

# inside OAKLAND

40th Anniversary Issue 1957-97

A special issue in honor of OU's first Founders' Day, April 18, 1997

## A diamond in the rough

### Founding Oakland University not on the mind of Matilda Dodge during early years



Michigan State University President John Hannah and Matilda Wilson break ground for the new university in 1958.

When Matilda and John Dodge bought Meadow Brook Farm in 1906, their intention was to have a place to take their children, Frances and Danny, for outdoor excursions on weekends and in the summers.

But 1919 through 1929 were tumultuous ones for Matilda Dodge. Her husband, John,

one of the Dodge brothers who founded Dodge Motor Company, died in 1910, a victim of an influenza epidemic. The young widow found herself the owner of an unfinished \$4-million Tudor-style mansion in Grosse Pointe that her late husband had started to build. Much of Detroit society expected her to complete this home and move into it when she became engaged to Alfred Wilson in 1925. Instead, Matilda Wilson ventured down another surprising path in her life.

In 1926, she and Alfred Wilson moved to Meadow Brook Farm and began work on Meadow Brook Hall. The magnificent 100-room mansion, the fourth-largest private home in the country, was completed in 1929. The hall became the new home for the two adopted Wilson children, Barbara and Richard, and Matilda's natural children, Frances and Dan Dodge, who were also married in the hall. Tommy Dorsey's band played at Frances' 25th birthday celebration when she inherited her share of the Dodge trust fund. Later in the 50s, Barbara Wilson's debut and her marriage were grand affairs at the hall.

The area surrounding Meadow Brook Farm was growing at a rapid rate and the Oakland County Planning Commission decided in 1955 that an institution of higher education should be located in the county. Several community leaders suggested to the Wilsons that their 1,500-acre farm would be an ideal location to establish a new campus. Matilda Wilson, having served as a member of the Michigan State University Board of Trustees, was well-acquainted with MSU President John Hannah. When Hannah and Vice President Woody Varner approached the

Wilson, they generously gave their land and \$2 million to MSU for construction of the first university buildings. Their generosity and enthusiasm provided a spark that encouraged others to join in the challenge of building and sustaining a new university.

In late 1958, university promoters invited a panel of distinguished citizens and educators to come to the hall to ratify the general principles developed by the several curriculum groups at MSU. Called the Meadow Brook Seminars (see related story on page 4), the efforts capitalized on the extensive work of MSU planners.

The initial group of 24 faculty was appointed in early 1959; about 570 students, all freshmen, were admitted and registered in September 1959. During the first several years, the

These programs became the basis for a three-divisional organization of humanities, social sciences and mathematics, and



The first sign of construction touted the name Michigan State University Oakland.

science. Also, in 1963, just before the first commencement, the name Michigan State University-Oakland was formally changed to Oakland University (there was some debate whether to use a hyphen). The first graduates received baccalaureates in spring 1963.

Matilda Wilson presented diamond rings to members of the first graduating class for their efforts and success.

And from that point on, OU was known by many as a "diamond in the rough."



Harold Fitzgerald and Matilda Wilson pose for the camera at the Fitzgerald House groundbreaking.

professional programs were treated as majors with a strong liberal arts emphasis.

Groundbreaking for the first Intramural Sports and Recreation Building took place October 12, 1961.



# Caught on videotape



Paul and Alice Tomboulia take a break from their work on their oral history project, *The OU Chronicles*. Paul Tomboulia is an Oakland University professor of Chemistry and longtime chair of the department. Tomboulia, Richard J. Burke, professor, Philosophy; and James H. McKay, professor, Mathematical Sciences; are the last of the charter faculty and staff still working at Oakland.

## Old Oaks spin their tales about OU's history for the camera — and for posterity

They came to Oakland University with the highest of credentials and a willingness to blaze new

trails in higher education.

The Old Oaks — OU's founding faculty and staff — are the subject of Paul and Alice Tomboulia's oral history project, *The OU Chronicles*.

Paul Tomboulia, professor, Chemistry, received a doctorate from the University of Illinois and taught subsequently at the University of Minnesota. He and Alice have a unique perspective on OU's growth and development.

"The people in those first few years were very important to the building of the university," says Alice Tomboulia. "A record of their accomplishments, their character, just what kind of people they were, is what we're trying to get at."

*The Chronicles* will consist of audiotaped and videotaped interviews with early OU pioneers along with photographs and transcripts. Before taping, guests are given a common set of

*"This is the youngest faculty, with the highest percentage of earned doctoral degrees of any university in America and it is a faculty with the greatest amount of enthusiasm in the land."*

— Woody Varner, OU Chancellor from 1958-70

questions to consider. Questions cover topics such as the guests' first connection to Michigan State University-Oakland and their accomplishments at the university.

