

SPRING 2013

Meadow Brook



**Dressed
for Success**

INSIDE: Master of The Manor | Danny's Cabin on the Move | Donor Report

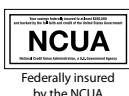


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Friends, Guilders, Cornerstone and Heritage Society members build a strong base of support for Meadow Brook.

On the Cover:

Matilda Wilson would have made quite a statement in this cream wool day dress with collar of embroidered chiffon and lace and mother-of-pearl buttons, designed by Peggy Hoyt, c. 1924. The hat featured a wide brim with elaborate crown of white chiffon flowers and leaves, designed by Crocker, c. 1920. The off-white wool day coat with stand-up collar of white fox was also designed by Peggy Hoyt, c. 1927. *Photo by Rick Smith, styling by Debra Lashbrook*

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 univer-
sity serves as an internationally renowned
historic house museum and cultural center.*

| Editor's Column

Gentleman Farmer

As we work with our archival resources on various communications projects, it has been apparent for some time that we know far less about Alfred than Matilda Wilson. And, because of the dearth of published resources and possibly due in part to his reserved personality, he gets less credit than his more celebrated wife for all things Meadow Brook.

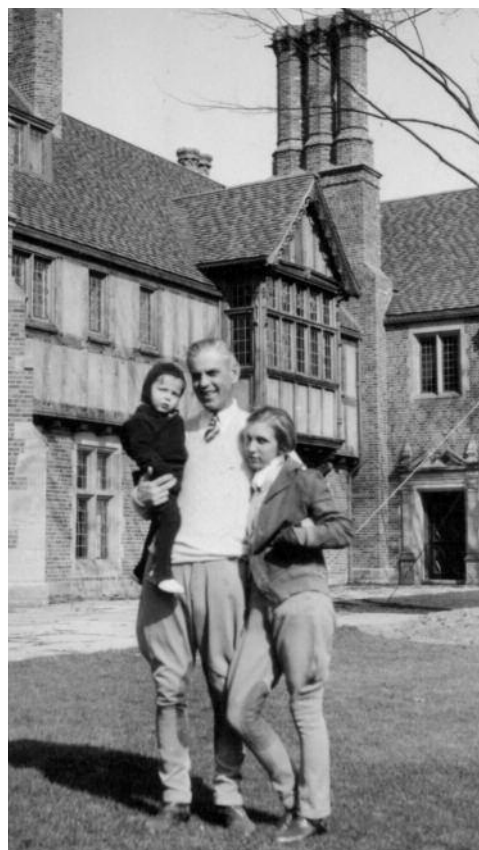
We hope Alfred emerges from Matilda's shadow to some extent with the publication of the article that begins on page 18. It speaks of the many roles of an "old-fashioned" gentleman who in middle age married into incredible wealth and, along with it, became not only a husband but a stepfather and ultimately a father and grandfather in his own right.

The writer, Karel Bond Lucander, deftly filled in the blanks from published accounts of his life with insight and recollections from family members. Alfred clearly played a major part in the building and operation of Meadow Brook Hall

and Farms, even if often in a supporting role to a strong woman, but a woman he adored. And, just as clearly, he was a father figure to four young people, a role he handled commendably in an era when children of the wealthy were typically raised by staff and boarding schools.

**"HE WAS A SUPER FATHER AND WE
HAD LOVE AND RESPECT FOR HIM.
WE DIDN'T WANT TO DO ANYTHING TO
DISAPPOINT HIM. HE WAS A GOOD ROLE
MODEL." – Barbara Wilson Eccles**

Alfred's story is joined in this issue by articles on the recent move of his stepson Danny Dodge's cabin down to the Meadow Brook property and a retrospective on his wife's decades of fashion. Given the number of outfits Matilda must have worn during their marriage, one can only imagine how many times he must have carefully said, "Dearie, you look wonderful in that dress."



Richard Wilson, Alfred Wilson and Frances Dodge, c.1932.

The good old days...



are back.

Join the Friends of Meadow Brook and experience the best of Americana. Check out all of our membership benefits and activities at

meadowbrookhall.org

Hall wins state grant

Meadow Brook has been awarded a grant of \$18,000 from the State of Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs (MCACA). The grant was awarded through the MCACA peer review process and was one of 401 applications to compete for fiscal year 2013 funding.

The grant dollars will directly support operational needs for The Hall's curatorial endeavors, including exhibition materials and student internships.

"As stewards of this independent auxiliary of Oakland University, and the fourth largest historic house museum in the United States, we need to raise significant dollars to be able to present informative and educational youth and adult programming that interprets the impact of

this country estate of the automotive aristocracy," said Geoff Upward, executive director of Meadow Brook Hall. "So this grant is much needed and appreciated."

Organizations receiving a MCACA grant award are required to match those funds with other public and private dollars. Local support of the project included a matching grant from The Matilda R. Wilson Fund, a foundation established by Meadow Brook and Oak-

land University founder Matilda Dodge Wilson in the 1940s.

Meadow Brook also receives significant private financial support annually from hundreds of individuals as well as corporations and foundations.



Volunteer support from the community includes more than 300 individuals who work as tour guides, curatorial assistants, hosts and hostesses, salespeople, landscaping and maintenance assistants and garden club members.

The MCACA peer review process allows for each grant application to be competitively considered by a panel of in-state and out-of-state arts and culture professionals. This ensures the taxpayers, who support this project through legislative appropriations, and all other visitors or residents in Michigan will have access to the highest quality arts and cultural experiences.

A complete list of grant awards around the state is available through the MCACA website at www.michiganadvantage.org/arts.

