



The
Oakwood
Historical Society

— *Make History With Us* —



Historian

Preserving the past, present, and future of the Oakwood Community • Spring 2016

Dayton, Ohio: the Quintessential Home Front during “The Great War”

—David Schmidt

(Editor’s note: this is an adaptation of a presentation given by the author to The Oakwood Historical Society during its Annual Meeting on November 11, 2015.)

The years 2014 – 2018 mark the centennial of World War One, which began during July 1914 in the wake of the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria and his wife, Sophie, Duchess of Hohenberg. The war, which was centered in Europe and claimed the lives of millions of combatants and civilians, involved all of the world’s major nations. After several major victories by the Central Powers of Germany and Austria-Hungary, successful Allied counteroffensives led to the end of the war during November 1918.

Many historians consider World War One to be the first modern war because it was a pivotal time in the use of military technologies. Although relatively primitive methods were still used during the war (e.g., with soldiers marching long distances on foot and horses used for transporting artillery and cavalry units) the war included the first widespread use of modern technologies such as motorized vehicles, tanks, machine guns, long-range artillery, and poison gas. The war also saw the first extensive use of airplanes in warfare. Open-cockpit biplanes, aerial dogfights, and Manfred von Richthofen (“The Red Baron”) are iconic symbols of World War One. Airplanes were mainly used for reconnaissance purposes (e.g., for monitoring troop movements and reviewing the landscape) but they were also used for strategic bombing and supporting movements by ground forces.

The United States entered the war during April 1917 after maintaining an extended period of neutrality. At that time Dayton, with its aviation base and solid industrial and innovation heritage, was ideally suited to contribute to the nation’s war efforts. At the onset of war Dayton was making a strong recovery from the 1913 Flood. John H. Patterson, after directing rescue and relief operations during the flood, was instrumental in contributing and raising money for what eventually became the Miami Conservancy District. After establishing the organization’s funding, Mr. Patterson turned the project over to Edward A. Deeds, who in turn hired Arthur E. Morgan as Chief Engineer for the district just two months after the flood waters subsided.

Meanwhile, Charles F. Kettering and his “Barn Gang” had recently developed the electric self-starter for automobiles. The group received a large order from Cadillac and established the Dayton Engineering Laboratories Company (DELCO). Deeds and Kettering also founded the Dayton Engineers Club as a place for local innovators to meet and exchange ideas. Among the club’s members was Orville Wright who, despite his brother Wilbur’s passing in 1912, continued to make innovative contributions to aviation. He also operated the Wright Flying School and the Wright Company until selling the latter on October 15, 1915. When the United States entered the war, Orville Wright lent his name to the Dayton Wright Airplane Company, which was formed and financed by Kettering, Deeds, and Oakwood’s Harold E. Talbott and Harold E. Talbott Jr.

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Message from the President

We are entering the 152nd birthday year for the Long-Romspert Homestead, which is Oakwood's Historic House Museum. The interior, which represents eras from the 1860s to the 1920s and 1940s, helps us enjoy and understand the trajectory of a family's life.

The Homestead hosts a variety of programs: historical, cultural, environmental, scientific, and family-oriented. For example, this year almost a hundred people enjoyed our *Holidays at the Homestead*, partaking of traditional holiday morsels, freshly baked gingerbread cookies, and hot mulled apple cider served by the Boy Scouts. Historical decorations warmed our hearts, and a cello / guitar duo delighted our ears.

Spring will soon be here with new activities such as our gardener on the grounds coaxing our myriad of shrubs and heritage flowers to bloom. Other volunteers will be helping at the Hawthorne Hill "*Wright at Home*" and our own "*A Taste of Wine and Cheese*" event.

The Far Hills Speaker Series finds Wright Memorial Public Library partnering with us on selected Sundays throughout the year to give background and depth to our proud understanding of our community's contributions to American Life.

The support of you as members, the community, schools, and volunteers makes our history come alive. JOIN US! Visit our website at www.oakwoodhistory.org. There are many ways your talents and interests can be showcased (project planning, writing, accounting, researching, etc.) Contact Linda at 937-299-3793 (Homestead phone) and please leave a message if you'd like more information about getting involved.

