



The  
**Oakwood**  
Historical Society

— *Make History With Us* —



# Historian

*Preserving the past, present, and future of the Oakwood Community • Summer 2015*

## August F. Foerste: Dayton's Preeminent Natural Historian

—David Schmidt

The year 2015 marks the centennial of the publication of *Introduction to the Geology of Dayton and Vicinity*,<sup>1</sup> which is a 210-page, richly-illustrated volume that has had a continuing influence on local geologists and historians. The book details the paleontology and intricate glacial history of the Dayton region, with a focus on the characteristics of the complex land forms occurring in Hills and Dales Park and the adjoining area to the west and southwest. The book was written by Dr. August Foerste (Figure 1), who was a Dayton native and one of the most distinguished geologists and paleontologists of his time.



August Frederick Foerste ("FIRST-ee") was born in Dayton on May 7, 1862 to parents who had emigrated from Prussia. Foerste's Germanic heredity is notable; during the nineteenth century, Prussian virtues emphasized discipline, education, science, and lifelong learning. This cultural heritage produced several scientists of direct Germanic lineage who were pioneers in the paleontology of southwestern Ohio.<sup>2</sup>

Foerste was educated in Dayton schools and, as a young man, his early scientific interests were in flowering plants.

Before his graduation from Central High School, he had accumulated an herbarium of over a thousand species that had all been collected from the Dayton area.<sup>3</sup> Foerste recalled his youthful observations of local flora as he wrote the introductory portion to *Introduction to the Geology of Dayton and Vicinity* on December 1, 1915.

In 1877 there was a swamp directly north of the present Schantz plat, northeast of Oakwood, full of fringed gentians, the scarlet lobelia, the shooting star, and a host of other flowers, forming a botanical garden unrivaled in the number and variety of the forms growing within such a narrow area. The blue-eyed Mary and Virginia cowslip flourished in the dense thickets along the Bluffs [south of present-day Carillon Park]. The long-spurred violet grew on the northern slopes of the Adirondack ridge in the Hills and Dales area, and in early March the skunk cabbage was found in the marsh at the southern end of the [Dayton] Country Club golf ground.

When Foerste was in high school he attended a lecture by Edward Orton, who was president of the Ohio Agricultural and Mechanical College (later The Ohio State University) and perhaps the most knowledgeable geologist in Ohio at that time. During this lecture, young Foerste learned of the diverse invertebrate fauna that had thrived in Ohio's ancient seas and of the abundance of fossils that could be collected in local quarries. Recognizing the young man's deep interest in natural history, Professor Orton later sent Foerste additional references pertaining to the paleontology of Ohio. Orton's encouragement inspired Foerste to turn his main scientific interest to paleontology, and he began collecting fossils on almost a daily basis in the stone quarry at the nearby Dayton Soldiers' Home.<sup>4</sup>

### Inside

President's Message	2
Foerste Article, cont.	3
Children's Program	7
Eagle Project	7



Volume 3 Issue 2 - 2015

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

E-mail: [info@oakwoodhistory.org](mailto:info@oakwoodhistory.org)

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

**THE OAKWOOD  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

- 2015 -

***Officers***

- **President** -  
Mark Risley

- **Vice President** -  
\*Position Available

- **Treasurer** -  
Carol Vinings

- **Assistant Treasurer** -  
Leigh Turben

- **Business Manager** -  
Linda Pearson

- **Secretary** -  
\*Position Available

***Directors***

Nicole Crawford  
Harry Ebeling  
Harrison Gowdy  
Karin Harris  
Carol Holm  
Susan Marra  
Phyllis Miller  
Donna Rosebaum  
David Schmidt  
Aaron Willhoite  
Mackensie Wittmer

## Message from the President

Now that the warmer months are here, programs and projects at The Long-Romspert Homestead are in full swing.

The Boy Scouts are renovating a basement coal bin for use as a storage area. A group of student volunteers spent 3 days in late May cleaning out the carriage house and garage, then painting the fence surrounding the kitchen garden. Children's programs began in earnest with the planting of the aforementioned kitchen garden.

The Oakwood Historical Society was well represented in the That Day in May parade with a banner, marchers and a 1930 Ford Model A provided and driven by society member Brian Mettling.

