

The Village of Waite Hill and Charles A. Otis Jr: A Brief Retrospective

Often little things go unnoticed in the grand scheme of history. Between 1885 and 1930, Northeast Ohio was home to 70 millionaires; and in 1918, thirty of them had summer estates in the rolling countryside of Lake County. A favored location for several of these prominent families is the little community known as **Waite Hill**. According to a 2020 census, its current population is just 543; and their hamlet, once known as **Carlton** and then **Chagrin**, occupies a mere 4.3 miles. This area retains the expansive beauty of the farms and homesteads put in place by its original landowners. It was incorporated in 1928. **Arthur Baldwin**, its mayor of four decades, may be remembered by many county residents. He contributed much to Ohio's history including the honor of being the longest continuously serving mayor in the state.

Waite Hill's roots date from July 1811, when the first pioneers settled just southeast of the present-day village. The **Christopher Crary** family, along with the **Isaac Morley** and **John Moore** clans, arrived at the densely forested area. By 1821, **Erastus Waite**, then 28 years old, and his 18-year-old brother Alvan journeyed from Onondaga County, New York. They came to clear the land their father had purchased. The **Joshua Hobart** family settled there in 1842.

Other familiar names followed in time. **John Sherwin Sr. and Marguerite 'Muffi' Sherwin** lived on South Farm. **Margaret Halle Sherwin** (daughter of Samuel Halle, co-owner of Halle Brothers

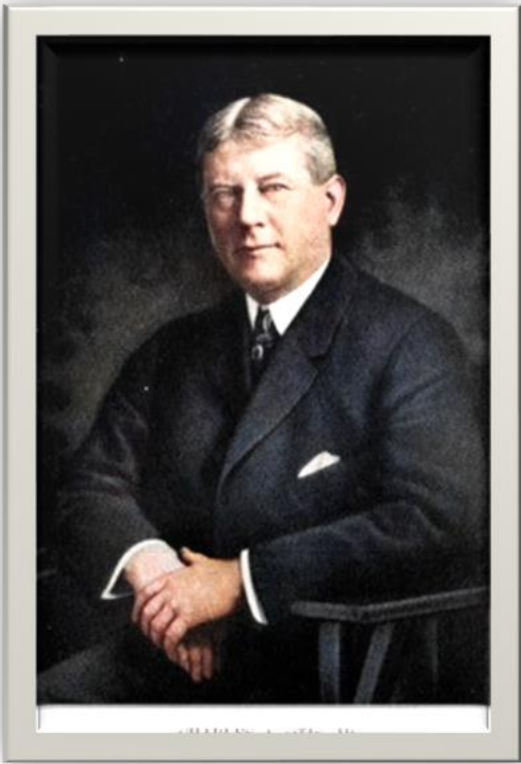


Dept. Stores) made it her home and coined the village's **Bird Sanctuary** nickname. There is much county and local village history to recall, but this month we'll feature **Charles Otis Jr.**, an industrialist, and briefly, a Cleveland newspaperman.

