Northern Kentucky Views Presents:

Clifton:
A History of the Hill

By

Alice Webster

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SOURCES:

What follows is essentially a memory culture, synthesized from the reminiscences of old- and not-so-old-timers, ranging in age from the early 50's to 89 years. This is not to imply that there are no documentary records which I might have consulted, for they do exist; but the old Clifton Council minutes and city records have been removed to the archives at Frankfort where they are currently as inaccessible as though they were in Hong Kong, given the limitation of time and the sad condition of my car. Old newspapers and railroad records constitute another valuable source, but again their utilization would be so time consuming as to be impractical. I have also recently learned that a history of Clifton was compiled by the late Sen. Charles Truesdell and is among the papers of the Christopher Gist Historical Society, but this group is in the process of moving and all their material is packed in crates where, I am told, it will remain for some time to come. Because of this lack of access to documentary material, dates are approximate and sometimes vague, and there are discrepancies, particularly involving the incorporation of Clifton and its annexation to Newport. I reserve the right to remedy this situation at the first opportunity (having been thoroughly infected with the local history "bug") and plan to spend my free time this summer visiting Frankfort and checking out old newspapers so that the history of Clifton, both official and anecdotal, may be compiled in one paper and made available to both Newport and Covington libraries which currently have absolutely nothing on the subject.

My thanks to the following ladies and gentlemen who have lived on and loved The Hill as much as I, and who shared with me their memories of days gone by:[1]

Joseph E. Quitter, Jr., age 87, former mayor, councilman, and chief of police of Clifton, who remembers everything as though it happened yesterday.

Louise Matz Hill, age 65, who was born on The Hill and never really left it.

Dorothy Sickmeier Schafstall, age 79, another lifelong resident, whose father was a councilman for Clifton.

Walter Weber, age 89, who brought his family to Clifton from Newport some 60 years ago.

Robert L. Sidell, a lifelong resident whose father was chief of police of Clifton, and who has himself held many offices in Newport city government.

Harold King, age 68, a retired postman who married a Clifton girl and decided to stay here.

Leroy Hoffman, Newport City Co-ordinator and local history buff, who has the old Seal of the City of Clifton.

[1]The ages of the following informants were volunteered by them; if they did not bring up the subject, neither did I.

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Avis Dunton, a transplanted New Englander and 40-year resident of The Hill.

Mike Barone, whose parents migrated from northern Italy during the late 19th century.

Jean Petrocco Sidari, whose mother came to Clifton in 1910, to join relatives already living here.

Also my thanks to Margaret Strebel Hartman of Alexandria, Ky., who fortunately remembered certain facts from Sen. Truesdell's paper and who provided information from an 1863 map in her possession.

THE LAND:

Descriptive designations such as "Clifton" (Cliff-town) and "The Hill" tell just about everything that there is to know about the topography of the land that is the subject of my paper. The area that became Clifton is well-defined by steep hillsides and sheer cliffs that rise abruptly from the river basins and stream valleys below. On the north, The Hill rises sharply just beyond 12th Street in Newport (see Fig. 1); to the west the border is, in places, a sheer drop from the heights to the Licking Valley below; and on the east the ascent is more gradual, with a gentle rise from the stream valley in which Alexandria Pike is located.[1] This eastern sector, the lower hill (see Map No. 1) which extends from 13th St. to the Southgate city limits, is probably the most densely settled section of The Hill due to the comparatively gentle slope of the land. On the south, the boundary is less clearly defined and is marked by the Southgate corporation line; however, one must go downhill from Clifton to reach Southgate where the terrain levels off considerably. If the traveller does not notice the "Southgate City Limits" sign, he nevertheless knows assuredly that he has left Clifton when he sees the level terrain, for in Clifton there is not one single square yard of flat land that is not man-made, either by cutting into the side of a hill, by slicing off the top of a hill, or by levelling low places with fill. Clifton's rugged relief is responsible for a frequently seen house form, the multi-level home, which is one story high in front and two or three stories in back, or vice-versa, depending on the orientation of the house to the slope of the land. The rugged terrain is also the reason that the land was not settled by early farmers who bypassed the steep irregular slopes of The Hill for the gently rolling land around Alexandria during the early 19th century. Clifton's earliest residents, true suburbanites, invariably tended garden plots, but these were small and confined to the gentler slopes or terraced hillsides.

[1] These directions are not really accurate according to the map, however, residents of The Hill always orient themselves in this way: Newport is north, Alexandria Pike is east, the Licking River is west, and Southgate is south.

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The only agricultural potential of The Hill lay in its use as pasture for dairy cattle, and as we shall see, it was used in this way to some extent in its early years. Mr. Quitter recalls that at one time the outlet of Kentucky Drive on Alexandria Pike was protected by a gate to keep the cows from getting out. The less rugged hills on the Cote Brilliante side of Alexandria Pike were also utilized for many years as grazing land by the dairies which owned them. (See Map 2.)

If nothing else, one can certainly say that The Hill is well-drained. In the early days, several creeks carried ground water down its slopes in various directions, but land-fill operations have taken all but one of these. Near the present intersection of Home and Main Sts. was Schneider's pond, from which a small creek flowed through the valley between 18th and 19th Sts. to Alexandria Pike, where it joined a small stream that paralleled the Pike from Southgate to 18th St., at which point it veered sharply to the northeast and flowed into East Newport. (See Map 3.) This is the only creek that has survived on The Hill, although Schneider's Pond is long gone. Also paralleling Alexandria Pike from 18th St. to Southgate was much low-lying swamp and at least one small pond, the result of rainwater run-off from the hills on both sides. The presence of this stagnant water was undoubtedly an unhealthy situation, cheerfully avoided by Cliftonites who lived high and dry above the soggy world below.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

It is, perhaps, appropriate that the story of Clifton begins with a problem, this one involving the original land grants made in the area. One view has it that the Lindseys (Clifton), the Taylors (Newport), and the Berrys (Southgate) were given their respective grants of land by George Washington for their participation in the Revolutionary War.[1] Another version holds that these grants were from King George for service during the French and Indian War, and were confirmed by the State of Virginia after independence.[2] A third view has Hubbard Taylor (brother of James Taylor) visiting the area in 1790 and purchasing the land which was settled by his brother.[3] In any case, the land which was to

[1] Mr. Quitter, conversation of 3/19/76. My gut reaction is to take his word for it, as experience has shown him to be a most reliable source.

[2] Pictorial and Industrial Review of Northern Kentucky (Newport: Northern Kentucky Review, 1923) This book is merely a collection of business advertisements with scattered anonymously written paragraphs of text. If memory serves, the British opposed trans-Appalachian settlement, and I tend to doubt this version. Someone obviously believed it, however.

[3] Kentucky (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1939) pp. 246-247. Compiled by the Federal Writers' Project of the Work Projects Administration, and sponsored by the University of Ky.

