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The Cleveland Heights Historical Society

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2721 Colchester Road
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View from The Overlook



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Sears Catalog Homes The Cleveland Heights Connection

by Chris Roy

Sears Roebuck and Company built many a marketing campaign around its ability to supply “everything for the home.” However, between 1908 and 1940, Sears also supplied the home itself. Through its mail-order catalog, Sears offered more than 400 different house styles: from the elaborate “Ivanhoe,” with French doors and art glass windows, to the spartan “Goldenrod”: three rooms and no bath.

According to Sears-house authority Rosemary Thornton, Sears kit homes contained about 30,000 pieces, including 750 pounds of nails, 27 gallons of paint and a 75-page instruction book with the homeowner’s name embossed in gold on the cover. Masonry (block, brick, cement) and plaster were not included as part of the package deal, but the bill of materials list advised that 1,300 cement blocks would be needed for



The Ardara.

the basement walls and foundation. The average carpenter would charge \$450 to assemble a Sears house. Painter’s fees averaged about \$35. Other skilled labor generally priced out at about \$1 an hour. Total home prices ranged from less than \$600 to about \$6,000.

In some cases, Sears houses were more modern than the communities in which they were built. Electricity and municipi-

pal water systems were not available in every locale where Sears homes were sold. To meet this need, Sears advertised houses without bathrooms well into the 1920s. And for \$23, you could always purchase an outhouse. This also explains, in part, why Sears sold heating, electrical and plumbing equipment separately, and not as part of the kit.¹

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The Cleveland Heights Historical Society



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The Cleveland Heights Historical Society, founded in 1983, is a state-chartered, 501 (c)(3), not-for-profit organization.

Our Mission

The Cleveland Heights Historical Society is dedicated to preserving and promoting the diverse character and traditions of Cleveland Heights.

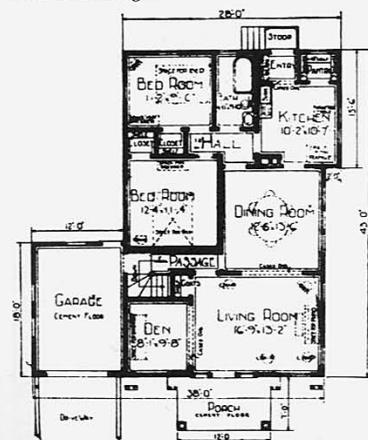
As a community-based historic organization, the Society encourages and facilitates greater knowledge, understanding and awareness of the heritage of Cleveland Heights.

THE ARDARA



The Ardara is a bungalow that will be recognized at once as possessing many unusually attractive features and conveniences. The artistic treatment of the porch and front windows leaves nothing to be desired. The garage attached to the building itself adds to the general pleasing effect.

Details and features: Six rooms and one bath. Attached garage (also available without garage); front porch with curved roof supported by columns; trellises in front; glazed front door with sidelights.



Years and catalog numbers: 1919 (13039); 1921 (3039); 1922 (13039); 1926 (P13039, P13039A); 1928 (C13039, C13039X); 1929 (P13039, P13039X)

Price: \$1,773 to \$2,483

Location: New York, N.Y.

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Taken from the 1926 Sears Catalog, this is a nearly-exact representation of the interior of 3402 Ormond Road. The only differences are that the Ormond Road house has a second floor, a fireplace and a stairway where the living closet is indicated.



The Columbine.



The Argyle.



The Crescent.

Sears Catalog Homes *continued from page 1*

The Cleveland Heights Connection

From 1908 to 1940, between 75,000 and 100,000 houses—all components manufactured by Sears—were made available through the company's catalog. Authorities believe that less than 5,000 of those have been conclusively identified as Sears homes, which means that at least 70,000 remain "undiscovered." Such is undoubtedly the case in Cleveland Heights, where only five homes have definitively been labeled "Sears":

- 2027 Marlindale Avenue (The Argyle)
- 3347 Ormond Road (The Crescent)
- 3402 Ormond Road (The Ardara)
- 3407 Clarendon Road (The Columbine)
- 3639 Randolph Road (The Wayne)

Mail order homes from other companies—Montgomery Ward, Aladdin, Gordon-Van Tine—also have been identified in Cleveland Heights. However, it is Sears that had, and continues to have, the enduring name recognition—the "cachet."

