

Garrett Morgan's Wakeman Country Club Statement of Significance

Garrett Morgan's Wakeman Country Club deserves the recognition of an Ohio Historical Marker because it was one of the earliest recreational clubs developed by African Americans in Ohio.¹ In 1923, Morgan was awarded a patent for his invention of an improved Traffic Signal.² Morgan sold the patent to the General Electric Company for \$40,000. The income from this sale helped Morgan create the Wakeman Country Club in August of 1924.^{3 4 5 6 7}

Morgan was born March 4, 1877 in Paris, Kentucky. He was raised on his family's farm where he enjoyed hunting and fishing. In 1895 Morgan moved to the city of Cleveland but still maintained his love of the outdoors.⁸

Morgan actively supported the African-American community throughout his lifetime. In 1908, looking to improve social and economic conditions for African Americans, Garrett Morgan joined other African-American businessmen in creating the Cleveland Association of Colored Men.⁹ Morgan remained an active member when the organization merged with the NAACP. In 1912, Morgan incorporated the National Safety Device Company in Oberlin to help market and manufacture his invention of the "breathing device" which received a patent in 1914.^{10 11} This invention was used by firefighters, the US Military and helped Morgan save lives in the Cleveland 1916 Waterworks Tunnel Disaster.^{12 13 14} In 1920, Morgan established the African-American newspaper, *The Call* where African-American accomplishments were recognized.¹⁵

¹ Wainio, Marilyn, Early African-American Recreational Clubs in Ohio and USA, April 12, 2022, Microsoft Word.

² Morgan, Garrett A. Traffic Signal. United States. Patent 1,475,024, filed February 27, 1922, and issued November 20, 1923. <https://patents.google.com/patent/US1475024/en>

³ Huron County, Ohio, Deed Book 106:54-55.

⁴ Huron County, Ohio, Deed Book 107:11-12.

⁵ "Ohio Incorporations," *Plain Dealer*, August 29, 1924, page 11.

⁶ "Of General Interest," *Pittsburgh Courier*, August 30, 1924, page 14.

⁷ Smith, Jessie Carney. "Garrett A. Morgan," in *Notable Black American Men*. Edited by Jessie Carney Smith, 830. Farmington Hills, MI: Gale Research Inc., 1999.

⁸ Ohio History Connection. "Garrett A. Morgan." *Ohio History Central*. Accessed March 31, 2022. https://ohiohistorycentral.org/w/Garrett_A._Morgan

⁹ Case Western Reserve University. "Cleveland Association of Colored Men." *Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*. Accessed March 31, 2022. <https://case.edu/ech/articles/c/cleveland-association-colored-men>

¹⁰ "New Incorporations," *Akron Beacon Journal*, September 25, 1912, page 8.

¹¹ Morgan, G. A. 1914. Breathing Device. United States. Patent 1,113,675, filed August 19, 1912, and issued October 13, 1914. <https://patents.google.com/patent/US1113675A/en>

¹² "Colored Inventor Instructs N.Y. Firemen," *Topeka Plaindealer*, December 26, 1913.

¹³ "Interesting News Concerning the Race - Cleveland, OH," *Denver Star*, March 9, 1918.

¹⁴ Case Western Reserve University. "Garrett A. Morgan." *Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*. Accessed April 1, 2022. <https://case.edu/ech/articles/m/morgan-garrett>

¹⁵ Case Western Reserve University. "Cleveland Call & Post." *Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*. Accessed March 31, 2022. <https://case.edu/ech/articles/c/cleveland-call-post>

In 1924, Cleveland had a thriving Black middle class who had time and resources for leisure.¹⁶ Unfortunately, Black Clevelanders and mixed-race families such as the Morgan family were impacted by racism which restricted access to social and recreational facilities.¹⁷ The racial climate in Cleveland was a source of great frustration for Morgan.¹⁸ Having achieved success with his inventions and businesses, Morgan felt he deserved the same rights and benefits as his white counterparts.

Garrett Morgan had a desire to create a “village of our own,” a safe place for his family and other affirming people to get away from the city and the stresses of daily life.¹⁹ On August 25, 1924 Morgan purchased 121 acres in Huron County “48 miles west of Cleveland public square and nine miles west of Oberlin.”^{20 21 22 23} The country club was located 1 mile south of Wakeman on Chenango Road near the intersection of Route 60.²⁴ The northern border of the property was the Vermilion River. Membership in the country club was dependent on purchasing one of the 247 deeded lots that were 30’ x 80’. Prices for most lots ranged from \$60 to \$160 and over 100 lots were sold.^{25 26 27 28}

The Wakeman Country Club offered outdoor recreation such as camping, horseback riding, hunting, and also fishing and swimming in the Vermilion River.²⁹ Amenities included a dance hall and a small restaurant called the “Chicken Shack.”³⁰ Music and dancing attracted African Americans from many counties in Northern Ohio.^{31 32} Boxers were trained and exhibited at an amphitheater near the river.³³ Cultural activities were held at the country club, including an Emancipation Day Celebration.³⁴ As an automobile enthusiast, Morgan offered to drive prospective members to the country club. Morgan instructed Clevelanders who wanted to attend

¹⁶ Giffin, William Wayne. *African Americans and the color line in Ohio, 1915-1930*. 23-27. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2005.