Led by board member Carol Holm, the annual Taste of Wine and Cheese featured spring pairings of wines and foods. Arrow Wine helped host the event by providing wines and expertise. Over 80 guests enjoyed this event and tours of "The Homestead" making this a successful fundraiser. The wine tasting continues to grow in popularity as the adult event following the activities of That Day in May.

On August 23rd, our annual "Classics on the Lawn" car show will, once again, have the grounds of "The Homestead" festooned with classic automobiles. The children's garden program will continue throughout the summer and well into the fall.

Volunteerism is the key to successful programs and projects for The Oakwood Historical Society. We couldn't do it without the support of members, community members and leaders and those who participate in our events. A grateful "Thank you!" goes out to all who help in that regard.

*Mark W. Risley*

## "Classics on the Lawn" Returns Aug. 23

On Sunday, Aug. 23rd, the annual "Classics on the Lawn" car show returns to the grounds of The Long-Romspert Homestead House Museum at 1947 Far Hills Avenue.

*Central Perc* will again be providing lunch from the summer kitchen at a nominal fee. Many of the area's finest vintage and special interest automobiles will be featured from local museums, car clubs and private owners. "The Homestead" will be open for tours where guests can enjoy one of Oakwood's unique landmarks representing life from the 1860s to the 1920s.

The show is 12:00 to 4:00 PM. Due to limited parking, guests are encouraged to park on side streets, near the library or to just enjoy a summer's walk or bike ride through Oakwood to "The Homestead". Mark your calendars for Sunday, Aug. 23rd and "Classics on the Lawn".



Get more info on our  
website or give us a call!  
www.oakwoodhistory.org  
937.299.3793

## August F. Foerste: Dayton's Preeminent Natural Historian (*cont.*)

August Foerste graduated from Central High School in 1880. Following his graduation, he taught for three years at the one-room Schoolhouse Number 2 in Centerville, Ohio. (The building that housed the school still stands on Centerville Station Road and has been converted to a private residence.) While teaching in Centerville, Foerste collected fossils from the area and studied the local bedrock. One of his primary research sites was the quarry belonging to the Lewis and Talbot Stone Company, which stood north of present-day Centerville High School and is now the site of the Rod and Reel Fishing Club.

In 1883, Foerste enrolled in Denison University in Granville, Ohio, where he completed the B.A. in Geology in 1887. After graduating from Denison, he attended Harvard, where he completed the M.A. (1888) and Ph.D. (1890) in Geology. During his graduate study at Harvard, Foerste assisted the United States Geological Survey (USGS) in its analysis of the geology of New England. After earning his Ph.D. at Harvard, Dr. Foerste completed post-doctoral studies with some of the most renowned geologists of his time at Heidelberg and the College de France in Paris.

During his post-doctoral studies, Dr. Foerste spent his vacations in continued employment with the USGS. However, the agency's funding was significantly reduced during 1892, which prompted Foerste to work as a tutor to the children of one of his supervisors in the USGS. Dr. Foerste returned to Ohio in 1893, where he obtained employment as a physics teacher at Steele High School in downtown Dayton. He held this position until his retirement in 1932. During his tenure at Steele High School, Dr. Foerste received many offers of employment from prestigious institutions. However, he refused these offers because he believed his position at Steele High School provided him with the best opportunity to earn a living while performing the research he most enjoyed. He was also committed to helping raise the three young children belonging to his sister, who lived in Dayton and had been widowed at a young age.

During his summer vacations from Steele High School, Dr. Foerste performed field studies for geological surveys in Ohio, Indiana, Kentucky, and Canada. He also did geological field work in other parts of the world, became fluent in several foreign languages, and developed a deep international respect for his knowledge of geology and paleontology.

During his teaching years at Steele High School, Dr. Foerste stored his fossil specimens at the school in wooden boxes. The 1913 flood that ravaged downtown Dayton extensively damaged the school building and carried away many of Foerste's boxes along the flood-swollen Miami River. After the floodwaters receded, Foerste's friends helped him retrieve the boxes from downstream.<sup>5</sup> However, not all of Dr. Foerste's belongings escaped the wrath of the floodwaters:

Inside Foerste's office was a large wooden file in which were collected his entire project materials of charts, maps, records and data about the coastal structure of the United States. It was a massive manuscript upon which he had been working for the past twenty years. At 10:40 a.m. [on Tuesday, March 25], the window to this office smashed and the file floated outside. In passing over the windowsill it bumped and tipped, the drawer flew open and the Foerste Coastal Harbor Project was lost forever.<sup>6</sup>

A few years later, after the Miami Conservancy District was established, Dr. Foerste advised the organization about local geology as the agency planned the designs and locations of dams, levees, and other flood-control measures.<sup>7</sup>

Dr. Foerste's teaching employment led to a friendship and scientific collaboration with William Werthner, who was a noted local botanist and long-time teacher and administrator at Steele High School. During 1893, Werthner and Foerste began exploring and photographing the glacially-derived landforms to the south of Dayton and sharing their insights into these features with students and the general public.

