



The
Oakwood
Historical Society

— *Make History With Us* —

The Historian

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

Message from the President



*Leigh Turben, OHS
and Betty Halley Jones*

It is not unusual for someone ask, “What does a local historical society do?” Many in Oakwood who are familiar with the Long-Romspert Homestead and House Museum might answer, “It manages an old house on Far Hills Avenue and holds various events about the past.” While it is true that the Society does both (and notably well), the real work and value of an historical society is in the preservation and dissemination of local history. That’s not always as visible as an historic house tour, an antique car show, or volunteers in historic costume, but its deep value to the community has an equal if not greater, long-term impact. Our history is important; our collective work in maintaining and archiving that history is a responsibility that we all share.

A supporter of the Society recently told me, “I read the Society’s newsletter because I want to learn something new about our community.” I hope this issue will please that supporter and others. For example, until a few months ago, I had no idea of the tremendous contribution my new friend and our neighbor, Betty Halley Jones, had made to our country. She made incredible personal and professional sacrifices for the sake of keeping our country safe during and after WWII. I first mentioned my association with Betty in the Spring 2019 issue of *The Historian*. This issue affords me another opportunity explain how the Society collaborated with the Mound Science and Energy Museum Association to share and preserve Betty’s historic work. I have no doubt you will learn something new about our community. Enjoy, and I won’t be surprised at all if you are truly inspired by Betty’s remarkable story and contributions to us all.

Respectfully yours,
Leigh Turben, *President*

Chance Meeting Leads to an Oral History

In what follows Society President Leigh Turben shares her account of how a chance meeting with Betty Halley Jones convinced her to share the story of this extraordinary member of our community.



*Bob Bowman, Mound Museum, Leigh Turben, OHS,
and Betty Halley Jones preparing for the interview*

It was September 16, 2018 and I was working our Society’s book table as people were leaving the hall at the Lutheran Church of Our Savior at the conclusion of the Far Hills Speaker Series presentation on the Dayton Code Breakers. John Harshman, a member of the original group of Code Breakers, was signing autographs and posing for pictures with many of the 200+ attendees. Through the commotion, a woman made her way to the table and introduced me to Betty Halley Jones, a member of that same historic Dayton project. I was taken at first by Betty’s striking presence and then I was amazed to learn that she had led several atomic bomb

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detonator development programs. Her looks simply defied how I had envisioned a bomb maker to appear. The next time I met Betty was at our Polonium in the Playhouse lecture. Linda Carrick Thomas (granddaughter of Dr. Charles Allen Thomas, former director of Monsanto and co-director of the Manhattan Project) was giving the presentation and asked Betty to speak. Betty walked to the podium, looked out over several hundred people, and with unnerving confidence began to share her story. I simply knew the Society had to capture and archive Betty's story.

Over the holidays, I convinced Bob Bowman (Board member of the Mound Science and Energy Museum and former employee of the Mound) to help me prepare Betty to give an oral history. First we reviewed Betty's three, well-organized scrapbooks. Betty never sought recognition for her work, but it became apparent to me that she had the perspective of a historian and recognized how the newspaper articles, pictures, and letters relevant to her work would interest others. Next, Bob and I submitted a list of questions to prompt Betty's thinking. Betty emailed back no less than seventeen pages of answers.

Next I contacted Bob and Dorothy Wickline. Bob and Dorothy are two volunteers videographers who film



Bob, Leigh, and Betty in the sound studio

public interest programs at the Miami Valley Communications Center. They agreed to videotape Betty's oral interview. Seated at a desk with Betty and Bob, I marveled at how calm and composed Betty appeared. Then I remembered: Betty was a person who had been flown across the country to dismantle a single faulty bomb detonator. Betty was used to working under pressure.

I am happy that the Society has captured a small but important bit of history from an amazing woman. Betty's video, will be included in a video package which contains all three of our presentations on Dayton in WWII: *Dayton Code Breakers*, *Polonium in the Playhouse*, and *George Koval - A Russian Sky in our Midst*, on sale at the Society later this year.