Carol Holm
President



Get more info on our
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Dayton, Ohio: the Quintessential Home Front during “The Great War” (cont.)

The Dayton Wright Airplane Company established factories in the former Wright Company factories in Dayton and added factories in Moraine and Miamisburg. Soon after the company formed, Deeds was commissioned the rank of colonel in the U.S. Army and placed in charge of procurement for the U.S. Aircraft Production Board. Deeds divested himself from the Dayton Wright Airplane Company and then granted the company two government contracts: (1) 4000 De Havilland 4 (DH-4) airplanes (Figure 1), which were British-designed biplanes to be redesigned to accommodate the American-built Liberty Engine; and (2) 400 Standard J-1 primary trainers, which were of American design and similar to the celebrated Curtiss JN-4 “Jenny” biplanes.



Figure 1



Figure 2

The Dayton-Wright Airplane Company also produced the “Bug” (Figure 2), which was an unmanned aerial torpedo developed by Charles Kettering.¹ Kettering tested the “Bug” at South Field, which was an aircraft landing strip adjacent to Edward Deeds’ estate (Moraine Farm) on Stroop Road. During early 1917, Deeds also purchased land just to the east of the Miami River and north of the Mad River that he named “North Field.”² After the U.S. entry into the war, the U.S. Army leased the field from Deeds and opened an airfield and experimental station on the site as “McCook Field”³ on December 5, 1917. The airfield was relatively small, and the outside of one of its hangars bore the message “THIS FIELD IS SMALL – USE IT ALL” as a directive to pilots to land early on the field’s runway. McCook Field’s limited size prompted the army to move its growing operations to Wright Field during 1927.

Along with the Dayton-Wright Airplane Company, other Dayton industry made significant contributions to the war effort. The National Cash Register Company (Figure 3) shifted much of its production from cash registers to military hardware such as parts for the Liberty Engine, metal fittings for airplanes, and the Colt .45 automatic pistol. The Maxwell Motor Company and Platt Iron Works co-produced the Renault M1917 Tank, which was a small tank of French design. Many local machine shops, foundries, and other subcontractors also manufactured parts for the M1917 Tank.

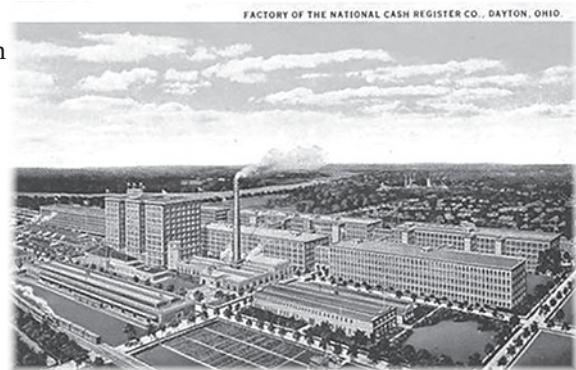


Figure 3

During 1915 the Davis Sewing Machine Company began manufacturing fuses for Russian explosive shells and, when the United States entered the war, the company expanded its production of fuses upon contract with the U.S. government. The Davis Sewing Machine Company also produced components of the Liberty Engine, parts for the DH-4 airplane, a specially-constructed sewing machine used by the U.S. Balloon Corps, and the Dayton military bicycle, which was equipped with a headlight and, to remain inconspicuous to the enemy, finished with an olive drab frame and dull nickel handlebars and sprockets.

Many other war-related products were manufactured in the Dayton area, including 6.5 million pounds of “hard bread” baked by the Green and Green Cracker Company.⁴ The company also designed and manufactured an airtight tin container having the dual purpose of keeping the hard bread: (1) fresh in shipment between the bakery and the trenches in Europe; and (2) uncontaminated from the effects of poison gas in the field.

Dayton, Ohio: the Quintessential Home Front during “The Great War” (cont.)

