

**50<sup>th</sup>**  
ANNIVERSARY  
THE OAKWOOD  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

# THE HISTORIAN

Preserving the past, present, and future of the Oakwood Community  
Fall 2024

## OAKWOOD HISTORY VIDEO SERIES



Trace the history of the early Oakwood farmers and landowners up through the establishment of the Long Homestead in 1863, including the family and their three generations of Long and Romsperdt descendants (as well as boarders) who lived in the house until it was bequeathed to the historical society in 1984.

Go to [oakwoodhistory.org/oak/lectures.html#102](https://oakwoodhistory.org/oak/lectures.html#102) to view the video!

[oakwoodhistory.org](https://oakwoodhistory.org)  
[info@oakwoodhistory.org](mailto:info@oakwoodhistory.org)



Save the Date  
The Oakwood Historical Society's  
**HOLIDAY**  
*home tour*

Saturday, December 7

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\$45 per ticket  
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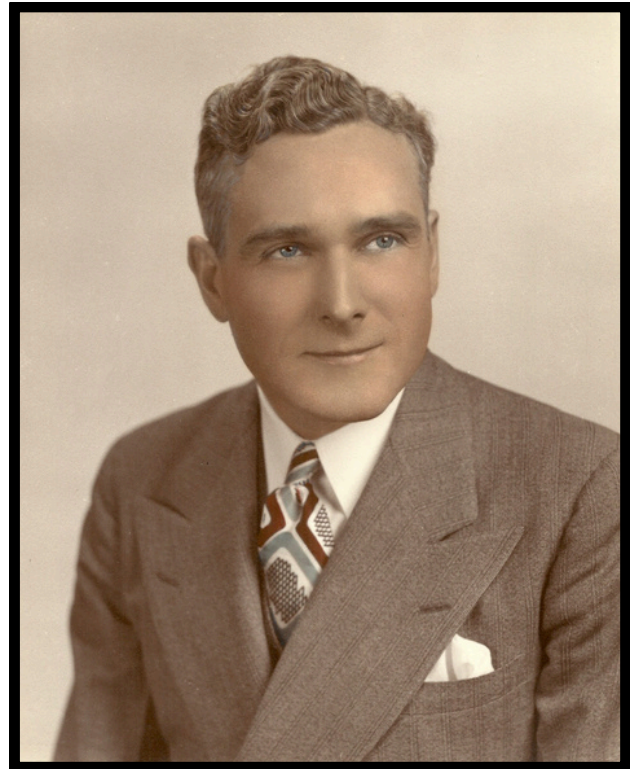
For tickets and information visit [oakwoodhistory.org](http://oakwoodhistory.org)  
or call 937.299.3793

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All proceeds benefit The Oakwood Historical Society



## FAR HILLS SPEAKER SERIES

In conjunction with the Wright Memorial Public Library, Far Hills Speaker Series presentations are held in the library's Community Room. Join us on Sunday, November 17 at 2:00 p.m. for "Lucky Eddie: The Life, Times, and Family of Dayton Mayor & U.S. Congressman Edward G. Breen." Presented by his son, Edward Focke Breen.



To register, go to [wrightlibrary.org/local/speaker-series](http://wrightlibrary.org/local/speaker-series).

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## VOLUNTEER WITH US!



Do you, a friend, or family member have an interest in history? We are always looking for volunteers to serve as board members, tour guides, researchers, educational program coordinators, House Museum maintenance experts, and more!

Email [info@oakwoodhistory.org](mailto:info@oakwoodhistory.org) for more information.

# EARLY REFRIGERATION AND THE FRIGIDAIRE AT THE OAKWOOD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

*Linda Pearson*

The Oakwood Historical Society's Homestead Museum has several examples of how people kept perishable food fresh. One example is the ice box. Starting in the early 1800s, an entire industry grew up around harvesting large blocks of ice off ponds and lakes in the winter, with the bigger efforts using ice cutters drawn by teams of horses. Blocks of ice were regularly delivered to houses and placed in the top of an ice box to keep food from spoiling.

