

# A Walk Through the University Courts Historic District

Historic Tour Guide No.

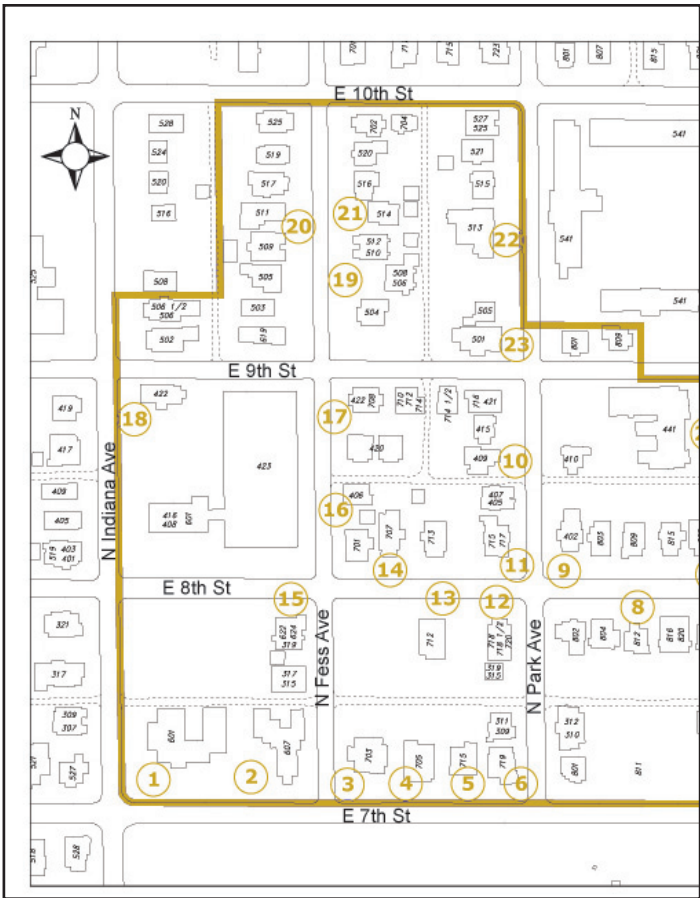


City of Bloomington, Indiana



The four original subdivisions in University Courts Historic District were platted between 1910 and 1913 on land that formerly belonged to attorney and farmer Moses Dunn. The Dunn farm and property stood just east of the present neighborhood on the site of the Indiana University HPER building (the former Men’s Gym). In 1883, after the fire at Seminary Square, the university began to construct a new campus on the Dunn farmstead. This immediately enhanced the real estate potential of all the adjacent land. The development at University Courts sought to capitalize on the proximity of what is now called the “Old Crescent.” The original developers were Elvet and Cora Rhodes and the German American Trust Co. In 1913, the remainder of the land was sold to Thomas and Nettie Sare. Only the first three subdivisions are part of University Courts. The fourth subdivison is now a part of the Indiana University campus.

The comfortable, gracious homes in “The Courts” were built by developers, limestone men, and others whose fortunes were made in business and industry. Many were the homes of distinguished members of Indiana University’s academic community. The houses were constructed predominantly out of brick and limestone in the popular period revival styles of the day. Georgian, Spanish Colonial and Mission styles dominated in the 1920s and Colonial Revival in the 1930s. The influence of the Arts and Crafts movement is also evident throughout the district. The builders spared no expense in construction, selecting the very best materials and including every “modern convenience.” Slate and tile roofs were common. No fewer than 13 buildings were designed by noted Bloomington architect John L. Nichols. The district is characterized by a relatively high number of architect designed structures, reflecting both the affluence of its owners and the relatively greater number of practicing architects in the Bloomington market after 1920. University Courts can boast examples from at least six known architectural firms including Alfred Grindle, Edwin Doeppers, Burns & James, Merrit Harrison, Lowe and Bollenbacher, as well as Bloomington’s own John L. Nichols. Thomas Sare personally developed four houses, all of which were design by Nichols’ firm.



