

MEMORIES

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In recent years, I have reflected on how the city of Indianapolis has changed since my first encounters with it. Memories have surfaced of the city as it existed especially during the 1970s and early 1980s, when I was in my twenties and absorbing life around me for the first time as an adult. In this paper, I am going to describe some of my memories of those years—of people, institutions, and the physical character of the city itself.

I did not grow up in Indianapolis, but my mother and grandmother did, and my siblings and I paid regular visits to my Grandmother Brown in Irvington. My grandmother perceived that I had a particular interest in history and arranged additional visits for me. She took me to historic houses, such as the President Benjamin Harrison Home and the James Whitcomb Riley boyhood home in Greenfield, and we went to some of the monumental public buildings, such as the Indiana Statehouse, the Soldiers' and Sailor's Monument, the State Library, and Indiana World War Memorial. In 1970 I entered Indiana Central College (now University of Indianapolis), a southside liberal arts institution, and began slowly to absorb more of the personality of the city. But during the first three years at Indiana Central I lived mostly in an academic cocoon, majoring in history and Spanish and writing papers.

That all began to change my junior year. Gene Sease (long-time member of our Club) had become president of the college at the same time I entered as a freshman, and he was taking decisive actions to

involve Indiana Central in its home city and build alliances with civic and corporate leaders. Leading the list of allies was Mayor Richard Lugar, a young, visionary leader who had transformed the community by persuading the Indiana General Assembly to merge the City of Indianapolis and surrounding Marion County, producing UNIGOV.

In the spring of 1973, I was looking for a summer job in Indianapolis and went to President Sease and asked him if he knew of any positions. Gene Sease contacted a star alumnus, Gene Lausch (also a Club member of long-standing), who at that time was Deputy Director of the Department of Metropolitan Development. Gene Lausch made inquiries at the Mayor's office, and I soon found myself reporting to the City-County Building as a Mayor's Intern.

The Mayor's internship program recruited seniors recommended by colleges and universities of the city and assigned each intern to a particular city department to perform duties as assigned and learn about the agency. Rich White, the mayor's press secretary, also arranged for us to meet with department heads and ask questions about city government. The City-County Building was only 11 years old, and was a symbol of modernity with its 26 stories and glass and steel curtain walls and lobby with granite floors and marble walls.

Rich (probably with advice of Gene Lausch) assigned me to the Urban Design Section of the Division of Planning and Zoning, Department of Metropolitan Development. Harold Rominger, a planner and architect, headed the section and told me candidly that he didn't have any projects for me to work on, but the Indianapolis Chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) could use my help on a guidebook to Indianapolis architecture that the local chapter was preparing. I met the guidebook committee at the Elbow Room restaurant in a flat iron building at the corner of Fort Wayne Avenue and Pennsylvania Street.

The co-chairs were two young architects, Wayne Schmidt and Don Claffey. They asked me to do the historical research needed on each of the buildings that they were going to include in the guidebook. That summer was my introduction to architecture and architectural styles. I also learned how to do research about buildings at the Indiana State Library and Indiana Historical Society, discovering the world of old city directories, newspaper clipping files, and Sanborn fire insurance maps.

The guidebook experience went so well that the AIA committee hired me on their own the next summer, after graduation, to finish the historical research. Two of the committee members later joined the Literary Club—Mack Huston and Jim Lingenfelter. By the end of the second summer, I was definitely hooked on local history and historic architecture and familiar with the downtown and many older neighborhoods.

After completing a one-year Master's degree in Latin American history at Indiana University, I felt the pull of Indianapolis and what I had learned about old buildings. In 1975 I went for an interview at the Morris-Butler House, recently restored by Eli and Ruth Allison Lilly and a new historic preservation organization, Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana. Jim Rogers, Director of Public Relations for Hook Drugs, had been appointed President of the Indianapolis Historic Preservation Commission by Mayor Lugar and was conducting interviews for the first staff people at the commission. The interview went well, and in July, 1975, I reported to the City-County Building as the first staff historian for the Preservation Commission.

