there. To bolster awareness, the Waldron Commercial Historic District was established in 2008, coinciding with the district's placement on the National Register of Historic Places. The district encompasses a five-block stretch of Main Street where the Old Scott County Jail and Courthouse are located, as well as the famous Scott Theater. Because of residents' preservation efforts, structures such as these are fully accessible to the public.

Featuring elaborate murals depicting pine trees and mountain streams that honor the Ouachita Mountains, the Pines Theater debuted in October 1930. In 1940, Circuit Judge Andrew Scott renamed the theater and supported the modernization of the interior. After operating as a nostalgic, single-screen cinema for 20 years, two major fires ravaged the building, leaving it in need of significant repairs. Community members rallied to keep their only movie theater intact. After briefly closing in 2014, current owners and Waldron locals Wade and Mandy Day purchased and retrofitted the structure. The venue is the oldest operating movie theater in the state and seats 220 patrons and offers a family-friendly, educational and inspiring atmosphere.

The Old Scott County Jail and Courthouse, above, a 1935 two-story structure built from native stone, was in operation for 27 years before housing the Boy and Girl Scouts of America until the mid-1960s. During this time, the Scouts added two fireplaces, painted both the interior and exterior, replaced broken windows and maintained the grounds. In 1987, the Scott County Historical and Genealogical Society moved in and are still there today. The space now houses a museum that showcases Waldron's rich history while attracting tourists.

Historic preservation is important because it protects the places, buildings and landmarks that tell the story of a community's past while creating benefits for current and future generations. By investing in historic preservation, Waldron supports community engagement and economic stimulation.

If there are historic areas in your city or town, it's important that you identify resources and invest in maintaining, revitalizing and cultivating those spaces. You can advocate for preservation-friendly zoning, create a historic preservation commission, promote heritage tourism efforts, and utilize tax incentives or grants for restoration purposes or to educate residents. Supporting local nonprofits or organizing a walking/cycling tour of historic areas are ways to build community-wide appreciation for historic architecture and local culture. Keeping historic areas alive is a valuable learning experience for everyone, as we can all learn something from the past.

You can follow updates in Waldron and Scott County by following the Scott County AR Historical & Genealogical Society on Facebook (@SCHGS).