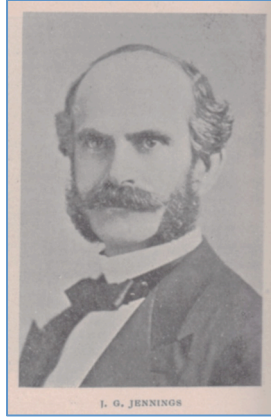


# John G. Jennings: His Life and Legacy in the Tremont Area



From Cristy, A.B., "The Cleveland Congregationalists", 1895

*By the Tremont History Project*

John Giles Jennings is likely among the most influential figures in the history of the Tremont area. He was born in Trumbull, CT in 1825 and moved with his family to Oberlin, Ohio in 1839. He came to the Cleveland and Brooklyn Township area in 1849 as a real estate investor and developer. He lived on 'Jennings Road' (now West 14th Street), which was named for him; his address was 194 Jennings Avenue.

In 1851, Jennings partnered with the local Pelton family to secure the land for Cleveland University, which drew some of the top faculty from nearby Oberlin College and aspired to compete with the great universities of New England. Jennings was the trustee for the Pelton family in the purchase of land to form the "John G. Jennings Subdivision of University Heights" later sometimes referred to as the "University Heights Allotment". This tract included 275 acres of land from local farmers towards the campus and grounds for this grand university, which ultimately lasted only two years due to the death of Mrs. Pelton and subsequent financial difficulties.

Following the demise of the area's University, Jennings partnered with the Pelton family in the sale of land from the 'Heights Allotment', including for residences around 'Pelton Park' (later becoming 'Lincoln Park'). He was involved in the highly contested legal dispute that resulted in this land eventually being acquired by the city of Cleveland and opened as a public park in 1880.

Jennings was a member of the group of Heights area residents that would found the origins of Pilgrim Church, as they started a Sunday School in the former University building in 1854, and later held many meetings at Mr. Jennings' home over the following years. This group grew rapidly and endeavored to establish their own church congregation for the area, and on November 13, 1859, University Heights Congregational Church was founded. Jennings continued as superintendent of the Sunday School for the church and served as Deacon for over 25 years. The Jennings family were among the most generous benefactors for this growing church, contributing to the construction of a large new building on Jennings Avenue which opened in 1870, and later in 1883 this church would be renamed Jennings Avenue Congregational Church. The influential Jennings family would provide further financial support for the church's ambitious new building, which began construction at the corner of Starkweather and Jennings Avenues in 1893, with John G. Jennings commencing the ceremonious groundbreaking event. Pilgrim Congregational Church, as it was named in 1892, completed this construction in 1894 for the building we see today.

John Jennings was also a founding trustee of the elegant Riverside Cemetery, which is the final resting place for many of the early 'Heights' residents. He died on Dec. 16, 1896 at the age of 71, and is buried in Section 5 of Riverside's graceful hills.

Jennings' son, John Gould Jennings, would also play a prominent role in the area, serving as the president and chairman of the board for the local Lamson & Sessions Company, as well as trustee for Pilgrim Church for over 40 years.