

4.0 Early History of Cleveland and Cuyahoga County

4.1 Pre-1940 History of Cleveland and Cuyahoga County

Located at the mouth of the Cuyahoga River, the area that is present-day Cleveland within Cuyahoga County attracted the attention of European explorers. As Moravian missionary John Heckewelder noted in 1796, the Cuyahoga River, via a brief, four-mile portage to the Muskingum River, offered one of the more convenient routes to the Ohio River from Lake Erie (Miller and Wheeler 1997:7).

Initial settlement in present-day Cuyahoga County was a process born of a seventeenth century charter granted to the colony of Connecticut. Following the Revolutionary War and independence from Great Britain, Connecticut negotiated with the federal government for claim to those lands described in the charter. Ultimately, Connecticut received a vast tract of land in the Northwest Territory named the Western Reserve. Looking to avoid administration of the property, in 1795, Connecticut sold the Western Reserve to an impromptu organization of land speculators incorporated as the Connecticut Land Company (Miller and Wheeler 1997:7).

Survey of the Western Reserve by the Connecticut Land Company followed on the heels of the 1794, Battle of Fallen Timbers and the defeat of the Native Americans that laid claim to the region. The terms of the treaty that followed granted the territory's former inhabitants a swath of land to the west of the Cuyahoga River, leaving everything east of the river open to Euro-American settlement. By the spring of 1796, a team of 40 surveyors, headed by Moses Cleaveland, was hard at work platting a town site that would serve as the capital of the Western Reserve (Miller and Wheeler 1997:9-10).

Bearing Cleaveland's name (although it is unclear when the 'a' was dropped to its current spelling), the capital of the Western Reserve was one of many settlements that featured town plans common to New England and New York. An agricultural village in concept, the plan included a 10-acre public square located atop a plateau overlooking the mouth of the Cuyahoga River. A grid of roadways emanated from the four sides of a public square, with parcels laid out neatly along streets and avenues. Improvements were largely non-existent as the Connecticut Land Company merely aimed to sell lots for a profit and disband (Miller and Wheeler 1997:8).

Initial settlement was haphazard due to a lottery system of land sales, which prevented investors from acquiring contiguous parcels of land. A number of hearty would-be residents located to the new village site within the first year. However, due to mosquito-borne diseases fostered by swampy conditions around the mouth of the Cuyahoga, the earliest settlers left the area for higher ground elsewhere in the Western Reserve. Despite problems within the capital, settlement within the Western Reserve transpired rapidly, with the population reaching 1,500 by 1800. Only one resident, however, remained within the village plat of Cleveland itself. Just ten years later, the Western Reserve boasted a population of 17,000, 1,459 of whom were located within the newly established Cuyahoga County (established May 1, 1810), and a mere 57 of those inhabitants residing within Cleveland proper. While a considerable number of Western Reserve landholders were indeed residents of Connecticut, the majority of those actually settling the Reserve were from elsewhere in New England and New York (Miller and Wheeler 1997:7, 14; US Census Bureau 1800-1810).

Changes in Cuyahoga County's fortunes came with the rise of "canal fever," as the hysteria surrounding New York's Erie Canal was often

referred. Construction of the Erie Canal, from 1817 to 1825, stirred great interest for internal improvement projects in Ohio and neighboring states. The State of Ohio sponsored numerous canal surveys through the early-to-mid 1820s, looking for the most advantageous routes between Lake Erie and the Ohio River. Quite logically, canal engineers set their sights on the Cuyahoga and Muskingum rivers, which offered the path of least resistance for any canal endeavor routed through the eastern-half of the state.

Construction of the Ohio & Erie Canal, which linked Portsmouth, Ohio, on the Ohio River, to the mouth of the Cuyahoga at Cleveland, began in 1826. By 1827, canal boats were travelling between Akron and Cleveland, and by 1832, boats were navigating the full length of the Ohio & Erie system. The effect of canal transportation was profound. Cuyahoga County and specifically Cleveland became a center with materials, goods, and passengers moving through the area. With the wave of excitement generated by increasing commerce came a flurry of speculation, as investors looked to develop more real estate at the mouth of the Cuyahoga (Miller and Wheeler 1997:31-34).

The canal boom attracted large numbers of immigrants to Cuyahoga County, and by 1840, as much as 25 percent of the population of Cleveland was foreign born, with most of those new arrivals originating in Ireland, Scotland, and Germany. Small numbers of free blacks also resided in Cleveland. Through the mid-nineteenth century, African Americans freely integrated into the local community, which was exceptionally liberal for the time (Miller and Wheeler 1997:39-40).