Betty Halley Jones: A Life of Service

Last June Oakwood Historical Society President Leigh Turben and Bob Bowman, a Board Member of the Mound Science and Energy Museum Association, conducted an oral history interview with Betty Halley Jones, a former Product Engineer at Mound Laboratories. Notably, Halley Jones, who had a career at the Monsanto Chemical Company, was a key participant in the Dayton Project that was part of the larger project that developed the atomic bomb.

This article condenses the seventeen pages of notes Betty prepared prior to taping the oral history. It shares in summary one woman's experience working on an important facet of the larger Manhattan Project in Dayton, Ohio.

Betty joined the Dayton Project in May 1945 and worked in the electronics laboratory. She knew the Dayton Project was a top-secret research and development effort carried out by the Monsanto Chemical Company. She did not know that Monsanto was a subcontractor working for the Manhattan Project. Only later did she fully appreciate that she had been part of a team that assisted in the development of the neutron generating triggers for the first plutonium bombs.

After the bombing of Hiroshima, Betty worked at several of the Atomic Energy Commission project sites. These included the Mound Laboratory in Miamisburg, Ohio and another laboratory in Los Alamos, New Mexico. She led several of the first detonator projects at the Mound and was actively involved in various technical and engineering activities until her retirement in 1979. For more than 60 years, Betty never talked about her life's work. It was not until 2007, when she was asked to speak at the Mound Science and Energy Museum, that she began sharing her story about what it was like to work in an environment shrouded in secrecy and to live a life largely detached from society.



Unit III, Dayton Project



Betty in High School

Betty was 15 years old when WWII broke out in 1939. Living under rationing restrictions is her clearest memory of those years. Betty recalls sugar and gasoline limits and remembers taking the extra grease from cooking to collection sites to support the "Turning Bacon into Bombs" campaign. Her two brothers enlisted after the U.S. declared war on Japan in December 1941. Soon after graduating from high school, responding to the government's call for women to enter the workforce, Betty began training for "war work" at Patterson Field. Betty learned engineering drafting fundamentals and basic radio training. It was a tough transition into adulthood. "Standing all night at the drafting board was one of the worst things I had ever experienced," recalls Betty. "My legs ached, my back hurt, and I was thoroughly drained by the time the night was over."

Betty reports that her father listened to her complain, and nodded in understanding. He explained, in Betty's words, "...in the working world, you are expected to work hard and maybe without breaks. It's just one of the many bumps you will encounter." Betty never forgot his words.

It was during her radio training that Betty was directed to focus on the detailed work of grinding crystals to respond to the frequency bands used in the Army's battlefield walkie-talkies and other equipment. This specialized job led to a new position at Univis Lens as an inspector of prisms used in submarine periscopes. However, what forever changed Betty's career, was her chance meeting of Dr. Josef Heyd, an official at the Monsanto Chemical Company who was charged with recruiting people to work on the Dayton Project. Betty had accompanied her mother on a job interview, which was not unusual for the time. Dr. Heyd likely questioned Betty about her work out of politeness, but when he learned what she was doing at Univis Lens, he realized Monsanto could use her skills. Her mother was not hired, but for Betty, it was the start of a 34-year career with Monsanto.

The lab to which Betty was assigned was commonly referred to as the counting room and it was located in the Bonebrake Seminary, also known as Unit III. There she fabricated the instruments used to measure radioactivity. Betty's group, under the supervision of Mary Lou Curtis, the only other technical woman in the lab, fabricated everything from the chassis to the finished counters. Betty worked most closely with Bob Gunther Moore and Will Konoker who, like the other 40 men throughout the facility, were members of the Army Special Engineering Detachment, a group specially selected after their enlistment or drafting based upon their educational background and aptitude tests for assignments as technicians or engineering specialists who would support the Manhattan Project. All these GIs had high-level secret clearances. Betty explains, "My cohorts had to hide their identity as GIs completely from their land ladies, and from any prying eyes in the neighborhood. Furthermore, since it was a secret that our connection was with the military; these men were not in uniforms. When they had to go to Wright Field (the predecessor



*Dr. Josef Heyd,
Mound Laboratory*

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of Wright Patterson Air Force Base), they would change into their uniforms on the bus in transit, and then change back to civilian clothes before returning to Unit III.”

