

THE AIA GUIDE TO COLUMBUS



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Introduction

Columbus Development History

Ohio's capital city began not as a pioneer settlement but rather as a speculative investment. When Columbus was founded, the area around it was largely wilderness. A small community on the west bank of the Scioto River, known as Franklinton, had been established in 1797 by Lucas Sullivant, a federal government surveyor. The high land to the east of the river, however, remained in forest.

Ohio statehood came in 1803. With a permanent capital not yet selected, the state legislature met at Chillicothe until 1810, in Zanesville between 1810 and 1812, and then again in Chillicothe.

In 1812, the state sought proposals for a permanent capital from communities within forty miles of Ohio's geographic center. Four Franklinton land owners who had acquired title to the "High Banks Opposite Franklinton at the Forks of the Scioto" submitted a proposal that offered ten acres of land as a new site for a statehouse, ten acres for a penitentiary, and construction of public buildings not to exceed \$50,000 in cost. The state accepted and Columbus was born.

The new seat of government had several north-south streets (Water, Front, High, and Third among others) and its northern and southern limits were what today are Nationwide Boulevard and Livingston Avenue. For many years, the new town had a frontier quality; tree stumps made passage along the streets difficult.

By 1815, as agreed, the Capital proprietors had funded the construction of a two-story brick statehouse with bell tower and an adjacent state office building at the southwest corner of today's Capitol Square at State and High streets. The population that year was about seven hundred. Travel to and from Columbus remained difficult, and growth was

correspondingly slow, until the National Road and the Ohio and Erie Canal's Columbus Feeder reached the town in the early 1830s. These routes of commerce, imperfect though they were (the canal, for example, was closed by ice for several months each year), spurred growth and development, and the population surged to some 18,000 by 1850.

A line drawing looking down High Street from Broad in 1846 shows a small town encircling Capitol Square. Houses and one-story shops are interrupted by occasional churches and the multistory mass of the first of three Neil House hotels.

The first railroad reached Columbus in 1850, and by the mid-1850s the developed part of the city consisted of much of the area within today's Innerbelt Freeway. Residential development was concentrated around Capitol Square and throughout the immediate area, as well as along East Broad and East Town streets, where the wealthier citizens built. Most of the great mansions close to the downtown are gone now, but a hint of what once was here can be seen at the Columbus Club at Broad and Fourth streets and at the Kelton and Snowden-Gray houses on Town Street. The Town Street mansions are now museums and open to the public.

In the "Alte Sud Ende" (Old South End), the growing German population settled in what would become today's German Village. An Irish Village that was coming into being in the North End near the train station would eventually be swallowed up by railyards, but the quaint brick architecture of German Village—as American as it is German—is a remarkable preservation success story.

Within forty years, the city's rail network was composed of some fifteen lines connecting Columbus to all points of the compass. The state canal system went into permanent decline during this time and was abandoned early in the twentieth century. The National Road was turned over to the states through which it ran and would not thrive again until the Good Roads movement emerged in the era just before and after World War I.

Clearly, rail transportation was the wave of the future. Columbus railroads provided access to coalfields and other mineral supplies south of the city and were a reliable means

of receiving other raw materials and shipping finished goods. Although the city never became a major industrial center comparable to Cleveland or Cincinnati, it was home to many different manufacturing enterprises, including makers of carriages, wagons, boots, shoes, foundry products, coal mining machinery, paint, glass, beer, and farm implements. Passenger trains on all the city's rail routes made travel throughout Ohio and beyond an easy matter.

By 1870, just over six square miles of land had been added to the city; by 1880, the urban area of Columbus was twenty-four square miles and extended about six miles north to south and about four miles east to west. The population of the city had grown to 88,000 in 1890, about a third of it of German heritage.

In addition to the factories that made all of the goods mentioned above, new office buildings using cast iron as well as stone and brick were rising three, four, and even five stories above downtown streets. Some, such as P. W. Huntington's bank at Broad and High, looked like castles. Others, such as Trinity Episcopal Church and the Hayden Bank Building on Broad Street, were even larger and more substantial.

But overshadowing them all was the Greek Revival Statehouse in the center of Capitol Square. When it was begun in 1839 to replace the original brick building, the original estimate was that the Statehouse would take two years to build and cost \$200,000. In the end it took twenty-two years to build and cost \$2,200,000. However, when it was done, it was one of America's great buildings. Recently renovated, it still is.

