

Octagon House Foundation, Inc.
 615 Octagon Road
 P O Box 1701
 Marion, VA 24354
www.smythoctagonhouse.org

Change of Leadership



Due to a promotion and changes in his job duties and location, Derek Orr has resigned as President of the Octagon House Foundation. Per our by-laws, Vice-President Ken Hall took over as President. Derek (left) is pictured here receiving a plaque from the Foundation which reads:

"Presented to Derek A. Orr in appreciation of your vision, sacrifice, generosity and hard work in serving for 3 years as our president. Given this day, September 26, 2017, by the Octagon House Foundation, Inc." Ken (rt) is presenting the plaque. Derek will continue to serve on the Board in the Past President capacity.

The Foundation would like to again express their thanks to Derek for all he has done to start the Foundation and move it forward to its current status. We wish him well in his new work endeavors.

The World Is Learning about the Smyth County Octagon House

If you get Blue Ridge Country magazine, you may have already seen the article below (note the white arrow next to "Octagon House Comeback" at the bottom of the cover). If not, go to our web site and check it out in greater detail. The article includes a brief history of the house and an interview with Derek Orr about the restoration. Word is spreading about the Octagon House!!



2018 CURIOS

OCTAGONAL HOUSE: AN EIGHTH LIFE?

The once-avant-garde structure has, since its 1858 construction, undergone many challenges and changes. A new effort may save it for all.

by Su Clanton-Wicker

Abijah Thomas was an early progressive thinker, textile plant founder and ironworks tycoon in Southwest Virginia. When he built his mansion near Marion, Virginia in 1858, he chose the most avant-garde design of the day—octagonal.

In a short-lived trend sweeping the country then, eight-sided houses were touted as less expensive to build as well as easier to heat and light. Plus they were just plain cool, according to octagonal architecture proponent Chose Foster in his 1988 book, "The Octagon House: A Home for All."

Thomas' two-story, 6,000-square-foot mansion is one of the nation's largest remaining octagonal houses from that period. Overlooking the South Fork of the Holston River, it features a grand staircase and faux marble woodwork. Slaves fired and

moisted the bricks enroute, including special angled bricks for the corners. The fingerprint of an era, a foundation brick.

Rumors still circulate about the windowless central "dark room" splashed with crimson stains. Was it used for torturing slaves or storing food? Historians say storage and suggest exploding beef jars, but no one really knows.

The Thomas family lost its fortune during the Civil War. After they sold the mansion, it was used as apartments, storage, and then sat neglected for decades. By 2000, the building listed on the National Register of Historic Places was nearly ready to collapse. Preservation Virginia listed it as one of Virginia's most endangered historic places.

In 2003, Smyth County native Derek Orr made a snap decision to buy the house at auction.

"When I found hidden talking about tearing it down and selling it as salvage, I had to buy it. I've always loved this house. My grandparents lived there for a while," he says.

Orr yearned to restore the house, but soon realized it was a daunting project. So he formed a nonprofit for its restoration and donated the house. He wants to see it restored as a cultural center and tourist attraction.

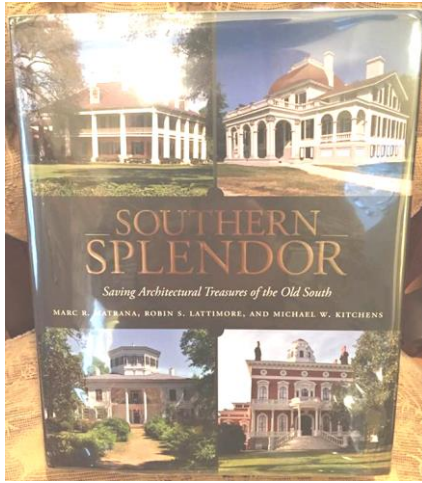
"We're stabilizing it, but it isn't safe to enter right now. When it's finished, the house will be open to the public for tours and events, a piece of living history," he says.

