

Register of Old Buildings  
Macon County Historical Coordinating Council

Address: Transfer House - center of Lincoln Square.

Date of original construction: Opened for use February 20, 1896.

Name of original owner: City of Decatur.

- History:
- 1892 - Small transfer station in the middle of Lincoln Square.
  - 1896 - Official opening of the Transfer House.
  - 1962 - City Council voted to remove the Transfer House from Lincoln Square, and to turn it over to the Park District (5/1/62). (Error in article! See notation beside c/ffina, C.N. 11/25/73)
  - 1962 - (10/30/62) Berry Construction Company will move the Transfer House to Central Park, construct a new floor, sidewalks and related work for \$24,450.00.
  - 1962 - (11/20/62) Transfer House moved to begin use as a transfer point 1/21/63.
  - 1970 - (5/13/70) Approval by the City Council of a 10-year lease at a minimal fee with option to renew at 5-year intervals by the Downtown Decatur Council as an office and information center.

NOTE: The Downtown Decatur Council spent \$24,000.00 remodeling the interior for office use. Belgian linen draperies, ceiling to floor cover the eight half-moon windows.  
Gray carpeting with specks of color cover the floor.  
Winning pictures from Central Park Art Fairs are on the walls.

One news clipping stated, --"It is appropriate that the Transfer House, a Decatur landmark, be located on Decatur's new Downtown Landmark Mall."

See attached newsclipping for a partial review of some of the controversy surrounding the Transfer House over the years.

Also, see the public school dittoed story of the Transfer House, the story designed for use with an early picture of Lincoln Square.

Two clippings from 1929 are quoted below:

Artesian Well Is Underneath City Transfer House

"Recent talk concerning the ownership of the Transfer House reminds some of the old timers around Decatur that underneath the Transfer House there is an artesian well, 110 feet deep, that used to supply the thirsty public with fine, cold water.

(See reverse side)

Present owner's name: City of Decatur  
Leased to the Downtown Decatur Council  
for office space.  
Address - #1 Central Park East.

Antesian Well Is Underneath City Transfer House Cont'd.

"That was before any transfer house adorned the square. There were three drinking fountains there. They were operated by a hydraulic ram, a contrivance that worked automatically after being given a start. The only other hydraulic ram in Decatur was in one of the Imboden springs.

"Pete Brilley said Friday morning that the old well is still under the transfer house, never having been filled up when the building was erected, and that the machinery was never taken out of the well."

Annual Question

"The transfer house has been a source of comment every year for years and every year the people served there have been in the majority. It serves as a transfer station, giving safety to those who change cars there by reason of traffic being on the outside of the tracks... Charles Laux, who built the St. Nicholas Hotel, started the movement for the transfer house. He went to see Henry Bachrach, founder of the Bachrach Store, and the subscription list was started for \$2000.00. Those who subscribed that the transfer house might be built in 1896 are as follows:

City Electric Railway Co.	\$600.00
Morehouse & Wells Co.	125.00
G. J. Danzeisen & Son	125.00
A. Wait & Co.	125.00
Linn & Scruggs	125.00
Charles Laux	125.00
Henry Bachrach	125.00
Henry Lyon	125.00
National Bank of Decatur	100.00
J. Millikin & Co.	100.00
W. F. Busher	100.00
H. Schlaudeman	50.00
A. Rothfuss	50.00
C. O. Young	50.00
Citizens National Bank	50.00
Mrs. Caroline Powers	50.00
Orlando Powers	50.00
W. Steinbach	50.00
Wm. Traver	50.00
John Ullrich	50.00

Enough others contributed lesser amounts to equal \$3,080.84.

(It's actual cost - see Xerox of 1956 news item - was fifty-three cents less than the amount collected.)

#1 Central Park East

1895



1902 photo - Decatur Herald and Review



Photo - Courtesy Lynn Bohon, 1972

### TRANSFER HOUSE REMODELING BEGUN

Excavators played havoc with sidewalks around the Transfer house Monday, work having started in earnest in clearing the site to make way for the drives of the new city bus terminal.

By quitting time Monday, workmen and a power shovel had made a complete circle of the Transfer house and concrete walks made twenty-five years ago were a thing of the past. Trucks hauled away the debris to the city yards on South Broadway as the work of destruction progressed.

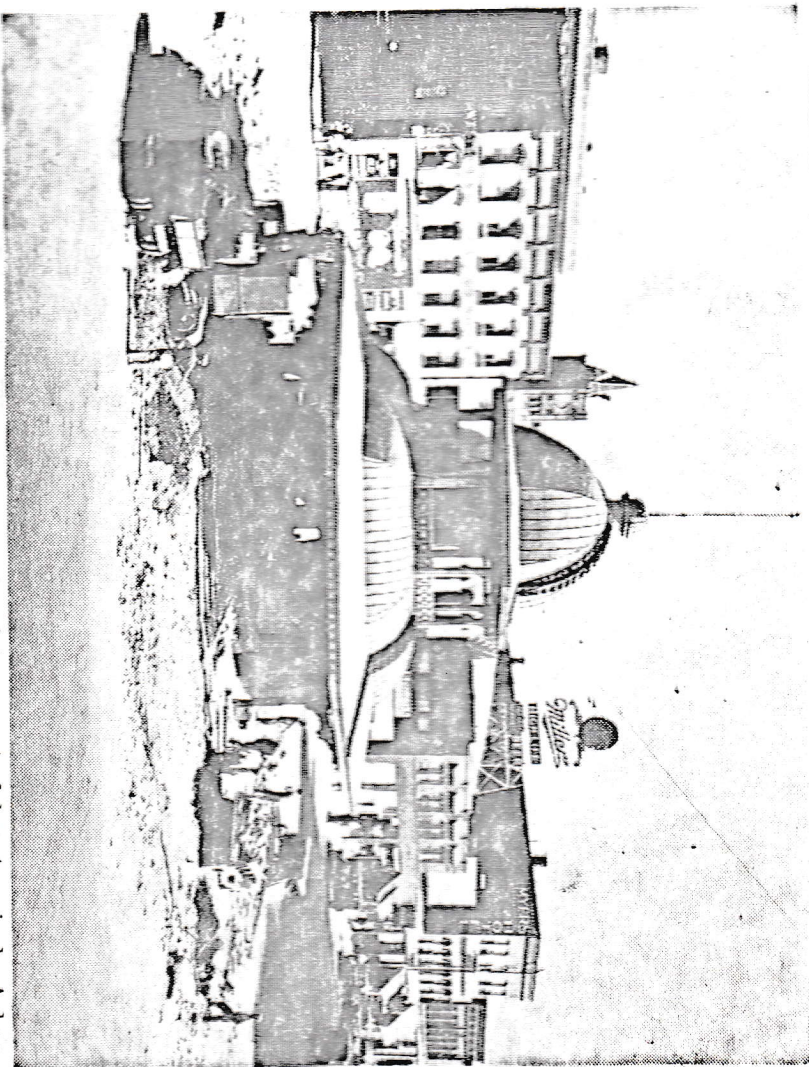
Excavation for the new drive will start today. Conduits for the new lights will be mounted on small islands at the edge of the circular drive, and will be installed by the end of the week, if the work progresses as planned.

The bus company shares the expense of \$6,110.68 in remodeling the circle and will pay a rent of \$1 per annum. Contract for the project was let to Fille & Collins.

Paul Hart, whose newsstand was located at the Transfer house for years, and who did not know where he was going to be in business when excavation work started for the new drive, moved to the corner of West's drug store Monday morning and is greeting his old customers with his usual vigor.

DECATUR PHOTO SERVICE  
D. ...

### TRANSFER HOUSE REMODELING PROJECT LAUNCHED



Contractors yesterday began tearing up the sidewalk around the transfer house preparatory to making the building into a central bus terminal. A bus driveway, flanked by safety islands, will replace the sidewalk. (Staff Photo.)

