

Clifton Town Meeting
US-77-7, US-82-7, US-83-3, US-88-18
US-90-5, US-93-11, US-93-12, US-94-6
US-86-5

Introduction

The records of the Clifton Town Meeting date from 1961 to 1977. They were created by the organization's Board of Trustees, its various committees and officers, other neighborhood and community councils, and various Cincinnati governmental bodies. The CTM records illustrate the varied activity of the Clifton neighborhood, the evolution and development of a community organization and its relationship to the larger urban community of Cincinnati. In particular, the records reveal the origins and problems of neighborhood-controlled community planning, the proscriptive uses of zoning, the various attempts to preserve the images of Clifton's nineteenth century "village" past (via retention of gas lighting in one case), and the existing traffic and education conditions of the Clifton community during the 1960s and 1970s. Also, the records highlight the development of other Cincinnati neighborhood and community councils during this period.

The records of the CTM were accessioned by the Special Collections Department of the University of Cincinnati Library in 1977. Periodically, other material dated from 1977 will be deposited in the Department and increase the scope of the present collection. The CTM records are part of the University's Urban Studies Collection of manuscript and archival material.

There are no restrictions as to access and use placed on the CTM records.

During the 1960s, urban America seemed to be confronted with a series of crises, which threatened it with destruction. Crime and industrial pollution appeared to multiply yearly and ravage the social and visual environments. Transportation systems and urban core housing deteriorated with alarming rapidity. Renewing the city even had unfortunate consequences: multi-million dollar economic improvements did not always equally benefit the societies of the

city's core area. The American city thus seemed and unstable governmental unit for the last half of the twentieth century, a decaying remnant of the past, decadent and self-destructive.¹

In such a milieu of crisis the Clifton Town Meeting was established during the spring of 1961. The CTM is a community organization dedicated to preserving the Clifton residential suburb as a "desirable neighborhood" of Cincinnati". The CTM also seeks to promote the cohesiveness of the neighborhood and community, through advertising to other sections of the city and the opportunities for "gracious living" in Clifton.

Cincinnati's 1961 plans to renovate the Avondale-Coryville area was one primary factor in the creation of the CTM. At that time, Clifton members of the Cincinnati chapter of the League of Women Voters conducted a thorough study of the city's renewal plans. In April 1961, this group met with Charles Stamm, Director of Urban Development for Cincinnati, to discuss the Avondale renovation project and its relations to Clifton. During this meeting, Stamm also digressed on what he saw as a need for the creation of semi-governmental neighborhood organization, which would represent Cincinnati's various suburbs and express their community's interests and needs to city Council. Stamm also envisioned these suburban organizations would assist the city in devising and implementing its renewal plans. Thus Stamm's comments proved to be influential and encouraging to the women of the League, for they "decided to take a look at Clifton as a residential community".

However, the principal factor in the creation of the CTM revolved around the city's traffic plans for Clifton and the construction of I-75 through Cincinnati. During the early 1960's, the city began to complete its portion of the federal interstate highway, which would extend from upper Michigan to mid-Florida. In planning the route of this thoroughfare, the city originally proposed to direct it through the suburb of Clifton (via Clifton Ave. from a Spring Grove Ave. interchange), into the downtown core area, and thence to the riverfront bridges and Kentucky. City planners thus anticipated creating a freeway system inside the city, not around it, though in the process that would physically bisect some neighborhoods via widened streets and increased automobile traffic.

During May of 1961, some Clifton residents objected to the physical desecration such a highway route would bring to their community. Charging that the plan would permanently

¹ William L. O'Neill, Coming Apart: An Informal History of America in the 1960's (N.Y.: Quadrangle, 1975), 147-157, 176-177.

dissolve the physical and aesthetical integrity of the Clifton community, cause the devaluation of property, and create a wholesale shift of one portion of Cincinnati's population to the semi-rural areas of Hamilton County, this group began to organize the Clifton Town Meeting. On May 4th, a steering committee was formed and charted the path toward establishing the CTM. Participants included residents of Clifton, some who were affiliated with the University of Cincinnati's Community Planning Department, and a representative from the city planning firm of Landislas Segoe Associates.² By September, this steering committee conducted a community meeting, which was attended by some 550 Clifton residents. The CTM thus began to function as a community-welfare organization and fought city hall.

