



The Historian

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Preserving the past, present, and future of the Oakwood Community • May 2022

*You are Cordially Invited...
The Town of Oakwood –
the 150th Anniversary*

When

Saturday, May 14 at 1:30 p.m.

Where

In front of the City Building on Park Avenue

What

Join the Oakwood Historical Society and the City of Oakwood as we celebrate the 150th Anniversary of the first platting of the “Town of Oakwood”.

We will be unveiling the first of our historic markers commemorating the 1872 platting of Oakwood.

Free docent-led historical walking tours of the “town” will be offered immediately following the unveiling.

Wright Memorial Library will be on-hand with their Book Peddler, filled with books on Oakwood and Dayton history topics – celebrating Oakwood’s first library building across from the City Building.

The newly revised Town of Oakwood booklet, sponsored by the Oakwood Rotary Club, will be available for only \$5.

Who

All are invited to this exciting community event, where you’ll learn more about this often-forgotten history, and the four men who first envisioned a “Town of Oakwood”

For more information

Visit the Society’s website at oakwoodhistory.org

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Letter from the President

Dear Society Members,

The month of May is promising to be an exciting month for the Society as we kick-off the spring season with two long-awaited events:

On Saturday, May 14 we will be celebrating the 150th Anniversary of the first platting of Oakwood with the unveiling of our first Historical Marker, commemorating this anniversary. We hope you will join us, along with the City of Oakwood, for this exciting community event, where you'll learn more about this often-forgotten history.

We will be joined by Wright Memorial Library, and free historical docent-led walking tours of the original town will be offered to all.

You'll find more information about this community-wide event on the cover of this newsletter, and you can also read about the fascinating history of the four visionary men who first sought to make Oakwood a "town" beginning on page 3.

On Saturday, May 21, you can unwind and kick back after the "That Day in May" festivities at our Annual Wine & Cheese fete at the Long-Romspert House Museum, where we will enjoy wines from Spain and Italy. All proceeds will benefit the Society's mission, and this is sure to be the "social event" of the season.

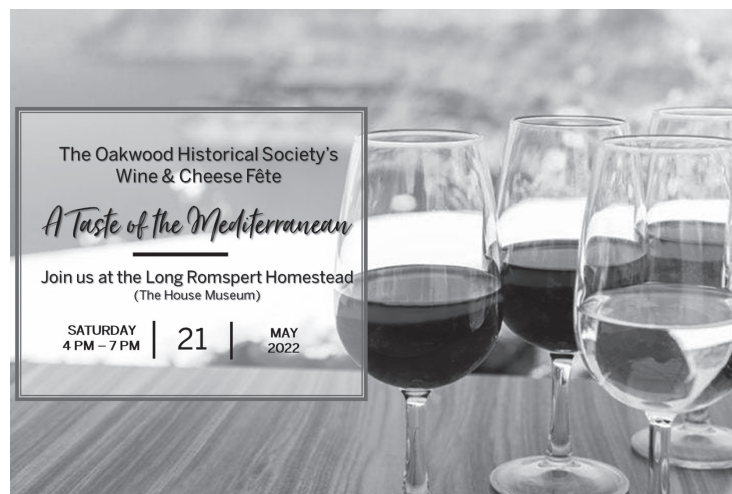
We hope you all are enjoying the warmer weather and promise of summer – and we look forward to seeing everyone again – in person – at these exciting May events!

Kind regards,
Debra Edwards
President

The Oakwood Historical Society

The Oakwood Historical Society's Annual Wine & Cheese Fête Returns

Join the Oakwood Historical Society on Saturday, May 21, 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. for our annual Wine & Cheese Fête: A Taste of the Mediterranean.



Kick back and relax after the That Day in May festivities at our Long-Romspert House Museum and enjoy the wine from Spain and Italy. These wines will be paired with cheeses and hors d'oeuvres hailing from Southern Europe.

Tickets are only \$25 per person, with all profits going to the Society's mission of preserving, recording and sharing Oakwood's history. The fun evening will also include lawn games and more.

