

Preserving the past, present, and future of the Oakwood Community • Spring 2014



1947 Far Hills Avenue
Dayton, OH 45419
(937) 299-3793

Let's Celebrate 40 Years at the Long-Romspert Homestead

--Harry Ebeling

The Oakwood Historical Society is excited to be celebrating 40 Years of Making History! We have a new membership committee that is actively working at recruiting new members, giving out membership cards, sending out renewal notices and creating new Members Only appreciation events!

But why are we celebrating? The history of Oakwood can all be covered in the story of the Longs and Romspersts. Our house museum, the Long-Romspert Homestead at 1945 Far Hills, has watched Oakwood grow from a farming community in Van Buren Township to a failed Town in 1872, to a growing suburb, then to a prosperous city. Our house museum has watched horses and buggies travel to Cincinnati, streetcars and their commuters during daily rush hours, electric buses, cars, and more.

We love telling our story, and we love expanding on the stories of Oakwood! In this issue we are thanking the people and places that made The Oakwood Historical Society possible. So, here is the story of our house museum - the Long-Romspert Homestead!

The name Long-Romspert Homestead is the official name of our museum. It is a common convention to name houses after their owners. Our house was built by Henry and Harriet Long and passed on to their daughter, Laura Long Romspert, then to her son Harry Romspert and his wife Ethel. Ethel eventually donated the Long-Romspert Homestead to The Oakwood Historical Society.

Henry Long was born in Maryland and came here with his father, Peter, in 1828. Peter Long purchased a quarter section on what is now Southern Blvd., and his house still stands at the corner of Laurelwood Rd. Henry was one of 13 children, and in 1856 he set out to start his own family by purchasing a quarter section (160 acres) and building a log cabin on what is now Park Rd. Henry's wife was Harriett Shroyer. Her family owned a lot of premier farmland in Oakwood, and in 1867 Henry and Harriett moved farther south towards the Shroyer farm and started building what would become our house museum. At first, the Longs thought they would farm like Harriett's family did, but they soon realized their acreage was at the end of a Wisconsin Glacier moraine and that the land was almost all gravel close to the surface. As luck would have it, the location along the Lebanon Turnpike (State Route 48) was ideal for a new type of business—a gravel quarry.

Celebrating 40 Years



The Oakwood Historical Society

— Make History With Us —

Inside

President's Message	2
Citizens Join	3
Let's Celebrate, cont.	4
Ethel & Mr. Bill Hager	6
Wright Library	7
Save the Dates	7



Volume 2 Issue 1 - 2014

Website: www.oakwoodhistory.org

E-mail: info@oakwoodhistory.org

Story continues on Page 4

2014
OAKWOOD HISTORICAL
SOCIETY
BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Officers

- President -

Mark Risley

- Vice President -

Harrison Stamm Gowdy

- Treasurer -

Deb Schenk

- Assistant Treasurer -

Leigh Turben

- Business Manager -

Linda Pearson

- Secretary -

Skippi Cross

Directors

Jacqueline Housel

Leah Konicki

Mackensie Wittmer

Lisa Kell

Nicole Crawford

Susan Marra

Carol Holm

Phyllis N. Miller

Message from the President

Spring is upon us!

This year marks the 40th anniversary of The Oakwood Historical Society. It will also mark changes in the Society itself. There is now an expansion of programs and events, as well as a change in the appearance of the Society. Rebranding includes a new logo and an expanded presence within the community.

You'll also notice a change in the appearance of the newsletter. Sponsorships from local businesses help cover the costs of printing and mailing - check out their logos listed on the last page. Our thanks to all of the businesses who participate in this effort and make our newsletter possible.

Partnering with Wright Memorial Library, the society has begun a new feature, "The Far Hills Speaker Series." Presented at the library, these programs spotlight many interesting and historical topics associated with Oakwood.

Traditional events such as the annual *A Taste of Wine & Cheese* fundraiser this month and the "Classics on the Lawn" car show in August will return with both featuring open house tours of the Long-Romspert Homestead House Museum.

