

Leaf Land Below the Terrace Park Bluff

By Esther H. M. Power

A forlorn chimney along the old road in Miami Grove Nature Preserve stands as a reminder of a time when summer people came to enjoy the river front before there was a nature preserve and before there was a year-round Miami Grove community. Some folks remember the chimney as part of the “Club Arcadie”, one of a number of clubs, cabins, cottages and campsites along the Little Miami River.

Although not the only owners of river front property, the Leaf family deserves recognition for its role and control of much of the southern and south eastern shore in Terrace Park. A closer look at samples of real estate transactions in that area helps to fill some of the gaps in available information. Much more is still unknown.

Michael Leaf, a widower of Terrace Park, leased to the Arcade Club in 1914 a southern parcel on the river described as “joining the grounds heretofore leased to the Linwood Country Club.” No more is known as yet about that Club. But the Arcade Club lease specified a renewable five-year term beginning January 1, 1915 to December 31, 1919 at fifty dollars a year. Michael Hoffman, President, and Joseph Dusenberry, Secretary, signed for the club.

Former residents of Miami Grove, Bobbie and Paul Scott, remember the building’s last days as a club when two old timers stayed there. After the club became inactive in 1946 the building was rented out as a house by Earl Runyan as agent for the owner.

It was during the rental period that Bobbie and Paul had the opportunity as children to go inside. They noticed the high ceilings with beading around the edge, the huge kitchen with large storage cabinets and the bunk beds. Outside there was a wrap around screen porch with an institutional size icebox. Two sets of wide steps provided access.

The chimney and fireplace stood in the middle of the room, not on an outside wall. The location of the fireplace, still observable in the standing chimney, indicates that it was above flood level. The Scotts report that the club was built on concrete piles high enough – maybe eight feet – to drive a car under the building.

It was Michael Turner Leaf who saw the value of using his property as a means of raising money and a source of income from recreational use. He had acquired the one hundred and two acre farm from his father, Henry, in 1871 by will. Henry had held the same land since 1846 when he had purchased it from John and Rebecca Kugler for \$6,000. This acreage included both what is now known as the Miami Grove Nature Preserve and the Edgewater area.

Michael added to his farm in 1882 a twenty-acre parcel joining his land on the northwest and containing the Smith-Lindell house. That land had come on the market at auction as Lot #20 of the Thomas R. Biggs estate and had been purchased by Joseph Foster of Clermont County with a successful bid of \$2,000, 2/3 of its appraised value. A year later Foster sold it to Michael for \$3,240.

As early as 1890 Leaf raised \$1600 by mortgaging a second twenty acre tract to the then recently chartered Milford Home and Building Company of which he was a member and stockholder. He renewed the mortgage at the end of the term. Many landowners mortgaged their property sometimes more than once.

The elbow in the river became a popular summer spot. Michael leased this prime location in 1897 to The Merry Young Bachelors of Cincinnati, Henry J. Stubbs, President. The term ran for three years at thirty dollars a year renewable for seven years.

Apparently, the Bachelors did not stay the full term because Michael and his wife, Elizabeth, leased the same property to The Crescent Nook Fishing Club in 1899. Although the rent remained the same, the renewal term was reduced to five years. L. E. Roettcher, President, signed for the club.

One year later Michael mortgaged the whole 102 acres to Henry Hodges of Milford for \$5,000. It was paid off in 1913.

Meanwhile, Michael found a new tenant for his elbow property – The Spotless Town Club. This ten-year lease ran from 1909-1919 for \$179.00 a year. The large increase may have been because there was a structure on the land or because of the addition of a little more land bringing the total to four plus or minus acres.

Before the term was out, legal complications arose and were settled by the court in 1913 with Michael agreeing to lease the property to the Edgewater Club for a renewable five-year term beginning April 1, 1919. By then Michael had died.

Michael made one sale in 1913 when Mary B. Andrew and her sister, Elyn B. Andrew, purchased 3.214 acres north of the leased land on the river for a summer cottage. The deed reserved for Michael a fifteen-foot roadway for access to and from his “Edgewater Camp and other premises.” That restriction remains in subsequent deeds.

When Michael died in 1916, he was living on the Smith-Lindell tract and left those 20 acres to his only daughter, Laura Leaf, who held it until her death in 1935. In addition to the land, house and buildings, she inherited her father’s “household goods, a horse named ‘Dick’ and the family phaeton.”

Michael’s sons inherited the rest of the Leaf land. It went out of family ownership in 1924 when Clifford Leaf and his wife Carrie sold it “subject to all leases for camp sites on the premises” to Henry Hodges who had held the mortgage in 1900.

(All source documentation is in the archives of the Terrace Park Historical Society.)

