



Fall 2023

Evans House Rehabilitation Set to Begin!

Ozanne Construction Chosen General Contractor for Phase 1

By Gary Kornblith

The Wilson Bruce Evans Home Historical Society (Evans HHS) is excited to announce the imminent launch of Phase 1 of the rehabilitation of the Evans house at 33 East Vine Street. Phase 1 focuses on the replacement of the house's decaying front porch, which dates to 1927, with a new structure designed in the architectural style of the mid-to-late 19th century. Also included in Phase 1 is repair and restoration of the house's brick masonry.

Evans HHS feels fortunate to have recruited Cleveland-based Ozanne Construction Company, Inc. to lead this project. Ozanne describes itself as a "multi-disciplinary construction management company doing business throughout the Midwestern and Southern United States." Among the many buildings credited to Ozanne in Northeast Ohio are the NASA Glenn Research Center, the Glenville Circle North Mixed-Use Development, Nordson Corporate Headquarters, and Elyria City Hall.

The firm has a distinguished history. After serving in the US Navy during World War II, Leroy Ozanne, its founder, relocated from Texas to Cleveland in 1946. Over the next decade he worked as a building inspector, one of very few African Americans to hold that position. In 1956, drawing on both the knowledge and the relationships that he had developed on the job, he started his own business. In the 1950s, Black-owned construction firms were almost unknown in the area and nationwide. As the company's website explains, "Leroy was a pioneer in an era and region that was often inhospitable – to say the least – to his aspirations. Fortunately, his inbred sense of self-confidence was fortified with a heavy dose of skill and stubbornness that allowed him to overcome obstacles."

During the 1960s Leroy Ozanne emerged as a business and civic leader in Cleveland. He supported the election of Carl Stokes as mayor, and he joined



*Conceptual drawing of new front porch, key component of Phase 1
Image courtesy of Robert P. Madison International Inc.*



*Leroy Ozanne with Martin Luther King, Jr.
Photo courtesy of Ozanne Construction Co.*

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the Greater Cleveland Growth Association and the Hough Area Development Corporation in seeking to expand economic opportunities for Black residents. Ozanne Construction partnered with Turner Construction to build the Martin Luther King Plaza shopping center, which opened in 1972 as a Black-led enterprise to promote economic development in the Hough neighborhood. (The architectural firm that designed MLK King Plaza was Robert P. Madison International, the same firm that has drafted plans for the Evans house rehabilitation.)

By the late 1970s, Ozanne Construction was, in the company's words, "one of America's preeminent African American businesses." Today the firm that Leroy Ozanne founded is headed by his son, Dominic L. Ozanne. As a youth, Dominic L. Ozanne interned in the family business. After graduating from Boston University and Harvard Law School, he returned to the firm as general counsel. He now serves as President and CEO and also sits on the boards of the Cleveland Museum of Art, the Construction Employers Association, and Case Western Reserve University.



*Dominic L. Ozanne, President & CEO of Ozanne Construction Co.
Photo courtesy of Ozanne Construction Co.*

Work on Phase 1 of the Evans house rehabilitation project is scheduled to begin in mid-November 2023 and to take 1-2 months. Evans HHS will soon be submitting to the National Park Service and the Ohio Historic Preservation Office plans for Phase 2, which will encompass rehabilitation of the one-story rear wooden wing of the house, restoration of the two-story Italianate core, and construction of an ADA-compliant annex to provide universal public access. We anticipate beginning this phase of the project in late spring 2024.

Was there a Tunnel? Looking Underground at 33 East Vine Street

By Karen Schaefer

The results are in!

On June 8-9, 2023, Dr. Jarrod Burks, Director of Archaeological Geophysics at Ohio Valley Archaeology, Inc., and his associate Alexandra Flores conducted a near-surface geophysical survey of the land surrounding the Evans house at 33 East Vine Street in Oberlin. The Wilson Bruce Evans Home Historical Society was deeply fortunate to enlist their expertise. Widely recognized as a leader in his field, Dr. Burks made himself available between two extended stints in Cambodia, where he is searching for the remains of American soldiers who died there during the Vietnam War in collaboration with the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA). He also has extensive experience researching earthworks built by the Hopewell and other indigenous peoples in the Middle Ohio Valley.