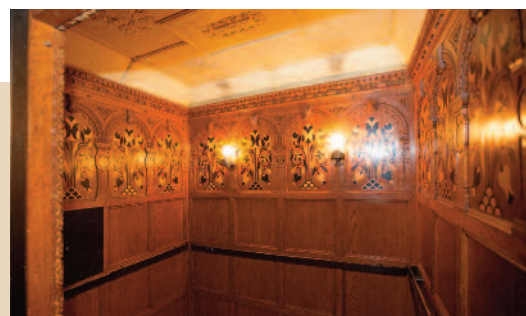


Upstairs, downstairs

At the relatively young age of 43, Matilda and Alfred Wilson had the foresight to include two elevators in the design of their new home, Meadow Brook Hall. Whether they anticipated that the grand staircase would not be so "grand" to climb in their approaching golden years, or the modern elevator was just the latest luxury to be installed in large manor homes, their initial investment of \$16,000 served the family well.

But as machinery goes, even the best-built in its day will eventually need repair or even overhaul. This is especially true for the two elevators, now approaching 84 years of age. Late last fall, The Hall began the major project to repair mechanical systems and restore original cab woodwork, doors and call buttons.

Visitors and catering staff will use the service elevator at the back of the house while the passenger cab in the master section of the house (pictured) is out of commission in June and July. Work on the freight elevator will commence this fall, with an expected completion in winter 2014.





Madelyn Rzakowski

Hall appoints new curator

This past February, Madelyn Rzakowski was appointed The Hall's new Curator, replacing Meredith Long, who had served in that capacity since 2009. Madelyn began her tenure at The Hall in 2009 as a curatorial assistant and in 2010 joined the marketing department as the Programs Coordinator, responsible for special events, youth programming and volunteer coordination.

Before coming to Meadow Brook, Madelyn worked in a variety of positions at the DePree Art Center in Holland, Michigan, the Carpenters Workshop Gallery in London, England, and the Northeast Oakland Historical Museum. She and Meredith co-authored the Images of America history, *Rochester and Rochester Hills* in 2011. Madelyn holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Art History from Hope College.

ON EXHIBIT:

The Belles of The Hall



Ever wonder why the bride tosses her wedding bouquet to her bridesmaids? Or why we call the trip the newly married couple takes after they exchange vows a honeymoon? Those are just some of the traditions and myths of the 20th century explored in Meadow Brook's exhibit, "The Belles of Meadow Brook Hall."

The exhibit takes a look at wedding traditions through the lens of the Dodge-Wilson family collection. Pictures, clothing and family artifacts are on display, including the magnificent ice blue satin wedding dress Frances Dodge wore in 1938, a tuxedo worn by Danny Dodge and historic images from his honeymoon, and Matilda Dodge Wilson's teal taffeta mother-of-the-bride dress which she wore to Barbara Wilson's wedding in 1953. Photographs from Matilda's marriage to Alfred Wilson in 1925 include a photo of her beautiful wedding ring. This special exhibit, which runs through May, is included in the price of a regular house tour.

Simply the Best

Meadow Brook Hall has been selected as a 2013 winner in "The Knot Best of Weddings," which will be featured on TheKnot.com, one of the top online wedding planning destinations for brides. The honor is especially meaningful because the selection was made by local brides.

"AMAZING! This place is just breathtaking! I used inside the house for the ceremony and the outside tent for the reception. The home is so historic and very Romantic! You really get what you pay for here. First Class."



VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

Squires: Men on a Mission

Tool boxes at the ready, the Meadow Brook Hall Squires are a group of men who contribute their time to assist in the preservation of The Hall and grounds and to support The Hall for special events and fund raising. Made up of 30-plus volunteers from diverse backgrounds, this essential group helps with maintenance, small repairs, gardening, tours, social functions, holiday decorating and much more.

According to Squires president, John Lohmeier, while their ongoing list of jobs is lengthy, one of their current projects is "...restoring the break room which was the original laundry room for the estate." Work has already begun, removing some storage closets that were added over the years, and repair-



Back row, left to right: Rich Parker, John Lohmeier, Bill Cichowski. Front row: Ron Lunney, Randy Walker.

ing and repainting the walls to return them close to their original condition.

However, the Squires aren't just a workforce. They contribute much to

the legacy of The Hall and often visit other historic sites throughout Michigan for education and inspiration. —Lisa Drummond



Frank Lawrence

HONEY-DO LIST

Here's a partial list of the dozens of projects the Squires completed in 2012, which greatly benefitted The Hall's preservation and maintenance efforts:

- Repaired interior doors and locks
- Constructed display materials for curatorial exhibits
- Re-set patio stones at Knole Cottage
- Cleaned gutters
- Served as hosts for the Hug-the-Hall event
- Maintained the American flag atop the flag deck
- Cleaned The Hall's stained-glass windows
- Painted and plastered restroom in Family Garage
- Cleaned up the entrance woodland
- Constructed chair rail protectors
- Painted exterior sign frames
- Repaired irrigation system

Summer's Sizzlin' at The Hall

JAZZ IN THE GARDEN

Be sure to join us this summer for our popular Jazz in the Garden concert series. Guests will listen to live cool jazz while experiencing the ambiance of The Great Estate. Sip some wine and have some eats while enjoying the jazz vibe. This summer's line-up welcomes back an MBH favorite, George "Sax" Benson, who performs June 20. Coming July 18 is the Oakland University Jazz quartet and closing the series, and performing at The Hall for the first time, will be Sheila Landis on August 22.

