

# Holliday Park

## *History*



*The Pergola at Holliday Park*

*The Pergola, designed by Alexander Holliday, is the only remaining structure in the park that was here during the Holliday's time.*



*Holliday Park Nature Center*





The history of Holliday Park is deeply rooted in its unique landscape, the bounty of its flora and fauna and the people that graced it with their lives, their families and their efforts. During the time that Native Americans roamed the land that would one day be central Indiana, it was covered with a vast forest of great trees. A beech-maple forest spread across the area that would eventually be Holliday Park and much of the early settlement that was to be Indianapolis. Tulip trees, some 200 feet tall, grew on the higher ground and sycamores flourished on the banks of the rivers. The trees and brush provided dense shade and the ground was covered with a deep mulch of leaves. In the springtime, when light reached the forest floor, great masses of wild flowers appeared.

Animal life was plentiful in the White River Valley. Waterfowl, fish, small mammals and songbirds thrived along the river, and wolves, elk and deer in the forests. Because of the plentiful game and abundant freshwater fish, Native Americans used the land as migratory hunting grounds. The Miami and Delaware tribes hunted in the vicinity of what is now

Holliday Park, but there is no evidence of any permanent settlements in the immediate area. The tribes also probably used the abundant seep springs as a source of fresh water.

The state of Indiana was admitted to the Union in 1816, opening up the Northwest Territory to settlers. In 1818 Governor William Henry Harrison signed the Treaty of Saint Mary's with the Delaware and Miami Indians. By this treaty the tribes ceded the land in the eastern half of the state from the Ohio River to the Wabash to the state of Indiana. The land, known as "the New Purchase," was to be occupied by the Indians until 1821, but the settlers began arriving as early as 1819. Indianapolis was selected as the state capital in 1821, and within a few years the dense forest was transformed into a small but busy community.

Among the settlers was Jeremiah Johnson, who arrived from Kentucky with three of his sons—Jeremiah Jr., Samuel and John Johnson—in the early spring of 1821. Although this family first located about two miles north of downtown, Jeremiah Jr. and Samuel later moved farther north and were the first to own the specific acreage that makes up Holliday Park. They

knew the area because of trips they took to Seth Bacon's gristmill.

The Johnson family was the subject of an account of pioneer life in early Indianapolis kept by Oliver Johnson, grandson of Jeremiah Sr., and published by his own son, Howard Johnson, in *A Home In the Woods*. The book relates how the 18-year-old Oliver and a younger brother were sent from John Johnson's homestead near what is now 38th and Meridian streets to the gristmill to have corn ground to meal. Finding most of the nearby mills engaged, they rode their horses from what is now 38th Street and Fall Creek (near the current fairgrounds) to Spring Mill (Seth Bacon's Mill). This mill was located at the top of Crow's Nest Hill on the west side of Mill Road, just south of what is now Holliday Park. The gristmill, which had an overshot wheel, used the old spring that flowed out of the hills. Remnants of the mill site and a millpond are still present on property at the west side of Spring Mill Road.

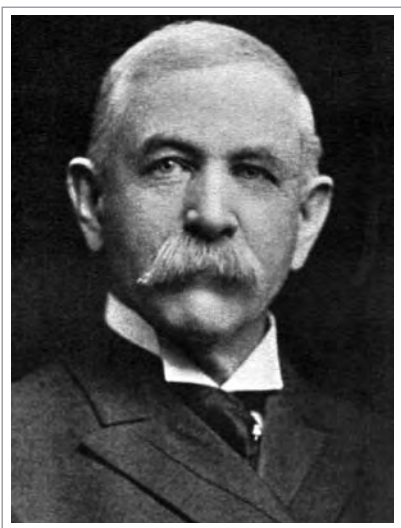
John Krise, who owned most of the land directly south of the park, ran a similar mill from 1840 to 1860. This larger and more elaborate mill, located on the east side of Spring Mill Road at the bottom of the hill near the river, was also known as Spring Mill, or Krise's Mill. Although the natural springs that once flourished in the area have diminished with the development of the land, there are still small geologic seeps in the park to remind us of the importance of this land's past resources.

Jeremiah Jr. and Samuel Johnson obtained the original patent, or deed, for the land that is now Holliday Park from the government on April 24, 1823. Samuel died shortly after obtaining the deed and the land passed to Jeremiah, who then sold it to Samuel's son John Johnson in 1827. John farmed the land until 1842, when he sold it to Augustus Keeler. His son Ira Keeler took possession of the land after two years, until his death in 1855. Because Ira died intestate, his brothers and sisters and all of their heirs were entitled to a share in the estate. Ira's brother, Foster Keeler, bought the other heirs' interests and continued to farm the property. He eventually sold the farm to William Bradley for \$2,000 in 1859. William sold it in 1887 to his son, John Bradley, who sold it to John Holliday in 1892.

### **John Hampden Holliday**

John Hampden Holliday—newspaperman, financier, philanthropist and civic leader—was born May 31, 1846, and grew up in the young city of Indianapolis. His grandfather, Samuel Holliday, had settled in Indiana in 1816 before the territory became a state and served as associate judge of the Madison County Circuit Court. After studying at Miami University of Ohio and Princeton Theological Seminary, John's father, the Reverend William A. Holliday, came to Indianapolis in 1833 to serve as pastor of First Presbyterian Church. He later left Indianapolis and joined the faculty of Hanover College.





