

IT WOULD MAKE A BEAUTIFUL CITY

By James A. Glass
Indianapolis Literary Club
Ladies' Night

May 7, 2018

Indiana when it became a state in December, 1816 was, for the most part, covered with a vast hardwood forest, punctuated by occasional meadows. The indigenous peoples—Miamis, Potawatomis, Delaware, Shawnees, Weas, and others—inhabited villages located mostly on rivers or streams and traversed the state on trails or traces. White settlers had created towns and started farms in the southern, eastern, and western edges of the state, mostly along the Ohio, Wabash, and Whitewater Rivers. Most of the northern two-thirds of the new state were owned by the indigenous, or Indian tribes (Figure 1). Indiana—the name chosen for the previous territory and now for the state—came from the indigenous tribes who then defined the identity of the area. There were slightly more than 60,000 white inhabitants, just enough to meet the minimum number established by Congress for statehood.¹

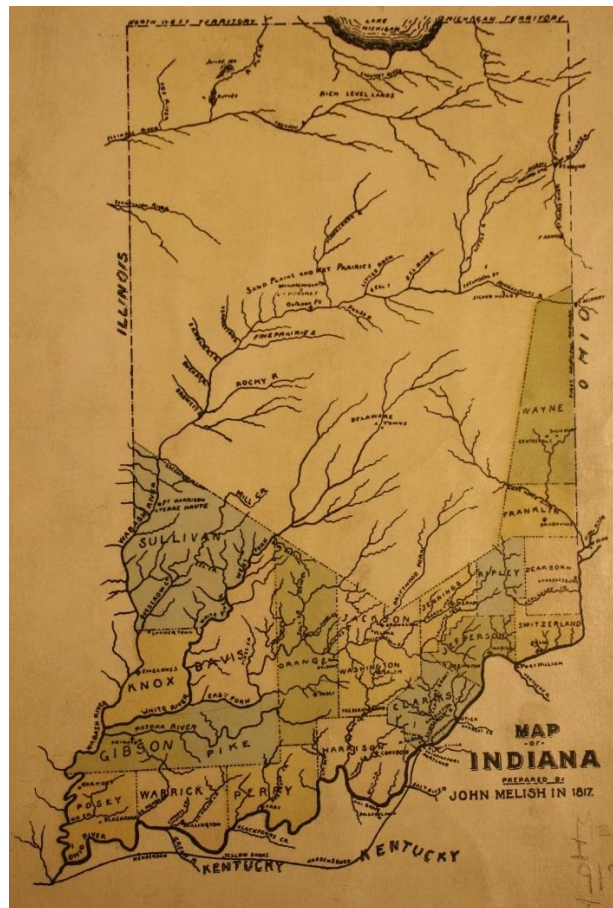


Figure 1: Indiana in 1817. John Melish, “Map of Indiana, 1817.”

¹ [Ignatius Brown], “Historical Sketch of Indianapolis,” in *A.C. Howard’s Directory, for the City of Indianapolis* (Indianapolis: A.C. Howard, Publisher, 1857), pp. 1-2.

The seat of Indiana government in 1816 was Corydon, Indiana, a small town in Harrison County, just north of the Ohio (Figure 1). The Indiana General Assembly did not expect to remain in Corydon for long. The leaders of the new state confidently expected for new settlers to fill the rest of the state eventually and for the permanent capital to be moved to a place that was near the geographic center. Congress in its act approving statehood set aside four sections of federal land from the territory that was still unsold to settlers for the new state capital. That land was to become known as “the Donation.”²

In 1818, President James Monroe appointed Indiana Governor Jonathan Jennings, Lewis Cass, and Benjamin Parke as commissioners to negotiate a treaty with the Delaware (or Lenape) Indian Nation in Indiana. The objective of the federal government and the new state was to secure cession of all of the lands owned by the Delaware in Central Indiana and thus open that large area to white settlement. On October 2, 1818, by the Treaty of St. Mary’s, the Delaware Nation did indeed cede their lands to the United States, and that territory became known as “the New Purchase.” (Figure 2). The Delaware people were to retain possession of the purchased land until 1821.³

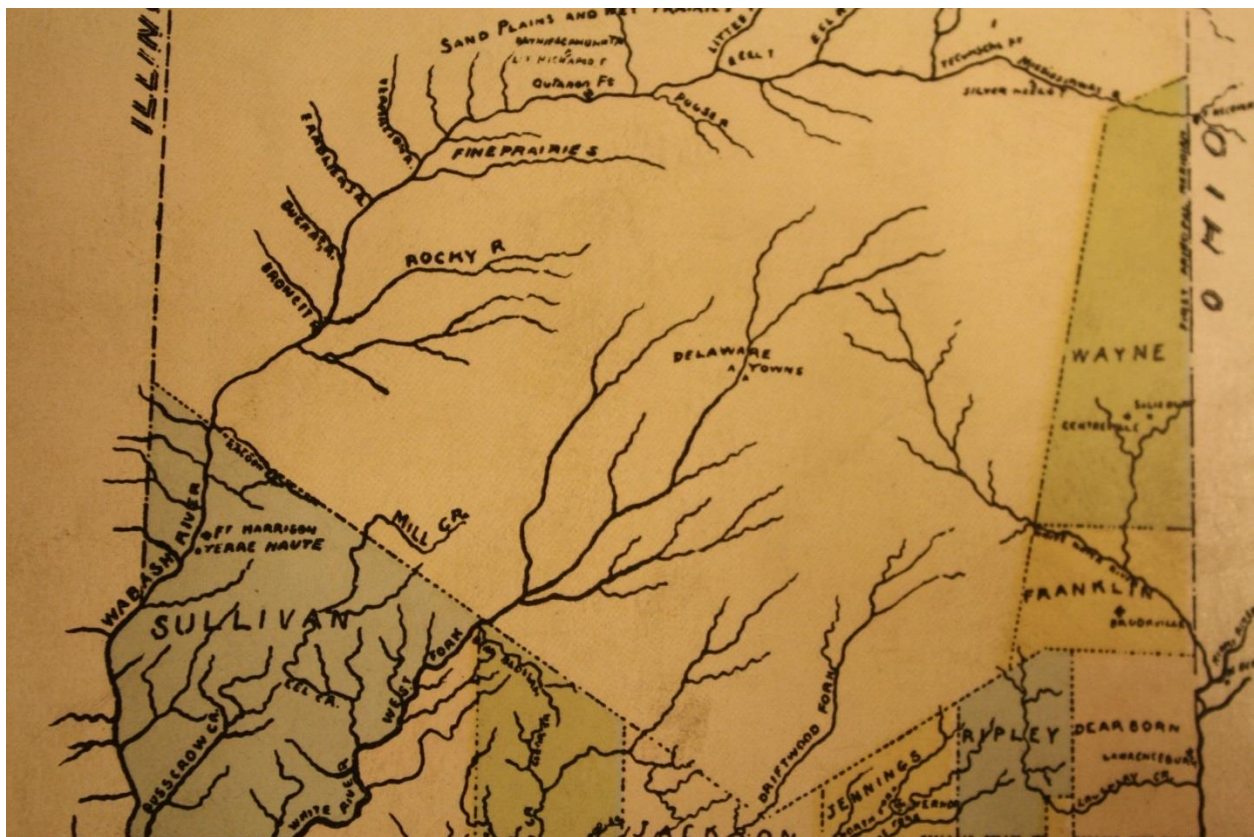


Figure 2: Detail of New Purchase Area, 1817. John Melish, “Map of Indiana, 1817”

² Ibid., p. 3; W.R. Holloway, *Indianapolis. A Historical and Statistical Sketch of the Railroad City* (Indianapolis: Indianapolis Journal Print., 1870), pp. 9, 12; Donald F. Carmony, *Indiana: 1816-1850: The Pioneer Era* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau & Indiana Historical Society, 1998), pp. 107-8.

³Brown, p. 4.

By an act of January 11, 1820, the General Assembly appointed a group of commissioners and charged them with selecting a site for the permanent seat of government in the New Purchase. In the early spring, the commissioners ascended White River by boat, examining several possible locations and met at the log house of William Conner, south of what is now Noblesville. They then debated the merits of three locations: the mouth of Fall Creek, William Conner's property on White River, and a location near what is now Waverly, Indiana. The legislature and the commissioners were disposed to site the capital along White River because they fully expected it to be a navigable stream capable of sustaining commerce and growth for the new community. The commissioners finally decided on the site at the mouth of Fall Creek and notified the legislature of their decision on June 7, 1820. By tradition, they made their decision in the cabin of John McCormick, near the juncture of White River and Fall Creek, now marked by a plaque and boulder (Figure 3).

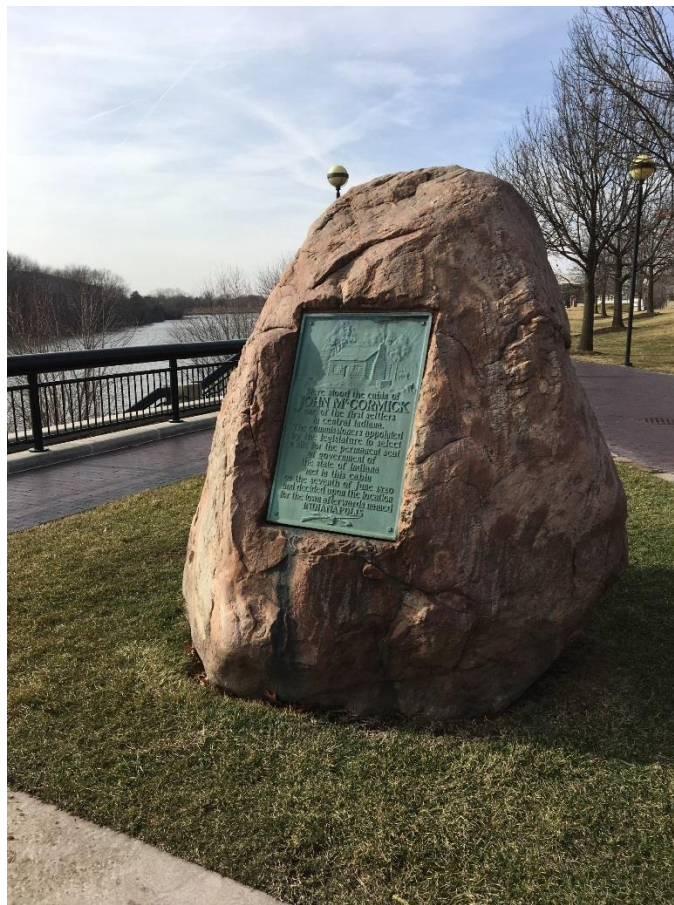


Figure 3. Marker—John McCormick Cabin Site. James Glass

In their report, the commissioners stated that they had endeavored to choose a site with the “advantages of a navigable stream and fertility of soil,” while being mindful of the need to select a location near the political center of the state. The Donation was indeed fixed near the geographic center and consisted of 2,560 acres. (Figure 4).⁴

⁴ Ibid., pp. 3-4; B.R. Sulgrove, *History of Indianapolis and Marion County* (Philadelphia: L.H. Everts & Co., 1884), p. 14; *Journal of the House of Representatives of the State of Indiana, 1820-21*, pp. 24-26.



Figure 4: 1831 Map of the Donation. Bethuel F. Morris, “Map of Indianapolis and Environs,” 1831. Reproduced by Indiana National Bank, 1966. Indiana State Library

As soon as word of the commissioners’ decision reached the residents in southern and eastern Indiana, the first settlers headed for the future site of state government. Of course, under the Treaty of St. Mary’s, the Delaware Nation was to hold the land in Central Indiana until 1821. Neither was there a mechanism yet for settlers to purchase land in the Donation from the State of Indiana. These niceties did not bother the early arrivals, who traveled with their belongings along traces cut in the wilderness by the first travelers, cleared land for dwellings, and put up log houses made from timber cut in the hardwood forest. Who was the first settler in what became the state capital? There was a long-standing debate between the adherents of George Pogue and those of John and James McCormick as to who deserved that distinction. The Pogue descendants claimed that George Pogue, a blacksmith, came on the scene of what was to become the Donation in March, 1819 and built his cabin on the east bank of the meandering stream that bears his name, Pogue’s Run (Figure 5). The supporters of the McCormick brothers asserted that Pogue did not arrive to stay until the spring of 1820 and the McCormick brothers appeared in February of that year. The McCormicks built a log house on the east bank of White River, just north of where the old Washington Street bridge now crosses the river.⁵

⁵ Brown, pp. 2-3; Holloway, pp. 7-9; Sulgrove, p. 19.

