



# The Historian

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Preserving the past, present, and future of the Oakwood Community • September 2022

## Robert Thruston Houk

by David Schmidt

Katharine Houk Talbott is a name well known among many local historians for her prominence as a citizen of the Miami Valley area. Katharine was a conspicuous influence on the cultural and civic life of Dayton and elsewhere during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. She was an accomplished singer, sponsor of Dayton's Westminster Choir, and founding member of the Dayton Garden Club. Katharine was also well known for entertaining family, friends, and prominent visitors to Dayton at her *Runnymede* mansion in west Oakwood and, upon its completion in 1927, her nearby "Runnymede Playhouse." After her passing, Katharine was extensively memorialized by a book written by her sons and daughters that was published in 1949.



Thruston Houk ca. 1903

Less well documented is the life of Katharine's older brother and longtime Oakwood resident Robert Thruston Houk. Houk was well loved by Katharine and her family, and he was an accomplished businessman, having completed distinguished careers at the National Cash Register Company, in the automobile industry, and at the Mead Paper Company.

Robert Thruston Houk was born at *Runnymede* in 1862 to Eliza Thruston Houk and her husband George Washington Houk, who was a Dayton lawyer and future member of the United States Congress. Throughout his life, the younger Houk went by his middle name "Thruston" (pronounced THROO-ston), with his sister Katharine (nicknamed "Kitty") calling him by the shortened name of "Thrus."

A family description of Thruston on his twelfth birthday stated: "He has not given up any of his mischievous rowdy ways. Howls, chatters, yells, teases, stands on his head, kicks up his heels, hugs, kisses, and is the life and rumpus of the house. Has broken the clock face . . . Hides behind the door to scare Kitty, loses his hat so often that he generally has 3 in circulation . . . is the joy of our hearts . . ."

Another family account of Thruston – who later in life was affectionately known as "Papa Hoo" to his nieces and nephews – showed that the young Thruston was indeed very capable of mischief:



Thruston Houk and Lily Talbott (left) and Harry Talbott and Kitty Houk (right) during their "courting days" ca. mid-1880s

It was during one of the periods when they [Kitty and Thruston] were going to a country school in the neighborhood, and the two hit upon a wonderful plan by which to enforce a holiday. Papa Hoo – Thrus – had killed a skunk. Expertly he removed the scent bag, and that night he and Kitty made their secret way to the schoolhouse. They pried up a floor-board that had a knot-hole in it, and beneath this hole they gently placed the scent bag; then they nailed the board back into place. Next morning Thrus found his opportunity, stuck a stick into the knot-hole and punctured the sac. We revelled in Papa Hoo's dry but triumphant conclusion that several days passed before it was possible for studies to be resumed.

Kitty and Thruston grew up at *Runnymede* and, through a friend who was acquainted with a family in Cincinnati named Talbott, Kitty and Thruston became acquainted with brother and sister in the Talbott family. Courtships ensued between the two couples and, on separate occasions in 1887, brother and sister married sister and brother: Robert Thruston Houk married Sarah Littler ("Lily") Talbott and Katharine Houk married Harold Elstener ("Harry") Talbott.

At the time he married, Thruston was Chief Inspector (of finished products) at the National Cash Register Company (N.C.R.), having recently moved to N.C.R. from work as a shipping clerk and buyer for the Mead Paper Company in Dayton. Over the years, Thruston held a number of different

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1947 Far Hills Avenue  
(The Homestead)

positions at N.C.R., with John H. Patterson assigning Thruston to a variety of tasks as different needs arose. Thruston regularly set up N.C.R. displays at major promotional events, such as the 1893 World Columbian Exposition (the “Chicago World’s Fair”) and the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition (the “St. Louis World’s Fair”). In 1901, Patterson purchased his grandfather’s log cabin from the then-current landowner of Colonel Robert Patterson’s former property in Lexington, Kentucky. Patterson sent Thruston to Lexington to supervise the dismantling and transport of the cabin to Dayton. After the cabin was disassembled, Thruston placed the components on a railroad car and shipped them to Dayton. The pieces of the cabin were then taken to the north side of the present-day “Five Points” intersection in Oakwood, re-assembled, and the cabin displayed in honor of Colonel Patterson and the rugged pioneer spirit of his times. The cabin stood directly across “Lebanon Pike” (present-day Far Hills Avenue) from Thruston’s home, which was known as *The Pines*. *The Pines* had



