

CLIFTON

From the Encyclopedia of Louisville

The Clifton neighborhood, located east of Downtown Louisville, is composed of approximately 423 acres bounded by Brownsboro Rd. to the north, Interstate 64 to the south, Ewing Ave. to the east, and Mellwood Ave. to the west. The neighborhood derives its name from one of the area's most important early landholders, gentleman farmer Col. Joshua B. Bowles, who built an estate near what is now the corner of Vernon and Sycamore Avenues between 1817 and 1842. He called it Clifton in reference to the area's topography, and the name eventually spread to the surrounding community.

Two early-nineteenth-century transportation systems that had a major impact on how Clifton was later developed are the Louisville and Shelbyville Turnpike (a toll road dating from the 1830s that was built on a ridge line trail originally formed by buffalo and migrating Native Americans) and the LOUISVILLE AND FRANKFORT RAILROAD (by 1850 it intersected the toll road and facilitated the movement of goods and people). As the turnpike road and the rail line made areas east of the city more accessible, an increasing number of people moved out to the countryside.

By the mid-1800s emerging industries began to attract residents to the area. The constant water supply provided by the Middle Fork of BEARGRASS CREEK brought DISTILLING as well as the slaughtering and processing of meats to areas nearby, while an abundance of limestone attracted quarrymen who slowly carved away huge chunks of hillside. A variety of religious denominations were represented and are noted in the presence of St. Frances of Rome Catholic Church, Clifton Unitarian, James Lees Memorial Presbyterian, and Clifton and Beargrass Baptist Churches.

In 1853 the KENTUCKY SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND, a state-supported grade and high school, relocated to Clifton. Eventually, other businesses related to the blind would emerge, among them the AMERICAN PRINTING HOUSE FOR THE BLIND (manufacturer of large-print and Braille literature), Recordings for the Blind (talking books and taped recordings), and Industries for the Blind (brooms and handicrafts). All continue to have a strong presence in the neighborhood.

While some subdivision of land occurred as early as the 1850s, it was not until after the CIVIL WAR that it was in full swing. The western tip of Clifton was annexed by Louisville in 1856. In 1876, with a population of seventy-five, a group of civic-minded residents successfully petitioned the state legislature to grant a charter to the town of Clifton. It was engulfed by subsequent annexations that occurred in 1895 and 1897.

With time, a Mature, mixed-use neighborhood emerged that was largely late Victorian in design. Modest one- and two-story frame and brick houses lined the side streets, with Frankfort Ave. serving as the primary commercial core. Residential building styles reflected the architectural fashions Popular between 1880 and 1910, the area's major period of development, and included buildings in the Italianate, Queen Anne, Princess Anne, Tudor Gothic Revival, and Craftsman Bungalow sales. With the popularization of the automobile and the extension of city streetcar lines, the Frankfort Ave. corridor began to take on a "layered" effect, with newer storefronts added onto older residential and commercial buildings.

Remnants of Clifton's historic past have served the neighborhood well. The neighborhood has felt a resurgence in recent years as people discover its unique historic character, and younger people have moved there to remodel the wide variety of houses. Neighborhood groups such as the Clifton Community Council and the Frankfort Avenue Business Association have bolstered community pride as well. A wide variety of new businesses has sprung up along Frankfort Ave., especially restaurants.

See Louisville Historic Landmarks and Preservation Districts Commission, Clifton National Register District nomination form, Louisville 1983 and 1994; *Louisville Survey East Report*, City of Louisville Community Development Cabinet, 1979; *St. Frances of Rome Parish: Story of Seventy-Five-Years (1887-1962)* (Louisville ca. 1962); Samuel W Thomas, *Crescent Hill Revisited* (Louisville 1987); *Courier Journal* Feb. 17, 1901, Feb. 15, 1953.

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