

Youngstown's Crandall Park

An Interwar Speculative Neighbourhood and Stability in a Landscape of Boom and Bust

Johnathan A. Farris

Assoc. Prof., Department of Visual and Dramatic Arts, Youngstown State University, jfarris01@ysu.edu

Abstract

Youngstown, Ohio, a small U.S. city midway between Cleveland and Pittsburgh, saw an unprecedented increase in population between the World Wars due to industrial development. In the 1910s, the city busily prepared for expansion, and the Realty and Guarantee Trust Company, local government, and a handful of rural landowners prepared for the development of a new suburb for the entrepreneurial elite and upwardly mobile to the north. The neighbourhood of Crandall Park, anchored by an eponymous park, took form based on a handful of public/private agreements and some boilerplate deed covenants. Within this framework, private clients hired various contractors and architects to create a great variety of houses in terms of style, type, and size. Though only a loosely planned speculative venture, Crandall Park had become one of Youngstown's most desirable neighbourhoods by the Great Depression. With the departure of the steel mills in the late 1970s, Youngstown's landscape changed drastically. The city depopulated, and its demographics shifted, yet the fabric of Crandall Park is notably intact. This paper proposes certain of Crandall Park's qualities brought about by its Interwar inception (particularly as related to diversity and variety) have allowed it to remain a stable presence on Youngstown's landscape.

Keywords

Interwar suburb, stability, planning diversity, speculative developments

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INTRODUCTION

Youngstown, Ohio, is a small city located midway between Cleveland and Pittsburgh. Between the World Wars, the city saw an unprecedented increase in population due to the development of steel and other heavy industries, increasing in population from just over seventy-nine thousand people in 1910 to just over one hundred seventy thousand in 1930.¹ The city prepared for expansion, and the Realty and Guarantee Trust Company, local government, and a handful of rural land owners prepared for the development of a new suburb for the elite and upwardly mobile to the north of the city as it then existed.² The suburb (fig. 1) would be anchored by a new public park, named Crandall Park after donors of the land.³ A loosely planned speculative venture, Crandall Park had become one of Youngstown's most desirable neighborhoods by the Great Depression. When the steel mills closed in the late 1970s, many areas of Youngstown were abandoned to blight, and subsequently an aggressive demolition policy emerged, leaving great swaths of the city's neighborhoods fragmentary. Though Crandall Park itself faced demographic and economic changes, it has remained one of the most intact districts. This paper concludes that Crandall Park's qualities that were brought about by its Interwar inception (particularly as related to diversity and variety) have allowed it to remain a stable presence on Youngstown's architectural landscape.

THE NEIGHBOURHOOD TAKES SHAPE

The neighborhood surrounding Crandall Park was part of a larger northward expansion of the city's middle and upper classes into the high and flat terrain between the Mahoning River Valley to the east and its tributary Crab Creek to the west, both flanked with steel mills and other factories.⁴ Downtown is situated in a valley along the Mahoning River and is laid out at approximately forty-five-degrees off the cardinal axes. The first phase of northern expansion, development around thirty-four-acre Wick Park around 1900, shifted the grid back to the cardinal directions.⁵ Running through the middle of the northern heights and bounding Wick Park on one side is Fifth Avenue (in a city without a fourth or sixth avenue), the spine for further northward expansion, initially limited by a ravine known as Andrews Hollow.

In 1910, the Realty Guarantee and Trust Company (aka the Realty Trust Company, aka the Realty Company) launched a plan to develop the area around Andrews Hollow and points further north up to the county line with a proposal to the city.⁶ The trust company had established a consensus among the landowners in the vicinity of the gorge to donate it and surrounding land for the purpose of a public park, to be bounded between undulating streets named Tod Lane and Redonda (now Redondo).⁷ This had importantly received the blessings of Volney Rogers, the force behind the city's 1890s development of Mill Creek Parks, an innovative early park district.⁸ The official communication from the trust company to the city outlined the deal to be struck:

“We will agree...to improve the two streets... by doing at our own expense and cost, all of the grading, laying of sewers, putting in the side-walks and curbs and paving them with Bessemer brick all to be done under the directions of the City Engineer.... In consideration of this gift...all we ask the city to do, is to agree that sometime in the future but no longer than five year from its acceptance of this land for a park, that it build or cause to be built across “Andrews Hollow” where Fifth Avenue extended on its present course, would cross the same, a proper and adequate Bridge...”⁹