Within the city, a growing network of streetcar lines encouraged continued development outward from Capitol Square. Pulled by horses for their first thirty years, the streetcars were fully electrified by 1890 and were able to travel even farther. They created the "streetcar suburbs" of the early twentieth century, neighborhoods several miles from the center of town where people could live close to a streetcar line and have a reasonable commute to work. We can still see these neighborhoods in every direction from downtown. The houses—many of them quite large—sit close to one another. The newly emerging middle class in Columbus did not

drive to work. People walked to the corner and took the streetcar downtown to where most of the city's jobs, shops, and entertainment were located. In the suburbs one found schools, churches, and the great parks, of which Goodale, Schiller, and Franklin were the largest.

At the turn of the twentieth century, Columbus had nearly 126,000 residents and was known as a center of government, insurance, and manufacturing. It was also an education center. Capital University, established in 1850, was the town's first college, but it would not be the last. By 1900, Columbus was home to what would eventually become Ohio Dominican University and Franklin University as well as the Ohio Agricultural and Mechanical College, now known as the Ohio State University.

Columbus had a thriving downtown business district and well-built substantial neighborhoods that began at the very edge of downtown and extended for several miles along the main east-west and north-south thoroughfares. The urban area, about ten miles from north to south and eight miles from east to west, was in the form of an irregular cross, the axes formed by Broad and High Streets.

Early in the twentieth century, the automobile became the primary force shaping the development of Columbus, an effect that accelerated as time went on. As people relied more on the auto and less on the streetcar lines, new areas became built up and the cross shape of the city began to fill in and spread out into a more circular form. Auto-dependent suburbs such as Bexley, Upper Arlington, and Grandview Heights began to grow and to develop their own commercial districts, although downtown Columbus remained the focus of retail trade and business activity. During the prosperity of the 1920s, most new growth was in established suburban areas, but Columbus also continued to grow by annexing unincorporated land at the city's edge. The population in 1920 was 237,000, and by 1930 the population of Franklin County was 361,000, with most of those citizens living in Columbus.

It was in this era that downtown Columbus began to emerge in the form that we know today. A devastating flood

in 1913 put much of the West Side of the city under water. In the wake of the flood, a program of river control and bridge construction sparked the construction of a civic center for Columbus. A new city hall and police station were complemented by the privately constructed American Insurance Union Citadel, known today as the LeVeque Tower. A State Office Building and Federal District Court building followed in the 1930s.

The Depression slowed business development and population growth—between 1930 and 1940 the county's population grew by only 27,000. But with the start of World War II, Columbus and central Ohio, like much of the country, boomed with war work, hosting such major facilities as the Curtiss-Wright aircraft plant at Port Columbus Airport, and the nearby government supply depot.

In the postwar years Columbus would see some of its most rapid growth. Nearly all of it was in the new suburban areas that blossomed as farmland near the city was converted to housing and commercial strips. Because Columbus was not hemmed in by other municipalities—a condition that would prove a major problem for cities such as Cleveland and Cincinnati—it was able to pursue an aggressive annexation policy that kept the urban boundaries pushing ever outward. The process was greatly aided by freeway development. The Innerbelt around the downtown area came first, followed by the Outerbelt and the Interstate routes. These roads made it feasible to live fairly far from the city's center while still working there; indeed, downtown Columbus even today retains the greatest concentration of jobs in Franklin County.

With the freeways and the suburbs came shopping centers and a whole new series of urban and metropolitan parks, as well as new commercial office complexes and education centers. Some of these new developments were architecturally and economically innovative.

By 1960, the county's population was 683,000, most of it still in Columbus. Suburban growth, however, came at a cost. Urban neighborhoods were gashed by freeways. Jobs and businesses moved out to remote areas and investment in the

city core dwindled, though not as severely as in some other places. Columbus suffered all the urban ills typical of American cities in the decades from the 1960s through the 1980s.

Completion of the freeway system in the early 1970s further encouraged development of the suburban fringes. But at the same time a hardy band of urban pioneers began to discover the benefits of urban living. Areas such as German Village, Victorian Village, and Italian Village, where people found well-built homes at bargain prices, soon became the focus of revitalization efforts, even as the departure of retail and demolition of buildings for parking and “urban renewal” projects resulted in a downtown area of as much as 50 percent vacant land.

Since the late 1980s, however, renewed focus on downtown Columbus for office, retail, entertainment, and, in recent years, residential projects has meant a true rebirth of the central city. Condominium and apartment projects have added numerous living units, and thriving nearby areas such as the Short North and the Brewery District have added residential, restaurant, and entertainment space, encouraging a whole new generation of people to live in and near the heart of town.

