



Silver Hills
Historical Society

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THE CLARION

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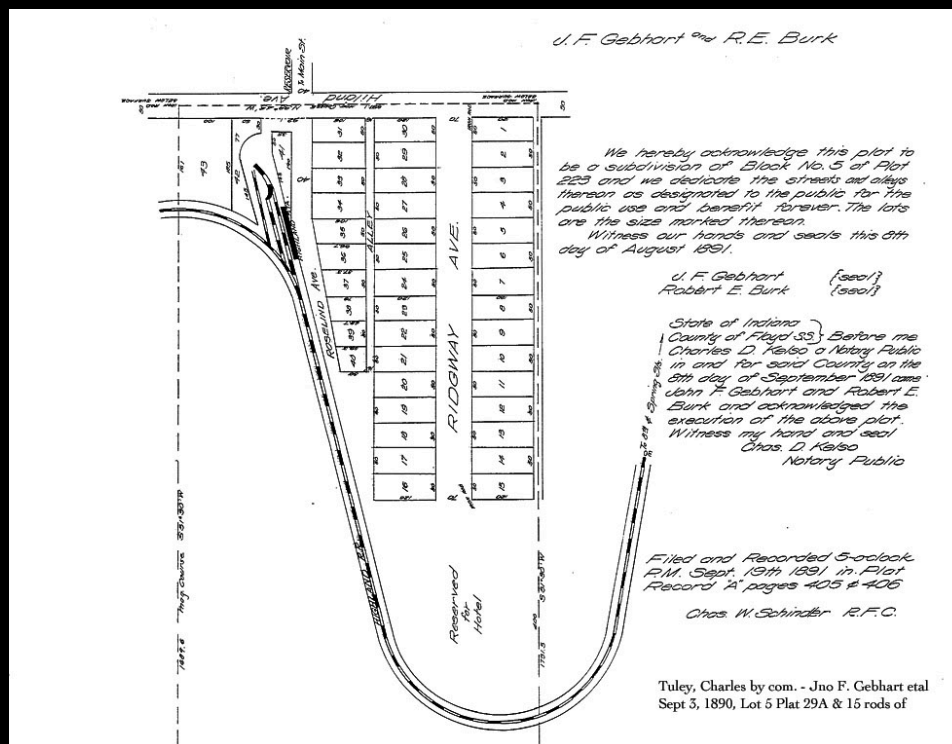
Special
Recognition



Photo Courtesy Mrs. Vernon Bundy

RIDGEWAY

AN HISTORIC EVENT



INSPIRATION

On July 26, 1879 an article was published in the Saturday evening edition of the New Albany Ledger-Standard newspaper titled: **HANDY, HILLTOP HOTELS And a Few Reasons Why New Albany Could be Made a Popular Summer Resort**. There is no by-line identifying the author of the story. Josiah Gwin was the owner and editor of the newspaper. He and his family built a beautiful home on Caney Knob (Silver Hills) in 1863. The Gwins lived at the east end of Knob Avenue, now Silver Hills Lane. The name of the estate was Oakland Heights. It's likely Josiah wrote the article himself. He writes, "It is not until recently that the Ledger-Standard and some of the Louisville papers have been giving publicity to the fact that this is the best location for summer hotels in the whole country. One of the shrewdest business men of this city, who is wealthy, for several years has almost been persuaded to purchase ground on the knob and test the hilltop hotel project that has been discussed." The author was referring to John Frederic Gebhart. John was the founder of the New Albany Water Works Company (Silver Hills reservoirs), president of the New Albany Railway street car line, and president of the New Albany Woolen Mills located on Vincennes Street. He would later establish the New Highland Railway Silver Hills trolley car line.

Five days later, on July 31, 1879, a second story appeared in the Ledger-Standard titled, **Knobs, Inclined Plane, Hotels, Parks Etc**. The author writes, "The most has been said of Hilltop Hotels, but this is the only scheme that would coin money for the man who would take hold of the matter. No better place could be pointed out anywhere in this section of the country, more suitable for parks, drives and all classes of summer resorts peculiar to such elevated positions. Why, inside of a year, after the construction of a first-class hotel on one of our hills, a park, garden, &c., laid out, the whole country would be ringing with praise that would give New Albany a reputation all over the country. A few thousand dollars would be sufficient to purchase grounds for a park and construct an **inclined plane railroad**." The article goes on to say, "then another party could easily be found to erect a hotel suitable for the purpose".

