

The Tradition Of The Talbotts

By Des Solomon
Journal Herald Special Writer

"... We wish that she and father could have been with us at another party a dozen years later. We mean, of course, the great reunion we had over the fourth of July in Dayton in 1947. Seventy-five of us were there —

(First of Two Articles)

Katharine and Harry Talbott's children, sons and daughters-in-law, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Father and mother would have laughed until they cried at the theatricals on Saturday night at the Meads', where the songs and skits of the third generation, we must admit, far outshone those of the second.

"They would have applauded the son-in-law who insisted on having a photographer present on every occasion. They would have been delighted, though not at all surprised, by the number of their descendants of all ages who turned out for the tennis tournament, and by the fervor, if not the skill, of the play.

"And that Sunday morning, when we had the service under the elms on the Hill where Runnymede (the family home) once stood, they would have looked from one to another, as we did, and known as we know that the spirit of Runnymede is safe in your, our children's and grandchildren's hands..."

Thus concludes the book compiled by the nine children of Harold Elstner and Katharine Houk Talbott, whose contributions to Dayton set them off as one of the leading families in the civic, social and cultural affairs of the city. Five of the children, Mrs. George H. Mead (Elsie Talbott), Mrs. Schuyler Church (Lillian Talbott Hilton), Mrs. F. M. Thayer (Lilah Talbott) of Philadelphia, Mrs. Alfred W. Jones (Katharine Talbott) of Sea Island Beach, Ga., and Mrs. Charles A. Thomas (Margaret Talbott) of St. Louis, Mo., are still living.

The tradition of family reunions, held every two years at Runnymede when Harry and Kit Talbott were alive, carries over today, bringing this large and illustrious fam-

ily together from wherever they may be to laugh and have fun together and to share in one another's joys and sorrows.

This year, over the Labor Day weekend, the entire family, now numbering over 150, will gather at the Whiteface Inn on Lake Placid (N.Y.) to celebrate their fourth reunion since that of 1947.

And between the laughter and the gaiety, each one there will have his own memories, brief flashbacks into the past. Harry and Kit's children may remember their mother's birthday book, recording all of their births as well as her own of Feb. 13, 1864. They may remember stories their mother told them of her youth, growing up at Runnymede, then a 20-acre farm south of Dayton, part of what was later to be known as Oakwood.

Runnymede in those days had just been purchased by Kit's father, George Houk, a lawyer. The family quickly outgrew the stiff little four-room farmhouse, and two rooms were added; one was the library, and the bedroom above it was where Kit Houk Talbott and all of her children were born. It was the first of many additions.

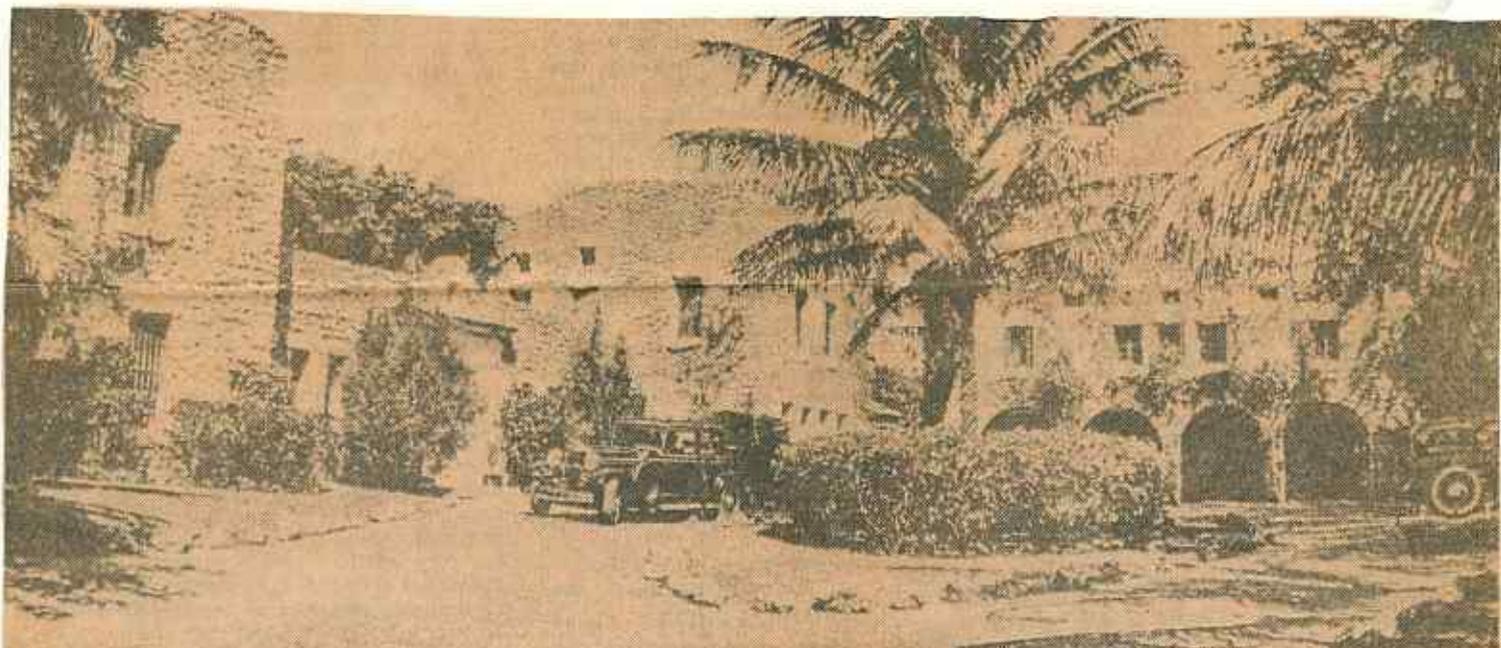
George Houk loved to build, and Kit grew up to share in that love, as did Harry Talbott

