

FALL 2012

# Meadow Brook



**Glass for  
the Ages**

INSIDE: Chimneys Restored | The World's Finest Doll House

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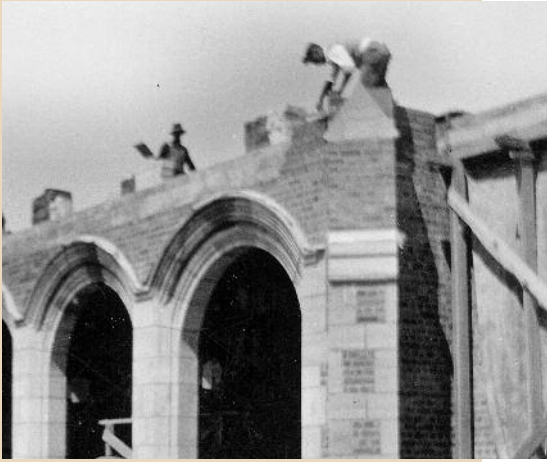
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One of 50 stained glass windows in The Hall, this library window by G. Owen Bonawit depicts an astronomer and tools of his trade. *Photo by Kim Zelinski.*

# Meadow Brook

MAGAZINE

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Matilda and Alfred Wilson

## | Editor's Column



THE WORLD IS HUGGED BY  
THE FAITHFUL ARMS OF  
VOLUNTEERS.  
—Terri Guillemets

## Many hands . . .

We have all heard the expression, “Many hands make light work.” While it is debatable whether work here at Meadow Brook is ever light, I can attest to the fact that we do have many hands engaged. And while some are those of our dedicated and paid staff, many others are attached to our hundreds of volunteers.

Our recent celebration of The Hall’s National Historic Landmark designation, chronicled on pages four and five of this issue, is a testament to that observation. Just the name of the marquee event, “Hug The Hall,” suggests hands were at work.

And they were: We threw a community picnic and 2,000 of our closest friends accepted our invitation. Were it not for the dozens of volunteers on the job that day, our visitors would no doubt have gone away disappointed. In the end, they were thrilled with yet another rewarding Meadow Brook experience.

Elsewhere in this issue, you will find articles on five very special people. Irene Connors, The Hall’s

VOLUNTEERS DO NOT  
NECESSARILY HAVE THE  
TIME; THEY JUST HAVE  
THE HEART.  
—Elizabeth Andrew

longtime volunteer coordinator, was this year’s recipient of the Barb Thorpe Award for exemplary service. And four of her comrades were honored for 40 years of service to Meadow Brook . . . that’s 40 years each! Few if any organizations can claim one, let alone four, volunteers with that kind of commitment.

In a small tribute to our friends who contribute their time, energy and passion to preserving and interpreting the lessons this house can tell, I have gathered some favorite quotes about volunteering. I hope you not only enjoy them, but they inspire you to either pursue such ideals, or to simply thank the many volunteers among you.

HERE’S TO ALL VOLUNTEERS,  
THOSE DEDICATED  
PEOPLE WHO BELIEVE IN  
ALL WORK AND NO PAY.  
—Robert Orben

ACT AS IF WHAT YOU DO  
MAKES A DIFFERENCE.  
IT DOES. —William James



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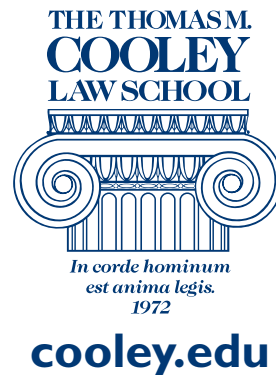


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# A landmark celebration!



Meadow Brook officially celebrated its National Historic Landmark designation in grand style and with overwhelming community support during both a July 18 Landmark Gala and a Hug the Hall community event held on July 20.

Hosted by Oakland University president Gary Russi and Meadow Brook Hall Executive Director Geoff Upward, the Landmark Gala included

the official unveiling of the National Park Service plaque on the mounting block near The Hall's front entrance. The event – attended by Dodge family members, Oakland University friends, Meadow Brook Hall Cornerstone Society members and community leaders – was an elegant affair featuring



fine cuisine, musical performances by Oakland University students and congratulatory acknowledgments from

elected officials, including U.S. Senator Carl Levin, U.S. Rep. Gary Peters and Gov. Rick Snyder, and Richard Wilson, son of Alfred and Matilda Wilson.

Meadow Brook Hall opened its grounds two days later to nearly 2,000 community visitors of all ages to perform the first-ever “Hug” of the Hall. Participants enjoyed a picnic lunch, tours of The Hall, a children’s scavenger hunt, a live musical performance by Oakland University alumna Jennifer Kincer, a Friends of Meadow Brook ice cream social and vintage Dodge automobile car rides, courtesy of members of the Dodge Motor Car Club. The event culminated with a shoulder-to-shoulder loop of visitors encircling The Hall for a celebratory balloon release.

