

View from The Overlook

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Mr. Brown's Neighborhood

by Charles Owen

For over a century, the beautiful tree-shaded community once known as "Mayfield Heights" has stood as a fine example of an early twentieth century suburban neighborhood. No, we're not speaking of the suburb that is located way out on Mayfield Road, but rather the original Mayfield Heights that is one of the oldest residential sections of historic Cleveland Heights.

The neighborhood, initially a part of East Cleveland Township, was envisioned by real estate attorney, developer and philanthropist Marcus M. Brown (M. M. Brown). Mr. Brown and his wife, Jeannette Cadwell Brown, emigrated from Chicago to rural East Cleveland Township in 1896. While Mr. Brown, a self-made man, had a successful real estate and legal career in Chicago, he and his wife moved to Cleveland to seek a less stressful lifestyle. He sought a new life that would be beneficial for his health and allow him more leisure time for literary and philosophical pursuits.



M. M. Brown

Shortly after the Browns' arrival in East Cleveland Township, M. M. Brown constructed a home on a Mayfield Road bluff just east of Coventry Road. Real estate development, it seemed, was still in his blood. From his new home, he started planning the development of a peaceful modern suburban community to be known as "Mayfield Heights." The new community, bounded roughly by Mayfield Road, Superior Road, Euclid Heights Boulevard and Coventry Road, was christened Mayfield Heights because it sat above the Mayfield Road interurban and streetcar tracks. M. M. Brown was very much aware of the progress of Patrick Calhoun's Euclid Heights Allotment and the access that the Euclid Heights streetcar would offer. M. M. Brown's new Mayfield Heights Allotment was established immediately east of the Euclid Heights Allotment's Coventry Road boundary. Potential residents were advised to take the Euclid Heights car to

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The Cleveland Heights Historical Society



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The Cleveland Heights Historical Society,
founded in 1983, is a state-chartered,
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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.

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Coventry Road and walk one block up Euclid Heights Boulevard to the Mayfield Heights sales office.

Unlike Euclid Heights and many of the other early Heights developments that were designed to attract a well-to-do constituency, Mayfield Heights was originally envisioned to appeal to the middle and professional classes. While some rather imposing dwellings were developed in the Mayfield Heights Allotment by Mr. Brown prior to 1900 (including a splendid new estate for himself and his family on Euclid Heights Boulevard at Wilton Road), later residences were relatively modest, builder-designed homes nestled on smaller lots.

M. M. Brown created a network of fine brick streets for Mayfield Heights with such names as Center Avenue (Hampshire), Preyer Avenue (Somerton), Florence Avenue (Radnor), Hurst Avenue (Middlehurst), Monroe Avenue (Wilton) and Cadwell Avenue. Interestingly, Monroe was M. M. Brown's middle name and Cadwell was the maiden name of his wife, Jeanette. Also of interest is that today's Preyer Avenue was originally known as Alvin Road and was owned by the Preyer family.

M. M. Brown fully believed in the future of Mayfield Heights and put everything he had on the line for the community. However, after the turn of the century, sales began to wane and then the nationwide economic calamity known as the "Panic of 1907" struck. Consumer interest in real estate all but dried up and M. M. Brown and his Mayfield Heights Realty Company were foreclosed upon by the Cleveland Trust Company in 1908. The bank took ownership of the Allotment at Sheriff Sale.

Subsequent to the takeover, Cleveland Trust began marketing Mayfield Heights aggressively. A. B. Smythe, the founder of the Smythe, Cramer Company, was hired by the bank to build and sell Mayfield Heights homes. Soon large newspaper advertisements proclaimed Mayfield Heights as "Country Life in Cleveland" and "Real Homes for Real People." Cleveland Trust stressed the advantages of owning a Mayfield Heights home to Cleveland's growing middle class who desired to leave the increasingly crowded and polluted industrial city. In order to further advance the idea of "Country Life," Cleveland



M. M. Brown's Mayfield Heights residence on Euclid Heights Boulevard at Wilton Road, 1905.

Trust changed the street names that M. M. Brown established to the English monikers we are familiar with today. The homes were sold for the advertised deal of "\$500 down, the rest same as rent" until all the lots were gone.

The spirit of M. M. Brown's Mayfield Heights lives on to this day. The allotment's solid American Foursquare, Arts and Crafts, Craftsman, Bungalow, Colonial and Queen Anne homes have been preserved and have remained mostly faithful to the styles in which they were originally built.

