



## Helping Build America: The National Road



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Glenn Harper, Preservation Services Manager for the Ohio Historic Preservation Office, will give a talk entitled **Helping Build America: The National Road**, Thursday March 13, at 7:00 PM., at the Lutheran Church of Our Savior, 155 E. Thurston Blvd.

Glenn Harper is co-founder and past president of the National Road Alliance, a founding member of the Ohio National Road Association and the co-author of *A Traveler's Guide to the National Road in Ohio*. Glenn is also a contributing author to the two-volume: *A National Road* and *A Guide to the National Road* and has written articles about the Road for *Timeline Magazine* and *Ohio Magazine*.

Spanning over 600 miles through six states, the National Road was the nation's first federally funded interstate highway. Authorized by Congress in 1806, the Road fulfilled a desire by such nation figures as George Washington and Thomas Jefferson to build an all-weather road across the Allegheny Mountains to create stronger political and economic ties between the east coast and the frontier. The Road particularly benefited the new state of Ohio, opening the state and much of the Old Northwest Territory to settlement and providing access for Ohio products to the burgeoning eastern markets.

Patterned after the popular National Road Traveler's Guide, Glenn's presentation will highlight the Road's origins, its heyday, decline, resurgence during the golden age of automobile touring in the early twentieth century and its modern era as U.S 40. Numerous architectural icons of the Road including milestones, inns and taverns, early motels and the Road's unique "S" bridges, will also be discussed and illustrated. Of particular interest to Dayton area citizens is the alternative road, the so-called Dayton Cutoff that local boosters constructed when the National Road bypassed the city.

A free copy of the Traveler's Guide will be available to everyone who attends the presentation.

*Glenn Harper is an adjunct faculty member in the Departments of History and Urban Studies at Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio, where he teaches courses in architectural history and historic preservation.*

## OHS Committees

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### *Please get involved...*

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## A note from the president

This is my first greeting to you, so let me say right off that it will be fun and an honor to serve as President for this Centennial Year. There will be many activities that the society will be contributing to the celebration. We are part of the planning committee that has been working for a year. You have seen pictures in the Oakwood Calendar put out by the Leisure Services Department and will see more from our archives in complementary souvenir book and television/CD production coming up.

We look forward to special programs that highlight Oakwood's history and participating in the summer events announced. You've seen the list of monthly events, and we hope that you'll be there for all of them. We can use all the help we can get at these events including some volunteers. Hint!

A major contribution will be the reprint of the Centennial Edition of *Oakwood: The Far Hills*, the popular history printed in 1983 for the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. We have exhausted the supply of these books and will be taking orders for a limited number of souvenir reprints. This book was written by Virginia Ludwig Ronald and her husband, Bruce, who then wrote several local histories which were quite popular.

We have a great working Board of Directors, each carving out an area of interest to add to our total program for the year. We look forward to serving our mutual interests and thank you for your support – including your membership renewal.

—Harry Ebeling

## Announcing a special reprinting: *Oakwood: The Far Hills*, centennial edition

The popular standard history of Oakwood, a the centennial edition is a reprint of the 1983 publication with an introduction scanning the 25 years since it was first published. The original book is in demand but no longer available. Many residents have a copy in their libraries and have bought them for their children and families as a priceless memory of life here.

This reprint, available in soft cover, is offered by **preorder order only**. Prepaid orders will be taken by the Oakwood Historical Society for delivery in April/May 2008.

#### **Mail your check for \$25 to:**

Oakwood Historical Society  
1947 Far Hills Ave.  
Dayton, OH 45419

Indicate "The Far Hills" on the Memo on the check

Add \$2.00 for Postal Delivery

You will be notified when they can be picked up

Enclosed is my check for \$ \_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_ copies of the reprint of *Oakwood: The Far Hills*. Please reserve in my name.

