

A Remarkable Turnpike Tract Survivor

PART ONE is the Story of the Isaac Burnham House and its 14 owners through 131 years as told by its owner for 38 of those years, music educator David Osburn. PART TWO of this Article contains a complete description of the property that was part of the materials made available to prospective buyers and info specific to restoration options.

PART ONE

The story begins just before 1800 when the “*Music Adventures*” land was part of the the 200,000 acres Gideon Granger owned for his \$80,000 investment in the Connecticut Land Company that established the Connecticut Western Reserve in Northern Ohio. For more than 100 years, Gideon and his heirs sold those acres to many hundreds of people and profited greatly. The Grangers rarely inhabited their part of the “Western Reserve.” It was strictly an investment and a large portion of the 200,000 acres they sold were from deeds created by a Justice of the Peace not in Ohio, but in Canandaigua, New York where Gideon Granger had repaired after falling out with the leaders of our country following the Jefferson presidency where he had been Postmaster General. He had no interest in living the rest of his life in Connecticut and chose rural New York instead. He had paid forty cents an acre for his 200,000 Ohio acres and if that seems like a “steal,” it was. Even today, that forty cents would be only about \$11 per acre but it sure brought people and expansion and it worked! He typically sold his acres for as much as a 4,000% gain and more. His name is on at least 180 early deeds here in Ohio. His sons and heirs are on more than 400 deeds spanning the entire 19th century. They made millions and millions over the years.

Briefly, the “Music Adventures land” went from Francis Granger to Kilby Doty in 1850, then to Samuel Lyon to Isaac Taylor to Isaac Burnham in 1865.

The actual home was built by Isaac Burnham and his family in 1885. Therefore, I call it the **Isaac Burnham House**. I do that reflecting on the fact that my wife is the great-great-granddaughter of **Phillip and Sophia Henninger** whose famous house is named the **Henninger House**. Located near the corner of Snow and Broadview in Parma it recently has been saved from demolition and commercial development by many persons, including the City of Parma, who are interested in preserving such history. Nearly \$500,000 was raised to buy the Henninger House even after demolition permits had been issued and in terms of “location,” it is fair to say that the **Burnham House** on famous Wooster Pike when it was still a dirt road has something of an “edge” on the **Henninger House** which then was decidedly “out of the way.” The Henninger House survived because it stayed in the Henninger Family for about 150 years. The Burnham House has survived through eleven owners spanning 107 years **since** it “left” the Burnham family!

It is worth noting that the City of Parma has taken a strong and financial interest in preservation of its historic buildings, notably the Henninger House while the City of Middleburg Heights abandoned and sold off the famous District 10 Schoolhouse many years ago and the Mayor has repeatedly vigorously criticized it. Of course, the City’s animus toward any restoration of the Isaac Burnham House is well told in the earlier portion of this document.

Isaac Burnham and his wife Lucina Meacham were raised and married in Parma Township.