*Official plaque unveiling with John and Julie Van Lennep, Executive Director Geoff Upward, OU President Gary Russi, Elizabeth and Rikki Caldwell. John Van Lennep and Rikki Caldwell are grandchildren of John and Matilda Dodge (Wilson).*





*Professional singer and Oakland University alumna Jennifer Kincer entertained visitors at “Hug the Hall.”*





*Irene Connors*

## VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

### She leads with her heart

Tirelessly, pleasantly, and with great grace. These words describe the work Irene Connors has done for Meadow Brook and its corps of volunteers. This year, Irene received the Barb Thorpe Outstanding Volunteer Award. Her service to The Hall included untold volunteer hours as well as a 10-year stint as volunteer coordinator, which she led by example.

“I was really surprised,” Irene admits. “As they were reading off the recipient’s qualifications I was trying to think who it was.”

In accepting the award she notes, “It’s really quite an honor. The award is named after a volunteer who really went above and beyond. It means so much more to me because it honors Barb Thorpe’s legacy.” And she hopes others will be encouraged to keep volunteering. “The Hall is part of history, but also part of the future. Hopefully future generations will be able to enjoy Meadow Brook as much as we have.”

## Four volunteers mark forty years

“Volunteerism is one of the most important things we do,” Gwen Kirby states with pride. “There are many businesses that couldn’t survive without us. And, seeing as I’ve volunteered for 40 years, it means I think it is important.”

Gwen is one of four volunteers who were recently honored for 40 years of service to Meadow Brook Hall – a record few, in any, nonprofit organizations could match.

“In the beginning, the volunteers were mostly women,” adds Doug Thorpe. “However, men play an important part – not just as docents, but as squires as well.” Mary Cichowski smiled as she looked around the room at her fellow honorees. “I’ve learned about so many things, and made so, so many friends. Meadow

Brook is a big part of our lives. Because Meadow Brook gets you here,” gesturing to her heart.

“I always like to talk, but not to a



*Left to right: Gwen Kirby, Doug Thorpe, Mary Cichowski and Shirley Holt.*

group,” volunteer Shirley Holt admitted. “But, as a docent, I learned to keep visitors’ attention and now it’s something I really enjoy.”



### Pure Meadow Brook

In September, Meadow Brook participated in a Pure Michigan 50-city sing-a-long, posted to the Internet, representing the Rochester area. The scene was a black-tie dinner party in the Wren Dining Room, filled by staff and friends.



THERESA FINCK

## 41ST ANNUAL HOLIDAY WALK Holiday Glitz

For Holiday Walk 2012, Meadow Brook is “Puttin’ on the Glitz.” Guests will be able to explore the amazing events that took place at and around the Great Estate through vignettes of clothing, jewelry and photography.

Thanks to a special loan from the Detroit Historical Society, visitors will be able to see Matilda Dodge Wilson’s Inaugural dress from 1940 when she became Michigan’s Lieutenant Governor. Also featured will be Frances’ debutant gown and her dramatic ice blue wedding dress. John Dodge’s pocket watches, Matilda’s costume jewelry collection, and other vintage jewelry will add to the glamour.

Even the decorations will sparkle and shine, as the Hall itself puts on the glitz with stunning holiday decorations.

A stop at The Hall’s Museum Store will reveal a treasure trove of specially selected holiday and gift merchandise encompassing all



price ranges (*see back cover*).

Holiday Walk begins Friday, November 23 and continues through Saturday, December 22. For information on Holiday Walk tour tickets, group tour-and-lunch packages, and other special events at Meadow Brook Hall

during the holiday season, please visit [www.meadowbrookhall.org](http://www.meadowbrookhall.org), or call 248-364-6200. **MB**

## Troubled bridge no more

Beneath the grandeur of Meadow Brook Hall’s Entrance Bridge, visible and invisible deterioration in the form of rust and rot posed a major concern for both the bridge’s soundness and aesthetics. Designed and constructed in the late 20’s in rustic Tudor elegance with stepped brick piers, massive timber beams and ornately carved wood railings, the span has borne its share of auto, tour bus and truck traffic over the decades.



The extent of the deterioration, revealed in condition assessments in 2011, indicated that critical work would be needed on the vital structural components at a cost of nearly \$360,000. The Entrance Bridge Restoration Project funded in part by the Matilda R. Wilson Fund Challenge Grant, kicked-off in early summer 2012. Contractor RAM (formerly Western Waterproofing) performed the work, which included

brick re-pointing, drainage improvement to the upper deck, restoration of the wood railings and extensive work on the underside deck to

structurally repair the steel-reinforced concrete support beams.

While the major extent of the repair work took place under the bridge, and therefore was not visible to guests, the sound and dust from hand-held jack-hammers breaking away hundreds of pounds of con-

crete could be heard . . . and seen . . . throughout the estate. Although the work required weekday closure of the entrance drive and the re-routing of traffic for several months, the inconvenience was a small concession toward a worthy outcome – a newly restored bridge that once again complements the grand approach to The Hall’s formal courtyard in all seasons...and a safe passage over the ravine below.

