Desegregating the Gables in 1947

By Lee Ehman

Veterans returning from World War II found a very segregated Bloomington. Though veterans and Blacks (and Black veterans) swelled Indiana University’s enrollment, there was no on-campus housing for Blacks. Blacks were not permitted in the university’s swimming pools. Black teachers-to-be could not student teach in the University’s laboratory school or in the Bloomington schools; they had to travel to Indianapolis. Movie theaters were segregated. Barbershops would not cut Black hair. Restaurants and drugstores would not serve Blacks.

As would be the case nationally in the 1960s, the desegregation of restaurants and drugstore counters was an important step in broader social change. IU president Herman B Wells played a part in the desegregation of restaurants near the campus:

“In spring 1947, black student George Taliaferro [veteran and NAACP Vice President], a football star...decided to pay a visit to President Wells....The student explained his problem: he had the money to eat lunch in the restaurants contiguous to campus, but he was barred on account of his color. Wells said, “Well, we’ll see about that.” And then he proceeded to call the manager of the Gables, who assured him that he was not prejudiced but feared a drop in business were he to allow blacks to patronize his restaurant. After more talking, the manager agreed to an experiment: Taliaferro and a date would be welcome for one week to see how it would go. There was no negative reaction to the presence of the two African American students. The following week, Taliaferro was invited to ask another black student couple. Again there was no negative reaction. After that, the Gables was desegregated.”

However, this anecdote, along with Wells’ own narration of events, leaves out a great deal. Wells played an important role, to be sure, but critical parts were played by others.

The state and local chapters of the NAACP brought pressure to bear on Indiana’s governor and the university administration to desegregate restaurants and other facilities.
In 1946 a group of students, veterans of the war, formed the “American Veteran’s Committee,” whose purposes included desegregation. There was a 1947 campus-based, NAACP-sponsored, “Race Relations Institute” formed to advocate and act for racial justice. The Board of Aeons, a university student government group with access to President Wells, also aimed to solve discrimination problems. These groups acted in concert to desegregate near-campus restaurants.

During the fall of 1945 Black and white students of the NAACP had staged “sit-ins” during which they were not served. Then the university’s Student Council attempted to negotiate the issue with restaurant owners, but to no avail.

Meanwhile, there was opposition to the NAACP and the Institute among senior administration members. In a November 1945 memo to Treasurer Ward G. Biddle, Board of Trustees President Ora L. Wildermuth disparaged the NAACP’s actions of that fall. His memo is virulently racist, stating that “I am and shall always remain absolutely and utterly opposed to social interrelationships of the colored race with the white. It always has been the dominant and leading race.” Biddle shared his sentiments.

Fast-forward to the winter of 1947. On February 6, two Black students, Louella Marie Love, a NAACP member, and James E. Phillips, Vice President of NAACP and member of the American Veteran’s Committee, entered the Book Nook restaurant and were refused food service. They brought lawsuits for $200 damages against the owners, citing an 1885 Indiana civil rights law. Six days later, President Wells received a telegram from the American Veteran’s Committee, asking him for a public statement clarifying “the attitude of the University regarding this matter.”

While these lawsuits were being pursued, the NAACP’s Race Relations Institute advocated a boycott against the restaurants. Director of the I.U. News Bureau E. Ross Bartley was alarmed. He warned Wells in a memo about local negative reaction to the Institute’s tactics: “…sending delegates of white and colored students to these business establishments has stirred up the whole question…The townspeople of Bloomington…are greatly disturbed…[the] criticism not limited to restaurants, drug stores, and theaters which were made the subject of attack.” He then alluded to “certain elements with Communistic leanings in the Institute, “although admitting he had no evidence of this.

The Board of Aeons discussed the problem with Wells on 26 September 1947, informing him that they had formed a committee which would talk with restaurant owners. Wells expressed dissatisfaction with the NAACP’s boycott but supported their cause.

On September 28 the Aeons committee met with the NAACP’s faculty sponsor, Francis D. Wormuth of the Government Department, and negotiated a ten-day postponement of the impending restaurant boycott.

