

Samuel R. White (1846-1917)

Prominent contractor and builder Samuel White's personal and professional "rags to riches" story is interwoven with the history and development of Bloomington, IL. This self-made businessman changed the physical landscape of the city in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by transforming 30 acres of pastureland into a neighborhood with fine residences and modern amenities. That neighborhood is known as White Place today. As the first planned development in Bloomington of its day, White Place is also significant for its architecture.¹

White was born on December 27, 1846² to James and Lucy (Phelps) White in Huntington, IN. His father, originally from North Carolina, died in January, 1853 when Samuel was four, leaving his mother Lucy to raise four children.³ Two years later his mother married John Reed of Wabash, IN on May 5, 1855.⁴

Like most children of the time period, Samuel was schooled during the winter months while assisting in fieldwork in the summer months. He became a carpenter's apprentice in Wabash at the age of 19.⁵ In 1868 he moved to Illinois, working as a journeyman carpenter in the towns of Ottawa, Wenona, and other locations throughout the state.⁶

White returned to Huntington in 1869 and started a successful contracting and undertaking business. On September 21 he married Minerva E. Moore, daughter of Samuel and Elizabeth Moore. In the spring of 1870, the Whites relocated to 706 North Evans Street in Bloomington which was to be a temporary stay.⁷ As White was looking for opportunities outside of Bloomington, he "began working his trade in the city." He found success as he began building schools, homes, and barns throughout McLean County.⁸ By 1872, the family was living at 817 East Douglas Street.⁹ However, in 1881 the home was severely damaged by fire. Minerva had a hot fire in the kitchen stove "and was cooking in anticipation of the arrival of company" when the fire was first noticed and the entire roof of the kitchen was engulfed in flames. Thankfully, due to quick-thinking neighbors, Minerva and a few goods were pulled out of the house, though the back part of the house was "utterly ruined, being burnt almost to the ground."¹⁰ After the fire the family relocated to 303 E. Mulberry Street in Bloomington.¹¹

In 1873 White established a lumber and coal yard in Bloomington, which evolved into the S.R. White Manufacturing Company. In 1874 he built the Stevenson hardware store on Front Street, followed by the First Ward School building in 1875.¹² An 1877 advertisement for White

¹ "White Place Historic District," *United States Department of the Interior National Park Service: National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form*, 1988, significance section.

² "Samuel R. White," *The Biographical Record of McLean County, Illinois*, (Chicago: S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1899) 59. Various records indicate Samuel's birth date as either December 27, 1846, 1847 (White's death certificate), or 1848 (his gravestone at Evergreen Memorial Cemetery).

³ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁴ Ancestry.com, *Indiana, Marriage Index, 1800-1941*, Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2005. Accessed July 4, 2016.

⁵ *The Biographical Record of McLean County*, 59.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁷ White is listed as a "carpenter" residing at 706 North Evans Street. "S. R. White," *Bloomington-Normal City Directory, 1870-1871*, 205.

⁸ *The Biographical Record of McLean County*, 59.

⁹ *Bloomington-Normal City Directory, 1872-1873*, p. 310.

¹⁰ "The Lurid Leveler," *The Pantagraph*, September 7, 1881

¹¹ *Bloomington-Normal City Directory, 1882-1883*, p. 187.

¹² Greg Koos. "Bloomington's White's Place," *Historic Illinois*, February 1994, 2.

in Bloomington's weekly newspaper, *The Democratic News*, listed him as "Contractor & Builder, And dealer in Lumber, Lath, Shingles, Doors, Sash, Blinds, etc., Job Work and Repairing Neatly done. 304 E. Douglas St., opp. Bacon's Planing Mill, Bloomington, Ills."¹³

In 1879, White turned his professional attention to the manufacture of house furniture and purchased an old mill on Douglas Street, (while still utilizing his carpenter shop for sales and storage). To promote his new business venture, he went on the road as a traveling salesman, successfully promoting his own products.¹⁴ His business started out small, employing one or two men manufacturing chamber (bedroom) sets. As business increased, he employed more men and increased the variety of furnishings he produced, including dressing cases, center tables, washstands, wardrobes, hat racks, and bookcases.¹⁵ By 1883, business was so profitable that he erected a planing mill and factory at 304 Douglas Street (across the street from his carpenter shop).¹⁶ White felt that there was "no other better point for locating an extensive furniture manufacturing factory than right here in Bloomington."¹⁷