Sept. 14, 1957

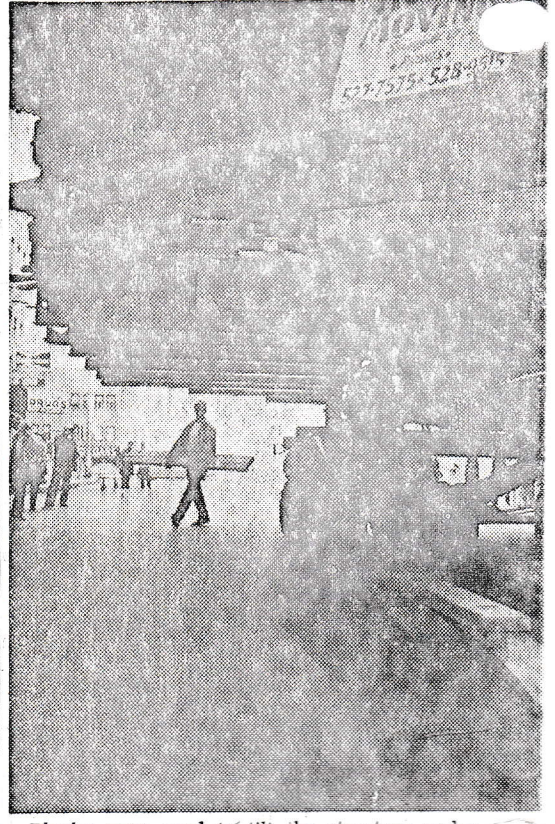
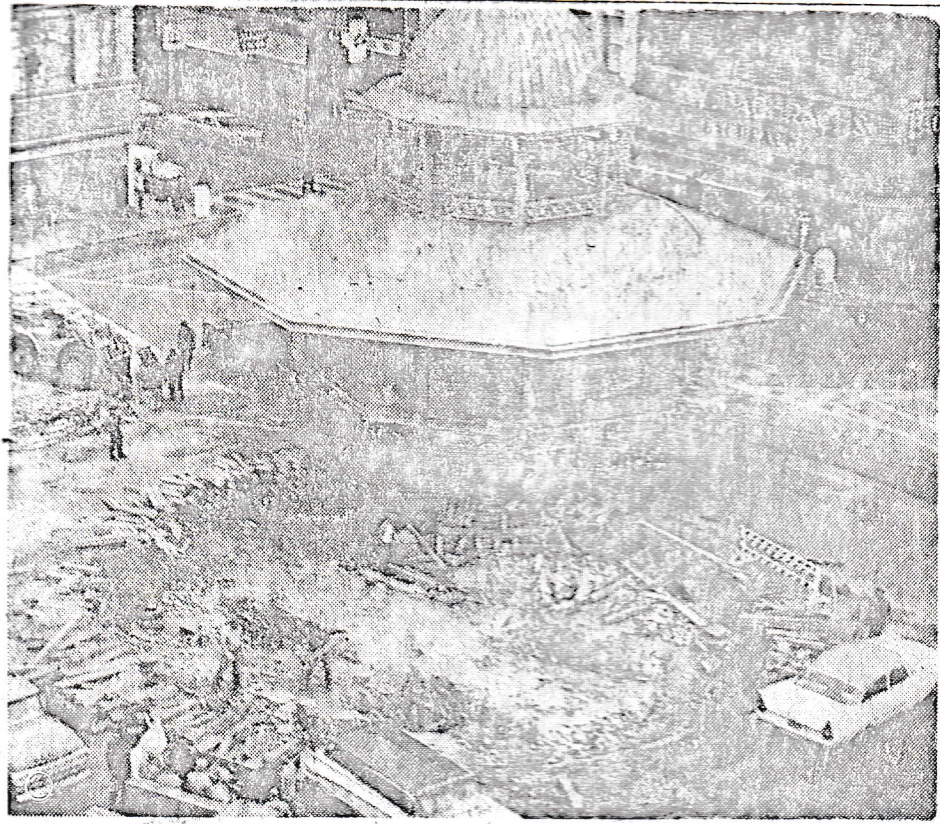
11-20-62

STAFF PHOTO BY ROBERT E. STRONGMAN  
DECATUR, ILLINOIS

11. Nov. 20-1962

DECATUR, ILLINOIS, TUE

Decatur, Illinois, Wednesday, November 21,



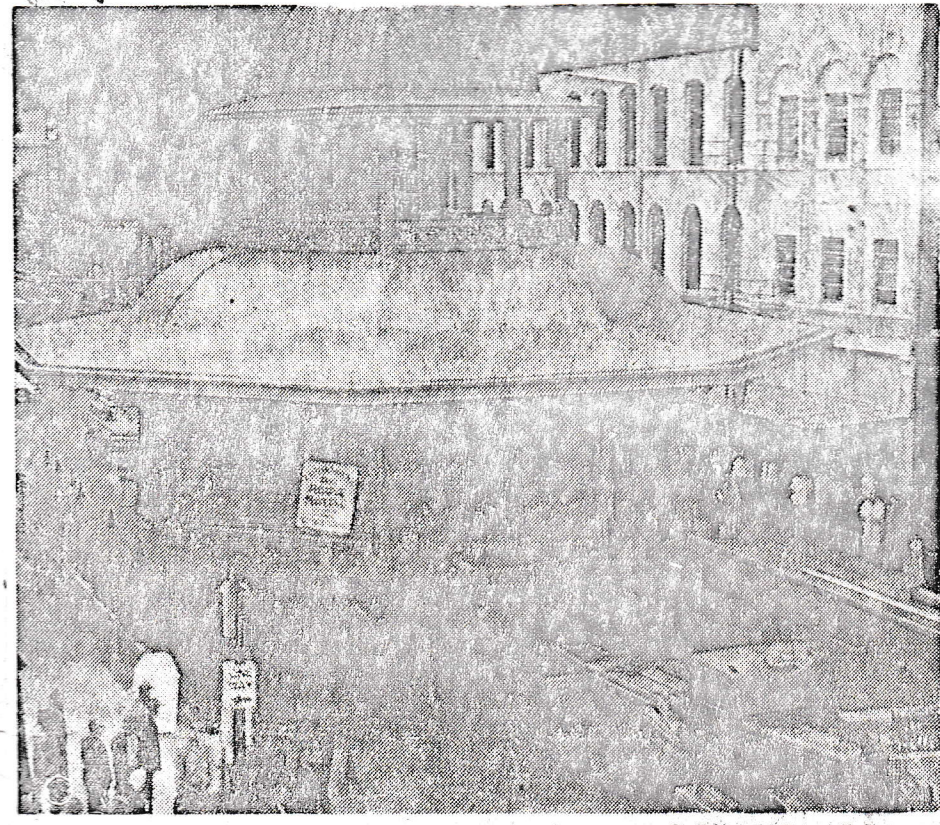
Planks were used to tilt the structure under

Staff photo by Robert E. Strongman

Out of the hole and ready to roll ...

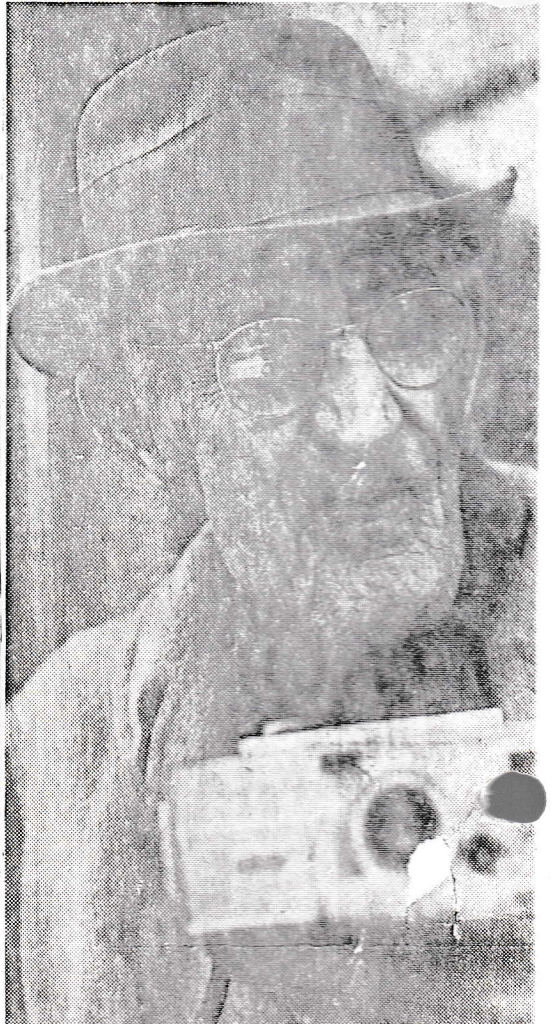
R. Nov 20 1962

Weight 150 tons



Staff photo by Robert E. Strongman

Easing down East Main Street ...



# 1962 Brought Changes in Decatur's Face

Decatur Public Library  
Decatur, Illinois

The year 1962 brought many changes in Decatur, including revisions in its architectural landscape.

The Transfer House, to some a valued sentimental link with the past, finally departed its 67-year location in Lincoln Square for another site in Central Park.

Fostered by soon to be made improvements to U. S. 51 through the city, petitions to remove and petitions to retain the landmark flew fast and thick with vocal opposition subsiding finally when the state agreed to pay for the move.

The big move came Nov. 20. Hundreds watched and took pictures as the 160-ton mound of stone and brick rolled to its new home.

