Chapter 30
Hymns of Praise - Some Later Churches in College Hill

Ohio pioneers of the Catholic faith traveled here from Maryland, French Canada and Germany. Their life had little time for long ceremonies and they couldn’t afford to support a church or priest. Worship was in small groups praying together augmented by a yearly visit from a circuit riding priest, who would perform necessary sacraments when he came. Pioneers had limited contact with other groups of people and books were scarce. It wasn’t until Ohio became a state that a school and church in every community became a priority.

Even though Cincinnati by the 1800’s was a fast growing town, the Catholic population didn’t have their own school or church. The closest bishop was in Bardstown, Kentucky. The first Catholic church was Christ Church (1812), built at Liberty and Vine streets - beyond the Cincinnati limits - due to the hostility that faced Catholics. It wasn’t until 1820 that the first Catholic church was built inside of Cincinnati through Bishop Edward Fenwick, the first Bishop of the Diocese of Cincinnati. He had been a circuit riding priest throughout Ohio and knew this area well.1

The early churches were few and poor. To raise money for the North American missions, Bishop Fenwick went to Europe. The European Catholics contributed a penny a week per person for missionary work. Within a century, those pennies amounted to eight million dollars for America.

Irish immigrants, who were predominately Catholic, were coming into Ohio to dig the state-wide canal system. The canal system was a major transportation pathway until 1855, when railroads became predominant. By 1913 the canals were starting to be filled in and covered over.

In 1822 Bishop Fenwick moved Christ Church to a site on Sycamore Street when St. Xavier Church now stands. The church was rededicated to St. Peter. By 1825 St. Peter’s was too small and was replaced by a Gothic style brick church built on the same site. This church was named ‘St. Peter in Chains’ in reference to a painting donated to Bishop Fenwick by Cardinal Fisch, who was an uncle of Napoleon. The painting had hung in the cathedral of Seville and was removed during Napoleon’s Spanish campaign. This painting remained on view until 1945, when it was moved to St. Gregory’s Seminary.2

St. Peter in Chains was outgrown in twenty years. Bishop John Purcell, who replaced Bishop Fenwick, planned a new cathedral. The architect was Henry Waters who was famous for his Greek Revival style architecture.

The familiar Plum Street property was purchased by Bishop Purcell in December 1840 for $24,000 from Judge Jacob Burnet. The body of the church was finished in 1845, the spire in 1847 and the Dayton limestone church was fully completed in 1855 at a total cost of $300,000. The stone work was done by Hummel. Charles Cist wrote (1851) that was the ‘finest building in the West.’ It was nicknamed the ‘White Angel’ by its parishioners.

Catholicism was growing in Cincinnati, partly because of the eastern European and Irish immigrants who followed the faith of their native lands. In Cumminsville, the predominately Catholic laborers of the Cincinnati, Hamilton & Dayton Railroad (chartered in 1846) settled there, leading to the formation of St. Aloysius parish in 1852 and St. Boniface in 1862. Those of German heritage built St. Boniface while those from Ireland remained at St. Aloysius. Prior to the founding of these churches, Northside Catholics had to travel to St. James in White Oak.

And as Catholicism grew and was accepted, there were conversions to the faith. Reuben R. Springer3 “...was born in the century year (of) 1800, in the month of November. His father was Charles Springer, a native of West Virginia and his mother was Catherine Runyion of Princeton, New Jersey. After an education in the common schools, Reuben, at age 13, clerked under his father in the post office, but after

---


two years he became a clerk on a steamer running between Cincinnati and New Orleans. After 12 years of
steam boating he succeeded Henry Kilgour, whose daughter Jane he had married in 1830, as a member of
the once famous grocery house of Taylor & Co. For ten years he continued in the business and then was
compelled to retire on account of poor health. By that time he had already amassed a fortune. In 1842 he
became a convert to the Catholic Faith...for the Establishment of Music Hall and the College of Music he
gave $420,000. He died December 10, 1884."

St. Clare Roman Catholic Church

The Catholic families of College Hill area met for the first time at the Ohio Military Institute on
September 5, 1909. A committee of Joseph Pfeister, John Rabenstein, August Dehmer, Joseph E. Phillips,
Stephen O’Hara, C. A. Bender, Martin Frey, John Brossart, J. J. Vogelpohl and George S. Binder
persuaded the archbishop to give permission to organize the new parish. It was named St. Clare, in honor
of the 13th century woman who was the first superior of a Franciscan convent.

Reverend John G. Stein, a former professor at St. Gregory Seminary, was appointed by Archbishop
Henry Moeller. Father Stein celebrated the first Mass on Sunday, October 3, 1909, at Town Hall. One
hundred twenty five people attended; the first collection amounted to $19.13.

Reverend Charles Mary Diener (born 17 September, 1872, Cincinnati) was appointed by the Bishop
to replace Father Stein on January 20, 1910.

The first Mass was held in Town Hall. Mrs. J. Philips supplied the candles and candlesticks along
with several of her carpets. Anna J. Phillips’ cousin, Virginia G. Mitchell is said to have been the first
baby baptized in the new parish on 10/06/10.

The new parish was now ready to begin with a look to the future. In 1909 a parcel of land 50’ X 317’
had been purchased from Newbold L. Pierson for $2,000. In February, 1910, permission was given to
purchase the present church property. A white framed church with a modest steeple was erected and
dedicated by Archbishop Murray in the name of St. Clare. The cost of this 75’ X 35’ structure was
$3,000.

Dedication of College Hill’s first Catholic church was an occasion of high celebration. More than
1,000 persons took part in a parade prior to the ceremonies despite a heavy rain. Uniformed knights of
several orders added color to the marching line, which proceeded south on Belmont Avenue from Town
Hall, took a sharp turn to go north on Hamilton Avenue to Cedar Avenue and then east on Cedar to the
Church. John Brossard was grand marshal, assisted by Walter Gray and William Hanlon. Father Diener
celebrated Mass; Father George Schmidt preached in English and Father Joseph Bussman in German.

The parishioners were planning for their most welcome part of the parish family - the Sisters. A lot
and house on Cedar Avenue, east of the parsonage, was purchased for their use.

St. Clare school opened on September 9, 1912. The lower floor of the Sister’s house was used for the
school.

Archbishop Moeller dedicated the present school on October 3, 1915. The building served as
combination church and school.

On February 21, 1930, the building of the current rectory and church basement began. The church
basement was used for the celebration of Mass until the body of the church could be added. The first
Mass was offered in the church basement on August 5, 1930. Father Diener moved into the new rectory
about a month later. On January 24, 1931 the old brick parsonage was sold and moved to 5912 Lantana
Avenue.

The original St. Clare boundaries have been divided into four parishes: St. Margaret Mary (1920);
St. Therese, Little Flower (1930); St. Vivian (1943); St. Richard (1950). St. Richard and St. Therese
merged January 2, 1992 into the St. Therese parish. The buildings and grounds of St. Richard also became

---

4 Source: Several St. Clare Church histories, Thanks be to God - St. Clare Parish Seventy-Fifth Anniversary Celebration, pages written by James M. Shea.
Thanks also to Doris Kuszler and Karen Forbes-Nutting

5 St. Clare and St. Pius (1910) were both formed from St. Boniface, founded in 1862. Source: History of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, 1821-1921, Rev.
John H. Lamott.
Reverend George Gude was appointed as assistant on August 10, 1948. One year later, on September 17, 1949, Father Charles Diener was hospitalized because of a broken hip. Father Gude was asked to carry on in his absence. Father Gude’s association with St. Clare was to stretch over the next 27 years until his retirement in 1975.

The school auditorium was converted into two more classrooms, making an eight room school with six Sisters and two lay teachers, with an enrollment of 360 pupils.

On February 27, 1953, the Most Reverend Archbishop Karl J. Alter gave permission to build the new church over the existing church basement. The architects Schulte and Schmidt were chosen.

A house and lot on Salvia Avenue was bought for $14,350. The lot was blacktopped for the playground.

It was December 11, 1953, that Reverend Gude was appointed Vicarious Adjuror with full parochial rights.

On June 30, 1954, a house and lot 41’ X 150’, located at 5814 Salvia Avenue was bought for $10,000 for future school expansion.

In 1955 permission was granted by Archbishop Alter to accept bids for the new church. March 26, 1955, the lowest bids on the church were approved by the Archbishop. The general contractor was Edward Honnert and Sons. The total cost including plumbing, heating and electrical work was $470,219. The work on the new church began May 9, 1955. The Right Reverend Magr. Marcellus R. Wagner blessed the laying of the cornerstone on May 9, 1955. The pastor, Father Diener, attended the ceremony in a wheelchair. Rev. Diener died the following year after a lengthy illness.

It was a memorable day for all when on May 26, 1957, Karl J. Alter, Archbishop of Cincinnati, dedicated the new St. Clare Church.

In 1964 the German made stained glass windows, were installed, thus completing the original plans for a suitable decoration of the church.

Construction of the Sisters’ convent was completed and it was occupied in February, 1967.


St. Clare School numbers among the approximately 100 schools conducted by the Sisters of St. Francis, whose Motherhouse is located in Oldenburg, Indiana. The Community of teaching Sisters owes its foundation to Mother Teresa Hacklemeier, a Franciscan religious from Vienna, Austria, who came to America on 1851. The Community’s over 700 Sisters conduct schools in Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, and Michigan, with missions in Montana and New Guinea.

St. Clare school, in existence since 1912, is located on Salvia Avenue. The principals of St. Clare have been: Sister Gonzaga Daller (1922-23); Sister Cupertina Grundler (1923-26); Sister Sulpitia Worland (1926-29); Sister Avelline Grassman (1929-30); Sister Angelique Schrimp (1936-42); Sister Lorenzo Jaspers (1942-55); Sister Mary William Tausch (1955-57); Sister Carol Ann Angermeier (1957-59); Sister Rose Helen Bosse (1959-65); Sister Mary Agnes (Kathleen) McCarthy (1965-77); Sister Mary Willard Miriam) Kaeser (1977-83); Gretchen Osner, first lay principal.

The first students in St. Clare School in the fall of 1912 were: Grade 1--Edwin Riedel, Earl Weigel, Eugene Brueckner, Edward Dornberger, Robert Deininger, Robert Hutchinson, James Hutchinson, Earl Thesken, Joseph Roach; Grade 2--Albert Weigel, John Lindeman, Arthur Gruter, Lawrence Brand, George Thesken, Marguerite Zitt, Rose Schafer, Eva Huschle, Mary Bross, Irene Brown; Grade 3--Philip Hahn, Joseph Riedel, John Ruby, Clara Stoecker, Virginia Bross; Grade 4--Margaret Brand, George Bross, Leroy Endres, Christopher Weigel, James Curetti; Grade 5--Loretta Gruter, Ruth Naglie, William Ammann, Merrill Hutchinson, Arthur Duffy, Mark Leiter, Irvin Naegele; Grade 6--Lillian Armbruster, Anna Ammann, Anna Hutchinson, Mary Curetti, Sophia Stoecker; Grade 7--Alice Casey, Eleanor Gruter; Grade 8--Edna Dornberger, Alma Hutchinson.
In 1996 St. Clare’s announced plans for a new school. The new school/gym/parish center will be on Saranac Avenue. The new school will have a library, computer classroom, art classroom, and classrooms for K-8th grade.

**McAuley Convent**

Five Sisters of Mercy on August 15, 1960 started the first McAuley Convent at 1768 Cedar Avenue. The house had been the family residence of Mary Bell Thomson (Mrs. Walter deGollyer Randall).

In 1964 a new addition to this convent was constructed in 1964. It was a three story building with accommodations for sixty-four Sisters, and a chapel. An entrance passageway connected it with the former residence. The Sisters of Mercy that taught at St. Ignatius School in Monfort Heights began to reside at the new convent in 1964. The Sisters of Mercy began to teach at St. Richard of Chichester School in 1965 and they also lived at the convent.

In the summer of 1965 some Sisters of Mercy from McAuley Convent joined with the efforts of people in the West College Hill Community to give new life to this area. Sister Mary Francisca Sherman coordinated the efforts of the Sisters in a six weeks summer program of tutoring, teaching arts and crafts, business and homemaking skills. The program was developed with the leadership of Rev. Edward Jones, pastor of the West College Hill First Baptist Church. Mrs. Grace Saunders, a parishioner of the Church, was also very active. The senior and retired Sisters of Mercy in the Cincinnati area began to reside in 1969 at McAuley Convent.

Demolition of the Thomson-Randall residence took place in 1974 and a new two-story building with a twenty-three room addition was completed in 1976. Today at the convent live the Sisters working at McAuley High School, the senior Sisters and those engaged in other active ministries in the area.

One of the past ministries was the Mercy Braille Library. Back in 1936, Sister Mary Catherine Harty (herself threatened with blindness) discovered that very little was being done for the spiritual life of the blind. She gathered a few blind and some concerned sighted ladies willing to Braille, collect tax stamps and locate the blind throughout the tri-state area. Soon the brailists were making books for each reader.

Further expansion came when Clovernook Printing House asked them to respond to the requests of countless schools, libraries, and individuals in Asia and Africa. Materials from American readers, publishers and other sources were gathered to maintain this project. The entire library has been sent since to the Sisters of Mercy in Africa.

**St. Richard of Chichester Church** 1945-1986

The major benefactor of St. Richard Church was Mrs. Richard Knight LeBlond (sister of Elizabeth Knight who married Edward Henshaw). Given the privilege of selecting the patron saint, she chose the name of St. Richard, a 13th century bishop of the See of Chichester, England, in honor of her husband.

Richard de la Wyche was a man of strong character, a scholar, but sensible and practical as well. He loved people and was greatly beloved by them.

Chosen Bishop of Chichester in 1244, Richard was an able administrator, as well as a holy man. Compassionate to the sinner, he expected high standards from his clergy. Although he considered it his duty to keep the state proper to a bishop, offering hospitality to the rich as well as to the poor, his personal life was very simple.

While preaching a crusade at the request of the Pope to rekindle enthusiasm for the recovery of the Holy Land, Richard became ill and died on April 3, 1253. He was canonized nine years later.

Affectionately known as the ‘Little Church on North Bend Road’ it was founded as a mission chapel shortly after the end of World War II. Cincinnati’s Archbishop John T. McNicholas had recently moved

---

6 Submitted by Sister Mary Timothea O’Neill, R. S. M., 1991

7 The Sisters of Mercy were founded in 1831 in Ireland by Mother Mary Catherine McAuley. Source: The Catholic Journey Through Ohio, Albert Hamilton, 1976.

his residence from Norwood to College Hill and saw that the needs of Catholic African-Americans in West College Hill were not being met. A piece of property was purchased on North Bend Road and the Society of the Precious Blood established the mission.

The red brick chapel was begun in the summer in 1945 and was completed in 1946. The congregation started to grow. Rev. Jerome B. Wolf, C.PP.S. was the first administrator, replaced by Rev. Florian Hartke, C.PP.S. in 1948.

In 1950, Archbishop McNicholas died and Archbishop Karl J. Alter was appointed. In that year St. Richard’s became a full-fledged parish. The parish did not have its own rectory and Rev. Hartke lived at St. Clare’s parish house.

The boundaries of the parish were extended in 1953 west to Banning and Pippin Roads, to include the Golfway Acres Subdivision. The Church had 300 parishioners at this time.

There was a need for a parish school by 1955 and construction began. The eighth grade faculty was four Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur. Sister Agnes Cecelia was the first principal, followed by Sister Adele and Sister Philip Mary. By 1960 the school was enlarged again. In 1965 the Sisters of Notre Dame left St. Richard and the Sisters of Mercy assumed the responsibility of the education of the children under the guidance of the new principal, Sister Mary Timothea, R.S.M.

In 1966 the teaching staff was expanded to three Sisters and four lay teachers. It also was a memorable year for the youngest ladies of the parish, as the girls changed their school uniforms from plain green to green plaid, and the Sisters changed their traditional black habit to one of modern blue. In 1971 at St. Richard’s 25th anniversary the staff was Sr. Mary Timothea R.S.M. principal, Miss Kathleen Ryan, Miss Karen Forbes, Mrs. Anna Lee Rosen, Mrs. Joan Dempsey, Sr. Mary Adelma R.S.M., and Sr. Marie de Lourdes R.S.M. Eventually, the school was closed and a shortage of priests led to the merger of St. Richard and St. Therese in 1992.

**College Hill Christian Church**

The Campellite or New Light movement of the American frontier was the root of the Disciples of Christ/Christian Church. Drawn primarily from Presbyterian, Baptist, and Methodist churches, the foundation of this faith was the elimination of various creeds and practices and to believe in no creed but Christ, and no book but the Bible. They were lead by Alexander Campbell.

In 1909 Rev. Harviout met in College Hill Town Hall with a small group of seventeen people to form the College Hill Christian Church. Rev. Justin Green, pastor of another Cincinnati church, served as the first minister. Officers of the church were: Louis Askew, president; Richard Roller, vice-president; Mrs. Carl Kammerdeiner, treasurer; Lillie Barnes, secretary.

Other members of the congregation were: Mr. and Mrs. Steinbeck, John Steinbeck, Lillie Steinbeck, Barbara Steinbeck, Ella Barnes, Walter Askew, Mrs. Louis Askew, Mrs. Richard Roller, Mrs. Huber, Mrs. Ault, Mrs. Nancy (Barnes) Simons, Mr. George Barnes.

A church history written by Bruce Martin states: “At first the young congregation met in homes. Later it worshiped in a storeroom and then over a florist’s shop - both on Hamilton Ave. In 1911 the congregation purchased the present lots on Marlowe Avenue. On July 4 of the same year, assisted by men from Christian Churches throughout the Cincinnati area, the men of the church erected the wood-frame building that housed the church for the next 48 years. hey completed the basic building in one day, including the exterior walls and the roof. The first worship service in the new building was held that same night, with the congregation sitting on the floor joists.

In 1959 the College Hill church became fully self-supporting, no longer dependent upon financial support from The Ohio Christian Missionary Society. During the course of this year the basic

---

9 Source: Rev. Larry H. Pigg, Mr. Artie Distler
The Dedication of the College Hill Christian Church, June 28, 1964. Historical Highlights 1909-1964 prepared by Bruce Martin.

10 Discover the Disciples College Hill Christian Church

11 To raise funds, members hosted paid dinners at their homes.
structure of the new building was completed, and the men of the congregation finished the interior, including the chancel and the balcony areas in the sanctuary, the floor tile and the ceiling throughout the basement level, and the installation of electrical fixtures throughout the building. In June of 1959 the Church School classes began meeting in the new building. On October 18 of that year the first worship service was held in the new sanctuary, following which the old, wood-frame building was razed and removed from the lot. In 1964, with funds bequeathed for this purpose by the late Rose Graeba, the building was finally completed, the final step being the placing of the spire and cross on June 23.

The church building on Marlowe Avenue was dedicated on June 28, 1964, for a congregation of over 200.

One of the best loved ministers was Rev. William G. ‘Daddy’ Loucks, who tended the congregation from 1925 until 1948.

Charles H. Ault was there building the first church in 1911. He recalled that the lumber and necessary tools were available and that with the help of the Carpenters Union, who would teach and aid in the building’s assembly, they were able to get the basic building - roof, exterior walls, floor joists - all constructed in one day. Being a hot July 4 in 1911, the women of the congregation fed the workers and gave them plenty to drink. He recalled the names of several of the congregation of workers: Richard Roller, Jack Chadwick Sr. and Jr., William and George Witt, Fred W. Hoover, and Walter Askew. Mr. Ault was born in 1877 and also recalled for the 1966 newspaper interview; He can remember the day when the ‘Battle of Manila Bay’ was recreated for Cincinnati folks, and the spectators were charged 2 cents each to view the proceedings on the Ohio River from the bridges.

In the congregation are Bertha Steinbeck (Mrs. John Keller) whose daughter, grand-daughter, and great-grandson and great-granddaughter are present members. Bertha’s great-grandson, who was once a member, was Jim Markwell, a United States Army Ranger and the first U. S. casualty of the Panama Invasion.”

