



BHA Bulletin

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Spring 2009

The Bonnycastle Homestead, Past, Present and Future

“Past experience, if not forgotten, is a guide to the future.” That Chinese proverb may be a less famous thought about history repeating itself than George Santayana’s oft-quoted maxim, but it has a much more positive ring than being condemned to repeat the past we have forgotten. But, of course, both express the same sentiment.

In this newsletter we share some of our neighborhood’s past in order that we all may be better prepared to meet present and future needs. And the members of the Bonnycastle Homestead Association board of directors hope to interest you, our neighbors, in joining us soon for a variety of neighborhood activities.

A Brief History

The Bonnycastle Homestead neighborhood, part of Louisville’s Highlands, is bounded by Bardstown Road on the west; Cherokee Rd. and Sulgrave Rd. on the east; Eastern Parkway on the north; and Speed Avenue on the south.

The name for our neighborhood is taken from the old Bonnycastle Homestead, which originally included much of the land on which the neighborhood is built. The old Bonnycastle Homestead mansion still stands on Cowling behind the Vineyard Christian Church, which was originally built by the Brith Sholom congregation and used as a synagogue for many years. (Brith Sholom merged with a downtown synagogue congregation and moved to Brownsboro Road in the eastern suburbs to become Temple Adath Israel Brith Sholom.)

The neighborhood began along a portion of the periphery of Cherokee Park more than 100 years ago when Harriett Everett Bonnycastle subdivided the Bonnycastle family farmland for housing development. The area saw its most significant growth from the 1920s through the ‘40s.

At the time Miss Bonnycastle began subdividing her property, she also gave a portion of the land contiguous to the Park to the city for a roadway that would provide access to the homes to be built overlooking the Park. Originally dubbed an extension of Eastern Parkway, the roadway is now the part of Cherokee Road from the Daniel Boone monument to Sulgrave Road where it becomes Park Boundary Road.

Our neighborhood was among the earliest “suburban” developments that began the expansion of Louisville’s original core to the east.

Like the continued suburban development after World War II, the expansion converted farmland to subdivisions.

But unlike much of the suburban development of the latter half of the 20th century, the development of the Bonnycastle Homestead followed many of the urban development principles of landscape architects such as Frederick Law Olmsted and numerous city planners in the late 1800s. That is, development included the construction of a mix of large homes, medium-sized and smaller homes, and multifamily residences with retail business areas nearby. This combination of land use was a notion popularly called the “village concept” which came back into vogue in recent years with new developments such as Norton Commons in eastern Jefferson County.

“Back in the day” when our neighborhood was first growing, folks hadn’t yet become totally dependent on automobile transportation. Therefore shopping within walking distance or along a trolley line was not just a convenience; it was a necessity.

As history tells us, the cycle of development is clearly on a continuum with areas rising and falling in popularity and development principles changing with the times and sensibilities. But past is prologue.

Suburban development proliferated after World War II and our city began spreading further into the farmlands to the south and east. With new ideas about suburban subdivisions and the building of new roadways, people changed their living patterns to be more centered around cars and commuting longer distances.

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As happened throughout the Highlands in the late 1950s and '60's, there was a slight decline in the popularity of the Bonnycastle area as families moved outward to the newly developing suburbs. As a natural recourse, property values also declined for a time. And some of the stately old homes in the Bonnycastle Homestead were cut up into apartments, while several small apartment buildings were added to the landscape. The neighborhood envisioned by Miss Bonnycastle, Olmsted and others was rapidly changing.

The Genesis of BHA

As part of a neighborhood-organizing movement throughout Louisville, the Bonnycastle Homestead Association (BHA) was formed in February 1973 to provide information to residents about a multitude of neighborhood concerns, such as police protection, neighborhood maintenance, and the development of new housing - especially the appearance of more inexpensive apartment complexes. A little more than a year later the Association had a veritable baptism by fire with the April 3, 1974 tornado.

The neighborhood pulled together to clean up and repair the damage and worked to address concerns about developers possibly buying damaged property cheaply and building large apartment complexes. Residents feared such development would drastically change the character of the neighborhood.

As a result of the Association's efforts, the Louisville Planning Commission imposed a moratorium on development in the area. Then the Association launched a strong and ultimately effective "down-zoning" campaign, which ensured that the neighborhood would become no more "apartmentized" than it already is.

The formation of the Bonnycastle Homestead Association coincided with and reinforced a renewed interest in the Highlands in the 1970s. Even though there was an upsurge of interest in older neighborhoods closer to the urban core during that time in cities around the nation, we can give much credit for the revitalization of our neighborhood to the residents who had the prescience to form BHA.

Back to the Future

The Bonnycastle Homestead neighborhood is now one of the most desirable areas for homebuyers. While property values have depreciated in other parts of metropolitan Louisville over the last few years during the current economic downturn, the housing stock in the Highlands in general, and the Bonnycastle area in

particular, has continued to appreciate in value. And the neighborhood has retained much of its original character: a mix of small to large single-family homes, multi-family residences and nearby retail businesses with Cherokee Park both connected to the neighborhood and providing a connection with other neighborhoods.



Terra Long, aide to Councilman Tom Owen, and Bonnie Pendegrass, Commonwealth Bank, make short work of gutter clutter at the BHA Spring Clean-up March 28.