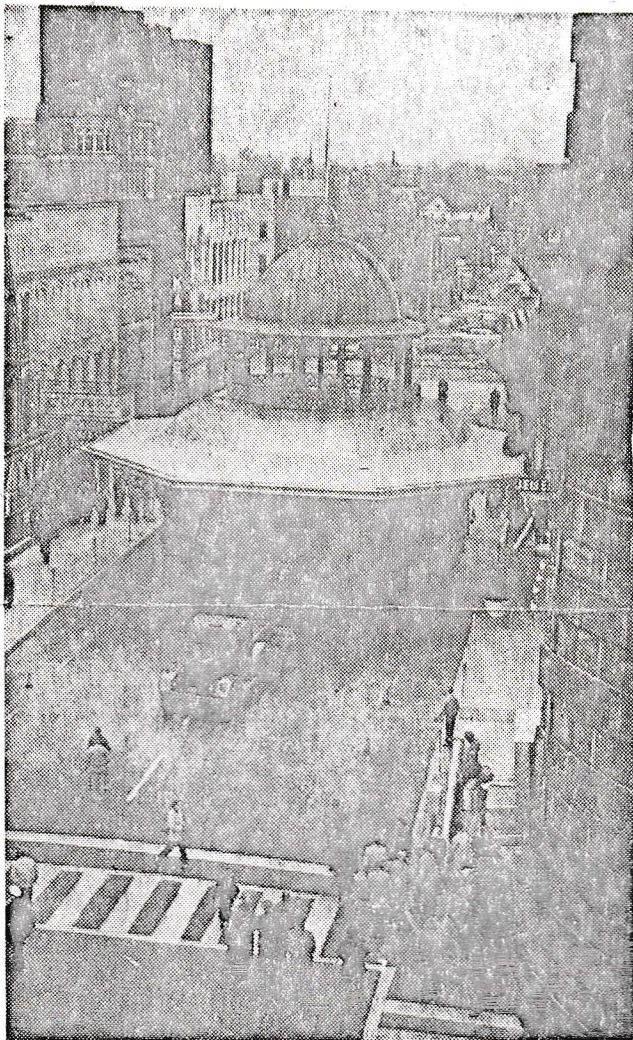
The comedy of errors that accompanied the construction of Lost Bridge neared an end in July of 1962 after a run of some four years.

As late as September there as still work to be completed and to date there has been no official opening.

Fiascoes preceding the bridge's opening ranged from overweight trucks to sub-standard pilings. Work stretched from the predicted 250 working days in the contract to nearly 1,000 days.

In November, open-mouthed spectators watched as a contractor's clamshell chewed away at the 50-year-old Empress Theater building. Bite by bite the building came down as truckloads of rubble. And another building in the downtown area gave way to the demand for more parking space.

But as other landmarks in



1-6-63 1412

Spectators watched the suddenly mobile building move.

the Soybean Capital evoked cries of support or opposition to their change, another one came down quietly.

The canopy at the Wabash Railroad depot which had shel-

tered generations of the carrier's passengers, was removed with no furor or comment.

Such were some of the changes that 1962 brought to Decatur.

W. J. ... 100 ...



1-6-63 Lincoln Square and the Transfer House before the momentous move.

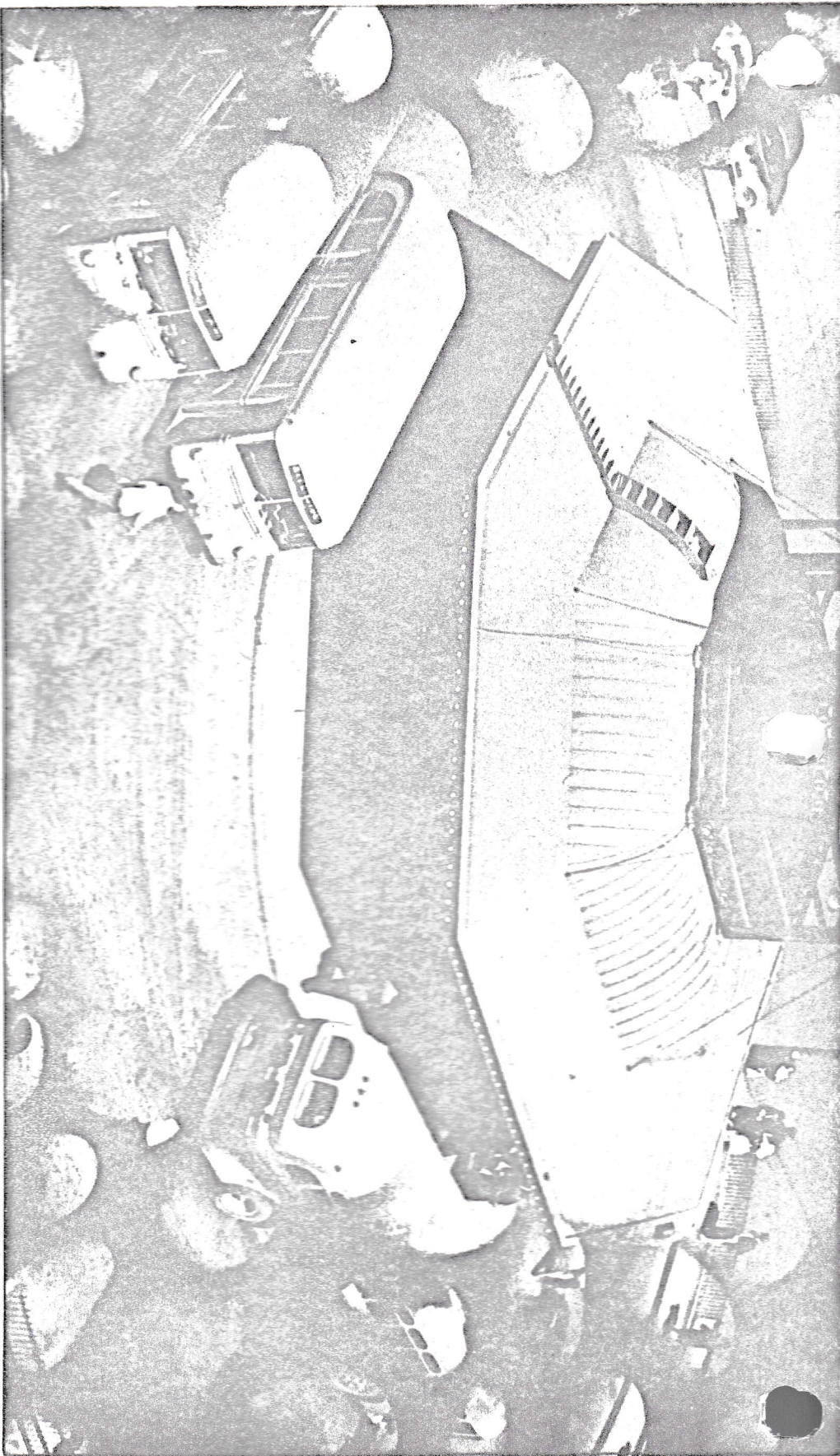
1963 Blondie's



• NOV • 76

Photo - Margaret M. Meyer, 1975





CHICAGO DAILY NEWS

February 16, 1952

# Home and Life MAGAZINE

**T**HERE are more than a million reasons why Decatur has become a leading city in the midwest. And, most of them are soybeans. Besides contributing to the city's economic and physical growth, the beans are responsible for a pleasant, toasty odor that greets the visitor on his arrival.

A friendly town, Decatur boasts it is the "international soybean capital." Its many soybean processing plants, the largest collection in the world, eliminate fear of contradiction.

Lincoln Square, site of many of Abe Lincoln's extemporaneous public talks, is at the junction of the city's two main streets. Located here is "transfer house," an octagon-shaped little building. Its unique use as a traffic center—buses converge here to take on and unload passengers—helps set the city apart from others. On pages 4 and 5 of this section are pictures of the city. A story appears in the main news section.

# Bus Line to Use Transfer House Terminal Next Week

Remodeling of the Transfer house will be completed and the building will be thrown open for use as a central bus terminal early next week. Commissioner Beecher Hughey announced Friday when he said all work on the Transfer house is nearly completed.

Kent Fitzgerald, president of the Decatur City Lines, notified Mr. Hughey Friday that he will come to Decatur Monday to confer with the city council on opening of the new terminal. He said the bus company probably will start running buses up to the terminal Tuesday.

**Remodeling Cost \$6,370**  
Commissioner Hughey said Mr. Fitzgerald announced he would also be prepared to either pay the bus company's share of the cost of the remodeling when he calls on the council Monday or make arrangements for a later payment.

Mr. Hughey has prepared a complete report on the Transfer house project for presentation to the city council on Monday. The reports show the total cost of the remodeling was \$6,370.86. The original estimate on the cost of the project was \$6,000.

The bus company will pay \$3,185.43 which represents one-half

of the cost of the remodeling. The city will pay a like amount. The bus company probably will pay its share of the cost of the improvement to the city early next week, according to Mr. Fitzgerald's telephone conversation with Mr. Hughey Friday.