It is rare that a small, local historical society owns any property. The Oakwood Historical Society has been supporting two full-sized homes on large lots for 30 years. The division of the two properties in 2003 began a full tax billing application to 1945 Far Hills. Increases in the cost of maintenance, services, insurance and taxes have significantly diminished the return of lease revenue from that property. Liability issues are of another concern.

After a great deal of research, discussion, consideration and soul-searching, the current Board of Directors has determined that, for an organization like the Historical Society, managing a fund established from the sale of the property at 1945 Far Hills Avenue (adjacent to the Long-Romspert Homestead House Museum) would be much easier, more productive and less costly than managing and caring for a real estate property. The funds from this sale will go a long way toward maintaining the Long-Romspert Homestead House Museum and supporting the programs and events of The Oakwood Historical Society.

The current Board includes not only historians, archivists and preservationists, but money management professionals, as well. This Board and future boards are cautioned to properly maintain and enhance that fund to ensure that The Oakwood Historical Society and the Long-Romspert Homestead House Museum remain as positive aspects of the Oakwood community for decades to come.

Your membership, donations and volunteer contributions are crucial for the continued success of organizations like The Oakwood Historical Society. We thank you for your interest and participation, and we never forget that it cannot be done without you.



Get more info on our website or give us a call!

www.oakwoodhistory.org • 937.299.3793

Citizens Join in 1970's to Preserve Oakwood's Story

--Mackensie Wittmer

A small group of Oakwood citizens joined together in the early 1970s with the interest of preserving and promoting the history of Oakwood. At the time, many larger homes were in danger due to the oil crisis, recession, and increasing living costs. Likewise, shops and services continued to move further outward into the surrounding suburban malls and centers. While the City Manager, Dave Foell, worked to revitalize the city's commercial areas, he also worked closely with key citizens Bob Jefferis, Bill Hager, Harry Ebeling and Toni Winger who were supporting the efforts to organize a local historical society.

At the same time, Thelma Yakura, a Wright Memorial Library librarian, was actively working to collect and display Oakwood records. She was an avid researcher and writer responsible for many of the Historical Society's earliest records and photographs.

Together the group formed The Oakwood Historical Society in 1974. One of the first major publications by the group was *Oakwood: The Far Hills*. This comprehensive history of the City of Oakwood was first published in 1983 for the 75th anniversary of incorporation. It was reprinted in 2008 with a new introduction for the city's centennial celebration and is available at Wright Library or through the Oakwood Historical Society's online store.

In 1985, Ethel Romspert deeded her family home to the Historical Society including a second property immediately adjacent to the north. The Long-Romspert Homestead is one of the earliest homes still existing in Oakwood, and was placed on the National Registry of Historic Places in 1987. This generous gift provided the Historical Society a place to meet, hold programs, and store records.

Over the course of the Historical Society's 40 year history, the ever- changing group of members and volunteers have produced countless books, articles, presentations, and programs for children and adults. In 2003, the Historical Society launched a major fundraising effort to restore the Long-Romspert Homestead that continued for five years and transformed the house into the Long-Romspert Historic House Museum. The group was active in the City of Oakwood's Centennial celebration in 2008 with creation of a 45-min film, *Our Home on the Hill*, and photographic support for the *Oakwood: From Acorn to Oak Tree* book.

The Historical Society continues to host school children for field trips and welcomes a number of groups each year for tours and special events. The Society continues its partnership with the City of Oakwood and Wright Library. In recent years, the city's Boy Scout troops have completed many Eagle Scout projects for the benefit of the Long-Romspert Homestead and the Society. In 2012, Dayton History recognized the Oakwood Historical Society with its annual Preservation Award.

Today the mission of the Oakwood Historical Society is to research, preserve, publish, and promote interest in the history of the City of Oakwood, including government, schools, public enterprises, citizens, architecture, and buildings. To promote a link to the past, the Oakwood Historical Society features programs and events throughout the year. Funding for the Historical Society's programs and publications comes from membership dollars, donations, publication sales, and rental income from the adjacent property. The Society welcomes anyone and everyone who has an interest in the history of Oakwood to get involved in its projects and programs.