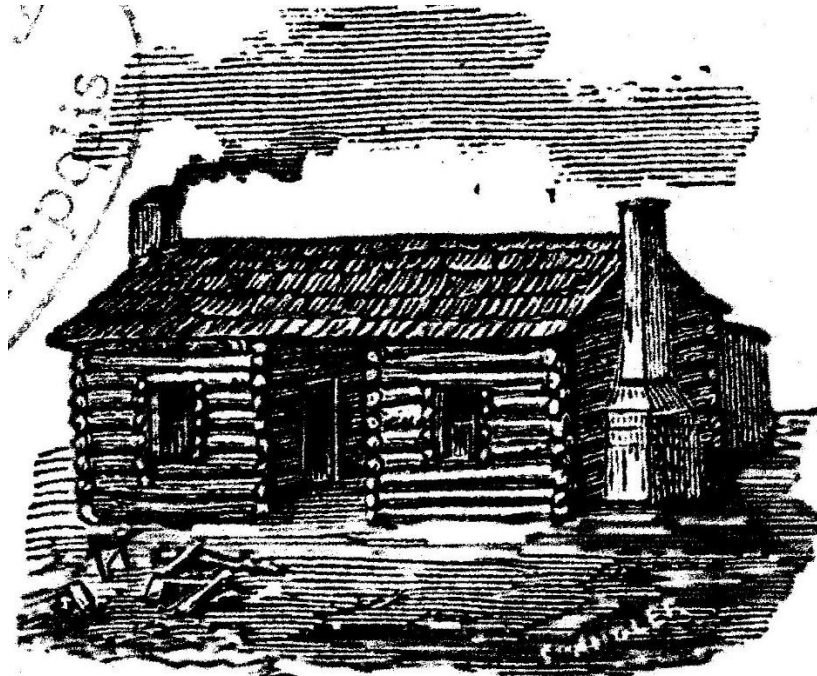


Figure 5. Drawing of George Pogue's Cabin. "Logan's History of Indianapolis, in *Logan's Indianapolis City Directory*, 1868. Indiana State Library

As the site of the Donation became known, other settlers began to assemble near the McCormick cabin on the river bank, expecting that location to be choice as navigation began to the capital. Among the other initial residents were several figures who were to play prominent roles in the founding of the new town: Morris Morris, Dr. S.G. Mitchell, Matthias Nowland, James M. Ray, James Blake, Daniel Yandes, and Dr. Isaac Coe. By the end of May, 1820, there were fifteen families living in the cluster of cabins along the river.⁶

On January 6, 1821, the Indiana General Assembly confirmed the site selected and provided for the election of three new commissioners to lay out a town on such part of the Donation and "as they may deem proper, and on such plan as they may conceive will be advantageous to the state and in the prosperity of said town, having specially in view the health, utility and beauty of the place." The legislature authorized the commissioners to employ "a skilful [sic] surveyor, chainmen and such other assistants as may be necessary in order to survey and lay out said town agreeably to their directions." Once the plan of the town was finished, copies were to be provided to the Secretary of State and the General Assembly. The legislature directed that the plan show the dimensions of lots and the width of streets and alleys. The plan was also to indicate each square designated as public ground and note whether such squares were intended for civil or religious purposes. The lengths of all streets and alleys and the names for each were to be shown on the plan and any variation of the north needle from the "true meridian." The commissioners were then to offer at public sale as many of the lots as "they may deem expedient," holding back every second odd-numbered lot in each square.⁷

⁶ Brown, pp. 3-4.

⁷ *Laws of the State of Indiana Passed and Published at the Fifth Session of the General Assembly* (Corydon: Brandon & Co., 1820-21), pp. 44-49.

The January 6 law also gave the future capital a name--Indianapolis. Jeremiah Sullivan of Madison (Figure 6) is generally credited with conceiving the name and proposing it to the House of Representatives. General Marston G. Clark of Washington County urged "Tecumseh," in honor of the great Shawnee chief, and another un-named legislator suggested "Suwarrow." Neither of these, nor a host of others, found favor in the House. Sullivan's proposal took the name of the state and joined to it a suffix, polis, the Greek word for city. "City of Indiana" won the support of the majority.⁸

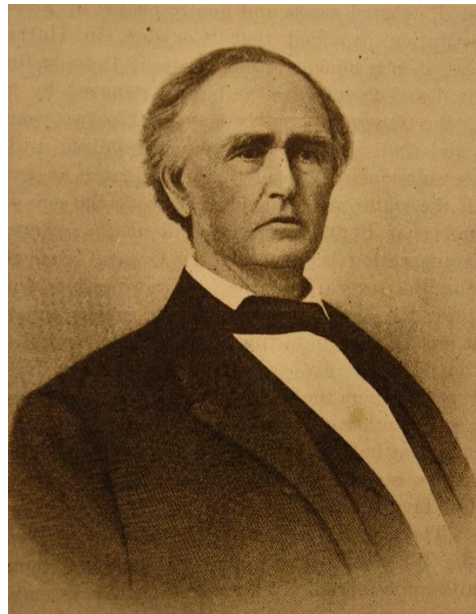


Figure 6. Jeremiah Sullivan. Jacob Piatt Dunn, *Indiana and Indianans*, (Chicago: American Historical Society, 1919), Vol. I, p. 365.

On that same day, the House of Representatives elected the three commissioners: James W. Jones, Christopher Harrison, and Samuel P. Booker. The act of the legislature directed the commissioners to meet at the mouth of Fall Creek on the first Monday in April or as soon after as they conveniently could. Only Harrison appeared, and in the absence of Jones and Booker, proceeded to carry out the provisions of the law on his own. Harrison was a colorful character (Figure 7). Born in Cambridge, Maryland in 1775, he came from a family that moved in the highest circles of Maryland society. He attended St. John's College in Annapolis and took a position in the counting house of William Patterson, one of the principal merchants of Baltimore. An unconfirmed legend states that young Harrison was in love with his employer's daughter, Elizabeth. The story asserts that Elizabeth jilted Christopher in favor of Jerome Bonaparte, younger brother of Napoleon, when the younger Bonaparte visited Baltimore. It does seem that Harrison suffered disappointment in love and left Baltimore abruptly. He eventually made his way to Jefferson County, Indiana, where he lived like a hermit in a log cabin overlooking the Ohio. In 1815, he and a business partner opened a store in Salem, Indiana, then a prosperous town to the north. About the same time, Harrison became active in politics and in 1816 was elected the first lieutenant governor of the State of Indiana. He resigned two years later, after a

⁸ Ibid., p. 53; Holloway, p. 10.

conflict with Governor Jonathan Jennings. The legislature retained enough confidence in Harrison's abilities to elect him commissioner for laying out the state capital.⁹

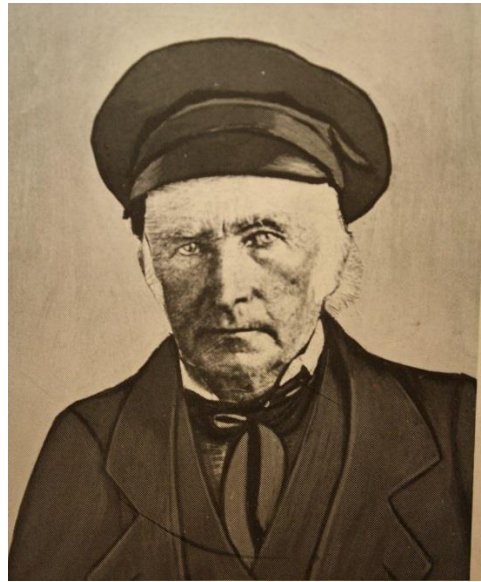


Figure 7. Christopher Harrison in old age. "Portraits—H," Photograph Collection, Indiana State Library

Harrison hired two surveyors, Alexander Ralston and Elias Pym Fordham. Both had excellent credentials as engineers and surveyors. Ralston, the elder, was born in Scotland in 1771 and appears to have obtained training as an engineer and surveyor. An 1879 *Indianapolis News* article states that young Ralston "was highly esteemed by Lord Roslin, who confided to [him] important engineering operations on his lordship's estate." At some point, probably in his early twenties, the young man emigrated to the United States. He found employment with the commissioners appointed by President George Washington to survey and lay out the new national capital on the Potomac River between Maryland and Virginia. The first history of Indianapolis, published in 1857, states that when Ralston "was quite young, [he] had assisted in laying off Washington City." Twentieth century sources have assumed that Ralston worked under Major Pierre Charles L'Enfant, the author of the "Grand Plan" for Washington produced in 1791. Actually, records of the national capital commissioners who oversaw the surveying and planning of Washington show that Ralston was not part of the survey team until after L'Enfant had been discharged for insubordination in 1792. He was still not a surveyor in March, 1793, when Andrew Ellicott, the subsequent head of surveying, was discharged. Sometime later in 1793 or in 1794, Ralston became part of the survey force. As such he helped to complete laying out the L'Enfant plan for the city and to survey the rest of the new District of Columbia. The work was finally completed in 1795. Ralston's 1827 obituary states that he lived for many years in Washington, so it is quite possible that he was employed in other survey projects in the embryonic city.¹⁰

⁹ *Laws of the State of Indiana, 1820-21*, p. 45; *Journal of the House of Representatives, 1820-21*, pp. 279-83; William Wesley Woollen, *Biographical and Historical Sketches of Early Indiana* (Indianapolis: Hammond & Co., 1883), pp. 160-66.

¹⁰ [Obituary for Alexander Ralston], *Indiana Journal*, January 9, 1827, p. [3]; Brown, p. 4; the Rev. J.C. Fletcher, "Indianapolis," *Indianapolis News*, March 22, 1879, p. 2, c. 4; Wilhelmus Bogart Bryan, *A History of the National*

From his experience in Washington, Ralston was thus quite familiar with L'Enfant's plan, in which a checkerboard pattern of squares and streets at right angles defined the essential character of the capital, while grand avenues ran in the ordinal directions across the grid (see Figure 8). The avenues intersected with both circles and squares and served to provide expeditious routes for crossing the city and to offer impressive vistas of future monuments or fountains in the circles or squares, as well as of the President's House and the U.S. Capitol. The L'Enfant plan also carefully sited important public buildings on hills or rises both for prominence, but also to avoid flooding and disease.¹¹



Figure 8. L'Enfant Plan for Washington, published in 1792. John W. Reps, *The Making of Urban America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1965), p.

Ralston's next chapter in life involved Aaron Burr, Vice President under President Thomas Jefferson, and Burr's supposed conspiracy after leaving the vice presidency to create a separate country from the United States in the Louisiana Territory or possibly to invade Spanish-ruled

Capital from Its Foundation Through the Period of the Adoption of the Organic Act (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1914), Vol. I, pp. 184-87, 208-11, 240-41.

¹¹ John W. Reps, *The Making of Urban America: A History of City Planning in the United States* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1965), pp. 248-52, 255.

Mexico. By 1806, Ralston had moved to Louisville, Kentucky to seek his fortune and was recruited by Davis Floyd on behalf of Burr to accompany them and others to found a settlement in the valley of the Washita River in what is now Arkansas. It is possible that Ralston was hired to survey lands for the settlement. Burr was accused of treason when the party reached the northern Mississippi Territory, and Floyd and Ralston were indicted by a Mississippi court as accomplices of the former vice president in the alleged conspiracy to take over Louisiana or invade Mexico. Ralston was able to leave Mississippi before his trial and made his way north; he was never prosecuted and appears not to have surveyed any land in Arkansas. The Burr conspiracy does not seem to have compromised Ralston's standing in the Ohio River valley. By 1814 he had moved to Corydon, capital of the Indiana Territory, and was living in Salem, Indiana by 1818, where he may have met Christopher Harrison.¹²

Elias Fordham, the second surveyor appointed by Harrison, had also led an interesting life prior to his appearance in Indiana. Born in Hertfordshire, England in 1788, Fordham as a young man became a pupil of George Stephenson, the inventor of the locomotive, and obtained training as an engineer. In 1817, he decided to emigrate to the United States with a group of English migrants led by farmer and writer Morris Birkbeck. The latter had purchased a tract of 4,000 acres in Southern Illinois on which he expected to found a farming colony. Fordham was given responsibility for conveying the baggage and supplies of the group to the site of what became known as English Prairie and became a mainstay of the settlement. He conducted surveys on the land acquired by Birkbeck and acquired a tract of land for his own house. In 1818, Fordham laid out a town called Albion. His plan, covering a square mile, called for eight streets and a public square. For a time, the young surveyor operated a general merchandise store in the new town.¹³

It is not known how Harrison knew of Fordham, but it is possible that the two met when the Birkbeck party was crossing Southern Indiana in 1817 or that Harrison had heard of Fordham's work in laying out Albion. Presumably, the young Englishman did appear at the Donation in April, 1821, met with the commissioner and Alexander Ralston, and participated in the surveying of the town site for Indianapolis. Ignatius Brown, author of the 1857 history, states that "Alexander Ralston and Elias P. Fordham were selected as the surveyors." He continues, "Of Fordham but little is known."¹⁴ If the Englishman had not appeared or not participated in the work, it seems likely that Brown would have noted his absence, just as he had when Harrison's two co-commissioners did not appear. It is probable, then, that Fordham did serve as a surveyor.

