

## **A Step Into The Past, Present and Future**

### *The Myers Y. Cooper Story*

by Patricia Stirnkorb

Few people realize the history that surrounds the Hyde Park Lumber Company. Unless you have the opportunity of climbing the steps and entering into the board room, on the office level at 3360 Red Bank Road, you would never realize the roots of the company. The room is filled with photography, letters, books and historical data about Myers Y. Cooper, namesake to current president, Mills "Mike" Cooper Judy Jr. Mike is the caretaker of his great-grandfather's legacy, and will proudly share his story with interested parties.

Hyde Park Lumber Company was started in 1902 by Myers Y. Cooper at the age of 25, one of his eventual nine building-related companies and two banks. But his notoriety was two-fold: Myers Y. Cooper, homebuilder, was responsible for building 7,000 homes in the Greater Cincinnati area and he was the governor of Ohio from 1929 to 1931. Myers Young Cooper was the youngest of eleven children, born near Newark, Ohio in 1873. He came to Cincinnati in 1894, following his three older brothers to work with them in the real estate business. With \$16 in his pocket, along with some beef jerky for lunch, Myers sought houses to list and sell, devoting his passion to his business.

Although the four brothers parted ways in the business area, Myers was successful in his real estate business and soon made enough money to begin to buy and sell property, mainly in the Hyde Park area. The brothers eventually started Myers, White and Cooper Company which is still in business today, building and developing property. In 1897, he married Martha Ann Kinney whom he met while attending Walnut Hills Christian Church. The Kinney's owned a 12-acre plot in Hyde Park, and Cooper and Martha moved in with her parents. This was the first residential development that Cooper established. But it was certainly not the last.

Over the next 20 years, Cooper bought up large tracts of property and built houses, almost exclusively with companies that he had started: Two lumber companies, two building supply companies, a heating and roofing company, a casting foundry company and a real estate brokerage company. The Hyde Park Lumber Company was located on Burch Ave. in the vicinity of where Rookwood Commons stands today. The premier lumber company was the cornerstone of Cooper's building and development ventures. The company remained in that location until the land was sold and the company relocated to its present spot on Red Bank Road in 1999.

It was Cooper's home-ownership program that many modern-day banks and mortgage companies adapted and still use today. Cooper allowed new home owners to get a first and second mortgage and did not require a large down payment, which was typical at that time. By 1917, Cooper had built 1,000 homes; by 1928, another 1,000 and eventually a total of 7,000 homes in and around Hyde Park, Mt. Lookout, Mariemont, Montgomery and Indian Hills.

In 1926 Cooper, an avid Republican, ran for the nomination of governor and in 1928, was elected as the fifty-first governor, serving from January 14, 1929 thru 1931. During his term, Cooper was responsible for beginning construction in a much-needed state office in Columbus. He was the last governor before the great depression. But like every Republican governor before, and many since, Cooper did not win the reelection of office.

He returned to Cincinnati and made his mark with major building projects. The whole of Hyde Park Square is filled with buildings constructed by Cooper. On three of the corners of Erie stand buildings he developed. The "Cooper building" the future home to Cock and Bull pub and restaurant, The Mills Judy Building, home to Graeter's and Echo restaurant and The Key Bank/Sibcy Cline office building.

Mariemont Syndicate was formed in the mid-1920s to construct homes and sell lots in Mariemont on property owned by Mary Emery. The layout of the "subdivision" was formalized by design with John Nolen. Construction materials, home size and design were established in advance as well as value for each lot. With an agreement in hand, the Cooper Company initiated street construction and home building in the area now known as Miami Bluff.

One of the great purchases by Cooper was a plot, once 160-acres, called the Pines. Little by little the plot was divided and sold, until finally Cooper and Martha purchased the last 11-acres and moved into the massive home. Previously owned by Bayard Kilgour, owner of many of the plots purchased and developed by Cooper. Mike Judy, great-grandson, remembers spending many days at the Pines. As he pointed out different photos with his great-grandparents, Mike Judy said, "This is in the living room at the Pines. I remember running through the house there and spending Christmas' there. We had wonderful times at the Pines."

But that was not the last house the Coopers would own. In 1950 they purchased the area known as Rookwood, the last 14 acres owned by the Longworth family, granddaughter of Theodore Roosevelt. But their home remained in the Pines until Cooper died in 1958 at age 85 and Martha in 1964 at the age of 90. The home was left to their children, son, Raymond and daughter, Martha, until the city of Cincinnati declared eminent domain to build a junior high school. Today it is the site of Clark Montessori School.

In 2010, Cooper was honored by Governor Bob Taft with induction into the Greater Cincinnati Businessman's Hall of Fame for his remarkable part in changing the footprint of Cincinnati and the government of Ohio.

The long-lasting legacy of Myers Y. Cooper will always be a part of Cincinnati; his name will forever be linked to his position as governor of Ohio. But the more important part of his life continues in the lineage of his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, and in the memories of the lives he touched. For Mills Cooper Judy, Jr. this includes the Hyde Park Lumber Company.

When Hyde Park developed the corner which encompasses Rookwood Commons, Hyde Park Lumber relocated to Red Bank Road where Mike Judy oversaw the building of a new warehouse and showroom being built by the Myers, White and Cooper Company, cousins to Mike Judy. Hyde Park Lumber and Design Center has continued to evolve, now including designers and a showroom unlike any other, encompassing a total of 80,000 square foot.

Included in the operation of Hyde Park Lumber and Design Center is Mills Cooper Judy, III, and Lindsay Judy Gray, both following in their great-great-grandfather's footsteps.