



Work on the Evans House Springs Forward

by Carol Lasser, Executive Director

Spring has finally brought renewal after a cold and challenging winter. At long last, we are knee deep in construction—and seasonally appropriate mud. After December 2025, when the tree ring specialist dated the timbers in the original wing of the Evans House to 1848 (see article on pp. 4-5), we discovered that many of those old hand-hewn beams and joists had significantly decayed and could no longer adequately support the building. Thanks to the work of our architect Sandra Madison of Robert P. Madison International and a dedicated team at the Ozanne Construction Company, revised plans will leave venerable timber in place—and visible to visitors—while reinforcement will ensure the safety and security of the educational center now taking shape. With great joy, we are just beginning to see the annex rise from its foundation, extending the Evans House to the south where it will provide our universally accessible main entrance and restroom. Less visible is the new wiring, plumbing, and HVAC that will ready 33 East Vine Street to open to the public.

This project involves both preservation and innovation. Historic paint analysis has revealed the use of calcimine paint in the brick Italianate portion of the house, built in the 1870s. The original pale neutral colors were later cover by darker shades, including an appealing green that, at one time, may have covered most walls. That palette will inspire the colors chosen for the front and back parlors and the dining room; the front hall will return to its original sky blue. In addition, the woodwork in the entryway will be lovingly returned to its prime, highlighting Wilson Bruce Evans’s own superb craftsmanship—his banister, newels, balusters, and decorative embellishments—setting off this zone of preservation.

Meanwhile, the exhibit design team—Renee Romano and Julie Min of Romano and Min Projects working with Danielle Rini Uva and Katie Parland of Agnes Studio—is



Rear view of the Evans House showing the original portion of the building undergoing rehabilitation and an emerging frame for the new annex.
Photo courtesy of Carol Lasser

hard at work fashioning a hybrid historic site that will draw on Wilson Bruce Evans’s furniture, traditional artifacts, contemporary graphics, and modern technologies to create an interactive experience. Their work will take visitors on a journey through the lives of the Leary-Evans Family, from their North Carolina roots to the crucible of antislavery Oberlin, through the Civil War and forward to the present day, exploring the choices and commitments made through multiple generations. Guests will learn about the strength and power of antebellum Oberlin, especially its African American community, and the extraordinary resilience and determination of the Leary-Evans family, with its sustained commitment to justice across generations. At the conclusion

**Phase 2 of Evans House
Rehabilitation in Photos**

See p. 3

**Counting Tree Rings at
the Evans House**

See pp. 4-5

**Following in Leary Family
Footsteps to Oberlin**

See pp.6-7

**Aunt Da, Guardian of the
Evans Family Legacy**

See pp. 8-9

of the tour, visitors will be inspired to reflect on their own choices in today's complex world.

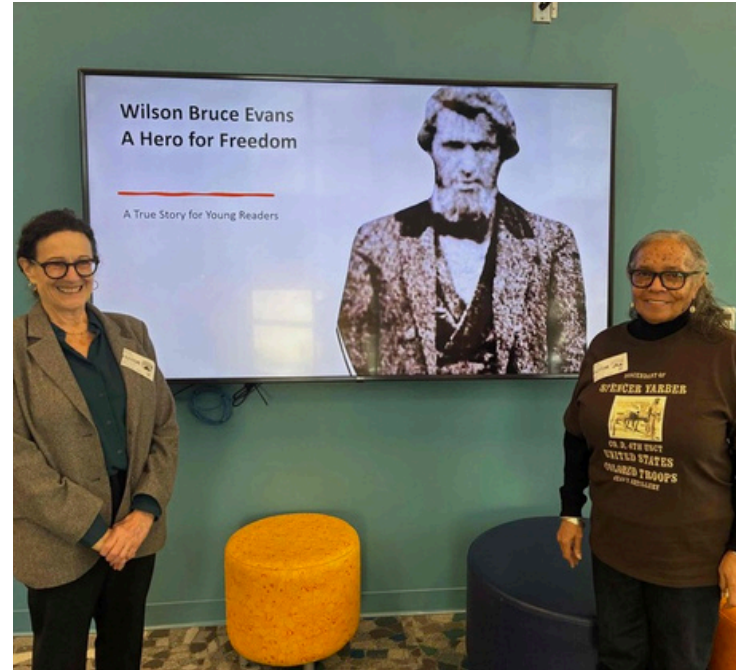
A special area will highlight the history of the rehabilitation project. Honoring Dorothy Inborden Miller, granddaughter of Wilson Bruce Evans and Sarah Jane Leary Evans, for her work in preserving the house and the family's legacy, it will also provide a view of selected artifacts from the archeological explorations. (For more on Dorothy Inborden Miller, see pp. 8-9.) And it will include a "shout out" to the many passionate and engaged people who have made this project possible—and continue to do so. Begun when family members came together with a handful of Oberlinians in the fall of 2020, this undertaking has relied for its success on an extended "village," now also including city officials, state historians, National Park Service colleagues, visionary designers, dedicated archeologists, generous donors, careful construction crews, and many more.

