

Willowick History Project – Compiled by Gale Lippucci

Timeline

Early History



The area now known as Willowick was included in the first survey of the Western Reserve made by General Moses Cleaveland in 1796. At the time, the area was home to various Native American tribes; among those were the Erie, Chippewa, Delaware, Wyandotte, Ottawa, Seneca, and Shawnee. These tribes were part of the Iroquois nation. Native American settlements were discovered to the west of Willowick in Cuyahoga County and to the east along the Chagrin River. There is no evidence of a permanent settlement in Willowick itself, but the area was used for hunting and fishing purposes. Lake Shore Boulevard and Vine Street were trading and transportation trails.

In 1796, a treaty with the Iroquois relinquished their claim to land east of the Cuyahoga River and, in 1797 the area was divided into districts and townships. Willowick was included in the area known as Willoughby Township. From 1788 to 1839 this area belonged to five different counties (Washington, Jefferson, Trumbull, Geauga, and Cuyahoga). In 1840, Lake County was established from parts of Geauga and Cuyahoga Counties.





Turn of the Century



From the late 1800's to the early 1900's, Willowick was known by two names: Willoughby-on-the-Lake and the Village of Willoughbeach. Vine Street was a crooked road and Lake Shore Boulevard was so narrow that two cars could not pass each other. The Log Cabin restaurant was a hunting lodge (1880's) before becoming a restaurant in the 1930's. Willowick Drive extending from East 305th Street to Vine Street was also known as Return Avenue because of the terrible condition of the road travelers had to 'return' because they could go no further.



1920's and 1930's

During this period of time, Willowick was viewed as a summer resort due to its location on the lake. The area boasted an amusement park and a private golf course and, as a result, summer cottages were built on the eastern portion of the community. It was also during the 1920's that advertisements for permanent homes were featured in pamphlets and in newspapers. One of the developments was Vinewood Beach, which included Glen Arden Drive, Parkland Drive, West Lake Drive (E. 322nd Street), Glenwood Drive (E. 323rd Street), and Lakeland Drive (E. 324th Street). Selling points of this neighborhood were beach privileges, a new school (Roosevelt),

cement sidewalks, storm sewers, water mains, graded streets, electricity, and two trees for each lot.

In 1922, approximately 300 people lived in Willowick. Led by William Flood and other residents, a proposal was written for Willowick to be incorporated as a village. On November 6th, 1923 voters approved the proposal and Willowick was officially founded in 1924. A mayor-council form of government was set up and George Mills was elected as mayor. Mills was a professor at Case Institute of Technology (Case Western Reserve University) and moved to Willowick in 1922 from Cadiz, Ohio. He lived on East 320th Street and raised goats and chickens on his property. Mills also served as judge of the village traffic court, which was held in a grocery store on Lake Shore and East 288th Street. Speed limits on Lake Shore and Vine Street were 25mph and 15mph at their intersection. The first Village Council was composed of Frank Alexander, Fred Ayer, William Dettman, John Taylor, J.R. Matthews, and William Knobel. The first council meeting was held at the dining room table of the home of Fred Ayer at East 314th and Lake Shore. That table was used for council meetings from 1924-1946 when it was placed in storage. It was brought out of storage in 1976 when the Municipal Complex opened and is still in use today in the council conference room. In the spring of 1924, a rigid zoning ordinance was passed to discourage real estate fraud. A planning commission also created laws allowing for the installation of water, sewer, and electrical lines and for the paving of streets. Police protection was also started at this time.

Soon after its incorporation, the village ran into financial trouble. There was little room for industrial growth, therefore Willowick asked to be annexed to Wickliffe, a successful industrial city, but was turned down. In the early 1930's the village neared bankruptcy and there was little population growth. It was at this time that many of the summer resort cottages became permanent residences. Even though the first Town Hall was established in 1934 (at the intersection of Lake Shore and Vine), many of the paved streets were without home development because sewers and other improvements had been installed on an assessment basis. The village reassessed the utilities and respread the costs in 1936 to offset the financial trouble. The costs were paid in full in 1966.

