



Full Speed Ahead on Phase 2 of the Evans House Rehabilitation Project

by Carol Lasser, Executive Director

We are officially back in construction mode!

On Wednesday, October 15, I joined Dominic Ozanne II of Ozanne Construction, architect Sandra Madison of Robert P. Madison International, City of Oberlin Director of Development Carrie Porter, owner's representative Gene Matthews, many local Evans HHS trustees, and other key people to break ground for Phase 2 of our comprehensive rehabilitation project. Substantial completion is scheduled for late summer 2026. Evans HHS will then install exhibits. By 2027, we expect to welcome visitors to tour this revived National Historic Landmark.

We first began this project in fall 2020. In the midst of the pandemic, descendants of Wilson Bruce Evans who owned the house came together over Zoom with Oberlin residents who cared passionately about local African American history. Collectively we have navigated our way through a myriad of challenges until at last this rehabilitation is happening! Our motto is "Preserving a Legacy. Reshaping the Future."

It's been a steep learning curve. Planning for the rehabilitation of a National Historic Landmark (NHL) is not a simple "This Old House" episode. With only about 2,500 NHLs in the entire US, these buildings, sites and structures are recognized as "nationally significant in American history and culture," and so merit strict reviews by the National Park Service. The Evans House is even more special to us because it is among the 3 percent of NHLs primarily identified with the African American experience—or about 75 such NHLs in the entire country!



Ceremonial Groundbreaking for Phase 2

Pictured from left to right: Gary Kornblith, Wilson Bruce Evans (cutout), Liz Schultz, Phyllis Yarber Hogan, Tom Kovach, Carrie Porter, Sandra Madison, Carol Lasser, Kevin Madison, Nancy Wall, Camille Hamlin Allen, Dominic Ozanne II, Gene Matthews
Photo courtesy of John Seyfried

So our planning has been careful. With guidance from David Klinge of ASC Group, we completed an 18-month archeology project that identified sensitive areas to be avoided during construction and also unearthed some noteworthy artifacts that will help us better tell the story of the Evans family. It will also guide us in the creation of future participatory public programs—stay tuned for your invitation to join us in public archeology initiatives.

This phase of our work includes construction of an annex for our ADA-universal entrance and restroom; rehabilitation of the rear wing--now identified as the original home--to serve as our educational center; and complete refurbishment of the two-story brick structure including plumbing, electricity, and HVAC.

And even when Ozanne has signed off, we will have more work to do! We will need to finish planning and installing

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Evans House**
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Evans HHS**
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exhibits, find and train our docents, and complete the planning, funding and construction of our immersive outdoor campus. We hope you will participate in all these projects!

All the while, you will also be hearing from us on the finalization and implementation of our Strategic Plan. The Trustees have worked hard with Rosa Consulting of Cleveland to craft a framework that will ensure the sustainability of the Evans House, beginning now, and charting a way into a productive and sustainable future.

We are grateful to all the funders, big and small, who have made our progress possible. The early support of the Nord Family Foundation was critical in our launch, and we are thankful for their subsequent grants that have seen us through difficult times. We are also grateful to local support from the Bill Long Foundation, the Nordson Corporation Foundation, the City of Oberlin, and the many members and donors in our community.

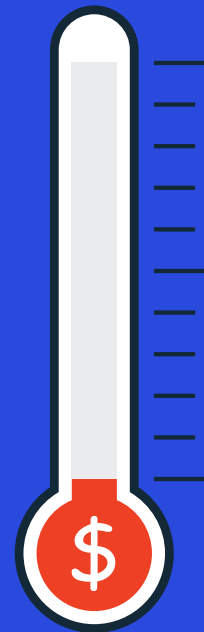
To complete our building project, we will rely heavily on two grants from the National Park Service that will ultimately reimburse over \$1 million for work done. We will also work with the State of Ohio Facilities Construction Commission for a \$250,000 reimbursement grant. In addition, we thank the Ohio History Fund for its support of our ADA-compliant restroom facilities.