In addition, the plans for our outdoor interpretive campus are taking shape. Jayme Schwartzberg of Deru Landscape Architecture is at work developing pathways, signage, and features that will reveal the significance of the site to casual visitors while deepening the experience of guests who have toured the house. The Evans campus will also invite the local community to extend their visits to Oberlin's Martin Luther King, Jr., Park just across East Vine Street, and to direct our guests to the Park's monuments to the Oberlin-Wellington Rescue and the Harpers Ferry martyrs—including Sarah Jane Leary's brother Lewis Sheridan Leary and Wilson Bruce Evans' sister's son John Anthony Copeland. The interpretive campus will include elements appealing to visitors of all ages, from Oberlin and from across the nation.

When will these projects be completed? The exciting news: as of this writing, construction is slated for substantial completion in mid-to-late July 2026. With exhibit planning proceeding, installation will start when construction is completed. Right now, the goal is to open the Evans House to the public officially during Black History Month 2027. While February can be cold in Oberlin, it's a time to bring people together to celebrate. Landscape and campus development will continue through 2027. Follow us on Facebook and Instagram for updates.

Even with so much energy going into the rehabilitation project, the Evans Home Historical Society has continued to offer a variety of educational programs, both in-person and via Zoom. For Black History Month this year, Evans HHS produced two programs for children. On February 7, at the Oberlin Public Library, youngsters tried out our new Wilson Bruce Evans coloring book, now available for purchase. (See Bulletin Board on back page.) Later in February, I joined with

Evans HHS Vice President Phyllis Yarber Hogan in reading a draft of our children's biography of Wilson Bruce Evans to third graders at the Oberlin Elementary School. With the encouragement of Principal Felicia Webber, these students drew pictures to help us think about illustrations for the book, which is still in development.



Carol Lasser and Phyllis Yarber Hogan at Oberlin Elementary School, Feb. 27, 2026
Photo courtesy of Felicia Webber

For adults, we have presented two programs this year that explored the theme of the Leary-Evans family migration. In January, Professor Craig Friend of North Carolina State University spoke on "Lunsford Lane and the Allure of Oberlin," highlighting both the forces that pushed free people of color out of antebellum North Carolina and the appeal of the distinctive free community in Oberlin. In March, Professor Kelli Cardenas Walsh of Fayetteville State University presented "Moving to Freedom: the Antebellum Journey of the Leary-Evans Family," drawing a connection that has been renewed in recent years.

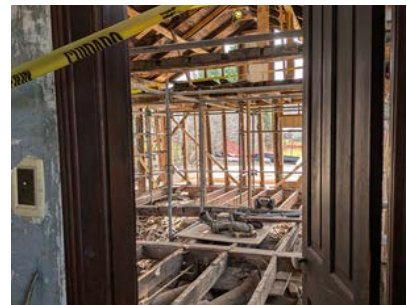
Most recently, our exhibit design team presented an update at the Oberlin Public Library on April 22. If you missed it, I encourage you to take the time to view their presentation online by clicking [this link](#). It's not too late to let us know about your thoughts for the displays that are beginning to take shape. Write to me at carol.lasser@evanshhs.org and help us realize our ambition to make the Wilson Bruce Evans House in Oberlin a key destination for Black heritage tourism—and, indeed, for all travelers—in our state, our region, and our nation.



