

# REGENERATION:

AN INSTITUTE FOR MAKING IN SOUTHEASTERN OHIO'S  
POSTINDUSTRIAL VACANCIES

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A Thesis in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Degree of Master of Architecture

University of Washington  
2014

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Program Authorized to Offer Degree: Architecture

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# ABSTRACT

The reality of the abandoned postindustrial in small town America is inescapable, an inevitable consequence of shifts in the economy and society in the 20th century. In the small manufacturing towns in the Appalachian and Rust Belt regions of the United States, the effects of the loss of industry has often been overlooked by the mainstream, although its economic impact has been felt more acutely. This fragmented urban fabric is more visible in places where industry once enjoyed a strong presence and an intimate proximity to all aspects of urban life. Rather than being confined to separate industrial districts, these fragments stand alongside sites used by the public every day, where they cannot be ignored.

This thesis argues that these surviving structures, with their strong connections to the past and to their physical context, can be transformed to become active players in the urban environment and a valuable asset to community life once again. These underutilized places should not be dismissed as blemishes that reflect the hardships of a community and offer only a collective sense of hopelessness. In their unique combination of flexibility and structure, these postindustrial sites retain their strong connections to the existing urban environment and have the potential to reanimate it once again.

This thesis proposes that the architectural regeneration of the abandoned sites of manufacturing can emphasize the memory of their unique former life while reconnecting them to the day-to-day life of this particular case study in Marietta, Ohio. Simply redeveloping these sites or preserving them as monuments to a bygone era are not appropriate means to accomplish this goal. Instead, the new life of these vacated buildings must recreate a place of purpose that brings together community, industry, and learning. This thesis will implement a vocational school program into a former industrial facility, bringing this education that is so critical to building a skillset in the local economy back into the center of town, encouraging innovation and progress to maintain a relevant workforce. This design will explore the manipulation of connections through the regular structural grid and the relationships possible in the hybrid typologies of the site as a means of reanimating the building and reconnecting with the surrounding community on a range of scales.



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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

The reality of the abandoned postindustrial condition in small town America is inescapable, an inevitable consequence of shifts in the economy and society in the last century. The impact of urban decay as a result of the flight of industry on these smaller urban centers has been understood to be even more severe than in more prominent cities, but conflicting attitudes to the reuse of this fragmented built fabric persist as vacant post-industrial sites wait to be filled with future developments or as ruined remnants of past technologies needing to be replaced.<sup>1</sup> This thesis argues that

these surviving structures, with their strong connections to the past and to their physical context, can be transformed to become active players in the urban environment and a valuable asset to community life once again. These underutilized places should not be dismissed as nondescript voids, blemishes reflective of the hardships of a community and offering only a collective sense of hopelessness. In their unique combination of flexibility and structure, these postindustrial sites retain their strong connections to the existing urban environment and have the potential to reanimate it once again.

In the small manufacturing towns in the Appalachian and Rust Belt regions of the United States, the effects of the loss of industry has often been overlooked by the mainstream, although its impact has been felt more acutely, as these areas were often far more dependent on these businesses and could not support fully diversifying their economies. This fragmented urban fabric is more visible in places where industry once enjoyed a strong presence and an intimate proximity to all aspects of urban life. Rather than being confined to separate industrial districts, these fragments stand alongside sites used by the public every day, where they cannot be ignored. This condition is clearly evident in the town of Marietta, located

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<sup>1</sup> Renn, Aaron M. "The Tough Realities Facing Smaller Post-Industrial Cities." *The Urbanophile* RSS. N.p., 3 Nov. 2013. Web.



*Figure 1 - Abandoned factory equipment in its architectural setting.*

in southeastern Ohio. This thesis proposes that the architectural regeneration of the abandoned sites of manufacturing can emphasize the memory of their unique former life while reconnecting them to the day-to-day life of Marietta. Simply redeveloping these sites or preserving them as monuments to a bygone era is not an appropriate means to accomplish this goal. Instead, the new life of these vacated buildings must recreate a place of purpose with an active program that brings together community and industry once again.

# CHAPTER TWO

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### THE POSTINDUSTRIAL PHENOMENON

Typically, studies of the postindustrial landscape in the United States focus on large metropolitan areas that have seen significant, sometimes extreme, population decline and economic hardship as a direct result of deindustrialization. In industrial centers throughout the country, production facilities were once an integral part of the urban fabric, centrally located for ease of access to labor forces and shipping infrastructure. These industries were not relegated to a district, but located immediately within the fabric of the city, woven seamlessly into the town's daily life. In the second half of the twentieth century, trucking and interstate transport became



*Figure 2 - Industry as storefront.*

standard, in many cases replacing rail lines and shipping by waterways. With this change, these industries moved first out to the peripheries of cities and more recently, overseas, leaving vacant structures behind as a testament to a working past.<sup>2</sup> Because the economies and identities of cities were so closely tied with industry, this loss removed the entire basis of their livelihoods. The famed so-called Rustbelt cities of Detroit and Cleveland, once booming industrial hubs, now consist of vast tracts of residual postindustrial landscapes left empty and unused. Although the sheer scale of these zones is immense, these areas are often located within industrial districts, not necessarily experienced by the majority of the city's residents on a daily basis. While these vacated landscapes are powerful in their large-scale demonstration of dereliction, this thesis focuses on a similar postindustrial condition at a significantly smaller scale, which ultimately makes the issue more visible.

On the scale of the small town, abandonment is usually not contained to a particular district or even a singular zone within the boundaries of the town. In these places, like Marietta, Ohio, industry was once so intimately integrated with the town as a whole that the decline of manufacturing creates palpable voids within the urban fabric.<sup>3</sup> Buildings once full of purpose and bustling with productive activity now stand vacant alongside still active homes and businesses, blankly staring out from empty,

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2 Baum and Christiaanse, *City As Loft: Adaptive Reuse As a Resource for Sustainable Urban Development*, 298.

3 Bollack, *Old Buildings, New Forms: New Directions in Architectural Transformations*, 16.

unused spaces lacking function. These deserted and underutilized properties may not be comparable in size to those of major industrial cities, but their impact by adjacency is much more significant. The community must contend with these gaps within city blocks every day, understandably perceiving them as wounds indicative of abandonment and neglect.<sup>4</sup> While the creative community, especially including artists and architects, might see design opportunity in these spaces emptied of their former purpose of making, the general public often instead perceives this degradation of the fabric as discouraging. This perception of post-industrial sites as a demonstration of hopelessness, that growth is no longer a possibility, can cast an "air of abandonment" over the community.<sup>5</sup>

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4 Mah, *Industrial Ruination, Community, and Place: Landscapes and Legacies of Urban Decline*, 195.

5 Baum and Christiaanse, *City As Loft: Adaptive Reuse As a Resource for Sustainable*



“THESE PLACES ARE NEITHER MERELY OBJECTS OF HERITAGE WHICH SHOULD BE CONSERVED NOR TOTALLY DILAPIDATED SPOTS TO BE DEVELOPED. THE JUXTAPOSITION OF THE PAST AND THE PRESENT, THE RUINS AND LIVING PEOPLE, INDUSTRIAL PAST AND POST-INDUSTRIAL PRESENT SHOULD BE CONSIDERED AS CRITICAL URBAN PHENOMENA.”

-JI YOUN KIM

Figure 3 - Vacant small industry intermixed with residential fabric.

*There is a shared sense of a leaden feeling of dread regarding an uncertain future; and the actual abandonment of the buildings... becomes perceptible through the atmosphere of abandonment<sup>6</sup>.*

The southeastern Ohio town of Marietta is just one of countless examples of the intertwined relationship between the industrial and urban landscapes of small town America. This particular urban condition is not often addressed through design at this scale despite the greater vulnerability of existing conditions and the significant impact any built intervention has at this scale, precisely because of the size difference to a location like Detroit or Cleveland. In a small postindustrial town, a design proposal to address this condition has a more obvious, direct impact on the larger environment. Sites of this nature occur throughout the town of Marietta, but a site with the high degree of visibility, immediate connection to infrastructure and community assets, and flexible building frame become decidedly desirable qualities for the purposes of this exploratory study. Located on a busy intersection close to the historic and business centers of the town, the proposed site of the former Safe Cabinet Company is one of the largest vacant sites in Marietta, Ohio. With its prominent location, connectedness within the city and its unique architectural characteristics, this complex provides a highly visible and accessible site of investigation for this thesis.

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*Urban Development*, 55.

6 Jürgen Hass, *City As Loft: Adaptive Reuse As a Resource for Sustainable Urban Development*, 55.

## THE FUTURE OF THE POSTINDUSTRIAL RUIN

In his study of architectural ruins, Bruce Dillon contends that despite the impression of gloom that underutilized structures of the past may convey in their urban context, these objects of decay and neglect are a “fragment with a future,” having the potential to remain for generations, living on in some form.<sup>7</sup> Sites with an industrial or utilitarian past, in particular, seem not to retain the traces of their former functions and thus provide an open terrain for new intervention. These fragments, currently holding no specific purpose, are uniquely positioned as a visible trigger for memory which can be utilized to build a strong intervention within the existing foundation.<sup>8</sup> Since industrial buildings were carefully located in their

7 Dillon, *Ruins*, 18.  
8 Dillon, *Ruins*, 151.

urban context to link to infrastructure, they are still well situated within the present-day city. Alice Mah observes that the prominent location of these urban ruins solidifies their position in the collective/public memory of the city, creating a sense of place attachment whether individuals had a direct connection or not.<sup>9</sup> Deeply ingrained in the intangible networks and daily rituals of the city, vacant industrial sites stand as markers in the geographical spaces<sup>10</sup> and cultural memories of the city.<sup>11</sup> As Mah suggests, the erasure of such markers contributes to the loss of a sense of place, creating disjointing voids not just in the urban fabric, but in the collective memory of place.