The ordinance enacting this was approved on October 10, 1910.¹⁰ Funds had been raised for platting and subdividing around the park by 1911 but further development of the plans was slow to emerge.¹¹ By 1915, the open spandrel concrete bridge had at last been constructed, opening development beyond the ravine, and finalizing the platting of the new suburb had begun, as reflected in a map from the city atlas (fig. 2).¹² The new streets relieved the northward march of the grid not only with the irregularly shaped park and flanking Redondo Road and Tod Lane, but also with curved terminations to Goleta and Catalina (fig. 3) Avenues, longer blocks, and some short dead-end streets. The majority of new streets received names redolent of sunny California.

The park began as scenic open greenspace, with a scattering of native trees, mainly oaks and maples. An allée of London plane trees (a hybrid species resistant to pollution) was added along Tod Lane and Redondo. A small Colonial Revival pavilion was added to the park in 1930 and the WPA produced a rustic picnic shelter on the north side of the park near Fifth Avenue in 1936.¹³ Lots across from the park and then along Fifth Avenue (particularly where it divides into a proper boulevard) became sought after by the city’s established and upwardly mobile families. Additional attractions for some inhabitants were the adjacent St. Edward’s Catholic Church (1917) on the eastern edge of the district and a nearby elementary school.

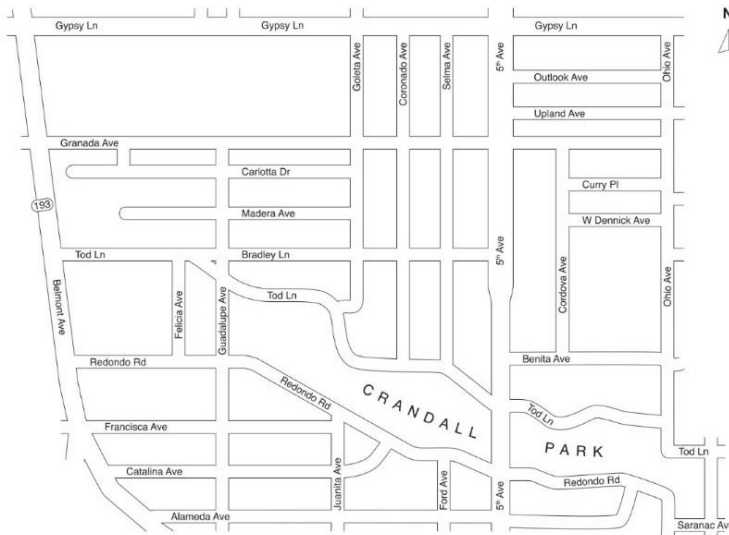


Fig. 1. Street plan of the Crandall Park neighbourhood in Youngstown, Ohio, as it exists today.