Vice President of the Aeons, Charlie Brown, and member Bill Ross met with eleven owners and discussed their views about desegregating the Gables, Varsity Pharmacy, Book Nook, Campus Lounge, Fergie’s, Dixie Barbeque, Herb’s, Brummett’s Pharmacy, Taylor’s, College Corner, and Moller’s. They reported this to Wells on October 6.

On October 9 the Aeons committee, Wells, and restaurant owners met and came to the agreement that Blacks would be served. The following terms were negotiated with the owners:

- No publicity in the newspapers
- Not too many Blacks enter any one restaurant
- The lawsuits be dropped
- The agreement considered “an experiment”

Professor Wormuth paid $25 court expenses to the Gables owners out of his own pocket.

Thus, in the fall of 1947 Black students began to be served in the restaurants near campus. It would not be until 1950 that all Bloomington eating establishments joined this resolution of the problem. Other advances were made, both within the university (student housing, athletics) and the town (barber shops, movie houses) as the years went on. But integration of the restaurants was a key beginning in breaking down racial barriers.

Notes
1. My thanks to Dina Kellams, Director of the Indiana University Archives, for her help in locating sources.
4. This was not the first sit-in in Bloomington. In 1894 a Black named Will Bass sued the Wells & Hall restaurant for $100 for not having been served. Bloomington Telephone, February 27, 1894, p. 1.
5. These and other events are revealed in the American Veteran’s Committee’s Scrapbook, p. 28. Indiana University Archives, AVC Scrapbook 1946–1949.
7. Monroe County Court Records, Box 410. Held at the Monroe County History Center. (Notes continued on page 3)
Message from the Garage Sale Ladies

By Sue Ellen Bowman

“This is so beautiful! I can’t believe it is so big. It’s like going to a fancy department store.” As I heard this customer’s remarks and many similar ones, it was gratifying to watch our patrons rush into the 2021 Monroe County History Center Garage Sale at our new location. I was surprised at how grateful our customers were about what had been done.

We received compliment after compliment from almost every customer, thanking us over and over again as they piled their items into the holding area. Some literally squealed over their bargains. We garage sale ladies had mixed feelings as so much of the merchandise in our beautiful displays soon found its way to the cashiers, but we were glad to see the dollars adding up.

Many of the prized items that our donors had given us soon found new homes where they were equally prized. They were now owned by people who love “nice things” but have smaller wallets. A lady who comes every year and saves her money for this sale proudly showed me the Waterford cross she had found for $2.00.

We garage sale ladies find this the culmination of all our hard work during the year. We realize how fortunate we are to have Cook provide us with such a beautiful facility and so much support in every way. We are also most thankful to our wonderful donors who bring us quality items on Wednesdays or drop them off at the History Center. Of course, we are thankful to our volunteers, and a big thank you goes to Big Boy’s Moving Company whose big boys made working with the heavy stuff so much easier. We are especially thankful to Joyce and John Poling for their beautiful car and to Cook Aviation for their car donation.

In the end, this is a wonderful community recycling event that brings so many people together and provides a great service for a great cause. No wonder we garage sale ladies keep doing this year after year! We love it!

Museum Store

Come explore our new collection of children’s literature at the Dunn Museum Store, featuring the Coretta Scott King Honor Book, Before She was Harriet by Lisa Cline-Ransome and We Are Still Here! Native American Truths Everyone Should Know by the award winning duo of Traci Sorell and Frané Lessac, or browse Sue Sue’s Boutique for vintage treasures and future heirlooms! Hours are Tuesday through Saturday, 10:00 am - 4:00 pm.

