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2721 Colchester Road • Cleveland Heights, Ohio 44106-3650

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The Cleveland Heights Historical Society

2721 Colchester Road

Cleveland Heights, Ohio 44106-3650

# View from The Overlook

THE JOURNAL OF THE CLEVELAND HEIGHTS HISTORICAL SOCIETY



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## When bad ideas happen to good suburbs Massive Heights Redevelopment Proposed in 1969

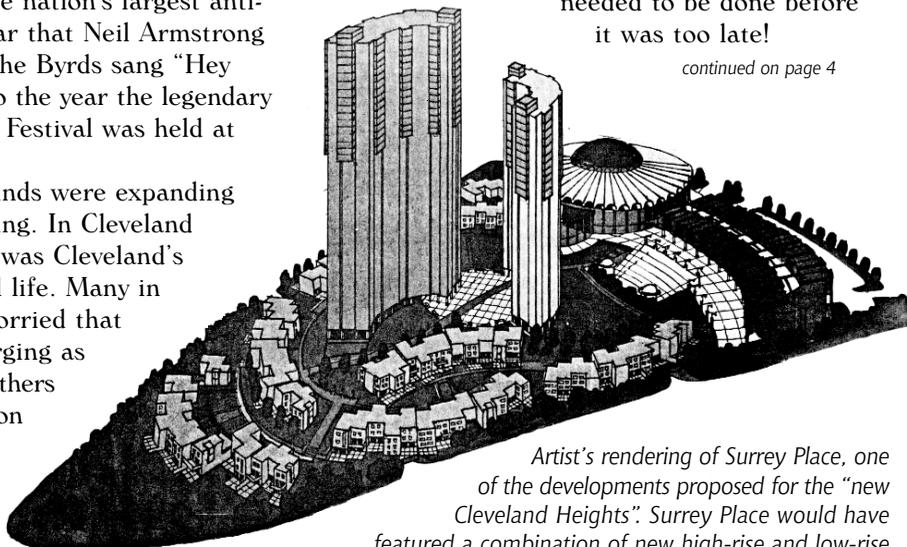
By Charles Owen

The year 1969 was a tumultuous time in America. The Vietnam War continued to rage as 250,000 Americans gathered on the Washington Mall in the nation's largest anti-war protest. It was the year that Neil Armstrong walked on the moon and the Byrds sang "Hey Mr. Spaceman." It was also the year the legendary Woodstock Music and Art Festival was held at Max Yasgur's farm.

It was a time when minds were expanding and behaviors were changing. In Cleveland Heights, Coventry Village was Cleveland's center for counter-cultural life. Many in Cleveland Heights were worried that scruffy Coventry was emerging as the city's first slum, while others welcomed the transformation as modern and enlightening. While peace, love, and tie-dye seemed to be the new order, some believed

that serious decay was beginning to set in. To many, the Cleveland Heights of 1969 was not considered particularly historic; it was just an old community that was getting older. Many citizens felt that something needed to be done before it was too late!

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*Artist's rendering of Surrey Place, one of the developments proposed for the "new Cleveland Heights". Surrey Place would have featured a combination of new high-rise and low-rise dwellings, office space, and direct access to a new rapid transit line.*

# The Cleveland Heights Historical Society



2721 Colchester Road  
Cleveland Heights, Ohio 44106-3650  
(216) 321-9141

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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.

## Philip Johnson

Philip Johnson, one of America's most influential and most consistently engaging architects, died on January 25 at age 98 at his Glass House in New Canaan, Conn.

According to the Cleveland Restoration Society, he served on the board of the National Trust for Historic Preservation from 1968 to 1971 and he entrusted the organization with future stewardship of the Glass House. The National Trust is working towards opening this landmark property to the public in the future. Johnson's Cleveland works include the Cleveland Playhouse and "Turning Point Garden" at Case Western Reserve University.

Born on July 8, 1906, Johnson grew up in a mansion on Overlook Road and inherited a fortune in Alcoa stock from his father, the prominent Cleveland lawyer Homer Hosea Johnson.

Johnson had a love-hate relationship with his hometown, where he never felt completely appreciated. But he kept coming home for quiet visits with his sister who lives in University Circle.

