

The Story of Loyola-On-The-Lake

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Almost two years ago, a mysterious place called Loyola-On-The-Lake first made an appearance in the Vermilion Photojournal. Postcard pictures of a rather substantial building (pictured) had surfaced on the internet several years earlier but no one seemed to know anything about the building nor where it might have been located.

Finally the pre-eminent interurban historian (Birmingham resident) Dennis Lamont discovered that the old Lake Shore Electric railroad had a stop (#123) called the "Loyola Stop" along Lake Road east of town. It was located between Camp Hakoah (#122) to the east and the area now known as Sunnyside (#124) to the west. A few weeks later Dennis found an old map (printed with the 2006 article) indicating that the Jesuit St. Ignatius College apparently owned a sizeable piece of land along the lake in that area.



Inquires made of Loyola University in Chicago, St. Ignatius School in Cleveland, and the Jesuit Province in Detroit concerning the property, while helpful, were not exceptionally productive. Consequently both the mission and fate of the Loyola-On-The-Lake Summer School of Science remained elusive and the matter was - at least for the time being - shelved.

But thanks to both the curiosity and persistence of another local historian - Albert "Al" Doane - of Amherst, Ohio the subject is no longer one of local history's mysteries.

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In 1892 one Father Knappmeyer -- a Cleveland, Ohio Jesuit -- initiated plans for the purchase of a villa outside the hustle and bustle of the city that might be used as a retreat site. In 1901 a Father Schulte was commissioned to buy 92 acres of land just east of the Village of Vermilion, Ohio. Early reports indicate that the land boasted some 1,200 feet of frontage along the lake. A later report suggested that there may have been as much as 2000 feet of lake frontage. Whatever the case, the land was purchased, and in 1904, at the grand expense of \$600, the Jesuit Brothers and Scholastics of the former Buffalo Mission constructed a three story frame building (pictured) on concrete pillars.

The mission of the project - aside from providing scholastics a place of respite - also allowed the same a place where they could hunt and study rocks, fossils, and other artifacts that might be found along the lakefront. (Ergo; it was very literally a summer school of science.)



The villa actually faced the lake. The photo shows it from behind. The building could accommodate from 35 to 40 men. Fresh water was pumped from the lake to a

cistern, and then to a water tower in the center of the building. Showers were located beneath the porch on the right side of the building. The living quarters were located on the second and third floors, and lavatories for the men were located in the tower. The kitchen was on the left side of the building, and the dining room, along with a large indoor recreation area, overlooked the lake. Covered porches surrounded the villa on all sides. All in all, it was apparently a very charming accommodation.

Charming or not the villa was hardly immune from tragedy. On Friday September 14, 1917 a fire in the kitchen quickly spread to the rest of the building and the entire structure was quickly reduced to a smoking mound of ash. Everything was lost -- save some articles from the chapel that were rescued by one of the brothers and several neighbors who had been alerted by phone. One priest, Father Neustich who had been working about the villa that morning, but had returned to Cleveland that afternoon said when hearing of the blaze, "*But dot is impossible, I vas just dere.*" Unfortunately, however, it was not only possible - it happened.

The property had been valued at, and insured for, \$7500 in 1917. The rector, one Father Sommerhauser, sought permission from Rome to sell the villa because "the debt on the college was so

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heavy". However; after consulting with a friendly real estate broker, he was advised against the sale. He was told that if they could retain ownership of the land for another 10 years they could realize no less than \$60,000 for the property. And in a letter to one of his successors, Father Thomas J. Smith, he later advised that "...In 1919, Lorain is in a wonderful boom; land between Cleveland and Lorain cannot be purchased (i.e. land with Lakefront) for any price." It was - to put it mildly - an extremely good piece of advice.

Sometime between 1933 and 1938 a second building was constructed on the foundation of a farmhouse that was originally on the property. In time Lake Erie took possession of it, and the Jesuits refurbished a garage creating another cottage. By then ownership had been transferred to the Jesuit communities of St. Ignatius High School and John Carroll University.

In 1992 the property was finally sold with the proceeds to be used to help support Jesuits in their retirements. **Today lovely condominiums known as "Vermilion Shores" occupy the site.** And thus the illusive story of Loyola-On-The-Lake is illusive no more.



Many thanks to the author: Rich Tarrant