

The Gateway to the Frontier, Indianapolis Riverfront at the National Road



As what almost could be thought of as the prologue for this book, as you will see, what happened along the Indianapolis downtown riverfront had a significant impact on the city, the state of Indiana and the entire United States. Because this was where the National Road, the first government road to connect Washington, DC to

the Mississippi (it stopped 50 miles short of it in Vandalia, IL), crossed the White River in 1834, here was an important doorway to the settlement of the West. The lands west of this 700-foot wide body of water were

thought of as the frontier until a wood covered bridge made them accessible.

620 miles in length, the National Road spawned a proliferation of roadside inns where food and drink and a night's lodging could be had. These were also liberally called taverns because alcohol was served. In Ohio and Pennsylvania, there were as many as one per mile to serve the needs of the more than 90 trailers an hour that used it. This important arterial also gave birth to a plethora of blacksmith shops and livery stables (horse hotels).

Conestoga wagons, the "tractor-trailers" of the 19th Century, pulled by six horses and capable of carrying up to six tons, were big users of this roadway. It was common for them to haul produce from frontier farms to the East Coast, returning with staples such as coffee and sugar for the western settlements.

In both coming and going, it was the National Road Bridge over the White River that regularly supported the combined weights of the oxen, their loads and the trailers themselves. Along with all the other forms of travel that would follow, this water crossing moved massive amounts of freight until it was taken out of service in 1902 as we will show you.

A busy thoroughfare, on the road and bridge there were also stagecoaches that could average 60 to 70 miles in

one day. At one time, in fact, there were 12 different stagecoach lines operating in the state of Indiana. Some of them carried mail, one of the most important official uses of the road. Thousands of others moved people through Illinois to St Louis where they could buy the prairie schooner they could actually ride in (Conestoga wagon drivers walked or rode horseback next to their oxen) to settle in the West. By 1849, a fair number of these were gold seekers traveling from the East because after the White River, in 1847, a bridge had been built over the Wabash River at the Indiana/Illinois border.

In quantifying the traffic volumes, one man remembered as many as 20 stagecoaches in a line at one time on the road. In 1848, another eye witness counted 133 Conestoga wagons in one day. Nor did he bother to account for the equal amount of prairie schooners and other wagons that were pulled by one, two, three, four or five horses. Besides all the animal drawn trailers, voluminous numbers of people traveled on the National Road by foot or rode it horseback.

In the 1840's one Hoosier was heard to say, "From morning till night, there was a constant rumble of wheels... when the rush was the greatest there was never a minute that wagons were not in sight, and as a rule, one company of wagons was closely followed by another." During many periods, traffic was so constant, another traveler noted,

that the wagons were so closely strung together, they resembled a train upon its tracks.

As we touched on above, the lands along side the National Road were also kept busy. One man remembered a night at an inn/tavern where there were 30 six-horse teams parked in the wagon yard, 100 mules in a pen, 1,000 hogs in an enclosure and as many cattle in the field.

As a road that genuinely shaped America, Indianapolis industry quickly learned that being near the White River and National Road could work to their advantage. They could use it to power their machines, and, in the not too distant future, use America's first interstate to ship their goods to far away markets

Because of such advantage, for several decades, from 1862 on, Kingan Pork grew on both sides of the river to become the country's top meat provider. They also introduced this Nation's industry to room and building refrigeration, the meat locker, and the American public to sliced bacon.

From one of the first bridge's to cross it, the first car headlight was tested and then regularly shipped overnight to the rest of the country from Pesto-O-Lite, a nearby nationwide business concern. While at its southern edge, Diamond Chain, made bicycles as well as cars affordable, Ford's assembly line possible and the Wright Bros plane a

reality. We'll talk about these manufacturing concerns later in the book.

Having devolved into a dying wasteland by the 1960's,

Downtown Indianapolis in the early 1960s had become a place for only work and government. There were no cultural attractions and most businesses closed between 5:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. The trash in the central canal and the abandoned meat packing plants along the White River produced a foul odor that kept people away from downtown. Pigeons even became such a problem that until 1970 the city was paying four men to shoot pigeons every Sunday. These four men would average over 400 pigeons per Sunday but families, especially with small children, were displeased with this method.

Butler Univ graduate thesis by Maxwell Hackman entitled "Unigov: The Indianapolis Response to Urban Sprawl"

however, in 1976, a new Mayor, Bill Hudnut, came to power. According to the book, *The Hudnut Years* (IU Press, 1995), when asked, "What would you do if you were called to lead a city known as Naptown, India-No-Place or Brickyard in a Cornfield?", he said he would change the city from India-No-Place to India-SHOW-place. From 1976 to 1992, he was a whirlwind of activity, an unstoppable force.

In my study of Hudnut, I came across the article at [this link](#) written in California in 1986 for the "Los Angeles Times". Two thousand miles away, they had taken notice of the miraculous transformation that was taking place here in this city.

And this article was written before the Indy Canal was built. Nor did the world-renowned Indianapolis Cultural Trail: A Legacy of Gene & Marilyn Glick ([Virtual Tour](#)) even exist.

As another one of his goals, Hudnut succeeded at getting Indianapolis known as the Amateur Sports Capital of the World with world class playing fields, swimming facilities, bicycle greenways, even the Major Taylor Velodrome built in 1982. It was also Hudnut who led the charge that built the Hoosier Dome in 1984 before Indianapolis even had an NFL team (it was replaced by Lucas Oil Stadium in 2006).

