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PO Box 18337 • Cleveland Heights, Ohio 44118

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The Cleveland Heights Historical Society  
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# View from The Overlook



THE JOURNAL OF THE CLEVELAND HEIGHTS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

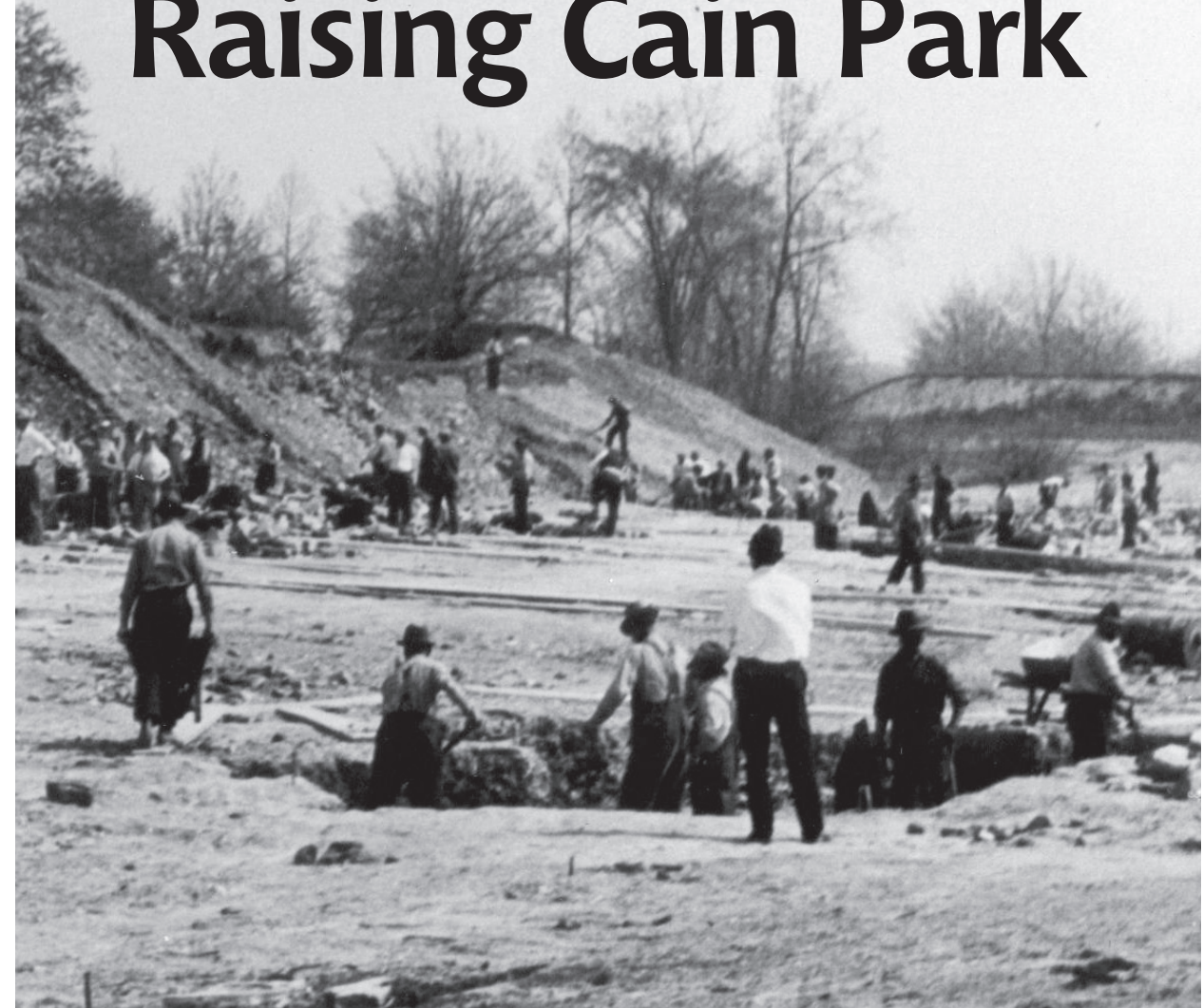
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NO. 33 • SPRING 2013

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## Raising Cain Park



On the cover:  
*Building Cain Park,*  
c., 1934.