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become Clifton was originally owned by the Lindsey family, and for this reason one of the early designations of the area was "Lindsey Hill." The area was originally surveyed by John Lindsey, using the old method in which trees and other impermanent objects were markers, and for this reason "nothing in South Newport is on the line today."[1] The old Lindsey house still stands on Main Ave. and is now the firehouse (see Fig. 2), but the small houses behind it, which were slave residences, are gone. The Lindsey family eventually became land poor and had to sell off their land for taxes, so that The Hill gradually came under the control of others, but the name "Lindsey Hill" lingered on for some time afterwards.[1]

In September of 1862, northern Kentuckians were in a state of panic over an impending invasion from the south by Morgan's Raiders and the Confederate Army under Kirby Smith. A string of protective forts was built throughout northern Kentucky, and two of these are pertinent to the history of Clifton: 1) Ft. Shaler, located in what is now Evergreen Cemetery in Southgate, to protect Alexandria Pike, and 2) Ft. Beech, located on the rim of The Hill overlooking the Licking Valley, to guard against incursion from that area.[1] (See Map 3.) In order to supply these forts, a dirt road (later called Grandview) was cut as a supply line from Newport with access from Alexandria Pike via what is now 13th St.[2] Another connection with the Pike was made by cutting a road along the ridge of Lindsey Hill. On the 1863 map in the possession of Margaret Hartman, this is called Hooper Rd., but today it is known as Kentucky Drive.[3] The area between Forts Shaler and Beech was virtually criss-crossed with dirt roads, many of which are still tracable today and indeed, some are still used by Gas and Electric Co. vehicles and as motorbike trails. These roads linked the forts with both Licking and Alexandria Pikes, so that troop movements could be made rapidly in either direction in case of invasion. But the expected attack never came, and after the Civil War the roads remained to provide access from Newport to the virtually empty hill area to the south. "Grandview," the name chosen for the main road, is obviously appropriate, for the former supply line follows the western rim of Lindsey Hill, and the view is indeed grand, if not outright spectacular. Hooper Rd. kept that name for sometime, but it was apparently less important in the history of Lindsey Hill, for the 1883 map does not show it. (See Map 3.) Earliest settlement of The Hill occurred along the western rim, in close proximity to Grandview and its

[1] Mr. Quitter, conversation of 3/19/76.

[2] Leroy Hoffman, conversation of 3/15/76

[3] Margaret Hartman, conversation of 3/17/76.

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secondary side roads, in spite of the fact that Alexandria Pike had provided access to the more gently sloped lower hill since its completion in about 1850. Perhaps access by the Pike was ignored because it was a toll road (and remained so until its purchase by the state in 1920), or possibly because the land adjacent to the Pike was poorly drained; but in the latter part of the 19th century, a street car line was built paralleling the Pike, linking Southgate and Clifton with Newport and Cincinnati. From this point on, residents of The Hill oriented themselves to the eastern rather than the western slopes, and settlement of the areas nearest the street car tracks proceeded rapidly and eventually outdistanced that of Grandview and the west.

THE PEOPLE:

In the early 1880's, the city of Newport entered a 20-year "boom" which resulted from the arrival of the railroad,[1] the massive influx of German migrants, the completion of bridges across the Ohio, and the growth of the county agricultural population made possible by the Licking and Alexandria Turnpikes.[2] Increasing population led to an expansion outward of native-born "Newporters" as well as some German immigrants into the rural area "up on The Hill," whose proximity to Newport enabled them to work in town yet live in the country. Another group of migrants moved onto The Hill sometime <u>after</u> 1883, when the railroad decided to lay another set of tracks between 12th and 13th Sts., which would cross a bridge to be built over the Licking River.[3] In order to achieve an elevation equal to that of the bridge, these tracks had to be gradually raised 20 ft. above the natural terrain, and moving that much dirt and stone was going to be a massive job by anybody's standards. It was a task calling for much cheap labor, and the railroad recruited immigrant labor from Italy, putting them to work quarrying limestone and dirt on John Schneider's property on Lindsey Hill in the area bounded today by Amelia, Ash, Main, and Home Sts.[4] (See Map No. 2 and Fig. 3)

[1]Possibly the railroad arrived during the 1870's, but it may have been earlier. I have not had much luck pinning down this date.

[2]<u>Kentucky</u>, <u>Op. Cit.</u>, pp. 246-247.

[3]Note that on Map 3, dated 1883, the railroad bridge is not shown, and since the Italian migrants built the tracks that crossed the bridge, it seems a fairly safe assumption that they arrived after 1883.

[4]I have not been able to ascertain whether the railroad recruited laborers in Italy, or whether a railroad representative simply met incoming boats of immigrants at New York and offered them work. Since the Italian community of Clifton is drawn from all parts of Italy (according to my conversation of 3/27/76 with Mike Barone), I suspect they were recruited in New York.

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John Schneider sold home lots quite cheaply to the Italian laborers who settled near the quarry along Amelia St. and Main Ave. After excavating rock and dirt from Schneider's property, they transported it to the site of railroad construction between 12th and 13th Sts.[1] I strongly suspect some sort of arrangement between John Schneider who owned the rock and housed the laborers, and the railroad who needed the stone and imported the workers, but I have found no evidence of this as yet. I have also not been able to pin down the exact year of the Italian influx, but Harold King recalls that his mother, who was born in Newport in 1876, was not permitted as a child (age 10-12) to go near 12th St. where the "hunkies" were working. This would have placed railroad construction at about 1886-1888, thus dating the arrival of the Italians at about the same time, and they were certainly the largest and most influential ethnic group on The Hill. Even today, Italian influence remains evident, although "Little Italy" no longer exists, for after the initial settlement in 1886-1888 there was a continuous influx well into the 20th century of new migrants who came from Italy after hearing from relatives who had come in the first wave of railroad workers. Descendants of the original Italian settlers have dispersed widely all over northern Kentucky, but an unusually high proportion of the present-day residents of South Newport bear such lilting and colorful names as Piccarillo, Bioni, Pangallo, Pellillo, Seminara, Santini, Pompilio, Barone, Petroze, etc.

According to Mr. Quitter, there were only two Irish families (Duffy and Moran) on The Hill, and two or three French families,[2] but the rest of the residents were German or Italian, with the latter far outnumbering the former. Interestingly, the great majority of the residents of The Hill were Catholics, regardless of their ethnic background. The Italian community, of course, was uniformly Catholic, and apparently German immigration at this time was coming from Southern Germany which is also predominantly Catholic. But even the native-born residents of Newport who chose to move to The Hill were also chiefly Catholic, and for this I have no satisfactory explanation. To serve this growing Catholic population, St. Vincent de Paul Church[3] was dedicated in June, 1916, and its first pastor was Father Wetzel, a man who spoke fluent Italian, French, and German in addition to English. There has never been a Protestant church of any denomination on The Hill, but about 1915 the old Lindsey house (see Fig. 2) was converted into a mission Sunday School which was held each Sunday afternoon

[1]Robert Sidell, conversation of 3/15/76.