¹² Isaac J. Cox, "The Burr Conspiracy in Indiana," *The Indiana Magazine of History* (December, 1929), Vol. XXV, No. 4, pp. 273-77; Emmet A. Rice, "A Forgotten Man of Indianapolis," *The Indiana Magazine of History* (September, 1937), Vol. XXIV, No. 3, pp. 287-89; "Burr's Conspiracy," Communication from President Thomas Jefferson to the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States, January 22, 1807, Miscellaneous Document No. 217 in *American State Papers Documents Legislative and Executive of the Congress of the United States* (Washington: Gales Seaton, 1834), Miscellaneous Documents Vol. I, pp. 468-69.

¹³ Frederic Austin Ogg, Introduction to Elias Pym Fordham, *Personal Narrative of Travels in Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Kentucky; and of a Residence in the Illinois Territory: 1817-1818* (Cleveland: The Arthur H. Clark Co., 1906), pp. 23-29; Fordham, *Personal Narrative*, pp. 173, 233; Walter Colyer, "The Fordhams and La Serres of the English Settlement in Edwards County," *Transactions of the Illinois State Historical Society for the Year 1911: Publication Number Seventeen of the Illinois State Historical Library* (Springfield, Ill.: Illinois State Journal Co., 1912), pp. 43-47, 52-53.

¹⁴ Brown, p. 4.

What were the respective roles of Harrison, Ralston and Fordham? As already seen, the January 1821 act of the General Assembly creating Christopher Harrison's mandate stated that the commissioners were to employ a skillful surveyor, chainmen, and others assistants as necessary in order to survey and lay out the town "agreeably to their directions." Harrison was tuned to the desires of the General Assembly and had been liberally educated in Annapolis and Baltimore. He may have even been familiar with the plan of Washington. But he had no training as a surveyor or engineer and no prior experience in laying out towns. Ralston and Fordham both had such experience, but Ralston was seventeen years older than Fordham and was by far the more experienced and seasoned surveyor. He also had first-hand experience in laying out and surveying the national capital. It is reasonable to suppose, then, that Ralston was the principal author of the plan for Indianapolis and that Fordham's role was to work with Ralston in conducting surveys of the site and laying out the streets and lot lines of the plan. Evidence of Ralston's role as the lead surveyor and presumed author of the plan is found in the Journal of the Indiana Senate for December 4, 1822. The Senate resolved "that Mr. Alexander Ralston receive the thanks of the Senate, for the elegant plat of Indianapolis, by him this day presented for the use of the General Assembly."¹⁵

The Ralston Plan for Indianapolis (see Figure 9) drew several ideas from L'Enfant's plan for Washington. The dominant pattern, like that of Washington, was a gridiron, or checkerboard made up of squares and streets laid out at right angles. Such a pattern was popular among new towns in the United States because a square could yield more lots for sale than a circle, a triangle, or other geometric forms. Ralston, like L'Enfant, imposed several diagonal avenues over the grid to facilitate transportation from one point to another and to make possible vistas of potential public buildings or other scenic features at the ends of the avenues. He did not run his diagonals through squares or circles, as in Washington, but did place a circular street and civic place at the center of his Mile Square plan (Figure 10). The four diagonal avenues he ran from the corners of the plan to within one-half block of Circle Street at the center (Figure 11). Washington Street, the first east-west street south of the Circle, Ralston gave a 120-foot right-of-way, anticipating that it would be the principal commercial street and join with the National Road that the federal government was planning to build through Indiana (Figure 12). The four diagonals received 90-foot widths, in view of their potential as traffic conveyors from the four ordinal directions. Circle Street was designated for 80 feet, as were most of the rest of the streets in the plan. The names for the diagonals and most of the other streets, following the precedent in the Washington plan, were drawn from the states in the Union as of 1821 and from the Michigan Territory (Figure 13). The exceptions were Meridian, running north-south through at center and Market Street, running east-west through the Circle.¹⁶

¹⁵ *Journal of the Senate of the State of Indiana Being the Seventh Session of the General Assembly* (Corydon, Ind.: Carpenter & Douglass, 1822), p. 20.

¹⁶ "Plat of the Town of Indianapolis" (Columbus, OH: Engraved and Published by H. Platt, December, 1821). Reproduced in Repts, p. 274; Sulgrove, p. 27; "Land Sales Begin," *The Indiana Historian* (Indiana Historical Bureau, June, 1996), p. 6.

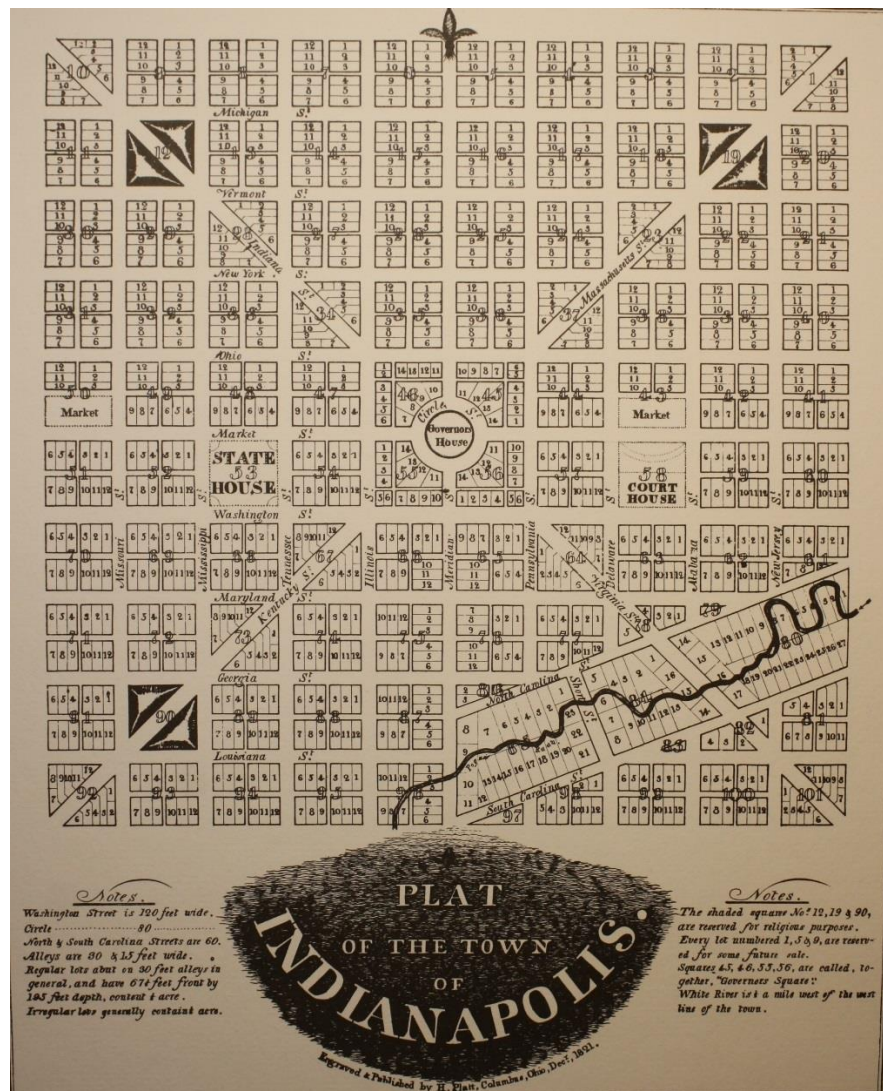


Figure 9. Ralston Plan, 1821. "Plat of the Town of Indianapolis" (Cincinnati: H. Platt, 1821. Reproduced by Historic Urban Plans, Inc., 1969

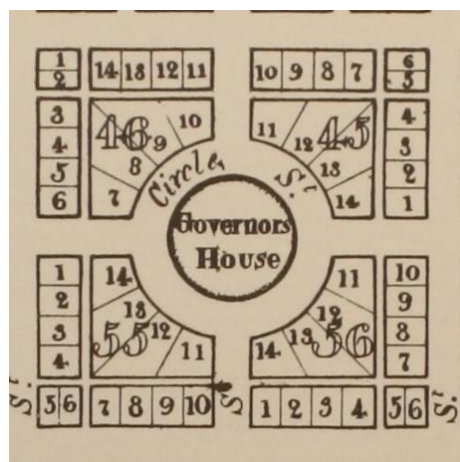


Figure 10. Detail: Circle Street, Governor's Square, 1821

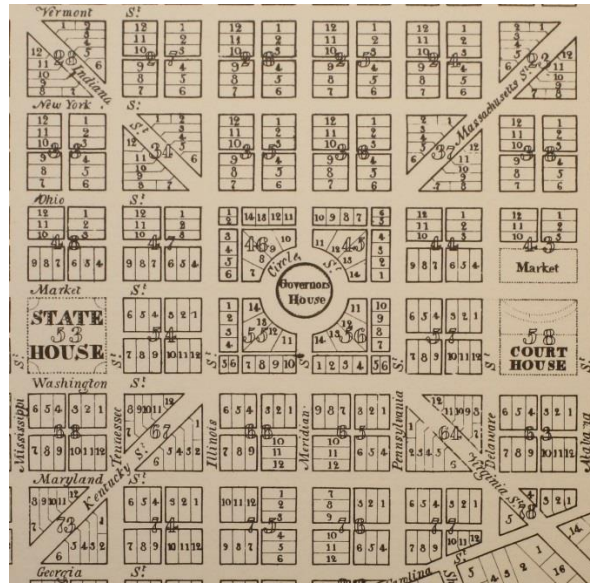


Figure 11. Detail from Ralston Plan, showing four diagonal avenues.

