

## Shaker Heights History

Shaker Heights has grown in many important ways over its first 100 years. This is due to its solid foundation:

- Careful planning
- Consistent and proactive leadership
- Residents who are deeply committed to the prosperity of the community

## The Early Years: From Settlement to City

The North Union Shakers, a utopian religious sect, settled here in 1822. Known as The Valley of God's Pleasure, the colony included several mills, farms, a Meeting House, and a school. When Cleveland emerged as an industrial metropolis, the dreams of the North Union Shakers faded. Horseshoe Lake, the Lower Lakes, and a handful of streets were all that remained of the Shaker community.

## Shaker Village

In 1905, business partners and brothers Oris Paxton and Mantis James Van Sweringen began purchasing the settlement's original 1,366 acres to develop a scenic residential suburb. They based their plans on the popular Garden City movement. Their development - named Shaker Village and incorporated in 1912 - preserved the natural landscape and provided residents with easy access to greater Cleveland on two Rapid transit lines.

They implemented strict development guidelines for setbacks, building heights and architectural styles, and planted spacious and lush tree lawns. Planners created an intentional hierarchy of streets - many with names chosen from an old English postal directory - to limit traffic in residential neighborhoods for a quiet, idyllic ambiance. Engineers dammed Doan Brook to form Marshall and Green Lakes, as well as some of the choicest properties in Shaker Village.

## Shaker Heights Public Library

In 1922, the Shaker Heights Public Library opened in a room at Boulevard Elementary School. The Village also became the new home for these Cleveland institutions:

- Hathaway Brown School
- Laurel School
- Plymouth Church
- Shaker Heights Country Club
- University School

## Rapid Growth

Rapid growth continued along with construction on block after block of architecturally unique and distinguished homes. Each home was designed within one of three sanctioned styles -

English, French or Colonial. These houses became an enduring asset for the City of Shaker Heights, officially established in 1931.

in 1947, the [Shaker Historical Society](#) was founded to preserve and to promote the history of the North Union Shakers. Today, their mission includes the legacy of the Van Sweringens and more modern achievements of Shaker Heights.

## The 20th Century: A Proactive City with Passionate Residents

The City and its residents made national headlines in the 1950s when they reexamined years of restrictive covenants that prevented minorities from purchasing homes in Shaker Heights. Black families from Cleveland moved first to Shaker's Ludlow neighborhood and marked the start of the City's focus on inclusion and integration.

Residents continued to support the City and local groups in these efforts to build community over the next 50 years:

### 1960

[Shaker Heights Public Library](#) expanded to include a second branch, Bertram Woods. More than a half-million people use Shaker's award-winning libraries and 30,000 Shaker library card holders borrow one million items each year.

### 1966

[The Nature Center at Shaker Lakes](#) was created when citizens opposed plans to construct two eight-lane freeways with an interchange at the site.

### 1970

Racial balance continued in [Shaker Schools](#) through a voluntary busing program.

### 1986

The Fund for the Future of Shaker Heights maintained the proactive integration of neighborhoods, assisting families with down payment loans. By 2012, the Fund's mission was realized and its assets were donated to the [Shaker Heights Development Corporation](#), a community improvement nonprofit created to enhance the City's commercial revitalization efforts, strengthen neighborhoods, and diversify the tax base.

### 1987

Cleveland's decline as an industrial city decreased its population and in nearby suburbs - including Shaker Heights. To promote integration through the population shift, the Shaker Heights Board of Education closed and repurposed four of its nine elementary schools. Moreland Elementary School became the larger home of the Main Library. The Shaker Family Center opened in the former Sussex Elementary School. Ludlow and Malvern schools became specialized private non-profit schools for school-age children.

## Beyond the Millennium: Shaker Heights in the 21st Century

In 2000, the Shaker Heights Strategic Investment Plan set goals to attract private investment and generate long-term economic opportunities. The Plan provided momentum for several public development projects, including:

- Revitalization of [Horseshoe Lake Park](#)
- Construction of a new firehouse,
- Renovation and enhancements at [Thornton Park](#).

Private developers completed significant updates and renovations in the Shaker Town Center district and finished construction on three new upscale condominium developments for young professionals and empty nesters. But in 2008, the global and national recession required City leaders to exercise fiscal discipline and thoughtful long-term planning in order to maintain Shaker's high level of services and quality of life.

## Commercial Districts

The City initiated a comprehensive economic development plan in 2010 and directed resources toward revitalization of two major commercial districts:

- [The Van Aken District](#) - a transit-oriented, walkable district of new commercial and retail activity.
- Chagrin/Lee - a corridor of innovation and home to The Dealership-a former car dealership turned shared entrepreneurial hub at 3558 Lee Road where deals are done, networks are created, and collaborations are forged.

Since its beginnings, Shaker Heights has been a community of prudent leaders and thoughtful residents - both persist as hallmarks of the City even today. These values support the City's resilience and will continue to fuel our confident path into the next 100 years.

## Historic Building Cards

In honor of the City's 2012 Centennial, the Shaker Heights Landmark Commission and the Shaker Heights Public Library collaborated on a project to assist and encourage citizen historians to learn more about their homes, neighborhoods, and heritage.

The Cleveland Historical smart phone app and website features information about nearly 50 landmark properties in Shaker Heights. The Historic Building Cards database includes information gathered from over 10,000 index cards. The original cards were created for each new building in Shaker Heights, and typically include information such as the date the home was built, the names of the home's architect, builder, and original owner, and the estimated cost to build the home.

Learn more at [Shaker Heights Centennial website](#).