[2]The presence of French-speaking people in Clifton is most unusual and the only explanation I can offer is that possibly they were from Alsace-Lorraine, a province that passed frequently between Germany and France. I have relatives named Jacquellard who came from this area and were originally French-speaking.

[3]Located at 18th St. and Main Ave.

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for the children of Protestant families. Louise Matz Hill, who attended this Sunday School at "The Chapel," remembers that it had some connection with the Methodist Church, but Mr. Quitter seems to feel that it was Baptist; in any case, it did not last very long, and German Protestant residents of The Hill went to Newport to attend St. John's Evangelical and Reformed Church which, in its early years, held services in German for the large immigrant population of Newport.

POLITICAL HISTORY:

As stated above, overflow from Newport and the arrival of Italian laborers in the 1880's led to population growth on Lindsey Hill, and on Feb. 15, 1888[1] Clifton was incorporated. The current Newport City Directory states that Clifton was incorporated in 1912,[2] and it is possible that this discrepancy might be explained by incorporation in 1888 as a village and later as a city. The elderly residents with whom I spoke agree that Clifton existed as a political entity before 1912, and I feel sure that this problem can be ironed out by examination of the Clifton Council minutes in Frankfort. The city of Clifton began at 13th St. (then called McCracken Ave.) to the north, extended from the middle of Alexandria Pike on the east to the middle of Licking Pike in the west,[3] and was bounded on the south by the Southgate city limits. Government of Clifton was simple, consisting of a mayor, a city council, police chief, fire chief, city engineer, and an assortment of clerks. Law enforcement was likewise simple, according to Mr. Quitter:

> The people up here were good people, they were neighbors, and we all helped each other. We didn't have any problems.[4]

The fire department was all volunteer, and every able-bodied man was a member. When the gong rang, everybody ran to the firehouse, which was near the site of the present one on Main Ave., and the men dragged the pumper to the fire and put it out. Garbage collection was likewise informal; Mr. Zappa had a 2-wheel dump cart pulled by a horse, and he was paid by the city to collect the garbage which he hauled away and dumped in the vicinity of the old Ft. Beech ruins. The former Lindsey house, former Chapel, became the Clifton City Building, and its upstairs housed the courtroom; there was no jail, nor was one needed.[4]

The earliest school in Clifton was a two-room schoolhouse at 49 18th St. (then Garnett Ave.), now a private residence (see Fig. 4), and Louise Matz Hill recalls that for a brief time the "Chapel" was hauled into service as

[1] Margaret Hartman recalled this date from Sen. Truesdell's paper.

[2] Newport City Directory (current), Introduction, Page xiii.

[3] Mr. Quitter recalled that a fugitive needed only to cross one of the Pikes to be out of jurisdiction.

[4] Mr. Quitter, conversation of 3/18/76

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a classroom. In 1915, West Clifton, later called Grandview School, was built, followed in 1916 by East Clifton on 18th St. (See Figs. 5 and 6) Although both these buildings still stand, neither is in use as a school at the present. In the late 1940's, East Clifton was sold and converted into an apartment building, and children of East Clifton were bussed to West Clifton which served The Hill until 1972 when it was closed and turned into a Board of Education warehouse. Today it stands a delapidated wreck, an embarrassment to the community in its deterioration, yet somehow still beloved by three generations of hill residents who learned "readin', writin', and 'rithmetic" within its now battered walls.

The annexation of Clifton to Newport is just as problematic as its incorporation, and again, only the Clifton Council records would be able to straighten out the matter accurately. Evidence leads me to suspect that Clifton was annexed to Newport in two pieces, the first in 1919 and the second and final annexation in the early 1930's. (See Map 1) Mr. Quitter, whose memory is fantastically good and uncannily accurate, states that annexation occurred in 1919, while everyone else I interviewed places it somewhere between 1932 and 1936. Old business advertisements from 1923 list Pieper Dry Cleaners on 18th St. as being in Newport, while the Campbell Co. Protestant Orphanage on Main Ave. (barely two blocks away) was still in Clifton.[1] Mr. Quitter lived (and still lives) on 18th St. which was Garnett Ave. before annexation to Newport, and he states that everything east of Central Ave. became part of Newport in 1919. This would include 13th through 21st Sts., the area marked in purple on Map No. 1. The rest of The Hill, shown in red on Map No. 1, was annexed in the early 1930's, and since my other sources live in this area, this might explain the difference in dates for annexation given by my informants. It is incomprehensible to me that the Newport Court House would not have these records, but they have assured me that all this material has been moved to Frankfort for lack of space. They did not even keep microfilm records, and until such time as I can visit Frankfort and/or read through years of old newspapers, I will not know for sure what happened. After annexation of the lower hill in 1919, the city of Newport extended gas, electric, water and sewage services to this part of The Hill, and home building proceeded apace. Fifteenth and Sixteenth streets were built up rapidly, many of the homes being in the Neo-Dutch Colonial style popular at that time. Water and sewage services came somewhat later to the rest of Clifton;[2] Harold King remembers that, while courting his future wife in 1929, he got his car stuck in the trench being dug for the sewers on Kentucky Drive. In the

[1] Pictorial and Industrial Review of Northern Kentucky, Op. Cit., pp. 81,84

[2] As late as 1967, residents of Clifton Ave. in South Newport still did not have sewers. They petitioned the city to provide them to replace septic tanks which drained into the streets. After a hepatitis epidemic swept The Hill, sewers were provided.

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early 1930's, probably about 1932 or 1933, the end came for the city of Clifton, and much to the chagrin of the residents it was annexed to Newport once and for all. Everyone I spoke to apparently had opposed annexation, stated that they didn't know anyone who was for it, and wondered why it happened. Here again, I feel the need to consult the city records to find how the decision was made in spite of concerted opposition.

MAKING A LIVING ON THE HILL:

Generally speaking, the residents of Clifton from earliest times were wage laborers who walked to work in Newport via the Wagon Bridge[1] and later payed 5¢ to ride the street car as far as Cincinnati. The Seminara brothers, Gus, Tom, and Tony, owned and operated a successful produce business in Cincinnati and epitomized the affluent Clifton suburbanite.[2] Most residents of The Hill, however, were considerably less well-to-do, and many, including the Italian migrants, worked hard and long hours for very little cash. For this reason, nearly everyone on The Hill had a garden and chickens to provide fresh vegetables, eggs, and chicken every Sunday. Walter Weber was one of the few people on The Hill who owned a horse, and he made extra cash by plowing gardens every spring.[3] It was necessary to grow one's own vegetables, for while meat could be obtained in butcher shops in Newport, one had to go to the Sixth Street Market in Cincinnati to purchase fresh produce at a reasonable rate; travelling peddlers, such as Mr. Horn who sold vegetables and fruits from a horse-drawn wagon, frequented The Hill, but their wares were expensive.[4]

In the early years, much of Lindsey Hill was open grazing land, and three dairies were located in Clifton or in close proximity to it. The first of these was Schuerman's Dairy located just across Alexandria Pike in Cote Brilliante, and its cattle grazed the hill that was later hacked away to make room for the Newport Shopping Center. (See Fig. 7) Another smaller dairy, Benedict's, was located south of Schuerman's on the hills where the Laycock subdivision now stands. (See Map No. 2) Although these dairies were in Cote Brilliante, they were literally just across the street from Clifton and were patronized by

[1]The Wagon Bridge spans the railroad tracks between 12th and 13th Sts., and was apparently built at the time of the elevation of the tracks to permit vehicular traffic across the area. Everyone I talked to says that it has been there "as long as I can remember" and some of these people remember as far back as the 1890's.

