
University Suburb, Founding the Village of Cayuga Heights in Ithaca, New York

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Good afternoon. Thank you very much for coming today to help me launch my book, *University Suburb, Founding the Village of Cayuga Heights in Ithaca, New York*. How fitting it is that we are gathering here in Marcham Hall, the village municipal building. Built a hundred years ago as a private home by Dorothy Cornell, granddaughter of Cornell University founder Ezra Cornell, Marcham Hall is emblematic of a close relationship between Cayuga Heights and the eponymous university. Called Stonecroft by its first owner, it was renamed Marcham Hall in honor of former mayor of the village and Cornell professor of history Frederick G. Marcham. My thanks to current Mayor Linda Woodard, the village trustees, and clerk Jeff Walker for making the building available to us; the village courtroom we are sitting in was once Dorothy Cornell's art studio.

The relationship between Cayuga Heights and Cornell is why the short title of the book you have come to hear about is *University Suburb*. I began to realize there was a story to tell about how the village came to be when I was a village trustee. What I propose to do today is show you some of the resources I used researching this origin story and tell you about them, leaving plenty of time—as any show-and-tell exercise must—for your comments and questions. Many of you live, or have lived here, or nearby; many of you know a great deal about the village and may have much to share.

In sum, as those of you who have had a chance to read it know already, the opening chapters of the book narrate the development of Cayuga Heights by Jared Newman and Charles Blood, two Ithaca law partners, Cornell alumni and trustees who went into local politics. The concluding chapters narrate the municipal incorporation of the village by Cornell faculty members and the coalescence of community life around the Cayuga Heights School in the early twentieth century. Land purchases, road construction, and landscape design take place against a backdrop of town-gown relations and politics in the City of Ithaca and Tompkins County. Every place on the planet has its own story to tell; the rich resources for the history of this one—the only village in New York

State founded in would otherwise have been just another faculty enclave in an upstate college town—compelled me to write about it.

Two secondary sources appear frequently in the chapter endnotes of the text: *A History of Cornell*, by Cornell University humanities professor Morris Bishop, and *Crabgrass Frontier*, a history of American suburbia, by Columbia University professor Kenneth T. Jackson. I've brought along my copy of the book written by Professor Jackson on Morningside Heights in New York City. You'll find a copy of the one by Professor Bishop in the collection of books written by residents of Cayuga Heights in Ithaca, New York, on the bookshelves here beside the fireplace. Morris Bishop and his wife, artist Alison Mason Kingsbury, lived in the chateau style house at the south end of Sunset Park in the village overlooking Cayuga Lake. A monograph about her by Jillian Piccirilli, with a forward by historian of Tompkins County Carol Kammen, has paintings by Kingsbury of seasonal views from the house on the front and back covers. When my husband and I arrived in Ithaca (in 1979), the house at 903 Wyckoff Road was on sale for \$90,000; when Carol Kammen wrote the forward for *The Life and Art of Alison Mason Kingsbury* thirty years later, it was on the market for over a million.

<https://rmc.library.cornell.edu/alisonmasonkingsbury/index.html> Alison Mason Kingsbury Bishop]

Maps drawn by three civil engineers in Ithaca named Crandall yield much of the information in *University Suburb*. Kirk Crandall drew a map of Cornell Heights overlooking Fall Creek between Cayuga Heights and the Cornell campus in 1898. His brother Charles Crandall, a member of the first graduating class of the university, who stayed on to teach, mapped the extension of Cayuga Heights Road north of Cornell Heights in 1902. And their nephew Carl, who stayed on to teach, too, after graduating from Cornell in 1912, mapped land in Cayuga Heights for close to fifty years. Carl Crandall began producing graphic images of what the village looked like shortly after it was incorporated as a municipality on half a square mile of land in 1915. I chose the compass rose, which he drew for this wall map when the village grew to almost two square miles by annexation in 1953, for the cover. You won't find many adjectives and adverbs in *University Suburb*, though I've chosen the word "university" to modify "suburb." I leave it to you to decide

what you think about what took place in this place. But I do find the hand-drawn Crandall maps “wonderful” and am “deeply” grateful whenever one of them explains the boundaries of properties described in deeds.