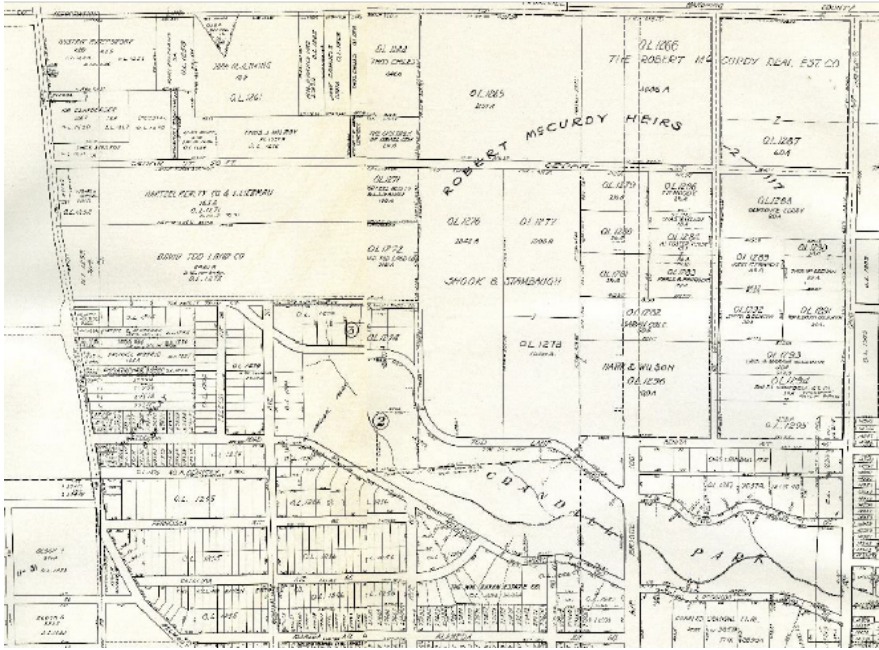


Fig. 2. Map of the Crandall Park neighbourhood as it was begun to be platted. This is compiled from two separate pages of the 1915 city atlas.



Fig. 3. The Catalina Avenue "curve." A scenic vista in the irregular plan surrounding the park, this shows the original Bessemer brick road.

CREATING THE STREETSCAPES

The Realty Guarantee and Trust Company had one additional role in shaping the neighbourhood appearance. It controlled building type and lot size and implemented other zoning regulations within the deeds it generated for sale to the prospective homeowners. Lots on Fifth Avenue, lots adjacent or facing the park, and near Gypsy Lane (the county line road northern boundary) generally were larger, and often dictated a larger minimum size for the house. The specified setback of the house from the street generally reserved more space for front yards than back yards. A deed for a typical lot across from the park, which would have a mid-sized (two thousand square foot) house built upon it, reflects the overall format of the boilerplate text generated by the realty company:

*"...said premises should be used and occupied for private residence purposes only; that no double house, flat, terrace, apartment house, duplex house, or other form of community dwellings and no business or commercial building or block shall be erected on said premises...; that not more than one, one-family dwelling house shall be erected or placed on said premises; that such... shall be not less than nine hundred sixty (960) square feet in size on the ground, which dimensions shall be exclusive of open porches, windows, bays, steps, garage, or any excavation thereunder; that no building of any kind shall be erected or placed so that any part of the same... shall be within fifty-five (55) feet from the line of the street to the body of the house, ...and that said dwelling house to be erected... shall be not less than a two story building."*¹⁴

Variations of this wording (with variations according to the status of the street—Corodova Avenue and western Tod Lane, for example, were worded to accommodate duplexes as part of the scheme and smaller back streets like Felicia Avenue allowing one story construction) appeared in every deed. This was true not only of the original Realty Guarantee and Trust streets, but other realty companies that took charge of later streets added to the neighbourhood plan.¹⁵ This frame of deed regulation allowed a variety of people to chose lots and built houses expressing their domestic aspirations. Dwellings in a great variety of sizes (ranging from one to six thousand square feet) and shapes (drawn from Arts and Crafts and a range of academic revival styles, including Colonial Revival, Tudor/Medieval Revival, Mediterranean Revial, and Chateaesque, but also including simple vernacular structures) soon lined the streets. The great variety of domestic possibilities attracted corporate executives and downtown business owners, but also brick masons, fire chiefs, confectioners, and the upper tier of skilled industrial workers.

While the first house facing the park and many of the grand houses on Fifth were built by Youngstown's "Old" British-descended Protestant families, a substantial number of first-generation immigrants chose to build in the neighborhood during its first generation, ensuring a social inclusiveness from the beginning.¹⁶ A group of prominent Jewish businessmen who had been born in Central or Eastern Europe claimed lots on Tod Lane, near the Reformed Rabbi Isador Philo on Selma, and on the east side of Fifth and south side of Outlook. The proximity of St. Edward's Church also drew upwardly mobile Catholic immigrants to the area. Two prominent Italian wholesale grocers' residences faced each other across the park and eight Italian

families (mostly in the building trades) lived dispersed to the north. First and second generation German and Irish immigrant building contractors and suppliers were another prominent presence. Inhabitants of the Catalina Avenue “curve” (fig. 3) with only one exception, fit this category and worked out of home offices.¹⁷ Leo Linberger, whose contractor father Frederick had immigrated from Baden, Germany in 1889, lived on and practically shaped the streetscape of Madera Avenue’s cottages through his virtuoso masonry work (fig. 4).

