

Cottage industries in Oakwood's past

By Harry G. Ebeling

Oakwood adopted its first zoning ordinance in 1925 and even then there was no provision for home or neighborhood businesses. In the Depression, a few small enterprises popped up, but there was little enforcement because it was a hard time for everyone and people had to do the best they could to make ends meet.

The Building Code – Platting Manual – Zoning Ordinance was adopted in 1925-6, using a New York consultant. In January, 1927, the first amended map showed business sites at Oakwood and Irving Aves., Schantz and Far Hills Aves., Patterson Rd. and Acorn Dr., Park Ave., Far Hills Ave. and Park Rd., Far Hills Ave. and Aberdeen Ave., Far Hills and Hilltop Aves. and Shroyer Rd. and Acorn Dr. This would seem adequate, but the little incursions came about anyway.

The best known and longest running was Brownie's at 312 Hadley Ave. People who lived in that area always remember it fondly. Bernie Brown bought the lot from Walter Carr, the developer of the plat, and built a house, converting it in 1926 to a mini grocery. It was never a big operation but served as the first convenience store for small items and last minute purchases and meat as well as for ice cream after school. Bernie and Hilda lived in the house with two daughters and a son until 1955. He retired and the pre-existing use expired and the house was converted back to residential use. The children attended school in Oakwood and one daughter sent us the adjoining photo several years ago.



Bernie Brown of Brownies Grocery at 312 Hadley Avenue.

The store at the street car loop at Monterey and Far Hills Avenues is remembered in two accounts. In interviews, folks remember Marge's, which sold candy and snacks. Bill Biddle remembered it as Kellys' fruit stand which burned down July 4, 1926, when the

fire works it sold caught fire. It was operated by Mrs. Herbert Kelly, a widow who lived at 301 Triangle Ave., and who also had children in the Oakwood schools.

Mrs. DeCamp operated The Marietta Tea Room in the first block of Dellwood Ave. It catered to tuition students who could get their lunch there. It was a source of annoyance that Mrs. Kelly, who sought to rebuild after the fire on Monterey, was denied a permit. She wrote a snarly letter to Council asking why Mrs. DeCamp could operate in a residential area and she was denied.

Many services were offered from homes such as Bill Biddle's Radio & Electronics at 249 Peach Orchard Ave., E.J. Gatewood's music lessons at 43 Spirea Dr., John G. Doerfert's bicycle repair at 35 Triangle Ave., Schneider's Subscription Service at 257 Wonderly Ave., Mary A. Wall Beauty Shop at 17 W. Schantz Ave., and Dr. Cushwa, dentist, at the corner of Far Hills and Corona Avenues. Doerfert continued to operate until the late 70's when he retired. (See his son's soap box derby racer at Carillon Park)

There are undoubtedly some small ventures operating under the radar screen in today's changing world with Internet connections. Services such as one person accountants, lawyers and realtors are probably there but what constitutes a business becomes a question of interpretation, traffic and complaint.

Tinkerers and inventors have had a place in the residential areas of Oakwood. In the 1940's a group of men, working in a three car garage at 419 Volusia Ave., developed at special projects for use in WW II. One such man, William D. Evans, fresh out of Ohio State University worked on the problem of cloud cover hampering the effectiveness of the Norden Bombsight. A simple attachment of a crosshatch on a blackened piece of glass reflected an image on to a parabolic mirror, thus eliminating the problem. It quickly became a standard part and was ultimately used on the bombsight of the Enola Gay which was the Nagasaki atom bomber. Evans moved to Wayne Ave. after the war where he continued making contributions to aviation such as an automatic parachute opener. He later went into the plastics industry. (Oakwood Register 8/19/1967)

Last week we mentioned the big industrial building behind the Fletcher building on Park Ave. which housed the printing presses of the Oakwood Press in the 30's and early 40's. Mayne Products leased it from 1946 to 1952 where it assembled blower wheels. Bob Mayne tells of Mayne Products, owned by his father, Robert A. Mayne who perfected the double louvered blower wheel in the mid-forties. Used in the heating and air conditioning industries, it claimed to be of superior strength and stronger than any predecessor. Perfected for and with the assistance of Chrysler Airtemp it gave a smoother flow of air with greater efficiency and longer life by reducing vibration and noise. Robert Mayne continued to improve the product and the patents, until at the time of his death in 1960, they numbered 35. And it was produced right here in downtown Oakwood!

Recalling stories about business and commercial enterprises in Oakwood, I must spotlight two which started here, and were immensely successful companies. They weren't actually conducted here but their inventive entrepreneurship deserves mention. Pierce Davies Schenck used the garage behind his house at 414 Oakwood Ave. to tinker with cars in 1907. He had a knack for it and the money to pursue his interest. He followed through by establishing the Speedwell Motor Car Company where the old Delco factory was later built in Edgemont. It was a quality product and successful until the Dayton flood wiped it out and it never was able to come back. Schenck was

president of Dayton Malleable Iron Company and he turned his interest to adapting high silicon iron alloy to practical uses. This led to his establishing the Duriron Company, (a name which he coined) in 1917. With the war creating need for the product, it prospered, employing 1,500 men and became one of Dayton's leading industries.