

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF CRESCENT HILL

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During the 1880's, the suburb of Crescent Hill had just begun to emerge along Frankfort Avenue. Several factors played major roles in the development of Crescent Hill. In the first place, the Louisville, Cincinnati and Lexington Railroad and the Crescent Hill Railway Company's streetcar lined along Payne Street provided suburban commuters with direct access to downtown businesses and offices. Eventually the LC&L stopped for commuters at Crescent Hill Grove at North Hite Avenue, and Reservoir Park near Eastover Court.

Another salient element in Crescent Hill's development was its topography. In contrast with the flat land of much of the central, western, and southern Louisville north of Iroquois Park, the rugged hillsides and deep valleys of Crescent Hill offered the possibility of a suburban lifestyle which seemed to truly Arcadian in character. At the same time, geological attributes which seem to make Crescent Hill a sylvan retreat, removed from the hustle and bustle of the city, also affected the neighborhood's physical configuration. Thus, while subdivisions in most older Louisville neighborhoods were platted according to a fairly rigid gridiron pattern, the vast majority of those in Crescent Hill were laid out in an irregular fashion, including some winding roads, short courts, and dead-end streets while preserving scenic vistas and open spaces. Finally, the development was encouraged by the parklike setting created by the Fair Grounds and the Louisville Water Company's Crescent Hill Reservoir. By 1880, the Fair Grounds had been a Louisville institution for more than a quarter of a century, but the Reservoir and its accompanying gatehouse and general superintendent's house were another matter.

During the mid 1870s it had become apparent that the Water Company had to increase pressure and expand its storage capacity if the growing city's need for water was to be met in the future. In the fall of 1876 the Water Company purchased two tracts of land between Frankfort Avenue and Brownsboro Road. The large tracts, consisting of 100 acres, was purchased from Z. M. Sherley, at a cost of \$60,000 while a smaller tract of 10 acres was acquired from the members of the Arterburn family for \$8,000.

Construction on the reservoir began in April, 1877. When completed two years later the facility included two storage basins with a total capacity in excess of 100 million gallons. Moreover, the new reservoir, built at an elevation of 179 feet above the low water mark of the Ohio River, was 33 feet higher than the existing 10 million gallon facility. This rise in elevation increased water pressure from 35 pounds to 48 pounds per-square inch.

The architectural highlights of the reservoir are the gate-house and general superintendent's house, both of which were designed by Chief Engineer Charles Hermany in a rich High Victorian gothic style. Built in rusticated limestone, and one and a-half story gate-house has rich exterior walls which are pierced by recesses, attenuated windows which are capped by solid-looking, smooth stone hood molds. What makes the gatehouse particularly striking is its skylight, which is composed of steeply-pitched gabled roofs, highlighted by carved stone pitchers and of iron decorative railings which accent the roof crests. Likewise, the one-story superintendent's house is built of rusticated limestone set upon a basement level. The structure includes simple segmentally-arched windows and recessed, rectangular window pairs separated by smooth stone, engaged columns with foliated capitals. The steeply-pitched roof was shingles with slate, and like the gatehouse, the roof crests include pointed, cast-iron railings, which were designed and manufactured by the local firm of F. W. Merz and Company.

Formally designed, beautifully landscaped, and carefully maintained, the Crescent Hill Reservoir attracted community attention from the beginning. Its grassy embankment, topped by a grand promenade of flagstones and a continuous cast iron railing, created the impression of a neat sloping

lawn and attracted Sunday sightseers in droves. Such an attraction was not lost upon land developers, who recognized the reservoir's large open spaces helped to provide and maintain the open, rural character which made suburban living so attractive. Indeed, a long standing tradition suggests that it was the beauty of the reservoir and its setting that provided the name of Crescent Hill. According to the legend, Mrs. Thomas S. Kennedy was driving her carriage through the grounds of the still unfinished reservoir when she observed that the hill and lake where the basins are located formed the shape of a Crescent. The image caught on and before long the name Crescent Hill was in common usage.

