



Irvington Historical Society Walking Tour

Bona Loop

The Town of Irvington was platted in 1870 as the first planned suburb of Indianapolis. Various additions were added to the Original Plat over the town's history. This tour begins in Woodland Park Addition (1873) and loops through the southern part of the Original Plat. Approximately two miles. Start at Bona Thompson Memorial Center, 5350 University Avenue, Indianapolis, IN 46219.

To view an interactive map online visit: <http://bit.ly/IRVWalkingTour> or scan the QR code!



1. Bona Thompson Memorial Center

5350 E. University Ave (NW corner of University and Downey)

Neo-Classical Revival, 1903. Butler University's library from 1903-28 and the last remaining building of the old Irvington campus, it was a gift to the university from Edward and Mary Thompson in memory of their daughter who died shortly after her 1897 graduation from Butler. In addition to being Butler's library, it was an Indianapolis Public Library from 1903-14. Renovated by the Irvington Historical Society, today it is the Society's headquarters and a community arts and cultural center.

(Proceed north on Downey Ave. to intersection at Ohmer Ave.)

After 1928, a five-building complex developed on this site. Known as the Missions Building, it was the national and international headquarters of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) until 1995. The former Sarah Davis Deterding Missionary Training School (College of Missions) occupied the center building. Constructed from 1907-10 by the Christian Women's Board of Missions, it provided instruction for prospective missionaries. The school operated until 1928 when it relocated to Hartford, CT. The Church moved its headquarters from St. Louis, MO to this building in the Fall of 1928. The present complex was completed with the addition of three adjacent buildings from 1946-58. Today, the four red brick buildings house the b. Historic Irvington Flats, 222 S. Downey Ave.

2. Sigma Chi House (1921-28)

209 S. Downey Ave

Built by Albert A. Johnson around 1890 as his family home so that his children could attend Butler, it became the Sigma Chi House in 1921.

(Proceed south [left] on Ohmer Ave to University Ave)

3. Christian Unity Across the Barriers of Time and Space

This sculpture on the north lawn of Historic Irvington Flats, was designed and made by Michael Dominguez, a member of the Indianapolis staff of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and Wayne Selsor, then a pastor in Bellevue, NE.

(Continue west [right] on University Ave to Butler Ave)

4. Butler College Marker

Intersection of Butler & University Ave. (NW corner)

Erected in 1967, the tablet on this boulder commemorates Butler University's Irvington Campus, 1875-28. Founded in 1855 as North Western Christian University through the efforts of Indianapolis lawyer, philanthropist, and abolitionist, Ovid Butler, the original campus was at 13th St and College Ave in the Old Northside area of Indianapolis. Affiliated with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the university was the first institution of higher learning in the United States to admit women into the same curricula with men. Shortly after relocating to Irvington, the name was changed to recognize the significant contributions of the school's founder and benefactor. The imposing three-story red brick Administration Building, stood 500 feet directly west of this site. Slightly to the southwest of this building stood Burgess Hall, the science building. At the NE corner of the campus stood Irwin Observatory (the telescope is still used at Holcomb Observatory). The Powerhouse stood behind the Administration Building. A Dormitory stood on the north side of the campus slightly west of the Powerhouse. A Summer House and Tennis Courts were west of the Powerhouse and just south of where University Ave now runs. The original Athletic Field was west of the Dormitory parallel to the old Pennsylvania RR. On the east side of Butler Ave, south of University Ave, stood the Gymnasium with Irwin Athletic Field extending to the south.

(Reverse direction, and proceed east on University Ave to Ritter Ave)

5. Graham-Stephenson House

5432 University Ave

Built in 1889 by W. H. H. Graham, Civil War veteran, attorney, and American Consul to Winnipeg, Canada. Butler Greek organizations rented the house before it was sold in 1923 to D. C. Stephenson, Grand Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan, who added the full height Ionic portico. The house is forever linked to the infamous activities of Stephenson and his brutal assault on Madge Oberholtzer that led to her subsequent death. b. Phi Delta Theta House (1922; 1927-28); c. Kappa Kappa Gamma House (1923); d. Chi Rho Zeta House (1926).

6. Blount-Nelson House

5470 University Ave (NW corner of Ritter and University)

Italianate, 1879. Built by Rev. Robert Silas Blount, an 1876 Butler graduate. The home was purchased in 1956 by Dr. Robert G. and June Nelson, former missionaries to Jamaica. He later was executive secretary of the Department of Africa, Division of Overseas Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

(Cross Ritter Ave into the Original Plat and continue east on University Ave to Irving Circle)

7. Irvington Private Kindergarten-Neier Residence

5506 University Ave

Mary Louise Neier, a Butler graduate, opened her kindergarten in 1935 in the family home. The school continued for the next 40 years providing early childhood education to Irvington children. Her father, Dr. Oliver C. Neier, came to Irvington in 1902 to assume the practice of Dr. Robert Long, at his request. In 1908 Dr. Neier delivered the first baby born at Methodist Hospital.