**First United Church of Christ**

Starting in 1855 as the German Lutheran congregation of Cumminsville, the sixteen members sought a place where they could meet and worship. Poor roads suppressed attendance and growth of the congregation, so a Cumminsville location was preferred. Ephraim Knowton rented to them Knowlton’s Hall, in the building known as Knowlton’s Block. Knowlton and his son Sidney were friendly toward Germans and rented the society space for a small price. In addition to a church, a school was necessary because German was not being taught in the public schools. Each member donated a dollar to establish such a school where the children would be taught in their native language. But first they needed a church that could double as a school. On March 17, 1856 Jacob Hoffner, who generously supported several causes, donated a lot on Apple Street. The cornerstone of the church was laid October 26, 1856. The church we remember on Hoffner Street in Northside was completed in 1894, now named the German Evangelical Church. The spire became a landmark on the Northside horizon.

In 1993 a tornado-like wind blew across Cincinnati, lifting and reversing the 197-foot spire so that it crashed through the church point down to the basement. Such damage was done to the rest of the building that the church was demolished and a different site was sought. The church had acquired some years earlier the land of the old A. D. E. Tweed estate on Belmont Avenue, so this is where the new church was built. The church (now the First United Church of Christ) was completed in 1995. Items from the former church were saved and incorporated into the new building: the old cornerstone, stained glass windows, the 1912 baptismal font, Bibles and the inscribed lintel stone above the original church door.

**St. George Serbian Eastern Orthodox Church**

---

12 College Hill Centennial, Porter Printing, Thursday June 23, 1966

13 Source: Souvenir History of Cumminsville, 1911.

The Oaks was once the home and convent of this church. The order sold The Oaks and moved into the original, separate carriage house. Members of this faith have Serbian/Yugoslavian roots. Followers of the Gregorian calendar, they celebrate Christmas on January 6, following traditional customs of their homeland.

The United Methodist Church

During April 1908, Mr. Ed. Bohnett met Mr. W. S. Norris in Cumminsville to have a friendly chat. During the conversation Mr. Bohnett asked Mr. Norris if he was still constructing Sunday school and church buildings. With Mr. Norris’s positive answer, the question arose about building a church in College Hill.

As a result of a canvas, the committee found only one local United Brethren member, Mrs. Edith Taylor, who was a member of the Bevis-Dunlap circuit of the United Brethren church. But the canvas also showed that there was great interest in establishing a Sunday school in the College Hill community.

The committee members went to Mr. Newbold Pierson, then in the real estate business, to secure a lot in a convenient place. Among the lots that Mr. Pierson described were two located in the eastern side of College Hill, where the present church now stands.

These two lots were once part of the plat owned by Samuel F. Cary in 1892. Two of the streets in this plot were Woodward and Lincoln, which today are Marlowe and Salvia Avenues. Later Mr. Cary’s daughter, Jessie, transferred the plot to other owners, one of which was Newbold L. Pierson.

Mr. Pierson donated these lots to the community, and during the summer of 1908 a little church was built.

In Feb. 1912 the little church was moved to the lot next to where the present church is located. In April 1912 the ground was broken for the present church building. In Oct. 1912 the corner stone was laid and the building completed in Aug. 1913 at 1449 Marlowe Avenue. The Norris Memorial United Brethren Church was well established, and the ladies of the church served their first meal to those attending the annual conference at the new church.

In 1915 the church was remodeled. Mr. W. Forbes did the carpentry, assisted by John Sevester and Edward Mendenhall, painters. Much of the electrical work was done by J. M. Harrell, who also did the electrical installations in the newly built homes on the surrounding streets. During the following year the parsonage (now Christ’s Community in College Hill) was purchased.

Early in 1940 a new chancel was built with the help of a good architect, Mr. Karl Abel, who is a member of the present congregation. The original church had been used as the Sunday school and the home for the janitor and was torn down to build the two story education unit on that site. The new building was connected to the church building’s east side and was dedicated in 1958.

A new parsonage, located at 6629 Orleans Court, was dedicated on Sunday, April 9, 1967. Rev. William D. Worth was the pastor at that time.

In April 1968 the Evangelical United Brethren Church in the United States, and the Methodist Church United in Dallas, Texas, combined. Thus the little church started in 1908 is today named the College Hill United Methodist Church.

Currently, Rev. Shirley A. Landis is pastor, and Rev. Landis leads her congregation in Sunday worship services in the church’s sanctuary that contains 17 stained glass windows with the following dedications: north windows - In memory of H. Geo. & Sarah J. Sherman, In memory of Walter Jr. & Emily Norris, Mr. & Mrs. W. H. Forbes, H. G. Pounsford; east windows - In memory of Mr. & Mrs. Louis Fink, In memory of Henry B. Corbett, A. J. Spence & wife, Rev. R. M. Fox & wife, In memory of Mrs. Mina Reeves & Mrs. Barbara Forbes; south windows - In memory of Mrs. Martha Taylor, Given by Miss Virgie Betscher & Miss Malinda Miller; west windows - Mr. & Mrs. Martin V. Wert, In memory of Robert H. Glass, Mr. & Mrs. R. E. Gough, In memory of James J. Eiler & George L. Eiler, Alvin L. Sadler & family.

14 Written by Sheridan E. Yelliott, church historian, College Hill United Methodist Church, 1990.
Charter members of the C.H.U.B. Church were: Miss Eva Seebohm; Mrs. John Eicher and son, Jule, and daughters, Mrs. Edna Morehead and Mrs. Kathryn E. Martin; Mr. & Mrs. H. Rice and son, Philip; Mr. & Mrs. George Taylor; Mr. & Mrs. Sam Taylor; Mrs. Jennie Benison; Mrs. Anna Benison; Mr. J. B. Theders and son, Edward, and daughter Clara Theders Strong; Mr. Percy Strong; Mrs. McCain and son, Roy; Mr. & Mrs. L. Hiatt; Mrs. H. Haverland; Mrs. Fortune; Mrs. Simonton; Mr. & Mrs. Henry Corbett and son, Walter; Mrs. Rose Corbett Kruell; Mrs. Elizabeth Corbett Forthman; Mr. & Mrs. J. M. Harrell; Mr. & Mrs. Stanley Aston; Mrs. Bell Smith Steinbeck.

First Grace Episcopal Church
Courtesy of Mrs. Martha Tuttle
Chapter 31
Great Families, Great Homes

The story of Laura Gamble Thomson begins with the renowned Clark family of Kentucky. John and Ann Rogers Clark had eight children, Jonathan being the eldest and Elizabeth (1768-1795) the youngest. Elizabeth married Colonel Richard Clough Anderson (1750-1826) in 1783. Their eldest daughter, Ann (1790-1863) married Mr. John Logan (1785-1826) and had the following: John, Richard A., Robert W., Elizabeth Clark, Larry, Charles, Isaac, Catherine Mary and Sarah Jane (1822-1905) who married James McFarlane Gamble (1811-1868) of Louisville. Of their large family, it was Laura who married Peter Gibson Thomson of Cincinnati. One of Laura’s sisters, Catherine Mary (1851-1931) married Joseph Rogers of Chicago. One of their children, James Gamble Rogers, became a noted architect. Catherine Mary was the granddaughter of Gen. Benjamin Logan, who was a close friend and companion of Daniel Boone.

The first of this Thomson family, Peter, came from the area around Paisley, Scotland to New York in 1825. A letter which Peter wrote Jan. 1, 1826 recounted his voyage and first year in America: “...I will give an account of my passage to New York. We sailed from Greenock the 12th of November. We was drove into Rose Bay and lay there three days. There was a brig bound to Dumerara that parted both her cables and ran afoul of our ship in a snow storm on the Sunday morning after I left you. When daylight came in, we got the brig parted from the ship and in clear. On our chain cables one of the sailors got his leg taken off at the ankle. It was hanging to a piece of skin and he says, ‘Damn you, has none of you got a jack knife to cut this piece of skin?’ His leg was taken from him and he was sent back to Greenock.

We sailed on Monday afternoon and on Tuesday afternoon we was drove on to Lanach Bay and lay there seven days. It stormed awful while we lay there. Sailed again on the 22nd of November and we cleared the coast of Scotland the next day. We had very stormy weather. All the month of December we had very cold weather and 12th December we had one of the awfustest storms I ever saw in my life. In the afternoon about 4 o’clock when the sailors was reefing the foretop sail, two of the sailors was swept from the yard and one of them we never saw more.

On the 22nd of December our ship took a buck and went down stern foremost. This was about 4 o’clock in the morning. I was on deck at the time with nothing but my shirt on, helping the sailors, and it was blowing and snowing. I was almost froze to death. The ship righted and we got into New York on the 29th of December. That was a passage of seven weeks.

I have a very happy New Year in New York. I went to a ball and fell in with an old lass of mine who was glad to see me and we made a match of it in a few days. I was married on the 6th of January. There was no time for trifling...Her name is Rhoda Johnson. She had a fine son the 1st of November and his name is Alexander...We had on Christmas a whole ox roasted, and the New Year the same for the novelty of it...” The family came to Cincinnati via flatboat from Pittsburgh about ten years after entering the country.

Alexander married Mary Ann Edwards whose family migrated to America from Wales when she was three. They came to Pittsburgh by sled through the snow covered mountains and then to Cincinnati by stage coach.

Due to an accident which killed his infant brother Alexander, Peter G. was the only surviving son. His father and grandfather died within a year of each other, forcing 14 year old Peter to go to work and support his mother and two sisters. In 1868 he purchased a $50 membership in the Bryant, Stratford & Co. Business College. The school offered bookkeeping, commercial arithmetic, commercial law and practical penmanship. He wasn’t robust and joined a gym conducted by Samuel Barrett, a professional boxer. This later became the Cincinnati Athletic Club. At the time of his death, he was the oldest member of this club. He credited his health and energy to the gym, and he neither smoked nor drank.

His first recorded job was in 1871 as a shipping clerk for Robert Clark Company, a bookstore in downtown Cincinnati. Within six years he borrowed money and opened his own store and publishing business on Vine Street. He worked from the store’s opening at 7 A.M. to its closing at 10 P.M. He kept this schedule for 5 years, without taking any time off.

204
While he was selling books, he also was collecting them - rare books on the history of the Northwest Territory. He had them bound in London and Paris, seeking out the premier names in leather binding, making each book a work of art. They now are with the University of Cincinnati. He 1880 he published a book which he wrote, A Bibliography of the State of Ohio, a listing of all books printed in and printed about Ohio up to that date. He wrote this book over a ten year period. It is still available today.

In 1875 he married Laura Gamble of Louisville. He met her by accident. According to family lore Peter G.’s mother asked him to leave work early on a Saturday, when he worked for the Robert Clark Company, to escort her and her friends to a matinee. Across the street visiting a family friend, Laura was included in this group. On the final night of her Cincinnati stay, Peter G. took her to Pike’s Opera House. They had a courtship at a distance after she returned home since, on a shipping clerk’s salary, he didn’t make much money. He proposed. They saw each other only seven times before their wedding day.

Years later in an interview Peter G. was quoted: “My wife was Miss Laura Gamble, a niece of the first Lars Anderson, and she was a wonderful woman. I had $10 when I was married. She had a great gift at writing poetry, jingles and pretty little lines. And she could write the most delightful children’s books and nursery takes. I owe much to her.”

By 1882 they started to publish toy books, games, nursery rhymes and school squeak less slates. Later, valentines were added. The children’s books sold for a dime. Laura did their business bookkeeping. This business was so successful that it was bought by the McLaughlin Brothers of Brooklyn, N. Y. to end his competition in children’s publications. Enough was made from this sale that he could move his family from downtown Cincinnati to College Hill (1885).

Peter G. had three maxims; establish a good credit and then use it as much as you can; keep constantly plugging; there is no luck connected with success, nor any secret. The surest way is to work hard.

It was at this time that he started Champion Coated Paper in Hamilton, Ohio, 20 miles north of Cincinnati on the Great Miami River. There were other paper mills lining the east shore of the river, for hydraulic water power supplied the industry. In those days, the Miami Valley was the third largest paper manufacturing region in the nation. The Miami-Erie Canal also made shipping paper convenient. The paper mills attracted mostly Appalachian workers which added to the growth of Hamilton. Through W.W. II, Champion remained the largest coated paper manufacturer plant in the U.S.

In the 1880’s printing underwent an improvement with the invention of the halftone process. It used tiny dots of varying size to render a detailed picture rather than engraved lines. This new process required paper smoother than any available at that time. The halftone process was used in newspapers and magazines. With his experience as a printer, Thomson realized that a fast and inexpensive way to coat paper would have an unlimited potential market.

Thomson sized the moment and Champion Coated Paper started with $100,000 of capital stock in 1892. He purchased 200 acres around the plant in 1889 and started a real estate business too, Prospect Hill and Grand View subdivisions, advertising homes that would be a 15 minute walk from Hamilton’s industrial center. The nearest industry was a brickyard. He relied on the paper industry already there to provide skilled workers.

One of Champion’s early investors was Harry Pounsford. Champion grew rapidly and built a mill in Canton, North Carolina that had 150,000 acres of trees to supply pulp. Thomson was an innovator in reforestation techniques, being careful not to over cut his trees so that he had an endless, growing, supply of pulp.

A fire in 1901 reduced the Hamilton mill to ashes, but it was immediately rebuilt. In its heyday, Hamilton could produce 15 boxcar loads of paper per day. A flood and fire destroyed the plant again in 1913 and once again was rebuilt, better than previously. One of Thomson’s strengths was constant innovation, seeking more effective and less expensive ways for production.

Thomson was a far-sighted and fair employer. His mills frequently employed several generations of the same family. He established an automatic raise at each five years of employment, free life insurance for his workers, free medical clinics and a commissary where food and household supplies were sold at
cost. One of his first employees was with him still in 1930. He also had his family working in key positions for the company, but they all started at the bottom and earned their way upward.

Peter G. and Laura had five children: Peter G., Jr (married Laura Simpson); Alexander (married Mary Moore Dabney); Mary Belle (married Walter Randall); Logan (married Sylvia Johnston) and Hope (married Reuben Buck Robertson). According to their son Alexander (born 1879), Peter G. took “...every bit as much care of the children as Mother did.”

Peter G. decided to give a nephew of Laura’s who had just completed the Beaux Arts architectural school in Paris - James Gamble Rogers - a chance to design their home. A graduate of Yale, Rogers returned to his alma mater to design the modern Yale campus, Harvard, Philips Exeter school and Brown University. Rogers designed “Laurel Court.” Norris S. Knight originally purchased the 23 acre property Aug. 29, 1867 for $24,214. Thomson purchased the Knight house and land, tearing down the Knight house in which they lived for the site on which to build Laurel Court. The family lived in a home across the street at The Oaks during construction.

Laurel Court was built in 1902-1905, and was based on the French Renaissance design of Le Petite Trianon, the Versailles, France palace of Louis XV and later home to Marie Antoinette. (The Governor’s Mansion in Frankfort, Ky. was built on the same French model). Known as ‘Gamble,’ he also designed a Swiss Chalet style home for Thomson’s sister, Rhoda, who married Charles Rammelsberg, whose father founded the Rammelsberg Furniture Company. Rogers also designed the Walter deGollyer Randall house, on which site McAuley Convent was built.

A railroad spur was added to convey the gray Alabama granite to Laurel Court’s site. The Ionic exterior front columns are made of a continuous piece of stone, not pieces assembled. The building cost $1 million to construct15, not including what Laura spent on furnishings acquired on a worldwide buying trip.

Laurel Court has 36 rooms, including 5 bedrooms, 4 complete bathrooms with showers and 7 foot bathtubs. The bathrooms and outdoor swimming pool were made of Rookwood tile. The bathrooms had three water choices: hot, cold or rain. The library was paneled in African Rosewood with the grain matched to form a butterfly pattern. Its wooden floor had a herringbone pattern that changed direction depending on where the viewer stood. The Turkish carpets were woven especially for particular rooms. Georgian marble was used for the dining room floor. Inlaid Delft tiles highlighted the kitchen walls and the sink. An elevator and central vacuum was installed, the mansion was heated by hot water, and utilities were underground. Solid bronze railings were used on the stair case, supported by balustrades filigreed with the initials PGT. The walls had a cardboard or felt covering underneath the fabric wall covering for acoustical value and to reduce the visibility of any cracks. Some walls were stenciled.

The center of the house has a glass ceiling two-story atrium which permits light to enter the interior rooms. A Tuscan colonnade frames three sides of the Atrium. Interior walls are constructed of polychromic brick made from volcanic ash. Water piped from the cistern below once watered the plants during the winter and during the summer the glass ceiling could be retracted for natural rain. When the house left to Thomson family, some of the large atrium plants were moved to the Krohn Conservatory where they are still thriving.

Years later it was written16 of him: “...he built a noble mansion on College Hill and on its walls hang many pictures of great artistic merit, while within and without the house are a score of bronze and marble statues that are veritable museum pieces. The Italian garden adjoining the house is ornamented with marble statues that would do credit to a European palace. None of these things was merely for display – they were an outward expression of the inner man - a man who loved art for art’s sake and who found in beautiful and artistic things a spiritual satisfaction. Proud as Mr. Thomson was of a magnificent and successful business career, he was much more proud of his ‘Bibliography’ and of his collection of books published in the days when Ohio was in the making.”

15 William Erd of Northside was the brick contractor.

16 Cincinnati Enquirer, Peter G. Thomson Expires Following Lingering Illness: Noted In Industrial World, Sat., July 11, 1931.
Despite all the finery, according to her grandson Chilton Thomson, Laura preferred dressing in borrowed gent’s trousers to play with the children to wearing a fancy dress.

At the edge of the Laurel Court property, Peter Thomson built a lovely house for his daughter Mary Bell and her husband Walter D. Randall.

Laura died in Jan. 1912. Logan and his wife, Sylvia, and their two children, Dwight and Jane, were born and raised in Laurel Court, the family then moved to the Caldwell/Prather house at the end of Windermere Way. Peter G. in 1920 married a family friend, Kate Prather Woolley. She was the widow of Edgar M. Woolley, whose family was in the leather trade and the daughter of Charles Blair Prather. In France during their world wide honeymoon they were lavishly entertained by the publishers of several magazines for whom PGT had Champion Coated Paper supply stocked during W.W. I, at his own expense. He did the same thing for Britain. I believe that, for a while, both L’Illustration in France and The Illustrated London News were printed on paper made in Hamilton, Ohio.17

Peter G. died in 1931. Mrs. Thomson moved to the Caldwell/Prather ‘Dower House.’ Laurel Court was sheeted and closed. Large plants from the atrium greenhouse were moved to Krohn Conservatory. Later Logan and his family returned to reside in Laurel Court. The house passed from the family in 1947 and for 30 years was the residence of the Archbishop of Cincinnati. Archbishops John McNicholas and Karl J. Alter lived there.

Donald S. ‘Buddy’ LaRosa bought the property in 1977, partially furnished, for $350,000. It encompassed 7.5 acres. Without this purchase, it is likely that the building would have been razed and apartments built on the site. Much of the building was in poor shape when Mr. LaRosa acquired it. In 1977 it cost approximately $50,000 per year simply to maintain and operate the mansion. Mr. LaRosa did much to restore and preserve the building and grounds. The oriental garden had completely grown over. It took four years to unearth the original garden site and restore it. It took three years to restore the Rookwood swimming pool, which was in such a bad shape in 1977 that it appeared to be a shallow reflecting pool. Mr. LaRosa had the wrought iron gates made in Mexico to add security and privacy to his home. For several years it served as his corporate headquarters and would be open to the public on certain occasions. Through his efforts the house was placed on the both the local and national historic registers (1979).

The house was sold in 1991 with an auction of the furnishings that drew international antique collectors.

In 1997 Champion International Paper sold the Hamilton mill. The Asian paper industry is creating inroads on U.S. production with newer, more efficient equipment and lower worker wages.

The Thomson name may be familiar if you are Boy Scout. Dwight Thomson, due to his support of the Scouts, has been honored by the Dan Beard Council. The Dan Beard Riverwalk Trail, for which any Scout can earn a medal and a patch, takes approximately 3 hours to complete. Starting at Fountain Square, the trail follows the Bicentennial Riverwalk and crosses over the river to Riverboat Row along the Kentucky shore and passes Dan Beard’s house. The medal says Dwight Thomson Trail Award. Mr. Thomson was a Star Scout and an Assistant Scoutmaster and served on many Dan Beard Council positions. For service to boyhood, Mr. Thomson was awarded the Silver Beaver, Antelope and Buffalo.

