

John Hartness Brown and the Development of Eastern Cleveland

William C. Barrow

Of the many trips that John Hartness Brown took up to the heights overlooking University Circle, the most fateful ones were two taken twenty years apart around the turn of the century. The first, in 1890, helped establish him as a real estate man in Cleveland and set him on a course leading to socialite attorney William Lowe Rice. The second, in 1910, would occur simultaneously with Rice's murder and would mark the beginning of the end of Brown's presence in this city.

These two trips not only harbingered changes in Brown's life, but also signaled the rise and fall of the luxury residential subdivision that Brown created — The Euclid Heights Allotment. This allotment represented the peak of fine living when created in 1892, but by 1910 was on a long slide into bankruptcy due to social and technological changes unforeseen by Brown. As such, the Euclid Heights Allotment offers a perspective from which to understand the movement of Cleveland's wealthier citizens from their estates along Euclid Avenue, out to the University Circle retreat that they prepared, and eventually farther out to the Van Sweringen's Shaker Heights community.

Versions of Brown's first trip have him showing the Garfield Monument to a visiting railroad promoter, Patrick Calhoun, in August of 1890. Calhoun, grandson of the famous John C. Calhoun, was reportedly so taken by the potential of the land south of Lake View Cemetery that he immediately made an offer to buy it.

He saw that Cleveland was rapidly growing out along Euclid Avenue and the other major arterials and that streetcars and residential subdivisions were being built to accommodate this demand. Just beyond the old Doan's Corners area (Euclid and E. 105th-107th) wealthy citizens like Jephtha Wade, William Gordon and John D. Rockefeller were establishing a veritable satellite community of scenic parks, luxury estates and cultural institutions, in order to escape the urban pressures of downtown Cleveland and to take advantage of the wild natural beauty of the area. Calhoun and Brown saw that a luxurious, modern residential subdivision on the heights overlooking this area would be a natural draw for the Millionaires Row class that was being pushed eastward. The Euclid Heights Allotment was the result of their collaboration.

Their subdivision of 1892 was planned for an era when electric streetcars were just coming into existence, with the power to scale the heights, and when personal mobility for the wealthy still meant their carriages. But the rapid success of the automobile after 1900 freed people from a dependence upon the streetcars and made personal transportation a more egalitarian and wider-ranging possibility. To some extent the Euclid Heights Allotment was being by-passed by the wealthy for more secluded areas farther out. It was also competing for middle class buyers with the myriad of streetcar suburbs created in the first years of the century. Its bankruptcy in 1914 is testament to the keen competition of this era and the rapid technological changes of the Gilded Age.

