

FILE  
COPY

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

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National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

received

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic The Tee Pee Restaurant

and or common

2. Location

street & number 3820 Fall Creek Boulevard N/A not for publication

city, town Indianapolis N/A vicinity of

state Indiana code 018 county Marion code 097

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
	N/A	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Indiana State Fair Board

street & number 1202 E. 38th Street

city, town Indianapolis N/A vicinity of state Indiana 46204

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Recorder of Deeds

street & number Room 721, City-County Building

city, town Indianapolis state Indiana

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title N/A has this property been determined eligible? yes  no

date federal state county local

depository for survey records N/A

city, town state

## 7. Description

### Condition

excellent

good

fair

deteriorated

ruins

unexposed

### Check one

unaltered

altered

### Check one

original site

moved date \_\_\_\_\_

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Tee Pee Restaurant, 3820 Fall Creeek Boulevard, is an outstanding representation of 20th century roadside architecture. The restaurant, which faces east, is located in the southeast corner of the Indiana State Fairgrounds at the heavily trafficked intersection of Indiana Highway 37 and a major east-west artery (38th Street). The stucco-covered building, as it currently exists, is a symmetrical, single story design composed of a central area, upon which rests the teepee, with identical wings to the north and south. A detached awning for drive-in service is located to the west of the restaurant.

A comparison of photos #1 and #5 will show that the Tee Pee still closely resembles its original appearance. The restaurant was built with two symmetrical wings and a cantilevered canopy which extended around the building. The teepee was placed on top of the central section. In 1952 additions were designed for the rear of each wing by architect Fran Schroeder. The kitchen area was also expanded to increase the service for the drive-in customers. Also in 1952 the basement area was further excavated to extend under the parking lot to the south. The basement, a twisting maze of rooms, consisted of an extensive food preparation area which included a self-contained butcher shop and a bakery, among the numerous rooms.

Located above the central entrance of the restaurant is a neon sign which says "Tee Pee" (photo #13). The glass double front door is located within an air lock (a later addition) which has access doors on its north and south sides. Located to each side of the door are large windows with four fixed panes each. Each wing likewise has its own entrance on the main facade (photos 4 and 5). There are horizontal bands of windows with four fixed panes each located on the east facade of each wing. The word "Dinners" appears in neon lights above the east facade windows of both wings (photo 6).

The cantilevered canopy, which outlines the Tee Pee Restaurant, forms a deep cove where the roofline meets the top of the building. Below the cove is a projecting architrave which defines the top of the windows and also encircles the entire structure.

The actual teepee is a stucco-clad steel frame structure. Recessed within the triangular-shaped entrance is a wood door which provides access to the teepee's interior. The door is located on the east side of the structure. The top area was originally highlighted in neon lights, but these have since been removed. The decorative Indian motifs which once highlighted the stucco teepee are likewise gone.

Three carved wooden Indian heads decorate the projecting eaves of the restaurant--one located on each of the northwest, northeast, and southeast sides of the building. As photo #7 illustrates, the Indian head on the northwest corner has feathers outlined in neon lights.

The west, or rear, facade has a central projecting, enclosed glass entrance bay (photo #8). This area, which opens onto the restaurant's kitchen facilities, provided access to the drive-in service for car hops. To each side of the projecting bay are bands of four-paned windows as seen on the main facade.

The north and south facades are mirror images, with four-pane bands of windows on each, located toward the east end of each facade (photos 4 and 5).

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Inventory—Nomination Form**

Continuation sheet Tee Pee Restaurant

Item number 7

Page 1

Photo #9 shows the front dining area located in the south wing. All of the interior walls are plaster. Located around the room, just above the windows, is an Indian motif border painted directly on the wall. This front room is separated from a smaller rear dining area (added in 1952) by a partition which has two large openings (photo #10). Located within the rear room are two murals painted on stretched leather applied to the wall. Photo #11 shows the south wall; photo #12 is the north wall.

The configuration of the two rooms in the north wing is identical to those of the south wing, but the room in the rear addition was converted into a lounge. The original murals of the north wing were replaced by pictures painted directly on the wall (photo #13).

Photo #14 is the main kitchen area located to the rear of the structure. All of the kitchen equipment, as well as the majority of fixtures, are gone.

At the 1984 auction the majority of the interior fixtures were removed. This included the booths, tables and chairs, and the kitchen and food preparation equipment. The lunch counter located in the central portion of the restaurant was also removed, as were the stools. The murals and painted designs remain, however, to provide a good indication of the interior decoration.

Photo #17 shows a detached, cantilevered awning of aluminum, steel, and concrete constructed in 1959 by the Orman O. McKinley Company. The awning provided shelter for the drive-in customers.

The Tee Pee Restaurant is a structurally sound building, although it is in need of maintenance.

## 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1939

Builder/Architect George Barr/Maurice Thornton, Fran Schroed

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Tee Pee Restaurant, an art moderne drive-in highlighted by a stucco-covered teepee, stands as a significant representation of 20th century roadside commercial architecture in a state where such examples are rare.

