

## HISTORY

### A NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK



There is an amazing amount of history packed into the one-square-mile area that comprises the Village of Mariemont. Long before Mary Emery developed the concept of a "model-town," people were living and raising their children here.

From about 1400-1650, the area at the end of Mariemont Avenue, known as the Madisonville Site, was occupied by a group of Native Americans. Little is known about these people beyond what archeologists have learned from examination of their artifacts and skeletal

remains. The people had disappeared before European traders and explorers reached this area.

Today, the artifacts uncovered in two major digs (1878 and 1987) are housed in over 30 museums around the world, with the most important pieces being located in the Smithsonian, Harvard University's Peabody Museum, and our own Cincinnati Museum Center. MPF has paid tribute to the memory of these pre-historic people by building a stone outdoor pavilion at the Madisonville Site.

Currently, the University of Cincinnati is conducting another archaeological dig in the South 80 Park and has found evidence of another Native American settlement there.

Mariemont's location above the Little Miami River made it desirable for the next group of people to occupy this area, the early settlers. The first group arrived here from New England in 1788, one year before George Washington began his first term as President. They originally located their settlement on land now occupied by Lunken Airport, which they named Columbia. However, it proved to be troublesome as it was prone to flooding. The Ferris and Stites families wisely chose to settle here instead, and became successful farmers. Joseph Ferris used water from the local



creek and corn from his fields to become a prosperous distiller. The area around the Boathouse is still known as "Whiskey Hollow." His brother, Eliphalet Ferris, built his house on Plainville Road in 1803 and expanded it in 1812. It is still standing (and in use) and is one of the oldest brick buildings in Hamilton County. The cemetery behind the Mariemont Community Church is the resting place of many of the early pioneer families.

The land that makes up our Village continued to be used for cultivation until the beginning of the 1920s, when Mary Emery (1844-1927) arrived on the scene. Appalled by

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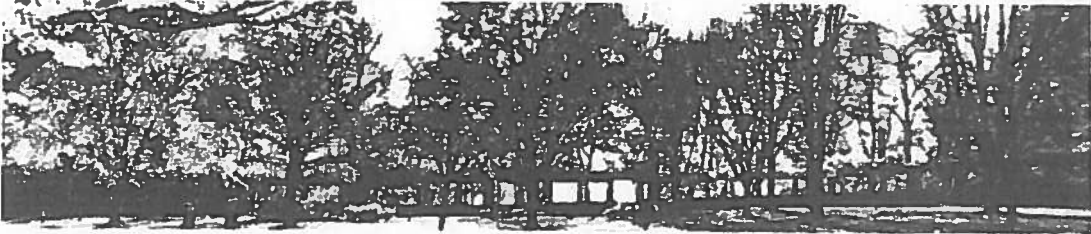
the unsanitary housing conditions in downtown Cincinnati, she was determined to use her vast fortune to establish a "model town," which would be planned to provide its residents with a high quality of life. Mrs. Emery and Charles Livingood, who administered her many philanthropies, hired John Nolen, an internationally known town planner. He developed the physical plan for the Village of Mariemont, which was named after Mary Emery's summer home in Rhode Island and is pronounced "Mary-mont." The result of Mr. Nolen's careful planning was a village with a real sense of community. From the start, there were band concerts, parades and other activities that brought the residents together.

This feeling of community was tested in 1941 when the city of Cincinnati proposed annexing Mariemont, Fairfax, and Madisonville. Residents of Mariemont and Fairfax voted to incorporate their villages as independent entities. Madisonville, however, became part of Cincinnati. In 1979 the Village of Mariemont was listed on the National Register of Historic Places and in 2007 was awarded status of a National Historic Landmark. In 2008, Mariemont was named a "Top 10 Great Neighborhood in America" by The American Planning Association.

For over 20 years, Mariemont has also been recognized as a "Tree City USA" community. This program, sponsored by the Arbor Day Foundation in cooperation with the USDA Forest Service and the National Association of State Foresters, recognizes communities with progressive forestry programs. Today, Mariemont is a thriving community, committed to preserving the dreams of its founder.

~ Claire Kupferle, MPF

taking advantage of easy access to nature and the Little Miami River. In addition to the historic architectural environment, the green spaces and parks are a vital part of Mariemont's character.



A particularly distinctive feature of Mariemont is the manner in which Nolen took advantage of the Village's location on the bluff overlooking the Little Miami River, a state and federal "Wild and Scenic" river. Not only does a linear park of over one mile extend along the bluff but, as a centerpiece of the town design, a beautiful concourse was built offering impressive views of the Little Miami River valley. Constructed with indigenous stones, the pergola was intended to "be the center of the greatest gatherings" with "a smooth lawn upon which tired men and women, after their day's work can lie full length away from the noise and bustle" (M. F. Rogers quoting Livingood, page 147).



The viewshed has been referred to as the 'Valley of the Kings,' and the stunning visual qualities have long appealed to Native Americans, early settlers, and turn of the century landscape artists. Also located at the top of the Mariemont bluff is a Native American serpent shaped embankment, believed to be the largest in the U.S. Photographs taken by Nolen depict "views across gently rolling hills of a pastoral and wooded landscape dotted with a few farm houses" (M.F. Rogers, page 18).

Looking out from the concourse today, the landscape is remarkably close to the vista that inspired Nolen almost a century ago, including an historic railroad bridge constructed in 1920. The concourse serves as a location for community gatherings and events, a testament to the success of Nolen's design and Mariemont's commitment to preserving his intent.

As a significant example of American Garden City design, Mariemont maintains a lasting influence on town planners, inspires design philosophies such as New Urbanism and Smart Growth, and demonstrates a successful option to current suburban sprawl in the United States.

#### Reference

Rogers, M. F. *John Nolen and Mariemont: Building a New Town in Ohio*. 2001. John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London.