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9 Mah, *Industrial Ruination, Community, and Place: Landscapes and Legacies of Urban Decline*, 154.

10 Baum and Christiaanse, *City As Loft: Adaptive Reuse As a Resource for Sustainable Urban Development*, 67.

11 Mah, *Industrial Ruination, Community, and Place: Landscapes and Legacies of Urban Decline*, 154.

## APPROACHES TO INDUSTRIAL RUINS

Luc Levesque notes that when industrial remnants are perceived as “indeterminate zones” that represent an undesirable chaos in the urban environment, the response is generally to fix aesthetic blight in order to repair this disorder.<sup>12</sup> The empty zones become a problem for the developer, who often seeks to combat this visual decay at the cost of erasing layers of valuable history and collective memory. Strategies range from either obliterating the structure from the urban fabric or cleaning and repairing it beyond recognition. However, as Bruce Dillon notes, another approach is to leave such spaces unaltered, allowing them to continue their process of deterioration as poetic events.<sup>13</sup> These romanticized sites left in ruin are often viewed as places for impromptu and creative exercise within the rigor of the city, offering a unique freedom. While more respectful of the history of a site, this strategy risks being an idealistic, romantic vision, disconnected from the realities of relinking the site to the public life of the city.<sup>14</sup>

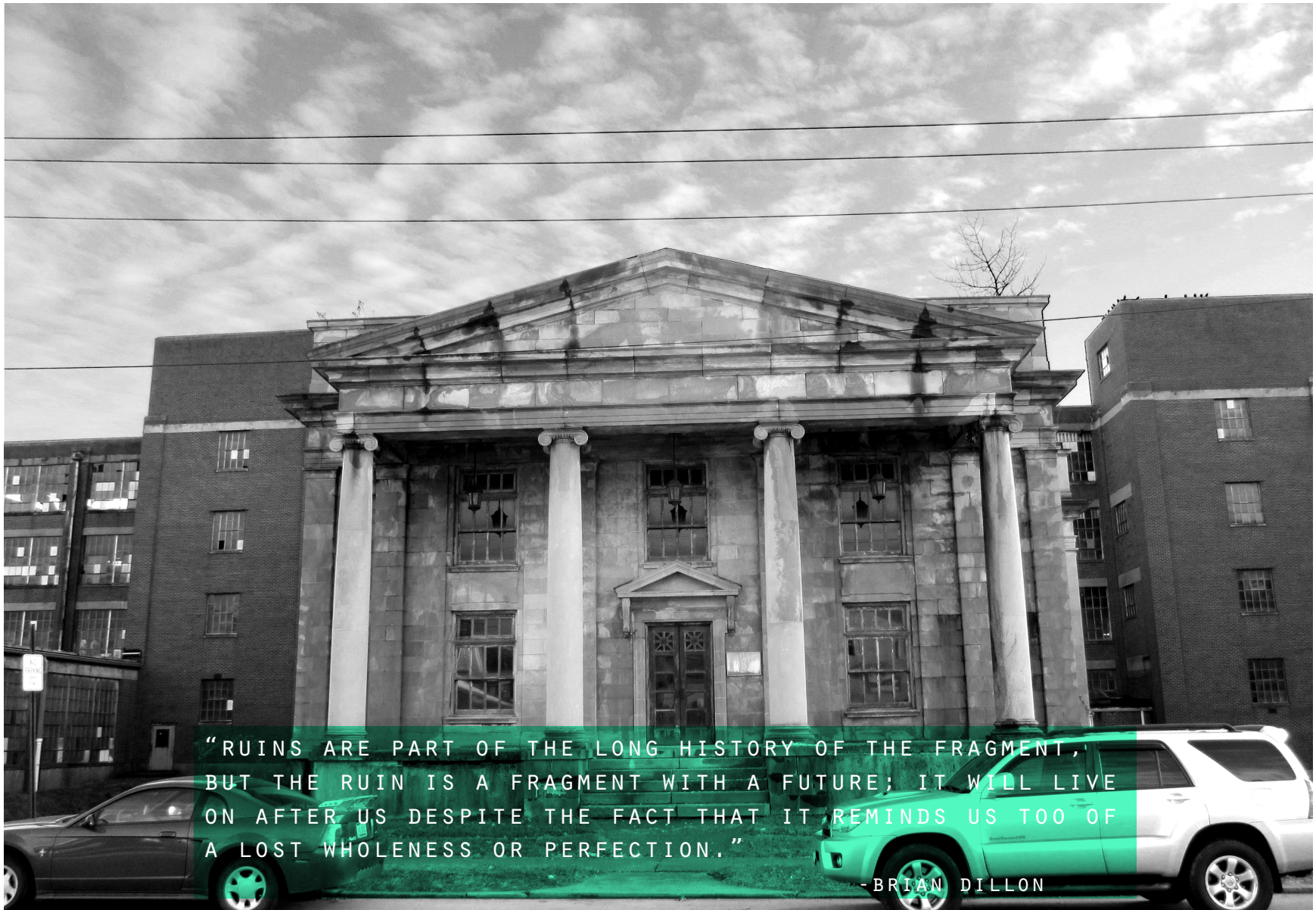
Both of these attitudes are limited by a degree of idealism in the struggle between order and disorder. The issue of these sites is not simply one of opposing aesthetics, between visual blight versus beauty, but of their relationships to their context. As places at the interstices of time and place, these sites have the potential

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12 Lévesque, *The «terrain Vague» as Material : Some Observations*.

13 Dillon, *Ruins*, 94.

14 Lévesque, *The «terrain Vague» as Material : Some Observations*.



“RUINS ARE PART OF THE LONG HISTORY OF THE FRAGMENT,  
BUT THE RUIN IS A FRAGMENT WITH A FUTURE; IT WILL LIVE  
ON AFTER US DESPITE THE FACT THAT IT REMINDS US TOO OF  
A LOST WHOLENESS OR PERFECTION.”

-BRIAN DILLON

*Figure 4 - History of fragmented ruin.*

to serve as intermediaries between these two extremes.<sup>15</sup> The intent here is to embrace the qualities of process and transformation inherent in the industrial ruin, then expand upon that to create a revitalized, valuable component in the city. The significance of these vacated sites is neither as objects of heritage to preserve for posterity, vacant playgrounds for urban chaos, nor as entirely ruinous sites made valuable only by the worth of the land they occupy.<sup>16</sup> By starting with what exists, new connections to the real landscape can be developed by uncovering the underlying layers of these storied sites.

Industrial remnants in particular continue to belong to the realm of everyday life due to their fundamental utilitarian

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15 Lévesque, The «terrain Vague» as Material : Some Observations.

16 Kim, Ji Youn. Book Review: Industrial Ruination, Community, and Place: Landscapes and Legacies of Urban Decline, 1770.

intent. While other building types can contribute value to the urban context through the preservation of their original image as the living fragments of industry must be preserved as active participants in the life of the city.<sup>17</sup> To return these buildings to their original state will do nothing to knit them back into their context; they will still remain disconnected from those alongside them. Following the “museumification” method that attempts to freeze a structure in time disregards the progress of time as an inevitable force.<sup>18</sup> Industrial structures were originally conceived as utilitarian, as buildings of process and activity, and continue to find stability in the current city through their dynamic, engaging use.

*Industrial ruins...are never static objects, but are in a constant state of change across time and space...the word “ruination” captures a process as well as a form.*<sup>19</sup>

As Alice Mah observes, industrial architecture as a typology is conceived as a process, or a tool for making, and is expressive of this through the cyclical nature of its lifespan. Although planned for a specific use, industrial buildings experience shifts in use and form, adapting as the processes occurring inside change.<sup>20</sup> Utilitarian in nature, the industrial type is not sacred or pristine, but meant to be treated as an evolving process, never complete or pristine. As a tool and process, the industrial

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17 Baum and Christiaanse, City As Loft: Adaptive Reuse As a Resource for Sustainable Urban Development, 364.

18 Berger, Wong, Hermann, Interventions/Adaptive Reuse, 22.

19 Mah, Industrial Ruination, Community, and Place: Landscapes and Legacies of Urban Decline, 3.

20 Mah, Industrial Ruination, Community, and Place: Landscapes and Legacies of Urban Decline, 129.



Figure 5 - Safe Cabinet Company in Marietta, Ohio

typology provides a shell or framework to be transformed and experimented with over time, often with the markings of this passage of time and activity evident (see *fig. 3*). If this innate function is lost or denied through erasure, inaction or museification, industrial structures become ambiguous in nature, out of place and without a sense of purpose. It is, as Bruce Dillon argues, only through the cycle of use and modification that these sites remain relevant in their context.<sup>21</sup>

Looking past the broken windows and invasive vegetation, one can see that the built remains of industrial prosperity can provide a foundation on which to build towards the future. As noted by Martina Baum and Kees Christiaanse, the predominant strategies of urban “renewal,” tend to suggest that the derelict reminders of the past have little to contribute to their

21 Dillon, *Ruins*, 121.

built surroundings, so that the slate should be wiped clean in order to build anew.<sup>22</sup>

The new environment produced by this method has usually lost its connection to either the past of the site, itself, and the larger collective memory of the community. The character of a city that forms through gradual alteration over time is sacrificed when these still-viable structures are erased. These sites woven into the fabric of the city should instead be viewed as living cultural objects awaiting an opportunity to “breathe new life and vitality into ailing communities.” As Baum and Christiaanse note, the interpretation of the past can reshape the future.<sup>23</sup> By refusing to dismiss postindustrial remains as an obstacle to progress, they can be seen instead as a

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22 Baum and Christiaanse, *City As Loft: Adaptive Reuse As a Resource for Sustainable Urban Development*, 73.