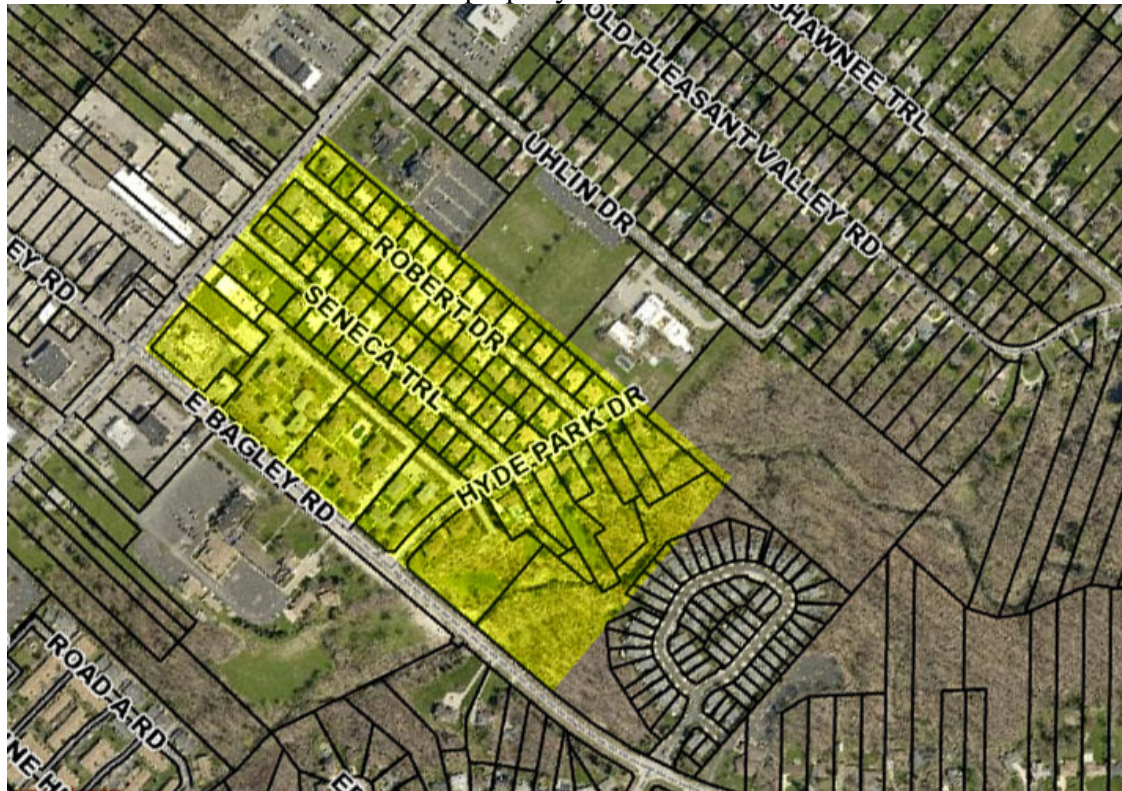
His father also named Isaac (b. 1793 d. 1851), was a **Trustee of Parma Township** in 1845 and was acquainted with **Phillip Henninger** who was also a Trustee in 1948 and other years.

His father, also named Isaac (b. 1768 in New York d. 1841 m. Artemisia) is buried in Parma Cemetery and he was a Revolutionary War soldier.

Isaac (b. 1829) who built the Burnham House had five siblings. He purchased their interest in their father's Parma Township property and sold that property to buy 62.5 acres in Middleburgh Township in 1865. Isaac is buried at Woodvale as are many other Burnhams, Rodds, and Werners.

Indeed, to show how the Burnham lineage has remained in the area, **Walter F. Werner**, buried in Woodvale, died just last year in October 2015. He was the great-great grandson of Isaac and Lucina Burnham (Isaac>Eugene>Mabel Burnham Rodd>Dorothy Rodd Werner>Walter Werner).

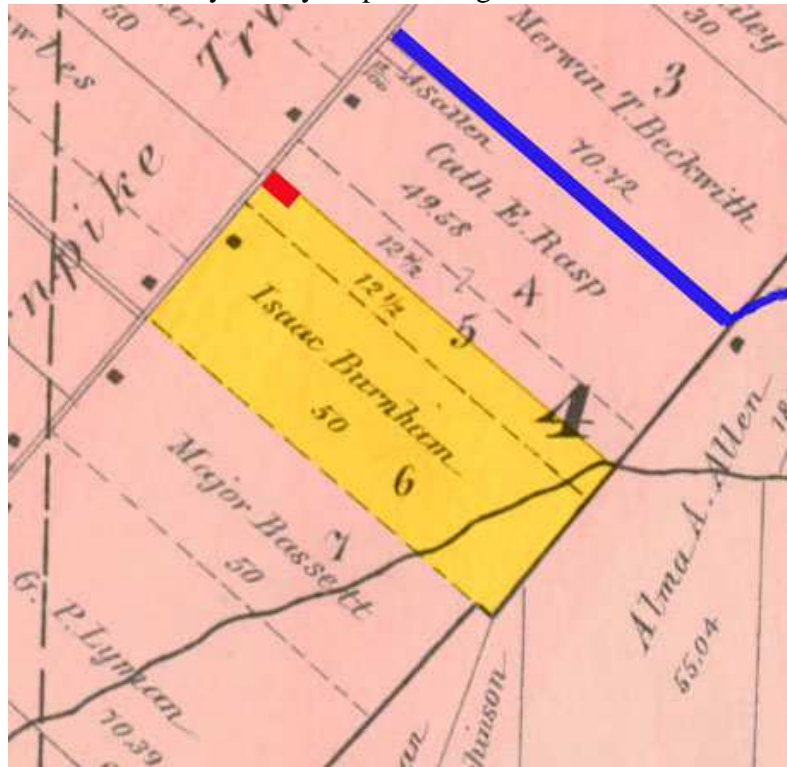
This shows the area of the Burnham property