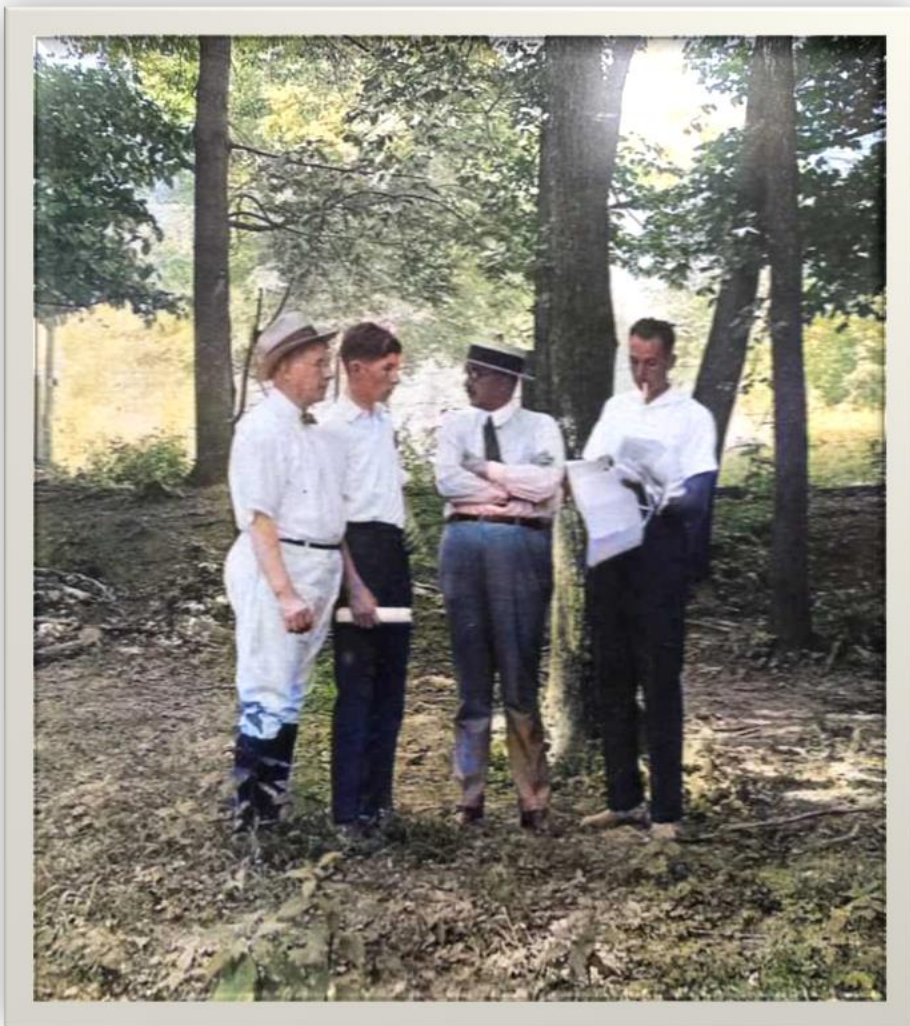
*One of the oldest structures in Waite Hill is a Victorian-style farm home located at 6725 Waite Hill Road. Built in the late 1870s by **George H. Hoose**, the 27-acre farm site was originally owned by **Luther Waite**. **Charles Otis Jr.** (1868-1953) purchased the property in the early 1900s. Named **Tannenbaum Farm**, the house still stands today. A boarding house for workers on the farm, with barns for pigs, cows, turkeys and racehorses followed. In time, even a half-mile racetrack was added, and Otis was one of the largest landowners in Waite Hill.*

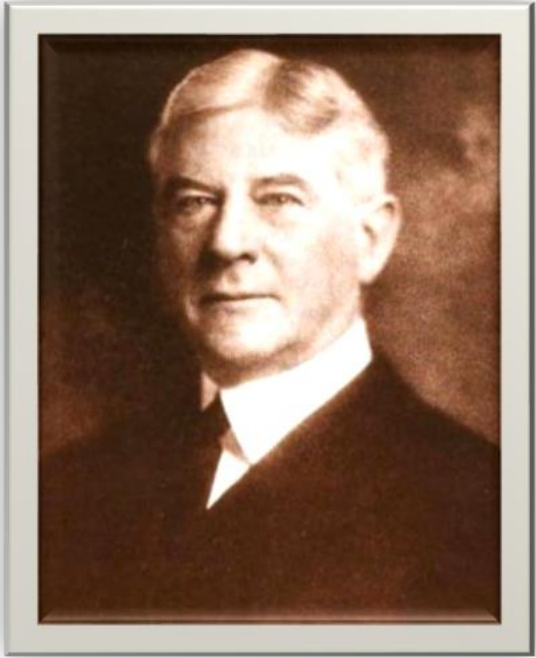
Charles A. Otis Jr.

Charles Augustus Jr. was born in 1868 in Cleveland. He was the accomplished namesake



Charles A. Otis, Sr.





of the former Cleveland Mayor (in 1873) Charles A. Otis Sr. (1827-1905) and his 2nd wife Ann Sheppard Otis (1839-1883). The family migrated from Connecticut and played a prominent role in the growth of the city. Charles Sr. was a local steel titan and successfully founded the **Otis Steel Company**, which became one of the largest employers in the area.

Like many other sons of prominent Cleveland families, Charles Jr. was educated at Yale University. Upon his return to the area after graduation, he worked in the cattle business.

He married Lucia Edwards in the summer of 1894. The couple moved to **Waite Hill**, and Charles entered the local iron and steel brokerage business. Organizing the **Otis, Hough & Company**, in 1899, he purchased the first seat held by a Clevelander on the **New York Stock Exchange**. His banking firm flourished, and he became President of the **Cleveland Stock Exchange**. Their son William was born in the spring of 1900. A daughter, Lucia Eliza, whom they called Queenie, was born in May 1905.

