

Mid Mod Arkansas Tour, Pierce and Smart Houses, Pine Bluff

September 8, 2018

### Intro

Good afternoon! I'm Rachel Patton, ED of Preserve Arkansas. Preserve AR is the statewide historic preservation advocacy group. We are a nonprofit, membership-based organization, and we would love to have your support. If you're interested in learning more about what we do, I'm happy to chat with you, or you may talk with one of our board members—Julie Bridgforth, Jodi Barnes—or my assistant, Amara Yancey.

It's my pleasure to introduce Callie Williams, National Register Historian at the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program and one of the administrators of the "Mid-Century Modern Arkansas" Facebook page. Callie will be talking to you about Noland Blass and his architecture at both houses.

I want to thank our hosts, Bill and Julie Bridgforth and Steven and Laura Beth Shaner, for generously opening their homes and providing delicious refreshments! Thank you so much.

I also want to recognize Dr. Reid Pierce and his wife, Barbie. Richard and Elsie Pierce were Reid's grandparents.

Pine Bluff is the second stop in our "Mid Mod Arkansas" tour series, which was created to increase awareness and appreciation for our state's Mid-Century Modern architecture. Our first tour visited the Tweedy House in Springdale back in April, and we hope to visit homes in Paragould and El Dorado next year. If you have an idea for a tour, please let us know.

### Pine Bluff

Pine Bluff experienced a population boom in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century largely as the result of the Pine Bluff Arsenal and the city's status as the "industrial hub of Arkansas." The population grew from 21,290 in 1940 to 37,162 in 1950, an increase of almost 75%. The 1955-56 population of Pine Bluff was 45,043. As the city grew and expanded to the south, new residential additions were developed.

### Richard and Elsie Pierce House, 29 Longmeadow

The Longmeadow Addition was platted on April 28, 1952, by Charles S. McNew, Jr. and J. G. Smith. Charles McNew, Jr. worked for the family business, McNew Realty and Insurance Company, serving as president of the insurance concern. Interestingly, Mr. McNew's niece was Lynne McNew Smart, whose house we will tour next. Jesse Guy Smith was president of Smith Paper Products Company and the Arkansas Oak Flooring Company. He and his wife, Jo, built the house at 18 Longmeadow, possibly before the official plat was filed.

McNew and Smith sold the first lot in the Longmeadow Addition on May 1, 1952--just three days after the plat was filed--to Mr. Smith's sister, Elsie, and her husband, Richard Pierce. Richard and Elsie Pierce

bought Lot 29 and immediately hired Little Rock architect Noland Blass, Jr. to design their new home. His plans were dated May 1952.

James Richard Pierce was born on June 22, 1903, in Cleveland County, Arkansas. Mr. Pierce grew up on his parents' farm east of Rison. He moved to Pine Bluff in the 1920s and went to work for Arkansas Power & Light Company as an electrical engineer. Pierce rose through the ranks at AP&L, eventually becoming assistant manager. In 1942, he became one of the founders of the General Waterworks Corporation at Pine Bluff. General Waterworks was a Philadelphia-based company with operations in several states, and Mr. Pierce served as vice president and general manager of the Pine Bluff office. He was a member of the American Waterworks Association and had received the George Warren Fuller Award from that group, which is still awarded today for distinguished service to the water supply field. Mr. Pierce held leadership positions on several boards of directors, including the Pine Bluff Chamber of Commerce, Guaranty Federal Savings and Loan Association at Pine Bluff, the Pine Bluff Community Chest, and the Methodist Children's Home at Little Rock.

Elsie Smith Pierce was born on January 29, 1906, at Pine Bluff. Elsie was the youngest of five children, and she was the only girl. Her mother, Lehna, was widowed by the time Elsie was four years old. Lehna Smith supported her family by working as a clerk at the post office. On August 9, 1924, Elsie Smith and Richard Pierce were married at Pine Bluff. Their son, J. Richard Pierce, Jr. was born the following year.

In 1952, the Pierces moved from their modest Colonial Revival-style home at 202 W. 19<sup>th</sup> Avenue to 29 Longmeadow. By that time, their son, Dr. J. Richard Pierce, Jr. was married and had received his medical degree from Tulane Medical School. 29 Longmeadow was one of the first homes built in the Longmeadow Addition. Interestingly, this house has one of the earliest yard sprinkler systems in Pine Bluff. As the head of the water company, Mr. Pierce installed it. The Bridgforths still use it today.

As you can see from Noland Blass's watercolor of the completed house, dated December 1952, the home's exterior orange brick matched the interior brickwork (the exterior has been painted gray). The interior boasts handsome ribbon mahogany paneling and a peg-and-groove wood floor, both items likely purchased from the Arkansas Oak Flooring Company in Pine Bluff, which was operated by Elsie Pierce's brother (and neighbor), J. G. Smith.