This was some *Fun With Photoshop* but definitely could have been



This is an early county map showing Burnham's 62.5 acres



The road above that runs through the “P” in “Turnpike” is Bagley road which ended at Wooster Pike and as both images show, the southwesterly property line was where E. Bagley road is now. It was not there until long after 1892!

The Burnham Wooster Pike frontage was 62.5 rods or 1,031.5 feet. The depth of the Burnham property was half a mile (160 rods) and reached back over Baldwin Creek. The home shown just above the word Isaac appears on earlier maps when Kilby Doty owned the property he purchased from Granger, who was, of course, selling vacant land, so, the home would have been built by Doty and since it was only 15 years old when the Burnhams bought the property, they would have lived in it too for 29 years raising two boys until, in 1885, they built the **Burnham House** when those boys (Clifford and Eugene) were 22 and 34 years old and more than able to assist.

The blue road is highlighted since it was referred to as the “Schutts road, so called” in some deeds. It allowed property owners without Wooster Pike frontage to reach their lands. George and Eleanor Schutts and their daughter Alma Schutts Allen (m. Abner) owned that backland. The “Schutts road, so called” eventually became (Old) Pleasant Valley road. The Schutts and Allen families are also buried in Woodvale.

As for the little red section above, observe that it is located in a far corner of the entire 62.5 acres but the house the Burnhams had lived in was located in the very center of that land's Wooster Pike frontage. The red section is where the 1885 house was built and it seems **there was a most interesting plan in doing it.**

Just nine years after the house was built, and barely a year or so after Wooster Pike had been completed as the **first brick rural road in America** (which made the properties fronting it

even more valuable), *Isaac Burnham did something else very interesting*. It seems he and his son planned to profit from selling off his 62.5 acres but he had no intention of letting such a fine house go with it. So, **he created a special parcel of exactly one acre that included the Burnham House** and in 1895 sold it to his son, Eugene. That **single acre** is represented by the red rectangle above and here is the deed language

...known as being one acre of land off the northwest corner of Turnpike lot number Five in Tract Number Four lying easterly of the turnpike...the one acre of land hereby conveyed begins and has a frontage of eight rods at the center line of the Turnpike and extends easterly the distance of twenty rods of equal width

Eugene lived in it for fourteen more years and after Lucina died in 1898, Isaac may have lived there with his son but Isaac also bought property in Berea in 1901 where he apparently retired. At the time of that 1895 “one acre subdivision” Eugene had a son, Raymond, age 5, who would die at age 10 and a daughter Mabel, age 8, who would marry Walter Rodd and died in 1938.

So, Isaac deliberately saved that **one acre and the house that still stands on it** from being sold with his other lands. It was an unique effort to make money off his property but keep his house in the family and even after Eugene sold it in 1909 after Isaac’s death in 1908, there would be **eleven more separate owners of the home including a bank and a land developer** spanning 121 years to the present.

As the land was sold and resold, deeds often included the phrase “*excepting one acre conveyed by Isaac Burnham to Eugene H. Burnham by deed dated October 18, 1895.*”

As noted, after Isaac died in 1908 Eugene sold the one-acre-with-house in 1909. It went to Albert Hileman who had acquired land surrounding it. Hileman “reconnected” the house and one acre with two other parcels to create a 16 acre plot with 2,640 feet of depth and 264 feet of Wooster Pike Frontage. The house became the residence for these sixteen acres and the following owners were **Vincent Elias** in 1913, **Alexander Rozman** in 1914, **Wesley Lehman** also in 1914, and **Charles Gohr** in 1918 who kept the property and the home going for 16 years through the Depression. The Depression apparently got the better of him because the 16 acres was sold to **Cleveland Trust Co.** (then Ohio’s largest bank which became Society Bank is now Key Bank) in 1934 in a Sheriff’s sale to cover Gohr’s debts.

