



Clintonville Suburbanization & Entertainment

Historical Context and Overview

American cities were rapidly industrializing in the decades following the Civil War. Industrial pollution and overcrowding made many cities undesirable places to live. To escape city squalor, developers plotted suburbs around major cities, which eventually were easily accessed by trolleys and streetcar lines.

Clintonville was conceived by some developers as a luxury suburb about 5-6 miles north of downtown Columbus. Large homes and lots on North Broadway reflected this development plan. However, despite being called a “suburb,” much of Clintonville remained rural area in the early 1900s. Clintonville’s real development as a suburb resulted from the installation of streetcar lines that connected Columbus with Worthington.

Industrial growth also contributed to the development of a new group of middle-class Americans, made up of managers, salespeople, and other white collar jobs. This new middle class enjoyed the luxury of greater disposable income and increased leisure time. New forms of entertainment and recreation developed for the middle class in Columbus, including three amusement parks.

In 1899, the Dusenbury brothers purchased Olentangy Park in the southwest corner of Clintonville. The park was conveniently located at the end of the streetcar line, and eventually became the largest in the United States. The park featured the Japanese Gardens exhibit from the 1904 World’s Fair in St. Louis, roller coasters, a zoo, a boat house where visitors could rent a canoe, a huge theater, and rides such as “The Olde Mill” and “Tunnel of Love.”

By the 1930s, the popularity of Olentangy Park had declined. Some Americans had less disposable income during the Great Depression. Others could now afford cars, which contributed to the demise of streetcar lines and the amusement parks along those lines. Olentangy Park closed in 1937.

Standards Alignment

Ohio’s New Learning Standards: Social Studies

Grade 3

Content Statement 1: Events in local history can be shown on timelines organized by years, decades and centuries.

Content Statement 7: Systems of transportation and communication move people, products and ideas from place to place.

Grade 4

Content Statement 23: Entrepreneurs organize productive resources and take risks to make a profit and compete with other producers.

Grade 5

Content Statement 1: Multiple-tier timelines can be used to show relationships among events and places.

High School American History

Content Statement 18: An improved standard of living for many, combined with technological innovations in communication, transportation and industry, resulted in social and cultural changes and tensions.

Learning Objectives

- Compare aspects of daily life in the past with daily life today.
- Analyze the impact of different forms of transportation on a community.
- Describe the role of developers in creating early suburban communities.
- Compare the area of Clintonville before and after the development of streetcar lines.
- Identify points of interest (technological, social, economic) that made Clintonville a “go-to” place in the first part of the 20th century.
- Explain the relationship between middle class growth and new forms of entertainment.

Discussion Questions

1. Early developers in Clintonville wanted to develop the area as a “luxury” suburb? How did they carry out this plan? How do the homes on North Broadway reflect this plan?
2. Was Clintonville more suburban or rural in the late 1800s and early 1900s? Explain.
3. How did developments in transportation impact Clintonville?
4. What was the relationship between the streetcar line and the popularity of Olentangy Park?
5. What did people do for fun in Clintonville in the early 1900s? How does this compare with what people do for fun today?
6. Olentangy Park was famous for many firsts, and many one-of-a-kind attractions. In what ways was Olentangy Park a forerunner in innovation and technology?
7. What forms of entertainment were popular at Olentangy Park? How did Olentangy Park reflect national trends in the growth of middle-class entertainment?
8. What contributed to the decreasing popularity of Olentangy Park in the 1930s?

Extension Activities

- Create a timeline (with multiple tiers, if grade-level appropriate) on the history of different forms of transportation and the brief history of Clintonville mentioned in the segment. Note the corresponding events and cause/effect relationships.

- Based upon descriptions and pictures that can be found describing Olentangy Park, draw a map depicting the many different attractions of the park.
- Have students research other leisure time activities associated with the rise of the new middle class. Topics could include: Vaudeville, spectator sports, movies, the circus, popular fiction, ragtime and jazz. Research projects should include local connections to the broader national trends. Student could demonstrate their learning through a multimedia presentation.
- Have students compare various maps of Clinton Township between 1872 and 1933 (see links below). Working in groups, students can compare small sections and note how the maps show the development of Clintonville from agricultural area (with large plots owned by single families) to suburban area (with new streets and neighborhoods).

Additional Resources

- Teaching Columbus Historic Sites: Historic Maps of Clinton Township:
1872: <http://teachingcolumbus.omeka.net/items/show/246>
1910: <http://teachingcolumbus.omeka.net/items/show/251>
1919: <http://teachingcolumbus.omeka.net/items/show/253>
1933: <http://teachingcolumbus.omeka.net/items/show/254>
- Streetcars: <http://www.columbusrailroads.com/new/?menu=03Streetcars>
- Olentangy Park: http://clintonville.com/history/h_olenpk.html
- Olentangy Park Photographs: <http://www.pinterest.com/hopemoore27/chp-olentangy-park-olentangy-bowling-center-olenta/>