
History Of West Indianapolis

VOLUME II

Prepared For

The West Indianapolis Historical Society

by

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Edited by

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DEDICATED TO

DICK FERNKAS

Since the last gathering of the West Indianapolis Historical Society in December, 1994, the organizations founder, Dick Fernkas, has died. On August 17, 1995, Dick suffered a massive heart attack which removed his physical presence from our gatherings.

Like so many things Dick touched, these gatherings have taken on a life of their own adding form, variety, and pleasures to our lives which would not have been experienced without his initiating effort. Many of the processes Dick initiated will continue because of the energy, imagination, and sheer enthusiasm which he infused into the individuals who surrounded him.

Most of us from West Indianapolis march to a different drummer. Fortunately for us, the drummer we were often marching to was Dick Fernkas. The singular quality which Dick conveyed was action, usually constructive, often extemporaneous, occasionally disastrous, sometimes ludicrous, often filled with pathos, but always intended to leave that portion of the world which surrounded him, a better place in which to live.

Dick's presence has improved the quality of our lives and will continue to do so long after his name is lost to those who are swept up in the momentum which he established.

Thank you Dick for what you have added to our lives, and for what you will continue to add through our marching to the drumbeat which you established and initiated.

The History of West Indianapolis, now being composed for the West Indianapolis Historical Society, is being dedicated to your memory.

J.R.R.

FUNNY MONEY THAT WASN'T FUNNY

The development of West Indianapolis was repeatedly held back by economic failures beyond the control of the people who lived there. The State of Indiana forfeited on the bonds it issued to develop the Erie Canal System in the 1830's. This affected everyone living in the state. Some of them filed bankruptcy. Wagon Trains passed through the northern boundary of West Indianapolis on the National Road in a steady stream. Because it was almost impossible to get financing for real estate development, the people didn't stop and settle in the area. This went on for twenty years, until the 1850's.

In the 1850's, the advent of the railroads brought temporary prosperity. Because of the lower transportation costs to bring goods into the area, the farmers' expenses were reduced by one-half. Also, because of the easy access to outside markets the railroads provided, the farmers could double the price for their crops.

Prosperity didn't last because the State Legislature passed the "Free Banking Law" in 1852, that removed governmental restrictions to the handful of individuals who owned and operated the private banks in the state. This proved disastrous. Each bank could issue its own money, and did. The value of the money depended on what each individual banker had to back it up. Giving the people the right to print their own money was a lot like legalizing counterfeiting. The state was filled with a lot of hard working individuals with pocketfuls of money for the first time in their lives, but no one knew what the money was worth. Try to picture yourself trying to pay off your bills with Monopoly Money, and you will get the picture of the condition of the people in West Indianapolis in the 1850's.

This problem continued until 1863, when the Federal Government passed legislation creating privately held National Banks. The privately held National Banks issued equally worthless paper money, but it had the advantage of being equally good (bad) everywhere, so people used it in exchange for goods, services, and property. Sulgrove pg. 143

The people of the West Indianapolis area were living largely in houses built of logs with the floor resting on the ground in the 1830's, 1840's, and early 1850's. Only a few of the more prosperous people lived in houses built of sawed lumber. In a tiny little town like Belmont, which was West Indianapolis' predecessor, streets were virtually unheard of and sanitary conditions almost non-existent.

During the fall and winter, people threw their animal wastes and food scraps out onto the ground where they were held fast by the ice and snow. With the warmth of spring and the rain, the refuse would begin to decay and produce a slimy ooze; especially in the valleys. Sulgrove pgs. 93 - 95

The spring rains had a tendency to wash the slimy ooze into the water supply and the sickness which followed was rampant. The illness was a paradise for patient medicine men who made liver pills and ague remedies. Sulgrove pg. 93

Among those who were attracted to the area to make these pills was Eli Lilly. This company was started in a one room brick building. Big things sometimes grow out of others adversity, as we will repeatedly see in the History of West Indianapolis.

The main diet of the early West Indianapolis residents also contributed to their illnesses. It usually was made up of the same three items; pork, in some form, cornbread, and coffee, three times a day. Sulgrove pg. 93
This diet, mixed in with polluted water, let sickness run rife until the dry season in the summer, and everyone would suddenly get well. Of course, many of the people thought it was the pills that had cured their sickness.

THE BIG TREAT

At this time, the use of whiskey, hard cider, brandy, and other hard liquor was hardly less general than the use of coffee. Sulgrove pg. 92.
A perfect example of this attitude toward hard liquor happened in Warren Township, possibly in the one room school in Belmont. On the morning the school opened, parents came from all directions, cutting paths, and blazing trees making paths for the children to follow because some of them had to walk as far as three miles through the forest to get to school. At Christmas time, the parents allowed the students to turn the "Master" out, and not let him in until he promised a "treat."

Then came the question of what to use for a treat. There were no apples, and no money to buy them, if there had been. One of the school's patrons offered a bucket of whiskey (they had no jugs), and another parent provided home-made sugar to sweeten the whiskey. On the day of the treat, the children turned out in full force. The "Master" mixed his toddy, seated the children in rows, and with his bucket and tin cup in hand, passed up and down the rows giving each student as much as he thought they could stand. Then the children were permitted to go out and play. In a short time, they were called inside. The process was repeated until all of the toddy was gone. This was the first "treat" of school children in Warren Township. The patrons, "Master", and children were all delighted with it. Sulgrove pg. 623

The P.T.A. had a little different outlook in that day and age. I have no record of this kind of event in Belmont's one room school, but it was isolated in the forest. Virtually, no money was available. Whiskey and home-made sugar were items the people did have, and with the generosity that always existed in the West Indianapolis area, and the nearness of the still producing "Bayou Blue", this "treat" existed and went unrecorded.