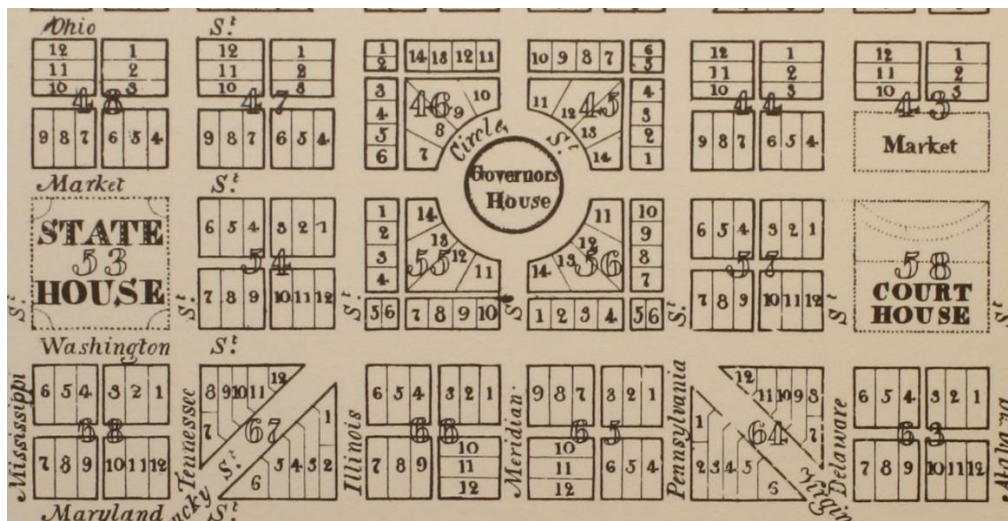


Figure 12. Detail, showing Washington Street

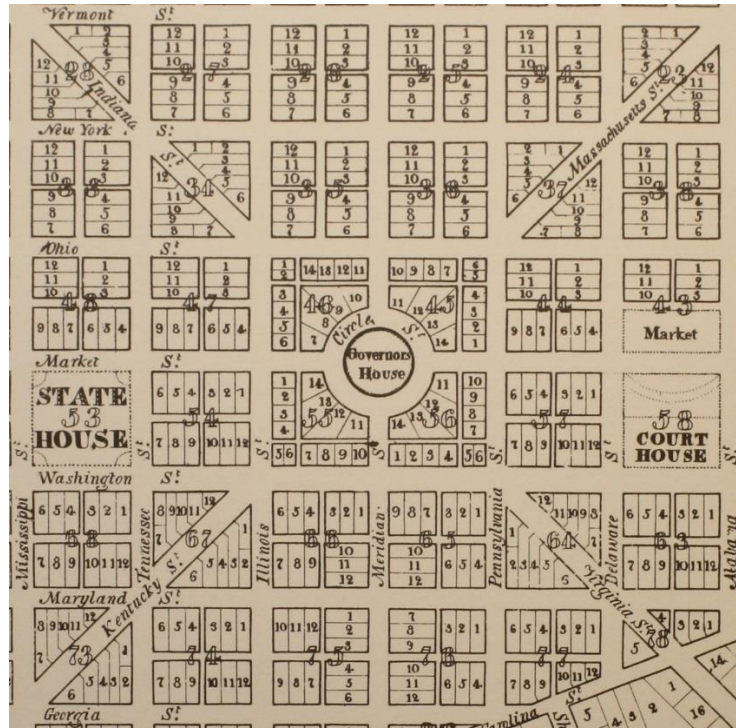


Figure 13. Detail showing names of streets in Ralston Plan

As was common in town plans, Ralston set aside sites for public buildings or functions. The circular center of the plan, within Circle Street, he designated for the Governor's House, and the four partial blocks surrounding the Circle he called the "Governor's Square." Square 58 (Figure 14), located on Washington Street one and a half blocks east of Meridian, he set aside for the county courthouse, and Square 53, one and a half blocks to the west, was to be reserved for the State House. Ralston provided amply for markets in the new town, setting aside (Figure 14) the south half of Square 43 for one market, just north of the Courthouse, and the south half of Square 50, at the west end of Market Street for a second market. He, or possibly Commissioner Harrison, reserved three squares—12, 19, and 90—all located on diagonal streets, "for religious purposes" (Figure 15).

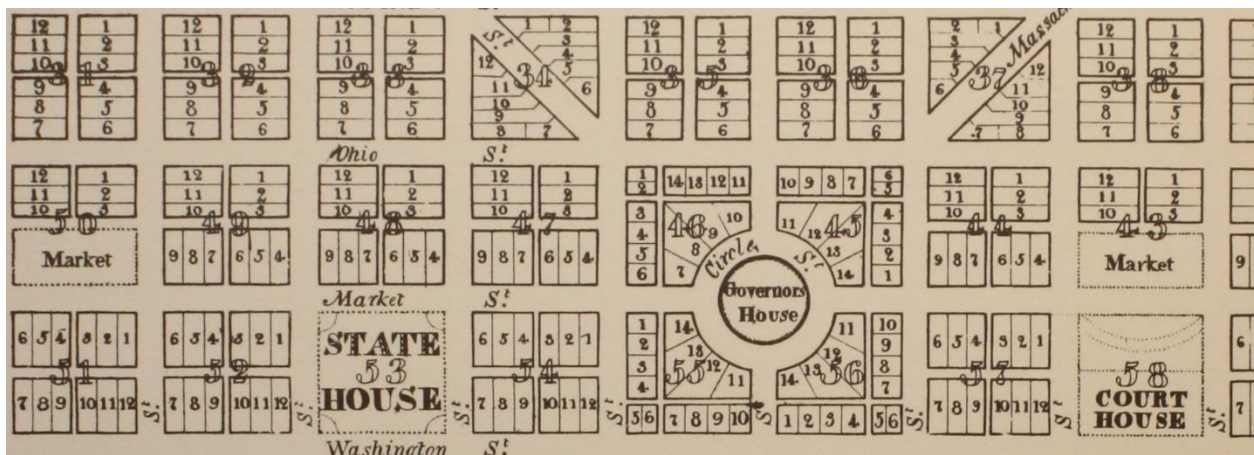


Figure 14. Detail showing locations of Courthouse in Square 58, State House in Square 53, East Market in Square 43, and West Market on Square 50.

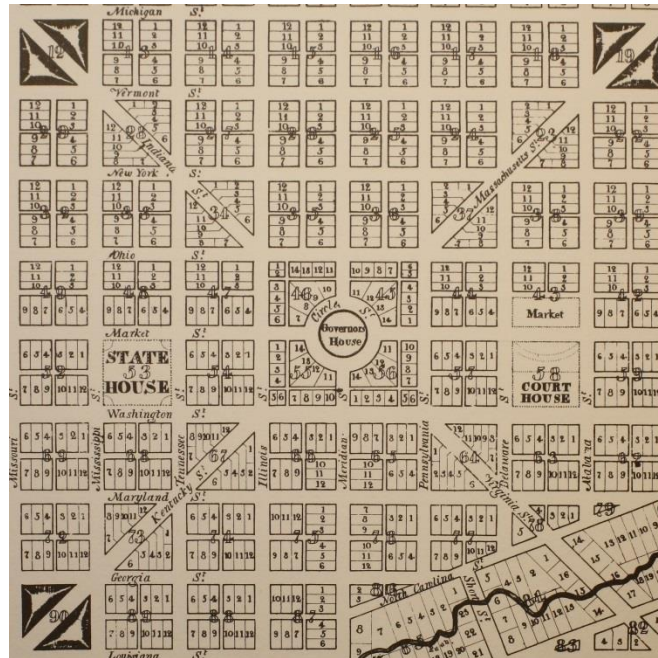


Figure 15. Detail showing three squares reserved for religious purposes

Each regular square (Figure 16) was divided into 12 lots, each measuring 67 ½ feet wide by 125 feet deep. Alleys were to run north and south and east and west through the regular squares. The triangular plots fronting the diagonal avenues each also contained 12 lots, but were irregularly shaped and given no alleys.¹⁷

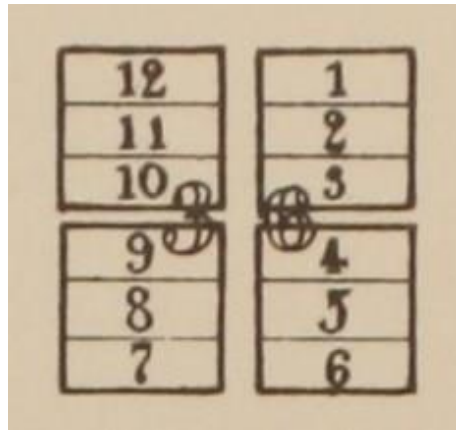


Figure 16. Detail of typical square, lots, and alleys, Ralston Plan

The town plat was sited not on White River, but one-half mile to the east (Figure 17). This location would remove the new capital from flooding prevalent along the river and possibly from the unhealthy conditions that were generally supposed to foster illness in that era. Ralston placed the Circle and its center on the highest point in the vicinity—a knoll containing a grove of sugar

¹⁷ “Plat of the Town of Indianapolis.”

trees. This would place the Governor's House on an imposing rise. This action also moved most of the Mile Square plan away from Pogue's Run, a meandering stream to the south that also was prone to flooding. Nevertheless, the southeast corner of Ralston's plan crossed the run and disrupted the neat grid regularity of the streets (Figure 18). He interrupted the north-south and east-west streets of the plan to run North Carolina and South Carolina Streets in northeast-southwest directions to face Pogue's Run.¹⁸

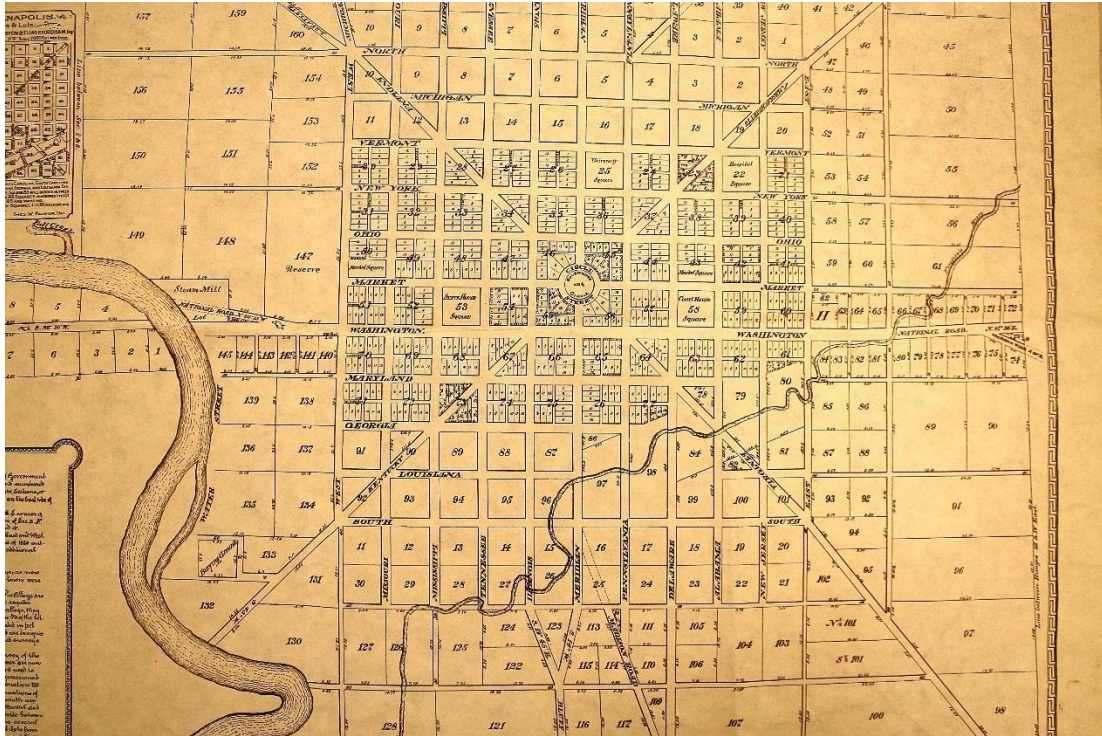


Figure 17. Detail of B.F. Morris, "Map of Indianapolis and Environs," 1831, showing the location away from White River of 1821 plan.

¹⁸ Brown, pp. 5-6; Holloway, p. 13.

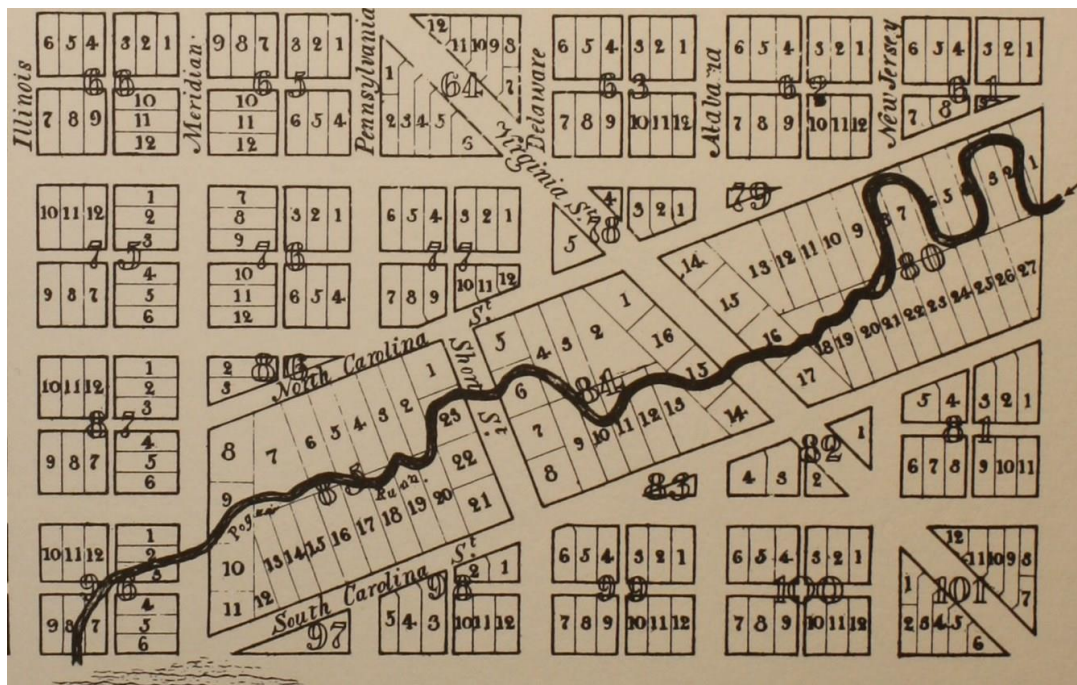


Figure 18. Detail from Ralston Plan, showing North Carolina and South Carolina Streets on either side of Pogue's Run.