**You’re Invited** to an elegant evening of holiday entertainment with live music, a strolling dinner, cocktails and open touring during this year’s Starlight Stroll event, fittingly themed “Ballroom Glitz.” The event is Thursday, December 13, 2012 from 7 p.m. to 10 p.m. Tickets are \$75 per person. For additional information or to make reservations, please call (248) 364-6263.



# Up the chimneys they rose

Tuck pointing, re-pointing, brick pointing, spot pointing or pointing up...just what exactly does all this “pointing” mean? This past year, Meadow Brook Hall became quite familiar with these masonry terms, when restoration work on four of The Hall’s 39 chimneys was tackled in a big way.

Although the masonry terms are often (and incorrectly) used interchangeably, they all refer to a process that applies or re-applies mortar joints to brick or stonework. While masonry is generally considered a permanent building material, it is not immune to

deterioration, especially the mortar joints. Over time, the joints can erode and crack, causing water to infiltrate and further damage the mortar joints and the adjoining brick.

Such was the case with the Meadow Brook Hall chimneys. Their condition, according to brick mason Ben Shaw (*pictured below*) of Pullman (Structural Group), “is what I expected for a building over 80 years old. Most of the deterioration on the mortar joints and brickwork is on the south and west exposures of the stacks where weather conditions tend to be more severe.”

The restoration process began a year ago with pre-construction work that included both mortar analysis to determine and replicate the appearance of the original mortar composition and the procurement of more than 1,000 hand-made bricks that included 17 shapes and colors.

With materials finally in place, the “re-pointing” process (the correct term for this particular restoration technique), began in early Spring with Shaw and his mason assistant, Dirk Morrison, harnessed into a lift bucket some 65 feet in the air. The arduous



task included “grinding away the damaged mortar joints up to a depth of 1-½ inches with an electric grinder and hand chisel, rinsing away the dust to ensure a proper mortar bond and, where needed, replacing the damaged bricks” Shaw said. “We then put down a 3/8” lift, which is the first pass of mortar into the joint, followed by the next lift after it is “thumb print” hard. The end result creates the best match possible to the original construction materials and should extend the chimney’s life span another 80 years.”

Shaw also added that although work was somewhat grueling during the summer’s hot spell, he loved working at Meadow Brook Hall. His birds-eye view of the building’s architecture and gardens was incredible. He also admired the team effort in working over, around and through the challenges of The Hall’s busy museum operations. But, he added “I could have done without the seven bee stings ... hazards of the job I guess.”

The project, funded by the Matilda R. Wilson Fund matching grant program, was managed by SmithGroup/ JJR, Detroit, George W. Auch Company of Pontiac and Pullman (Structural Group, Inc.) out of Trenton, MI. **MB**



### Brick and Mortar

The procurement of more than 1,000 custom-made bricks included various darker colored bricks (as seen in the photo on the left) which were designed for a specific purpose described by original Hall architect William Kapp: “Starting with the brickwork above the roof line, which in some cases is ordinary sized brick, the color should be the full range as now in the field for any and all walled work. The gradual intensity of color as the brickwork travels up the shaft to the caps, gives a smoked-up effect at once, rather than waiting for time to do this for us.”

# A Little Cottage On

BY KAREL BOND LUCANDER



PLAYHOUSE for  
MISS FRANCES • M • DODGE •  
Rochester • Michigan

# The Hill



The sky is cloudless, as a ring of smoke rises from the chimney of this cozy Tudor-style home. The surrounding path and trees cut an enchanting silhouette.

But there's work to be done, and a girl in her polka-dot apron sweetly sweeps crimson and gold leaves from the front porch. Will chipmunks now gather and chirping birds swoop down to lift her and any troubles away? After all, this scene looks like something straight out of a storybook. But for a young lady named Frances M. Dodge, this fairytale setting, called Hilltop Lodge, was just an everyday backdrop to her life growing up.

Hilltop Lodge was a birthday present when Frances turned 12 in November 1926. Her mother, Matilda Dodge Wilson, widow of John Dodge and then wife of lumber executive Alfred G. Wilson, wanted to gift her daughter with something that would not only offer an idyllic place to while away the hours, but a brick-and-mortar building in which she could learn the practical lessons of running a home. She might one day be the keeper of a grand home, and what better way to practice than in a miniaturized version of the "American Castle" they would be living in called Meadow Brook Hall?

To reflect the image of Meadow Brook, then on the drawing board, the Wilsons called upon the same artisans to create this one-of-a-kind playhouse. It was designed by Smith, Hinchman & Grylls and constructed

# Frances' playhouse was the first all electric-powered home of any type in the Detroit metropolitan area.



by general contractor Bryant & De-twiler. When completed and fully furnished, this \$23,000 fantasy, encircled by a white picket fence, would be dubbed “the world’s finest doll house” in newspapers across the state and country. Even other girls born into wealthy families at the time, like “million dollar baby” Doris Duke and “poor little rich girls” Barbara Woolworth Hutton and Brenda Frazier, didn’t enjoy a three-quarter scale, six-room retreat of this caliber.

