

# California on the Ohio

by Steve Hill  
publisher Jackie Frazier



**EBERSOLE COMMUNITY CENTER**  
(formerly California Grade School — Erected 1870)

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**H**ugging the bank of the Ohio River in the eastern reaches of Cincinnati, lies the Village of California. The hills of Kentucky and the mighty Ohio River join forces to create the Village's powerful backdrop.

The history of this small community is as rich and colorful as the people who live here. The residents, many of whom are of German descent, all feel a deep sense of loyalty towards their town and an unusually strong bond with their neighbors. Where else do residents actually wave to each other with a friendly greeting from their cars and front porches?

The early history of California is indeed sketchy. According to the "School Herald" of May 1917, the land now known as California was actually given to Major Ross (a descendant of Betsy Ross) in exchange for services rendered during the Revolutionary War.

The first settlers in the area were Christian Ebersole and his wife Annie. After arriving from Hagerstown, Maryland in March, 1802, the Ebersoles purchased 400 acres of land from William Lytle and within a short time they built a log cabin on the land. In 1808 the Ebersoles had a son whom they named Abram — and thus they have the distinction of having the first child to be born in this area.

In the year of the Gold Rush, 1849, three friends — Joseph Guthrie, John W. Brown, and Thomas J. Murdock — shook off the desire to become gold miners and decided instead to make money in an "easier" way. Their idea was to lay off a town that would become one of the greatest industrial cities along the Ohio River. The Village was platted from the Ohio River to the New Richmond Turnpike with seven streets between and seven streets across. The name for this new town was taken from the State where gold had been discovered — and thus, "California," Ohio was born. Unfortunately, their dreams were never fully realized and California was to remain a small rivertown until it was later annexed to the City of Cincinnati in 1909.

Major access to California was provided by the New Richmond Turnpike which is now known as Kellogg Avenue. Right of way

through the Ebersole land was granted by Abram Ebersole in 1856. October 15, 1877 saw the first train pass through California on the C.G.&P. line, linking the Village with the City of Cincinnati. The I.R.&T. line (commonly referred to as the "Black Line" because the cars were painted a dark Pullman green and looked "black" to most people) competed with the C.G.&P. for the California and Mount Washington business.

For many years, the Ebersole family was the largest property owner in the town with over 400 acres. According to the Bennett Thomkins' survey of 1867, other major land holders with 50 or more acres included: P. and Eunice Rogers, A. Rilea, J. Whetstone, Thos. Riley, H. Riger, H. Farenkamp, J. Hawkins, and J. H. Gerard.

Another land owner during this time was James Parker, who owned 19 acres of land. Mr. Parker is credited with the evolution of a recreation area that would one day become one of this country's best amusement parks — Coney Island. This park eventually became so popular that it spilled out into neighboring Anderson Township.

The year was 1912 when California participated in a Coney Island publicity stunt as the receiving end of Cincinnati's first Air Mail delivery. Pilot Paul Peck flew from Coney with a single sack of mail and dropped it to the California Post Office below. This stunt was repeated on the two following days.

The first business of importance in California was the Molder's Union Foundry which was located on Second Street during the early days of the Village's existence. The foundry, a co-operative concern, was a regular corporation organized by a group of striking stove molders from Cincinnati. James C. C. Hollenshade, a prominent citizen of the times, was employed as president and business agent. Hollenshade used his own credit to build the foundry and provide the necessary machinery. After enough money was in the treasury to pay back Hollenshade's investment, he resigned and entered the wrought iron and hardware business in Cincinnati. Without his direction, business at the foundry soon dwindled and it was eventually closed down.

Still, there were businesses of other years. The first financial institution was the California Building and Savings Association founded in 1871. Other businesses included: Shillings factory, a barber shop, Linnemann's store, Sullivan's store, a

hotel, boarding house, pool hall, harness factory, brick foundry, and an ice house. It is interesting to note that the ice house, owned by John Foken, got its ice from Coney Island's Lake Como during the winter. The ice was then stored in the saw dust insulated building and made available all summer long.

The land for the California schoolhouse was donated to the county by the Ebersole family in 1870. The schoolhouse entered the Cincinnati School System after annexation of California to Cincinnati in 1909. It served faithfully until its useful life as a school diminished and in 1952 found renewed hope as the new California Community Center. Within a short time, the schoolhouse boasted the addition of restrooms, a kitchen, and storage, as well as a new name — "The Ebersole Community Center" — named in honor of California's first family.

