



Observatory Historic District

A walking tour of the historic homes along
Observatory Ave, Observatory Place & Avery Lane




About

The Observatory Historic District began its development in 1873 with the construction of the Cincinnati Observatory building by renowned architect Samuel Hannaford. This, along with the development of new and improved transportation systems to Cincinnati’s suburbs is what prompted the initial development of Mt. Lookout.

Named for the prestigious community in New York of the same name, it was the intent of brothers Charles and John Kilgour to attract property owners of a higher profile. Thanks to the efforts of the “Mornington Syndicate,” a group of businessmen who helped develop the rural area, plans were set up and restrictions put in place to keep out commercial and industrial development. This allowed John Kilgour to successfully promote the area as desirable to live in with an easy commute to the city of Cincinnati.





This walking tour is designed to help show off the different architectural elements of this early Mt. Lookout district.

The uniqueness of each structure takes you back in time to the early operations of the Cincinnati Observatory and the lifestyles of the first Cincinnatians to make this neighborhood their home.

Back in time

With the development of properties along Avery Lane in 1910, the district became exclusively residential, apart from the Observatory buildings. The development of the district took place within a span of years from 1873-1923, grouped into three time periods:

I. **Initial construction** c. 1873 - 1880

II. **Major construction** c.1886 - 1904

(due to the expansion of the train commuter service)

III. **Last construction period** c.1910 - 1923

(following the annexation of Hyde Park in 1903)

Minimal changes to the neighborhood took place throughout the years. The area remains a fashionable residential neighborhood with a variety of architectural styles and an overall visual cohesiveness.

The characteristics that unify the district include: similar building height/scale, materials used, setbacks from the road, lot sizes, placement on lots and open space. These residences are generally 1-2 stories, frame built and single-family.



Period One 1873–1880

Initial District Construction

The buildings that began the development of the Observatory Historic District include the original 1873 Observatory building along with a couple residences along the southwest corner of Observatory Place and Avery Lane.





**3489 Observatory Place,
The Cincinnati Observatory: Herget Building
c. 1873**

The main building of the Cincinnati Observatory was built in the Greek Revival Style typical for academic institutions of its time. This style is reflected in its symmetrical façade with fluted columns and prostyle portico, along with its balustrades and side chimneys. The building was designed by prominent architect Samuel Hannaford in 1873, making it his first public building ever completed. Currently it houses a 16-inch Alvan Clark & Sons refractor telescope, built in 1904. The building is designed to ensure separation between the telescope and the structure, preventing vibrations from disrupting viewing. The pier extends eight feet below basement level.



3300 Observatory Avenue
c.1877 78

Once the foundation of an 1833 L-shaped farmhouse, this property was purchased by the third director of the Observatory, Ormond Stone at the start of the district's development. A strong example of second-empire styles, with a Victorian finish to the exterior and interior decorations, makes this home unique to its surrounding neighbors. Remodeled in 1939 by architect Charles Cellarius, who would go on to establish the look of Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, the Georgian influence is evident throughout the home. The most notable features include its mansard roof with iron decorations, porches, and central hall and stairway.




3458 Observatory Place c. 1878

During the term of Jermaine Porter as fourth Observatory director, this home was built in 1878 for the total of \$2,500.00 for assistant director Phillip Isham. The home had no plumbing, electricity or heaters but made up for it with a fireplace in every room. This is one of the few Victorian homes in Cincinnati with a major Italianate influence, highlighted by its strong emphasis on vertical design. The windows, doors, porches and rooflines all suggest a heavy Gothic influence as well. Its notable features include its decorative slate roof, exterior ornamentation, original fireplaces and tall windows and doors which make for a dramatic entry.



3459 Observatory Place c. 1880

As a result of early remodeling, this home blends a hybrid of different architectural styles that make it what it is today. Among the things that are original include the bay windows as well as the interior hardwood floors. The entrance of the home boasts Colonial Revival features blended with Italianate ornamentation. The entryway window has some Tudor influences. These stylistic choices were most likely due to the personal taste changes of the original owners, who kept the home in the family for generations up to the 1960's. Another notable feature is that it has many of its original fireplaces still intact, one even with the original cover.



Period Two 1886–1904

Major Construction Phase

These residences were built in part due to the improvement of local roads and utilities. Cincinnati and Eastern Railroads in turn, began to expand, making it an easier access point from Cincinnati. Five of the twelve residences in the district were constructed in a span from 1886-1904. This list includes the O.M. Mitchel building of the Cincinnati Observatory, constructed in 1904 with additions to be added in 1911-12.