[2]The Seminara brothers (pronounced SemiNARy) built three identical brick houses on Kentucky Drive. (See Fig. 8 and 9) These houses are visible on the ridge of The Hill for a great distance, and have become a trademark of South Newport.

[3]Walter Weber, conversation of 3/9/76.

[4]Louise Matz Hill, conversation of 3/27/76.

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its residents. Another source of dairy products was the Dietrich farm, located on the hills between 19th St. and Kentucky Drive (see Map No. 2). Old Mr. Dietrich delivered milk to his customers by wagon. Louise Matz Hill recalls that as a child she carried an enamel pail out to the street and left it for Mr. Dietrich to fill with milk as he made his rounds; and although he was not the official garbage collector for Clifton, he would gladly haul away garbage which he fed to his pigs. (One can only hope he hauled the garbage and milk in different wagons.) Ruined buildings of the old Dietrich farm are still standing and are easily seen from Amelia St., although the entire area has grown up and is covered with weeds and deciduous woodland. (See Fig. 10) While the various dairies provided milk for the German and native Kentuckian residents, the Italian immigrants brought with them a preference for goat's milk, and most of them kept goats in addition to their gardens and chickens. In this way, Clifton fell heir to another nickname which replaced Lindsey Hill in popularity; it became "Billy Goat Hill" to the residents of Newport who obviously never understood that Billy goats do not give milk.[1]

There has never been much in the way of business, let alone industry, in Clifton. Schneider's rock quarry has been mentioned, but after the railroad was finished and Alexandria Pike macadamized with limestone crushed by Italian laborers, the business disintegrated, perhaps because the limestone was gone, or perhaps because the land became more valuable as house lots. Quarrying operations certainly left their mark on Clifton, and a gaping hole at the site of the excavation may still be viewed from Broadway, Home and Ash Sts. (See Fig. 11) Schneider's pond, located east of what is now Home St. and Main Ave., provided a seasonal source of income in the cutting and storage of winter ice for sale in the summer.[2] Another local business was Pieper's Dry Cleaning on 18th St., which survived into the 1950's as Garfield's; it was then bought by the Neltner Oil Co., and now serves as a storage facility.

Although not strictly a business, the Campbell Co. Protestant Orphans' Home was established on April 3, 1884 by an act of the legislature, in the area now occupied by the Baptist Convalescent Center.[3] (See Fig. 12) Walter Weber recalls that the Orphans' Home kept three cows which kept the grass down and provided milk for the children. Mr. Quitter remembers that William Ader, the superintendent, was a Catholic, an unusual trait only when one considers that he was superintendent of a Protestant Orphans' Home.

[1] Dorothy Schafstall, conversation of 3/18/76.

[2] Walter Weber, conversation of 3/9/76.

[3] Pictorial and Industrial Review of Northern Kentucky, Op. Cit, p. 84.

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During the period from 1910-1920, several small "Mom and Pop" groceries were established on The Hill: Weber's Grocery at Main and Parkview, Cochran's Grocery at 18th and Main, Busse's on Main just above Home St., and Hasselberg's on 18th St. These were small general stores which sold staples and other non-perishable items, but what most people remember about them is that each had a huge glass case filled with dozens of kinds of penny candy. Peddlers of various kinds of goods carried their wares to residents of The Hill, and "the Rag Man" called out "Rags, Old Iron!" to alert citizens to the fact that he would take almost anything they could no longer use.[1]

During Prohibition, another business gained a certain following on Billy Goat Hill. Mr. Quitter states that during this time The Hill was virtually alive with stills.

> We called them monkeys, and I'm not exaggerating when I say that every other house had a monkey.[2]

Some of the moonshine was made for personal use, but there was a very active and lucrative business shipping the stuff across the river for sale in Cincinnati. Federal agents were aware of this traffic, but did not know where the stills were.[3] They approached Mr. Quitter, then Chief of Police, and asked him for the names of those who had stills.

> 'Why, I don't know,' I said. 'I don't go onto people's property and snoop around. I just don't know.' That's what I told them. But I knew, and I never told. The people up here, they knew that I wouldn't tell, and they always gave me jugs of 'moon.' Now, I don't even drink, and I had 'moon' all over this place -- in the out house, under the sink, everywhere.[2]

Once someone presented him with two jugs of 190 proof "moon," which he was able to sell to his uncle for $35.00.[4] Those residents not involved in "monkey-business"

[1] Louise Matz Hill, conversation of 3/27/76.

[2] Mr. Quitter, conversation of 3/19/76.

[3] The stills were often ingeniously hidden. Walter Weber told of one resident of Amelia St. who had a secret room in his chicken coop where his "monkey" was hidden. Pete Schmidt, whose name was later to be involved with Newport gambling, had a still hidden somewhere in the cow pastures of Schuerman's Dairy; and one ambitious moonshiner built his still underground on the top of the hill where Grandview Gardens is now located. I understand from my conversation with Jean Sidari that this underground room is still there, though I personally have never seen it.

[4] He also gave the following instructions for cutting it. "Buy distilled water and caramel color at the drugstore. Melt the caramel until you get the water the color you want. Then add the 'moon' to the colored water--slowly."

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provided themselves with milder spirits by growing grapes and fermenting wine, but this never got to be a business on a par with bootlegging. The professionalism of moonshining is illustrated in another story told in Mr. Quitter's own words:

> One night, Ernie Saccone -- he's dead and gone now--knocked on my door and said, 'My machine she's-a broke down. Can I leave-a somethin' on you' porch for awhile?' 'Sure,' I said, and was I surprised when they unloaded a whole shipment of moon! They left it there and the next morning it was gone, all gone. They came back and got it during the night and I never heard one sound, not one footstep, not one board creak. And in the morning it was all gone.

