

Centennial Reflections

Essays from the Oakwood Historical Society

Isaac Haas – the man who bought Oakwood

By Harry G. Ebeling

Where did the name “Oakwood” come from? I’ve seen an old article that asserts that it originated as early as 1830, but this is undocumented, and only appears once. I believe that it was originated by the first promoter of our community – “Isaac Haas – the man who bought Oakwood.” This is the title given to him by the Dayton Daily News in an article in 1920 by Harriet Gebhart. She traces him to Westmoreland County, PA, where he and his parents came from in 1835. Establishing himself in the tannery and harness business, he joined Patterson Mitchell as a partner on Ludlow Street in 1856.

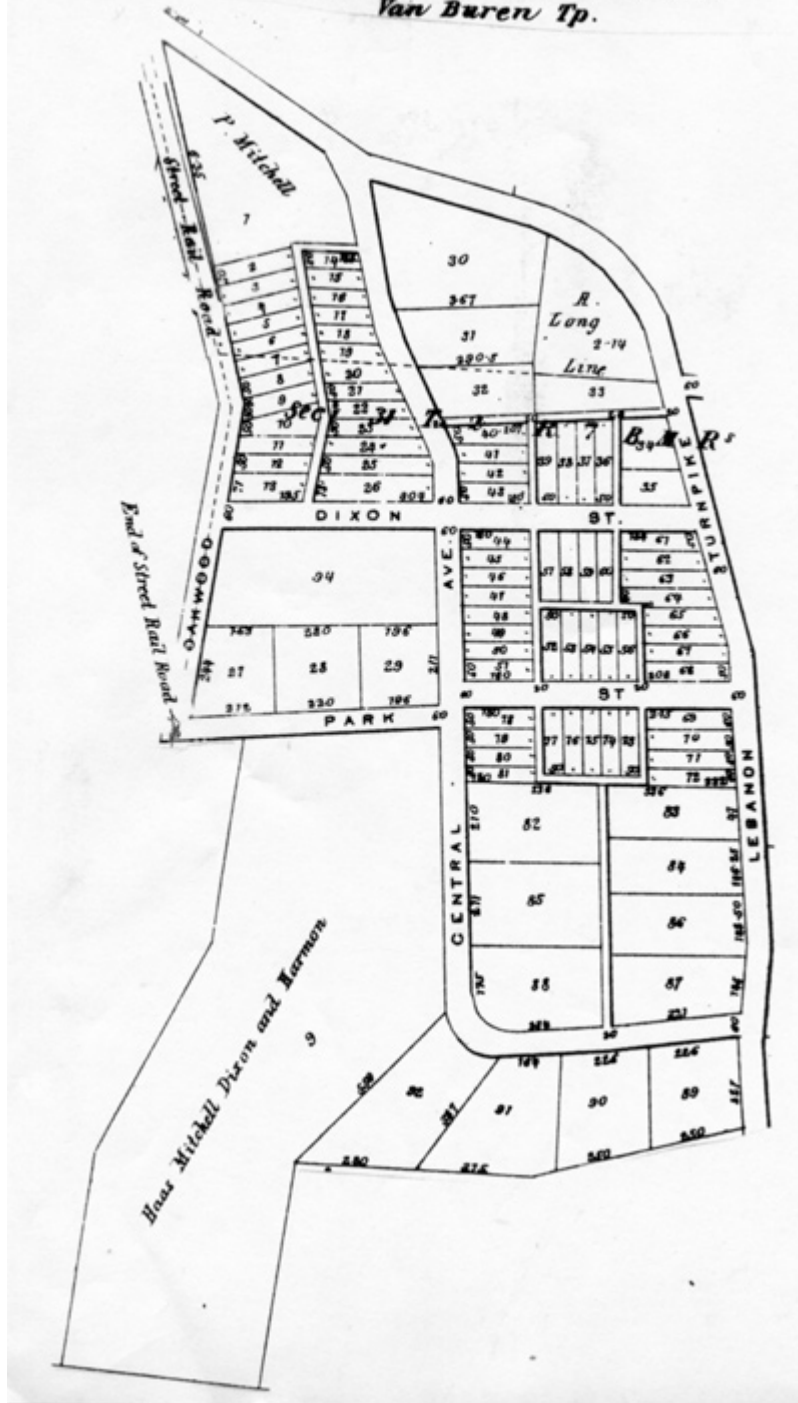
He became interested in construction when the First Presbyterian Church was built at the northwest corner of 2nd and Ludlow. (This later became the Central Reformed Church and is now a parking garage.) He had bought the property at sheriff’s sale and sold it to the church at a profit, but built the church for \$1.

