WILSON BRUCE EVANS HOME HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

P.O. Box 284, Oberlin, OH 44074 Fall 2026 https://www.evanshhs.org

Almost Home! Rehabilitation of the Evans House Nears Completion

by Carol Lasser, Executive Director

Leaves have begun to crunch under our feet, and there's a nip in the morning air at 33 East Vine Street in Oberlin. While we have not yet finished the comprehensive rehabilitation of the Evans House, we have made great strides. Our new annex building, clad in brick, is largely complete, awaiting the installation of plumbing and other final features; we cannot wait to open its spacious new doors to visitors. The rehabilitation of what we now know to have been the original structure, our soon-to-be Education Center, is also nearing finish. On the outside, the decayed lap siding has been replaced, with the best specimens of the original material saved for a "feature wall" on the original southern exposure. Historic paint analysis has revealed that this wood was first undercoated by brown stain, then covered with a green paint that has now aged to a gentle dappled color. Inside the Education Center, now on view are the majestic hand-hewn timbers that support the spacious room and loft, revealing their antebellum glory. This space holds the promise of the many gatherings it will soon host.

Work on the two-story brick Italianate portion of the house built facing the street in the 1870s is also progressing. With the help of a matching grant from the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the front entry hall will highlight the restored woodwork of master cabinetmaker Wilson Bruce Evans, his banister, spindles, and decorative work. Paint analysis revealed its original color as sky blue, which will again grace the space, along with historically appropriate carpet and lighting. Throughout the first floor, rooms will be plastered and painted, floors refreshed, woodwork cleaned, all in preparation for the magical work of storytelling and interpretation, now being finalized by our inspired exhibit design team.

Every day, the house buzzes with activity, as carpenters, painters, plasterers, electricians, and other trades people



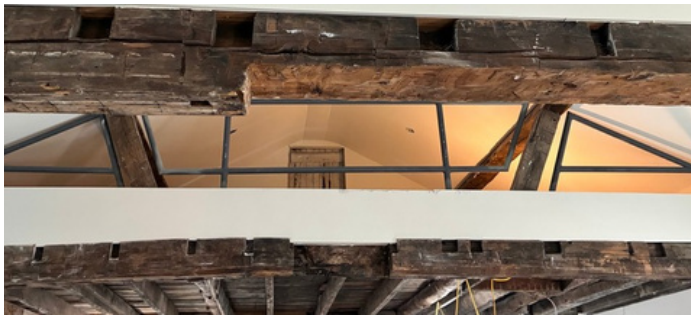


Top: Eastern façade of Education Center with new wooden lap siding.

Middle (left): "Feature Wall," once the southern exposure of the earliest structure, with hay door surrounded by original exterior siding.

Bottom: Hand-hewn beams and loft reveal the structure of the Education Center as built ca. 1848.

Photos courtesy of Carol Lasser



Oberlin City Council President's Remarks at 6th Annual Meeting
See p. 3

Awards Bestowed at 6th Annual Meeting
See pp. 4-6

The Under-Told Story of Ohio's Black Settlement Movement
See pp. 7-9

bring us closer to completion. Together, we are all working hard, keeping our sights on a ceremonial opening during Black History Month 2027.

We are also deeply immersed in plans for the Evans Interpretive Park on the grounds surrounding the house. It holds special opportunities. Looking at the connection from the property to Oberlin's Martin Luther King, Jr., Park across the street with its monuments to Harpers Ferry martyrs, Oberlin-Wellington Rescuers and more, the Evans Interpretive Park has a triple mission: it will (1) enhance the story of the Evans family, abolitionist Oberlin, and the long struggle for racial equality provided for visitors to the Evans House; (2) introduce guests who arrive outside regular hours to the Evans story; and (3) offer additional recreational space for Oberlin neighbors and residents.

The first stage of the park will be the construction the required parking lot, supported by a generous gift from anonymous private donors. The Ohio State Historic Preservation Office has approved the route of the interpretive "Stony Path" along which we will tell the story of the journey from enslavement to freedom, and we continue to work with an amazing team to devise a landscape that will help narrate that important history. We are thrilled that we received a grant from the National Park Service's Network to Freedom - Association for the Study of African American Life and History for this Interpretive Park, and soon you will be able to see it taking shape on the land adjoining 33 East Vine Street. Eventually, when funding permits, we will create an amphitheater nestled onto the grounds behind the house, focused on a picnic shelter/stage with solar panels to feed the needs of the historic house, literally lighting the way to a more just future.

