

**A PLACE FOR THE LADIES:  
ADMINISTRATIVE HISTORY OF  
FIRST LADIES  
NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE  
OHIO**



Prepared for:  
U.S. Department of the  
Interior  
National Park Service  
Interior Regions 3, 4, 5  
Omaha, Nebraska



Prepared by:  
**Outside The Box, LLC**  
Richmond, Virginia

2023

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Prepared under the supervision of Dr. Bruce G. Harvey, Principal Investigator



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**FIRST LADIES NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE**

**OHIO**

**Administrative History**

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U.S. Department of the Interior  
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## INTRODUCTION

The First Ladies National Historic Site in Canton, Ohio, is the direct result of combining the power of childhood memories of an ancestral home with one woman's enduring passion and search for information about First Ladies. Marshall B. Belden's family home, earlier known as the Saxton-Barber House, had once been the part-time home of Congressman William McKinley and his wife, Ida Saxton McKinley. By the mid-twentieth century, the elegant high-Victorian house sat concealed behind a flat commercial façade in a neighborhood of Canton, Ohio. Belden remembered visiting his grandparents there and even living there himself for about a year. He remembered sliding down the curving walnut banister as a child. When he learned the house might be destined for the wrecking ball, he decided to save it. He purchased it, had the exterior restored to its original elegance, and worked to find a way to adapt the house to an appropriate use. Meanwhile, Mary Regula, a former teacher, had been frustrated for years by the paucity of information about important women in America's history and especially about the First Ladies, the women who worked beside and supported the Presidents of the United States. In her search for information, she was amazed to discover that even the Library of Congress did not have a bibliography of books about the First Ladies. She decided to create one. She recruited a group of friends to her cause, and the group began to explore ways to create an easily accessible bibliography of all printed material related to First Ladies. They created the organization now known as the National First Ladies' Library Association (NFLA).

These two disparate endeavors – saving the house in Canton where William McKinley once lived and compiling a bibliography of published works on the First Ladies – were brought together by Mary Regula's husband, Congressman Ralph Regula (R-OH), Chairman of the House Appropriations Committee in Congress and an admirer of President William McKinley, whose congressional seat he held. Regula, through his position in the House of Representatives, ensured the future of the Saxton-Barber House and, incidentally, provided a place for the National First Ladies' Library Association to promote their new, electronic bibliography of books and other print material about America's First Ladies. This is the story of how the dreams of Marshall B. Belden and Mary Regula became reality through the agency of Ralph Regula and the National Park Service, how the First Ladies National Historic Site was born and was nurtured through its early days by the National First Ladies' Library Association, and how the two organizations have worked to make it what it is today.

Although Marshall B. Belden and Mary Regula began their projects independently, Ralph Regula initiated the legislative process that brought the two together, working to preserve the Saxton-Barber House for future generations by having it brought under the ownership of the federal government. He used the Historic Sites Act of 1935 to bring ownership of the building under the umbrella of the federal government and then brokered a lease agreement between the

National Park Service (NPS), the federal agency to which ownership of the building fell, and the Stark County Foundation, a local non-profit group dedicated to addressing an assortment of local civic needs, for occupation of the Saxton-Barber House. Under the lease agreement, the Stark County Foundation was allowed to sub-let space in the building, and they leased part of it to the National First Ladies' Library Association. Eventually, recognizing that the federal government was better equipped to fund the long-term maintenance of the Saxton-Barber House, Congressman Regula supported designation of the property as a new unit of the National Park System, the First Ladies National Historic Site (First Ladies NHS). He ensured, however, that the National First Ladies' Library Association would continue to be significant to the development of the new national historic site through a cooperative agreement between NFLL and the National Park Service. This arrangement was outlined in the site's enabling legislation. The National Park Service would provide funds and technical assistance to the National First Ladies' Library Association, which would provide the day-to-day management of the site operations. The National Park Service, in turn, received a new unit of the National Park System in which to interpret the lives of the First Ladies and their role in American life, a theme found nowhere else in the United States, but NPS did not have to invest the time and money to develop it. It was a win-win arrangement for both organizations.

The management arrangements described in the enabling legislation for First Ladies National Historic Site remained in place through iterations of cooperative agreements for more than ten years. The National Park Service provided the funds, and National First Ladies' Library Association, which incorporated as National First Ladies' Library, Inc. ran the site with little oversight from the National Park Service. This began to change in 2012, when the National Park Service saw the need to have a greater stake in the park's management that would justify funding for the repair or replacement of some big-ticket items such as the HVAC system in the Education and Research Center building. In addition, in 2016, the National Park Service funded a consultant selected by NFLL who conducted a study and reported on ways to improve the management and fiscal posture of National First Ladies' Library, Inc. in light of the National Park Service's determination to have a greater presence at First Ladies National Historic Site and in its management.<sup>1</sup> This organizational review by Judy Czarnecki of Centripetal Strategies focused mostly on reorganization and strengthening of the operations of the National First Ladies' Library, Inc. Board of Directors but also made some suggestions for improving the fiscal position of the organization.<sup>2</sup> The National Park Service, in consultation with the NFLL Board of Directors, subsequently made significant changes to the cooperative agreement, which expired in 2017. Discussions regarding the changes were attenuated, but a new cooperative agreement was finally signed in early 2019. After the agreement was signed, the National Park Service began to

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<sup>1</sup> Craig Kenkel, oral history interview, June 21, 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Judy Czarnecki, "National First Ladies' Library Organizational Assessment Discussion," PowerPoint presentation to National First Ladies' Library, Inc. Board of Directors meeting, October 28, 2016. PowerPoint slides included in the meeting minutes gave a summary of the findings of the Organizational Assessment. The complete text was not available for review for this report.

take on the primary responsibility for managing the site, including conducting tours of the Saxton House. Restrictions that resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic had eliminated participation of the National First Ladies' Library, Inc. volunteer docent corps, who had been conducting those tours, due to their age and medical vulnerability. In-person tours were temporarily paused, and once resumed, the National Park Service rangers and guides completely assumed this responsibility.<sup>3</sup> With a few exceptions, the rest of the First Ladies' Library, Inc. staff was reduced over time, beginning in about 2016, due to retirements, positions taken elsewhere, or redundancy as a result of the management reorganization in the cooperative agreement signed in 2019. Their duties were assumed by National Park Service staff. Although the cooperative agreement was signed in 2019, details of how to apportion management responsibilities of the First Ladies National Historic Site are still being negotiated between the National Park Service and National First Ladies' Library, Inc. in 2023 as preparations are being made for the two organizations to enter into a fifth cooperative agreement in 2024.

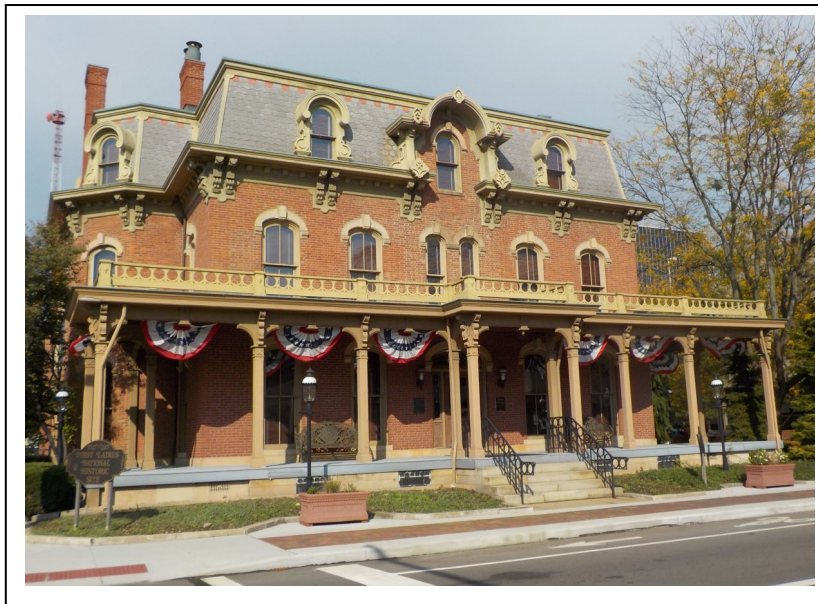


Figure 1: Saxton House, 2021. Photograph by Deborah Harvey.

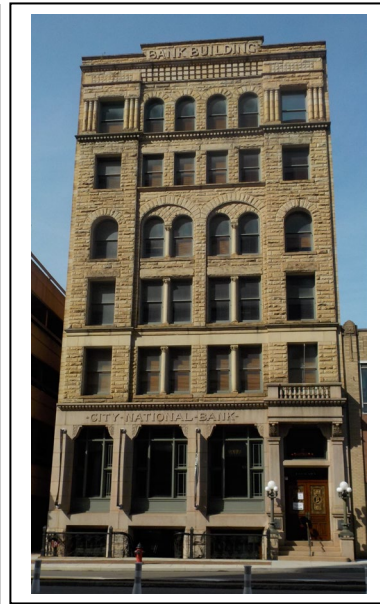


Figure 2: City National Bank Building/ Education and Research Center, 2021. Photograph by Deborah Harvey.

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<sup>3</sup> Christopher Wilkinson, oral history interview, October 9, 2021. See also Gail Fahrney, oral history interview, October 9, 2021.





Figure 3: First Ladies Garden and Surface Parking Lot, 2021. Photograph by Deborah Harvey.

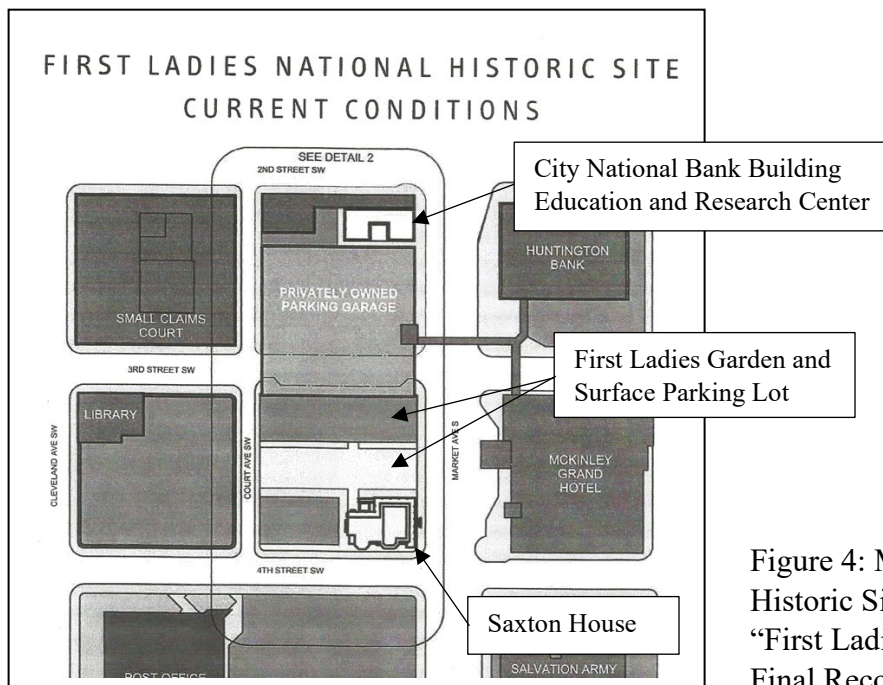


Figure 4: Map of First Ladies National Historic Site. From Design Minds, Inc. "First Ladies National Historic Site Final Recommendations Document."



First Ladies National Historic Site currently consists of three properties: the Saxton House, which was the original property designated, now owned by the National Park Service; the Education and Research Center (ERC), formerly the City National Bank Building, which was added to the First Ladies NHS in 2011 by donation from National First Ladies' Library, Inc.; and the First Ladies Garden, a brick-paved contemplative space located immediately north of the Saxton House and currently (2023) owned by NFLL. The Saxton House, formerly known by various names (the Saxton-Barber House, the Saxton-McKinley House, the McKinley House, and the Goldberg Building), is a brick dwelling located on the corner of Market Avenue South and Fourth Street S.W. in Canton, Ohio (Figure 1). Built in approximately three main construction campaigns beginning about 1841, the rear, two-story part of the house is in the Federal architectural style, and the front, three-story part of the house is in a Victorian-era style known as Second Empire. The Saxton House is currently operated as a house museum. Some original furnishings and memorabilia belonging to William and Ida Saxton McKinley and their families are displayed in the house along with memorabilia from other First Ladies. Portions of the displayed collections are the property of National First Ladies' Library, Inc., and others have been donated or are on loan from various other public and private collections.

When not on display, the National First Ladies' Library, Inc. collection is housed in the Education and Research Center located at 221 Market Avenue South at the north end of the next block north of the Saxton House. It is a six-story stone building with basement in the Romanesque style and was, at one time, the tallest building in Canton, Ohio (Figure 2). This building was purchased by Marshall B. Belden and donated to the National First Ladies' Library, Inc., which raised \$7.5 million for its rehabilitation and then donated it to the National Park Service in 2011 after completion of the work. In addition to storage space for the collections, the Education and Research Center houses the Visitor Contact Center for the First Ladies National Historic Site and serves as the administrative center with offices for National First Ladies' Library, Inc. and the National Park Service. It also provides library space and reading rooms for conducting research on First Ladies and houses displays of First Ladies' memorabilia on the first floor and in the basement.

Located between these two structures is the third element of the First Ladies National Historic Site, originally called Rotary Park and now known as First Ladies Garden. Long before it was a park, however, it was part of the original DeWalt-Saxton property on which the Saxton House was built. As South Market Street commercialized, the lot was eventually sold, and three commercial buildings were constructed on it. During urban renewal efforts in downtown Canton in the early 1980s, the Canton Rotary Club, working with Newmarket Project, Inc. which was spearheading the urban renewal project, purchased the lot, demolished the buildings, and created a brick-paved park with rose gardens, which they named Rotary Park.<sup>4</sup> In 2003, the park was

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<sup>4</sup> "Deed of Trustee," between McBel Trust and Newmarket Project, Inc., December 30, 1986, in Ralph Regula Papers held at Ohio State University Archives, Columbus, Ohio.

donated by the City of Canton, which then owned it, to NFLL.<sup>5</sup> National First Ladies' Library, Inc. repaved the park and renamed it First Ladies Park. This property belongs to National First Ladies' Library, Inc. and, although it is within the boundaries of First Ladies National Historic Site, it is not currently (2023) expected to become the property of the National Park Service (Figures 3 and 4).

The neighborhood surrounding the First Ladies National Historic Site is thoroughly commercial. To the east across Market Avenue South is the relatively new DoubleTree by Hilton Canton Downtown Hotel. The DoubleTree covers the entire block and is connected by an overhead walkway to the parking deck on the southeast corner of Market Avenue South and Third Street, S.W. and to an office building to the north across Third Street, S.E. North of that office building is the Huntington Bank, across the street from the former City National Bank Building. The county courthouse complex is within walking distance to the north, as are office buildings, eateries, and shops. First Ladies National Historic Site is at the south edge of the 1980's urban renewal area. Further to the south, also within walking distance, are several used car dealers, a sheet metal fabrication shop, automobile repair shops, and the Salvation Army store and headquarters. Generally, parking is provided in dedicated parking areas and in the parking deck rather than along the street.

According to the *Foundation Document Overview* for First Ladies NHS, the purpose of the site is “to preserve, interpret, and honor the role and history of First Ladies for the benefit, education, and inspiration of the people of the United States, and to provide global public access to information about how the accomplishments of America’s First Ladies shaped our nation’s history.” The *Foundation Document Overview* explains that the site is significant and, therefore, valuable, because it is “the only remaining private residence associated with William McKinley and First Lady Ida Saxton McKinley” and, because of her status as a First Lady, Mrs. McKinley’s childhood home provides an appropriate venue to interpret the lives and roles of all the nation’s First Ladies. In addition, thanks to the efforts of National First Ladies’ Library, Inc., the site “maintains the nation’s most comprehensive electronic bibliography about the First Ladies of the United States,” and is “the only place in the world dedicated to providing accurate, non-partisan information” about their lives and accomplishments.<sup>6</sup> The value of the site, therefore, is that it provides an opportunity to present an American family story of a specific President and his First Lady, but it also provides the venue to present the stories of the work of all the First Ladies, who were also part of presidential families but important in their own right. In this regard, National First Ladies’ Library, Inc., its work on the digital bibliography, and its

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<sup>5</sup> “First Ladies NHS Timeline” chart, n.d., n.p. by unknown compiler but most likely Superintendent Sherda K. Williams due to location, in First Ladies NHS archives, Box 2.

<sup>6</sup> This statement in the *Foundation Document Overview* is somewhat out of date, as another organization, the First Ladies Association for Research and Education (FLARE), was established in Washington, D.C., in 2021 by the First Ladies Initiative, American University, Washington, D.C. Information about this organization may be found at flare-net.org.

archived collection of primary source material and original museum objects, has been, and remains, essential.<sup>7</sup>

Other sites in the vicinity of Canton offer resources for interpreting First Ladies National Historic Site. Preeminent among them are the McKinley Presidential Library and Museum and the William McKinley National Memorial, located in McKinley Memorial Park, where the McKinley family is buried, both in Canton, Ohio. The McKinley Memorial, designed by Harold Van Buren Magonigle in 1904, sits atop a hill overlooking the city of Canton.<sup>8</sup> The McKinley Presidential Library and Museum, located within view of the McKinley National Memorial, contains the largest collection in the world of McKinley artifacts, many on display in the permanent exhibits chronicling McKinley's life and political career. In addition, the museum houses a life-sized replica of "a historic town." Although it does not claim the town is Canton, several of the businesses represented bear the names of businesses that were in early Canton, including the Eagle Hotel and the early train station. The McKinley Presidential Library and Museum also houses a planetarium and Discovery World, which is an interactive science exploration museum for children and adults.

Outside Canton are three other sites related to United States presidents: the James A. Garfield National Historic Site in Mentor, Ohio, the William Howard Taft National Historic Site in Cincinnati, and the Ohio Presidential Trail. The James A. Garfield National Historic Site is owned and managed by the National Park Service to preserve and interpret the Lawnfield estate and surrounding property owned by the 20<sup>th</sup> President of the United States, James A. Garfield. Garfield invented the "front porch" campaign for president that McKinley later adopted and improved upon, and, like McKinley, Garfield was assassinated while in office. Garfield was shot and killed only four months after his inauguration. Four years later, his widow added a wing to the family home that became the first presidential library established in the United States. The William Howard Taft National Historic Site, also owned and managed by NPS, preserves the home in which Taft was born and raised in the wealthy suburb of Cincinnati called Mt. Auburn. This site interprets the life of Taft as well as how the surroundings of his childhood influenced his world view and his later political life. Taft achieved his life's dream of becoming a Supreme Court justice only after he completed his tenure as President of the United States, and he is the only U.S. president to have served in both capacities. Ohio touts itself as the "Birthplace of Presidents," and the Ohio Presidential Trail features twenty locations associated with nine Presidents of the United States and one site interpreting the lives of the First Ladies. This last site is the First Ladies National Historic Site in Canton, Ohio, which is the subject of this Administrative History.

The purpose of this Administrative History is to explore the establishment, development, and management of the First Ladies National Historic Site. The greatest challenge in

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<sup>7</sup> National Park Service, *Foundation Document Overview, First Ladies National Historic Site, Ohio*, 2016, online at <https://www.npshistory.com/publications/foundation-document/fila-fd-overview>. Accessed March 31, 2022.

<sup>8</sup> Ronald E. Sterling, *Images of America: Canton, Ohio*, (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 1998), 33.

accomplishing this mission lay in the fact that, for three years before the NHS was established and for the first fifteen years of its existence, the site was managed almost solely by the partner organization, National First Ladies' Library, Inc., which, to date, has not shared its records with the National Park Service to any great extent. During that time, the National Park Service's role at the site was limited to negotiating the cooperative agreement with National First Ladies' Library, Inc. under which the site would be managed and approving and funding the activities of NFLL at the site. Beginning in about 2008, NPS site managers assigned to this task also occasionally sent seasonal interpreters to the site in the summer to assist with interpretation, but this was, apparently, not welcomed by National First Ladies' Library, Inc. staff and had little impact.

As a result of this minimal involvement in the site, few NPS records regarding the site have been found prior to 2009, and records do not reach a normal level of site documentation until after 2015, when NPS became more involved in, first, maintenance and, later, interpretation, at the site. Therefore, this study relied more heavily than usual on the recollections, through oral history interviews, of long-time staff members to supplement the archival documentation available from the National Park Service archives at the site, at Cuyahoga Valley National Park, and at James A. Garfield National Historic Site, and the collection of Ralph Regula's papers at Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio. However, the majority of long-term NFLL staff members who might have provided information on early development at the site were either not available or declined to participate in the oral history project. This left significant gaps in understanding the history of development of the site. Fortunately, several long-term staffers at Cuyahoga Valley National Park, who also had interactions with First Ladies NHS over the years, agreed to be interviewed and were able to help plug some of these knowledge gaps. Oral history interviews were conducted in person or via internet-based video with three former staff members and one current board member for National First Ladies' Library, Inc., all former NPS site managers for First Ladies NHS, several former and current staff members from Cuyahoga Valley National Park, and one member of the Canton, Ohio, community with some knowledge of the museum and collections aspects of the site. Although oral histories must be used with care, understanding that memories of past events may be inaccurate and attempting to corroborate them through reference to documentation and through other means, the oral histories conducted for this study became an invaluable resource for this Administrative History.

This study was produced by Outside The Box, LLC (OTB) under contract with the Midwest Regional Office (Regions 3, 4, and 5) of the National Park Service. Bruce G. Harvey, Ph.D. served as the Principal Investigator under whom the study was produced. During production of this study, Dr. Harvey reviewed, edited, and approved the work of Project Historian Deborah E. Harvey, MHP, who conducted the primary research, including all oral history interviews, authored the Administrative History, and prepared the final oral history package and this document for submittal to NPS. The contract for this project was awarded July

1, 2021, for an intended two-year period. However, difficulties with scheduling and completing oral history interviews partly due to lingering restrictions resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and partly due to the need to recruit supplemental oral history respondents delayed completion of the research. As a result, the contract was extended for six months.

Several people were instrumental in advancing the work for this project. Of note are Karen Kopchak's team at Cuyahoga Valley National Park, who scanned archival documents related to First Ladies NHS located at Cuyahoga Valley National Park and James A. Garfield NHS, and Carly Dearborn's team at Ohio State University Libraries, who scanned the Ralph Regula papers located at the University of Ohio in Columbus. Both sets of documents were transmitted to the author electronically, obviating the need to travel to those locations for research. As well, the OTB team would like to give grateful appreciation to the many staff members at Cuyahoga Valley National Park who gave of their time to find things, tote things, and provide things that made on-site research so much easier. Lastly, this report could not have been completed without the guidance of Regional Historian Ron Cockrell, who provided direction, insight, and counsel at so many crucial points in the process. This project would not have been possible without all of these helpful people.

# CHAPTER ONE: Background History

## *Geology and Topography*

The two most significant factors that formed the landscape of Ohio during the past several hundred million years are orogeny (mountain building) and glaciation (the formation of glaciers). The last advance of the Laurentide Ice Sheet, known as the Wisconsin glaciation, finally fully retreated about 14,000 years ago. “At its peak, the Wisconsin Glacier was at least a mile thick over modern-day Cleveland and fifty to 200 feet thick at its edge, which stretched from Hamilton County in the southwest to Columbiana County in the northeast.” Although this period of glaciation in Ohio ended about 14,000 years ago, it continued to affect the environment and the landscape of the area for thousands of years after it was gone.<sup>1</sup>

In Ohio, as elsewhere, the glacial advance mounded up rocks and soil that were then left to create a ridge along the leading edge of the glacier when it retreated. The extent of the Wisconsin glaciation in Ohio can be discerned on a map by drawing a line between the rivers that run north to Lake Erie and the rivers that run south to the Ohio River, both of which are, themselves, creations of glaciation. This is the Wabash Moraine, a terminal moraine, or glacial ridge, that runs from Celina, Ohio, on the west side of the state to Akron on the east, passing through Canton.<sup>2</sup> Based on this feature, Edward T. Heald, Stark County Historian in the mid-1900s, surmised that the edge of the last glacier rested at 12<sup>th</sup> Street in Canton.<sup>3</sup> The Appalachian Plateaus, in the eastern half of Ohio, consist mostly of the unglaciated Allegheny plateau in the south with a small, glaciated plateau located just south of Lake Erie. Canton sits at the boundary between these two areas, and, if Edwin T. Heald is correct, the Saxton House occupies the formerly glaciated portion of the city.<sup>4</sup>

The geology and topography of Ohio are important to understanding why Stark County developed as it did over the centuries. The geology provided a number of important natural resources available for exploitation: salt; clay; building materials such as shale, limestone, sandstone, and conglomerate; other construction materials such as sand, gravel, gypsum, and halite; energy resources such as peat, coal, oil, and natural gas; and iron ore. Some of these resources are no longer exploited commercially, but all were, at one time or another, important to the development of the State of Ohio, of Stark County, and, for the most part, of Canton, Ohio. However, the geology and topography did not provide the types of resources that facilitated habitation by either prehistoric or historic peoples until about 1800. The soil was too rocky and the topography too hilly for extensive agriculture, and the area sported a ridge, the Wabash

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<sup>1</sup> Kevin F. Kern and Gregory S. Wilson, *Ohio: A History of the Buckeye State* (Chichester, West Sussex, U.K., John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2014), 10.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Edward T. Heald, *Brief History of Stark County, Ohio: A Digest of Mr. Heald's Six-Volume Stark County Story*. (Canton, Ohio: The Stark County Historical Society, 1963), 4.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

moraine, that required portage between rivers running north to Lake Erie and those running south to the Ohio River, preventing easy navigation. The area of Ohio that became Stark County was not conducive to settlement by American Indians or, later, by early British and French trappers and explorers. It was a place of passage, where early hunter-gatherers foraged for food but did not settle and through which European trappers and traders, and, later, United States soldiers, passed on their way to somewhere else. The following account illustrates that the land of Stark County was, according to the archeological and historical record, chronically uninhabited until Bezaleel Wells established Canton in the new State of Ohio in 1803.

### *Prehistoric Period: American Indians in Ohio*

The first identifiable Ohioans were the native peoples who came to this area after the glaciers retreated about 14,000 years ago, known to us as the Paleo-Indians. These earliest peoples did not come to the area that became Stark County, Ohio, until about 12,000 BCE. Ohio then had “an erratic climate that was still often cold and the land was inhabited by a wide range of plants and animals known to have lived in temperate to colder climates.”<sup>5</sup> Stark County was predominantly forested in pine and spruce but with stands of deciduous trees such as willows, poplars, and oaks. A stretch of open grassland extended “from what is now downtown Canton west to Massillon, to towards Navarre, and north into future Plain Township.”<sup>6</sup> It hosted game such as the white-tail deer and woodchucks that still abound in Ohio today, but it also was home to bigger game mammals such as the “mammoth, the giant ground sloth, the giant beaver, the flat-headed peccary (a wild pig) and the stag moose (a giant deer).” Nomadic bands of Paleo-Indians roamed the hills of eastern Ohio for thousands of years, subsisting on the nuts, berries, game, and food plants found there.<sup>7</sup>

In general, Paleo-Indians left little evidence of their presence in Ohio. Although some bone and stone tools from this period have been found, the most prevalent artifacts discovered from this era are “distinctive spear tips known as Paleo Points.” More than 1,000 such points have been discovered in every county in Ohio by archeologists and collectors, “making Ohio second only to Alabama in the number of these artifacts found per square mile. This indicates that Ohio was a popular hunting destination for Paleo-Indian populations.”<sup>8</sup> In addition, the Flint Ridge in Licking and Coshocton Counties southwest of Stark County was an important site for obtaining flint and chert for manufacture of spear points and an important source of early trade goods.<sup>9</sup> The best evidence for the presence of Paleo-Indians in Stark County, Ohio, is at Nobles Pond in Jackson Township near Canton, “one of the largest Paleo-Indian sites excavated in eastern North America.” This site was not a settlement. It was, apparently, a seasonal gathering

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<sup>5</sup> Kern and Wilson, 23.

<sup>6</sup> Heald, 1.

<sup>7</sup> Kern and Wilson, 23.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

place for small bands of nomadic Paleo-Indians to meet, socialize, work, and trade, and has provided researchers with more than 55,000 artifacts, which include more than 6,000 tools and nearly fifty points of various types.<sup>10</sup>

The Paleo-Indians gradually stopped assembling at Nobles Pond. Once that activity ceased, the area became a place through which people passed to get to other places. Until the Late Prehistoric Period from about 1,100 to 400 years ago, it was not a destination. No American Indian settlements were made, and evidence of even temporary shelters is scant.<sup>11</sup> It is tempting to say that “nothing happened” in this part of Ohio from about 900 BCE to about 1800 CE, but that may or may not be true. What is true is that, during the prehistoric period, whatever human activity occurred in this part of Ohio left no trace upon the landscape. Two of the most important human developments on the continent, the Adena cultural complex and the Hopewell cultural complex, both named after the locations where they were first identified, developed in southwestern Ohio and spread outward from there, including to what is now the state of New York. However, neither of these cultures left identifiable remnants in Stark County. This same observation applies to the early historic period. After 1492, various sovereign foreign nations, first the French, then the British, and, finally, the Americans explored the land and claimed it in succession for their governments but did not settle it and left no discernible traces upon it. Even the American Indian tribes called the Iroquois by the French, which claimed the area as their own and enforced that claim with bloodshed after “the Beaver Wars” in the 1640s, did not leave a mark on the Stark County lands.<sup>12</sup>

The Iroquois (Haudenosaunee) Confederacy was just one of several groups that occupied the Great Lakes region. Others included the peoples called by the French the Huron and the Petun (also known as the Wyandot), who occupied lands south of Lake Huron in Ontario, and the Erie, who occupied the eastern Lake Erie region in New York and Pennsylvania. Other Iroquois-language group villages “formed to the north and west of the Iroquois Confederacy and were often at odds with it.” Trade goods such as firearms and iron and steel weapons obtained in exchange for pelts from the Europeans altered and defined the balance of power between these groups, favoring those who had acquired them.<sup>13</sup> In addition, the deadlier weapons greatly increased the mortality rate among native populations during warfare. Although the conflicts between indigenous groups over access to these trading partners and hunting grounds as well as the traditional rivalries among them lasted from approximately 1630 to the end of the century, the most devastating, collectively known as the “Beaver Wars,” occurred during the 1640s and “resulted in the almost complete depopulation of Ohio.”<sup>14</sup> After defeating the Erie, Huron, and other groups in what is now Ohio, the Iroquois began an aggressive and wide-ranging war against other tribes and peoples throughout the Great Lakes and the Ohio Valley regions “in a

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 24-42.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.



deliberate attempt to clear out all occupation of the upper Ohio Valley and destroy any lingering resistance.” The area south of Lake Erie and north of the Ohio River, Ohio, “became virtually devoid of human settlement as members of the Iroquois Confederacy – particularly the Seneca – policed the region, maintaining it as a sort of hunting reserve,” as well as keeping it as an open corridor for making war on their western enemies. It is the Iroquois name for the area that has lasted the longest: “Oh-He-Yo,” which means “Great River.”<sup>15</sup>

### *The Early Historic Period and the Wars for the Oh-He-Yo Lands (1650-1764)*

The Iroquois Confederacy dominated the lands south of the Great Lakes for several decades and prohibited permanent settlements in northern Ohio. The French first made peace with the Iroquois in the 1660s and began sending explorers and missionaries south. They passed through the Ohio area, claiming it for France and noting that it was mostly uninhabited.<sup>16</sup> This led to the notion that Ohio had been without much human activity during the prehistoric period, which effectively ended about 1650. However, neither the explorers nor the missionaries established any settlements. Though a few, widely spaced trading posts were established by the French in the Ohio lands, the area of Stark County continued to be without permanent settlements for more than one hundred years.

In the mid-1700s, refugee members of tribes the Iroquois had previously defeated, as well as groups from areas to the east who were being dispossessed of their traditional lands by the increasing numbers of English settlements east of the Allegheny Mountains, began to trickle into “uninhabited” Ohio.<sup>17</sup> About 1750, the Delaware, who had previously only hunted and fished the area, came into the Stark County area more permanently, driven out of their home range around Delaware Bay and the Delaware River by other American Indian tribes and by the British.<sup>18</sup> “The Delawares [sic] found no permanent tribes established” in the area, though they occasionally came in contact with bands of Shawnee and Erie traveling through from south of Lake Erie.<sup>19</sup> The Delaware people became affiliated with the “Beaver Wars” refugees from the northwest to form new, multiethnic villages made up of members of several tribes.<sup>20</sup> The French found these unallied, multicultural villages difficult to understand or manage and referred to them as “Indian republics.” One of these “republics” was located to the east of the Cuyahoga River and down to the upper reaches of the Muskingum River, cutting across Stark County, and “contained elements from all of the Iroquois nations (particularly Seneca and Onondaga) as well

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 55-56.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas Guthrie Marquis, “The Ohio Indian War,” included in Rossiter Johnson, *A History of the French & Indian Wars, 1689-1766: The Conflicts Between Britain and France for the Domination of North America*, (first published in New York, NY: unknown publisher, 1882; republished in USA: Leonaur/Oakpast Ltd, 2021), 243.

<sup>19</sup> Heald, 7.

<sup>20</sup> Kern and Wilson, 56.

as scatterings of other groups including Lenape, Mohican, Ottawa, Abenaki, and Chippewa.”<sup>21</sup> Collectively, these people eventually became known as the “White River Indians,” after the French name for the Cuyahoga River .<sup>22</sup>

“Nothing” continued to happen in the Stark County area between the end of the “Beaver Wars” in the 1640s and the end of the American Revolutionary War in 1784. Although indigenous people living in what is now Stark County, Ohio, may have participated in the conflicts, no evidence has been uncovered of battles or even skirmishes fought in Stark County. Indeed, only a few contingents of soldiers or warriors even traversed the area on their way to conflict elsewhere. This area of Ohio was still used mostly for hunting, fishing, and gathering rather than for settlements, large or small.

After the defeat of the French by the British at the Battle of Quebec in 1759, during the French and Indian War, the Ohio “Indian republics” were alarmed at their treatment by the English, who now claimed the Ohio lands formerly claimed by France.<sup>23</sup> Sir Jeffrey Amherst, commander-in-chief of English forces in the region, believed the English could treat the Ohioans as conquered peoples because some of them had been allied with the French during the war.<sup>24</sup> He was disdainful of the American Indians and did not believe in gift-giving as a means of cementing relationships with them. Therefore, he ordered that “all exchanges of goods should be done through regulated trade” and restricted the amount of powder and shot that could be sold to the American Indians. Unable to get furs to trade without powder and shot, the hunters of the Ohio republics now found that, without furs to trade, they could not get powder and shot. Amherst’s attitude and the double bind in which the native peoples now found themselves under the English contributed to a violent attempt in 1763 by American Indians to regain control of what came to be called the Old Northwest Territory, formerly part of the province of Quebec and now the states of Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Illinois.<sup>25</sup> Called “Pontiac’s War,” the uprising took the name of Pontiac, a chief of the Ottaway Confederacy living in what is now Michigan. On May 7, 1763, Pontiac and his allies, the Ojibwa and Potawatomi, laid siege to Fort Detroit, later named Fort Pitt, in Pennsylvania. News of the siege traveled, and other American Indian groups throughout the region engaged in similar attacks on British forts in Ohio and Pennsylvania. The White River tribes of the Cuyahoga Valley may have joined in this resistance, but the actual fighting took place all around them, at Forts Detroit and Sandusky to the northwest and at the line of French forts to the east. There is no indication of battlegrounds in Stark County during this period of unrest. Though defeated on July 31, 1763, by Pontiac’s forces at the Battle of Bloody Run, the English Colonel Henry Bouquet finally broke the siege of Fort Pitt, and, by late October, Pontiac was ready to negotiate for peace.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>24</sup> Marquis in Johnson, 239-240.

<sup>25</sup> Kern and Wilson, 65.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 71.

The cessation of hostilities provided a temporary respite for the American Indian tribes of the Ohio lands, with some hope that the peace might be long-lasting. The American Indians did not recover their exclusive rights to the territory they formerly held, though they did get some concessions from the English. The English gave up claims that the American Indians were subject nations. Gift-giving resumed, and the English retreated from some of Amhurst's more egregious policies and vowed to respect American Indian land claims made according to treaties as well as according to the British government's Proclamation of 1763, which drew an imaginary line across the western slopes of the Appalachian Mountains and forbade English settlement west of it.<sup>27</sup> The Proclamation Line may be one of the most significant acts of George III's reign to push his American subjects toward independence.

### *The American War of Independence in Ohio (1763-1783)*

On October 7, 1763, conscious of promises made to Native American tribes who had supported Britain during the French and Indian War (Seven Years War), Lord Halifax, the First Lord of Trade and Plantations, issued a proclamation preventing American colonists from moving westward past the Appalachian Mountains. The Proclamation drew an imaginary line from the Great Lakes along the Mississippi River, down to the Gulf of Mexico, and then along the western slopes of the Appalachian Mountains, designating the entire area thus enclosed a reserve for the American Indian peoples where no colonial settlement would be permitted. In addition, it ordered settlers already on the western side of the Line in the Appalachians to move back to the east side.<sup>28</sup> The Line served several purposes of the Crown: it responded to treaty obligations made earlier to American Indian peoples; it kept the colonists clustered on the east coast between the Atlantic Ocean and the Appalachian Mountains, thereby focusing their economic transactions on England rather than Spain or France; and it made policing the colonies easier and less expensive by restricting the area necessary to be controlled.

The Proclamation Line frustrated and infuriated Americans of all degrees but especially those who wished to move west for more land and better economic opportunities and those who wished to sell them the lands on which to accomplish their dreams. The colonies of Virginia, New York, Connecticut and Massachusetts all claimed strips of the Ohio lands based on their original charters or later royal land grants, and all had similar plans once settlement west of the mountains began.<sup>29</sup> The colony of Virginia claimed the Ohio River Valley land by right of its original grant from James I, King of England, in 1609, which gave it "all the lands west of the Ohio River" to the width of the north and south boundaries of the Virginia colony, in theory, all

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>28</sup> Andrew Roberts, *The Last King of America: The Misunderstood Reign of George III* (United Kingdom: Viking Press, 2021), 124.

<sup>29</sup> James A. Rhodes, *A Short History of Ohio Land Grants* (Columbus, OH: Hassell Street Press. n.d.), 5. This booklet is in the public domain, originally published by the Ohio Auditor of State, James A. Rhodes.

the way to the “South Sea,” now called the Pacific Ocean.<sup>30</sup> The colony of Connecticut claimed a strip of land from south of Lake Erie to the forty-second degree of north latitude based on grants to the colony from England’s King Charles II in 1662 and on a certain amount of ignorance and confusion regarding geographical knowledge of the area.<sup>31</sup> Stark County lies in this latter claim. However, the plans of the various land companies in the several states came to a screeching halt in 1763 when the Proclamation Line was established by the administration of King George III.

Many historians cite the Proclamation Line as a “precipitating cause of the Revolution” as it created “intense resentment from [the] colonists,” particularly those who hoped to profit from the sale of land in Ohio.<sup>32</sup> The Quebec Act of 1774, another Act dealing partly with Ohio, gave Roman Catholic French Canadians greater civil liberties, including the right to retain their language, freely practice their religion, and gather tithes for the support of their churches.<sup>33</sup> It also expanded Quebec to include the Ohio country, further exacerbating the anger and frustration of colonists in Virginia and Connecticut, as well as those in New York and Pennsylvania, who feared the effects of having a Roman Catholic colony just across their borders. Most, if not all, of the colonists objected to the Quebec Act because they saw it as granting to a conquered people rights that they did not themselves have and giving to those “others” land that belonged to the colonies.<sup>34</sup>

Once the American War of Independence began, however, military activities did not materially affect the part of Ohio in which Stark County lies until the close of the war, when the Ohio country again became part of the territory of the new United States. It might not have been so. The Treaty of Paris, formally ending the American War for Independence in 1783, relinquished to the Americans all rights of England to the lands west of the Alleghenies, but, except for the statesmanship of John Adams, the boundary of the new nation might have been set at the Proclamation Line just west of the Appalachian Mountains.<sup>35</sup> Instead, it included land all the way to the Mississippi River except for East and West Florida and the southern third of the land that became Alabama and Mississippi, which were all claimed by Spain.

The American Indians of the Ohio country endeavored to remain neutral during the opening conflicts of the American War of Independence but were ultimately drawn into it on both sides. There was no unanimity among the Native Ohioans regarding what to do about the war, and the conflict between the British and American forces resulted in conflicts between the American Indian tribes as they tried to negotiate for the best outcomes possible for their own people. As a result, many of the indigenous peoples left the Ohio country forever.<sup>36</sup> Though major military excursions and battles occurred in the Ohio country, it appears that none occurred

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 6-7.

<sup>32</sup> Kern and Wilson, 79.

<sup>33</sup> Roberts, 236.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 302.

<sup>35</sup> Rhodes, 5.

<sup>36</sup> Kern and Wilson, 80.

in Stark County. When the American War of Independence was over, however, big changes came to the Ohio country.

### *Ohio Becomes a State (1783-1803)*

When the Treaty of Paris was signed in 1783, the new nation found itself with a nearly unimaginable amount of territory and the problem of what to do with it. Although it claimed the land west of the Alleghenies, the new government had little control of the people there. By this time, the native people who remained viewed the Americans with implacable hatred due to the atrocities committed against them in Ohio during the American War of Independence.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, news of the ratification of the Treaty of Paris caused the trickle of unauthorized American settlement in the Ohio country to become a small stream. The U.S. government managed to get the Iroquois Confederacy to relinquish any claim to the Ohio Territory once and for all at the Second Treaty of Fort Stanwix in 1784. At the Treaty of Fort McIntosh in 1785, representatives of the Lenape, Ojibwa, Ottawa, and Wyandot tribes signed an agreement that “ceded the southern part of Ohio and put the signers under U.S. government protection.”<sup>38</sup> However, because most of the villages and groups in the Ohio country were not consulted or represented, and the Shawnee and Miami refused to attend the treaty negotiations or abide by its terms, the treaty had little practical effect. Subsequent efforts to negotiate separate treaties with the Miami and Shawnee had limited success as most of the Shawnee and all the Miami also refused to attend these separate negotiations, whereupon the American negotiators resorted to threats of war to intimidate those that did attend into signing a document ceding most of the Ohio lands without compensation and recognizing American authority over them.<sup>39</sup>

The Americans were making the same mistake made by the British twenty years earlier – assuming that their defeat of the British was *de facto* defeat of the American Indians who had fought with the British as well as those who had remained neutral. The indigenous people did not see it this way at all. It was a cultural misunderstanding of epic proportions and far-reaching consequences. The tribal warriors believed themselves to be personally able to choose whom to follow and obey and also to choose when to stop following and obeying. The Americans of European descent, accustomed to the prerogatives of monarchs, did not understand that tribal chiefs did not assert the same authority over their people as European kings did. Therefore, when treaties were signed ceding land in Ohio, but American Indians did not then leave the land, the American settlers took this as proof that the American Indians were occupying the land illegally and sometimes reacted violently.<sup>40</sup> Because the American Indians had not vacated the lands some of them had ceded, the United States government, recognizing the potential and, indeed,

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 84-87.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 88.

the fact, of deadly conflict over land, posted warnings for its people to stay out of Ohio, further infuriating prospective settlers there. Unauthorized settlement in Ohio proceeded through the 1780s, however, with the accompanying episodes of bloody violence in its wake. Most of it, including military expeditions to punish American Indian violence, was in the Ohio River Valley to the south and in the western parts of the Ohio country, not in Stark County.<sup>41</sup> In fact, the only recorded incidence of any battles with American Indians in Stark County is “a very minor brush between Capt. James Downing and four other scouts serving under Brady, in 1793, and Indians in the valley of the Big Sandy near Waynesburg.”<sup>42</sup>

The American Indian tribes of the Old Northwest Territory, which included the land that would become Ohio, were finally defeated in 1795. A treaty line was drawn, called the Greenville Treaty Line for Greenville, Ohio, where the treaty was finalized, setting aside the northwest area of Ohio, containing mostly low, swampy land not suitable for farming, for the tribes. The Greenville Treaty Line ran south from Lake Erie through what would become Stark County along the Tuscarawas River, turned west at Greenville, and proceeded west-southwest across the countryside to the Mississippi River. Congress sorted out the claims of the various states to the lands west of the Proclamation Line, including in the Ohio Country. Thomas Jefferson and Thomas Hutchings, Geographer of the United States, drew up a plan by which the new lands could be surveyed and sold as well as the means by which the territory could become new states of the United States. With modifications, this plan became the Land Ordinance of 1785 and the Northwest Ordinance of 1787. After some surveying in the southwest corner of the Ohio country was completed, the United States began selling its lands to prospective farmers and land speculators. In 1790, the new governor of the Ohio Territory established the territorial capital at Cincinnati, and, by 1800, the territory had achieved a sufficient population to write a constitution and apply for statehood.