During one visit, in 1991, Johnson said it always irked him that he never designed a skyscraper here. He designed a neo-Byzantine expansion of the Cleveland Play House in the early 1980s when he was in his Postmodernist phase, but bigger assignments eluded him. He vied unsuccessfully in the late 1980s to win the commission to design the Key Tower in downtown Cleveland, but lost the assignment to Cesar Pelli. He tried again to design the expansion of the Cleveland Public Library, but was edged out by Malcolm Holzman. "I'd love to work in Cleveland, but you know, you never work in your home town," Johnson said in an interview in 1991. "If you come in as a stranger with a briefcase, it's a much better introduction than boyhood charms."

*"I'd love to work  
in Cleveland, but you  
know, you never work  
in your home town,"*



The "Joy" mural, designed by Betty Lau, remains a landmark of the Cedar Lee District.

## Drive-by History: The Joy Mural

By Mazie Adams

Most Cleveland Heights residents are familiar with the Joy mural at the corner of Lee and Silsby Roads, but not many of us know its history. In 1973, the Citizens for Cedar-Lee Inc, a neighborhood development group, sponsored a "Supergraphics" contest. Supergraphics were large murals painted on public buildings, described as "one of the most stimulating social and artistic phenomena in our country today." The goal of the Cedar-Lee contest was to create public art to "embellish and spiritually uplift the neighborhood" and bring publicity to the shopping district.

Three sites were chosen for beautification: 2307 Lee Road (Bonn Drug, now Cutri Studio), 2203 Lee Road (Lee Road Variety) and 2174



Silsby and Lee Roads, prior to "Joy."

Lee Road (Meyer Miller Shoes, next to the used car lot, now the parking lot of CVS).

Three winners were announced at a gala affair in September 1973. "Labor Day Weekend," a mural featuring the silhouettes of children, graced the rear wall of Lee Variety. Meyer Miller Shoes would be painted with "Red Carpet Welcome." And Cleveland Heights resident Betty Lau designed "Joy" for the

Bonn Drug site. Only the Joy mural remains. As a retirement gift to herself, artist Betty Lau funded the restoration of the mural in the 1990s.

The Joy Mural continues to brighten the Lee/Silsby intersection. The Citizens for Cedar-Lee would be pleased to know that they achieved their goal, creating an artistic landmark in the neighborhood and a piece of history that we drive by and enjoy everyday.

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When bad ideas happen to good suburbs

## Massive Heights Redevelopment Proposed in 1969

*continued from page 1*

In September of 1969, Mayor Fred Stashower and Cleveland Heights City Council mailed to each household a consultant's summary of studies by the Battelle Institute of Columbus and Barton-Aschman Associates of Chicago. The summary stated that Cleveland Heights was a good community, but that the city needed to address its aging housing and commercial areas through redevelopment. The report outlined some community concerns and suggested some possible steps that might be taken in Cleveland Heights to attract "good developers and stimulate redevelopment in aging residential and commercial areas." The reports cited a growing need for public transportation and the need for Cleveland Heights to facilitate redevelopment of older neighborhoods like Coventry and Cedar-Fairmount.

A few years earlier, in 1963, the original Severance Center "mall" was built at Mayfield and Taylor on the old Severance estate. Severance Center was a pretty big deal back then and was at the forefront of the new American shopping mall movement. Severance was viewed as the new downtown for the Heights with convenient and plentiful parking. Everyone was going to the new Severance. The mall had department stores, a movie theater, a drug store, and many other shops. Some of the stores were very exclusive. Severance was seen the "new" Cleveland Heights.

In its study, Battelle strongly urged Cleveland Heights to promote an extension of

*The proposal would have required that scores of apartment buildings, storefronts, and single-family homes be demolished.*

the CTS rapid transit up Cedar Glen, Euclid Heights Boulevard, and through the neighborhoods (south of Mayfield) to Severance Center. Much of the new rail line would reinvent the route that the old streetcars once took to the Heights. The Euclid Heights portion of the line was proposed to be below grade in an "open cut" similar in style to the Shaker Rapid's open cut just west of Shaker Square. Ornamental acoustic walls to buffer the rapid would line Euclid Heights Boulevard.

In the study, the scenario deemed "most attractive," would have the rapid line coming down Coventry Road along Rock Court and then running behind the commercial stores on the south side of the street. It would then run eastward, south of Mayfield Road and through many residential neighborhoods, until it reached Severance Center. A terminus that would be capable of storing twenty rapid transit cars was planned for a section of the Oakwood Country Club. It was envisioned that major transit stations should be constructed on Euclid Heights (between Cedar and Derbyshire/Surry, Coventry and Lee, as well as Severance and Oakwood.