## August F. Foerste: Dayton's Preeminent Natural Historian (*cont.*)

With encouragement and financial support from Edward Deeds, these efforts eventually led to the publication of *Introduction to the Geology of Dayton and Vicinity*. As Dr. Foerste wrote in the book's introduction:

This volume was begun in response to the request of Mr. E. A. Deeds that a few pages of printed matter be produced, describing the chief points of geologic interest in Moraine Park, his beautiful estate among the hills of the city. Soon, however, it was found desirable to include also illustrations from Hills and Dales, and from the gravel ridge area south of the Calvary cemetery, and so the few pages grew into a pamphlet. Through the generosity of Mr. Deeds, numerous photographs were added, a map of the gravel ridge area was prepared and investigations were extended to other points beyond the limits of the gravel ridge area, until the pamphlet grew into the present volume. Finally, Mr. Deeds assumed the entire expense of publication.

Some highlights of the book include:

- Detailed descriptions and drawings of the invertebrate fossils occurring in the southwestern Ohio area
- Thorough descriptions of the glacially-derived landforms in the area south of Dayton and the mechanisms by which these features developed
- Photographs and diagrams of Calvary Cemetery's former earthworks, which were constructed by ancient "mound builder" tribes
- Panoramic photographs of south-Dayton landscapes prior to their development (Figure 2)
- A detailed map of the roads, paths, and natural land formations (many of which have been lost due to development) in the Hills and Dales and Moraine Park area (Figure 3)
- Even after one hundred years, *Introduction to the Geology of Dayton and Vicinity* remains an unsurpassed reference to the glacial geology of the south Dayton area.