The neighbourhood was on the surface socially open enough by the 1930s to welcome anyone of the appropriate means or status. However, most deeds in the neighborhood carried a “race clause”:

“...the grantees herein, their heirs or assigns, are firmly bound to the agreement that this lot or no part thereof shall ever be sold, leased, or occupied by a member of the negro race, except than as an occupant may permit a chauffeur or domestic servant to occupy a room or rooms in said residence building or garage, but only during the term of such service.”¹⁸

However, not every deed carried such specifications, possibly because of preferences of the original landholders when the lots were subdivided. The last inter-war house to be built facing the park on Tod Lane added to neighbourhood diversity, as the Colonial Revival at number 514 was for William R. Stewart, a notable African-American lawyer and state legislator.¹⁹ African-American presence in Crandall Park was however contentious enough for Rabbi Philo’s grandson to have been informed that “certain people” objected to him playing with the daughter of the African-American maid who served the family across the street.²⁰



Fig. 4. Streetscape of Madera Avenue’s fairy tale cottages, attributed to contractor Leo Linberger.

ASSESSMENT AT MID-CENTURY

In 1938, when the Home Owner's Loan Corporation, a Depression-era US government agency founded to stabilize housing prices, produced its report on and "redlining" map of Youngstown (fig. 5), Crandall Park was one of only two neighbourhoods inside the city limit to possess areas ranked in the best category (indicated in green).²¹ This sort of report outlined which areas could readily receive homeowners' loans based on neighbourhood qualities but also alas the ethnicity and occupations of their inhabitants. The product was a prolonged institutionalized discrimination, particularly against African Americans, in obtaining means of home ownership.²²

The perceptions of Crandall Park in the 1938 report were not entirely accurate, and often distorted historical truth. The lines between the first-ranked (green, dubbed by the surveyor "Logan Brook and 5th Avenue") and second ranked (blue, dubbed by the surveyor "Old Crandall Park") districts were arbitrary, dividing parts of the city that were part of a single development and blending historically separate areas. Substantial houses inhabited by established white collar families fell within the second ranked districts. The only apparent justification for the drawing of the lines between the two were proximity to racial integrated public schools.²³ Additionally, the surveyor overlooked the presence of the neighbourhood's one African-American homeowner and underestimated foreign-born families at only 5% in the "A" ranked zone and 10% in the "B" ranked zone, discussing only the offensively worded "infiltration of High Jewish population" in the former and the "infiltration of middle class Jewish people" and Italian immigrants in the latter.²⁴ These families had not "infiltrated" but were original homeowners who had helped build the neighbourhood. The Home Owner's Loan Corporation did state that plenty of lots left room for further building. Carlotta Avenue, for example, wasn't even built upon until the post-war period, and the last house to appear on the eastern side of Fifth Avenue arrived in 1969. Substantial later construction indicated continued desirability.

CONCLUSION: STABILITY IN AN ERA OF DECLINE

On September 19, 1977, known in Youngstown as "Black Monday," Youngstown Sheet & Tube abruptly shuttered its Campbell Works, putting thousands out of work. This was followed by the end of that decade by the departure of U.S. Steel, and by the mid-1980s there was just a vestige of heavy industry left in the city. This has precipitated Youngstown's long population decline. Current inhabitants hover at just over a third of the population of the mid-20th century.

As real estate prices declined and many families sought work elsewhere, the demographics of the Crandall Park neighbourhood changed. Because the racially restrictive deed covenants were struck down, African American families seeking more spacious and sturdy housing made purchases as soon as the mill closing out-migration began.²⁵ However, professional class white inhabitants still choose to remain in Crandall Park, reflecting a tradition of acceptance originating out of the neighbourhood's immigrant roots. The district's postal code now indicates an African American majority of about fifty-seven percent.