WEBBED FEET

Returning back to the restraints which prevented the development of West Indianapolis, floods were one of the primary factors. With Eagle Creek on the west, White River on the east, and mostly low ground in between, the area was repeatedly inundated. The only areas free from flooding were the high ground on the "Hill" around Richland and Howard Streets, the land on Belmont north and east along Lambert Street, and the town of Belmont stretched out along Morris Street to Blaine Avenue. These areas had an elevation of about 700 feet which kept them safely out of the water.

One of the largest floods was in 1828. The Governor revoked the people's taxes in this area at that time because of the losses they had suffered. The people were so stricken, they could not have paid taxes anyway. At least they didn't lose their land to taxes. Many floods followed, but the really big one was in 1847. It threatened the National Road Bridge on Washington St. and reeked havoc on the West Indianapolis settlers of that period. This was followed by another huge flood in 1858. There were many smaller floods than those mentioned above which I am sure the people who lived in "Happy Hollow" will attest to.

By 1875, a mile of levee had been built on the West Bank of White River to protect the National Road Bridge, and the Vandalia Railroad bridge just north of River Avenue. Sulgrove pg. 15

Even with the levee the flood waters still engulfed the West Indianapolis area. In 1875, there was a flood in May and a second one in August. These devastating floods were followed by one of the highest floods in local history in 1883. By this time, three miles of levee had been built, but the waters poured over the levee tops and destruction was widespread. The levees, by this time, ran from Washington St. to Pleasant Run near Raymond Street. Sulgrove pg. 15

The floods were damaging enough in the area, but it took an eternity for the flood waters to dry up because they had very little means to return back to the river. It wasn't wise to build in the flood plain then, and it isn't any wiser now, but people still do it for the huge financial gains they can make from land they bought cheap and sell high. This is done even though it is now against the law to build in a flood plain. It seems like you can always get the county commissioners to wave the rule for some election time boodle, or a share of the action. Time hasn't changed human behavior much; as this history demonstrates.

In spite of the flooding, a bright man named James H. McKernan speculated on real-estate. He bought whole forests in the area, cut the trees down, built saw mills to cut the trees into lumber, and then erected streets of cheap but serviceable houses in the late 1850's and early 1860's. Sulgrove pg. 15

Some of these houses were located near a slaughter house, and the Starch Works, which is located south of what is now the Morris Street bridge. These early houses were framed with oak, and poplar was used for the inside lath, weather boarding, shingles, and finishing. Sulgrove pg. 166

You can tell the age of a house in West Indianapolis by the materials from which it was built and the front windows were often set at angles instead of the usual flat front. This had been the only form of construction used prior to the 1850's. I lived in one of these houses at 1414 S. Richland Street and was shocked when I tried to add wiring and found the inner walls under the plaster covered solid by overlapping 1/2 inch poplar, and studs of oak.

MONARCH PERISHES, AND SCHOOL OPENS

An old elm tree grew at the back of my house which was so huge two grown men with their arms fully extended could not embrace it. When the tree died and was cut down about 1940, we counted the rings, and it was about 176 years old. That tree was up and growing when they wrote the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence. Most of the forest area around West Indianapolis was composed of such "Monarchs", which had to be cleared to make way for our livelihood. The forests had lasted for thousands of years. It will be interesting to someone, like the almighty, to watch how long our creation exists compared to the forests. You can drive around West Indianapolis and spot the houses that were built from the timber of the forests which grew in the region by the angle of the windows in front of the house.

The earliest collection of houses on graveled streets in West Indianapolis were located primarily in three regions. The McCarty houses were built from sycamore lumber, that McCarty sawed out of the trees that his workers cleared on his bayou farm, so crops could be grown there. The workers were then offered the houses at reasonable prices. They were allowed to apply their rent toward the purchase of the home. This helped Nicholas McCarty to attract a ready labor supply which was willing to live in an area subject to flooding. Ironically after the streets were graveled, and after the houses were built, he planted trees along each street so they wouldn't be so barren.

The second group of houses were the McKernan houses built on the west bank of White River south of Morris Street. An additional group of houses were built in the town of Belmont mainly along Morris Street between Belmont and Blaine Avenues. The Belmont Village houses were probably built in the real estate boom of the 1860's and early 1870's.

The country village named Belmont was built along the gravel toll road we now know as Morris Street. In part one of this history I had guessed the location of the town of Belmont to be a little farther east, but this observation has proved incorrect. I finally found a map in the State Library dated 1875, which showed Belmont laid out along Morris Street in a width running two blocks north, and stretching from Belmont Street to Blaine Avenue.

The first school in the town of Belmont was a one room building at the northwest corner of Belmont Avenue and Lambert Street. Mr. Fitzgerald was the first teacher. (History of Daniel Webster School #46 , Jan. 23, 1948.)

