



CENTER[©] CITY

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MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE

FEBRUARY 13, 1975

ANOTHER LOSS, BUT NOT DEFEAT

Remember the old Loew's State Theatre with its hallway of mirrors? "Gone With The Wind" had its Memphis premiere there in 1939. Maybe it was an omen of what was to happen in the downtown area. The site is now a parking lot.

It's hardly news that we're losing many of our downtown buildings. Some of these buildings are soundly constructed and architecturally pleasing. Here's a story about one of them. And while it doesn't have an entirely happy ending, it may give many of us encouragement that speaking up and asking a question or two can produce positive results.

Back in 1920, the Northcross family opened their mantel and grate business at 411 Madison Avenue. They designed their own building, using many of the tiles produced by the firm on both the inside and outside of the ornate little structure. Tiles usually destined for mantelpieces in homes across Memphis and the Mid-South decorate the building. The main floor is constructed entirely of white tile. The walls on both the upper and lower levels of the building are partially covered with the multi-colored tiles, many of them imported from Italy and Holland.

O.K., now for the bad news. The family is moving their business. Plans originally called for the building, tiles included, to be demolished within the next few months. It seems the plant in the next block needs room for expansion.

A couple of interested citizens found out about the situation, decided to ask a few questions, and started making phone calls.

Someone at City Hall suggested calling Eleanor Hughes. Mrs. Hughes is a member of the City's Historical Task Force. She expressed interest in

the situation, immediately called the plant and spoke to a very cooperative gentleman, who, it turned out, was in charge of the plant's expansion.

No, he told her, unfortunately it was too late to save the Northcross building.

But, he promised Mrs. Hughes that if her task force, or someone designated by the City, came down and pointed out which tiles were to be saved, the wrecking crew would carefully remove them and see that they weren't damaged.

Mrs. Hughes tells us she wants the tiles incorporated in the much-talked-about city sculpture garden.

If this story has a villain, it's got to be apathy. Apathy on the part of many Memphians who see buildings being torn down all around them and never stop to ask "Why? Can't we still use it, providing it's sound?" After all, it wasn't until a few weeks ago that the plant found out some Memphians were even interested in the building.

So the tiles from the Northcross building will be saved. That's something. But think what might have happened if people, informed and aware of their downtown community and what buildings are contained in it, sat down and discussed the situation. Maybe the plant could have used the building in its plans, possibly as a combination bakery and coffee shop. And only a few blocks from the upcoming Mall. It is this lack of awareness on the part of many Memphians that is so appalling.

It's too late for the Northcross building. But it's not too late for many downtown structures. Think about it.

—James H. Roper

TO CENTER CITY:

Again, those voices rise that struggle to hold Memphis forever in the shadows of its past. Referring to Ms. Bridges' letter in the January 22 issue of *CENTER CITY*, I think a grandiose scheme is long overdue for this city. By your reasoning Atlanta, the Southern city enjoying a national reputation, should be entitled to nothing more than magnolias down Main.

Too long have we dealt our problems fifth-rate designs for solutions. Too many times have we carefully laid our plans only to abandon them and begin the process again. I am afraid if we let ourselves and our city in 1975 again get caught in this trap we will be permanently left behind. The world, like that river at our front door, is passing us by.

To offhandedly reject the interest of outside developers is to refuse what may be Memphis' deliverer. If by chance you haven't looked lately, Memphis developers are all out in east Memphis proclaiming it "the center of the future" and "Memphis' most prestigious office location." This community cannot support five centers anymore than it can support five museums (as your letter suggested). We have divided ourselves and diluted our energies and, in so doing, have compromised quality.

Is a decaying rivertown image what we, the government and business leaders and citizens of this community, really want for our city? If so, why don't we just surrender the charter so the ones of us who are serious about living in a big city can pack up and get on with it.

CAROL C. COLETTA

We have received the January 22, 1975 issue of *CENTER CITY*, and have read with interest the article "Exploring Downtown".

This is just to let you know that we are behind you 100 per cent in stressing maintenance of these downtown buildings.

SR. ISABEL REILLY, MSW, SCMM
DIRECTRESS, COMMUNITY SERVICES
CATHOLIC CHARITIES OF THE
DIOCESE OF MEMPHIS

I think your *CENTER CITY* bulletin is very good. The two or three issues that I have seen are outstanding. I believe the comments by Elinor B. Bridges should be known by many people. The powers that be should certainly consider this plan, and it is possible, that they have not thought of it.

The Chamber of Commerce, we know, is trying to do a good job and this may be helpful.