Ralston, Fordham, and a team of assistants did their work of surveying and laying out the Mile Square plan quickly. By October, 1821, Christopher Harrison was ready to hold the first sale of town lots. General John Carr was elected by the legislature as the first agent for selling lots. Settlers had continued to arrive and take up residence on the bank of White River as the surveying proceeded. By July, 1821, there were thirty to forty families living in the Donation. They were joined by others who were prepared to make offers for lots in the new capital. The three log taverns were packed with newcomers.



Figure 19. Artist's drawing of early log house and clearing, Indianapolis, c. 1820-21. B.R. Sulgrove, *History of Indianapolis and Marion County* (Philadelphia: L.H. Everts & Co., 1884), p. 30.

On the second Monday of October, bidding was spirited. The highest price brought by a lot--\$560--was for one on the northeast corner of Washington and Delaware Streets, across from the anticipated site of the County Courthouse. The buyer, no doubt, was expecting much of the commercial activity to take place on the blocks surrounding the future courthouse. The second highest price--\$500--was paid for a lot facing the State House square, where business involving state government would be conducted. The next highest prices were offered for lots in the east and north parts of the plat. Buyers could pay one-fifth of the purchase price at the time of sale and the remainder in four annual payments. The initial sale sold 314 lots, with a value of \$35,595.¹⁹

On November 28, 1821, the General Assembly ratified Harrison's actions in laying out the town of Indianapolis and in selling the first lots. He was later appointed one of the commissioners for building a canal around the Falls of the Ohio at Louisville. Eventually, never having married, Harrison made his way back to Maryland to live with a sister, dying at the advanced age of 88 in 1863. Ralston decided to take up residence in the town that he had planned. He was elected county surveyor and appointed by the legislature to survey parts of White River and to estimate the cost of removing obstacles for navigation. The planner of the town lived in a brick house that he built on Maryland Street, just west of what is now Capitol Avenue. His housekeeper, Chaney Lively, was the second African American to reside in the new town. Ralston was part of a community that concentrated hopefully along or near Washington Street, waiting for the future National Road to be constructed to the capital and end its nearly complete isolation. Forest trees still covered most of the Mile Square and even stood in the principal streets (Figure 19). Ralston urged his fellow residents to lay out a spacious park that would enhance the plan

¹⁹ Brown, pp. 6, 9; *Indiana Historian*, p. 4.

he had devised. He also is said to have made the following wistful statement about the infant capital: “It would make a beautiful city, if it were ever built.” He died in 1827, and was, says early historian Ignatius Brown, “much loved for his virtues and intellectual powers.”²⁰

We do not know if Elias Fordham completed all of his share of the surveying for the town. Records in Illinois indicate that he obtained a court judgment in the Town of Albion on November 10, 1821 against the proprietors of Albion for \$66.50, in payment for surveying and platting the town plan. Shortly afterward, Fordham returned to England, where he worked as an engineer for his old mentor George Stephenson. He also was employed by the Duke of Wellington, then serving as Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports. Fordham oversaw construction of several docks for English warships at the five ports that Wellington oversaw. He died in 1850.²¹

The isolation of the infant community began to lift somewhat when the Indiana state government moved to Indianapolis from Corydon in 1825. One of the pre-conditions for the move was construction of a two-story brick county courthouse, which could also house the legislature when in session and the other state offices. The Federal-style design of the courthouse (Figure 20), complete with Palladian window, fan transom, and cupola, was supplied in 1822 by contractors John Baker and James Paxton. Construction was completed in 1824. The legislature in 1827 also directed that the Governor’s House be constructed, and a spacious two-story building containing four large rooms on the first floor was constructed on the knoll surrounded by Circle Street. It was also Federal in style (Figure 21) and had multiple pediments and a Palladian window. No governor ever lived in the building, apparently because of the public exposure that any first family would face, surrounded by the Circle, and the structure was never finished as a residence. Both buildings were constructed from the proceeds of lot sales.²²

²⁰ *Laws of the State of Indiana, Passed and Published at the Sixth Session of the General Assembly* (New Albany: Patrick and Wheelock, 1821-22), pp. 18-19; [Obituary for Alexander Ralston], 1827; Brown, p. 4; the Rev. J.C. Fletcher, “Early Days,” *Indianapolis News*, August 2, 1879, p. [2], c. 6; Woollen, pp. 165-66; and Sulgrove, pp. 25-26. The statement attributed to Ralston about “It would make a beautiful city...” was first quoted by Jacob Piatt Dunn in his 1910 *Greater Indianapolis* (Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Co.), Vol. I, p. 29. However, Dunn provides no 19th century documentary or oral history source for the statement.

²¹ Colyer, pp. 46, 52-53.

²² Holloway, pp. 20, 33-34; Sulgrove, p. 26.

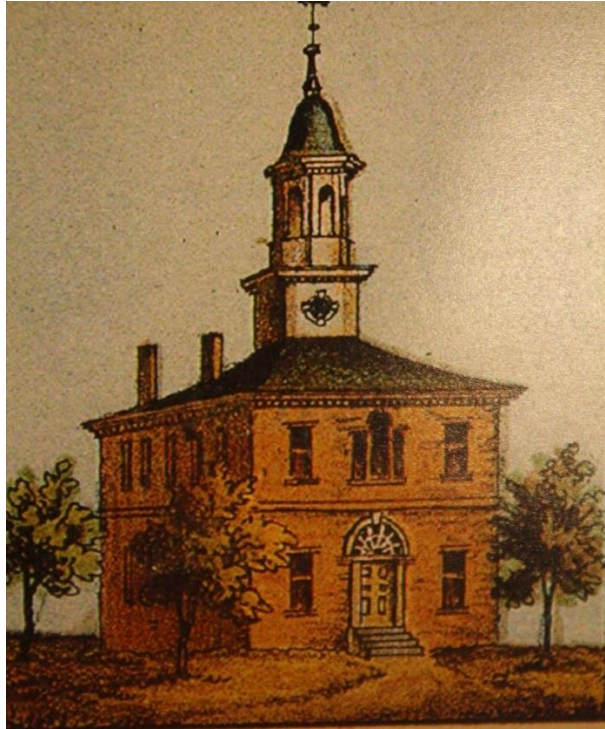
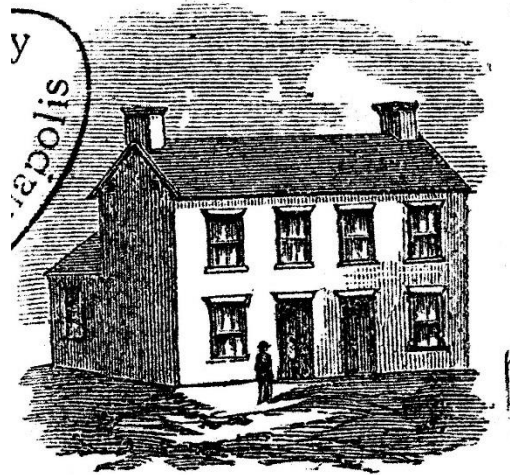


Figure 20. First Marion County Courthouse in 1854. From J.T. Palmatary, "View of Indianapolis from the Top of the Asylum for the Blind" (Baltimore: E. Sachse & Co., 1854) [reproduced by Maps from the Past, Inc., 2011]



Figure 21. Governor's House on Circle. From J.T. Palmatary, "View of Indianapolis," 1854

There was a steady movement of residents during the 1820s from the initial settlement on the east bank of White River into the Mile Square, due in large part to the fear of sickness near the river. Swiftly, almost from the first year after the town was planned, frame and brick houses were constructed by residents. The first frame house was constructed by James Blake in 1821-22 on Washington Street, just east of Tennessee (now Capitol) Street. In the winter of 1821-22, Thomas Carter built a two-story frame tavern building with plaster ceilings on a lot just west of Meridian on Washington. The first brick house was erected in the summer of 1822 by John Johnson on Market Street, just east of Pennsylvania (Figure 22).²³



(The First Brick House.)

Figure 22. First Brick House, 1822. “Logan’s History of Indianapolis,” 1868, p 8.

Before Christopher Harrison departed Indianapolis, James Blake persuaded him to lay out four streets along the boundaries of the Mile Square plat. Blake suggested that forty to fifty years from that time, the additional streets would provide a pleasant, four-mile drive, always one-half mile from the center of town. That is the origin of North, East, South, and West Streets (Figure 23). During the 1820s, the legislature made certain changes in the reservations made in the 1821 plan. In 1825, the General Assembly responded to a petition by the Baptists of Indianapolis for the legislature to donate part of Square 90 as the site for a Baptist meetinghouse. This was one of three squares set aside in the 1821 plan for religious purposes. The assembly, after much debate, failed to pass a bill making the donation, and no further effort was made to reserve those squares of state property for religious purposes. In 1827, the legislature set aside two other squares for public purposes (Figure 24)—Square 22 was reserved for use by a state hospital and lunatic asylum, and Square 25 for a state university. In the 1840s, Hospital Square was sold by the State when a spacious site west of White River was acquired for the Indiana Insane Asylum. University Square has been continuously owned by the State of Indiana since the 1820s, but never was used for a state university.²⁴

²³ Brown, pp. 6, 9, 12; Holloway, p. 13.

²⁴ *Journal of the Senate of the State of Indiana, Being the Ninth Session of the General Assembly* (Indianapolis: Douglass & Maguire, 1825), pp. 71, 73-75; *Journal of the House of Representatives, of the State of Indiana, Being the Ninth Session of the General Assembly* (Indianapolis: Douglass & Maguire, 1825), pp. 144, 146-47; *Laws of the*

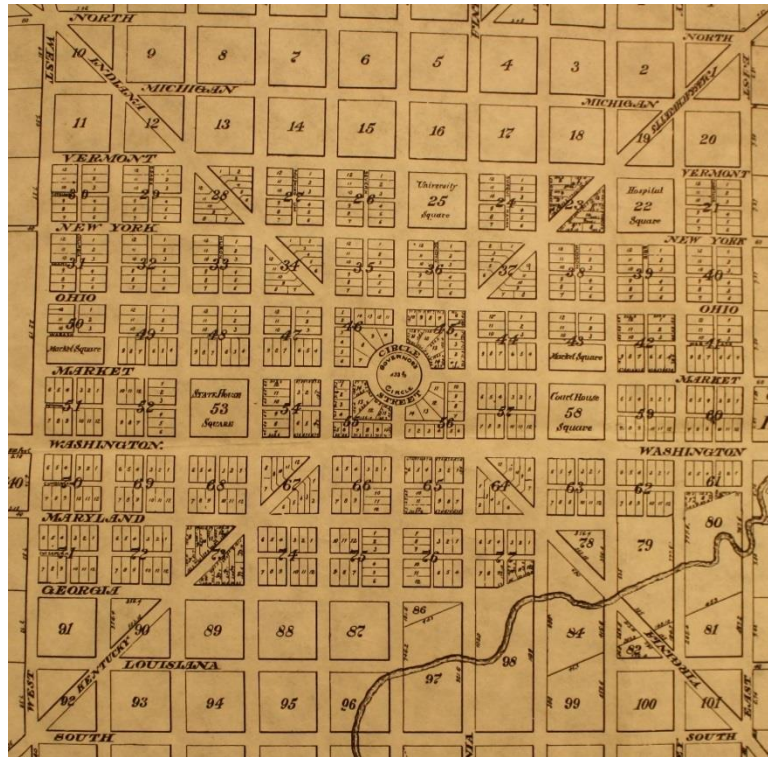


Figure 23. Detail of B.F. Morris's "Map of Indianapolis," 1831, showing West, North, East, and South Streets