Tickets are \$30 per person and include hors d'oeuvres and a main floor tour. A cash bar is available and reservations are required. The concerts begin at 7 p.m. and run until 10 p.m.

SUMMER TOURING

Summer tours begin May 28 and run through September 1. Tours are offered Monday through Sunday at 11:30 a.m., 12:30 p.m., 1:30 p.m. and 2:30 p.m. Reservations are not required.

DECADES OF DRESSES EXHIBIT

A major special exhibit and tour of the Meadow Brook Hall fashion collection opens May 28 and runs through September 1, 2013.

TWILIGHT TUESDAYS

If Jazz music isn't your thing, then be sure to visit The Hall for our Twilight Tuesdays evening tour. Guests will experience a self-guided house tour and enjoy music on Meadow Brook's beautiful Loggia Terrace. Wine will be available to purchase by the glass. Tickets are \$10 per person. Twilight Tuesdays will be June 18, July 23 and August 27 from 6-9 p.m. Reservations are not required.

BEHIND-THE-SCENES TOUR

Just when you think you've seen it all. Back by popular demand, the Behind-the-Scenes tour will be available during our summer tour schedule. Explore rarely seen areas of the home on this extended tour, which includes staff wings, bathrooms, closets & playrooms. Tours are offered Saturday and Sunday at 12 p.m. & 1:30 p.m. Reservations are not required. The tour begins May 28 and runs through October.

ESTATE WALKING TOUR

NEW! This summer come and experience our new Estate Walking Tour. This guided tour will take you around the Estate gardens and grounds, past numerous outbuildings and into Knole Cottage (the playhouse of Frances



Dodge) and the newly opened Danny Dodge's Log Cabin. Learn the history of Meadow Brook's landscape and see all fourteen of the beautifully manicured gardens. This new tour will be offered daily at 12:30 p.m. and 2 p.m. Reservations are not required. The tour begins May 28 and runs through October.

For more information or to make a reservation for a Meadow Brook Hall special event, visit www.meadowbrookhall.org or call (248) 364-6263.

World's Greatest feted

Wing Commander, the chestnut American Saddlebred foaled at Meadow Brook's Dodge Stables in 1943, became arguably the greatest show horse of all time . . . of any breed.

Meadow Brook was the fortunate setting in March for Wing Commander's 70th birthday celebration, sponsored by The American Saddlebred Association of Michigan. Dignitaries from around the country attended, including several members of the Dodge family.

Beginning in 1948, Wing Commander, bred and owned by Frances Dodge and trained and ridden by Earl Teater, won six consecutive Five-Gaited World Grand Championships, the first of only two horses to do so. He retired to stud service at Frances Dodge Van Lennep's Castleton Farms operation in Lexington, Kentucky, and became the most successful breeding stallion of all time. **MB**



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THIS NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK



*Fred Christian, owner,
C & A Building Movers with
Danny's Cabin.*

On the move

On a cold wintery day in January, with temperatures hovering in single digits, a moving truck towed Danny Dodge's historic cabin to its new home in the woods adjacent to Meadow Brook Hall. Despite the cold, the day-long move – in two trips, one for each section of the structure – could not have gone smoother.

As with any conservation and preservation project, however, the move was preceded by



Above: Danny's Cabin was moved in two sections on January 17 from OU's golf course to its new location west of The Hall (pictured below). Right: The Sheep Barn makes its way from OU's main campus on March 23 to its new location east of The Hall's Entrance Drive.

“propping out” the spaces with original and period furnishings and artifacts, and likely the addition of a Dodge automobile for workshop display (Danny Dodge worked on cars in the workshop).

Once completed, the cabin will serve as a site for youth education programs, such as Boy Scout and Girl Scout programs, summer camps and special events. The cabin will also be included in The Hall's new estate/grounds tour that will launch in the coming months.

Barn raisin'

Two months after Danny's Cabin rolled over hill and field to the Meadow Brook woodlands, D & B House Movers of Monroe, Michigan, hoisted a 1940s sheep barn from the northwest corner of the university's campus and trucked it down Meadow Brook Road, Sunset Lane and Mansion Road to its new location on a rolling meadow adjacent to Meadow Brook's main visitor lot.

Originally a sheep shed located on the Cook Farm, which had been purchased by Matilda Dodge in 1924 as she expanded Meadow Brook Farms, a new barn was built on the site by the Wilsons in the late 1940s/early 1950s. As the university grew, the barn over time was surrounded by a student parking lot and adaptively reused for residence hall storage. With construction on new campus housing beginning this spring, the barn was no longer needed by the residence halls.

Once installed on its new site, the barn will be repainted to match the former Wilson Stable and Riding Ring (now the home of OU Inc. and OU School of Engineering researchers). Meadow Brook will use the building for grounds and gardens storage, freeing up space in the former Visitors Garage for interpretive programming, and include it on the walking tour.

In addition to D&B, the moving project team included Biernat & Associates-Architects (Northville), Kasco Construction Services (Royal Oak), OU's department of Facilities Management and Hall staff. **MB**



DRESSED for Success

BY KIM ZELINSKI

In the span of
her lifetime,

from the turn-of-the-century to mid-century, Matilda Dodge Wilson's petite silhouette would conform to six decades of American fashion raves and rebellions in an ever-changing system greatly influenced by social, political and economic conditions. Matilda's fashion history, documented in numerous photos and original costumes, represents a visual pageant of luxury, sophistication, simple elegance and subtle assertion of status.