Betty never worked at the Runnymede Playhouse, another site of the Dayton Project, but on occasion she would drive Dr. Heyd to meetings there. According to Betty, “While Dr. Heyd was tending to business, I would relax around the beautiful grounds and pool. I thought at these times that I really had it made!”

Betty was eventually given more responsibility for maintaining the counters, some of which came from “hot” labs. “At that time,” said Betty, “We had no idea how the contamination would affect us... [however] we were alert to it, and I would call on the health physics groups to have them cleaned... [This] explains why I was assigned to an isolated room to work.”

The culture in which Betty worked was profoundly secretive. Workers were restricted from going into any room other than the one they were assigned. Radio stations broadcasted, “Loose lips sink ship.” There were constant meetings and posted signs with the message, “DO NOT TALK, KEEP WHAT YOU SEE HERE.” It meant that for many years Betty almost never socialized outside the circle of people with whom she worked. “I was shocked to learn,” Betty recalls, “that George Koval, whom I knew as one of the health physics person who occasionally surveyed one of my Geiger counters, was a Soviet spy.”

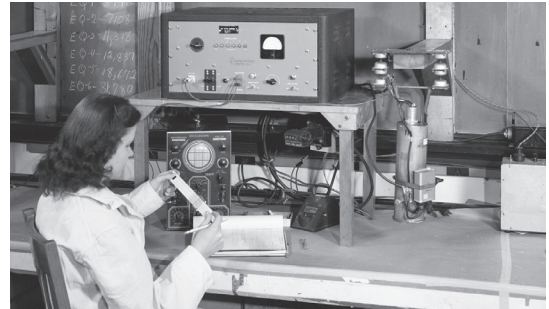


George Koval, Russian spy in the Dayton Project

Although Betty was one of the few women in the lab playing a technical role, she reports that she always felt accepted and respected by her male counterparts. She felt she had a family of fathers and brothers that helped her endure the long hours and isolation associated with the nature of their collective work. The male soldiers encouraged her learning, admired her work ethic, and recognized her largely self-taught skills. Betty also credits her father, an electrician, with developing her natural aptitude for science. As a young child she spent many hours working with him on his radios.

When the war ended, the government sought to transition from the Manhattan Project to the Atomic Energy Commission. New and larger facilities were needed. The move from the scattered buildings in Dayton to the consolidated facilities at the new Mound Laboratory built in Miamisburg began in 1948. Betty worked in Building B at “the Mound.” The nature of her work changed continually and Betty met every challenge.

In 1953, Dr. Heyd learned that scientists at the Los Alamos facility were unhappy with the high reject rate of detonators that were being fabricated. He sent Betty to Los Alamos to learn everything about detonators. She was told especially to concentrate on the critical wire attachments within the detonators. Returning to Dayton, and working with a team of eight other individuals, Betty set up an entirely new lab dedicated to producing no-fail detonators. She trained people as their clearances came through and supervised the mass production of detonators



One of many counters used to detect radioactivity (note the slide rule)

for the War Reserve atomic bombs. This two-year intense program not only achieved its goal of fail-safe detonators, but it also provided a stable mission to allow the Mound to adapt and provide other services.

In addition to traveling to Los Alamos to report on technical changes in the bridge wire attachment, Betty occasionally traveled to Livermore, California to evaluate if the Mound had enough capacity to take on different, but somewhat related work since the Mound sought to broaden its capabilities. An assigned male almost always escorted her about the work site, an indication of how professional women were treated during the 1950s. Betty also recalls the time she was sent to Los Alamos to bend, size, and cut extremely fine wires that were essential elements of the detonators that determined the timing of the explosions. Engineers were having trouble and needed someone with “a more delicate hand who was not afraid of the explosive.” That was in 1961.