But the subdivision process itself, which consisted largely of the inexorable partition by heirs of the original pre-Civil War estates which dotted the area, began much earlier in the 1870's. The initial focus of development was the Fair Grounds. In 1871, John T. Thatcher, through realtor S. S. Meddis, partitions promoted, a sold the tract known as Glenwood, which lay east of Stiltz Avenue between Frankfort Avenue and Hermany Court on land that is today owned by the Louisville Water Company. Contributing to the lands saleability was the fact that it overlooked the Fairgrounds. Depending upon location and degree of improvements, land in Glenwood brought that ranged from \$750 to \$1,000 per acre for some improved lots to \$12,500 for nine and one-half acre tracts of improved land. Approximately four years after Thatcher's Glenwood subdivision was platted, Lewis Lentz laid out his Fairview subdivision on a tract of land north of Frankfort Avenue opposite the Thomas Kennedy estate along either side of Crescent Avenue.

Lentz's Fairview subdivision also ushered in a nine-year moratorium on new land subdivision in Crescent Hill, a hiatus which one historian attributes to the depressing effects of the panic of 1873. Between 1875 and 1884, the only major project was construction of the Crescent Hill Reservoir.

Nevertheless, by 1884 enough people had constructed homes in the area to convince the General Assembly to incorporate the Town of Crescent Hill. The charter authorized certain taxes and improvements, but, as a testimony to the town's limited municipal status, it deprived the trustees of any power to interfere in the operation of the Louisville Water Company or involve itself in the management and conduct of the railroad and streetcar lines within the town's corporate limits. But incorporation did help to create a sense of community spirit and individual responsibility in the growing town. The town hired a night watchman to guard property, but most "crimes" were investigated by residents themselves and the charter mandated that each adult inhabitant participate in volunteer fire services. Schools, churches, and Sunday schools developed quickly, frequently meeting initially in private homes. Permanent buildings would be constructed once funds became available. The first community project was construction of a school, which also served as a weekend social gathering place, as a town hall, and as a church for Methodists and Presbyterians until their own edifices were completed.

Along with the incorporation came a new surge of subdivision development. As if to underscore the changing state of affairs, 1884 witnessed the platting of the first subdivision to carry the name Crescent Hill. (Now considered part of Clifton.) The developer was George K. Speed, and the subdivision was Crescent Hill Subdivision No. 1, an irregularly shaped tract between Brownsboro Toad and Frankfort Avenue. Like numerous other Crescent Hill property owners, Speed named the streets for members of his family, in this case, his children. Thus the tract is bounded on the west by Jane Street, on the east by Ewing Avenue, and is bisected north to south by Keats Avenue. In a manner befitting its shape, the subdivision was platted according to an irregular grind pattern. Most lots measured 50 by 200 feet, and the average lot sold for \$500. Advertisements boasted of the neighborhood's beauty and prestige as well as its picturesque altitude, healthfulness, and favorable transportation connection.

Five (5) years after Speed laid out his subdivision; heirs began to partition Thomas Kennedy's Fairview estate, with Kennedy's Crescent Hill Subdivision being staked out along both sides of Kennedy Court between Frankfort Avenue and present day Grinstead Drive. The following year, S. S.

and Jennie Hite recorded a subdivision called Crescent Hill Park along either side of Hite Avenue north of Frankfort Avenue.

The tempo of growth picked up considerably during the 1890's and continued strongly into the early decades of the twentieth century. Between 1890 and 1917, some 25 new subdivisions were laid out and recorded in Crescent Hill. In 1890, M. E. Galt and T. G. Galt laid out Galt's subdivision in Crescent Hill, located between Peterson Avenue and S. S. Hite's Crescent Hill Park. A major surge of development began the following year, when three (3) new subdivisions were laid out on the south side of Frankfort Avenue between Jane Street on the west and the Kennedy estate on the east. On the western end, A. W. Randolph staked out Raymond's subdivision, which extended from Jane Street to Peterson Avenue between Frankfort Avenue and Grinstead Drive. Two blocks to the east, Valentine and Fredrick Frank platted Valentine Frank's Subdivision which extended along either side of Frank Avenue from Frankfort Avenue almost to Longview Avenue. Somewhat further to the east, Martin and John Faust, along with realtors S. S. Meddia and Charles Southwick, platted Faust's Morning Side Addition, an irregularly shaped tract which stretched along both sides of Bayly Avenue from Frankfort Avenue to Grinstead Drive.

