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## The Beginning of Hills & Dales - John H. Patterson & The Olmsteds

--Harry Ebeling

Go back with me to the years between 1866 and 1900, when John H. Patterson was starting the National Cash Register Company (NCR) with his brother, Frank. John had ideas that were later termed as “progressive.” He wanted to make the workplace a comfortable environment – one where everyone worked hard and long hours willingly because it was a nice place with reasonable wages and a chance to advance according to one’s abilities.

This belief led him to engage the well-known architect Frank Andrews for the design of the first NCR buildings which were open with plenty of light and air, with grounds and surroundings that had ample space – quite different from the cramped, poorly ventilated, crowded ones that were typical of the 1880’s. John asked the landscaping design firm of Olmsted Brothers, headquartered in Brookline, Massachusetts, to come and review the factory site in order to make plans to turn it into a desirable, pleasant environment. He knew the work done by Frederick Law Olmsted for the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair and earlier when Olmsted designed New York’s Central Park in 1857. Frederick Law Olmsted retired in 1895, but his sons John Charles and Frederick L. Jr. succeeded him, and it was they whom John H. Patterson hired to improve the grounds of NCR.

Their work was also appreciated by a local community activist in Dayton, Elizabeth Phillips Thruston Houk, who contacted them via a personal (and unannounced) visit at the home of John C. Olmsted, introducing herself as a friend of John H. Patterson. Mr. Olmsted reported on the interesting visit in a memo dated 1901. Apparently, Mrs. Houk started off by stating that she was the owner of 160 acres south of Dayton for forty years, 24 acres of which were her front yard. All together with her family, she controlled 400 acres! Much of the area at that time was leased to a golf course for five years, with the right to renew for five years more. Her land contained two ridges and two valleys, and she thought much of it was prime for development and well suited to “a better class” of urban residences. Since the Dayton region was growing, she felt there would soon be a demand for such “executive” housing. Most of the other land owners in that area had fewer acres and were “land poor,” except a Mr. Sylvester Carr, who possessed 275 acres. Elizabeth felt that if roads were designed by agreement with all the land owners, the area could be developed with a better class of homes with large, wooded lots than those envisioned by Mr. Carr, who was looking to develop his property into numerous small lots with much less expensive homes.

With Mrs. Houk being a convincing woman and after some consideration of the fees to be charged, the Olmsted brothers began looking the site over in 1903. Sylvester H. Carr confirmed an agreement on behalf of “The Oakwood Improvement Association” with the owners of some 513 acres for a preliminary layout survey and agreeing to the fees to be charged, some in cash and some from the proceeds of the first sale made. (An accompanying document lists the people who agreed to pay, with the number of acres they owned. This was written on the stationery of his law firm, Carr, Altman & Kenedy. Carr apparently wasn’t familiar with the Olmsteds, because his confirming letter of Feb 1906 was addressed to the “Armstead Bros.”)

*Story continues on Page 4*

2014  
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## Message from the President

Here at The Oakwood Historical Society, we constantly strive to uncover, research, document and tell the story of our city, its association with neighboring communities and the Oakwood citizens who have made a difference. Oakwood's history is often directly tied to that of the entire Dayton area, and that history has, sometimes, had an impact world-wide. It's intriguing to peel back the layers of history and reveal new stories of Oakwood and the people involved. These stories are then preserved in our archives and presented to the community in the form of programs and articles.

This, our 40th year, has been one of change, growth and decisions. Your membership, donations and volunteer contributions are crucial for the continued success of non-profit organizations like The Oakwood Historical Society. We never forget that it cannot be done without you, and we thank you for your continued interest and participation.



## A Year in Anticipation...

2015 will be another busy year for The Oakwood Historical Society as many events and programs are already planned.

"The Far Hills Speaker Series" is scheduled, and we are looking forward to continuing our partnership with Wright Memorial Public Library to provide many interesting programs on a variety of topics throughout the year.

Children's programs are in the works as our kitchen garden rests during the cold season. Our relationships with scouting groups will continue as they provide assistance with projects in and around The Long-Romspert Homestead House Museum.

We hope to work again with Dayton History as they plan another open house event at one of Oakwood's premier landmarks, Hawthorn Hill. Traditional programs and events such as the annual "A Taste of Wine and Cheese" and "Classics on the Lawn" car show and open houses are already in their planning stages.

The maintenance, restoration and preservation of "The Homestead" is an ongoing labor of love, and we look forward to the floral colors blooming in the gardens around the house. The addition and organizing of the Society's archives at the City Building is a project that, likely, will never end as new documents, photos and stories pertaining to our unique community are uncovered.

As the year moves on, other programs may be added. We are constantly on the lookout for volunteers for our programs and attendees for our events. Visit us at [www.oakwoodhistory.org](http://www.oakwoodhistory.org) or on Facebook to look for the programs, projects or events which may interest you.