Since 2006, the city of Youngstown has sought to manage its decline strategically.²⁶ Rather than allow abandoned houses to attract urban blight and maintain infrastructure unsupported by revenue, the city in partnership with the Mahoning County Land Bank embarked on a vigorous program of demolition. The number of demolitions in a neighbourhood therefore serves as a good measure of its resilience. Only slightly more than 6% of Crandall Park's housing stock has been demolished in the period between 2016 and 2021.²⁷ This compares to nearly a third of housing stock demolished elsewhere in the city's North Heights district, where houses were of comparable size but laid out in regular grids. It also appears favourable compared to the other "good" district within city boundaries on the Home Owner's Loan Corporation map, which has lost over 20% of its stock to demolitions. Of the Pre-World War II neighbourhoods in the city, it also commands the highest median occupied home value, although some post-war neighbourhoods have higher-priced homes.²⁸

To what then does Crandall Park owe its stability? Since its inception, the district has flourished because of its spatial and visual variety. Houses range from just over a thousand to over six thousand square feet. The lots they occupy can range from less than a fifth of an acre to over an entire acre. The heart of the neighbourhood is a park whose meandering edges provide vistas and scenic surprise. Where orthogonal streets were employed, long blocks and streets of limited run discouraged disruptive traffic to a degree. While deed stipulations broadly funnelled house size and configuration, individual homeowners were free to choose any configuration or style of residence. All of this lent the neighbourhood a distinctive character within the city. By catering to variety and diversity, Crandall Park ensured a level of attractiveness to generations of diverse homebuyers and maintains an exceptional place in an historic landscape of boom and bust.

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DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTOR(S)

Johnathan Farris is associate professor of art history at Youngstown State University. He is the author of *Enclave to Urbanity: Canton, Foreigners, and Architecture from the Late 18th to the Early 20th Centuries* (Hong Kong University Press, 2016). Dr. Farris's previous research chiefly focuses on exchanges between Asia and the West from the 17th through the early 20th centuries, but during the pandemic he has turned his attention to his own neighborhood in Ohio. He holds a B.A. from Yale, an M.A. from the University of Virginia, and a Ph.D. from Cornell University.

ENDNOTES

1. *Thirteenth Census of the United States—1910, Population Vol. 3, Report for Ohio*, p. 363, and *Fifteenth Census of the United States—1930, Population, Vol. 1, Report for Ohio, Table 12*, p. 478.
2. See Realty Guarantee and Trust Company, *Crandall Park* [promotional booklet] (self published, mid-1920s), Mahoning Valley Historical Society Archives.
3. *Youngstown Vindicator*, July 16, 1951.
4. These included along the Mahoning, Carnegie Steel Company's Ohio Works, Briar Hill Steel Company, and in nearby Girard, Ohio Leather, and along the Crab Creek tributary Republic Iron & Steel, Truscon Steel, The Republic Rubber Co., and General Fireproofing.
5. Joseph G. Butler, Jr., *History of Youngstown and the Mahoning Valley, Ohio* (Chicago and New York: American Historical Society, 1921), Vol. 1, 402.
6. Youngstown City Clerk's Office, *Communication Sheets*, No. 13929. This is a letter on Realty Trust letterhead from the Realty Trust Company signed by its Secretary, W. B. Hall, proposing the development scheme.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.* and Youngstown City Clerk's Office, *Communication Sheets*, No. 13931. For more on Mill Creek Parks see John C. Melnick, *The Green Cathedral: History of Mill Creek Park*, Youngstown, Ohio (Youngstown: Youngstown Lithographing, 1976).
9. Youngstown City Clerk's Office, *Communication Sheets*, No. 13929.
10. Youngstown City Clerk's Office, *Ordinances*, No. 14082
11. *Youngstown Vindicator*, February 9, 1911. and Butler, *History of Youngstown and the Mahoning Valley*, Vol. 1, 238-241. This could well have been because of resources being pulled towards repairing damage from the catastrophic floods of March 1913.
12. In spring of 1914, the city council finally voted \$50,000 bond for the Andrews Hollow bridge. *Youngstown Vindicator*, April 21, 1914.
13. Youngstown North Side Citizens Coalition Volunteers and Judith B. Williams, "Crandall Park—Fifth Avenue Historic District," National Register of Historical Places Registration Form, Section 8, 4. The WPA pavilion is conveniently signed and dated over its hearth.
14. "Executrix 's and Trustee's Deed from Henry K. Wick by Extrx etc. to James E. Roach et al." Mahoning County Deed Book 396, 416-418.
15. Notably Madera, Upland, Outlook, and Carlotta Avenues.
16. As part of his study of the neighborhood, the author compiled individual pre-World War II histories for each of the houses. These are based upon United States Census records for 1920, 1930, and 1940, Burch Directory Company's Youngstown Official City Directory (1910-1936 passim.), Joseph G. Butler, Jr., *History of Youngstown and the Mahoning Valley, Ohio*, and when possible oral history interviews.
17. This is indicated by listings and advertisements in the Burch Directory Company's Youngstown Official City Directory, most notably during the 1920s.
18. "Executrix 's and Trustee's Deed from Henry K. Wick by Extrx etc. to James E. Roach et al." Mahoning County Deed Book 396, 416-418.
19. United States Census for 1940. and "Atty. William R. Stewart, 93, Dies; Dean of City's Lawyers" in *Youngstown Vindicator*, April 5, 1958, 1-2. His presence held enough visibility for the newspaper to flatter his rose garden in his obituary
20. Philo Washburn, interviewed by Johnathan Farris 6/11/2021.
21. Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC), Residential Security "Redlining" Map Area Descriptions, Youngstown area, Ohio (1938), and Area Descriptions for Youngstown area, Ohio, 1938. Home Owners' Loan Corporation, box 25, City Survey Files, Record Group 195: Records of the Federal Home Loan Bank Board, National Archives II, College Park, Maryland. See also Jennifer Rodriguez, "1938 Report Shows How Redlining Prevented Growth in Youngstown," WKBN News. Jan. 24, 2022. <https://www.wkbn.com/news/local-news/1938-report-shows-how-redlining-prevented-growth-in-youngstown>. The other of the "best neighborhoods" was the "Cohasset District," which featured substantial houses with scenic views of Mill Creek Park, on even larger lots than in Crandall Park, but limited by the previously implemented gridded southern expansion of the city. The largest blocks of neighbourhoods in the best category are further to the south, outside of city limits, and well beyond substantial impact from the heavy industries along the Mahoning River (as the report duly indicated, one of the few drawbacks of Crandall Park was that it was in the path of air pollution from the steel mills).
22. *Ibid.*
23. Area Descriptions for Youngstown area, Ohio, 1938. Home Owners' Loan Corporation, box 25, City Survey