Unfortunately, less than a year later in September 1884, a fire destroyed White's three-story wood frame planing mill. White immediately proclaimed that he would "at once rebuild his factory and put it in operation."¹⁸ He followed through with his promise and rebuilt in the same block. This building (located at 305 E. Douglas)¹⁹ for his company, the S.R. White Manufacturing Company, was a three-story brick building with massive boilers, engines, and the latest improved machinery.²⁰ He later acquired the remainder of the block (expanding to 303 and 305 E. Douglas)²¹ and built an addition to this plant "in order to meet the demands of his constantly increasing patronage."²² However, White would be forced to rebuild again in 1887 when fire destroyed this building too.²³

As larger companies began monopolizing the furniture business, White diversified into the construction of sashes, doors, blinds, and buildings.²⁴ As a contractor, he constructed buildings for the American Sugar Refining Company, Realty Cooperage Company, Pullman Palace Car Company, Bradner Smith Paper Company's mill, and repaired the Hotel Peoria and the Dunlap House.²⁵

By 1889, Samuel and Minerva White were the parents of six children: Louis A., Ora E., Elizabeth, Alma, Samuel Warren, and Delmar.²⁶ The family attended the First Methodist Episcopal Church located at the corner of Grove and East streets, where White was a trustee. In 1893 White donated \$500 (equivalent to over \$13,000 in 2015) toward building the Methodist

¹³ *The Democratic News*, August 10, 1877, 1.

¹⁴ *The Biographical Record of McLean County*, 59.

¹⁵ "100 Years Ago," *The Pantagraph*, November 23, 1980.

¹⁶ *The Biographical Record of McLean County*, 60.

¹⁷ "100 Years Ago."

¹⁸ "Mr. S.R. White," *The Pantagraph*, September 30, 1884.

¹⁹ *Bloomington-Normal City Directory, 1885*, p.

²⁰ "Mr. S.R. White."

²¹ *Bloomington-Normal City Directory, 1886*, p.

²² "Mr. S.R. White."

²³ Koos, 3.

²⁴ *Ibid.*.

²⁵ *The Biographical Record of McLean County*, 60.

²⁶ Elinor White-Wells, compiler, "Ancestry Chart," *The Life of S. R. White 1847-1916*, McLean County Museum of History Library and Archives.

Episcopal chapel on West Washington Street.²⁷ He held a similar position with the Women's Industrial Home²⁸ and was a liberal contributor to both institutions.

In addition to his own business ventures, White had interests in a variety of other local businesses including the Corn Belt Printing & Stationery Company (president and stockholder),²⁹ located over 221-223 East Douglas Street in 1899;³⁰ the Novelty Manufacturing Company (partner and stockholder); the B.S. Constant Company, (manufactures of grain cleaning and elevator machinery),³¹ located at 205 East Douglas Street; and a large grocery firm, the A.N. Stevens Company (stockholder).³² In 1901 White was a charter member, director, and later president of the Bloomington Business Men's Association, a permanent organization of 225 leading business men formed "for mutual advantage."³³ This group, described as "a truly representative gathering of the pushing and progressive men of the city" was instrumental in supporting the formation of a Bloomington and Normal Park District, among their other endorsements for city improvements.³⁴ The various enterprises with which White was involved, furnished employment to about 250 men in the 1890s. This in itself aided in the progress and advancement of the city and general welfare of its people.³⁵

In 1889, White organized the Bloomington Builder's Supply Company, located at 507-509 N. Prairie Street.³⁶ This business was most likely the forerunner to the Bloomington Store Fixture Company, (of which he was listed as the proprietor) that was in operation by 1894 and located at 405-415 North East Street.³⁷ The Bloomington Store Fixture Company offered "Store and Bank Fixtures, Office Partitions and Railings, Desks, Library and Book Cases and all kinds of Cabinet Work, Drug and Jewelry Fixtures."³⁸ By 1897, White had moved this store closer to the rest of his manufacturing operations on Douglas Street, the store now being located at 217-223 East Douglas.³⁹ Additionally, in 1893, White transferred operation of the lumber and coal company to his son, Lewis, so he could focus on his other businesses.⁴⁰

²⁷ *The Pantagraph*, July 11, 1893, 7.

