

City Center

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ONCE UPON A BUILDING

by
PAT WATERS

Carlos Basanta is at it again—painting up downtown. As you walk north towards the semblance of Court Square, look up to the Porter Building. Some mercurial process involving a cotton boll and musical notes seems to be climbing the south wall over Walgreen's. Walk down a little further, if you dare, to the mall in the mud, then turn around and gawk up at the E. H. Crump Building 'come Police Headquarters. A dynamic circle seems about to smash itself in a chromatic spinoff. All this action is happening on the north wall. That man sure has been busy, and so have a lot of other people, trying to brighten the blighted face of downtown.

Last year the Chamber of Commerce raised \$10,000, of which a private donor gave \$2,000, for the sponsorship of downtown public art. A competition was offered to local artists for designs to complement the Malco Theatre, the Wm. R. Moore Building, the Memphis Bank & Trust Co. Building, the Memphis Cold Storage Building and the Porter Building. The Chamber also applied for a matching grant—i.e., funds to match those already raised—from the National Endowment of the Arts. In the meantime 5 artists won \$500 each and 10 finalists won \$100 each for the designs submitted. In June the grant for matching funds was refused—not because of any lack of intrinsic merit. There had been 153 applications as compared to the previous year's

50, and there were only 40 fundings. However, the Chamber was told to reapply for '76—promises, promises.

\$6,000 remained — enough for 2 buildings. The Chamber was aware of Carlos' mural on the Allen C. Thompson Building at Jefferson and 3rd. The artist was available, so why not?

The "why not" became a reality when Carlos and 3 associates—Bret Griffith, Anthony Murrell and William Wong—hung their scaffolding from the Porter Building. And hang they did. In Carlos' words:

It took us an hour to crank the scaffolding up to the top. We worked from the roof of Walgreen's—40 feet from the street—and had to go up another 100 feet. Those 140 feet were murder; we could not look down. All of us were inexperienced in painting at such heights. As the winch would draw us closer and closer, I would watch the hook approach and the line grow more and more taut. Always I would have the irrational fear that the line would snap.

So, daily overcoming the natural fear of heights, they got to work—removing paint. "There were about 8 coats of paint on the Porter Building. We were going to contract the cleaning but found it

would cost \$1,800. We didn't have the money." So 4 people took wire brushes and removed 8 coats of paint from a 3400 square foot area in 2 days.

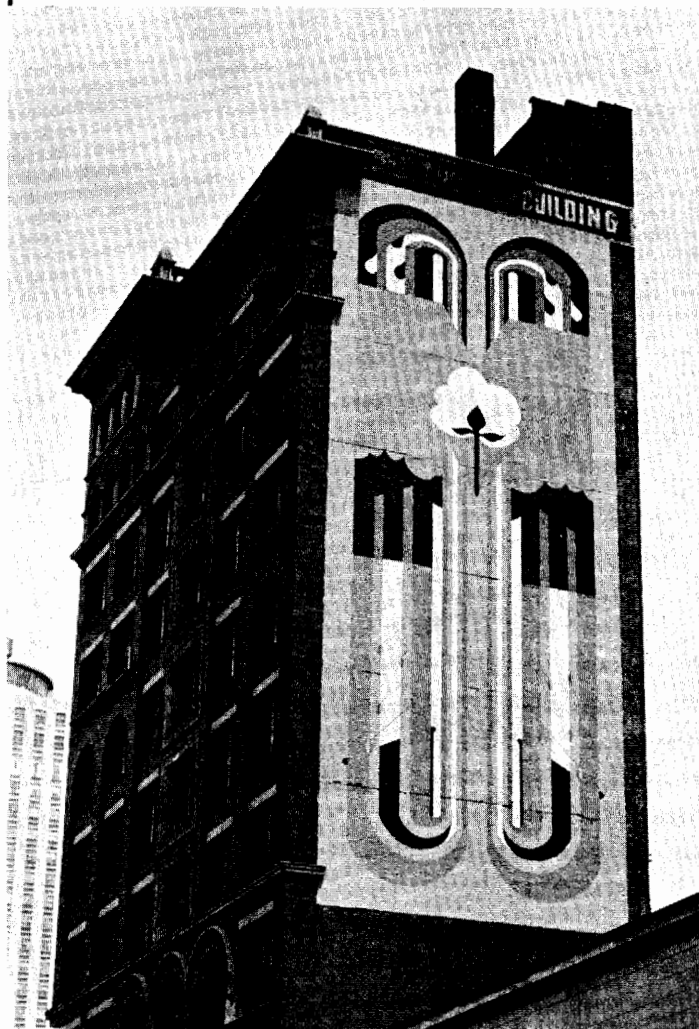
Scaffolding and labor cost money—paint even more, over \$9 per gallon. Jim Key of the Paint, Varnish and Lacquer Association was instrumental in organizing paint donations from Burk-Hall and Sherwin-Williams. (Sun attacks the color—sometimes for the better—hence enamel is often used in exterior murals because it has a longer lifetime than latex.) Carlos and associates mixed their paints then squared off the 34 ft. x 100 ft. area (the scaffolding was only 32 ft. wide which made for interesting edge work). The background of mixed golds was used as a primer as well. The design by Shirley L. Sherman has numerous vertical, straight and elliptical lines running throughout the mural. The strategic points were located on a 1:100 scale with the design; the straight lines were chalked, the verticals nailed and strung (there were 24 going down at once). The cotton boll and notes were done free-hand. The work continued from top to bottom and was completed in 4 weeks of July sun.