( ) I will pick up at the Historical Society. Please notify me at the phone number below:

( ) Mail to me at the below address. Additional \$2.00 for postage is added

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

# An Overview: Routsong Funeral Home and the funeral home business

In 1938, the Bradford & Routsong Funeral Home opened its doors at 6 Oakwood Avenue in a prominent two-and-a-half story brick Colonial Revival home with a full-width porch with awnings and a clay tile roof. Prior to its history as a funeral home, 6 Oakwood Avenue was the residence of John A. and Mary Murphy. John A. Murphy was the president of the John A. Murphy Company, dealers in anthracite and various coals, cement, and contractors' supplies. The Murphys moved to Oakwood in 1912 from Sears Street near today's Second Street Market. They lived in the house until the early 1920s when they sold the home to Fred Tejan, a contractor and later owner of a stone quarry on the west side of West End Avenue. Fred Tejan and family lived in the home until they sold the home to Bradford & Routsong Funeral Home in 1938. Seventy years later, Routsong Funeral Home is leaving Oakwood. The building is currently for sale or lease, and its fate is unknown. However, it leaves behind a unique history as one of the area's oldest family-owned funeral homes.

The funeral home business transformed dramatically during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Many people credit the rise of the modern funeral home with Abraham Lincoln's funeral and the desire to transport Civil War casualties home for burial. There are two reasons why Abraham Lincoln's funeral is widely considered as the birth of the modern funeral industry. First, it broke the idea that death and burial quickly followed one another, and secondly, it began to transform the notion that funerals were private events that took place within the home of the deceased.

After Lincoln's assassination, it was decided that his funeral could be



*Routsong Funeral home on Oakwood Avenue.*

a unifying event for a still divided country. Therefore, his body was embalmed and over two weeks driven by train through thirteen cities. By the time Lincoln was buried, it was estimated that nearly one-fifth of the US population had viewed his body. This procession would not have been possible without advances in embalming.

Prior to the Civil War, most funerals were held quickly after death. However, the modern embalming techniques of arterial embalming and ability to avoid any cavity work allowed families to control the final disposition. By the early 1880s, embalming began to grow in popularity as undertakers were constantly educated by chemical and casket companies on the benefits of preservative fluids. Companies that manufactured embalming chemicals began to send out salesmen in the 1880s. These salesmen taught courses lasting a few hours and presented certificates or diplomas. By the end of the nineteenth century, schools were established exclusively for the training of students in the arts of embalming. In Ohio, the Clarke School of Embalming (later renamed the Cincinnati School of Embalming) was established in 1882.

The funeral director and funeral home were another very important transformation in the funeral business. Previously, funerals were private events held within the home.

*continued on page 4*

## 2008 Programs

*The Society's new Board met in January and firmed up the programs for the coming year. Here's our plan:*

**March 13 – Glenn Harper  
Helping Build America:  
The National Road**  
(see article on front page)

**April 13 - Special Home Tour  
of John's Gray's "The Farm"**  
to see the daffodils in bloom  
**This is a fundraiser;  
please save the day!**

**April 24 – Potluck Dinner**  
(see page 7)  
An annual favorite – with a special program by Harry Ebeling and Board Members:  
**"Treasures from theAttic"**  
Restoration features

**May is Preservation Month!**

**May 15 – Glenn Harper  
"Drive-Ins And Ranch Houses:  
Preserving the Recent Past"**

**May 17 – Centennial Parade**

**June 15 – Old Fashioned Picnic at  
the Homestead**  
Earlier this year because of the Centennial Celebration

**July 12 – Premier of  
Centennial Film**  
at High School Auditorium

**July 25 – Homestead:  
Thank You Preview Party**  
For special donors and City Officials

**July 26 – Homestead Open House**  
Completion of Phase I Restoration)

**Sept. – Woodland Cemetery Tour**  
Date to be announced

**Sept. – Homestead  
Garage and Art Sale**

**Nov. 19 – Founders Day &  
Annual Meeting**  
Dayton Country Club

**Dec.14 – Holidays at the  
Homestead**  
Community invited and house tours available

## Committee Reports

### **Buildings & Grounds— Marilynn Sheehan** (by Mark Risley)

Mark is watching the store while Marilyn basks in the sun. The grounds are in Winter rest. The gutters were cleaned preparatory to a spring realignment. We are investigating gutter guards to minimize any drainage issues. The garage and Summer Kitchen will need paint this year. The Carriage House needs door repair. The brick Walk will be extended around to the front of the house for visitor access from the parking area. We have installed outside lighting from the parking area to the back door of the house, and we are looking into upgrading our security system.

### **Preservation/ Centennial Celebration— Harrison Stamm-Gowdy**

The committee is spending time with the Centennial Public TV Program which will be introduced in July. We are working on the Preservation & Restoration Handbook to be sponsored by the city. We plan to take orders for Schantz Historic District plaques like the original ones sold in 1992.