23 Baum and Christiaanse, *City As Loft: Adaptive Reuse As a Resource for Sustainable Urban Development*, 74.

resource to be grafted back into the existing built fabric, serving as a vehicle for urban regeneration within a community.<sup>24</sup>

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24 Bollack, *Old Buildings, New Forms: Directions in Architectural Transformations*, 9.



Figure 6 - Vacant and underutilized structures in Marietta, OH.

# CHAPTER THREE

## SITE ANALYSIS & METHODOLOGY

### MARIETTA, OHIO: A POSTINDUSTRIAL TOWN

Nestled between the rolling hills of southeastern Ohio and mighty Ohio and Muskingum Rivers lies a modest town that once thrived on the small industries made possible through the region's natural resources, skilled and artisan labor, and robust infrastructure connecting it to the greater vicinity. Agriculture, industry, and higher education have coexisted within a radius of only a couple of miles since the end of the eighteenth century, prospering through enterprise for most of its existence. While it no longer competes economically with the major cities of Ohio, Marietta remains the most populated town in Washington County and a hub for learning

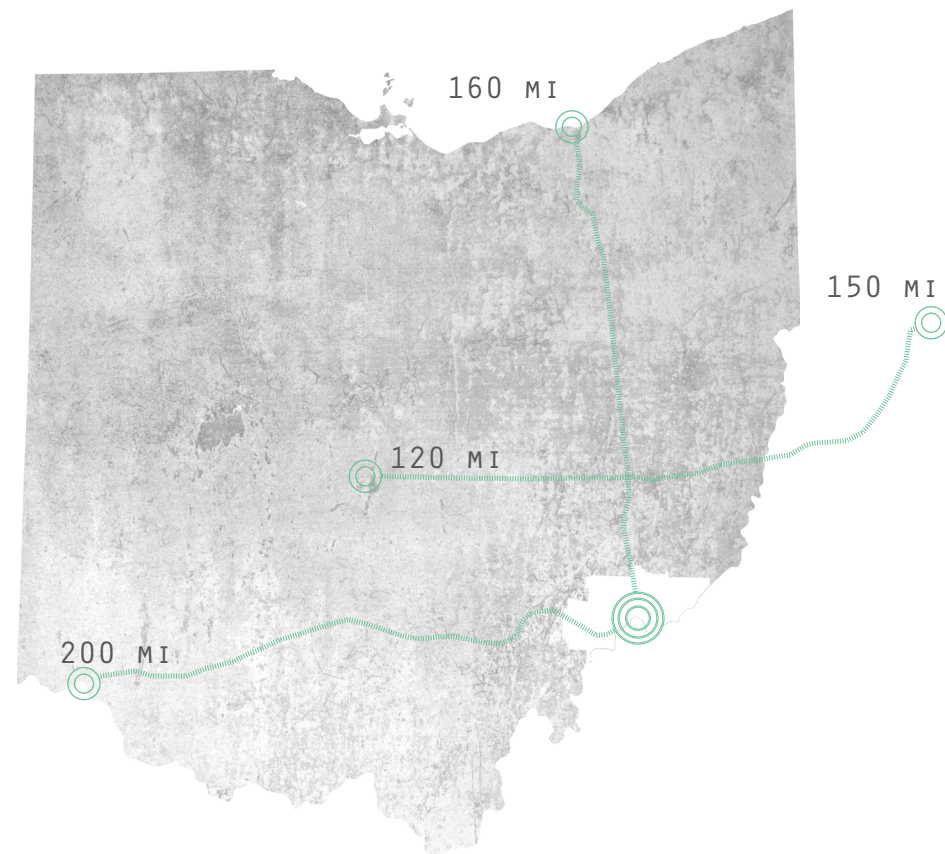


Figure 7 - Marietta in context.



Figure 8 - Portrait of Marietta, Ohio

and commerce in the otherwise mainly rural region. Located 120 miles from the present-day state capital of Columbus, 150 miles from Pittsburgh, and 160 miles from Cleveland, today Marietta is somewhat physically isolated from major economies, yet remains the most populated town in Washington County, with 14,085 residents as of 2010.<sup>25</sup>

Founded in 1788 as the first permanent settlement in the Northwest Territory, Marietta, Ohio represented a critical step towards westward expansion after the Revolutionary War. Purposefully situated at the confluence of two rivers and with an abundance of natural resources at its disposal, the town grew to claim a place among the ranks of later cities such as

<sup>25</sup> “Marietta (city) QuickFacts from the US Census Bureau.” Marietta (city) QuickFacts from the US Census Bureau. United States Census Bureau, 27 Mar. 2014. Web. <<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/39/3947628.html>>.

Figure 9 - Historic advertisement for Marietta, a Progressive City

Figure 10 - Industry in the city



Figure 11 - Historic industry in the city of Marietta.

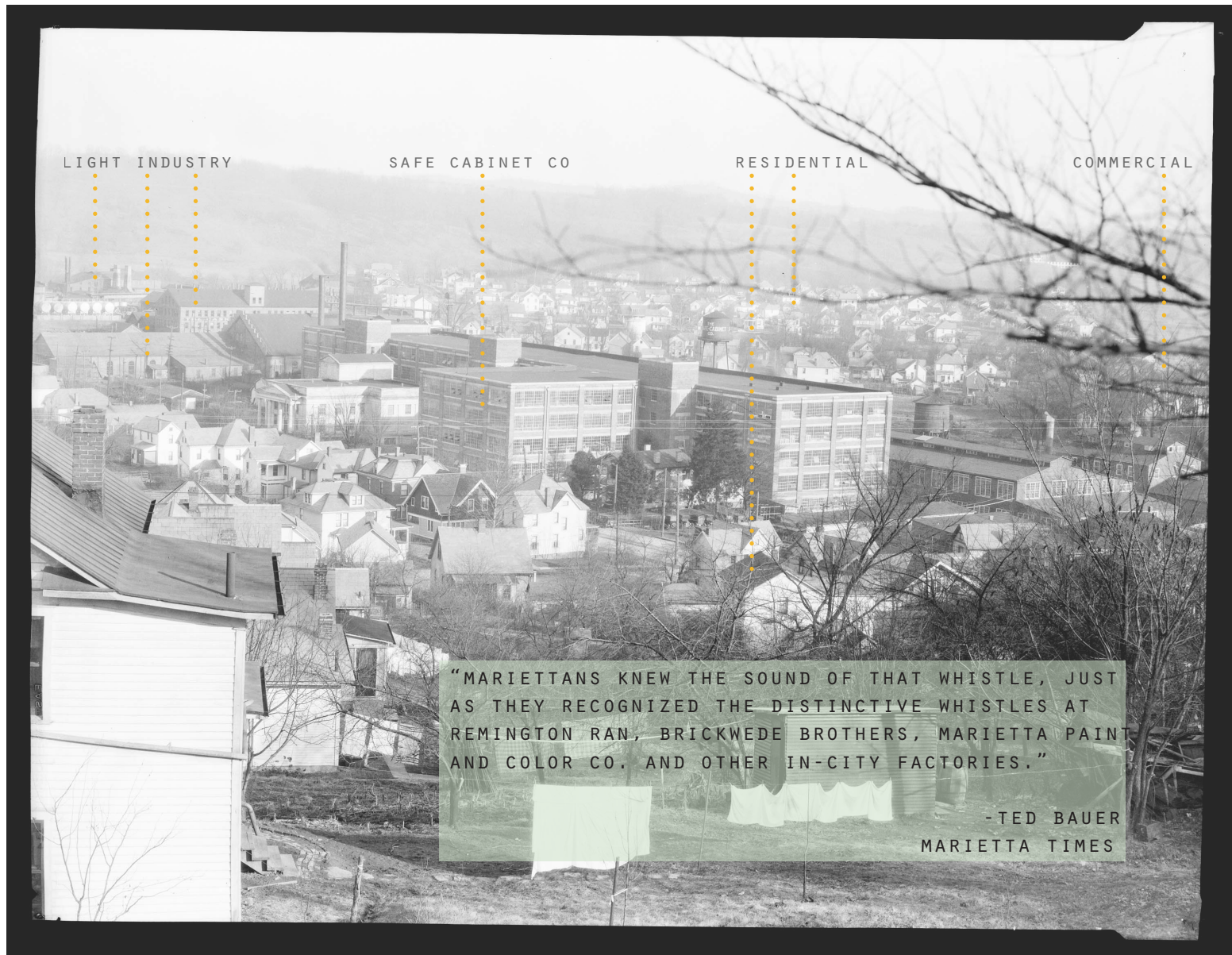


Figure 12 - The Safe Cabinet Company in the context of residential, commercial and light industry urban fabric.

