

View from The Overlook



THE PUBLICATION OF THE CLEVELAND HEIGHTS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

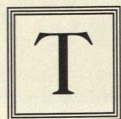
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THE PENTYS THE HECKERS AND “THE ROYALS”:

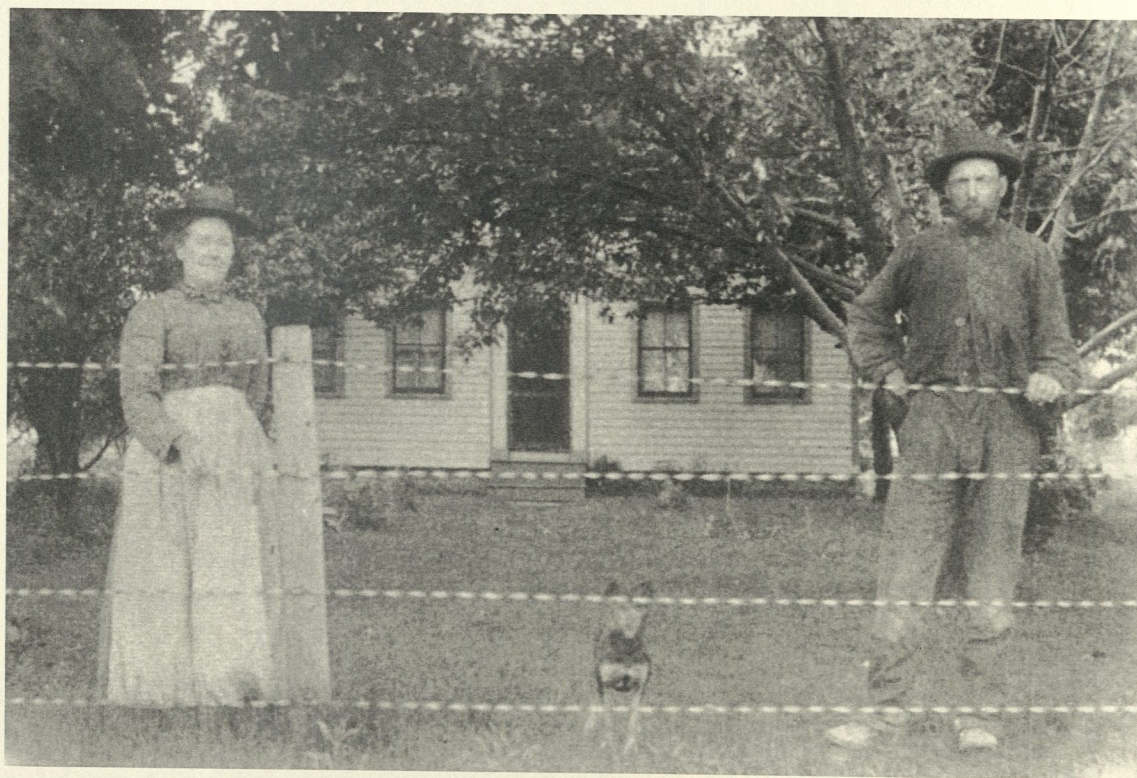
A NEIGHBORHOOD HISTORY THAT BEGINS IN 1847

By Marian Morton



his Cleveland Heights neighborhood rather grandly refers to itself as “Royal Heights”¹ because it includes Queenston, Kingston, Princeton (and Canterbury) Roads. On its southern boundary, Fairmount Boulevard, sit two nineteenth-century farmhouses, whose owners, the Pentys and the Heckers, turned their farms into these royal streets and the rural countryside into a suburb.

¹ Although the street names were always “royal,” my guess is that the name “Royal Heights” is of recent origin, created by website designers and realtors to give the neighborhood a distinctive, distinguished identity.



This photograph of Richard Penty's son, Robert and his wife, Susan Walkden Penty (1852-1932) appears on Ancestry.com. Although Robert inherited the home at 3497 Fairmount, the house in the background is not identified.