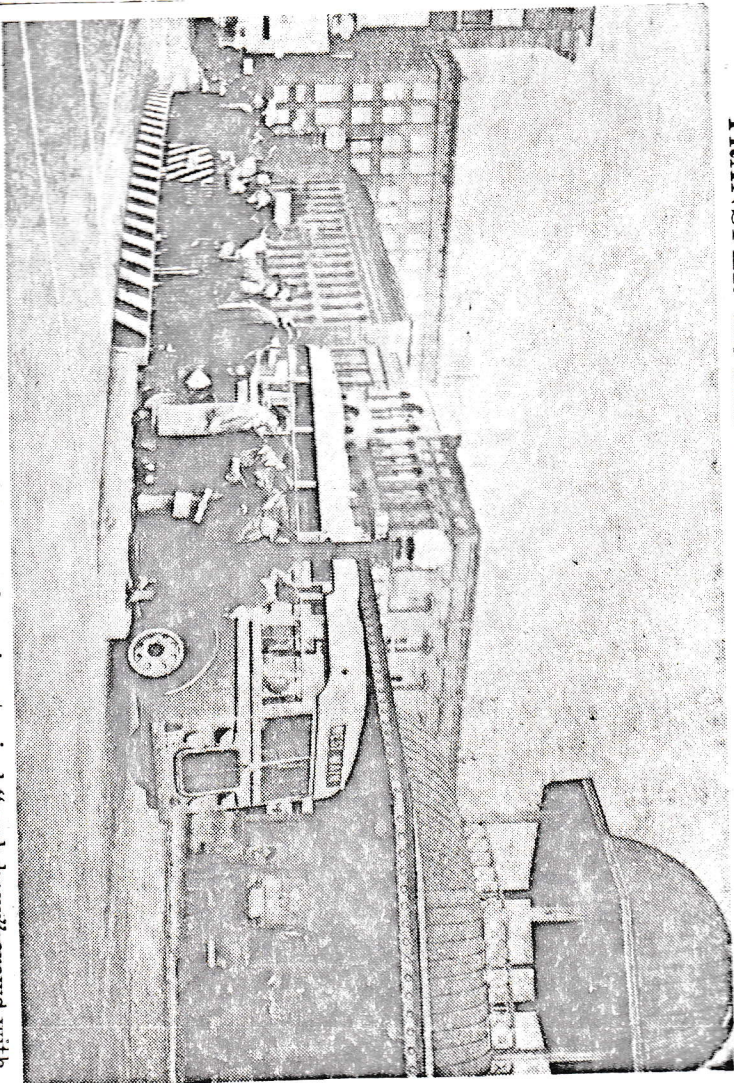
### Street Dance Planned

Complete plans for an opening program to be sponsored by the bus company are expected to be finished Monday by P. J. Britley, local bus company official. Tentative plans for the opening include a street dance on Lincoln square.

As soon as the Transfer house is opened the city buses will use the terminal exclusively for loading and discharging passengers on the square. The buses will travel on the inside circle next to the terminal while regular traffic will travel in the outside circle. Bus passengers will board and leave buses from the new safety islands created as part of the remodeling.

The city has given the bus company a ten-year lease on the building in return for half of the remodeling costs. Under the city and bus company agreement, the transportation company will maintain the terminal and take care of the interior.

## TRANSFER HOUSE POPULAR AS BUS TERMINAL



Throng of bus passengers jam the Transfer house every day about 5 p. m. and find it a big improvement over the old street corner bus stops. Pictured

here is a typical "rush hour" crowd with the loading platforms crowded with persons waiting for their bus.

(Herald-Review Photo).

2000 1, 1989

# Transfer House Murals to Be Repainted This Summer

Decatur Public Library  
Decatur, Illinois

Lincoln murals painted on the ceiling of the transfer house a year ago have started peeling off and will be repainted soon. Commissioner John Rehfeldt announced last night.

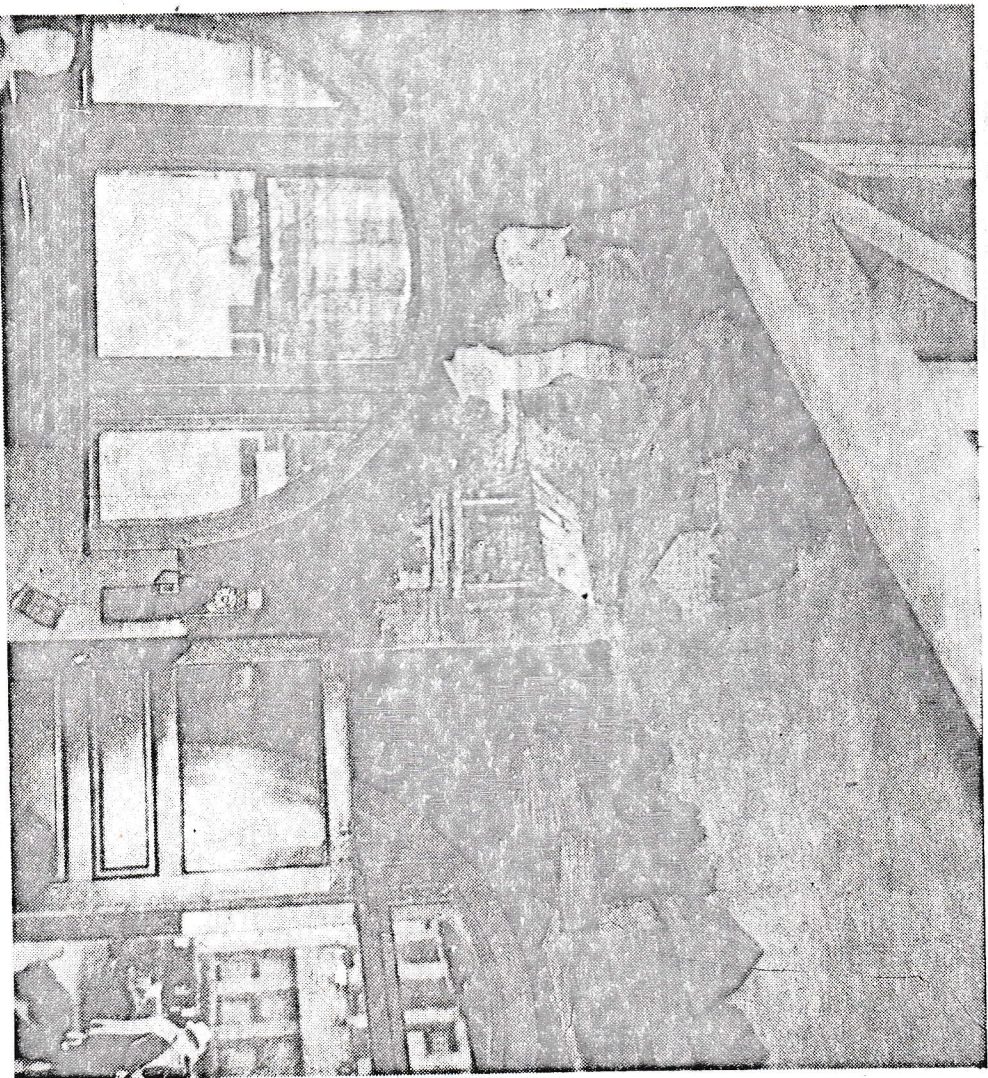
The murals were painted by A. Hartmann, Decatur decorator, last February. The ceiling surface was painted when the entire transfer house was redecorated under a CWA project. Mr. Hartmann painted the murals over the ceiling coat which had been applied by CWA workers, according to Mr. Rehfeldt. The under-coat of paint is believed to be responsible for the peeling so soon, Mr. Hartmann told Mr. Rehfeldt.

All of the murals will be removed and Mr. Hartmann will repaint them, according to Mr. Rehfeldt's plans. He said the matter will be brought up in the city council Thursday and he will ask the council to allow a small appropriation to finance the repainting.

The murals show Lincoln's cabins in Kentucky, Indiana, and Illinois, and also his residence at Springfield. Scenes of Old Salem where Lincoln knew Ann Rutledge, are represented by the old mill, and the Rutledge tavern.

Mr. Hartmann will reproduce the murals exactly as they were first painted.

TRANSFER HOUSE MURALS 'PEELING'



Paint has started peeling from walls of painting will be ordered this summer. the Transfer House, leaving large holes in (Herald and Review Photo) the Lincoln scenes painted last year. Re-

Feb. 6, 1935

# Transfer House Murals of Lincoln's Early Life

## 4 FB 35 Will Be Started Today

Painting of murals on the walls and ceiling of the transfer house portraying the early life of Abraham Lincoln is scheduled to start today. Commissioner Earl V. Smith, who has been directing renovations of the building since last fall, announced Sunday. A Hartmann, decorator, has been employed to do the work. The series of pictures inside the dome will constitute the Lincoln trail. Commissioner Smith recently conferred with H. W. Fay, custodian of the Lincoln tomb in Springfield and obtained authentic pictures to be used as models in painting the murals.