Resources for learning more about Sears Catalog Homes:

- Houses by Mail by Rosemary Thornton. Published by John Wiley & Sons
- The Houses That Sears Built by Rosemary Thornton. Published by Gentle Beam Publications
- Small Houses of the Twenties. Written and Published by Sears, Roebuck and Company and Dover Publications

¹ Source: The Christian Science Monitor (<http://www.csmonitor.com/2002/0612/p11s02-lihc.html>).

When Bad Ideas Happen to Good Suburbs

In our last issue, we launched a series discussing some of the most dramatic “improvement” projects that (thankfully) never happened in Cleveland Heights. The most famous of those was the proposed Clark, Lee and Heights Freeways of the late 1960s. In this issue, we discuss a lesser known and not quite so “bad” an idea: building a 14,000-seat stadium on the land where Cain Park now sits.

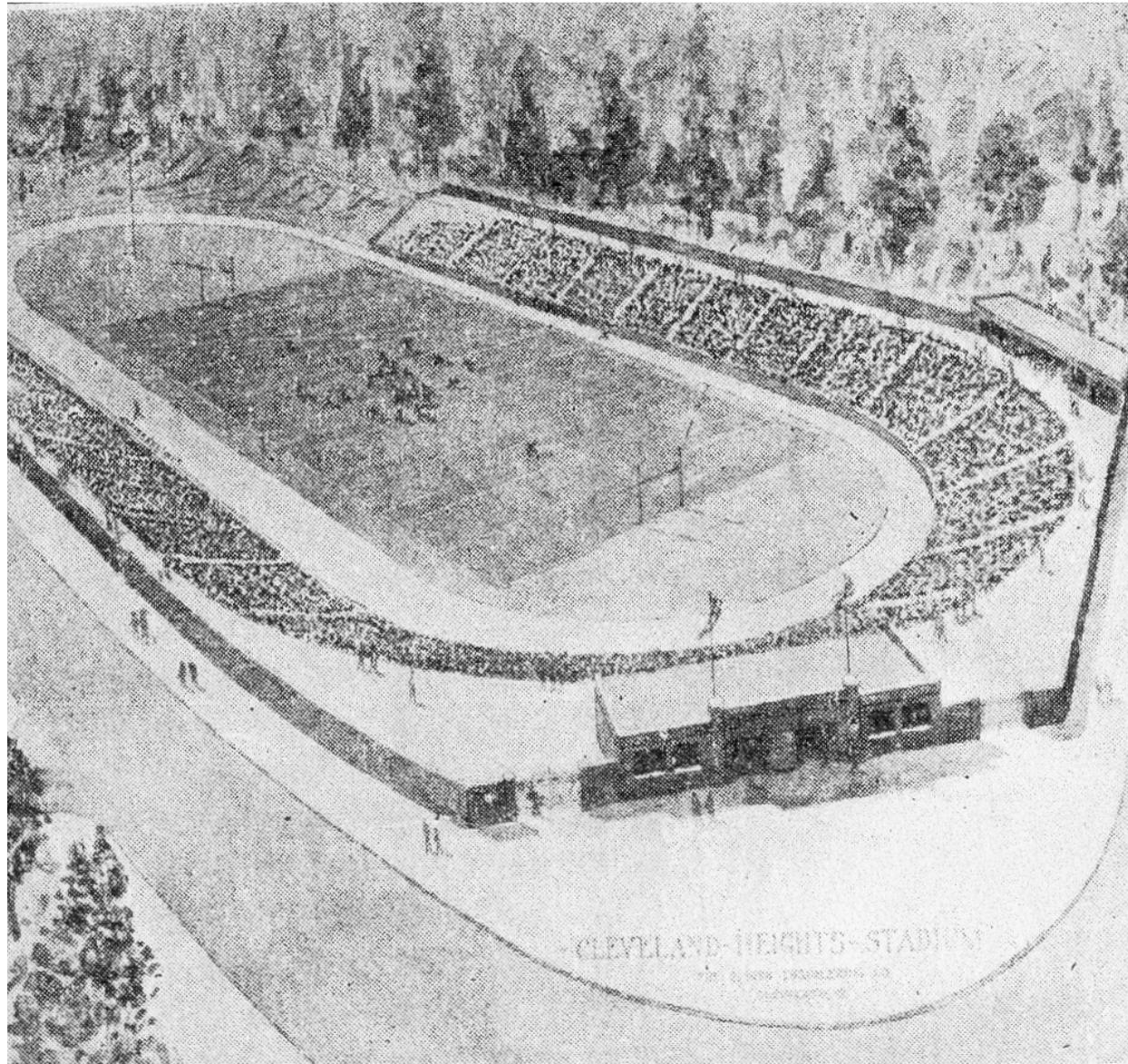
Stadium Square

Seating for 14,000
in the Heart of the Heights

by Ken Goldberg

Most Clevelanders who have been in the area a short time have heard of Public Square, Shaker Square and Playhouse Square. But “Stadium Square?” This was a term tossed about quite extensively in the Heights area in the 1927-28 period. It could come alive once again if city merchants and/or residents or city planners would let it, for it refers to a small section of Cleveland Heights with no other distinctive name.

The “Stadium Square” phrase referred specifically to the vicinity of the complex of two commercial/apartment blocks and two adjoining apartment houses at South Taylor Road and Superior Park Drive, named accordingly because of a planned stadium for a hillside site at South Taylor and Superior Roads. The stadium went the way of a great university planned for the Tremont neighborhood in the 19th century,



Artist's rendering of the Stadium, November 1927.

a Cleveland College for University Circle, and a jetport for Lake Erie—they never happened.