The one room school was replaced in 1881 by a two story brick building erected at Reisner and Howard Streets, elevation 700 ft., which was the sight of " Frog Island " and it's " Tadpoles ". More about the first schools in West Indianapolis and some of the events which took place in them will follow in a later section.

A SLOW RACE AT BELMONT

The village of Belmont remained a small farmers trading town, even through the huge industrial expansion of the Civil War and on into the 1870's. Most wagon traffic had to enter Belmont from the west on a bridge over Eagle Creek on what we know as Morris Street. Further travel toward the east to reach Indianapolis was hampered most of the time by swampy muddy conditions of the land from Harding Street to the river.

Tibbs Avenue ran from Maywood, north, to the National Road. Traveling this route, round trip, all the way to Mt. Jackson, and Indianapolis, by horse and wagon would take more than a full days time for a farmer. So they would usually stay overnight. This was expensive and time consuming, therefore, Belmont become a convenient place to obtain supplies; somewhat like our smaller shopping malls.

The Vincennes Turnpike (Highway 67) leading into Maywood, was originally an old buffalo migration route where the hooves of the beasts traveling in huge herds had pounded the clay ground into a road. This hard surfaced path was better than any other road which existed in the state at that time. The migrating buffalo probably grazed in the West Indianapolis area.

HOW DO YOU KEEP THEM DOWN ON THE FARM ?

The Civil War drained manpower off of the farm and into the city to produce the manufacturing goods needed to conduct the war, or into the Union Army to fight the war. Most of the young men had grown up on their parents farms and worked around the clock. They had never been paid cash money. The kind of money you could put in your pocket or use for the comforts and pleasures in life.

For the first time in their lives, many young men found out there was more to living than slopping hogs, cutting hay, shucking corn, cleaning out barns, and spending your lifetime virtually penniless, waiting to inherit a family farm. In this new life, they could mix with friends of their own age, were free to participate in the social life of the city on a daily basis, could associate with and get to know a number of ladies, and had the freedom which "money in your pocket" extends to virtually anyone.

Many of these young men never returned to the farm. Sadly, they were not prepared for what the city life was like when things went bad. That is the next part of this history.

CASTING BREAD UPON THE WATERS

The rapid expansion of industry and the economy during the Civil War, and the inflationary spending to cover the costs of the war, led to an overheating of the economy and the crash of the 1870's. The job market dried up, incomes disappeared, and families went hungry for days, even weeks, or months at a time. The situation was so desperate in this area that on the night of June 6, 1877, some men assembled on the State House lawn with guns, ropes, clubs, and torches demanding food and jobs or they were going to tear the city apart. Sulgrove pg. 212

A man named John Caven, who had been a working man all of his life and had been elected Mayor, attended the meeting. He was highly respected, so the men let him speak to the group. Mayor Caven promised the men he would get them bread that night, and employment the next day. He then requested, that "those men willing to pledge themselves to preserve the peace, and obey his orders, in putting down the disturbance, to hold up their right hand". Every hand went up. Sulgrove pg. 212

The Mayor then invited the crowd to go with him to Simpson's Bakery, south of the State House, which had a large quantity of bread on hand. Mayor Caven and Mr. Simpson handed out six loaves of bread to every man that passed, until the bread was gone. Next, Mayor Caven led the crowd to Taggart's Bakery on South Meridian Street. Taggart refused to supply any bread for the crowd. The Mayor then led the crowd to Bryces' Bakery on South Street. Mr. Bryce was asleep, but when he was told what the Mayor needed, he helped distribute the bread. Each man was given six loaves, but as the pile of bread grew smaller, the number was reduced to five loaves, then four loaves, then three loaves, and finally two loaves, with the promise more would be supplied the next morning. Mayor Caven paid Mr. Bryce his bill, then went out on the street where a few minutes earlier a group of hungry, angry, desperate men had gathered. Not a human being was in sight. Sulgrove pg. 212.

The next morning Mayor Caven met with the men on the State House lawn and told them to report to the Beatty farm and jobs would be waiting.

In that twinkling of an eye, West Indianapolis was changed to produce a thriving industrial, and business community. There were jobs for workers, and incomes which would pay for the roofs which covered their heads, the food they ate, the paved streets, the good schools, and virtually everything else they enjoyed.

In June, 1877, on Beatty's farm, men were put to work building the Belt Railroad and the Stockyards. This was the beginning of everything which followed which we grew up with, came to depend upon, and often took for granted.

None of the events described above happened just by accident. On a day in September, 1875, the newly elected Mayor walked along the overgrown west bank of the river in W.I., the weeds were higher than his head. He walked from the sight of the old Grist Mill, and the Bayou Blue Distillery, to what would be the sight of the Belt Railroad Bridge just north of Raymond Street.

Upon reaching Raymond Street, the Mayor took off his shoes and waded across the river to a pier sticking out of the water on the east side. He sat there for two hours and tried to figure out the process which could bring into motion the building of a Belt Railroad around the city, and a Stockyards which could be serviced by it. He was planning for the new jobs, the taxes these facilities would bring in, and the relief from the depression these facilities would provide. Sulgrove pg. 211.

Mayor Caven left the river bank and went home. He studied the things that had prevented things like bread strikes in the past, and what actions in the past that had made great cities successful. He observed what our natural advantages were, and planned how capitol and enterprise might be attracted to overcome the unemployment, and hunger which were sweeping over the area. Sulgrove pg. 211.

