

1947 Far Hills Avenue
Dayton, OH 45419

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The Great Flood: Untold Stories from Oakwood

--Harrison Stamm Gowdy

In 1913 Oakwood was a small city that watched with wonder and sadness at the destruction left after the Great Dayton Flood. Many Oakwood families were closely connected to Dayton, which was their home before moving to Oakwood, a new suburb. Dayton was where their workplaces, shops, and churches were still located, and where friends and family lived.

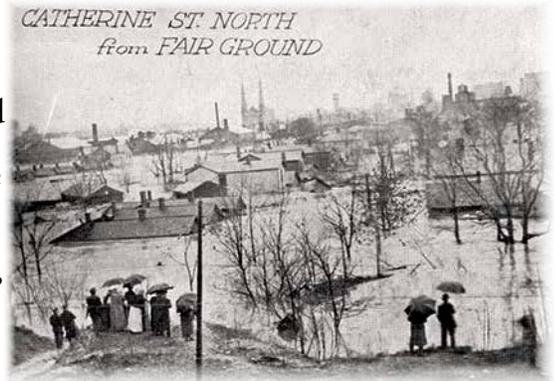
This year, as the Miami Valley prepares to celebrate the Centennial of the Great Flood, we at the historical society would like to share some of the stories and memories of our residents. And, while the two most influential Oakwood residents were John H. Patterson and Adam Schantz who were strongly dedicated to the Miami Valley, their stories have been told many times so, in this issue, you will read stories of others who lived through and remembered the Great Flood.

The Gerstner Family

The first story is from Charlotte Gerstner Campbell (daughter of the founder of H. Gerstner Company, a company proudly making tool chests in the USA.). Charlotte passed away in 2003 at the age of 90. She and her husband raised all their children in Oakwood and the family continues to live here; in fact, Charlotte's grandchildren are currently enrolled in Oakwood schools.

Charlotte was born in Dayton on December 21, 1912, in an apartment at the corner of Washington and Cincinnati streets. In March, 1913, Charlotte was only 3-1/2 months old and so sickly her parents brought a minister to the apartment to baptize Charlotte the month before in preparation of her death. Then the flood came. Charlotte and her parents were marooned in the second floor of their apartment. The power was off and the water was up to the ceiling on the first floor and rising into the second floor. The NCR boats came around and offered Charlotte's parents powdered milk, sterilized water, and a little Sterno. Charlotte's father decided that maybe the powdered milk would be better than mother's milk. The family started feeding Charlotte powdered milk and she began to thrive. The Gerstners lived out the flood in their apartment and credited Charlotte's life to the NCR boats that offered the powdered milk.

The NCR boats manned by volunteers and Ohio National Guardsmen were life savers; their gifts of food and water helped many families make it through the storm and then gave them hope to rebuild their community. Charlotte's father was one of them. After the flood, he did not abandon this neighborhood. Instead, he finished construction on his new factory (which was only a foundation at the time of the flood) at 20 Cincinnati Street. H. Gerstner & Sons continues to operate at this location and is a cornerstone of the area. It is one of the only surviving buildings after the realignment of Interstate 75.



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Message from the President

Greetings everyone!

Last year was a busy one as you will see from some of the reports in this issue. This coming year will no doubt be every bit as busy as new opportunities present themselves and get interwoven into our annual events calendar.

This year is the centennial of the Dayton Flood of 1913. Mark Risley from our Board of Directors has been involved with an area-wide planning committee, working on the commemoration of this major disaster and the highlighting of the conservation and flood control measures that affect our valley yet today. We have a display of flood photos for you to view in our museum room, donated by avid historian and long-time member Ed Herrman, which some of you may have seen during our holiday open house. Our main focus in this issue is the flood, starting with the feature article, but look for some other tidbits as well.

At the beginning of last year, members of the board met several times to review the society's bylaws and to update them to reflect current practices. This project continued to occupy us as time permitted over the course of the year, and the end product is now being typed and proofed. We will hold our regular February Board Meeting at City Hall to allow enough space for members who would like to attend to participate in officially adopting the new bylaws. See "Coming Events" for details. Please put this date on your calendar and come read, comment, and vote!