In 1879 the idea of developing the knob west of the city was laid out including the construction of an inclined railway, what would become the Highland Railway trolley car line. Eleven years later, in 1891, the idea of building homes, parks etc. became a reality.

RIDGEWAY

Ridgeway was developed in 1891 by John F. Gebhart And Robert E. Burk. Robert owned a real estate company in New Albany. The land was originally part of the Mary C. Tuley property, a prenuptial gift from her first husband, Charles Paxson, when they were married in 1823. Charles died within a year of the marriage. A few years later, Mary married Preston Floyd Tuley. In 1863 she divided the property amongst her children. Charles Paxson Tuley bought the section of land where Ridgeway was located. He sold the land to Gebhart and Burk on Sept 3, 1890. On the 8th of August 1891, plat 383 with 43 lots was recorded, establishing Ridgeway Avenue. The property at the west end of the Avenue was "**Reserved for Hotel**". In May of 1892 George Tuley, George Philip Helfrick, and John Gebhart organized the Silver Hills Land Company to manage the sale of the property. Robert and John sold one half of all lots in plat 383 to the Company.



*Photograph Courtesy
Silver Hills Historical Society*

THE NAME

The name Ridgeway possibly came from the Avenue's location on the knob. At the west end of Ridgeway, the terrain steeply slopes down toward Corydon Pike. The hills beyond are clearly visible as seen in the picture above. This would give one the sense they were standing on a ridge. The first house to be built on Ridgeway was constructed in 1891 by Milton C. Pritchett. His daughter, Lois is standing to the right wearing a hat (ca.1892).

INCLINED RAILWAY, PARKS AND HOTEL

In 1888 the Silver Heights Holiness Association was founded and the Silver Heights campgrounds was established on the west side of the knob. Once a year, thousands of people flocked to the campgrounds for two weeks to attend the religious retreat. They made their way up the hill by way of horse drawn wagons from Cherry Street, Market Street Hill Road and the newly constructed Burk Avenue (Camp Avenue). The Holiness Association annual meetings and the thousands who attended, made it possible for an inclined railway system to be constructed on the knob. John F. Gebhart and investors founded the New Albany Highland Railway in 1890. The trolley car line began operation in May of 1891. The terminal was located on the north side of Ridgeway, which was nothing more than a wooden platform. The track continued until it reached the campgrounds. Just north of the terminal, the Highland Railway Company developed a park (Scenic Park). At the west end of Ridgeway, property was set aside for the construction of a hotel. The park was eventually closed and the property was sold. The hotel was never built.

THE FIRST HOMES AND ARCHITECTURE



1891 - Milton C. Pritchett, a graduate of the Cincinnati University School of Design, was president of the New Albany Design School when he bought lots 16 and 17 on Ridgeway. There he built a small, modest home for his wife, Mary, and his daughter, Ethel Lois. Mary was also a graduate of the Cincinnati School of Design. It is believed Milton was the architect of the first five houses built on the Avenue. Lois lived in the house until 1951 when it was sold. It was torn down in 1966 and replaced the house standing there today.

Photo Courtesy Silver Hills Historical



1892 - Rebecca J. Pierce, widowed, bought lot 9. Wesley Pierce, Rebecca's husband, died in 1885. He was a carpenter by trade. Together they had five children. The youngest was Harry Pierce. In 1909, Harry and his wife, Gertrude, purchased the lovely home built by William P. Lewis on Riddle Road. Tragically, the Pierce home on Ridgeway was destroyed by fire.

Photo left and below courtesy Stuart B. Wrege Indiana History Room – New Albany-Floyd County Public Library



1897 – Claude L. Balthis and his wife, Margaret Bowling Balthis, purchased lots 5 and 6 and built a two-story house accented with a tower above the front porch. Claude was born in Marengo, Indiana in 1869. He had a distinguished career in banking starting out as Secretary and Treasurer of the Mutual Trust and Deposit Company. He was elected president in 1914. Claude eventually left banking, and became president of the Universal Car Company. They sold the house in 1913 and moved to Louisville. The house was recently razed and rebuilt.



