

Centennial Reflections

*Essays from the
Oakwood Historical Society*

The Women's Groups of Oakwood

By Harry G. Ebeling

Women's groups, popular in years gone by, seem to be fading in today's busy society with all the pressures of competing interests and time demands of raising children. But such organizations were instrumental in the growth of Oakwood and contributed greatly to our quality of life in many ways since the beginning of the city and before.

One of the earliest groups was The Oakwood Efficiency League. The name doesn't seem exciting now, but in 1912 when it was started it had grand purposes and a strong organization. A full page in The Oakwood Village Record in 1913 stated it was formed to increase the efficiency of the village – to enlarge “its power of producing intended or desired results.” It undertook to be efficient in five areas, each under the chairmanship of an appointed board member. The areas were: Good housekeeping, Enjoyment of Art, Child Welfare, Recreation and Knowledge of Public Affairs. Notable among its founders were Mrs. Fowler Smith, Mrs. George Shaw Greene, Miss Frances Parrott and Miss Dorothy Patterson.

Their discussions resulted in some action such as establishment of playgrounds and parks, the oiling of streets to prevent dust, the establishment of a library, open air concerts, support of cooking, carpentry and endorsement of women for school board and village council positions. Since this was the time of the women's suffrage movement, one can see their shadow in the development of our community. Dues were 25 cents per year and fund raising was done by card parties to support a scholarship fund. One day a week was set aside for charity and later for efforts such as bandage folding for the war effort. They seemed to have moved on to greater things by 1920.

The League of Women Voters was part of a nation-wide movement encouraging women to be active in government and the political life of the country. Founded in 1920, the clubs became established across the country and Montgomery County had one with its Oakwood District Unit. Our clippings' file shows interest in issues such as support for the school levies. A surprising aspect of the 1963 discussion about a levy was the proposal to build a new middle school for sixth, seventh and eighth grades. Many of the meetings, held in homes, were on such subjects as “Know Our City” by Manager David Foell, hazardous wastes, and pros and cons of issue #2. One of the first booklets about our city and its schools and government was one produced by the LWV in 1980.

The Daniel Cooper Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, formed in 1953, is an Oakwood offshoot of the Jonathan Dayton Chapter of the D.A.R. It is interesting to note that both chapters were formed in Oakwood with the older one dating

from 1896. The Oakwood chapter has about 100 members and meets monthly to discuss patriotic and historical subjects. Originally it met in the evenings to accommodate working women but it no longer does, which is an unusual reversal of the trends in many organizations.

Women's Literary Club, one of Dayton's oldest (1880's) and most "establishment" clubs has had many Oakwood members through the years. Phyllis Heck remembers her grandmother referring to it as "the smartest women in Dayton" as a subtitle. Many well known ladies such as Marie Kumler, Jane Marlay, Alta Becker and Charlotte Reeve Conover were members. Other Oakwood members included Harriet King, Carrie Lorenz, Mary Legler, Harriet Colvin, Maria Bickam Bender and Ellen Jane Lorenz Porter. They met at The Dayton Women's Club. The papers were assigned in the spring and the ladies agonized over them until their turn for delivery came. In the early years they were memorized and then, several weeks later, critiqued and discussed publicly not only for content but also for grammar and delivery. Later, these high standards were relaxed a bit but preparing the paper for reading was always traumatic.

One of the most active and hard working women's organizations in the area is The Garden Club of Dayton which dates back to its formation in 1922 when Katherine Houk Talbott called a group of women together at Runnymede. They sought the advice of The Garden Club of Cincinnati and organized themselves "to stimulate the knowledge and love of gardening...and to aid in the protection of native trees, plants and birds...." They elected Mrs. Talbott as president, and Mrs. Deeds, Mrs. Fowler Smith, Mrs. Rike, and Mrs. Blackmore as officers. The energy and determination of Mrs. Talbott are legendary and by 1926 she had organized the club for application to membership in the Garden Club of America.

Their growth was rapid and included every prominent family in Dayton and Oakwood. It soon became a source of great pride and pleasure as the ladies strove to personalize their property for exhibits. As they spread the word and formed sub groups, gardening became popular throughout the area and Dayton became known for gardening among travelers and businessmen as they saw such sights as the N.C.R. factory grounds, bridges and parks when they visited here.

One of the early high points was the tour put on for Garden Clubs of America in 1928 when they held a national meeting in Cincinnati. The gardens were photographed and the slides colored, creating a wonderful show which was the subject of the Oakwood Historical Society's annual meeting in November 2007. In recent years they have worked toward the development of Aullwood and Cox Arboretum as well as environmental issues.

A sub group was formed for south Dayton and Oakwood in 1928 under the leadership of Mrs. Delmar Hughes. Known as The Four Seasons Garden Club it has been a source of pleasure to folks who don't have the estates typical of the originating club. They have had projects over the years such as River Corridor Park, identifying trees at Woodland Cemetery and improving the grounds at The Museum of Natural History. This group took charge of the Long-Romspert Homestead of the Oakwood Historical Society soon after it was acquired in 1985 and cleaned up the property, adding flowers and trees to give it the authenticity of a 1800's working farm.

Space doesn't permit tracing the growth of many women's groups which exist for political, social, card playing and even Mahjong, but they're out there. They all represent the varied interests and active life styles of our community. Maybe some other time.

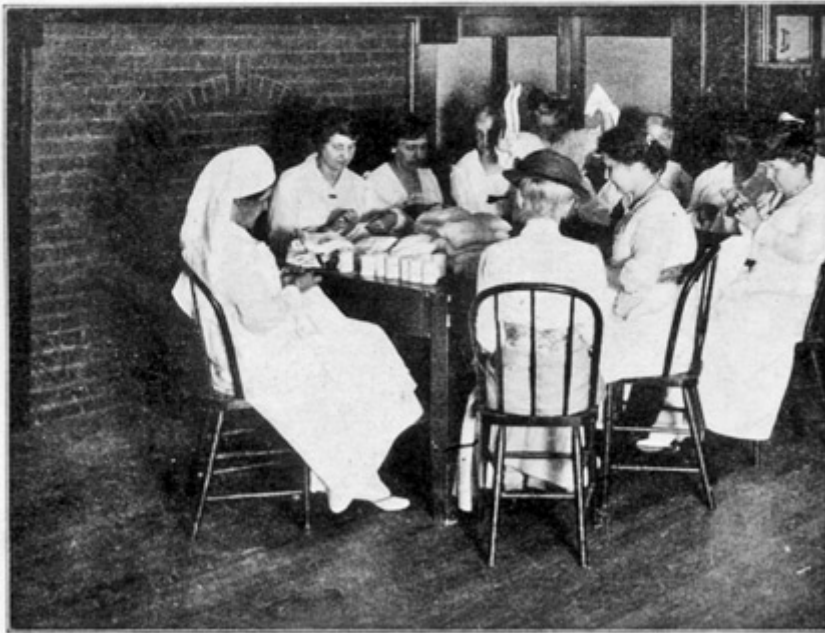
The Oakwood Record

Be pleasant, it is contagious

A Neighborhood Magazine Published Monthly
at Oakwood Village, near Dayton, Ohio.

October 1917

Ideas are more powerful than bayonets



Oakwood Efficiency League wraps bandages during WWII.