The pictures will show Lincoln's cabins in Kentucky, Indiana and Illinois, and also his residence in Springfield. Scenes of Old Salem

where Lincoln knew Ann Rutledge, will be represented by the old mill, the Rutledge tavern, and Lincoln's general store. Other pictures of the Lincoln trail will include covered wagons drawn by ox teams, the martyr president splitting rails and learning to read. Commissioner Smith is a former resident of Petersburg which is near the restored village of Old Salem. He believes the such paintings are appropriate on the site where Lincoln practised law in a log cabin 100 years ago.

The transfer house was cleaned and painted inside and out last fall. Painting of the murals was delayed because the plaster had not cured at that time and it was feared the lime would injure the pictures.

### Two Transfer House Murals Paintings Completed

Two murals, one showing the Lincoln cabin in Kentucky and the other the Lincoln Indiana cabin, have been completed on the walls of the Transfer house by A. Hartmann, decorator, who has the contract to paint similar murals on the remaining six panels of the building. Each mural will show a scene from the life of Lincoln, including the old mill at which Indiana worked. A feature of the Indiana cabin picture is an old well with the rope windlass in place.



### 35 TO PAINT LINCOLN MURALS

A. Hartmann, decorator, Tuesday completed the outlines for the first of eight Lincoln murals to be painted on panels in the dome of the Transfer house. He is shown here preparing to outline the sketch which will portray the

# Scenes From Lincoln's Life

## 5 FB 35 Hartman, Transfer House Mural Painter, Obtained Authoritative Background for Sketches.

Andrew Hartman today began painting eight murals, depicting scenes from the Central Illinois history of Abraham Lincoln, on the walls of the Transfer House in Lincoln Square. Scaffolding was erected Monday and Mr. Hartman started preliminary work Tuesday morning. When completed, the murals will adorn the eight panels of the Transfer House interior, with paintings of the cabin in which Lincoln was born, his Indiana home, the New Salem scenes, and the Lincoln residence in Springfield.

Mr. Hartman, in making preliminary sketches for the murals, delved into the history of Lincoln, studied maps and discussed the

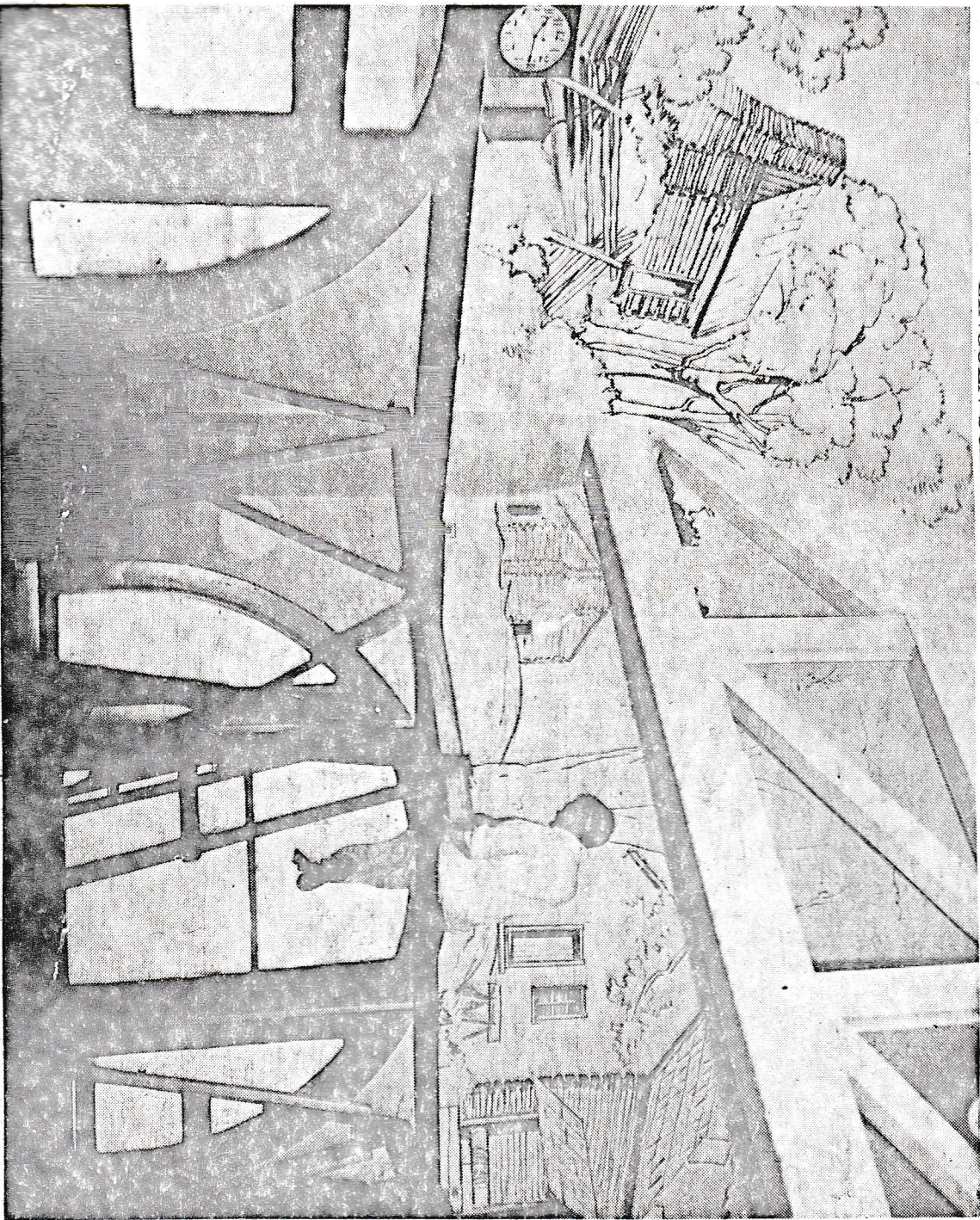
Background Material. One of the paintings will portray the old mill in which Lincoln worked as a young man. Mr. Hartman studied a working model of the mill at Springfield before making his sketch. For the scene of the Lincolns Indiana home, Mr. Hartman will add the covered wagons, or "prairie schooners," in which the Lincolns were supposed to have traveled overland on their journeys from Kentucky to Indiana and Illinois.

A feature of the murals

Decatur Public Library  
Decatur, Illinois

222 4, 1935

LINCOLN SCENES APPEAR IN TRANSFER HOUSE



6 PM '35  
Following pencil sketches he already had made, A. Hart-  
man is making rapid progress in outlining the scenes of  
Lincoln's life in Illinois which will decorate the walls of the

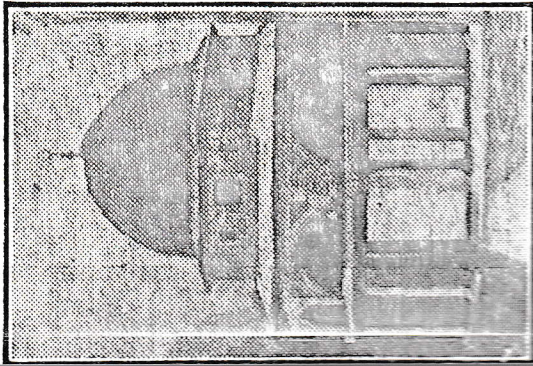
transfer house. Paint will be applied after all the pictures  
have been sketched in.

—Herald and Review Photo.

## Raab Discovers Inspiration of Transfer House

**B**ELIEVED until now to have been modeled after a Chinese pagoda, the Transfer house, which graces the disgraced Lincoln square, is now de-

### Prototype



*Dome of the Chain, otherwise known as the Temple of David, standing in the sacred enclosure in Jerusalem, which is declared to have formed the*

clared by George Raab, art instructor in Millikin university, to be modeled after a building known as the Dome of the Chain, near what is believed to be the site of Solomon's temple in Jerusalem.

Comparison of the two structures leaves little room for doubt that the ancient Moslem building is the source of the distinctive design of the structure in Lincoln square, Mr. Raab declares.

