

WELCOME TO HISTORIC IRVINGTON -- A SELF-GUIDED TOUR

(The Town of Irvington was platted in 1870 as the first planned suburb of Indianapolis. Various additions were added to the Original Plat over the town's history. This tour begins in Woodland Park Addition (1873) and loops through the southern part of the Original Plat. Approximately two miles. Start at Bona Thompson Memorial Center)

1. a. BONA THOMPSON MEMORIAL CENTER, 5350 E. UNIVERSITY AV (NW CORNER OF UNIVERSITY AND DOWNEY):

Neo-Classical Revival, 1903. Butler University's library from 1903-28 and the last remaining building of the old Irvington campus, it was a gift to the university from Edward and Mary Thompson in memory of their daughter who died shortly after her 1897 graduation from Butler. In addition to being Butler's library, it was an Indianapolis Public Library from 1903-14. Renovated by the Irvington Historical Society, today it is the Society's headquarters and a community arts and cultural center.

(Proceed north on Downey Av to intersection at Ohmer Av)

After 1928, a five-building complex developed on this site. Known as the **Missions Building**, it was the national and international headquarters of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) until 1995. The former **Sarah Davis Deterding Missionary Training School (College of Missions)** occupied the center building. Constructed from 1907-10 by the Christian Women's Board of Missions, it provided instruction for prospective missionaries. The school operated until 1928 when it relocated to Hartford, CT. The Church moved its headquarters from St. Louis, MO to this building in the Fall of 1928. The present complex was completed with the addition of three adjacent buildings from 1946-58. Today, the four red brick buildings house the **b. Mission Place Apartments, 222 S. Downey Av, 72-** units for senior citizen.

2. SIGMA CHI HOUSE (1921-28), 209 S. DOWNEY AV:

Built by A. A. Johnson in the mid-1870s as his family home so that his children could attend Butler, it became the Sigma Chi House in 1921.

(Proceed south [left] on Ohmer Av to University Av)

3. CHRISTIAN UNITY ACROSS THE BARRIERS OF TIME AND SPACE:

This sculpture on the north lawn of Mission Place Apartments, was designed and made by Michael Dominguez, a member of the Indianapolis staff of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and Wayne Selsor, a pastor in Bellevue, NE.

(Continue west [right] on University Av to Butler Av)

4. BUTLER COLLEGE MARKER: INTERSECTION OF BUTLER & UNIVERSITY AVS (NW CORNER):

Erected in 1967, the tablet on this boulder commemorates Butler University's Irvington Campus, 1875-28. Founded in 1855 as North Western Christian University through the efforts of Indianapolis lawyer, philanthropist, and abolitionist, Ovid Butler, the original campus was at 13th St and College Av in the Old Northside area of Indianapolis. Affiliated with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the university was the first institution of higher learning in the United States to admit women into the same curricula with men. Shortly after relocating to Irvington, the name was changed to recognize the significant contributions of the school's founder and benefactor. The imposing three-story red brick **Administration Building**, stood 500 feet directly west of this site. Slightly to the southwest of this building stood **Burgess Hall**, the science building. At the NE corner of the campus stood **Irwin Observatory** (the telescope is still used at Holcomb Observatory). The **Powerhouse** stood behind the Administration Building. A **Dormitory** stood on the north side of the campus slightly west of the Powerhouse. A **Summer House and Tennis Courts** were west of the Powerhouse and just south of where University Av now runs. The original **Athletic Field** was west of the Dormitory parallel to the old Pennsylvania RR. Leading to the east of campus south of the brick **Senior Walk** (a section remains at the SW corner of Butler and University) stood the **Gymnasium** with **Irwin Athletic Field** extending to the south.