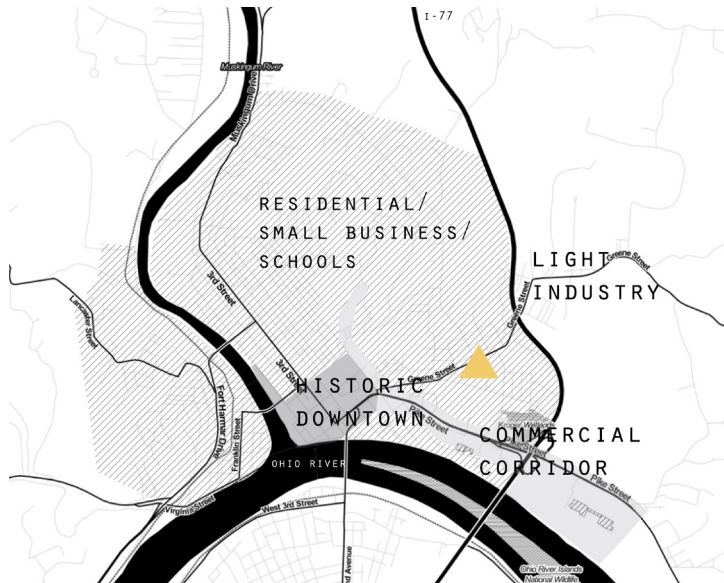


Figure 13 - Safe Cabinet Co. location in Marietta, Ohio

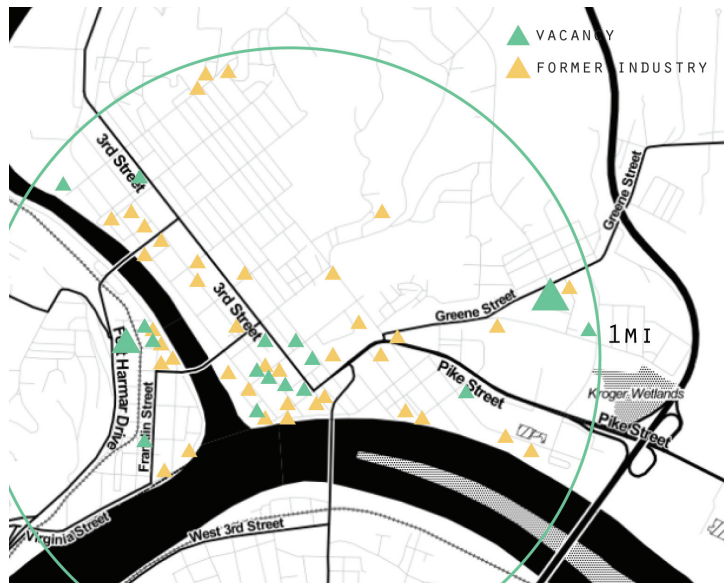


Figure 14 - Industrial vacancy in Marietta, Ohio.

Pittsburgh and Cincinnati in its economic prosperity and enterprising spirit. With rich natural resources, including mineral deposits of natural gas, coal, and oil, and its location along the Ohio River linked to larger industrial ports throughout the region, the town flourished for over a hundred years. While operating as a successful subregional hub between the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Marietta was eventually surpassed by other cities in size and status, leaving it somewhat isolated on the periphery of economic development.

## A HISTORY OF MAKING

Local historians have traced the strong tradition of making in Marietta that has existed over its two hundred and twenty-five year history, demonstrated mainly in small to medium scale light industrial enterprises. A range of manufactured goods, from construction

materials like brick and paint, to household items like furniture, pianos and bicycles, were at one time made within a roughly one-mile radius of the downtown, if not right within the center.<sup>26</sup> These enterprises thrived with easy access to both the shipping docks along Marietta's two rivers and the numerous railroad connections running from the town to markets elsewhere. These craft-based industries were not confined to one particular part of town, but instead punctuated the city grid, interspersed in the commercial and residential fabric. The seamless integration of making into the daily life and urban fabric of Marietta is evident in the adjacencies between small industrial enterprises and residential and commercial sectors. Although the town has distinct neighborhoods and districts within its area,

<sup>26</sup> Century Review of Marietta, Ohio. Marietta, OH: Marietta Board of Trade, 1900. Print.

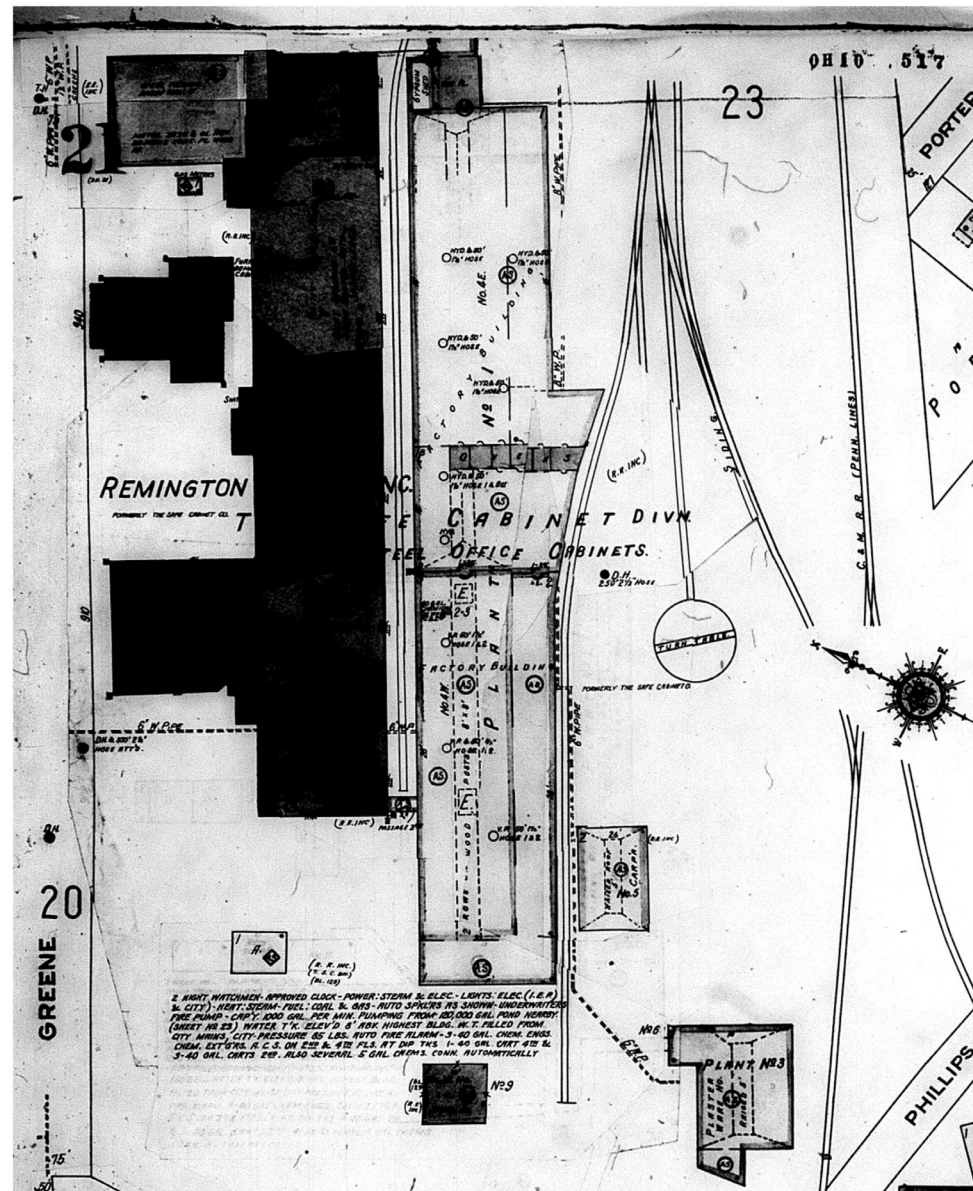


Figure 15 - 1941 Sanborn map of Safe Cabinet Company property

small industries and makers were found scattered throughout, directly next door to homes, offices and retail.

The tightly woven fabric of residential, commercial, and industrial uses carried the town through decades of economic success, lasting well into the twentieth century. No single industry prevailed entirely over the city; instead, the industrial economy represented a diverse set of enterprises. This variety likely stemmed from the previously mentioned range of natural resources and raw materials, varied transport methods available, and the distance between the town and its immediate communities and large cities like Cincinnati and Pittsburgh. Industries such as foundries, planing and saw mills, and brick makers existed to support the community's daily needs as well as those of more specialty industries. Several wagon and carriage makers and boatbuilders contributed to building the infrastructure and transportation options in the area, allowing businesses to reach beyond the region and expand to markets all over the East coast and Midwest. This provided a market for brewers, glass makers, and even piano and organ manufacturers, all based within the fabric of the small city. One of the largest, most successful and most far-reaching of these more specialized manufacturing industries was the Marietta Chair Company, a furniture manufacturer located immediately next to the local college, whose business expanded to include manufacturing facilities in Cincinnati and St. Louis. In such close proximity within the heart of the town, industry and education coexisted to support the needs and nurturing of a community

grounded in both making and learning.

## **HISTORICAL INNOVATION & PRODUCTION: SAFE CABINET CO.**

Located along a busy intersection that connects different parts of town, the commanding Safe Cabinet Company complex has laid vacant since the late 1960s, no longer a participant in the everyday life of Marietta. Built in the mid-1920s, the facility housed the largest manufacturing operation of fireproof safe in the world, housing both research and production processes on a single site. When the building was completed, the Safe Cabinet Company was the single largest employer in Marietta, alongside other mid-sized industries found within the city limits. The history of the Safe Cabinet Company on this particular site began with a single-story, narrow, linear wooden

structure that still stands in a dilapidated state at the back of the property. With increased success, the company decided to consolidate its operations through the construction of a new million-dollar facility adjoining the existing one on Greene Street. This site provided the acreage needed by the company in a growing area of town while also offering opportunities to link to transportation infrastructure. The development included a dedicated rail spur that connected the property directly to downtown Marietta's main depot and to shipping docks beyond on the Ohio River, connecting the business to cities across the country.