Throughout the 1960's, CTM was kept busy by many community problems, originating both from Clifton residents and from city government. Cincinnati's periodic attempts to remove all obsolete lighting in the city, including Clifton's gas lights, provoked the CTM to defend its community and try to preserve the remnants of Clifton's "village" history. Between 1961 and 1977, the city and CTM conducted an on-going battle as to whether the gas lights should be financed by the city—and thus be removed due to their high maintenance costs—or whether their financial responsibilities should be accorded to property owners. Some Clifton residents even suggested that the city had to maintain the lights, a stipulation emanating from the Clifton-Cincinnati annexation agreement of 1896. By 1977, the gaslights issue was still burning in Clifton as well as in other city neighborhoods that possessed them.

Zoning as a tool for shaping the social patterns of the community was another popular concern of Clifton residents and the CTM. Desirous of preserving the Clifton neighborhood as one of "single-family houses"—and thus containing mostly middle-class, married persons—the CTM crusaded to make Clifton better by zoning. Though they disclaimed that racial exclusiveness was not the primary objective of periodic zoning activity, the CTM zoning plans sometimes appeared as a bulwark against community migration, especially Cincinnati's Black neighborhoods. Between 1961 and 1969, zoning was an outstanding activity of the CTM.

The CTM also attempted to create a master plan for the Clifton community, paralleling the city's activity of 1948. Between 1961 and 1975, there were several attempts to generate

² Members of the original CTM steering/planning committee included: Mr. Wolfgang Roeseler of Landislas Segoe, Mrs. Louis Gottschalk, Dr. William Ransohoff, Mr. Alvin Hansen, Mrs. Joseph Sagmaster, Mr. Maurice Costello, Mr. Robert Inkrot, Mrs. Eugene Mihaly, Mr. John Ritter, Mrs. Donal Ross, Mrs. Robert Smith, and Mr. Philip Walters. Mrs. Sagmaster was later elected President of CTM in 1961-62

interest in creating a long-range plan for Clifton. However, only in 1973-1974 was planning enthusiasm sufficiently strong to prompt any action. The CTM, in cooperation with graduate students from the University's Department of Community Planning, conducted a survey of Clifton's community needs and priorities as to remain a desirable residential suburb of Cincinnati. In spring 1974, the graduate students revealed the results of the survey and the CTM called for an intensive study of Clifton's existing conditions and its interests for community life during the next generation. As the CTM remarked, "despite Clifton's long history of doing its own community planning, too often Clifton planning was piecemeal and reactive to forces not of the community's own initiative. The CTM Board of Trustees decided to begin a long-term community planning process for Clifton that would be comprehensive..." The result of the study was The Clifton Community Plan (1976), which again asserted Clifton's right—as conceived by the CTM—to define its community interests and preserve its community heritage. The Clifton Plan seemed to be the logical result of the CTM's function as a community-welfare organization and it was the crown jewel of CTM's sixteen-year history.

The records of the CTM consist of those generated by the organization or members thereof and those that were created by other Cincinnati and suburban community organizations and collected by the CTM. The records span the years 1961-1977, but the bulk of this material covers the years 1961-1968. Only since 1973 with the interest created by the community planning study does the amount of records include the following seventeen series: Creation of the CTM; Clifton Neighborhood Master Plan, 1961-1976; Board of Trustees material; Correspondence; Membership, Elections, and Community Meetings, 1961-1977; Newsletters and News clippings; Publicity and Promotional material; Clifton Business Community, 1961-1968; Land Use and Zoning in Clifton; Schooling in Clifton; Traffic in Clifton; Cincinnati and Suburban Community Organizations, 1961-1975; Publications and Brochures; Photographs and Memorabilia; and Oversize Maps.

The records include various types of material including letters, surveys, committee reports, news and publicity items, advertisements, addresses and speech working notes, and secondary publications. Reports, either generated by the CTM or other Cincinnati community councils, plus correspondence seem to be the predominant types of material in the CTM records. Most of the correspondence is between CTM, or certain members of it, and the city government. There is also a large amount of general or miscellaneous correspondence from the Clifton

community at large and reveals, to a degree, the opinions of the general populace about such issues as Clifton's racial minorities, housing or zoning problems, and general complaints about the Clifton visual environment. The correspondence reveals other subject concerns of Clifton, such as the future of its gaslights, and the Ludlow Business District, which one urban developer wanted to turn into "one big shopping mall." The reports follow similar subject lines and consist primarily of working papers and finished documents.

