

BETTY & CONNIE'S OVER-THE-RHINE TOUR GUIDE

Introduction

Cincinnati, Ohio was incorporated as a frontier town in 1802. Its growth into a thriving industrial city was assured when the first steamboat was launched on the Ohio River in 1812. It was the Ohio River, plus access to key resources for building and manufacturing like iron, coal, timber, limestone, and clay, that established Cincinnati as a major business center by the mid-1800's.

Industry thrived: Cincinnati became home to soap and glycerin works, cooperages, lumber yards, foundries, stone yards, tanneries, meat packing houses, silversmiths, tanners, cabinetmakers, machine makers, boot and shoe makers, printers, potters, and many breweries, 36 at their peak number, by 1860.¹ The central business district became crowded with a variety of businesses willing to pay high rents for access to the river. Later arrivals were pushed north, into a basin area that had the Miami-Erie Canal (the "Rhine") as a rough south and west boundary. This basin area became a significant port of entry for increasing numbers of eastern Europeans who were fleeing war, conscription, economic depression, and feudalistic land inheritance laws. As the German-speaking community grew, the area across the canal became known as "Over-the-Rhine."

The neighborhood was at once profoundly connected to the economic life of the city and separate in its strong European culture. Every block had businesses that provided the service and product necessities of life. To the Germans, that included churches, good food, and wholesome beer. A nickel beer bought a free buffet lunch. Local beers were 21 for \$1. In the evening, saloons were visited by itinerant food vendors. A favorite was the sausage man, "Wienerwurst Mike" (they were all called Mike). His condiments of bread and seasonings were carried by a small boy at his side while he carried the tin pail of mettwurst, bratwurst, frankfurters, and Vienna sausage. Others sold steaming corn on the cob, tamales, "bretzels," and pickles.

A community of Germanic, English, Irish, and native-born Americans, rich and poor, lettered and not, skilled tradesmen, former soldiers, and businessmen, contributed to the phenomenal growth of Cincinnati as a leading U.S. city in the mid- to late-19th century. As a major manufacturing and cultural center, with a strategic position on the Ohio River, it was, indeed, the Queen City.

Estimates of Over-the-Rhine's peak population, around the turn of the 19th century, vary from 43,000 to 50,000. It was a densely crowded, lively neighborhood, with a strong Germanic culture within a strongly Germanic city: in

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1890, more than 57% of Cincinnatians were either German-born or native-born of German parentage.²

Much of the European character of Over-the-Rhine architecture dates from the period 1860 to 1900, when “new masonry structures replaced the original smaller frame buildings. Three- to five-story row houses predominated in the neighborhood. The majority of the buildings included a storefront at the ground level and apartments on the upper floors. Single-family homes, meeting halls, theaters, churches, stores, breweries, and light industrial buildings also were built during this period.”³

The community was so famous throughout the country that at the beginning of the 20th century it was a popular honeymoon destination.⁴

The start of World War I brought a heavy anti-German backlash to Cincinnati and Over-the-Rhine. The German culture of beer and *gemütlichkeit* (a cozy sense of belonging and acceptance) was now viewed merely as a collection of dirty saloons and overly friendly drunkenness. Any business or church with “German” in its name was blacklisted. In April 1918, Germanic sounding street names were changed: Bremen to Republic; Berlin to Woodward; Bismarck to Montreal; German to English; Frankfort to Connecticut; Wilhelm to Orion, Humboldt to Taft, etc. Fourteen streets had their names changed at this time: almost every one of them in Over-the-Rhine.

Teaching German, and all tolerance of the German language, was dropped from the schools. All German books and newspapers were moved to closed stacks in the public library. The anti-German hysteria, which was partially linked to disapproval of beer culture, contributed to the public sentiment supporting Prohibition in 1919, which closed most of the breweries and saloons. There was decreased use of the canal for transportation of goods, being superseded by the railroads and the beginnings of auto traffic. The canals were drained and, in 1922, the start of the subway system and the wide boulevard of Central Parkway was under construction.

