

# View from The Overlook



THE JOURNAL OF THE CLEVELAND HEIGHTS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## Firemen's "Clubhouses" Inspired Public Structures

### The Kelvin Home:

"A New and Better  
Way of Living"

Celebrate  
National Historic  
Preservation  
Month



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# The Cleveland Heights Historical Society



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www.chhistory.org

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The Cleveland Heights Historical Society, founded in 1983, is a state-chartered, 501 (c)(3), not-for-profit organization.

*Our Mission*

The Cleveland Heights Historical Society is dedicated to preserving and promoting the diverse character and traditions of Cleveland Heights.

As a community-based historic organization, the Society encourages and facilitates greater knowledge, understanding and awareness of the heritage of Cleveland Heights.

## Celebrate National Historic Preservation Month

Plan to attend the following lectures co-sponsored by The City of Cleveland Heights Landmark Commission, The Cleveland Heights Historical Society and FutureHeights.

**THURSDAY, APRIL 27 – 7:00 P.M.**

Cleveland Heights Historical Center at Superior Schoolhouse • FREE

### History of Cleveland Heights

*Explore our community's history with Kara Hamley O'Donnell, Historic Preservation Planner for the City of Cleveland Heights. The slide presentation will illustrate the history and architecture of Cleveland Heights from its inception as a farming community through the middle of the 20th century.*

**THURSDAY, MAY 11 – 7:00 P.M.**

Cleveland Heights Historical Center at Superior Schoolhouse • FREE

### Maintenance and Efficiency for Your Old Home

*Join the Cleveland Restoration Society to learn tips on tackling your older home's maintenance and repair issues. Learn how to inspect your house from roof to basement and find ways to improve the energy efficiency of your home while the staff dispels common efficiency myths.*

**WEDNESDAY, MAY 31 – 7:00 P.M.**

Cleveland Heights Community Center • \$3.00\*

### House History Workshop

*Learn the "who, what and where" of researching your home's history. Participants will be walked through the research process, be provided some basic information to start their search, and given detailed instructions on how to continue their research. Historic maps will be available for viewing. (\*\$3.00 charge at the door will cover cost of handouts and preliminary research materials for your specific property.)*

**THURSDAY, JUNE 15 – 7:00 P.M.**

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CLEVELAND HEIGHTS



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# The Firemen's "Clubhouses" of Cleveland Heights

By Sven H. Dubie

The design and construction of contemporary public structures tend to be governed by two fundamental factors: practicality and cost. This has often led to the creation of structures that are, in the eyes of some observers, less than inspiring. However, in older cities such as Cleveland Heights, this was not always the case. Consider, for instance, two of the city's fire stations: Noble/Monticello and Lee/Silsby. Although these facilities were designed to suit the basic needs of the fire companies they housed, they were also intended to be "an ornament to the neighborhood in an architectural sense." This was at the insistence of the legendary mayor Frank Cain, who was committed to the idea that architectural quality need not be sacrificed on the altar

of functionality. City leaders further expected that the stations would serve as an architectural standard for future development of their respective areas, particularly with respect to commercial properties.

Fire Station Number Two, at 2529 Noble Road just north of the intersection of Noble Road and Monticello Boulevard, was built in 1929. This was the first of Cleveland Heights' outlying fire stations to be constructed as a result of the city's rapid expansion and population growth in the 1910s and 1920s. Prior to this point, the city's original fire station (Number One), which was located at the old city hall on Mayfield Road, had provided fire protection for the entire city. The new station would enable a more rapid response for residents of the increasingly densely populated north-eastern section of the city.

The station was designed by the de facto city architect and native Ohioan, William Powell, a graduate of Oberlin, the Case School of Applied Sciences and Columbia University. Powell also attended the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris. Prior to architecting the city's new fire stations, Powell had designed the old city hall and Cumberland Pool. In keeping with his other public facilities, Powell drew up plans for the fire station in the English Tudor Revival style, which he knew would please Mayor Cain.