The facility was part of a northeastern expansion of the town, spreading to the boundaries of the valley, in response to significant industrial growth at the time of its construction. As industry



Figure 16 - Partial figure ground of Marietta, locating the Safe Cabinet Co.



Figure 17 - Aerial of the Safe Cabinet Co. in its context

in the area continued to grow, Marietta chose to create a new neighborhood called Norwood within the city limits, rather than banishing industry to its outer zones, and so kept the making process linked to the daily workings of the town. The small-scale industry in the area, including the Safe Cabinet Company, was connected to a residential area to the north by Greene Street, the main route through the area linking it to downtown. As other small-scale manufacturing businesses also located along Greene Street, workers moved into homes directly across the street, with some minor commercial businesses joining the mix. This decision to keep industry within the city is a demonstration of the importance placed on the processes of making being intertwined with daily life at the turn of the twentieth century. The Safe Cabinet Company operation was later sold to outside companies who first relocated the business in an industrial campus outside the city limits, and later moved all operations out of state and overseas.<sup>27</sup>

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27 Shawver, Kardex Cuts Touch Local Workers.

## THE COMPLEX

The 1920s complex on Greene Street consisted mainly of an administration and laboratory building, as well as a production building, each exhibiting distinctive characteristics true to its program typology. The classical temple office building was a unique structure both in its program and its architectural expression. It contained not only the administrative offices required of an enterprise of that scale, but also research laboratories and a demonstration theater. The Safe Cabinet Company was at the forefront in developing technology to produce more secure document safes for government and business use, and home use. Built in the early 1920s, the classical edifice, with its stone-faced ionic columns, represented the institutional public face of the business, suggestive of the scientific innovations



*Figure 18 - Administration & laboratory building, July 2014.*



RESEARCH LABORATORY  
of  
THE SAFE-CABINET COMPANY

Equipped with every facility for the scientific testing of protection  
devices.

The Only Institution Of Its Kind In The World

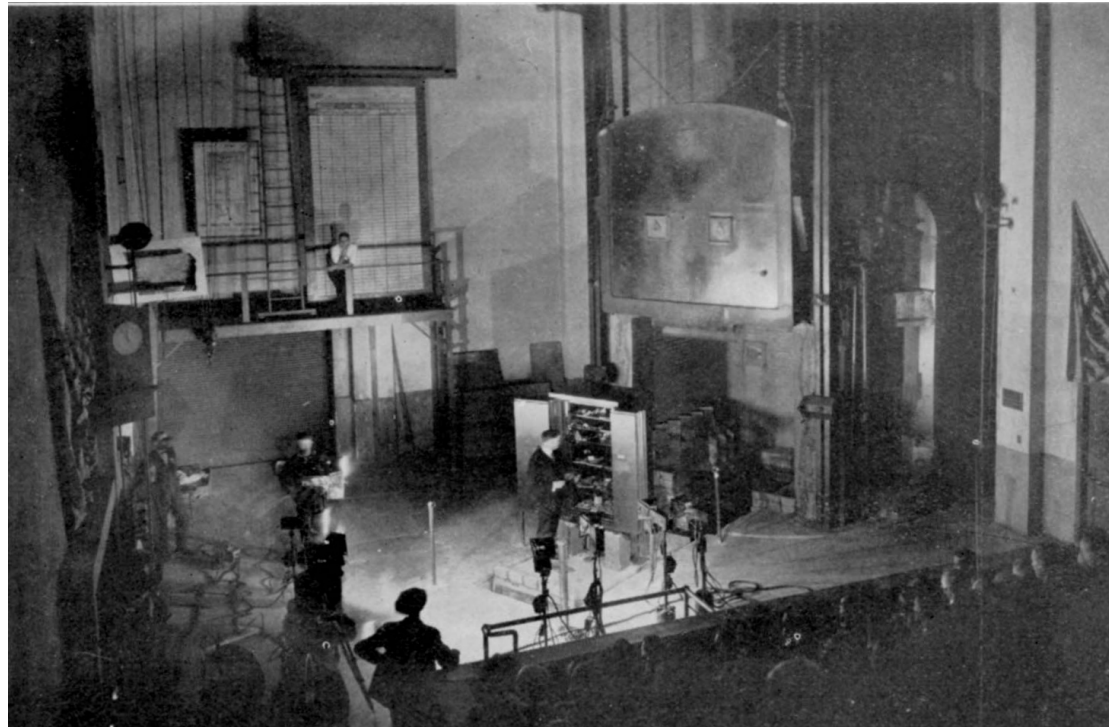
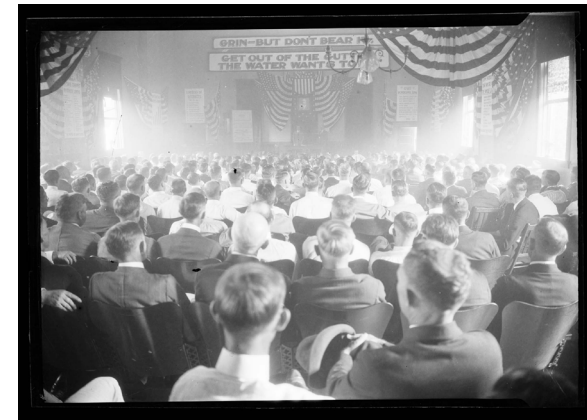


*Figures 19 & 20 - Juxtaposition of architectural language seen in the Safe Cabinet Co. complex.*

occurring in the laboratories inside.

These advances in safe technology and innovation were then displayed in public demonstrations in the facility's theater that involved setting safes on fire in front of captivated audiences. Early twentieth century photographs, company newsletters and promotional materials illustrating these demonstrations and other public events in the theater make evident the prominent role of the facility to serve as the company headquarters, giving it a unique public face in the city.

In 1925, a four-story factory was constructed immediately to the south of the administration building, enclosing 224,000 square feet of production floor space for increased manufacturing capacity compared to their previous locations around the city.<sup>28</sup> In contrast to the stoic administration



*Figures 21-23 - Demonstrations and laboratories in administration building.*

<sup>28</sup> Finance Outline. Marietta, OH: Safe Cabinet Co, April, 1925. Print.

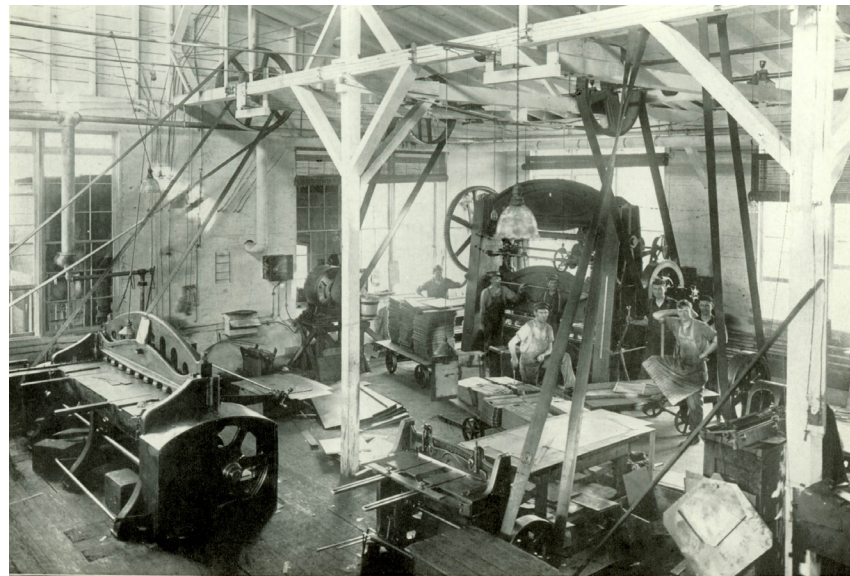


*Figure 24 - Brick façade applied to concrete grid*

building, the factory was a more typical brick-faced concrete frame structure with generous semi-operable windows to bring light and fresh air into the workspace. The building was architecturally expressive of its utilitarian purpose in its regular grid structure and large scale in relation to the existing residential and commercial fabric of the Norwood neighborhood. The brick façade reflected the material language of Marietta, that had a long history of brick-making industries, expressed through a prevalence of the material in the industrial and commercial fabric. Despite the trend toward linear, single-story factories in the mid 1920s,<sup>29</sup> the Safe Cabinet Co. opted to maximize the area of its centrally-located site and build four stories high, employing

<sup>29</sup> Lewis, Robert. "Redesigning the Workplace: The North American Factory in the Interwar Period." *Technology & Culture* 42.4 (2001): 665-84. Academic Search Complete. Web. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25147799>>.

elevators to transport wares and materials between floors. Behind this expansive façade, a regular grid of mushroom-topped concrete columns established a flexible, open framework in which any number of assembly configurations was possible.



*Figures 25 & 26 - Interior of previous production building.*



Figure 27 - Interior of production building during construction

## **THE SAFE CABINET CO. COMPLEX TODAY**

Ninety years after its construction and forty years after production ceased in this particular facility, the Safe Cabinet Co. facility sits vacant, slipping into ruin despite its once prosperous and bustling past. The older wooden building at the back of the property sits in an unsafe state of dilapidation, while the once grand administration building shows obvious evidence of neglect in its broken windows and invasive plant life. The site holds a prime location along busy Greene Street, a major thoroughfare connected to downtown and the retail corridor and was once an asset to the business, but now serves only to remind passersby and commuters of its degraded present, exuding a sense of despondency. This route connects the site within the city, but also still links the site to the interstate, state

routes, the river transport system, and beyond to industrial rail services a few miles down the highway. The property sits in an area of predominately detached single-family homes and small businesses related especially to the building industry. An elementary school is a few streets over, but more importantly, Marietta College, Washington State Community College and Marietta High School are all within a five minute drive from the Safe Cabinet Company complex.