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Brother And Sister Married Brother, Sister
... Thurston Houks (left), Harold E. Talbott





Talbotts Built Winter Home In Miami, Fla., In 1920

... Fieldstone house was big enough to hold all children and their families

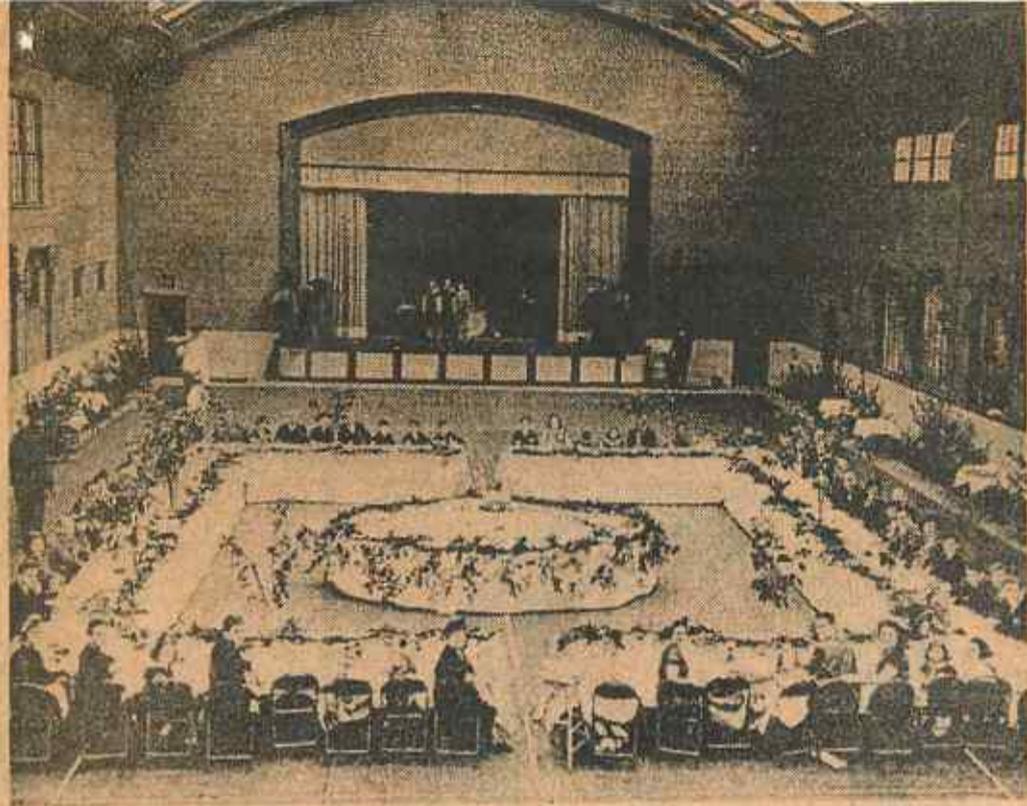


Runnymede Grew From Four Rooms To This

... Torn down in 1935, it stood atop Runnymede road hill at the head of Katharine street



Last Family Group Taken With Mother Talbott
... Mrs. Harry E. Talbott (in circle) surrounded by her children and grandchildren



Christmas Dinner In Playhouse At Runnymede 1938

...Building housed indoor tennis court, stage, dressing rooms, kitchen, living room and, finally, an atomic energy research laboratory

Talbotts Rich In Tradition

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Talbott's work in Canada stopped. Fortunately he had been paid before the failure and consequently, had enough capital with which to establish the H. E. Talbott company.

