

**YOU CAN PLAY A DIRECT ROLE IN
SAVING AN IMPORTANT PIECE OF RICHFIELD/AMERICAN HISTORY!
WE NEED YOU TO ACT **NOW** TO HELP SAVE THE OVIATT HOUSE!!**

Before



After



In 2019, the Richfield Joint Recreation District (RJRD) board, which administers and oversees operations at Richfield Heritage Preserve (the former Girl Scout Camp Crowell Hilaka which is now a 336-acre public park), voted to raze the Oviatt House (located in the southwest portion of the park on Oviatt Road, just off Route 303). The house is one of the oldest buildings in Richfield, built in 1836 by Mason Oviatt. Even more important than its age, however, is its connection to Richfield's (and America's) story.

The Oviatts were pioneers – among the first settlers in the Western Reserve. Direct descendants are numerous and some still live in the area. Mason and Fanny Oviatt were known to have helped John Brown's family when they lived in Richfield, and Mason was involved with John Brown in the Underground Railroad – aiding in the transportation of runaway slaves on their way to freedom.

When they learned of the decision to raze the Oviatt House, a number of concerned Richfield residents banded together to form the "Save the Oviatt House" group. They have met with the RJRD board on several occasions, where they presented information to document the historic authenticity and importance of this house and asked the board to rescind their motion to tear it down. They vowed to pay all expenses (approximately \$53,000 has already been pledged for the salvation of this historic gem) involved with restoring and maintaining the structure as well as presented a variety of possible uses for the house – the RJRD board would incur no responsibility and would reap all the benefits from this property. Even without a final decision being made by the board, the Save the Oviatt House volunteers made the house 'pretty and safe' at their own expense. The 'before' picture above shows what the house looked like when the RJRD board voted to tear it down and the 'after' picture is what it looks like now. At their November 23, 2020 meeting, the RJRD board voted (4-2) **not** to rescind the motion to raze the Oviatt House but also stated they would not take immediate action until they can align their decision with a strategic plan for Richfield Heritage Preserve. Unfortunately, we don't know how much time we have before this happens so the need to take action and make sure the RJRD board makes the right decision is urgent!

Richfield Historical Society members Linda Fleming, Juanita Taylor and Serena Juchnowski have been researching the presence of the Underground Railroad in Richfield with plans to apply to have appropriate sites listed on the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom, a program run by the National Park Service. The program's mission is "to honor, preserve and promote the history of resistance to enslavement through escape and flight, which continues to inspire people worldwide." Such national recognition would not only be extremely important to Richfield but would also honor our history while showing that we continue to support freedom from oppression. A listing comes along with grant funding that could be used to help restore the house.

According to Jim Fry, life-time Richfield resident and webmaster of "johnbrownohio.com", the Oviatt House is a most vital piece of the telling of such important American History. School children, tourists, and history seekers from across the Midwest and all of America could come here to learn about the Underground Railroad. We could teach essential lessons about the goodness of America. That house, and Richfield's greatest story, must be saved and preserved as part of our American story. That house is not just an entrance to a park. It stands on its own as an indispensable part of an incredible story.

If you would like more information and/or would like to be added to the Save the Oviatt House group's 'interested party' list, you may email saveoviathouse@aol.com.

We need the support of each one of our members and friends to save this historic home. Let your voice be heard by the Richfield Joint Recreation District board. You may call them at (330) 888-0511, email them at office@rjrd.org, or write to them at Richfield Joint Recreation District, P.O. Box 246, Richfield, OH 44286-0246. You have an opportunity to play a direct role in rescuing a significant piece of not just Richfield's history, but of America's history as well. Please speak up for the Oviatt House!