*John Hampden Holliday*

John and his three siblings spent their childhood in the 1850s enjoying both urban and country life in what was by then a small city. The woods that surrounded the city provided squirrels, rabbits and birds to hunt and nuts, berries and pawpaws to collect. In summer the boys swam and fished in the rivers and canals, and in the winter they sought out ponds on which to slide and skate.

Holliday lived in Indianapolis all his life. His college years were spent at Northwestern Christian University (now Butler) and at Hanover College, graduating in 1864. Then 18 years old, he enlisted in the 137<sup>th</sup> Indiana Volunteer Infantry shortly before graduation and served his 100-day enlistment. After he was discharged, he attempted to re-enlist in the 70<sup>th</sup> Infantry but was rejected by the medical examiner.

He turned to journalism as a career and in 1869, when he was 23 years old, he established the *Indianapolis News*, functioning initially as owner, editor and business manager. It was one of the first two-cents evening newspapers



*Evaline Holliday*

west of Pittsburgh. During the ensuing 23 years, the newspaper grew from a circulation of 1,200 to 25,000 readers. Holliday intended his newspaper to be a family paper attractive to women as well as men. In the beginning he established policies for the paper that included: making circulation numbers available to all advertisers, refusing to print advertisements as editorial matter, and excluding all advertisements with objectionable content. The paper was well written and well edited, and through its editorials the newspaper took a stand on many causes, including support of the adoption of the city charter and the formation of the Chamber of Commerce. It opposed the loan of public money for the construction of the Belt Railroad. It supported sound money and home rule and opposed the third term for the presidency. The paper was independent of political parties, unusual for a paper of that period.

In 1909 the federal government filed a libel suit—related to Theodore Roosevelt's involvement in dealings concerning the

Panama Canal—against the paper. Although the trial was scheduled for Washington, the lawyers insisted that it be tried in Indianapolis, where the libel was alleged to have occurred. The judge's ruling in favor of the newspaper stands as an early victory for freedom of the press.

John Holliday waged war on corruption during the years that he owned the *News*. An advocate of good government, he worked for the people as a whole and not for any faction or individual. Ill health forced him to sell the newspaper in 1892, but after his recovery a year later, Holliday and a group of friends founded the Union Trust Co, where he served as president. In 1899 his love of journalism led him to establish the short-lived *Indianapolis Press*. In 1901 this paper merged with the *News* and Holliday returned to the Union Trust, where he continued for the remaining 26 years of his life, first as president and later as chairman of the board. (Union Trust eventually merged with Indiana National Bank)

John Holliday had met Evaline Rieman in 1874 while vacationing at White Sulfur Springs, Virginia. She was the daughter of Alexander Rieman, a prominent Baltimore merchant. They married in 1875 and together they built a life for their seven children at their home at 1121 North Meridian Street.

Concerned for the poor and their children, John Holliday was involved with most of the charities in the city. His philanthropic activities included serving as president of the

Indianapolis Charity Organizations Society for 24 years and as a member of the State Board of Charities. He formed the Immigrant Aid Association and the Foreign House in an effort to improve living conditions for immigrants and to give them a place where they could attend language classes.

He was active in many civic groups: president of the Board of Trade, a member of the Commercial Club (forerunner of the Chamber of Commerce), president of the Public Welfare Loan Association, and a member of the University Club, the Indianapolis Literary Club, the Sons of the American Revolution and the Grand Army of the Republic. He was one of seven charter members of the local chapter of the American Red Cross, and during World War I he was its treasurer. He was instrumental in the creation of the Juvenile Court. His long experience with the Charity Organizations Society had acquainted him with the needs of the children of the poor, and he promoted legislation to help the court in its work for child welfare.

He served as president of the board of trustees of Hanover College and was a member of the board of McCormick Theological Seminary and a ruling elder of First Presbyterian Church.

Evaline Holliday was a loving mother to their seven children, but also was busy with church and civic affairs. She was a member of the Indianapolis Woman's Club, president of the Indianapolis Free Kindergarten Society, and a member of the DAR and the Indiana Society of

Colonial Dames. She was instrumental in the founding of the Society of Indiana Pioneers. She was an honorary member of the board of that organization and of the board of the Children's Guardian Home and a director of The Teacher's College of Indianapolis. Both she and John were so busy that she once told her children that she looked forward to the Wednesday evening prayer meeting at First Presbyterian Church because she had her husband all to herself as they walked to church.

Although both were involved in civic, church and social activities, they spent time with their children. John was an avid reader, and he liked to tell the children stories from the books he read. He was an excellent storyteller, making events in history and fiction exciting for them. He radiated a love of life, making the children laugh, and his hearty laugh joined with theirs. He sang hymns in a beautiful tenor voice, and music was part of their lives.

In 1892, while he was recovering from his illness, John Holliday bought John Bradley's 80-acre farm. At the time, the property included a farm, woodlands with ravines leading down to the White River, a number of springs, a brook and a short stretch of riverbank. Even though this land had been farmed for 70 years, it provided a beautiful place for the children to play, swim and enjoy the freedom of the outdoors, just as Holliday had done when he was a boy.

The Hollidays built a 23-room frame house with porches facing the river. A lane of chestnut

trees and a circular drive approached the front of the house. They planted arborvitae, copper beeches, a blue spruce and a ginkgo tree and developed a rose garden near the circular drive. Their son, Alexander, an amateur landscaper, designed a tennis court and formal garden backed by a pergola and a hedge of Siberian arborvitae. The pergola and the arborvitae hedge remain today at the entrance to the nature center. There were horses, a pony and cart, and a log cabin that was used as a playhouse for the children. They played tennis and croquet. Still, the woods were their primary playground, and the sandy spring was the site of dams and forts.