But development in 1891 was not confined to the south side of Frankfort Avenue. The largest single subdivision platted that year was Reservoir Avenue between the reservoir and Fenley Avenue. The developer was the Reservoir Park Company, which appears to have been associated with the Mechanics Trust Company.

The boom continued into 1892, when Jennie E. Speed subdivided Chatsworth, the former estate of manufacturer Joshua B. Speed. This tract included most of the land adjoining Peterson, Ewing, and Calvin Avenues north of Frankfort Avenue. The following year, the Columbia Finance and Trust Company platted Aubindale, a subdivision demarcated generally by Frankfort Avenue on the south, the Fairgrounds on the west, Field Avenue on the north, and Linden on the east. But the creation of Aubindale marked the beginning of another break in Crescent Hill's development, precipitated the time by the panic of 1893 and the severe depression that followed.

Despite the lull in development, Crescent Hill had grown enough since its incorporation that Louisville officials began to look upon the suburb with a longing eye. In 1893, the General Assembly enacted legislation which authorized first class cities to annex surrounding territory, including smaller incorporated towns, unless 75 percent of the citizens of the affected territory could demonstrate that annexation would "materially retard the prosperity of the (annexing) city and of the owners of real estate in and inhabitants of the territory sought to be annexed." The following year, the General Council passed an ordinance to annex Crescent Hill and two other suburbs on the city's fringe. Louisville sought through annexation to enlarge its population and broaden its tax base. But many residents of Crescent Hill and the other satellite towns fought to maintain their independence. For some it was a matter of snobbishness. As one Crescent Hill resident recalled decades later, "We thought we were too good to belong to the city." For others, it was a matter of maintaining home rule and avoiding payment of higher taxes. On the other hand, some newer residents of the community favored annexation out of a desire for better urban services and a belief that being a resident of the growing, larger city was in itself a mark of pride and prestige.

Opponents of annexation apparently out-numbered proponents, however, and in 1894 the town of Crescent Hill filed suit in the Common Pleas Division of Circuit Court, maintaining that 75 percent of the town's residents favored maintenance of the status quo. The petition further questioned Louisville's need for the land because "there is now within the corporate limits a vast territory of land unimproved and many thousands of vacant lots." But the fight against annexation failed, and in June 1894, Crescent Hill dropped its suit and yielded to annexation.

As an economic recovery set in during the late 1890's, Louisville experienced a new wave of suburban land development. Much of the new activity was in Crescent Hill. In 1899, James E. and

Carrie Bell platted J. E. Bell's Subdivision in Crescent Hill located upon a small tract on the south side of Frankfort Avenue between Kennedy's Crescent Hill's Subdivision and Thatcher's Glenwood subdivision, it was the last development platted in the neighborhood during the nineteenth century. Two years later, Nancy Jane Birch began subdividing the farm of George Birch, who had been a prominent livestock dealer at the Bourbon Stockyards. Beginning with the northern half of the tract along Birchwood between Faust's Morning Side Addition and Kennedy's Crescent Hill Subdivision, she replatted the subdivision in 1913 to take in all of the Birch property between Frankfort Avenue and Grinstead Drive.

In 1902, Peter Ellwanger, executor of the will of D. F. Ellwanger, subdivided an irregular tract of his family's land lying along the southern part of Hite Avenue between Frankfort Avenue and Hillside Avenue. The following year, Samuel English resubdivided a section of Lewis Lentz's Fair View Subdivision along English Avenue between Crescent Avenue and Stiltz Avenue north of Frankfort Avenue and Lexington Road. Four (4) years later, surveyor Ben Ford, Fred Diefenbach, Jr., and Hy Tobe added a second section immediately to the south along Richard Avenue.

Only one subdivision was laid out in Crescent Hill during 1906, and it was nothing more than a resubdivision of a section of Keats Avenue in Raymond's Subdivision of 1891. The subdivider was J. H. G. Wallbaun. But, in 1907, three (3) new subdivisions were laid out, besides the addition to Inglenook. The largest of the three was Blue Grass Addition, developed by realtor Charles M. Phillips and located along either side of Pennsylvania Avenue between Brownsboro Road and Frankfort Avenue. Capitalizing upon its distant suburban, Phillips called the Blue Grass Addition "The Crown of Crescent Hill, and advertised as the place where one could build a "modern Bungalow." Prices, he added, were "so low up here . . . that you can buy enough ground to spread out and have a garden, fruit trees and chickens, etc., etc." The year 1907 also witnessed the initiation of Cherokee Heights, one of the first subdivisions developed in Crescent Hill by a land company. Developed by the Cherokee Heights Land Company, this small tract is located on the north side of Lexington Road between Stiltz Avenue and Cherry Lane.