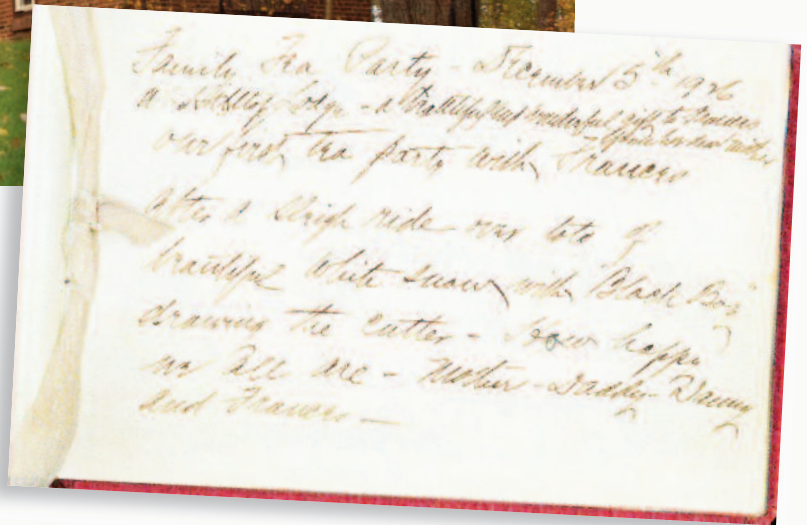
But a few years earlier, young Frances’ life had been rather tumultuous. In 1920, her father, John, died suddenly of complications from the flu and her uncle, Horace Dodge, a few months later. At that time, her family was living in the Boston-Edison neighborhood of Detroit, home to many aristocratic automotive families, including Henry Ford, Walter Briggs and four of the Fisher brothers. By the time Hilltop was built, Frances and her family had moved their residence to Lincoln Road in Grosse Pointe, only steps away from where her widowed aunt Anna Dodge’s mansion would be built. During the years 1926-29, while Meadow Brook Hall was under con-

struction, the family moved again, leaving Grosse Pointe for the summers and staying at Meadow Brook Farms.

While Frances was adjusting to the many changes in her life, this beloved new playhouse eased her into living on the Rochester estate.

At 22 by 30 feet, the dimensions of Hilltop were ideal for a girl edging closer to adulthood. The doorways were 5 feet 4 inches and the ceilings throughout were 6 feet 3 inches, with the exception of the living room, which was a foot taller. Her stepfather, Alfred, who towered at 6-foot-3, could only join her in the living room for tea parties.

Though the size would particularly appeal to someone of Frances’ stature, Hilltop Lodge had something that would be the envy of any adult homeowner: Electricity. Frances’ playhouse was the first all electric-powered home of any type in the Detroit metropolitan area. Along with electricity, she also had the luxury of a fully operating



*Handwritten note inside a Hilltop Lodge (Knole Cottage) autograph book, dated December 5, 1926. “Family Tea Party – After a sleigh ride over lots of beautiful white snow with “Black Boy” drawing the cutter – How happy we all are – Mother, Daddy, Danny and Frances.”*

kitchen and bathroom, with steam heat and running water. Of course, with these household utilities came responsibilities. Thus, Frances had her own checkbook to oversee the budget and manage the expenses.

“It’s a splendid thing for her,” Matilda Dodge Wilson is quoted as saying in the Dec. 27, 1926, issue of the *Jackson Citizen Patriot* newspaper. “When she gets together a dinner for her friends she learns that serving a dinner means a lot of work and a lot of effort. She learns that it takes care and



*Frances Dodge, age 12, with her first pony, "Lassie" at Meadow Brook Farms.*

thought to conduct a home properly."

Stepping through the front door of Frances' dream house, guests would have been suspended in a golden tapestry of the finest antiques and furnishings. No expense was spared. The authentic art and accessories, some imported from Europe, echoed that this was the finest money could buy.

At the hall entrance, a visitor's eyes would have been drawn to the woven rug on the floor, featuring a charming picture of "Little Red Riding Hood." A marble-topped end table and a tiny gold-framed mirror, flanked by electric candles, might have beckoned. Off the hall was a coat closet, and beyond that the ample living room.

Looking around the living room, there was a fireplace, with mini logs sometimes ablaze, a window seat with five windows bordered by brown

## Frances' Twelfth Birthday



Light in her tread,  
As elf or fay  
She's over the house  
And far away.

Dashing full speed  
As her tresses fly,  
And her pony climbs  
The hillock nigh.

Her merry laugh  
Rings clear and sweet,  
Which the voice of brother  
And playmates greet.

And the happy hours  
Glide swiftly by  
As the golden sunbeams  
Round them lie.

She eagerly quaffs,  
At the fount of knowledge,  
Preparing for future life  
At college.

And to further fit  
For life's career,  
A housekeeper's task  
She does not fear.

In a beautiful cottage  
On the slope of the hill,  
In miniature form  
She works with a will.

Her curtains to hang,  
Her rugs put in place,  
And pictures on wall  
And mantel to grace.

