

FALL 2011

Meadow Brook



Pegasus

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Meadow Brook icon

INSIDE: Q & A with the Wilsons | Landscape Unrealized

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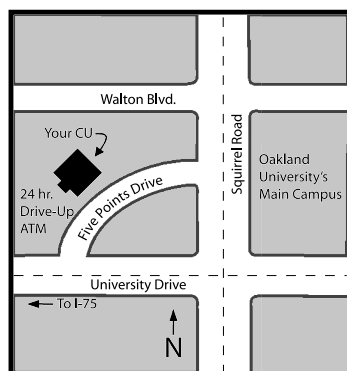
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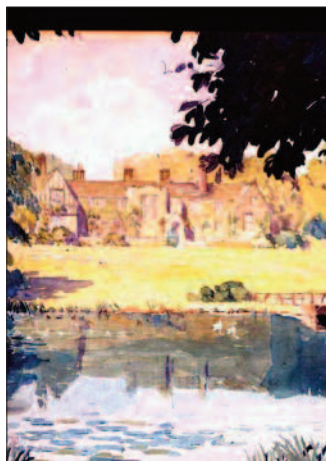
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On the Cover:

Meadow Brook's iconic equine statue, backdrop for countless garden weddings, looks stately even after-hours. *Photo by Theresa Finck.*



Richard and Barbara Wilson, c. 1936

All in the family

"History never looks like history when you are living through it."

— JOHN W. GARDNER

As we work with pages of documents and visual images in our mission of preserving and interpreting Meadow Brook's multi-faceted story, we are reminded that the number of years the Dodge and Wilson families lived on the property were relatively few . . . roughly 1908-1967. For a building that had its architectural roots in the English Tudor era (generally considered to be 1485-1603), this would be considered a fairly brief, and certainly modern, period in historical annals.

From this "newness," however, comes opportunity. We are fortunate, for example, to be able to talk with family members who actually lived in our building, or spent time here, and others who worked on the property . . . a historian's dream.

In July, the Dodge and Wilson families came "home" for several days of tours, social interaction with friends of The Hall (including a birthday celebration for Barbara Wilson Eccles), private conversations with each other and oral history sessions with staff members.

Beginning on page 12, you will get a glimpse into some of these memories, stories of a lifetime ago, lived in a very different time in our history by two of the very people who walked the halls and rode the fields in this place we call Meadow Brook.

Like our own lives, they will tell you that those years had no historical feel to them; they were simply a boy and a girl growing up and making their way in the world. We hope you enjoy their memories as much as we enjoy them as unique and fascinating individuals . . . and good friends.

Meadow Brook

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Matilda and Alfred Wilson



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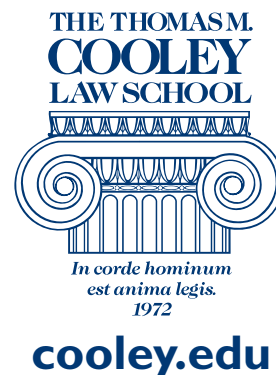


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What a Week!

A NIGHT OF WINE & ROSES

It couldn't have been a more beautiful evening; good weather, good food, good wine and good company. Actually, "great" would be more fitting. Meadow Brook Hall kicked off Heritage Week (see article on facing page) with Wine and Roses, a birthday celebration for Barbara Wilson Eccles, daughter of Alfred and Matilda Wilson, who reached...well, a milestone age this year.

The event was attended by her son Jeff Eccles as well as other members of the Dodge and Wilson families, including older brother Richard Wilson, and more than a hundred members of The Hall's Cornerstone Society and their friends. Guests strolled between the terraces and gardens as they tasted fares of Italian, French and American cuisine while sampling specialty wines from those cultures, presented by Meadow Brook's "sommelier-in-residence" and CEO of Wines of Distinction, Michael Cregar.



Top: Barbara Wilson Eccles and her son Jeff Eccles; Above: Richard Wilson with guests Mary Paquin and Susan Citraro; Upper right: Cornerstone member Maggie Savage (right) and Monica Amb; Right: Cornerstone members enjoying Italian cuisine.



*Top: Julie Van Lennep and John Todd Van Lennep;
Above: Elizabeth Caldwell and Rikki Van Lennep
Caldwell; Top right: Jade Van Lennep;
Right: Frances Dodge's children, John Van Lennep,
Judy Johnson, Rikki Van Lennep Caldwell.*



Family Drive

Cruising the Meadow Brook Estate property in a 1923 Dodge Business Sedan was just one of the activities the Dodge and Wilson families participated in during their four-day Heritage Week visit in July. For Matilda's great, great granddaughter Jade (pictured above) her first ride in a vintage car around the estate was a high point of the week . . . that and the Pegasus horse stuffed animal that rarely left her side. The family also enjoyed an estate and campus tour led by The Hall's executive director, Geoff Upward, as well as the new behind-the-scenes tour in the house led by Curator Meredith Long. Several family members also participated in oral history sessions, which will become part of Meadow Brook's archives.





Lois Harsh, Irene Connors and Diane Konkle

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

Twenty years...and counting



How do you thank someone for 20 years of dedication? At Meadow Brook Hall, you award them with a Gold Castle. Part of the volunteer award system, the Gold Castle is given to people who have worked at least 50 hours a year for 20 years (1,000 hours). This

July, three remarkable women received this special honor: Irene Connors, Diane Konkle and Lois Harsh. Lois, who also volunteers at Cranbrook, currently keeps track of the volunteer hours – not an easy task given Meadow Brook Hall’s substantial volunteer corps. Diane became certified as a docent after coming to The Hall as part of a group tour and lunch. Irene also served 11 years as volunteer coordinator and still conducts docent training. When asked about the award, Irene summed it up. “It’s the culmination of 20 years of volunteering. For those of us who donate our time, it’s an honor to volunteer at Meadow Brook Hall.”