But our delays have been costly, and we need to close our funding gap, both for the comprehensive rehabilitation and for the next phase of the work—the outdoor immersive campus and facilities. We are thrilled to have a challenge that will turn every dollar you give into two (see right-hand column). Help us finish the work! Together, we can make the Evans House a preeminent destination for Black heritage tourism, and a steady beacon shedding light on crucial parts of American history in these challenging times.

Double Your Impact!

Anonymous Philanthropists Pledge to Match \$100,000 in Donations to Evans HHS

To date, the Wilson Bruce Evans Home Historical Society has been awarded over \$1.2 million in grants to rehabilitate the Evans House and open it to the public as a historic site. But we still need to raise more funds to meet anticipated costs. Please help us by contributing now! For the next six months, donations to Evans HHS will be matched on a one-to-one basis, up to a total of \$100,000. Please note that this fundraising initiative is separate from membership dues.



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ROBERT P. MADISON INTERNATIONAL

Artist's rendering of rehabilitated
Wilson Bruce Evans House
Courtesy of Robert P. Madison International



A Peek Beneath: Archeological Investigation at the Wilson Bruce Evans House

by David Klinge

The Wilson Bruce Evans House at 33 East Vine Street in Oberlin, Ohio, stands as more than just a historic building—it represents a window into 19th-century African American life and the broader story of American freedom. Archeological investigations conducted at the site in 2024 reveal how modern scientific techniques are helping us understand the daily lives of people who lived there over 150 years ago.

Wilson Bruce Evans was born free in North Carolina in 1824, at a time when most African Americans in the South lived in slavery. In 1854, he moved his family to Oberlin, Ohio, a town known as a “hotbed of abolitionism.” Evans worked as a cabinet maker, upholsterer, and undertaker, and became actively involved in the Underground Railroad. He participated in the famous Oberlin-Wellington Rescue of 1858, an event where townspeople helped free a fugitive slave from federal authorities. Evans lived in the house he built until his death in 1898.

Today, the Wilson Bruce Evans Home Historical Society is working to rehabilitate the property and open it to the public as an historic site and educational center. However, before any construction work could begin, federal law required a thorough archeological investigation to ensure that important historical evidence wouldn't be destroyed in the process.

Why Archeology Matters

The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 mandates that when federal money funds a project involving historic properties, investigators must first assess what might be affected by the work. This law, along with its companion, the National Environmental Policy Act, presents some of the most forward-thinking legislation for protecting America's cultural heritage.

The rehabilitation project needs to make the house accessible to visitors with disabilities by adding wheelchair access and bathroom facilities. This will require constructing a small addition behind the existing house and creating a sloped walkway. While these improvements are necessary, they will disturb the ground where people lived and worked for over a century.

Mapping the Past: What Historical Records Revealed

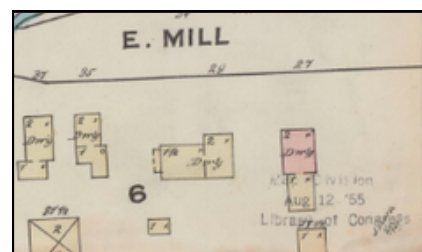
Before any digging began, researchers from ASC Group, Inc. spent considerable time studying historical maps and documents. The most valuable resources proved to be



Archeologist David Klinge holding inkwell discovered on property behind the Evans House. Photo courtesy of Carol Lasser.

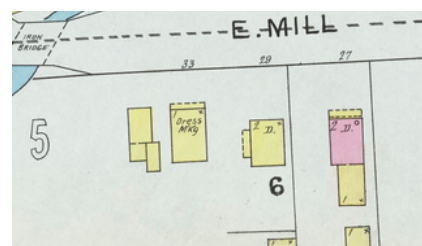
Sanborn fire insurance maps—detailed surveys created for insurance companies beginning in the late 19th century to assess fire risks in American cities. These maps, drawn with remarkable precision, showed every building's location, construction materials, dimensions, and use.

The Sanborn maps revealed fascinating details about the Evans property over time. The 1884 Sanborn map showed the main brick house (colored pink to indicate brick construction) with a one-story wooden wing at the rear. More intriguingly, it depicted another structure south of the house that appeared similar to the rear wing. Notably, this outbuilding was assigned its own address—27½ Mill Street. This may have signified that the building served a commercial purpose or housed separate residents.