Bootlegging has long since ceased to be a major occupation on The Hill, having ended here, as elsewhere, with repeal of Prohibition. Perhaps it is a coincidence, perhaps not, that Clifton was annexed to Newport just about the same time (between 1932 and 1936). As previously stated, there was much opposition among the citizens to annexation, yet when it was accomplished, the leaders of Clifton became the leaders of Newport. In a very real sense, then, one might say that Clifton annexed Newport rather than vice-versa. This leads me to pose another question: did the organization involved in bootlegging on The Hill during Prohibition extend itself into gambling and prostitution in Newport after moonshining ceased to be profitable? A thorough examination of old newspapers might provide part of the answer; I would want to know, for example, if Newport's reputation as "Sin City" antedated the bootlegging activities, was contemporaneous, or appeared as a chronological extension of them. There are residents living on The Hill today who would know, but it is safe to say that they will not talk about it. Yet, it is a question that deserves careful examination; there is a real possibility that Newport's shady past might be the direct result of its having clasped a viper to its bosom in the annexation of Clifton.

CHANGE:

In many ways, South Newport has changed little from the early days of Clifton, for it is still a "bedroom suburb" for people who work in town but don't want to live there. The Hill is more densely populated today, but lots are often large and many people still have gardens; some -- believe it or not -- still keep chickens.[1] Schuerman's Hill, once grazing land for dairy cattle, had long since grown up with weeds and briars when I was a child, and I remember going there every summer to pick wild blackberries. In 1954, Schuerman's Hill was literally sliced in half (see Fig. 7), and the Newport

[1] Mr. Quitter, for example, lives literally within shouting distance of the Newport Shopping Center, and he still has chickens.

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Shopping Center built in the resultant gaping hole. Dietrich's old farm is now covered with woodland, and beer cans litter the old home site, but the top of Dietrich's hill has been cleared for the new Sweetbriar Apartments (see Fig. 13), a development that many old residents have viewed with alarm, for apartment construction[1] is seen as the beginning of the end for the close-knit community spirit that has long existed among residents of The Hill.

The terms "Lindsey Hill" and "Billy Goat Hill" have long since been forgotten by all but the oldest residents and have been replaced by such epithets as "Dago Nob" or "Spaghetti Nob," though it is more frequently called simply "South Newport" or "The Hill." Amelia Street, still largely Italian, has earned the nickname "Spaghetti Lane," and appropriately it flanks Johnny Peluso's Grandview Gardens, noted for its Italian cuisine. St. Vincent de Paul Church[2] and its school of 8 grades is still here, but the public schools are all gone, and children are bussed either to Mildred Dean School on Grand Ave. or A.D. Owens School at 11th & York Sts. The only Protestant "Church" here at the moment is a little store-front church at 17th and Parkview, a "mission" much like the Chapel of days gone by, but with a definite Appalachian flavor, suggesting the arrival of a new breed of migrant on The Hill.

Many new service and food businesses are growing up along Alexandria Pike (now U.S. 27), but as one travels up the hill, he finds the same quiet residential area as existed 50 years ago, now interspersed with steep-sloped woodlands where grazing land used to be. On summer afternoons, visitors to The Hill can still smell the spicy aroma of spaghetti sauce simmering, hear neighbors chatting with charming Italian accents, and pick up a pizza at Reno's Carry-Out. Our Fire Department is still located in the old Clifton City Building, but a recent study has declared it obsolete and it is soon to be phased out. The old street car tracks that once paralleled Alexandria Pike are long gone, having been replaced in the 1930's by a busline providing more efficient service for residents of The Hill. Alexandria Pike is the main access route for visitors to South Newport, as well as the focus of Hill residents who trade at the Newport Shopping Center; but for a short-cut to downtown Newport or Cincinnati, the old Wagon Bridge is invariably used to avoid the traffic on the Pike. (Non-residents never use this route as it tends to scare the living daylights out of people who are unfamiliar with it.)

The little creek that once paralleled Alexandria Pike (see Map No. 3) is gone now, and the nearby swampy areas have been drained, filled, and built on.

[1]Valhalla Apartments, built on the Newport-Southgate boundary, were built first, and both complexes are tolerated - just barely - by old residents whose attitude is, "Well, there goes the neighborhood!"

[2]A new church was built in 1959 on the same site as the old one.

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The creek bed was not filled in, but rather channeled into culverts underground, and the single remaining stream from The Hill (which flows between 18th and 19th Sts.) enters this underground system at 18th St. and Alexandria Pike. (The only place where the original little creek may be seen is behind Grimme Dry Cleaners in front of the Newport Shopping Center.) In 1958, this underground system proved inadequate when heavy rains produced a flash-flood which swept down from The Hill, demolishing everything in its path. To prevent a recurrence, an earthen dam was built across the 18th St. creek to hold back rainwater, but in the 1960's a new system of storm sewers was built, and the earth dam was allowed to deteriorate, though it may still be seen in the hollow at the end of Home St. near the old Dietrich farm.

The Campbell Co. Protestant Orphans' Home is gone now, having moved to Holly Hill in the early 1950's, and the site is now occupied by the Baptist Convalescent Center, a nursing home that has a number of lifelong residents of Clifton among its patients and personnel. Several of my informants are patients here, and they still exhibit the enthusiastic chauvinism that is so characteristic of the older residents of The Hill. This is still an area where neighbors know one another, and where people can leave their doors and cars unlocked,[1] and although petty vandalism has increased somewhat in recent years, it is still a very nice place to live. May it ever be so.

[1]Granted this is unwise, but it has been safely done. We lived on Clifton Ave. in South Newport from 1961 to 1967. Shortly after moving there, I lost the key to the back door, which we never replaced until we sold the house. For nearly six years, our back door was never locked and this was no cause for concern. To be perfectly fair, however, I must admit than any potential burglar on The Hill would have known that we had 5 children and therefore probably had nothing worth stealing.

