

REFLECTING ON THE PAST OF THE CHILDREN'S HOME

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE OF THE FATHER'S HOUSE - 2017

By Kathleen Stuckey Fox

Hamilton Historian



(The Children's Home, circa 1900 – Then)



(The Father's House, 2017)

This beautiful farm house was built in 1850 by Hamilton industrialist E.G. Dyer. Although I spent a lot of time there growing up, I really had very little knowledge of its history. I am glad that now that I have recently studied the past history of this wonderful building and grounds that am able to bring back such precious memories hidden in my mind for years.

My personal connection with the Children's Home began long before I was born on April 24, 1943. In fact, my connection to the Children's Home dates all the way back 1869 when several concerned Christian women and two clergy, the Reverend Thane Miller and the Reverend W. B. Chidlaw, decided that Hamilton needed a home to care for fatherless children, victims of the Civil War. One of those concerned women was Ann M. Janes Matthias, the

mother of Lutie Matthias Gard, who was the first wife of Homer Gard, owner and publisher of *The Hamilton Journal News*, and my great uncle. Also, another concerned woman who was an original member was Martha Woods Beckett, daughter of John Woods, the famous Hamilton Lawyer, and U.S. Congressman, and my great, great, great, great uncle. Martha Woods married William Beckett who started the Beckett Paper Company in 1848. The site of that building was a temporary one located on "C" Street. Mrs. William Tweedy, a matron was hired, the group welcomed five little boys into the home, which later would welcome many other children from Butler County. For six years, the family on "C" Street grew to overflowing.

In 1875, E.G. Dyer and his partner, Hamilton philanthropist Clark Lane, came to the realization that the Children's Home needed a new location. Together Dyer and Clark donated \$10,000 to the cause with the contingency that the individuals who created the original Home in 1869 would raise \$2,000 for expenses. Having met that goal, the new Children's Home, located at 425 South "D" Street was opened to the public in September of that year. Not only did the Children's Home house orphans from the Civil War, but also it was a stipulation of Mr. Lane's that with the purchase of the property, his invalid son, Harry, would be cared for there for the rest of his life. Harry lived on the first floor of the newly created Children's Home until he died at age twenty-nine.

When the Children's Home was two years old, it was on December 11, 1877, to be precise, when my grandmother on my father's side, Emma Sault, who was born on Poor House Hill and four months old, was given up for adoption by her mother to the Children's Home, this information obtained by my

mother, Kathleen Neilan Stuckey, when working there. Emma's mother died of consumption shortly thereafter on Poor House Hill. Emma spent exactly two years and one day in the home until she was adopted by Frederick H. Berk, and his wife Louise Deuscher of Trenton, Ohio, on December 12, 1879.



(Emma Sault, circa 1900)

My sister, Neil Ann Stuckey Levine of Princeton, New Jersey, said that the Berks came in one day and selected Emma Sault and took her home, and that no formal adoption took place, which caused great angst later on in her life.

Lutie Matthias Gard began her service at the Children's Home in 1904. She succeeded her mother, Hamilton-born Ann M. Janes Matthias, mentioned earlier, when her mother passed away in 1898. Future Board President Lutie Gard would serve from 1904-1913 and from 1927 until her death on May 15, 1934.



(Lutie Matthias Gard, first wife of Homer Gard)