---

17 Correspondence, Chilton Thomson, July 1, 1996
Laurel Court was seldom called that by members of the Thomson family or their close friends. It was the ‘Big House’ and, in many ways, it was a BIG mistake. It originated in the sudden, and quite dramatic, decision of my grandfather, Peter Gibson Thomson, to provide a ‘meaningful opportunity’ to a young cousin who had just completed architectural school in the Beaux Arts in Paris. It did what it was supposed to do: ‘Cousin Gamble,’ Yale ca. 1896, went on to rebuild much of modern Yale and numerous other important structures in the northeast quadrant of the country.

James Gamble Rogers was my grandfather’s nephew. Like her, he came from a modestly comfortable Louisville family that included most of the Gambles who did NOT make soap or move to California at the turn of the century and make fortunes in real estate out there. He was a grandnephew of George Rogers Clark and son of a well intentioned and ambitious mother who painted in oils. He inherited much of the daring dash and skill of both of them, along with a powerful physique and weak eyesight that prevented him from playing football at Yale. He did however pick the right room-mate, from the future’s point of view: Wm. L. Harkness was to inherit countless millions and make as much again, to pay for the rebuilding of Yale and Harvard!

Gamble (as he was always called) came through Cincinnati on his way home from Paris and, as always, stopped to visit his beloved Aunt Laura and Uncle Peter. At this distance of nearly eighty years, I am sieving bits that I was told or overheard over FIFTY years ago, such as whether the house should have a ‘garritch’ (always PGT’s pronunciation) for ‘motors’ or a carriage house and stable. I know that it was to have both. Also, there was never any doubt that Grandfather intended it to be his beloved Laura’s ‘court’ and so it was named. It had to have a relatively large number of bedrooms. My father, Alec, was still living at home and working at the paper mill in Hamilton. He was twenty-five, a bit younger than Cousin Gamble. Peter Jr. was frequently at home, Hope and Mary Belle were in school in Cincinnati and Logan was about to leave for the new school in Cleveland that had a boarding department, University School. He didn’t go! So: five bedrooms for children, a master suite with dressing and sitting room, four bathrooms (and they were glorious, seven-foot porcelain tubs, separate stall showers complete with ‘liver spray’...I never knew what it was but the handle said so!) And the necessary service accouterments made the second floor.

The first floor, a true ‘piano nobile’ in classic tradition, is about six feet above ground level. (Incidentally, there was a good sized hill on the site, which was removed by a dummy train to a marsh S. E.) There are (or, were....several of the rooms have changed ‘assignment’ over the years) in a flat horse-shoe from the N. E., billiard room, library, front hall, ballroom and dining room. As above, all backed onto an atrium covered by a (once) removable reinforced glass roof. In the back if the house are pantry, very large kitchen, larder, servant’s dining-living room and a large general service area which housed a hydraulic elevator which, to the best of my knowledge, never had worked. I remember it as a coat and broom closet. The cellars were out-of-bounds when I was a young boy; grandfather died when I was ten and my step-mother, Mother Kate, moved to the Dower House on Windermere Way very soon afterwards. Then, when the house was empty of all but care takers, I really had a chance to explore! The ground rules were firm, however. No closed door was to be opened, no piece of furniture or bric-a-brac was to be moved. But we were free to play Sardines in the Can, Hide and Seek, slide on the tremendous banisters, play pool, use the house intercom telephones and ...particular joy...play the dinner chimes and the gilded piano in the ballroom. What more could a kid want for a ‘play-house’ on a dull day?

Then, in 1934 (about), my uncle Logan and Aunt Sylvia decided to move up from Hamilton Avenue. My father and the other heirs sold their shares and, very rapidly, the Big House was itself again. Some of the old furnishings were changed; the billiard room became a cozy cocktail room, its fine fire-place frequently used. The living room and dining room got new rugs and draperies (after thirty years, they needed ‘em!). Best of all, with relatively young adults who loved hospitality and teen-aged Dwight and ten year old Jane, it was a home again.
My grandmother had been warmly hospitable and very active in College Hill’s active society around the turn of the century. There had been amateur dramatics in the Town Hall (I have a marvelous photo of Dad with a fake moustache in something of the nature of ‘The Belle of the Klondike’; with his black hair, he was a perfect villain) much of which moved up to the Big House. A kindergarten ran for years in the stable, which never accommodated a horse. Grandfather even sat at his Louis Seize ‘maitre ebeniste’ desk helping the children make paper chains, and he was a stern and rather humorless man. The lawn and developing gardens were open to everybody but the swimming pool, first in College Hill, was not. It was specifically designed to be in full view of the front porch where, in pre-air-conditioning summer, the family sat up late. Grandmother died in February, 1911, in Florida where she had been taken after a near-stroke. Logan and Sylvia moved in before 1919: Dwight and Jane were born in the house, then in 1918 or 19, PGT married Kate Prather Woolley, a widow and devoted friend. The ‘Logans’ moved out and the newlyweds took the first east-bound trip of the new Cunard *Mauretainia* for a very unusual honeymoon: they were very close to teetotal, they had no particular goal in their travels and, most importantly, PGT had scads of money and very, very little knowledge about spending it! Mother Kate undoubtedly did have exquisite taste and some knowledge but she let him buy whatever he wanted: a Reynolds portrait and a Byzantine papal crown which proved phony, a mass of carved copies of famous marble statues (which led to a new formal garden to house them) and masses of collectibles such as swords, manuscript illuminations, tapestries, bronzes which changed the interior considerably. My particular favorite was a mechanical bird-in-a-cage which lived on a tabouret in the ballroom. Well wound, it would spring out of its base and warble ‘Funiculi Funicula, ‘with beak and head moving and wings flapping, then pop back down at the end. In spite of numerous broad hints to Mother Kate, I never got the bird.

In her day, entertainment at the Big House was of two kinds: dinner parties and concert/lectures. Perhaps money paved the way up Hamilton hill but many stars of the Twenties seemed to like to come. Once in awhile, if the performance seemed ‘proper’, I was taken over by a parent or sibling from our house across the street (now Doug Trimmel’s) to hear John McCormick, Richard Crooks, Reinhold Werrenrath, Margarete Matzenauer, singers; Percy Grainger and Anton Rubinstein, pianists; Carveth Wells, explorer; Hendrik Willem VanLoon, historian, and my own fascinating cousin, Gamble Rogers. I could usually sneak into the pantry and kitchen before or immediately after the dinner to goggle at the great table, set from the one-thousand piece of Capo da Monte porcelain which....supposedly!....had been made at Napoleon’s order for the Princess Borghese. Or, at the twenty-four German service plates emblazoned with gold and scenes from Wagner’s operas. There were two great epergnes of round silver base supporting four caryatids who held a large bowl on their heads, overflowing with grapes (which might well have come from the green house behind) and flowers. I have one piece left of the glassware which was French, acid-etched and picked out in gold in a geometric design.

Mother Kate had brought into the marriage a jewel of a cook, who happened to have the same name, so Mother Kate re-named ‘Kate’ something like Sarah! However, nobody else did. She was plump, strong, incredibly good-natured and was simply ‘Cookie’. She presided over the huge range, coal-burning at one end (that stopped about 1930) with eight over-size gas burners at the other, with four ovens and two huge grills. Mrs. Kinney, who didn’t seem to have a first name, presided over her own end of the kitchen (facing the formal garden) where she had her own work-table and sink to prepare pies, pastries, cakes (her white fruit-cake was Mother Kate’s highly prized Christmas gift to close friends) and especially Parker House rolls. I finished twelve of them one evening, and was stopped with the thirteenth well on its way into my mouth. Kids just could NOT leave her rolls alone so she seldom baked fewer than 144, 72 in two huge flat pans. My occasional job was buttering them, which took half a stick apiece.

Meals were far from extravagant and, only at Christmas, Thanksgiving and major birthdays were there more than three courses; then, salad and a sherbet were served before a rich dessert. The first course was almost invariably soup, light and clear if the entree were heavy, thick and rich if not. Always homemade, from one of the stockpots on the range. Dessert was almost always homemade ice cream and cake. Oh, those incredible Angel Foods! Those dreamy Lady Baltimores! (I haven’t seen one since Mother Kate died in 1937.) Particularly memorable are the sand cookies and macaroons. There never was wine until
Repeal, then only on occasions such as Jane’s debut ball in December ‘39 or my wife’s and my Rehearsal Dinner in December ‘41. I do not remember that there was a real wine cellar in the house.

Aunt Sylvia and ‘Nunkie’ Logan stepped up the pace of entertaining, but only a bit. Drinks were now prepared in the ‘new’ sitting room, often held in hand during singing around the grand piano in the living room. Aunt Sylvia’s father had taught piano at home as she grew up and she played well enough by ear but never learned to read music or to transpose key. She had a very sweet, feminine voice and sang accordingly, so the rest of us could not sing the National Anthem to her accompaniment. To everybody’s joy, the singing that began with the Cocktail Song (There’s a moment that comes before dinner... is as much as I recall) did not end until Brown or Horace announced dinner. On Christmas Day, this was at 1:30 PM and lasted until well past 3:00. Then, most of us went for a long walk.

Two events stand out in memory: Jane’s debut, the great hallway illuminated by candles, the living room and sitting room stripped, with two bands alternating for constant dancing. The atrium was as warm as a room, filled with poinsettias and some white flowers, all of which sparkling in candlelight and subdued hidden lighting. Two bars out there and then, at one-thirty in the morning, the dining room opened to reveal a magnificent buffet of good, plain, ‘eatin’ food’ as my oldest brother called it: scrambled eggs, bacon and sausage, English muffins brought from the East (they weren’t yet available in Cincinnati) and Mrs. Kinney’s Danish and cookies. Our rehearsal dinner was dimmed by the fact that Pearl Harbor had occurred but plans previously made sat twenty-four of family, groomsmen, and bridesmaids down to an elegant meal topped off with Perrier-Jouet brut champagne, the reserve of the monarchs of Great Britain. Nunkie had, somehow, laid in a supply for the debut and had enough left over.

One other thing about Laurel Court means much to me: I hold an unregistered, legally meaningless lien on a small bit of it. Here’s how: I was eight, and was caught by one of the gardeners climbing on one of the marble statues. He took me before Mr. Corbett, chief gardener, who led me to my grandfather...at the Riesener desk. Have you climbed the buckeye tree next to the south driveway? he asked, fixing me with stern eyes. No, grand-dad, never! I wavered. Well, go try! I did, and got fairly close to the top, Mr. Corbett watching. We went back into the house. Grandfather was writing at the desk, then turned to me with the paper. It was on is letterhead and said in beautifully perfect Spencerian ‘hand’: I, Peter Gibson Thomson, being in sound mind and health, do hereby give and bequeath the large buckeye tree beside the south driveway of Laurel Court to my grandson, Chilton Thomson, to have and to climb at his will! /signed/ Peter G. Thomson. There, boy, he smiled, climb it and stay off the statuary, please?

Years and years later, after Nunkie died in 1947, the Big House stood vacant again, finally to be sold to the Roman Catholic archdiocese of Cincinnati for the residence of the newly declared archbishop. I wrote to him, offering my welcome and telling him about my ‘lien.’ His lovely reply acknowledged my right to make use of it and added: And, Mr. Thomson, when you come to climb your tree, you may be sure that I’ll be right along side you: then, we’ll go back to the Big House and have a cup of tea!

I never met this lively, witty man. I have never been back to Laurel Court. I am not sure that I would not hear the echoes of Past Presences which would haunt me even more than they now do.
Chapter 33 The Oaks

This property was first part of Richard Hankin’s forfeit. It passed to Isaac and Sarah Sparks, Richard’s son-in-law, to their son-in-law David and Rachel Long, in 1837 to Israel Brown, another of Richard’s sons-in-law and thence to Thomas B. Smith, all buried in Gard Cemetery. A small school was built on the land. For the teacher to live in, a brick building was constructed behind it with a wooden lean-to in the rear. Each room had a fireplace and a central hall separated the rooms, two on either side. The one story, four room building from 1814, is the nucleus of “The Oaks.”

The deed on this land is a catalogue of College Hill history - William Cary, Zadock Lewis, William A. Bagley, Albert G. Arnold, Abel Canton Wilder. Albert Arnold sold the land in 1837 to the school directors who were William A. Bagley and Jeremiah Steelman. William Bagley’s wife was Rosalinda Witherby. The property was sold in 1863 to Maria L. Knight. Her husband was George C. Knight, a New York developer who built several properties in College Hill. Their son, Norris, drowned in a lake in College Hill about 1871. By now a fine house occupied the land. The house was sold at a sheriff’s sale to John Hunt, who purchased it April 30, 1869 for $18,333.34. The house was sold to Jane and Patrick Kennedy, who went bankrupt. In July 1877 the house was sold by Siller A. Thompson (assignee in insolvency) to Marie E. Emerson, wife of Lowe Emerson.

Col. Lowe Emerson was a distinguished officer in the Union Army during the Civil War. Before the war, he was a Kansas land speculator and came to Cincinnati, returning here to work in the lumber trade. He resided at The Oaks from 1877 until 1902 when the property was purchased by the Thomson family. During that time the Emerson’s expanded and modernized the house. The roof was raised and additional height was added, the sixteen foot ceilings were lowered to their present ten and one half feet, and three other floors were added. A large zinc-lined tank in the attic was installed to collect rain that supplied a bath and sink, which is still in place. The fireplaces were changed and more added. Mr. Emerson was responsible for all the Victorian refinements, such as the parquet floors on the ground level, the sliding cherry wood doors between the music room and dining room, and the open three-story stairway made of cherry wood with inlays of oak that match the paneling in the dining room. Heating was added at this time. The house used acetylene gas for light. This gas was supplied from a shed in the garden.

Emerson was born in 1854 in Massachusetts and of the same family that included Ralph Waldo Emerson. Lowe tried many business ventures early in his life, from wholesale manufacture of shoes, to land speculator. After the Civil War he was in Cincinnati’s lumber business when he met Cincinnatian, John W. Fisher. Fisher had experience in carriage manufacture and made harness, saddle-bags, ambulances and other wagon equipment for the Federal government during the Civil War.

In 1872 these two enterprising young men, Lowe Emerson and John W. Fisher, formed a partnership, The Emerson & Fisher Company, to manufacture buggies. Emerson staked his finances that with their business experience, contacts and Fisher’s knowledge of the carriage and leather trade that they could succeed in changing the buggy industry. They selected two or three representative styles, and commenced a plan of interchangeable parts and buying material in large quantities. They produced a quality vehicle at a price lower than the competition. Buggies that were retailing at $500 each from other companies they could make to be sold $200-$300 apiece, bringing a luxury item into the economic realm of the middle class. The carriages were durable as well as stylish. Sales soared and the market for their buggies increased until they were in demand throughout the country. In 1882, Cincinnati was the leading carriage manufacturing center in the world, producing 100,000 vehicles a year.

The company incorporated in 1881 with Emerson was president and Fisher as vice-president. Emerson was on a board of several other carriage manufacturers and other businesses in which he owned a part; was vice-president of the Chamber of Commerce, and was the president of the National Carriage Makers’ Association in 1886 and for years was a trustee of College Hill’s Belmont College and later, the O.M.I.

The 1896 their first and only venture into automobiles appeared, the Emerson-Fisher, the first car made in Cincinnati.
Emerson retired in 1902 and his son, Lowe K. Emerson became president. The distinctive Napoleonic coach “Body by Fisher” logo, adopted in 1914, became one of the world’s most recognized symbols.

In 1866 Emerson married Maria Elizabeth Knight (1837-1899). Their children were: Harrison Dexter Emerson (married Flora Coan), Ernest Lowe Emerson (1870-1871), Guy Winslow Emerson (1874-1889), who was killed by a lightning strike at his home when he was age 15, Laura Elizabeth Emerson, and Lowe Knight Emerson (1876-1911), who married Flora Coan’s sister, Barbara. Maria’s sister, Olive A. Knight married John R. Allen. Their daughter, Cora Marie Allen (1864-1952) married College Hill’s Orville Simpson. They had two children: Lowe and Robert Orville Simpson. Olive and Maria’s other sister, Louise Mary Knight, married Harrison Dexter. Laura Emerson was raised by her aunt, Laura Emerson, who married Herbert Aiken.

Lowe K. served in the Spanish American War, forming a Cincinnati company of infantry to fight and thereafter went by Captain Lowe Emerson. In 1874 he and Col. R. Dollings formed the Ohio Life Insurance Co. Lowe died unexpectedly of appendicitis in 1911.

The Oaks was sold to Peter G. Thomson in 1902. The building was remodeled and pillars were added to the front when Mr. Thomson anticipated that his son, Alexander, was going to married a Gould daughter. The Goulds came from New York to College Hill for a visit but the marriage didn’t occur. The Thomson’s lived in the house when Laurel Court was under construction. Mr. Thomson gave the house to his son Alexander when he married Mary Moore Dabney, who later became the president of Western College for Women. During their honeymoon in Europe The Oaks was again remodeled. The sash type windows on the ground floor were removed and French doors installed. The one-story porch was removed and the present two and one half story porch added along with a breakfast room. The interior woodwork was changed to the present fluted Corinthian type and decorative Greek key cornices and plaster moldings were installed. Another wing was added with a new kitchen.

In 1920, a tunnel running from the acetylene shed, under the smoke house and into the southwest corner of the cellar was obliterated. This tunnel was mentioned in Levi Coffin’s description of the Underground Railroad.

In the yard is a gingko tree, a gift from Mr. Sugimoto. A trumpet vine still blooms that was planted at the end of the Civil War. A century old pine oak is in the front yard along with oak trees from the time of Farmers’ College. Grapevines smuggled from Portugal by the Thomson’s first gardener, Joe Riis, are still there. Mr. Riis came from the University of Cincinnati and started working for the Alexander Thomson’s in 1907.

After the death of Alexander Thomson in 1939, the mansion was sold to Walter T. Askew, president of the Pierson Lumber Company. Mr. Askew passed away suddenly and his widow, being unfamiliar with the business, sold their interest.

The house was acquired in the 1950’s by the St. George Serbian Eastern Orthodox Church. The exterior was painted gray and the house visually vanished. Green paint covered interior mural decorated walls and wood paneling. The church congregation later moved to the former carriage house on the Thomson property and sold the ‘big house.’ It was purchased by Douglas Trimmel and the late Robert D’Amato in 1977 and the huge task of restoration of the house started. Without their work, time, and loving care, this house might truly ‘be history’ today.
Chapter 34  Life at The Oaks
By Chilton Thomson

The Oaks, at 5907 Belmont Avenue, was extensively remodeled during 1919-1920. I, the writer, was being ‘modeled’ to be born there in May, 1920, the house not quite complete....nor was I, but that’s another story. The First World War was over; the family and the house had done their part through victory gardens, animal husbandry (four cows, six swine, a work horse), Red Cross and Home Guard....there was a lot of catching up to do. A new guest-room suite out of the two small NE rooms on the second floor with white-tiled bath and foyer; new bath, dressing rooms and sleeping porch for the master suite on the SE and re-decoration throughout. ‘Modern’ wiring, with push-button switches and porcelain-plug floor outlets; RUUD constant-flow hot water heater to cope with endless baths, dish washes and laundry; all gas lighting eliminated with ‘electroliers’ and wall brackets in all major rooms. An amazing total of eight electric circuits, with the fuse box outside the master bedroom and the master switch next to the huge coal-fired furnace in the old stone cellar.

The kitchen and laundry on the west end were up to their task, supplying a major manor. The former was insulated from the western sun by a stair well to the cellar and a large storage room cum larder housing the dozens of bowls and pans needed to cook for an AVERAGE of fifteen people. The range had two coal ovens and four stove rings, two gas with six rings and a broiler big enough to handle two dozen chops. The giant ice-box, built into the wall of the kitchen and the all-weather porch, could take two hundred pounds a day from D. D. Peters’ wagon. The kitchen was connected to the dining-room by a pantry larger than most modern kitchens which had two sinks about 3’ X 3’ and 14” deep, wooden drain boards and towel racks beneath. Cleaning supplies above in closed cabinets, five pairs of glass fronted cabinets surrounding the room which housed five sets of china, numerous serving pieces and drawers full of flat silver. In the porch was the broom closet, a huge built-in container for trash bins and vegetable storage, the stairs to the cellar and the entrance--the only one--to the laundry.