Her kitchen a wonder  
With all things complete,  
Her marvels of cooking  
To woo you to eat.

May this beautiful home,  
A picture abide,  
Of one in the future  
Where you will reside.

May the birthday at hand  
Your girlhood unfolding,  
Be the prophecy sweet  
To tell of life's molding.

These verses accord  
With your birthday just twelve,  
So in rhymes poetic  
No farther we delve.

GRANDPA WILSON

November 27th, 1926



## The world was different then . . .

In 1926, the stock market was booming, and silent movie stars Mary Pickford and Charlie Chaplin were lighting up theater marquees. Irving Berlin's "Because I Love You" was dominating radio airwaves, and Bubbling Over won the Kentucky Derby. If you wanted to drive in style and bought a new Dodge Brothers De-Luxe Sedan – with luxurious mohair interior and the finest chrome vana-dium from engine to axles – you spent a grand sum of \$1,075.

This was also the year Frances M. Dodge, heiress to the John Dodge estate, received her gift of Knole Cottage. This fancy playhouse cost \$10,000 to build and an additional \$13,000 to furnish. In contrast, \$7,800 was the average price of an American family's home, and most workers were earning about \$1,300 a year.

Children in similar socio-economic circles as the Dodge-Wilson family most likely enjoyed sophisticated playthings, including Sutcliffe Pressing's wooden boats, Kingsbury's three-motor monoplanes, and American Flyer locomotive systems. Well-to-do girls would have cradled expensive dolls, such as Effanbee bisque dolls and Madame Alexander composition dolls.

Meanwhile, most girls in America were probably hugging a Flossy Flirt Doll or Teddy Bear – each under \$5. Boys were playing with Magic Lanterns, pulling Olympic Flyer Wagons or experimenting with Erector Sets. Pedal cars, fashioned after famous carmakers (like Dodge), were prized possessions for the middle-class lad. Bird whistlers, cast iron cars, gyroscopes and marbles were more common.

But Knole Cottage, Frances' 12th year birthday gift, would have wowed children and adults alike – and continues to do so, more than 85 years later.

taffeta draperies, a Newfoundland throw rug with a dogsled scene, and a bookshelf with miniature volumes of Tennyson, Burns and others. On the wall hung a mezzotint, "Boy With Hare" by T. Hamilton Crawford, a renowned British illustrator and painter. And over the mantle hung a portrait of her little sister, Anna Margaret, who died two years earlier. It was at once a sweet tribute and a sad reminder that Frances' young life was already twice struck by tragedy.

To nurture her caretaking instincts, the cheery pink nursery was home for a dozen dolls. Some were as small as old-fashioned matchboxes and others were nearly head to head with Frances herself. To spend quality time with them, she had a cradle, swing and high white dresser, where she carefully tucked away their tiny dresses, stockings and mittens, even a beaver-trimmed coat. The adjacent linen closet held more of her dolls' clothing along with her own lacy sweaters, dancing frocks and everyday dresses.

If one was lucky enough to receive an invitation to visit, Frances' blue-themed bedroom offered an extravagant respite and its own adjoining tiled bathroom, complete with a bathtub, washstand and monogrammed towels.

An elegant harvest-style table and chairs, petite tea wagon and built-in china cabinet, containing sherbet glasses the size of little thimbles, graced the dining room. "Girl With White Hat" by H.T. Greenhurd brightened the wall, while a three-quarter-sized floor screen with green fabric inserts and a Chinese plant stand adorned the space.

The kitchen, the heart of her home, featured an electric two-burner cook range, set of tiny pots and pans, jars of jelly, jam and pickles, a small refrigerator, child's drop-leaf oval table with turned legs and a matching teacart.

A cabinet stored her precious hand-painted china and tea sets.

Behind the playhouse, Frances

would entertain on the manicured lawn with her miniature-sized furniture: two green umbrella tables with chairs, a green glider set, two doll-sized sets of Redwood picnic tables and benches, and two sets of dolls' wooden furniture.

Frances' playhouse was originally set upon a small hill near the John Dodge Farmhouse on her family's 1,500-acre estate, hence the name Hilltop Lodge. But in 1929, it was relocated closer to the newly opened Meadow Brook Hall and later renamed Knole Cottage. It seemed fitting because the Knole House, in west Kent, England – where King Henry VIII and Earls and Dukes of Dorset once resided – was a model for the English medieval-style architecture of Frances' mini home as well as Meadow Brook.

Though it would be three years until the kidnapping of Charles A. Lindbergh, Jr., several well-publicized child abductions had already struck society's elite. After burying her first husband and a 4-year-old daughter, Matilda wasn't about to take a laissez-faire approach to protecting her family. All her means couldn't shield her from life's heartaches landing on her doorstep, but Matilda and Alfred would make every effort to do what they could. So when the cottage was moved, they also installed a guard-house nearby.