At our annual meeting in September, we celebrated all we have done to date, and proclaimed ourselves "almost home." Yet our work will, in a sense, never be finished. We look forward to a joyful 2027, when the preservation of the legacy of Evans Family can inspire us to continue our joyful labors together for all that we still need to accomplish. In the words of Ella Baker, "We who believe in freedom cannot rest."

North



West East

South

Conceptual Rendering of Plans for the Evans Interpretive Park

Courtesy of DERU Landscape Architecture

Oberlin City Council President Eboni Johnson's Welcoming Remarks to the 6th Annual Meeting of the Evans Home Historical Society, September 19, 2026

On behalf of Oberlin City Council, it is truly my pleasure to welcome you and to join the Wilson Bruce Evans Home Historical Society for this special gathering.

This year's themes — resilience and "Almost Home" — feel especially meaningful right now.

When we talk about resilience, we're talking about more than simply making it through hard times. We're talking about the strength it takes to keep going, to keep building, to keep hoping — and sometimes, to create a sense of home even when the world has not always made it easy for you to belong.

That is part of what makes the story of the Wilson Bruce Evans Home so powerful.

This home has stood through generations of change, but what it represents is even bigger than the building itself. It represents family, community, courage—the determination to make a life, to make a difference, and to create something that those who came after could build upon.

And I have to say, the idea of "Almost Home" resonates with me personally. Oberlin has been part of my life in many different ways over the years, and one thing I've learned is that home isn't always somewhere you simply arrive. Sometimes you grow into it. Sometimes you leave and find your way back to it, like I and many others have. Sometimes it is created through the people who welcome you, the relationships you build, and the places that become part of your story. For me, I've encountered Oberlin in different seasons of my life, and each one has deepened what "home" means to me.

And I think that is part of what makes "Almost Home" such a powerful idea. Home is so much more than an address. It is where our stories live. It is where we find belonging. It is the people who know us best, the



Eboni Johnson speaking at the Oberlin Underground Railroad Center on Sept. 19, 2026
Photo Courtesy. of Gary Kornblith

history that grounds us, and the hope that keeps pulling us forward.

Oberlin is a place of many stories. The work of the Wilson Bruce Evans Home Historical Society helps make sure those stories are not lost. You are — we are — preserving an important part of Oberlin's history while reminding us that history is alive — and that all of us, in our own way, are helping to write what comes next.

So today, I hope we celebrate the resilience of those who came before us, and also the communities they built, the legacy they left behind, and that enduring journey toward home.

Thank you to everyone who makes this work possible, and thank you all for being here.

Welcome!

Awards Bestowed at the 6th Annual Meeting

Legacy Guardian Award

Adenike Sharpley

Presented by Phyllis Yarber Hogan



Adenike Sharpley on right, Phyllis Yarber Hogan on left
Photo courtesy of Gary Kornblith

Adenike "Ade" Sharpley arrived in Oberlin in 1989 to join Oberlin College, where she served with distinction as Director of Afrikan Heritage House and Artist-in-Residence of Africana Studies until her retirement in 2017. In 1992, she founded Dance Diaspora, a semi-professional touring West African dance ensemble that brought the rhythm, movement, and meaning of the African diaspora to audiences near and far.

But Ade's contributions were never confined to the college campus. She became a well-known, beloved, and deeply active member of the greater Oberlin community. She opened Ade's Place, a cherished shop on Main Street that offered African art, clothing, and gifts—a storefront that is still fondly remembered and sorely missed. She shared her love of dance and history with the community's children through community-sponsored programs and summer programs in the park, planting seeds of cultural pride in generation after generation of young people.

In the summer of 1992, Ade began the work of incorporating Oberlin's Black history into the annual Oberlin Heritage Days festival. A few years later, she introduced Juneteenth to this community. Oberlin's proud history of abolitionism, its role in the Underground Railroad, and its enduring promise of freedom for all made it a city of profound significance to the Juneteenth holiday—and Ade recognized that significance before most others did.

