

and Lawrence. If someone were to go to the Literary Club, John Q., and give them this information, and they appreciated the value of it, then and only then would I consider telling you more. In the meantime, John Q., you can give my regards to Broadway, and while you're at it, give my regards to the City of Cincinnati and Hamilton County."

THE EAST ENDERS

February 8, 1999

Edward Lee Burdell

One of the most popular shows on British television is The Eastenders. This soap opera-like dramatic series appears on Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday for half an hour and repeats as a single 90-minute presentation on Sundays. It describes the lives and crises of members of a working class neighborhood surrounding the mythical Albert Square in the equally imaginary borough of Walford. Set in contemporary times, the community, its residents and concerns very much resemble Stepny and the other East End communities located to the east of the walls of the City and along the bank of the River {TEMZ} Thames. [As another example of American corruption of things British - the river of the same name in New London, Connecticut is known locally as the {THAMZ} Thames.]

Historically, London's East End has been home to waves of immigrants who have entered England by coming up the River. In fact, in very early times, many of these new residents were barred from entering the City. On the television show, the characters portray a representative mixture of newcomers and long-time residents. The Cockney is the most renown of these long-time residents, but the neighborhood is replete with markets, taverns and restaurants which reflect Italian and Jewish heritages as well as the new residents of the East End who have come from all over The Empire. One of the joys of the television show to British watchers is the running

commentary on political times. Certainly things were said about Mrs. Thatcher and her government of self-reliance that many might have felt, but which at least must be considered rude.

The heart of The Eastenders show is the Queen Victoria, the neighborhood pub. It was there that the initial show began with the now classic phrase by the owner of the pub, "Stinks in here." At the Queen Vic, many of the day-to-day events get played out as patrons bring in and share their tales. A recurring character for many years, Dot Cotton, served as a one woman Greek chorus with commentaries, usually sad and frequently cynical.

The show has, not surprisingly, been attacked by the moral watchdogs of British society. The topics are frequently too bold, the language too vulgar, and the attitude too negative to be an appropriate representation of life in "This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England." (W. Shakespeare) The show began in 1984, and continues to run as one of the top-viewed British productions.

Ten years ago, my Godson and his British bride came on a visit to the Colonies and brought along Jane's parents, Alister and Louise Chisholm. These residents of East Anglia are the stuff that the British Empire is made of. Alister's business card includes the initials, "O.B.E." which identifies him as one of the "Most Excellent Order of the British Empire." In the course of their visit, I came to learn Louise's firmly held views on three topics: Northern Ireland, female priests in the Anglican Church and The Eastenders. Regarding The Eastenders, she asked if we had ever seen the show, and almost before we could answer said: "You mustn't believe any of it; it really is trashy. We are not at all like that." Recently, her son-in-law reported that they have come to know that there are four times a week [Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday] when they don't call the Chisholms because Louise is busy watching The Eastenders.

As you all know, Cincinnati also has its own East End. Of interest is that shortly before the beginning of this century, Cincinnati's West End was centered around Garfield Park and its elite residential East End centered

on Lytle Park. Preservation of the Park and the residential character around our clubhouse is credited to the work of Charles P. Taft, as he and other residents successfully prevented the encroachment of factories from both sides. (Boss Cox's Cincinnati by Zane Miller) From the 1900's until recent times, the East End extended from Eggleston Avenue at the Ohio River out to the mouth of the Little Miami, and up the western edge of the Little Miami flood plain to Fairfax.

When we returned to Cincinnati in 1982, I was surprised as I looked through the real estate section of our newspapers to discover that the fastest growing part of our region seemed to be Hyde Park. From the neighborhood, which I remembered being centered around Hyde Park Square, it seemed that realtors had extended it to include virtually all of Mt. Lookout and O'Bryonville as well as parts of Evanston, Oakley and Madisonville. Even today, most consider the Rookwood Pavilion shopping center located at the site of the LeBlond Machine Tool Company to be in Hyde Park and occasionally under the heading "near Hyde Park", one can discover other Norwood properties.

