

The Lost Clark Home

My family traces part of its history to Irish immigrants in Glendale as far back as the 1850s. Having grown up in the area myself, I've always had a personal affinity for the village, its history, and, in particular, its old houses. It was while looking for vintage pictures of old houses that I came upon this 1889 photo of a gracious and rare example of stick and shingle architecture. It was identified as the home of Albert Gardiner Clark in Glendale, Ohio, and it was the work of Cincinnati architect, Charles Crapsey. Crapsey was well-known in the 19th Century for designing churches, as well as residences and other buildings, such as the Westwood Town Hall.

But, who was Albert Gardiner Clark, his family, and where was their home in Glendale?

There are many unanswered aspects of that question. It's almost as if Mr. Clark wanted to disappear from history. I'll tell you the story of what I know, and maybe others can help solve the mystery...

Albert Clark was born in Glendale in 1846, the son of Henry and Mary Clark. His mother was from Philadelphia and came from a wealthy merchant family. Henry was a druggist and bank director from Connecticut, who headed west and found himself among the original seven founding members of the 1851 Glendale Association. Of course, the heart of Glendale's historic district, which centers on Fountain Avenue, is still known as the Crawford & Clark subdivision, since Robert Crawford and Henry Clark were the trustees for that piece of land. According to the *1894 History of Cincinnati & Hamilton County*, Albert Clark lived on the "first lot" of that subdivision, which his father, Henry, had purchased at premium price of \$500 (John Cleve Symmes paid just 66 2/3 cents an acre for this same land in 1794). The 1869 Glendale Titus Map indicates that Lot #1 of Crawford & Clark was at the northeast corner of Congress and Oak, across from what we know today as Century Inn. However, I've found no evidence that the home pictured here was ever at that corner. Moreover, this 1894 mention of Albert is one of the very few references that I have found of him in Glendale's archival material, which will seem strange to you as we get to know him better.

It's important to know that Henry Clark's family does not appear related to another prominent Glendale citizen, Robert Clarke (sometimes spelled without the "e"), whose name still figures in the village history as one of the founders of the Lyceum on Congress Avenue. Although Henry lived until 1879 (aged 89 years old) and was buried in Spring Grove, his name fades from Glendale history in the 1860s. Strangely, no member of Henry's family was listed among the voters in Glendale's 1869 election, and yet census records show that they were residents of the village throughout those years.

Nonetheless, young Albert Clark attended prep school in Cincinnati and Connecticut. In 1865, he began studies at Sheffield College, which at the time was the "scientific" branch of Yale. He was a member of the Book and Snake Society and named class poet. He graduated in 1868, returned to Glendale, and in 1873 married Miss Jeanette Wilson. Together they had four children: Henry, Albert Jr., Carroll, and Mary, all born in Glendale between 1877 and 1891.

Albert became a lawyer and eventually made his name as an executive with the Cincinnati Street Railway, the Mt. Adams and Eden Park Street Railway, and several other municipal transportation enterprises. He was also a member of the executive committee and a director of Cincinnati Bell Telephone and the Cincinnati Insurance Company. For many years, he was on the board of directors of Rookwood Pottery and the Cincinnati May Festival. His business ventures had him traveling the American West, mining zinc and gold, and even growing oranges in Florida and harvesting timber in Louisiana. Clearly, Albert was quite successful and wealthy.

The Queen City Club counted Albert among one of its earliest and most respected members. He was also one of the 13 founding members of an exclusive tongue-in-cheek social club made up of other wealthy Cincinnatians: The 13 Club to Kill Superstition. These gents sought to challenge various myths and superstitions by confronting them head on, starting with having membership dues of \$13 a year.

Albert and Jeanette, apparently known as “Zach” to her friends, were regulars in the society pages, and they hobnobbed with the elite of Cincinnati. “Zach” was said to be a woman of uncommon grace and charm with a large circle of friends. The Clarks appear to have been particularly close with Mr. and Mrs. John Shillito—a name still fondly remembered by Cincinnatians of a certain age.

Despite his many dealings in Cincinnati, Albert continued to call Glendale home and was active in its affairs. In 1881, he sued the Glendale Council for spending \$1,800 on improvements to Fountain Avenue on the basis that revenues for such a project had not yet been collected in taxes. Later, a *Cincinnati Enquirer* account of the dedication of the Lyceum in 1892 listed Albert and Jeanette among the many recognizable dignitaries on hand.

According to his Yale biography, he was also president of the Glendale School Board and president of the board constructing the Glendale Water Works. He was named alongside Charles Going and William Proctor by the *Enquirer* in a May 1893 story about the opening of the water works. Oddly, my 1955 *Centennial History of Glendale* does not list Albert’s name among those associated with either of these institutions and that’s where the trail starts to go cold...

It appears that by 1897 Albert and Jeanette left Glendale for Denver, Colorado, where Albert joined his eldest son, Henry, in his law practice. The family continued a semblance of life in Cincinnati for another decade or so, with part-time residences in Mt. Auburn and Avondale. Albert maintained his law office in the old Carew Building at 5th and Vine and he remained active with Rookwood’s board. Son Albert Jr. relocated to Mobile, Alabama, where he was later joined by baby sister, Mary. Mary married a man from Mobile in 1912. Eventually, Albert and Jeanette, and later even Henry, would also adopt Mobile as their home, living at 2007 Dauphin Street in a much more modest home than they had in Glendale. Carroll, another son, went into business in Indianapolis, where he died in 1924 at just 37 years old. Albert died in 1919, reportedly of Bright’s disease while in Georgia, where apparently Henry was living at that time. Jeanette passed in 1938 at the age of 86, and her body was brought back to Cincinnati where she was also buried at Spring Grove.

Despite their one time prominence, the Clark family’s mark in Glendale is small and faded after more than a century. Why they left Glendale is a mystery. Little is written about them other than the snippets I have gathered here, and the location of their house remains unknown. Census records in Glendale often did not include street names nor house numbers. And, directories and social registers only cite their home as “Glendale,” which in the late 19th Century was probably adequate for a small village.

While Glendale is heralded for its historic architecture, a number of homes have been lost or heavily modified over the years. I followed one lead about a house on Fountain Avenue that appears to have been lost in a 1914 fire while owned by a Wilton Coney, who had lived there for about five years. Newspaper accounts called the house “one of the finest” in the village and the loss was estimated at \$30,000. I thought that this may have been the “lost” Clark home, but other clues led me to discount that (I believe that house was owned earlier by Frederick Brackett, a bridge builder, so it could not have been the Clark home).

Having made inquiries on social media, some responses offered speculation that the Clark home did indeed stand on Lot #1 and was likely lost to a fire sometime in the early 1900s, but no record has been

found to support that. Lot #1 appears to have been split in two equal parts, and around 1912, a small Arts & Crafts-era home was built on the eastern half at 20 Oak Avenue. That home still stands today.

Perhaps the readers of this publication might help solve the mystery of the lost Clark home, and in a future edition we can reveal the complete story.

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