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Agent Two

As a student at Lehigh University, I am the familiar agent within the fabric of reuse of industrial buildings in the Bethlehem Area. Dissecting this fabric, I will show my associations with it and further analyze the buildings that lie within the fabric. Forgetting the fabric temporarily, reuse alone was something I always liked and was cognizant of even before coming to Lehigh. I normally shop secondhand, buying clothes, books, equipment, and whatnot for quite some time now. The majority of the time I am able to find things that are more unique and valuable to me, and lower costs as well as environmental impact also hold great importance to me. This philosophy extends to architecture, and as an architecture student this feeling is compounded and integrates two of my passions. Adaptive reuse projects captivate my interest as many times older buildings, or a fusion of classic and contemporary architecture, provide a respite from the monotony of new construction in certain areas. Reusing older structures also helps preserve the history and culture of the area, and is also a sustainable practice.

Moving forward to industrial buildings in Bethlehem, they are abundant in the city as well as the larger Lehigh Valley. Founded in 1741, there are plenty of historical buildings in the area, and it is apparent as soon as arriving in the city. Exploring the steel stacks with a friend the first week, we passed many decrepit buildings that were once warehouses in the complex. Some blocks contained arches which stood alone, rubble scattered around the base, while other buildings were more formed, although about half of the windows had been shattered. Arriving at the actual stacks, I marveled at the towering blast furnaces as I sauntered along the pathway. Maybe it's cliché, but it reminded me of the High Line in New York, an old elevated rail line that was transformed into a public walkway with gardens. This led me to think about the theme of reuse, which was evident here, and allowed me to further appreciate it. Fittingly, the steel stacks was my first introduction to this fabric, and I would encounter it a lot more throughout my years at Lehigh.

I would be back to this site several weeks later, but this time I would find myself in the actual ArtsQuest Center. The plan was to go to a concert where Milky Chance, a German rock band would perform. It was originally supposed to be outside on the pavilion, but was moved to the indoor venue due to weather conditions. I found myself confused by two large I-beams protruding from a nearby building, nearly touching the ArtsQuest center, but I felt a sense of connection between the center and

the rest of the site. People gathered at the front and trickled in, and I remember feeling a type of pressure and release as I entered, with congestion at the small doors giving way to the expansive ceilings inside. I made my way to the elevator to get to the concert floor above, but briefly caught a glance at the lobby and noticed bright orange metal all over the interior. The color reminded me of the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, where I had once lived. Perhaps this was intentional, as I had recently learned of the influence of Bethlehem Steel, the company which once occupied these grounds, and how they supplied the steel that went into making this famous bridge. The industrial nature of this building already reflected the surrounding industrial architecture, and although the novelty was certainly there, it was subdued. It must've been difficult to integrate this building with the rest environment given its current state. They probably wanted to design the center to reflect the same language and history, but not overpower the setting with modernity and newness. As I ascended to the top floor, the same language was repeated with bright orange beams standing vertically near the windows. Nearly the whole front facade had windows which overlooked the pavilion and perfectly framed the steel stacks. The view was breathtaking even at night, and provided an amazing backdrop for the performers. Inside, the same orange beams ran above horizontally, with trusses of the same nature connecting them to the ceiling. This ceiling, however, was littered with lighting, sound systems, and wires for the concert, which still followed the same theme of the building. Opposite to the windows hung a seating area, allowing people to sit down and view the concert from above. It was held up from above by more beams, and was empty underneath, making it look like it was floating. This replicated the catwalks that could be seen across the way in the steel stacks, again paying homage to the steel workers and that entire era. The venue was unlike anything I had experienced before, but provided a unique and lovely atmosphere, staying true to the site and the city it was in.

The next condition that fit this fabric was a restaurant in North Bethlehem called the Wooden Match. I didn't know what to expect before going, and as we arrived and stepped out of the car, I was greeted with the sight of an oddly proportioned building standing by itself. I didn't get to look at it very long, as snowfall and brisk winds forced us inside quickly. The warmth inside sheltered us from the elements as my group was escorted to the lower level to be seated, where the temperature then took a slight dip again. Outdoors, the stone masonry wall that was visible at the base continued into the ground and formed the walls inside, each stone unique from one another. Dark wood covered the ceilings while the chairs and tables were made out of lighter wood, living up to part of the restaurant's name. Cigar smoke penetrated the air, explaining the other half, and all the elements combined gave off a very traditional feeling. The tables were close together, and the ceiling was low, making the space feel

compact and projecting a certain intimacy among me and the other patrons. At this point I couldn't have guessed it was an old train station given I didn't see the tracks outside while entering, but I could tell it may not have always been a restaurant.

After leaving that night, I didn't see the outside much or was too buzzed to notice, but I would revisit the site several times later on. Going on walks in the area, I could view the building in its entirety with daylight exposing the rail tracks running parallel to the restaurant. Somedays I would see a lone train car or a handcar with levers that would get placed along these tracks, and since they aren't in use I assumed they were just props for an event. When it's nice outside, tables would be set up next to the tracks, and one particular day I witnessed a crowd surrounding live performers in this area. It's a nice venue and I always admired how the old station was transformed into such a lively place while preserving the old, historic structure.

The last site of the three that I would encounter was Brighton Court apartments. I passed this building while walking or driving across the Hill to Hill Bridge which connects North and South Bethlehem, but never gave it much thought. However, while looking for housing before my junior year, I stumbled upon this building. I thought it was quite majestic with the bay windows overlooking the city and the arched brick entrance. It didn't work out here but I ended up living near the same area, and my walks would lead me to venture more on the west side of South Bethlehem where I encountered this apartment complex. A nearby building on the way had embossed letters spelling "LEHIGH VALLEY R R," drawing attention to all the cars passing on the adjacent bridge. Brighton street itself is a cozy area, tucked away into a quiet pocket of Bethlehem despite the busy street within earshot. Trees lined the street and residential houses continued where the building left off, while opposite of the building stood an imposing Masonic Temple. Approaching the building I would notice the brickwork, especially near the impressive entry arch, where a plaque read "The former headquarters of the Lehigh Valley Railroad." On the left side of the arch the facade was relatively subdued, with a repetitive window pattern, while the other side was much different. Sure, it was still the same materials, but it was clearly more decadent here, and it seemed like the designers put ornamentation wherever they could get away with it. Geometric patterns were sparsely distributed on this facade, and a frieze with indented trefoils wrapped around to the other side of the building facing the bridge. A large bay window with more ornament stood at the top right corner with yet more ornament, and other windows were placed on the front. One window closer to the ground broke up what would have made these second windows symmetrical, and fused blocky geometric patterns adorning the outside of the windows with curves in the corners above an arch. Finally, atop this funky window is the year "1886," written in an art deco font, which was the

year this structure was built. This building seems to reveal a new detail everytime I look at it, making walks by it much more interesting.

Overall, all three of these buildings, or complex in the case of the steel stacks and ArtsQuest center, deeply relate to the fabric of industrial reuse in Bethlehem. Although each of them fit under this umbrella, they all suit different conditions and it's interesting to see how they branch out from their original meaning. As a Lehigh student, I'm within proximity to experience all these sites and am more likely to take them in and appreciate them given my relationship with both reuse and architecture.