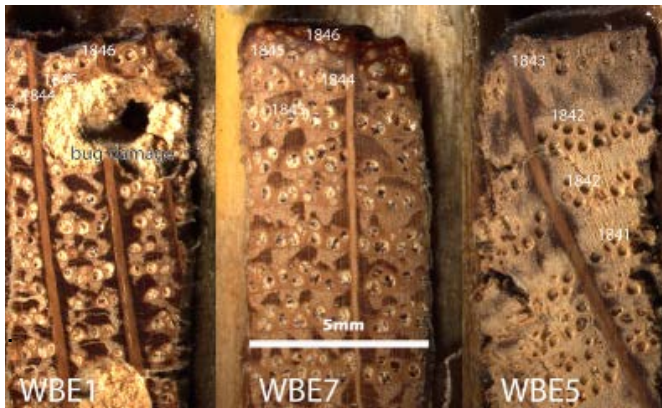
Bringing Back the Evans House

Phase 2 Rehabilitation Work by Ozanne Construction Company, Nov. 2025 - April 2026

Photos courtesy of Carol Lasser and Gary Kornblith



the wood or cut trees had sat outdoors for some time before being incorporated into the house. The tree-ring dates confirmed this story. While some samples showed outer rings from 1846, others showed outer rings from 1843, or 1844.



Images of three cores taken from the Evans House. Both WBE1 and WBE7 contain the 1846 outermost ring. The degraded sapwood of WBE5 dating to 1843 suggests that it sat outdoors for several years.

Images and explanation courtesy of Nick Weisenberg

The seasonal timing of the construction adds another dimension to the story. By examining the density and completeness of the outermost growth rings, Wiesenberg determined that different trees were felled at different times of the year. One hand-hewn basement sill showed evidence of being cut in early summer 1846, while other timbers contained only spring growth. This suggests a construction process that unfolded over many months, not all at once.

The question remains: if not Wilson Bruce Evans, who built the original part of the house that stands today at 33 East Vine Street in Oberlin? The most likely answer is James McWade, a blacksmith who had been born in Vermont in 1808 and made his way to Oberlin before 1840. McWade was listed on the 1851 map as a “head of family” residing on Mill Street in the location now occupied by the Evans House. According to tax records, James McWade and his wife Mary sold the property to Ephriam A. Spooner in 1852-53, and Spooner in turn sold the property to the Wilson Bruce Evans in May 1854. Meanwhile, the McWades erected a new residence around the corner on South Main Street. Like the Evans House, that building—pictured below—has survived to the present day.



The McWade House, 117 S. Main St, Oberlin
Photo courtesy of Gary Kornblith

AN URGENT REQUEST

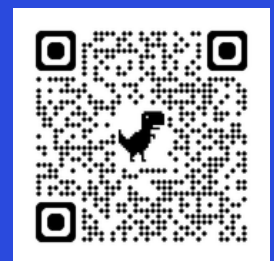


To date, we have raised over \$2 million dollars to rehabilitate the Evans House and transform it into a historic site and educational center. Yet we still need to raise another \$220,000 to finish the project.

Help us by contributing TODAY!
Your donation will be matched on a one-to-one basis by anonymous philanthropists.

Click to [GIVE HERE!](#)

or scan to give here



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.

Following in Leary Family Footsteps: From Fayetteville, NC, to Oberlin, OH

by Kelli Cardenas Walsh

For the past fifteen years, I have researched the Leary family of Fayetteville, North Carolina. The Learys were a free Black family who enjoyed respect and privilege in the town because of their American Revolutionary roots, their interaction with the Marquis de Lafayette during his visit in 1825, and their successful businesses in the antebellum era. My initial research focused on Lewis Sheridan Leary, a follower of John Brown who died in the famous raid on Harpers Ferry, a key event leading to the Civil War. My research questions evolved as I explored the generational layers of the Leary family and eventually led me to take a research journey to Oberlin, Ohio.