In the winter of 1875, Mayor Caven developed the proposal for the Belt Railroad and Stockyard development. He presented his proposal to the City Council on July 17, 1875. The proposal was masterly prepared and was published in newspapers all over the United States.

Two days later, the President and the Superintendent of the Stockyards in Louisville arrived and said they were interested in starting a stockyards in Indianapolis. Mayor Caven told them the city could not assist them with money, but suggested the idea that they might be able to exchange bonds in the undertaking to obtain financial support.

The enterprise was met with a great deal of opposition, but finally carried. This was the beginning of an activity which made the owners rich, added a huge number of jobs and income for the people, and kickstarted the economic development of West Indianapolis. We didn't know it then, but the smell of pig and cow dung, to which all objected, was actually the smell of money and opportunity.

THE OLDEST PROFESSION

One of the events relating to the Stockyards economy happened in my home. My father worked at the Stockyards and he often brought home tiny lambs, pigs, or calves which were born to the creatures who were about to reach their demise. We nursed the

babies and then hauled them on the Interurban out to my Grandfather's farm where they were raised.

Well, one night my dad brought home more than baby creatures to be rescued. My father worked from before sunup, to late at night. My mother had already gone to bed on this terrible March night, when my father brought home two ladies. He pulled out the daybed so the ladies could sleep in our living room that night. When my mother came downstairs the following morning and found two ladies sleeping in her living room, she was curious and awakened my dad to find out what was happening. My father explained that these two ladies had showed up at the Stockyards Hotel, where they were prepared to ply their trade for the visiting farmers, or commission men. It was so late that no customers were available. The ladies were penniless and were about to be turned out into the cold and sleety night. My father was always a kind hearted man so he brought them home. I never found out exactly what my mom's response was when my father explained who the ladies were, but I thought it was one of my dad's finest moments. It may well have been one of mom's finest moments as well. I'll never know.

I reaped benefits from the incidents when my father would take me to the Stock Yards Hotel. He would walk me down the long hallway with commission men and farmers making booming sounds from their thumping heavy boots, and with whips or canes in their hands. We would walk through the swinging doors at the end of the hallway into the restaurant and bar. The bar was made of rosewood or mahogany and it stretched across most of the width of the building which was 120 feet. It was a standup bar and frequented by the working ladies with whom my father had established such a favorable reputation. The ladies welcomed me with hugs and kisses and bought me the choicest morsels from the restaurant. They even stood me up on the bar and told me how wonderful I was. I have never had it so good with the ladies, throughout the rest of my life, as I did there in the Stock Yard Hotel. Too bad, I was only six years old. My mother would have crowned my father with a frying pan if she had known my father was taking me into a bar and letting ladies of ill repute whisper sweet nothings in my ears.

CITIFIED MORE OR LESS

The Stock Yards was built, and in operation by November 10, 1877. The population of Belmont five years later, in 1882, was 471 persons. The men who worked at the Stockyards walked to work on paths, because most of the streets in West Indianapolis hadn't been built yet.

The Belt Railroad was beginning to attract industry so in 1881, the one room school on the corner of Belmont and Lambert Streets had to be augmented. Frederick and Martha Reisner deeded land to the School Board for the construction of a two story brick building containing four rooms and facing Reisner Street with it's southern face exposed to Howard Street. The rooms were separated by wide corridors, and two stairways led to the second floor.

The new school served the whole district of West Indianapolis, many children had to walk long distances along muddy roads. To attend school, they often cut through corn fields. It was Mr. Lawrence Breedlove's task, as a custodian, to be ready at the entrance, with a broom in hand, to remove the mud from the pupils' shoes.

In 1882, Belmont changed its name to West Indianapolis, became an incorporated town, and elected a board of trustees to govern. The name of the brick schoolhouse became West Indianapolis School #1.

Houses were scattered here and there. The only ones close to the school and still being used were located on the northwest and southwest corners of what is now Reisner and Lambert Streets. (History of Daniel Webster School 1948). Children watched herds of cattle being driven down the road, now Howard Street, to the Stock Yards from the school windows. They also watched the mule cars being turned around on the turntable at the corner of Richland and Howard Streets.

The town's school stood as a prominent community center, because spacious buildings were so scarce. Even through the suburb's rapid growth of more than 4,000 people, the red brick building was the one logical place for meetings and gatherings of all kinds. Two religious denominations, the Methodist Church, and the Church of Christ, held services in the school while awaiting the building of their own churches.

About 1886, another four-room, two-story building was constructed about fifteen to twenty feet away and to the rear. Steps and entrances to the rooms were between the two buildings.

In the early 1900's, the space between the two buildings was made into four small rooms. The school now had a total of twelve rooms. One of the small rooms served as the principal's office. Until this time, he had used a corner of a cloak room for that purpose. The other small rooms were used for German classes and other special classes. Later, because enrollment increased, they were used as regular classrooms; seating only twenty-eight pupils.

Some of the principals and teachers of School #1 were Mr. Dixon, Mr. D. K. Armstrong, Mr. Daniel Mathers, Mr. W. V. Hall, Miss Mary Hogan, Miss Virginia Mann, Mrs. Irene V. Webb, and Miles Pentecost.