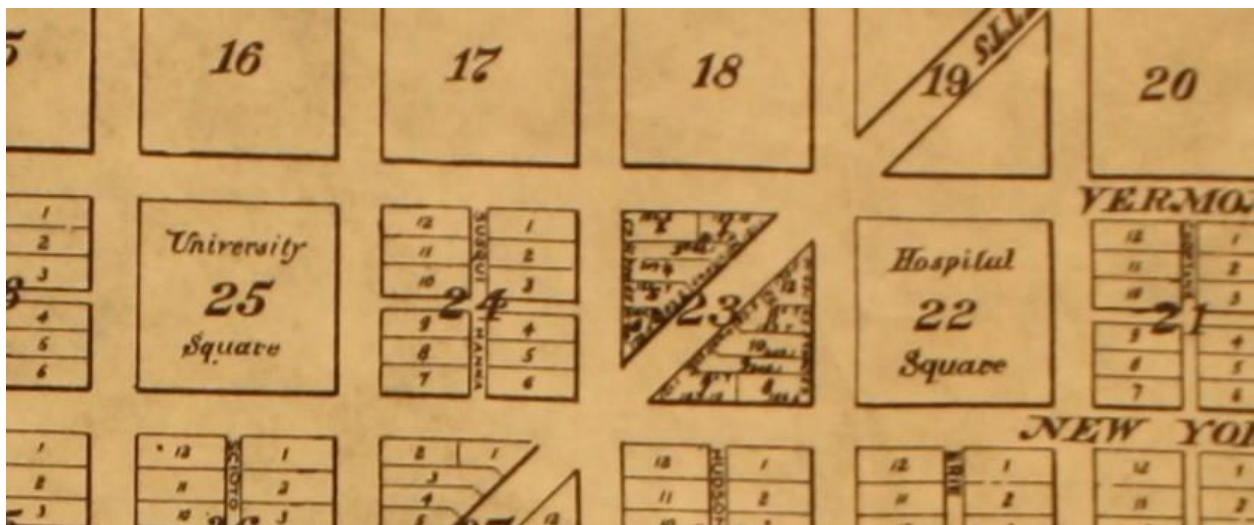


Figure 24. Detail from 1831 "Map of Indianapolis," showing University and Hospital Squares

The three miles in the Donation that lay outside the Ralston Plan were divided into out lots by order of the General Assembly in 1821 and 1825. In 1831, the legislature ordered that a complete survey be conducted of the out lots and that the whole Donation be mapped (see Figure 25). The area of settlement continued to be well within the Mile Square until after the advent of the railroad era in the late 1840s. An idea of the gradual growth of the town can be seen from

State of Indiana, Passed and Published at the Eleventh Session of the General Assembly (Indianapolis: John Douglass, 1827), pp. 5-6; Brown, p. 18; Dunn, pp. 33-34.

this drawing from about 1850, showing the changes in settled areas between 1821 and 1850 (Figure 26). The out lots were eventually subdivided into streets and lots by private owners. The 1855 “Map of Indianapolis and Suburbs” by A.B. Condit (Figure 27) shows the subdivisions and additions outside the Mile Square by that date.²⁵

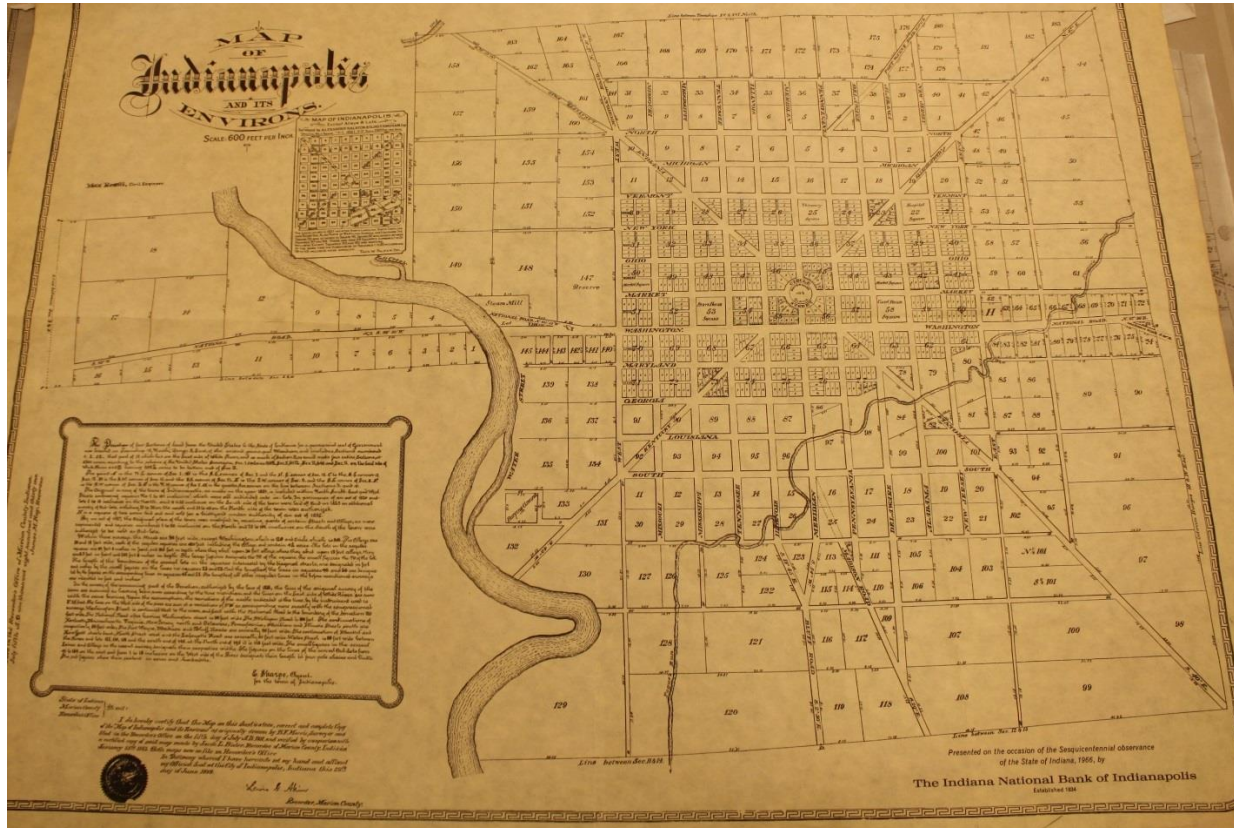


Figure 25. B.F. Morris, “Map of Indianapolis and Environs,” 1831, showing the Donation and division of area outside Mile Square into out lots.

²⁵ Brown, p. 5; Sulgrove, p. 27; Dunn, pp. 29-31; [map] “Occupied Areas of Early Indianapolis, 1820-1850,” [manuscript drawing, n.d., copy in Indiana Division, Indiana State Library; A.B. Condit, “Map of Indianapolis and Suburbs” (Indianapolis, William Wiley, 1855?, in Indiana Division, Indiana State Library.

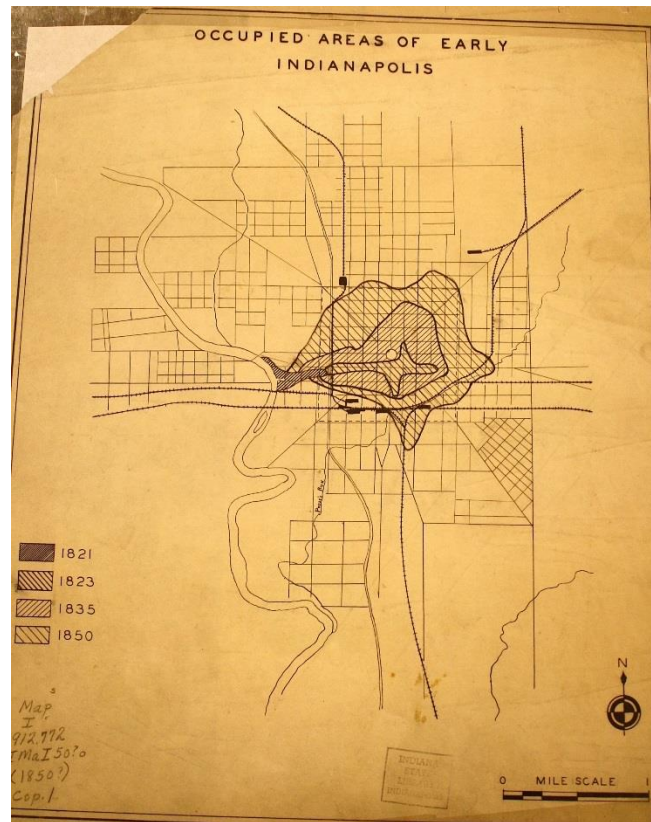


Figure 26. Map showing growth of Indianapolis, c. 1850.
Ignatius Brown, "Occupied Areas of Early Indianapolis," c. 1850.
Map Collection, Indiana State Library

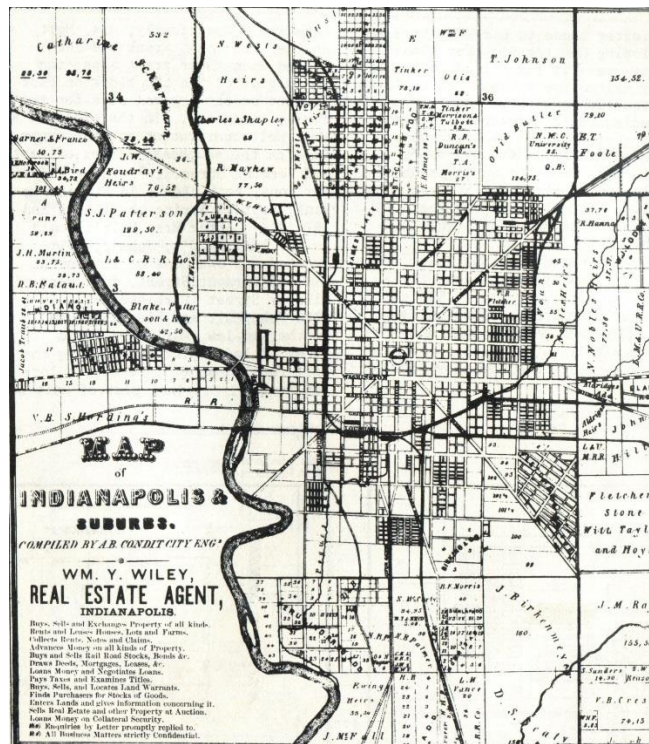


Figure 27. Map of Indianapolis, 1855. A.B. Condit, “Map Of Indianapolis & Suburbs,” 1855. Map Collection, Indiana State Library

A major public building rose in the 1830s. The second Indiana State House was built for \$60,000 from the public building fund arising from lot sales. The Greek Revival building (see Figure 28), although built cheaply of brick with a stucco veneer, initially presented an imposing seat for State government in the State House Square. The design by architects Town and Davis of New York featured a main portion resembling a Greek temple, topped by a Renaissance-style dome.²⁶

²⁶ See James A. Glass, “The Architects Town and Davis and the Second Indiana Statehouse,” *Indiana Magazine of History* (December, 1984), Vol. LXXX, No. 4, pp. 329-47.

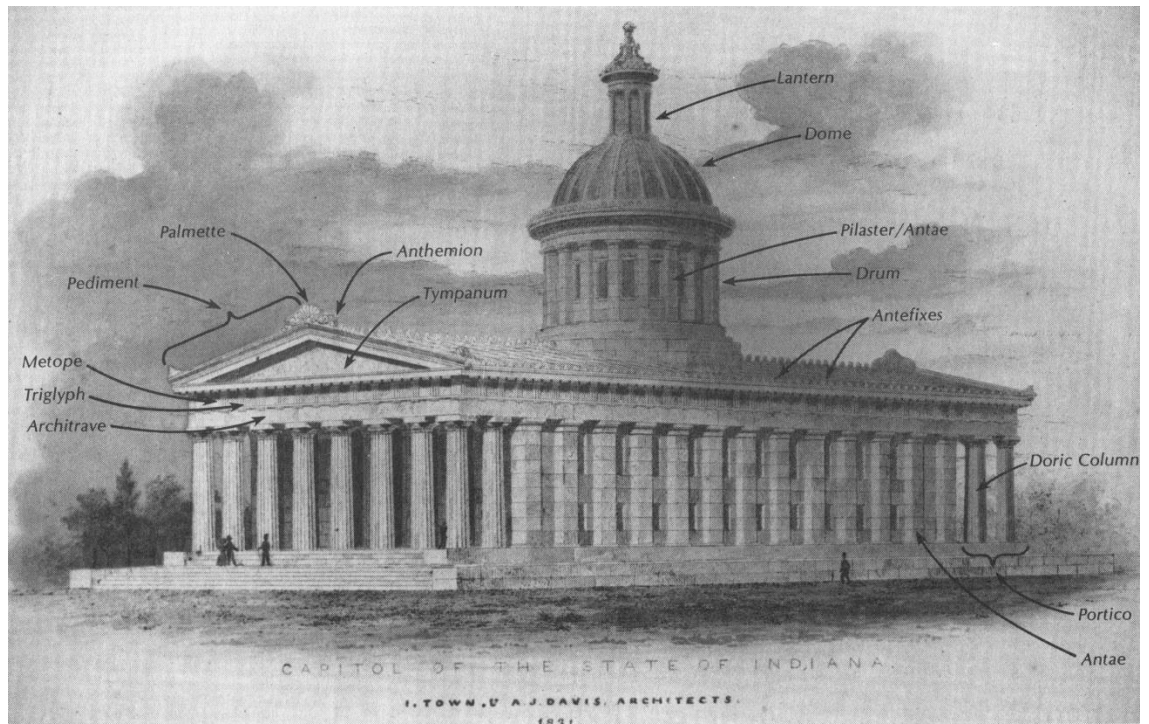


Figure 28. Perspective drawing of Second Indiana Statehouse, 1831. Indiana State Library

Rapid growth associated with the railroad during the late 1840s and through the 1850s brought industry and a major population increase, as well as incorporation of Indianapolis as a city. Because of the state capital's position as a railroad center in the Midwest area, during the Civil War it grew even more rapidly, as factories opened to produce munitions and clothing for Union troops. Wholesale houses opened to receive foodstuffs, dry goods, and manufactured products and re-sell them to retailers. An 1871 "Bird's Eye View of Indianapolis," showing the city from the west (Figure 29), indicates a considerable expansion of additions to the 1821 plan and Donation area, with a grid-iron pattern extending in all directions.