The smallest, but possibly most heavily advertised development of 1907 was Eastover Park, a one-block tract bounded by Frankfort Avenue, Sacred Heart Lane, Gardiner Avenue and Crestwood Avenue. Owned by A. McVaw, the subdivision was developed by realtor Clarence Gardiner. In a 1908 advertisement, Gardiner and Company, described Eastover Park as:

The expression of a conceit – an effort to prove a theory. It is the work of a man who insists that beauty is by no means the exclusive possession of the rich, who believes that we can have beautiful homes for the same money we are spending for ugly, commonplace houses, and that houses of good architecture . . . hold their value permanently if well-placed in a proper environment, for the effect of the most beautiful house is lost if placed upon a crowded lot in a narrow street.

To attract the middle-class buyer to Eastover Park, Gardiner advertised a broad boulevard guarded by a classis gateway and lined by concrete gutters, curbs and sidewalks: colonial, patio, and bungalow type homes designed by such local architects as Arthur R. Smith; deep lots and 95 foot setbacks; and payment terms that were better than rent.

New subdivisions were laid out on an almost annual basis until 1916, although no single year witnessed so many new projects as 1907. Among these new subdivisions were several developed by professional land companies. In 1908, Crescent Hill reached its southern-most point when the Eastern Realty Company, headed by banker Atilla Cox, platted a subdivision called Eastleigh. Located on a scenic track that lay between Grinstead Drive and Lexington Road, Eastleigh provided a bridge which united Crescent Hill with the northern edge of Cherokee Park. But the highlight of Eastleigh is its sight plan. Apparently in an attempt to treat the land as sensitively as possible, the developers took

advantage of the tract's hills and ravines to lay out such narrow winding ways as Cross Hill, Top Hill, and Foot Hill roads.

In 1909, the Cherokee Heights Land Company platted Hill Crest, its second Crescent Hill Subdivision, which was laid out along Hill Crest Avenue between Lenz's Subdivision of Air View and Blue Grass Manor. The following year, Harry and Eliza Dumesnil recorded the Dumesnil and Rowland Subdivision, bound by Frankfort, Peterson and Galt Avenues and Grinstead Drive. In 1910, George Stiliz, president of Stiliz Realty, developed Stiliz Subdivision, one of the period's largest such enterprises, upon a tract of family land bounded today by Stiliz Avenue, Grinstead Drive, Lexington Road and the grounds of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. The only subdivision recorded in the neighborhood between 1911 and 1915 was Nancy Jane Birch's 1913 resubdivision of Birchwood. But in 1915, two more very small tracts were laid out – Shippen's Subdivision by E.S. and Ada Shippen, between Hollywood Trail and Field Avenue west of Birchwood Avenue, and Weisser Addition, by F.D. Weisser, near the southwest corner of the Intersection of Frankfort Avenue and Cannons Lane. The last activity in Crescent Hill was Ambrose and Annie E. Burner's dedication of several streets which overlapped the southern portions of Faust's Morning Side Addition and Ellwanger's Subdivision.

Although most of the land available for residential development in Crescent Hill had been subdivided by 1917, more than a dozen additional subdivisions were recorded during the interwar period. Most were small and several were merely replattings of older subdivisions. But a handful of new subdivisions deserve note. Between 1921 and 1927, three new subdivisions – Hollywood in 1921, Ridge-Dale in 1912 and Idlewylde in 1927 – filled in most of the available space along Brownsboro Road between Ewing and Birchwood Avenues. In 1921, the Wheeler Company, Inc., headed by Blakemore Wheeler, platted the Upland Field "Cherokee" subdivision between Eastleigh and the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary campus. Finally, the ten-year period between 1922 and 1932 saw the creation of four small subdivisions along the south side of Frankfort Avenue between Eastover Park and Cannons Lane. After 1932, as a consequence of the depression in the housing industry and the general unavailability of undeveloped land, not a single subdivision was laid out in Crescent Hill between Jane Street on the west and Fenley Avenue and Cannons Lane on the east.

