

Welcome to the Squirrel-Forest Historic District in the Five Oaks Neighborhood. This walking tour will highlight the architectural and historical features of the area. Two other locally-designated historic districts, Grafton-Rockwood-Wroe and Kenilworth, are just a few blocks to the northwest and also await your discovery.

The tour is intended to provide a leisurely walk through this National Register District, allowing ample time to pause and appreciate its irreplaceable architecture and streetscapes. Please walk carefully, as streets and sidewalks can be uneven, and it's important to observe the terrain while you appreciate the area. We recommend that you allow approximately one hour to complete the tour. If you have any questions about the neighborhood, please contact us on Facebook at Five Oaks Historic Districts Dayton Ohio: www.facebook.com/Five-Oaks-Historic-Districts-Dayton-Ohio-111646802184943

Please begin your tour at the Corpus Christi Church at 527 Forest Avenue. The most convenient access is at the rear of the church where Squirrel Road ends, one block north of Five Oaks Avenue.

The Squirrel-Forest Historic District exhibits a diverse mix of significant, mostly upscale urban domestic architecture built in the early 20th Century.

These streets and the larger Five Oaks neighborhood were part of the expansion away from Dayton's historic center. This expansion created an inner-city ring of unique architecture. Five Oaks is generally defined as the area bounded by North Avenue on the south, Salem Avenue on the west, Delaware Avenue on the north, Main Street on the northeast, and Forest Avenue on the east.

In the 1850s and 1860s, the area was primarily rural in character. Historical maps from this period show 11 small and moderate-sized farmsteads in the area with the largest farm more than 50 acres in size. By the 1890s, the Dayton View Street Railway traversed up Forest Avenue from downtown Dayton and crossed over Neal Avenue. This access led to increased development in the Five Oaks area from approximately 1900 to the late 1940s.

The area was incorporated within a rural estate established by Jeremiah Hunt Peirce during the 1850s. Peirce was born in Dayton in 1818. He graduated from Miami University at age 16 and joined the Engineering Corps of the Miami-Erie Canal. Later he went to work for the Miami Lard Oil Company. In the 1870s, Peirce formed a lumber and wood products business and then formed a second wood products firm, Peirce and Colman in 1876. Peirce was a lover of fruits and flowers and served as president of the Montgomery County Horticulture Society.

In 1853 Peirce married Hannah Forrer. By then he had accumulated a large tract of land in the area. In the same year, he constructed a large estate on a portion of his land holdings on the west side of Forest Avenue. The larger area became known as Five Oaks because of the stand of mature oak trees found in close proximity to their home.



Five Oaks, before the tower was built, undated (Dayton Metro Library, FPW, Box 9, Folder 23)

With the death of Mr. Peirce in 1899, the estate passed to a son, J. Elliot Peirce. Peirce's son was also a successful business man who owned a tile manufacturing company and was able to maintain the estate during his ownership.

Most of the larger homes within the Squirrel-Forest Historic District were built

starting in 1900 when heirs of J. Elliot Peirce begin selling off portions of the Peirce estate. There was no established subdivision plat and no grand scheme for development of the land. However, the Peirce heirs placed specific deed restrictions on the lots that they sold. This contributed to the development of the remarkable homes and streetscape that comprise the Squirrel-Forest District.

A typical deed restriction required the grantee and their heirs to build a single-family dwelling required to cost a minimum of \$5,000. Homes had to be set back 35 feet from the front of the lot with no fencing in front and a uniform grade on the lot. Stables could not be built within 35 feet of Forest Avenue and the proposed Five Oaks Avenue. Deed restrictions also required landscaping and trees to conform to a ground plan for improving the overall area.

The Peirce family lived in their large house on the west side of what is now Forest Avenue until 1932. By that time, the majority of the original land holdings had been sold and developed. In 1934, the last of the Peirce family descendants ceased to live in the home. Management of the remaining estate and home passed onto an administrator who was appointed by the family. The home began to deteriorate and in 1946 the city of Dayton demolished the home and developed the few remaining acres into a city park.

The built environment of the Squirrel-Forest Historic District reflects a different architectural development compared to the rest of the Five Oaks. The built environment is a mix of mostly 1½- to 2 ½-story buildings found within two different residential subdivision patterns. One variance from these patterns is found along the west side of Squirrel Road where several Tudor-inspired homes are located. Some homes are found on larger lots while others occupy a more compact development pattern.