The house retains its original floorplan with two bedrooms and 2.5 baths. Blass integrated interior and exterior spaces through continuous brick flooring at the front entrance and sliding glass door to the patio. The fireplace is an important aesthetic and structural component of the house. You'll notice that Blass used some of these concepts in the Smart House, but on a much larger scale—the fireplace, oversized sliding glass door, wooden pocket door, and built-in shelves and cabinets are all repeated themes at our next house.

The Pierces lived here until 1966, when they were tragically killed in a car accident while returning from a trip to Florida. The head-on collision took place near Clanton, Alabama, and resulted in the deaths of Mrs. Pierce, age 60, and a couple from Illinois. Mr. Pierce remained at a hospital in Birmingham for three months and succumbed as a result of his injuries on May 20, 1966, at age 62. The Pierces are buried at Graceland Cemetery in Pine Bluff.

The Pierce House has had four owners since 1966. Bill and Julie Bridgforth have lived here since 1998, and as you can see, are wonderful stewards of the home.

### Richard and Lynne Smart House, 710 W. 46<sup>th</sup> Avenue

Hello, again! I'm Rachel Patton, ED of Preserve Arkansas. I'd like to thank Steven and Laura Beth Shaner for allowing us to tour their beautiful home, and for providing refreshments! Bubba and Lynne Smart were Laura Beth's grandparents, and she and Steven bought it after her grandfather died, so it has stayed in the Smart family. I'd also like to thank Lee Smart, Laura Beth's dad, who grew up in the house, and Ben Quinn, Jr. who built the Smart House, for their help.

The Richard and Lynne Smart House was designed in 1964 by the Little Rock architectural firm of Erhart, Eichenbaum, Rauch & Blass. Construction on the 4,700-square-foot home began in 1965 and took one year to complete. The Smart House was one of the first Mid-Century homes of its kind in Pine Bluff, both in terms of size and craftsmanship. Including the carport, which could accommodate three to four cars, the house has about 6,100 square feet of covered space. And because there was very little sheetrock used in the home, the brickwork had to be perfect. In the words of Mr. Quinn, "the house was hard to build because you couldn't cover anything up with sheetrock and paint."

The Smart family has a long history in Pine Bluff, dating back to at least the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century when Felix Grundy Smart settled at Pine Bluff and became one of the first bankers here. His son, Felix G. Smart, Jr., was a prominent Pine Bluff businessman, starting off in the grocery business (Smart & Richey), followed by the real estate business, and still later, the automobile business. So the present-day Smart Auto Group traces its origin to 1906, when F. G. Smart, Jr. started selling horse-drawn buggies, which evolved into automobile sales. Felix, Jr. died unexpectedly on July 4, 1915, at age 39 after an operation for stomach ulcers. At that point, his son, Felix, III (Bubba's father), had to quit school and take over the car business at the young age of 17.

The F. G. Smart Motor Company was located at 309-311 W. 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue and was the local Ford agency until 1932, when the Smarts dropped Ford for Chevrolet. In 1964-65, a new showroom was constructed at 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Laurel Street. The business was headquartered there until 2013, when the Smart Dealerships moved out along the interstate at White Hall.

Generations of the Smart family have operated the car business, and it was very important to Bubba Smart.

Richard Lee "Bubba" Smart was born July 29, 1924, at Pine Bluff to Felix G. Smart, III and Elise Moore Smart. After graduating from Pine Bluff High in 1942, he attended the University of Arkansas on a golf scholarship. He served in the Army for three years during World War II and returned to college afterwards, finishing his degree in 1948. Bubba Smart married Lynne McNew on December 26, 1947, at Pine Bluff. The couple had four children: Meredith Smart Maxwell; Felix G. Smart, V; Richard Lee Smart, Jr.; and Roger McNew Smart.

Bubba Smart was one of the greatest amateur golfers in Arkansas history. A child prodigy, he won his first Sand Greens Arkansas championship at age 14. In 1940, he won the Arkansas State Golf Association Amateur Championship at age 15, defeating Miller Barber among others. He won his second straight ASGA Championship in 1941. At age 16, Smart held six major golf titles in Arkansas, including the State Junior and State Amateur titles. After his military service, he won the State Amateur title again in 1946. Smart also won the Trans-Mississippi Amateur, and other tournaments of significance including the Oil Belt three times, two consecutive Arkansas High School state championships, two consecutive Arkansas Sand Green titles, and went undefeated in Southwest Conference college play at the U of A. He also won more than 20 four-ball championships around Arkansas. He was inducted into the Arkansas State Golf Association Hall of Fame in 2002.