A portable building was added to the school about 1902. Later it was used as an assembly hall for programs, for physical training classes, and for chorus. Again, the enrollment increased so much that the portable was made into classrooms. By this time pupils in the seventh and eighth grade attended school #49.

A large frame building was built on the rear of the school yard, facing Howard Street. It was used as a Library until 1909. Miss Gertrude Hilligoss and Miss Anna K Guenther were the librarians. This building was bought by J. Stephen Fullen and moved to 1317 Kappas Street. Later, it was remodeled and made into a double house. The house still stands there and is a very nice double in sound condition. I seriously doubt the residents are aware they are living in the old library.

Mr. James Hartley and Mr. Fred McClain remember transplanting maple trees which Mr. Hall had secured. The trees were named for the boys planting them and some stood on the back of the school grounds until recently.

Miss Bertha Walden remembers the teacher allowed the class to stand at the window to watch the first electric street car pass by. The experience was considered an historical event. She also recalls that graduating from grade school was an occasion to be remembered.

According to Mr. Benjamin Wysong and his wife, graduates of the 1904 class, the rooms of the school were still heated by large stoves.

Playing on the way to school was a problem many years ago, back in the 1880's. One noon, a group of fifteen boys and girls removed shoes and stockings and waded into a marshy place along Harding Street to catch tadpoles. They were so busy having fun they didn't hear the school bell. Soon a colored boy, out of breath from running, said, "You all is going to get it. Mr. Hall sent me to get you". In the room at school they were told to sit in the front seats, and each in turn was given one whack across the knees with a barrel stave.

History of Daniel Webster School# 46 , January 23, 1948.

BUILD IT, AND THEY WILL COME

After 1877, industrial development in West Indianapolis became almost an every day experience. The jewel in the crown at first was the Stock Yards. You had to be there to see it, or you simply couldn't understand what it meant to the people at the time.

A huge arch was built at the entrance to the Stock Yards similar to the Arch of Triumph in Paris, started by Napoleon, and completed in 1836. The building of Arches of monumental proportions originated to celebrate the triumphs of generals, or other conquerors, and later to commemorate a joyful event.

As strange as it may seem to us today, the farmers passing under the Stock Yard's Arch were experiencing a joyful event, the triumph of their labors. Weeks, months, and even years of toil and labor were spent in producing the stock they were bringing to market. The cash accumulations they were paid for their livestock were probably the largest amounts of money they were ever going to receive exclusive of selling their farms, which was not a joyous occasion. So the Stock Yard's Arch was a very appropriate symbol in the lives of the men who passed under it.

As a child, I took huge pride in an animal at the Stock Yards which almost no one has ever heard of. My pride and joy was the Judas Goat. The goat had clipped horns fitted with polished brass tips so the workers could spot the Judas Goat easily as he did his work. This animal had been trained to lead the herds of livestock to be shipped out into the waiting freight cars lined along the loading pens. Judas Goat was kind of like a sheep dog, but he walked in front. For whatever reason, the trusting cattle would follow the Judas Goat into the freight cars without balking. Old Judas Goat would circle around inside the car until he reached the open door again. When he stepped out, the men would slam the door shut. Then Judas Goat would proceed to lead the next batch of passive animals into the next waiting car, continuing the process until the train was loaded. I was always fascinated watching Judas Goat at work. I thought he was magnificent. He was leading the beasts which trusted him to their doom. Old Judas Goat was kind of like a modern version of the Generals and leaders who lead men into wars, then return as heroes with shiny brass marks of rank. I played with that goat with the shiny brass tipped horns, fed him, and liked his company about as much as I had enjoyed the company of the working ladies in the bar in the hotel. As a grown man, I now recognize that Judas Goat was part of the industrial revolution. He was a cog in the wheel of progress which was vital in making the shipping of cattle work efficiently and smoothly. Those polished brass tips on his horns were a mark of rank which saved him from the fate his fellow beasts had to suffer. It puts a lot of job titles and positions in perspective.

An early plant, of what was to become one of the world's largest meat packing industries, had a representative firm in West Indianapolis. William Mansur, his brother Isiah Mansur, and a Mr. Wright killed hogs at the west end of the old bridge in a building on the west side of the river bank. They cut and packed them in a building near the depot of the Jeffersonville Railroad. I think a hotel of that era was still standing in the late 1940's. It was called "the hole" because of the dilapidated condition it was in and the pitiful condition of the people living so near to where hogs were once slaughtered and butchered.

Another meat packer on the west side of the river was called the Abattoir which was pretty fancy because that was the French word for slaughterhouse. That, no doubt, made it's owners more acceptable in society. They also slaughtered beef which was a classier undertaking. The Abattoir and the Piel Starch Works were established on the west bank of the river south of Morris Street in 1867. The Starch Works has since grown into a huge industrial complex, but you can still see an old building of the era in the front of the complex. My mother said the Starch Works used to blow up fairly often. The burning and flaming grain hurling into the air was a kind of fireworks when viewed by the residents living in the "Valley".

Another of the earliest industries was the Perry Manufacturing Company. This was allegedly the world's largest cart, wagon, and carriage company. This company built the Marion Motor Car. Martin became associated with Perry, and the company was known later as the Perry-Overland Company. They were bought out by Chevrolet Company. (Memories of West Indianapolis by members of the Mary Rigg Senior Citizens' Group)

I assume, this Perry-Overland plant grew into the present truck division of the Chevrolet plant now in the "Valley" west of the Oiver Avenue Bridge.

