CHAPTER XIII
Street Structures and Appearance

The Appearance of Cincinnati

Cincinnati is one of the most beautiful cities in America. It not only has a wonderful setting by nature with its picturesque hills rising sharply from the narrow, winding valley of the Ohio, but in its buildings and in its streets it preserves a charm of form and color that is rare in American cities.

There are innumerable corners in Cincinnati that delight the artist, many of which have been preserved in painting or etching by local artists. Cincinnati has all of the picturesqueness of Boston, or New Orleans or Quebec, and in addition color and atmosphere.

Cincinnati has an unusual number of striking vistas and alluring outlooks, and what is more interesting still, these views are enjoyed by the citizens. For example, at least 50 people have been counted stopping to enjoy the sunset over the “Basin” and the western hills on a hazy day as seen from the top of the steps at Upper Main Street. Consciously or unconsciously, Cincinnatians would greatly miss the charm of their city if it were to be replaced by the more or less standardized development of so many of our American cities.

In other words, Cincinnati has a real and vivid personality that is a great asset and should be retained at all costs, for if allowed to disappear through inadvertence, much of the charm of living in Cincinnati and its appeal to the stranger, would be lost.

Even in its more central residential sections, Cincinnati differs from most cities in its wide spread-outness, which is due to the broken topography, for in every part of the city there are tracts of virtually waste land on steep hillsides or in hollows that are left open because it does not pay to build upon them. All of this again, adds to the charm of the city.

Cincinnati is also fortunate in its splendid park system, following the Kessler Plan, one of the most extended in proportion to the population, in the United States. Every part of the existing park system has been chosen with due feeling for its actual beauty, so that a large proportion of the more charming natural sites have been permanently preserved for the use of all the people. In this connection the only regret is that the greatly curtailed funds available to the Park Department have made it, and are making it impossible to develop and maintain the parks as they must be maintained, if their charm and usefulness is not to be destroyed.
As a first essential to conserving the appearance of the city, the charm, as well as the usefulness of the existing park system, should be maintained by the immediate appropriation of reasonable funds to the Park Board, and the system should be rounded out, as proposed in Chapter X, on “Parks and Playfields.”

The rounding out of the park system will also conserve for public enjoyment, most of the worth while views and outlooks of the Cincinnati district.

The majority of the picturesque corners in the old city, are maintained indirectly by their conservation in residence districts under the Zoning Ordinance, also by a conscientious effort to avoid them in developing the circulation system of the future city.

**Historic Sites**

The points of historic interest in Cincinnati include the following:

1. The first landing and the settlement of Losantiville, December 24, 1788. The landing which took place at the public landing at the foot of Sycamore Street, should be marked. The water gate provided for in the Report in Chapter IX. on “Waterways and Flood Control,” which is approximately at this location, could well be treated as a monumental water gate to the city, commemorating this first landing.

2. The landing of Benjamin Stites, November 18, 1788, about three-quarters of a mile below the Little Miami River in what is now Columbia, should be marked by a monument, or by an appropriate small park.

3. General Wayne’s camp near the west end gas works, probably near Seventh Street, between Rose and Mill Streets, is unmarked. It was the only bit of land in that district out of water at that time.

4. Dr. Richard Allison’s house was located in what is now Lytle Park. A tablet or monument could well be dedicated to him as the first surgeon to be stationed at Fort Washington.

5. The house in which Reed wrote “Sheridan’s Ride,” on the south side of Eighth Street, east of Walnut Street, is now marked by a tablet which, unfortunately, is so badly placed that it is rarely noticed.

6. The site of Fort Washington at Third Street, between Broadway and Ludlow Avenue, is marked by a monument erected in 1901.

7. Governor St. Claire’s house on the east side of Main Street near Eighth Street, should be marked.

8. The Bloody Run fight with the Indians probably took place just southeast of Carthage, along what is now known as Bloody Run. It was not on or near the former Bloody Run Parkway, since called Victory Parkway. It should be marked with a small park or monument.

9. The White Station fight with the Indians in 1793 can not be located.

10. The Court House mob in 1884 to demonstrate the slowness of justice, stormed the jail and burned the county records, on what is now the site of the present Court House.

11. The block between Main, Walnut, Fourth and Fifth Streets was originally dedicated for churches, courts, jails and schools. The old jail, with whipping post, gallows and stock, was located at the southwest corner of Fifth and Main Streets. It should be marked. The old Lancaster Academy was replaced by The Cincinnati College and The Mercantile Library Building.

12. The old Bazaar built by Madame Trollope in 1829, is now replaced by the Lorraine Apartments on the south side of Third Street, just east of Broadway.

