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## Cadle Tabernacle: Indy's home of fire and brimstone

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**T**HE CADLE TABERNACLE, an old-time-religion revival hall that looked like a Spanish Mission, once occupied most of a city block at the corner of New Jersey and Ohio streets across from what was then City Hall. The tabernacle was located on the very spot where 21st century city dwellers now reside in the townhome development known as Firehouse Square.

When it was built in 1921, Cadle Tabernacle seated 10,000 and cost \$305,000. From within its stucco walls, owner/revivalist E. Howard Cadle preached his message of fire and brimstone into the radio ethers and across the United States.

Cadle found his life's calling through a much-publicized redemption. His epiphany changed his life and moved tens of thousands to become his followers when he published his story in an autobiography, *"How I Came Back."* As he recounted it, Cadle was born in 1884, in Fredericksburg, Indiana. In his early adult years he became a gambler and a drunk. Hard living brought him to a health crisis and in 1914 his doctor told him he had only six months to live. Cadle's mother prayed long and hard for his life and, when it became apparent that he didn't die, he attributed his survival to his mother's prayers and his conversion to Christianity.

Pledging to pay back his saved life, Cadle channeled his



Indiana State Library Picture Collection, Marion County Churches

▲ Cadle Tabernacle sat on land which is now occupied by Firehouse Square townhomes.

new-found religious fervor and eventually became a fiery evangelist. With that goal, he built the Cadle Tabernacle, a Spanish-Mission style building of whitewashed walls and red-tiled roof. The Ohio Street façade was modeled after the Alamo with tall towers on both sides of the arched entrance. Inside those clean, white walls Cadle's radio program made a stand against the tainted life of drunkenness, gambling and dissolution that Cadle himself had enjoyed prior to his conversion experience.

Cadle built the tabernacle from the proceeds of his days as an automobile salesman, and from the money earned at his chain of shoe repair stores and fruit juice stands. He kept it running from the contributions of the thousands of radio listeners who tuned into his weekly "Nation's Family Prayer

## **CADLE TABERNACLE / page 2**

Period.” The program began in 1931 and was picked up by WLW radio in Cincinnati in 1933 and broadcast over a large multi-state region in those years of strong AM radio with few programming options.

Today, Benny Hinn heals the lame and halt on his TV program. From the 1930s through 1942 Cadle healed the sick of heart through his radio ministry. His organization distributed radios to pastorless churches as far away as rural Kentucky and he preached his conversion message so successfully he brought in 4,000 letters a week.

Although Cadle’s earlier jobs might have made him wealthy, his old-time religion kept him that way. He drove a Cadillac, owned an airplane and managed to keep up with the \$100,000 a year operating expenses of the tabernacle. His church’s motto was “No creed but Christ, no law but love, no Book but the Bible.” All donations accepted. Time magazine’s 1939 article about him was entitled “Cash & Cadle.”

Cadle’s the-Lord-can-do attitude made good radio. The New York Times dubbed him the “evangelist of the air,” a moniker others later claimed, but probably applied first to Cadle and his generation of radio evangelists. In 1939, Life magazine published a five-page photo spread about him, calling him the latest in a “long line of free-lance revivalists” who were “exhorting U.S. sinners to repentance.”

In 1942, E. Howard Cadle went on to bigger media market when he died at the young age of 58. His wife, Ola M. Cadle, became president and director of the tabernacle. She and Cadle’s son, Buford, and daughters, Helen and Virginia Ann, ran the family evangelism business. In 1952, they began to air a television program based at the tabernacle.

After Ola Cadle’s death in 1955, the ministry and the building began a rapid decline. The organization rented out the building for civic events which included the annual Indiana State Teacher’s Association conferences and Shortridge High School graduations, as well as Ku Klux Klan rallies.

In 1968, according to the “Encyclopedia of Indianapolis,” Indiana National Bank purchased the tabernacle and razed it to make space for a parking lot. In the 2000s, the parking lot gave way to suburban-style housing development.

E. Howard Cadle and his nationally known Cadle Tabernacle are part of an Indianapolis lost to memory and wiped from the city’s ecology. But, if you ever think you feel compelled to forego whatever sin you were contemplating as you pass the intersection of Ohio and New Jersey streets, you just might be tuning in to E. Howard Cadle, reaching out to you over the radio waves of the afterlife.

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