Just the opposite has happened with the East End. Lunken Airfield has become its own neighborhood and what it hasn't absorbed has been sectioned off between Linwood and the newly emergent Columbia-Tusculum. Moving out from the city, Sawyer Point and Adams Crossing have seceded from the East End and claimed all of the land on both sides of Eastern Avenue from Eggleston Avenue to the Rookwood overpass. The Rookwood overpass is that neck-wrenching, dogleg turn beneath the rail line as it crosses from the riverside of Eastern to the north side. Today, the official city definition of the East End neighborhood shows the river as the southern border, Columbia Parkway to the north, Rookwood overpass on the west and Delta Avenue on the east.

Almost as important as the river in describing the East End is the nature and uses of both sides of Eastern Avenue. The construction of Columbia Parkway in the 1930's established a clear line of demarcation on the northern edge of the neighborhood. The initial work and subsequent improvements to Columbia Parkway have eliminated virtually all of the housing that used to sit

on the south side of the road and was a part of the East End. As is true of many river valleys, the railroad also was a part of the East End. Generally running in the area between Columbia Parkway and Eastern Avenue, the railroad further divides the already narrow linear neighborhood. One early response to that was the construction of pedestrian tunnels beneath the railroad to serve residents of Walworth, Aspasia and Golden Avenues. Vestiges of at least three tunnels remain, and one further to the east is still in use. The tunnels connected the residents who lived above the railroad with the folks on Eastern Avenue.

On the south side of Eastern Avenue, the land can roughly be divided into three areas. The elevated and protected sites, which enclose the Gas Works and the Water Works, are above the one hundred-year flood line. Most of the remainder of the properties on the south side of Eastern are within the one hundred year flood plain and properties at the end of Worth Street, Strader, Setchell and Wenner are actually in the floodway. This latter term identifies parts of the shore where – at flood – the river actually has a strong current, as opposed to the floodplain which is more of a backwater. The other natural condition, which impacts development, is the hillside portion of the East End as it rises from Eastern Avenue to Columbia Parkway. The hillsides are unstable and construction can only be undertaken with the utmost care. A few years ago, an effort to develop property across from the LeBlond Recreation Center came to a swift half during the initial excavation phase as front steps and even porches of houses on Gladstone began to pull away from their foundations and the railroad track began to separate. Despite all of these natural challenges, the East End is a unique, desirable residential neighborhood.

In the early days of our city, the East End was truly a working neighborhood as boat yards and docks built and serviced the vessels that plied the Ohio and served as the economic engine for the new porkopolis. Few of the early residences were of a substantial nature; rather they were thrown together to accommodate the men and their families who came to work on and by the river. One early observer in the mid-19th Century described it thus, "People could be found living in dreary rat holes,

ten, fifteen and thirty feet underground which were small dark, unventilated, wet, dreary dungeons." At the turn of the Century, it was estimated that over six thousand people lived in the East End.

Through the early decades of the 20th Century, industrial and residential activity grew in the East End. It became one of the rock solid working-class neighborhoods. Similar to its London counter part, the neighborhood grew up just outside of the edge of the central city and became home to immigrants who followed the river upon their arrival in Cincinnati. Not unlike much of the city, there was a strong German influence, but the East End predominantly became the home of the first migration from Appalachia. Many came from West Virginia and Kentucky by way of the river; others came from Tennessee and central Kentucky and found their way to the river communities on both to the east and the west of downtown. Even today, Sedamsville and Lower Price Hill as well as the East End are considered Appalachian neighborhoods.

One unique characteristic of the Appalachian migration was the inclusion of persons of color from the Appalachian counties. These freemen and freed slaves became a part of the neighborhood, and the East End today continues as one of Cincinnati's few historically integrated neighborhoods. Possibly because of these immigrants, but more likely because of its location and the strength of the abolitionist movement in Cincinnati, the East End was a landing point for escaping slaves. At least two houses on the riverbank remained which have secret spaces that served to conceal the fugitives.

Those families who lived by the river and drew their living from it were also subject to its occasional rampages. Flooding has always been a regular feature of East End life. The most visible testimony to this is the scale painted on the southern side of the landmark Saint Rose Catholic Church. Saint Rose is the tallest landmark in the East End, clearly visible from Columbia Parkway and is a point of bearing for riverboats.