### **Website— Mackensie Wittmer**

We are in the process of updating the information on our Website, and getting good comments on it. Please visit us at [www.oakwoodhistory.org](http://www.oakwoodhistory.org) Please give us feedback so that we can be responsive and informative.

For the public to embrace the entire range of services offered by the funeral director, the funeral home was established. Funeral homes offered a new social space for preparing, displaying, and communing with the dead. Funeral homes also widened the gap between the living and the dead since, prior to the invention of the funeral home, corpses were displayed in the familiar residential surroundings of the deceased. Therefore, as funeral homes gained popularity, their appearances were carefully chosen to resemble a home away from home.

Several funeral homes opened in the Dayton area in the late-nineteenth century. The Routsong Funeral Home began as a partnership between George Bradford and Carl T. Routsong. According to the corporate website, Carl T. Routsong's life was transformed during the 1913 Flood. Carl was a rural mailman working in the main post office as he watched floodwaters wash away his horse and buggy, leaving him with no transportation to maintain his route. He, therefore, went to work for his brother-in-law, George Bradford, who had recently started Bradford and Gustin Funeral Home. In 1918, when Mr. Gustin retired, Carl entered into a partnership with George Bradford, and the firm was founded. The first funeral home was located at 627 W. 3rd Street. Both Carl and his wife and George and his wife lived at 627 W. 3rd Street. They later moved the business to 1489 Salem Avenue and in 1938 opened a second location in Oakwood.

Typical of the time, the Bradford & Routsong Funeral Homes utilized former residences that were altered to serve as a single location for the treatment of the physical remains and their public presentation before or during a funeral service. Numerous reasons are associated with the trend to move funerals outside the home of the deceased. These include the rise in new illnesses and more frequent hospital deaths, changes in home design which eliminated the traditional parlor, and general difficulties associated with planning a funeral in the home at a painful and chaotic time. In addition, many people no longer wanted to contaminate the sanctity of living space with the palor of death. Changing attitudes in public sanitation contributed to the viability and efficiency of separate funeral homes that cared for the dead.

In 1952, the name Routsong Funeral Home was adopted, and, in the 1960s, additions were made to the building, giving it its current appearance. Routsong Funeral Home has been part of Oakwood's history for seventy of the city's 100 years. This landmark will be missed, and we all will watch with anticipation and trepidation as this building's fate is decided once again.

(For more detailed information, please refer to Gary Laderman's *Rest in Peace: A Cultural History of Death and the Funeral Home in Twentieth-Century America*: Oxford University Press 2003)

## Renewal Reminder

If you would like to continue receiving the  
Quarterly Newsletter  
and notices of our programs  
and events, please renew your membership to  
the Oakwood Historical Society.

Fill out the form on the back of this newsletter  
and mail it in with your check today!



# A Delightful Interview

By Harry Ebeling

Sometimes my position as resident historian leads me to fun experiences. Such was the case in June, when I had the pleasure of conducting a taped interview for our archives with Mary May Penn Burkhart in Miami Twp. She was referred to me by our long time friend and Long descendent, Margie Mack Yowell, who has provided so much information and a video interview.

To refresh your memory, Margie is from the Peter Long line, who lived at the corner of Triangle and Far Hills and is Oakwood High School Class of '42. Mary May Penn is the daughter of Lemuel Penn, who owned the house across the street, at Triangle and Far Hills, which now has offices, shops and a beauty parlor. Mary graduated from Fairmont in 1933, which gives you an idea of her age, which she guards.

This delightful lady is so upbeat and verbal, that I hardly know where to begin. She wanted to tell me about her father, who encouraged her and motivated her. He was a barber from Circleville, who moved to Dayton and had a very high class clientele downtown. Seeking to improve himself, he sought further skills in New York under a famous hair stylist named Antoine. This, in turn, led him to Paris where he learned women's hair styling and brought them to Dayton where he introduced the "Bob" in the mid-twenties.

The parcel at the corner of Triangle was three acres and had a large barn behind the house, where Penn's father raised Nuvean Goats, whose milk was very good for people with digestive problems. His entrepreneurial spirit lead him to platting the property into the Penn Plat in 1925, a subdivision of 11 lots, extending along the south side of Triangle to three lots east of Shafor Blvd., excluding his homesite. He built several of the houses there, in addition to the two between his house and the Oakwood Club. He later built the Monterey Apartments at the corner of Monterey and Far Hills with the design help of



Architect Ralph Carnahan. The family bought a 48 acre tract on the Lebanon Pike near Rte. 73, which they enjoyed for many years.