Survey methodology

Burks and Flores used three different types of underground surveying that penetrate the surface but do not involve any actual excavation. These modern geophysical survey techniques include a magnetometer, ground penetrating radar, and an electromagnetic induction meter.

Magnetometers measure the effects buried materials have upon the geomagnetic field, allowing archeologists to "see" into the ground and identify what lies beneath. Ground penetrating radar does much the same by bouncing radar waves off buried structures. And electromagnetic induction meters can provide better information in complex urban soils.

What the survey did not find

First, no signs of an underground tunnel were uncovered. While that may be a disappointment

for people who grew up hearing stories of an escape tunnel leading from the house, it confirms the more prevalent view that in Oberlin, an abolitionist hub with a sizable Black population, freedom seekers could “hide in plain sight.” With rare exceptions, they were securely housed in private homes, on nearby farms, or in college buildings prior to continuing their journey to Canada.

What the survey found

Yet the geophysical survey conducted by Burks and Flores identified eight “anomalies” - what archaeologists call an out-of-place artifact - of possible interest around the Wilson Bruce Evans home that may warrant further archaeological investigation

As shown on Figure 15 of the report (reproduced at the right), the team concluded that sites 1, 2, and 8 are pit- or shaft-type anomalies that could be remnants of an old outbuilding. Another may be an old well. These are the sites the survey team suggests may be worth excavation.

Anomaly 4 is a possible sidewalk/walkway that leads south from the rear of the Wilson Bruce Evans house. Anomalies 3 and 7 are possibly more recent features associated with fill used to flatten out an old drainage channel in the southwest corner of the property.

What comes next

Executive Director Carol Lasser is exploring with members of the Firelands Archaeological Research Center in Sheffield the possibility of conducting a participatory archaeological dig on the site of the Wilson Bruce Evans house this coming spring.

If the project comes to fruition, local residents and school children would be involved as volunteer excavators under the guidance of Firelands archaeologists. The volunteers may find outbuilding debris such as old wood, nails, hinges, and doorknobs. Or they could possibly turn up artifacts from freedom seekers fleeing north.

Stay tuned!

