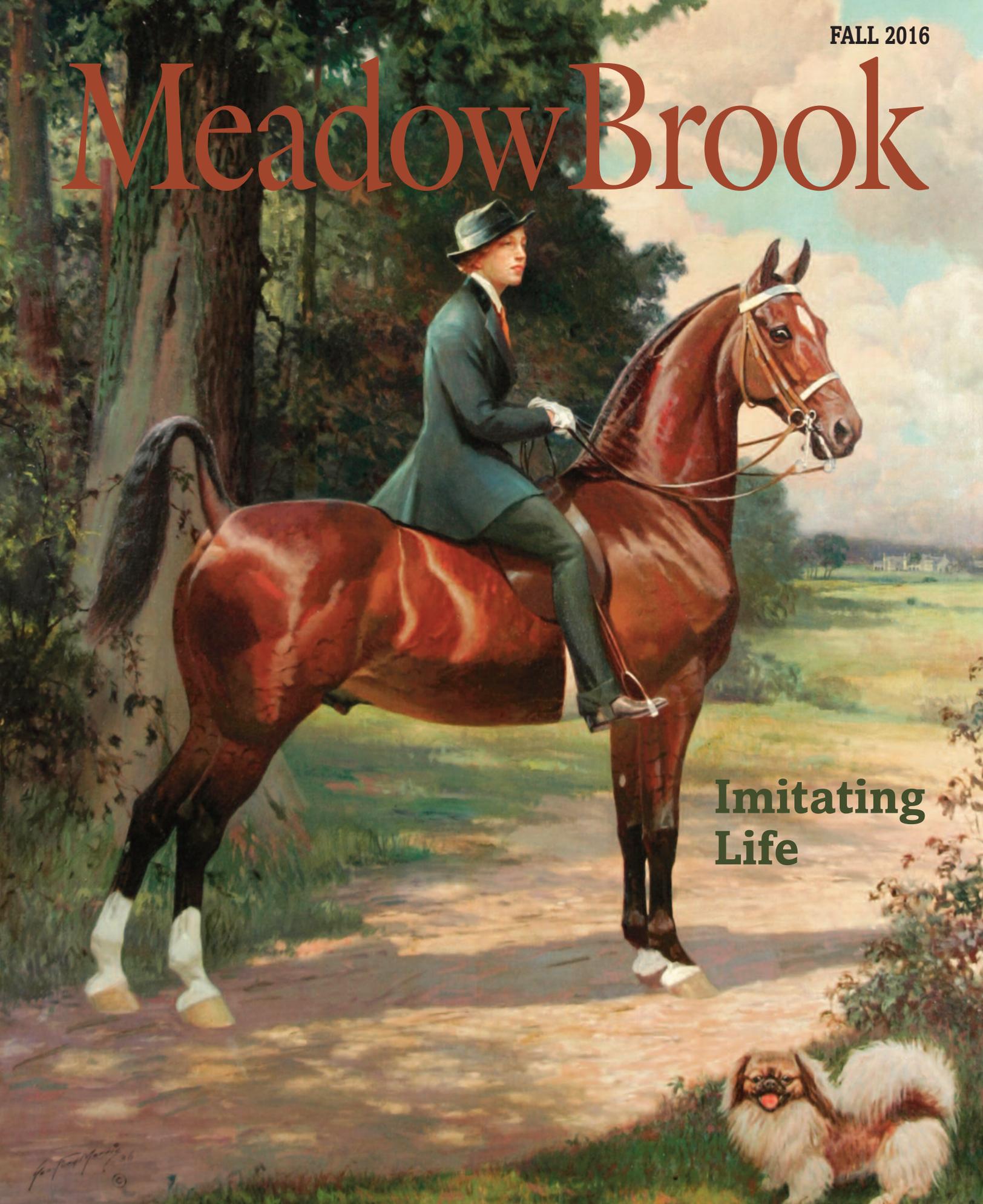


FALL 2016

Meadow Brook



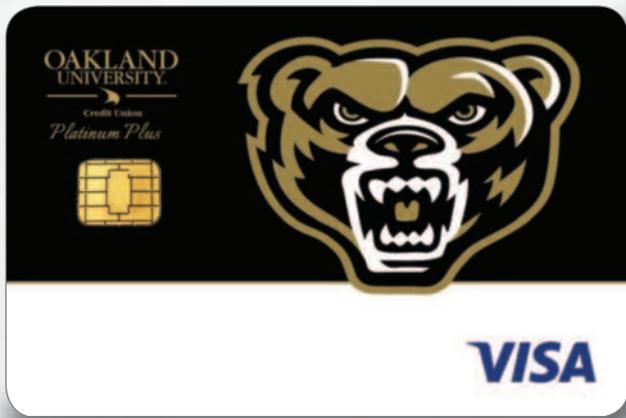
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On the Cover:

Frances Dodge on one of her favorite Saddlebred show horses, Pendennis, with Pekingese, Robyne. *Painted by legendary animal portraitist, George Ford Morris, in 1936.*

Meadow Brook

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MEADOW BROOK

ONE OF AMERICA'S GREATEST ESTATE HOMES, AN ICON OF THE AUTOMOTIVE ARISTOCRACY, AND A NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK

The former home of Alfred and Matilda Dodge Wilson, founders of Oakland University, Meadow Brook Hall is located on Oakland's 1,400-acre campus. The self-supporting auxiliary of the university serves as an internationally renowned historic house museum and cultural center.

| Editor's Column

A leader among women . . . and men

It was a day that I felt vividly both the absence – and contributions – of the guiding force behind Meadow Brook Estate and Oakland University. On Friday, November 4, more than 200 women gathered to honor the “begetter of the university” at the first annual conference of the Oakland University Women’s Leadership Institute. Though I wish Matilda Wilson could have witnessed this day, on the campus she created, the room reverberated with the memories of her leadership, determination and pursuit of fair and equal treatment for those less fortunate.

November 4 was important for another reason: The State of Michigan declared it the Matilda R. Dodge Wilson Day in honor of her “vision, generosity, and significant contributions as a strong woman of leadership in the state of Michigan.” Matilda Wilson became the first female lieutenant governor in the United States when she was appointed to the position in 1940. State Rep. Michael Webber put forth the resolution, stating “Matilda Dodge’s story is truly inspiring in terms of hard work and leadership, both of which are qualities that have been passed on to Oakland University and its students.”

Both the Leadership Institute and the idea of honoring Matilda for her political successes were spearheaded by OU faculty member Beth Talbert, who had the creative and brave idea to gather female professionals from the community and form an incubator of networking, advice and instruction.

The day’s theme, “Asking for More: Positive Strategies for Change,” delved into issues not dissimilar from those that Matilda faced when breaking barriers in the philanthropic, political, financial, automotive and agricultural spheres. Change is not easy. Leadership is not easy. But Matilda weathered both and the inspiration and mentoring qualities we feel from her today were developed during a lifetime of community service.

The article beginning on page 10 gets right to the heart of the matter. Her strong desire to help others likely would have borne fruit had she not benefitted from a position of great wealth. But, when her spirit and means came together as her husband John’s business took off, a powerful force of community service leadership was created. She assumed her role naturally and with humility and strength, qualities that we hope our generation and those following can model.



Matilda Wilson (right) and Mrs. Gilbert O'Connell, wife of education engineer of the WPA, 1940. In office, Matilda continued to pursue her goal of bettering the lives of the residents of Michigan.

