



The  
**Oakwood  
Historical Society**

— *Make History With Us* —



# Historian

*Preserving the past, present, and future of the Oakwood Community • Summer 2018*

## Historic Preservation & Oakwood

—Alex Duncan

Close your eyes and picture the City of Oakwood. Envision the tree-lined, family friendly streets, the well-manicured lawns, the public parks, or the varied styles of homes and commercial buildings that blend seamlessly together. These unique characteristics draw people to Oakwood today, and future generations deserve to enjoy them. One way to ensure this legacy is historic preservation.

Historic preservation can be viewed in many ways, and in Oakwood, historic preservation is as much about the future as it is about the past. Changes to the city should reflect the past, while enriching the future. As changes are made in beloved landmarks, it is essential to accommodate functional needs without destroying the community's historic integrity and character. Like all communities, Oakwood benefits from historical preservation in many ways.

Historic preservation maintains the historic and architectural heritage of an area, creating a strong sense of community. Suburban sprawl and urban development tend to minimize a community's sense of history and charm. Simply put, the cohesiveness, attractiveness, and uniqueness of old buildings draw people to a community. In addition, preservation honors previous generations and recalls their contributions to the community.

Historic preservation is also essential to save old-world craftsmanship that is seldom seen today due to increased costs and a lack of skilled craftsman. Older buildings were made with higher quality materials because they were expected to last indefinitely with routine maintenance. These buildings also have distinct architectural details that are seldom seen in newer buildings. By preserving these buildings instead of demolishing and rebuilding them, we are conserving resources and money, reducing waste, and allowing new generations of craftsmen to learn preservation skills.

Oakwood's Wright Library's current renovation demonstrates preservation in action. The recently reopened front reading rooms feature ceiling fixtures that are much more appropriate than the "ice-cube tray" fluorescent lights installed in a previous renovation. To provide current to the lights, the architects added beams in keeping with the building's Tudor style. The refinished octagonal tables, part of the original 1930s furnishings, now incorporate concealed electrical outlets for today's computer users. Past and present live in harmony.



*The renovated library reading rooms show how preservation can maintain past features and still serve current needs.*

Preservation is a community-engaging mindset that allows residents the opportunity to work together to treasure the past and manage positive change. That change may be honoring a neighborhood as a Historical District, revitalizing commercial buildings to attract new businesses, or adding unobtrusive electrical outlets to a table. Historic preservation benefits current and future residents in large and small ways.

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## Meet Our Secretary & Preservation Officer

Alex Duncan is Secretary of the Society for 2018. The new Board member's passion for historic architecture and historic preservation brought her to the Society.

Except for a brief stint in Tucson, Alex has lived in the Dayton area her whole life. She has always lived in historic homes, thus breeding her love for them. She grew up in South Park Historic District in two different late 1800's Victorians, the first of which is now Remember When Antiques on Wayne Avenue. Her family moved from South Park to an 1810 farmhouse in Washington Township that had belonged to Mead Family. Alex's parents lovingly restored the three homes she grew up in, and she has fond memories of helping them strip and refinish original woodwork, lay tile, and paint every single room. Participating in these renovations instilled in Alex a great passion for historic preservation and appreciation of the craftsmanship found in older homes.



*Alex Duncan*

Aside from volunteering with the Society, Alex runs a very active "old house love" Instagram page called @dayton\_architecture. As a hobby, she photographs and posts different types of architecture throughout Dayton and the surrounding areas. She has amassed over 4,600 followers in just one year. If you ever see a woman walking a black dog snapping house pictures on an iPhone, that's probably Alex!

Alex is a relatively new resident of Oakwood; she has lived here for 2-1/2 years. She and her husband Mike, their dog, and two cats share a 1920 American Foursquare. Alex received degrees in Entrepreneurship and Management from the University of Dayton, and is currently the Operations Manager for ServaTool, a small manufacturing company in downtown Dayton.

## Special Thanks to Our Donors!

As a 100% volunteer-run, nonprofit association, we depend on the generous donations and contributions from our members and friends. Recently, the Society received a contribution from Charles and Molly Campbell. Long-time former Society President Harry Ebling also donated funds through the Meta E. Pavlik Charitable Fund, a fund of the Dayton Foundation.

Everette C. Yowell and Margie Mack Yowell established an endowment fund with the Dayton Foundation in the name of Edward and Ruth Mack. This fund provides operating revenue for the Oakwood Historical Society. This generous and continuing bequest has allowed the Society to institute a maintenance reserve account for the Long-Romspert Homestead & House Museum. This year's projects include waterproofing the basement, patching the stucco on the exterior of the house, and glazing the windows.

