



# The Lakewood Historical Society

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## BOBSON HARDWARE

By Mazie Adams

We've all watched with sadness and nostalgia as Bobson's Hardware closed. Recently, the hardware store and the beautiful home behind it were demolished. The home and store have a very interesting history dating back to 1910. The Stranahan home was located just behind Bobson's at 1384 Nicholson Avenue. The Stranahan family lived in the home from 1910, the year it was built, until 1922. Agnes Jeannette Stranahan, a graduate of Lakewood High School (Class of '22), kept a wonderful diary of her experiences as a teenager in Lakewood. The following information on Jeannette and her diary has been adapted from a series of articles by Dan Chabek, which appeared in the Lakewood Sun Post.

Jeannette started keeping her Lakewood diary in 1918, when she was 14, and continued it till she left the city with her parents in 1922. The early entries of the diary include news about World War I. Jeannette volunteered at the Red Cross House (old Wallace Home), which was located on present-day St. Edward High School property on Detroit, and where she knitted socks and made bandages for the soldiers.

She watched the troop trains, sometimes as many as six a day, pass through Lakewood along the Nickel Plate on their way to shipping-out posts on the eastern seaboard. "All the boys were leaning out the windows and waving," she penned. She picked up a slip of paper that one of the doughboys threw out. It had a name and address and said "Please answer." After a few days she retrieved three more addresses. She wrote to the first writer.

Later, Jeannette went to see a German tank on Public Square. "It was the first one we captured," she chronicled. Then came the armistice. Her entry for Monday, Nov. 11, 1918 told how the newspapers were "out in dark of morning and newsmen were yelling, 'The war is over.' Everyone was up and shouting at 4 a.m. We tied tin cans

on our new car and drove all over Lakewood. There were people pounding on the back of dishpans and yelling all day long."

Though the war had gone its way, a new calamitous upheaval -- the influenza epidemic -- swept in during the fall of 1918. On Oct. 18 of that year, Jeannette recorded that 101 people died of the flu in Cleveland during a 24-hour period. Then, during the next eight days, she noted 470 more deaths.

Lakewood schools and churches were closed. "Children under 6 have to stay at home," she scribbled. They are not allowed on the street or in picture shows.

Jeannette chronicled her many activities, which included playing Parcheesi with friends, crocheting, playing ragtime music on the piano, telling ghost stories, eating sundaes at the local ice cream parlor or dancing at Gilberts, a public ballroom on Detroit and Marlowe. Jeannette and her friends also played along "the creek," a babbling brook that ran from Madison to the lake in the area of Waterbury Drive. When the city planned to cover the stream, Jeannette was saddened. "Our beautiful ravine and the creek are to be filled. It is breaking my heart as well as Mama's."

Jeannette's Lakewood diary concludes in 1922, when the family moved out of town. Her father Frank ran Stranahan Bros. Co., caterers, bakers and confectioners, in a six-story building at 421 Superior Ave., N.W. The building was soon to be demolished because the city of Cleveland needed the space for "new tracks and buildings for a new depot. Papa says he is too old to rebuild," Jeannette chronicled in her diary. "It wouldn't be easy. The bakery ovens are built into the walls. We are going to rent our house and go on a long trip this summer so that he won't have to see all his work torn down to rubble." The family piled into their new car, a Willys Knight, which had a

folding, camp-version trailer attached. That trip became a permanent move. The lovely 2 story brick, frame and stucco home that Frank Stranahan built in 1910 was rented to a Dr. Arthur Fath.

Eventually a Canfield Oil filling station was built at the intersection on what was once the Stranahans' front yard. Later this frontal property was sold to Standard Oil Company. Robert C. Schoch came on the scene in 1950, first buying the Haefele Hardware Store building on Detroit adjacent to the filling station, and later changing the store name to "Bobson's," a word he coined by combining his nickname of "Bob" with "son," for his son Robert Jr.. Schoch bought the corner filling-station property in 1966. Two years later, he tore down the station and put up the present Bobson's hardware store -- a one story brick and concrete block building at the intersection of Detroit and Nicholson.

Seventeen family-owned hardware stores were in town when Schoch opened his shop. In its prime, Bobson's made its reputation on the staffs old-home renovation expertise. You could get lawnmower blades sharpened, pipe cut or window screens repaired.

The Stranahan home was purchased in 1979 by Robert Schoch Jr. Some years before this acquisition, the large residence had been converted into five efficiency apartments, with all original natural hardwood retained. The former basement was renovated into an office at the same time an addition was added to the store, about 1981.

Three generations of Bobson's owned and operated the store. Bobson's was the last of the family-owned hardware stores in Lakewood to fold under the pressure of "big-box" retailers like Home Depot. They closed in December 2001.

St. Edward High purchased the Stranahan house and Bobson Hardware in 2004 for \$400,000, and has subsequently demolished them to create a larger parking lot. St. Edward's allowed the Lakewood Historical Society to salvage architectural items from the home. On May 7, 2005 we will be having a Salvage Sale during the annual Sale on the Grounds. You'll find a wide array of architectural elements including numerous doors with inlaid wood designs, mahogany woodwork, a large pocket door, window and door hardware, railings and banisters. This is a wonderful way to re-use and preserve a bit of our community's history.