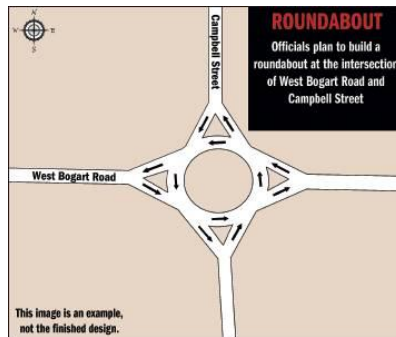


BYE-BYE TO 'THE BRICK HOUSE'

Structure to be demolished to make way for roundabout

April 4, 2018 By ANDY OURIEL



A structure known as “The Brick House” at the corner of West Bogart Road and Campbell Street in Perkins Township is slated to be demolished in the coming days to make way for a roundabout traffic device at this intersection. Supporters for preserving the house include, from left, Rick Scheel, Edwin Roll Jr., Bonnie Roll, Debbi Miller and Nancy Glass.
Register photo/ ERIN McLAUGHLIN

Register graphic/BRI HALLER

Register photo/ERIN McLAUGHLIN
A truck turns left onto West Bogart Road off Campbell Street in Perkins Township

PERKINS TWP.

Edwin Roll Jr. remembers herding up ponies, which enjoyed galloping around the premises, for trips to Cedar Point, where amusement park guests would ride them. Nancy (Rupp) Glass recalls the massive grassy area near farmland as a popular gathering spot for neighborhood kids to play football, run around and simply enjoy each other’s company. Debbi Miller, through her research, recognizes the 116-year-old structure as Perkins Township’s first grocery and dairy. And thousands of community members identify with “The Brick House” as a local landmark, doubling as a helpful navigational tool for when cars should turn on Campbell Street from West Bogart Road or vice versa. Almost everyone who’s either lived or traveled through Erie County is familiar with the 2-plus-story tall structure, which won’t stand for too many more days. But few know the backstory.

History lesson

Built in 1902, the building served multiple purposes. First and foremost, it acted as a home for spouses Peter and Catherine (Windau) Smith. All told, five generations lived there over an eight-decade period. Peter became familiar with the property when working on nearby farmland, formerly referred to as Columbus Pike. “He worked hard clearing the land of trees, since much of Perkins Township was wilderness in the 1800s,” said Miller, a Castalia resident who is one of Peter’s great-granddaughters. “He saved the best wood from those trees to build his dream home.”

In February 1899, Peter and Catherine bought 1 acre of property from Joseph and Lydia Puckrin for \$500, considered “a large sum” back then, Miller said. “It took Peter a few years to finish the house,” Miller said. “He decided to build a brick house. The fact that his father was a very skilled stonemason may have influenced his decision. Peter used the wood he had cut down and saved to frame and trim the house, including the beams, doors, windows, stairs and oak flooring. He truly built his dream home.” To support themselves and their seven children, Peter and Catherine owned and operated a grocery, located beneath the residential living quarters. “While growing up in Perkins Township, Peter decided that someday he would open a general store since his family and neighbors had to travel all the way into Sandusky to buy their supplies,” Miller said. “When he set the foundation for his house, it was placed near the road, current Campbell Street, so horses and wagons could pull up to the front door, and people could load their supplies.”

Family members tended to a large garden, which provided produce for the grocery. Peter also built a barn on his property to house dairy cows. Historians credit Smith with opening the township’s first dairy, called P.E. Smith Dairy. Milk quickly became a popular item for customers to purchase at the store. “The teenaged children delivered cans of milk by horse-drawn wagon on the delivery route before going to school each day,” Miller said. When they grew older, Peter and Catherine built a smaller home on Fifth Street in Sandusky. It’s there where both Peter, in 1931 at 80, and Catherine, in 1938 at 81, both died. Their direct descendants, however, still occupied the “The Brick House” up until the 1980s. At the time, a

couple bought the house with intentions to revamp it. “The wife became ill, and the house was never fully restored,” said Miller, adding it’s been uninhabited now for at least 30 years.

A date for demolition

Miller discovered the house’s storied history about two years ago, coinciding with when she learned about some disturbing news during a dentist appointment. At Stefano Dental, located a stone’s throw from “The Brick House,” she found out about an Erie County engineer’s office-led plan to demolish the home for a roundabout traffic device at the intersection on Campbell Street and West Bogart Road. “I was shocked,” said Miller, who added Stefano Dental uses this house as a place to store records. The business must soon find a new location to keep these files.

In short, the house sits too close to Campbell Street, and crews must tear it down to make way for a roundabout, which was first announced in 2015. “At the time, I started working with the records and the Erie County engineer’s office and Perkins Township, asking if there was anything we could do to stop the demolition,” Miller said. “Sadly, by that time, things were too far along.”

The razing-related job could start within days. “Demolition of the brick house is expected to begin (this week),” Erie County project engineer Mike Farrell said. “This work might not be noticeable immediately as there is some internal removal work to be performed on the structure.” Through eminent domain — which allows a government to acquire private property for public use — county officials acquired the house and land. A court-supervised process continues with its previous owner, Perkins Professional Centre, for a fair compensation agreement.

Before the house comes crashing down, Miller invited Glass and Roll, who are also direct descendants of Smith, for one final visit. Along with Roll’s wife, Bonnie, and Rick Scheel, a representative of the Erie County Historical Society, they took one last look around Tuesday morning. Walking around the property, family members couldn’t help but to reminisce. “This was a great place where children would come and play,” said Glass, who lived at the house from 1954 through 1984. “It’s sad to see anything of historical value, especially this, go. I have so many great memories living here. My entire life growing up happened at this house.”

Added Edwin, who resided there from 1939 up until 1955: “I remember riding a pony to deliver newspapers down Schenk Road. We also raised ponies here, and we took them to Cedar Point each year.”

Miller essentially exhausted all opportunities to save the house. Unfortunately for her and others, no such feasible option exists. For instance, with a crane, picking up and dropping the house a few dozen feet away from the road costs about \$70,000. “Up until March 15, our plan was to get the house moved, and everything just fell apart,” she said. “Now it just becomes a salvage effort.” The house should remain in its current configuration and location, Scheel said. “Preservation is our goal, and this house is certainly a part of Erie County’s history,” Scheel said. “Take yourself back 120 years. Everything around here was basically the wilderness and farmers. These people made a living for themselves by providing supplies to people. It shouldn’t be demolished.” When asked for their opinions on the roundabout, their emotions soured, turning from a feeling of remorse to repulsed. “It’s stupid,” Edwin said. “What’s the actual proof that they need one there? A stoplight would simply take care of the traffic.”

The other four standing around Edwin pretty much smiled, nodded and agreed with his sentiments. “I started working with the records and the Erie County engineer’s office and Perkins Township, asking if there was anything we could do to stop the demolition.”
Debbi Miller