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

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## The “Far Hills Speaker Series” Lineup Announced for 2015

Mark your calendars and save the dates as The Oakwood Historical Society and Wright Memorial Public Library announce the 2015 lineup of programs and speakers for their “Far Hills Speaker Series.” Each program takes place on a Sunday, starts at 2:00 PM, runs 60 to 90 minutes in length and is held in Wright Library’s lower level conference room. This year, there is another wide variety of intriguing topics and engaging speakers!

**Please visit [www.oakwoodhistory.org](http://www.oakwoodhistory.org) for more details on the programs and their presenters.**

**Date: Sunday February 8, 2015 at 2 pm**

Speaker: Dr. David Schmidt

Title: Boulders, Bedrock, and Brewing Water: How Local Geology has Influenced the History of Oakwood & Surrounding Area

**Date: Sunday March 15, 2015 at 2 pm**

Speaker: Mr. Mark W. Risley, President, The Oakwood Historical Society

Title: The Classic Architecture of Oakwood

**Date: Sunday April 12, 2015 at 2 pm**

Speaker: Mr. Timothy R. Gaffney

Title: The Dayton Flight Factory: The Wright Brothers and the Birth of Aviation

**Date: Sunday May 3, 2015 at 2 pm**

Speaker: Mr. Jim Charters

Title: Dayton Inventions

**Date: Sunday September 13, 2015 at 2 pm**

Speaker: Ms. Angelina Hoschouer

Title: History, Mystery, Mayhem and Murder

**Date: Sunday November 8, 2015 at 2 pm**

Speaker: Mr. Mark Risley

Title: The Great Flood of 1913

## Neoclassical

*--Mark Risley*

The World’s Columbian Exposition held in Chicago in 1893 revived interest in classical structure designs. The exposition’s planners mandated a classical theme, and many of the best-known architects of the day designed dramatic colonnaded buildings. The exposition was widely photographed, reported and attended, and soon these Neoclassical models became the latest fashion throughout the country from 1895 and remained popular until about 1950.

The style features a symmetrical façade, full-height porch with tall columns and classical ornamentation. It is those tall, full-height columns that are the most prominent detail of the design. Oakwood’s best-known landmark, Hawthorn Hill, is a fine, local example of the Neoclassical Style.



## Beginning of Hills & Dales - *Cont*

J.C. Olmsted traveled to Dayton in early 1906 to look at the Parrott and adjacent Houk, Carr, and Chalmers tracts to be involved in the layout survey. The report from Olmsted was enthusiastic, using such phrases as, “admirably adapted to the best sort of urban residences,” and “but not for anything approaching ordinary rectangular system.” The Olmsted brothers then recommended “Curvilinear” streets and 4-5 acre lots, with the land owners agreeing on transportation to town, and restrictions for improvements in deeds.

In February 1906, J. C. Olmsted had a discussion with Col. Parrott about the proposed restrictions to the Parrott land. The Colonel objected to the plan as he wanted something more simple with a route across the golf club to Rubicon Road for access to the Brown Street trolley cars, and a road that was not as steep as apparently Olmsted had proposed. The Parrott land was ultimately included, and the Colonel later stated he changed his mind. The important thing to note about this meeting was Col. Parrott’s suggestion that they should organize a Village to prevent the City of Dayton from annexing the area. (Colonel Parrott went on to be one of the original incorporators of Oakwood the following year in 1907.)

J. C. Olmsted visited the site again in May 1906, then called Mr. Carr to discuss the portion of the project containing his land. Carr objected to the restrictions proposed by Olmsted on the land in the valley between his land and Mrs. Houk’s property that was divided by Waving Willow Road. He felt that they were much too elaborate for his plan for developing smaller lots and homes on his property. Concurrently, Olmsted received a report from the General Manager of NCR Hugh Chalmers that Mr. Carr and Mrs. Houk had agreed to the installation of a boulevard in the Houk valley to be called John H. Patterson Blvd. or Parkway all the way to O’Neil Road (now Dorothy Lane). Olmsted’s restrictions, however, apparently created the breaking point with Carr, and in June of 1906 Sylvester Carr recorded the Carrmonte Plat for smaller, cheaper houses and began referring to this area as “West Oakwood,” even though the Carrmonte Plat at the end of West Schantz Avenue from Calvary Cemetery and along Patterson Blvd. was not in Oakwood.

So began the development of the area in Oakwood called “Hills & Dales.” An interesting review of the extensive correspondence and memos in the files of Dayton History between John H. Patterson, his staff, Charlton Putnam – well known Dayton surveyor –and the Olmsted Brothers from 1901 to 1916 traces the development of the Hills & Dales area and the Park which John H. Patterson donated to the public in June 1918. It also paints a picture of the relationship between Mr. Patterson and the people who worked for him. Some of the Olmsted correspondence is phrased gently to tell him what they advised, without being forceful, and to make him think he was approving and making the decisions as Mr. Patterson always wanted to be in charge.

One letter written by JHP reports: “My lifetime interest in horseback riding led me to acquire land in the hills adjacent to our newly formed Village of Oakwood. The first major purchase was the Adam Coblenz land which had been purchased by George W. Silzell in 1885, and by me in 1905. Along Dorothy Lane and making the south entrance to the park. It began by creating winding roadways, plantings, rustic bridges to allow people to wander, picnic, ride horseback and enjoy the natural environment of the beautiful rolling hills, and made possible by the end moraine of the former Wisconsin Glacier.”

