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LIFE IN THE ANGLE

by

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In the early 1900's, outsiders saw only the Angle's poverty, gangs and saloons; today, tales of colorful characters with nicknames to match have been spun of the same stuff. Less dangerous and more everyday then either view might admit, the Angle was, to the first and second generation Irish that grew up there, a friendly and familiar village--like many others within a city that was busy growing by nearly half-again its size between 1900 and 1910.

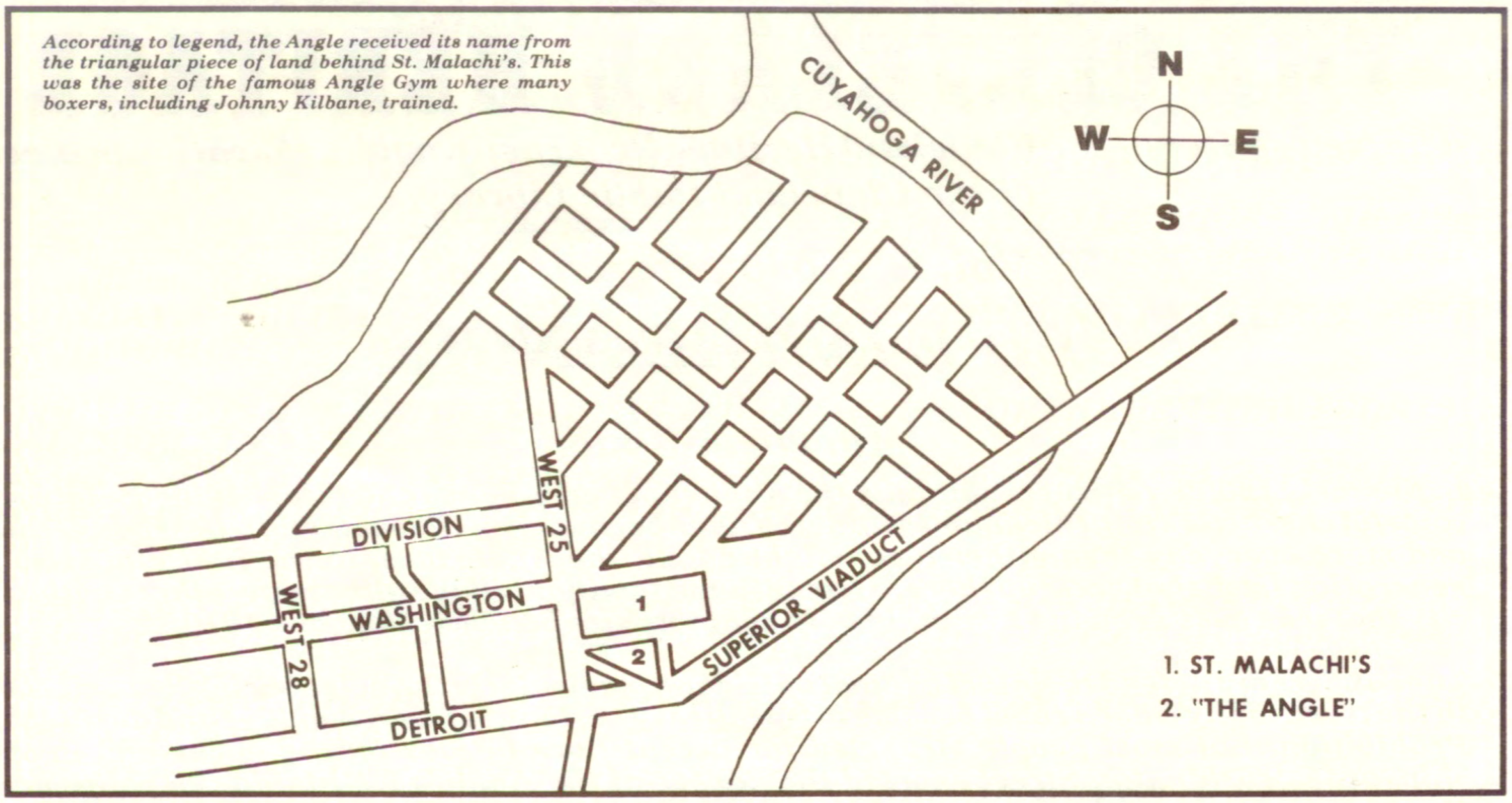
The Anglers did defend their turf against outsiders, particularly the neighboring "swampers" to the west. Many a back room became a "speakeasy" after hours, on Sundays and during the Prohibition. But most people struggled for decent lives in jobs on the docks and in the shipyards. Washington Street sported the houses of the Angle's well-to-do, its policemen, teachers, politicians, shopkeepers and bankers. The Russell sisters on the corner of 28th and Washington even had a picket fence, a cow and a butler. Neighbors looked out for each other by helping newcomers with the immigration men or by writing for those who couldn't--the letters containing money for family members back in the old country. At a death, neighbors mourned with the family and sat up nights watching the coffin (with the help of clay tobacco pipes and a "drop of the cray-ture" on the house).

