



49.1976.3 Woodruff Place
Marion County
Marker Text Review Report
8/14/2008

Marker Text

Conceived by James Orton Woodruff, prominent citizen and industrialist, platted in 1872, as a residence park, this 77 acre landscaped enclave long existed as an incorporated town completely surrounded by the larger City. The district was finally annexed by the City of Indianapolis in 1962. Two hundred and forty dwellings of predominantly neo-Jacobean and Eastlake styles are aligned on three prominent esplanade drives adorned with handsome urns, fountains and statuary. The area was officially listed on The National Register of Historic Places July 31, 1972.

Report

IHB research confirms that the marker text is correct with the exception of the acreage of the area.

According to Marion County land deeds, James Woodruff purchased the land for Woodruff Place on October 2, 1872. Woodruff experienced financial problems in the Panic of 1873, went bankrupt in 1874, and had to leave his Woodruff Place home in 1877. For more information see Timothy J. Sehr's article, "[Three Gilded Age Suburbs of Indianapolis](#)," in the *Indiana Magazine of History*, Volume 77 (December 1981).

After his bankruptcy, Woodruff remained involved in the area's activities by leading residents in their bid for incorporation, which succeeded in 1876. The impetus behind the incorporation originated from the unauthorized and repeated grazing of dairy cows on Woodruff Place grounds. The residents knew incorporating would grant them the ability to prosecute the offending dairymen. See Sehr's article and a March 8, 1914 article from *The (Indianapolis) Evening Sun* for more information.

According to a July 8, 1899 article in the *Indianapolis Journal*, Woodruff Place prospered, but officials from the City of Indianapolis began attempts to annex the town in the 1890s. In the mid 1900s, the city intensified its efforts, and tried to force residents to agree to annexation by charging Woodruff Place \$25,000 a year for police and fire protection. The residents fought these attempts all the way to the Indiana Supreme Court, which upheld the city's right to annex. The residents then appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court, whose refusal to hear the case assured annexation. Soon after, on March 19, 1962, Woodruff Place's clerk-treasurer signified the township's annexation by turning the town hall key over to Ellsworth Maxwell, the executive



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secretary of the Indianapolis City Works Board. See articles in the April 23, 1959 issue of the *Indianapolis Star* and the March 20, 1962 issue of the *Indianapolis Times* for more information.

According to the [National Park Service website](#), the area still embodies James Woodruff's idea, due largely to a fence that separates the community from metropolitan developments. Development would have ruined James Woodruff's original vision, a neighborhood that looks like a Victorian version of formal Italian Renaissance gardens. In accordance with this design, the houses possess many Victorian features; ornate flower urns, iron statuary and fountains adorn the streets. To this day, the community retains these unique, original features that warrant its July 31, 1972 addition to the National Register of Historic Places. See also August 27, 1972 article from the *Indianapolis Star*.

The sources support all of the claims in the marker text, with the exception of the district's acreage. The marker text lists Woodruff Place's acreage at seventy-seven acres. The original Marion County land deed lists the acreage at 68 72/100 acres. Sehr's article in the *Indiana Magazine of History* lists that number as eighty. The 2001 official *Historic Area Preservation plan, Woodruff Place Historic Area* indicates that area "occupies an eighty acre site."