



# The Historian

Preserving the past, present, and future of the Oakwood Community • Summer 2019

## Message from the President

Dear Members,

Let me share some things that give me joy.

- Last month 501 people took the Wright at Home tour. We're proud of our partnership with Dayton History!
- Weeks before the Wine and Cheese event takes place, a record number of tickets has been sold. This means that many new people will discover the history of the Homestead for the first time.
- Two summer interns, Linnea Kedziora and Callie Martindale, start working on our archives on June 1. I see them as helpful now and possibly as professional archivists in the future.
- Linda Pearson has designed new educational programming suitable for all ages that she and other Society volunteers will begin offering this summer. When people of multiple generations learn something new together it is especially rewarding to witness.
- I continue to meet with Betty Halley Jones to prepare for the video taping of her retelling what it meant to work on a project that gave rise to the atomic bomb.
- The Oakwood Rotary has given the Society \$1,000. This affirms the Society's efforts to meet its mission and it is much appreciated.

Respectfully yours,

Leigh Turben  
*President*



*Leigh Turben,  
President of Oakwood  
Historical Society*

## Meet our New Board Member and Property Manager

This past summer woodcrafter Larry Bilderback restored the deteriorating Dutch doors that adorn the Society's summer kitchen. It wasn't the first time Larry had stepped up to help. For years he and his wife, Jo, Oakwood residents for 45 years, have repaired things around the Homestead, ranging from the home's skein winder to its sleigh and wagon. Together, they have also crafted many of the toys used for children's projects.



*Jo Bilderback and Property Manager  
Larry Bilderback take a quick "selfie"  
between jobs*

This past January Larry volunteered to be the Homestead's Property Manager. This means, he's the guy other Society volunteers call when a pipe starts to leak, the heating system fails, or a tree branch falls. Larry walks the property regularly and determines the daily jobs that must be done. He picks up sticks before the lawn service mows, repairs or replaces window and door screens, and oversees the work done by contractors. "It's not easy to find a volunteer who has Larry's range of skills," says Society President Leigh Turben. "He is willing to do it all, and the Society can depend on him to make good choices when contractors have to be hired." Larry was unanimously voted onto the Board in March.

## Inside

Message from the  
President ..... 1

Meet Our  
Property Manager..... 1

Meet Our  
Secretary..... 2

Miller Demonstrates  
Her Artistry..... 3

2019 Home Tour ..... 3

We're Making  
History ..... 4

Baby Clothes Donated  
to Society ..... 5

Classics on the Lawn  
Returns ..... 6

Homemade at the  
Homestead ..... 7



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Larry is currently selecting contractors to pour a new concrete floor in the carriage house and cover the parking area with limestone road pack. Next, he'll select tree trimmers to remove branches that are out of his reach.

The Society is so lucky that Larry and, by extension, Jo have adopted the Homestead as their "second home" to maintain. Everyone (except former Property Manager Mark Risley) has assured him it's an easy job – and very satisfying! Larry cheerfully expresses, "I look forward to helping keep the Homestead in good repair."

## Meet Our Secretary

As she loves old homes and everything history, Laura Bettinger started attending Society board meetings last spring to get more involved in the community. After earning several business degrees at the University of Maryland, Laura worked as a financial manager for the Air Force in Arlington, Virginia, overseeing aircraft acquisition and sales. The job had its fascinating aspects, but Laura recognized there is little personal contact involved in aircraft transactions. She therefore decided to return to Ohio where her family still lived and become a realtor, acting on her interest in old homes to assist people happily challenged by old-home ownership. Although she had attended high school in New Carlisle, Laura was drawn to the close-knit, hometown feel of Oakwood where she found a bungalow with the old-house character she liked. Then, once she acquired her puppy, Sadie, Laura met seemingly every dog owner in town. And while Laura loves talking to other dog owners, she thought joining the Society would give her an additional opportunity to meet more people who share her interest in historical homes and local history.



*Laura Bettinger*

Laura's passion for older houses stems from her deep love for her grandparents' turn-of-the-century farmhouse in central Maryland. In thinking back on that house, she fondly remembers that there was a hole, two inches in diameter in the dining room ceiling. While clearly a pragmatic feature designed to move heat from the first to the second floor, the hole nonetheless allowed Laura and her cousins to spy and eavesdrop on late night adult conversations. As Laura recalls, "When our giggles revealed our mischief, we'd be commanded back to bed just as my mother probably would have been when she was a child." That and other memories inspired Laura to start her *Historic Dayton Homes* blog and to become a realtor for Coldwell Banker Heritage.