Given in 2010 for the first time, the BARBARA THORPE MEMORIAL AWARD recognizes an individual or couple who demonstrate an exemplary call to service. This year’s recipient, DIANE KONKLE, was “...shocked I was chosen. Barb was not only my mentor, she was my friend.” When Diane first started as a volunteer she remembers hearing Barb tell Rita Pascoe, another docent, that “Diane is a good girl.” That was high praise. Friends with both Barb and her husband Doug for years, Diane was delighted to get a hug from Doug at the awards ceremony. “Barb gave many hugs. When I was asked to work in the archives as Barb did, I immediately said ‘yes’. I feel like I’m following in her path. And she was a very special lady.”

Preservation front

MBH CHIMNEYS GET A LITTLE NIP AND TUCK-POINTING

Work got under way this fall to restore two of The Hall’s 14 stacks of chimneys; addressing the most critical areas of deterioration to the mortar joints, brickwork and stone caps. Not unlike many of The Hall’s previous preservation projects, the Chimney Restoration Project will depend on the procurement of custom-made materials to replace its failing components; a lengthy and costly process. In this case, the restoration project, funded by the Matilda R. Wilson Fund, required the fabrication of new bricks, the removal and replacement of mortar joints and stone patching on the chimney caps. Project design and oversight was conducted by SmithGroup (formerly Smith, Hinchman and Grylls) the architectural firm that originally designed Meadow Brook Hall. The Hall is hopeful that work on the remaining chimneys identified as high priority can continue in the near future as funding becomes available.

Also under way is the rehabilitation of the Servants Dining and Sitting rooms (known as the “Wilson Room” since the 1970s). The project will restore the rooms and adjacent hallway back to their original design and function, allowing the space to be purposed for interpretive activity including touring, exhibitions and room rental.





Children in bloom

*Take a seat and start to dream . . .
find the fern painted red and green*

It was a meandering path, an interactive exploration of landscape and architecture that led participants to a freshly tilled stretch of earth behind Knole Cottage on a beautiful June morning. In tribute to the summer tour and theme, “Meadow Brook in Bloom,” and with the support of the dedicated Garden Club, The Hall introduced “Children in Bloom,” a youth garden day intended to inspire respect and knowledge of gardening.

Smelling herbs and answering riddles, families took scavenger hunt tours of the 14 gardens on the estate, ending at Knole for games and snacks. Melody VanSledright, this summer’s Landscape Sustainability Project student employee, gave gardening tips and helped the children plant their flowers, which they then decorated with stakes they had painted.

Children in Bloom is just one of many educational programs for children at Meadow Brook Hall. For more information, visit meadowbrookhall.org/visit/youth.

Wall of Honor planned

Coming soon to the Fountain Room on Meadow Brook Hall’s entertainment level will be a new Wall of Honor, recognizing both individuals and institutions who have reached milestone cumulative giving levels. Gifts to The Hall during the most recent calendar year will be recognized through a listing of Friends, Guilders and Cornerstone Society members. Members of the Heritage Society, which includes donors who have made

planned or estate gifts to The Hall, will also be featured. Currently in the design phase (artist’s rendering pic-



tured), the new “wall” will include video display capability and easily accommodate annual updates. The Wall of Honor replaces the large plaque in Meadow Brook’s entry hall, which had reached capacity. For

further information on giving to The Hall, contact Kim Zelinski at (248) 364-6204.

Mr. McGregor would approve

A succulent cherry tomato bursting with sweet flavor, purple beans that snap crisp and green when tasted, cheerful sunflowers that track the progress of the sun throughout the day and provide a splash of golden yellow to please the eye...these were a few of the plants growing in the Chef’s Garden at Meadow Brook Hall. Planned by executive Chef Patrick Gazzarato and planted and tended by student Melody VanSledright through an Oakland University Summer Corps Internship, the garden included heirloom vegetables like tomatoes, peppers, rattlesnake and pole beans, corn and eggplant; and a variety of herbs such as chives, tarragon, sage, rosemary and cilantro.

According to Chef Patrick, “Because of the scale of the garden, the vegetables have been used only for small events or parties, however the herbs have been used in larger gatherings over the course of the season.”

Other crops, such as sunflowers, gourds and winter and summer squash were incorporated as decorative elements for reception displays. Located at the back of The Hall adjacent to the kitchen area, Chef Pat’s kitchen garden has also been a popular stop for gardeners and guests alike.



HOLIDAY WALK NOVEMBER 25-DECEMBER 22

The games people played

As visitors walk through magnificent Meadow Brook Hall this November and December, festoons will drape across fireplaces ablaze, ornate trees will twinkle with fairy lights, and the organ will call out favorite tunes. But this year, Meadow Brook will go beyond beautiful decorations. For the 40th anniversary of the Detroit area's classic Holiday Walk, the estate will go "unplugged" with the theme "The Games People Played."



Exhibits throughout the house will feature a variety of traditional games, games American families have played from the 1930s to present. From card games to board games, Tinker Toys to Lincoln Logs, and even a rare carved-ivory chess set (below) owned by the Wilson family, visitors of all ages will be taken back in time to relive treasured memories with family and friends.

For children, The Hall will also present a special activity area in the Coach House for game playing and Frances Dodge's playhouse in the woods, Knole Cottage, will be decorated with a fairytale glow and open for touring.