Contributions such as these ensure that one of Oakwood's most treasured historical properties will be well cared for and open for future generations to enjoy. "These donations make our mission possible," according to Society Treasurer Brian Mettling

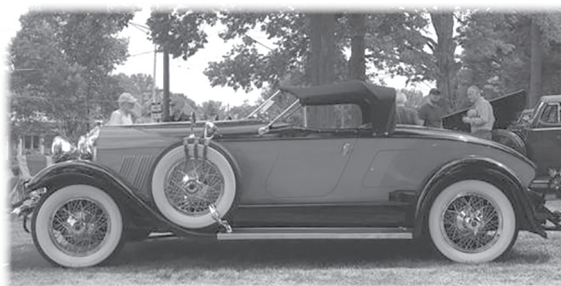
"These  
donations  
make our  
mission  
possible"

-- Brian Mettling

## Classics on the Lawn Returns August 19th

The 8th annual Classics on the Lawn Car Show and Open House is planned for Sunday, August 19th, from noon to 4:00 p.m. at the Long-Romspert Homestead House Museum. Admission is free, and lunch will be available for a modest price. The home and grounds will also be open for tours. Side street parking is available.

This non-competitive automotive event allows car owners and aficionados to appreciate some of the area's finest classic, special interest, and exotic automobiles in a historic setting. The featured cars are from local museums, car clubs, and private owners.



*A rare 1928 Auburn Boattail Speedster at the 2017 Classics on the Lawn.*

Turn to pages 4 and 5 for a history of car shows.

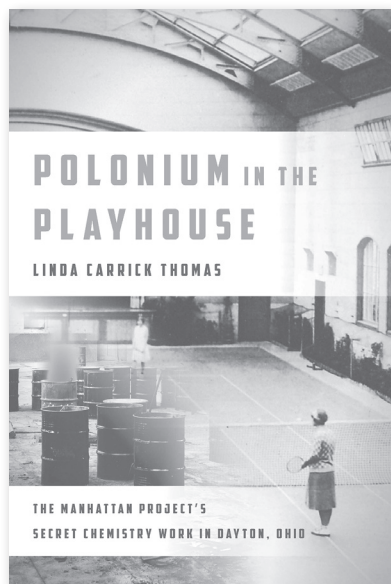
## Far Hills Speaker Series - Fall 2018 World War II Series

The Oakwood Historical Society and Wright Memorial Public Library co-host the Far Hills Speaker Series on Dayton and Oakwood history. These presentations are held on Sundays at 2:00 p.m. **New this fall: the series has been moved to the Lutheran Church of Our Savior, 155 Thruston Boulevard, to better accommodate attendees.** The fall also institutes our first series of presentations on a topic; we are highlighting Dayton in WWII.

**September 16 - Dayton Codebreakers** – Oakwood's Joseph Desch headed a top-secret Navy project in NCR Building 26 to build a decoding machine to interpret intercepted German messages and foil Nazi attacks. Presented by Jim Charters, who makes presentations about significant historical events and individuals from the Dayton area for Dayton History



*Joseph Desch*



**October 21 - Polonium in the Playhouse: The Manhattan Project** – The Talbot Family's Runnymede Playhouse in Oakwood served as a top-secret laboratory where the triggering mechanisms for atomic bombs were developed. Presented by Linda Carrick Thomas, a freelance writer focusing on science and engineering research and author of *Polonium in the Playhouse*.

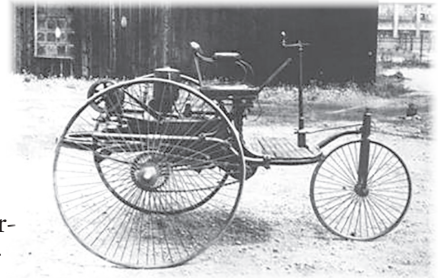
**November 18 - The Russian Spy in the Dayton Manhattan Project** – George Koval was an American-born spy who gave secrets of the atomic bomb to the Soviet Union. Presented by Bob Bowman, who is on the board of directors for the Mound Museum of Science and Energy in Miamisburg as well as several other history and genealogical societies.

## Car Shows: Past Is Prologue to Oakwood's Classics on the Lawn

*Editor's Note: To prepare for the Society's 8th annual Classics on the Lawn Car Show, local historian and car aficionado Mark Risley provides a historical overview of how car shows evolved.*

In 1886 Karl Friedrich Benz of Germany created the first practical, gasoline-powered automobile. This was followed by a number of other inventors and engineers who applied the Benz prototype to create similar conveyances.