The voluminous records held in the Cornell University Library documenting the professional lives of developers Jared Newman and Charles Blood all but demanded a book. Newman, who was very much the senior partner, thought their joint real estate venture was important and wanted, very much, to be remembered for it. At one point, he even offered the editor of the *Ithaca Journal* the chance to publish a book based on ads he was placing in the paper under the heading “Cayuga Heights Notes.” His son, Ithaca lawyer Charles Hardy Newman, pulled together 41 boxes of correspondence, legal documents, accounting records, blueprints, maps, clippings, and more when his father died. Blood left fewer records than Newman, but they contain innumerable letters the partners sent each other, spelling out in detail what they were doing and, sometimes, what they thought they would do but didn’t. Many are upbeat; others less so, reflecting, for example, Blood’s qualms about mortgages they took to invest in land together when they were young men, or arguments over gas line rebates from NYSEG when each was in financial straits not long before he died.

To understand the real estate transactions Newman and Blood made in Cayuga Heights meant parsing many documents: most importantly, deeds found in abstracts of title summarizing the history of land ownership on Lots 88 and 90, two of the 600-acre plots of land in the vast Military Tract of Central New York given to veterans of the Revolutionary War. Newman and Blood created a title abstract listing land sales in Military Lot 88, known as the Renwick Tract on the west side of Cayuga Heights, in 1909. This contemporary copy is kept in the village safe. Newman made one for land east of Highland Road on Lot 90 in 1921, for which I used a copy from the library of The History Center in Tompkins County. It chronicles the early subdivision of farmland for suburban development in Cayuga Heights. If you live in a house built on or near The Parkway or nearby neighborhoods, your property may well be listed. Thanks to the Hubbell family, here’s a piece of an oak tree that once stood on the boundary line between Military Lots 88 and 90; you may well remember seeing the old tree on East Upland Road across the street from Cayuga

Heights Elementary School before it blew down only a few years ago. It figures prominently in a beautiful painting of the house at 109 East Upland by architect Arthur Gibb, which the Hubbells kindly allowed me to include in the book.

Along with maps, the primary source for road making in Cayuga Heights is a set of legal papers given to the village by local attorney George Russell. Russell clerked for Jared Newman and practiced law downtown in Ithaca for sixty years. He lived on Klinewoods Road near Community Corners, so when he dropped the papers off with the village clerk here at Marcham Hall shortly before he died in the early 1980s, he didn't have far to come. These documents tell the story of Cayuga Heights Road, Wyckoff, Hanshaw, Highland, Klinewoods, Iroquois, Northway, Remington, and Triphammer Roads, as well as The Parkway—how their routes evolved and where they would go. They are road applications that when approved resulted in layout orders issued by the Town of Ithaca Board of Supervisors. The Town Board was pleased to approve the applications because the cost of maintaining a suburban landscape was more than the rural town's shrinking tax base could afford.

The road making story needed to be teased out of these documents because it created the bone structure of Cayuga Heights extant today. Newman thought the legacy of roads he and Blood were leaving us, which would be extended north to the Village of Lansing and east of North Triphammer Road when the village grew after World War II, would last a thousand years. I have Sol Gruner to thank for confirming the route of the trolley line the partners ran through Cayuga Heights. Richard Kerr, a member of the Cornell class of 1972, produced this richly illustrated history *The Ithaca Street Railway* in his senior year. A rusted iron spike that was driven into the ground to secure a railroad tie, only to be dug up by village forester Fred Cowett while planting a tree on Highland Road in 2023, is currently on display in an exhibit about transportation in Tompkins County downtown at The History Center. (Sorry, I can't show it to you today, but don't miss the exhibit: it's great. What I can show you is the first bond issued by the village: for the first \$500 of the \$2,500 cost of sidewalk construction, paving and rerouting the trolley line on Highland when the railroad spike was new, in 1918.)

Mayors and clerks of the village have always taken great care of its municipal records, perhaps because Cayuga Heights is an academic community. Cornell law professor and first mayor of the village C. Tracey Stagg decided to save all the papers relating to the municipal incorporation in 1915 because he thought that someday they might have “historical value.”

Among the records Stagg and his contemporaries put aside are those of the Cayuga Heights Association, formed a few years before the municipal incorporation took place. One is a handwritten note on the personal stationery of Daisy Sandidge, a schoolteacher from Texas who built the Sigma Chi fraternity house on Cayuga Heights Road in 1913; she enclosed a contribution of two dollars to efforts the Cayuga Heights Association was making to deal with tent caterpillars and snow removal. Another is a typewritten letter on the official stationery of the United States Military Prison at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, from the prison executive officer, US Cavalry Captain Frank S. Barton. An alumnus, he had previously headed up the military cadet corps at Cornell and would soon be reassigned as commandant of the military training program at the university in World War I. He and his wife, though they would never build on it, purchased a double lot from Newman and Bood in Cayuga Heights that one day would be known as 507 Highland Road. Captain Barton enclosed a check for a dollar in his letter, sent wishes for good luck “in your war on the tent-caterpillar,” and said he would reimburse the association for any expenses “to spray fruit trees on my lots.”