Sorting through history

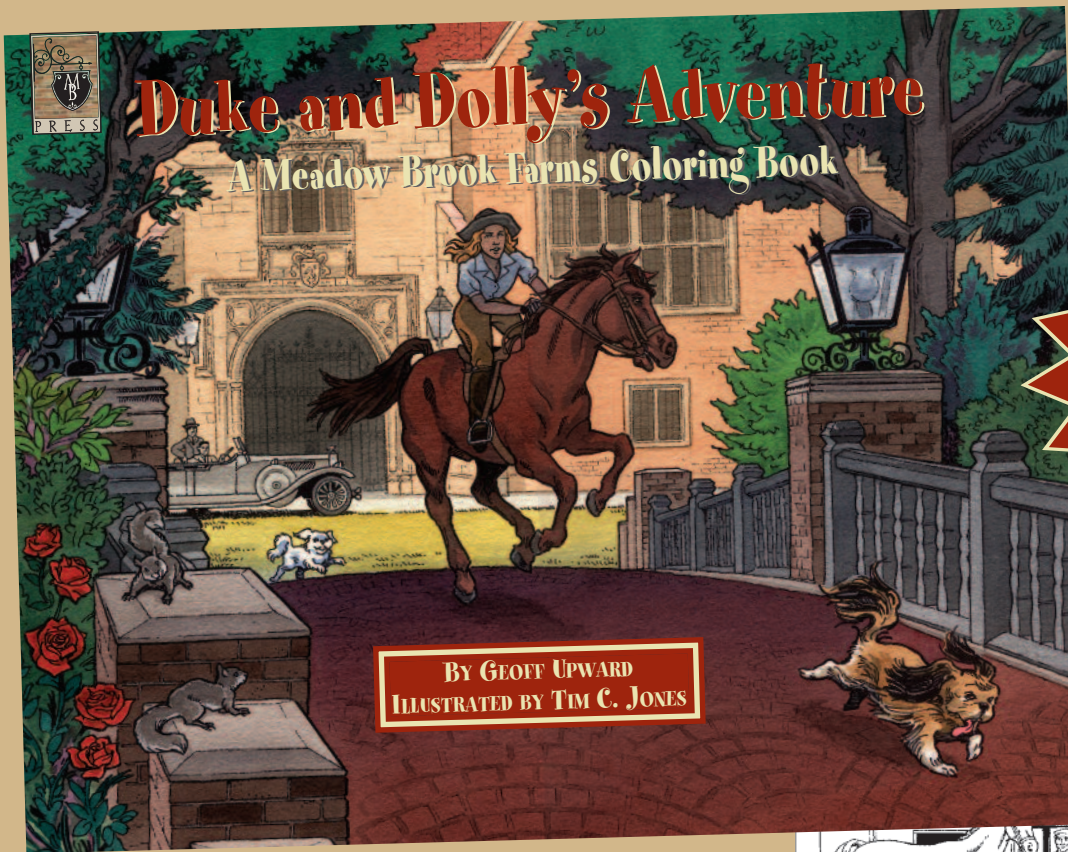
Oakland University history major Olivia Marsh is spending this semester in a 4th floor attic, sifting through newspaper and magazine clippings, old photographs and books. And, she loves it. "It's amazing to see what life was then, and how the Wilsons helped influence what was happening in the area. Life here reflected what was going on in the nation."

Hired part time to help organize the extensive Meadow Brook Hall archives, Olivia soon found herself helping to research facts and find relevant photos for an upcoming book about The Great Estate. "I think to myself how lucky I am to be working at a job that follows my passion," Olivia admitted. "A job that may someday lead to a career." **MB**

WANT TO VOLUNTEER?

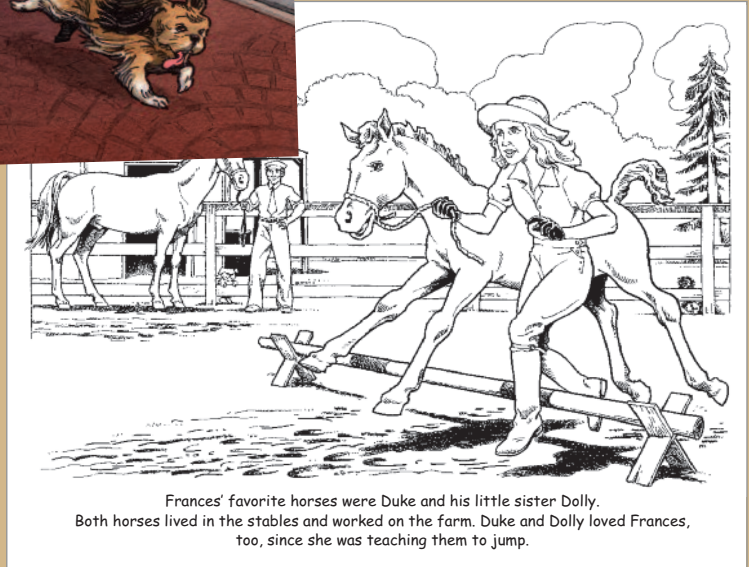
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PEGASUS

Style, utility and a Meadow Brook icon

BY KIM ZELINSKI

Centered in Meadow Brook's Great Hall, a cross axis extends eastward, down the length of the long Gallery, through the Wren Dining Room and out the Breakfast Nook doors to the Evergreen Garden, where it terminates at its intended focal point; a heroic-sized bronze of a winged-horse named Colt Pegasus.

The garden sculpture, graciously perched on the crest of a cloud floating above the octagon-shaped pool and seemingly ready for flight, reflects both the incredible variety and depth of Matilda and Alfred Wilson's collection of decorative and fine art. Below the spiral cloud, a constellation of stars are precisely positioned into the pool's base grid of Pewabic tiles, and rising jets of gradual height enhance the garden with sights and sounds of water.

The surrounding landscape, originally planted with evergreens of various textures, colors and forms, complements the weathered green and blue

patinas of the statue. In addition to being a focal point viewed each morning by family during breakfast or in the evening from Matilda Wilson's bedroom windows, the garden beautifully transitions its two connecting gardens, the Breakfast and Rose gardens.

The inspiration for Colt Pegasus, installed in 1947, came from two sources. The renowned sculptor, Avard T. Fairbanks (who created numerous earlier master works including the Golden Fleece located in the niche of the Breakfast Garden wall) was intensely interested in classic Greek mythology and impressive garden figures. The estate owners' love of animals, especially horses, suggested its form be modeled after one of their own Hackney Ponies. It is also plausible that the ideals of the iconic equine figure – heroic, divine and symbolic of wisdom – were shared by both artist and patron.