(Proceed counterclockwise [three-quarters] around Irving Circle to Audubon Rd)

8. Irving Circle Park

One of the oldest planned public parks within the Indianapolis city limits, the Irving Circle Park was intended to be the community's centerpiece. Today the community enjoys a summer concert series sponsored by The Friends of Irving Circle. A bust of 19th Century author Washington Irving, the community's namesake, is located on the north side of the park.

9. Eudorus Johnson House

5631 University Ave, (SW Quadrant)

Victorian Gothic, 1876. Built by the son of one of Irvington's founders, Sylvester Johnson, this home has a solid stone foundation, three-foot walls, tall ceilings and is distinguished by turrets at the front and back. The gable ends bear distinctive Eastlake Style turned wooden braces. The home was thoroughly restored in the late 1990s. b. Alpha Delta Pi House (1928).

10. Demarchus Brown House

251 S. Audubon Rd, (NE Quadrant)

Craftsman Style, 1909. Demarchus Brown, former professor of Greek at Butler University and acting university president in 1906, lived in this house while director of the Indiana State Library. b. Zeta Tau Alpha House (1927); c. Pi Beta Phi House (1928).

(Continue north [right] on Audubon Rd)

11. Original Business District

Shank Commercial Building, 201-203 S. Audubon Rd, (SE corner of Audubon and Bonna)

This simple vernacular two-story brick commercial building was erected by William H. H. “Tipp” Shank, c. 1872, with little pretense to architectural style, only the upper paneled parapet has any detail. Although the use of brick construction was less common than wood frame for small town buildings, brick was used in the construction of buildings near railroads as a fire prevention measure. Tenants have included a meat market and grocery, a fish market, and the U. S. Post Office Branch.

Pennsylvania Railroad (Parallel to Bonna Ave)[SITE]: The Indiana Central Railway was completed in 1853 running from Indianapolis to Richmond, IN. Through various mergers, this railroad became the “Panhandle,” the Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Chicago & St. Louis Railroad (the nickname came from an early railroad that crossed the West Virginia “Panhandle.”) Additional mergers brought the line under the Pennsylvania Railroad by 1921. With the location of The Irvington Depot at the northeast corner of Audubon Rd at the railroad crossing, this area quickly became the town’s business district. Moore’s Block, a large three-story brick building containing the U. S. Post Office Branch, pharmacy, grocery & dry goods store, doctor’s offices, and a third-floor dance hall was on the NW corner of the crossing and dominated the scene. The depot was razed in the early 1920s. Moore’s Block was demolished in 1938. To the west of this crossing at Ritter Ave stood a signal house atop a massive steel pillar. Abandoned by 1982, the double set of tracks were taken up and the land sold to adjacent property owners. Fill dirt and new construction has obliterated evidence of the railroad in some areas. A portion of the old railroad bed was developed as the “Pennsy Trail.” Completed in 2009, it begins at Ritter Ave and extends 1.2 miles east to Shortridge Rd.

12. George W. Julian-Clarke Home

115 S. Audubon Rd. (East side of Audubon, north of former railroad crossing)

Italianate, 1873, built by George W. Julian, brother of Irvington co-founder Jacob Julian. An ardent abolitionist, Free Soil Party nominee for Vice President of the United States, a founder of the Republican Party, and United States Representative from Wayne County, IN, Julian championed homestead legislation, served on the Committee on the Conduct of the War, and authored the first bill providing for women’s suffrage. While residing in Irvington, he was appointed Surveyor General of New Mexico. His daughter, Grace, married Charles Clarke. Both were influential on the social issues of the day. Grace was active in the organization of the Federation of Women’s Clubs and wrote a column in the Indianapolis Star. Charles was active in the Democratic Party and served a term in the Indiana State Senate. Over the decades of the Julian-Clarke residency, they hosted such persons of note as Susan B. Anthony, Sojourner Truth, and Presidents Cleveland, Harrison and Wilson.

(Return to Bonna Ave. Proceed east [left] on Bonna Ave and continue south [right] on Good Ave)

13. Railroad Warehouse

5721 Bonna Ave

Italianate, c. 1874. This two-story wood frame building served as a warehouse for railroad goods. Dr. John A. Campbell, Irvington's first druggist, had his pharmacy in this building. Later, Dr. Robert W. Long had his office and pharmacy in this building in the 1880s.

14. First Baptist Church of Irvington

231 Good Ave

Craftsman Style, 1928. African-Americans have been a significant part of Irvington since the community's early days. Irvington's founders and many of the original prominent residents were active abolitionists. Consequently, blacks were more welcome here than in other parts of Indianapolis. Working as artisans, craftsmen, and in other trades, they participated in the civic life of the town. Descendants of many of the original congregation still worship here.

