

Neighborhood Focus

A Drive through Rockefeller Park

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Traveling down Martin Luther King Drive on your daily commute, coping with the traffic and sipping your morning cup of coffee, it's easy to forget that you are driving through a remarkable urban green space, Cleveland's Rockefeller Park.

History of the Park

In 1896 John D. Rockefeller's purchase of \$250,000 worth of land along the Doan River Valley completed the final link in a chain of public parks extending from Shaker Heights to the shores of Lake Erie. Rockefeller's additional \$300,000 donation helped insure the development and maintenance of the park that still bears his name. (*Michael Rotman, "Rockefeller Park," Cleveland Historical, accessed April 10, 2013, <http://www.clevelandhistorical.org/items>*)

Cleveland Cultural Gardens

Glancing through your car window, you may have noticed the colorful flags, unique bronze sculptures and beautiful waterscapes of the Cleveland Cultural Gardens. Founded in 1939, the Cultural Gardens were conceived as a living tribute to world peace and cultural harmony. The first garden in the park, the Shakespeare Garden, was founded in 1916 in celebration of the 300th anniversary of Shakespeare's birth. Located on the upper level of the park, this garden is now known as the British Garden. After addition of the Hebrew Garden and the Poet's Corner during the 1920's, development of the gardens accelerated during the Depression when the costs of labor were defrayed by WPA, and generous donations of the cost of materials by various Garden groups fueled growth. In rapid succession new gardens were planted. The Hungarian, Polish, Czech and Yugoslavian Gardens were founded in 1934, and the Russian, Grecian, Syrian, American, Irish and American Legion Peace gardens followed in 1938 (Source: Clara Lederer *Their Paths were Peace: A History of the Cleveland Cultural Gardens*).

During the past 10 years, there has been an amazing renaissance in the Gardens with several brand new gardens added and intensive renovations of many existing gardens completed or in process. There are now a total of 35 Cultural gardens within Rockefeller Park. The Azerbaijan Garden was completed in 2008, and features a striking funnel shaped bronze sculpture. Supporters of the Italian Garden have kicked off a renovation plan; currently, organizers have completed \$465,000 of the \$1.2 million project. Other planned improvements include a new design for the African-American Garden, a joint project by the Albanian and Asian-Indian groups to erect a 1-ton bronze statute of Mother Theresa, and improvements to the Croatian garden including a newly dedicated statue, "Immigrant Mother" by Croatian sculptor Joseph Turkaly.

A highlight of the Cultural Gardens is the annual "One World Day" event. This year the Federation is planning an expanded multicultural festival featuring many ethnic performing groups, entertainment and food and beverages for sale.

Watch for the banners advertising this event to be held on Saturday and Sunday afternoons on August 24 and 25. (For additional information about the Cleveland Cultural Gardens, visit www.clevelandculturalgardens.org)

Rockefeller Greenhouse

As you travel west from Bratenahl, just past the entrances to I-90, you can see the glass windows of the Rockefeller Greenhouse. Originally used as a source for plantings in the Park, the greenhouse now consists of outdoor and indoor display gardens. Highlights include a formal Japanese Garden, planted in the 1960s; a desert-like Latin American garden; a tropical garden; and the outdoor Peace garden.

Charles Schweinfurth Historic Bridges

Some of the most remarkable features on your drive down Martin Luther King are the stonework bridges. Charles Schweinfurth (1856-1919) was one of the premier architects in Cleveland around the turn of the 20th-century. He arrived in Cleveland in 1883 and went on to design a number of structures in and around the city, including a number of the mansions that lined Euclid Avenue's famous "Millionaire's Row."

The four bridges Schweinfurth designed in Rockefeller Park cross over Martin Luther King Boulevard at St. Clair Avenue, Wade Park Avenue, Superior Avenue, and -- furthest north near Gordon Park -- the Lake Shore and Michigan Southern (now Conrail) Railway tracks. They were erected between 1897 and 1900 and partially funded through a donation made to the Cleveland Park Board by John D. Rockefeller in 1896. The stone and concrete arched bridges feature winding staircases that lead down into Rockefeller Park. Though their condition has declined somewhat over the years, the bridges remain standing today. (Source: Cleveland Historical, www.clevelandhistorical.org)

Rockefeller Lagoon

Watch out for geese crossing as you drive past the Rockefeller Park Lagoon. Once a popular destination for ice skating, fishing, and boating, the city drained the lagoon for a time in the 1970s, but it has since been restored. In the summer you can find fishermen trying their luck in the pond, families picnicking in the pavilion, as well as children playing in the "splash park" located next to the pond.

Jean Murrell Capers Tennis Courts

Immediately across from the Lagoon are public tennis courts. Recently, Forest City Tennis Club, America's oldest African-American tennis club, celebrated 100 years in a special way by renaming the courts in honor of Judge Jean Murrell Capers. "Judge Jean Murrell Capers, 99-year-old Cleveland pioneer, is very deserving of this honor," said Forest City Tennis Club President Kevin Strickland. "Not only was she the first black woman elected to city council of any major U.S. city, served as assistant attorney general, received a Cleveland-Marshall College of Law honorary doctorate of law degree and is the oldest living retired judge in Ohio; in her spare time, she was a city-wide tennis champion and is the oldest

living member of the Forest City Tennis Club. It is only fitting that her legacy live on at the Rockefeller Park tennis courts." (Source: www.newsnet5.com)