Planned to be built on little-developed parkland—110 acres of city-owned ravine, including Cumberland Park and what was later to be named Cain Park—the stadium was to be amid a 1920s neighborhood, with older homes on Taylor, Superior and the streets between Blanche Avenue and Euclid Heights Boulevard. Comfortable, picturesque homes were built on Blanche and Superior Park from 1923, on land previously owned by the Minors and several other families.

Site Was a Natural

The city bought land for a park in 1916 for \$100,000. But in the mid '20s—an era of an expanding sports-enthusiastic population, and also a period when Cleveland's main sport events were held at League Park in Hough—a segment of the Heights population desired their own stadium. This was to be a sizable structure for municipal events—such as high school athletics, musical events, pageants or civic gatherings such as for 4th of July fireworks—on a natural amphitheatre site. The structure was first proposed by the Heights Kiwanis Club in 1927 and endorsed by the newly organized Exchange Club as well as the Heights Press in 1928, after a bond to finance the stadium won the majority of votes the previous November but failed to receive the necessary 55 percent of the total vote (losing by 67 votes).

As the media stated that “engineers who have inspected it (the site) say that it is one of the finest natural locations for a stadium they have ever seen” and that the stadium would be “capable of seating upwards of 12,000 people”

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[the figure is stated elsewhere as 14,000] and would thereby “afford the largest out-of-doors gathering space on the Heights or in the entire eastern section of Greater Cleveland,” a second bond issue for \$125,000 was placed on the ballot in November 1928.

In fact, a local newspaper article stated in September of that year that “while the financial condition of the city [Cleveland Heights] is now so good that these bonds could be issued without going to the voters with the question, the members of council feel that the people should be given an opportunity to express their opinion in the matter.” It was anticipated that revenue from the completed stadium would cover all maintenance costs and “probably...wipe out in time the cost of construction.”

