

# EVANS HHS NEWSLETTER

Scenes from the Second Annual Meeting of the  
Wilson Bruce Evans Home Historical Society, Sept. 17, 2022



Photos by Steven Rice

## ANNUAL MEETING BRINGS MEMBERS TOGETHER

Over 70 people attended the Second Annual Meeting of the Wilson Bruce Evans Home Historical Society in Martin Luther King Jr. Park on Sept. 17. Story on pp. 2-3.

## NATIONAL PARK SERVICE RECOGNIZES EVANS HOUSE AS AMERICAN TREASURE

Evans HHS has been awarded over \$350,000 in grants in 2022. The largest was a Save America's Treasures grant from the National Park Service. Story on p. 4.

## RESTORATION OF EVANS HOUSE MOVES FORWARD

Working with Robert P. Madison International, Naylor Wellman Historic Preservation Consulting, and R.W. Clark Co., Evans HHS has begun restoring 33 East Vine Street. Story on p. 4.



Photo by Carol Lasser

Upon the recommendation of our building committee and team of consultants, and with approval of the Oberlin Historic Preservation Commission, a talented crew from Ohio Roofing, Siding and Slate installed a new synthetic cedar shake roof to protect the brick core of the Evans house in July 2022. Primary funding was provided by a grant from the Nord Family Foundation.

## EVANS HHS HOLDS 2<sup>ND</sup> ANNUAL MEETING



On September 17, 2022—a warm, sunny Saturday in Oberlin—over 70 people gathered in Martin Luther King Jr. Park at 11 am for the second annual meeting of the Wilson Bruce Evans Home Historical Society.

Society Manager Carol Lasser served as chair for the occasion, which opened with an invocation by Reverend Brenda Grier-Miller of Oberlin's House of the Lord Fellowship. Dr. Doris Hughes-Moore, President of the Society's Board, delivered welcoming remarks on behalf of all the Evans descendants involved in the restoration effort, and Bryan Burgess, President of Oberlin City Council, delivered welcoming remarks on behalf of the community. Representatives of other organizations also offered greetings: Liz Schultz of the Oberlin Heritage Center; Annessa Wyman of the Oberlin African-American Genealogy and History Group; Pam Brooks of the Oberlin College Africana Studies Department; Caroline Jackson-Smith of the Oberlin-Wellington Rescue Theater Project; Kathy Dean-Diehlman of the Lorain County Historical Society; and Ruth Smith of the NAACP.

Ann Longworth Orr read a letter by U.S. Senator Sherrod Brown. He recalled having attended the ceremony designating the Evans house a National Historic Landmark in 1997. Evans HHS Trustee Gary Kornblith read a letter from Robert Bryson, associate regional director of the National Park Service. DJ Billie Neadham broadcast a greeting recorded by Dorothy Wallace, President of the Chatham-Kent Black Historical Society & Black Mecca Museum in Chatham, Ontario, Canada.

At the Board's initiative, three honorary Guardian certificates were awarded at the meeting. Sandra Madison, CEO of Robert P. Madison International, was named the Society's first Heritage Guardian in

recognition of her role as lead architect for rehabilitation of the Evans house. As Carol Lasser explained, "The Evans Home Historical Society is so fortunate that she accepted our invitation to join us on our journey toward rehabilitation—she knew better than we did what we were getting into. To our great joy, she said yes. We are so grateful—because—as she has said in her own words: 'I am at the stage of life where I know how to say, 'No, thank you.' I turn down things that aren't going to be fun for me ... I don't want to do anything that I can't put 200 percent in.'"

For the second year in a row, the Society conferred two Legacy Guardian awards upon individuals who have worked for decades recovering, preserving, and promoting Oberlin's African American history. Before suffering a stroke in 2020, Linda Robinson Isabell helped to form and sustain numerous local organizations, including the Oberlin Alliance for Black Progress, the Oberlin African-American Genealogy and History Group, Friends of the Oberlin Underground Railroad, and Juneteenth Oberlin. In her statement honoring Linda, trustee Phyllis Yarber Hogan emphasized that "Linda was not just a member but a working member" of these groups. "Any event or program that was held, you can be sure that Linda was there, working to make sure that everything went as it should. She arrived early and stayed late. No task was too small for Linda to take on if it furthered the organization's cause. Any task she took on she carried to completion."

The other recipient of a Legacy Guardian award this year was Marlene (Marly) Merrill. Beginning in the 1970s, Marly researched the early history of African American students at Oberlin College, especially Black women. In 1983, she and Ellen Lawson published "The Antebellum Talented Thousandth: Black College Students at Oberlin before the Civil War," a pathbreaking article, in the *Journal of Negro Education*. The following year they published a book titled *The Three Sarahs: Documents of Antebellum Black College Women*. Among Marly's later writings on Oberlin's Black heritage were the entry on Mary Jane Patterson, the first African American woman to earn a Bachelor of Arts degree, for *Black Women in American History: An Historical Encyclopedia* and a paper—later turned into a booklet—on Sarah Margru Kinson, a survivor of the *Amistad* uprising who also attended Oberlin College.