On June 8, 2004, the Oberlin City Council passed a resolution officially recognizing Juneteenth as a day of commemoration and celebration. That same year, Juneteenth Oberlin was incorporated—seventeen years before Juneteenth would go on to achieve federal holiday status. Ade was not following a movement. She was building one, right here at home.

Ade, your impact on our community is profound. You gifted Oberlin with a deep knowledge and understanding of its own significance—teaching us to see our history not as something behind us, but as something we carry forward. Your enduring commitment to sustaining this celebration, even throughout your retirement, is truly commendable.

We are deeply grateful for the immense time, energy, and determination you have invested in educating our community and the broader county on the vital importance of honoring our ancestors and preserving our history. Because of you, Juneteenth in Oberlin is not simply observed—it is understood, cherished, and lived.

Thank you, Ade, for your vision, your leadership, and your love for this community. On behalf of all of us, it is our privilege to honor you today.

Heritage Guardian Award

Wendy Hoge Naylor

Presented by Liz Schultz



Wendy Hoge Naylor on right, Liz Schultz on left
Photo courtesy of Gary Kornblith

It is with great pleasure that the Wilson Bruce Evans Home Historical Society bestows on Wendy Hoge Naylor the 2026 Heritage Guardian Award

Wendy Hoge Naylor first laid eyes upon the Wilson Bruce Evans House almost exactly five years ago, at our very first annual meeting. Our amazing architect Sandra Madison had recommended the firm Naylor Wellman to us as Historic Preservation consultants. Carol remembers taking Wendy and her business partner Diana Wellman through the house, and hearing them suggest that they were not quite satisfied with the history of the building as it had been presented in the documentation for the National Historic Landmark designation it had received in 1997. Thus began Wendy's deep dive into the history of the house--and her commitment to guiding us through the multiple challenging reviews, negotiations and agreements that would mark the next five years. At the time, none of us knew how long and complicated this project would become. But from the start, Wendy was there—and on target. And she has been with us, patiently researching, advocating, and guiding ever since, an absolutely critical member of the team who has brought this project to the verge of conclusion.

First, Wendy rewrote the history of the house. In August 2021, she presented to the Board evidence that the original Evans structure was the 1 and ½ story barn-like structure that stood behind the two-story brick structure—a claim subsequently bolstered by careful deconstruction revealing the old rafters, which, themselves, yielded further proof when tree ring experts found that they had been harvested from nearby trees in 1847 and 1848.

Then, Wendy became our fervent advocate in the many meetings held to secure approval for our rehabilitation plans. Because a major portion of our funding has come from Department of the Interior grants through the National Park Service, the Evans House was subject to regulations that included Section 106 reviews, National Environmental Policy reviews, archeological reviews, reviews by the Ohio State Historic Preservation Office, and more. Wendy was always helping us move forward, bringing to our project not just her preservation knowledge but her lawyering skills as well—and (let me tell you), Wendy can structure and present a legal argument that will win the day.

Wendy knows much about many things—not just what Section 106 requires—that is the "Secretary of the Interior Standards for Historic Buildings"—the critical review for most of us. Wendy also has a preservationist's understanding of paint colors, historic siding, windows, flooring, decking, brick, and more. She also always knows who to call. Need a contractor who can do a bit of selective demolition for documentation purposes? She has a recommendation. Need an archeologist? She can give you a set of choices—and get these busy people to answer her calls when your site suddenly faces a mandated set of digs.

Above all, Wendy is committed. She has rarely missed a meeting of Owner-Architect-Contractor team. She been with us through the good times of approvals, and the hard times of challenging reviews; the triumph of our completion of our Phase 1 porch project, and the designation of

portions of our campus as sites of potential archeological significance, putting heavy restrictions on them. Wendy has never given up, and never given up on us. The Evans Home Historical Society is deeply indebted to Wendy Hoge Naylor, who has gone above and beyond the role of consultant to become a devoted and faithful member of the team who is making possible the vision: opening the Evans House to the public as an historic site and educational center that will tell the story of the Evans family and the long quest for social justice—in Oberlin and beyond.