In 1974 Betty traveled to the Pantex Plant in Amarillo, Texas, an Atomic Energy Commission/Department of Energy facility. She was sent to replace a suspect detonator on the core of a nuclear warhead. Betty describes the experience.

“When I arrived at Pantex I was escorted to an auto where three men sat waiting for me. I didn’t know them and they didn’t introduce themselves. I was driven many miles out into the desert, arriving at a Quonset hut with an armed guard standing at the entrance. He took my badge and left. When I entered the hut, I noticed immediately that in the middle of the room sat a large sphere; covering its surface were numerous detonators and connecting cables. A gentleman who had been waiting for me explained that this particular sphere failed inspection due to a suspect detonator. It was my responsibility to change the detonator and replace it with another. After finishing the changeout, I was taken back to the main building, given my badge and escorted off the site. It was a long trip, but the job was completed.”

When asked if she were ever afraid, Betty’s answer is always, “I couldn’t afford to be scared; I had a job to do.”

Betty remains reticent about talking too personally about fellow workers; however, she confirms the story that Dr. Oppenheimer was a chain smoker. “He had an ever-present cigarette in his mouth. I don’t think he ever took it out except to light another.”

Betty is proud that she earned the job title of Project Engineer at the time she was assigned responsibility for the War Reserve program. Her work during the war years denied her the formal education typically needed for such a position, but her work associates believe she more than deserved the title given her professional work experience. Betty retired in 1979 after working for 34 years on top-secret and dangerous projects. She continued to keep her professional life a secret until 2007 when she was asked to speak at a Mound celebration.

Betty married in 1975, and she currently lives in Springfield where she cares for her husband of 40 years who suffers from Alzheimer’s. She still recalls her father’s wise words because they still apply, “Work won’t always be easy, and there will be times when it is hard and long, but it is your job, and you are expected to do it.”

Family Photo Event - October 13th and 27th

Each fall the Society acts on its invitational call, “Make History With Us,” by offering residents the opportunity to be photographed on the grounds of the Long-Rompert Homestead & House Museum. This initiative started as a fund raiser, but Committee Chair Linda Pearson finds that families that return each year regard it more as a “fun raiser.” Individuals, families, book club members, and friends enjoy experiencing the creativity that Photographer Betty Cochran brings to each



of the sessions. Betty helps her subjects bring their personalities to the historical settings they choose. Society Vice President Tiffany Rubin recalls the fun her family had at their family shoot, noting that “Betty takes silly photos during the shoot to keep everyone relaxed and comfortable.” Rubin said that there are so many costume and prop options from which to choose that deciding what to wear is the hardest part.

Photographs are transferred to a take-home memory stick, and a waiver is provided so the photographs can be freely printed. The price per twenty-minute session is \$75. Sessions are scheduled from 9:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. The cost is tax deductible. Reserve a session at 937-299-3793 or online at www.oakwoodhistory.org.

Far Hills Speaker Series – Fall 2019

The Oakwood Historical Society and Wright Memorial Public Library co-host the Far Hills Speaker Series with presentations on Oakwood and Dayton history. These presentations are held on Sundays at 2:00 p.m. at the Library. This is a change in location from last fall when the presentations were held at the Lutheran Church of Our Savior.

Photography Over Time – September 15

Jay Cymbalak Jr. will present a history of photography and link various camera types to famous photos. Cymbalak is a photographer and collector of a century of cameras and photography memorabilia. He has worked in his field for about 30 years.

John Patterson and the Jewish Community – October 13



While conducting research for his 2018 book, *Jewish Community of Dayton (Arcadia)*, Marshall Weiss uncovered documentation of a nuanced relationship between leaders of Dayton's Jewish community and John Patterson, his company, and the village of Oakwood. Weiss will parse myths that persist to this day regarding Patterson and the Jewish community, navigating the industrialist's legacy of civic benevolence and racism.

