II. A HOUSE IN THE COUNTRY

The West End, bounded by Central Avenue on the east, the Mill Creek to the west, Bank Street to the north, and the Ohio River at the south, interested land speculators from the time of the founding of Cincinnati.

One of the area’s earliest residents was William Betts, Sr. (1763-1815), a farmer and brick manufacturer. Betts moved to Cincinnati in 1800 with his wife, seven children and his parents from New Jersey via Pennsylvania. He received a large tract of land as repayment for a loan he made to a tavern-keeper. His 111-acre L-shaped tract was bounded by Chestnut Street on the south, Central Avenue on the east, Liberty and Everett Streets on the north and Freeman Avenue on the west. By 1804 Betts had built a brick farm house, where his eighth child Oliver Clark was born. The house survives at 416 Clark Street, but Clark Street wasn’t laid out until about three decades later.

By 1802 Cincinnati had 1,000 residents and was incorporated as a town. The following year, the first commercial bank was organized to promote river trade with New Orleans. In 1808 Fort Washington was razed because it was no longer needed; Cincinnati had transformed from a frontier outpost to an established commercial center. In 1810, the population reached 2,320 and continued to increase by 700 to 1,000 every year.

The Miami & Erie Canal

With the coming of steamboats and factories came increasing prosperity; and city boosters envisioned Cincinnati as the hub of a network of roads, canals and bridges. By 1829, the Miami & Erie Canal was completed, connecting Cincinnati to sources of raw materials and agricultural goods to the north and west, and spurring development.

The canal entered Cincinnati along what is today 1-75, went along Central Parkway just east of the Betts House, and then turned south following the route of Eggleston Avenue to the river. According to reminiscences, the canal was a picturesque spot to boat, fish and swim in the summer and skate in the winter.

The canal passed little more than a block away from the original Betts farm house, which by 1830 was occupied by William’s son Isaac. His family was close by; Oliver Clark Betts lived with his mother Phebe Stevens Betts at 419 Clark Street; John Betts lived at the northwest corner of John and Elizabeth Streets; and Smith Betts, who had married in 1826, lived in a frame house he built that same year on the site of the present 438 Hopkins Street, one block north of Clark Street.

Within 15 years of its opening, the canal had a dramatic effect on the growth of the city. An 1834 “Plan of Cincinnati,” shows that streets were mapped all the way to the northern boundary, and blocks subdivided along the central portion of the canal from Seventh to Twelfth Streets. West of the canal, five new streets appear, but they extended only a single block and not past Western Row.

Subdivisions were in progress. After William Betts’ youngest child Eliza reached 21 years of age in March 1835, in accordance with his will the Betts property was subdivided for sale. By 1838 the canal was incorporated as a city.

Betts Farm Subdivided

The Miami & Erie Canal

The Miami & Erie Canal

By 1835, the year William Betts died, Cincinnati had grown beyond Third Street with a population of 6,000. A “Plan of Cincinnati” of that year, shows that West End streets ran west from Western Row only three blocks or less to the section line (Mound Street). Churches had sprung up on Fifth and Sixth Street, and a new courthouse was built at Court and Main Streets. In 1849, Cincinnati was incorporated as a city.

Subdivisions were in progress. After William Betts’ youngest child Eliza reached 21 years of age in March 1835, in accordance with his will the Betts property was subdivided for sale. Clark Street was named for William Betts’ mother Elizabeth Clark Betts (1744-1832).

100 acres of land were sold at auction on Thursday, April 21, 1833, and the four surviving sons, John, Oliver Clark, Smith and Isaac Betts, received cash from the sale of the property. Their names as well as other Betts family members appear on the Atlas indicating the subdivisions of each.