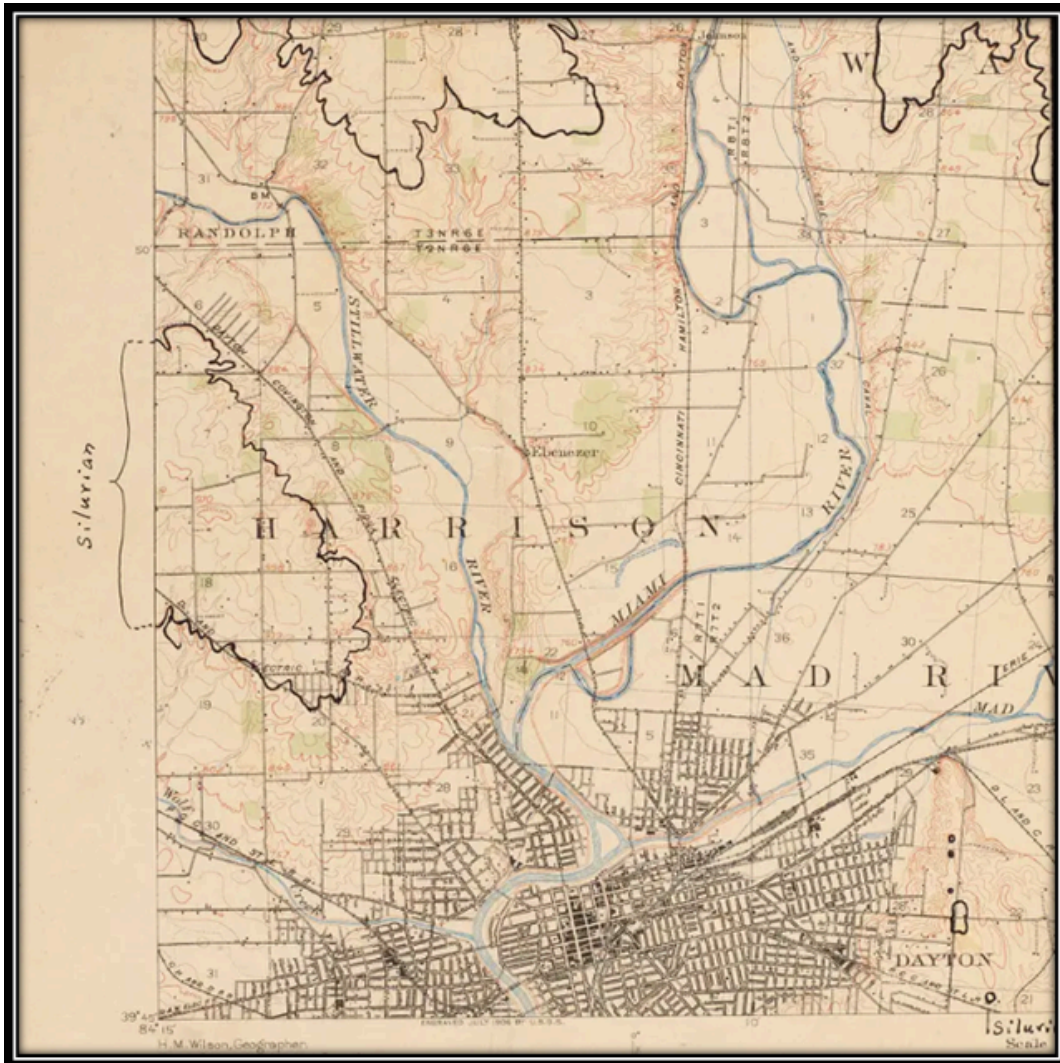




SINCE 1841

WOODLAND

HISTORIC CEMETERY & ARBORETUM



Above: Topographic map (including the city of Dayton) surveyed by Dr. Foerste ca. 1909-1910

Before Bill Nye, there was...

Dr. August Foerste (pronounced FIRST-ee) was an internationally respected geologist and paleontologist best known for describing the geology of the Dayton area. His book, “Geology of Dayton and Vicinity” published in 1915, is considered a classic in the field. In addition to his work with the United States Geological Survey, Dr. Foerste taught physics and science at Steele High School for more than 30 years.

Upon Dr. Foerste’s death in 1936, the *Dayton Daily News* published the following obituary, including a letter written by Dr. Sigmund Metzler, curator of the Public Library museum & for many years a close friend of Dr. Foerste:

Rhum* and Picnics Were Chief Diversions of Late Scientist

While the name of August F. Foerste will live long in the world of science because of his great achievements in that field of endeavor, it will also live long among those who knew him as a man and a friend—those who knew him as a kindly, democratic humanist. [...]

[...] “I shall leave the story of Dr. Foerste as a scientist to other men, who are better qualified to tell of his achievements in the fields of science. Watch the various scientific papers and magazines; they will be full of accounts of Dr. Foerste’s accomplishments. Let me, instead, tell something of this famous man’s social activities.

“All great men are in the first place, human beings; they need relaxation from their serious work. They all have their own hobbies; some select music, others collect stamps or study paintings, and so on, as a release valve from their nervous strain.

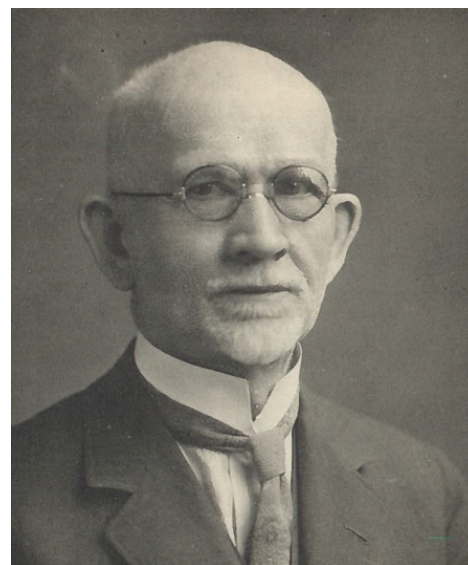


Photo: Dr. August F. Foerste from the "[Memorial of August F. Foerste](#)" included in the 1937 Proceedings of the Geological Society of America – by R.S. Bassler.