FIRST FAMILIES | 1847-1907 |

THE RICHARD PENTY HOUSE, a Cleveland Heights Landmark, is at 3497 Fairmount Boulevard. The Landmark Commission files date it from 1853 (it may be earlier) and describe it as a "Greek-Revival-influenced" farmhouse with a front-facing gable and porch to which a dining room wing has been added. In 1858, it was one of a dozen farmhouses along what was then called "North Woodland Road" that transported farm families and goods from the Warrensville Township countryside to the settlement of Doan's Corners (E. 105th St. and Euclid Avenue today) and from there to the city of

Cleveland. When the Penty house was landmarked in 1976, the original home had been only slightly modified. The original barn in the back was restored in 2005.

The home's owner, Richard Penty (1803-1855), immigrated to the United States from York, England, in 1833 and two years later married Jane Barker (1810-1869), whose father Robert Barker owned property nearby. Penty must have been a person of substance because in 1847, he bought 50 acres in Lot 14 (each township in the Western Reserve was divided into approximately equal lots for easy sale) and presumably built the house shortly afterwards. His property was bounded by what are now Fairmount, Taylor, East Scarborough, and Princeton Roads – in other words, almost all of the royal streets' neighborhood.

Here he raised his children, who raised their own families nearby: George W. (1836-1926) Mary Ann (1838-1913), Sarah (1841-1931), and Robert (1846-1918).

John Hecker (1804-1880), Richard Penty's neighbor to the east, owned the rest of Lot 14. Hecker was a German immigrant, and like Penty, had money – maybe even more money – enough to buy his 100



The Richard Penty farmhouse at 3497 Fairmount Boulevard is a Cleveland Heights Landmark.

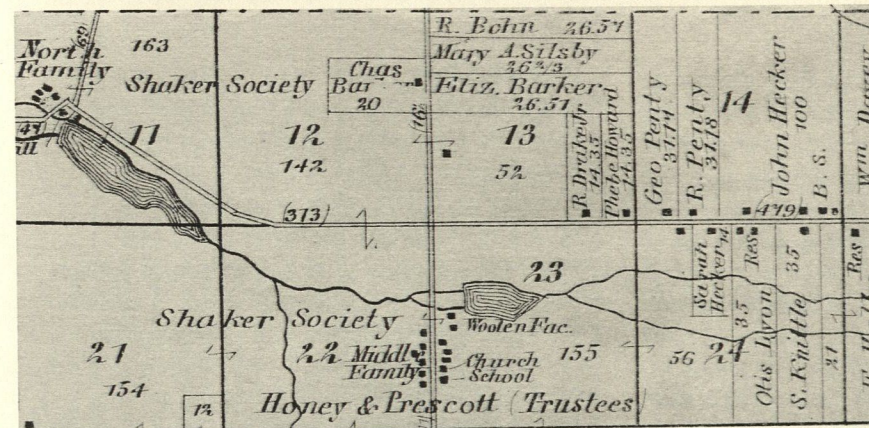


The John Hecker home at 3585 Fairmount Boulevard is also a Cleveland Heights Landmark.