Town's New Center

The stadium could have been adjacent to the new high school, but construction would have been far more costly. An Oct. 12th editorial stated: “While residents of the older section of the Heights may think this location as somewhere far out, it will soon be the center of the population, as the fastest growing section of the Heights now lies beyond it.” Cleveland Heights had grown in ten years from a population of 15,000 to approximately 45,000, and in 1928 (according to some sources) had the lowest tax rate of any city in the country.

The November ballot also included a \$1 million bond issue for the expansion of school buildings. The City of Cleveland was urging a bond issue of \$2.5 million for a stadium on the lake-front—a stadium to seat 75,000 to 85,000.

Yet despite much glowing commentary in the news media that reflected great confidence in the stadium issue, it again lost out in November 1928, not even claiming a majority of the voters.

The school bond issues won easily and, soon after, its chief purposes were carried out—the

construction of Monticello Junior High and the addition of ten rooms to the still very new Oxford School. A Shaker Heights school bond issue, primarily to finance construction of a new high school, was even more successful.

Tudor Complex Built

But meanwhile a whole Tudor complex was envisioned and constructed at South Taylor and Superior Park Drive. Built by the Roseman family, major property owners in the vicinity

“While residents of the older section of the Heights may think this location as somewhere far out, it will soon be the center of the population, as the fastest growing section of the Heights now lies beyond it.”

for many years beyond, the complex closely resembled the style of commercial/apartment complexes on East 140th Street in Cleveland, in Shaker Heights, Lakewood and in Rocky River—all from the late '20s.

The Stadium Square real estate complex was planned in five sections. The fifth did not materialize as originally planned, but the two business/apartment blocks and apartment buildings facing each other on Superior Park were complete by September 1928, and all blended in with the late '20s English-style homes in the area. The only other large building on South Taylor was the public school, until the modified Tudor-style Cedar-Taylor Building was constructed in 1929.



Stadium Square Shoe Repair—the only literal evidence of the area's unique history—survived until the 1990s.

The Stadium Square complex was clearly intended to set a “high-class” tone (as an October 1928 editorial inferred) for the section and was an “upwards of \$2,000,000 investment.” The editorial also stated of this highly detailed and ambitious group of buildings: “...Mr. Roseman... at no time sacrificed quality. He has insisted upon quality in design as well as in materials.

His buildings are artistic as well as useful. They are of a design fitting them to be part of a high-class residential section. The...buildings are a striking demonstration of the fact that beauty can be combined with utility. Their amazing commercial success [all stores and the over-100 apartments rented immediately] proves that such insistence upon architectural merit pays in dollars and cents as well.”

Apartments and Stores

Apartment building names were Morley Hall, Essex Court, Barclay Court, Essex Hall, Superior Park and Monroe. The eight stores to open that month included, according to a Heights Press article: “a large and well-equipped drug store, a wholesale and retail fruit store, a hardware store, a creamery, a delicatessen, a dry goods and gents furnishings store, a chain grocery store, a shoe repair shop and a radio store.”

During the Depression, the Cain Park amphitheatre was constructed, with much federal funding, and the high school acquired its facilities for sports spectators. But nothing materialized in Cleveland Heights anywhere approaching the 1928 stadium ambitions in scale. Nor did other commercial or apartment structures appear on Taylor Road with any appreciable flair. Indeed, the clock tower of the 1980s Taylor Road Commons is the only newer distinctive commercial structure in the district and it is extremely modest in relation to some of the detailing of the 1920s complexes it faces.

Some Taylor Road merchants, amid a beautification campaign during the late 1970s, chose to label the district “Taylor Commons” rather than apply a name relating to a unique bit of history. At that time, the only vestige of the area's potential heritage was a small store known as “Stadium Shoe Repair” and, since the mid-1990s, that too has disappeared.