Marshall Weiss is the founding editor and publisher of *The Dayton Jewish Observer* and is the Project Director of Miami Valley Jewish Genealogy & History, both initiatives of the Jewish Federation of Greater Dayton. He is also a past President of the American Jewish Press Association.

A Brief History of the Monsanto Company Laboratories in Dayton and Miamisburg, Ohio – November 17



In 1928, Charles A. Thomas and Carroll A. Hochwalt co-founded Thomas & Hochwalt Laboratories in Dayton, Ohio, a research chemical corporation located at 1515 Nicholas Rd in Dayton. The Monsanto Chemical Company acquired the corporation in 1936, and it became known as the Monsanto Central Research Department. In these facilities, the Dayton Project of the Manhattan Engineer District conducted research on the first atomic bomb. After World War II, the government built the Mound Laboratory in Miamisburg. The Monsanto Company managed "the Mound" until 1988. This presentation gives a historical overview of the very diverse missions, roles and activities for both the Monsanto Dayton and Miamisburg Laboratories.

Dr. Bob Bowman serves on the Board of Directors for the Mound Science and Energy Museum Association and is also active in a number of historical societies. Bowman holds a Ph.D. in chemistry and was employed by Monsanto at the Mound Laboratory for 15 years.

Homemade at the Homestead

Linda Pearson, Chair of the Society's Education Committee, and volunteer Lisa Kell continue to offer programs open to people of all ages who have an interest in learning domestic skills practiced in the past and still applicable today. These two-hour programs begin at 1:30 p.m. and are held at the Long-Romspert Homestead and House Museum. The cost is \$15 per program and includes all materials, recipes, and take-home treats.

Preserving the Harvest – Sunday, September 22

Explore "tried-and-true" techniques for preserving, canning, and drying herbs and vegetables.

Fat Rascals, Butter & Tea – Sunday, October 6

Create your own Yorkshire afternoon tea.

Sweet and Savory Doughs – Sunday, November 17

Practice homemade recipes and shortcuts to impress friends and family.



Oakwood's 2019 Holiday Home Tour – December 7, Noon – 7:00 PM

Plans for the Society's 2019 Holiday Home Tour on December 7 are complete. The tour will feature seven homes in the Hatcher Hills neighborhood. Judge Irvin Harlamert helped recruit the homes for this year's tour. Each home was chosen because of its architectural integrity and historic significance. The homes are all located within a compact square bordered by Far Hills and E. Schantz Avenues on the east and north, and Kramer Road and W. Thruston Boulevard on the west and south.

Guests will learn about the lives and times of Oakwood's earliest industrialists and socialites. Homes have ties to the Kuntz lumber dynasty, the Wright Brothers' patent attorney, Old Miami Valley Hospital, Oakwood's only winery, and several high-profile early 20th century weddings. The tour also includes appetizers and beverages served at the Long-Romspert House Museum, the home of the Oakwood Historical Society.



As in the past, this year's home tour is a community partnership starting with the generous homeowners who have agreed to open their homes to the public, as well as the homeowners from last year's tour who are participating this year as house managers. The Little Exchange helped recruit docents, the Oakwood Register plans to run a feature article about the tour, and local flower shops and Dorothy Lane Market continue to support this community event with their sponsorship and donations. Thank you!

Tickets for the tour will go on sale in late October for \$20 each. Last year tickets sold out in a week. Financial supporters on the Society's email list will receive advance notification of ticket sales. To receive Society email notifications, please call (937) 299-3793 and leave your name, phone number and email address. There is still a need for docents and volunteers for this event; it's an altruistic way to receive a free pass to the tour.

Make Your Event Something Special at the Homestead

The Long-Romspert House Museum and Homestead is open for tours upon request, and can be rented for meetings, family reunions or picnics, showers, birthdays, or other festive occasions. For information call (937) 299-3793.



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