Although Laura describes herself as having an old soul, she met husband, Major Robert Bettinger, the modern way: online. Robert is also a self-described old soul who loves history and books. Laura and Robert married in Dayton at the Patterson Homestead where Laura also volunteers as a docent for Dayton History. The Society greatly benefits from Laura's degrees in business, her knowledge of historical homes, and her contact with new residents.

### ***Make Your Event Something Special at the Homestead***

The Long-Romspert House Museum and Homestead is open for tours upon request, and can be rented for meetings, family reunions or picnics, showers, birthdays, or other festive occasions. For information call (937) 299-3793.

## Niemeyer Miller Again Demonstrates Her Artistry

Although Phyllis Niemeyer Miller has chaired the Society's Facilities/Interior Committee for 15 years, she still manages to amaze her fellow Board members with her artistry. Members first saw proof of her artistry when the Society converted the Long Romspert House into a house museum. Phyllis researched, repaired, painted, and stenciled the downstairs walls, restoring them to look as they did in 1860, 1908, and 1920. She sewed period-appropriate curtains for all the windows and reupholstered various pieces of furniture. In total Phyllis worked for two years restoring the Homestead's original look.

In addition to taking primary responsibility for the decorative touches that make the Homestead authentic and welcoming, Phyllis surprised Board members by offering to thank the homeowners who pioneered Oakwood's first Holiday Home Tour last December with a gift of her original pen and ink illustrations of their homes. In making these illustrations, Phyllis began by photographing the homes from many different angles. Next, she zoomed in to capture the architectural details she wanted to include in each rendering. Phyllis completed each drawing in about 16 hours. This labor of love, talent, and of many hours of dedicated attention actually had its origin when Society President Leigh Turben posed the simple question: "How can we meaningfully thank the homeowners who aided the Society by opening their homes to five hundred visitors?" Phyllis had an immediate answer, and now those generous homeowners own beautifully framed illustrations of their homes. The Society greatly appreciates Phyllis' creative thinking, artistry, generosity, and boundless energy.



*Phyllis Niemeyer Miller working on a new pen and ink illustration*

## 2019 Holiday Home Tour Planning Underway

On a spring-like day in late March, the Honorable Judge Irvin Harlamert and Oakwood Historical Society President Leigh Turben hosted an afternoon gathering at Judge Harlamert's home to plan the Society's second Holiday Home Tour for December 2019. Judge Harlamert enjoyed sharing his Tudor style, English garden cottage home with 500 new friends during last year's Home Tour, and he believes that many of his neighbors would similarly like to share their homes.

The gathering at Judge Harlamert's home gave owners of last year's featured homes an opportunity to meet and share their experiences with perspective hosts for this year. "Everyone was so positive," said Turben. Last year's tour was meant to showcase the architectural styles of Oakwood's historical homes and the welcoming, creative ingenuity of its current residents. According to Turben, it did that and much more. "The tour gave neighbors a chance to meet more neighbors, reflecting Oakwood's spirit of community." This year the tour will focus on the historical and architectural qualities of homes built after the early platting of Oakwood. Turben reports that six homeowners in the Hatcher Hills neighborhood have already agreed to host. The tour will take place on December 7 from noon to 7:00 p.m.



*Homeowners discuss plans for the 2019 Holiday Home Tour in the neo-medieval, floor-to-ceiling, oak-paneled walls of Judge Harlamert's great room*



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Please get involved . . .

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## We're Making History

### Smith and Harman Third Graders Visit

On April 18 and May 17, the Society hosted 146 Smith and Harman third graders. Their academic curriculum explores local history themes, and the Long-Romspert House Museum and Homestead makes for an ideal field trip. In visiting the museum, students are introduced to a mid-19th-century Victorian Italianate farmhouse that has an early 20th century suburban Arts & Craft addition. Notably, they learn about the lives of the families that occupied the house for well over a century from 1863 to 1985. With the help of teachers,



*Smith School 3rd graders playing "graces"*

Students are invited to guess the function of a once commonly used item. Beyond this activity, and following a short presentation on the history of toys, students embrace the challenges involved in hoop rolling and playing marbles. To play hoop rolling, also called graces, two students each get two dowel rods. One player puts a wooden hoop on the rods and 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.

Preparing for approximately 150 third graders might not appeal to everyone, but these are some of Pearson's favorite days of the year. "What I see is curious wonderment and the opportunity to make them lovers of history," explains Pearson.

### Rotary Club Officers Visit

On Tuesday, April 9, officers of the Rotary Club of Oakwood held their Board meeting at the Long Romspert House Museum. Members of the 18-person Board expressed their amazement that a community as small as Oakwood could maintain such a high quality museum with only a volunteer staff. Like the Oakwood city administrators who also held a staff meeting at the house last July, Rotary Board members enjoyed meeting in a space that holds such historical significance for our community.

