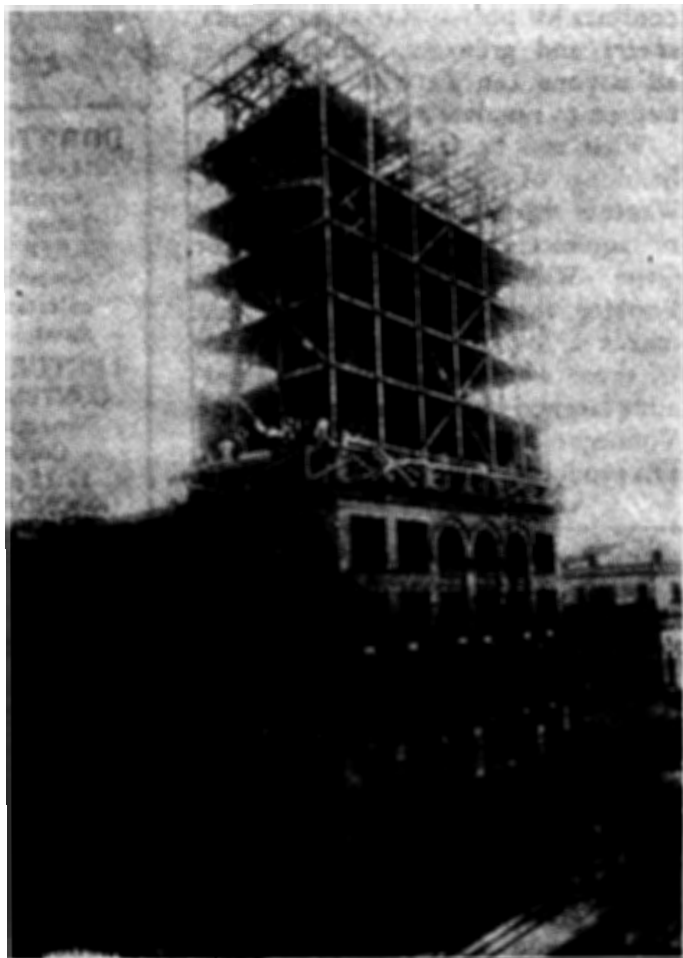


The Wind Never Blew It Down



On the front page of this issue are three pieces dedicated to publicizing the merits of a building; they are representative of the kind of architectural investigation Memphis needs.

The October 2, 1974, issue of *Center City* carried an article entitled "Fingered to Fall" in which the grim prospects for the D. T. Porter Building were considered. At that time, economic conditions and owner-neglect appeared bent on wearing away at the Main Street structure; notwithstanding these threats, it had a more immediate and potentially damning adversary in an official document (persistently ascribed to a Marcou and O'Leary) outlining the phases for doing over Downtown. The document emphasized the prime location of the Porter and insisted that, because it was empty and old, it should be

replaced by a new 16-story office complex. As it turns out, that profligate compilation (\$280,000 of it) was never wholly swallowed as a plan — much less as the plan — for Downtown redevelopment. The pitch, as many saw it, was little more than a propaganda puff and can hardly be thought of as more, even by present-day believers. But all that history is the stuff for a complete pamphlet in itself. Let it be enough to remark that, for now, developers have had sufficient sense to see through the sleights of hand and renovation is winning the day over planner crayons and tinker toys. —G. Murley

For years the Dr. D. T. Porter Building was one of Memphis' most prestigious addresses. Opened in 1895, it was the city's first skyscraper and continues to testify to the energy and optimism of the "Gay Nineties." Although it no longer dominates the skyline as it once did, the architectural firm of Keith Kays and Associates, along with the owners, Philip Belz and his family, strongly contend that the best days of the Porter Building are yet to come.

As a first step in the plans to breathe new life into this landmark structure, application has been made for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Also underway are preliminary studies for converting the building to office condominiums. Space is to be sold to tenants who will then have the opportunity to renovate the interiors to meet their individual needs.

