

Martindale-Brightwood Community History

The Martindale-Brightwood Neighborhood originated as two separate communities capitalizing on local railroad lines and their peripheral industries. Settled by railroad workers, Brightwood became the railroad center of Indianapolis and was platted in 1872 and incorporated as a town in 1876. In 1897, it was annexed to the City of Indianapolis. The Town of Brightwood continued to prosper into the 20th century, primarily the result of rail traffic. Another factor adding to this sense of prosperity was increased industrialization, characterized by companies like the Topp Hygienic Milk and Ice Company, the Laycock Manufacturing Company, George F. Neher & Sons and the Cleveland, Cincinnati, Chicago and St. Louis Railroad Systems. Until the late 1960's, Station Street was the community's primary business district and commercial center of the Town of Brightwood.

To the west of Brightwood, the Martindale area, settled in 1874, became a prominent industrial hub, primarily supported by the nearby railroad lines. This newfound industrial focus caused the population to evolve into one of a working class neighborhood. Martindale continued to develop as an industrial and residential area centered on Martindale Avenue (presently Dr. Andrew J. Brown Avenue). Among the many businesses operating in Martindale were the William Egges Field Lumberyard, the Hoosier Sweat Collier Factory, Indianapolis Gas Works, the National Motor Vehicle Company and the Monon Railroad yards. For years to come, railroads and heavy industry continued to be the major economic base for both Martindale and Brightwood until the four major railroad lines were relocated.

The middle of the 20th Century brought much change to the Martindale-Brightwood Neighborhood. By 1944, the majority of once prominent railroad-affiliated business had relocated, remaining railroad connections were moved and the Brightwood railroad station was razed. The departure of railroads, construction of Interstates 65 and 70 in the 1960's and the expansion of suburban Indianapolis were all detrimental to the social and economic status of Martindale-Brightwood, post-World War II. This mass migration from Brightwood in particular left a surplus of available housing that would soon be filled by lower-income families. Throughout the late 1800's, the population of the Martindale-Brightwood area was comprised largely of African-Americans and first generation European-Americans. In the years following World War II, there was a dramatic increase in the African-American population. This trend continued through 1960, when African-Americans came to compose 50 percent of Martindale-Brightwood's total population and increased to upwards of 90 percent by 1990. By the turn of the century and continuing onward, the urban fabric of the Martindale-Brightwood area remains predominantly small, working class homes spotted with industry.