1940's

After World War II, a building boom took place as young war veterans and their families moved away from Cleveland to surrounding cities and villages in search of affordable housing. Willowick had an advantage over other communities as many of the streets had basic sewer systems already installed. The population quadrupled from 1940-1950 (from 915 to 3,667). Willowick's period of greatest growth was 1946 to 1959, and until 1960, it was the largest city in Lake County. This growth also saw the expansion of village services in the late 1940's and early 1950's as the number of police and service department employees increased, a modern service building and a new City Hall were built at East 312th and Vine Streets, and sidewalks and sewers were installed in all parts of the village. In 1953, the first playground was built. Dudley Park was

named after Dudley Brown, who was mayor of the village between 1946-1951. It is located on Willowick Drive between East 314th Street and Bayridge Boulevard.

1950's

Despite the tremendous growth, Willowick was struggling financially. In 1953, the village took two steps to increase the cash flow. First, the village raised building fees. Land developers who bought up entire subdivisions were required to install new sewers and water lines at their own expense. The developers were also responsible for the cost of paving and curbing. In cases where improvements were already in place, the developers were required to pay assessments in advance on the lots that they owned. Second, Willowick adopted a charter in 1952, which allowed the village to borrow more cash. However, even with the adoption of the charter and the increase in construction fees, Willowick had non-existent credit and was \$27,000 in debt.

1960's

There was a small increase in the population in the 1960's. Home construction slowed but plans were made for apartment buildings. The Cody Park Apartments on Lake Shore Boulevard and E. 315th Street were the first, built in 1962. Other garden apartment buildings followed: Bayridge Estates, Shamrock Park, and Willowick Towers. Plans were also made for apartment buildings on the former Willoughbeach Park site, across from Shoregate Shopping Center, but the construction was never carried out.

1970's

Willowick's population reached 21,237 in 1970 and the decade brought several changes. A second shopping center, Northshore Mall, was completed in 1971. The eastern end of the shopping center occupies the former site of Schoolhouse no. 4. Two high-rise apartment buildings (Shoregate Towers) were built at the intersection of Vine and Lake Shore in the early 1970's, and the Community Center on E. 314th Street was opened in 1970. In December of 1976, the City Hall Complex at 30435 Lake Shore Boulevard was ready for occupancy. The property that was to become the Lake Front Lodge Park was purchased in 1978 from two families with the assistance of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources. One home was remodeled, while two other structures were razed as part of the requirements for the state's financial help. A seawall was constructed in 1979-1980. In 1993 the Lake Metropark System signed a lease with the City of Willowick to maintain the 10-acre park. At the time, long-range plans included the extension of the park from Shoregate Towers west to Cresthaven Drive.

1980's – 2000

In the 1980's, Willowick's population started to decline due to the aging of the World War II generation and the movement of the baby boomers to more rural areas. In the early 1990's, young families moved to Willowick because of the affordability of the single-family homes. A number of other changes took place during this decade. A new housing development was built

around the Uxbridge Drive area. The former Shoregate School was sold and razed and became the Carrington Court development. The Log Cabin Restaurant suffered two fires (1989 and 1993), but reopened for business. However, the former Willo Restaurant on Lake Shore Boulevard was destroyed in a fire in 1995. The restaurant, which had been remodeled as a Brown Derby Roadhouse, was a landmark in Willowick since the early 1950's. The library underwent a complete renovation in 1994.

From the late 1990's to the early 2000's, several improvements were accomplished regarding sewers and road programs. One road improvement to Lake Shore Boulevard led to the discovery of the old tunnel. As only a foot of concrete and steel separated the roadway from the tunnel, the Ohio Department of Transportation filled the passageway with mortar to prevent a possible collapse, thereby sealing the tunnel forever.

Further improvements were to the Service Center on Vine Street (1999), the Community and Senior Center on East 314th Street (2001) and Manry and Dudley Parks (2000-2002). Besides Carrington Court, new housing developments are Legend Trails near East 288th Street and Winbury Estates on East 305th Street.