*Thruston Houk (standing at right) and other Houk and Talbott family members gathered for a large family Christening in the 1930s.*

originated as one of the original Houk family “cottages” that were located on the *Runnymede* estate. In 1907, Thruston left the National Cash Register Company and became general factory manager of the Dayton Motor Car Company, which operated as one of several automobile manufacturers in Dayton. The company was later purchased by the United States Motor Company, and Thruston moved to New York to serve for a year as sales manager of the Stoddard-Dayton branch of the United States Motor Company. Thruston left the automobile business in 1912 and returned to employment with the Mead Paper Company in a managerial position. By that time, the Mead Paper Company was thriving under the direction of George Houk Mead, who married Thruston’s niece, Elsie Louise Talbott, in 1914. In 1922, George and Elsie Mead moved to their *Little Woods* estate off Runnymede Road.

In 1916, *The Pines* was extensively damaged by fire, and the Houk family relocated to the beautiful Queen Anne-style home at the intersection of Oakwood Avenue and Katherine Street. By 1930, George Houk Mead and Thruston Houk were President and Vice-President (respectively) of the Mead Paper Company. Also by 1930, with the growth of both Oakwood and the Mead Paper Company, other officers of the Mead company took up residence in Oakwood, including several who lived on Harman Terrace. Oakwood lore states that the Mead company dispatched, on a daily basis, a limousine to pick up the Mead executives from their homes along Harman Terrace and transport them to the company’s headquarters in downtown Dayton.

Another family tale – about a visit Thruston made to his daughter (nicknamed “Jim”) and her husband – tells of the entertaining spirit Thruston kept throughout his life: “Papa Hoo, in his seventies, decided to try fox hunting for the first time in his life when he was visiting Jim and Alex Hammer in Lexington. Jim tried to dissuade him. ‘Dad,’ she said, ‘think how stiff you’ll be tomorrow.’ ‘Hell,’ said Papa Hoo, ‘that’s tomorrow!’ and he went.”

Thruston passed away in 1938 at age 75, and his remains were interred at Woodland Cemetery in the Houk family plot. Thruston was survived by his wife Lily and their two sons, two daughters, and several grandchildren. Thruston



and Lily Houk had also remained very close to Kitty Talbott and her family over the years, with Lily having acquired the affectionate nickname of “Mama Id” among her nieces and nephews. After both their aunt and uncle had passed, one of the Talbott nieces wrote to the next generation: “Many of you must remember Mama Id, as we called her. She was very pretty; her eyes were as blue as Father’s; she was gentle and gay and quick-witted. Mama Id and Papa Hoo and their children were always so close to us that we can never think of them as relatives so distant as Aunt, Uncle and cousins.”

## Letter from the President

Spring and summer were busy months for The Oakwood Historical Society. We unveiled our first historical marker, commemorating the 150th Anniversary of the first platting of the “Town of Oakwood” in early May.

Thank you all for joining us that day, along with the City of Oakwood officials. A special shout-out to the High School Band members who added to the festivities and our knowledgeable historians who led tours of the original “Town of Oakwood”. Much appreciation to John and Mj Gray for their support in making this, the first of our markers, possible. Be on the lookout for our second historical marker unveiling for the First Oakwood Public Library Building this fall.

Over 100 people attended our annual Wine & Cheese event this past spring after a two-year COVID hiatus—and while it was dampened by torrential rain—all had a good time, and the wine poured just as freely as the rain. Thank you to past-President Tiffany Rubin, Vice-President Stuart McAllister and the many volunteers, most notably Tonya Dickie, for making this a great fundraiser.

Volunteers of the Society also welcomed the third-grade classes from Harman and Smith School to our House Museum for “a step into Oakwood’s past”—I think they really liked the “dungeon”—also known as an old-fashioned root cellar.