As you tour the district, please notice how the Peirce family deed restrictions helped to define the area's unique streetscape settings, the high quality of the homes and their architecture.

Our first stop is the remarkable Corpus Christi Church. Please walk to the front of the church at 527 Forest Avenue. The church was designed by William E. Russ and ground was broken on July 10, 1911. Work progressed so rapidly that dedication ceremonies were held on December 24, 1911. In its account of the dedication ceremonies, the *Dayton Herald* described the new church as “a replica of the old Spanish missions in Mexico and California.”



According to the same article, the church was “the only structure of its style in this section of the country and was chosen in conformity with the desire of the pastor and his congregation to break away from the stereotyped forms of church architecture.” Further, “when the sun shines on the red tiled roof and white stucco walls, the church presents an Old World picture which is as pleasing as it is rare.”

Later, a school was added to the property. Fortunately, the flood waters of 1913 did not reach as far north as the church and school buildings. However, the parish did not escape the great flu epidemic of 1918. The first pastor of the church, Reverend F.A. Gallagher, was probably weakened by exposures to the flu while visiting many sick parishioners. Reverend Gallagher died on November 11, 1918.

During the Great Depression, a cafeteria was added. And in 1930, the main altar was trimmed down. Much of the ornate upper part was removed and the two side altars were replaced by new ones. A new wrought iron altar railing and new cross beams in the body of the church were installed. Two imported paintings, the *Miracle at Cana* and the *Miracle of the Loaves and Fishes*, were placed on each side of the main altar, and the entire sanctuary and body of the church were completely redecorated. The *Dayton News* of March 23, 1930 carried a picture and a description of the two paintings. In the following year, new flooring was laid in the sanctuary and a new pulpit was installed. A choir transept was also added.

In addition to various interior renovations in both the church and the school, the most noteworthy outdoor project was the construction of the Wayside Shrine. The wood for the cross that dominated the shrine was cut from a tree on the newly acquired property that the pastor called “Strawberry Hill”. A parish garden club was organized for the construction and maintenance of the shrine. For years the shrine attracted visitors from all over the city and surrounding towns. Christmas cards, featuring a picture of the famous Wayside Shrine, were extremely popular.

Additional outdoor projects included grading the school yard and moving the curb line on Forest Avenue back nine feet, making it possible to park in front of the church.

In 1952, a transept on the south side of the church was completed, providing a greatly needed increase in the seating capacity of the church—from 550 to 750. The new transept marked the end of the old Wayside Shrine. The following year the bronze crucifix of the Shrine was mounted on a stone base and placed on the church grounds at the head of a newly designed, formal flower garden. To complete the whole job, the “old” part of the church was given a beauty treatment in the form of a new tile roof, new stucco siding, and new vines.

Please return to the rear of the church and continue south down Squirrel Road past Five Oaks Park on your right.

Please pause at 148 Squirrel Road, the Jenet-Roetter House. Framed in blond brick, this home is a notable example of Prairie School architecture made popular by the famous American architect, Frank Lloyd Wright. The expansive front porch of the house is a trademark Prairie School feature. The home was designed by Dayton's preeminent architectural firm, Schenck and Williams. The firm also designed the Wright Brothers home, Hawthorn Hill, a National Historic Landmark that is open to the public.

The Jenet-Roetter House was built in 1913. The City of Dayton's *Blueprint for Preservation* handbook devotes a whole page to the home as an outstanding example of the Prairie Style. The home is also designated as a Dayton Historic Landmark. The house has 11 rooms including five bedrooms and three bathrooms. The great room features a large fireplace. The office includes built-in bookshelves. A dining room with built-in display and storage cabinets, a breakfast room, a sunroom, and a full kitchen with a butler's nook are other notable rooms in the house .



Carrie E. Jenet was born in 1861 in Illinois to German parents. She acquired the 8,735 square-foot lot in 1911. Carrie and her sister, Elizabeth Jenet, were sisters-in-law to the head of the household, William J. Roetter. Roetter spent 47 years as a buyer for the linen and white goods department of the Rike-Kumler Company. It is likely that Roetter made a significant financial contribution to purchase the lot for \$1,200, hire the architectural firm of Schenck and Williams, and construct the house for \$7,500. A garage was later added at a cost of about \$300.