As the city of Willowick enters the 21st century, it approaches a crossroad. Shoregate Shopping Center and Northshore Mall have experienced substantial business losses and the city's population continues to decrease. Comprehensive studies were conducted in late 2002 and a series of town meetings were held in early 2003 to determine the possibility of redeveloping Shoregate Shopping Center and the area north of Lake Shore Boulevard from Cresthaven to East 317th Street for residential and commercial purposes. The final decision will affect the future of Willowick.

Events

G.P. GRIFFITH

One of the most tragic events in Willowick's history was the burning of the G.P. Griffith on June 17, 1850. There were approximately 320 people aboard, of which an estimate of only 40 to 87 survived, making it Lake Erie's worst disaster. There are many different accounts of the burning and sinking of the steamship, most agree that the German, Irish, English, and Scandinavian immigrants boarded at Buffalo, New York then headed for Cleveland and Toledo. A fire started near the smokestacks soon after the ship left Fairport Harbor. By the time it reached the Chagrin River, the fire was out of control. The steersman attempted to ground the steamer, but it struck a sandbar about 600 feet offshore. The fire enveloped the entire ship. Many immigrants had filled their pockets with valuables and the women passengers had sewn gold coins into their petticoats. As a result, many of these people sank from the extra weight when they jumped overboard to escape the flames. Others were crushed by the paddlewheels or burned to death. Lifeboats were not lowered for fear of being swamped and some were already burnt.

The captain and his family were among the victims. A mass grave was dug for over 100 victims at the top of a bluff. The tragedy drew people from Cleveland to Eastlake and south to Wickliffe. It was reported that nine members of the Priddy party were buried on a farm at E. 300th and Ridge Road in Wickliffe. Estimates were 286 lives lost. The location of the sinking is approximately an area north of Lake Shore Boulevard, from Cresthaven to East 305 Street. The mass grave was lost to lake erosion in the 1920's.

CITY STATUS

In the November 1956 general election, 5,125 residents voted thereby enabling Willowick to move from village to city status. The Secretary of the State of Ohio, Ted Brown, delivered the Proclamation at the council meeting on December 4, 1956. Over 200 state, county, and local officials attended the meeting. Willowick also became the largest city in western Lake County surpassing Willoughby. The official date of the city's status was January 1, 1957. Mayor John Olsen suggested a series of events for the 1957 calendar year to celebrate the milestone.

Landmarks

SCHOOLS

Willoughby Township had thirteen school districts, of which Willowick's school was designated as Schoolhouse no. 4. The first schoolhouse was built in 1829 near E. 330th and Vine Streets. It was a wood frame, single-story building and was moved to a citizen's property for use as a

private residence until the owner's death. It was dismantled and citizens of the community used the wood for beehives and other outdoor structures.

The next schoolhouse no.4 was constructed in 1889 at the corner of Vine Street and Lake Shore Boulevard. This schoolhouse was also known as the Wellner School and served the community from 1889 to 1922. Children were transported to school by the 'kid hack', which was a horse drawn wagon with a rounded wood top. There were benches along the sides facing each other and the floor was covered with straw to keep the children's feet warm. In the winter, the wheels were removed and were replaced by runners to turn it into a sleigh. Children also rode the interurban, rode horses, and walked. Teachers' salaries ranged from \$50.00 per month plus \$2.00 for janitorial services in 1907 to \$1,350 per year plus \$15.00 per month for care fare in 1922. The school fell into disrepair and was closed in 1922. It then became the village's first 'Town Hall'. The building was also used as a police station, with a temporary jail attached to the rear of the building. The cells were outdoors and unheated. The school was last used as a residence, until 1958 when it was destroyed in a fire.

Roosevelt School at East 322nd and Vine Streets was built in 1922. St. Mary Magdalene parochial school opened in 1949 at East 321st and Vine Streets. Due to an increase in population in the 1950's, two other public schools followed ' Shoregate School on East 293rd Street (1954) and Royalview Elementary (1957). Willowick Junior High was built in 1959. Kindergarten classes were opened at the former Nike site (now Manry Park) in 1962. Willowick's population declined in the 1970's and, as a result, Roosevelt School closed in 1981 followed by Shoregate School in 1983. Shoregate School was razed for a housing development and Roosevelt School is vacant as of 2003.

