

A Brief History of North College Hill, Ohio

The history of North College Hill and its progression from farm community to village to city has its roots in the earliest days of the United States and the beginning of the country's westward expansion across North America. The mostly urban character of twenty-first century NCH has evolved from a quiet, rural community first settled soon after the end of the American Revolution. Over the decades, NCH residents have included a pair of highly acclaimed poets, a prominent national religious leader and reformer, and the founders of the first home for blind women in Ohio.¹

Early Settlement

One of the first easterners to survey the area was John Cleves Symmes, a judge and former Congressman from New Jersey, after whom Symmes Township is named. In the 1780s, Symmes became interested in the opportunity provided by a series of land ordinances, which proposed that sections of the midwest, including what is now Ohio, should be sold to raise funds for the United States government.² After a visit to examine the land in 1787, Symmes returned east and received tentative permission from the new Federal government to purchase a section of land between the Little Miami and Great Miami Rivers. This tract became known as the “Symmes Purchase” or “Miami Purchase” and extended south to the Ohio River. It contained the Losantiville settlement on the Ohio River, which became Cincinnati,³ as well as the settlements of Columbia and North Bend, which grew rapidly as European pioneers migrated across the midwest.

Several of those pioneers are buried in the LaBoyteaux-Cary cemetery, North College Hill's oldest landmark, on the northwest corner of Galbraith Road and Hamilton Avenue. The cemetery was established in approximately 1806 and includes the graves of two Revolutionary War veterans and several members of the Cary family. The last burial in the cemetery was in 1860.⁴

Cary Family

In 1813-14, William Cary, having migrated from New Hampshire to Cincinnati in 1802,⁵ purchased 491 acres north of Cincinnati along what is now Hamilton Avenue. Cary built a log cabin and moved his family to this “wilderness,” then known as Mill Creek Township.⁶ The area became a wealthy suburb called Pleasant Hill, but later adopted the name College Hill because of several schools that were established there in the nineteenth century: Cary's Academy for Boys was established in 1832 and soon became Farmers College. It was later named Belmont College and still later taken over by the Ohio Military Institute. Also, the Ohio Female College operated in the area from 1849 to 1873.⁷

Soon after, William Cary purchased an additional 75 acres north of North Bend Road adjacent to his original tract, and sold part of it to his nephew Robert Cary. Robert initially erected a small frame house for his family, then in 1832, built the white, brick house now known as Cary Cottage.⁸ Robert Cary and his wife Elizabeth raised nine children, two of whom, Alice and Phoebe, became



Gravestone of Revolutionary soldier Henry Deats in LaBoyteaux-Cary Cemetery

well-known poetesses and writers. Both girls began having their poems published as teenagers, and they eventually counted among their admirers Massachusetts poet and abolitionist John Greenleaf Whittier, *New York Tribune* newspaper editor Horace Greeley, and author Edgar Allan Poe, who pronounced Alice Cary's *Pictures of Memory*, "one of the most musically perfect lyrics in the English language."⁹



Cary Cottage

Cary Cottage became the first home for blind women in Ohio through the work of the Trader sisters, Florence and Georgia, who was blind. In 1903 the Cary house and the land surrounding it were purchased by William Procter, grandson of the Procter & Gamble co-founder, in order to give them in trust to the Traders. The sisters used the land to establish Clovernook and provide employment to visually impaired women as a source of dignity and direction. Today, the Clovernook Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired offers instruction, employment, community living and low vision services for men and women, and runs three manufacturing departments, including one of the world's largest volume producers of Braille publications.¹⁰

Religious and Legal Reformers

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, North College Hill was the home of Dr. Isaac Mayer Wise, who has been called “the most prominent Jew of his time in the United States”¹¹ for his influence as one of the early leaders of Reform Judaism in America. The son of a rabbi, Wise became a rabbi himself in Bohemia (now part of the Czech Republic) two years before moving to Albany, New York in 1846 in pursuit of religious freedom. In 1854 Wise accepted an appointment to serve as the rabbi of the Reform congregation Beth Eichim in Cincinnati and remained in that position until his death in 1900.¹² Following Wise's death in 1900, the farm was the home of his daughter and granddaughter, respectively, until 1968.

