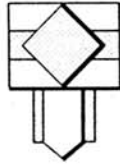




LIVINGSTON DOWNTOWN

July 1993

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The Back Page

By Dwight Young
Preservation News
March/April 1993

Sometime in the 1960's sinister forces put something in the national water supply that made us temporarily nuts. That's the only way to explain the awful things that have been done to too many American downtowns in the past few decades.

Look at what happened to Rockville, MD for example. Just over 20 years ago, Rockville (now the second-largest city in Maryland) went in for urban renewal in a big way. A sizable chunk of downtown was razed, and in its place rose the Rockville Mall. Recent articles in the local papers have said unkind things about the mall, describing it variously as "a disaster," a "hulking concrete eyesore," and "a largely vacant monolith plagued by poor design and bad luck since its opening." With reviews like those, it's no wonder the mall's owners have announced that they'd like to knock the thing down.

This is the part that intrigues me: They want to replace it with something "more closely resembling a city center of yesteryear"—which, as far as I can tell, is what they tore down around 1970. The new development will be "designed to look and feel pretty much like the bustling village Rockville once was" with streets that will be "accessible to pedestrians and cars." In other words, a total switcheroo: out with the old newfangled downtown, in with the new old-fashioned downtown.

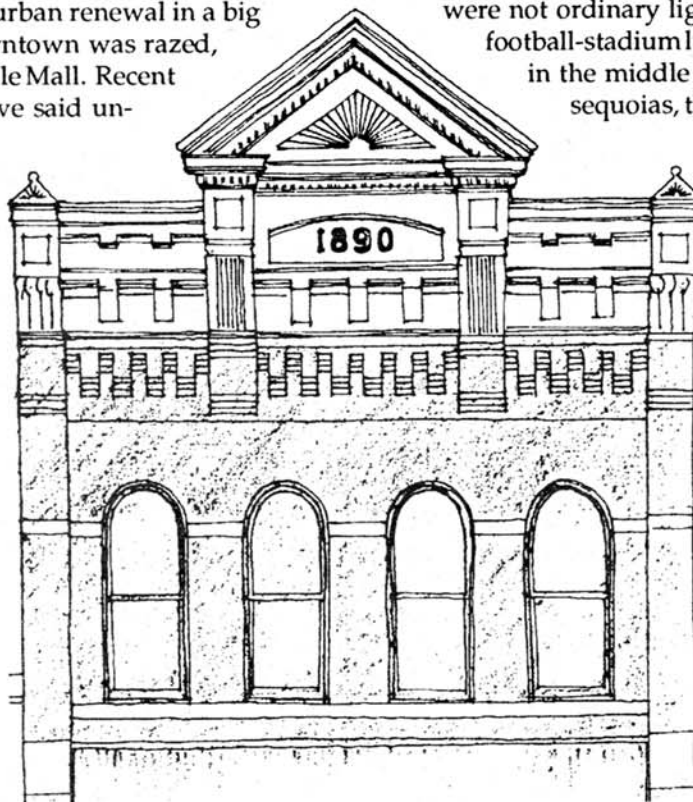
Well, I hope it works, but the whole thing strikes

me as a sad example of Americans' seeming inability to avoid the temptation to mess around with their business districts. These efforts to "fix" downtown can range from merely misguided to downright stupid.

Consider, as an example of low-key muddle-headedness, the new lights that were installed on Main Street in Columbia, the capital of South Carolina, some years ago. These were not ordinary lights; they were huge megawatt football-stadium lights on tall metal poles. Planted in the middle of the street like a row of steel sequoias, these towers managed to obliterate the view of the capital dome, which had always been downtown's major focal point. Fortunately, the lights didn't last very long (astronauts in outer space probably complained about the glare) and the view of the capitol was restored—not, one assumes, without considerable expense.

Much more extreme is the case of Helen, a small town in the North Georgia mountains that transformed itself into a Bavarian village—Hansel-and-Gretel architecture, signs in Gothic script, and a half-timbered

cont. page three



Currently housing the Whiskey Creek Saloon, this venerable Livingston structure first appeared on the skyline in 1890. Records indicate the liquor business has resided here at least since 1906, when William Grabow operated a retail wine and liquor store. Marino Napoli ran a subsequent saloon on the premises until prohibition, then John Conrow is recorded as managing a billiard parlor circa 1929. Since prohibition, the building has been home to the Old Faithful Bar, Fran's Bar, and Sally's Bar.

Welcome! This is the first of what we hope to be a continuing series of newsletters focusing on Livingston's historic downtown. Inspiration, helpful hints and historic tales are just some of the ideas to be included. Please offer comment and suggestions.