As it falls into disrepair, empty and unused, the complex embodies the larger condition of the town of Marietta, standing as a patchwork of voids and fragments left by the retreat of industrial life. By revealing the layers of its past life, the assets of the Safe Cabinet Company facility can be more fully understood as sturdy foundations for new uses. The complex relationship between the administrative/ laboratory facilities and the production building suggests both programmatic and spatial relationships that need to be explored. The open floorplan of the production facility that once allowed it to adapt to new arrangements of processes for safe production now holds the potential to accommodate programs requiring flexibility, to allow new users to take ownership of the building. The space is a flexible, empty shell that allows for the reconfiguration of space for a new purpose through the manipulation of the grid. By acknowledging its original primary purpose to house working processes and the patina of use and abuse in its built remains, the reinvention of the space can extend this cycle of making in new directions.<sup>30</sup>

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30 Doorley, Scott, and Scott Witthoft. *Makespace: How to Set the Stage for Creative Collaboration*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2012. Print.



Figure 28 - Current conditions, July 2014.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## DESIGN RESPONSE

### DESIGN OBJECTIVES

The site of this thesis involves two distinct scales – the town of Marietta as a postindustrial site within its unique geographical context, and the specific site of the former Safe Cabinet Co. in its context within the city fabric. This design investigation will seek to reintegrate this abandoned industrial remnant into the fabric of the city, rebuilding a stronger, useful relationship between the structure and the life of Marietta. The means for achieving this goal will involve a close exploration of the fabric of the site in terms of its formal and functional relationships within its urban context. The program for a new institute

of making will be informed by the history of past craft industries. This project will provide a place of education, innovation and connection for the community of Marietta.

Taking into account the past life of the Safe Cabinet Company buildings, this design will seek to build upon what currently exists on the site in order to reconnect to present-day Marietta. The design intervention seeks to revive the building from its abandoned state and give it new life as an active participant in the current life of the community. While returning the existing structure to a safe condition, the process does not involve banishing all evidence of use from its surfaces. These traces of the past speak of the site's dynamic history and identify it as utilitarian terrain, open to creative activity.<sup>31</sup> The non-precious and open nature of the complex provide a loose framework to guide, but not control, design possible intervention strategies.

With the intention of demystifying the desolate air of its vacant postindustrial condition, an active, productive program must be implemented to restore its connection to residents. The program of a museum, articulating that memorializes

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31 Doorley & Witthoft, *Makespace: How to Set the Stage for Creative Collaboration*, 203.



Figure 29 - Existing site conditions

the past in the area has been rejected because this type of program does not engage with the community on a daily basis. While commemorating collective memory, such a use might actually create a distance since it serves primarily outside visitors. In order for the complex to be revived, its new life will be about actively participating, producing and making. This new program will engage with two kinds of users: daily, active users who work and learn in the facility, forging the connection to the city street, and occasional users in the form of community members, school groups, and tourists who will visit and experience the institute's public face of innovation.

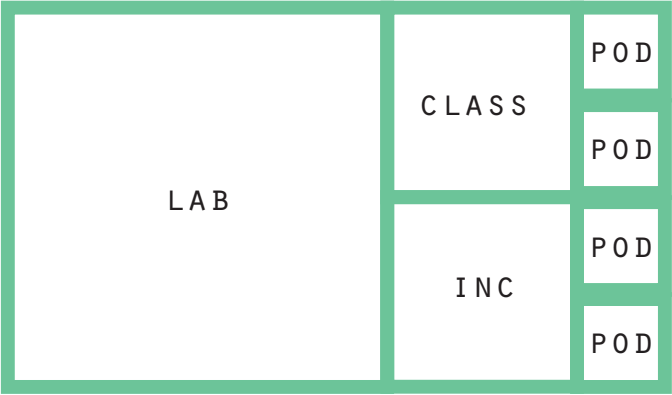
### **DELIMITS & LIMITS**

The issues related to this site are hardly restricted to those of the design of abandoned buildings within the context of a small town. Deindustrialization and

the resulting fallout is a complex matter involving complex political and economic issues, and for the purposes of this project, they will not be taken into consideration. The exploration of this project will also be limited by outside forces, including the accessibility to building information. The site was studied during two visits, however, the buildings are private property and required permission to enter a potentially hazardous environment, so only one visit included an interior tour. Building drawings were unavailable, so information for the design project was compiled and estimated through the use of historic maps and imagery, photographs, and aerial images.

### **PROGRAM**

After reading the former Safe Cabinet Company buildings within the context of their history and that of the city of Marietta, the opportunity for growth and connectivity through innovative technologies education stands out as a program to facilitate the regeneration of both the site and the city. This project houses a modern-day vocational school, bringing together vocational skill programs already taught in the area together with programs in digital fabrication and computer programming technologies that do not yet exist in the area but provides invaluable skills to the labor force of local industries and businesses. This institute does not only provide standard training in these technologies, but partners with local industry and colleges to develop incubators, a program requiring large, flexible spaces for experimentation and testing. The flexible and unpolished nature of the production facility coupled with the strong public presence found in the administrative building,



## LABS

- + metal
- + wood
- + building technologies
- + robotics
- + digital fabrication
- + sports medicine
- + cosmetology
- + grow/botany
- + cooking

## SUPPORT

- + material resource/library
- + supply shop
- + classrooms
- + career resource center
- + administrative offices

## PUBLIC

- + makerspace incubators
- + food/drink incubators
- + incubator retail
- + exhibition hall
- + auditorium

Figure 30 - Program breakdown

as well as their prime location, offer a mutually beneficial position for such a program and the abandoned industrial structures to flourish and contribute to the greater area.

The program breaks down into a series of large lab spaces, providing the necessary equipment and space to learn and practice various trades. There are then support spaces to these larger educational components for various student services and more traditional classrooms. Additionally, there are small “pods” that plug in throughout the building to provide flexible space for independent student projects and experimentation. Students can own and adapt these compact spaces to suit the needs of their research. The hands-on nature of this type of school benefits from the durable, flexible nature of the existing building, while also offering the opportunity

to engage the public through spaces such as incubators for testing business ideas, making and manufacturing, and mentoring students, and exhibition, auditorium and event space found in the pavilion to be shared by the school and the greater community.

## **TAXONOMY OF TRANSFORMATION**

Various methods of adaptive reuse were investigated and broke down into a set of strategies for transformation: insert, wrap, juxtaposition, parasite, and weave. Two of the most dominate visual elements from the street are the neoclassical administration building and the strong vertical egress tower elements. Rather than entirely rehabilitate the neoclassical building’s dilapidated interior, a steel box holding an auditorium is inserted behind the existing institutional facade. The weight of the box hovers over the plaza, allowing a glazed, open space below for a public gallery and exhibition hall. This move turns the building into an event pavilion, welcoming visitors into the plaza and announcing the institute to the street. The dominate verticals are re-wrapped by the same steel material steel to carry the language of the intervention into the school and serve as beacons to the institute, with glass sides that illuminate the length of the facade with a diffused glow and reveal glimpses of activity inside.

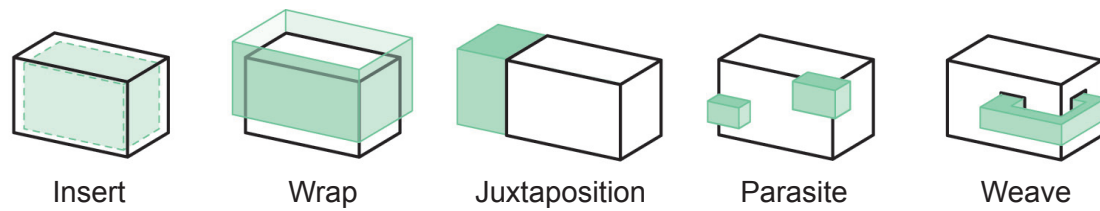
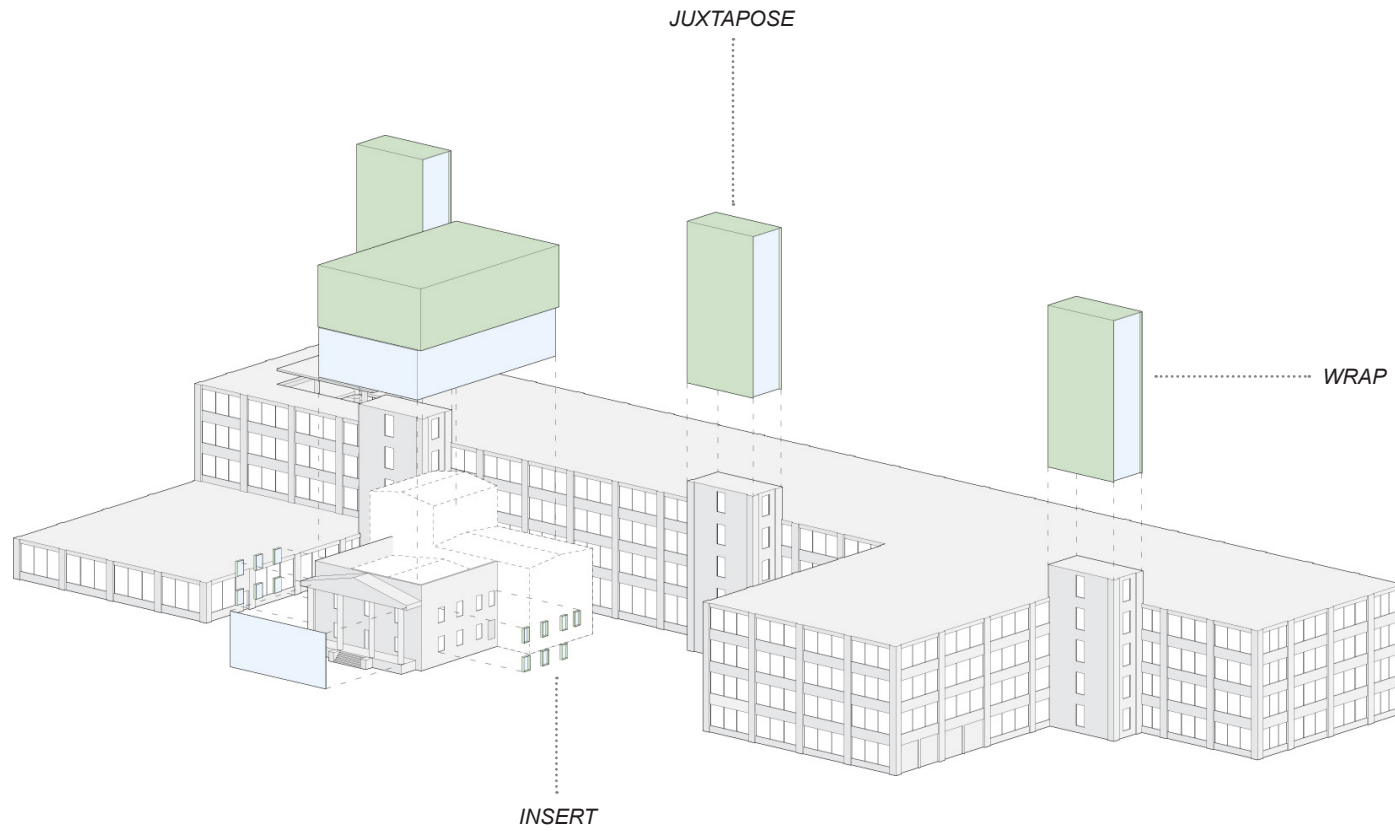