In the 20th Century, of course, the most famous flood was in 1937. The river crested at 80 feet, some 30 feet over its banks. This was one of the rare instances

when floodwaters crossed Eastern Avenue and the damage was enormous. My grandfather's family lived on Worth Street at the corner of Eastern, right where Eastern turns under the rail overpass at Delta Avenue. My memory of family stories includes that of my great aunt's upright piano floating out the front door of the house. When the floodwaters receded, the piano was discovered hanging from a nearby telephone pole.

To outsiders, it is always somewhat of a mystery why East End residents endure the floods and return to their homes to clean up and start again. There is no mystery to long-time residents of the East End. Because the river is a constant presence in their life, when it chooses to flood, it is no different than when the weather turns especially cold or hot. It is a simple act of nature which many must accept and live with.

The thirties, forties and fifties were vibrant periods of activity in the East End. The trolley, which ran from downtown all the way out Eastern Avenue, provided a ready and inexpensive means of transportation. Businesses thrived on the river and the Water Works and the Gas Works built major facilities and provided service to the factories and homes. One of the advantages to business in the East End was the ready availability of sewer lines to dispose of waste-byproducts. Residents also hooked into lines to provide all of the comforts of indoor plumbing. Unfortunately it wasn't until very recently that it became clear that the reason for such ready availability was that the sewer lines, in most cases, ran directly to the river and that much of the effluent from the East End never reached any of the city's sewerage treatment plants all of which are located at a higher elevation than the centerline of Eastern Avenue. A practical illustration of this natural law was provided to me by a Navy Chief Petty Officer. I had complained that all the rotten jobs and mid-watches seemed to be coming to Ensign Burdell. As he explained it to me, "Sir, shit flows downhill and ensigns are at the bottom of the hill."

The East End was a very tight-knit community. For reasons that have passed into family lore, my grandmother and her sister-in-law did not exactly get along. So when grandmother wanted to find out if grandfather was down at

Worth Street visiting his sister, she would call the neighbor who lived across the street and ask, "Is Tom over there?" I recently ran into that woman's daughter at church, and she still remembered that as one of the interesting curiosities in the community's life.

Speaking of my grandfather, he was reputed to be the strongest man in the East End. To me, this licensed master plumber was a gentle giant who would take me to Crosley Field and Coney Island. But once again my memory is of a man who could take a cast iron bath tub off the back of a pick-up truck by himself and hoist it over his head to carry it up the steps. Although there may have been some pugilistic aspects to grandfather's reputation, some of it I know was gained from his baseball exploits at Turkey Ridge where he was reputed to have hit more than one ball out of the park and into the river. Both my father and I followed grandfather in playing baseball there. Turkey Ridge is located at Kellogg and Delta and stretches westward along the river. The city's new neighborhood maps would indicate that Turkey Ridge is a part of Columbia, Tusculum, but my Dad and I know better.

Recreation has been a major part of the East End for decades. Even during the Depression, the Recreation Commission and a staff led by neighborhood legend "Pop" Madden taught the neighborhood kids how to play sports. At about this same time, the baseball and football fields at Turkey Ridge were supplemented by a boat landing and a dance pavilion where all the young people gathered on Friday and Saturday nights. It is an interesting commentary that during youth soccer season nowadays, the roads and parking lots at Turkey Ridge look like a used car lot specializing in mini-vans, sport utility vehicles and late model European station wagons. Another Recreation Commission center was the Pendleton. When the trolleys had been horse drawn, the Pendleton Car Barn served as a public transportation facility. Later as a City rec facility, it was a gathering place for dances, wedding receptions and other community events.

The true social centers of the East End, however, were the same as the center of activity in The Eastenders. Every node of commercial or industrial activity along Eastern Avenue had its own bar. In my memory during the early 1960's - as I achieved my

majority, there was no Queen Vic's but there was at least three Do Drop Inns on Eastern Avenue. So that no one would be confused, each of them was spelling differently. Today, only one Dew Drop In remains as a community meeting place and "watering hole." Another sign of the times is that one of those sites is currently being renovated as an upscale restaurant called A 'Mesetta Café.

