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Clarence Mack: Architect In Lakewood

Clarence Mack designed, built and furnished upper middle class housing in Cleveland's emerging suburbs of Lakewood, Shaker Heights and Rocky River. Kingwood in Mansfield, Ohio was his largest commission. A successful land developer, Mack provided a complete package for an upwardly mobile clientele. Mack designed houses that satisfied the need for tradition while providing for modern practicality.

Clarence Mack

Clarence Mack was born in Cleveland on April 29, 1888. His father Louis Mack was a clerk for the New York Central and the Erie Railroads for a total of 67 years. Clarence's older brother Roland and younger brother Vincent later helped Clarence to build houses. By 1904, the upwardly-mobile Mack family had moved to 1520 Clarence Avenue in Lakewood. The 1910 City Directory lists the males residing at this residence as Louis, Roland (an accountant), Clarence (a trimmer) and Vincent (a clerk).

According to Mack, his grandfather, father and uncles were house builders. One of Clarence Mack's uncles worked on the construction of Theodor Kundtz's mansion which was located at 13826 Lake Ave. Clarence visited the building site as a child, so he knew "every beam and joist and mortise in it."

In a 1965 letter to LHS curator Margaret Manor Butler, Mack explained his work in this area. "The houses in Lakewood and Shaker Heights as well as elsewhere in Ohio and Michigan were all built prior to the financial crash in November of 1929. Although I had studied architecture for ten years prior to the first world war, both in America and Europe. I did not commence those houses in Lakewood until 1920. I lived in most of them, as I also furnished them and they were sold furnished to the new owners. I purchased many of the furnishings in Europe on

annual buying trips. Most of the houses are of late Georgian design, based on old traditional examples, both in this country and England."

Clarence Mack built at least 19 homes in Lakewood. The first Lake Avenue home was built in 1922, and the last in 1927. Most of Mack's Lakewood homes were built on land "purchased from Theodore Kuntz [sic] who has the Hungarian Castle on the lake built by an uncle of mine. There were thirteen houses in that group on both sides of Lake Ave and two painted brick ones on Edgewater Drive on land purchased from the Hutchinsons." Mack later paid Kundtz for the land with profits from the home sales.

Mack went on to build a total of eight houses in Shaker Heights and, with his brother Vincent, four modest-sized dwellings in Rocky River. At the other end of the size and economic spectrum is Kingwood mansion, located on 47 acres in Mansfield, Ohio.

Following his Ohio building projects, Mack moved to Florida in the 1930s. In 1938, as the Depression was reaching its conclusion, he began designing and building houses in the Palm Beach area. He completed two major housing developments called Regent's Park and Parc Monceau. He retired in 1960. Mack died in Palm Beach on January 6, 1982 at the age of 93.

The Complete Package

Mack took part in the housing boom in Lakewood, building classically styled Georgian and French Eclectic homes for his wealthy clientele. In addition to their carefully designed exteriors, Mack's houses included interior details such as imported marble mantels, crystal chandeliers and furniture in style and proportion to the architecture of the house.

He provided a complete package: house, furnished interiors and landscaping. If his clients were unwilling or unable to make decisions on wall colors, lighting or

furniture and its arrangement, Mack handled these details as well. Mack wrote that "most of the furnishings were brought from England and France when first purchased, in all of the houses." These furnishings included desk and table lamps, side tables, crystal sconces, four-poster beds, Chippendale-style mirrors, chairs, couches and even libraries complete with matching book bindings. Because of the large scale of the rooms, Mack positioned furniture into conversation groupings. Many of the living rooms have combinations of couches and side chairs that could seat twenty people.

Mack could influence his clientele because he knew their tastes and needs. Many were company owners and newly wealthy. They had not inherited family heirlooms, but Mack's interiors and replica furnishings could give the impression that they did. Mack offered a stage set for living, just waiting for an occupant to inhabit, while providing interiors that could be personalized further.