²⁸ Founded on March 12, 1889, the Girl's Industrial Home (first known as the Women's Industrial Home of McLean County), was not a school for delinquent children, rather it was a home for dependent children who were neglected or had no one to care for them. The Home was a place where they could have both a place to live and a place to get some education; Emily Swartz. "Biography of Lucy Orme Morgan," <http://www.mchistory.org/research/resources/lucy-orme-morgan.php>, Date Accessed June 29, 2016.

²⁹ "The Cornbelt Printing Company," *The Daily Pantagraph*, July 20, 1896, 5.

³⁰ *Bloomington Normal City Directory*, 1899, 144.

³¹ *Bloomington Normal City Directory*, 1895, 139.

³² *The Biographical Record of McLean County*, 61.

³³ "Business Men's Association," McLean County Museum of History Library and Archives file.

³⁴ "In Grand Unison for City's Progress," *The Daily Pantagraph*, January 10, 1911, 6; In 1911, the Bloomington Business Men's Association's Special Park Committee published a 56-page booklet, "The Facts About the Proposed Bloomington-Normal Park District" containing endorsements from citizens along with questions and answers about a joint park district needing votes of the people to approve a park tax levy. The proposed plan would have one area extending "southeasterly to White's Place in the city of Bloomington connecting Clinton street and White's Place with Broadway in Normal."

<https://archive.org/details/factsaboutpropos00bloo>, Date Accessed July 28, 2016.

³⁵ *The Biographical Record of McLean County*, 61

³⁶ *Bloomington-Normal City Directory*, 1889, p. 122

³⁷ *The Pantagraph*, April 10, 1894, 7.

³⁸ *The Biographical Record of McLean County*, 61

³⁹ *Bloomington-Normal City Directory*, 1897, p. 95

⁴⁰ *The Pantagraph*, July 11, 1893, 7.

In 1895, White erected the “White Block,” a five-story brick structure to house his manufacturing company (S.R. White Manufacturing Co.), and was located at 301-307 East Douglas Street. A three-story addition was also added for his the Bloomington Store Fixture Company, located at 217-223 East Douglas.⁴¹ With this building, White took extra precautions against fire so that his building would hopefully not suffer the same fate as his planing mill had in 1884 and 1887. White created vaults for hazardous materials, used fire-proof flooring in high-risk areas, and powered his machinery with a steam engine located across the street. As president, White employed 40 workmen and shipped the products they made nationwide.⁴²

As a businessman, White most likely paid close attention to the business climate in other parts of the country. Upon returning from a 10-day visit to Pittsburg in 1897, White’s reflection on that trip and the economic climate in Bloomington was published in the pages of *The Pantagraph*. At this time, the country was still recovering from an economic downturn that began in 1893. But White stated that “People in this part of the country have experienced no hard times. We don’t know what they are. There everything is iron and coal; there is no agricultural country. Here we have everything and each has helped the other along. There are few cities like Bloomington. The difference between the extreme rich and the extreme poor is not great, and there are more good substantial homes in Bloomington than in any city I know of, the population considered.”⁴³

At the same time, because of his intimate knowledge of fire loss, experience in the construction business, and with insurance, White was appointed an independent insurance adjuster, settling loss claims for various companies and businesses.⁴⁴ White’s insurance business was a great success. For a number of years he was in demand as an adjuster, traveling to large cities across the United States including Knoxville, TN;⁴⁵ Colorado Springs, CO;⁴⁶ and Baltimore, MD. In 1906⁴⁷ he spent several months in San Francisco following the magnitude 7.8 earthquake which destroyed over eighty percent of the city.⁴⁸ He also served as an adjuster on state and local cases such as the 1899 loss by fire of the Woodward Hotel in Pekin, IL;⁴⁹ the loss estimate for damage done to Withers Public Library caused by a nearby barn fire in the summer of 1900⁵⁰; and, along with William Reeves of Peoria, produced an analysis of repairs needed to the third McLean County Court House following Bloomington’s devastating Great Fire of June 19, 1900 fire.⁵¹

In November of 1897, at what was probably the height of his successful career, White decided to try his hand at real estate development. He began developing plans for a new residential subdivision that is today “recognized as one of the city’s first developments with a

⁴¹ Koos, 3

⁴² *The Biographical Record of McLean County*, 61.

⁴³ “No Hard Times Here,” *The Pantagraph*, June 9, 1897, 7.