Photos by Rick Smith, styling by Debra Lashbrook



Matilda Dodge, c. 1912



*Clockwise: Paper fan, c. 1900;
Evening gown, c.1913; Harry Collins
evening gown, c.1913 and blouse and
skirt ensemble, c.1910; umbrella han-
dle with "MR" monogram, c.1905.*



The Age of Opulence 1900-1913

As a young American woman at the turn of the century (she was born in 1883), Matilda Rausch's initiation into fashion conformity paralleled the arrival of the "modern" woman: educated, physically active and independent, and beautiful. These years also saw lavish fashion and the peak of luxury living, especially for the very rich.

During this time, Matilda's station in life progressed from middle-class "pink-collared" worker to the wealthy "class of leisure" when she married auto supplier John Dodge in 1907. As a newcomer to the upper strata of Detroit society, Matilda learned the intricacies of fashion etiquette. A daily routine could include up to four changes of clothing. From tea gown to evening dress, these were laborious tasks that required the assistance of a lady's maid to maneuver the multiple layers of undergarments, including the tightly laced "S" bend corset.



Flappers and Jazz 1914-1929

No other fashion era would display such a variation in women's styles as the years 1914 to 1929. While the headlines of the period included war, Prohibition, jazz and the Art-Deco movement, these 15 years for Matilda represented the gamut of tragedy and joy. Her wardrobe depicted society's extremes between mourning attire and hemlines that inched higher and waistlines that inched lower. While staying in France in 1923, Matilda acquired the latest designs of Paris haute couture, including the era's most iconic style, the flapper dress.



Clockwise from above: Evening gown, c. 1924; ostrich feather fan, c. 1920; gold shoes, c. 1926; Paul Poiret day dress, c. 1924.

Opposite page, clockwise: Evening purse, c. 1930; evening gowns, c. 1932-1936; Frances Dodge debut, 1933.



The Glamour Years 1930-1938

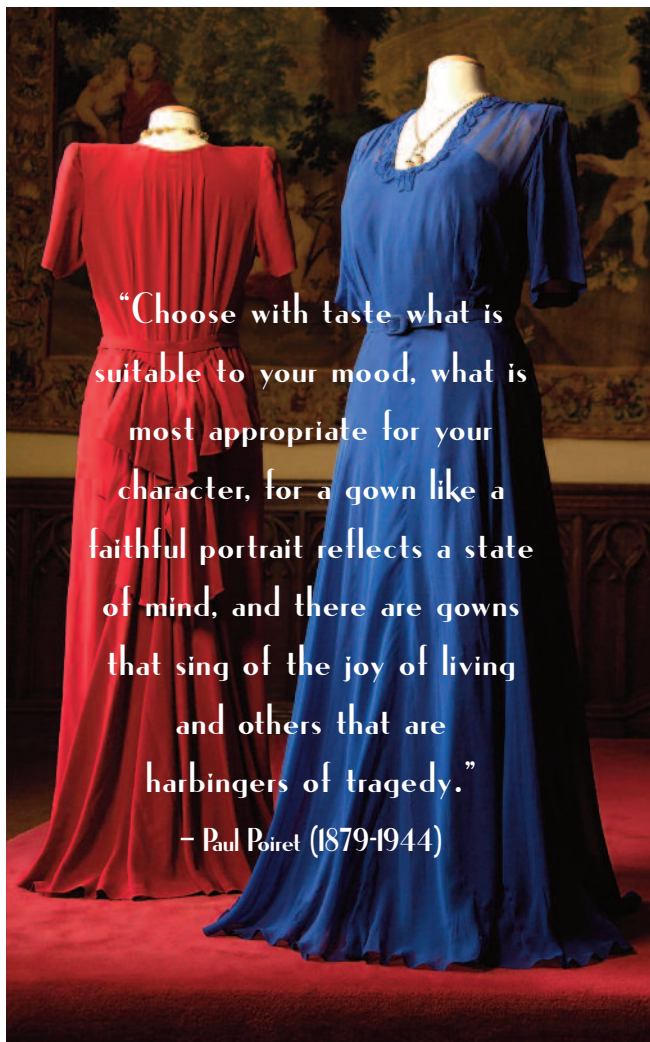
In sharp contrast to the indulgences of the Roaring Twenties, the Great Depression reflected leaner times and fashion styles adjusted. The curvy silhouette was back, and just as Dow-Jones stock values dropped, so too did women's hemlines. New styles reflected a subtle elegance and "womanly" look. Clothes were feminine and tidy by day, with a return to real glamour at night. The years between 1929 and 1938 were the peak of social entertaining for Matilda and her daughter, Frances Dodge. The beautiful gowns worn during Meadow Brook's housewarming party, Frances' debutante ball, weddings and evenings at the theatre were custom-made in the finest of fabrics and showcased the latest trends of the decade.





Fashion Rations 1939-1949

The hallmarks of 1940s fashion were portrayals of the effect World War II had on everyday life. Women dressed down in this time of shortages and rationing and slogans like “make do and mend” were prominent. The new silhouette included narrow hips, padded shoulders and all modes of hats. Matilda wore this “New Look,” as it was dubbed, during the business week, a practical choice for those daily trips to her Detroit office. Day dresses and two-piece suits were essential wardrobe selections.



Clockwise from above left: Peggy Hoyt day dress with satin shoes and hat, c. 1935; beaded purse, c. 1940; Peggy Hoyt day dress, c. 1939; evening gowns, c. 1940. Opposite page, upper right: Evening gown, c. 1960; middle, floral day hat, c. 1950; lower left, evening gown, c. 1945.