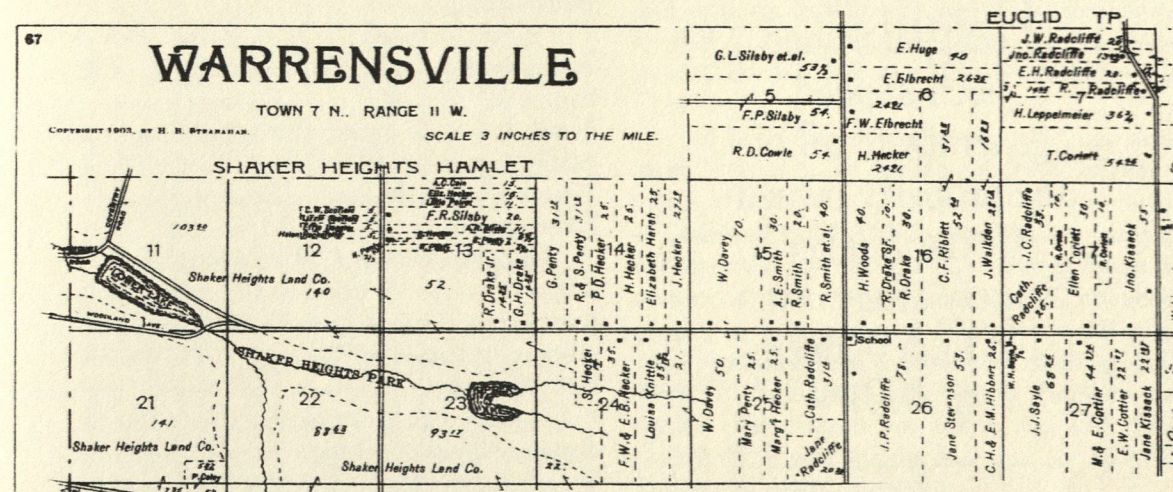
Bill Hopkins
Angelina M. Bair
Charles Owen
Korbi Roberts
John Wheeler

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.

— Ken Goldberg



Left: The 1874 atlas shows the location of the Penty and Hecker properties in Lot 14 and their proximity to the Shaker Society.



This 1892 map of Warrensville Township shows the Penty and Hecker properties along Fairmount Boulevard.

acres from Jacob Strong in 1853. His property extended from Richard Penty's to what is now Ashurst Road. Much of the acreage was pasture and meadowland; the rest was plowed fields or woods. His home at 3585 Fairmount was named a Cleveland Heights Landmark in 1988; according to the Landmark Commission records, the home was built in 1873. More elaborate than the Penty home, it is clapboard with decorative detail and a wrap-around porch.

John Hecker and his wife, Julia Raquet Hecker (1813-1851), had six children: Jacob (1848-1916), Elizabeth (1839-1913); John (1845-1889), Philip David (1842-1910), William (1843-1871), and Henry (1841-1920).

Henry married his next-door neighbor, Sarah Penty. Like the Pentys, the Heckers stayed in the neighborhood.²

² A special thank you to Margaret Morton Garrett, who found the families, the maps, and the photos.

The term
“Shaker
Heights” had
been applied
generally to all of
the property owned
by the Shaker
Society after it was
sold to developers
in 1891.

Nearby were the Shaker Society's family homes, church, school, and busy broom and woolen factories, the primary source of the society's income. Other businesses in Warrensville Township in 1874 included two merchants who sold dry goods, shoes, groceries, and medicines; a grocer with “a superior assortment of Family Groceries, cheap for cash”; a gardener who peddled strawberries, blackberries and raspberries; a butcher; and a shoemaker. Most were located close to the town center at what are now Warrensville Center Road and Chagrin Boulevard.³

As the first generation died, the original properties passed to their children. An 1892 map of Warrensville Township shows these homes in Lot 14, facing Fairmount (from west to east): George W. Penty; Robert Penty; Philip D. Hecker; Henry Hecker (husband of Sarah Penty); Elizabeth Hecker Harsh, and Jacob Hecker.

Richard Penty in 1850 had also bought property in Lot 13, just west of Lot 14, that ran from Lee to Taylor Roads. In 1892, much of this property belonged to Elizabeth Hecker, John Hecker's widow, and Mary Ann Penty Silsby, who had married neighbor Charles Silsby. The Silsbys also owned lots of property in the neighborhood. Today's Silsby Road runs through much of it.

FARMERS GO INTO REAL ESTATE (AND POLITICS)

LIKE MOST LOCAL RESIDENTS, the Pentys and Heckers realized in the first decade of the 20th

³ D.J. Lake, *Atlas of Cuyahoga County* (Philadelphia: Titus, Simmons, and Titus, 1874), 116.

century that selling land was far more profitable than farming it. To the north in the new village of Cleveland Heights, other long-time residents like the Minors, Preyers, and Comptons were selling the family farms, vineyards, and quarries to suburban developers.

