



Photos by George H. Ketteringham, courtesy of Ruth E. Ketteringham

The Charles F. Olney Residence (right) and Art Gallery, as they appeared around 1902. The house was initially built about 1870 by industrialist Thomas Lamson. Collector Charles Fayette Olney built an art gallery as an annex to the Jennings Avenue home in 1893.

Tremont pride stands up to Grace plans

by Carol Poh Miller
 HABITAT CONTRIBUTOR

Site of a great "national university" that came to nothing but left a legacy of such interesting street names as Literary, College and Professor; closely built with the modest cottages of mill workers and the mansions of mill owners; marked by the steeples and

CLEVELAND STYLES

onion domes of more than a dozen churches built by successive waves of immigrants — perhaps more than any other neighborhood, Tremont preserves the look and the feel of turn-of-the-century Cleveland.

Now, however, an interesting part of its past stands threatened as tiny Grace Hospital proceeds with its ambitious plan to create an international spinal and arthritic care center. That project likely would involve a significant amount of new construction and, what has neighborhood residents worried, demolition.

The 87-bed, private, non-profit hospital, located on West 14th Street just north of Lincoln Park, reportedly has signed purchase agreements with, among others, the Lincoln Park Investment Co., owner of the Pelton Apartments immediately south of the hospital, and the Ukrainian American Center Inc., owner of the former Charles F. Olney House and Art Gallery, on the north side of the hospital. Both buildings are significant in the history and development of this South Side neighborhood.

The Pelton Apartments represents a large and ambitious



A rare interior view of the Olney Gallery is captured in this ca. 1902 photo. The gallery was closed in 1907 and its collections given to Oberlin College.

apartment building of above-average design.

Designed by the prominent Cleveland firm of Knox & Elliot, the handsome red-brick complex features parapets with elaborate corbelling and battlements, bay windows and an entrance court framed by a rusticated-stone archway. (Knox & Elliot's other work in Cleveland includes the Rockefeller, Engineers and Standard buildings downtown, and the Hippodrome theater and office building, since demolished.)

Even more important, all but six of the Pelton's 33 units are occupied. Mary Ashdown, an ac-

tive volunteer who has lived there for 13 years, finds the building very convenient, adding, "There's a lot of tenement housing (in Cleveland) that needs to be torn down. But this is very well built. It's basically sound and well kept-up."

Avid collector

To the north of Grace Hospital, the former Charles F. Olney House and Art Gallery has a complex history that mirrors the fortunes — and misfortunes — of Tremont itself.

The house at 137 Jennings

Road (after 1906, the address changed to 2255 W. 14th St.) was initially built about 1870 by Thomas Lamson. Lamson relocated his carriage bolt business from Connecticut to Cleveland, establishing the nucleus of what would become the Lamson and Sessions Co., one of the city's largest nut and bolt manufacturers.

Lamson died in 1882, but his widow, Abbie Bradley Lamson, continued to reside in the house. When she remarried in 1887, her new husband, Charles Fayette Olney, joined her in Cleveland.

The musically gifted Olney had been a teacher, and had worked for nearly 30 years in the cause of popular education. According to one biographer, when his first wife died, leaving him childless, collecting became "a refuge as well as a passion."

Olney traveled extensively, collecting thousands of interesting and beautiful things, including paintings, sculptures and curios.

To accommodate his notable collection, Olney built an art gallery as an annex to his Jennings Avenue home in 1893. The beautiful Greek temple-miniature was designed by Coburn & Barnum of Cleveland.

About the same time, the Olney house was extensively remodeled from its original Italianate form into the then-popular Colonial Revival style. Added were a two-level wrap-around porch supported by slender, fluted columns, a Palladian window and, on the new hipped roof, a belvedere.

Both the Olney house and the gallery mirrored the artistic and literary interests of their owner. The oak mantelpiece in the living room, for example, incorporated intricate carvings of various musical instruments, while the gallery featured molded plaster bas-reliefs of mythological subjects and decorative wreaths encircling the names of classical writers and composers.

Ukrainian home

Olney's private gallery — which was periodically opened to the public — by no means represented a retreat from community life. By all accounts, Olney was "a citizen of rare

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usefulness."

Olney taught classes in fine arts at nearby Pilgrim Congregational Church, where he also led the choir. He was an active member of the Cleveland Vocal Society and of the Cleveland Architectural Club. In association with the latter, he urged, beginning in 1895, creation of a Group Plan of public buildings downtown.

Olney wielded a fluent pen and was a frequent lecturer. Both he and his wife were noted for their philanthropic spirit and zeal for the public welfare.

Olney died in 1903, his wife Abbie the following year. In 1907 the gallery was closed, and its collections given to Oberlin College.

The house and gallery changed ownership several times — for a short while serving as home of the Polish National Church — before it was purchased in 1920 by the Ukrainian National Home Co. to provide a cultural and social meeting place for Ukrainians.

Both structures were remodeled to accommodate their new functions. The gallery was made over into a small theater with the addition of a stage and balcony. Later, a section of the house's long porch was enclosed for use as a bar and party room.

The Ukrainian National Home celebrated its 25th anniversary with a special program on Sept. 3, 1944, but by the 1960s, much of the Ukrainian community had dispersed to other parts of the city and to the suburbs, and the complex was less and less used. Later, the bar was opened to the public, and much of the architectural charm of the house was concealed with aluminum siding. The gallery, however, and the house interior, remained substantially intact.