From its population peak near twelve thousand persons during the 1950's, the East End entered a period of population decline. By 1970, the population had dropped below five thousand; and by 1990, below 2,500. Today, there are fewer than 2,000 people living in this once vibrant neighborhood. The causes for the decline include changing conditions in the nation and the neighborhood as well as actions and sometimes inactions by government officials and property owners.

The housing stock in the East End is predominantly made up of small, usually frame, single-family homes with some multi-family housing. Most of the latter is made up of small, one or two bedroom apartments in 2-4 family houses. Only a few old brick buildings have survived the floods and the wrecker's ball. The demise of the trolleys and the construction of Columbia Parkway made it easier for children of East End families to move to the suburbs. Mt. Washington, New Richmond and the older sections of Anderson Township are home to many second and third generation East Enders.

The river and hillside bracket Eastern Avenue so most homes are built on very small lots that are not conducive to expansion or extension renovation. Because of these characteristics, property values in the East End remain static and declined significantly in comparison to other eastside communities. Other neighborhoods with similar housing, such as Lower Price Hill and Camp Washington, have experienced a similar phenomenon. Although many residents of the East End were and are multi-generational East Enders, the rate of home ownership is extremely low. Rents in the East End are traditionally very low. A study in 1989 found that the maximum rent was \$350 and that 40% of the rents were less than \$200 a month. Such a modest return provides no incentive for landlords to maintain or improve their

properties. Inevitably, properties that are poorly maintained by the landlords are poorly cared for by the tenants and the spiral of deterioration and decline accelerates.

Beginning in the 1970's, the City of Cincinnati recognized the potential value of its riverfront and initiated a number of planning ventures. The establishment of the Riverfront Advisory Council provided a vehicle for a series of specialized studies focusing on various segments of the riverfront. Probably the most successful initiative was the Sawyer Point Park development given impetus by Cincinnati. To date, the least successful effort focuses on the central riverfront. The consequences of a variety of public and private decisions, none of them reflecting a comprehensive planning construct, were described only too graphically by Francis Barrett in last week's paper. Somewhere between these two efforts is the city's planning work in the East End.

In December of 1988, the Riverfront Advisory Council adopted the "Eastern Riverfront Revised Concept Plan." That was followed in short order by the "Eastern Riverfront Development Strategy" in June of 1989 and the "Eastern Riverfront Implementation Analysis" in December of 1989. Finally, in the fall of 1992, City Council adopted the "East End Riverfront Community Development Plans and Guidelines."

For surely I know the plans I have for you,
 says the Lord,
 plans for your welfare and not for harm,
 to give you a future with hope."
 Jeremiah, Chapter 29, verse 11

Always in community life, there are tensions among competing goals and values and interests. In the East End, this is played out in many ways. The planning process itself was sufficiently intricate and conflicted to provide the material for a book by a University of Cincinnati anthropology professor who described it as a case study in class, culture and power in an urban neighborhood. The players included long-time residents, new residents, developers and the many elements of city government from Council members

to various administrative departments including Planning, Economic Development and the Department of Buildings and Inspections. From the beginning of the process, each of these groups – none of whom are completely unified, especially the life-long residents – had strikingly different aspirations. The traditional residents wanted to protect what they had in terms of a tight-knit community, low rents and a tradition of benign neglect from the city. If they could expand a little on city services and possibly add new, low-cost housing that would be an improvement and would permit the return of many residents who had left the East End in the last decade. They would have been satisfied.

For the new residents, there was a definite desire for increased city services and support and a general upgrading of the neighborhood, restoration of viable buildings and elimination of the blighted buildings. They realized that to accomplish this would require establishing a clearer and strong relationship with City Departments and the vehicle for doing this was the East End Area Council.

Cincinnati neighborhood councils are somewhat like New England town meetings in that membership and vote are conferred upon residents and property owners. The thought behind this is that business interests are important stakeholders and should be involved. In the East End, this has taken the form of developers becoming vital parts of the area Council.

