

## THE BONINE HOUSE AND RAINBOW FARM

From a presentation at the "Can we afford to preserve this house--Can we afford not to?" community gathering to decide the future of the Bonine House, April 29, 2008.

The legacy of the Bonine Mansion is freedom. The house carries in its bricks and mortar an important piece of the story of Cass County. It embodies what makes this area unique. It is a special place.

There is another chapter in the Bonine Mansion history. This house is the last home of Tom Crosslin and Rollie Rohm. Most of us know the story of Rainbow Farm and what happened there in September, 2001. No matter what your viewpoint, it was a terrible tragedy. The story of Rainbow Farm is also woven into the fabric of Cass County; and it too is about freedom.

Tom bought the mansion in 1999 and got to work. He hired local contractors with the intention of restoring the house. Quoting Dean Kuipers from his book *Burning Rainbow Farm*. "The radical history of Cass County was not lost on Tom after he settled there. Little Vandalia Michigan had been a remote outpost for resistance politics and church activism for over 150 years. Tom devoured stories about the Underground Railroad and was proud to buy into it when he bought the Bonine Mansion. This became part of his deep connection to Vandalia and his friendship with five-term mayor Sondra Mose-Ursery, who helped organize Vandalia's Underground Railroad Museum.

Tom Crosslin had plans. And as always, Tom's plans included this community.

Since 2001, the Bonine House has fallen to near ruin. If we don't stop the deterioration right now, we won't have another chance. The first step is preservation; and that's what we're talking about tonight--simply preserving it. We can decide what to do with it later. And preservation is possible, as you'll hear in a moment, but we need to act now.

So, it's up to us. Do we save the Bonine House, or do we not? Do we close the book on this symbol of our history? Or do we preserve it for our children and all to come, that they may know their story--and their legacy of freedom.