We are excited to see what the next 40 years will bring!



Early OHS Members

Let's Celebrate - *Cont*

Henry started "farming" the gravel on his property and selling it to landowners along the Lebanon Turnpike. A turnpike was a privately owned toll road that connected two or more well-known markets. In the 1870s, a trip to Cincinnati took two days—one day from Dayton to Lebanon, one day from Lebanon to Cincinnati. If a section of the toll road was improved the toll road owner could charge a higher fare to cross it. Therefore, a gravel quarry nearby was ideal for improving the road and charging a higher toll.

Fast forward to 1896: Henry and Harriet were aging, and their four children were now adults. One of their daughters, Laura, had married Alexander Romspert, a well-known attorney in Dayton. Alexander died in 1892, leaving Laura with their two children, Maud and Harry, to raise. Laura moved her family into her parents' house, allowing her to take care of her children and aging parents, and she began to help with the family business, too.

After Laura's parents died, the family land to be divided between the four adult Long children had grown to contain 286 acres through inheritance from John Shroyer. The portion on the west side of Far Hills Ave. (Lebanon Pike) was 90 acres, through various sales by Henry Long, and this became Laura Romspert's property, including the Long-Romspert Homestead and the gravel quarry. [See the map for Henry's sales. In 1883, he sold 38.3 acres on the north end roughly between Park Rd. and Forrer Rd. to Henry Parrott. In 1884, he sold 20 acres off the remaining NW corner of the Section to Henry Harman, who then sold it in 1894 to James Young, together with an access strip to Far Hills Ave. (Park Rd.)]

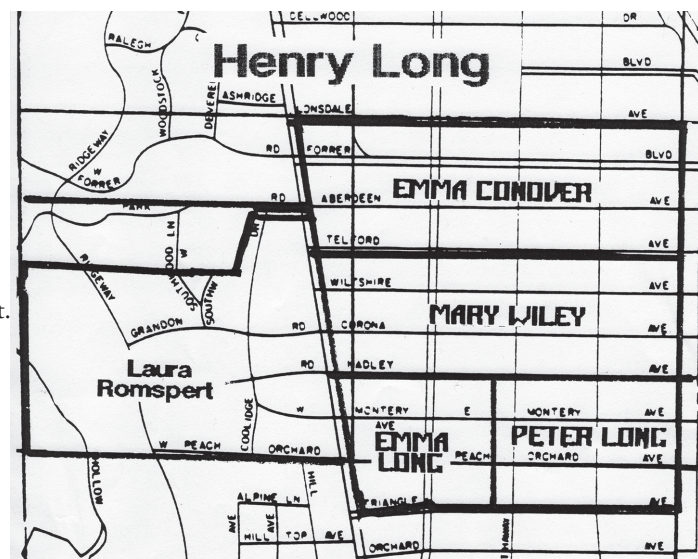
Laura was a good businesswoman. She rented a portion of the SW corner of her land at Peach Orchard Rd. and Ridgeway to George Lawson for the planting of a peach orchard. In 1906, she sold 30 acres of the west side (which became Ridgeway Rd.) to realtors who were straw men for John H. Patterson. About the same time, she sold the adjoining 12 acres in an "L" shape extending north to Young's tract (Park Rd.) to Hugh Chalmers (VP of NCR). Then she sold a square parcel of 5 acres to the NCR realtors. But the cat was out of the bag when all three of these parcels were transferred to John H. Patterson on the same day! This sale resulted in the creation of Ridgeway Road.

In 1923, she sold 23 acres to the south of the Homestead to Horace Huffman, of Huffu Bike fame. Huffman then sold 1.9 acres along Peach Orchard Rd. from the corner of Far Hills Ave. to Coolidge Dr. to Dr. S.H. Salume, a prominent physician who platted the Field Plat. Huffman also sold 11.78 acres to G. W. Hartzell and C. L. Eckert who platted from Far Hills Ave. to Ridgeway, including Monterey and Hadley Rds., into Ridgeway Plat in 1923. He then sold off the remaining land - several parcels on the east side of Ridgeway Rd. The prominent businessman then developed this area into the neighborhoods we now love from Peach Orchard to Coolidge, and later from Far Hills to Ridgeway including Monterey and Hadley Rds.