13. There used to be prehistoric mounds near Fountain Square.

14. The Baum House, erected 1825 at 316 Pike Street, is now occupied by Mr. Charles P. Taft.

15. Kemper House in Zoological Gardens is preserved by a historical society.
16. The Drake House, completed 1813 at Third Street near Ludlow.
17. The Mansfield House, built in 1827 at Third Street between Ludlow Street and Broadway.
19. Prehistoric burying ground in Madisonville, one of the most interesting in the country.
20. Clark's Block House, the first in Cincinnati probably, at the foot of Sycamore Street.
21. The burial ground on Water Street below Main Street, near the Suspension Bridge.
22. The old graveyard at Columbia.
23. Filson Outlook commemorates John Filson, the first surveyor and original city planner of Cincinnati.

It should be of great interest to the future citizens of Cincinnati that these sites among others, should be approximately marked by tablets, monuments or small parks, or by the erection of dignified public or semi-public buildings appropriately named or marked. The City Planning Commission in locating public works of
art, should bear in mind the possibility of also utilizing them as monuments to mark historical sites.

Appearance of the Streets

The impression that Cincinnati's streets make on the visitor depends on their orderliness, their harmony, their setting, and the intrinsic beauty of the structures on, or bordering them. Orderliness means freedom from clutter, due to poles, wires, superfluous street fixtures, ragged pavements or curbing, trees and grass strips poorly distributed and maintained, overhanging street advertising signs and a ragged silhouette of bordering buildings and too bad architecture.

Street fixtures may be bad from their placing as well as in their design. Bordering buildings, by their shabbiness or ugliness, can ruin any street. Poles, wires and overhanging street signs can make any street look like a back alley. Most fortunately, curb gasoline pumps have been abolished. In proportion to its extent, Cincinnati is unusually free of poles and wires along its thoroughfares and in its downtown sections.

In general, the public should be fully aroused to the need of orderliness, harmony and attractiveness in the appearance of streets, so that popular sentiment, representing the self respect of the community will insist on the preservation of a dignified character to the streets.

Poles and Wires

Most fortunately, the policy of the Telephone Company and the various other public service corporations, is to bury wires in conduits as rapidly as practicable, and on many of the streets there are today no poles except those of lighting fixtures and trolley poles. In consideration of the remarkable improvement in the downtown streets of Rochester N. Y., since trolley cross wires were attached directly to abutting buildings, the removal of the downtown trolley poles is most desirable, especially also, if the sidewalks are to be narrowed in order to increase the number of moving traffic lanes in the roadways.

Not only should the present policy of burying wires be continued actively, but in the downtown business section at least, even trolley poles should be removed and the trolley cross wires connected directly to abutting buildings.

Street Fixtures

Fire alarm boxes, police call boxes, hydrants, letter boxes, waste cans, sewer gratings and other such street fixtures, present a great variety of designs in Cincinnati, most of which add little to the appearance of the streets. The various leading street fixture supply concerns have of late, greatly improved the artistic quality of their designs for these fixtures, so that for the same price, a good, modern fixture is usually much more attractive than its predecessors. With a little discrimination in purchasing, a very considerable improvement can be made in the attractiveness of the streets.

For every new street fixture installed in Cincinnati, the design should be passed upon as required under the charter by the City Planning Commission, with a view to improving the general appearance of Cincinnati's streets.

Street Lighting

The new boulevard lighting in the downtown district is as good as any in the United States. The lights are of the most efficient type, and the design of the fixtures is excelled nowhere. It is an excellent standard for the city to live up to. Unfortunately, throughout most of the city, the electric and gas light fixtures are below standard, both from the standpoint of efficiency and appearance. This is largely due to the limited funds available of late for proper renewals and replacements. The street lighting fixture manufacturers have developed recently a number of most attractive types, fully as reasonable in cost as the older purely utilitarian types.

Each new type of lighting fixture located in Cincinnati should be passed upon, as required under the charter, by the City Planning Commission, with a
view to gradually bringing the rest of the city up to the high standard of the boulevard lighting in the downtown district.

Street Name Signs

Street name signs are singularly lacking in Cincinnati, more so than in most cities. This makes it particularly difficult for the stranger to find his way about. Furthermore, the signs where they do exist, are of the old, simple type, which could be easily read in the old days of the slow moving, horse-drawn vehicle, but which are illegible today to the driver of the faster moving automobile. Fortunately, the Department of Public Service realizes this fact, and is experimenting with new modern types of fixtures, with excellent results, but the lack of funds has prevented the installation of even the cheapest modern types.