Alice Walton, who lived in the ‘sub’ presided over the laundry daily from 1911 to 1925. She had two sets of tubs, one on the south and one on the west, a huge center table for sorting and folding, a gas fired mangle which could do double sheets I one pass, two pairs of twin-burner gas rings for boiling and a copper washing machine whose slow clunk-suck, clunk-suck could be heard all through the house every Monday and Wednesday. Alice was helped by ‘fill-in’ girls but did all the hand ironing herself with sad irons heated on the ‘rings.’ When she retired, Mamie Thomas took over until the laundry was closed and did the hand ironing with an electric iron.

Sallie Dowtin, who’d worked for Mrs. Thomson’s mother since 1886, joined the staff in 1920 as ‘fill-in’ on Thursdays and Sunday afternoons. Arthur ‘Shinny’ Chenault, ex-Pullman porter and prize fighter, started the same year as heavy cleaner. Ernest (last name forgotten), the man to be immortalized on the Cream of Wheat box, was Butler and Carrie Payne was cook. Outside, Phil Zimmerman had just replaced famous Joe Riis as gardener (Gustav Eckstein wrote his story; Alexander Woolcott reprinted it in his Second Reader aided by Walter Robinson, who had gone to College Hill’s school with Mr. Thomson in the ‘80s. All of these wonderful people were to stay into the ‘30s; Sallie until The Oaks was closed in 1940.

In 1930, to ease working conditions and create jobs, the Thomsons decided on major revamping of the facilities. The laundry was given up when Mamie retired; the Avondale Steam Laundry took on the household as a ‘run.’ By this time, the country place in Indiana added tremendously to the laundry load with week-ends not infrequent bedding thirty, one time forty-two people. A new kitchen was developed in the former laundry space with a hotel sized Kitchen Aid and three giant sinks taking the west-end, a tremendous four door refrigerator (with compressor in the cellar) on the north, cabinets on the south and an all gas range on the dining room wall. A marble-topped center table could seat six, the normal number for lunch or dinner; over-flow, particularly when the children ate in the kitchen ‘when the old folks were out,’ tipped chairs against the cabinets.
Food came from the one acre garden or Bolam’s Grocery at the bottom of the hill by the bushel; oranges and spinach by the crate, milk and cream and butter from Ruther’s Daily by the dozen, daily. When Mrs. Grogan, the seamstress, had to stay on for dinner, her son usually joined in order to drive her home. With grand-parents visiting for six or eight weeks, there were eight in the dining room (the table seated twelve spaciously) and eight more in the kitchen. Easter and other special events demanded card tables set up at the end of the dining room or the adjacent breakfast room for ‘children’ up to 16. Then there’d be two big rib roasts or four legs of lamb or two hams, one ‘sweet’ and one Virginia.

Biscuits or hot rolls came with every dinner, left-overs toasted for breakfast or the few for lunch. Canned goods from Bradens, in California, would arrive by dozens of crates every fall and spring to be carried to the pressing room on the third floor where ceiling-high cabinets housed perhaps forty different products. Soft drinks were made; root beer ‘working’ in the cellar, iced tea or lemonade seasonally and...always....a large granite-ware coffee pot on the back of the stove. When canned ground coffee came on the market, it too was brought in by the case. Mrs. Thomson made a trip to Peebles’ fancy grocery at ‘their’ corner about once a month for tea, candied fruit, special jellies and pickles. She seldom came home with less than two large baskets full.

And yet, it was not a lavish household, in any respect. The four boys all had assigned chores which they performed fairly regularly. Their only sister was killed in 1925, not long after their mother had a still-birth. The entire household tried to distract and/or relieve her. There had been a chauffeur, for example, so when young Ottawa Indian Michael Kishingo (Indian name A-kish-I-go-yami, the ‘moon maker’) arrived from Harbor Springs, Michigan (where he had serviced the family cars during summer vacations) with the announcement that he was ‘taking’ that job, every one was pleased. He built a three-room apartment in the second floor of the huge old brick and stone barn, outfitted it with home-made furniture, wife and eventually seven children. His work-shop on the main floor took over all the odd jobs of the estate (Mike could do anything, from electric wiring to wine and brandy making) and the maintenance of four cars. He taught the boys wood-craft, auto maintenance, driving....and perseverance.

A very quiet but determined man, he never in his life said that something could NOT be done. The writer not only swam an eight-mile lake in Canada, the summer he was fourteen, because Mike said that he ‘could and should’ and helped him train for it, he also learned a variety of skills from the man who had never been to formal school: how to know direction within a few degrees, even hundreds of feet underground in London’s subways, and how to put a hard-boiled egg into a glass milk-bottle (if you can find one, now!). Secret: shell the egg, drop a fair-sized piece of burning paper into the bottle, put the egg on top and the vacuum created will suck it in! Mike was the last of the staff to be retired in 1940; his family was considerably larger than Mrs. Thomson’s, with only two sons left at home.

There was constant work to keep the big house viable and comfortable. Much of it, thank God and the C. G. & E., never to be done by humans again. Until the late 20s, the tap water was often muddy and had to be settled with ground alum in large tubs. The clay tennis court (now almost obliterated) had to be forked, swept and rolled almost daily - and sprinkled in hot, dry weather. Over a thousand feet of graveled driveway was raked, edges clipped and dust settled with calcium chloride. Wallpaper and lamp shades were cleaned twice a year with ‘water less’ cleanser, something like an art gum eraser. Every inch of every stick of furniture was washed with Ivory suds at least twice a year. The large kennel of English Clumber Spaniels had to be cooked for (there was no prepared dog food until the ‘30s) and each dog combed and patted and washed. The boys mixed with the staff on all of these, along with mowing and trimming the three acres of lawn. They did not, however, work with the strong men who carried every rug to the heavy pipe frame in the back garden to beat the dust out of them, every spring....then roll and wrap in strong kraft paper to store while woven grass rugs replaced them for summer.

Each season brought marked changes. Soon after the family returned from summer stays, Walter Robinson or his helper began to arrive at 5:00 AM to fire up the giant coal furnace. Then the ping-ping-PING, whim-whim-WHAM! Of ascending heat came to the third floor where the boys slept with windows wide open. The two lower floors hot air heat from an exchanger. Some wise-apple kid would roll marbles, or perhaps pour some syrup to run down the long pipes but cod-liver oil was tried only once.
The oldest son married and moved out in 1933, lessening the crush on the two available bath rooms. Breakfast was served by the butler in the glass-walled breakfast room until it got too cold, then in the dining room, at 7:15 promptly. Quite plain; fruit, almost always citrus, dry cereal mostly with milk, toast and jelly. None of the boys drank coffee or tea. The parents were served their even scantier breakfast in bed. All the males scattered before 8:00, the two youngest taken to school in Clifton by Mike, the other going to Hughes by street-car until he went away to school at fifteen.

Mrs. Thomson had a busy morning, every day of the week. Consultation with the cook about meals, very specific for that day, less so about the end of the week. She paid and recorded all the household bills, including the servants....paid weekly by check. During the 20s and 30s, she was president of the symphony board, the YWCA and very active in local politics. She had two other houses to plan toward: the Indiana ‘farm’ every weekend through the school year, a summer place (finally, one owned in Canada from 1934 to 39). She had been the first woman to drive a car in College Hill but, as soon as Mike got back from delivering the boys to school, he’d start driving her around her working day. Except during a protracted illness in 1926, she never had a house-keeper or governess to help her. That time, Miss Isabel Coates from Marlowe Avenue, lived with the family for a year and then moved across the street to Laurel Court to help Mrs. Logan Thomson.

Weekends found the family in Indiana, at their lodge near Holton. The Oaks was never left vacant, however. One man, at least, lived in and Walter Robinson came Saturday morning and Sunday afternoon to check the furnace. Summers, with the family away, was the time for heavy cleaning and gardening. Joe and Nellie Cleeny, who worked at a school during the nine months, moved in to wash and polish everything possible. Shinny and Sallie, Mike and the current butler went to Canada with the family and took their annual vacations in late September. Mrs. Thomson’s plans and programs for all this were usually complete about a year in advance.

The days for such a way of life were at an end in 1940, due to the death of Mr. Thomson in 1939 and the maturing of the four sons. Mrs. Thomson moved to flats or rented houses, helped by Sallie, until the latter died in 1947. The Oaks was sold, to begin a slow but steady decline for nearly a generation until Doug Trimmel ‘caught’ it in the nick of time and began its slow, steady restoration. Once again the large old house, perhaps the oldest continually occupied residence in the state of Ohio, stands proudly on its hill-top, ready to commence another century.

Early photo of The Oaks
Chapter 35  An On-Going Project: Restoring the Oaks
By Douglas Trimmel

The first thing you learn about restoring a pre-Civil war home is that you never finish. Once you’ve accepted that fact, the rest is all hard labor, time, and a whole lot of luck. By luck I mean, you’ve found the right person to do the work, someone who won’t make what’s wrong, worse. Thinking back, I’ve had my share of bad luck.

Looking back to January 1977 and the first time I saw the huge grey mass (the mansion was painted battle ship grey), which, at the time, I did not know it was called “the Oaks,” named that because of the giant primeval oaks in the yard; I wondered if I was out on my mind for even considering a second look. There was lots of snow that year and the only drive open was the one at the rear on Glenview, so we drove in. I remembering saying, It looks so spooky, I wonder what it’s like inside. Maybe that was the incentive to call the Realtor for the second look.

After setting up the appointment for the ‘second look’ and having a little time to think it over, it seemed such a waste of time to keep the appointment because I knew it was just really a little more house than was needed, but what’s to lose by just looking. So, toward the end of January 1977 after work, we met the Realtor at the rear of the house and he showed us to the rear door on the servants’ wing. The first thing we were greeted with was this incredibly ugly tile floor - black and green squares and all worn out. But that was really just the beginning of ugly sites. That first room turned out to be the original kitchen (pre-1932) and it is now the billiard room with its original oak paneling, cherry wood windows, and beautiful oak flooring. But that first day it was covered with layers of peeling paint, cracked plaster, and that ugly tile.

Next on the tour was the back hall and stairs, which were all painted an institutional green with white trim. The stairwell, which opened three full stories, looked grand enough, solid cherry and oak, and with a little time and paint stripper it could be beautiful again. That little time turned out to be the entire summer of 1978 and gallons of paint stripper. The back hall opened into the main hall and again more green paint. There must have been a sale on green paint because, as it turned out, the entire first floor was green. The ceiling had water damage along with the Greek key cornice, but it all looked repairable. The next room on the left was the library which had space for thousands of books and had fluted woodwork with Corinthian capitals, a ceiling with large holes, and the same water damaged Greek key cornice as in the main hall. The plaster would be no problem, we’ll just hire a plasterer to redo it. Except there are very few plasterers and almost none that do Greek keys.

Across the hall was the music room which was a large room 35 feet long with red chenille carpeting that hid the rotted hard wood flooring of oak and mahogany. Where do you buy mahogany flooring?

Through a pair of missing French doors was the breakfast room, all glass with the east wall bayed and a beautiful red tile floor. A great room to enjoy breakfast. It even had a hidden button on the floor to ring for the maid. Then through more missing French doors we entered into what is probably the best room in the Oaks; a huge dining room with a bayed east wall, solid cherry paneling with raised panels of oak, fluted woodwork, a solid cherry buffet, mahogany birch and oak inlaid flooring and, to top it off, a solid cherry fireplace with brown and beige marble. Though the room was all under six to seven layers of paint and with 6 months of almost daily work it would be beautiful again.

I think it was at about this point that the Realtor said, The kitchen and butler’s pantry need to be redone - they’re both outdated! He swung open the pantry door and there it was again - that awful green and black tile and even more of it in the kitchen. The floors were rotted clear through to the basement and in the butler’s pantry I could see part of the servant’s wing on the second floor, what a view! In the butler’s pantry was the call box which is connected to push buttons throughout the home. Just press a button, it rings the box and a small shield with the room name drops. The maid would then know where he or she was wanted. I thought that was really novel.

The kitchen had an old Miller gas range with six burners and five ovens which work and was in reasonable condition considering it was 50 years old.
Well we’ve seen most of the first floor, a few doors were locked and no one knew where the keys were. As it turned out, we sawed the locks off 6 months after moving in and found two servant’s rooms and another set of stairs.

Moving up to the second floor was more of the same and even more on the third. Twenty rooms and six baths in all plus extras, like 23 closets, a few linen closets the size of modern day bedrooms, 70 doors, and an uncountable number of panes of glass all with loose putty or none at all. Oh, and even, a dark room for photo work.

Well after that first tour, I thought, No way would I buy a place like this, even though there were a few things about the house that I liked. Maybe that’s where I went wrong; I should have said there was nothing about it I liked.

It took 4 months and many more trips up to College Hill before signing the papers. I remember the night before signing I thought I’ve never owned a home before and never renovated thing (except for painting a few old dressers of my mother’s and things like that) - I must be out of my mind for doing this, I was investing every penny I had and I was only 25 years old. Looking back it must have been that naiveté that talked me into it. I had given notice to my landlord and I had no choice any more but to go.

The first 3 months were simply awful. The home sat empty prior to its sale, except for a few furry creatures who moved in and took advantage of the vacancy. They were forced to leave as soon as they were discovered. We contracted with who we thought was a restoration specialist but who really had no more idea of what he was doing than I did. I remember coming home from work and as I walked up to the second floor I noticed the bedroom window was left open and then I remembered it was the window on the side of the house they were sandblasting. It took 12 tons of sand to clean the exterior of the house and half a ton was now in the master bedroom. I wanted to cry but after several hours with a snow shovel and broom, things didn’t look all that bad.

Getting through all the painting, sandblasting, plastering, getting the yard mowed, and the hedge row trimmed made the first summer go by quickly. Fall was spent finding out that the old oak trees dropped millions of leaves, and raking leaves was always something I hated to do.

Winter was next on the agenda. The house is now heated by a new one-half million BTU, low-pressure, gas steam boiler, but during the first and second winters, we heated with a prehistoric, converted to oil, coal boiler. In the yard to the east and rear of the house underground 2000-gallon oil storage tank which is measured with a dip stick. That October in 1977 the boiler was started and, to my surprise, heated the house quite comfortably. My next surprise came the first week in December when the boiler shut down. Out of fuel oil, that winter was long and cold and 6000 gallons later, Spring came. Spring cleaning revealed a thin film of soot that oozed from the boiler. Two years later it was removed from the basement piece by piece - too big to be removed in sections, it was sledge hammered to rubble.

The next 6 years were spent almost endless with either a paint brush or scraper in hand. Today the project is about two-thirds complete and the house is much more comfortable that first time I saw it in 1977, but a house built 140 years ago I’m certain will have a few more surprises up its sleeve in the future.

Recently I was asked if I’d do it all again, and I said, Sure, it’s taught me a lot. Restoring an old house is like life. You can’t enjoy it unless you accept the satisfaction along with all the disappointments, and, like life, a restoration project can hand out plenty of both.
Chapter 36  College Hill Remembered
By Chilton Thomson

The College Hill that I remembered from the mid-20’s to the late thirties was largely within the loop of the #17 street car. The Episcopal church was at the southern end, across the street from Mr. Bolam’s meat shop, where the best franks and pickle olive loaf in the city was made. Our family doctor, ‘Shorty’ Howard, lived on the dead-end road opposite that and my uncle, Logan Thomson’s family, were down Hamilton Avenue. The Larmons lived further north on Hamilton, not far from the Presbyterian church where I was baptized by Dr. Austin. They owned an enormous touring car, either Packard or Franklin, driven sedately by their jack-of-all-work, Jim (known as Larmon) or madly by their oldest son or by my oldest brother, Alex. Dr. Loucks had his dentistry and home almost opposite them, before he moved ‘uptown’ to the business district which grew north and south from the Hamilton-Cedar corner. There were a few businesses further south: C. D. Peters’ ice and coal yard on Llanfair (he, personally, delivered our ice from a dirty white wagon pulled by an equally dirty white horse until we got a Frigidare, about 1926); and the two delights of my young life, the little soda fountain shop just north of the church and the Betty Sweet Shop, next to Kohnop’s shoe repair and shine shop near the end of Llanfair. The lady there used a small metal mallet to break chunks off of a giant chocolate bar that was the glory of her candy counter....one got a bag reasonably full for a nickel. It was hard! Hard enough to suck all the way home to the corner of Belmont and Glenview.

There were fascinating places in that part of town. Dr. P. V. N. Myers lived in a cut-brick house not far from the church. He had worked on the uncovering of Troy and had corresponded with Ledyard, the English discoverer of Nineveh. He taught my father at the O. M. I. (Ohio Military Institute) in the early 90’s and, in his nineties, was warmly appreciative of visits by small boys who’d sit gapemouthed to hear his stories of the long past and gaze reverently at the bits of ancient cities set into his front wall. Leaving, I’d walk toward home past the Frank Simpson’s cow pasture on Llanfair, then past Tyrone Power’s mother’s house and cross to Bolam’s grocery, where my friend Darryl lived and his family worked to supply our food. The first sign that I recall being able to read was on the side of the store, it asked, ‘Eventually, Why Not Now?’ about some make of flour. Inside, there were rows of tin boxes with glass fronts and lovely cookies and cakes inside. The candy counter was in front, featuring root-beer barrels and cinnamon red hots. (Businesses that sold anything to eat were as well-known and rated for their feature items as gourmet restaurants are today. Miller’s Drug Store, on the west side of Hamilton near the Hollywood Theater was known for its chicken salad sandwiches, ‘Doc’ Schneider’s pharmacy at the corner of Marlowe had the hottest candy cigarettes and Fortmeyer’s Drugs at the corner of North Bend Road had the best nectar sodas. The Americus theater in Northside had the best pop-corn, best because you got a bag about the size of a quart for a dime!)

The ‘dummy’ line, the freight branch of the Cincinnati & Lake Erie Interurban, cut across Belmont Avenue next to Bolam’s. Mr. Harry Pounsford had the great sloping lawn opposite but we couldn’t sled there. Mrs. Pounsford sang in the Presbyterian choir but he never came to hear her or the organ that my grandfather gave in memory of my grandmother, Laura Gamble Thomson, at whom I had to gaze throughout Dr. Austin’s rather pedantic sermons. (Things improved later when the Rev. R. Dale LeCourt took the pulpit; the old moldering manse on Groesbeck Road was replaced by an attractive modern house and Mrs. LeCourt was good looking!) Mr. Pounsford’s daughter built a house catty-cornered from the grocery just above the culvert that drained into the stream that ran down behind the O. M. I. The builders cut down a marvelous grapevine on which all the boys used to swing from the dummy embankment to the hill opposite. I was jealous of the older guys who dared: it would’ve been a twenty foot drop to the stream bed if you let go.

It always seemed shorter to walk the ‘dummy’ tracks to the bridge which crossed them, just before Meryton Place and Kirby Road, than to go straight up Belmont to home. In good weather, we kids would explore the new houses being built on Meryton beyond the Simpson’s two houses, in bad, there were barns with real cows....probably the last ones in College Hill. The McCaslins bought the white house at
the corner about 1930, adding another boy to the gang and opening marvelous sledding on their back hill which, unfortunately, featured a few hawthorn trees which defined the slalom. There were a few houses down Kirby, then a lane that ran into the woods where an eccentric ‘hermit’ lived. He was as friendly as he was filthy and always had time to show us his collections: arrowheads, big old pennies, stamps, bottle caps....all the things that boys loved. Sometimes he came to our back door with something to trade and, at 14 or so, I traded my general stamp album to him for a fine Indian axe. I don’t remember seeing him again.

Coming back along Glenview, I was always glad to see Mrs. Stegner, who often, walked her Boston bull terriers. More often than not, she’d ask me....or us....in for a bite or a glass of something. We kids knew the many houses where we’d usually get some calories: Mrs. Benedict, out Belmont, known for her cakes; Mrs. Runck, not quite so far, whose children had a genuine horse as well as a pony and whose black cook made marvelous Virginia reels; an elderly couple on Cedar, near the school, who’d always offer their persimmons in the fall and, when turned down on those sour things, would proffer their own walnuts. It seems to me that we ate all the time! And, nearing home, there was the grape arbor around our acre-size garden and the pear trees lining our back driveway.

