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# ARCHIVES

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## Historic maps tell stories of mixed-use development

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A RECENT PROPOSAL FOR REDEVELOPMENT in a historic Downtown neighborhood stretched out almost interminably at the Indianapolis Historic Preservation Commission. It wasn't the modern design of the proposed new structure that raised the ire of neighborhood residents, but rather the intrusion (in their view) of mixed-use retail space into their residential setting.

Eventually, IHPC decided in favor of the developer but some residents continued to argue that retail has no place in a neighborhood that was historically residential.

Lacking our very own "Way-Back Machine," we can't go back in time to check the accuracy of that argument, but historic Sanborn and Baist maps, available to us with a few strokes on our computer pads, allow us to make a virtual trip into the past. The minute details that made these fire insurance maps important at the time they were created now allow us to get a feeling of what life was like in an urban neighborhood back in the day.

Anyone who is a historyphile should bookmark the IUPUI Library Digital Collections website on their computer. Wonders exist in that cyber location. Among them are maps of Indianapolis from its early years.

And one thing that jumps off the pages of historic maps is the amount of commercial, warehousing and even light-industrial establishments located along the fringes of and even within current-day residential districts. For instance, in 1887 the neighborhood we now call Chatham Arch had livery stables, a drug store, barber shop, tin shop, hardware store, a grocery, a carpenter shop, an "overall factory," and



▲ A hardware store and a plumbing supply store once occupied the first floor and a Masonic Lodge had its home on the upper stories of the Bushman building at 11th Street and College Avenue.

even a coal yard in and around its present-day boundaries. (Chatham Arch, by the way, is non-historic nomenclature for a district that didn't have a cohesive neighborhood identity until the last quarter of the 20th century.)

Another example in today's Chatham Arch is the "Bushman Block," still standing today at the corner of College Avenue and 11th Street. The building once housed a Masonic Hall on the third floor over a hardware store and a plumbing store downstairs. The current owners have restored the downstairs storefronts, turning them into office space. Upstairs, condo owners now live where the mysteries of the Masonic order once held sway. Across the street, an

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early 20th century version of a shopping mall provided a variety of needed services and products to neighbors.

On the other hand, the 1887 Sanborn reveals that there weren't many buildings dedicated to business of any sort in the area that we today call Ransom Place. That largely African-American section of the city had retail and other businesses shown only along two main corridors, Indiana Avenue and West Street, but otherwise commerce appears to be limited to a few blacksmith shops spread among the residences. What the Sanborn maps don't show is that, in this poorer section of town, businesses probably shared space in living quarters. Barbers, seamstresses and other service and goods-providers were probably operating out of many of these homes, but the mapmakers didn't record those in-home businesses on the maps.

About a mile east of Ransom Place and a few years later, between 1898 and 1913, present-day Lockerbie Square (another appellation that did not exist historically), was home to a tent-and-awning manufacturer, the Shank Furniture Co., and a dual-purpose building that was a book bindery on the second floor and a pentacostal tabernacle on the ground floor along its mostly residential streets. The area was also home to a number of schools and churches (some of the latter which are still standing), a restaurant, and an automobile repair shop intermingled with the homes of workers and the rising middle-class who lived there.

The truth revealed by old maps is that Indianapolis neighborhoods historically offered soup-to-nuts shopping as well as homes within their boundaries. In the years before automobiles expanded the city and moved shopping to the burgeoning suburbs, downtown dwellers wanted and needed services and retail outlets conveniently located in their neighborhoods. In many cities – New York and Milwaukee come to mind – these neighborhood shopping spots remain essential components of urban living.

Eventually Indianapolis chose a different path to city life. But the changes that made our reality different from other cities did not begin to happen until Indianapolis was almost a century old.

According to the "Encyclopedia of Indianapolis," it was not until 1905 that the city began to regulate against factories in residential areas. In 1922, the first zoning ordinance created five types of districts, including residential, industrial and business. But it was 1935 before state law required the city plan commission to create a master plan for Indianapolis, and it was this master plan that firmly separat-

ed residential and business – but only on the north and east sides of the city. The south and west sides continued to be mixed-use areas.

Citizens on the north side of town were the most vocal in opposing businesses, which were now considered to be "encroaching" on their residential area. In fact these parts of town, including North Meridian Street above 38th Street, were relatively new areas of Indianapolis that had not begun to develop until around the 1920s. They were platted as automobile suburbs at the edges of the city and, with rare exceptions, were almost exclusively residential from their inception. The well-off and influential residents of these neighborhoods were successful in maintaining the already-extant separation of residential and business areas.

In the end – in Indianapolis anyway – this suburban way of viewing life in the city trumped the historic patterns of mixing businesses with residences. With the family automobile distances collapsed and Downtown dwellers, like suburbanites, could drive their cars to get the services and items they needed and had once been able to walk to in their own neighborhoods. As the decades passed, we began to think that this was how life in the city had always been.

Historic maps reveal a different truth from our past. The realities of \$4-a-gallon gasoline just might make that former truth a reality again in our future. While it's unlikely, and hopefully not a possibility, that we would ever again allow a coal yard to take up residence in Chatham Arch, it's a practical revisiting of our urban past to reconsider our proscription of retail space in our walkable neighborhoods.

And, as old maps show, it's historically accurate to boot.



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