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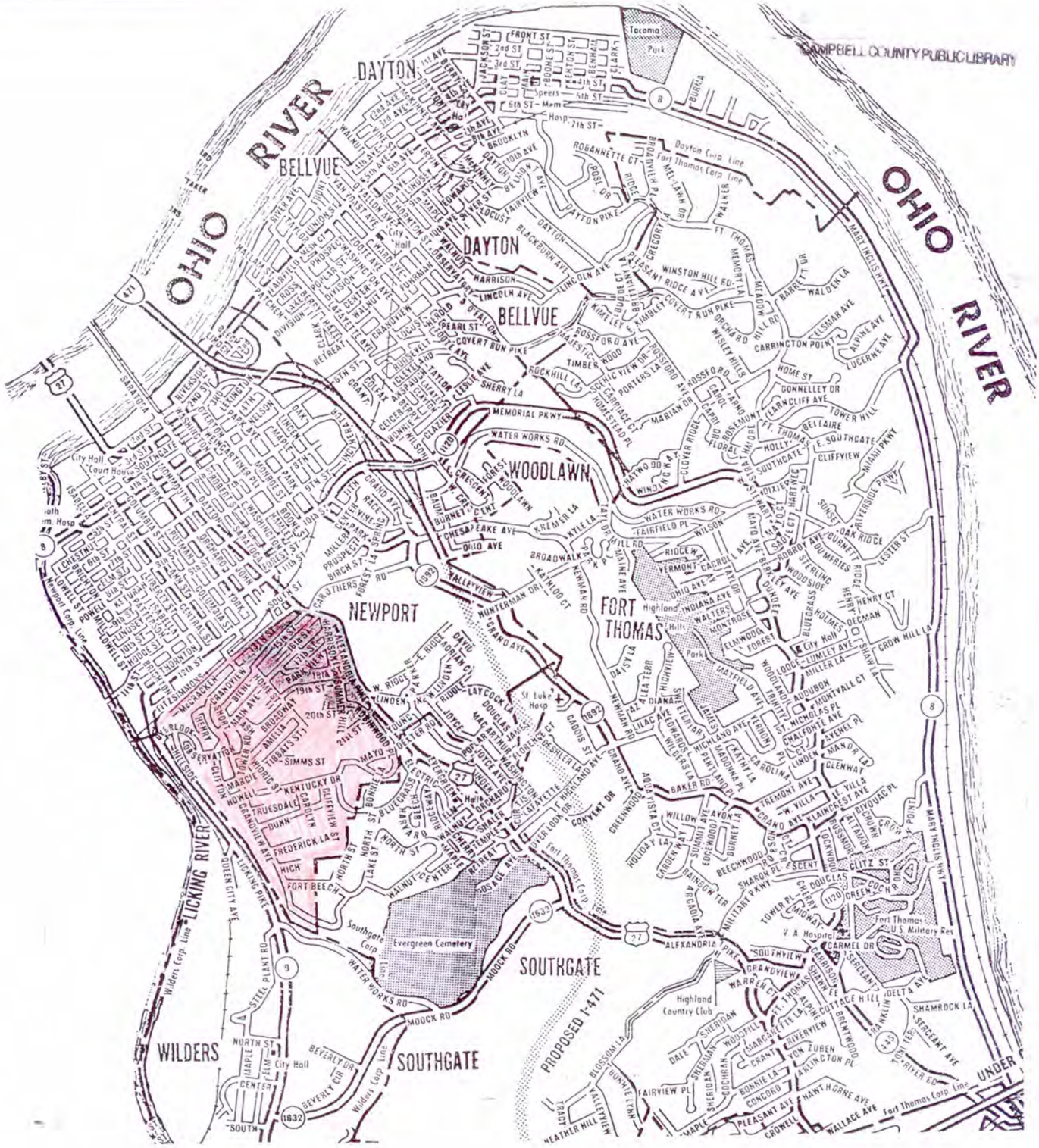

Map No. 1. The colored area indicates the original boundaries of the city of Clifton. The purple area demarcates the more gently sloping eastern face of The Hill, which was apparently annexed to Newport in 1919. The red area is the upper hill, more rugged and less densely settled, which became a part of Newport sometime between 1932 and 1936.

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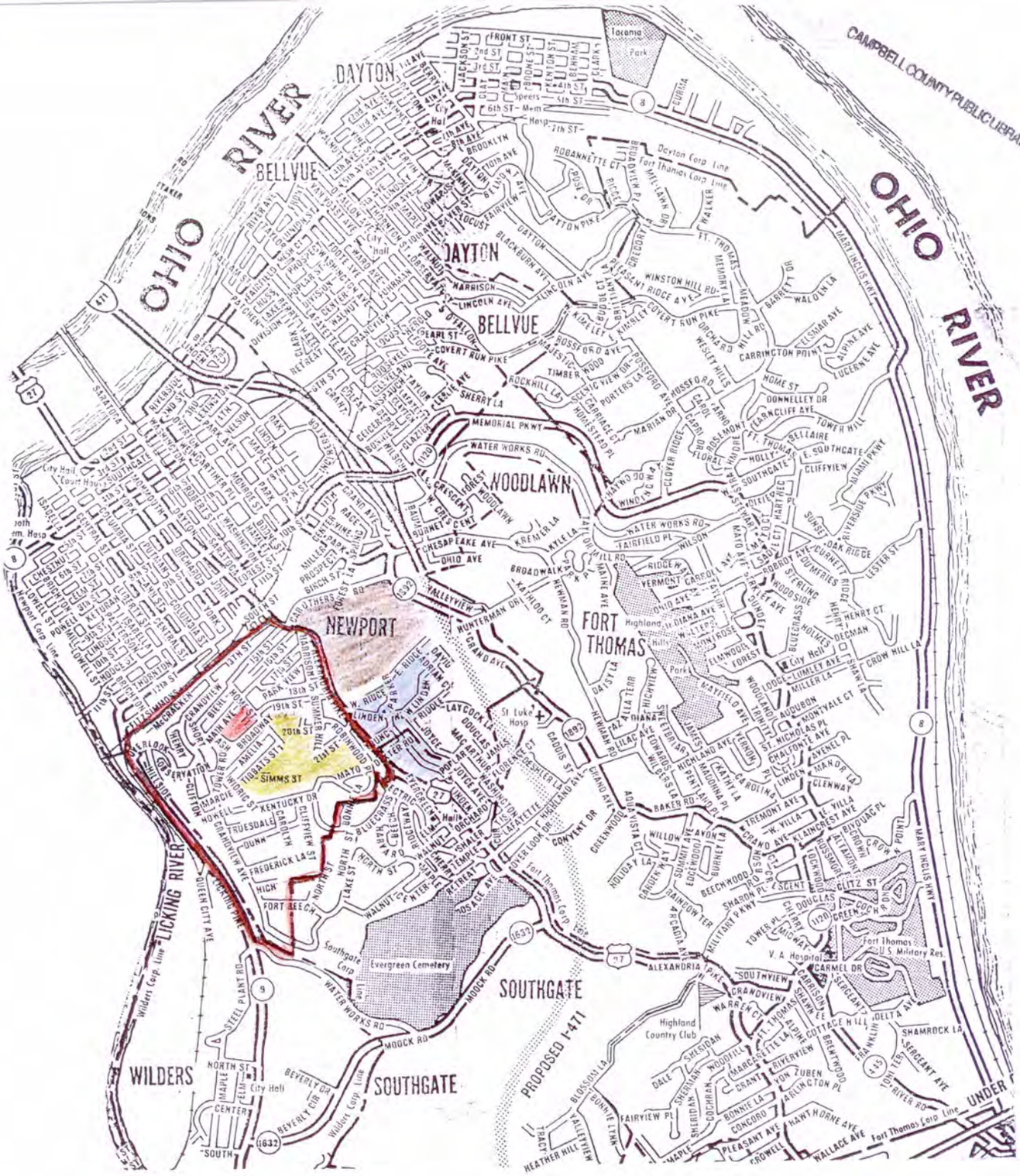
OHIO RIVER
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WOODLAWN
NEWPORT
FORT THOMAS
SOUTHGATE
SOUTHGATE
WILDERS
LICKING RIVER
PROPOSED I-471
Taconia Park
Highland Country Club
Evergreen Cemetery
St Luke Hosp
V. A. Hospital
Fort Thomas U S Military Res.
Wilders Corp. Line
Newport Corp. Line
Southgate Corp. Line
Fort Thomas Corp. Line
Dayton Corp. Line
Fort Thomas Corp. Line
SIMMS ST
FORT BEECH
City Hall
City Hall
Court House
Hall's Orchard
Hosp
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Park

