Will They Be Saved or Lost Forever?

The Sawyer House on Mentor Avenue and the Eber Howe / Drake House on Fay Road are two of Lake County's iconic homes. Both are extremely important to our county’s history and sadly both may be lost to a wrecking ball in 2019. Historical preservation is no longer a valued commodity. Collecting memories, mostly from family collections or photos that need to be seen as well as stories and documents that need to be published / archived are becoming increasingly lost in the snippets of today's social media explosion. Research, publishing, archiving are vanishing from the shelves of current society. Historic homesteads are now routinely bulldozed into oblivion. How much or how little do you know about either home mentioned above?

Eber Howe House at Liberty Hollow (6735 Fay Road) -
Eber D. Howe (1798-1885) emigrated from New York, by way of Erie, Pa. to Cleveland in 1819. A participant in the War of 1812, his early post war years saw him become a journalist for the Buffalo Gazette and Erie Gazette. In 1819 and only 21, he started the Cleveland Herald, a newspaper he himself delivered weekly to Painesville. His inaugural edition denounced American slavery and became a lasting platform for his editorial career and beyond. In 1822, Howe moved east to Painesville, Ohio, had a friend Jonathan Goldsmith design him a home, and founded the Painesville Telegraph. It was the fourth newspaper to be established in the Western Reserve and had 150 subscribers. Howe, a staunch Whig, railed continuously against Slavery, Masons, and Mormonism. Howe also used his paper to promote road, canal, and railroad growth in Lake County. Howe continued to expand the Telegraph until 1836, when he sold it to his brother Asahel. The Painesville Telegraph which began in 1822 ended its daily run in 1986.

Eber D. Howe lived in a home on Mentor Avenue in Painesville. While there, he began to harbor refugee slaves. In 1838, he moved his family to the 'Hollow' in Concord. Again, the runaway slaves were sent to Howe. Throughout the 1840's and 50's, "Howe's Hollow" became known as "Liberty Hollow" and history has recognized it as a stop on the Underground Railroad. Howe moved away in 1856, but the 'Hollow' continued to operate under the auspices of Hawley Drake.

"Liberty Hollow" and the Eber Howe House in the Big Creek Valley continued to play a part in Lake County industrial and social history for generations. Many notable Lake County residents owned the 30'x50' house after the Drakes (1907). Some changes and additions were made by the Zorn's and Judge Hayer. Since 1998 the home and surrounding 63+ acres have become a part of the Lake Metroparks holdings.

Sawyer House (9470 Mentor Avenue) -
This Western Reserve Style stone structure was the home of Daniel Sawyer. Daniel was the son of early pioneers Benjamin and Polly Sawyer. The home’s Federal Style architecture dates back to 1843 although records indicate the first grist mill appeared there circa 1810. Daniel and his brother Joseph farmed on the property till 1923. Joseph’s farm was called Twin Maples. In 1920 Jan Jacob Grulemans and nurseryman
Elmer Schultz acquired the Daniel Sawyer property. Holland plants and the patented 1922 Regal Lily made their Wayside Gardens known worldwide. Their contributions along with some other county nurserymen put the Mentor area on the map and soon heralded as the Rose Capital of the World. Over time the Wayside Gardens moniker was sold to Park Seed in South Carolina. The farm has changed hands many times since the 70s as engineering firms and local restaurants have occupied the majestic stone home. Joseph Sawyer’s original home built in part with the help of Jonathan Goldsmith on the corner of Mentor Avenue and Chillicothe Road was moved in the 60s. It remains today as a private home and may be found on Forsyth Lane. Sadly, Daniel’s home may soon become only a memory and replaced by a medical park facility. Efforts to save or relocate the historic home down the road to Mentor’s newly acquired park property have produced little real dialogue or preservation commitment.

Remember there are only two choices: Let our county history be lost forever or help save our heritage home history for future generations. Contact your local elected Mentor officials or county park commissioners to express your desire to preserve these priceless artifacts. Better yet offer ideas to repurpose these sites for educational purposes or collaborative uses with local non-profit societies. Perhaps a creative use grant or corporate sponsor will step forward in 2019 with a monetary infusion to continue what has been done by those who came before us- Help Save Our History!

* Sawyer source L. Vandevort article, LCHS October 2017 article

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