Fairbanks was recognized as one of



PHOTOS THIS PAGE BY THERESA FINCK

The Golden Fleece, c. 1940, was installed in the Breakfast Garden in 1998.

America's most notable creators of monumental art. Earning a masters degree in fine arts and Ph.D. in anatomy, he publicly advocated for the appreciation of the arts. Fairbanks believed "The arts are created for contemplation and edification; the expressions of the highest ambition, and the spiritual hopes of a people. These produce a culture that lives on to uplift subsequent generations."

Of his master works, it has been written that he put into each creation such a sense of concern, whether tragic or happy, that one can feel the significance of each event recorded. So life-like is each statue that "if given a spirit, the subject could get up and walk away," or in the case of Colt Pegasus, perhaps run or fly away. **MB**



Colt Pegasus has presided over the Evergreen Garden since 1947.



“It was a different

A conversation with the Wilson children,



way of life”
Richard and Barbara

Matilda and Alfred Wilson’s children and longtime residents of Meadow Brook Hall, Richard Wilson and Barbara Wilson Eccles, are a rich source for stories of the times and characters of the estate’s heyday. Richard (now 82) was adopted in 1930 and Barbara (80) in 1931 by Alfred and Matilda Wilson from the same orphanage, The Cradle, in Chicago. Their lives were markedly different from the lives of the two children from Matilda’s first marriage to John Dodge, Frances and Dan Dodge, who were already teenagers when the Wilson children came to Meadow Brook. Richard and Barbara graciously allowed MEADOW BROOK MAGAZINE (“MBM”) to interview them in July of this year on a variety of topics, many of which are shared on these pages. Editor’s notes of clarification are shown in italics. – ed.



Previous page: Richard Wilson and Barbara Wilson Eccles reunited at Meadow Brook Hall in July 2011.

Top: Meadow Brook Farms pool located near the Clubhouse, c. 1942; Above: Barbara and Richard, second and third from left, with friends c. 1944.

MBM: Let's start off with an easy one to loosen up the memory banks . . . since you lived on the 1,500-acre Meadow Brook Farms estate, which was out in the country north of Detroit, where did you go to school, and how did you get there?

BWE: Well, I attended Brookside in Bloomfield Hills until the 5th grade. Then I went to Vaughan School, which was also in Bloomfield, for two years, and then I went to boarding school. The first one was in Wellesley, Massachusetts, called Tenacre School. The second was the Ethel Walker School in Simsbury, Connecticut, near Hartford.

RW: I went to Brookside and Vaughan, too. Otis, our chauffeur, took us to school. Mother had that 8-door LaSalle station wagon, which is still around, and Otis took our football team places, too. He ended up in bad shape because he was a bit of a degenerate. He knew every dirty limerick, so that's where I got my background in

limericks! But, of course, I later went away to school, too.

BWE: One of the reasons we were sent to boarding school was that during World War II there was gas rationing and Birmingham and Bloomfield were 10 or 12 miles away from Meadow Brook Hall. . . and that's a lot of traveling and ration stamps for a couple of kids. And the family couldn't get an extension on its gas ration. So it became obvious that we needed to be sent away, to board somewhere. I don't know why they sent us out of state when we had Kingswood and Cranbrook (*both boarding schools in Bloomfield Hills*) at the back door, but that's what happened.

RW: I liked Culver (*Military Academy near South Bend, Indiana*) so much that I decided to go to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. So I talked to my father and he said he'd talk to his friend, (*Michigan*) Senator Vandenberg. I didn't go because I missed registration by one day.

I was stubborn. My father then wanted me to go to Princeton, but I wanted to go to Wesleyan University (*Connecticut*) with all my friends from Culver. So I took the entrance exam for Princeton and passed everything but the mathematics exam. I had never gotten anything less than an A in mathematics before, and he suspected I did that on purpose . . . which I did. So I went to Wesleyan and then graduated from Michigan State in agricultural economics, which is just a fancy word for farming. My father said, "When you come back, you're going to farm," and I said sure.

BWE: The schools out east were girls' schools and you couldn't do whatever you wanted, that's for sure. I went by train and I always had a chaperone because an 11-year-old couldn't travel alone. We didn't have jets! I liked my friends at school, but I couldn't have cared less about classes

and my grades showed it.

I later went to college two years in Massachusetts at Garland Junior College. It was a "home ec" college and I got an associate of science degree there.

MBM: Did your friends come out to Meadow Brook to visit? If they did, what types of things did you guys do?

RW: Our folks were very particular who we hung out with because they were afraid that someone was going to be kidnapped, like the Lindbergh thing. If there were functions or parties in Birmingham or Bloomfield, the chauffeur took us. Or, if I had things going on here at home, the chauffeur would bring them out here.

We swam, rode horses and just played. Nobody had TV in those days. We'd build model airplanes, listening to the radio, which was great because you could do things while you were listening to it. We just did kid things, ran around, played hide and seek. I used to hide in the basement a lot.

It was kind of a normal life, but just the distance alone was a problem. Adams Road was dirt; in fact most of the roads were, except Crooks. We didn't have freeways or interstates. It wasn't like it is now for sure . . . and I got my driver's license at 14!

BWE: I was a girl; he was a boy. In those days, that made a big difference. Girls couldn't do everything boys could. Two generations ago, girls didn't work, for one. A lot of boys didn't go to college. They'd get out of high school and work on a farm. We had a boarding house here for young



Barbara and Richard, c. 1935

"I was a girl; he was a boy. In those days, that made a big difference."



men to come and live and work on the farm. They got their room and board and a paycheck.