The business district was still quite small in the late 20’s. The Brighton Bank had built a rather imposing building at Hamilton and Cedar, just before my memory begins. I went there regularly to put fifty cents into my Christmas Account. One of the Waldman boys sold newspapers on the corner; there were still quite a few to choose from, the Post and the Times-Star in the afternoon, the Commercial Tribune and Enquirer in the morning, and a German one. On the west side heading south, there was the College Hill Toggery, better known as ‘Gene’s’ whose pipeless furnace fascinated me. Then there was the pool hall, an absolute no-no to us, where - gossip said - one could buy real beer and girlie magazines. Across the street was the Buster Brown Shoe Shop, ‘featuring fine Blue Goose shoes,’ a slogan which puzzled me more than the picture of ‘Buster Brown’ in brown knickers walking with a blue goose as tall as himself!

On the northern corners of the intersection were: west, Dow’s Drugs, where Hollywood’s later-to-be glamour king Tyrone Power had worked just before my memory. Its soda fountain did not get most of the kids trade: it was expensive! Fifteen cents for a chocolate soda and they put in only one scoop of ice cream and one shot of syrup! And, when you bought a pack of ‘weeds’ (for your oldest brothers, of course), THEY were fifteen cents straight, not two for a quarter as they were at Miller’s and Schneider’s. On the east side, there was a wonderfully messy hardware store in a former feed dealer’s big red brick building. We weren’t too thrilled when it turned into a restaurant-cafe about 1932. Mr. Hoffman was the kind of old-fashioned store keeper who took as much time with a boy over a bag of nails needed to build a new shack as he was with an adult. Besides, he raised pigeons and, seasonally, had squabs to sell. The two ladies who had the little sewing shop next to the ‘new’ theater (it opened just as sound was coming in and bravely resisted it long enough for me to see Douglas Fairbanks in THE GAUCHO in its silent version and then, months later, with Vitaphone sound) were just the same way. They sold the makings of valentines and were known to offer a piece of maple candy to a kid accompanied by a buying adult.

Dad told me about hunting birds’ eggs and catching passenger pigeons out of the trees in the area around the end of Marlowe, about 1890. Even in my childhood, in the 20’s, that street between Cedar and North Bend was little more than a track. ‘Doc.’ Schneider’s ‘ethical pharmacy’ opposite the end of Marlowe, on Hamilton Avenue, was the only business building north of the Hollywood Theatre. How I remember him! He was always immaculately dressed in a morning suit, grey and white cravat with a stick-pin and wing collar. There were two counters in the tiny store, opposite the corner door: the longer one at a right angle with Hamilton Avenue and the shorter, containing cigars, parallel with it. A tiny gas light burned constantly in a stand above that. A beautiful set of pharmaceutical jars stood on shelves behind both counters but, to me, the REAL magic was a glass dish of the most powerful peppermint ‘cigarettes’ just about where the two counters came together. In person, he’d roll a couple in a bit of ‘pill paper:’ when prescriptions were delivered to us on Belmont Avenue, there’d be four or five rolled up for whichever of us got the dosage -- probably prescribed by Dr. ‘Shorty ‘Howard, who lived on Hillcrest.
‘Doc’ Miller’s drug store, built much later on the other side of Hamilton and nearly opposite the Hollywood, was much larger and more diverse in stock. He had a soda fountain...not as big or glamorous as Dow’s, which had a ‘Moon River’ machine and sold sandwiches...and had plastic phonograph records called ‘Hit O’ The Week!’ for thirty-five cents. That was a dime more than my weekly allowance but I finally saved enough to buy one. It didn’t last very long; when I was through with it, we used it like a Frisbee.

Miller’s Drugs was a major help with my biggest under-10 project: my ‘museum show’ in aid of the new parish house at the Presbyterian Church. I have always been an avid collector of rocks, shells, playing cards, old kitchen implements...whatever. My stellar piece was a meteorite loaned me by a man in Glendale who, as a boy, had seen it fall on his family’s farm in Silverton. I couldn’t lift it, alone, but - with help - got it on my coaster wagon to take to the new building. Miller’s Drugs paid for my tickets, a quarter for children, and fifty cents for adults. He got an advertisement on the back, we made over fifty dollars for the building fund. I had to give back the meteorite; someone returned it to Glendale.

My other ‘main’ trip with the coaster wagon was to the Kroger store on Hamilton Avenue. Mr. Bolam, who supplied most of our groceries from his shop at Belmont and Llanfair, didn’t carry ‘malt extract’ but I rather gathered that my older brothers didn’t want to talk about it, anyway. They’d give me a dime to bring a can or two back to the house. I didn’t know, then, why they wanted it. It clearly said, on the front of the big can, ‘For Baking Purposes Only!’ and I knew they never baked a thing. Several times, bottles cached in back corners of our old basement exploded and I was told that it was ‘root beer.’ Didn’t smell like it, though.

My older brother went to the C.H. School for two years. I never did, but I used the public library branch a lot. I found my first detective story when I was 10 or 11, about a ‘dick’ named Creek. I have been reading mysteries ever since. While being tutored at 14 (after an unfortunate lapse of performance at school), the young university student took me there to find Milton’s L’Allegro and Il Penseroso, my first look into the world of higher erudition. I can’t say that it worked wonders on my imagination, then.

Grandfather’s house, Laurel Court, was another home to all us kids. He had married for a second time and Mother Kate tolerated almost any kind or number of invasion if it was reasonably quiet and behaved. Better yet, she had wonderful cooks and a kind, friendly butler named Brown who didn’t watch too closely when we’d take down the key to the cellar or to the freight elevator....both prohibited areas. Mr. Corbett, the head gardener, was far tougher. No climbing on the statuary. No climbing on trees. No scuffling up the pebbles in the garden walks or frightening the giant carp in the Japanese garden. He was right, of course, but he didn’t have the ‘touch’ which Brown had, which even made one careful to wash dirty hands before playing the grand piano or the dinner chimes. A favorite phrase of Brown’s has stayed with me to this day: Remember, Chil--tee, you can catch more flies with honey than you can with vinegar!

College Hill was a bee-hive of activity areas for growing boys and life had much honey in it. I remember so many kind, generous people like Mr. Theobald, the letter carrier who walked an eight-mile route TWICE a day but who could take time to visit a new pup; Mr. Hildebrand, the neat night patrolman; ‘Whitey, the dean of route seventeen’s motormen who’d let you ride home from the movies when you’d spent your last dime....but remember the next week to collect it for the company! Yes, ‘the cars’ connected us to a big city which started at the bottom of the hill but the ‘best place in town’ was up top.

---

18 In a 1994 letter, Mr. Thomson described Mr. Theobald as...He was a dignified, but affable, white-haired man whom I confused with Uncle Sam...
Chapter 37  Some Assembly Required

Today we have modular homes that are trucked to a prepared site and assembled. But do you know that you might be living in a precursor to that trend - a ready-cut home purchased from a catalog? Sears and Roebuck houses came directly to the door, pre-cut, ready to assemble, no architect needed. Sears sold and financed nearly 100,000 mail order houses from 1909-1937, peaking in 1926-1929. There was a demand for comfortable homes fueled by a surging economy. Sears opened sales offices in major cities across the country, including one on 4th Street in downtown Cincinnati. Buying a house became as easy as ordering furniture.19

House kits were delivered anywhere in America where there was a rail line. Montgomery Ward and Aladdin also had home kits available. Even local lumber yards, such a Pierson’s in Northside, had pre-cut houses for sale.

Contractors could pick out house plans from over 100 styles and customize them for the purchaser by altering the floor plan, reversing and changing room locations, or expand the options for house exteriors by using brick, wood or stucco. Houses were available with one or two stories, electric or gas fixtures, and with garages. Interior pictures were drawn with suggested furniture placement and furniture packages were available with the identical items used in the drawings.

Preservationists now recognize the architectural significance of the homes produced by the creative marketing of the catalog movement. There are entire neighborhoods constructed of ‘Modern Homes.’ The houses were varied in roof lines, porch locations and details to add diversity to the street scape. Carrying the Sears guarantee, a full refund was offered if the customer didn’t like the finished house.

A home built in this manner had economy in mind. An ‘Honor Bilt’ home was advertised to cost 40% less than standard construction. Houses were available for under $1,000. Styles ranged from a small cabin to southern-style mansions with tall exterior columns. The latter was called ‘The Magnolia’ and was the most expensive available - $5,140 in 1918. It included French doors, a curved staircase with a black walnut banister, a solarium, servant’s quarters, and inlaid floors. For a short time even steel framed houses were offered.

Construction/assembly was simple even for a novice. All that was necessary was choosing the model, sending an order with a down payment and the house was shipped. Kits included everything - down spouts, paint, varnish, nails, lath, shingles, beveled glass doors, etc. The kits did not include materials for a foundation. The home builder needed to prepare the foundation, haul materials from the train yard to the construction site, and match up parts numbers to those with instruction plans. A pipeless furnace body was $100 extra.

One of the companies that produced Sears’ sash and doors was located in Norwood, the Norwood Sash & Door Manufacturing Co. Started in 1912 it was sold by Sears in 1945 and is still in business.

These houses could have fine detailing but the instructions were simple. An instruction booklet assured the handyman that every board, stud and joist had been notched or mitered to fit and was numbered. The booklet even included how far apart to hammer the nails. This reduced the labor needed to construct homes during a time without electric power tools. The construction materials were shipped in installments so that all the house pieces did not come at once, posing a storage problem. A house filled two boxcars. As can be seen by the large number of these houses still occupied, the houses aged well.

Bungalows were the most popular style from 1900-1930, featuring wide porches. Built-ins were popular; bookcases, kitchen cabinets with continuous counters, ironing boards, and breakfast nooks. The Victorian style of elaborate gingerbread trim was replaced by the economical and efficient Arts & Crafts movement. The new emphasis was on craftsmanship and a return to simplicity, focusing on the family.

---

Smithsonian, When home sweet home was just a mailbox away, David M. Schwartz, Nov. 1985
Sears, as well as Montgomery Ward’s ‘Wardway’ and Aladdin’s ‘Redi-Cut’ homes, had architects that offered a full range of popular styles. Sears had their own draftsmen but purchased designs from outside architects. The first time ‘Modern Homes’ were offered was in the 1908 Sears catalogue.

In 1911, Sears financing was for 5 years at 6% interest. They were the only company to grant mortgages without inspecting the property or meeting the buyers, even offering small cash loans to start construction. Sears saw as their customer farmers that had some additional land, wanted a new house and had bits of time available to them and their workers that could be used for construction. Factory workers also wanted new, modest houses. At this time, the average factory worker earned $520 yearly. The Depression ended Sears’ ability to continue to carry home mortgages. The ‘farmers friend’ had started to repossess. The house line continued to be available until 1937 amidst a sagging resale market and no demand for new houses.

The Jones/Wells house on Cedar Ave., not built from a Sears kit but from plans published in the Cincinnati Enquirer
I would awaken at dawn on the Fourth of July with the sound of firecrackers crackling far and near. Soon my Daddy would be urging me to hurry and come outside. He and I would stand on the driveway and toss lighted firecrackers into the grass, and light clumps of tiny crackers woven together that produced a staccato of pops. Soon after breakfast, cars decorated with bunting and flags began parking up and down Larch Avenue beside the Town Hall. Until I was old enough to drive, Daddy would drive his car, and often another man who was a friend of Daddy’s would ask me to ride with him in his car. All the cars were filling with children, many of whom were waving flags and yelling. As soon as all the cars were full, a ‘lead’ car would start us winding slowly along the avenues of College Hill. After touring our streets we would drive up around Mt. Healthy, waving flags at everyone and feeling important.

I remember one time after I could drive, filling our car with children and teaching them to sing out, ‘Ice cream, soda water, gingerade and pop. College Hill, College Hill, always on the top!’

Finally the parade would wind back to Town Hall, just as races were starting. There would be a potato race, a fat man’s race, a three-legged race, a boys race and a girls race. Big tables covered with red, white and blue bunting had been put up under large trees beside the Town Hall building. Voluptuous ladies wearing big aprons were selling lemonade, pop, popcorn, peanuts, candy and Neapolitan ice cream. By lunch time most of the crowd had thinned out and I would go home for lunch.

In the early afternoon, my girl friends and I would return to the festivities wearing ruffled summer dresses and I often wore a big ribbon bow in my hair. A band of uniformed, portly musicians came and sat on chairs in a circle under the trees and began playing patriotic band music and familiar songs we all knew. A stand had been set up and decorated with flags and red, white and blue bunting. Orators would stand on it and make speeches. My friends and I would listen to the music, eat ice cream and talk with lots of other friends.

Late in the afternoon my aunts, uncles, grandparents and relatives would start gathering on big white chairs under the linden trees in our yard at our house, which was across the street from Town Hall on the corner of Larch and Davey Avenues. A big American flag was hung out from our upstairs window and we had put many small flags on all the shrubbery. Our yard was filled with white chairs and tables covered with white linen tablecloths and napkins. Everyone gathered to listen to the music and watch festivities at the Town Hall.

At supper time my mother served ham, her delicious potato salad, pickled beets, cucumber and onion slices, tomato salad, cottage cheese, sharp yellow cheese, peach and strawberry preserves, rolls and butter, tea and coffee. For dessert we had vanilla ice cream which we had made in a freezer in our cellar.

After supper friends and everyone gathered in our yard because it was a wonderful place to sit and watch the fireworks which were going to be set off at the Town Hall after dark. I didn’t watch them there. I went over into the Town Hall lot and sat in the cold, wet grass as close as I could safely get to where the fireworks were going to be set off.

But before this happened, just as the sun was setting, dozens of little balloons were sent up into the air and into the sunset. They were small paper balloons that looked like little Japanese lanterns, inflated by the heat of a lighted candle. Dozens of them floated high up in the air until they floated away and disappeared. But a good many of them caught fire and burned and fell to earth where they could be found almost immediately. To each one was fastened a ticket entitling the lucky finder to claim a box of Dolly Varden chocolates! Each chocolate was a fat, chocolate covered piece of candy, consisting of a big maraschino cherry imbedded in white, runny candy, surrounded by a heavy coating of chocolate. In my time I had eaten perhaps one or two of those delicious things but never even dreamed of owning a whole box of them! It was a treat beyond imagining, made and donated by Mr. Charles Eisen, who lived in College Hill. Quite a number of them fell, of course, and boys raced far and wide trying to find them. As a little girl, I never even thought of trying, but I longed for one. Eventually, in later years the custom of
sending up these balloons was stopped by the fire department after one had fallen on a barn and burned it to the ground.

As darkness began to descend, people from all around gathered into the Town Hall lot and filled a big wooden grand stand there, waiting for the fireworks to begin. As I mentioned, I sat in the damp, dewy grass with other children, as close to the fireworks as I was allowed. The crowd held its breath while the dim figures of the men could be seen in the darkness as they carried torches to light the first colored lights and send the first rockets high into the air. Beautiful colored lights began to shower brilliant beauty all around us, or exploded loudly overhead. Everyone oh-oh-ed and ah-ah-ed as each brilliance exploded in the sky and descended almost onto our heads. We were filled with unbelievable awe as the soft pops and loud bangs and beautiful colors showered over us. We lost track of time as these continued for a long while until at the last, the highest of all of the shooting lights repeated again and again and ended with an ear splitting bang into a flaming American flag. In exhausted silence the crowd dispersed and then we headed home to our own yard. My relatives and many friends were waiting while Daddy passed out chunks of watermelon he had cut for everyone. Friends and I sat on the grass under dim trees and spit watermelon seeds at one another.

Aerial photograph of Town Hall taken from the water tower. The road to the right is Belmont Ave; that to the left is Larch Ave. The Graham Hotel is the low, wooden building closest to Town Hall on Belmont Ave.
Since I’ve lived in College Hill since 1940, Dr. Fred Smart asked if I’d share a few of my memories of what it was like to grow up here. So I sat down, thought a bit, and came up with the following recollections:

Going into Hardert’s Saloon on Halloween because we’d heard the owners were dropping dimes into the kid’s trick-or-treat bags. In the early ’40’s, a dime was a windfall! And if you saved enough of them, you could treat yourself at the soda fountain in Dow’s Drug Store at Cedar and Hamilton where Discepoli’s Wine Shoppe is today.

Sitting on my friend’s front porch on Cedar Avenue with our suit boxes full of movie stars’ pictures which we’d exchange with the same fervor reserved for baseball cards today---a Clark Gable for a Hedy Lamarr, or a Deanna Durbin for a Fred Astaire, etc.

Going to movies at the jam-packed Hollywood Theater where admission had skyrocketed to 40 cents! But during the War, we could get in free when the Hollywood had ‘scrap drives.’ Then, instead of paying, you brought in so many pounds of rubber or scrap metal for the war effort. The Hollywood was a special place at Christmas, too, when there’d be a kiddie matinee and Santa would be on stage handing out little bags of hard candy.

Getting report cards at St. Clare School from the elderly pastor, Rev. Charles Diener, whose advice to us was always the same---Stay Away from Bad Eggs!

When Albers grocery occupied the building next to Hodapp’s, and we thought it was the ultimate in supermarkets! Why, the parking lot must have accommodated at least a dozen cars!

When we did all our Christmas shopping right on the Avenue at such wonderful stores as Braun’s Toggery, Gerstner’s (later called Vonderbrinks) and Ludwig Shoes.

When the heart-throbs for College Hill teen-age girls were the boys from OMI -- the Ohio Military Institute -- where Aiken is now. They were handsome in their sky-blue uniforms, especially at the dress parades on Sunday afternoons. And then there was the cannon that was shot off every morning at OMI about 6 AM. The cadet’s days started with a bang - literally!

Taking ballet lessons for a quarter a session from Mrs. Faison in the gym at College Hill School, and appearing in one of her dance recitals as a female hunter in Peter and the Wolf. Women’s Lib. ahead of its time!

Sitting in our house on Saranac Avenue during the War with all the lights out during the blackouts (air raid practices) while my father, who was the air raid warden on the street, patrolled in is white helmet looking for any houses that might still have lights on.

Declining to join my girl friends’ sewing club --I had no interest in the domestic sciences then, either -- which met, in of all places, under the bridge over Groesbeck Road, roughly where the wooded ravine behind Hillrise is today.

Proudly walking up to the librarian’s desk at the College Hill Library (located then in the easternmost wing of College Hill School) to accept a brown-and-cream certificate for reading, and reporting on, the required number of books over summer.

In the late ’40’s,’ coming home from high school on the bus and stopping first at Baumer & Reddert’s Appliance Store to watch that marvelous new invention called television in the front window. After all, none of us had a TV at home.

I’ve enjoyed recounting these College Hill memories with you, and hope they’ve stirred up nostalgia for some of you, also.
Chapter 40   Memories of old College Hill
By Mrs. Ruth J. Wells

My earliest recollections go back to about 1911. My father, George E. Jones, had the house in which I still live built in 1910. It is a six room bungalow all on one floor. We had gas lights and a coal furnace. My first memory is that of looking out of the dining room window in the early evening and watching the lamplighter put his little ladder against the light post and climb up to light the street lamp across from our house. From that same window in the winter I would watch for the man and his horse and plow to clear the sidewalks of snow. (Cincinnati didn’t live up to its annexation agreement to continue this which was specified in the annexation papers.) I still have the lighter that we used to light the gas lamps in our house- a rod with a slender tube on the side to hold the wick. It had a sort of key on the top with which to turn on the gas, then the flame on the wick would be used to light the lamps. Mother used to let me do it while she watched me. Then I would go into the parlor and stand at the window to watch for my father to walk down the street from the street car.

We always ate in the dining room and I still think of the delicious old fashioned dishes my mother used to make, which aren’t to be found today. I can remember walking with my mother and father up Hamilton Avenue Newbold Pierson’s log cabin office just north of Ambrose on Hamilton, when Dad made the final payment on the house. The cabin was moved later on and today stands on Cedar Avenue, the second house east of Saranac on the north side of the street, now covered with siding.