(Desegregating the Gables in 1947, continued from page 2)

Notes

8. Western Union telegram from American Veteran’s Committee to H. B Wells, 12 February 1947. Indiana University Archives, Indiana University President’s office records, Box 414.
10. Board of Aeons minutes of 26 September 1947. Indiana University Archives, Indiana University President’s office records, Board of Aeons, Box 10.
11. Board of Aeons minutes of 28 September 1947. Indiana University Archives, Indiana University President’s office records, Board of Aeons, Box 10.
12. Charlie Brown, memo to Assistant to the President Fenwick Reed, 6 October 1947. Indiana University Archives, Indiana University President’s office records, Board of Aeons, Box 10.
13. Board of Aeons minutes of 11 December 1947. Indiana University Archives, Indiana University President’s office records, Board of Aeons, Box 10.
Gayle Cook Honored for Decades of Preservation Leadership

In recognition of more than 40 years of advocacy and direct work to save important historic places, Gayle Cook is the recipient of Indiana Landmarks’ 2021 Williamson Prize for outstanding leadership in historic preservation.

When the Monroe County Courthouse was threatened in the 1970s in Bloomington, Gayle and a small band organized to defeat the demolition proposal. The courthouse was restored, and since then, Gayle, Bill, and their son Carl have restored many buildings in Bloomington including a railroad depot, an eight-story former hotel, the vacant J.C. Penney building, and the linked buildings that comprise the south side of the courthouse square. Seeing the need for a community history center, Gayle helped raise money to repurpose the city’s historic Carnegie library, designing and building a sensitive addition to create the Monroe County History Center. Along with raising money for the cause, Gayle donates her time, working throughout the year to sort, repair, and price items donated for the center’s annual garage sale. Staged every June, the event raises hundreds of thousands of dollars to help the center’s operation.

Remembering

Judith Iverson, an accomplished traveler, painter, and poet, was very active in supporting the local arts community in her native Bloomington, Indiana.

Danny Ray Turpen wrote two books, was a community columnist for the local newspaper, and enjoyed acting in his grandson’s independent films.

Jack Shiner served on a destroyer during WWII before becoming a renowned professor in chemistry and Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at IU.
A Note from the President

By Phil Stafford

Wow! The entire Board of Trustees and wonderful staff of the History Center have endured and passed a big test...the successful transition from an experienced and loved administrator to an eager and equally experienced new one. This has all happened at a time when several terrific new board members have just joined the fold. Personally, I have appreciation and admiration for all of those responsible for this positive transition – lots of applicants from all around the country; lots of zoom and in person interviews by the personnel committee, board, and staff; lots of correspondence floating across Justin’s desk; and lots of assistance from our departing Director.

So I am very pleased to introduce Daniel Schlegel, Jr., as the new Director of the Monroe County History Center. His starting date was July 6, 2021. Daniel is an experienced museum professional with 20 years of experience in the field. His career began in his home state of Ohio, with the completion of a BA in History and Anthropology at Kent State and an MA in Public History from Wright State. Following stints in local interpretation, visitor experience, archiving and exhibits in Dayton and at Wright State, Daniel became the Executive Director of the Scurry County Museum in Snyder, TX. Daniel’s term there spanned 2010 to 2018 and his county museum experience was important to the hiring committee. Daniel dramatically expanded the budget, staffing, programming, and visitorship to the small museum over his tenure. He left Scurry County to become the Director of Operations at the highly regarded Colorado School of Mines Museum of Earth Science in Golden, CO, prior to his arrival in Monroe County. Despite a love of natural history, his love for social history took precedence and he is totally excited about his new role and, doing an unusual amount due diligence himself, very impressed with the quality and scope of the Monroe County History Center staff, programming, and volunteer corps. I look forward to working closely with Daniel as he gets settled. The hospitality of the community has shown itself early with the generous offer of temporary housing for Daniel and his dog by board member Michael Carter. Thank you Michael!

Meanwhile, life goes on at MCHC with multiple new ventures, an exciting new exhibit developed by A.J. Gianopolous for the Rechter Gallery: Monroe: A County of Cultures, June 25–January 8, 2022. A.J. negotiated a wonderful arrangement with the Evansville Museum of Art, Culture and History for exhibit material. And I note an upcoming trip by staff professionals Hilary Fleck and Andrea Hadsell to Little Rock, AK to represent MCHC and receive the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH) 2021 Award of Excellence for the project Monroe County Women in the Suffrage Movement. The AASLH Leadership in History Awards is the nation’s most prestigious competition for recognition of achievement in state and local history.