Over-the-Rhine’s population slowly decreased as first- and second-generation immigrants moved out of the basin, up into the “seven hills.” The formerly foreign immigrant neighborhood became home to new American migrants from Appalachia. Although the sense of community was strong, the lives of the Appalachians were marked by extreme poverty. Soon, African-Americans, displaced from their West End neighborhood by interstate highway construction, found a place to live and work, gradually replacing the Appalachian population who were moving out of the basin. In early 2008, the population was estimated at between 7,000 to 8,000.⁵

Over-the-Rhine has been romanticized—or hyperbolized—by almost every group that claims a stake in its future. It is, from one time to the next, the most, the

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least, the best, the worst: a treasure-trove of architecture; a loyal, but poverty-stricken community; a new arts community; a home for the homeless; a refuge for the mentally ill poor; ground zero for churches and social welfare non-profits; the most crime-ridden area; training ground for social activists; or, maybe, as we like to think of it: Cincinnati's best kept secret.

More than one heyday of Over-the-Rhine has passed. Its historic buildings have withstood generations of families trying to make their way into the American dream, one way or another. "Over-The-Rhine contains the largest collection of 19th century Italianate architecture still standing in the United States. The entire 360 acre district of Over-the-Rhine, consisting of 6 districts of distinct character, was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1983. OTR has over 500 empty buildings, 2,500 empty units, and 700 vacant lots available for repopulation and renovation."⁶

The continued survival of the people and the buildings is still uncertain. New investment, hardy entrepreneurs, and long-time neighborhood business are all vulnerable to the current severe downswing of the U.S. economy. But **enduring with grace** could be a motto of Over-the-Rhiners from all of its generations. Nothing can be left to chance as we help revive and re-fill the streets of one of the country's few remaining architecturally intact, historic neighborhoods.

The Over-the-Rhine Foundation, committed to improving the quality of life in the neighborhood, has launched a Memory Project to capture the experiences and oral history of those who have lived and worked in OTR. This complements the foundation's preservation and restoration work.⁷

Betty Smiddy and Connie Menefee have connections to Over-the-Rhine: check out their biographies. They invite you to take a closer look: down, up, or sideways. Get to know the buildings, the people, and the history of this dynamic neighborhood. Especially the people.

BETTY & CONNIE'S OVER-THE-RHINE CONNECTIONS

Betty Ann Smiddy: I am a native Cincinnati who has written two books published by Arcadia,⁸ *Cincinnati's Golden Age* and *Cincinnati's Great Disasters*. Both are available at the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County or local bookstores.

I also have written a short history of Mt. Auburn, a history of Mt. Auburn's Church of Our Savior, and completed the second edition of [A Little Piece of Paradise...College Hill, Ohio](#). I have written about Cincinnati architect Samuel Hannaford on the Web: <http://www.samuelhannaford.info>. I am a 1992 *Cincinnati Enquirer* Woman of the Year and was given a key to the City of Cincinnati for my volunteer activities.

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My grandparents, John A. Hubert and Margaret Dipong, were part of the wave of eastern European immigrants arriving in Cincinnati at the turn of the 1900's. My grandfather came from Temessag, Hungary. His father apprenticed him to a barber while he was still in high school: paying the barber to train him and to let my grandfather board with his family. After his apprenticeship and education were completed, John was sent to America to join his older brother, George, who was already established in Cincinnati. This practice was called chain migration (one immigrant sponsors others in the family). John was only 16 when he arrived aboard the *Pannonia*. Their father apprenticed all of his sons because of impending military conscription. A war was brewing in Europe and he wanted them to have a chance in another country.

My 11 year old grandmother left Kathreinfeld, Hungary, accompanied by her father, and joined her older sister in Cincinnati. She was a servant in an Avondale household. She was so short that she needed to stand on a soap box to reach the sink to wash dishes. She learned English at free night classes held in the, then, new Avondale High School on Reading Road.

John Hubert and Margaret Dipong met at a dance and married in 1913, moving to an apartment above a candy store in Mohawk, where the Hungarians lived. My grandfather shared a barber shop at 234 Central Ave. After saving enough money at a local savings and loan, probably in a bar, they bought a house in Over-the-Rhine at 2224 Vine St. (now owned by Talbert House). That area is now considered lower Mt. Auburn.

