

# Prospect Hill Prospectus



Spring 99

edited by Chris Sturbaum

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## **Around the Neighborhood**

The sidewalk program is slowly progressing. Housing solutions has finished their renovation of the yellow house at Smith and Walker and we have a new neighbor as a result! Bloomington Restorations has made progress on its two projects at 601 W. Howe and 835 W. 5<sup>th</sup>. The houses are still available for sale to qualified buyer as this paper goes to press. Doug Wissing has restored a small house just east of the BRI house on Howe and the area is looking so much better. Doug, along with David Wilsey, has acquired the old county garage building and rumors of a coffee shop have been heard. Another rumor involves the conversion of Mace's Grocery into a venue for the Ryder films. This could be really interesting for our neighborhood.

## **National Register Possible for Greater Prospect Hill**

The Bloomington Historic Commission received a grant to survey the rest of Prospect Hill for a chance to be on the National Register as an

National Historic District. There is a bill floating around congress (HR 1134 and S 496) which would give 20% federal tax credits to individual homeowners for this credit and subsequent matching state credits if available.

With a National Register Designation you can still do anything you want with your property if federal money isn't involved. It is questionable whether we can go beyond Maple Street due to the level of existing modifications to old there but it is possible. There was much fear-mongering when the Near Westside was added to the National Register. The only complication to you would be if you were getting free money from the city for a rehabilitation project. That work would be required not to destroy historic materials. This means that old windows would be repaired instead of replaced and that vinyl siding would not be funded. Otherwise you can do anything including tearing down your own house and nothing can stop you regardless of what anyone else tells you. Stay tuned for more info to come.

The two-block area of Third and Rogers is the only Local Historic district in town. In this small area only, the homeowners need to get approval to modify the exterior of their homes. If

you have a question about this, please call Nancy Heistand, City Preservation Officer at 349-3401.

## **Spring Block Party**

The Spring Prospect Hill Neighborhood Party is scheduled for April 17<sup>th</sup> at the Building Trades Park shelter house. The pitch-in always features really good food and interesting company. If the weather allows, there might be volleyball game too. There is also an added dimension to this block party.

This year we are cooperating with the Evergreen Institute to do something nice for our older neighbors. The goal of Phil Stafford, head of the organization, is to help the elderly stay in their homes and “again place”. To this end, Phil is offering free service from volunteers to any interested elder in the neighborhood. Sometimes a little thing like the lack of a safety bar in the shower can have large consequences. Smoke alarms are another simple item and several have been donated for installation by the fire Department. See the article inside for more information. Please don’t be suspicious if someone calls. These are nice people who only want to help.

The other part of this program will be the interviewing of elder neighbors for stories of Bloomington’s past. It would be real help to these young folklore student volunteers if you would be willing to sit down and talk with them about simple thing from the past, from far to recent experiences in the neighborhood. It just might be enjoyable for all involved call and please consider helping this project.

You can also help by bringing photos of the neighborhood, old or new. We will put up some photos at the party for sharing and for fun. These too may be old or new. If we make an effort to bring something, talk to someone or let someone help us in our home, this could be the most interesting block party in a while. Oh, and don’t forget the food!

## **Prospect Hill:**

### **A Home for all Ages**

Submitted by Phil Stafford

On Saturday, April 17, the Prospect Hill Neighborhood Association will co-sponsor two events in conjunction with our spring Block Party.

“**Staying Put Saturday**” will provide minor home modifications and repairs to elder members of our neighborhood. This project is being sponsored by the Neighborhood Association in partnership with several local service groups, including Abilities Unlimited, Area 10 Agency on Aging, the city’s HAND department, the Evergreen Institute on Elder Environments and Habitat for Humanity.

We hope to serve 10-15 elders in the neighborhood by implementing minor home improvements such as bathroom grab bars, package shelves, handrails, lighting improvements, etc. There will be no cost for labor, as services will be provided by skilled Habitat volunteer. Supplies might be available if local donations can be found or the elder may choose to pay for them.

If you or someone you know in the neighborhood would like to be contacted about this program, please call Bill Sturbaum at 332-5780 or Phil Stafford at the Evergreen Institute at 856-5526. Phil will contact each and

every interested elder to discuss the program in more detail.

“Prospect Hill Photo Day” will be the other fun event scheduled for April 17. This project grows from an Indiana Humanities Grant program called Visions of Place, sponsored by several local organizations. We are looking for any and all photographs of the neighborhood and its people to share with one another in a fun and interactive exhibit at the Block Party. Folklore and Anthropology students will be combing the neighborhood for oral histories from elder neighbors and photographs that can be duplicated for this exhibit.

