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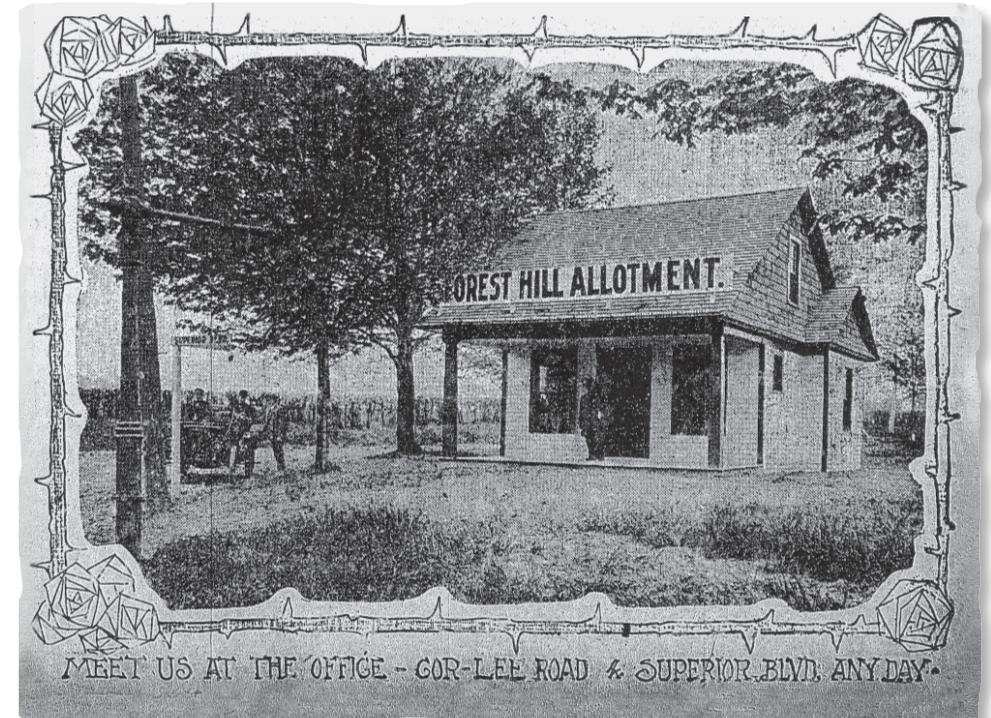
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The Other Forest Hill

Grant Deming's Garden-suburb Allotment

By J. Mark Souther

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Mention Forest Hill in Cleveland Heights and the discussion will probably focus on John D. Rockefeller's mammoth summer estate, his son's garden-suburb development north of Mayfield

Road (carved from the original property) or perhaps Forest Hill Park, the emerald swath that also was part of the original Rockefeller land. Yet the name also applies to a residential district developed by Grant Deming south of Euclid Heights Boulevard (Figure 1).

Early Development

Forest Hill atop sits a sloping plateau astride a branch of Dugway Brook about a mile east of the Portage Escarpment that demarks the so-called "heights": the back edge, or foothills, of the Appalachians. The development encompasses 194 acres of former farmland, most of it owned by Rockefeller and James B. Haycox. Forest Hill evolved almost entirely during a two-decade period that saw Cleveland Heights' population surge from 2,576 in 1910 to 50,945 in 1930.

Grant Wilson Deming (named after Ulysses S. Grant, a West Point classmate of Deming's paternal grandfather, and Henry Wilson, Grant's second-term Vice President) and his four brothers—Hubert, Orville, Barton, and Cecil

Deming—developed some of Cleveland's most notable suburban allotments. The Deming brothers, sons of a lumber baron, grew up in Sarnia, Ontario, Canada. In

1895 the young men moved to Cleveland and formed the Deming Brothers Company in 1903. Before their suburban projects, the Demings developed high-quality subdivisions in Cleveland's Glenville neighborhood, including the Grantwood and Columbia allotments along Doan Street (later East 105th Street)¹.

