Community Corners in Cayuga Heights

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Introduction

Thanks for coming to hear about the history of Community Corners in the Village of Cayuga Heights. Love Living at Home, of which I am an appreciative member, is our host this afternoon here in Marcham Hall, the village municipal building. My thanks also to the LLH board and staff, as well as the village mayor and clerks.

I'd like to begin by asking you a few questions. If the following obtain, please raise your hand, possibly more than once,

you are a Love Living at Home (LLH) member/

you live in Cayuga Heights?

or elsewhere in Ithaca?

Did you grow up here?

or in another suburb?

or in a city?

or a rural area?

Perhaps abroad?

Well, we're here to talk about a suburb today. As you may well know, more than half the US population lives in one. Suburbs have typically been defined as places where single family homes are built on roads that are connected to retail centers with low rise service and office buildings. The first American suburbs were developed after the Civil War by entrepreneurs who built roads and bridges leading out of cities to open up farmland for a growing middle class. Historians have called the process suburban land use conversion.

Cayuga Heights, distinguished by a beautiful setting in the Finger Lakes of upstate New York, conforms nicely to this pattern, but it is also distinguished by an intimate relationship with Cornell University. Only ten years after it was founded by Ezra Cornell in 1865, his son, Franklin Cornell, predicted that before long land across Fall Creek Gorge on the north side of the new university's campus would be highly valued, that "campus people will burst across the gorge in a stream and make those lands the choicest in Ithaca." By 1900, suburban development was underway north of Fall Creek, and in 1915 the Village of Cayuga Heights was incorporated on 280 acres, less than half a square mile, with a population of 130. By 1925, the population was close to 400; almost a hundred houses had been built, and the vast majority were owned by Cornell faculty or administrative staff. In tandem with the growth of the university as a research institution after World War II, the village grew in size to almost two square miles in 1953 by the annexation of new suburban neighborhoods around Community Corners and in the vicinity.

The story of how the village came to be is told in my book *University Suburb*. What I propose to do today is use two American girlhoods, those of Carrie Manning who lived here in the nineteenth century and Diane Heasley Van Dyke, who grew up here in the mid-twentieth century, to take a look at the suburban development of Cayuga Heights at the Corners. The numbered key to your map follows their stories; please stop me with your thoughts or questions. If you like, we can then go outside and look at a few of the buildings on the map and point in the direction of the others that are not so far away. I'll be referring to a diary that Carrie Manning kept in 1869 when she was thirteen years old; here is my copy. What I have to tell you about Diane Heasley Van Dyke, a contemporary of our generation known as Dee, she told me in person during an oral history interview over lunch in 2017. That took place across the road at the Heights Café when Dee was in town visiting from Honolulu, Hawaii, where she has lived since college. I am grateful to her for permission to share her story with you.

Carrie Manning was the daughter of Thompson Manning and Caroline Drake who lived in a farmhouse where the suburban house at 105 Warwick Place is found today (number 1 on the map); their barn was right off Burleigh Drive north of Winthrop Drive and Renwick Brook (good water source). Born in 1856, one of three daughters, Carrie experienced a girlhood surrounded by relatives in a large extended family who are frequently mentioned in the diary. (Her father was one of ten children and two of his sisters married brothers in the local family of farmers named Bush.) According to a state census of agricultural land use, in 1870 her parents owned over a hundred acres valued at $8,700: 90 acres of farmland and 20 of woodland. In addition, her father reported owning livestock valued at $1,100: 2 horses, 4 milking cows, 2 oxen, 5 other cattle, and 7 swine. The farm raised winter wheat, Indian corn, oats, barley and buckwheat, plus fruits and vegetables. A very old apple tree extant only a few years ago, it's been suggested, may have been planted in their orchard. In the fall, Thompson Manning could hitch the horses to a wagon and drive through Community Corners to Pleasant Grove Road and take his crops and harvested timber to grist and lumber mills in Forest Home. Community Corners was then known as Hanshaw Corners for the family who came there in 1790 and bought 90 acres of land on the east side of the intersection. (The Hashaw family farmhouse at 1011 Hanshaw Road is number 2 on the map.) Pleasant Grove Road was then known as Kline Road for the family who bought 170 acres on the west side of the intersection; the Kline family built the brick farmhouse next door to us today, at 832 Hanshaw Road where Love Living at Home formerly had its office (number 3 on the map).