During Hudnut's tenure, emboldened by his magic, by the 1980's, many other city leaders jumped in to help reinvent this population center. With regard to the riverfront, the public was also excited. Countless meetings were held. Many with citizen participation. Design contests were produced. Plans were drawn and redrawn and exhibited and re-exhibited, sometimes more than a few times. It would all be called White River State Park. All 250 acres. In the early 90's the bulldozers got to work

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The Indianapolis Riverfront that resulted, has become a

showpiece celebrated the word around. And because Indianapolis is the most centrally located big city in America, where well over half of the USA can get to it in under eight hours driving time, as the shining trophy that its riverfront is, it inspires hope. Nicknamed the Crossroads of America, it plants the seed for what is possible in other population centers all across this nation.

Or as the Indianapolis Tourist Bureau says:

This year, over 28 million people will arrive in Indianapolis. And leave reluctantly.

To really enjoy this huge 250-acre swath of waterfront property, a bicycle is an important tool. Toward that end, the internationally celebrated King of Greenways and National Bicycle Greenway Director, Ray Irvin, made his mark the world around by making the Indianapolis riverfront a true bicycle heaven. Adding just more reason why the National Bicycle Greenway has relocated to Indianapolis the city with the most bike friendly downtown in these United States and quite arguably all the world.

Indianapolis Riverfront Evolution

Timeline

1820 John McCormick builds first cabin in Indianapolis

1821 Wilson's Mill, a flour mill just south of Fall Creek, outside the city limits devised by Alexander Ralston when he plotted Indianapolis

1831 Robert Hanna steamboat reaches Indianapolis, then runs aground

1830-1835 Indianapolis Steam Mill, a continuation of Wilson's Mill (first incorporated Indianapolis biz, saw mill, gristmill, wool mill, 7-acres) locates next to and north of National Road wooden bridge

1834 National Road Bridge (wood & covered) completed

1836-39 Indy Canal construction work

1845 Indianapolis Cotton Mill Company

1853 Indianapolis Steam Mill burns down

1862 Kingan Pork begins

1862 Salisbury Vinton Paper Mill (became Beveridge)

1864 Geisendorf Bros build a 5-story brick structure at Nat Rd Bridge where Steam Mill was located

1870 Washington Bridge completed

1870 Indianapolis Water Works

1873 David Gibson and his two brothers build largest flour (and grist) mill in Indiana on Washington Avenue near Blackford St (now on the Indy Canal,).

1881 Geisendorf Mill sold to George T. Evans who owns other mills in the area

1884 Brower & Love Cotton Mill

1895 Indiana Bleaching

1902 National Road Bridge dismantled

1902 Washington Bridge rebuilt

1905 W. Washington Street Park (Babe Ruth played here, a baseball stadium)

1909 Gibson Mill merges with Acme Mill and George Evans to become Acme Evans. (known also as E.Z. Bake Flour before Archer Daniels Midland purchased it in 1988)

1917 Fire burns Acme Evans mill. It is replaced with a 9-story structure

1952 Detroit-based Hygrade Corp. buys Kingan in 1952

1966 Hygrade closes

1967 Hygrade burns down

1979 White River State Park Construction (250 acres), begins 1999

1982 Washington Bridge closed to cars

1984 Bus Maintenance Yard at what is now the Zoo moves to old Dusenbergs Factory (started at zoo location 1882)

1985 Zoo Construction begins, Opens 1988

1986 to 2001 Indy Canal re-rebuild

1989 to 1999 Army Corps River Levee construction (first time 1935)

1989 Eiteljorg Museum

1994 Acme Evans Flour Mill demolished

1994 Washington Bridge retrofitted

1996 IMAX

1998 Perry W one of IPL's electric plants (brick building next to canal where NCAA is now, smokestack demolished, built 1910

1999 NCAA headquarters

2001 Beveridge Paper demolished

2002 IMAX merges with IN State Museum

2011 JW Marriott, 34 stories

Indianapolis population

1830 – 1,900 | 1850 - 8,091 | 1860 - 18,611 | 1870 - 48,244 | 1880 - 75,054 | 1890 - 105,436 | 1900 - 169,164 | 1910 - 233,650 | 1920 - 314,194

The White River in Indianapolis starts roughly 90 miles northeast of the Capital City, near Winchester, IN. Made up of two forks, what travels through Indy is known as the river's West Fork. Going west from Indianapolis, it reaches the East Fork, 130 car miles later near Petersburg, Indiana. From there it becomes one tributary for another hundred miles until it reaches the Wabash River which forms the border between Indiana and Illinois.

From its source, before it reaches Indianapolis, the West Fork of the White River travels through the medium sized cities of Muncie, and Anderson, about 60 and 43 car miles away, respectively. Throughout its course, this lazy

waterway offers a handful of mild rapids as it passes through remote woodlands, open space and a few small population centers. Dams are also sprinkled throughout the course of its shallow waters. These obstructions and its minimal water depth make it difficult to travel any worthy distance in a boat. Even water skiing, though legal, is rare.

By 1830, there were an estimated 1,900 people living in Indianapolis when they soon learned their river was not going to be a worthy transportation arterial. In 1831, eleven years after the city had become the state capital, the Robert Hanna steamboat got stuck in its waterway. The Hanna, built on the Ohio River in Jeffersonville, Indiana (home of America's largest inland shipbuilder, Jeffboat, which only recently shuttered its 80-acre riverfront yards laying off 278 workers in 2018. At its peak, it employed 1300 people), traveled from the Ohio to the Wabash before it reached the White River. Remarkably, especially in hindsight, on April 11 of that year, it reached Indianapolis with its payload, lumber and stone for the National Road bridge that would be completed in 1834.

It reached Indianapolis to great fanfare. People lined the river banks to welcome its arrival, proclamations were read from, a dinner was held. The following day, however, on its return trip, it ran aground a few miles away at Hog Island. There it stayed until winter, when the waters rose

again. The sandbars, tight turns and trees that had toppled its observation tower before it was grounded, sent out a message. No boat freight has traveled on the White River since.