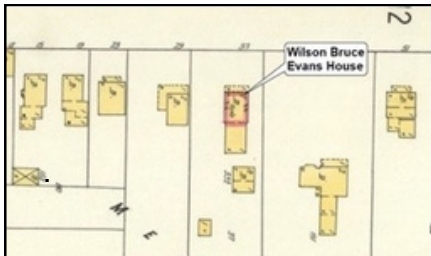
1884 Sanborn Map

The Sanborn map for 1893 showed an important development: a nearby property featured a building identified as a “dressmaker shop,” suggesting the area had some commercial activity.



1893 Sanborn Map

The 1911 map provided more revealing information. The outbuilding was now labeled with a "D," indicating it was being used as a dwelling—someone was living there. This raised important questions: Who lived in this separate structure? Was it family members, boarders, or tenants? How did this arrangement reflect the economic and social conditions of African American life in early 20th-century Oberlin?



1911 Sanborn Map

Yet the Sanborn map in 1922 showed that the outbuilding had disappeared entirely. This gave researchers a clear timeframe: a structure had existed behind the main house from at least 1884 to sometime before 1922, and it had housed people during at least part of that period.



1922 Sanborn Map

Modern Technology Meets Historical Investigation

Besides the Sanborn maps, the ASC Group's research team took advantage of cutting-edge geophysical techniques to "see" beneath the ground without digging. In 2023, under the auspices of the Evans Home Historical Society, Ohio Valley Archeology, Inc. (OVAI)—a leading firm in this specialized field—had conducted two types of non-destructive surveys to map what lay buried on the property.

First, the magnetic gradient survey measured variations in the Earth's magnetic field. Certain materials—iron, burned clay bricks, and even organic matter—create distinctive magnetic signatures that show up as patterns of light and dark spots on survey maps. These patterns can indicate buried foundations, metal objects, deep pits, or areas where fires once burned.

Second, ground-penetrating radar works like an underground X-ray, sending radio signals into the earth and measuring what bounces back. Hard materials like stone foundations

reflect signals strongly, while soft soil allows signals to pass through. By analyzing multiple "slices" of data at different depths, specialists can identify buried structures, pipes, or other features.

These sophisticated techniques identified eight anomalies—areas where something unusual appeared to be buried. The most significant findings included a long, linear feature that might represent a walkway or foundation; a large, irregularly shaped area that could be building rubble; and several deep pit features that might be old privies or trash pits. One particularly intriguing discovery was what appeared to be a "rubble pad"—a common feature at historic sites where old buildings were demolished and the debris simply pushed aside and covered over, rather than completely removed.

Breaking Ground: The Excavation Process

Armed with historical maps and geophysical surveys, the archeological team began the careful process of excavation. The team began with small test excavations across the backyard—what archeologists call "shovel tests"—to understand the soil layers and get a preliminary sense of what lay beneath. These revealed 12 to 15 inches of topsoil containing numerous artifacts, but these objects had been mixed together over decades of yard maintenance and building activities. Below this disturbed layer, the excavators encountered sterile subsoil—the yellowish-gray clay that was deposited during the last ice age, before any human activity in the area.



Map of ASC team's excavations overlaid on geophysical survey by OVAI
Image courtesy of ASC Group

However, in two locations, the team encountered areas where they could dig down over two feet through dark, artifact-rich soil without reaching sterile subsoil. This suggested intensive human activity had occurred in these spots—someone had been living and working there for an extended period.

The team then opened larger excavation units to investigate the geophysical anomalies more thoroughly. They discovered

the clear remains of a building foundation, exactly where the historical maps suggested it should be.



Shovel test pit showing foundation remains in foreground
Photo courtesy of ASC Group

The foundation told a fascinating story through careful analysis of the soil layers. On one side, archeologists found what they call a "builder's trench"—a clear indication that someone had dug into the ground surface to install the stone foundation. On the other side of the foundation, however, the story was different. Instead of a builder's trench, layers of sandy, ashy fill had been deposited directly against the foundation stones. This suggested that after the building was constructed, the area inside the foundation had been repeatedly filled in over the years.

