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Introducing Cleveland Heights' Latest "Historic Neighborhood"

By Diana Wellman

In 1920, what is now known as the Inglewood Historic District was a 41-acre wooded lot owned by Charles Lathrop Pack.¹ The property, situated off of Mayfield Road just east of Taylor Road, was surrounded by several large estates. The Robert Gowanlock estate lay just east. Elisabeth Severance Allen's Glen Allen (built in 1913) was located to the west, while Allen's sister Julia Severance Milliken owned Ben Brae (1915), located at the northeast corner of Taylor and Mayfield Roads. Just south of the Inglewood neighborhood (across Mayfield Road) stood John Long Severance's Longwood, which was completed in 1911.

John D. Rockefeller's property occupied some 800 acres, bordered nearby by Taylor Road on the east and Mayfield Road on the south, all the way to Superior Avenue on the west and Euclid Avenue on the north. Substantial remnants of these palatial properties include the Severance fountain at City Hall, the Severance stables near the Post Office, the stone wall in

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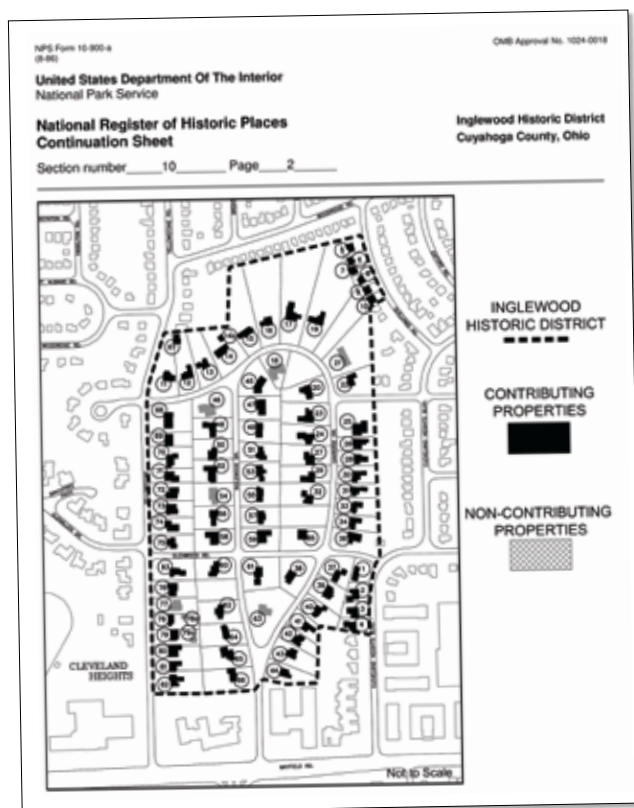
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Our Mission

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.



Inglewood's Ascension to the National Register of Historic Places

The National Register of Historic Places application process usually takes about one year. The nomination is reviewed by staff at the Ohio Historic Preservation Office to ensure that the property is eligible for listing. Once the draft nomination is finalized, the nomination is presented to the Ohio Historic Site Preservation Advisory Board, which meets three times a year. Once the OHSPAB committee confirms the nomination, the nomination is forwarded to the National Park Service, where it is approved and listed by the Keeper of the National Register of Historic Places. The Inglewood draft nomination, developed primarily by Diana Wellman and Diana Woodbridge, was submitted in August of 2008 and reviewed at the December OHSPAB meeting. Notification was received from the NPS in early April of 2009 that the District was listed. The City of Cleveland Heights approved three signs to mark the district. These were installed in August.

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front of the Blue Stone development, a small farmhouse (a Glen Allen outbuilding) on Yellowstone Road, and the pond in what is now Forest Hill Park.

The City of Cleveland Heights was developing from a small farming community into a residential suburb, as residents from Cleveland fled the crowded city.² A key "driver" of the Inglewood development was the streetcar—the C & E Mayfield Road inter-urban line that ran from Euclid Avenue east along Mayfield Road to

Gates Mills, thus creating easier access between suburban home and urban work. Oris and Mantis Van Sweringen had already parlayed streetcar access to create their Shaker Heights District along Fairmount Boulevard. Nathan Ambler's Ambler Heights District and Barton Deming's Euclid Golf Allotment also were successful due in part to accessibility by streetcar. However, other amenities also made these neighborhoods attractive, including public schools, access to private schools such as Hathaway Brown, University School and Hawken School, and

city amenities such as police and fire departments and Cumberland Park and pool. All these characteristics worked to make the Inglewood neighborhood a prime location that the Van Sweringen's Shaker Heights Improvement Company, was fortunate to secure.