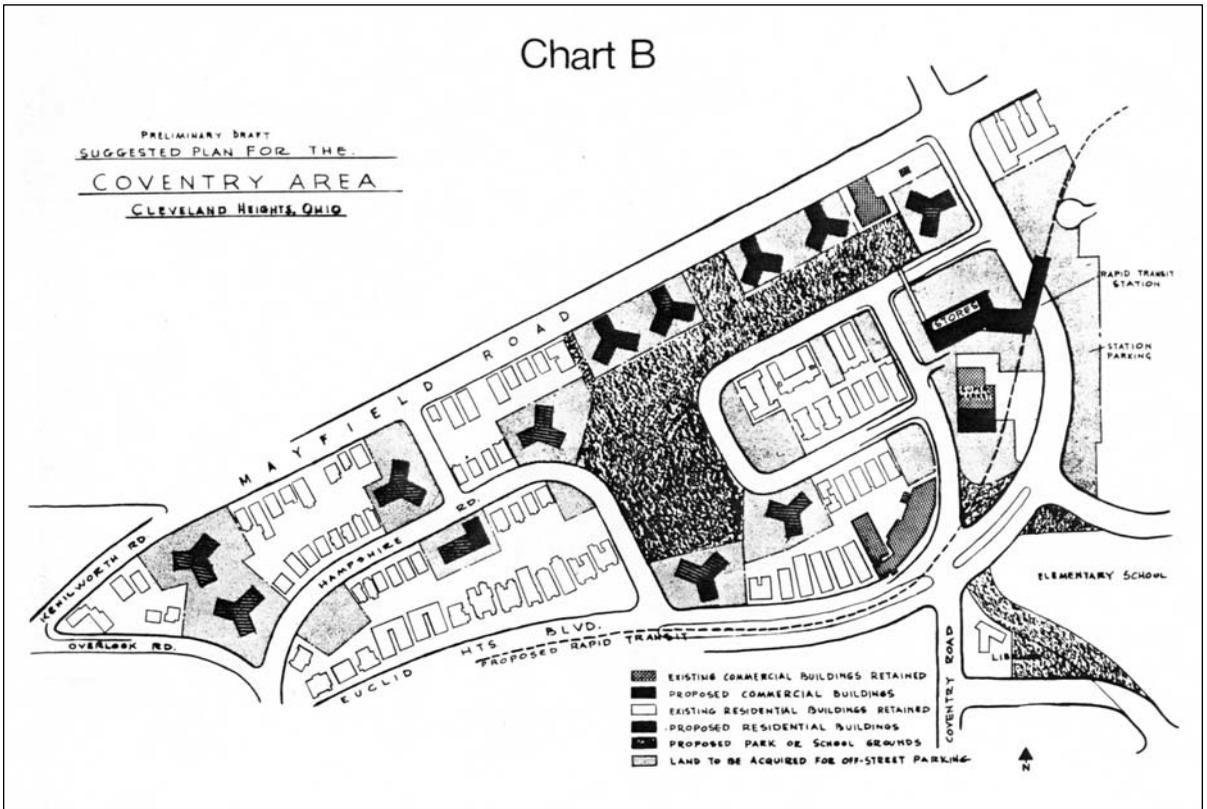
The proposal would have required that scores of apartment buildings, storefronts, and single-family homes be demolished. In Coventry, dramatic changes were envisioned that would greatly alter the community. Most commercial buildings would be razed and a transit station featuring new stores would be built on a relocated Coventry. The residential plan boldly suggested

clearing the land of numerous apartment buildings and in their place a series of high-rise residential structures would be constructed.

In the Cedar Fairmount neighborhood, massive demolition would take place in the Cedar-Surry-Euclid Heights triangle. Some very tall apartment buildings surrounded by townhouses would be built, as well as a sort of performing arts center/open-air plaza. Called Surry Place, it was seen as a dramatic and new “gateway to the Heights.” It was even thought that the Cleveland Play House might