He speculated in other property, such as the third block of W. 5th Street, which he developed for several large houses, and in 1871 sold part, which was restricted for use as a railroad station. When the City of Dayton appropriated it in 1964 to extend Wilkinson Street, his heirs divided \$30,000 – a nice surprise. He lived at the southwest corner of 4th and Main, later developed for the Reibold Building.

He bought a half interest in 178 acres in South Park and Oakwood from Jonathan Winters who had bought it from the heirs of Col. Robert Patterson at the Partition sale. (See previous article about Patterson). When he defaulted on his part, Winters bought him out, and later sold 100 acres to Adam Schantz (another story). However, Haas retained a tract, on which he built the beautiful stone house for himself which stands at 505 E. Schantz in 1882.

MAP OF OAKWOOD

Van Buren Tp.



His major interest in Oakwood was the purchase of 78.95 acres, which was developed into the original plat of Oakwood in 1872. He got financial help from his old partner in the tanning business, Patterson Mitchell, and local investor Gabriel Harman and his brother in law William Dixon. They laid out the area into lots and streets and waited for people to come knocking on their door – but they didn't come. By 1875, he was in serious financial trouble and filed an Assignment for the Benefit of Creditors (a form of Receivership), and his Assignee (Trustee) sold his interest in his remaining lots to Gabriel Harman. The original owner's Executor sold Dixon's remaining lots to Mitchell. Harman bought most of the lots from Mitchell and Dixon.

To promote lot sales, they installed a donkey-powered street car which came out from Dayton, up the hill (Oakwood Avenue) to what is now Park Avenue. Here the driver blew a horn to tell folks nearby that the car was available, then rehitched the donkey (later horses) to the other end of the car, rested, and returned to Dayton. Lots 2 and 3 were for a speculation house built by Joseph Peters to induce sales. The builder gave it up and it still stands at 622 Oakwood Avenue. It was bought by Harriet P. Clegg who developed the Oakwood Street Railway Co.

The majority of lots in this central Oakwood area were owned by Harman and can be traced to him or his heirs. When his widow died in 1899, she left them in Trust to their four children who divided the lots and sold them. Lots # 31 & 32 were taken by Elizabeth Harman Porter who built the large frame house at 620 Harman Ave. Part of the lot became Harman Terrace and part became the Far Hills Apartments. Several of the lots in the first block of West Dixon were sold to John R. Fletcher, who gave his house to the school board for a library. They sold it to Elsie Mead in 1939 for the Little Exchange. The commercial building next door still bears the name Fletcher. The Municipal Building lots were sold by the Elizabeth Harman Trust to a lady who sold them in two years to the village for a tidy profit. Lot # 89 became the Oakwood Manor in 1929. Part Lots 90 & 91 became part of Elizabeth Gardens plat in 1925. Lot # 93 was sold to the Wright Brothers in 1912.

Another speculation of Haas' went sour. He bought 9.93 acres east of Lebanon Pike/Far Hills Avenue from what is now Dellwood to Forrer and back to Schantz. This was caught up in his Assignment for the Benefit of Creditors and was sold in 1876 to a group of investors. They held it for many years before selling it in 1919 to Albert Seibert, whose Oakwood Real Estate Co. platted it into Park Hill, Section 2 in 1928.

Haas suffered a serious stroke in 1880 and was restricted to a wheel chair for the rest of his life. He still owned 17 acres which he sold in 1890 to the Schantz Estate, retaining two acres and the beautiful stone house at 505 E. Schantz which he sold to Herman Mahrt. "The Man Who Bought Oakwood" died in 1897 without seeing his dream of Oakwood come true.