Why is an old building such as this worth saving? The answer is to be found on several levels. Philosophically, a mixture of old and new buildings within the urban fabric lends a sense of timeless validity to a city. In this harmonious coexistence of old and new, it is as though a dialogue between the generations were being carried on.

The Porter Building, as an eloquent reminder of life at Main and Court Square in bygone days, contributes an air of truly urban diversity in its contrast to the contemporary simplicity of the new Mall. Its towering masonry mass anchors the southwest corner of Court Square and commands the approach from the south. Its restrained but energetic facade effectively contrasts with the multicolored ornamentation, reminiscent of icing on a cake, which enlivens the Kress Building across the street.

Architecturally, the Porter Building is a visual delight with its exuberant display of form, texture, and detail. Just above the second floor, a band of limestone wraps around the corner; the band relates to the scale of the pedestrian and emphasizes the tall windows of the original main banking room. Higher up, the eye of the observer is greeted by the brick and terra cotta of the upper facade with its rich and varied arches, ornamented lintels and window frames, and heavy carved cornices. The cornice above the fifth-floor level originally corresponded to the prevailing height of the other buildings along Main Street and Court Square — a gesture of respect for and recognition of its somewhat less glamorous neighbors. The summit, at the juncture of building and sky, is celebrated as an architectural event. Here is located the once-elegant twelfth-floor penthouse with its Corinthian columns. At the roof level the cornices and balustrades mark the location of the original roof-garden and observation deck, which were major tourist attractions in turn-of-the-century Memphis.

Surely the architect, the well-known Edward C. Jones, felt a sense of exhilaration and freedom in the design of the north and west facades. Perhaps this was due to the steel skeleton which relieved the masonry skin of its structural duties. By contrast, however, the east and south facades are virtually blank. This seems curious until one realizes that Jones no doubt anticipated that the Porter Building would be the first of many skyscrapers along Main and Court Streets and intentionally left these facades windowless to accommodate future high-rise next-door neighbors.

Memphis' original skyscraper was first described in *The Commercial Appeal* of February 24, 1895. The bank went out of business on March 9, 1899, and the building was sold soon after for \$175,000 to the Porter family as a memorial to Dr. D. T. Porter. Dr. Porter was the first president of the Taxing District and the man who led the city back to full economic and cultural recovery through a series of progressive policies in the 1880's.

The new building being erected on the corner of South Court and Main Streets is a skeleton steel construction, strictly fire proof and twelve stories, including a basement and an observatory. It will have two high-speed electric elevators, will be heated with hot water, and will have a new and improved mail chute with delivery on each floor for the convenience of the tenants. The wood work will be of oak. All the corridors will have tile floors and marble wainscoting. The floors of all the offices will be laid in white maple. The entire building will

be supplied with combined gas and electric fixtures. The windows will be of plate glass. In the first two stories the material is to be Alabama limestone, and the balance of granite, brick and buff terra cotta. The roof is to be fitted for a summer garden and observatory.... The total height of the building will be 163 feet. The whole weight of the edifice will be carried by the steel structure, making each separate story self-supporting. It will have...broad stairways of ornamental iron running to the top. The lavatories will have the latest improved plumbing, with white Italian marble wainscoting and encaustic tile floors.... The building is being equipped with a hot water heating apparatus.... This building is the highest in the world heated by water.

— *The Commercial Appeal*

The excerpts reprinted here are abundantly supportive of architect Keith Kays' ambitions to get the Porter Building on the National Register of Historic Places.

— David Bowman

The passing of the years, while taking its toll on the interiors of the Porter Building, has failed to obliterate numerous traces of the original character. In the former main banking room, now a wig shop, the red marble wainscoting, mosaic tile floor, and ornate Corinthian columns remain. The dramatic open stairwell with its wrought iron railings and skylight illumination also remains.

Construction feasibility studies show that renovation efforts will need to concentrate on mechanical systems and interior changes which will result in the building exceeding the requirements of fire and building codes. In addition the masonry facade will be cleaned and new tinted glass windows will be installed. An important part of the design approach is the recognition that the original nineteenth century interior finishes and fixtures cannot and should not be duplicated. Those which have survived will be carefully restored. In cases where fixtures and finishes have vanished, however, they will be replaced by compatible contemporary versions which are in keeping with the elegant, restrained spirit of the originals.