Ohioans pushing for statehood were encouraged by the election of Thomas Jefferson as President of the United States in 1800, because he was known to favor it. However, Jefferson could not act unilaterally and declare Ohio a state; he had to wait until the territory itself had resolved its political differences about its status.<sup>43</sup> The Territorial Governor, Arthur St. Clair, unwilling to relinquish his power, advocated dividing the Ohio Territory into two states, which would effectively reduce the population numbers in each half of the territory, making the path to statehood for each half longer and allowing him to remain as Territorial Governor.<sup>44</sup> The debate over this strategy lasted through 1801, until several citizens favoring statehood for the entire Ohio Territory lobbied Congress and President Jefferson for relief from the autocratic leanings of St. Clair and his backers. Jefferson agreed to press Congress for an Act legislating statehood for Ohio, and, on April 30, 1802, Congress passed the Enabling Act for Ohio statehood with its

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 88-90.

<sup>42</sup> Heald, 9.

<sup>43</sup> R. Douglas Hurt, *The Ohio Frontier: Crucible of the Old Northwest, 1720-1830 (A History of the Trans-Appalachian Frontier)* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), 278.

<sup>44</sup> Hurt, 277, 279.

original boundaries intact, which President Jefferson signed.<sup>45</sup> The Enabling Act did not make Ohio a state, but it set the rules for seating a constitutional convention and authorized the convention to write a constitution and select a name for the proposed state. Once these things were completed and Congress had approved the constitution, the territory could become a state on equal footing with all the other states.<sup>46</sup>

The state constitutional convention finished its work in November 1802 and decided to forego public ratification (they decided not to allow the citizens to vote on the constitution) in order to become a state as quickly as possible. The members of the convention set March 1, 1803, as the date the first state legislature would convene. One of their members, Thomas Worthington, “personally rode his horse over the Appalachian Mountains to Washington DC to deliver the document to Congress, arriving on December 19.”<sup>47</sup> The United States House and Senate reviewed the constitution as a bill, and President Thomas Jefferson signed it into law on February 19, 1803, making Ohio an official state on that day. However, because the bill identified March 1, 1803, as the date the first Ohio legislature was to meet, and because Congress did not issue a separate resolution declaring Ohio a state as it did for all the other states, over the years, debate raged as to whether February 19 or March 1 was the official date that Ohio became a state. Some even argued that, because of the lack of congressional declaration, Ohio had never really been authorized as a state. In 1953, President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed a congressional resolution retroactively declaring March 1, 1803, as the official date of Ohio statehood.<sup>48</sup>

### *Founding of Canton and Stark County (1803-1809)*

March 1, 1803, was also an important date for Bezaleel Wells. Wells was one of the thirty-five-members of the committee that drew up the first constitution for the state of Ohio.<sup>49</sup> As a state senator representing Jefferson County, he attended the first session of the state legislature on March 1, 1803, where he learned of an impending treaty with the American Indian tribes to eliminate the Greenville Treaty Line and open up lands west of the Tuscarawas River for American settlers; this was the Treaty of Fort Industry, signed on July 4, 1805.<sup>50</sup> Wells also learned that plans were in the works to form a new county in the lands to be opened, and he learned where the first road was planned to run. With this advance information in hand, about four months after the treaty was signed, he began purchasing land in the territory of the proposed county and laid out the city of Canton with the aim of making it the county seat.<sup>51</sup> He purchased

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 281.

<sup>46</sup> Kern and Wilson, 122.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>49</sup> Heald, 11.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 11.

forty quarter-sections of land, ten square miles, at \$2.00 per acre directly from Congress, sight unseen.<sup>52</sup> Although it is unknown why Wells named his new town Canton, the original plat of Canton mimicked that of Baltimore, where Wells spent his early years (Figure 5).<sup>53</sup>

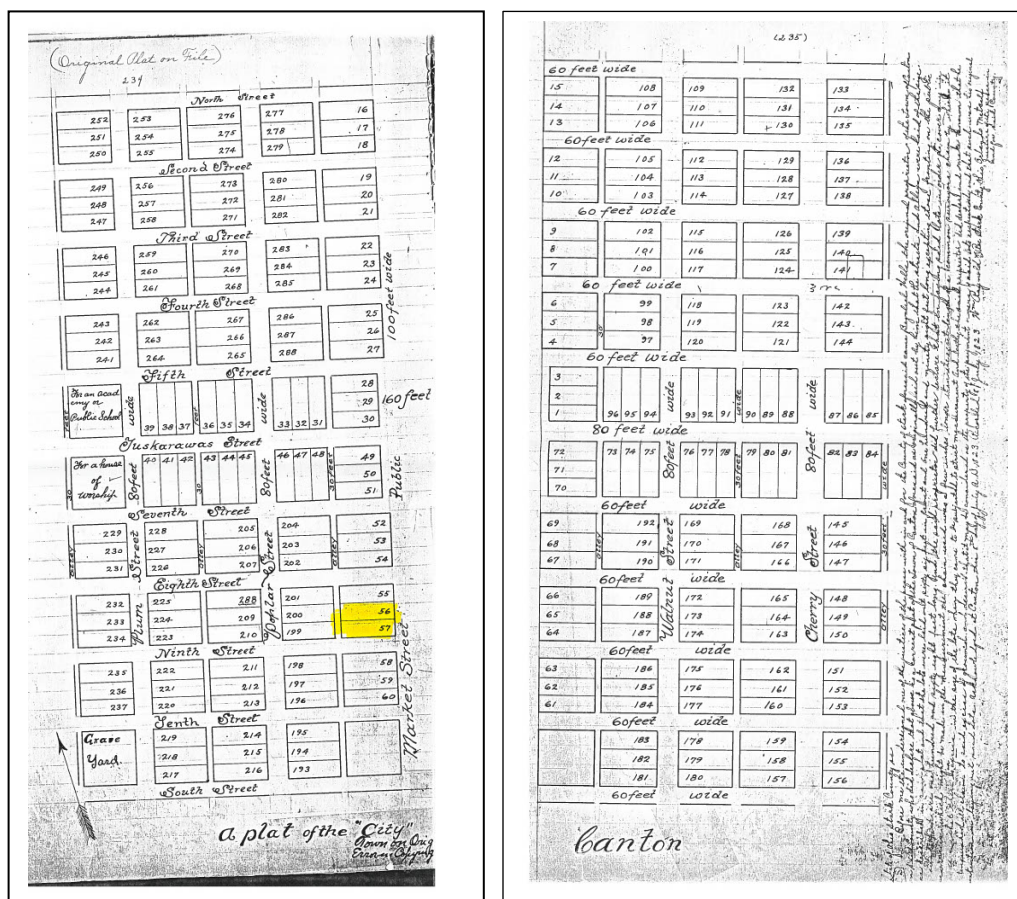


Figure 5: Redrawn Original Plat of Canton, Ohio, in Ralph Regula Papers held at Ohio State University Archives, Columbus, Ohio. Yellow highlight shows later location of the Saxton House.

Canton's original plan featured two main streets, Market Street and Tuscarawas Street, intersecting in the middle of what was called a "Public Square," consisting of four city blocks. The northwest block of the four blocks was designated for building a courthouse. Wells later sold that block to Stark County, once it was organized, for \$10, and the Stark County courthouse stands there today.<sup>54</sup> Additionally, Wells set aside one section for "the support of education," as required by the Land Ordinance of 1785, as well as one section for a church and another for a

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 12. See also Sterling, 7.

<sup>53</sup> Heald, 14.

<sup>54</sup> Sterling, 8.



cemetery, which were not required by law. A school occupied the lot set aside for that purpose well into the 1950s, and, although the cemetery was later moved and the lot converted to a park, one grave was left on the lot to fulfill Wells' wishes for its use.<sup>55</sup> Lots stretched east to west from street to street. The lots were numbered; the lot on which the Saxton House now stands is number 57, and the lot north of it, which George DeWalt also purchased in the 1830s, now the First Ladies Garden, is number 56.<sup>56</sup>

As Bezaleel Wells anticipated, Stark County was authorized in 1808 by an Act of the State Legislature and organized in 1809. The thirteenth county to be created in Ohio, with an area of 573 square miles, Stark County was mostly formed from Columbiana County and named for the oldest surviving Revolutionary War general when the county was formed, General John Stark. The largest settlement in the county at the time, Canton was named the county seat when Stark County was organized.

Canton did not grow quickly in the years immediately following its founding. The area was heavily forested except for a stretch of unforested plains extending from what is now downtown Canton "westward to Massillon, south to towards Navarre, and northward into what became Plain Township," making clearing land a difficult task for would-be farmers.<sup>57</sup> Additionally, the Treaty of Greenville in 1795 had not served the American Indians of the area well and caused much unrest among the tribes. Now confined to the northwestern portion of the state, a large part of which consisted of swampy lowlands, they suffered from hunger due to loss of game and restrictions on hunting ranges as well as from loss of the lands designated to them because American settlers repeatedly breached the treaty line and took up lands on the Indian side.<sup>58</sup> President Thomas Jefferson advocated teaching the American Indians to farm as a means of supporting themselves, and, although some of them did adopt this way of life, the results were mostly unsuccessful.<sup>59</sup> By 1799, rumors that the American Indians were preparing for war were rife among American settlers.<sup>60</sup> Despite the 1805 treaty that made possible the founding of Canton, as well as other treaties in which the American Indians ceded lands in Ohio to the United States, settlers in this part of Ohio were uneasy.<sup>61</sup>

The threat of conflict with American Indian groups remaining in the area likely made selling lots in Canton and the lands around it challenging for the first five years. On the other hand, being named the county seat doubtless increased the number of lawyers in the town and drew in other professionals to service the needs of the government there. In 1810, the population

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>56</sup> Original plat map of Canton, Ohio, online at [ohiomemory.org/digital/collection/p267401coll36/id/3447/rec/5](http://ohiomemory.org/digital/collection/p267401coll36/id/3447/rec/5). Accessed February 25, 2022. This old plat map is difficult to read and could not be suitably reproduced for this report.

<sup>57</sup> Heald, 1.

<sup>58</sup> Hurt, 315.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 316.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 315.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 316.

of Canton was reported as forty people.<sup>62</sup> By 1814, when John Saxton, grandfather of Ida Saxton McKinley, first arrived in Canton after the hostilities of the War of 1812 had ceased, the town population numbered approximately 500 people.<sup>63</sup>

### *The War of 1812 in Stark County, Ohio (1807-1815)*

For Ohioans, as for many other citizens of the new United States, the War of 1812 actually began in 1807, when the British ship *Leopard* attacked the U.S. Navy frigate *Chesapeake*. Marine troubles with Britain had been heating up for some time, and, in April 1806, President Thomas Jefferson called for the states to provide 100,000 men to be trained and ready in case armed conflict developed. After the attack on the *Chesapeake*, Jefferson asked Ohio to make ready to “march at a moment’s notice” the 291 militia that had been requested from them.<sup>64</sup> Additionally, concerned that the native Ohio peoples would again side with the British in this conflict, the acting governor of Ohio, Thomas Kirker, sent emissaries to Greenville to warn the American Indians to stay out of the conflict between the Americans and the British, which they ultimately agreed to do.<sup>65</sup> Nevertheless, the Americans, especially those in the immediate vicinity of the American Indian settlement at Greenville, remained uneasy. The Shawnee war chief, Tecumseh, did not accept the Greenville Treaty, believing that, through it, the United States had stolen 25,000 square miles of territory from the American Indian peoples.<sup>66</sup> In 1810, he began to travel throughout the Northwest Territory and as far south as the Alabama lands, attempting to assemble a confederacy of tribes intended to stretch from New England to Alabama that would have “sufficient strength to guarantee the integrity of Indian lands” and prevent any more loss of those lands.<sup>67</sup> Attacks on American settlers increased, and, by 1811, those in Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois were convinced that the Shawnee were planning another war and petitioned the federal government to remove them from the Northwest Territory.<sup>68</sup> Violence escalated on both sides, and, by 1812, settlers in Ohio and the territories believed that war with Britain would not only solve “the Indian problem” by legitimizing expulsion of the tribes from the Northwest Territory for fighting on the side of the British, which it was assumed they would do, but it would also increase the territory of the United States because the government could take Canada from the British as reparations once the war was won by the Americans, which they also assumed would be the case.<sup>69</sup> The Congress of the United States declared war on Great Britain on June 17, 1812.

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<sup>62</sup> Heald, 16.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>64</sup> Hurt, 320.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 321-322.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 324.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 323.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 324-325.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 325-326.

The prosecution of the War of 1812 did not involve fighting in Stark County, Ohio. Although men were recruited and joined companies locally, they were then sent elsewhere to fight. Indeed, with only 2,734 total inhabitants in 1810, it is unlikely that, by 1812, Stark County was able to field more than a few companies of able-bodied men of appropriate age.<sup>70</sup> Though regular troops, supplies, and volunteer militia crisscrossed Ohio during the war, Ohioans did not fight the war in Stark County. They fought at River Raisin and Detroit, and they built Fort Meigs at the Maumee Rapids and fought the British and the American Indians under Tecumseh there. On August 1, 1813, they fought and, finally, won the battle of Fort Stephenson on the Sandusky River. “The attack by the British on Fort Stephenson was their last attempt to invade Ohio and the Northwest Territory. A month later, Oliver H. Perry’s fleet gained control of Lake Erie,” and the British withdrew across the Thames River to Canada.<sup>71</sup>

With the British withdrawal, William Henry Harrison, commander of the Northwestern Army to which the militias of Ohio belonged, also faced a problem with “his Ohio Volunteers, who had mobilized to relieve Fort Meigs because their time would run out before he could complete another campaign.” To remedy this, he called upon Ohio and Kentucky to send additional militiamen. Kentucky’s Governor Isaac Shelby promised to lead his militia into the field, and “more than 3,000 men headed north to Fort Meigs....” However, in addition, “the patriotic zeal of Ohio’s young men set several thousand on the road to Dayton for a rendezvous.” Harrison found himself without enough supplies for the approximately 5,500 regulars and militia at the fort and was obliged to send home all but 1,200 of the Ohio volunteers. Harrison then rendezvoused his army at Portage River in late September, and they were transported by Perry’s fleet to the Detroit River, stopping just below Amherstberg, where they disembarked and marched overland to Detroit.<sup>72</sup> The British had abandoned the fort, so the Americans retook it easily and then marched after the withdrawing British forces, engaging them at Moraviantown, fifty miles east of Detroit in what is now Chatham-Kent, in the Canadian Province of Ontario. Harrison’s forces overwhelmed the much smaller British army, and, when it was reported that Tecumseh had been killed in the battle, his warriors quickly left the field, and British opposition disintegrated. The Battle of the Thames effectively ended the War of 1812 by breaking British power in the Northwest Territory and ending Tecumseh’s confederacy.<sup>73</sup>

On July 22, 1814, Generals Harrison and Cass signed the Treaty of Upper Sandusky, which included the Wyandot, Shawnee, Delaware, Seneca, and Miami, and obligated them to fight with the Americans against the British to end hostilities in the United States. Harrison’s victory and the treaty at last brought peace to the Ohio frontier.<sup>74</sup> At Ghent, Belgium, on December 24, 1814, American and British peace commissioners signed a treaty that simply

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<sup>70</sup> Heald, 16.

<sup>71</sup> Hurt, 340.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 342.

<sup>74</sup> Ohio History Connection, “Treaty with the Wyandots (1842) (Upper Sandusky) (Transcript), n.d. Accessed August 3, 2022, at [ohiohistorycentral.org/w/Treaty\\_with\\_the\\_Wyandots\\_\(1842\)\\_Upper\\_Sandusky\\_\(Transcript\)](http://ohiohistorycentral.org/w/Treaty_with_the_Wyandots_(1842)_Upper_Sandusky_(Transcript)).

restored the status quo before the war. No territory was gained by the United States, and the British did not give up their right of impressment or recognize the United States' rights to freedom of the seas, but the war did end the threat of war with American Indians on the Ohio frontier. On September 8, 1815, American peace commissioners met at Detroit and signed a treaty with the chiefs of the Shawnee, the Seneca, the Wyandot, Delaware, Miami, Ojibwa, Ottawa, Potawatomi, Sac, and Winnebago, in which, "with considerable ceremony and apparent sincerity'...they agreed to bury the hatchet with the United States."<sup>75</sup>

During the War of 1812, 26,280 men enlisted from Ohio to help defend their nation. They comprised three regiments, 464 companies, thirteen cavalry troops, and one artillery battery. From Stark County, Captain George Stidger's Company answered the call, serving from August 23, 1812, until January 19, 1813.<sup>76</sup> This company included Private George DeWalt, born in 1792 or 1794 (records vary) in Aaronsburg, Hanover County, Pennsylvania, who served the entire period of enlistment.<sup>77</sup> George DeWalt and his wife, Christiana Herter DeWalt, were the parents of Katherine DeWalt, who married James Asbury Saxton. James and Katherine Saxton were the parents of Ida Saxton, wife of President William McKinley.<sup>78</sup>

After the war officially ended in 1815, "Ohio's economy boomed. Federal lands could be purchased with credit on easy terms." At the end of the war, approximately seventy-five percent of Ohio's lands were owned by residents, but more settlers quickly spread into the vacant lands except for the Black Swamp area in the northwest corner of Ohio, which remained sparsely populated. Most residents lived on farms or in towns with fewer than one hundred people. Only Cincinnati, with a population of 9,642 in 1820, could be considered urban.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Hurt, 343.

<sup>76</sup> Adjutant General of Ohio, *Roster of Ohio Soldiers in the War of 1812*, (Ohio: Adjutant General of Ohio Transcription, 1916), 343, online at [resources/ohiohistory.org/roster](https://resources.ohiohistory.org/roster). Accessed March 1, 2022.

<sup>77</sup> Ancestry.com, *Ohio, U.S., Soldier Grave Registrations, 1804-1958* [database on-line], (Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2017). Accessed February 27, 2022.

<sup>78</sup> Ancestry.com, "History and Genealogy of the Harlan Family," [database on-line], (Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2005). Original data: Harlan, Alpheus H., *History and genealogy of the Harlan family: and particularly of the descendants of George and Michael Harlan who settled in Chester County, Pennsylvania, 1687*, (Baltimore, MD: Lord Baltimore Press, 1914). Accessed February 27, 2022.

<sup>79</sup> Hurt, 344.

## CHAPTER TWO: The Saxton-McKinley Years in Canton

### *Growth of Canton, Ohio, to the American Civil War (1815-1860)*

Canton was the first village established in what would become Stark County, Ohio. By the end of the War of 1812, nine other communities had been established within the borders of Stark County despite concerns about relationships with nearby American Indian tribes. Canton continued to be the largest, especially after it was named the county seat in 1809. Settlers were mostly of German extraction, coming by way of Pennsylvania, as well as some with English ancestors, principally from Maryland, Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Connecticut, the states which had claimed the Ohio territory before it became a state.<sup>1</sup> Most settlers were farmers, but some came to set up shops and businesses on Market Street in Canton, which, because of its proximity to the county courthouse on the public square, became the locus of commerce for the village. The War of 1812 and its aftermath temporarily halted the growth of Stark County; no new settlements were established for the next ten years, but the existing communities continued to attract settlement, commerce, and civic institutions.<sup>2</sup> John Saxton arrived in 1814 and set up his printing shop.<sup>3</sup> The Farmer's Bank, the first bank opened in Stark County, was founded in Canton in 1816. A Canton library was established with donated books.<sup>4</sup> Churches of several denominations were founded between 1817 and 1821, one occupying the lot set aside for that purpose by Bezaleel Wells.<sup>5</sup> By 1822, Canton had finally achieved the population required by state law, two thousand inhabitants, to be incorporated as a town, which occurred on January 30, 1822, with James W. Lathrop as town president. Lathrop managed the town along with five trustees, but, in 1838, Canton re-incorporated to change the town management structure to four wards and a mayor instead of a president and trustees.<sup>6</sup>

It is not clear exactly when George DeWalt arrived in Canton, but he was certainly there by August 1812, when he enlisted for service in the War of 1812, and he was there in 1821, when he married Christiana Herter, from Knox County, Ohio.<sup>7</sup> His father, Phillip DeWalt, had moved to Canton by 1820, and, by 1824, ran a stop on the stagecoach line from Pittsburgh through Canton and Massillon to Mansfield and points west. The stagecoach stop, called the Spread Eagle Tavern, was operated out of his home, a log cabin at the corner of Market and Tuscarawas Streets, across the street from the county courthouse.<sup>8</sup> In 1827, Phillip DeWalt sold the tavern to his son, George, who changed the name to the Eagle Hotel, likely moving into it

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<sup>1</sup> Heald, 13.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>7</sup> Ancestry.com, *Ohio, U.S., County Marriage Records, 1774-1993* [database on-line], (Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2017). Accessed March 2, 2022.

<sup>8</sup> Heald, 20, identifies the subsequent location of the First National Bank as being on the lot first occupied by the DeWalt stagecoach stop.

about the time his daughter, Katherine, was born that year. When First National Bank purchased the property and built the bank building there in 1868, it retained the eagle symbolism, placing a large stone eagle over the entrance to the bank.<sup>9</sup> The 1887 *Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, Canton, Ohio*, shows the First National Bank located on the northeast quadrant of the block just south of the county courthouse, at the corner of Market and Tuscarawas Streets. This corner is identified as the “Eagle Block” on this and subsequent Sanborn Maps, probably a reference to the Spread Eagle Tavern and the Eagle Hotel, part of the early commercial development of Canton (Figure. 6).<sup>10</sup>

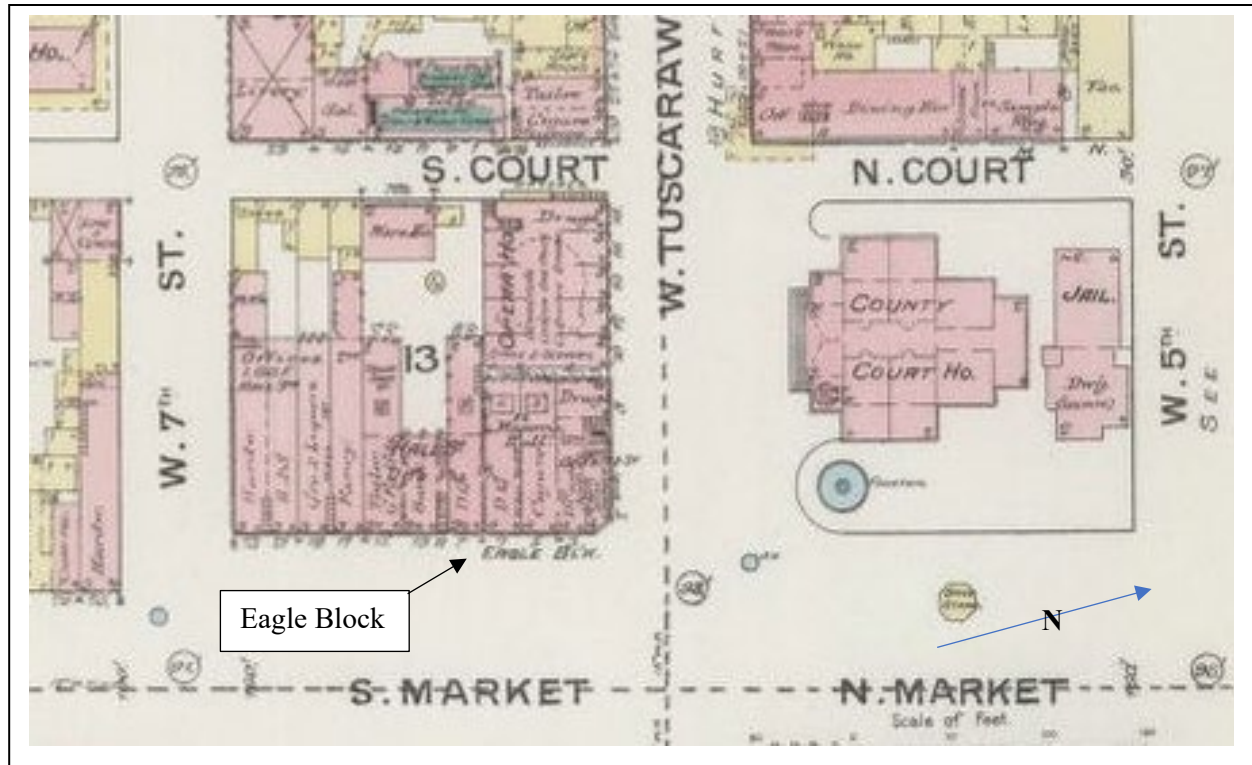


Figure 6: Detail of 1887 *Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Canton, Stark County, Ohio*, Image 2. Online at [www.loc.gov/item/sanborn](http://www.loc.gov/item/sanborn).

Like George DeWalt, John Saxton was born in Pennsylvania, and it is not clear when he arrived in Ohio. Two privates named John Saxton enlisted from Ohio during the War of 1812, each from a different county, but none from Stark County. It was not discovered for this report if either of these were John Saxton who arrived in Canton in 1814.<sup>11</sup> In 1815, John Saxton founded

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Sanborn Map Company, *1887 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Canton, Stark County, Ohio* (New York, NY: Sanborn Map Company, January 1887), 2, Image 2. Online at [https://www.loc.gov/item/sanborn\\_06631\\_001](https://www.loc.gov/item/sanborn_06631_001). Accessed March 1, 2022.

<sup>11</sup> Adjutant General of Ohio, *Roster of Ohio Soldiers in the War of 1812*, 77-78, 94.

a weekly newspaper, publishing the first issue on March 30, 1815.<sup>12</sup> Named *The Ohio Repository*, it became *The Ohio Repository and Stark County Gazette* in 1826, which lasted until 1830. In 1830, Saxton dropped the *Stark County Gazette* and published only *The Ohio Repository* until 1858, sometimes in partnership with one of his sons. In 1858, he also began publishing *The Stark County Republican*. *The Ohio Repository* merged with *The Stark County Republican* in 1868 to form *The Canton Repository and Republican*, which continued to be published until 1874 by one of John Saxton's sons, Thomas W. Saxton. In 1874, the *Republican* was dropped, and the now-daily newspaper became *The Canton Repository*, published under that name until 1913.<sup>13</sup> The newspaper is now simply *The Repository* and is still published in Canton. After his newspaper was established, John Saxton travelled back to his home in Huntington County, Pennsylvania, to fetch a bride. He married Margaret Laird on August 3, 1815, and the couple returned to Canton to set up their household, purportedly in the former Herbst House on South Market Street, where their first two children were born.<sup>14</sup> The couple produced five children, of whom the eldest, James Asbury Saxton, born May 1, 1816, became the father of Ida Saxton, wife of President William McKinley. John Saxton lived in the Herbst House until 1820, when he purchased two lots to the north and built a new print shop and a home for his family.<sup>15</sup>

The Ohio State Legislature passed the Canal Act in 1824, authorizing construction of the Ohio-Erie Canal, one of the most important events in Stark County before the arrival of the railroad. It was inspired by the success of the Erie Canal in New York State, and that state's Governor George Clinton came to Ohio for the groundbreaking with Ohio's Governor Jeremiah Morrow on July 4, 1825, at Licking Summit near Newark, Ohio. The planned route ran from Cleveland, Ohio, south along the Cuyahoga River, across the portage lands to the Tuscarawas River, west to the Licking River, to the Scioto River running through Columbus, and south to Portsmouth on the Ohio River, a total of 308 miles.<sup>16</sup> Canal-building began at Cleveland and employed more than 2,000 laborers.<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately for Canton, the designated route did not run through town but followed the Tuscarawas River to the west. James Duncan, a ship's captain from the East, had purchased land in the area and managed to get the canal routed on the east side of the Tuscarawas River, where his land was. At his residence in Kendal, Ohio, the contracts were signed on January 18, 1826, for digging forty-four sections of the canal. Canal construction was expected to bring thousands of new jobs and commercial opportunities to the area, and Duncan founded Massillon, Ohio, later that year to take advantage of that. The canal spurred

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<sup>12</sup> "Saxton-Barber House, 331 S. Market Street," unknown author, unknown date, 1, in Ralph Regula Papers held at Ohio State University Archives in Columbus, Ohio. Consists of five pages of typed notes, including a brief genealogy of the Saxton family in Canton and references Mary Herbst's diary. It should be noted that not all information in this document is accurate, so its contents should be regarded with caution.

<sup>13</sup> Library of Congress, website, <https://loc.gov/newspapers>. Accessed March 2, 2022. See also Gay Morgan Moore, *Canton: Postcard History Series* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2009), 33.

<sup>14</sup> "Saxton-Barber House, 331 S. Market Street," 1.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ron Cockrell, *A Green-Shrouded Miracle: The Administrative History of Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area, Ohio* (Omaha, NE: National Park Service, Department of the Interior, 1992), 7.

<sup>17</sup> Heald, 18.

population and commercial growth in Massillon, which soon began to rival that of slower-growing Canton.<sup>18</sup>

Through the early years of the nineteenth century, the DeWalt and Saxton families grew and prospered. In the 1830 federal census, George DeWalt is listed as head of a household of twenty-seven. Since his family consisted, at the time, of only himself, his wife, and one or two children, the enumerators likely also counted the guests at the Eagle Hotel as well as any employees George DeWalt might have had because enumerators were instructed to count everyone in the dwelling at the time of enumeration, whether they lived there or not, to ensure that everyone was counted.<sup>19</sup> In 1836, George DeWalt purchased two lots (lots numbered 56 and 57 on the original plat of Canton) on South Market Street and began constructing his new house there in 1841.<sup>20</sup> This house, located on lot number 57, is the back wing of the house that is now part of the First Ladies National Historic Site at what is now 331 Market Avenue South.<sup>21</sup> Market Street was solidly commercial where it passed through the public square and past the courthouse, but this part of Market Street, three blocks south of the public square, was still a mostly residential area in the 1840s. Across the street from George DeWalt's property stood the brick home of one of the earliest residents of Canton, built in 1810 at an address which later transitioned to 336 Market Avenue South. Mary Herbst's unpublished diary, "My Ancestral Home," written in 1947, claims that the John Saxton family moved into the Herbst House immediately after marriage in 1815 and that James A. Saxton was born there about 1816.<sup>22</sup> It became known as the Herbst House later in the century, which, for the sake of clarity, will be used when discussing it in this report. The Herbst House was purchased in 1832 by Peter Kaufman, immigrant from Germany, who used it as a publishing house for a German-language newspaper, *Vaterlands Freund Und Geis Zeit*, and German-language almanacs for the German-speaking community in Canton. The east side of Market Street South had already begun to transition to commercial use when George DeWalt built his home on the west side.<sup>23</sup> John Saxton's newspaper business, located north of the Herbst House, prospered and, as previously discussed, several of his sons partnered with him in various iterations of *The Canton Repository*. John Saxton's eldest son, however, James Asbury Saxton, went into business for himself about

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>19</sup> Ancestry.com, *1830 United States Federal Census* [database on-line], (Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2010). Accessed March 3, 2022. Original data: Fifth Census of the United States, 1830 (NARA microfilm publication M19, 201 rolls). Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

<sup>20</sup> Sheila Fisher, PhD, "The Saxton House and its Restoration," in Carl Sferrazza Anthony, ed. *This Elevated Position: A Catalog and Guide to the National First Ladies' Library and the Importance of First Lady History* (Canton, OH: National First Ladies' Library, 2003), 29. See also unknown author, "Restoration of the Saxton-Barber House: First Phase, March 1979 to March 1980," 4. Report in Ralph Regula Papers held at Ohio State University Archives, Columbus, Ohio.

<sup>21</sup> Fisher in Anthony, 29.

<sup>22</sup> "Saxton-Barber House, 331 S. Market Street," 1.

<sup>23</sup> Heald, 24.



1834, opening a hardware store when he was eighteen years old.<sup>24</sup> He married Catherine DeWalt, daughter of George DeWalt, on August 31, 1846, and their daughter, Ida, was born on June 8, 1847.<sup>25</sup>

The federal census of 1850 was the first census to provide information about inhabitants other than simply a name, if the person was a head of household, and a general age range of the rest of the members of the household. Enumerated in the 1850 census, George DeWalt stated he was fifty-eight years old, indicating he was about twenty years old when he enlisted with George Stidger's Company to fight the War of 1812. In 1850, George DeWalt listed his occupation as broker for a securities and commodity brokerage investment company and had real estate valued at \$5,000. He was enumerated in dwelling number 87 with his wife, Christiana, and a twenty-year-old clerk, Joseph R. Saxton, who was a son of John Saxton and brother of James A. Saxton.<sup>26</sup> James A. Saxton, his wife, Catherine, and their daughters, Ida, aged three years, and Mary, aged one year, lived in dwelling number 86, enumerated just before that of George DeWalt. In 1850, James A. Saxton listed his occupation as hardware merchant, with real estate valued at \$400. The fact that his dwelling number is listed as 86, different from that of George DeWalt, indicates that they did not live in the same house, but the sequential numbering suggests that the James A. Saxton family lived near, if not right next door or, possibly, across the street from, the George DeWalt family. Census enumerators generally recorded one side of a street completely before moving to the other side. The separate but consecutive enumeration of the two families may indicate that James A. Saxton had either purchased and built a home on a lot north of George DeWalt's property on the west side of South Market Street or had inherited or purchased a home north of the Herbst House, where the Saxton Block building later stood, before the 1850 census. Another explanation may be that George DeWalt built a house for his daughter and her husband on lot number 56 when they married. This may be the house that appears on the corner of the same block on which the Saxton House stands in the *1887 Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps of Canton, Ohio* (Figure 10), or the house may have been demolished before publication of the *1887 Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps*, though no evidence for either theory was located during research for this Administrative History. Whatever the case, because the census was enumerated by residence, and the James A. Saxton family was enumerated separately from the DeWalts, it is clear that the Saxton's residence was separate from the George DeWalt home. This arrangement does not appear to have lasted long, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

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<sup>24</sup> David A. Simmons, *National Register of Historic Places Nomination for Saxton House, Canton, Ohio*, Columbus, Ohio: Ohio Historic Preservation Office, 1978, 4. Unsigned copy in Ralph Regula Papers held at Ohio State University Archives, Columbus, Ohio. Signed copy reviewed online October 29 2023 at [https://s3.amazonaws.com/NARAprdstorage/lz/electronic-recordings/rg-079/NPS\\_OH/79001950.pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/NARAprdstorage/lz/electronic-recordings/rg-079/NPS_OH/79001950.pdf).

<sup>25</sup> Fisher in Anthony, 29.

<sup>26</sup> Ancestry.com, *1850 United States Federal Census* [database on-line], (Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2010). Accessed March 3, 2022. Original data: Seventh Census of the United States, 1850. (NARA microfilm publication M19, 201 rolls). Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

In 1851, James A. Saxton opened the Stark County Bank in Canton under the regulations of the Free Banking Act of 1851. At that time, banks could print their own currency, backed by deposits in the bank. When the Stark County Bank closed voluntarily in December 1863, probably in response to the reorganization of the United States banking system resulting from the National Banking Act of 1863, the bank still had around \$3,500 in circulation, which was written off by the state in 1873.<sup>27</sup> James A. Saxton apparently opened the Stark County Exchange Bank under the new banking rules after closing the Stark County Bank, probably also in 1863, and most likely in the same building as his former bank. In the year following the 1850 census, Saxton had evolved from hardware store owner to banker.

By 1850, forty-five years after its founding, Canton had grown, but slowly. In fact, Massillon, to the west, overtook Canton in population thanks to the Ohio-Erie Canal. At mid-century, Canton boasted 225 dwellings, of which fifty were brick buildings, housing 2,603 inhabitants, but Massillon claimed between 3,000 and 4,000 inhabitants.<sup>28</sup> There was an effort in Massillon to change the county seat from Canton to Massillon, but “the railroad came just in time to save the day for Canton.”<sup>29</sup> The 1855 map of Stark County includes an inset map of Canton (Figure 7), which shows the growth of Canton mostly toward the south and the route of the Ohio and Pennsylvania Railroad, completed in 1852.<sup>30</sup> The first locomotive reached Canton at 3 p.m. on March 2, 1852, but the official grand opening of the railroad was held on March 11, when a train carrying officers, stockholders, and invited guests left Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, at 8 a.m. and arrived in Canton at 2:15 p.m. the same day. Although ultimately bound for Massillon, the train stopped in Canton for almost two hours to allow passengers to have dinner and tour Canton. John Saxton, likely representing his newspaper, *The Ohio Repository*, was present for the festivities, along with other important men of the town.<sup>31</sup>

The coming of the railroad affected Canton and Massillon differently. Canton experienced an immediate boom, but Massillon underwent a period of adjustment as transportation transitioned from the canal to the railroad. The railroad enabled Canton to become an industrial city by providing quicker transportation of people, materials, and goods than had the canal. The first great industry in Canton to be spurred by the coming of the railroad was the manufacture of agricultural machinery. The C. Aultman Company produced reapers and mowers in Greentown, Ohio, but moved to Canton as soon as the route of the railroad had been

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<sup>27</sup> Information about James A. Saxton’s first bank, Stark County Bank, online at <https://www.ha.com/itm/obsoletes-by-state/ohio/canton-oh-stark-county-bank-at-canton-ohio~>. The easiest way to get to the site is to google “stark county bank canton ohio history” and click on the link. This site sells rare currency, and the Stark County Bank information was part of background information on bank notes issued by the Stark County Bank that were for sale on this site. Accessed March 5, 2022.

<sup>28</sup> Heald, 21.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>30</sup> William Schuchman, “New Map of Stark County, Ohio, 1855,” (Pittsburgh: Williams Dorr & Co., 1855), online at <http://www.loc.gov/item/2012592393>. Accessed February 2022.

<sup>31</sup> Heald, 28.

established, buying property just south of the railroad tracks for their factory in Canton.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, Russell and Company, maker of threshing machines, moved their manufacturing operations from Massillon to Canton in 1865 after W.K. Miller, who had patented the Peerless mower and reaper in 1857, became a Russell and Company partner. “Canton became the reaper-and-mower producing center of the country. ‘Peerless’ was the Russell Company trade name.”<sup>33</sup> The railroad facilitated quick import of materials to Canton and export of finished products to farmers across the country. By the time the train arrived, Canton had already reached a population of 3,500, required by the state constitution to qualify for status as a city. Canton adopted a city form of government, with a mayor, a city council of eight members, two from each of the four wards, and various other city officials. This form of government remained in place until 1910.<sup>34</sup>

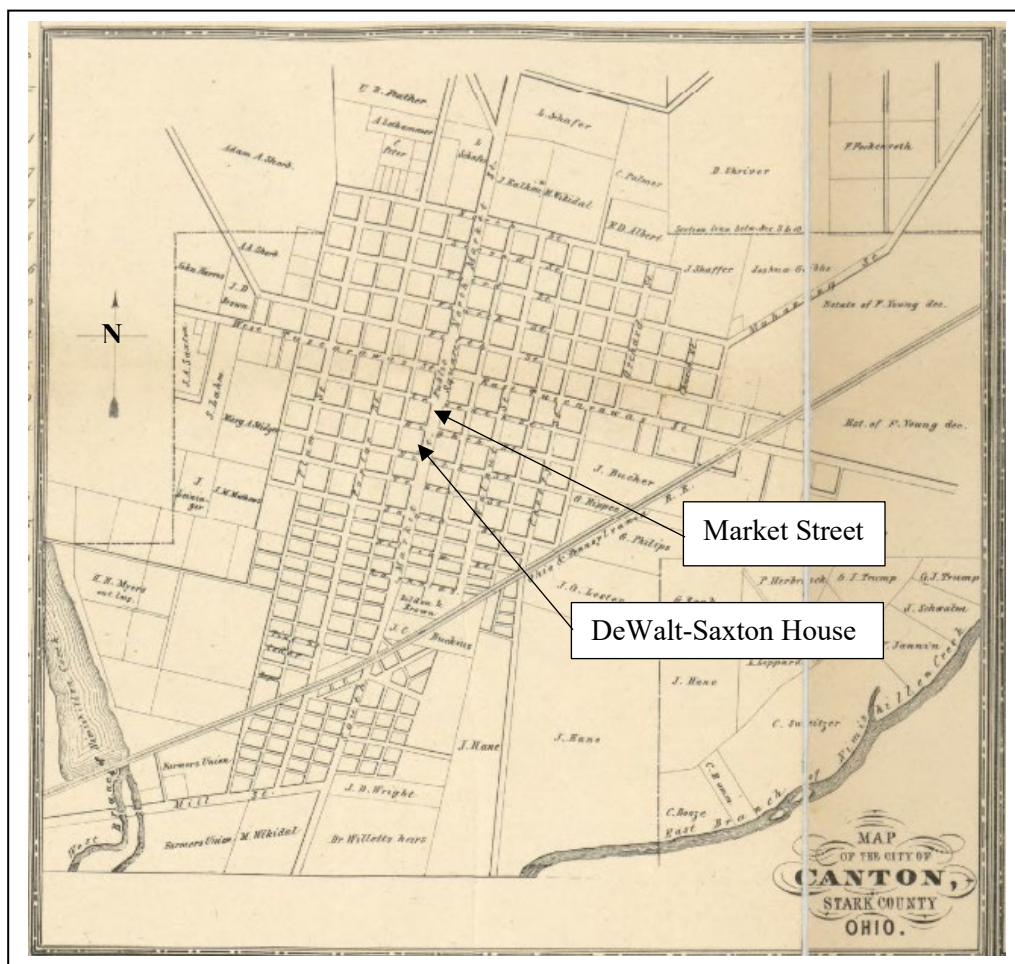


Figure 8: 1855 Map of Canton, Ohio. From Schuchman, “New Map of Stark County, Ohio, 1855.” Online at [www.loc.gov/](http://www.loc.gov/).

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 31.