As for its name. why it is called the White River is not absolute. To the Miami Indian tribe, who once called this part of Indiana their home, 'Wabash' meant 'water over white stones'. As such, it could be thought that since early white Indiana settlers also saw white pebbles in the waterway that ran across the state, as a way to delineate the two connected rivers from one another, one was given its Indian name and the other two were just shortened to 'White'.

About 700 feet wide where it passes thru Indianapolis, in front of what is now the NCAA headquarters complex, overlooking the river stands a plaque emblazoned boulder, maybe ten feet in height. Known as McCormicks Rock, it was here in 1820 that John McCormick, Jr., built a log cabin to make his the first settlement in Indianapolis. A key figure in Indianapolis history, the ten person group that had been commissioned by the new state's General Assembly to determine, a permanent spot for the Indiana capital, kept finding themselves returning to his spot for food and drink. His cabin had two rooms - one was his sleeping quarters, the other a tavern.....

At a pay rate of \$2 a day, called commissioners, they traveled by horseback and were gone for 27 days. In all, the group did not cover a lot of ground, roughly 50 miles. Here are a few of their diary entries complete with misspellings:

[..]

May 24, 1820 . . . Resolved that the Commissioners proceed diligently to explore that part of Township 16 of Range 3 East which they have not yet seen together with Townships 15 of Range 3 and 14 & 13 of Range 2 East—And the Board adjourned

Benjamin I. Blythe, the appointed clerk to the commissioners.

“we Set out for the mouth fall creek the Town we are now in is high Dry rich Bottom very large one of the most Beautiful on the river but Timber scarce . . . got to McCormicks who lives on the river quarter of a mile below the mouth of fall creek Last Kt I Staid in an Indian . . . Town . . . eat at the Table of a Frenchman who has long lived with the Indians and lives like them . . . alterede times Sinc 1813 when I was last here hunting the Indians with whom we now eat Drink and Sleep they have sold thier land for a Trifle and prepareing to leave the Country . . . (in which we are now hunting a site for the Seat of Govnt of our State) . . . “

John Tipton, commissioner

[..]

June 7, 1820 The Board met pursuant to adjournment when on Motion Resolved that we locate in Township 15 of Range 3 East at Sections 1 & 12 East and West Fractions 2 East Fraction 11 and as much on the East side of West Fraction 3 as by a line Beginning on the South side of said Fraction and running North or parallel with West line of said Fraction will make 4 Complete Sections in quantity On Motion Ordered that the Clerk make out the report accordingly which was done received and signed and the Board adjourned without day — — —

Benjamin I. Blythe, the appointed clerk to the commissioners.

. . . we met at McCormicks and on my motion the Commissioners came to a resolution . . .

John Tipton, commissioner

Meeting as a Board, it was on the June 7, 1820 date that they formally made the decision to move the state capital north to the area surrounding McCormick's cabin. It would be called Indianapolis and was 106 miles north of

Corydon, the capital at the time, located near the Ohio River at the bottom of the state. According to an 1819 General Land Office survey this land was made up of forest broken only by scattered brushy openings that contained streams and swamps. American beach and sugar maple predominated while Ohio Buckeye, black walnut, American slippery elm's, bitternut Hickory's, black cherry and sassafras were also proliferous.





Soon, in 1821, a Revolutionary War veteran, Isaac Wilson, built a flour mill next to McCormick, just south of Fall Creek. This was when Fall Creek entered the White River in two different spots, with a mill

race having been added as its southernmost stream to where NIFS, the National Institute of Fitness and Sport, is located today. After a disastrous flood ravaged Indianapolis in 1913, the federal Works Progress Administration, as part of a comprehensive flood protection plan, rerouted the creek so that it entered the White River further north, near 10th St.

As for Wilson's Flour Mill it used the Fall Creek mill race it built to power the watermill that ground its grain. Wilson died in 1823, but his son in law, Samuel Patterson, took over and ran the business soon teaming up with James

Blake and James Ray, who would go on to become state governor.

To take advantage of the new transportation highway that had entered town, in 1832, they moved their operation a small bit south to a 7-acre parcel near where the new National Road Bridge was being built. They called it the Indianapolis Steam Mill and the machinery it would use came from Cincinnati on the ill fated Robert Hanna steamboat that had also delivered material for the bridge.

The Steam Mill used the White River to power its water wheels that drove a gristmill, a sawmill and even a mill for wool carding. As a business, because it produced far more than could be sold locally, and to expand regionally they needed the markets the National Road Bridge would bring, it closed its doors in 1835. In 1853, it burned down. Ahead of its time when it opened, because Wilson Flour Mill was outside the city limits, the Steam Mill was celebrated as the first incorporated business in Indianapolis.

Numerous other mills, some fed by mill races, man-made streams that connected to Fall Creek, making everything from flour, cornmeal and stock feed, were in operation in the area. In the end, through mergers, acquisitions and death, in 1909 Acme Evans came to control all of the milling in the area. With their main mill, located along the

Indy Canal near Washington and Blackford, they survived a 1917 fire to build a nine-story mill.

With this new production facility, they would flourish selling EZ Bake Flour until the grain embargo (leveled against the Soviet Union in 1980 for their invasion of Afghanistan) slowed them to a crawl. In 1988, Archer Daniels Midland (ADM) purchased the operation and kept it going until 1994. It was then that its long reign as a flour mill ended when it was all demolished to make way for White River State Park.