Figure 2

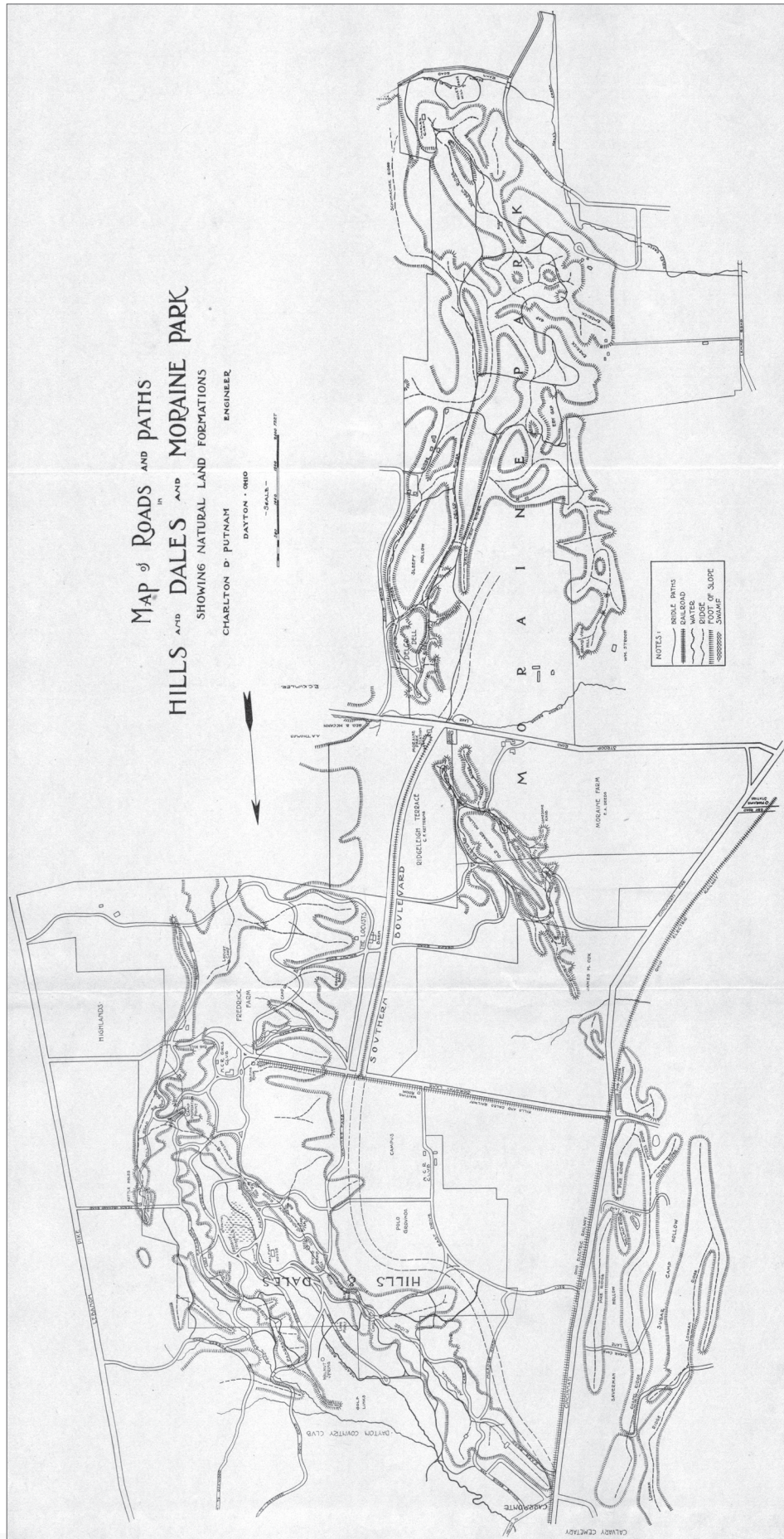
During 1918 and 1919, Dr. Foerste became the first geologist to map the highly complex and chaotic ring of bedrock in northern Adams County (and portions of the adjoining Highland and Pike Counties) that has become known as the Serpent Mound Disturbance.<sup>8</sup> The site is classified by geologists as a complex crater because it consists of an uplifted central portion surrounded by a ring-shaped trough with a diameter of several miles. The geometry of the crater, along with other physical and chemical anomalies within the geology of the area, are characteristic of an ancient meteorite impact. The site is named after the Serpent Mound, which is located on a plateau near the southwestern edge of the crater.

Also during 1919, Arthur E. Morgan, chief engineer of the Miami Conservancy District, brought to Dr. Foerste a fossil specimen of the trilobite *Isotelus* measuring approximately 14-1/2 inches long and 10-1/4 inches wide. (Trilobites are an extinct group of marine animals related to modern-day horseshoe crabs.) The fossil had been discovered by workmen constructing an outlet conduit for the Huffman Dam, which was being built in the wake of the 1913 flood to control the flow of the Mad River.<sup>9</sup> Through Dr. Foerste's efforts, the fossil was placed on permanent display at the Smithsonian Institution. It has since become one of the world's most famous fossils and remains one of the largest, complete trilobites ever collected.<sup>10</sup>



During 1920, Dr. Foerste began spending the summer months performing research in invertebrate paleontology at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Natural History in Washington, D.C. Following his retirement from Steele High School in 1932 at the age of seventy, he moved to Washington, where he continued his research at the Nation Museum as Associate in Paleontology. Dr. Foerste's research at this time focused on ancient cephalopods, which were relatives of modern-day octopuses, squid, cuttlefish, and the chambered nautilus.

Dr. Foerste passed away in Dayton on April 23, 1936 during a trip home from Washington D.C. He is buried in Woodland Cemetery.



**OHS Committees**

Please get involved...

**Archives & Aquisitions**

Harry Ebeling  
293-0611  
hebeling@aol.com

**Education**

Linda Pearson  
648-9702  
lindapinoh@gmail.com

&amp;

Lisa Kell  
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  
charybdismom@yahoo.com  
&  
Zachary Kell  
farhillsdesign@gmail.com

**Publicity**

Nicole Crawford  
305-0221  
nclcrawford@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

**August F. Foerste: Dayton's Preeminent Natural Historian**

--David Schmidt

The Smithsonian's index of Dr. Foerste's writing includes 135 scientific papers, 5500 pages on geology and paleontology, and 650 pages of scientific photographs.<sup>11</sup> This is an impressive output for a scientist, especially one whose primary vocation was teaching high-school physics.