The competition for control of the East End Area Council may be one of the most important continuing dramas in terms of the neighborhood's future. Area residents controlled the Council up to the very end of the planning process in 1992. Since then, leadership has passed to newcomers and developers who have presided over the departure of most area residents from the meetings. One result has been the creation of new rump groups, which have sought recognition and resources on behalf of the long-time residents. Two emerging institutions which seek to expand opportunities for traditional residents are the Pendleton Heritage Center Non-Profit Corporation which is renovating that building to once again serve as a

central element in community life and the East End Housing Preservation Fund, an alternative financing vehicle for moderate income development. These organizations have been supported with technical and financial resources from religious and community organizations, which view this as an investment in economic justice.

Pressure from the developers and new residents has resulted in a series of raids on the community by the department responsible for housing inspections. One consequence has been the loss of many housing units and residents as property owners, in some instances, have called the department to inspect their own units – even when they are occupied – in hopes that the building will be condemned and the property then demolished. This then reduces taxes in the short term and clears the land for future development which sets the stage for combinations of the small parcels so that larger, more profitable buildings can be built. This form of economic displacement is absolutely clear of any city requirements for relocation assistance to residents. Unfortunately, the new Plan – with its designs for market-rate housing and community improvements – has rewarded and accelerated this trend.

Just as the EastEnders on the television show are a small community which turns in on itself and bickers about day-to-day problems of life so too are our East Enders. Among the old-time residents, connections of location, family and occupation link the community together. The strong family ties are an absolute part of the neighborhood. Many families are represented with three and even four generations living within three or four blocks of one another. Inevitably, the eldest female assumes the role of matriarch, teacher and commentator on the fortunes and misfortunes of family and community.

The connectedness also manifests itself in the caring and support for one another as well as the willingness to do battle in cases of perceived slight and insult from some other resident clan. In some cases, these are folks who not only know about the McCoy's and the Hatfields, but also were a part of that legendary conflict in the hills of Kentucky.

Traditional demographic analyses of the residents of the East End show many serious problems. One of the most horrifying is that the dropout rate among young people in the East End approaches 100%. On the other hand, 82% of the young people in the East End live in two-parent families. The explanation of this anomaly is that young people frequently assume the role of caregiver for older members of the extended family, and also become a part of the economic structure of the family by seeking early employment. To East Enders, the ability to barter and swap services is almost as important as conventional employment. Possibly no where else in the city is an underground economy as strong a part of the neighborhood's fabric. None of these characteristics prepare East Enders to deal with the middle class bureaucracy and the developers who increasingly hold the East End's future in their hands.

One of the defining events in the future of the East End occurred in the spring of 1997. The river crested at 65 feet, the highest in more than thirty years, and only four feet below the 1945 level which ranks third to the great flood of 1937. Traditional East End residents reacted in their usual fashion by moving things as best they could, getting their cars out of the way and taking refuge with family and friends. Some of the new residents also got a taste of the river as the new construction in the 2000 block of the Eastern saw the basements of all of the very expensive townhouses flooded as the river lapped against the side of the buildings, almost level with the first floor. It was the aftermath of the flood, however, that brought the most change. Residents were truly surprised and gratified at the outpouring of immediate assistance. City Hall staff worked side-by-side with residents cleaning up from the aftermath of the flood; Public Works employees pulled long shifts, gathering and carting away the debris. True American generosity came into play as individuals and organizations from around the country sent donations. Despite the initial efforts, many houses were unlivable.

Properties located in the floodplain are generally not eligible for flood insurance and usually lending institutions are unable to offer traditional funds for

repair and renovation. The properties in the floodway face an even greater challenge. The patrons at the Queen Vic in The EastEnders regard government programs and workers with suspicion and derision. Patrons at the Do Drop Inn on Eastern Avenue have an even greater understanding of one of the three great lies, "I'm from the government, and I'm here to help you."

The Federal Emergency Management Act [FEMA] was designed to respond to disasters such as the flood, and to assist people in the community with their recovery. However in the East End, the combination of FEMA officials and the city's own Department of Buildings and Inspections combined to bring frustration, distrust and distress to most of those residents impacted by the flood. In addition to the almost four dozen houses located in the floodway, additional buildings - bringing the number closer to 100 - were either condemned or placed under an immediate order for renovation because they were adjudged to be unsafe. It is sad to note that, almost two years after the flood, 45 residents whose property has been taken have yet to receive payment.

