



The Historian

Preserving the past, present, and future of the Oakwood Community • Spring 2019

Message from the President

Dear Members,

2018 was a fabulous year! Our objective was to increase awareness in the community of the Oakwood Historical Society and its work; the numbers we keep at our events to measure our impact indicate we far exceeded that goal.

This year I know the Board wants to capitalize on this heightened awareness and, ideally, turn it into actual memberships and volunteers. To this end, Laura Bettinger, the Society's new Secretary, has agreed to serve additionally as our Membership Director. Laura has a strong background in marketing, leading me to think that we're in for a new strategic approach.

The Board remains committed to strengthening its internal operating procedures, ensuring that the Society's operations remain secure and sustainable. Of course, we'll keep our energies focused on historic preservation and education, keeping in mind that our purpose is not about saving everything that's old but about promoting historic preservation that is sensibly committed as much to the future as to the past.

On a personal note, I have to share how thrilled I was to attend the Wright Memorial Public Library's 80th birthday celebration on February 14th. The Society and the Library are regular collaborators because we share common goals. I felt I was helping to make history as I held my candle and listened to Jacqui Taylor retell the story of the night the Library opened in 1939. Joining me was Betty Halley Jones who has already made her mark on history. In Dayton, Mrs. Jones participated in work essential to the production of the atomic bomb, thereby contributing to the successful conclusion of World War II. Her work continued long after the war's end, leading detonator projects with related nuclear laboratories in Dayton, Los Alamos, Livermore (Berkeley), and Albuquerque. This story became known only after Linda Carrick Thomas, author of *Polonium in the Playhouse*, made Mrs. Jones' role in the war effort very public. Mrs. Jones has agreed to work with the Society so that we might learn more about her fascinating career with both the Manhattan Project and Mound Laboratories.

It's these moments that make me proud to serve as President of our Historical Society for another year. The role connects me to extraordinary people in our community, and that makes my volunteer job most rewarding.

Respectfully yours,

Leigh Turben
President



Betty Halley Jones with Leigh Turben at Wright Memorial Public Library's 80th birthday celebration.

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Meet Our Vice President

Tiffany Rubin began her association with the Oakwood Historical Society eight years ago, strongly motivated by how much her daughter, Lilly, enjoyed the education programs that Society Board Member Linda Pearson had offered. "I could see Lilly gaining a sense of community and a love for history," Tiffany expresses. "So when Linda kindly asked me to get involved, I agreed." Since then, Tiffany has played many roles in the organization, from coordinating the Society's presence in the That Day in May Parade, to planning events such as Haunted Halloween, A Vintage Valentine's Party, and this year's A Taste of Wine and Cheese. A resident of Oakwood for over 20 years, Tiffany has seen the impact that dynamic citizen involvement has in shaping a community.

Tiffany is the Director of Human Resources and Administration for a nonprofit organization in Dayton. She holds degrees in both Education and Human Resource Management. Aside from volunteering with the Society, Tiffany acts as a volunteer ghost, i.e. she frequently performs as a historical character at Woodland Cemetery and Arboretum. Her favorite person to portray is Electra C. Doren, the Director of Dayton Public Library in 1897, for whom the oldest branch in the Dayton Metro Library system is named. "Electra Doren is an inspiration to me," offers Tiffany. "Only a few public buildings in the U.S. are named after a woman, and I get to bring that woman back to life, if just for a few hours each year."



Tiffany Rubin



Tiffany Rubin with her family dressed for Oakwood's annual That Day in May Parade

When not working or volunteering, Tiffany enjoys hiking with her dog, Bella, reading historical fiction and mysteries, and spending time with her husband, Bobby, and their seven daughters and two grandchildren. Tiffany hopes her love of history and her example of community involvement will inspire her children, grandchildren, and others to volunteer for community organizations. She likes that the Society attracts volunteers of all ages and that most events are meant for families.

Relooking at History – Leigh Turben

The Oakwood Historical Society takes seriously its mission to preserve community history, believing there is always something new to learn from studying the past. This is why when I heard about the research of Marshall Weiss and Tracy Staley, I felt compelled to share their findings with Society members.

When Marshall Weiss, founding editor and publisher of the *Dayton Jewish Observer*, learned that Tracy Staley, public relations and community engagement specialist with Wright Memorial Public Library, was re-examining the Library's history in preparation for its 80th birthday celebration, Weiss decided to write a birthday-related piece profiling Max Kohnop. Weiss had written about Kohnop in his book, *Jewish Community of Dayton*, in which he identified Kohnop as a person who had "actively contributed to the betterment and welfare of the Gem City." Kohnop served as a Trustee of the Wright Library for 53 years.

