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MTM Cincinnati: Over the Rhine January 25, 2010

Posted by eviljwinter in Cincinnati, My Town Mondays.

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North of downtown lies Over the Rhine, a troubled neighborhood struggling to emerge from decades of decay.



Founded in the early 1800's, it started out as an immigrant ghetto for Germans who flocked to the city. At the time, a canal separated the district from the city center. Natives referred to the area derisively as being "over the Rhine."

The neighborhood grew into one of the most extensive areas of Italianette architecture in the country. Many of the building built in the late 19th century remain intact to this day.



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About...

Jim Winter is an writer and reviewer from America's Heartland. Jim Winter is annoyed with people who embrace or stir up fear. Jim Winter should find himself a hobby to stay out of trouble.

Jim Winter loves his Schmoopie.






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Above is Music Hall, OTR's most prominent building and home to the Cincinnati Symphony, Cincinnati Pops, and Cincinnati Ballet. As you enter the front of the building, you can see the remains of the city's old trolley system in the exposed brick beneath the asphalt.



Dozens of churches, many of the Catholic or formerly Catholic, dot the neighborhood. Cincinnati's German immigrant population is unusual for Ohio. In cities such as Columbus and Cleveland, Germans tended to be Protestant with Anabaptists migrating for the rural parts of the state. Amish and Mennonites are very common even in suburban areas in some parts of the state. In Cincinnati, however, the Germans tended to be Catholic and as recently as the nineties, some Catholic churches held German language masses.

Unfortunately, there is also a lot of decay, some of it coming back. Slowly.



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In the early 1970's, the area became depressed and returned to its roots as a ghetto. A battle ensued between historic preservationists and developers on one side and advocates for the poor on the other. Developers like Jim Tarbell wanted to remake OTR into a trendy historic district. Buddy Gray, a social activist who turned his back on a career as a high-powered attorney, wanted the neighborhood to be a sanctuary for the poor. Gray died in the 90's, however, sadly murdered by one of the people he had tried to help. The neighborhood began to turn around with the Main Street corridor becoming the city's premier night spot and a technical center called "Digital Rhine" sprouting up during the tech boom of the 1990's. The race riots of 2001 caused development to grind to a halt. Change eventually began again, but slowly, with the Vine Street corridor the focus now.



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Condos have sprouted up in former warehouses and converted tenements and hotels. A casino is planned for Broadway Commons, once a leading candidate for what is now Great American Ballpark. A somewhat controversial plan to build a street car system between downtown through the neighborhood and up to “Pill Hill” is also expected to spur development. Voters rejected a charter amendment designed to block the project (ironically not paid for out of city income taxes but from government grants). With financing in place and the casino project moving forward, Over the Rhine is on the verge of a new chapter in its history.

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