The design for the E.H. Crump Building was originally intended for the Memphis Bank and Trust Building. However, permission was obtained from City Hall and the Mall architects for the transfer; now the building's singular architecture and color is stressed amongst the modern gray. Carlos, Kay de Yette and Bret began work on August 15. Again, local paint dealers came to the rescue. Pittsburgh Paints donated a masonry sealer for caulking the brick surface. Farrell-Calhoun donated 26 gallons of acrylic latex for the colors-in-action.

The design is by Bob Fields, a teacher in MSU's Department of Graphic Arts. It has its own complexity: the gradation of color makes this abstraction of circles and tangential lines move from the wall into the imagination. The central circle contains very strong shades of red, orange, yellow, blue and green. Below the color gradates from green by keeping the red constant and adding white, while above the color gradates from blue by maintaining a constant orange and, again, adding white. Go back, take a look, see the colors change and the painting come alive.

Two down; three to go. No money and a maybe

from the federal cookie jar. How would you like to see more of this kind of renewal of urban life?



Painting on the Porter Building—contributed by Alan Copeland

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MENU FOR SEPTMEBER 18 – SEPTEMBER 29

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 18

Fried Chicken, Rice & Gravy, Squash or Green Beans, Rolls

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 19

Ham, Blackeyed Peas, Corn, Corn Bread

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 22

Chopped Steak, Whipped Potatoes, Green Beans, Rolls

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 23

Pork Chops, Potatoes Augratin, English Peas, Rolls

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 24

Spaghetti, Cole Slaw, French Bread

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 25

Barbecued Chicken, Lima Beans, Apple Sauce, Rolls

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 26

Ham, Macaroni-cheese, Turnip Greens, Corn bread

DUMPING GARBAGE DOWNTOWN

by David Bowman

We don't get excited over sewers, or garbage, or street improvements, yet those are three of the costliest items that regularly come before the City Council. We ignore these matters, so they are routinely passed, without undue discussion as to whether they are justified. The finest example of this came up last week: the Council approved MLG&W's \$70 million garbage plant to provide electricity, steam, and chilled water for the center city.

Fortunately, it's not too late to reconsider the plan, because the system won't be built until enough contracts have been signed with downtown and medical center users; MLG&W has until April 1, 1976 to sign up 75% of its potential customers. Maybe this will give us a few more months to try to understand what the plant will do to us.

MLG&W considered eight different sites before settling on the 6.6 acres bounded by Alabama, Danny Thomas, High, and Carroll. This means that the new plant will be across the street from Lauderdale Courts, two blocks from Victorian Village, and a hulking deterrent to further downtown housing nearby.