The commission was charged by state statute to oversee the preservation and revitalization of historic districts in the city. There was one district designated thus far—Lockerbie Square—the neighborhood around James Whitcomb Riley's home—and the beginnings of restoration were

stirring in what became the Old Northside and in the east side suburb of Woodruff Place. I knew nothing about historic preservation, but learned as much as I could on the job. The beginnings were being felt in Indianapolis of a national “back to the city” movement of young adults who wanted to live downtown, close to where they worked and also felt attracted to the old housing stock in the city centers. Through “sweat equity,” these urban pioneers did most of the rehabilitation work themselves.

The back to the city movement came at an opportune time. Many nineteenth century houses in city neighborhoods had been divided into multiple apartments after World War II by absentee landlords, many of whom did not maintain the units of their low-income tenants. The county Board of Health would condemn lots of rental units as unfit for habitation and evict the tenants. The City of Indianapolis would then demolish the condemned units—sometimes as many as three to four per month in the Old Northside. The tenant population rapidly decreased in several older neighborhoods, and the ranks of deteriorated, often vacant houses increased.

In my first year on the job, I met a remarkable preservation leader, Reid Williamson, who had just become Executive Director of Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana. Reid set up revolving funds in Lockerbie Square and the Old Northside to acquire deteriorated houses, restore the exteriors, and sell the properties to buyers who would complete restoration. He also persuaded the Junior League of Indianapolis to adopt historic preservation as one of their project areas, and League volunteers and I started on historical research to place the Old Northside on the National Register of Historic Places. This would also lay the foundation for eventual designation of the neighborhood as an Indianapolis historic area by the Preservation Commission. I learned

how to do research on the chain of title for each property at Pioneer Title Insurance Company and then trained League volunteers to do research at the title company and work at the State Library with city directories and Sanborn insurance maps.

After the Old Northside was listed in the National Register in 1976, the League volunteers and I focused on doing additional historical research on the properties in Lockerbie Square as the Preservation Commission and the Division of Planning and Zoning prepared a new historic preservation plan for Lockerbie. We also launched a project to do additional research for an inventory of historic buildings in the Old Northside that could be incorporated into a historic preservation plan for the near-northside district.

One of the most interesting projects that the League and I worked on in the late 1970s was an Old Northside oral history project. We thought that the history that we were preparing for the plan would be considerably enhanced, if we were able to document the social history of the neighborhood during the period in which many of the residences were built, that is, at the end of the 19th century and beginnings of the 20th century. Katie Steele of the League began to put out feelers to League members who had elderly relatives who had lived in the Old Northside when they were young. We visited about a dozen ladies who regaled us in recorded interviews with stories of their lives growing up and as young women in the neighborhood when transportation was by horse and buggy or by streetcar. The ladies also loaned us invaluable historical photographs showing existing houses as they looked before recent remodelings or demolished residences that once stood along the streets.

One of the most remarkable interviews was with Irma Vonnegut Lindener, the daughter of noted architect Bernard Vonnegut (and aunt of

the novelist, Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.). Mrs. Lindener painted an evocative picture of life in the family home on 13th Street and loaned us historical photos of her family riding bicycles and enjoying Christmas time in the parlor. Later, the Preservation Commission obtained a federal Economic Development Administration grant to restore the exterior of the Vonnegut house and rehabilitate the interior, and I asked Irma Lindener if she would meet us at the residence and help my boss, Jim Kiesling, an architect, to reconstruct the floor plans. She met us at the house at 1304 Broadway and indeed helped Jim sketch in the original floor plan on the rehabilitation drawings.

Eventually, before I left in 1982, the Preservation Commission prepared historic preservation plans for four historic districts—Lockerbie Square, the Old Northside, Fletcher Place, and Chatham-Arch. We also prepared a preliminary plan for Woodruff Place.