This was where my parents lived when I was born and they were saving for their first house in Fairview. After they moved, I went every weekend by bus to stay with my grandparents. We often walked down Vine St., going to Findlay Market or, further, to downtown. We would take a bus back up the hill with our shopping bags. As we walked, my grandmother or my Aunt Margaret would tell me stories about what the buildings had been in earlier times. It is because of my aunt that I developed an interest in architecture. She always urged me to look up at the rooflines of the buildings across the street.

Betty on Samuel Hannaford: If you pay close attention, you will discover that Samuel Hannaford and his various associates, including his sons, are connected to many historic properties both in Over-the-Rhine and the Cincinnati area.

One of Cincinnati's best loved architects, Samuel Hannaford, was born April 10, 1835, in Devonshire, England. His family came to Cincinnati and settled on a farm in Cheviot in 1845. After attending Farmers' College in College Hill in 1853, he started working with an architect the following year. He married three times, his last wife outliving him. He made his home in Winton Place, where he also was the mayor. Hannaford helped develop the first building codes for Cincinnati, urged smoke abatement,

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wanted to eliminated slums, and championed the building of the Mill Creek Valley sewer system.

His sons, Harvey Eldridge and Charles Edward, joined him to form Hannaford & Sons in 1887. After Samuel's death in 1911, this continued to be a prominent architectural firm until the 1960's, designing among other buildings, the Times-Star building, Cincinnati General Hospital, Deaconess Hospital, the annex to the state capitol building in Columbus, and the original buildings of Ohio State University. For more information about Samuel Hannaford go to <http://www.samuelhannaford.info>.

Constance Lee Menefee: I am a native of St. Louis, Missouri. I grew up from kindergarten through 8th grade, in Syracuse, New York, and moved into the city of Cincinnati, from Harrison, Ohio, in 1974. (I graduated from William Henry Harrison High School in 1970.)

Betty and I met in 1972 at the home of the late University of Cincinnati biology professor, Alex Fraser, Ph.D., as part of a McMicken Scholars Honors colloquium on death. Our friendship has sustained both of us through difficult times. We have many interests in common, and many that each can share with the other. I admit that my knowledge of Cincinnati history was meager until Betty suggested we write a history of some of the places and people in Over-the-Rhine.

In one of those lovely, quirky moments, my husband (John Burkhardt) and I bought the first house we looked at in 1989. When I called Betty to give her the address, she said in her usual matter-of-fact way, "That's where Bruce and I lived when you first met me." I had no idea!

I have lived in several Cincinnati neighborhoods: Clifton, Mt. Auburn, Over-the-Rhine, and, currently, College Hill, in Betty's old house. In Over-the-Rhine, I lived on Peete St. (the good end, as we always reassured people) in the late 1970's, next door to my husband-to-be. John was from Chicago, Illinois and had come to Over-the-Rhine as part of the VISTA program after graduating from the Krannert School of Management at Purdue University. When his VISTA stint came to an end, he stayed in Over-the-Rhine, managing the Liberty Co-op at 12 Green St. for the Franciscans. He eventually began working as a painter for the A.G. Hauck Co. (once located at 1107-1109 Vine St. in Over-the-Rhine).

I spent ten years as a library assistant at the Main Branch of the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County, riding the bus through Over-the-Rhine on my way to and from work, first from Mt. Auburn (53) and then from College Hill (17).

It was downtown Cincinnati and Over-the-Rhine that brought John and me together in 1974. A big band concert on Fountain Square drew me with some folk dancing friends. I was dancing—by myself—when John and his companions, also downtown for the music, espied me. We did not meet then. It was a week or

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so later that I met my future husband at King's Row, a bluegrass bar in Clifton where I had an apartment. His friends recognized me and, with plenty of elbow-nudging by his friends, we finally met and the rest, as they say, is history. We got married in 1979. Our son, Jonathan Burkhardt, is a photographer who worked retail at Park + Vine, 1107-1109 Vine St. for almost a year. He is working on his Ph.D. in Chemical Engineering at the University of Cincinnati.

