

# City of Bexley

## Franklin County, Ohio



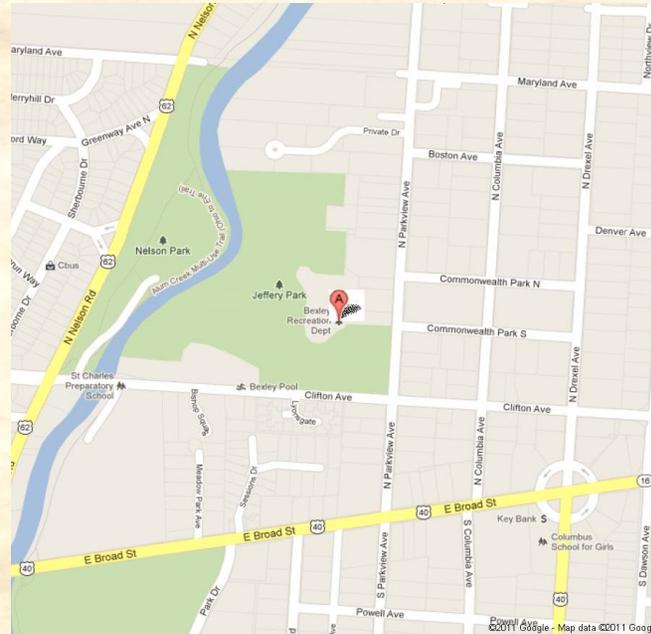
The City of Bexley provides all of the quiet charm and benefits of a small town though located just 2 1/2 miles east of downtown Columbus. Nestled alongside the winding banks of Alum Creek, Bexley's community of 13,500 enjoys the natural beauty of a mature urban forest within its City limits. The meticulously maintained parks and tree lined streets provide a splendid experience throughout the entire year. Bexley's dedication to City beautification through floral plantings and tree care programs has earned several awards and recognitions.

Bexley residents also benefit from some of the finest City services in Ohio while a wide offering of civic organizations help support community spirit. A full range of indoor and outdoor recreational facilities also exist within the City enhancing the leisure time of its residents.

High quality education is a valued community commitment. With this strong emphasis on education, Bexley is proud to offer outstanding public, private and parochial schools. In addition, the City is home to Capital university and Trinity Lutheran Seminary.

Many Ohio governors have also called Bexley home. Since 1957, the official governor's mansion has been located on one of Bexley's tree lined streets.

The combination of dedicated people in an ideal setting make Bexley "A Very Special Place to Live".



A special acknowledgement goes to the Bexley Historical Society for background information and to Edie Mae Herrel for illustration.

Jeffrey Mansion  
Bexley Recreation & Parks Dept.  
165 North Parkview Avenue  
Bexley, Ohio 43209  
614.559.4300



# The Jeffrey Mansion Estate

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## Jeffrey Mansion

Experiencing Bexley would not be complete, without visiting Jeffrey Mansion. The grand English style home reflects the City's past, present and future. In 1908, City fathers gathered on the back terrace of Jeffrey Mansion and chose the name Bexley for the fledgling community. Now the home of the Bexley Recreation and Parks Department, Jeffrey Mansion is the cornerstone of a 34 acre estate located between Parkview Avenue on the east and Alum Creek on the west.

The three story brick structure was built by Robert H. Jeffrey (1873-1961), the son of Joseph A. Jeffrey (founder of Jeffrey Manufacturing Company). Construction of the mansion took place between 1903 and 1905 during the time Robert Jeffrey was serving as the thirty-second mayor of Columbus. A well liked and highly visible public servant, Jeffrey is also remembered for successfully managing the family business, helping shape the infant City of Bexley and creating the majestic residence and grounds known as Jeffrey Mansion.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the prevailing trend of many wealthy Americans was to emulate British aristocracy in their homes, customs and landscaping. Following that tradition, Mr. and Mrs. Jeffrey sought a country setting for their English style estate. In the early 1900's, the future city of Bexley offered the perfect rural setting. The fact that Mrs. Robert Jeffrey, formerly Alice Kilbourne, was a descendant of a prominent English family, further influenced their choice of architectural style.

The Jeffrey's commissioned Frank Packard, one of Columbus's most prolific architects of that time, to design their home. Packard also designed other well-known Columbus landmarks including the Franklin County Memorial Hall (COSI), the Atlas Building on Long Street, the Seneca Hotel, the Broad Street Presbyterian Church and the Governor's Mansion on East Broad Street (now the Columbus Foundation). Construction of the large Jacobethan Revival style mansion was said to be modeled after fabled English manor houses such as the famous Haddon Hall. Great banks of windows, emphasis on horizontals and the combination of stone and brick are some of the mansion's distinguishing features. The home was named the Kelvedon estate after Mrs. Jeffrey's family home in England.

