## OHIO HISTORIC INVENTORY

### Wilson Bruce Evans House

#### Location of Negatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Roll #</th>
<th>Exp. #</th>
<th>Facing</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Front</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rear</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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#### Historic or Other Name(s)

Wilson Bruce Evans House

### Date(s) or Period

1856

### Style or Design

High Style

### Original Use, if apparent

Residential

### No. of Stories

2

### Ownership

Public

### Property Acreage

.417

#### History and Significance

Wilson Bruce and Henry Evans built this house in 1854-56 for Wilson Bruce’s family. The brothers were born free blacks in Orange County, North Carolina where they learned the trades of cabinetmaking and millwork. The two brothers married two free born sisters, Henrietta (Henry) and Sarah Jane Leary (Wilson Bruce). The two couples left North Carolina in 1854 as the legal constraints on free blacks tightened after passage of the Fugitive Slave Act. After a three month journey, they arrived in Oberlin and the brothers set up shop as cabinetmakers and upholsterers, (cont.)

### Description of Environment and Outbuildings

This three bay, two-story side hallway home has its entrance located on the far west side. The entrance has its original wooden double doors with an arched transom light. The rear kitchen wing has painted wood shingle siding and small one over one double hung windows. All of the original millwork, made and installed by Wilson Bruce Evans and his brother, still can be found on the interior. The front porch, probably added to the house circa 1920, is made of wood supported by brick pillars. The only non-historic fabrication exhibited on the exterior is vinyl siding between the porch posts and concrete steps, which provide access to the porch. There is a wood frame two-story (cont.)

### Further Description of Important Interior and Exterior Features

This street is perpendicular to South Main near what was, until the 1940s, a busy commercial and industrial intersection. Planning mills, lumberyards and other similar businesses dominated the area. Today the businesses are gone; the north side of the street is a public park bordered on the north by Plum Creek. On the south side of street, the historic 19th century integrity is threatened by alterations.

### Sources of Information

Lorain County Courthouse: Lorain County tax records. Oberlin Public Library: Oberlin City Directories. O.H.I.O. Resource Center: Oberlin Historic Preservation Commission Files; Oberlin City Directories; National Historic Landmark Nomination. Oberlin College Library Special Collections: Oberlin City Directories.
addition with gable roof at the rear exposure.

first on East Mill (now Vine) Street and then on South Main, in the former Walton Hall. The brothers moved their building to East Mill where it burned in 1864. East Mill Street was, in the 19th century, the home of many of Oberlin’s prominent African Americans. Evans’ brother-in-law, Lewis Sheridan Leary, participated in John Brown’s 1859 raid at Harper’s Ferry. A monument dedicated to John Brown’s Oberlin allies stands across Vine Street. During the Civil War, Wilson Bruce enlisted in an all white unit of the Union Army. He mustered out of the Army in June 1865 and died in September 1898, five months after his wife. After Wilson Bruce and Sarah Jane Evans’ deaths in 1898, Mrs. Mary J. Blake and C.B. Evans occupied the house in 1899; in 1902 a Mrs. Sarah Lewis joined them. These names continue to appear in city directories with the additional names of Mrs. Mattie Sheldon in 1908 and 1910; and Miss Ophelia Pettiford and Mrs. G. Grayson in 1910. In 1914 C.E. Evans, a painter, and in 1920 Cornelius Evans, a laborer, were identified as occupants. Then in 1916 C.B. Evans, Mrs. Laura Grayson, Mrs. Celia Scott, and Lucinda Valentine were listed as occupants. In 1922 Mrs. Olive Young was sole occupant. In 1931 and 1933 a baker, Arthur J. Pettiford, was sole occupant (City Directories). The Pettiford family had the only African-American owned bakery on South Main Street in downtown Oberlin from the 1920s into the 1980s. Later occupants included Mrs. Mattie Burwell, in 1942; Blanche Payne in 1956; and Dorothy Miller, a teacher, and Harry Hawkins, a factory worker, in 1961. The house is currently owned by descendants of the original owners and unoccupied.

The Evans House is significant for its association with a family active in abolition, black franchise and education, and known for their skilled craftsmanship, and for its association with an important African-American business family. It has significant architectural integrity. Evans House was listed by the City of Oberlin as an Oberlin Historic Landmark in September of 1975. The Evans House was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1997. In April of 1998 a community celebration was held to honor this designation and Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt spoke at the event.