Development and Preservation

George W. Geib
Butler University, ggeib@butler.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.butler.edu/facsch_papers

Part of the Historic Preservation and Conservation Commons, Political History Commons, and the United States History Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at http://digitalcommons.butler.edu/facsch_papers/790

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences at Digital Commons @ Butler University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Scholarship and Professional Work - LAS by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Butler University. For more information, please contact omacisaas@butler.edu.
pigments in egg white (rather than the usual egg yolk). He then slathered a thin solution of the yolk (instead of the white) over his image and sealed everything under varnish and a coat of wax, to dull the shine. Over time, the wax collected dust, the varnish darkened to a golden brown, and the unevenly applied egg-yolk coating contracted, sometimes pulling the paint surface away from the ground.

The problems latent in Benton's unorthodox technique were then compounded by the peripatetic history of the murals. Painted in the Old Germania beer hall on South Delaware Street in Indianapolis, the panels were lowered on ropes five stories to the street, where they were loaded on a truck and conveyed to Chicago. Returned to the city six months later, the murals were stored in dubious conditions at the state fairgrounds until they were transferred to Bloomington in 1939. Changes in temperature and humidity, as well as a few rude jobs in shipping, took their toll on the paintings. Benton was on hand in 1940 to advise on the arrangement of the mural panels in their new homes and to supervise any necessary cleaning and restoration. Sixteen years later, he drafted instructions for those who were assigned the job of cleaning the murals again. Unfortunately, Benton's cleaning solvents were too strong, and the crew had been too energetic, for the paint surface, already fragile, was badly abraded in some areas.

By the early 1980s, the condition of the Benton murals had become a cause for concern, particularly in Woodburn Hall, where the controversial Ku Klux Klan subject (discussed by James H. Madison in this issue) drew repeated vandalism. Led by professor of art history Bruce Cole and the Indiana University Art Museum's director (then curator) Adelheid Gealt, the university raised funds to conserve the two panels in Woodburn and the six panels in the University Theatre. A team of conservators headed by Martin Radecki of the Indianapolis Museum of Art joined IUAM conservators Dana Tomme and Cathy Metzger to complete the work. Ten years later, when plans for the renovation of the auditorium were under discussion, the IUAM's current paintings conservator, Margaret Contompasis, realized that the lobby murals needed to be protected from the ravages of construction. She suggested that the period when the building was closed was the ideal time to clean and treat the paintings as needed. Tests by Contompasis and Radecki indicated that their attention had come just in time. The murals were dislustered and flaking under a coating of darkened varnish and grime. Recognizing the importance of the murals to the university, the state, and the nation, the National Endowment for the Arts declared the project the most important current conservation treatment in the country. A similar appeal to the Getty Grant Program also brought funds to match support from the university, the NEA, and many private donors.

A new team under Radecki's supervision moved to Bloomington in May 1998 to join forces with the IUAM staff. Working on a false floor built directly beneath the lower edge of the paintings, the conservators carefully in-painted and retouched the paintings, removed grime and discolored varnish, and reduced the tension created by the egg-yolk layer. Their work required patience. The losses were then covered with varnish to emulate the luster of the glazed surface Benton preferred when he placed the finish coats. The auditorium reopens in the fall of 1999, their work of history at Butler University.

The problems latent in Benton's unorthodox technique were then compounded by the peripatetic history of the murals. Painted in the Old Germania beer hall on South Delaware Street in Indianapolis, the panels were lowered on ropes five stories to the street, where they were loaded on a truck and conveyed to Chicago. Returned to the city six months later, the murals were stored in dubious conditions at the state fairgrounds until they were transferred to Bloomington in 1939. Changes in temperature and humidity, as well as a few rude jobs in shipping, took their toll on the paintings. Benton was on hand in 1940 to advise on the arrangement of the mural panels in their new homes and to supervise any necessary cleaning and restoration. Sixteen years later, he drafted instructions for those who were assigned the job of cleaning the murals again. Unfortunately, Benton's cleaning solvents were too strong, and the crew had been too energetic, for the paint surface, already fragile, was badly abraded in some areas.

