

CLEVELAND LANDMARK
NOMINATION

JOHN HEISMAN BIRTHPLACE

3928 BRIDGE AVENUE

MAY 11, 1978



Heisman Marker



OR IS IT?



Raising Questions

- Here was born (October 3, 1869)
- Cuyahoga County birth records
- Sarah Heisman family Bible
 - October 23, 1869

Raising Questions

- A 1984 *Cleveland Plain Dealer* article by Thomas Andrzejewski noted discrepancies in the story and felt the location was at 4006 – 4008 Bridge Avenue

THE PLAIN DEALER, FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 1984

City's landmark signals mixed

By THOMAS S. ANDRZEJEWSKI
STAFF WRITER

After the nation's top college football player is named recipient of the Heisman Trophy tomorrow night, he could plan to visit Cleveland's near West Side to see the birthplaces of John W. Heisman.

Both of them.

First there is the one that has a plaque, half the size of an import car and on a 4-foot pedestal, at 2825 Bridge Ave., in the Ohio City neighborhood.

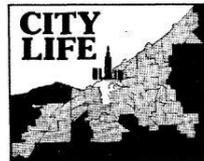
And then there's the unmarked one, 12 blocks away and across the street, that county archives list as the property of Heisman's barrel maker father, Michael.

The Plain Dealer found the 1869 records while checking rumors that the wrong site had been designated. John Heisman was the legendary football coach who invented the forward pass and the center snap, among other innovations.

There are several stories going around, and the one I heard is that it's really down around W. 43rd or W. 49th streets," said E. Robert Shimp, an Ohio City architect who was one of the skeptics.

Others in the neighborhood said the site was perhaps a few houses down Bridge, and there are some rumors it may be a couple of blocks away, perhaps even on a different street. In fact, at one time Michael Heisman had a barrel business on Lorain Ave., city directories show.

Heisman birthplace plaque not on target



The mixup apparently came about because of several address changes that Cleveland went through, the most recent in 1906. In that change, the old address for the Heisman home, 183 Bridge, would have been on a house behind the plaque erected in 1978.

But historians and archivists say there was another address change. In the 1870s, John Heisman was born Oct. 3, 1869.

The Cuyahoga County tax duplicate for 1869 shows that Michael Heisman paid his property taxes — \$16.53 — on the land and buildings in the old Barber & Lord allotment, subplot 594.

The lot is under two houses that now bear the addresses 4006 and 4008 Bridge.

Maps from that era show three buildings, two large ones that could have been the barrel business facing Bridge, and one smaller one that was likely the Heisman residence on the rear part of the lot.

So maybe Michael Heisman rented

the family homestead elsewhere? The 1869-70 Cleveland city directory shows the barrel factory to be at 187 Bridge, and the Heisman residence at 183.

A reporter took Timothy H. Barrett, educational coordinator for the Cuyahoga County Archives, to the site to view the houses. Because of the carpentry styles and the foundations, the houses were likely to have been built later than 1869, said Barrett.

Property records showed an estimated date of construction of 1880 — which means the original Heisman house may have been destroyed.

The plaque at 2825 Bridge was placed by the Rotary Club of Cleveland, the Cleveland Landmarks Commission and the Ohio Historical Society, based on the research of former Common Pleas Judge Earl R. Hoover, now senior vice president for Ohio Savings Association.

Heisman coached at eight colleges, including Oberlin College and Buchtel College, now the University of Akron. He coached a rampaging Georgia Tech in a 1916 wipeout of Cumberland College — 222-0.

Hoover said he found that Heisman had not been mentioned in any Ohio or Cleveland history books, so he embarked on making his Cleveland origins known.

"Jimmy Christmas, not even Gib Shanley (the WEWS Channel 5 sportscaster) knew that," Hoover said.

Sportswriters learned of the Cleveland connection, which resulted in The Plain Dealer twice running a picture of the alleged Heisman house — in disrepair and full of graffiti at the time.

A non-profit group was formed to save it. Civic wheels started turning, and dozens of do-gooders involved in Cleveland's heritage participated. On March 30, 1978, Cleveland City Council joined in and declared 2825 Bridge an historical landmark.

But the house in the pictures, on the back of the lot, was built in 1916, according to a yellowing, almost-crumbling building permit in city files. Heisman would have to have been there at age 37.

And the house on the front part of the lot? That building permit was taken out in 1913.

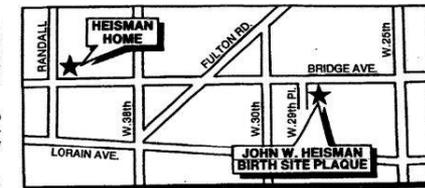
Hoover said a city worker had given him the information that it was the right house, but later he had learned it was too new. He believes the former house must have been razed and replaced.

Hoover said a city worker had also supplied the address conversion information. He said he did not check any further.

