

SCHNULL AND COMPANY BUILDING
(Commercial Building)
110-116 South Meridian Street
Indianapolis
Marion County
Indiana

HABS No. IN-219

HABS
IND
49-IND,
56-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY
MID-ATLANTIC REGION, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19106

HABS
IND
49-IND,
76-SCHNULL AND COMPANY BUILDING
(Commercial Building)

Location: 110-116 South Meridian Street, Indianapolis, Marion
County, Indiana

USGS Indianapolis West, Indiana Quadrangle
Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinator
16.570 100.4401 840

Present Owner: City of Indianapolis
Department of Metropolitan Development
148 East Market Street
Indianapolis, Indiana

Present occupant: Vacant

Significance: The Schnull & Co. Building was constructed for Henry Schnull as the home of his wholesale grocery firm. Schnull (1833-1905) was the founder of the Indianapolis Wholesale District. He erected the first speculative wholesale building in 1863 realizing the value of the location with the dual growth of commerce and railroad transportation in Indianapolis during the Civil War. This structure occupies the site of Schnull & Co.'s first building, destroyed by fire in 1895. The building is the design of the prestigious local architectural firm of Vonnegut & Bohn. The building has retained much of its integrity and is a contributing structure in the Indianapolis Union Station-Wholesale District, listed in the National Register of Historic Places in July 14, 1982.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Date of erection: The Schnull & Co. Building was built in 1897.
2. Architects: Bernard Vonnegut partner and co-founder of the prestigious local architectural firm of Vonnegut & Bohn was the architect of the Schnull & Co. Building ("Bernard Vonnegut Claimed by Death," Indianapolis Star, August 8, 1908, p.1). This is not surprising considering that Vonnegut was also the son-in-law of Henry Schnull, having married Nanny Schnull in 1883. Vonnegut (1855-1908) was a member of a prominent Indianapolis German family. He studied architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and at the Polytechnical Institute of Hannover Germany. Returning from Germany, he worked in the architectural office of George B. Post in New York then returning to his native city where he formed with Arthur Bohn the firm of Vonnegut & Bohn (Jacob P. Dunn, Greater Indianapolis, Chicago: Lewis Publishing Co., 1910, II:966). The firm is responsible for other buildings in the Wholesale District. Throughout the city stand numerous examples of the firm's work including Das Deutsche Haus-Athenaeum (HABS No. IN-63), Ayres' and Block's department stores, Selig Dry Goods Co. Building, John Herron Art Institute, Crown Hill Cemetery, Porter's Lodge (HABS No. IN-57) and the Roosevelt Building (HABS No. IN-215).
3. Original and subsequent owners: The Schnull & Co. Building was originally built for, and owned by Henry Schnull proprietor of Schnull & Co. Schnull heirs owned interest in the building until its purchase by L.S. Ayres & Company Corporation 1968. LaScala Restaurant purchased the building in 1976 and owned it until its sale to the City of Indianapolis on September 14, 1988 (Marion County Recorder's Office, Indianapolis, Indiana).
4. Builder, contractor: Unknown
5. Original plans and construction: The location of the original plans for the Schnull & Co. Building is unknown. The Sanborn-Perris Insurance Map of 1898 describes the building as having "mill construction" and utilizing steam power and heat. The map describes usages as follows: fruit canning, second floor; syrup works, and roaster, fourth floor (Sanborn-Perris Map Co., Insurance Maps of Indianapolis, Indiana, New York: Sanborn-Perris, 1898, III:302).

6. Alterations and additions: Exterior alterations to the Schnull & Co. Building are found at the storefront and in fourth floor windows. The current storefront was installed in 1985 and is a remodeling of the 1977 storefront installed when the building was converted for use as a restaurant. The 1977 remodeling resulted in the removal of the original storefront and the creation of the mezzanine level windows. The 1985 storefront is framed by wood panels. Originally the storefront did not express the mezzanine level which was lighted by transom lights above the storefront bays. The original storefront bays were composed of lighted aprons with metal grills, plate-glass windows and transoms. The three double doors were surmounted by their own transoms. In 1977 the glazed sashes of the six of the eight fourth-floor windows were removed and replaced with metal louvers as part of the buildings ventilation system.