In 2010, I was serving on the NC State Historical Highway marker commission. Two marker applications submitted by State Senator Larry Shaw came up for a vote. One pertained to the Arabic scholar Omar Ibn Saidd, enslaved by the Owen family in Wilmington, and the other was a marker application for Lewis Leary of Fayetteville. The committee approved both markers, and I was proud to support them and bring historical recognition to Fayetteville. In February 2011, an unveiling event was held to reveal the Leary marker. It was a celebratory day bringing long overdue recognition to a man who was forced to leave his birthplace and who died a martyr for freedom.



Unveiling of the Lewis Leary marker in Fayetteville, NC
Photo courtesy of Kelli Walsh

Yet controversy arose about the marker's placement across the street from Fayetteville State University. Matthew Leary, Sr., Lewis's father, owned dozens of properties in town, but not the site where the marker was installed. Just several months into my Leary research, I did not know the exact location of the Leary home. Apparently, no one else did either. This fact gnawed at me. Why didn't anyone know where the family lived?

Indeed, there seemed to be a general lack of knowledge about the Leary family in modern-day Fayetteville. Fortunately,



Dr. Kelli Cardenas Walsh is Associate Professor of History at Fayetteville State University. On March 12, 2026, she gave a presentation titled "Moving to Freedom" that can be viewed online at <https://evanshhs.org/2026/03/15/moving-to-freedom-a-talk-by-dr-kelli-walsh/>

Photo courtesy of Kelli Walsh

I met a local journalist who showed me an article he had written when he interviewed Mary Perry Allen, a Leary descendant, about Lewis Leary. She indicated that she did not know a lot about him beyond what happened at Harpers Ferry. She further shared that the people at Fayetteville State (my alma mater and employer) should – but they didn't. She was right. We didn't know much about Lewis or his family. Matthew Leary, Jr. had been one of the school's founders, but no one really knew much more. The decision to place the marker across from the university was made because we could at least tie the Leary family to the university.

As fate would have it, a couple of years later I was assisting in a cemetery survey with a local genealogist when I saw a car pull up. Two elderly women got out and were placing flowers at tombstones. I introduced myself and quickly learned I was speaking to none other than Mary Allen Perry. She invited me to come to her home, where she shared information about her family, including recollections of her husband and uncles, who were military and community leaders.

In the ensuing years, I learned where the Learys resided in 19th-century Fayetteville and much more about their lives. But I had yet to go to where Lewis and other family members fled in the 1850s, when the Fugitive Slave Law made it ever more difficult and uncomfortable for even free people of color to live in North Carolina. During a late-night research binge, I came across an article about the Wilson Bruce Evans home and the society founded to restore it. I recognized the name: Wilson Bruce Evans and his older brother Henry married two Leary sisters-- Sarah Jane and Henrietta, respectively. I emailed Carol Lasser, executive director of the Evans Home Historical Society, and expressed my interest in documents or pictures related to the Learys that the society might possess. We communicated back and forth, but it

would be a few more years before we had a better idea of what we could share about the Leary-Evans family.

Another turning point in my research was attending a lecture by Dr. Peter Wood from Duke University about the five Black men who joined John Brown at Harpers Ferry. After the lecture I spoke to Dr. Wood about my own interest in researching Lewis Leary. He was generous in sharing what he knew, and he inspired a new list of questions about antebellum Black families in North Carolina who were connected by marriage, business, and the cause of emancipation.

Fast forward to 2023. On the recommendation of Dr. Wood, Katie King, a Ph.D. candidate, reached out to me to learn about free Blacks from Fayetteville who made their way to Oberlin. She explained that she would be traveling to Oberlin to work with Carol over the summer.

Having met scholars of like mind and shared research interests, I would soon meet contemporary descendants of the Leary family. In the summer of 2024, the director of the local Fayetteville History Museum received a call from Lewis Sheridan Hughes. He and his family wanted to stop in Fayetteville on their way home from vacation in Myrtle Beach, SC. Heidi Bleazey and I arranged for a tour of two places pivotal to the Leary family's Fayetteville experience—St. John's and St. Joseph's Episcopal churches. Church staff and pastors agreed to meet the family and generously shared institutional records and historical knowledge. Heidi and I also took our guests to the Lewis Leary marker before departing.

