

Introduction

This report presents the findings and recommendations for a local landmark designation of the La Ventura apartment building at 700 Chalfonte Place in Avondale. The purpose of this designation report is to establish the building's significance as an individual landmark. This report was prepared by Beth Sullebarger of Sullebarger Associates at the request of the owner, 700 Chalfonte Holdings LLC.

Background

Overview of Designation Process

This designation report is supported by the owner, Nadav Livne, owner of YOLO Investments, who plans to rehabilitate the building using state and federal tax credits for historic preservation as 700 Chalfonte Holdings LLC.

Research Methodology

Archival research was conducted online through the Cincinnati-Hamilton County Public Library, Hamilton County Recorder's Office, Hamilton County Auditor, Ohio Public Library Information Network (OPLIN). Among the sources consulted were historic maps, atlases, photographs, local histories, federal census, newspaper articles and city directories, which provided information about the building, the builder and architect, and the surrounding neighborhood. Additional information about George Miller, the builder, was obtained in a phone interview with his grandson, Marvin Kaplan, on October 3, 2022.

Description

Site

The La Ventura occupies a lot at the west end of Chalfonte Place, a cul-de-sac that runs west from Reading Road. The building stands on a parallelogram-shaped site, measuring 102.85 feet by 215.40 feet by 102.81 feet by 215.56 feet containing 0.4947 acres, which is proposed for landmark designation. No other structures are present on this parcel. (See plat in Figure 1.) While the builders acquired several other parcels that are now combined with the original parcel into a consolidated lot totaling 0.995 acres, the additional pieces are mostly vacant, except for a concrete slab, and do not contribute to the historic or architectural significance of La Ventura.

Setting

The La Ventura is located at the west end of Chalfonte Place, a cul-de-sac that runs west from Reading Road in Avondale (Photo 1). The building faces east on axis with the street, which is lined with other 3-story apartment buildings and 2-family homes built between 1928 and 1965, mostly in the Tudor style. The setting is relatively unchanged except that a one-story parking garage on the north side of the building was removed by 2006 and all that remains of it is a slab. A driveway runs around the north side of the building to a paved parking area in the rear. Woods further west and to the south screen La Ventura from neighboring properties on those sides.

Building

The structure is a three-story, 23-unit walkup Mediterranean-style apartment building built in 1928. It has a long front elevation parallel to the street comprising three sections, each with its own entrance. The building has a smooth yellow brick exterior, multi-light steel casement windows, and a flat roof enclosed by a low parapet with terra cotta coping. The façade is enlivened by three projecting entrance bays, which contain stairways. Unified by a rise in the parapet, the center section is more elaborate and wider than the others at five bays vs. three bays. The entrance has a porch with a round-arched opening flanked by pilasters and an entablature above. The center of that entablature is incised with the name of the building—La Ventura, surmounted by a fan-shaped cap (Photo 2). The pilasters are capped by ball finials, one of which is missing. The central entrance is further dramatized with curved wing walls with stone coping. Above is a slightly projecting tower with an octagonal window at the second floor. The tower is topped by a belvedere with round-arched openings, a pyramidal terra cotta tile roof and a shallow corbelled balcony in the front. The tower is flanked by paired steel casement windows and wrought-iron balconies with French doors. The balcony on the third floor left of the tower has a pent roof, which appears to be an alteration; the corresponding balcony on the right has none.

The projections at the ends are three-bays-wide with porches flanking the central stair tower. Each has a simple doorway at the ground floor, an octagonal window at the second and a tall window at the third floor. The tower has a hipped terra cotta tile roof with a front gable. The porches are detailed differently at each floor—with straight lintels and solid railings at the ground floor, round-arched openings and wrought-iron railings at the second floor, and solid railings with twisted colonnettes at the third floor. The fenestration varies between paired steel casements and wider windows with casements flanking a stationary section in the center, all with transoms and soldier-course lintels, except for blind arches in four bays at the third floor on each side of the center section.

The side and rear elevations are simpler and utilitarian in design. The north elevation has a square chimney that rises well above the roof (Photo 3). The land slopes down at the north end and rear, exposing the poured concrete foundation. The fenestration on the rear (Photo 4) includes double paired windows that light the kitchens, paired casements that light the bedrooms and rear stairways, and single casements that light the bathrooms. Similarly sized windows at the foundation provide light into basement apartment units.