The majority of the interior alterations were made in 1977 when the large open storage spaces of the upper floors were adopted for restaurant use including drywall partitions, carpeting, and restaurant fixtures. The main (east) facade and portions of the interior were sandblasted in 1977.

B. Historical Context

Henry Schnull, one of the greatest leaders of Indianapolis commerce in the last half of the nineteenth century erected the headquarters for his wholesale grocery firm after the fire of December 3, 1895 destroyed the commercial block that he had previously erected on the site. Schnull & Co. dominated the Indianapolis wholesale grocery trade until the 1930s. Dating back to 1855, Schnull & Co. was one of many businesses started by Henry Schnull in his long, successful business career in Indianapolis. Schnull (1833-1905) emigrated from the German province of Westphalia in 1852 with some business experience. He started a retail grocery business here with Fredrick P. Rusch in 1855, that later became A. and H. Schull & Company with Schnull's brother, August, as a partner. The retail business ended in 1860 and the Schnulls turned their attention to the wholesale trade and to developing and building the Wholesale District. Noted as the "Father of the Wholesale District", Schnull erected the first business block on South Meridian in 1863 at the southwest corner of Meridian and Maryland Streets known as the Schnull's Block, abutting the Schnull & Co. Building. The Schnulls sold their business in 1865 and that same year founded Merchants National Bank with Volney T. Malott, David Macy and Alexander Metzger. Henry Schnull served as the bank's first president from 1865 to 1866. In 1868, he formed the wholesale grocery firm of Severin, Schnull & Company in partnership with Henry Severin,

a fellow Greman immigrant. Between 1872 and 1877, he was a hotelier operating the Occidental Hotel on the site of the Occidental Building (HABS No. IN-211), but returned to the wholesale grocery business in 1877 founding the firm of Schnull & Krag. This firm bacame Schnull and Company in 1889. The results of the 1895 fire were a new building and Schnull's Phoenix brand of groceries, an obvious reference to the firm's recovery after the fire. Schnull commissioned his son-in-law, Bernard Vonnegut of Vonnegut & Bohn to design the new building. Schnull & Co. pioneered vacuum-packed coffee in 1922. The firm occupied this building until 1924 when it moved to larger facilities at 601 Kentucky Avenue ("H. L. Summerfield is Elected President of Schnull & Co.," Indianapolis Star, May 16, 1938, p.12).

After Schnull & Company vacated 110-116 South Meridian, the Taylor Carpet Company occupied the building until the early 1930s. The Hibben, Hollweg & Company, wholesalers of drygoods and notions, occupied the building from 1937 to the 1960s. L. S. Ayres & Company department store used the Schnull & Co. Building as a warehouse until 1977 when the building was remodeled and occupied by LaScala Italian Restaurant. In 1985 the building was again remodeled by the same owners and it functioned as a night club and discoteque from 1985 to 1988. Since that time it has been vacant.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Schnull & Co. Building is a five-story, brick commercial building built in 1897. The main facade is clad with light-brown brick and is accented with moulded brick details and limestone sills.
2. Condition of the fabric: The Schnull & Co. Building is in good condition, having been occupied with few lapses in the 1930s and 1980s since it construction in 1897.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The Schnull & Co. Building is located on a rectangular parcel of land, virtually occupying the entire parcel from South Meridian Street to the alley Bird Street. The building is 64 feet wide and 187 feet, 6 inches long (Centre Venture, "Building Description for Circle Centre Mall, : Indianapolis, Indiana, Feb. 8, 1988, revised July 15, 1988, typewritten & unpublished).

