

JH: It was a medical building, and I think at one time it was largely doctors and dentists who occupied it. It was all clustered together. Here again, [it was] available through transportation that came up into the city through the center of town.

MILLER: On both 7th Street and on down Wabash.

JH: Yes.

MILLER: Yeah.

JH: And down 7th Street, too. The streetcars and the interurbans and all those things came in, and that was the core of it.

Now would you like to develop for us these changes of style now?

MILLER: Well, in the 1930s although the office was very small and everybody (laughs) had left the community except Miller and Yeager because of the Depression . . .

JH: Well, what did they do during the Depression?

MILLER: Well, for the first three years, I understand, they sold insurance.

JH: Well, that's one way to keep alive.

MILLER: Yeah. And then things started to come back a little bit. Well, the things that kept architects going then are not available, and it's not really housing. It was remodeling of drugstores. You had an architect to do your grocery store. You had an architect to do your gas station. And it was a whole series of those little jobs that have since become "canned" as they've moved into the shopping center. A specialist lays out the way things are stored in a grocery store, so that you buy the most amount on your way out of those kind of impulse items you know . . . and the level of lighting. They have become really warehouses rather than groceries as we knew them, you know, where someone waited on you and packaged it up and carried it to your car. They're now warehouses of food.

The same with . . . the grocery store. Now, you will remember . . . was it Riggs? Was that the little drugstore at the corner of 8th and Wabash?

JH: No, Raney drugstore was up on Locust Street.

MILLER: No, not Raney, Riggs.

JH: Oh, Riggs. Yes, Carl Riggs. That's right.
Eighth and Wabash.

MILLER: Carl Riggs, yeah. That was a nice art deco before it was torn apart to make room for something else. But that was a beautiful art deco drugstore done in Carrara marbles and a glass front which was very popular in those days you know.

JH: Do you know just when that was done? Sort of?

MILLER: Ummm. I would venture that it was just pre-World War II, probably.

JH: Yes.

MILLER: In the late '30s.

JH: But now that was all part of an old building that already was there. That was a remodelling of an area within the building.

MILLER: Well, I think remodellings were a very large part of their work /plus/ an occasional governmental building like the Federal Building or the City Hall and a very occasional building on the Indiana State campus, which was then known as Indiana Normal, wasn't it?

JH: Well, the Normal . . . it was Normal School, then Indiana . . .

MILLER: I don't know when that changed.

JH: I can't . . . I should be able to . . . but I can't.

MILLER: It had become . . .

JH: It was the Normal school through the early '20s. I think by the mid- . . . by the '30s it was Indiana State . . .

MILLER: Well, it wasn't Indiana State College . . .

JH: . . . College.

MILLER: . . . until right after World War II. It became Indiana State College right after World War II. And probably just about the time that I came here. Now,

MILLER: I don't think it was called the Normal school. They had dropped that; it was just called Indiana State.

JH: It was called Indiana State . . . because I went to school there, and it was Indiana State.

MILLER: I think the "Normal" was dropped probably . . .

JH: Yes, that's correct.

MILLER: . . . in the late '20s, early '30s.

JH: Do you know what buildings they did there?

MILLER: Yes. Well, we had mentioned that one of their nicest building was the Student Union Building that was done in a sort of a simplified French provincial style.

They also did the dormitories and I'm . . .
Reeve Hall, which was across the way.

JH: Reeve Hall was the first . . . this was the first dormitory.

MILLER: Yeah.

And then the next building they did was that . . . was also really a nice building, particularly from the exterior of . . . was the Fine Arts Building.

JH: Yes, over on Chestnut Street.

MILLER: Yeah. And it was interesting to go back and see all of the master planning that was being done. It was very formalist with big gardens and a long mall that would have really gone also across Chestnut Street, eventually, and gone on down.

JH: So, this was incorporated in the original concept?

MILLER: Yes, it was that. Yeah, yeah. It was a north-south access through there.

Now then, Ralph Yeager had . . . to continue a little bit with the history and intertwine it here in what was being done, the modern movement started to come in then; and they were experimenting with this in the late '30s, early '40s. During the war their major project was a large air base down around Vincennes, and that kept them busy. It was a training base,

MILLER: I believe, for twin-engine aircraft, and I've now forgotten the name of the field. It actually . . . it's across the river, and it serves as the commercial field still for the Vincennes area -- the Vincennes-Robinson area.