⁴⁴ Apparently White was an independent adjuster as city directories for the period do not show his affiliation with an insurance company.

⁴⁵ “In the Sunny South,” *The Pantagraph*, April 24, 1897, 7.

⁴⁶ “To Adjust Fire Losses,” *The Pantagraph*, October 28, 1898, 3.

⁴⁷ “S. R. White is Dead,” *The Pantagraph*, September 22, 1917, 18.

⁴⁸ “From the Archives 110 years ago: Images from San Francisco’s devastating 1906 earthquake,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 18, 2016, <http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-110th-anniversary-san-francisco-earthquake-pictures-20160413-htmlstory.html>, Date Accessed June 29, 2016.

⁴⁹ “Woodward to be Rebuilt,” *The Pantagraph*, November 9, 1899, 2.

⁵⁰ “Will Pay Library Loss,” *The Pantagraph*, June 30, 1900.

⁵¹ “Court House to be Rebuilt,” *The Pantagraph*, June 21, 1900, 7.

distinct suburban feel.”⁵² White purchased a 30 acre tract of land that was mostly pasture with a few houses scattered throughout. Bordered by Empire Street to the south, Clinton Street (today Clinton Blvd.) to the west, the Illinois Central Railroad to the east (today the Constitution Trail), and Flagg’s pasture (today Emerson Street),⁵³ this area of town was once called “an unsightly appearance, a part being grown up to weeds and the remainder a swamp hole in which tadpoles spurted in spring and frogs sang all summer, and malaria was exhaled nine months in the year” by *The Pantagraph*.⁵⁴ White would take this undeveloped land, nestled between Bloomington and Normal, and turn it into one of the most desirable and unique areas of town in which to live.

Eventually named “White’s Place (after himself), the neighborhood would feature architecturally distinct modern homes, stretching four blocks from Emerson Street to the north and Empire Street to the south.”⁵⁵ The houses lined a broad street 70 feet wide, with landscaping in the center and a horse watering fountain. Additionally the neighborhood featured paved streets and sidewalks with stylish street lights.⁵⁶

The land for the new addition began to be cleared in spring 1898. Trees were felled and grading of the land began. Dynamite was used to blow up the remaining stumps of the felled trees. The detonations were so sharp and frequent that some of the ladies in the area near the addition “got it into their heads that the war with Spain had opened and that possibly a Spanish cruiser had taken advantage of the high water and steamed up Sugar Creek.”⁵⁷

White’s Place was significant in the history of community planning in Bloomington. Nineteenth century city planning consisted of new towns or additions being laid out to existing population centers in the hope of quick land sales and profits, with no laws or regulations controlling the establishment of real estate developments.⁵⁸ During the last decades of the 1800s, converging ideas on the improvement of sanitary conditions, the beautification of cities, and housing reform lead to the development of suburbs which were laid out to promote city beauty and provide many of the amenities required by the occupants.⁵⁹

Working with a young Bloomington architect named Paul Moratz, White modeled his vision on a new mode of residential developments happening in St. Louis, MO and Indianapolis, IN. Neighborhoods in these cities had three things in common: a single architect for the first houses, deed restrictions, and a distinctive gate to the area.⁶⁰ Moratz attended, but did not graduate from, the School of Architecture at the University of Illinois in Urbana, IL.⁶¹ He and White shared an interest in technology and manufacturing. Moratz designed numerous Late Victorian house plans and published them in his *Up-To-Date Homes* book, which was published in 1899. The plans used products from Moratz’s own planing mill business.⁶² Although the houses were constructed from ready stock plans, built of mass-produced material according to modern standards, “each home was unique. Its façade, shape, the size and decoration of the

⁵² Bill Kemp. “White Place one of Bloomington’s signature neighborhoods,” *The Pantagraph*, June 27, 2010.

⁵³ “S.R. White’s Enterprise,” *The Pantagraph*, November 23, 1897.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ The neighborhood now encompasses 7.5 blocks including parts of Clinton Blvd., Fell Avenue, and University Street,” “White Place Historic District,” *National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form*, p. 8-8.

⁵⁶ Koos, 4.

⁵⁷ “Thought it was War,” *The Pantagraph*, April 8, 1898.

⁵⁸ “White Place Historic District,” *National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form*, Section 8-13.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 8-13.

⁶⁰ Koos, 5.