In 1901, the president of the Crescent Hill Improvement Club asked realtor Clarence Gardiner to explain why he operated in Crescent Hill. In his response, Gardiner placed appropriate stress upon such technical innovations as the electric streetcar, which made suburban land more valuable and suburban living more accessible to the central city. But the main purpose of his statement was to underscore he Crescent Hill's true uniqueness:

Crescent Hill stands alone in this regard – it is our only suburban district, and it will remain suburban. Crescent Hill, for the most part, is laid out on the village plan, with wide streets and big yards, with the tendency to open new streets even wider than the old, until the district has taken on a character so thoroughly suburban that no amount of increased population can ever change the suburban atmosphere of the place, and with the increasing demand for room, and yet more room, that comes with education in the better things of life, Crescent Hill will continue to grow in popularity and value, for it is the only suburb of today that is not the city of tomorrow, - its suburban character is too firmly fixed to ever be changes, - the family seeking the joys of the country with the conveniences of the city has nowhere else to go.

Nearly half a century later, local journalist, Grady Clay, noted quite logically that most of Gardiner's praise for Crescent Hill "sounds like optimistic poppycock today." By the late 1950s, Clay noted, Crescent Hill had indeed become "engulfed by Louisville." It was "no longer a separate suburb, but an old city neighborhood," with many of the attendant features that label frequently connotes – closely built homes, larges houses which had been converted to apartments, and nearly complete turnover in population since World War II. And yet, with a degree of chauvinism befitting a resident of the

neighborhood of which he was writing, Clay demonstrated that Crescent Hill had indeed maintained a large measure of the uniqueness and stability of which Gardiner had spoken 48 years earlier.

Central to that uniqueness was, of course, the influence of Crescent Hill's terrain, which already has been discussed at some length. Equally important is the variety of housing styles which is found in the neighborhood. In addition to the remaining antebellum mansions are several large homes built by affluent Crescent Hill residents after the Civil War. Most notable are the Peterson and Field houses. Located at 301 South Peterson Avenue, the former structure was built about 1870 for tobacco merchant Joseph Peterson. The design, attributed to the distinguished Louisville architect Henry Whitestone, combines the blockiness and severity of the pre-Civil War Greek Revival mode with the much more timely features of the Italianate style. Set upon a limestone foundation, the two-story brick structure has the asymmetrical massing and central tower characteristic of the Italian villa style, along with such other appropriate features as bracketed cornice and tall, segmental-arched windows topped with cast-iron hoods. As if to say it is a Louisville home, each window hood has a modified fleur-de-lis motif in the center. Of similar stature is the Judge Emmet Field House, located at 2909 Field Avenue. Built around 1870 and purchased by Judge Field in 1886, the two-story country villa also has strong Italianate features such as bracketed cornice, a low-gabled central hall, quoined corners, and window pediment which are broken and straightened at each end.

But more important than such gems as the Peterson and Field houses in shaping the residential character of Crescent Hill is the variety of solid middle and working class homes which line the neighborhood's streets and courts. Unlike many other Louisville neighborhoods, there are very few streets in Crescent Hill where one is confronted with block after block of homes having similar or even identical massing and materials. The vast majority of houses in the neighborhood are of frame construction, no doubt because wood was cheaper than brick or stone, but the neighborhood also has its share of brick, stone, and stucco homes. Likewise, most streets have a variety of styles, mixed in Queen Anne and other Victorian styles with shotgun cottages, bungalows, and historical revival homes. The result, especially when combined with the neighborhood's topography, is a strong sense of exuberance and vitality. This is all the more striking when one realizes that houses in Crescent Hill are devoid of the sumptuous ornamentation frequently found on structures in Old Louisville and Cherokee Triangle.

Another vital factor in preserving Crescent Hills' uniqueness is the continued presence of large institutions, which have helped to maintain stability and provide green space. At one time, Crescent Hill was the site of three large orphanages, two of which still remain. Woodcock Hall, built by the Episcopal Church about 1870 and located on Crestwood Avenue at the southwest corner of Crabbs Lane and Gardiner Avenue, operated as a home for boys until 1955, the structure was sold in 1961 to the Ursuline Order for use as a dormitory by Ursuline College.