While Clarence Mack built in traditional, established styles, he remained a man who was very much a part of his times. Mack said, "While the style of houses has been inspired by traditional examples, the floor plans were all laid out to meet more modern demands of comfort." Many Mack designs have long hallways for easy circulation and powder rooms and coat closets next to the centrally located front door. He also provided specialized storage: pantries next to kitchens, large walk-in closets for bedrooms, dressing rooms with built-in drawers. The interiors are flooded with natural light from floor-to-ceiling windows, and mirrors are used extensively to reflect the light and bring the outdoors inside.

Mack's designs included the convenient placement of a two- or three-bay garage, fully acknowledging the important place the automobile had come to represent in the lives of his clients.

Mack Homes in Lakewood

1460 Waterbury, 1914

Mack built this frame, two-story side gabled house for his family, who moved in upon completion. On the building permit, Mack is listed as the owner, with 1520 Clarence as his address.



1467 Lewis Drive, 1919

The lot for Mack's second house shares a back property line with the 1460 Waterbury lot. This house has a steeply pitched gambrel roof, a massive center chimney and an attached garage.

13881 and 13883 Lake, built 1922

These Georgian style houses are brick with flat-top hipped roofs. Both have an attached two-car garage which originally had glass-paned doors.

13883 Lake was sold fully furnished to Bernard P. Pearse, the secretary-treasurer of Atlas Foundry Company.



13881 Lake was sold fully furnished to Harlan Newell. Newell was the vice-president of Society for Savings and later commissioned Mack to build a home for him in Shaker Heights at 19200 South Park Blvd.



13867 Lake, 1923

Construction of this Georgian house started in October 1923. The brick house has a flat-topped hipped roof, a projected center front gable and brick quoins at the corners. The house was sold to Edward H. Fishman.

13851 Lake Avenue, 1923

Built in the French Eclectic style, this brick home has an asymmetrical plan that surrounds a courtyard. Mack used this design in part to conceal the view of the garage opening from the street. The walls of the house had been treated to resemble whitewash. The window frames were painted in what was described as "a rich blue-green." The garage door was painted in wide stripes of green and blue. Photographs from the twenties show a wooded lot with sunlight filtered through the trees. The floor plan of this house shows a large center hall with a lavatory and coat closet. The living room, morning room and dining room include floor to ceiling windows. There are six bedrooms in all, with two above the garage. William D. Becker, the vice-president of the Valley Steamship Company was the first owner of 13851. He previously lived just down the street at 13431 Lake Avenue.

13843 Lake Avenue, 1923

Francis Richey purchased the salmon-colored brick house at 13843 Lake Avenue. The restrained facade is only embellished with attention to the frontpiece and the cornice. The front entrance originally included a swan's neck pediment and elegantly designed ironwork handrails and lamp posts. Mack explained, "The entrance doorway was inspired by one at Westover, Virginia, although it did not have the large stair landing window above it."



13835 Lake Avenue, 1923

This French Eclectic has a steeply pitched roof and a tower at the front entrance. Constructed of stucco over tile, the house was described in 1925 as "built of buff-colored stucco" with shutters of a lighter tone. Charles Richman, who operated the successful men's clothing company, Richman Brothers, purchased this house and adjoining lots. Mack furnished the house with items he "brought from France as it was a French style house" and landscaped the entire grounds. Most recently it was owned by Ziggy creator Tom Wilson.

13857 Lake Avenue, 1923

A French Eclectic with whitewashed brick and unpainted quoins at the corners, this house was first owned by James W. Wilson, the treasurer of the Insurance Center Building.



13875 Lake Avenue, 1924

The house is side-gabled with exterior paired end chimneys. While on the same size lot as the other Lake Avenue houses (70' x 200'), this house has a smaller footprint with 1397 square feet. It was purchased by Charles E. Doty, whose offices were in the Hippodrome Building in Cleveland.

1038 Homewood, 1924

The 1038 Homewood house has a hipped roof, central chimney and hipped dormers. The main entrance is on the south side of the house, perhaps to shelter the owner from winds coming off Lake Erie, which is just 150 feet away. The owner listed on the building permit is Miss Margaret Smith, whose daughter Kathy later owned the house.