City Landmarks Director John D. Cimperman said historic sites often are questioned, which is good, because it prompts further research and accuracy.



The Heisman plaque Wrong spot?



The John W. Heisman birth site plaque is in front of 2825 Bridge Ave., but county property records show the family lived at what is now 4006-8 Bridge.

Raising Questions

- In 1988, Jim Mesker found that the Cooperage site was owned by Michael Heisman while the house two doors down was owned by Sarah Heisman.

Heisman plaque still at wrong site; resident upset

By TOM ANDRZEJEWSKI
STAFF WRITER

A historical site that gives Ohio City a claim to national recognition remains misidentified, three years after the mistake was discovered. And that has resident Jim Mesker upset.

A plaque identifying the birth site of John W. Heisman, legendary football coach after whom the Heisman Trophy was named, was erected 10 years ago in front of 2825 Bridge Ave. But yellowing records from 1899, the year Heisman was born, show the real birthplace to be in the 4000 block of Bridge, almost a half-mile away.

Even though the Cleveland Landmarks Commission was notified of the error in November 1983, the marker remains in the wrong place.

"Correctness is its own virtue," complained Mesker. He has lived for 11 years in an 1853 house a block from the real birthplace. "Why call a rose a petunia? The thing's either right or it's wrong."

It doesn't appear that the plaque will soon be moved to the actual site on Bridge Ave.

"One of the reasons we haven't moved it is that we don't think it's the most pressing issue before the City Landmarks Commission," said Director John D. Cimperman.

'Why call a rose a petunia? The thing's either right or it's wrong.'

— Jim Mesker, peruser of records

"After all, he's a Clevelander," said Cimperman. "A sign like that could be placed next to the Stadium."

But not according to Mesker, whose family first settled in Ohio City in 1844, and who has spent much of his time researching specifics of the area's history.

The misplacement of the bronze plaque was uncovered after a Plain Dealer reporter and a former Cuyahoga County archivist found records that established that the Heismans never lived where the plaque is erected.

Mesker, proprietor of the Neighborhood Tavern, 4114 John Ave., has been known to spend hours perusing musty, crumbling records to establish authenticity of neighborhood events as far back as 150 years ago. Because of his reputation, he was contacted recently by a team from Cox Cable Network doing a story on



JIM MESKER: After tracking down proper home for plaque, he wants it moved.

PHOTO BY PETE COPELAND

the Heisman trophy.

Mesker then did further research, pinpointing the residence using details such as placement of fire-plugs on the street and building permits. He found Heisman's father,

Michael, had his barrelmaking factory two doors away from a residence owned by his mother, Sarah. The site is 12 blocks down the street from the officially designated one.