Matron Meets Mod 1950-1967

In the last two decades of Matilda's life, a progressive change in American fashion and lifestyle came rushing in. While styles in the post-war decade emphasized fragile femininity in the form of soft shoulders, full, billowing skirts and little hats with veils and feathers, the late '60s depicted cutting edge styles such as hot pants and go-go boots, ushering in a second wave of the "modern" woman. History had come full circle. Matilda Wilson balanced her traditional role of society matron with that of her new role as "godmother" to students of a university. She kept company with both generations in a variety of social activities such as lunches, teas and balls. And, although she maintained the appropriate fashion etiquette for a woman of her age, she was always keen to the latest styles.



In a single lifetime, there is reasonable certainty that today's woman will never experience the dramatic change in fashion styles as Matilda Wilson's generation did. From the conservative ankle length hobble skirt of the early 1900s to the thigh-high mini-skirt of the 1960s, she witnessed the full range. Although her fashion anthology appears to be an undulating graph of rising and falling necklines, waistlines and hemlines, Matilda's true achievement was her sublime flair for fashion and belief in the possibility that beautiful clothes can enhance the charm of the woman who wears them. **MB**

Don't miss...

"Decades of Dresses," a major special exhibit and tour of the Meadow Brook Hall fashion collection, opening May 28 and running through September 1, 2013.



MASTER OF THE MANOR

BY KAREL BOND LUCANDER



a quiet, unassuming husband,
stepfather and father, worked
hand-in-hand with Matilda
Dodge Wilson to build a family
life ... and the Meadow Brook
legacy

After scraping clumps of earth from his boots, Alfred Wilson dusts off his Tattersall jacket, opens the door, and ducks slightly as he steps through the back entrance to his home. Making the rounds to check on his Hampshire hogs and prize cattle and sheep was commonplace for this master of Meadow Brook. Unlike many of his social-strata contemporaries, he put in a good day's work, whether it was around the farm or at his office in Detroit's Fisher Building.

It wasn't that he needed the income, but Alfred Gaston Wilson was more determined than ever to continue being productive after making Matilda R. Dodge his wife. When Alfred married Matilda — the widow of John F. Dodge and a member of Detroit's automotive aristocracy — the spotlight shone brightly on him. Matilda was a queen in the city's celestial sphere and one of the world's wealthiest women. Though he was a successful businessman before they wed, her celebrity would overshadow that. His station was similar to that of Philip Mountbatten, who became the husband of Queen Elizabeth II some two decades later. This was an era in which men were expected to completely embody the traits of caretaker and breadwinner. To become the husband of one of these powerful women would require someone self-assured and able to ignore the rumor-mongers speculating about him marrying for privilege and comfort. He adored Matilda enough to endure the slings and arrows of a closely examined domestic life — until death did him part. Alfred, it seems, knew what he was getting into, and he was up to the challenge.

Yet Alfred's penchant for proving himself and realizing success on his own terms would happen long before he crossed paths with her.

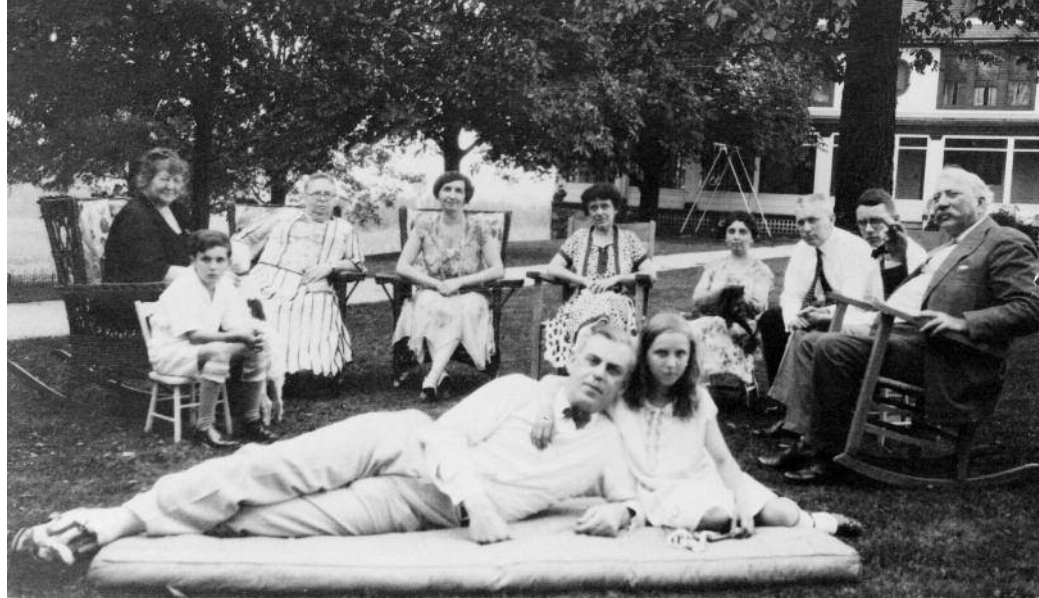
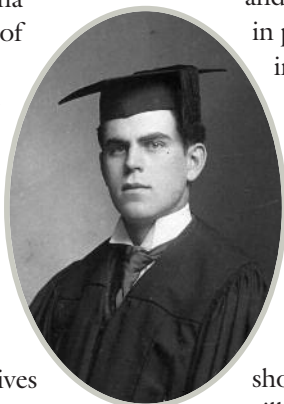
Alfred G. Wilson was born March 31, 1883 in Lawrenceburg, Ind., to Samuel and Eliza Wilson, a Scotch-Irish Presbyterian minister and his wife. Being raised under the influence of a clergyman would steer him toward a lifelong involvement with his church. In 1900, his family relocated to Wisconsin, where he would attend Beloit College and

become active in sports and the Beta Theta Pi Fraternity. After graduation in 1906, he entered the lumber business. In 1919, he moved to Detroit with his brother Donald and formed the Wilson Lumber Company. The business first served as a wholesale distributor of lumber, but eventually began manufacturing operations, with sawmills in Perry, Fla., and Fort Wayne, Ind. The brothers made a small fortune during the tag end of the building boom in the 1920s.