Figure 31 - Design intervention strategies

## **PUBLIC INTERFACE**

The most public program is located on the ground floor, attracting visitors into the plaza and funneling them towards the various entries into retail space, selling goods from maker incubators and supplies for student projects, the restaurant incubator food court, and the institute itself. An automotive repair lab is also located on this level with vehicle access at the rear of the site and connection to the rest of the public realm through the ground level of the institute. The public amenities, such as the spillover restaurant incubator dining, activate the plaza and build on the relationship between the building and the street.



*Figure 32 - Pedestrian approach from west along Greene Street.*

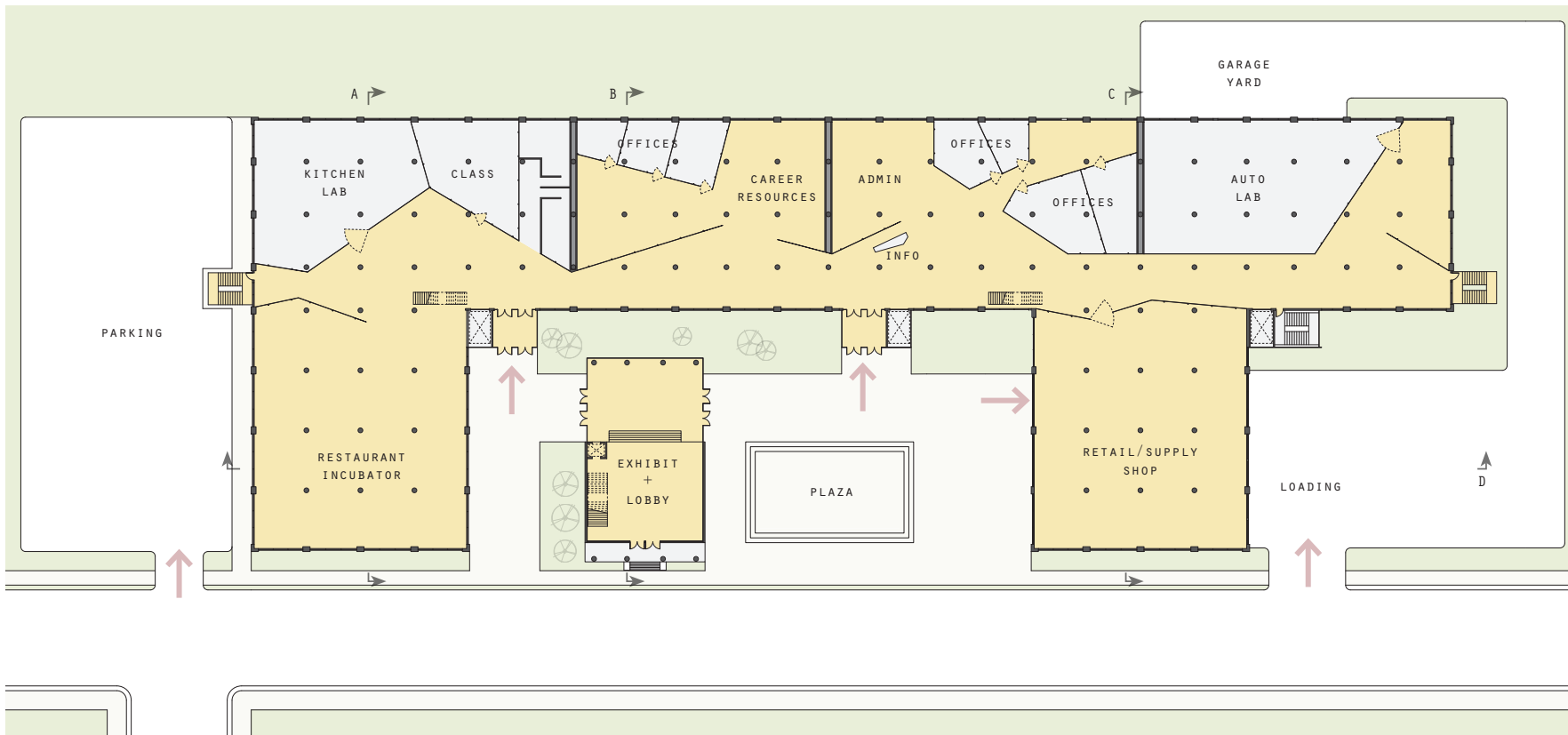


Figure 33 - Ground level plan with public entrance plaza.



*Figure 34 - Pavilion in the plaza*



Figure 35 - Activating the plaza.

## SCALE AND THE STREET EDGE

Although massive, the existing production building does not entirely dominate the street edge with its extreme scale, consisting of four floors of roughly 48,000 square feet each. This is accomplished in the way the majority of the brick-faced mass is set back from the property line, reaching out at different scales to present itself. The restaurant incubator is located in the low, one-story wing, maintaining a comfortable scale in the midst of mainly single-family residences. Its location closest to the busy intersection of Greene and Colegate Streets also allows a view from this point to the rest of the facility, in contrast to the full 4-story height of the main institution on the western side of the site.

The variety in scales and relationships in the north-south sections demonstrate the layering of a variety of spaces to meet differing needs and



*Figure 36 - Changing spatial and scale relationships throughout institute.*



*Figure 37 - A variety of scales and spatial relationships exist across the length of the plaza.*

relationships within the institute. The contrast in spatial qualities of the inserted intervention in the former administrative building and the rigor of the existing floorplates of the concrete-frame production building are apparent in section, with the event and auditorium space intended for the public enjoying large, uninhibited interiors, while the existing building connects floors by punching through the repetitive pattern of its architecture with a ribbon of circulation at either end of the institute.

The second through fourth floor plans of the institute follow a similar rhythm, with circulation occupying the northern bay to relate most closely to the public space towards the street. New stairways on either end of the building thread through the floorplates, with student project pods surrounding these circulation areas to create a commons for gathering on each

level and bring a human scale to the large volume. The pods animate the space with student activity as they evolve with their changing projects and constant creative bustle.

Rather than vertically circulating through the egress stair towers and simply popping out on a new floor, these staircases of steel plate wrap the cut in the floor and fold down through the opening to serve as a ribbon, visually and spatially linking multiple floors at once. The steel and glass ribbon of partition walls also weave through the column grid, opening and narrowing to create spaces of unique identity. This arrangement creates distinct identities for each floor as the ribbon meanders through the floorplate, intervening in different areas of an otherwise monotonous field of columns.

Where possible, labs for making have been given double-height spaces to allow more room for equipment and project flexibility, such as the two-story cut in the building technologies lab to provide vertical space for students to actually construct indoors. Where this occurs along the circulation corridor, it also provides an opportunity for onlookers to view into these workshops from above and understand the work going on within. This kind of adaptation is possible as a result of the building's original heavy-duty utilitarian purpose.