⁶¹ “White Place Historic District,” *National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form*, Section 8-6.

⁶² Koos, 4.

rooms, offered recognizable signs of the family's taste, interests, and place in the social world."⁶³ Additionally, Moratz was an architect that worked in a variety of styles to fit the needs and pocketbooks of his clients.⁶⁴

White had a specific vision in mind for his neighborhood so he created guidelines for people who purchased lots to build a home in White's Place. Lot sizes were uniform; measuring on average 50 feet wide by 160 feet deep, with two-story homes of various architectural styles sitting shoulder-to-shoulder and set back 15 feet from the street in an aesthetically pleasing line.⁶⁵ Lots would be sold with the condition that no house costing less than \$3,000-\$3,500 would be erected (which in 2015 would cost between \$85,000 and \$100,000).⁶⁶ The lots were to be fronted by a heavy iron fence and each one furnished with a heavy gate that could be locked. No old houses would be allowed to move onto any piece of ground in the neighborhood, nor on land adjacent to the neighborhood per contract. Additionally, based on contracts with landowners in adjacent neighborhoods, homes could not be built on land near White's Place for less than \$1,500 (or \$43,000 in 2015).⁶⁷ White also required that all houses built be of "uniform grade and building," and be two stories.⁶⁸ Finally, no prefabricated houses were allowed in the neighborhood either.⁶⁹

In the center of the street was a 25 foot grass boulevard with shade trees and sidewalks for strolls, enclosed with stone curbing. A grand fountain was originally planned, but was scaled back to a more modest horse watering fountain.⁷⁰ These center green spaces were then divided into three equal sections. The streets on either side of the boulevard were paved too. Among other amenities, White touted that his neighborhood would include a lake at the north end (just north of Emerson Street). The plan also called for a small park to be created on the west side of the lake. On the southeast corner of the lake, a steam plant would be erected that would "convey steam heat to each of the residences in the addition" and also pump "soft water" to them.⁷¹

A unique amenity for residents was the concept of paved alleys. These would be created at the rear of all the homes, thus providing access for deliveries and services, "reserving the boulevard for pleasure driving only."⁷² Additionally, all sewers and pipes (for water and gas) were to be carried through the alleys in the rear. A watchman was to also be employed to patrol the addition at night.⁷³

The central boulevard in White's Place was framed with a large, elegant set of three wrought iron gates in rock-face stone designed by Paul Moratz. At the top of the gate is the name

⁶³ Ibid., 4.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 4.

⁶⁵ Kemp, "White Place one of Bloomington's signature neighborhoods."

⁶⁶ Consumer Price Index, <http://liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/sites/liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/files/polisci/faculty-research/sahr/inflation-conversion/pdf/cv2015.pdf>, Date Accessed June 29, 2016.

⁶⁷ "Lots, Lots, Lots," *The Pantagraph*, March 9, 1900; Consumer Price Index, <http://liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/sites/liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/files/polisci/faculty-research/sahr/inflation-conversion/pdf/cv2015.pdf>, Date Accessed August 6, 2016

⁶⁸ "In White's Addition," *The Pantagraph*, April 6, 1900.

⁶⁹ Elaine Graybill, "White Place a bold new idea," *The Pantagraph*, January 10, 1984, C1

⁷⁰ In 2015, the horse watering fountain is now a planter.

⁷¹ "S.R. White's Enterprise."

⁷² Ibid; Koos, 4.

⁷³ "S.R. White's Enterprise."

Whites Place, underneath the crowing date 1898, all in iron lettering.⁷⁴ The gate's design is similar to one designed by Theodore C. Link for St. Louis' Portland Place (but was built at Westmoreland Place). The drawing, published in 1890, caught the eye of White and Moratz. Moratz's gate is similar, but was done in rock-faced stone and has tapered wings.⁷⁵

To entice people to purchase lots and build homes in his subdivision, White frequently published ads in *The Pantagraph*, and published handbills and pamphlets. In 1899, White issued a "neat little publication" to be given away, available from Mr. John H. Wood, White's Place agent.⁷⁶ An advertisement published in *The Pantagraph* promoting "The Advantages of Living in White's Place" proclaimed:

*It is adjacent to the best part of the city, and you do not have to cross dangerous railroad tracks to reach it. It is easy to reach by street cars and paved streets, and is within walking distance of Wesleyan University, Normal State University, and Public Schools. It is the only part of Bloomington set apart for light driving. No heavy hauling of any description will be allowed upon its boulevards. You will not be annoyed by loaded wagons dumping their loads in front of your doors, causing dirt to be carried by the wind into your yard and house. You will escape the annoyance of having your streets and front yards torn up, as well as all water, steam and gas pipes in the alleys. The only addition in this city where you get all these improvements with the purchase of a lot.*⁷⁷

Houses slowly began to appear in the neighborhood. With Moratz as architect, White built his own Queen Anne style home with Dutch Colonial and Romanesque elements at 27 White's Place in 1899 at a cost of \$4,000⁷⁸ (approximately \$114,300 in 2015),⁷⁹ moving there from 303 Mulberry Street in 1900.⁸⁰ White's son-in-law and daughter, Emilie and Elizabeth (White) Lewis, built the most expensive house in the neighborhood at the time for a cost of \$10,000 (in 2015 would be \$285,714).⁸¹ It was located at 22 White's Place. Within a few years, White and his wife moved into the house with the couple when Lewis converted it to a duplex.⁸²

By the end of 1904, 18 houses had been constructed. Over the next five years, another 17 houses were constructed.⁸³ In an effort to stimulate interest in his development when construction in White's Place slowed, White modified property deeds to attract further development. While specifications of materials to be used and types of houses that could be built remained about the same, White set more modest house costs that would appeal to an emerging middle class, and no longer required a fence in the front yard.⁸⁴

⁷⁴ Ibid; No apostrophe was used in the possessive of *Whites*, leading to confusion to this day about the true name of the neighborhood.

⁷⁵ Koos, 5.

⁷⁶ "White's Place," *The Pantagraph*, March 11, 1899, 5.

⁷⁷ Koos, 6; "Lots, Lots, Lots," *The Pantagraph*, March 9, 1900.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Consumer Price Index, <http://liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/sites/liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/files/polisci/faculty-research/sahr/inflation-conversion/pdf/cv2015.pdf>, accessed July 4, 2016.

⁸⁰ *The Daily Pantagraph*, February 21, 1900, 7.

⁸¹ Consumer Price Index, <http://liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/sites/liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/files/polisci/faculty-research/sahr/inflation-conversion/pdf/cv2015.pdf>, accessed July 4, 2016.

⁸² Koos, 5; *Bloomington-Normal City Directory, 1905*.

⁸³ "White Place Historic District," *National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form*, Section 8-8.

⁸⁴ Koos, 6.

By 1910, renewed interest in building homes in White's Place began. The period between 1910 and 1914 marked the time of heaviest house construction in White's Place, with 52 houses being built. Several of those residences were all built in 1914, costing between \$7,000 and \$10,000 each.⁸⁵ Those same houses built in 2015 would have cost between \$166,667 and \$238,095.⁸⁶ By 1915 there were nearly 90 homes in the area.⁸⁷ From the beginning of the development, White's Place residents were from an upper and upper middle social class standing, including common occupations such as a bank president and vice president, a commercial traveler, doctor, dentist, store proprietor, grain dealer, minister, college instructor, lawyer, and mayor.⁸⁸

Bloomington and Central Illinois was experiencing the most prosperous years yet between 1895 and 1929, with trade growing and local and national business booming.⁸⁹ White, being a savvy businessman, selected the best possible time to develop a new subdivision. Bloomington families who had laid secure economic foundations in the 1880s and 1890s now felt comfortable showing their wealth through prestigious new homes.⁹⁰ In the early twentieth century, with the great extension of paved streets, the new electrified trolley cars, and advent of automobiles, "it was now possible to live some distance between a person's residence to their workplace, allowing new areas to open up to residential development."⁹¹ White's Place was destined to succeed.⁹²

Many of the amenities White promised were fulfilled, though some sooner than others. A *Pantagraph* notice from 1899 stated, "Mr. S.R. White has just completed the smokestack for the plant to be erected to heat the residences in White's Place. It is 110 feet high and very substantial. An American flag flies from each of the four corners at the top."⁹³ The plant was under development just north of Emerson Street by the summer of 1910. However, it was not until 1913 that the heating system was ready for operation. White stated in an untitled November 1913 *Pantagraph* notice: "The new co-operative heating system at White's Place is nearing completion. The plant is all rebuilt, new boilers placed, and all that. All but one of the houses which are to receive the heat are now connected up, and things are in good shape for winter weather. We all think the system is going to be a dandy, and will be unlike any other system for a neighborhood in the city."⁹⁴ The house to the west of the heating plant was occupied by a heating plant employee responsible for keeping the plant operating.⁹⁵ The coal fired steam boilers worked until 1949, when the subdivision was connected to city heat.⁹⁶ With his steam heat plant, White was embracing new ideas of industrial power and centralized steam heat. The technology

⁸⁵ "Many Residences Going Up," *The Pantagraph*, August 8, 1914, 14.

