Walker & Weeks:
An Architectural Power in Cleveland Heights
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by Eric J. Silverman

Cleveland is home to numerous architectural treasures. Some dominate the skyline, such as the BP Building, Key Tower or the Terminal Tower. Others are emblematic of an earlier design vision—the Society for Savings Building or the Cleveland Public Library, for example. But the buildings designed by one firm in the early 20th Century are so much a part of the city that it is hard to believe only one team was behind them.

That “team” was Walker & Weeks—a collaboration of Frank Walker (1877-1949) and Harry Weeks (1871-1935), who began their careers working for J. Milton Dyer (Dyer designed John L. Severance’s palatial “Longwood” in collaboration with Charles Schweinfurth). Walker and Weeks left Dyer in 1911 to set up their own practice, and their subsequent commissions in the city of Cleveland constitute a virtual encyclopedia of iconic buildings: Public Auditorium, the Federal Reserve Bank, Cleveland Public Library, Epworth-Euclid Methodist Church, Severance Hall, W. Bingham Company Warehouse, the Guardian Building, Cleveland Discount Building, Allen Memorial Medical Library, the Lorain-Carnegie Bridge, Cleveland Municipal Stadium, the United States Post Office at the Terminal Tower Complex, and the Cleveland Board of Education Building.

In addition to their amazing impact on the City of Cleveland, Walker & Weeks also designed a stunning array of commercial structures in Cleveland Heights and Shaker Heights. Other than the work of Franz Warner and John Graham for the CH-UH schools (much of which has been demolished or significantly altered), one would be hard-pressed to find another firm that designed so many prominent buildings in our community. Nor does that résumé include the many magnificent W&W residences still standing in Cleveland Heights:

- 2465 Marlboro Road (1912)
  Original F.W. Judd Residence
- 2611 Guilford Road (1915)
  Original Mrs. John Nash Residence
- 2005 Chestnut Hills Drive (1915)
  Original E.G. Buckwell Residence
- 3085 Fairmount Boulevard (1913)
  Original Orville W. Prescott Residence
- 3097 Fairmount Boulevard (1915)
  Original W.H. Prescott Residence
- 2638 Fairmount Boulevard (1923)
  Original Armen H. Tashjian Residence (Figure 1)
- 2357 Tudor Drive (1927)
  Original C. Lowe Residence
- 2225 Delamere Drive (1928)
  Original H.W. Strong Residence
- 1251 Oakridge Drive (1929)
  Original Henry H. Taylor Residence

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Figure 1: Armen H. Tashjian, a Walker & Weeks partner, had the firm design his home at 2638 Fairmount Boulevard in 1923.
Early structures, early deaths

Walker & Weeks would become known for designing banks and other commercial structures. However, as noted above, many of their earliest commissions actually came from wealthy industrialists seeking to build manorial residences in Cleveland’s burgeoning borderlands, including the exclusive enclaves on the bluffs in Cleveland Heights. Between 1910 and 1930, Walker & Weeks would design almost a dozen homes in Cleveland Heights and the area immediately adjacent to the city on Carlton Road. The homes on Carlton, while large by today’s standards, were generally Tudor, shingle and colonial-style homes—not nearly as palatial as those on Overlook. Many of these would be converted to institutional use (some by Ursuline College, which occupied much of the area from the 1920s to the 1950s), only to be demolished in the 1960s by
Figure 3: Amidst some controversy, the James H. Foster home at 2200 Devonshire Drive came down in 2011. (Photo: Christopher Busta-Peck.)

Case Institute of Technology (later Case Western Reserve University).

The Louis Weber home—a W&W creation at 2860 Euclid Heights Boulevard—would also fall prey to the wrecking ball. This home stood at the east end of the property upon which the former and current Coventry Elementary Schools were erected (Figure 2).

Then there is the most recent casualty: the mammoth James H. Foster home at 2200 Devonshire home—whose recent and controversial destruction spurred the author to write this article (Figure 3).

We should also note that one of Walker & Weeks’ most unique structures—the Warner & Swasey Observatory on North Taylor Road—is suffering a slow death by neglect. Walker & Weeks was commissioned by Western Reserve University in the late teens to build a structure to house a 9.5-inch refractor telescope designed for Worcester Warner and Ambrose Swasey, owners of Warner & Swasey Company. The telescope had originally been used in the shared back

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yards of Warner & Swasey at East 77th Street and Euclid Avenue (Figure 4).¹ In the 1950s, light pollution from Cleveland began to make research impossible from the East Cleveland site, and the facility’s telescopes were moved to a new structure in Geauga County. The original East Cleveland observatory still stands (albeit barely) on North Taylor Road at Hanover Drive, just up the hill from Euclid Avenue (Figure 5).²

Most still thrive

Fortunately, many of the Walker & Weeks structures in Cleveland Heights are still standing, mostly in the Ambler Heights (Chestnut Hills) district or along Fairmount Boulevard. They vary in styles and size, but all are typical of the attention to detail and craftsmanship that W&W’s wealthy buyers demanded.