The country house was situated on a hill overlooking the White River. They called the house Reka Dom, River House in Russian, after a house in a story by Juliana Ewing that Evaline had read to the children. They lived in their country house five months of the year, from May to September, entertaining friends and family throughout the summer and particularly on the Fourth of July. A granddaughter, Elizabeth Hitz, recalled one of these annual parties in the *Indianapolis News* in 1969. She remembered her excitement at seeing the carriages driving up to the porch on the morning of the Fourth with whole families arriving for the celebration. Noon dinner, including platters of fried chicken, was served on the porch of the farmhouse. The afternoon was spent relaxing or enjoying a game of cards or tennis. The boys set off firecrackers or explored the woods. After a light supper and when darkness fell, there were elaborate fireworks.





*Reka Dom — the Holliday residence*

In 1916 at the centennial celebration of Indiana statehood, the Hollidays donated their beautiful country estate to the city of Indianapolis. At the time it was given to the city, the land comprised 80 acres on Mill Creek Road (now Spring Mill Road) in a section of beautiful country homes. In addition to the springs and natural forest, the property had a garden of flowers, fruits and roses around the house and a grotto. There was a farm, maintained by a farmer that produced fruits and vegetables for the family.

John Holliday's words at that celebration tell us much about the man: "I believe that a responsibility of his community rests upon every citizen. If he has prospered through the growth and business activity of the place, he ought to do something to make it better than he found it."

In donating the estate to the city Holliday expressed his belief that "the land is singularly suited to be a place for recreation and the study of nature and the grounds should be used as a public park and a playground." The conditions

of the donation were that the city would take possession of the land three years after the death of the surviving spouse, that a plaque would be erected with the names of the donors engraved thereon and that the property would be used for recreation and the study of nature.

In 1921, shortly after a walk in his woods, John Holiday had a stroke; he died one week later at his country house. At his death he was eulogized by most of the civic and business leaders of the city and state, as well as by Thomas R. Marshall, former vice president of the United States. One of the most moving tributes to him was made by the foreign-born residents who gathered at the "Foreigners' House" to sign a resolution in their native languages (Greek, Serbian, Rumanian, and Bulgarian):

"The men and women of foreign birth residing in the city of Indianapolis have lost their best friend. He organized the Immigrants Aid Society and through this organization he and his associates blazed the way for

*“I believe that a responsibility of his community rests upon every citizen. If he has prospered through the growth and business activity of the place, he ought to do something to make it better than he found it.”*

*John Holliday, 1916*

real Americanization. Thousands of aliens, young and old, men and women have been beneficiaries of the good work done by this organization.”

Holliday’s sons, Alexander and John Jr., graduated from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. John Jr. died of pneumonia during the influenza epidemic that occurred during World War I. He had been in the Army just one month and was stationed in Washington, D.C. The five Holliday daughters graduated from Bryn Mawr College. Evaline died in 1929 at her home on Meridian Street, and in 1932 the Holliday estate was turned over to the city.

### **The Botanical Garden and The Arboretum**

In the next few years after the city took possession of the property, two events affected the park and its landscape. One was the presence of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and the other was the appointment of Willard Clute as director of the park.

Workers employed by the WPA, an employment relief and economic stimulation program of the Roosevelt Administration, cleared the underbrush and fallen trees in the park. Their bulldozers rearranged the terrain and destroyed many native plants in the park. However, they also constructed paths and roads in the woodlands. Several small streams that flowed down the ravines were dammed

to create small ponds that were stocked with trout and bluegill. The workers built a picnic shelter along one of the paths near 64th Street and brought in boulders to construct the path down the ravine, creating what is now the rock garden.

The person chosen to develop the park was Willard Nelson Clute. Trained as a botanist and with experience as a curator at several botanic gardens, he envisioned the park as one of the largest and finest botanical gardens in the country. Clute was an instructor at Butler University from 1938 to 1941 and curator of the herbarium there at the time of this appointment. He had no formal academic degree but had experience as an assistant curator of botany at both Columbia University and the New York Botanical Gardens. He taught high school biology in Chicago and Joliet, Illinois, before coming to Indianapolis. His particular interest was ferns and fern allies, and he published several guides to this group of plants. He was a founding member of the American Fern Society as well as a member of many other scientific societies, and he also founded the periodicals *Plant World*, *The Bryologist* and *The Fern Bulletin*. He wrote 19 books on various topics in botany, including a number of high school biology manuals and books and essays for the general public on botanical subjects.

In developing the botanical gardens at Holliday Park, Clute bought, borrowed and swapped in



his efforts to build up a collection of rare and exotic plants, which he then distributed along the trails and walks. He designed herbaceous gardens at the entrance to the park with 86 varieties of peonies, and he planted a similar number of varieties of iris near a shallow pool. Woody perennials were arranged in phylogenetic order, from the most primitive plants to the more highly adapted plants. There were more varieties of maples in the park than existed in any other park in the country. There was a Japanese “red” maple, rare at the time, and an unusual Japanese lilac. In a sandy area in the southeast section of the park, he planted a cactus garden with 43 kinds of cactus and many exotics. The construction and collection of plants took eight years to complete, and the gardens were finally opened to the public in 1940.

