

History of the Octagon House-by Pat Hallman

On May 12, 1984, the first meeting of the "Save the Octagon House Committee" was held at Macomb Community College. Harvey Dean, a lawyer from Warren and a member of the college board, sent letters to political, historical, and cultural activists and organizations to gather and create a group to save the unique home on Van Dyke, north of 26 Mile Road in Washington Township. The house was listed on the State and National Registers of Historic Places.

The Octagon House was built in 1860 by Loren Andrus, a very successful farmer, engineer, and surveyor. The Andrus family owned the property until 1894. Then there were several owners from that year to 1938, when French chef, Paul Weyer, purchased the home, renovated and opened it as "Paul Weyer's Farm Inn". That enterprise lasted only about a year. From 1945 to 1962, Wayne State University operated it as the Albert H. Schmidt Foundation Farm, a working farm with an agricultural training program. The property was then sold to Syracuse Company and the house was rented from 1964 to 1974. In 1974, the house was condemned and scheduled for demolition, when the William Hamilton family purchased the house and 4.25 acres. From 1974 to 1984, the house was restored and operated as the "Apple Barrel Farm". In March 1984, the property was foreclosed and the Hamiltons left. From 1984-1987, the Octagon House was vacant, neglected, and vandalized.

"Save the Octagon House, Inc." was formed and money was raised through donations, an *Octagonathon* with local school children, and a Michigan Equity Grant for \$100,000. The house and property were purchased in January, 1987, for \$185,000.

"Save the Octagon House" was renamed "Friends of the Octagon House" in 1989. During the first few years of ownership, work on the infrastructure was done as funds were raised or grants acquired. The house was connected to city water, there were plumbing and electrical upgrades, a new roof and porch, and 2 new furnaces installed (one for the original part of the house and one for the addition). From 1995 to 1997, there was a "Restore the Staircase" project with fundraising of \$72,000. In 1996, windows and plaster were restored and a handicap ramp completed. Over the years, there have been many Boy Scout Eagle Projects completed in the house and on the property. In 2000, the MSU Extension took over the restoration and maintenance of the grounds.

In the last 25 years, many volunteers and contractors have brought the house back to what is seen today. There are lists of all the work done and like any house it is an ongoing effort to manage the upkeep. Funds from tours, special events, memberships, and grants help pay the bills of this all volunteer organization.

The members of the Friends of the Octagon House would like to take this opportunity on their 25th Anniversary (1984-2009) to thank everyone who has helped preserve this historic home for future generations.

For more information on the Octagon House or their event schedule, call: (586) 739-6184 or go to www.octagonhouse.org. There is presently a case of Octagon House memorabilia from the last 25 years displayed in the house.