

View from The Overlook



THE PUBLICATION OF THE CLEVELAND HEIGHTS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NO. 47 • SUMMER 2021

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The First Bicknell Home in Cleveland Heights

By Wm. Hopkins, CHHS Trustee



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The First Bicknell Home in Cleveland Heights

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n 1910, ten years before the architectural firm of Meade & Hamilton designed Warren Bicknell's home at 1801 Chestnut

Hills Drive, Cleveland Heights, he hired another noted Cleveland architect, Harlan Shimmin, to design an approximately 5,000 square foot home and carriage house at 2323 Coventry Road, into which Bicknell moved his family from their earlier residence at 2073 Adelbert Road in Cleveland. The Coventry home's exterior was primarily brick, with Tudor-inspired stuccoed and timbered second and third floor gables and dormers. The house originally was on a little more than 2.5 acres of wooded and landscaped beds, bounded by Coventry Road on the west, Corydon Road to the south, and Stillman Road to the east. According to Cleveland Heights Building Permit Database records compiled by preservationist Kara Hamley O'Donnell, parcels of this property were built on in 1924, 1962 & 1978, still leaving a sizable lot today. There are still two large European Beech trees flanking the north and south sides of the front drive, easily appearing to be 100 years old or more.



Main Hall — Residence of Mr. Warren Bicknell, Cleveland Heights, Ohio.
H.E. Shimmin, Architect



Opposite view of same room showing fireplace — Residence of Mr. Warren Bicknell, Cleveland Heights, Ohio. *H.E. Shimmin, Architect*

Shimmin's style has been noted for its light, spacious interiors. The Bicknell home has large archways between the main first floor rooms in order to facilitate movement, with windows along multiple walls. He was known for Craftsman influences, simplicity in interior design and for innovations in fluorescent lighting and modern plumbing. Ceiling heights were lowered to 9.5-10 feet, and bathroom innovations such as pedestal toilets, built-in bathtubs with concealed pipes, and steam heat, were utilized. While the Bicknell living room was finished in stained wood, including the strip of picture molding beneath the white crown molding, the dining room was a combination of painted and stained wood moldings. "And in the home of Mr. Warren Bicknell, they... (living room chandeliers)... have been eliminated entirely" as the pictures show from a January, 1913 article in *Ohio Architect, Engineer & Builder*, pages 35 & 36.

The Dec. 7, 1919 issue of the *Plain Dealer* (page 78) reported that "H.P. McIntosh, Sr., chairman of the board of directors of the Guardian Savings & Trust Co., ...has purchased the residence of Warren Bicknell at 2323 Coventry Rd., in a high class residential community in Cleveland Heights.

Mr. Bicknell is constructing a large attractive residence in Cedar Glen Parkway, where he will remove when completed, Mr. McIntosh then taking the Bicknell residence on Coventry Rd., midway between Fairmount Blvd. & Cedar Rd."

On June 9, 1920, another *Plain Dealer* article regarding Miss Betty Bicknell, Warren Bicknell's daughter, noted that, "her parents will move into their new home, Beacon Hill, Ambler Heights, in the near future." The family must have left that summer or fall, as the Bicknell family is not listed in the 1920 census at the Coventry Road address.



Dining Room — Residence of Mr. Warren Bicknell, Cleveland Heights, Ohio. *H.E. Shimmin, Architect*

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.

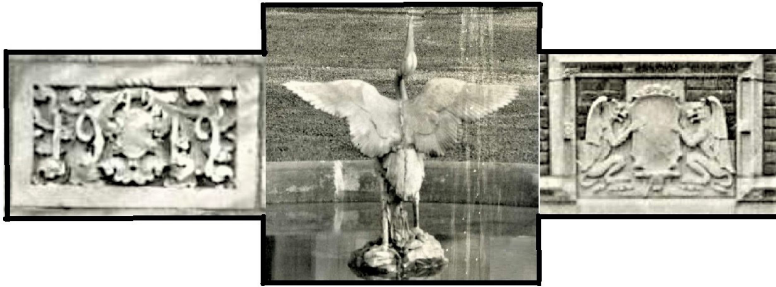
This *View from the Overlook* concentrates on our
city's Ambler Heights Historic District—specifically Judson
Manor's former Bicknell Mansion and some information
on the Bicknells. Related history, including information
on a particular early suburban development within the
current Cleveland Heights which has gotten extremely
little attention, will be covered in our next issue. Expect
to be surprised. You are also being treated in the current
issue with Trustee Steve Holowicki's article on T-locking
shingle roofs. There are many of these still around in our
beloved Cleveland Heights, but the number dwindles
each year. Personally, when I see one I think "old
fashioned"—sort of an amiable carryover from the past
I'm comfortable with.

As most of you know, 2021 is the year our fair city
is celebrating its Centennial. 1921 is the year Cleveland
Heights became a City, but it became a Village with
that name in 1903. Cleveland Heights encompasses land
that had been in East Cleveland, Euclid, and Warrensville
Townships, and later Idlewood Village – the Townships
dating from the early 1800s.

The Historical Society is doing its part in the
celebration, including contributing to the City's Centennial
Page on the web, contributing as usual to our series of
history-related talks and possibly tours, and contributing
to the City's Centennial Time Capsule. I personally offered
several architectural walking tours of the Cedar Fairmount
district on its festival days. A good proportion of our
houses south of Mayfield road are already "century
homes" – a term now encompassing far more styles than
did the "century home" image which most of us have
associated with the label. Almost all our streets south of
Mayfield road were already constructed by 1930.

