

Preserving the past, present and future of the Oakwood Community • Spring 2007



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The Oakwood Historical Society and City of Oakwood continues to work on the Centennial Film project. We have currently finished the first segment of the film and are gathering images and working on the second draft of the second segment. The film will run for 30 minutes, but several hundred images are necessary. While the Oakwood Historical Society has a variety of photographs of Oakwood, we are always looking for more. We are also looking for any home movies that may exist.

OHS member and life-long Oakwood resident Lisa Reeder has shared her family history with us and allowed us to use both family movies and private photos. Lisa's grandparents, Dr. Warren and Elaine Breidenbach, built the

WANTED:

Images from private collections for the Centennial Documentary Film



home at 824 E. Schantz Avenue around 1927.

This Tudor house was designed by local architect Roy W. Chessman. The family movies show the house under construction as well as several shots of their first house at 34 Forrer Boulevard. There are also charming images of the family riding horses in Hills & Dales, a 6th grade graduation at Harman School, and horses pulling sleds up and down Forrer in the winter. Their photographic collection includes interior shots of their newly built house, its picturesque landscaped grounds, and several of family and friends.

We would like to thank all of you who have told us you have images and we will be contacting you soon. We would also like to continue to hear from anyone else who has photos or video to share. Please contact Harrison Gowdy at 643-4075 or stammgowdy@sbcglobal.net.



OHS Committees

Please get involved...

Archives & History

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Facilities/Grounds

Maintenance

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A note from the president

In 2008, Oakwood will celebrate its centennial. Plans by the City are underway to make this a memorable celebration worthy of our town's historic past. The Oakwood Historical Society is proud to be included in these plans and to provide any assistance needed from our archives, collections and recollections.

When we think of history, we often think of significant people, places and events. But, there is a further definition of "from a past time." Oakwood has always been one of the premier places to live in the Dayton area. Much of this, as we know, is due to its excellent schools, outstanding city services, tree-lined streets and wonderful homes. From its beginning, Oakwood has attracted people with the desire and ability to preserve and maintain their properties. As a result, one can walk down any street in Oakwood and see homes in their original, intended appearance. It can truly be said that living in Oakwood is like living in a physical place that's "from a past time."

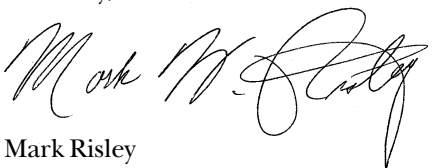
A few years ago, the Society formed a Preservation Committee. One of the intentions was to provide educational resources for residents interested in the history, architecture and restoration of their homes. Last year, the Society, along with the Oakwood Rotary Foundation, published the "Schantz

Park Historic District Self-Guided Walking Tour" booklet. Not only is it an enjoyable tour through Oakwood's only neighborhood on the National Register of Historic places, but it's an excellent early 20th century architectural guide that can apply to many of the homes throughout our town. This free booklet is available at the City Building, Oakwood Community Center and at Society events.

The Preservation Committee is now at work on a home restoration guide that is designed to assist homeowners who desire to maintain the quality and appearance of their homes. It, too, will feature architecture with an even stronger emphasis on details of the earlier homes. This project is progressing, and we hope to have the guide available later this year. Other walking tours are also in the planning stages.

Oakwood's 100th birthday celebration will be a significant addition to its already remarkable history and its exciting future.

Sincerely,



Mark Risley
President

Oakwood Centennial Celebration

The Oakwood Centennial committee is looking for enthusiastic volunteers to help them plan the year-long celebration of Oakwood's Centennial.

If you would like to volunteer, please fill out the form to the right and mail it to:

**City of Oakwood
30 Park Avenue
Dayton, OH 45419**

Oakwood Centennial Committee Sign-up

Name _____

Address _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ E-mail _____

I am interested in (check all that apply):

- Oakwood Retrospective: 100 years and counting
- Excellence in Learning: A celebration of education
- Haven on the High Ground: A salute to our environment
- Closing Ceremonies
- Legacy
- Marketing and promotions
- Fund and friendraising

2007 Society Programs

April

Potluck Supper (*see page 6 for details*)

Program: Tom Cecil Speaks on George Washington

Thursday, April 26th

Time: 6:00 p.m.

Location: Lutheran Church of Our Savior, Oakwood

May

Preservation Month:

Restoring Your Historic Home

(Presentation by Neal Oxman of the Durable Slate Co.)

