

Mostly About People



Walhalla Section Derives Street Names From Old Norse Legends

By KARL B. PAULY

ONE of the most picturesque sections of Columbus is the Walhalla area along the southern boundary of Clintonville in the city's far north side. This deep, winding ravine, with its shady glens formed by tall, slender trees, its rock formations and wild underbrush, is all the more picturesque because of the mythological names borne by its steep, tributary streets—names like Brynhild Rd., Midgard Rd. and Gudrun Rd.

Anyone with a poetic sense at once recognizes the fitness of the names in view of the rugged beauty of the terrain. In recent years, many homes have been built on the brink of the ravine and many of them have addresses in Walhalla Dr., but the story behind the naming of the streets is not generally known.

Some years ago, one of the best-known business men in Columbus was Mathias Armbruster, merchant and scenic artist. Born in Wittenberg, Germany, near the Swiss border, he came to America at the age of 20, bringing with him memories of the mountains and ravines and woods of that picturesque section of Europe.

Soon after he came to America in 1859, the land of his adoption was riven by the Civil War and he spent three years in the Union army. But he was essentially a man of peaceful pursuits and one who was interested in the arts.

He painted scenery for theaters for a living and sang in the Maennerchor as a diversion and for its pleasant associations. His son, A. E. Armbruster, carries on the tradition today, serving as president of the singing society and running the scenic art business which his father established.

Mathias Armbruster read and thought much about German and Norse mythology and was well versed in their characters and legendary places.

ABOUT 40 years ago, Mathias Armbruster "discovered" a beautiful ravine north of Columbus which pleased his artist's eye and tastes and which, perhaps, recalled to him the beauties of his native land. He purchased a tract of land overlooking a ravine and built a summer home upon it.

The ruggedness of the terrain, combined with the peacefulness of the surroundings, made it a sort of heaven to him and he called his retreat Walhalla, which in Norse mythology was the heaven of Norse warriors slain in battle.

Finally, Mr. Armbruster decided to make his permanent home in that section and he eventually bought an old church in High St. at the entrance to the ravine which he remodeled into a residence. There he and his family lived for a number of years.

When he eventually sold his 29 acres to a real estate company and it began subdividing the land into building lots for the fast-expanding city, the subdividers asked him how he came to call the area Walhalla. This led to his discussion of Norse mythology with them and their decision to name some of the new streets for characters and places in the old legends.

One of the streets was named Brynhild for a legendary queen of great strength, a name which also is borne by one of the Valkyries in Wagner's Nibelungenlied. Another was called Midgard, which, in Norse mythology, was the earth, the abode of men. Still another was named Gudrun after a princess in a twelfth-century German epic.

Thus came these picturesque names to the streets of a picturesque section of Columbus.

THERE'S a story, too, in the old church which Mathias Armbruster bought and remodeled into a residence. The building has undergone several changes in recent years. Subsequently, it was made into an apartment house and just recently it was remodeled again and is occupied by the Southwick funeral home.

The land upon which the building stands was at one time owned by Jason Bull, one of Franklin County's pioneers. He donated the land as a site for a church and for a burial ground. The church was, of course, far out in the country, but it flourished and was the forerunner of North Methodist Church.

During the Civil War it was a station on the underground railway at which fugitive slaves, en route to Canada, paused for rest and food. Not many years ago, a colored woman, working as a domestic in a Clintonville home, recalled that her mother had said that she had spent her first night out of slavery under the roof of the old church at the corner of N. High St. and Walhalla Dr.

The old burial ground is still there, behind the building, although few who pass are aware of it. It lies, sequestered, a sort of Walhalla in itself.