*The American Civil War in Canton and Northeastern Ohio (1861-1865)*

As with the other wars throughout the history of the United States, no battles of the American Civil War were fought in Canton, Ohio, or even in Stark County. Skirmishes were fought in the southern part of Ohio, but Canton was situated too far north to be materially affected. What Canton could supply to the federal war effort was men and materials. By 1860, Ohio had what was needed to contribute to the cause: it ranked third in population, behind only New York and Pennsylvania; it ranked highest among the states in production of horses, sheep, and wool, and second in corn, cheese, flax, milk, cows, and other livestock; it led the nation in miles of railroad; it was the third most industrialized state in the nation; and it was economically and politically unified with the East Coast.<sup>35</sup> What Ohio did not have in abundance was consensus. Southern Ohioans were aligned with Kentuckians by ties of culture and family, while northern Ohioans were similarly aligned with the East, especially Pennsylvania, and with the other Old Northwest Territory states such as Michigan and Indiana. Divisions of opinion existed between more recent immigrants and earlier settlers. Women were beginning to advocate for their own equality. Most White Ohioans were not interested in equality or, in many cases, even freedom, for African Americans. They feared, among other things, that Black emancipation would prompt a flood of Black migrant farmworkers from southern states, disrupting the labor situation of this mostly rural state. These divisions meant that some effort was required to make sure Ohio contributed appropriately to the war effort.<sup>36</sup>

When Fort Sumter in South Carolina fell on April 12, 1861, to shelling by forces of the newly formed Confederate States of America, President Abraham Lincoln called for 75,000 volunteers from the states remaining loyal to the United States for a three-month term of enlistment. Thirteen thousand volunteers were expected to come from Ohio, but, “from all corners of the state, 30,000 men offered themselves for service.” Within five days of the fall of Fort Sumter, the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Ohio Volunteer Infantry regiments had been organized in Columbus and were dispatched east to help defend Washington, D.C.<sup>37</sup> The Fourth Ohio Volunteer Infantry regiment, which included Company F, calling themselves the “Canton Zouaves,” mustered in April 26, 1861, at Camp Jackson in Columbus, Ohio, and mustered out July 4, 1861, at Camp Dennison, Ohio, having fulfilled their three-months term of enlistment. By then, it was apparent that the American Civil War was not going to be a quick and easy victory for either side. Most of the men re-enlisted for three years or the duration of the war and served in the same unit, which was reorganized for three years’ service on June 5, 1861.<sup>38</sup> The Fourth Regiment of Ohio Volunteer Infantry served in the Eastern Theater, first under Major General George McClellan and, later, under General William Rosecrans, participating in battles in western Virginia, notably

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<sup>35</sup> Kern and Wilson, 222-223.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 223.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *4<sup>th</sup> Regiment, Ohio Infantry*, online at [http://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/4th\\_Regiment,\\_Ohio\\_Infantry](http://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/4th_Regiment,_Ohio_Infantry). Accessed March 4, 2022.

Rich Mountain and Corrick's Ford.<sup>39</sup> They were eventually transferred to the Army of the Potomac, and fought at Fredericksburg, Antietam, Chancellorsville, and at the Battle of Gettysburg, to name a few. After Gettysburg, the Fourth Regiment of Ohio Volunteer Infantry remained with General Ulysses S. Grant until the close of the war, though older members were mustered out on June 21, 1864, and the regiment was consolidated into a battalion five days later. After Lee's surrender, the battalion marched to Washington, D.C., participated in the Grand Review, and was mustered out on July 12, 1865.<sup>40</sup> On the roster of Company F can be seen surnames familiar to Canton, such as Laird, Lambert, and Miller, though no names from the DeWalt, Saxton, Barber, or Belden families appear in this company, most likely because the men of the families were either too old or too young to enlist or because they served elsewhere or in other capacities.<sup>41</sup>

The history of the Fourth Regiment of Ohio Volunteer Infantry is typical of the service of the other Ohio regiments to serve during the American Civil War. Regiments such as the 104<sup>th</sup> and the 115<sup>th</sup> Regiments of Ohio volunteers also contained companies of men from Stark County, with names that were, or would become, familiar in Canton. Men from the Harter family served in Companies E and F of the 115<sup>th</sup> Regiment Ohio Volunteer Infantry, which both mustered in on September 18, 1862, at Massillon and mustered out on June 22, 1865, at Murfreesboro, Tennessee.<sup>42</sup> Marshall C. Barber, who later married Mary B. Saxton, sister to Ida Saxton, served as a wagoner in the Ohio National Guard from May to September 1864.<sup>43</sup> William McKinley Jr., served the entire four years in the Twenty-Third Regiment Ohio Volunteer Infantry, mustering out as a brevet major. Conflict in Ohio during the American Civil War was brief and mostly in the southernmost counties.

Despite that Ohioans disagreed among themselves on the need and reasons for the American Civil War and despite that they were often not in favor of emancipation for the people held in bondage in the Southern states, Ohioans contributed significantly to the war effort. Ohio provided political leadership in the federal government in the persons of men like Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, from Steubenville, who was among those in Lincoln's cabinet who advocated strongly for emancipation, and Secretary of the Treasury Salmon Chase, who kept the Union solvent during the early years of the war.<sup>44</sup> Chase introduced paper currency during the war, the "greenbacks," which served as the precedent for our current system of paper money.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Kern and Wilson, 224.

<sup>40</sup> Larry Stevens, comp., *4<sup>th</sup> Ohio Infantry*, online at <http://www.ohiocivilwar.com/cw4.html>. Accessed March 4, 2022.

<sup>41</sup> *4<sup>th</sup> Regiment, Ohio Infantry*. See also National Park Service website, [nps.gov/civilwar/soldiers-and-sailors-database.htm](https://nps.gov/civilwar/soldiers-and-sailors-database.htm), where names of individual combatants may be searched and their records located. Accessed November 9, 2022.

<sup>42</sup> Heald, 38. The family name of Christiana Herter DeWalt is spelled variously in the records as Herter and Harter.

<sup>43</sup> Ancestry.com, *Ohio, U.S., Soldier Grave Registrations, 1804-1958* [database on-line], (Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2017). Accessed March 7, 2022.

<sup>44</sup> Kern and Wilson, 235.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 235-236.

He also helped to see through Congress the National Banking Act of 1864, which gave the country a more uniform and stable banking system.<sup>46</sup>

Ohio provided economic leadership in the person of Jay Cooke, from Sandusky, who was tapped by Chase to sell bonds authorized by Congress to finance the war. Cooke proved up to the task: “In all, he raised three billion dollars for the government....” Ohio supplied military leadership, both in terms of enlistments and in terms of ranking members. Many states struggled to fulfill their enlistment requirements, but Ohio ended the war with thousands of men over its quota. More than 200 Ohio men achieved the rank of general during the American Civil War, including George Armstrong Custer, William Rosecrans, Philip Sheridan, and William Tecumseh Sherman. Pre-eminent among these was General Ulysses S. Grant, who led the Union army finally to victory and later became the eighteenth President of the United States.<sup>47</sup> Not the least important of its contributions, Ohio also provided supplies and transportation, including nearly a fifth of all wool fabric used to make uniforms. Ohio was the third largest producer of cattle, which provided rations for the army and also leather for items such as belts, straps, shoes, boots, and saddles. Ohio ranked first in the nation in the supply of horses and also supplied timber, coal, and pig iron for the manufacture of many commodities needed by an army. Additionally, with the greatest number of miles of railroad tracks in the country at the time, Lake Erie to the north, the Ohio River on the south, and the canal system in between, Ohio was the hub of the federal transportation network for moving men and supplies to where they could be used to support the war effort.<sup>48</sup> In summary, Ohio was a critical resource for the successful prosecution by the federal government of the American Civil War, which effectively ended on April 9, 1865, when Confederate General Robert E. Lee surrendered to Union General Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Courthouse in Virginia.

#### *The William McKinley Jr. Years in Canton (1867-1907)*

It appears that James A. Saxton and his family had moved into the Saxton house on South Market Street by 1860 and were living with Catherine’s mother, Christiana DeWalt, who is enumerated in the same dwelling with them in the 1860 census.<sup>49</sup> George DeWalt’s gravestone in Canton’s Westlawn Cemetery records that he died on October 29, 1850, shortly after completion of the 1850 census, so the James A. Saxton family likely moved from the house in which they were enumerated in the 1850 census to the original Saxton House during the 1850s. This indicates that Ida Saxton called this house her home, living in the earlier, Federal style

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 236.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 238.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 237.

<sup>49</sup> Ancestry.com, *1860 United States Federal Census* [database on-line], (Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2010). Accessed March 5, 2022. Original data: Eighth Census of the United States, 1860 (NARA microfilm publication M19, 201 rolls). Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

portion from the time she was four or five years old and, possibly, in the Second Empire portion of the house after it was built until she married William McKinley Jr. in 1871.<sup>50</sup> It should be remembered that the date of construction of that portion of the house is thought to be between 1865 and 1870, a time during which Ida McKinley was often away at boarding school and taking a six-month Grand Tour of Europe after graduation, so she may have remained living in the original part of the house until she married.

Family tradition indicates that James A. Saxton built the Second Empire-styled front portion of the house in 1870, after he and his wife inherited it from Christiana DeWalt.<sup>51</sup> However, when first built, the larger building did not connect to the earlier, Federal-style home of George and Christiana DeWalt. According to investigations undertaken in 1979 into the construction chronology of the building, when the connecting element was built to connect the two, “the logical entry point for the two original buildings did not quite line up,” which created the “curious offset or skew in the hallway of the connecting element.” Also, the five-sided bay on the east side of the Second Empire-style portion of the building was added after that part of the building was completed, evidenced by the lack of keying of the brickwork between the walls of the building and those of the bay. The historical architects investigating the Saxton House placed the probable construction date of the three-story portion of the house from the 1860s into the 1870s. This supposition may be based on the period of popularity of the Second Empire style of buildings, about 1855 to about 1875, indicating that the current configuration of the Saxton House is not the same as that of the house in which the James A. Saxton family was enumerated in either the 1850 or the 1860 censuses. It may be that James A. Saxton built the three-story portion of the Saxton House in the mid to late 1860s, adding the connecting feature once he and his wife inherited the property.<sup>52</sup>

William McKinley Jr. moved to Canton in 1867 to begin his legal practice.<sup>53</sup> Born January 29, 1843, in Niles, Ohio, he entered Allegheny College in Meadville, Pennsylvania, in 1860 but was obliged to leave due to illness. McKinley taught at the Kerr District School near Poland, Ohio, and served as the Postmaster for Poland in early 1861. He enlisted as a private in Company “E” of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Regiment Ohio Volunteer Infantry on June 11, 1861, and served until being mustered out on July 26, 1865, having been promoted to Captain of Company “G” a year earlier and to brevet Major by President Lincoln on March 13, 1865.<sup>54</sup> McKinley studied law in 1866 and 1867 and was admitted to the bar at Warren, Ohio, in March 1867. After he arrived in Canton in May of that year, McKinley first lived with his cousin, W.K. Miller, partner in the manufacturing firm, Russell and Company. In June, William McKinley Jr. became a law partner

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<sup>50</sup> Information on George DeWalt online at [findagrave.com/memorial/11866802/george-dewalt](https://findagrave.com/memorial/11866802/george-dewalt). Accessed March 16, 2022.

<sup>51</sup> Fisher in Anthony, 29.

<sup>52</sup> “Restoration of the Saxton-Barber House: First Phase, March 1979 to March 1980,” 4. See also Simmons, *National Register of Historic Places Nomination for Saxton House, Canton, Ohio*. The nomination gives the date of construction of the front part of the house as around 1865.

<sup>53</sup> Heald, 29.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 59-60.

of Judge George W. Belden.<sup>55</sup> In his early days in Canton, he liked to be called Major McKinley, a show of respect from the population and also a way to differentiate him from his father, William McKinley Sr., who had moved his family to Canton by 1870.<sup>56</sup>

William McKinley Jr. threw himself into the civic and social life of Canton with gusto, becoming associated with many, if not all, of the important civic institutions then available there. In August, he paid his first visit to Canton Lodge No. 60 F&AM, the Masonic lodge organized in 1821, which the most prominent men of Canton joined. McKinley joined the YMCA Literary Club, which held weekly debates that served as social gatherings of the times, and, “by March 11, 1868, he was presiding at the regular Friday evening discussions,” which were rotated through the rented YMCA rooms, the Good Templars Hall, and the Union School building. On April 15, 1868, McKinley won the debate on Women’s Suffrage at the Literary Club. He had the affirmative side and “stole the show...his 10-minute period was stretched to an hour by vote of those present. On May 20, 1868, he was elected its president....” During his tenure, McKinley secured permission from the Directors of the First National Bank to allow the YMCA to use the third floor of their new, four-story bank building, rent free, for ten years.<sup>57</sup> The site of the former Spread Eagle Tavern and the Eagle Hotel across the street from the county courthouse, it was the most desirable location in town. The new rooms were dedicated on June 15, 1869. The First National Bank also leased the fourth floor of their new building to the Masons, and McKinley and Belden had their law offices on the second floor.<sup>58</sup> McKinley barely had to leave the building to conduct his life. He also became involved in local politics and, on August 5, 1868, was chosen Chairman of the Republican Central Committee of Stark County. That same month, his law partner, Judge Belden, died, and McKinley continued his law practice alone for a time. In November 1869, William McKinley Jr. was elected the County Prosecutor for Stark County, which remained his position for the next two years.<sup>59</sup>

Ida Saxton, meanwhile, was becoming a young lady of education, culture, and refinement. She attended local schools in Canton and then private schools in Cleveland and Delhi, New York. In 1866, she was sent to Brooke Hall Female Seminary, a day and boarding school for young women in Media, Pennsylvania. In 1869, Ida toured Europe for six months with her sister and a female chaperone, visiting Ireland, Scotland, England, Holland, Belgium, France, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and Italy. Her stints in boarding school and on tour in Europe coincide with the probable date of construction of the Second Empire-style portion of the Saxton House. When she returned home, Ida worked in her father’s bank, the Stark County Exchange Bank, for a time, first as a clerk, then as cashier, and, finally, serving as bank manager when her father was absent.<sup>60</sup> Legend has it that this was where she first met William McKinley Jr., and,

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 29-30.

<sup>56</sup> Sterling, 26.

<sup>57</sup> Heald, 36.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>60</sup> Fisher in Anthony, 29.



smitten with the most eligible young lady in town, “he pursued her until she caught him.”<sup>61</sup> A different legend states that the two met when John Saxton, editor and printer of the local newspaper, took William McKinley Jr. to meet his son, James A. Saxton, at the younger man’s home on Market Street. Either way, a match was soon made.

By 1870, the population of Canton was 8,660.<sup>62</sup> Some of that population was part of the family of William McKinley Jr.: His father, William McKinley Sr., who listed his occupation as “iron manufacturer,” his mother, Nancy, keeping house, his sister, Anna, teaching school, his brother, Abner, studying law, and one domestic servant are enumerated together in June 1870; William McKinley Jr. is enumerated with them, indicating he likely lived with them at the time.<sup>63</sup> This living arrangement did not long survive the census taking, however. Ida Saxton and William McKinley Jr. were married on January 25, 1871. After a honeymoon of three or four weeks, they moved, first, into a local hotel, now demolished, for a few months and then into a house at 143 North Market Street (the numbering system centered on North Street during this period, so the first block of Market Street north of North Street was the 100 block of North Market Street), which they rented from James A. Saxton, who owned it (Figure 8).<sup>64</sup> Built in 1866 or 1867 by newlyweds Thomas and Mary Kimball, the house was owned by George D. and Elizabeth Harter, who had purchased it as newlyweds in 1869, when Saxton acquired the house for \$8,000 for his own newlywed daughter and her husband in 1871.<sup>65</sup> William and Ida McKinley’s first child, Katherine McKinley (Katie), was born there on Christmas Day of that year.<sup>66</sup> By this time, James A. Saxton described his occupation in the 1870 census as banker instead of merchant and claimed real estate valued at \$100,000 and personal property valued at \$75,000. Some of the real estate would have been his bank building, along with his home on South Market Street, but he also owned other real estate on North



Figure 8: William and Ida McKinley House, 143 N. Market Street, Canton, Ohio. From Moore, *Postcard History Series, Canton*.

<sup>61</sup> Sterling, 21.

<sup>62</sup> Heald, 30, 60.

<sup>63</sup> Ancestry.com, *1870 United States Federal Census* [database on-line], (Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2010). Accessed March 9, 2022. Original data: Ninth Census of the United States, 1870 (NARA microfilm publication M19, 201 rolls). Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

<sup>64</sup> “Saxton-Barber House, 331 S. Market Street,” 2. Early histories of William and Ida McKinley state that they were given this house as a wedding present from Ida’s father. Recent investigation indicates that they rented the house after marriage and purchased it later. See Mark Holland, oral history interview, October 13, 2021. See also Carl S. Anthony, oral history interview, June 17, 2022.

<sup>65</sup> Janet Immler, “Happy Birthday, Mr. President – January 30 [sic]: A salute to William McKinley,” unknown newspaper, but probably *The Repository*, n.d., but handwritten note on copy states “January 1889.” In Ralph Regula Papers held at Ohio State University Archives.

<sup>66</sup> Heald, 60. See also Sterling, 22.

and South Market Street. The value of his real estate and personal property put James A. Saxton among the wealthiest men in town.

In November 1871, William McKinley Jr. was defeated for re-election as county prosecuting attorney but continued his career as a lawyer. His younger brother, Abner McKinley, completed his law studies and became a partner in William McKinley Jr.'s practice in March 1873.<sup>67</sup> The year 1873 was traumatic for the Saxtons and McKinleys. Katherine Saxton, Ida Saxton McKinley's mother, for whom the McKinley's young daughter was named, died suddenly on March 14, 1873. Ida McKinley, pregnant with their second child, became deeply depressed, and gave birth prematurely to the McKinley's second daughter, also named Ida, on April 1, 1873. The child lived only until August 1873, which did not help Ida McKinley's mental health.<sup>68</sup> According to family history, William and Ida McKinley moved out of their home on North Market Street after the death of baby Ida and moved into a suite of rooms on the upper two floors of the Saxton House with their remaining daughter, Katie. James A. Saxton sold the N. Market Street house back to the earlier owners, George and Elizabeth Harter.<sup>69</sup> For Ida Saxton McKinley, the final emotional blow came on June 25, 1875, when Katie died. Ida McKinley never recovered emotionally from the loss of her mother and two daughters in the space of three years. "Ida McKinley would remain an invalid, beset by physical and psychological weakness" for the rest of her life, although, because of the social stigma associated with her illnesses, the details were not then made public, not the least to protect William McKinley's political career.<sup>70</sup> On a more positive note, in October 1873, James A. Saxton "conveyed equal shares in the McKinley Block building (that is, they each owned half of it) to William and Ida," and, in December of that year, he appointed William McKinley Jr. manager of the Stark County Exchange Bank.<sup>71</sup>

Continuing to be active in the Republican Party, William McKinley Jr. was elected to his first term in the United States Congress in November 1876 and remained a congressman until the 1890 election except for a brief period between May 1884, when "a Democratic committee unseated him," and November of 1884, when he was re-elected to his seat.<sup>72</sup> During his fourteen years in Congress, William and Ida McKinley lived in a suite in a residential hotel in Washington D.C. When they were in Canton during congressional recesses, they occupied their suite of rooms on the second and third floors of the Saxton House (Figure 20).<sup>73</sup> According to the 1880 federal census, also living at the Saxton House on South Market Street was the family patriarch, James A. Saxton, widower, his unmarried son, George, and the family of his daughter,

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<sup>67</sup> Heald, 60.

<sup>68</sup> Fisher in Anthony, 29.

<sup>69</sup> Janet Immler, "Happy Birthday, Mr. President – January 30 [sic]: A salute to William McKinley."

<sup>70</sup> Fisher in Anthony, 29.

<sup>71</sup> Heald, 60. The McKinley Block is shown on the *1914 Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps of Canton, Ohio*, as being the block immediately north of the Saxton Block, which is east across Market Avenue South from the block on which the Saxton House is located.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 60-61.

<sup>73</sup> Anthony, oral history interview.

Mary, which was composed of Mary, her husband, Marshall C. Barber, a grain and feed dealer whom Mary Saxton married in 1874, and their four children. With so many family members residing in the house, it appears that the household help had to come in daily from elsewhere, as none are enumerated with the family.<sup>74</sup> On July 29, 1882, the house must have become even more crowded when James A. Saxton married widow, Hester Bradshaw Medill.<sup>75</sup>

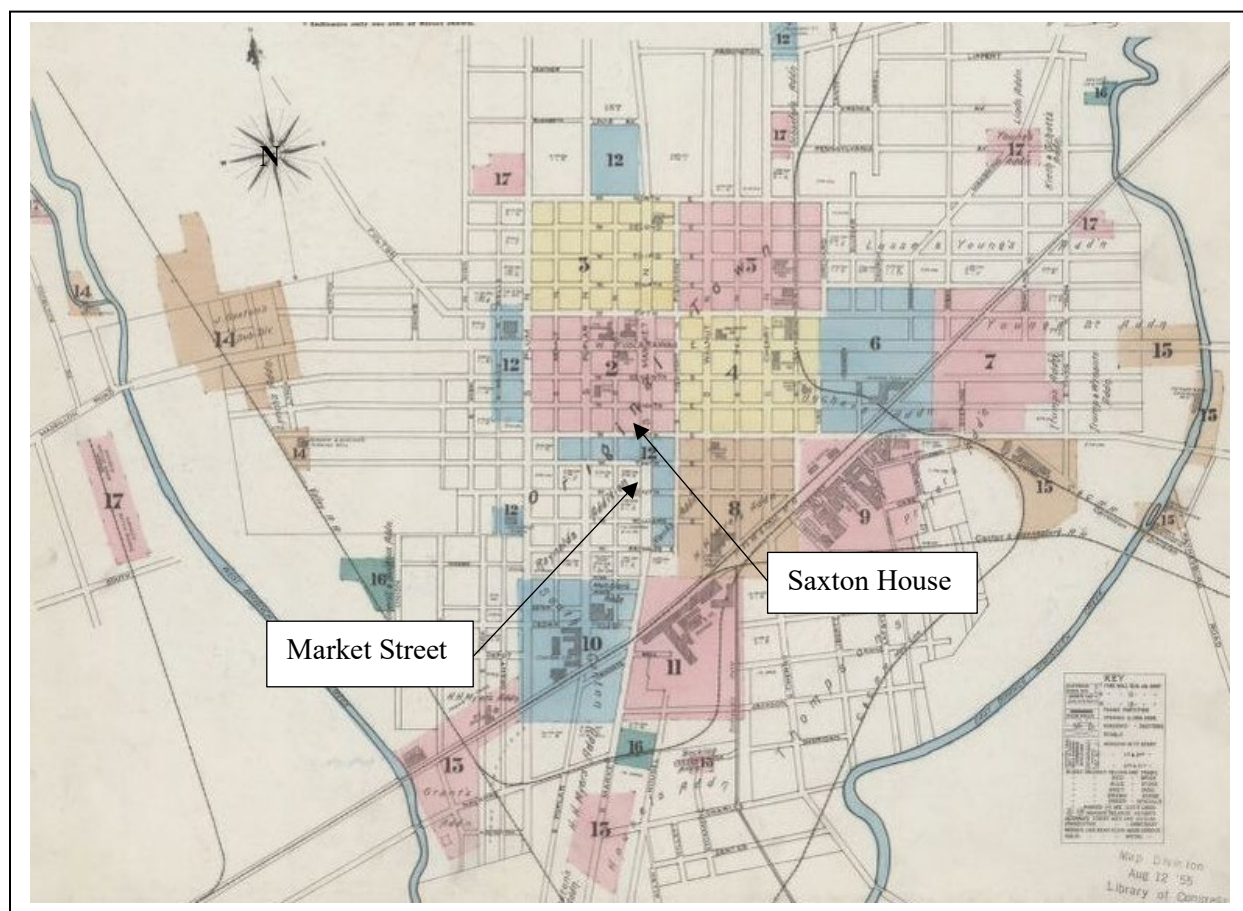


Figure 9: 1887 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Canton, Stark County, Ohio, Image 1.  
Online at [www.gov.loc/](http://www.gov.loc/)

<sup>74</sup> Ancestry.com, *1880 United States Federal Census* [database on-line], (Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2010). Accessed March 9, 2022. Original data: Tenth Census of the United States, 1880. (NARA microfilm publication M19, 201 rolls). Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

<sup>75</sup> Information on Hester Medill Saxton online at [findagrave.com/memorial/154421413/hester-saxton](http://findagrave.com/memorial/154421413/hester-saxton). Accessed August 9, 2022. This website includes a link to an image of the marriage license and certificate of marriage for Hester Medill and James A. Saxton. Some researchers have concluded that she was nineteen years old when she married Saxton because the marriage license certifies that she is over eighteen years of age (and, therefore, does not need her parents' permission to marry). This supposition is incorrect. Hester Medill Saxton, widow of James C. Medill, whom she married in 1855, and widow of James A. Saxton, was born approximately 1830, according to her tombstone. She died in 1907 and is buried in Chicago, Illinois.

Market Street was always part of the commercial hub of Canton. When George DeWalt began building his home there in the 1840s, that block of Market Street was already changing from residential to commercial, although, by 1887, it still had not fully made the transition. The *1887 Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps* for Canton, Ohio, shows that Canton had not expanded significantly since the 1855 map was drawn (Figures 7 and 9).<sup>76</sup> A few additional streets had been platted and laid out to the east and south, but very little expansion had occurred in the north and west.<sup>77</sup>



Figure 10: Detail of *1887 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Canton, Stark County, Ohio*, Image 2. Online at [www.loc.gov/](http://www.loc.gov/).

The address of the Saxton home standing on the corner of West 9th and South Market Streets in 1887 was 63 South Market Street, as it had been for the past eighty years (Figure 10). The *1887 Sanborn Map* shows what is probably the Saxton House carriage house on the southwestern corner of the block, conveniently across the street from a livery stable. Although the west side of Market Street where the Saxton House stands was almost completely residential, with only one other dwelling on the block facing Market Street (possibly the one in which the young James A. Saxton family was enumerated in 1850), a small office building had been constructed on the northernmost lot, between the two houses. Three years later, by 1891, the dwelling with its associated office building had been replaced by a drug store and shop where the dwelling had been and a row of office buildings lining West Eighth Street from South Market

<sup>76</sup> Sanborn Map Company, *1887 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Canton, Stark County, Ohio*, 1, Image 1. Accessed March 2, 2022.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 12, Image 12. Accessed March 9, 2022.



Street to South Court Street. Industrial uses had begun to invade the neighborhood north and west of the Saxton House by 1891, with a two-story bindery building probably associated with the Canton Roller Printing Company building newly constructed on South Court Street. The carriage house had been demolished and two buildings, one of which was a duplex, constructed on West Ninth Street west of the Saxton House. The brick building constructed on the site of carriage house was likely also a duplex. Although not shown as such in the 1891, *Sanborn Fire Insurance Map*, it is clearly shown as a duplex in the 1914 map (Figures 11 and 22).<sup>78</sup>

In 1887, the east side of the block on Market Street across the street from the Saxton house was almost completely commercial buildings, mostly constructed of brick (Figure 10). The home and print shop built by John Saxton in the 1820s had been demolished, and the “Saxton Block,” a four-story brick building, covered the northwest quadrant of the block. Commercial buildings south of the Saxton Block spanned to the Herbst House, formerly the home of the printer of the German-language newspaper, which, though still a residence, had become a duplex and also housed an oyster vendor. However, behind this unbroken wall of commerce on Market Street, the block was still mostly vacant land. The blocks of Market Street north of the block on which the Saxton House sits were almost completely

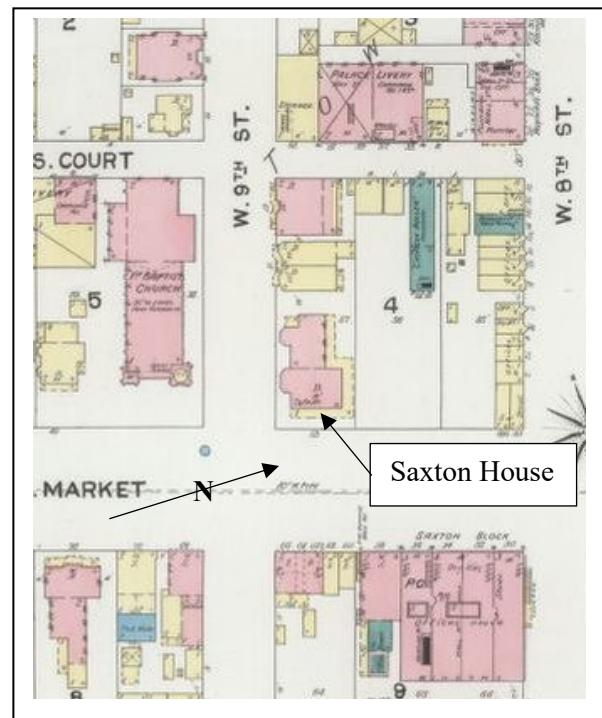


Figure 11: Detail of 1891 *Sanborn Fire Insurance Map* from Canton, Stark County, Ohio, Image 13. Online at [www.loc.gov/](http://www.loc.gov/).

commercial/industrial on both sides by 1887 all the way to Third Street, north of the county courthouse. The City National Bank occupied a building on the southeast corner of the intersection of South Market and 7th Street, across the street from its current location. The southwest block of the public square, south of the county courthouse, had been commercial almost from the founding of Canton. The Spread Eagle Tavern had been located here, as described earlier, and the 1887 *Sanborn Fire Insurance Map* called the large brick First National Bank building on the northeast corner of this block “The Eagle Block.”<sup>79</sup> Next to the First National Bank Building, on Tuscarawas Street facing the county courthouse, stood Louis Schaefer’s Opera House, which opened in 1868 to much fanfare by its

<sup>78</sup> Sanborn Map Company, *1891 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Canton, Stark County, Ohio* (New York, NY: Sanborn Map Company, January 1891), 12, Image 13. Online at [https://www.loc.gov/item/sanborn00631\\_002](https://www.loc.gov/item/sanborn00631_002). Accessed March 19, 2022. See also Sanborn Map Company, *1914 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Canton, Stark County, Ohio*, 17, Image 18, online at [https://www.loc.gov/item/sanborn06631\\_004](https://www.loc.gov/item/sanborn06631_004). Accessed March 17, 2003.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

Catholic and German supporters and much condemnation by the Protestant congregations and preachers of Canton. Despite the opposition, the Opera House succeeded and remained in operation until the death of Louis Schaefer in late 1889.<sup>80</sup> The remainder of this block was taken up with warehouses and storage sheds.<sup>81</sup> The 1887 *Sanborn Fire Insurance Map* shows the county courthouse situated on its own block, facing south toward Tuscarawas Street, with a fountain on the southeast corner of the block and the jail and sheriff's dwelling to the north. Two banks in brick buildings fronted on Tuscarawas Street in the block east of the county courthouse. One, the Farmers' Bank, was three-stories with a printing shop on the third floor.<sup>82</sup>

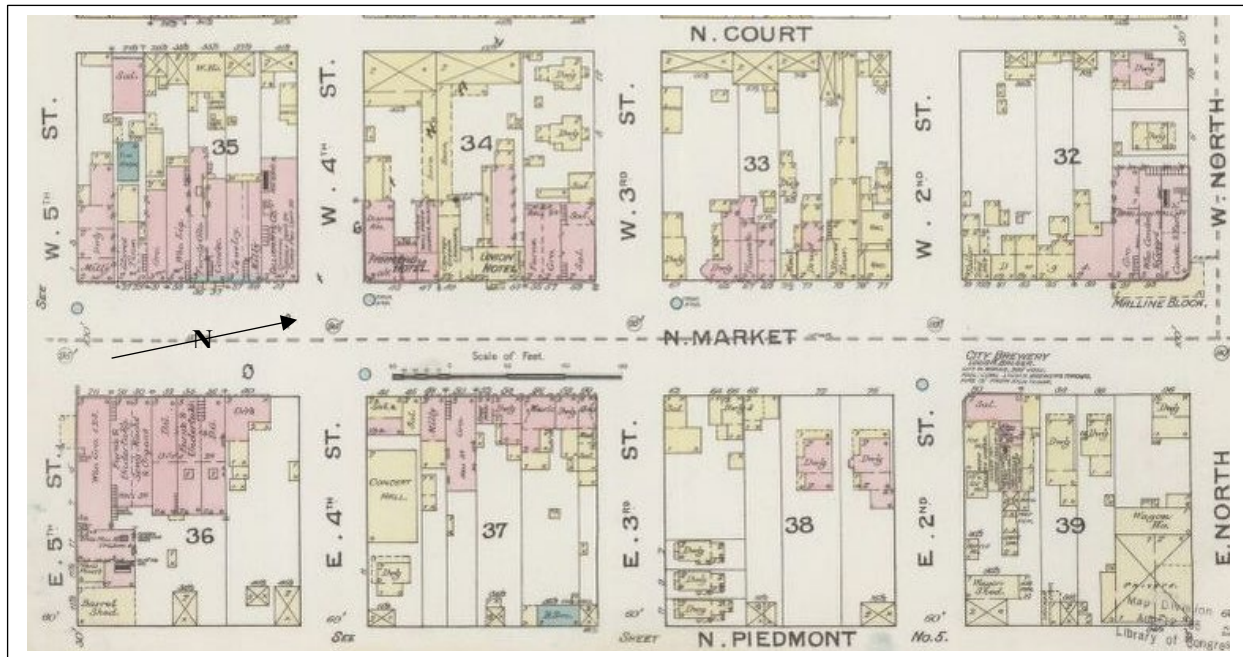


Figure 12: Detail of 1887 *Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Canton, Stark County, Ohio*, Image 3. Online at [www.loc.gov/](http://www.loc.gov/).

Once North Market Street passed the county courthouse block, it gradually became less commercial and more residential. A dwelling in the block immediately north of the courthouse block had a milliner's shop attached to it. The rest of the block was completely commercial, with mostly two- and three-story brick buildings on both sides of the street. The lot at the north end of the block on North Market Street was vacant of buildings (Figure 12).<sup>83</sup> The block between Fourth Street and Third Streets was the last of the mostly commercial blocks on North Market Street in 1887. After that, though they had a scattering of small business, the blocks were mostly residential. However, this block did feature two hotels, the Farmers' Hotel and the Union Hotel, with a steam laundry between them. These hotels took up most of this block on North Market

<sup>80</sup> Heald, 34-35.

<sup>81</sup> Sanborn Map Company, *1887 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Canton, Stark County, Ohio*, 2, Image 2.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Sanborn Map Company, *1887 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Canton, Stark County, Ohio*, 3, Image 3.

Street and apparently stretched all the way west to the next street, North Court Street, with sheds and probably livery stables for guest use. The other commercial buildings in this block were two-story brick buildings with retail stores on the ground floor and a hall for the Cleveland Metropolitan Bar Association (C.M.B.A) above. Two buildings on this block, facing West Third Street, were dwellings, presaging the transition to residential use north of the public square.<sup>84</sup>

The former and future McKinley home at 143 North Market Street was as far north on Market Street as it was possible to be and still be in the city. Indeed, the residential block on the west side of North Market Street immediately north of North Street (now 6th Street) was the final block in the north of Canton that the 1887 *Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps* recorded. It was strictly residential (Figure 13). By the early part of the twentieth century, North Market Street north of 6<sup>th</sup> Street (formerly North Street) was the most fashionable address in the city, known as “Quality Hill,” but, in 1887, the McKinley house was one of only six homes on North Market Street north of North Street, with, apparently, no homes on the east side of the street (the 1887 *Sanborn Fire Insurance Map* did not include that side of the street).<sup>85</sup>

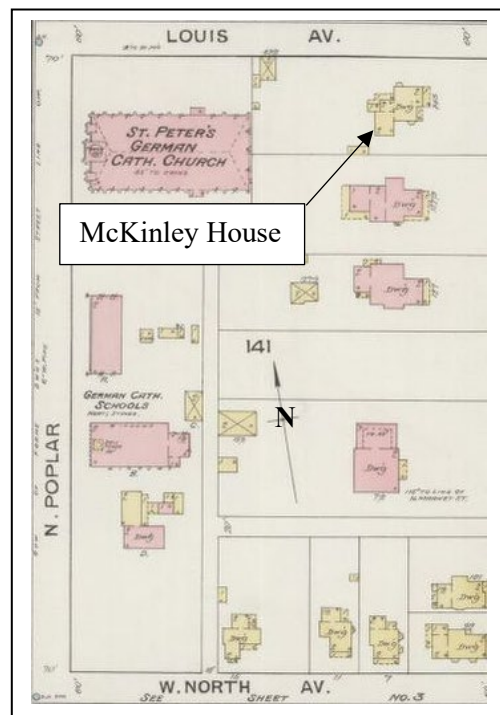


Figure 13: Detail of 1887 *Sanborn Fire Insurance Map* from Canton, Stark County, Ohio, Image 12. Online at [www.loc.gov/](http://www.loc.gov/).

James A. Saxton had made South Market Street his home for over thirty years when he died on March 23, 1887.<sup>86</sup> His daughter, Mary, and her husband, Marshall C. Barber, with their family and Mary’s brother, George Saxton, continued to live in the Saxton House on South Market Street, as did William and Ida McKinley during congressional recesses when they were not in Washington, D.C. When William McKinley Jr. lost his seat in Congress in 1890, he returned to Canton after his term ran out in 1891 and promptly ran for Governor of Ohio, a contest that he won.<sup>87</sup> He and Ida moved to a hotel in Columbus, Ohio, in 1892. That hotel burned down while they were living there, and the McKinleys leased a house in Columbus for the remainder of their residence in that city.<sup>88</sup> After two two-year terms as Governor,

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Moore, 30. See also Janet Immler, “Happy Birthday, Mr. President – January 30 [sic]: A salute to William McKinley.”

<sup>86</sup> Fisher in Anthony, 30.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> “President McKinley still homeless,” article (Canton, OH: Canton Preservation Society, n.d., but handwritten note on the print copy says September 1988), Original from Bill Smith, “William McKinley (1843-1901)” in *Homes of the Presidents* (New York, NY: Crescent Books, 1987) n.p. In Ralph Regula Papers held at Ohio State University Archives.

McKinley ran for President of the United States, launching his campaign for the Republican nomination in Thomasville, Georgia, in March 1895.<sup>89</sup> Learning that their first home in Canton was available for rent, the couple leased it in 1895 and began plans to refurbish and upgrade the old house, including construction of a wide new front porch. In February 1896, William and Ida McKinley hosted a magnificent silver wedding anniversary party at that home, to which Ohio's most prominent citizens were invited.<sup>90</sup>

On June 18, 1896, McKinley was nominated for president at the National Republican Convention in St. Louis, Missouri. Due to Ida McKinley's poor health, McKinley campaigned from home instead of going out to meet his supporters. Orchestrated and financed by Marcus Hanna, a wealthy industrialist from Cleveland, trainloads of supporters from states such as Illinois and Vermont arrived at the train station on South Market Street every day except Sunday from June 1896 until the election in November. Together, McKinley's supporters marched north on Market Street and through a temporary arch constructed over the street just south of the McKinley home, accompanied by a uniformed horse troop and a marching band known as the Grand Army Band, to hear McKinley's oratory in the front yard of his home.<sup>91</sup> Ronald Sterling, author of the pictorial history, *Canton, Ohio*, comments that this made "every day except Sunday seem like the 4<sup>th</sup> of July" in Canton.<sup>92</sup> Campaigning mostly from the new front porch on his old home, McKinley won the election and was inaugurated President of the United States on March 4, 1897. William and Ida McKinley moved out of their home on North Market Street in Canton and into the White House.<sup>93</sup>

In the ten years between 1887 and 1897, Canton boomed, as can be seen by comparing the *1887 Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps* with the *1897 Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps* (Figure 14). By 1897, Canton boasted a population of around 31,000 residents.<sup>94</sup> Significant additions had been made to the east and west of the city, including expanding Canton to the western side of the Nimishillen River. Railroad lines snaked through the city.<sup>95</sup> Horse-drawn street cars were added as a transportation amenity in 1886 at a cost of a nickel a ride.<sup>96</sup> By January 1890, the street cars had become electric trolleys.<sup>97</sup> "By 1892, Canton had become the center of the street paving brick industry" for the country after Henry S. Belden, of Canton, attended the 1876 Centennial Fair in Philadelphia "and saw the original stiff-mud brick-making machine," which manufactured paving bricks. Belden had such mud, in the form of clay and shale deposits, on his farm in Waco, Ohio. Partnering with John Merley, the two men began manufacturing paving

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<sup>89</sup> Heald, 61.

<sup>90</sup> Fisher in Anthony, 30.

<sup>91</sup> Sterling, 23. See also Moore, 12.

<sup>92</sup> Sterling, 23.

<sup>93</sup> Heald, 61.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>95</sup> Sanborn Map Company, *1897 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Canton, Stark County, Ohio*, n.p. (Cover Sheet), Image 1. Accessed March 10, 2022.

<sup>96</sup> Heald, 44.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.



bricks, and the paving of streets and roads in the Canton area expanded rapidly.<sup>98</sup> Henry S. Belden's company, Belden Brick, began paving Canton's streets in about 1889, starting in front of the Barnett House Hotel on the corner of Cherry Avenue and Tuscarawas Street.<sup>99</sup> The clay and shale of the area were also found to be suitable for making firebrick, pottery, and crockery, and several companies for the manufacture of these commodities were formed by 1890.<sup>100</sup>

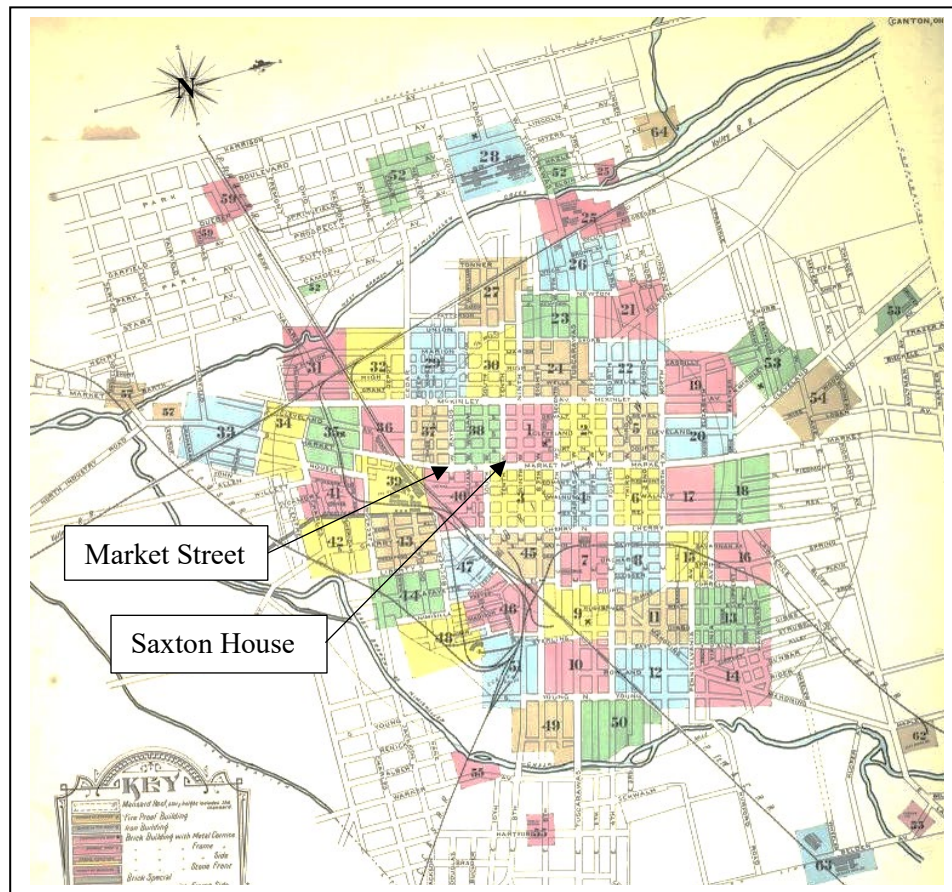


Figure 14: Detail of 1897 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Canton, Stark County, Ohio, Image 1. Online at [www.loc.gov/](http://www.loc.gov/).