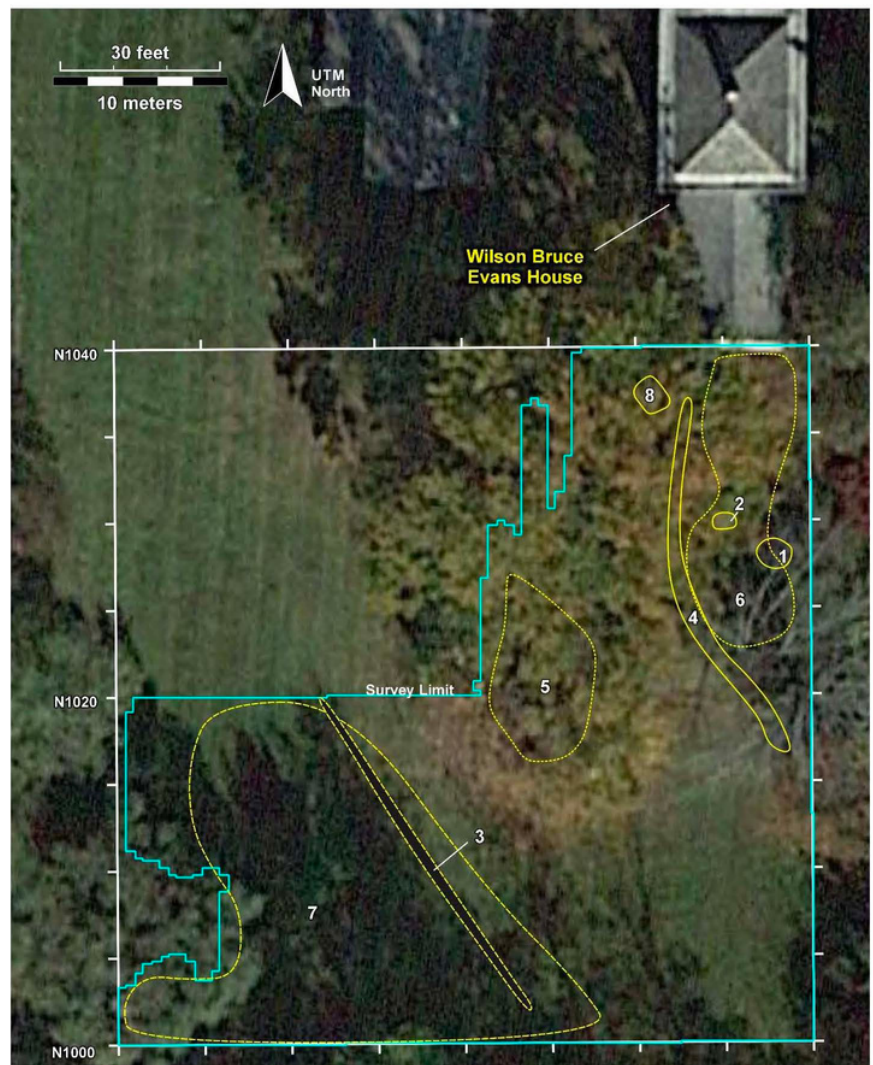


Figure 15 from “Geophysical Survey Results from the Grounds Around the Wilson Bruce Evans Home in Oberlin, Ohio” | Image courtesy of Jarrod Burks

A Conversation with Phyllis Yarber Hogan, Lifelong Oberlin Resident and Vice President of Evans HHS

by Karen Schaefer

Phyllis Yarber Hogan is Vice President of the Wilson Bruce Evans Home Historical Society. She jokes that everyone knows vice presidents don't do much. But Yarber Hogan, a lifelong resident of Oberlin, has a deeper connection to Oberlin's history that's worth telling.



Phyllis Yarber Hogan
Photo courtesy of Phyllis Yarber Hogan

"I was born in Oberlin. And I grew up on Lincoln Street, which when I grew up was the ghetto, Oberlin's ghetto. And I mean, we were treated differently. And I never didn't understand why."

Phyllis Yarber Hogan says when local schools were redistricted back in the 1950s, she was assigned to a mostly white school.

"I went to Prospect School, which was where all the rich white kids lived. There were some Black kids. There weren't a lot of us." Yarber Hogan says she learned nothing in school about Oberlin's African American history, only stories about Oberlin College's history and the War Between the States. She and her few fellow Black students were so confused about their own past, they misinterpreted the statue of General Giles Shurtleff, who commanded Ohio's first Black regiment in the Civil War. The statue, which still stands on South Professor Street shows Shurtleff with a hand extended, pointing west.



Shurtleff Statue | Photo courtesy of
Jonah Volk

"We had no idea who Shurtleff was. People used to say the Underground Railroad came through here," says Yarber Hogan. "And we all used to think that Shurtleff was posed the way he was because he was pointing to a safe place."

Over time, Phyllis Yarber Hogan decided she needed to find her own safe space. On her own, she began to read the work of African American writers.

"When I started to learn stuff, I was real mad. I wouldn't read a book by white writers for years," she says. "Eventually I came to realize there are wonderful writers in all colors. But I was angry for a long time."

In the process of discovering her African American heritage Yarber Hogan also began exploring her own roots, back before there was Ancestry.com, the Internet, even home computers. She started with her name.

"I have always been Phyllis Yarber. And I realized that my name was a derivation of Yarborough, because they were the enslavers. And I quit. I stopped. I wouldn't go any further. It took me a while to go back."

But undaunted, she did go back. And accepted her past.

"I'm like, it's not really my name. But it IS my name," she says. "And you are who you are. It can only make a difference if you let it make a difference. I'm just proud that they survived. And that they were part of making where they lived a better place."

And that has been Phyllis Yarber Hogan's lifelong mission - to make her town of Oberlin a better place. Twenty years ago, she co-founded the Oberlin African-American Genealogy and History Group (OAAGHG), which has sponsored the collection of untold family histories for two decades. In 2014 she retired from her job as administrative assistant for student academic services at Oberlin College. And a few years ago, she accepted a position on the board of the Wilson Bruce Evans Home Historical Society.

"Because I have longed for a place that all children, particularly Black children, can go and learn. They need to know that we were not always the people that were helped, that we helped ourselves, too," she says. "And the

Wilson Bruce Evans house and family history tells that story very well."

At 73, Phyllis Yarber Hogan is more than willing to step back and let younger leaders take her place, to make their own changes and own mistakes. But her passion for educating young people stands firm.

"They need to be proud of themselves, be proud of their history. You weren't just slaves. There was another part of your history, too," she says.



