

How To Revive City's 'Dead Heart' Eccentricities

By HANK HOGAN

If We Will but Listen ...

In the "People's Column" letter at the right, a recent visitor to our city expresses his views of Birmingham. They are particularly valuable to us in that they come from an unjaundiced eye.

They are free of any of the emotions that normally might clutter the views of us who live here. Sentimentality stands in our way.

Many residents have strong convictions as to what they like in our city; but too often these convictions are based primarily on emotion.

An outsider may be able to view Birmingham's character and its community values much more objectively. Surely, the outsider can be of help to us in placing into proper perspective whatever qualities we have as a community, qualities that should be protected and enhanced. Let us, at least, listen to what he says.

IF WE HAVE the quantities which the author describes in his letter, they should suggest to our own citizens the need of doing something to preserve and enhance them.

To the extent we are unique and do have worthwhile attributes, we have a responsibility as individual citizens and as a community to build upon them; to help prepare a more meaningful future for our children and their children.

The letter writer compares the heart of Birmingham to that which has been ascribed to Australia—though he says ours is dead "in a less final way."

Ah, then, there is hope for the future. We can offer some encouragement. Here is the realization that we can build a more beautiful city that will be an even greater source of pride to us than it has been in the past.

THE AUTHOR credits us with the "valuable assets to overcome the undesirable

elements of the status quo." Let us utilize these assets, putting them to work for us in a more positive way.

Let us apply ourselves diligently and enthusiastically to programs designed to assure progress for our community.

We must remember that no community ever stands still for any length of time. Decay sets in and slow deterioration takes place where neglect prevails.

The only way to make sure that this doesn't happen to Birmingham is to plan for the future, to take steps now to see that our community values grow rather than die.

THE LETTER writer urges development of a civic center in the heart of Birmingham (the general area around Shain Park) as an urban space that would be characteristic of all facets of our lives.

Let us, then, give thought to this plan; to the views expressed by this non-Birmingham resident who cared enough for our city to tell us what he thinks. Let us realize that some aspects can be accepted in their entirety while others must be modified.

We can profit from this outsider's views of our city. That he took the time and the effort to set them down in writing attests to the significance of the community values that we do possess.

We can gain, too, from the opinions of other visitors to our city. We urge our readers to invite their out-of-town guests to express their views in letters to the editor, as Mr. Kollar has done.

Let us accept our responsibilities as individuals and as a community in implementing projects that will preserve and enhance those things that mean so much to us.

Tomorrow is ours, if we prepare for it today.



Aerial view by City Planner William Brownfield shows part of area which letter-writer L. Peter Kollar terms the heart of Birmingham. Shain Park is the open space between the municipal building on the left and Baldwin field on the right in the far background. Jacobson's is the building in the center foreground.

PEOPLE'S COLUMN

Create An Urban Space Around Shain Park Area

EDITOR'S NOTE: L. Peter Kollar, senior lecturer in architecture at the University of New South Wales and a practicing architect in Sydney, Australia, recently came to Birmingham to visit internationally known photographer Baltasar Korab. He sent his reactions to Birmingham and his thoughts on what it could do for its future.

To the Editor:

Can any visitor's impressions of Birmingham be isolated from his image of the surrounding world? Mine certainly can't. They mingle with those of the neighboring townships, of Detroit which is their magnet, of the United States in general and indeed of the whole world which we call "progressive" and "modern."

In this modern world, places like Birmingham are numerous and from the bird's-eye view there is little to distinguish one from the other. The causes and

parking meters and traffic lights in the center, surrounded by unrelated, dimly lit and silent dormitories.

Flat Landscape

But the bird's-eye view can only generalize. The close-up, the worm's-eye view alone provides the particular and the unique, which distinguishes each settlement from every other. The singular characteristics are the ones which make a suburb, a township, a settlement recognizable in its own right within the over-all picture.

What are, then, Birmingham's unique characteristics from the worm's-eye view? To answer this question fairly, it will be best to discuss undesirable and unfortunate features separately from those which are valuable and advantageous.

There are certain inherent difficulties with which the present Birmingham is settled for good, and nothing much can be done about them. Coming from the hilly city of Budapest in the first place and en route from San Francisco in the third place I was struck by the over-all townscape and landscape which is flat.

There are no landmarks to speak of, no vistas to look into and no views to gaze over. A traveler coming from afar has no fixed points to take his bearings.

2 Landmarks

Of course, many cities were built on flat land throughout the history of mankind, but then the people tried to establish some verticality in buildings to relieve the monotonous horizontality of the terrain.

Needless to say, such verticality cannot be applied without discrimination as far as purpose,

meaning and importance goes. Traditionally ecclesiastical and civic buildings were the proper, natural and meaningful landmarks in settlements of all shapes and sizes for the past.

Birmingham, however, could furnish only two fixed points for me: the water tower and a semi-complete building clad in plastic sheeting at the intersection of Hunter and Maple.

