

Briavel Holcomb. Spring, 1984 update.

Start: Railroad Plaza on Albany Street.

On this walk you will see many examples of rapid urban transformation which are accompanying the city's revitalization. Things to keep in mind are the changing scale of the built environment, the customers, clients or residents for whom the city is being transformed, and the distribution of costs vs. benefits of revitalization.

#### Railroad Plaza.

This is a hub of the city. The railroad station is to be renovated and is a building with some architectural merit. The plaza has redesigned by Cook students and the contractor donated his time for landscaping. Across Albany Street is the Ferren Parking Deck. Construction began on this in 1980 and was financed by a bond issue. The cost was about \$12 million. About 30 properties were taken and demolished, including two restaurants, a tire merchant, a newsagent, Suburban transit bus station and an office equipment company. Owners of those properties were offered "fair market prices" for their properties and were eligible for relocation assistance. However, since owners of nearby properties taken for the Middlesex Hospital expansion had received prices well above market value in some cases, the Ferren Deck owners felt aggrieved. Rutgers Bookstore was moved from the College Avenue location to the Ferren Deck and is the largest tenant. Its presence here presumably draws students (and their purchasing power) downtown. The Ferren Deck accomodates about 1,250 cars.

#### Golden Triangle.

The triangle of land containing the Cone Zone, Art Cinema and George Street Playhouse is to be redeveloped, probably in the near future, to a ten story, 250,000 square foot office block with retail stores on ground level. The developer is planned to be Garibaldi Realty Corporation of Springfield in partnership with the architectural firm of Rothe Johnson Associates. The cost is estimated at \$35 million. Announcements about this project can be expected in the next few months.

#### Middlesex General Hospital.

In 1978 an agreement was reached between Middlesex Hospital and UMDNJ to make the hospital the primary teaching hospital of the Medical School. Construction of a medical education building and parking garage began in the early 80's, and will ultimately cost about \$72 million. The expansion required the taking of about a block of residential and commercial properties, some of which were purchased at prices quite favorable to the previous owners. However, tenants of those properties, some of whom were low income Hispanic families, were less fortunate and reportedly received short notice and little relocation assistance. The hospital expansion has provided construction jobs, medical and service sector employment, improved

health care availability for city residents and brought affluent professionals to work and spend in the city.

#### Somerset Street.

This is part of the Hungarian Neighborhood. New Brunswick has been called "the most Hungarian City in the United States" because proportionately it once had more Hungarians than any other city. In 1915 out of a total population of 30,013 there were 5,572 Hungarians. The first immigrants came in 1888 and there followed in the early twentieth century many skilled workers who found employment in the former cigar factory on Somerset Street and at Johnson and Johnson. It is estimated that, at one time, nearly two thirds of J and J employees were Hungarians. While some immigrants returned to Hungary after WWI, many came back to New Brunswick within a few years and in the 1920's built homes in this area, many financed through the Magyar Building and Loan Association. In 1956 after the Hungarian uprising, 30,000 refugees were resettled through Camp Kilmer in nearby Piscataway. About a thousand of these refugees settled in New Brunswick. On this walk we pass a Hungarian restaurant, The Hungarian Civic Association (at Somerset and Louis), St Ladislaus Church with its statue of Cardinal Mindszenty commemorating the visit of the cardinal here in 1973, the Hungarian American Athletic Club, founded in 1913, and other visible manifestations of this cultural heritage. The former cigar factory is presently occupied by several small businesses and various proposals have been made for its adaptive reuse, perhaps as condominium or senior citizen housing.

#### French Street.

This street is in transition. A few years ago it housed mainly low income residents and businesses which catered to that clientele. There were storefront churches, a family health clinic run by Middlesex Hospital, and several thrift shops. Some of these remain, but evidence of change is obvious with the addition of several antique shops, a stained glass window store, an art gallery, and the remodelled Melody Bar, inter alia.