By the early 1980s, the condition of the Benton murals had become a cause for concern, particularly in Woodburn Hall, where the controversial Ku Klux Klan subject (discussed by James H. Madison in this issue) drew repeated vandalism. Led by professor of art history Bruce Cole and the Indiana University Art Museum's director (then curator) Adelheid Gealt, the university raised funds to conserve the two panels in Woodburn and the six panels in the University Theatre. A team of conservators headed by Martin Radecki of the Indianapolis Museum of Art joined IUAM conservators Dana Tomme and Cathy Metzger to complete the work. Ten years later, when plans for the renovation of the auditorium were under discussion, the IUAM's current paintings conservator, Margaret Contompasis, realized that the lobby murals needed to be protected from the ravages of construction. She suggested that the period when the building was closed was the ideal time to clean and treat the paintings as needed. Tests by Contompasis and Radecki indicated that their attention had come just in time. The murals were dislustered and flaking under a coating of darkened varnish and grime. Recognizing the importance of the murals to the university, the state, and the nation, the National Endowment for the Arts declared the project the most important current conservation treatment in the country. A similar appeal to the Getty Grant Program also brought funds to match support from the university, the NEA, and many private donors.

A new team under Radecki's supervision moved to Bloomington in May 1998 to join forces with the IUAM staff. Working on a false floor built directly beneath the lower edge of the paintings, the conservators carefully in-painted and retouched the paintings, removed grime and discolored varnish, and reduced the tension created by the egg-yolk layer. Their work required patience. The losses were then covered with varnish to emulate the luster of the glazed surface Benton preferred when he placed the finish coats. The auditorium reopens in the fall of 1999, their work of history at Butler University.

George Gelb

Separated by forty feet, ninety years, and a conceptual revolution in architecture and design, two Marion County courthouses stand to front to this in 1961 bass photograph.

In the foreground is the courthouse's contribution to the 1876 centennial year. Exuberant and eclectic, it is a study in the elaboration of the Second Empire style. Renaissance orders parade around its window lines, while modern cast-iron railings and balconies compete with statuesque and triumphant stairways for our attention. Built in an era of intense political competition, it is a palace of popular sovereignty.

In the background is the city and county's joint contribution to the modern resurgence of downtown Indianapolis. Solidly vertical and starkly functional, it is a series of glass and stone facades that affirms the best and the worst in modernism. Built in an era of bureaucratic efficiency, it is a corporate headquarters placed at the service of government.

Don't credit the new structure to Unigov, that merger of many city and county fusions created by the Indiana General Assembly in 1965. The City-County Building appeared almost a decade earlier. The building peaks to a flexible, adaptive spirit in government services that anticipates, rather than follows, the better-known features of the Unigov era. Complement the planners for their ability to make many clocks strike as one, bringing city hall and county offices into one location. But County Building was one of government's contributions to that new city, surely incorporating the hope that it would soon be dwarfed by other new structures supported by increased private resources.

Forty years ago, there was no room for the old alongside the new on the courthouse block. The 1876 structure was scheduled to remain only long enough for the move to the new structure to be completed. But far from winning universal acclaim that another old building was going, the ensuing demolition became one of the defining events in the emergence of the current historic preservation movement in Indianapolis. Just as the wreckers' ball was about to strike, a court injunction delayed the process to permit alternatives to be sought. Angry responses by the builders only served to increase media attention, and a well-publicized auction of artifacts from the building provided symbolic souvenirs that are still treasured by many local residents. The demolition thus became a rallying issue for those skeptical of the untested benefits of development.

All who have been touched by the modern historic preservation movement have seen comparable scenes somewhere else in their communities as a result of the political and development clash over private or public space. Today we are often assured that preservationists and developers are natural partners, with far more interests in common than in conflict. But this photo captures a moment when those two concerns stared at one another across a narrow space too deep to admit compromise, giving visual expression to the stark choices that admirers of Hoosier history sometimes confront as they strive to affirm both the present and the past.

George Gelb is professor of history at Butler University.

ONE PEOPLE

Todd Gould

(Photo on page 54)

She was one member of the crowd who gathered early on the morning of 27 July 1969 outside St. John's Missionary Baptist Church in downtown Indianapolis. She and so many others came from all areas of the state—Evansville, Marion, Hammond, Fort Wayne, Gary—to take part in a march for equal rights. Whether this unidentified little girl in pigtails knew it or not, she was making more than a social statement. She was making history.

The hot July day, approximately fifteen hundred civil rights workers and their families clamored around the front steps of St. John's. The church's pastor, Rev. Andrew J. Brown, a lieutenant of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the head of the local chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, addressed them: "You can see God in everything that is made. But mostly you can see Him among His fellow humans who years to be free—free from poverty and free from oppression."

After the short speech, Brown led the multitude in a three-mile march from downtown to Gov. Edgar D. Whitcomb's residence at 4343 North Meridian Street. The demonstrators stood side by side, young and old, black and white, marching and chanting phrases such as "Freedom Now" and "I Am Somebody."

Civil rights marches in the 1960s were potential lighting rods for racial violence in many United States