The keystone of the Shaker Heights Improvement Company plan was to provide houses of different value levels on the

same tract of land, without undermining the value of the more expensive homes.³ Fundamental to this strategy was avoiding a gridiron scheme of straight streets and rectangular blocks in favor of a curvilinear style. There would be a series



1255 Oakridge Drive

of main thoroughfares and curved "inside" streets dividing the properties into different price sections. The "inside" streets would conform to the natural topography of the land (the resulting Inglewood neighborhood is a horseshoe shape).⁴ The final key was to prompt well-to-do community members to purchase larger houses at prices they couldn't refuse—thereby helping to market the rest of the properties.

Promotional material was also essential. In the Vans' Shaker Heights, for example, a

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brochure—"Peaceful Shaker Village"—noted that "On every family's horizon is a rainbow, and for many the pot of gold at the rainbow's end is Shaker Village." For the Inglewood neighborhood, the brothers described "A select neighborhood for Finer Homes, a natural Park of Great Beauty."⁵ The advertisement continues:

"Hemmed in by the splendid Severance, Prentiss and Gowanlock estates, its character is established, itself a beautiful park, shaded by lovely trees and commanding a view of Lake Erie for many miles, Inglewood has long been the residence site most envied in Cleveland. This Company was fortunate in securing this property and intends to develop it into a neighborhood exclusively for the finer homes of selected people of culture and refinement. This wide experience that the officers of this Company have had in



An Oakridge Drive backyard in the 1940s.



1400 Inglewood Drive

developing properties of this character, the extensive study they have made into the matter of restrictions, and the care with which they have enforced their restrictions, is a warrant of the future of Inglewood. They promise a continuance of the thoroughness and care which made for character in their Fairmount Boulevard development of Shaker Heights. This offering is timely as the wooded lots of other neighborhoods are practically all held under private ownership. The few for sale being held at two to three times the prices placed on Inglewood lots."

The first Inglewood homes were constructed in 1923. Cleveland Heights was enjoying extraordinary population growth, 500 percent, in the 1920s.⁶ Suburban growth, which was a national trend, was due in part to the 20s' well-known increase in prosperity, availability of credit, public transit systems and private automobile ownership. From 1922 to 1925, an average of 1,200 homes were built each year in Cleveland Heights.⁷ The majority of the Inglewood lots (47 of the 81) were sold and constructed during the 1920s. The Depression had a small impact on the

construction of lots; 15 homes were constructed during this time period. In addition, eight homes were built during World War II, despite the Government's temporary moratorium on domestic housing construction. Seven more homes were built from 1945 to 1958. The last of the lots were built out after 1960.



Oakridge family gathering, 1940s.

Prestigious but Affordable

The name "Inglewood" was part of an early 20th century trend to combine "wood" with other English names. There are nearly 20 streets in Cleveland Heights with the suffix "wood." "Ingle" stems from a Gaelic word for fire and is used in the English language to denote the area in a house next to the hearth.

The current Inglewood neighborhood reflects Van Sweringen standards. Many of the houses constructed during the first half of the 1920s are moderate in size but most all have an attached garage and servants' quarters. Setbacks are generous and consistent, and many properties are outlined

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with low stone walls. A few homes also have water features—either pools or fountains. Three of the back properties along Oakridge (1251, 1255 and 1259) are believed to have been landscaped by the Olmsted Brothers. The woods behind these lots are landscaped, with winding stone steps, outdoor fireplaces, fountains and waterfalls. All driveways are narrow, and a few are shared.

One of the first homes constructed was for Lucretia Prentiss at 1255 Oakridge Drive. In 1903 Ms. Prentiss lived at 921 Euclid Avenue. She then moved farther down Euclid (to 3407) in 1912. Her sister, Ellen Cox, lived at 4311 Euclid Avenue. Eventually the sisters shared the 4311 home, which was a double house. Congestion on Euclid Avenue encouraged Lucretia to move to a residential neighborhood in Cleveland Heights.⁸ Lucretia traded her ownership of the double for the land in Cleveland Heights, which was owned by her sister Ellen. The house on Oakridge Drive, was designed by Charles S. Schneider in the Colonial Revival style. The house was built with an elevator leading from the first floor to the second

floor. The original construction also included two secret hiding places, probably for jewelry.