# Raising Cain Park

By Kara Hamley O'Donnell

Cain Park is unique. Owned and operated by the City of Cleveland Heights, the park is a treasure trove of entertainment; a blend of natural and man-made beauty; a center of recreation and relaxation; and a showcase for smart political decisions.

The park is bounded by South Taylor Road on the East, Superior Road on the South, Lee Road on the West, and Hyde Park and Superior Park Roads on the north. One of several tributaries of Dugway Brook runs underground through the park's center—rising out of the ground to the east behind Berkowitz-Kumin Funeral Home and to the northwest in Cumberland Park, and ultimately emptying into Lake Erie.

Along with Cumberland Park, Cain Park was acquired around 1915 when voters approved a \$100,000 bond issue. Frank Cain, the park's namesake and mayor of Cleveland Heights from 1914 to 1946, helped negotiate the purchase. Shortly after the acquisition, Cumberland was filled and improved. The 22 acres that made up Cain Park were left as natural area. In 1925, residents passed another bond issue that allocated \$75,000 for the improvement of both parks. Physical improvements began in October 1934, supported also by County Soldiers and Sailors Relief Commission and Works Progress Administration funds. Workers cleared out and culverted the ravine between South Taylor and Lee Roads, removed trees for a sledding hill and

quarried sandstone from the creek. John D. Rockefeller provided financial support and trees.

Around that same time came the first hint of the area's performing-arts future. In 1934 a theatre group led by Dr. Dina Rees (Doc) Evans, a dramatics instructor at Cleveland Heights High School sought to collaborate with the Civic Theatre of Allied Arts on an outdoor presentation of "A Midsummer Night's Dream." The production was held at the foot of the sledding hill at Taylor and Superior Roads. The actors dressed in an empty store on South Taylor Road and paraded ceremoniously down the street in costume to the stage. Heights High furnished bleachers and City Council put in a transformer for lights. Needing a name for the performance location, Ms. Evans hastily dubbed it Cain Park. Mayor Cain voiced no objections.

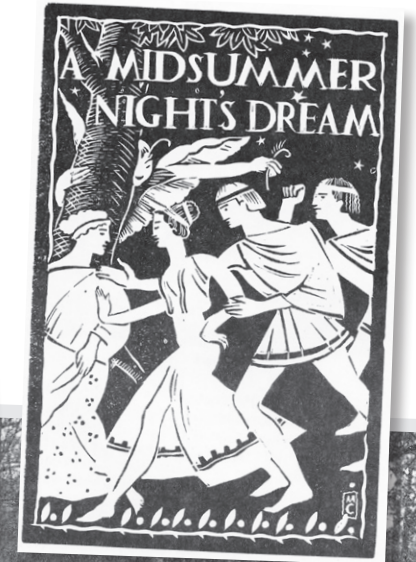
Perhaps inspired by Evans' work, Russell Prentiss Hecker, son of Captain Harvey H. Hecker who headed the Cuyahoga County Soldiers and Sailors Relief Commission, volunteered to build a model theatre about a quarter mile west of the sledding hill. Since the City's cost would be minimal, City Council was happy to endorse the proposal. As many as 200 men—including many partially disabled veterans—worked on the project beginning in late 1934. The City purchased timber from nearby wooded areas and had it sawn for use in construction. The sides of the ravine were



Above: Cain Park  
sledding hill, c., mid 1930s.

Upper right: Promotional  
poster from "A  
Midsummer Night's  
Dream," 1934.

Right: Covering  
the ravine, c., 1934.