If you or someone you know would be interested in providing either an oral history interview and/or interesting photos for this event, please contact Bill Sturbaum or Phil Stafford, as above.

### **New Openings on Prospect Hill**

Submitted by Pat Murray

It took a little longer than it was supposed to, but then many of the old house projects, or in this case, old garage projects we undertake, take longer than we estimate. It was to be finished around Thanksgiving, but when that didn't happen it was going to be a Christmas present to a patient spouse. As it turned out, it became a Valentine's Day present. The present was a garage door. But this isn't just any old garage door. This is a hand crafted one of a kind unit that finishes a garage restoration and expansion that was begun in mid-summer. As you know, sometimes we “old-house people” get little carried away in our efforts to have our cake and eat it too. How to maintain that old barn door look and still have the

convenience of that wonder-of-wonders, that late 20<sup>th</sup> century marvel, an automatic garage door opener. Imagine sitting in the warm dry comfort of your, press the button, and the door opens, as if by magic. Saved from the huffing and puffing, the struggle against creaky hinges and rusty recalcitrant hardware to open that old door.

If you haven't seen or heard about it already, this marvel-of-marvels is located on the garage behind 525 W. 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, the home of Patrick and Glenda Murray. The door was designed by the owners with a lot of free advice from friends and neighbors. It was constructed during many a late evening, with a poplar frame joined with biscuit joinery and waterproof glue, sandwiched between layers of ¼ inch plywood glued with 2-part epoxy resins, stapled with ¾ inch staple front band back. “Well, maybe it's a little over-engineered, but I didn't want to take any chances.”, was the builder's remark. Decorative moldings were applied to the face of the door with glue and screws to make a 2-inch thick sandwich. Old glass from the original doors add a touch of history to this otherwise new door. A professional installer applied the hardware and installed the door and opener. It works flawlessly, opening and closing at the touch of a button. As one appreciative neighbor said of the installation, “The Victorians wanted modern conveniences in their homes, they installed electric lights and running water. I think that they would have put in automatic doors, too, if they were available.”

### **Places I'll Remember A Photo Contest**

If you look at photos of our community in the past, you can see that the way things look has changed a lot. What will it look like in the future? What do you want it to look like? OK, that's a big order. What do you want to be sure is still around in the future? As change occurs, is there a place that's special to you, a place that you enjoy, where something memorable happened, that you would miss if it were not here in the future? What is it about this place that has meaning for you? We are interested in learning about (and sharing) the special places and stories about them that make our community have meaning for us.

**Your assignment:** Submit your photo of a special place and tell us what its significance is.

- This place may be of personal or community significance; it should be a place in our community.
- Your photo may be one already in your possession or one you took for this competition.
- Because we are interested in learning about the memorable places in our community, photos will be judged both on their artistic merit and the story they tell.
- Entries will be judged, and those selected will be exhibited at the John Waldron Arts Center May 7-14.

We encourage photographers of all experience and age to enter.

- Prizes will be awarded for the top entries selected by the judges in these categories:
  - children younger than age 18
  - adults over age 18
  - professional

- Participants will be asked to mat and frame entries selected for the exhibit.
- Photos may be black and white or color and may be any size up to 10" x 12".

Send or deliver your entry by March 22 to:

Visions of Place  
at the Evergreen Institute  
501 North Morton, Suite 210

For more information, phone 855-6329  
or email: [jclay@indiana.edu](mailto:jclay@indiana.edu)

Visions of Place Co-Sponsors:

- Bloomington Restorations, Inc.
- Indiana University Folklore Institute
- Evergreen Institute  
on Elder Environments

## STORIES OF THE JOHN EAST HOUSE

The original Methodist Episcopal Church once stood at the south west corner of Sixth and Madison where the Photo Solutions building is now. The old brick building, which CFC is now restoring was the parsonage. This was bought from the church by John R. and Matilda (Binkley) East when the church built a larger building at College and Third, where the Convention Center now stands.

John R. East was a character. His nickname "Rouser" referred to his ability to elicit great emotion with his speeches. In a case involving an injured worker, the owner of the stone mill himself became so moved by tears

running down the pleading lawyer's cheeks that he began to cry. In another case where a young widow stood accused of poisoning her husband, John "Rouser" spoke for three hours claiming lack of evidence and the possibility of suicide. The relatives had been crying through much of the defense and as he climactically cried out, tears rolling down his cheeks, "Oh, God! How can they hang a poor innocent woman for a crime she did not commit?", the woman's mother fell to the floor in a dead faint. The woman on trial loudly wailed, "Oh, my poor mother is dead! God bless my poor children!"

For the record, she was acquitted.