On the interior, each of the three sections is divided down the middle by a front stair and back stair, with a 2-bedroom apartment on each side on each floor, for a total of 18 units on the first through third floors. The basement holds five additional units, for a total of 23. Beyond a small entrance vestibule with glazed brown tile wainscot, the front stairs are steel with molded newel posts and stringers, wood handrails, steel risers and concrete treads and landings. Accessed from the kitchens by two-panel metal doors, the back stairs are cast concrete with simple pipe railings. The walls of the front stairs are plaster, while those in the back stairs are glazed brick.

Boundary

The property boundary for the purpose of landmark designation is that conveyed per Deed Book 1452 Page 392, as follows: Starting at the northwest corner of Lot six (6) of the Robert Andrews Subdivision and recorded in Plat Book 4, pages 306-307, of the Hamilton County Recorder; then eastwardly along the north line of Lot six (6), one hundred two and 85/100 (102.85) feet to the northeast corner of Lot six (6); thence northwardly two hundred fifteen and 40/100 (215.40) feet; thence westwardly one hundred two and 81/100 (102.81) feet; then southerly two hundred fifteen and 56/100 (215.56) feet to the place of beginning, containing 0.4947 acres of land.

Justification of Boundary

The above-listed boundary delineates the original property on which the La Ventura stands and for which designation is being requested. No other structures are present on this piece. The boundary excludes adjoining properties that were acquired separately but consolidated into a 0.995-acre parcel.

Statement of Significance

La Ventura is significant under Criteria 1 and 3. Under Criterion 1, it is significant as a reflection of the transformation of Cincinnati's Avondale neighborhood from one of large estates and single-family homes to multi-family housing as the area became accessible to new residents via streetcars and automobiles. It is also representative of the movement of Jews from the West End to Avondale in the early 20th century. Under Criterion 3, the building is architecturally significant as an example of the Mediterranean style as applied to an apartment building by the firm of architects S. S. Godley and his son George H. Godley, who designed numerous projects for Jewish clients in Avondale.

Historical Significance

La Ventura

Built in 1928, La Ventura is significant under Criterion 1 for exemplifying the development of the Avondale neighborhood as it transitioned from an area of large estates to a suburb of upscale single-family homes, to a mixed-income neighborhood of streetcar apartment buildings and finally to a low-income neighborhood where single-family homes were converted to multi-family dwellings. It also is representative of the movement of Jews from the West End to Avondale in the early 20th century, who were followed by African Americans beginning circa 1930.

Just three years after the Chalfonte Place Subdivision was recorded in 1925 (Figure 3), La Ventura was built by George Miller (1893-1962), owner of Miller Properties, a contractor and developer (Figure 4.) The son of Lithuanian Jews, Miller immigrated to the US (1940 US Federal Census). In 1924, George married Ohio-born Libbye Leitz (1900–1961)(See Figure 5 for obituary.), daughter of Russian Jewish immigrants Julius and Ida B. Leitz (1910 US Federal Census).

Despite completing just one year of high school, George Miller was a successful entrepreneur in demolition, construction and real estate development. According to his grandson, Marvin

Kaplan, George and his brother Norman started a paint and wallpaper business known as Miller Brothers (which is still in business, although under different owners, as the largest independent dealer of coatings in Southwest Ohio). Miller avidly salvaged materials from his demolition business that he then reused in his construction projects.

Miller and his wife Libbye acquired the site for La Ventura from Beatrice T. Kaichen on January 1, 1928 (Deed Book 1452, Page 392), being part of Lot 6 in the Robert Andrews Subdivision, which was recorded in 1876. In 1927, the Millers moved into a Tudor Revival house they built at 3604 Eaton Lane in the newly recorded J. G. Cooper's Eaton Lane Subdivision (Plat Book 31, Page 13). This property, where the Millers lived until 1948, adjoins the La Ventura property to the northwest (Hamilton County Auditor). They acquired several more pieces of land around La Ventura, including a curved piece around the circle of the cul-de-sac and a large rectangular lot to the north, which, according to a 1963 article about the sale of the building, had a one-story concrete-block garage with space for 50 cars (demolished by 2006). (See Figure 6.) (These additional parcels are not proposed for designation.)