Madelyn Rzakowolski
Curator

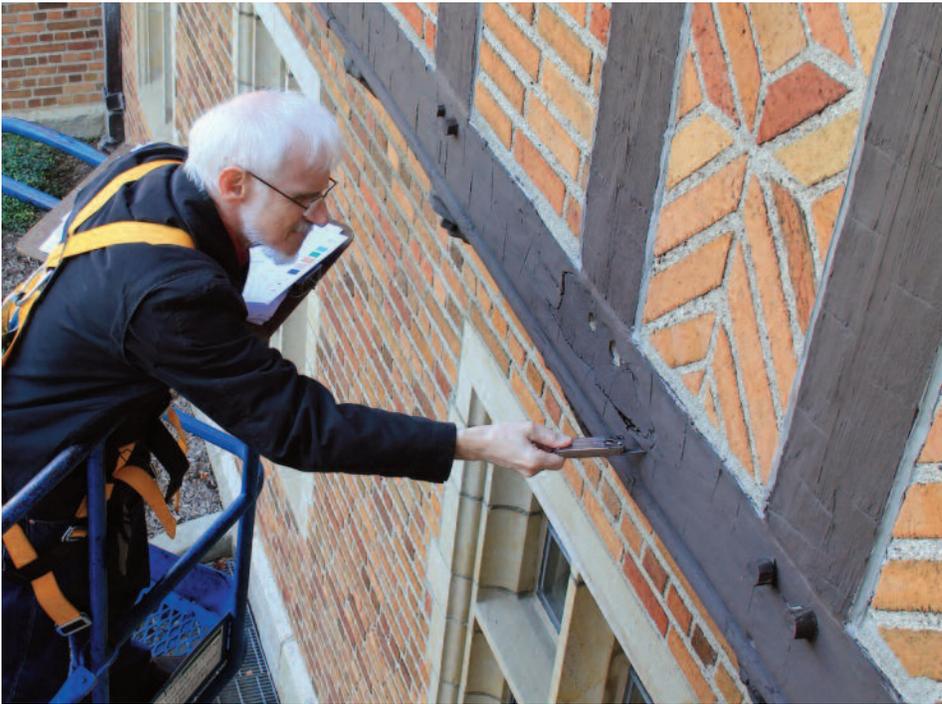
The good old days...



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meadowbrookhall.org



Tim...ber!

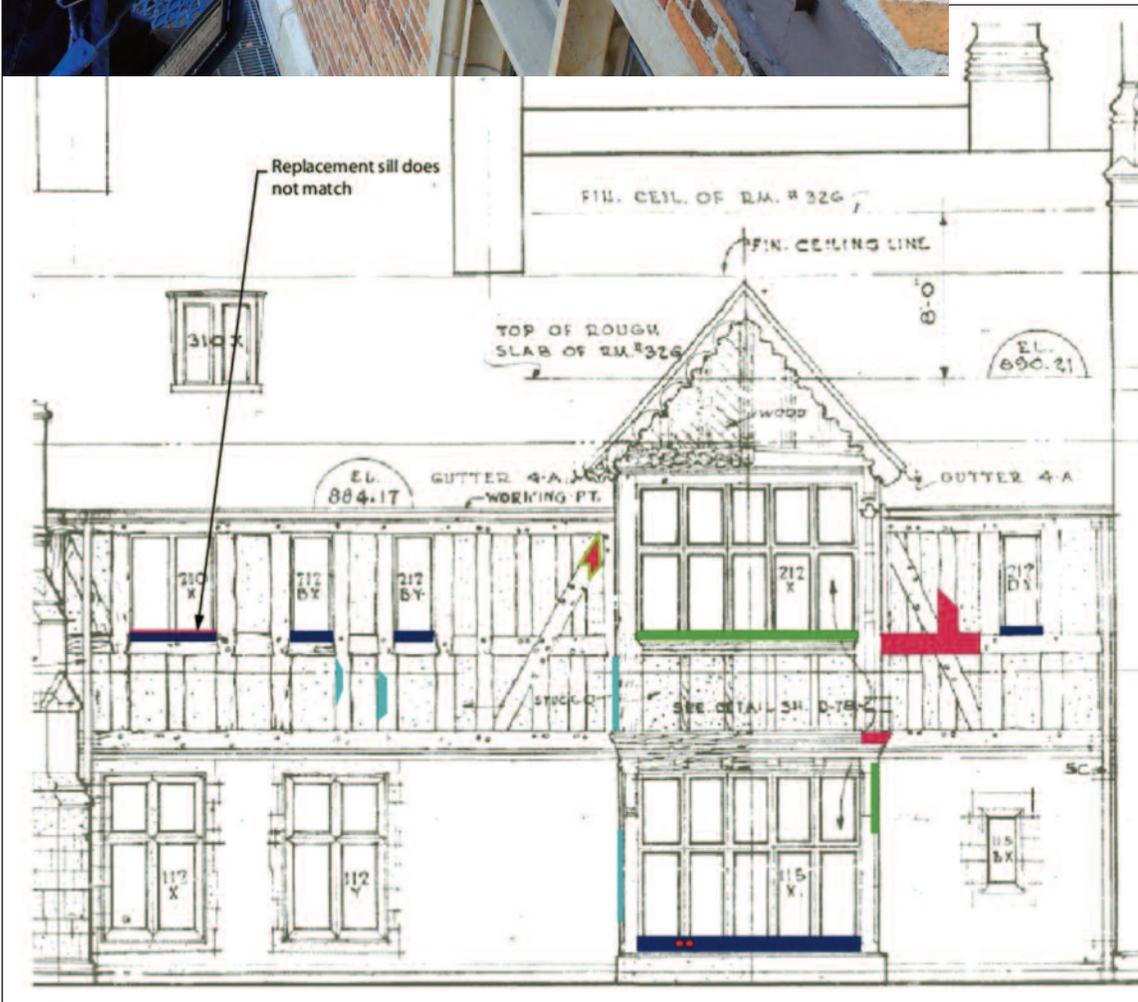
As support from the Matilda R. Wilson Fund's challenge grant approaches its final funding year, The Hall is preparing to take on its last major preservation project of the grant, timber restoration. Initial preparation for the project began several years ago when Meadow Brook commissioned preservation architects HopkinsBurns Design Studio to complete a comprehensive assessment of the timbers.

The project scope will address timbers on The Hall as well as other Estate outbuildings and structures including Knole Cottage, the family garage, courtyard gates and exterior

doors. The first phase of the restoration project entails HopkinsBurns' visual inspection and documentation of the deterioration levels and prioritization of restoration needs. Once completed, the firm will prepare construction documents for the bidding process and then provide oversight during construction.

The project work is expected to begin in early Spring of 2017, and will be conducted with no disruption of Estate activities.

Preservation architect Greg Jones of HopkinsBurns Design Studio inspects timber conditions; south elevation showing areas needing work.



VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

Volunteers step forward

2015 was a great year for Meadow Brook Hall and our volunteers! This summer at our annual Volunteer Appreciation and Awards Dinner, we recognized four of our own for their achievements and milestones last year.

Bill Cichowski and Pat Koykka, both longtime volunteers at The Hall, received their Gold Castle awards for giving



Bill Cichowski and Pat Koykka

50 hours of their time every year for the past 20 years. A Meadow Brook Hall volunteer since 1993, Pat is an invaluable member of the Meadow Brook Hall Garden Club, donating her time for the last several years as the club historian. As such, she tirelessly keeps the records for the Garden Club by documenting their work throughout the year in scrapbooks and photographs, as well as heading up the committee that organizes “pot luck” lunches for the many Garden Club members who come in weekly to maintain the gardens.