We'd like ideas for articles for future issues of our
"View" journal and writers as well! What would you like
to contribute and share? Articles need not be lengthy;
we've included issues with several articles and would be
glad to do so again.

— Ken Goldberg



“Bicknell Mansion”

By Angelina M. Bair, former CHHS Trustee, and Thomas G. Matowitz, Jr.

By the turn of the 20th century Cleveland’s Millionaires’ Row had begun its long decline. The wealthy began to turn their attention to new development on the Heights overlooking the city from the east. This exodus from Euclid Avenue coincided with the rise of one of Cleveland’s greatest architectural firms, Meade & Hamilton. Partners Frank Meade and James Hamilton were responsible for some of the finest residential housing in the area. Their heyday came in the 1920s and one of the finest expressions of their skill is the house they designed for Mr. and Mrs. Warren Bicknell in the Ambler Heights allotment, in Cleveland Heights.

Construction of the house occupied several years, beginning in 1919. A December 15, 1950, article in *Yesterday’s Homes* reported that the cost of building the home was \$400,000 and the architectural landscaping \$30,000. The Jacobean style, half-timber, stone and brick dwelling were modeled after Compton Wynyates - a Tudor period manor house in Warwickshire, England. The Bicknell house was ready for occupancy in 1923. Many of the interior spaces, the ornamental plaster, and elaborate woodwork were direct copies

of the English originals. In the May 1923 issue of *Architectural Record*, critic I.T. Frary praised the house lavishly, stating that the craftsmen who built it appeared to have had fun turning the architect’s plans into reality. The new house was notable for its comfort and lack of pretension.

The opulent residence included 18 fireplaces, a stone arch recessed entryway with a massive oak door with “linen fold” wooden panels, a basement brick billiard room with large brick arches, a large ballroom on the third floor, and a “secret staircase” that connected the living room to the master bedroom above and also to the wine cellar below. Wood panels were executed by wood carvers from Holland who lived in the mansion for months while they finished the magnificent woodwork. Images of the carvings were repeated in the oak and in a leaded-glass vestibule inner entrance door, which today is proudly on display in the solarium for visitors to view the incredibly detailed craftsmanship of the woodcarvers’ art.

The main hallway opens into a magnificent reception room with wainscoting and a massive stone fireplace with its curved mantle mirroring the style of the doorway. The grand staircase leads to the second-floor balcony. The main hall



BICKNELL MANSION FRONT

The Bicknell mansion, today part of Judson Park, resembles a 17th century Jacobean English manor house. The Bicknell family purchased the property in 1916 (Cuyahoga County deeds vol. 1852/pg. 202 and vol. 1852/pg. 204). The house featured an open port-cochere to the left, which was used as a loggia (porch) instead of a carriage drive-through. The original perpendicular driveway, now discontinued, led straight on, and then turned eastward. It was designed to show off the whole view of the house at once, and for as long as possible. The Bicknell family employed four indoor servants to assist in house-keeping. The 1930 U.S. census lists the servants as native to Maine, Ireland, Poland and Switzerland, reflective of the “melting pot” demographics of Cleveland. The east wing of the house included separate sleeping quarters and dining room for the staff. The mansion also had seven other bedrooms on the second floor with two window-filled “sleeping porches” to escape the summer heat in the days before air conditioning. The first floor had an “ice room” with insulated cabinets to store ice blocks.

led to the kitchen, dining room with oak wainscot and decorative plaster ornament, and a small family breakfast room. Intricate plaster ceiling patterns were custom designed and executed by hand. Beyond the staircase lay the stone-walled solarium, a library with open bookshelves, and

a spacious, elegant living room. The living room features a large stone fireplace set into a decoratively carved wood-paneled wall. The grand portecochère western doorway has an arched panel over the opening, with “linen fold” carving (Frary, pp. 203-216). Although built on a vast scale, the



BICKNELL MANSION BACK YARD

The rear view of the Bicknell mansion perched on the old "Point Lookout" of Ambler Park (predecessor to Ambler Heights), was designed to look like a second "front view." Until recently, this view had been blocked by Judson Park's wing additions (Mouat and Milner Halls built in the 1950s). A datestone over the main rear doorway shows "A.D. 1919" while a datestone over the front entrance shows "1920." The circular pond with fountain in this photo was moved in, is now a flower bed. It once featured a lovely Heron sculpture with its wings open as if enjoying the spray. The garage (not shown) was designed to look like an English hunting lodge. It included living quarters, twin octagonal decorative chimneys, and a built-in early automobile "turntable" (still intact).

interiors were warm and inviting.

The house's location was ideal. Perched near the brink of a bluff overlooking the city, its setting one hundred years ago was practically rural. Advantage was taken of a natural ravine lying just south of the house to create a garden with ter-

aces descending towards a lower-level vegetable garden, and there is a flight of steps leading to a narrow swimming pool. The pool was fed by steams of water shooting from three decorative fountain spouts. Designed by the Olmsted Brothers' firm, the garden created an illusion



Old servants' wing of Bicknell mansion (east elevation), now redesigned into Judson Park independent living apartments.

of spaciousness, even though it was nowhere more than 76 feet wide, and frequently far narrower. The formal gardens were featured in Kate Burton's "Diversified Gardens of Cleveland," a 1923 issue of *Art & Archaeology*, and a July 1930 issue of the *Landscape Architecture Magazine*. Photographic archives from the National Park Service's Frederick Olmsted Collection give behind-the-scenes details of the construction of the landscape architecture at the Bicknell house.