Orr invites anyone interested to join the effort. Check the Octagon House Foundation Facebook page for upcoming events and ways to contribute. ☺

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And there's more--see page 2 for information about the Octagon House's inclusion in a new book!

Octagon House Is Included in *Southern Splendor: Saving Architectural Treasures of the Old South*



The Octagon House is featured in an upcoming book “Southern Splendor: Saving Architectural Treasures of the Old South,” published by the University Press of Mississippi. The book, by world renowned Southern author and historian Robin Lattimore, along with Marc R. Matrana and Michael W. Kitchens, contains a 100,000 word manuscript, 57 B&W photos, and more than 270 color photos, many taken by Lesley Bush and Jacques Levet, Jr. The book features antebellum homes throughout the South that have been saved from destruction and restored to their former glory. The Octagon House is featured with the likes of Mount Vernon and Monticello. Mr. Lattimore calls the Octagon House “one of Virginia’s, and the South’s, most important historic structures, a treasure”.

The book’s nationwide release date is scheduled for March 22, 2018 and will be available through Barnes & Noble, Amazon, and the University Press of Mississippi websites. In addition, the American Library Association (ALA) recognized the book today by placing it on a list of recommendations for all public, university, and school libraries in the nation. Also, Bookpage.com, the publishing industry’s leading reviewer of new titles, plans to feature the book in its holiday advertising before Christmas.

The publicity generated by our inclusion in this wonderful publication should not only bring new members to our organization but financial contributors, and those with expertise in the field of restoration, preservation, and maintenance of this historic structure.



Original Smokehouse

Pictured above is the smokehouse, the last remaining out building on the property. For safety reasons, it will soon be torn down. Hopefully, some wood can be saved and used to rebuild a new structure on site.

It's easier than ever to make donations now on our web site: www.smythoctagonhouse.com! Check us out on Facebook at <https://facebook.com/OctagonHouseFoundation>

News Tid Bits and Updates

- Ken Hall has been participating in the Chamber of Commerce's Business Plan Boot Camp, and working on a business plan for the Octagon House.
- If you've seen activity on the grounds at the house, it's because trees and/or shrubs have been cut and/or relocated in preparation for landscaping and power lines. Keep watching for more things to happen.
- New President, Ken Hall, has been a Foundation member for two years, and is a local resident. He brings extensive building experience from having his own business. We thank Ken for stepping up to this leadership position.
- The Board is working with Cindy Fields, VHCC Small Business Center Director, to address steps we need to take to be better prepared to qualify for grants.
- The VHCC Horticulture Department is creating a landscaping plan for the property.

We've Been Busy Again!

Raising money for the Foundation still seems to be our top priority these days. Your Board has been having a fund raising event almost every other month, and plans to continue with that schedule. If you have any spare time, be sure to volunteer and help! Your services are always appreciated and needed.

We truly appreciate the time and effort that our volunteers have put in to make each event a success. Without our members, we couldn't have provided the community the wonderful opportunities to have such delicious meals!!

We would also like to welcome 3 new members to the Foundation! We appreciate all the membership renewals and donations that have been received, as well as the delicious desserts which have added to the success of all our fund raising efforts.



Ham dinner plate and baskets for Silent Auction



Kitchen crew, guests, and desserts for Spaghetti Dinner

Recent fund raisers cleared \$5,649.75!



2017 Christmas Market and Octagon House Ornament





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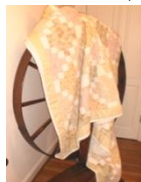


WE STILL NEED YOU...
to volunteer with us!

Upcoming Octagon House events where you can help

April 6
Spaghetti Dinner
4:30-7 PM
Adults \$8
Children \$4
Eat in or take out

May 13
Quilt Raffle
Tickets - \$1



June 2
Tables \$10



August 3
Dinner
Details TBA

October ?
Event at House
Help plan a
special event

Contact Nancy Smith (919-783-3723)
to volunteer for any event.

Your time and monetary donations are always needed and gratefully appreciated.