3441 Observatory Place c. 1886

This home was once owned by Jermaine Porter, the fourth director of the Cincinnati Observatory. With a striking curb-appeal due to the number, shape, and size of its front windows, this home was a typical choice for an upper middle-class professional during its time. Highlighting its Victorian features, the home features a turret on the South West corner. Because of the repeated remodeling of the home throughout the years, the original floorplan has been altered significantly. One thing to note is that the present garage was built on the same foundation of the original carriage house.



3435 Observatory Place c. 1891

This was a home speculatively built by Jermaine Porter, fourth Observatory director, which may explain the star and moon decorations to the exterior. No longer showcasing its original colors of muddy yellow with maroon and gray trim, this home has a dominant Queen Anne style with heavy Eastlake influences. Eastlake would eventually give rise to the “Gothic” sensibility. The design of the home is dominantly diagonal with the fireplaces and bay windows placed at its corners. Remodeling of the home throughout the years includes the finishing of the second floor and the widening of the back porch, making for a full-sized rear entryway. The garage was built by the present owners.



3457 Observatory Place c. 1892

Despite its age, this home achieves a more modern look thanks in part to the many renovations it has undergone. Much of the original Victorian feel is being lovingly restored throughout. The Second Empire Victorian elements, as well as Italianate details are still present in the interior of the home. Notable interior decorator and landscape designer Walter Farmer owned the home from 1953-1991, his influence is still present in the home's appearance. The size and shape of the windows is something to note, especially the bay window, which is original and similar in design to many others in the neighborhood.



3450 Observatory Place c. 1895

Built by Streetcar magnate John Kilgour, this home is the only pure example of Late Victorian Colonial Revival in the district. Colonial Revival is typified with the home's expansive scale, calm presence and early American nostalgia. The emphasis on broad and horizontal lines gives it a New England flavor, further highlighted by the fan light over the door, wide arched passageways and a restraint of ornamentation. Due to remodeling, the home has been changed from the original floorplan but the overall impression still remains. Now a single-family dwelling, it was once divided into a two-family during the Great Depression in the 1930's.



Cincinnati Observatory: O.M. Mitchel Building c.1904

This is the second building built for the current Cincinnati Observatory and was named for Ormsby MacKnight Mitchel, the founder of the Observatory and the Father of American Astronomy. The building was constructed in two phases: Phase one was begun by Tietig & Lee architectural firm in 1904, when the Observatory acquired the Clark telescope. They needed a place to put the original 1845 telescope and began construction on the Mitchel building. Later additions were added in 1911-12 including a classroom, library and office space. The symmetrical façade and portico reflects Greek Revival style as well as its columns and transom window. Note the masonry blocks projecting at the corners of the walls, called quoins.

These can be either decorative or structural.

Period Three

1910–1923

Last Construction Phase

This period of construction took place after the annexation of Hyde Park to the city of Cincinnati.

This phase focuses primarily on the homes built along Avery Lane, a subdivision developed by Fred W. Cook. The time span is from 1910-1923.



**3326 Avery Lane
c. 1912**

This bungalow style home fits right in with the character of the historic district. A bungalow has open floor plans, low pitched roofs and the essential large front porch and was embraced by the builders of the Arts and Crafts movement. Although not much history is documented with it, it is one of two homes in the district that exhibits an interior garage.



3314 Avery Lane c. 1912

This home exhibits both Craftsman and Bungalow styled influences and is one of the only Tudor houses in the district. The home was designed by the Tietig and Lee architectural firm and was the second dwelling of Observatory director Jermaine G. Porter. Some of the well-known features of the home include a number of clipped gable roofs at different levels, large arched multi-paned windows and a stucco wall finish. Another unique feature of this home is the fact that its original garage is enclosed in the structure, quite the innovation for this time period. There is only one other home in the district with an interior garage.



**3290 Observatory Avenue
c. 1915**

This rectangular, brick home is distinguished best by its slate gable roof and central shed dormer with four-paneled casement windows. The home exhibits slight classical influences.



3445 Observatory Place c. 1923

This is another Tudor-style home featuring a stone arched opening with a large wooden door at the entrance. The home's exterior decoration includes a stone first floor and second story stucco accent. Typical of many structures in this style, this home also includes multi-paned windows that vary in size and placement.



Period Four 1995

New Construction

There are a handful of homes in the neighborhood that could be considered “new construction.” Many of these homes are located along Avery Lane. One home in particular is worth highlighting due to its design and style that match very well within the parameters of the historic district.



3451 Observatory Place c. 1995

This home was designed to complement its historic neighbors in the Italianate style that was popular in the 19th century. The formal lines of the home are balanced out by the detailing of the front porch and bay window as well as the decorative paired brackets along the cornice. Key features include its exterior trim, bay window and grand front staircase. This home was constructed on a portion of the property that once included the formal gardens of Walter Farmer.

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Herget Building

2. 3489 Observatory Place *(page 15)*

Mitchel Building

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