As Weiss writes in the *Dayton Jewish Observer*, January 24, 2019, "Max and Minnie Kohnop moved to Dayton in 1922 when the *Dayton Daily News* hired him away from the *Cincinnati Enquirer*. Their first address was 1207 E. Third St. From 1924 through 1926, they lived in the then, up-and-coming neighborhood of Dayton View. In 1927, the Kohnops lived on Monterey Avenue in Oakwood, where they would remain. According to Weiss, "Jews were generally not welcome to live in Oakwood until the late 1970s, and they often faced discriminatory real estate restrictions."

A Kohnop granddaughter, Sandy Senser of Columbus, writes of her grandparents' lives in Oakwood, "They kept kosher, they kept to themselves." "They were neighborly, they had good neighbors." Senser doesn't remember going to the synagogue with her grandfather, perhaps because Kohnop worked on Saturday at his job editing the Sunday morning edition of the *Dayton Daily News*, and she does remember him coming home at 2 a.m. after the paper had gone out. However, Senser says her grandfather was clearly a leader in the community, citing as evidence his service as President of Temple Israel and his chairing of its Cemetery Committee. He also served as President of Dayton's B'nai B'rith Lodge 55, and he was a longtime member of the Jewish Federation board. Employing his professional skills from the *Dayton Daily News*, Kohnop edited the B'nai B'rith and Jewish Federation newsletters for decades.

Kohnop's work for the Wright Library clearly demonstrates he was driven to contribute to the betterment of society. He brought strong executive skills to this work, particularly the knowhow to leverage resources and maximize the talents of others. Kohnop first sought membership on the Library Board in 1933. A year later he was elected President of the Board, and he served in that capacity until 1976. He continued on the Board until 1981. According to Tracy Staley, Kohnop guided the Library through its greatest periods of growth, first when its levy was passed in 1938 and then when the new building opened; he also saw the Library through expansions in 1964 and 1972. Kohnop supported Library staff and delighted in the collection of books the Library acquired during his tenure.

Notably, Kohnop forged a good working relationship with Orville Wright. He knew Wright from the days he covered aviation for the newspaper. As a working journalist, Kohnop knew the Wrights distrusted the press. Not deterred by this distrust and knowing the stature Orville Wright might bring to the Library, Kohnop convinced the famous inventor and aviator to join the Board when a vacancy came open in 1934. Kohnop always respected the two conditions Orville set for taking up a Board position: that he would never be quoted in the newspaper, and that he would never have to preside over a meeting. Kohnop was correct in his prediction of what Orville Wright would bring to an engagement with Wright Library: Orville proved keenly interested in the Library's growth and development, and he served the Library with dedication and distinction until he died in 1948.



Marshall and Donna Weiss pose for a selfie with Max Kohnop's portrait.

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Please get involved . . .

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**Wright at Home: Its Second Component -
The Neighborhood Tour – Harrison Stamm Gowdy**



As much as people love seeing and touring the home of Orville Wright, I've heard it's the neighborhood walkaround tour that lures them back to the annual Wright at Home event. The combined tours, sponsored by Dayton History and the Oakwood Historical Society, are well researched and most engaging. Much information is available online about Hawthorn Hill. Information about the neighborhood tour isn't. This article attempts to mimic a written trailer of the tour—the kind you might watch to determine if you want to see a movie.

Lights dim. Surround sound kicks in. Roll it!

Picture the 1910 streets of the Town of Oakwood. Your guide tells you about Oakwood's only school and library, its first church and water tower, and what shops constituted Oakwood's thriving commercial district. Discover where Wrights' business partners lived, the ones who helped build propellers and supplied warehouse space.

Stroll by the house the Cheez-It snack-cracker maker designed and built. Hear stories about how the Hadelor neighbor kids, next door, came to know Orville like only family members were able to do. Learn why Orville asked the young man to serve as his personal assistant when he vacationed in Canada and how the famous airplane inventor suggested his sister apply for the library position at the new Wright Memorial Public Library.

Imagine Himes Dairy Farm on the site of Oakwood High School and see the site where Oakwood's first truant officer and one-man public works and sanitation department, used to dump city trash. See the elegant Spanish Revival house built by Oakwood's first City Engineer and later City Manager.