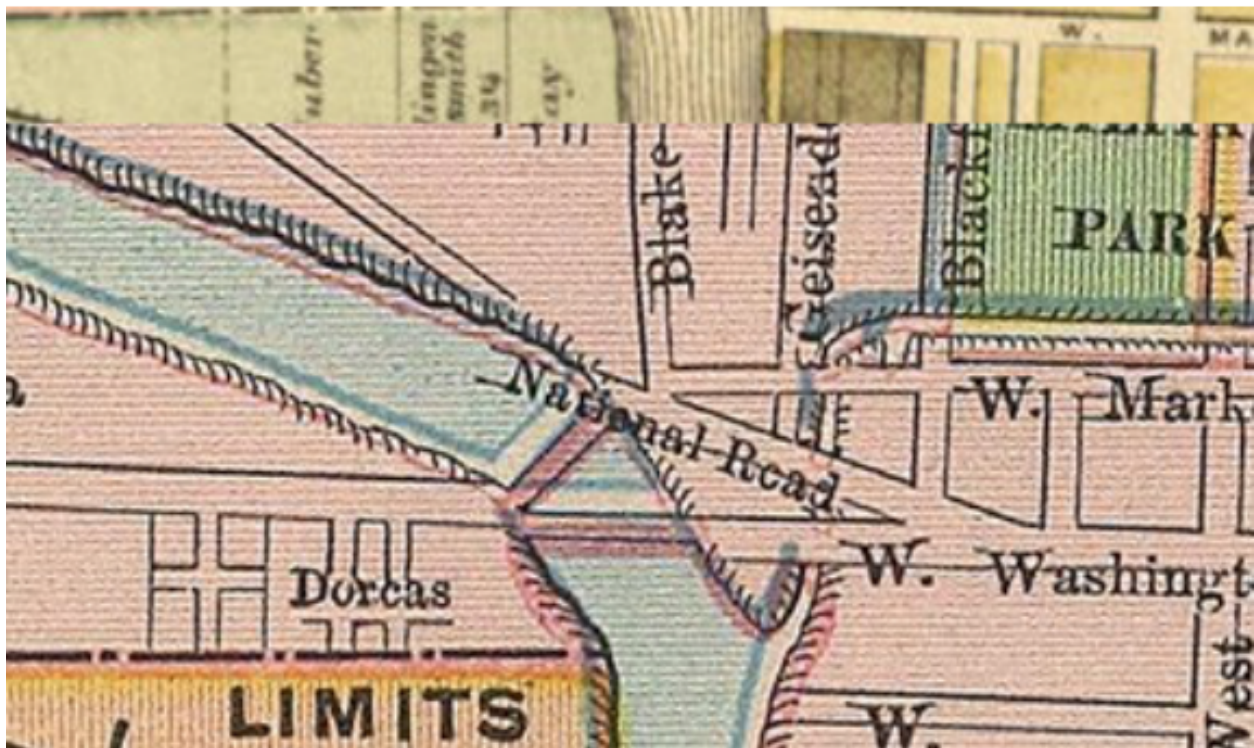
Until the National Road Bridge finally crossed it, the White River had served as a dividing line between the east and the frontier of the west. Here, near John McCormick's cabin, in 1827, the National Road stopped. This was so until the covered wooden bridge that the Robert Hanna steamboat had helped to build was completed in 1834. Like most bridges of its day, the National Road Bridge had a roof to keep its wooden road bed from rotting out because of rain and snow.



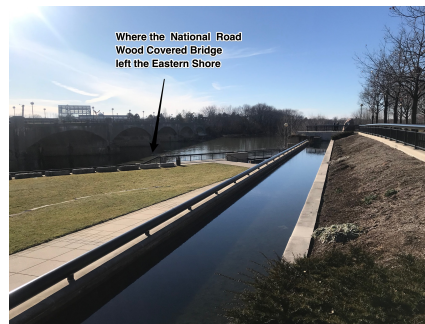
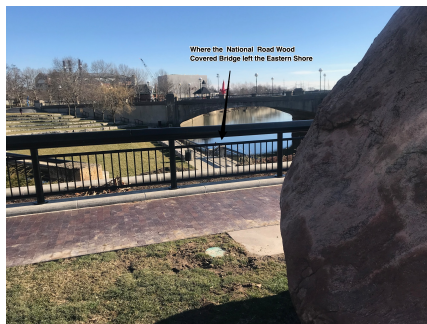


The National Road turned away from Washington St. just before where the Indy Canal is today. Near the elevators to the underground parking, this is marked by the kiosk this chapter opens with that honors the National Road. The plaque does not tell you where the road was though. In the above 1866 map of Marion County, registered at the Library of Congress, one can see that what was called Washington Ave, ran on an angle to just south of where Market St, from the State Capitol would have ended had it been built to reach the White River (note also the artistic liberty of placing a steamboat in the unnavigable waters). This location was chosen because this was where the river was the narrowest. Where the National Road Bridge left the eastern shore of the White River, today, is close to where the NCAA headquarters is located.

By the late 1860's, a bigger bridge was needed. So construction began on a bridge that would extend nearby Washington Street. Made out of iron, it left the downtown side a few hundred feet south of the National Road Bridge. Typical of early iron bridges, its road bed began with cast iron plates topped by clay and blast furnace slag.



Once it crossed the water in 1870, it met the old National Road on the western bank at pretty much the same spot. The two bridges co-existed until 1902 with the National Road Bridge functioning as a toll bridge and seeing less



and less use until the time came to widen the Washington St Bridge.