Continuing in an entrepreneurial mode, Miller recorded the George Miller Subdivision (also a cul-de-sac off Reading Road in Avondale) in 1940. He named it Debbe Lane (after his daughter) and developed it with seven apartment buildings. He configured Debbe Lane very similarly to Chalfonte Place and anchored its west end by building the Bonheur (971 Debbe Lane), a massive three-story buff-brick Norman Revival apartment building with a central tower, half-timbering, and terra cotta tile roof, in 1937. He built six other apartment buildings there, in the 1930s. Marvin Kaplan believes that the Bonheur and other apartment buildings (four extant) that followed on Debbe Lane were all designed by S. S. Godley and/or his son George. In their final years, the Millers lived at 974 Debbe Lane, a modern apartment building built in 1951 of brick salvaged from their wrecking business.¹

Development of Avondale

The neighborhood of Avondale, approximately five miles north of downtown Cincinnati and comprising 800 acres, evolved as a single suburban village but over the years the movement of different social, economic, and ethnic groups in and out of the community altered and eventually fragmented its identity. Today Avondale is split into two neighborhoods, North and South Avondale (often referred to simply as Avondale). Avondale is bounded on the north by the City of St. Bernard and Avon Field Golf Course, on the east by the City of Norwood and the I-71 expressway, on the south by Walnut Hills and Corryville, and on the west by Clifton. Glenwood Avenue, where 818 stands, delineates the boundary between North Avondale and South Avondale.

Avondale's first wave of construction began in the 1830s when members of the merchant class began building large single-family dwellings on extensive parcels and commuting to work in the city. As more wealthy Cincinnatians began to construct suburban residences, Avondale landholders further divided their large holdings for sale as residential lots. Examples are

¹ After the death of George and Libbye Miller, their son Frederick, an architect who participated in the family business, inherited a lot from them at 710 Chalfonte Place in 1963 and built a three-story modern apartment building in 1965.

Jonathan Dayton, who subdivided his property, known as Clinton, in 1846, and James Corry, who subdivided a tract called Locust Grove soon after (Giglierano & Overmyer, 380). In 1852, Samuel Cloon's Subdivision created 37 lots to the north of the future Chalfonte Place, with streets originally named Dennis and Duffield streets, later to be North and South Crescent avenues and finally North and South Fred Shuttlesworth Circle. These lots ranged in size from .68 acres to 10.7 acres, so still fairly large.

The village of Avondale incorporated in 1864. One of the major factors behind that decision was an attempt to control issues that plagued the community between the 1870s and early 1890s, including burglaries, vagrants, public drunkenness, and brawling. These efforts were largely unsuccessful, much to the dismay of Avondale's upper-class residents. The village did have more success, however, with its public works programs, such as road improvement and the laying of sewer lines (Giglierano & Overmyer, 380).

Beginning in 1870, the City of Cincinnati began annexing communities, including Avondale, in hopes of regaining population, and the associated tax income that had been migrating to the suburbs. This measure was approved by only a small majority of voters, and its opponents contested the results. The Ohio Supreme Court declared the law under which the election was held to be illegal, but annexation ultimately did occur in 1896. Despite the original opposition, annexation afforded some benefits to Avondale residents. The improved police and fire protection that Cincinnati provided significantly reduced Avondale's crime problem within only a few years, and the suburb became generally a safer, more pleasant place to live (Giglierano & Overmyer, 381).

These improvements generated a wave of subdivisions named for Wayne, Krohn, Wilson, and the Avondale and the Cincinnati & Avondale syndicates, comprising two or three hundred acres. This was followed by the subdivision of over a hundred acres of the original Woodward property, which had been divided among his three daughters—Mrs. Hutchins, Mrs. Gallup and Mrs. Cleveland. The former Woodward tract was crossed by a narrow-gauge railroad, which had been abandoned by the company so that when the streets were improved, the cuts at the crossings were filled in and railroad bridges removed. In 1876, Robert Andrews made a small subdivision of seven lots on Gholson Avenue to the south of the still future Chalfonte Place. In 1892, Robert Mitchell began to develop the Rose Hill subdivision to the north

Most of Avondale's population during the nineteenth century were merchant class of Protestant English or German ancestry. Only a small number of its inhabitants were middle or lower class, and only 8-10% were black. Beginning in the 1890s, however, well-to-do German Jewish families began moving into the northern part of Avondale (Giglierano & Overmyer, 380).