Perhaps the most unusual project on which I worked while historian at the Preservation Commission involved the Schnull-Rauch House. There had been talk for several years about establishing a Mayor's residence somewhere in the city, where the Mayor and his wife could live and entertain official guests and hold social functions. Jack Rauch, a local attorney, saw a newspaper article about the idea and proposed that his family home at 3050 North Meridian Street be considered for a Mayor's residence. Reid Williamson saw an opportunity to assure a long-term use for the historic Schnull-Rauch mansion, designed by Bernard Vonnegut and constructed as one of the first houses north of Fall Creek in 1903-4. He suggested to the City that a study be done of the feasibility of such a residence in the Schnull-Rauch House and asked Jim Rogers as President of the Preservation Commission whether I could be detailed for 3 months to work on the study. Jim was agreeable, and I

spent three months probing the practicality of a Mayor's residence at that location.

Much of the study consisted of interviews with key opinion leaders in the business community. A couple of years before, the *Indianapolis Star* had run some articles identifying the top 10 "movers and shakers" in the city. I took those articles and wrote letters to all of those on the list. To my surprise and delight, most of the leaders agreed to be interviewed, and I devised questions to ask each. The most obvious question of course was whether each person thought a Mayor's residence was desirable and should be a priority for the community. I also interviewed all of the living former mayors except Senator Lugar, who was busy in Washington. I soon found that none of the business leaders thought a residence was needed or should be a priority for fund-raising. Tom Binford, then the chairman of Indiana National Bank, spoke for many when he said that it would be a nice thing to happen if funding for it suddenly appeared, but it was probably not something that should take precedence over many other needs. He used as a parallel the discussion that had popped up recently of building a domed stadium for a football team—nice idea but not a top priority. Another bank chairman threw cold water on the Schnull-Rauch House as a Mayor's residence, but suggested that it could make sense in the Oldfields mansion at the Indianapolis Museum of Art. The former mayors mostly said that in their tenure such a residence was not necessary, and several deferred to current Mayor Bill Hudnut on the desirability. When I met with the Mayor, he quickly answered the question behind the study by stating immediately that he and his wife would not live in a Mayor's Residence.

I then turned to the idea of a Mayor's Residence for just entertaining, and Historic Landmarks brought in Emmet McGaughey, a businessman who had advised Mayor Tom Bradley of Los Angeles on creation of a

Mayor's Residence there. McGaughey met with Mayor Hudnut and an advisory committee that Reid had assembled, but it was soon evident that while Mayor Bradley used his city's residence for a lot of entertaining, Los Angeles was a much larger city than Indianapolis and could generate more support for an official residence. We also tested the idea of a Mayor's residence based on entertaining by inviting a group of younger civic leaders (then called the "Morris Mafia" after Lilly Endowment executive Jim Morris) to tour the Schnull-Rauch House and give us feedback about the residence idea. The conclusion that emerged was that a residence for entertaining only was also not a priority for Indianapolis.

All was not lost, though, because Reid Williamson soon persuaded the Junior League to move their headquarters from Carmel to the Schnull-Rauch House, and the Rauch family donated the house to the Junior League.

In 1977, the Preservation Commission conducted the first county-wide inventory of historic properties in Marion County. We hired three historic preservation surveyors and formed two teams. I joined Jim Peters on one of the teams, and each team drove every street in the county looking for any buildings that appeared potentially eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. We found many eligible buildings in predictable places within the old city of Indianapolis, but we also found unexpected historic structures in rural and industrial areas. For each possibility, we filled out a survey form, provided a description and a statement of significance, and took black and white 35 mm. photos of each property. The negatives and contact sheets are still on file at the Preservation Commission, and many of the potential historic districts we identified have been listed on the National Register and designated as local historic districts by the commission.

One of the observations that occurred to me at the end of the survey regarded the areas of vitality downtown in the late 1970s. Today, one sometimes hears the comment that the downtown was dead before the City built the RCA Dome, brought the Colts to town, and expanded the Convention Center. But the true situation was a bit more complicated than that. It was the case that most of the area within the inner interstate loop was economically depressed by the mid-1970s. The pattern of development downtown was like that of many other major cities—business leaders emphasized constructing high rise office buildings at the center, and much of the area near the center was cleared of older buildings and became surface parking lots. Parking lots pervaded the whole inner loop area, continuing a trend begun in the early 20th century of accommodating the automobile and commuters traveling between downtown and the suburbs. The residential neighborhoods in the downtown and Center Township were emptying their populations. Mostly white residents had moved since World War II to the suburbs and more recently, low-to-moderate residents were leaving as nineteenth century rental houses were condemned and demolished.