Market Street continued to develop as the commercial and financial hub of the city. By 1897, the block on which the Saxton House stands had been bisected north to south with an alleyway separating the Saxton home from the two duplexes to the west. The single-story frame buildings along West Eighth Street, filled with shops and offices, now included a dwelling with a doctor's office attached just west of the alley, fronting on West Eighth Street. Perhaps least complementary to the Saxton House, three commercial buildings stretching from South Market

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>99</sup> Sterling, 15, 17.

<sup>100</sup> Heald, 41.

Street to the alley had been constructed next to the Saxton House. The closest, a used furniture store in 1897, was only six feet from the edge of the porch on the north side of the home. North of these three commercial buildings was approximately forty feet of vacant ground to the backs of the buildings fronting West Eighth Street. The 1897 *Sanborn Fire Insurance Map* shows two Market Street addresses for the Saxton House, numbers 333 and 339, and one address on West 9<sup>th</sup> Street, 101, which probably indicates it had been divided into three living quarters by this time (Figure 15).<sup>101</sup> It also indicates that Canton had changed its house numbering system between 1887 and 1897. The Saxton House was probably a triplex by 1897, but the 1900 census shows that only Marshall C. Barber and his wife, Mary Saxton Barber, lived at 333 South Market Street with five of their six children and two domestic servants.<sup>102</sup> The other two addresses for the building were not enumerated, indicating that no one besides the Barber family and, possibly, the domestics lived there. By the 1900 census, the William McKinleys' home on North Market Avenue had been redesignated 717 North Market Street, and he and Ida were "enumerated" there. McKinley's occupation is listed as President of the United States at that address in the 1900 census of Canton, Ohio, although the McKinleys resided in the White House in Washington, D.C. at the time.<sup>103</sup>

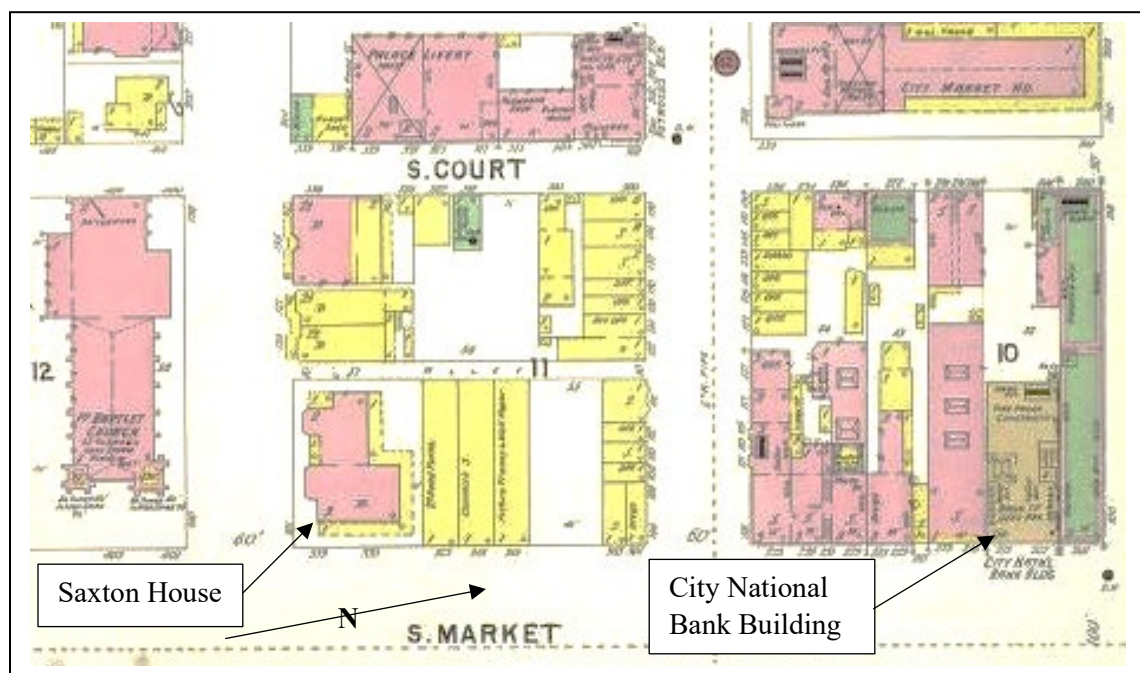


Figure 15: Detail of 1897 *Sanborn Fire Insurance Map* from Canton, Stark County, Ohio, Image 2. Online at [www.loc.gov/](http://www.loc.gov/).

<sup>101</sup> Sanborn Map Company, *1897 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Canton, Stark County, Ohio*, 1, Image 2. Accessed March 15, 2023.

<sup>102</sup> Ancestry.com, *1900 United States Federal Census* [database on-line], (Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2010). Accessed March 15, 2022. Original data: Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900, (NARA microfilm publication M19, 201 rolls). Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

The most significant change to the block north of the Saxton House block, on the west side of the street in 1897, was construction in 1895 of the City National Bank Building (Figure 15).<sup>104</sup> Of “fireproof construction,” it was, at the time, the tallest building in the city at six stories and featured an elevator. Invented in the 1860s by Elisha Otis, internal elevators had finally become common in the United States by the 1880s and, as a result, buildings had become taller. This is the building that eventually became the National First Ladies’ Library, Inc.’s Education Center discussed in subsequent chapters of this report. On the east side of South Market Street, across the street from the Saxton House, the buildings remained essentially the same as in 1887, including the Herbst House, although, by 1897, it had no associated commercial enterprises. The Saxton Block building remained on the north corner of the block. The major change on this block by 1897 was that the Grand Opera House, of which Marshall C. Barber was a shareholder and the manager, had been erected east of the Saxton Block Building, fronting on East Eighth Street.<sup>105</sup> The Grand Opera House “had been constructed by a stock company of leading citizens who raised \$50,000” for the endeavor after the death of Louis Schafer in 1889.<sup>106</sup> The next block north, on the east side of Market Street remained essentially the same as it had been in 1887, although a different bank occupied the bank building formerly occupied by City National Bank on the northwest corner of the block.<sup>107</sup>

Between 1887 and 1897, the commercial blocks of Market Street north from Seventh Street had not changed significantly, though the owners and names of some of the stores changed. It was still a solid wall of brick commercial buildings.<sup>108</sup> The county courthouse had been significantly expanded, eliminating the fountain formerly located on the plaza to the east of the courthouse, but the jail and sheriff’s dwelling on the same block and north of the courthouse were not significantly enlarged.<sup>109</sup> North of North Street in 1897, North Market Street was completely residential, and the *Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps* that year recorded substantial dwellings on large lots on both sides of the street, including the McKinley home with its new front porch from which William McKinley Jr. conducted his campaign for President of the United States (Figures 16 and 17).<sup>110</sup> By the time these changes had been recorded by the Sanborn Map Company, however, McKinley no longer used the house on North Market Street to campaign for president; he had been elected, and he and Ida Saxton McKinley had moved to the White House in Washington, D.C.

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<sup>104</sup> Mary L. Reeb, Ph.D, *National Register of Historic Places Inventory Nomination of City National Bank Building*, July 15, 1982, online at <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/71991396>, accessed May 21, 2023; see also Sanborn Map Company, *1897 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Canton, Stark County, Ohio*, 1, Image 2.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 3, Image 6. Accessed March 12. See also Ancestry.com, *1900 United States Federal Census* [database online], (Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2010). Accessed March 15, 2022.

<sup>106</sup> Heald, 75.

<sup>107</sup> Sanborn Map Company, *1897 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Canton, Stark County, Ohio*, 3, Image 6.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 2, Image 4. Accessed March 10, 2022.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 20, Image 25. Accessed March 17, 2022. See also *Ibid.*, 17, Image 22. Accessed March 17, 2022.



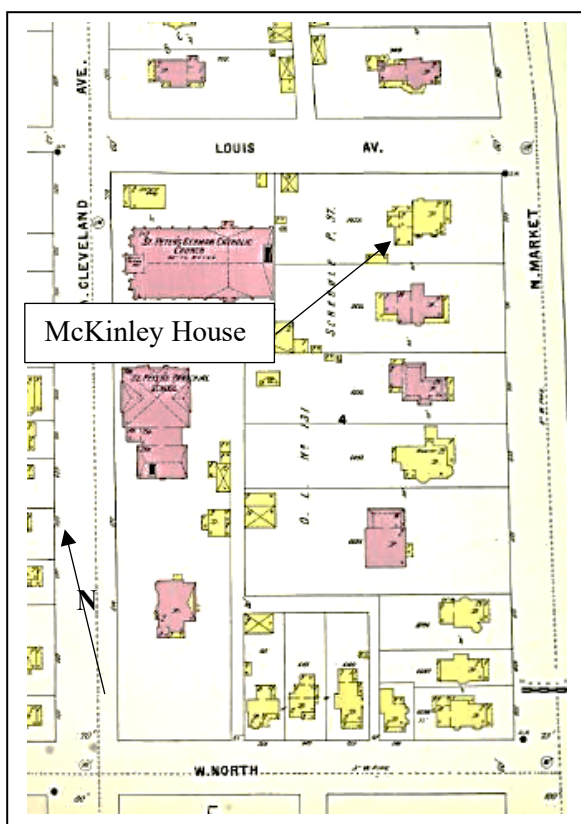


Figure 16: Detail of 1897 *Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Canton, Stark County, Ohio*, Image 25. Online at <https://www.loc.gov/>. West side of Market Avenue North.

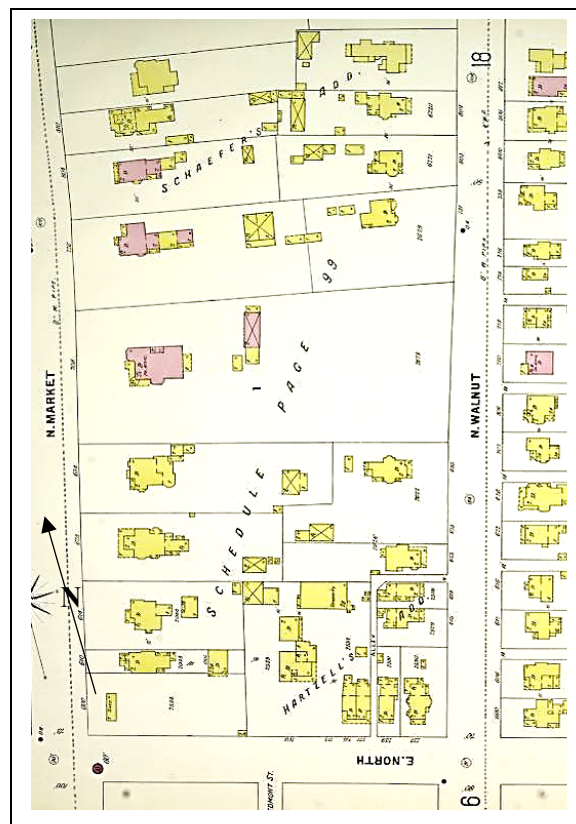


Figure 17: Detail of 1897 *Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Canton, Stark County, Ohio*, Image 22. Online at <https://www.loc.gov/>. East side of Market Avenue North.

Having fought in the American Civil War, McKinley had no desire for further conflict, but, even as President of the United States, he could not prevent the country from being drawn into the short war that came to be called the Spanish-American War.<sup>111</sup> During conflict between Spain and revolutionaries in Cuba, American newspapers inflamed public passions by reporting inflated death tolls for the revolutionaries and acute suffering by the Cuban population, all caused by the alleged depredations of the Spanish.<sup>112</sup> Although McKinley proposed a policy of “neutral intervention,” the United States Congress passed three resolutions favoring Cuban independence from Spain, the equivalent of declaring war on Spain, on April 22, 1898, and McKinley called for 125,000 volunteers to conduct the “intervention.”<sup>113</sup> As usual, the men of Ohio answered the call. From Stark County, the Eighth Ohio Volunteer Infantry, who called themselves “McKinley’s Own,” fought in Cuba, returning to a hero’s welcome in Canton

<sup>111</sup> Sterling, 26.

<sup>112</sup> *William McKinley – The 25<sup>th</sup> President of the United States*, online at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/about-the-white-house/presidents/william-mckinley>. Accessed March 11, 2022.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.* See also Heald, 62.

afterwards.<sup>114</sup> During the war, which only lasted one hundred days, the United States “destroyed the Spanish fleet outside Santiago harbor in Cuba, seized Manila in the Philippines,” occupied Puerto Rico, and annexed the islands of Hawaii as a United States territory, ostensibly to forestall their use by Spain as a base for attacking the western coast of the United States, but more likely to ensure a stable supply of sugar to the U.S. mainland.<sup>115</sup> The United States also acquired Puerto Rico as a territory when Spain ceded it at the ratification of the peace treaty on December 10, 1898.<sup>116</sup>

In March 1899, McKinley expanded the remit of the Isthmian Commission, which was looking into possible canal routes across Central America, including a route across Panama where, previously, the French had unsuccessfully attempted to build one. After the experience of the Spanish-American War, the ability to more quickly get military supplies and troops from one side of the continent to the other seemed more pressing than it had in 1897, when the Commission was only looking at building a canal across Nicaragua.<sup>117</sup> Although William McKinley Jr. laid the groundwork for the United States to construct such a canal, it fell to his successor, President Theodore Roosevelt, to see the Panama Canal project through to completion years later.

On June 21, 1900, William McKinley Jr. was unanimously re-nominated for president by the Republican Party, this time with Theodore Roosevelt nominated as vice president after McKinley’s first vice president, Garret A. Hobart, died in 1899.<sup>118</sup> Also in the summer of 1899, the McKinleys learned that their first home in Canton was on the market. The McKinley’s purchased it from the George D. Harter estate for \$14,500 and began renovations with the intention of living in the house once William McKinley retired, either after his second term as President of the United States or sooner if he was not re-elected.<sup>119</sup> The ticket was successful that November, and McKinley and Roosevelt were inaugurated on March 4, 1901. After the McKinleys spent two months traveling in the West, visiting mines in Arizona and New Mexico, Ida fell ill, and the couple returned to Canton for a few months, monitoring the house renovations and visiting family.<sup>120</sup> In early September, they travelled to Buffalo, New York, where McKinley was scheduled to give a speech on September 5 at the Pan-American Exposition.<sup>121</sup> The following day, while standing in a receiving line, visiting with others who were attending the Exposition, McKinley was shot by anarchist Leon Czolcosz.<sup>122</sup> Although his wounds were not considered fatal at the time, medical staff were unable to locate the bullet lodged deep in the

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<sup>114</sup> Sterling, 26.

<sup>115</sup> *William McKinley – The 25<sup>th</sup> President of the United States*.

<sup>116</sup> Heald, 62.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>119</sup> Anthony, *This Elevated Position*, 31. See also Janet Immler, “Happy Birthday, Mr. President – January 30 [sic]: A salute to William McKinley.” See also Janet Immler, “From splendor to splinters – *shame, shame!*” unknown newspaper, but probably *The Repository*, n.d. In Ralph Regula Papers held at Ohio State University Archives.

<sup>120</sup> Sterling, 28.

<sup>121</sup> Heald, 62.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.* See also *William McKinley – The 25<sup>th</sup> President of the United States*.

abdominal area. William McKinley Jr. died of gangrene on September 14, 1901, at the home of John G. Milburn of Buffalo, New York.<sup>123</sup>

Following lying in state in the Capitol rotunda in Washington, D.C., a train brought President William McKinley's body back to Canton for burial on September 19, 1901.<sup>124</sup> After lying in state at the Stark County Courthouse on the evening of September 18 and into the following morning so that local people could pay their respects, McKinley's body was placed in the Wertz Receiving Vault in Westlawn Cemetery because the family had not been prepared for the suddenness of his death.<sup>125</sup> It remained in the Wertz Receiving Vault until 1907, with a round-the-clock full military guard, until a suitable memorial could be constructed. A committee was formed on the day of the funeral to decide the location and design of the memorial.<sup>126</sup> The committee selected a hilltop on which William and Ida McKinley had often picnicked, with a commanding view of the city below it, which McKinley himself had suggested would make a fine site for a military memorial.<sup>127</sup>

As was customary for the times, McKinley's widow, Ida Saxton McKinley, did not attend his funeral. She returned to their home on North Market Street and lived there until her death, though she often visited her family in the Saxton House.<sup>128</sup> According to research into the land abstracts of the North Market Street house, undertaken by an attorney for Judy Pocock, who is writing a book about the house entitled "The Fall of the House of McKinley," Ida McKinley did not inherit the North Market Street house when William McKinley died. It was inherited by William McKinley's family, which was eventually whittled down to his maiden sister, Helen McKinley. William McKinley's heirs managed the North Market Street house, which was in a "living trust" that allowed Ida McKinley to reside in the house as long as she lived.<sup>129</sup> Ida Saxton McKinley died on May 26, 1907, four months before the completion and dedication of the William McKinley Memorial. Her body was temporarily placed in the Wertz Receiving Vault with that of William McKinley's until both were transferred to the William McKinley Memorial vault on October 10, 1907, along with the coffins of their two daughters, Catherine and Ida.<sup>130</sup> After Ida McKinley's death, the McKinley House was sold to Rose Klorer, who donated it to the Catholic Diocese of Cleveland in memory of her husband, Herman Klorer. At her request, the Sisters of Charity of Augustine converted the home to a hospital with eighteen beds, naming it Mercy Hospital.<sup>131</sup> Only two years later, Mercy Hospital had outgrown the building, and a large, four-story addition was constructed to the west, using the McKinley home as a hospital annex

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<sup>123</sup> Heald, 62. See also Sterling, 28.

<sup>124</sup> Heald, 62. See also Sterling, 29.

<sup>125</sup> Moore, 14. See also Sterling, 31.

<sup>126</sup> Moore, 15. See also Sterling, 31.

<sup>127</sup> Sterling, 32.

<sup>128</sup> Anthony, *This Elevated Position*, 31.

<sup>129</sup> Mark Holland, oral history interview. The book he mentions has not yet been published (2023). Progress toward publication may be tracked online at <http://www.archivistsattic.wordpress.com/2022/05/22/fall-of-the-house-of-mckinley/> or by contacting the McKinley Presidential Library in Canton, Ohio.

<sup>130</sup> Moore, 20.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

(Figures 18 and 19).<sup>132</sup> Mercy Hospital used the building until 1928, when an expansion necessitated moving the McKinley House off the lot on North Market Street. It was moved to Myers Park on Sixth Street, S.W., with the intention of restoring it in the future. Unfortunately, the stock market crash in 1929 and the ensuing Great Depression forced the cancelation of those plans, and “it sat, deteriorating, until a 1934 condemnation order from the board of health was issued” citing the house as a fire hazard.<sup>133</sup> The house was demolished on January 30, 1935, leaving the Saxton House the only remaining building directly associated with President William McKinley’s life in Canton (Figure 20).<sup>134</sup>



Figure 18: McKinley House on Market Avenue North with new hospital building behind it. From Moore, *Postcard History Series: Canton*.

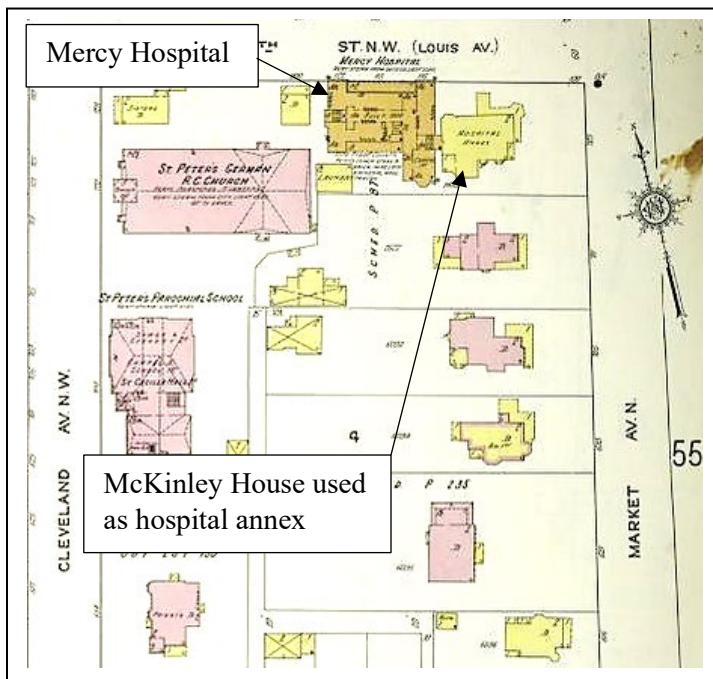


Figure 19: Detail of 1914 *Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Canton, Stark County, Ohio*, Image 55. Online at [www.loc.gov/](http://www.loc.gov/).

<sup>132</sup> Sanborn Map Company, *1914 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Canton, Stark County, Ohio* (New York, NY: Sanborn Map Company, January 1914), 54, Image 55.

<sup>133</sup> Moore, 78. See also Sterling, 24.

<sup>134</sup> Moore, 11. See also Sterling, 24.



RESIDENCE CHRONOLOGY	DATE RANGE	NOTES
DeWalt House (constructed 1841); Saxton House (constructed c 1865-1870)	c. 1851- January 1871 (Ida Saxton only)	Although Ida Saxton lived here from approximately 1851 until 1871, she was often away at boarding school and spent six months touring Europe following graduation, so her residence here was somewhat intermittent. The front addition was not constructed until 1865, at the earliest, so she mostly lived in the original DeWalt House.
N. Market Street House	April 1871 - approximately August 1873 (approximately 2 years, 5 months)	Ida and William McKinley, Jr. rented or leased this house from Ida's father, James A. Saxton. Family legend has it that, after their youngest daughter died, the McKinley's moved into the Saxton House, where they, apparently, occupied rooms on the second and third floors. The exact date they made this move is currently unknown.
Saxton House apartment	Approximately August 1873 - March 1877 (approximately 3 years, 7 months)	The William McKinley's are said to have lived in the Saxton House during the time William McKinley ran for Congress and was elected.
Residential hotel in Washington D.C./ Saxton House apartment	March 1877 - May 1884 (approximately 7 years, 2 months)	The McKinley's lived in a residential hotel in Washington, D.C. when Congress was in session, and lived at the Saxton House during Congressional recesses.
Saxton House apartment	May 1884 - March 1885 (approximately 10 months)	During the period after McKinley was ousted from Congress "by a Democratic committee," the McKinley's likely lived at the Saxton House while William McKinley ran for and was re-elected to his Congressional seat until they returned to Washington, D.C. the following year.
Residential hotel in Washington D.C./ Saxton House apartment	March 1885 - March 1891 (6 years)	The McKinley's lived in a residential hotel when Congress was in session, and lived at the Saxton House during Congressional recesses.
Saxton House apartment	1891-1892 (approximately 1 year)	The McKinley's lived in the Saxton House after William McKinley lost his Senate seat and while he was running for Governor of Ohio.
Rented residences, Columbus, OH	1892-1896 (4 years)	McKinleys first lived in a hotel in Columbus, which burned down while they were in residence. They subsequently rented a house in Columbus, Ohio.
N. Market Street House/Saxton House apartment	1896-1897 (probably less than a year)	The McKinley's purchased the N. Market Street House, and McKinley conducted his Presidential campaign from its front porch before moving to Washington, D.C. after he won the election. There is some debate that they actually did not live in the Saxton House, and that this was only the "campaign house," but the McKinley's bedroom was on the first floor of this house, so they presumably lived in it.
The White House, Washington, D.C.	March 1897 - September 1902 (approximately 5 years, 6 months)	The McKinley's did not live in the Saxton House during this period. The 1900 census shows that they claimed the N. Market Street House as their residence, but they lived in Washington, D.C. until McKinley was killed.
N. Market Street House	September 1902 - May 1907 (approximately 4 years, 8 months)	Ida McKinley lived here after her husband died.

Figure 20: Residence chronology of William and Ida McKinley. Compiled by Deborah Harvey, 2023.

### *The Saxton House and Market Street, 1907 to 1978*

In the early twentieth century, the Saxton home on South Market Street continued to be occupied by descendants of George DeWalt, who built the two-story back wing of the building in 1841, and of James A. Saxton, who added the Second Empire-style, three-story front of the building between 1865 and 1871. However, by at least 1897, it appears to have been divided into three dwelling units, as two dwelling numbers (333 and 339) were assigned to the building on the Market Street side and one number (101) was assigned to the building on the West Ninth Street side in the *1897 Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps*. It seems reasonable to conclude that Mary Saxton Barber's family, who, between 1877 and the late 1890s, were sharing the home with William and Ida Saxton McKinley, with Mary and Ida's bachelor brother, George Saxton, and, until 1887, with their father, James A. Saxton, would have partitioned the house, converting it



into multiple living spaces for the sake of privacy. By the 1900 census, however, they had the house to themselves because James and George had died, James' second wife had returned to Chicago, and the McKinleys had moved to Washington, D.C. Nevertheless, the home apparently remained partitioned. The 1914 *Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Canton, Ohio*, showed that the home still had multiple dwelling numbers.

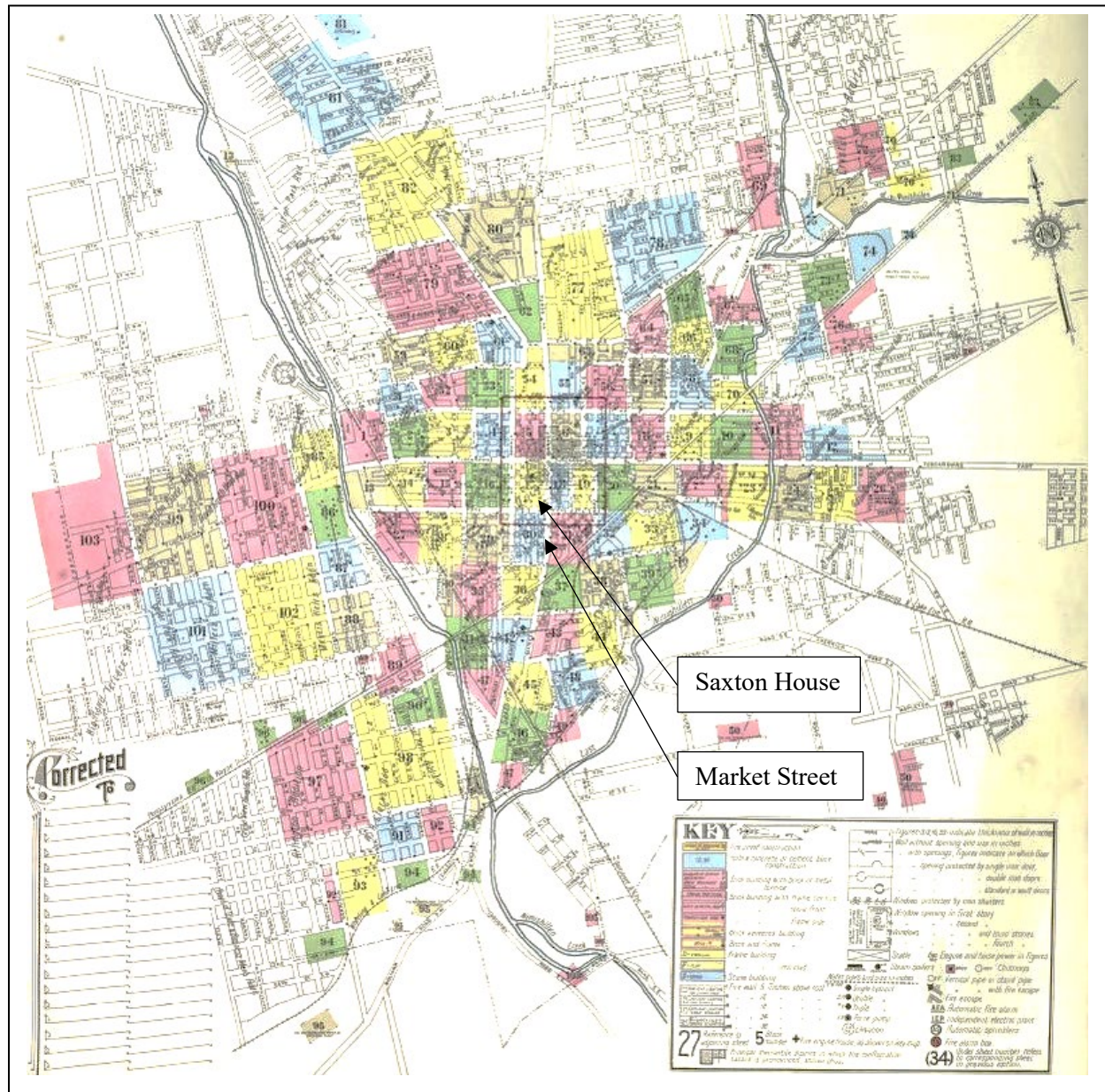


Figure 21: 1914 *Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Canton, Stark County, Ohio*, Image 1. Online at [www.loc.gov/](http://www.loc.gov/).

Much changed about Canton in the seventeen years between 1897 and 1914. As shown in the 1914 *Sanborn Fire Insurance Map*, the city continued to expand to the west and to the north and northeast, though growth was apparently constrained in the east and southeast by the East Branch of the Nimishillen Creek (Figure 21).<sup>135</sup> In the 1910 census, only Mary B. and Marshall C. Barber, with their unmarried daughter, Katherine, aged 25, lived at 333 South Market Street, where they were enumerated with two maids.<sup>136</sup> This arrangement did not last long. Katherine Barber married Henry S. Belden, Jr. on February 21, 1911 (Figure 26 shows relationship of Marshall B. Belden to Ida Saxton McKinley).<sup>137</sup>

About 1913, Canton revised its street naming system. In the original plat, arranged as a grid, North Street, running east and west, had been the street from which the other streets had been numbered. Immediately south of North Street was Second Street, then Third Street, and so forth until the numbered streets stopped at Tenth Street, and the next street south was South Street, which delineated the southern border of Canton. The new street numbering scheme placed the intersection of Tuscarawas and Market Streets, in the middle of the public square, at the center of the street numbering system, with Tuscarawas Street the dividing line between the street numbers to the north and south, and Market Street, which was changed to Market Avenue, the dividing line between the street numbers to the east and west. Streets running east and west retained the Street designation, but streets running north and south changed to Avenues. The first street north of Tuscarawas Street became Second Street North, and the first street south of Tuscarawas Street became Second Street South. North Street was changed to Sixth Street North, and South Street became Sixth Street South. Additionally, a designator was applied to each street to indicate its position relative to Market Avenue or Tuscarawas Street. Therefore, Second Street North, west of Market Avenue, was designated Second Street North West (or Second Street N.W.) and, east of Market Avenue, it was Second Street North East (Second Street N.E.). Similarly, DeWalt Street, which is west of Market Avenue, became DeWalt Avenue North West (DeWalt Avenue N.W.) when north of Tuscarawas Street and DeWalt Avenue South West (DeWalt Avenue S.W.) when south of Tuscarawas Street. As previously suggested, the building numbering system may have already changed before 1914. The result of these changes was that, in 1913, the Saxton House was no longer on the corner of South Market Street and West 9<sup>th</sup> Street; it was on the corner of Market Avenue South and 4th Street S.W., house number 333 (Figure 22).<sup>138</sup> House number 339 had been dropped, but house number 101 Fourth Street S.W.

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<sup>135</sup> Sanborn Map Company, *1914 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Canton, Stark County, Ohio*, 1, Image 1. Accessed March 17, 2022.

<sup>136</sup> Ancestry.com, *1910 United States Federal Census* [database on-line], (Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2006). Accessed March 19, 2022. Original data: United States of America, Bureau of the Census. *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910*. (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1910. T624, 1,178 rolls.

<sup>137</sup> Ancestry.com, *Ohio, U.S., County Marriage Records, 1774 – 1993* [database on-line], (Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2004). Accessed March 19, 2022.

<sup>138</sup> The 1914 *Sanborn Maps* give both the old and the new street numbers, indicating the change was recent.

(formerly West Ninth Street) remained, suggesting that one of the apartment units constructed in the home by 1897 had been eliminated and the house had become a duplex.<sup>139</sup>

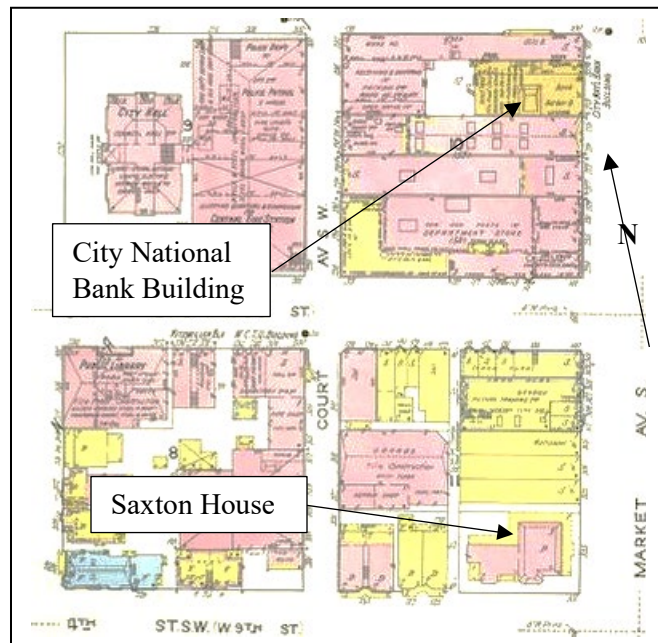


Figure 22: Detail of 1914 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Canton, Stark County, Ohio, Image 18. Online at [www.loc.gov/](http://www.loc.gov/).

The north end of the block on which the Saxton House was located had become completely commercial by 1914 (Figure 22). In addition to the three stores next to the Saxton House, the lot that had been vacant in 1897 held, in 1914, a two-story building with a “garage,” likely an automobile repair shop, on the first floor and a picture framing shop on the second floor. The two-story buildings along West Eighth Street in 1897 had also been replaced by one two-story building with shops. The two duplex dwellings west of the Saxton House, built by 1897, remained, but a large, single-story garage and automobile repair shop of brick and tile construction with a 250-gallon underground gasoline tank beneath its brick floor had replaced the vacant land, shops, and

dwelling north of them. Newer one- and two-story buildings containing shops took up the northwest corner of the block. Likewise, the two commercial blocks north of the Saxton House on the west side of South Market Avenue were filling with new, larger commercial buildings as the smaller, older buildings were replaced or modernized. The series of small commercial buildings south of City National Bank were replaced by a three-story brick department store and two two-story brick commercial buildings fronting on Market Avenue South and stretching all the way to the next street west, Court Avenue S.W. The vacant lot behind the City National Bank Building in 1897 housed a four-story brick warehouse in 1914 that would have completely blocked the fire escape egress from the bank had it not been for the covered driveway providing access to Court Avenue S.W. from the courtyard behind the bank building. The four-story brick warehouse was part of the four-story brick building that had replaced the hardware store north of the City National Bank Building by 1914. The block south of the courthouse remained completely commercial; the configurations of the buildings did not change much between 1897 and 1914, though the owners of the shops along Market Avenue South likely changed.<sup>140</sup>

<sup>139</sup> Sanborn Map Company, *1914 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Canton, Stark County, Ohio*, 17, Image 18. Accessed March 17, 2022.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.



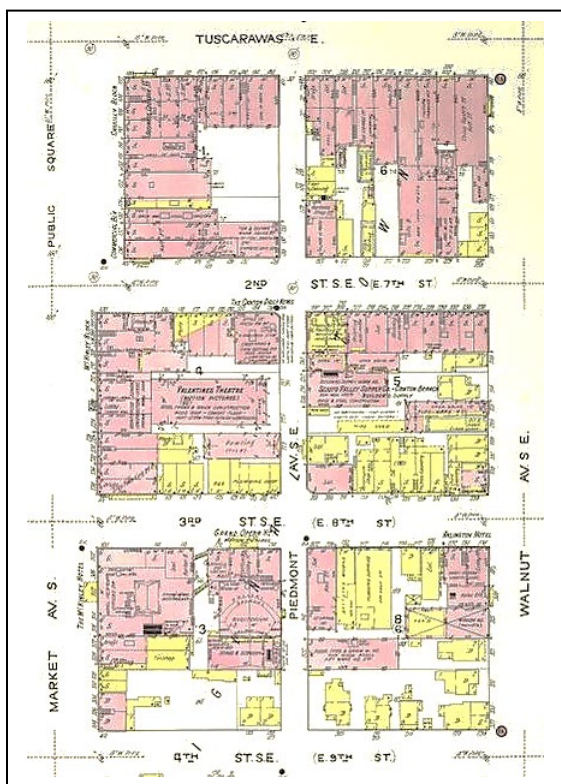


Figure 23: Detail of 1914 *Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Canton, Stark County, Ohio*, Image 19. Online at [www.loc.gov/](http://www.loc.gov/).

taken up by a bowling alley fronting on Piedmont Avenue S.E.<sup>141</sup> With the McKinley Hotel and the movie theater, these developments served to greatly increase foot traffic and, soon, automobile traffic in the vicinity of the Saxton House. By 1907, the Cassilly Block building on the southeast corner of the intersection of Tuscarawas Street and Market Avenue had been the East Ohio Business College for several years.<sup>142</sup>

The 1915 and 1917 *City Directories of Canton Ohio* give the occupant of 333 South Market Avenue as Marshall and Mary Barber. The 1919 *City Directory* gives the occupant of 333 South Market Avenue as H.S. Belden, Jr, his wife, Katherine Barber Belden, and their family.<sup>143</sup> By the 1920 census, none of the Barber family lived in the Saxton House. Mary Saxton Barber died June 21, 1917.<sup>144</sup> Marshall C. Barber died March 18, 1918.<sup>145</sup> Katherine Barber Belden and her husband, Henry S. Belden, Jr. occupied the house with their family for

Across Market Avenue South, east of the Saxton House, the Saxton Block had either been converted or rebuilt about 1902 as the McKinley Hotel. By 1914, it featured iron bridges from the second and third stories of the hotel to the Grand Opera House to the east, which also served as a movie theater. Little else changed on this block between 1897 and 1914 (Figure 23). Significant changes had come to the commercial block north of the McKinley Hotel by 1914, across Market Avenue South from the City National Bank Building. Individual buildings on the northwest corner appear to have been replaced by one larger building, known as the McKinley Block, though it still contained shops on the ground floor. South of the McKinley Block, Valentine's Motion Picture Theater had been inserted behind a new building with three storefronts on Market Avenue South. The plumbing supply business on the northeast corner of the block in 1897 had constructed a new building on the southeast corner of the block by 1914. The rest of the east side of the block, which had been vacant in 1897, was mostly

<sup>141</sup> Sanborn Map Company, *1914 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Canton, Stark County, Ohio*, 18, Image 19. Accessed March 19, 2022.

<sup>142</sup> Moore, 74.

<sup>143</sup> Ancestry.com, *U.S. City Directories, 1822-1995* (Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2010). Accessed March 19, 2022.

<sup>144</sup> Ancestry.com, *U.S. Find a Grave Index, 1600s to Current*. Accessed March 19, 2022.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

about a year after the death of her father while they worked on selling it, but, by 1920, they were living at their home on Nineteenth Street N.W. with their three children, Marshall B., aged seven years, Elizabeth S., aged 5 years, and Henry S. Belden III, aged 2 years.<sup>146</sup> The 1921 *City Directory of Canton* records the following occupants of the Saxton House: at 331 South Market Avenue, the Farah Brothers Company, confectionery; at 333, E. Kahen, maker of cloaks; at 335, Hall Bast, no occupation listed; at 337, the Spring-Holzwarth Company, dealer in clothing, all indicating that the Saxton House had, by 1921, become thoroughly commercial and was beginning to be partitioned into separate spaces for commercial enterprises, likely offices, but possibly residential rooms. By 1925, the Saxton House featured the Central Lunch Room on the first floor, at 331 Market Avenue South. The rest of the house, now called the Goldberg Building, at 333 Market Avenue South, also hosted the following: the office of Ned R. Goldberg, confectioner, with a sales outlet at 319 Market Avenue South; J.C. Neeley & Company, which handled railroad and contractors' equipment, asphalt, tar, and other road-making products; the Quick Repair Company, servicing roofing, guttering, and furnaces; C.T. Little, provider of tile roofing; Charles S. Bolender, selling real estate; Morris & Company, seller of wholesale meats; Sickafoos Construction Company, general contractors; Vogue Dressmakers Shop, run by two women; John D. Barber, living in the building and selling real estate from it; Gottfried Schneider, a truck driver living in the building with his wife, Anna; Mrs. Ann Sanders, widow, living in the building; and Mrs. Caroline E. Stanford, widow, living in the building. Charles Farris' confectionary was at 339 Market Avenue South; 335 was vacant. At this point, the building space had been divided into fourteen units, some of which were residential. By 1929, little had changed for the Saxton House with respect to tenancy. The restaurant on the ground floor at 331 Market Avenue South had become the Sanitary Restaurant, and a few of the tenants in 333 Market Avenue South had left and been replaced by others. A&P Tea Company had an office in 335 Market Avenue South, but the confectioner, Charles Farris, still occupied the unit at 339 Market Avenue South.<sup>147</sup>

The Great Depression began with the crash of the stock market in October 1929. Some tenants had left the Goldberg Building by 1934 and fewer tenants had replaced them, but the Sanitary Restaurant, the Goldberg Company, the Neely Company, the Bolender Company, the A&P Tea Company, and the Charles Farris Company remained. By 1940, though the A&P Tea Company still occupied an office at 335 Market Avenue South, the Goldberg Building at 333 Market Avenue South had all new tenants; even Ned Goldberg no longer had an office there. The Sanitary Restaurant at 331 Market Avenue South had given way to Norman F. Miday, beer sales, and the Tasty Lunch occupied the space formerly rented to Charles Farris, confectioner, at 339 Market Avenue South. The number of tenants had increased from 1934, when only eleven

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<sup>146</sup> Ancestry.com, *1920 United States Federal Census* [database on-line] (Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2010). Accessed March 19, 2022. Original data: Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920. (NARA microfilm publication T625, 2076 rolls). Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

<sup>147</sup> Ancestry.com, *U.S. City Directories, 1822-1995*.

tenants occupied the Goldberg Building; in 1940, it had more tenants than ever at sixteen. The 1945 *City Directory of Canton, Ohio*, indicates that Norman Miday and the Tasty Lunch still occupied their 1940 spots on Market Avenue South, but the Goldberg Building had become residential rooming except for the first floor, with seven rented rooms on the second floor and three on the third floor. The first floor was divided between two union halls. Capitol Billiards had taken over 335 Market Avenue South, formerly occupied by A&P Tea Company.<sup>148</sup>

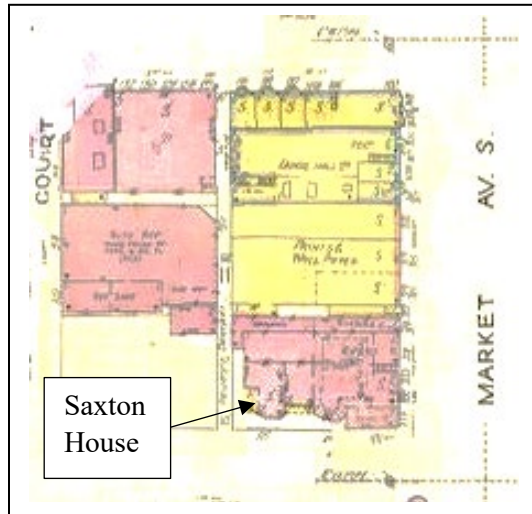


Figure 24: Detail of 1950 *Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Canton, Stark County, Ohio*, Image 20. Online at [www.loc.gov/](http://www.loc.gov/).