Its outstanding exterior features included steeply pitched slate roofs with copper ridging, tapestry brickwork, and chimneys corbelled with limestone trim. The entryways, some windows, and the apparatus

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*Above is the Silsby Road Station c. 1931. Shown on the cover is its architectural counterpart, the Noble Road Station, also c. 1931.*

# Firemen's "Clubhouses"

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doors were also trimmed in limestone. All of the building's windows were outfitted with English case-ment cottage sashes. Inside, the first floor consisted of a large equipment room lined with white enamel brick and a concrete floor. Near the main entrance of the building was the signal alcove. Adjacent to the equipment room was the firemen's recreation room, complete with a magnificent stone fireplace and bookshelves. Just off the recreation room there was a spacious living quarter for the officer in charge of the facility. Completing the main floor were a kitchen and dining room for the firemen, and a small repair garage for servicing the fire equipment.

The second floor consisted of a dormitory that could accommodate eighteen people, as well as lockers for their belongings, showers and toilet facilities. And yes, the firemen used sliding poles situated at either end of the dormitory to pass quickly from the second to the first floor. With the exception of the enameled brick in the equipment room, all of the walls and ceilings on the first and second floor were finished in Old English rough plaster. As one contemporary observed, the living quarters reminded one of nothing so much as "a high grade club." The station also had a basement that was outfitted with a small gymnasium and showers, as well as a storage room to house the chemicals and other materials used to fight fires.

One of the most unique design features of the building was a fifty foot hose tower that was connected to a drying apparatus. This would allow hoses up to fifty feet long to be hung up to dry, which was a more efficient means of drying them and subjected them to less bending and coiling, which typically caused the material in the hoses to deteriorate more rapidly.

Powell's hunch that Mayor Cain would like the design was correct. When Fire Station Number Two was dedicated in March 1929, Cain stated, "The old

idea that a fire station must be an ugly, cheese-box type of building is now out of date. It was never in date as far as Cleveland Heights is concerned. Those who think a fire station cannot be as artistic and pleasing a structure as any it is possible to build should go and take a look at the new Noble Road station." The *Cleveland Heights Press* echoed the mayor's sentiments, noting that the new station had been heralded as "the most beautiful fire house in Greater Cleveland." The total cost of the structure was \$55,000, much of which was funded by the sale of an adjacent parcel of land. As this section of the city was developing rapidly, officials felt certain they would recoup all of the building costs within several years of the station's completion.

As construction of Fire Station Number Two neared completion in late 1928, City Manager Howard Canfield proposed to Mayor Cain and the City Council that a third station be constructed near the intersection of Silsby and Lee Roads to service another area of the Heights that was undergoing rapid development. Canfield suggested that Powell again be commissioned to design the station in a style identical to that of Station Number Two. In 1931, Station Number Three—the Lee-Silsby facility—was completed. As many readers

know, it's a mirror image of the Noble Road structure, albeit with slight modifications to accommodate the different shape of the Silsby Road land parcel.

Stations Two and Three served Cleveland Heights residents for half a century until more modern facilities were constructed in the 1970s and 1980s. Both stations were closed in 1982. Station Number Two subsequently re-opened in 1990 as a police academy, which it remains today. Station Number Three housed a series of restaurants. Since the late 1990s, it has been the site of the Lee-Silsby Compounding Pharmacy. Despite these changes in the utilization of the inside of the buildings, their handsome, eye-catching exteriors remain a testimony to the architectural standards set by Cleveland Heights' early leaders. 🏠



*Silsby Station reincarnated as the Firehouse Cafe.*





*Cleveland Heights leads the way: The Kelvin House on Rumson Road was one of the first homes built in Cleveland to feature central air conditioning.*

# The KELVIN HOME

*Toward a New and Better Way of Living*

*By Christopher J. Hubbert,  
President, Forest Hill Homeowners, Inc.*

On Wednesday, September 8, 1937, George W. Mason, president of Nash-Kelvinator Corporation of Detroit, presided over the opening ceremonies of two “Kelvin Homes,” one at 3202 Rumson Road in Forest Hill and the other at 21361 Stratford Avenue in the Beach Cliff neighborhood of Rocky River. The Kelvin homes were the first homes built in Cleveland with central air conditioning. They also featured “the latest discoveries and achievements of housing science,” including an electric Kelvinator range, refrigerator, washing machine and ironer. According

to an advertisement, they were “homes where all the drudgery is eliminated—where tasks are done electrically.”