# 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.

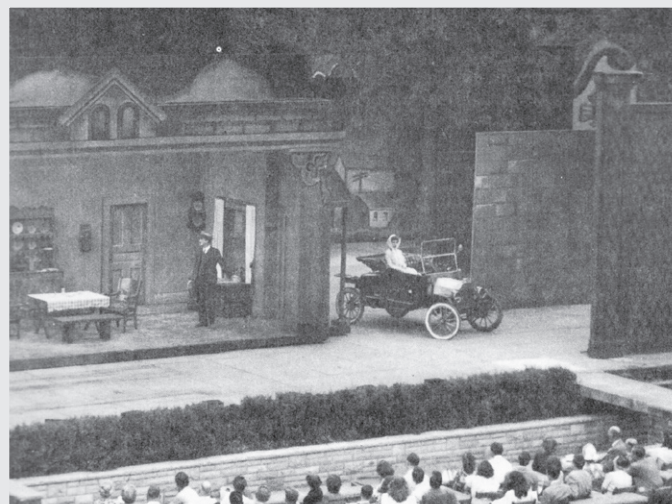
[www.chhistory.org](http://www.chhistory.org)

scraped and graded. The veterans built foundations, wooden seats, and a stage with lighting. A 100 x 40-foot colonnade was constructed behind the seating area for lectures, class work, rehearsals, parties and picnics. The project leader for the Works Progress Administration was a former Colonel in the US Cavalry, which may account for the stable-like appearance of the theatre's ticket office and the carpenter shop.

The Amphitheatre's first production was "Warrior's Husband" which opened on August 11, 1938. Local television legend Dorothy Fuldheim played the part of "third sentry." According to *The Plain Dealer*, 1,000 participants and 45,000 attendees were part of the first nine-week, three-production season.

Dina Evans held the position of theatrical director until 1950, although she continued to oversee the children's school until 1958. From 1938 through 1950, young talents such as Broadway music director Jack Lee, producer Ross Hunter, and actors Hal Holbrook, Dom DeLuise, Carol Kane, Jack Weston and Pernell Roberts performed on sets designed by Viktor Schreckengost among others. In 1942 Cain Park was touted in a *Family Circle* article as the only municipally owned and operated outdoor theatre of its kind in the United States. During those 12+ years, scores of productions were

"I Remember Mama," 1948.



held, including "Our Town," "Petrified Forest," "Of Thee I Sing," "Babes in Toyland," "The Man who Came to Dinner" and "Peter Pan."

Ballets and Community Hour talks (political, religious and general-interest discussions) also were held at the theatre. Community hymn singing was another mainstay, with words flashed on the screen while choirs and audience sang. In 1942, 2,000 Cleveland Heights "civilian defense volunteers" were sworn in at a mass induction at the theatre. In 1946, a ten-week series of radio dramas were broadcast from the Park.



In 1942, Hal Holbrook (right) starred in "The Man Who Came to Dinner"

After Evans' departure, Cain Park's theatrical direction changed. Marvin Kline oversaw productions in the mid-1950s, importing national talent. From 1959 to 1962, the Amphitheatre was leased to bring in such big-name stars as Bob Hope, Frank Sinatra, Harry Belafonte, Johnny Mathis, Jerry Lewis and Sammy Davis, Jr. The stage was also used for the Heights Youth Theatre's Teen Theatre in the mid-1960s until it was moved to Wiley Junior High School in 1969.

"Aaron Slick of Pumpkin Creek," 1939.