Bill wears many hats at Meadow Brook Hall. As a member of both the Squires and Garden Club, he is dedicated to preserving, maintaining and beautifying The Hall for future generations. Bill also volunteers his time inside by giving tours to guests and serving as a volunteer captain during our annual Holiday Walk. While Bill has

been volunteering here for twenty years, he has been a part of the MBH family since his late wife, Mary, started volunteering at The Hall shortly after it opened as a museum in 1971. He knows as much about the inside of The Hall as he does the outside, and he is an invaluable member of the Meadow Brook community.

Each year, the Barbara Thorpe Memorial Award recognizes an individual, or couple, who habitually goes above and beyond the call of duty in service to Meadow Brook Hall. This year’s recipients, Irene and Pete Townsend, have been fixtures at Meadow Brook for many years as part of the Squires, the Garden Club and the overall MBH family. They are always willing to lend a hand and go out of their way to help out in any way that they can, for which we are truly grateful.

As a member of the Garden Club since 2007, Irene works as a garden co-captain in the Orientation Garden, a wonderful first introduction to the gardens of Meadow Brook Hall for all guests who come in to visit. Pete is also instrumental (no pun intended!) in organizing the wonderful musicians who come in to play the organ, an addition to the holidays that everyone enjoys. They have also both been a tremendous help inside the house as “servants” during our Downton Days “Servant’s Life” programming, and hosts during Holiday Walk, events and weddings. – *Liz Eberlein*



Irene and Pete Townsend

A straight arrow

Meadow Brook presented its fourth annual Dodge Sportsman Award to Ralph Cagle at the ninth annual Wild Game Dinner & Auction in September.

The award honors a man, woman or organization who, in the spirit of entrepreneurial American sportsmen John, Horace and Danny Dodge, has demonstrated outstanding contributions to Michigan's outdoor heritage, wildlife and habitat conservation and the promotion of hunting and fishing activities, ethics and education.

An avid and accomplished bowhunter for the past 40 years, Ralph has been active in associations governing the sport, including Safari Club International, for which he currently serves as president of the Southeast Michigan Bowhunters Chapter and director of the Education Committee.

He has also served as a bowhunter and archery instructor for the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, hunter safety instructor and coordinator for Oakland County, and coordinator of SCI's State Hunter Apprentice Program.

Perhaps his greatest contributions have come through his co-founding, with Bob Easterbrook, of an all-volunteer organization, Michigan Sportsmen Against Hunger. Since 1991, the MSAH has been working to create linkages between donors, wild game processors and charities that feed

needy individuals. The initiative annually donates thousands of pounds of meat, primarily venison, to the poor.

Ralph and Bob were also instrumental in facilitating the Salvation Army Outdoors Initiative, a faith-based effort designed to provide youth and families with engaging and educational outdoor experiences. Recent opportunities for adults and children have included summer camps at Echo Grove in Leonard, MI, youth pheasant hunts and more.

The Wild Game Dinner & Auction, planned and executed each year with the assistance of a volunteer committee, is Meadow Brook's second-largest fundraiser (after Holiday Walk).



Presenting Sponsor Dan Pienta, Northern Trust President and CEO, Ralph Cagle and Geoff Upward

THE
KRESGE
FOUNDATION

Kresge Foundation grants operational support

Meadow Brook Hall was recently awarded \$15,000 from the Kresge Foundation Detroit Arts Support program, providing unrestricted operating dollars to organizations in performing, visual and literary arts.

This is the fourth round of such operating support for The Hall. Since 2007, Kresge has provided nearly \$20 million in support to more than 80 arts and cultural organizations in metro Detroit's three-county region. During this cycle, Kresge will award \$4.8 million to more than 60 organizations.

George Jacobsen, senior program officer for the foundation believes "A stronger arts and cultural sector enriches the quality of life for residents of all ages and makes visiting the region a richer, more attractive experience. At the same time, this support helps arts and cultural organizations fulfill their roles in community engagement and revitalization. That work, in turn, contributes to green, healthy, active neighborhoods and a thriving city core."

"With operational support from the Kresge Foundation for the past several years," Geoff Upward, executive director of The Hall, said, "we have been able to direct the funds to the areas of greatest need. From exhibits and visitor experience enhancements to educational programming to bricks and mortar repairs, the Kresge grants have made a real difference in our efforts."

Chapter and verse of adoptions

The second year of Meadow Brook Hall's Adopt-an-Artifact program – which allows individuals or groups to sponsor conservation of needy collection items – saw the adoption of all the identified artifacts in the Library.

The generous and enthusiastic response from friends, volunteers and even past adopters allowed the curatorial staff to identify and conserve even more objects in need. Previously unable to find a close match to the gold silk velvet of the Library's original drapes, their replication was put on hold. With the help of a magazine reader (and some additional funds), a similar fabric was found and the drapes will be remade in the exact style with new velvet and the original trim.

With more than \$17,000 contributed for adoptions in the Library, the most prominent feature of the room – the books – got a little extra at-

tentation. Twenty-two important works will be conserved, including the 1855-57 serials of *Little Dorrit* by Charles Dickens and William Henry Pyne's three-volume series from 1816-1819, *The History of the Royal Residences*. (See page 8 for more information on the contents of the Library.)



Live from Meadow Brook Hall's Library!

When Curator Madelyn Rzakowski and a textile conservator work together to repair the upholstered furniture in the room, Meadow Brook members and tour guests will be invited to observe the process and to ask questions. Contact Madelyn at rzadkovo@oakland.edu or follow at Meadowbrookhall.org/news for these dates.

Treasured Childhoods

HOLIDAY WALK 2016

The presents are wrapped, the stockings hung, and trees and garland will be aglow at Meadow Brook Hall's 45th annual Holiday Walk (November 25- December 22). This year's theme, "Treasures of Childhood," explores the sights, sounds and memories of youth, particularly what growing up was like for the Dodge and Wilson children in the 1920s and '30s.

Though Frances, Dan, Richard and Barbara were the children of extraordinarily wealthy parents, Christmas morning echoed that of many children across America. They woke early and

dashed down the staircase, ready to open their presents but forced to be patient until the rest of the family breakfasted. As an adult, Frances Dodge donned a red velvet cape and drove a sleigh down from the farmhouse, laden with presents for the family. Once she arrived, the living room doors were thrown open, revealing stockings full to the top and presents from Santa Claus under the tree the family had decorated together.

These tales and more will be told through rare home videos of the family ice skating, sledding, riding horses and clowning about on the beach in Florida. The family's favorite cartoons will play on the ballroom movie screen and Danny's Red Bug go-kart will be displayed next to a 1932 Dodge pedal car.



Guests can follow the governess' footsteps through her closet and into the Nursery and its bathroom, both decorated with Mother Goose tiles. Mother Goose appears in Knole Cottage this year as well, where colored projection slides from the 1920s tell the story of *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*. **MB**

Long Overdue

By MADELYN RZADKOWOLSKI

Of all the original objects at Meadow Brook that were personally enjoyed by family and staff, perhaps the ones that evoke the most visitor interest are the books in the Library. The 1,600 books were not chosen by a decorator, purchased in lots from an auctioneer, or bought and relegated to homes on oak shelves to serve as props rather than instruments of knowledge. Like most true collections, Meadow Brook's books were acquired over decades, with some coming from local bookstores, some acquired during travel and some received as gifts. They bear hand-written marginalia, cracked spines, dog-eared edges and inscriptions from friends or family members. This is a library that was well-used, for when Meadow Brook Hall was a thriving family home, books were still the pinnacle of recreation, offering knowledge, adventure and beauty to those who turned their pages.