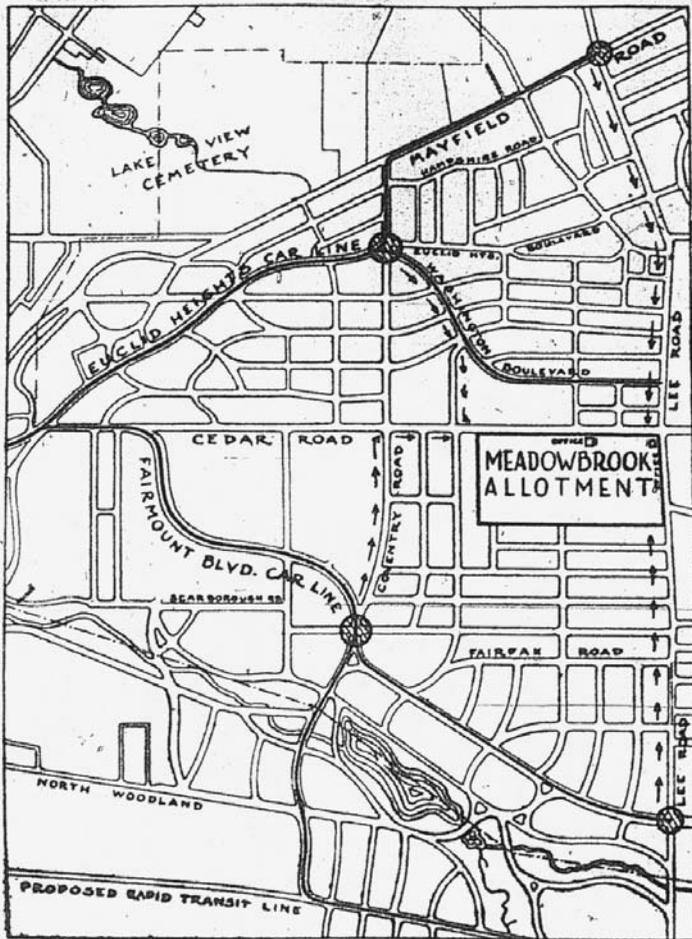
be persuaded to relocate to the development!

While this massive Heights redevelopment proposal seems curious and even scary to us today, 1969 was a year of contrasts, and the plans represent what many hoped Cleveland Heights might become. The plan, however, was deemed too disruptive and too costly in terms of money and also in terms of the neighborhoods that would have been seriously compromised. Most importantly, the plans garnered little citizen and political support and so they were eventually shelved.



*Preliminary drawing showing the dramatic changes that would have ensued in and around the Coventry Business District. Note that Coventry Road would no longer connect to Mayfield, and that many of the homes and businesses we know today would have been demolished for construction of several high-rise apartment buildings. In addition, a new rapid transit line would have been established through the area, ending at Severance Center.*

# THE WAY TO COME TO Meadowbrook Allotment



is to take a Euclid Heights car to Coventry-rd, where our auto will meet you and show you over this wonderful section of the Heights.

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*From the Cleveland Plain Dealer, April 19, 1914.*

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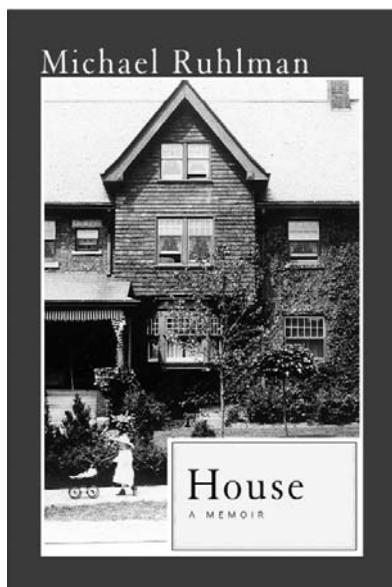
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The Cleveland Heights Historical Society and the City of Cleveland Heights  
Landmark Commission invite you to a talk by

## Michael Ruhlman

acclaimed author and Cleveland Heights resident, who will discuss his new book:

# House: A Memoir



Michael Ruhlman's ability to take a wide range of subjects—cooking, education, medicine, boat making—and make them his own has made him a widely known and respected writer. In his latest offering, he owns the subject literally and figuratively: his Cleveland Heights home.

Exploring its roots and renovation, *HOUSE* delves into one family's saga to establish a new home—everything from haggling with carpet-delivery men to researching the history of the neighborhood and the home's former residents. *HOUSE* is a terrific narrative and, now, a pleasant and informative evening of entertainment.

Ruhlman "has a wonderful sense of narrative and pace ... an amazing visual and aural memory."

-The New York Times Book Review

"Mr. Ruhlman consistently comes through with touching lyricism."

-The Wall Street Journal

**ONE NIGHT ONLY! Wednesday April 13 at 7:00 pm**

Cleveland Hts. Historical Center - Superior Schoolhouse (corner of Euclid Hts. Blvd. & Superior Rd.)

**Reservations Required • Call 216-291-4878**

Admission is free but seating for the presentation is limited to 50 people.

Parking is available at the Cumberland Pool parking lot.

Handicapped and special needs parking is provided at the Schoolhouse.