LANDOWNERS

Early residents of the area included the Jennison family who lived at E.337th and Vine Streets. Although this area is present-day Eastlake, it belonged to School District 4 and the Jennison children attended that school in the 1890's. Other families were the Welners who owned 83 acres of property that stretched north from the lake to south of Vine Street and from schoolhouse no. 4 to East 320th Street. Present-day East 305th Street was known as Rush Road after the R.B. Rush family. Willowick Drive was previously known as Powell, named after J. Powell who owned 20 acres in the area. W. H. Harrison had 15 acres near the Powell and Rush properties. It was not unusual for families to own large tracts of land in the late 1800's.

During the 1910's and 1920's, prominent landowners included J.C. Gilchrist whose property was north of Lake Shore Boulevard between East 288th and East 293rd Streets; William Flood, who played an important role in the incorporation of Willowick as a village; Claude Foster who had property north of Lake Shore and east of Willoughbeach Park (he invented the Gabriel car horn and Snubbers shock absorbers); and the Lindus Cody family whose property ran north and south

of Lake Shore, bordered on the east by East 317th Street and on the west by the intersection of Vine and Lake Shore.

Lindus Cody and his family had purchased this land from Rollin and Louisa Welner in October of 1901 for \$22,845. Cody established a building and real estate business in Cleveland. The present-day Cody house on Lake Shore was a summer home for Cody, his wife and their ten children. Cody was a religious man and donated a large portion of his property in 1908 for a center for Bible teaching and conferences. The Erieside Bible Institute was established on the present-day grounds of the Cody Park Apartments at East 316th Street and Lake Shore. In 1925, the Erieside Gospel Church was incorporated. One famous visitor to the Cody house was Buffalo Bill Cody, who was a cousin of Lindus. Lindus Cody died in 1926 at the age of 86 and he and his wife are buried in Lake View Cemetery.

INTERURBAN AND WILLOUGHBEACH

The Cleveland Painesville and Eastern Railroad was chartered April 25, 1895 to connect Painesville to Cleveland. The first car ran July 1, 1896 and celebrations were held along the rail line. Due to the railway's success, another line was built in 1898 along Lake Shore Boulevard and Vine Street. This was called the Shore Line and there were approximately 10 stops along the way. Edward Moore and Henry Everett owned land on the north side of Lake Shore Blvd. and established Willoughbeach Park, an amusement park, in 1898. The company not only collected fares from their cars, but also profited from rides and concessions at the park. Timbers from an old wooden trestle in Willoughby were used in construction of the dance hall. Early pamphlets advertised a pavilion, dance hall, concessions, baseball fields, and the bathing beach.

By the 1910's, the rail company had persuaded many churches and lodges in the area to hold their annual picnics at the park and Cleveland newspapers promoted Willoughbeach as a resort. The rail line transported groups of 500 people from Cleveland to the park for \$.25 per round trip. A carousel and a roller coaster were added at this time. In 1925, the park installed an auto roller coaster. Car owners drove their own cars up a steep incline and then let the automobiles coast up and down the wooden tracks through gravity. During the same period, Euclid Beach Park held automobile days for local motorists.

In 1923, the rail company suffered financial losses due to competition from the automobile and improvement of the roads. Willoughbeach Park could not compete with other amusement parks. The directors of the CP and E line decided to end the service in May 1926 and the park closed for good. Willoughbeach did exist as a bathing beach and campground into late 1930's.

WILLOWICK COUNTRY CLUB

In 1911, the Willowick Country Club was founded on Lake Shore Boulevard. It was a private course, par 70, and consisted of 18 holes and 154 acres. Eight of those acres were on the north side of the boulevard and included the clubhouse. A tunnel ran under Lake Shore Boulevard

connecting the course to the clubhouse. The golf course was known for its many sand traps. The most difficult hole was no. 6, which was cut by a deep gully and was known as the ‘canyon’ hole. The club’s members moved to the Manakiki Golf Course in 1929 and the Willowick Club became public. The Depression of the early 1930’s and gas rationing during World War II took their toll and the course eventually closed in 1951/1952.