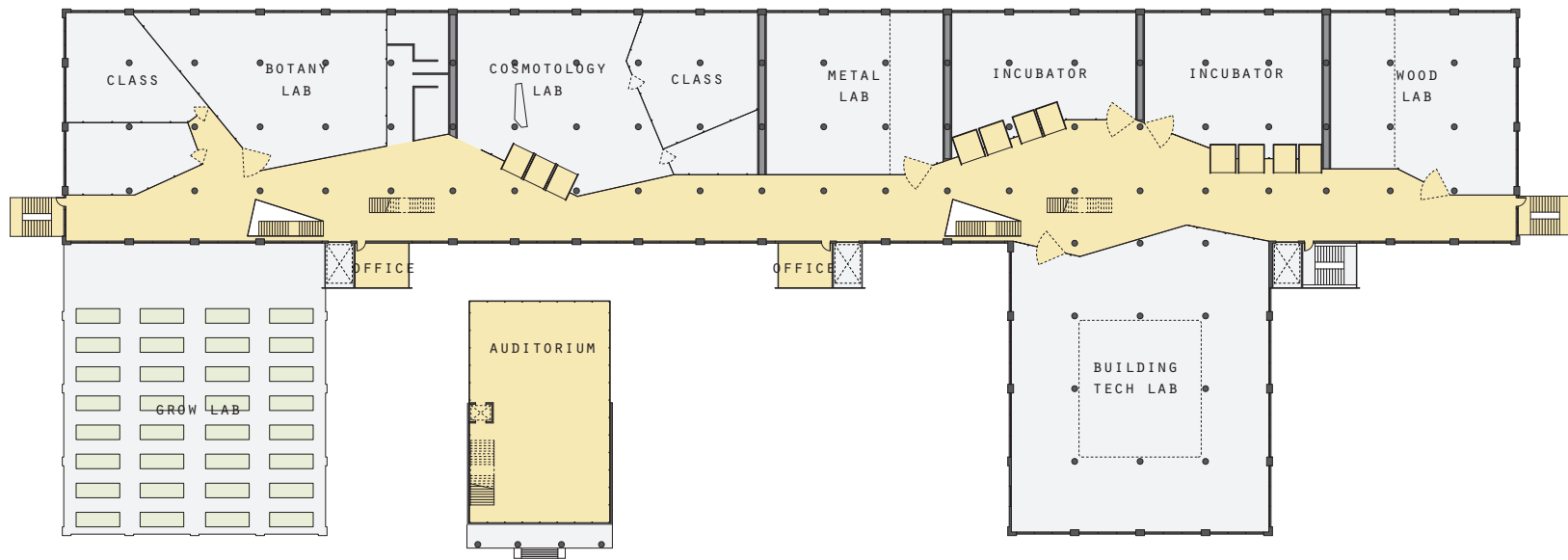


Figure 38 - Level 2 showing auditorium, incubators, and major labs (building technologies, wood, metal, cosmotology and botany).

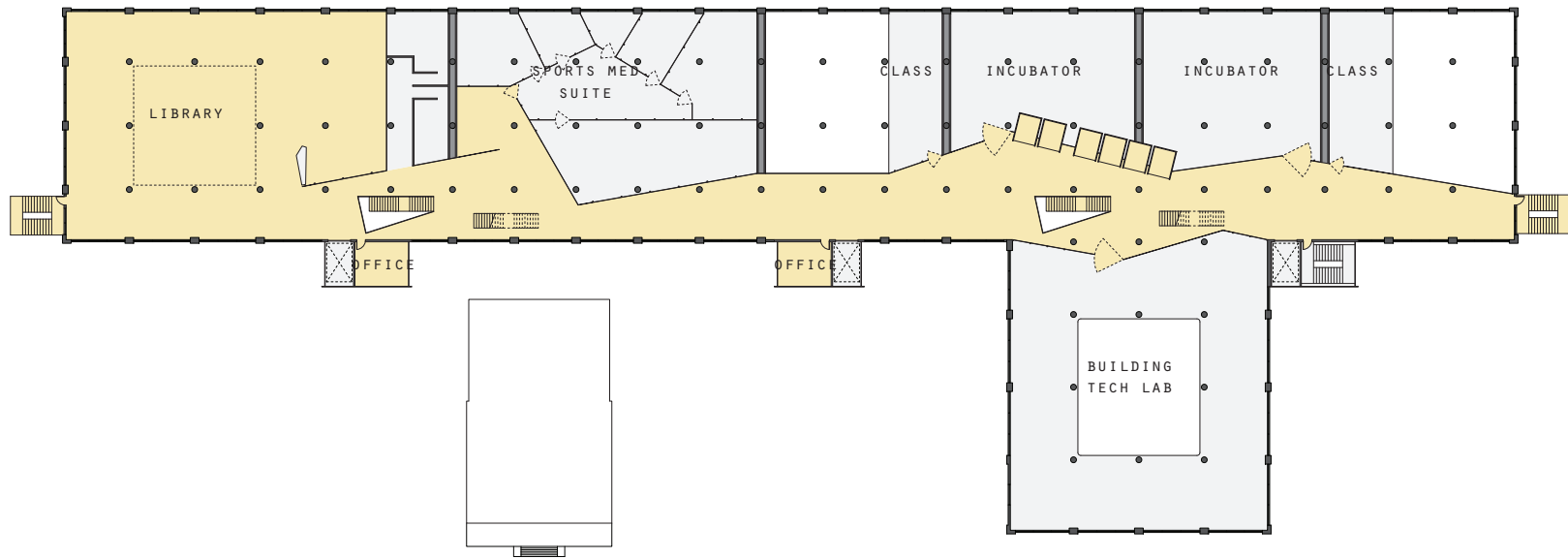


Figure 39 - Level 3 includes double-height lab space, a public sports medicine suite, more incubators and a student library.

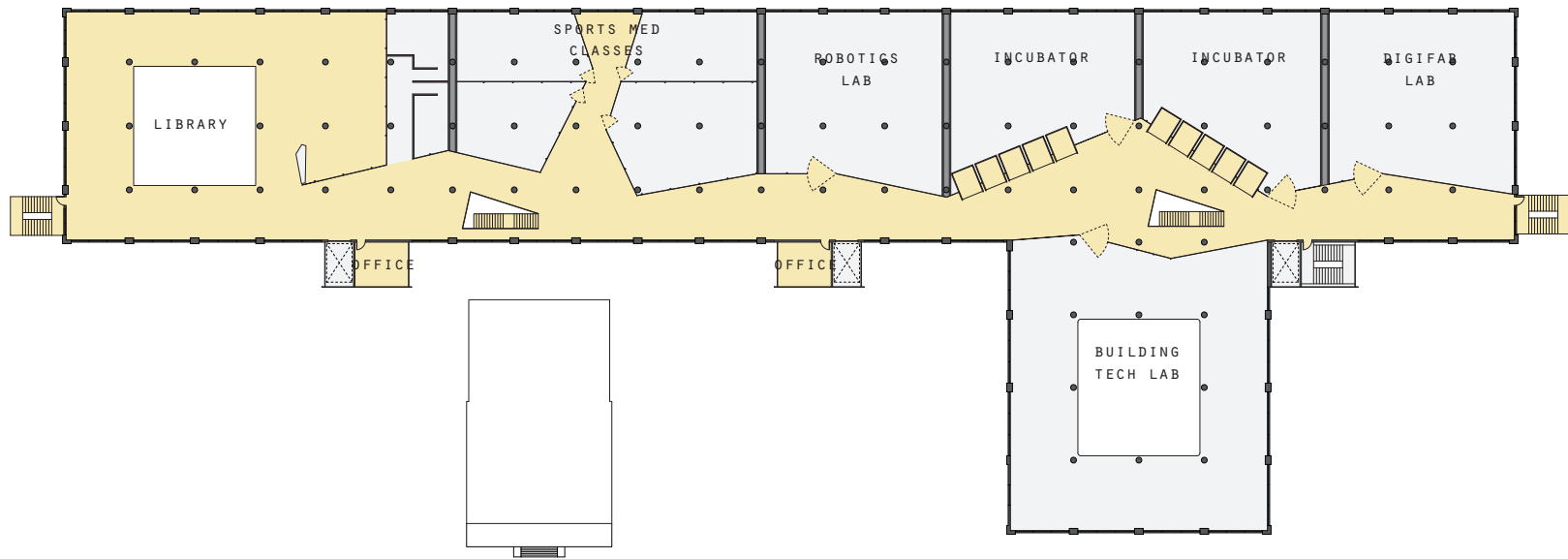


Figure 40 - Level 4 houses digitally-oriented labs like robotics and digital fabrication.



*Figure 41 - A ribbon of stairs thread multiple levels together visually and spatially.*



*Figure 42 - Student project pods are centralized around these ribbons to create active common spaces.*



*Figure 43 - The utilitarian architecture allows for unlimited creative bounds for experimentation.*



*Figure 44- View of auditorium & exhibit space.*



*Figure 54 - Overview of project.*

## CONCLUSION

Marietta, and small towns and cities like it across the region, now stand at a defining point in their histories as they navigate the ways in which they might grow and evolve to keep pace as changing economies and technologies push forward. These communities must now determine their own emerging identities, which can be found through examining their histories and existing assets. By recognizing the existing relationship between industry, education and the greater public in Marietta, the reuse of the Safe Cabinet Company facility as a vocational institute addresses both the historic value of the building and town as well as explores how this can be applied to further the healthy development of the area. Featuring the potential of the area's youth to expand their skillset and attract industry on a site notable for its scale, mark on local

history, and prominent location, gives the community a focal point to be proud of while reclaiming the urban fabric through the reuse of abandoned structures.

Both the program and the building itself also possess a quality of flexibility to adapt over time. In the future, the incubators may need to expand as new industry and business is attracted to the area's rediscovered assets, or find ways to reach out beyond Marietta to build relationships outside of the area. The programs offered within the school may need to be modified or expanded to meet changing industries' needs, especially at the rapid pace technological advances has set. The utilitarian origins of the Safe Cabinet Company's architecture provide the ideal armature for supporting evolving program, and this intervention in particular contributes to this cause in that it, too, shares the ability

to some degree to be changed around to allow for the growth or reduction of labs and classrooms over time.

The proposed vocational institute stands as a kind of beacon to the community and industry, broadcasting the strengths of the region as it moves into the world of modern industry and inspiring the community to seek out its own vitality and value from within.



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