Figure 25: Saxton House, 1980s. From Anthony, *This Elevated Position – A Catalog and Guide to the National First Ladies Library and the Importance of First Lady History*.

The 1950 *Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, Canton, Ohio* shows that the Saxton House had been completely built out to the sidewalk on Market Avenue South by then (Figures 24 and 25).<sup>149</sup> The National Register of Historic Places nomination of the Saxton House, submitted in 1979, describes the changes made to the house to accomplish this: the front porch and the first story façade were removed to facilitate construction of the two-story, flat, commercial front; the brick chimneys were removed to below the roofline, and the slate roof was replaced and covered with a corrugated metal roof; the front wall on the first floor level was removed and replaced with steel support posts to open the existing building to the new construction; and “a single-story cinder block addition was erected along the entire north side of the building and in the area between the two projecting bays on the south side;” a rear porch was enclosed; and a metal fire escape was added to the rear. On the interior, most of the historic fabric was removed on the first floor, including the front staircase to the second floor. Fewer material changes were made to the second floor, and the third floor was left mostly intact, with only non-load-bearing interior

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Sanborn Map Company, *1950 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Canton, Stark County, Ohio*, Vol. 1 (New York, NY: Sanborn Map Company, Oct 1950), 17. Map online at [https://www.loc.gov/item/sanborn06631\\_005/](https://www.loc.gov/item/sanborn06631_005/), Image 20. Accessed March 20, 2022.

partitions breaking up the space of the former ballroom.<sup>150</sup> These changes began in the 1920s, but likely were not all made simultaneously.

In 1950, the building held two restaurants, one at 331 Market Avenue South and one at 339 Market Avenue South.<sup>151</sup> The shops north of the Saxton House remained essentially unchanged except for ownership, although the “garage” had been converted to a restaurant with a lodge hall on the second floor. West of the alley on this block, the two duplexes west of the Saxton House had been removed and not replaced, but the auto repair shop remained in place. The one- and two-story shops had been replaced by a three-story brick building fronting on Third Street S.W. In the next block north on Market Avenue South, the City National Bank had become the Canton Bank and Trust Building and housed a restaurant and a barber shop in its basement.<sup>152</sup>

The McKinley Hotel still stood, in 1950, across Market Avenue South from the block on which the Saxton House was, with the former Grand Opera House building to the east of it. The Grand Opera House had closed, and the building housed Bethel Temple and Motion Pictures in 1950. Little else had changed on the east side of this block on Market Avenue South. The Herbst House duplex remained the only dwelling on the block; the duplex on the southeast corner of the block had been removed. Except that the bowling alley and the plumbing shop on the east side of the block had been torn down and several of the stores converted to restaurants, the block on which the McKinley Block building stood, north of the McKinley Hotel, had changed very little by 1950. Also, by 1950, the Business College in the Cassilly Block building on the block north of the McKinley Block was no longer there, but all the buildings on Market Avenue South remained essentially the same on this block.<sup>153</sup>

By 1950, commercial growth in the center of Canton had slowed. Most of the lots viable for commercial ventures were built out, so new businesses either conformed to the existing architectural structures, perhaps adding updated facades or an extra story to the buildings, or they were established further from the center of town due to the high cost of tearing down existing buildings and constructing new ones. Only three blocks from the public square, the Saxton House, with its flat commercial façade, blended in with the lower-end commercial buildings surrounding it as the area became increasingly less desirable as a business location.<sup>154</sup> It was purchased about 1960 by Dimetar Traikovich, who used it as a rooming house.<sup>155</sup> By the 1970s, the Saxton House had become so disreputable that the City Health Department evicted the

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<sup>150</sup> Simmons, *National Register of Historic Places Nomination for Saxton House, Canton, Ohio*, 3.

<sup>151</sup> Sanborn Map Company, *1950 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Canton, Stark County, Ohio*, Vol. 1, 17, Image 20.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Sanborn Map Company, *1950 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Canton, Stark County, Ohio*, Vol. 1, 18, Image 21.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Rosemary Kubera, “Old mansion a trip back in time,” unknown newspaper, unknown date, but most likely in 1978, in Ralph Regula Papers held at Ohio State University Archives.



tenants, calling it a health hazard. The house appeared headed for demolition as part of an aggressive “urban renewal” project encompassing twelve downtown blocks, sponsored by Newmarket Project, Inc. and supported by local civic and government leaders and non-profit organizations. The McKinley Hotel had already been torn down. Plans were underway to build a modern hotel and convention center on the site, and the work began in 1984. The Newmarket Project also planned to replace the department store on the southeast corner of the block north of the Saxton House with a parking garage to be connected to the hotel and convention center by a second-story walkway across Market Avenue South.<sup>156</sup> Luckily, the Historic Sites Act of 1935, the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, and the Tax Reform Act of 1976 came to the rescue, as will be chronicled in Chapter Three.

Marshall B. Belden purchased the Saxton House from owner Dimetar Traikovich, in 1978 to prevent its demolition. His grandparents, Marshall C. and Mary Saxton Barber, lived in the house until Belden was four or five years old, and he doubtless visited them during that time. After his grandparents died, Marshall Belden’s parents moved their family into the house in 1919 for about a year while they prepared to sell the house, so it was also his own home for a brief time. Belden set about finding a way to save and repurpose the house. He arranged to have the house nominated to the National Register of Historic Places, and the Ida Saxton McKinley Home nomination was accepted by the Keeper of the National Register and listed on April 26, 1979. Listing was a requirement for taking advantage of the tax incentives offered by the Tax Reform Act of 1976. Marshall Belden’s plan was to use changes to the income tax codes in the Act to fund removal of the commercial additions, restoration of the exterior of the building to its original appearance, and conversion to a restaurant for the purpose of generating other reinvestment and restoration efforts in the area.<sup>157</sup> He began restoration shortly before the house was listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The exterior restoration work is described in more detail in Chapter Three. With the exterior restoration nearly completed, a pamphlet detailing the amenities of the building provided floor plans for each floor except the third but including the basement. The pamphlet was intended as an aid to finding a business tenant to lease the property. Having made the initial investment to restore his grandparents’ home, Marshall Belden was ready to use it to help revitalize downtown Canton. Wealthy and connected, he was able to tap into his pool of friends and associates for help with that project. Later, he would advance that effort by purchasing and contributing the City National Bank Building to National First Ladies’ Library, Inc., establishment of which is described in Chapter Three, enabling that organization to expand their library and use it for an Education and Research Center.

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<sup>156</sup> Anonymous author, “The Saxton Barber House,” n.p. Printed pamphlet, in Ralph Regula Papers held at Ohio University Archives in Columbus, Ohio.

<sup>157</sup> Simmons, *National Register of Historic Places Nomination for Saxton House, Canton, Ohio*, 5.

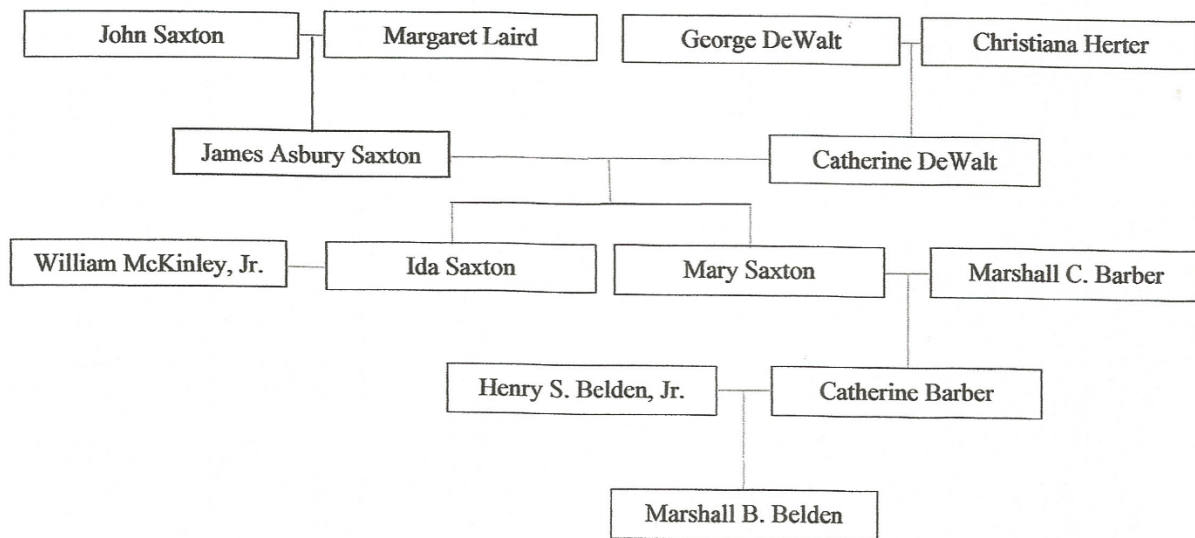


Figure 26: Family Tree Chart Showing Relationship of Marshall B. Belden to Ida Saxton McKinley.  
Compiled by Deborah Harvey.

## CHAPTER THREE: Legislative History

This chapter chronicles the evolution of the First Ladies National Historic Site from approximately 1978, when Marshall B. Belden endeavored to save his family's ancestral home by purchasing, restoring, and repurposing it, through 2000, when President William Jefferson Clinton signed the legislation that established the house as a national historic site. Several Acts of Congress formed the basis for the legislative transition. The first and earliest piece of legislation was the Organic Act of 1916, which created the National Park Service and established a federal agency tasked with preserving, protecting, and interpreting important national places for the citizens of the United States and their descendants. This Act gave Representative Ralph Regula a federal agency with which to entrust the care of the last building in Canton, Ohio with a strong connection to William McKinley Jr., the nation's twenty-fifth president. The second piece of legislation, the Historic Sites Act of 1935, made it possible for Representative Regula, in 1989, to appropriate funds from the public purse for the federal government to purchase the property for the purpose of preserving it. The third piece of legislation, the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, provided the criteria for determining whether a property was historically significant and created the National Register of Historic Places as a means of recognizing that significance. The fourth piece of legislation, the Tax Reform Act of 1976, made Belden's objective of restoring the house more feasible by allowing tax savings to be realized from the effort. Finally, the fifth piece of legislation, the First Ladies National Historic Site Act of 2000, established the house and grounds of the Saxton House as one of the places of national historic importance worthy of the protection of the United States federal government for the people of the country. Although the Organic Act of 1916 and the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 are the bedrock upon which this effort was founded, they will not be described in detail in the following pages, representing as they do the background landscape to the story. The story is revealed in how Marshall B. Belden and Representative Ralph Regula used the other three Acts to create the First Ladies National Historic Site.

### *Marshall B. Belden Saves the Saxton House (1978 to 1986)*

Marshall B. Belden Sr. (1912-1995) had a personal connection to the commercial building he purchased in 1978 (Figure 26). Behind the flat, somewhat unsightly, commercial façade stood his family's ancestral home. Until about 1920, the building belonged to members of his family whom he visited, and he had lived in it himself for about a year as a child. When the building was included in a comprehensive and aggressive "urban renewal" plan for Market Avenue South in Canton, Ohio, in the 1970s, Belden purchased the Saxton House to prevent its demolition and subsequently worked at finding a way to save and repurpose the house. The Tax Reform Act of 1976 provided a path for financing the effort.

Introduced in the House by Representative Al Ullman of Oregon in 1975 as H.R. 10612, the Tax Reform Act was passed by the Senate and signed into law by President Gerald R. Ford on October 4, 1976, as Public Law (P.L.) 94-455. The legislation included among its provisions a five-year amortization tax deduction for a “certified historic structure,” as well as permission for the taxpayer to treat costs for removing “architectural impediments” as deductible expenses rather than capitalizing them.<sup>1</sup> These two changes to the tax code enhanced Belden’s ability to deduct in the year the work was accomplished the cost of removal of the commercial additions to the Saxton House and, over the ensuing five years, the cost of the work to restore the building. To be a “certified historic structure,” the historic property had to be either on the National Register of Historic Places or certified as eligible for it by the State Historic Preservation Officer.

In March 1978, the Canton Preservation Society, a non-profit organization dedicated to encouraging the preservation and restoration of historic structures and neighborhoods in Canton, adopted the Saxton House as a project. The Society formed a subcommittee to investigate the history of the house, develop plans for its restoration, raise funds for the restoration, determine an alternate site for the Saxton House in case it needed to be moved, propose a plan for adaptive uses of the building, and create a plan for disposing (selling or donating) the property once it had been restored.<sup>2</sup> The Canton Preservation Society engaged Chambers and Chambers Architects, consulting historical architects from Akron, Ohio, to investigate the condition of the Saxton House. In September 1978, the architects reported to Bruce Williams of the Canton Preservation Society on their findings. The firm also supplied estimates of costs to remedy the deficiencies and recommended that a more comprehensive structural report be completed, estimated to cost between fifteen and twenty thousand dollars.<sup>3</sup> However, sometime between April and September 1978, the Stark County Foundation expressed interest in having the Saxton House be part of the newly-developing Newmarket Project, an urban renewal effort beginning in downtown Canton in which the Stark County Foundation was involved.<sup>4</sup> Newmarket Project’s mission was “to engage in the purchase, sale, and rental of real property to enhance the rehabilitation of downtown Canton, Ohio.” Newmarket Project, Inc., a non-profit, non-governmental organization (NGO) received its 501(c)(2) certification in 1980. It operated independently until about 2010 but is currently a subordinate organization of the Stark Community Foundation (formerly, the Stark County Foundation).<sup>5</sup>

A week after receiving the Chambers and Chambers Architect’s letter in September 1978, the Canton Preservation Society met, reviewed its progress on its stated goals for the Saxton

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<sup>1</sup> H.R.10612, Tax Reform Act of 1976, online at <https://www.congress.gov/bill/94th-congress/house-bill/10612>. “Summary,” accessed March 22, 2022.

<sup>2</sup> “Saxton House Committee Report,” September 21, 1978. In Ralph Regula Papers held at Ohio State University Archives, Columbus, Ohio.

<sup>3</sup> Letter, J. Henry Chambers, of Chambers and Chambers Architects to Canton Preservation Society, September 15, 1978. In Ralph Regula Papers held at Ohio State University Archives, Columbus, Ohio.

<sup>4</sup> Simmons, *National Register of Historic Places Nomination for Saxton House, Canton, Ohio*, 5.

<sup>5</sup> Information on the Newmarket Project online at <http://www.causeiq.com/organizations/newmarket-project,341282839/>. Accessed March 22, 2022.

House, and decided to cede responsibility for managing the restoration of the Saxton House and the associated activities to the Stark County Foundation and the Newmarket Project. The Canton Preservation Society's new function regarding the Saxton House would be, according to minutes of the meeting, to encourage a new owner to save, restore, and reuse the historic building. The meeting minutes noted that they felt that their efforts had already been successful in that "the purchase and restoration of the Saxton House and redesign for use as a restaurant seems imminent."<sup>6</sup> Although the Canton Preservation Society was the first to contact the owner about selling it, by September 21, Marshall B. Belden had already purchased the property from Dimetar Traikovich, who was operating it as a rooming house.<sup>7</sup>

Belden arranged to have a nomination written by David A. Simmons, of the Ohio Historic Preservation Office, which serves as the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) for Ohio, to place the Saxton House on the National Register of Historic Places. It was listed there on April 26, 1979, under the provisions of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. At the time, Marshall Belden's plan was to use the tax advantages of the Tax Reform Act of 1976 to help fund the removal of the commercial additions, restoration of the exterior of the building to its original appearance, and conversion of the building to a restaurant to create "a focal point to generate other reinvestment and restoration in the central business district of Canton...."<sup>8</sup>

Belden did not wait for the Saxton House to be approved for the National Register of Historic Places before arranging for the exterior restoration work to begin. Contracts for demolition of the inappropriate commercial additions were signed by March 1979 with general contractor, Gibbons-Grable Company, who employed project manager Jay Fricker and on-site construction supervisor Ralph Green. Belden hired architect Ray George to determine the dimensions and configurations of details, "working from photographs and applying the mathematics of perspective," and to provide demolition and construction drawings.<sup>9</sup> The commercial additions were removed, the removed portion of the front wall on the first floor of the house was rebuilt, and the architectural features, removed in the 1920s, were replicated and installed. The front porch was reconstructed, a new roof of "slate-like shingles" to match the original slate roof and roof flashings were installed, and the six brick chimneys were rebuilt using old photographs as a pattern to replicate the originals. Some interior features were also recreated based on the few photographs available and on architectural discoveries made during demolition and reconstruction. The first floor, which had been lowered about forty inches to street level, most likely in the 1920s to allow commercial use, was removed and reinstalled at the historic height. The basement of the three-story portion of the Saxton House had been filled with debris from various remodeling projects over the years, and the detritus removed from it yielded

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<sup>6</sup> "Saxton House Committee Report," September 21, 1978.

<sup>7</sup> Rosemary Kubera, "Old mansion a trip back in time." Kubera reported that Traikovich had been contacted by the Canton Preservation Society about selling but had not received an offer or decided to sell. The purchase occurred between the publication of this article and September 21, 1978.

<sup>8</sup> Simmons, *National Register of Historic Places Nomination for Saxton House, Canton, Ohio*, 5.

<sup>9</sup> Anonymous author, "Restoration of the Saxton-Barber House: First Phase, March 1979 to March 1980," 5.

pieces of original interior features which made possible their recreation. Once the basement debris had been removed, brick-lined channels in the dirt floor of the basement were discovered. Their purpose is still unknown. One theory is that they were somehow used to provide heat to this portion of the building, but how that might have worked is unclear. A second, more likely theory, is that the channels were related, somehow, to the operations of the Empire Mining Company, with mines in Illinois, which manufactured Empire Royal Flux, sold to iron manufacturers such as President William McKinley's father, William McKinley Sr. James A. Saxton was treasurer of the Empire Mining company. Based on the brick lining of the pits and the recovery of slag in one of them, it appears some sort of smelting operations were conducted in the basement of the house, possibly experiments or tests, as the basement pits are not large enough for a full-scale smelting operation, and the basement would not have been an appropriate location for one in any case.<sup>10</sup>

Removed or destroyed features of the house were reproduced by skilled craftsmen employed by Marshall B. Belden. Clair Edwards, of Cadiz, Ohio, searched through three states to find the clear black walnut necessary to refabricate the spiral staircase from the first to the second floor.<sup>11</sup> Mahogany doors and woodwork were installed, and the twelve fireplaces with white marble mantels rebuilt. Modern ducted heating and air conditioning was installed. Walls were replastered and painted, but no decorating schemes were employed on the interior to allow prospective tenants to do their own decorating.<sup>12</sup> No elevator was installed, and the progress report submitted to Marshall B. Belden in 1980 indicated that none was planned. The report also noted that a large number of historic photographs had been assembled, a twenty-minute slide presentation of the project had been created, and more than two hundred photographs were taken during its first year.<sup>13</sup>

When the exterior restoration work was completed, a pamphlet detailing the work and providing floor plans for each floor except the third but including the basement was printed and circulated. It was intended as an aid to finding a business tenant to lease the property (see Appendix for Saxton House floor plans from this pamphlet). The sales pitch at the end of the "walk-about" declared,

Exterior restoration is historically faithful. Tax deductions available for Historic building. 8,300 sq. ft. on four levels. Complies with code. Automatic fire protection system. Well insulated. Generous building-to-land ratio. Spacious parking. Rooms for dining, meetings, receptions. Kitchen. One of vigorous downtown redevelopment programs. Close to government, financial

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Anonymous author, "A Walk-About Tour of the Saxton Barber House," n.p, Printed pamphlet in Ralph Regula Papers held at Ohio University Archives in Columbus, Ohio.

<sup>13</sup> Anonymous author, "Restoration of the Saxton-Barber House: First Phase, March 1979 to March 1980," back cover.

business centers. Options for finishing interior, lighting, etc.<sup>14</sup>

It is not clear how successful this promotion was. Marshall B. Belden attempted to sell the Saxton House at auction in 1983, even though he had not yet recouped his expenses through the 1976 Tax Reform Act amortizations, but the highest bid was \$850,000, which he rejected.<sup>15</sup> By 1984, the Canton Preservation Society was occupying space in the Saxton House.<sup>16</sup> In 1986, it was discovered that a sliver of the porch on the north side of the Saxton House encroached on the property to the north. The discovery was likely made when the Newmarket Project had the property surveyed when that organization purchased Lot 56, tore down the three buildings occupying it, and converted the lot to a public park called “Rotary Park” (now “First Ladies Garden”). A complicated financial transaction completed between December 30, 1986, and January 2, 1987, transferred that small sliver of property from Newmarket Project to the McBel Foundation, set up by Marshall Belden to be the legal owner of the Saxton House, for the princely sum of one dollar with the stipulation that the land would not be used for anything except a public park in recognition of the effort and funds expended by Newmark Project on creating Rotary Park.<sup>17</sup>

In October 1987, the Canton Preservation Society formed a committee to investigate the feasibility of establishing a William McKinley Library and Research Center in the property. Research by the committee had determined that McKinley “was the only U.S. President not memorialized in some type of house museum.” The committee reported in 1987 that research into this idea was continuing.<sup>18</sup> On July 7, 1988, the Canton Preservation Society’s McKinley Presidential Center Committee met in the Preservation Society’s office in the Saxton House to discuss and plan for the William McKinley Library and Research Center they intended to establish there. At this meeting, the McKinley Presidential Center Committee formed several subcommittees to further these intentions. The goal of one sub-committee was to develop an action plan with long- and short-term goals. A second committee was to work with architect John Harris and contractor Paul Knoch to assemble a cost estimate for physical rehabilitation of the interior of the building and also “to consult an expert in museum development” to ensure that the restoration plans met “the highest standards of a research and library facility.” The third committee was to look into funding the effort, and a fourth committee was charged with

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<sup>14</sup> Anonymous author, “A Walk-About Tour of the Saxton Barber House,” n.p.

<sup>15</sup> Barbara Galloway, “McKinley – National Park Service adds Canton home to its list of presidential sites,” *The Akron Beacon Journal*, 1991, unknown month and day. In Ralph Regula Papers held at Ohio State University Archives.

<sup>16</sup> “McKinley Library and Research Center Proposed,” unknown newspaper, March 1988. In Ralph Regula Papers at Ohio State University Archives.

<sup>17</sup> Documents of Sale: two “Deeds of Trust” and a “Warranty Deed” executed between the Harter Bank, McBel Trust, and Newmarket Project, Inc. In Ralph Regula Papers held at Ohio State University Archives. Documents include a plat showing the porch encroachment and the property thus conveyed.

<sup>18</sup> “McKinley Library and Research Center Proposed.”



preparing a new “audio-visual presentation on the life and times of President William McKinley.” This presentation was to be in the form of slides, not film.<sup>19</sup>

### *Ralph Regula Saves the Saxton House (1987-1995)*

About this time, Congressman Ralph Regula (R-OH, 1973-2009), began to investigate completing the restoration of the Saxton House through federal government intervention. Regula was a strong supporter of the Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area (now National Park) to the north, and he felt he had a special connection to William McKinley Jr. in that Regula represented the 16<sup>th</sup> Congressional District of Ohio, which McKinley had also represented in Congress.<sup>20</sup> Regula’s objective was to ensure the last remaining building strongly associated with McKinley remained in good condition but at the least possible cost to the United States taxpayers. In doing this, he helped to develop a partnership plan for management that required members of the community who also wished to save the Saxton House to be financially invested in the success of such a project, not merely wanting it and expecting the federal government to pay for it.<sup>21</sup> By 1989, he had a plan.



Figure 27: John Debo, former Cuyahoga Valley National Park Superintendent, 2021. Photograph by Deborah Harvey.

According to John Debo, former superintendent of the Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area (now National Park), Representative Regula, who, at the time, was the Chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, told him that he, Regula, intended to have the federal government acquire the Saxton House using its authority under the Historic Sites Act of 1935. As Debo recalled, “the specific language that I recall very vividly that he intended to use in a legislative bill was very simple, and that was, ‘as if authorized under the Historic Sites Act of 1935.’ That language was going to be included in an appropriations bill in which he would provide the funds to acquire the Saxton House.” (Figure 27) Debo also remembered that Regula told him that he wanted Debo to be involved in negotiating a lease of the property with the Stark Community Foundation. Regula needed a local non-profit to occupy the building. He had already discussed his plan with the CEO of the Stark Community Foundation before approaching Debo to

<sup>19</sup> “McKinley Presidential Center Activities,” n.p., n.d., but handwritten memo on the print copy indicates July 1988.” In Ralph Regula Papers held at Ohio State University Archives at Columbus, Ohio.

<sup>20</sup> John Debo oral history interview, October 13, 2021.

<sup>21</sup> Mary Cain, “Historic partnership – Joint effort keeps Saxton House alive and well,” newspaper and date unknown. In Ralph Regula Papers held at Ohio State University Archives at Columbus, Ohio.

negotiate the lease agreement between the Foundation and the National Park Service.<sup>22</sup> Debo explained that the proposal to have the government purchase the Saxton House was unusual because it did not have “national status,” but was not illegal or nefarious. The federal government typically purchases only buildings that are nationally important, usually determined to be National Historic Landmarks through the National Park System Advisory Board. The Saxton House had been listed on the National Register of Historic Places with only statewide significance, which would seem to make it ineligible for Regula’s plan to acquire it under the Historic Sites Act of 1935.<sup>23</sup> The Historic Sites Act of 1935 authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to identify and acquire buildings and archeological sites for the United States that “possess exceptional value as commemorating or illustrating the history of the United States,” and to operate and manage those buildings and sites for the benefit of the American public. It stipulates, however, that Congress must appropriate funds before money can be spent in this endeavor. Hence, Regula’s wording in the appropriations bill: he was expecting members of the Appropriations Committee to view the appropriation of funds for purchase of the Saxton House as though such purchase was, *de facto*, approved by the Historic Sites Act of 1935. Despite concerns within the National Park Service and his own staff that the Historic Sites Act of 1935 did not apply to the Saxton House, Regula successfully pushed ahead with his plan.<sup>24</sup>

On June 29, 1989, Representative Sidney R. Yates (D-IL-9) introduced bill H.R. 2788, “Making appropriations for the Department of the Interior and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 1990, and for other purposes.” Within this appropriations bill, under Title I, National Park Service, Land and Water Conservation Fund, Land Acquisition and State Assistance, the following appropriation is described:

For expenses necessary to carry out the provisions of the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965...and for acquisition of land or waters, or Interest therein, in accordance with statutory authority applicable to the National Park Service, \$88,550,000, to be derived from the Land and Water Conservation Fund, to remain available until expended... *Provided* That of the amounts previously appropriated to the Secretary’s contingency fund, \$406,000 shall be available in 1990 for administrative expenses of the state grant program; *Provided further* That of the amount provided above, \$800,000 is for acquisition of the Saxton House, 331 South Market Street, Canton, Ohio, as if authorized by the Historic Sites Act of 1935 (16 U.S.C. 462 (e))....<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> John Debo oral history interview.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Memorandum, “Mary Ann” to David Watts, faxed on September 11, 1989, conveys information about the Saxton House and the Historic Sites Act from Jerry Rogers. In Ralph Regula Papers held at Ohio State University Archives at Columbus, Ohio.

<sup>25</sup> H.R.2788 (P.L. 101-121) online at <https://www.congress.gov/bill/101st-congress/house-bill/2788/text>. Accessed March 24, 2022.

The House Committee on Appropriations reported the original bill (House Report 101-120) by Representative Yates on June 29, 1989, and it was passed by the House on July 12, 1989, by a recorded vote of 347 to 49. On July 25, the bill was reported to the Senate Committee on Appropriation by Senator Robert Byrd (Senate Report 101-85) with amendments. The next day, the bill was passed in the Senate, with amendments, by a voice vote. The bill was then sent to Conference Committee, and conference meetings were held in September. On September 29, the Conference Committee agreed to file a conference report (Report 101-264) which was filed on October 2, 1989, with sixty-one amendments in disagreement with the House bill. None of the amendments pertained to the funds allocated for purchase of the Saxton House. Consequently, no discussions among the Members of Congress as to their intent with regard to the Saxton House were available for this report, and, as is very often the case with appropriations bills of this kind, there is no evidence that the Department of the Interior or the National Park Service, which would ultimately be responsible for the Saxton House, was asked by Congress to comment on the appropriation.

On October 3, the bill was returned to the House, which agreed to the conference report by a vote of 381 to 41. The House then proceeded to resolve its differences with the Senate version of the bill by agreeing to each amendment without objection. On October 7, the conference report was returned to the Senate, which approved the House bill by a vote of 91 to 6. The bill was presented to President George H.W. Bush for signature on October 13, and signed into law on October 23, 1989, as P.L. 101-121.<sup>26</sup>

Congress had approved \$800,000 in the Fiscal Year 1991 budget appropriation so the National Park Service could acquire the Saxton House as Regula planned, but, before the money could be spent, the property had to be appraised. The appraiser set its value at \$1.1 million. Congress, required by law to pay the higher appraised value for properties which it intends to purchase, appropriated another \$250,000 in late 1990.<sup>27</sup> The sale was finalized in early 1991. The next order of business for the Saxton House was to find a reliable tenant suitable to the National Park Service, which was now charged with management of the property. Debo, with the concurrence of the Midwest Regional Office, whom Debo notified of Regula's request that he manage this part of the effort, brokered an agreement at Regula's request between the National Park Service and the Stark County Foundation for the Foundation to lease the Saxton House and restore the interior, using it as office space for the Foundation. Negotiations began in January 1991. According to Debo, it was not difficult to start the negotiations because Regula had already spoken to James Bower, CEO of the Stark County Foundation, about this plan. Debo also stressed that this type of arrangement was not unusual. The National Park Service has the authority to lease historic properties under its care to nonprofit organizations. Regula knew this because he and Debo had discussed it previously in connection with another matter.<sup>28</sup> Regula

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Barbara Galloway, "McKinley – National Park Service adds Canton home to its list of presidential sites."

<sup>28</sup> John Debo, oral history interview.

advocated that the main parlor on the first floor and William McKinley's office and the ballroom on the third floor be open to the public and not used as office space. Debo successfully negotiated these exceptions, and the National Park Service agreed to lease the Saxton House to the Stark County Foundation.<sup>29</sup>

The process was not without its disagreements and delays, mostly regarding whether the National Park Service and the Stark County Foundation would enter into a Memorandum of Understanding, preferred by the National Park Service, or a lease, preferred by the Stark County Foundation, for tenancy of the Saxton House and regarding the federal government's insistence on the right of early termination. However, negotiations between the National Park Service and the Stark County Foundation were proceeding by April 1991. The National Park Service was prepared to agree to a lease rather than a Memorandum of Understanding, if it was for a reasonable term of thirty to fifty years, but still insisted that the federal government have the right to early termination of the lease with compensation to the Stark County Foundation if they acted upon it. According to Stark County Foundation President James Bower, Debo offered to deliver a copy of the lease to Bower as soon as it was sent to him by the U.S. Department of Interior's Office of the Solicitor in suburban Denver, Colorado. Bower reported that Debo would like to have "the U.S. take title to the property and sign the lease at a public ceremony in Canton," possibly in late May. Bower also noted that he was unable to find the drawings produced by Gibbons-Grable, the general contractors for the reconstruction and had contracted with Hammond Construction to prepare measured (as-built) drawings for future use.<sup>30</sup>

By mid-year, stories began to trickle out to the public about Ralph Regula's part in getting the federal government to purchase the Saxton House. A July 17, 1991, newspaper article by Tim Belden, titled "The McKinley Years in the Saxton House," reported that Ralph Regula had made appeals to the Parks and Recreation Administration, which oversaw the National Park Service [sic – the Department of Interior, then as now, oversees the National Park Service], for purchase of the Saxton House for use as a William McKinley Research Center.<sup>31</sup> The revelation prompted some vitriolic press and charges of "pork barrel legislation." An August 4, 1991, article by Jack Anderson and Dale Van Atta, titled "Pork barrel grows despite huge federal debt," observed that "most of the wheeling and dealing is done behind closed doors in the House-Senate conference on appropriations." One staffer the writers interviewed said, "No one has time to comb through a fat appropriations bill to find self-interest projects." Among the legislators singled out for special disapprobation was Ralph Regula, the ranking Republican on the House Interior Appropriations Committee who, according to the writers, "thinks the

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<sup>29</sup> Mary Regula, "How it Came to Be," in Carl Sferrazza Anthony, ed. *This Elevated Position: A Catalog and Guide to the National First Ladies' Library and the Importance of First Lady History* (Canton, OH: National First Ladies' Library, 2003), 25.

<sup>30</sup> Memorandum, Jim Bower to Ralph Regula et al, April 9, 1991. In Ralph Regula Papers held at Ohio State University Archives, Columbus, Ohio.

<sup>31</sup> Tim Belden, "The McKinley Years in the Saxton House," unknown newspaper, July 17, 1991. In Ralph Regula Papers held at Ohio State University Archives, Columbus, Ohio.

American taxpayers should spend \$320,000 to buy the [Saxton House] in Canton, Ohio, and donate it to the state for a museum. Canton already has a museum dedicated to the town's most famous native, but Regula says the house would be used for more." The authors seemed unaware of the actual cost of the building; they were reporting rumors and outdated facts. Apparently quoting Regula, the authors also reported that the Saxton House would become "part McKinley museum and part First Ladies museum, although why Canton needs a First Ladies museum remains a mystery."<sup>32</sup> This may be the first time Regula publicly mentioned the idea of a First Ladies' museum.

Other media outlets joined the chorus of "pork barrel spending." Television personality Geraldo Rivera inaugurated a new segment of his television show, *Geraldo!* by reporting on the Saxton House in Canton. A newspaper article, "Geraldo: 'Pork Barrel!' TV host takes on purchase of Saxton House," by Mark Ferenchik, discussed Rivera's reporting on Ralph Regula's successful efforts to get the United States government to purchase the Saxton House as "an example of pork barrel legislation." He reported that Regula called it "the best bargain the federal government ever got" because the federal government would spend no money to restore or maintain the property. Regula explained that he asked for the federal money to buy the house "after people of the community talked to him about it," and said that the local community, specifically the Stark County Foundation, would take care of finishing the restoration which, he estimated would cost about one million dollars. "[W]e'll not spend one more dime on it," Regula reportedly said of the Saxton House. The purchase from the owner, McBel Trust, headed by Marshall B. Belden, had not been completed, according to the article, and the building was currently occupied by an antique shop.<sup>33</sup> An August 13, 1991, article entitled "Oink, oink," reported that a new, bipartisan "Porkbusters' Coalition" had been formed in Washington, D.C. to try to cut one million dollars from the federal budget. Their list of targeted spending included \$320,000 proposed by Ralph Regula to purchase the Saxton House.<sup>34</sup> The rumored price of the Saxton House was eventually corrected. A newspaper article titled "McKinley home to be national site – Park Service buys Saxton-Barber structure, renovations expected" in late 1991 correctly stated that the house was purchased by the National Park Service for \$1.1 million.<sup>35</sup>

Other media, particularly media associated with Canton, lauded the purchase. On September 22, 1991, *The Repository* responded to the Geraldo Rivera television show in an

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<sup>32</sup> Jack Anderson and Dale Van Atta, "Pork barrel grows despite huge federal debt," unknown newspaper, August 4, 1991. In Ralph Regula Papers held at Ohio State University Archives, Columbus, Ohio.

<sup>33</sup> Mark Ferenchik, "Geraldo: 'Pork Barrel!' TV host takes on purchase of Saxton House," unknown newspaper, unknown date. See also Edd Pritchard, "Sale of Saxton House forces antique shop to close doors," *The Repository*, November 21, 1991. In Ralph Regula Papers held at Ohio State University Archives, Columbus, Ohio.

<sup>34</sup> "Oink, oink," *Akron-Beacon Journal*, August 13, 1991. In Ralph Regula Papers held at Ohio State University Archives, Columbus, Ohio. Note scrawled on the copy from Daryl R to Barbara Wainman, Regula's assistant, says, "Ungrateful bastards. Send money to CVNRA [Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area] they're happy. Send it to Canton, it's pork."

<sup>35</sup> Barbara Galloway, "McKinley home to be national site – Park Service buys Saxton-Barber structure, renovations expected," *Akron-Beacon Journal*, unknown date, but late 1991. In Ralph Regula Papers held at Ohio State University Archives, Columbus, Ohio.

editorial entitled “Saxton House project a deserved tribute,” by Michael Henke, editor. This article restated Regula’s claim that no further federal funds would be expended on the Saxton House after the government purchase because the Stark County Foundation would undertake to fund and accomplish the interior restoration. Henke opined that the money proposed to be spent on it “is an appropriate memorial” to McKinley and reminded his readers that, if the money was not spent on the project in Canton, it would be spent on a different project somewhere else.<sup>36</sup>

Ralph Regula ignored his detractors and proceeded to shepherd the project forward. On October 25, 1991, John Debo sent Regula’s assistant a copy of the Saxton House lease agreement to be executed in mid-November. The agreement stated that Congress had authorized acquisition of the Saxton House “as if authorized by the Historic Sites Act of 1935 (16 U.S.C. 462 (e) d) in the Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Act of 1990, 103 Stat 701; at 708,” and that the Stark County Foundation “desires to manage and rehabilitate said property.” It further stated that the Historic Sites Act provides that the federal agency with responsibility for the management of any federally-owned historic property may, after consultation with the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, enter into management contracts as necessary to protect the interests of the United States and to preserve the historic property. The contract agreement was that the Stark County Foundation would lease the property for forty years. It would also rehabilitate and maintain the property at its own expense and in accordance with the *Secretary of Interior Standards for Rehabilitation*, operate the property as a center for not-for-profit community organizations and other appropriate parties consistent with the purposes of the Stark County Foundation and with preservation of the property, and also designate a portion of the house for McKinley exhibits to inform the public about his presidency, the property, and “related historical themes.” It specifically stated that no Department funds would be expended on the project unless specifically authorized by Congress and that the Stark County Foundation would request written approval from the Director before making any changes to the property. The Stark County Foundation was also required to report annually to the superintendent of Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area a summary of repairs and physical improvements made to the property and identify planned repairs and improvements for the upcoming year. The Stark County Foundation was prohibited from transferring the entire property to another entity but was allowed to sublease portions of the building to other compatible organizations. It included sections regarding early termination of the lease, insurance, taxes, and end of lease requirements. It was signed by Stark County Foundation Executive Director James A. Bower, Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area Superintendent John Debo, and National Park Service Midwest Regional Director Don Castleberry.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Michael Henke, ed., “The Saxton house a deserved tribute,” *The Repository*, September 22, 1991. In Ralph Regula Papers held at Ohio State University Archives, Columbus, Ohio.

<sup>37</sup> “Agreement” for a lease of the Saxton House between the National Park Service and the Stark County Foundation. In Ralph Regula Papers held at Ohio State University Archives, Columbus, Ohio. Regula’s Papers hold copies of the unsigned lease.

Debo also drafted several press releases regarding the purchase of the Saxton House (at the time, also known as the McKinley House by the National Park Service) and the lease agreement with the Stark County Foundation.<sup>38</sup> On November 13, 1991, both press releases were sent to Congressman Ralph Regula and his assistant for approval. Two other press releases were made in November touting the acquisition by the National Park Service of the “historic McKinley Home,” (November 15) and the Stark County Foundation’s help with rehabilitating the interior of the Saxton-McKinley House (November 27); both releases came from the office of Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area Superintendent John Debo. The November 15 press release quoted National Park Service Director James P. Ridenour as saying, “NPS hopes a partnership restoration project can quickly be established with private interests in Stark County, Ohio.” Handwritten notes on the back of the document listed pledged donors to the restoration effort: the Timken Foundation (\$1 million for the “renovation,” and to establish an endowment to fund future maintenance costs) and McBell [sic] Trust (\$150,000).<sup>39</sup> Twelve days later, that wish was accomplished with the agreement for interior rehabilitation of the building by Stark County Foundation and confirmation of funds pledged by the Timken Foundation and McBel Trust.<sup>40</sup> These press releases were sent to fourteen local print media outlets.<sup>41</sup>

By 1992, part of the vision for the Saxton House appears to have been development of a museum.<sup>42</sup> The original agreement with the National Park Service by the Stark County Foundation was to set aside space on the first floor of the Saxton House to display McKinley memorabilia, most of which they intended to get on loan from the McKinley Museum, also in Canton. By early 1993, the plan also included displaying memorabilia from the nation’s First Ladies. Mary Regula, wife of Ralph Regula, was invited by the Stark County Foundation to attend their March 22, 1993, meeting. At this point, Mary Regula had become involved in the plans for using part of the Saxton House as a museum, although the National First Ladies’ Library Association had not yet been organized. It is apparent from the meeting notes that this was not the first of these meetings she had attended. The meeting notes indicate that reports of progress were made by the architect, including receipt of proposals by general contractors, and that selections had been made from previous proposals by architectural firms and landscape architects. Measured drawings of the building had been completed and incorporated into architectural concept drawings, which included the addition of an elevator and a rear exit

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<sup>38</sup> John Debo, “Historic McKinley Home Purchased by National Park Service,” and “Park Service and Stark County Foundation enter into Saxton House agreement,” draft press releases, October 29, 1991. In Ralph Regula Papers held at Ohio State University Archives, Columbus, Ohio.

<sup>39</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ and George Berklacy, “Ohio’s Historic McKinley Home now under National Park Service,” press release, November 15, 1991. In Ralph Regula Papers held at Ohio State University Archives, Columbus, Ohio.

<sup>40</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, “National Park Service’s McKinley House to be Rehabilitated with Help from Ohio’s Stark County Foundation,” press release, November 27, 1991. In Ralph Regula Papers held at Ohio State University Archives, Columbus, Ohio.

<sup>41</sup> List of local print media outlets to which press releases were sent. In Ralph Regula Papers held at Ohio State University Archives, Columbus, Ohio.

<sup>42</sup> Mary Cain, “Historic partnership – Joint effort keeps Saxton House alive and well,” *Free Press*, unknown date but likely late 1991. In Ralph Regula Papers held at Ohio State University Archives, Columbus, Ohio.



stairway to the existing building. A proposed change in heating system was discussed. Changes were reviewed and approved by the National Park Service architect, probably Paulette Oswick Cossel, historical architect at Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area (now National Park), although the meeting notes do not specify a name. The discussion of the exhibits, the meeting notes reported, was lengthy.