Another refrigeration example in the Homestead Museum, one with a connection to Dayton, is an early Frigidaire electric refrigerator. According to Jerry Strange, who writes for the Washington-Centerville historical society, in 1913 an inventor from Dayton by the name of Alfred Mellowes developed an electrical/mechanical refrigeration unit. It took Mellowes several years to sell 40 handmade Guardian units in Fort Wayne, Indiana, where he started his company. By 1918 Mellowes was deeply in debt. General Motors soon acquired Guardian and renamed it Frigidaire.

According to Strange, by 1921 only about 3,000 Frigidaire refrigerators had been sold, so the decision was made to move the operation to the DELCO Light division of General Motors in Dayton. This decision was influenced by Charles F. Kettering, a member of the GM board and one of the founders of DELCO Light.



## EARLY REFRIGERATION AND THE FRIGIDAIRE AT THE OAKWOOD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Several improvements were made after Frigidaire arrived in Dayton. One was the change from a wooden case to a porcelain enamel coated steel cabinet with a temperature control. Other improvements included the addition of compartments to make ice cubes and to provide additional storage (see *images below*).

Frigidaire had many firsts. In addition to the porcelain coated metal cabinet and the thermostat, Frigidaire was the first refrigerator to use Freon gas. “Early refrigerators,” Strange writes, “used various toxic gases as refrigerants and, as a result, there were health risks, including death, if the system were to leak.” “There were enough such incidents,” Strange continues, “that people reportedly started putting their refrigerators outside. This problem was solved in 1928 when Thomas Midgley, Jr., a member of Kettering’s Barn Gang, developed Freon, a nontoxic refrigerant gas. Freon was the refrigerant of choice until the 1970’s when it was shown to cause a depletion in the ozone layer in our upper atmosphere.”

By 1926, Frigidaire had become such a big operation that it was removed from DELCO Light and became its own division of GM. With efficient manufacturing, the price came down from \$775 to \$468, still expensive for the time but more affordable. Frigidaire began manufacturing in Moraine in the vacant Wright Plane Company building. Staff and employees lived in many surrounding towns, including Oakwood.

During the 1920s sales grew exponentially. By 1929, Frigidaire had sold over one million units! Even the Great Depression of the 1930s was unable to stop sales growth.



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Board Meetings

*Fourth Monday of each month at 7 p.m.*

Location:

1947 Far Hills Ave.  
(The Homestead)

## EARLY REFRIGERATION AND THE FRIGIDAIRE AT THE OAKWOOD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Frigidaire president, Elmer Biechler, lived in Oakwood. Legend has it that Biechler was diabetic and had an early model refrigerator in his bedroom to store his insulin. Insulin was first used on a person during a research project in Canada in 1922 and was first manufactured by Eli Lilly in 1923. This was just in time for very early refrigerators to keep it cold.

The Frigidaire at the Homestead House came from Biechler's Oakwood home. Our donated refrigerator has many of the hallmarks of the improved 1920s Frigidaire refrigerators (metal housing with enamel interior; a small freezer compartment big enough to hold two ice cube trays; an additional drawer for holding other food stuffs). The bottom half of the Homestead Frigidaire is now empty except for storage, but we believe the motor was originally in that area.

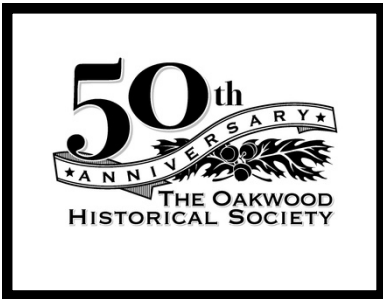


*Image courtesy of the Ohio History Connection*

On your next tour of The Oakwood Historical Society, be sure to ask to see the ice boxes and refrigerators in our collection!

### NEWSLETTER SPONSORS





**THE OAKWOOD  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY**  
1947 Far Hills Avenue  
Dayton, OH 45419

## **DONATE TODAY!**

Our supporters understand that history matters and are interested in preserving our local story. Join others as we make great strides to preserve Oakwood history and bring historical education and events to our city.

Your donation is appreciated. To make a gift, contact us at 937-299-3793 or at [info@oakwoodhistory.org](mailto:info@oakwoodhistory.org).