Unique among Walker & Weeks’ work in Cleveland Heights during this decade is the original Cleveland Heights High School, built in 1915 on Lee Road north of Euclid Heights Boulevard and known after 1926 as Roosevelt Junior High School. Compared to other commissions by the firm, the building was quite austere. Thousands of students had their photograph taken posing on the front steps of Roosevelt between two large copper lamps (Figure 6, page 9). Roosevelt would come down in the 1970s as part of the School District’s renovation program.

By the 1920s, Walker & Weeks’ work in the area would include landmark buildings that motorists pass every day. Just over the city’s southeast border, the firm designed the campuses for Hathaway Brown and University School, and the First Baptist Church on Eaton Road. This gothic building with its 130-foot tower has a similar design aesthetic to

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² Photo: Cleveland Public Library, see Jan Cigliano, Showplace of America: Cleveland’s Euclid Avenue, 1850-1910, Kent OH: Kent State University Press (1991). 189
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St. Paul’s Episcopal Church (Coventry Road and Fairmount Boulevard), another Walker & Weeks commission.

Two other commissions from Walker & Weeks in the 1920s would come to dominate their locations. One is the First Church of Christ, Scientist (now Nottingham-Spirk Design), located on Overlook Road in Cleveland (Figure 7, page 10). Bearing a striking resemblance to Severance Hall (built by Walker & Weeks several years later), the church is slightly more classical in its details (the pediment over the portico at Severance has a decidedly Art Deco feel to it). The sloping site on Overlook masks just how large the former church actually is.

The second W&W commission was designed in the 1920s but not finished until after World War II: St. Ann’s Church at Cedar and Coventry Roads also owes much of its existence to the work of Father Powers, who acquired sections of the structure from buildings demolished downtown.

W&W’s last 1920s project in the area was the New York Central & Nickel Plate Railroad Bridges at the base of Cedar Hill.

With the onset of the Great Depression, Walker & Weeks, like many firms, eked out work where it could be found, including smaller commissions and additions to existing buildings. In Cleveland Heights, the firm designed the Noble Road Library in 1937, which has recently undergone a complete renovation that maintained its exterior design but updated the interior to match the needs of today’s patrons.

Just over the border in East Cleveland, Walker & Weeks designed the 1939 pedestrian footbridge over Forest Hills Boulevard (Figure 8, page 11). At the time, Forest Hills Boulevard was a new road cut recently through the site of the former John D. Rockefeller summer property. The 140-foot-long bridge rises 48 feet above the boulevard.

The firm’s last project in Cleveland Heights was another prominent building: the main sanctuary for Fairmount Presbyterian Church at the intersection of Coventry and Fairmount, built in 1941. This would bring to three the number of churches in the Heights designed by the firm—five if you include First Baptist and First Church of Christ, Scientist, which are just over the city limits.

Improving the future by appreciating the past

Henry Weeks passed away in 1935 and Frank Walker died in 1949. Over a span of more than 50 years, they created a trove of great buildings, many of which are close to entering

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Figure 6: Ninth grade class from Roosevelt Junior High, Fall, 1949.
Figure 7: Construction of the First Church of Christ, Scientist, July, 1930.
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their second century. As noted earlier, one of those creations didn’t quite make it: 2200 Devonshire fell to the wrecker’s ball in April 2011. The 8,000 square foot home needed huge amounts of renovation, and attempts to find a buyer focused more on renovation than replacement were unsuccessful.

The great majority of Cleveland Heights’ grand homes, including Walker & Weeks structures, have had better fates, including a (non-W&W) Fairmount Boulevard residence whose recent “green” renovation included new mechanicals, finishes and energy-efficient systems. Our hope is that the same level of imagination and appreciation—combined with increased levels of legislative support—can be applied to the preservation of all Cleveland Heights’ great structures, and that every future initiative takes as its legacy the course of the First Church of Christ, Scientist or the Noble Road Library, rather than that of the James H. Foster Residence on Devonshire Drive.

Four long-gone W&W homes on Carlton Road

Figure 8: Construction of the Forest Hills footbridge, 1939.
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