In 2025, the Chancellor of Fayetteville State decided to rename seven dormitories to honor the school's seven founders. Descendants of the founders were invited to attend the event. Lewis Hughes, his mother Dr. Doris Hughes-Moore, and other Leary descendants joined the celebration. Today Leary Hall sits diagonally across the street from the Lewis Leary marker. The marker placement that was questioned in 2011 seems perfectly appropriate now—the Leary name linking the university and community in common purpose.

In 2026, I finally traveled to Oberlin, where the Lewis Leary had journeyed some 169 years earlier. Carol graciously helped to arrange my schedule to include a public presentation of my research, accommodations, and an introduction to Ken Grossi, the Oberlin College Archivist. Once in Oberlin, I had dinner with Carol, Gary Kornblith, Liz Shultz of the Oberlin Heritage Society, and Phyllis Yarber Hogan, Vice President of the Wilson Bruce Evans Home Historical Society. It was a lovely occasion where everyone knew the background of the subjects so we could just jump in and share our thoughts and ask questions.

I was excited to spend hours in the Oberlin College Archives. I came across several document gems such as the handwritten



Left to right: Liz Schultz, Kelli Walsh, Carol Lasser, Phyllis Yarber Hogan

Photo courtesy of Gary Kornblith

constitution and registry of the 1851 Anti-Slavery Society and a subsequent letter written by Mary Patterson Leary, Lewis Sheridan Leary's widow, asking the American Missionary Association for support so she could return to Fayetteville, where her young daughter's grandparents lived. This was the first time I saw evidence of Mary's interest in returning to North Carolina.

On March 12, I had so much to say about the Learys that my presentation went long. The downside was that it limited time to take questions from the audience. If anyone was in attendance and had a question we did not get to, I hope you will email me with a follow up (kwalsh@uncfsu.edu).

In my three days in Oberlin, I experienced three seasons. One day it rained, one day in snowed, and on the final day, there were strong winds. Weather conditions did not slow Carol and me down. We drove through the cemetery to see the grave of Wilson Bruce Evans. We visited the Evans House on Vine Street, and I saw woodwork that the Evans brothers produced and looked out the window of Sarah Jane Leary Evans' room, from which she could view the home of John H. Scott, another Fayetteville-born African American transplant. We went to First Church and drove by the home of John Mercer Langston, where in 1859 John Brown's son came to ask if Langston knew men of "nerve and courage" for his father's plan to liberate the enslaved. The two men whom Langston recommended were Lewis Sheridan Leary and his relative John Anthony Copeland.

Finally, Carol and I went by the Copeland farm. The placement of the farm in relation to Vine Street and College Street and Professor Street and Tappan Square helped me gain a spatial understanding of how these families moved, interacted, worshiped, and mourned in Oberlin.

I want to thank all of those who came out to hear my presentation, my hosts Gary and Carol, and everyone else I met who shares an interest in securing the Leary-Evans family's place in the narrative of American history. Let's stay in touch.

Remembering Dorothy Inborden Miller, Guardian of the Evans Family Legacy

Editor's note: The youngest grandchild of Wilson Bruce Evans and Sarah Jane Leary Evans, Dorothy Inborden Miller played a central role in preserving the Evans family legacy across the 20th century. Born in the Evans House in 1897, she inherited the property upon the death of her uncle in 1941 and resided there most summers until her death in 1996. At her initiative, the house was listed on the National Register for Historic Places in 1980 and declared a National Historic Landmark in 1997.

Mrs. Miller was the daughter of Thomas Sewell Inborden and Sarah Jane Evans Inborden, founders of the Brick School in North Carolina. She earned her B.A. at Fisk University and an M.A. from Columbia University. She married World War I veteran Walker Doyle Miller in 1920. Like her parents, she became an educator. In 1933, the District of Columbia Public Schools hired her to head its Home Economics program in the district's segregated Black schools. A decade later she was named principal of the Margaret Murray Washington Vocational High School, a position that she held until her retirement in 1966.

Although she had no children of her own, Aunt Da—as she was known in the family—helped to raise her sister's children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. Below are brief recollections by past and present Evans HHS Board members who visited Aunt Da in Oberlin when they were young. Their memories convey her commitment to passing along to future generations a deep respect for the family's African American heritage, social values, and accomplishments.