That all was true. But it was also the case that there was a belt of vitality and authentic Indianapolis culture thriving at the center of the Mile Square along Market and Washington Streets. There was a substantial body of office workers occupying older and newer office buildings in the belt—including state government workers at the west end of Market in the Statehouse and old state office building, city and county workers in the City-County Building and in leased space in private buildings, employees of the big Three banks—Merchants National, Indiana National, and American Fletcher National; employees of other corporate headquarters, such as those for Inland Container Corporation, Indiana Bell, Blue Cross-Blue Shield, and Indianapolis Power and Light Co; lawyers with suites in office buildings throughout the belt, situated to be

near state and federal courts; and doctors and dentists in offices throughout. There was a mini-financial district along East Market Street, where smaller banks, savings and loans, branches of the Big 3, and the headquarters of American Fletcher occupied buildings of medium scale. The presence of such sizeable numbers of retail customers sustained two major department stores—L.S. Ayres and Company at the center of the city and the state—Meridian and Washington—and the William H. Block Company at Market and Illinois Streets. These stores had once dominated retailing in the county, but now accounted for about 10% of retail sales in the metropolitan area. Nevertheless, they still drew significant income from the office base and some shoppers from outlying neighborhoods and suburbs.

The Ayres store, with its ten stories and three-quarters of a block, was the ultimate experience in Hoosier retailing. Each of the selling floors featured a particular line of wares, and the store drew shoppers through all of the departments on escalators as many ascended to the eighth floor, where they enjoyed lunch at the Ayres Tea Room or the cafeteria-style Tray Shop. For those customers in a hurry, there were two banks of elevators. The north bank was unique to Ayres. In 1946, the architecture firm of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill had designed the doors and spandrel panels above the doors on all floors as curtains of transparent glass, and passengers could watch the anatomy of the store's structure flash by, along with glimpses of merchandise on each floor.

The Tea Room was a magnet for both downtown workers and suburban customers shopping for the day. An army of waitresses in distinctive black uniforms with white lace collars and white aprons brought Ayres' delicacies to favorite customers in the spacious Tea Room marked by stately columns and distinctive chandeliers. Specialties drew repeat customers—such as the Hawaiian Chicken Salad, Chicken Velvet Soup,

Strawberry Ice Cream Cake, etc. Children brought by parents or grandparents were rewarded after their meals with a prize from the Treasure Chest at the exit from the Tea Room. Gene Lausch and I used to walk over regularly to the Tea Room from the City-County Building and had a favorite waitress, an Irish immigrant named Mary Sullivan. For the ladies in the Tea Room (but also the men), Ayres featured the latest in their women's fashions, as models strolled through the room impeccably dressed. Down the hall on the eighth floor, Ayres staged special shows in its auditorium, and at Christmas enthralled children with their holiday train and visits with Santa.

Block's attracted the eye with its gleaming white terra cotta façade and Art Deco design along Market Street and in the interior. The company followed a similar strategy as Ayres for shoppers—escalators through the departments on each floor leading to the tea rooms on the fifth floor. In 1934-36, Chicago architect William Pereira designed two tea rooms—a Men's Grill with streamlined maple paneling, silver plated light fixtures, and large photos of the Indianapolis 500 race and a "Terrace Tea Room," presumably for ladies, with floral murals.

