

# A Walk Through History

THE PHELPS BUILDING & LYTTLE PARK • CINCINNATI, OHIO



# Welcome to the historic Phelps Building.

The city of Cincinnati and particularly the area surrounding the Residence Inn Cincinnati Downtown at the Phelps is steeped in history. We welcome you to our city and encourage you to explore the neighborhood. As you enjoy the view from your window or venture out for the day, picture yourself in this walk through history.

*First, a little background...*

## FORT WASHINGTON

Cincinnati was founded in 1788 and was originally named Losantiville, meaning “the city opposite the mouth of the (Licking) River.” It was a village of about 20 cabins and 50 – 100 inhabitants. <sup>(1)</sup> In 1789, Fort Washington was built here to protect early settlements in the Northwest Territory and named in honor of President George Washington. Constructed under the direction of General Josiah Harmar, he described it as “one of the most solid substantial wooden fortresses... of any in the Western Territory.” <sup>(1)</sup> The fort’s boundaries were directly outside the front of the Phelps building: Fourth Street to the north, Ludlow Street to the east, the Ohio River to the south and Broadway to the west. <sup>(2)</sup> Today’s Fort Washington Way, a corridor of I-71 running through Cincinnati, was named to mark the fort when remains were unearthed during construction. A blockhouse and marker on 4th street stands at the site of the fort.

In 1790, Arthur St. Clair, the governor of the Northwest Territory, renamed the settlement “Cincinnati” in honor of the Society of Cincinnati, of which he was president. In 1811, the introduction of steam navigation on the Ohio River and the completion of the Miami and Erie Canal helped grow the area to an incorporated city in 1819.

The city has several nicknames starting with “Porkopolis,” which was coined around 1835 when Cincinnati was known to be the country’s chief hog packing center. Herds of pigs actually traveled the streets on their way to the plants. Cincinnati is also known as the “City of Seven Hills” for the crescent formed by the hills of the city, and as the “Queen City.” This name was derived from the Henry Wadsworth Longfellow poem “Catawba Wine,” in which he refers to the city as “the Queen of the West.”



*Photo courtesy: The Cincinnati Historical Society Library*

## LYTLE PARK NEIGHBORHOOD

This neighborhood of just a few square blocks makes up a community of historic heritage. It borders 4th Street to the north, Lytle Park to the south, Broadway to the west and Pike Street to the east. It is marked with buildings and monuments that tell the tales of the pioneers of old and the modern day. Brick mansions, row houses, and an upscale apartment building known as The Phelps were homes to some of the city's and the country's elite families, including the family of William Howard Taft, the 27th President of the United States.

## TAFT MUSEUM AND THE PHELPS – TAFT FAMILY

To tell the story of the Phelps Building, you must first start at the Taft Museum (316 Pike St.), once the Taft Mansion. The grand white Federal style clapboard home was originally built around 1820 for Martin Baum, Cincinnati's first banker and manufacturer. Later, the home became the Belmont, a boarding house for women.

In 1830, it was sold to Cincinnati's first millionaire, Nicholas Longworth<sup>(15)</sup>. The Longworths later sold the home to David Sinton<sup>(16)</sup>, whose daughter Anna married Charles Phelps Taft, William Howard Taft's half-brother.<sup>(4)</sup> After the death of Sinton in 1873, the Taft Mansion became the home of Anna and Charles Taft until their respective deaths in 1931 and 1929. In 1908, Charles Phelps Taft's half-

brother, William Howard Taft, was notified of his nomination for President of the United States under the portico of the house. The Tafts willed their historic home and their private collection of 690 works of art to the people of Cincinnati in 1927. After extensive remodeling, the house opened as the Taft Museum in 1932. The museum today



*Notification of President Taft of his election on the steps of the Taft mansion.  
Photo courtesy: Taft Museum of Art*

is a National Historic Landmark and displays the Taft collections and is regarded as one of the country's finest small art museums.<sup>(5)</sup>

## MT. ADAMS

Above and behind the Taft Museum sits a hilltop known as Mt. Adams, named after President John Quincy Adams. This land was owned by Nicholas Longworth during the 1830s and 1840s and was used to cultivate the Catawba grapes needed to make his Golden Wedding champagne. Rookwood Pottery, located in Mt. Adams, was opened by his daughter, Maria, whose works are still highly sought-after collectibles.

In 1872, the Mt. Adams incline completed and linked the hilltop community to downtown Cincinnati until 1948 when it was closed. Today, Mt. Adams is a popular residential area for people who work in downtown and is filled with popular cultural attractions, restaurants and bars.<sup>(12)</sup>

## CHARLES PHELPS TAFT - THE PHELPS BUILDING

Charles Phelps Taft was educated at Yale and the University of Heidelberg. Though he followed in the Taft family footsteps of law and public service, he also developed the family's involvement in journalism and business. He served one term in

Congress and then returned to Cincinnati to manage the newspaper business and the family's vast real estate investments. He joined his father-in-law, David Sinton, in numerous business ventures, including a controlling interest in the Times Star, where he became editor.

