



***Octagon House Foundation, Inc.***

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## *Annual Meeting. . . .*

Happy Fall from the Octagon House Foundation to our members, volunteers, individuals, and business associates. We hope you have weathered the hot and dry summer and that this newsletter finds each of you well.

The Foundation will hold its annual meeting, Monday, October 28, 2019 at 6:00 pm at the Adwolfe Community Center. This yearly meeting, which is open to the public, is held to allow membership and give other interested parties an opportunity to ask questions about the progress of our restoration efforts, provide vital input, connect with others within the organization, and have the opportunity to become more actively involved. The Foundation NEEDS you. Join us, and bring a friend!

## *Restoration Efforts. . . .*

The Foundation has continued to be diligent in the goal of restoring the Octagon House and you may have seen the work taking place on the grounds surrounding the house. Many have questioned the need to cull the trees surrounding the property. The reason is twofold.

The first is the preparation for restoration of the lawn and gardens as interpreted by historical descriptions of family and visitors at the time. While these descriptions are often vague, we can decipher some detail as to how the front lawn of the house may have looked during the antebellum period. Unfortunately, construction of the home was completed only a short time before war ravaged the South, including life at the Octagon House. The turmoil and change brought by the war would have halted efforts for what may have been beautiful landscaping designed to compliment such a large and prestigious home. Ornamental gardens and manicured lawns took years to cultivate during this time period. We can assume there were plans for extensive landscaping due to a small gardener's house constructed to the north or left of the current front lawn. At this time, we have garnered that a mixture of dogwood, redbud, and cherry trees were interspersed with large shade trees. English roses, lilac, and other ornamentals were also present. While only one lilac remains today, our plan is to reintroduce period specific and native species back to the grounds in a manner that would have been comparable to gardening aesthetics of the day. We have already received a donation of red bud trees from members Alvin and Linda Crowder. We thank you for your generosity!

The second is the upcoming relocation of electric lines. The lines crossing the property are within mere feet of the house and hinder any exterior construction efforts. Appalachian Power (AEP) has agreed to move the lines, free of charge to the Foundation, if trees within the new right-of-way were removed. While a safety factor, this move will also be more visually pleasing to the front lawn area. Though still visible, the electric lines will no longer dominate the view from the front of the house. The Foundation would like to thank AEP for donating their time, equipment, and labor in this effort.



## *Moving forward. . . .*

Landscaping efforts have resulted in the most visual changes for the project, but work continues in our efforts to begin restoration of the house itself. The board has recently consulted with local architect William Huber of Marion and voted to retain his services.

Mr. Huber has vast knowledge and expertise in restoration of historic buildings. Locally, he has been involved in the restoration of the Lincoln Theater and The Henderson School of Music in Marion, among other projects. Restoration efforts of historic buildings must be specific, detailed, and in accordance with the National Parks Service guidelines if the project is to receive historic tax credits, which would be vital to our effort.

Architectural services, applications, and coordination of those with knowledge of historic building systems are necessary and will be the most expensive venture by the Foundation as of yet. Average cost for these services are estimated to be around \$20,000.00. They include architectural drawings, the application and submission to the National Park Services for tax credits, and initiation of a three-phase project plan.

The three phases include stabilization of structure (including removal and cataloging of original architectural details), selective demolition, a new roof and ultimately, full restoration. These phases must be completed within three years from initiation, with the third phase being “the ability to use the facility” and generating a self-sustaining income.

### *Your call to action. . .*

The restoration effort, thanks to your memberships, donations, and attendance at events has raised the funds for the pre-construction planning phase. Our efforts will now center on raising the funds for physical construction of the structure. A business plan has been in development that encompasses three fundamental elements—educational, self-sustainability, and total cost of the project. Once restored, the home and grounds will continue to operate by the self-sustainable business model that incorporates historical experiences and events, while also operating as a venue for private functions on a year round basis.

Educationally the house and grounds will be used to allow visitors to experience 1860’s life in southwest Virginia. All aspects of that time period will be portrayed either throughout the year or seasonally, encompassing social norms of the time from the enslaved population, the plantation owner’s family, and others who lived during that time.

In the near future, we will begin a capital campaign to raise funds for construction costs. This will require extensive efforts through mailings, contacts, and presentations to individuals and/or business to support this effort. Additionally, the Foundation will vigorously pursue grant funding and investors who may apply or have an interest in this type of project. Both will require detailed documentation and returns throughout the process.

Therefore, we **NEED YOUR HELP!**

Because the effort has broadened in outreach and requirements necessary for this type of project, the Board of Directors has established committees. Each committee will be chaired by a board member for specific purposes such as building and grounds, planning, grants, and finance, among others. Our board of directors is relatively small in number and the tasks required at this stage of growth outnumber the board members.

The committees will be introduced at the annual meeting. If you or someone you know would be interested in participating on a committee, bring them along. All help would be greatly appreciated and useful in seeing this project come to life!

### *History. . . .*

Benjamin Jackson, formerly of Marion, recently visited the Octagon House. Ben has passionately and extensively researched history of enslaved people. His knowledge of their lives and experiences is, without a doubt, a testimony to those who worked, lived, loved, and died under the ownership of others. His work will forever give a voice to those now gone, with little written history to explore.





Ben came to the Octagon House to see the “fingerprints” in the handmade brick. He was astounded to see more than a few. He described most brick plantation homes as having one or a few. He found many fingerprints which he described as the only remembrance a slave might have been able to leave during their lifetime.

Because this project encompasses ALL who lived at the Octagon House, plans are in the works for Ben to return to the area and provide a presentation that will give an insight into the enslaved peoples’ lives and experiences.

### *The Challenge. . . .*

New memberships and renewal memberships in the Foundation have slowed. Your continued presence through your membership fees, donations, and attendance at events have made possible the funds being used for architectural services, ground work, and other necessary expenses.

### **WE NEED YOU NOW MORE THAN EVER!**

We also issue you a challenge: Have a family member, friend, or coworker join the Foundation. You could buy them a membership for Christmas, their birthday, or as a gift just to say thank you. (We can even provide you with a gift card or gift certificate!) For information visit our FaceBook page, The Octagon House Foundation, our website at [www.smythoctagonhouse.org](http://www.smythoctagonhouse.org), or write to P.O. Box 1701, Marion, VA 24354

### *Upcoming events. . . .*

As always, we will continue to have events to support the restoration efforts. Bring your ideas for events to the annual meeting. We would love to hear your thoughts!

**November 9:** It’s hearty meal time—Beans and Cornbread or Hot Dog Supper! Come join us for a good ol’ Southern mountain meal at the Adwolfe Community Center 4:30-7:00 pm.



Enter to win one of two raffles. A winner will be chosen that evening from tickets purchased at the door for a turkey fryer. Give your family the taste of a deep fried turkey for Thanksgiving! They’re delicious! Tickets will also be on sale for the pair of Adirondack Chairs. Tickets may also be purchased at any time from a board member.



**December 6-8:** Marion Downtown Christmas Market. The Octagon House booth will be located in the Henderson School of Music along with many other vendors stretching from the Farmer’s Market up to the school.

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

It's easy to make donations on our web site: [www.smythoctagonhouse.com](http://www.smythoctagonhouse.com)!  
And check us out on FaceBook at <https://facebook.com/OctagonHouseFoundation>.