To serve the large luncheon crowd downtown, there were several restaurants along Market Street in 1978—the Indianapolis City Market, built in 1886, featured sandwiches, stews, and salads for lunch, and Weiss's Delicatessen at Market and Pennsylvania was known for their thick ham sandwiches. Around the corner on Pennsylvania was the popular St. Moritz Steakhouse. For those customers with expense accounts, downtown boasted a five-star restaurant in the basement of the Kahn Building—the King Cole. Two new buildings also attracted lunch and dinner customers—the Teller's Cage and the LaTour restaurant on the top floor of the Indiana National Bank Tower and the Eagle's Nest revolving restaurant atop the Hyatt-Regency Hotel.

Also in this vital belt at the center of downtown, one could find two clubs in imposing historic buildings—the 1922 Indianapolis Athletic Club at 350 N. Meridian Street and the 1924-25 Columbia Club on the Circle. The Athletic Club, housed in a ten-story building in the Italian Renaissance style, included varied athletic facilities—gymnasium, swimming pool, squash and racquetball courts, and pool tables—; space for social activities—a ballroom and meeting rooms; a fine dining room; and a luncheon room. It was considered the Democratic club. Its friendly competitor, the Columbia Club, was (and is) housed in an elegant clubhouse with an English Tudor theme. Founded by boosters of President Benjamin Harrison, the club was considered the Republican club and included a black walnut-paneled lobby and fine dining room on the first floor, a two-story Crystal Terrace luncheon room with an Italian Renaissance theme on the third floor, and a ballroom on the 10th floor.

Civic leaders in the 1970s and early 1980s gauged the health of the center of the city by how much new construction was occurring. Rehabilitation of existing buildings was not seen as feasible or desirable. To facilitate convention business, the City in the 1960s had acquired several blocks on either side of Kentucky Avenue, the southwest diagonal in the 1821 Ralston Plan. They had then vacated part of Kentucky Avenue and portions of other streets and created a superblock for a convention center that continually grew in size as the decades passed. With this precedent, the City and several major companies acquired other blocks of Ralston's diagonal avenues and vacated them to create big development sites. The private entities then constructed high rises or structures with large masses. The first of these projects in the late 1960s cleared both sides of the first block of Massachusetts Avenue, the northeast diagonal in the Ralston Plan, and vacated the street. On the site Indiana National Bank constructed a 37-story tower with glass and white marble curtain walls. The second happened in the mid-1970s

when Merchants National Bank and the Hyatt hotel corporation collaborated on a combined bank headquarters and Hyatt-Regency hotel on the site of the first block of Kentucky Avenue. The third project occurred in 1981-82 on the site of the first block of the northwest diagonal, Indiana Avenue. There American United Life Insurance Company, previously located in a 1930 office building on Fall Creek, constructed a 40-story tower clad in limestone designed by Skidmore, Owings and Merrill. In all three cases, significant flat iron buildings from the early 20th century were demolished.

There were hopeful signs of a rebirth in some of the historic neighborhoods around the downtown in the late 1970s, but retail in the city's center was losing ground. The administration of Mayor Bill Hudnut recruited Melvin Simon and Associates, an Indianapolis-based shopping center developer, for a joint venture to create an enclosed suburban-style shopping mall on Washington Street between Ayres and Blocks department stores. The initial design in 1978 called for a massive multi-story bridge that would have crossed Washington Street between Meridian and Illinois and again across Illinois north of Washington. It would have required the demolition of seven historic retail and office buildings and blocked the traditional vista of the heart of Washington Street from the east and west. Reid Williamson recruited a Yale classmate, Herb McLaughlin, an architect from San Francisco, to propose an alternative design that would have saved some of the historic buildings, but there wasn't much interest in his concept. Fortunately, for other reasons the bridge design did not proceed, and construction of the mall was deferred for another decade.

Other factors connected to the historic preservation movement emerged at the end of the 1970s to revitalize both residential neighborhoods and parts of the downtown itself. There had been a federal tax deduction

available since 1978 for the rehabilitation of income-producing historic buildings, and investors used the deduction to help finance two highly visible buildings downtown. First, attorney Henry Price rehabilitated the Hammond Block, an 1876 flatiron building at 301 Massachusetts Avenue, and real estate attorney Tom Charles Huston and business partner George Sweet acquired the 1871 Morrison's Block at the corner of Maryland and Meridian Streets and rehabilitated it for retail on the ground floor and offices in the upper stories. The Italianate-style façade had been completely covered by metal siding since the 1950s or 1960s, and everyone was amazed when Huston and Sweet pulled off the siding and revealed the handsome stone hoods over the arched windows beneath.