In 1905, with construction crews busily erecting houses in his family's Glenville developments, Grant Deming organized the Deming Realty Company and looked eastward beyond the sprinkling of millionaires' mansions on the Overlook (Patrick Calhoun's Euclid Heights development). Two years later, Deming began assembling land to create his most ambitious suburban allotment—Forest Hill. In a 1909 promotional booklet titled *Home Sweet Home*, Deming conveyed his vision for

Cover: The Forest Hill sales office, originally situated at the corner of Lee and Superior roads, moved to the intersection of Coventry and Euclid Heights soon after development began, likely owing to Deming's desire to appeal to streetcar riders. Source: The Plain Dealer, May 31, 1908.

Forest Hill. He described "the vari-colored foliage" in the allotment as including "[s]turdy oaks, stately elms, straight, towering ash, wide-spreading maples, and here and there a birch. Natural, just as the Creator placed them there, some of them older than Cleveland itself, and we've left them, just as they were, for you and yours." Deming characterized Forest Hill's streets as "natural openings through the giants of the forest" (Figure 2). Although he repeatedly emphasized its affordability, Deming incongruously dubbed Forest Hill "America's Richest Suburb."² Still, Forest Hill almost immediately assumed a diversity of housing that included architect-designed single-family homes, builder-designed homes, catalog kit homes, and even a number of two-family houses. Deming hired F. A. Pease, who later designed Shaker Heights, to lay out more than 600 home sites on winding roads. Piggybacking on the prestige of Euclid Heights, Pease kept the names Berkshire, East Overlook, and Edgehill as he extended them into Forest Hill. The streets were paved with a combination



Figure 1: The borders of Grant Deming's Forest Hill.

of asphalt and macadam that Deming promised would afford "durability and no dust."³ Crews laid sawed-bluestone sidewalks set back from roadways by tree lawns, as grass sidewalk strips were commonly called in Cleveland.

Deming envisioned Washington Boulevard as a continuation of Euclid Heights Boulevard (Washington Boulevard used to intersect with Coventry at Euclid Heights Boulevard). However, the earliest marked entrances to the allotment were placed on the development's north side at the fork of Lincoln Boulevard and Woodward Avenue (Figure 3, next page and Figure 6, page 6) and on the east side at Redwood Road's entrance at Lee Road. The Lincoln entrance was marked by two pairs of rounded stone pylons connected by low stone walls and topped with decorative semicircular iron street markers. Smaller obelisk-shaped stone piers with pyramidal bases flanked the Redwood entrance.

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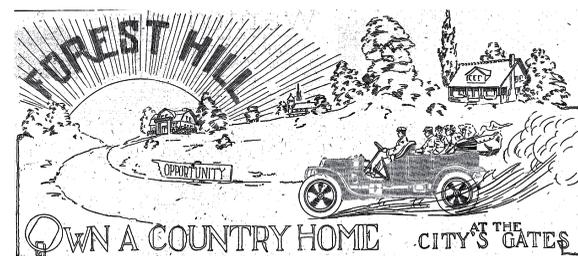


Figure 2: A warm and fuzzy ad appearing in *The Plain Dealer* (July 18, 1909) focuses on the sylvan beauty of Forest Hill.

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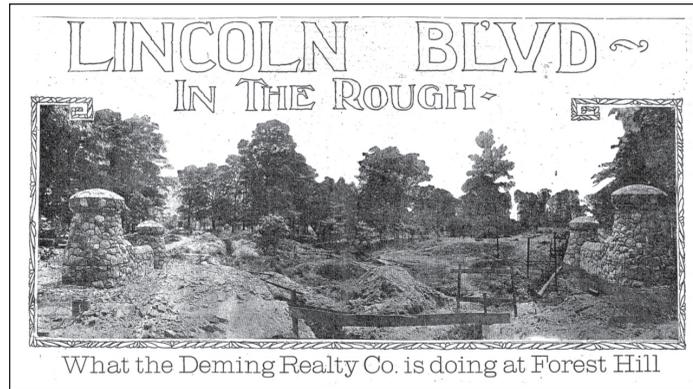