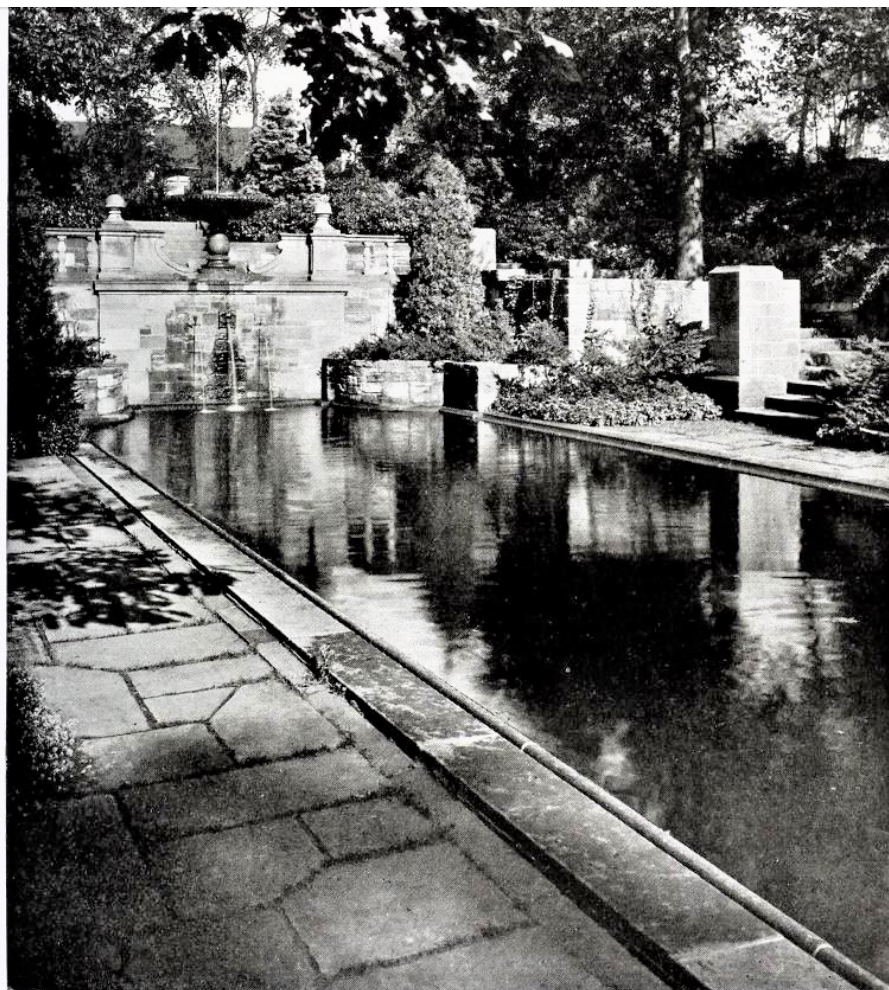
Given the house's comfort and the resources devoted to its construction it is noteworthy that the Bicknells lived there for less than twenty years. In 1939 the Bicknell mansion and property were purchased at the astounding low sum of \$50,000 by the Baptist Home of Northern Ohio, to serve as a residential and nursing facility for seniors. The organization, renamed Judson Park in the 1970s, has resided there for over eighty years now.

The Baptist Home of Northern Ohio has an interesting past. In 1907, the Louise Southworth

residence at 3334 Prospect Avenue was sold to the Baptist Church. John D. Rockefeller, Sr. donated \$5,000 towards the purchase and it served as a refuge for Baptist widows. The Women's Social Bible class had met earlier to discuss Sarah T. Garlock, an elderly woman who was ill and had been recently widowed. She had no family, home, or financial resources, and the Bible group decided to create a home for the caring of the elderly. Over a period of thirteen years the home grew from six to 27 occupants and in 1919 the facility was moved to 8903 Cedar Avenue. It was sold in 1939 to purchase the seven-acre Bicknell estate at 1801 Chestnut Hills Drive, which became the center of the Judson Manor Retirement Community (Encyclopedia of Cleveland "Judson Retirement Community," ; Judson Manor "About-History," 2020; Cleveland Plain Dealer, 1920).

By the early 1950's The Baptist Home of Ohio added two wings onto the back of the mansion and named them Mouat Hall and Milner Hall (now demolished). It was at this time that the front yard around the mansion was paved with parking lots and the remnants of the Bicknell's Olmsted gardens were filled in. In 1972 The Baptist Home was then renamed Judson Park. In 1974 there was a dedication for another addition - the ten-storied Jordan Gardner apartments built into the Ambleside Drive hillside. A lower parking garage allowed for the removal of the upper parking lots. The front grounds around the mansion were returned to green lawn with the addition of a lovely front sitting garden and pond for the residents to enjoy.

In the late 1990s Judson Park took steps to convert part of the mansion into independent living apartments called Mansion Courts.



The Architectural Record

March, 1923

The sunken swimming pool and fountains in the formal garden was fed by lovely water spouts and was left to flow naturally (more pond-like). Unfortunately, the exquisite, but high maintenance formal gardens created along the old ravine bed were filled in by the early 1950's after the Bicknell mansion was converted into the Baptist Home. *Architectural Record*, March 1923

This challenge was undertaken by the noted architect Peter van Dijk, and he rose to it admirably. The house's architectural features had survived largely intact, and with great sensitivity van Dijk adapted it into seven large apartments. They are spacious and airy and are among the most

desirable living spaces in Cleveland. A waiting list to get into them is ever present.