Understand why in 1926 Orville Wright sold land surrounding Hawthorn Hill only to a select three buyers. Each soon-to-be neighbor shared Orville's up-from-the-bootstraps background, and each had a remarkable story. One started his career as John Patterson's errand boy, moving up to be Charles Kettering's chief engineer, ending his career as President of DELCO. Now the errand-boy-turned-CEO had a friend he'd worked with at Delco Light Co. That friend became the second buyer, and he was devoted to ensuring every American home replace



Home of Joseph Green - Maker of the Cheez-It snack-cracker Photo: Amelia Robinson

its icebox with a Frigidaire. Mr. Electric-Fridge salesman supported himself through high school digging holes for telephone poles. He had Orville's same insatiable appetite for anything innovative. The third buyer earned Orville's favor because he was the architect Orville employed to design Hawthorn Hill. Orville and his three surrounding neighbors were all members of the Engineers Club of Dayton. Orville enjoyed their company, and they understood his need for privacy and his terms of friendship.

Finally, hear the story of a penniless German immigrant who it was said had the aptitude to fix absolutely anything. He built his career inventing machines that were designed to perform a specific function. Later he became the manufacturer of his inventive machines. He was someone Orville would naturally be attracted to knowing.

The music rises, the speakers blare: Coming soon! Happens only once a year!

The trailer ends.

It is truly astounding how many extraordinary people lived within such a small geographical location during a most dynamic period in American history. When I pass by their homes, I feel a sense of gratitude for the contributions Orville and his neighbors made to our community, our country, and our world. I hope my little trailer entices you to discover the people whom Orville called, "neighbors."

WRIGHT at HOME

Sunday, April 28 – 12:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.

\$25 per Adult – Day of Event

\$20 per Adult in Advance and
OHS and Dayton History Members

\$5 per Child – Ages 4-12 (Free – Ages 3 and Under)

Free Parking – City Municipal Lot and along Park Ave.

Full information available at www.oakwoodhistory.org or 937-293-2841

Relooking at History *Continued from page 3*

In an oral history interview of 1967, Kohnop did not emphasize his own achievements in building the Library. Instead, he shared stories about the Board's working relationships. "They had these Board meetings that would go on for hours with Orville Wright telling all of these stories," Staley says. It appears many decisions shaping the Library as we know it originated from a group of civic-minded leaders who genuinely enjoyed each other's company.

Sandy Senser is certain her grandfather relished the success of the Library. "When visiting from Ashland," Senser writes, "we would always go to visit the Library." "Even now, whenever we're down in that area, we always stop in the Library." When the Sensers visit next, they will see a portrait of Grandfather Max hanging prominently near the service desk. Kohnop died in 1990.

Unless we make an effort to preserve and make known Kohnop's contributions, his dedication to the Wright Library will probably always be overshadowed by the name our Library carries. We are grateful for all the years Orville served on the Board. His involvement undoubtedly had an important impact on how the Library became central to the community's culture. That said, it seems more fitting to think of Kohnop as the rightful "Father of Wright Library" during this 80th year of its existence. Kohnop played a major role in shaping our Library to reflect our community's commitment to lifelong learning. Thank you to Marshall Weiss and Tracy Staley for allowing me to broadcast your findings about this dedicated and influential community servant of the Wright Memorial Public Library.

Note: For the full Weiss story, see <http://daytonjewishobserver.org/2019/01/the-father-of-oakwoods-library/>

Homestead a Popular Site for Eagle Scout Projects

The Society and local Boy Scout troops have worked together for years to their mutual benefit; there isn't a clear record of when the Society-Scout relationship started, but this overview will start with the coal bin renovation. It may have been the dirtiest of projects undertaken. In addition to its coal bin, Society's Homestead House Museum requires constant maintenance and restoration, and Eagle Scout candidates are always in search of worthwhile service projects. Society Business Manager Linda Pearson watched her son work to meet his Eagle project requirements, and this experience gave her the knowhow to identify additional project options for scouts to consider. Guiding scouts through completion of the Eagle Scout process often fell to Mark Risley, Society volunteer overseeing the Homestead's facilities and grounds committee.

As for the aforementioned coal bin project, all that is recorded about this 2015 endeavor is that a team of nine young men, led by Robbie Keller, cleaned the walls and floors of the coal bin. A picture from the Society newsletter shows six scrubbers wearing hair bonnets, facemasks, and a full covering of plastic armor. The boys sealed the walls and applied multiple coats of paint before installing donated shelving units. Three members of this cleaning team, Ben Keller, Peter Salisbury and Logan Connally, would return to the homestead to lead their own Eagle Scout projects.