By the turn of the twentieth century electric railway was on the precipice of changing the character of the neighborhood again. *C. S. Mendenhall's Standard Guide Map of Cincinnati* published in 1903 shows an electric railway running up Reading Road, a stone's throw away from La Ventura to Clinton Springs Avenue where it turned west, continuing along Mitchell Avenue to Winton and Spring Grove Cemetery. By the early 20th century transportation innovations stimulated the market for more housing in the desirable neighborhood of Avondale, which led to construction of apartment buildings. For instance, circa 1905, the Beaux-Arts-style Alameda Flats (NR # 14000293) was built at 3580-3586 Reading Road; circa 1908, the

Romanesque-inspired Poinciana (NR# 14000294) was erected at 3522 Reading Road; and in circa 1911, the Mediterranean-style Crescent apartments (NR# 14000336) was built at 3719 Reading Road just around the corner from La Ventura.

Although these early apartment buildings were built for members of the upper-class, several other apartments for the growing middle-class were erected in Avondale, allowing for the community to become more diverse. These new residents included many Greek Americans and Eastern European Jews, particularly following a general exodus of the Jewish population from the declining West End in the early 20th century and would profoundly change the character of the community. Between the 1920s and the end of World War II, Avondale was known as the “gilded ghetto,” with Jewish inhabitants making up 60% of the suburb’s total population. A variety of Jewish institutions and businesses, many of which originated in the old Jewish neighborhoods of the West End, also took up residence in Avondale at this time (Gigliero & Overmyer, 381-382).

Resulting from this exodus of the middle-class to Avondale, its community development pattern shifted away from the construction of large residences on spacious lots to the construction of high-density suburban apartment buildings erected near streetcar lines. It was during this period of suburban expansion that the Chalfonte Place subdivision was created from the former Alms property (Figure 2) in 1925 by the Realty Equity Company by C. C. Weber President and subsequently developed with apartments buildings and two-family residences (Figure 3).

During the 1930s Avondale’s community development pattern began to change, once again. As outlined in the “North Avondale Community Master Plan,” published in 1970 by the Cincinnati City Planning Commission, the land use pattern and density increased substantially in Avondale from 1930 to 1970 (40). It was common for the large single-family dwellings to be subdivided into apartments. In addition to the subdivision of dwellings, the increase of renter-occupied housing resulted from the development of vacant land zoned for high-density development.

During this transition in the community development pattern, many of the community’s younger residents bought more modern homes in the newer suburbs, taking advantage of low mortgage rates. Older residents, whose large homes were becoming too difficult to maintain, also began to move away. These departing residents were often replaced by middle-income black families who were willing to pay inflated prices to live in one of the few “decent” neighborhoods available to them.

Some white homeowners panicked and left Avondale as the black population grew, a process that was encouraged by opportunistic realtors. As property values fell, Avondale became even more accessible to lower-income residents, including black families that had been displaced by urban renewal efforts elsewhere in the city. By 1959, the southern portion of Avondale, which had been predominantly Jewish, had become mostly black, particularly after the Cincinnati Department of Relocation settled 220 black families in the neighborhood, often in larger houses that had been illegally subdivided into multi-family dwellings (Gigliero & Overmyer, 382). In addition to the subdivision of single-family dwellings into multi-families, the increase of renter-occupied housing resulted from the development of vacant land zoned for high-density development, which changed the community development pattern.

North Avondale did not experience the dramatic racial turnover and reduction of property values. The North Avondale Neighborhood Association (NANA) was formed in 1960 for the express purpose of actively fighting blockbusting and improving community relations. The group's efforts helped racially and economically integrate North Avondale, a process that had not occurred in South Avondale. As a result, North and South Avondale became increasingly separate neighborhoods.