The Sigma Chi House, erected in 1906, is the only structure in the district that pre-dates platting of the area. It was the first building to be constructed by a fraternity for its own use at Indiana University. Through the years, nine Greek Letter Societies were housed in University Courts. Most were originally designed as single-family homes and later adapted as Greek houses. Beginning in the 1960s, a number of residences were also converted for use as offices by Indiana University. Much of the renovation has respected the interior and exterior of these houses and has helped preserve the district’s historic character. In University Courts, single family homes were interspersed harmoniously with duplexes and small apartment buildings. All were built at a comfortable residential scale. Several paired duplexes are located on corners. They were developed by families who also resided in the neighborhood. The wealth of architectural styles, rich variety of building materials, retaining walls, and Bloomington’s only remaining brick streets create a charming and unique environment, a synthesis of “town and gown.”



Besides the men and women whose homes are described as part of this walking tour, other early residents of “The Courts” include: Agnes Wells, Indiana University Dean of Women; William Rawles, Dean of the School of Commerce and Finance; Zora Clevenger, Indiana University Athletic Director; Joseph and Agnes Nurre, of the Nurre Mirror Plate Company; Chester and Ethel Tourner, of the Tourner Coal Company; Tunie Buskirk, widow of a prominent Bloomington lawyer; stone man Philip Kearny “P.K.” Buskirk; and Kenneth Williams, professor of mathematics and celebrated author of a five volume history of the Civil War, *Lincoln Finds a General*; among many others.

University Courts, a neighborhood originally built to capitalize on its proximity to the University, suffered several demographic changes starting in the 1960s. The area was further endangered by the 1944 Master Plan for campus expansion. Original owners, who were mainly university professors and prominent local businessmen, began to age and sell their long-time homes. Many properties were converted to rentals or departmental annexes for the University. The area that once housed distinguished professors found itself increasingly defenseless in the face of maintenance issues and the clash between student and resident occupants. The struggle to preserve University Courts continued over more than three decades. As early as 1982, correspondence between President Ryan at Indiana University and Sybil Eakin of the Historic Building and District Study Committee show that the community was already concerned with the conditon of the brick streets. In response, a local



## In Appreciation:

Financial support for this publication was provided by the Housing and Neighborhood Development. This brochure was first published in 1988 and has gone through three editions. It was originally funded through a grant from the Indiana Division of Historic Preservation and Archaeology.

Research by William Coulter and Nancy Hiestand. Archival Photographs are courtesy of the William H. Mathers Museum. Design assistance by Ellen M. Campbell.

## University Courts Tour Sites

### 1. Sigma Chi House 601 East Seventh Street 1906/1953

The Sigma Chi House was originally built in 1906 and designed by John Nichols. Its construction predates the platting of University Courts neighborhood. It can be said that this was the first building built by a fraternity for a fraternity in Bloomington. The building was renodeled in 1925 by Granger, Lowe and Bollenbacher without changing its free classic styling. Substantial alterations in 1953 retained the limestone veneer and Georgian Revival style, but the significant changes are well documented. (See archival Shaw photo on the other side of this sheet.)



### 2. University Lutheran Church 607 East Seventh Street 1932

Alfred Grindle was trained in England at the Manchester School of Art. After immigrating to the Midwest, he worked primarily in Bloomington, Fort Wayne, and Muncie. He was best known for his work on churches and schools. The Tudor Revival styling of the entrance portico blends well with the rest of the neighborhood. Architectural elements of interest include a crenelated tower, buttresses and a gabled parapet wall.



### 3. 703 East Seventh Street ca. 1915

This truly unique limestone veneer home built by Louis Hughes has a three story tower which once housed a fountain in the first floor atrium. Hughes was a principal in the Hughes Brothers Lumber Company, which was pivotal in the development of University Courts. He resided in three houses in the district over the years.



### 4. 705 East Seventh Street 1913

This house, known to be designed by John L. Nichols, was the home of attorney Thomas Sare, one of the developers of the University Courts neighborhood. In 1925, it was occupied by Henry Smith, Dean of Indiana University School of Education. This architecturally significant Spanish Colonial bungalow is unusual for its use of glazed tapestry brick and its careful composition. With vigas, pilasters, curvilinear rafter ends and split timbering, the house is a fusion of Mission, Craftsman and Tudor influences.