Clute’s insistence that the botanical garden should be limited to rare and exotic plants led to a dispute with the Parks Department over

the planting of beds of common garden plants, which he felt were inappropriate in a botanical garden. When, in 1941, the Parks Department wanted to plant beds of zinnias, he resigned.

While most of his herbaceous gardens have disappeared, many of the trees planted in the arboretum still exist. The Japanese lilacs are large and showy trees, and many of the wild species that Clute collected still grow in the woodland.

After Willard Clute left, a series of park managers were appointed. Most were high school botany or biology teachers who worked part-time during the school year and full-time in the summer. In 1941 Scott McCoy, a botany teacher at Arsenal Technical High School, was hired to work at the park during the summer developing and maintaining the flowerbeds. McCoy was an Indiana farm boy who spent one year at Indiana University (1916) before serving in the Navy in World War I. After the war he did not return to college, but was employed



by Indiana Bell and, later, at the Indianapolis Morris Plan. His interest in natural history led him to the Nature Study Club and the Indiana Academy of Science in 1928. Eventually he returned to college, enrolling in Butler University in 1934. He received a bachelor of science degree in 1937 and a master's degree in 1938. He began teaching botany at Arsenal Technical High School in 1937 and he taught there for 30 years. During his tenure, he developed a nature preserve and botanical gardens at the high school, and he published a number of papers on ecological surveys of several large tracts of land in Indiana. He was a close friend of a number of local naturalists, including Charles Deem, a famous naturalist who wrote the first book on the trees of Indiana. These associations led to McCoy's interest in native plants, and he took on the job of increasing the number of native plant species in the arboretum. He also popularized the park in his column "Happenings at Holliday Park," which he regularly contributed to the *Indianapolis Star*.

One of McCoy's lasting legacies is the number of native plant specimens in the park. He actively planted these specimens in the upper gardens and along the wooded ravines of the park, adding diversity to the original plants that grew there. He resigned in 1947 because of differences with the director of the city parks, Paul V. Brown, who wanted to allow boys to use the park for camping. McCoy believed that the arboretum should be protected and that it should not become a playground. He later

worked as a forester, planting native trees at Eagle Creek Reservoir, which at that time was not a city park.

After McCoy, there were irregular appointments to the position of director or park naturalist. The individuals appointed had varied qualifications and interests, and most stayed only a few years. Chester Long, who followed McCoy, continued writing the columns in the *Star* and kept the gardens up in the summer. In 1947 a tornado destroyed many trees in the park, including some that the Hollidays had planted around their home.

Sidney Eaton, who served the park in the 1950s, taught at Broad Ripple High School, and was a lecturer in zoology at Butler University from 1936 to 1951. A naturalist for 30 years, he had been chief naturalist for the Indiana State Parks and a lecturer for the State Conservation Department. By this time, the Holliday home had been converted into a botanic library and museum of natural history, which was used by school children, local garden clubs and community organizations. Eaton gave lectures on plants, animals, birds and wildlife during his tenure at Holliday Park, and the park had exhibits of cultivated flowers during the summer.

In 1952 Walter Holt was appointed as year-round supervisor of the park. A neighbor and friend of Willard Clute, he was a retired insurance executive whose only qualification was that he was an amateur gardener specializing in roses. His main contribution to

the park was improvements to the picnic area.

Also in 1952, the Indianapolis Parks Department offered the Indianapolis Art League (now Indianapolis Art Center) the use of the Holliday House for classes, workshops and art lectures. The house was also used to exhibit the members' works. One of the Art League instructors was Elmer Taflinger.

### **The Ruins**

Throughout the 1940s and into the 1950s, Holliday Park was maintained as a botanical garden and arboretum. It contained the largest collection of plants between Philadelphia and St. Louis. It had formal gardens, reflecting pools, five spring-fed ponds in the woods (one was stocked with trout), a boulder garden, picnic area and more than three miles of marked trails and paths. However, the park was not heavily used. It was at this time that the common names were added to the labels on the plants and trees.

Gradually, during the 1950s, the park ceased to be maintained as a botanical garden. The Holliday House was used by the Art League until it was destroyed by fire in 1955. The library and all the botanical records were lost, as well as the Art League's supplies and paintings then on exhibit in the house. In 1960 a new Holliday House, a contemporary flat-roofed building, replaced it. The new building contained a 35 by 50 foot meeting room, library, office and small kitchen and provided

meeting facilities for garden clubs and nature study groups and served as a senior citizens' center.

In 1958 a new development would bring a fresh emphasis to the park. It began hundreds of miles away in New York City at the St. Paul Building at 220 Broadway. On the façade of the building, which was owned by the Western Electric Company, were three massive statues made of Indiana limestone. They had been created by the well-known architectural sculptor Karl Bitter who had designed part of the façade of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the bronze doors to Trinity Church in New York City. Indianapolis already had several sculptures by Bitter, two Herron Art Museum plaques and the DePew Fountain in University Park executed by A. Sterling Calder.

Since Western Electric planned to build a new skyscraper at the site, the company wanted to find a new home for the sculptures, which were referred to as "the Races of Mankind." Indianapolis, among a number of other cities and universities that had presented plans for use of the statues, was awarded the highly prized sculptures, which were valued at about \$150,000. In the description of plans for the statues, the Parks Department, with the approval of Mayor Phillip Bayt, requested the facing stone, the doorways and the ledge supported by the figures. They also planned to restore the original base and columns. The statues were to be placed east of the new community center that was under construction at that time. A reflecting pool would be



*Facade of St. Paul Building with The Races of Man*

located between the building and the statues, and two geysers of water would rise from it. Indianapolis artist Elmer Taflinger submitted drawings of the site, and the city estimated that it would spend \$25,000 on the installation. The description of plans stated that funds were available for the erection of the structure and that Taflinger would supervise the entire installation.

