

# VIGNETTES OF CLIFTON PARK I

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The following pages are a record of two business ventures, The Clifton Park Association and The Clifton Park Land Improvement Company, that never reached the goals set by the men who invested their money and time in the idea of Clifton Park.

In 1866 a group of Cleveland businessmen met and formed the organization known as The Clifton Park Association. These men were all successful businessmen. Most were officers of the companies they served.

It was found that transportation was needed to bring Clevelanders to Clifton Park. By 1869 the men of Clifton Park had built a narrow gauge railroad and had bought three engines. The railroad was known as The Rocky River Railroad and nicknamed the Dummy. The three engines were named The Dan P. Rhodes, The Elias Sims and The Mark Hanna. Also in 1869 the Articles of Incorporation were signed and the Clifton Park idea was then a concrete business venture.

The men of the Clifton Park Association had the idea of a huge resort area. The present Yacht Club Island was even considered in their plans. Old records show that Daniel P. Rhodes owned four-fifths of the island and Elias Sims owned one-fifth.

Photograph Courtesy of Mr. Hans Penndorph



This is to certify that eve the undersigned  
 Daniel P. Rhodes. Elias Sims. George W. Jones  
 John H. Sargent. Thomas Dixon. John -  
 Spaulding. Ezra Nicholson. George E. Nuttall  
 & Josiah Barber. Have associated ourselves  
 together to become a body corporate as provided  
 in an act of the General Assembly of the State  
 of Ohio passed April 5<sup>th</sup> 1866. and amended  
 April. 16. 1867. for the purpose of constructing  
 and maintaining buildings to be used for Hotels  
 Storerooms. Conement Houses or Water Cure es-  
 tablishments. for the treatment of invalids. and  
 for places of general public resort. That the  
 amount of the Capital Stock necessary for the  
 purposes of said association is One hundred  
 thousand Dollars. \$100,000. That the amount  
 of each share is One hundred dollars. That the  
 place of doing the business and exercising the  
 privileges of said association is at or near the  
 mouth of ~~the~~ Rocky River in the Township of  
 Rockport. Cuyahoga County Ohio. That the name  
 and style by which said Company shall be -  
 known is the Clifton Park Association

In witness whereof we hereunto set our hands and  
Seals the 28<sup>th</sup> day of January A.D. 1869.

W. Rhodes  Thomas Dixon   
Elias Sims  John Spaulding   
G. W. Jones  E. Nicholson   
John H. Sargent  Geo E Hartnell   
Josiah Barber 

A171 1245

State of Ohio }  
County of Cuyahoga } ss

Personally appeared before  
me a Justice of the Peace in and for said County  
the within named Daniel P. Rhodes, Elias Sims,  
George W. Jones, John H. Sargent, Thomas Dixon,  
John Spaulding, Ezra Nicholson, George E. Hartnell  
& Josiah Barber, who acknowledged that they  
did sign and seal the foregoing instrument and  
that the same is their free act and deed

In testimony whereof I have hereunto set  
my hand this 29 day of January 1869  
Daniel Stephens  
Justice Peace

MEN OF THE CLIFTON PARK ASSOCIATION - 1869

- Daniel P. Rhodes                      Served on the Cleveland School Board. Coal operator. Owner in part, of the Westside Street Railroad and the Rocky River Railroad (Dummy) and of Cliff House.
- Elias Sims                              Owner, in part, of the Rocky River Railroad. Real estate.
- George W. Jones                      Captain Jones, shipyard owner.
- John H. Sargent                      Civil engineer, road builder, owner, in part, of the Rocky River Railroad and Cliff House. Cleveland Parks Board of Commissioners. Real estate developer.
- George Hartnell                      Peoples Savings and Loan Association.
- Ezra Nicholson                      Owner, in part, of the Rocky River Railroad. Inventor of the Nicholson Log (a marine device which records ships' speed), large land owner in early Clifton Park property.
- Josiah Barber                      Real estate. Chief stockholder in Cuyahoga Steam Furnace Co. Active in city government of Ohio City. First president of Riverside Cemetery. Gave land for an open air market and public square at West 25th St. and Lorain Ave.
- John Spalding.                      Captain Spalding was in charge of the canal locks at the Soo. He was known to all the old time captains. Owned the Alameda Allotment in Rockport.
- Thomas Dixon                      Real estate developer in association with J. H. Sargent.