### 5. 715 East Seventh Street ca. 1929

Both Thomas Sare and Lewis Hughes built second homes on Seventh Street. Hughes' second home is again unattributed, however Hughes own firm, Hughes Lumber Co., is thought to have provided design assistance to buyers. The Tudor Revival style is enhanced by the use of dressed limestone. The broad cross-gabled plan is punctuated by front purlins and rafter ends. The most impressive element of the facade are the multiple wood casement windows.



### 6. 719 East Seventh Street 1925

This was the second home of Thomas and Nettie Sare, possibly designed for them by John L. Nichols in the Spanish Colonial style. Built 15 years after the first, it cost three times as much but was far simpler in its details. The facade is punctuated by round arch windows and limestone quoining. The porch is offset by an arcaded roof with exposed rafter tails.



### 7. Stiehm House 825 East Eighth Street 1922

This home, designed for the Ewald Stiehm family by architect Alfred Grindle, was occupied for only a short while before Stiehm's untimely death. Indiana University hired him as football coach and athletic director in 1916. Coach "Jumbo" Stiehm received nine varsity letters as a player at Wisconsin and continued his career as a coach at Nebraska before locating here. The house is Bloomington's best example of the Prairie Style.



### 8. 812 East Eighth Street ca. 1922

This property was the home of Elizabeth Sage, an early Indiana University home economics professor, whose career extended from 1913-1937. Upon her retirement, Elizabeth Sage donated her historic costume collection to the university. She is widely attributed with establishing the study of costume design as an academic pursuit and was the first professor of clothing and textiles at Indiana University. This is one of very few frame homes in the district. The design includes clipped or jerkin head gables and massively scaled purlins.



### 9. 402 North Park Avenue ca. 1920

Designed in the Georgian Revival style, this house rapidly converted to a fraternity after its construction. Delta Tau Delta was located here until 1928. It was later purchased by Judge James B. Wilson and his wife, Maude. The limestone tuscan columns and pilasters on the porch, the elliptical fan light transom, block modillions and keystone window heads are elements of a high classical design.



### 10. 409 North Park Avenue ca. 1928

Harry and Nova Vonderschmitt, owners of the Indiana Theatre (now the Buskirk-Chumley) built this house during the heyday of movie theaters in Bloomington. The family later built in Elm Heights with the help of architect Hiram Callendar and this home was so distinctive that it retains the family name. They established a preference for steeply pitched roofs at their University Courts location.



### 11. Feltus Duplexes 715-717 East Eighth 405-407 North Park ca. 1915 and ca. 1918

These paired brick and stucco duplexes were designed for Thomas Sare by Nichols and Nichols. Their Arts and Crafts styling is creatively interpreted: the split timbers are curvilinear, the heavy purlins are notched and the porch tie beams are open. Paul Feltus, publisher of the *Bloomington Star* lived here for many years.



### 12. Bowman Duplexes 718-720 East Eighth Street 1924

Another corner single duplex project, this properties were designed by John L. Nichols for Herman Bowman of Bowman King Stone Company. The house is substantially built of dressed limestone with multiple hipped roofs



### 13. 712 East Eighth Street ca. 1920

Originally designed as a residence for H.S. Bowman by Nichols, this bungalow is most distinguished by its resident from 1922-1925, Paul McNutt, who was then Dean of the Indiana University Law School. Later McNutt was elected governor and was a candidate for president in 1940. He accepted a position in the Truman administration, becoming ambassador to the Phillipines.



### 14. Ward Johnson House 707 East Eighth Street 1922

Thw house was designed by John L. Nichols for Ward Johnson's family. Ward, his brother Ellis, and father Charles established the Johnson Creamery Company. The creamery still stands at 7th and Madison, adapted as an office complex. All three Johnson resided in Univeristy Courts. This home is in a later Colonial Revival style with sunroom wings and a side loaded entry.