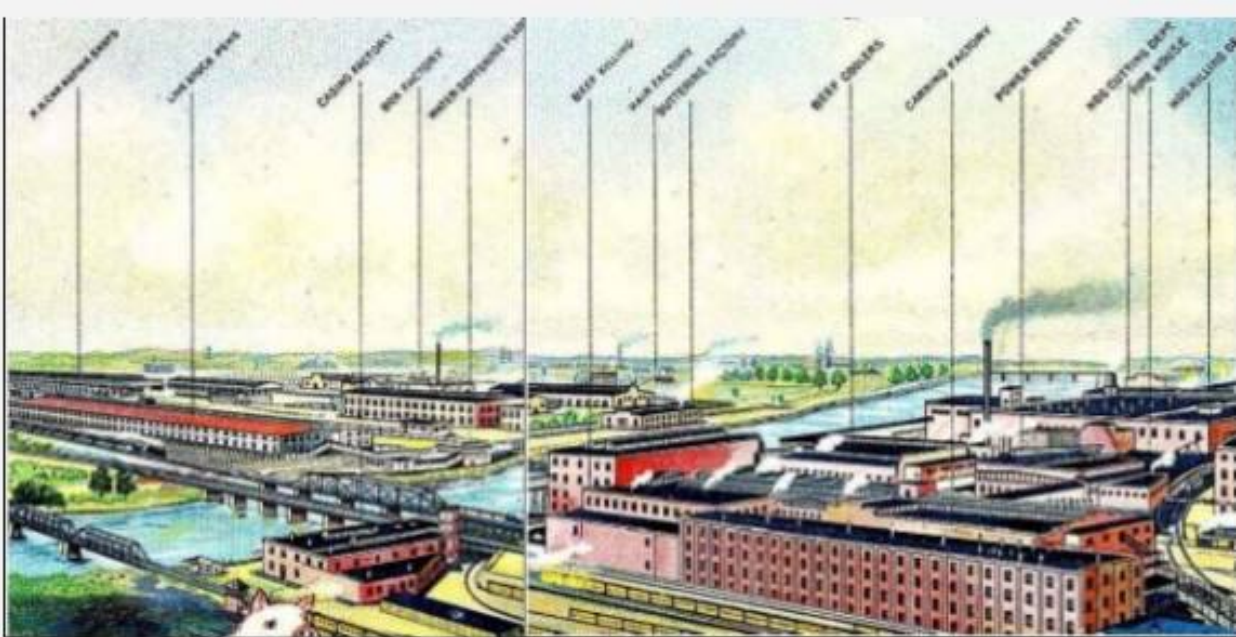
While the Washington Bridge was being rebuilt, the National Road Bridge made out of poplar (which is termite resistant) was dismantled because there was no way to enlarge the Washington Bridge approach with the covered bridge's approach in the way. Despite the fact that nothing was left behind to honor the pioneering water crossing, not even a marker, at least some of its wood would see another use. News reports of the day talk about how it was used symbolically to make courtroom gavels. Its poplar also became, a part of the barge that would help build other bridges up and down the White River.

As for traveling west over the water with both of these bridges out of service, this had become possible because another bridge had been built under a mile south. In 1894, an iron bridge had been constructed at Kentucky Ave. By 1904 the Washington St Bridge was up and running again.

In 1913, a flood took the new bridge out. It was rebuilt the next year and served the city until 1982 when it was closed to cars for good as a part of the White River State Park transformation called into law by the state General Assembly in 1979. As such, the car-free bridge with lawns, public art and colorful banners, a promenade connecting the Zoo and the Governor's Lawn of White River State Park, is what the rebuilt Washington St bridge of 1914 became in 1994.

Traveling back in history again, not long after the White River was crossed, in 1836, work began a few hundred yards away, on the Central Canal. A planned water highway, the Central Canal was supposed to reach all the way across the state, from Peru on the Erie Canal, to Evansville, 296 miles away on the Ohio River at the southern edge of the state. Because the Panic of 1837 bankrupted the state, however, construction stopped in 1839. In the end, only eight miles were built, all in the city of Indianapolis, all parallel to the White River, ending where it would have emptied into the river near Washington St.

A few decades passed before another big player came to the riverfront area. In 1862, Kingan Pork, or Kingan Reliable Meats as they began to call themselves, located south of the National Road Bridge's eastern approach. Behind the Indy Canal that used to run in back of the Water Works that is still there, and that we will talk about later, their many buildings would grow to occupy a lot of real estate. In time, they would come to take up 27 acres on both sides of the river where the Zoo, Victory Field (a baseball stadium) and music stage, all tenants now of White River State Park, are presently located.



Kingan was from Belfast, Ireland. At its peak, it stood at 5,000 mostly Irish employees and had become the most powerful economic force in the city and region. In the big

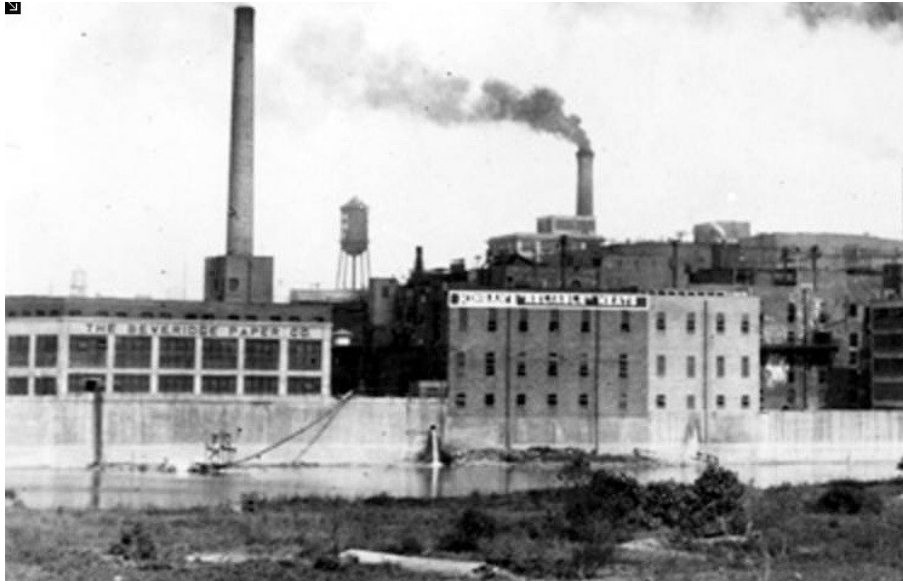
picture, because Kingan, reigned as the largest pork packing operation in the world, for a few decades, in the late 19th Century, Kingan made Indianapolis the center of the meat universe.