The foundation itself was surprising. Built of dry-laid fieldstone without mortar, it was roughly constructed and not built to last very long. Evidence suggests that it had begun to fail and lean prior to the ca. 1922 demolition of the house. This was not the kind of foundation typically built in northeast Ohio, where New England building traditions emphasized full basements for thermal regulation in cold winters. Instead, this foundation resembled building techniques from the Mid-Atlantic states—Virginia, the Carolinas, and the Piedmont region.

This architectural evidence supports the theory that Wilson Bruce Evans, having been born and raised in North Carolina, built using techniques familiar to him from his prior life experiences. The foundation created a crawl space that elevated the building above ground level but provided little insulation or structural stability.

A Final Discovery: The Underground Storage Cellar

Just as the ASC team was preparing to complete their excavation, they made an additional discovery. While cleaning up what appeared to be a small piece of rusted metal in the corner of their excavation unit, they uncovered a square pit that had been dug below the sterile subsoil—directly beneath where the building's floor would have been.

This feature, about 12 inches deep, was packed with tin cans and kerosene containers. The metal objects were so corroded that many crumbled when touched, but the

archeologists could identify them as food storage containers and fuel cans that would have been essential household items in the late 19th century.

This discovery represented what archeologists call a "root cellar"—a common feature in similar buildings of the period. Residents would pull up floorboards and dig a storage pit to keep food cool and store household supplies like kerosene for lighting. Such cellars were particularly common in buildings following Mid-Atlantic construction traditions, reinforcing the connection to Wilson Bruce Evans's North Carolina origins.

The cellar had eventually collapsed as its earthen walls slumped inward, burying its contents and creating a time capsule of domestic life. The soil layers showed that the cellar had been in use when people were actively living in the building, then had been abandoned and gradually filled in as the structure deteriorated.

Artifacts Tell Stories: Literacy, Family, and Global Connections

From their excavations, the team recovered over 2,500 artifacts that provide intimate glimpses into the lives of the Evans property's residents. These objects tell stories about daily life, family relationships, and cultural connections.

Evidence of literacy and education appeared throughout the site. The team found numerous fragments and a few complete examples of glass inkwells and ink bottles, indicating that writing was a regular activity.



Selected artifacts recovered by the ASC team on the Evans House grounds
Photo courtesy of ASC Group

The presence of children became clear through a tiny ceramic teacup from a child's tea set. While archeologists typically resist making broad conclusions from single artifacts, this discovery reinforced historical evidence of the multi-generational nature of the Evans household, where children and extended family members frequently lived or visited.

Interestingly, the team also discovered fragments of Japanese export porcelain manufactured in Nagoya between 1891 and 1921. These ceramic pieces, some marked "Made in Nippon," represented high-style tableware that was very fashionable during the period. Prior to the 20th century, fine ceramics often

served as important outward indicators of a family's prosperity and cultural awareness.

The presence of this porcelain demonstrates that the Evans family participated in global consumer culture and kept up with contemporary fashions. They were actively engaged in the material culture of their time.

Interpreting the Building's Life Cycle

By combining archeological evidence with historical maps, the team reconstructed the "lost" building's 40-year history. The structure was built sometime before 1884 using North Carolina construction techniques. It served as a residence—possibly for Wilson Bruce Evans's son Cornelius, who came of age in the 1880s, or for visiting family members like Sarah Jane Evans Inborden, who regularly returned to spend summers in Oberlin.

Sometime before 1922, the building was demolished. Rather than being completely removed, the demolition debris was likely pushed into the basement and crawlspace area—a common practice before heavy machinery became available. The space was then filled and leveled to create the backyard that exists today.

The rear building's architecture also tells a cultural story. Wilson Bruce Evans's use of North Carolina construction techniques in Ohio demonstrates how migration brings not just people but ways of understanding and organizing the physical world. His choice to build using familiar methods, even when they weren't ideally suited to the local climate, reflects the deep cultural knowledge that people carry with them across geographic boundaries.

Looking Forward: Continuing Research and Public Interpretation

The archeological work at the Wilson Bruce Evans House represents just the beginning of efforts to understand the complete story of the property. The team will continue analyzing the thousands of artifacts recovered from the excavation.