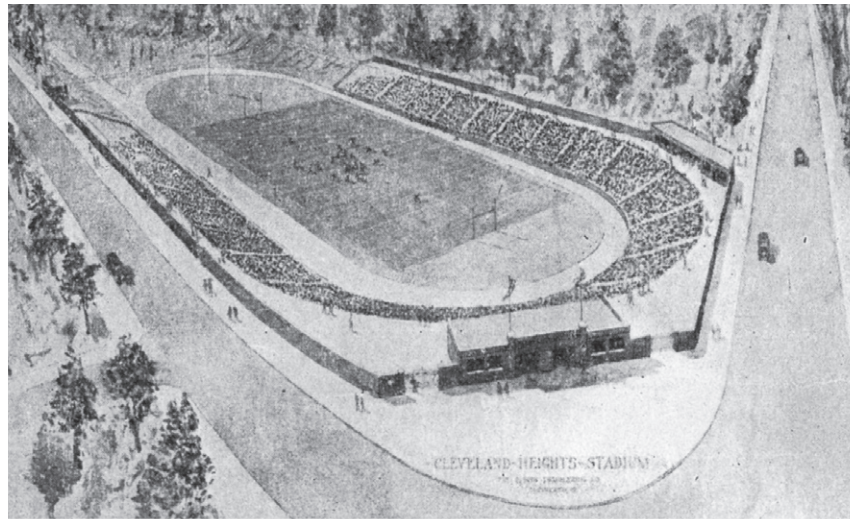


## The East Side's Largest Sports Stadium?

Few people know that in the mid-1920s, a stadium with up to 14,000 seats was planned for the hillside at Superior and South Taylor Roads (Cain Park's beloved sledding hill). It is from this effort that the "Stadium Square" moniker (which refers to the commercial/apartment blocks and structures around South Taylor Road and Superior Park Drive) emanated.

In 1926, a bond to finance the stadium won the majority of votes but failed to receive the necessary 55 percent of the total vote. In 1927, however, a local newspaper article stated that "while the financial condition of [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 wipe out the cost of construction in a comparatively short time. During the previous 10 years, Cleveland Heights had grown from a population of 15,000 to approximately 45,000 and (ironically) was reputed to have the lowest tax rate of any city in the country.

The subsequent November 1928 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 lakefront, with seating for 75,000 to 85,000 people. Yet despite much glowing commentary in the local media, the Cleveland Heights stadium proposal



lost again—this time failing to claim even a majority of the votes. However, the school bond issues won easily, resulting in the subsequent 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.

*Above: Artist's rendering of the proposed Cain Park Stadium*

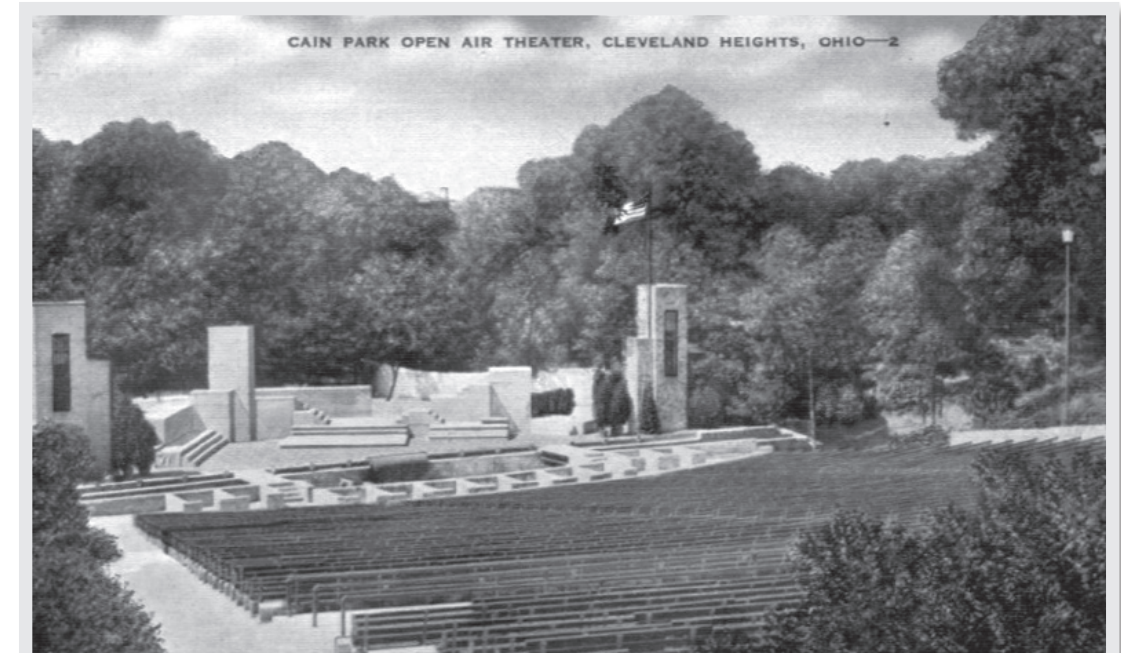
The late 1960s also brought visual arts to the park. In 1968, the Cain Park Art Gallery opened in the former children's theatre office building. The gallery was later named for Audrey and Harvey Feinberg, who were responsible for initiating the Cain Park Arts Festival.