To purchase tickets, visit our website: www.Oakwoodhistory.org

Four Men with a Vision of "The Town of Oakwood"

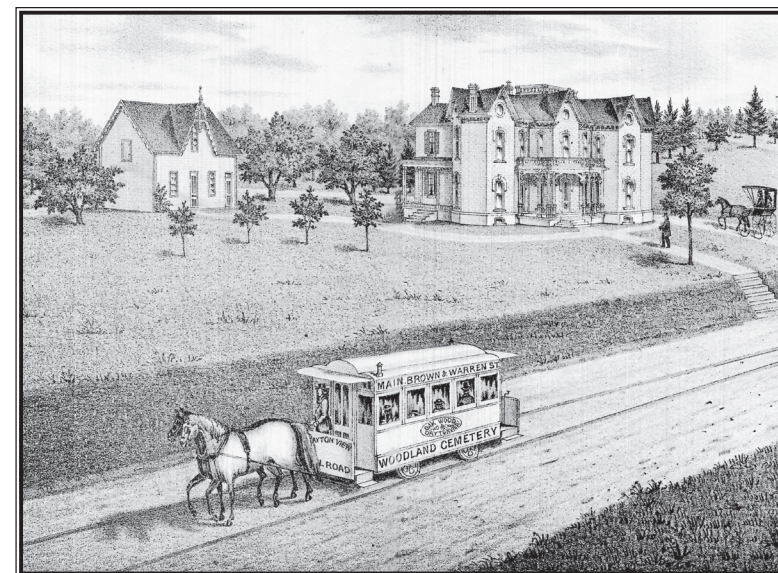
On November 6, 1872, Isaac Haas, Patterson Mitchell, William Dixon and Gabriel Harman were officially granted and named the proprietors of a newly formed plat in the heart of what is now Oakwood, Ohio. The 82 acres and 94 lots were cited in the Montgomery County recording book as the "Plat of Oakwood."

The men had surveyed the area for several years and financed street curbing, tree removal and the extension of a horse-drawn streetcar. It took more than one hour to travel from the developing area to downtown Dayton.

Soon after the official granting, the men convinced Dayton carpenter Joseph Peters to build a home on speculation. The home now stands at 622 Oakwood Avenue. It was said that you could see the elaborate home on the hill for miles. Each of the four founders also built a home. All are still in existence.

However, few other homes followed in the early days and the streetcar failed to produce a profit. The steep hill leading from Dayton into the newly platted "town" was arduous and sometimes impassable because of muddy conditions, ice, or drifts of snow. Their initial investment was lost. Early newspaper accounts called Oakwood "a failure."

But the dream of the visionary Isaac Haas and his three investors would one day come to fruition, although none of the men lived to see it happen.



Isaac Haas



Isaac Haas was born in Pennsylvania in 1820 and moved to Dayton with his parents in 1835. He later established a tanning business, along with partner Patterson Mitchell, selling horse collars, whips and saddles. In 1851, he married Mary Gebhart and they had two children.

Isaac Haas was a perfectionist and introvert. He was very involved in the Presbyterian church, and was instrumental in the building of the new First Presbyterian Church during the late 1860s, since considered to have been one of the most beautiful in downtown Dayton. It is recorded "how carefully Isaac Haas watched each stone go into the wall!"

Around 1870, Haas sold his portion of the tanning business to his partner, and used the proceeds to purchase approximately 178 acres from Jonathan Winters, in the area now known as the Schantz Park Historic District. Haas had the vision and the dream that this tract of property would soon become "one of the most desirable places to reside in the Dayton area." And there, circa 1880, he built the home of his dreams, with the same "eagle eye" for perfection and "the watchful setting of each stone" as in the church that preceded it. This monumental home of stone is a testimony to his perfectionism, and he named it *Ravenswood*.

In the early 1870s, Haas convinced Patterson Mitchell, William Dixon and Gabriel Harman to join him in purchasing approximately 82 acres in what is now the heart of Oakwood – with the dream of forming "The Town of Oakwood". They platted the area and built speculative homes in the newly formed plat. Haas' speculative home is on the corner of Park and Oakwood Avenues. He never resided in the home. Haas also once owned land just south of Gabriel Harman's farm on Lebanon Pike.

Due to lack of public interest in "The Town of Oakwood," rising taxes and defaulted mortgages, Haas' large tract of land in the northern area of Oakwood was placed in a sheriff's auction and purchased

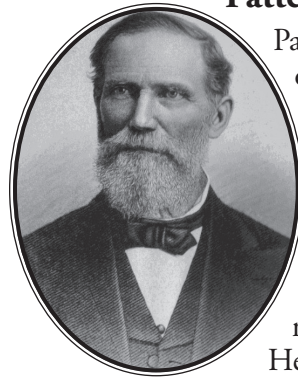
back by Jonathan Winters. The tract was later sold to Adam Schantz, Sr.