According to a promotional pamphlet MLG&W mailed to 720 community leaders, the plant will be "environmentally acceptable," in that all operations will be within a sound-insulated structure for "quiet and nuisance-free operation." Odors will be eliminated by drawing the air used in combustion across the garbage-storage pit and into the combustion chamber. MLG&W also promises "the most advanced pollution control equipment available - 99 percent efficient electrostatic precipitators."

It sounds wonderful. But an August 22 article in the New York Times featuring a similar plant in Nashville suggests we will have serious problems in financing and plant performance.

The Nashville Thermal Transfer Corporation, formed in 1970, "had high hopes of becoming

the first organization in the United States to produce steam for heating and cooled water for air-conditioning by burning garbage and producing electricity." It issued \$16.5 million of tax-exempt bonds in 1972 and now needs \$8 million in additional financing, because of unforeseeable problems: "The incinerators failed to meet pollution-control standards, boiler tubing failed to work properly, one of two refrigerators vibrated excessively, and finally, Thermal was unable to get enough garbage to burn." Therefore \$3 million will have to be spent on capital improvements. Just as bad, "sales have not lived up to engineer estimates, and a customer recently filed a suit to set aside two rate increases." Therefore the company has "an estimated cumulative deficit of \$4.7 million as operating expenses of the system have far outstripped revenues."

In its status report to investors, Thermal warned that after December 1 it will fall short, and that without additional financing, "it is doubtful that the bonds can be serviced thereafter."

Does Nashville's experience with garbage-burning offer us a cautionary tale? I am told that the Memphis plant's design is almost identical to Nashville's. If we spend three times as much on our plant, will we be able to avoid their financial disaster? If the technology is the same, but the investment is greater, losses could be colossal. Someone has said it would be cheaper to burn dollar bills to keep warm.

Other aspects of the MLG&W plan look as if they also might cause trouble. The distribution system, costing \$16.6 million, will dig up Third Street from Exchange to Union, and tie up every east-west street except Washington from Poplar to Union, and tie up Front from Monroe to Court. Out at the medical center, Madison, Manassas, Dunlap, and Pauline will also be torn up. This should bring traffic to a dead stop for

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earthly delights

DOWNTOWN EXHIBITS

National Bank of Commerce (Lobby)

September—Eight artists from the Memphis Chapter of the National League of American Pen Women display their work*

First National Bank (Lobby)

September—Dry-brush watercolors by Ben Madden*

Sterick Building (Lobby)

September—Watercolors by David Wade*

Memphis Area Chamber of Commerce (Lobby)

September—Photographs by Allen Rankin*

FILM

Lyceum Film Theatre

September 23—"Twentieth Century"—

September 30—"Marat/Sade—First National Bank Auditorium—7:30 p.m.

Peabody Library

September 19—"In Search of the Lost World" & "Dig, a Journey into the Earth"

MUSIC

MSU Harris Auditorium

September 21—Violinist, Robert Snyder & pianist, Joan Gilbert—3 p.m.*

*FREE

DUMPING DOWNTOWN (Bowman)

about six months while the pipes and tunnels go in.

Doubts have also been raised about the fuel. The MLG&W plan will take 2000 tons of garbage a day, while the city generates about 2800 tons a day now, and may generate nearly 4000 tons a day by 1990. MLG&W says it would install additional 400-ton units at \$7 million per unit to take care of tonnage increases.

Shortage is also possible. A garbage strike would use up the four-day stockpile soon enough, thereby cutting off power, heat, or cooling to hundreds of hospital beds, unless alternative service is provided. It is easy enough to send downtowners home in case of a strike or system failure; it would be impossible to run essential medical services on such a ticklish fuel source.

The interesting thing about the City Council's vote on September 9 was that it totally ignored the Mayor's words of caution on adopting any plan at all, and in fact it tried to cut out any debate on the plan, arguing it had heard all the arguments and had already reached its decision. Several Council members on this issue set a new high for their public-be-damned attitudes.

If the new City Council is substantially different, after October 9, perhaps the MLG&W plan will be reconsidered. Or is that assumption a lot of garbage?



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