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History never really interested me. I never saw the point in rehashing what had already happened, especially if I never knew the people that lived those events. However, studying the history of the buildings and spaces that made up the city of the place I went to school revealed to me how intertwined these spaces were with each other, and with my experience in that city. It showed to me how all of these buildings built under the same empire of a wealthy engineer took separate paths, but all “grew up” in similar ways.

I was attracted to Lehigh University for its rolling hills, gorgeous campus, and intellectually stimulating environment. Other than those things, I, probably similar to other students, felt like an outsider. Through studying the history and the changing function of buildings that make up South Bethlehem where Lehigh University is located, I came to find out that a lot of these buildings are intentionally or unintentionally accommodating the students that came from all over to attend school there.

My very first impression of Bethlehem was in the Sayre Mansion. I stayed in the Sayre Mansion twice- the first time was when I toured Lehigh University and the second time was when I was moving in for the first time. The first thing I noticed about it was how it sat upon a hill, much like how the University did. The building’s brick masonry and location set back into the trees showed to me that it wasn’t trying to be flashy like the newer developments that I saw throughout Bethlehem, but I could tell it had importance to the city. It sat proud upon the hill and had a certain elegance about it.

At the time, I didn’t think much about the history of the building. It was nice, and I could tell that it wasn’t new by anyone’s standards. However, what the Sayre mansion represented when it was first built is what it represents for me as a student. Robert Heysham Sayre built the Sayre mansion in 1858 because he wanted to be at the center of everything. Lehigh University was to the east, St. Luke’s hospital was to the west, the Cathedral Church of the Nativity was to the south, and “on the banks of the Lehigh River, which ran through the valley below him, were the railroad and the Bethlehem Iron Works, the company he helped build, and which later would become the sprawling industry of Bethlehem Steel” (Sayre Mansion). So much of what Bethlehem is today came from this one man, who built the beginning of his career in this one house.

Sayre Mansion was the launchpad for Robert Sayre to build the fabric of the steel mill city that Bethlehem is today. In a way, Sayre Mansion is the launchpad for me into building the fabric of my own career. From my first stay at the Sayre Mansion to now, I have had many experiences at Lehigh University and throughout Bethlehem that have shaped me into the person I am today.

While the owners of the Sayre mansion today tried to keep the authenticity of the original building, the building's form of residence has shifted. It went from an extremely private mansion of the most wealthy man in Bethlehem, to a bed and breakfast where families and individual travelers can stay.

Right across the street from the Sayre Mansion, at the corner of West Third and Wyandotte Street sits the Cathedral Church of the Nativity. On November 8th, 1862, Robert Sayre sat in the parlor of Sayre Mansion with six other men and formed a vestry for what is now known as the Cathedral Church of the Nativity. I'm not very religious, and only noticed this building for two things- its architecture and its thrift shop. This church was built in 1864 by E.T. Potter in an English Gothic revival style. The style is apparent from the outside- consider the pointed arches on the stained glass windows, the rose window on the entrance, and its angled buttresses and parapets on the tower. One of the things that stood out to me the most was the rounded ambulatory that was set into the hill. I felt that this highlighted how steep the hill from the Sayre Mansion to the church really was, and how the mansion seemed to sit above everything else.

The relation of the mansion to the church was interesting to me. This church built by wealthy engineers was only a stone's-throw away from a symbol of wealth and power in its day. The ideas that Robert Sayre and the other members of the original vestry had about congregation in this church are in some ways the same and in other ways very different. Something that has stayed the same is the religious congregation that takes place. People gather outside the church near the narthex to enter. They also congregate in the choir to visually congregate around the altar. The church more recently has taken on other forms of congregation. Today, the church has a thrift shop and an adjoining homeless shelter. With these programs, the church is opening itself up to the public more than it had before. These features encourage people of all walks of life to gather, whether they are religious or not.

If I were to drive down the road and around the corner a little further, I would find myself at the E.P. Wilbur Trust building. Built in 1910 by A.W. Leh, this building was "prized for its masonry and brick exterior, plumbing that included hot showers in the basement, metal stairways, a rooftop beer garden and a bank vault for security during a time of labor unrest" (Radzievich). The Wilbur Trust building is wedged between a busy intersection at Broadway and Fourth street. It is highly decorated on the cornice, and it radiates elegance and importance among the other surrounding buildings. At the time it

was built, it was the home of the E.P. Wilbur Trust company, a company made by wealthy banker and president of Lehigh Valley Railroad Company, Elisha Packer Wilbur. Since then, the building has been taken over by a new developer, Larry Eighmy. This flatiron-style building houses 11 other businesses and nonprofit organizations according to an article in the local paper, the Morning Call. These businesses include a commercial Wells Fargo bank, luxury apartments, and a contemporary brewery called Seven Sirens Brewing Company. In the same article, this new development within the historic building was called “a gateway into South Bethlehem” by Mayor Robert Donchez.

Personally, I don't have any real connection to the Wilbur Trust Building. I always passed it on the way to my friend's house or to my favorite bagel shop, but I always simply admired the building for its architectural qualities. Flatiron buildings are interesting to me because of their narrow facade and angled sides. They stand out in a city because they add definition and drama to their intersections and all of the buildings surrounding them. However, I may have more of a connection to this particular flatiron building than I originally thought. When Larry Eighmy described the Wilbur Trust building as the “gateway” to South Bethlehem, it made me think about how many new businesses that I frequently use were funded by the new Wells Fargo bank there, and how many businesses and buildings that have been there for over a century were funded by the original E.P. Wilbur Trust Company. Has this building always been a gateway to South Bethlehem? How did the original bank and the new bank in this building shape the student and local experience of South Bethlehem? Would I even be going to school at Lehigh University if it weren't for that bank?

It is interesting to think about how these three buildings have changed over the years to accommodate those who live in Bethlehem. Something that they all share in common is how they each went from a private place, accessible only to those who created them, to a more public place over the years. It will be equally interesting to see how these buildings continue to develop. Calling the Wilbur Trust building the “gateway” to South Bethlehem could have two meanings- bringing in new businesses and technologies will bring a new life to Bethlehem, or they will push out the current residents to make room for new, wealthier residents that have no connection to the history of Bethlehem. An example of these two tracks could be expanding the Sayre Mansion to accommodate more guests, or on the flip side raising the rates. Since my time as a student at Lehigh, I've seen both new, expensive buildings that don't correspond to the current architecture of the city be built, but at the same time, a push to support local businesses and artists. It will be interesting to see how the city develops, and how this development will hurt or help certain communities within Bethlehem.