The first set of 11 interviews will soon be available in the Kresge Library. The Tomboulia's hope to continue the series with another set focusing on students from the charter

class and other individuals who contributed significantly to the university during its early years.

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## Who was it named for?

Many of Oakland University's classroom buildings, residence halls and laboratory facilities are named after significant people. Here's a sampling:



### O'Dowd Hall ▲

This classroom building was named for Jan and Donald O'Dowd. Donald O'Dowd served as OU's second chancellor for two months in 1970 before serving as president from 1970-1979.

### Dodge Hall of Engineering

John F. Dodge was Matilda Dodge Wilson's first husband. The engineering building was named to honor him and brother Horace E. Dodge for their contributions to engineering in the automotive industry.

### Fitzgerald House

Harold A. Fitzgerald was publisher of the *Pontiac Press* and served as the first head of the Michigan State University-Oakland Foundation. His gift of

\$45,000 furnished Fitzgerald and Anibal Houses.

### Hamlin Hall

Delos Hamlin was chairman of the Oakland County Board of Supervisors and served on the MSU-O Foundation board.

### Hannah Hall of Science

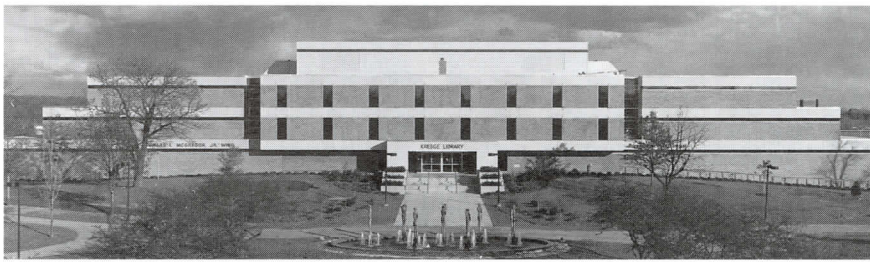
John Hannah, president, Michigan State University, helped to found MSU-O.

### Katke-Cousins Golf Course

Mr. and Mrs. Marvin Katke and Mr. and Mrs. Harold Cousins, friends and neighbors, contributed \$500,000 to develop the golf course. Marvin Katke was chairman of the OU Board of Trustees from 1970-72 and served as president of the OU Foundation. Harold Cousins served as OUF vice president.

### Lepley Sports Center

Hollie L. Lepley was a former assistant professor of physical education and swim coach at the University of Nebraska who was hired to guide the first recreation program at MSU-O. He served at OU from 1959-79.



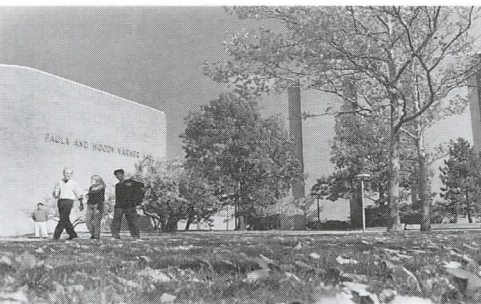
### Kresge Library ▲

Sebastian S. Kresge, founder of the Kresge store chain and creator of the Kresge Foundation, donated \$1.5 million to build the original library building. One of the new wings is named for Howard McGregor, former director of the OU Foundation and longtime OU supporter.



### Vandenberg Hall ▲

Arthur H. Vandenberg was a senator from Michigan who actively participated in the formation of the United Nations.



### Varner Hall ▲

Woody Varner served as the university's first chancellor from 1958-1970.

### Pryale House

Mr. and Mrs. Harry M. Pryale of Bloomfield Hills made this building possible through a gift from their Pryale Foundation.

### Van Wagoner Hall

Murray D. VanWagoner was a former Michigan governor and resident of Oakland County. This hall was named in honor of his contributions to higher education during his term as governor.

**40**  
OAKLAND UNIVERSITY  
Pioneering the future

# oakland FIRSTS

## First student — Lynn Anderson Ruth

Lynn Anderson Ruth registered for classes in 1959 at Michigan State University-Oakland, received student number 000001 and made history as the first MSU-O student. Chosen from a pool of students who finished in the top half of their class, Anderson Ruth recalls the university's initial tough academic standards.



"Back then, it was known as 'Egghead University,'" she says. "We had 500 students in my freshman class and only about 120 graduated."