Figure 29. Bird's Eye View of Indianapolis, 1871, showing the expansion of city. *Hyman's Hand Book of Indianapolis* (Indianapolis: M.R. Hyman Co., 1897), p. 50.

By 1883, the population had increased to about 95,000 people. An 1889 map (Figure 30) shows a further growth of the physical area of the city through more real estate additions. The private citizens who platted these additions favored the gridiron pattern almost exclusively as the one that yielded the most lots for sale. A further look at the northern portion of the 1889 map (Figure 31) reveals that the authors of the new plats frequently made little effort to integrate their streets smoothly into the existing grid pattern, creating jogs on north-south and east-west streets. Some of these jogs still exist on Illinois, Pennsylvania, and Delaware Streets traveling north and south and on New York Street to the east.



Figure 30. Map of Indianapolis, 1889. “R.L. Polk & Co’s City Directory Map of Indianapolis, Ind.” (Indianapolis: Wm. B. Burford, 1889).

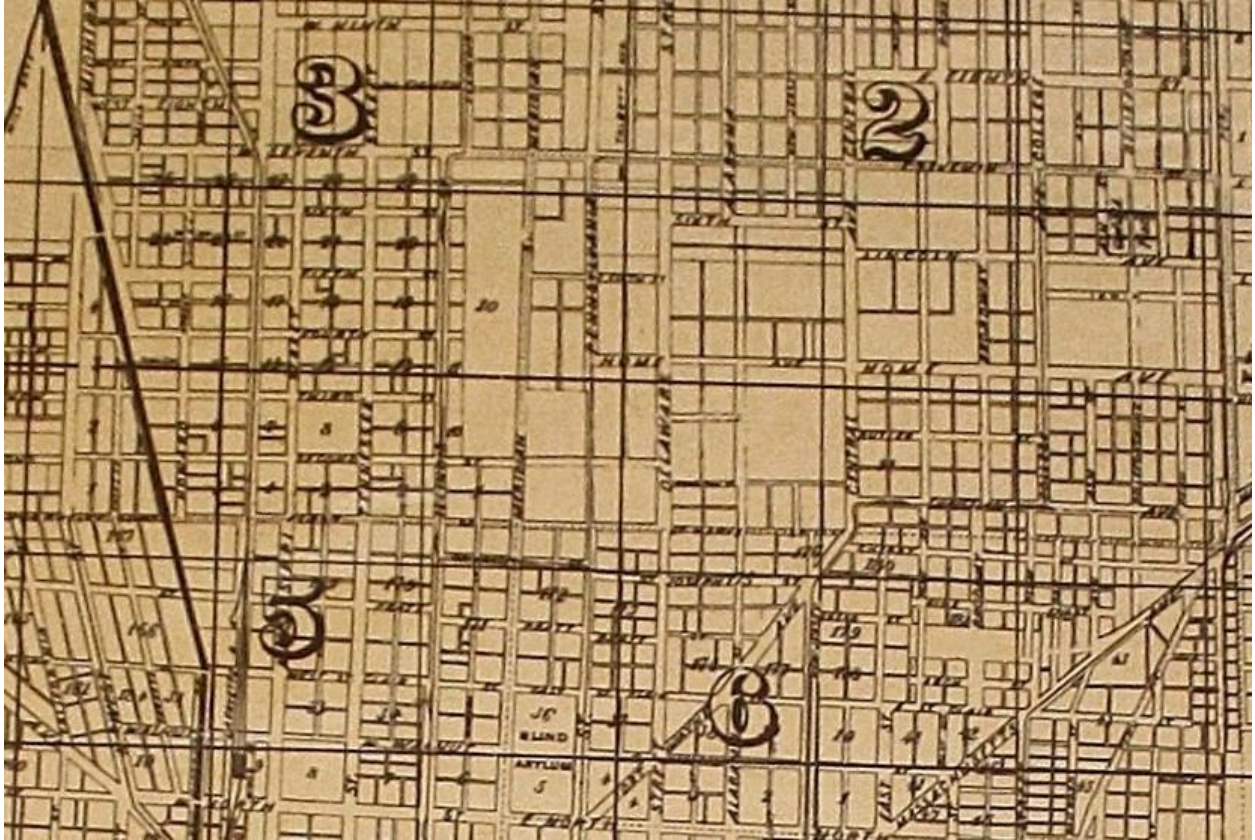


Figure 31. Detail of 1889 Map of Indianapolis, showing irregular gridiron street patterns.

A few real estate promoters, like James O. Woodruff, created exclusive suburbs with refined embellishments. His Woodruff Place, due east of Indianapolis, featured expansive esplanades at the center of the north-south streets, cast-iron fountains at the center, and statuary, additional fountains, and trees along the esplanades (Figure 32). A Romantic-era suburb also rose five miles east of the Mile Square in the early 1870s, as promoters from Centerville laid out the town of Irvington (Figure 33), with curvilinear streets and two circles north and south of Washington Street, as we can see from this early map of Irvington.²⁷

²⁷ Sulgrove, pp. 16, 20; R.L. Polk and Co., "City Directory Map of Indianapolis, Ind." (Indianapolis: William B. Burford, 1889). Copy in Indiana Division, Indiana State Library.



Figure 32. Promotional poster for Woodruff Place, c. 1872. "Entrance to Woodruff Place, Indianapolis, Indiana" (Indianapolis: Braden and Burford, n.d.). William Henry Smith Library, Indiana Historical Society



Figure 33. Map of Irvington, 1872. From Paul C. Diebold, *Greater Irvington: Architecture, People and Place on the Indianapolis Eastside* (Indianapolis: Irvington Historical Society, 1997), p. 3.

By the early 20th century, Ralston's Mile Square had been completely developed. A large retail district extended along Washington Street (Figure 34). Banks and office buildings had risen along Washington and adjacent streets to the north. An imposing Union Railway Station (Figure 35) discharged and accepted passengers between Louisiana and South Streets, and the state's largest wholesale district held sway between the station and Washington (Figure 36). Industry had moved for the most part outside the Mile Square, especially along White River. Retail stores, hotels, and office buildings, often with flat-iron shapes, had been constructed along the four diagonal avenues (Figures 37 and 38). And at the center of the Circle, a majestic, 284-foot Soldiers' and Sailor's Monument had arisen during the 1890s, as Indiana's tribute to its veterans of the Civil War (Figure 39).



Figure 34. Retail district along Washington Street (left) and office buildings along Meridian Street, c. 1924. *Souvenir of Indianapolis* (Indianapolis: Kingan & Co., c. 1924)



Figure 35. Union Station, c. 1924. *Souvenir of Indianapolis*



Figure 36. View north on S. Meridian Street, in wholesale district. *Souvenir of Indianapolis*



Figure 37. View on Massachusetts Avenue from Pennsylvania, 1912. "Massachusetts Avenue at Night, Indianapolis, Ind." 1912. Posted by LiterateIndy on Twitter, February 6, 2018



Figure 38. Hotel Lincoln and Kentucky Avenue from Washington Street, c. 1924. *Souvenir of Indianapolis*



P0130_BOX39_FOLDER6_1602

Figure 39. Indiana Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument, c. 1905. Bass Photo Collection, William Henry Smith Library, Indiana Historical Society



Figure 40. Peace sculptures by Rudolf Schwarz, west side of Monument, 1902. Joseph Van Trees, "Views in Monument Place, Indianapolis" (Indianapolis: Charles Mayer & Co., c. 1902).

To what extent had the center of Indianapolis become the beautiful city that Ralston wistfully predicted? In terms of public spaces, architecture, and parks, the city had much beauty to commend it. At the center of the Mile Square plat, the soaring Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument terminated the vistas from far to the north on Meridian, from Union Station on the south, from the State House on the west, and from the City Market and county courthouse on the east. Its unique ensemble of vertical shaft crowned by the statue of Victory, thrilling sculptures (Figure 40) depicting the drama of Civil War battles and sacrifices of Indiana soldiers, and dominance of Monument Circle made it a memorable element of city planning. Two blocks to the west, the current Indiana State House, an imposing Italian Renaissance style building, terminated the vista effectively from the Circle along Market Street with its portico and dome (Figure 41). As we've seen, the four diagonal avenues were given definition and personality by a series of flatiron buildings constructed at the corners, and from the top of the Monument, sight-seers could gain impressive views looking down each avenue to its termination in the distance (see Figures 42, 43, and 44).

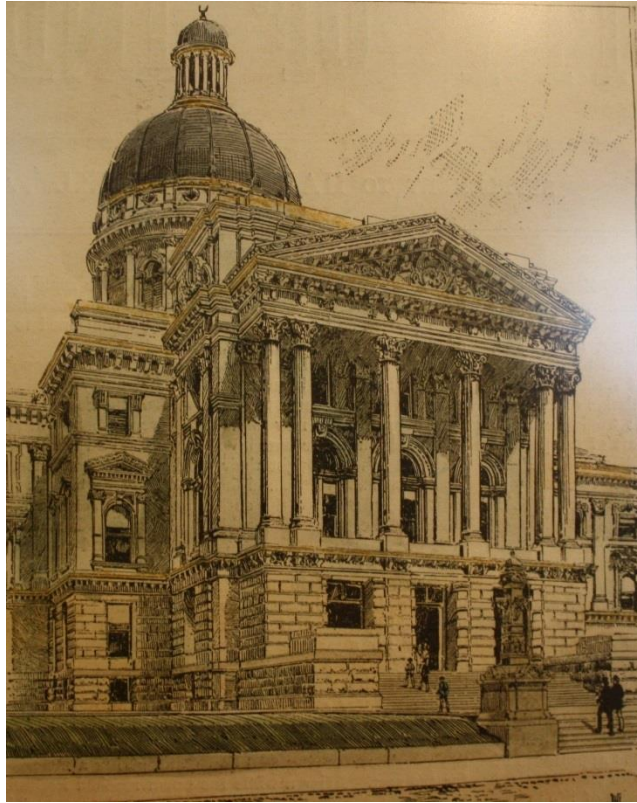


Figure 41. Portico and dome, Indiana State House, 1888.
From "The City of Indianapolis. Supplement to *Harper's Weekly*
August 11, 1888."



Figure 42. Looking northwest from Monument on Massachusetts Avenue, c. 1893. Photographic
Collection, Indiana State Library



Figure 43. Looking northwest from Monument on Indiana Avenue, c. 1893. Photographic Collection, Indiana State Library



Figure 44. Looking southeast on Virginia Avenue, c. 1955. Photographic Collection, Indiana State Library

There were two 19th century parks in the downtown area—University Park on the site of the University Square (Figure 45) and Military Park on the site of a military reservation created along West Street in the 1820s (Figure 46). These were joined in the 1920s and 1930s by the monumental World War Memorial Plaza, a five-block long City Beautiful park and memorial constructed to honor the sacrifices of Indiana's World War I veterans (Figure 47). At its center, soaring over neighboring buildings was the Memorial Hall (Figure 48), a Neo-Classical shrine with pyramidal roof based on the design for the Tomb of Mausolus at Halicarnassus in the ancient world. At the north end of the plaza was a sunken grassy mall terminating in the elegantly proportioned Greek Doric Indianapolis Public Library (Figure 49).

