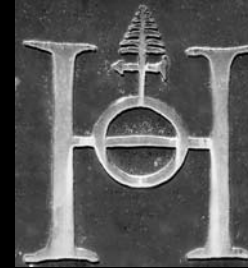




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History of the Ruins

at Holliday Park





In 1916 at the centennial celebration of Indiana statehood, John and Evaline Holliday donated their beautiful country estate to the City of Indianapolis for a park. The land at the time it was given to the city was 80 acres located on what is now Spring Mill Road. It was Holliday's intention that the land be used for recreation and the study of nature and the grounds, as a public park and playground."

Eighteen years earlier, in 1898, New York's first skyscraper, the St. Paul building had been built. It was located at 220 Broadway. One of the outstanding architectural sculptors of the day, Karl Bitter, designed the façade of this building as well as that of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. On this façade were three massive statues made of Indiana limestone. The statues, called "the Races of Man" represented the African-American, Asian and Caucasian races laboring together as they appeared to hold the skyscraper on their backs.

In the 1950's the owners of this building, the Western Electric Corporation, decided to build a modern skyscraper on the site. Seeking to find a new home for the sculptures, they held a competition among cities for a plan to display and preserve them. Indianapolis among other cities and universities, presented a plan: to place them in Holliday park, then an arboretum. We were awarded these highly prized sculptures estimated to be valued at \$150,000,

The design submitted and later implemented by this city was a reproduction of the façade of the building's entry including original facing stone, doorways and the ledge that upheld the figures, each one of which weighed 8 tons. The statues were placed east of the new community center that was under construction at that time. A reflecting pool was located between the

building and the statues and two geysers of water rose from it. Indianapolis artist, Elmer Taflinger who provided the sketches of the proposed structure was chosen to carry out the design. Taflinger worked to complete the project over the next twenty years and five city administrations.

Taflinger was a vocal force in the arts in Indianapolis during this period, A contentious man he found reason to contest many issues during his years in Indianapolis. His most prolonged campaign was for the appropriation of money that would allow him to carry out his design for the Ruins. There was never enough funding to carry out his ideas for the project. However, the lack of sufficient funding by the city was not the only problem. Taflinger was continually making changes and additions. During the next few years as older buildings were demolished and pieces worthy of salvaging became available they were incorporated into the design. Thus, a horse trough formerly located at the base of an historic monument on Fountain Square was positioned in the reflecting pool west of the statues. He redesigned the reflecting pool to add twenty-six Greek columns from the Sisters of Good Shepherd Convent. These were purchased by the Indianapolis Star and donated to the project. Moved to Holliday Park, they were installed around the reflecting pool. Still later he obtained four of eight statues that stood for many years above the Marion County courthouse when it was demolished. These were positioned on either side of the Ruins. Two capitals from columns originally at Broadway Christian Church and a stone table once part of an altar at St Paul's Church were also added.

By 1970 concern about the lack of progress on the structures and the landscaping led then Mayor Lugar to request the Department of Parks and Recreation to complete the project that had been initiated 12 years earlier. The Ruins were finally dedicated in October 1973.

As the 1976 Bicentennial Celebration approached, Elmer Taflinger proposed an expansion of his design converting it into a symbolic panorama of American history. His concept, Constitution Mall, symbolizes the American Republic in which men and women of all races are united in working for freedom and justice. The elaborate plan, which was mostly completed, added a large reflecting pool at the east side of the original statues. There was extensive landscaping with long lines of English hornbeams, one for each state of the Union and groups of evergreens representing the thirteen original colonies. A single columnar oak represented Washington, D.C. and the Washington monument. Giant slabs of rough Indiana limestone were inscribed with the words of the preamble to the constitution: "We the people of the United States in order to form a more perfect Union". Each element of the design had historic symbolism (see figure with details). Constitution Mall was dedicated in September 1977.

The Mall today is much as it was at that dedication except for changes caused by time and nature. The row of boxwoods did not thrive in Indiana winters and were replaced by a similar number of basswood trees in 2005. Several of the statues of the goddesses were damaged and unstable and had to be removed. The reflecting pools developed leaks and are no longer filled with water. After the nature center was opened in 2004, the old, inadequate community center was torn down and the view of the ruins was much improved.

Much of the landscaping of Constitution Mall has grown to grace the setting. The columnar oak that represents Washington Monument is an impressive tree and it functions as a sundial much enjoyed by children. The Religion tree, a huge fir, served for a time as living Christmas tree, decorated each year for the holidays. The great statues of the races, impressive still, look over a park that is used for recreation and nature study by families of many racial and international origins.