

Partnership between PTP and the Friends of Keyser-Swain Farmhouse

In February of 2021, The City of Cuyahoga Falls announced the condemnation and future destruction of the historic Keyser-Swain Farmhouse in Cuyahoga Falls, located in Keyser Park. The City wanted to raze the home to build a new state of the art event center in its place as a part of the Cuyahoga Falls Park and Recreation 2021 Continuous Improvement Plan. The historic home had been neglected by its owner, the City of Cuyahoga Falls, since the 1990s. After numerous efforts and many years of the Northampton Historical Society trying to work with the City of Cuyahoga Falls and the Parks & Recreation Department, a new group called Friends of Keyser-Swain Farmhouse (FOKSF) was formed by Cuyahoga Falls residents, Sarah Deitrick and Beth Kinney, as a last-ditch effort to save the farmhouse. The objective of Friends of Keyser-Swain Farmhouse was to propose a solutions-oriented compromise plan with the City of Cuyahoga Falls to achieve historic preservation while promoting civic progress and partnership for community enrichment.

The Keyser-Swain Farmhouse: A Brief History

Built in 1877 and located in old Northampton Township, the Keyser-Swain Farmhouse is a significant, widely recognized historical asset in the community. Its foundation dates back to sometime between 1836-1840 and, by 1850, the Best family members were occupying the 16x 24 1 1/2 story frame house. John Best, his wife Rebecca and their 8 children (at that time; there were 10 total later on) were well known members of the community. Two of their sons were Civil War veterans (William and John H. Best). The Best family ran their farm from the 1850s-1870s. J.C. Johnson was the architect responsible for the construction of the farmhouse as we know it today. It is a vernacular style farmhouse with Eastlake and Italianate characteristics. Mr. Johnson built many of the buildings in Northampton during this period, including the 1877 Keyser-Swain Farmhouse, Northampton Center School, the Methodist Church, and also the Town Hall. Johnson was an amateur balloonist, and also served his community as town clerk in 1885. The farm changed hands several more times, but by 1905 Alva and Leona Keyser purchased the farm from the Wiolland family (Charles and Mary) who bought it from the McCuskey family (Andrew and Kate) in 1894. The Keyzers worked the farm for over 50 years and defined the property boundaries as we know it today. Their daughter, Carrie Keyser-Swain and her husband, Fred, inherited the farm and house after Carrie's parents died in 1956. By this time, Carrie and her husband had retired from their jobs and had no children. They were able to focus on improving the farmhouse and did so over the next 20 years. Carrie deeply loved her family farm. She was a prominent, public servant in the community, involved in multiple groups, a founding member of the Northampton Historical Society, and a passionate historic preservationist. It was no secret that she wanted her family's land, the barn and farmhouse to be utilized for community and family recreation while keeping history alive for generations to come. Carrie is our SHERO. Here is a list of some of her contributions:

- Chairwoman on the Northampton United Fund Drive in 1960



- Member of the Northampton Hill and Vale Garden Club
- 2nd VP of Cuyahoga Falls Business and Professional Women's Club
- Founding member and at one time president of the Northampton Historical Society.
- Led the restoration of the Botzum Cemetery on Yellow Creek Road
- Led the 1975 drive to buy the old Center School, so well-known to the Keyzers, and had it moved to the Keyser property that belonged to the town. There it was restored into a schoolhouse museum for all to enjoy. Sadly, in July 1992 a tornado destroyed the Center School building and it no longer stands,

Sarah Deitrick and Beth Kinney began the “Save the Keyser-Swain Farmhouse” campaign in April of 2021. In a short period of time, they gained impressive momentum that included a successful petition of over 700 signatures, over \$6,000 in restoration donation pledges, nomination as one of Ohio’s Top 10 Most Endangered Historic Places, and significant community awareness to save this historic landmark home.

FOKSF engaged in two meetings with City officials in an effort to convince them to allow the advocacy group to raise funds to save the farmhouse and develop adaptive reuse options. Sarah and Beth joined Progress Through Preservation (PTP) of Greater Akron to bring further awareness to their cause. An idea was developed to try and convince the City to partner FOKSF and PTP to preserve and repurpose Keyser-Swain Farmhouse. PTP would act as the legal entity and fiscal agent for a license agreement with City of Cuyahoga Falls. FOKSF requested to form a subcommittee under the umbrella of PTP, which the Board unanimously approved in September 2021. After a meeting with Cuyahoga Falls Mayor Don Walters in that same month, FOKSF and PTP presented a 33 page document containing a detailed restoration timeline for the farmhouse, a new concept for dubbed “Old Northampton Historic District in Keyser Park,” as well as site plan to repurpose the Keyser-Swain Farmhouse, the Keyser Barn (and a generous portion of Keyser Park) into an income producing event space that the City desired. After this meeting, it was decided by the City that they would not tear down the Keyser-Swain Farmhouse. This was most excellent news and ultimately the end goal to preserve this piece of history was achieved. Although the City of Cuyahoga Falls has not officially engaged in the restoration project with FOKSF and PTP, at this time they are taking the financial responsibility of repairing the farmhouse. The City of Cuyahoga Falls announced an exterior restoration will begin in late 2021/early 2022 to preserve the structural integrity, at the same time they will be making improvements to the historic Northampton Townhall. Sarah and Beth made a public statement at the October 11 City Council meeting to make it known the FOKSF and PTP stand ready to assist in any way as the project moves forward.

The partnership between Friends of Keyser-Swain Farmhouse and Progress Through Preservation (PTP) of Greater Akron is an shining example of how two organizations can combine resources to advocate and save at-risk historic properties in Summit County.