Melany Hughes: Aunt Da would spend June through August at the Vine Street house every year; she was an educator, so she had summers off. She was one of the first Black female principals in Washington, D.C., and there's a school named after her there. When we'd arrive at the house, usually in our station wagon, we'd have to be formal when we got there. We couldn't just run around. We had to greet Aunt Da properly, help unload the car, and follow certain rules. She was blind, but she'd still check on how we looked. She'd say things like "Why are you wearing those dungarees? You need to look more presentable."



We'd explore the house, including going down to the basement where we thought there might be hiding places from when the house was part of the Underground Railroad. The house felt alive with history—sometimes at night you'd hear footsteps upstairs when we knew no one was up there, but it wasn't scary. We felt like they were our relatives, just part of the house's history.

We'd go to the cemetery to clean graves and put flowers on them, though we'd always get lost trying to find where family members were buried. Aunt Da would give tours of the house and talk about the family's history. Aunt Da was always working on historical projects.

Catherine Grooms (Cathy): Aunt Da was extraordinary. My middle name is Dorothy, named after her. She was a school principal in Washington, D.C. Aunt Da didn't have children of her own, so she made sure to be actively involved in the lives of her nieces and nephews. When I attended Howard University, I'd visit her every weekend to help with bills, letters, and taxes. Even after she became legally blind, she remained fiercely independent and insisted on paying me for my help.

Aunt Da was committed to our family history long before genealogy websites existed. She would go to the National Archives in D.C. to conduct research. She was so dedicated to preserving our story that she paid a writer named Robert Greene to produce a book about our family, contributing her own research to the project. She wanted to ensure we never forgot where we came from and understood the importance of the house in Oberlin.

If Aunt Da were alive today—she lived to be 99—she would be beside herself with excitement about our restoration plans and the vision for creating a community space and museum.

Nina Grooms-Lee: My grandmother's aunt—Aunt Da, as we called her—was the one who really told us everything about our rich family history. Her name is Dorothy Miller, and she is the granddaughter of Wilson Bruce and Sarah Jane. She was one of the first African American principals of a public school in the Washington, D.C. area, so she was very focused on education and making sure that we knew our history.

She didn't just tell us stories—she brought them to life in tangible ways. She had lots of photographs, so she wasn't just telling us this history, she was showing us the pictures to go along with the stories. She also had pocket watches from her grandparents and other mementos. She would show us the pictures, tell us the stories, and then give us little gifts as mementos of the stories. I got a gold watch that was probably Sarah Jane Leary Evans' daughter's pocket watch. She had archived a lot of these different mementos, whether it was pocket watches or old money or other things.

She was very focused on making sure that 33 East Vine Street was preserved—that the house and structure were

preserved because she was really proud of it. That was her grandparents' house, so she loved and respected and admired them, and there was nothing but positive memories about them that she shared with us. She also told us that she wanted to focus a good amount of time in her retirement on making sure that house got preserved, that the history got written down and published in places like the Library of Congress. She wanted everything to be very official because she didn't want there to be a chance that any of this history could be wiped out because it wasn't documented or captured in "permanent" ways or in ways that couldn't be passed down to generations to come after her.

If you ever saw her, you would never guess in a thousand years that she was anything other than Caucasian. She looked like an older Caucasian woman. It was just always this contradiction, this living contradiction. But what was really important, what she instilled, was that there was never any question, never any doubt about being African American, ever. And never any other way to be than that, focusing on serving the community through education, other means of empowerment. She instilled a strong sense of pride in us regarding being African Americans with a rich history as both Americans and people who made an undying commitment to swell the ranks of free people of color in this country. That was just the way it was. That is part of the legacy she instilled in us and the torch that she passed on to us to keep burning bright,

Richard Hughes: I have some great memories of visiting 33 East Vine Street. We would come in late summer, stay with Aunt Dorothy, and she'd give us histories and tell us about our family and how important it was. She'd tell us how our great-great-grandfather was in the Civil War, and about Lewis Sheridan Leary and John Anthony Copeland, and how they were killed in the raid at Harpers Ferry. Then she'd take us to the five-and-dime, and our parents would take us to Cedar Point, which was the highlight of our trips.