Dick could go anywhere on the farm he wanted. He learned to drive all the vehicles. I wasn't allowed to leave the house except for horseback riding and then I had an escort. Mr. Smith went with me everywhere and I didn't get my driver's license until I was 18. I was stuck on the farm and I was actually tied down.

I could rarely have friends over. When I did, we would go horseback riding or swimming. My sister Frances (*Dodge*) put in the outdoor pool, which made a big difference. She did that in 1939 or '40. She also put in the riding ring.

The people I knew best were the men who worked on the farm. They were good to me. Thelma, the telephone operator, called me "The Pest" because I was always popping in and saying hi to her because she was the only person I could talk to in the house. I learned to enjoy reading and how to knit and crochet . . . and thank God for the radio and a book.

MBM: Did the two of you have chores, or did the staff do everything? Your growing up years were during The Depression and World War II, right?

BWE: We didn't have help during the war. So when I came home (*from school*), guess who did the laundry?

We vacuumed, we swept, we mopped, we did a little bit of everything, because who else was going to do it? It wasn't a big deal, because I had to clean up at school, so this was no different. And, at the age of 11, 12, 13, who cared?

I have no idea what Dick did during that time because in a sense we lived two different lives. Dad didn't do the laundry or make coffee. I'm sure Dick didn't either. Girls back then were to have babies and take care of the house.

RW: Nope, I didn't make coffee!

Before the war, when we were real young, we always ate in the breakfast room, and we had dinner in the breakfast room at 6 o'clock with a governor-ness. Later, we would sit down with the family when they were eating dinner. We had to put on a coat and tie. When we were older, we all ate together . . . usually in the dining room at 7 p.m.

Mother planned the meals. In the house, she had a cook and assistant, a butler, an assistant butler. She hired this Danish butler named Nelson, who was short. He of course had days off. We got a call once from the Detroit police. He had tried to pick up and accost a plainclothes policeman and got bounced out of the country quick. Mother was horrified, of course.

She also had her maid, Beatrice Whitaker, who lived in the first bedroom down the hall and then there were two or three other maids upstairs. There was Julia the cook, an assistant cook, mechanics, Burt the superintendent, Charlie Wyman the engineer, Montgomery the watchman. Mary



Top: Otis, Meadow Brook chauffeur; Above: Beatrice, head maid; Right: Montgomery, watchman.



Matthews was Mother's personal assistant from the early Dodge days. She was probably more of a confidant for our mother than anybody else. She had power and if Barbara and I didn't behave, she spoke up about it. She did Mother's hair, her nails.

Then, as Barbara said, things changed. I remember we moved back to the farmhouse for a while because heat and oil were rationed. People today don't realize, but during the war they had stamps for gasoline, food, sugar, things like that. Because of our agriculture here, we had whatever we wanted. The Guernsey herd would produce milk that was brought down to the house by horse and wagon. The milk was in glass milk bottles, with the cream on top. We slaughtered our own hogs and cattle.

MBM: So, you would watch all this happening?

RW: Yeah, well I worked at one of the farm groups each summer . . . cattle, sheep, hogs – they were on that whole bunch of property my folks owned where you used to turn onto Crooks Road instead of Adams. One summer I worked on the pig farm, cleaning out the pens every day.

Matilda ran the house, the Belgians, other horses, the dairy operation. Alfred ran the sheep, the cattle, the hogs. They were each supposed to support themselves. She and my father would have discussions about that.

BWE: August was when all the fruit started to come in, and Herman's vegetable garden started to do its thing. The last two weeks of August, first two of September, all we did was can. I mean can tomatoes, peaches, relishes, cucumber relish, pickles . . . we actually grew Concord grapes. We made jelly, jam. Everything Herman produced, we canned if there was a lot of it. Off the back of that garden up near the farmhouse were a couple of pear trees and a lot of apple trees. The garden was right off where the gate was.

We did all the canning in the big kitchen, and it was all over the wood fire stove. There was no electricity. You'd be amazed what you could do. The only reason you need gas and electricity is because it's faster. Canning you're not in a hurry. We had a little stove in the corner which is where we boiled. All our jars and lids were set up on a little table in the middle of the room. I did a lot of that kind of stuff. I did a lot of the tomato pressing. We didn't have all these sophisticated things . . . we did them the old-fashioned way.

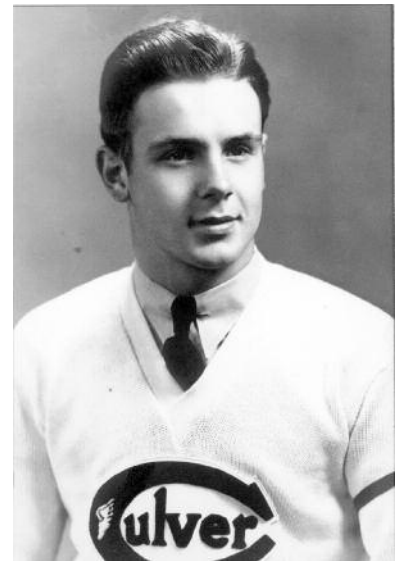
MBM: How did things change after the war?

BWE: It never went back to the way it was. Before the war we had Julie the cook and Joseph, who was the butler. Everything was very formal, and they used to prepare everything from scratch. Joseph didn't care about doing the dishes . . . it was part of his job. We also had Mrs. Hoffman in the laundry. She would wash the tablecloths and when you have that kind of help, you go all out.

After the war, when you couldn't get help, you cut back. We used linen placemats instead of the tablecloths and we cut back on the amount of silver because some guy in the kitchen didn't want to do the washing or polishing. There was an attitude change.

All of the people in the domestic world had gone to work in the factories during the war. That's when they found out women could do jobs as well as men. So, here we go through the war and they had trouble finding help afterwards because nobody wanted to do that anymore . . . and nobody especially wanted to be at Meadow Brook out in the middle of nowhere. **MB**

END OF PART ONE. Up next (Spring 2012): Richard and Barbara talk about leisure pursuits and family members.



