

Self Guided Tour of Oakwood

Welcome to Oakwood – a unique experience in suburban living.

We invite you to drive through our community and enjoy some of its most beautiful homes and parks. You may want to have a passenger to read the directions and background information. Please keep a watch for joggers, bikers, and walkers. Oakwood residents use our streets.

The City Building

Start at the Oakwood city building and police station at 30 Park Avenue off Far Hills Avenue. Its Tudor style sets the tone for the whole community and dates back to the 1920s. In 2004, the city built an addition on the west side of the building. Oakwood is one of very few communities that run a combined police, fire, and emergency services department. Created in 1924, Oakwood's Safety Department is the second oldest continuing consolidated department in the country.

Hawthorne Hill

Travel west to Harman Avenue away from Far Hills Avenue. Continue through the intersection on Park Avenue. The large Southern colonial house to your left is Hawthorne Hill. Orville Wright, his sister Katherine, and their father Milton lived in this home. Wilbur Wright helped plan the house, but contracted typhoid fever and died before the home's completion in 1914. They named the property Hawthorn Hill because they had lived on Hawthorn Street in the City of Dayton when they were young boys. Orville Wright lived here from 1914 until his death in 1948. The symmetrical house has two-pillared facades, on the south and north sides, which are connected by a wide and elegant reception hall. Built in a time before air conditioning, the home's design maximized the flow of fresh air throughout the house. From 1949 to August 2006, the home was a corporate guesthouse for the National Cash Register Company (NCR). In 2006, NCR donated the home to the Wright Family Foundation for preservation. The home is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Smith Gardens

Continue on Park Avenue, turn right on Oakwood Avenue, and continue to Walnut Lane on your left, where you will find Smith Gardens. This is beautiful, quiet place that you may want to return to if you can't stop for a stroll today. The garden was planted in the 1930s by property owners, Carlton and Jeanette Smith, with the intent of having continuous bloom. It is now an Oakwood city park, and the city's horticulturist coordinates its upkeep. In April 1996, Ohio Magazine called Smith Gardens the "finest tiny public garden in Ohio. It's like a secret treasure on an ordinary side street." Residents use Smith Gardens for family picnics and as a backdrop for family photographs. The City of Oakwood hosts summer blanket concert series in the park.

Runnymede Playhouse

Continue on Oakwood Avenue for one more block. Turn Left on W. Dixon Ave. Continue one block to Runnymede Road.

Straight ahead of you at the stop sign is the former site of the Runnymede Playhouse. Today, homes built in the 1970s cover the secret the playhouse once held. Originally part of the Talbott family estate, the Runnymede Playhouse was first a social and entertainment center for the Oakwood community. Groups would gather to play games, sports, and hold social meetings in the massive building. The playhouse was large enough for 1200 women to play bridge together. The complex included indoor tennis and squash courts as well as a ballroom and stage.

During WWII, the US Army used the playhouse for research and production of polonium triggers for the atomic bomb. The Monsanto Chemical Company ran five total research sites around Dayton. The Runnymede Playhouse, known as Unit IV, housed much of the scientific research relevant to the Dayton Project prior to the completion of the better-known Mound lab in Miamisburg. Although the playhouse's Oakwood neighbors had no idea of the activities going on at the site, nearly 90 people worked at Unit IV.

From the Dayton Daily News: "Between big trucks rolling in and out, the floodlights and heavy-duty power lines strung all over, the place was a real mess," Lee Jones of Oakwood recalled in a 1983 story about Runnymede Playhouse, part of the Talbott family estate where the polonium was refined. "But those were the days when you knew enough not to ask questions."

In 1949, operations moved to Miamisburg, and the following year the Runnymede Playhouse was dismantled and later buried in Tennessee.

Turn right onto Runnymede and continue to Thruston Blvd. as you enter the country club area. Turn left onto Thruston Blvd and continue on this road. It will change into Kramer Road as it curves to the right.

Kramer Road and Sugar Camp

Kramer Road was the original home to William Kramer's winery and pleasure gardens in the 1880s. City of Dayton residents would ride on horse and in carriage to the vineyard to spend a relaxing day and enjoy the impressive flower and shrub gardens on the property. In this area, you will find some of the oldest homes in Oakwood. You will also pass the Dayton Country Club on your left. While located in the City of Kettering, it has served Oakwood's recreational and social needs since its inception in 1898.

Kramer Road will dead end into Schantz Avenue. Across the road, you will see Sugar Camp. Originally part of Colonel Robert Patterson's property and site of a sugar cane grove, Sugar Camp became a corporate training facility for the National Cash Register Company (NCR) in the early 1900s. NCR has recently sold the property to an investment group which will develop the land for empty-nester housing, office buildings, and Beth Abraham synagogue.