In the experience of other cities, the type which proves most useful and is at the same time good looking, consists of white letters on a blue enamel field, with the name of the intersecting streets in small letters just above that of the designated street in large letters.

Within the next five years, efficient and good looking blue enamel street name signs should be installed throughout Cincinnati, and each type used should be passed upon, as required under the charter, by the City Planning Commission.

Advertising Signs Overhanging Streets

According to section 345 of the official 1924 Building Code, all advertising signs overhanging streets shall be at least 12 feet above the sidewalk, and a fee is charged by the city in proportion to the size of the sign. There is no further restriction on the projection or size of signs.

In other cities, it is customary, both for fire protection and for appearance, and also to avoid the possibility of signs falling during a high wind, to limit the projection and size of overhanging street signs. The average projection in such cities is less than three feet.

The Building Code, section 345, should be amended to prohibit the projection of advertising signs over streets.

Billboards and Sky Signs

Under the Zoning Ordinance, billboards and advertising signs of all sorts are prohibited in all residence districts. In all business districts, according to section 452-21 (d) "Any structure not against a wall of a building, used as a billboard, or as an advertising sign board, is prohibited if it has less than two feet of space under it, between it and the ground, or is at any point higher than 12 feet above the ground level, or that is longer than 25 feet, or that is distant less than six feet away from any other structure, or from any lot line, or less than two feet from any billboard, or that is not well lighted, both front and rear, all night. Any sky sign is prohibited that sets back less than five feet from a wall on a street front, or that projects more than 25 feet above the roof of the building, or that has a space of less than 6½ feet in height, between the bottom of the sign and the roof." In addition, according to section 345 of the Building Code, every billboard and advertising sign board must be passed upon by the Commissioner of Buildings, and must pay a fee according to its size.

All of this is a long step forward, and is excellent as far as it goes. However, the State of Massachusetts has set a worthy example of a much more effective control of billboards. For example, no billboards are allowed within 300 feet of a public park or reservation visible from any part of the same, except for electric display signs on buildings, under certain restrictions. No outdoor advertising can be painted or fixed upon any fence or pole within 50 feet of any public way, nor upon any rock or tree, nor directly upon the wall of any building, and no advertising device of any sort is allowed where it would obstruct traffic visibility, or interfere with any unusual scenic beauty. Outside of business districts, no advertising device is allowed within 150 feet of the center line intersections of two public ways, nor within 50 feet of any other advertising device, except back to back, nor nearer than 50 feet to a boundary line of any public way, nor nearer than 100 feet if it covers more than 32 square feet of
The City Planning Commission should insist that at least in the downtown district and along thoroughfares, some attention should be given, if only by the application of a little paint, to making all sidewalk protection structures good looking, as well as safe.

News Stands and Kiosks

There is hardly any street news stand or kiosk in Cincinnati that adds to the appearance of the street. Most of them are distinctly sloppy. It should be no real hardship, and would certainly add vastly to the orderliness of the streets, if these news stands and kiosks were abolished entirely, except where a part of a store front.

Street news stands and kiosks should be abolished.

Public Comfort Stations

The three public comfort stations in Cincinnati other than in parks, are, in two cases located on lots, and in the third, underground. They in no way obstruct the streets, and in each case are reasonably attractive in appearance. Further facilities are gradually being provided in connection with the parks and playgrounds, and it is to be expected that with the carrying out of the proposed park system, all of the needed additional facilities will be provided.

Future additional public comfort facilities should be provided in connection with existing or proposed parks or playgrounds, and at least the present standard of design should be maintained.

Street Railway Shelters

There are few street railways shelters in Cincinnati, the best known one being that on Main Street alongside of the post office; (not used at present). If additional ones are provided in the future, their design should be controlled by the City Planning Commission.

Bridges and Viaducts

The bridges across the Ohio are not attractive in design, except for the old
Suspension Bridge, between Walnut and Vine Streets. The Hopple Street Viaduct and that over Kemper Lane are good in design, as is also the new viaduct at the foot of Ludlow Avenue and the new viaduct of the Rapid Transit line over Clifton Avenue; also, to a lesser extent, Grandin Road Viaduct. Fortunately, the modern tendency is to design better structures. Several interesting suggestions for such viaducts, notably for the Zoo-Eden trolley bridge in Eden Park and the Ida Street bridge on Mount Adams, were presented by the Municipal Art Society in the 1921 report entitled, "A City Plan for Cincinnati." Modern engineering has also found that a bridge or a viaduct structurally perfect, can usually be made attractive in its lines and proportions at little or no added cost.