The community prides itself as a traditional neighborhood of attractive homes and gardens in a friendly pedestrian-friendly environment.

Editor's note: Mr. Owen has initiated "The Mayfield Heights Allotment Research Project of Historic Cleveland Heights" which includes an eventual nomination of the vintage neighborhood to the National Register of Historic Places. He and his wife, Dumont, live in old Mayfield Heights and are currently restoring their 1913 home built by Cleveland Trust.

When Bad Ideas Happen to Good Suburbs

With this month's edition of "View From the Overlook," we present the first in a series of stories on some dramatic "improvement" projects that (thankfully) never happened. The most famous of these is the initiative you will read about herein: the proposed Clark, Lee and Heights Freeways of the late 1960s. As many readers will observe, the story is excerpted from Marian Morton's "Cleveland Heights: The Making of an Urban Suburb," which is available at Borders, Appletree Books and Amazon.com. The Cleveland Heights Historical Society extends its gratitude to Ms. Morton and encourages everyone to obtain a copy of her wonderful book.

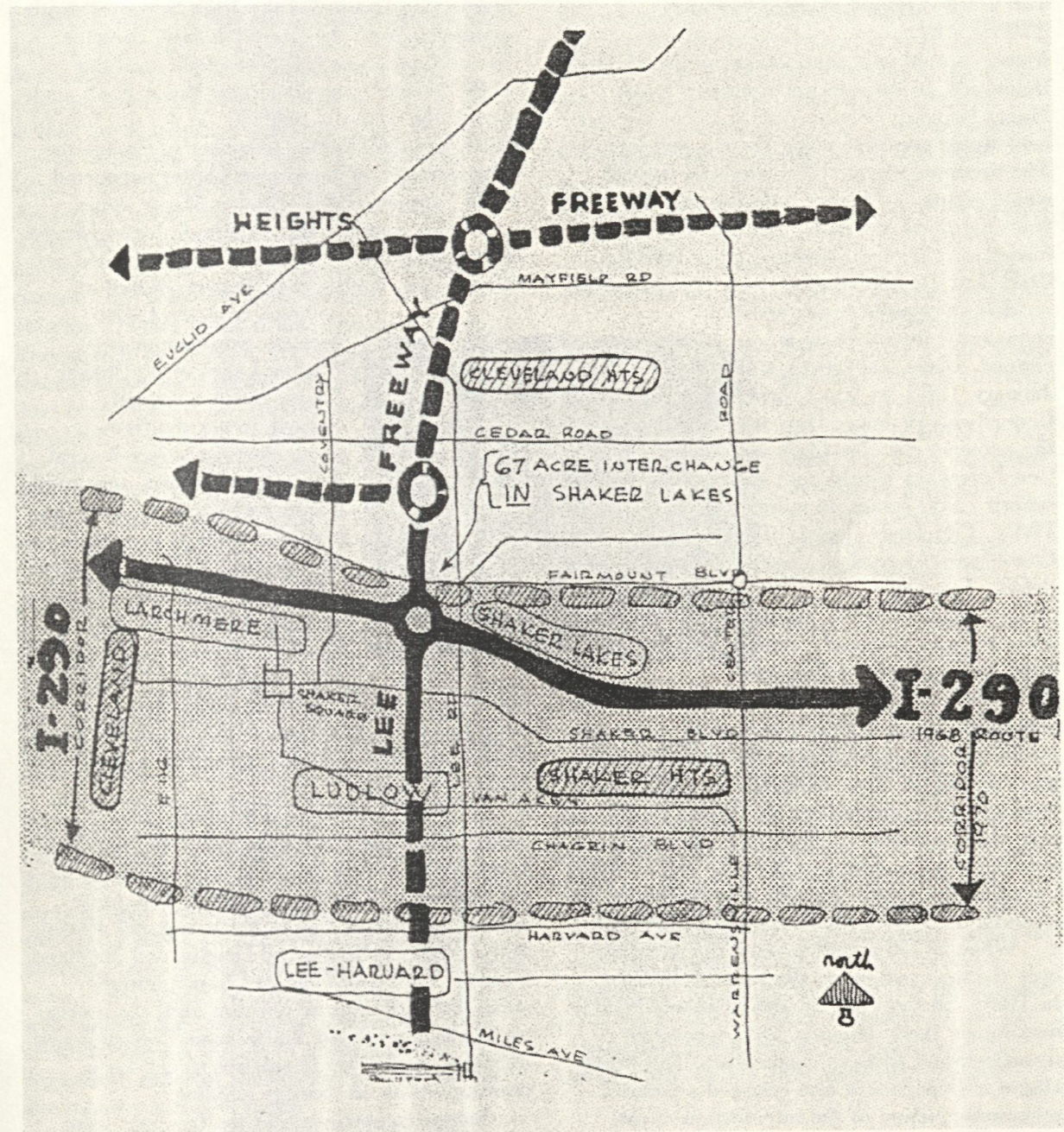
The Clark, Lee and Heights Freeways

Plans for a federal highway system were already underway by 1944, but not until 1956 and the passage of the Federal Highway Act did they receive adequate political support and funding to materialize. Cold War fears then legitimized spending money on highways that would efficiently transport military personnel and equipment in case of an attack by the Soviet Union. In early 1956, alarmed Cleveland Heights residents first got wind of plans for a federal highway that would run from Euclid Avenue through the Forest Hill development and east to South Euclid, Lyndhurst, and Highland Heights. They were reassured that this "Heights Freeway" was 25 years away.

In December 1963, however, County Engineer Albert Porter made public his proposals for the Clark Freeway (I-290) that would run east and west along the Shaker Lakes to I-271 in Pepper Pike, with a north-south interchange at Lee. The "Sun Press" immediately reported that the eight-lane highway would eliminate 80 homes and five commercial properties in Shaker Heights. Despite assurances that the freeway was in the distant future, Shaker Heights residents, led by Mayor Paul K. Jones, mobilized immediately in opposition to what they interpreted as a reckless destruction of fine homes and priceless parkland. In response to 1962 federal legislation, the Cleveland/Seven County Transportation/Land Use Study (SCOTS) was established in 1963 and an early task was to assess Porter's proposal. At this stage, Shaker Heights officials and residents played key roles in opposing this imminent freeway since it posed the most threat to their suburb.

Cleveland Heights officials followed Shaker's lead. In 1963, County Engineer's maps showed Cleveland Heights would be on the paths of three future freeways: the Heights Freeway through East Cleveland, Cleveland Heights, South Euclid, and Lyndhurst; the Central Freeway along Cedar through the center of Cleveland Heights, and the north-south Lee Freeway that would connect the proposed Clark Freeway to Interstate 90. The Clark Freeway would also endanger Cleveland Heights since the northern boundaries of the Shaker Lakes are in Cleveland Heights, and the

