

How a Historic District Get its Name

There are 12 historic districts in Muncie, each carrying a unique name. The names come from the neighborhood title, like the Old West End, Riverside and Westwood. But for the Emily Kimbrough Historic District, things are a little different.

“There are no hard and fast rules for naming historic districts,” Indiana Department of Natural Resources Assistant Director for Preservation Services Frank Hurdis said. “In general, districts usually derive their name either from a well-established neighborhood name such as Westwood, or from the name of a significant resident.”

“It fits this neighborhood,” East Central Neighborhood Association Board Member Mike Mavis said. “Her house is here and we really embrace it and the name of the community.”

The neighborhood, known in the early 1900s as the east end, is rich in history and culture. When gas was found north of Muncie in the late 1800s, many manufacturers and businessmen were attracted and moved to the Muncie area for the cheap, local energy. Many of those prominent and wealthy families lived in the east end, but no family was as involved with the community as the Kimbroughs.

“The Kimbrough family was very instrumental,” Mavis said. “There were a lot of big families in the district, but they didn't stay as involved in the society as much as the Kimbroughs.

C.M. Kimbrough owned the Indiana Bridge Company and employed many in the community. The family owned the first hardware store and was known through out the area. But it was C.M. Kimbrough's granddaughter, the writer Emily Kimbrough, who brought the most outside attention to Muncie.

In 1944 Kimbrough authored *How Dear to My Heart*. The novel told the life of 12-year-old Emily Kimbrough and her exciting stories from her childhood in the neighborhood and around Muncie.

She saw her first automobile, had the most fun of her youth and lived within walking distance of her relatives in the district. The locally, nationally and internationally read book personified the great features of the neighborhood and city.

“Emily Kimbrough Historic District could also have been called 'East Side Residential Historic District' or something,” said Indiana DNR Team Leader of Survey and Registration Paul Diebold. “But, nationally published author Emily Kimbrough wrote about growing up in the area, and the writers of the nomination wanted to memorialize her connection to the area.”

A connection that continued until her death at 90 in 1989. Kimbrough was known for sending flowers to the neighborhood and keeping in touch with her family and friends living in the neighborhood.

“It was a friendship that still exists and the neighborhood owed it to her to name the district Emily Kimbrough,” Mavis said.

“In her time it was the neighborhood to live in and she held it dear to her heart,” Mavis said.

Today, the Emily Kimbrough district is guided by the East Central Neighborhood Association. The organization preserves the history and culture, like the Kimbrough name and family, while advising building and historic ordinances. But unlike most historic neighborhoods and organizations, the naming of the Emily Kimbrough District wasn't just because of a location, but because of a relationship.