What's Not to Love

Residents love the area's proximity to Cherokee Park, a centerpiece of Louisville's parks system designed by Olmsted's firm in the late 19th century. The neighborhood is characterized by tree-shaded streets, graceful older homes of varying sizes, and older apartment buildings (many now condo-ized) such as the *grande dame* of the neighborhood, The Commodore. There has also been considerable renovation and some limited new construction of single family and condominium buildings adding to public interest in our neighborhood.

Proving the functionality of the village concept, neighbors can also enjoy the many restaurants and shops along Bardstown Road within easy walking distance and are only a short drive or bus ride from downtown Louisville. Over the past three decades, the neighborhood has been revitalized by a diversity of people drawn to the area because of its rich history, varied types of housing, natural beauty and lifestyle conveniences. What's old has become new again. ❁



Upcoming Neighborhood Events

Soup 'N' Salad

With a Pinch of History

\$10/person

Sunday, April 19

6:00 – 8:00 p.m.

Speaker: Joanne Weeter, Historic Preservation Consultant
(Joanne.weeter@insightbb.com)

Preserving Carnegie Libraries in Louisville

Home of Claudia and David Runge

1578 Cherokee Road, Unit 5

(yellow brick condo building @ corner of Cherokee Rd.
and Bonnycastle Ave.) • RSVP 749-5675

Sunday, June 14

6:00 – 8:00 p.m.

Speaker: Sam Thomas, Author and Louisville Historian

Louisville's Highlands: A Brief History

Food by Café Metro with comments by

Head Chef Gary Byler

Home of Jessica Loving and Sheryl Snyder

1616 Cherokee Road • RSVP 451-8410

Plant Swap

Saturday, May 9

Deer Park Baptist Church

1733 Bardstown Road

Bring the plants you've divided during your spring gardening and trade them for new varieties. Or just come get some new plants for a small donation to BHA. We will meet in the area in front of the church just across the street from the Farmer's Market.

Mark your calendars for Festivus!

Festivus! *The Bonnycastle neighborhood festival "for the rest of us"*

Saturday, September 26

4pm – 8pm

Maryland & Cowling Avenues

More History and a Little Geography

The Bonnycastle Homestead area corresponds to Louisville and Jefferson County planning N-11 and U.S. Census Tract 85 (established in 1940). In 1970 the area's population was 2,528, with 1,120 dwelling units. And the numbers are approximately the same today.

The Bonnycastle Homestead land was bought by Isaac Everett in 1848 from Myrah and Angereau Gray, and was described as being "near the City of Louisville and on the Turnpike Road leading to Bardstown and on the Sinking Fork of the Beargrass Creek." A 14-½ acre, "bell-shaped" parcel of land comprised this homestead near Cowling Avenue.

Spring Drive forms the curving portion of this bell. Isaac Everett willed his property to his son-in-law John C. Bonnycastle, in trust for Bonnycastle's daughter, Harriet B. Everett Bonnycastle. In 1885 Harriet Bonnycastle inherited the bulk of the property making up our neighborhood. The subdivision plot for Bonnycastle Addition was recorded on July 3, 1900, and was signed by Miss Bonnycastle.



BHA board members Art Cromer, Jen Schultz and John Sniffen work on the corner of Bardstown and Bonnycastle at BHA's March 28 clean up.

Junk Pickup

Weeks of 6/15, 9/14, 12/14

<http://www.louisvilleky.gov>

Questions: Call 311 or 574-5000

Note: Please put junk by curb no later than the Monday of the week it will be picked up and no sooner than the weekend prior to pickup.



BHA Initiatives

This all-volunteer association provides a platform for addressing neighborhood concerns and needs. BHA can provide a voice for the neighbors when dealing with government agencies and becomes a conduit for communication about everything from junk pickup, beautification projects and public safety. If you are not a member, we hope you will join and help make the Homestead an even better place to live. Here are just a few things the membership supports:

✿ Zoning

The Association was the moving force behind the post-tornado down-zoning and subscribes to a monitoring service, which notifies us of any zoning appeals of building permits that affect our area. This allows us to have routine input into these decisions and prevents unpleasant "surprises." A number of such cases have been routinely handled for the past 30+ years.

✿ Neighborhood Improvement

The Association, with the help of a \$10,000 federal grant and an equivalent amount from the neighborhood (mostly in the form of labor) fertilized and revitalized trees in the right-of-ways.

The Association cooperates with the Operation Brightside in the annual spring clean up and trash pick-up drive along the streets and in alleyways.

The Association sponsored the landscaping of the triangular traffic island at the intersection of Cherokee Road and Spring Drive and maintains that area with volunteer labor and funds generated by membership dues and event proceeds.

The Association continues to find large and small ways of improving the appearance of our neighborhood.

✿ Safety and Security

The Association works with the 3rd District of the Metropolitan Louisville Police Department to provide Block Watch protection and to disseminate information about home security and personal safety.



Bonnycastle Homestead Association Board of Directors

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BHA Board Meetings

Meetings are the second Tuesday each month. We meet at 7 p.m. in the activity room on the first floor of The Commodore at the corner of Cowling and Bonnycastle Avenue. Join us to find out ways to become involved!

Join Bonnycastle Homestead Association Today

Name(s) _____
Address _____
E-mail _____

\$10 individual; \$20 family or business

Make check payable to:
Bonnycastle Homestead Association

Please mail this form and your check to:
BHA • P.O. Box 5165 • Louisville, KY 40205