As time marched on, and days turned to years, Knole Cottage would remain an important part of Miss Dodge's life on the estate. But as girls grow up, their interests can turn to other loves, like shiny American Saddlebred horses. Frances' passion would intensify to riding competitively, breeding and caring for her horses in her own specially built facility. With the addition of Dodge Stables, the fairytale estate became even more monumental. Yet with its larger-than-life presence, that special 12th year birthday gift called Hilltop Lodge would always burn brightly in the heart of a young heiress named Frances M. Dodge. **MB**

The kitchen . . . featured an electric two-burner cook range, a set of tiny pots and pans, jars of jam and pickles . . . a small refrigerator



*Knole Cottage interiors, c.1929. Top: Kitchen.  
Left: Frances' bedroom. Below: Living Room.*



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

# GLASS FOR THE AGES

BY KIM ZELINSKI





*Opposite page: ballroom windows depicting poetry readings and the Wilson crest. Clockwise from upper left: "servant bringing in the boar's head," dining room; "shield with rampant unicorn," grand staircase; below: "crowned knight during the time of the 100 Years' War," living room south bay.*



...A MINIMUM USE OF LEADING IN THIS TECHNIQUE GIVES STRUCTURE TO THE OVERALL COMPOSITION, RATHER THAN SEPARATING THE GLASS INTO FRAGMENTED COMPARTMENTS AS WAS TYPICALLY DONE IN THE "MOSAIC" STYLE

As the changing daylight streams through the windows, brilliant images of gallant Knights clad in armor, majestic clippers in full sail navigating the seas, lions and unicorns dramatically poised and a humble servant steadying a boar's head on a tray, are spectacularly revealed.

These figurative icons represent just a few of the 50 stained glass medallions and panels that embellish the massive windows in Meadow Brook Hall. Installed in nine rooms throughout three floors, the windows' rich tapestry of color and interplay of light bring the exquisite details to life and enliven the spaces with subtle gleams of beauty.

Meadow Brook's glass medallions, depicting scenes from literature, history, music and the arts of medieval society, are the artistic work of G. Owen Bonawit, who operated a glass studio in New York City from 1915 to 1941. Bonawit produced the medallions for Tiffany Studios. They were initially installed in the Grosse Pointe mansion John and Matilda Dodge were building in 1919. The medallions, along with many other architectural items in the unfinished home, were salvaged and installed in similar rooms at Meadow Brook Hall a decade later when Matilda and her second husband, Alfred Wilson, built The Hall.

Additionally, three pairs of new stained glass windows were specially made for the Ballroom. These windows possessed what the Hall's architect, William Kapp, described as "unusual conditions:" The two-story, north-facing Ballroom windows were positioned at ground level. Kapp referenced the challenge in letters sent to potential glassmakers as needing "a decorative window which will introduce a great deal of light in the day time and yet not be so transparent as to permit a clear vision of the outdoors and making it apparent that it is a basement room. The problem is further complicated by the fact that the room will be used principally in the evening and the average leaded glass window is



*Right: 16th century ship, Alfred Wilson's study. Above: living room north bay series (fighting bird, lady with shield, lion with wings and angel). Opposite page, clockwise from top: figure of a Scribe, library; swan and shield with horse, grand staircase; lady with flower and bird, servants porch.*



rather a dead affair at night. Of course, we would not consider, under any circumstances, to attempt to place lights on the outside of the windows.”\*

Several masters in the field were solicited, including Bonawit, but it would be the designs of John Scott Williams of Henderson Brothers (New York) that the Wilsons would select. His designs appropriately themed for the room's function – entertainment – included scenes of a romantic poetry reading, Shakespearian play, a Faust opera and cleverly placed in the center window, the Wilsons' family crest.

Both Bonawit and Williams enjoyed successful careers as master craftsmen in stained glass fabrication for both ecclesiastical and secular buildings. They used similar technique: painting, staining, firing and etching, and minimum use of leading. In this technique, the leading gives structure to the overall composition, rather than separating the glass into fragmented compartments as was typically done in the “mosaic” style.

Although the stained glass art form was developed nine centuries ago, production in America did not fully emerge in its own right until the 1840s and peaked during the building boom of the early 20th century. It was during this period that wealthy patrons, particularly the industrial barons, replicated the art forms of churches, including carved wood, large gold and silver objects and stained glass, as a means to “sanctify” the display of their fortunes in the form of great mansions, importing European styles of architecture with great accuracy. Tudor revival architecture, such as that used at Meadow Brook Hall, reflected the medieval period of 1479-1607 in England and incorporated a prolific use of leaded and stained glass windows based on the designs and themes of that period.

Few other forms of artistic expressions are so well suited or have been so widely used to express a story or recount important historical events as stained glass. The beauty, artistry and craftsmanship of such windows have endured for centuries in churches, universities and grand mansions. As a repository of note, Meadow Brook Hall proudly gleams with visions of knights, kings and angelic maidens when the sun moves slowly across the south façade. **MB**

*\*Author’s note: Meadow Brook installed such exterior lights in the 1990s. We hope Mr. Kapp would agree that they are a tasteful addition.*



## THE MAKING OF A MANSION

# A colossal construction project

BY KIM ZELINSKI

PART TWO OF TWO PARTS  
PART ONE OF THE ARTICLE  
ENDED WITH THE HALL'S  
GROUNDBREAKING IN 1926.