⁸⁶ Consumer Price Index, <http://liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/sites/liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/files/polisci/faculty-research/sahr/inflation-conversion/pdf/cv2015.pdf>, accessed July 4, 2016.

⁸⁷ "White Place Historic District," *National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form*, Section 8-11.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 8-12.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 8-12

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 8-13.

⁹² "White Place Historic District," *National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form*, Section 8-13.

⁹³ "Smokestack Erected," *The Pantagraph*, October 21, 1899, 8.

⁹⁴ "S.R. White," *The Pantagraph*, November 20, 1913, 10.

⁹⁵ "White Place Historic District," *National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form*, Section 8-15.

⁹⁶ Kemp, "White Place one of Bloomington's signature neighborhoods."

of White's residential development was designed to give its residents "an escape from the pressures of an industrialized city."⁹⁷

Some of White's Place amenities, however, never came to full fruition or were not created at all. At the north end across Emerson street (where Sugar Creek is located), White originally planned a four-acre area with a one-and-a-half acre park (to be called Children's Park) and an artificial lake, named Lake Minerva after his wife.⁹⁸ As described in *The Pantagraph* in June 1900: "There will be two islands in the lake and winding walks through the park, the islands being connected with bridges....The small lake will be concreted on the sides and bottom and in the winter a glass roof will be put over it. It will be drained and used for a conservatory then."⁹⁹ A bridge over Lake Minerva would extend White's Place north to Division Street.¹⁰⁰ In reality, the lake was only partially constructed, but then filled in after White's death in 1917.¹⁰¹ White also planned to extend his neighborhood on White's Place Boulevard and Clinton Street further north by adding another addition called "Lake View." An April, 1909 *Pantagraph* advertisement advertised "Lake View Addition" as having 36 lots available with "all of the conveniences of White Place Addition."¹⁰² However, this addition never came to fruition.

Improvements supported by residents continued to be made to White's Place over the years, including the "new co-operative heating system,"¹⁰³ widening the main drive to 18 feet,¹⁰⁴ paving the alley running north to south through White's Place,¹⁰⁵ and adding brick pavement and replacing flagstone sidewalks with concrete ones.¹⁰⁶ As described in *The Pantagraph* in 1915: "The pavement will be a double drive improvement, which will necessitate the moving of some of the old curbing. When completed, it will be one of the beauty spots of the city and will improve the northeast section of the city."¹⁰⁷ Electric lights in ornamental cast concrete street lamps, designed by Chenoa artist W.D. Neher, were added to the White's Place Boulevard in December 1915, again highlighted with a notice in *The Pantagraph*: "The effect was gorgeous, and added materially to the beauty of that choice residential section....Citizens of that part of the city were out in numbers viewing the illumination."¹⁰⁸ White continued to champion for improvements to his neighborhood the rest of his life.

In declining health by the age of 70, White was a patient at Brokaw Hospital for about two months before being reported in critical condition on September 1, 1917, according to a notice in *The Pantagraph*.¹⁰⁹ A few weeks later, White lapsed into unconsciousness and died peacefully on September 21, his death being caused by a cancerous growth according to his death certificate.¹¹⁰ Funeral services for White were held on a Sunday afternoon at First Methodist Episcopal Church with the room at full capacity. The funeral was conducted by the

⁹⁷ Koos, 4.

⁹⁸ "Lake View Addition," *The Pantagraph*, April 17, 1909, 2.

⁹⁹ "White's Place" *The Pantagraph*, June 15, 1900, 3.

¹⁰⁰ Graybill, "White Place a bold new idea."

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² "Lake View Addition."

¹⁰³ Quote from S. R. White in untitled notice, *The Pantagraph*, November 20, 1913, 10.