I couldn’t speak plainly in 1911 and would stand at the dining room window and look across the street to the Eicher’s house which I called the ‘moopy’ house because they had their own band, but I couldn’t say music house. It must have been about that time that the little frame fire house was built on the southwest corner of Cedar and Salvia. Each of two horses had its own stall in the back corner of the building. I loved horses so I tried to go over there when I could. The firemen called me ‘Whitey’ because my hair was so blonde. In the summer they would tie the horses out under the big tree west of the fire house. There was a big sink hole next to the tree.

The grocery boy used to come down every morning to get our order and then deliver it in the afternoon. One day he asked me what I wanted and I said a ‘hinnemon’ cake-he handed me the pad and told me to write it, so I drew a circle for the round cake I wanted.

In 1911 my father got his first auto-a used, red Pope Hartford, with acetylene lamps on the front fenders and rods holding the top to the fenders-and red leather seats! It also had to be cranked. There were only three cars in College Hill at that time-Peter G. Thomson’s, my father’s and one other. We had a gasoline tank in the back yard enclosed in a wooden box sort of thing. A garage and graveled driveway were built. From then on we always drove out to the countryside on Sundays.

I can remember driving out Colerain Pike after the waters from the 1913 flood had subsided to see the destruction it had wrought. When we crossed the old Venice bridge we found the road had been washed out, leaving a crater about twenty feet deep where the road had been. A temporary road had been built going some distance down river and swinging around to return to the old road near Venice. I think at that time that Dad had bought his first Model-T Ford.

In those early years I did not get too far away from home. Across the street from us was the little frame church-St. Clare. On that side at the corner of Saranac and Cedar was the one story frame-still there- where the Meyers lived. Their daughter and family-the Beckers-lived on the north side of Marlowe three doors west of the path that led from Salvia over to Ambrose. I knew Alice and Dorothy Becker. The house just west of ours, owned by Mr. William P. Biddle, who owned the hotel at Hamilton and North Bend-here lived the Westhoffs-I called Gertrude, who was five years older that I was-my big sister. She was a cousin of the Becker girls. Mr. Westhoff worked in a jewelry store and one Christmas gave me a lovely little gold ring with one tiny sapphire set in it. Directly across the street was the brick house in

20 Richard J. Harrell also remembered these horses, mentioning that they were dapple grey.
which the priest, Father Diehner, lived. The Eicher house became the dwelling for the nuns who taught at the St. Clare School. Miss Rose was the priest’s housekeeper. She was always good to me and when I was ill would send over special dishes to tempt my appetite.

On the south side of Cedar between Salvia and Hamilton was only the fire house on the corner, then the two old frame houses, still there. The first was owned by Miss Miles, who had the dry goods store and next was Lou Eiler, who worked for Mr. Vail, who operated the feed store at the corner. On the north side of the block were two-story frames, the first the residence of a contractor, the second owned by Mrs. Vat. I don’t remember Mr. Vitt-he died and Mrs. Vitt had a hard life, working as a cleaning woman for people in the neighborhood.

There were empty lots until you got near the corner, where there was a small one-story shop and residence-a glass shop operated, I think, by a Mr. Griffith. The Griffiths lived in back of the shop. At the corner was the brick store facing Hamilton, which was McNutt’s Hardware store. A building was built later on next to the hardware store which was the Kroger grocery. Then came the RuthEllen building with two stores and entrance to the flats above. Next was the two-story frame Huschle building, where he operated a barber shop in the first store and Miss Miles had her dry goods store in the second one.

There was nothing more until the corner, where soon after William ‘Doc’ Schneider built the little brick building and had his drug store there. Earlier he had his shop in the Deininger Building next to their blacksmith shop.

On the west side of Hamilton at the corner of Cedar was the Diehn’s Candy store. The next building was Doll’s Bakery and at the corner of Marlowe was Dr. Van Pelt’s home. On the northwest corner of Hamilton and Marlowe was a big brick house with a stone wall along the front, which later became Twin Lanterns. Next was the lovely little cottage, later moved back to Budmar. Then came Mr. Hoffman’s house and photo studio. Where Hodapp’s Funeral Home is today stood the old William Cary mansion.

On the east side between Marlowe and Ambrose were the frame buildings there today—the one next to the corner of Ambrose was Dr. Howard’s residence and office. The brick building at the corner was our post office for a time. Neither Ambrose nor Elkton were built through to Lantana. We used to go through the path to go sled riding on the hill on Elkton in the winter time. Coming back to Cedar, at the northeast corner of Salvia lived the Werts family, with a son named Byron. Mr. Wert was an insurance man and drove around in a horse and buggy, the building now used as a three car garage was the stable. Next was the house owned by Mr. Biddle, then our home. The house east of us was being built at the same time as ours. Mrs. Burke bought it before it was finished and had dormers added on the second floor, so she could take in boarders. I remember mother saying that they would all come running out to go to the street car of a morning and would cut down the bank by our driveway, so she planted a type of grass bush to discourage it.

Just east of Mrs. Burke was another two-story frame where the Kinbers lived. Their only child, Carl, was my only playmate in the early years. Later on this was owned by the Huschle family, with two daughters, Ruth and Lucille. Mr. Huschle was the son of Mr. William Huschle, the barber.

Continuing on down on the north side of Cedar was an empty lot on the corner, then the log cabin land office, moved there from Hamilton Avenue. A friend of ours, the Ambroses, moved into it. They were a couple well along in years-I was about eight years old when Mrs. Ambrose, of whom I was very fond, died from pneumonia. The nurse took me in to see her on the day she died and I will never forget the awful sight of her struggle to breathe.

I think most of the houses on that side of the street were there at that time. All of the houses on the south side of that block were there as they are today. The building at the corner of Lantana was the Simon’s grocery— I think they lived upstairs. I believe the Keller family, with a daughter Charlotte, lived just west of the grocery.

In 1918 I had the flu and was sick for several months— in consequence I had to repeat the fifth grade. I had Miss Strasser both years. Her home was a very old frame just south of the Deininger building. The

21 Hoffman the photographer began in a frame house at 5912 Salvia Avenue, near Cedar. He moved later to a new residence/shop on Hamilton Avenue.
Presbyterian Church bought it at the time to make room for the new building and demolished her old home. I remember her telling the class that it was so old that it had no nails—had been put together by pegs. She was an interesting teacher. Another house I remember from those years was the John R. Davey mansion at 1626 Linden Drive, which was the boarding house for some of our teachers. Miss Stewart, our sixth grade teacher, gave a party for our class there and we were in the beautiful parlor.

On the north side of Llanfair were the ‘Dummy’ tracks for the freight line used by the Traction Company going along the north side of the street, crossing Belmont going through a ravine and under a bridge on Glenview Avenue, then curving around, crossing Belmont again, going northward crossing North Bend Road and into Steele’s subdivision (West College Hill). It went along Railroad Avenue to Simpson, along Simpson, crossing Galbraith Road and ending at Compton Road in Mt. Healthy. We were always warned to be careful going out on the Llanfair Avenue side and told to stay off the freight cars. About this time Mr. Altamer (our principle) told us one morning that Wilson Hunter, an African American boy in our class, had been killed the day before falling off a freight car and being run over.

In the early spring I would come home from school and mother and I would start down Cedar Avenue looking for very young dandelion plants. Mother made a delicious salad, tossing them with vinegar and bacon, garnishing the salad with hard boiled eggs. Another dish that Dad taught her to make he called ‘slum gullion’ which he said he had learned from hobos—it was liver pudding sausage cooked, taken out of its casing, mixed with mashed potatoes and made into cakes and fried.

We always had a little garden in the back yard. Dad would go out in the evenings and dig in the dirt. The birds would follow him around waiting for him to turn up worms. One year he had a robin so tame it would take worms out of his hand. Dad would go out on the front porch after supper with the evening paper and the robin would spot him and sit on the fence post nearby and call until Dad would laugh and get up and go around the house to the garden. The robin would fly alongside and wait for Dad to dig worms for it.

In 1913 I went to kindergarten—Miss Bridgemann was the teacher in the southwest corner of the little red brick building still standing. (I learned many years later that it had been the high school for College Hill). Hausers lived just west of the school—Steve was in my class and at Easter time they had tiny little baskets with wee candy eggs in them hidden in their yard for the class to find... I can remember making a present for my father—men used mugs for shaving soap then and we made a sort of booklet of round tissue paper pieces to wipe the soap off the razor...

The old school building was in use then—a big two-story brick with three rooms on each floor. Miss Maybelle Brown’s first grade room was on the east side of the first floor. We only had class in the morning—Miss Brown taught music in the afternoon. Miss Alice Wilde’s second grade and Mary Bryant’s third grade were on the west side of the first floor. Miss Gatch had a fourth grade on the east side of the second floor and Mamie Strasser had her fifth grade on the west side. I cannot remember who was in the other room up there. By that time two frame colony buildings had been built just west of the old building my fourth grade was in one of the colony buildings. My fifth grade was back in the old building with Miss Strasser. In the sixth grade I had Miss Stewart; the seventh was Miss Waldman and the eighth, Miss Hattie Braiser. The principal, called ‘Dusty’ Altamer because he always wore gray suits, had his office in that building. We also had manual training for the boys and cooking and sewing classes for the girls in the basement. Our restrooms were also in that building—there was none in the old ‘pig eye’ school and you could see kids running over from there.

The boys used the Cedar Avenue side of the playground and on the Llanfair Avenue side, near the old building, were the swings—the only playground equipment we had. I can remember a May Day fete on the Cedar Avenue side where we wound streamers around the May pole. There was a bell in the tower, which the janitor used to ring—a warning bell and a final bell. I used to stop and bring tidbits for the patrolman’s horse tied to a maple tree on Cedar Avenue and pet him until the warning bell rang, then run so as not to be late for school. I would bring clover and apples for my four legged friend named Major. It was awfully hard for small legs to make it across Hamilton Pike—the street car and traction tracks were deep down in ruts from the constant build up of macadam.
Diehn’s candy store was on the northwest corner. I used to go in to buy tobacco for my father and Mrs. Diehn would give me a peach stone candy. She would always watch to make sure that Mr. Diehn wasn’t watching her—he didn’t give out treats.

I can remember the huge oak trees on Hamilton Pike down near Llanfair on the east side of the Pike near Deininger’s blacksmith shop—mother had me take my tricycle there to have it welded when it broke. I also walked that way to go to Sunday school at the Presbyterian Church. Before you got to the blacksmith shop you had to cross the traction tracks where the line came out onto the street. Just before you got to the tracks was a long driveway leading back to the Simpson house. Before that was the yard of the old Hammitt place which had been changed so that it was on (5819) Salvia Avenue. A path started near the fire house and angled across the field to end up on Hamilton Pike near the Hammitt yard. We used to go that way to go to Thesken’s butcher shop in the red brick building on the west side of Hamilton. Later on that same store became the Public Library for College Hill.

In the spring mother would order coal for the next winter. When she knew it was going to be delivered, she would go down to see Mr. Banks about putting it in the coal cellar. The Banks family lived in an old cottage next to the little African American church (site, 1310 Cedar Ave.) on the corner of Piqua. The coal would sometimes be put up in the driveway, earlier it had been dumped in the street. Several doors past Bank’s house was the Jesse Locker home set down below and well back from Cedar Avenue. Jesse was a city councilman, later being appointed Ambassador to Liberia. He was very highly regarded by most of the people of College Hill. His wife had beautiful flower gardens and teachers would bring classes down to see them.

One good friend was Louella Buenger, who lived on Argus Road just north of Cedar. They had a little farm there with greenhouses and gardens. Mr. Buenger worked at Procter and Gamble. They had a horse and buggy and Mrs. Buenger would drive down Groesbeck Road to meet him after work. I used to go there to play. Their house was built into the hill with a kitchen and dining room at the back and cellars into the hill, with the other rooms on the floor above. There was a porch all across the back of the house, and the barn down hill immediately behind the house.

Lou and I used to go to their back fence, climb over and go down into what we called Cataract Woods, the area in the deep ravine below Groesbeck Road. It was full of wildflowers in the spring and we used to find beechnuts. It was wonderful for children.

Some years later I became friends with Earline Chambers, who lived in the old Harbison house on the west side of Hamilton north of North Bend Road. Just past it was a frame cottage that the Harbins had built for their own use. The old house stood just about where Harbison Avenue is today. On the northwest corner of North Bend and Hamilton was the old car barn—the street cars would pull in under the sheltering roof off the street and wait there until the next car came along before leaving. It was the ‘end of the line.’

Occasionally mother would take me downtown with her on a Saturday. I can remember riding the summer cars—all open with running boards all along the side and seats clear across the car. Before the Ludlow Avenue viaduct was built the cars would go over bridges crossing Mill Creek, the canal, and the railroad and up onto Ludlow Avenue.

When I was very small I remember crossing the canal bridges downtown. In high water Knowlton’s Corner would be under water and they would build up the street car tracks with ties placed under them. It was scary going up so high above the street level. When you left College Hill about at Windermere Way was the cross over—cars going down on the left side of Hamilton until about Rockford Place—then going onto the center of the street again. The northbound cars went up on the left to the cross over. This was done to prevent cars going over into the deep ravine below the Methodist Home. The old pumping station was on the east side of the cross over.

When I was a little older, we were allowed to take the street car to Cumminsville to go to the old Liberty movie house. We also went to the Cumminsville playground to swim in the summertime.

Finally Hamilton Pike was brick paved in 1916. The interurban gauge was narrower than that of the streetcar and there had to be three tacks on the northbound side. The streetcars only traveled north on Hamilton between Belmont and North Bend Road, but the traction went both ways.
I used to love the old houses along Groesbeck Road and be curious about them. At the Hamilton Avenue end of the street was the Presbyterian Church—very different from its present day appearance. Behind it was the old manse, a frame house long since gone. Next was the Chatfield house owned by the church (1528 Groesbeck Rd, demolished in the 1980’s). Beyond where the Hillrise now stands was the large frame house owned by Mayor Bruce, the last mayor of College Hill as a village. I remember that it had a large porte-cochere for carriages to pull under on the east side—I think the house was painted yellow. It was next to the traction track and the bridge over the tracks on Groesbeck Road.

On the south side beginning at Hamilton were several little frame cottages standing close to the street. Then came several larger houses, one of which was owned by Mr. Altamer. Those houses are still there, including the last one sitting up on a hill just before you came to the traction line (1421 Groesbeck Rd. built by Jacob Tuckerman).

Beyond the tracks were some large frame houses, now gone. The one opposite St. Elmo was occupied by the Jones family, daughter Helen whom I knew. On the north side of that block were several very old brick houses and one frame, still there, at the corner of Kenneth. Across Kenneth, very close to Kenneth but facing Groesbeck, was the large brick where our classmate, Johnny Massman, lived with his aunt and uncle. On the south side was the large Howard estate, the old house now surrounded by apartments. There was a large tennis court in the front and west of the house. I don’t remember just how many other houses were down there until you got to the one sitting way back on the south side of the road east of Argus. The Shepherd’s, who had a pear orchard, lived there in what I learned later was another of the Howard homes. There were no sidewalks on the east end of Groesbeck so I didn’t walk there too often.

I can still remember the old Larmon Mansion, where Larmon Court is today, which had been built by Freeman Grant Cary. It stood well back from the street with beautiful sloping lawns and flower gardens. Across from it was the Cincinnati Sanitarium. It, too, stood way back from the road, with a long driveway going downhill past the lake in the low area. The kids used to go there to skate and sled ride too, stood way back from the road, with a long driveway going downhill past the lake in the low area. The kids used to go there to skate and sled ride on the hill leading down to the lake. Next to the drive at Hamilton Avenue was the brick residence of the superintendent. His daughter, Mary Collins, was in our class at school.

Next came Aster Place leading off to the west—at the north corner was Mr. Aiken’s home—he was the supervisor of the Music Department in the Cincinnati Schools. On the south corner was a lovely white frame house, now replaced by apartments.

West from Hamilton ending at Belmont is Pasadena—very few houses on it, one on the north side being the old post office. The south corner was a vacant lot, then one or two houses in one of which lived Elizabeth Kelly, whose mother was a nurse. Then came the Grace Episcopal Church. On the north side, just before Hillcrest were several brick houses. South of Hillcrest on the corner property was the Eisen mansion. Then came the Zebulon Strong house and sitting below the street level a lovely brick, both are still there. On the opposite side was the beautiful Glenwood Apartments, recently torn down. It was considered the elite place to live in College Hill. Next to it up on the hill with a stone wall in front was a very old frame (Obed J. Wilson house) now gone. Then came Windermere Way and the Methodist Home. Back on Windermere was the superintendent’s house, Dr. Ross, whose daughter, Peggy, was in my class. We had mutual interests in the history of College Hill and she told me many things about it as we rode the street car to Hughes High School.

At the end of Windermere Way was a house hidden way back in the woods, which I never saw, but Peggy told me about (Caldwell house). Across Hamilton Avenue from Windermere Way was the red brick pumping station. As you started down the hill from it were some three or four houses, some still are there today. One was the home of Louis Aiken, our music teacher at Hughes High School. Where

---

22 Across from Kenneth on Cedar Avenue was an ice house. On Cedar, two houses from Leffingwell, Joseph Fink had a dairy. His daughters were Beatrice and Lorraine, per Irma (Zimmer) Waechter.
Hammond North is today was a large white frame owned by the Laboyteaux family. I learned later that it had been built to replace the octagon house just south of it up on the hill. Across the road from it was a small frame cottage very close to the car track. I remember that a classmate of ours lived there, but died with diphtheria as her family did not believe in doctors. This had once been the old toll gate house. Just above Rockford Place, west of Hamilton Avenue, was the Wilson’s stone quarry. There were two or three houses back there when the stone quarry was active. The quarry could be reached by a cart road off Groesbeck Road.

Louise and I used to walk on Sunday afternoons. Most of the time we would walk up Hamilton Avenue to North College Hill. The traction track was on the left side of the road on a right-of-way of its own. It traveled through North College Hill and didn’t come onto the paved way until it got into Mt. Healthy. The old Harbison place was on the left side of the road. About this time Wittekind started building the house on the east side of the road. The area from the car barn to Harbison’s old house was all a thicket. I learned later on that the old Cary Cemetery was in there, but most of it had been moved to Spring Grove. Some graves were still there and I found out later that the work gang disinterred some of the skeletons. Apparently, one of the graves which had been left was that of Solomon Howard which was then moved to Wesleyan Cemetery.

Marlowe Avenue ran west of Hamilton up to Cary Avenue. I can remember going with another friend to visit the Methodist Sunday School on the south side of the street. All I remember of the north side of that section was the brick police station, now the fire house for College Hill. East of Hamilton Avenue it went as far as Lantana. Most of the houses there today had been built at the time. I believe that the Winnises, who had the feed store, lived two doors from the path opposite Salvia and the Beckers next to the west. I didn’t know any of the people who lived on the south side of the street. Harrell’s lived in a big two story frame on the east side of Saranac about the middle of the block. The Baechle’s lived on the west side. I didn’t know any one on the dead end of it except the Rumpke’s, who delivered our papers. St. Clare Church on the east side and the old Hammitt place on the west side as well as a few other newer frame houses were at the dead end of Salvia. The street ended at the property line of the old Simpson place, which faced Hamilton Avenue.

I used to make my way up Larch Avenue on some of my walks. I have very early memories of Town Hall and the big fireworks displays on the Fourth of July. Mother and Dad had to take me home one very early holiday, because I cried in fear of the fireworks. Later on, the Public Library was in the room on the west side of the first floor. Several of my classmates lived on Larch-Adelia Hanks lived on the south side and Ruth Smith lived on the north side of the street. Harrell’s lived in a big two story frame on the east side of Saranac about the middle of the block. The Baechle’s lived on the west side. I didn’t know any one on the dead end of it except the Rumpke’s, who delivered our papers. St. Clare Church on the east side and the old Hammitt place on the west side as well as a few other newer frame houses were at the dead end of Salvia. The street ended at the property line of the old Simpson place, which faced Hamilton Avenue.