Date: May 17th

Time: 7:00 p.m.

Location: Lutheran Church of Our Savior

June

Walking Oakwood's Many Parks

Saturday, June 9th

Time: 10:00 a.m.

Various Oakwood Parks

July

Picnic at the Homestead

Demonstrations: metal forging and chair caning

Sunday, July 22nd

Time: 2:00 p.m.

September

NCR Boys' Garden

Thursday, Sept. 20th

Time: 7:00 p.m.

Location: Lutheran Church of Our Savior

October

Antique Show and Sale

Date: TBD (Saturday)

Time: 9:00 am – 4:00 pm

Location: Smith School Gym

November

Founders' Day/Annual Meeting/Elections

Program: "Landscaping Historic Gardens"

The Oakwood Garden Club

Date: Nov 14th

Time: 6:00 p.m. social hour/ 7:00 p.m. dinner

Location: Dayton Country Club

December

Holidays at the Homestead

Sunday, Dec. 10th

Time: 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Committee Reports

Events/Programs—

Teresa Prosser

Over the last two years, the Ohio Historical Society has gradually increased its educational programming with very positive results! The attendance at programs has grown, and the feedback has encouraged the Society to once again offer a slate of programs geared to delight and satisfy all ages. The familiar events are still there but in different months. This change is intended to alternate educational programs with more social events. If you have any suggestions or ideas for programs, please get in touch with Teresa Prosser at 293-8506. In the meantime, annual postcards, newspaper articles, and the Society's own quarterly newsletter will highlight and announce the topics, days, times, and locations of this year's offerings. We hope to see you all soon!

Membership—

Mackensie Wittmer

A special thank you to all who renewed or joined at the end of 2006. The volunteer that managed the membership process has recently moved out of state. Thank you for your patience as we transition to a new volunteer and she gets up to speed. If you have any immediate needs (such as a receipt) please email info@oakwoodhistory.org with your full name and request. Membership dollars are essential to maintaining the historical society's programs and outreach. Thank you for showing your support for the Oakwood Historical Society!

Oakwood's Beginnings and Turn of the Century Transportation Trends

Committee Reports

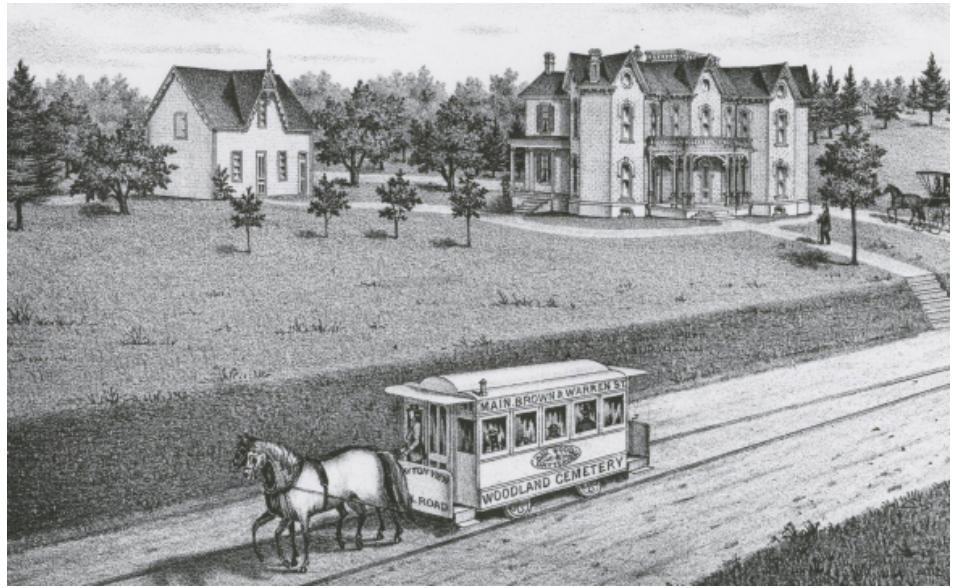
Education — Mackensie Wittmer

Look for an update to the website oakwoodhistory.org in the coming weeks. Events for 2007 will be listed there as well as a new section for you to share your favorite Oakwood memory. To share your memory you can email info@oakwoodhistory.org. To view others, log onto oakwoodhistory.org and click on the Oakwood History link.

Facilities/Grounds — Mark Risley

The grounds and gardens of the Long-Romspert Homestead are in their winter rest right now. Tracks in the snow of rabbit, squirrel, and deer remind us that we share the grounds with other true residents of Oakwood. We all look forward to spring bringing the gardens to life again as well as greening up the lawn and the many trees.

