

Bohlen, Meyer, Gibson, & Associates

Founded: 1853

Location: Original location unknown, Indianapolis; 43 ½ East Washington Street [check?]; 23 East Washington Street; Aetna Building, North Pennsylvania; 31 West Ohio; 19 Talbott and New's Block; 95 East Washington Street (16 and 17 Brandon Block); 1017–1019 (later 1001–1002) Majestic Building; 47 South Pennsylvania; 15 East Washington (930 State Life Building); [????]; 1308 North Meridian Street; 3000 Meadows Parkway (1970–1978); 6435 Castleway Drive (1978–1991); 3040 North Post Road (1991–).

Diederich August Bohlen was born near Hanover, Germany, in 1827 and studied architecture at the University of Holzminden. He hiked across northern Germany and Poland making sketches and studying construction methods before immigrating to the United States some time between 1850 and 1852. He debarked in New Orleans, traveled up the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers, and worked for a time in Cincinnati as a draftsman before moving to Indianapolis. In Indianapolis the young architect worked for various firms, including that of the city's leading architect, Francis Costigan. While with Costigan, Bohlen helped design the Asylum for the Blind on North Street, located between Pennsylvania and Meridian Streets on the present site of the World War Memorial Plaza. In April 1853 Bohlen established his own architectural firm.

Diederich Bohlen introduced the German neo-Gothic style to Indiana. His early commissions included the Charles Mayer Store facade (1853); the dome for the Odd Fellows Grand Lodge (1854), a building designed by Costigan but completed by Bohlen; and the Metropolitan (1858), the city's first theater. The present firm of Bohlen, Meyer, Gibson, & Associates maintains client relationships that Bohlen originated, including St. Mary-of-the-Woods, a Roman Catholic college and one of Bohlen's earliest clients; Diederich Bohlen designed Foley Hall, completed in 1858. Over the years the firm has

completed more than sixty projects for the Terre Haute school run by the Sisters of Providence. Another major source of early commissions was the German community in Indianapolis. Bohlen constructed the General German Protestant Orphans Home (later the Pleasant Run Children's Home) on State Avenue south of Pleasant Run in 1872. He also designed the Morris-Butler House (1864); Saint John's Catholic Church (1867–1871), the oldest Roman Catholic church in the city; Roberts Park Methodist Episcopal Church (1876), constructed of Ellettsville limestone; and the Crown Hill Cemetery Chapel (1875). Bohlen became one of the city's most prominent architects, and his firm became one of the city's most lucrative.

In 1876 and 1877 Matthew Roth joined Bohlen's firm as a partner. Diederich's son Oscar D. Bohlen, born in 1863 on the day his father left to fight for the Union in the Civil War, joined his father's firm in 1881. In 1884 the firm became D. A. Bohlen & Son. Diederich died six years later. Major buildings constructed by Diederich and Oscar Bohlen included the City Market (1886), which replaced the previous, semi-enclosed East Market House, and Tomlinson Hall (1886), which was located at the corner of Delaware and Market streets adjacent to the City Market. For many years Tomlinson Hall was the only public assembly hall in Indianapolis. It was destroyed by fire in 1958.

Oscar Bohlen designed many buildings in Indianapolis, including the Pennway (1909) and Big Four (1929) buildings; it was said that he designed at least one building in nearly every business block downtown. His most notable achievement was the ten-story Majestic Building, constructed for the Indianapolis Gas Company at Pennsylvania and Maryland Streets in 1895. The building, which cost \$400,000 to construct, was the first steel-skeleton skyscraper in the west outside of Chicago. For twenty years (1890-1910)

Oscar continued the firm of D. A. Bohlen & Son alone, except for a time period between 1897 and 1899 when Hugo A. Zigrosser was a partner. Between 1897 and 1898 the company moved from the Brandon Block to the Majestic Building. Oscar's son, August C. Bohlen, joined the firm in 1910. The firm's notable buildings included the old St. Vincent's Hospital (1913) located on Fall Creek Parkway and the Murat Temple (1910) located at the corner of Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Michigan Streets. The Murat was designed by Oscar Bohlen with a skylight, revolving stage, and elaborate air circulating system. The firm continued to prosper over the years, specializing in churches and institutional buildings (including educational buildings and buildings for the city's fire and public parks departments) and designing structures in Cleveland, Detroit, Dayton, St. Louis, and Grand Rapids. One associate, Hans Mengerling, designed the first parking garage in Indianapolis. August's son Robert C. Bohlen joined the firm in 1946. His most notable design was of the art deco Empire Life and Accident Insurance Company building (later the Lilly Endowment building). Robert committed suicide in 1960.

After his son's death August Bohlen entered into a partnership with David V. Burns and in 1961, the architectural firm became Bohlen & Burns. In 1967 it incorporated as Bohlen, Burns, & Associates. With Bohlen's retirement in 1970, ownership passed to the firm's principal architects, Melvin B. G. Meyer and John M. Gibson, and Noel Cord, the company's accountant. The firm became Bohlen, Meyer, Gibson, & Associates and moved to the Meadows Office Complex on 38th Street. Meyer was a graduate of the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris and the University of Cincinnati and Gibson a graduate of the University of Cincinnati. Meyer joined the firm in 1946 as a

draftsman and was chief designer from 1948 until 1990. He designed the executive offices of Indianapolis Newspapers, Inc., the Franciscan convent and academy at Oldenburg, the Krannert Pavilion and Children's Pavilion at Methodist Hospital, the Krannert Library at the University of Indianapolis, and the Kiwanis International headquarters building. In 1971 the firm added a marketing department and the following year began offering interior design services, yet it remained linked to the Bohlen tradition. In a 1970 newspaper interview Meyer stated that the firm used the same mortar formulas in its buildings that Diederich Bohlen had developed over one hundred years before. In 1978 Bohlen, Meyer, Gibson, & Associates moved to new offices in Castleton. Mike Rogers and Hans Mengerling, both architects with the firm, replaced Cord as investors in 1980.

Bohlen, Meyer, Gibson, & Associate's prominent clients included Indianapolis Newspapers, St. Vincent's Hospital, Methodist Hospital, Indiana National Bank (later NBD Bank), the Indianapolis Fire Department, Beveridge Paper Company, the University of Indianapolis (originally Indiana Central University), and Diamond Chain Company, but by the mid-1980s, as Melvin Meyer experienced health problems, business was slowing. Meyer retired in 1990. That year John V. Schneider and his wife, [owners ?] of Schneider Engineering Corporation, purchased [some ? a majority ?] of the company's stock. Bohlen, Meyer, Gibson, & Associates and Schneider Engineering Corporation moved to new offices on North Post Road in 1991 and two years later, the architectural firm moved into the multifamily housing market. Twenty of the firm's projects are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.