

KARL BITTER STATUARY COLLECTION, 1958-1960

Collection #
SC 2585

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Processed by
Chris Harter
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USER INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION: 3 folders

COLLECTION DATES: 1958-1960

PROVENANCE: Nancy Adams, Indianapolis, IN

RESTRICTIONS: None

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ALTERNATE FORMATS: None

RELATED HOLDINGS: SC 1823, David Burns Oral Interview; M 698, Elmer E. Taflinger Papers

ACCESSION NUMBER: 1996.0536

NOTES:

HISTORICAL AND BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Located at 6349 Spring Mill Road, Holliday Park is named after John H. Holliday (1846-1921), founder of the *Indianapolis News*, and his wife, Evaline Holliday. In 1916, the Hollidays deeded their 80-acre estate to Indianapolis for use as a public park.

In 1958, Holliday Park became the home of the three *Races of Mankind*, sculpted by Karl Bitter. Bitter had designed the three five-foot tall statues of kneeling men for the St. Paul Building in New York City. When the Western Electric Company decided to demolish the building in 1958, they chose to donate the statues. Indianapolis was selected as the new home of the Bitter works. Bitter had already designed the city's De Pew Fountain. Indiana artist Elmer E. Taflinger was commissioned to design a grotto for the statues, and architect David V. Burns oversaw the installation. Due to changing city and parks administrations, development of the site was delayed until the 1970's. It was dedicated in 1977, and became known as *The Ruins*.

Karl Theodore Francis Bitter (1867-1915) was born in Vienna, Austria. He studied at the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts before coming to the United States in 1889. He found work at an architecture firm, and became known for his architectural sculptures. Throughout his career, he distinguished himself at various national and international expositions. In 1915, Bitter was struck by a car and killed in New York City.

David Vawter Burns (1911-1995) was the son of Lee (1872-1957) and Anna Ray (Herzsch) Burns. He attended Cornell University's College of Architecture (1929-1933) and the Purdue University School of Civil Engineering (1936-1937). In 1933, Burns joined his father's architecture firm, Burns and James, Architects, and was made a partner four years later. He formed the firm of Burns and Burns along with his father in 1949. From 1961 to his retirement in 1969, he was a partner in Bohlen and Burns, Architects.

David Burns married Jessie Lucille Strickland of Indianapolis in 1938. They had two children: Nancy L. and James L. Burns. He became a trustee of the Indiana Historical Society in 1965, and served as president from 1974 to 1983.

Elmer E. Taflinger (1891-1981), a native of Indianapolis, attended Manual High School. He studied art at the New York Art Students' League for six years, and continued his studies in Florence, Italy. In 1928, Taflinger returned to Indianapolis due to his belief in the "regionalism" art movement. His studio was located at 158 E. 14th Street, where he taught life-drawing classes. Taflinger also taught at the Indianapolis Art League (now the Indianapolis Art Center) until 1965. His most enduring works include the mural *Apotheosis of Science* (1938), the fresco *The Triumph of the Ideal* (1940) and *The Ruins*, dedicated in 1977.

Sources: *The Bridge*. vol. 2. no. 2 (March-April 1996) p. 6.
Dictionary of American Biography. vol 1. p. 99.
Encyclopedia of Indianapolis. p. 701, 1316.
Hepburn, William Murray. *Who Was Who in Indiana*. p. 34.
Indiana Historical Society News. vol. 3. no. 5. (September-October 1988) p. 4.
Ruegamer, Lana. *History of the Indiana Historical Society*. p. 179, 204, 211.
Who Was Who. vol. 1. p. 99.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

This collection consists of correspondence, notes, and a presentation relating to the design of the Karl Bitter statuary located at Holliday Park in Indianapolis, Indiana. *The Ruins*, as it came to be known, combined the three *Races of Mankind* statues by Karl Bitter with a fountain setting designed by Elmer E. Taflinger. Indianapolis architect David Vawter Burns oversaw the installation of the site.

Folder 1 contains correspondence (July 1958-February 1960) between David V. Burns and Elmer E. Taflinger, the Indianapolis Department of Public Works, the Indianapolis Board of Park Commissioners, and engineers and contractors associated with the work at Holliday Park. The letters are arranged in chronological order.

Folder 2 includes "A Presentation Indicating the Desire Of the City Of Indianapolis, Indiana, For the Karl Bitter Statues and the Intended Use To Which They Will Be Used." The presentation consists mainly of letters sent in July, 1958, to H. G. Ross, Works Manager of the Western Electric Company, from various associations in Indianapolis. It also includes proposed designs for the statuary. The folder also contains a draft of one of the letters and reproductions of the designs.

Folder 3 contains notes in an unknown hand pertaining to the design and construction of the site, as well as a newspaper or magazine clipping calling for support of Indianapolis' quest in securing the Karl Bitter statues.

Correspondents include: W. H. Albersmeier; George Bahre; Phillip L. Bayt; R. Norman Baxter; William H. Book; David Vawter Burns; T.C. Conley; Agnes P. Connor; Harry E. Cooler; Eugene W. Dorn; Richard L. Gilliom; C. E. Gruber; M. B. Hudson; Maynard A. King; Murray H. Morris; Max W. Null; Wilbur D. Peat (see also: SC 2128; M363); Nevin W. Raber; Paul E. Rathert; H. G. Ross; Fred H. Stout; Roscoe Stovall; Elmer E. Taflinger; A. J. Thatcher; Herman T. Tilly; Charles D. Ward.

FOLDER LISTING

Folder:

1 Correspondence (July 1958-February 1960)

2 "A Presentation Indicating the Desire Of the City Of Indianapolis, Indiana, For the Karl Bitter Statues and the Intended Use To Which They Will Be Used"

3 Notes and Clipping

CATALOGUING INFORMATION

MAIN ENTRY: Karl Bitter Statuary Collection, 1958-1960

SUBJECT ENTRIES: Bitter, Karl Theodore Francis, 1861-1915--Races of Mankind

Ruins (Indianapolis, Ind.)

Statues--Indiana--Indianapolis

Holliday Park (Indianapolis, Ind.)

ADDED ENTRIES: Burns, David V. (David Vawter), 1911-1995

Taflinger, Elmer E. (Elmer Edward), 1891-1981

END