Elmer Taflinger became the driving force in the development of what came to be known as “the Ruins.” Taflinger was a native of Indianapolis (1891–1981) and a graduate of Manual Training High School, where he had been a student of Otto Stark and George Bridgeman. During his high school years he also worked as a stagehand at the Murat Theatre and the English Opera House, then on Monument Circle. He attended the New York Art Students



*The Races of Man in the park*

League for six years, and from 1914 to 1922 he was art director and stage manager for the Broadway producer David Belasco, designing costumes and sets for Belasco’s New York productions. For a time, sponsored by Belasco, he traveled between Florence and New York, studying in both cities. Returning to Indianapolis in 1928, he joined the printmakers George J. and Gordon B. Mess in their studio and taught at the Circle Art Academy. In 1934 he established his own studio at 158 East 14<sup>th</sup> Street, where he taught life drawing classes. He taught at the Indianapolis Art League until 1965. Taflinger illustrated a textbook on classical anatomy by George Bridgeman, but he worked primarily on frescos and murals. One of his murals, done in 1968, was at Manual High School. He had many interests besides art, including mathematics, photography, history, architecture, electricity and engineering.

When Taflinger conceived a work, it was always massive in scale. In 1959, having been asked to help with decorations for the Beaux Arts Ball, he painted a mural symbolizing the conflict of traditional and modern art that was 78 feet long and 21 feet high. It was shown for only one night and remained rolled up in his studio for many years.





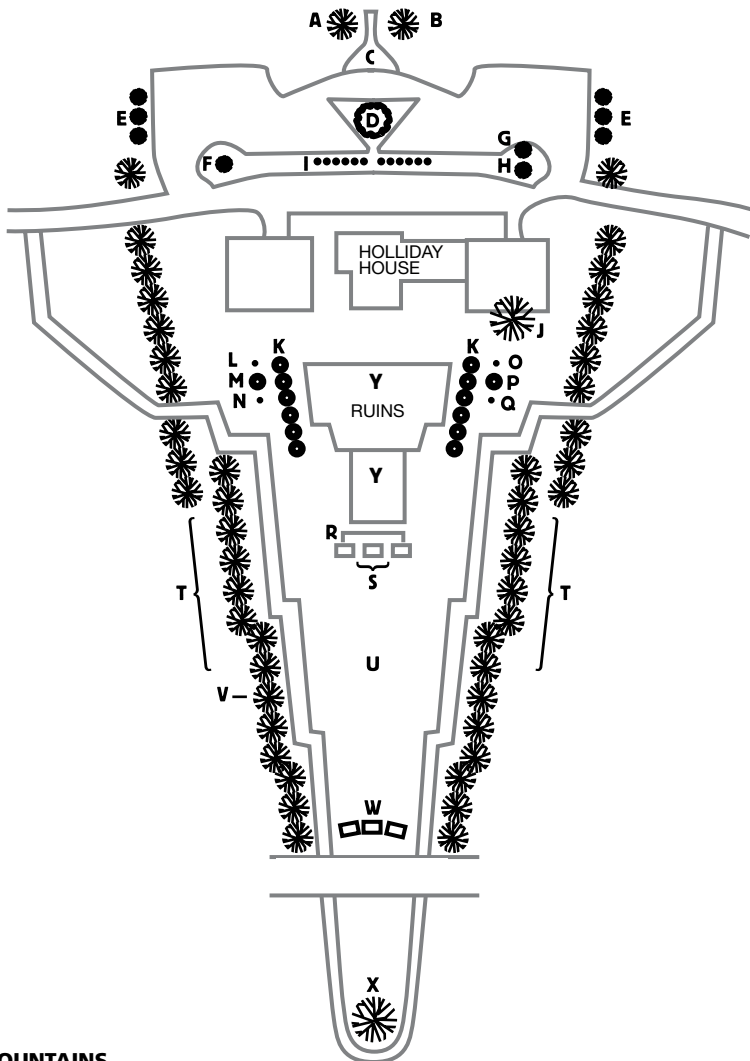
*Incomplete Constitutional Mall about 1977*

Taflinger was vocal, and often contentious, about the arts in Indianapolis throughout his later life. In one case, he argued that the commission for the design of Indiana's contribution to the Chicago World's Fair should have been awarded to a Hoosier artist rather than to Thomas Hart Benton. His most prolonged campaign, over 20 years, was for the appropriation of funds that would allow him to carry out his ever-expanding design for the Ruins. The original, rather simple and classical design, called for the statues to be positioned on the reconstructed façade of the building and included a reflecting pool with a fountain. At one point in the negotiations, Taflinger wanted to have jets of water spray out "V" for victory and "Peace" in Morse code every 40 minutes. That feature was soon cut from the proposal for lack of funds.