After crossing Davey Avenue the beautiful Bauhmann home took up a large area on the north side of the street-I remember that they had twin daughters. There were several more old houses past Bauhmann’s, the one just before Paul Briol’s was the old Professor Burns house. It was empty a good part of the time after his died-Mrs. Burns would come back occasionally to try to take care of the property. She was a scary person. I used to meet her on some of the walks I took. She had piercing black eyes, wore tennis shoes and an old coat green with age. She always smiled and spoke to me. The house being empty so much, the kids would break into it and poke into things. Louise’s sister, Margaret Buenger, knew about it and told us some of the things they told her-getting into family pictures, one being of a member of the Burns family in his casket. Finally the house was set on fire and destroyed. Past the Briol house was the lovely big (Robert) Simpson mansion at the corner of Belmont, where the Bellwood is today. I remember it had a big square tower, which I learned many years later was a ballroom.

At the Hamilton Avenue end of Belmont was the Grace Episcopal Church, the manse and several more old buildings/ On the west side was the Belmont Apartment building, an old frame (still there), several small stores (now gone) and then the Ohio Military Institute. We used to like tot come up on Sunday afternoon and watch the cadets drill and march-in the spring they used to parade around the hill accompanied by their band. There was a cannon on the parade ground, which was fired at six in the morning and in the evening. The O.M.I. was always special to College Hill residents-being a part of our
lives for so many years. The cadets dated some of the College Hill girls. Some of them used to come to the Presbyterian Sunday School. I never got to know any of them very well. After Ralph and I married I learned that he had a letter from the Institute offering him a job as a riding instructor, when they were considering adding riding to their curriculum. Ralph had been in the cavalry stationed at Monterey, California before I met him. I still have that letter.

Peggy Ross told me about Bishop’s mound on the grounds of Farmers’ College. In winter the kids would have snowball fights from the top of the mound-to be king of the mound. Robert Hamilton Bishop came from Miami University at Oxford to join Freeman Grant Cary at the college. He gave specific directions as to be buried on a spot he selected in the grounds of the college and specific directions as to the construction of his burial mound. When he died in 1855 his wishes were carried out. His wife died two weeks later and her casket was slid in beside his. When the Cincinnati Board of Education learned of this after buying the land, they insisted that he had to be removed. Miami University learned of this and asked that they be allowed to take the two bodies up to Oxford. They built another mound at the end of the Rose Garden next to Fisher Hall, following his directions. Another request that he had made was that no stone should be erected over his grave, so that unless you knew the story, you would not have known that this mound was a grave site. The University followed his directions except that the sides of the mound were sloped more gradually so that a mower could be used on it. At the end of the Rose Garden is a circle with an opening showing the mound behind it, a huge boulder is in the center of this circle with a bronze plaque telling who is in the mound behind it.

At the far end of the O.M.I. grounds was a cottage, and then came a wooded area. Next were several lovely old homes-then came the water tower where our water was stored before College Hill came into the city. Somewhere close there on the west side of the street lived Tommy Birch, one of our classmates. He was a friend of Powel Crosley’s son and was supposed to have worked with him to develop the radio. At that time Powel Crosley, Jr. lived on Davey Avenue, about opposite the end of Linden Drive. Several doors from the Cozy Corner on Davey lived Miss Benson. I used to visit her because she had a big collie dog-I loved horses and dogs and my parents would never let me have a pet. Later on she committed suicide by hanging herself in the basement of that house.

On Llanfair between Hamilton and Davey all of the houses there were now were built. The Center family lived in one of them. On the north side of the street there was only one house, a big frame, owned by Mr. Peters, who had the ice and coal business that was in a large metal building at the corner of Llanfair and Hamilton Avenue. Then came the school property and past that an ugly old square building on what was said to be the ‘pound lot.’ The rest of the north side was empty until you got the Lathrop Place. On the south side from Davey there were about five or six houses, and then empty pastures until you got to the old house about opposite Lathrop. I think that there were several more houses, but the corner lot was empty. On the north side were two or three old cottages before you got to Flamm’s Grocery (5802 Belmont Ave.). Around the corner on Belmont there were several houses, then the very old house at the corner of Cedar. On the opposite side was the Pounsford home standing way back on the hill. The came ‘The Oaks’ at the corner of Glenview.

I remember a row of frame store buildings built south of Mr. Vail’s Feed Store (who also had a stable). It stood back a little way from Hamilton Avenue. With a drive leading into the front end of it- there were wide doors at both ends of the building so that wagons could be driven through and over the scale inside. These stores were slanted toward Hamilton Avenue, starting from the south end of the feed store. There was Philip Steinman’s Palace Market in one of them. Shortly after that Mr. Vail had his brick house built just east of Miss Miles’ house. It has since been torn down to make way for the present post office. The previous post office had been in the little brick building just north of Waldman’s house. Several stories were built between it and the bank building’s three stores. Diehn’s old candy store had been moved around the corner onto Cedar (where the meat and produce store is now located). Then the Dow building was built on the corner. Over the years the buildings between it and Doll’s Bakery were built as well as the ones between the Hollywood and doc. Schneider’s drugstore. The Hollywood Apartments were built in what had been the Hammitt front yard. Just north of it was a two-story frame sitting back from the street where Dr. Evelyn Partymiller lived with her parents and had her office. We got acquainted
when she was in medical school and I was in high school-we rode the same street car every morning. She became a doctor after she graduated. Another narrow brick building was built between the Hollywood and Partymillers. Both buildings have since been torn down-the parking lot for LaRosa’s is there today. Gone also is the brick station that stood beside the traction tracks (it dated back to the days when the traction line had been a railroad). That building had been a Marsh Pontiac and then a Porsche-Audi dealership for some years.

Just behind Vail’s feed store was another small building where Lou Eiler had a poultry store for some time-later he sold antique’s in it (some of my antiques were bought there). Added on to McNutt’s Hardware Store was a metal building where some kind of work was done. There were no parking lots in College Hill as there are today. After Vail’s Feed Store was torn down there was a filling station there for some years. The old Simpson house just south of the dead end of Salvia is gone and parking lots of the Presbyterian Church have replaced it. Llanfair Terrace stands where the old pastures were on Llanfair Avenue. The Larchwood Apartments have replaced the Bauhmann house on Larch. On Belmont new houses were built in what had been the Pounsford front yard. Their old home on the hill above Belmont was torn down-their carriage house now serving as a church property. A house was built down in the ravine where the traction tracks had gone under Glenview Avenue. The bridge is gone-the area filled in and a railroad built over it as was done with the one on Groesbeck Road.

On North Bend road just east of the Wigwam, the old Matie Bowman home, with its lovely old trees was raised and now an apartment complex stands there. The library and Pleasant Hill School have replaced the old Crawford Home. Most of the north side of that street is now apartment buildings. The pasture lands along the east side of Lantana have been taken up with apartment complexes. Savannah Avenue was the first street leading north from North Bend Road, it having been the driveway to the Ephraim Brown house. Later Cary was extended northward and Heitzler and other streets added. The new College Hill Plaza has replaced almost everything in the block between Cedar and Llanfair except the bank building.

I loved to walk and every afternoon would walk around College Hill. Sometimes I would follow the ‘Loop’-Hamilton, Belmont, Oakwood, and North Bend-the way street cars ran. I used to enjoy looking at the lovely homes on those streets. I dreamed of what life had been for the people in those homes in years gone by. My interest in history was already developing.

On the west side of Hamilton Avenue on the southwest corner of Cedar was a grove of chestnut trees-we used to go back a path in it to look for the nuts. Next to it back almost to the school fence was a large frame house owned by Deters, the plumber. In front of it was built a smaller house (which was used as a police substation before the present mall was built). Mr. Deter’s daughter lived in this little house. Next south was the Waldman house. He was a painter and his daughter was our seventh grade teacher. Next south was another frame house-I never knew who lived there. Next was a large brick building where the Duennes’ lived. I knew Dorothy. Then came the big brick building known as the Augsburger building (5811-5813 Hamilton Avenue), now gone. Last was a big metal building used to store feed and grain. Across Llanfair were two very old frame cottages. One was torn down when the former filling station was built, the other-the Solomon Howard-was moved. Next south was the charming little shingled cottage built by Newbold for his son. There was a small ravine in the front yard and a little footbridge was built to cross it.

Coming back to Cedar Avenue west of the chestnut grove were two houses before you reached the school property. Katie Forbes (Schevene Neuzel) lived in the first one. A few years ago it was moved to (1629) Linden Drive. Past the school grounds were several large frame houses, one was that of the

---

1669 Cedar Ave. was the home of Samuel F. Cary. Built about 1840 it is a square frame house, 2.5 stories high with a deep from porch.

At the turn of the century, the prominent College Hill residents. Dr. and Mrs. Jacob Ferris lived in a large frame house at the southwest corner of Cedar and Hamilton Pike. Dr. Ferris and E. N. Wild owned 3 acres of Hamilton Avenue and around 1900 subdivided it into lots, requiring a cash payment of $25.00 per lot and the balance in monthly payments. In 1903, the Ferris’ divorced. Mrs. Ferriss built a five room cottage at 1615 Cedar. That same year Mrs. Ferriss left College Hill and sold the house to Katherine and George Forbes. Their daughter was Katherine Forbes Schevene Neuzel.

The second Forbes house referred to was 1714 Cedar Ave. Charles Henry Forbes, carpenter and wagon maker, moved a two room log cabin from North Bend Road to this site ca 1867. This house stayed in the Forbes family until 1965 when it was purchased from the estate of Alice Forbes Fox, Charle’s daughter. It was demolished in 1968.
Hausers. In the sharp bend of Cedar was the Haven property—a large frame house occupying a large tract of land. Houses had already been built on both sides of Lathrop Place. On the north side of Cedar, past Diehn’s Candy store was a large old brick—still there. Most of the houses that are there now had been built. Next to the corner of Cary is the house that I always knew had been built off the same plan as ours. At the corner was the lovely big frame home of the Neuzel family—the house still there but the front yard now filled with apartments. Across Cary were two frame houses. The first one still there, the second—belonging to a member of the Forbes family, has been replaced with an apartment building. Next at the sharp turn was the (William T.) Simpson mansion (1750 Cedar Ave.), its front lawn extending all along Cedar to the second turn. Around the turn, well back from the street, was a beautiful white brick mansion with big pillars on the front. The rest of the street was part of the Peter G. Thomson grounds. The houses on the south side of that part of Cedar that are there now had all been built by that time. The first one from Lathrop Place is very old—we always referred to it as Mary Steele’s house.

The Thomson mansion, Laurel Court, was always an important landmark in College Hill. Very few people, except their friends, ever got inside it. There were two greenhouses on Lantana opposite Marlowe. The one raising vegetable plants belonged to the Reeses. Mr. Corbet’s had flowers only. Mother always bought plants from him. He was the head gardener for Thomson and one time he invited us to come up there and see the Thomson gardens. They were beautiful and I think it was the first time I ever saw the flower, lantana. After we walked all through the gardens he took us into the house and showed us the beautiful atrium area with trees reaching up to the glass topped roof. It was an experience I will never forget.

Laurel Court took up the whole area between Cedar and Oakwood. Across Oakwood on that side was a large frame belonging, I believe, to Crosley’s parents. Next came several more houses. The one I remember was the lovely old cottage almost hidden by a screening of blue spruce. Then the Aiken place at the next corner. There is another very old house in the block before you get to North Bend Road. On the south side of Belmont beginning at Glenview, the houses there now were all built in my memory. Next to where the line used to cross Belmont at the foot of the hill is a very old house (part of it the original log, the Witherby house) sitting way back from the street with a swimming pool in front of it belonging to Reno Runck. Just past it near the street is a lovely white colonial, where the Benedict’s lived. Mr. Benedict was a professor at the University of Cincinnati and his daughter Jean was a classmate of mine. Both were killed when his auto skidded in front of a street car on Ludlow Avenue. There were a few more houses between that and North Bend Road.

When I was in the sixth or seventh grade the school gave a program at the Town Hall. We were given tickets to sell. I decided to try my luck on North Bend road. One of the first places I stopped was the big mansion east of Lantana, where Judge Coleman Avery lived. He came to the door and bought a ticket, but I didn’t have change and stopped on the way back to give it to him. Sometime after that we saw in the newspaper where he shot his wife and then committed suicide. Opposite Lantana was the Crawford Home for aged African American men. East were fields, a lane leading back to Judge Avery’s stable and race track, where we used to go on a Sunday afternoon to watch the horses. There were three large old houses in large grounds from there until you got to Daly Road. At the corner of Lantana and North Bend in an old house a classmate of mine, Marie Vogele, lived. In the last house before Judge Avery’s a friend of mother’s, Mrs. Holman, lived. I remember she had gooseberries along her fence.

There weren’t many houses along Argus Road. One house not far from North Bend way back from the road was the Gray, the florist’s, home. There were two or three old houses north of Buengers. Next past Buengers was a house high up on the hill opposite Cedar Avenue. I can’t remember the name of the family but they were from Europe and had ovens in the yard where they baked bread. Next was a lane leading my way back to a house you couldn’t see from the road. Then came the brick house where our postman, Mr. Zimmer, lived. I think the next thing was the big pear orchard reaching to the corner of Groesbeck Road. There were several old houses on the west side of Argus—I think most of them belonged to the Wrenn family. About half way along was a path leading to a huge chestnut tree.

When I was quite small I had whooping cough. It was a very hot summer and my parents moved my little bed out onto the front porch because of the heat. There was no air-conditioning in those days and
they kept the hose running water over the porch floor to keep it cooler for me. I was awfully sick and everyone worried about me. That is one of the times I remember Miss Rose, Father Diehner’s housekeeper, coming over with special dishes. She was always good to me.

Another memory that comes back is when Gertrude Deters, who worked for Miss Miles in the dry goods store, got too close to the little gas stove in the shop and had her dress catch on fire. She took some time to recover from her burns and I think she went back to work for Miss Miles. I remember hearing that Miss Miles was a descendant of the Miles family in Mt. Healthy for which Miles Road is named.

When I was a little older I used to roam all over the hill. One day another girl and I decided we were going to make our way across from the end of Hillcrest to the traction tracks. We forced our way through high weeds until we came out at Howard’s stone quarry down the traction line. We talked to a lady in one of the houses and she gave us a drink of water. She had a piano and wanted me to play. We then made our way up to Groesbeck Road and went home.

Another time I will never forget-I had gotten the soles of my feet covered with tar from crossing Hamilton Pike to go to the library in my bare feet, so I couldn’t wear my shoes to go to the farm. The Bauer’s daughter and I were chasing around in the orchard when I ran a wire into the side of my foot. Mrs. Bauer made a poultice for Mother to bring home and she said it would draw out the poison. But I nearly got blood poisoning. Mother called Dr. Howard and he cut open the side of my foot and cleared up the poisoning. In the summer time usually we would hear a bell ringing and knew that the scissor grinder was on his way. Mother would get her knives and scissors to be sharpened. He carried the grindstone in a wooden frame on his back. We also had occasional tramps ask for a meal.

We didn’t get electricity until 1918. I remember that you were only allowed a certain number of outlets and mother had one more than she should have, so she placed a hassock in front of the one in the front hall until the inspector had examined the house.

We had gas lights until that time, gas pipes running up some of the walls to lights on the side-one such was in the pantry. Those lights were odd, a white jet made the flame flare out like a fan-these were also in some of the closets. The light fixtures had a mantle—a sort of mesh shaped like a small bag, which I would light with the lighter after the gas was turned on. Mother had a water powered washing machine—a wooden tub with a wringer on the side. She would connect up the hoses to the faucets and I could hear the click, click of the machine as she did the laundry. She had just gotten a new ice box when Dad decided to get an electric ice machine for her, so she wanted it installed in her new ice box. It was a water cooled Frigidaire, with the unit in the basement in the bottom of the old fruit closet and the box in the back of the pantry. She used the old sad irons, which were heated on the gas cook stove in the kitchen.

The hot water tank was just inside the door leading from the hall into the kitchen. Gas pressure was very uncertain in winter, one time getting so low that Mother couldn’t cook our supper in the kitchen—I went down the cellar with her as she broiled a steak over the coals in the furnace. By this time Dad had a Model-A Ford and drove back and forth to the foundry. He worked in most of the iron foundries in Cincinnati during his lifetime. We always had a little garden in the back yard, tomatoes and other vegetables growing there. We also had a pear and a peach tree. Mother would make preserves and jellies. I also remember that she would make her own cottage cheese. Letting the milk clabber, putting it in a cheese cloth bag and letting they whey drain out into the sink. She also used cloth bags to put fruit in to make jelly and let the juice drain out the same way. About that time Dad decided to get an oil burner put in the furnace—that lasted about two or three years—it wasn’t satisfactory. Then we got a stoker to fire the furnace with coal again. Dad was always looking for gadgets to make Mother’s work easier. Earlier, before we got electricity, we had a strange vacuum cleaner—you pulled the handle up and down on the side to create a vacuum to pull out of the carpets. We had many unusual things that Dad discovered. He was always interested in new things—we got a crystal set radio and I remember sitting around the dining room table with sets of ear phones over our ears while he manipulated a sort of wire whisker over the crystal and we heard far away voices or music. He also bought any new medical discovery he heard about—there is still an old violet ray set in the attic that was supposed to help your health.

There was no lunch room at school in those days so we went home for lunch. I was an only child and I adored my mother, so time spent with her at noon was a joy. One of my favorites for lunch was a catsup
sandwich. (Can you imagine today’s youngsters wanting that?) Sometimes we had soup or bread and jelly. Mother would give me ‘grandma’s tea’-half tea and half milk. Occasionally, if Mother had to go downtown, I would be allowed to go over to Cozy Corner (located in the house at the southeast corner of Llanfair and Dave) where they served soup and a sandwich to the school children.

Mother had bought a piano and had Miss Brown, my first grade teacher, gave me lessons. I took lessons from her for several years, then mother decided to send me to the College of Music (then located next to Music Hall). That was when I started riding the street cars by myself. I went to the College of Music on Saturdays and had lessons for several years with Irene Carter. After I started to Hughes High School I had lessons with Isle Huebner.

Thinking back to the early days of my childhood, I am remembering what life was like. At the beginning of my memories there were only horse drawn wagons to serve the customers. A regular morning event was the arrival of the ice wagon-the driver would chip out a block, carry it in with his tongs and place it in the old oak ice chest for mother. I still have the old ice pick in a kitchen drawer. Another morning caller would be the milk man. I think we used to get our milk from Steiner, who had a dairy farm on North Bend Road a short distance east of Argus-his pastures ran down to the edge of Cataract Woods, where Lou and I used to play and we could see his cows. A butcher wagon used to come by, but I don’t remember who had it. Another family mother used to get vegetables from was the Bauers, whose farm was up on the east side of Hamilton Pike north of New Burlington. They came once a week with vegetables and I think cottage cheese which Mrs. Bauer used to make. We were invited to visit them on the farm and I remember one Sunday being there when they made home-made peach ice cream, the first peach ice cream I ever tasted.

During World War I feelings were high and even reached the children. Lou’s parents were from Germany and she had a pro-German attitude which nearly wrecked our friendship for awhile. At this time nearby German Road became Daly Road as it remains today. My parents bought War Bonds and even at school the war effort was stressed. I was in the fourth grade when we were taught how to pick oakum apart and knot squares to be put together to make blankets. I remember a big parade that all the schools took party in-the girls wore white dresses and wore a sort of headdress with a red cross pinned on it. I can remember being downtown in it and marching down Sycamore Street. Our next door neighbor, Leonard Westhoff, Gertrude’s older brother, was sent into the Army-he looked handsome in his uniform. He was sent to Camp Sherman near Chillicothe, and we used to drive up on a Sunday to visit him. We were hearing stories of German atrocities-one about Edith Cavell, as nurse, as I remember. We didn’t have one the scary blackouts which became so common during WW II. War never seemed to get so close to us in the First World War.

College Hill was beginning to grow. More stores were built along the Avenue and houses were springing up north of North Bend Road. Earlier we used to have to go down to Cumminsville to see a movie at the Liberty or the Park. I think it was about this time that the Hollywood was built. There was an ice cream shop in the store to the left of the lobby, which we patronized after a movie. I think it was about this time that the bank building was built at the corner of Cedar where the chestnut grove had been. We now had our own swimming pool at Town Hall and didn’t have to go down to Cumminsville playground. There were also the tennis courts at Town Hall. It lost its importance after we were annexed to Cincinnati. I remember that there was a Building and Loan office in it for a time. We nearly lost it-our Samuel Hannaford building-as the city wanted to tear it down. Thank goodness they didn’t succeed!