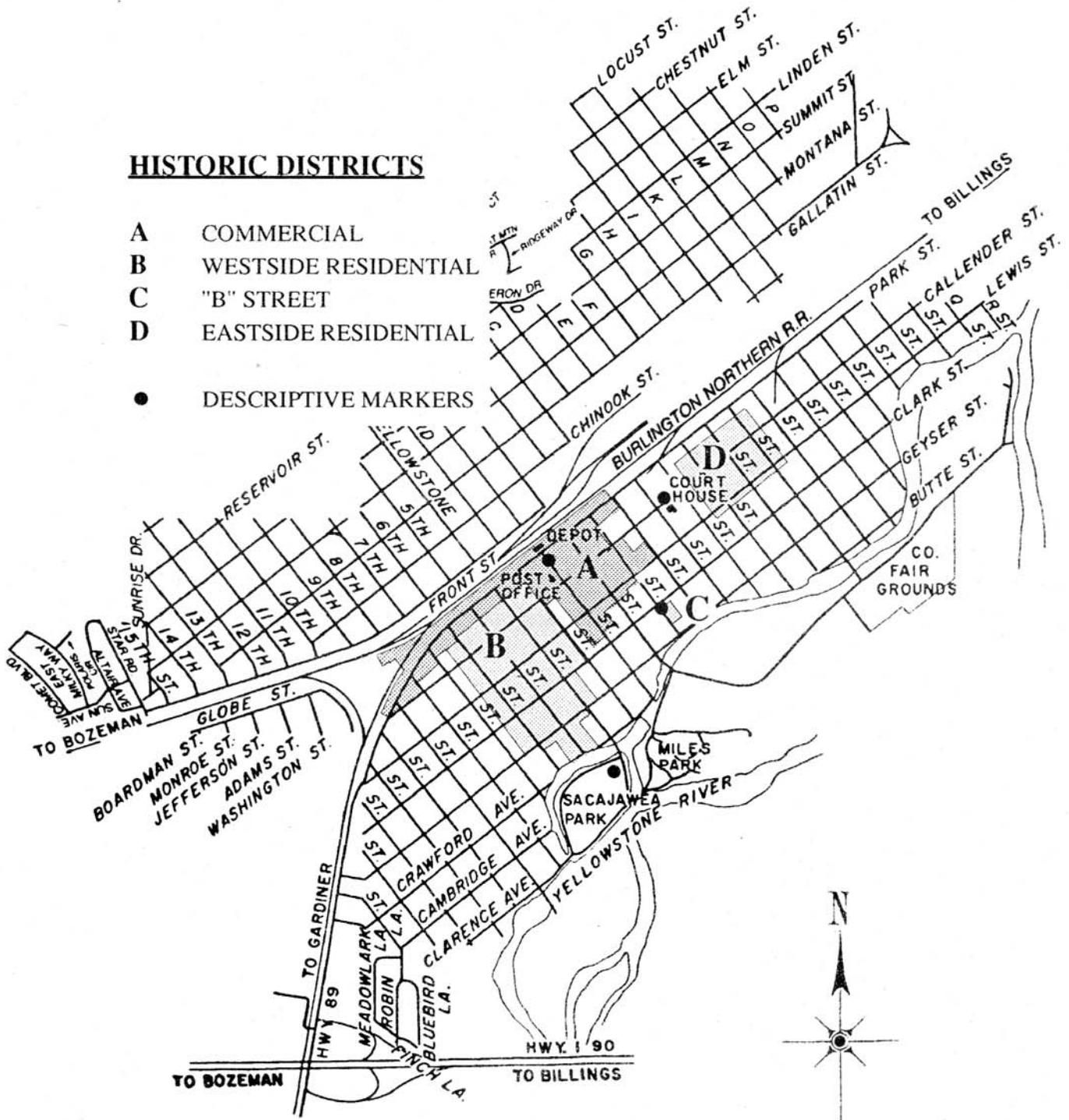
Livingston's Commercial District

As the Northern Pacific Railroad pushed its tracks westward in 1882, representatives arrived at this bend in the Yellowstone River to open a company store. They pitched a tent, stocking it with 140,000 pounds of goods hauled by ox-drawn wagons. Other merchants set up shop as track-laying crews spilled into Clark City. By 1883, Northern Pacific surveyors had platted a townsite nearby for their division headquarters, and Clark City's tents moved to the new town of Livingston. Named after a company director, Livingston's early Main Street was a muddy

track bordered by wooden sidewalks, and the false-fronted wooden stores, offices and many saloons did a lucrative business. Madame Bulldog's Bucket of Blood Saloon served a rowdy and transient clientele, among them the notorious Martha "Calamity Jane" Cannary. In 1885-86, fires destroyed much of downtown prompting reconstruction of more substantial, permanent brick buildings. Advertising painted on downtown buildings boasted all manner of goods and services while local cigar factories, mills, brick-yards and breweries further assured Livingston's survival. By the 1890's, the town had become essential to tourists as the departure point for Yellowstone Park.

