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## Finding a Place in History – A History of My Home & Its People

--Hank Beyer

*Having a sense of place is important to many of us and especially so for Hank Beyer who explored this topic for an AP English Literature class at Oakwood High School. We would like to thank Hank for sharing his research with us. Below is an excerpt from his paper, which makes one wonder-- How much do we know about the people who once shared the space in our beautiful homes?*

To start any well-rounded history one must start at the beginning. For 500 million years, in the place where my home at 800 Oakwood Avenue now stands, there existed an abundance of little changing aquatic environments. Reefs were abundant and the seas existed until about 400 million years ago. After the seas came swamps, then came plains, and more recently a snowy glacial scape resulting from the ice age. So it is more than likely that Mammoths, tropical fish, and other ancient beasts of the times once plodded across my backyard.

The first humans to come to the area were the Woodland Indians. They inhabited the area that is now Oakwood until 1100 AD, and the area was left uninhabited until the 1600s when Shawnee and Miami Indians used the area as hunting and fishing grounds occasionally; however, the area that is now my home was largely unoccupied. The Treaty of Greenville in 1795 opened the settlement of Dayton -- including the first summer homes and farms in the area surrounding my home.

In 1908 the land was finally purchased and built upon by James Montfort Irvin, a middle-aged Daytonian and Yale graduate. The architecture of the home is that of the colonial revival style. Mr. Irvin had one son at the time, James Baxter Irvin, born to a wife that had since died. He moved into the home with his son and new wife of French descent, Laulette Parrot Irvin. The couple would soon have a daughter, Laulette, in 1913, the year of the great flood, bringing the occupants of the home to a total of 5 including a 16-year-old servant girl named Elizabeth Prether.

Mr. Irvin was known as an intelligent and successful businessman. Along with his brothers he managed the Irvin Paint and Glass Company, which was "highly regarded in its field of business." The building of the business was wrecked in the great flood of 1913, but fortunately the business was rebuilt and continued on. Mr. Irvin also was a Freemason and,

as his brother Horace was the most powerful Freemason in Ohio for some time, the Masonic Temple in downtown Dayton was built largely due to Mr. Irvin's efforts.

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*Oakwood Ave. before it was paved.*

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## Message from the President

Happy Summer!

By the time you are reading this, we will be in mid-summer. We have had a busy spring at the Homestead, and I hope you were able to participate in some of the offerings.

We participated in the That Day in May parade, thanks to John Gray and his loaning us the tractor, hay wagon, and driver. A number of Oakwood children enjoyed the opportunity to throw candy from their high seats in the wagon. For the adults, we hosted the "Taste of Wine and Cheese" after the community festivities. It's our major fundraiser and we're delighted it's gaining support. We appreciate Dorothy Lane Market for its sponsorship and support and also thank former board member Kjirsten Goeller who first proposed this event and coordinated it for the first four years.

We were pleased to have four graduating high school students choose us for their community service project for three days in late May. Daniel Ehler, Grant Kincaid, Lee Leboeuf, and Paige McDonald were delightful volunteers and hard workers. Our front porch furniture has a new coat of paint, the wood burning stove in the summer kitchen has been blacked, and the garden fence has been tightened up against hungry critters.

The Children's Programs continue to bring children to the Homestead on a regular basis, while the "Seasons in the Garden" program will continue until late October. There's more about these programs later in this issue.

Past President Mark Risley has been in demand as a speaker on the topic of the Dayton Flood of 1913. He has spoken before a number of groups, including the Wright Library, UDLLI, and other historical societies in the area. He returned to Wright Library in June after his earlier presentation was standing room only.

Activities don't slow down in the summer. We're preparing for our August open house and the "Classics on the Lawn" show and for our September Photoshoot. We're excited about a special Eagle Scout project. A scout from Kettering Troop 193 will be scraping and painting some of the first floor exterior window sills and woodwork. With over 20 wooden window plus 6 external doors, it's a daunting task and we are grateful for the help with this much needed and always ongoing maintenance on our lovely old home.

We are also very pleased to introduce a new volunteer and welcome a new summer intern. Nicole Crawford is offering her expertise with publicity, a much needed role for our society. And, for the second year, we will have the help of a summer intern. Olivia Harrison, a sophomore at Miami University, will join us in early July. We've already compiled a "to-do" list.