The old red brick building on Clifton Beach which has served for many years as a work-center for Beach workers and as a home for the Beach caretakers, was originally built to house the Rockport Pumping Station.

Cleveland Water Department records tell that the Rockport system was a "first high service," which means water was pumped once a day into a well plus a storage tank. The water level was kept at 15 to 18 inches in the tank to maintain pressure. The tank was on Clifton Road at the present location of Arlington Road. The water intake was just west of the Pump House. The intake pipe ran about 190 feet from the Pump House into the lake. The well was close by the Pump House in what is now the Lagoon.



Cleveland water began servicing Rockport through one meter in November of 1895. The Rockport Pumping Station then became inactive.

There is no date on the Pump House. Lakewood records have no date but because of the activity of the Park, Cliff House and other buildings it is believed the Pump House went to work in 1873.

The Army Engineer Corps has navigation map records on the pier at the east side of the Rocky River channel. Authority to construct a stone pier was given to the Army Corps in 1872 and work was started and completed in 1873. In 1881 the pier was repaired and made so it rose five feet above the water level. In 1937 an authority was given to the Army Corps to build the pier to its present length and to improve the pier with lights, etc. Actual work did not begin until 1941 when money was available.

George H. Singleton, 1378 Belle Avenue, tells about early Clifton Park. "Clifton Park got its name from The Cliff House Estate (later named Murch House) because that company (Clifton Park Association) owned the entire Park at that time. It was a picnic ground. I came with the First Congregational Church Picnic to the old pier in a small pleasure steamer in the summer of 1872. We walked up the hill and along a small path to the Cliff House, where the real picnic grounds were among the great big acorn trees, as we called them. There is where I saw the first acorn."\*

The heyday of the Park as a public amusement spot was in the 1870's and 1880's. There was great activity in boating, large picnic groves, clean bathing and beer gardens. Those who could afford it came to Clifton Park on the Dummy Railroad while others came in wagons on the bumpy roads, and some came on boat excursions from Cleveland.

The entrance to Clifton Park was at a Dummy Railroad stop on Railroad Avenue (now Sloane Avenue). After leaving the train and turning west there was a broad avenue called Vista Street. There is a reminder of this street at the present footbridge over the Norfolk and Western Railroad tracks called Vista Bridge. Within the Park there is a remnant of Vista Street consisting of trees that in a line run through the rear yards of Forest Road lots on the west side of Forest. Mr. Wallace Snow, 1122 Forest Road, has had a metal sign made that reads "Vista Street" and fastened it to one of those few remaining trees which once lined the old street.

The route Vista Street took through the Park was from the footbridge to the Lake's edge. It is hard to plot the street exactly because each map used has been in different scale.

The Clifton Park Association bought lands south of the Park with the possible thought of expanding. This property, on the rim of the valley, was known as the Scenic Park Allotment of Clifton Park. Land owners on Rio, Gridley and Scenic Avenues have this wording on their early deeds. It is believed the larger "floor plan" of the Park was abandoned in 1881 when the Nickel Plate Railroad bought the Rocky River Railroad.\*\*

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\* From Lakewood Library-Margaret Butler files.

\*\*Information supplied by Ruth Houck (Mrs. Charles W.)

## JOHN KNOLL'S PLACE

The earliest date found in regard to John Knoll and his Clifton Park and Clifton Beach establishments is the year 1874. Maps show where on the Beach the John Knoll properties were. The photograph, Knoll's Place, was taken in three parts and then skillfully matched. The figures of Mr. and Mrs. Knoll and their three daughters, nephews and other kin are repeated in the three sections.

The building on the left rear is the light wine, beer and food place. There is still a remnant of the cellar in the hillside. The cellar was used to keep food, wine and beer cool. The building in the center is the dance hall and dining room; the building at the right is the bowling alley.

Mr. Hans Penndorf, 26609 Midland Road, Bay Village, grandson of John Knoll, says his grandfather's place was for the family. A guest book is

among some of the treasures from John Knoll's day. From it we read: "The splendid breeze which caused such a good appetite is an inducement to call again - August 18, 1881. Yacht Kitte, the crew signed John McMahon, John Dare, John Gerlach - July 26, 1883. William Street Coffee Club - September 12, 1883, thirty members present. Saint Paul's Church group from Scovill and Greenwood Avenue.