Robert G. Hoopes, MSU-O faculty dean from 1959-61 and English professor, defined an egghead as "an intellectual in the good old sense of the word. We want to make eggheads out of each and every one of you. Eggheads ask questions that need asking."

Anderson Ruth fondly remembers her college days, especially helping to create the original Student Senate, the OU chorus and Senior Ball at Meadow Brook Hall.

"We only had the Foundation buildings for classrooms, we had no residence halls and no library building, we created all

our clubs and wrote our constitutional by-laws," she says. "It was fun creating from scratch. You learn so much doing this for yourself."

## First employee — George Karas

George Karas was responsible for the maintenance of Meadow Brook Hall and Meadow Brook Estate and the physical plant at Michigan State University-Oakland.

He also coordinated the construction of the buildings for the university, starting with the Foundation Halls and the student center.

He helped plan for the additions of the library, intramural building for athletics and Dodge Hall of Engineering. He and his wife lived in a cottage on the estate for seven years.

One of Karas' fondest memories was when he, Woody Varner and MSU campus planners Milt Baron and Harold Lautner moved the prospective campus from north of Deer Lake on Adams Road to the current location. The decision to move the campus site was made in half an hour, as they were driving around Meadow Brook Farms.

Karas retired in 1987.



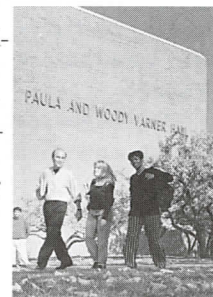
## First chancellor — Woody Varner

Woody Varner had served as vice president of Michigan State University under President John Hannah and was present at Meadow Brook Hall when Hannah asked Matilda and Alfred Wilson to finalize the donation of their estate for the establishment of a new university.

Varner maintained that the stature of a university is measured by its principal product — its students. The quality of the instructors and the motivation of the students should be the first consideration.

"It is here we have bet our money and it is here we shall make our mark," he said.

Varner served from 1958 through 1970.



## First classes

Noncredit continuing education classes started in July 1958 in a converted chicken coop.

"We took one of the chicken coops and converted it into a classroom," said Lowell Eklund, then dean, Continuing Education.

The coop had ceramic tile and concrete floors with a few

stray chicken feathers in cracks in the wall. "It was everything a chicken could ask for," he said.

## First temporary off-campus classroom

The school calendar in December 1959 forced students to forego their last Western Civilization class before their final exam.

Professor William Kluback's 32 students approached him with the idea of holding the class as a Saturday evening dinner meeting at a Birmingham restaurant.

Word got out and more than 100 students attended Kluback's final class, where they discussed Plato and Copernicus until midnight.

*"We want to make eggheads out of each and every one of you. Eggheads ask questions that need asking."*

— Robert G. Hoopes, MSU-O faculty dean, 1959-61, and English professor

# Partners in success

## Giving to Oakland began with the Wilsons and continues to flourish with the OU Foundation



Dedication of Foundation Hall took place on October 1, 1959.

Continuing a legacy that began with the gift of Matilda and Alfred Wilson, OU's benefactors have given graciously and generously during the past 40 years to bring the university to

the point where it is now — poised for the future.

But in 1957, a single donation and many good ideas were hardly enough to make the new university a reality. The building process needed moral as well as financial support. It would require energy and conviction along with good ideas.

A citizen's committee of some 50 civic and business leaders from the surrounding community was formed to promote and help the new institution. This group was the nucleus of what would later become the Oakland University Foundation, the base of private giving for the university.

Several individuals contributed significantly for particular projects and programs. Gifts

from Harold Fitzgerald, the first president of the foundation, built Fitzgerald House in 1961.

In 1966, seven years after the first students were admitted to the university, Chancellor Woody Varner worked with the

OU Foundation leadership to organize the Chancellor's Club. The concept for membership established a \$1,000 gift to the institution each year for 10 years. Fifty members were recruited in the first year.

OU found itself in a unique situation. Most educational institutions relied on a large alumni body to provide financial support for expansion and funding. With few graduates, there were few alumni, so influential citizens, many of whom were parents of Oakland students, joined with several of the first alumni to form another support group, the Friends of the University. In one sense, the Chancellor's Club and the Friends provided the nurturing necessary for the successful development of the young university. However, as the number of alumni grew, OU established an Alumni Council. Eventually, the Alumni Council and the Friends of the University joined resources and efforts and became the Oakland University Alumni Association.

Phillip Williams SECS '64, one of the original members of the Alumni Council, helped organize the first Annual

Alumni Drive.

In recent years, corporate support for various building and program efforts has grown remarkably.