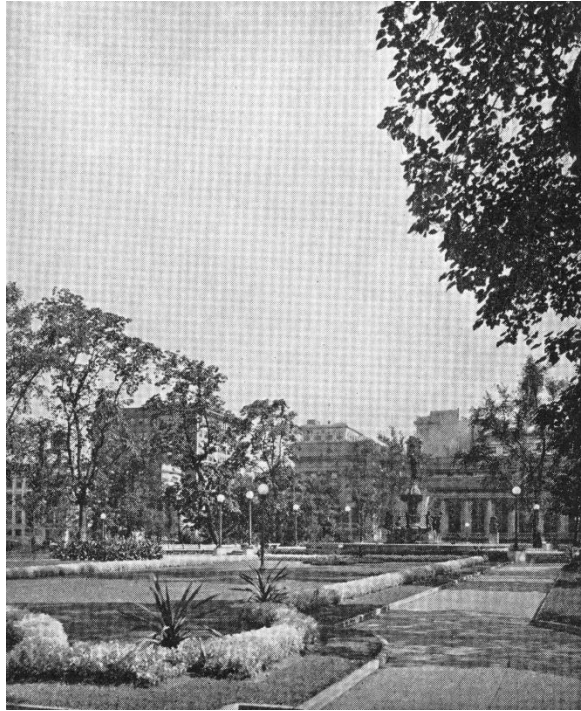


Figure 45. University Park, c. 1924. *Souvenir of Indianapolis*



Figure 46. Military Park, 1897. *Hyman's Hand Book of Indianapolis*, 1897, p. 65.



Figure 47. Indiana World War Memorial Plaza seen from Memorial Building, c. late 1930s. Indiana War Memorials Commission Collection



Figure 48. Indiana War Memorial Building, c. 1929. Indiana War Memorials Commission

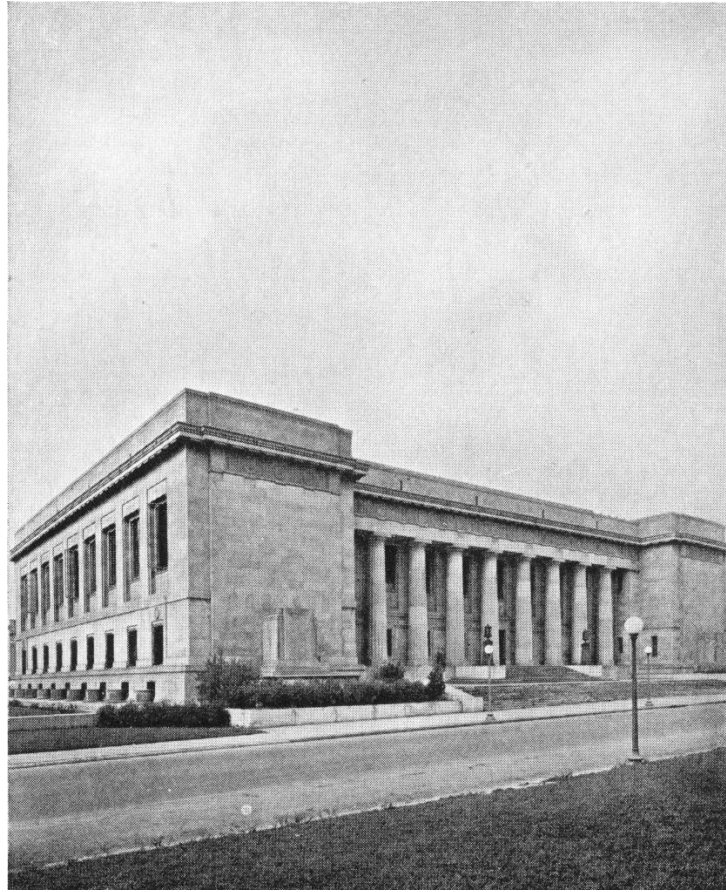


Figure 49. Indianapolis Public Library, c. 1924. *Souvenir of Indianapolis*

Buildings on the Circle constructed between 1902 and 1930 paid deference to the Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument with restricted heights and limestone facades (Figure 50). Along the World War Memorial Plaza, architects designed new buildings to defer to that memorial, with limited heights and orientations to face the plaza. One of the most beautiful buildings of the 1920s, according to the American Institute of Architects, fronted the north end of the plaza, the Neo-Gothic Scottish Rite Cathedral (Figure 51). It rose majestically on Meridian Street with its central carillon tower. Others carefully scaled to complement the memorial were the Italian Renaissance Indianapolis Athletic Club (Figure 52) and the Neo-Gothic Chamber of Commerce Building (Figure 53).²⁸

²⁸ William L. Selm, Statement of Significance for Expanded Indiana War Memorials National Historic Landmark Historic District nomination, 2016, pp. 33-34, 37-38. Copy at Indiana Division of Historic Preservation and Archaeology, Indianapolis.



Figure 50. Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument, Circle, and 1920s office buildings fronting Circle. Photographic Collection, Indiana State Library



Figure 51. Scottish Rite Cathedral, c. 1930. Indiana War Memorials Commission Collection



Figure 52. Indianapolis Athletic Club, c. 1924. *Souvenir of Indianapolis*



Figure 53. Chamber of Commerce Building, 2018 James Glass

All of the above elements grew organically out of the Ralston Plan and provided an urban sensibility with a high degree of aesthetic harmony. What is the situation today? In a word—mixed. The Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument continues to be a source of identity for the city at its center, providing the perfect element of urban design in the 1821 Circle (Figure 54). The Circle itself serves as a natural civic gathering place for festivals and special events. The Statehouse (Figure 55) continues to terminate the vista along Market Street and be acknowledged as a majestic seat for state government.



Figure 54. Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument and Monument Circle in 2014. James Glass



Figure 55. Indiana State House terminates vista from Monument, 2018. James Glass

The War Memorial Plaza (Figure 56) continues to provide a complementary monumental exercise integrating impressive works of architecture and landscape design. Most of the early 20th century limestone buildings designed to defer to the Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument have been retained, and the newer ones have tended to be restrained in their massing and detailing. Likewise, the Scottish Rite Cathedral and its companions from the 1920s along the World War Memorial Plaza continue to give a high degree of aesthetic refinement to the corridor. With a couple of exceptions, the newer buildings along the plaza, such as the concrete Capehart-Minton Federal Building, have honored the scale set by the earlier buildings (Figure 57).



Figure 56. World War Memorial Plaza, c. 2013. Indiana War Memorials Commission



Figure 57. Minton-Capehart Federal Building, 2013. James Glass

The most unsatisfactory change in Ralston's plan and a loss to the civic beauty that he foresaw, I would suggest, is the removal of much of the four diagonal avenues—a key element from Washington's plan that Ralston brought to Indianapolis. Since the 1960s, all but the outermost block of Kentucky Avenue, the southwest avenue, has been vacated and covered with the

Convention Center and Merchants Plaza (Figure 58). Virginia Avenue, the southeast diagonal (Figure 59), is still open to traffic in the Mile Square, but a substantial part of it is covered and its vista obstructed by a large parking garage for Bankers Life Field House. On Massachusetts Avenue, in the late 1960s, the first block was vacated to provide an expansive site for the 37-story headquarters building of Indiana National Bank (Figure 60). A similar project in the early 1980s filled in the first block of Indiana Avenue with a new headquarters building for American United Life Insurance Company (Figure 61). These building projects without question have brought economic development benefits to downtown Indianapolis, provided it with a more vertical skyline, and concentrated jobs in the city center. But it is quite possible that all of these benefits could have been accommodated by more imaginative designs that kept open the defining corridors of the diagonals or shifted the sites to the square blocks nearby. Massachusetts Avenue, with most of its historic commercial buildings and unusual configuration surviving (Figure 62), has shown how diagonals can attract thriving entertainment and arts districts that add richly to downtown vitality. Further evidence is found on Virginia Avenue near Fountain Square.



Figure 58. Hotel Lincoln and first block of Kentucky Avenue, c. 1959 (left) and same location with former Merchants Plaza and Hyatt Regency Hotel, 2018. First, Indianapolis Historic Preservation Commission Collection. Second, James Glass

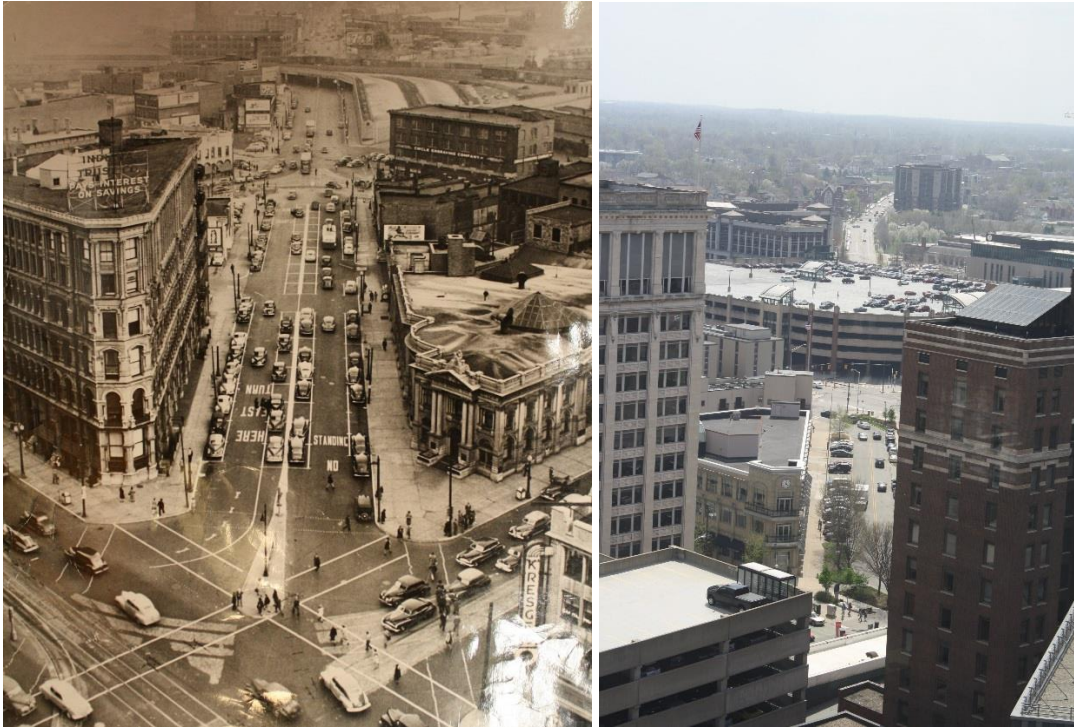


Figure 59. Looking down Virginia Avenue, c. 1955 (left) and looking down Virginia Avenue, 2018, Left: Photographic Collection, Indiana State Library. Right: James Glass

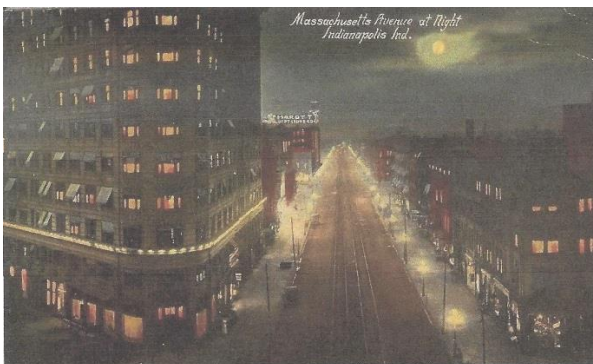


Figure 60. Looking down Massachusetts Avenue from Pennsylvania, 1912 (left) and looking at same location, 2018. Left: posted by LiterateIndy on Twitter, February 6, 2018. Right: James Glass



Figure 62. Looking down Indiana Avenue from Monument, c. 1893 (left) and Looking at same location, 2018 (right). Left: Photographic Collection, Indiana State Library. Right: James Glass



Figure 63. View of Massachusetts Avenue northeast from New York Street, 2018. James Glass

In closing, let us return to Alexander Ralston. What has been done to honor the author of the Indianapolis Mile Square plan? If you travel to Crown Hill Cemetery and visit Lot 30 of Section

3, you will see the tribute created by Emmett Rice and the Indiana Teachers Federation in 1937. A granite headstone marks Ralston's grave (Figure 63), and the Mile Square plan that he designed is engraved on the front of the gray granite stone.²⁹



Figure 64. Marker on grave of Alexander Ralston, Crown Hill Cemetery. James Glass

²⁹ Emmet A. Rice, "Marker to Man Who Designed City Is Unveiled, *Indianapolis News*, November 29, 1937, in clipping file "Indianapolis—Memorials," Indiana Division, Indiana State Library.