Three young ladies signed

John Knoll's guest book on July 19, 1883, Irma Mueller, Laura Mueller and Minnie Seelbach. Detroit Baseball Club, August 27, 1882. Straub's String Band, July 21, 1883. Babcock's 8th Regiment Band from Akron, Ohio. Miss C. Odenthal of Columbus, Ohio wrote, "Mrs. Knoll is so pleasant, so clever, no trouble, no care is too much for her."

The last entry has the flavor of the day and the poetry of the teenager of the 80's . . .

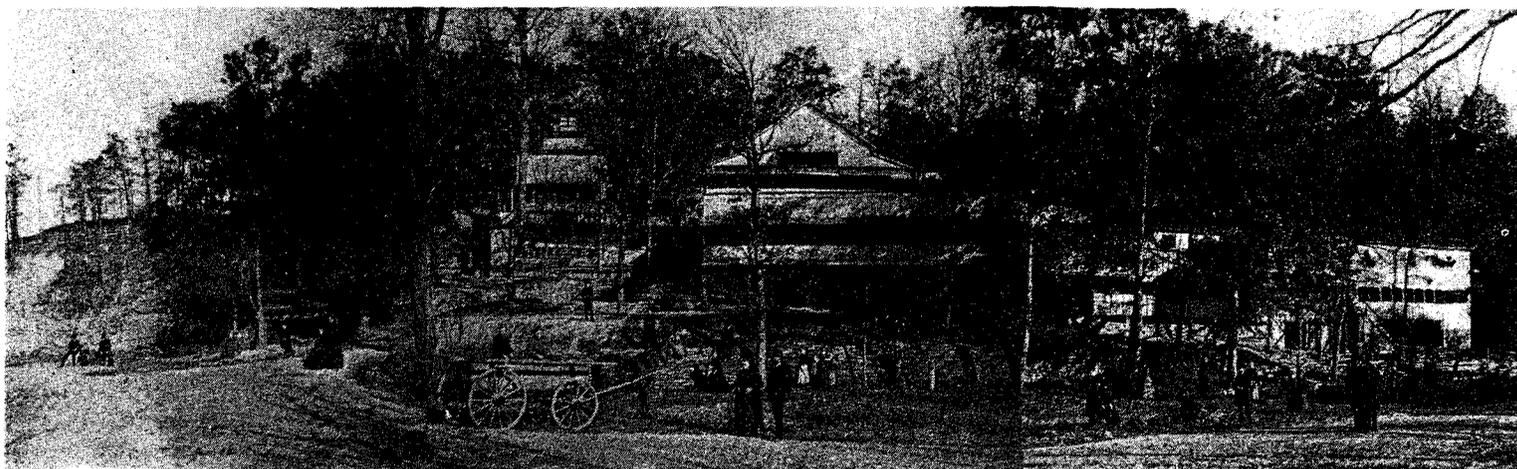
If when you are washing at the tub,  
Think of me at every rub.  
If the water is too cold,  
Think of me, but do not scold.

Lottie Knoll  
Rocky River, 1887



There is an interesting passage found in the Abstract Title records of Clifton Park - "Israel Wagar got the Dwight #4 lots in the 3rd division (Beach and Lagoon) - Wagar sold to John Knoll. Knoll ran the hotel, picnic grounds and amusements on the Beach. John Knoll sold to Clifton Park Association." \* Mr. Penndorf remembers his mother telling how she drove the team of horses while her father John Knoll, cleared and widened Beach Road hill.

From 1869 when the Articles of Incorporation were signed forming the Clifton Park Association and for five years afterward, Clifton Park was a great summer resort. By 1874, apparently the resort idea was not bringing in a good financial return to the owners. A subdivision of eighty some lots was made within the Clifton Park Allotment. The subdivision and its streets were in the upper or southern end of Forest and Clifton Roads.