At this point in 1993, the concepts for either the McKinley display or the First Ladies' display had not been resolved. The McKinley Museum explained that they did not have a lot of McKinley artifacts at the McKinley Museum and, although they were willing to loan what was needed, they did not feel they had the budget to create such displays. It was suggested that the McKinley artifacts be displayed in his study on the third floor and the First Ladies' artifacts be displayed in the area set aside on the first floor, but the third floor was considered inaccessible for daily public traffic. Both the McKinley Museum and Mary Regula were asked to compile a written "vision" statement for the two exhibit concepts to be reviewed at the next meeting.<sup>43</sup> The agenda for the next meeting indicates that Mary Regula was invited to attend along with her husband and his administrative aide, together with Superintendent John Debo from Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area, an unnamed National Park Service exhibit designer invited by John Debo, National Park Service Historical Architect Paulette Oswick Cossel, architect Joe Clancey, several representatives from the McKinley Museum, and two members of the Stark County Foundation, one of whom was its Executive Director, James A. Bower. Mary Regula's purpose there was to present her concept for a First Ladies exhibit.<sup>44</sup>

In December 1993, the Stark County Foundation tried again to project when completion of the interior restoration project and installation of exhibits at the Saxton House would be completed. Restoration had initially been projected to begin in Spring of 1992, after the National Park Service announced the purchase of the house and the lease to the Stark County Foundation in November 1991. After several delays to the project, the Stark County Foundation announced that rehabilitation and restoration would begin in January 1994 and that the work would take six to eight months. The Stark County Historical Society had agreed to lend William McKinley memorabilia, consisting mostly of documents and photographs, for display at the Saxton House on the first floor, main stairway, and third floor. However, by 1993, the city of Canton had added a new wrinkle to the Stark County Foundation's plan and schedule for the Saxton House when it created a Planning Commission. This new Commission was given authority to review any changes to city buildings listed on the National Register of Historic Places to determine if proposed changes were appropriate. The Saxton House was the first historical project to be subject to Planning Commission review. Although still occasionally ridiculed as a "pork-barrel project," the Saxton House project increasingly garnered positive reviews, at least in the Canton

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<sup>43</sup> "Saxton House Renovation Project Meeting Notes," March 30, 1993, for meeting held March 22, 1993. In Ralph Regula Papers held at Ohio State University Archives, Columbus, Ohio.

<sup>44</sup> "Meeting Notice: Saxton House Renovations Project," March 24, 1993, for meeting held April 12, 1993. In Ralph Regula Papers held at Ohio State University Archives, Columbus, Ohio.

*Repository*.<sup>45</sup> On January 27, 1994, *The Repository* reported that work had begun.<sup>46</sup> How much work actually was done before National First Ladies' Library, Inc. took over the project is unclear, but, of course, the interior decorating could not begin until the changes approved by the Ohio Board of Building Appeals, such as the installation of the elevator, sprinkler and HVAC systems, and handicapped-accessible bathrooms, had been completed.

#### *National First Ladies' Library Association Organizes and Begins Work (1994-1998)*

The initial First Ladies' exhibit proposed by Mary Regula for the Saxton House in 1993 gained no traction, and it did not appear in any newspaper reporting located in Ralph Regula's papers at Ohio State University Archives. Mary Regula, however, had not scrapped the idea; in fact, she had expanded on it. On October 22, 1994, the *Akron Beacon Journal* reported that, during an early-morning hiking tour at Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area which she and her husband took with Roger Kennedy, Director of the National Park Service, Mary Regula pitched the idea of a First Ladies' resource center and library – not a museum – to be located in the Saxton House, and Kennedy agreed to it. Apparently, Ms. Regula already had a plan, as she told the newspaper that the details would probably be finalized in the next thirty days. The newspaper reported that Mary Regula added, "This has been a dream of mine for a long time!"<sup>47</sup>

Mary Regula wasted no time assembling supporters for her dream. She had been frustrated for years by the lack of information about the First Ladies or even a way to find out what resources were available. Her original plan was to create and publish a bibliography of print materials about the First Ladies of the United States, a resource that, at the time, did not exist. However, her daughter, a librarian by training, persuaded her that the bibliography should be digital, published on a website on the internet so that people all over the world could easily access it. Mary Regula called together thirteen women she knew in Canton to raise money for the endeavor, and she called upon her husband's contacts in Washington, D.C. for support. The group met in a room of the Saxton House, courtesy of the Stark County Foundation. Originally, Mary Regula envisioned only the need for "one room with a computer and perhaps a bookcase for the trickle of...First Lady books and biographies that [the] committee was beginning to pick up..."<sup>48</sup> In January 1995, she visited First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton at her office in the East Wing of the White House to explain the concept of a digital bibliography and, eventually, perhaps an actual library where books about the First Ladies could be assembled. Clinton became an enthusiastic supporter, referring Regula to writer Carl Sferrazza Anthony to create the bibliography and agreeing to be an honorary chairperson on the Board of Directors for the new

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<sup>45</sup> Nancy Ozimek, "Saxton House work to start, finish in 1994," *The Repository*, December 9, 1993. In Ralph Regula Papers held at Ohio State University Archives, Columbus, Ohio.

<sup>46</sup> Monica Davis, "Work replaces guts of Saxton mansion – renovation is underway," *The Repository*, January 37, 1994. In Ralph Regula Papers held at Ohio State University Archives, Columbus, Ohio.

<sup>47</sup> Bob Downing, "First Ladies to get center in Canton," *Akron Beacon Journal*, October 22, 1994. In Ralph Regula Papers held at Ohio State University Archives, Columbus, Ohio.

<sup>48</sup> Regula in Anthony, 25.

First Ladies' Library. Most of Clinton's living predecessors eventually followed her lead, signing on as honorary chairpersons of the First Ladies' Library.<sup>49</sup> Encouraged by Clinton's response and advice, Mary Regula and her thirteen friends and associates founded the National First Ladies' Library Association later in 1995, and the Stark County Foundation leased space for it in the Saxton House.

The National Park Service distributed a press release in December 1996, announcing that "the only comprehensive bibliographic database on the lives and contributions of America's First Ladies" was being compiled by the First Ladies' Library Association and would be ready for release online in the Spring of 1997. The press release described the contents of the database and gave the location of the First Ladies Library as the Saxton House in Canton, Ohio, but reminded its readers that, although the Saxton House was owned by the National Park Service, it received no government funding for its operations. The press release also reported that the official dedication of the First Ladies Library was planned for Summer 1997.<sup>50</sup> However, the event was not held until the following year, June 8, 1998, Ida Saxton McKinley's birthday.<sup>51</sup> Former First Lady Rosalynn Carter was on hand to officially dedicate the National First Ladies' Library located in the Saxton-McKinley House. Mary Regula dressed as Mary Todd Lincoln for the event, and her colleagues donned costumes representative of other First Ladies.

On September 16, 1997, the group incorporated in the District of Columbia as National First Ladies' Library, Inc. (NFLI), which provided the gravitas to attract prominent people to serve on the Board of Directors and the Advisory Board.<sup>52</sup> Mary Regula assembled an impressive National Board of Directors for National First Ladies' Library, Inc. With Mary Regula serving as president, the two vice presidents were her friend Suzanne Timken and Francis Hughes Glendening, wife of the governor of Maryland. Among the twelve Executive Advisors were Edith Mayo from the Smithsonian Institution; author Carl Sferrazza Anthony; Dr. Elizabeth Brown from the National Museum for American Art; Dr. Carol Cartwright from Kent State University; Frankie Hewitt from Ford's Theater; and Colleen Nunn, wife of Senator Sam Nunn. The thirty-five other members of the first Board of Directors included such notables as Jane Alexander, former chairperson of the National Endowment for the Arts; United States Ambassador to the Vatican Lindy Boggs; Senators Robert Byrd (D-WV) and Mark Hatfield (R-OR); Representative Jennifer Dunn (R-WA); Coretta Scott King, representing the Martin Luther King Center; wives of Congressmen, including Marianne Gingrich and now-Representative Debbie Dingle; former Director of the National Park Service Roger Kennedy; and Mary Regula's daughter, Martha Regula.<sup>53</sup> The mission of National First Ladies' Library, Inc.,

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>50</sup> National Park Service, "Commemorative Ornament Features National First Ladies Library," press release. In Ralph Regula Papers held at Ohio State University Archives, Columbus, Ohio.

<sup>51</sup> Regula in Anthony, 25.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. See also "First Ladies NHS Timeline" chart.

<sup>53</sup> List of initial National First Ladies' Library Board Members in Ralph Regula Papers held at Ohio State University Archives, Columbus, Ohio.

initially, was “to create a central repository of information about these extraordinary women and their contributions to our national history.”<sup>54</sup> Over time, the intended mission grew and changed, but the mission statement, fortunately, was broad enough to accommodate those changes. By early 1978, the entire mission statement, which Carl Anthony in his 2022 oral history interview declared that he wrote, was:

As the first and only facility of its kind, the National First Ladies’ Library Will serve as a unique, national resource for patrons from school children to serious scholars. As a national archive devoted to educating people about the contribution of First Ladies and other important women in history, the Library’s holdings will fill an informational void that has long frustrated academicians and armchair history buffs alike. The Library will fulfill this mission by serving as both a physical educational facility and an electronic virtual library, in an effort to educate people in the United States and around the world.<sup>55</sup>

Originally intended to be a virtual repository, by 1997, a “full fledged effort was underway to collect the thousands of titles of books and articles listed in the completed bibliography.”<sup>56</sup>

Beginning in 1996, Carl Sferrazza Anthony spent a year creating the bibliography with more than 40,000 entries, while another team created the website and added the entries to it.<sup>57</sup> Stark State College of Technology professor Patricia Krider helped to develop and populate the website with the bibliography entries. The bibliography can be accessed through the National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. website. After the Library officially opened, Krider was hired as Webmaster, but, by 2000, she became the Executive Director for National First Ladies’ Library, Inc.<sup>58</sup> The website offers not only the searchable database for the bibliography but also a brief review of the physical site of the library at the Saxton House in Canton, Ohio, and an online catalog of the books and audio-visual materials available for research there. It also features articles exploring the family backgrounds and genealogies of eight former First Ladies as well as a collection of newspaper and magazine articles focusing on First Ladies; lesson plans for teachers; a list of other resources, with links, for First Lady information; a collection of Fast Trivia Facts about First Ladies; a monthly calendar of events, and a blog.<sup>59</sup> The work of Carl S.

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<sup>54</sup> Regula in Anthony, 24. See also National First Ladies’ Library, “First and Only National Archive Dedicated to America’s First Ladies to be Announced,” press release, January 13, 1998. In Ralph Regula Papers held at Ohio State University Archives, Columbus Ohio.

<sup>55</sup> National First Ladies’ Library, “National First Ladies’ Library Mission Statement” on cover sheet of a fax sent from “Connie” to Kristi Helmuth, apparently containing a transcript of a speech by historian and author David McCullough, plenary speaker at a bipartisan congressional Retreat, n.d. In Ralph Regula Papers held at Ohio State University Archives, Columbus, Ohio. See also Carl S. Anthony, oral history interview, June 17, 2022.

<sup>56</sup> Regula in Anthony, 25.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>58</sup> Janet Frankston, “Library will get support in new year – National First Ladies’ Library may be operated by federal government,” *Akron Beacon Journal*, January 3, 1999. In Historic Resource File – National Parks, General, held at Cuyahoga Valley National Park archives.

<sup>59</sup> National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. website online at <http://www.firstladies.org>. Accessed March 26, 2022.

Anthony features prominently in these offerings. By approximately 2001, National First Ladies' Library, Inc. claimed the website averaged six to eight thousand "hits" per month from people in eighty-two countries around the world.<sup>60</sup>

On December 19, 1997, National First Ladies' Library, Inc. sent an announcement of forthcoming invitations to media, politicians, and other interested parties to attend a press conference and luncheon at noon on Tuesday, January 27, 1998, at the Renwick Gallery at the National Museum of American Art in Washington, D.C. to officially announce the launch of the Library "at a national level." The invitation was signed by Mary Regula as founding chair and president of National First Ladies' Library, Inc., Debbie Dingell, president of the General Motors Foundation, and Ray N. Ivey, vice-president of the CNG Foundation., and included a second page devoted to the impressive list of members of the National Board of Directors and the National Advisory Board for National First Ladies' Library, Inc.<sup>61</sup> Invitations were sent the first week of January 1998, followed by a "Media Advisory" announcing the launch of National First Ladies' Library. Cokie Roberts, ABC news correspondent, was to be Master of Ceremonies at the official launch, and the list of Honorary Chairpersons included every living First Lady from Claudia "Lady Bird" Johnson to Hillary Clinton. The advisory also touted that "First family descendants" would be present.<sup>62</sup> The website with the completed bibliography was officially inaugurated about a month later, on February 23, 1998, when First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton sat down at a computer terminal in the East Room and looked herself up on it.<sup>63</sup>

One of the changes to the mission of National First Ladies' Library, Inc. was completion of the interior of the Saxton House. Interior decorating was not on the original agenda for the National First Ladies' Library Association before it was NFLL. The lease agreement between the National Park Service and the Stark County Foundation stipulated that the Stark County Foundation would undertake and fund restoration of the interior of the Saxton House. Nevertheless, National First Ladies' Library Association, which moved its operations into the Saxton House in 1994, took on the task of the interior rehabilitation of the building under an agreement with, and with funds from, the Stark County Foundation. Restoration in historic preservation parlance means putting things back the way they were. Because the interior of the house had been thoroughly gutted and because so few photographs of the interior before 1920 existed, the décor of the Saxton House cannot properly be called a restoration. John Debo, former superintendent of Cuyahoga Valley National Park, and Mark Holland, archivist at

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<sup>60</sup> "National First Ladies' Library Education and Research Center Operational Plan," n.d., but contents appear to place it in 2001, n.p. In Cuyahoga Valley National Park digital archives, folder "Brochure," file 402\_FILA Brochure Drafts 2001-2003.pdf.

<sup>61</sup> National First Ladies' Library to The Honorable Ralph Regula and Mrs. Regula, invitation to announcement of National First Ladies' Library, December 19, 1997. In Ralph Regula Papers held at Ohio State University Archives, Columbus, Ohio.

<sup>62</sup> Invitation located in Ralph Regula Papers held at Ohio State University Archives, Columbus, Ohio. See also National First Ladies' Library, "Media Advisory," January 13, 1978, in Ralph Regula Papers at Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio.

<sup>63</sup> Regula in Anthony, 23.

McKinley Presidential Library and Museum referred to it as a “conjectural” or “speculative” restoration in their interviews for this project.<sup>64</sup> The work re-creates the décor of the High Victorian period when William and Ida McKinley were using part of the house as their Canton home when not in Washington, D.C. This report, therefore, will use the term “high-Victorian re-creation” when referring to it.

Dr. Sheila Fisher, a retired clinical psychologist, was one of the women in Canton recruited by Mary Regula to join her team working on creating the First Ladies’ Library. Due to her interest in the Victorian Age, several members of the group suggested she oversee the high-Victorian re-creation effort, a task which Fisher enthusiastically adopted with a view to making the Saxton House an elegant backdrop for the work of the First Ladies’ Library Association.<sup>65</sup> Details of her work on the Saxton House can be found in Chapter Eight of this Administrative History. As previously discussed, the McKinleys lived in the Saxton House full time only following the death of their youngest daughter, beginning in August 1873 until the beginning of McKinley’s career in Congress in March 1877, for about ten months between May 1884 and March 1885, and for about a year in 1891 and 1892, between William McKinley’s terms as a Representative in Congress and his terms as Governor of Ohio, a total of about seven years during the more than thirty years they were married (Figure. 21).

Mary Regula scheduled the Grand Opening of the National First Ladies’ Library to coincide with the anniversary of Ida Saxton McKinley’s birthday, June 8, 1998. The rehabilitation work was completed in the nick of time. The evening before the opening, wallpaper was still being installed. The National First Ladies’ Library Association staff and volunteers draped the Saxton House in red-white-and-blue bunting reminiscent of William McKinley’s famous front porch campaign for president at his house on North Market Street.<sup>66</sup> To officially open the Library, former First Lady Rosalynn Carter cut the ribbon and offered remarks on the occasion, in company with members of the National First Ladies’ Library Association dressed in period costumes.<sup>67</sup> Actress Jean Stapleton, who played Eleanor Roosevelt on stage and on television, served as mistress of ceremonies. The Canton Symphony Orchestra brass quintet played patriotic music, including ‘*The Lady of the White House*,’ composed by John Phillip Sousa for First Lady Ida Saxton McKinley.<sup>68</sup> A local newspaper reported that “First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton sent a recorded video message praising the library’s opening” for the occasion.<sup>69</sup> The ribbon-cutting was followed by a fund-raising dinner held in a tent in the rear parking lot of the Saxton House attended by approximately five hundred guests dressed either in Victorian costume or in black-tie attire, who paid \$1,500 per couple to mingle. The Canton

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<sup>64</sup> John Debo oral history interview. See also Mark Holland oral history interview.

<sup>65</sup> Fisher in Anthony, 32.

<sup>66</sup> Kerry Clawson, “First Ladies’ Library plans vintage opening,” *Akron Beacon Journal*, June 7, 1998. In Historic Resource Files – National Parks, General, held at Cuyahoga Valley National Park archives.

<sup>67</sup> Regula in Anthony, 24,

<sup>68</sup> Kerry Clawson, “First Ladies’ Library plans vintage opening.”

<sup>69</sup> “First Ladies focus of new library,” *The Times Reporter*, Dover-New Philadelphia, Ohio, June 9, 1998. Online at <https://newspaperarchive.com>. Accessed March 27, 2022.

Symphony Orchestra string quartet also played during the dinner catered by Brookside Country Club, which was a sold-out event.<sup>70</sup> Mary Regula noted that, within three years of founding, they had raised over five million dollars “through corporate, foundation, and individual contributions,” emphasizing Ralph Regula’s prediction that no further government funds would be spent on the Saxton House after purchase.<sup>71</sup>

Within a year of opening the restored rooms in the Saxton House to visitors, National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. reported a total of 3,300 visitors to the site during the ten-month period from June 1998 through March 1999. These visitors were welcomed and offered tours “[t]wo to three days per week (depending on the season)” by a cadre of volunteer docents dressed “as their favorite First Lady,” who guided them to the front parlor on the first floor, to Ida’s sitting room and bedroom on the second floor, and to William’s office on the third floor, “all finely appointed with furnishings of the period...” Also on the third floor, in the former ballroom, visitors were able to view a recently revised video from the Smithsonian Institute on the First Ladies as well as other exhibits pertaining to First Ladies, some locally donated and some borrowed from other local McKinley attractions. The collection of artifacts had not yet been accessioned into the site’s archives because the site’s archives had not yet been created, so they remained undocumented, but National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. had “made an impressive start on its portal website,” which, between January 1, 1999, and the end of April 1999, had recorded 12,200 visitors from seventy countries. The “core of a research center” had been set up in the Saxton House, “with a modest collection of books on the First Ladies and the availability of a computer to provide access to their website.”<sup>72</sup> Staff consisted of Mary Regula in an unpaid position as founding chair and president of National First Ladies’ Library, Inc.; Patricia Krider, who was hired as the information technology director charged with managing the NFLL website, particularly the online bibliography, and who became executive director in 2000 in anticipation of the transition to a unit of the National Park System; Gail Fahrney, part-time bookkeeper; and a manager for the volunteer docents and the gift shop. Beginning in September 1999, National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. also contracted with consultants for project-specific help developing “curriculum enrichment programs with units of study on each First Lady” which were made available to the public on the NFLL website as each was completed.<sup>73</sup> Mary Regula and her colleagues registered as a Section 510(c)(3) charitable organization under Section 501(a) of the Internal Revenue Code, and recruited major corporate donors to the National First Ladies’

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<sup>70</sup> “A time of firsts for folks in Canton – June 8 grand opening of National First Ladies Library is taking shape,” *Akron Beacon Journal*, May 21, 1998. In Historic Resource File – National Parks, General held at Cuyahoga Valley National Park archives., See also Kerry Clawson, “First Ladies’ Library plans vintage opening.”

<sup>71</sup> Regula in Anthony, 25.

<sup>72</sup> National Park Service, Midwest Regional Office, “National First Ladies Library Special Resource Study, Canton, Ohio,” April 2000, 5-6. In Cuyahoga Valley National Park archives. It is not clear if this report was ever published. Electronic file provided by staff at Cuyahoga Valley National Park.

<sup>73</sup> Memorandum, Superintendent, Cuyahoga Valley National Park to Regional Director, Midwest Regional Office, Memorandum related to Department of Interior Office of Inspector General Case File No. OI-HQ-05-0635-R (First Ladies NHS), June 28, 2006. In Cuyahoga Valley National Park archives.



Library. These included the Coca Cola Company, Consolidated Natural Gas Company, General Motors Corporation, Microsoft Corporation, and the Procter and Gamble Corporation.<sup>74</sup>

### *The City National Bank Building*

National First Ladies' Library, Inc. undertook renovation of the City National Bank Building located on the next block north of the Saxton House. Built in 1895 in Richardsonian Romanesque Revival style, the masonry building is six stories tall and constructed in a "U" shape, which allows light to penetrate from a skylight in the roof through glass ceiling/floor openings to the first floor, originally aimed at the teller's station. In 1923, the bank was closed after being purchased by another banking institution in 1916, and the building was abandoned. It fell into disrepair but was finally purchased by Marshall Belden Jr, who arranged for the building to be nominated to the National Register of Historic Places. The City National Bank Building at 205 Market Avenue South was listed on the National Register of Historic Places on July 15, 1982.<sup>75</sup> In September 1997, Marshall Belden offered to give it to the National First Ladies' Library Association to be used for future expansion.<sup>76</sup> The transfer was completed in May 1999.<sup>77</sup>

In July of that year, First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton visited the National First Ladies' Library to announce the adoption of the City National Bank Building as an official project of the Save America's Treasures (SAT) Millenium Council Initiative, a millennial project initiated by President and Mrs. Clinton of which she was the honorary chair. In 2000, SAT awarded National First Ladies' Library, Inc. a \$2,500,000 matching grant for rehabilitation and adaptive use of the City National Bank Building out of the total of thirty million dollars in awards made that year.<sup>78</sup> Along with the matching funds, eventually three million dollars, the money was to be used to convert the City National Bank Building into the National First Ladies' Library's Education and Research Center, intended to accommodate the collection of print materials and artifacts that had overrun the space at the Saxton House.<sup>79</sup> Beginning in March, 2002, Dr. Sheila Fisher headed the National First Ladies' Library, Inc. rehabilitation committee to prepare the seven floors of the building, which include the "daylight" basement, for its use.<sup>80</sup> With approximately twenty thousand square feet of space, the new building gave the National First Ladies' Library room to

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<sup>74</sup> National Park Service, Midwest Regional Office, "National First Ladies Library Special Resource Study, Canton, Ohio."

<sup>75</sup> Information on City National Bank Building located at <https://home.nps.gov/fila/learn/historyculture/city-national-bank.htm>. See also Reeb, *National Register of Historic Places Inventory Nomination of City National Bank Building*, n.p.

<sup>76</sup> Regula in Anthony, 25.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>78</sup> President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities, "Save America's Treasures Awards, 1999-2010, by State," online at <https://www.pcaph.gov/sites/default/files/SAT>, Accessed March 26, 2022.

<sup>79</sup> Regula in Anthony, 25. See also "Canton's national First Lady library looks forward to \$5.5M expansion," *Chronicle-Telegram*, Elyria, Ohio, September 4, 2001. Online at <https://www.newspaperarchives.com>. Accessed March 27, 2022.

<sup>80</sup> "Canton's national First Lady library looks forward to \$5.5M expansion."

accommodate the burgeoning collection of print material, audio and audio-visual material, and artifacts that had been “gathering in nooks and closets and offices” in the Saxton House.<sup>81</sup> This rehabilitation is described in greater detail in Chapter Eight. Before this, however, a significant change in management and funding of the sites occupied by National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. occurred. On October 11, 2000, President William Jefferson Clinton signed Public Law 106-291, part of which established the First Ladies National Historic Site as a unit of the National Park System.<sup>82</sup>

#### *First Ladies National Historic Site Established (1999-2000)*

Within a year of opening the Saxton House as the National First Ladies’ Library, some members of Congress may have been considering designating it a National Historic Site. Funding for the National First Ladies’ Library became part of the federal budget for 1999. As reported by the *Akron Beacon Journal*, Congress provided \$300,000 to National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. in the 1999 budget for staff and operational costs and another \$300,000 in 2000, relieving National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. of some of their fundraising responsibilities. These funds were provided, likely through the agency of Ralph Regula, as what are known as “congressional earmarks,” which are provisions for funds to be included in the budget that are designated to be spent on specific projects. In addition, by 1999, the notion of making the Saxton House a national historic site focused on First Ladies was being discussed in the press. Despite Ralph Regula’s claim in 1991 that no further government monies would be spent on the Saxton House after its purchase, Congress authorized the National Park Service to conduct a study in 1999 to determine the suitability and feasibility of making the Saxton House, which it already owned, a unit of the National Park System. Responding to questions from the press, Mary Regula said she was excited about the prospect of the designation “because I think this is part of our national history and we ought to focus attention on it,” and because the funds provided by the federal government would allow her to hire more permanent staff, such as a director, instead of relying on volunteers to manage the site.<sup>83</sup>

As Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area Superintendent John Debo tells it, he first heard of the plan to make the Saxton House part of the National Park System when Ralph Regula’s assistant contacted him in 1999 with a request to help her “devise some legislative scenarios for First Ladies to become a unit of the National Park System.” According to Debo, he agreed to help, and they discussed over the telephone “several different variations on a theme for the First Ladies site, one of which was the legislation that ultimately was enacted into law.” In his view, there was nothing unusual about the legislation; it was a tried-and-true model for establishing a unit of the National Park System similar to one recently used to establish the

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<sup>81</sup> Fisher in Anthony, 43.

<sup>82</sup> “Public Law 106-291,” online at <https://www.congress.gov/bill/106th-congress/house-bill/4578/text/>. Accessed March 22, 2022.

<sup>83</sup> Frankston, “Library will get support in new year.”

James A. Garfield National Historic Site in Mentor, Ohio. Because that site also had a private partner, Debo believes, Mary and Ralph Regula saw a way to add the National First Ladies' Library to the National Park System without losing control of the operations to the federal government. He explained, "They wanted the National Park Service to provide some structure and federal funding, but for the funding to be a pass-through...." Debo explained that this kind of management structure was already in place at several units throughout the system, so it was not a new concept, and he recalled that he and Regula's assistant settled on the name: First Ladies National Historic Site.<sup>84</sup> Debo did not provide a timetable for these discussions, but subsequent events indicate that they likely were concluded between June and September 2000.

While Debo and Representative Regula's assistant worked out the details of the legislation, others from the National Park Service's Midwest Regional Office undertook the study requested by Congress. A Special Resource Study is prepared for proposed units of the National Park System to determine if the site is appropriate, suitable, and feasible to be included in the System. To be appropriate, the site must represent a feature of United States history or natural resources of interest to its citizens that is not significantly interpreted at another site in the country. To be suitable, the site must have enough integrity of historic or natural features to facilitate interpretation to the public. To be feasible, a site must have available on-site, or reasonably nearby, enough space to accommodate public and staff parking and either a suitable built environment or space to construct a visitor contact center with public restrooms, staff headquarters with meeting spaces and restrooms, and maintenance facilities. A Special Resource Study considers and analyzes several management strategies for a proposed site that meets the criteria of appropriateness, suitability, and feasibility and makes recommendations for management of the site should it become a unit of the National Park System.

When authorizing a Special Resource Study, Congress generally also provides funding for research, travel, and team participation, along with a hard deadline for completion, usually two to three years. The study team for the Saxton House, led by Jill York O'Bright from the Midwest Regional Office in Omaha, Nebraska, however, had a slightly different approach and perspective. According to O'Bright, the Midwest Regional Office decided to use existing staff and funding to prepare the study requested by Regula.<sup>85</sup> In addition, instead of focusing on the physical resources of the site, the study for the National First Ladies' Library concentrated on "the *organizational concept or mission* [italics original] of the National First Ladies Library."<sup>86</sup> Although titled a Special Resource Study in the report on the team's findings, the study conducted by O'Bright's team was more in the nature of a New Area Study based on its focus and structure.<sup>87</sup> National Park Service team members for the study were: Superintendent Carol

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<sup>84</sup> John Debo oral history interview.

<sup>85</sup> Jill York O'Bright to Regional Historian Ron Cockrell, in telephone conversation, September 18, 2023, reported to the author by Cockrell in review comments for this report, September 19, 2023.

<sup>86</sup> National Park Service, Midwest Regional Office, "National First Ladies Library Special Resource Study, Canton, Ohio," 1.

<sup>87</sup> Regional Historian Ron Cockrell, review comment notes for this report, September 19, 2023.

Kohan, from Herbert Hoover National Historic Site, Iowa; Vivian Rose, historian for Women's Rights National Historic Site and acting superintendent for Martin Van Buren National Historic Site, New York; Diane Vogt-O'Connor, Senior Archivist of the Museum Management Program in the NPS Washington, D.C. office; and Historian Jeff Winstel, from the Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area (now, National Park). In addition to these, the team "contacted managers and/or staff members at 115 Presidential sites and other institutions interested in issues addressed in this report. ...randomly distributed between units of the National Park System associated with Presidents; Presidential sites operated by other Federal agencies; Presidential sites managed by state or local agencies or private institutions; and other organizations interested in American political history." The report listed forty-five respondents from those contacted who had also agreed to have their names revealed and acknowledged that others preferred to "have their comments used anonymously."<sup>88</sup>

Based on research conducted by the study team, it appeared that interpretation of the role and work of First Ladies at other National Park Service units that interpreted their husbands, the Presidents, could be called "poor," at best. Many sites reported that "they did not address the First Ladies in any fashion in their interpretive programs and saw no reason why they should." Twenty-five percent of those responding addressed the First Ladies in their exhibits and/or audio-visual programs; ten percent talked about them in their regular public programs, and another ten percent conducted special, non-recurring programs regarding the First Lady associated with the President that site interpreted.<sup>89</sup> These results indicated that the National First Ladies' Library site met the criterion for appropriateness, given the paucity of effort invested at other sites to interpret the lives of the First Ladies. The study team reported that National First Ladies' Library, Inc. envisioned remedying this deficiency by: using the Saxton House, childhood home of First Lady Ida Saxton McKinley and sometime residence of William and Ida McKinley after they were married, to interpret the role of First Ladies in American history; creating a research center to house a repository of print and microfilmed materials about First Ladies and providing space for research and programs on the First Ladies; compiling an online bibliography of print materials on First Ladies to be made available to anyone researching the topic from a distance; developing classroom materials for kindergarten through twelfth grade to enable teachers to become more knowledgeable and better able to present information on First Ladies to their students; and presenting special events to recognize the contributions of First Ladies and other notable women to the country and to humanity.<sup>90</sup>

After describing the vision of National First Ladies' Library, Inc., the study team assessed the condition of each vision goal and provided several site management alternatives for consideration. These alternatives proposed: continuing to manage the site as it was currently being managed by the small paid staff and volunteers, with most funds provided by corporate

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<sup>88</sup> National Park Service, Midwest Regional Office, "National First Ladies Library Special Resource Study, Canton, Ohio," 31.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 4.

donations augmented by funds from the National Park Service; partnering with other national institutions and organizations with similar foci, such as the Smithsonian Institution, the Library of Congress, and the National Archives, through cooperative agreements to tap into the expertise and resources of these larger, older organizations but continuing to provide the current base activities such as conducting tours, assisting with research, and developing teacher curricula and guides; funding National First Ladies' Library, Inc. activities through an endowment, which would allow the organization flexibility to add paid staff and to expand programs as desired, based on available funding from donations and the endowment; or partnering with the National Park Service through a cooperative agreement based on the existing James A. Garfield NHS management model in which National First Ladies' Library, Inc. managed the site as they were currently doing, and the National Park Service provided the funds and the oversight of their expenditures.<sup>91</sup> Ultimately, National First Ladies' Library, Inc. and the National Park Service agreed on the fourth option, a partnership between the two organizations managed through cooperative agreements, discussed in Chapter Five. The National First Ladies Library Special Resource Study was approved on April 14, 2000, by Midwest Regional Director William Schenk six months prior to congressional authorization of the Saxton House as First Ladies National Historic Site.<sup>92</sup>

On June 1, 2000, Representative Ralph Regula, Chairman of the Interior Subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee, introduced H.R. 4578, the "Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, 2001," an omnibus spending bill which was reported out of committee as Report 106-646. This report on the proposed budget for agencies within the purview of the Department of Interior such as the National Park Service explained that, in the course of compiling the bill, the committee conducted twenty-five hearings in twenty-three days and received testimony from nearly five hundred witnesses from federal agencies under the jurisdiction of the Department of Interior, members of Congress, state and local government officials, and private citizens. This first version of H.R. 4578 contained no references either to the National First Ladies Library or to a First Ladies National Historic Site, so it is assumed that none of the hearings discussed it.<sup>93</sup> On June 14, 2000, Representative Regula asked the Speaker of the House in a session of the Committee of the Whole House that the members unanimously agree to take five days to review and revise H.R. 4578, and that he be allowed to include in the bill "tabular and extraneous material," which would be such things as charts showing proposed appropriations for individual units of the National Park or National Forest Systems. This request was unanimously approved. House bill H.R. 4578 was then read aloud to the Committee of the Whole House for the purpose of giving the members the opportunity of proposing amendments to the bill. Amendments were proposed, debated, and either withdrawn or added to the bill as the members determined. None of the proposed amendments referenced the National First Ladies'

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 6-11.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., n.p. (Title and Signature page).

<sup>93</sup> "H. Rept. 106-646 – Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, 2001," online at <https://www.congress.gov/congressional-report/106th-congress/house-report/646/>, Accessed March 22, 2022.

Library or involved establishing a First Ladies National Historic Site.<sup>94</sup> H.R. 4578 was voted and passed by a vote of 204 to 172 on June 16 and forwarded to the Senate with the aforementioned “tabular material,” which were the costs associated with the bill.<sup>95</sup>

On June 22, 2000, the Senate Committee on Appropriations reported out H.R. 4578, the “Department of Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill for 2001,” in Report 106-312, in which the Senate amended the bill by substituting the text of the House bill with their own version. This version generally followed the format and most of the wording of the House bill but reduced appropriations for some items, increased them for others, and added new provisions. It included the tabulated appropriation costs proposed by the House for the individual expenditures for each unit of the National Park System in a chart entitled “Comparative Statement of New Budget (Obligational) Authority for Fiscal Year 2000 and Budget Estimates and Amounts Recommended in the Bill for Fiscal Year 2000.” The chart compared the proposed 2000 appropriation of the House with the proposed appropriation of the Senate. In this chart, under the National Park Service section titled “Statutory or Contractual Aid,” the House proposed again appropriating \$297,000 for the National First Ladies’ Library. The Senate version proposed appropriating no funds for the National First Ladies’ Library. Establishment of a First Ladies National Historic Site is not mentioned in the Senate version of H.R. 4578.<sup>96</sup> On July 18, the amended bill was passed in the Senate by a vote of 97 to 2 and returned to the House for concurrence. The bill remained in conference of the House Committee on Appropriations until the Committee filed its report (Report 106-914) on September 29, 2000, in which the conference stated what changes by the Senate it agreed with, what it disagreed with, and what changes it proposed to the bill as amended by the Senate. Under “General Provisions, Department of Interior,” the conference agreed with Sections 101 through 112 and Section 117 of the Senate version, which contained sections carried forward from previous years, and it explained the changes it made to the Senate versions of Sections 113 through 116 and Sections 118 through 135. Sections 136 through 157 proposed new general provisions, one of which, Section 149, changed the name of the Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area to Cuyahoga Valley National Park. Section 145 authorized “the establishment of the First Ladies National Historic Site in Canton, Ohio, to provide unique opportunities for education and study into the impact of First Ladies on our nation’s history.”<sup>97</sup> On October 3, the whole House agreed to the conference report by a vote of 348 to 69. The Senate agreed to it by a vote of 83 to 16, and the final H.R. 4578 was presented on October 7 to President William Jefferson Clinton on October 7, who signed it into law on October 11, 2000, as P.L. 106-291.

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<sup>94</sup> H.R.4578 – Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, 2001,” online at <https://congress.gov/congressional-record/106th-congress/>. Accessed March 22, 2022.

<sup>95</sup> “H. Rept. 106-646 – Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, 2001.”

<sup>96</sup> “S. Rept. 106-312 – Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, 2001,” online at <https://www.congress.gov/congressional-report/106th-congress/senate-report/312/>. Accessed March 22, 2022.

<sup>97</sup> “H. Rept.106-914 – Making Appropriations for the Department of the Interior and Related Agencies for the Fiscal Year Ending September 30, 2001, and for Other Purposes,” online at <https://www.congress.gov/congressional-report/106th-congress/house-report/914/>. Accessed March 22, 2022.

The “First Ladies National Historic Site Act of 2000,” located in “General Provisions, Department of Interior” of P.L. 106-291, provides that the First Ladies National Historic Site would consist of the land and improvements already owned by the National Park Service at 331 Market Avenue South in Canton, Ohio, then called the Saxton-McKinley House. If subsequently acquired by donation, the City National Bank Building property at 205 Market Avenue South, a block north of the Saxton House in Canton, Ohio, could be added to the national historic site at a later date. As Dennis Hamm, former management assistant at Cuyahoga Valley National Park, which provided oversight of First Ladies NHS of varying degrees for more than twenty years, explained it,

[T]he boundary when the park was created in 2000 was the Saxton House and that little parking area right behind it. That was it. But there was a dotted line around the bank building saying, if its donated, then the official boundary will automatically get redrawn to include the bank building.<sup>98</sup>

The legislation authorized the Secretary of Interior (or its representatives) to enter into a cooperative agreement with National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. to operate and maintain the site and with other public and private organizations for other purposes. It allowed National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. to charge fees for admission to the historic site as well as to lease parts of the site to others, which monies the organization could retain for its own use. The National Park Service would provide technical assistance in preservation and maintenance of the historic structures and landscaping as well as financial assistance for these activities and for operation of the site as a venue for educating and interpreting to the public the lives and importance of the First Ladies of the United States.<sup>99</sup> The Act provided financial relief from the stress of fundraising to National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. while also ensuring that the organization would be able to continue to do what it had already been doing: collecting documents and artifacts about the First Ladies and interpreting their lives to the public. It would also give National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. the freedom to use the grant money from “Save America’s Treasures” and from other donations and fundraisers to restore the City National Bank Building that Marshall B. Belden had donated to them, although the fact that SAT was a government grant implied that there would be some governmental oversight. At the same time, the National Park Service received a ready-made National Historic Site complete with a management organization that required almost no effort or expenditure to get it up and running. National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. celebrated with a ceremony in the front parlor of the Saxton House on January 17, 2001, attended by about sixty people, among them National Park Service Director Robert G. Stanton and Mayor of Canton, Richard Watkins.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Dennis Hamm, oral history interview, October 15, 2021.

<sup>99</sup> “Public Law 106-291.”

<sup>100</sup> Andale Gross, “Prominent step for library – Canton attraction is the third in Ohio to be named a National Historic Site,” *Akron Beacon Journal*, January 17, 2001, in Historic Resources File, National Parks – General, held in Cuyahoga Valley National Park archives.



The management structure established by the cooperative agreement between the National Park Service and National First Ladies' Library, Inc. held for about fifteen years, as discussed in the following chapters. National First Ladies' Library, Inc. managed the site operations with funds and minimal oversight from the National Park Service through a cooperative agreement initially signed in 2002 and renewed every five or six years. A Grand Opening to celebrate completion of the \$7.5 million rehabilitation of the City National Bank Building and officially open it as the National First Ladies' Library Education and Research Center was held in 2003, drawing approximately four hundred people. Market Street was blocked, a stage was built over the porch so that the speakers could step from the building to the platform, and First Lady Laura Bush, herself a former librarian, offered remarks for the occasion and cut the ribbon. The National Park Service was represented by fourteen uniformed staff. Security was provided by the City of Canton and the U.S. Secret Service.<sup>101</sup> By the time the Education and Research Center opened, it housed more than 3,000 books on, or by, First Ladies and held more than 3,500 First Lady photographs and other artifacts.<sup>102</sup> In 2011, the Education and Research Center was donated to the National Park Service and became part of the historic site. Chapter Four continues the story of the development and the history of management of the First Ladies National Historic Site.

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<sup>101</sup> "First Ladies NHS Timeline" chart. The compiler of the chart noted that, "NPS role was to represent the NPS visibly to the public, provide a sense of oversight of the artifacts and furnishings in the Saxton House displays and in the Education and Research Center (ERC), [and] function as a source to whom the public and NFLL staff can go to for assistance."

<sup>102</sup> Andrea Misko, "Where learning is first – National First Ladies' Library Education and Research Center opens on Market Avenue to honor First Ladies, women's history," *Akron Beacon Journal*, September 5, 2003, in Historic Resources File, National Parks – General, held at Cuyahoga Valley National Park archives, Files B1, B6.

## CHAPTER FOUR: Initial Implementation (2000-2012)

After the National Park Service acquired the Saxton House in 1991, it entered into a forty-year lease agreement with the Stark County Foundation (now the Stark Community Foundation). The lease required that the Stark County Foundation (the Foundation) complete restoration of the interior of the building and allowed the Foundation to sub-lease space in the building to other not-for-profit community organizations. Before the lease with the Foundation was finalized in November 1991, Representative Ralph Regula had already made public the possibility that the Saxton House could be used as a “First Ladies’ museum.”<sup>1</sup> However, it was not until 1994 that the Foundation sub-leased space in the Saxton House to the National First Ladies’ Library Association, founded by Mary Regula, wife of Representative Regula. The National First Ladies’ Library “operated under the auspices of the Stark County Foundation, until it was incorporated as a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization in Washington, DC in 1997. It later obtained 501(c)3 status in Ohio in 2001.” National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. “operates under the leadership of an Executive Director” at the direction of a Board of Trustees.<sup>2</sup>

### *Staffing Up*

When founded, staff at National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. appears to have consisted of unpaid volunteers, including its founder and president, Mary Regula.<sup>3</sup> Increases in staff began in earnest about 1998, when Mary Regula engaged Gail Fahrney, apparently on a contract basis, to set up a bookkeeping system for National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. (Figure 28). According to Fahrney, she helped to select bookkeeping software and taught Information Technology Director Patricia Krider how to use it. In October 1999, Fahrney was hired as a part-time bookkeeper, working only one day a week and sharing an office at the Saxton House with Krider. Because she shared not only an office but a desk with Krider, Fahrney worked on Tuesdays, when Krider was out of the office overseeing the restoration work at the Education and Research Center. Mary Regula also hired a staff person in 1999 to manage the gift shop, take reservations for house tours, and serve as receptionist for the site and as secretary for Mary Regula.<sup>4</sup>

In anticipation of the transition to a new status as managers of a unit of the National Park System, Mary Regula upgraded her staff in 2000, before the enabling legislation passed, by elevating Patricia Krider from Information Technology Director to Executive Director and hiring a part-time receptionist and cashier, working Saturdays only, to relieve some of the burden from

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<sup>1</sup> Anderson and Van Atta, “Pork barrel grows.”

<sup>2</sup> Memorandum, Superintendent, Cuyahoga Valley National Park to Regional Director, Midwest Regional Office, June 28, 2006.

<sup>3</sup> NFLL staff records for this time period were not available during research for this report.

<sup>4</sup> Gail Fahrney, oral history interview.