All new bridges and viaducts in Cincinnati should be approved as to their design by the City Planning Commission, with a view to securing at least simplicity of line and beauty of proportion.

Street Tree Planting

There is no shade tree commission in Cincinnati. The planting and care of trees in public streets is left entirely to the initiative of abutting property owners. In former years, the Mabley & Carew Company contributed a great many trees through the school children. In the "Clean-up and Paint-up Campaign" of 1914, 84,000 trees were thus distributed.

The field survey, conducted throughout the city and surroundings to acquire data for the City Plan, disclosed an unusual absence of good street trees in Cincinnati.
This is greatly to be regretted, as the charm of the city as a place of residence, depends so much upon the bordering of its streets with trees and grass strips. Unless there is constant incentive to maintain existing trees and to plant new ones, and unless subdividers are encouraged to plant trees, Cincinnati will eventually become a barren city, with residential streets void of charm. There is nothing that adds so much to the appearance of residential streets and that costs so little, relatively, as the planting and care of street trees.

A shade tree commission should be appointed, or the Park Board should be delegated, and eventually a city forester should be appointed, to encourage street tree planting, and to provide trees and maintenance at cost. Tree guards and tree gratings should also be supplied at cost.

The same applies to a lesser degree to grass strips between the roadways and the sidewalks, not only to give ample moisture to the roots of the trees, but to preserve within the residence portions of the city the illusion of the country. Further encouragement should be given to abutting property owners to maintain these grass strips in good condition.

Street Art

Cincinnati has surprisingly few street monuments, statues or fountains; the one most notable exception is the fountain in Fountain Square. Also noteworthy is the Lincoln statue in Lytle Park and the Norwood World War monument. There are also the Lincoln statue in front of the Avondale School and the Garfield and the Harrison monuments in Garfield Park, and several interesting monuments in Spring Grove Cemetery. Even aside from the historic sites previously mentioned, which should be marked wherever practicable, there are a number of points within the city, particularly with the execution of the proposed City Plan, that are or will be admirably suited to the location of monuments, statues or fountains. There will be several such locations in
FOUNTAIN SQUARE

Beautiful civic art in the city's busiest square

—Copyright, Paul Briol, 1925
connection with the proposed civic center and along Central Parkway, east of the Court House, at the junction of Broadway and Fifth Street, and at the junction of Fifth and Plum Streets on the extension of Central Parkway to the proposed union station, and in each of the local civic centers, as developed.

All new works of public art to be located in public streets, should be approved, as provided in the charter, by the City Planning Commission, and should be located where they will count the most in the development of the City Plan.

Fountain Square

The present development of Fountain Square and the setting of the Memorial Fountain is quite undignified. For traffic purposes each roadway needs to be widened from two to four feet. This widening of each may be the occasion of remodeling the treatment of Fountain Square, with a view to making it a real asset to abutting property. Fortunately, a committee has been working on this problem and designs for the improvement of the Square have been prepared.

In general it can be said that a square of the size and shape of this in the heart of the busiest retail and hotel section, should be formal in character, in harmony with the surrounding buildings, and should strictly avoid a naturalistic or picturesque effect.

The European capitals offer many suggestions for the treatment of downtown squares of this sort. The cost of such improvement should be borne by the abutting and nearby property owners, for if properly done, it should enhance the value of their properties.

Public Squares, Plazas and Bridge Approaches

Cincinnati has several interesting squares, but unfortunately, their full value is rarely brought out by their present treatment.

Fort Washington Place is bold and lacks distinction. The treatment of Fountain Square is quite inadequate. Court
Square and the setting of the Court House is arid. Garfield Park has a certain charm, which is enhanced by the attractive buildings about it, although it is possible to conceive of a more attractive treatment of the Square itself. Brighton Corner has no distinction. Peebles Corner is tawdry. In fact, except for Garfield Park, it is hard to find a Square that the city can look to with pride.

The same is true with respect to the bridge and viaduct approaches. The approaches to all of the Ohio bridges are disgraceful, and utterly without dignity. Gilbert Avenue Viaduct, Eighth Street Viaduct, Harrison Avenue Viaduct, Hoppie Street Viaduct and Ludlow Avenue Viaduct, one and all, have failed utterly to feature their approaches.

The recent bridge or viaduct approaches in Boston, Philadelphia, New York, Albany, Rochester, Cleveland, Detroit, Chicago, Dayton and San Francisco suggest some of the possibilities of approaches of this sort.