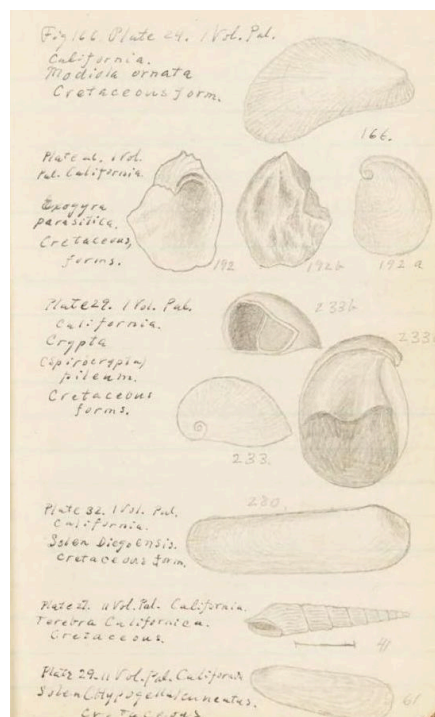
* Today, we would know 'rhum' as 'rummy' - a card game, not a beverage.

“Dr. Foerste had his hobbies also. For instance, he never missed a concert. And how I shall miss his regular phone calls whenever he came to Dayton: ‘This is August Foerste talking. Will you be home tonight?’ After I answered ‘yes’ he would add, ‘all right, I’ll be over for a game of rhum.’ Now rhum is not a very interesting game to me, but playing it with Dr. Foerste was a pleasure. He was as interested in his cards as he might have been in a rare or strange fossil.

“He greatly enjoyed going on picnics and on fishing parties, even though he never fished himself. Gathering wood, starting the fire, watching the kettles—these jobs always fell to him. And after the meal was over and most of the campers just faded away, he was always one of the few faithful who stayed to wash the dishes, clean up the place, pack the baskets, and so on.

“His knowledge of plants, rocks and fossils usually made his companions forget about the after-dinner nap, and instead listen to his talks. He was never tired of answering even the most foolish questions, and many of these picnics turned out, in fact, to be better natural history classes.

“All men were equal in his eyes, whether they were princes or paupers made no difference to him. All received a polite answer to questions asked.



Above: a page of Dr. Foerste's specimen notebook (Ohio 1887-1888) with sketches of crinoid & brachiopoda shells; courtesy of the [Biodiversity Heritage Library](#) & Smithsonian Institution Archives.

“‘Who is that man?’ asked a farmer of me one day, while Dr. Foerste was here on a visit. ‘He knows more about soils and seeds and planting than anyone else I ever listened to, and I’ve been a farmer myself all my life.’ ‘That’s Dr. Foerste, the great geologist,’ I told him. ‘Why,’ said the man, ‘I thought he was another farmer from upstate.’ That was Foerste—all human, helpful and sociable to the highest degree.

“Scientists, friends, former students, and all who knew him will miss him. The city of Dayton has lost one of its most prominent and distinguished citizens.”

Dr. Metzler and Dr. Foerste had been close friends and associates since 1893, the year that both entered the Dayton public school system, Dr. Foerste as a botany teacher at Steele, and Dr. Metzler as principal of Emerson.

Dr. Foerste was, according to Dr. Metzler, the type of scientist that is seldom found in the present day. He was at home in absolutely any field of scientific endeavor, whether it was chemistry or anthropology, botany or geology, physics or paleontology. It is doubtful, his friend says of him, if any man was ever more familiar with the entire field of science than Dr. Foerste.



Photo: Steele High School Faculty, 1921. Dr. Foerste is circled in red. Photo courtesy of the Dayton Metro Library's [Montgomery Co. Picture File](#).

[...] Dr. Foerste spent the entire Wednesday afternoon in the company of his old friend Dr. Metzler, the latter driving him to his Wroe av. home toward evening.

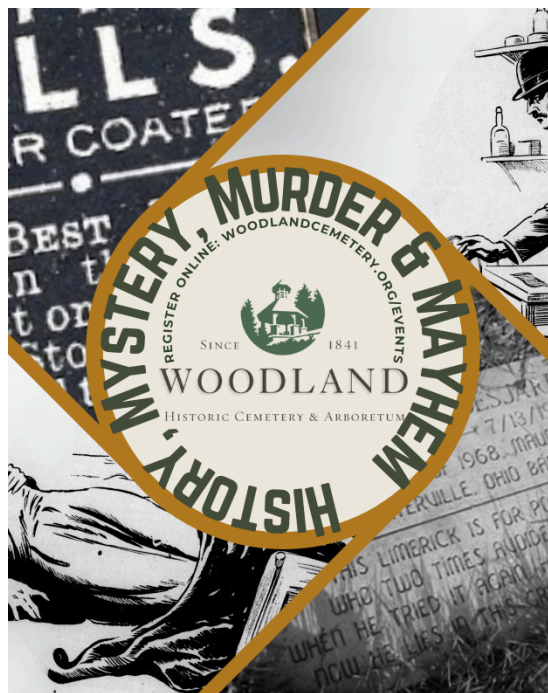
“I never saw him looking in better health than he was then,” Dr. Metzler said, “and I commented to him about it. After dinner Wednesday night Dr. Foerste phoned me to come to his residence and play rhum with him.”



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