Then in 1938, **another amazing thing happened**. **William and Marian Doraty**, who had been living on Archwood in Cleveland after starting their West 25th Street dealership a year or two earlier, bought the sixteen acres and the house from Cleveland Trust. The Doratys obviously took a liking to it and poured plenty of money into remodeling it impressively. Their work on the house is described in detail below.

Needless to say, as we know now, the Doraty auto business did well but they also lived in the home for six years! They sold in 1944 to one Charles Viets who lived there for nine years and in 1953, Viets sold to Sam Uhlin and Otto Psenicka who were developing all of the various large acreages on the easterly side of Pearl Road into small lots for entirely ranch-style homes called **South Park**.

With hundreds of new ranch homes planned, Uhlin and Psenicka had good reason to think the Burnham House, then almost 70 years old, might have reached the end of its life. They owned it and all of the land surrounding it outright. They were wiping out all the old deeds

and creating new, small lot sizes for their new homes. And they certainly had no problems knowing how to build a replacement for the Burnham House. The 16 acres that had belonged to the house for 40 years became less than a third of an acre with only 121 feet of Pearl Road frontage (115 ft. deep) to match the sizes of the residential lots on Robert Drive. But the **Burnham House stayed** and the developers sold it to the **Weiser** family in 1956 with a deed mentioning Robert Drive “**proposed.**” In 1960, after the Robert Drive homes had been built, Uhlin and Psenicka sold an undeveloped Robert Drive lot to Weiser expanding its 115 foot depth from Pearl to the 200 foot depth it has today (.556 acres).

The **Weisers** seem to have enjoyed the house. They bought it 18 years after it was improved by the Doratys and the Weisers lived in it for 22 years—the longest period of single ownership since 1885 when it was first built. I purchased it in 1978 and remodeled and revived it yet again (with considerable praise from city officials at the time) and now in 2016, I am the record holder for occupancy—38 straight years, or 30% of its 131 year life and I have really loved every minute of it.

So, the unique creation of a special one acre parcel for his 1886 house in the corner of 62.5 acres seems to have been a brilliant move just nine years later by Isaac Burnham and son Eugene to keep the home they loved, and prosper from selling frontage on the coming brick Wooster Pike in a way similar to the way a new Interstate interchange spikes property values. The brick road construction began in 1893 to be completed in 1896 and in 1895, that one acre parcel was created and by 1905, the Burnhams were selling off other properties to owners like Clarence Foster, John Graff, Albert Hileman and Herman Flandermeyer.

Clearly, as at least three dozen other similar homes all along Wooster Pike/Pearl Road in Middleburg were disappearing, it is amazing that this **Isaac Burnham House** went through **48 years on 16 acres** after the Burnhams were gone and then another **63 years on a half acre (.556)** to the present.

There can be no doubt, even when looking at the interior of the building now, that the impressive remodeling work of the Doraty family when the house was barely more than a half century old is what saved it. Even with plenty of money to do other things, the Doratys saw something in it to revitalize in 1938 and the Viets and Weiser families after that found reason to enjoy the house without changing it for 34 more years, and then I found reason to keep most of the Doraty work for another 38 years while also creating a worthy music education facility with its own distinction featuring a fully restored Holtkamp pipe organ dating from 1913 & restored and modernized in 1942 and 1974..

There are a few structures older than 1885 scattered about. The 1853 “George Haag Home” is actually in the same “neighborhood” as the Isaac Burnham House (Section 4 of the Township) and located just about 2,500 feet from the back line of the old Burnham land. Although accessed from West 130th now, the only way to reach the Haag home in the Burnham days was on the “Schutts road” from Wooster Pike which became Pleasant Valley Road. Aside from the Haag home, the Isaac Burnham House is the only other vintage building in Middleburg Heights that stands out, especially in so many “secret” and, until now, undiscovered ways.

