



The Stockbridge in Cleveland has been sitting proudly on Euclid since the days of Millionaires' Row

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ELEGANT CLEVELAND / *This series looks back at the finest elements of Cleveland's stylish history, as shown in its people, architecture, fashion and other cultural touchstones.*

Across the street from the gleaming glass headquarters of Applied Industrial Technologies is a dark-brick balconied building that you've almost certainly driven past on Euclid Avenue in Cleveland, near East 30th Street.

Perhaps you didn't notice it, eclipsed as it is not only by the adjacent modern structure but also by the massive Masonic Auditorium half a block away.

But should the Stockbridge Apartments -- once known as the Stockbridge Hotel -- tease your eyes, well, you might be interested to know that this 1911 edifice was designed as far more than a typical apartment house or hostelry.

Exactly a century ago, it opened with only 10 suites of 16 rooms each. Those 4,000-square-foot units were created for the industrial barons whose palatial estates surrounded it, and a number of them moved in for the winter season.

But the Stockbridge also became a mirror of Cleveland's transformation through the 20th century. When the Stockbridge opened, it seemed at the time that Cleveland's Millionaires' Row was still thriving in its sixth decade. At least it looked that way to those who drove their carriages -- horseless or not -- down Euclid Avenue to view the wrought-iron gates, vast lawns and turreted mansions of those estates.



Western Reserve Historical Society

This photo of the Stockbridge is believed to have been taken within a few years of its opening in 1911.

Oilman George Canfield had picked up on something, likely while talking to his moneyed friends at the private clubs and lodges they belonged to, over drinks and cigars.

The Gilded Age was developing a hint of tarnish, and even the barons who never worried about money were beginning to worry, just a little, about money.

While they once didn't have to consider property taxes, by the end of the first decade of the 20th century, they were facing considerable tax bills. And heating a mansion -- if that's the right word for something that ranged from 10,000 to 40,000 square feet -- during a Cleveland winter was costly. So was maintaining a year-round staff of perhaps 100 people to make these palaces function as smoothly as they should.

A home that would give these men proximity to their businesses and, perhaps, their social lives (including opera and the theater district) and let them be near downtown during the winter seemed like it would appeal.

And it did: Several closed up their mansions for the season and moved into the Stockbridge. Among the first residents in Canfield's Stockbridge were Henry Sherwin, co-founder of the Sherwin-Williams Co., and bank owner Harry Wick. The son of President James Garfield, also named James, moved in with his wife. But the Stockbridge Hotel, designed for the comfort of millionaires, heralded the beginning of the end of a certain level of opulence, especially near downtown.

Soon, millionaire residents were replaced by people who were merely wealthy. Even into the early 1930s, some of the tenants -- including Miss Lotta Brewbaker, a music teacher at The Arcade -- were listed in the city's social register, the Blue Book.

Then, as the huge suites got carved up to create more rooms, some visitors were vaudevillians, including Bob Hope and Jack Benny, who appeared at the nearby Hippodrome. The headliners would stay in the front; roadies and the rest of the entourage would stay in the more utilitarian Stockbridge Annex, built in 1923, in the back.

Over the years, longtime Stockbridge residents included doctors, lawyers, secretaries, chefs and waiters. Temporary residents included the cartoonist Herblock and performers from the Metropolitan Opera, which would tour Cleveland each spring.

Some of the itinerant entertainers were not as lofty but fascinating in their own right -- Ice Follies and roller-derby girls, circus performers or wrestlers appearing at the nearby Arena (at East 38th Street and Euclid), and sometimes burlesque dancers from the Roxy or the New Era.

Still, the Stockbridge's spirit held fast, with quieter, longtime residents leavening the tone of more frolicsome, temporary guests -- and being entertained by them. Magician Doug Henning and his troupe stayed there in the '70s and '80s, and would sometimes put on a show for residents in the lobby.

Even into the early '90s, on some afternoons the desk clerk, Pat Riddle, played the piano in the lobby parlor for fellow residents sitting in wingback chairs. Riddle was known for wearing white gloves while performing Gershwin and Porter and other standards, to protect her vermilion manicure.

