

THE HISTORY OF EAST WALNUT HILLS

The origins of East Walnut Hills' development are found in a small, German Catholic community and the adjoining rural estates of a number of Cincinnati businessmen, which coexisted in the area beginning in the mid-19th century.

The little settlement of Germans was clustered around St. Francis de Sales Church, founded in 1849 by Henry Westjohn, Francis Fortman and Joseph Kleine, all of whom owned large amounts of property in the area. Their original stone church, built about 1850, was located at the southwest corner of Hackberry and Taft Road on land donated by Francis Fortman. Beginning in the 1830s, prosperous Cincinnati businessmen established residences in the suburban area, most of them east of the German community with panoramic views of the Ohio River. A remarkable number survive from the 1850s, built by a small circle of men related by profession and marriage. John Baker had two houses designed in the early 1850s, one for himself and the other for his son-in-law, Samuel Keys. W.W. Scarborough erected a home here in 1853, while his law partner, Joshua Bates, moved into the area in 1858. George Hoadly, Scarborough's half-brother and Bates' brother-in-law, came to the area in 1860. Hoadly, a lawyer like his two relatives, became Governor of Ohio in the 1880s.

In 1866, just after the Civil War, a square mile in Section 2 of Millcreek Township, which encompassed the German community and many of the rural estates, was incorporated as the village of Woodburn. Prior to its incorporation, the area had been called East Walnut Hills to distinguish it from the more central Walnut Hills and included portions of present-day Hyde Park. The area south of Taft Road, known as Forest Avenue in the 19th century, was within Cincinnati's city limits at the time of Woodburn's incorporation. Woodburn's mayor was Joshua Bates, who served from the time of the village's incorporation until its annexation to Cincinnati in 1873.

Although the village had only a seven-year life span, two sources from the

period provide a graphic and written account of its middle years. A map dating from 1869 shows a tight pattern of streets, filled with numerous small lots, in the village's southwest corner where the German community was located. Some businesses were scattered along Woodburn and Madison, but the area was primarily residential. The remainder of the village was relatively open with large houses set upon spacious parcels of land. The largest estates lined both sides of Madison Road (then called Madisonville Pike), many with curving drives leading to the mansions. The map is elaborated upon in an 1870 written account of Woodburn. In Sidney Maxwell's *The Suburbs of Cincinnati*, the German community is described as "...a settlement about the church of neat homes and pleasant surroundings..." The efforts of several residents, including Joseph Kleine and Isaac Chase, to improve the village through the erection of a number of substantial rental houses in the vicinity is recounted in the chapter on Woodburn. In addition to descriptions about the "tasteful" dwellings of the rural estates in the village, there was also a mention of four area schools including one affiliated with St. Francis de Sales Church.

An 1883-84 map of the area reveals changes that took place in little over a decade. The west side, where the streetcar lines ran, was becoming filled with frame and brick houses and commerce and was evolving into a cohesive district. Although the large estates were still intact at this time, a series of dotted lines crisscrossing them indicated the proposed new streets--among them Fairfield, Annwood and Wold Avenues--which would be nearly developed by the turn of the century. Single-family homes were the predominant mode of housing in the area, although a number of duplex-type residences are also found here, particularly in the western portion along Cleinview, Hackberry and Woodburn, where many working-class residents lived.

The firehouse, a crucial improvement, was finally erected in 1888; a fire

company was established two years earlier but was housed in temporary quarters. Another landmark on Madison Road, the Seventh Presbyterian Church, was built in 1886 through the efforts of W.W. Scarborough and other Madison Road residents.

During the 1890s, Fairfield Avenue was one of the most intensively developed streets. The land had belonged to Joshua Bates, who sold the parcel to Charles Mills, a real-estate developer, in the 1880s after Bates' return to downtown Cincinnati to live. The first occupants of the street, who were not allowed to build frame residences, were predominantly of a German-Jewish background and employed in fields such as clothing production and distilling. The areas east of Fairfield Avenue were still owned by the heirs of such early residents as W.W. Scarborough, Samuel Keys and Charles Dexter who began granting perpetual 99-year leases in the late 1890s. Their leases usually specified location and construction value requirements for the houses which the lessees agreed to erect. Most of these new homes, built on the spacious grounds of the mid-19th-century mansions, shared the feature of being architect-designed with the first generation houses. Along with these developments was the establishment of the Cincinnati Tennis Club at Dexter and Wold Avenues in 1899. The club had been persuaded to move here by W.W. Scarborough's heir, John, who saw the club as attractive to middle-class families contemplating a move into this area.

Handsome residences continued to be erected, along with more modest single-family and some multiple-family buildings, on the older streets in the early 20th century. New, but small, streets or lanes were carved out of the remaining open estates on the eastern side of the community. Most of the houses were designed in the extremely popular Tudor or Colonial Revival style, with a few suggesting a more Modern inspiration. In spite of some losses to commercial or large-scale apartment development, East Walnut Hills as a whole retains to a remarkable extent its early 20th-century flavor.

Information for this history was obtained through the following sources: the Hamilton County Courthouse, Cincinnati Preservation Association, Cincinnati City Hall, and Cincinnati Historical Society.

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