In the fall of 1923 I started to Hughes High School and sadly watched our old school building being torn down. I think it was several years before the present building was completed. Students were taken to Mt. Airy School at that time. I took the music course and was excused a bell early to go home to practice piano. I went into the orchestra and Mr. Kratz started me on cello. After my afternoon practice sessions I would start my walks around the hill to relax. Shortly thereafter I began cello lessons as well as piano at the College of Music. For awhile we were able to ride the traction for a nickel until the street car company stopped them from picking up passengers below North Bend Road. My cello and I used to board the traction and ride down to the terminal on Spring Grove Avenue across from the end of Spring Grove Cemetery. There a bus waited to take us downtown. Lots of times I had to stand and I remember
wrapping my arm around the neck of my cello and a post until I got down there. I studied cello with Arthur Knecht. I played in the Hughes Orchestra and the College of Music Junior Orchestra. At this time music was my main interest, but I always had an interest in history.

Thanksgiving and Christmas were always family gatherings. Usually it would be Aunt Laura’s family coming from Bond Hill. We always had turkey and all the trimmings. One of my jobs was to fill the big fruit bowl for the table centerpiece. Mother always bought kumquats at Christmas and we had apples, oranges, tangerines, bananas and grapes to put in the huge bowl, then English walnuts and pecans scattered in among the fruit. Nutcrackers and picks were placed around the foot of that bowl. We always made Waldorf salad which I helped to make and Mother always had me make the dressing for it—a ¼ teaspoon of dry mustard, a tablespoon of sugar in a pan, breaking an egg over them and beating over boiling water until the egg started to thicken, then thinning it with cream. Our vegetable was always Brussels sprouts. The family always remarked about mother’s dressing almost green with the amount of parsley she used in it. Those were wonderful occasions with Aunt Laura and the cousins gathered around our table. Mildred, Florence and Freddie were my cousins. Christmas was always a special time for me as I was married on Christmas Eve of 1929.

Cedar Avenue had been just a macadam road with no curbs for a long time, but finally they built curbs, but the constant build-up of macadam made the street higher than the sidewalks. It was in the 40’s before it was finally made a concrete street. We had two Lombardy poplars, one on each side of the lot, so when the driveway was built it had to be curved because of the one tree. The beautiful Italian magnolia in the front yard was planted when I was a very small child—I am sure that it must be much more than eighty years old today. I always pray that we don’t get a freeze to spoil the blossoms each spring. I wonder now each winter if I am going to be here to see it bloom the next spring. I love my home here and dread the time that death will take me from it. (Ruth passed away in 2004).

After Mrs. Burke and her daughter and son-in-law, Carrie and Tony Epping, (another daughter was married to Mr. Neuzell) moved to Denver, the house east of ours was bought by the Wuest family. Mr. Wuest had one son, Charles, who lived just south of the Knights of Columbus building on Hamilton Avenue in Northside; another son, Dick, was in the Navy stationed in China—he sent many things home for his father to sell, the Chinese trinkets I have come from him. Charles’ daughter, Elizabeth Wuest, was in our 1927 class at Hughes High School. The Wuest family, mother named Julia, lived there for many years. Mr. Wuest had a number of grape vines and made wine. He also had a chicken pen at the back of the lot—a pet hen named Jerry, whom I used to visit. She would sit beside me on a box in the pen and ‘talk’ to me. They had a handicapped son, who had been hit on the head with a baseball, making him speechless and unable to walk. Mother Julia took care of Edwin for many years. She died several years after they celebrated their golden wedding anniversary. Mr. Wuest lived there alone until his death. Mother Julia was a short, roly-poly little woman, with very dark eyes, of whom I was very fond and spent a lot of time with—she would have me come over to help her bake a cake. There was a daughter, Mrs. Exley, who came to live with them during an illness—she had a son who became a doctor and a daughter, Virginia.

I can’t remember all of the families who lived in that house, but Verne and Zoe Yates were there for a long time—that was after Ralph and I were married. Also Leonard and Harriet Franks were there for a long time—we used to spend a lot of time with those two families. The Franks were still there after Ralph died.

To the west in Mr. Biddle’s house I remember best the Friesens, a widowed mother and daughter Catherine—I was still in grade school when they were there—I remember that Catherine made a little powder compact for me, with hand painted flowers. Much later Cara Fernbach lived there—y that time I was actively searching for Colerain Township history and she helped a lot with that, having lived in the old Charles Cone Inn (which had been in the old town of Crosby) during the 1913 flood. I was interested in that building because it was opposite Dunlap’s Station site on the Greta Miami River. She told me that they had to get out in such a hurry that she left her diamond ring on the mantel and feared that it would be lost, but after the flood subsided they found it still on the mantel inches deep in mud.

She was very interested in what I was trying to do in preserving Colerain township history and would go with me on trips out into the township. She told me many things that she remembered about the
area. She knew where the old toll gate had been on Blue rock Road and how farmers would go through neighboring fields with their wagons and teams to avoid paying the toll gates. She was an interesting person and I had many happy times with her.

Many families had lived in that house during the years Mr. Biddle owned it. The Tertinskys own it now. They have modernized it and have beautiful gardens, both flower and vegetable.

Thinking about the 1937 flood brings back many memories. We were almost completely cut off from downtown Cincinnati-Ralph had to drive down North Bend Road into Carthage to be able to go to work. He was a stationary engineer with the Cincinnati Gas and Electric Company, stationed in the old Front and Rose power plant. He had to make his way into town by way of Vine Street, getting as far as Third Street and going into the plant by boat. Knowlton’s Corner was under water up into the second floor of the building’s there. The water was up Hamilton Avenue beyond the railroad tracks and Blue rock. I was teaching piano classes at the time at Garfield School—of course all the schools were closed, but we were called and asked to come into Garfield to help feed the flood workers everyday. You weren’t allowed to drive in those areas without authority, so I was given a Red Cross flag to put on my car so that I could get through. The intersection of Colerain and Hoffner was under water and they had taken down sections of fence on each street at Wesleyan Cemetery. They had put a temporary gravel road across the corner of the cemetery to permit you to get over to Beekman Street. That stretch of Beekman just beyond the school was under water for some distance past Dreman Avenue. They brought the workers in by truckloads, bringing hot food in for them. It was our job to serve their dinner on the school plates, then clean up and wash dishes. The cafeteria was in the basement and I remember looking out the window at flood water up to the terrace leading down to the playground. I also could see the houses on down Beekman Street where I knew some of my students lived.

It was a frightening time—often Ralph wouldn’t get back home until the early hours of the morning. We couldn’t use the water and I remember going to the corner where Eilers had a well in the yard and getting water. Gas pressure was low and it was sometimes difficult to cook. Part of the time there was no electricity.

Then there was the horrible fire—gasoline floating on top of the flood waters caught fire and most of Spring Grove Avenue was ablaze. Many businesses were destroyed. I remember driving down Spring Grove after the water went down and seeing some of the old houses just beyond the Mill Creek bridge. The people living in them had moved all their furniture up into the second floors, which were completely burned away.

I recently learned from Cleon Wingard, who was the Assistant Principal at Garfield, that a National Guard unit was housed in Garfield School during the flood and he stayed in the building during the night and fed the Guards their breakfast in the morning. It was a sad sight to see so many of the homes of our students in the flood waters.

I have fond memories of Garfield. It was a wonderful school and was so much a part of the community life. Mr. Miller, the Principal, had a Mothers Choral Group and I was their accompanist. I gave evening recitals every year and had some very fine students. We also had violin classes. There was a drum corps and the students learned to march. They always took part in the Memorial Day Services at Wesleyan Cemetery. South Cumminsville was a fine, close-knit community.

During the Second World War we spent a lot of time in Colerain Township as Ralph’s sister Carrie was married to Bob Foster. They lived on Banning Road and had an extra lot next to their house, so we banded together and farmed that ¼ acre going there in the evenings to work (we received a gas ration for this). Also they were members of the Wilmot Rifle Club, which put on a training session to learn to shoot (the Federal Government was encouraging everyone to be prepared to use firearms). This was held in the basement range of Bob Foster’s building at the southwest corner of Colerain and Galbraith. We also had beagles and hunted and trained dogs in Colerain Township. Those war years were frightening times—with blackouts occurring regularly. Ralph was a stationary engineer for CG&E and was deferred because of it. We learned of his youngest brother Billy’s death in the invasion of Africa—he was buried there. His brother, Frank, was stationed in the Pacific. Then came the notice that Ralph was changed to 1A—a worrisome time for both of us, but he wasn’t called because they changed the age limit and he was too
old. His younger sister, Margaret, was in the WAVES, so there was always worry over far away family members. I will never forget the sound of President Roosevelt’s voice on the radio announcing the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Over the years we had watched the growth of St. Clare Church-first the little frame building on the Cedar Avenue side, then the construction of the present buildings. The frame church was torn down, as well as the Eicher’s house, which was then a home for the teaching nuns. Strangely enough they didn’t raze the priest’s home, but moved it down to 5912 Lantana. It was interesting to watch the moving of that brick home. It sat up on a bank level with our house and just across the street from it. They built up a support of railway ties in the street until it was level with the house, shifted it onto rollers, which were gradually removed until it was down to rollers on the street-then came the slow move down Cedar to Lantana, north around the corner and onto its new location. Before that the church building, with school rooms on the second floor, had been built on Salvia. Then the new priest’s house was built, partially on the site of the Eicher house. Finally the basement of the present church was built and used as the church for many years until the new church was added above it.

One of our classmates from old College Hill School and Hughes High School became very famous in Cincinnati—Caroline Williams also lived on Larch Avenue. We knew that her father was the artist for the Cincinnati Enquirer—we always looked for his sketches on the weather report and Seckatary Hawkins—a favorite reading of mine as a child. I lost track of her for awhile, but after she moved to Burlington, Kentucky, I contacted her and we became firm friends because of our mutual interest in history and old buildings. I used to visit her and thoroughly enjoyed her log cabin. I had become interested in old cemeteries and we walked about the one she discovered on her farm. I used to get treats to take to hr big police dog, Annie-I always loved dogs.

Ralph died in 1950 and I started classes at the University of Cincinnati and got my undergraduate degree and teaching certificate in elementary education. I continued my classes after I got a teaching position in 1953 and got a Master’s degree in 1956 and continued for several years after that-for awhile I thought I wanted to get a doctorate. While I was teaching third grade at Struble School I became interested in local history and started actively to try to gather as much information on Colerain Township as I could. It resulted in the formation of the Coleraine Historical Society. I also worked with other groups interested in local history.

In 1966 College Hill was planning to celebrate its Centennial. I was contacted and asked to do a history of the community for Hilltop News. As a result I plunged in to get as much information as I could, researching and interviewing people about what they remembered. One interesting contact was an elderly gentleman who lived on a street northwest of North Bend Road. He told me that when he was a boy he used to tag along with old Mr. Harbison, who would always take two flags with him on Memorial Day or Fourth of July and take them into the old Cary Cemetery. This would seem to indicate that there may have been two soldiers’ graves left there after the Cary family removed their own members to Spring Grove Cemetery. He also made the remark when they were tearing down the Crawford Home on North Bend Road, “I wonder if they discovered the old hiding place for escaping slaves in the sub-cellar underneath it.”

While I was working on College Hill history, the old Bowman house on North Bend Road, just east of the Wigwam was empty. Eleanor Bowman asked me to go there with her as it was to be torn down. Matie Bowman was Eleanor’s aunt or great aunt. Matie’s maiden name was Ludlow-William B. Ludlow had been her father. The original property had been a seven acre tract-the north east corner of Hamilton and North Bend Road. It had been in the family descended from John Ludlow, half-brother to Israel Ludlow and early sheriff of Hamilton County. Matie had apparently become estranged from her family and left everything to her servant, who left many things in the house which upset Eleanor and me quite a bit. Matie had lived a very prominent social life in College Hill and had saved everything. The attic was full of things pertaining to her interests. There were art magazines, pictures, music and old dresses-several wardrobes and many other things. Kids had broken into the house and gotten into the attic before we got there and had gotten into everything-the floor was covered at least a foot deep with the things they scattered. I tried to save as much as I could find-programs of a College Hill women’s group, small calling
cards which visitors used to leave when they came to call (giving us many of the old prominent families),
her speech as valedictorian of her class, as well as her mother’s records. They had both attended and
graduated from the Wesleyan Womens’ Seminary located on Vine Street in downtown Cincinnati.

She was also descended from the Cary family, her mother’s family. One of the things saved from
that attic was a broadside advertising the sale of Rebecca Cary’s seven acre tract in the late 1800’s. Matie
and her husband built their home on a portion of this tract. It was a large two story frame having its front
gable decorated with pieces of colored glass. It was an interesting house. It was too bad that more things
weren’t able to be saved from it.

Biddle’s old hotel on North Bend Road just west of Hamilton Pike had become the Eastern Star
Home. They used the old hotel building for quite some years before building their present building/ I
remember going into Biddle’s for lunch. The old car barn was torn down and replaced with a Kroger
store, the earlier one on the corner with the parking lot north of it. Across Hamilton Avenue the original
tiny Wigwam had grown and grown into the lovely restaurant it is today.

African American families were located in many parts of College Hill-Piqua, next east of Lantana,
goes north off Cedar a short distance, then bends sharply east, has a number of black families. Bertha
(Burgess) Rodriguez and husband Carlos were in the last house on the north side of the street, next the
Lockers, George Smith, ‘Mother’ Wait with daughter Theresa, Estelle and George Wyatt and the Hunters;
on the south side were the Mills, Grace and Tootsie Brown and the Houstons. At the sharp bend was the
Methodist Church. Next to the Christian Church was the little cottage owned by the Banks family;
another Morris family, later a Houston family in the house next to the drive leading down to the Jesse
Locker home. Past that were three or four more cottages, in one of which Mr. Lafayette C. Robinson
lived. On the south side of cedar east of Lantana is a very old cottage owned by the Parrots, who lived as
caretakers on the Harold Simpson estate, while their son-in-law, Hutchins, lived in the cottage. Next was
Nellie McKinney (whom I remember stopping when our magnolia was in bloom and asking if she could
have one of its blossoms to take down to her class in the city as the children there had never seen anything
like it). Next to her lived Cindy (Evans) Houston and Emma Houston. The Morris family (Dorothy
Wyley’s ancestors) lived on Lantana opposite the end of Marlowe and the Hockers lived next to them. On
the east side of St. Elmo near Cedar was the brick house of George Smith’s, next was the Imes family.
They had a son and a daughter, Marjorie, who was a piano student of mine for many years. Mrs. Imes and
my mother were friends. Sarah Virginia Hutchins was another of my students. The Wrenn family went
back many years in College Hill’s history. ‘Grandpa” John Wrenn also owned a large tract of land on the
southwest corner of Cedar and Argus including the Cornelia (now Elsie) Avenue area. He had several
houses there which faced on Argus Road. Arthur Parrott also lived on St. Elmo. George Wrenn was Louis
Wrenn’s son and was tragically drowned with his two children. Katie McNeer was another resident on St.
Elmo. Families on Cornelia (Elsie) were Louis Hunter, Frank Ally, Conley, Thomas, Duckworth and the
Allens. Mr. Thomas worked for the Thomson family. An Allen family and Mrs. Kinney and son lived on
Argus. A Cox family later lived in Elizabeth Locker’s house on Piqua. The Hawkins family lived and
worked in the ‘Oakwood” (the old Davey mansion on Linden Drive).

On Pasadena there were two African American families- the Petersons and the Williams. George
Peterson became a detective on the Cincinnati Police Force and married Hazel Banks and lived in the old
Banks cottage. The Settles family lived down a lane near the O.M.I. and worked there. On the south side
of North Bend Road not far from Savannah was a little green frame cottage, which I remember from
childhood, in which an African American family lived. We have learned that this lot was bought in 1880
by John Alley, Sr. from the College Hill railroad. In 1904, John Alley, Jr., residing in College Hill died
intestate and frank Ally was made his administrator and guardian of John Alley, Sr., who died in
Indianapolis, Indiana in 1917. Frank Alley and John Alley Sr.’s daughter, Louise Gorham, were the heirs
to this property. It wasn’t until 1935 that the property was sold to Dr. Theodore Walker, who tore down
the cottage and built his brick house on the site. Apparently the heirs must have rented the cottage to
African American families from Mrs. Rosemary Forbes remembered of seeing a tall, thin black man who
played a ‘squeeze box’ living in the green cottage, which had no foundation, only stones supporting the
four corners.
Almost from its beginning College Hill has had a small African American population. There was always a strong Abolitionist element residing on the hill. There were a number of places in which escaping slaves could be hidden. Mrs. Anna Benison, a descendant of the Strong family, told me how slaves used to come up the ravine on the east side of the hill, where the old railroad line was located, and come up to the Freeland Strong home on Hamilton Avenue near where Hillcrest Avenue is today. They would be told to creep in under a huge brush pile in the gully beside the road and given sacks to cover themselves. The Strong children would play around on the brush pile carrying sacks of food, which they would carelessly drop, and would fall down into the brush for the hungry blacks hidden underneath. After dark the wagon would be hitched up with a goody supply of straw in its bed for the slaves to hide under. Mr. Strong would then drive out the old Colerain road (now Belmont Avenue) to the next station on the Underground Railroad, which was the old brick house at the northeast corner of Colerain and Springdale roads. We never did discover who the conductor at that location was.

There were always a few African American students in our classes at school. As I grew older and developed an interest in history, I learned that some of our African American families had been here from the time of the Civil War or before. Many of the wealthy families on the hill employed them and built homes on the east side of the hill for their servants. The Howard family had a stone quarry down along the traction line on the east side of the hill. There were some five or six houses down along the tracks for the African American quarry workers. There were some living on Lantana, St. Elmo, Cedar, Piqua, Argus and Elsie, along with the Crawford Home for old African American men on North Bend road.

The most prominent African American family on College Hill were the Lockers. Jesse was always highly regarded on the hill. Rev. Laban Locker, a Christian Church minister, was his father, who preached at the little Christian Church on Cedar at the corner of Piqua. After his father died, his mother, Elizabeth Locker, brought the children from their old home in Mt. Healthy and located on Piqua so the children could go to College Hill School. Jesse was a top student and was the valedictorian of his class when he graduated from the old College Hill High School. As a schoolboy he went to the Grace Episcopal Church and pumped the organ for the services. He was a Cincinnati Council member for some years and later was appointed as Ambassador to Liberia, where he died in 1955. His body was flown back to Cincinnati in a military plane. He lay in state in the Cincinnati Council Chambers; a representative from President Eisenhower being here for the funeral. It was probably the largest funeral procession ever seen in Cincinnati as he was taken from City Hall to Mt. Pleasant Cemetery in Mt. Healthy for burial.

John Robinson, although he lived in West College Hill, was a well known and well liked figure in College Hill. He had a team of horses and did a lot of hauling for College Hill residents. His son, Lafayette “Lefty” Robinson said his father used to take wagon loads to the railroad station for residents of the Glenwood Apartments when they were starting off to Michigan for their summer homes. He was also the man whom I remembered from my early childhood with a snow plow cleaning the sidewalks of College Hill. His mother was a half-sister to Elizabeth Locker, Jesse Locker’s mother. Many of the old time residents of the hill have fond memories of the Robinson family.

Most members of the African American families on the hill worked in one capacity or another for many of the old families in the area. Ola Mills, of the family on Piqua, worked for the Partl family on Cary Avenue. The Morris family was another old family living on Lantana. John Morris was a carpenter and built some of the houses on Piqua. His wife Julia and their daughter, Ida, was Matie Bowman’s cook. Her daughter, Dorothy (Wyley) remembers going to the Bowman home many times to help her mother. The Smith family lived next door to the Imes’ on St. Elmo and ‘Chick’ Smith was a well known football star. One old man named Higginbottom lived in the old Crawford home and worked for ‘Dusty’ Zimmer on Belmont. He used to tell stories of his father, who was a slave. If only more stories had been handed down!