

Extended Research on the Shademoore Community

prepared by Donald Burden

As part of the Eastern Corridor background literature review, additional research regarding the Shademoore Community, located on the lowland flats just north of the downtown Newtown, was conducted. The purpose of this research was to provide a better historical context for this type of summer community that was popular along the Little Miami River during the early twentieth century.

Summer Camps along the Little Miami River

From ca.1900 through the mid-1930s, the banks of the Little Miami River, from Terrace Park through Plainville, offered Cincinnati residents an escape from the heat, pollution, and congestion of the inner city during summer months. Millponds, located behind dams built by the Armstrong brothers, provided a series of three, deepwater pools along the Little Miami. Referred to as the "Lower," "Middle," and "Upper" Armstrong grist and sawmills, the millponds for these processing centers afforded campers an opportunity for swimming and boating. Among the first to recognize the potential of these shady, secluded recreation sites was Amy Campbell of the Campbell Business School and a group of Harvard alumnae. Named "Guenticol," the retreat for

the latter group of individuals included a pair of two-story houses. Located in Hartman's Grove near Armstrong's upper mill, the Campbell and Harvard cottages occupied the south bank of the river (Burke 1973:42).

By ca.1905, additional summer camps appeared along the Little Miami. The "Willows," the "Hermitage," and the Church of the Advent (Episcopal) comprised some of the early summer retreats on the river near Terrace Park. A Dr. I.D. Jones of Walnut Hills owned a stretch of land along the river near Newtown. Jones leased campsites to families, including those of George Clephanes, William H. Settles, George L. Wright of Madisonville, and Frank Bahlman of Walnut Hills. Jones screened the families to whom he leased campsites, insuring against unwanted tenants. He forbade the use of liquor at the campsites under penalty of lease termination (Burke 1973:43).

The YMCA operated a clubhouse on the Little Miami just below Terrace Park. During the summer months, a number of Cincinnati businessmen commuted to the facility on a daily basis. The Pennsylvania Railroad and the Cincinnati, Milford & Loveland Traction Company provided transportation to and from the campsites. Upon arrival of the train or interurban, a caretaker from the YMCA ferried the men from the north bank of the river to the camp. Additional camps included the "Tower Hill Canoe Club" and "Idle Hours" (Burke 1973:44).

By 1910, at least some of the camps included electricity. About 1910, or shortly after, someone built a road to the campsites along the south side of the river. It extended from the Newtown area to the Little Miami via the Aicholtz farm. Aicholtz and neighboring farmers, including George Clephanes and William H. Settles, supplied campers with milk and fresh vegetables (Burke 1973:44).

Additional camps appeared along the river during the 1910s. Fourth of July regattas became an annual event at these camps, with swimming, paddling and boat races attracting much attention from Cincinnati residents. Local papers apprised the community of results and dances at the campsite pavilions received much publicity. Dances at the "Old Upper Mill" at Hartman's Grove and the Bass Island Dance Pavilion (burned in 1966) at the "Middle Mill" proved exceedingly popular during the early twentieth century. Informal dances occurred at the YMCA camp under the direction of Dr. and Mrs. Carl Wilzbach (Burke 1973:44).

On the Upper Mill section, also known as Tower Hill, camps along the south bank of the river, from the "Riffles" area (just below Terrace Park) south included River Bend Camp, Union Bethel Camp, YMCA, Tower Hill Canoe Club, Idle Hour, Frank Bahlman, Grant Blaney, George Wright, Charles Kroeger, James Dugan, and The Field. On the north side of the river, camps from the Riffles south included Ferris, Stumps, Advent, Guentico (Harvard), Campbell,

Stevenson cottages, Hermitage, Avoca Park, Hartman's Grove. All of these camps sat north of the Upper Mill Race and dam (Burke 1973:65).

The Middle and Lower Mill areas extended through the mill seat of Plainville, which included the lower Armstrong mill and Beasley mill. Bass Island, located near the Newtown Road bridge across the Little Miami, was one of the more prominent features of this stretch of river. Camps at this area included picnic tables, a dance pavilion, and areas for swimming and boating. The Bass Island Dance Pavilion burned in 1966. A newspaper article from January 9, 1966 noted that the pavilion was about 65 years old, indicating that it was built about 1901. West of Bass Island, Shademoore Park constituted the western most camp along this stretch of the Little Miami (Burke 1973:45).

By the 1930s, people travelled to the camps along the river by automobile. Carloads of recreation seekers continued to visit the area well into the Great Depression (Shayler and Burgess 2007:137). The flood of 1937 appears to have destroyed many of the camps, including the millponds. World War II prevented redevelopment of the campsites and the advent of air conditioning in the postwar era eliminated the need for summer camp retreats on the river. In addition, the loss of the millponds eliminated one of the more important features of the Little Miami in this area. These ponds supported the boating and swimming activities that proved a significant draw during the initial development of the campsites. Although most of the campsites along the river disappeared by the late 1930s, the Shademoore Park Association remains active and the camp remains largely intact. The cottages, however, have undergone extensive alterations.