These early automobiles resembled nothing more than an open, wooden carriage without a horse attached at the front, hence, the term "horseless carriage." The engine, both noisy and prone to spew smoke, was typically rear-mounted and drove the rear wheels. To give the contraption direction, a tiller attached to the front wheels or singular wheel was operated by hand. Tillers were later replaced by steering wheels.



*The world's first automobile, created by Karl Benz*

As the number of car manufacturers grew and their designs became distinctive, the idea of an automotive exposition surfaced. The first such event was the *Internationale Exposition de Velocipede et de Locomotion Automobile* in Paris in 1894. Four automobile manufacturers showed their latest products at the city's magnificent Grand Palais in the Champs-Élysée. Other shows followed, but this show is still one of the most famous and is now known as the Paris Motor Show.

The first car exhibition show in the United States took place in New York City in 1900. Soon, larger cities such as Boston, Chicago, Philadelphia, Buffalo, Cleveland, and Detroit organized their own car shows. Along with combustible fuel versions, electric and hybrid cars were also shown, even though it wasn't until the early 21st century that an efficient version of these cars became practical. Thousands of people gathered to see the latest models and groundbreaking technologies.

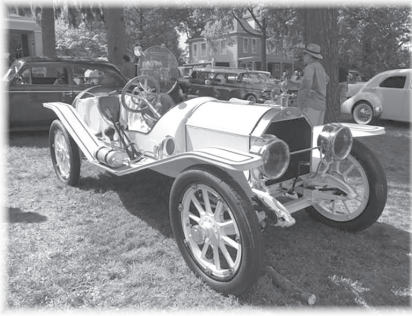


*An early automobile exposition.*

Over the decades, car companies utilized these shows to make important announcements, premier the latest models, and exhibit fantastic and imaginative concept cars. Year after year, manufacturers introduced innovative design concepts to entice new buyers. They partnered with experienced coachbuilders who incorporated brass, nickel, leather, glass, and colorful paints to make cars a work of art. Design became almost as important as function. Of course, advancements in engineering, convenience, and safety also drew potential buyers to car shows.

By the mid-twentieth century, nostalgia for times gone by became prevalent, and suddenly antique automobiles became popular. Classic car shows evolved from non-competitive local exhibitions to more sophisticated, adjudicated Concours d'Elegance events. The first Concours in North America was held in 1950 at the Pebble Beach Golf Links in Monterey, California. Vehicle judging at a Concours is more demanding than that of a neighborhood or general automobile show. Trained judges examine the vehicle thoroughly and individual components are rated.

Car shows continue to evolve. Some shows feature hot rods, that is, old, classic American cars with large engines modified for linear speed. Imaginative applications of modified design and engineering have made the hot rod the epitome of American ingenuity. Other motor shows exhibit American-made 2-door muscle cars of the 1960s and early 70s. These shows are for people who like powerful engines designed for high performance driving. The range and number of car shows held in the United States indicate that car shows of whatever type have never lost their appeal.



*A 1911 Marmon among the Classics on the Lawn.*



*A vintage Rolls-Royce, a Packard, and a Dodge on the lawn at the Homestead.*

Dayton's love affair with the automobile is apparent. It is home to America's Packard Museum and The British Transportation Museum. America's Packard Museum is a restored Packard dealership and houses the largest collection of Packard automobiles and memorabilia in the world. The British Transportation Museum holds more than forty British-built transportation vehicles utilized in the United States. In addition to these permanent car shows, Dayton hosts the annual *Concours d'Elegance* at Carillon Park, considered one of the Midwest's best-known automobile expositions.

In 2011, the Oakwood Historical Society initiated its own "Classics on the Lawn" car show. It's a non-competitive automotive event designed for car owners and motor aficionados to gather beneath the tall pines of the Long-Romspert Homestead House Museum. Some of the area's finest classic, special interest, and exotic automobiles are featured. The event highlights not only the cars, but also Dayton's automotive heritage and its affection for all things automobile. Emphasizing quality over quantity, the cars exhibited are specially selected from local museums, car clubs, and private owners. Each year the show grows in popularity. It's a worthy addition to a tradition started in Paris in 1894.

## Coffin Doors – Death or Design?

--Leigh Turben

When my husband and I were looking for a home in Oakwood, we were shown a beautiful colonial home made from a Sears, Roebuck and Co. kit. A grand front door welcomed us. Realtor Bill Hager told us that it was a coffin door.

Many colonial homes have a coffin door. It is wider than a normal door, 44 ½" to be exact. Such doors are more common on homes with a center chimney. There are several explanations for the wider door design.