Society Board member Phyllis Niemeyer Miller served as hostess while impersonating Ethel Romspert, granddaughter-in-law of Henry and Harriet Long, as she treated the group to a full tour of the house and grounds. It was Ethel Romspert who donated the property to the Society in 1985. Phyllis wore a long black skirt and white-collared blouse, an outfit similar to what Ethel might have worn in 1919.

parents, and Society volunteers, students toured the house and heard the stories behind the home's major renovations. Linda Pearson, the Society's Education Committee Chair, knows that the favorite part of the day is always the hands-on activities. Among these, "Guess This Gadget" always draws a lot of laughter.

Rotary member Carol Collins wrote of the tour, "The fact that a lot of research has gone into the house and grounds is phenomenal. How lucky Oakwood is to have this community treasure to share."

Attending the meeting were Rotary President Scott Fischer, President-Elect Bruce Reger, Secretary and Secretary-Elect Cathy Campbell and Kristi Hale, Treasurer and Treasurer-Elect Jane Voisard and Doug Hammer, Foundation Liaison Carol Collins, Club Service Director Jerry Alter, Community Service Director Eric Hutton, Development Director Stefan Susta, Vocational Director Lisa Emmel, Membership Director Polly Petricola, New Generations Director John Ferneding, and Sergeant at Arms Rob Stephens.



*Phyllis Niemeyer Miller, alias Ethel Romspert, tells the stories of the Romspert and Long families of Oakwood*

## Mary D. Bird, Great Grandniece of Emma May Downer, Donates Clothes to Oakwood Historical Society



Society Board members Carol Holm, Linda Pearson, and Phyllis Miller collaborated to assemble an exhibit of baby clothes that Oakwood resident Emma May Downer wore as a child in the 1860s. While Baby Emma lived in Pennsylvania at the time she wore the clothes, she later lived in Oakwood. Holm, who curates exhibits for the Wright Memorial Public Library, is excited to display the clothing at the Homestead museum. "These items are excellent examples of the fine hand

sewing and embroidery that once characterized baby clothes," said Holm. "We are very grateful to Mary Bird for having donated these important items to the Society."

Emma May Downer was born in Washington County Pennsylvania on February 24, 1860. Little is known about Emma other than she never married and lived most of her life with her younger brother, James William Downer Jr. and his family. This was typical for the time; single women generally did not live alone. As a result, James Downer's career, first as President of Sanitary Ware and later of Dayton Supply, took Emma, and most likely her treasured baby clothes, to Brooklyn, New York in 1892, to London, England in 1897, to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in 1910, and eventually to Dayton. At the time of her death in 1930, Emma lived at 315 Oakwood Avenue. She was 70 years old.

Linda Pearson has pieced together other facts about Emma's family. At the time of her birth, Emma's father worked as a tinsmith or tinner. Later he became a machinist. Despite having a young family at home, in 1864, at the age 35, Emma's father joined the Union Army for a short-term as an enlisted man. He was with the 6th Pennsylvania Heavy Artillery Company E. He entered as a Private and mustered out as a 2nd Lieutenant in the spring of 1865. It is unclear how many siblings Emma had in addition to James who, like Emma, lived into adulthood.

Emma Downer's baby clothes will be on display in the Library's south reading room until mid June. Residents who have items they would like to share with the community are encouraged to contact the Society. The exhibits highlight local history and represent an on-going collaboration between the Society and the Library.



*Oakwood photographer Betty Cochran captures the embroidery found on the clothes. The dolls are part of Carol Holm's collection.*



## Classics on the Lawn Returns for its 9th Year

Plans are underway for the 9th annual Classics on the Lawn car show. The show will take place on August 18 from 12:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. on the grounds of the Long Romsperst Homestead and House Museum. Committee Chairman Brian Mettling suggests the timing makes it possible for families to view the cars, enjoy a live band, and eat an early, casual dinner at the Homestead. The cars exhibited are specially selected from local museums, car clubs, and private owners. It is exclusively a car-by-invitation show. "Quality over quantity" is how Mettling describes it.

As the founder of the event and past President of the Society, Mark Risley explains how the event originated. "Ten years ago Society Board members wanted to hold a summer event that would draw more community members to the Homestead. I suggested a car show primarily because I'm an avid vintage car aficionado." Mark thought that hosting a historical car show also worked well with the Society's mission.

Admitting he had little experience, Risley writes, "I started by attending various car shows and made contact with local car owners. At British Car Day in 2011, I met the organizers of the British Transportation Museum in Dayton." Risley notes that meeting people who are dedicated to preserving our motoring heritage through education and vehicle preservation marked a turning point for him. It convinced him that the Society could host its own mini "Concours d'Elegance" in Oakwood. "You know, the Society's tagline, "Make History With Us?" suddenly took on real-time meaning to me," said Risley.