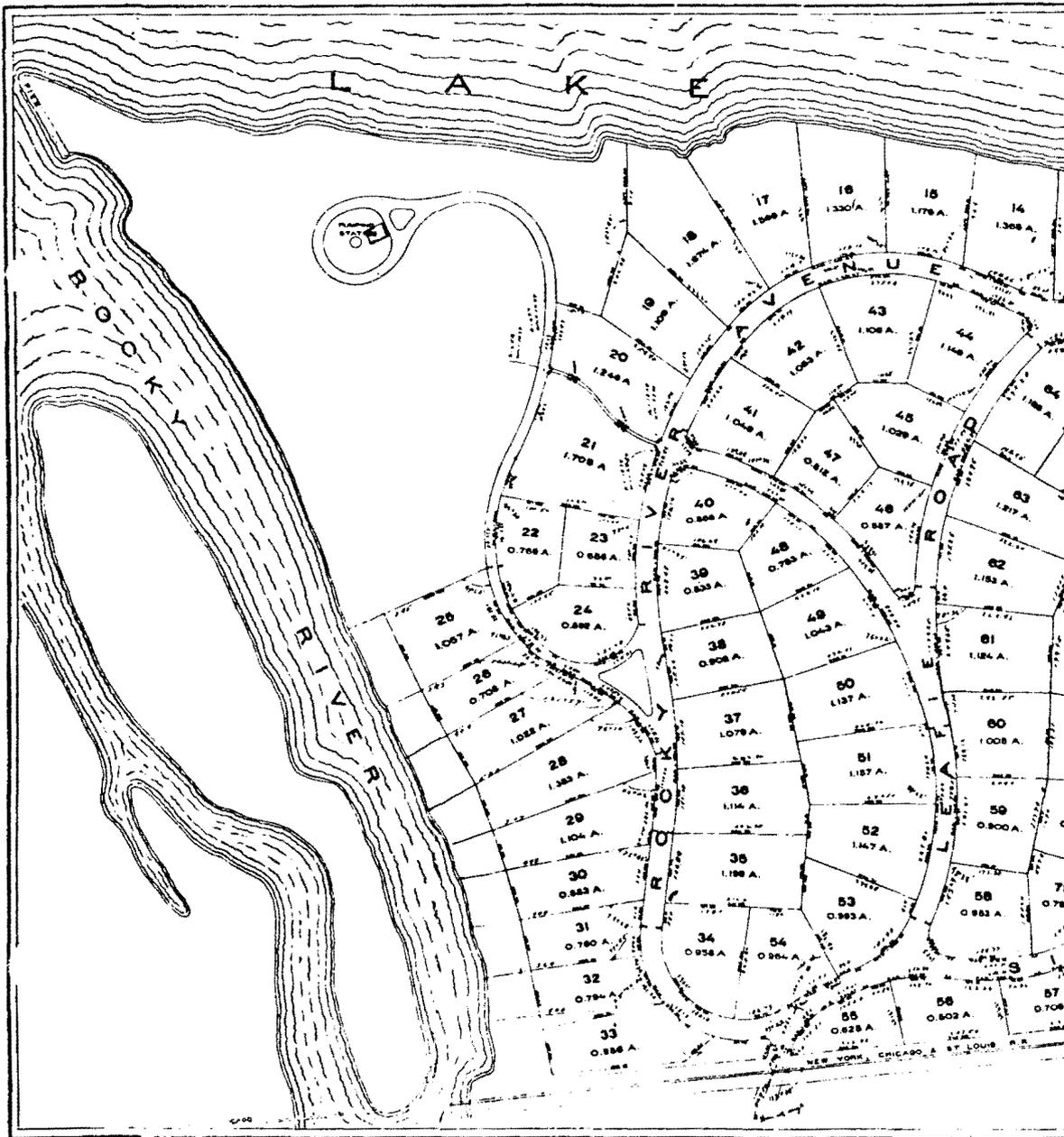


For map lovers the 1894 map of Clifton Park, prepared by Ernest W. Bowditch, a landscape gardener of Boston and New York, is an interesting one. It is reproduced on the following pages. The lots number from one to ninety-six and they are all about an acre in size. The roads are named differently too . . . the old names honor early Clifton Park people.