For the treatment of public squares, there are several very interesting suggestions in the 1921 City Planning Report of the Cincinnati Municipal Art Society.

In the carrying out of the City Plan, special thought should be given to the detailed architectural and landscape treatment of each square and bridge approach, so as to make it contribute to the beauty of the city.

Street Decoration for Festivals, Parades or Memorial Occasions

It is often desirable to decorate certain streets. Such decoration has frequently been undertaken along Central Parkway, at the occasion of fairs. The decorative treatment of streets can make or mar them. At best it is a matter that requires a great deal of study and taste. The ability to do this sort of thing effectively certainly exists among Cincinnati’s architects and artists.

However, in order to preserve all that is best in the personality or character of the streets to be decorated, all major pro-
jects for street decoration for festivals, parades or fair purposes, should be approved by the City Planning Commission.

Open Air Theater

With a climate as mild as that of Cincinnati, with such enjoyment of the open air as is evidenced, and with the exceptional interest that obtains in music, drama and art, it is surprising that Cincinnati has never developed a permanent open air theater, although various good, temporary ones have existed. It has been often recommended, particularly in the 1921 Municipal Art Society Report, where a splendid scheme was presented for the development of such a theater in a perfectly suited natural hollow in Eden Park.

Another suggestion would be, with the creation of a community center at the crest of the hill on Fairview Avenue, to feature there a public open air theater, facing the southwest, so that the wonderful panorama of the “Basin” and the Ohio Valley would serve as a background to the stage. Its dramatic possibilities are unique.

Not later than 1930, a permanent public open air theater should be developed either in a park or in connection with a community center on the hillcrest at Fairview Avenue.

Street Architecture

Cincinnati boasts of quite a number of interesting semi-public or private buildings. Among them may be mentioned the following:

- The Rookwood Pottery Building
- Gruen Watchmakers’ Guild
- The Baldwin Piano Company Building
- Western & Southern Life Insurance Building
- The new Schmidt Realty Company Building
- Union Central Life Insurance Company Building
- Two large hotels
- Dixie Terminal Building
- Keith Building
- The Telephone Building
- The Gwynne Building
- LeBlond Machine Tool Building
- The Business Men’s Club and the new Doctors’ Building, across Garfield Park from it

to say nothing of many smaller buildings, such as churches, clubs, stores, apartment houses and homes.
In general, however, the business street architecture of Cincinnati is rather common place. It lacks distinction. Little or no attempt has been made to preserve any harmony or unity of street treatment.

It has been found worth while in various other cities, to try to preserve a certain harmony of architectural treatment along principal streets, especially in the downtown district, by the creation of street associations, the most famous of which is the Fifth Avenue Association of New York. These street associations obviously have no legal control over those who build along the street; nevertheless, representing as they do, a considerable consensus of opinion among property owners along a given street, they can, by persuasion if not otherwise, point out to the proposed builder, that by even minor modifications in the design of his building, he can make his building contribute far more to the general harmony of the street.

On various of the important streets, especially in the downtown district, the existing street associations, or new ones that might well be formed, should endeavor to persuade prospective builders to modify their designs where practicable, so as to harmonize with the general development of the street.

An Art Jury

With as much natural and inherited charm as exists in Cincinnati, and with its pre-eminence as a place of enjoyable residence, it is a great pity not to do every-
thing possible to preserve that charm. The work of the Municipal Art Society is a long step in the right direction, but if results are to be obtained, a more active and insistent control over public and private development is needed. Various cities have solved this problem by the creation of an art jury that passes upon the location, character and design of all public structures, and which endeavors to influence the design of semi-public and private structures. Such an art jury in its long existence in New York and in Philadelphia has served not only to considerably improve the character of public structures, but also to simplify them, and in so doing, has often reduced their cost; in other words, saved money.

Under the Ohio State law, the location of all public structures and to a limited extent, the control of their design, is a duty of the City Planning Commission. The powers of the City Planning Commission in this respect are not as broad in the State of Ohio as in some other States. It would be well to modify the present law so as to assure to the City Planning Commission all of the art jury powers that similar bodies have in other States. This means simply more insistence in the State law on the control of the design as well as the location of all public structures.

The City Planning Commission should insist that the location and design of all public structures of any sort, whether works of art or not, should be submitted to it for approval from the standpoint of art, as well as in relation to the rest of the City Plan, and the State Enabling Act should be modified to clarify their control of design as well as of location.

PARIS ALONG THE SEINE
Docks below, Boulevards above

FORT AND DOCKS, ALBANY, N. Y.
This recently created dock development is having a most beneficial effect on local commerce.