Roadside architecture is characterized by structures designed as a direct result of the influence of the automobile. Roadside architecture is most frequently associated with diners, drive-ins, tourist cottages, roadside parks, and the whimsical designs such as the Tee Pee Restaurant which mimic real or fanciful objects designed to draw the attention of the passing motorist. Due to the expansion of the interstate system and the popularity of fast food chains, many of the few remaining early roadside structures stand vacant and neglected; most have already been lost.

There is very little of the roadside architecture characterized by the Tee Pee in Indiana. Only two other known examples remain, which date to the 1950s and 1940s, respectively. The Frank-N-Stein, a hotdog stand in the shape of Frankenstein, is located on U.S. 20 near Hammond; the Coffee Pot is located on U.S. 40 in Pennville.

On July 4, 1932, at the height of the Depression, Albert R. "Mac" McComb opened his first Tee Pee Restaurant at this location, which was replaced by the present structure in 1939.<sup>1</sup> The original Tee Pee drive-in was a free standing teepee-shaped structure which stood directly on the ground (photo #19). As the first drive-in in the city to serve food (previous drive-ins were limited to ice cream) the Tee Pee had a varied menu throughout its existence with items which ranged from sandwiches to ice cream. The first City Directory listing for the Tee Pee read, "Albert R. McComb--restaurant." In 1936, the name changed to the "Tee Pee Cone Shop," which it remained until 1940. In 1941 the name officially changed to the "Tee Pee Restaurant."

Prior to his ownership of the Tee Pee Restaurant, Albert McComb was the secretary, treasurer and manager of the C. H. Meyer Cigar Company.<sup>2</sup> McComb spent his winters in Southern California, where he was part owner of a cafe' at the Santa Anita Racetrack. In California McComb was introduced to roadside architecture. He returned to Indianapolis with the idea to construct something similar. The present location proved to be very successful. Not only was the restaurant at a busy intersection of Indiana Highway 37 and a major east-west artery (38th Street), but it was also the southeast corner of the Indiana State Fairgrounds. McComb leased the property from the State Fair and built his restaurant. Initially, the drive-in operated during the summer season, only; but later, due to its success, the restaurant expanded to include the entire year.

The 1930s witnessed a growth in the use of the teepee design for commercial purposes. While Albert McComb's original Tee Pee Restaurant was not the first such structure, it did precede the patent of wigwam-shaped motels: it was not until 1936 that Frank Redford patented the design for his nation-wide chain of Wigwam Village Motels.<sup>3</sup> There is, however, another early example of teepee architecture. Located near Lawrence, Kansas, was a wigwam complex which opened in 1930. The complex, which preceded the Redford patent, consisted of a 50-foot tall teepee gas station in front of 14 teepee cabins arranged in a semicircle.<sup>4</sup>

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Continuation sheet Tee Pee Restaurant

Item number 8

Page 2

In 1939 McComb demolished the original Tee Pee to make way for a larger facility which would accommodate sit-down dining.<sup>5</sup> The new building was designed by Maurice Thornton. Thornton had received his architectural training at the University of Illinois. He later formed a partnership with A. W. Rodecker which lasted from 1928 until 1930. After a brief period as an insulation salesman, Thornton returned to practice architecture in 1937. He maintained his office at 604 Fort Wayne Avenue in Indianapolis.

The popular restaurant/drive-in attracted numerous customers with its eye-catching design. The Tee Pee was a natural draw for students of nearby Butler University and numerous local highschools. By 1952, expansion was a necessity. Architect Frank Schroeder, assisted by Thornton, designed an addition to the kitchen and the rear of both wings. Once again, George Barr served as the contractor. The basement was also enlarged to extend south under the parking lot. Located in the basement was an extensive food preparation area which included a self-contained butcher shop and a bakery, among the other numerous rooms.<sup>6</sup> In 1954 Albert McComb contracted for the construction of a smaller, yet architecturally similar, southside Tee Pee drive-in at 2830 Madison Avenue.

On June 24, 1964, the Tee Pee's original owner, Albert McComb, died. His wife, Dorothy, maintained ownership of the property and continued to operate the restaurant with the assistance of her attorney, Jim Beatty, until she died in 1972. At that time Charles McComb, the son of George and Dorothy, gained ownership of both the north and southside Tee Pee establishments. Charles continued to operate the restaurants with the assistance of American Fletcher National Bank until 1978, at which time he sold the southside property to the McDonald's Corporation (who, in turn, demolished the structure) and sold the original Tee Pee to the Indiana State Fair Board.

Since 1978 the Tee Pee Restaurant has witnessed several different tenants: Richard P. Turner; Theodore Shaver (1980); Acie and Billie Williams (1981); and Ralph Brandi, the last tenant to date. Circa 1980 the structure was painted white, which obscured the characteristic Indian motifs on the teepee itself. In 1981 the Tee Pee received a Preservation Award in the continued use category from Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana. In November, 1984, the restaurant closed and its interior furnishings and equipment were sold at an auction.

The Tee Pee currently stands vacant under the ownership of the Indiana State Fair Board. The structure is endangered due to neglect and the threat of demolition by the State Fair Board, whose master plan recommends that the area now occupied by the Tee Pee be utilized as a parking lot.