### 15. Schuman Duplexes 622-24 E Eighth Street 315-317 N Fess ca. 1915

These paired duplexes were built as investments for John T. Schuman by the architect Edwin C. Doeppers. They are built of stone veneer with cross timbered gables. The duplexes are nicely matched Tudor style buildings. A catalogue of Indiana University professors lived at these addressess, along with Ben Becovitz, proprietor of the Louben a longtime clothing store on the square. Schuman was an editor at the newspaper and lived at 624.



### 16. Stith Thompson House 406 North Fess ca. 1915

Designed by Edwin C. Doeppers who also designed the Banneker School, a local African American landmark. The most prominent resident was Stith Thompson, professor of English and founder of the Indiana University Folklore Institute along with Richard Dorman. The Arts and Crafts style is illustrated by three over one window panes and the battered columns that support the broad front porch.



### 17. 422 North Fess ca. 1928

This massive limestone duplex is an example of the side-by-side form. It was built for Howard and Catherine Graves, proprietors of a local clothing store. Preston Gilliate and his wife Sara, who managed the Graham Hotel, resided at this address for forty years.



### 18. 422 North Indiana Avenue 1913

This home was built for the Wyatt Wicks family who owned Bloomington's major early department store on the courthouse square, 'Wick's Beehive.' The business was over 100 years old when it closed in 1976. Another well established local businessman, Thomas Karsell, lived in the home from 1920-1938. Karsell's Bloomington Milling Company was located just west of the passenger station downtown. This substantial Dutch Colonial home is interpreted in limestone with a french celadon tile gambrel roof. A long shed dormer is supported by open knee braces and the rafter tails are so massive and blunt that they appear to be dentiled molding.



### 19. 504, 506-508 and 510-512 North Fess 1917 and 1931

Of this trio of English and Tudor homes, Merritt Harrison designed the first, 504 N. Fess, for Prof. William F. Book. The other two duplexes, constructed later, were placed around a central court, accessed by a curved stair from the sidewalk. The limestone and brick retaining walls had arched gateways. Alumnus remember the south entrance as the campus location for romantic rendezvous for over 50 years.



### 20. Harlos Court Apartments 509-511 North Fess 1927.

This pair of apartments was designed in a distinctivie Spanish Colonial style by Cecil Harlos who also designed the apartment block at Second and Fess in Elm Heights. His use of parapet walls, clay tile and metal casement windows is consistent in both apartment developments. Over the years, these apartments hosted an array of citizens in transition: widowers, the newly divorced and single ladies.



### 21. 514 North Fess 1930

This is one of a handful of one-over-one duplexes or 'flats' in the district. Beatrice Geiger and Una Robinson lived here for over 40 years. Both were professors in the home economic department. Many single women lived in the area, either as independent professionals or the widows of prominent men. The Tudor touches in this home are the stucco gable ends and the diamond pane casement windows.



### 22. Hoadley House 513 North Park 1926

This house was built by William Hoadley and his wife, Lucille Hughes, who was the daughter of developer, Louis Hughes. Hoadley used the proceeds of the sale of his stone company to Indiana Limestone Co. (ILCO) to build this Tudor Revival home. Hoadley was also a local attorney who served a term in the state senate. Although no designer was identified, Hoadley was believed to have been influenced by his work as an estimator at the stone mill and had overseen hundreds of house plans.



### 23. Ellis Johnson House 501 North Park 1922

This massive brick Craftsman dormer front bungalow was built by Ellis Johnson and presides over its corner location with its elevation from the street and a period rockfaced retaining wall.



### 24. Kappa Alpha Theta 441 North Woodlawn Avenue ca. 1934

This sorority house was designed by Burns and James, architects who collaborated on several Greek houses on campus including Delta Tau Delta and Pi Beta Phi. Many of these were built during the heyday of Greek expansion in the 1920s. During this period many Greek organizations built new chapter houses along Third, Jordan and 10th Streets. The Charles A. Pike Lumber Company was the contractor on the Kappa Alpha Theta project and was an active contracting firm in the late 20s and 30s. Their work is represented heavily in the grand homes in Elm Heights (Kinsey, Cline, and Pike's own home). The Kappa Alpha Theta house is a classic Tudor Revival style building with multiple steeply pitched slate covered roofs, label hood moldings, and steel casement windows.



Please respect the privacy of the owners by viewing all listed buildings from the street.