During the next few years, as older buildings in Indianapolis were demolished and pieces worthy of salvaging became available, they were incorporated into the design. Thus, a horse trough formerly located at the base of a historic monument in Fountain Square is found today in the reflecting pool west of the statues. Taflinger redesigned the pool also, adding 26 Greek columns, remnants from the demolition of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd Convent. These were purchased by the *Indianapolis Star* and donated to the project. They were installed around the reflecting pool and topped with urns filled with plants. A wrought iron fence surrounded the pool and the area was landscaped. Still later, Taflinger obtained four of the eight statues of Greek goddesses that had stood for many years above the façade of the Marion County Courthouse. These were

# Map of the Holliday Park Ruins and Constitutional Mall - 1978

*As designed by Elmer Tafflinger*



- A** "Adam" Tree  
Faces east to the dawn of the future
- B** "Eve" Tree  
To Left of Adam, thus closer to his heart
- C** 9 Stones  
Members of the Holliday Family
- D** The Religion Tree  
Also the Living Christmas Tree
- E** 6 Trees  
Six territories of the "Old West"
- F** Peach Tree, Punch
- G** Pear Tree, Perseverance
- H** Plum Tree, Patience
- I** 12 Yuccas, with Religion Tree, represent  
"13 Creeds" in New York City in 1789
- J** Tulip Tree  
State tree of Indiana
- K** 13 Trees  
13 little colonies growing into 13 big states
- L** Statue looks to Africa
- M** Department of Parks and Recreation Tree
- N** Statue looks to Asia
- O** Statue looks to Europe
- P** Indianapolis Tree
- Q** Statue of Justice to all races
- R** Grass Stage, St. Paul Church Altar
- S** 3 Stones  
Three branches of government:  
Legislative, Executive, Judicial
- T** 50 State Trees  
Laid out in paths of western expansion of  
the Union
- U** Grass Stage, St. Paul Chapel
- V** 19th Tree, Indiana Tree
- W** Dedicatory Stones
- X** Washington, D.C. Tree
- Y** Reflecting Pools

## FOUNTAINS

Twin Jets of Water: The Spirit of American man and woman reaching far beyond the stars. Intersecting Jets: The life force of the races of man mingling

## 26 COLUMNS

From the Sisters of the Good Shepherd Convent. Five represent continents, 20 the world's major islands and the 26th marks man's leap from earth to moon

## SCULPTURE GROUP

From the entrance of the St. Paul Building (left to right: African, Caucasian, Asian)  
A trinity laboring in unity

## THREE STONE COLUMNS

Also from the St. Paul Building. The source of Man's life giving water

## POOLS

East reflecting pool: The New World Pool

West inner pool: The Common Pool of Mankind



*Taflinger Medallion in the Ruins*

positioned on either side of the Ruins. Only two remain in 2007, the result of weather, time and vandalism. Two capitals from columns originally at Broadway Christian Church and a stone table once part of an altar at St. Paul's Church were later included.

In 1970, twelve years after the project had been initiated, concern about the lack of progress on the structures and the landscaping led Mayor Richard Lugar to request that the Department of Parks and Recreation complete it. The Ruins were finally dedicated in October 1973.

As the 1976 Bicentennial Celebration approached, Elmer Taflinger proposed an expansion of his design that would convert the Ruins into a symbolic panorama of American history. Constitution Mall, dedicated in September 1977, symbolizes the American Republic, in which men and women of all races are united in working for freedom and justice. The elaborate plan, which was mostly completed, includes a large reflecting pool at the east side of the original statues. Each element of the design had historic symbolism (see figure with details), and extensive landscaping was part of the design: long lines of European hornbeams, one for each state of the Union, and groups of evergreens representing the 13 original colonies. A single

columnar oak, which also served as a sundial, was planted at the eastern edge of the mall to represent Washington, D.C. or the Washington Monument. Giant slabs of rough Indiana limestone were inscribed with the first few words from the Preamble to the Constitution:

"We the people of the United States in order to form a more perfect Union . . ."

In 1975, even before this portion of the design was completed, Taflinger again proposed expansion. This time he wanted a stage and amphitheater—to be used for historical, artistic and musical performances—and this time there was loud public opposition to further expansion. Neighbors objected to the added traffic, noise and disruption that such performances would produce. The Hollidays voiced their objections also, noting that such functions "would not be in keeping with the original intent of the donor." The Parks Department did not approve any further development.

But Elmer Taflinger was not finished. During the discussion of the terms of the deed, he discovered that the plaque recognizing Holliday's gift had never been erected. He designed a new park entrance on Spring Mill Road west of the Ruins and placed a tablet there in memory of the Hollidays.





*Holliday Commemorative Plaque*

Fragments of the façade of the Indiana National Bank were incorporated here also. In 1978, 52 years after John Holliday's death, the entrance and plaque were dedicated.

Two of the three conditions of the deed had been met. The park had been handed over to the city three years after the death of the surviving member, Evaline. A plaque honoring their gift had been placed in the park years later. The third condition, that the property be used for recreation and the study of nature, was still unfulfilled. There was no playground, and nature programs were nonexistent into the 1980s.

### **The Playground and the Nature Center**

In the next few years, John Holliday's vision began to come to fruition. The Parks Department, recognizing the growing need for environmental education, included Holliday Park as one of its centers for such studies. In 1982 the Parks Department upgraded the park, remodeled and landscaped the Holliday House, and labeled and replaced trees in the Arboretum. It also constructed the Wedding Circle, a round wood and brick gazebo surrounded by formal plantings that was used

for weddings and receptions in warm weather. Some roads were also repaved and rerouted at this time.

In the late 1980s problems developed in the park. Neighbors were afraid to visit, and schools were reluctant to bring classes for environmental studies because of its reputation as a place that was unsafe for children. Several nearby residents led by Pat Lynn, a longtime supporter of the park, gathered to discuss their concerns. At the first recorded meeting, in January 1990, the ten people who attended decided to develop an organization of volunteers to maintain and preserve the park. One of the first projects was a spring cleanup in April 1990 with 75 enthusiastic workers.

