



Tri-Village Planning and Suburban Growth

Historical Context and Overview

Although much of the United States was still rural in the late 19th century, cities—especially those in the Industrial Midwest—were experiencing a population explosion. Cities typically grew organically—beginning in the central core, and expanding outward as the population density increased. In an era when walking and horseback were the most common modes of transportation, people needed to live close to the businesses and factories where they worked.

Industrial cities soon became overcrowded and undesirable places to live. Horsecars, trolleys, and later automobiles, made it possible for the middle class and well-to-do to escape city life for residential tracts and suburbs. While cities grew organically, suburbs were planned communities. Developers purchased strategic plots of land to build residential and commercial corridors.

In the Tri-Village area, Marble Cliff incorporated as a hamlet in 1901, to avoid absorption into the city of Columbus. Marble Cliff and Grandview later separated, as some Marble Cliff residents saw the development of other parts of the area as bringing in more of the “commoners.” King and Ben Thompson planned the village of Upper Arlington as the “Country Club District” on 1,000 acres of farmland. Northwest Boulevard was a strategic residential corridor.

By the 1950s, suburban commercial corridors emerged in Upper Arlington in the Lane Avenue and Kingsdale Shopping Centers. They featured grocery stores, drug stores, and restaurants. Grandview’s commercial corridors were along Grandview Avenue and 5th Avenue, and were home to theaters, drug stores, an outdoor store, and fresh produce market.

As suburbs expanded in the 1960s, the Tri-Village area began to decline. In the 1970s, the Wagenbrenner brothers redeveloped the bank block on Grandview Avenue. Liquor licenses allowed new restaurants (such as Spagio) to open, spurring further revitalization of the area.

Standards Alignment

Ohio’s Learning Standards: Social Studies

Grade 3

Content Statement 2. Primary sources such as artifacts, maps and photographs can be used to show change over time.

Content Statement 3. Local communities change over time.

Content Statement 6. Evidence of human modification of the environment can be observed in the local community.

Content Statement 10. Individuals make the community a better place by solving problems in a way that promotes the common good.

Grade 5

Content Statement 14. The choices people make have both present and future consequences.

Grade 8

Content Statement 16. Choices made by individuals, businesses and governments have both present and future consequences.

High School American History

Content Statement 12. Immigration, internal migration and urbanization transformed American life.

Learning Objectives

- Describe changes in the landscape and economy of the Tri-Village area over time, and analyze the impact of these changes on the community.
- Explain how the planned communities in Tri-Village reflected national patterns of suburbanization.
- Explain how developers in Tri-Village created planned suburban communities.
- Cite examples of strategic decisions and unique developments in the Tri-Villages area.

Discussion Questions

1. Why was the Hamlet of Marble Cliff incorporated? Why did Grandview and Marble Cliff later separate?
2. What strategic decisions did the Thompsons make in the development of Upper Arlington? How did they make the area appealing to residents? How was the community unique?
3. How did the growth of the Tri-Village area reflect patterns of suburbanization in the United States?
4. Why were the shopping centers in Tri-Village so important to the fabric of the community?
5. What led to the decline of Tri-Village in the 1960s? What actions were taken to revitalize the commercial corridors in the 1970s?

Extension Activities

- Have students identify a problem or challenge mentioned in the segment. Students should brainstorm a list of ways the problem could have been solved and possible consequences of those solutions. Then, students should explain how the problem was solved in the Tri-Village community. How did the solutions make the community better?
- Have students use maps of Tri-Village to compare Upper Arlington with Grandview Heights. What differences exist? What accounts for these differences in the two communities?

Additional Resources

- UA Archives/Upper Arlington History: <http://www.uaarchives.org/cdm/>
- Historical Overview of Grandview and Marble Cliff: <http://www.ghmchs.org/history.html>
- Grandview Bank Block: <http://columbusbicentennial.blogspot.com/2012/05/grandview-bank-block.html>