This was so because, unlike beef, which needed refrigeration, pork could be preserved with salt. As a result, most people in America and in Europe, ate pork. Before electricity and refrigeration became affordable and widespread, Kingan left an indelible impact on the American diet. In 1914, it led the way once again when it became the first meatpacker to sell sliced bacon.

Another way in which the riverfront played a leading role on the world stage was with the meat locker. It was invented here in 1868 by George Stockman, an engineer with Kingan & Co. His breakthrough was 18 years before the refrigerated rail car was invented so beef could be kept fresh.

It was this that enabled Kingan to be the world's first year-round meatpacking operation. To understand the impact of this innovation, consider that in his 1910 history of greater Indianapolis, historian Jacob P. Dunn, said:

"If Indianapolis wants to put up a monument for a citizen who did more for all the world than all her professional men and statesmen put together, she has the subject in George W. Stockman."



At the same time Kingan put down roots on the riverfront, the Salisbury Vinton Paper Mill opened its doors too. This is notable because this location became Beveridge Paper, a maker of folding boxboard, which, in 2001 was the last business to be torn down to make way for White River State Park. In its last years on the river, Beveridge made, colored construction paper for artists and schools as well as poster board. Because of the superior transportation system, rail and road, in Indianapolis, they shipped all over the world.

Another business that called the riverfront its home was the Indianapolis Cotton Mill. In 1868, they opened on the banks of the river. Until a fire burned its bottom two floors in 1884, it was located just north of where the Washington St bridge met the east side of the river. It was rebuilt and by the time it merged with Brower & Love, that we'll talk

about below, it was 300 feet long, three stories tall and 130 feet wide!

Indianapolis Water Company



The only building left standing today from the 19th century riverfront, a handsome one-story, brick structure with slate roof and copper finishings, is the Indianapolis Water Company. It began life in 1870 as the Water Works of Indianapolis. Though it is located well within a stone's throw from the White River, that is not where it got the water it sold and delivered to its Indianapolis customers.

Instead, it relied on the wells it dug. It was these wells that tapped into underground aquifers. As subterranean rivers that radiated out from the White River, the liquid they contained had been purified as it leached through the soil and sand between them and the waterway above.

The power for the machines, the steam turbines that sucked the water up to the surface, came from the Indy Canal that, like a dam, the building stood in front of on its way to the river. While as many as 25,000 Indianapolis settlers were already using wells of their own, the pumphouse operation pressurized the water it provided. Until it was retired and closed in 1969, it delivered both drinking water and pressured water for fire protection.

As a side note, in its original form, this pumphouse was shaped in the form of a 'T'. That changed in 1930 when a tornado took off the back half of the building.

A little over a decade later, another large employer came to the riverfront. In 1884, Brower & Love Cotton Mill took up residence on the river bank just north of the former Indianapolis Steam Mill. When they opened, they bought the Indianapolis Cotton Mill as we said above. Soon, 300 people were working for this merged operation.



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1916



The 1940 neighborhoods you see are all now the IUPUI campus

From the cotton they processed, they made flour sacks. Twelve years later, in 1896, another sack making business, Bemis Bag, a company begun in 1858 in St. Louis, joined forces with Brower & Love. In order to whiten their products, because cotton came with dirt and other impurities, they combined resources to build another structure at their riverfront site, Indianapolis Bleaching.

Over a space of 11 acres and 400,000 square feet of building space, where the IUPUI playing fields are located now, Bemis stayed in operation until 1954. At one point there were as many as 700 people working for Bemis Bag. No longer in Indianapolis, Bemis has gone on to become a global manufacturer of flexible packaging products, with over 13,000 employees in locations all over the world.

Moving to the other side of the river, where the zoo is located now, the world's largest interurban street car system had its maintenance yard. From 1882 until 1953, the over 500 street cars, carrying some seven million passengers a year, all ended up here for service and repairs. When gas buses took over, they were also serviced here until 1985. It was then that they retrofitted the old Dusenbergs (once the most expensive car in the world) factory, a block away on Harding and Washington.

Next to the street car yards, they played baseball at what was called West Washington Street Park. Before that



Above photo thanks to the Schenectady Museum and Science Center from their GE Photographic Collection to Digitalballparks. Full Indianapolis Washington Park baseball collection at http://digitalballparks.com/AmerAssoc/IndyWash_640_1.html

though, Indianapolis baseball roots went all the way back to 1876 when the Indianapolis Westerns played at South Street Park which is now a parking lot for Banker's Life Field-house where the Indiana Pacers of the NBA play their basketball games. Known in 1877 as the Blues, in 1878, they were called the Indianapolis Hoosiers for one year when they played in the National Association of Professional Baseball Players (aka, the National League of today) that had formed the year before. When management ran out of money to pay their players,

Indianapolis sadly stopped being a Major League baseball city for good.

Relegated to the Minor Leagues in 1905, when West Washington Street Park was built, the American Association's AAA Minor league team, the Indianapolis Indians, played before 4,000 people. In 1909, the ball field was completely rebuilt, and the seating capacity was enlarged to 20,000, the most in the minor leagues. It also boasted the largest playing field of any minor league park, and was larger than many major league parks of its era. Aside from hosting the Indians, this venue was also home to the Indianapolis ABCs of the Negro National League from 1920 to 1926.

This baseball complex also featured some of the first lights for night baseball in all of America. In addition, two of the game's greatest players of all time, Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig even played an exhibition game here. On his last at bat, Babe, the Sultan of Swat, hit one so far out of the park, that Indianapolis locals talked about it for years.