Inside the house, an upstairs bathroom was recently refurbished and foundation work was just completed on part of the original section of the house to ensure it will remain stable for many more decades to come. Work like this reminds us that the Long-Romspert Homestead is an ongoing project, and our vigilant stewardship is an important part of preserving one of Oakwood's beautiful historic landmarks.



The Oakwood Omnibus travelled along Oakwood Avenue to Park Avenue. This image from 1875 depicts Oakwood Avenue.

During the late 1800s and early 1900s, suburbs like Oakwood throughout the country evolved as a result of the changing forms of transportation that were available at the same time. Suburbs are so commonplace now that it seems odd to think of them as a new concept, but before the omnibus, a horse-drawn trolley, all citizens lived within walking distance of their work. Two of Oakwood's most well-known families—the Pattersons and the Schantz family—initially lived in downtown Dayton. John H. Patterson lived on First & Ludlow streets before he built the Far Hills around 1898, and the Schantz family had several homes on Riverview (near what is today Dayton View) basically across the street from their brewery. At that time, these downtown locations were the most desirable. But as cities industrialized, wealthy citizens sought out locations away from the negative qualities of the city but close enough for daily contact.

This scenario helps to explain the location of the town of Oakwood which was platted in 1872 with 94 lots designed for the urban elite as retreats from their daily work lives. Located with easy access to the omnibus, Oakwood was viewed as a virtual utopia. There are no historical records

indicating that the partnership that platted Oakwood was trying to build an ideal suburban residential neighborhood. But for several of Dayton's elite, that was just what occurred.

Prior to the platting of the town, Oakwood was home to farmers and quarries. Once the town was platted and an omnibus route was established (from downtown up Oakwood Avenue, across Far Hills, and ending at Park Avenue), a handful of Dayton's urban elite recognized the benefits of living on the hill with its picturesque setting and relatively easy commute downtown to their offices. This two to three mile commute was made possible by the omnibus, which allowed people to travel this distance much more quickly.

The earliest subdivisions were platted by upper-class citizens, and it was an unspoken reality that only the upper class could afford to live nearby. However, soon everyone wanted the dream of a single-family home removed from the city center, and the introduction of electric trolleys in 1888 nationally and locally in 1895 made it possible.

The later subdivisions of Oakwood were built for several economic classes including the middle- and upper-middle classes, and later even the

working class. The streetcar allowed Oakwood's residents to travel in ten minutes as far as they could walk in thirty minutes, and it was the primary mode of transportation for all residents.

Plats were being laid out beyond Oakwood by the 1920s, and Oakwood was bustling. Developers would entice prospective buyers with advertisements stating that the Oakwood streetcar offered 12-minute service to the center of Dayton with an under 5-minute schedule while still being "up where the birds sing—up where you can enjoy the hot summer days in the shade of stately forest trees—up where you can live a simple life and yet have every city convenience at your fingertips." Bill Biddle, an early resident, describes his neighborhood as "Peach Orchard was a dirt street—well oiled...I didn't own a car when I moved out here. I rode the Oakwood Streetcar and walked 2 and 1/2 blocks. It seemed like every day when I went to work and came back there was a new house started."

The 1920s were an amazing time for Oakwood. The city was expanding southward, and while the streetcar was still active and very important, a new mode of transportation, the automobile, was becoming more widespread, allowing for expansion to move farther away from the blocks closest to the streetcar. The growth and availability of the automobile is amazing in and of itself. The following statistics from the Federal Highway Administration (FHA) are a relection of this automobile growth: In 1894, the FHA recorded 4 motor vehicles in the United States; this grew to 16 in 1896, 8,000 in 1900 and almost a half a million by 1910. By 1920, the administration recorded 9.25 million followed by 27 million in 1930.

As automobiles became more commonplace, the older streetcars were also converted to trackless trolleys—the familiar electric buses we know today. Introduced in 1935, these trolley buses had a fare of five cent for adults and three cents for children under twelve. The automobile and longer bus routes expanded the commutable area for Dayton, and Oakwood quickly began to compete for residents who could live farther away in Kettering, Patterson Park, Belmont, and beyond. As early as 1925, there was

a conscious effort to associate Oakwood with more than just its proximity to Dayton. The advertisements mention the value of Oakwood, the quality of education, and its city services. One advertising brochure from this period stated "away from the smoke and dirt of the city—up where values are now increasing, not just by years, but by months..." Another stated, "a man or woman's success can be measured by their ability to save and invest their money wisely. Few of us are born rich. We have to work, work hard, for the money we earn."

