

IMAGES

...THEN AND NOW

From the Indian Hill Historical Society



**Buckingham Lodge
1861**



A Look Back at St. Michael's Convalescent Home

The 1928 painting “Map of Camargo” by Frank Meyers, commissioned by O. DeGray Vanderbilt depicts the estate properties in the area then known as Camargo, and now as Indian Hill. Each parcel is represented by a logo, and there are 80 that constitute the work of art. On south Given Road, a Christian cross marks the location of the Convalescent Home.

In that era convalescent homes served the society at large as well as their patients. Unlike today's nursing or rest homes, where residents are long term, convalescent homes were designed to provide a place where patients could recover from illnesses or medical procedures before returning to their own homes. They offered an interim home-like environment for the convalescent and freed up space in hospital wards. Often these homes were in rural areas, thought to be more conducive to recovery than urban locations. They appealed to philanthropists because they offered therapy while inculcating healthy habits and values.

Records from Cincinnati newspapers document donations as early as 1915 to St. Michael's Convalescent Home. The all-female Needlework Guild, which according to its President, “receives cash only for the purpose of transforming it into new articles for the needy” provided 210 garments to St. Michael's about that time. Though the exact date of the establishment of the home is uncertain, it became a charity to which many locally prominent Cincinnati families donated their funds and talents. St. Michael is known as an archangel in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In early Christian legend, he was considered a healer, and in later years, as a patron of warriors, mariners, the sick and the suffering. This possibly explains why his name was chosen for the convalescent home. Not only did women's groups contribute to the home, agencies led by men also supported it, including the Community Chest (which gave \$3600 in 1927) and the Council of Social Agencies.

The idea of creating the convalescent home is attributed to Mr. Howard Nelson Bacon, who had assistance from several well-to-do beneficiaries. Bacon came to Cincinnati at age 22 seeking a career in business, but instead joined the lay staff of Christ Church, where he started by earning \$100 a month and living in the Parish House. After serving with the Red Cross in World War I, he resumed his dedication to the civic and religious life of the Cincinnati community. As President of the Board of St. Michael's, his altruistic efforts continued. He was also involved with many other local committees of a philanthropic nature.



Howard N. Bacon

In 1915, Mrs. Georgina Holmes Thomas helped secure 70 acres on Given Road. The house once belonged to Judge Peter Swing and his forebearers. Originally built by the Conklin family, the quaintly gabled structure was about 100 years old. It was described as having “an early 19th century aspect”. A new sunroom was added, and the view from the ridge of Red Bird Hollow was said to be “a radiant panorama”. St. Michael's Home could accommodate 142 men and women. The usual period of convalescence was a fortnight (two weeks). The cost to each patient was \$1 daily. Annual expenses were about \$11,000, and sales from the farm on the property helped defray costs. Vegetables, milk, cream, butter, fresh fruit from the orchard, and canned preserves (about 650 jars per annum) generated some income. Additional expenses were funded by charitable donations and endeavors.

One such enterprise was the Christmas Bazaar at Christ Church Parish House. In 1929, the proceeds were designated for the home's much needed heating plant. This was always a well-attended charity function, with different tables/booths managed by capable women (e.g., Mrs. John Jay Rowe, Mrs. O. DeGray Vanderbilt, Mrs. Lily Fleischmann, Mrs. Edgar Ernst). Items could be purchased at the Children's Booth, Candy Table, Basket Table, Farm Products Table, Fruit Stall, Book Counter, and Useful Articles Table. Fresh Christmas greens (pine and balsam) from the Adirondacks and Maine were also for sale, as were all kinds of fancywork. Even a cocker spaniel which was born at the farm at St. Michael's was available as a gift. This 2-day benevolent affair was a highlight of the holiday season.

By the mid-1930s, the home was no longer mentioned in local papers. John G. Holters, one of the original stockholders of the Camargo Realty Company, constructed an elegant brick family home on its site in 1936. St. Michael's Convalescent Home briefly was part of Indian Hill history; benefactors enabled its success, and patients recovered there. The cross on the old “Map of Camargo” painting is a reminder of its early 20th century existence.