



The Lakewood Historical Society

established 1952



Robert Russell Rhodes Estate

Before there was a skateboard park, the Women's Club Pavilion, Kid's Cove and even the Oldest Stone House, there was a beautiful old home in Lakewood Park, one of the earliest lakefront estates in Lakewood. Daniel P. Rhodes began purchasing property throughout Rockport Township (now Lakewood) in the 1860s and his son, Robert Russell Rhodes, built the home in 1881, with several additions over the years.

Robert moved from Franklin Avenue to Lakewood in 1890, making the Lake Avenue estate, "The Hickories," his permanent home.

Daniel Pomeroy Rhodes:

A prominent Cleveland industrialist, Daniel P. Rhodes made his money in the coal and iron businesses. He helped construct several railroads, including the Rocky River Railroad (Dummy Railroad) in 1869, which ran from Bridge Avenue and W. 58th to the Cliff House resort overlooking Rocky River Valley. This line helped promote Lakewood's development. Daniel Rhodes also helped to establish the Clifton Park Association. According to his son James, he was "a rugged individual, explosive in his expressions, lacking in the grace and refinement associated with his wife and daughter." A staunch Democrat, Daniel often got into heated and noisy arguments with his son-in-law, Republican Marc Hanna.

Daniel Rhodes married well. Sophia Lord Russell Rhodes was a member of the wealthy Lord family, who at one time owned all of Ohio City. Her great-grandfather was the Honorable Sylvester Gilbert of Heron, Connecticut. As a member of the Connecticut legislature, he served on the committee which sold the Western Reserve to the Connecticut Land Company. James F. Rhodes described his mother as "a woman who enjoyed doing good, and while she took pleasure in society and European travel,

etc. she never seemed to be bored when in her church and charity work she was thrown among boresome people."

Daniel and Sophia had four children: James Ford Rhodes was an illustrious historian and a Pulitzer Prize winner; Charlotte Augusta Rhodes married Marcus A. Hanna—their children were Daniel Rhodes Hanna, Ruth Hanna McCormick Simms and Mabel Hanna Parsons (who built a large home in Clifton Park); Fannie S. Rhodes married William McCrudy; and Robert Russell Rhodes.

Like many of their neighbors on prestigious and wealthy Franklin Avenue, the Rhodes family acquired property along the lakefront in East Rockport for a summer cottage. Daniel P. Rhodes died on August 7, 1875, just one year his beautiful Franklin Avenue home was built. Sophia remained in this house until her death in 1907. This home is now the Cuyahoga County Archives.

Robert Russell Rhodes:

At the age of 19, young Robert volunteered for the 150th regiment of Ohio infantry for one hundred days of service in the Civil War. He was made a corporal and spent most of his deployment in 1864 protecting Washington D.C. Ten years later, Rhodes joined with his father, his brother James and his brother-in-law Marcus A. Hanna to form Rhodes & Co., producers and commission merchants in iron, iron-ore, and coal. The firm was dissolved in 1885, later reorganized as M.A. Hanna & Co.

Robert Rhodes served as the president of the United States Coal Company, Rhodes and Beidler Coal Company and the People's Savings and Loan Association. As his prestige grew, he was asked to be the director of numerous banks and corporations, including the Great Lakes Towing Company, the Cleveland Railway,

Cleveland Storage and other companies. In 1868, Robert married Kate Newell Castle. She was the daughter of a mayor of Ohio City and Cleveland, William Bainbridge Castle. "Although he too married into a political family...he held aloof from political entanglements," stated local historian Margaret Manor Butler. "Their marriage on September 30, 1868 was a social event of prime importance."

Robert and Kate Rhodes had two children. William Castle Rhodes and his wife Myra lived on the Lakewood estate with his parents. William Castle Rhodes died in February 1914. Fannie, named for her aunt, married Sidney Farwell. She died suddenly in 1900.