"She was a jazzy old lady," says Tonie Love, who lives in the Stockbridge today, as she has for 37 years.

Just like the Stockbridge, in its way.

The rise and fall of a grand avenue

Most Clevelanders have heard about Millionaires' Row. But they might not know the breadth and depth of its wealth or fame.

Dan Ruminski, a business owner who lives in Chesterland, has created a sideline as a history buff who researches and lectures on Millionaires' Row, circa 1850 to 1910.

"There was a time during that period when half the millionaires who existed in the world lived in Cleveland," he says.

That storied portion of Euclid Avenue, stretching from downtown to about East 55th Street, was known as one of America's "grand avenues." The Euclid Avenue of that era was compared to the Champs-Élysées in Paris and Unter den Linden in Berlin.

But as Jan Cigliano writes in the definitive book on the Row, which was published in 1991, there was a difference. "Unlike their European counterparts in London, Paris or Berlin, which were planned and built under authoritarian state edicts, America's grand avenues were created out of the collective actions and interest of private individuals," she says in "Showplace of America."

"The huge fortunes made from capitalist endeavors and the aspiring cultural appetites of Euclid Avenue patrons created these residential showcases in Cleveland and elsewhere."

Tax rates on the wealth of those patrons were nominal in the 19th century. But that started to change in the 20th century.

That wasn't the only thing that began leading to the Row's demise. Many of the owners of the estates were responsible, directly or indirectly, for the industry and commerce that were dramatically making Cleveland grow. Gradually, pollution from industry and railroads and the choking congestion of automobiles and streetcars made their way toward the mansions. Commercial demand for property on the avenue grew, too.

There was another aspect as well: Some of the owners didn't want to see their palatial homes carved up into

apartments that the poor, especially immigrants, would move into. They chose to have them demolished instead. So the grand avenue died.

Today, the less-than-a-handful of mansions that remain (the University Club, Cleveland State University's Mather Mansion) have been converted to other uses.

But the Stockbridge? It's still there, and functioning as it was designed to -- as a residence.

"It outlasted them all," says Ruminski. "It was at the heart of Millionaires' Row, and it's one of the few remaining physical traces of that whole era."

Luxurious features, but no kitchens

Canfield -- the oil baron who had once worked for John D. Rockefeller and would go on to build Cleveland's first gas station -- hired George Steffens as his architect.

Steffens was experienced at designing private homes and apartment buildings, and in the Stockbridge, he created a building that combined the Georgian Revival style with Tudoresque touches -- including the shape of the rooftop gables and a coat of arms painted on the top tier of balconies.

A multitude of luxurious details was apparent inside, from the lined-in-marble entryway to the substantial and intricately carved banisters and brass fixtures in the elevators. Beamed ceilings and massive fireplaces and mantels lorded over enormous living rooms. Bathrooms were lined in white porcelain tile, with deep tubs and pedestal sinks.

None of the suites contained a kitchen, though, because these wealthy men didn't need them. They would either do their fine dining at the restaurant in the basement or eat at their clubs; the Tavern Club is just a block away at East 36th Street. Or they could order a meal that would come to their suite via the dumbwaiter.

The hotel provided maids, housekeeping and linen services, though with 16 rooms for each suite, it was easy enough to house the few servants necessary for personal services.

The sixth floor even had a ballroom, should a resident want to throw a formal gala.

But over the years, time and bad taste took its toll. A rectangular awning eventually obscured the building front, and a garish neon sign announcing the "hotel" went up.

In the mid- '70s, a young man who worked as a clerk for a union bought the place. Jim Stack was only in his 20s, and he was looking for an investment. When he learned some Stockbridge history, he was hooked and moved in himself. His dad loaned him the money for the down payment, "and I paid it back in six months."

The rent he collected -- by then, 40 units had been created from the original 10 suites -- left just enough for him to make repairs here and there. Then he got a federal loan in the mid- '80s for about \$700,000, all of which he put into rehabbing the building. He hired architect Bob Gaede to bring back as much splendor as he could. Stack applied for and won the Stockbridge a spot on the National Register of Historic Places.

