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Centennial Reflections

Essays from the Oakwood Historical Society

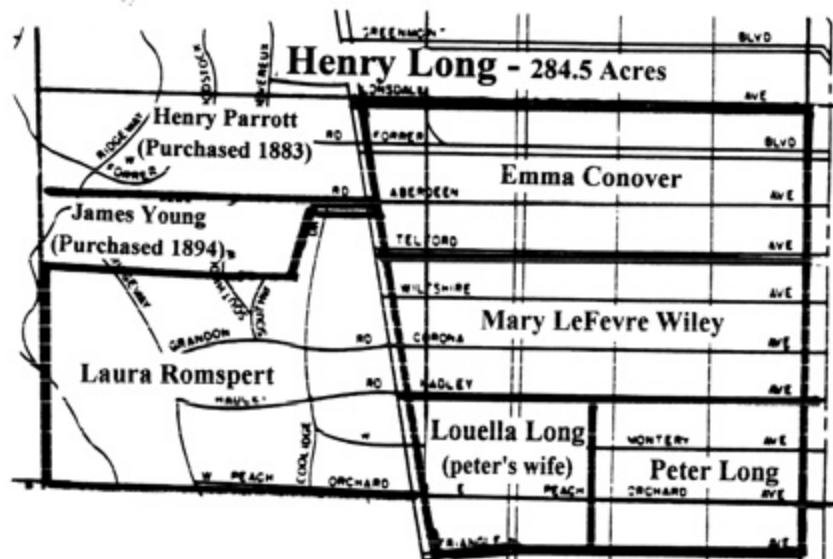
The Longs and the Shroyers - a family history

By Harry G. Ebeling

Since this series is aimed at those who may not know or who have forgotten the roots of Oakwood history, let's take the time to look at two families that are responsible for about half of Oakwood – the Longs and the Shroyers.

Peter Long came here from Maryland in 1828 and purchased a quarter section in what is now Kettering in the Southern Boulevard area. His home on Laureldale Rd. is on the National Register of Historic Places. One of his thirteen children (by four wives) was Henry Long who purchased a quarter section in the south west corner of what is now Oakwood in 1856. He built a log cabin on what is now Park Rd. and began to clear it. By 1863 he was able to build a house for his growing family, which is the basic Long-Romspert Homestead of the Oakwood Historical Society, also on the National Register.

It is important to know that this house is still there, hiding under the 1920 stucco exterior. It is always surprising when we take people through, that this isn't known. The land, as we discovered in the initial articles of this series, wasn't suitable for farming as he had hoped, but it contained a substantial amount of gravel from the glacier. He was able to plant a few orchard trees, but it turned out to be a fairly successful gravel quarry. He sold two tracts off and by the time of his death in 1896 there remained 101.5 acres of the original 160.



The Shroyer brothers, John and Jacob, came here from Maryland in 1819 and bought half sections, returning to get their father and bring him here before settling down. John's first purchase proved to be unwise, for the same reason Henry Long's purchase

wasn't. It was in the Hills & Dales area off what is now West Schantz, and wasn't tillable.

A few years later he cut his losses and bought the Section which was opposite Henry Long's which is what is now in Oakwood – from Far Hills Avenue to Shroyer Road, and from Peach Orchard Avenue to Lonsdale Avenue. He added 13.75 acres between Peach Orchard and Triangle Avenue, from Far Hills to Shroyer. All of this was good land, and by hard work he and his family cleared it and made a successful farm.

His farm house was at the corner of what is now Hadley Avenue and Far Hills. It was made from bricks baked in a kiln on the property.

This house was torn down in 1960 and an apartment was built, otherwise it would be the oldest house in Oakwood.

John later acquired the quarter section on the other side of Shroyer Road so that he had 410 acres at the time of his death. Now it gets interesting – the rest of the story. John's daughter, Harriet, married Henry Long. After John died, his heirs got together in 1881 and guaranteed their mother a life income in return for a deed to the share of the property they would get at her death. Thus Harriet Shroyer Long got 102.5 acres. Her brother, Andrew, had no interest in farming, so he sold his 80.5 acres to Henry Long. Now Henry was in business with 284.5 acres of what is now south Oakwood! He farmed and sold gravel until his death in 1896.

When Henry and Harriet died in 1896, his heirs split up the acreage. Their daughter, Laura Long Romspert, who had had cared for the parents since her husband died in 1892, got the Homestead and 90 acres. That's why it's called the Long-Romspert homestead.

That's where we begin to tell the story of the Homestead to school children and visitors. We point out that in 1863, there were no utilities, and cooking wasn't done inside the house. So we have an authentic summer kitchen building in the back, complete with a large open fireplace and a bell to summon the farm workers from across the way on the former Shroyer farm. We point to a pump house where water was pumped to a trough for watering livestock. We show a picture of a large barn that stood in the parking area behind the house, where horses and feed were kept for farming and quarrying operations. We tell about the carriage house where a formal buggy was kept. We tell about the gardens where flowers and vegetables were grown and there was a grape arbor. It all spins into a story about another time, when life was simpler but a lot harder.

It's a hard sell to third and fourth graders, when we explain what a chamber pot is for, that there wasn't always a street out front, that schools were over a mile away, and there was no television – but that's the fun of it.