Surprisingly, in my further walks I discovered that the virgin land is not without topographical meaning and charm. The Rouge River Valley with its surrounding hills inspired me to a momentary vision of houses climbing the slopes surrounding the civic and shopping areas built with concentrated charm on the riverbanks. Perhaps Birmingham was founded on the wrong spot.

Poorly Used

Strangely, sometimes we fly 12,000 miles only to discover anew something that we have left behind. It is said that Australia has a dead heart, since its center is occupied by a huge desert.

Similarly, on a much smaller scale and in a less final way one could say that Birmingham has a dead heart, since the area around Shain Park with its civic buildings is used practically by no one and is little more than a glorified parking lot.

All the shops, traffic and people congest on Maple and Woodward, and along these two ribbons all the commercial, social and entertainment activities concentrate. One need not elaborate on the total unsuitability of this arrangement in the motor car age.

Again, the motor car causes further problems. The innumerable array of parking lots, private or public alike, draw apart and scatter the buildings, are un-

(See CREATE AN URBAN SPACE, 5-B)



"All the shops, traffic and people congest on Maple and Woodward, and along these two ribbons all the commercial, social and entertainment activities concentrate..." Kollar says in his letter.

A Wise Change Was Made

When a civil rights march was proposed for the Birmingham area, many residents felt an apprehension that our community might end up as a focal point of national publicity, having the same name as a town in Alabama which has been guilty of not treating all men as equal.

There was concern that this would arouse agitation within a community which as a whole is free from discriminatory practices.

The local Council of Churches, apparently to forestall misunderstanding, rescheduled the march from last fall to Brotherhood Sunday, Feb. 9, and took steps to make it a religious procession instead of a political one.

There has always been some question of whether political marches win or lose votes.

NOW THAT the plans for the march are complete and next Sunday is the day, we must compliment the council for a program that promises to be both inspirational and effective.

The march has been planned by and will be made up of local clergy from all faiths and laymen who wish to make a public showing that they are not pleased with the

effort that Congress is making in providing that all men be equal in our nation.

They want this demonstration to be a witness that they are protesting all forms of discrimination based on race, color or creed.

THIS PROCESSION is not geared against our community. It has arisen because its planners believe that our residents have not had an opportunity to publicly profess their feelings on the matter. And they are now offering that opportunity to anyone who wishes to take part.

The procession will not go through the center of town with brass bands and screaming sirens.

It will start at the Congregational Church on Woodward with prayers and end at Holy Name Church on Harmon, three blocks away, with a hymn.

THE NATURE of the ceremony precludes extremists from interfering and gives the community a chance to exhibit its true feelings.

Again, we compliment the Council of Churches for its well-planned program of moderate action and hope our residents accept "the hand of Christian Fellowship" and help in the success of the venture.

involved in the related undertakings of industry and the military. Wheeler suggests, in the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, that the scientific revolution demands a "new science of politics." His ideas on the subject, and those of others who see the danger, should be thoroughly explored.

McCormack doesn't want to talk about presidential succession. Millions of Americans don't want to talk about it, they'd like to see something done about it.

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City Beat

By KEN WEAVER

I met Ike—almost.

The plan of action formed as I sat there watching first one person, then another walk up to the former President and request his autograph.

The occasion was the Republicans' "Dinner with Ike" at the Hotel in Detroit on Wednesday night of last week. Many Birmingham-Bloomfield area residents were in attendance.

This is simple, I thought. All I have to do is walk up to Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower, request his autograph, then casually ask when was the last time he saw Kevin McCann.

MCCANN, president of DeFiance College in DeFiance, O., was Ike's chief speech writer when he was President.

He served under the general during World War II, was his assistant when Ike was president of Columbia University and wrote speeches for him during both his first and second terms as chief of state.

On Oct. 15, 1953, President Eisenhower delivered an address at DeFiance College as the highlight of cornerstone-laying ceremonies for the Anthony Wayne Library for American Studies.

He made a plea for greater support of the small, privately-endowed colleges like DeFiance. I remember the tumultuous occasion rather well inasmuch as I covered the story for The News-Sentinel in Ft. Wayne, Ind.

SO, I THOUGHT, all I have to do is mention the name of Ike's old friend and perhaps get an autograph and maybe a few words that would give me an exclusive story. Overcoming a native timidity, I walked rather nonchalantly up to the two head tables. Standing there at the end of the aisle between them was a tall, slim, red-headed fellow.

As soon as he saw me approaching, he began to shake his head. The general and his party were eating dinner and couldn't be disturbed, was the answer. Explaining my purpose brought only the same response.

Seems that the people I was talking to the general were those seated at the head tables, not anyone from the audience.

And that's how I met Ike—almost.

(See CITY BEAT, 4-B)



MR. HOGAN



KEN WEAVER

GEN. DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER
The man with the famous smile
passed through Eham in 1952