(Proceed west [right] on Dewey Ave to University Ave)

15. Oberholtzer House

5802 University Ave (NE corner of Dewey and University)

Queen Anne and Colonial Revival Styles, 1909. Built by Dr. Franz Abendroth, he specialized in treating women's diseases and maintained his practice in the home. The house was sold in 1916 to George Oberholtzer, an inspector for the U. S. Railway Mail Service and vice president of the U. S. Railway Mail Clerks Association. He resided here with his wife, Matilda, and their two children, Marshall and Madge. In the Spring of 1925 while working as a Statehouse secretary, Madge caught the attention of D. C. Stephenson, Grand Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan and Irvington neighbor. She was brutally assaulted by Stephenson while accompanying him on a train trip to Chicago. In desperation, she took bichloride of mercury, a disinfectant. Brought back to her home in Indianapolis, she provided a deathbed statement which was instrumental in Stephenson's conviction at his subsequent trial. With his imprisonment, the notorious influence of the Klan in Indiana came to an end.

16. Irvington Preparatory Academy

5751 University Ave

The building originally was the Marion County Childrens' Guardian Home. A public institution established by state law for the care of mistreated or neglected children, the home was re-located to Irvington in 1898. The center Georgian Revival dark brick building was erected in 1916. Over the next 83 years various additions were made, the most recent opening in 2001. Irvingtonians long supported the mission of the home through the community-based Marion County Guardian's Home Guild and the Pleasant Run Run mini-marathon. The home closed in 2009 and the Irvington Preparatory Academy, a charter school, opened the following year at this site.

(Continue west [right] on University Ave to Irving Circle. Proceed counterclockwise [three quarters] to Audubon Rd)

17. Alfred J. Geeves House

250 S. Audubon Rd, NW Quadrant

It is believed that Jacob B. Julian had this house built in 1873 by architect Joel Stover as investment property. It is reputed to be one of the original 25 houses in Irvington. Dr. Robert W. Long resided in the house around 1890. Alfred J. Geeves, assistant secretary, Bricklayers, Masons, & Plasterers Union, bought the house in 1919 and altered its appearance in the early twenties following a fire with a new porch and a layer of face brick.

(Proceed south [right] on Audubon Rd to Beechwood Ave)

18. William F. Kaeser Home

316 S. Audubon Rd

Irvington Group artist William Kaeser came to the United States from Germany in 1923. He was graduated from John Herron Art School where he studied under William Forsyth, and Clifton Wheeler. A painter of portraits, landscapes, and still life, he worked primarily in oil and pastel. Kaeser displayed with the Irvington Group at the annual Irvington Artists Exhibit in 1935-37. He also exhibited at the 1939 World's Fair. Kaeser received numerous prizes for his oil and watercolor exhibits. He founded the Indianapolis Art League and served as its first teacher. He was a past president (1936-38) of the Indiana Artists Club and is noted for the mural at the Pendleton, IN Post Office. Kaeser resided in this home until his death in 1987.

19. Belzer House

320 S. Audubon Rd

Queen Anne style, c. 1895. Francis Belzer moved into the house in 1907 and it would remain in the family until the death of their daughter, Katherine, in 1980. In 1911, Francis "Chief" Belzer organized Boy Scout Troop 9 at the Irvington United Methodist Church. He served many years as president of the Central Indiana Boy Scout Council. Recognized as a pioneer scout leader throughout Indiana and nationally, Chief Belzer is memorialized in the name of the Boy Scout Camp in northeast Marion County.

(Proceed west [right] on Beechwood Ave to Burgess Ave. Continue [left] on Burgess Ave to Ritter Ave)

20. "Ingleside," 359 S. Ritter Ave

(north [right] of intersection)

Built 1876. Mrs. Ingles ran a boarding house for women attending Butler University. Hilton U. Brown wrote that, "Half of the college (romantic) matches in the first five years after [Butler] came to Irvington may be safely credited to this place."

(Cross Ritter Ave into Woodland Park Addition and continue northwesterly on Downey Ave. returning to Bona Thompson Center)

21. Benton House

312 S. Downey Ave (NW corner, Downey and Ohmer)

French Second Empire, 1873. Restored by the Irvington Historic Landmarks Foundation in 1966, this unusual one and one-half story structure was built by Nicholas Ohmer as a speculative property. Dr. Allen Benton and his wife Silence resided in the home during his tenure as Butler's president from 1886-1891. Now the home of the Benton House Association, it is a meeting site for various Irvington organizations.

22. Howe-Kingsbury House

317 S. Downey Ave

Georgian Revival Style, 1904. Built by Dr. Will David Howe, professor of English Literature at Butler University. In order to take a faculty position at Indiana University, he sold the house, soon after construction to Edward Kingsbury, treasurer and then owner of Dockwiler & Kingsbury, manufacturers of fertilizer. The Kingsbury family lived in the home until 1958.

23. Elijah Johnson House

304 S. Downey Ave

Craftsman Style, built in 1908, with flared wood shingle-sided walls and bellcast clipped gable roofs. Dr. Elijah Johnson was professor of mathematics at Butler University from 1908-1934. He also served as the university's treasurer from 1924-29.

24. Katherine Merrill Graydon House

303 S. Downey Ave

Craftsman and Tudor Revival Styles, 1908. Katherine Merrill Graydon was a respected professor and chair of English Literature at Butler University.

(Return to Bona Thompson Memorial Center Along Downey)

Other Irvington area tours are available at the Bona Thompson Memorial Center.