At the end of each year, we take time to sadly, but fondly remember members and friends who are no longer with us and who most recently include Mary Fricke, Edgar Herrman, and Ray Bach. Their support has been invaluable to the society. We also take time to express our gratitude to all of you, our readers, community individuals, businesses and organizations for contributions of time, skills, ideas, artifacts, and monetary donations. The historical society continues to be vibrant and vital because of this support. A heartfelt thank you to you all!

I'm honored to be your president again for another term; please look inside this newsletter for the full list of board directors for the coming year. Remember - this is your Oakwood Historical Society, so we welcome your suggestions and, as always, your participation in our programming!

Linda Pearson

Linda Pearson

Happy New Year

2013



People First

Transit in Oakwood - Once more with more

There is no question that convenient access to downtown Dayton—to its stores and factories—led to the rapid growth of Oakwood in the 1920s. **Tom Morrow**, a local resident and expert on the subject of development of public transportation in the Dayton area, presented a slide show at the historical society's Annual Meeting with photos and maps tracing the various routes and companies from the early days of Oakwood to the '50s.

Morrow has read extensively on this subject and has been a member of the Dayton Railway Historical Society since 1986. With much more information to share, he will give another presentation in February in collaboration with Wright Memorial Public Library. See "Coming Events" for date and times.

Society to share rare 1913 Flood Photo

A rare photograph depicting Dayton's 4th and Main Streets during the Great Flood of 1913 was recently rediscovered at the Homestead. It will be featured prominently during this year's area-wide centennial commemoration of the flood. Currently on display at the Homestead, it and some of the society's other original flood photos will be loaned to the Dayton Art Institute for its exhibit on the 1913 flood.

On March 16th, society past-president **Mark Risley** will present a program on the Great Flood of 1913 at Wright Library. Watch local publications for more information.



Society welcomes new board member

Debra Schenk has been the Fiscal Officer at Wright Memorial Public Library for seven years. Before that she worked as a financial consultant and served as treasurer for several non-profit organizations, as well as a private high school. Debra graduated from the University of Dayton with a Masters in Business Administration. She is married with two children still at home. Her hobbies include reading (especially historical fiction and nonfiction), music and watching ice hockey.

Reports

New Artifacts for the Homestead

--Harry Ebeling

Two significant treasures were donated to the society last fall and are now displayed at the Homestead.

We acknowledge the gift and the framing of an original Olmsted Brothers design plan for the Hills and Dales area on Oakwood's southwest side; it is now hanging in the Museum room. The map has been folded and stored for many years, but you can see many current roads and landmarks and can trace Forrer Road past the planned Houk Stream Park and Elizabeth Gardens Park, and see how the path of Runnymede Road was originally proposed. Other interesting finds include a Houk Road that is now Thruston Boulevard and a proposed Waving Willow Road that ran from West Schantz Avenue through to what is now Dayton Country Club. (Waving Willow was later shortened and is now Thornhill Road.) Ridgeway Road is not on the plan.

This plan is from the imagination of John H. Patterson, when he had Olmsted Brothers lay out bridle paths for his enjoyment. Originally dated 1907, it was updated in 1912, and much of the planning is documented by correspondence from Patterson in the Dayton Public Library.

The Romspert Family

Sometimes, history is just a story that makes you remember how lucky you are in life. In 1978, Ethel Gilbert Romspert was interviewed and asked about the flood. Ethel and her husband Harry were living in Oakwood at the Long-Romspert house, the current Oakwood Historical Society Homestead. While the floodwaters never got higher than the Fairgrounds, Ethel and Harry were interested in the aftermath and ventured out to see for themselves. This is Ethel's story.

"There was a little street that came in at an angle near the fairgrounds. Harry and I looked at a house to buy for an investment. We wanted to rent it. We looked at the house the day before the flood... and it was what we wanted; and we decided to take it. And that night was when the flood went through, and took the house, so we were just one day lucky. We went down to the floodwaters. Of course, they wouldn't let anyone through—we went down and followed the line clear around to Eagle Street" (Eagle Street no longer exists, but ran from downtown near Fifth Street to what is now the South Park neighborhood). "We just walked around there. We went all around. I suppose we spent the whole day, I don't remember. But we couldn't find anything to eat. We went in one little grocery store, and he'd sold out of everything, except dill pickles, and we bought a dill pickle a piece. And that was all we had to eat all day."



Ethel also recalls the aftermath downtown.