Figure 3: Taken on July 30, 1909, this construction scene shows that Deming erected two pairs of stone pylons at the western end of Lincoln Boulevard, “The Gateway to Forest Hill,” even before completing the excavation to lay water and sewer pipes. Source: The Plain Dealer, August 1, 1909. (See page 6 for the same view after construction.)

A small fleur-de-lis crowned an iron street marker atop the right pier.⁴ This entrance led directly to the site (3154 Redwood Road) where Deming built his family homestead in 1909. His choice of a site at the farthest point from Cleveland’s eastward growth, rather than on the Euclid Heights allotment side to the west, may have reflected a desire to live closer to the open countryside.

Deming’s homestead originally sat on the middle of three lots, each 50 x 202 feet. The cross-gabled wood shingle home almost precisely replicated one built for the Deming Company’s secretary, Albert C. Newton, at 10607 Drexel Avenue in the Grantwood allotment (Figure 4, below). It reflects elements of the Queen Anne and Shingle styles, with its cedar shingle siding, half



Figure 5: Postcard promoting Grant Deming’s Minor Heights, just north of what would become the western entrance to Cain Park.

timbering in the side gables, irregular massing, simple detailing, bay windows, and large porch. A matching carriage house with a front-gabled gambrel roof stands to the rear of the house. In 1914 Deming added a castellated porte-cochere with a second-story bedroom on the house’s east side. Deming employed two maids, a chauffeur, and full-time gardeners to tend his estate.⁵

Slow Start

The early development of Forest Hill seems to have been sluggish, with only 76 building permits secured through 1913. Deming’s troubles led the manager of Rockefeller’s Abeyton Realty Company to report that Barton Deming, who sought Abeyton financing for Euclid Golf, should

Figure 4 (at left): In 1909, Grant Deming built and subsequently occupied the house on the right on Redwood Avenue (now Redwood Road). One may wonder why it looks like no other houses in Forest Hill. The answer lies in his apparent fondness for the home of A. C. Newton, one of his business associates, at 10607 Drexel Avenue in Deming Brothers’ Grantwood allotment in Glenville (photo at left). Source: Home Sweet Home (Cleveland: Deming Realty Co., 1909), courtesy of City of Cleveland Heights, Historical Center at Superior Schoolhouse.

not be too closely associated with the “somewhat discredited” Grant Deming. Rockefeller doubtless became perturbed when Deming lagged in mortgage payments in Forest Hill’s early years.⁶ Whatever Deming’s financial condition, he experienced growing competition from the many new subdivisions being developed in suburban Cleveland in the 1910s.

Grant Deming’s difficulties may have led to his loss of control over Forest Hill by 1914, the same year that Patrick Calhoun’s Euclid Heights was forced into auction. In any case, Deming began developing his next allotment, Minor Heights, between Lee and South Taylor Roads (Figure 5). By that time, two of the company’s subsidiaries, Cleveland Heights Realty Company and Heights Realty Company, had come under the leadership of Frederick C. Werk and John C. Lowe, respectively, and Forest Hill was in trusteeship under its mortgager, the Guardian Savings and Trust Company, which held a special trustee’s sale of remaining lots between August and December 1914. Reminiscent of the sheriff’s auction in Euclid Heights earlier that year, Forest Hill ads averred that “you’ll not be able to buy them again at present prices after a sufficient

continued on page 8



Figure 6: Gateway to Forest Hill, c. 1910. Built for Thomas B. Haycox in 1910, the eclectic Arts-and-Crafts Tudor house at the fork of Lincoln Boulevard and Woodward Avenue set the tone for Forest Hill, although few subsequent houses matched its size. Owned for a time in the Depression years by Wooster College, the house later became the longtime home of famed Notre Dame lineman Bob Lally and his family. Source: Architectural Record, April 1918.