Though lack of funds prevented completion of the home as originally planned, several additions were eventually finished. In 1922, a multi-windowed foyer containing a monumental stone stairway was finished just in time for a visit from Jeffrey's long-time friend and golfing partner President Warren G. Harding. The visit created much excitement in Columbus. The Republican Glee Club entertained the hundreds of people who had gathered on the lawn to see the President. In 1926, a north and south wing were also added, completing Jeffrey's original plans. Though changes have been



*Mr. and Mrs. Robert Jeffrey and Family, 1910*

made throughout the years, the home's basic structure remains the same. On the first floor, two ten foot doors open into the library and dining room from the formal living room. A second set of heavy wood sliding doors connect the spacious dining room and library. The family spent most of their time in the library. Lavish fireplaces are the focal point of all three rooms. A butler's pantry and servants area surround the kitchen facility while a separate back staircase leads to the upper floors.

Bedrooms, Mr. Jeffrey's exercise and office room and sun porches were located on the second floor. These rooms now serve as offices, conference rooms and a playschool for the Bexley Recreation and Parks Department.

Servants' quarters, an attic and a tower room occupied the third floor. Though many eerie stories have contributed to the allure of the third floor tower room, it was actually a favorite Jeffrey children hideaway. Located at the highest point of the house, this small circular room was ideal for model trains.

The home was, and still is, impressively located at the end of a long driveway, flanked by towering oak trees. Positioned on the high ground, the castle-style home regally oversees breathtaking meadows, gardens and woods. In the British tradition, the estate includes extensive park-like grounds and walking paths. The paths wind through twenty acres of woodland featuring an outdoor classroom, two foot bridges, an observation deck on Alum Creek and tree identification signs. He was devoted to the growth and maintenance of its plant life and particularly its trees. Many of the trees were imported from England, Scotland and other European countries. It was said that Jeffrey, a skilled arborculturalist, would often return from trips abroad with tree seedling stored in his coat pockets. Unfortunately, some of the trees were stolen by envious tree poachers.

Early in the estate's development, Jeffrey employed a newly-arrived immigrant, Herman Carl Kaestner to oversee the grounds landscaping. Kaestner, a highly experienced gardener from the F.C. Heinman Gardens in Germany, dedicated his gardening talents to the horticultural needs of the estate. Under the expert care of Jeffrey and Kaestner, the mansion grounds flourished. Together they planted an impressive evergreen forest, a formal rose garden, varieties of shrubs, bulbs, wildflowers and other distinctive plantings. The oak trees lin-

ing the east entrance, the meadow on the west, and the evergreen forest behind the meadow remain essentially unchanged. The early grounds also included a swimming pool, a clay tennis court, a horseshoe area, a green house, putting greens, skeet shoot and picnic areas.

During the early 1900's, Jeffrey Mansion knew its heyday. The estate had become what Robert H. Jeffrey had hoped - a showplace in the community. Soon after President Harding's visit in 1922, however, tragedy struck with the death of Mrs. Jeffrey. Shortly after, Jeffrey's friend and trusted gardener, Herman Carl Kaestner, also died.

Though the grounds and trees continued to be maintained, times were changing. The Depression, the blight of the Dutch Elm Disease, and the onset of World War II made upkeep of the building and grounds difficult. By the late thirties, the Jeffrey family was realizing the time consuming and expensive maintenance requirements of the large estate. As a result, Mr. Jeffrey donated the family home to the City of Bexley in 1941. Provisions were made for the estate to be used exclusively for parks, playgrounds, athletic, recreational and educational purposes. In 1942, Mr. Jeffrey and his second wife, the former Mary P. Allen whom he married in 1924, moved to smaller accommodations with the assurance that the legacy of Jeffrey Mansion would continue.

The City of Bexley was entrusted with the responsibility of maintaining, utilizing and rehabilitating the estate. In 1968, the national award-winning Bexley Recreation and Parks Department took year-round occupancy of the building and began its full-time operation. The Department offers a diversity of programs and opportunities for community members of all ages. The building is also available for public meetings, private parties, and a variety of other affairs.

In order to continue to better serve the community, further renovations began on September 6, 1988. The mayor, City Council and the Recreation Board spearheaded the many improvements that needed to be made. Floors and woodwork were refinished, fireplaces and the grand staircase were sandblasted, bathroom facilities were added while plumbing, heating and electrical needs were brought up to code. The most visible and striking renovation was the addition of the first floor terrace room. The new room closely resembles the style and character of the original structure. It features a floating oak floor and oak-encased windows that invite a panoramic view of the grounds Mr. Jeffrey had envisioned almost a century ago.

Jeffrey Mansion is an integral part of Bexley's past, present and future. The elegant home and grounds remain a visual testimony to the grandeur of an earlier time and to the dreams of Robert H. Jeffrey.