Richard, c.1946



Barbara, c.1948

“We moved back to the farmhouse for a while because heat and oil were rationed.”

Richard and Barbara

THE FASCINATING STORY BEHIND MEADOW



ALIZED

BROOK'S LANDSCAPE

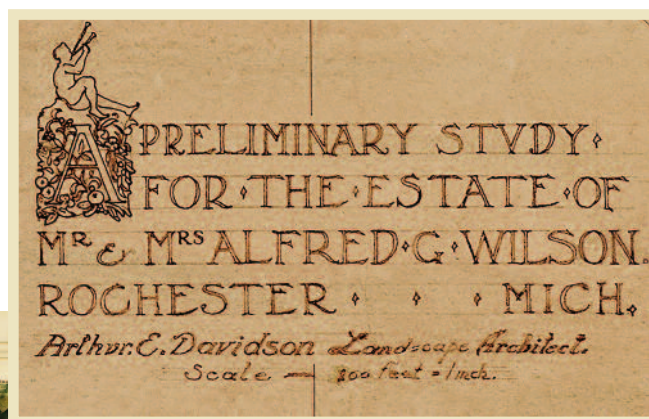


Matilda and Alfred Wilson's decision to construct a new family home on the Meadow Brook Farms property followed a common trend among the era's nouveau riche. For them, nothing expressed prosperity, success and status better than the creation of a European-inspired country estate. Their retreat to the country afforded them the pleasures that could not be found as city dwellers: tranquility, seclusion, rejuvenation and its most tangible benefit... land, often thousands of acres of nature's assets including meadows, valleys, hills, woodlands and lakes.

While these estate-makers built on the most beautiful sites across America and obsessed over architectural design, they also sought to provide scenic backgrounds for their grand manors. Just as a great estate was intended to reflect a family seat, beautiful gardens became a popular arena through which to display their wealth, having the same societal value as good horses, a box at the opera or a magnificent dinner party. A universal belief, if not conviction, also emerged suggesting that personal contact with nature was especially beneficial and "making gardens," even on private estates, became socially valuable, if not almost a public duty.

Matilda Wilson shared in this sentiment and by 1925, already enormously wealthy and herself a capable gardener, she commissioned New York City landscape engineer Charles Leavitt to develop a plan for her young family's growing Meadow Brook estate. This forethought indicated that even prior to the development of the house's design, the estate's landscape was to be a major component.

Although many of Leavitt's concepts were eventually incorporated into the landscape, it would be English land-



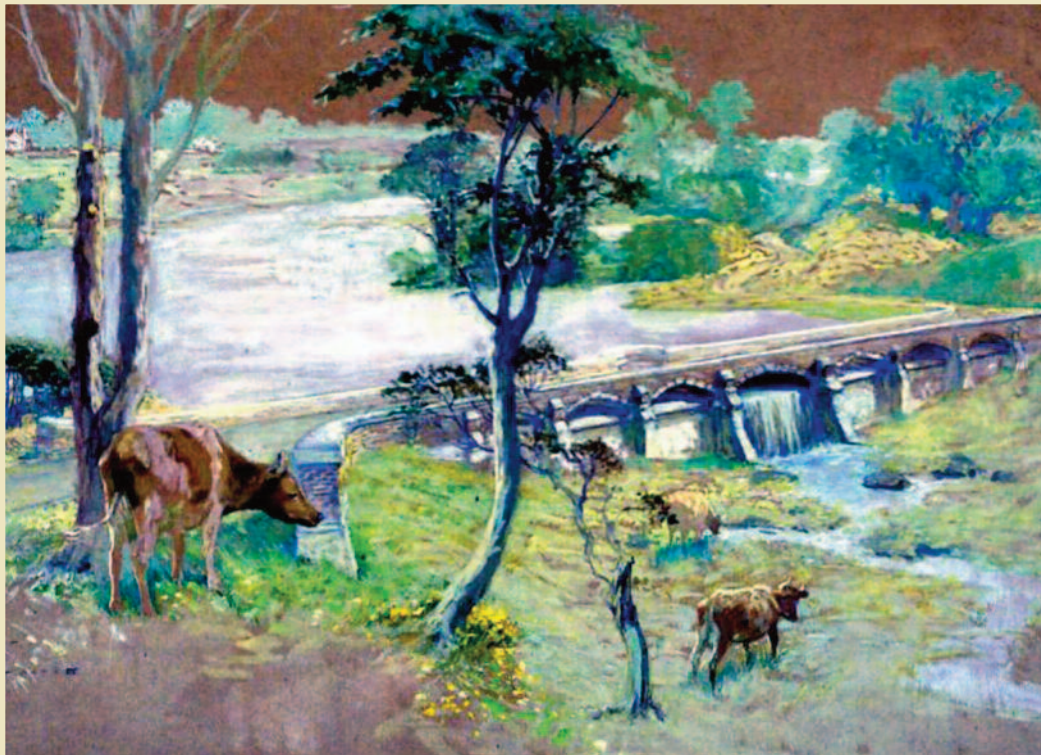
Previous page: Arthur Davidson's master plan for the Meadow Brook Hall landscape; Above: artist's rendering of the proposed parterre garden; Opposite page top: the entrance drive from the Gate Lodge; Opposite page bottom: the proposed lake on the south lawn.

scape architect Arthur Davidson who would provide the Wilsons with an elaborate master plan. His design incorporated an eclectic mix of garden components of every type, style, function and pattern imaginable: formal parterres, wildflower garden, water gardens, rill pools and fountains, expansive vistas and greenswards, a dancing garden and bowling green, a lake with boathouse and two islands, children's and maid's garden, greenhouse,

horse stables and even a plant hospital for ailing plants.