You couldn't jump up and down in that living room because the floor was one floorboard thick—she would tell us not to jump because we'd fall through the floor. She would also tell us about the beautiful cherry woodwork and banisters.

She lived to be 99 years old. She was diabetic from an early age but managed it very carefully with diet. She was one of those people who would say, "You're going to remember me when I'm gone," and she outlived all her doctors and so many people who said she was old.

Wilson Hughes: My Aunt Da (Dorothy Miller) had lived between D.C. and Oberlin throughout her life, and she would

frequently go out to Oberlin and take us out there for summer vacations.

When you got there, you would see the house and see the plaque, and it was really interesting. We would walk up and walk in and get settled, and the house was where we would learn more stories. My grandma would come on some of these trips, my mom would come, and it would be all of the siblings and sometimes cousins too. We would use it as our base to visit and understand—it was a place to go for the summer to learn more about the family.

Because there were so many of us, we had to figure out where we were going to sleep. Since my aunt or my grandma was upstairs, we were sleeping somewhere in the living room or the dining room. The parlor area was probably my favorite room, just because that's where we slept. It was like camping out in the parlor, although I didn't know what a parlor was back when I was that age.

The yard was awesome. I was always worried about snakes because it was so big and backed to a forested area. But we loved playing in that yard and the yard next to it.

Whenever we'd go outside, we would look at the plaque and feel proud about it. Every now and then we would see an Oberlin student, or even a group of Oberlin students, walk by and read the plaque. It felt weird because they were reading a plaque about our family, about the house that we were in. I felt proud about it but also kind of strange, like sleeping in history.

Aunt Da was very smart, thorough, and a critical thinker. She was very concerned about us and concerned about our understanding and respect for where we came from. She would consistently give us information and guidance on our family history.

When I first saw her, I thought she was a white person, and I was like, "Why is my Aunt Da so light? She seems like a white person." Then when I saw her family and her sister, I was like, "They all look white - I don't understand how they call themselves Black. What it made me realize is that Black people can look all kinds of ways. It was even more impactful when I learned and later understood that their significant contributions to American life really focused on African American freedom and African American education. They could have easily decided to pass, but Aunt Da had no intention of doing that, and none of them did.

Evans HHS Bulletin Board

Save the Date!

Saturday, Sept. 19

**Sixth Annual Meeting of the
Wilson Bruce Evans Home
Historical Society**

**Evans HHS Board Members
Attend Cleveland Foundation's
2026 Power of Philanthropy Summit**

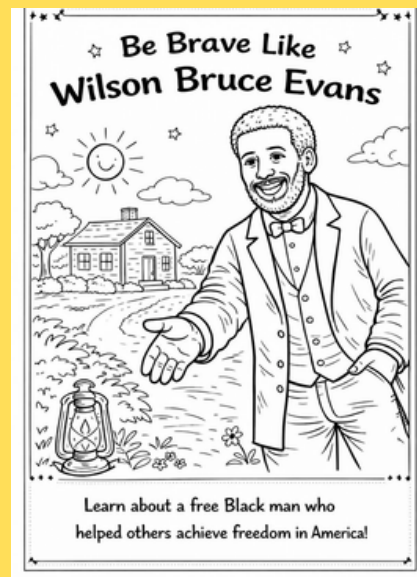


From left to right: Wilson Hughes, Dr. Melany Hughes, and Dr. Doris Hughes-Moore, descendants of Wilson Bruce Evans
Photo courtesy of Gary Kornblith



Now Available!

**A Coloring Book for Kids
about Wilson Bruce Evans**



\$3 per copy plus tax and postage

**to purchase, contact
manager@evanshhs.org**

Wilson Bruce Evans Home Historical Society

Board of Trustees, 2025-26

Doris Hughes-Moore
President
Gary Kornblith
Secretary

Phyllis Yarber Hogan
Vice President
Catherine Grooms
Treasurer

Camille Hamlin Allen, Lewis Sheridan Hughes,
Melany Hughes/Tom Karro-Gassner,
Richard Hughes, Wilson Hughes, Brigette Johnson,
Donna Russell, Liz Schultz,
Nancy Wall

Carol Lasser
Executive Director