Today, the suburban model remains much the same with transportation driving growth. As improvements continue in our highway system and travel becomes easier, we continue to sprawl farther and farther away from the older built-up areas. The I-75 corridor between Cincinnati and Dayton is now known as a megalopolis, with Warren County as the second largest growing area in Ohio. The omnibus that began this cycle is now known as the Greater Dayton RTA, and it too has recently announced expanding its routes in Greene and Warren counties and eliminating the electric trolleys we have in Oakwood for diesel buses. The reason for this expansion is that much of the area's retail and residential growth is occurring in these counties, and the RTA hopes that the expanded bus service could boost ridership.

Oakwood's history as a first suburb makes it the unique and beautiful place we experience today. However, many first-tier suburbs are experiencing central city-like challenges—aging infrastructure, deteriorating schools and commercial corridors, and inadequate housing. However, Oakwood is one of the more fortunate communities because it remains affluent, small in size, and continues to be an anchor for metropolitan stability.

—by Harrison Stamm Gowdy

Committee Reports

Archives and History— Harry Ebeling

There hasn't been much demand for archives in the winter, but we've been busy supplying pictures to the Centennial Film Committee. It's great to be able to have an excuse to look through old files for nostalgic pictures. What do you have to offer? We continue to try to make sense out of our new location, merging files, boxes, and misc. stuff from closets and cubby-holes in the Homestead. The winter addition was the collection of some 280 books from the collection of Harry Ebeling, which includes Dayton, Montgomery County, and Ohio history.

Preservation— Harrison Stamm Gowdy

The Preservation Committee continues to work on the preservation handbook. Our artist, Phyllis Niemeyer Miller, continues to sketch our featured homes and Kent Miller, our graphic artist, is currently designing portions of the book. Writing and research needs to be done. We are still hoping to have this completed in 2007. We would like to thank everyone for all their hard work. These large projects are so beneficial to the history of Oakwood, but take such dedication from our volunteers. Thank you.

Please turn the page and take a look at the fabulous work Phyllis Niemeyer Miller is doing for this handbook.

Potluck Supper

Join us **Thursday, April 26, at 6:00 p.m.** at the Lutheran Church of Our Savior, 155 East Thruston Blvd. for our **Welcome Spring Potluck Supper**. We have moved this annual Society event to the spring to spread out our social gatherings throughout the year instead of focusing so many of them in the fall.

This supper is always a crowd-pleaser, and there's no charge! Just check below to see what dish you should bring. If your last name starts with:

A through F - Bring a main dish

G through M - Bring a dessert

N through Z - Bring a salad or a vegetable

Don't forget to bring plates and utensils. Beverage and rolls provided. Although there is no charge, we need to know how many to expect. Please call **Teresa Prosser at 293-8506 or e-mail her at teresa.prosser@sinclair.edu**

Potluck Program

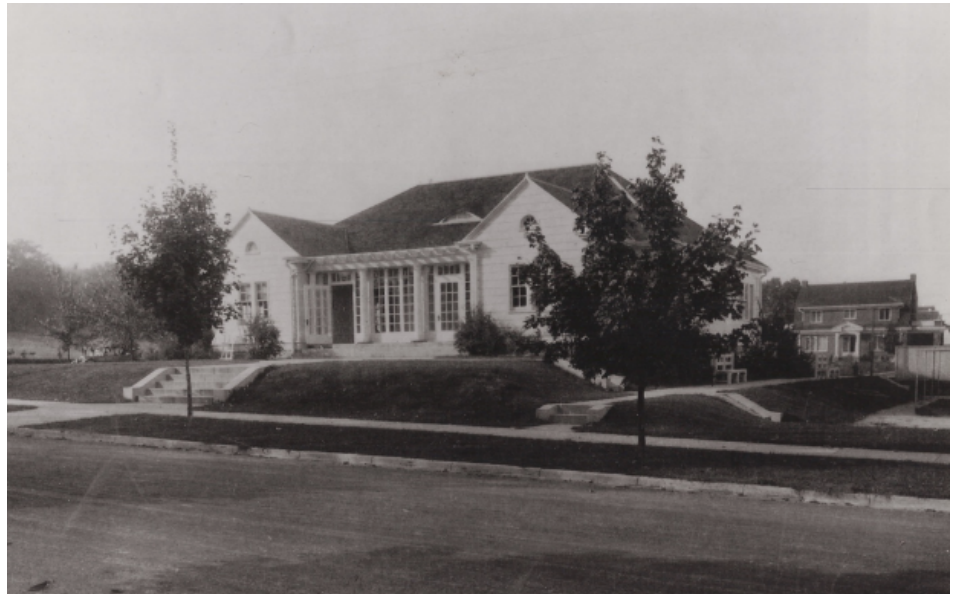
Tom Cecil will be on hand to speak on the topic of George Washington.