Of the many non-English-language books in the Library, a copy of the *Koran* may be the most unusual. Purchased during the family's chronicled trip to Cairo in 1934, the book served as a reminder of the exotic sights and people as well as the holiness and spirituality of the Middle East. Though no one in the family read Arabic, the *Koran* could still be perused and used for meditation or inspiration.

German books – of which there were many – were either purchased abroad or inherited from Matilda's German father, George Rausch. *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (Grimm's *Fairy Tales*)



The Wilsons' copy of the Koran.

featured gorgeous pen and ink and watercolor drawings from renowned illustrator Arthur Rackham. The scenes from the legendary moral tales provided a visual backdrop as George read the stories to his English-speaking grandchildren.

In the most important suite of books in the Library – the arts section – illustrations were obviously as or more important as the words. Many were purchased as resources for Matilda and Alfred Wilson as they designed, built and furnished their Tudor-Revival style home. Detailed photos, illustrations and descriptions gave the Wilsons and their architects the tools they needed to recreate the finest in historic-looking English and French homes. Before purchasing art for the walls of her

home, Matilda would buy books to familiarize herself with Rembrandt, Gilbert Stuart and other renowned artists.

A charming example of a gifted book is *Someone Like You*, an illustrated complimentary poem. It was given to Matilda by Mrs. Kate Dodge, the wife of John Dodge's half-brother Charles Frontier. The inscription indicates a close relationship that extended beyond John Dodge's death, reading "To my Fairy Matilda Wilson – Sister Kate," the descriptor likely a playful comment on Matilda's five-foot stature.

Most books have to be opened to be enjoyed, but two in the Library just need a close look at their exteriors. These books bear "fore-edge paint-



ings,” minuscule paintings along book edges that can only be revealed with the right touch. To create them, artists lightly splay pages, paint scenes with a single-bristle brush, and then apply gilding to obscure the scene from the casual observer. The paint on every individual page is too small to be noticed so it is only when the pages are fanned that the picture is revealed. The better example of the technique, *Barnaby Rudge* by Charles Dickens (published in 1925), depicts a scene from the historical novel by the most famous fore-edge artist of all time, Miss C. B. Currie.

Though Meadow Brook Hall’s books are too delicate to be handled by visitors, they offer a strong reminder that there is more to see if one looks beyond “the covers,” revealing a family that loved lifelong learning, art, friendship and storytelling. 

Clockwise from top left: German edition of Grimm’s Fairy Tales; three-volume set of Charles Dickens’ Child’s History of England, 1852-53; illustration of canopy bed in A History of English Furniture by Percy Macquoid, 1908.



Fore-edge painting by Miss C. B. Currie on Barnaby Rudge by Charles Dickens, 1925.



Many Detroit children in the first half of the 20th Century relied on the generosity of organizations like the Salvation Army and Presbyterian Church for food and shelter.

'Twas (Always) The Season

Matilda Wilson's generous spirit of giving transcended her lifetime

BY MADELYN RZADKOWOLSKI

When 24-year-old Matilda Rausch married John Dodge in 1907, she was not only thrust into a world of significant and growing wealth but also a family with an affinity for charitable giving. Like Matilda, John and siblings Horace and Della came from humble beginnings, with their father working at a machine shop and both brothers contributing to their family's wages from an early age by working small side jobs. As they grew up, their skills and talents allowed them decent, regular wages but still they remained on the cusp of poverty. Once John and Horace became the primary automobile parts suppliers to Ford Motor Company, they were destined to become millionaires, but unlike many in their position, their upward movement included a desire to help their families, neighbors, employees and by extension, their fellow citizens, have the basic elements of life: clean, warm lodgings, security and full bellies.

The brothers, wives Matilda and Anna, and sister Della supported a



“Santa” visits the Caspian Community House during Christmas, c. 1924.

myriad of causes in Michigan in the early 20th century, from building a tuberculosis sanitarium to donating money to a fund that provided lunch and milk to schoolchildren. Their efforts were not all public and Herculean: When both brothers died in 1920, it was revealed that they had placed many widows and ill friends on their payroll. The plights of women and children were an ongoing concern for the Dodge family, and it was the work they did in this arena for the Presbyterian Church and the Salvation Army that has stood the test of time, with many of the programs still in operation today.

Helping Your Neighbors

At John Dodge’s death in 1920, his will provided \$250,000 to the First Presbyterian church in Detroit. The church, with the Dodge family’s and their friend and minister Reverend Vance’s support, chose to split John’s gift. They put the majority in their endowment, but designated \$100,000 to build the John F. Dodge Community House in Hamtramck in 1923, a cause that

John Dodge had been working on before his untimely death. The Dodge brothers’ automobile empire was located nearby and John wanted immigrant employees to have a safe place for child care and help with assimilation. Reverend Vance later recalled that after hearing of the interest in establishing such a center in Hamtramck, John personally drove some church leaders around to scope out open lots for construction, even looking at land owned by John to see if it was suitable for development.

Community houses were built in impoverished areas to provide gathering

spots, basic services and help with assimilation for poor and immigrant populations. They typically had large libraries, English-language cooking and housekeeping classes, daycare, and probably the most popular feature – free hot baths. Matilda Dodge donated \$20,000 a year to the Dodge Community House for 5 years after John’s death and also built a modern laundry facility that could also be used by neighbors. When the costs of the construction came in under \$100,000, Matilda asked for the remainder to be returned to her, and then quickly donated the full amount right back to the center, a characteristic move learned during her days of business accounting at Dodge Brothers. In 1955, the Dodge Community House was taken under the umbrella of People’s Community Services, an organization that continues to help children, seniors and others today.

Christmas in Caspian

At the same time that John Dodge’s sights were set on helping a neighborhood close to home, Matilda’s were set a little higher – all the way north in the mining towns of Michigan’s Upper Peninsula. As treasurer of the Presbyterian Missions group, Matilda helped build a community house in tiny Caspian, Michigan by donating the money to furnish the main floor rooms and fundraising. The Caspian Commu-



Medical experts in the 1920s prescribed outdoor recreation as essential to children’s health, and community centers followed suit.



Above: Family in Caspian, Michigan, believed to be resident community house directors Walter and Frances Berry with daughter Beth, 1927.

Below: Delphine Dodge Ashbaugh, elder sister of John and Horace Dodge, c. 1915.

nity House depended on the generosity of Presbyterian churches throughout the state to build and furnish the house, share gifts and food, and pay staff as building managers and educators. The project was started in 1916 and completed in 1921, with a 300-person auditorium, 2,400-book library, a kindergarten, eight showers or baths and even a deer park.

“[Matilda] was great to work with. She was perfectly charming, but a very practical woman. She never made any distinction between rich and poor... treated all alike.”

– a friend from Salvation Army Auxiliary



Though the Caspian Community House was important year-round, it truly brought everyone together at Christmas. The town flooded the next-door lot for an ice skating rink, brought in balsam firs for a tree trimming party, and set up their prized

electric train to wind its way around the miniature town they set up on the floor. On Christmas morning, the contents of the barrels that had been sent to the center were finally revealed: nuts, fruit, clothes and toys for all of the town’s residents. Matilda provided enough ice cream for a week of parties.