By June of 1990 the Friends of Holliday Park had been organized. They wrote bylaws and elected a board of directors and officers (Appendix I). They obtained a state charter and in 1991 the federal government granted them not-for-profit status. Through surveys they conducted, the Friends and the Department of Parks and Recreation determined that the neighborhood wanted a playground that would bring children and families to the park.

Funding was a challenge. In September 1990



there was only \$1,000 in the treasury, money that had been raised from donations and from the sale of ice cream at an Indianapolis Symphony concert held in the park. The board, composed of entrepreneurial individuals experienced in dealing with city agencies and dedicated to park improvement, initiated a plan to raise money for constructing a playground. In July 1991 the children of Janet Noyes Ayres Adams donated \$350,000 for the playground in memory of their mother. Another \$40,000 was raised from individual donors, and the playground was closer to becoming a reality. A portion of the funds was set aside in an endowment for future maintenance.

A site was selected and a playground design of wood and other natural materials was chosen. Fifty volunteers helped with the construction on two weekends in September 1991. By December, the contractor had completed the sidewalks, landscaping, fences and drinking fountains. At the annual meeting of the Friends of Holliday Park in March 1992, Mayor Stephen Goldsmith recognized the Friends' contribution as an important model for other neighborhood groups working in other city

parks. The playground was dedicated in May 1992. Springtime brought happier times to the park as people came to play and picnic at the state-of-the-art playground.

The planning committee of the Friends realized the need for a master plan for the park and, with the approval of the city, contracted with Fred Kellums to develop such a plan, which was completed in 1991. Holliday Park was the first city park to have a master plan that fit with the city's new emphasis on environmental education. In addition, Indy Parks appointed Janice Krupa as park naturalist. Among her accomplishments was the creation of two nature interpretive programs for preschool children: "Two's News" and "Natural Moments." Both classes are still being offered.

In 1993, as part of the Building Better Neighborhoods Campaign, the city spent \$800,000 to revitalize the park's trail system. Stairways leading down to the White River were repaired; wooden walkways were constructed to protect delicate woodland wet areas; and a spring-fed pond was re-dammed to create a nesting area for waterfowl. The



north entrance was moved to align it with 64<sup>th</sup> Street, resulting in improved parking areas and more useable space in the park, in addition to making this entry point safer.

In June of the same year, John Schaust began an 11-year tenure as park manager and Holliday Park naturalist. A naturalist educator with 14 years experience, eight of those in Indiana state parks, he brought to Holliday Park a wealth of practical knowledge in program development, park management and volunteer recruitment. He also had professional stature as a naturalist interpreter, having served as a board member, regional director and vice president of the National Association of Interpretation (NAI). The immediate effect of his leadership was an increase in nature and environmental programming for children, adults and families. Under his tutelage, volunteers were recruited and trained to be naturalist assistants and trail monitors, as well as to help with trail

maintenance, gardening and landscaping.

Working closely with Indy Parks' Stewardship and Planning Sections, Schaust applied for a grant from the Indiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to complete an accurate inventory and map of the Arboretum at Holliday Park. The installation of numbered tags on the trees, the creation of an Arboretum brochure, and development of a long-term management plan were to be additional products of this grant. In March 1994, DNR approved the grant, which was matched by the Friends of Holliday Park and the in-kind services and labor of Indy Parks personnel. The resulting database and Arboretum map/brochure have encouraged greater use of this resource by teachers, schoolchildren, scout troops and other visitors.

In 1993 a rock garden, previously unknown to staff and visitors, was discovered in a natural ravine, where, over the years, erosion,



ivy, euonymus and honeysuckle had buried the rocks and stones. With the support of an energetic corps of volunteers and the fundraising efforts of the Friends, who obtained a grant from the Indianapolis Foundation in 1994, the rock garden was brought back to life.

Garden club meetings and senior activities continued in the Holliday House, and a section of the main room was converted into a colorful, child-friendly area for nature activities. However, the building, which had been constructed in 1960, was in need of many repairs. The cost of renovation and the unsuitability of the building for environmental education convinced the Friends that a new nature center should be built. Presented with the opportunity to shape the future of Holliday Park, Schaust researched and wrote “The Nature Center at Holliday Park: A Conceptual Plan and Scope,” which provided the framework and justification for the development of the center. The Friends of Holliday Park embraced the concept, and their ambitious goal was to raise \$4,000,000 to build and endow the center.

The selection of a site for the nature center was

complicated by the location of the Ruins. The first renderings by Cunningham Architects of Dallas, Texas, proposed that it be constructed at the site of the Holliday House and that the Ruins be reconfigured to accommodate a lake and marsh area to be located outside the nature center. A number of vocal supporters wanted to preserve the Ruins—an integral part of the park’s history—as Taflinger had designed it. This and other questions led potential donors to suggest a study by an outside organization. In July 1995 the Friends and Indy Parks contracted with BBC Research and Consulting of Denver, Colorado, to address the feasibility of building and operating an interpretive nature center in the park. They conducted interviews with personnel of 19 nature centers in other states, key people in the Indianapolis community and members of the Friends and held an open meeting with the public. In a report presented in December 1995, the reviewers agreed that the plan was economically feasible and should prove to be a benefit to the community. The report recommended that the Ruins be maintained. A more desirable site, near the trailheads and close to the area of the original Holliday family complex was chosen.

