

# THE RUINS

AT  
HOLLIDAY  
PARK

In 1916, at the centennial celebration of Indiana statehood, John and Evaline Holliday donated their beautiful country estate to the city of Indianapolis. At the time it was given to the city, the land comprised 80 acres located on what is now Spring Mill Road. It was the Hollidays' intention that the land be used for "recreation and the study of nature and the grounds, as a public park and playground." It would also become the home of Indianapolis artist Elmer Taflinger's massive art project known as "The Ruins" which took two decades to complete.

The story of the Ruins began in the 1950s when the St. Paul building, at 220 Broadway in New York City was torn down to make way for a modern skyscraper. Karl Bitter, one of the outstanding architectural sculptors of the late 19th century,



Photo courtesy Casey Cronin, Photographer



had designed the façade of the original building including three massive statues made of Indiana limestone called "The Races of Man." To find a new home for the sculptures, the building's owner, the Western Electric Company, held a competition among U.S. cities, which were required to submit plans for the display and preservation of the statues. Indianapolis proposed to place them in Holliday Park, which was then an arboretum, and the city was ultimately awarded the highly prized sculptures valued at that time at \$150,000.

The design submitted and later implemented by the city was included plans to rebuild the façade of the original building, including the facing stone, the doorways and the ledge that supported the fixtures, each of which weighed eight tons. The statues were placed east of the new Holliday House. Between that building and the statues, was a reflecting pool with two geysers of water.

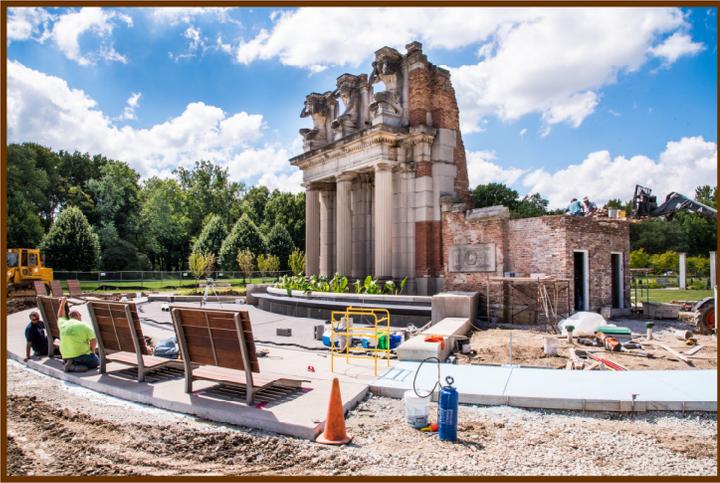
Taflinger, who provided the sketches for the proposed structure, was chosen to carry

out the design. He worked to complete the project over the next 20 years and under five different city administrations.

Taflinger was a vocal, and often contentious, force in the arts in Indianapolis. His most prolonged campaign was for the appropriation of money that would allow him to carry out his design for The Ruins, to which he was continually making changes and additions. As older buildings in the city were demolished and pieces worthy of salvaging became available; he incorporated them into the design. For example, a horse trough once located at the base of a historic monument in Fountain Square was positioned in

Friends of Holliday Park (FHP), an independent public charity, reopened the revitalized Ruins in September 2016. FHP, a 501(c)3, maintains The Ruins gardens, fountains and restrooms. FHP relies on community support to continue to improve Holliday Park.

To make a donation, please visit [www.hollidaypark.org/donate](http://www.hollidaypark.org/donate).



*The Ruins under construction, September 2016  
Photo courtesy Casey Cronin, Photographer*

the reflecting pool west of the statues. Taflinger redesigned the pool, adding 26 Greek columns salvaged from the Sisters of the Good Shepherd Convent. These were purchased by The Indianapolis Star and donated to the project. Still later he obtained four of eight statues of goddesses that had stood for many years above the entrance to the Marion County Courthouse before it was demolished. These were positioned on either side of the Ruins. Two capitals from columns originally at Broadway Christian Church and a stone table once part of an altar at St. Paul's Church were also added.

In 1970, 12 years after the project was started, concern about the lack of progress on the structures and the landscaping led Mayor Richard Lugar to request the

Department of Parks and Recreation complete it. The Ruins were finally dedicated in October 1973.

As the 1976 Bicentennial Celebration approached, Taflinger proposed a new expansion of his design that would convert it into a symbolic panorama of American history. Constitution Mall dedicated in September 1977, represents the American Republic. The elaborate plan, which was mostly completed, added a large reflecting pool at the east side of the original statues, and each element of the design had significance. Extensive landscaping was also a part of the original design: long lines of European hornbeams, one for each state of the Union, and groups of evergreens representing 13 original colonies. A single columnar oak stood for Washington, D.C. and the Washington Monument. Giant slabs of rough Indiana limestone were inscribed with the first few words of the Preamble to the Constitution: "We the people of the United States in order to form a more perfect Union..." The European hornbeams, which did not thrive in Indiana winters were replaced by silver leaf linden trees in 2005. Several of the goddess statues, which were damaged and unstable, had to be removed and the reflecting pools developed leaks and were no longer filled with water. After further decay, The Ruins sat behind a chain linked fence for twenty years, closed to the public.

In 2012, Friends of Holliday Park began a capital campaign to revitalize The Ruins and open the space to the public. After raising more than \$3.2 million for the project, the revitalized Ruins reopened on September 17, 2016. The new design by local landscape architects Eric Fulford (deceased) and Ann Reed of NINEbark, re-energizes the front third of the park creating spaces for events, performances and celebrations, and invites the public to interact with The Ruins as never allowed before. Horticultural design of the gardens were created by Chris Turner/Utopos Gardens and construction was completed by Smock Fansler Corporation. Friends of Holliday Park maintains the Ruins gardens, restrooms and fountains for the public to enjoy with help from community support.

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*Children playing in The Ruins Shimmer Fountain*



#### **THE FRIENDS OF HOLLIDAY PARK: A CATALYST FOR ACTION:**

Incorporated in 1990, the Friends of Holliday Park (FHP) is an independent 501(c)3 public charity committed to preserving and enhancing Holliday Park. FHP has a proven record of accomplishment as an organization that has rescued a public park with private dollars. It has been recognized as an outstanding model of a public/private partnership.