¹⁰⁴ "Are To Widen Drive," *The Pantagraph*, September 11, 1914, 6.

¹⁰⁵ "White's Place To Have Paved Alley," *The Pantagraph*, May 29, 1914.

¹⁰⁶ "Two Paving Contracts Go To I.D. Lain," *The Pantagraph*, April 23, 1915, 12.

¹⁰⁷ "New Pavement Is Assured," *The Pantagraph*, April 2, 1915, 7.

¹⁰⁸ "New Lights Turned On," *The Daily Pantagraph*, December 8, 1915, 15.

¹⁰⁹ *The Daily Pantagraph*, September 1, 1917, 9.

¹¹⁰ "S.R. White is Dead;" "Samuel R. White," State of Illinois Standard Certificate of Death, September 22, 1917.

Rev. A. G. Byrns with Rev. W. H. Arbogast assisting. According to *The Pantagraph*, at his funeral “Rev. Byrns spoke of the public spiritedness of Mr. White, of how he worked in such a way that his works would be a great benefit to others. The White’s Addition was mentioned as a fitting and long-enduring monument to this good man. Mr. White’s habit of looking at the bright side of things was spoken of, his Christianity eulogized and also his habit of being outspoken in his convictions and then standing by them.”¹¹¹ A large number of people attended his burial in Evergreen Memorial Cemetery in Bloomington. In addition to immediate family, out of town relatives from Indiana and Missouri were also in attendance.¹¹²

The Pantagraph carried an article on White’s death, describing him as “always a booster for Bloomington and instrumental in bringing a number of businesses to the city,” and calling White’s Place “one of the beauty spots of the city, a lasting monument to the man who was such an important factor in the development of the city.”¹¹³ However, there were some in town that did not hold White in high regard. According to White family legend, recounted by Hazel White (Samuel White’s great-grand daughter) in a March 13, 1985 *Pantagraph* article, a resident living at the south end of the street removed the “S” in “Whites Place” after White’s death in 1917. The resident did this to proclaim that the street no longer belonged to the founder.¹¹⁴

Dying without a will, his son Louis acted as administrator of his estate.¹¹⁵ White’s estate included real estate of various lots, valued at nearly \$63,000¹¹⁶ or approximately \$1.2 million in 2015.¹¹⁷

His wife, Minerva, died of dropsy¹¹⁸ and heart ailment just a few months after Samuel, on December 6, 1917. According to an article in *The Pantagraph*, “She had been failing rapidly since the death of her husband...,” and was described as “a great lover of her home, and a devoted wife and mother.”¹¹⁹ At the time of her and Samuel’s deaths, they had been married 48 years and left five children, ten grandsons and three grand-daughters.¹²⁰ *The Pantagraph* reported that “the death of Mr. and Mrs. White so near together removed two of Bloomington’s early settlers and esteemed citizens.”¹²¹ She was buried in Evergreen Memorial Cemetery next to Samuel.

As an additional nod to the impact of Samuel R. White on Bloomington’s urban development, White’s Place was designated a historic district and placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1988.¹²² To this day, this landmark neighborhood remains one of the premiere residential districts in Bloomington.

¹¹¹ “Funeral of S. R. White,” *The Daily Pantagraph*, September 24, 1917, 7.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 7.

¹¹³ “S. R. White is Dead,” 18.

¹¹⁴ Graybill, “White Place a bold new idea.”

¹¹⁵ Clerk of McLean County Court, Letter of Administration, Bloomington, Illinois, November 20, 1917.

¹¹⁶ Samuel R. White estate inventory, June 4, 1918.

¹¹⁷ Consumer Price Index, <http://liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/sites/liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/files/polisci/faculty-research/sahr/inflation-conversion/pdf/cv2015.pdf>, accessed July 4, 2016.

¹¹⁸ Dropsy is today known as edema, which is a swelling, usually of the legs, feet, and/or hands due to the accumulation of excessive fluid in the tissues; “Edema,” <http://www.medicinenet.com/edema/article.htm>, Date Accessed August 12, 2016.

¹¹⁹ “Mrs. S.R. White Dies,” *The Daily Pantagraph*, December 7, 1917, 7.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² “White Place Historic District,” Illinois-McLean County-Historic Districts, accessed June 14, 2016, <http://www.nationalregisterofhistoricplaces.com/il/mclean/districts.html>.

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