HISTORIC DISTRICTS

- A COMMERCIAL
- B WESTSIDE RESIDENTIAL
- C "B" STREET
- D EASTSIDE RESIDENTIAL
- DESCRIPTIVE MARKERS



Base map reprinted with the permission of the copyright owner, U.S. WEST Direct, Publishers of the White and Yellow Pages

Cont. from page one

Olde Towne clocktower that probably houses a cuckoo the size of a pterodactyl. When I saw the place, it seemed that everything stationary had a basket of geraniums hanging from it, and everything ambulatory was wearing a dirndl or lederhosen. Heidis yodeled. Glockenspiels tinkled. I got out of there fast.

Sometimes it takes a sales pitch for a new commercial development to open our eyes to the quirky things that make a traditional downtown unique. The reborn Rockville, for instance, will include streets for cars and pedestrians—what a concept! Christmas advertisements for another new downtown in the Washington suburbs, the Reston Town Center, urged shoppers to forsake enclosed malls for the thrill of walking from store to store on an actual sidewalk exposed to the actual open air. Outdoors! What will they think of next?

Downtowns are fragile things, easily injured. They should have "Handle with Care" stickers plastered all over them. Lots of them need help, but they don't need to be turned into something else altogether. While such groups as the Trust's own National Main

Street Center have had great success in conveying that message, too many people—public officials, planners, merchants, shoppers—just don't get it.

So here's my plan: We'll go to Bavaria, see, and find a pretty little village tucked away somewhere. Then we'll convince the townspeople to transform their village into a lock-stock-and-barrel replica of a typical American downtown: a courthouse square with a Civil War monument on one corner, a five-and-dime, a drug store, a movie theatre, a barber shop with a dentist's office upstairs—you know, the whole works. American tourists will discover the place and be charmed by it. They'll ask one another, "How come we don't have anything like this back in the States?", and sooner or later one of them will say, "Wait a minute, we do!"

The scary thing is, it just might work.

Dwight Young is a senior communications associate for the National Trust. The opinions expressed in this column are his own.

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Keeping up Appearances

Storefront Guidelines

What makes for a successful Main Street business? It can't be measured exactly; there is no single success formula. Product, price, display, service, location and market all play a part. So too does the appearance of the store, the outside image of the business.

Many store owners seem to regard appearance as secondary to the more immediate concerns of running a business. Too often, the building is neglected or mishandled.

Yet experience shows, time and again, that appearance is important to a healthy business downtown. With merchants working together to create an attractive image, downtown as a whole can benefit.

The 20th century brought changes for Main Street. The automobile brought new competition from commercial strips and shopping centers. Downtown merchants turned their attention to passing cars, erecting shiny new storefronts and eye-catching signs. Main Street stores tried to imitate their modern competitors.

In many ways, the result has been a sorry one. Downtown now appears as a curious cross between neglected old buildings and a commercial strip. It presents a confused image to the shopping

public.

The idea of visual relatedness is crucial to the goal of an integrated Main Street. Historically, Main Street facades complemented and reinforced one another. Compare the drawings on this page. Notice how the remodeling of the old facades has destroyed their continuity. They are no longer visually tied together. Each facade is unrelated to the next, and the character of the building group as a whole suffers.

With its buildings, history, setting and place within the community, downtown is unique and special. It makes sense to acknowledge these resources and take full advantage of them—to develop the qualities that are already present downtown.

What improvements can make your building work better for you? How can you make it more attractive to shoppers? In following newsletters we will present suggestions for improving appearances as well as ideas for prolonging the life of old buildings.

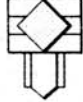
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LIVINGSTON
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Livingston Enterprise.
July 6, 1993.

Todd Dvorak, Enterprise Staff Writer

Author and radio personality Garrison Keillor discovered Livingston recently - and the city has qualities he considers key ingredients to the unique small towns he has spent his life writing about.

"This is a great little city," Keillor said in an interview in the lobby of the Murray Hotel Monday morning. "And that's because it has great things. I love the old (Empire) theater with the marquis, the railroad depot and a wonderful museum and places like the Murray. Livingston is a real place."

Before arriving in Livingston late last week, Keillor spent some time in what he called "Yellowstone National Park's southern portal," Jackson, WY.

Without prompting, Keillor pauses, buying time to pick his words carefully before offering personal observations on two differ-

ent western towns.

"You have a feeling going into Jackson that, there is no city here but just a shopping complex," he said. "Everyone in Jackson is out trying to take your money and that gives you a bad feeling."

"But coming into Livingston, from Jackson, is like coming from the other side of the world. Livingston is still a real place. There is something truly western about this hotel and the other buildings around here, but I can't tell right now what it is," he said.

What Keillor does know is "we needn't turn everything into that log cabin style facade," to capture the flavor of the West, he said.

"I think it's important to remember that the com-

munity has to be good for the people who live there, not for the tourists or visitors that spend money," he said. "I think it's important to remember that (Livingston) must keep its own integrity for the people who live here."

Are we listening?

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