Beth Berry, daughter of resident directors Walter and Frances Berry, recalled: “Mine was a rare and privileged childhood, and Christmas was the focus of all my early years.” Beth wrote that “the people loved [Matilda],” who often visited the little town to provide reports to the church. Her support continued until her passing in 1967. The Caspian Community House is today one of the oldest such centers still in existence, let alone still in use.

“More men will get jobs, more mothers be sheltered, more children clothed and fed, because [of] Matilda Wilson.”

– Woman’s Home Companion Magazine

Women’s Work

Matilda’s generosity extended to another organization that helped families in need of Christmas cheer – the Salvation Army. In 1914, her sister-in-law Della founded and was president of the Ladies’ Auxiliary to the Children’s Work of the Salvation Army, a group of Detroit women who dedicated their time and resources to a variety of projects. In 1925, Matilda was elected president at the same time that the group’s name was changed to the Women’s Auxiliary so that their work could branch out to other projects. Matilda held the position for a total of 24 years.

From the Auxiliary’s onset, the women sewed outfits for children in need, recognizing the individuality of each child by providing well-made, unique outfits, much like a child might receive from their mother. The clothes

were not made in bulk or bought off the shelf, which was a revolutionary approach that reflected the women's understanding of the feelings of the group home children and orphans who received the garments.

For years the Ladies' Auxiliary had been involved in far more than sewing. In 1916, they helped found the Salvation Army Rescue Home and Hospital on Detroit's southwest side. Nearby, they turned the old Buhl mansion into a home for female orphans and children of unwed mothers. The mothers paid a small fee to have their children stay there, or at the boys' home, until they could get on their feet.

In 1929, the Women's Auxiliary took part in the Salvation Army's massive \$3 million fundraising project for new buildings: Grace Hospital; Booth Hospital; a secondary children's home called Denby Home; the Evangeline, a subsidized apartment building for young working women; the expansion of its Rescue Home; and creation of an education department addressing narcotics.

Of these, the Denby Home was closest to Matilda's heart. She provided some \$100,000 for its 1931 construction and also paid to furnish two rooms inside. Her portrait was hung in the entry. Many thought the home would be named after her, but when the chairman of the united campaign and president of the advisory board, Edwin Denby, passed away during construction, it was named in his memory. On June 7, 1931, Matilda Wilson played a key role in the dedication ceremony, introducing Salvation Army Commander Evangeline Booth, daughter of Salvation Army founder William Booth and the first female commander.

A Tradition of Giving

Every Christmas Eve, well into the 1960s, after wrapping 60 or so presents, the Wilson family visited the Denby Children's Home. After watching the children perform a play, Matilda – and at times her family, Al-



Christmas program in Caspian auditorium, c. 1924.

fred, Frances, Dan, Richard and Barbara – distributed gifts and shared cookies and milk. Matilda was said to know each child individually and she spent weeks personally picking out a new outfit and toys for each child. Children later recalled that the pockets of their dresses were filled with candies and trinkets.

On July 11, 1940, Matilda's home movie camera was rolling as she helped lay the cornerstone for a new Salvation Army hospital in Detroit. The hospital

“In the death of Mrs. Alfred G. Wilson, the Salvation Army lost one of its most admirable, valuable, and consecrated friends and supporters.”

– Richard C. Hedke, Chairman of Salvation Army Advisory Board

supported unwed mothers and their families. The women who left that hospital often left behind the gift of life, a

orphanages into adulthood. Matilda sponsored McKenzie's high school graduation, taking her to J.L. Hudson's for a new dress, patent leather high-heeled shoes and a meal in Hudson's renowned lunch room. Matilda attended the graduation ceremony and gave her a gold watch. Later, when McKenzie found that she could not have children, she remembered how so many years before the women of the Salvation Army Auxiliary had made her feel special, emotionally preparing her to become, with her husband, foster parents for a total of 101 children.

Matilda Dodge Wilson devoted her talents, time and wealth to bettering the lives of others, and the Salvation Army served as a catalyst for many of her ventures. "It was the Salvation Army which needed me most," she said. "The Army's work has never been glorified. It approaches areas other organizations never touch and deals with broken minds and broken people to help them find themselves. Little of what the Army does ever comes to light."

The same could be said about Matilda Wilson. Many of the buildings she helped construct for the Salvation Army in Detroit have been forgotten in the annals of history as has much of her dedicated work at the Dodge and Caspian Community Houses. But her legacy lives on in the continued work



Above: Matilda Wilson and fellow Salvation Army Red Shield Club members prepare supplies to be sent to U.S. troops in Alaska, c. 1942. Below: Recent photo of the Denby Center in Detroit.

of these great institutions and through the families whose lives she touched.

For the last few years, Meadow Brook Hall has partnered with the

Salvation Army, serving as a toy drop location for its annual toy drive.

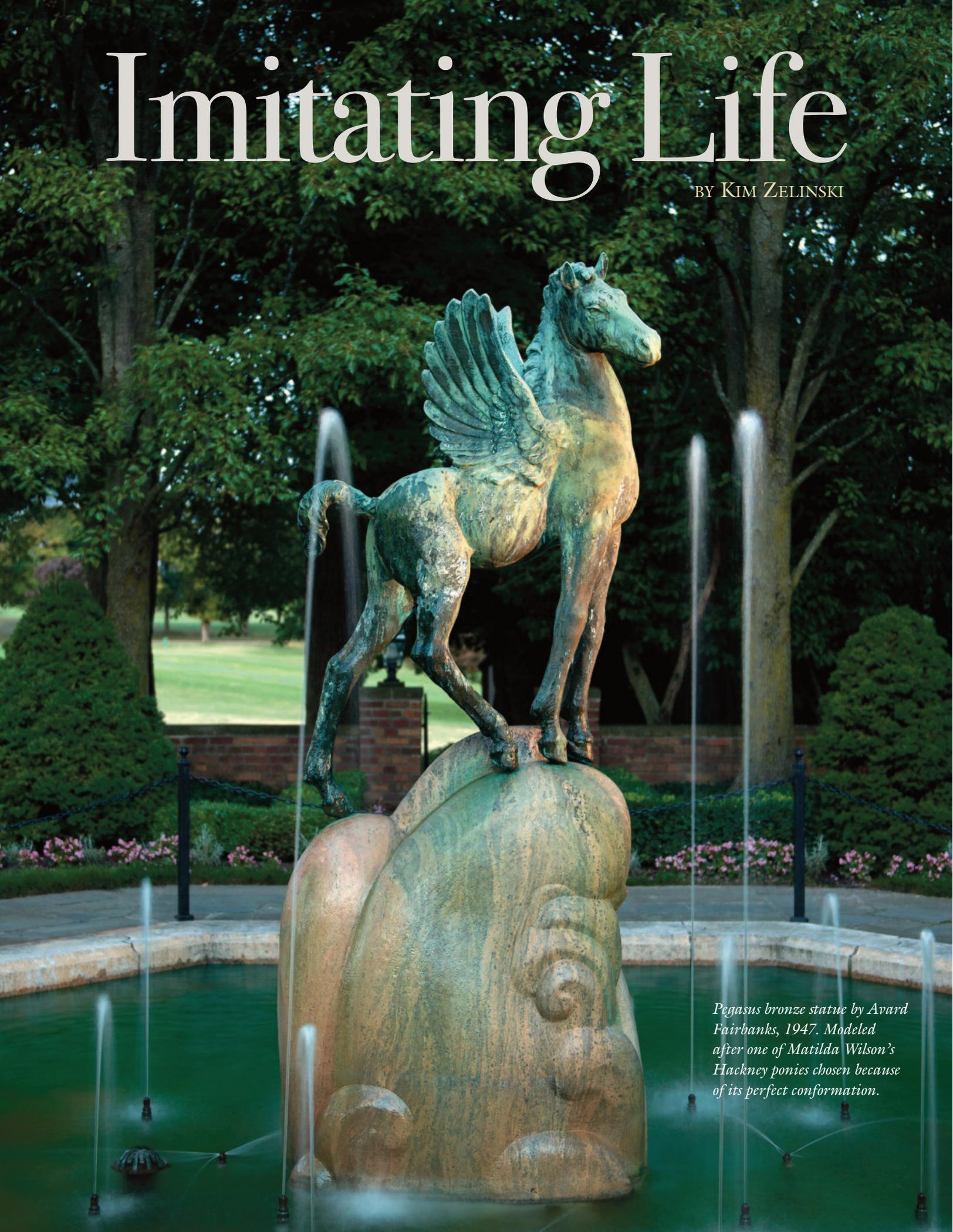
Matilda and Alfred Wilson would love knowing that their home lives on not only as a place for family and friendship during the holiday season, but also a place where new, unwrapped toys are gathered for distribution to families in need.