Phyllis Yarber Hogan telling the story of Henry "Box" Brown with her granddaughter at the Oberlin Public Library | Photo from video of "Telling New Stories about Black History in Oberlin," Feb. 4, 2023

"They have a right to run for city council, they have a right to be on the school board, they have a right to have their place, and they need to do it. And not be pushed out, because, well, nobody's going to listen to me. They have every right. That's why I really believe in the project and I really want to see it happen."

If Phyllis Yarber Hogan has anything to say about it, the Wilson Bruce Evans House will fulfill its promise. And even though she claims no accolades and honors, she has surely earned a place as one of Oberlin's best storytellers and upholders of real history.



Phyllis Yarber Hogan addressing the 3rd Annual Meeting of Evans HHS | Photo courtesy of Courtney Cannon-Scott

Cleveland Heights Art Gallery Features Elizabeth Catlett Lithograph as Fundraiser for Evans HHS

by David Lusenhop

LUSENHOP FINE ART is pleased to present an exhibition of prints by Elizabeth Catlett (Am.1915-2012), on view at our Cleveland Heights, Ohio gallery from November 3 to November 25, 2023.

Featured in the exhibition are linocuts and lithographs made by Catlett between 1947 and 2005, including fine color impressions of the artist's iconic linocuts titled *Sharecropper*, 1952/1968 and *My right is a future of equality with other Americans*, 1947/1989. As well, we will offer a pristine impression of the 1992 color lithograph *New Generation*. Thanks to a generous donor, all proceeds from the sale of *New Generation* will be donated to the Wilson Bruce Evans Home Historical Society in Oberlin, Ohio, a group dedicated to the preservation of this documented Underground Railroad safe house and the legacy of African American abolitionist Wilson Bruce Evans and his family, who built the home in 1856 and played central roles as organizers and activists in the freedom movements of the time.

For more information, please email blackarthistory@gmail.com.



New Generation by Elizabeth Catlett
Image courtesy of David Lusenhop

Report on the 3rd Annual Meeting of Evans HHS

By Gary Kornblith

The Wilson Bruce Evans Home Historical Society (Evans HHS) held its third annual meeting at Martin Luther King Jr. Park in Oberlin on September 9, 2023. More than 70 people turned out for the event, which began a little after 11 am.

Oberlin College Multifaith Chaplain David Dorsey opened the proceedings with an Invocation that offered “thanks for the Evans Family, across generations . . . who never gave up on all they imagined.” His inspiring words were followed by welcoming remarks from Dr. Doris Hughes-Moore, great-great-granddaughter of Wilson Bruce Evans and the Society’s President. Dr. Hughes-Moore underscored the need to continue the long struggle for racial justice in the United States at this precarious moment in the nation’s history.



The audience in Martin Luther King Jr. Park. | Photo courtesy of Gary Kornblith

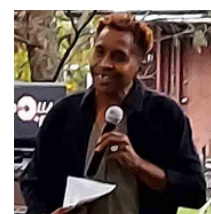
- Professor Caroline Jackson Smith spoke on behalf of the College’s Africana Studies Department and Theater Program;
- Kerri Broome offered greetings from the Lorain County Historical Society, which she directs, and the Lorain County Bicentennial Commission;
- Pre-recorded remarks by Claudia Jones, Vice President of the Ohio Metro Central NAACP, were aired over the public address system;
- Tracie Haynes offered a neighborly welcome from the Wheatley Boot Center, which – like the Evans house – borders Martin Luther King Jr. Park.



David Dorsey (left) and Dr. Doris Hughes-Moore (right) |
Photos courtesy of Courtney Cannon-Scott

A series of greetings from officers of other organizations followed:

- City Council member Eboni Johnson represented the City of Oberlin;
- President Ken Grossi spoke on behalf of the Oberlin Heritage Center;
- Phyllis Yarber Hogan, Treasurer, spoke on behalf of the Oberlin African-American Genealogy and History Group;
- Kristen Surla, Human Resources Director of Equity and Inclusion, represented Oberlin College;



Clockwise from top left: Eboni Johnson, Ken Grossi, Caroline Jackson Smith, Tracie Haynes, Kerri Broome, Kristen Surla, | Photos courtesy of Courtney Cannon-Scott and Gary Kornblith

This section of the program closed with pre-recorded greetings from representatives of organizations located outside Lorain County:

- Sally Bradley, Executive Director of the Hubbard House Underground Railroad Museum in Ashtabula;
- Martha Swan, Executive Director of John Brown Lives! in Westlake, New York;
- Barry Jurgensen, Midwest Regional Manager of the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom;
- Dorothy Wallace, President of the Chatham-Kent Historical Society, Ontario, Canada;
- Andy Verhoff, Ohio History Fund and State Historic Preservation Office Outreach Manager, Ohio History Connection.