The last part of Laura's inheritance was the parcel behind and south of the Homestead, consisting of Coolidge Dr. from Park Rd. to Grandon Rd. and all of present-day Grandon Rd. This was accomplished by a sale to William F. Cappel and Julius Ruttenberg that took ten years of negotiation with Cappel! In the end, Laura conceded to certain requirements, such as the tearing down of the original barn on the Homestead property. She agreed to the platting of Park Ridge Plat on this parcel and was paid on a lot-release basis. This left her with the 2 acre Homestead property.

When Laura died in 1943, she devised the remaining 2 acres to her son, Harry Romspert. In 1969, Harry died and tried to leave a Life Estate only to his widow, Ethel (Gilbert) Romspert. Since such a disinheritance is prohibited by Ohio law, she elected to take her statutory share, thus receiving a ½ interest. She bought the other ½ interest from Harry's devisee, the oldest living male Romspert heir who was living in California at the time.

Ethel lived in the Homestead for another 14 years. The Oakwood Historical Society was formed in 1974 as a community organization. Realtor Bill Hager was interested in finding a permanent home for the society and befriended Ethel. And, well, the rest of the story comes from our interview with Bill Hager...



Ethel and Mr. Bill Hager

--Linda Pearson



The Oakwood Historical Society had been in existence for most of a decade without a physical home before the Long-Romspert Homestead became the official heart of the Society.

The main players in this acquisition were Ethel Gilbert Romspert, the owner of the house, and C. William (Bill) Hager, a local realtor and Oakwood Historical Society member with interests in historic preservation and historic neighborhoods. Ethel was the widow of Harry H. Romspert, and they were the last remaining members of the family living in the house since it was built in the 1860s. They had no children, and she had become reclusive in her later years.

With Ethel having married into the family and moved onto the property at 1947 Far Hills in 1910, she was certainly an early member of the new community of Oakwood, which had incorporated in 1908. Ethel was a very bright woman with a college degree. She trained to become a teacher but married before she could begin her career. She belonged to many clubs and societies and collected information on many topics. Growing dahlias, exotic to Dayton, was one of her long time hobbies.

In her early years at the house, she and her husband would sometimes hold moonlight dances on full moon nights in the summer. In addition to running the family gravel pit and rental businesses, Harry was a composer. Both he and Ethel played piano, so they had a great mutual interest in music. There was no electricity in the neighborhood yet, so the parties were held by only moonlight and featured a fiddler and refreshments. The Shroyers (her brother- and sister-in-law who lived in the house next door) and other friends would come to enjoy the evening.

Naturally, as a long time community member, she was invited to attend Historical Society events when the Society officially began in 1974. She was a good fit, being a member of an early settler family and living in one of the early homes in the area. Some invitations she refused; however, she had developed a special bond with Bill Hager and attended events with him and his wife a half dozen times or so.

According to a recent interview with Mr. Hager, he and Ethel had first met in the 1970s when several events occurred. Their first acquaintance occurred when Mr. Hager took a choral youth group to sing at the Methodist church on Salem Avenue where Ethel was the pianist. Their second meeting was when he came to the house to help her find roofers who could bid on repairing her leaking slate roof as she was very thrifty but wanted things done right. He found her in her garden where she cultivated her dahlias, and when they went indoors to discuss the roofers, Bill noticed her piano. He asked to try it out and played a Chopin waltz.

This led Ethel and Mr. Hager to forge a connection based on music. Both were expert pianists, and she suggested that they have piano playing sessions at her house. Ethel had two pianos, an upright which she played in the 1920s living room while Mr. Hager played a spinet in the adjoining dining room. On Saturday afternoons they could sometimes be found playing for each other, usually classical music or hymns from her hymnals.