In July of 1967, two months before her death, Matilda wrote to a friend: "So far as having my name remembered, I think so long as there is...the Salvation Army, my name will not disappear from projects or from the public." **MB**



Imitating Life

BY KIM ZELINSKI



Pegasus bronze statue by Avard Fairbanks, 1947. Modeled after one of Matilda Wilson's Hackney ponies chosen because of its perfect conformation.



Not only dogs, but horses, cats, birds, cows, sheep and a variety of wildlife kept things hopping on the Meadow Brook Estate... and inside the house... as art forms captured family favorites.

Hanging alongside the Old Masters on Meadow Brook's walls and galleries, and interspersed among priceless pieces of decorative arts in dozens of curio cabinets and on side tables, visitors will find a large and varied representation of domestic animals and family pets. Whether champion competitors or simply companions, animals held a special place in the hearts and minds of the Dodge-Wilson family members. The art forms portraying them throughout the house and even on the grounds can be found in all shapes and sizes, from tiny figurines under an inch in height to the life-sized Pegasus horse statue in the fountain of the same name. Here are a few that had special meaning.

Horses

Meadow Brook Farms was home to hundreds of horses, from its beginnings in 1908 to Matilda Wilson's death in 1967. While most were show horses – Hackneys, American Saddlebreds, Shetland ponies and Belgian Draft horses – others were used for farm work or leisure riding. The estate's equine enterprise, above all the other estate activities, was a passion the family pursued throughout most of their lives.



Top: Oil painting by Lloyd G. Sawhill of Alfred Wilson and Harold Clark in a Meadow Brook Farms wagon pulled by champion 6-hitch Belgian draft horses, 1962.

Above: Bronze statue by Joe Krstolich of Progress, a champion Belgian draft horse, 1937.



Bronze statue of a German shepherd that looked like the estate's watchdog, Rolph, artist and date unknown; and a bronze statue of a Doberman Pinscher that resembled Alfred Wilson's pet dog Linda, artist and date unknown.

Dogs

While a majority of the dogs on the estate served as companions to family members, many were watchdogs assigned to various areas on the property, including the stables and chicken coups. Some were bred for show. Matilda Wilson owned a variety of breeds including a black Terrier, a champion Pekingese, a Saint Bernard, Boxers and a mutt named Sunday the family rescued on a Sunday afternoon after finding him chained to their fence. Alfred Wilson's companion and guard dog, a Doberman Pinscher named Linda, was brought to his bedroom each night. Danny Dodge owned Penny, a Beagle that accompanied him on his hunting trips. Richard Wilson's golden colored Cocker Spaniel was appropriately named Goldie.



Oil painting by George Ford Morris of the family's Saint Bernard, Cleopatra (Cleo), 1941.

Porcelain figurines of dogs reminiscent of the many breeds owned by the Dodge and Wilson family.





Wildlife

The Dodge and Wilson families had a great love for nature and the wildlife that inhabited the estate. When the farm was first purchased by John and Matilda Dodge in 1908, it included a refuge for a large herd of deer that the family enjoyed throughout the years, especially when they could feed the fawns. Other wildlife included pet rabbits and flocks of birds for which Matilda had houses built, including a few canaries that lived in cages inside The Hall.

One of the most unusual pets to reside on the estate was a tortoise named Pete. Small at the time, Pete was shipped from Africa with a zebra and four donkeys when Frances Dodge and Matilda and Alfred Wilson toured the continent in 1934. The zebra only lived on the estate for a short time, but Pete lumbered around for years until he became too large to manage and was adopted by Detroit's Belle Isle Zoo.



Above and previous page: Pair of Royal Worcester Dorothy Doughty porcelain cactus and wren figures, c. 1960.

Left: Art glass of small deer crafted by Lalique, c. 1924, and purple quartz figurines of rabbits, artist unknown.

Middle: Grouping of turtle figurines; bronze, wood and porcelain, artist and dates unknown.

Pet Cards

Sending holiday and birthday cards to family and friends was not only considered proper etiquette during the estate's heyday, it was also a family tradition. Even the family pets were included in this custom, particularly at Christmas. In addition to the estate's staff receiving gifts from each family member, staff also receive a special card from the pet they were assigned to take care of. **MB**



The Dodge-Wilson family celebrated their affection for a variety of animals.



Alfred and Matilda Wilson, c. 1955

A Sporting Life

THE HEYDAY OF THE MEADOW BROOK ESTATE, 1925-1967

BY KIM ZELINSKI

Fourth of Four Parts

*L*ike other great estates of the country place movement (1890-1930), Meadow Brook Farms included a residence palatial in size and furnished in the richest manner, built on an expansive tract of land a good distance from the city. Most had enough acreage to support an independent farming operation and to incorporate elaborate gardens on a grand scale.

As guests eagerly motored down the two-mile approach from Dodge Road to Meadow Brook Hall during the first years after its completion in 1929, they would have witnessed just such a farming operation in full tilt: grazing livestock, fields of crops, orchards, poultry coops, barns and barnyards, work horses and trucks and tractors.

However, estates began to develop beyond bucolic agricultural enterprises. A changing attitude swept through the country during this time, expounding the virtues of play, exercise and recreation.

Not surprisingly, beginning in 1934, motivated by 19-year-old Frances Dodge (John and Matilda Dodge's eldest child), Meadow Brook's farming operation and John Dodge's golf course and clubhouse were joined by new leisure and recreational pursuits: a secluded swimming pool, an extensive kennel with a picket-fenced yard for dogs to play and exercise and, most dramatically, a sprawling equine operation of stables and paddocks.

Dodge Stables

It was the horse, in all of its many forms – carriage horse, trotter, race-horse, polo pony and workhorse – that made the most indelible mark on American country estates. There was beauty in a well-kept, well-built stable and nothing more delightful for its owners than a morning visit to the stalls.

Meadow Brook Farm’s equestrian enterprises achieved national fame and recognition on many fronts, Frances Dodge’s accomplishments in particular. While Frances recalled riding at 5-years old, it was an accident, literally, that sparked her distinguished equestrian career. Around ten years old, while playing with her brother Danny, Frances injured her hand in an old wringer-washer. The doctor prescribed riding as a therapeutic means to help her regain the strength in her hand. Agreeing with the doctor’s recommendation, her mother, Matilda, bought Frances a new pony. Within a few years, Frances had become an accomplished rider, competing in many junior horse shows. In her teens, she advanced to larger shows, traveling throughout the country, competing with her own stable of horses.