Another break came. About the same time, the owner of Platt Ironworks asked Talbott to become its president at \$10,000 a year, which in those days was a very handsome salary. He continued in this for five years until the construction work being done by his own company had grown to such proportions it needed all his efforts.

Runnymede during this time—its woods, fields and stream, its chickens, cows and horses—was forming a solid, lovely background against which the varying memories of the Talbott children are cast.

By 1904 business was such that Talbott's income could absorb the shocks of a large family and the necessary expansions of the house at Runnymede, and then some. Consequently, Harry Jr. was sent off to boarding school (The Hill School). The next year, Daisy went to St. Margaret's, followed by Lillian to St. Margaret's and Westover, and in 1908 by Nelson to Hotchkiss. In fact, Kit Talbott became almost a permanent fixture at Westover during the 20 consecutive years that her seven daughters were at school there. She already had a daughter at Westover when her ninth child, Margaret, was born in 1905.

Harry Talbott, too, visited his sons and daughters at their schools, even though his business life was growing increasingly complex. In 1907, besides running his own company and the Ironworks, Talbott joined his future son-in-law, George Mead, in reorganizing the Mead corporation in Dayton. George was vice president and general manager, later becoming president. Harry was chairman of the board, an office he held until his death in 1921. Then in 1909, Algoma

Steel was reorganized, and Harry was called back to the Sault to do more building.

There was now a greater sense of permanence about the Sault, and Harry rented Montfermier, a large stone, elaborately furnished house that stood, like Runnymede, on the top of a hill, with pine woods coming right to the lawn, and a grass tennis court. The Talbott children recalled many happy summers spent there, much of it having to do with the fact that they could go right from this lavish house to a rustic hunting camp their father had built north of it. These happy times, which created in the children a lasting love for Canada and wilderness life, ended in 1914, when World War I brought an end to the Canadian operations.

THE WAR was to open a new chapter in Harry Talbott's business life. In 1915 he, along with Charles F. Kettering, Col. E. A. Deeds and Harry Jr. formed the Dayton Metal products company and began to manufacture munitions for the Russians. A little later, they created the Dayton-Wright Airplane company.

The company was small, but there were so few aircraft plants in the U.S. that when we went to war, the government called on it to produce 4000 planes—not a small number at that time.

During the years before and after the war, Kit Talbott, who could stretch a dollar nine different ways when she had to, also proved her adeptness at enjoying her husband's financial success.

She entertained with real flair at Montfermier and in Dayton, once housing a British princess and her court at the Canadian compound. At Runnymede, she added a large music room to the house which could, (and once did) house 10 grand pianos for a program of the Dayton Music club.

But her love for building continued, and a little later she built an enormous playhouse on the 30-acre Runnymede estate

that housed an indoor tennis court, a squash court, dressing rooms, a greenhouse, kitchen and living room—and a stage at one end so that it could double as an auditorium for concerts. Almost every weekend was open house there, and Kit served a buffet lunch for all and sundry.

Located near where the Glen Maxon Jr. home on Runnymede road now stands, the building was used during WW II as a laboratory for atomic energy research, and has since been torn down.

Before the first World War was over Harry had had the first warning of heart trouble and was encouraged to "take it easy." He and Kit began spending their winters in Miami, Fla. After a few years, they decided to build a house there, one that would be big enough for everybody. They chose a lovely site overlooking the bay, and "Fieldstone House" rose. It was built around an open patio that had a pool in the center. Upstairs, the bedrooms in the corners of the quadrangle, each provided with its own stairway, were large enough to hold extra cots and cribs. The sun decks between were ideal for riding tricycles, taking sunbaths, and having breakfast overlooking the bay.

As the roaring 20s came in, everything was wonderful. During all the years since his first railroading days in the Dakotas and then Illinois, Harry Talbott had been constantly building his earning power; but he had never stored that power, so to speak, by capitalization, and so was never entirely relieved of financial worry. The year before building Fieldstone, however, he and Harry Jr. merged their various business projects in the General Motors corporation, along with Charles F. Kettering. Kettering and Harry Jr. then went with General Motors, and Harry retired.