The most interesting document relating to the founding of the village is, I think, this twenty-eight-page report on legal-size paper titled *In the Matter of the Proposed Incorporation of the Village of Cayuga Heights*. Addressed to members of the Cayuga Heights Association and circulated in six copies among twenty-five eligible voters, it was written by law professor and soon-to-be mayor Stagg. Stagg argued the case for incorporation so well in the report that when the vote was taken June 1, 1915, the proposal passed with 21 ballots marked in favor and one left blank. Among the points Stagg made persuasively were what he perceived to be the benefit of local home rule, convinced, as he was, that Cayuga Heights should have its own government rather than become part of the City of Ithaca.

What happened next during the founding years of the village is recorded in these two cardboard binders containing early board of trustees meeting minutes. Paper records since then, including village laws and ordinances, have been digitized by the Tompkins County clerk and made accessible from the public portal on the village website: <https://cayuga-heights.ny.us/for-residents/village-of-cayuga-heights-public-portal/>. Mayor Stagg, though village mayors in New York State were then called presidents, would be more than pleased. He and the two village trustees who served with him approved spending \$3.50 to purchase this embossing stamp in 1916; it still works perfectly, affixing the village seal on all official paper records.

Along with information available due to the diligence of mayors and clerks, researching early village history is greatly facilitated by articles and editorials in local newspapers. Newspapers supported political parties with candor back in the day, and the Republican *Ithaca Journal* (*Ithaca Daily Journal* until 1913) supported Republican Party stalwarts Newman and Blood throughout both their careers. Opposing viewpoints, which were responsible for the failure of Newman to be reelected mayor of the City of Ithaca in 1908 and Blood as judge and surrogate of Tompkins County a year later, appeared in the Democratic *Ithaca Daily News* and the short-lived, socialist *Ithaca Independent*. The *Cornell Daily Sun*, in which, to my knowledge, an unnamed reporter referred to Cayuga Heights for the first time as a “university suburb,” was another resource for local news. So, too, was the *Cornell Alumni News* under the editorship of alumnus Robert W. Sailor, who lived in Cayuga Heights on White Park Road and produced the first village directory in 1925.

In addition to proximity to Cornell, what distinguishes Cayuga Heights is the natural setting it shares with the university “far above Cayuga’s waters.” Fortunately, the network of village roads took shape at just the right time to take advantage of this picturesque location. While the roads and lots were surveyed and mapped by civil engineers, their placement was largely determined by the designs of two landscape architects whom developers Newman and Blood dealt with, Harold A. Caparn and Warren H. Manning. Both these men, Caparn from New York City and Manning from Boston, were important figures in the American school of landscape design pioneered by Frederick Law Olmsted in the second half of the 19th century. We owe the

curving network of roads in Cayuga Heights, confusing though it may be, to their vision. It wasn't easy to determine what each of these two men did because, as emeritus professor of landscape architecture at Cornell Daniel Krall explained to me was frequently the case with early practitioners, many of the plans each made were thrown out when he died. Records that have survived, however, make it clear that Caparn, whose papers, like those of Newman and Blood, have been deposited in the Cornell library archives, was primarily responsible for design of the roads and the streetcar route in Cayuga Heights. Proposals put forward by Manning, whose papers are held in the Iowa State University archives, were influential, particularly in the subdivision Newman named White Park, but they simply proved too expensive for execution.

So, there you have it: highlights of the material that made writing *University Suburb* unavoidable. I've not made time to talk about such resources as Cornell University faculty memorial statements, New York State Laws, Tompkins County public records, and much more accessed online and cited in endnotes. It was a gift to have so much available and the help of archivists, librarians, local history colleagues, friends and neighbors who guided my research, as well as the professional book design, editing, mapping and indexing services credited inside the front cover. A major regret is not being able to find the names and stories of the people who did the work building the physical infrastructure and houses in the village. Who, for example, was the unknown workman that drove that railroad spike into the ground for the Highland Road trolley?