The grand opening of the Kelvin homes was accompanied by much fanfare and was attended by city officials and civic leaders. The event was heralded by a flurry of articles and advertisements in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, *Cleveland Press* and *Cleveland News*. Various contractors and decorators trumpeted their involvement in the project. The Second Federal Savings and Loan Association got into the act by running an ad touting its mortgage services with the tagline “Comfort in your financing, too” with a drawing  
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# The KELVIN HOME

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of the Forest Hill Kelvin home. The Rudolph Wurlitzer Company installed a new "Butterfly" piano in both homes and their playing was featured on the "Kelvin Home Radio Show" on WGAR on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. The dedication ceremonies were broadcast as well. After the ceremonies were completed, Mason spoke at a luncheon held at the Advertising Club.

The homes were designed by Detroit architect J. Ivan Dize and built by Oil Heating Devices, Inc., Kelvinator's local distribution agent. In an interview in the *Cleveland News*, the president of Oil Heating Devices, W. R. Kromer, claimed that because of the high efficiency cooling unit, the cost of year-round comfort in the "specially-designed" Kelvin home would in many cases be less than only the cost of heating a comparable residence. Kromer predicted "universal acceptance of residential air conditioning in the near future."

The Kelvin home in Forest Hill is in some sense a result of the failure of John D. Rockefeller, Jr.'s, original plan for the development. When Andrew J. Thomas' French Norman homes on Brewster Road and adjacent streets failed to sell, Charles O. Heydt, Rockefeller's trusted advisor and president of Abeyton Realty Corporation, and James C. Jones, manager of the Forest Hill allotment, explored innovations in home building to attract attention to the development. The results of their efforts include the five Arcy Corporation steel frame homes on Monticello Boulevard and one of the first air conditioned homes in Cleveland being built on Rumson.

Despite all the hype, the Kelvin home did not sell immediately (perhaps due to its proximity to Dean Dairy on Mayfield at what is now U-Haul) and was rented out like many other Rockefeller homes. In an October 1958 letter to Frank S. Staley, who worked closely with Heydt on real estate matters for Rockefeller, Jones states that the architectural design of the "Kelvin house was only accepted after numerous allowances were made for the location." It appears that Rockefeller did not care for the newer homes being built in the

development and Jones was forced to defend the choices of his architect. In his response, Staley indicates that Rockefeller preferred the garage to be hidden behind the house instead of being a prominent element of the front elevation. Interestingly, he also notes that Rockefeller's sons Nelson and Laurance, perhaps with more contemporary taste, did not agree with their father.

## The Story of Kelvinator

In 1914, Nathaniel B. Wales, a young inventor, began developing refrigerating mechanisms for home installation. In 1916, Wales, with the financial backing of Arnold H. Goss, then secretary of the Buick Automobile Company, formed the Electro-Automatic Refrigerating Company in Detroit, Michigan, becoming the first company to produce an automatic refrigerator for the household market. Almost immediately, the firm's name

was changed to the Kelvinator Company in honor of the British physicist who originated the absolute temperature scale (measured in kelvins).

By 1923, the Kelvinator Company held 80 percent of the market for electric refrigerators. In 1926, Kelvinator acquired the Leonard Refrigerator Company, a

Grand Rapids, Michigan, manufacturer of cleanable ice-box cabinets. That same year the company acquired Nizer Corporation, the largest maker of ice-cream cabinets. George W. Mason joined Kelvinator as president in 1928. Although only 37, Mason already had an impressive record with Chrysler and Copeland Products.