And who could not remark on the incredible 2021 MCHC Garage Sale held in June and, as always, only successful because of the efforts of an amazing group of volunteers who labor for 12 months. We netted $130,000 this year! I am in awe.

Finally, we are asking for help from the community in researching the connection between the Covenanters and the Underground Railroad (UGRR). Hopefully, this research will result in an Indiana State Historical Marker being placed adjacent to the Covenanter Cemetery at the corner of High Street and Moores Pike. The Covenanters were a group of Christian abolitionist families that moved to Monroe County beginning in 1820. They migrated to Monroe County after years of unsuccessful attempts to abolish slavery in their home state of South Carolina. In Indiana, the UGRR included “stations” to the south of Bloomington at Walnut Ridge, north of Salem, at Washington, in Daviess County, and to the north at Morgantown and Mooresville. The Monroe County history of the Covenanters’ involvement with the UGRR is well documented. However, most of the documentation supporting their contributions has relied heavily on oral history. Unfortunately, the State of Indiana does not consider oral histories as primary evidence. So, the History Center needs documented proof of the involvement between the Covenanters and the UGRR. This involvement, and subsequent documentation, is difficult to find since these activities were done in secret, not recorded, and not openly discussed. This was an illegal practice at the time. In short, the Covenanters of Monroe County risked being arrested and put in jail to assist slaves fleeing north to Canada. Board Member Scott Faris at dsfaris@comcast.net has volunteered to serve as the point of contact. Thanks in advance for your help.
Monroe County History Center Receives Award of Excellence

MCHC proudly announces that the *Votes for Women: Monroe County Women in the Suffrage Movement* exhibit and related programming is a recipient of the Award of Excellence from the American Association for State and Local History. The awards program was initiated in 1945 to establish and encourage standards of excellence in the collection, preservation, and interpretation of state and local history throughout the United States. The AASLH Leadership in History Awards is the most prestigious recognition for achievement in the preservation and interpretation of state and local history in the country. Thanks to the Indiana University Advanced Visualization Lab, the exhibit was digitized and is still available on our website at [monroehistory.org/online-exhibits](http://www.monroehistory.org/online-exhibits).

The exhibit, *Votes for Women: Monroe County Women in the Suffrage Movement*, was curated by collection manager Hilary Fleck and was the result of original research into local Monroe County suffragists. Her research was funded by the May Wright Sewall Fellowship awarded by Indiana Humanities and uncovered over thirty local women who were active in the suffrage movement, either at the local, state, or federal level. The exhibit was accompanied by a year of programming, designed by education manager Andrea Hadsell, to further engage and connect the community with the historic milestone. A speaker series, several sash making workshops, suffrage march, and cemetery markers all drew attention to the centennial of women’s suffrage and the unique contribution of Monroe County women. Andrea and Hilary will be traveling to the AASLH Conference in Little Rock, AR in September to accept the award on behalf of the History Center.

Volunteer Spotlight

Where would the History Center be without the volunteers that drive our Garage Sale fundraiser? We returned to our regularly scheduled time in June and our volunteer corps made this year’s sale a success! Over the sale’s four days, our volunteers contributed over 1000 hours. We are so grateful to have such a dedicated group of volunteers that help us achieve our mission.

Education Updates

By Andrea Hadsell

Limestone Month in Bloomington would not be complete without a tour of Rose Hill Cemetery with our Cemetery Committee! We had a blast with Scott Emery and Lou Malcolm highlighting the limestone heroes of Monroe County. If you missed the afternoon with us, you can view the program on our YouTube channel soon.

Join us on August 7 for Connect and Cook! In conjunction with our fall exhibit, we are hosting programs this fall featuring local communities and their traditions. With Connect and Cook, families and individuals can register to learn how to make Chinese dumplings. We hope to see you there!

For more information on upcoming programs, be sure to follow our website and social media.

New Shades in the Library

The Research Library recently received new wooden window shades. Many thanks to our volunteers, Steve Rolfe and Scott Loman, for installing them. They look amazing and really give the Research Library a nice facelift!