Haas later suffered a serious stroke and was bound to a wheelchair for the rest of his life. In 1890 he traded his beloved *Ravenswood* to Herman Mahrt for a house located in Dayton, at Bonner and Oak Streets, where he died in 1897. He is buried at Woodland Cemetery.

Haas was a man with the prophetic vision of creating a town named Oakwood but did not live to see his dream to fruition. He was ahead of his time. As much as he dreamed of a creating a new town and community, Haas died without owning any property in Oakwood, nor with any namesake landmark to honor him.

Although at the time of his death his dream was unfulfilled, much of his wealth remained intact. He bequeathed \$250,000 to each of his two heirs. A tidy sum for 1897.

Patterson Mitchell



Patterson Mitchell was born in 1812 as the eldest of six on a small family farm outside of Cincinnati. His father died when Mitchell was twelve, and at the age of 16, he went to apprentice with John Barnett in Middletown, Ohio. He married the Barnett daughter, Lois, in 1834. Twenty years later, he moved to Dayton to start a tanning business in partnership with Isaac Haas, a connection made through a Barnett relative living in Dayton.

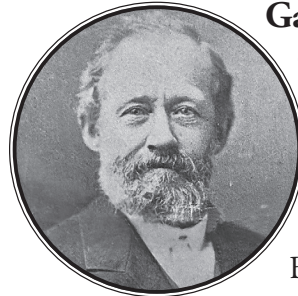
In 1870, Mitchell purchased Haas' interest in the tanning business and started the Dayton Leather and Collar Company and served as president. Through his relationship with Haas, Mitchell became a partner in the development of Oakwood.

He is thought to be the only investor not to have ever lived in Oakwood, but he financed the speculative home at 622 Oakwood Avenue.

In 1885, Mitchell suddenly died of a heart infection that set in soon after he severely injured his foot in his store's elevator. He was 73. His shares of the Oakwood plat were divided by the two remaining original investors, Isaac Haas and Gabriel Harman. His son, William Harvey Mitchell, lived at 45 Park Avenue, once Oakwood's first free-standing library and now home to The Little Exchange.

Patterson Mitchell is interred at Woodland Cemetery.

Gabriel Harman



Gabriel Harman was already living in the area now known as Oakwood when the "Town" was platted. He was born in 1823 and came to Dayton in 1846, where he worked in a variety of dry goods stores, including for the druggist, George Dixon, brother of William. Harman later entered the banking business, rose quickly up the ranks and was elected cashier at the National Bank of Dayton. This soon became the banking firm of Gebhart, Harman & Co. which later merged with City National Bank, where Harman was again elected cashier.

In 1855 Harman married Elizabeth Dixon, sister of William and George, and the Harmans had four children.

The Harmans built a large, Gothic Revival farmhouse along Lebanon Pike, where the Oakwood High School now stands. Harman was considered an astute businessman and gentleman farmer.

Harman helped finance the construction of at least three homes in the newly platted "Town of Oakwood," including the home at 620 Harman Avenue for his newlywed daughter, Elizabeth.

Harman's mother and a few siblings also lived along Lebanon Pike, just south of his own farm. After his mother's death in 1881, his two sisters moved into a house in the "new town" on now Runnymede Road. His brother, P. M. Harman, built a home on Oakwood Avenue.

Gabriel Harman died in 1894 and was interred at Woodland Cemetery after a large funeral at the old Masonic Temple. The Masons had named the Gabriel Lodge of Perfection in his honor prior to his death and this lodge is still in existence.

William Dixon

William Dixon was born in Williamsport, Pennsylvania in 1818. His family moved to Dayton around 1840, and he married Elizabeth Reed in 1852. Elizabeth died shortly after giving birth to their first child, Carrie, in 1854. He never remarried.

Dixon's sister, also named Elizabeth, was the wife of Gabriel Harman and this relationship may have led to his partnership in the development of Oakwood. Dixon was also instrumental in the establishment of the Oakwood Street Railway Company, along with Patterson Mitchell, John H. Patterson, John W. Stoddard and John McMahon. In 1874, he built the home at 740 Harman Avenue—known as "Central Avenue"—although he only lived in the home about a year before returning to a residence on Ludlow Street.

Dixon's daughter Carrie married in 1878 and soon moved to Tacoma, Washington. Dixon dissolved his partnership in Oakwood around 1879 and relocated to Tacoma to be closer to his only child. Dixon lived in Tacoma until his death on May 18, 1900.