Figure 7: Developer Frederick C. Werk built this imposing Prairie-style home on Washington Boulevard in 1914.

number have been sold to meet our obligations as Trustee.” As late as 1914, only one house, Werk’s imposing Prairie-style home, stood at 2956 Washington Boulevard, the intended grand boulevard of Forest Hill, where the street intersects with Yorkshire (Figure 7). While Werk must have been frustrated by Deming’s failure to attract additional houses to match the scale of his own, he also must have understood the evolving demographics of Cleveland Heights, whose growth henceforth would consist mostly of people of modest to moderate means.⁷

Gaining Traction

Likely sensing the need to offer more affordable homes in Forest Hill, in late 1914 Werk and Lowe re-subdivided Washington Boulevard’s lots, converting most of the unsold 100-foot-wide lots into smaller lots with 50- or 60-foot frontages. Concurrently, they introduced a double-track electric streetcar, or “dinky,” which

ran the length of Washington Boulevard in the center median (Figure 8). The companies may have viewed the provision of streetcar service as an amenity that would aid in the sale of home sites, particularly those toward the eastern edge of the allotment farthest from the terminus of the Euclid Heights streetcar line at Coventry Road. The dinky was in service from 1915 to 1923, when it was dismantled as a result of the extension of the Cedar Road streetcar line east

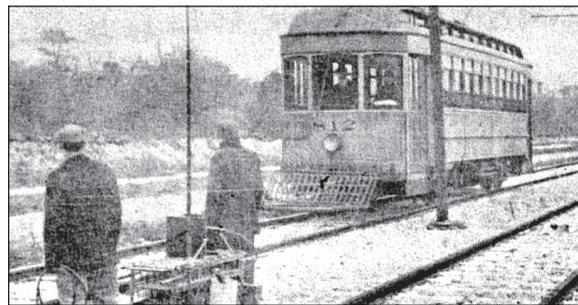


Figure 8: The Washington Boulevard Dinky, c., 1915.

to Lee Road (just two blocks south of the eastern stretch of Washington).⁸

Under the guidance of Werk and Lowe, development accelerated in 1914-16, when 133 building permits were issued. Even into the 1920s, however, the southern and western parts of Forest Hill remained mostly undeveloped. As one resident, Miriam Greene, recalled of the late 1910s and early 1920s, “at the corner of Washington Boulevard and Cottage Grove for quite awhile it was kind of a woody swamp. They had spring flowers there and they had frogs croaking there.”⁹ Stanley Adelstein remembered that in the mid-1920s there was a stream running through one of the several vacant lots left on Washington. Such tranquil scenes were short-lived, and the sights and sounds of home construction soon replaced romps in brooks and streams.¹⁰ Paralleling the rapid growth of Cleveland Heights in the years between World War I and the Great Stock Market Crash of 1929, Forest Hill saw the construction of another 424 houses, or close to two-thirds of all the houses that would ultimately be built in the neighborhood. Deming’s Heights Realty Company also deeded several sublots on the northwestern edge of Forest Hill to the Board of Education of the Cleveland Heights Village School District in 1917 to build Coventry School.

Forest Hill People

By the onset of the Great Depression, Forest Hill was mostly developed. Like many neighborhoods across the Cleveland area and nationwide, the area suffered a spate of home foreclosures. Adelstein, a child at the time, recalled how banks paid him to mow the lawns of foreclosed houses.¹¹ Given the lack of remaining lots and the economic situation, it is hardly surprising that only seven houses were built between the onset of the Great Depression and Pearl Harbor. Although these 1930s houses were generally not distinguished, one stands apart. The

Bramson House at 2837 East Overlook Road, a designated Cleveland Heights Landmark, is an unusual Prairie- and Japanese-influenced stone house perched on the rhododendron-studded edge of the Dugway Brook ravine.