1925 Houses

Mack had five houses under construction in 1925. The two sets of houses were planned in close relationship to each other. The three houses on the north side of Lake Avenue were in Georgian style and the two houses on Edgewater Drive were in the French style.

In 1925, House & Garden sent the New York photographers Tebbs and Knell to illustrate an article about the three houses at 13842, 13840 and 13834 Lake Avenue. These photographs are now part of the Cleveland Public Library collection.



13842 Lake, 1925

The emphasis of this house is on the front entrance. Inspired by an 18th-century London doorway, this one of Mack's most beautiful and refined doorways in the Cleveland area. The first floor of the house contains a powder room, deep closets, central hall, dining room, kitchen, library, living room and a narrow screened-in porch. The second floor has four bedrooms with walk-in closets, two bathrooms, a cedar closet and a large linen closet with drawers. The basement or service floor contains the garage, a sitting room, bedroom and bathroom for a staff member, laundry room and several storage rooms. Eugene E. Ledogar was the first owner.



13840 Lake, 1925

The house is Adams-style with a strong vertical presence due to the three stories above ground level. The House & Garden article described the house as having "very dark green" shutters and including a reception foyer, service room and motor rooms. The first story or service floor is differentiated from the second and third stories by a stone belt course. Charles E. Myer purchased the furnished home, shown in the photographs.

13834 Lake Avenue, 1925

This three-story brick house is adorned with different window treatments that accentuate each story--nine over nines with alternating triangular or curved pediments on second floor and plain, six over six on third floor. James W Fraser, who worked at Bituminous Construction, moved here from 1060 Forest Cliff.



13823 Edgewater, 1925

13810 Lake, 1926

This variation of the Georgian Style has a hipped roof, paired end chimneys, cornice with dentils. Addie Hackenberg, second wife and widow of Harvey Hackenberg, moved here from Grace Avenue.





1106 West Forest, 1926

Mrs. George Newell commissioned this house and is listed as the owner on the building permit. The floor plans include a center hall, living room, loggia with a terrazzo floor, dining room, morning room, kitchen and attached garage on the first floor. The second floor had four bedrooms, two bathrooms and an area designated as a studio with a second set of stairs over the garage. The studio and loggia are distinct elements not found in Mack's other work in Northeast Ohio.

13845 Lake Avenue, 1927

Mack wrote in a letter to Margaret Butler that the last house he built in Lakewood, "although English Georgian [on the] exterior, had some French interior, particularly a white and gold-paneled library with a French marble mantle with a Trumeau over it, brought from France." A trumeau is a mirror with a painting above in the same frame.

The first owner was Robert Hascall, who inherited several companies from his father and served as president of Hascall Paint Company, Tropical Paint and Oil Company and Union Products.



Unfounded Attributions

Several additional homes in Lakewood have been attributed to Clarence Mack but evidence either has not been found or directly refutes the attribution. Clarence Mack, with an address of 1460 Waterbury, was listed as the owner of fifteen of eighteen building permits on file. (One permit for 13883 Lake Avenue is missing). Two houses were commissioned and therefore the owners' names are listed. As more information becomes available, more houses designed by Clarence Mack may be added to the list.

Other Mack Houses in Ohio

Charles King commissioned Clarence Mack to design his 27 room mansion on a 47 -acre country setting outside of Mansfield in 1926. The home cost \$400,000. The mansion is now Kingwood Center, dedicated to horticulture education. Mack built seven houses in Shaker Heights in 1928 and 1928, on South Park, South Woodland and Courtland. He also built a house on Landon in 1938. In Rocky River, Mack built 21024 Aberdeen and 21165 Aberdeen in 1927. 21121 Aberdeen in 1936 and 21873 Avalon for Mr. and Mrs. Gillingham in 1937. A set of blueprints show a design for Mr. and Mrs. Otto Rhein of Avalon Road, but this house was never built.