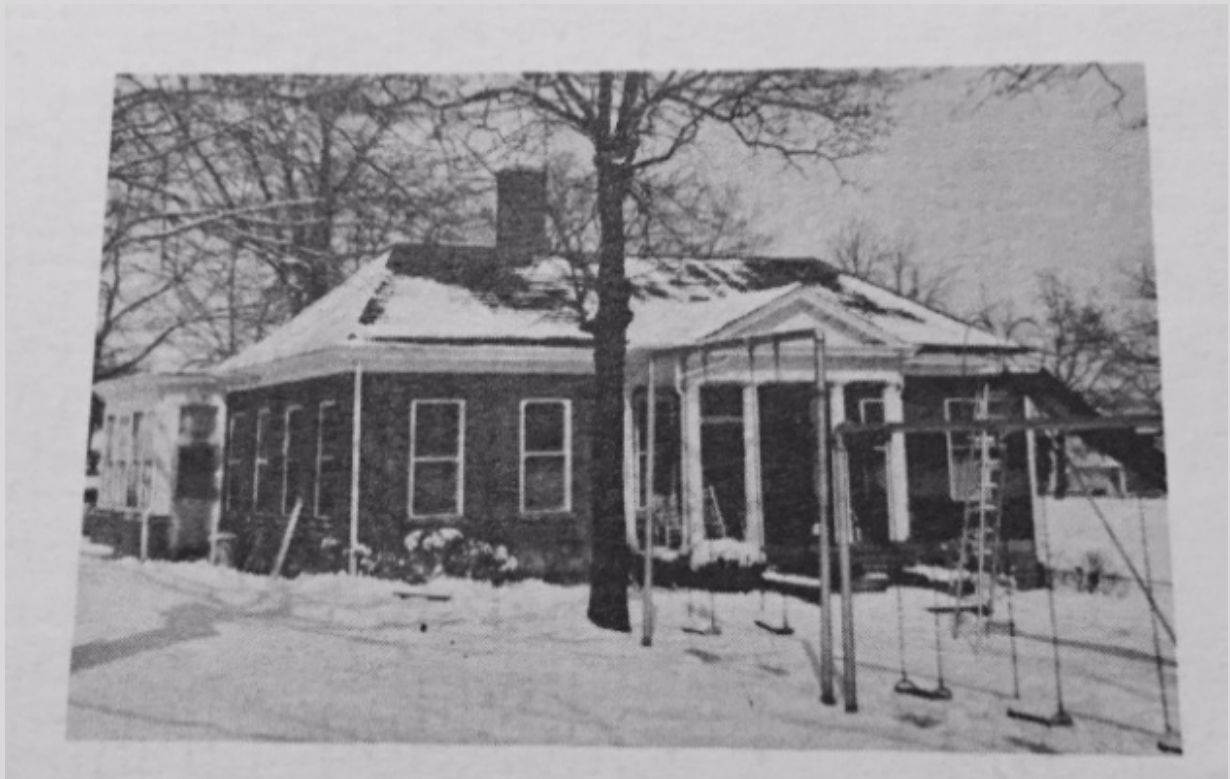
Over the past two years, I have been engaged in family research about the Woodses, Neilans, and Gards, and was reminded of so many great family connections to the Children's Home. My great grandmother on my mother's side, Jenny Zuver Woods, served at the Children's Home, probably in the late 1800s, though I do not have any concrete dates. My mother, Kathleen Neilan Stuckey, served as President of the Board of Trustees from 1950-

1960, but had also worked there as a social worker or Homefinder in the early to late 1930's, returning often to help out as she was raising us girls. My mother, Kathleen, wrote many newspaper articles about the Children's Home, which were published in *The Hamilton Journal News*, which was owned by her Uncle Homer Gard. Homer Gard's brother, Congressman and Judge Warren Gard, was married to Pearl Zuver Woods, her mother's sister, Lydia Marie Woods Neilan.