While the hot, dry summer had us wishing for some more of that earlier rain and cooler temperatures – we’ve thoroughly enjoyed our time with the children during the garden program throughout the summer. We’ve had a bounty of vegetable crops – thanks to Linda Pearson and her leadership in this program. And you can read about our newly expanded kitchen garden, thanks to the efforts of Scout Patrick Toussiant, in this edition.

Our work has also continued on with our mission... beginning with the long process of digitizing several years of The Oakwood Register and digging into and improving our Archives. We are also making much-needed improvements to our House Museum. You can read more about several of our ongoing activities in this newsletter.

Hope to see you all this fall during our upcoming Far Hills Speaker Series!

Kind regards,

*Debra Edwards*

*President, The Oakwood Historical Society*



## News from the Homestead

### Scouts Enlarge the Kitchen Garden

In June, we welcomed a Boy Scout Eagle Scout project to repair and enlarge the garden behind the 1920s kitchen at the Historical Society.

Patrick Toussaint of Oakwood Troop 101 led a team who worked to increase the growing space for our children’s summer garden programs. The previously L-shaped area is now a large rectangle with an additional gate that opens near the side door of the summer kitchen. Patrick added two new raised beds and upgraded the chicken wire to keep nibbling critters out. New paint will arrive after the wood in the picket fence has a chance to weather in place.



## Over the Years...

### Highlights from the City Council Minutes Digitization Project

#### 100 Years Ago in Oakwood (1922)

The story with Drewey Wysong, who was acquitted of embezzlement of funds collected in his job, continued. After computing the receipts and the payouts, it was determined he deposited \$87.75 more than he collected, and this bill was submitted to the Village. Additionally, he submitted a claim for \$163.70 for records and supplies, for a total claim of \$250.45. Council decided to wait for the findings of the Bureau of Uniform Accounting of Public Officers of the State to pay the bill.

#### 75 Years Ago in Oakwood (1947)

April 7: 103 lot owners (of 131 total) residing in the Oak Knoll Plat filed a petition with the City objecting to a "Peanut Stand and Pop Corn Stand" are to be placed on one of the vacant lots in the 2500 block of Far Hills Ave. They point out the restrictions of the Oak Knoll Plat, in which these vacant lots reside, are strictly for residential purposes only.

Argument ensued. Council Chairman Storms reviewed zoning history and indicated that the Municipal Government has no control over enforcement of Deed Restrictions, which are between individual purchasers and developers, with no Police Power conferred on municipalities to enforce restrictions. Attorney Koogler, representing the Peanut and Popcorn Stand, indicated several of the lots surrounding this lot were zoned by the City as "Business Zone", and this would be a step backward to begin to enforce the restriction as many businesses already were there. Attorney Reese, representing the homeowners, countered that the 1927 and 1941 actions by Council to zone these areas for "Residential Purposes" only, which prompted further discussion.

The James saga of the one block narrowing of Far Hills Ave at Claranna continued. During a petition to rezone the James property [right across the street from the Oak Knoll controversy above] from residential to business in advance of potentially widening the road, the current land was appraised at \$8,270 and \$4,210 for the buildings (total \$12,480), and with proposed improvements, valued at \$250,000.

Schumacher's attorney prompted a lengthy discussion after presenting an oral proposal to Council of the City to pay Schumacher \$15,000 for the land right-of-way and improvements to sidewalks and to Claranna Avenue, plus pay to remove the existing filling station.

Council found the proposal exorbitant and prohibitive. Additionally, lot owners north of the James property also wished the same considerations to be applied to the James property. Council decided to take no action at this time.

May 5: The Oakwood Community Council provided a petition seeking the availability of what was formerly known as the East Oakwood Club, located at the Northeast Corner of Patterson Road and Schantz Avenue, (then known as Shafor Park House) for use as a Social and Recreational Center for the "teen-agers" of Oakwood, under the sponsorship of the Oakwood Community Council. Council accepted the proposal and filed for later consideration.

Attorney Filbert, representing Schumacher in the James situation reported to Council that his client had relinquished his right to purchase the land and set up a modern service station. Chairman Storms said "When you have a client who is willing to dedicate the thoroughfare and street right-of-ways to the use of the public, come around and see us again, and we will gladly start negotiations from that point."