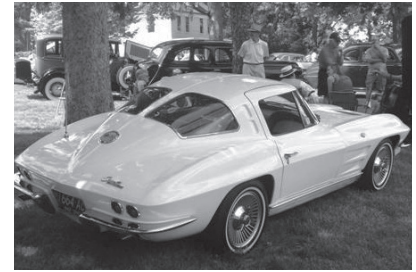
The first Classics on the Lawn in August 2011 featured 30 British cars. About 100 people attended and, keeping with the British theme, Oakwood's Central Perc European Café supplied the food. People who came to see the cars also toured the house museum and Homestead outbuildings. The event achieved the goals Risley had envisioned.

Still supported by British Transportation Museum, but wanting to broaden the range of cars presented, the Society later collaborated with America's Packard Museum - The Citizens Motorcar Co. Nine cars were shown, most notably automobiles by Rolls-Royce, Austin, Chevrolet and even a rare Amphicar. The Society has continued to partner with the Packard Museum each year, and although as many as 54 automobiles have been shown in a given year, the guiding principle in planning has been to present quality of cars over quantity. The formula is working: over 300 people attended the 2018 show.

In planning the event, Risley explains, "Exhibition cars are hand-selected from his personal, ever-growing contact list of private collectors, local museums, and visits to other car shows and cruise-ins." The field of collectable automobiles now includes the finest examples of original, restored, historical, special interest, and exotic cars in the Dayton area. Classics on the Lawn is a unique car show. It is non-competitive and geared toward building relationships among car owners. The atmosphere created is a thank you to owners for their efforts in preserving automotive history.

Risley's vision has had positive ripple effects extending beyond the Society's mission. With his contacts in the car community, Risley has been instrumental in arranging for classic car owners to participate in Oakwood's That Day in May Parade and the October Woodland Days tours at Woodland Cemetery and Arboretum.

It was a difficult decision for Risley to relinquish chairmanship of the event to Board Treasurer Mettling this year. "He's ready," said Risley, "and he loves cars even more than I do." Risley acknowledges it was a lot of hard work and quite the adventure. He got to watch Classics on the Lawn grow in size and prestige; he knows he was part of something that will continue indefinitely. Risley helped the Society "Make history..."



*A very desirable 1963 Corvette split window coupe*



*Two 1957 Cadillac models*



*A rare Amphicar*



*A 1957 Edsel station wagon*

## Homemade at the Homestead

Linda Pearson, chair of the Society's Education Committee, is rolling out a series of programs open to people of all ages who have an interest in learning domestic skills practiced in the past and applicable to the today. These two-hour programs begin at 1:30 p.m. and are held at the Long-Romspert Homestead and House Museum. The cost is \$15 per class and includes all materials, recipes, and things to take home.



### Pasta, Peas, and Pesto, Please! – *Sunday, June 23*

Turn home-grown basil into delicious Italian pesto sauce.

### Wrap Up Some Summer! – *Sunday, July 21*

Make spring rolls and egg rolls with fresh ingredients from the Homestead garden and Oakwood Farmers' Market.

### So You Want to Learn How to Sew?! – *Sunday, August 25*

Learn sewing and mending basics, and maybe get started on a small sampler.

## The Society Needs Your Help Soliciting Sponsors

Oakwood residents who attend Society events know how much the Society does to build a shared sense of history and spirit of community. The Society researches, preserves, displays items important to the history of Oakwood, publishes its findings, and educates adults and children about everything Oakwood. The Society seeks at once to preserve past history and to capture local history as it is being made. It's a big effort and all work is done by volunteers.

The Society wants to touch as many Oakwood citizens as possible. One method is to make its quarterly newsletter available to a growing group of supporters. To accomplish this, the Society needs more individual and corporate sponsors for its newsletter.

The cost of a corporate sponsorship is \$150 per year. If you are a business owner living in Oakwood, please consider becoming a sponsor. Dear readers, you are the Society's only sales force. Most businesses are just waiting to be asked to support a worthy cause. Please reach out to business owners you know or consider becoming a sponsor yourself.

Our thanks to long-time newsletter sponsors: The Flower Shoppe, LCNB National Bank, UPS-The Oakwood Store, Huffman Travel, Houser Asphalt & Concrete, Ferneding Insurance, Park Avenue Antiques, and Carol J. Holm, Attorney at Law.

To be recognized as a sponsor, contact Carol Holm at (937) 671-6673 or lawholm@gmail.com



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