

# LIVING

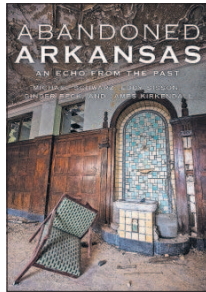
## Fort Smith author pens 'Abandoned Arkansas'

### New book explores sites, structures in state

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For those who have ever wondered the history and current conditions of numerous abandoned buildings throughout Arkansas, answers now can be found courtesy a Fort Smith author's new book.

Retailing for \$24.99 and written by Fort Smith resident James Kirkendall, Eddy Sisson of Vilonia, Ginger Beck of Little Rock and Michael Schwarz of Los Angeles, "Abandoned Arkansas: An Echo from the Past" explores abandoned structures and areas in the Natural State, including Dogpatch USA, the Majestic Hotel in Hot Springs and more. The book can be ordered online via Amazon, Books A Million, Target and Barnes &



The new book, "Abandoned Arkansas: An Echo from the Past," was co-written by Fort Smith native and 2006 Southside High School graduate James Kirkendall. The book explores numerous abandoned structures throughout Arkansas and can be ordered online via Amazon, Books A Million, Target and Barnes & Noble. (PHOTO SUBMITTED BY JAMES KIRKENDALL)

Noble.

"The book is derived from our website, AbandonedAr.com, and there will be a mixture of color



Kirkendall

and black-and-white photographs," said the 32-year-old Kirkendall, who is a member of the Abandoned Arkansas nonprofit group and a 2006 Southside High School graduate.

Kirkendall will discuss and autograph copies of his book from 2-4 p.m. Feb. 2 at Bookish: An Indie Shop for Folks Who Read, 115 N. 10th St., Suite H-119-C. He will do the same at a similar event that will begin at 1 p.m. March 23 at the Fort Smith Museum of History, 320 Rogers Ave.

"The book is set up in four different parts, with Michael's area mostly on the Majestic Hotel in Hot Springs, and Eddy's part mostly is mostly about Dogpatch USA," said Kirkendall. "The parts written by Ginger and I kind of involve different locations.

"My favorite type of explorations involve hospitals, and there will be one hospital located near Fort Smith that will be in the book," he added. "I'll just leave the name of it as a secret for now, to help get people really interested and excited for this book."

Kirkendall admitted he initially was nervous about being a co-author for the book. He had never written a book before, and his abilities in writing and photography were self-taught.

"The publisher, America Through Time, reached out to us to do the book, which was neat," Kirkendall said. "When Michael Schwarz asked if I wanted to be a part of it, I was pretty nervous about it, but it was exciting."

Calming his own nerves, Kirkendall formed a metaphorical roadmap of how he was going to structure the writing for his section of the book. He said once

his "anxiety" disappeared, ideas came to him quickly.

"What's different about this book, I think, is we are bringing a personal touch to it — a personal connection," said Kirkendall, who has visited and photographed more than 50 abandoned structures in Arkansas and parts of Texas. "I feel like that is what makes this book stand out."

The Abandoned Arkansas group originated by Schwarz, the nonprofit's director, in Conway in 2012. Schwarz, according to Kirkendall, was "bored in college and needed something to do." The Abandoned Arkansas Facebook page was created, resulting in the public's growing interest in it and AbandonedAr.com, Kirkendall said.

"There are four main members, who are the four of us who wrote the book, but we do have some guest photographers submit photos from some locations

every now and then," he said. "Most of the photos in the 'Abandoned Arkansas' book are original works by us."

For years, Kirkendall refused to see the attraction to history, even the history of his own state. It was his growing interest in abandoned structures that eventually boosted Kirkendall's respect for history.

"For me personally, Abandoned Arkansas has given me a great opportunity," Kirkendall said. "There's a lot of things that I get obsessed over, and this is one of them. I think 'Who gets to write a book?' We've been in magazines and in the news, so it's great to have your work exposed."

"I'm grateful to Michael Schwarz for giving me this opportunity to be a part of the team," he added. "We're kind of combining art with history, and it's good to get that awareness on these buildings out there."