The guiding philosophical concept in the renovation of the Porter Building is the belief that true progress does not entail the destruction of worthy and useful aspects of a community's past. Rather, there exists a civic duty to preserve those elements of our architectural heritage which still contribute to the vitality of the city. It is with this potential in mind that the Porter Building will be given a chance to once more take its place at the heart of what promises to become a vibrant, healthy and prosperous Downtown.

— James Floyd Williamson

Playhouse Shoots The Works

Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.'s didactic farce, *Happy Birthday, Wanda June*, has opened at Playhouse on the Square, where it will run nightly, except Mondays and Tuesdays, through November 13.

This is the story of how Harold Ryan (John Molloy), adventurer, nimrod, despoiler of women, tough guy, is undone as king of the mountain. He and his babbling, high-strung partner, Looseleaf Harper (Mark Johnson), have just returned from an eight-year jaunt through Africa, bringing home a pocketful of rough diamonds. Their families, having had no word from them in eight years, have pronounced them dead and have adjusted their life styles accordingly. Looseleaf's wife has remarried an accountant. Ryan's wife has become engaged to the family doctor, Norbert Woodyly. Ryan's daughter, Wanda June (Cindy Moore), has just been run over by a truck on her birthday and whisked off to heaven.

Ryan's re-adjustment to civilization, and its to him, are the action of the play. This cameo Hemingway has found that civilization has run out of room for the likes of Harold Ryan. When this is brought home to him in a confrontation with the peace-loving, violin-playing Dr. Woodyly, Ryan takes the rifle which has been pointed at Woodyly and most of the audience and retires to the next room — there to blow his brains out. But unlike his prototype, he shortly returns to say he missed.

(Continued on back page)

PLAYHOUSE SHOOTS IT
(Continued from front page)

All of this is viewed from an up-stage platform, which is heaven, by Wanda June and two other heavenly bodies, Seigfried von Konigswald, the beast of Yugoslavia, and Mildred, Ryan's former wife. From heaven they rhapsodize about their undoings and about the shuffleboard games. All they do in heaven is play shuffleboard.

This is the second time around for *Happy Birthday* which was last seen at Circuit's Theatre II just over a year ago. It would have been better

to let the dead lie. Vonnegut is a poor dramatist and little more as a humorist. Despite its occasional wit, the play is loaded with simplistic didacticism which is tiresome, unoriginal, and no longer fashionable.

Nevertheless, Vonnegut fans will enjoy this production. The acting is generally good, especially Johnson who, as Looseleaf, brings laughter to the house and vitality to the character. John Dunavent, one of the best character actors among us, is aptly suited to the part of the mephitic Nazi, von Konigswald. Molloy, as the brachycephalic Ryan,

confines his portrayal to rages, grunts, sneers and grimaces, which is just all anyone can do with a character written to simulate a gorilla.

What can be faulted is the casual handling of the rifle in the play. Whether this is the folly of the actors or acquiescence to that of director Gene Wilkins, it is inexcusable. Looking into the barrel of a gun makes a lot of people uneasy. So, to those who do not share Wilkins' complacency about firearms, but are Vonnegut fans anyway, I commend this production. But keep low.

— Chris Ellis

MoviesMoviesMov
MARATHON MAN

Screenplay by William Goldman
Directed by John Schlesinger

Laurence Olivier, wearing a hairnet and holding an umbrella, is in a canoe being conveyed down a Uruguayan river on his way to New York to do dirty things to Dustin Hoffman. Diamonds are what Olivier is after and information about wanted Nazis is what he trades for them in the secrets market subscribed to by various governments and their terror agencies. Roy Scheider is one of the agents involved with a group called The Division, which takes care of

what the F.B.I. and C.I.A. either won't or can't do. He is Hoffman's brother and his spectacularly messy death in Hoffman's arms is what brings Olivier from hiding in South America. He thinks Hoffman has been told something by his dying brother. No matter that he hasn't. Olivier sets about to torture Hoffman with dental equipment, a scene that sends one's skin on a crawling expedition.