Introduction to the Geology of Dayton and Vicinity *is available in several local libraries, including Wright Memorial Public Library.*

References

- <sup>1</sup> Foerste, A. F., 1915, An Introduction to the Geology of Dayton and Vicinity, with Special Reference to the Gravel Ridge Area South of the City, Including Hills and Dales and Moraine Park, Hollenbeck Press, Indianapolis, 210 p.
- <sup>2</sup> Potter, P. E., 1996, Exploring the geology of the Cincinnati/northern Kentucky region, Special Publication 22, Kentucky Geological Survey, p 6.
- <sup>3</sup> Bassler, R. S., 1937, Memorial of August F. Foerste, Proceedings of the Geological Society of America for 1936, p. 143.
- <sup>4</sup> Bassler, p. 144.
- <sup>5</sup> Bassler, p. 146.
- <sup>6</sup> Eckert, A. W., 1965, A Time of Terror: the Great Dayton Flood, Little, Brown, Boston, p. 115-116.
- <sup>7</sup> Bock, C. A., 1918, History of the Miami Flood Control Project, Technical Reports Part II, State of Ohio: The Miami Conservancy District, Dayton, Ohio, p. 60.
- <sup>8</sup> Schumacher, G. A., 2003, August F. Foerste; the First Geologist to Map the Serpent Mound Disturbance, Ohio Geology, v. 2003, no. 2, p. 1, 3-5.
- <sup>9</sup> Foerste, A. F., 1919, Notes on Isotelus, Acrolichas, Calymene, and Encrinurus, Denison University Bulletin, Journal of the Science Laboratories, v. 19, p. 66-67.
- <sup>10</sup> Shrake, D.L., 2005, Isotelus: Ohio's State Fossil, GeoFacts No. 6, Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Division of Geological Survey, p. 2.
- <sup>11</sup> Bassler, p. 148.

Figure captions:

Figure 1. August Foerste ca. early 1930s. (Bassler, 1937)

Figure 2. View ca. 1915 looking eastward in front of the present-day Kettering Hospital area. Charles Kettering's home is visible at the upper left of the photo and the Moraine Park trolley station stands in the left foreground. (Foerste, 1915)

Figure 3. Map of the Hills and Dales and Moraine Park area during 1915. (Foerste, 1915)

### Seasons in the Garden

--Linda Pearson

We have had a busy year so far in the garden planting, weeding, staking plants, harvesting, and dealing with a very wily rabbit who wants those carrot greens for himself! In June we had a visit from Red Wiggler worms in a worm compost box; yet to come is a visit from a beekeeper!

The Children's Garden Program has been meeting since April, and will continue into October when we put the garden to bed.



### Robbie Keller's Eagle Project

--Linda Pearson

Beneath the Homestead are two basements, one under the "old" side of the house; the other under the 'new' side. Each side has a history not visible upstairs, namely some of the remnants of old infrastructure such as heating systems the house has used in the past. Although we now use natural gas heating, Both basements have coal rooms as coal was the heating material of choice for many years.



On the 'new' 1920's side, the coal room still has the window where coal used to come down the chute from the delivery truck and fill that room. The old coal burning furnace used to sit at the end of the room

No coal has entered that room for many years; instead, it has been used as a catchall storage area for objects that didn't fit easily onto shelves in the rest of the basement. Dark walls still had the color of the coal that spent so much time rubbing against them - a gloomy place, and hard to see even with the light on.

Thanks to a Boy Scout Eagle project this spring, the room has been transformed! It took 4 days of scrubbing and hosing, then 2 coats of primer and 2 coats of paint before the paint stopped soaking in. There were seventeen helpers on the project. The boys wore donated surgical masks and gowns to protect them from any remaining particles that might be found in the room. Basement windows were opened, and fans were going to help the various layers dry out. The room is now bright and clean. Shelving has been installed. The space is so much more usable now!



Thank you very much to Eagle Candidate Robbie Keller, and Boy Scout Troop 101 for their hard work! And thanks to the anonymous donor who provided over \$500 worth of paint and supplies for the project!



"The Oakwood Store"



CAROL J. HOLM  
ATTORNEY AT LAW  
Dayton, Ohio



Park Avenue Antiques



FERNEDING  
INSURANCE



**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 _____	\$25.00
_____ 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