When the Wilson Bruce Evans House opens to the public, visitors will experience not just the main house but the domestic landscape that surrounded the Evans family's daily life. The archeological evidence will allow interpreters to discuss not only Wilson Bruce Evans's public role in the abolitionist movement but also the private world of an African American family navigating prosperity, cultural identity, and community engagement in 19th-century America.

The Wilson Bruce Evans House archeological project reminds us that history isn't just about famous events and prominent

figures. It's also about the ordinary people who lived extraordinary lives, and the material traces they left behind that continue to teach us about courage, community, and the ongoing struggle for freedom and equality in America. Through careful archeological investigation, we can recover voices that were never recorded in written documents and ensure that the full complexity of American history continues to be told for future generations.

Editor's note: David Klinge is a historical archeologist and Vice President/Chief Operating Officer of the ASC Group, Inc., Cultural and Environmental Consultants. This article is based on a talk that he delivered at the Oberlin Public Library on April 5, 2025. Artificial intelligence was used to transcribe and edit the public presentation. The text was then reviewed and revised by Mr. Klinge.

Evans HHS Merchandise for Sale

Click on
www.cafepress.com/shop/evanshhs

The Evans HHS Newsletter is published twice a year, in the spring and the fall. It is edited by Gary Kornblith, who can be reached at gary.kornblith@evanshhs.org.



Exec. Director Carol Lasser welcomes folks to the Oberlin UGRR Center



Members and friends sign in for the meeting



Rev. Lester Allen of Christian Missionary Alliance Church delivers an invocation



Dr. Doris Hughes-Moore, president of Evans HHS, calls the meeting to order



Ebony Johnson, president of Oberlin City Council, offers greetings



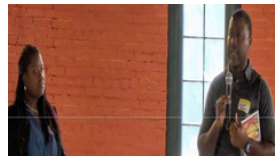
Carmen Twillie Ambar, president of Oberlin College, offers greetings



Prof. Nina Reid-Maroney of Huron University offers greetings from Chatham, Canada

Scenes from the Fifth Annual Meeting September 13, 2025

Photos courtesy of Gary Kornblith



On behalf of Evans HHS, Kurt Russell presents **March** by John Lewis to Meisha Baker, Director of Curriculum and Special Programs of the Oberlin City Schools



Claudia Watson Jones accepts Legacy Guardian award



Kelli Cardenas Walsh accepts Legacy Guardian award



Bill Chapman accepts Heritage Guardian award



Jerome Bias accepts Heritage Guardian award



The folk duo Magpie (Terry Leonino and Greg Artzner) present selections from their song cycle "Sword of the Spirit"

Spotlight on the Evans Family Legacy

The Franklinton Center at Bricks: A Historic Life-Giving Center

by Yvonne V. Delk

Franklinton Center at Bricks (FCAB) is in rural Edgecombe County in the small town of Whitakers, North Carolina. Edgecombe is the 11th most impoverished of North Carolina's 100 counties. FCAB's site abuts Halifax County, North Carolina's 3rd most impoverished county. The land on which it is located is surrounded by cotton and tobacco fields reminiscent of a time long ago. FCAB was an antebellum plantation holding as property African men, women, and children in the bondage and horror of slavery. It was the site where those humans were sent by their owners to be broken into submission.

Throughout its evolving history from the post-Civil War era to the present, the site has been transformed into a sacred space, containing sacred stories and memories. A sacred model of resistance, resilience, and sustainability of African people has grown. Today FCAB is home to a freedom walkway in memory of the enslaved and the free, clergy and laity, justice advocates and organizers who gave time, talent and resources for freedom and justice. FCAB has built a bridge from slavery to freedom by transforming its historical space from a slave plantation into a social justice movement site.

In 1895, under the auspices of the American Missionary Association, Thomas Sewell Inborden and his wife Sarah Jane Evans Inborden—a daughter of Wilson Bruce Evans—opened the Joseph Keasbey Brick Agricultural, Industrial and Normal School to serve Black students from North Carolina and Virginia. The first United States Post Office to be headed by an African American postmaster opened there in the early 1900s.