Trustee Connie Ponder introduced Kurt Russell, a lifelong Oberlinian whom Connie has known since he was a little boy. Kurt was educated in the Oberlin schools and later returned to teach history at Oberlin High School. This past spring, he was named National Teacher of the Year for 2022 and subsequently feted at the White House. Kurt told the annual meeting that it was more special to be recognized for his work by his fellow Oberlinians than by President Biden and other national figures.

In Mr. Russell's honor, Trustee Phyllis Yarber Hogan presented a copy of Mary Church Terrell's autobiography to a representative of the Oberlin City Schools. Phyllis noted that in recent years Oberlin College had renamed its main library for Mary Church Terrell, "an 1884 graduate of Oberlin College . . . feminist, and activist who worked to further social justice during a pivotal time in which one's gender and race were limiting factors." Yet the Oberlin High School library lacked a copy of Terrell's autobiography, and her name was absent from the school's "hall of illustrious alumni." "Before she was Mary Church Terrell," Phyllis pointed out, "she was Mary Eliza Church, a 12-year-old girl who came to Oberlin and boarded with a Black family in the community in order to attend Oberlin High School. Mary Eliza Church graduated from Oberlin High School in 1879. What she took with her to Oberlin College, she got from Oberlin High School." Phyllis added with characteristic eloquence, "Mary Church Terrell was a product of the Oberlin African American community and Oberlin High School. The Wilson Bruce Evans Home Historical Society is not only about restoring the Evans Home, we also desire to inform, inspire and empower the youth of this community to claim their heritage and become involved in the future of this community."

By good fortune, the person who accepted the book on behalf of the Oberlin City Schools was Meisha Baker, who graduated from Oberlin High School in 1990, the same year as Kurt Russell. Meisha now serves as Principal of the Oberlin Elementary School, and she joined Kurt in thanking the Society and the wider community for their support.



Kurt Russell and Meisha Baker, with Connie Ponder mostly hidden in back. Photo by Steven Rice.

After a "seventh inning stretch," Evans HHS Secretary Annessa Wyman presented Officer Billie Needham with a Community Service Award. The meeting then welcomed a special visitor from the 19<sup>th</sup> century: Mrs. Sarah Jane Leary Evans, wife of Wilson Bruce Evans, as portrayed by Camille Hamlin Allen, Ph.D., a member of the Oberlin African-American Genealogy and History Group, Oberlin Heritage Center, and Evans HHS. In recent years Camille has researched the biographies of several notable women of color connected to Oberlin's African American heritage, and she has brought these

remarkable individuals back to life through short historical reenactments. This summer, at Oberlin's Juneteenth celebration, she added Sarah Jane Leary Evans to her repertoire. Camille returned as Mrs. Evans for the Second Annual Meeting. Although she explained that, as a respectable woman of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, she was uncomfortable speaking publicly, Mrs. Evans declared that "the cause of freedom and civil rights for ALL is what my family has been willing to give its life's blood for—and I stand before you, fiercely proud of that legacy." She expressed regret that she could not welcome her listeners into the nearby Evans residence while it was under repair, but she promised that once the building had been restored, she would be pleased to show visitors around the house that she, as a dedicated wife and mother, had turned into a home.



Camille Hamlin Allen portraying Sarah Jane Leary Evans. Photo by Steven Rice.

Next on the agenda was the business meeting. Manager Carol Lasser reported on grants awarded and restoration projects accomplished over the past year (see separate stories on p. 4). Treasurer Cathy Grooms, speaking over a phone connection, reported that Evans HHS closed out its first fiscal year at the end of 2021 with net assets of \$103,255. Nina Grooms Lee, Governance Committee Chair, also speaking remotely, identified the uncontested nominees for election to the Board of Trustees: Camille Hamlin Allen, Cathy Grooms, Doris Hughes-Moore, Gary Kornblith, and Melany Hughes/Tom Karro-Gassner. Paper ballots were distributed at the meeting and members could also vote electronically.

Carol Lasser read a statement from members of the Oberlin College frisbee teams who had kindly set up chairs lent by the House of the Lord Fellowship for the occasion. The teams declared, "As student-led organizations, we are always seeking ways to connect with Oberlin in a meaningful way. It is no secret that in recent years, a rift has emerged between the College and the community. We refuse to be complacent and wish to rekindle the close bond that once existed."

To close the meeting, Jeanine Donaldson, Executive Director of the Elyria YWCA, led the audience in singing "Lift Every Voice and Sing." The meeting adjourned on time, at 1 pm.

## EVANS HHS AWARDED GRANTS BOTH LARGE AND SMALL

Over the past year, the Wilson Bruce Evans Home Historical Society has applied for and received grants from a wide array of foundations and government agencies. Below is a list of grants received in the order that they were awarded, with amounts of funding. The grants with asterisks (\*) require matching funds.