Born in 1845, he was just old enough to enlist in the Civil War and march with Sherman from Atlanta to the sea. He returned and received his law degree in 1870 from Indiana University. After graduation, he approached an older lawyer requesting a partnership. "But you haven't any experience", James Roger's responded. "And you haven't any practice," countered John R. East, and a partnership was born.

A confident and well spoken man, John made speeches for the democrats. To draw a crowd, he once promised a free pig to the ugliest republican in the audience. He was also a prohibitionist, which caused him to split with his party in 1882 and campaign for dry republicans while attacking the big brewery domination of Indiana. His political days were pretty much over after this, though he served as a representative at the next state convention in 1896.

John, or "Big John" as he was called, was a powerful man. When Former Governor Paris Dunning collapsed at the courthouse in 1884, it was John East who carried him to his

room at the National Hotel. John decided to write a book after seeing the success of "Ben Hur" which was penned by Civil War General and lawyer Lew Wallace from Crawfordsville. "If Wallace can write such a good novel, guess I can write a pretty fair one too," he decided. His topic was a robbery, which had occurred on the Monon Line between Bedford and Bloomington in the vicinity of Harrodsburg. The Monon Express Robbery was published in 1891.

July 7<sup>th</sup>, 1906 was the last court day in the old brick courthouse. John East would live just long enough to see the courthouse where he had spent his entire legal career, demolished. Bright's Disease ravaged John East's body in his last years and he was quite ill. In October, 1906, the word on the square was that John East had passed away. It was written up in the next day's Indianapolis paper. An ailing but very much alive John East was sitting in his front yard at 417 W. 6<sup>th</sup>, when a passerby expressed surprise to see him alive. He told his wife about the incident and she brought out the newspaper she had been keeping from him. He is said to have read his obituary in silence and made no comment. On April 25<sup>th</sup>, 1907, he passed away.

John's son, William C. East lived in the house with his wife Lu Ella. The story of this couple begins on a hardscrabble farm in Indian Creek township. Lu Ella was born in 1870 to George and Evelyn (Butcher) Rush. Her youngest sister died as a toddler when she fell on a sharp ax and bled to death. When Ella was five, her father was robbed on his own farm, beaten to death, and his body was mutilated by the hogs. The single mother of two children tried for three years to make it on the farm but

life was just too hard and she came to Bloomington to seek employment.

Evelyn found a childless couple, Tom and Nancy Farris, who wanted to adopt Ella's sister, and Ella was sent to stay with a doctor and his wife in Louisville, who agreed to feed, clothe and educate Ella in return for help around the home. Ella's mother took a job as cook for the Lindley family in the house on the NW corner of 8<sup>th</sup> and Roger's Street, where the CFC offices are now.

Evelyn found out that the arrangement was not working out in Louisville and she needed legal advice. She sought out a nearby lawyer named John R. East, whose advice was to just break the agreement by taking back her child. She took Ella out for a "walk in the park" and they boarded a train for Bloomington. Ella had not received the promised education but for two years had worked as little more than a slave. Ella was allowed to live with her mother at the Lindley House.

Some years later, back at the East House, 18 year old William C. East had taken a job around the corner at Wesner's Grocery, which was in the old wooden frame structure on the alley at Rogers and 6<sup>th</sup>. (This run down structure was recently demolished for the new CFC apartment building.) William was looking out the window of the store when he saw a beautiful young woman walking toward town on Roger's Street. He said, "That is the girl I'm going to marry." Six weeks later, they were married in the parlor of the East House. She was also 18. The marriage lasted 55 years, until William's death. The girl was Lu Ella Rush. The year was 1888.

John R. East and his descendants lived in this house for generations. The parlor was the marrying room and three

succeeding generations were married there. Mrs. Jane Burris, a great granddaughter of John East, was married in the parlor in 1942 and she tearfully remembers her grandmother Lu Ella's beautiful rose garden where the parking lot to the west is now. Lu Ella is fondly remembered by her granddaughter as a dedicated church-woman, who lovingly spoiled her.

Mrs. Burris can also recall democratic rallies held at the house with the young Herman Wells in attendance. She sang at her cousin's wedding there in the parlor and her brother and sister-in-law, Richard and Mabel (Staley) Worley, her parents, William and Helen (East) Worley and her grandparents, William C. and Lu Ella (Rush) East were all married in the parlor of 417 West Sixth.

For the past 30 years, the East House has been a shambles. The restoration by CFC has saved this house and by doing so, saved these stories of Bloomington's past. Without the material ties to these times, our past has nothing to connect to, our stories drift away and are forgotten and lost forever. Bricks and mortar hold thoughts and history with them and we are richer for it. The East family plot is in Rose Hill Cemetery.