This was the beginning of what would become Hills & Dales Park... the story will be continued in the next Newsletter!

*A map of the area originally considered, dated 1907, by Olmsted Bros. and updated in 1912, was recently acquired by The Oakwood Historical Society through the alertness and generosity of Oakwood resident John C. Gray. It is framed and is now in the Museum Room of the Long-Romspert Homestead. It is the basis for many references in this discussion. If you would like to view this map please call the Oakwood Historical Society, and arrangements can be made.*





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Please get involved...

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## The Year in Review...

--Leigh Turben

2014 was a year of positive change and forward movement for The Oakwood Historical Society. We drew benefit from a renewed focus on membership and developed a three-year operating plan. Our collaborations with Dayton History, Wright Memorial Public Library and other Dayton institutions added value for our members and the community. Below are a few of our accomplishments in 2014:

- We initiated our 40th anniversary by redesigning our logo which is now featured on our literature and in our programs.
- With a focus on building our membership, we set a goal of adding 150 new members in 2014. We are delighted to find that we have added 201 members already this year! As the Membership Chair, I am very proud of our accomplishments!
- To promote and advance our new growth, we have added the capability to accept credit cards which allows us to accept payment for events, even when offsite. For added convenience, we've added online payments so our members and friends can now sign-up or renew their memberships, pay for events and purchase our merchandise online through our website.
- Those visiting our website, [www.oakwoodhistory.org](http://www.oakwoodhistory.org), will notice the new look and feel! It is now an active and dynamic website for people to learn about The Oakwood Historical Society and what we do. The updated site includes our new logo, notices of upcoming events and plenty of historical information, as well as a storefront where we sell our informative books and merchandise.
- We were pleased to announce that the Wright Memorial Library was listed on the National Register of Historic Places as of January 2014! The library is one of several individually listed properties in Oakwood to hold this designation, along with Hawthorn Hill (a National Historic Landmark) and our house museum, The Long-Romspert Homestead. All are in good company with Schantz Park Historic District, and information is being gathered on the Maysfield area near Dayton Country Club for a possible nomination to the NRHP.
- In April, we partnered with Dayton History for a tour of the Wright Brothers' Hawthorn Hill home along with an historic walk in the surrounding neighborhood. We had an impressive attendance of over 300 participants! This is a great partnership that we will continue to foster.
- We collaborated with Wright Memorial Public Library, introducing the "Far Hills Speaker Series" of free presentations open to the public addressing Oakwood and/or Dayton's history. Last year we hosted seven presentations such as "The Classic Architecture of Oakwood," "The Mound Builders," "Beyond the Flyer III," and "Public Transit in Oakwood from Early Days to Present." All were well-attended, and the feedback from our guests was very positive.
- Our Summer Garden Club and Children's History Camp were sold out for the 4th year in a row! Many of our area's youth learned the finer aspects of traditional gardening, meal preparation and home life from the earlier decades.

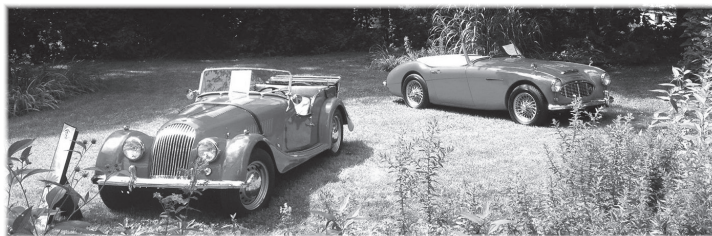




- Traditional events were also successful. The annual “A Taste of Wine and Cheese” in May was a well-attended, relaxing adult event after the rigors of the “That Day in May” parade and festival. The “Classics on the Lawn” vintage car show in August was bigger than ever with 29 of the area’s finest classic cars on display on the lawn of “The Homestead” and over 150 attendees! We look forward to the upcoming “Holiday at the Homestead” open house on December 14th to close out this year’s active schedule of events.

- We still maintain our research and published historic papers Archive for the City of Oakwood providing invaluable insight and great new stories of Oakwood.

- Lastly, the Board of Trustees made the difficult decision this year to sell the adjacent property at 1945 Far Hills Avenue. It was a bittersweet decision, but we welcomed our new neighbors and have been excited to watch the progress as they make the house into their home and into a stand-out gem along Oakwood’s main thoroughfare. Monies from the sale of the house have been placed in an endowment fund, and the interest proceeds will go toward the preservation and maintenance of our headquarters, The Long-Romsper House Museum, as well as helping to support our many programs while providing a degree of financial stability to the Society for some time to come.



**Free Admission!**

**Donations Welcome!**

## Holiday Open House

Sunday December 14th, 1-4 PM

Long-Romsper House Museum  
1947 Far Hills Ave

Festive Music • Fun Family Activities  
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