¹⁷ “Local News.” *Cleveland Gazette*, April 18, 1908, page 3.

¹⁸ “Do Not Get Fair Chance in North.” *Plain Dealer*, October 17, 1907, page 9.

¹⁹ Promotional Material, Box 1, Folder 6, MS 3534 Garrett A. Morgan Papers, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio.

²⁰ Huron County, Ohio, Deed Book 106:54-55.

²¹ Huron County, Ohio, Deed Book 107:11-12.

²² Huron County, Ohio, Mortgage Book 92:407-408.

²³ Promotional Material, Box 1, Folder 6, MS 3534 Garrett A. Morgan Papers, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio. Microfilm (Cab. 54:2)

²⁴ Huron County Map Department. [Map Showing Wakeman Community Park and Wakeman Country Club], 2022, Norwalk, Ohio, <https://huronoh-auditor-classic.ddti.net/Map.aspx>

²⁵ Huron County, Ohio, Deed Book 117:103-104.

²⁶ Contract: Mrs. Richard Kerns, Box 1, Folder 6, MS 3534 Garrett A. Morgan Papers, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio. Microfilm (Cab. 54:2)

²⁷ Wainio, Marilyn, *Wakeman Country Club Members*, April 11, 2022, Microsoft Excel file.

²⁸ Huron County, Ohio, Plats Volume 7:16.

²⁹ “Society.” *Pittsburgh Courier*, September 27, 1924, page 14.

³⁰ Morgan, Garrett, III. Interviewed by Marilyn Wainio. Personal Interview. Wakeman, Ohio, July 9, 2019.

³¹ “Akron, O.” *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 18, 1925, page 14.

³² “Dance to Mike’s Harmonizers,” *Sandusky Register*, November 16, 1935, page 3.

³³ “Boxing.” *Afro American*, July 9, 1927, page 14.

³⁴ “Society.” *Pittsburgh Courier*, September 27, 1924, page 14.

the club to “take route 20 to Wakeman.”³⁵ There was also a passenger train that stopped in Wakeman, just a mile north of the country club.

African-Americans from Oberlin and Cleveland signed the September 4, 1924 deed which transferred the 121 acres to the Wakeman Country Club Company. These club members were: Garrett A. and Mary A. Morgan (Mary was of Czech heritage), Roger H. and Kate T. Holly, Harry G. and Ella Williams, and Vassar B. and Pauline H. Wallace.³⁶ Proprietors of the subdivision certifying the January 10, 1927 Plat of the Subdivision for the Wakeman Country Club were: Robert K. Hodges, George W. Burdin, Garrett A and Mary Morgan, Charles H. Jackson, Harry G. Williams, and Samuel Richardson.³⁷

Activities at the country club began to wane during WWII.³⁸ Garrett Morgan, his wife, Mary Hasek Morgan and their family continued to enjoy spending time at their Wakeman cabin, “G. A. Morgan’s Manor.”³⁹ The Morgans cultivated vegetable gardens and tended to Mary’s orchard until Garrett’s death in 1963. There are no remaining buildings from the Wakeman Country Club era. Garrett Morgan’s grandson, Garrett Morgan III, built his home in 2007 on a portion of the original property and has been able to purchase back all but one lot that was owned by the families of the Wakeman Country Club members.⁴⁰

In 2003 an Ohio Historical Marker was erected in honor of Garrett Morgan and his inventions on East 55th Street and Harlem Avenue, Cleveland, Ohio, in Cuyahoga County.⁴¹

³⁵ Promotional Material, Box 1, Folder 6, MS 3534 Garrett A. Morgan Papers, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio.

³⁶ Huron County, Ohio, Deed Book 107:11-12.

³⁷ Huron County, Ohio, Plats Volume 7:16.

³⁸ Morgan, Garrett, III. Interviewed by Marilyn Wainio. Personal Interview. Wakeman, Ohio, July 9, 2019.

³⁹ Garrett Morgan III, personal family photos, 1920’s -1950’s.

⁴⁰ Morgan, Garrett, III. Interviewed by Marilyn Wainio. Personal Interview. Wakeman, Ohio, July 9, 2019.

⁴¹ Ohio History Connection. “Garrett A. Morgan.” Remarkable Ohio. Accessed April 1, 2022.

<https://remarkableohio.org/index.php?/category/309>