Architectural Significance

Under Criterion 3, the building is architecturally significant as an example of the Mediterranean style as applied to an apartment building by the firm of architect S. S. Godley and George H. Godley. La Ventura is one of a dozen handsome apartment buildings built in the first half of the 20th century on or near the Reading Road corridor in Avondale. As mentioned above, the Beaux-Arts-style Alameda Flats (NR#14000293) was built circa 1905 at 3580-3586 Reading Road; the Romanesque-inspired Poinciana (NR#14000294) was erected at 3522 Reading Road circa 1908; and the Mediterranean-style Crescent Court apartments (NR#14000336) was built at 3719 Reading Road circa 1911, creating ample precedent for an undertaking such as La Ventura.

La Ventura Apartments is an excellent example of a Mediterranean-style apartment building. Typical characteristics of that style include its yellow brick exterior, steel casement windows, arched motifs, porches and balconies, central tower and terra cotta roof tiles. Besides Crescent Court, another example of a Mediterranean-style apartment building in Avondale is the Ambassador (NR#14000356), built at 722-724 Gholson Avenue in 1929, slightly later than La Ventura. Like La Ventura, the Ambassador is a three-story brick building with wrought-iron balconies and terra-cotta tiled roofs.

The architect of La Ventura was Cincinnati architect S. (Samuel) S. Godley (1858-1941), who designed several buildings in Avondale for Jewish clients. S. S. Godley practiced with his son George H. Godley (1889-1961) from 1921 to 1931, when La Ventura was built. Educated at the Farmers' College in College Hill, S. S. Godley "received his practical education in the offices of local architects," including Edwin Anderson, Henry Bevis, and James W. McLaughlin. He opened his own office in Cincinnati in 1888, expanded it in 1893, practiced on his own, and with his son George in the 1920s, as mentioned above.

According to architectural historian Walter E. Langsam, S. S. Godley was "one of the most sophisticated designers of residences for both the Jewish and Gentile elites of the city for several decades. His residential clients included members of the Doepke, Duttonhofer, Feiss, Fleischmann, Freiberg, Heinsheimer, Herschede, Jacob, Kuhn, Mack, Mitchell, Prichard, Resor, Steinau, Strader, Wise, Wolf, and Workum families, all of whom had leading roles in the economic, social, and cultural life of the city." Many of these homes were in the Cincinnati neighborhood of Avondale, including the handsome Beaux-Arts Frank Herschede mansion (1908), which stood at 3886 Reading Road. S. S. Godley also designed a few apartment buildings in Avondale, including a three-story Tudor Revival-style court apartment building at 603-613 Forest Avenue. It appears that S. S. Godley was also the architect for the Bonheur at the end of Debbe Lane, which is very similar to La Ventura in its siting, massing and materials.

George H. Godley clearly benefitted from his father's long association with Avondale and by adopting his father's profession. After Samuel's death in 1941, the son practiced under his own name until his death 20 years later in 1961. His design of the South Crescent Arms (now known

as The Redding) in 1950 continued the firm's residential commissions in Avondale but reflected the dramatic changes in scale and style that occurred after World War II. About the same time as the South Crescent Arms, George Godley designed a few low-scale modern brick apartment buildings on Debbe Lane for George Miller circa 1950-51.

Summary

La Ventura is significant under Criteria 1 and 3. Under Criterion 1, it reflect the transition of Cincinnati's Avondale neighborhood from one of large estates and single-family homes to multi-family housing as the area became accessible to new residents via streetcars and automobiles. As the project of a Jewish builder and real estate developer, it also is representative of the movement of Jews to Avondale in the early 20th century. Under Criterion 3, the building is significant as an example of Mediterranean-style architecture reflected in its yellow brick, steel casement windows, arch motifs, its porches and balconies, central tower and terra cotta roof tiles. It is further significant as the work of architect S. S. Godley and his son George H. Godley, who designed numerous projects for Jewish clients, like George Miller, in Avondale.

Findings

According to Chapter 1435 of the Cincinnati Zoning Code (Historic Preservation) certain findings must be made before a historic structure can be designated by City Council. The structure must be found to have historic significance. Historic significance means that the attributes of a district, site or structure possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, and:

1. That are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or
2. That are associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or
3. That embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
4. That has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in history or prehistory.

Planning Considerations

Compatibility with Plan Cincinnati

"Plan Cincinnati", the current Master Plan adopted by City Council in 2012, supports and encourages historic preservation:

"As housing demand increases in the oldest neighborhoods, the City's broad and reputable historic building stock should be preserved...."