May 19: A combined public hearing and Council session was held for the purposes of discussing the Peanut and Popcorn Stand in Oak Knoll. Arguments were aired from both sides, the Oak Knoll residents bemoaning the effect on their property values to have businesses operating in their residential district, and the existing and proposed business owners noting that the City had zoned these properties for business, and the effect of changing them back to residential. Council closed the hearing, satisfying the laws of the state of Ohio, and referring the matter back to the Planning Commission for further study and discussion.

Owners of lots adjacent to the proposed Social and Recreational Center were surveyed, and 43 of 45 indicated their assent to make the property available for a social and recreational use for the teenagers of Oakwood.

Mr. Woodford, Superintendent of Schools, addressed Council and related that he was not unsympathetic to the program of the Oakwood Community Council but at the request of the President of the Board of

Education of the City of Oakwood he was here to request a deferral of any conclusion, inasmuch as the Board of Education is seriously in need of added space for the ~100 Kindergarten Children of Oakwood now attending the Harman Avenue Elementary School.

## 25 Years Ago in Oakwood (1997)

Oakwood Rotary's sponsored Oakwood Employee of the Year was Chris North, from the Leisure Service and Service Department.

A resolution was passed supporting William Burnett, a 1968 graduate of Oakwood High School, who is spearheading an effort to include the Wright Flyer in the official seal of the State of Ohio. [this effort was not adopted, although other efforts have sprung up from time to time]

Approximately 200 people attended the Smith Gardens concert to hear the Ohio Valley Brass Band.

### Notes

#### From The Archives

As we continue with our ongoing mission of updating and bringing our archives into more modern practices, we often “rediscover” many of our precious and historical documents that are so important to the recording of Oakwood history.

Most recently, we've been sorting through our massive collection of books – many of which are rare, first editions (and some the only editions). Several are signed by famous and esteemed Oakwood citizens, one most notably signed by Orville Wright.

One such rare publication, which is dear to us for its quaint and sometimes humorous musings on early Oakwood, is *The Folks on Hole's Creek and Why We Joined Them*. It was written by A. A. Thomas for The Saturday Club and was published in 1915. In his writings, Thomas recalled the early Oakwood area from around 1867 to the early part of the twentieth century.

In the latter of those years, a friend asked Thomas, “When you married and tried to make a home, did you want to go to Oakwood?”

“Not on your life,” Thomas responded. He then proceeded into a lengthy and often amusing listing of the reasons he chose not to make Oakwood his permanent home.

#### A few of our favorites include:

“There was no rural delivery of mail. Many an evening I have harnessed a horse and trotted to town merely to get the evening mail.”

“Schools were inadequate. The time, trouble and expense the Parrott and Houk children had for twenty years going into town was no small matter.”

He also included in his reasons, the following quote attributed by Colonel Parrott to his daughter—

“May, we have lived here just twenty-five years, and this is the only land near Dayton that has not advanced in value in that time.”

Thomas also shared many stories of famous Oakwood citizens, including the following legend about John H. Patterson, after Patterson's rise to nationwide fame after the 1913 flood:

*Mr. John H. Patterson is fond of doing curious things. He tried once to stop the night Pan Handle train east till he was ready to take it two hours later. This was before the flood. A month after that affair, he tried the same thing out West, with the night express north. They took him to the office of the General Manager of the railroad, where he stood. “Are you flood Patterson?” He was asked. “I guess I am.” The railroad official phoned for a bunch of his subordinates. They were introduced and stood. Then the General Manager said, “Yes, I'll hold that train for you, when you get home, say you are the only man in the United States who could get such a favor.”*

This small pamphlet is a delightful, unique and historical peek into early Oakwood, Dayton and our southern neighbors. The Society hopes to republish the booklet in entirety this coming fall.



## Far Hills Speaker Series – Fall 2022 Program

We are proud to present our Fall Far Hills Speaker Series, in partnership with and presented at Wright Memorial Library. Lectures will also be accessible via Zoom (link available via Wright Memorial Library website).

### Who has Lived in My House: Historic Property Research Basics

*Sunday, September 18 at 2:00 pm*



Have an interest in learning more about your home and/or past residents? This presentation will provide the basic steps of historic house research and share a variety of local, state, and national resources available in print and online.