2. Walls:

- a. East elevation: The principal facade, east building elevation, is on Meridian Street. This facade is clad in light brown brick from the second floor above the store front to the top of the parapet. The facade brick also clads the three piers framing the storefronts. The facade is divided into four bays, from second floor up, with each bay having two windows. At the first floor is a wood storefront window system. It has double doors in the south and north bays, with an extra door in the south bay, which are wood frame glass doors (Centre Venture). Architectural detailing includes the moulded brick entablature with dentils and the moulded bricks framing the fenestration of the upper floors. The fifth floor windows are distinguished by a terra-cotta enframement and projecting sills and are separated by terra cotta pilaster mullions. Limestone is employed in the plinth and window sill courses.
- b. West elevation: The west facade facing Bird Street is common red brick with a three-foot stone base. The first floor has a loading area, with a concrete platform projecting out to Bird Street. The northern-most of four bays has double steel doors. The other openings are infilled with brick. The second to fourth floors have four openings each, with the south opening on second and third floor being a door to the steel fire escape. Only the north half of this facade projects up to the fifth story (Centre Venture).
- c. North elevation: The north elevation is blank except for the fourth and fifth floors which both have a pair of windows located approximately fifty feet east of the western end of the wall. The first through third stories of north elevation bear plaster finishes and the fourth is painted as this wall also served as the party wall of the 1863 four-story Schnull's Block that collapsed in 1987, exposing the Schnull & Co. Building's north elevation.
- d. South elevation: The south elevation is covered by the adjoining four-story, Mallot Building (HABS No. IN-226). The south elevation of the fifth story rises above the Mallot and is blank, unpainted, common brick.

3. Foundations:

Coursed rubble limestone is the foundation material exposed on the north elevation.

4. Structural System:

The building's structural system is that of mill construction with a heavy timber structure, with heavy wood beams from basement through roof, and generally wood columns from second through fifth floors. First floor and basement columns are brick and steel. The fourth column from the west seems to be a brick enclosure for the roof drains. In the basement, stone and brick were used as bearing and foundation walls. The perimeter walls are all brick with a minimum thickness of twelve inches (Centre Venture).

5. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: The three front entrances on the east elevation have glazed wooden doors, all of which date from the 1985 remodeling.
- b. Windows: Original windows in the Schnull & Company Building are one-over-one light, double-hung sash type found on the east facade. The west facade has eight-over-eight, double-hung sash windows. Pairs of historic multi-lights steel sash industrial windows are located on the fourth and fifth floors of the south facade. The mezzanine windows of the east facade date from 1977 and include in each bay a fixed center sash flanked by a pair of casement windows.

6. Roof:

The main roof, clad with built-up composition, gently slopes from east to west to a point 187 feet west of the front facade. From this point the roof continues westward approximately 28 feet, sloping from west to east. The westernmost portion of the roof, approximately 50 feet long and 32 feet wide in the northwest corner of the building slopes westward. The roof immediately to the south is above the four story section of the building and accommodates a metal-framed, gable-roofed, wireglass skylight. three elevator towers rise above the roof line as well as the stairtower penthouse in the southwest quadrant of the building. Other roof features include two stubby chimneys slightly rising above the north parapet and two roof air vents.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. First floor: The first floor of the Schnull & Co. Building establishes the pattern followed by the upper floors. The first floor is distinctive for its decorative elements and the mezzanine. The first floor is a large open area approximately 137 feet long and 61 feet wide. The area is interrupted by two columns of piers supporting the mezzanine. In the middle of the west end of the room is the open, public staircase to the mezzanine. In the southwest corner of the room is the enclosed stairs. West of the main open area is an open room with six steel pipe columns.
- b. Typical plan above: The floors above (second through fifth) are divided into three areas the large open space, the enclosed stairs on the south wall containing restroom facilities, and the small space located in the western most quarter of the floor. The exception to this pattern are the fourth and fifth floors. The southwest corner of the building has a skylight room on the fourth floor resulting in no floor area above this space on the fifth floor. The fourth and fifth floors have retained their three rows of wooden support posts but on the second and third, the middle rows have been removed, creating a large opening in the center. Corresponding to the open area on the first floor surrounded by mezzanine. The third and second floors have some drywall partitioned areas, created in 1977 as private dining rooms.
- c. Basement: The basement is divided into four rooms and the stairwell. The large room corresponds to those on the upper floor and is punctuated by three rows of steel columns. The four smaller rooms are located in the west end and had mechanical service functions, containing boilers, electrical panels, etc. The room farthest to the west extended under the open loading dock area.