In many ways, progress has not been kind to California. Much of the available land has been used for such city and state projects as the Cincinnati Circle Freeway and the Cincinnati Waterworks, the latter being the largest land holder in the Village. Residents are quick to act when threatened with a change in their community that they feel is not needed and not wanted.

This community spirit has been demonstrated recently with a commitment to clean up their neighborhood after years of neglect. Fresh coats of paint were given to buildings along Kellogg Avenue, which is the most frequently seen area by people passing through the Village. And once a year, junk and debris are hauled away from front porches and vacant lots where it sits discarded by its owners. The results of these projects have been remarkable.

With the construction of the nearby Interstate highway, residents in the Cincinnati area have better access than ever to the pleasures to be found in this unique community.

Two long standing attractions are the California Nature Preserve and the California Golf Course, both operated by the Cincinnati Recreation Commission. The preserve offers such activities as swimming, hiking, arts and crafts, education classes, as well as a chance encounter with any of the resident forest animals.

The Golf Course sits on a plateau overlooking the Little Miami and Ohio Rivers. Eighteen holes challenge golfers in this wooded atmosphere.

Coney Island still attracts visitors to the area with swimming at Sunlite Pool, picnicing in the famous grove, or simply relaxing.

Nearby, River Downs creates its own kind of excitement with thrills for the horse racing enthusiast.

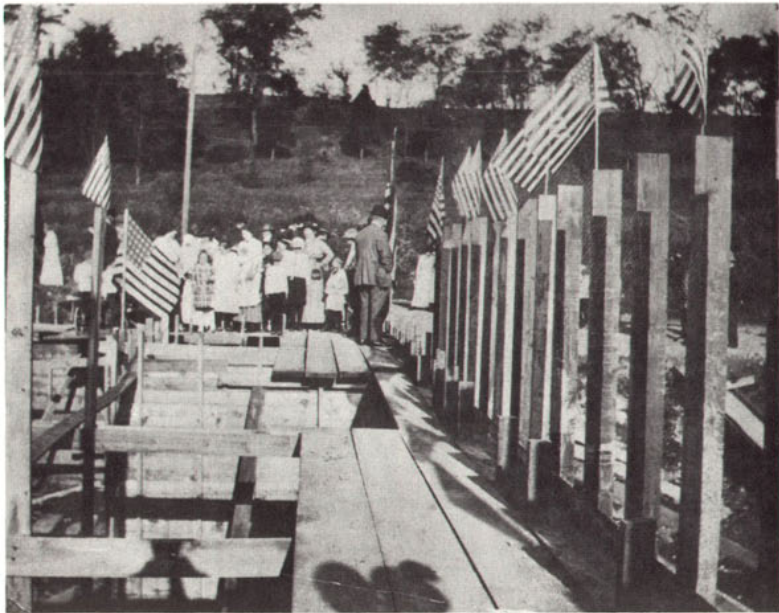
Four owner operated harbors — the California Yacht Club, Harbor Town Yacht Club, Bridgeview, and the Harbortown complex — turn the Ohio River into a summertime bonanza for boaters.

One of the newest additions to California recreation is the \$500,000 Riverstar softball complex. With its five diamonds, Riverstar is another great entertainment choice provided in this rivertown.

California has survived flood, neighborhood decline and almost run-away progress so it is safe to say that the Village will remain for many years to come. As of this writing, there are six buildings being rehabilitated and some new house construction planned. A huge undertaking by the community includes an urban design plan to attract new businesses, as well as the annual clean-up operation.

The future of California is certain, but it is the quality of life there that the community is trying hard to improve. The Village has shown great strength in the past and there is no doubt that the same strength and determination will propel California in the direction that they, the residents, desire.

The most important asset of any community is the people who live there. California's size is indeed a blessing, bringing its residents closer together. The Village has seen its share of changes in many physical ways; but luckily, people still send those friendly neighborly waves. That is what really makes California a unique Cincinnati community.



**Formerly Daughters of America Hall  
erected circa 1910, under construction.**



**Old Riley Chapel, erected 1884.**



**St. Jerome Roman Catholic Church, cr. 1873. Erected 1863.**



**California Methodist Church**



**The Bustling Business Area Kellogg Avenue.  
Note the old jail extreme left.**



**The Front Gate — Coney Island.**





Can you name these well-known Californians? 1937 Flood.  
(L to R) Hawkins, Cropper, Linneman, Draggoo,  
Strief, Brokamp.



California in the 1907 Flood.  
The dirt road in the foreground is Kellogg Ave.

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