Through the 1970s, the Amphitheatre was largely dark, with almost all Cain Park performances staged in the Alma Theatre. Two exceptions were "Oklahoma" and a production of "Our American Cousin," the play that had been performed at Ford's Theatre in Washington DC the evening Abraham Lincoln was shot.

During the Amphitheatre's dark period, however, many non-theatre events were held on the main stage. "Dancing Under the Stars" on Saturday nights ran until the early 1970s. Big bands, such as the Paul Burton, Vince Patti and Lou Sivillo Orchestras performed.

Tables seating several hundred people surrounded the stage. Average nightly attendance for these events exceeded 1,100 people. WJW Radio 850 broadcasted live from the park. During the same period, Rock-n-Roll Friday teen nights were held, featuring bands such as "Little G and the Vibrators" and "Lunatic Fringe." Up to 5,000 teens were often present on a single evening. Lectures and movies were held in the "Little" (Alma) Theatre.

In 1974, the Cain Park Theatres Association, Inc., was formed to help effect the return of live theatre to Evans facility, extend the season, and improve facilities of the Alma Theatre and Art Gallery. Around this time, steel lighting towers were taken down and seats in the back two thirds of the Amphitheatre were removed to make a lawn area.



*Postcard depicting Cain Park Theatre, late 1930s.*

Cain Park alumnus David Shaber scouted the Amphitheatre in 1978 for the location of his movie "Those Lips, Those Eyes." The film company invested \$100,000 to help refurbish the facility. These improvements, along with renewed public interest, allowed the City to begin staging musical productions there and open it up for concerts. The official return of live performances came in 1980 with the staging of "Camelot."