During the first year of construction, general contractors Bryant & Detwiler (B&D) would retain a daily roster of nearly 100 workers, including engineers, masons, carpenters, laborers and a watchman for site security. The workforce would endure long hours on a six-day-a-week schedule during an era when overtime was not paid.

The inventory of construction machinery, in addition to the lone steam shovel, would include a steam hoist, concrete mixer, electric saw, Fordson tractor, saw mill and “burning outfit.” Supplementing this “power” equipment was a horse-drawn wagon used primarily for hauling soil. Though, on at least one occasion when Dodge Road’s (now known as Adams Road) muddy condition prevented a delivery of much needed materials from reaching the job site, the two workhorse hitch, with wagon in tow, delivered.

The Hall’s structural framework, made of concrete reinforced with steel, was equivalent to that of a commercial building. The composition of the concrete, critical to the overall strength of the building, was a precise measurement of three ingredients: cement (purchased in single refillable bags), fine and coarse aggregate (delivered by the truck-load) and water. A good

composition was oddly described as having a “waxy” appearance. Each day of pouring would require a sample to be delivered in cylinders to a laboratory for strength and compression testing. A remark in one of the daily logs referred to a record mixing of 154 cubic yards of concrete all in one day. This milestone would have required nearly 900 bags of cement alone. Thousands of pounds of steel reinforced the concrete walls, floors and beams.

By May of 1927, with all the basement floors and walls poured, the foundation was ready for its base course of granite stone. Most of the product was salvaged from the Dodges’ Grosse Pointe home. Once set, the masons began to construct the exterior walls with the decorative face brick shipped in bi-weekly loads via railroad car to Rochester.

It was common at that time for architects to visit suppliers to review drawings and to inspect their materials. Sterling Brick would be one of several companies architect William Kapp would visit for that purpose. It was also common for many company owners, especially those with large contracts, to visit the construction site.

Prior to making any final decisions on the selection of the exterior wall materials, a sample wall was erected to show the blend of the different materials including the brick, stone and roof tiles. The importance of getting the brick layout just right was a task that

Kapp would personally direct. The desired “weathered effect” was accomplished by slightly slanting a few bricks on each course. When this was not correctly achieved on the east wing due to “excessive” slanting, the wall would be rebuilt. In all, nearly 400,000 face bricks of various sizes and color were used to build Meadow Brook Hall’s exterior walls.

The supply and installation of the massive pieces of sandstone by the Briar Hill Stone Company, one of several companies still in existence today, made them the highest paid contractor at just over \$143,000 dollars. The company handled all of the stonework, including the stone window surrounds and stone traceries, door jams, copings and capstones.

Adding interesting detail to many of these sandstone pieces were carvings crafted by the then 25-year old Corrado Parducci (who also created the dining room’s plaster ceiling). Parducci modeled the pieces on several thematic concepts, including: carvings of the four seasons, the Dodge and Wilson coats of arms, the zodiac symbols, sporting activities that would take place on the estate, and native wildlife.

Lumber used in The Hall’s construction covered both structural and ornamental purposes. The wood framing – half-timbers that were mortised, tenoned and pegged together – served primarily as a decorative architectural feature that filled the spaces between the stucco, brick and stone and repre-

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*Upper photo: East Wing, c. 1928. Above: Loggia, c. 1927.*

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sents a prominent design element of Tudor Revival architecture.

The lumber used for framing windows and the roof came from the Grosse Pointe home salvage. It was categorized as either 'good oak,' that which could be cut with little waste, or "cull oak," that which would produce too much waste if cut. Supplementing this supply would be a small amount of wood brokered through Alfred and brother Don Wilson's lumber company, based in Florida. The Wilson lumber was primarily used for roof framing.

When the roof framing was completed in the latter part of 1927, both the flat portions and pitched areas of the roof were ready for their decorative covering. The flat roofs were protected with sheets of lead-coated copper and the pitched roof was tiled, utilizing shingle-styled clay tile manufactured by

Ludowicki. Aesthetically appealing for their irregular and antique appearance of old world masonry, the 6"x14" x 5/8" clay tiles were composed of at least five different variations of color and texture. The approximately 200,000 tiles, advertised to last forever without repair, were laid in just three months.

Bronze windows sashes, 150 of which were salvaged from the Grosse Pointe home, would be integrated into the design of Meadow Brook Hall and included 44 with tiffany insets. McCoy Bronze Company would need to almost double this count with new sashes. Detroit Stained Glass performed the widow glazing. DSG would spend nearly 10,000 hours and a total of numerous trips to the property to complete the project.

Two of the most decorative features

on the house were created by Oscar Bach, perhaps the most recognized name in the decorative iron works industry: the iron gate at the front entry door and a gate hung between Matilda's office and the Loggia.