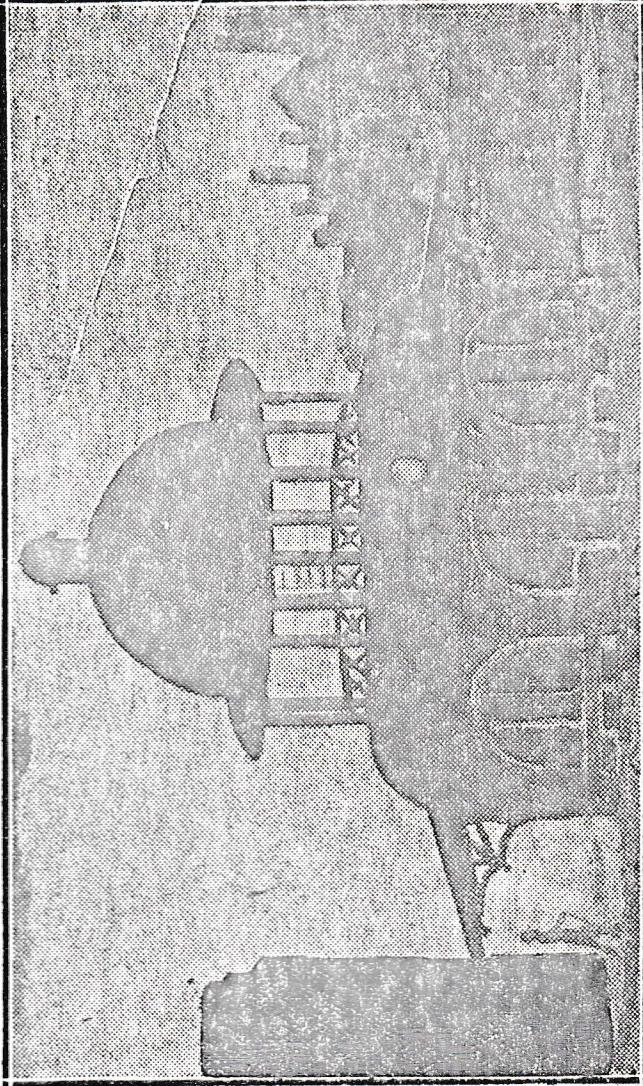
### Sanctified Ground

The Dome of the Chain, also known as the Tribunal of David, stands in what is known as the sacred enclosure, which has been sanctified ground from pre-historic times. Jerusalem was occupied by the Moslems in the year 637 A. D., and several of the buildings in the enclosure, possibly including the Dome of the Chain, were erected within the next 400 years. The city was taken by the Crusaders in 1099, but was retaken by the Moslems 89 years later and has remained in their hands ever since.

The temple of the Chain is so known from the legend that on its site was a place of judgment by a miraculous chain. For, as the legend has it, a chain was once suspended from heaven over this spot, to which it was the practise in Solomon's time to appeal cases of conflicting evidence. Each witness was made to grasp the chain in turn; if he succeeded in holding it, his truthfulness thereby was vindicated, but if it eluded his grasp, then he was a manifest liar.

"The similarity in the outlines of these two buildings leaves no room for doubt that the one was the model for the other," according to Mr. Raab.

## Really Has An Ancestor



**T**RANSFER HOUSE in Lincoln square, reviled by many as hideous and freakish, but declared by George Raab to be a gem of architecture, is believed by Mr. Raab to have been designed after the Dome of the Chain, a building in Jerusalem held sacred by the Moslems. Comparison of the outlines of the two buildings, Mr. Raab declares, leaves no room for doubt that one furnished the idea for the other.

DECATUR PUBLIC LIBRARY  
DECATUR

# Transfer House Still A Debatable Question

Now that dirt has actually been disturbed on the site of the North Main subway, there are many who will say that the city's most controversial question has been settled, but they are wrong. There still remains the question of the transfer house and what shall be done with that imposing landmark that has given Decatur the reputation throughout the nation as the "city with the dog-house in the middle."

The subway problem has worried many a city council, but not so many as the transfer house. The matter of moving the building has been a hardy perennial in city politics and there have been few city administrations that have not proposed to do something with the building, chiefly, it is suspected, to start something.

This time, with the South Main underpass well under way, a start made on the North Main subway and with prospects for doubled or tripled traffic on North and South Main streets, the matter of the fate of the transfer house has once more become a burning issue and this time, it seems, something may be done about it.

### What to Do With It?

It isn't so much a matter of deciding to move the thing this time, as it is of deciding what to do with it after it is removed, if anything. Earl Smith, city commissioner, may be said to be the head of one school of thought. He maintains that the structure should be uprooted bodily and transported to the waterworks park where his painted lady with the umbrella is the piece de resistance of the landscaping at the present time. He has his sup-

porters and he has his opponents. "That house was built for street cars to run around and for people to use in transferring," said one regular customer of the place Saturday morning. "It'll be a heck of a note to put it way down on the river where nobody can find it. No sir, if they are going to do that, I'd rather see it torn down entirely."

### Oppose Removal to Park

A second group favors its removal to Central park where it may be used as a comfort station, rest house and nesting place for park sparrows. The Mayor it is said, is one who favors this solution of the problem, but fears that there will not be sufficient funds in the city treasury to do much with it after it is taken to the park. Park bench regulars are said to oppose this plan, since it will obstruct the view and take up space that is needed for benches during the summer months.

"There aren't enough to go around as it is," said one. "And anyway we don't want a lot of women and kids around."

It has been suggested that it be removed to Fairview park for a sort of handstand and rest house. It has also been suggested that it be taken to each of the other city parks. All suggestions have their ardent supporters.

### 'Who'll Move It?'

And then there are those who say, "Tear it down and be done with it," and their name is Legion. And last but not least, it has been suggested that the matter of moving the house be left up to Roy Bundy, who has gone down in history as the only man who has been able to move the transfer house,

and he did it unoriginally, as it were. True, he did not move it very far, but he tried.

Roy, a heavyweight taxicab driver was heading west on Main street early one March morning in 1924, and forgot to detour when he reached the circle. Early risers found him when they followed the sound of the crash to its source. Roy had apparently tried to drive

his cab into the east entrance of the building, but had erred slightly in his aim. Two dents in the stone wall showed where the front spring hit. The big bench just south of the door was broken and knocked flat and the whole section of the wall back of the bench was knocked several inches out of plumb. The inside was a mass of wreckage.

### One More Chance

As for the taxicab, it had two broken front springs and a windshield. Roy, who was stopped from going through the windshield by the steering wheel, was still at the helm, apparently uninjured except for loss of breath.

There have been many who disapproved of what was done with Roy after the crash. He was locked up on charges of reckless driving. Some approved, but others maintained that he should be given a vote of thanks and a heavier taxicab on the grounds that he was attempting to render a public service by removing the bone of contention, namely, the transfer house.

"Just one more crack at it, and Roy would have ended all of the controversy for good," said one man. "Maybe it would be a good idea to give Roy another char-

# Rotarians Hear Discussion of Transfer House

Consideration of the history of Decatur's Transfer house and the question of what, if anything, should be done with it, occupied members of the Rotary club in their meeting in Hotel Orlando Monday noon in a program arranged by E. C. Whitsitt.

One suggestion was that the building be torn down and a monument to Abraham Lincoln be erected in its place. Another was that the sidewalk around it be eliminated and the building left standing as a comfort station. A third was that the building be given Earl Smith for removal to Waterworks park; that all buses and street cars be routed by its new location, and that three hickory shad be given with each transfer slip. Thus, at one time would be settled the problems of what the city shall do with the transfer house and what Commissioner Smith shall do with the hickory shad.

### Tell History

History of Lincoln square from the time it was laid out in 1829 with the building of a \$268 court house was traced by H. C. Schaub. He described the coming of the Lincoln and Hanks family in 1830.

C. A. Walt stated that the Transfer house is rented to the street railway company for \$1 a year. It was built in 1895 at a cost of \$3,080.31. At times since 1915, there has been agitation for abolishing the building.

W. C. Starr, whose grandfather and father owned a harness shop on Lincoln square, added to the information about the place, and stated that Abraham Lincoln's first lawsuit, in defense of a man charged with hog-stealing, was tried in the basement of a building on the site of the Krifbaum Electric store. Other bits of history of the square and its ornaments were given by Frank Goodman.

Despised by Some, Loved by Others, Building Weathers Everything

# City's Transfer House Has 60th Birthday Today

By Norman T. Monson  
Of The Herald Staff

Today is the 60th birthday of a Decatur landmark—the venerable Transfer House in Lincoln Square.

The Transfer House was opened for inspection and first used Feb. 20, 1896. A small ceremony the next day marked its opening officially.

Despised by some, loved by others, it has weathered verbal criticism, the elements and physical injury. **MON FEB 20 1956**

It was not wanted by many residents when it was built and there still are disputes over it.

It was completed in 1896 at a cost of \$3,080.31, replacing a small frame building erected in the square in 1892 to accommodate persons using the City Electric Railway Co. cars.

The present building now affords shelter for bus patrons.

Owned by the city, the structure has been the subject of petitions and population polls over its possible removal.

Some have said it is a traffic hazard while others call it an "island of safety."

The Transfer House — it has never been given any other name despite attempts—has been the subject of numerous paintings.