Correction

In the *Monroe County Historian’s* June/July 2021 issue, the article titled “Women in Monroe County Local Offices” was incorrect in citing Marilyn Shultz’s office. She was elected to the Indiana State House of Representatives, not the Senate. Thanks to Steve Moberly for pointing this out.

IGS Publications

The Indiana Genealogical Society is inviting contributions to its publications. The bimonthly *IGS Newsletter* publishes genealogy-related news items from across the state. The quarterly *Indiana Genealogist* publishes abstracts of records and helpful articles related to Indiana genealogy research. The topic for the September issue is Civil War families, and the deadline is August 15th. IGS also has several social media outlets. For submission guidelines and contact information, go to: [www.indgensoc.org](http://www.indgensoc.org) and choose “Publications.”
Current Exhibits

RECHTER GALLERY: Monroe: A County of Cultures

*June 25-January 8th, 2022*

The Monroe County History Center is excited to display close to forty objects on loan from the Evansville Museum of Art, History, and Science. Representing centuries and communities from all over the globe, *Monroe: A County of Cultures* aims to show how organizations, institutions, and other groups practice and infuse varying ways of life into the fabric we all call home.

BROWN GALLERY: Transportation in Monroe County

For the past 200 years, the import and export of raw materials, finished goods, and people has been a challenge for those living in Monroe County. Exhibits in the Brown Gallery tell the story of how Monroe County continued to grow despite obstacles presented by hilly terrain and a region without a major water source. The ongoing theme of the exhibits in the Brown Gallery will be transportation in Monroe County with changing artifacts throughout the year. Come check out the newest exhibit on Ralph Rogers and the Rogers Group

HILL GALLERY: Extra! Extra! Bloomington Newspaper Advertisements

A dedicated photographer for over forty years, Dr. Robert Wrenn captures beautiful landscapes, star trails, and wildlife in his latest exhibition at the History Center. Twenty photographs of Monroe County and the surrounding region give a glimpse into nature just a short drive away.

DECKARD EDUCATION ROOM: See Her Run

Through research gathered from Monroe County Election Records, the exhibit, *See Her Run: Monroe County Women in Politics*, highlights the remarkable Monroe County women who have run for public office. The exhibit features artifacts, documents, and photographs from the museum collection that trace the difficult defeats and historic victories of women in local politics. Sponsored by the SCI REMC Operation Round Up program.

DECKARD EDUCATION ROOM: Collection Spotlight Case:

Summer Collection Textile Intern Jaqueline Harding has curated a display of the wonderful assortment of accessories from the Textile Collection. From August 3rd to September 30th, the display in the Education Room will feature jewelry, gloves, hats, hatpins, and much more. Be sure to stop by and see this student project.
Monroe County Historical Society’s
Monroe County Historian
August/September 2021
Vol. 2021, Issue 4

Society established 1905
Museum established 1980

For subscription information contact the Monroe County History Center at 812-332-2517, or visit www.monroehistory.org

Collection Spotlight

Bowles Hotel, Bloomington, Ind.
Postcard from the collection,
1980.028.0027
Gift of Thomas S. Hunter

Monroe County History Center Membership Form

Annual Membership Levels

- □ Student $10
- □ Teacher $20
- □ Individual $40
- □ Family/Grandparents $50
- □ Supporter $100
- □ Benefactor $250
- □ Patron $500
- □ Sponsor $1000
- □ Sustaining membership beginning at $5 a month

Name (please print):
__________________________________________
Address:
__________________________________________
__________________________________________
Phone: ______________________
Email: ______________________

Method of Payment

- □ Visa  □ Mastercard  □ Discover  □ Check

Credit Card Number: ________________________________________
Expiration Date:    CVC Number: _____________________________

Check if you are interested in:

- □ Volunteer Information

Renew and donate online at:
http://monroehistory.org/join-and-give

Signature: ____________________________

Or Send form to:
Monroe County History Center
202 East Sixth Street
Bloomington, IN 47408