2. Stairways: The primary stair connects all floors of the building, including a storage penthouse on the roof, and is of wood construction with wooden treads, risers and landings with beaded tongue and groove board paneling lining the stairs and supporting the railing. A concrete stair off of the main stair connects the different basement levels. The open public stairs is clad in marble with an ornate wrought iron balustrade connecting the mezzanine and the first floor as does a smaller stair in the north wall. A stair on the southwall was built in a former elevator shaft and connects

the first, second and third floors. A small wooden stair connects the fourth floor to a storage loft above in the skylight room in the southwest corner of the building.

3. Flooring: All of the floors of the Schnull & Co. Building are wooden except the basement with its poured concrete floors. Wall to wall carpeting covers the flooring of the first and mezzanine stories. White octagonal tile are found in the restroom floors on each level.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: With the exception of the fifth floor and basement, all of the wall and ceiling surfaces in the building are plastered. The first floor and mezzanine are exceptional for their exhibition of decorative plaster detailing including capitals, consoles, cartouches, cornices and decorative ceiling moulding. With the exception of the first floor all of the posts and ceiling joists are exposed in the upper floors. The western most rooms on each floor are unplastered as are the walls of the basement and the fifth floor.
5. Openings: With the exception of stairwell and bathroom doors the interior historically has had no interior doors. Paneled doors with simple undecorated frames close off the stairs and toilet areas. Metal-clad double doors close off the west room on the fourth floor. Simple window frames are found on the east end of the buildings, no window framing is found on the west end.
6. Decorative features: Interior decorative features are found on the first floor and mezzanine level with the plaster features noted above, the open marble stairs and the decorative wrought iron mezzanine and stair balustrade.
7. Mechanical equipment:
 - a. Heating, air conditioning, ventatilation, and lighting: None of the historical elements in these categories has survived. A portion of the fourth floor is occupied by the HVAC equipment installed in 1977.
 - b. Plumbing: Original toilets and lavatory basins have survived and are located on the different floors.
8. Elevators:

Two elevators provide mechanized vertical transportation. The freight elevator near the west end, on the north wall connects all floors. The passenger elevator near midpoint on the north wall connects first through third floors (Centre Venture). The freight elevator is an addition, probably added in the 1930s during the tenancy of Hibben, Hollweg & Co.

D. Site:

The Schnull & Co. Building was built in 1897 on the site of the firm's commercial building destroyed by fire in 1895. The four-story Mallot Building (HABS No. IN-226) to the south was also constructed in the fire's aftermath. The Schnull & Co. Building abutts commercial and industrial buildings to the north. Most of its north elevation is exposed following the collapse and demolition of the four-story, 1863 Schnull's Block (HABS No. IN-210) in June 1988, also erected by Henry Schnull. The western most portion of the Schnull & Co. Building's north facade was abutted by the four-story, 1889-90 Levey Bros. Printing Company Building (HABS No. IN-212), demolished in 1989. The Schnull & Co. Building occupies the entire parcel of land except the westernmost 15 feet which historically served as a loading area protected by a sheet metal shed roof (Sanborn, 1914-1954 I:19).

