

Abandoned, Not Forgotten

New book takes readers behind history's closed doors

BECCA MARTIN-BROWN
NWA Democrat-Gazette

James Kirkendall isn't a ghost hunter. Neither does he consider himself an urban explorer — or not exactly. He is, in fact, a historian, albeit an unlikely one.

"I had a dislike for history," the Fort Smith resident admits. "However, when I accidentally stumbled upon the 'Abandoned Arkansas' website, that feeling toward history changed. I was touring an old hospital when I felt a shift of interest to the building and its stories itself.

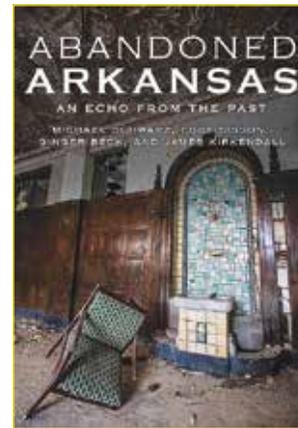
"I think in a way exploring is a way to express myself," he muses. "Whenever I find an interest, I am usually obsessed. Every time I document a location, I feel as though I have a vision through storytelling.

"I think that the term 'urban explorer' is limited to someone who only explores forgotten places for the thrill," Kirkendall goes on. "Yes, of course we go into places for the thrill of it. However, over the years I believe our group has become more than just a team of explorers. There are too many people who pass by historic buildings just because they are not labeled 'historic.' We want to fill the gap that other historic preservation groups

do not — to capture everything that is left behind."

Now, Kirkendall is one of the four authors of "Abandoned Arkansas: An Echo From The Past," born from the Abandoned Arkansas website designed by Michael Schwarz. "America Through Time reached out to us for an opportunity to write the book," he explains. "Through the book, I believe each of us brings something new to the table. We each have our own experiences while documenting these locations. 'Abandoned Arkansas: An Echo From The Past' brings a personal touch — a connection. This is what makes the book stand out. People have memories through these buildings. It's important to take historic preservation awareness to a new level."

"Traveling to decayed places around the state and bearing witness to the vandalism, weathering and slow death of countless historic buildings is simultaneously heartbreaking and captivating," says Leisa Gramlich, executive director of the Fort Smith Museum of History, where Kirkendall will sign books March 23. "Through historic documentation, these photographers hope to immortalize the stories of the places they visit beyond the building's finite lifespan, and to preserve an echo from the past."



Courtesy Image

"Sometimes it takes a lot of work to negotiate your way into a specific building," author James Kirkendall says of the version of urban exploring chronicled in his new book. "I'm always trying to talk my way into places. Luckily for the majority of the time it's a 'yes.' It's the most chilling experience to enter the halls of a hidden capsule — to see what's behind that door."



FAQ

Book Signing:
James Kirkendall

WHEN — 1 p.m. March 23
WHERE — Fort Smith Museum of History
COST — The book signing and discussion are included with museum admission: \$7 adults; \$2 children
INFO — 783-7841, AbandonedAR.com



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