

## STORY OF SILVER HILLS

*Silver Hill, rising majestically at the western end of New Albany, has always been a place apart from the city itself. In the earliest days it was the favorite haunt of adventurous youngsters and picnicking families, a shade-carpeted woodland dotted here and there with orchards and farm houses. Later, after the Civil War, the sound of hammer and saw echoed frequently along its quiet lanes as country homes were erected by New Albany residents seeking a retreat from the bustle of the industrial age that had come to the city. And then, in the early 1890s, a real estate boom developed that transformed Silver Hill into the residential area of today – now within the city limits – but still a place apart.*

Geographically, Silver Hill is the southernmost tip of the range of hills extending far to the north – a range of hills christened Knobs by early Virginia and Kentucky settlers who brought the name with them from their native state. The term Silver Hills was not often used in the early days, and when it was used, it referred to the entire range of the Knobs. That tip of the Knobs which today is called Silver Hill and Crestview was originally called Caney Knob from the abundance of cane which grew on its steep slopes.

It was not until 1892 that the name Silver Hill was applied only to the tip of the Knobs. In that year a subdivision project was begun and the promoters, casting about for an attractive name, decided upon the little-used term, Silver Hills.

How and why the name Silver Hills was applied to the Knobs is an unanswered question, but the earliest printed reference – in 1808 – uses

the name Silver Creek Hills, suggesting that they were named from the creek which had received its name as early as 1784. Other explanations of the name say it came from the silver poplars on the Knob or from the silvery haze which often hangs low over the hills.

Though there may be disagreement as to the origin of the name, there has never been disagreement on the beauty of the hills. They have been praised by John James Audubon, the famous naturalist; Carl Schurz, the German immigrant, author and statesman; a long list of travelers and visitors to New Albany, and by those who have chosen to build their homes there.

The modern history of Silver Hill begins with the formation of the Silver Hills Land Company in 1892 and the construction of the old scenic electric line to the top of the hill. The construction of the electric railway made the hilltop easily accessible and resulted in the construction of homes on all parts of the hill. Earlier attempts to subdivide the hill had failed because of the lack of transportation. One of the earliest attempts was made in the early 1850s by New Albany's pioneer doctor, Ashahel Clapp, who laid out the Knobs Plat at the top of Cherry Street, then waited in vain for the boom.

The New Albany City Council expected a boom, too. It authorized building Cherry Street westward from State, then proceeded to annex the whole hill. Some 20 years later the still mostly rural area was quietly excluded from the city limits.

But with the building of the electric railway and the simultaneous extension of electric lights, development of the hill was rapid. New residents flocked in; Oakwood Recreation Park at the end of the car line attracted patrons, many of whom came from Louisville for the scenic ride;

the Silver Hills Camp Grounds was opened as a place for yearly religious meetings, and the Highland Club was organized and built a clubhouse.

Soon the New Albany Waterworks, which had been opened in a quiet spot on the hill in 1876, was surrounded by the new suburban development. But there were still open areas and a favorite Sunday entertainment for many New Albany families was to ride the open summer cars up the hill and hunt nuts in the wooded patches.

In their Sunday strolls they might have wandered over into what is now Crestview to see Orlo Heights, a hotel built in the early 1880s as a resort from the summer heat of the city. Many families spent the entire summer at Orlo Heights before changing taste in entertainment pushed such quiet diversions into the discard. Orlo Heights, long unused, burned to the ground in a spectacular fire one October night in 1821.

And the Sunday visitors might have traced the path of the old wagon road which ascended the western slope of the hill from Corydon Pike to the Camp meeting ground. It was difficult to find since it had never been graded and, in fact, officially it did not exist. But wagon drivers who wanted to avoid paying toll at Corydon Pike tollhouse knew they could wind up the hillside and go down Cherry Street and completely avoid the toll gate. Now a new road cuts straight down the hill where the wagon teams made their tortuous zig-zag way up the slope.

Today Silver Hill is a blend of tradition and change. Incorporated now into New Albany, it retains a strong community pride that is proud of past tradition, yet looks forward to progress in partnership with the whole urban area. And still it is Silver Hill – a place apart.