Closer to home – in fact, almost right next door to the Pentys and Heckers – , the greatest developers of them all, Oris P. and Mantis J. Van Sweringen (“the Vans”) had begun in 1906 to buy and sell properties for their first version of Shaker Heights, marketed by the Shaker Heights Improvement Company. The term “Shaker Heights” had been applied generally to all of the property owned by the Shaker Society after it was sold to developers in 1891. The Vans' Shaker Heights Improvement Company allotment ran roughly north and south of Fairmount from Coventry to Lee Roads. This neighborhood is now included in the “Shaker Farm Historic District” on the National Register of Historic Places.⁴

The Vans marketed this Shaker Heights to Cleveland's elite families. Lots were large. So were homes, all designed by distinguished architects in distinctive styles that ranged from Tudor to Georgian to Mediterranean to French on appealing curvilinear streets. Most included carriage houses or garages.⁵ As was the custom of the time, advertisements for this Shaker Heights boasted of its beauty (“many of the buyers on Fairmount Boulevard, Stratford and Arlington roads are laying extensive plans for beautifying the grounds about their homes”) and stringent restrictions on land use (“no apartment houses, terraces, double houses, boarding houses ... sale of liquor, commercial use”) ⁶ Even more

⁴ See Mary Dunbar's nomination form at <https://www.clevelandheights.com/DocumentCenter/View/204/Shaker-Farm-Historic-District-2012>.

⁵ Dunbar.

⁶ *Plain Dealer* (PD), May 31, 1908: 26; PD, May 15, 1908: 15

important, affluent home buyers could easily get to this Shaker Heights, for the Vans had persuaded the Cleveland Street Railway in 1906 to run a streetcar up Fairmount.

Their success at using public transportation to sell private property would persuade them to do the same when they established the village of Shaker Heights in 1911. The boundary between this village and Cleveland Heights ran through the center of the Shaker Lakes, leaving their first version of Shaker Heights in Cleveland Heights.

The Pentys and the Heckers had bought and sold property on a small scale in the neighborhood for half a century. Perhaps inspired by the Vans' success, the families now moved into real estate in a big way.

But first, they went into politics. They were surely players in the founding in 1907 of the village of Idlewood, out of a southeastern corner of Cleveland Heights and a northwestern section of Warrensville Township. This village of farms and pastures encompassed 3 square miles, bounded roughly by Lee, Idlewood, Silsby, Green Roads, and Fairmount, with a population of about 400.⁷ Much of it belonged to the Pentys, Heckers, and Silsbys. The village's first mayor was A.R. Silsby, George W. Penty was the assessor, and G.E. Penty was on the village council.

Consequently, the Pentys and Heckers sold their properties in a village where they made and enforced the rules and regulations. George W. Penty made the first major sales in 1909 to developer Frisbie-Berwald, which then became Berwald Stewart, the primary marketer of the royal and nearby streets. The Heckers began to sell property to Berwald Stewart in 1910.

They took advantage – as did other developers – of the Vans' streetcar and their allotment's name recognition. The Pentys and Heckers also

⁷ <https://www.universityheights.com/history/>

named their allotment "Shaker Heights" in the Shaker Lakes Subdivision (of course, the Vans themselves had borrowed the name).

The subdivision included not only the Penty-Hecker properties on Fairmount, but the Hecker-Silsby properties between Lee and Taylor. These were laid out and sold as Bradford and East Fairfax Roads at the same time as the royal streets.

Like the street names in the Vans' subdivision – Arlington, Guilford, Wellington, Fairfax – , Queenston, Kingston, and Princeton were chosen to suggest a connection with an elite Anglo-American heritage. Canterbury, Scarborough and Bradford are other nearby examples.