Charles Phelps Taft became concerned that the downtown business associates were beginning to migrate to the suburbs of the city. To encourage them to remain living in the city, he built the Phelps Apartment building on 4th street (506 East 4th St.). People of money lived on 4th street, and the style of the apartment building reflected their affluent tastes. The building's tenants were the families of many of the prominent business people of the city. William Howard Taft visited his Aunt Delia there through the years.

The architects for the building were Garber & Woodward, a firm nationally recognized for its high quality and innovative design work. They made many

architectural contributions to the city of Cincinnati, including the Guilford School Building across from the Phelps. Other work related to the Phelps Taft family was the design of the Anna Louise Inn and the remodel of the Taft home conversion to the Taft Museum. Known for many innovative Cincinnati school buildings and University of Cincinnati building designs, perhaps one of the firm's most significant designs was of the Dixie Terminal Building on 4th Street. It provided a shopping center and ingenious design in the terminal for buses crossing the Ohio River on the Roebling Suspension Bridge. <sup>(13)</sup>

#### PARK PLACE AT LYTLE

Next to the Taft Museum on Pike Street is the ten-story Park Place at Lytle (400 Pike St.), formerly the R.L. Polk building that housed the Pugh Printing Company, founded in 1803. When Pugh published the abolitionist journal, *The Philanthropist*, mobs wrecked his press and dumped his materials into the Ohio River. <sup>(4)</sup> A marker on the Pike Street side of the building commemorated the printer's fight against slavery. In 2004 the building was converted to prestigious condominiums and renamed Park Place at Lytle.

#### PROCTER & GAMBLE COMPANY

Fifth street is the site of the global headquarters of the Procter & Gamble Company. P&G was founded in 1837 by two men who met by marrying sisters. Their father-in-law encouraged them to become business partners because they were both competing for the same raw materials. William Procter immigrated from England and was a candle maker in Cincinnati. He took advantage of the fat and oil by-products from Cincinnati's large meatpacking industry. He began as a one man operation, making, selling and delivering his candles. James Gamble was from Ireland and was headed for Illinois but took ill and came ashore in Cincinnati. Once he recovered, the family decided to stay and he eventually became a soap maker.

The company grew into the global consumer goods business known for its in-depth research, innovative products and equally innovative marketing techniques, which included radio and "soap operas." In 1985, Procter & Gamble opened the General Office Towers on 5th street, an expansion of their world headquarters. Today, the company has almost 140,000 employees working in more than 80 countries

worldwide. Their brands touch the lives of more than three billion people each day. <sup>(14)</sup>

#### ANNA LOUISE INN

Across the street from the Taft Museum is the Anna Louise Inn (300 Lytle Place) which was named after Charles Phelps Taft's daughter, Anna Louise Taft Semple. The Tafts donated the site and the Inn was built for young women from rural areas coming to Cincinnati to work and in need of suitable and safe housing. <sup>(6)</sup>



*Procession on 4th Street during the notification of President Taft's election.  
Photo courtesy: Taft Museum of Art*

#### LYTLE PARK

Directly across from the Phelps Building (the Residence Inn) is Lytle Park, once the site of the mansion of General William H. Lytle, first Surveyor-General of the Northwest Territory and the State of Ohio. <sup>(4)</sup> In the park stands a statue of Abraham Lincoln, a gift from Charles Phelps Taft to commemorate the centenary of Lincoln's birth. The statue was unveiled by William Howard Taft in 1917 and was not initially well received by Cincinnatians due to the statue's weary portrayal of the man. The Corporal Merrill Laws Ricketts Marine Corp Memorial was dedicated to the Marines of Hamilton County. The site of this memorial was once the home of the family of President William Howard Taft. A wall displaying 9 historical markers tells the many stories of the neighborhood.

In the 1940s, a national system of highways to connect all cities was approved. As part of the plan for Cincinnati, the Northeast Expressway (I-71) was slated to run through Lytle Park. Many years of dispute over the need to protect the historical neighborhood resulted in a plan to tunnel the highway under the park, Western & Southern used its resources to save the park and paid to cover the highway. Lytle Park became the only park to be built over an interstate road system, one of many firsts for Cincinnati. The area is on the National Register of Historic Places. <sup>(3)</sup>