PART III SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Architectural drawings: No architectural drawings of the Schnull & Co. Building have been located. Searches for drawings in the architectural archives of the Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis and the Ball State University College of Architecture and Planning at Muncie, Indiana proved fruitless. The building is documented in the series of Sanborn maps. These maps provide construction and usage information.
- B. Historic views: The Schnull & Co. Building appears in a number of photographs in the Bass Photo Collection of the Indiana Historical Society Library, Indianapolis. An undated Bass photograph (#331976, probably c. 1920) provides an excellent view of the main facade complete with original signage and window displays. Bass photo #A-137 shows the building in the context of the first two blocks of South Meridian Street from the south in July 1907. Bass photo #94281-F of November 4, 1925 illustrates the Schnull & Co. Building in the context of the 100 block of South Meridian viewed from the north, wherein it depicted as being occupied by the Taylor Carpet Company with a three-story high projecting sign and a metal sidewalk canopy added. The building is depicted by an unnumbered Bass photograph in the 1902 Journal Handbook of Indianapolis. Numerous photographs of the building's interior were published in the Indianapolis Star and News in 1977 after the building was remodeled and used as a restaurant.

C. Bibliography

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Centre Venture, "Building Description for Circle Centre Mall," Indianapolis, Indiana, February 8, 1988, revised July 15, 1988 (typewritten, unpublished).

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Indianapolis Historic Preservation Commission, "Washington Street Retail Mall Project: Inventory of Properties Declared Eligible or Potentially Eligible for the National Register of Historic Places," Indianapolis, Indiana, April 29, 1980. (typewritten, unpublished).

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2. Secondary and published sources:

a. Books

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b. Newspapers

"Bernard Vonnegut Claimed by Death," Indianapolis Star,
August 8, 1908, p.1.

Death Has Come to Henry Schnull," Indianapolis News, November
4, 1905, p.1, c.2.

"Downtown's Rebirth Includes \$500,000 Restaurant,"
Indianapolis Star, February 27, 1977, pp. A1 & A4

"LaScala Essence of City's 'Italy'," Indianapolis News, May
7, 1977, pp. 20-21.

"New Italian Restaurant to Fulfill Dream," Indianapolis News,
March 23, 1977, p.56.

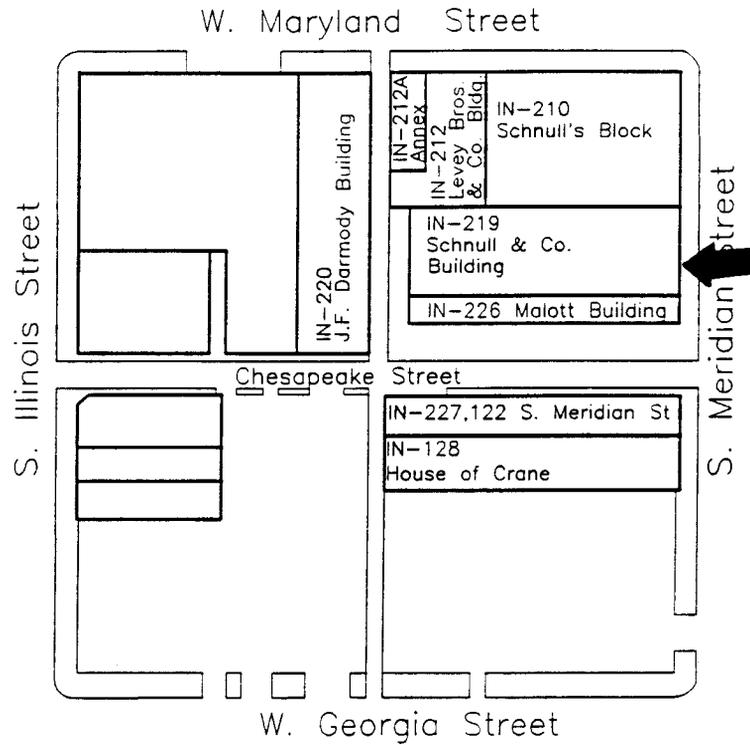
"A New Place in Town," Indianapolis Star, April 10, 1977.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the Indianapolis Historic Preservation Commission (IHPC) in compliance with Executive Order 11593 and a Memorandum of Agreement with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation as a mitigative effort before demolition.

Prepared by William L. Selm
Historian
Indianapolis Historic Preservation Commission
March 20, 1990

SITE PLAN



INDIANAPOLIS, IN.
CITY SQUARE 75