#### Bayard Street.

On the corner of Bayard and Joyce Kilmer Avenue is the Hungarian Presbyterian Church, founded in 1905. Joyce Kilmer Avenue is increasingly an axis of a growing Hispanic community. The Cuban, Dominican and Mexican segments are currently growing faster than the Puerto Rican proportion. The numerous lawyers office on this street are partially explicable by the proximity to the County Court House, the jail, and other municipal and county offices close by.

#### Kennedy Square.

The Middlesex County Office Building was constructed in the early 'Sixties with a grant from the Kennedy administration to ease high unemployment. The County is a major employer and this building brings several hundred commuters into the city each day. The city of New Brunswick (City Hall is also in Kennedy Square) now has a residency requirement for new employees.

George Street.

This is the major commercial axis of the city. Like many other central cities in the region it has experienced severe decline with the suburbanization of middle income populations and commerce since World War II. Between 1965 and 1975 New Brunswick lost seven of its major stores - Arnold Constable, Sears, P.J. Yonds, Roselle's, Fishman's, Nathan's and Woolworths. Many other smaller enterprises moved out and their place was taken by various budget merchandise stores oriented to low income patrons, or left vacant and boarded up. Between 1950 and 1976 commercial rentals in the central business district declined 91% from \$9.66 per square foot to \$.86 per square foot. In the 1970's New Brunswick lost more than 3,100 white collar jobs from the departure of Squibb, Boy Scouts of America, National Bank of New Jersey and WCTC. Over the last 40 years New Brunswick has lost over 6,000 industrial jobs as firms have left the city's high taxes, obsolete utility infrastructure and unionized labor market. Plans began in 1979 to stimulate commercial redevelopment by converting George Street into a two lane mall with widened sidewalks to accommodate pedestrians and landscaping. Funding was obtained from various sources - the Economic Development Authority, the city and some private contributions. The cost was about \$3million. Some new businesses have opened and others have expanded, but there is still plenty of scope for commercial upgrading.

Senior Citizen Plaza

This fountain is new and the plaza represents the future focus of the cultural center. Plans are underway for the refurbishing of the former YMCA for the new home of the George Street Playhouse, the Sissler Brothers building for Crossroads Theatre and other groups, the former Arnold Constable store has been bought by Rutgers and will house the Mason Gross School of the Arts, and the State Theater is to be renovated for concerts and other performances. It is hoped that this area will have regional attraction.

Plaza II

This \$6.5 million office building was designed by I.M. Pei and was one of the first projects of DevCo. It was built on land cleared during Urban Renewal, twenty years ago, which remained essentially vacant in the intervening period.

The Former Davidson's Supermarket, George Street.

The only supermarket in the downtown area, Davidsons, closed in February 1979 saying that its operation was not profitable, but leaving local residents with few alternatives for food shopping. Many low income people rely on cabs to reach the nearest supermarket, several miles away on Livingston Avenue. Efforts to attract another supermarket to town have so far been unsuccessful, meanwhile several smaller grocery stores and co-op food shops have opened to partially fill the need. Generally, however, these stores have higher prices and less choice than a supermarket. The city does currently support 5 gourmet ice cream parlors, however!

## The New Brunswick Homes.

These public housing projects were built in the late fifties and housing over a thousand people, of whom over half are children. Most of the residents are minority, over 70% of household heads are women. The projects are currently not accepting applications from welfare recipients. There have been various proposals and alleged plans, over the years, to relocate the present tenants to other places and to refurbish the New Brunswick Homes into mixed income housing. This scenario seems unlikely under the present administration since there are few funds for low income housing at the Federal level.

## Hiram Market.

This is the oldest part of New Brunswick and was the original focus of the city's commercial activity. The first market was on the corner of Richmond and Burnet (in 1732) and the Hiram Street Market was built in 1814 and used until 1864. For several years this was the scene of a long controversy over the effort to obtain historic designation for part of the Hiram Market area, designation which interfered with plans for the Hyatt hotel and the redevelopment of the area. The district designation effort failed, and today few historic structures remain, several having been demolished last winter. A few which remain as of April 1984 include:

- \* Congregation Ahavas Achim 31-37 Richmond. Formed in 1889 it housed the oldest Orthodox congregation in New Brunswick until a major fire on Yom Kippur, 1980 which demolished the roof and dome.
- \* Deinzer Block 135-137 Neilson. Built in 1885 in Italianate style. Notice the carved lintels and the bracket-like carvings under the windowsills. This has been one of the better maintained buildings in the district.
- \* Slock's School and the Bank Of New Brunswick are no longer standing, but were on Neilson Street a year ago.
- \* First reformed church. This congregation was organized before 1703 but the present church dates from 1812. Of Georgian design, with a central steeple and rounded windows, the steeple, built in 1827 was pillared corners and is decorated with winged cherubs. The Sunday school building on the south side was added in the 1880's.
- \* Hiram Market was the hub of activity in New Brunswick in the 19th century. A marketplace used to occupy the center of this street from 1822-1916. At 48-50 Hiram Street is Hannahs Building, the site of a rubber factory run by Horace Day between 1839 and 1960. In 1952 Day lost a patent fight with the Goodyear Rubber Company. The rest is history.... At Hiram and Dennis is The Frog and the Peach, a new restaurant in a renovated building.
- \* Christ Church. This congregation was organized in 1702 and was the "birthplace" of American Episcopalianism. Some of the brownstone headstones in the graveyard date back to 1760. The Georgian style church is built of native brownstone and the steeple reflects the work of Christopher Wren.

## Church Street

The National Bank of New Jersey had offices here (at 61-63 Church

Street from after the Civil War until 1910. Note the heavy carved lintels above the second story windows and the round medallion windows on the third. This block, between Church/Albany/Neilson and George is to be redeveloped into a retail shopping mall. In September 1983 a \$3.6 million Urban Development Action Grant was awarded for the project. Other financing is expected to be obtained from a \$6 million State Economic Development tax-exempt bonds, \$1.5 million from the developers Don Gatarz and Robert Epifano, and from other sources. Construction will begin soon. Some of the buildings on lower Church Street, such as Pottery International and J. Augusts will be renovated. A walkway will traverse the block from the Jycle Kilmer Park to Neilson Street.

#### Hyatt Regency Hotel

Plans for the Hyatt were announced in August 1978 and a \$6 million Urban Development Action Grant was awarded to the project. Initially the hotel was scheduled to cost \$18 million and to generate 400 jobs. Construction of the hotel was delayed by the controversy over historic designation of the Hiram Market. The hotel eventually was built much as originally planned, although some modifications to the design allowed the saving of the King Block on Memorial Parkway. When the hotel opened in September, 1982, there were 239 new employees. One hundred of the jobs were reserved for low and moderate income people who would then have qualified for CETA. There have since been charges of employment discrimination at the Hyatt and there are ongoing efforts to form a union. Construction of the hotel necessitated the relocation of some families and businesses, who were eligible for compensation under the 1970 federal legislation. The Hyatt was awarded a 15 year tax abatement under the state Fox Lance legislation. In 1983 the hotel paid \$560,000 in lieu of taxes.

#### Johnson and Johnson Corporate Headquarters

This is the centerpiece of the redevelopment effort. After the decision to remain in the city was made in the mid Seventies, the plans for the new headquarters, designed by I.M.Pei, were made public in 1978. The site is 12.5 acres and was formerly occupied by residential, commercial and industrial uses. The land was acquired and cleared and construction began in 1979. It was completed in early 1983. The complex includes the 16 story tower and six low rise modular office buildings. There are 380,000 square feet of floor space and the cost was originally assessed at \$60 million. A final audit of the cost is still underway. While the new headquarters brought construction jobs, it does not involve an increase in employment within the headquarters. Prior to redevelopment the site produced about \$140,000 in taxes. Now, with a tax abatement, the same area generates \$1,000,000 in lieu of taxes.

Sources for this guide include The Home News, Barbara Listokin, The Architectural History of New Brunswick, New Jersey 1681 -1900 (Rutgers University Press, 1974), the Historic Hiram Market Preservation Association, and Barbara Cunningham, The New Jersey Ethnic Experience (Wm. H. Wise: Union City, 1977).