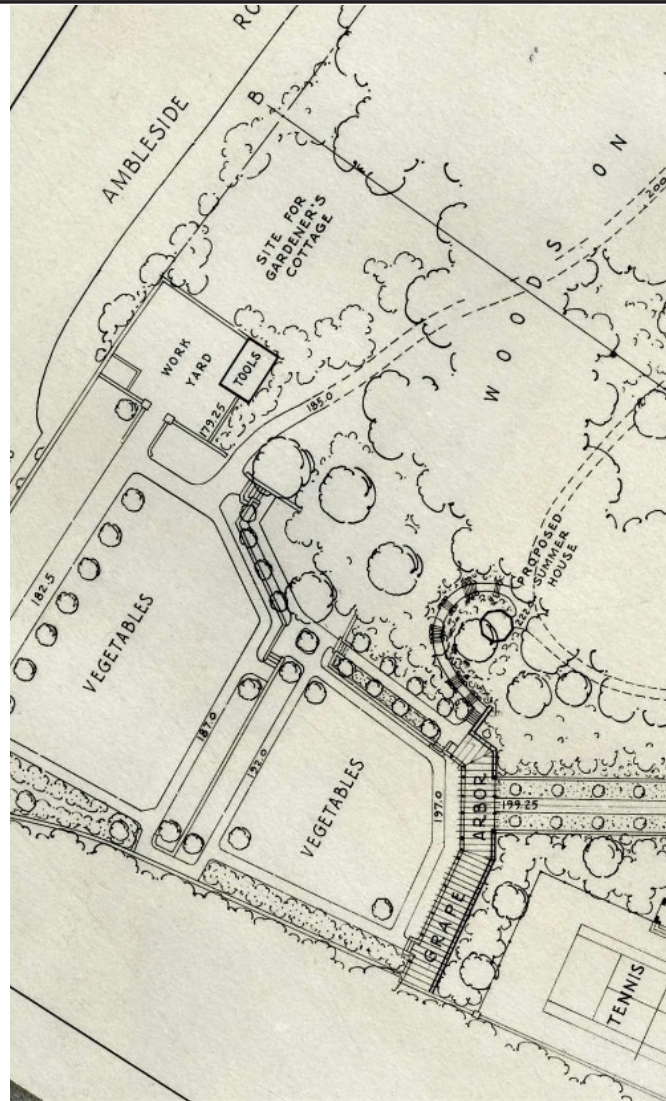
If Mr. and Mrs. Bicknell could return and spend an afternoon in their old home, they would find much that could easily be recognized. The living room, library, and solarium are largely



Main hall with stairs and balcony. *Architectural Record*, March 1923



Dining Room, Residence of Warren Bicknell, Esq.
Cleveland, Ohio. Frank B. Meade and James Hamilton,
Architects, *Architectural Record*, March 1923



unchanged, and the adaptations done to create the apartments are very subtle. Outdoors the picture is different. The gardens created by the Olmsted Brothers are gone and modern buildings occupy the slope below the house. Nevertheless, much of the old atmosphere remains. A 1920s Meade & Hamilton masterpiece, the house has transitioned

into the 21st century with great deftness by architect Peter van Dijk. The mansion today represents the skills of some of the finest architects who ever practiced in Cleveland as well as the skills of those who worked under their direction. It remains a showplace and reflects great credit on all concerned.