Other prominent Clevelanders were attracted to homes built in the Inglewood neighborhood. Samuel Slotky, founder and publisher of the weekly *Heights Press*, forerunner of the *Sun Press*, bought his home—designed by John G. Graham in 1931 in the Georgian style—at 1276 Oakridge. Edgar Byers, an attorney from the law partnership of Byers and Friebolin, purchased the Tudor Revival home at 1247 Oakridge Drive. Willard Wetmore Combes was a professor at the Cleveland Institute of Art and an editorial cartoonist for the *Cleveland Press*. He won a Pulitzer Prize honorable mention in 1938 for a cartoon on a cemetery lot racket. He resided in the Tudor at 1266



1285 Inglewood Drive. Dr. Benjamin Spock lived here from 1956 to 1958.

Oakridge from 1931 until his death in 1984. Other leading members of the community living in the Inglewood neighborhood include Barlett Shepherd of the law firm of Smith, Olds, Smith and Shepherd at 1325 Oakridge; Edward McConnell, radio entertainer at 1243 Oakridge; William Tonks, vice president of the Union Trust Company at 1259 Oakridge, Henry Toedtman of Toedtman & Follis at 1286 Oakridge; Frank O’Dea, secretary of The May Company at 1311 Oakridge; and Rienhold L. Wendt, president of Excelsior Cabinet Co at 1314 Oakridge.

The neighborhood attracted many doctors, due in part to its close proximity to the Cleveland Clinic and University Hospitals. At one time, the neighborhood was coined “Pill Hill” because of its number of medical people. Dr. Benjamin Spock, one of the country’s leading pediatricians, lived at 1285 Inglewood from 1956 to 1958. Another famous physician residing in the neighborhood was Richard Renner, founder of Hillcrest Hospital. During the 1940s he lived at 1259 Oakridge.

Tradition Lives On

Today, the Inglewood Historic District neighborhood is still home to physicians, medical personnel, attorneys, architects, engineers and civic and business leaders. It also continues to reflect the Van Sweringens’ standards of romanticism popular in American culture in the 1920s.⁹ The Vans’ impact on the eastern suburbs of Cleveland prevails in Shaker Heights, but it is actually felt throughout Cleveland Heights. In fact, the Shaker Heights Improvement Company developed six subdivisions in Cleveland Heights, but only the Inglewood neighborhood—developed at the height of the

company’s investment—followed through fully on the developers’ original intent of architect-designed homes for the upper middle class.

The same deed covenants outlined for the Shaker Heights Improvement Company for properties in South Cleveland Heights and Shaker Heights also applied to the Inglewood development. These guaranteed a high level of quality in construction and clientele. The development was created for residential use with single-family dwellings only. All houses were to be architect designed with no two exactly alike. Prominent Cleveland architects, such as Howell and Thomas, Walker and Weeks, Charles Schneider and Bloodgood Tuttle, along with lesser known architects such as Maxwell Norcross, Copper and Dunn, George Johnston and Chester Lowe designed houses in Shingle, Colonial Revival, Tudor, Beaux Arts, French Eclectic and Italian Renaissance styles. All of these architects were well established when they were designing homes in the Inglewood neighborhood. The architectural diversity, as well as the quality, charm and beauty that endure today, are further testimony to the architects’ skill and the developers’ foresight and success.

1, 2 Lucretia Prentiss deed for purchase of 1255 Oakridge Drive

3 Herbert H. Harwood, *Invisible Giants: the Empires of Cleveland’s Van Sweringen Brothers* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2002) 11

4 Haberman, Ian S. *The Van Sweringens of Cleveland: The Biography of an Empire* (Cleveland: The Western Reserve Historical Society, 1979) 12

5 “Inglewood Advertisement” 1920, *Cleveland Topics*, 11 September.

6 Marian Morton, *Cleveland Heights, Ohio: The Making of an Urban Suburb, 1847-2002*. (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Pub., 2005) 49

7 Ibid

8 Lucretia Prentiss deed for purchase of 1255 Oakridge Drive

9 Patricia J. Forgac, *Shaker Village colors: a guide to exterior paint colors for residences 1905-1939* (Shaker Heights, Landmarks Commission of City of Shaker Heights, 1983) 14