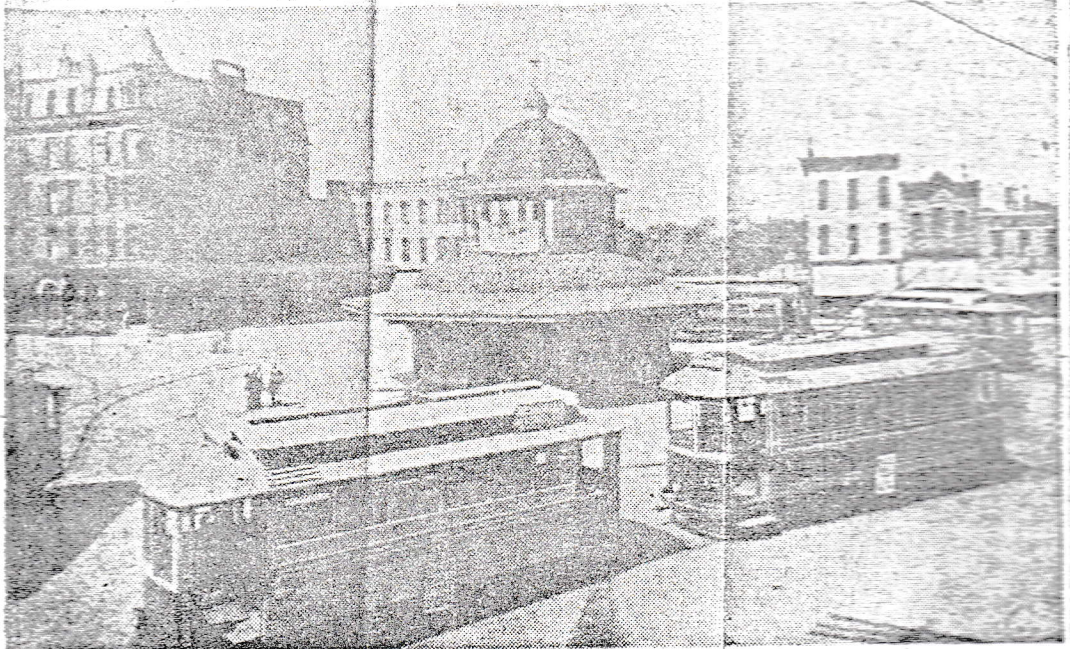
Visitors have remembered it as an imposing landmark, although not always in a flattering way.

One visitor once mistook it for an old slave block. Another described it as "that doghouse in the middle of the city."

Called a haven for loafers, suggestions have been made to convert it into a fruit stand or a drug store.

Over the years the building has been smashed into by cars, broken into by burglars and damaged by vandals.

The upper portion of the building once accommodated the Goodman band which played concerts there while residents danced in the streets.



This picture of the Transfer House was taken in 1902 when it served as a transfer point for

both street car and interurban passengers. The St. Nicholas

Hotel and other buildings are seen on the south and west sides of the square.



This was the transfer station which was the forerunner of the

Transfer House. It was completed about 1892.

On Sept. 22, 1903, a double wedding was performed in the upper portion.

The late George Raab, once instructor of art at Millikin University, said in 1930 that it was modeled after a building known as the Dome of the Chain, near what was believed to be the site of Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem.

Because Jerusalem was occupied by the Moslems in 637 A.D. and the building was erected within the next 400 years, it is then correct, he believed, to suppose the Transfer House is of pure Moslem design.

This disagreed with the belief that the Transfer House was modeled after a Chinese pagoda.

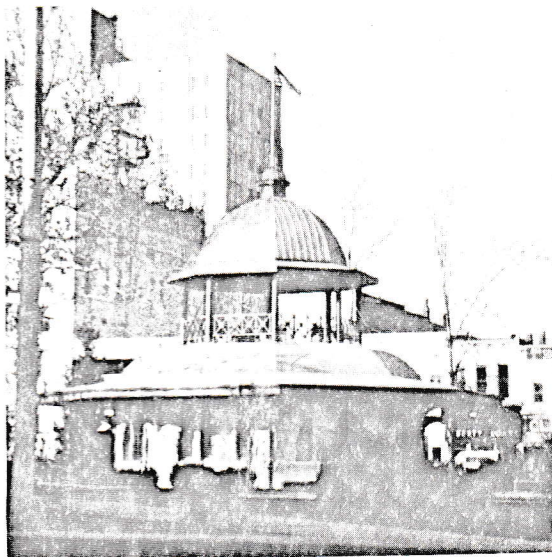
Throughout 60 years the building has seen changes on Lincoln Square and progress in Decatur. Horse-drawn cars were replaced with electric cars and later with city buses.

There has always been controversy over the value of the building. But protests against its removal have preserved the Transfer House for posterity—so accept or reject.



Moving out of the domestic realm, we found many fine commercial, public, and industrial structures. The Millikin Bank building, the warehouses on Cerro Gordo, and the Merchant Street area, all reflect this quality. It is, however, difficult to assign specific styles to this non-domestic architecture. It is aesthetically pleasing, but is primarily a mixture of styles. There are some structures which do represent distinct styles, and the quality of these individual structures is reason enough to present them here.

The Transfer House is distinctive first because of its octagonal plan. This plan for polygonal or circular structures dates back to the imperial mausoleums of ancient Rome. The more recent history of this type structure, and that which probably inspired the shape for the Transfer House, concerns the effort of man to develop a perfect or ideal form which increased efficiency. This shape increases the ratio of floor to wall space. Orson Squire Fowler was, to a large extent, responsible for the wide propagation of the form. His book, A Home for All, was first published in the 1850's and enjoyed wide circulation and many reprintings. In it, he praised the round form and expalined its many advantages. It was functional, as was discovered when it was put to use in Decatur. It now symbolizes this attempt of our forefathers to progress and create a more rational environment.



*From Preservation in Decatur, prepared by a team of students in the Environmental Planning Workshop, Dept. of Urban and Regional Planning, University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana, under the supervision of Professor S. J. Blair. p. 24. 1974*

## The Transfer House

The "Old Square" in which the Transfer House stands was laid out in the original survey of 1829. On June 6, 1831 James Johnson was given an order by the county commission to dig a public well on Block 2, west half of lot 8. Bachrach's Store now stands where the first public well was dug. Years later a well was dug in the middle of the square. An old wooden pump stood there, with a tin cup chained to it. There was also a watering trough for the horses.

For years the Square was the center of the town. Here farmers parked their wagons and fed their horses at the hitching posts which lined its sides. An auctioneer, Squire Fuller, conducted sales of horses here every Saturday afternoon. Wagon loads of hay were also sold in the Square. The only sidewalks were of wood. Through the 1870's and a part of the 80's the merchants would send out their janitors every morning to clean the Square. They did not want the city government to ban the hitching of horses there for it brought them business. The first brick side-walk in the town was laid in 1856. It was around what is now the Bachrach corner of Lincoln square. One of the eight light towers was put up beside the well in the center of the square. It was first lighted Feb. 21, 1886.

After the street cars were electrified, and the two companies merged, the owners of the City Electric Company decided that there should be a shelter for passengers when they were transferring from one line to another. They built a small square building for this purpose in 1892. The light tower was taken down and the well filled up before this building was erected. It was replaced in 1895 by the present building. Lincoln Square before this time had been paved with bricks. North Main was paved from the square to North Street; East Main to Broadway; South Main to Wood Street; West Main to the 800 block west. The watering trough had disappeared from "Old Square," but one remained in the middle of the 100 Block South Church for several years after this.

Notice the drinking fountain in the foreground of this picture. There was a faucet in the center where passers-by could always get a drink. But if the well had disappeared, the public drink cup had not. One was chained to the side of the structure. Medical science with its development of the fact that diseases are spread through contact with things touched by the mouth banished the public tin cup.

Once a stranger driving into Decatur on North Main Street spied the Transfer House from a distance. "Look," she cried, at the merry-go-round right in the middle of a main street." On closer view she was surprised to find a round building used as a station for the bus passengers.

*Written by Miss Mildred C. Price, and duplicated by the Decatur Public Schools, to be used by Decatur elementary school teachers to accompany the projecting of a picture of Lincoln Square and the Transfer House in the early days of its existence.*

## HISTORY OF THE TRANSFER HOUSE

The Transfer House is an elaborate, octagonal, limestone structure with a dome-shaped roof which projects to provide ample shelter from sun and rain. The top is surmounted by a pagoda-like structure which at one time served as a bandstand. One of Decatur's most prominent landmarks, the Transfer House was built in 1895 in Lincoln Square, the exact center of the original town of Decatur, which is located at the intersection of North, South, East and West Main Streets.

In the early history of the town, farmers used Lincoln Square as a general meeting place and as a hitching spot for their horses. When the first horse-car line was built from the Wabash railroad station (now the Norfolk and Western) west on Cerro Gordo Street and south on North Main Street to Lincoln Square, a turntable was constructed in the center of the Square. After the street was paved with brick, the turntable was removed and the tracks placed in a circle around the center of the Square. To provide shelter for passengers, the City Electric Railway Company proposed to the City Council that a transfer house be built within the circle of tracks. This idea came from Indianapolis, where a streetcar was so used.