Needless to say, (laughing) there wasn't much going on in the civilian market at that point. And then right after World War II was finished, Ralph Yeager had one son, Ralph, Jr., who came back to the city. They decided . . . or evidently Ralph, Sr. decided that he and his son would set up their own business. It was during this period of time that Allison Vrydagh's work had shown so much promise that I know Warren very much wanted to bring him into the firm and brought him into the partnership. So, for a period of time then it became Miller, Yeager and Vrydagh. And then Yeager decided that he would pull out and form another firm with his son, the Yeager Architects.

Then there was a second son, Peter. I believe he went to Yale initially and graduated either in . . . well, probably with a liberal arts degree. Let's put it that way. And then I think he went back to Illinois University to study. He worked in the State Department for a while, and then he went back to Illinois to study architecture.

JH: Well now, was Ralph, Jr. educated at Illinois?

MILLER: Ralph, Jr. was educated at Illinois, too, I believe.

JH: Yes, I kind of thought he was.

MILLER: Yeah.

And . . . now before Pete joined the firm, he came back about the time that I came here. Peter came back.

JH: Yes. And that was 1955?

MILLER: 'Fifty-five, yeah.

Well, to trail me in this period of time, I decided that I would go to study architecture and see whether this fit me; and I entered school in 1941. Well, by 1942 the bugles were sounding, and we all left for service in that period of '42-'43. I served

MILLER: out my service and was discharged in 1945. And the thing that was important to my career later on I'd been on . . . in service I became a military pilot and was a combat pilot and flew everything from A20's to B-24's.

I then went back to school . . .

JH: To the University of Pennsylvania.

MILLER: To the University of Pennsylvania and graduated from there in '48, taking my master's in '49. Hap Miller, who was then Happy Good (chuckles) by nickname, graduated also in '49 with her bachelor's. And we were married then and settled in Philadelphia. I worked for several firms there. One very large one that was an old-line practitioner. As a matter of fact, the man who founded it, Paul Cret, had been my father's professor; and in my freshman year I had had Paul Cret as well. He was . . . oh, dear, this becomes very complex at this point because he not only had been taken ill but he was a very elderly man, and he came to the school on a few occasions. There is now recognition that he was probably . . . latently, there is recognition that he was one of the great architects in this country. And there are quite a few books being written now about his "bridging" style between the eclectic or the historical style and into the art deco. He did a number of things, by the way, in Indianapolis that I'm finding -- the Heron School of Art and a number of those buildings. A very deft hand. He was a contemporary and worked much in the same way as the elder Saarinen and had a . . . did some very fine things. /He/ did quite a bit of the work in that period in Washington, D.C., which reflects that very sort of formalist stuff, U.S. government style, that was prevalent in those days.

JH: So, he became your mentor in a sense?

MILLER: Well, he was the mentor for several generations of family in that way.

Anyway I went to work for that firm, and that was a very large firm, and I did lettering ad infinitum as my (breaks into laughter) . . .

JH: (joining in laughter) As the low man on the totem pole?

MILLER: Low man on the totem pole. I got to arrange

MILLER: Roman letters for all these monuments we were doing (laughing) in Washington; and then I complained about that and I think they transferred me to stairs. And I did stairs for six months (laughs). This was all good training (continuing to laugh), but it's what young people have to go through.

I then went with a smaller firm and thought that . . . I practiced with them for a year and got more into the design, as you would in a small firm, and a much greater variety of work.

I came to Terre Haute the first time really in 1953. It was right at the beginning of the Korean War and /I/ wanted to try this for a minute . . . or for a . . . not a minute, for a year to see whether I would like the community. And it was before all of the activity started around . . . Indiana State really was not doing anything right then.

Now, as fate would have it, Ralph Yeager and his son, Ralph, Jr., had now established their own practice when I came here. So that must have been . . . come to think of it, that must have been right about '52 or '53 when they did this. Because it seems to me I came here right when they were doing this.

JH: So you filled a needed gap in your uncle's firm?

MILLER: That's right. I was sort of the young man in the firm then that came in. And the Yeagers, having been good friends over the years, why we . . . I would visit with them and talk about Terre Haute and the sort of friendly competition we were going to have.

Well, as fate would have it, friends of mine that I had left back in school went to work for a very large firm in Philadelphia, and they were all sent to England to work on U.S. air bases there because this was the buildup of the cold war. And I had been in correspondence with them /and had/ said that I thought that they were very fortunate to be able to see so much of history that we had all studied and at somebody else's expense really. Because you know travel wasn't that . . . it was still one of the things that the very wealthy did or the very adventurous like the Haliburtons (laughs), but it wasn't the thing that everybody did quite so much. We did travel around our country, I think, in automobiles

MILLER: from the time that you and I were both young, but not as many people thought about going abroad. I think your family was one of the few that did this, really.

JH: So, you hankered for the . . .