PART TWO WHY RESTORATION MAKES SENSE

- was long a farmhouse, **built in 1885**
- is the **oldest structure on Pearl Road for miles in two directions**
- is a much finer home and history than the few others in City with older dates
- has a foundation of **Baldwin quarries sandstone**
- has original solid oak framing and full 2 inch by 4 inch 2x4s
- is **27 years older than the District 10 Schoolhouse**
- has historically important **Wooster Pike address when it was dirt!**
- allowed Burnhams to watch the **first rural red brick road in America** being built
- was owned by the Doraty auto family for six years
- benefited from their **stunning improvements but maintained farmhouse appeal**
- has **six** good rooms for activities, displays, programs, events
- has two huge rooms about 15x30 ft. each
- has three other smaller rooms
- has another room that was and can be a small kitchen
- has plenty of golden oak floors
- has all **copper** water line and all **PVC** gas line
- has 6000 square feet of parking space with drainage
- has fine set of **8 foot tall built in audio speakers** in corners of the main room
- comes with a **nice old upright piano** in good condition
- has excellent condition wall-to-wall carpeting over oak floor in main room

OBSERVATIONS

- After my own 38 years I remain amazed at how solid everything is. You would think some kind of awkward settling would have occurred after 131 years but walls remain perfect.
- The undivided open space of the main room (400 square feet) with its remarkable low sill windows always impresses me. I know it can look very good on the outside because I have had it looking good in the past.
- The fireplace has always been an asset and I had a history of having a fire, later in a woodstove insert, every day in the winter.
- I have always wanted to convert the siding from white to slate blue with beige shutters but that requires a major sanding preparation to keep decades of white from protruding and being a problem.
- The way the building is wide open to views from Pearl Road is perfect for signs and its appearance makes for a huge constantly seen virtual billboard.

Here Are Useful Facts What the Doratys Did

While preserving the “farmhouse look” they also modernized it in ways that remain impressive even today, 75+ years later.

- added a basement below the two new room additions in the rear
- installed a state-of-the-art forced air heating system “to die for”
 - its very thick metal hot air ducts are in perfect condition
 - the air flow/damper controls work perfectly

- the large size of the ducts allows for **quiet** blower airflow
- whole building air conditioning can certainly be added
- built an impressive front window system containing nine large glass panes bracketed by two hinged tall windows that open vertically
- built a fireplace and chimney still in good condition
- conceived and built tall and wide side windows that presently face the parking area with extremely low sills that make the main room feel uniquely open and allow plenty of daylight to enter
- installed 8 inch siding and I think it was installed over the narrower original farmhouse siding but I am not sure.
- installed “triple-locking” weather-stripping mechanisms used on all of the first and second floor sash windows that came from a remarkable Cleveland company and are stunning in their design and effectiveness and all sash windows operate perfectly—most have been re-glazed and sash ropes replaced with nylon cord
- installed the solid wood front door with its two handsome leaded glass sidelights, each flawless 75 years later..

The size of the main room with fireplace and large windows is wide open 15x28 ft. without any partitions or support columns. Like three other rooms, has 100% golden oak flooring.

What I Did To the Building

- Replaced knob & tube wiring with “pipe” and Wiremold
- Service is 60amp, 2 branch boxes, 20 amp breakers, 12 ga. wiring
All electrical is to “code” but could be expanded somewhat
- Fluorescent lighting in several places and track lighting in other places
- Converted the former garage & front porch into the “organ room”
it measures 15x35 ft
insulated walls and ceiling
redirected a heating duct for heat
installed large two panel insulated picture window in rear
- The main room was recarpeted some years ago—remains in excellent condition
- Same for the stairs and the upstairs hallway.
- The walls were always in good condition. Most are plaster and lath.
- Installed three sewer cleanouts, one for sanitary and two for storm
- Replaced the gas line from Pearl to the meter with PVC
- The water line is 100% copper from the manhole meter on Pearl to the house

One Substantial Project Needed

When Doratys excavated a basement for furnace, water heater & laundry to go under the two rear rooms (their kitchen and bedroom) they discovered a fairly high water table that required a sump. So, for about 77 years, the sump has been very active and the basement very wet in one corner. That has meant frequent pump-out activity by the sump pump. I have replaced the pump four or five times in 38 years. It is annoying and the smartest solution would be to fill in the basement and install a modern furnace on the first floor, easily done and keep in mind that the hot air ducting is extraordinarily thick compared to today’s systems..

Summary

It is a fine, spacious, unique building that can be reasonably restored into a handsome historical landmark in an outstanding location.