(Reverse direction, and proceed east on University Av to Ritter Av)

5. a. GRAHAM-STEPHENSON HOUSE, 5432 UNIVERSITY AV:

Built in 1889 by **W. H. H. Graham**, Civil War veteran, attorney, and American Consul to Winnipeg, Canada. Butler Greek organizations rented the house before it was sold in 1923 to **D. C. Stephenson**, Grand Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan, who added the full height Ionic portico. The house is forever linked to the infamous activities of Stephenson and his brutal assault on Madge Oberholtzer that led to her subsequent death. **b. Phi Delta Theta House (1922; 1927-28); c. Kappa Kappa Gamma House (1923); d. Chi Rho Zeta House (1926).**

6. BLOUNT-NELSON HOUSE, 5470 UNIVERSITY AV (NW CORNER OF RITTER AND UNIVERSITY):

Italianate, 1879. built by **Rev. Robert Silas Blount**, an 1876 Butler graduate. The home was purchased in 1956 by **Dr. Robert G. and June Nelson**, former missionaries to Jamaica. He later was executive secretary of the Department of Africa, Division of Overseas Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

(Cross Ritter Av into the Original Plat and continue east on University Av to Irving Circle)

7. IRVINGTON PRIVATE KINDERGARTEN-NEIER RESIDENCE, 5506 UNIVERSITY AV:

Mary Louise Neier, a Butler graduate, opened her kindergarten in 1935 in the family home. The school continued for the next 40 years providing early childhood education to Irvington children. Her father, **Dr. Oliver C. Neier**, came to Irvington in 1902 to assume the practice of **Dr. Robert Long**, at his request. In 1908 **Dr. Neier** delivered the first baby born at Methodist Hospital.

(Proceed counterclockwise [three quarters] around Irving Circle to Audubon Rd)

8. IRVING CIRCLE PARK:

One of the oldest planned public parks within the Indianapolis city limits, the Irving Circle Park was intended to be the community's centerpiece. Today the community enjoys a summer concert series sponsored by The Friends of Irving Circle. A bust of 19th Century author Washington Irving, the community's namesake, is located on the north side of the park.

9. a. EUDORUS JOHNSON HOUSE, 5631 UNIVERSITY AV, (SW QUADRANT):

Victorian Gothic, 1876. Built by the son of one of Irvington's founders, **Sylvester Johnson**, this home has a solid stone foundation, three foot walls, tall ceilings and is distinguished by turrets at the front and back. The gable ends bear distinctive Eastlake Style turned wooden braces. The home was thoroughly restored in the late 1990s. **b. Alpha Delta Pi House (1928).**

10. a. DEMARCHUS BROWN HOUSE, 251 S. AUDUBON RD, (NE QUADRANT):

Craftsman Style, c. 1910. The original owner, **Demarchus Brown**, was professor of Greek at Butler University, acting president of the university in 1906, and director of the Indiana State Library. **b. Zeta Tau Alpha House (1927); c. Pi Beta Phi House (1928).**

(Continue north [right] on Audubon Rd to Bonna Av)

11. ORIGINAL BUSINESS DISTRICT:

a. Shank Commercial Building, 201-203 S. Audubon Rd, (SE corner of Audubon and Bonna):

This simple vernacular two-story brick commercial building was erected by **William H. H. "Tipp" Shank**, c. 1872, with little pretense to architectural style (only the upper paneled parapet has any detail). Although the use of brick construction was less common than wood frame for small town buildings, brick was used in the construction of buildings near railroads as a fire prevention measure. Tenants have included a meat market and grocery, a fish market, and the U. S. Post Office Branch.

b. Pennsylvania Railroad (Parallel to Bonna Av)[SITE]: The Indiana Central Railway was completed in 1853 running from Indianapolis to Richmond, IN. Through various mergers, this railroad became the "Panhandle," the Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Chicago & St. Louis Railroad (the nickname came from an early railroad that crossed the West Virginia "Panhandle"). Additional mergers brought the line under the Pennsylvania Railroad by 1921. With the location of **The Irvington Depot** at the northeast corner of Audubon Rd at the railroad crossing, this area quickly became the town's business district. **Moore's Block**, a large three story brick building containing the U. S. Post Office Branch, pharmacy, grocery & dry goods store, doctor's offices, and a third floor dance hall was on the NW corner of the crossing and dominated the scene. The depot was razed in the early 1920s. **Moore's Block** was demolished in 1938. To the west of this crossing at Ritter Av stood a signal house atop a massive steel pillar. Abandoned by 1982, the double set of tracks were removed and the land sold to adjacent property owners. Fill dirt and new construction has

obliterated evidence of the railroad in some areas. Indianapolis Greenways has initiated planning for a new pedestrian trail, the "Pennsy Trail," that would start at Ritter Av and extend east to Cumberland and on into Hancock county.