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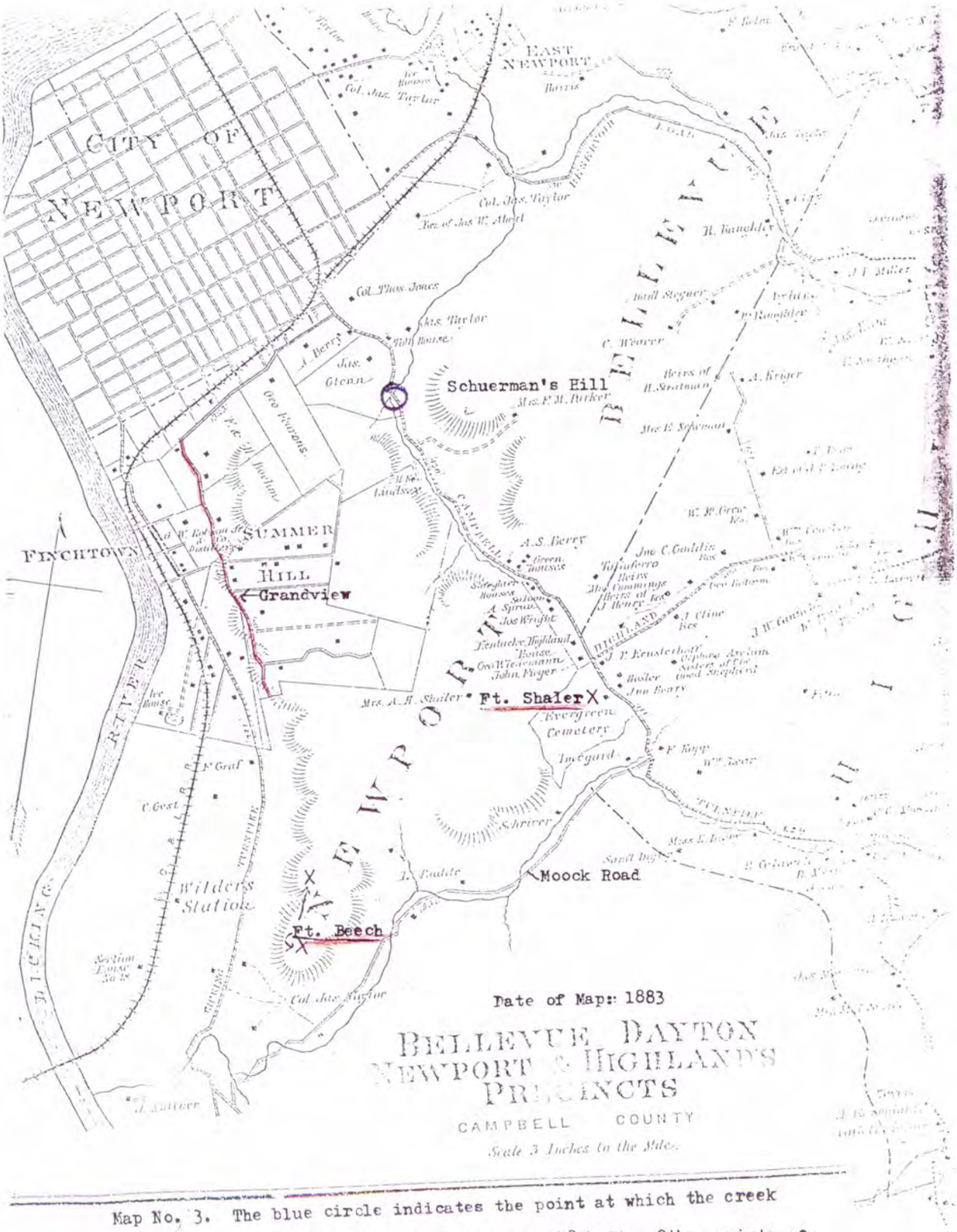

Map No. 3. The blue circle indicates the point at which the creek passes under Alexandria Pike at what is now 18th St. Other points of interest are indicated above.

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_____ Kentucky. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1939.

_____ Newport City Directory. Cincinnati: Williams Directory Co., 1975.

_____ Pictorial and Industrial Review of Northern Kentucky. Newport, Ky.: Northern Kentucky Review, 1923.

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Fig. 1. Taken from 12th St. in Newport, this photo shows the abrupt rise of the north face of The Hill from the Ohio Basin below.

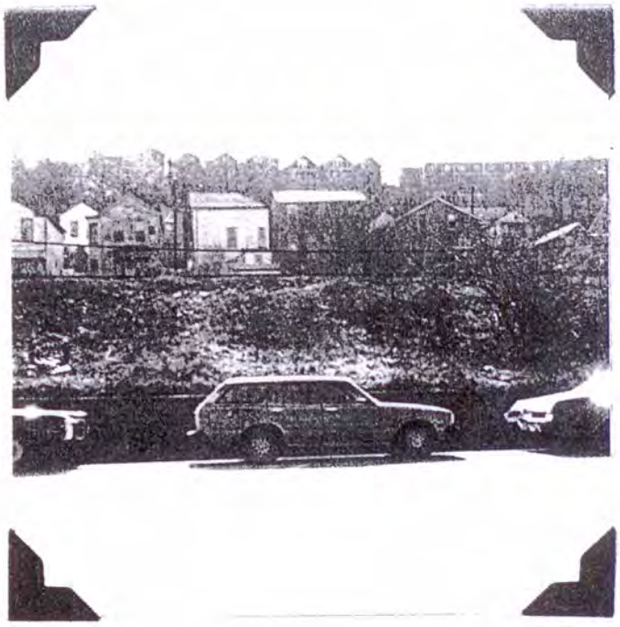

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Fig. 2. Below are two views of the present firehouse located on Main Ave. This building was originally the old Lindsey home, then became "The Chapel," a Sunday afternoon Sunday school of indeterminate denomination. Next it saw service as the Clifton City Building, and it presently houses South Newport's Fire Department, soon to be phased out.