Dayton citizens subscribed abundantly to Liberty Loan campaigns during the war, lending hundreds of thousands of dollars to the U.S. government for its war efforts. Dayton citizens also contributed to the Red Cross War Fund Campaign, which was chaired in Dayton by Harold E. Talbott.

Dayton also furnished personnel for ground forces. The most well known of these was Battery D of the 134th Field Artillery of the Ohio National Guard, which began initial training at Camp Triangle (in Triangle Park) in Dayton. Other Dayton troops included members of the 148th Infantry, 37th Division, which trained at Camp Sherman in Chillicothe, Ohio. Dayton also provided recruits for the 372nd Infantry Regiment of the 93rd Infantry Division, which served in France beginning April 1918 and returned home during February 1919.

During the waning months of the war, John H. Patterson’s daughter, Dorothy Patterson Judah hosted a dinner and dance for several hundred local Signal Corps members at the Hills and Dales Club⁵ (Figure 4), with vehicles from the National Cash Register Company providing transportation to and from Wilbur Wright and McCook Fields. Mr. Patterson attended the event and “was here, there and everywhere with a word of welcome, and ate supper at one of the long tables with the soldiers.”⁶



Figure 4

The armistice was signed on November 11, 1918 and marked the end of the war. This concurred with the deadly influenza pandemic of 1918, which killed many soldiers and several tens of millions of people worldwide.⁷



Figure 5

After the war, several memorials were established in the Dayton area including one on Ridge Avenue honoring Battery D of the 134th Field Artillery. Dayton’s Memorial Hall, which was built to honor veterans of the Spanish-American War, added a statue of a “doughboy” at its front entrance. Locally, the Victory Oak Knoll Memorial (Figure 5) was established on the grounds of the Community Golf Club and dedicated on the eve of Memorial Day, 1921. The memorial honors the 189 Dayton-area soldiers who died as a result of the war.⁸

In the Dayton area, observations of the war’s centennial have been held since 2014 with events at Wright State University, the Schuster Center, and the Dayton Art Institute. Local observations are continuing with displays at Wright State University and in Carillon Park, which is scheduled to open a display during the spring of 2016 entitled *Dayton in the Great War*.

Notes

¹The “Bug” was launched on a metal track and carried 180 lbs. of explosives. The weapon was developed late in the war and wasn’t used in combat; however, it served as an important step in the development of modern cruise missiles. A replica of the “Bug” is displayed at the National Museum of the United States Air Force.

²Deeds purchased the property at North Field after Orville Wright told him it was an excellent place to land airplanes.

³McCook Field was named in honor of Alexander McCook and his family of “Fighting McCooks,” who were prominent officers in the Union Army during the Civil War.

⁴The Green and Green Cracker Company later developed and manufactured the popular “Cheez-It” snack cracker.

⁵The Hills and Dales Club was renamed “The Old Barn Club” during 1919 and was a popular dining and recreational facility through the early 1930s.

⁶Dayton Daily News, July 28, 1918.

⁷This “Spanish Flu” mostly affected previously healthy young people by prompting a chaotic overreaction of the body’s immune system. Conversely, persons with weaker immune systems (such as juveniles and the infirm) were not as adversely affected.

⁸The Victory Oak Knoll Memorial drew large crowds to Memorial Day observations during the 1920s and 1930s. The memorial is open to the public and stands near the main entrance of Community Golf Course.

Figure Captions

Figure 1. The De Havilland 4 (DH-4) biplane. (U.S. Air Force)

Figure 2. The “Bug” aerial torpedo undergoing field testing. (U.S. Air Force)

Figure 3. The National Cash Register Company ca. 1917. Notable features in this image include Rubicon Creek and the DL&C Railroad (lower left) and the Patterson Elm, a large, historic tree that formerly marked the northern end of Col. Robert Patterson’s Rubicon Farm (right margin).