An examination of the 1930 Cleveland City Directory reveals much about the people who called Forest Hill home at the end of the neighborhood’s rapid growth. Many of the area’s residents were professionals, salesmen or businessmen, with a substantial proportion serving as officers of their respective companies. They were principally engaged in occupations that afforded comfortable but not extravagant living. An apt example was Clare H. Whitney, a real estate broker who lived in a 2-1/2 story shingle-sided house at 3081 Lincoln Boulevard and worked on the seventh floor of the Williamson Building on Cleveland’s Public Square. His company’s president, by contrast, lived on fashionable North Park Boulevard in Shaker Heights.¹²

Among the 68 homeowners for whom occupations were indicated on Washington Boulevard west of Cottage Grove Drive and on Lincoln Boulevard east of Cottage Grove, most commuted to downtown Cleveland or various locations on the city’s east side. Only one, William G. Hildebran of 3014 Washington Boulevard, who was president of the Heights Savings and Loan Company on Coventry Road, worked in Cleveland Heights. Roughly 46 percent were proprietors or officers of commercial or manufacturing companies and another four were business managers. Two of them both lived and worked across the street from one another. Harry Fox of 3101 Lincoln was co-owner of a music publishing company located in The Arcade on Euclid Avenue in downtown Cleveland. His neighbor Joseph Welf of 3120 Lincoln was president of Joseph Welf and Sons, a company established in 1865, specializing in watches,

continued



1954 Woodward Ave.: Two-family foursquare with Prairie influence, built in 1915.



3105 Lincoln Blvd.: Eclectic Arts & Crafts with Tudor details, built in 1911.

diamonds, jewelry, silverware, and clocks, and located across Euclid in the Colonial Arcade. About 21 percent were engaged in sales. For instance, Fred Riddell of 3043 Washington was a freight representative for the Pennsylvania Railroad, while Arthur C. Weaver of 2997 Washington was the sales manager for an automobile dealership in East Cleveland.¹⁵ Even some “less-desirables” were represented: Alex “Shondor” Birns, legendary archcriminal (rackets, prostitution, theft, assault and murder) lived for several years at 2813 Edgehill Rd. In



2956 East Overlook, c., 1968. Swiss Chalet-influenced Craftsman house, completed in 1915. It is one of two known designs by architect George H. Burrows in Deming’s Forest Hill. Burrows designed nearly 1,000 Cleveland Heights homes.



2889 Washington Blvd.: California Craftsman bungalow, built in 1921.

1975, Birns was killed by a bomb planted in his automobile.

The picture that emerges in the city directory is one of a largely middle-class neighborhood. Yet Forest Hill was hardly socially homogeneous. The allotment attracted some of the thousands of affluent Jews who began migrating eastward from Cleveland in the early 20th century. By 1926, some 5,000 Jews lived in Cleveland Heights, and a number of Jewish-owned businesses flourished on Coventry Road near Forest Hill. Among the Jewish residents

of Forest Hill was Joseph Weiss, the proprietor of the Majestic Hotel at the corner of Central Avenue and East 55th Street, which was Cleveland’s only large African-American hotel and soon the site of one of its notable jazz nightclubs, the Furnace Room. The Weiss family lived at 2925 Washington Boulevard. Others included Isadore Rosenberg, who co-owned a drug store on East 55th Street, living at 3090 Lincoln Boulevard, and Stanley Adelstein’s father Abraham Adelstein of 3052 Washington Boulevard, who owned a pharmacy on Kinsman Road near East 55th Street.¹⁴