In the same era, his brief but pivotal foray into newspaper ownership in Cleveland was significant in Northeast Ohio history. He acquired the **Cleveland World** in 1904, the **Cleveland Leader** and **News & Herald** in 1905, added the **Evening Plain Dealer** and finally consolidated these papers into the afternoon



paper - **Cleveland News**. He disposed of both the News and the Leader in a 10-minute million-dollar deal to Daniel Hanna Sr., father of his future son-in-law Dan R. Hanna Jr.

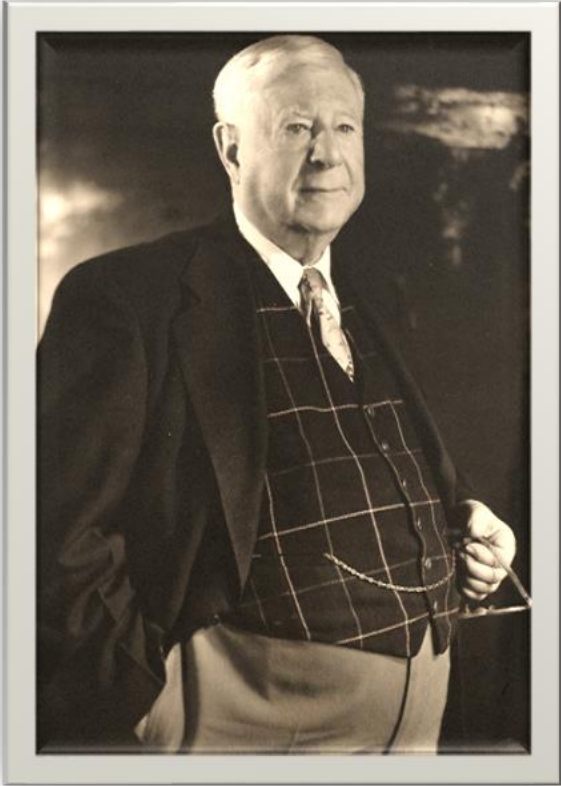
Charles reorganized in 1912 to run Otis & Hough as **Otis & Company**, whose other subsidiaries included Wm. Edwards, the Otis Terminal Warehouse Company in Cleveland, plus other firms.

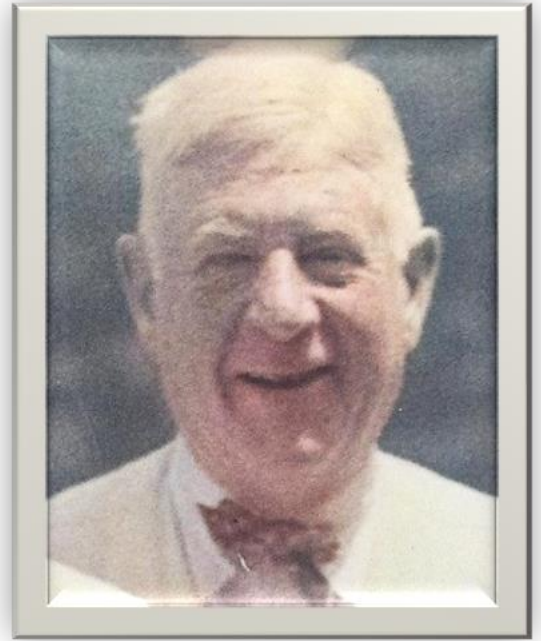
He sold his holdings and retired in 1931. He also served on the **War Industries Board** during World War II. His last major contributions to the region included organizing and chairing the **Tavern, Cleveland Athletic Club** and **Chagrin Valley Hunt Club**.

The wealth and high profile of the family made them the subject of gossip in the 1930s when daughter Queenie left her husband John Newell and was drawn into the messy public divorce between Dan Hanna Jr. and his wife Ruth.

Charles Otis Jr. lost his wife Lucia in the winter of 1949, and he died in 1953. The Otis estate, **Tannenbaum Farm**, was parceled off to several distinguished owners, including the founder of Cedar Point and the widow of President Garfield's grandson, **Janet Dodge Newell**. But the lovely property still reveals some of its special heritage through structures visible to those traveling the backroads of the pastoral village of Waite Hill.

Sources: *Lake County Historical Society Quarterly*, Vol. 19, #4, December 1977; *Here I Am...Yesteryear* by Charles Otis, 1951; *Hidden History of Lake County, Ohio* by Jennifer Boresz Engleking, 2021; *Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*.





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