

Home - Blogs - Staff Blogs

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The Search for a "Holy Grail" Photo at a FotoFocus Show

0 Comments



Tags: [FotoFocus](#), [King Records](#), [Syd Nathan](#), [George Rosenthal](#)



Photo: George Rosenthal

Brian Powers, the Cincinnati librarian who has done exhaustive work researching King Records history, thought he had found a "Holy Grail" photo — of the West End record store that Syd Nathan owned before starting King.

He knew it had been on Central Avenue, but didn't know what it looked like.

It was in the Hebrew Union College/Skirball Museum FotoFocus-connected exhibit *Documenting Cincinnati's Neighborhoods*, which features George Rosenthal's photographs, taken in the late 1950s, of the West End before I-75 construction would dramatically alter it.

Rosenthal's photographs, owned by Cincinnati Museum Center, hadn't been shown at least in 50 years, if ever.

Visiting on the exhibit's opening day, Oct. 22, Powers saw one Rosenthal photo of a Central Avenue record store at 1567 Central Ave. Just a small storefront with a homey screen-door, it had what looked like neon signs that announced "Records All Speeds" and then listed the choices: Spirituals, Classics, Pops, Rhythm-Blues, Bop, Hillbilly & Western.

You can also partially see some letters and the initials "CO" at the top of the signs. Some additional written information was on a window, and another sign offered television sets for \$29. Nathan wouldn't have still owned such a store in this time period — he started King in 1943 — but might it have carried on the same location, more or less unchanged, with someone else in charge?

Powers told Henry Rosenthal, the late George's son, about his hunch.

And in his opening remarks, Henry mentioned it. Henry was particularly proud because he owns the desk that James Brown kept at King Records' headquarters in Evanston. "It's my prize possession," he said.

Among the Rosenthal family members at the opening, besides Henry, were Jean Rosenthal Bloch, George's wife; daughter Julie Baker; George S. Rosenthal and Roger Baker, George's grandsons; great-grandson Clay Baker, and cousin Ed Rosenthal. With several hundred in attendance, it was an important moment in recognizing Rosenthal's work.

Alas, when Powers (who didn't attend the reception) later started researching, he saw the record store in this photo wasn't where Nathan's was located.

"Syd's shop was at 1351 Central Ave.," he said via E-mail. "The shop in the photo is at 1567 Central. It was called Mo-F-A Co. It's listed as a TV repair shop. It was owned by a guy named Ted Savage, who seemed to have lived there with his wife.

"It looks like Syd handed over his store to Ike Klayman around 1945 to 1946. I don't see 1351 Central listed after 1949. It may have been torn down by then. It's where Taft football field is now."

Powers added that he has seen a photo of a record store owned by Klayman, but believes it is at a different location

So the search for a photo of Nathan's record store goes on, but meanwhile this very evocative one is now — finally — available to be seen.

The exhibit, which looks at what life in Cincinnati was like in the West End and Downtown before much was torn down for controversial "urban renewal" from the 1960s to 1980s, both in terms of their architecture and the conditions of the poor, also features powerful photos by Daniel Ransohoff and Ben Rosen.

It is up through Dec. 21 at the Skirball and Jacob Rader Marcus Center on the HUC campus, 3010 Clifton Ave. Go [here](#) for details.