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Opponents drew this map of the proposed freeways knifing through Shaker Heights and Cleveland Heights (Source: Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland Ohio).

freeway would take some homes on North Park Boulevard. In January and February 1964, Mayor Kenneth Nash pointed out that the freeways would carve Cleveland Heights into segments. The proposed elevated Lee Freeway, he said, would create "a Chinese wall dividing our suburb from the north to south." He promised to join forces with Shaker Heights against both the Clark and the Lee Freeways. Cleveland Heights residents organized and attended community forums such as one entitled "Blight and Freeways" in January 1965, at which future Councilman Philmore Hart told the audience that the Clark and Lee Freeways would cost the suburb 1,000 homes. In summer 1965, Cleveland Heights City Council passed a resolution against the Lee Freeway.

In the fall of 1965, women's organizations proposed a nature center on the lower Shaker Lake that would serve the schools of both suburbs. The proposal allowed freeway opponents to capitalize on the negative impact of freeways on the lakes and watersheds, thus avoiding what might otherwise have been interpreted as a rather crass battle over the destruction of expensive property in wealthy suburbs. Supporters of the nature center, including the mayors of both suburbs, hoped that it would block both the Clark and Lee Freeways.

While SCOTS staff studied the situation over the next two years, the battle continued. In 1966, Shaker Heights and Cleveland Heights maintained their vigilance, both appointing transportation advisory committees. The State Highway Department also released a detailed panoramic picture of the intersection of the proposed Lee and Central Freeways that would have eliminated everything at the Cedar-Lee

intersection except for the High School. Despite assurances from the State Highway Director that no final plans would be made until the SCOTS study was completed, Mayor Nash again blasted the proposal publicly. So did the School Board and the Heights Chamber of Commerce. (The manager of Severance Center supported it.) In February 1967, Shaker Mayor Jones assured an audience that Governor James Rhodes had promised that the Clark Freeway would not be built. Two weeks later, Porter assured an

audience that the Clark Freeway would be built—Shaker Lakes or no Shaker Lakes. Rhodes himself, anxious to get the freeway route clarified before federal dollars disappeared, appointed a local task force to study the matter in hopes of reaching some agreement. Members included Richard S. Stoddart, chairman of the Cleveland Heights Mayor's Advisory Committee on Transportation. (Stoddart

became Councilman in June 1968 when Nash resigned to become a Judge of the Cleveland Heights Municipal Court. Fred P. Stashower replaced Nash as Mayor.)