The Campaign for the Nature Center resulted in an outpouring of support from many individual donors, neighbors, corporations and foundations. Over time, the campaign goal had increased to \$5,000,000 and the city of Indianapolis assumed responsibility for site preparation, contributing \$1,300,000 to the project. By the summer of 1998 the fundraising goal had been met, and the long-awaited groundbreaking ceremony occurred in October. Jungclaus Campbell served as the general building contractor and construction manager. Karl Steegmann, a Friends board member experienced in construction, volunteered to serve as project manager throughout construction. After many months of site preparation and construction, the Holliday Park Nature Center opened its copper doors on April 15, 2000.

From the inception of the project, John Schaust served as the primary liaison between Indy Parks and the Friends and, with his staff, coordinated more than 200 volunteers who devoted untold hours in the planning, designing and fundraising for the nature center. The attention to detail is immediately apparent to visitors approaching the building. The rough stone exterior blends into the surrounding woods, and the lobby windows focus on the magnificent 200-year-old white ash tree. The “quote wall” panels made of a variety of Indiana woods greets visitors with quotations from John Holliday, Aldo Leopold, Rachel Carson and others. The innovative exhibit hall was designed by John Schaust, Naturalist Vickie Prusinski

and Art Burke, Director of Environmental Education for Indy Parks. It displays the history of the park, the White River, and the plants and animals that call the park home. It sparks the interest of all age groups, from preschool to adult. The hallways were designed for use as art galleries to display the work of nature artists. Bird watching has never been so comfortable as in the indoor wildlife viewing area, and the research library next door offers a collection of nature-related guides and children’s books, compliments of the Indianapolis-Marion County Public Library. An auditorium and classrooms are available for nature programs. This extraordinary nature center is a tribute to the unique partnership between the Friends of Holliday Park and Indy Parks.

The Friends continue to serve the park in countless ways. In 2001 they initiated a new fundraising event called the Holliday Park Trail Run. This five-mile race, which follows a course from Holliday Park to Marott Park via the Sol Blickman Educational Trail, has proved to be very successful in gaining sponsor support as well as promoting the park. Indy Parks and the Friends installed totally new playground equipment in 2006 and 2007. Plans for the maintenance and improvement of the park continue. The Holliday Park Endowment Fund initiated in 1991 continues to grow, and distributions are targeted for program development and maintenance.





*Holliday Park Trail Run*



*Playground gardens*

No matter what the season, activities abound at the park. In spring, hikers of all ages explore the trails looking for wild flowers and birds. Summer finds children enjoying the playground, working in the children's garden and attending summer day camps. Students wander through the Arboretum collecting leaves in the fall. Neighborhood children sled on the hill behind the nature center on snowy winter days. Year-round interpretive programs bring adults and families to the nature center, and schoolchildren from Indianapolis and the

surrounding counties come for spring and fall field trips. The nature center welcomes nature groups, such as the Audubon Society, Sierra Club, Hosta Society and Daylily-Iris Society, to conduct their meetings and offer educational programs for the public. There are summer outdoor concerts in the shadow of the Ruins and nature art exhibits year-round.

In 2007, we can safely say that John Holliday's vision of a park dedicated to recreation and the study of nature has been fulfilled.



## Acknowledgements

*Those who love this park are forever grateful to John and Evaline Holliday for their foresight and generosity. We thank the City of Indianapolis and the Friends of Holliday Park who have developed and preserved it. We salute the many staff and volunteers who over the years have given so much to make this park a special place.*

This history is the work of many people. It began as an update of the brochure that Margaret Brooks wrote in 1989. Her work is summarized in the brochure “Heralding the History of Holliday Park.” Another brochure, “The Ruins: A Brief History,” author unknown, summarizes the history of that project.

I am indebted to others who have contributed their notes on parts of the history: John Schaust and several assistant naturalists; Tim Cassidy and Kendall Stark; Sherman McMurray, for the early history of Friends of Holliday Park; and Ed Fleener and Karl Steegmann, for the research on the gristmills in the vicinity. Evaline

Hitz Rhodehamel, granddaughter of John and Evaline Holliday, has kindly loaned documents and photographs that contributed to this history. Joe Komenda of American Legion Post 186, the John Holliday Jr. Post, shared his research on John Holliday, Jr.

Most of the unpublished notes and articles written about the history of the park are held in the office of Holliday Park Nature Center. Kathy Hubbell and John Schaust provided early minutes of the Friends of Holliday Park meetings. Tom Hiatt offered great insight into the early Friends plans, as well as the fundraising efforts to underwrite both the playground and the nature center.

I would like to thank Mary Bergerson for her continued support and efforts to have this history published and Jane Graham and Katie Neill for editing the manuscript. Thank you to Amy Kirchner for the handsome design of this book.

*Catherine G. Palmer 2007*



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## Appendix I

### Friends of Holliday Park Founding Board Members

*Thomas A. Hiatt, President*

*Sally Demars*

*Howard Hoffman*

*Kathryn Hubbell*

*Miles Kappes*

*Thomas Kellum*

*Philip Snodgrass*

*Stuart Stinette*

*Edward Taylor*

*Thomas Townsend*

*Cheryl Venturi*

*Tamara Zahn*

### Department of Parks and Recreation representatives:

*Charles Beard*

*Paula B. Kutcher*

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Inside front cover, pages 2, 3, 16, 17, 23, 24, 25

*John Schaust*

Cover, inside back cover









# Holliday Park

## *History*