HERBERT W. STREULI

Citizen Comments

I was quite impressed with an article in your most recent publication, January 22, 1975, written by Ms. Elinor B. Bridges. In response to it, our organization, Writers Relations Association and Publishers, Inc., is projecting plans for helping to maintain the music of Memphis.

RANDLE C. CATRON
EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT
WRITERS RELATIONS ASSOCIATION AND
PUBLISHERS, INC.

BRAVO ELINOR B. BRIDGES!

...Our city still has its heart, and injected with new life and confidence, our downtown can pump pride into our future as it did with our past.

Memphis must remain Memphis. We must not allow the suburban sprawl to turn us into a non-community of Whitehavens, Parkway Villages, Raleighs, and Fraysers—all competing for government, utility, and growth favors.... Developers and tax payers need to realize that unnecessary sprawl is expensive and inflationary. New streets and utilities are more expensive than modifying present systems. A great deal of developable property lies within the perimeters established by Parkway.

It will take a long time, but we are going to give Memphis a new life and new pride—down near the river. The unfortunate prospect is that we have to do it in spite of Memphis.

R. STEVE SIMS

FRIEND:

Please accept fervent congratulations on the article in your latest issue entitled "Citizen Comments," by Elinor B. Bridges.

Like many other readers I'm in full support of her 5 suggestions for renovating downtown Memphis. I wish only to add another: that the empty, recessed walls of our new Convention Center be filled with murals of Memphis history, by local artists. Please bear in mind, that in India a "white elephant" is regarded as both rare and regal.... Maybe if we dress up our Convention Center properly it can begin to pull its own weight.

MARGARET VALIANT

CENTER CITY is delighted to hear from its readers. Please share your ideas with us often.

Construction on the Main Street Mall will begin within the next week or ten days. Work will be done on two to four blocks at a time, with the construction starting at McCall Avenue and progressing North.

Vehicular traffic will not be allowed on the blocks under construction, except MAC bus service will be in operation on Main Street on the best possible schedule allowed by construction activity.

Stores involved directly with construction activity will be accessible to customers by portable ramps. Major construction of the street Mall is scheduled to be completed by December 1, 1975.

RETAIL MERCHANTS ASSOCIATION

MEMPHIS FILM SERIES

Memphis Public Library

- February 14 – Southern Folklore
MSU
- February 14 – “The African Queen”
UT–Center Film Society
- February 14 – “The Fox”
Brooks Art Gallery
- February 16 – “The Seagull”
Lyceum Film Theatre
- February 18 – “Footlight Parade”
MSU
- February 19 – “The Illustrated Man”
Southwestern
- February 19 – “Black Orpheus”
21 – “Slaughterhouse Five”

The art exhibit in the lobby of the Sterick Building for the month of February is a collection of paintings by Mildred Nelson.

There is to be a nationwide workshop for coordinators and consultants of local, state and national volunteer programs. The conference is to be held April 29 through May 2, and is sponsored by the National Information Center on Volunteerism. For further inquiries write to: Gwen Winterberger, Conference Manager; National Information Center on Volunteerism; P. O. Box 4179; Boulder, Colorado 80302.

Center City
First Presbyterian Church
166 Poplar Avenue
Memphis, Tennessee 38103

The Johnson Auxiliary to the City of Memphis Hospital needs volunteers. Pre-service training school will be held February 26, 27 and 28. To register, call: 528-7242.

The winner of the first “Exploring Downtown” contest was Mrs. George Hoogasian of the Immigration and Naturalization Service in the Federal Building. Mrs. Hoogasian correctly identified the two renderings as (1) 63 N. Main St. and (2) 109 Madison.

CIVIC CENTER COMMUNITY CULINARY CLUB

Serving from 11:30 to 1:00

First Presbyterian Church, 166 Poplar Avenue

PRICE: \$1.50 per serving, including drink

MENU FOR FEBRUARY 13 – FEBRUARY 21

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 13

Fried Chicken, Rice & Gravy, Squash, Rolls

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 14

Meat Loaf, Potatoes Au Gratin, Lima Beans, Rolls

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 17

Ham, Blackeyed Peas, Creamed Corn, Corn Bread

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 18

Oven-baked Chicken, Rice & Gravy, Peas & Carrots, Rolls

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 19

Spaghetti, Cole Slaw, French Bread

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 20

Pork Steak, Whipped Potatoes, Green Beans, Rolls

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 21

Beef Stew, Tossed Salad, Corn Bread

*Second-class
postage paid at
Memphis, Tennessee*