

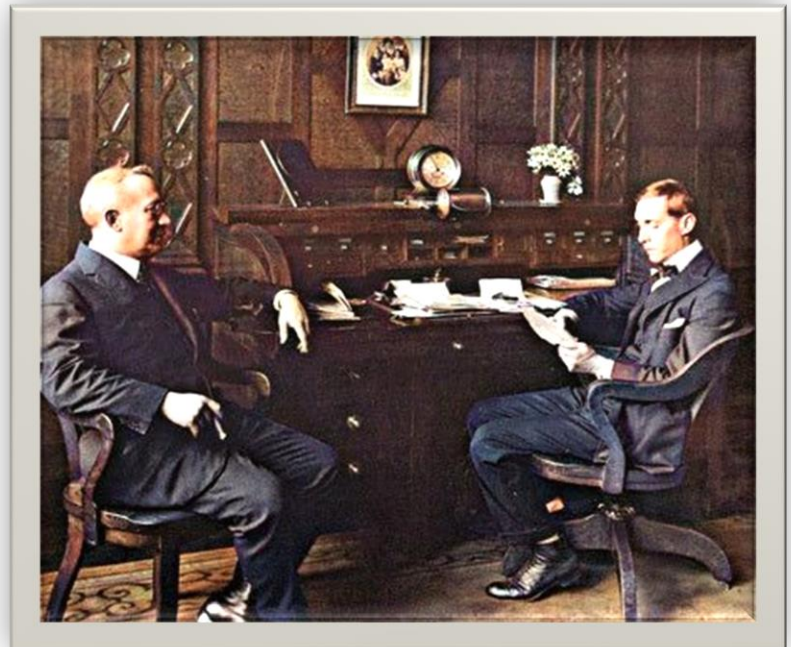
Katherine “Mata Halle” & Penitentiary Glen’s First Family