In 1823, a carding machine for carding wool was installed in the Grist Mill of Andrew Wilson. This was on the bayou near the distillery which made the "Bayou Blue". Then the Quaker City Machine works was established a little west of there in 1873 by A.N. Hadley and Co. of Richmond, Indiana. This plant was purchased from Mr. Hadley in 1876 by the Nordyke -Marmon Company to make grist mill machinery and mill stones. That business changed and adapted it's production to new products repeatedly as will be shown. Sulgrove pg. 469

Lewitt and Company, and the Nordyke-Marmon Company were among the earliest and most active manufacturing establishments in West Indianapolis. Lewitt and Company was located on the Vincennes Railroad. They were involved in curing and tanning of hides. They needed swampy soaking ponds to process the hides. The Nordyke-Marmon Company produced windmill blades and milling machines during the 1896 period. Before and during the first World War, propellers were produced in Plant 1. Plant 2 was built for the production and the assembly of Liberty Aircraft engines. Later, the V-16 and Straight 8 Marmon cars were added to the production.

Very early in their development, West Indianapolis workers became involved in producing products for the infant aircraft industry, and the auto industry. They were also involved in developing race cars. This attracted some very famous early fliers to this area, such as Roscoe Turner and Wiley Post. I used to get to walk on the fabric of the wings of the open cockpit airplanes at Stout Field when I was a youngster.

About 1930, retired Army Captain Herrington used the ground floor of the west end of the Marmon plant along Morris Street to design, and develop, the first fourwheel drives. These were later installed in Army tanks and trucks. I used to watch the Army tanks being driven south on Harding Street for testing on Mann's Hill.

Murray's body shop was located on the second, third, and fourth floors of the Nordyke-Marmon plant, and preceded the Hayes body shop in the same location. My mother used to upholster cars there and she said she used to swallow a few tacks which she held in her mouth while working. She said they never did any harm because her stomach dissolved them. I always knew my mom could stomach about anything, but I harbor some doubts about the tacks. Could that have been why her boys were so sharp? Well, maybe pointy headed.

Just north of West Indianapolis, Mr. Haugh established the Architectural Iron Works. They produced the elaborate and fancy cast iron fronts for buildings, that were constructed all over the United States. It was a pre-fab type of construction. He was the founder of the community known as Haughville, which was a fierce competitor of West Indianapolis. The Iron Works employed many men from our community. The demand for labor was so intense that a majority of the cities immigrants were brought to Haughville to work.

In 1914, Stewart Warner built it's power house and gear works. The main plant was built in 1918, and it was followed by a larger addition that was constructed in 1927. One of the products produced was the South-Wind gasoline heaters for automobiles. They used the slogan "South-Wind Susie, hot in 90 seconds", with a picture of a woman getting out of a car with her skirt up to her buttocks. The slogan worked fine, but one of the women working in the plant was called "South-Wind Susie", and she sued Stewart Warner and won. This may have been one of the earliest sexual harassment suits in the country. The Stewart Warner plant was built just east of a hugh railroad repair shop which serviced steam locomotives and required skilled workers. Many came from our community.

Robin's Body Corporation, located at the corner of Division And Morris Streets, allegedly was the first shop to build automobile bodies from steel and wood. They also built bodies out of leather and wood. This tells you something about how old that operation was.

Bixby's, known for it's Shinola products, was first located on Division Street. As production soared, the plant became too small, and it was moved to the 1400 block of West Morris Street. The Rit-Dye division of Best Foods moved it's production facilities from Chicago to Indianapolis in the late 1940's. It occupied the second and third floors of the Bixby building. I helped install the machines that were used to mix the dyes. James William "Bill" Ezell got a job in the mixing room. Bill used to walk home sporting a different color of complection and hair every day. He was a W.I. chameleon. People used to wait and see what color Bill was going to be each day. It became a form of entertainment. James William Ezell went on to become an educator and was recognized as a National Principal of the Year. He was an Assistant Superintendent in the Indianapolis Public Schools. I worked in the shipping department and became anAsstistant Foreman prior to spending a lifetime in education as a Dean twenty-five years at Harry E. Wood High School, and eight years at Franklin Central High School. No one ever thought I would become the, "Pinky Hargraves" type when I was working in the old Bixby plant. Norma Wills also worked in the office of the plant, and became a fixture in the community walking home each day for much of her lifetime.

Bob Rabb warrants a story in this industrial section. He wanted to be a railroader like his dad. He was given three trial trips as an apprentice fireman. The first two trips went without any difficulties, but the third trip was a different kettle of fish. Rabb pulled out of St. Louis on a double header steamer hauling freight and running on a diesel schedule. The steamer had to stop for water, and that meant it had to run like a "banshee out of Hell" to keep up with the diesel schedule. As they crossed the bridge over the "Father of Waters" coming east out of St. Louis, the Engineer cautioned Rabb, "Hold on tight sonny because when we get across this bridge I'm going to open her up and it can draw you out of the cab!" So Rabb sat on his little jump seat behind the fireman holding on tight. The double headed steam and fire breathing beast began to rumble and shake going down the track so violently that it would have put most earth quakes to shame. The fireman told Rabb to stick his head out the window to see if the smoke looked right. Bob made a weak attempt at looking and said it's all right. The fireman said, "No really look!" So, Bob stuck his head out the window and away went his hat, with part of his hair as far as he could tell. The train continued down the track until it grew low on water.