The second orphanage to locate in Crescent Hill, where it remains today, was St. Joseph's Catholic Orphan's Home. Founded in 1849 by German Catholics, the first home operated in the old Jefferson Seminary at Eighth and Grayson (Cedar) streets. During the mid-1850s, it moved into the large Colonial style home of Colonel Jason Rogers at the corner of Jackson Street and Fehr Avenue near St. Boniface Church. There the institution remained, in quarters later enlarged, until 1885, when it moved to its present location on the north side of Frankfort Avenue at Crescent Avenue on part of the old Fairgrounds land. Architects for the stately, two-story building were Cornelius Curtin, William Redin, and Charles D. Meyer.

Finally, in 1927, the Masonic Widows and Orphan's Home of Kentucky moved into its new quarters, located on a 126-acre tract on the north side of Frankfort Avenue between Fenley Avenue and Sprite Road. Organized in 1867, the institution had operated since 1871 in quarters located on the east side of Second Street between Bloom and Avery Streets, south of the central business district. By World War I, the existing facilities had become inadequate. In 1919, the Board of Directors initiated a Million Dollar Committee to raise funds necessary to build a new facility. By 1921, over \$900,000 had been

subscribed. The following year, the directors commissioned the Louisville architectural firm of Joseph and Joseph to begin drawing plans for the institution's new buildings including a school an auditorium, administration building, including a school and dormitory, infirmary, industrial plant, kitchen and dining room space, and children's dormitories. By late 1923, the Million Dollar fund had been oversubscribed, and more than half a million dollars had been collected. The cornerstone was laid in October 1925 and the new home was dedicated in October 1927.

Crescent Hill also is the locus of important educational institutions. Among these, in addition to the area's numerous public and parochial schools, is the Southern Theological Seminary, and the former Ursuline College, now headquarters of several of the order's other educational programs. Organized in 1857, Southern Seminary operated in Greenville, South Carolina for two decades. In 1877, it moved to Louisville, and developed a campus of four buildings at Fifth and Broadway. But during the early twentieth century the noise and bustle which accompanied the movement of the city's main business area toward Broadway had begun to intrude upon the serenity of academic inquiry. By 1910 the trustees had begun to search for a setting more conducive to educational life. But it was not until 1921 that they purchased a 53-acre tract on Lexington Road in Crescent Hill. Ground was broken in 1923 for Norton Hall, the main administration and academic building. Two years later, construction began on Mullins Hall, a men's dormitory. Finally, in March 1926, the seminary abandoned its downtown campus and moved into its \$2 million Crescent Hill facilities

One of the most distinguishing architectural sites in eastern Louisville, the Seminary campus was planned and its initial buildings were designed in the Neo-Colonial style by architect Arthur Loomis, in association with the prominent New York firms of James Gamble Rogers. Built during the era in which Neo-Colonial architecture was particularly popular, Southern Seminary takes on added significance because of its critical praise. Architectural historian, Rexford, Newcome, for example, found the institution's red brick buildings "particularly pleasing" and suggested that Norton Hall, "with its Adamesque portico and terraced tower, is eminently characteristics" of the Federal style.

Ursuline College was established during the late 1930s by the Ursuline order of Roman Catholic nuns, which already operated its Mother House and Sacred Heart Academy, a preparatory school for girls, on the grounds between Stilz Avenue and Cannons Lane east of Southern Seminary. In 1940, the sisters broke ground for Brescia Hall, a science facility, which also housed classrooms and administrative offices. Designed and executed in the Colonial style by Louisville architect Walter Wagner, Brescia Hall was the first of several academic dormitory buildings which would be erected upon the order's Sylvan campus. Ursuline College continued to operate at the Lexington Road Campus until 1968 when it merged with Bellarmine College and eventually moved all its operations to the latter institution's campus on Norris Place. The Ursuline Order continues to operate its other educational and religious activities at the Lexington Road Campus.

For all its variety, Crescent Hill has a sense of cohesion. It has the kind of uniform mix of housing styles and the central artery, such as Frankfort Avenue, which together gave Crescent Hill a sense of unity in the midst of variety and vitality.