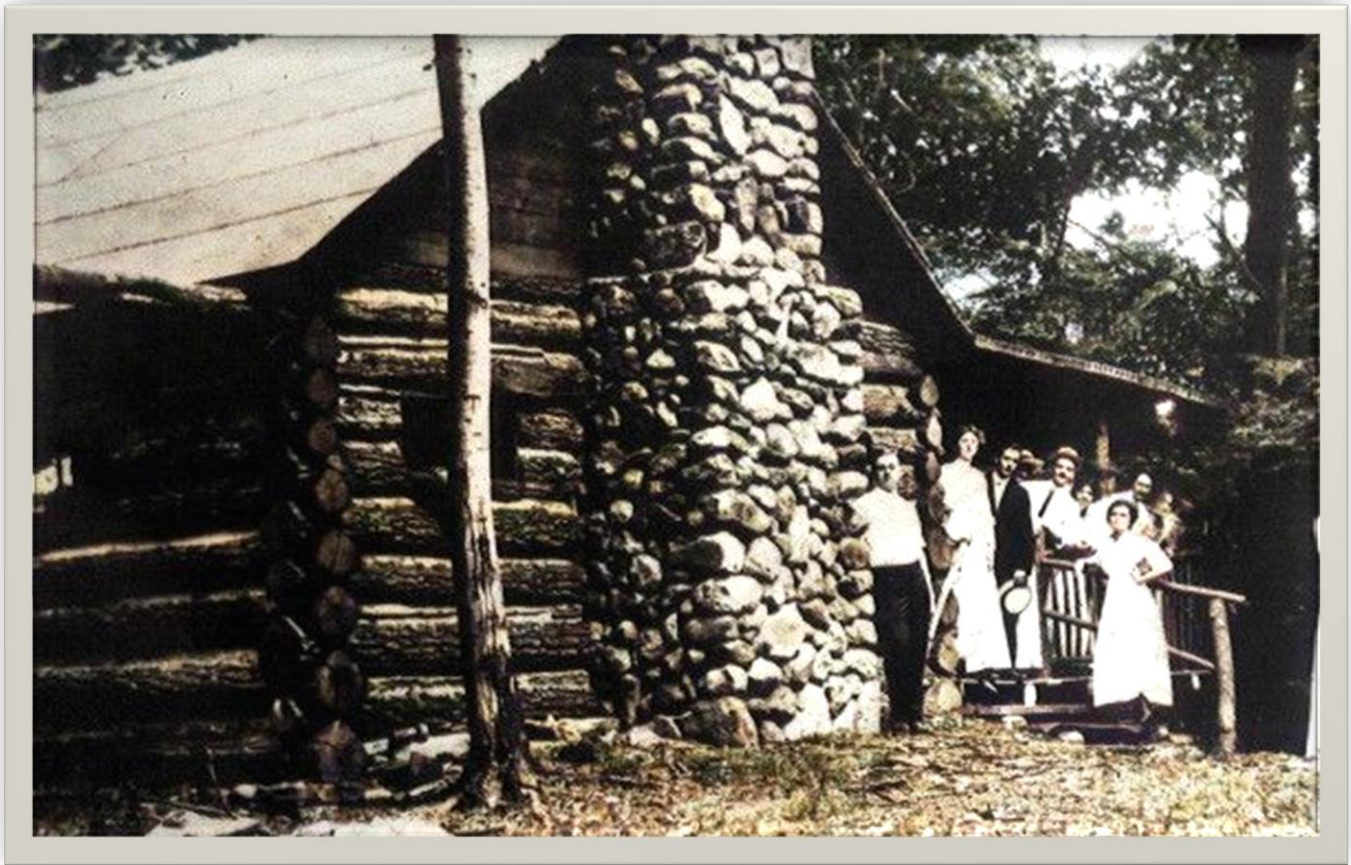


One of the crown jewels of the **Lake Metroparks** system sits on a property located on Kirtland-Chardon Road in Lake County. Miles of hiking trails, wetlands, a wildlife center, an outdoor nature play area, a concert amphitheater as well as a gulley throughout, comprise a

unique microclimate and storied history. Leaving a recounting of the glen’s natural origins for another day, the focus here will be the land’s history as a familiar Cleveland family’s summer resort and working Lake County farm. Additionally, we’ll look at the story of one key celebrity family member.

Samuel Halle, of Cleveland’s **Halle Brothers Department Store** fame, purchased the 184-acre Kirtland property known as **Snake Hill** in 1912 for \$12,000. Although the property contained several farm buildings, he was enamored by a small log cabin located near the 100’ gorge. He and his wife **Blanche Murphy Halle** (1874-1951), a former Higbee’s Department Store cosmetic counter girl, quickly enlarged the cabin into a bigger house. Stone from the gorge, water from the nearby well, and an outhouse fondly known as Sunset Villa became part of their amenities. A swinging suspension bridge was used to cross the gorge by Sam, Blanche and their five children to reach what, at one time, was called Ann’s Cottage. Despite being only an intended summer residence, the next few years saw fountains, formal English gardens and a silo converted to a sun tower added.





In 1917, the **Burnett family** was brought on to manage the farm year-round. They remained on the property through 1940. 1918 saw nearly two thousand locals employed in one form or another by Mr. Halle. Additions to the farm included apple orchards, peach orchards, a horse stable, tennis courts, swimming pool with bathhouse, and more. Even “**The Kirtland Pioneer Picnic**” was held on the grounds from 1926-1941.

A fire in 1930 marked the next era for the history of the Halle farm. Sam Halle died in 1954, leaving a trust to manage his estate because his children lived away from the area. That was followed by a succession of tenants renting the property. In the 1970s, Lake Metroparks acquired it, leading to renovations and accommodations for the public to began.

Nature and time may have reclaimed much of the family’s farm, but one can visit the former stables and current visitor center to see artifacts from the Halle era. Self-guided walking tour maps can be requested to easily spot the remnants of the estate, including beds of myrtle, stone steps, columns, stone lined paths and two partial posts from the old bridge location.