Historic Conservation is considered a fundamental component in Cincinnati's future with policy principles including:

"Preserve our resources and facilitate sustainable development."

“Cincinnati is known for our historic built character and spectacular natural beauty. The City will focus on preserving and protecting our unique assets and reverse the modern trend of ‘disposable’ development.”

Cincinnati’s Zoning Code includes a commitment to historic preservation through its goals and policies. Three specific purposes of historic preservation, according to the current Zoning Code Section 1435-03 include:

“to safeguard the heritage of the city by preserving districts and landmarks which reflect elements of its history, architecture and archeology, engineering or culture,”

“to conserve the valuable material and energy resources by ongoing use and maintenance of the existing built environment,”

“to maintain the historic urban fabric of the city.”

Thus, landmark designation of the La Ventura Apartments, which allows for preservation of the building, is compatible with city plans and consistent with policy and code.

The La Ventura Apartments has historic significance according to Chapter 1435 as defined under Criterion 1. It is significant as a reflection of the transformation of Cincinnati’s Avondale neighborhood from one of large estates and single-family homes to multi-family housing as the area became accessible to new residents via streetcars and automobiles. It also is representative of the movement of Jews from the West End to Avondale in the early 20th century. The building also meets Criterion 3 as a significant example of a Mediterranean-style apartment building by S. S. Godley and his son George, a locally renowned architectural firm that served many clients in Avondale.

Summary of Findings

The designation of the La Ventura Apartments meets the requirements of Chapter 1435 of the Cincinnati Zoning Code (Historic Preservation). The documentation in this designation report provides conclusive evidence that all required findings may be made for the proposed designation.

References

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La Ventura, Front Elevation, looking west