Like the Vans', this allotment promised restrictions on property use: "SHAKER HEIGHTS Cleveland's Most Carefully Restricted Residence Suburb," exclaimed a 1910 advertisement with some exaggeration. The restrictions meant that properties could be used only for residential purposes. These were not the restrictive covenants that made it difficult for non-whites or non-Christians to buy homes, such as appeared in the Vans' Shaker Heights in the mid-1920s and later.⁸

Although single-family homes predominated, there were duplexes scattered throughout the neighborhood. The lots were smaller (40- to 50-foot frontage) than the Vans' lots (80- to 100-foot frontage) and less expensive (\$450-\$1900).⁹ Streets were laid out on a simple grid, running north and south from Fairmount to East Scarborough, corresponding to the boundaries of Lot 14.

The homes were of modest size in a variety of American-derived styles: variations on the

front-gabled Penty and Hecker farmhouses, bungalows, four-squares, and Colonials of brick and frame.

Lots on Kingston and Queenston sold briskly in 1910 and 1911. Lots on Canterbury were advertised in 1911 as "the last of the properties we own in this vicinity." The street and sidewalks were not in, continued the ad, but they were promised. Prices were lower: \$400-\$800,¹⁰ probably because Canterbury was farthest from the streetcar, which didn't run east of Lee until the 1920s. In 1915, a seemingly desperate seller advertised " LOTS – LOTS – LOTS Bargains for cash. Beautiful lot, cor. Canterbury and Randolph ... Only \$1,050."¹¹ (Randolph later became the easternmost extension of Bradford.)

PUBLIC SPACES

IN 1914, the section of Idlewood Village west of Eaton and south of Silsby was re-annexed to Cleveland Heights, then enjoying a spectacular population and building boom. The re-annexation generated new sales. In 1921, Cleveland Heights became a city, and its school board recognized the need for new school for the new neighborhood and began to buy properties on Princeton and Canterbury for Canterbury School.

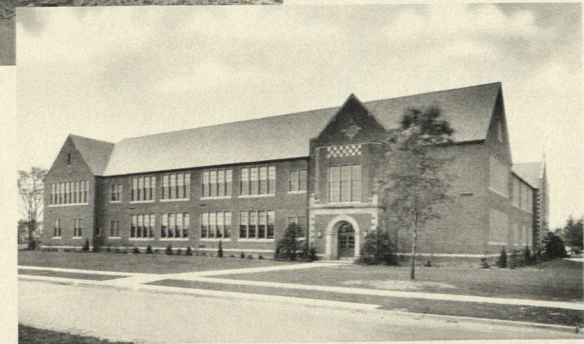
Because of the school's location at the far eastern end of the city and the northern end of the very long "royal" blocks, the city started to buy the lots on Queenston, Kingston, and Princeton that became "the cinder path" or "the Bradford path" from Taylor to Canterbury so that neighborhood children could get to school more



Left: Although it has been paved for years, this is called the cinder path and takes children to school and dog walkers, pedestrians, and bikers through the royal streets. **Below:** The original Canterbury School, completed in 1927 and designed by John Graham, has since been added to.

easily. The school, designed by John R. Graham, also the architect of Monticello Junior High School and other schools, was completed in 1927 and later added to.

The cluster of shops and offices on Fairmount, just east of Taylor, is the obvious exception to the residential-only restrictions on the properties. Substantial frame structures appear on a 1912 map. Although their use is not clear, this would be the logical spot for commerce. According to the Cuyahoga County website,¹² the two buildings closest to Queenston date from 1920; the third, from 1925. In 1929, this was a busy shopping destination with a Standard Oil gas station, an East Ohio Gas office, two butchers, a confectioner, a dressmaker, an auto tire shop, a hardware store, a drugstore, a delicatessen, and two chain grocery stores, a Fisher Brothers and an A & P.



By the end of this decade, the royal streets and Canterbury were almost built out. The Depression and World War II slowed, although they did not quite halt, the building of new homes in the neighborhood.

The village of Shaker Heights had annexed the portion of Idlewood Village south on Fairmount in 1914, and the tiny village, population about 70,¹³ named itself University Heights in 1925 in anticipation of becoming the new home of John Carroll University. (This

⁸ In 1911, this puzzling ad appeared in the PD, May 30, 1911: 15: "Have property ... on Princeton-rd ... will sacrifice equity for \$800; will make good investment for colored person."