Samuel and Blanche Halle had five children: **Katherine** (1903-1997), **Walter** (1905-1972), **Margaret** (1906-1993), **Jane** (1909-1963) and **Ann** (1914-2012). The eldest, Katherine or “Kay,” reached celebrity status with her high-profile career and love affairs. She was a WWII intelligence operative, a famed journalist and confidant and/or mistress to many luminaries of the 20th century, including **George Gershwin, Randolph Churchill, Joseph Kennedy Sr., Walter Lippmann,**



W. Averill Harriman and even a President.

Here is the brief story of a bewitching socialite whose swath affected both sides of the Atlantic.

Katherine. 'Kay' Halle was born in October 1903. An heiress to the Halle Brothers Company (carriage trade and premier Euclid Avenue department store), her early education included **Laurel School**, Miss Wheeler's Finishing School, Smith College and the **Cleveland Institute of Music**.

At the age of 13, a family visit to Washington D.C. introduced her to



President Woodrow Wilson's Secretary of Defense, **Newton Baker** a former Cleveland mayor. Baker introduced her to his assistant

Walter Lippmann. Lippmann granted her many special admissions including to **Wilson's Declaration of War** in April 1917.

A brief marriage to former Dartmouth quarterback **Halsey Mills** in 1927 would be her only walk down the aisle. The Roaring 20s saw her move to New York City and captivate **George Gershwin**. In her apartment and using her piano, Gershwin completed the song **Summertime** for his opera **Porgy and Bess** that premiered in 1935. The song is among the most recorded in history, with more than 33,000 covers.

Other luminaries on her weekly docket included **Fred Astaire, Irving Berlin, Helen Hayes, Cole Porter** and author **Sinclair Lewis**.

In 1931, she met **Randolph Churchill** (1911-1968), son of statesman **Winston Churchill**. Eight years her junior,

the two had a love affair at **Chartwell**, the Churchill country home in England, that spanned more than two decades. The senior Churchills objected to them marrying. Despite this, her dalliance with Randolph allowed her to be on intimate family terms with Winston Churchill and **Franklin D. Roosevelt**. Kay might have been one of the few people to have been so close to two wartime leaders. She was the author of four books, including: **Irrepressible Churchill: A Treasury of Winston Churchill's Wit** and





Churchill on America and Britain (with an introduction written by Lady Churchill and a preface by W. Averell Harriman).

During the war years, she served as an intelligence operative for the **Office of Strategic Services** (forerunner of the CIA). Her training included parachuting behind enemy lines, using handguns and deployment of mines.

After the war, with the encouragement of Randolph Churchill, Kay launched herself into a stellar journalism career. She wrote for the **Cleveland Plain Dealer, Reader's Digest, Look Magazine, the New York Times Magazine, The Washington Post,** and the **Christian Science Monitor.** *On the Boulevard* became her regular



1951: Jane Halle Crile, Walter Halle, Sam & Blanche Halle, Margaret Halle Sherwin, Kay Halle, & Ann Halle Little



column for the **Cleveland News**. She was a radio commentator and served as an intermission commentator for the **Cleveland Orchestra** from the 1940s into the 1950s.

Moving to Washington D.C. in the 1950s, she was asked by **John F. Kennedy** in 1960 to join his inaugural committee; and later she became an advisor to what developed into the **Kennedy Center** and its awards programs. Her major input came when she urged President Kennedy to make Winston Churchill the first honorary U.S. Citizen in 1963. In 1968, she was awarded the **Most Excellent Order**

of the British Empire with the rank of officer for efforts in the relationship between the United States and Great Britain.

Her last years were filled with duties for the **1976 Bicentennial Committees** of both Cleveland and Washington D.C. Her active career ended as a trusted advisor to **Alice Longwith**, Teddy Roosevelt's daughter. Kay Halle, whose childhood was spent traversing the verdant grounds of Penitentiary Glen, passed away in August 1997 at the age of 93. Today her portrait hangs in the **National Gallery**. Her personal papers are housed at the **John F. Kennedy Library**.



Sources: CWRU Encyclopedia of Cleveland History; Cleveland Public Library; New York Times, August 24, 1997; Hidden History of Lake County 2021, Jennifer B. Engleking; Lake Metroparks Archives; *The Washington Post*, August 12, 1997.

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