As one looks across the landscape today, it is apparent that in spite of extensive planning and preparation, many of the components were not fully realized. Davidson became seriously ill in 1929, unable to direct its implementation, and the stock market crash the same year caused both financial and moral concerns that may have influenced the Wilsons to dial back.

As a whole, gardens during this golden age of estate building were places of refuge that not only smelled and looked good, but embodied wealth, culture and a love of nature. It is reasonable to believe that had circumstances allowed, Davidson's master plan could have rivaled the finest estate gardens in the country both in magnitude and cost, supporting the old garden saying that at the end of the day "money is the best manure."



Before the Hall

FROM MODEST BEGINNINGS, MATILDA DODGE WILSON WOULD
KNOW A LIFE OF PRIVILEGE AND PAIN LONG BEFORE THE
FIRST BRICK OF HER BELOVED MEADOW BROOK HALL WAS LAID

BY MADELYN RZADKOWOLSKI



Matilda Rausch was born in Walkerton, Ontario, Canada on October 19, 1883 to George and Margaret Rausch, beginning a life that would see tragedy and triumph and affect thousands of people before it ended some 83 years later.

In 1884 the family moved to Detroit and her father opened the Princess Saloon, her mother operating the Dry Dock boarding house next door. Three years later, Matilda's younger sister Amelia was born. The Rauschs installed a strong work ethic in their daughters, but never let them work in the saloon below their upstairs apartment. Margaret and George desired a higher education and better life for their girls, and Matilda graduated from the 8th grade at Detroit's Duffield School in 1899. She later attended Gorsline Business College where she learned secretarial skills, and after a year of study took a position at the E.J.

Kruce Cracker Company.

Her next job would have long-lasting consequences. She became a stenographer for John Dodge at the machine shop he owned and operated with his younger brother Horace, in later years returning as his secretary. The Dodge brothers worked long hours to grow their business, and probably did not have a lot of time to organize their office. Matilda's organizational and clerical skills filled the gap, earning John Dodge's attention. Soon, John, who had lost his wife Ivy to tuberculosis in 1901, began courting his young secretary. Attending the opera and theater in the midst of a growing prohibitionist awareness, she sought to escape her parents' life as saloon owners and become a more proper and respectable member of society.

Ivy Dodge had left John with three young children – Winifred, Isabel and John Duval – along with a home to maintain. Horace's wife Anna encouraged him to hire her friend Isabelle Smith as a housekeeper. In 1903, while courting Matilda, John Dodge inexplicably married Isabelle in a secret ceremony. In December 1905, the Rauschs heard confirmed rumors that Dodge was married, and Matilda took a job at Detroit Lumber Company, effectively

cutting off contact. Her sister Amelia also left the Dodge Brothers enterprise.

But John somehow won back Matilda's affections. He was already building a Tudor Revival home in the prestigious Boston-Edison district, and Matilda took home economics and elocution lessons to prepare for the marriage. Her parents sold the saloon and bought a grocery store. Dodge quietly divorced Isabelle after a two-year separation and married Matilda on December 10, 1907. Horace and Anna Dodge, as they had been for John's second marriage, were the only witnesses.

That day John brought Matilda home to 33 Boston Boulevard, marking the first time she had met her new stepchildren. She immediately entered their lives, encouraging John Duval's studies and planning lavish debutante parties for Winifred and Isabel. She took charge of the household and introduced the staff to an elaborate inventory system. At first put off by the extra work, the staff changed their minds when they saw Matilda laboring the hardest to achieve her goals. This desire to help staff with difficult or extra tasks is a trait that Matilda would carry with her for the rest of her life, most notably at her last home and legacy, Meadow Brook Hall in rural



Clockwise from lower left: Matilda Rausch, c. 1885; Matilda Dodge, c. 1916; Matilda Rausch, c. 1902; the Dodge family in Ireland, c. 1909 (from left: John Duvall Dodge, John F. Dodge, Matilda Dodge, Winifred Dodge, Isabel Dodge).





*Clockwise from below:
Matilda Dodge at Meadow
Brook Farms, c. 1909; John
and Horace Dodge in their
first Dodge Brothers automo-
bile in front of John and
Matilda's Boston Boulevard
home, 1914; Matilda Dodge
with children Anna Mar-
garet, Frances and Daniel,
c. 1923; Alfred and Matilda
Wilson aboard the Aquitania
on their honeymoon, 1925.*

Rochester, Michigan.

A young Matilda had spent time on her grandparents' sheep farm in Ontario, inspiring a love of nature and farm life that would later lead to her decision to center the family's life on the Rochester estate. John Dodge, an avid hunter and sportsman, connected with his wife on this passion. While driving country roads north of Detroit in 1908, the couple saw a large farmhouse near the road, behind it sprawling meadows, stands of old oaks and the potential for a thriving family farm and country retreat. John Dodge purchased the 320-acre farm and fur-

nished farmhouse from Mr. John Higgins for \$50,000, naming it Meadow Brook Farms. Matilda's parents, George and Margaret Rausch, moved to the farmhouse to run the farm.

John and Horace Dodge, who by 1902 were successfully manufacturing engines and transmissions for Ransom E. Olds, soon began supplying parts for Henry Ford. The brothers ultimately were responsible for supplying at least 60 percent of Ford parts before 1913.

That same year, John Dodge resigned as vice-president of Ford. In 1914, after designing their first car at the Meadow Brook farmhouse, John and Horace launched the Dodge Brothers Motor Car Company. On November 10, 1914, John and Horace proudly rode their first completed car to Boston Boulevard, a pregnant Matilda watching from her bedroom window. On November 27, she gave birth to their first child, Frances Matilda.