With the canal came an infusion of culture from points further east. What had been an isolated settlement on the shores of Lake Erie was now in closer communication with long-established population centers on the east coast. Architectural trends of the day more readily influenced new construction in Cleveland, with Georgian style homes replacing local,

vernacular buildings. By the end of the 1830s, Georgian architecture gave way to the Greek Revival movement of the 1830s and 40s (Miller and Wheeler 1997:).

Through the 1840s and 50s, Cleveland evolved from canal town into a city of national significance. Canal traffic peaked in the late 1840s and declined thereafter. As railroad technology eclipsed that of its slower and less convenient waterborne counterpart, Cleveland embraced the new era of rail travel, welcoming its first rail line in 1851. Just as the canal proved a boon during its arrival, so too did the railroad.

Significantly improving the transportation of goods and materials, railroads facilitated Cleveland's rise as a major commercial center. The iron and steel industry, which would one day drive the heart of the city's economy, got its start during this period. Through the 1850s, the city's first rolling mills turned out iron products made from ore shipped from the mines of upper Lake Superior. The city's growing economy largely owed its success to the nexus of lake, canal, and rail transportation that converged on the mouth of the Cuyahoga (Miller and Wheeler 1997:50-53).

All of this economic activity in turn fueled a population boom in Cleveland and greater Cuyahoga County. Between 1850 and 1860, the population of the county grew from approximately 48,000 to over 78,000. In Cleveland, the population more than doubled, expanding from roughly 17,000 residents to well over 44,000. Much of this growth was driven by foreign-born immigration, of which most originated from Western Europe. There was also a significant rural-to-urban movement as residents from the outer reaches of the Western Reserve relocated to Cuyahoga County in search of work in the numerous manufacturing and commercial enterprises then underway. Throughout this period, the city's upper class evolved into a tightknit enclave, using its wealth and influence to shape local politics (Miller and Wheeler 1997:56; US Census Bureau 1850-1860).

By the middle of the nineteenth century, Cleveland's architectural trends mirrored those of eastern urban centers, with Greek Revival giving way to trends in Gothic and Italianate architecture. The city's wealthy built large, high style mansions along Euclid and Superior avenues, such as Amasa Stone's palatial Italian villa, complete with heated water in every room. Middle-class neighborhoods gradually expanded along the West Side, where families of small means could afford modest houses within walking distance to work. Along Lorain Avenue and south and west of Pearl Street, low-income, working-class families clustered in more densely populated neighborhoods. With massive immigration came growing prejudices amongst the native-born population, and an increasing movement toward segregation of neighborhoods based on ethnic loyalties (Miller and Wheeler 1997:57).

By 1860, Cleveland was ranked among the most attractive urban centers in the country. It boasted all the modern conveniences associated with successful, modern cities, including good transportation, public utilities, emergency services, including police and firefighting forces, and all manner of social and cultural organizations. As the nation teetered on the brink of civil war, Cuyahoga County was poised to meet the challenge, offering substantial manpower for the battlefield and ample resources to support the war effort. Roughly 10,000 recruits from Cuyahoga County joined the fray. Of that number, approximately 1,700 lost their lives while another 2,000 were left crippled (Miller and Wheeler 1997:75).

Demand for wartime materials during the Civil War further expanded Cuyahoga County's industrial capacity. Industrialists, such as John D. Rockefeller, prospered from wartime demand, selling grain, meat, and produce. As commerce and manufacturing grew, the population expanded in step. During the 1860s, immigrants from Italy and the Eastern European countries of Czechoslovakia and

Hungary began entering the local workforce for the first time, signaling a change that would soon reshape the demographic structure of the city. By 1870, Cuyahoga County was home to 1,149 separate manufacturing enterprises, employing more than 10,000 workers. The population of Cleveland alone reached 92,829, 70 percent of the county's 132,010. Through annexation of neighboring villages and townships, Cleveland expanded its tax base, growing ever larger in the process (Miller and Wheeler 1997:76; US Census Bureau 1870).

Changes in manufacturing and demographics that began during the Civil War gradually shifted Cleveland from a commercial city dominated by New England, Yankee influence, to a multiethnic, multicultural industrial juggernaut. By 1890, three-quarters of the city's population was foreign born or born of foreign parents. Of these new arrivals, many originated in Eastern Europe. Despite these changes, the city remained under the tight control of its wealthy elite. Socially and politically, Cleveland remained dominated by its Puritan heritage (Miller and Wheeler 1997:78).