Enjoy this issue. You'll learn about upcoming events and find a new Q&A column introduced for the curious. You'll also read more about Olivia and the feature story from a 2013 Oakwood High School graduate. We think their interest in history is very special! And, speaking of graduates, we congratulate and thank all graduates who have volunteered their time with us over the years and extend a special shout out to Zach Kell and his graduation from Sinclair. We wouldn't have a newsletter without his time and talent in designing the *Quarterly*.

Linda Pearson



*Society members fondly remember long-time member and supporter Jim Sheehan who passed away in spring and extend their condolences to his family who continue to be involved in many affairs of the society.*

## Q & A

*We get questions--good ones! Starting with this issue, we're introducing a new column to share the answers with all our readers. This time around, Harry Ebeling responds! If you have questions or are simply curious, leave us a message at 299-379, drop us a note by slow mail, or e-mail at [info@oakwoodhistory.org](mailto:info@oakwoodhistory.org).*

### **Q. How did Schenck Avenue get its name? What's the correct pronunciation?**

A. The Schenck family was one of the most prominent families in the Dayton area. It would take pages if not books to describe the accomplishments of the Schencks with military men, lawyers, politicians, entrepreneurs, inventors, and businessmen all found on the family tree. Presumably, the street was named for General Robert C. Schenck who served in the Civil War and had a long and distinguished political career.

Peirce Davies who built the home at 414 Oakwood Avenue may be the Schenck with the most local interest. The son of lawyer and businessman, Robert C. Schenck, and the great nephew of General Robert C. Schenck, Peirce was a prominent industrial and civic leader in Dayton. An entrepreneur and inventor, he worked in the garage at 414 to develop the process that became Durion. He succeeded his father as president of the Dayton Malleable Iron Company and founded the Durion Company. Always interested in cars, Peirce established the Speedwell Motor Car Company that had great success in building quality cars and is remembered as the pace car at the first Indianapolis 500 race. (There is one on display at Carillon Park.)

The answer to the second question is **Skenk**—with a hard K sound! It's often mispronounced, which is not a respectful way to remember this distinguished family.



*General Robert C. Schenck*

*Photo courtesy of Dayton Metro Library*

### **Q. An old photo shows people walking on West Peach Orchard to Hills and Dales Park. Was this the main entrance to the park?**

A. No, but West Peach Orchard was one way pathway to the park since the street was about at the end of the street car line. Todd Catchpole from Five Rivers MetroParks says "when the park was developed the rail line was extended from Cincinnati Pike down Dorothy Lane to provide entrance to the park via South Patterson Blvd." This entrance makes sense since it would have been close to the Old Barn Club, a community gathering space on 17 acres near the intersection of Oak Knoll Drive and the boulevard. The Old Barn Club burned down, but the old chimney still remains at what is now called Old Barn Camp, part of Five Rivers MetroParks.



*Old Barn Club*

## Finding a Place in History ...Cont.

From 1914-1915, James served as the mayor of Oakwood. He apparently was not the best of drivers although he tried to learn. On one occasion, according to his granddaughter, he took out a chunk of the lilac bushes while attempting to drive. Laulette at one point was the only family member that could drive!

The son, James, went on to train for World War One in Kentucky before returning home to help out with the family business. Laulette, the daughter, was highly intelligent, and unlike many women of her era attend Columbia University and the University of Chicago studying law and political science. She later moved to Montana and married. She passed in 2007 at the grand age of 94.

Shortly after James died in 1939 his wife sold the home to a new family. In 1942 Carter and Harriet Helton moved in. They had several children. Carter had been the quarterback and Indiana University and Butler and was described as lacking "weight to carry the ball himself, but makes up for this with a thorough knowledge of the game and the requirements of his post." As a Daytonian he helped in founding the Kircher, Helton & Collect Advertising Agency.



*Harriet and Carter Helton*



*Photo Courtesy of NCR Archives at Dayton History*

One of the tragedies of the home's history occurred in December of 1960. Carter Helton was aboard a Trans World Airlines plane traveling to New York to help with his son Michael who had tuberculosis. Over New York City, the plane collided with a United Airline DC-8; the TWA plane crashed into Staten Island and the United plane crashed into Park Slope, Brooklyn. At the time the crash was described as "the worst air disaster in world history." It became known as the Park Slope crash.