Mary acquired many artistic skills from her mother, which she used throughout her life, working as a seamstress and flower arranger. She tells of working for L. Slayden Davis interiors and for Hugh Howard's Oakwood Florist before moving to Ray's Florist on Far Hills. She combined this experience with her natural talent to make artificial flower arrangements, a skill which she still uses in making beautiful silk arrangements and paintings on various backgrounds. Her memories of Oakwood include the Hirsch family who had a grocery at the Oakwood Club site and opened the first restaurant there. On special occasions the family would eat at The Coffee Pot Restaurant across the street. She attended Harman Ave. School until high school, when she opted for Fairmont which was closer. She and Marge Yowell have remained friends through the years, and it was a most pleasant experience getting to know her.

This article was written for the Oakwood Historical Society newsletter in October, 2007, but not used. She

## Committee Reports

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### Archives & Acquisitions Harry Ebeling

Our archives are bulging in the new digs at the city building. The restoration project and creation of a winter kitchen forced us to clean house and move all artifacts not related to operations there. The good news is that we have an efficient office for our records in the end of the new exhibit room – and boy are we tidy! We plan to begin inventorying our possessions with the help of new laptop computers and special curating software. The major acquisition is a wood/coke burning stove donated for use in the 1908 kitchen. After cleanup, this will be a real addition to our interpretation program. Also adding to this is another donation: an early linen press known as a mangle. Come to the Pot Luck Dinner and hear about these and other things we have acquired.

promised to call me when she had her "Boutique" sale of Christmas decorations, flowers, and centerpieces. She called on Friday, November 9, and I arranged to go out at noon on Saturday. When I knocked on her door and rang her doorbell, there was no response. I looked in the window, and saw her fallen over on the couch in a very unnatural position. Fearing the worst, I roused a neighbor who had her key, but the door was double bolted. They called 911, and I left. On checking back later in the afternoon, I talked to her daughter, who reported that she had died on Friday night. I would have liked to buy a decoration as a memory of knowing this bright and enthusiastic, upbeat and talented, 90+ year old.

# Announcements, congratulations, and other news

## Committee Reports

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### Restoration— Phyllis Miller

If you were at our open house in September or the Christmas open house, you know that all you've been reading about our restoration and renovation project is true! Many hands have helped move furniture and artifacts to make way for paint, wall paper, and clean up workers. Although Phyllis has done the artistic work and used her decorating background in designing and advising, it took a lot of work by many folks just to be able to do it. We've had some great carpenters, painters, and electricians performing their magic on week ends and at odd hours. We're finishing the downstairs, and showing it off to special friends while planning ahead for Phase II – upstairs. Hopefully you'll plan to see the Homestead this year. You won't recognize it!

### Schantz Park Architecture Lecture by Mark Risley

"Back by popular demand." That is the way the University of Dayton Learning in Retirement brochure announced the lecture to be offered on April 12th by former OHS president Mark Risley. Mark will repeat his PowerPoint presentation of "Early 20th Century Architecture as Illustrated in the Schantz Park Historic District of Oakwood." This is a two-hour presentation followed by a "weather-permitting" walking tour of the district. Class size is limited so contact UDLLI to register!

### Philo T. Frarnsworth Video Festival first place award winners

Congratulations to John and Barb Moraites, long time active supports of the Oakwood Historical Society, for another first place award in the Philo T. Farnsworth Video Festival for non-professional documentary profiles. The festival is a four-state annual regional competition. John often films our programs, and Barb makes the best coffee and most attractive set-ups for many of our programs and events!

*John and Barb Moraites*



### 1850s Sofa and 1920s Rocker restored

The 1850's sofa has been restored and reupholstered! The sofa, finally pulled out of the basement, is now sitting center-stage in the newly restored sunroom area off the original front parlor. This was made possible through the generous donations of our members who contributed to the restoration campaign.

The 1920 era rocker has also been given new life! An original Long-Romspert piece, the rocker came out of storage, was stabilized, and reupholstered for use in the 1920 living room. It reclines in the same way a Morris chair does....note the unusual carving on the arms. Once again, restoration dollars from our members made this possible...thanks!