And now that his business was thriving, Alfred could turn his attention to personal matters.

Known for his gentlemanly manners and tall, debonair appearance, Alfred Wilson was considered one of the most handsome bachelors in Detroit. By the early '20s, having never been married, he seemed like an impossible catch. But he caught the attention of Matilda Dodge, who had been widowed when John Dodge died in 1920. They met at the First Presbyterian Church, where they both attended services. Alfred was a consoling influence when her youngest daughter, Anna Margaret Dodge, died of the measles in 1924. Walking beside one another, they must have been quite the sight: her demure 5-foot figure next to his lanky 6-foot-3 frame. After courting for a short time, the two decided to unite their lives in holy matrimony.

"I am very happy today, of course. It is one of the supreme days in any man's life, his wedding day. I seem to be having the best of luck, fine weather and I feel well except for a slight cold. We will leave directly after the ceremony for New York and will sail at midnight on the *Aquitania*. Our plans include a trip down through southern France and on into Venice, seeking the towns and districts that Mrs. Dodge has not seen. We will make Paris and London on our return after a brief stop



in the Alps," he said in a June 29, 1925, *Detroit News* clipping.

When they returned from their honeymoon, they lived in a farmhouse on their property in Rochester. There, in 1926, they began building their 110-room, 88,000-square-foot Tudor Revival-style residence, Meadow Brook Hall, which would eventually take three years and \$4 million to complete. Both Wilsons took an active interest in the design and construction of The Hall; Alfred, in particular, contributed invaluable insight into both exterior and interior wood selections, which were so critical to the soundness and livability of the building.

Along with constructing their dream home, Alfred had something else on his mind: expanding their family.

Though Matilda would miscarry shortly after they married, Alfred was still hoping to have children with her. Matilda was apprehensive. She was in her early 40s now and already a stepmother to John Dodge's children from his first marriage and mother to her own two (Frances and Danny). Alfred would press her to consider adoption, and she eventually relented. In 1930, they brought home a toddler son, Richard, from The Cradle adoption agency in Chicago. The next year, they would return to adopt a baby girl, Barbara.

Though many of his peers were now



Top: summer picnic at the Farmhouse, Alfred with Frances Dodge; seated, Matilda Wilson and Danny Dodge, c. 1926. Above: Alfred with Richard and Barbara Wilson, c. 1936; Left, Alfred, c. 1906.

becoming grandparents, Alfred embraced the opportunity to become a father, regardless of his age. When he wasn't working, Richard and Barbara have fond memories of him taking them to watch Detroit Tiger ball-games, driving to farm auctions, going to the Wilson Theatre, which Alfred and Matilda built in Detroit in 1928 (later renamed the Music Hall Center for the Performing Arts), and horse-back riding or taking long walks through the meandering acres of Meadow Brook Farms.

In January 1934, he and Matilda



Clockwise from left: With farmhands, c. 1946; with prized Hereford and Matilda, c. 1946; with Matilda in garden, c. 1955; in Detroit office, c. 1948; on Belgian horse hitch, c. 1961.

would leave the young ones in the care of their nurse while they enjoyed a whirlwind tour of the continents, compliments of their adult daughter, Frances M. Dodge. She had received a portion of her inheritance from her father's estate and invited her mother and stepfather to accompany her on a tour aboard the *Conte Savoya* into darkest Africa, on to India, and finishing with the sights of Europe. They set sail from New York, heading first for Gibraltar. Always interested in adding to their estate's menagerie, they would return with 36 new horses, a zebra and donkey, two giant turtles and seven rare Pekingese in tow.

After this excursion, Alfred would continue on as president of the family lumber company. But he was also transitioning into a pastoral existence as he and Matilda continued to add acreage and livestock to their farm holdings, frequently showing their animals at state and county fairs, winning prizes throughout the Midwest and Canada. Overseeing farm properties and watching over investments became Alfred's full-time pursuits. In 1942, he and his brother sold Wilson Lumber Company.

When he wasn't working, Alfred liked to play a few rounds of golf, read and listen to music. A deacon at their church, he also enjoyed singing bass in the choir. He was active in community affairs in Oakland County, serving as chairman of the county's community and war fund campaigns in 1942-43,

and director for many years of the Pontiac and Avon Township community chests. He was also a director of the Boys Club of America in Pontiac and Detroit. He and Matilda enjoyed socializing and dining at area clubs, and they were active members of several, including Bloomfield Hills Country Club and the Detroit Club.

They also hosted legendary New Year's Eve parties, where they would play cards all night long and feast on lobster buffets at midnight. Many friends, who drove across town from their homes in Grosse Pointe or Bloomfield Hills, would be invited to stay overnight in the Wilsons' "modest" home. Richard and Barbara would invite their own friends and happily co-



mingle, age appropriately, at this annual soiree. It was some-

thing everyone looked forward to.

By the mid-1950s, Matilda and Alfred were ushering in the autumn season of their lives. Meadow Brook Hall was becoming a bit too expansive as children moved on and staff dwindled, so they built a smaller home for themselves on the estate in the Prairie style, calling it Sunset Terrace. They used The Hall from that point on for special family events or fund-raising functions.