Clifton Road was Sims Avenue for Elias Sims; Forest Road was Leafie Road, the nickname of Mrs. William Starkweather; Lake Road was Rocky River Avenue (from Scenic Subway to West Forest); Lake Road was Cliff Road (from West Forest to Webb Road); West Clifton Road was Rhodes Avenue; and West Forest Road had no name. In the 1895 Blue Book of Cleveland, Helen deKay Townsend found the notation that Mrs. Starkweather was the daughter of Elias Sims.

On the Bowditch map lot number 18 was the Starkweather lot. Lot #25 was the Henry D. Coffinberry lot. Note the pumping station on the beach. There was no Arlington Road in 1894; part of that section was for stables and the water tank.

\*In 1881 the Dummy Railroad was bought by the Nickel Plate Railroad. With the Dummy no longer bringing people to Clifton Park, Knoll's Restaurant and the other establishments suffered. Knoll closed and sold the land to the Clifton Park Association. The buildings and contents were auctioned off in 1887.

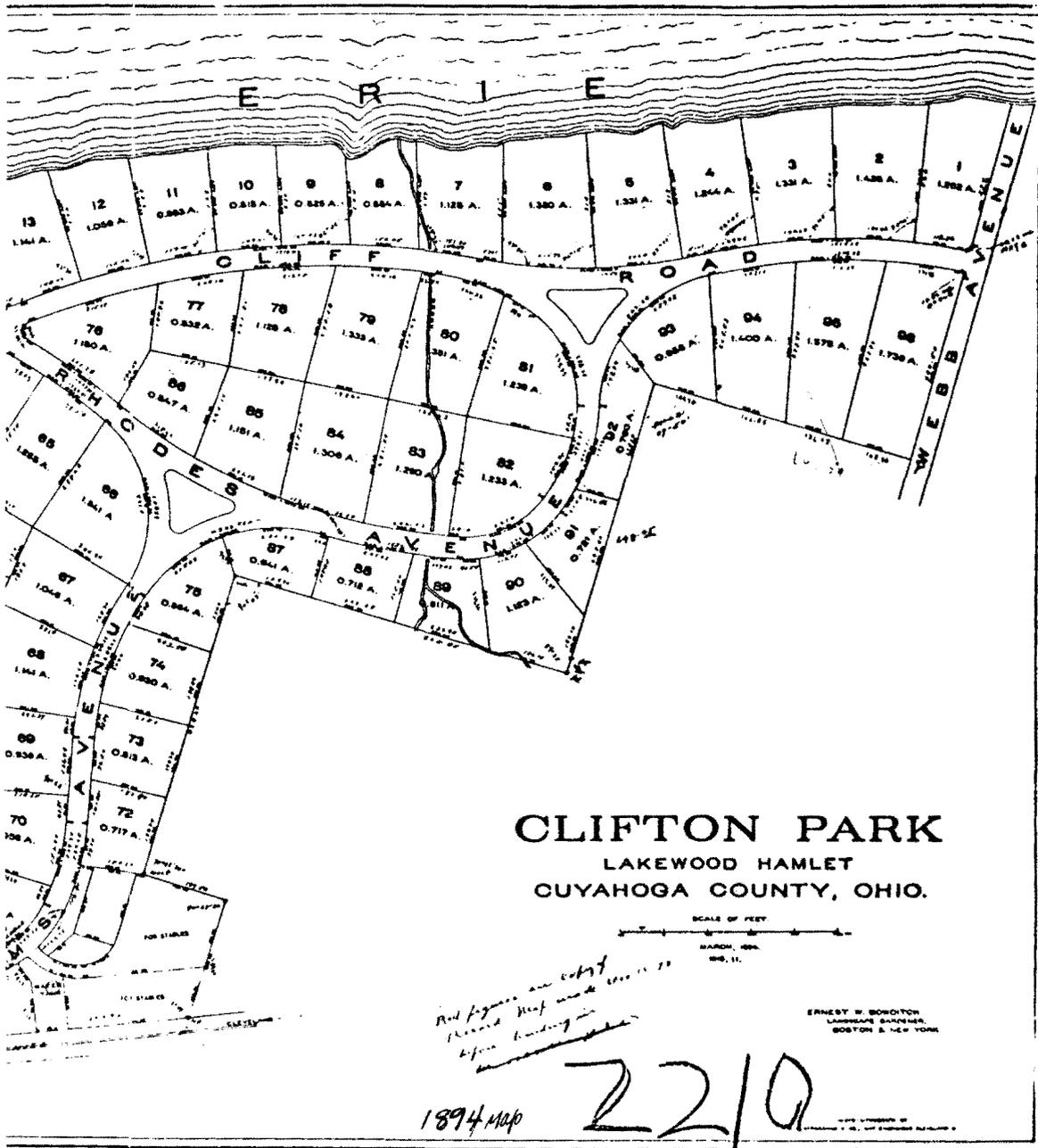


*Map courtesy of Mr. Lorin Weddell*

The question of why and how a man in Boston, Massachusetts laid out the street plans and the lots of Clifton Park is found in Cleveland history.

"Further evidence of the wisdom of the commissioners (A. Everett, Jephtha H. Wade, J. M. Curtiss) was the retaining of E. W. Bowditch, the noted landscape architect of Boston, for perfecting the plans of this splendid conception."\* This quote is from the records of how Gordon Park, Wade Park and Rockefeller Park were planned for the City of Cleveland.

So, when Clifton Park was being thought of as a modern residential section, its leaders called on the well-known Mr. Bowditch.



One of the men sent to Clifton Park from the Bowditch offices was Myron B. Vorce. Mr. Vorce was a native Clevelander. In his early years Mr. Vorce was a clerk in a Cleveland store. He left his staid clerking position and joined a surveying party which took him to Tennessee. Mr. Vorce proved to be a natural mathematician and he possessed a good mechanical skill. While in Tennessee he accepted a position with E. W. Bowditch of Boston.

Mr. Vorce was eventually sent to Cleveland to develop Euclid Heights and Clifton Park. He stayed on in Cleveland to help develop the boulevard system. In 1898 Mr. Vorce went into private practice in Cleveland.

\*From A History of Cleveland, Ohio, Vol. II, by Samuel Orth of the Cleveland Bar, 1910, and the kindness of Mr. Wallace Snow.