While Ethel had become a recluse to most of the world, she did manage to get an invitation to ride in a 1910 Lambert automobile in the 1976 That Day in May Parade. She asked Mr. Hager to ride with her. When the parade ended, the driver, Mr. Billy Lambert, Jr., drove them back to her home at full speed which thrilled her greatly. This appreciation for speed would figure in later events.



OHS Committees

Please get involved...

Archives & Aquisitions*Harry Ebeling*

293-0611

hebeling@aol.com

&

Cataloging*Lisa Kell*

299-2267

charybdismom@yahoo.com

Education*Linda Pearson*

648-9702

lindapinoh@gmail.com

&

Lisa Kell

299-2267

charybdismom@yahoo.com

Events

Board members (by event)

Facilities/Grounds*Mark Risley*

294-2537

therisleys@ameritech.net

Facilities/Interior*Phyllis N. Miller, consultant***Membership***Leigh Turben*

lturben@woh.rr.com

Newsletter*Lisa Kell*

299-2267

charybdismom@yahoo.com

&

Zachary Kell

pixelshiftdesign@live.com

Publicity*Nicole Crawford*

305-0221

nclrcrawford@yahoo.com

Research & Outreach*Harrison Stamm Gowdy*

643-4075

stammgowdy@sbcglobal.net

&

Mackensie Wittmer

291-2831

mwittmer@gmail.com

Website*Joan Milligan*

479-1000

milligan_joan@yahoo.com

&

Mackensie Wittmer

291-2831

mwittmer@gmail.com

Ethel and Mr. Bill Hager *Cont.*

As time went on, Ethel told Mr. Hager that she was getting tired. She threw out her dahlia bulbs instead of replanting them each spring; she said she was too tired to attend meetings any more. She started giving away some of the furnishings in the house, saying she didn't need them any more. She called a local church to come pick up her piano music. Mr. Hager was there when the man came to get the music. She gave him everything, but as the music was going out the door she decided she wanted to keep one piece. She chose "My Way".

Several times Mr. Hager carefully broached the topic of what Ethel planned to do with her house. She was undecided, although her original thought was to give it to the Germantown Historical Society since she was originally from Germantown. According to an article in the Dayton Daily News from 1990, "Hager said Romspert, in her 90s, was nearly unapproachable." Then one night in early 1984 she suddenly called Mr. Hager and "gave me two hours to call everyone (on the board of The Oakwood Historical Society.) She said she was seeing her lawyer the next day and asked if I thought we could take care of her home."

The next morning there was an official signing at the house. In attendance were Ethel, her attorney David Bart who had drawn up the document to Ethel's specifications, attorney Bob Jefferis, the president of the Society at the time, and Bill Hager. The house was to be conveyed to the Historical Society after Ethel was no longer living there. She was at that time on a waiting list to move to Otterbein, a Methodist retirement community in Lebanon. The house next door, which she also owned, was part of the gift to the Historical Society, to provide income.

The transfer came sooner than anyone would have expected. Ethel had been in the habit of gunning her car from Wiltshire Avenue across the intersection on Far Hills Avenue to get up into her driveway. She told Mr. Hager her husband had said she would not need to plow snow off the driveway if she were going 30 miles per hour as she crossed Far Hills. At that speed she could get all the way up the drive and into the garage without stopping. Late in 1984 she had been out running errands to Dorothy Lane Market. On her way home she followed her usual route up Wiltshire Avenue, and entered the intersection on Far Hills without noticing an oncoming car. She was hit, and her 1969 Ford sedan spun around. She was taken by ambulance to Kettering Hospital. While she was recuperating there, Ethel fell, broke her hip and was transferred to Otterbein, where she was already on the waiting list. She never recovered from her broken hip.