Carrie's diary is full of details about a rich life lived in one place. She helped on the farm carrying wood and picking vegetables (beets and carrots are mentioned); she held a candle while "Pa" cut up three hogs butchered in November; she quilted, darned, and baked cakes. For fun, there were games like dominos and jumping rope. For Christmas, celebrated at "Uncle Charley's," likely 309 East Upland Road today (then the home of Charles Stroud Bush and her aunt Maria Manning Bush), she received a gold pin, a knife, a bottle of perfume, a handkerchief, and some candy.

Carrie attended school at Hanshaw Corners in the old schoolhouse that is a dental office at 1001 Pleasant Grove Road today (number 4 on the map); it was called the Kline School because it fronted on Kline, now Pleasant Grove, Road. A one- or two-room school was built there as early as 1823 after New York State law required the provision of grade schools for all children within walking distance from home. There were 130 such public schools in Tompkins County early in the twentieth century, nine in the Town of Ithaca alone. In her diary, Carrie notes that "Pa" often drove her to

school in winter, hitching the oxen to the wagon when there was deep snow. She wrote about formal recitation of memorized material in end-of-year exercises, about writing compositions, and playing with friends. Two front doors of the old schoolhouse, one for boys and one for girls, and a brass bell on the front porch, speak to us of the past. Sadly, when she was only 18 years old, Carrie Manning died of tuberculosis, which, as you know, was epidemic in the 19th century, with a particularly high death rate among young people. Buried in Pleasant Grove Cemetery (number 5 on the map), she shares a headstone with her mother who died six years later. Had she lived, she might have continued her education downtown at the Ithaca Academy, a private school that became Ithaca High School in 1879. There is a rich trove of information about Carrie's school compiled by Pat Longoria on the *Cayuga Heights History Project* website.

Dee Van Dyke, at home in Honolulu fifty years after Carrie's passing, is the daughter of the late Walter Cressler Heasley Jr. Her father came to Ithaca from Pennsylvania for college in the Cornell University class of 1930. An economics major, he was what was once called "a big man on campus"—president of his senior class, a track star and a popular fraternity member. It was thought at one time, Dee told me in our interview, that he might be suitable material to marry one of the daughters of Cornell president Livingston Farrand and his wife Daisy, the arbiter of campus social life. But no, Walter Heasley went back to Pennsylvania after graduation to work in the Philadelphia offices of several stock brokerages dealing in early mutual funds and married Katharine Ziegler of suburban Haverford, a 1931 graduate of Vassar, then a women's college.

Given that this was the depths of the Depression, it must have been difficult for Dee's parents to depend on her father's income from the investment industry during the early 1930s. In any event, they were lured back to his alma mater in 1939 when he accepted a job in the administration of alumni affairs and development, or fundraising, at Cornell. Proving himself very good at the job, as the national financial picture began to improve at the end of the decade, he was named secretary of the alumni association, credited in one account with strengthening the structure and activities of the alumni classes. During the demanding years of World War II, when it was all hands on deck within Cornell's central administration, he became President Emund Ezra Day's administrative assistant, and in the 1944-45 academic year, as the war was ending, he was even appointed acting university provost.

The eldest of five children, Dee was five years old when her parents arrived in town for her dad's new job. They first lived in university housing at the edge of the campus on Thurston Avenue (in the current Latino Living Center), then briefly in a rental home in Cayuga Heights on Highland Road around the corner from the Cayuga Heights Elementary School. In 1941, the year the United States entered the Second World War, when she was just starting school, the Heasleys bought a large parcel of farmland off Warren Road in the Town of Ithaca just south of the Lansing town line near the old farmstead where Carrie Manning once lived. By then, the Thompson Manning farm had been sold more than once and was owned by a granddaughter of Ezra Cornell and her husband who were using the land for dairy farming. Walter Heasley bought land in Ithaca as a canny investment. From his vantage point in the Edmund Day administration at Cornell, which embarked on tremendous expansion as a research university during the war years, he saw expansion coming in the market for local real estate.

In 1941, the growing Heasley family, now with three children, moved into the farmhouse on the land they purchased at 572 Warren Road, added on to it and stayed there after two more children were born. (Number 6 on the map.) Today, the old house sits next door to the Warrenwood Apartments. Renovated and enlarged, the bedrooms are rented to graduate students. When I first went to see it at the time I was interviewing Dee, who remembered fondly a swing still hanging from a tree in the front yard, it was a Chinese Cultural Center. Back in 1942, when they were new owners, the Heasleys listed their address in the Ithaca telephone book (remember those?) as Warren Road in Cayuga Heights Manor. Although Warren Road lay east of the Village of Cayuga Heights then and would when the village was enlarged by annexation in the 1950s, calling their upstate farm property a manor, though aspirational, must have made them feel at home in the area on arrival, already a part of its suburban transformation. Dee's mother joined the Ithaca Garden Club and entertained its membership for meetings and flower shows in a barn on the grounds.