## THE PIONEERS

The first recorded lot in Clifton Park was at 17866 Lake Road, which became the Lake Point Drive subdivision in 1969. This was the W. J. Starkweather property, bought in 1897. However, in the Cleveland Blue Book of 1895 it is stated that the William J. Starkweathers lived in Clifton Park and the name of their home was Wywoka. Henry D. Coffinberry also is listed in the Blue Book as living in Clifton Park in 1895. His later land holdings became the Coffinberry Estates in Fairview Park according to Mr. Coffinberry's granddaughter, Mrs. Phillip M. Schloss of Shaker Heights.

We find in the Abstract Title records that the early upper Lake Road lots referred to the "Leafie Starkweather" lot when describing the footage of the newer lot.

The land description of the first house in Clifton Park, the William J. Starkweather home, 17866 Lake Road, contains this quote from the deed "and known as being part of Original Rockport Township Sec. 23. Situated in the City of Lakewood, County of Cuyahoga and State of Ohio and described as follows: Commencing at a stone set at the intersection of the center line of the Vista with the center line of Elm Street, as dedicated in plat of the Clifton Park Association Subdivision. Thence along the center line of the Vista and said center line produced Northerly, thence Westerly to a proposed right of way, 50 feet wide, called Rocky River Avenue."

The house was a summer home for the Starkweathers. Even so the house contained nineteen large rooms. Mrs. Frank U. S. Gilbert supplied the deed information and also said there were seven fireplaces in the house. Mahogany woodwork was used throughout the house. There was a Roman influence in the detail of the fireplaces such as the use of dentils under the mantel shelf. Dentils are small blocks of wood placed at intervals for decoration.

The House, a center hall arrangement, had the welcome of a fireplace in the reception room, with built-in fireside seats on each side of the fireplace. Mrs. Gilbert said, "It was the coziest fireplace in the house. On a freezing day all the sofas were drawn up to the fire."

The staircase was finished in creamy woodwork with a large high window of leaded glass at the landing. The library had deep window seats, heavy carved moldings and all mahogany wall paneling.

An interest for children -- one of the later owners painted in mural style Dr. Suess' McElligott's Pool around the upper walls of the reception room. There was a feeling as though one were entering the grand saloons of a ship when moving through the public rooms.