Bill Stolz writes a regular column on archival preservation and enjoys helping others uncover the history of their homes and communities. Bill has had an interest in history since childhood and worked as an archivist and librarian in Kentucky, Missouri, and North Carolina before returning home to Dayton, where he now serves as the branch manager for the Dayton Metro Library Southeast Branch. Bill is a graduate of the Wright State Public History Program.

### Dorothy Lane Market: A Look Back and Forward

*Sunday, October 16 at 2:00 pm*

The Dorothy Lane Market (DLM) story starts with its founding in 1948 as a fruit stand on the corner of Dorothy Lane and Far Hills Avenue. Jerry Post will detail the early history of DLM and talk about pivotal moments DLM shares with Oakwood. Hear what is in store next for DLM.

Jerry Post started at DLM as a carry-out in 1991. In his current role as the DLM Oakwood Store Director, Jerry oversees the day-to-day operations at the Oakwood location. Jerry has a passion for great food and wine and understands the importance of educating customers and associates about the wonderful products and functions of DLM. And with his friendly disposition, greeting customers with a big smile, Jerry makes both the Oakwood community and the store associates at this location feel at home. Jerry is the proud father of three and a fan of almost every sport.

### The Future of Oakwood

*Sunday, November 20 at 2:00 pm*



As the final Far Hills Speakers Series lecture of 2022, we take a look forward and envision our community several decades in the future.

Oakwood Vice Mayor Steve Byington moved to Dayton after graduating architecture school in 1991 and was quickly drawn to the incredible architectural diversity of Oakwood. Wanting to get more involved in the future of his community, he volunteered for the Oakwood Planning Commission where he shared his expertise in architecture and urban planning principles. He was elected to the Oakwood City Council in 2008 and was chosen Vice Mayor in 2010. He is the city's liaison to the Miami Valley Regional Planning Commission, the Dayton First Tier Suburbs Consortium, continues to serve on the Planning Commission, and sits on several community committees.



*DLM Grand Opening in 1953*



*DLM Grand Opening inside the store 1953*



*Front end of DLM in 1959*

## Schedule Your Fall Family Photo Sessions at our House Museum

Need a family photo for your holiday cards? A \$75 donation to The Oakwood Historical Society will get you a 20-minute session with photographer Betty Cochran.

You'll receive all your photos on a USB drive as high-resolution JPEGs with no copyrights to worry about. Simply take your photos to a photo printing store, or to an online site and make as many copies as you wish!

Ask about our special reduced rates for Society members and returning families. Visit the Society's website at oakwoodhistory.org to pay for your session, and we will contact you to schedule your time.



## William Dixon Grave Restoration Project at Woodland Cemetery



We're pleased to announce that we are almost halfway to reaching our goal in raising funds to restore the damaged gravestones of one of our early Town of Oakwood founders, William Dixon and his wife Elizabeth.

Thank you so much to members Richard Carlile, William Frapwell and Dan Turben for your generous support of this much-needed restoration, and to all the other anonymous members who have donated.

All four of the Town of Oakwood investors are interred at Woodland Cemetery—Isaac Haas, Patterson Mitchell, William Dixon and Gabriel Harman—but Dixon's gravesite remains in ruins. Until recently, very little was known about William Dixon, except that he was one of the four founders of the first platting of Oakwood, who seemingly disappeared soon afterward. It had not even been verified until recently that his sister was married to Gabriel Harman. His only remaining legacy in Oakwood was a street named for him.

As we slowly discovered more about William Dixon, a somewhat sad history unfolded. After the loss of his young wife in 1854, most likely during childbirth, Dixon never remarried. He was known to only have the one child, a daughter, born in the same year as his wife's death. Dixon died in 1900.

Please consider contributing to this gravesite restoration project to honor one of our early founders and also help Woodland Cemetery in maintaining their beautiful and peaceful grounds.

### Donations can be sent to:

The Oakwood Historical Society, 1947 Far Hills Avenue, Oakwood, OH 45419

*(Please note on check that funds are to be directed to the Dixon Grave Restoration Project)*



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



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**THE OAKWOOD HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

1947 Far Hills Avenue  
Dayton, OH 45419

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**The Oakwood Historical Society Membership Form**

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- Family ..... \$35.00
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