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Tour gives rare glimpse into MBH treasures

By **Jeff Samoray**, OU Web Writer

Visitors have marveled at the grand elegance of Oakland University's **Meadow Brook Hall** since it first opened to the public in 1971. Now, they are being given a rare glimpse of the hall's treasures not normally available for public viewing during special "Behind the Scenes" tours.

The Behind the Scenes tour, guided by Lisa Baylis Ashby, executive director of Meadow Brook Hall, takes visitors through areas on the hall's upper levels, some of which have been converted to staff offices. Other rooms serve as storage areas containing priceless artifacts that belonged to Matilda Dodge Wilson and Alfred Wilson, the original occupants of Meadow Brook Hall and founders of Oakland University.

Among the areas visitors will see are the playrooms of Danny and Frances, children of Matilda Dodge Wilson and John Dodge, Matilda's first husband; the organ blower and pipe room; a recreation of the bedroom of Matilda and John Dodge from their Detroit home; the John Dodge Archive Room, which contains many documents related to Dodge Brothers Motor Cars, the company he co-founded; Matilda's beauty parlor; the servants' quarters; the costume storage room, which contains over 1,000 pieces ranging from Matilda's Victorian-era dresses to her fashion accessories; and Alfred's secret staircase made from carved stone.

"The historical significance of Meadow Brook Hall exists from a social to an art and architecture level," Baylis Ashby said. "It's the finest example in the country of Tudor-revival style architecture. The extensiveness of the architectural detailing simply could not be reproduced today. Every key, every hinge and every knob in the home was custom designed."

Testament to the custom-built nature of the home is the architectural drawings room, which is included in the tour. Besides many floor plans, this room contains cabinets filled with drawers of spare knobs, screws, handles and other custom-made items.

"It was very interesting to see the behind-the-scenes areas and imagine what life must have been like when Matilda Wilson lived here," said Geoff Johnson, cataloguer at OU's Kresge Library. "It was amazing to see the amount of dresses she had. The background and insight is a great addition to the regular tour."

Dana Juriew, assistant professor at Kresge Library, also enjoyed viewing the materials in the costume room.

"I really enjoyed seeing the dresses from various periods that Matilda wore," Juriew said. "I was also very impressed by the Tiffany glass in the bathroom adjoining the recreation of John Dodge's bedroom."

The Behind the Scenes tours run through Thursday, April 18, and are from noon-1 p.m. April 16 and 18 and from 4-5 p.m. April 17. There is no cost for OU students, faculty and staff. Regular daily tours of the hall also are being conducted at no charge for OU students, faculty and staff through Saturday, April 20, at 1:30 p.m. each day.

Meadow Brook Hall is the fourth largest historic house museum in the United States. It is especially renowned for its superb craftsmanship, architectural detailing and grand scale. Built between 1926 and 1929, the 80,000-square-foot mansion is complete with collections of original art and furnishings. In 1957, the Wilsons left their residence and its collection along with the estate's 1,500 acres and \$2 million to found Oakland University.

Listed on both the national and state registers of historic places, Meadow Brook Hall strives to preserve and interpret its architecture, landscape, and fine and decorative art so visitors may be entertained, educated and inspired by its history.

For more information, visit the **Meadow Brook Hall** Web site, or call (248) 370-3140.

SUMMARY

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