# The Rationale Behind the Renovations

## *Why we're doing what we're doing...*

In 1985, Ethel Romsperth bequeathed her residence and surrounding property, known as the Long-Romsperth Homestead, to the Oakwood Historical Society providing that such a property be maintained as an historical house museum and education center. Since that time and over the last four years, in particular, the society has expanded its efforts, with great success, to develop outreach educational opportunities for school children, both within and without Oakwood, and for the general public.

Because the Homestead represents the transition of American history from the Civil War era to the turn-of-the-century to the 1920's, it provides the perfect opportunity to make history "real" for all who tour the Homestead; this has prompted a discussion to increase the Homestead's interpretation of these eras with the intent of demonstrating the transformation from rural to suburban culture during the years of 1865-1920.

The society is currently in the process of interpreting and creating a living history of the past 100 years by accurately recreating time periods throughout the Homestead, beginning with the restoration and interpretation of the four period kitchens associated with the house: the 1865 summer kitchen, the winter kitchen, the 1908 kitchen, and the 1920 kitchen. The Homestead will come to life with historically accurate costumes for docents and children to wear representing each of the three time periods. Cooking utensils, decorations, food items, paint choices, window treatments and all details are being carefully researched and selected to create a fully functional kitchen of the appropriate year. With these four functioning kitchens of three different eras (Civil War, Industrial Age, Depression), the society will be able to provide visitors with a tangible experience of real life activities from these times. This experience will highlight not only the technological evolution of household items such as cooking and cleaning appliances but also how social history - specifically women's roles and real life- changed over time; for example, how improved kitchen and home appliances were touted as labor-savers but instead increased women's workloads. Soon-to-be addressed is the accurate restoration of the 1920 living room and dining room.

The educational interpretation continues with the now-completed professional exhibit gallery which will soon have its first two exhibits: one on the larger context of local history and the second on the history of the Homestead and its owners.

So, why do we do all this? Because it's the right thing to do...for our children and for ourselves. We can create through the Homestead a living testament of our history for the generations of children who will learn to cherish and appreciate our heritage as a city, as a state, and indeed as a nation through the programs administered by the historical society.

You have believed in the vision with us. Through your generous donations to the restoration, and, through careful and responsible spending of those donations, we are very close to completing Phase 1: the first floor. Just a mere \$4,000 will ensure its completion.

If you're already contributed, thank you! We could not have come this far without you! If you've not yet contributed, won't you consider it now and help leave a legacy for the future?

Tax-deductible donations can be mailed to the Oakwood Historical Society, 1947 Far Hills Avenue, Dayton, Ohio 45419. Please mark the envelope: Restoration.

Any questions can be directed to Teresa Prosser, Fundraising Chair, by emailing [teresa.prosser@sinclair.edu](mailto:teresa.prosser@sinclair.edu) or to Phyllis Niemeyer Miller, local artist and Restoration Chair, by calling 299-3837.

## Potluck Supper

Join us **Thursday, April 24, at 6:00 p.m.** at the Lutheran Church of Our Savior, 155 East Thruston Blvd. for our **Welcome Spring Potluck Supper**. We have moved this annual Society event to the spring to spread out our social gatherings throughout the year instead of focusing so many of them in the fall.

This supper is always a crowd-pleaser, and there's no charge! Just check below to see what dish you should bring. If your last name starts with:

**A through F - Bring a dessert**  
**G through M - Bring a salad or vegetable**  
**N through Z - Bring a main dish**

**Don't forget to bring plates and utensils. Beverage and rolls provided.** Although there is no charge, we need to know how many to expect. Please call **Teresa Prosser at 293-8506 or e-mail her by April 23 at [teresa.prosser@sinclair.edu](mailto:teresa.prosser@sinclair.edu)**

### *Potluck Program*

Harry Ebeling and other society board members will be on hand to speak on the topic "Treasures in the Attic."



THE OAKWOOD HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
1947 Far Hills Avenue • Dayton, Ohio 45419

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[www.oakwoodhistory.org](http://www.oakwoodhistory.org)

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**Membership Categories (please check one)**

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The information that you submit will be used only by the Oakwood Historical Society and not given or sold to outside parties. Please make check payable to:  
**Oakwood Historical Society Mail to: 1947 Far Hills Ave, Dayton, OH 45419**