Files, Record Group 195: Records of the Federal Home Loan Bank Board, page on "Old Crandall Park, B1."

24. *Ibid.*, pages on "Logan Brook & Fifth Ave, A1" and "Old Crandall Park, B1."

25. This was accomplished by the U.S. Supreme Court case of *Shelley v. Kraemer*, 334 U.S. 1 (1948), and was reinforced by the Civil Rights Act of 1968

26. This topic has been amply covered in news media and some academic sources. See for example Christopher Swope, "Smart Decline" in *Governing*, November 2006, Vol. 20 Issue 2, p46- 52., Timothy Aeppel, "As Population Declines, Youngstown Thinks Small" in *Wall Street Journal*, May 3, 2007., and Brent D. Ryan and Shuqi Gao. 2019. "Plan Implementation Challenges in a Shrinking City: A Conformance Evaluation of Youngstown's (OH) Comprehensive Plan With a Subsequent Zoning Code." *Journal of the American Planning Association* 85 (4): 424–44. See also the Mahoning County Land Bank website, <https://mahoninglandbank.com>.

27. Data provided courtesy of city of Youngstown, Mahoning County Land Bank, Mahoning County Auditor, and YSU Center for Applied GIS (with special thanks to John Bralich). The demolitions have notably been mostly on the neighbourhood's borders and among the duplex rental properties on Cordova Avenue.

28. *Ibid.*

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IMAGE SOURCES

Fig. 1 Map drawn by Shann Larsson.

Fig. 2 William Gutknecht, *Atlas of Mahoning County, Ohio, and Hubbard, Liberty and Weathersfield Townships of Trumbull County*. Youngstown, OH: The Youngstown Arc Engraving Co. and The Vindicator Printing Co., 1915, plates 2 and 3 combined details.

Fig. 3 Photo by author, 2021.

Fig. 4 Photo by author, 2022.

Fig. 5 Home Owners Loan Corporation (HOLC), Residential Security "Redlining" Map Area Descriptions, Youngstown area, Ohio (1938) for Youngstown area, Ohio, 1938. Home Owners' Loan Corporation, box 25, City Survey Files, Record Group 195: Records of the Federal Home Loan Bank Board, National Archives II, College Park, Maryland. Digital image courtesy of The Ohio State University Libraries Map Collections. <https://guides.osu.edu/maps/redlining>