I am an experienced writer and editor, crack researcher, and intermittent visual artist. In addition to having written a small business column for the late *Cincinnati Post*, I spent two summers in Alaska, and visited Vietnam with a group of veterans in 1994. I was awarded an Ohio Arts Council Individual Fellowship in 1998 for poetry about the Vietnam War. For more, visit my website: <http://www.selfcraft.net>.

FIRST, A FEW SIGHTS SOUTH OF THE RHINE

Central Parkway and Court St.

The fourth **Hamilton County** courthouse is on this site, completed in 1919. It is made of limestone and granite in the Renaissance Revival style, designed by Rankin, Kellogg and Crane architects. The cornerstone was put in place by William Howard Taft in 1915. In the lobby stands the statue of Captain John J. Desmond, who died in the courthouse riot of 1884. Other memorials pertaining to that event are found in the main lobby. Each side of the court house contains a different quote:

On the **North**: "That the commonwealth may have a government of laws and not men." This is from the Constitution of Massachusetts, Bill of Rights, Article 30.

The **East** wall: "Equal and exact justice to all men of whatever state or persuasion religious or political." President Thomas Jefferson said this in his first inaugural address.

The **South** wall has a quote from the Bible, Micah 6:8: "What doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly and to love mercy."

The source for the **West** wall has been attributed to President William Howard Taft; "The pure and the wise and equal administration of the laws forms the first end and the blessing of social union."

Court St. Market

The original Court St. Market was a wooden, open sided building surmounted by a bell that would ring the hours and signal the start and close of the market. The market house was razed in 1915, but the market has lived on with open air stalls

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near Vine St. **Avril-Bleh & Sons Meat Market** at **33 E. Court St.** is the last custom butcher shop remaining. In 2008, they added a small grocery store and a deli.

Court St. is wide because it once accommodated the width of a market house. Underneath the market house were brick lined tunnels used to run the pigs to the nearby slaughterhouses. Terrified citizens hid in the tunnels during the 1884 courthouse riot.

South of the Rhine, at **919 Vine St.**, you can find **Scotti's Italian Restaurant**, which has been busy serving pasta for more than a century! Brother and sister Marco and Rina DiMarco are the fifth generation to run the restaurant.

Bookstore, art print, and framing shop, **Carteaux & Leslie**, owned by Tim Leslie and Scott Carto, was located at **921 Vine St.**, but, regrettably, closed in 2009. Around 1906, Rensler's Portrait Studio opened at **925 Vine St.**, later moving to **921 Vine St.**⁹ It closed in 1989. Nearby, also, is the art and gift shop **Apollo's Muse** at **923 Vine St.** and **Krondilou's Shoe Repair Service** at **925 Vine St.**

Betty and I think there should be a historical marker to Louis C. Graeter, for it was at the Court St. market house that he started his company by selling milkshakes. Graeter's has been a Cincinnati tradition since 1870, selling French pot ice cream, bakery goods, candy, and other delicacies.

15 W. Central Parkway

AAA, the **American Automobile Association/Cincinnati Automobile Club** has been in this location since 1940. Built in 1904 as the Canal Telephone Exchange building, its handsome stone and brick exterior has needed little maintenance through the years. It was the neighborhood switching office for the Cincinnati & Suburban Bell Telephone Co., and is Italian Renaissance in style. Hake & Kuck were the architects. The switching service became outmoded in 1930 when direct dial service became available.

1015 Vine St.

The **Cincinnati** building, built by architectural firm Rendigs, Panzer & Martin, was purchased by the Kroger Co. for use as an annex. Kroger's had a trompe l'oeil mural painted on the north facing building wall in 1983, by New York artist Richard Haas, to commemorate 100 years of business. It depicts the statue of Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus, after whom the Society of Cincinnati and this city was named. Look closely at the wall and you will see real windows and a doorway hidden among the painted ones. At one time, headquarters of the Brotherhood of Railway and Steamship Clerks was located here.