The records also contain a small amount of material, which demonstrates CTM's function as an organizer of community activities and events. While the amount of the material is quite small, it nonetheless demonstrates that CTM conceived of itself as an organization devoted to creating a cohesive neighborhood, one that was filled with exhibitions of Clifton's accomplishments and talent and demonstrated Clifton's community spirit. This series expresses the ordinary activities of a neighborhood, from trimming the Clifton Christmas tree to planting trees on Arbor Day.

Not surprisingly, the most predominant theme contained in the CTM records is the need to preserve Clifton as a "desirable place to live". This is the overriding function of the CTM and expressed in nearly every activity of the organization. The CTM records thus possess abundant informational value in this regard on a variety of subjects—land use and zoning, traffic, neighborhood schools, lighting needs. Yet in attempting to preserve the Clifton neighborhood, the CTM revealed what it conceived its primary function and identity was—that of a community government. The evidential value of the records are thus equally as rich and pose an interesting problem for CTM's history: how can it act like a semi-governmental body for Clifton when its membership is restricted to those who pay dues?

Other collections of material within the Special Collections Department may supplement the CTM records. The collections of William Jenike and Walter C. Langsam are of possible importance since both were affiliated with CTM during the 1960's. Then too, the papers of Charles Stamm would be of primary importance in evaluating the reasons for the creation of CTM. Outside of the University, the records and archives of Cincinnati city government and various suburban community councils appear of importance in supplementing the CTM material. The city offices of Safety and Traffic, Urban Development, City Planning Commission, and the Cincinnati School Board might yield some materials and information bearing to the establishment and growth of the CTM and the problems facing the Clifton community during the

1960's and 1970's. The papers of the various community councils would be valuable to evaluate the interrelationships of Cincinnati's neighborhood representatives and also to judge the success of the Clifton experiment in community "government". Presently the Special Collections Department is engaged in a plan to secure the records of many community councils and document the growth of urban and suburban Cincinnati and America. Finally, such Cincinnati organizations as the Better Housing League and the League of Women Voters may possess interesting and valuable information on the problems facing Cincinnati's communities over the past fifteen years.

The value of the Clifton Town Meeting collection varies in its scope and content. While the records adequately document the functions of the CTM, they do not clearly show how the organization was accepted by the Clifton community as its spokesman. Nor do the CTM records demonstrate to a great extent the organization's influence on city hall. The move to let community councils help the city formulate its plans was a major development in Cincinnati history of the 1960's. However, the CTM records must be supplemented by other community council records to evaluate the importance of such a federating process. Thus they may have some relative importance in discerning the origins of decentralization in American government at the city level, a phenomena which appears in conjunction with the centralizing of government power at the federal level. Social historians, as well as urban historians, would find some value in the CTM records. They are useful, in part, to document the role of women in American government of the twentieth century. Finally, the records of the CTM are valuable to the organization itself. They provide a clear guide as to its past, its accomplishments and shortcomings, and what needs to be done in the future to secure Clifton as a "desirable place to live."

Series Arrangement

The following is the principal arrangement and description of the CTM records, 1961-1977.

CREATION OF THE CTM, 1961-1962:

Arranged alphabetically. Contains the CTM constitutions, 1961-1977, the files of the Steering/Planning Committee which contain minutes, reports, and miscellaneous correspondence, and the hearing of city council in April 1962 concerning the widening of Clifton Ave. for expressway traffic.

CTM-CLIFTON NEIGHBORHOOD MASTER PLAN, 1961-1976:

Arranged chronologically. Contains studies of Clifton needs for community development. The majority of the material is the working papers relating to the creation of the Clifton Community Plan of 1976. There is some correspondence between representatives of Landislas Segoe, planning firm, and the CTM. This latter material comprises the master plans generated between 1961-1964.

CTM-BOARD OF TRUSTEES:

Arranged alphabetically. Primary contents of this series consists of officer lists, 1962-1977, definitions of committee functions, financial reports, 1962-1977, minutes of the Board, 1973-1975, correspondence with the Board from Clifton residents and city officials, 1962-1977, and the establishment of the Clara Sagmaster Memorial Foundation.

CTM-CORRESPONDENCE:

Arranged alphabetically and chronologically. The essence of this series consists of general complaints received by the CTM from Clifton residents 1962-1975, general correspondence with city council, 1961-1977, and miscellaneous correspondence from Clifton residents and other communities. This file may be quite useful in determining the various sentiments of Clifton residents toward the CTM, some of the community problems it was requested to deal with (such as "odor nuisances"), and the effectiveness of the CTM in representing the Clifton community's problems to the city.