In 1931, baseball moved a little over a mile and a half north, still on the river, to Bush Stadium, at 16th Street. In doing so, they brought the light standards from West Washington Park to the new stadium. There the Indianapolis Indians played from 1931 to 1996 until they came back. Only to the other side of the river.

They returned to a beautiful baseball complex called Victory Field. A few hundred yards from West Washington Park, this park is on land once occupied by the Kingan pork people. Now, it is one more attraction in White River State Park.

As for Kingan Pork, in 1952, the once hard charging Kingan Pork packers sold to a Detroit-based company called Hygrade Corp. Hygrade stayed in business until 1966. However a year later, when fire destroyed the business, the rest of the riverfront entered the several decade period of decay this chapter opens with.

Oscar McCulloch School



On Washington St, one block before the Indy Canal, stood Oscar McCulloch School, a victim of the blight that had cursed this area. It was originally built in 1915 to serve disadvantaged children. In addition to serving as a school for

children, it also taught citizenship classes to the immigrant families in the neighborhood on the west side of the river. Right before it closed in 1978, it was a school for mentally disabled and emotionally disturbed students. It acted in that capacity from 1968 - 1978.



Waning in attendance, and much underused, it was razed in 1981 to make way for White River State Park. As a result of the outrage the early stages of its demolition brought about, its front facade was saved and relocated to the nearby

Indiana State Museum, which, like the Eiteljorg, also has an entrance on the Indy Canal.

City leaders, following Mayor Hudnut's lead, in 1984 also saw, what is now called the Indy Canal, as a way to bring their city back to life. Indy Canal was the name given to the Central Canal abandoned since 1839, where it runs though downtown Indianapolis. In 1986 work began on rebuilding it.

Its water would come from the underground river construction crews hit in 1982 when building the nearby, 38-story One America Tower. Before this water reaches the Canal, the One America people turn it into steam for their own heating system. The warm water it becomes enters the Canal under the Ohio St. bridge across from the Indiana Historical Society.

A semi-dry ditch full of trash and blown in waste, as Ray Irvin describes it below, the canal was also punctuated by

stagnant ponds before it was transformed into the international attraction it has become. **HERE** is a 1984 TV news video of what city leaders had envisioned. Nine million dollars later, in 2001, the last of three Indy Canal renovation sections was completed. In all, the full length of the 1.5 mile long water paradise became a 3-mile loop, complete with sidewalks, benches, water walls, fountains, mural art, beautiful landscaping, pedestrian overwalks, even a bike bridge, etc.

In the water, during the summer, there are pedal boats and kayaks as well as gondolas piloted by opera singers. There are swimming and canoe races and the water portion of a triathlon. Along its sidewalks are four and six-person rental bikes and trikes, all means of public forms of human propulsion, fun runs and walks, cafes, courtyard music festivals, benefits, art shows and museum entrances.

Just a couple of years after the Canal started to be transformed, in 1989, the Army Corp of Engineers began to increase the size and height of the levees it first worked on in 1935. To both sides of the river where it ran from Victory Field, to as far north as 10th St, the Corp also added a bike path. This work lasted for ten years until 1999.

Coming back to the streetcar yards and their 1984 departure, the next year construction began on the

Indianapolis Zoo. It opened to the public in 1988. Begun in 1964 at George Washington Park on East 30th Street, it now receives over a million visitors per year at its location along the White River.

As the world class institution that it is, it has the distinction of being the first zoo in the world to be accredited as a zoo, aquarium and botanical garden (throughout the grounds there are 23,000 plants). In comparison to other big city zoos, as the fluctuating measure that such rankings are, in 2017, the Indianapolis Zoo was judged second in the world behind the world famous San Diego Zoo. No matter the judging panel or criteria that has been set, the Indianapolis Zoo still hovers in and out of the top ten animal exhibitions in all the world!

Inside its 60 acres, there are 3,800 animals of more than 320 species and subspecies. The Indianapolis Zoo is revered throughout the world for its cutting-edge elephant reproduction research. It was here that the first and second African elephants in the world were successfully conceived and born through artificial insemination. And recently, the Indianapolis Zoo was named one of the best zoos for orangutans by Zoophoria.net.

Where the Zoo meets the White River, there is a bike path motorists do not see that is a lifeline to transportation cyclists who live on the city's west side. Here Mr.

Greenway, **Ray Irvin** (for his charismatic work as a leader of the riverfront transformation, Ray was given the Distinguished Hoosier award by Governor Frank O'Bannon) talks about how this beautiful bikeway came about, as well as other important history in this area:

“Sasaki and Assoc. from Boston MA, worked on the design of the original master plan for White River and the Old Canal Channel downtown. Ray R Irvin and Assoc. is listed on the master plan as part of that team along with Russell Ernstberger of Reasite and the Storrow Kinsella people. We had countless meetings, presented designs and displayed our design work to the public at every opportunity. The Old Canal downtown was a semi-dry ditch full of trash and blown in waste. I also worked with then Mayor, Bill Hudnut, and Jim Ridenour, who was chairman of the White River State Park (WRSP) planning commission. Ridenour had been the National Parks Director and founder of the Eppley School at Indiana University.

The original plan for the Indianapolis Zoo, also being finalized at that time, was to put a concrete wall between the Zoo and the White River. I found that totally not in keeping with our celebration of nature and wildlife and

Indianapolis's only remaining natural resource, so the WRSP commission hired Angela Danadjieva, a prominent Landscape Architect from California, who had worked a lot with natural large stone formats of native stone art and design. She proposed an Indiana natural stone wall that would serve as a backdrop for the zoo and afford a promenade along the White River.