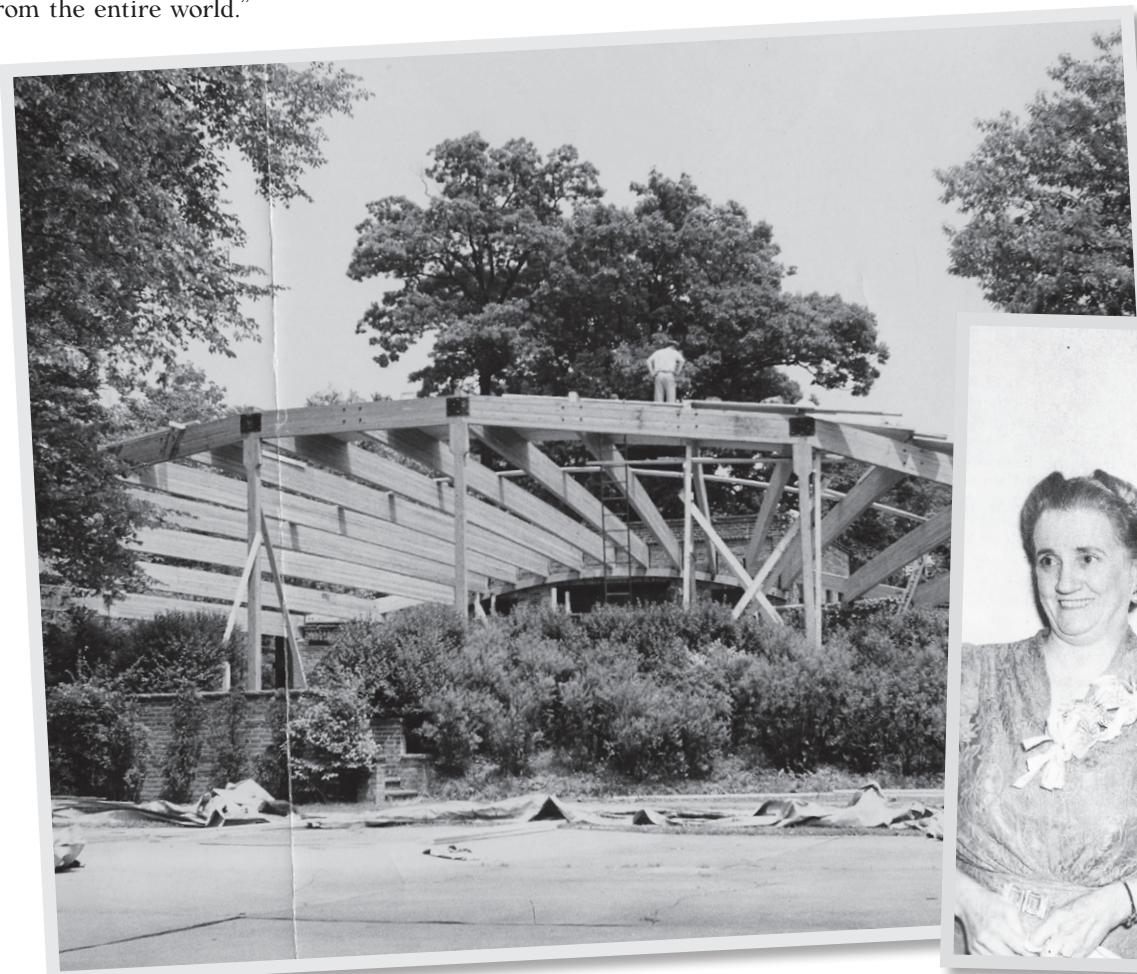
In 1988, residents passed a \$12 million Parks Bond Issue, of which \$5 million was earmarked for further improvements to Cain Park. Results included new concrete columns, a steel truss roof, improved lighting and landscaping, and upgraded children's recreation facilities throughout the park. The Evans Amphitheatre was dedicated in 1989 to Dr. Evans. Today, the amphitheatre seats 1,222 people, with capacity for another 1,300 on the lawn.

The Alma Theatre, named after Cain's wife, was completed in 1944 for the staging of children's puppet shows. A 1945 issue of *Curtain*

*Time* stated that "The Alma Theatre houses facilities for the construction and performance of marionettes, hand puppets, and the shadow puppets of the Chinese stage. It is the first theatre in the United States to be designed and built to the scale of the little figures, and is probably the most complete puppet theatre in the world. It boasts three complete stages, one for each of the three types of puppets named; compete lighting and sound systems; and real velvet curtains. This most complete theatre will someday be the meeting place for puppeteers from the entire world."



Above: Eating lunch on the terrace, c., 1940s.  
At right: Construction of the Alma Theatre.  
At far right: Alma and Frank Cain.



By 1946, the Alma was also headquarters for the Junior School of the Theatre and Children's Theatre, which featured classes in Creative Dramatics, Rhythms, Choral Speaking, Creative Dance, Speech Games, Radio, Stagecraft, Voice and Diction and Puppetry. In 1953 a roof was built over the theatre, after which time the facility was used for live actors rather than puppets. The Alma was redesigned in the late 1980s in a Post Modern vein with a vaguely Victorian tower.



## Cain Park Today

Each season, beginning with the renovations of the late 1980s, Cain Park has produced at least one play and both stages offer musical performances, dance companies, story telling and much more. Children's programming—from dance to theatre to music—is also an important part of every Cain Park season. The Audrey & Harvey Feinberg Art Gallery also has flourished, highlighting two artists every season. This summer, however, the facility will showcase Cain Park's colorful history for the entire season. Every year the Cain Park Arts Festival gains a larger following, drawing an average of more than 30,000 patrons.

The main stage regularly attracts more than 100,000 people during its 10-week summer season. Thousands more have attended performances by internationally known musicians, including Joan Baez, Harry Belafonte, The Chieftains, The Temptations,

The Moody Blues, Sarah McLachlan, Judy Collins, Johnny Cash, Dionne Warwick, Art Garfunkel, Emmylou Harris, The Everly Brothers, Lyle Lovett, Bela Fleck, Kenny Loggins, Arlo Guthrie and scores of others.