Boy Scout Ben Keller and helper secure the garden from small intruders

In 2016 Jack Froelich completed a sub-ground downspout drainage project along the south side of the house to direct rainwater away from the foundation. He fixed a second area on the west side of the summer kitchen where heavy rainwater pooled. Ben Keller, former volunteer coal-bin-cleaner, led his 2017 project to ready the kitchen garden in time for the summer children's programs. This involved weeding the area, prepping the soil, painting the surrounding wood fence, and reinstalling a heavy-duty chicken wire lining inside the fence's interior. To minimize future maintenance, the teen laid a weed barrier beneath the paved walkway.

Having learned from his 2015 experience, Peter Salisbury chose a project that didn't involve dirt. He rebuilt the Homestead's 15-year-old accessibility ramp. Peter led 24 volunteers who worked a total of 177 hours. He secured antique porch railings, found at a salvage store, and finished off the landing, honoring the Homestead's architectural integrity.

Logan Connally also traded his coal bin dirt for sawdust. Logan restored the 1920s era garage so it can now be used as both a storage area and an exhibit hall. He installed a partition that conceals a much needed storage area from a new exhibit space. Logan's team built shelving in the storage area for tools and equipment. The exhibit hall area now houses a vintage automobile and artifacts depicting the early days of motoring. Logan also constructed wood-framed screens to cover the garage windows and the transoms located above the front doors of the main house, markedly enhancing ventilation in both areas. The hand-built screens were well researched and are authentic in appearance. Logan's major concern while leading his crew of 10 was safety. He didn't care that the drills, jig and circular saws, a power hammer, and ladders were used mostly by adults; his goal was that all of his emergency planning protocols would be followed in the event of an emergency.

This past summer, Boy Scout Kyle Lethander pressure washed, primed, and painted the exterior of the Homestead's original 1860s summer kitchen. This outbuilding once served as a detached cooking facility, and occasionally it serves that same function to this day. Lethander started a Go Fund Me account and raised over \$400 to complete the project. He was lucky that Sherwin Williams could access their "historical" sales records and tell him the exact type and color of



Jack Froelich and adult helper addressing drainage problems



Eagle Scout candidates Logan Connally and Kyle Lethander present their projects to Society Board

paint that was or would have originally been used in such a building. There were several prep days, but when the day to paint arrived, Lethander had over 25 volunteers ready to roll. It's estimated that 177 hours went into the project. Lethander was inducted as an Eagle Scout on January 24, 2019. "It feels good to be done."

Both 2018 projects were completed with excellent results and The Oakwood Historical Society expresses its gratitude and appreciation to the following team members for their outstanding efforts:

Kyle Lethander and his team members: Peter Connelly, Collin Youker, Nick Manzo, Henry Bolmida, Alex Mayer, William Boylin, Aidan Sullivan, Michael Valencia, Thomas Lange, Noah Callinan, William Case, Myron Hall, James Musto, Ethan Lethander, Aidan Baer, Alex Tackett, Jack Beyer, Jared Dunn, Jonathan Thomas, Tom Lange, David Sullivan, Mr. Case, Andrew Lethander, Chris Connelly, Doug Callinan, and John Dues.

Logan Connally and his team members: Caleb Dunn, Peter Salisbury, Henry Salisbury, David Salisbury, Sam Casebere, Will Arzola, Alex Tucker, Ben Keller, Becca Gerier, Seth Gitzinger, Mary Kidwell, Nate Kaval, Brendan Tsui, Mr. Tucker, Mr. and Mrs. Dunn, Mr. Connally, Drew Connally, and 12 visiting English scouts.

Upcoming Events

Far Hills Speaker Series: Maintaining Your Vintage Home – *Sunday, April 14 at 2:00 p.m.*

Wright Memorial Public Library

Information presented by city officials and contractors about permit requirements, HVAC, and plumbing.

Wright at Home – *Sunday, April 28 from noon to 5:00 p.m.*

Hawthorn Hill, 901 Harman Ave., Oakwood, OH 45419

The Wright Family home, Hawthorn Hill, will be open for tours, and Society volunteers will conduct walking tours of Orville Wright's Oakwood neighborhood, recounting stories about his noteworthy and industrial neighbors. See the article on page 4.

A Taste of Napa and Sonoma – *Saturday, May 18 from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m.*

Long-Romspert Homestead and House Museum - Tickets go on sale April 7th - \$25 each or \$40 per couple.

We're excited to announce our That Day in May wine tasting at the Oakwood Historical Society House Museum. We have been working with wine experts to showcase two separate regions: Napa and Sonoma.

Enjoy the great tastes of wine in a laid back historic setting accompanied by bite sized nibbles for a fun late afternoon. No cooking, no cleaning, no work. Total indulgence!

We hope that you will join us!



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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

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

- Student Senior Active Military

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