1899 – Charles D. Kelso and his wife, Mary, bought lots 2, 3 and 4 at the corner of Highland and Ridgeway from C. W. Schindler. Charles and his father, James Kelso, were prominent lawyers in New Albany. C. W. Schindler bought the property in 1897. It's not certain if he built the house. He is not listed in the city directory as ever living on Silver Hills. Based on this, it is assumed that Charles built the lovely home.

Photo Courtesy Mrs. Vernon Bundy



1897 – Ira Strunk purchased property on Ridgeway and built a charming Victorian, Queen Ann style house with a large wrap-around porch and exquisite conical tower. It is not certain he ever lived in the house but between 1897 to 1900 he was listed in the New Albany City directory living on Silver Hills. The house has been home to many families who were either renters or owners. It is the only house on the Avenue that retains its original architecture.

Photo Courtesy Stuart B. Wrege Indiana History Room – New Albany-Floyd County Public Library

American Victorian Architecture 1840 – 1900 - The Queen Ann style of architecture was the choice of design in many of the homes on Ridgeway. Modest in detail, the use of brackets, spindles, and scrollwork were not incorporated, and instead, a tower or turrets that projected from the second floor were added into the design. They were often capped with a conical, tent or domed structure with a copper finial.

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

Professor Ira Strunk, founder of the New Albany Business College, shot Charles Hoover in on July 27, 1886. The account of the brutal murder was well documented. Ira was arrested, charged, tried, and found not guilty by reason of insanity. Several days after the trial, a jury concluded Ira was sane, and he was set free. His wife, Myra, left New Albany with their children, Florence and Eva, and moved back with family in Western Pennsylvania. She and the children never returned to New Albany. In 1888 the marriage ended in divorce.

Ira came to New Albany from Pennsylvania in 1874, and established the New Albany Business College. The college had become well established within a few years, and Ira and Myra settled down to raise a family.

Ira committed the crime reportedly in a fit of rage over rumors his wife was keeping company with a close family friend, Charles Hoover. Ira had invested in orange groves in Florida and California, which demanded his time away from home. Myra and Charles had been close family friends. Aside from gossip, there was no evidence they had been intimately involved. At the trial, an insanity plea was entered. In the end, a jury of 12 men took only minutes to deliberate, and found Ira not guilty.



Ira Strunk



*Photograph Courtesy the Stuart B. Wrege Indiana
History Room - New Albany-Floyd County Public Library
Stoy-Streepey Collection*

Ira remained in New Albany where he continued his success at the Business College. Shortly after the development of Ridgeway, Ira began to invest in property on the Avenue. On July 10, 1897, he purchased lots 22, 23 and 24 from the Peoples Building and Loan. On July 25, 1901, he bought lots 29, 30, 31 and 32, again from the Peoples Building & Loan. On August 15, 1902, he bought lots 7, 8, 11 and 12 across the street. Shortly after buying lots 22, 23 and 24, Ira built a lovely three story Queen Ann-Victorian home. It is believed Milton Pritchett was the architect. The story behind the house was he built the home to entice his wife and two daughters to return to New Albany. If he indeed lived there, he did so for only a few years. The New Albany City Directory listed his residence on Silver Hills from 1897 to 1900. From then on Ira rented the property until he sold the house to the Rowe family in 1920. The Strunk house is the only home on Ridgeway today which still retains its original architecture.

SPECIAL RECOGNITION

The Historical Society especially wants to thank Julie Janes for graciously opening her house for a tour and hosting the members' reception at the Ridgeway Historical Event. For a brief moment, we could step back into time and revisit the Avenue as it was in 1897. We also want to pay special tribute to Nancy and George Everbach for again sponsoring the hor d'oeuvres and refreshments from Lilly's of Louisville. It takes a team effort to organize and host an historical event. The Historical Society wants to thank all of those who volunteered their time to welcome our guests and help guide them down the Avenue to experience 125 years of history.