Schantz Historical District

Go right on Schantz Avenue continuing to Far Hills Avenue with the gazebo on your right identifying the entrance to Oakwood from downtown. Continue through the intersection to the second traffic light at Oakwood Avenue. Jogging right continue on Schantz Avenue passing the massive stone gateway. Along this road, you will find a variety of homes in Oakwood's typical mixed architecture, a result of early development with houses spaced apart, and the subsequent pressure to sell intervening lots in the 1960s. You are now in the Schantz Historical District, Oakwood's only neighborhood on the National Registry of Historic Places. For more information on the homes in this neighborhood see the Oakwood Historical Society's guided tour available on the website.

Community Center, Schools, & Parks

Schantz Avenue meanders to the South and up a hill where it levels off to homes typical of the 1920s and 1930s. There is a light at the intersection of Patterson Road. To the left is the Oakwood Community Center, a hub of recreational and educational activity since the 1920s. Behind the center are the community swimming pool and tennis courts.

Turn left at Patterson Road and proceed one block. On your left you will see Shafor Park, a playground and the gathering place for the annual community ice cream social. At the corner of Patterson and Shafor you will see the Michael Bashaw sculpture, Wings/Lift Compounded (Defy the Impossible) installed in 2003 celebrating the centennial of flight.

Turn right onto Shafor Blvd. proceed four blocks to Spirea Drive and turn right. Travel one block to Schantz Avenue and turn left. As you continue, the junior high and the high school are on your right and the Mack Hummon football stadium on your left. At Dellwood Avenue, turn left and proceed one block passing the other athletic fields.

At Shafor Blvd. turn right and drive South to Aberdeen Avenue to the first traffic light. Continue on Shafor Blvd, and on your right will be the Edwin D. Smith elementary school, one of two elementary schools in Oakwood.

At Hadley Avenue turn left at the church and proceed two blocks to Delaine Avenue. Turn Right and go to

Orchard Road where you will see one of several popular parks with playground facilities, a picnic shelter, wading pool, and tennis and basketball courts. Continue south to East Drive where you will turn right and continue for three blocks which will bring you to Far Hills Avenue.

Far Hills Shopping District

Turn right just before Far Hills Avenue onto the access road to cruise the shopping district. On your right is Dorothy Lane Market, a family-owned independent grocery store serving the Oakwood community since 1948. Over the next several blocks there are many goods and services for Oakwood and surrounding area residents. At Peach Orchard Avenue, proceed through the light onto Far Hills Avenue and get in the left lane. Turn around at the first division in the boulevard and head South again. At the light, enter the access road on your right to cruise the stores on the west of Far Hills. Many of these shops were built into homes. Look at the side and rear of these buildings and you will see the original home architecture.

Turn right on Dell Park Avenue and proceed to Roanoke Avenue. Turn left, go one block, and turn right onto Oak Knoll Drive. Take Oak Knoll Drive two blocks to Ridgeway Road.

Ridgeway Road and Far Hills Avenue

Turn right onto Ridgeway Road. You will pass several estates built in the 1920s and 1930s for Dayton's and Oakwood's business and community leaders. This roadway was originally laid out and designed by Frederick Olmstead (of Central Park fame) for his friend and constant client, John H. Patterson, President of the National Cash Register Company.

Proceed to Park Road, turn right, and continue to Coolidge Drive, turn right. On your left will be the rear of the Sunrise assisted living facility. Proceed on Coolidge Drive, the original site of sand and gravel quarries that provided materials for roads and homes throughout Oakwood through the 1930s. Proceed to Grandon Road and turn left. Go one block to Far Hills Avenue.

Turn left on Far Hills Avenue. The Oakwood Historical Society's Long-Romspert will be on your left across the boulevard. The yellow home with the sign in the front yard is on the National Register of Historic Places. It is one of the oldest homes in Oakwood started in 1863 and was inhabited by one family the entire time until it was given to the Oakwood Historical Society in 1985.

Ahead on your right will be the Wright Memorial Public Library. It serves the community needs with a variety of programming, services, and materials. As you proceed North, try to imagine electric streetcars running up and down Far Hills Avenue. The Oakwood Street Railway Company shuttled people downtown into the 1930s when the streetcars were replaced with electric trolleys.

Ahead on your right will be the Senior High School. The high school also serves as a community meeting place in their large auditorium.

There is a traffic light at Park Avenue. Get in the left lane and at the next block (Dixon Avenue) turn left. Proceed on Dixon Avenue past a large church to the corner of Harman. Across the street is Harman Elementary School, the second elementary school in Oakwood on this tour. Turn left on Harman Avenue and go one block to Park Avenue. Turn left and you have returned to the city building. Along Park Avenue you will see the second shopping district in Oakwood. Please note The Little Exchange in the green house on your left. Started by the Junior League of Dayton in 1931, a group of dedicated volunteer women assumed responsibility for it in 1956. The independent volunteer-run store today gives 100% of its proceeds to the Children's Medical Center in Dayton.

We hope you have enjoyed your tour.