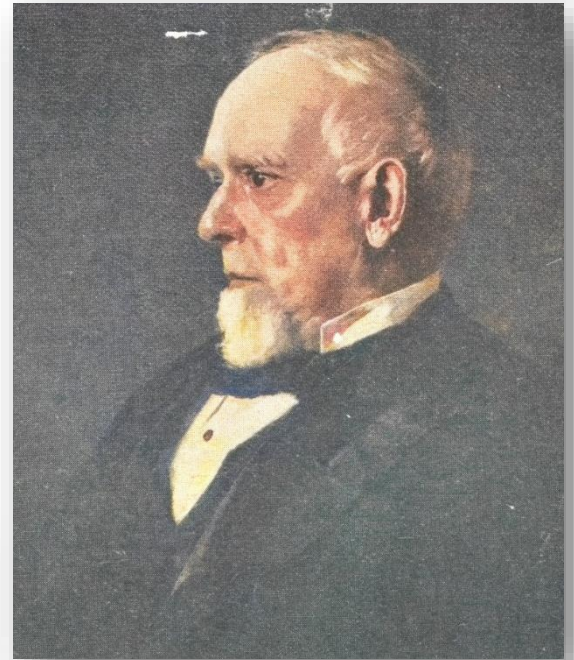




Lost Lake County History: Morley Manor & Farm

It is said that every artifact tells a story, but can a house be an artifact? Yes, as a vintage building can offer a glimpse into Lake County's past. There are over eighty documented farms in Concord Township's history alone. A 1915 *Atlas of Lake County* listed more

than twenty of those, and a good number were quite large in size. **Charles Rockwell Morley** (1864-1952) had a manor house and farm which is one such homestead. Its history spans both the 20th and 21st centuries. Drivers likely travel along **Morley Road** unaware of its past and the family whose name it bears. They may only notice the handsome equestrian



center on the property, but the students of **Lake Erie College** know their campus's interconnected story with **Victor Manor** and **Morley Farm**. Here is the rest of the story.

The first Morley Manor and Farm, (currently 8001 Morley Road) was the summer home of **Jesse Healy Morley** (1820-1903) and third wife **Helen Rockwell Morley Kennerly** (1833-1923). (*Jesse donated the property and building for the original **Morley Library** in Painesville.*)

Construction began on the summer residence in 1903, just before Jesse's death. Totalling 335 acres with outbuildings, it was a home of grand scope. The property passed to his wife and then 40-year-old son **Charles Rockwell Morley** (1863-1952) who took over the

residence. In 1905, Charles, his mother Helen, and her companion **Hedwig Hotopf** (1859-1955) purchased the property outright. By 1912, Charles expanded the residence two-fold; and just nine years later, he authorized a 60' x 30' addition to become their home library. Stone fences from three on site quarries were also added.



HELEN (ROCKWELL) MORLEY

Charles, whose fortunes were made as Director of the **Kelly Island Lime & Transport Co.**, President of **The Stark Electric & Cleveland Alliance** and **Mahoning Valley Railroad Lines**, as well as various Cleveland real estate enterprises, kept accruing more acreage



and structures throughout the 1920s. In time, his grand residence expanded to 23 rooms with nine fireplaces, the attached library & art gallery, a Prohibition-era rathskeller, a 3-acre lake, two tenant houses, three barns, plus some additional structures.

Priceless oil paintings, antique furniture, Steuben glass and Tiffany glass items were collected. In all, the property grew to encompass 500-acres with its own water tower.

Two events changed the course of the farm's ownership and its history. Charles fell in love with his mother's companion Hedwig, a Polish immigrant. When tensions grew and Helen's opposition to their proposed marriage surfaced, Charles deferred their plans. Sadly, it would be far past their chance to have children together.

Helen's death in 1926 led Charles, who was a trustee of Lake Erie College in Painesville, to gift \$300,000 to build the **Helen Rockwell Morley Memorial Music Building** on campus in her honor. Helen was a graduate of the **Willoughby Seminary** and daughter of one of the 1856 Lake Erie College founders. On December 12, 1927, the Music Building was dedicated. Its magnificent Skinner pipe organ was the largest in the state of Ohio.



Charles Morley was 58 when he married 63-year-old Hedwig at last, just seven days after Helen's death. After Hedwig and Charles died in the 1950s, the 37-year LEC trustee left provision for the sale of his estate to the college in 1958. The cost was a mere \$231,000 for 500 acres and

all buildings on the property. College President Paul Weaver was the first of the college leaders to

live on the

estate and in beautiful Morley Manor.



Some good news and some not-so occurred in the years that followed. In 1960, the college sold off \$35,000 worth of fine art and rare Manor collections to benefit the college and University Circle Foundation. In 1971, an Equestrian Center, designed by architect Bruce Hurston, was started on the Manor acreage. The Center had a capacity of 1500 persons; a 130' x 75' warming area; glassed in observation windows; a 100' x 225' performance area;



indoor riding arena measuring 80' x 90'; and stables for 100 horses for equestrian studies majors, LEC students and others. In 1990, over 200 acres of land north of Morley Manor and Morley Road were sold off to developers to relieve college debts. An additional riding center was added in the last couple of years to the current Manor property. President Weaver's vision of seminars, student functions, conferences and dorm-like living for students or visitors at the renamed **Victor Manor**

House is still a reality and being improved upon under the tenure of the current college president, Jennifer Schuller.

Eighteen Morleys, including Charles, Hedwig and Helen, are buried together at Cleveland's Lake View Cemetery.



Sources - *Dancing on the Table, A History of Lake Erie College* by Margaret Geissman Gross, 1993. *Images of America Concord Township* by Daniel Maxson & Debra Bethel-Esker, 2021, Concord Township archives. Additional research material by Virginia Jeschelning.

Submitted by. Dan Maxson

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