They pulled over on a siding, and Rabb was sent out on the coal tender to fill her up with water. Before he got out of the cab, the engineer warned him that another double header steamer was coming from the east at top speed. If he saw the light coming, he should either get back down in the cab, or hold onto the water pipe because at that speed the passing train could pull him off the tender and kill him. So our West Indianapolis hero climbed out on the tender and began watering her up, while watching down the track to spot the headlight of the approaching monster. When the tank was three-fourths full, Rabb spotted the headlight and pulled the cord to shut off the water. It wouldn't shut off. With the water running, Bob grabbed hold of the pipe real tight. By the time the train had passed, the water had run over and was standing several inches deep on the tender. Rabb climbed back into the engine cab and the engineer asked him, "Did you run her over sonny?" Like any teenager who thinks he's made a harmless mistake, Rabb said, "No." With that answer, he had overlooked one not so tiny factor, every action has a reaction. The engineer eased open the throttle. The freight cars pulled tight all along their couplings, and then reacted surging backward. The water on the tender sloshed forward down into the coal car. It shot into the cab of the engine as a black slime of wet coal dust and covered the engineer, the fireman, and Bob Rabb. That was Bob's last day on the railroad.

FROG ISLAND'S LABOR POOL

As part of the of the history of the industrial development of West Indianapolis, a few adventures of our entry into the laboring market might be in order.

Elmer Ford had obtained a job at J.D.Adams. A condition of employment was that he buy a pair of steel toed safety shoes. Elmer was really proud of those steel toed shoes and couldn't resist showing them off when his cousin drove in the driveway. Elmer told him how safe the shoes were and repeatedly challenged him to drive over his foot to prove the point. Elmer's cousin drove the car up on Elmer's foot, got out of the car, and left it there. The point was proven. The toes were fine, but Elmer had to take his shoes off to get out from under the wheel of the car! As the story goes, it was a while before the cousin returned and Elmer could reclaim his new steel-toed shoes.

My story traces to when I was working on the graveyard shift at Shirley Corporation on St. Joe Street making steel kitchen cabinets, and going to school all day. I often was sleepy at work as a result. One night, when I loaded a stack of steel skids on the freight elevator, I failed to notice one of them was sticking out over the area of the steel beams which supported the building. I pressed the start button, and as the elevator started up, I leaned my sleepy head against the gate. My brief slumber was interrupted when the most God awful noises began to come out of the elevator shaft. It was a screaming and wailing such as one seldom hears. The skid had caught on a girder, and the main supporting framework of the building was beginning to bend. Blue flames were shooting out of the huge electric motor lifting the elevator until it finally burned itself up. The building was now leaning in a direction it had never assumed before.

When I was a Dean working with the kids in school, I would get disgusted with some of their foul ups. I used to drive by that building on St. Joe Street and look at it's bent condition to refresh my memory about what it was like to be fourteen going on fifteen in an adult world. It helped keep my head screwed on right in dealing with the kids.

Bill Litzelman also worked at Shirley Corporation which hired under age "W.I. Tadpoles" because the war was on and they needed warm bodies to operate the plant. One night Litzelman decided to go out and get some hamburgers for himself and his hard working buddies. Litz "borrowed" the company's eighteen wheeler loaded with twenty tons of kitchen sinks to run his errand. It hardly seemed like any time had passed when we looked out the second story window and watched the telephone pole carrying the power lines into the building swaying like a palm tree in a storm. Litzelman had returned and hooked the semi on the light pole while backing up. He nearly tore it down. All's well that ends well, and the hamburgers were real tasty. On another occasion, the foreman and I loaded up squirt oil cans with carbontetrachloride and hid behind stacks of material so we could soak the backside of one of the guys hanging the assembly line. The fluid would evaporate quickly cooling whatever it touched. We added more fluid until the guy's backside began to feel really cold and numb. He couldn't get away from the line for quite some time. When he did, the foreman and I went to the washroom with him. As soon as he reached the restroom he dropped his pants to look at his backside. He could see it was turning a little blue from the chill. I was considered the medical expert in the plant, so he asked me what I thought was wrong. I told him he had a rare malady caused by a pinched nerve from hanging the line, and the only way he could cure it up was to jump up and down to relieve the pressure as he hung the line. He went back to work and everybody in the plant came to see the "jumping jack" hanging the assembly line. He jumped up and down until the shift ended. On the way home he told me how much better he felt, and thanked me for the medical advice. Moral....Beware of the "Helping Hand".

We had a real circus on that job, but our production was terrific because we would work like maniacs so we could have a couple of hours to fool around at the end of the shift. That was a real incentive for production. One tall and lanky guy used to grab the handle of his lunch bucket on a full run so he could get a choice seat in the washroom where we ate. One night we screwed his lunch bucket to the floor, and he did a regular whirling dervish Ichabod Crane when he grabbed hold of his lunch bucket.

