

PART TWO

2-1 HISTORY OF LAKEWOOD

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THE EARLY YEARS

Different types of transportation had important roles in the development of Lakewood. Roads, railroads, and streetcars have all left their imprint on the city. This interplay over almost two centuries has created the Lakewood we see today, including the patterns of buildings.

Lakewood, the first suburb west of Cleveland on the shores of Lake Erie, began simply in 1805 as Township 7, Range 14 of the Connecticut Western Reserve. It was a wooded wilderness through which cut the old Huron Post Road, which ran from Buffalo to Detroit. In 1819, a small group of eighteen families living in the area of present-day Lakewood, Rocky River, and part of Cleveland's West Park neighborhood, named the growing community Rockport Township. By 1871 the Lakewood area was known as East Rockport. A community of farms, orchards, and vineyards prospered as people came from New England and New York, and immigrants arrived from England, Germany, and later, Eastern Europe. In 1889, East Rockport, with 400 residents, separated from the Township and became the hamlet of Lakewood. Settlement accelerated rapidly, with Lakewood becoming a Village with 3,500 residents in 1903. City status, with 12,000 residents, came just eight years later. By 1930, the population of Lakewood was 70,509.

ROADS AND TRANSPORTATION

Roads were the earliest influence on development in Lakewood. The Rockport Plank Road Company improved the old Detroit Road in 1848, opening a toll road from present-day West 25th Street in Cleveland to five miles west of the Rocky River. It continued operating as a toll road until 1901.

A series of bridges carrying Detroit Avenue over the Rocky River Valley, the first of which was built in 1821, improved commerce between Cleveland and the emerging communities to its west. An 1874 atlas of Cuyahoga County shows present-day main roads such as Detroit Avenue, Madison Avenue, Franklin Boulevard, Hilliard Road, Warren Road, and Riverside Drive, as well as several other streets.

The Rocky River Railroad was organized in 1869 by speculators as an excursion line to bring Clevelanders to the resort area they developed at the mouth of the Rocky River. Financially unsuccessful as a pleasure and amusement venture, the line was sold to the Nickel Plate Railroad in 1881. The railroad line still exists today, running in an east-west direction north of Detroit Avenue.

History of Lakewood, continued

The type of transportation most significant to the growth of Lakewood was the streetcar system. The Detroit Avenue line opened in 1893, followed by the Clifton Boulevard line in 1903, and finally the Madison Avenue line in 1916. As the early farms were subdivided and real estate speculators advertised Lakewood's ideal natural setting by Lake Erie, neighborhoods appeared adjacent to the streetcar lines. An interurban rail system connected Lakewood with communities farther west.

THE FIVE LANDSCAPES OF LAKEWOOD

All of these changes created present day Lakewood. In their book, *Lakewood: The First Hundred Years*, Jim and Susan Borchert describe five specific landscapes in Lakewood.

Urban Village - This neighborhood, along Madison Avenue from West 117th Street to Madison Park, is often referred to as Bird's Nest. A subsidiary of National Carbon laid out over 400 lots in 1894 as a way to attract workers to the nearby factory, which did not have a streetcar connection. Mainly Eastern European immigrants built a distinctive and densely packed neighborhood of houses, shops, and churches.

Clifton Park and Lakefront Estates - Unable to succeed as a resort area at the mouth of the Rocky River, the area was developed as an exclusive residential district beginning in the late 1890's. Clifton Park was designed to have a park-like setting with curving streets, which contrasts to the grid pattern of the rest of Lakewood. The neighborhood became home to many of Greater Cleveland's leading industrialists and professionals.

Along Lake Avenue, estates stretched from the north side of the street to Lake Erie, with large houses situated close to the water. Today, only a few of the Lake Avenue estates remain.

Middle Lakewood - These are the familiar streets of single-family and two-family homes in Lakewood, almost always laid out in a grid pattern, built from the 1890's through the 1920's. These lots were the result of subdividing larger farms and woods, with a street added to provide access, and a grid created the most lots. Builders sometimes constructed speculative housing, often with several similar or identical houses near each other. In other cases, individuals purchased a lot and contracted with a builder. Because of the patchwork development pattern over several decades and by many people, features such as the street width, lot size, tree lawn depth, and distance from the curb to the front porch often vary, often from street-to-street.

Apartment Houses and Cliff Dwellers - Apartment buildings, intended for singles, newly married couples, and small families, were closely linked to the streetcar lines. By 1930, Lakewood had about 200 apartment buildings. As the streetcar lines opened, most apartments were built along Detroit and Madison Avenues, or around the corner on side streets. Apartments either occupied the entire building or the floor above stores. In addition, several clusters of larger apartment buildings were constructed during the 1910's and 1920's at the east end of Clifton Boulevard, Lake Avenue, and Edgewater Drive, as well as the areas around the intersections of Clifton Boulevard/Warren Road and Lake Avenue/Cook Avenue.

History of Lakewood, continued

Commercial Landscapes - As the main road through Rockport Township, Detroit Avenue has always been a center of activity. A few 19th century houses remain today, however the streetcar lines ensured that Detroit and Madison Avenues would become the focal point of commerce and civic life. Hundreds of merchants provided daily necessities to a population on-foot in an era before modern refrigerators and widespread automobile use. The buildings included many two- and three-story structures with first floor shops and apartments or offices above, as well as movie theaters, dance halls, fraternal lodges, municipal offices, and numerous churches. With their focus to the streetcar line, buildings were located close to the sidewalk. West 117th Street, on both the Lakewood and Cleveland sides, was also a major commercial street, however, most of the early 20th century buildings have been demolished.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE AUTOMOBILE

By mid-century, the popularity of the automobile resulted in the decline of urban rail systems. Shortly after the Clifton Boulevard line ended service in 1947, the road was widened from two lanes to six lanes. The last streetcar in Lakewood traveled the Madison Avenue line in 1954.

The popularity of the automobile has also caused other changes to development patterns in Lakewood. The original early 20th century commercial areas filled with small shops did not need parking because residents walked or used streetcars. Today, changes in retailing such as shopping centers and large supermarkets, as well as convenience demanded by many customers, means that parking areas have been incorporated into commercial areas. In residential areas, the number of vehicles requiring off-street or on-street parking spaces has increased substantially over the years.



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