In summer 1968, a preliminary SCOTS report suggested a northern route for the Clark Freeway that would have touched only the northeast section of Cleveland Heights. This route spared the Shaker Lakes, but it angered officials and residents of Richmond Heights and Highland Heights. Cleveland Heights Council initially adopted a wait-and-see position until the precise route was determined, but in June, Council joined with the other affected suburbs to call for a moratorium on all freeway building.

Suburban opponents of the freeways were joined by Cleveland Mayor Carl B. Stokes. Cleveland had already experienced the destructive

**"The Highwaymen
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*Citizens for Sane Transportation and
Environmental Politics*

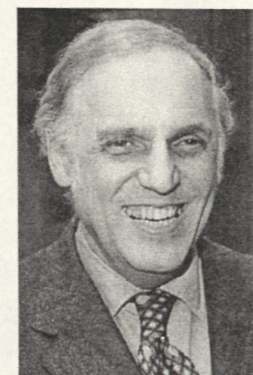
impact of highways that not only drained residents away from the city but destroyed the neighborhoods in the highways' paths. Cleveland's population dropped from 914,808 in 1950 to 876,336 a decade later; freeways were one of the reasons.

In December 1969, Porter won a major victory when he persuaded the Northeast Ohio Areawide Coordinating Committee (NOACA), which had succeeded SCOTS as a planning agency, to include in a "Recommended Highway System" the southern route through Shaker Heights. Shaker Heights and Cleveland Heights immediately hired a law firm to help them block freeway plans and joined Cleveland in withholding dues from NOACA and condemning its decision. Residents formed still another committee, Citizens for Sane Transportation and Environmental Politics (CSTEP), headed by Cleveland Heights resident Worth Loomis. "STOP FREEWAY STUPIDITY," exclaimed CSTEP's advertising: "The Highwaymen are at it again! They want to make the Heights Area into an asphalt jungle. Once more we must stop these destroyers of our homes, parks, lakes, and neighborhoods." A crowd of 2,000 citizens jammed CSTEP's public meeting in January 1970 to hear the proposal blasted by clergymen, State legislators, and members of the Stokes administration.

And suddenly it was all over. In February 1970, Rhodes at a breakfast meeting with suburban officials scrapped the plans for I-290 (both the Clark and Lee Freeways). Rhodes was no particular friend of historic preservation or the environment; he had earlier proposed an alternate freeway route that would have eliminated most of the homes on Shaker Boulevard. But he was running for the United States Senate and certainly needed friends in these traditionally Republican suburbs. Rhodes lost his contest, but the suburbs had won theirs.

A key player in this battle was the editor and publisher of the weekly Sun Press, Harry Volk. A former reporter for the Cleveland News

and a much-decorated veteran of World War II, Volk founded the Shaker Sun in 1946 and merged it with the Heights Press in 1948 to create the Heights and Sun Press, later the Sun Press. Volk generally sided with the forces for progress and development. He had little sympathy for the former mansions of the Cleveland Heights elite, referring to them once as "outmoded mausoleums," but he instantly recognized the devastating impact of freeways, and from the time that Porter revealed his plans in 1963 to February



Harry Volk

1970, Volk kept the issue alive and Heights citizens informed. Freeways were front-page headlines every week, and there was little pretense of journalistic objectivity when, for instance, the proposed freeway was described as a "concrete and steel monster." In spring 1964, Sun Press headlines prematurely shouted that, according to a reliable

source, "CLARK FREEWAY IS DEAD ISSUE." When Rhodes finally killed the freeway, he revealed that he had been Volk's source and gave the editor much of the credit for the freeway's demise. Rhodes did not say why he allowed the battle to continue for another six years. Volk himself applauded the "angry, concerned citizens, acting with intelligence [who] make our democracy work. This is people power." Volk was also a champion of racial integration and the preservation of the environment and an opponent of the war in Vietnam. The death of the Clark Freeway, however, was Volk's most successful crusade.