CHURCHES

The growth in the number of churches coincided with the growth of Willowick’s population. In the early part of the 20th century, there was only one non-denominational church located near East 322nd and Vine, which served the community of 300. Another church, the First Baptist Church, was formed with 19 members in 1924. Starting in the late 1940’s and early 1950’s, several churches were established: Erieside Church (1948); St. Mary Magdalene (1949); Shoregate Methodist Church (1952); and Bethel Lutheran Church (1956).

SHOREGATE

With very little land available for industrial use, the only solution was the rezoning of the former golf course property. The course was owned by Willowick Estates, a subsidiary of Forest City Enterprises, and closed in 1951/1952. The land was originally designated for construction of single-family homes, garden apartments, a playground, and a small shopping center. There was some opposition from the public to the shopping center and, as a result, the issue was referred to Willowick’s residents for a vote. The citizens passed Ordinance 751 in November 1952 and Shoregate Shopping Center became a reality.

The original area was comprised of 141 acres. However, by 1954, the plans for the garden apartments and playground were eliminated. In August 1955, the shopping center opened. Among the first occupants were the Shoregate Barber Shop, Fisher Foods, Woolworth’s, A & P, and Federal Department Store. During the mid-1960’s, the western end of the shopping center was developed further with the addition of seven stores, a large furniture store and a movie theater. Plans to build a community center at Shoregate were never carried through. During its prime, Shoregate boasted a major department store along with numerous smaller stores, restaurants, a movie theater, a 48-lane bowling establishment, and medical offices. Presently, Shoregate occupies 62 acres of land.

LIBRARY

As the community grew, the need for a public library became more apparent. For a short period of time in the 1920’s and 1930’s, a small satellite library station existed. It wasn’t until 1954, however, that a summer library was established in a classroom of Roosevelt School. Due to overwhelming popularity, this library was moved to a small, vacant house located on the school’s property. That also proved to be inadequate and, in 1955, 600 residents met at Roosevelt School to decide the future of the library. At that meeting, over 300 people signed up to

volunteer their time and skills to refurbish the old golf clubhouse on Lake Shore Boulevard. Charles and Max Ratner of Forest City Enterprises donated rent-free use of the clubhouse for 3 years, \$400 in cash, and building supplies. The city matched the \$400 donation. Councilman Robert Cable spearheaded the project, and the new library was completed in early 1956. Ceremonies at the opening in March of that year drew over 600 people. Residents parked at the new shopping center and walked to the library through the tunnel. A time capsule containing aerial views of the area, photographs of 1950's fashions and everyday life, predictions for 2056, and a toothbrush was sealed. Mayor Olsen gave \$5.00 to a little boy for the contents of his pockets, and these were included in the capsule. The time capsule is presently at City Hall.

The library was very popular. Despite the renovations, however, the building flooded twice during heavy storms, destroying thousands of dollars' worth of books. In August 1957 a gas leak was discovered in the tunnel, thereby closing the tunnel to the public. In 1959/1960, Library Trustees proposed a new site on East 305th Street for the library. Construction began in 1961 and a new split-level building opened in 1962.

NIKE-SITE

In the late 1950's the United States government took steps to protect against attacks from foreign countries. One step was the installation of Nike Hercules anti-aircraft missiles in several areas throughout Lake County. The present-day site of Manry Park at 30100 Arnold Road did not house any silos for missiles, but it did provide living quarters for several army battalions from 1957 to 1962. Besides barracks and a mess hall, there also was a radar center. The Willoughby-Eastlake School System purchased the 'Nike Site' and used rooms inside the buildings for kindergarten classes. In 1964 the city of Willowick purchased the site for \$66,650 and turned the buildings and surrounding area into storage and recreational use.