Summer 2026 Coloring Contest Award

Chalise Joi Grantham

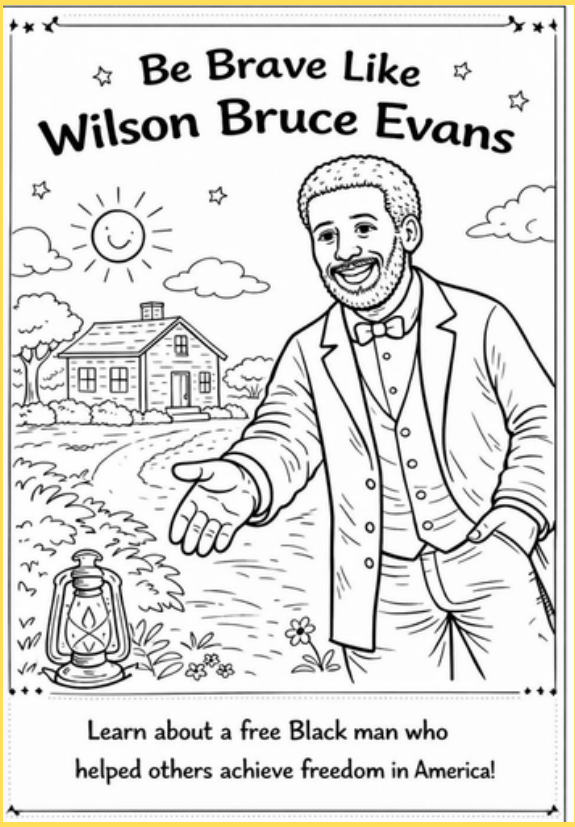
Presented by Nancy Wall



Photo courtesy of Nancy Wall

Now Available!

A Coloring Book for Kids about Wilson Bruce Evans



$3 per copy plus tax and postage

****

to purchase, contact manager@evanshhs.org

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.

Pursuing Life, Liberty, and Happiness: The Under-Told Story of Ohio's Black Settlement Movement

by Phyllis Yarber Hogan

Ohio was once home to more than ninety Black settlements. Little written record survives for most; many exist today only as memories passed down locally. But a number are well documented, and together they tell the story of a determined, interconnected network of communities across the state.

- **Hicks Settlement** in Ross County was founded by Tobias Hicks, who migrated from Maryland with his son as early as 1800 and purchased land in Concord Township, eight miles north of Chillicothe. As it thrived, both freed people and fugitives gathered there, including Joseph Stillguest, a young runaway later adopted by Hicks. After Hicks's death, Stillguest kept opening his home to freedom seekers, and the ccmmunity was sometimes called Stillguest Settlement.

- **Berlin Crossroads** in Jackson County was founded in 1830 by Thomas Woodson, his wife Jemima, and eight other families. Woodson claimed to be the eldest son of President Thomas Jefferson and the enslaved Sally Hemings. Within a decade Berlin Crossroads was a fully functioning community. Woodson became an agent for the abolitionist newspaper *Palladium of Liberty.* Of his and Jemima's eleven children, three became ministers and five became educators; the youngest, Sarah Jane Woodson, enrolled at Oberlin College in 1852 and in 1858 became the first African American college instructor, teaching English at Wilberforce University.



Historical marker in Jackson County, Ohio, near Berlin Crossing
Photo courtesy of Historical Marker Database

- **Brown Settlement** in Greene County was founded by Godfrey Brown. Born into slavery in 1768 in Brunswick County, Virginia, he purchased his family's freedom on March 7, 1820. His emancipation document named his wife Chaney and children; those under twenty-one were guaranteed freedom at adulthood. Carrying their savings in a tobacco box, the family bought 254 acres in Caesars Creek Township for $1,000. In 1822, Godfrey and his sons founded Middle Run Baptist Church, the first Baptist church in Ohio organized by people of African descent. Godfrey ministered there 24 years, his son Samuel after him. Godfrey died January 3, 1843, and is buried beside the church. The congregation relocated to Xenia in 1889, where Middle Run Baptist Church still stands on East Church Street; a monument to Godfrey Brown was dedicated there in 2001.