**12. GEORGE W. JULIAN-CLARKE HOME, 115 S. AUDUBON RD
(EAST SIDE OF AUDUBON, NORTH OF FORMER RAILROAD CROSSING):**

Italianate, 1873, built by **George W. Julian**, brother of Irvington co-founder Jacob Julian. An ardent abolitionist, Free Soil Party nominee for Vice President of the United States, a founder of the Republican Party, and United States Representative from Wayne County, IN, Julian championed homestead legislation, served on the Committee on the Conduct of the War, and authored the first bill providing for women's suffrage. While residing in Irvington, he was appointed Surveyor General of New Mexico. **His daughter, Grace, married Charles Clarke.** Both were influential on the social issues of the day. Grace was active in the organization of the Federation of Women's Clubs and wrote a column in THE INDIANAPOLIS STAR. Charles was active in the Democratic Party and served a term in the Indiana State Senate. Over the decades of the Julian-Clarke residency, they hosted such persons of note as Susan B. Anthony, Sojourner Truth, and Presidents Cleveland, Harrison and Wilson.

(Proceed east on Bonna Av and continue south [right] on Good Av)

13. RAILROAD WAREHOUSE, 5721 BONNA AV:

Italianate, c. 1872. This two-story wood frame building served as a warehouse for railroad goods. **Dr. Robert Long** had his office and pharmacy in this building in the 1880s. Later, Dr. Krumrine operated a drug store in this building that had a soda fountain that is reported to have been a favorite stop for Butler students.

14. FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF IRVINGTON, 231 GOOD AV:

Craftsman Style, 1928. African-Americans have been a significant part of Irvington since the community's early days. Irvington's founders and many of the original prominent residents were active abolitionists. Consequently, blacks were more welcome here than in other parts of Indianapolis. Working as artisans, craftsmen, and in other trades, they participated in the civic life of the town. Descendants of many of the original congregation still worship here.

(Proceed west [right] on Dewey Av to University Av)

15. OBERHOLTZER HOUSE, 5802 UNIVERSITY AV (NE CORNER OF DEWEY AND UNIVERSITY):

Queen Anne and Colonial Revival Styles, 1909. Built by **Dr. Franz Abendroth**, a specialist in the treatment of women's diseases, he maintained his practice in the home. The house was sold in 1916 to **George Oberholtzer**, an inspector for the U. S. Railway Mail Service and vice president of the U. S. Railway Mail Clerks Association. He resided here with his wife, Matilda, and their two children, Marshall and Madge. In the Spring of 1925 while working as a Statehouse secretary, **Madge** caught the attention of D. C. Stephenson, Grand Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan and Irvington neighbor. She was brutally assaulted by Stephenson while accompanying him on a train trip to Chicago. In desperation, she took bichloride of mercury, a disinfectant. Brought back to her home in Indianapolis, she provided a deathbed statement which was instrumental in Stephenson's conviction at his subsequent trial. With his imprisonment, the notorious influence of the Klan in Indiana came to an end.

16. MARION COUNTY CHILDREN'S GUARDIAN HOME, 5751 UNIVERSITY AV:

This public institution, established by state law, for the care of mistreated or neglected children was re-located to Irvington in 1898. The center Georgian Revival dark brick building was erected in 1916. Over the next eight decades various additions were made, the most recent opening in 2001. Irvingtonians have long supported the mission of the home through the community-based Marion County Guardian's Home Guild and the Pleasant Run Run mini-marathon.

(Continue west [right] on University Av to Irving Circle. Proceed counterclockwise [three quarters] to Audubon Rd)

17. ALFRED J. GEEVES HOUSE, 250 S. AUDUBON RD, NW QUADRANT:

This house is a remodeled Second Empire Style home and is reputed to be one of the original 25 houses in Irvington. **Alfred J. Geeves**, assistant secretary, Bricklayers, Masons, & Plasterers Union, resided here when a new porch and a layer of face brick were added in the 1920s.