Robert Rhodes was very civic minded, a patron of the arts and a sponsor of the Western Reserve Historical Society. Although important figures in Cleveland's social and philanthropic life, the Rhodeses also took an active interest in Lakewood.

Kate Castle Rhodes was an organizer of the Visiting Nurses Association in 1902, and served on the board and executive committee. The purpose of the VNA was to provide graduate nurses to visit those otherwise unable to secure skilled assistance in time of illness, to teach cleanliness and the proper care of the sick and to prevent the spread of disease. Mrs. Rhodes and her daughter-in-law Myra kept very busy with philanthropic work. Kate Rhodes died in 1907, the same year as her mother-in-law Sophia.

The Lakewood dispensary in Birdtown, founded in 1911 by a group of benevolent-minded women that included Mrs. Myra Rhodes, was named in honor of Kate Castle Rhodes. The dispensary was created to help lower the infant death rate in that area. Local mothers could bring their infants to a small clinic on Dowd Street. The mothers received instruction in child care, medical advice and supplies and milk. After expanding to larger quarters on Madison, the dispensary was taken over by Lakewood Hospital in 1921.

Robert and Kate Rhodes greatest refuge from the demands of a busy life was their lovely lakefront home, where members of the closely knit family gathered for quiet and recreation.

The Rhodes estate was assembled over a period of almost twenty years from four separate parcels. Originally,

all of what became the Rhodes estate was owned by John Honam, builder of the Oldest Stone House. The land was willed to Honam's daughter and son-in-law, Isabella and Orvis Hotchkiss. In 1869, Orvis Hotchkiss deeded nine acres in exchange for a capital stock subscription in the Rocky River Rail Road Company. Daniel P. Rhodes, a major investor in that railroad company, purchased this land in 1871. The 1874 Atlas of Rockport Township shows Rhodes owning an L-shaped parcel in the area of modern day Lakewood park. This map also shows a house, located on what is now the southeast corner of Belle and Lake. This is perhaps the first structure on the property.

Over the years, Robert Rhodes added more parcels to complete the 26 $\frac{3}{4}$ acre estate and built what was originally a summer "cottage" on the property in 1881. This cottage, which eventually became Lakewood City Hall, was located in the vicinity of the current War Memorial in Lakewood Park. He made improvements to The Hickories in 1906 and 1909, adding at least one story to its height.

Interesting, another substantial house was also on the property, just west of "The Hickories." Built in 1889 by Lydia Taylor, the home remained on the estate until 1903, when it was burned down. This large home is shown on maps dating from 1890 to 1898. Robert's son William is listed in City Directories as living on the estate starting in 1892. Perhaps he and his wife Myra lived in this home until it burned down.

The 1912 and 1914 Atlas maps show the estate as having three driveways (one went to the burned down house), one 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ story house, two outbuildings and two cottages in the center of the estate, and one 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ story barn, near where the Taylor house used to be.

Robert and his son William "loved the gardens and spent months turning the place into a veritable paradise [that] delighted visitors with its well appointed flower beds of every variety, neatly trimmed grassy paths and the covered garden seats where one could relax and enjoy the surrounding beauty and the Lake with its famous sunsets." The home was featured in "Art Work of Cleveland" in 1911.

Lakewood historian Margaret Manor Butler described the Rhodes home as "a rendezvous of a celebrated company, where gathered on many occasions all members of the Rhodes and Hanna families and close friends, among them the McKinleys, the Garfields, the Sims, the Barretts

and the Nicholsons". Robert Rhodes's neighbors included Dan Hanna, whose summer home became the first convent for the sisters of St. Augustine (now Lakewood Catholic Academy). William Prescott, another Cleveland industrialist, lived just east of Robert Rhodes, in his estate "Rosecliff." Mr. Prescott was vice-president of American Agricultural Chemical Company.

Robert Rhodes died on February 26, 1916, and by the terms of his will, widowed daughter-in-law, Myra Rhodes, was allowed to occupy the homestead for a period of up to two years after his death.

