

Cornelius O'Brien Lecture Series Concerning Historic Preservation in Indiana

From its initial appointment by President Herman B Wells in 1969 the Indiana University Committee on Historic Preservation has devoted its efforts to fostering educational programs concerning historic preservation within the Hoosier State. Three annual preservation conferences have been held, and a fourth will meet at Bloomington on September 29-30, 1972. After sponsoring tours of homes and other buildings in or near Bloomington in connection with the two initial conferences, the committee conducted a separate two day tour of historic structures and sites in Evansville and vicinity on April 22-23, 1972, in cooperation with a local committee. A similar two day tour of some portion of northern Indiana is planned for the spring of 1973. These and related efforts have been very favorably received, and they have both directly and indirectly made significant contributions to historic preservation within Indiana.

A most promising addition to the efforts of the Indiana University Committee on Historic Preservation has recently been announced by its chairman, Dean Eunice C. Roberts. Through a grant received from Mrs. John Timberlake Gibson and her mother, Mrs. Cornelius O'Brien, a lecture series concerning historic preservation in Indiana has been established in honor of Cornelius O'Brien (1883-1953) who contributed substantial and devoted service to historic programs and the preservation movement within Indiana. A successful farmer, banker, and manufacturer, Mr. O'Brien was long an active member of the Indiana Historical Society, serving on its executive board and as one of its vice presidents. He was also a member of the Indiana State Library and Historical Board and of the Purdue University Board of Trustees. Mr. O'Brien was a pioneer in historic preservation in Indiana, and his efforts in this field were directed especially toward restoration of a portion of the Whitewater Canal and preservation of Veraestau, the family home overlooking the Ohio River near Aurora. Cornelius O'Brien was a delegate to both state and national conventions of the Democratic party, becoming its nominee for the United States Senate in 1944.

Veraestau, with its commanding and scenic view of the Ohio River, had its beginnings in territorial days as the combination log cabin-brick residence of Jesse L. Holman, one of the leading political figures of pioneer Indiana. William Steele Holman, a son who served as United States congressman from Indiana for three decades, was born in this house. The log cabin portion of Veraestau burned in the 1830s; following the fire Allen Hamilton, son-in-law of William Steele



CORNELIUS O'BRIEN.

Courtesy Mrs. John T. Gibson.

Holman, added a Greek Revival structure to the original brick portion. Further additions have been made to Veraestau during this century, including a brick extension by Cornelius O'Brien in the late 1930s. Veraestau is an excellent and well preserved example of an Indiana house which had humble beginnings in the pioneer era, then with additions from period to period developed into a large and attractive home. It is certainly one of the oldest, if not the oldest, such structure surviving in the state; and the prominence of its residents and visitors in state and national life for more than a century and a half has made it one of the outstanding houses of Indiana in terms of its historic associations.

The initial presentation of the Cornelius O'Brien Lecture Series will be given at Bloomington on the evening of September 29, 1972, as a featured part of Indiana University's fourth annual historic preservation conference. The speaker will be James L. Cogar of Shakertown, Kentucky, who will give an illustrated discussion of the restoration of the Shaker community there. Two additional lectures are tentatively planned for other places in Indiana during the academic year 1972-1973. The lecturers will be persons who are nationally recognized for their experience and competence in one or more fields of historic preservation. The Cornelius O'Brien Lecture Series Concerning Historic Preservation in Indiana will thus be a continuing memorial to an outstanding Hoosier who achieved a significant niche in the economic and political life of his native state and who made important contributions to historic programs and the advancement of the preservation movement.