In 1995-96, the OU Foundation (OUF) allocated a record nearly \$2 million to university projects. OUF, a private, non-profit corporation, is comprised of business, civic and community leaders.

OUF support made possible such recent projects as the renovation of the Academic Skills Center and Admissions Office, the Animal Care facility for biomedical research, the expansion of the Honors College and the establishment of an automotive research and education center, the Michigan Center for Automotive Research.

Meadow Brook Seminars

Bringing educators and others together

How would you build the best possible university?

If building a university from scratch was exciting, putting together the curriculum for that new institution was a more formidable challenge.

The original Meadow Brook Seminars on Higher Learning included leaders from Michigan State University-Oakland, MSU, MSU-Oakland Foundation, Matilda and Alfred Wilson, the Zeder committee as well as from Harvard, Vassar, New York University and Time Magazine.

The goal was to create a platform or aura of independence

from MSU, even though the new university would be based on MSU's curriculum.

Sponsored by the MSU-OF in late summer and fall 1958, the university conducted the seminars at Meadow Brook Hall.

Each group of leaders would gather for one of five topics: liberal arts, teacher education, engineering, business education and adult education. The elements of the curriculum and the focus areas were developed by sets of advisory committees starting in 1957.

"There were four separate

but related approaches," Woody Varner said. "These were 1) faculty group at MSU working under Vice President Thomas Hamilton to serve as an MSU-O curriculum committee; 2) the Zeder committee of the MSU-OF, who sponsored the Meadow Brook Seminars; 3) the deans of the related colleges at MSU identified a small group of personnel to help; and 4) a set of MSU faculty serving as a working committee to spell out a specific curriculum.

"The Meadow Brook Seminars provided general recom-

mendations. Attendees were invited to direct their thoughts to the opportunity of developing a totally new curriculum."

Another goal was to adhere to a rigorous intellectual education designed to produce students with a classic liberal arts background who could not only learn information, but analyze it with critical minds and question its use and authority. The seminars concluded that MSU-O should emphasize quality and depth and "produce men and women of broad understanding and high principles."

Oakland Trivia

Test your knowledge of Oakland University and its history by playing Oakland Trivia

OU FACES	OU PLACES	OU HISTORY	OU CURRICULUM
100 He came from Michigan State University to serve as chancellor at the new MSU-O location.	100 It's a learning lab for Art History.	100 This was Oakland University's original name.	100 These meetings with distinguished leaders helped set the course for the original academic agenda.
200 They are the three remaining professors from the original faculty.	200 It is now the tallest building on campus.	200 This festival was a major cultural event at its opening in 1964.	200 This was the year OU reorganized as a conventional university, rather than a liberal arts college.
300 His strong views on liberal education made him a long-remembered figure in OU history.	300 A university president and his wife.	300 This quote from Ulysses in Dante's <i>Inferno</i> became the school's motto in 1963.	300 This school awarded its first master's degree in 1986.
400 His nude poetry reading in literature class was a major campus controversy in 1967.	400 It has been nicknamed "the Moat."	400 This center, established in 1981, was on the cutting edge of technology.	400 These were the first languages offered at OU.
500 Her 3.66 GPA made her the top student of OU's first graduating class.	500 It was the first classroom used for continuing education classes in 1958.	500 Her enrollment at MSU-O made her the first student at OU.	500 "We are interested in producing...critics of society, not adjusters to it."

TRIVIA ANSWERS

OU FACES	OU PLACES	OU HISTORY	OU CURRICULUM
100 - Who was Woody Varner? 200 - Who are Paul Tomboularian, professor of Chemistry; Richard J. Burke, professor of Philosophy; and James H. McKay, professor of Mathematical Science? 300 - Who was Robert G. Hoopes, English professor and first faculty dean? 400 - Who is student Lee Ellinger? 500 - Who is Beverly Donato?	100 - What is Meadow Brook Hall? 200 - What is the new Science and Engineering Building? 300 - Whom was O'Dowd Hall named for? 400 - What is Beer Lake? 500 - What was a converted chicken coop?	100 - What is Michigan State University-Oakland? 200 - What is Meadow Brook Music Festival? 300 - What is "Follow courage and knowledge?" 400 - What is the Center for Robotics? 500 - Who was Lynn Anderson Ruth?	100 - What were the Meadow Brook seminars? 200 - What was 1965? 300 - What is the School of Nursing? 400 - What were Russian and French? 500 - What was the educational philosophy of Robert G. Hoopes?

How well did you score? 4,000-6,000-Top of the Class; 2,000-4,000--"A" for effort; 0-2,000--Need work; walk around campus!