He is interred next to his wife at Woodland Cemetery, and within a few feet from the graves of Gabriel and Elizabeth Harman.

William Dixon, A Forgotten Founder and A Gravesite in Ruin

Until recently, very little was known about William Dixon, except that he was one of the four founders of the first platting of Oakwood who seemingly disappeared soon afterward. It had not even been verified until recently that his sister was married to Gabriel Harman. His only remaining legacy in Oakwood was a street named for him.

As we slowly discovered more about William Dixon, a somewhat sad history unfolded.

After the loss of his young wife in 1854, most likely during childbirth, Dixon never remarried. He was known to only have the one child, a daughter, born in the same year as his wife's death.

All four of Oakwood's founders are interred in Woodland Cemetery. The sad story of William Dixon and his wife continues today, as the gravesite of both he and his once young wife lay in ruin.

There are no discernible names remaining on the now broken markers, having eroded long ago since their respective burials in 1854 and 1900.

The Oakwood Historical Society has obtained an estimate of \$350 to restore the William and Elizabeth Dixon gravesite by an individual recommended to us by Woodland Cemetery. We hope to be able to complete this restoration as part of our 150th Anniversary celebration. Please consider donating toward this very worthy reconstruction, which will also benefit the historic Woodland Cemetery.

Donations can be sent to:

The Oakwood Historical Society, 1947 Far Hills Avenue, Oakwood, OH 45419

(Please note on check that funds are to be directed to the Dixon Grave Restoration Project)

For more information, you may contact Debra Edwards directly at:

dedwards@oakwoodhistory.org or call 1-937-239-1253

Summer Gardening: Learn, Grow, Blossom

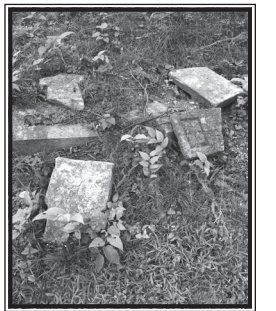
With spring warming the air, and early blooms popping up, we at the Oakwood Historical Society have made plans for the Children's Summer Gardening Program. Beginning in late May, we will host eight sessions for children in Grades 1-4. Sign up at our website: www.OakwoodHistory.org.

The class size is small, so sign up early! We will plant, harvest, prepare, and eat our produce. Extra produce will come home with the children.

Location: The Kitchen Garden behind the Historical Society

Dates: May 22; June 5 and 19; July 10 and 24; August 7, 21, and 28 at 3:30 p.m on Sunday afternoons

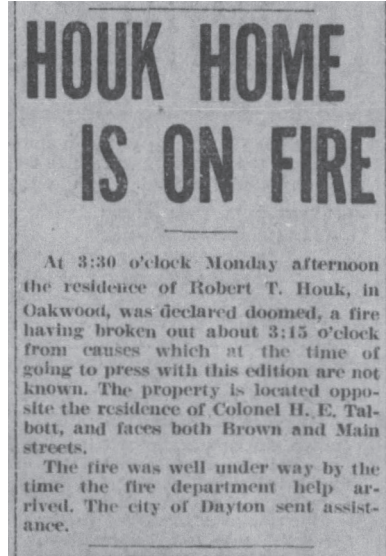
Cost per child: \$70 for 8 sessions.



Notes from the Archives

It's always a great day at the Society to discover something new! To us, that really translates to a re-discovery of something old – that is new to us.

As often is the case, this newest discovery was serendipitous. While researching the 150th Anniversary of the first platting in Oakwood, a frequently repeated reference to an Oakwood home around the turn of the last century, named *The Pines*, piqued our curiosity.



We were surprised to stumble over accounts referencing *The Pines*, as our earlier research of Oakwood homes revealed no record of a home of this name. Further surprising was its mention in the newspaper articles as the home of Robert Thruston Houk and his wife, Sarah. The name of *The Pines*, and a few articles describing a “long driveway” were not descriptive of today's Oakwood Avenue home, considered to be the Houk family home during that period.

Digging a little further, the 1910 Census listed Robert Houk and his family as living on Lebanon Pike (now Far Hills), not Oakwood Avenue.

It remained a perplexing mystery until the discovery of a January 18, 1916 *Dayton Daily News* article stating “*The Pines*, R. Thruston Houk's home in Oakwood was badly damaged by fire Monday afternoon.” The article was accompanied by a photo of the home taken during the blaze.