In 1861 Wise and his wife Therese bought a 40-acre farm near the current intersection of Goodman and Hamilton Avenues and raised a family of ten children. The farm is reputed to have given Dr. Wise great delight since land ownership was extremely uncommon among Jews in Europe.¹³ Known as an organizer and a uniter of American Jews, Wise played a huge role in the establishment of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and the Central Conference of American Rabbis. He also served as president and teacher at the first Jewish seminary in the United States – Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati.¹⁴



Plaque on the site of the Isaac Wise Farm on Goodman Avenue

North College Hill's mayor attracted national attention for a very different reason in the 1920s. From 1920 to 1933 the prohibition of the manufacture, sale and transportation of alcohol in the United States profoundly affected the life of the nation. Many American towns, including North College Hill, saw frequent raids during this time to enforce “dry laws.” The fines that were levied as a result

became a substantial source of income for many municipalities and their officials. In 1925 the Mayor of North College Hill was involved in a prohibition case that rose to national significance and continues to have an impact on legal matters today. The case started in 1925 when North College Hill Mayor A. R. Pugh led a raid on the home of White Oak resident Ed Tumeley and charged him with alcohol possession in violation of the Ohio prohibition law.¹⁵ When Tumeley appeared in court, the prosecutor was...Mayor Pugh. And the judge? Also Mayor Pugh! This arrangement allowed Pugh to benefit from his own decisions since convictions rewarded Pugh with a fee and acquittals did not.¹⁶ Tumeley claimed that this denied the defendant a fair hearing and moved for dismissal. Pugh denied the motion and fined Tumeley \$100 from which he received a fee of \$12 for acting as judge.

The case was appealed and eventually made it all the way to the United States Supreme Court, which was then headed by Cincinnati-born Chief Justice William Howard Taft. When the court issued its decision in Tumeley's favor on March 7, 1927¹⁷, the case provided one of the first breakthroughs in the repeal of prohibition by helping to strike down a municipal system whose self-interest denied citizens their right to the “due process of law” guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment.¹⁸ The court's decision in this case continues to provide precedent today in many cases involving judicial impartiality.¹⁹



Development of a Community

Through the nineteenth century, as College Hill to the south and Mt. Healthy to the north matured into towns, the area that was to become North College Hill remained largely farmland. Beginning in 1905, saw mill owner John Meyer used his surplus lumber to build a subdivision of small homes north of Galbraith Road and west of Hamilton Avenue and called it Meyerville. Within the next ten years, two other groups of homes – Clovernook, east of Hamilton Avenue, and Sunshine, south of Galbraith and west of Hamilton – were started. The three subdivisions, with a total of about 500 residents, were incorporated as the village of North College Hill in 1916.²⁰ John E. Williamson was elected the village's first mayor and took the oath of office on June 24, 1916 along with the members of the first council.

As the automobile stretched commuting distances, the village's affordable housing attracted a growing population, and it increased from about 1,100 to 4,100 residents during the 1920s. In 1941, the village incorporated as a city and continued to grow until the population stabilized at its peak of around 12,000 by 1960.²¹ A few homes were removed for the completion of Ronald Reagan Cross County Highway in 1997 and as of the 2000 census, the City's population was 10,082.²²

Twenty-first century North College Hill is a diverse community with its own police department, fire department, recreation department and school system. The City's long-standing reputation for housing value was affirmed in 2007 by a national survey when *Money* magazine rated it one of the top towns in the United States “where homes are affordable.”²³ Remarkably, in late 2010, *Bloomberg Business Week* magazine again called national attention to North College Hill by calling it “the best place in Ohio to raise kids.”²⁴

In 2007, the City adopted a charter form of government which allows municipal officials more flexibility and increased local autonomy.

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