A 1917 *Dayton Herald* article identified Carrie Jenet as a “modiste,” or dressmaker, who dealt in high-end fashion by “enchancing the color, style, and fabric of garments.” She traveled to Cuba, Panama, Peru, Bolivia, Chile, Argentina, Brazil, and the Barbados for her business. She never married and died on July 5, 1938.

In the 1950s, the house was owned by Charles W. Danis, Sr. and his wife Elizabeth S. Danis. Charles Danis was chairman of the renowned building and highway construction company, Danis Industries which was founded by his father, B.G. Danis. His company which continues today was the contractor for many buildings in the region and in Dayton. These included several buildings designed by Schenck and Williams, such as Hawthorn Hill and the Engineers Club of Dayton. In 1975 Danis, received the “Spirit of America Heritage Award” from Junior Achievement of Dayton and Miami Valley at a dinner attended by 1,200 people. He retired from the company in 1983 and died in 1996 at the age of 80.

Directly across the street, stop to look at the house at 141 Squirrel Road. This is a classic 1920s English Tudor home that has been well maintained by the present owners. It was designed



in 1923 by the Dayton architectural firm of Hermann and Brown. The firm also designed the Wilbur Wright School that stood at 1361 Huffman Avenue on a hill overlooking Dayton's East End neighborhood for more than 80 years.

The house was built on one-half acre in 1924 for Clarence P. Folsom. Folsom was born in Malone, New York in 1869. He left public school when he was 15 to take a job as a clerk in

a woolen mill office. When he was 18, he moved to Dayton.

Soon after his arrival in Dayton in 1887, Folsom got a job in the drafting room of Stillwell & Bierce Manufacturing. The company built woolen mills and later was the world's largest producer of turbine wheels. He was president of Stillwell & Bierce when he built this house. Folsom worked there until 1903. That year, he took a new job as vice president of Dayton Globe Iron Works which made water wheel turbines and pulp and paper machinery. A water wheel he co-invented was patented in 1906. Folsom was also the sole applicant for a seating machine roll that was patented in 1919.

Folsom was a widower with two children, Miriam and Eleanor. A Republican, he was also a Mason who belonged to the local lodge and council. Folsom was also a member of the Dayton City Club and the Third Street Presbyterian Church. He was described at the time as someone who "made his presence felt as a forceful factor in commercial and industrial circles." He died in September, 1970 at 101 years old.

The house opens on the main level with original hardwood floors throughout and crown molding. A striking wood staircase greets visitors upon entering the spacious foyer. French doors flank both sides and lead to the sunken living room with a fireplace and built-ins and a massive dining room with a second fireplace. The ceilings are 9 feet on the first floor and 10 feet in the living room. There are impressive wood accents throughout. Another set of French doors leads to a screened porch on the side yard. A new designer kitchen enhances this historic home. The master bedroom is ensuite with the added bonus of a private composite balcony. The home features three additional bedrooms on the second floor and two bedrooms on the third floor. Meticulous gardens and patio areas are additional notable features of the home.

Now cross back to the other side of the street and continue to the end of Squirrel Road.

Please pause at 106 Squirrel Road. This home was built in 1919 in the Bungalow style, a favorite American style at the turn of the 20th Century and is featured in a full page in the City of Dayton's *Blueprint for Preservation* handbook.



The Bungalow style was easily adapted, and it became a popular style for contractors and builders to mass produce. The style has a few basic elements with an infinite variety of details borrowed from other styles.

Primary characteristics of the Bungalow style include one-and-one half story construction, a gabled roof with the slope facing the street, roof dormers, and front porch. Windows may be double hung sash or casement. Trim is simple and functional.

Early Bungalow houses featured floor-length windows reminiscent of the Greek Revival period. Others had transoms and sidelights at the entries. These were also details employed on Colonial Revival houses, another popular style at the time. Many Bungalows exemplified the Craftsman ideal that was popular in the early Twentieth Century. The Craftsman style rejected earlier, more elaborate tastes and morals and utilized a more natural aesthetic. A key Craftsman design principle was to incorporate its architecture into its natural surroundings.

This home has several Bungalow and Craftsman features. Its story-and-a-half construction has a large shed roof and a front slope that flairs. Double hung and casement windows are both used. The full front porch is supported by plain Tuscan columns.

The house also has a distinctive porte-cochère with similar columns and exposed rafters that function as a pergola. A porte-cochère is a doorway to a building or courtyard, often very grand in size—large enough for a horse and carriage or a motor vehicle to pass through. Porte-cochères are not only aesthetically pleasing, they also provide protection from the elements for arriving and departing occupants and visitors.

