

# *The History Of Wildwood Cultural Center*

Welcome to the City of Mentor's Wildwood Cultural Center. Formerly known as the Wildwood Estate, the Manor House and park grounds hold an affluent and prosperous history.

The Wildwood Estate, once fertile apple orchards and rolling hills, was developed by Cleveland industrialist John G. Oliver in the early 1900's. Mr. Oliver, well noted for drafting the plans to the largest telescope of it's time while employed by Warner and Swazey Inc., became co-founder of Bardons & Oliver, a machine tool firm. It was during that time that Mr. Oliver, in the development of his business, visited England and grew fond of the English Manor House architecture of the late Medieval and early Renaissance era.

As his business flourished, Mr. Oliver and his wife, May, purchased 34 acres on Little Mountain Road and began the construction of the estate home. Following in the footsteps of other wealthy Cleveland families, the Oliver's decided that the Wildwood estate would become their summer residence. Oliver then commissioned Abram Garfield, son of the late President James Garfield, to build the manor home. Garfield had studied architecture at M.I.T. and through his own Cleveland architectural firm had become noted as one of the most important residential architects in Cleveland.

The construction of Wildwood lasted nearly three years. To monitor the progress and escape the city, the Olivers, along with their children Margaret, Hortense and Lockwood, would occasionally make the long journey from their University Circle home in Cleveland to Mentor and spend time at Wildwood. Overnight accommodations for the family were unsophisticated in the estate's barn.

After construction was complete in 1908, the Wildwood Estate became one of the earliest renderings of the English Tudor Revival style in Northeast Ohio. Situated on 34 acres, the home contains 25 rooms. There are 9 bedrooms; 3 of which were used by servants, 8 fireplaces, a full basement and a third floor ballroom. Occasionally when not being used by the family, the Olivers would rent Wildwood to friends of the family so they could also enjoy Wildwood's beauty. The home was run by a staff of six who tended to the homes interior, exterior, barn, gardens and landscaping.

To make the home comfortable for his young children, John Oliver had a small childrens' playhouse constructed in the woods behind the home. The small brick house had running water, electricity and a mini-kitchen with working stove for the girls to practice their skills.

As most families did, the Olivers also kept livestock. Milk from the cows was transported to Kirtland for processing and when it wasn't used at Wildwood, it was transported back to the family's home in Cleveland for use there. The Olivers had vegetable gardens on the estate which provided for the family during the summer months. In fact, Wildwood was one of the first homes in Lake County to acquire a freezer for storing food.

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Shortly after John Oliver's death in 1939, his daughter Margaret Oliver Collacott and her husband Robert Collacott, inherited the estate. The Collacott family had the home winterized for year round use and eventually by 1949, as transportation increased and Mentor village began to grow in size, the Collacott's became permanent Mentor residents. Wildwood remained as one of Lake County's premier homes throughout the 50's, 60's, and 70's.

In the fall of 1973 Margaret Oliver Collacott died, leaving the Wildwood estate to her daughters, May Targett & Catherine DeWitt. While both of John Oliver's granddaughters were grown and had lives of their own, they continued to visit and maintain the house for a short while.

In early 1980, Mentor city officials, realizing the great value of preserving the property, approached Mrs. Targett and Mrs. DeWitt to discuss the possible sale of the property for preservation as a park that all Mentor residents could enjoy. They negotiated a purchase price of \$300,000 for the entire estate including the Manor House. The sisters agreed and the property became a public park months later.

The City of Mentor was notified in October, 1980 that the Wildwood Estate would be placed on the National Register of Historic Places by the United States Department of the Interior. At that point, the City became eligible for federal grants for acquisition reimbursement in the amount of \$172,000 as approved by the Department of the Interior.

Restoration of the building included the heating system, adding a new furnace, and updating electrical wiring and plumbing. Interior redecorating included wallpapering, refinishing the woodwork, and adding carpeting, draperies and new furnishings.

In December, 1980, an official dedication of the center was held. The Wildwood Cultural Center was opened to the public as a City of Mentor facility under the Parks, Recreation and Public Lands Department.

Wildwood Cultural Center has become one of Mentor's finest jewels, preserving both architectural heritage and scenic surroundings. It is a place for cultural enrichment as well as passive recreational and educational opportunities. Classes for both adults and youth are offered at Wildwood in areas like fine art, cooking, creative art, music, and much more. The Wildwood Cultural Center has also become home to many fine clubs including The Wildwood Singers, The Wildwood Garden Club, The Creative Artists Association, and The Wildwood Quilters Guild, and The Wildwood Basketry Guild.

Wildwood is available for rental and provides a historic, unique and comfortable setting for weddings, receptions, parties, business meetings, seminars, conferences and special events. Rental information, as well as membership opportunities, for the center is available by calling The Wildwood Cultural Center at (440) 974-5735 Monday through Friday between the hours of 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

We hope that you enjoy the unique atmosphere and the many benefits brought to you by the Wildwood Cultural Center and the City of Mentor.