## GUILFORD BUILDING

Walk a few steps from Lytle Park to the Guilford Building (421 East 4th St.), the site of Fort Washington from 1789-1808. The original regional hospital was located beyond the north wall of the Fort in space that would later become the west half of the Guilford. A cartouche of George Washington is on the north façade. The building is named after Nathan Guilford, the father of the Cincinnati school system and the author of the first Ohio law that provided a property tax for educational purposes leading to the public school system. It served as a school for many years. Stephen Foster, a pre-eminent songwriter lived in a home on the site of the building from 1846-1859. While in Cincinnati, Foster penned his first successful songs, the famous “Oh! Susanna” among them. A few years later, he wrote one of his best-known songs: “My Old Kentucky Home.” In 1916, President Woodrow Wilson delivered a speech at the school on a visit to Cincinnati. Today, the building is occupied by Eagle Realty Group, a division of Western & Southern Financial Group. <sup>(7)</sup>

## UNIVERSITY CLUB

Next to the Guilford is the University Club (401 East 4th St.), founded in 1879 as a result of a call for persons interested in forming a club of “college men,” meaning graduates or those with at least two years of college experience. William Howard Taft and Charles Phelps Taft were both members. Charles Phelps Taft generously acquired the ownership of the Seeley residence and the Smith residence for the purpose of a Club House. He offered the properties to the Club, provided they raise the money through “subscriptions” to merge the two buildings. In the late 1960s, the Club lifted its restrictions on women members due to changing social conventions. An interesting fact – the Club charged \$.70 for lunch in 1929. <sup>(8)</sup>

## WESTERN & SOUTHERN FINANCIAL GROUP BUILDING

Across from the Guilford Building and the University Club is the Western & Southern Financial Group Building (400 Broadway), a four-story structure built with eight massive Ionic columns on the Fourth Street façade and four similar ones on the Broadway side. The company, which was founded in 1888, has been on this site since 1901. Prior to this building, the site was the Dexter home, where Charles Dickens,

a popular English novelist, had been entertained. <sup>(9)</sup> The building serves as home to the Western & Southern Financial Group, including the Western & Southern Life Insurance Company and the Columbus Life Insurance Company.

## THE LITERARY CLUB OF CINCINNATI

Adjacent to the Phelps building stands one of the last reminders of the original homes of the 1800s on 4th street in Cincinnati. The Literary Club (500 East 4th St.) occupies a two-story Greek revival house that was built in 1820. It was originally the home of William Sargent, the secretary of the Northwest Territory. The Literary Club was founded in 1849, making it the oldest organization of its kind in the United States. It has no more than 100 members, all of them men. Many prominent Cincinnati residents have been members, including Rutherford B. Hayes and President William Howard Taft. Members present papers of a literary nature at club meetings. Noted guest speakers have included Ralph Waldo Emerson, Booker T. Washington, Mark Twain and Robert Frost. <sup>(10)</sup>

Once you complete your walk through this historical neighborhood and pause in front of the hotel, you will note that you can see the eras of Cincinnati’s history all represented from this spot. The marker of Fort Washington depicts the beginning of the settlement. The Literary Club building is a remnant of the townhouses and row homes that lined 4th street when the city was first formed. The Phelps Building represents the era of the city when people started to move out of the central city. It played an integral role in keeping people downtown. The park and the 550 apartment building symbolize the twentieth century progress of the city when the national highway system changed transportation in the country. Today, the statue of Abraham Lincoln looks toward a new sign of growth for our city: the Great American Tower at Queen City Square. Now the tallest building in the city stands for the next era of progress and symbolically places the crown atop the Queen City.



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#### SPECIAL THANKS:

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## SIGNIFICANT CINCINNATI FACTS

- 1866 The bridge later to be known as the John A. Roebling Suspension bridge opened. At the time it was the longest main span in the world. The design was later advanced to the Brooklyn Bridge in New York.
- 1869 First weather bureau
- 1869 First professional baseball team – the Cincinnati Red Stockings
- 1870 First municipal university – the University of Cincinnati
- 1875 Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Gardens opens – making it the second oldest zoo in the country. In 2010 it was named the Greenest Zoo in America.
- 1880 First city in which a woman, Maria Longworth Nichols Storer, began and operated a large manufacturing operation, Rookwood Pottery
- 1902 First reinforced concrete skyscraper – the Ingalls Building
- 1905 Daniel Carter Beard founded the Sons of Daniel Boone, later known as the Boy Scouts of America.
- 1925 WLW 700 first radio station to broadcast at 500,000 watts, making it the most powerful station in the world. During World War II the federal government used the station to broadcast the Voice of America all over the world.
- 1935 First Major League Baseball night game
- 1952 First heart-lung machine – makes open heart surgery possible.  
Developed at Cincinnati Children's Hospital
- 1954 First licensed public television station – WCET
- 1970 - 1976  
The Big Red Machine – nickname of the Cincinnati Reds which dominated the National League. They won five National League Western Division titles, four National League pennants and two World Series.
- 1985 Pete Rose broke Ty Cobb's record to become the all-time Major League leader in hits.
- 2004 National Underground Railroad Freedom Center opens –  
Cincinnati was a major hub of activity as slaves escaped across the Ohio River to freedom.



Photo courtesy: The Cincinnati Historical Society Library

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