Harriet resided in the home for many decades afterwards. It was tastefully decorated and well kept. In the late 1990s, the home was sold to the Bryan family who only resided there for a few years until the house was sold in 2001 to my family, the Beyers.

Today the home remains largely unchanged from its original state. I live here with my three siblings and parents. My family occasional unearths artifacts of the past residents, including a shoelace puller from the early nineteen hundreds likely to belong to a member of the Irvin family and a board marked with the words "Mr. and Mrs. Carter Helton."



*Hank Beyer graduated from Oakwood High School in June. He will attend the University of Cincinnati in the fall studying Industrial Design.*



## Georgian and Colonial Revival Architecture

--Mark Risley

These styles are the main architectural theme of Shafor Heights, but can be found throughout Oakwood. Based on 18th-century styles, these homes initially became popular around 1895 and are still common today. Both styles were the result of architects and builders trying to evoke America's own patriotic past.



The Georgian Revival style was generally employed for larger houses in more affluent neighborhoods and was clad in brick. The Colonial Revival was usually a smaller home, clad in wooden clapboards, but obvious in the relationship with its larger cousin. Common elements of both styles include a rectilinear form, symmetrical facade, a fan-light window over the door, sidelight windows on either side of the door, dormer windows with classical details, a columned portico and classical entablatures.



## Oakwood Farmers' Market

--Mychaelyn Michalec

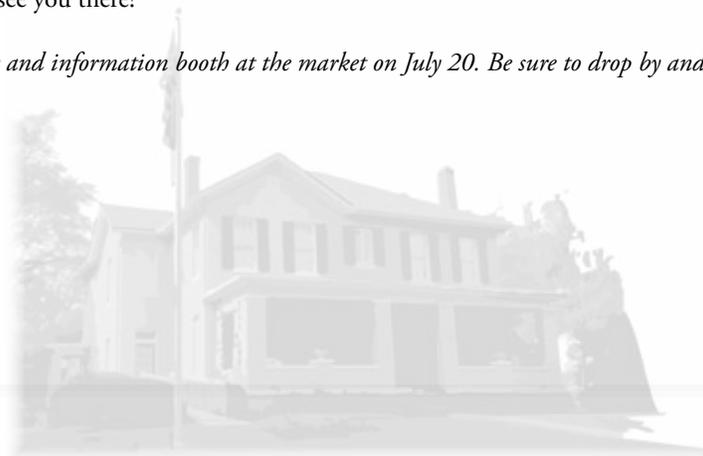
Farming has played a part in the history of the City of Oakwood for at least the past two centuries. In the 1800s, William Kramer owned 60 acres, upon which he cultivated orchards and vineyards. He also grew expansive flower gardens for visitors to stroll through and enjoy. By the 1870s, Oakwood was still a rural area with only a few large farmsteads on the east side of the present-day city. Into the next century, another large farm was Briar Hill, which remained in operation through the 1900s. Briar Hill was owned by Eugene Parrott, the second mayor of Oakwood, who kept horses and a herd of dairy cattle. Of more recent note was the 85-acre Wonderly Farm which operated until the 1920s.

Recently, Oakwood resident Dorthy Rhodes-Kupka wondered if she could bring the farm back to Oakwood. Organized by a group of citizens in cooperation with the City of Oakwood and sponsored by local businesses, a downtown Oakwood farmers' market opened on June 29th; it will run weekly on Saturdays through September 28th.

The market is located at 22 Orchard Drive in the municipal parking lot behind Chico's and Talbots. The market features produce, plants and flowers from local farms as well as homemade salsa and jam and fresh baked goods and pastries. Local food trucks serving gourmet food and delectable treats are in attendance. The market also features the work of local artisans and community business and organizations.

In America, informal markets have been around since the early settlers in Jamestown. The modern farmers' markets, with their common eating areas and their neat rows of tents and tables, started in this country as early as the 19th century. It is our hope to connect our agrarian past with our present and continue this community-minded activity into the future at the Oakwood Farmers' Market. We hope to see you there!