In 1934, at the age of 20, Frances

Dodge officially registered as a breeder in the American Saddlebred Horse Breeders Association. She began expanding what she named Dodge Stables on the Meadow Brook Farms property, constructing a new grouping of stables, one for Hackneys, the other for Saddlebreds. She also built a 20,000 square-foot indoor riding ring that featured a loft for viewing, trophy cases and two private dressing rooms with bathrooms. Another barn housed her Shetland ponies.

Between 1934 and 1937, Frances invested generously in Dodge Stables. Costs to build and furnish the stables exceeded \$100,000, the purchase of horses another \$185,000 and annual operating expenses including salaries, maintenance, insurance and travel were significant.

An equine magazine article written in 1936 described Dodge Stables as “a phenomenon for a comparatively new stable to achieve the success it had.” It further claimed that in both the saddle and harness divisions, “Frances Dodge has likely the strongest stable in the country given the number of show ring luminaries boarded in the stables.”

Frances preferred harness racing to Thoroughbred racing because she could do both her own driving and training. There was, however, one occasion when Frances’ trainer hoisted her onto her trotter, Greyhound, and she rode him to a



Frances Dodge, c. 1936

“I CAN’T REMEMBER WHEN I DIDN’T RIDE. WE HAVE PICTURES OF ME ON MY PONY WHEN I WAS JUST FIVE YEARS OLD.”

– Frances Dodge Van Lennep,
newspaper interview

trotting mile in 2:01 ³/₄, a world record that stood until 1994. It was one of the greatest feats of horsemanship of all time, male or female.

Frances drove herself in another way...pursuing ribbons and trophies by purchasing and breeding the best studs and mares she could find. She intensified her breeding program in 1940 and it paid off three years later when she bred what became the greatest American Saddlebred horse of all time, Wing Commander, arguably one of the best show horses of any breed.





Top: Matilda Wilson, c.1960, bottom: Frances Dodge Johnson, c. 1938

His record included 167 winning performances and Wing was a six-time World Grand Champion.

Dodge Stables, in most years, was the leading stable in the country for ribbon winnings. Frances herself was held in high esteem. She was praised in an issue of *Sportalogue* magazine for her “showmanship, expert reins-man ability and true sportsmanship.” The article noted, “She is as modest in her conquests as she is game in her defeats. These are attributes which should be cultivated by everyone who engages in the sport.”

In 1945, Frances and her husband Jimmy Johnson, bought Castleton Farms in Lexington, Kentucky. She spent the next four years rebuilding the farm, and then with construction complete in 1949, she and her second husband, Fred Van Lennep, relocated Dodge Stables to Castleton Farms. During the Castleton years, the Van Lenneps continued to dominate Saddlebred show rings and harness tracks. Culminating an unprecedented career,

Frances was named to the World Championship Horse Show Hall of Fame the year following her death in 1971.

The Avon Pony Stable and Belgian Draft Horses

Matilda Wilson shared Frances’ interest in Hackney harness racing and in 1938, constructed a new facility, the Avon Pony Stables, to adjoin the Dodge Stables grouping.

Although Matilda never achieved the level of success Frances did, the Avon Pony Stables continued to show Hackney and Shetland ponies across the country, even into Matilda’s

“SHE ALWAYS PICKED OUT HER OWN HORSES AND SHE WOULD HAVE DRIVEN HER OWN DRAFT HORSES IF SHE COULD HAVE FIGURED OUT HOW TO GET UP ON THAT WAGON.”

— Judy Johnson,
speaking about her grandmother,
Matilda Wilson.



later years of life. At the age of 81, she participated in a dedication at the Michigan State Fairgrounds, driving herself around the ring in a shiny blue buggy led by two of her prized Hackneys, delivering the American Flag to the podium.

The Wilson children were also avid and accomplished riders. Richard and Barbara each owned their own Shetland ponies, and when they were older, competed in the show ring with their Hackneys in the three-gaited class. Richard recalls that they rode almost every day and were responsible for exercising their own horses. For fun, the family could choose from an array of carriages, surreys, pony carts, wagons, sleighs and even a western stagecoach to drive.

How special horses were to the family may have been best illustrated when Frances bought Matilda a new Hackney pony one Christmas. The gift was not delivered to the stable; rather Frances led the horse into the Great Hall at Meadow Brook and presented it to her mother there. Barbara remembers, “Frances had nerve that no one else had.”

The longest operating stable at Meadow Brook Farms was Matilda’s Belgian draft horse operation. Founded in 1933, she achieved almost immediate success with her first horse in the newly constructed Belgian barn, a stallion named Progress. He became the senior herd sire from which all of the Meadow Brook Belgians were descended, including Firestone, who won 58 Grand Championships and was considered the greatest Belgian draft horse of all time.

For a quarter of a century, the Meadow Brook Belgians set the industry standard, with success in both the show ring and breeding operation. One of Matilda’s greatest accomplishments occurred in 1946, when her Belgian six-horse hitch beat the Clydesdale hitch for the first time. From that year to 1973, Meadow Brook Farms won 24 of the 27 annual six-horse competitions.



Matilda at one time had close to 100 Belgian draft horses. During the Second World War, when gasoline was rationed and in short supply, the Belgians were put to work, carrying milk a mile or so from the Dairy Barn to Meadow Brook Hall.

In 1961, as the majority of the Meadow Brook Farms land was transitioning to the new MSU-Oakland campus, the Wilsons moved their Belgian operation to a new farm they built near



Top: Matilda Wilson, c. 1940, bottom: Richard and Barbara Wilson, c. 1934



PROGRESS

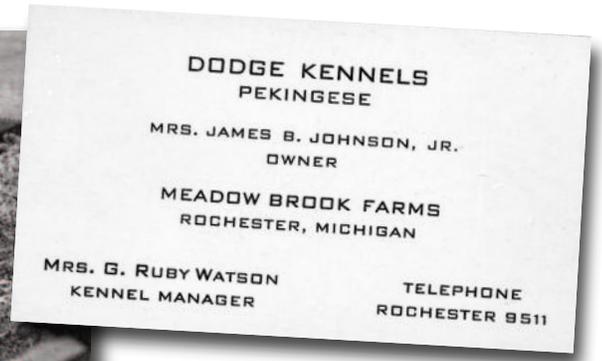
BELGIAN STABLES
HOWELL, MICHIGAN

Mrs. Alfred G. Wilson
1710 Fisher Building
Detroit 2, Michigan



COMMANDO

HACKNEY STABLES
ROCHESTER, MICHIGAN



Clockwise: Dodge Kennels, c. 1936; Richard and Barbara Wilson with Pekingese dogs, c.1936; Ruby Watson, c.1943.

Howell, Michigan. Matilda continued to manage it and was in Belgium purchasing additional Belgian horses for her stables in 1967 when she suffered a fatal heart attack.

Meadow Brook Kennels

Dogs also inspired great kinship with the family. The Wilsons owned many breeds, for the farm or stable operations, as watchdogs or as family companions.

Frances Dodge took it a step further. She acquired her initial brood of Pekinese dogs in 1934 while visiting England, the final stop on her six-month world tour with her parents. Frances and Matilda visited the Wai-Tou Kennel in Sydenham, thought to be the only kennel in existence that bred white Pekingese. They purchased six dogs to bring back with them on the ship. Two months later the dogs were joined by a new kennel manager, Ruby Watson, and the rest of the Pekingese family, including a dog eventually bought by Charles Correll, star of the famous “Amos ‘n’ Andy” radio program.