Figure 4. The Old Barn Club (formerly the Hills and Dales Club) ca. 1923. (Art Work of Dayton, Ohio, Gravure Illustration Company of Chicago, 1923)

Figure 5. Victory Oak Knoll ca. 1923. The cannon was given up to a scrap-metal drive during World War Two. (Art Work of Dayton, Ohio, Gravure Illustration Company of Chicago, 1923)

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Upcoming Events

“*Wright at Home*” Tours in conjunction with Dayton History – **April 24, 2016**

TOHS Visits to Harmon & Smith Elementary Schools – **late April/early May**

“*Rediscover Oakwood*” Oral History Project @ Wright Memorial Public Library – **May 17, 18 & 19, 2016**

“*A Taste of Wine & Cheese*” *That Day In May* Fundraiser – **May 21, 2016**

Far Hills Speaker Series Off to a Great Start

A few years back, The Oakwood Historical Society teamed up with Wright Memorial Public Library to formulate *The Far Hills Speaker Series*. This program brings presentations to the library on various topics regarding the fascinating history of Oakwood and the Dayton area. Usually six programs are scheduled throughout the year but, this year, eight topics will be presented. The attendance for these popular programs has been growing, and this year has already started off strong. “*The Craftsman Home*” and “*The Old Barn Club and the Golden Age of Hills and Dales*” were both informative and exceedingly well-attended as they explored one of Oakwood’s iconic housing designs and the valued green space adjacent to (and so much a part of) our community.

The next program in the series is “*Charles F. Kettering Research Laboratory; Ridgeleigh Terrace, Yellow Springs and Beyond*” with Chuck Johnson. Mr. Johnson, a former co-worker of “Boss Kett” and currently a volunteer at Woodland Cemetery and Dayton History, will discuss first-hand stories of Kettering’s passion for invention, business practices, personal life and legacy. This program takes place **Sunday, March 13th, 2:00 PM** at Wright Memorial Public Library, 1776 Far Hills Ave. in Oakwood.

And, don’t miss “*The Other Assassination Attempt: Fanny Seward and the Night of Horrors*” with Trudy Krisher on **April 17th** and “*Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Normandy Farm: The Story of Richard H. Grant, Sr.*” with Jerry Strange on **May 15th**.

To learn more about *The Far Hills Speaker Series* line-up, visit www.oakwoodhistory.org and see what it’s all about.

Annual *A Taste of Wine & Cheese* at The Homestead

Make sure you get this date on your calendar! This delightful event is held on **Saturday evening, May 21**, at the end of *That Day in May*. Bring your friends and relax on our lovely grounds with wine and paired edibles, or come by yourself and meet new people!

Watch our website, www.oakwoodhistory.org for details as the time gets closer.

Tickets go on sale on May 2!

Children's Program

No Children's Garden Program will be taking place this year – but for a very good reason! The garden will be undergoing a well-deserved and needed renovation this summer; a scout from Boy Scout Troop 101 in Oakwood will be organizing the renovation for his Eagle Project. Among other tasks, new anti-critter wire fencing will be installed, the garden paths will have upgraded pathway materials, and the raised beds will be made deeper with organic supplements added to improve the quality and structure of the soil. The garden will be back next year and ready to help young gardeners have wonderful learning adventures again! Feel free to stop by over the summer and check out the progress and/or see the finished & refreshed garden; wander the Homestead grounds and check out the other plantings, too.

Later this year, look in the fall *Historian* and online at our website for announcements about an exclusive children's workshop led by a local artist for making unique & special Christmas decorations! It will be great fun and most certainly will fill up quickly.

New Webmaster & Archivist

Joan Milligan, our webmaster for the past 4 years, has been busy training her replacements. Coming on board is Melissa Dalton, our new webmaster, and Victoria "Chad" Chadbourne, our new archivist. A hearty welcome to both of these new volunteers! Melissa's transition has been seamless; Chad is delving into organizing our archives, which are bursting at the seams!

Volunteer Positions Available!

As with all self-supporting non-profit organizations, we look to our wonderful volunteers to keep The Historical Society running, and offering programs to the community. We have an opening on the Board of Directors, as well as positions helping with the wine tasting in May. Please call and leave a message on the phone at The Historical Society! (937) 299-3793. Someone will return your call right away.

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