Dr. Camille Hamlin Allen, Evans HHS Trustee, presented this year's Sarah Jane Evans Book Award – a copy of ***She Came to Slay: The Life and Times of Harriet Tubman*** by Erica Dunbar Armstrong – to Ms. Meisha Baker, Director of Curriculum and Special Programs for the Oberlin City Schools. In accepting the book on behalf of the City Schools, Ms. Baker thanked Evans HHS for its support of local K-12 education.



Photo courtesy of Courtney Cannon-Scott

Dr. Allen next conferred the Legacy Guardian Award upon the Oberlin Underground Railroad Center Implementation Team (OURCIT) for its decades of work aimed at converting the former gasholder building into a space for public programming focused on the experience of enslaved peoples. Mrs. Jessie Reeder and Mr. Chris Yates accepted the award on behalf of OURCIT, and all team members present at the meeting came forward to join in the celebration of this collective achievement.



OURCIT members | Photo courtesy of Courtney Cannon-Scott

Following a short break, Caroline Jackson Smith and David Bugher of the Oberlin-Wellington Rescue Theater Project read excerpts from *The Rescue of John Price*, a script by award-winning playwright Ifa Bayeza that is currently under development.



Photo courtesy of Courtney Cannon-Scott

At approximately 12:30 pm, the Business Meeting of Evans HHS convened. Executive Director Carol Lasser summarized the Society's accomplishments since receipt of a Save America's Treasures Grant from the National Park Service. In taped remarks, Catherine Grooms, Treasurer of Evans HHS, noted "We are a 100% volunteer organization" and emphasized that every donation, small as well as large, promotes the rehabilitation of the Evans house. Membership Secretary Gary Kornblith then introduced the slate of candidates nominated by the Board of Trustees for the Society's elected offices: Dr. Doris Hughes-Moore (President), Phyllis Yarber Hogan (Vice President), Cathy Grooms (Treasurer), and Annessa Wyman (Secretary). The meeting approved the slate by acclamation.

After an announcement by filmmaker Scott Spears of the scheduled afternoon showing of "A Higher Law: The Oberlin-Wellington Rescue of 1858" at the Oberlin Public Library, Mrs. Jessie Reeder led the attendees in a rendition of all three verses of "Lift Every Voice and Sing." The meeting adjourned at 1 pm.



Photo courtesy of Courtney Cannon-Scott

Planning Together: What Stories Should the Evans House Tell?

by Carol Lasser

On June 2-3, 2023, the Wilson Bruce Evans Home Historical Society hosted three discussion sessions - two in person at the Oberlin Public Library and one online via Zoom - to gather input from a wide array of people, including its trustees, organizational stakeholders, neighbors, and other community members, to inform programming decisions as it proceeds with the rehabilitation of the Wilson Bruce Evans house.

With the financial support of an Ohio Humanities Spark Grant, Evans HHS enlisted Ms. Sally Bradley, Executive Director of the Hubbard House Underground Railroad Museum in Ashtabula, Ohio, as a facilitator.



Flyer for "Planning Together"
Design by Phyllis Yarber Hogan

Each in-person session began with an introduction by Executive Director Carol Lasser, accompanied by a PowerPoint. Then Ms. Bradley talked about programs at the Hubbard House and showed a short video. Next, participants were asked to join in a "think tank" imagining what they would like to see at the Evans house. After about 10 minutes, Ms. Bradley encouraged participants to share their ideas with others while Dr. Lasser and Liz Schultz of the Oberlin Heritage Center summarized them on poster-sized paper. After about 30 minutes, participants were asked to use small adhesive dots to mark the posted ideas that most appealed to them. Sessions wound down after about 80 minutes, though some participants lingered until the two-hour mark, talking to the organizers and to each other. About 22 stakeholders attended the Friday session, and 12 community members attended Saturday afternoon.



