

# View from The Overlook

*The Journal of the Cleveland Heights Historical Society*



Nº 1

~ Inaugural Issue ~

August 1997

*Introducing ...*

## THE CLEVELAND HEIGHTS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

We are pleased to present to you the Inaugural Issue of *View from The Overlook*, the journal of The Cleveland Heights Historical Society. In celebration of the recent 75th Anniversary of the establishment of Cleveland Heights as a city, the Society was revitalized by community residents as a historic preservation organization dedicated to protecting and promoting the city's diverse character, traditions, and heritage. The Society is a state chartered 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. With the support of the community, the Society plans to eventually house a museum and historic preservation resource center at the landmark Superior School (1882) which is located on Superior Road at Euclid Heights Boulevard.

The Cleveland Heights Historical Society is a new and vital civic link that will serve to illuminate Cleveland Heights as a venerable historic community with a unique sense of place. Some early objectives of the Society are to:

- Develop greater community knowledge, understanding, and identification with Cleveland Heights by increasing public awareness of the city's heritage.
- Research the history of Cleveland Heights and its environs.
- Promote historic preservation activities in Cleveland Heights.
- Establish a Cleveland Heights Heritage Center at the landmark Superior School.

The Cleveland Heights Historical Society is an exciting opportunity for anyone interested in the history of Cleveland Heights. We want to hear from you! Your helpful suggestions and comments are most welcome. Why not join us? It's just not the same without you.

Charles Owen  
President

## The Cleveland Heights Historical Society

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### Mission Statement ...

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

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



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## Historic Superior School to be Restored

Focus has once again returned to historic Superior School with the recent passage of the Cleveland Heights Recreation Bond Issue.

Currently, the schoolhouse is used as a city carpentry shop and storage facility, however, the bond issue package included a promise to restore the landmark structure on Superior Road at Euclid Heights Boulevard as a "city historical museum."

Possibilities include establishing a Cleveland Heights heritage and historic preservation resource center which could also involve exhibits and a reference library featuring Cleveland Heights photos, documents, and artifacts of historical significance. Other potential uses include space for social events, meeting rooms, and an office for the Historical Society.

With so many opportunities, the Society looks forward to the exciting reuse of this proud structure. We hope to see a high level of community participation in helping to develop the plans for this important piece of history. ☀

## Old Superior School Photos Needed

In planning for the eventual restoration of the Superior Schoolhouse, old exterior and interior photographs would be very helpful. Do you have any to share?

Please contact Kara Hamley O'Donnell at the Cleveland Heights Planning & Development Department (291-4878) for details. ☀

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## **Heights History Web Site to Debut**

Marching Forward into the Past! Over the next few months, the Cleveland Heights Historical Society will unveil its new virtual history museum at "www.chhistory.org".

Society Board of Trustee member Chris Roy, who has been spearheading

this progressive effort, notes that items of significant historical interest, such as photographs, postcards, and articles on people and places will be featured. Look for the next issue of *View from The Overlook* for further details on our new web site. ☀

## **Sacred Structures, Sacred Memories**

A presentation titled "Sacred Structures, Sacred Memories" will be offered on Wednesday evening, September 17, 1997 at 7:00 p.m. at the Cleveland Heights - University Heights Main Library on Lee Road.

The presentation will take place in conjunction with the annual Heights Heritage Tour which is sponsored by the Heights Community Congress. Sacred Structures, Sacred Memories is free and open to the public.

At this community event, Marian J. Morton and Charles Miller, who are members of the Cleveland Heights Landmark Commission, will offer their insights on the history and preservation of sacred landmarks in Cleveland Heights. Noted Cleveland State University art and architecture historian Dr. Walter Leedy will provide commentary, as well. Introductory remarks will be made by Charles Owen, president of the Cleveland Heights Historical Society.

During the week of September 8th, the Society has reserved the main display case in the Lee Road Library for the display of photos and artifacts related to the Sacred Structures, Sacred Memories program. The Society is pleased to be a sponsor of this annual cultural event. ☒

## Notes from the Blackboard - Superior School Days

*... by Charles Miller and Charles Owen*

By 1853 Cleveland was a growing Lake Erie port city, and pre-Civil War antislavery rumblings were beginning to be heard from the plains of Kansas to Oberlin. Railroads were cropping up along the Lake Erie shoreline fueling community growth.