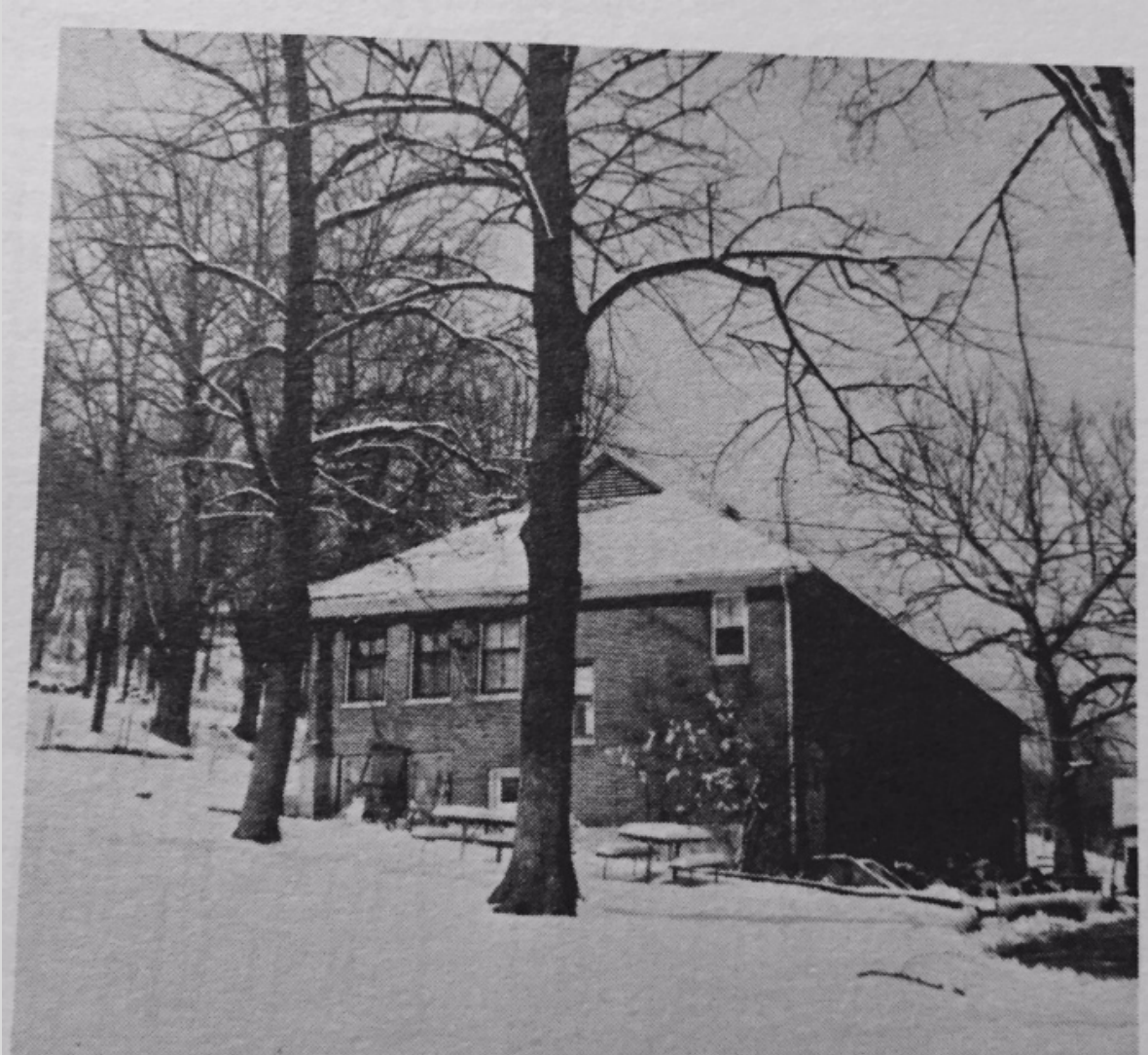


(Kathleen Neilan Stuckey in center, 1953)

Thus, my sister, Neil Ann, and I had many occasions to swim in the pool during the lunch hour, so as not to disturb the residents. The pool on the west lawn no longer exists. Many other memorable occasions were spent there, and I remember the Plasterers well, Marvel and S. C., who were supervisors at the Home from 1940-1959. I can recall the jungle gym where the current playground is, and the high gray steel structures, from which hung rugged seats and rings on long chains, and the infirmary where residents went when they were ill. It was in 1902 that Colonel and Mrs. R. C. McKinney (Eleanor Beckett who was the daughter of Mrs. William Beckett/Martha Woods), saw a need for a hospital on the grounds, and they gave money to build the structure and named it after their daughter who had died in infancy, and thus the name, Ruth's Hospital.



(Ruth's Hospital, built 1902)



(Dormitory built in 1909)

In 1909, a structure was built behind the grand home, to house forty boys. Originally, the both boys and girls were housed in the structure, but with so many children needing help, a dormitory was built in the back of the mansion where the boys would live. In 1921, a swimming pool was built through the generosity of Charles E. Heiser, Hamilton philanthropist and once president of The Second National Bank of Hamilton. All these memories that had lain dormant for so long now are coming back into focus.



(Kathleen and Neil Ann Stuckey in pool built in 1921)

Today, June 10, 2017, is like coming home to my ancestral history. I had not been in the Children's Home building for over a half century. I recalled all the beautiful woodwork, now that I have seen it again. It is good to be back, and I know the City of Hamilton and its residents appreciate the fact that the Gunnarson's have begun this wonderful faith-based restoration project to bring new life to the Children's Home, now The Father's House, as a residential center for families adopting or giving children foster care. For twenty-five years there was one other owner when the property was sold at auction, until Daryl and Roxann, the present owners, saw a vision,

purchased the property, moved to Hamilton, and made their dream a reality. Ruth's Hospital has now been remodeled, and the Gunnarsons, are now able to live on the property that they are renovating and dearly cherish.



(Photograph of Kathleen Stuckey Fox, enjoying a dinner at The Father's House on June 10, 2017, to help raise funds for the restoration of the all the beautiful buildings and grounds.)

The information and pictures in this article were supplied by myself, Kathleen Stuckey Fox, the Butler County Historical Society, and the "Centennial Celebration of The Children's Home of Butler Count, 1869-1969."

Children's Home 1891



Children's Home – 1890s



Children's Home – circa 1930?



Tim and Kristin MacDonald – Proprietors, The Father's House
2022

