RESPONSES

Robert C. Gaede, Architect

First, I must agree with John Grabowski that Euclid Avenue was, indeed, a neighborhood. Notable for its linear shape and definite edges, it was established not by physical boundaries but by the depth of the lots facing its singular strand, Euclid. Its distinction as a place of familiar associations was more dramatically stated than, perhaps, any other Cleveland neighborhood. Here, architecture and landscaping assert the uniqueness of the district most distinctly.

John Grabowski’s thoughtful and broadly examined exploration of Cleveland’s neighborhoods and their formation, ascendancy and decay is most thorough. It’s hard to know what component of these areas to develop further. Since architecture is my specialty, and since John barely refers to that quality, I would like to explore that facet.

It would seem reasonable to find that many, if not all, of Cleveland’s neighborhoods had been stamped with an architectural character which would still today be clear evidence of their origins. Yet, this is not the case, or at least not assertively so. For the most part, Cleveland’s 19th and early 20th century ethnic neighborhoods are fashioned from very similar building stock.

You may quickly rise to remind me that distinctions exist, that the close-packed houses of Little Italy are unique as are the occasional brick cottages of Ohio City. And, there is the superficial phenomena of old world exotic architecture in the Fleet Avenue area—a recent veneer which was applied to basic Victorian stock. There are some distinctions but, in the main, the houses and shops of Cleveland, springing forth in almost reckless abundance between 1860 and 1930, follow familiar patterns on either side of the bounding river, the Cuyahoga, and vary more by the special whim of the subdivision builder than by profound associations with ethnic roots.

Considering that the immigrants to Cleveland were often poor, it is not surprising that they had little means to command the styling, much less the planning of their neighborhoods. Cleveland grew by the mode employed across America—a ruthless and erratic consumption of land to find room for a burgeoning population. While a modest recognition of a grid iron pattern exists here and there, the discontinuities of Cleveland’s streets became so severe that names were dropped for numbers, and even these could hardly produce order.
Cleveland's first houses of ethnic neighborhoods seem to be frame cottages, gable to the street, many with a simple porch. This form can be found throughout the city. Once economic substance permitted style to be considered, national movements set the pace, from Classic Revivals through Victorian. Perhaps Cleveland's only special invention, the familiar two story with porches up and down (The Cleveland Double-Decker) proliferated at the turn of the century, appearing in identical format in Buckeye, Collinwood or Detroit-Shoreway.

High style being the province of the few, the new neighborhoods in the up-scale suburbs could afford distinctive styling, but even here followed national themes in the main. But, for the city proper, we must turn to the other distinctions to establish our neighborhood identities.