1 The Indianapolis Star, 1 July 1962, Section 8, Page 4.

2 R. L. Polk & Company, Indianapolis City Directory, (Indianapolis: R. L. Polk & Company), 1933, Page 1343.

3 John Margolies, The End of the Road, (New York: Viking Press), 1981, p. 19.

4 Daniel I. Vieyra, Fill 'Er Up, (New York: MacMillan Publishers), 1979, p. 22.

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

Please see continuation sheet

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreege of nominated property 1.04 acres

Quadrangle name Indianapolis West

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A 

1	6	5	7	4	3	4	0	4	4	0	8	6	2	0
Zone	Easting			Northing										

B 

Zone	Easting			Northing										

C 

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D 

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H 

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Verbal boundary description and justification

Please see continuation sheet

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A code county code

state code county code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title F. Eric Utz, Director, Fund for Landmarks Indianapolis Properties  
Suzanne T. Rollins, Preservation Historian

organization Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana, Indianapolis Regional Office date April 17, 1986

street & number 1028 N. Delaware telephone 317/638-5264

city or town Indianapolis state Indiana 46202

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature 

title Indiana State Historic Preservation Officer date

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date

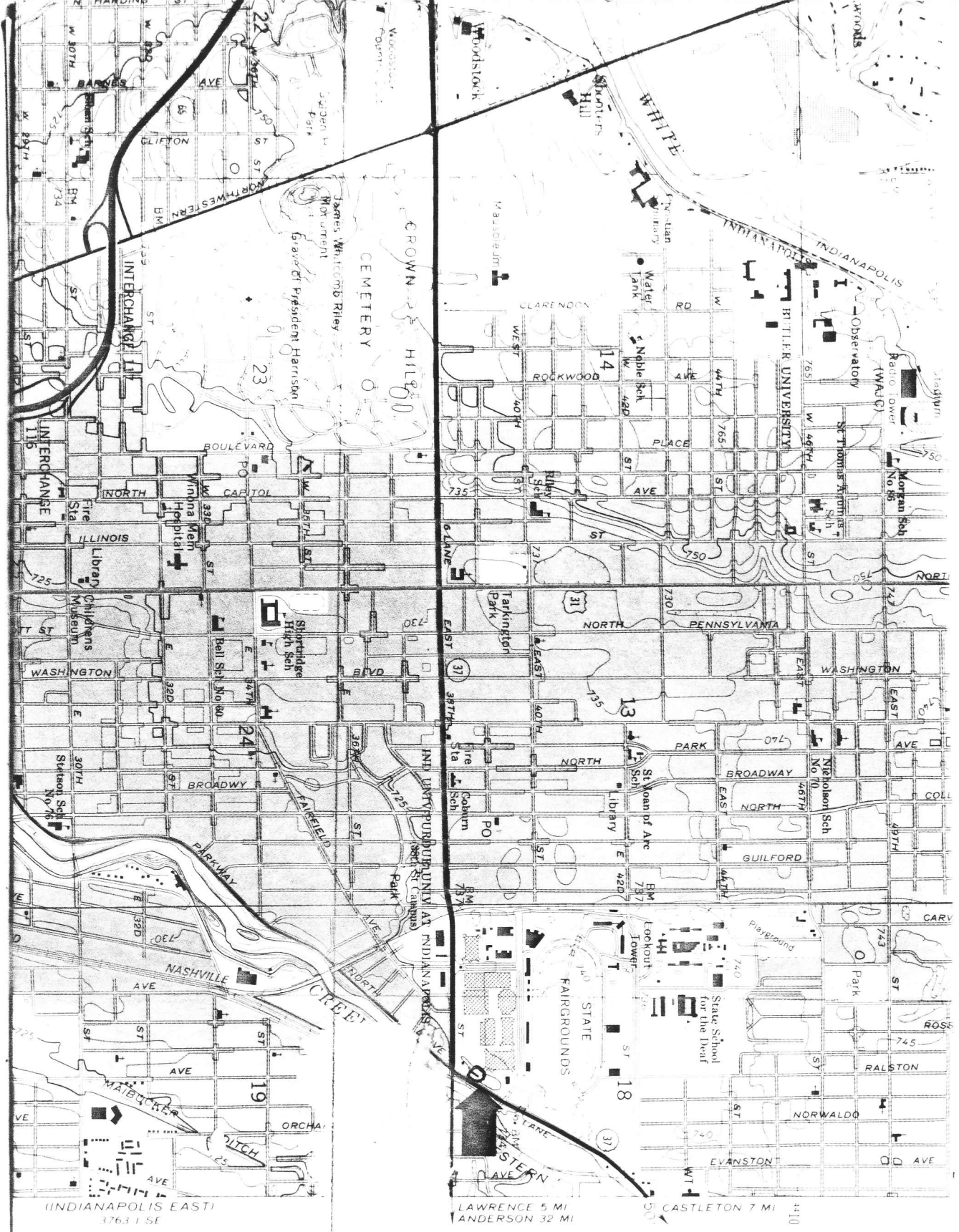
Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration





Tee Pee Restaurant  
 Indianapolis, Indiana  
 UTM Reference: 16/574340/4408620

rd