(Proceed south [right] on Audubon Rd to Beechwood Av)

18. WILLIAM F. KAESER HOME, 316 S. AUDUBON RD:

Irvington Group artist **William Kaeser** came to the United States from Germany in 1923. He was graduated from John Herron Art School where he studied under William Forsyth, and Clifton Wheeler. A painter of portraits, landscapes, and still life, he worked primarily in oil and pastel. He displayed with the Irvington Group at the annual Irvington Artists Exhibit in 1935-37 and he also exhibited at the 1939 World's Fair. He received numerous prizes for his oil and watercolor exhibits. Kaeser founded the Indianapolis Art League and served as its first teacher. He was a past president (1936-38) of the Indiana Artists Club and is noted for the mural at the Pendleton, IN Post Office. He resided in this home until his death in 1987.

19. BELZER HOUSE, 320 S. AUDUBON RD:

Queen Anne style, c. 1895. Francis Belzer moved into the house in 1907 and it would remain in the family until the death of his daughter, Katherine, in 1980. In 1911, **Francis "Chief" Belzer** organized Boy Scout Troop 9 at the Irvington United Methodist Church. He served many years as president of the Central Indiana Boy Scout Council. Recognized as a pioneer scout leader throughout Indiana and nationally, Chief Belzer is memorialized in the name of the Boy Scout Camp in northeast Marion County.

(Proceed west [right] on Beechwood Av to Burgess Av. Continue [left] on Burgess Av to Ritter Av)

20. "INGLESIDE," 359 S. RITTER AV (NORTH [RIGHT] OF INTERSECTION):

Built c. 1875, Mrs. Ingles ran a boarding house for women attending Butler University. Hilton U. Brown wrote that, "Half of the college (romantic) matches in the first five years after [Butler] came to Irvington may be safely credited to this place."

(Cross Ritter Av into Woodland Park Addition and continue northwesterly on Downey Av returning to Bona Thompson Center)

21. BENTON HOUSE, 312 S. DOWNEY AV (NW CORNER, DOWNEY AND OHMER):

French Second Empire, 1873. Restored by the Irvington Historic Landmarks Foundation in 1966, this unusual one and one-half story structure was built by Nicholas Ohmer as a speculative property. **Dr. Allen Benton and his wife Silence** resided in the home during his tenure as Butler's president from 1886-91. Now the home of the Benton House Association, it is a meeting site for various Irvington organizations.

22. HOWE-KINGSBURY HOUSE, 317 S. DOWNEY AV:

Georgian Revival Style, 1907. built by **Dr. Will David Howe**, professor of English Literature at Butler University. In order to take a faculty position at Indiana University, he sold the house, soon after construction to **Edward Kingsbury**, treasurer and later owner of Dockwiler & Kingsbury, manufacturers of fertilizer. The Kingsbury family lived in the home until 1958.

23. ELIJAH JOHNSON HOUSE, 304 S. DOWNEY AV:

Craftsman Style with flared wood shingle-sided walls and bellcast clipped gable roofs, this structure was the home of **Dr. Elijah Johnson** from 1909-45. He was professor of mathematics at Butler University and also served as the university's treasurer from 1924-29.

24. KATHERINE MERRILL GRAYDON HOUSE, 303 S. DOWNEY AV:

Craftsman and Tudor Revival Styles, c. 1910. **Katherine Merrill Graydon** was a respected professor and chair of English Literature at Butler University.

(Return to Bona Thompson Memorial Center Along Downey)

Other Irvington area tours are available at the Bona Thompson Memorial Center.

Thank you for sharing our heritage.

©Published by

The Irvington Historical Society, Bona Thompson Memorial Center, 5350 E. University Avenue, Indianapolis, IN 46219 317/353-BONA (2662). Compiled from The Hysterical Irvington Jogging Society brochure; A Walking Tour - Historic Irvington, 1996; *Greater Irvington Architecture, People and Places on the Indianapolis Eastside*; and other materials. 03/04