One theory asserts that the wide door was created to allow easy access to the front parlor for a coffin containing the remains of a recently deceased member of the family. Before 1930, most funerals were held at home in the parlor. The door is also known as the funeral door, the casket door, or the death door.

Another theory is related to home design. In the eighteenth century, houses were typically designed by joiners, not by architects. These craftsmen referred to pattern books and builders' guides for design ideas and rules on measurements and proportions. One such book that was popular during the Georgian period was *The Gentleman's and Builder's Repository*, first published in London by Edward Hoppus in 1737. Hoppus' publication devotes considerable attention to "problems in geometry" and "rules for arches, doors, windows, ceiling pieces, chimney-pieces, and their particular embellishments." One diagram from the book shows the proportions of a front doorway. It is highly likely that the book was used in designing many Colonial homes.

So, the question remains, was the door widened to increase the aesthetics of the front of a house, or to move a coffin in and out of the parlor? Decide for yourself – death or design?



*A coffin door greets visitors to this Oakwood Home*



*This illustration from a Sears catalog shows a house with a coffin door.*

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**Great-Grandnephew Visits the Homestead**

Ted Perry, the great-grandnephew of Henry Long, traveled from Memphis, Tennessee, to visit the Long-Romspert Homestead on April 28. Society Member Harrison Gowdy gave Ted and his wife Gaynell a tour of the house museum. The Perrys came in search of information for their family history.



*Ted Perry visiting the home built by his great-granduncle Henry Long.*

Seeing the painstaking preservation and many interpretive uses of the Long-Romspert delighted the Perrys. Gaynell wrote Harrison, "Family stories revealed during our tour breathed life into gravestones in a way that mere genealogical paper trails could never have done." The Perrys also visited with the current owner of an additional Oakwood property, the 1827 Long-Mueller House, built by Ted's great-great grandfather and Henry's father, Peter Long.



*This 1919 photo shows Ted Perry's aunt Nelle Long Soward at her Cragmoor house.*

The Perrys were able to solve a puzzle surrounding a family farmstead called Cragmoor and explored its long-overgrown ruins. The ruins are now referred to as the 1868 Samuel Martindale residence. They overlook the Stillwater River east of Union and now are part of Englewood MetroPark East. A photo of Ted's aunt Nelle Long Soward, a first cousin of Laura Long Romspert, helped solve the puzzle. The Perrys promised to share any additional historic facts they uncover.

**What Is Unique about Your Home?**

We are researching offbeat qualities of houses in Oakwood for a possible future article in the *Historian*. Perhaps your home was moved from another location, was a farmhouse or a store, or has unique features. Send an email to [TOHSnewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:TOHSnewsletter@gmail.com), and we will get back to you!



### Future Members Visit the Homestead

This Spring, the Oakwood Historical Society happily hosted Smith and Harman third graders. Their academic curriculum explores local history themes, and the Long-Romspert House Museum is the perfect field trip for them to learn about our community's history and life in the old days.

With the help of teachers, parents, and historical society volunteers, students toured the house and heard the stories behind the home's major renovations. "I loved hearing about how the house changed over time depending on the family living there," commented one supervising parent.

The visitors' favorite part of the day seemed to be the hands-on activities. "Guess This Gadget" drew a lot of laughter. A volunteer held up a common item from the past and invited students to guess its function. Parent Dori Spaulding noticed the confusion on many students' faces and said, "What people used in the early 1900s is so different from what we see today."



*Oakwood third graders seemed stumped while playing "Guess This Gadget."*

Linda Pearson, the Society's Education Committee Chair, is delighted when she meets students who actually know about household tools from the past. "They tend to be the readers in the crowd," she noted. The station explaining clothing and the weekly chores of washing, sewing, and ironing made the students more appreciative of today's appliances.

After a short presentation on the history of toys, students quickly embraced the challenges involved in activities such as graces, marbles, and hoop rolling. "It was fascinating to watch the kids play the games and make up new ideas around these old-fashioned toys," observed parent Colleen Saxen.

Linda felt the day went especially well when one student trotting down the front walk looked back and called, "Goodbye! I liked your house."



*To play graces, two people get two dowel rods each. One player puts a wooden hoop on the rods and then pushes the rods apart, sending the hoop into the air for the other player to catch. The winner is the player who is first to catch the hoop ten times.*



*Hoop rolling, also called hoop trundling, is an activity in which a large hoop is rolled along the ground, usually with a stick.*



**CAROL J. HOLM**  
ATTORNEY AT LAW  
Dayton, Ohio



*"The Oakwood Store"*

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