Construction of a new kennel began that September on a site near the Dodge Clubhouse, a good earshot away from Meadow Brook Hall. The \$20,000 kennel included a showroom, living quarters for Ruby Watson, a



fully equipped kitchen where the dogs’ meals were prepared, a dogs’ bath, an infirmary to isolate ailing dogs, and a wing that housed 28 dog compartments. Each compartment was neatly outfitted with a place to sleep, eat, play, and each had a small door that opened onto the dog’s backyard.

At one point, the kennel housed as many as 36 Pekingese, which were trained and shown. The Pekingese operation ended in 1949 when the last Pekingese died and Frances moved to Kentucky. Ruby continued her employment at Meadow Brook’s kennels, training other breeds as well as caring for the dogs on the estate until she be-



came ill in 1957 and the kennel was finally closed. Frances provided a retirement home for Ruby and the three remaining kennel dogs until Ruby’s passing in 1971.

Pastimes and Amusements

Indoors or out, the Meadow Brook Farms estate offered a host of activities to entertain family and friends. Sundays, after church, were particularly special for the family in that regard.

When the Dodge and Wilson children were young, they whittled away the hours playing in their playhouses, supervised by their governesses. Each had their own private structure: Frances had Knole Cottage, Danny, a rustic cabin and workshop; and the Wilson children shared a playhouse, each having their own distinct play areas.

The children also enjoyed Sunday picnics, a tradition carried on from the early days at the Farm. Most often,



picnics were held at the Dodge Clubhouse, which had access to both the indoor and outdoor pools. On other occasions, the family gathered under the trees between Meadow Brook Hall and Knole Cottage.

During the summer, a croquet course was set up on the lawn near the Gazebo. The Wilson family competed as teams: Richard with Matilda and Barbara with Alfred. This partnership and friendly competition extended into Alfred's den as well. Backed up by a pantry generously supplied with snacks and drinks, the four Wilsons enjoyed playing bridge with the same teams. The family also enjoyed listening to radio programs such as "The Shadow," "Gangbusters," "The Long Ranger" and "The Green Hornet" in that room.

Alfred, joined occasionally by Danny and Frances, or his brother Don Wilson, played golf on the estate's 9-hole course. Even Matilda tried her best to participate in an occasional round.

However, by far one of the most popular pastimes was swimming. An indoor pool, built in 1915 by John Dodge, was located in the lower level of the Clubhouse and just a few steps down the hill sat the peanut- or kidney-shaped outdoor pool built by Frances Dodge in 1935-36.

Afternoon parties at the pool were

"WE SWAM, RODE HORSES,
BUILT MODEL AIRPLANES,
LISTENED TO THE RADIO
AND PLAYED HIDE AND
SEEK. MY FAVORITE
PLACE TO HIDE WAS
IN THE BASEMENT."

— *Richard Wilson*

regular events for Frances, at times for as many as 60 friends. And, if by chance any of her guests forgot their suit, Frances had on hand extras that were specially imported from Paris.

Richard and Barbara also enjoyed

their days at the pool. Richard in particular remembers one of his first dates in the winter when he asked a young lady to bring her bathing suit. She was quite relieved, and impressed, when Richard brought her to the estate's indoor pool.

The Meadow Brook staff and their families were also treated to a yearly picnic at the Farmhouse, followed by a pool party. The cabana was always stocked with treats, including a ginger ale dispenser.

Matilda and Alfred hosted gatherings as well, such as birthday parties for the grandchildren and get-togethers for their charities and church group. Although Matilda did not learn to swim until her later years, George Karas, an early employee of Meadow Brook Hall and Oakland University, recalls Matilda telling him the pool was her favorite place.

On Sunday mornings or afternoons, in the northeast corner near the trickling fountain and ledge rock wall, she would sit in her favorite lounge chair and read, or maybe do some office work.

Matilda, as George affectionately recalls, had a great love for life and enjoyed it to the fullest... and the Meadow Brook Estate offered her, her family, and the farm and domestic workers a unique place to pursue their interests. 



Top: Meadow Brook Farms swimming pool, Barbara and Richard Wilson, second and third from right, c. 1946.

Bottom: Matilda and Alfred Wilson at pool, c. 1940.



As the earth turned...



90 years ago, on October 19, 1926, Matilda Wilson shared her birthday with another historic event, the groundbreaking ceremony for the construction of Meadow Brook Hall. In attendance were family, close friends, the architect and a special tool that played a major role – a ceremonial silver spade.

Each guest, including Matilda and Alfred Wilson, Frances and Danny Dodge, took their turn with the silver-plated shovel, holding its strong oak handle and turning over a small clump of dirt. It wasn't, however, the spade's first commission. In 1918, it was used to break ground on a massive residence John and Matilda Dodge were building in Grosse Pointe, Michigan (never completed after John's death in 1920).

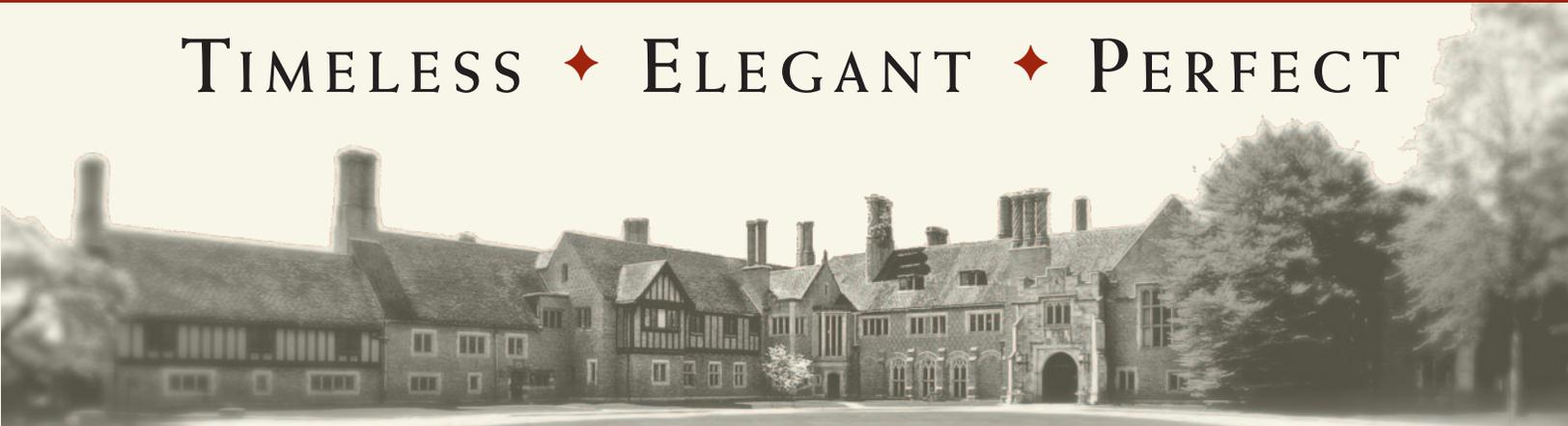
Following Meadow Brook Hall's groundbreaking, the spade stood idle until its next tour of duty: the 1958 ceremonial groundbreaking for Oakland University. Since then, it has passed through the hands of many in a succession of groundbreakings for campus buildings, and now awaits its next assignment. **MB**

Weddings at The Great Estate



Theresa Finck Photography

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