WALKING UP VINE STREET

VINE STREET.....”this great thoroughfare leads directly to the center of all the attractions to be found “Over the Rhine.”¹⁰

For more than a century and a half, Over-the-Rhine, with Vine St. as its major artery, has excited argument, accolade, dispute, riot, comment, and even a “popera:” the **blueS alleY caT**.¹¹

....”the visitor has no sooner entered the northern districts of the city lying beyond the Court St., across the canal, than he finds himself in another atmosphere—in a foreign land as it were. Germans and Americans alike love to call the district “Over the Rhine”...The visitor leaves behind him at almost a single step the rigidity of the American, the everlasting hurry and worry of the insatiate race for wealth, the inappeasable thirst of Dives, and enters at once into the borders of a people more readily happy, more readily contented, more easily pleased, far more closely wedded to music and the dance, to the song, and life in the bright open air.”¹²

Once heralded as the “Paris of America”: “The town was as wide open as a kitchen garden with amusements of all types, and gambling flourished like the proverbial green bay tree in almost every part of the city. Its inhabitants were deluged with beer and wine, principally beer; old Vine street sparkled like a huge Brazilian diamond by night...his ears would be drinking in some high-class music; there would be congenial and cheery companionship everywhere about you, and a your right hand, would be a tall flagon of the best beer that was ever brewed in America.”¹³

At one time, between 12th and 13th Sts., there 23 saloons and concert halls. When temperance crusader Carrie Nation came to town, she said “...if I had undertaken to break all the windows of all the saloons on your Vine street I would have dropped from exhaustion before I had gone a block.” Not surprisingly, in 1899, it was estimated that, in Cincinnati, 41 gallons of beer would have to have been consumed by every man, woman and child, so great was the total consumption. Over-the-Rhine and the West End had 17 breweries between 1875 and 1900.

There was a bridge over the canal at Vine St.: “On the level boys, when a fellah started down Vine Street say about 1 or 2 in the morning after a night among the concert halls, even the malodorous canal took on a the aspect of a dimpling, singing brook, wending its sinuous, silvery way through meadows of green and purple. Looking over the railing of the canal bridge into the depths of the stream he saw mirrored there seven or eight moons provided, of course, there was a moon, and depending entirely upon his capacity to carry it...I will cite the famous bit of verse that John Kernell pulled at People’s. It follows:

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*I stood on the bridge at midnight,
While the clock was striking the hour,
And fed the little fishes below,
For the last evelen (sic) beers were sour.”¹⁴*

“It is to be feared that the next generation, when the canal through the town gives place to a grand boulevard, will never hear what even the present generation seems to have forgotten that “over the Rhine” meant the German district above the canal where there were many beer gardens and theaters for the most delightful experience of ‘doing nothing.’”¹⁵

1 Susan K. Appel. *Buildings and Beer: Brewery Architecture of Cincinnati*. Queen City Heritage 44 (Summer 1986): 2-20.

2 G. A. Dobbert, G.A. *The “Zinzinnati” in Cincinnati*. Cincinnati Historical Society Bulletin 22 (October 1964): 209-220.

3 IRhine.com website - http://www.irhine.com/index.jsp?page=history_neighborhood.

4 Edward Behr, *Prohibition: Thirteen Years That Changed America*. New York, NY. 1996.

5 http://www.otrchamber.com/otr_profile/otrdemographics

6 Over-the-Rhine Chamber of Commerce - <http://www.otrchamber.com/>.

7 Over-the-Rhine Foundation - <http://www.otrfoundation.org/>.

8 Arcadia Publishing - <http://www.arcadiapublishing.com>.

9 <http://www.citybeat.com/cincinnati/article-3440-paper-moon.html>

10 D.J. Kenny. *Illustrated Cincinnati*. 1875.

11 Written by Joe Gorman; performed at the School for Creative and Performing Arts, 10 July-3 August 2003.

12 D.J. Kenny. *Illustrated Cincinnati*. 1875.

13 Frank Y. Grayson. *Pioneers of Night Life on Vine St*. 1924.

14 Frank Y. Grayson. *Pioneers of Night Life on Vine St*. 1924.

15 *Cincinnati, the Queen City, 1788-1912*.