William Goldman has adapted his novel with a cinematic eye toward compression, managing to get in a lot of the flesh and all of the bones, but the plot is complex and the characters literally fall apart at the

slightest probing.

John Schlesinger has directed *Marathon Man* as if it were great literature. He has succeeded in making it look and move much better than Goldman's script would indicate. The subtleties of guilt and remorse and the difficulty of identifying one's role in the current world are reflected in the anguish he gets from Hoffman.

Marathon Man is a violent film, with a great deal of gore, garroting, shooting and slashing. The violence has meaning within the boundaries of the story, which makes it acceptable on that limited level.

—Howell Pearre

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Copy for the November 11 issue must be in by November 1. Copy for the November 25 issue must be in by November 15.

earthly delights

DOWNTOWN ACTIVITIES
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE—lobby*
November — weaving by Wanda James
GREEK NIGHT
November 7 — Greek drink, food & entertainment — Holiday Inn Rivermont — 6 p.m. 'til—\$15—327-8177
LECTURES/DIALOGUE
CONTEMPO '76*
November 9 — Beginning Genealogy — Cossitt-Goodwyn Libraries — 12:15 p.m.
NOONDAY BOOK REVIEWS — Trinity Lutheran Church — 11:45-12:50*
November 3 — 'The Ulysean Adult'
November 10 — 'Escape from Evil'
THEATRE
PLAYHOUSE ON THE SQUARE
Through November 13 — 'Happy Birthday, Wanda June'
CIRCUIT PLAYHOUSE
Through November 28 — 'The Tavern' by George M. Cohan
BEALE ST. REPERTORY COMPANY
Through November 21 — 'Black Folk Tales'
MUSIC
FRIENDS OF MUSIC*
November 1 — Linda Childress, soprano; Billy Christian, organist — 8 p.m. — Idlewild Presbyterian Church
MEMPHIS OPERA THEATRE
November 4 & 6 — 'Turandot' — Auditorium South Hall — 8 p.m.
BEEHOVEN CLUB
November 5 — Mexico Folklorico — Auditorium South Hall — 8 p.m.
CABARET EVENING
November 6 — Ian and Caroline Mitchell — 7:30 p.m.

FILM
LYCEUM FILM THEATER — 7:30 p.m. — First National Bank auditorium
November 2 — 'The Little Foxes'
November 9 — '42nd Street'
November 16 — 'Best Years of Our Lives'
CONTEMPO '76 — Cossitt-Goodwyn Libraries — 12:15 p.m.*
November 2 — 'Women in Management'
FRIDAY FLICS — 4 & 7:15 p.m. — Peabody Library auditorium*
November 5 — 'Touchdown!'; 'Mayhem on a Sunday Afternoon'; 'Forever Football'
November 12 — 'American People In WWII' & 'Memphis Belle'
MPL-SHELBY STATE — Midtown campus — 4 p.m.*
November 16 — 'The Gold Rush'
November 13 — 'Yellow Submarine'
SHELBY STATE CONTINUING EDUCATION SERIES — Midtown campus — 7:30 p.m.
November 4 — 'Nothing But A Man'
CENTER FILM SOCIETY — UT Student Center auditorium—7:30 p.m.
November 12 — 'The Garden of the Finzi-Continis'

ON THE AIR
THE BEST OF TV MOVIES*
November 5 — (LM-WREG) 'Night of the Following Day' — a tight, edgy crime film with superb performances from Brando, Rita Moreno and Richard Boone
November 5 — (LLM-WREG) 'The Big Heat' — Whatever romance is attached to cops and crime is shattered. Watch Gloria Grahame steal every scene.
November 10 — (EM-WREG) 'Sabrina' — intelligent fairy tale — see Bogie charmed by a French elf
November 10 — (LM-WREG) 'King Rat' — a prisoner of war film that is neither heartwarming nor fun, just bitter
November 13 — (LM-WREG) 'Topaz' — the nadir of Hitchcock's career
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