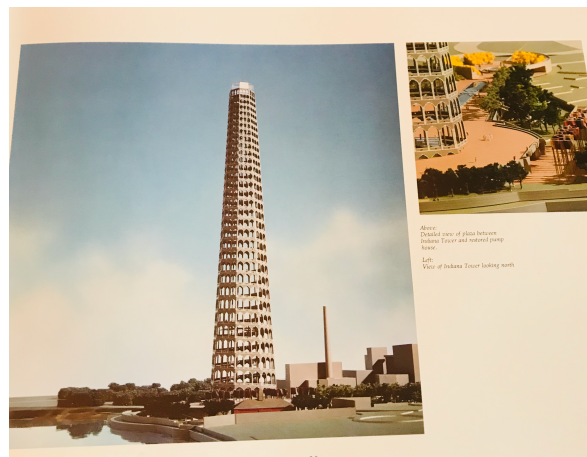


The Indiana Lime Stone Industry donated 1,188 stones (boulders), “flawed stones that builders had rejected” and they were trucked two at a time from all over southern Indiana. They had them lined up on the east side of the river where the old paper company (Beveridge) was located. Angela then had many of them moved to where they are now where they serve as the backdrop for the zoo. Along the path behind the zoo that resulted, we etched into the rock the story of the Indiana limestone industry and all the nation’s great structures, such as the Empire State Building, Lincoln Memorial, Grand Central Station and the Pentagon, etc, that were built with Indiana limestone. Where the path gets close to the road, we built a small semi-circle theater for gatherings and talks about the White River environments.”



A whole nation of youth is following the example Ray set.

This 750 foot tower was from a 1981 report that took the form of a beautiful white, coffee table book. It was called the HNTB Master Plan Team Report proposal for what they were calling the White River Park. It never got built but lots of proposals were floated.





When the wrecking balls, earth movers and construction crews finally got to work on the east side of the river, in 1989 the first building to be completed was The Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art.

The work was non stop as earth movers and bull dozers gave shape to the canvas on which the public and landscape architects had painted their vision. In 1996, another huge building, the IMAX theatre, was completed, not far from the Eiteljorg, also with an entrance on the Canal.

Then as if almost a signal that an old era had passed, in 1998, the 300-foot tall smokestack that had been constructed in 1910 for the Indianapolis Power and Light (IPL) coal fired power plant came tumbling down! One of two electricity makers close to each other here in the city, this one was located next to the Indy Canal across the water from ADM, formerly Acme Evans Milling. As everything below it was crushed into rubble and hauled away, it had stood strong and tall until the last days of the old industrial riverfront.

It wasn't long after the smokestack demolition, in 1999, that the landmark NCAA national headquarters built to replace IPL, overlooking both the White River and the Indy Canal, was opened for business. Made up of three iconic buildings, they additionally renovated the old IPL power

plant offices. A handsome three-story brick building, it became the National Federation of State High School Associations. There is even a museum next to the river called the Hall of Champions. Open to the public they use it as a backdrop for special announcements as well as for exhibitions and conferences.

The last building to go as the Riverfront was reinvented, as we said above, was Beveridge Paper. It was demolished in 2001.

The next year, 2002, the Indiana State Museum was added on to the IMAX theatre building. With the museum addition, all of the big pieces for White River State Park were all now in place. The work of fine tuning the all new park would begin.



As testimony to how massively changed this area had become, with the closure of as many as 50 businesses, 14 streets were either removed or altered per this graphic at a talk entitled "Lost Intersections" given in Nov 2018 by Indiana Historical Society researcher, Jordan Ryan.

Who the 250-acre White River State Park claims as tenants & other assets:

- Indianapolis Zoo
- White River Gardens
- Victory Field (home of Indianapolis Indians Baseball team)

- Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art
- Indiana State Museum
- IMAX Theater (inside the Indiana State Museum – Park operated)
- NCAA Headquarters
- NCAA Hall of Champions
- National Federation of State High School Associations
- National Institute of Fitness and Sport (on Indiana University owned land)

As well as its open areas:

Military Park | Indy Canal (White River to West St.) | Old Washington St. Bridge | Celebration Plaza & Amphitheater
Governor's Lawn | Pumphouse Amphitheater | Terraced Gardens



White River Promenade & Amphitheater across from the zoo with NCAA and NIFS out of the picture at left

And all of this magic began because of one man's cabin, now commemorated by McCormick's Rock. It will be next to this location, on the old Washington Street Bridge, now an esplanade,



that our 17th annual **National Bicycle Greenway Mayors' Ride** will celebrate the 200-year birthday of Indianapolis with this **reception** on Sunday Sept 27, 2020. Public welcome.



In helping Martin krieg research the Indianapolis riverfront now occupied by the 250-acre White River State Park, for his book, "How Indianapolis Built America", I stand behind the title he has given to the chapter that introduces his publication -

"The Gateway to the West,
Indianapolis Riverfront at the National Road"

In my work as an historian, some of which was done for the Indiana State Museum, I have studied the population shifts that occurred in this state as a result of events that occurred elsewhere in the nation. From Oregon Trail pioneers in search of gold in California or homestead opportunities in Oregon, Mormon Trail pilgrims headed to Salt Lake City or those seeking to populate Kansas to make it a slave-free state, the largest majority of these settlers, an average of 90 an hour, crossed over the White River on the National Road wood covered bridge of 1834.

As Martin and I tracked down the businesses and other activity that took place in this area, it has become abundantly clear to us that not only is this the cradle of the Crossroads of America, here where the White River met the National Road, was the dividing line between the unknown of the frontier and the already settled east. And it is his chapter that shows how, in bridging this gap, it was the National Road wood covered bridge history forgot about, that gave birth to the development of the Indianapolis riverfront and its downtown as it helped to open up the West.

Brigette Cook Jones

Director Hancock County Tourism and Visitor Center
Indiana History, James Whitcomb Riley and Little Orphan
Annie authority