In 1937, Kelvinator merged with Nash Motor Company, forming Nash-Kelvinator Corporation. Mason served as the president of the joint operation. As a division of Nash-Kelvinator, Kelvinator continued to grow, expanding into making condensers and compressors for manufacturers of other makes of refrigerators, freezers, and air conditioning units. The company's household product line was supplemented by electric ranges, water heaters, home freezers, room air conditioners, kitchen cabinets, sinks, kitchen waste disposers, and in 1952 a complete line of home laundry equipment acquired through the purchase of Altorfer Bros. Company (ABC), of Peoria, Illinois.

Kelvinator was purchased by White Consolidated Industries in 1968, and subsequently became part of



the Electrolux Group in 1986. Today, Kelvinator continues to offer an assortment of household appliances.

## A Brief History of Domestic Air Conditioning

Mechanical refrigeration was developed in the first half of the 19th century and was often employed to manufacture ice as an alternative to natural ice harvested from frozen lakes and rivers. Refrigeration machinery was bulky and expensive, limiting its use initially to commercial applications. The first domestic application of mechanical cooling technology was food refrigeration. Early in-home refrigerators were cooled by blocks of ice and although mechanically cooled refrigerators were available to homeowners as early as the 1890s, they did not become widespread until the 1920s when the technology had become less expensive and more reliable.

It wasn't long before refrigeration equipment was adapted to comfort cooling, or air conditioning.<sup>1</sup> Once again, early air conditioning systems were expensive and initially were limited to commercial uses such as factories and food processing plants. These first air conditioners were primarily water cooled, requiring plumbing connections and a sewer hookup. Most existing homes of the era also required additional ducting for air distribution and upgraded electrical service before air conditioning could be installed. Home air conditioning was a luxury that few could afford and most people first experienced comfort cooling in theaters.<sup>2</sup>

In the late 1920s and early 1930s several companies introduced console-style room air conditioners, followed shortly by window units. The early portable room air conditioners were built like fine

furniture, with wooden cabinets and decorative grillwork. Room air conditioners were more common than whole-house systems that were generally too expensive for the average homeowner to install in an existing home.

After World War II air conditioning became increasingly affordable. The popularity of whole-house air conditioning allowed new forms of domestic architecture, unencumbered by the constraints imposed by natural cooling, primarily shade and ventilation. Post-war homes could be low slung ranches with large expanses of sealed glass. The availability of domestic air conditioning has even influenced where we choose to live, fueling the population growth in the warm climates of the south and west. ■

## Author's Note

I would like to thank Kenneth W. Rose of the Rockefeller Archive Center for alerting me to the presence of the Kelvin home in Forest Hill and Tony Evans of Electrolux for providing Kelvinator's history. To learn more about the history of air conditioning, please visit the website of the

American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers at ASHRAE.org. *Sleeping Soundly on Summer Nights*, by Mike Pauken, P.E. (ASHRAE Journal, May 1999), was the source of much of the information in this article regarding air conditioning.

1 Stuart W. Cramer coined the term "air conditioning" in 1906 to describe mechanically controlling the temperature and humidity of interior air.

2 The first documented theater to be air conditioned was the New Empire Theatre in Montgomery, Alabama in 1917.

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 Doors: ...  
 Stairs: ...  
 Floors: ...  
 Paint: ...  
 Lumber: ...  
 Brick: ...  
 Tiles: ...  
 Glass: ...  
 Hardware: ...  
 Ironwork: ...  
 Steel: ...  
 Copper: ...  
 Lead: ...  
 Zinc: ...  
 Aluminum: ...  
 Brass: ...  
 Bronze: ...  
 Silver: ...  
 Gold: ...  
 Marble: ...  
 Granite: ...  
 Slate: ...  
 Limestone: ...  
 Sandstone: ...  
 Travertine: ...  
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# The Cleveland Heights Historical Society

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*\*The Deming and Severance Memberships include one free admission to the Historical Society's annual fundraiser and periodic acknowledgement in "View from The Overlook."*

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