"We had property in the flood—my husband owned property on Bank Street and then on another street off of Bank Street. Two little cottages in there. Afterwards, it was all mud. We had to clean it all out." Downtown "there was so much... houses gone, and there were dead horses and all sorts of things. I think I tried to close my mind to what I saw. We didn't stay around very much, very long. It was terrible.

"We also had friends, Ted and Ethel Routsong that lived near Irving Avenue. There was a scare about the gas being shut off. The Routsongs came out and spent one night with us. But that was just a scare, one of these rumors that went around.

"It took quite awhile to clean up [after the Flood] and yet it's strange, in a time like that people sort of jump in and help; in a surprisingly short time it was cleared away."

Frederick Patterson, Nelson Talbott, & Frank Lane

Charlotte and Ethel were not "workers" in the rescuing or recovery; rather, their stories are personal memories. However, Oakwood did have its share of workers. There were young men like Frederick Patterson and Nelson "Bud" Talbott. Both were sons of leading citizens and while these two 21-year-old men could easily have been protected and given "desk" jobs during the recovery, they instead took out their own canoe and rescued 162 people. There is also the story of Frank Lane.



Frank Lane was born in Milford, Ohio, in 1867. When the flood hit he was 46 years old and working for NCR. Mr. Lane was also a member of the Oakwood City Council and lived in a house on Far Hills Avenue with his wife Emma and their two children Charlotte and Frank, who were 8 and 5. Mr. Lane had not been well during the winter of 1912-1913, but his civic duty would not allow him to rest. After the flood hit on Tuesday, he worked endlessly doing relief work and taking little rest. Then, on Saturday of that week, Mr. Lane died of heart failure.

The Glutwein Family

There are many stories of families sharing space like the Gutwein family who had a big rambling house on the corner of Far Hills and West Schantz (now demolished). The house was built around 1894 by Daniel and Phillippina Gutwein for their large family that included seventeen kids (thirteen lived into adulthood). In 1977 Edith Gutwein Beacham remembers how her family helped the flood survivors. Edith was sixteen years old when the flood hit Dayton. These are her words...

"When the flood came, it stopped at Apple Street as far as Main Street is concerned. John H. Patterson had a lot of boats built in his factory. Then my brothers helped to rescue people in those boats. A newborn baby was rescued and we took care of him at the house. We took care of quite a few people from the flood.



"We kids slept on the floor and gave the flood people our beds. My mother would buy flour by the barrel and about seventy-five bushels of potatoes and we'd make sauerkraut by the barrel. Because we had a big family, we always had a lot of food in the house, so we took in a lot of the survivors of the flood. A lot of people in Oakwood, I understand, did that.

"People would sit on our hillside, after running from the flood, and we'd bring them in and feed them. That wasn't all. We kept the new baby there until he was ready to leave. They lived on Little Street, and they were rescued off the roof and the baby was born in a rescue boat. I took care of it and when they got ready to leave, we went down to their home, which was a cottage. We helped them get all the mud out. We made everything clean for them. We did that for the flood victims."

General George Wood

Finally, there is the story of General George Wood. General Wood was born in Dayton and he was dedicated to this area. He left Dayton for several years to attend school. He went to several different places, including Dayton Collegiate Institute, Sheffield Scientific School, Yale University, and Cincinnati Law School; in 1890, he came back to Dayton to practice law. From 1898 to 1901 he served in the Army and was offered a commission in the regular Army; however, he refused and instead returned to Dayton. He acted as a secretary in the Citizens' Relief Association and in 1910 was a member of the Civil Service Commission of Dayton, a commission that advised on city building projects.

General Wood lived at 25 West Schantz, now known as 131 Rubicon Road. In 1913 Gov. James M. Cox appointed General Wood to the leadership position of Adjutant General for the Ohio National Guard. His leadership skills were soon tested with the Dayton Flood. In 1913, General Wood quickly took command of the situation and had more than 3,000 soldiers of the Ohio National Guard under him restoring order to Dayton and Montgomery County. General Wood enforced the strictest martial law and was able to bring about the restoration of the city in a surprisingly short time.

The Oakwood Historical Society continues to record memories of growing up in town. We are so glad to share these stories and we hope that the past will help shape the future for it reminds us what people can achieve when coming together for a common goal.



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Please get involved...