La Ventura, Front Elevation Detail



La Ventura, East (Front) and North (Side) Elevations



La Ventura, West (Rear) Elevation



Figure 1. Parcel map, CAGIS, 2022

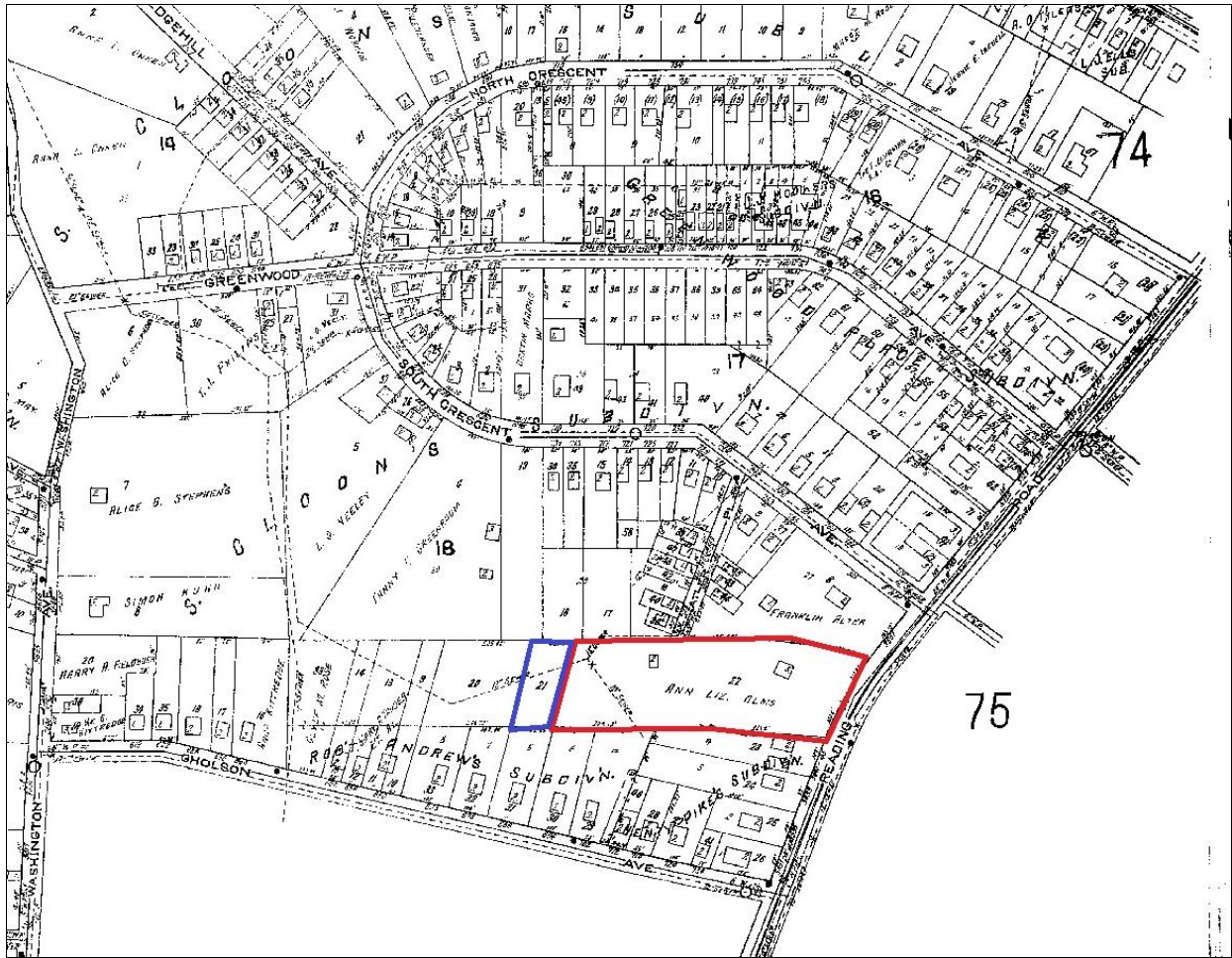


Figure 2. 1922 Sanborn Map, Vol 2, Plate 74, showing the Alms estate, future site of the Chalfonte Place Subdivision, outlined in red, and future site of La Ventura outlined in blue, being part of Lot 6 in the Robert Andrews Subdivision.