Figure 28: Gail Fahrney, former National First Ladies' Library, Inc. bookkeeper, 2022. Photograph by Deborah Harvey.

the full-time, weekday receptionist. National First Ladies' Library, Inc. also engaged a consultant, Craig Schermer, at the beginning of 2000 as a historian and researcher to assist in procuring items for archives and exhibits, assist with exhibit planning and setup, and provide historical background on First Ladies.<sup>5</sup> Schermer, a First Ladies aficionado, owned a collection of photographs consisting of "thousands of rare images" of First Ladies and was locally known for his costumed interpretation of First Lady Florence Harding. He gave several performances of this type to benefit National First Ladies' Library, Inc. fundraising efforts. Schermer began creating First Ladies bibliographies for the NFLL website after he was hired in 2000.<sup>6</sup>

National First Ladies' Library, Inc. continued to operate the First Ladies NHS as they had been doing but made further enhancements to staff after the enabling legislation was signed but before the signing of the first Cooperative Agreement in February 2002. To compensate for the loss of Patricia Krider's service as Information Technology Director, National First Ladies' Library, Inc. contracted in March 2001 with a Professor of History at Iowa State University to update at least semi-annually (or more frequently, if necessary) the First Ladies' bibliographies on the NFLL website, a service still performed in 2021. Also in March 2001, National First Ladies' Library, Inc. contracted to have constructed and maintained a catalog of all books, other print material, videos, and other visual media material in the research library. This contract lasted until August 2004. National First Ladies' Library, Inc. hired a part-time Director of Educational Programming on October 1, 2001, but continued to rely on consultants hired for specific projects for other aspects of managing the First Ladies NHS. For example, Carl S. Anthony continued to be employed under contracts to perform research and writing services for the NFLL website, some of which was also used for the interpretive displays at the Saxton House.<sup>7</sup>

Once the first Cooperative Agreement was signed in February 2002, National First Ladies' Library, Inc. operated the First Ladies National Historic Site with its existing staff for a year without making changes as they became accustomed to working with the National Park

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<sup>5</sup> Memorandum, Superintendent, Cuyahoga Valley National Park to Regional Director, Midwest Regional Office, June 28, 2006. See also Gail Fahrney, oral history interview.

<sup>6</sup> Carl S. Anthony, oral history interview.

<sup>7</sup> Memorandum, Superintendent, Cuyahoga Valley National Park to Regional Director, Midwest Regional Office, June 28, 2006. See also Carl S. Anthony oral history interview.

Service.<sup>8</sup> Superintendent John Debo, at Cuyahoga Valley National Park, on the other hand, in the summer of 2001, assigned a National Park Service site manager for First Ladies NHS, Carol Spears, who was also site manager at James A. Garfield National Historic Site in Mentor, Ohio, ninety miles away (Figure 29). It was Spears' responsibility to monitor the management of the First Ladies National Historic Site by National First Ladies' Library, Inc. staff. To initiate this, Debo and Spears made a trip to First Ladies NHS to meet with National First Ladies Library, Inc. staff and get acquainted. Debo personally handled the introduction to Mary Regula of Carol Spears as the NPS-appointed First Ladies NHS site manager. About this meeting, Debo said, "I won't say she was rude to Carol, but she wouldn't give Carol the time of day." According to Debo, although Spears worked hard for several years to establish a relationship with Mary Regula, "Mary would have none of it."<sup>9</sup> Mary Regula would not agree to

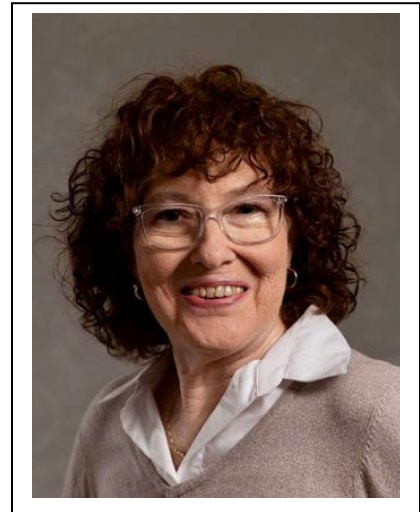


Figure 29: Carol Spears, former First Ladies NHS site manager, 2022. Photograph provided by Carol Spears.

make room at the Saxton House, at the time the only building in the First Ladies NHS, for Spears to have an office, because she saw no reason for Spears to be onsite. Debo discussed the problem with Ralph Regula, but Regula refused to get involved. "And, eventually, I advised Carol to give up," Debo said.<sup>10</sup> Carol Spears and her successor as NPS site manager and, later, superintendent, of James A. Garfield NHS, Sherda Williams, maintained an office at the James A. Garfield NHS in Mentor, Ohio, and managed First Ladies NHS from afar. Spears underscored Debo's assessment. She said, "...there was no welcome as to any participation [by NPS] in any kind of management or administration there." She recalled that, when she went to First Ladies NHS with Debo for the first time to meet with Mary Regula and the rest of her staff, she toured the Saxton House, which held offices for National First Ladies' Library, Inc. Founder and President Mary Regula, Executive Director Patricia Krider, Vice-President Dr. Sheila Fisher, who was charged with interior renovation of the Saxton House, and the NFLL Director of Educational Programming. Spears, however, was never allowed to establish her own office in the building.<sup>11</sup> As she explained,

...all of the files [for First Ladies NHS], I kept at Garfield, because I had no office at First Ladies. I was not allowed to have an office. .... John [Debo] thought it would be a good idea if I could have at least an office

<sup>8</sup> See Chapter Five, "Cooperative Agreements" for details of this first cooperative agreement between the National Park Service and National First Ladies' Library, Inc.

<sup>9</sup> John Debo, oral history interview.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Carol Spears, oral history interview, October 11, 2021.

that I would go down once a week just for whatever. But they said no.<sup>12</sup>

It was not an auspicious beginning to the relationship between the National Park Service and National First Ladies' Library, Inc., and this reluctance to share responsibility for the site on the part of Mary Regula goes a long way in explaining the length of time it took the National Park Service to fully staff up First Ladies National Historic Site.

When Spears toured the Saxton House in 2001, the Stark County Foundation had offices there, and rehabilitation of the entire interior of the house had not been completed. In her recollection, the third-floor ballroom had been completed, with new carpeting, portraits of all the First Ladies up to the present (2001) arrayed on the walls around the room, and a large conference table in the middle of the room used for meetings. She recalled that rehabilitation of the dining room and the kitchen on the first floor were completed. Also completed were the entryway with the newly reconstructed walnut stairway and the room that was used as the gift shop, at the front of the building across from the elevator, on the second floor. National First Ladies' Library, Inc. offices were also on the second floor, but Spears did not recall if they had been redecorated or just had standard office decor.<sup>13</sup>

On March 14, 2003, the lease agreement with the Stark County Foundation was terminated, leaving responsibility for the Saxton House, including maintenance and repairs, to National First Ladies' Library, Inc.<sup>14</sup> This increased responsibility prompted NFLL to hire additional staff. In anticipation of the change, on February 26, 2003, National First Ladies' Library, Inc. hired their first facility manager. In March, National First Ladies' Library, Inc. contracted with a local electrician to provide electrical services on an as-needed basis. In April 2003, the existing cooperative agreement between NFLL and NPS was modified to codify the change in responsibility for the Saxton House from the Stark County Foundation to National First Ladies' Library, Inc., and, on July 29, 2003, NFLL hired a maintenance worker. During 2003 and into 2004, Mary Regula's daughter-in-law worked intermittently as a part-time receptionist and cashier, but she was paid on an as-needed basis and was not permanently employed at First Ladies NHS.<sup>15</sup>

September 2003 was a significant month for National First Ladies' Library, Inc. and First Ladies NHS. Renovations on the north side of the first-floor spaces of the Saxton House formerly occupied by the Stark County Foundation, which had been rehabilitated to represent the Saxton family parlor, dining room, and kitchen, were completed, and the rehabilitation and furnishing of the Education and Research Center housed in the former City National Bank

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> "First Ladies NHS Timeline" chart. It is not clear from documentation whether it was the decision of the Stark County Foundation or the National Park Service to terminate the lease. Carl Anthony stated in his oral history interview for this study that Mary Regula told him that she had convinced the Stark County Foundation to leave the Saxton House. See Carl Anthony, oral history interview.

<sup>15</sup> Memorandum, Superintendent, Cuyahoga Valley National Park to Regional Director, Midwest Regional Office, June 28, 2006.

Building were also finished. National First Ladies' Library, Inc. held a celebratory Grand Opening of the Education and Research Center in September which included opening the additional rehabilitated spaces in the Saxton House to visitors for the first time. More space to operate and to interpret required additional staff. In September 2003, as the FY 04 budget for the federal government was being negotiated, National First Ladies' Library, Inc. hired both a full-time and a part-time receptionist and cashier. The full-time receptionist and cashier eventually became the assistant to the National First Ladies' Library, Inc. Director of Educational Programming. To fulfill their cooperative agreement responsibilities to provide site security for First Ladies NHS, National First Ladies' Library, Inc. hired four part-time security personnel on October 1, 2003.<sup>16</sup> Gail Fahrney, although still the part-time bookkeeper, began working three days a week instead of just one, though she still only worked on an "as needed" basis rather than on a standard schedule.<sup>17</sup> An additional part-time receptionist and cashier was hired on February 10, 2004, and a janitorial and custodial worker was hired on May 11, 2004. In October 2004, Martha Regula, a librarian and the daughter of Ralph and Mary Regula, became part of the National First Ladies' Library, Inc. staff when she was hired as a part-time Library Director. This was a major escalation of professional staff for National First Ladies' Library, Inc., as she held a Master of Arts degree in Library Science from Kent State University in Ohio and had worked professionally in the field since 1985, most previously as Director of the John D. Ong Library at the Western Reserve Academy in Hudson, Ohio.<sup>18</sup>

The following year, in April 2005, National First Ladies' Library, Inc. added another outside contractor to work on development of the educational curriculum enrichment program with units of study on each First Lady, which were then posted on the website for public use. This contract appears to have been in addition to the two consultants already working on this project. In May 2005, National First Ladies' Library, Inc. contracted for an archivist to develop and maintain the growing collection of archival materials housed in the Education and Research Center. This contract terminated on October 1, 2005, when the archivist's employment status transitioned to permanent, full-time employee, a position she continues to hold (2023).<sup>19</sup> According to NFLL Bookkeeper Gail Fahrney, by the end of 2005, National First Ladies' Library, Inc. employed six full-time and seven part-time employees.<sup>20</sup>

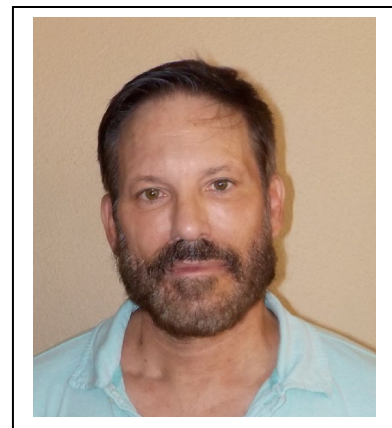


Figure 30: Carl S. Anthony, author, 2022. Photograph by Deborah Harvey.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Gail Fahrney, oral history interview.

<sup>18</sup> Memorandum, Superintendent, Cuyahoga Valley National Park to Regional Director, Midwest Regional Office, June 28, 2006.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Gail Fahrney, email to Deborah Harvey, July 17, 2022.

Craig Schermer left the National First Ladies' Library in 2006, and Mary Regula asked Carl Anthony to rework and complete the First Ladies bibliographies Schermer had started. Anthony explained that the revisions to the online bibliographies were slowed by a directive from Mary Regula "two years after I started in 2006," that he include additional details on the parents, siblings, and education of the First Ladies and by other projects assigned to him by Regula (Figure 30). After the City National Bank Building was donated to National First Ladies' Library, Inc. and became the Education and Research Center, Anthony also worked on developing the archives located in the Education and Research Center. In fact, he considers himself the "founder of the archives." He explained,

My original idea was that we would get biographers of individual First Ladies To donate their research papers. And so I started that. ...I began to donate Everything I had – all of my research papers for *First Ladies, Volume One And Two. As We Remember Her*, the Jacqueline Kennedy oral history biography, I believe I donated some stuff. The Nellie Taft biography – donated it. The Florence Harding research – donated. ...the Ida McKinley – donated. .... Those research papers...were all donated there. ...They were my notes – my early drafts of the book but also photographs, old magazines, old newspaper articles. In some cases, copies, but, in some cases, the original. So, boxes and boxes and boxes of stuff.<sup>21</sup>

After donating his own research materials, Anthony tried recruiting other authors of First Ladies biographies to also donate their research materials. According to Anthony, he introduced Mary Regula to *Washington Post* reporter Redonia "Donnie" Radcliffe, who covered First Ladies for that newspaper "from Pat Nixon up through...Laura Bush, and she donated her research papers on her biography of Hillary [Clinton] and...on Barbara Bush...as well as all of her notes as a reporter."<sup>22</sup> In September 2006, forty-two boxes of original research material, "each labeled 'Nixon,' 'Ford,' 'Carter,' 'Reagan,' 'Bush,' or 'Clinton,'" containing original documents, tape recordings, photographs, letters, and other materials were delivered to the care of the NFLL archivist at the Education and Research Center.<sup>23</sup> This appears to be the extent of Anthony's work on expanding the archives as he does not mention any other donations in which he was involved during the interview conducted with him for this Administrative History.

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<sup>21</sup> Carl S. Anthony, oral history interview.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Paula Schlels, "First Ladies donation is 'huge' – Canton gets 42 boxes covering several eras," *Akron Beacon-Journal*, September 22, 2006, B-1, B-4. In Historic Resource File: National Parks: Presidents Wives National Library, General in Cuyahoga Valley National Park archives.



*Department of the Interior's Office of the Inspector General's Investigation (2006)*

In February 2006, Midwest Associate Regional Director David Given sent to Cuyahoga Valley National Park Superintendent John Debo, who had oversight and responsibility for First Ladies National Historic Site, an inquiry from the Department of Interior's Office of the Inspector General. The Office of Inspector General (OIG) had received a list of questions posed to that agency about management of First Ladies National Historic Site. The inquiry was the result of a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request filed by the Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER) group. Given forwarded twelve questions from this group regarding management of the First Ladies National Historic Site by National First Ladies' Library, Inc., to which Debo responded. These included questions such as, "Where else in the NPS is there so little control on how money is spent?" and "Why are people who are on their staff paid huge consulting fees?" PEER wanted to know "why nepotism [ran] rampant at the site, with so many Regulas on the payroll," and requested an accounting of all members of staff, their salaries, and their relationship to Mary Regula. A major concern seemed to be why National First Ladies' Library, Inc.'s bidding practices for contractors did not match federal practices, and the questioners revealed their opinion of what the true answer was by asking how many of the contractors providing services to NFLL were "regular campaign contributors to Ralph Regula's re-election campaign." This particular question is interesting because it uses the agency-specific acronym for the First Ladies National Historic Site which is not generally known to the public at large. Questioners also wanted an accounting of how many visitors per year the First Ladies NHS saw and how that number justified the budget for the site as well as what kind of income National First Ladies' Library derived from charging for tours of the property and how that money figured into NPS's accounting process for determining how much money to allocate for the First Ladies National Historic Site. There were also questions regarding the accounting procedures used by NPS Site Manager Carol Spears, the rate of her salary increases, and what the financial relationship was between the First Ladies NHS and a private commercial concern, the McKinley Grand Hotel across Market Street from the Saxton House.

Debo responded to these concerns in detail, explaining the legal, contractual relationship between National First Ladies' Library, Inc. and the National Park Service, including responsibilities of each organization and what did or did not pertain to each based on its organizational structure (federal agency vs. private non-profit organization). He appended supporting documentation, including a copy of the enabling legislation, copies of the 2001 Cooperative Agreement and subsequent amendments, a list of full and part-time employees for the previous six or seven years, a list of consultants paid by NFLL and what work the consultants did, and the resume of the Regulas' daughter who worked for National First Ladies' Library. Debo also included a financial audit conducted for NFLL in 2004 by Linc, Malachin & Dennis, Inc., accountants out of Akron, Ohio, which found no areas of concern as to the accounting methods employed by National First Ladies' Library, Inc. Debo forwarded his response to the OIG inquiry to the Midwest Regional Office Regional Director Ernest Quintana on June 28,

2006.<sup>24</sup> No further action on this FOIA request was located in the records of the First Ladies NHS.

### *General Management Plan (GMP)*

Although it is not marked as an appendix to Superintendent Debo's response to the OIG inquiry, he may have also included a copy of the "Record of Decision: First Ladies National Historic Site General Management Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement," a copy of which was filed with Debo's "Memorandum" letter at the Cuyahoga Valley National Park Archives. This document was finalized likely while Debo was assembling his response to the OIG inquiry. The "Record of Decision (ROD)" is a summary document, indicating that, by April 7, 2006, the National Park Service had fulfilled its obligation under the first Cooperative Agreement to provide a General Management Plan for the First Ladies NHS. The General Management Plan team was led by Sandra Washington, planner at the Midwest Regional Office. First Ladies NHS Site Manager Carol Spears served as the local liaison between the Midwest Regional Office, National First Ladies' Library, Inc., and the surrounding community. A public scoping meeting for the General Management Plan was held in Canton on February 5, 2002, and NFLL Bookkeeper Gail Fahrney asserted that members of the NFLL staff and board of directors participated in meetings and reviews of the GMP, though she was not one of those who did so.<sup>25</sup> No other interviewed NFLL staff or members of the Board of Directors recalled being involved, and no documentation of participation by NFLL staff in deliberations regarding the General Management Plan were located during research for this Administrative History. The ROD provides a brief description of the resource, a summary of management decisions made and the basis for those decisions, descriptions of alternative decisions considered and of "the environmentally preferred alternative," a discussion of possible impairment to park resources and means of mitigating harm to the environment, and "an overview of public involvement in the decision-making process."<sup>26</sup>

The purpose of the First Ladies National Historic Site "is to preserve and interpret the role and history of First Ladies for the benefit, inspiration, and education of the people of the United States." The purpose of the General Management Plan, as declared in the ROD, was to document the condition of the existing site resources, determine the visitor experience desired at the park, and "decide what kind of resource conditions and visitor experiences should ultimately be achieved and maintained" as well as providing guidance for managing the park for the next ten to fifteen years. The General Management Plan explored four management alternatives for

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<sup>24</sup> Memorandum, Superintendent, Cuyahoga Valley National Park to Regional Director, Midwest Regional Office, June 28, 2006.

<sup>25</sup> Gail Fahrney, oral history interview. See also "First Ladies NHS Timeline" chart.

<sup>26</sup> National Park Service, "Record of Decision: First Ladies National Historic Site General Management Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement; First Ladies National Historic Site, Ohio," May 22, 2006, 1, in Cuyahoga Valley National Park archives.

the park: a no-action alternative; an alternative that emphasized establishing partnerships with other agencies “to share resources, collections, exhibits, and programs;” an alternative “emphasizing scholarly research” into the First Ladies as the prime focus of the site, and a fourth alternative which, in the final analysis, became the preferred alternative. In the opinion of the framers and reviewers of the General Management Plan, the Preferred Alternative presented the best plan for preserving the resources that represent the park’s purpose while also making those resources available for the enjoyment and education of the general public.<sup>27</sup>

Under the Preferred Alternative, the National Park Service would partner with National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. to manage the First Ladies National Historic Site, although efforts would be made to also partner with “a wide variety of agencies and organizations” to share resources, programing, exhibits, and information and publicize the site. Most of the Saxton House, owned by the National Park Service, “would be managed as an historic zone,” and visitors would access it through guided, interpretive tours of its three floors. Interpretive programs to encourage visitors to learn about the public and private lives of First Ladies, their roles and importance, and the historic events associated with them would be developed and made available to the public. The Education and Research Center, located more than a block north of the Saxton House, would be primarily a library and research facility, with visitor access restricted to portions of two of the six floors. In 2006, the Education and Research Center, formerly the City National Bank Building, belonged to National First Ladies’ Library, Inc., but the National Park Service anticipated that selection of this management alternative would precipitate acquisition of the building by the federal government. In the opinion of the National Park Service, federal ownership of both buildings, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, would ensure the preservation and maintenance of the historic character of the two buildings comprising the primary resources of the site. Exhibits and artifacts interpreting the First Ladies would be available at both buildings, with onsite guided tours providing information at the Saxton House and “further information available in the ERC theater and during special programs.” The aforementioned ERC theater was not a feature of the Education and Research Center building at the time the General Management Plan was written, so this is apparently a proposed improvement. No additional parking was planned, most likely because a multi-story parking deck stands between the Saxton House and the Education and Research Center, so further construction of parking would be superfluous. Especially because of the minimal amount of construction anticipated for the site, the General Management Plan estimated that this preferred alternative would cost just under \$400,000 in “one-time construction and upgrade expenses.”<sup>28</sup>

The General Management Plan ROD concluded that selection of this preferred alternative management strategy would have no adverse impact on the Saxton House or the Education and Research Center and, indeed, would have “a long-term moderate beneficial impact on the House

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

and the ERC, as a result of the availability of NPS technical and operational assistance.”<sup>29</sup> A description of the three alternative management strategies not chosen followed this assertion in the General Management Plan. On February 25, 2002, the planning team presented a preliminary scope for management strategies to the public to elicit comments, and, in autumn 2005, more detailed preliminary alternatives were presented to the public for further comment. A draft General Management Plan was assembled and subjected to a rigorous National Park Service decision-making process called Choosing By Advantages. During a Choosing By Advantages review, each proposed alternative is rated based on how well it fulfills selected criteria for management of the site such as preservation of historic resources, variety and range of possible visitor experiences, quality of collections management, and visitor and staff safety. Cost is not part of the initial consideration but can be considered if two or more of the alternatives score evenly. As a result of this review and in consideration of the public comments on the draft General Management Plan, Alternative B, previously described, was chosen as the preferred management alternative for the First Ladies National Historic Site.<sup>30</sup>

In addition to being the preferred management alternative, Alternative B was also the environmentally preferred alternative. Although all three of the alternatives that involved taking action met the NEPA criteria, the selected preferred alternative “was found to have the best overall potential for protecting and preserving the historic cultural resources of First Ladies National Historic Site.” New construction, which has a negative impact on the environment, would be limited to some modifications on the interiors of the buildings. The collections and archives would be better protected with the preferred alternative than with any of the other alternatives.<sup>31</sup> After evaluating the impacts of the four alternatives on the environment, the planning team determined that the preferred management alternative would not impair the resources of the First Ladies National Historic Site and, indeed, would “protect and enhance the site’s cultural resources and provide for high-quality visitor experiences.” The preferred management alternative, the planning team determined, “would not prevent NPS from fulfilling the purposes of the park, threaten the integrity of the park, or eliminate opportunities for people to enjoy the park.” Therefore, the team concluded, no mitigation of harm to the park’s resources was required. The planning team determined, based on these findings and the public comments received, that Alternative B was “the most comprehensive and effective method” for “meeting the park’s purpose, mission, and goals...and for meeting national environmental policy goals.” The General Management Plan ROD for the First Ladies National Historic Site was signed by Site Manager Carol Spears on May 9, 2006, by Cuyahoga Valley National Park Superintendent John Debo on May 10, 2006, and by National Park Service Midwest Regional Director Ernest Quintana on May 22, 2006, and the selected preferred alternative became the chosen management strategy.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 5.

## *Rotary Park/First Ladies Garden*

When the second Cooperative Agreement between the National Park Service and National First Ladies' Library, Inc. for management of the First Ladies NHS became operative on October 1, 2006, it included references to the possibility that NFLL would donate to NPS the former National City Bank building, renamed the Education and Research Center, and Rotary Park. Rotary Park, formerly lot 56 belonging to James A. Saxton and located north of the Saxton House, had been developed as an urban park with a small parking lot to the north by the Canton Rotary Club in the 1980s. The park was part of the Newmarket Project of urban redevelopment which spurred Marshall B. Belden to purchase the Saxton House in order to save it from the wrecking ball. Development and donation of the City National Bank Building is discussed later in this chapter. In expectation of the possibility of also acquiring Rotary Park and the adjacent parking lot, the National Park Service embarked on environmental investigations of the park and parking lot property to determine if it was, indeed, land the National Park Service wanted to own. As it turned out, it was not.



Figure 31: Dennis S. Hamm, Cuyahoga Valley National Park Management Assistant, 2021. Photograph by Deborah Harvey.

The National Park Service engaged Marc Enviro Services, Inc., an environmental consulting service from Omaha, Nebraska, in early 2009 to conduct a Phase I environmental investigation to determine if there were any likely hazardous materials requiring remediation in the soils beneath Rotary Park and the parking lot. In March 2009, Mark E. Schafer, of Marc Enviro Services reported that a preliminary investigation of the *Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps* dating back to 1887 had revealed the presence on that property in earlier days of the Canton Roller Printing print shop, an “electro-plating” business, a “garage repair shop” (auto repair also suggested that other former uses adjacent to the site could have impacted the site soils.<sup>33</sup> The email was forwarded by Cuyahoga Valley National Park Management Assistant Dennis S. Hamm to First Ladies NHS Site Manager Sherda Williams, who entered on duty on November 1, 2007, along

with his acknowledgment that this preliminary assessment significantly complicated an ongoing project to have National First Ladies' Library, Inc. donate Rotary Park to the National Park Service (Figure 31).<sup>34</sup> Because of the preliminary findings of the types of commercial businesses formerly located in the vicinity of the Saxton House, the National Park Service would be required to conduct a Phase II environmental assessment, which would involve core drilling to

<sup>33</sup> Mark E. Schafer to Dan Betts, email, March 3, 2009, in First Ladies NHS archives, Box 1, Folder: Budget. See also Chapter 2 of this document for more detailed information on the history of businesses located on the site and surrounding area.

<sup>34</sup> Dennis S. Hamm to Sherda Williams, email, March 5, 2009, in First Ladies NHS archives, Box 1, Folder: Budget.

acquire dirt samples, testing the samples for contaminants, and producing a report, estimated at the time to cost approximately \$20,000. Hamm's suggestion was to withhold the \$20,000 from the 2008 funds allocated to National First Ladies' Library, Inc. for operation of the First Ladies NHS to pay for the Phase II assessment.<sup>35</sup> This suggestion was followed every year from 2008 to at least 2011, but, as the National Park Service delayed contracting for the Phase II assessment from year to year, the withheld funds were added back into the annual National First Ladies' Library, Inc. allotment toward the middle of each year. Eventually, National First Ladies' Library, Inc. withdrew its offer to donate Rotary Park and the small parking lot to the National Park Service. The impediment, as Dennis Hamm explained, was that, should NPS proceed with the Phase II assessment and the soils be found to be uncontaminated, all would be well, and NFLL could donate the property. However, if the soils were found to be contaminated, and the National Park Service subsequently declined to accept the property donation, National First Ladies' Library, Inc. would then be required to fund clean-up of the contamination themselves. National First Ladies' Library, Inc. opted to not know what is under the paving bricks at Rotary Park, now renamed First Ladies Garden. To this day, maintenance personnel from the National Park Service are under orders not to dig in the First Ladies Garden.<sup>36</sup>

*National First Ladies' Library, Inc. Donates the Education and Research Center to NPS*

In addition to investigating the acquisition of Rotary Park, the National Park Service was working on finalizing transfer of ownership of the former City National Bank Building, which Marshall B. Belden donated to National First Ladies' Library, Inc in 1998, to the National Park Service from NFLL. National First Ladies' Library, Inc. rehabilitated the building and converted it to their Education and Research Center, which housed the physical library, the NFLL archives, and NFLL offices. They planned to eventually donate that building to the National Park Service to be added to First Ladies NHS as allowed by the park's enabling legislation. This plan, too, was experiencing some hurdles in early 2009 which impeded finalizing the transfer of the building.<sup>37</sup> Dennis Hamm recalled that the problems related to a lease of space in the building given by National First Ladies' Library, Inc. to the State of Ohio Arts Commission as security for a grant of approximately one million dollars to help fund the rehabilitation of the former City National Bank Building. According to Hamm, the lease, secured in the early days of National First Ladies' Library, Inc.'s ownership of the building, was for approximately twenty years and, at the time the National Park Service was investigating the ramifications of accepting the building from NFLL, still had nine years to run before it expired. This complicated the transfer of the Education and Research Center from National First Ladies' Library, Inc. to the National Park Service because, as Hamm said,

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<sup>35</sup> Mark E. Schafer to Dan Betts, email, March 3, 2009.

<sup>36</sup> Dennis Hamm, oral history interview. See also Eric Semple, oral history interview, September 9, 2022.

<sup>37</sup> Dennis S. Hamm to Sherda Williams, email, March 5, 2009.

Not in a billion years is the federal government going to subject itself to Enforcement [of the lease] by the State of Ohio. So, we had a problem. And...it was probably the biggest challenge of the whole project.<sup>38</sup>

According to Hamm, “I had 1,200 – 1,400 pages of emails for the overall project, and I estimated 800 pages or more relate to solving this problem.” The solution, worked out between solicitors for the National Park Service and for the State of Ohio Arts Commission, was to modify the Arts Commission’s lease so that, although the National Park Service would own the building, National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. would still be responsible for the lease agreement with the State of Ohio Arts Commission, which would hold the federal government harmless should any enforcement action against the leaseholder be required.<sup>39</sup> This solution is now moot, because the State of Ohio Arts Commission’s interest in the building expired in approximately 2018.

Another issue associated with acquisition of the Education and Research Center involved questions of handicapped accessibility and easements between the two properties. A minor issue was that communication lines ran between the Saxton House and the Education and Research Center in easements in the city streets. These easements had to be re-negotiated with the City of Canton to ensure there would be no problems with keeping them in place. In addition, no handicapped-accessible parking existed for the Education and Research Center on its property. When the building was a bank, the adjacent parking garage had provided handicapped parking for the bank. After the bank building was donated to National First Ladies’ Library, Inc., that organization secured from the owners of the parking garage an easement to continue to provide a handicapped-accessible parking space near a side door of the parking garage which gave access to the sidewalk running between the two buildings. The sidewalk provided access to the Education and Research Center building’s handicapped access door on the south side of the building. Describing this access, Dennis Hamm explained that National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. had to “cut into the concrete wall to allow access, but it worked well.” Because the parking garage had changed owners several times since NFLL arranged the easement, the National Park Service updated the ownership information and made sure that the current owners were aware and supportive of this arrangement for providing handicapped parking for the Education and Research Center. Hamm observed that

[T]here were many...aspects [of acquiring the Education and Research Center From NFLL], and those typically did require some work to ensure that we understood what they were and ensure that there would be no hiccup with present operations and rights if the property and building transferred to the NPS. Everyone was helpful and cooperative, but it was critical we left nothing

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<sup>38</sup> Dennis Hamm, oral history interview.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.



to chance.<sup>40</sup>

Transfer of the Education and Research Center building from National First Ladies' Library, Inc. to the National Park Service finally occurred in 2011.

With the acquisition of the Education and Research Center accomplished, the First Ladies National Historic Site as envisioned by its enabling legislation was completed. Thanks to the enthusiastic efforts of the National First Ladies' Library, Inc. staff and their supporters, the National Park Service owned two rehabilitated historic buildings in which to tell the fascinating and important stories of the First Ladies of the United States. Initial planning through the General Management Plan was completed. The site was staffed early by NFLL, relieving NPS of relocating its own staff or stretching the resources of nearby Cuyahoga Valley National Park to manage the onsite needs of the park. Operation of the park was defined and directed by a series of cooperative agreements between the National Park Service and National First Ladies' Library, Inc. beginning in 2002 and continuing to the present. The evolution of these cooperative agreements is discussed in the next chapter.

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER FIVE: Cooperative Agreements

This chapter describes the most critical component of the management strategy for First Ladies National Historic Site, the cooperative agreements between the National Park Service and National First Ladies' Library, Inc. for management of the site. Understanding the development of the four successive cooperative agreements is key to understanding the development of the site. Cooperative agreements for management of units of the National Park System were a relatively new approach when First Ladies NHS was established, and the simplicity of the park's first cooperative agreement in 2002 attests to the assumption of both parties that the other party understood and agreed to what was meant by its clauses. As time and experience accumulated, the cooperative agreements became more detailed, complicated, and lengthy as each signatory endeavored to tie the other one to its own vision of how the site should be managed. The fourth cooperative agreement, signed in 2019, changed everything. Whereas in the earlier agreements the National Park Service offered, suggested, or implied it should be involved in site management, in the fourth agreement, NPS simply asserted. This is the story of the journey of the National Park Service from passive observer to active participant in the management of First Ladies NHS.

### *First Cooperative Agreement: February 2002 –September 2006*

When the Saxton House site was established as the First Ladies National Historic Site in October 2000, it immediately became a unit of the National Park System. The federal government already owned the property, so no acquisition was necessary. National First Ladies' Library, Inc. continued to operate the site as they had been doing since 1998, and the National Park Service assumed responsibility for providing the funds from the public purse for NFLL to continue site management without assuming any actual control over how the site was run. The park's enabling legislation allowed the National Park Service and National First Ladies' Library, Inc. to work out details of this management relationship through development and execution of a cooperative agreement. The parties began negotiating this cooperative agreement almost immediately upon establishment of the First Ladies NHS in 2000, but it took over a year for the two organizations to come to agreement on the management structure and on the role of each organization in management of the site. Although the initial cooperative agreement was intended to take effect on October 1, 2001, officially the beginning of Fiscal Year 2002 (FY 02), the necessary signatures were not completed until February 2002.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Memorandum, Superintendent, Cuyahoga Valley National Park to Regional Director, Midwest Regional Office, "Attachment B - National Park Service Midwest Regional Office, Cooperative Agreement between the National Park Service and National First Ladies' Library, Inc. regarding the Cooperative Management of the First Ladies National Historic Site" (H6160020002), 2001, 10, located in Cuyahoga Valley National Park archives.

In this initial cooperative agreement, the National Park Service was authorized to provide “technical assistance for planning, preservation, and maintenance” of the physical properties of the site, including, if acquired by donation, the City National Bank Building that National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. owned, and to provide financial assistance to NFLL to operate and maintain the First Ladies NHS subject to availability of Congressional appropriations for that purpose. This meant that the National Park Service would provide the guidance and expertise but not the labor or materials for preservation and maintenance of the building(s) and provide the funding for such endeavors as well as for the day-to-day operation of the site in whatever amount Congress appropriated for it. National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. was authorized to operate the site, manage the property, charge fees for admission to the site according to a fee schedule mutually agreed with the National Park Service, and keep whatever fees thus obtained for use of NFLL as well as to lease property within the NHS to other public and private entities and to retain any revenues thus received. In other words, National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. would continue to operate the site as they had been doing, including retaining any fees accruing from their endeavors, as well as being allowed to lease space in the Saxton House and in the City Bank Building, since they owned it, except for the space previously leased to the Stark County Foundation, which the National Park Service would manage as the lessor of record. The lease between the National Park Service and the Stark County Foundation assigned all responsibility for “building and site maintenance and utility costs” to the Stark County Foundation until termination of the lease, but the cooperative agreement also intimated that the Foundation was expected to terminate their forty-year lease, signed in late 1991, within eighteen months of the signing of the cooperative agreement with National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. This stipulation meant that the National Park Service would potentially have no actual responsibility for building and site maintenance of the Saxton House.<sup>2</sup>

The cooperative agreement stipulated that the National Park Service, in concert with National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. and germane political agencies of the State of Ohio, would, beginning in the autumn of 2001, prepare a General Management Plan to be completed in spring of 2004 which would “describe in greater detail the responsibilities of both parties in administering, maintaining, and interpreting” the First Ladies NHS. The cooperative agreement also provided that the National Park Service would assign a part-time site manager for First Ladies NHS who would be duty-stationed at James A. Garfield National Historic Site in Mentor, Ohio. This staff position was to have responsibility for day-to-day interactions between NPS and National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. The National Park Service, with the concurrence of NFLL, would develop a site brochure and other educational and interpretive materials, both provisions “subject to availability of funds,” and collaborate on educational materials, media releases and other promotional materials, and planning of visitor services such as tours, educational services, and special events. The cooperative agreement noted that the National Park Service could assign other staff to the site, with the mutual agreement of National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. and if

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 2.

appropriated funds were available. The National Park Service was expected to provide to National First Ladies' Library, Inc. "technical support for research, training, and professional development in interpretation, education, curatorial functions, electronic data management and communications, and historic preservation" if NFLL requested such assistance and funds were available to provide it. The National Park Service was also required to provide annual safety inspections of the site and financial support to National First Ladies' Library, Inc. for "operating costs, including personnel, utilities, supplies and materials, contracted services," and other appropriate operational expenses, "subject to the availability of appropriated funds."<sup>3</sup>

For its part, National First Ladies' Library, Inc., agreed to provide all personnel, including a site manager, tour guides, building security, and administrative staff that were required for operation of the site, be responsible for recruitment, training, and supervision of the docent tour guides for the site, and pay all site utility bills incurred during operation of the site. They also agreed to allow public access to the Saxton House and to the City National Bank Building according to a schedule mutually agreed with the National Park Service and to keep accurate records of visitation and of funds they collected for admission, tours, special uses, and special events associated with the Saxton House. National First Ladies' Library, Inc. also agreed to plan, fund, and manage the rehabilitation of the City National Bank Building, including paying for design and construction services and to obtain approval from the National Park Service for any building or property modifications at the Saxton House and at the City National Bank Building if NPS acquired it in the future. Finally, they agreed to notify the National Park Service promptly of any safety or security problems.<sup>4</sup>

The two organizations agreed that, as this cooperative agreement was new – indeed, such documents, while not unprecedented, were relatively recent to the National Park Service and completely new to National First Ladies' Library, Inc. – they would recognize that circumstances might necessitate changes to the agreement in the future, and they would "remain flexible toward issues relating to management, curatorial functions, interpretation, and maintenance" of the First Ladies NHS. They agreed that it might be necessary to introduce additional permanent National Park Service staff to the site in the future and that any changes would be implemented by either modifying the existing cooperative agreement or by instituting a new one. The National Park Service and National First Ladies' Library, Inc. set the term of this first cooperative agreement to one year from the date of signing (February 2003), renewable in additional one-year increments for up to five years in total.<sup>5</sup>

The cooperative agreement proceeded to detail the paperwork involved with being a recipient of federal funds. It designated \$600,000 to be the annual stipend allocated to National First Ladies' Library, Inc. to manage the First Ladies NHS. This amount could be paid as frequently as once per month or as infrequently as once per year, as National First Ladies'

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 2-3.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 3-4.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 4.

Library, Inc. wished. This section of the cooperative agreement, which described which forms were to be filled out under what circumstances and when they were to be submitted to the National Park Service, thus initiated National First Ladies' Library, Inc. to the paper trail required by the federal government. The cooperative agreement also announced that the Secretary of the Interior, the Comptroller General, or an authorized representative of these two offices was to have access to "any books, documents, papers, or records...pertinent to the agreement at all reasonable times..."<sup>6</sup>

Following the litany of reporting requirements, the cooperative agreement outlined the procedure for terminating the agreement and then included boilerplate contract notices such as a list of Office of Management and Budget circulars and other regulations pertaining to the agreement, prohibitions on discrimination and lobbying, and rules regarding maintenance of property insurance and the publication of studies.<sup>7</sup> The cooperative agreement named five people who were considered "key" to the operational success of the First Ladies NHS. From the National Park Service, they were Cuyahoga Valley National Park Superintendent John Debo, James A. Garfield NHS Site Manager Carol Spears, and National Park Service Midwest Regional Office Contract Specialist Theora McVay. From National First Ladies' Library, Inc., Executive Director Patricia Krider and President and Founding Chair Mary Regula were named key people. All five signed the cooperative agreement.<sup>8</sup>

This, then, was the agreement under which National First Ladies' Library, Inc. and the National Park Service agreed to work. The National Park Service issued periodic modifications to the agreement, which document how the financial process worked. A modification to the original agreement was issued each time National First Ladies' Library, Inc. requested and received a disbursement of funds, up to their approved limit. However, by April 2003, National First Ladies' Library, Inc. and the National Park Service had negotiated some changes to the original contract that necessitated amendment number 0005. The yearly stipend was raised from \$600,000 to \$700,000, and a change to Article I removed the reference to the lease of the Saxton House to the Stark County Foundation, which had been terminated.<sup>9</sup> As a result, references to the lease and the responsibilities of the Stark County Foundation to the Saxton House were deleted from "Article III – Statement of Work" and elsewhere in the document. Though not specified as the reason, that the Stark County Foundation ceded its responsibilities for the Saxton House to National First Ladies' Library, Inc. and the National Park Service likely explains the sudden rise in the annual allotment for NFLL. The National Park Service agreed to be responsible for cyclic maintenance, capital repairs and improvements, and, upon request, assist with any emergency

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 5-6.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 6-9.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 4-5, 10.

<sup>9</sup> Carl S. Anthony, in his oral history interview for this report, recalled, "I do remember Mary saying, at one point, 'Well, I've convinced the others to leave, and we're going to take over the house.'" Whether Anthony's version of why Stark County Foundation moved to the Huntington Bank building is accurate was not learned for this report as telephone calls and emails to the Stark County/Community Foundation about their time at the Saxton House elicited no response.

repairs or emergency maintenance tasks for the Saxton House and its associated grounds and also to those of the City National Bank Building in the event the National Park Service acquired it during the life of the cooperative agreement. The National Park Service would continue to conduct annual safety inspections and added conducting annual facility condition assessments of the buildings and associated grounds located within the National Historic Site boundaries to its responsibilities. For its part, National First Ladies' Library, Inc. agreed to reimburse the National Park Service for any costs incurred should NFLL request emergency assistance with repairs or maintenance, provide regular and routine maintenance of the buildings and grounds, and provide to NPS a yearly report detailing any "significant repairs and improvements" made to buildings and grounds in the preceding year and any such planned improvements anticipated in the coming year. National First Ladies' Library, Inc. added as one of their key people the facility manager who had been hired in February of that year. Other parts of the original cooperative agreement remained as written.<sup>10</sup>

Following acceptance of these changes to the agreement, regular amendments continued apace as yearly funding for operation of the First Ladies NHS was transferred from the National Park Service to National First Ladies' Library, Inc. Generally, amendments adding funds to the cooperative agreement based on the year's congressional appropriation for First Ladies NHS occurred twice per year, though small amendments usually occurred in September as National First Ladies' Library, Inc. sought to secure remaining appropriated funds not requested earlier in the year. Each year, the terms of the cooperative agreement were extended for another year. At some point, National First Ladies' Library, Inc. modified its fiscal year to match that of the National Park Service for easier record keeping. Patricia Krider, Executive Director for National First Ladies' Library, Inc., signed the extension of the cooperative agreement into FY 06 in mid-August 2005; this appears to have been a temporary arrangement, as Mary Regula, who had been signing all agreements up to that point, resumed signing them afterwards. Theora McVay signed for the National Park Service. On December 1, 2005, modification number 017 changed the financial terms of the contract from \$700,000 per annum to \$1,100,000 per annum, but, in February 2006, the costs of replacing three heat pumps and painting the second floor of the administrative space at the Saxton House added another \$19,000 to the total amount designated for National First Ladies' Library, Inc.'s management of the First Ladies NHS.<sup>11</sup> These additional funds were drawn from the Midwest Regional Office's contingency fund, intended to address emergency situations such as the heat pump replacement, and the funds are generally granted upon request. Funding for non-emergency needs are placed on an "unfunded needs list," managed by the Midwest Regional Office Comptroller to fund park projects as part of the fiscal year closeout to ensure all funds are allocated.<sup>12</sup> Records of funding for all of 2005 were not

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<sup>10</sup> Memorandum, Superintendent, Cuyahoga Valley National Park to Regional Director, Midwest Regional Office, "Attachment B," n.p. (Modification No. 0005).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., n.p. (Modification Nos. 0017 and 0018).

<sup>12</sup> Regional Historian Ron Cockrell to author in review comments to this Administrative History, March 23, 2023.

located for this Administrative History, but it seems likely that National First Ladies' Library, Inc. applied for all funds allocated to them and were approved.