Residential character

Grace Hospital reportedly has offers pending on several parcels in the block bounded by West 11th and West 14th streets and Kenilworth and Fairfield avenues. So far, the hospital has been less than forthright in sharing its plans with the Tremont community, prompting formation of the Tremont/Southside Coalition for Truth.

At risk, many believe, are not only the familiar, historic buildings on either side of the hospital, but the residential character of the entire block.

"This is a historical, beautiful section of the neighborhood," says Tremont activist Jack Kenney as he recalls the loss of nearly 3,000 homes for the construction of highways in the 1950s and 1960s. "We are all upset," he says.

At the heart of Grace's plans for expansion is a recent management contract signed with Longford Hospital Management Corp., a division of Glenbeigh Inc., the Florida-based company that operates several for-profit hospitals in the Cleveland area for treatment of

drug and alcohol abuse.

The Grace agreement with Longford brought in Richard D'Enbeau as Grace executive director on April 1. D'Enbeau promptly recruited Dr. John Collis, a leading neurosurgeon at St. Vincent Charity Hospital, to initiate the Grace expansion.

The plans have drawn the ire of local health-care officials, who have charged that Grace's expansion will duplicate facilities already available in Cleveland, thereby further driving up health-care costs.

Officials at St. Vincent, meanwhile, are worried about the impact of Collis' loss on hospital revenue, since part of that income subsidized the substantial indigent care provided by St. Vincent.

Alternative plan

Early last month, Tremont West Development Corp., a local non-profit housing and economic development corporation, asked St. Vincent to come up with an alternative plan that would, according to executive director Robert C. Laycock, "destroy no buildings, displace no residents and avoid duplication of health-care services."

St. Vincent officials proposed that solution on June 15 at a meeting attended by representatives of the two hospitals, Tremont West and the Tremont/Southside Coalition.

According to Robert P. Range, senior vice president for corporate development at St. Vincent, "St. Vincent's position is not to block Grace's plans, but to suggest an alternative that we see as a 'win-win' situation — to see if there could be a solution to meet everyone's needs."

St. Vincent proposed that Grace revise its mission to meet community needs not currently being met — care for senior citizens, for example, or hospice care, neither of which would require expansion beyond the hospitals' present site; that Grace physicians' needs for high-tech equipment be accommodated by St. Vincent; and that historic properties adjacent to Grace remain under community control.

St. Vincent would agree, if necessary, to serve as middleman to buy and sell back the properties to the neighborhood at fair market value. (Grace reportedly has offered prices higher than market value for both the Pelton and the Ukrainian Center.) St. Vincent would even assist in the buildings' upgrading.

Richard D'Enbeau, Grace executive director, was out of town last week and could not be reached for comment. According to Grace Administrator Edward Baginski, "Grace has an option to purchase" the Pelton Apartments and the Ukrainian Center. Baginski referred all further questions to the hospital's public relations counsel, Robert Carter, of Robert Carter & Associates.

According to Carter, "Grace is getting information, advice and quotes from architects" for the



Photo by David M. Thum for the Cuyahoga County Archives

The former Olney Residence and Art Gallery as it appeared in 1981. Aluminum siding obscures the historic architectural detail of the house, but the gallery remains substantially intact.



Photo by Carol Poh Miller

The handsome red brick Pelton Apartments. As part of its plans for expansion, Grace Hospital has signed purchase agreements to buy the Pelton and the Olney House and Gallery, among other properties in Tremont.

rehabilitation of the existing hospital. An office building is also planned, he said. According to Carter, "Grace has not accepted (St. Vincent's) proposal." Carter said he was "not able to say" how hospital expansion would affect the historic buildings flanking the hospital.

Good neighbors

Is the St. Vincent plan realistic? "Yes," says Tremont West's

Laycock, "far more realistic than Grace's plan." Laycock reports that a tenants' group is investigating the feasibility of turning the Pelton into a cooperative apartment.

And the Ukrainian Center? Laycock sees it as "a historic building with magnificent potential. It could be a restaurant, a bed-and-breakfast inn, an office — or a combination," though he admits it has been "underutilized and undermaintained" for years.

In an attempt to delay any demolition plans, Councilman Gus Frangos has nominated the Pelton Apartments as a Cleveland landmark. (The Olney House and Gallery already is a designated landmark, and has received preliminary approval for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.)

The issues, to be sure, are complicated. Driving Grace's grandiose plans — which have been rumored to include an expanded physical therapy department, new research facilities and possibly a hotel — is the hospital board's 11th-hour effort to rescue a financially troubled and underused hospital. Grace's current census, according to hospital spokesman Carter, averages between 30% and 40% (or between 26 and 35 of its 87 beds).

The present situation contrasts starkly with Grace's own history. The hospital, which began serving the Tremont community when the Physicians' Hospital Association bought two old houses on West 14th Street in 1912, embarked on a campaign for a new hospital building in 1937. At the time, all of the hospital's 32 beds were occupied, mostly by neighborhood residents.

The local community then supported the hospital's plans. "Like good neighbors," the Plain Dealer reported, "they want the best for Grace Hospital."

Now, however, with Grace sharply deviating from its original mission of serving local needs, it is not surprising that the historic Tremont neighborhood wants the best, not for Grace Hospital, but for Tremont.

Carol Poh Miller is a historian and preservation consultant in Cleveland.