During the 1990s and into the new century, this downtown rebirth accelerated, spurred by such major projects as the Statehouse restoration; the incorporation of Central High School into the new Center of Science and Industry (COSI); and renovation and expansion of the convention center. Completion of the Nationwide Arena, home of the city’s own Blue Jackets hockey team, has triggered many acres of new commercial and residential development in the Arena District, with positive spillover into the adjacent North Market neighborhood. As traditional downtown office buildings have seen tenants leave for new space in the Arena District and elsewhere, these buildings have become available for creatively designed loft-conversion apartments and condominiums.

Residential development in the Brewery District has continued and even accelerated. This neighborhood, as well as German Village and others, has suffered for many decades

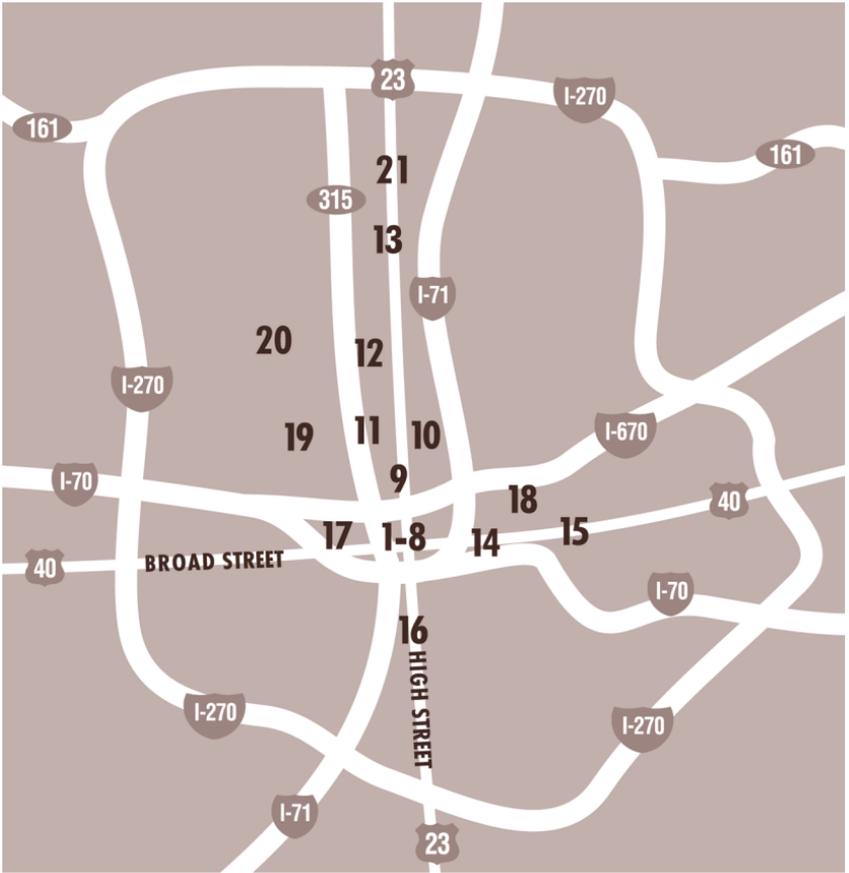
from being separated by the I-70/I-71 Innerbelt freeway from the downtown core. Planning for freeway improvements now is taking a serious look at caps that can carry streets over the roadway and provide new urban land for development. The successful I-670 Short North Cap, which relinked the convention center and the North Market district with the Short North neighborhood, provides a nationally important model for this effort.

Internationally known architects have left their mark on Columbus in projects such as COSI and the Wexner Center for the Arts on the Ohio State University campus. OSU's new Knowlton School of Architecture has received major attention in architecture and design circles. A huge amount of ongoing construction on the OSU campus is helping the institution hold its place as one of the nation's most important public universities.

Despite the loss of some important historical structures over the years, Columbus still offers a rich variety of historical and contemporary architecture. Some of the best of it can be seen in the pages that follow.

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- 6 DOWNTOWN NORTH HIGH STREET
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- 16 GERMAN VILLAGE HISTORIC DISTRICT
- 17 FRANKLINTON
- 18 MOUNT VERNON AREA
- 19 GRANDVIEW HEIGHTS & MARBLE CLIFF
- 20 UPPER ARLINGTON
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