*The society will have an activity and information booth at the market on July 20. Be sure to drop by and say hi!*



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**A Special Toast!**

--Jacqueline Housel

Irises, poppies, and daisies were the backdrop for our annual wine and cheese tasting held on Saturday, May 18th following "That Day in May." Members and friends of the historical society gathered to sample wine and beer served by Jim Irvin of Dorothy Lane Market and taste cheeses and spreads from the market. Guests took advantage of the time to ask Jim many questions about different wines and his recommendations of wines to serve with specific dishes. It was a wonderful time to meet new friends as well as chat with old friends and neighbors.



This event has become an important source of funding for our--your--historical society with monies going for educational programs, on-going maintenance, and capital improvements. Thank you to our friends at *Dorothy Lane Market* and especially to our loyal members and friends for supporting this major fundraiser.

**Children's programs continue at full tilt**

--Linda Pearson

At the end of May the third-grade students from Smith Elementary walked to the Homestead to learn about the history of Oakwood and how people lived in Oakwood's early years. Each class had the facility to themselves for close to an hour with historical society docents leading them through various aspects of living in the 1800s. A packet has since been delivered to the Homestead filled with illustrations and thank-you notes from the children.

Our *Seasons in the Garden* class, which lasts for seven months, is filled. The program teaches many aspects of gardening, from identifying weeds and insects to planting, weeding, and harvesting. This year in addition, we are expanding our program beyond the garden fence. We have scheduled field trips to see how other community gardens are run, how local farmers plant and harvest for market, how the food supply chain works in getting food to market, and learn about other types of gardening techniques that we are not able to use in our own garden, including Permaculture and Food Forest gardening.



Our history based summer children's programs were held immediately after school was out in June. This year the topic was Life in Pioneer Times. Every year we choose a different time period for our programs, and it had been a number of years since we last interpreted this time period. Each year the programs are updated, so attending several years in a row continues to be a good learning experience. As usual, we cooked, did chores, and learned period appropriate games and crafts. A Boy Scout

attended to show the elementary children rope skills that people used to fasten things together in the time before duct tape, rubber bands, and bungee cords.

## Summer Intern

--Jacqueline Housel

The historical society is once again delighted to welcome a summer intern, Olivia Harrison. A junior at Miami University this fall, Olivia is an American Studies major because—in her own words: “I am passionate about examining American Culture. I think it is so important to be critical consumers and take time to think deeply about the culture that we are immersed in.”

Olivia is from Chattanooga, Tennessee, loves to travel, and visit historical homes with one of her favorite the McLean Home in Appomattox, Virginia. While at our historical home, Olivia will be inventorying the boxes of documents and pictures taken from the Wiltshire House and blogging about her finds on our website.



## Car Show & Open House: August 25

--Mark Risley

On Sunday, August 25, The Oakwood Historical Society will present “Classics on the Lawn” Car Show and Open House on the grounds of the Long-Romsperst Homestead House Museum from 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

This is our third-annual non-competitive automotive event. It is designed for car owners and visitors to enjoy a relaxing afternoon among classic automobiles nestled within the Homestead’s beautiful setting. Lunch will be available from Oakwood’s own *Central Perc Café* at a nominal fee.

The Long-Romsperst Homestead House Museum and its grounds will be open for self-guided tours. This event is free and open to the public! Due to limited parking, visitors are encouraged to park on side streets or enjoy a summer’s walk or bike ride to the Homestead. Come and enjoy the cars, the food and the Homestead!



## Annual Fall Photoshoot, September 22 & September 28

--Linda Pearson

This fall we will hold our third annual photoshoot at the Homestead. The grounds of the are beautiful in early fall, and the old-fashioned scenes create timeless backdrops for years of viewing pleasure. These photos will be perfect for gifts or for holiday greeting cards. We are maintaining our original prices for one more year so take advantage of this event!



For the price of \$50, a family gets a 20-minute photo session with all photos burned to a disk to take home afterwards. Inside, outside, individual shots, group shots, and even pets (on leash) can be accommodated. These photos come with a photo release by the photographer, allowing unlimited duplication of any of the photos. The photos are not re-touched, but we can refer you to someone you can hire to touch them up.

The dates are Sunday, September 22, and Saturday, September 28, 2013; hours are from 9:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Last year’s photographer, Betty Cochran, will be returning. To see sample photos from last year, please visit our website at [www.oakwoodhistory.org](http://www.oakwoodhistory.org) ; to reserve a time, leave a message at 299-3793 with your phone number and we’ll get back to you to confirm an appointment time.

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