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Artifacts (cont)

The acquisition of this valuable document was through the generosity of Mr. & Mrs. John Gray, and funding for the mounting was with funds from memorial gifts for Edgar Herrman, and framing was from a grant from the Meta E. Pavlik Charitable Trust.

The second donation is the only likeness we have of Henry Long, the original owner of the Quarter Section that was the foundation of the south Oakwood development on the west side of Far Hills Avenue. The charcoal drawings of Henry and Harriet Shroyer Long came to us from Edgar A. Herrman's daughter who has had them hanging in her house for many years. Beautifully framed, they will be placed in the parlor on the south side of the Long-Romspert Homestead, where they will preside over the original part of the house built by the careful hands of Henry Long and his children in 1867.

**Children's Programs**

-- Linda Pearson and Lisa Kell

The Gardening Program finished the growing season in mid-October, with the remaining organic produce picked and hauled home by our busy young gardeners. We celebrated the last day with green tomato pizza and ice cream. At the final session, as the gardeners pulled up the spent plants, boy scouts from Troop 101 were working on enlarging the growing space for next year. We are pleased to announce that we now have three new raised beds for our garden. Gardening will begin again in April.

Due to the Oakwood Schools scheduling classes until just before Christmas, it was difficult to hold our usual Before Christmas children's programs. There will be programs held over the Oakwood Schools Winter Break the week of Feb 18 instead. We are hoping to coordinate with the Wright Library's children's programs that week. Watch the historical society website for more details as the time approaches.

Wiltshire Home Tour a Success

-- Mark Risley

A recent home tour presented by The Oakwood Historical Society proved to be a great success as over 400 people visited a virtual time capsule at 413 Wiltshire Blvd. Guests enjoyed hearing the fascinating story of the Costas family from their origins in late 19th century Greece to establishing their new roots in 20th century America.

They also viewed the home and its remarkably well-preserved artifacts representing the period of the 1930s and 1940s. This was a rare opportunity to step back in time to view and appreciate early Oakwood.



Research & Outreach -- Always More

-- Harrison Stamm Gowdy

Our committee enjoyed this fall so much! There has been such good history uncovered and we are busy spreading the word to anyone who will listen!

We look forward to wrapping up two large projects. We are completing the story of Wiltshire Blvd. with more interviews and oral histories about the Greek families who first moved into Oakwood. These oral histories will add a new chapter to Oakwood's history. We are still unraveling the story of The Town of Oakwood. This project started as a walking tour of Oakwood's first neighborhood (around Harman School), but, after the public open house, we knew there was more history to uncover and we have! The stories are great and we look forward to weaving them together for another walking tour open house and library programs.

We are also working with the Wright Memorial Public Library to better document its history and help celebrate its 100 years of Oakwood libraries.

As we look forward to another enriching year, we do have a special request about photos! No photo is meaningless! If you have family collections of growing up in Oakwood in the 1930s, 1940s and forward or backwards in time, we are interested! Please contact Harrison Stamm Gowdy at stammgowdy@sbcglobal.net or 937.643.4075 so we can meet with you and scan your images. Our collection grows because of your generous support!

Coming Events

Transit in Oakwood

February 9, Saturday, 2:00 p.m.

Wright Memorial Public Library

Transportation to and from Oakwood to Dayton and points beyond was a critical piece of Oakwood's history, and Tom Morrow, Oakwood resident and Oakwood Historical Society member, will talk about how transit played a key role in Oakwood's growth and prosperity from the beginning up until the 1950s

Children's Programs

During week of February 18

Special programs will be held over the Oakwood Schools Winter Break. Watch the historical society website, www.oakwoodhistory.org, for dates, times, and other details.

Special Members Meeting

February 25, Monday, 7:00 p.m.

City Hall

30 Park Avenue

Join us as we review and vote on the revised bylaws for the historical society followed by the regular monthly board meeting. Both meetings will be a good opportunity to meet board members and learn more about the society.

Great Flood of 1913

March 16, Saturday

Wright Memorial Public Library

Society past-president Mark Risley will present a program on the Great Flood of 1913 at Wright Library. As a member of the region-wide centennial steering committee, Mr. Risley's presentation will include facts and photos from Dayton and around the Miami Valley. Visit the society website and watch local publications for more information.

**THE OAKWOOD
HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

1947 Far Hills Avenue
Dayton, OH 45419



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