Paul Jenkins worked in the paint room painting the kitchen cabinets white and their bases black. Paul grew tired of repetition, so one night, the cabinets began to come out black and the bases were white. It was the foreman's turn to jump up and down that night.

Jim Litzelman was a dumm dumm gun operator. The dumm dumm gun squirted a thick glob of gummy stuff into the doors of the cabinets so they would go clunk when you slammed them shut. Every so often, Litz would get that funny smile on his face, and he would turn up the air pressure and shoot a glob of the stuff across the plant. Dumm Dumm went "thunk" when it hit you on the side of the head. His accuracy was remarkable.

The list would not be complete without a story concerning Dick Fernkas and his shadow Don "Moose" Mueller. Don was out of a job, so Dick offered to take him up to Chicago to meet his boss for a job interview. They met at the house of Dick's boss. When they arrived at the house, the boss was busy. They went downstairs to the recreation room to wait for the interview. Big Don flopped down in the boss' favorite chair and broke it. At that point, Don thought his chances for a job were over. Dick, in his ever resourceful way, waited at the bottom of the stairs and gave the boss hell for buying such a cheap chair. I think Don ended up getting the job.

ONE WONDERS

Would the early industries in West Indianapolis have been able to survive a work force like ours? Maybe the work force then wasn't too different, but the stories were just lost in time. Some of the other early industries included the Pathfinder Auto Company at Division Street and Standard Avenue, the Tack Factory on Standard Avenue, Liquid Carbonic on Standard Avenue, the Handle Factory on Harding and McCarty Streets, Metal Auto Parts on Henry Street between Arbor Avenue and Harding Street, Puritan Bed Springs located near Riley Park, Skeltons Tin Shop located on Oliver Avenue, Thiesing's Veneer located at Chase and Mc Carty Streets, United Screw Products location unknown, may have been a precursor of the Pragmatic Screw Company on Howard Street near Blaine Avenue, Gottlieb Drum Company location unknown, Imperial Drop Forge location unknown, American Foundry location unknown, and Ellis Trucking Company which started as a one horse dray, grew to be a large trucking operation located on Oliver Avenue for many years.

This group of hard working people made the community the fastest growing area in it's time. The people poured in. Houses were built. They had money in their pockets. Merchants built every kind of establishment you could imagine to service the families' needs right in their own neighborhood. More of that history will be found in the next series.

Dr. R. J. Gatling developed the Gatling gun and tested the first one on the River bank at the foot of Kentucky Avenue. . Sulgrove pg. 464

WHAT IT TOOK TO MAKE IT

One old character, very active in our area, lived just west of Eagle Creek in what was called the "Big Raspberry Patch". His real name was Robert Harding, but he was known to everyone as "Old Helvey". He was quite a fiddler, and his house was headquarters for dances and sprees of all kinds. He had several fine daughters. He would go around saying "Thar's no such gals in the settlement as Old Helvey's!" They were Bash, Vine, and Tantrabogus. He would say, "That Bash is a Hoss, would you like to come over and take a rassel with her?" She threwed Old Liakim Harding two throws out of three; tother

was a dog fall, but Bash soon turned him and got on top of him. She killed the biggest buck in the new purchase. She could shoot off a hand at seventy-five yards. Sulgrove pg. 651

Old Helvey distinguished himself in many a hotly contested battles at Jerry Collins Grocery and won the trophies of war which were usually a piece of an eye, apart of a finger, or a slice of flesh from the antagonists person. In his yard were all kinds of dogs from the surly bulldog to the half wolf , or Injun dog. Sulgrove pg. 651-6

MEET YOUR MAKER

In the fall and winter of 1842 and the early spring of 1843, West Indianapolis faced what many thought was going to be it's ultimate peril. A comet was passing in the sky and some preachers began to say the tail of it was breaking up and spelling out, "The Lord is coming ". To many, this meant the "end of the world". Strange intimations of the great catastrophe were found in marks on leaves, sometimes in prophetic eggs of strangely inspired pullets, sometimes in bark of trees, or the accidental lines of raindrops. They were all paraded in a paper called the Midnight Cry. The secular press laughed at these fantastic phenomena. They called the paper the Midnight Howl and the Evening Yell, and said the meteors actually spelled out, "Pay the Printer". One Preacher came to town to preach about the end of the earth. At the end of his sermon, a strange lurid glare appeared in the western sky. It looked as if the world was on fire in the back yard. There was a drizzling rain to enhance the mistif. Everyone thought it was the anticipation of the sermon. Nobody fainted or screamed, but they were sure it was the earthly conflagrations. It proved to be the burning of a few large ricks of hemp on the White River bank. Many still remained convinced the end was near. They made ascension robes, and some sold or gave away their property. One woman became permanently insane and was put in the asylum. Sulgrove pgs. 130-131

The failure of the world to come to an end in April, 1843, disappointed many. Some of the prophets pushed the date to June. When June came and went, they predicted September was the date the world would end. Finally the interest in the predictions died out, and West Indianapolis survived. However, this is the end of the History of W.I. Volume II.

THIS IS INSTALLMENT TWO OF THE WEST INDIANAPOLIS HISTORICAL SOCIETIES HISTORY OF WEST INDIANAPOLIS.

If you like it and want me to continue call me at 317-823-6008, or drop me a line with some little story or other information that you have that I might be able to use in future installments.

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