Bubba Smart was on the path to become a professional golfer, but that was not to be. His older brother, Felix G. Smart, IV, who served in the Navy during World War II, was killed in 1944 when the USS Hull went down in the Philippine Sea during Typhoon Cobra. Bubba was his parents' only other son, so after his service in the War and his graduation from the U of A in 1948, he came home to Pine Bluff and went to work for Smart Chevrolet instead of pursuing professional golf. Bubba Smart became the dealer in 1958 and managed the company until 1990, when he turned things over to his sons, Lee and Roger. Bubba continued to work full-time at the dealership until 2013, when it moved to White Hall. He also partnered with his son, Felix, V, in the F. G. Smart Farming Company.

As you can imagine, Bubba Smart was active in his community and served on numerous boards. He was a past-president of the Arkansas Automobile Dealers Association and served on the boards of the National Bank of Commerce, Pine Bluff Chamber of Commerce, Teen Town, and the Boys Club. He was very involved in the First United Methodist Church, having served as chair of the Administrative Board and a Sunday School teacher.

Lynne McNew Smart was born at Pine Bluff on October 11, 1925, to Roger Williams McNew and Phoebe Clement McNew. Lynne graduated from Pine Bluff High in 1943 and attended Mary Baldwin College and later, the University of Arkansas, where she graduated in 1947. She and Bubba returned to Pine Bluff in 1948, where they spent the rest of their lives.

Mrs. Smart loved her family, her church, and her hometown. She enjoyed socializing, playing Bridge, cooking, sewing, and gardening, among other things. Lynne was a faithful member of the First United Methodist Church, serving as a study leader and on the Administrative Board. She was a past president of the Parent Teacher Associations at all of her children's schools. Like her husband, Lynne served in leadership positions on numerous boards of directors, including the Pine Bluff Symphony Orchestra, Arts and Science Center, Fine Arts Club, Junior League of Pine Bluff, Jenkins Memorial Children's Center, and the YWCA. She was also a member of the Hawthorne Book Club and the Junior Sesame Club.

Bubba and Lynne Smart lived in this house until their deaths. Lynne died on January 2, 2013, at the age of 87, and Bubba died on March 17, 2015, at the age of 90.

The house was vacant for about two years after Bubba died, and then Steven and Laura Beth Smart Shaner bought it. Laura Beth is the daughter of Lee and Laura Smart and granddaughter of Bubba and Lynne Smart. The Shaners have been here since March 2017.

### About this house

Before the Smarts built this house, they lived at 36<sup>th</sup> and Cherry. The family needed more space, and Bubba Smart wanted to live by the golf course. It was Lynne Smart who wanted a Modern home.

The Smarts bought this wooded property near the Pine Bluff Country Club golf course in 1963 and hired EERB to design a home. The plans are dated June 22, 1964. The Smarts hired their friend, Ben Quinn, Sr., a local contractor, to build the house. His son, Ben Quinn, Jr., began working for his father in 1958 and helped with the Smart House. He remembered having a “superior crew” at that time that included four painters, six carpenters, one brick layer, a plasterer, tile guy, and a few laborers. As you can see, the house has a massive amount of brickwork, and one person, Tony Schimmel, laid every brick in the house.

All of the lumber and wood paneling in the Smart House came from the Dierks Mill at Mountain Pine, Arkansas, and was purchased through Hutt Building Material in Pine Bluff. It’s all longleaf pine, and the paneling was called “stained” pine. It was painted by one of the crew members who was really good at mixing colors. The paneling was a special kind of tongue-and-groove called the Whittington Pattern, where one side of the tongue is ¼” longer than the other side, so it fits together and creates a groove between the boards on the top side (can see this in the hallway).

Mr. Quinn also recalled that the skylights in the Smart House were some of the first ones they did in Pine Bluff, and that they never leaked. And that they came back to build the wooden screen by the front door a couple months after the house was completed because Lynne thought you could see into the bedrooms too much if you were walking up to the front door.

### House Details:

Virtually unaltered. The original cedar shake roof was replaced with shingles 10-15 years ago. And Steven and Laura Beth remodeled the kitchen.

5 bedrooms/3.5 baths

Kitchen—enlarged by removing a wall between the original kitchen and breakfast room. New island, cabinets, appliances. Original bi-fold closet doors line the kitchen concealing a massive amount of storage space. Note the original barbeque grill as well.

In kitchen and hallway—note the skylights with decorative screens

10 massive sliding glass doors throughout the home

Two-sided brick fireplace separating the living room and “game room”

Pocket doors designed to close off the private side of the house

Built-in shelving, cabinets, and closets with bi-fold doors everywhere

Going down the hallway from the front door:

Bedroom A: Felix Smart's Room

Jack & Jill bathroom with separate access for Felix and his younger brothers

Bedroom B: Lee Smart's Room

Bedroom C: Roger Smart's Room

Bedroom D (in the front corner): Meredith Smart's Room—much larger bedroom than her brothers. Meredith had her own private bathroom with vanity, shower, and sunken tub.

Bedroom E (rear corner): Master bedroom with master bath. The master bath has a large dressing room lined with closets and the original intercom system panel is still there with the Smart children's names next to the buttons.