What is the East End's future? For whom do we plan? What community will exist along Eastern Avenue ten years from now?

One certain trend is the virtual elimination of the East End as a manufacturing employment center. With the departure of Flerage Marine, only Johnson Electric, Allied Building Supplies and Verdin Bell remain. Even at the far end of Eastern Avenue near Beechmont Levy, Multi-Color has sold its ancient plant facilities to a new owner who specializes in building wine racks. Only two river-related activities remain: a small marina at Turkey Ridge and the barge crane located near the Rookwood overpass. This facility and the surrounding warehouses extending down to Johnson Electric may well disappear as new up-market development occurs next to the new Theodore Berry International Friendship Park which is slated to extend to the east from the Montgomery Inn Boathouse. What new employment opportunities do occur can be expected to be limited to professional office activities in renovated churches and small industrial buildings.

Transportation plans may also bring major change to the East End. While Eastern Avenue will continue to be a major artery into downtown, there are plans for the railroad track. Currently, less than a half-dozen trains a week use the tracks. Recent proposals in City Council call for establishment of a commuter rail line along this track which would increase activity and make the neighborhood even more attractive to downtown workers. One a more human scale, a proposed pedestrian riverwalk is to connect Turkey Ridge, the recreation complex at Schmidt Field and the central riverfront parks. This will further the recreation uses of the neighborhood and open it even further to outside users.

It is the changing housing stock, however, which will most dramatically impact the nature of the East End community. In the last thirty years, only eleven new units of subsidized housing have been constructed. An additional dozen units were renovated for moderate-income rental. On the other hand, market-rate housing has come to the East End. In recent weeks, the list of the most expensive property transfer in the Cincinnati area shows Eastern Avenue sales in the vicinity of \$350,000 on a regular basis. By the end of the summer, the new construction across from these properties will have created an enclave of upscale housing in the heart of the East End. A number of similar proposals are in the planning stages. All of these for-profit projects are receiving various city subsidies.

A part of the competing vision for the new East End relates to how long-time residents and new arrivals relate to the river. Most of the proposed development is on the upper side of Eastern Avenue and seeks to provide views of the river. The housing for long-time residents, which is under the greatest threat, is that on the southern side of Eastern. For these long-time residents, the Ohio River is something, which they feel — changes in current, the rise and fall of the river — all are a part of their daily life.

Can there be an East End which accommodates the inevitable pressure for change and yet maintains the rich fabric of the traditional community? Let me share my dream of how a mixed-income development of new and old residents might be achieved. The most expansive

and important resource for the new East End is the section between Eastern Avenue and the river and roughly between Worth Street/Delta Avenue and Schmidt Field's playgrounds. It is in this area where buildings in the floodplain have been damaged, and in many instances condemned, and yet it is also in this area where new construction could take place as long as the living area of the homes is above the 100-year floodplain.

Because most of the property is made up of small, single-family lots, the idea of a series of buildings on stilts – not unlike those seen in many coastal communities such as the Outer Banks of North Carolina – is a possibility. Such an approach, however, is prohibitively expensive for most current residents and would lead to a community with a sawtooth aspect as new buildings rose awkwardly over their adjacent neighbors. My dream design to this would be to build a base platform above the flood stage and then develop on the platform. This could be done, but it would require substantial public investment as well as innovative approaches to ownership of the construction sites above the small parcels below. This is an opportunity for Cincinnati to achieve a new economically and socially integrated community, because most of the small lots beneath the new community platform belong to current residents. Do we have the will, the courage to try such a venture? Do we care enough ". . .to give. . .a future with hope?"

Resources:

Practicing Community – Rhoda H. Halperin, 1998

The Social Areas of Cincinnati: An Analysis of Social Needs – Michael E. Maloney and Janet R. Buelow, 1997

Boss Cox's Cincinnati – Zane L. Miller, 1968

East End Riverfront Community Development Plan and Guidelines – Cincinnati City Planning Department, 1992