Into the 1870s and 1880s, Euclid Avenue, between Muirson (East 12th Street) and Case (East 40th Street) streets remained the domain of the city's elite. Along Euclid, stately Victorian mansions line the road. In close proximity stood the houses and flats of the working class. Built two to a city lot, Cleveland's working-class housing was dominated by row after row of wood frame buildings, standing one-and-one-half or two stories in height with gabled ends facing the street. As the century progressed and the population increased, population density within these houses increased, reaching 5.96 persons per dwelling by 1890. On average, the density numbers were lower than that of other American industrial cities. Possibly owing to the wide dispersal of the city's industries, Cleveland lacked the densely packed tenements found in other urban centers (Miller and Wheeler 1997:78).

In an age prior to streetcars, everyone, wealthy and otherwise, lived within walking distance of the industrial district. Following the advent of electric streetcars in the early 1890s, greater distances could be travelled in less time. For the first time, real estate in the less congested fringes of the city was in reach of the city's wealthy elite and the middle class alike. Euclid Avenue remained popular with the city's wealthy, but Clifton Park and Glenville came into favor. Streetcars not only expanded housing options but entertainment opportunities as well. Theatres, like the Euclid Avenue Opera House on Sheriff Street, Halthnorth's Gardens on Willson (East 55th Street) Street and Woodland Avenue attracted large gatherings, as did amusement parks at Euclid Beach and Puritas Springs (Miller and Wheeler 1997:78).

Industrial expansion during the last quarter of the nineteenth century fueled further population growth in Cleveland with numbers in the city quadrupling from just shy of 93,000 in 1870 to just short of 400,000 residents by 1900, over 90 percent of the entire county's population. The population continued to expand in the following decade, reaching 560,663 by 1910, making Cleveland the sixth largest city in the nation by population. One third of the city's population was foreign born by this time, with many recent immigrants arriving from Poland, Italy, and Bohemia. The immigrants came to Cleveland to work in its vast garment factories, steel plants, and burgeoning auto industry. There were some 2,230 manufacturing facilities in the city by 1909, giving employment to 103,709 persons. Iron and steel dominated the city's economy, followed by foundries and machine shops. Other significant industries included meatpacking, printing and publishing, and paint and varnish (Miller and Wheeler 1997:100-01; US Census Bureau 1870-1910).

Cuyahoga County's commercial activity remained concentrated in downtown Cleveland. Through the early 1900s, numerous large commercial buildings sprang up along downtown streets. Outside of the city center,

businesses clung to streetcar routes. By 1900, streetcar lines extended outward to points as far as Rocky River and Rockport to the west, South Brooklyn Village to the south, Euclid Beach Park, Five Points to the northeast, the Euclid and Mayfield Heights subdivisions to the east, and Warren Township. Streetcar expansion fueled real estate speculation and commercial growth further and further from the city center, facilitating early steps toward decentralization (Miller and Wheeler 1997:102).

As middle-class families vacated Cleveland's inner core for streetcar suburbs, landlords subdivided the single-family homes they left behind. Two and three immigrant families now crowded into a house built for one family. Gradually, the city center became the least desirable place to live. Recent immigrants from Eastern Europe poured into the vacuum created by the exodus of the middle and upper classes. Inner-city neighborhoods evolved into ethnic enclaves, such as Big Italy in the lower Central Woodland district; Little Italy at Murray Hill and Mayfield roads; and the Polish colony of Warszawa, located along Fleet Avenue (East 56th Street).

Cleveland's African American population was slow growing through the late nineteenth century, rising from 1,300 in 1870 to only 8,448 by 1910. Much of this migration was from the American South. Unlike many of the Euro-American communities that concentrated in tightly defined neighborhoods, African Americans remained spread out throughout the greater Cleveland area. As their numbers grew and they became more conspicuous, African Americans experienced increasing hostility from the white community. While they had received largely equal treatment through the nineteenth century, by the turn of the twentieth century, Cleveland began implementing segregation laws (Miller and Wheeler 1997:106).

By 1900, the city's residents were taking aim at the growing squalor in the city's center. In response, Mayor Tom L. Johnson moved to build a Group Plan or Mall that would

concentrate the city's public buildings in one location. Under the administration of the Group Plan Commission and commission chair, architect Daniel Burnham, the plan called for clearance of slums just east of the Public Square. In their place the city built a symmetrical group of buildings that extended toward the lakefront. The architecture was Classical in design and included federal and county courthouses, public library, city hall, public auditorium, and school administration building. The buildings were grouped around a rectangular-shaped promenade (Miller and Wheeler 1997:109).