Brick School campus in the early 20th century.

Image courtesy of Laura E Schuetz



Rev. Dr. Yvonne V. Delk is chair of the Franklinton Center at Bricks Council of Elders. For more than 60 years she has served as an educator, preacher, organizer, and prophetic voice leading the fight for human and civil rights for people of color, children, and the poor throughout five continents. She was the first Black woman to be ordained in the United Church of Christ..
Photo courtesy of the Franklinton Center at Bricks

In 1925 the Brick School became a junior college, but it closed its doors during the Great Depression. It was succeeded by The Bricks Rural Life School, which equipped farmers with modern and scientific agricultural practices and assisted them in becoming land owners. The site also became home to the Tri-County Public High School as well as a primary school that operated there until the 1955-56 school year. An application for FCAB to secure designation on the National Register of Historic Places is in process.

From the 1950s until the present, FCAB has served as the conference and retreat center for Black churches in the United Church of Christ located in the southern region. Ministers and laity training, Christian education conferences, summer camps, women's events, and youth events, have served to support and sustain the lives of congregations.

Today, it serves organizations and visitors from across the United States. On FCAB grounds, bold visionaries, male and female, in church and community, are empowered and encouraged to address issues such as food insecurity, health disparities, educational inequity, criminal justice, environmental justice, sexism, racism and gender identity concerns.



FCAB stands as the home of the Afro Christian Archive which documents and preserves the history and legacy of the Afro Christian heritage in the United Church of Christ. On Franklinton Center Day, August 2, 2025, the Dr. Willa Cofield Collection was received. The collection holds her articles, books, films, pictures, videos documenting the Bricks School history and other artifacts of the time.

Diana Rosa Guides Trustees in Drafting Evans HHS Strategic Plan

by Gary Kornblith

Since the creation of the Wilson Bruce Evans Home Historical Society in January 2021, its Board of Trustees—composed of both Evans descendants and Oberlin history enthusiasts—has focused on rehabilitating the Evans House and converting it into an educational center open to the public. Yet in early 2025, as Board members began thinking about what would come next, they decided to undertake a formal strategic planning process. On the recommendation of Executive Director Carol Lasser, they hired Rosa Consulting LLC to coordinate this process.

Rosa Consulting is headed by the charismatic Diana Rosa, a native Clevelander with more than three decades of management experience in the nonprofit sector. Over the past four years, Ms. Rosa has grown her firm from a one-woman