Now we were convinced of the existence of the home and could verify the owner. But its exact location remained a mystery until an additional article in the *Dayton Daily News*, dated on January 16, 1916, was uncovered,

citing *The Pines* home was “located opposite the residence of H.E. Talbott, and faces both Brown and Main Street.”

Digging further into the Olmsted archival maps, the home of R.T. Houk was clearly indicated near today's corner of Rubicon Road and Thruston Blvd, complete with its very long driveway. This may also explain the name change of the former “Houk Road” to its present name of Thruston Blvd.

Robert, known by his middle name “Thruston” was the son of George and Eliza Houk. George Houk and his brother David purchased land with an existing “four room” farmhouse in 1856 in what is now Oakwood. George Houk and the Houk/Talbott family greatly expanded and enlarged the small farmhouse during the next many years and decades, resulting in the *Runnymede* mansion that formerly stood on the high ground on the north side of present-day Katharine Terrace. Thruston Houk's sister, Katharine Houk Talbott, resided at *Runnymede* nearly all her life.

An article in the 1913 Oakwood Village Recorder states that after George Houk's sister, known as “Aunt Mary” departed, “Thruston wanting a home of his own, his father gave him her cottage. While it was being improved, and before that at times, he and his family made their home at *Runnymede*.”

Hence, *The Pines* was once a Houk family cottage on the great estate of *Runnymede*, and also the former home of the R. Thruston Houk family.

After the 1916 fire of *The Pines*, the Houk family moved to 703 Oakwood Avenue, as noted in the 1917 Oakwood Village directory.

Research by Debra Edwards and David Schmidt.

If anyone has additional information regarding *The Pines*, to add to this bit of history, please email us at info@oakwoodhistory.org



Over the Years... Highlights from the City Council Minutes Digitization Project

100 Years Ago in Oakwood – January-March 1922

Discussions were held about paving the first block of Aberdeen Ave.

Drewey Wysong, former Justice of the Peace of Van Buren Twp and Oakwood Village was acquitted of embezzlement of \$502.19 in fines collected as a function of his job. Subsequently, after a further examination of the books, State Examiner Doyle indicates that Wysong actually overpaid Montgomery County and is due restitution.

75 Years Ago in Oakwood – 1947

A proposal was received from George Schumacher, and William and Estrella James for a request to rezone property on the east side of Far Hills between Claranna and East Drive for a “modern garage and automobile sales and service agency, and also to use part of the lot as a modern filling station.” Council advised the petitioners that the matter would have to first be referred to the Planning Commission, after which a public hearing would have to take place.

[Background: The property in question here stuck out into Far Hills Ave to shrink the roadway from a four lane boulevard to a two-lane street for that single block. This is the beginning of what will be a multi-year story of how that lane blockage was eventually resolved]

25 years Ago in Oakwood – 1997

Discussions regarding the latchkey site analysis (South Connection) study being performed. Several residents brought forth concerns and recommendations both for and against. Mayor Bullock reiterated that the whole issue is a very emotional one. The analysis was presented to the public at a special meeting held at Harman School. Subsequently, Council voted to temporarily house the latchkey site at the Lutheran Church of Our Savior, while a search would be undertaken for a permanent location.



News from the Homestead

Our House Museum is undergoing a major front porch spring renovation!

Houser Asphalt & Concrete Company has installed all-new front steps and side columns that have greatly enhanced our curb appeal.

Society House Curator, Phyllis Niemeyer Miller, and Board member, Linda Pearson, are now adding their talents in providing

new porch seating cushions. We will also be sprucing up the front porch wicker with a fresh coat of paint to ring in the spring season.

asphalt & concrete
Houser
black top • sealing • striping



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**THE OAKWOOD
HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

1947 Far Hills Avenue
Dayton, OH 45419

CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED
DATED MATERIAL

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

Date _____

First Name _____

Last Name _____

Spouse/Partner _____

Business/Organization (if applicable) _____

Address _____

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Phone Number _____ E-mail Address _____

Receive a \$5 Discount *(Check if applicable)*

- Student
- Senior
- Active Military

Please make Checks Payable to:

The Oakwood Historical Society

Mail Checks to: 1947 Far Hills Ave., Dayton, OH 45419

To Pay via Credit Card: Visit www.OakwoodHistory.org
and click "Get Involved", and then "Join"

The information that you submit will be used only by the Oakwood Historical Society and will not be given or sold to outside parties.