In 1985, the house became available to the Historical Society. All the remaining furnishings were willed to the Montgomery County Historical Society (now Dayton History), so The Oakwood Historical Society inherited an empty building. Loren Gannon, a professor at the University of Dayton, helped to get the house on the National Registry of Historical Places in 1986. Thus, the new life of the Long-Romspert Homestead Historical House Museum at 1947 Far Hills Avenue began, one that would bring new adventures to a house that had already seen plenty over the years, along with more visitors than the reclusive Ethel had invited in some time. Over the last few years, some of the original furnishings have been returning to the Homestead from Dayton History as it organizes its collections. The new life has thus been able to merge with pieces of its past.

Wright Library Officially Listed

--Leah Konicki

In December 2013, Oakwood's much-treasured community asset, Wright Library, was officially listed in the National Register of Historic Places. An honorary designation, the library is the fifth building or district in Oakwood to be included in this list, created and maintained by the federal government to recognize buildings, districts, sites, objects, and landmarks that are important in American history, either locally, regionally, or nationally.

Wright Library was listed as an example of a building designed in the Tudor Revival style by Dayton architects Schenck and Williams. This firm also designed other significant Oakwood landmarks, including the Tudor Revival Oakwood High School, Smith School and the municipal building, as well as many private homes. With its designation, the library joins other notable Oakwood buildings including The Oakwood Historical Society's Historic House Museum (known as the Long-Romspert Homestead), Wilber and Orville Wright's Home--Hawthorn Hill, and a Queen Anne style duplex at 314-316 Schantz Avenue, built by Adam Schantz Sr. for his unwed siblings. Oakwood is also home to one National Register Historic District-- the Schantz Park Historic District roughly bounded by Marht, Schenck, Rubicon, and Irving Avenues.



Volunteers Leah J. Konicki and Harrison Stamm Gowdy of The Oakwood Historical Society prepared the nomination documents, which enabled the Historical Society to provide a public service for this unique resource. For more information on the library and its history, architecture and significance, please see the OHS website at <http://www.oakwoodhistory.org>. For more information on the National Register of Historic Places, please visit <http://www.nps.gov/nr/>.

2014 Calendar of Events

--Nicole Crauford

This February we began a new addition to our lineup – our Far Hills Speaker Series. This series includes various speakers and topics, including aviation, local architecture, and even how to find out more about your own home's history! Each session is held at Wright Memorial Library and provides a great opportunity to learn about your local history and meet others in the community with similar interests.

Another big announcement for 2014: The Oakwood Historical Society is having a membership drive! This is our 40th Anniversary, and we want you to join us in making it memorable! This is the perfect opportunity to join us as a new member or to renew your membership. There are several benefits to being a member, and this year we will have even more opportunities than ever for you to get involved! We welcome you to call, email, or come to one of our many events to learn more!

Of course, your favorite annual events are still on the schedule – the children's programs and the Car Show. Here are the details:

Children's Summer Programs Entering Grades 1-3: June 11-13, 1:00 – 4:30 p.m.
 Entering Grades 4-6: June 16-18, 1:00 – 4:30 p.m.
 \$50 members/\$70 non-members

“Classics on the Lawn” Car Show Sunday, August 24, noon – 4:00 p.m.

You can find out more by calling 299-3793, or visit www.oakwoodhistory.org for details on upcoming events. Join us!

This issue of the newsletter sponsored by:

**FERNEDING
INSURANCE**



asphalt & concrete
Houser
 black top • sealing • striping

PRINTPOINT INC.

Park Avenue Antiques

**THE OAKWOOD
HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

1947 Far Hills Avenue
Dayton, OH 45419

**CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED
DATED MATERIAL**

Please Renew Your Membership!

The Oakwood Historical Society Membership Form

Membership Categories (Please Check One)

_____ Individual _____	\$20.00
_____ Family _____	\$35.00
_____ Business _____	\$50.00
_____ Bronze _____	\$75.00
_____ Silver _____	\$100.00
_____ Gold _____	\$200.00

*\$5 Discount: Student Senior Active Military

Date _____

First Name: _____

Last Name: _____

Spouse: _____

Business/Organization (if applicable): _____

Address: _____

City/State _____ Zip: _____

Phone Number _____

E-mail Address: _____

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