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Centennial Reflections

Essays from the Oakwood Historical Society

A tale of two founders – Adam Schantz Sr. and Jr.

By Harry G. Ebeling

The history of Oakwood cannot be undertaken without telling the story of Adam Schantz. Actually there are two of them – Adam Sr. and Adam Jr. Adam Schantz Sr. came from Germany as a boy and achieved remarkable success as did so many of our immigrant ancestors. Born in Darmstadt in 1839 to a prosperous milling family, he emigrated to the U.S. at age 15 to escape military conscription. He learned the butcher trade working for his uncle, Michael Olt, in Dayton. After traveling the country for 10 years he returned to Germany and after working there and in London, he returned to America and Dayton in 1862. In 1863 he married Salome Latin.

Establishing himself in the slaughterhouse business he was twice wiped out by fire, but through hard work and good credit was able to rebuild. In 1887, he purchased his brother George's interest in the Riverside Brewery. Becoming a well-regarded and trusted businessman in the community, he acquired property and wealth and had a family of twelve children. The brewery was on the banks of the Miami River in what became Dayton View on Riverview Avenue.

In 1880 he had acquired 103 acres in what was to become Oakwood, and built his home and a half mile race track and a stable that was 600 feet long and 100 feet wide. The Italianate house still stands at 430 E. Schantz. He predicted that in fifty years this land would become the most desirable residential property in Dayton.



Adam Schantz Sr's home, 430 Schantz Ave. circa 1883.

He turned over the operation of all his business affairs to his son Adam Jr., in 1896, and settled down to enjoy his family and his interest in raising horses. In 1901 he traveled to Daytona, Florida and discovered the warm climate and the opportunity to establish businesses, including an ice, purified water, and electric plant. His enthusiasm for the area led to his death in 1903, when he became over-exerted while supervising development work.

Adam Jr. took over as Executor and Trustee of the estate and became manager of his father's many interests. In 1901 he married Maria Olt.

There were many properties in downtown, as well as the brewery and the production and sale of purified "Lilly Water," (named for the family flower, the Calla Lilly), the product Adam Sr. developed for home delivery and which was very successful. The brewery was merged with five others into Dayton Breweries Company in 1904.

Carrying out his father's dream and prediction in the development of the land took some planning and patience. The land was not all level as it is now and required a huge investment to create what is now Schantz Park (now on the National Register of Historic Places). He hired the Olmsted Brothers of Massachusetts to help design the landscaping and establish the trees as it slowly became a plat with lots, streets, sidewalks and utilities in the 1913 era. This took an immense investment before the first lot was sold.

However by 1914 he was ready to sell lots and promote Schantz Estates. He built the house at 202 E. Schantz for himself. Lots were distributed to his brothers and sisters who settled here: John Michael (201 E. Schantz), Matilda Sauer (270 E. Schantz), William "Bill" (224 E. Schantz), Edith Olemann (225 E. Schantz), and nephew Herbert E. Whalen built at 265 E. Schantz. He built a lookout tower on nine acres on the bluff overlooking the plat and the city as a way to market the area. This was a popular spot for families and young people to picnic and spend leisure time. The site was 250 feet above Third and Main and the tower rose another 50 feet. Adam Jr. had a dream of building a house for himself there, but Prohibition curtailed his business, and he sold the property in 1919 to Will I. Ohmer under the condition that it would be built upon within two years. Ohmer defaulted and it wasn't developed until 1950. It is now Lookout Ridge.

The promotional booklet, "A Place to Live", published in 1915, tells the story of lots and houses being developed for sale in the Schantz Estates. Using flowery language, it extols the virtues of suburban living in an exclusive area of custom designed homes. Adam Schantz Jr. preferred to use local architect Louis Lott in designing homes in the plat, and his influence can be seen in Oakwood, particularly on Volusia Avenue. Lott is by far the most prolific of architects in Oakwood with 144 homes to his credit (A reprint is available from the Oakwood Historical Society for \$20).

Prominent in the promotion of the Miami Conservancy District, acquiring land for Patterson Field, investing in "Dreamland," a proposed model community which became Moraine and the site of the Dayton-Wright Aeroplane Co., then Delco, then Frigidaire, and the creation of parks. Schantz was, like his father, a man of restless energy.

Adam Jr. died in 1921, before the estate had been settled, because his mother was still living. This probably caused some hard feelings within the family. On her death in 1927, it was finally settled, but the Depression affected expansion in Oakwood for many years,

followed by the restrictions of World War II. So the "Place to Live" was delayed for years beyond Adam Sr.'s projection of fifty years.