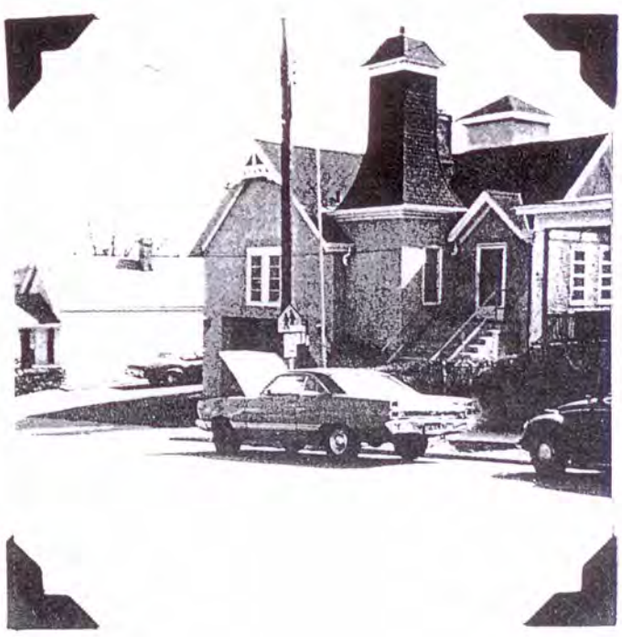

Fig. 3. Taken from the Wagon Bridge, this photo shows the two sets of railroad tracks below 13th St. Those on the right are elevated by earth and rock quarried by Italian laborers from Schneider's land in Clifton. The red circle denotes the railroad bridge that crosses the Licking.

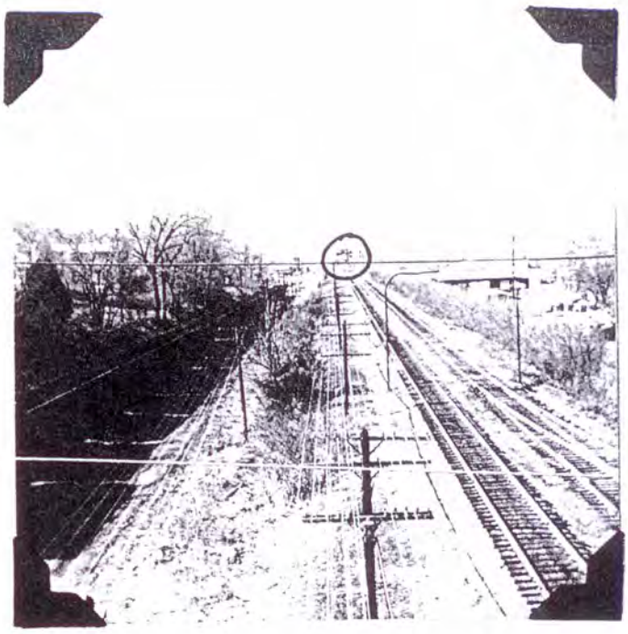

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Fig. 4. This building, now a private residence at 49 18th St., was the earliest school in Clifton. It had only two rooms.

Fig. 5. Grandview School, formerly known as West Clifton, served The Hill until 1972. It is now abandoned, a target for vandalism, and a "hang-out" for local kids who have no trouble at all getting inside. Torn down Summer, 1979

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Fig. 6. East Clifton School, built in 1916, is now an apartment building.

Fig. 7. This view of the Newport Shopping Center shows clearly the remaining half of Schuerman's Hill standing behind the shopping area. In early times, dairy cattle grazed this hill which extended almost all the way to Alexandria Pike.

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Fig. 8. This photo, taken on Kentucky Drive, shows the 3 identical brick houses built by the Seminara brothers, Gus, Tom, and Tony. Perhaps "identical" is not the proper word, for there are certain deliberate differences in the treatment of the front dormer windows, but their similarity is far more striking than their divergence. Though still called "the Seminara homes" none belongs to Seminara descendants today.

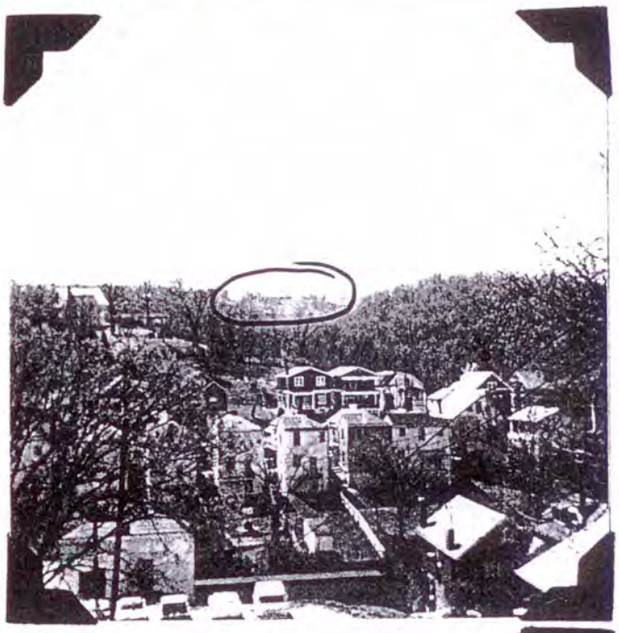

Fig. 9. Taken from the front porch of the house at 30 - 18th St., this photo shows (dimly) the Seminara homes as seen from the lower hill. They are circled in red because of the poor quality of this photo, but in reality they are quite striking and are a kind of trademark of South Newport. The houses in the foreground are located on 19th St., and are examples of the multi-level home found frequently on The Hill. Those depicted have two stories in the back and only one story facing 19th St.

Fig. 10. Ruins of the old Dietrich farmhouse. This is little more than a nondescript pile of rubble, but the old well, seen in the right foreground as a deeply shadowed area, is still neatly lined with stone and has water in it.

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Fig. 11. This photo turned out so badly that I hesitate to use it; however it might give some idea of the scope of the excavation in the quarry area. This was taken from Home St., looking toward Ash St. The red line indicates the roof line of the houses on Ash, and since the photo is not 3-dimensional, I can only advise that the depth and width of this hole in the ground is amazing. Dirt and limestone from this area were used to elevate the 12th St. railroad tracks, and the Italian immigrants settled down nearby to be close to their work.

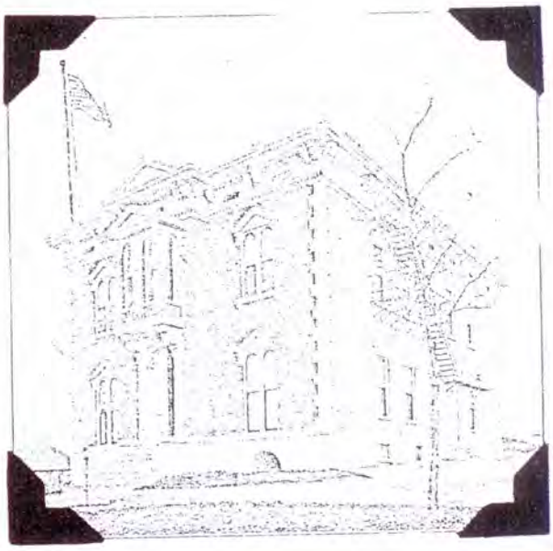

Fig. 12. This is the original building that housed the Campbell Co. Protestant Orphans' Home. It was razed in the 1950's to make way for the Baptist Convalescent Center.

Fig. 13. Taken from Amelia St., this photo shows the new Sweetbriar Apartment complex which tops the hill on which old Mr. Dietrich's dairy cows once grazed.