The massive influx of European immigration that defined the late nineteenth and early twentieth century came to a near standstill with the onset of World War I. While the war fueled yet more industrial expansion, the new labor force did not come from abroad but from the American South. The war set off a mass exodus of Southern blacks, who made their way north to factories in Chicago, Detroit, and Cleveland. The number of African Americans living in Cleveland jumped from 8,448 in 1910 to 34,451 by 1920. These numbers would more than double to 71,899 by 1930. The event came to be known as the Great Migration, and its impact on the future of Cleveland was far reaching. Overwhelmed by the immense number of African Americans arriving on its doorsteps, Cleveland struggled to accommodate its new residents. The Great Migration sparked a call from civic leaders for an additional 10,000 housing units. As African Americans sought housing, they experienced discrimination in the form of rent hikes, paying 65 percent more than whites for the same accommodations. Whereas the African American population had previously been dispersed throughout the city they now congregated within defined communities (Miller and Wheeler 1997:121).

Massive migration of Southern blacks continued through the 1920s as economic growth in northern industrial cities moved at a remarkable pace. In Cleveland, prosperity fueled

considerable expansion during the 1920s with large-scale, private housing developments appearing on the outer fringes of the city's perimeter. Shaker Village, located east of the city, was a product of this time. Touted as a safe haven from commercial intrusions and other unwanted, social incursions, Shaker Village was a hint of things to come in the post-World War II period. Nevertheless, the city center remained the economic focal point of Cuyahoga County through the 1920s. Construction of the Van Sweringen brothers' massive, Cleveland Union Terminal complex was testament to this fact. Numerous additional buildings of significance appeared downtown during this time, including a new public auditorium, public library, and music hall. The city also undertook construction of a series of parks and boulevards around Cleveland, and even set aside scenic areas for exclusion from development (Miller and Wheeler 1997:113-14).

By the late 1920s and early 1930s, major shopping centers were appearing outside the city center. Sears, in 1928, built stores on the outer, east and west sides of the Cleveland (Sears Archives 2017). The following year, Shaker Square shopping center opened on the edge of Shaker Heights. That same year, Bailey's opened branches of its department store at Euclid-East 105th and in Lakewood. The only thing prevented further decentralization at this time was the Great Depression. World War II would further forestall the exodus from the city center for several more years. New construction of major buildings in Cleveland was in fact almost non-existent through the 1930s (Miller and Wheeler 1997:143).

While major commercial construction was at a near standstill during the Great Depression, the US government launched numerous initiatives aimed at housing the poor. As a make-work measure, the Public Works Administration, in conjunction with the Cleveland Metropolitan Housing Authority, facilitated construction of numerous public housing projects in Cleveland, including the nationally acclaimed, Lakeview

Terrace. Other Cleveland public housing projects included the Cedar Apartments between East 22nd and East 30th streets, and Outhwaite Homes, between East 40th and East 46th streets and Scovill and Woodland avenues. Additional housing projects occurred in 1940, including Valley View Homes at West 7th Street and Starkweather Avenue, and Woodhill Homes at the site of the former Luna Park amusement park on Woodhill Road and Woodland Avenue (Miller and Wheeler 1997:141).

Despite the devastating economic effects of the Great Depression, iron and steel remained Cuyahoga County's most significant industry through the 1930s. During the mid-1930s, Republic Steel Corporation expanded its Cleveland plant, the first of numerous expansions that would occur over the next 30 years. Labor unrest occasionally turned difficult, if not violent, but Republic would remain the city's largest, single employer until 1980. Population in the county surpassed the million-mark between 1920 and 1930, and in

Cleveland alone, the population expanded from almost 797,000 to over 900,000 (Miller and Wheeler 1997:142; US Census Bureau 1920-1930).

In celebration of the city's industrial heritage, in 1936 and 1937, Cleveland hosted the Great Lakes Exposition. The event occupied the Mall north of St. Clair Avenue, extending from the Cleveland Indians stadium to East 20th Street. In the process, the city transformed a public dump into a fairground. The exposition showcased Cleveland's industrial might, instilling a sense of pride in the city's residents and offering a bit of respite from an otherwise bleak economic forecast. However, as war in Europe loomed on the horizon, Cleveland's fortunes were once again soon to change, as its great industrial capacity would be called upon to support yet another massive war effort (Miller and Wheeler 1997:144-45).

Summaries of neighborhoods surveyed in Cuyahoga County are located in Section 16 of this report.