East Cleveland Township, part of which was later to become Cleveland Heights, was a quiet, but growing rural community with enough farm families to require a school for their children. The site selected for the first one room schoolhouse for the area then known as "District 9" was located on the same corner where the landmark Superior

School stands today on Superior Road at Euclid Heights Boulevard.

Due to the community's steady growth, a new larger and more substantial school named "Superior" was built on the same corner in 1882. Superior School, which still stands today, was first erected as a one-storey stone building. A wood sided second floor and belltower were added in 1915.

Superior School was used for classes continuously from 1882 to 1925. Later, the school was used briefly as an office for

the Board of Education. In 1947, Superior School was opened as a classroom building for children who were considered "trainable but not educable." The school later

closed and ultimately became a woodshop for the City of Cleveland Heights.

In 1974, Superior School was the second structure to be designated a "landmark" by the Cleveland Heights Landmark Commission. It was added to the National Register of Historic Places by the U. S. Department of the Interior in 1979. ☒



## Rockefeller's Forest Hill Legacy

... by Anne Marie Meissner

Rockefeller and Cleveland Heights?

Absolutely! Forest Hill

Park was once part of the estate of John D.

Rockefeller, Sr., founder of the Standard Oil Company and the country's first billionaire.

In the early 1870's, Rockefeller purchased 79 acres of land stretching between Euclid Avenue and what was later to become Mayfield Road. Forest Hill, by nineteenth century standards, was considered to be out in the country.

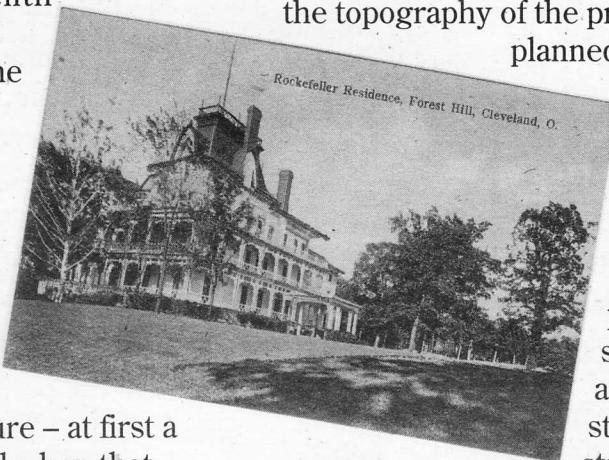
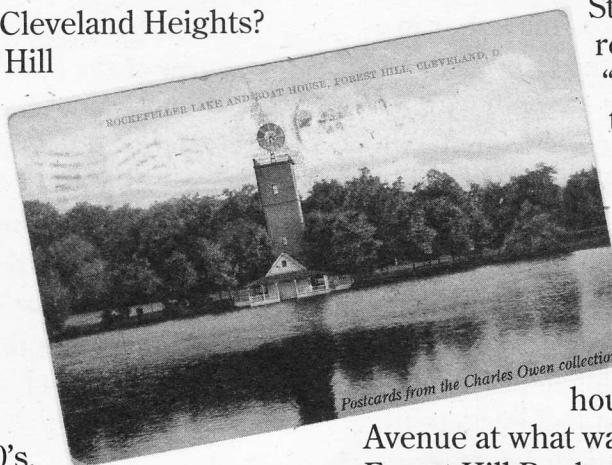
Over the years, Rockefeller acquired adjacent acreage and by the 1920's his holdings totaled approximately 700 acres. The land was originally meant to serve as a business venture – at first a water therapy facility, and when that failed, Rockefeller established a hotel. That too, proved unsatisfactory and so several years after the initial land purchase, Rockefeller completed the main building as a second home for his family

in the area – the first being a Millionaires Row mansion at the southeast corner of Euclid and Case Avenues (East 40th Street). The Forest Hill residence, called "Homestead," served as the family's summer home from about 1875 until Mrs. Rockefeller's death in 1915.