'A gumbo of characters'

A woman named Johnnie Mae Green came with the building, Stack says.

"She had moved here at 17, and by the time I met her, she was in her 70s," he says. "She knew every shut-off, every fuse. When we got the federal loan, I had her help cut the ribbon."

Another tenant, Larry Weist, was an expert plasterer who helped make the molds to replace missing pieces.

"And Bobby Love [Tonie's late husband] was my eyes and ears and my best friend," says Stack. "He was a street-smart guy who would tip me off if there was potential trouble."

Stack and Tonie Love remember some of the same stories, especially the one about the dancer from the New Era, Queenie, who wore a boa constrictor around her neck as part of her act. The boa lived at the Stockbridge, too.

"The snake got loose one day, and the housekeeping staff went crazy," says Stack.

Tonie remembers the photographs that hung on the lobby wall, near the entrance -- black-and-white shots of all the celebrities who had stayed at the hotel.

"Bob Hope, Jack Benny, Dean Martin and Lucille Ball," she recalls. Seeing Lucy's photo was special, since Tonie is a native of Jamestown, N.Y., as was Ball.

"She could have been my aunt," Love says of the comedian. "My uncle was engaged to her before she hooked up with another guy whose connections got her a job in New York City."

The Stockbridge was special, says Stack. "We had a Christmas party every year, and the chef who lived here -- he once worked for Chef Boyardee -- made the food," he says. "Remember that show 'Hot L Baltimore'? This was like that."

In fact, one tenant liked living there so much that when Stack reminded him he was behind on his rent, "he went out and robbed a bank to pay it. I didn't know until the police came to search his apartment."

By the late '80s, Stack was married with two children and moved to a suburb. It was getting too complicated to

manage a building downtown, so he sold it.

In 1989, Cleveland writer Mary Mihaly wrote a story for Cleveland magazine on the still-reinvigorated Stockbridge that Stack had created.

"The quality of the renovation was striking, because it was done in a way that kept the integrity of the building intact," she recalls. "It really did evoke the glory days of the building -- not just its early history, but its vaudeville flavor."

Today, the Stockbridge is not quite as cozy. The lobby parlor is gone, because a wall was added to create a mailroom. There are no celebrity photographs hanging. The building is, in fact, in receivership.

Tanya Sams is managing the building for the receiver, a job she considers special, for personal reasons and her love of history.

"My grandfather, Calvin Ballard Clay, once lived here, and so did my mom for a while, when she was 14," she says. So when Sams found out the company she worked for was taking over, "I was thrilled." She fervently wishes for archival records and photos of the building, which seem not to exist.

Her rapport with residents is obvious. Besides Tonie Love, they include Hortense Dismuke, a retired nurse who remembers when the place still had maid and laundry service 20-plus years ago, and Carolyn Jones, a former go-go dancer ("I used to dance at the Malibu and Wine & Roses, all the places up and down Euclid Avenue"). College and grad students are mixed amid the retirees.

Dismuke remembers other nurses living here, as well as FBI agents. "A lot of older men stayed here for six months or so and then would go to Florida," she says. "It might have had something to do with the dog races."

Sams attributes part of the Stockbridge's charm to the residents: "We have a gumbo of characters living here."

What will happen to the Stockbridge now? Actually, its location might be propitious again, at least for an investor. As CSU continues to expand, it either directly or indirectly encourages the creation of places for students and employees to live.

For residents like Tonie Love -- who, after several decades here, managed to get one of the larger units, on the fourth floor with a balcony -- the Stockbridge is home. Her apartment, with its large living room, boasts four separate conversation areas she's made with chairs and loveseats.

Summer means opening the French doors to Euclid Avenue, which is much quieter and cleaner than it used to be.

"From up here, you can see the lake," Love says, and you can -- the same blue-gray water that the millionaires of

100 years ago could see, and did, from this very balcony.

Plain Dealer researcher Joellen Corrigan contributed to this story.

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