Godfrey Brown marker in Xenia, Ohio
Photo courtesy of Historical Marker Database

- **Randolph Freedpeople**. Virginia politician John Randolph died in 1833, leaving his will freeing 383 enslaved people and setting aside $8,000 for 3,200 acres in Mercer County, Ohio. His family fought the will for 13 years before a judge upheld it in 1846. That June, the freedpeople traveled to claim their land, but an armed mob and militia met them at New Bremen and forced them back. Local settlers published resolutions vowing to

resist the settlement of blacks and mulattoes in their county. Randolph's executor sold the 3,200 acres, recovering an investment worth over a million dollars today, but what became of the money is unknown. After being denied access to their land, the group scattered into small communities across Miami and Shelby counties, including Rossville, founded by William Rial in 1857. Descendants formed the Randolph Ex-Slaves Association in 1900, holding reunions through 1906.



Gathering of Randolph Ex-Slaves Association
Photo courtesy of Ohio History Connection

A 1907 lawsuit for compensation failed on a statute-of-limitations ruling upheld by Ohio's Supreme Court. But the fight continues today. House Concurrent Resolution 11, introduced by State Representative Dontavius Jarrells, seeks to acknowledge and apologize for the freedpeople's wrongful displacement, and a Miami University mapping project has located 3,140 acres of the original parcels, now worth from $14 million to over $60 million dollars. Seventh-generation descendant Paisha Thomas founded the nonprofit organization Land of the Freed to raise awareness and advocate on behalf of descendants and help restore the African Jackson Cemetery in Rossville.



African Jackson Cemetery in Rossville, Ohio
Photo courtesy of Ohio History Connection

- **Gist Settlement** in Highland County can be traced back to the 1815 will of Samuel Gist, a wealthy British absentee landowner, freeing roughly 350 enslaved Virginians and funding their relocation. His executors bought over 2,000 acres across Brown, Adams, and Highland counties. Local Quaker trustees oversaw Gist's trust, and settlers walked the entire distance from Virginia to Ohio. The trust was mismanged: settlers were promised land in exchange for paying taxes but were never given clear legal title, leaving families vulnerable to tax trouble for generations. In the 20th century, Paul Turner, who was born on the settlement, returned after over 25 years in the Navy to find his family land facing foreclosure. He eventually paid nearly $29,000 in back taxes and, in 2017, he was finally given clear title to 150 acres. He died in 2019 at eighty-eight.

- **Guinea, or Captina**, in Belmont County was founded in the early 1820s by Alexander "Sandy" Harper, who had acquired more than 300 acres in Somerset township. In 1825 he donated land for the Captina African Methodist Episcopal Church. Captina was known along the Underground Railroad as an especially safe stop because its residents were well-armed and prepared to defend freedom seekers from slave catchers crossing the river. Today only its cemetery remains.

- **Carthagena** in Mercer County was founded in 1840 by Charles Moore, a Black landowner from Kentucky. Carthagena became home to the Emlen Institution, a boarding school for African American and Native American children funded by Quaker Samuel Powers Emlen Jr. Although the Institution relocated to Pennsylvania in 1857, many Black families stayed in Carthagena. In 1860 they owned more than 10,000 acres, supporting four churches and three schools. Yet all closed by the 1930s. Carthagena's Black Cemetery survives with 240 headstones standing.



Headstone of USCT Corporal J.R. Durant in Cathagena Black Cemetery
Photo courtesy of Historical Marker Database

- **East Wren** in Van Wert County was settled on former Great Black Swamp land near the Indiana line. Early settler William White was born enslaved and trained as a prizefighter. He was freed after refusing to fight again following a brutal match where he seriously injured his opponent. In 1837 Augustus Wattles lectured and taught there, reportedly drawing Godfrey Brown and son Samuel from the Brown Settlement. Residents founded St. Mary's African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1843 and the Educational Orphans Institute a decade later. The 1850 census counted 43 Black residents.

- **New Guinea** in Stark County was founded between 1805 and 1807. It was populated by Virginia Quakers joined by free Black families and fugitives from slavery. The community flourished from 1810 to 1840. An 1837 account in the abolitionist newspaper T*he Philanthropist* described a settlement of 51 families owning 1,860 acres with two schools, a meeting house, a 120-volume library, four ministers, and no recorded crime.