In 1957, Alfred and Matilda donated their 1,500-acre estate, \$2 million and dozens of structures, including the original farmhouse, Sunset Terrace and





Meadow Brook Hall, to Michigan State University to form a branch campus. The two homes were to pass to the university upon their deaths. In 1963, the campus known as MSU-O would become Oakland University.

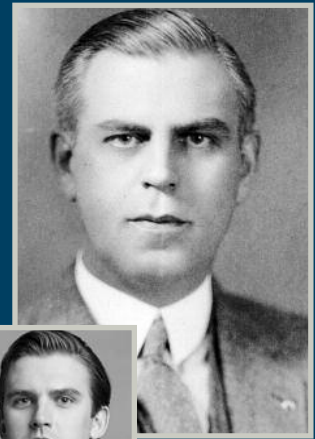
But a year earlier, on April 6, 1962, Alfred G. Wilson, age 79, died of a heart attack at their winter home in Scottsdale, Ariz. He was returned to Michigan for a simple service at First Presbyterian Church in Detroit, where he and Matilda first met. He was then entombed in Woodlawn Cemetery, the final resting place for many in Detroit society.

After Matilda's death in 1967, Alfred's wife of nearly 37 years would lay beside him in the pale granite mausoleum they designed together. It was near the south wall of the Dodge family mausoleum, where her first husband, John Dodge, was interred in



1920. Matilda wished to be buried beside Alfred, as he was the partner she spent most of her life with. She was a strong woman, and this quiet, towering figure of a man offered her a love and companionship that she relied upon for decades, and a life that left an enduring legacy of historic preservation and education. **MB**

Karel Bond Lucander is a freelance writer from Davidson, North Carolina



DOWNTON ABBEY MEETS MEADOW BROOK HALL

The PBS Masterpiece series, *Downton Abbey*, portrays life at the fictional Yorkshire country estate of the aristocratic Crawley family and their servants. Though the story begins in the post-Edwardian era, these characters could have eventually and ironically collided with the real-life characters of Meadow Brook Hall.

In the photos above, you may notice a more than slight resemblance between the 1920s-era, debonair Alfred G. Wilson and handsome actor Dan Stevens, who plays Matthew Crawley. Crawley, husband of Lady Mary, died in a car crash in the final episode of Season 3.

Kim Zelinski, director of museum operations and advancement at The Hall and associate editor of *MEADOW BROOK MAGAZINE*, recognized the resemblance between Alfred Wilson and Matthew Crawley, and the *Detroit Free Press* recently published a short piece about it.

Watch for more similarities between *Downton Abbey* and Meadow Brook Hall as the series continues to unfold.

ROYAL

Indoor bathrooms were rare in 1920s America,
but Meadow Brook's spaces are even today
models of design and functionality

FLUSH



BY KIM ZELINSKI

In the realm of domestic modernization, it can be argued that nothing has transformed the world we live in as much as the “modern” bathroom. Although necessity may have been its motivation, similar to other great inventions of the early 20th century, money and innovative manufacturing made it happen. This household marvel was the confluence of several developments: a perfected plumbing and sewer system; the inventions of the flush toilet, stationary tub and sink; and the realization that they could all coexist in one room.

The fact that in 1921 only one percent of the homes in the United States had indoor plumbing also speaks to the reality that initially the modern bathroom was an amenity to be enjoyed by the well-to-do.

And certainly budget would be of little concern to Matilda and Alfred Wilson when they built Meadow Brook Hall between 1926 and 1929 and incorporated 24 spacious bathrooms, well-appointed with high-end fixtures, gold-plated hardware, floor-to-ceiling decorative tile and other



lavish accoutrements (in the master sections of the house).

At the top of the scale in both luxury and size, Matilda Wilson’s five-room bedchamber offered the ultimate retreat into boudoir extravagance. The chamber included a spacious sleeping room, dressing room, two wardrobe closets and a 220-square-foot bathroom with private enclosures for the toilet and foot bath. The bathroom itself featured a built-in closet for storing perfumes and bath salts, Art-Deco styled mirrored vanities and a substantial daybed used for lounging and as a place for Matilda to have her hair done. The room was exquisitely tiled in lavender-rose and green Rookwood tiles, including its main showpiece, a tiled mural depicting the Greek myth, Leda and the Swan.

Frances Dodge’s suite, decorated in a style appropriate for the young mistress of the house, portrayed a cheery, feminine elegance of soft pink tile work accented with hand-painted flower and



Above: Nursery bathtub and faucet; left, Matilda Wilson’s bathroom vanity.

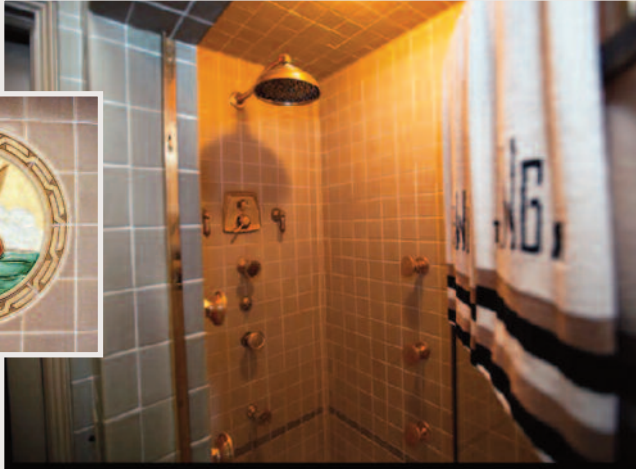
dragonfly motifs. Frances also had a built-in cabinet to store toiletries and a magnifying mirror that could be extended from the wall to the window for added light to apply her make-up. And tucked just behind her wardrobe room was a princess-like turret with a curved window seat.

