

Collection #  
P0160

## VONNEGUT AND BOHN ARCHITECTURAL RENDERINGS, 1896, 1911

[Collection Information](#)

[Historical Sketch](#)

[Scope and Content Note](#)

[Contents](#)

[Cataloging Information](#)

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[www.indianahistory.org](http://www.indianahistory.org)

### COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION:	Two oversize folders in flat file storage
COLLECTION DATES:	1896, 1911
PROVENANCE:	Unknown; Athenaeum Turners, Indianapolis, 1987
RESTRICTIONS:	None

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**ALTERNATE FORMATS:**

**RELATED HOLDINGS:**

**ACCESSION NUMBER:** 0000.0666, 1987.0307

**NOTES:** This is an artificial collection.

## **HISTORICAL SKETCH**

### **Vonnegut and Bohn Architects**

Both Vonnegut and Bohn, acclaimed local architects, came from immigrant German families. Bernard Vonnegut (1855-1908) and Arthur Bohn (b. 1861) acquired their architectural training in Germany. They first worked together as teachers in 1884 at an industrial training school. By 1888 they formed their architectural firm and their first major project was Das Deutsche Haus (now the Athenaeum) constructed between 1893 and 1897. Bernard Vonnegut died in 1908 and his son Kurt joined the firm and the partnership continued. It was during this later period that the William H. Block Company building was designed and built. Over the years the firm has been responsible for several outstanding buildings throughout the state. Arthur Bohn retired in the 1940s and since then the firm has acquired new partners and changed its name.

### **The Athenaeum (Das Deutsche Haus)**

Located at 401 E. Michigan Street, the building reflects Vonnegut and Bohn's early studies in Germany. A German Renaissance Revival style building built in two phases—the east wing 1893–94, and the west wing, 1897–1898—it boasts decorated gables, a steeply pitched roof, façade sculpture, art windows and more.

As originally designed, Das Deutsche Haus housed a gymnasium, locker rooms, meeting rooms, auditorium, ballroom, restaurant, and a beer garden for the Socialer Turnverein Aktien Gesellschaft, a German gymnastic society. Repairs and renovations through the years have brought changes to the large facility. Significantly, during World War I, because of anti-German feeling, the name was changed to the Athenaeum. Today (early 21<sup>st</sup> century), it no longer depends upon German ancestry to determine membership but is open to all who want to learn and enjoy what German customs, history and scholarship have to offer. In 1973 the building was listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Today it houses a restaurant, theatre, a YMCA facility, and the Athenaeum Foundation.

### **William H. Block Company**

What is now called “The Block” building, shoppers in the early twentieth century called “Block’s”, an eight-story department store at the southwest corner of the intersection at Market and Illinois Streets. It was named for its hard-working entrepreneurial immigrant founder, William H. Block.

Herman Wilhelm Bloch (anglicized to William H. Block) was born in Austria-Hungary about 1855. At the age of 21 he left his family and sailed to America to pursue a career in the New World. Arriving in New York City, he worked there for a brief time before moving west. He peddled dry goods door to door in Cleveland and Cincinnati before opening a store in Kokomo, Indiana in 1878. In 1883 he married Amelia Miller of Bellaire, Ohio, a small community

near Wheeling, West Virginia and together they had five sons.

In 1896 he settled in Indianapolis where he opened a small store on Washington Street between Illinois and Meridian Streets and incorporated the name of the Block Company. After more than a decade in his West Washington Street location, he built a modern eight-story building at the southwest corner of Illinois and Market Streets and moved there in 1911. The public praised the physical attractiveness of the new store with its terra cotta ornamentation. The location proved ideal as it was situated across the street from the Traction Terminal Building, the transportation hub for downtown buses and interurban trains.

On the morning of December 11, 1928, the 74-year-old William H. Block succumbed to heart failure at his Indianapolis home, 1918 North Delaware Street. His widow and five sons survived him. Following the death of their father Block's sons assumed responsibility for the retail establishment and the company grew and prospered. In the state the company ranked in size second only to L.S Ayres. Major changes were in the future. In 1963 Block's merged with Allied Stores. A quarter-century later, Federated Department Stores bought Block's and relabeled the newly acquired stores, using the Lazarus name. The following year (1988) Campeau Corporation, a large Canadian real estate and investment company, acquired Federated's several divisions, including Block's. Not long afterwards, Macy's bought from Campeau the former Block stores, leading to the 1993 closing of the downtown store. In 2003, the upper seven floors of the Block Building were converted to residential apartments.

#### Sources:

*Encyclopedia of Indianapolis*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, c1994.

Reference Room Collection: F534.I55 E4 1994

Probst, George. *The Germans in Indianapolis, 1840-1918*. Indianapolis: German-American Center & Indiana German Heritage Society, c1989. General Collection: F534.I55 P76 1989

Dunn, Jacob Piatt, *Indiana and Indianans*, IV. Chicago: American Historical Society, 1919. Reference Room Collection: F526.D85 I53 1919.

Stempfel, Theodor. *Fifty Years of Unrelenting German Aspirations in Indianapolis*, Indianapolis, Ind.: German-American Center & Indiana German Heritage Society, 1991. General Collection Folio: F535.G3 S74 1991

## SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The collection contains two watercolor renderings of buildings designed by the architectural firm of Vonnegut and Bohn: the Athenaeum (Das Deutsches Haus) and the William H. Block Company. The renderings are in color and show the finished buildings as conceived by the architects.

## CONTENTS

### CONTENTS

Das Deutsches Haus (The Athenaeum)

Size: 30 x 50 inches

Illustrator: W. Campbell

Description: Watercolor rendering showing the north and west facades, three-quarter view, mounted on board, 1896

### CONTAINER

Oversize Graphics:

Folder 1

Flat File 19-a

William H. Block, Co.

Size: 27 ½ x 37 inches

Illustrator: [name cannot be read]

Description: Watercolor rendering showing the east and north facades, three-quarter view, 1911

Oversize Graphics:

Folder 2

Flat File 2-f

## CATALOGING INFORMATION

For additional information on this collection, including a list of subject headings that may lead you to related materials:

1. Go to the Indiana Historical Society's online catalog: <http://opac.indianahistory.org/>
2. Click on the "Basic Search" icon.
3. Select "Call Number" from the "Search In:" box.
4. Search for the collection by its basic call number (in this case, P0160).
5. When you find the collection, go to the "Full Record" screen for a list of headings that can be searched for related materials.