Please continue walking to the corner, turn left on Neal Avenue, and then left on Forest Avenue where we walk north.



Our first stop is 445 Forest Avenue. The home is situated on the higher side of Forest Avenue, which was historically referred to as “The Gold Coast.” The president of Miami-Jacobs College built this white stucco American Foursquare house in 1913, the year of the Dayton Flood. The house has always had two lots. It is almost 3,500 square feet and features a detached three-car garage.

Dr. Austin J. Brogan, chief of staff at Good Samaritan Hospital, lived in the house from 1950 to 1970 with his wife Mary Belle and six children. A female pediatrician who lived across the street at 442 Forest Avenue visited them for house calls. Mary Belle, who worked as a nurse, refused to call a doctor at the end of her life, and died peacefully in the master bedroom.

The Brogans purchased the home from a father and daughter who had to sell quickly after losing their money from speculating in sugar prospects. The finished rooms do not extend completely to the foundation walls. Rather, there are “false walls” in many of the rooms with several feet of space behind them. One doubtful tale about these walls is that the sugar speculator who owned the house prior to 1950 hid his criminal friends behind the walls during police raids.

The house has 19 rooms plus a grand foyer beyond the 42-inch-wide front door. With four full baths and five bedrooms, it boasts lots of space. The original roof was red tile. The home has nine-and-a-half foot ceilings and original hardwood floors. The second floor has a long room on the rear of the house. This room was used as a sleeping room for many years. The Brogans’ small daughter, Patti, also learned to roller skate in this room when she was quarantined with the flu in the 1950s.

The massive walk-up attic features a full-sized staircase, the same tall ceilings as the lower floors, and wood floors. The attic also contains a large cedar closet where mink coats and a wedding dress were stored for many years. Retired Dayton-area Judge James Brogan and his brother Bill Brogan are sons of Dr. Brogan. They wonder if anyone will ever find the 1949 Joe DiMaggio baseball card that they are quite sure they tucked into the attic somewhere.

The basement is just as fully finished as the upstairs, with red and green asphalt tiles throughout all the rooms. The floor tiles were possibly installed in the early 1950s with a pattern edged in a golden-colored tile border. The basement also contains a large furnace room, built out of original brick, where regular games of spin-the-bottle apparently took place in the 1960s.

The room just inside the back door was where milk and bread were delivered straight into the kitchen for many years. Whenever bats got down into the house from the attic, delivery men and neighbors would come into the house to help get them out. Another fun fact: the entire interior of the garage, including the full ceiling, is covered in dark-stained original bead board.

Continue walking down Forest Avenue to 467 Forest. You are standing in front of an 1898 mansion that was recently brought back to its original grandeur with the addition of a totally new gourmet kitchen and other updates. At the same time, the home's many historic features have been preserved. These include exposed brick, double pocket doors, built-ins, and original flooring throughout. The house has seven fireplaces throughout the nearly 5,000 square feet of living space including a huge attic. The home includes a double garage with an automatic entry gate and fenced-in rear yard with a private area.



This concludes your walking tour of the Squirrel-Forest Historic District. If you have any questions about this remarkable residential neighborhood, please contact us on Facebook at Five Oaks Historic Districts Dayton Ohio: www.facebook.com/Five-Oaks-Historic-Districts-Dayton-Ohio-111646802184943

The history of Jeremiah Hunt Peirce and the Peirce family's role in developing Five Oaks and the Squirrel-Forest areas is excerpted from a blog post authored by Lisa P. Rickey. Ricky is a Miami Valley archivist.

We hope you will join us to explore these and all of Dayton's vibrant historic neighborhoods.

You may also want to continue your tour of two additional Five Oaks Historic Districts, Grafton-Rockwood-Wroe and Kenilworth. If so, please continue west on Five Oaks Avenue and walk up the hill past Five Oaks Park until you reach Rockwood Avenue. The Grafton-Rockwood-Wroe walking tour will begin at the intersection of Rockwood and Five Oaks Avenues.

This walking tour is a project of Preservation Dayton, Inc. Preservation Dayton is a grassroots alliance of neighborhoods and individuals who actively promote preservation and historically sympathetic revitalization of the Dayton community. For more information, visit www.preservationdayton.com.

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