- **Hayti, or the McIntyre Settlement** in Jefferson County was founded in 1829. Virginia plantation owner Nathaniel Benford freed seven enslaved people and their families in 1825, and nine more by his will and entrusted their care to his Quaker friend, Benjamin Ladd. In all, 27 people settled on land bought by Ladd. Early attempts to grow Virginia crops like tobacco and hemp failed, and critics attributed it to the laziness of the Black settlers. They then turned to growing corn, oats, rye, and market gardens. The community grew and intermarried extensively, even as later generations moved on for opportunities elsewhere.

- **The Depp Settlement** in Delaware County. In 1801, Virginian John Depp filed a deed of emancipation for an enslaved woman, Lucinda, and her children. When he died 1831, he left substantial land to several of them. Abraham Depp traveled to Ohio in 1834 and worked as a blacksmith in Columbus as he scouted land in Delaware County. In 1835 he brought his wife and children north. Other relatives followed. Abraham amassed nearly 1,500 acres across Delaware, Union, and Franklin counties. He founded a Baptist church and sheltered freedom seekers on the Underground Railroad. His son Aurelius attended Oberlin College for two years before illness at home called him back. The property stayed in the family for generations; in the 1920s, daughter Lucy sold part of it to a cousin, Robert Goode, who created Lucy Depp Park, a 102-acre subdivision that became a popular Black summer retreat. In 2019 the Dublin City Schools named a new elementary school for Abraham Depp. Lucy Depp Park still stands, now part of a private community near Powell, Ohio.



Barn at Lucy Depp Park
Photo courtesy of Lucy Depp Park

- **Harveysburg** in Warren County was founded in 1829 as a Quaker settlement by William Harvey. Harveysburg became a center of abolitionism and the Underground Railroad. In 1831, Elizabeth and Jesse Harvey opened the Elizabeth Harvey Free Black School—the first school in Ohio built specifically for African American children. Its reputation reached far and wide. In 1838, North Carolina plantation owner Stephen Wall sent his own children—fathered with three enslaved sisters—north to Harveysburg. Taken in by local Quaker abolitionists, the children achieved remarkable success. When their education in Harveysburg was complete, most of the Wall children continued north to Oberlin. Two Wall descendants currently sit on the Board of the Wilson Bruce Evans Home Historical Society.

Editor's Note: Phyllis Yarber Hogan is Vice President of the Evans Home Historical Society. She wishes to give credit to David Meyers and Elise Meyers Walker, Historic Black Settlements of Ohio (The History Press, 2020), which was an especially helpful resource for this article.

Evans HHS Bulletin Board

FRIENDS OF THE OBERLIN COLLEGE LIBRARIES PRESENTS

PARTNERS IN PRESERVATION: HOW THE OBERLIN COLLEGE LIBRARIES COLLABORATE IN THE RESCUE OF THE HISTORIC EVANS HOUSE

Lecture & Reception



The Oberlin College Libraries are playing a pivotal role in rehabilitating the nineteenth-century home of Wilson Bruce Evans—an African American abolitionist and Underground Railroad operative—and transforming it into a historic site and educational center open to the public.

This presentation celebrates a partnership built on shared purpose—one that will ensure future generations understand how past Oberlinians, both College and community members, stood up for racial equality and social justice.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 7, 2026 | 6:00 PM
DYE LECTURE HALL, SCIENCE CENTER
119 WOODLAND ST. | OBERLIN, OH 44074

RECEPTION TO FOLLOW AT THE SCIENCE LIBRARY
RSVP BY OCT. 31 TO MKOPERDA@OBERLIN.EDU
LIMITED SEATING

OBERLIN COLLEGE & CONSERVATORY | Oberlin College Libraries

WILSON BRUCE EVANS HOME



Taylor Tomu of the America 250-Ohio Commission presented a certificate of Commendation to Evans HHS Executive Director Carol Lasser at the 3rd Annual Underground Railroad Gathering in Cleveland, Sept. 27, 2026

Wilson Bruce Evans Home Historical Society

Board of Trustees, 2026-27

Doris Hughes-Moore
President

Phyllis Yarber Hogan
Vice President

Gary Kornblith
Secretary

Catherine Grooms
Treasurer

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

Carol Lasser
Executive Director