

Welcome to The Cleveland Athletic Club a club rich in history and tradition.

The Cleveland Athletic Club's official history began on February 1, 1908 when it found its first home on the top floor of what is now the "old" National City Bank Building. By August, 1909, the CAC had over 900 members and was actively seeking a site to construct a new building. As fate would have it, a five story office building was being constructed on the south side of Euclid Avenue just west of East 12th Street. The developer was amenable to adding additional floors to his building but unable to secure financing. This financing dilemma spawned the wonderfully creative process that ultimately resulted in what may be the world's first "sky rights lease."

Today, over ninety years later, CAC members are still reaping the benefits of this history making lease. Even more importantly, today's Cleveland Athletic Club is still reaping the benefits from the extraordinary vision and mission of our Founding Members.

FOUNDING MEMBERS MISSION FOR THE CAC - 1910

"Aside from the comforts and pleasures to be derived by the members, their family and friends because of their affiliation with the Cleveland Athletic Club, it is the purpose of the organization to provide them with wholesome, interesting recreation and entertainment and to look after their physical welfare to promote and foster clean athletic competition and make this organization a new guiding and stimulating force in physical development and in the wide realm of amateur athletics generally." [November 10, 1910 - CAC Director's Entry]

Studying CAC's nearly 100 year history reveals a consistent adherence to the Founding Members' vision ... not only on a local basis but in the world "generally." Since 1908, the Cleveland Athletic Club has contributed to the history of the City of Cleveland, the State of Ohio and the United States of America. While its membership has vacillated in numbers over the years, it has always maintained exceptional athletic, business and social facilities in the heart of downtown Cleveland ... and a prominent list of the city's business, professional and civic leaders on its membership roles.

From the very beginning the Cleveland Athletic Club has always attempted to promote wellness for members and local amateur athletes. When times called for a broader focus, however, the CAC rallied to the cause. Emphasis and courses of action changed with the times, of course, but the mission never wavered. For instance, with the onset of World War I, Club activities were severely curtailed and aiding the war effort became the primary focus. CAC'ers sold \$3,670,000 in Liberty Bonds at an event held at the Hippodrome Theatre. During this same time period the Club agreed to take charge of managing the industrial division of Cleveland Victory Chest Campaign, the forerunner of United Appeal.

Through the rest of the 20's and 30's the Club supported billiards, swimming, track and boxing. In 1922 the CAC sponsored the National Amateur Pocket Billiard Tournament on the 6th Floor as well as the National Swimming Championships in the Club's pool ... during which Johnny Weissmueller set a world record in the 150-yard backstroke. In 1923 the CAC sponsored the very first indoor track meet in Cleveland ... an event that attracted nearly 2000 high school and college athletes. In 1925 Jimmie Lee became CAC's Athletic Director and, during his subsequent 40 year tenure, gained international fame by serving as coach to the U.S. Boxing Team for three Olympic Games.

This ebb and flow pattern is repeated over the ensuing decades. During times of peace and prosperity the CAC focuses on members, sponsorships of various local amateur sporting events and maintains international notoriety through Jimmie Lee's tenured prominence in Olympic Boxing. Through the Great Depression and World War II the Club stands tall.

Ebbs and flows were also manifest in matters financial. Tough times invariably led to attrition in membership and financial struggles. At several junctures, particularly during the Depression, the future of the Club seemed bleak. But, where there's a club there's a way. As CAC President William J. VanAken stated in a 1938 message to the members, "The finest and most satisfactory asset in life is good friends. The membership of this Club represents a solid cross-section of good fellows. It is a pleasure to know them." During times of greatest desperation the "good fellows" of CAC collectively kept the ship afloat.

The 1950's and 60's were times of prosperity for the Club. Membership rolls were filled to capacity and the athletic and social calendars were filled. 1963 will be remembered as the inaugural year of CAC's St. Patrick's Day party. In 1966 the Jimmie Lee Foundation was formed for the purpose of providing financial scholarships to high school graduates who have excelled at track and field.

By the late sixties, however, business had begun its migration to the suburbs and Cleveland was slipping into a deep slumber. Changing tax laws conspired with population loss to trigger a steady and nearly fatal decline that would last well into the 1990's. During this time period membership rolls would ultimately drop from a high of 2942 in April of 1971 to a low of 511 in July of 1997. CAC had become technically insolvent

In August of 1997 CAC's Board of Directors formed an alliance with a small local investment group in order to facilitate a major restoration project. By September of 1998 significant work had been completed on all Club floors, many abandoned services had been restored and membership had grown to 1125. The Cleveland Athletic Club now finds itself taking a leadership position in the revitalization of Euclid Avenue between the "Squares."

On October 3rd, 1998 over 1000 members and guests gathered to celebrate this progress and to dedicate the new Aerobic Studio and Fitness Complex. The year 2000 marked the "New Millennium" as well as the completion of another major facilities project. Demolition, new construction, reconfiguration and remodeling transformed the 10th Floor into a cluster of family amenities. The existing Women's Locker Room was doubled in size and outfitted with all the traditional "Turkish Bath" amenities (Massage, Steam, Sauna and whirlpool). A Family Locker Room was also added to provide changing and showering accommodations for parents with small children. And the former Nautilus and Free Weight area was transformed into the "Kids on Ten" baby sitting center.

In order to position our club's primary party facilities at the front of the pack, 59 CAC'ers stepped up to the plate in 2001-02 and provided funding for two important projects. The 7th Floor's Sterling Room and Cocktail Lounge were redecorated and appointed with new furniture. As well, our one-of-a-kind 15th Floor Bowling Center was equipped to rock with the "Thunder Alley" sound and light show.

In June, 2002 Cleveland Athletic Club President Jim Chriszt signed a 53 year extension to the club's lease with the CAC Building. After years of speculation that our club would lose its lease in 2008, we will now enjoy unencumbered opportunity for several generations.

In April of 2003 the CAC embarked on the most ambitious single project since the building's initial construction. After years of study (and more than 60 years since its last "facelift"), the Men's Locker Room and Coffee Shop on the 11th Floor is being remodeled. A four-phase plan calls for complete demolition and rebuild so that the reconfigured floor will effectively address the requirements of today's membership now and well into the 21st Century.

Echoing through the floors of the building located at 1118 Euclid Avenue are the words originally spoken on November 22, 1911 at the grand opening of the CAC Building by President William P. Murray, "... It will live now from generation to generation for the benefit of yourselves, your children and your grandchildren." Where there is a club, there is a way and the Cleveland Athletic Club is, above all else, a club.





"It is a stunning yet humbling actuality. CAC's Founding Members designed and built a space that has been functional and adaptable enough to span a century and worthy enough open a new millennium."

CLEVELAND ATHLETIC CLUB

HISTORY