MANRY

In 1966 the Nike Site was renamed Manry Park after Robert Manry, a resident who sailed his 13 foot sloop, Tinkerbelle, across the Atlantic Ocean in the summer of 1965. Manry lived with his wife, daughter, and son on Royalview Drive and worked as a copy editor at the Cleveland Plain Dealer. Manry left Falmouth, Massachusetts on June 1st and arrived at Falmouth, England on August 17, 1965. The event received world attention and Manry returned to Willowick to a parade attended by a crowd of 10,000. He was presented a key to the city and was honored at a dinner at the Willo Restaurant at which over 400 people attended. Other gifts were a Honda motorcycle, two paintings of himself in Tinkerbelle, an engraved plaque from the city, and an honorary membership in the Willowick Kiwanis Club. He also received a governor's award from Governor James Rhodes for the advancement of the prestige of Ohio. Manry wrote a book, Tinkerbelle, and donated the boat to the Western Reserve Historical Society in Cleveland. A few years after the voyage, Virginia Manry was killed in a car accident. Robert Manry died of a heart attack in 1971 at the age of 52.

NOTABLE WILLOWICK CITIZENS

- Dudley Brown – Willowick mayor 1946 – 1951.
- Jamie Callender – Ohio State Representative (House District 62) since 1997.
- E.P. Cambell – Willowick mayor 1/1/30 – 3/24/30.
- B.D. Cullings – Willowick mayor 3/25/30 – 12/31/31.
- Lindus Cody ‘ (1840-1926) Prominent landowner in the early 1900’s. Cousin to Buffalo Bill Cody.
- Robert Collins ‘ Willowick police officer, 1936 ‘ 1941. Willowick Police Chief, 1941 ‘ 1973.
- Thomas Dreher – Willowick mayor 1980 – 1983.
- Lorraine M. Fende – 1st woman mayor of Willowick, 1996. 1st mayor to serve 4 terms.
- A. Donald Fitzgerald ‘ Over 30 years of public service as Willowick Police Officer, Willowick City Councilman, City Council President, Service Director, and Mayor of Willowick 1990 – 1995.
- Robert Foley – Willowick mayor 1966 – 1971.
- Claud Foster ‘ (1866-1959) Inventor of Snubbers shock absorber and Gabriel car horn.
- Roy Foster – Willowick mayor 1938 – 1945.
- Paul Gebhart ‘ Member of Planning Commission 1924 ‘ 1966 and member of Kiwanis for 50 years.
- Ralph Gilfether – Willowick mayor 1984 – 1985, Willowick City Councilman and President of Council for 20 years.
- Carl Hall – Willowick mayor 1960 – 1965.
- Edward Hocesvar – Willowick mayor 1986 – 1989.
- Ray Kaluba – over 25 years of public service as City Council President, Planning Commission member, and mayor of Willowick 1974 – 1979.
- Walter C. Karl – former Safety Director in the 1930’s.
- Ross McFarland – Willowick mayor 1972 – 1973.
- Robert Manry ‘ (1919?- 1971) Sailed solo across Atlantic Ocean summer of 1965.
- G. Fred Martin ‘ Attorney. Served over 25 years as Finance Director, Clerk and Secretary of every Board and Commission.
- George Mills ‘ Willowick’s first mayor, 1924 – 1929.
- John Olsen ‘ Mayor of Willowick, 1954 ‘1959, during the city’s greatest growth.
- E.L. Richter – Willowick mayor 1932 – 1937.
- Ratner family ‘ Founders of Forest City Enterprises. Prominent land developers and philanthropists. Built Shoregate Shopping Center.
- Donald Swetland – Willowick mayor 4/1/65 – 12/31/65.
- Arthur Sulzmann – Willowick mayor 1952 – 1953.
- Daniel Troy – Over 30 years of public service as Willowick City Councilman, City Council President, Ohio State Representative and Lake County Commissioner.

Resources provided by the Willoughby Historical Society, Willowick City Hall, Eastlake Library, Willoughby Library, Willowick Library, *The Cleveland Plain Dealer*, *The Cleveland Press*, *The Lake County News Herald*, *The Willoughby Republican*, *The Painesville Telegraph*, and *The Sun Journal*.