Dodge Motors continued growing, as did the Dodge family. In 1917, Daniel George Dodge was born. 1919 was another important year, as the brothers won \$25 million from Ford in a suit over unpaid dividends, and Anna Margaret Dodge was born. John and Matilda began plans for a massive estate on Lake Shore Drive in Grosse Pointe, an exclusive suburb of Detroit. They hired Smith, Hinchman, & Grylls (the same firm that built the Boston Boulevard house and some of the Dodge Brothers factories) to design the 110-room house. Though it has been documented that John Dodge had a heavy hand in the design of the house and landscape, Matilda was likely involved, for she engaged the same firm and some of the design and materials when building Meadow Brook Hall a decade later.

1920 promised to bring success to the John Dodge family at home and in business, with the 80,000-square-foot home scheduled for completion and the ever-popular John and Horace Dodge cementing their company's



reputation at the auto show in New York.

Instead, Horace contracted the Spanish flu, which gave way to pneumonia. John, despite weak lungs from a bout with tuberculosis in the late 1890s, sat outside his beloved brother's room and caught the disease himself. Matilda and Anna Dodge were summoned to New York to see their very sick husbands. Horace made a slow recovery, but John Dodge died the evening of January 14, 1920. (Horace would die later that same year.) Matilda, also ill, and her stepdaughters made their way back to Detroit with John's body.

Within a year, Matilda left the unfinished shell of the Lake Shore Drive house and a quarreling family (over inheritance issues), gathering Frances, Danny and Anna Margaret for an extended vacation in Europe.

In 1923, the young family moved home and settled into a smaller house on Lincoln Avenue in Grosse Pointe. Tragedy struck again when four-year-old Anna Margaret contracted the measles. An attempt to surgically remove infection was too much for the child and in April 1924 she died. Matilda again donned mourning clothes and prepared for another funeral and another battle over inheritances.

Her fortunes would take a turn for the better, however, when around Christmas time in 1924 she began to be formally courted by a man she had known through the First Presbyterian Church in Detroit and whom many considered to be the most eligible bachelor in the city, 42-year-old lumber broker Alfred G. Wilson. Before the wedding, Matilda and Anna Dodge sold the Dodge Brothers Car Company for \$146 million, the largest cash transaction up to that time. Alfred and Matilda married in June 1925 and began planning to build a house and home for their family in the country on the Meadow Brook Farms property . . . a house that would be known as Meadow Brook Hall. **MB**



Curtain call

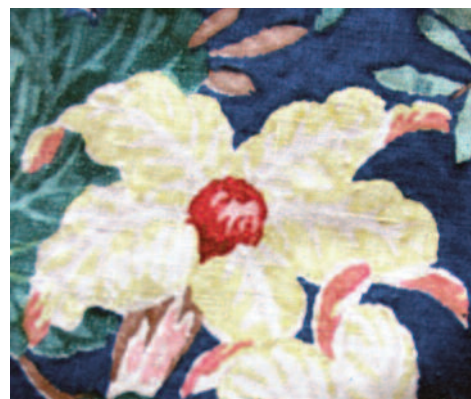
BY MEREDITH LONG

With more than 100 rooms, MBH has, well, a lot of windows. Just imagine that for each of these rooms' two to six windows, custom draperies were fabricated from sumptuous materials like silk, linen and velvet. Some of the rooms would have had two sets of curtains for both the winter season (made from heavy, rich fabrics) and the summer season (light and airy fabrics). Seasonal colors for the drapes would match the color schemes of each.

These hard-working textiles – responsible for blocking light, keeping out the heat and cold, all the while being highly decorative – are the focus of a new and ongoing collections management project at The Hall.

The first step – the tedious process of inventory – kicked off this summer. With the assistance of Ruth Ann Frantz, a Meadow Brook Hall volunteer with years of textile experience, the curatorial team dove into the fourth-floor cedar closets where the majority of the curtains are being stored. Inventory documentation was first, involving recording for each its overall description, condition, size and the most difficult category, its original location. To determine this, the team referenced the original 1971 inventory and old photos of rooms currently stored in Archives. If those measures proved inconclusive, plain old detective work was required, physically matching the curtains to the individual windows.

An ideal outcome of the project will be to rotate some of the curtains seasonally, giving visitors a more accurate picture of how the house was lived in. (A similar approach was taken in Matilda Wilson's bedroom suite with the fitting of the room's summer



floral chintz slipcovers.)

Next time you are at The Hall, take a closer look at the windows throughout, not only to admire the beautiful window dressings, but also to appreciate the detective work of Team Textile! **MB**

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

Brand new

For the past two years, Meadow Brook staff have been engaged in developing and implementing a new line of “branded” merchandise that reflects the quality of the historic property widely known as the preeminent example of the country estate lifestyle of America’s automotive aristocracy.

In the last issue of MEADOW BROOK MAGAZINE, several new products were introduced, including “The Great Estate” Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon and Meadow Brook Farms coffee (regular and decaf).

In this issue, The Hall introduces its new clothing line that will make great gifts this holiday season – all in the new Meadow Brook identity family. Sales support the preservation and interpretation of The Great Estate.

For information on specific items pictured here, go to www.meadowbrookhall.org and click on the Shopping button, call (248) 364-6206 (and speak with Kelly) or visit The Museum Shop during business hours.



“WHAT YOU LEAVE BEHIND IS NOT WHAT IS ENGRAVED INTO MONUMENTS, BUT WHAT IS WOVEN INTO THE LIVES OF OTHERS.” – PERICLES



Planned gifts – whether bequests, gifts of securities, IRA charitable distributions, charitable trusts, gift annuities, insurance policies or other financial planning vehicles – can provide significant and lasting support to Meadow Brook's efforts to preserve and interpret this great historical legacy for the benefit of our children's and grandchildren's generations. And many of these strategies can provide life income to the donors or their loved ones.

FOR INFORMATION ON PLANNED GIVING TO MEADOW BROOK HALL, AND MEMBERSHIP IN ITS HERITAGE SOCIETY, CONTACT GEOFF UPWARD, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, AT (248) 364-6240.



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PERFECT

*Weddings at
The Great Estate*



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