

WCHS Statehood Day Speakers & Programs

The Washington County Historical Society's Statehood Day observance began on a regular basis in 2006.

Programs have included speakers and other sorts of observances. For example, the WCHS has occasionally combined the Statehood Day event with the annual Ice Cream Social (ICS) fundraiser. However, the ICS was quickly moved back to the third Saturday in August, as summer vacations resulted in smaller crowds.

The Statehood Day programs have been held at Headquarters House (118 East Dickson Street), the nearby First Christian Church (220 N. College Avenue), and other locations.

Following are the events, speakers, and activities since 2006:

2006 – A celebration with a birthday cake and assorted programs from Heritage School was held on the Headquarters House lawn.

2007 – A celebration with a birthday cake and assorted programs from Heritage School was held on the Headquarters House lawn.

2008 – Dr. Nancy Hendrix spoke on June 15, and a birthday cake was served on the Headquarters House lawn.

2009 – Dr. Jeannie Whayne spoke on "The Coming of Arkansas" from the Archibald Yell Law Office courtyard.

2010 – Art and history lectures were presented by Aaron Jones and Louise Hancock from Crystal Bridges, the Walton Arts Center (WAC), and the Fayetteville Public Library. Area schoolteachers could earn Continuing Education Credit for attendance. Lectures were in the Walker Room of the Fayetteville Public Library.

2011 – The NWA Writing Project, along with the Fayetteville Public Schools, the WAC, and the WCHS's Trike Theater held workshops for teacher CEC credits on a Wednesday.

2012 – The Ice Cream Social and Heritage School performed on June 11.

2013 – The Ice Cream Social and Heritage School performed on June 12.

2014 – Dr. Brooks Blevins, noted Ozarks scholar, discussed his latest book, *Bear Hunters, Hillbillies and Good Ole Boys*, on June 15.

2015 – Lyle Sparkman, WCHS Board member, spoke in-character as Judge David Walker in a presentation at Headquarters House on June 15.

2016 – David Pryor, former U.S. senator, congressman, and Arkansas governor, was the speaker at the First Christian Church on Sunday, June 12. Kyle Kellams, KUAF news director, reviewed Pryor's life in Arkansas in the program. Clarke Buehling provided Statehood Day banjo music.

2017 – Garret Kremer-Wright, of the University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR), and former governor Jim Guy Tucker discussed Tucker's father's military service in World War I. Tucker then talked about his family's history in the state. The program was at the First Christian Church, and Clark Buehling again provided banjo music.

2018 – Bethany Rosenbaum, University of Arkansas graduate student in history, and John McLarty, president of the Northwest Arkansas Heritage Trail Association,

spoke about the Civil War Trail, the Trail of Tears, and the Butterfield Mail Coach Trail in a presentation at the First Christian Church.

2019 – Award-winning historian and author Dr. S. Charles Bolton of UALR spoke about the Arkansas Territory and the development of the state with particular emphasis on statehood. The location was the First Christian Church. The NWA Brass Band provided the music for the day, including the “Fayetteville Polka,” the first sheet music in the state’s history written in Fayetteville.

2020 – The event was cancelled due to COVID-19.

2021 – Still amid COVID, the WCHS hosted Rex Nelson, senior editor of the Arkansas *Democrat-Gazette*, addressed a small but enthusiastic crowd from the front porch of the Headquarters House.

2022 – Still observing COVID protocols, the WCHS hosted Dr. Kelly Houston-Jones of Arkansas Tech who discussed her new book, a groundbreaking look at slavery in Arkansas titled *A Weary Land: Slavery on the Ground in Arkansas*. A small, but enthusiastic crowd endured 90-degree temperatures.

2023 – James L. “Skip” Rutherford of Little Rock, former dean of the Clinton School of Public Affairs, long-time government worker, community activist, and former leader on several statewide campaigns, was scheduled to speak, but car troubles prevented him from appearing. In lieu of Rutherford’s lecture, Maylon Rice, WCHS past president, gave a personal history of his family and what the state meant to him. The location was the First Christian Church.

2024 – James L. “Skip” Rutherford fulfilled his promise to be the Statehood Day Speaker and spoke to a large crowd at the First Christian Church.

2025 – Former U.S. Senator Mark Pryor and his mother Barabra Lunsford Pryor discussed their lives and the Pryor legacy in Arkansas

2026 – Asa Hutchinson, former governor, congressman, director of the Drug Enforcement Agency, and undersecretary of Homeland Security, spoke at the First Christian Church.