While the ladies’ bathrooms dripped with feminine elegance, Alfred Wilson’s and Danny Dodge’s bath suites sported a masculine sophistication. Each of their bathrooms included

Decorating advice from Elsie deWolfe, author of the 1923 book "The House in Good Taste." On dressing room mirrors: "Have your mirrors so arranged that you get a good strong light by day, and have plenty of electric lights all around the dressing-mirrors for night use. In other words, know the worst before you go out!"



Above: English Room bathroom; left, Alfred Wilson's shower and Rookwood tiled medallion; below, Danny Dodge bathroom and Rookwood tiled medallion. Opposite page: Frances Dodge bathroom.





From outhouse to in-house

Just how the modern bathroom made its way into homes in the early 20th century was an evolution of how people viewed personal hygiene, along with changes in technologies and room design.

The concept of an indoor toilet didn't gain mainstream popularity in the United States until after World War I, when American troops came home from Europe full of talk about the "slick invention" they experienced abroad.

Invention of the S-curve discharge pipe, which prevented dangerous sewer gases from backing up, brought acceptance to the idea of including toilets in the main living spaces of the home. So, over a relatively short span of years, the "throne" would move from an outhouse in the far corner of the backyard to an enclosure attached to the house (but only accessible from outside) to an addition at the back end of the house, and then finally to a location inside the home.

Americans began remodeling spaces in their homes – dressing rooms, bedrooms and closets – to accommodate the modern bathroom. By the 1920s, American building codes were requiring indoor bathrooms in all new single-family residential construction. The market for plumbing and fixtures grew by more than 350 percent from 1929 to 1954.

Now the indoor American bathroom is as much of an institution as, say, the late comedian Bob Hope, who once said, "I grew up with six brothers. That's how I learned to dance – waiting for the bathroom." **MB**



floor-to-ceiling Rookwood tiles in earth tones with a centerpiece; Alfred's a sailing ship medallion and Danny's an inset depicting birds and fish. In addition to the soaking tubs, both could indulge in the ultimate shower experience. The shower stalls were equipped with both overhead and side shower heads that could deliver a soothing massage.

No other room in Meadow Brook Hall carried the spirit of a theme through with such charm and delight as the Nursery suite. Rookwood tiles, portraying characters from Mother Goose nursery rhymes, decorated both the bedroom fireplace and the adjoining bathroom. As young toddlers, Richard and Barbara Wilson's bath time was likely a playful occasion enhanced by the border of nursery rhyme tiles that included such favorites as Humpty Dumpty, the Cat and the Fiddle and Little Miss Muffet.

Of The Hall's four guest rooms, the English Room (used by Richard Wilson as a bedroom and later as a guest room) was an unexpected departure when it came to the bathroom. A French imported console and mirror were paired with cherry red, black and butter yellow tile work, accented with a bold pattern of abstract floral tiles. The room virtually screamed Art Deco.

Although 24 bathrooms may seem excessive, especially for the chamber maids who were responsible for their daily cleaning, it was a reasonable quantity considering the active lifestyle of the Dodge and Wilson family. Today, the family's private bathroom suites, the en suites and powder rooms for guests and the shared communal bathrooms for the service staff, give visitors a glimpse into the early history of what is still considered the most essential room in the home, albeit a home of the rich and famous.



2012 Meadow Brook Donor Report

In November, The Hall mounted a new donor recognition wall in the Fountain Room on the entertainment level. Cumulative donors are highlighted, along with the previous year's annual givers and members. The new wall also includes updated information on all donors listed on the plaque that formerly hung in the front entry hall.

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Staff wrap rings for the charter class in Alfred Wilson's Study. Inset: The OU Charter Class received rings set with diamonds (men's and women's models above), compliments of Matilda Wilson. Matilda had her own ring, plus a pin (above), compliments of the Charter Class.

What a send-off!

In April 1963, the night before Oakland University's first graduation, Mrs. Wilson gave the charter class a prom. "We had dinner and a society orchestra in the ballroom at Meadow Brook Hall," says '63 grad Beverly Donato Miller. "It was a fairy tale. "We danced until 3 a.m."

But the students have more than just a memory of that night. "We weren't able to order our class rings until almost January of our senior year because of the university name change (from Michigan State University-Oakland to Oakland University)," recalls Tom Werth ('63).

"We were expecting to get our class rings on the day of graduation because of the short delivery time," Werth continued. "While we were all downstairs dancing in the ballroom, Mrs. Wilson said she wanted all of us to come up to her study. 'I have something for you,' she said. In the study she had all the little gift boxes with a card with our names in front of them. Inside the cards were the deposits that we had paid on our rings and inside the boxes were our gold rings for graduation. They're the only OU rings that have a diamond in them, compliments of Mrs. Wilson."

"The party didn't end until the next day," Ronald Miller ('63), Beverly's husband, says, "after the students ate breakfast under a tent in the Meadow Brook rose garden."

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Weddings at The Great Estate

Theresa Finck Photography

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Meadow Brook is pleased to add five new private label wines to its Museum Store portfolio. All are produced and bottled for The Hall by Rose Valley Winery in Rose City, Michigan. Make sure you stop in to take home a bottle of each. We also carry a full line of creative accessories, a few of which are featured here.



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