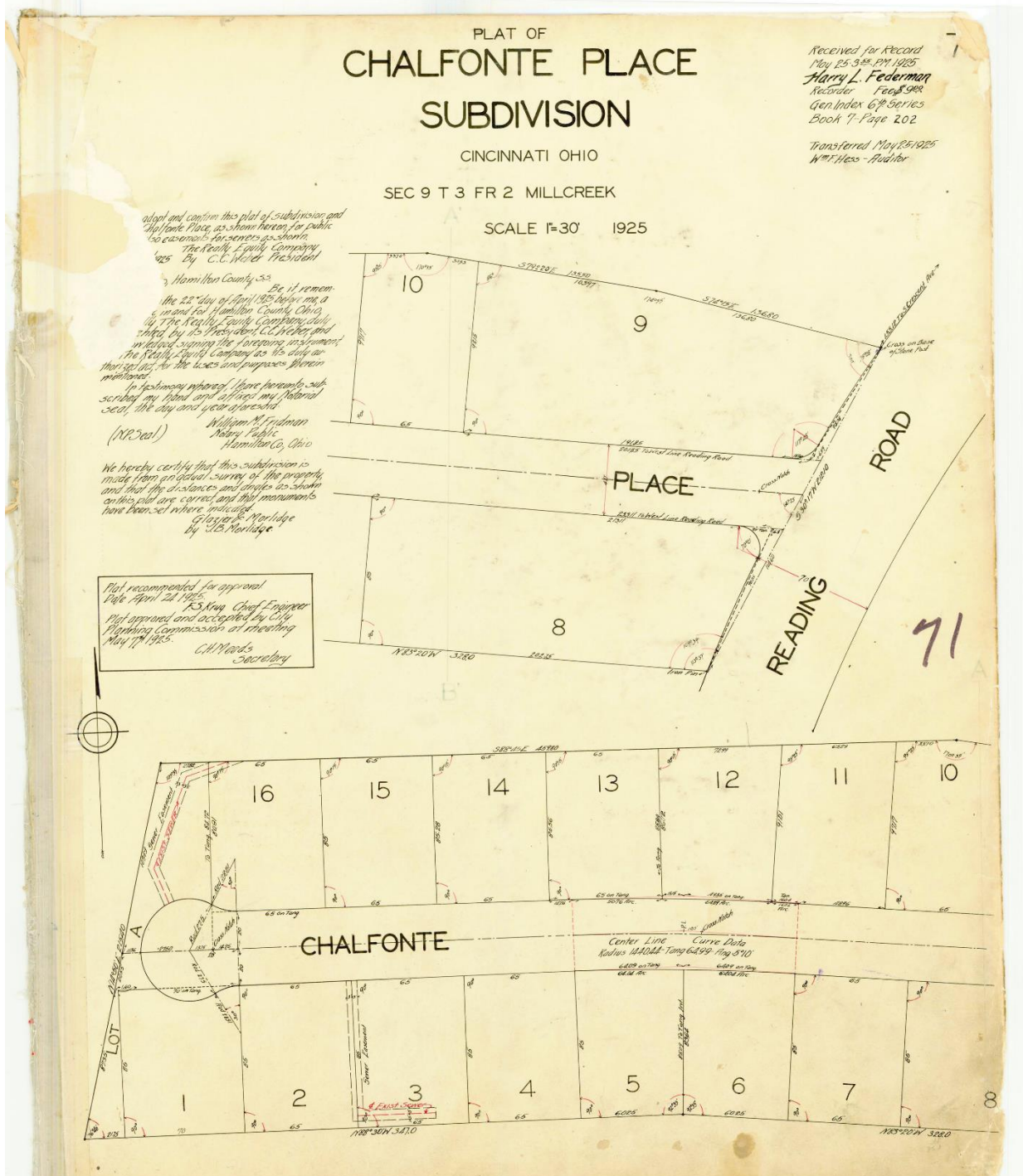


Figure 3. Plat Map of Chalfonte Place Subdivision, Plat Book 27, Page 71,
Recorded May 25, 1925

George Miller

George Miller, 70, a retired building contractor who resided at 973 Debble Ln., North Avondale, died yesterday at Jewish Hospital.

Survivors include a son, Fred H. Miller; two daughters, Mrs. Arthur Kaplan and Mrs. Albert Lane; a brother and sister, Norman S. Miller and Mrs. Harry Elias of Dayton; a sister, Mrs. Ralph Rothenburg of Los Angeles, and eight grandchildren.

Services will be at 1:30 p. m. today at the Well Funeral Home, 3901 Reading Rd., North Avondale. Burial will be in Kneseth Israel Cemetery, Covedale.

Figure 4. George Miller Obituary, *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 5/13/1962, 45:2

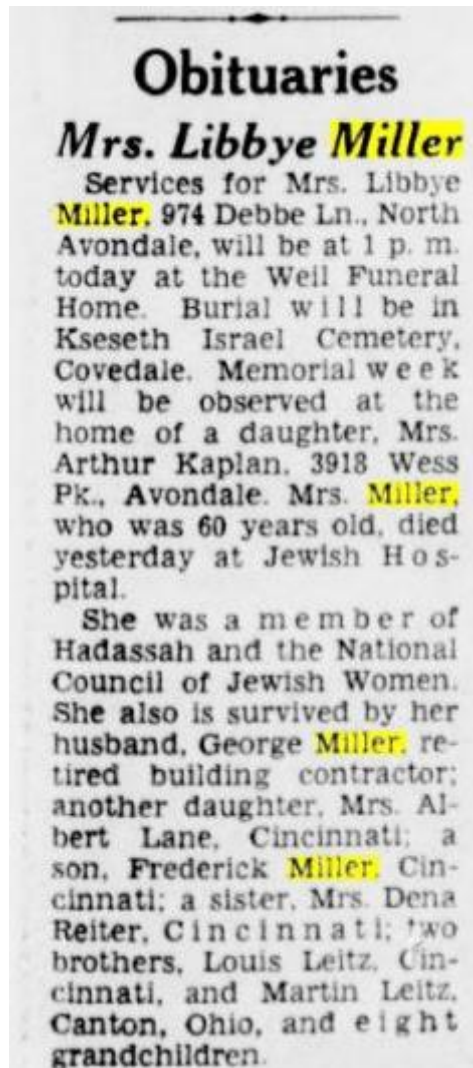


Figure 5. Libbye Miller Obituary, *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 8/2/61: 35.



Figure 6. *Cincinnati Enquirer*, 3/31/1963