"What you always wanted to know about our first president" will include answers to such hotly debated questions as:

- Did G.W. really chop down his father's cherry tree?
- Did he ever tell a lie?
- Did George really wing a silver dollar across the Potomac?
- Did G.W. really have wooden false teeth?
- Did the father of our country have any children?
- Could G.W. have become King George instead of our first president?

As a special treat, there will be a five minute skit by The Oakwood Players.

A Brief History of the Oakwood Community Center



The OCC circa 1923

The history of the Oakwood Community Center (OCC) began in 1919 through the efforts of John H. Patterson. Patterson wanted a social center for the residents of the growing Oakwood community that was not as elite as the country club and that encouraged people to know each other socially. Patterson began the process of creating the OCC by contacting Walter Shafor, developer of the adjacent plat, who owned the strip of ground along Patterson Road between Schantz Ave. and Shafor Blvd. Issuing a challenge to the citizens in the area, he agreed to buy the land for \$4,000 down. A non-profit corporation was formed which assumed the unpaid \$25,000 mortgage, and the program was launched on the agreement that local citizens would raise \$2,500 and Patterson would match it for construction of a building. Oakwood citizens not only raised the sum, but came up with an additional \$2,000! Patterson chipped in \$500 for furnishings.

The property contained 4 acres, sufficient for a building, 4 tennis courts, and a playground. The building was designed by Shafor's architect, Ralph Rossell, and was compatible with the nearby houses. Sales brochures for Shafor's Park Hill Plat contained references to the club and park.

The city acquired the building and land in 1928. Not being in the recreation business and faced with the Depression, the city did nothing with the premises in the 1930s other than maintain the park and tennis courts. Tennis became a popular sport in Oakwood, a tradition which survives to this day.

During WWII, the club housed the local Draft Board. The building was nominally looked after by the tenant in the Schantz side in an apartment occupied by Police Chief Farler. After the war, a group of young people obtained permission to use the basement for a wrestling ring, which was constructed with volunteer funds and help. By 1947, the Oakwood Community Council, a group of 21 members representing church, school, and civic organizations, tried to obtain control of the building as a center for youth activities. City Council rejected the request by a 4 to 1 vote – and the issue entered the realm of politics.

Putting up three candidates for election to City Council who were committed to establishing a teenage recreation center, members of the Oakwood Community Council claimed that residents in the area favored their idea. A committee investigated the problem of a youth center and upon

receiving their report, the Council entered into an agreement with the YMCA to operate it at the old club house. A lease delegated the building use to the "Y" and community programs.

The first branch executive was Kenneth Simpson who served for 12 years until Gilbert Martin took over. In August 1955, Sarah Jane Huston assumed the role of director of women's and girls' activities. Besides professional leadership, Oakwood citizens dedicated time, talents, and money to the operation of the "Y". New officers were elected annually. An annual membership drive, which raised in excess of \$20,000 for operations, allowed it to be self-sustaining without help from the central Y. The city paid for major capital needs such as plumbing renovations.

By 1956, ninety percent of the city's youth were enrolled, with total membership of 3,353, and total attendance of 48,877 at events. Its program handled five cub scout dens, nine baseball teams, six softball teams, bowling teams, craft classes, dancing classes, a ham radio club, Hi-T and Tri-Y clubs, and other activities. Adult classes for cooking, sewing, art, and bridge were popular. After school and after game activities were popular as well. Planning and promoting activities was aided by the Youth Council, elected by the three senior high classes. The annual "Beachcombers Ball" became a popular feature.

In 1969, William Gardner and his wife, joined by the E. T. Gardners, offered a gift to the community of \$160,000 in memory of their son,

William, Jr. (Billy), who died unexpectedly at age 17. This created a problem for the City Planning Board. The Gardner's specified 28,500 sq. ft. in the park ground adjacent to the tennis courts with a Z-shaped pool, a bath house, office, and snack bar. This created traffic and parking issues, as well as green space and congestion concerns which were shuffled around for four months, with committee, neighbor, council, and community opinions. There was a proposal to build an enclosed pool on Schantz at the north end of the Junior High School.