The incentive for rehabilitation became a major economic factor in real estate development in 1981, when President Ronald Reagan signed into law a 25% federal historic rehabilitation tax credit as part of the Economic Recovery Tax Act. The new incentive was a tax credit, not deduction, and the 25% credit proved very attractive. Its potential was demonstrated almost immediately in Indianapolis when architect Jim Kienle (recently deceased member of our Club) and others purchased the former Indianapolis Glove Company Factory building in Lockerbie Square in 1982 and rehabilitated it for condominiums using the new historic rehabilitation tax credit. This challenged conventional wisdom regarding development in the community. Previously, factory buildings when they became vacant were adjudged obsolete and destined for demolition. Kienle and his co-investors showed that there was an emerging market for converting industrial buildings into residential units. The project also included some new construction—brick town houses to the south and west of the old factory.

The project also illustrated the growing demand for living downtown. Scott Keller (another of our members) and other investors formed the Acquisition and Restoration Corporation and acquired many historic apartment buildings in the downtown area and nearby neighborhoods. They nominated the buildings to the National Register of Historic Places and rehabilitated many of them using the new tax credit, which helped finance preservation of decorative features and historic materials. The growth of popularity in living in historic neighborhoods led to construction of new houses. The pioneers in building houses downtown had been Justice Roger DeBruler of the Indiana Supreme Court and his wife Karen, who constructed a Federal-style home on Vermont Street designed by architect Roll McLaughlin in 1971. The DeBrulers were joined in challenging the convention wisdom that no one would want to build a residence downtown by civic leader Tom Binford and his wife Jan, who constructed in 1976 a well-proportioned house with a design drawn from the historic houses of the neighborhood at the corner of East and Lockerbie Streets. By the early 1980s, some developers realized that there was a market for living downtown. The City of Indianapolis provided cleared land from the 1960s Urban Renewal Project H east of Fort Wayne Avenue to a developer who advertised that they would build garden-style homes on the cleared tract, known as Renaissance Place. The houses were all purchased almost immediately.

In 1981 and 1982, the City Department of Metropolitan Development, the Historic Preservation Commission, Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana, and the Indiana Division of Historic Preservation and Archaeology jointly sponsored two Mayor's Conferences on Incentives for Rehabilitation. The sponsors emphasized the new federal 25% tax credit. The first conference was held in the Atkinson (now Omni-Severin) Hotel on Georgia Street, and we were amazed to find over 200 people appearing and filling the ballroom. It soon became apparent that

real estate investors and their attorneys had discovered the historic rehabilitation credit and wanted to find out all about it.

The impact of the credit was immediate. Besides the Glove Company conversion, the City of Indianapolis and developers Robert and Sandra Borns made use of the credit for the rehabilitation of historic Union Station and its conversion (adaptive use) as a festival market place including restaurants, shops and a hotel. Other historic rehabilitation tax credit projects of the 1980s included the restoration and adaptive use of the Circle Theater as the new home of the Indianapolis Symphony, the rehabilitation of the historic Severin Hotel and its conversion into the Omni-Severin, and the adaptive use of the former Sears Roebuck department store building as the Lockerbie Marketplace.

By 1982, when I left Indianapolis for graduate school at Cornell, the outlook for downtown and several of the adjacent older neighborhoods was cautiously optimistic. The Back to the City movement had proven to be no brief phenomenon, but a sustained movement of people coming back into the city. Nineteenth century architecture, so long despised in the 1950s and 1960s, was now popular and spurring investments in old buildings. Historic preservation was proving that it could contribute substantially to urban revitalization, along with new construction.

So, these are some of my memories of Indianapolis in the 1970s and early 1980s. I would welcome hearing about some of yours and compare our perspectives.