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Google Street View Essay
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Superior Avenue from Innerbelt Freeway to East 39th Street

This essay describes the urban landscape of Superior Avenue between the Innerbelt Freeway (I-90) and East 39th Street just east of downtown Cleveland. This description begins on the south side of Superior Avenue, moving eastward. Then it describes the north side of the street from the same starting point, again proceeding eastward.

In the first block on the south side of Superior Avenue, an old five-story brick warehouse with a large empty billboard overlooks the off ramp from I-90. It appears that the warehouse is occupied by Daniel's [Office?] Furnishings. The building occupies the entire block up to East 30th Street.

Beyond East 30th Street, the landscape changes dramatically to mostly low, flat-roofed buildings that appear a few decades old but not as old as the aforementioned warehouse. One of the buildings appears to have a restaurant in it, and at least one other building is for sale. An old house at the eastern corner of East 31st Street has been converted into some sort of business, possibly a restaurant judging from the red awnings. Just east of there is a building that sells some kind of supplies according to its sign.

On the east side of East 32nd Street, two narrow 2½-story houses with steeply pitched roofs intervene. The houses appear to be very old but perhaps updated, judging from their apparent condition. It's possible that the open parking lot beside them may have once had similar houses before the street transitioned toward more wholesale, retail, and industrial uses. Past the parking lot is an Asian (Chinese?) store and an adjacent bar or convenience store in a

very old 3-story building, judging from the probable Ohio Lottery sign on the wall and corner sign along its East 33rd Street side.

East of East 33rd Street are more of the same sort of low buildings, including one that appears to be an auto repair shop with a front-facing garage. Beyond East 34th Street is Cleveland Spring Service, which has three garage bays large enough to accept trucks, and an apparently empty warehouse. East 36th Street, on the eastern side, begins the first really commercial stretch with four old 1 to 2 story buildings housing businesses. One of them appears to be a Chinese store. A parking lot completes this block to East 38th Street.

Past East 38th Street is a large, empty fenced parking lot and then a large railroad overpass overgrown with weeds on the side. A nondescript building defaced by graffiti stands beside the eastern side of the bridge and across from East 39th Street, which goes north from Superior only.

Returning to the starting point, the north side of Superior Avenue, trees obscure the Innerbelt Freeway, but one can see the on ramp. To the east of the ramp, is an empty building followed by a drapery outlet and a carpet wholesaler. At East 30th Street, a large green overhead sign alerts motorists of the entrance to I-90 and its connection to I-71 and I-77.

Past East 30th Street is a glass-enclosed bus stop in front of a building with a colorful sign reading "Repros," which may be a photography business. This building also houses the Mad Hatter Automotive Service Center. (From this vantage point, if you pans around to the west, the Cleveland skyline, dominated by Key Tower, is visible in the distance.) The next building, on the near corner of East 31st Street, is a large 2-story brick Italianate house with dark green trim and stone-colored brackets over its windows and beneath its roofline. It appears to be from the

nineteenth century, much older than the surviving buildings and houses around it. Perhaps this was once a neighborhood of substantial homes.

East of East 31st Street is a 2½-story house that may have had a corner bar in it, judging from the corner door and single long window facing Superior. Napa Auto Parts and the Auto Diesel Piston Ring Company (in business since 1921, according to the sign) complete this block. This latter building seems to have once had large windows that have been covered. Perhaps this was and is a small factory. It seems plausible that this area was changing from residential to industrial and wholesaling uses around 1920. The only houses noted thus far seem pre-1920, and they are few in number, suggesting a rather complete transformation as people moved away from the inner city.

At East 32nd Street is a parking lot, Wallace Industr[ies?], and two adjacent houses, one of them housing some kind of small business, and a business called CompSource. At East 33rd Street is another bus stop. Behind it is an imposing 3-story brick building with a glassy storefront (possibly empty), above which is an exposed steel fire escape and two sets of bay windows. This may have been a tenement house or rooming house in the past. A nondescript one-story building with garage bays fronting Superior is to its east, ending at East 34th Street.

Lush trees hide the older buildings in the next block from view. The next building that comes into view is what appears from the somewhat blurry sign to be Saint Nicholas Byzantine Catholic Church. The complex is brick and is in a more modern style, probably from the 1970s or so, indicating that this is an active parish and that a probably Eastern European population either lived here and commutes or still calls this area home.

At the intersection of East 36th Street (and extending more than a block eastward to the railroad overpass) is a large, impressive warehouse complex that even has a two-level archway

two to three stories above East 36th Street. The building in the foreground is a large, 4-story brick building with terra cotta details along its roofline. The building behind it is even taller—6 stories—and is architecturally the same. The archway probably connects to a related building behind the church. A young man with a backpack is riding his bicycle past the warehouse. He could be a CSU student! The next frame that comes into view reveals that this complex is the W. S. Tyler Company, which will be a place I need to research. A related 7-story building is to its east. Clearly this was a massive operation. Interestingly, a banner attached to the light pole in front of the building reads “Authentic People.” It is of the sort that various organizations put up to promote places or whole neighborhoods. It seems that someone is trying to interest visitors or perhaps the residents themselves in this area’s heritage.

Completing the north side of Superior to East 39th Street is a two-story brick building that appears to be from the late nineteenth century. It has been restored and has a business in it called The Town Fryer, possibly a southern-style restaurant.

Framed by the Innerbelt and the Nickel Plate Railroad, this section of Superior Avenue is, in sum, quite a mix of buildings and houses from different periods ranging from perhaps the mid-1800s to the 1970s. Most common are early to mid 20th-century wholesaling and industrial buildings, which likely replaced many houses in a previously more residential neighborhood. The biggest surviving landmarks are the five-story warehouse beside the Innerbelt, St. Nicholas Byzantine Catholic Church, and the old W. S. Tyler Company factory complex. The area reflects the presence of both Asians and Eastern Europeans. It seems that no new buildings have been constructed there in the past few decades, and only a small number of buildings have been renovated. One gets the sense that this area may be on the verge of a period of revitalization, but the area’s sluggish economy has thus far prevented a noticeable transformation.