At Cain Park's dedication in 1938, Mayor Frank Cain counseled: "Treat it well, keep it on a high plane, and above all, support and enjoy it." Despite a dip in the 1970s, Cain Park's proprietors and attendees have clearly heeded the Mayor's advice.

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# Preservation Month 2013

Presented by the Cleveland Heights Landmark Commission,  
the Cleveland Heights Historical Society, and Cleveland Heights Library.

**May is National Preservation Month and this year's theme is "See! Save! Celebrate!"** May is the month when small towns and big cities focus on our nation's heritage with events that range from architectural and historic tours and award ceremonies, to fundraising events, educational programs and heritage travel opportunities. In Cleveland Heights, we offer free presentations and walking tours to learn the history of our community and beyond. Space is limited and pre-registration is required for all events.

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## Historic Nightlife: East 4th St. & Vincent

**When:**  
Wednesday May 1, 7:00 p.m. at Lee Road Library

**Registration:**  
Begins April 17 at [www.heightslibrary.org](http://www.heightslibrary.org)  
or by calling 216-932-3600

**Presenter:**  
Alan Dutka, author

East Fourth Street and "Short" Vincent Avenue are tiny downtown Cleveland streets long on character and excitement. Today, Fourth Street is the center of a chic residential and entertainment district commanding national attention. Short Vincent, once filled with elegant restaurants and seedy bars, also acquired a nationwide reputation along with ample notoriety. Join us on this fun-filled tour of two amazing little streets. Books will be available for purchase.



*Short Vincent Avenue.*

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## Cedar Hill Walking Tour (rain or shine)

**When:**  
Saturday, May 18, 10:00 a.m. to Noon.  
Meet at the upper parking lot behind (south of) the Heights Medical Building (2446-2482 Fairmount Boulevard at Cedar

**Registration:**  
Register through the Cleveland Heights Planning Department at 216-291-4878

**Presenters:**  
Roy Larick, Bill Barrow

Cedar-Fairmount holds a delightful mix of natural and cultural landscapes. The Cedar-Fairmount area is home to two different types of rock layers, former quarries in surprising places and many stone homes built with the quarried stone. Come see how the Heights was first opened here to settlement and suburban development. Learn about the underlying nature of Turkey Ridge and Blue Rock Brook.

## Lee Road History, Walking Tour & Beer/Whiskey Tasting

**When:**  
Wednesday May 29, 7:00 p.m. at the Lee Road Library

**Registration:**  
Begins May 15 at [www.heightslibrary.org](http://www.heightslibrary.org)  
or by calling 216-932-3600

**Presenters:**  
Mark Souther, Mazie Adams  
& Kara Hamley O'Donnell

Enjoy a short crash course on the Cleveland Historical app (bring your smart phone or tablet if you have one), followed by a short presentation on Lee Road's history. Then we'll take to the street, learn about its architecture and older businesses, and end with an optional beer/whiskey tasting at Parnell's for a small fee.

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## Celebrate Cain Park's 75th Anniversary

**When:**  
Wednesday, June 5, 7:00 p.m.

**Registration:**  
Begins May 22 at [www.heightslibrary.org](http://www.heightslibrary.org)  
or by calling 216-932-3600

**Presenter:**  
Emily Smith

Help kick off a summer-long celebration of Cain Park. Learn about its 75-year history through historic images, playbills and other items archived by the City. This presentation will walk you through the physical changes made to the park as well as its transformation from a summer stock theatre to the Cain Park of today. Ms. Smith spent three years researching Cain Park's history as part of her Ursuline College Master's thesis.

Throughout the Cain Park season (June 13 to August 18), the Audrey and Harvey Feinberg Gallery near the Alma theatre will host an exhibition entitled "Cain Park: Dreaming Under the Stars for 75 Years." Photos, playbills, memorabilia and relics from the past will be on display.