Much of life was taken up with getting and providing goods. Hucksters, like the Stadlers who sold soap in exchange for grease, hawked wares from horse-drawn wagons. Every day, Frank Wright filled each family's bucket with milk from huge cans, while on Fridays, Martin Skelly came around with fish. Clamoring after the Burns Pie wagon, children followed Dan the Pie Man on his rounds to the stores. Fifty or twenty-five pound blocks of ice and coal at $3.50 a ton were delivered to the homes--though hardpressed families also sent children to pick coal off cars in the train yards on Whiskey Island. (If they could outrun the detectives, children could glean more than coal from the yards. When a train loaded with peanuts pulled in, the aroma of roasted peanuts soon wafted from Angle ovens.)

Women and children shopped nearly every day at neighborhood stores like Mrs. Haley's on 28th Street for smaller items, and several times a week for larger purchases at the Market and stores along 25th Street--Sword's Drug Store, C.D. Kenney's Tea and Coffee Store, Westropp Wallpaper and Paint. Day-old bread and bags of broken crackers and cookies at a dime a pound drew them to R.B. Biscuit Company, near 28th and Bridge.

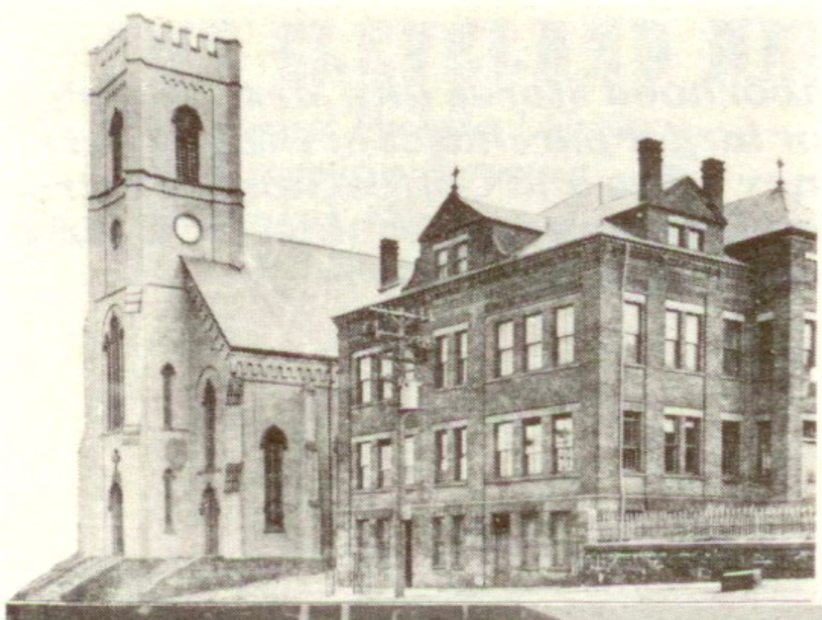
Burns Pies Advertisement, c. 1918.

Washington Street, c. 1930.
Courtesy of the Plain Dealer



If the bustling docks, streets and stores were the sinew of the Angle, St. Malachi's was its heart. Fr. John McHale, stern, with his cane and John L. Lewis eyebrows, ruled firmly. Not everyone was able to complete the ten grades offered for boys by the Christian Brothers and for girls by the Ursuline Nuns. But life revolved around the school, the Sunday School, Mass, Sunday vespers, Sodality Sundays, the Social Club, the Minstrel Club and the LaSalle Club.

Other entertainments were available--an occasional ice cream at Bevan's, movies for a nickel or Mitty de Vere's comedies and musicals for a quarter, both at the Majestic Theatre. For the most part, people entertained themselves. Adults had house parties and Irish dances. Children rollerskated and sledded down the hill at 28th and Washington, and swam off the pier at Whiskey Island or occasionally at Edgewater where girls rented bathing suits for a nickel or a dime. Boys practiced acrobatics in the alleys for amateur nights at the vaudevilles. Encouraged by Johnny Kilbane's world featherweight championships, many also took up boxing and crossed the city to face such opponents as Packy East (later known as Bob Hope).



In making the Angle their own, the people also entered into the larger life of the city and secured a place for their children in its work, its politics, its play and, indeed, its future.

This account of the Angle is based on reminiscences of Beatrice Lynch, who grew up there. Margaret Lynch is employed at the Cleveland Museum of Art.

St. Malachi Church and School, 1942.
Courtesy of the archives of the Catholic Diocese of Cleveland

In this time-exposure photograph taken outside St. Malachi's Church in the early twenties, Kilbane, the boxer, proved his dexterity by appearing at the far left—and the far right.
Courtesy of James McGorray