

SETTLING IN Where People Lived

Heavenly Aspirations and Earthly Realities: Urban Utopias in the Western Reserve

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Northeast Ohio was the destination of a number of religious groups seeking to create their own utopian settlements. Although widely divergent in terms of theology, they were united in their collective desire to forge a new societal framework on the American continent. The communities of Tallmadge, Shaker Heights, and Kirtland, Ohio each share a common heritage of utopian/religious thought. Their urban plans are cultural artifacts which reflect each particular group's vision of heaven on earth. Because these urban plans controlled land acquisition and settlement patterns, these utopian visions remain a part of the landscape today. In the case of Kirtland, the relatively modest growth of the towns has done little to change the basic urban form. However for Shaker Heights and Tallmadge, the nature of the original plan and the subsequent population increases have significantly altered the function of the plan with different consequences for each city. For Tallmadge, the centripital street arrangement fostered a strong sense of community up until the arrival of commuter traffic, while the North Union Shaker settlement's only legacy is the preservation of park land and the preservation of a land parcel sufficiently large to allow for planning that ignores the five mile square grid established by the Connecticut Land Company.