

IMAGES

...THEN AND NOW

From the Indian Hill Historical Society



Buckingham Lodge
1861

Looking Back in Time at Ambleside

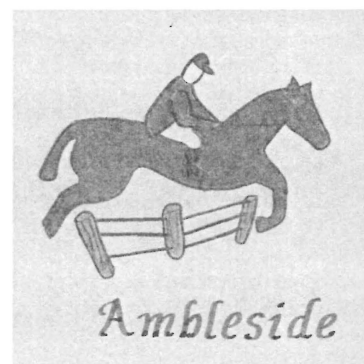
The 1920s marked the beginning of the Estate Era, when Indian Hill was transformed from a farming community to residences for some of Cincinnati's most prominent families. Fabulous homes surrounded by rolling farmland were built as the Camargo Realty Company attracted buyers. One of these estates was Ambleside, situated at the corner of Blome and Keller Roads.



Built in 1928 for Mr. & Mrs. Leonard Smith, Jr., and reminiscent of a European manor house, the complex is a monument to an earlier epoch. Architect John Henri Deekin designed the 12,000 square foot abode. The Smiths, who were enamored of England, perhaps named it Ambleside for the hamlet of that same name in Great Britain. Situated on 180 acres, the estate included 4 tenant houses, miscellaneous farm buildings, a greenhouse, tennis courts, pool, and pool house. The landscape design plan was devised by A.D. Taylor of Cleveland, and featured lawns, formal hedge rows, courts, gardens, vineyards, orchards, pasture, and a wide variety of trees. The gatehouse at the entrance was awarded first place by the Cincinnati Institute of Architects in 1929, and the plaque recognizing this honor still remains attached to the structure. Here the retainer, Willis, lived and watched those who entered and exited the grounds.

After entering the estate through the gatehouse, a long curving driveway leads to the stone courtyard at the residence. The exterior reminds one of a medieval chateau, with slate roof, stone, stucco, and half timber construction. The entry hall — where 20 foot tall Christmas trees stood for the Smith family — has a full cathedral ceiling. Built for gracious living, Ambleside's elegant details were constructed by yesteryear's talented artisans.

Ruth and Leonard Smith raised three children (Ruth, Stephen, and Jane) at Ambleside. Mr. Smith was President and later Chairman of National Marking Machine Company in Northside. An enthusiastic horseman, he was joint Master of the Camargo Hunt, a member of the Ohio Valley Thoroughbred Club and the Masters of Foxhounds Association of America. His interest in equestrian sports is reflected in the crest symbol of Ambleside — a rider jumping a fence. The estate was a regular fixture for the Camargo Hunt. Four horses were stabled on the property and there was a large staff to manage the grounds, gardens, and farm. Chickens, sheep, cows, and mules were on site throughout the 1930s, and a full garden provided some produce for the family. The Smiths were most hospitable and enjoyed entertaining their guests lavishly. Ruth's debutante party featured the Jan Savitt Orchestra, and her extravagant wedding was also held at her childhood home.



The second owners of the estate were Mr. & Mrs. Charles Schott. They purchased it in 1954, with hopes of raising a large family there. When her husband died in 1968, Marge inherited Ambleside, which she called "Charley's Castle", as well as his car dealership and other enterprises. Though she was childless, she was passionate about children, animals and her hometown. At one time 22 St Bernards resided on the property. An owner of the Cincinnati Reds, Marge decorated her 19 room home with abundant baseball memorabilia and photos of dogs and celebrities. A generous philanthropist, she opened the estate for charitable benefits and rallies which featured Reds players, Buicks, and animals, including elephants from the Cincinnati Zoo. Mrs. Schott died in 2004. Under the terms of her will Ambleside was deeded to the Schott Foundation, and in 2008 HPA Development Group acquired the property for development.

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