The original Transfer House was a plaster and stucco building 13 feet by 20 feet in size. It was opened in April of 1892. Two years later the merchants on the Square wanted a better structure. Thus, the existing Transfer House, designed by W. W. Boyington and Company was erected (reportedly at a cost of \$3,031). The money was furnished by the streetcar company, the City, and the neighboring businessmen. Formal ceremonies opening the Transfer House were held in February, 1896. The octagonal office of the streetcar company was located in the center, while the perimeter of the structure served as a waiting room for passengers. All streetcars arrived at and departed from the Transfer House.

It was first suggested during a City Council meeting in 1915 that the Transfer House should be moved or demolished. It was thought by some people that the edifice was detrimental to vehicular traffic as the congestion caused by the streetcars and automobiles began to appear at that early date. Suggestions that the structure be moved continued to be offered for the next forty-seven years.

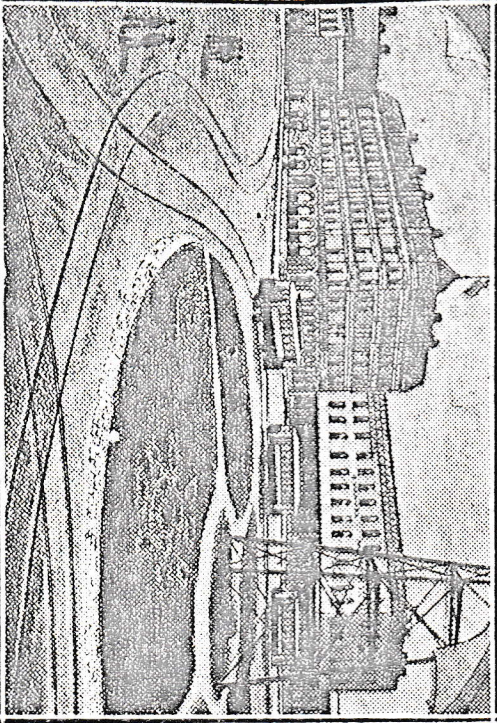
In 1958, the State of Illinois conducted a traffic study and recommended that the Transfer House be moved and that Main Street become a one-way artery with traffic flowing south. The State report concluded that the continued presence of the Transfer House in Lincoln Square would impair the movement of traffic. After much controversy between those people who wanted to implement the State report and those who wanted to preserve the landmark in its original location, the City Council voted in 1962 to remove the structure from Lincoln Square to its present location in Central Park. This fete was accomplished without dismantling the building at a cost of \$24,400.

In 1970, after being victimized by vandals and transients for several years, after extensive renovation, the Transfer House was converted into offices for the Downtown Decatur Council and an information center thus preserving one of the community's most cherished landmarks and enabling it to serve a useful community function.

Secured from the office of the Downtown Decatur Council, July, 1974.

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 30, 1927

## Sure, You Know This Place



Lincoln Square hasn't changed none other than part of the light much since the Naughty Nineties tower, pride and joy of the burr- when this picture was taken. Plain- hers of that decade. From a dizzy ly showing in the picture is a street height of 125 feet searchlights sent car which was quite the thing those forth their beams telling all and days.

The structure slightly resembling look closely aren't those tulips in the underspinning of a windmill is the center of the plot. Well I never

# There Was Always Controversy

By James M. Dedman  
Of The Herald and Review

While she now sleeps peacefully in Central Park, the Transfer House, as it is affectionately known to Decaturians, was always a subject of controversy.

It has been called a lot of other things by those not native to Decatur and by those not indoctrinated with the nostalgia of the octagonal pagoda that once dominated Lincoln Square like a sleeping Buddha.

As early as 1915, there was a movement to have it removed from the square, but nothing came of it.

If you mentioned abroad that you were from Decatur, people would say, "Oh, yes. That's the town that has that round thing in the center of the square!" Few knew, cared or remembered that Decatur was the "Soybean Capital of the World" — but they all remembered the Transfer House.

It all started back in 1876 when a franchise for The Decatur Horse Railway & Carrying Co. was granted to Franklin Priest to run a horse-drawn car line from the depot to the "Old Square." Central Park was referred to as the "New Square."

Priest built the line west from the depot on Cerro Gordo to Main street, then south to the square.

Along about 1880 there was a turntable in the square to turn the cars around.

In 1886 the square was paved with brick, and by 1892, electric street cars were put in by the City Electric Railway Co. Number One

The first Transfer House was an 18 by 20-foot wood building with stucco on the outside and plastered walls on the inside. It was just east of the light tower in the center of the square and was put up in 1893.

When the present Transfer House was started in 1896, the old structure was moved to the east end of Wood Street and used as the office building for the Matties Brick Co. When the city acquired the land about 25 years later, the building be-

came the caddy house for the Nelson Park golf course.

Later, it was moved down to the beach in back of the boat and canoe house, and in May of 1927 it was destroyed by a wind storm.

Meanwhile, back at the square, work was completed on the octagonal pagoda, and on Feb. 20, 1896, it was formally opened.

As the rail service had expanded, cars came into the square from the four Main Streets and circled the Transfer House.

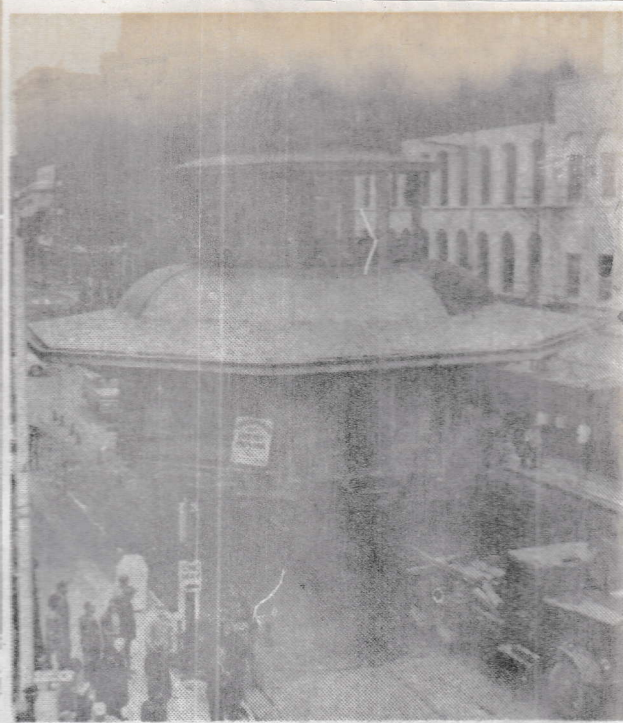
### City Center

It is interesting to note, because people other than Decaturians are often confused with four Main Streets, that Lincoln Square was once the center of Decatur, and the four Main Streets emanating from it like the points of a compass were most logical.

By 1902, the Goodman Band was giving weekly concerts in the summertime from the bandstand on top of the Transfer House.

A survey made in 1913 shows that 36 street cars an hour passed through Lincoln Square. In addition to these there were 82 interurbans a day, making a total of 730 cars plus any work cars the two lines might run through.

At one time, there were several pagoda-topped drinking fountains around the Transfer



Crowds ogled as the building was moved.

House. Of course, every kid had to climb up on the stone block and get a drink.

In 1921, both the City Council and the county claimed ownership of Lincoln Square, but it was finally decided that the city owned it.

In 1923 the Illinois Power & Light Co. took over the street car lines.

The City Council, by a vote of 4 to 1, decided to move the Transfer House. Decatur voters must have changed their minds, because in 1934 they rescinded their vote to move it.

### Replacements

In 1936, street cars were replaced by buses, and the following year, the Decatur City Lines took over from Illinois Power, remodeled the house, took out the tracks and put an inner circle for the buses to come into to protect people from other traffic.

Again a formal opening with a band concert. In fact, band concerts were popular, and in '38, a WPA orchestra played every Wednesday atop the T-House in the summer.

In 1968, the Lochner report recommended the removal of the Transfer House and revising the traffic pattern — and upsetting Decaturians.

The fight was on. In 1961, petitions were circulated to keep it where it was, and it was a hotter subject at coffee breaks than the Dempsey-Tunney fights 30-odd years before. You were either for or against it.

But despite the uproar, the City Council voted in 1962 to remove it, and turn it over to the Park Board — tearing it down would have probably started a riot!

### The Big Move

On Nov. 30, 1962, Robert P.

Downtown Decatur Council as a possible office for them, an information center and a place where various committees could meet in a conference room with a large table and plenty of chairs.

Any good use of the Transfer House would be an improvement over its current status, most city officials agree.

In the meantime, she sleeps, bloody but unbowed in Central Park, and remembered by every Decaturian.

*\* A phone call to the Decatur Park District, January 16, 1975 states that is an error. The Transfer House and Central Park are the property of the Decatur City Council. The Park District maintains Central Park, but bills the city for it. However, it has no responsibility for maintaining the Transfer House.*

\*

#1 Central Park East



Photo, courtesy Lynn Bohon  
Taken in 1972