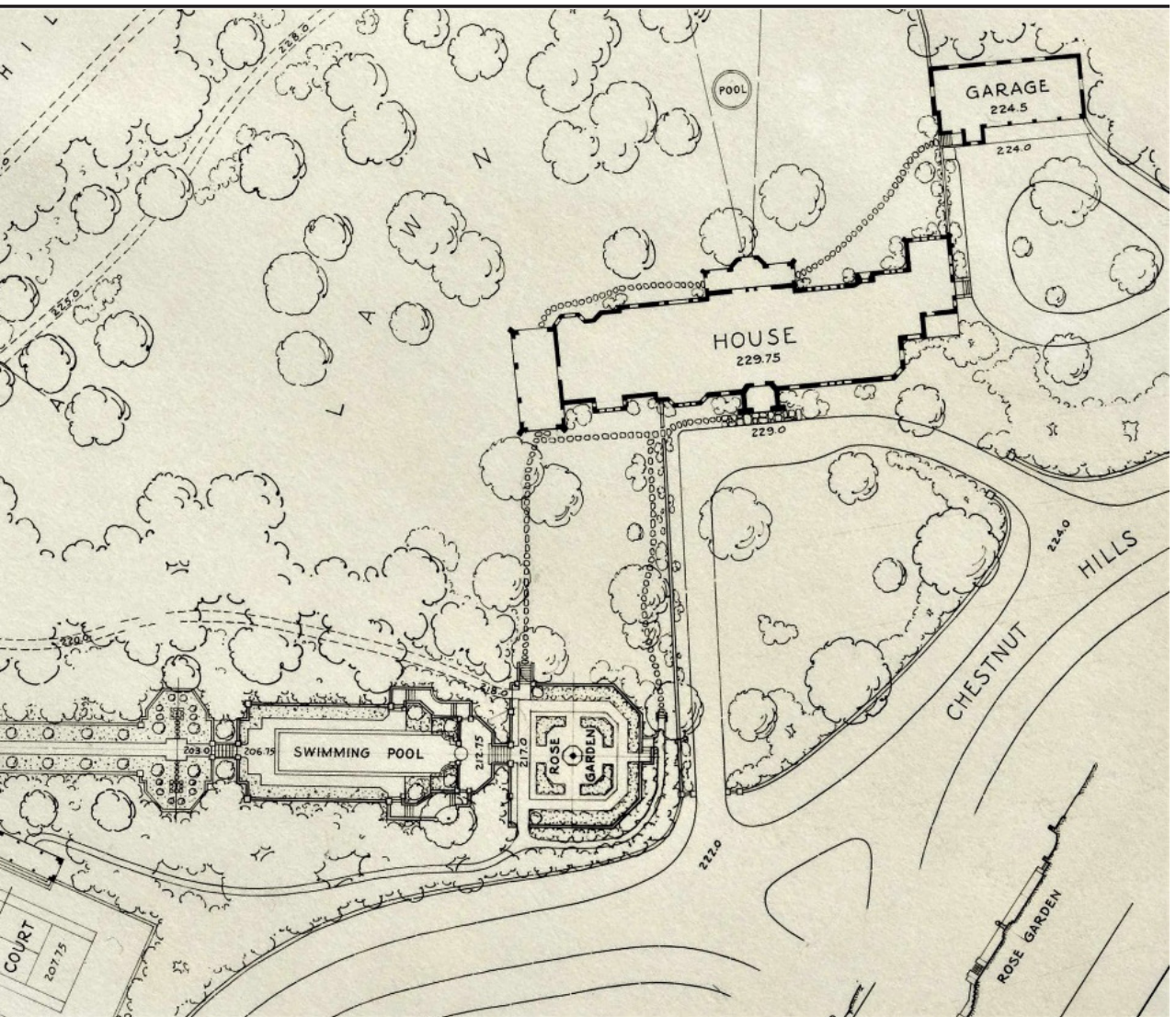


PHOTO ABOVE: GRANDMOTHER’S GARDEN. The property lots for the Bicknell estate extended over the hill down to Ambleside Road (now Drive). The Olmsted Brothers, of Brookline, Mass., designed their narrow formal gardens and set them into the ravine crevice in a terraced-stairstep configuration. The tranquil, “fairy haunt” gardens included a fountain, a pool, a vista walk, topiary, rose gardens, tennis courts, a grape arbor, and vegetable gardens. Mapleside Drive, once located on the southwest bank of the same ravine, was an early access road up to Ambler Park (later called Ambler Heights). Grand homes built during Cleveland’s Gilded Age were expected to have “show place” gardens to entertain high society guests.



The Architectural Record Living Room March, 1923

Above: View of the Bicknell mansion formal living room. *Architectural Record*, March 1923

Below: View of the first floor hallway. The Solarium with a fountain and fishpond are to the left, and the elevator, especially useful to take guests up to the third floor ball-room, is on the right. *Architectural Record*, March 1923



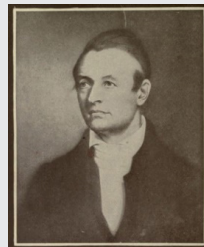
The Architectural Record Corridor March, 1923

RESIDENCE OF WARREN BICKNELL, ESQ., CLEVELAND, OHIO
Frank B. Meade and James Hamilton, Architects

ADONIRAM JUDSON

WHERE DID JUDSON PARK GET ITS NAME?

The American Baptist home acquired the Bicknell mansion in 1939, expanded it, and renamed it Judson Park in the early 1970s in honor of the pioneering Baptist mis-



sionary Adoniram Judson (1788-1850). Born in Massachusetts to a pious, disciplined, and loving family, Rev. Judson was best known for his missionary work in Burma. He and his equally talented helpmates, (he was married three times), embarked on a self-sacrificing, well-meaning quest to guide others toward salvation. A gifted prodigy, Mr. Judson's academic accomplishments included creating an English-to-Burmese dictionary and translating the Bible into Burmese. Politically targeted, he suffered imprisonment and hardship, and eventually succumbed to a long illness. He was laid to rest "at sea." Many books were written about his life and accomplishments, and his own writings continue to inspire.

"I never prayed sincerely and earnestly for anything but it came at some time; no matter at how distant a day, somehow in some shape, probably the least I would have devised, it came."

"There is no success without sacrifice. If you succeed without sacrifice it is because someone has suffered before you. If you sacrifice without success it is because someone will succeed after."

"...had it not been for the consolation of religion, and an assured conviction that every additional trial was ordered by infinite love and mercy, I must have sunk under my accumulated sufferings."

The Bicknell Family

Compiled by Korbi Roberts, CHHS Trustee



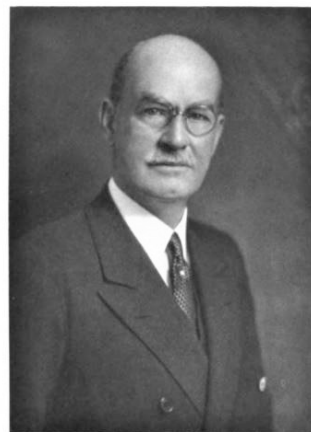
arren Moses

Bicknell was born in Morrisville, New York February 19,

1868, to Charles T. Bicknell (1836-1930) and Susan Payne (1840-1872). Warren's father, Charles Bicknell, was a merchant and manufacturer of paper goods. The family moved to Massillon, Ohio in 1878. Warren Bicknell graduated with a B.S. from Adelbert College in 1890. Starting in law with the firm Boynton, Hale, and Horr, he discovered that the law profession did not appeal to him. He next tried the coal business in Pennsylvania. Along the way, he became interested in rail and transportation logistics and construction. His talent lay in managing, reorganizing, and consolidating companies to make them efficient and more profitable. He seemed to stay only long enough with each company to learn and contribute before moving on to his next challenging project. His life accomplishments showed that he was a trustworthy person who had great business skill and financial acumen. Warren Bicknell was sought after by electric railway companies, traction companies, major railroad

companies, construction companies and many other types of businesses and organizations as well. His work titles included secretary, auditor, general manager, director, vice president, president, chairman, board member and trustee.

