

St. John's Leaving Over-the-Rhine and Moving to Resor Avenue

In 1946, St. John's congregation moved from the beautiful building at 12th and Elm Streets in Over-the-Rhine to Clifton. The conditions leading to the move are described below by Dick Reiman, St. John's historian from about 1980 until 2007. His childhood years were in the building at 12th and Elm, and later as an adult he was able to interview people who had been involved in the decision to sell the property and move to Clifton.

"Ralph Taylor, President of the Council at the time, remembered that the 12th & Elm Church became a liability in the 1930s and 1940s, finally terminating with the sale of the property to the Church of God in February 1946 for \$50,000. The 12th and Elm location was no longer central to a congregation who had moved to the suburban hills; the sanctuary was difficult to heat and expensive to maintain. The neighborhood was deteriorating and made going to the church a security risk. Meetings had to end before darkness. Special lights were installed in entrance halls and the older women who came on the street car to 12th and Vine Streets had to come in groups for personal safety. All of the above resulted in declining membership and deficits which were made up by withdrawing money from dwindling bequests. The older members were dying and the young people would not attend."

What caused the "deterioration" of Over-the-Rhine neighborhood? According to the Over-the-Rhine Foundation this is how the neighborhood changed.

"Over-the-Rhine remained a vibrant, working-class neighborhood in the early twentieth century; but as improved public transportation and automobiles made it easier for working-class families to live in the surrounding hilltop neighborhoods, the people who could afford to leave OTR's densely packed, small apartment buildings moved away. OTR's tenements increasingly became home to the working poor. Starting during the Depression, Over-the-Rhine saw the arrival of a new era of American-born immigrants. Appalachians left failing farmlands and coal fields in eastern Kentucky and Tennessee for industrial work in Cincinnati, often in industries located in OTR and its neighboring communities. Because of its proximity to jobs, and because they could afford the small, cold-water tenements that had come to characterize the neighborhood, Over-the-Rhine progressed into an era when the community became distinctly Appalachian. Although this period was predominately defined by poverty, these residents epitomized the Appalachian culture, producing local bluegrass legend Katie Laur, and many other great musicians and artisans."

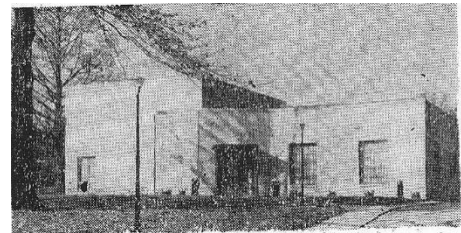
On October 5, 1943, the search for a new site for St. John's Unitarian Church began. The map of where most of the congregation lived, Ralph Taylor recalled, indicated the Clifton area as the central point. The agreement to sell the Elm Street church was dated November 26, 1945, and services were



moved to Hanselman Masonic Temple (picture on the right) on Clifton Avenue in March 1946.

Three properties in Clifton were considered for the location of the new church building. One on Clifton Ave near the University of Cincinnati, another on McAlpin Ave and the third at 320 Resor Ave. On November 22, 1948, the 320 Resor Avenue property was selected as “the most desirable,” and an offer of \$21,000 was authorized by Council, funded from new building funds. It had the advantage of being in the university district which was what the congregation wanted. After St. John’s decided to buy it, Jacob Haehnle surprised and thrilled the minister by offering to pay the \$21,000 for the property. St. John’s has a copy of the “Letter of Thanks” dated February 8, 1949.

However, before the congregation started to build, the inflation times of The Korean War escalated costs up to \$252,749. That was when the congregation voted to postpone the sanctuary so they could build the rest of the church for the original \$150,000. On April 16, 1951, new bids came to \$145,843. The groundbreaking ceremony was on June 17, 1951. The first service was held at Resor Avenue on September 14, 1952. The building (picture above) was dedicated November 23, 1952. Krolfifer Hall was used as the church’s sanctuary during the first 10 years on Resor Avenue.



During this transition from Over-the-Rhine to Resor Ave., Rev. Julius Krolfifer was St. John’s minister. He began his ministry at the 12th and Elm Street building in 1931. He and Rev. Eisenlohr, St. John’s Minister Emeritus, along with some members of St. John’s were active members of Hanselman Masonic Temple. Rev. Krolfifer was St. John’s minister until 1955 and was able to experience St. John’s new home on Resor Avenue. The congregation admired Rev. Krolfifer and his wife, Mabel, so much that they named Krolfifer Hall for them.

Sources:

As I Remember: The Building of this Church by Dick Reiman June 14 ,1970

The Church at 12th and Elm and the Move to 320 Resor Avenue by Dick Reiman, 2002

http://www.otrfoundation.org/OTR_History.htm accessed June 2022

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