By early 1928, The Hall's Tudor Revival architecture was magnificently revealed. The characteristic decorative brick, massive stone, half-timbers, steep gabled roofs, imposing chimneys and leaded-glass window were classic expressions of shelter and protection. From each exterior view the architectural elements demonstrate unique visual experiences. Even today, visits to The Hall inspire awe as well as a welcoming feel, recognized by the Wilsons themselves in the invitational inscription carved over the building's mid-section: "Welcome the coming, Speed the parting guests." **MB**

*South façade, c. 1928.*

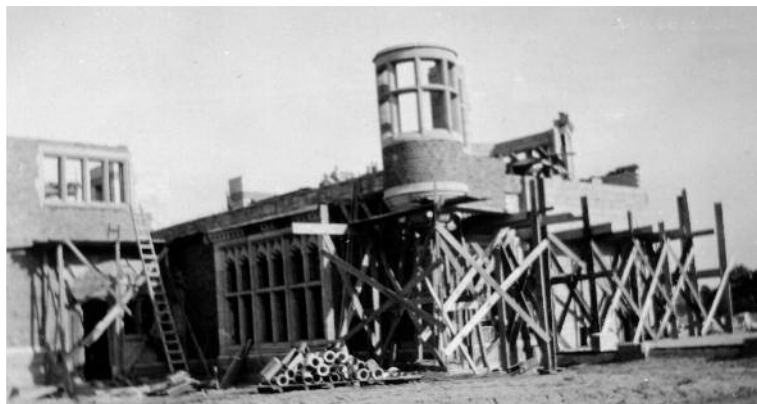




*Top: Living Room, c.1928.*

*Middle: Living Room, c. 1927.*

*Bottom: second floor construction, c 1927.*



### **Labor Wages in 1929**

Bricklayer and stone mason – \$1.57/hour

Carpenter – \$1.00/hour

Plasterer – \$1.56/hour

Painter – \$0.90/hour

Electricians – \$ 1.25/hour

Plumber – \$1.25/hour

Laborer – \$0.55/hour





## *Managing* Maintenance

Preservation is a key component of the stewardship of The Great Estate. Intern Jasmine Jackson recorded the structures and objects that make up Meadow Brook using a new software program, CP Tool. “First I had to figure out how it worked,” Jasmine explained. “Then I input images and documentation for everything from boilers to cracks in the wall. It was meaningful work, providing and organizing much-needed information into an easily retrievable format. And a by-product was great experience for me.”

According to Facilities Operations Coordinator Nicole Thomas, “Now that Jasmine is finished, we have a full-life history of the building and equipment.” This will help determine where the needs are, monitor repairs, and help manage assets and funds. Jasmine is hoping her internship will give her an edge that her peers won’t have when she graduates from the Ferris State University’s Architectural Technology and Facilities Management program this Fall. “Most of them spent their internships painting buildings or doing repair work.” And when she needed a break from all that keyboard time? “I was planning my wedding here,” she confided with a sly smile. Now that’s planning. **MB**

# *Weddings at The Great Estate*

Theresa Finck Photography

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*A Place in the Country: Matilda Wilson's Personal Guidebook to Meadow Brook Hall / \$8.95; American Treasures DVD (featuring Meadow Brook Hall) / \$18.95; Duke and Dolly's Adventure: A Meadow Brook Farms Coloring Book / \$5.95*



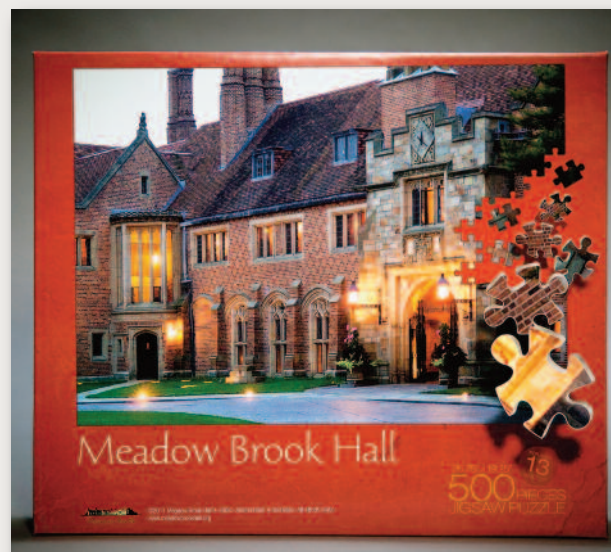
*AmeriScape Ornament / \$25.95 (left)  
24 kt Gold Finish Ornament / \$15.95 (right)*

To find unique and meaningful gifts this holiday season, stop by Meadow Brook Hall's Museum Store (Mon-Fri 1:00 to 3:30 p.m.; Sat & Sun 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.)

The Store sells dozens of Meadow Brook-inspired items and many more vintage holiday gift items.

Meadow Brook's private label food line includes coffee, preserves, dipping oils, dip mixes and gourmet chocolate-drizzled popcorn.

And be sure to check out the Store's new line of Michigan wines, including red, white, dessert and fruit wines!



*500-Piece Puzzle / \$18.95*

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