<b>Funding Source</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Nordson Corporation Foundation	\$13,500
Nord Family Foundation	\$50,000
Ohio State Historic Preservation Office—Certified Local Government Grant*	\$30,000
Bill Long Foundation	\$5,350
National Park Service—Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Grant	\$10,000
National Park Service—Save America’s Treasures Grant*	\$283,250

By far the largest grant received was the Save America’s Treasures (SAT) grant awarded by the National Park Service in September. The Save America’s Treasures program is highly competitive. A total of 80 SAT grants were awarded across the entire country this year, and the Wilson Bruce Evans Home Historical Society was the only organization in Ohio to receive one. In response to this news, Dr. Doris Hughes-Moore, President of Evans HHS and great-great granddaughter of Wilson Bruce Evans, declared, “We’re over the moon with joy.”

Over the next several months, the Society will need to raise matching funds from private donors for the grants that require them, and it will apply for additional grants as well. We estimate that it will cost a total of roughly \$1 million dollars to restore the Evans house and make it accessible to the public.

**Wilson Bruce Evans Home Historical Society  
Board of Trustees, 2022-23**

Doris Hughes-Moore <b>President</b>	Phyllis Yarber Hogan <b>Vice President</b>
Annessa Wyman <b>Secretary</b>	Catherine Grooms <b>Treasurer</b>
Camille Hamlin Allen Candyce Hughes Lewis Sheridan Hughes Melany Hughes/Tom Karro-Gassner Richard Hughes Wilson Hughes Brigette Johnson Gary Kornblith Constance Ponder Liz Schultz	
Carol Lasser <b>Manager</b>	

## RESTORATION OF HOUSE PROCEEDS, LEADS TO NEW DISCOVERY

Since its formation in 2021, Evans HHS has assembled a remarkable team of experts to help plan and guide the restoration of 33 East Vine Street: Sandra Madison, AIA, Chairperson and CEO of the architectural firm Robert P. Madison International, Inc.; Wendy Naylor and Diana Wellman, co-principals of Naylor Wellman Consulting and registered professionals in historic preservation; Eugene Matthews, retired Director of Facilities Services at Case Western Reserve University; and Andrew Clark, President of R.W. Clark Company, a general contracting and construction management firm that specializes in historic renovation.

The first steps in restoring the Evans house involved cleaning the interior and exterior of the building, which had been unoccupied for a quarter-century, and putting existing furniture, some of which dated to the 19<sup>th</sup>-century, into storage. We also had to arrange for new stairs to the front entrance, new locks, and the removal of raccoons and other unwelcome critters. Next came reconnection of electricity for lighting purposes and for powering a new security system.



Eugene Matthews celebrates the reconnection of electricity at the Evans house on April 23, 2022. Photo by Carol Lasser.

In July 2022, Ohio Roofing, Siding and Slate replaced the leaking roof over the house’s brick core with a new roof composed of synthetic cedar shake in keeping with historic preservation standards. Also in July, Andrew Clark and Wendy Naylor determined that, contrary to prior accounts of the house’s evolution, the rear wing was built before the brick core. This discovery has prompted us to reconsider our rehabilitation strategy. Rather than replace the deteriorating rear wing with a new structure, we now plan to save as much of it as possible. The photo below shows a log beam discovered while researching the rear wing’s construction.



Log beam discovered in the rear wing of the Evans house. Photo by Carol Lasser.

## If you joined the Wilson Bruce Evans Home Historical Society before September 17, 2022, it's time to renew your membership for 2023!

There are two convenient ways to renew:

- (1) Go to our "Become A Member" webpage at <https://evanshhs.org/become-a-member/>. You will have the option of choosing which membership category you prefer, and after clicking on the "Donate with PayPal" button, you will have the option of paying with your credit card, debit card, or PayPal account.
- (2) Alternatively, you can complete the following form and mail it with a check made out to Evans Home Historical Society, P.O. Box 284, Oberlin, OH 44074.

### Wilson Bruce Evans Home Historical Society

#### Membership Form for 2023

(All memberships and renewals paid on or after the Second Annual Meeting are valid until December 31, 2023)

**Complete and mail to Evans Home Historical Society, P.O. Box 284, Oberlin, OH 44074**

Your name:	<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th colspan="3" style="text-align: center; font-size: small;">Annual Membership Categories</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> <td>Regular Vine</td> <td style="text-align: right;">\$12</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> <td>Student Vine</td> <td style="text-align: right;">\$5</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> <td>Vine Family</td> <td style="text-align: right;">\$33</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> <td>Triple Vine</td> <td style="text-align: right;">\$99</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> <td>Golden Vine</td> <td style="text-align: right;">\$330</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Annual Membership Categories			<input type="checkbox"/>	Regular Vine	\$12	<input type="checkbox"/>	Student Vine	\$5	<input type="checkbox"/>	Vine Family	\$33	<input type="checkbox"/>	Triple Vine	\$99	<input type="checkbox"/>	Golden Vine	\$330	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p style="font-size: small;">Is this a new membership or a renewal?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">__ New</p> <p style="text-align: center;">__ Renewal</p> </div>
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Your mailing address:	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; font-size: small;">           Additional donation to help match the Save America's Treasures Grant from the U.S. National Park Service: \$ _____         </div>																			
Your email address:																				

The Wilson Bruce Evans Home Historical Society is a 501c3 nonprofit corporation

**Please consider making an additional donation to help match the Save America's Treasures Grant awarded by the National Park Service.**