CTM-MEMBERSHIP, ELECTIONS, AND COMMUNITY MEETINGS, 1961-1977:

Arranged alphabetically. This series contains the minutes from the annual community meetings, 1961-1965, 1971, 1974, the results from elections to the Board and to the various offices of CTM, 1966-1977, and the growth of membership, 1964-1977. The membership material is in the form of membership lists. The material is valuable in charting the social position of the CTM members (with the assistance of William's Directory from 1966-1977) and their position within CTM.

CTM-NEIGHBORHOOD ACTIVITIES AND RELATIONS:

Arranged alphabetically. Contains studies, reports, advertisements, and surveys on the varied neighborhood activities promoted by the CTM. This is an important file in determining the daily life of Clifton as recorded by the CTM.

CTM-NEWSLETTERS AND NEWSCLIPPINGS:

Arranged chronologically. This file contains the Clifton Town Meeting Bulletin, 1963-1977 and various news clippings collected by the CTM, 1961-1964, 1976-1977.

CTM-PUBLICITY AND PROMOTIONAL:

Arranged alphabetically. This series contains the various publicity items such as radio-television editorials distributed by the CTM. Topics include traffic, schools, and zoning in the Clifton area. There is also an interesting booster-type document explaining why a Clifton resident should join CTM.

CLIFTON BUSINESS COMMUNITY, 1961-1968

Arranged alphabetically. This series contains the records of the CTM Business Area committee, 1961-1965, minutes of the Clifton Business Men's Meeting, 1967-1968, and lists of Clifton merchants, 1961-1963. Most of the material is generated from sources outside the CTM and is useful for determining the problems of the Ludlow Business District during the early to late 1960's.

GAS LIGHTING IN CLIFTON, 1961-1977

Arranged alphabetically. This file consists of reports and various studies about the city's attempts to remove gas lighting from residential neighborhoods, 1961-1977. There are also some news clippings, which document the city's activities in this area, 1962-1967, 1974-1977. Some of the material was produced by members of the CTM, but not acting in an official capacity for the organization. A large part of the material originates from the office of the Cincinnati City Manager.

LAND USE AND ZONING IN CLIFTON:

Arranged alphabetically. This series consists of four subdivisions: environmental, housing, zoning, and urban renewal. The period covered by this material is 1960-1974. Most of the material is in the form of reports or studies, hearings, surveys, correspondence, and maps. There is much in this series, which reveals the functions of the CTM in preserving the desirable qualities of a single-family neighborhood. Most of the material comes from outside the CTM, but it contains the responses of the organization to the problems of zoning changes and urban development of Clifton.

SCHOOLING IN CLIFTON:

Arranged chronologically. The records of the CTM Schools committee and the PTA newsletters of Clifton Elementary School, 1961-1963, 1973-1974.

TRAFFIC IN CLIFTON

Arranged alphabetically and chronologically. This file contains the records of the CTM traffic committee, 1962-1974, miscellaneous proposals and reports dealing with Clifton traffic conditions, 1961-1967, and correspondence with city officials concerning traffic in Clifton, 1962-1964. Most of the materials come from city offices.

CINCINNATI AND SUBURBAN COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS, 1961-1975:

Arranged alphabetically. This file contains information collected by the CTM on various community councils, 1961-1975, and various Cincinnati organizations such as the League of Women Voters and the Better Housing League. The file is good for documentation of

Clifton's growing interrelationship with other similar community organizations, and to document the growth of community government or the federating process in Cincinnati.

PUBLICATIONS AND BROCHURES:

Arranged alphabetically. This set contains the secondary publications of the CTM concerning the history of Clifton and the booklet "Clifton: Neighborhood and Community in an Urban Setting: A Brief History," by Henry D. Shapiro and Zane L. Miller, professors of history at the University of Cincinnati.

PHOTOGRAPHS AND MEMORIBILIA:

Arranged alphabetically. This series contains the various pictures of CTM officials and Clifton society, life, homes and landscape that was collected by CTM and given to it. Some of the pictures are dated, a majority are of snapshot size and have no description.

OVERSIZE MAPS:

Arranged by map number. These maps were collected by CTM during its fifteen-year history. Consult map container listing for a full description of these maps. However, they are of streets, zoning outlines, and city planning maps. Consult container listing for location of maps in Special Collections.