But everyone was clear that this generous offer could not be turned down. A citizens' committee made a post card poll, which showed 3 to 1 support. The Gardners were firm in stating that it should be a public open air pool. Finally, Council decided that the pool should be where it was originally proposed, dropping the free wading pool idea and the North/South street through the park that was suggested, and adopting the cul-de-sacs on Ivanhoe and Collingwood. A lease was signed with the Y. There were unhappy neighbors, but Council was firm, saying only that it would revisit the arrangement if problems arose.

A community recreation committee was established by the city to address program issues and oversee the parks, including the newly created Creager Field.

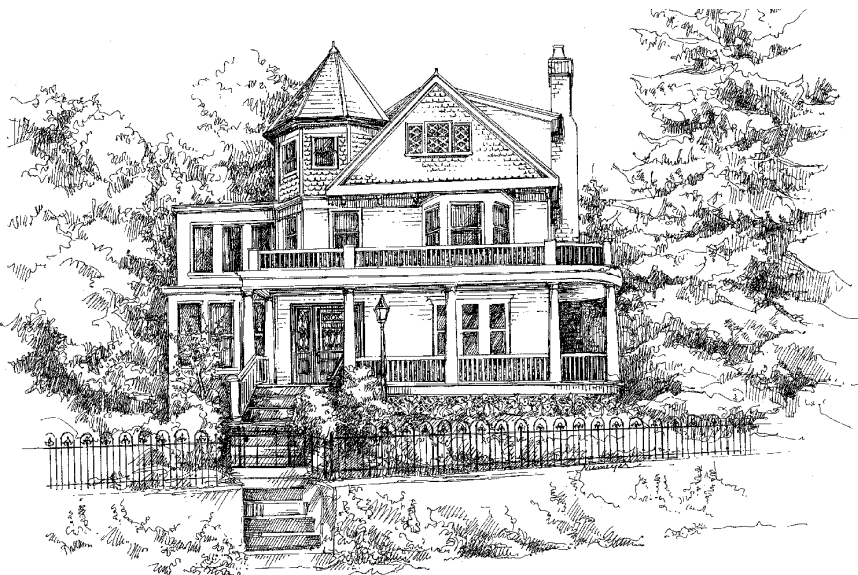
In 1981, the popularity of the "Y" pool created a minor controversy when parents wanted to extend the hours to allow for 8 a.m. opening for swim team

practice. After discussing the possibility of changing the evening closing to 7 p.m. two days, the request was approved on a trial basis. This prompted strict enforcement of the parking rules on Patterson and Ivanhoe.

By 1986, the Metro Y wanted to get out of the landlord business of its suburban branches which it had been involved in for 36 years. There were deferred maintenance issues which the Metro Y could not handle, and the city took the "Y" over in February 1987 changing the name to The Oakwood Community Center and committing \$83,344 to repairs. The lease, scheduled to last until 2009, was cancelled, and the newly established Leisure Services Department took over the building and the Gardner Memorial Pool.

In the first year, the city spent \$160,000 on repairs to the building. It estimated that it would take a minimum of another \$100,000 for interior remodeling, including adding restrooms and making more efficient use of space. The director of the department was Jerry Neff, who worked with a 15 member advisory board. The community was surveyed for its desires. Fees for membership during this time were \$36 for individuals, \$60 for families, and \$12 for seniors. Baseball and soccer teams were added along with exercise, discussion groups, and lectures. After game dances and Saturday programs continued. The Oakwood Community Center continues to be a vital part of our community.

—by Harry Ebeling



Harman Avenue Victorian

*Sketch by Phyllis N. Miller for the upcoming
Oakwood Preservation Handbook,
scheduled for publication later this year.*



THE OAKWOOD HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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oakwoodhistory.org

After months of research, planning, design, and implementation, the Oakwood Historical Society website is up and running. Our overwhelming gratitude goes out to Mackensie Witmer who took the reigns and singlehandedly created this site for us. Please take a look at this evolving project. There are all sorts of interesting Oakwood factoids and links to other interesting historical information. Please give us your feedback so that we can continue to provide the kind of information you would like to see on our site.

**The Oakwood Historical Society
website has arrived!
Bookmark it!**