A partial list of companies Mr. Bicknell joined included the Cincinnati and Miami Valley Traction Co., Dayton Traction Company, Elgin and Chicago RR Co., Lakeshore Electric RR Co., Springfield and Xenia RR Co., Citizens RR and Light Co. (TX), Havana Electric RR Co. (Cuba), Toledo RR and Light Co., Cleveland Railway Co., Union Salt Company, National Acme Company, and Land Title and Guarantee and Trust Co. He was also President of the Cleveland Construction Co., which erected water and light plants, helped build railroads, and installed telephone lines throughout the country. As Vice President of the Crowell, Lundoff, and Little Co., he was responsible for overseeing the construction of many Cleveland buildings such as Cleveland Museum of Art, the Public Library, Keith Palace Theatre, St. Lukes Hospital, and many



Warren Moses Bicknell

others. He loved baseball and golf, and he was a member of many social and athletic clubs such as the Hermit Club, Union Club, Cleveland Athletic Club and the Mayfield County Club. He was Vice President and director of the Cleveland Natural History Museum. He also served as a trustee of Western Reserve University and the A. M. MacGregor (nursing) Home. The later position may have influenced the sale of their mansion at 1801 Chestnut Hills Drive to the Ohio Baptist Home in 1939 (Cuyahoga County deeds vol. 5011/pg. 449 and vol. 5011/pg. 453). A Plain Dealer article of August 8, 1941, summed up Warren Bicknell by saying he was a man of imagination and foresight, and that the City of Cleveland is indebted to him for making it a better place.

Anne Sabra (Guthrie) Bicknell was born July 13, 1873 in St. Paul, Minnesota, and passed away in Shaker Heights, Ohio April 15, 1959. She was the daughter of Archibald Guthrie (1844-1913) and Frances Wescott (1851-1928). Anne's father, Archibald Guthrie, was a wealthy railroad contractor who had not approved of Warren at first, uncertain the newcomer would be able to keep his daughter in the lifestyle to which she was accustomed. However, after a long courtship, Anne married Warren Bicknell on February 19, 1900, and they decided to make the Cleveland area their home. They had four children together - Frances Louise (1900-1990), Warren Jr. (1902-1975), Elizabeth (1904-1980), and Guthrie (1913-1998). They settled into a quaint wood-framed house at 2073 Adelbert Road, near the Western Reserve Campus, and then in 1910 had their elegant brick and Tudor home built by noted architect Harlan Shimmin at 2323 Coventry Road in Cleveland Heights.

In 1916 the family decided to relocate again, this time to the prestigious Ambler Heights neighborhood overlooking Cedar Glen and University Circle. They choose the old "Point Lookout" section and at a time when the allotment was not quite half full of new homes. Enlisting architects Meade and Hamilton, and with the Olmsted Brothers as landscape architects, they created their impressive mansion and gardens at 1801 Chestnut Hills Drive. Making the most of a high school education and finishing school, Anne Bicknell raised a family there, managed the estate, threw high society garden parties, and undertook philanthropic projects. Her passion for gardening inspired her involvement with the Cleveland Garden Club as well as the Shaker Lakes Garden Club.

Mrs. Bicknell showed her creative side by writing a fanciful flower identification book for children of all ages called "Flower Folks."



Anne G.
Bicknell taken
from a 1919
U.S. Passport
application
(Ancestry.com).

Inspired by her own Olmsted-designed gardens, she dedicated it to her grandchildren with, "In Grandmother's garden are such wonderful sights: All day children play there, but during the nights The Moon and Stars light a place of renown, For then Grandmother's Garden is Flower Folk Town." It contained her original poems, and was beautifully illustrated, with whimsical and interesting vignettes by local artist Martina Grenwis. Mrs. Bicknell's book represented her own garden flowers "coming to life" to engage in romance and theatricals, with visits from cherubs, fairies, sprites, brownies, gnomes, insects, and toads. The richly colorful volume is valued by collectors still today.

The book's illustrator, Martina D. Grenwis, born c. 1910, was a longtime Cleveland Heights resident, living at the family house at 2200 North St. James Parkway. She was a graduate of the Cleveland School of Art and worked in her father's printing company, the Grenwis Company. Her work was shown in galleries and in the May Show. She was noted for her depictions of plant and animal life. Ms. Grenwis died in 2007.



FRANCES LOUISE, WARREN JR. AND ELIZABETH BICKNELL
Children of Mr. and Mrs. Warren Bicknell

Photo by Edmondson

The Halle Bros. Co.

The Book Shop

presents

Anne Guthrie

Bicknell and

Martina Grenwis

*Cleveland author and
illustrator of that
charming new book*

"Flower Folk"

Mrs. Bicknell and Miss
Grenwis will be in the
Book Shop today from
2:30 to 4 to meet their
friends and autograph
copies of "Flower Folk."
\$2.50.

