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Centennial Reflections

Essays from the Oakwood Historical Society

Col. Robert Patterson's Log Cabin

By Harry G. Ebeling

Prior to Oakwood and even Montgomery County, there was Federal Land as surveyed by the government under an Act of Congress in 1876. This part of the country and west to the Rocky Mountains was laid out in units called Sections in a grid of Towns and Ranges. Revolutionary War soldiers were paid in warrants which were redeemable for land, thus paying the obligation to them for their service, and encouraging the westward settlement of the country.

One such veteran who put together a substantial number of these claims, was Col. Robert Patterson who had been an Indian Scout and a soldier, suffering ten wounds during his career as both. He was with Daniel Boone at the Battle of Blue Lick and accompanied Col. Bowman against the Shawnees in the Miami campaigns. He also accompanied George Rogers Clarke to Illinois, where he earned his commission and land grants. He built a little log cabin in Louisville, Kentucky from which he expanded his holdings. He also defended the rear during the defeat of St. Clair in 1791. As a citizen-statesman he was in the first Kentucky Legislature.

Because he had guaranteed some debts for a friend in Louisville which became uncollectible, he was in dire financial straits in 1804, so he used his only assets – land rights, and combined with his brother-in-law Robert Lindsay, to purchase a substantial piece of ground in what is now Montgomery County, Ohio. He bought Lindsay's interest and then added to it by buying a large tract from Daniel Cooper, the proprietor of a large portion of south Dayton. Thus he owned 2,417 acres, extending from Gettysburg Avenue east to the border of Woodland Cemetery and Wayne Avenue, south to Patterson Road, and east to Schantz Avenue. Included in this was a cabin and three mills which he ran successfully, serving the area for many miles. He became known as a shrewd businessman, establishing a grist mill, a carding mill, and a saw mill. During the War of 1812, he became a quartermaster, supplying troops. In 1816, he was able to build the substantial home we now know on Brown Street as the Patterson Homestead.

When Col. Patterson died in 1829 he left a very careful Will which divided his property among his nine children. After some intra-family sales and a partition action, his son Jefferson ended up with 281.5 acres, including the Homestead. Jefferson was not as careful in his estate planning, because he died without a Will. In 1865, a partition action was brought by his adult heirs and their mother, asking that the remaining land be split up and sold. A survey was made, and a sale held, but only five of the lots sold. The property was resurveyed and the remaining lots were distributed. His son, John H. Patterson got a 25.50 acres and later bought 15.30 acres from his brother Stephen to develop into "The Far Hills" (which we now know as the site of The Lutheran Church of Our Savior). Jefferson's widow, Julia Patterson, got some lots in Trust, and upon her

death many of the remaining parcels, including what became the N.C.R. factory and Sugar Camp, came under the control of John H. Patterson.

But the memory of Col. Robert Patterson, the pioneer Indian fighter, founder of Louisville and Cincinnati, lives on in Oakwood. In 1904, John H. Patterson had the original log cabin of the family, built in 1775, moved from Louisville to the intersection of Far Hills Avenue and Oakwood Avenue, and erected on the little triangular piece of ground that remained there for 35 years. He maintained it and had his grounds keeper watch over it, opening it for visitors on weekends. He left the three fourths of an acre to the City of Dayton (Oakwood was still a village), as a public park, and left 50 shares of NCR stock as a perpetual care fund. The city had two years to accept this. Years later, the city decided it didn't want to own and maintain a park in Oakwood, so they conveyed it to the State who in turn conveyed it to Oakwood.



Col. Robert Patterson's log cabin as it stood at the corner of Far Hills and Oakwood Avenue from 1904-39.

In 1939, Dr. Charles Allen Thomas, son-in-law of Katherine Houk Talbot, prominent chemist and later President of Monsanto, the pioneer researcher of polonium at Runnymede Playhouse, and a graduate of Transylvania College, arranged to have it transferred back to Lexington, Kentucky, where it is still on the campus. Compare this to the controversy over Building 26 !

The plaque on the large stone monument in the park is dedicated to Col. Patterson as "Explorer, Surveyor, Patriot, Statesman, Farmer, Manufacturer and Leader in Education, Religion, Good Government, Industry, and Transportation". It concludes that his "...intrepid soul, adventurous spirit and sterling integrity helped make possible the great middle west of today."