The stakeholders discussion session at the Oberlin Public Library
Photo courtesy of Liz Schulta

The trustees' session took place over Zoom and included 8 participants as well as Ms. Bradley and Dr. Lasser. Ms. Bradley gave the trustees the same instructions to brainstorm after 10 minutes of thinking and writing. The trustees engaged in energetic and productive conversation for about 45 minutes.

Stakeholders, community members and trustees all talked about presenting neighborhood history, including charting the changes in the residents, the businesses, the history of Black entrepreneurs and artisans over time. Additional suggestions included maps, exhibits and walking tours. Several participants wanted to trace original families over time as they left the area, perhaps using a diasporic map. Other suggestions included highlighting the neighborhood traditions of resistance, and the role of Black abolitionists, Oberlin-Wellington Rescuers, and NAACP founders from the area. Some proposed Oberlin history tours that would focus on the Underground Railroad; it was also suggested that QR codes could be used to identify important Oberlin history sites. Interest was expressed in tracing the legacy of Black businesses as well as the transformation of the neighborhood over time, particularly when buildings on the north side of East Vine Street - many of them homes inhabited by African Americans - were demolished to create Martin Luther King Jr. Park.

Clearly, there is much interest in Oberlin's African American history, and in centering it in the historically Black Southeast Quadrant. A recurring theme was the interest in telling the story of Wilson Bruce Evans through his work as a carpenter and undertaker, using his artisanal production to explore Black history and connecting his craft with present-day programs for children and adults to learn carpentry, with potential for outreach to carpentry programs at the local joint vocational high school (JVS). The suggestion was made that Evans HHS also contact the local bricklayers' union to connect with masons who carry on the craft that built the front portion of the house. One participant suggested that the house support the building of coffins today as a gesture of social engagement, since caskets are expensive and often environmentally unfriendly.

All participants emphasized that Evans HHS should be connecting history with present-day concerns about racial equity. Many were interested in how Evans descendants continued the work of resistance and the fight against racism. Some suggested connecting Oberlin's history as a safe haven on Underground Railroad with its current status as a sanctuary city. One person suggested a bookstore at the Evans house that, in addition to works on history stocked books to read about current struggles for racial equity.

An interest in educational outreach was also evident in all groups. Evans HHS was encouraged to work with local schools on teacher education programs, and to use the house as a site for school visits, as well as to create a Junior Docent program for students. Several people proposed connecting with Oberlin College and the Oberlin Public Library to develop programs on information literacy and on reading primary documents. Many ideas for hands-on programs for children were discussed, including theater and garden programs. Involving children in living history and in re-enactments was also discussed. Participants saw the opportunity to engage children through the Oberlin City Recreation Department's summer programs.

Participants in all groups mentioned theater as a way of involving local populations and telling the stories of

the Evans family and the Oberlin-Wellington Rescue. Stakeholders and community members both noted that the ample land surrounding the Evans house seemed well suited for an outdoor amphitheater or performance space. Stakeholders and community members also talked about planting gardens to involve students and community members, investigating herbs, local plants, beekeeping, and wildflowers. Some linked this to possible cooking projects with a historic orientation. Stakeholders and community members also expressed a specific interest in honoring Black soldiers from Oberlin who served in the Civil War.

Finally, community members enthusiastically put forward the idea that the Evans house should sponsor an annual community picnic to celebrate the residents of the Southeast Quadrant, past and present, suggesting a tent, "nice food," and house tours. The picnic would be scheduled near the anniversary of the 1858 Oberlin-Wellington Rescue (September 13th) and coincide with the Evans HHS annual meeting.

It's not too late to share more ideas for programs and exhibits at the Evans house. Please participate! You may email suggestions to carol.lasser@evanshhs.org.



*Casket hardware recovered from Evans house loft
Photo courtesy of Carol Lasser*

We're in the home stretch but still need to raise \$6,500 to fully match the Save America's Treasures Grant awarded by the National Park Service. Please donate for this purpose if you can!



There are 2 easy ways to donate to Evans HHS:

(1) Go to the Donation page on our website at <https://evanshhs.org/donate-to-evans-hhs/> and donate by credit card, Venmo, or PayPal.

(2) Send a check to Evans Home Historical Society, P.O. Box 284, Oberlin, OH 44074. Please write "SAT match" on the memo line.