MILLER: So, I hankered for this, yeah. And . . . but the thing that was the clincher was that my master's work was really in planning. I was one of the very few that had spent a master's degree in what was then the very beginning sort of science-art of urban planning. And I had a telegram from a man by the name of Erman Mitchell that I had been a very close friend of both he and his wife. And he said, "If you can be in England (laughs) in four weeks, why we have 20 some odd air bases that have to be planned and you're the only one I know that can actually fly with the pilots and determine the characteristics of what was then the evolving jet aircraft."

JH: Aaaah! So it tied up with your experience in the air . . .

MILLER: So it tied up with the experience of having been a military pilot and still being relatively young and not out of the service that long. And these were cities really of five to fifteen thousand people. What was known as a SAC base (Strategic Air Command base) was 15,000 people. And it had to have schools and hospitals and industry and housing, because the English economy couldn't support this influx of Americans.

JH: Now, these bases were planned under the Strategic Air Command then?

MILLER: That's right.

JH: Who paid for this?

MILLER: Oh, the Americans did. It was a combined force of the British Air Ministry and the American Air Force -- which was a separate branch of the service by then -- that planned and executed them. But the Americans paid for them. Britain was really strapped at that point.

JH: So you were working for SAC at that point?

MILLER: That's right.

MILLER: We had an interesting office made up of sort of key Americans in command, so to speak. And then all of our secondary people, right down through draftsmen, were all British. So we had a marvelous experience. And that's where I met David Field, and then he'll come into the picture a little bit later.

JH: How long did you stay in England then?

MILLER: Well, totally we stayed there about three years. In that period of time, two of it was working. Then Hap and I just decided to take every penny we had and spend almost a year touring the continent from all down into southern Italy, where I had flown out of, and back into Germany -- which I did with great trepidation because of having been their prisoner for a while -- and 'way up into the Scandinavian countries, which were the leaders of architecture at that time. Sweden and Denmark and the social philosophy was reflected in their architecture. It was . . . they were the great designers of that period. The thin birch furniture, the very sparse, minimalist kind of architecture that they had developed and made so popular in the magazines. The Scandinavian look really was . . .

JH: Do you think your travel in Europe at that time had a great influence on your subsequent thinking about architecture and design?

MILLER: Oh, it couldn't help not to, Jane. The world was a very exciting place then. It really was. You know we . . . although I flew to England, by far the cheapest way of going was still going by boat. So that gives you an idea about what transportation rates were. I flew in a 4-engine Lockheed aircraft that in 1954, or 1953, they still announced the point of no return, you know (laughs). And we stopped . . . we left New York . . . or I guess I left out of Philadelphia really. And we stopped in Gander in all this incredible amount of snow (continues to laugh). And we took off and they finally said, "Well, we're at the point of no return. We now must go on," you know. And of course, you flew at very low altitudes which meant you were buffeted by all the north Atlantic storms, and we landed in Shannon for breakfast. Oh, God, it was tedious. It was 18 hours, you know, that people put up with.

Now, when Hap came over to join me, why she came by boat. And we came home by boat.

MILLER: So, the world was smaller in that way, and it was . . . and by that, I don't mean smaller in time-distance -- that it makes the world smaller today. But the countries were much more parochial. They were much more protective. The whole concept of the international style was just beginning so you'd find a bit of it in Italy, and we'd search it out, you know. There was one firm in Rome that was doing great contemporary work, and we And surprisingly, there were two Americans that had started but then had Italian partners, and we went and visited them. And it was a heady period of time in which we thought that architecture was really going to set free the true democracy, the true forces of mankind into this brave new world. We really did.

And when you got to Sweden and saw what was being done and how clean the cities were and how good the transportation was and how everybody was really taken care of and provided for, it did look like Utopia. It was a lovely period of time to be alive, I thought.

JH: But you came then back to Terre Haute.

MILLER: That's true.

JH: When?

MILLER: Well, we came back here . . . for all practical purposes, we could say January, 1955. I think it was really December of '54. Or November (laughs) or sometime around in there.

JH: Yes, I really believe it was. It was November of '54.

MILLER: But, you know, in that year that we were here where we saw so little hope for the town, we made a lot of friends. And one of the people that influenced We made these through Community Theater really -- where we first met you and Kenny and worked so hard on getting the thing transferred with Weldin into new quarters. But one of the people we met then was George Mayrose. And Bob Wiandt. And they had stayed because Bob Wiandt particularly, the jeweler, was such an anglophile that he wrote to us continually and we wrote back. I think it was George that wrote and said, "Well, you ought to come back and try it one more time because Indiana State's beginning to grow, and we really think