But he was to enjoy the complete Fieldstone for only a few weeks when his heart gave out while playing golf. Kit again showed her tremendous strength by keeping thankfulness to the foreground of the family's emotions and thus helping them through a very difficult time. She held tightly to a philosophy she had many times repeated to her children, "Consider the blessings for which you may be thankful—and reflect as little as possible upon your misfortunes. Every human being has a share of both."

During the next 14 years, Katharine Houk Talbott traveled extensively, pursuing her own interests and visiting her children and grandchildren. She died at Runnymede Oct. 2, 1935.

The Proud Talbott Tradition

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when he married Kit and later came to live at Runnymede. But years before that event of 1887, Kit's father also purchased 103 acres still farther south, which eventually became known as Hills and Dales, and where many of the family still reside.

AT AGE 23, Kit Houk married Harry Talbott, a Cincinnati, who completed his studies at the University of Cincinnati as a construction engineer. Their first home was to be in Joliet, Ill., where Harry had lined up a job with the Elgin, Joliet and Eastern Railway to do some construction work.

The events that occurred there not only depict the times, but tell a lot about the kind of people that Harry and Kit were, and why they were so successful in life. He expressed his philosophy to Kit not long before their marriage: "First of all comes love—Yannie (Kit's mother) said so—and Yannie has a great head. But she said nothing of what comes second and third. How will charity in thought and deed do for no 2? And next comes money-making—because—I don't know just why, but I am sure money-making must come in pretty early in the deal."

He never veered from that philosophy, as his years in con-

struction work will tell. As each new venture came along, it was necessary for him to gamble all he had, and he never hesitated or entertained the consequences of failure.

This force of character showed up in Joliet, where he was to supervise the laying of a siding. This was in the day of bitter competition between the young railroads in the country when one railway would not allow another to cross its tracks. In order to accomplish the job, it was necessary to cross the Michigan Central line, which was keeping an engine under steam just east of the crossing to prevent any such move. The engine, however, was blocking a public road, which gave Talbott an idea.

His plan was to coax the engine to stand in the road longer than the law allowed, have the crew arrested, and while they were being bailed out, pull up a rail behind the engine, back her off the track, draw the fire, and let the water out of the boiler. Then the Michigan Central could not bring anything from the mainline side.

This he did successfully, and had assembled about 300 men to lay the track. He had it nearly to the crossing when the arrested crew reappeared with 300 men of their own. A brief but decisive skirmish followed. Talbott won; but not before one of the Central's boxcars ended up in a nearby cattleyard.

Harry finished the job by getting an injunction to prevent the opposition from tearing up the crossing. It was this kind of action and nerve that enabled Talbott to cross 16 of the largest railroads in the country, and that earned him the reputation of being the man who could get the job done.

Meanwhile, Kit was stirring up a little of her own excitement organizing a chair of prisoners at Joliet penitentiary.

One day she remarked to the warden, "I have become so fond of that dear little old man sitting there—that one with the white beard and kind

blue eyes. He seems so religious and has such a real appreciation of music. I've often wondered what miscarriage of justice could have brought him here."

"Mrs. Talbott," said the warden, "that dear little old man chopped his wife to pieces with an ax."

"Well, some women can be very irritating," was Mrs. Talbott's loyal reply.

AFTER TWO years in Joliet, Harry took a job as assistant engineer with the C&O Railroad, which enabled them to return to Dayton and Runnymede. But life was not always easy.

During the next six years, five little Talbotts were born, and Harry's \$175 monthly income had to be watched closely. Added to that, Harry's job required his being away quite often, and it was left to Kit to run Runnymede alone.

With the arrival of the fifth child, Elsie, Mrs. Talbott hired a German nurse, Stella Harshman (Tedda), who was to live with the family until she died 40 years later.

Five small children can easily keep two average people busy full time, but Kit Talbott was not average. Harry's salary compelled her to cut all the expenses she could, and she did. She made all of the children's clothes, took care of the cows and horses, canned, made her own applebutter, kept the smokehouse well supplied, and even carved a whole set of dining room furniture while awaiting the birth of three of her daughters. A friend of her's once drew a picture that showed her with three pairs of arms: holding babies, sewing, playing the piano, driving a horse—and writing poetry with her feet.

Her philosophy, which she passed along to her children, was "if I live up to the limit of my strength I shall grow and develop greater powers of endurance and my capacity for useful labor will be equal to my need."

(Tomorrow: Harry Talbott's star rises.)