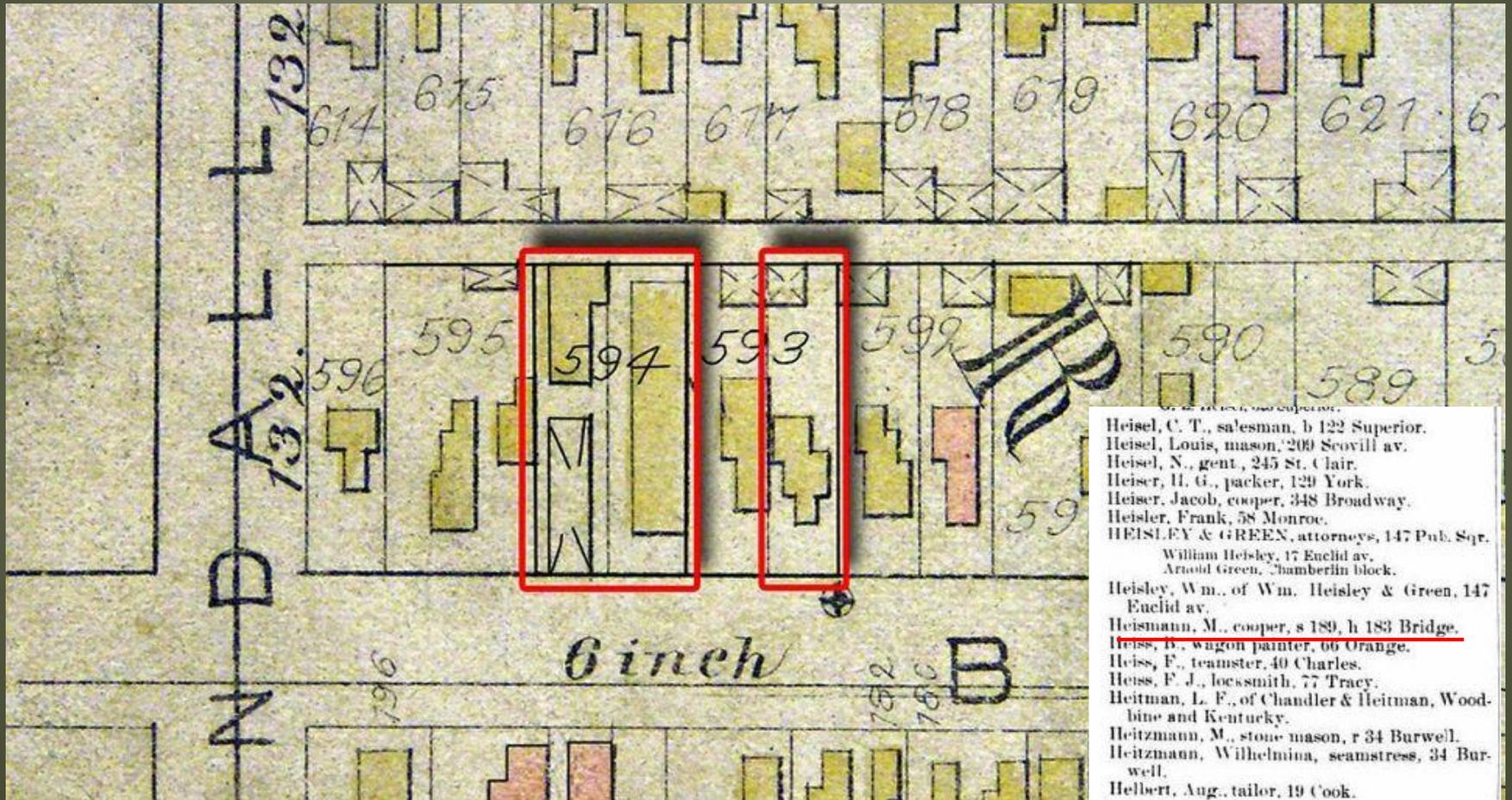
The problem with the new loca-

tion is that the house is so close to the street there isn't room for the marker, Cimperman said. Besides, he said, other markers are in approximate locations.

"We're not absolutely certain

Moses Cleveland landed at the foot of Superior (Ave.), but there was an old Indian trail going to the (Cuyahoga) river," he said. "It's more the event, not the location."

Raising Questions



Raising Questions

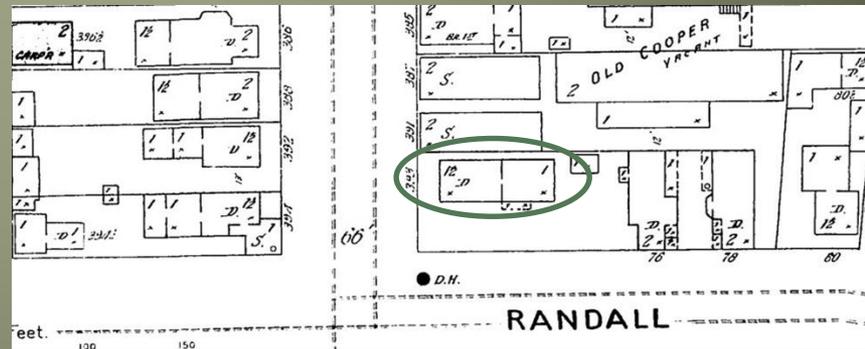
- Craig Bobby fully documented the location in 2002 and with this evidence wrote to the Ohio History Office about moving the marker to the correct location.
- Christopher Busta-Peck also confirmed the location in his 2009 blog post for Cleveland Area History.
<http://www.clevelandareahistory.com/2009/11/birthplace-of-john-w-heisman.html>

3928 Bridge Avenue



How did the Error Occur?

- 1905 ordinance for street name changes
- 1894-1895 Street numbering changes
 - Some streets had the odd and even numbers change sides of the street



Finding the House

- 1869 Cleveland City Directory has Michael Heisman living at 183 Bridge Avenue
- Tax Duplicates show taxes owed for East half of Sub Lot 593 of Barber and Lord's Allotment
- Cuyahoga County Fiscal Officer records recording sale of the property to Sarah Heisman in 1868

Finding the House

...into the said grantee. His heirs and assigns the following...
of Cleveland county of Cuyahoga. and state of Ohio. and known as the East half of sub lot number
five hundred and ninety three in Barber and Lord's allotment or subdivision in said city and is sit-
uated on Bridge street north side and between Reynold's & Kentucky streets and known as 183. on
said Bridge street. The said lot being 31 1/2, thirty one and one half feet front and one hundred

- “Situated in the city of Cleveland county of Cuyahoga and state of Ohio and known as the East half of sub lot number five hundred and ninety three in Barber and Lord’s allotment or subdivision in said city and is situated on Bridge Street, **north side** and between Reynald’s and Kentucky Streets and known as **183 on said Bridge Street.**”
- Reynald’s error for Randall

“MOVING” THE MARKER

Proposed Treatment



Tim Barrett 11 - 2018

THANK YOU