⁹ PD, August 28, 1910: 26.

¹⁰ PD, May 21, 1911: 8C.

¹¹ PD, July 18, 1915: 29.

¹² <https://myplace.cuyahogacounty.us/>

¹³ <https://www.universityheights.com/history/>



Kingston Road,
July 4, 2019

didn't happen until 1931.) University Heights became a city in 1940 when its population passed 5,000. In the post-World War II years, as the University Heights population grew rapidly, housing styles changed. Builders and buyers sought more architectural uniformity in contrast to the royal streets where cheerful architectural eclecticism is the rule.

AND AFTER THAT

THE TWO FAMILIES stayed in the neighborhood long after their farms became the royal streets. In 1929, five Heckers and three Pentys lived on Fairmount within walking distance of each other and the families' first properties. In 1947, John T. Penty, son of Robert Penty and grandson of

Richard Penty, celebrated his fiftieth wedding anniversary in the family farmhouse at 3497 Fairmount where he was born and raised.¹⁴ The house remained in the family until 1959. Charles H. Hecker, the son of Henry Hecker and Sarah Penty Hecker and the grandson of Jacob Hecker and Richard Penty, lived at 3625 Fairmount, a block from the Hecker farmhouse, at the time of his death in 1962.

Unlike the Minors, the Preyers, and the Comptons, the Pentys and the Heckers have no streets named after them. But they left their imprint on the rectangular grid that was first, Lot 14 in Warrensville Township; then their fields, woods, and pastures, and now this neighborhood. And the families left the two humble farmhouses that – more than a century and a half later – anchor the royal streets and remind us of the transformation of the city's rural past into its suburban present.

¹⁴ PD, May 17, 1942: 12.

LEE ROAD ... & BOULEVARD

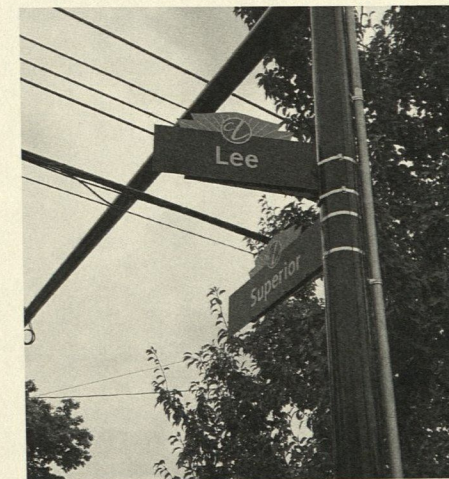
CLEVELAND HEIGHTS has one street that goes from "Road" to Boulevard – Lee. The Road part goes way south of our town, but the Boulevard is only from Mayfield Road north – into East Cleveland. How come this name division?

The "Boulevard" title was granted by the Rockefellers when developing Forest Hill in the 1920s; that stretch had simply been part of Lee Road until then. The new name, of course, was to accompany attractive new homes facing a lush park – a name in sync with the new boulevards named Forest Hills (ending with an "s"), Monticello, Mt. Vernon, and Northvale. Interestingly, these broad streets had few houses until after World War Two.

As for Lee, the addresses are problematic, with numbers duplicated along both Road and Boulevard. Addresses on the Boulevard, as in pre-Forest Hill years, follow the standard East Cleveland pattern, with "1800" just south of Euclid Avenue were there to be any houses there. But Lee Road, as well as other north-south streets situated between Mayfield and Cedar roads, also hit the "1800" mark somewhere near the middle.

Hence another reason for differentiating the Road and the Boulevard. North and South Taylor roads, likewise, have stretches with the same span of numbers. That's typical with streets in other communities with "north" and "south" segments, though in Taylor's case the numbers of both segments rise going southward.

Ken Goldberg
President, Cleveland Heights Historical Society



JOIN TODAY!

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The Cleveland Heights Historical Society

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