BOOK SHOP, SEVENTH FLOOR,
EUGENE BUILDING

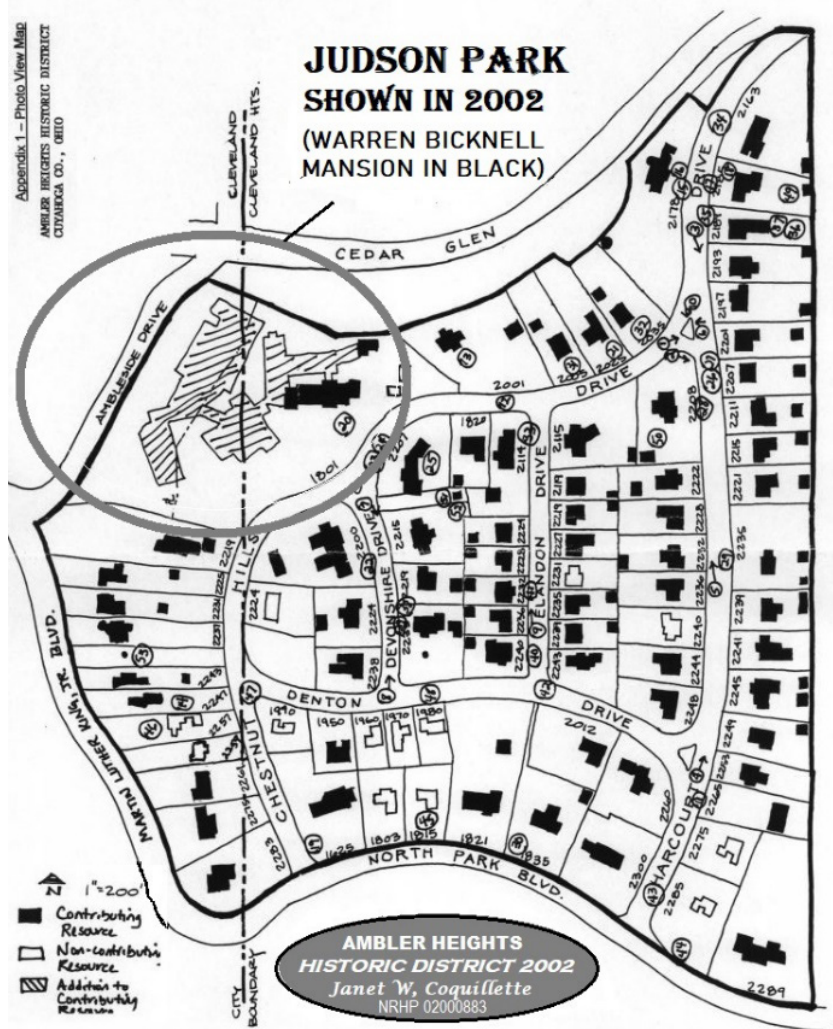
Halle's ad from Cleveland Plain Dealer
Historical 5-8-1936, CCPL



An illustration from "Flower Folk."

Sources for Bicknell Mansion: *Art and Archeology* v. 15-16 (1923). *Art and Archaeology*. v.15-16 1923. - HathiTrust Digital Library; Burton K. (n.d.). *Diversified Gardens of Cleveland*.; Frary, I.T. (1923). *Architectural Digest*; JudsonSmartLiving.org; Judson Retirement Community; Judson Retirement Community | Encyclopedia of Cleveland History | Case Western Reserve University. Case.edu./ech/articles/j/judson-retirement-community; *Landscape Architecture Magazine*. Vol. 20, No. 4, JULY, 1930 of *Landscape Architecture Magazine* on JSTOR.; National Park Service Olmsted Archives.; Yesterday's Homes (n.d.). From Bob Oldenberg archives on the Judson Mansion Courts.; Michael Henry Adams (Historic Preservationist); Southworth House History

JUDSON PARK SHOWN IN 2002 (WARREN BICKNELL MANSION IN BLACK)



Some sources for "Bicknell Family" article:

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CuyahogaCounty.us Recorder
Office deeds, Cleveland Public
Library maps and Cleveland his-
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Library (Plain Dealer Historical),
Ancestry.com, Kelvin Smith Library
(digital Case), and Hathitrust.
org.; Special Thanks to Kristina
Kuprevicius and Doug Berger (of
Judson Park), William C. Barrow
(CSU Special Collections), Kara
Hamley O'Donnell (Principle
Planner at City of Shaker Heights),
Ken Goldberg, Wm. Hopkins, Dr.
Roy Larick (Bluestone Heights),
Angelina M. Bair (former CHHS
Trustee), and Thomas G. Matowitz,
Jr (freelance author and historian).



"FLOWER FOLK"

One of Anne Bicknell's poems, and one of Martina Grenwis' illustrations from "Flower Folk" (1936, G. P. Putnam's Sons. New York) -

"A flower Sprite in a dark green glen – a fairy haunt unknown to men – Found a blossom, timid, low - Bade it o'er the whole world go - Catching a ray from the purple sky – Left by the sun as he passed by – Adding a fragrance none might forget - Now, everyone loves the wild violet."

The Story of the T-Locking Shingles in *Cleveland Heights*

By Steve Holowicki, CHHS Trustee

Moving to Cleveland Heights from Detroit back in 2013 and making my way through the housing and real estate world has been interesting and educational. I came to a good place given my historic preservation and urban planning backgrounds. Friends in Michigan, knowing I was accepting a position on Cleveland's East Side and who were familiar with the area, kept saying "you have to live in Cleveland Heights." I was thrilled to discover that Dean Martin, Paul Newman, Bill Kennedy, Debra Winger and Ettore Boiardi ("Chef Boyardee") had once lived in homes or apartments here.