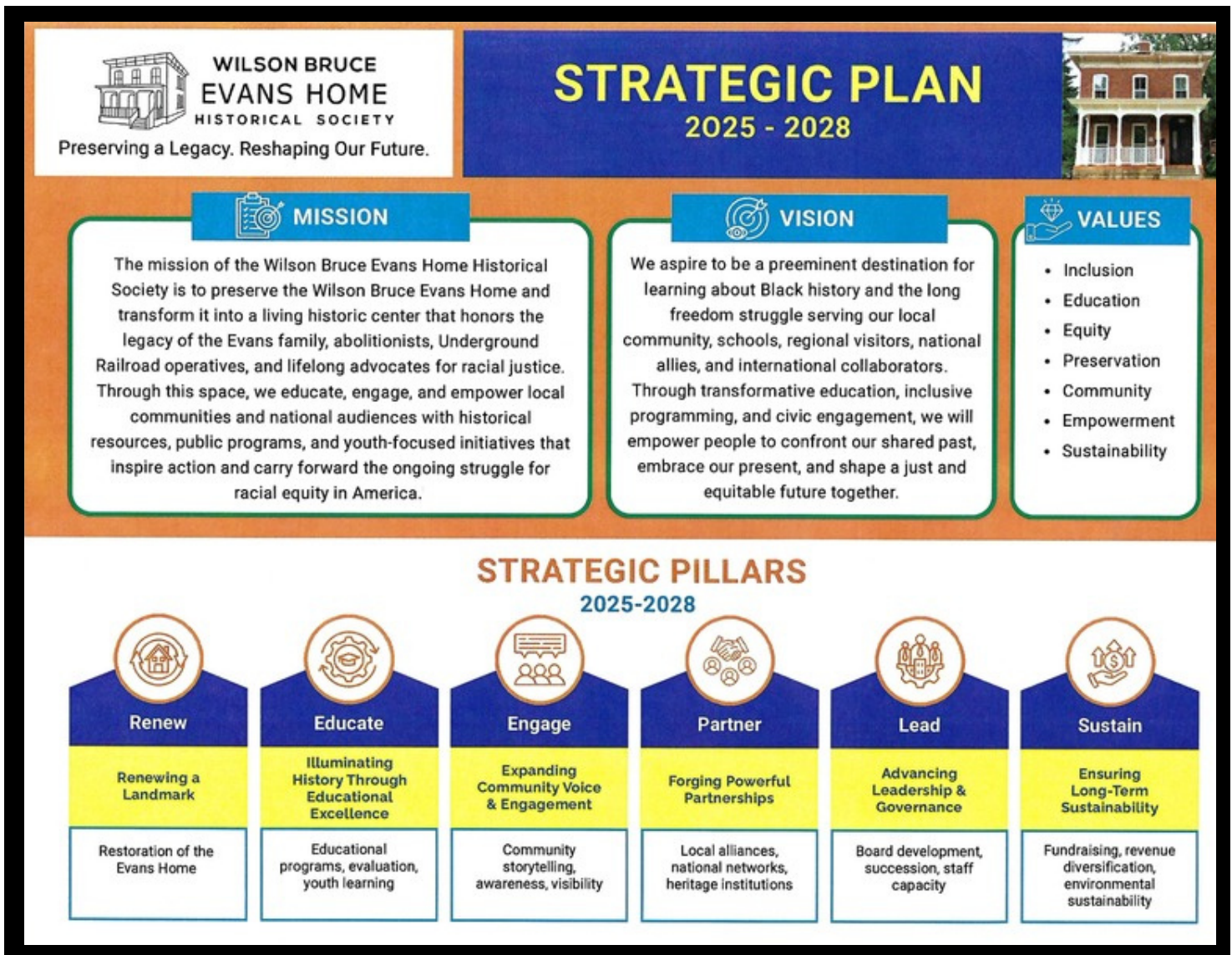
Diana Rosa

Photo courtesy of Rosa Consulting



enterprise to a 20-person team that has served more than 60 organizations in Northeast Ohio and beyond. As described by the women's advocacy organization Collaborate Cleveland, her particular passion is helping "small nonprofits . . . create significant change by adopting efficient business practices, engaging and retraining solid boards, and implementing strategic plans."

Guided by Ms. Rosa's expertise and energy, Evans HHS expects to complete and release its strategic plan by the end of this calendar year. In the meantime, the infographic below—developed by Rosa Consulting—offers a concise summary of where we are heading.



Evans HHS Bulletin Board



55 East College Street, Suite 1, Oberlin, Ohio

The Hope Collection by INTO invites shoppers to participate in a charity shopping day on Sunday, November 16th, 12:00-5:00pm in support of the Wilson Bruce Evans Home Historical Society. The Hope Collection will proudly donate 15% of net sales for the day to the Wilson Bruce Evans Home Historical Society, remembering Oberlin's legacy.

The National Park Service has added the Wilson Bruce Evans Home to the Reconstruction Era National Historic Network--we are one of only three sites in Ohio



Evans HHS Director Carol Lasser interviewed refugee advocate and documentary photographer Tariq Tarey at the 2nd annual Ohio Underground Railroad Gathering in Cincinnati on Sept. 22

Upcoming Presentation

Prospects for African American Public History and Museums Today

7:00 pm

Tues, Nov 4, 2025

Mill on Main

95 S Main, Oberlin

Free and Open to the Public

Nancy Bercaw

Curator of Political History, Smithsonian Institution; co-Founder of its "Center for Restorative History;" Lead Curator, Slavery and Freedom Exhibition, Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture



Sponsored by Wilson Bruce Evans Home Historical Society, Oberlin African-American Genealogy & History Group and Oberlin Heritage Center with support from the Oberlin College History Department

Questions? email manager@evanshhs.org



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