Visitors to Forest Hill entered the estate at the gate house located on Euclid Avenue at what was later to become Forest Hill Boulevard. Guests would then travel over carriage roads and stone bridges and gradually ascend the heights. The roads were laid out in keeping with the topography of the property and planned so that one

experienced a variety of natural vistas enroute to the residence. Turn of the century picture postcards show the home as an enormous three storey Victorian structure towering

above the crest of the escarpment – which is to say on the "heights" of 300 feet above Lake Erie. It was sited with a view looking north to the lake and was surrounded by lush gardens.



Built of wood, the home was destroyed by a fire of unknown origin in 1917.

John D. Rockefeller, Sr.'s son, John, acquired the property from his father in the early 1920's. He wanted to preserve Forest Hill in the form of a country club that would be open to the residential development of Forest Hill—an upscale subdivision of 600 French-Norman homes. However, with only 81 of the homes built by 1930, the project came to a halt with the Great Depression. In 1938, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. donated the remaining land, as Forest Hill Park, to the municipalities whose boundaries crossed the property. Over 82 acres were given to Cleveland Heights and more than 183 acres were given to East Cleveland.

Explore the park today and find "Indian Hill," the promontory point over the place where the two branches of Dugway Brook meet. See vestiges of the quarry where stones for the carriage roads were carved out. Enjoy forested areas of old growth trees and hundreds of botanical species. Trace the "Great Meadow," where John, Sr. had his horse pacing path and his golf course. Explore the lake built by John, Sr. And in winter, sled down the escarpment hill or cross-country ski over the carriage trails.

Forest Hill Park is the Rockefeller's legacy—in perpetuity, according to the land deed—to all of us. ☐

## John Long Severance's "Longwood"

... by Kara Hamley O'Donnell

"The entire place is imbued with the charm of the old English manors and, although new, has little of the awkwardness of youth; quite to the contrary, its splendid setting of trees, augmented by a liberal planting of shrubbery, has tied it well into its surroundings, so that it already possesses that most desirable of assets, the quality of seeming to be an essential part of its environment."

*The Architectural Record, June 1917, page 503.*

Today, amongst the bulldozers and dump trucks at Severance Town Center, one would have no inkling of the Severance Estate in existence as described above. The estate consisted of 161 acres covered with trees and manicured lawns. In 1904, Severance commissioned the construction of a large English Tudor home, which underwent alterations and additions in the late 1910's and into the 1920's. In 1917 the national architectural periodical, *The Architectural Record*, stated that the "owner and architect have worked together in harmony to the end that every detail of construction and enrichment should be as perfect as skill and material could make

it." The mansion home was located near the center of the property. Formal gardens, gardeners' cottages, several stables, and a dairy barn were located to the east.

Severance lived on this estate with its small working dairy until his death in 1936. After Severance's death, Longwood was taken over by his second cousin, Severance Millikin, who lived on the property until 1960. Then the land was sold to the developers of Severance Town Center.

Severance's "Longwood" was largely obliterated by the construction of Severance Town Center in the mid-1960s. Two remnants of this 161-acre estate survive, the Millikin Barn/Severance Stables and Severance Fountain. The Severance Stables remain where they were in the days of Longwood and are the only substantial architectural remnant of the former grand estate. They are constructed of beautifully detailed brick and are built in a U-shaped plan.

The fountain, seen near the current movie theater entrance, is French Baroque and made of white marble. Today it, too, is in its original location, but the context is dramatically different. It was originally located in a wooded setting on the estate and today is surrounded by asphalt. The current Severance Town Center redevelopment plan does not include the fountain in its plans.

If you are interested in more information about the Severance family or Longwood, try these sources:

*In Our Day; Cleveland Heights: Its People, Its Places, Its Past*, edited by Susan Ringler Jones.

*Severance Family Papers*, Western Reserve Historical Society.

"The Rebuilding of Longwood, Residence of John L. Severance, Esq., Cleveland, Ohio. Charles F. Schweinfurth, Architect," *The Architectural Record*, June 1917. ☐

Kara Hamley O'Donnell is the Preservation Planner with the City of Cleveland Heights Department of Planning and Development.

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**The Cleveland Heights Historical Society**

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