The Western Reserve Historical Society annual report commemorated the passing of Robert Rhodes. "His will is the most remarkable one ever placed on record in Cuyahoga County in the amount of bequests, coupled with the diversity of objects, all of which were local institutions. He left no descendants, and after designating certain relatives and friends who were to receive life annuities, the large sum of \$1,675,000, about $\frac{3}{4}$ of his estate, was divided by this broad-minded giver among 28 beneficiaries: hospitals, homes for the aged and orphans, settlement houses and religious institutions, regardless of race or creed."

In 1918, the city purchased the property from the Rhodes estate for \$214,500. The home was initially used as a convalescent hospital for wounded soldiers returning from the front. Area women mobilized to solicit gifts and equipment and to sew much needed cloth to supply the hospital. The land itself was turned into a public park, which was expanded with the 1928 purchase of four acres to the west from Charles Hopkinson, designer of many of the city's schools, for \$100,000. In 1932, the Lakewood DAR planted 100 Colorado Douglas fir trees in the park.

City Ownership:

An October 11, 1917 Lakewood Press article described the city's recent purchase. "Little work would have to be done in the converting. A supply of benches, picnic tables and a pavilion would make it a park as it stands. Winding drives cover almost the entire estate; massive oaks, beeches and buckeyes rear up from the lawn stretches and provide ideal picnic shelters; rustic bridges across a lazy little creek which winds through the grounds; the creek drops 20 feet under one bridge in a miniature Niagara. At the westerly end of the

grounds is a forty foot square hedge, enclosed garden, which was the apple of William Rhodes eye, and in which are an aquarium, stocked with gold fish, all sorts of small flower beds separated by grass walks and a number of covered garden seats. A shale and rock cliff drops sheer fifty feet to the lake. There is no beach and no stepped approaches to the water from the grounds." The little creek mentioned above was a continuation of a stream that flowed through Lakewood where Belle Avenue is today. After the street covered up the stream, it continued to flow into the open at a point where the drive separates as you enter the park from Lake Avenue. The stream through the park was eventually covered.

The influenza epidemic struck Lakewood in 1918. Mayor Cook and the local government had to quickly devise plans for the care of hundreds of influenza victims. Crowded hospitals needed some relief, and Cook pressed into service the recently purchased Rhodes home as a supplementary hospital.

In 1920, the house became City Hall, replacing the Teagardine House (on the SW corner of Detroit and Warren) and housing up to 47 employees by the 1950s. The glassed in area on the first floor veranda where the Rhodes family spent quiet afternoons reading and entertaining was transformed into the offices of the Telephone and Exchange and of the Building Department. The living room and master bedroom became the site of the Engineering Department.

A 1959 newspaper article by Jim Vail chronicled that last year of the house and how the city used the building. "Lakewood's Finance Director Henry Reese probably is the only man around who deals with debits and credits while sitting in a bathroom eight hours a day. Although most of the fixtures are gone, the bathroom atmosphere is still there. The marble walls and floor, the clay tile and the big broad mirror all reflect considerable original luxury."

The broad sprawling porch became the office of the Permit, Parks and Building Departments. The dining room became the Water Department. The reception hall and music room housed the Street Department, where a "huge fancy chandelier was replaced a few years ago by fluorescent glitter." The Health Department used the former kitchen and the Health Officer "sits in the pantry. (The maid has long since gone). At the head of the wide stairway is Mayor Amos I. Kauffman's office. The former dressing room is filled with the desk and files of his secretary." A second floor sitting

room and master bedroom “accommodates the drawing boards and plat records of the Engineering Department” and the third floor has been turned into storage. “The fourth floor has been abandoned, ever since it was discovered a janitor kept a cot and number of bottles up there.” The city also ran a refreshment stand on the lakefront side of the house.

The building was torn down on December 10, 1959, following the completion of the new city hall on Detroit Avenue. The only remnant of Robert Rhodes estate is the stone wall, which originally stood above the opening of the small creek. You can still the “The Hickories” engraved on the post.

Sources:

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