

WELCOME TO THE BONINE HOUSE!!

We hope you enjoy your tour and please feel free to ask questions. The following is a short history of the house and summary of our plans:

James E. Bonine came to Cass County in 1843, married Sarah Ann Bogue in 1844 and began building their Greek Revival farmhouse shortly thereafter. You can see the shadow of the Greek frieze as well as the wood it was attached to under the roofline at the southwest side of the house.

This original home was a simple rectangle. The back outside wall was just behind the staircase, evidenced by its width. **Essentially it was a four room 'two over two' house--living room and parlor downstairs; and two bedrooms upstairs.** The kitchen was likely a separate structure. There is a crawl space under the original house built during UGRR years--no tunnels found so far.

James E. was a very successful farmer and businessman and one of the largest landowners in Cass County. By 1853 he had over 1600 acres. **He built the Gothic Revival Carriage House across the street in the early 1850's, and there is substantial evidence that fugitive slaves, called "freedom seekers" were hidden there, making he and Sarah stationmasters on the Underground Railroad. It is claimed that over 1500 freedom seekers passed through this area from 1840-1860 and were helped on their way to freedom in Canada.**

James E. earned a great deal of money during the Civil War and spent a large sum remodeling his home. **"Second Empire" is a style that originated in France with Napoleon and is widely seen in Paris.** It was popular from 1860-1880 and adopted by wealthy Americans. **Around 1870, the tower with its distinctive mansard roof and double doors was added to the front of the house.** Decorative brackets were added under the eaves and a covered porch surrounded the front and east side of the home. **The house was enlarged to the north, adding the dining room, kitchen, and another parlor on the first floor; and four bedrooms on the second.** The windows in the living room and parlor were elongated, a bay installed in the living room and double arched windows upstairs, all features of "Second Empire" style. **A basement is under the addition.**

James E. created "Bonine Elk Park" east of the house, stocked with elk, deer and buffalo, that became a MDOT State Park. The Michigan Historic Marker now stands in Milo Barnes Park in Vandalia.

This 1870's Second Empire remodel and the Gothic Revival Carriage House make the Bonine property one of the most unique examples of Victorian Domestic architecture in Southwest MI and Northern IN.

The Underground Railroad Society of Cass County (URSCC) is restoring the Bonine House to the Second Empire remodel. We're fortunate that the interior is almost entirely original. We plan to strip or paint the trim, paint the walls and ceilings, and restore the floors. **We'll install a functioning kitchen so the downstairs can be used for events and community activities. The upstairs will tell the story of the UGRR in Cass County.**

The grounds will be landscaped with gardens, walkways, benches-- a lovely place for weddings and other events. The Carriage House will be restored as an Underground Railroad Station and period museum.

We hope you'll support our efforts by becoming a member of URSCC and Friend of the Bonine House, and donating as generously as you can. Please remember URSCC/Friends of the Bonine House in your charitable giving, memorials and planned giving. URSCC is tax deductible 501c3 non-profit organization. Thank you very much.

Go to www.urscc.org to learn more about the Bonine House and the UGRR in Cass County.