Although Forest Hill reflected a degree of ethnic and religious diversity, the neighborhood was largely inaccessible to African Americans. When a black physician and his wife purchased a home on Washington Boulevard on the corner of Cottage Grove in the early 1930s, their arrival sparked such an uproar that many residents on the street collectively raised money to hire someone to plant an explosive at the house to deter the newcomers. The bombing of the house did not prevent the couple from

occupying their house, and they continued to live there for many years.¹⁵

Indeed, the identity of Forest Hill evolved quickly in its first two decades, with Deming’s designation fading from collective memory. Neither Miriam Greene nor Stanley Adelstein identified Forest Hill by name in later oral histories, focusing instead on their own streets. Today the neighborhood that evolved from Deming’s development is again recognized by its original name, a result of its listing on the National Register of Historic Places in 2010. Forest Hill retains many of its original architectural and landscape characteristics. It continues to increase in social diversity. In contrast to the 1930s bombing incident on Washington Boulevard, many African American families have made their homes without incident in Forest Hill since the 1960s. Thus Forest Hill continues to mirror trends in Cleveland Heights just as it did in the 1910s to the 1930s.

Mark Souther is associate professor of history at Cleveland State University. He lives in the Forest Hill allotment, which he nominated for the National Register of Historic Places, and serves on the Cleveland Heights Landmark Commission.

Notes

¹Samuel Peter Orth, *A History of Cleveland, Ohio, Vol. 2*, 1910, pp. 211, 352, 770, 773, cited in Deanna L. Bremer and Hugh P. Fisher, *Euclid Golf Neighborhood* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2004).

²*Home Sweet Home* (Cleveland: The Deming Realty Co., 1909), n.p.

³*Home Sweet Home*.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Grant W. Deming House and Carriage House, Certification of Landmark Status by the Cleveland Heights Landmark Commission, September 29, 2003; 1909 *Cleveland City Directory*.

⁶Letter dated 5/2/1913, from Clarence E. Terrill, Manager of Abeyton Realty Company, to Mr. Charles O. Heydt, Secretary, and Letters from John D. Rockefeller’s Abeyton Realty Company to Grant Deming in 1909, Rockefeller Archives, cited in Deanna Bremer Fisher and Hugh Fisher, “The Development of Euclid Golf,” *Historic Euclid Golf Allotment*, http://www.euclidgolf.com/the_development_of_eg.htm, accessed March 18, 2009.

⁷Cuyahoga County Recorders Map Book, Vol. 48, p. 28; advertisements, *Plain Dealer*, October 20, 1914, p. 17, and October 22, 1914, p.15. On the sheriff’s auction, see Hamley, “Cleveland’s Park Allotment,” 159.

⁸Cuyahoga County Recorders Map Book, Vol. 42, p. 9, Vol. 45, p. 29, Vol. 55, pp. 38-39; “Suburb Railway Incorporates,” *Plain Dealer*, December 5, 1914, p. 16; Morton, *Cleveland Heights*, 49.

⁹Greene interview, p. 3; Deed, Heights Realty Co. to Board of Education of Cleveland Heights Village School District, September 8, 1917, Cuyahoga County Recorder’s Office Deed Book 1937, p. 558.

¹⁰Miriam Greene, interview by Deanna L. Bremer, June 24, 2002, Cleveland Heights Oral History Project, transcription by Marilyn Meadows, p. 9; Stanley and Hope Adelstein, interview by Amy Gomez, January 20, 2002, Cleveland Heights Oral History Project, transcription by Marilyn Meadows, p. 4.

¹¹Adelstein interview, p. 8.

¹²*Cleveland City Directory*, 1930.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Morton, *Cleveland Heights*, 108-9; *Cleveland City Directory*, 1930; Joe Mosbrook, “The Blue Monday Parties,” Jazzed in Cleveland, a WMV Web News Cleveland series, Part 61 (January 18, 2001), *WMV Web News—Cleveland*, http://www.cleveland.oh.us/wmv_news/jazz61.htm, accessed March 19, 2009.

¹⁵Adelstein interview, p. 4.

¹⁶Greene interview, pp. 3-4; Adelstein interview, pp. 5-7, 9.