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## Downtown Oberlin Walking Tour of Civil War Monuments

### *Wilson Bruce Evans House*

#### *Main Tour*

#### First Church (The Meeting House)

Wilson Bruce Evans House

Chauncey Wack House

Harper's Ferry Memorial

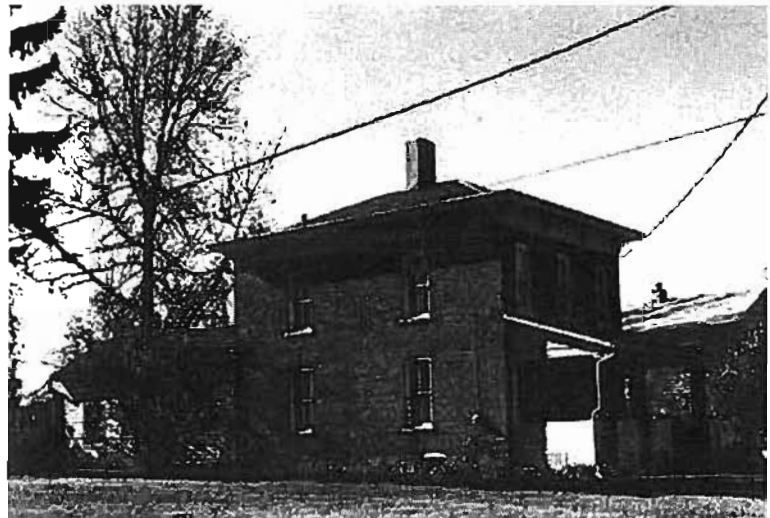
Oberlin-Wellington Rescue Monument

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Monument

Oberlin War Memorial

Giles Shurtleff Home and Statue

#### *Extended Tour*



Courtesy of Geoffrey Blodgett

### **Wilson Bruce Evans House, 33 East Vine Street**

Wilson Bruce Evans (1824-1898), an African American carpenter and furniture maker, built this red brick, hipped roof, home in 1854-56, shortly after he and his brother Henry arrived from North Carolina. The house, still standing on Vine Street, is representative of the vibrant African-American community in Oberlin.

Born free in Orange County, North Carolina, the Evans brothers learned their trades as young men and married two sisters, Henrietta (who married Henry c. 1844) and Sarah Jane (who married Wilson Bruce in 1854) Leary, also free-born African Americans. After the families moved north together in 1854, the brothers established a cabinet shop and later a store. They were part of a growing African American presence that numbered 442 persons in a total population of 2,114 in Oberlin by 1860.

Both Evans brothers participated in the Oberlin-Wellington Rescue in 1858. This incident began when John Price, a fugitive slave residing in Oberlin, was captured by slavecatchers who took him to Wellington, the town south of Oberlin, for transport via railroad to Kentucky. Oberlin residents and students, black and white, intervened to rescue Price, who was then secretly transported to Canada. As a result, 37 Oberlinians, including the Evans brothers, faced indictment for breaking the Fugitive Slave Law. Jailed in Cleveland while awaiting trial, the Oberlin-Wellington Rescuers were hailed as martyrs for the abolitionist cause. Wilson Bruce Evans and his brother spent 84 days in jail until prosecutors in Lorain County agreed to halt proceedings against the slavecatchers in exchange for the dropping of charges against the rescuers.

During the Civil War, Wilson Bruce Evans passed as white to enlist in an all-white unit of the Union Army. After the war, he returned to Oberlin, where he continued his work. He died in 1898.

The Wilson Bruce Evans house remains under family ownership. Until November 1996, the house was owned by Dorothy Inborden Miller, the granddaughter of Wilson Bruce Evans by his daughter Sarah and her husband Thomas Sewell Inborden. At her death, the home passed to Mrs. Frances Kent, the niece of Mrs. Miller.

On Tuesday, April 7, 1998, Bruce Babbitt, the United States Secretary of the Interior, and the Oberlin Historical and Improvement Association will celebrate the designation of the Wilson Bruce Evans House as a National Historic Landmark.

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