So, I moved into an apartment on Superior Road for about a year and later my wife and I bought a home in the city. Cleveland Heights has unique and, for the most part, well maintained historic housing stock as well as some great walkable districts. Not unlike many inner ring, older suburbs of Detroit, like Dearborn and Ferndale, many of the homes here are of an older, vernacular stock. The 2-story, 3-bedroom home with the third-floor, walk-up attic is very common. 1920's six stepper: six-step walk up to the front porch which means the basements were not dug as deep as newer homes built during and after the Great Depression. What did stand out is the number of homes covered with T-locking



A home in Cleveland Heights sporting a T-Lock Shingle roof.

shingles, generally referred to as "Squire roofs." Squire, among several other companies, made this style of roof for decades.

The T-locking shingle roof was developed a century ago and was very popular in the 1930's. Instead of nailed and layered like a standard asphalt shingle of today they locked in place. When they came out, t-locks were a heavier shingle with much more asphalt content than the t-lock shingles

we saw in the last years of their existence. These were particularly well liked because of their decorative design and their durability and resistance to high winds. In fact, many older homes still have them. In my best estimation many remaining are at least 40 years old. It was a good roof. They were thick and heavy.

Even as they begin to decay and break apart, their old style has sort of a woven look. Worn but chugging on, like an old Cadillac that still runs. The character of the roof is eye catching and unique; it's not something you see every day. Reminiscent of my grandmother's home in in the old Polish neighborhood in southwest Detroit. The roofs were very durable and were available across the U.S.

The problem arose when makers of the shingle began to scale back on the materials which, over time, compromised their quality and which rendered them somewhat obsolete. My research implies their manufacture was discontinued by 2004. "Squire roofing" was the household name for them and many contractors and appraisers generically refer to them as Squire roofs, much like "Band-aid or Kleenex." Though Squire is still in business, they no longer manufacture this style.

In 2017 I began working as the Cleveland Heights citywide property investigator. I address vacant and distressed housing throughout the city, handling foreclosure activity, acquisitions,

and transfers; evaluate property conditions for our nonprofit partners; and coordinate serious problems between the inspectors and the housing director. This involves a good amount of research. On any given month, the City processes an average of around 100-200 residential property

transfers. I see the T-locking shingle quite a bit. They are not unique to one single area of Cleveland Heights, as I see them throughout the city, though they tend to be more prevalent on houses built before the 1930's. I have such a roof myself that we are replacing soon.

When I went to get quotes for my first homeowner's policy,

nobody wanted to insure me. I was recommended to a reputable agent through my loan officer. I was informed by the agent that getting insurance on the T-locking shingles was very difficult, which surprised me since the roofs can last a long time. But there's more to the story.

Due to its age, replacement would therefore be imminent. I did happen to find a company to underwrite a policy, however. The policy does cover the house in the event of a disaster, thankfully, but there are some drawbacks. The insurance company cannot simply replace a handful of shingles if a small portion of one's roof is damaged. Most reputable insurance companies will not insure these homes and, if they do, generally, it is with a higher deductible or "actual cash value coverage" that phrase means that there will be a depreciated value for your roof so you have a higher out-of-pocket obligation.

This changed my perspective on things. First, I know I will need a new roof, at some point. The roof is not leaking. Second, there are a lot of homeowners in Cleveland Heights who may not carry homeowner's insurance due to that very fact.



When I see a home with this style roof, the first thing that comes to mind is questioning if the home is insured, and for good reason. A mortgage means taxes and insurance are escrowed and lumped into the payment. If the house is paid off, it might mean the homeowner may have allowed the insurance to lapse and there's little protection from casualties. I suspect that most homeowners in Cleveland Heights with this roof already know this.

There are two options: get a new roof or find a company that will insure yours with the best possible coverage. If you are a new buyer, you can try to negotiate a total roof replacement with the seller.

One such company I am familiar with is a specialty insurance company, offering insurance to homeowners who can't find adequate coverage from mainstream companies. Its customers are very unlikely to find the lowest premiums, however the company has satisfactory customer service reviews, which puts it ahead of some other specialty insurers. There are other companies of this type, but they are relatively few.

There are a number of reasons your home might not qualify for insurance from other companies. It might be because your home is in a high-risk location, like on a hilly slope; because

it's very old, historic, or just low value; or because the owner made a high number of insurance claims in the recent past.

It's worthwhile to think of such policies as similar to an auto body shop that specializes in classic cars. While the shop will likely be able to fix a high-production SUV, it is more than likely going to charge you much higher rates than you can find somewhere else. But if you have an older, classic car, it's worth paying more for the service that matches your needs.

I shall conclude by referring to some photos included here to give some perspective. The shingle's appearance in relation to the architectural character of the home is very subjective. To some it is kitschy, dated, and obsolete and that opinion does have its merits. But to others, it is classic, like a 1963 Thunderbird. Its time in our history was early-to-middle 20th century and a bit beyond. Changing the style permanently alters the appearance of the home and can take away from its distinctive characteristics. I have seen homes where the roof is in particularly poor condition and keeping it does nothing to spare the home's building integrity or visual appeal. With others, the roof adds to and enhances the home's architectural features.

Cleveland Heights History Hunt



Mythical and fanciful figures called "Grotesques" were used on buildings during the Middle Ages to decorate and ward off evil spirits. The tradition continued into modern times. Where in Cleveland Heights would you find these faces? (Answers below)

Answer – – decorating the outside of the historic Severance "Longwood" fountain located next to Cleveland Heights City Hall

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