Canby House in Grafton Hill
Designers’ Show House V

History

Across the Great Miami River from the central part of Dayton is a high rise of ground known as Steele’s Hill. Once owned by an early settler, Dr. John Steele, it was a pleasant wooded area, surrounded by farms where many Daytonians went for walks and picnics. John Stoddard acquired the land in 1875 and developed his “Bellmonte Park” plat during the next 21 years. One of the citizens who purchased land in Stoddard’s plat was Edward Canby—president of Canby, Aeh and Canby, a company that made roasted coffees, teas, ground spices and peanut butter. On this land, standing where the Rike Pavilion of the Dayton Art Institute is now, Edward Canby built a magnificent Victorian mansion. Edward’s brother, Frank Canby, also built a house in “Bellmonte Park” on the corner of Belmonte Park North and Plymouth. The latter street no longer goes through, having been closed to accommodate the extension of the Masonic Temple parking lot.

In 1915, Harry B. Canby, Edward’s son, began construction of his house on a lot near his father’s. He was president of Crawford, McGregor and Canby, a company which began manufacturing shoe lasts and last blocks. Since the same type of machinery was required, the firm expanded into the manufacturing of golf club handles, golf clubs and golf supplies.

The architects of Canby’s Tudor Revival mansion were Schenck and Williams—a prominent firm which also had designed Ridgeleigh Terrace, home of Charles F. Kettering, and the Wright brother’s home, Hawthorne Hill. Harry Canby helped in the design of the home, which included many innovative features. The house contained a central vacuum system, a gas-fired clothes drying rack in the laundry, galvanized steel counter tops in the kitchen and a concealed wall safe in one of the upstairs bathrooms. The three-car garage had an apparatus in the ceiling for washing the cars and its own gas pump outside the doors.

The 30-room mansion also featured magnificent architectural details in its oak and mahogany woodwork and paneling, leaded glass windows, stone fireplaces and its beautiful carved staircase.

Harry Canby and his wife, Hannah, had two daughters and a son who grew up at 528 Bellmonte Park North. One daughter, Alice, was married in the house. Their son, Edward, eventually joined Crawford, McGregor and Canby. In the late 1930s Crawford, McGregor and Canby was sold to a Cincinnati company, went through several successive owners as the MacGregor Golf Company, and is now owned by golf pro Jack Nicklaus.

The Canby family remained in the house until 1953. The house was sold in 1959 to Delta Theta Tau, Inc., a national teachers’ sorority, to be used as the sorority retirement home. The sorority undertook some restoration of the interior, but no major alteration.

In 1972 the Canby House was bought by Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church, its present owner.
Valley of the Giants—
(Grafton Hill—Formerly, Steele Hill)

Note: This is a historic view of one of the areas in which Dayton’s early entrepreneurs lived.

Steele Hill was occupied in the early 1800s by a farmer, John H. Steele, who kept this hillside area, surrounded by farms, a pristine wooded picnic area. In 1875, it was acquired by John Stoddard, who platted the area for residential development.

One of the early plat owners was Edward Beaver Canby, the fourth man to join The Engineers Club of Dayton. He was president of a firm that packaged and sold coffee, teas, spices and peanut butter. He built his home where the north end of the Dayton Art Institute now stands; and his son, Harry B. Canby, later built his home on the third plat to the north. This 1915 home was the 1997 Philharmonic Show House. Harry Canby was owner of what was later to become the McGregor Golf Company, now owned by Jack Nicklaus.

The 1997 Philharmonic Show House is located one block north, at 205 Belmonte Park E., and it was the second most successful for the Philharmonic. The home was built in 1913 by Thomas A. Ferneding, one of Ohio’s earliest railroad executives, who had developed a revolutionary street railway tie used throughout the world. He was also an Engineers Club member.

Edward A. Deeds, one of the Dayton area’s greatest entrepreneurs, an inventive genius, as well as one of The Dayton Engineers Club founders, lived at 319 Central Avenue. It was in the barn in back of his house that the original Barn Gang was so helpful in improving the early automobiles with ignition systems, self-starters, etc. Charles Kettering was an active member of the Barn Gang and a co-founder of The Engineers Club. William Chryst and Zerbe Bradord, in this original Barn Gang, were among the first 100 Members, as well as Anderson, Demaree, Johns, Koffer, Lipes, Mooney, Phillips, Sheets and Todd, most of whom joined the Engineers Club after the first 100.

Jim Custer and his father, Lucerne, were earlier names in our Valley of the Giants, and were long-time Club members. Their home was near the corner of Forest and Grand. Also, Irving Levy, Ken Zahrt and Jim Veghte have become residents of Grafton Hill in the past 15 years, and Wilson Charbonneau, since 1947. All are listed in our Valley of Giants. Club members Jim Tankersley and Arden Pulver also live in the area.

Other G-H former residents of V-G rating were potato chip founder, Mikesell, and U.S. Congressman Roy Fitzgerald as well as Ohio Governor Cox, of Cox Newspapers and a former candidate for U.S. Vice President. Grafton Hill is deserving of recognition in this, our beloved VALLEY OF THE GIANTS! (See article on Page 2)