Dee, her brothers David and Doug and her sisters Ceci and Sheila, all went to the Cayuga Heights School. The Northeast Elementary School, which takes up a portion of the old Manning farm much closer to where they lived on Warren Road, wouldn't be built until the early 1960s, and the Kline School at Hanshaw Corners that Carrie Manning attended, closed when the Cayuga Heights School opened in the early 1920s. (see number 7 on the map, between The Parkway and Hanshaw Road) Dee attended the Cayuga Heights School through eighth grade, the last class to do so before her younger siblings were sent downhill to Boynton Middle School in the Ithaca school system. If Carrie Manning was an ideal pupil, judging from her diary, Dee Heasley has not described herself as such. She told me about flicking a paintbrush across the room in art class one day in third grade and being made by Miss Hitchcock, the much-revered school principal, to return to her classroom wearing a sign around her neck saying, "I have misbehaved," which left her mortified. Like Carrie's school you'll find more about the Cayuga Heights School during the Miss Hitchcock era, also compiled by Pat Longoria, on the *History Project* website.

In 1947, when Dee was twelve, her father resigned from Cornell. He would be called back into service for a short time during the 1950s as an assistant to Deane Malott who succeeded Edmund Day as the university president, but he had evidently recognized when World War II ended that it was a good time time to make a living in local real estate. According to an urban legend, which Dee has confirmed, her mother told her father that the growing number of residents of Cayuga Heights needed somewhere to buy a loaf of bread and a pack of Lucky Strikes, their brand of cigarettes. With what would have been intimate knowledge gained while working in the office of the president, Walter Heasley knew Cornell University owned the land on the west side of Hanshaw Road in the old farming hamlet of Hanshaw Corners. (see number 8 on the map) (Sold by the Kline family to Cayuga Heights developers Jared Newman and Charles Blood in 1906, to farmer Albert Sheldon and his wife in 1911, the university bought the land on the west side of Hanshaw at the Corners in 1921.) The Heasleys bought 8.3 acres there in 1946, hired Ithaca architect Sherwood Holt to design a farmhouse style storefront, and in 1947 opened the Community Corners shopping center with the façade you see across the street today. (see the plan on page 11 of *The Story of Marcham Hall*) A Heasley grandson, Rick Hedrick, remembers helping lay the curbing at the edge of the front parking lot. Like so much of what we've touched on today, you can learn more about the Corners Community Center on the *History Project* website including reminiscences, one of which is attributed to author Valdimir Nabokov from his book *Pale Fire*. Dee can remember buying movie

magazines at the Community Bookshop owned by the parents of author Kirkpatrick Sale and butterscotch sundaes at Hill Drugstore.

After the Cayuga Heights School Dee went away to boarding school but chose Cornell for college to study art, entering in 1953, the same year the Village of Cayuga Heights grew by the annexation of Community Corners and land farther northeast almost as far as her family's property on Warren Road. Dorms were crowded after World War II, meaning she could only live in a women's residence hall for her first semester, which left her commuting from home second semester. But she pledged Delta Gamma Sorority, which enabled her to move into its North Campus sorority house at 117 Triphammer Road for part of sophomore and all her senior year. (number 10 on the map just outside the village boundary)

Dee knew Eleanor Malott, the wife of President Malott whom her father had worked for, while she was at Cornell. The Malotts came from Hawaii, and Mrs. Malott, when she learned that Dee had enjoyed a spring break trip to Bermuda and was interested in moving to a warmer climate than Ithaca offered after graduation, encouraged her to apply for a position teaching art at the Punahoe School in Honolulu. Told by the headmaster that he would hire her if she obtained teaching certification, she was hired after completing a one-year program funded by the Ford Foundation at Cornell and moved to Honolulu in 1957. A move that turned out to be for good. Having made a fine career teaching at Punahoe while raising three children, Dee has lived in Hawaii ever since, staying on in retirement. She came back to Ithaca to visit her parents, who downsized in 1966 to a one-story ranch house in Cayuga Heights where they lived on The Parkway until father's death in 1975 and her mother's in 1999. (number 9 on the map). In recent years, during visits to her hometown she has very much enjoyed spending time at a special spot in Sheldrake on Cayuga Lake, as well as visiting with her roommate in the Delta Gamma sorority house at Cornell. She and her husband reside in the brick farmhouse at the Kendal retirement community in Ithaca. Quite possibly the oldest house in the Village of Cayuga Heights at 2114 North Triphammer Road (number 11 on the map), it once belonged to relatives of the grandparents of nineteenth century farm girl Carrie Manning.