*Second Cooperative Agreement: October 2006 – September 2011*

Negotiations for the second cooperative agreement between the National Park Service and National First Ladies' Library, Inc. likely began in late 2005 or early 2006. The final signature to the agreement was affixed by National Park Service Midwest Regional Office Contract Specialist Theora McVay, who had handled the previous cooperative agreement and its addenda, on August 25, 2006. Wording of this cooperative agreement closely resembled the 2002 cooperative agreement with amendments, although with some slight rearrangement of paragraphs and with the additional observation that Rotary Park, located between the Saxton House and the Education and Research Center and owned by National First Ladies' Library, Inc., might be donated at some time in the future to the National Park Service. Because the first three responsibilities of the National Park Service outlined in "Article III – Statement of Work" of the 2002 cooperative agreement – administration of the forty-year lease of the Saxton House by the Stark County Foundation, preparation of a General Management Plan, and a site brochure – had been addressed in the intervening four years, the National Park Service was left with the responsibilities remaining from the previous cooperative agreement of providing a National Park Service site manager to function as a liaison between National First Ladies' Library, Inc. and ensuring that the requirements of the cooperative agreement were met. Additionally, the National Park Service committed to developing further interpretive and educational materials in concert with National First Ladies' Library, Inc.; providing additional funds, technical expertise, and, possibly, physical labor for cyclic maintenance and capital improvements and, upon request, emergency repairs and maintenance assistance for the buildings and other property features; providing technical and financial assistance to NFLL for ongoing management of the site; and conducting annual safety and facility condition inspections. The only material changes to these National Park Service responsibilities were the additional mentions of the Education and Research Center and Rotary Park, "if acquired by the NPS."<sup>13</sup>

For National First Ladies' Library, Inc., only the responsibility to "manage and fund rehabilitation of the City National Bank Building" changed, becoming, instead, the responsibility for managing the operations of the building, which had been renamed the Education and Research Center, as well as Rotary Park and the surface parking lot to the north of Rotary Park, all of which were still owned by NFLL. The requirement to provide regular and routine maintenance to the built environment of the NHS, and to annually report on such work completed during the previous year and contemplated during the upcoming year, was retained.

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<sup>13</sup> National Park Service Midwest Regional Office, "Cooperative Agreement between the National Park Service and National First Ladies' Library, Inc. regarding the Cooperative Management of the First Ladies National Historic Site (H6160070001)," signed July and August 2006, 1-3, in First Ladies NHS archives, Box 1, Folder: Budget.



The only addition to the responsibilities jointly undertaken by the two organizations was mention of Rotary Park and the surface parking lot.<sup>14</sup>

The new cooperative agreement took effect on October 1, 2006, and remained in effect for one year, after which it was eligible to be renewed yearly for the following four years.<sup>15</sup> The National Park Service added Cuyahoga Valley National Park Administrative Officer Barbara Fearon to its list of key officials designated to be responsible for NPS administration of First Ladies NHS, and National First Ladies' Library, Inc. added its vice president, Dr. Sheila Fisher, as a key official to replace the facility manager, who had been added as a key official in the 2002 cooperative agreement under amendment 0005.<sup>16</sup> The agreed annual funding was an amount not to exceed \$1.5 million, for which National First Ladies' Library, Inc. would apply in the usual way, though by this time James A. Garfield NHS Site Manager Carol Spears, also serving as First Ladies NHS site manager, had responsibility for processing the requests. Spears would then forward them to the Agreements Specialist at the Midwest Regional Office. This process, left unstated in the 2002 cooperative agreement, was clarified in the second cooperative agreement.<sup>17</sup> Rotary Park and the surface parking lot were added to the property that National First Ladies' Library, Inc. was required to insure, although the required amount was not raised in this cooperative agreement. In addition, NFLL was required to provide workers' compensation coverage to employees and officers of the organization, which had not been required under the previous agreement.<sup>18</sup> All other parts of the 2006 cooperative agreement remained the same as in the 2002 cooperative agreement. National First Ladies' Library, Inc. President Mary Regula and Executive Director Patricia Krider signed the agreement on July 27, 2006, and Cuyahoga Valley National Park Superintendent John Debo, Administrative Officer Barbara Fearon, and Midwest Regional Office Contract Specialist Theora McVay signed in August 2006.<sup>19</sup>

On August 5, 2008, Site Manager Carol Spears notified Jennifer McMahon, Sherda Williams, James Baker, and Theora McVay that National First Ladies' Library, Inc. did not propose any changes to the existing agreement and recommended that it be extended for another year.<sup>20</sup> The following day, she alerted this group that she was completing the document required to add \$45,435.00 to the cooperative agreement total after having received an Application for Assistance (the standard mechanism for obtaining funds from the government for costs related to managing the First Ladies NHS) from National First Ladies' Library, Inc.<sup>21</sup> On September 25, 2008, Spears wrote again to McVay, McMahon, and Williams to say that she had not yet seen a

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 3. See also Memorandum, Superintendent, Cuyahoga Valley National Park to Regional Director, Midwest Regional Office.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 6-7.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>20</sup> Carol J. Spears to Jennifer McMahon, James Baker, Theora McVay, and Sherda Williams, email, August 5, 2008. In First Ladies NHS archives, Box 1, Folder: Budget.

<sup>21</sup> Carol J. Spears to James Baker, Theora McVay, Sheba Harris, and Sherda Williams, email, August 6, 2008. In First Ladies NHS archives, Box 1, Folder: Budget.

modification come through for the cooperative agreement and reminding the recipients that National First Ladies' Library, Inc. Executive Director Patricia Krider was ready to submit an Application for Federal Assistance but had been told by Spears to delay submittal until the National Park Service knew the extent of the funds that would be available for use during the recently-passed congressional budgetary Continuing Resolution (CR).<sup>22</sup> On September 5, 2008, Contract Specialist Theora McVay replied that she had signed a modification authorizing an additional \$45,435 and extending the agreement for a year to October 2009.<sup>23</sup>

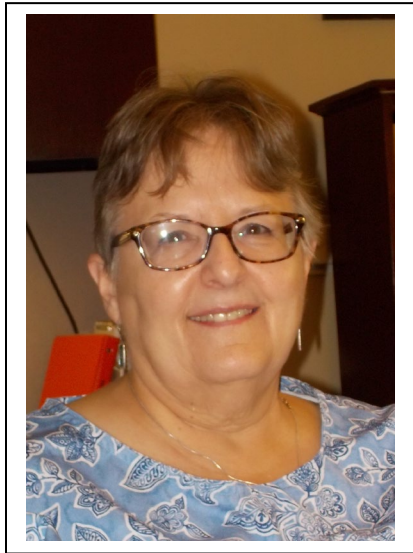


Figure 32: Sherda K. Williams, former First Ladies NHS Superintendent, 2021. Photograph by Deborah Harvey

Sherda Williams became part of this discussion in November 2008, when Carol Spears retired as site manager for James A. Garfield and First Ladies NHS (Figure 32). Williams was duty-stationed at James A. Garfield NHS in April 2008 to assist Spears with making the transition at that park from onsite management by the private, not-for-profit partner at James A. Garfield NHS to onsite management by the National Park Service.<sup>24</sup> Sherda Williams entered on duty as site manager of First Ladies National Historic Site and James A. Garfield National Historic Site on November 9, 2008. Her title was officially changed to superintendent effective June 6, 2012.<sup>25</sup>

The 2008 Continuing Resolution (CR) extending the existing federal budget into March 2009 caused difficulties for the National First Ladies' Library, Inc., which needed to access funds in order to pay the day-to-day operating expenses. As a result, NFLL Executive Director Patricia Krider asked Carol Spears in October 2008, shortly before her departure, for permission to make a request for twenty-five percent of their previous budget from the FY 09 funds.<sup>26</sup> Likely based on previous experience (CRs had been passed for various agencies of the federal government for some parts of twenty-seven of the past thirty years), Spears recommended a request for forty percent of the previous budget, suggesting a figure of

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<sup>22</sup> Carol J. Spears to Jennifer McMahon, Theora McVay, and Sherda Williams, email, September 25, 2008. In First Ladies NHS archives, Box 1, Folder: Budget.

<sup>23</sup> Theora McVay to Carol J. Spears, Jennifer McMahon, and Sherda Williams, email, September 25, 2008. In First Ladies NHS archives, Box 1, Folder: Budget. A record of this modification was not located during research for this Administrative History.

<sup>24</sup> Sherda K. Williams, oral history interview, August 30, 2021.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Patricia Krider to Carol J. Spears, email, October 15, 2008. In First Ladies NHS archives, Box 1, Folder: Budget.

\$376,000.<sup>27</sup> Presumably, it was the new superintendent of First Ladies NHS, Sherda Williams, who received and processed the request for these funds.

On April 29, 2009, Williams sent to Cuyahoga Valley National Park Budget Analyst Sheba I. Harris a worksheet showing the breakdown of existing obligations for the \$1,009,800 in Operations of the National Park System (ONPS) funds budgeted for First Ladies National Historic Site. Of that amount, Williams retained \$106,540 for National Park Service expenses of managing the site, leaving \$903,260 for National First Ladies' Library, Inc.'s operations. Williams noted that \$576,000 had already been obligated in an earlier modification to the cooperative agreement, and she was preparing a new modification to add the remaining \$327,260. The amount the National Park Service retained for its use covered a portion of Williams' salary as site manager/superintendent of First Ladies NHS plus the salaries of NPS seasonal employees providing services at First Ladies NHS and expenses for a General Services Administration (GSA) vehicle since Williams, who was duty-stationed ninety miles away from First Ladies NHS, had to drive to the site whenever onsite administration was necessary.<sup>28</sup> It also covered the \$20,000 she had been advised by Cuyahoga Valley National Park Management Assistant Dennis S. Hamm to hold from the budget in case it was decided to conduct a Phase II environmental assessment of Rotary Park, which the National Park Service was considering accepting as a donation from National First Ladies' Library, Inc.<sup>29</sup> However, Williams noted that the \$20,000 could be added back into the cooperative agreement if the land transfer was "not progressing" by July 15, 2009. The understanding was that the funds would then be held out of the 2010 Fiscal Year agreement. With \$1,488 remaining in project funds, the balance of the funds still available to National First Ladies' Library, Inc. for operation of the First Ladies NHS would be \$328,748 (without the \$20,000 land acquisition funds) or \$348,748 (with the land acquisition funds) to be added to the cooperative agreement at the next amendment.<sup>30</sup>

At the end of the 2009 Fiscal Year, on September 23, 2009, Williams sent to National First Ladies' Library, Inc.'s Executive Director Patricia Krider a summary of the second cooperative agreement's fiscal status.<sup>31</sup> The following year, Williams compiled a record of the federal funding for which National First Ladies' Library, Inc. had applied and the approved

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<sup>27</sup> Carol J. Spears to Patricia Krider and Sherda Williams, email, October 17, 2008. In First Ladies NHS archives, Box 1, Folder: Budget. See also "United States Department of the Interior Requisition No. FILA-09-01," October 24, 2008. In First Ladies NHS archives, Box 1, Folder, Budget

<sup>28</sup> Sherda K. Williams to Sheba I. Harris, email, April 29, 2009. In First Ladies NHS archives, Box 1, Folder, Budget. The amount retained from National First Ladies' Library, Inc. funding covered only part of Williams' total salary. She was duty-stationed at James A. Garfield NHS, so ONPS funds for that park provided the remainder of her salary.

<sup>29</sup> Dennis S. Hamm to Sherda K. Williams, March 5, 2009.

<sup>30</sup> Sherda K. Williams to Sheba I. Harris, April 29, 2009.

<sup>31</sup> Sherda K. Williams to Patricia Krider, email, September 23, 2009. In First Ladies NHS archives, Box 1, Folder, Budget.

monthly expenses reimbursed by federal funds for FY 10.<sup>32</sup> These two documents show how the cooperative agreement was then being managed under Williams.

According to the summary, the total of the funds allotted to operate First Ladies NHS between FY 07 and FY 09 was \$3,017,065.45, which included a total of twelve budget modifications. The summary showed \$11,976.23 remaining to be requested from the available funds for FY 09, and Williams conveyed to Krider that Midwest Regional Agreements Officer Theora McVay approved submittal of a request for those funds in October 2009. Again in 2009, a Continuing Resolution on the FY 10 budget was expected, but, since it had not yet been passed, the duration of the CR was unknown. Williams explained that, once the scope of the Continuing Resolution was established, they would be able to estimate the amount of funding for which Krider could apply. At the end of the summary, Williams proposed a new protocol for managing the cooperative agreement by suggesting, with McVay's approval, that National First Ladies' Library, Inc. apply for the funds for the entire fiscal year the next time they submitted their SF-424 form so that they would only have to submit it once per year (and the National Park Service would only have to process one amendment per year).<sup>33</sup> As it turned out, the Continuing Resolution originally scheduled to end on October 31, 2009, was extended into December. On October 19, 2009, in anticipation of the end of the Continuing Resolution, National First Ladies' Library, Inc. Executive Director Patricia Krider submitted a request for \$920,616.00, the total allowed, and estimated that NFLL would also raise \$554,384 in non-federal funds for a total operating budget for FY 10 of \$1,475,000.00. The budget for expending these funds showed amounts for personnel, travel, "fringe benefits," equipment, and supplies, but no funds allocated for "Construction," although \$728,000 in funds were designated as "Other" expenditures.<sup>34</sup> Because the Continuing Resolution was still in effect, this request could not be approved. With the extension of the CR, Krider requested, at William's suggestion, one-twelfth of the previous years' appropriation for First Ladies NHS in the amount of \$84,000 on November 13, 2009, which was processed on December 2, 2009.<sup>35</sup> Once the budget was approved in early December, another request for the remaining amount allocated to National First Ladies' Library, Inc., in the amount of \$823,378, was processed on December 7, 2009.<sup>36</sup> The National First Ladies' Library, Inc. acted with alacrity on Williams' suggestion that they request all funds early in the fiscal year.

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<sup>32</sup> Sherda K. Williams, "Reimbursements, FILA Cooperative Agreement, FY2010," n.d. but, since it contains the entire history of the year's disbursements and expenses, presumed to be late September or early October 2010. In First Ladies NHS archives, Box 1, Folder, Budget.

<sup>33</sup> Sherda K. Williams to Patricia Krider, September 23, 2009.

<sup>34</sup> "Application for Federal Assistance (SF-424)," October 19, 2009. In First Ladies NHS archives, Box 1, Folder, Budget.

<sup>35</sup> "United States Department of the Interior Requisition No. FILA-10-01, October 26, 2009. In First Ladies NHS archives, Box 1, Folder, Budget.

<sup>36</sup> "United States Department of the Interior Requisition No. FILA-10-02, December 4, 2009. In First Ladies NHS archives, Box 1, Folder, Budget.

In FY 10, the funding authorization for First Ladies NHS was \$1,010,790, of which the National Park Service retained \$103,412 for NPS site expenses. National First Ladies' Library, Inc. requested the remaining amount, a total of \$907,378,00, in two funding requests in the first ten weeks of the new fiscal year. These requests resulted in two cooperative agreement modifications because the first request for funds, \$84,000 on November 13, 2009, was limited by the Continuing Resolution restrictions. The second request, made on December 7, 2009, after the federal budget was passed and the Continuing Resolution was no longer in force, was for the remaining amount allocated to National First Ladies' Library, Inc. for operation of the First Ladies NHS for FY 10. The reimbursement record documents amounts disbursed monthly to NFLL.<sup>37</sup> As Williams explained, "the system was set up so that, every month, they would send a list of their expenditures to me, and I would review it and then send it on to the Agreements Office."<sup>38</sup> Because they were based on the actual expenditures approved monthly by Williams, these reimbursements were not uniform in size; they ranged between \$59,500 and nearly \$93,000 throughout the year. The reimbursement record for FY 10 also shows a modification to the cooperative agreement for forwarding the unused portion of the funds held back for the Phase II environmental assessment of Rotary Park, which occurred every year until National First Ladies' Library, Inc. withdrew its offer to donate Rotary Park and the small adjacent parking lot to the National Park Service. A fourth modification for FY 10 was for disbursement of project funds (VIP funds) to National First Ladies' Library, Inc.

### *Third Cooperative Agreement (May 16, 2012 – May 15, 2017)*

The second Cooperative Agreement expired on September 30, 2011, but the third Cooperative Agreement was not signed until June 2012. In the meantime, the National Park Service and National First Ladies' Library, Inc. continued to operate the site as it had been operated in the past, despite funding issues and questions of which organization was responsible for what. During this interim period, National First Ladies' Library, Inc. was obliged to rely for funding on an endowment created for them by the Timken Company and several other organizations in the early days of NFLL. This was, apparently, standard practice for National First Ladies' Library, Inc. when National Park Service funding was not forthcoming in accordance with their needs during periods of government shutdown or delays in completing cooperative agreement paperwork. They repaid the endowment when they received their grant money from the federal government.<sup>39</sup>

By the time negotiations for the third cooperative agreement were begun between the National Park Service and National First Ladies' Library, Inc., several aspects of the historic site had changed. Most notably, National First Ladies' Library, Inc. donated the Education and

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<sup>37</sup> Sherda K. Williams, "Reimbursements, FILA Cooperative Agreement, FY2010."

<sup>38</sup> Sherda K. Williams oral history interview.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

Research Center in the former City National Bank Building to the National Park Service in 2011 for inclusion in the First Ladies NHS. In addition, the financial responsibilities of maintaining the physical integrity of the two properties, the Saxton House and the Education and Research Center, were beginning to overtop the capabilities of National First Ladies' Library, Inc. By that time as well, the National Park Service was changing how it managed cooperative agreements, tightening the oversight and reporting requirements to better track the funds provided to private organization from the public purse for operating units of the National Park System.

Negotiations began in 2011 on the third cooperative agreement. At the same time, NFLL, like many NPS partners, underwent an audit of their business practices and financial systems. National First Ladies Library, Inc. reported on June 18, 2012, in a section of Attachment C included as part of the third Cooperative Agreement that it was "currently working with the auditors to modify the chart of accounts to clearly show what is funded by private moneys and what is funded by federal money. The auditors are satisfied that the moneys are currently being allocated properly but are developing recommendations for the organization to reorganize the chart of accounts to clearly identify funding sources."<sup>40</sup> It does not appear that any possible discrepancies rose to the level of impropriety, and NFLL modified its accounting practices to accord with the recommendations.

According to First Ladies NHS Superintendent Sherda Williams, partly because of the 2006 FOIA request from PEER and the subsequent investigation by the Department of the Interior's Office of Inspector General into the financial and management practices of National First Ladies' Library, Inc. at First Ladies NHS and into the NPS oversight of those practices, "they were tightening up our authorities on agreements and...there were also questions about money going into the building and doing repairs without going through the [historic preservation] compliance process..."<sup>41</sup> Williams, who was responsible for negotiating and implementing the third cooperative agreement, explained that

...the maintenance folks in the Regional Office were coaching me that we needed to define the roles for both the Park Service and the partner more clearly.... And so, I totally re-wrote that agreement and laid out the roles. And...the Park Service started taking on more of the maintenance, which was not completely appreciated by either the Park Service or the partner, because it takes so much longer for our system...for us to get projects identified and in the project management funding system, for us to get the money, for us to do the compliance.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> "Cooperative Agreement No. P12AC100314 between The United States Department of Interior National Park Service and National First Ladies' Library, Inc." Attachment C, June 18, 2012, n.p. In First Ladies NHS archives, Box 1; Folder: FILA Cooperative Agreement; Subfolder: P12AC100314, May 15, 2012, to May 15, 2017.

<sup>41</sup> Sherda Williams, oral history interview.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

In Williams' opinion, the changes were not the result of deficiencies on the part of National First Ladies' Library, Inc. but because of changes to the National Park Service guidelines for writing cooperative agreements. She said, "From what I was being told by the Agreements Officer in the Regional Office, when the Park Service first got legal authority to enter into cooperative agreements, it basically just said, 'You can enter into cooperative agreements,'" with no instructions for doing so. Over the years, however, the National Park Service began to standardize cooperative agreements and regularize reporting protocols with the result that, by 2011, cooperative agreements were much more detailed and precise about what could and could not be done under such an agreement and on how expenses would be reported expenditures than they had been just a decade earlier, when the initial First Ladies NHS cooperative agreement was signed. Williams asserted that National First Ladies' Library, Inc. closely followed the Office of Management and Budget criteria for expenditure of grants money, even as the criteria changed. She said, "They were managing the money really well...and being very effective at keeping repairs done on the property." She also felt confident in National First Ladies' Library, Inc.'s programming and exhibits, although she noted that their visitor orientation was "not up to Park Service standards."<sup>43</sup>

Williams worked diligently with other NPS staff from Cuyahoga Valley National Park and with Mary Regula and Patricia Krider, president and executive officer at National First Ladies' Library, Inc., to craft a new agreement to better serve the site. Maintenance was the biggest issue. From Williams' perspective, the only major concern was that National First Ladies' Library, Inc. might not be able to fund upcoming big-ticket maintenance and repair items as the original repairs and rehabilitations to the two buildings aged. National Park Service management and maintenance staff had become concerned, as the rehabilitations from the 1980s and 1990s aged, that National First Ladies' Library, Inc. would find it difficult to fund major maintenance needs for the two buildings such as new roofs, upgrades to electrical systems, or replacement windows. This concern first arose in early 2006, when additional funds had to be allotted to National First Ladies' Library, Inc. to replace three heat pumps at the Education and Research Center and did not abate as the years accumulated. By 2011, when negotiations for the third Cooperative Agreement began, National Park Service Administrative and Maintenance staff were vigorously advocating that responsibility for capital improvements and major repairs should belong to the National Park Service, the agency that owned the property. Williams was also being encouraged to make changes to the cooperative agreement that would allow NPS maintenance personnel to enter cyclic maintenance work and anticipated repairs for the two buildings at the site into the Facility Management Software System (FMSS) so that NPS could understand, anticipate, and fund the site's maintenance needs in the future. As Williams tells it, the main reason for revamping the cooperative agreement in 2011 was to define responsibility for repairs and maintenance. "That question was always going to be up in the air unless we had it

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

very clearly defined in the cooperative agreement that the Park Service would do the capital repairs on the buildings and...the partner would continue to do the day-to-day operating repairs, and maintenance, and preventive maintenance, and janitorial. So, we defined that.”<sup>44</sup> National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. was in agreement with NPS that NFLL likely could not underwrite the costs of major repairs and capital improvements to the buildings long-term. The third Cooperative Agreement assigned these responsibilities to the National Park Service, and National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. retained management of the day-to-day maintenance and small repair responsibilities.

The third cooperative agreement was not signed until June 2012. Because it came into effect in the middle of the year, funding for National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. in FY 12 was limited in the agreement to only \$86,413, for which NFLL immediately applied. A significant change in this third cooperative agreement was that it was for a period of five years instead of being for a period of one year renewable annually for a total of five years. After ten years of managing the site on a year-to-year basis, National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. could finally be confident that it would continue to manage the site for at least the next five years.<sup>45</sup>

The third cooperative agreement was similar in structure to the first two, with a first section that outlined the history and the objectives of the park and a second section that laid out the legal authority by which NPS could enter into the cooperative agreement with NFLL. Both sections are similar in nature to those found in the first two First Ladies NHS cooperative agreements, though longer and more detailed.<sup>46</sup> “Article Three: Statement of Work” is where the new cooperative agreement significantly deviated from earlier agreements in the level of detail of responsibilities accepted by both parties. National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. agreed to “Serve as the primary point of contact for questions from the media, public visitors, public officials, and others regarding the actions, regulations and policies of [National First Ladies’ Library, Inc.] and questions relating to day-to-day interpretive programming (events, tours, hours of operation, traveling directions, etc.)” In this section, the National Park Service delegated the job of explaining what National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. was doing at First Ladies NHS. However, the National Park Service wanted some oversight of what National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. might be saying. The National Park Service required that National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. provide NPS with copies of any media releases involving policy or management decisions or that could be considered potentially controversial, and NPS remained the main point of contact for the media in this regard. For that reason, the National Park Service also required National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. to promptly notify NPS if NFLL was contacted by government officials such as members of Congress or their staff or by personnel from the NPS Washington Office and

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> “Cooperative Agreement No. P12AC100314 between The United States Department of Interior National Park Service and National First Ladies’ Library, Inc.” Attachment A, 1. In First Ladies NHS archives, Box 1; Folder: FILA Cooperative Agreement; Subfolder: P12AC100314, May 15, 2012, to May 15, 2017.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 2-3. The background history of the park in Article I erroneously stated that the Saxton House was donated to NPS by NFLL in 2006, when, in fact, the federal government purchased that property in 1991.



to refer such contacts to NPS site staff for response. National First Ladies' Library, Inc. was not authorized to respond to such contacts.<sup>47</sup>

Another new feature of the third cooperative agreement was the requirement that the NPS-appointed superintendent or designee be included at the National First Ladies' Library, Inc. Board meetings as a non-voting liaison and official representative of the National Park Service for the purposes of offering technical advice as well as advising on federal conduct and ethics rules. The National Park Service designee was prohibited from voting on any National First Ladies' Library, Inc. Board matters, and Superintendent Sherda Williams averred that she left the room when voting occurred.<sup>48</sup> The new cooperative agreement also specified for the first time precisely which of the properties (the Saxton House and the Education and Research Center) belonging to the National Park Service at First Ladies NHS were allowed to be used by National First Ladies' Library, Inc. "for purposes that support the mission" of the park as referenced by the enabling legislation. To use the properties for any other purpose, such as for fundraising for NFLL, National First Ladies' Library, Inc. was required to first obtain a Special Use Permit from NPS. Rotary Park and the small parking lot adjacent to Rotary Park were included under this clause only if they were donated to the National Park Service during the service period of the cooperative agreement. National First Ladies' Library, Inc. was apparently allowed to use those spaces for their own purposes without obtaining a Special Use Permit until such time as they donated Rotary Park and the parking lot to the National Park Service.<sup>49</sup> As of this writing (2023), Rotary Park and the small parking lot are still the property of National First Ladies' Library, Inc.

National First Ladies' Library, Inc. was required for the first time by this cooperative agreement to "provide sufficient personnel" for day-to-day management of First Ladies NHS, and the roles the National Park Service expected NFLL to cover were specified: executive director and administrative staff; interpretation, "visitor orientation, and tour guide staff; library, archives, and museum management professionals; and maintenance and janitorial staff." Included as an appendix to the cooperative agreement was an organizational chart for staffing First Ladies NHS and a set of position descriptions defining the ranges of activities expected of each type of staff. The agreement also required that National First Ladies' Library, Inc. make the site available to the public year-round, with standardized operating times when the site would be open for interpretive and educational purposes. The required hours were based on a chart, included as "Attachment Q" to the cooperative agreement, showing the operating hours in force as of June 28, 2012. The National Park Service required that the buildings and gift shop be open Monday through Saturday from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. all year round and on Sunday from 12:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. between September 1 and May 31, except for nine designated holiday closures: New Year's Day, Presidents' Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 3

<sup>48</sup> Sherda Williams, oral history interview.

<sup>49</sup> "Cooperative Agreement No. P12AC100314 between The United States Department of Interior National Park Service and National First Ladies' Library, Inc." Attachment A, 3. See also Sherda Williams, oral history interview.

Day, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, and New Year's Eve. Buildings were also to be open for occasional evening programs and special events. Guided tours were to be offered on Tuesday through Saturday five times per day all year round and three times on Sunday between September 1, and May 31. The on-line bibliography and other on-line resources were required to be available at all times except in the event of emergency closures due to equipment failure or software upgrades.<sup>50</sup>

Under the third cooperative agreement, National First Ladies' Library, Inc. was required to provide written management procedures for the site and to inventory and report on tangible personal property using the form provided by the National Park Service. As with previous cooperative agreements once the Stark County Foundation had left the Saxton House, National First Ladies' Library, Inc. was assigned sole responsibility, including funding, of routine maintenance of the Saxton House, all "material improvements," the surrounding grounds and the parking lot to the west. Routine maintenance of the Education and Research Center was added to this cooperative agreement. Significantly, "routine maintenance" was specifically defined as meaning "custodial and grounds-keeping functions such as cleaning, vacuuming carpets and floors, dusting, polishing floors," cleaning gutters and grates, washing windows, removing trash, mowing, pruning, and snow removal. Maintenance was also to include "servicing all lighting, telephone, and IT service lines; servicing, maintaining, and inspecting all heating and air conditioning equipment," elevators, lifts, and safety equipment and "life and property security/protection equipment," as well as providing touch-up painting on the interior and exterior, and undertaking any other operational or emergency repairs that did not meet the criteria for funding under the National Park Service's Cyclic & Repair/Rehabilitation program. National First Ladies' Library, Inc. was required to notify the National Park Service of anticipated cyclic repairs and maintenance but was encouraged to keep in mind that NPS needed at least five years' advance notice to fund such cyclic repairs and any major maintenance or rehabilitation projects. National First Ladies' Library, Inc. agreed to notify the National Park Service of any building or property modifications or improvements undertaken by NFLL and to provide a record of all maintenance performed on NPS properties. National First Ladies' Library, Inc. also agreed to "monitor and safeguard" the National Park Service properties it was managing in the event of storms or "national emergencies," and was required to develop a written Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for responding to emergencies and reporting them to NPS. In addition, they were required to monitor their employees, volunteers, and contractors to prevent "willful destruction" of National Park Service property and, if a "major repair" was due to "negligence or willful damage" by any of these, National First Ladies' Library was responsible for paying for necessary repairs.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. Interestingly, this cooperative agreement does not appear to require National First Ladies' Library, Inc. to employ security personnel. Employment records for National First Ladies' Library, Inc. were not available during research for this Administrative History, so it is not clear if the organization continued to provide them.

Unlike in previous cooperative agreements, National First Ladies' Library, Inc. was specifically required to provide "suitable office space for NPS personnel" at the site, and to make the Saxton House and the Education and Research Center available for National Park Service employees and its designated vendors and contractors "to conduct official business." National First Ladies' Library, Inc. was also required to "allow and encourage" the public and researchers to access their collections and library materials online and in person in order to fulfill the mission of the park. They agreed to submit an Annual Work Operating Plan to the NPS-appointed park superintendent for approval by May 1 of each year. This plan was to detail interpretive programs, events, exhibits, changes to the facilities, and expected deviations from normal management practices for the upcoming year. National First Ladies' Library, Inc. agreed to more oversight of its operations by the National Park Service. If more park brochures were required, National First Ladies' Library, Inc. was to apply to the National Park Service to print them rather than designing and printing their own. They were required to get advance approval for all major fundraising events from the National Park Service regardless of where the events were held and were expected to "provide marketing and promotion of park programs and events" with self-raised funds rather than with funds provided by the federal government. Potential donors were to be vetted and approved by the National Park Service in an attempt to avoid conflict of interest issues.<sup>52</sup>

Not all requirements of the third cooperative agreement were new or more specific than previously. As in earlier cooperative agreements, National First Ladies' Library, Inc. was required to maintain adequate liability protection and pay the operational costs of First Ladies NHS, including utility bills, expenses for daily maintenance, and service work performed in the course of daily operations. National First Ladies' Library, Inc. was still allowed to collect fees for admission, tours, and special events and to retain the proceeds for its own use, and they were required to keep and provide to NPS accurate records of such fees collected as well as to keep accurate visitation records and provide those records monthly to the National Park Service. National First Ladies' Library, Inc. also agreed to continue recruiting, training, and supervising docents and volunteers, but the new cooperative agreement specified that they were to be trained in "park mission, interpretive themes, orientation, customer service ...interpretive techniques and safety practices." In addition, National First Ladies' Library, Inc. was newly required to "integrate NPS interpretive interns...into interpretive operations, utilizing them at appropriate grade levels" and including them in "interpretive and safety training offered to other interpretive staff and docents."<sup>53</sup>

Lastly, National First Ladies' Library, Inc. agreed to "provide a safe and healthful environment for all public visitors, NFLL employees, and NPS staff" by training staff and volunteers in appropriate responses to fire emergencies and conducting routine fire and emergency evacuation drills; providing routine inspection and servicing of all fire and security

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

protection and alarm systems and providing documentation of these activities to NPS; ensuring that the property met all fire and safety building codes; promptly reporting all safety and security incidents to the National Park Service superintendent, and, subsequently, completing the required NPS reporting forms. National First Ladies' Library, Inc. also agreed to add information to the NFLL website to tell visitors how to make comments or register complaints; and investigate and respond to all visitor complaints and to report them to the National Park Service superintendent. The cooperative agreement required National First Ladies' Library, Inc. to forward any received Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests to the National Park Service superintendent.<sup>54</sup>

For its part, the National Park Service agreed to continue to work with National First Ladies' Library, Inc. as it had been doing for the past twelve years, with some additional responsibilities brought on by the changes to NFLL responsibilities. The National Park Service agreed to allow National First Ladies' Library, Inc. to continue to use the Saxton House and the Education and Research Center at no cost to NFLL to further the mission of the park and also agreed to "provide technical assistance for planning, preservation, and maintenance" of the buildings and grounds to NFLL during the life of the cooperative agreement. As in the previous cooperative agreements, the National Park Service pledged to provide financial support for operational expenses "according to the approved budget...and availability of funds from Congressional appropriations," and to continue to provide technical assistance with the variety of activities previously enumerated in the earlier cooperative agreements. The National Park Service also agreed to continue to conduct annual safety inspections, including fire safety inspections, and provide documentation to National First Ladies' Library, Inc. of deficiencies to be corrected as well as to continue to conduct the annual facility condition assessments and provide NFLL with a report. In both cases, these inspections added the Education and Research Center to the inspections and reports and anticipated also adding Rotary Park and the small parking lot to the north of the park should they be donated to the National Park Service during the life of the third cooperative agreement. The National Park Service would also notify National First Ladies' Library, Inc. of any safety or security issues "that might impact their staff or public visitors" and provide appropriate staff to investigate safety or security incidents. To enhance security, NPS pledged to provide new, interchangeable core locks on exterior doors of the Saxton House and the Education and Research Center but made no mention of providing any security personnel.<sup>55</sup>

In addition to agreeing to continue doing the things it already was doing, the National Park Service added provision of "a part-time NPS manager (a Superintendent, Park Manager, or other management employee)" as funds allowed and to assign that employee to be the liaison to the NFLL Board as well as the daily liaison between National First Ladies' Library, Inc. and the National Park Service. Although Carol Spears and Sherda Williams had been, consecutively, part of the National Park Service management strategy for First Ladies NHS since the first

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 6-8.

cooperative agreement, this feature had not been specified in the earlier documents. The National Park Service also agreed to provide furnishings for the office space that National First Ladies' Library, Inc. was required to make available to NPS personnel for their use under this third cooperative agreement. As additional responsibilities, the National Park Service agreed to review the National First Ladies' Library, Inc. Annual Work Plan, monitor the performance and financial progress of the management of the site, and perform an annual review, which would include a report to NFLL of the findings. The National Park Service specifically agreed that it would not be "involved in the direct supervision or direct the work" of National First Ladies' Library, Inc. staff, but it would encourage collaboration between the staffs of the two organizations to "enhance efficiencies of operation and...the quality and quantity of interpretive and educational programs on First Lady history to the public" and would provide enhanced opportunities for NFLL staff to access the technical expertise of NPS staff. In particular, the National Park Service pledged to provide technical assistance in interpretive techniques and program and media development to National First Ladies' Library, Inc. and to provide financial support, if funds were available, to train NFLL volunteers. Though not specifically mentioned, this training was likely aimed at the volunteer docents who conducted the guided tours of the site for National First Ladies' Library, Inc. The National Park Service also agreed to manage its own NPS park website for First Ladies NHS. Although this may seem like a superfluous pledge, the focus of the third cooperative agreement was to specify which organization was responsible for what at First Ladies NHS in an attempt to curtail misunderstandings.<sup>56</sup> The smallest detail mattered.

Most significantly for the future maintenance of the site, the National Park Service agreed to "be responsible for capital repairs and improvements" of the park property, subject to availability of funds, and to promptly notify National First Ladies' Library, Inc. when NPS employees, vendors, or contractors required access to the Saxton House or to the Education and Research Center for official government business. The National Park Service also pledged not to let such work interfere with public access to the site or with National First Ladies' Library, Inc.'s management operations as much as was feasible.<sup>57</sup> Finally, the National Park Service listed all the reporting required by the agency and the federal government for First Ladies' National Historic Site and pledged to either complete the reports within the agency or to assist National First Ladies' Library, Inc. in completing the reports, whichever course was indicated by the type of report.<sup>58</sup>

Each organization pledged – and expected the other to pledge – to "place the park mission and public interest at the forefront of all decisions related to" First Ladies NHS. Unlike in the previous cooperative agreements, the ability to accept donations from public and private sources "in support of the purposes and programs of the park" was extended to both

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 7-8.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 7-9.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 8-9.

organizations instead of just to National First Ladies' Library, Inc., and the responsibility to maintain accurate accounting and timely reporting of such donations fell to both organizations as well. The two organizations also pledged to "explore" sharing and collaborating on archival and curatorial services. Gradually drawing National First Ladies' Library, Inc. into the "Park Service Way," the third cooperative agreement also instituted a "Key Control" system for the new core locks to be installed by the National Park Service, mandated development of standard operating procedures (SOPs) for events such as evacuations due to fire, bomb threats, or other emergencies, and initiated the first official requirements for handicapped accessibility at the Saxton House and the Education and Research Center.<sup>59</sup>

Although the term of the third cooperative agreement was from May 16, 2012 to May 15, 2017, a period of five years instead of the previous one year with option to extend for four more years, funding for the agreement was still extended only annually, and set at \$1.5 million for the first full fiscal year (2013), with no guarantee as to what the funding would be in the future because it would be "based on availability." Funding was specified as not to extend past May 15, 2017. The funds were to be requested in the usual manner, but the cooperative agreement served notice that this procedure was changing because the National Park Service was being required by the Department of Interior to transition to a new method of paying financial assistance awards. This new method was known as Automated Standard Application for Payment (ASAP), scheduled to go into effect in November 2013. This payment system used the internet as the mechanism for making application for payment by the federal government of grants and monetary awards and required the recipient to register with Dun and Bradstreet, a financial services corporation, and with the federal government's Centralized Contractor Registration (CCR) to be paid. In addition, this section of the cooperative agreement stipulated the rules for charging the federal government for travel costs associated with the grant award.<sup>60</sup> The remainder of the third cooperative agreement followed the standard format developed for such documents, although the requirements were more precise than formerly. Thereafter, the document included, as previously, "applicable regulations, program legislation, departmental policy, and special provisions" relating to the agreement, which had not changed significantly since being included in the first cooperative agreement except for the new prohibition on text messaging or using electronic equipment supplied by the government while driving, which President Barack Obama mandated by Executive Order on October 1, 2009.<sup>61</sup>

The third cooperative agreement included several attachments incorporated as part of the agreement. Attachment C included a document entitled "National First Ladies' Library Personnel Policies," indicating how National First Ladies' Library, Inc. intended to manage its personnel under this agreement and, possibly, how they were already managing personnel under the

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 9-10.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 11-12.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 12-19.

previous one.<sup>62</sup> Also included as part of the third cooperative agreement was “Attachment D: Annual Work Plan” covering the second half of 2012 from May through September, as required by the cooperative agreement. It was divided into sections for exhibits, programs, special events, research library/website, archives/collections, visitors and volunteers, education/outreach, and building maintenance and repair. For detailed information on the contents of Annual Work Plans, see Chapter Seven: Education and Community Outreach.<sup>63</sup>

Attachments E through O of the third cooperative agreement consisted of federal forms to be used by National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. to report to the federal government. Attachment K was a completed form SF-424 “Application for Federal Assistance,” signed on June 28, 2012, by National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. Executive Director Patricia Krider. Attachment M was a standard list of assurances to the federal government that National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. would follow the rules and procedures established for recipients of grant awards, also signed by NFLL Executive Director Patricia Krider. Attachment O was a disclosure of lobbying activities form completed and signed by Patricia Krider indicating that National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. was not engaging in any lobbying activities.<sup>64</sup> The final two attachments to the third cooperative agreement were informational. The first, Attachment P, explained that the Repair/Rehab program anticipated a five-year plan which, in this case, would be from 2014 through 2018, and described the steps to be followed for inclusion in the program. This information was likely included with the third cooperative agreement to alert National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. to the reasons that funding repair, rehabilitation, or cyclic maintenance for the Saxton House or the Education and Research Center would likely be an extended process. This, no doubt, helped National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. be reconciled to the change in administration of repairs and cyclic maintenance at First Ladies NHS from NFLL to the National Park Service.<sup>65</sup>

For the National Park Service, key officials for this cooperative agreement were Sherda Williams, who had been designated an Agreement Technical Representative (ATR) as superintendent for First Ladies NHS and for James A. Garfield NHS, and National Park Service Midwest Regional Office Grants and Agreements Officer Penny Russell. For National First Ladies’ Library, Inc., the key officials were, as before, NFLL Board of Directors President Mary Regula and Executive Director Patricia Krider. No other “key officials” were listed for this cooperative agreement. All key officials signed the agreement in June 2012.<sup>66</sup>

The third Cooperative Agreement changed the relationship between the National Park Service and National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. by giving the National Park Service

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<sup>62</sup> “Cooperative Agreement No. P12AC100314 between The United States Department of Interior National Park Service and National First Ladies’ Library, Inc.” Attachment C.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., Attachment D.

<sup>64</sup> “Cooperative Agreement No. P12AC100314 between The United States Department of Interior National Park Service and National First Ladies’ Library, Inc.” Attachments E, F, J, K, M, and O.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., Attachment P.

<sup>66</sup> “Cooperative Agreement No. P12AC100314 between The United States Department of Interior National Park Service and National First Ladies’ Library, Inc.” Attachment A, 10-11.

responsibility for maintenance of the site. It was the crack that gave the National Park Service a foothold to develop and implement management strategies at First Ladies NHS commensurate with normal practices of NPS. The era in which the National Park Service transferred money from Congress to National First Ladies' Library, Inc. but had no substantial role in management of the site was at an end. From June 2012 forward, First Ladies NHS would gravitate increasingly toward the standards of the National Park Service for management of its sites.

*Fourth Cooperative Agreement (March 2019 – September 30, 2023)*

Sherda Williams made a lateral transfer to Brown v. Board of Education NHS, Kansas, entering on duty as superintendent in January 2015. In her place, Cuyahoga Valley National Park Superintendent Craig Kenkel thereby became also superintendent of James A. Garfield NHS and First Ladies NHS under a reduction in force plan approved in 2013 and applied throughout the National Park Service. According to Williams, after the 2013 government shutdown caused by the failure of Congress to pass the annual budget, the National Park Service required “that we all go through and make sure that our budget could be sustained for five years into the future, and we had to downgrade positions or eliminate positions as the opportunity became available, so I actually had to file a report that my position as superintendent would have to be downgraded to a site manager...after I left the park.”<sup>67</sup> As Kenkel tells it, before he became Cuyahoga Valley National Park superintendent in 2014,

A year or two before that, all the national parks were asked to...prepare a reduction in workforce plan. So, Cuyahoga Valley had one, and Sherda Williams, the superintendent of James A. Garfield, and First Ladies, also had a reduction in workforce strategy. And that plan said that, whenever Sherda transferred into the new job, then, it would trigger James A. Garfield and First Ladies being placed under the superintendent of Cuyahoga Valley. .... Nobody told me that before I went to Cuyahoga Valley. .... So, at some point, I got a phone call from my boss, and she said, “Hey, congratulations. You're now the superintendent of two more parks.” And I said, “How much more are you paying me?” And she was like, “Zero.”<sup>68</sup>

Before leaving Ohio, Williams briefed Kenkel on the management of the two parks, so he understood that management of First Ladies NHS mostly involved approving the transfer of funds from Congress to National First Ladies' Library, Inc. However, in December 2014, the month before Williams departed First Ladies NHS and James A. Garfield NHS, Kenkel was notified by National First Ladies' Library, Inc. Executive Director Patricia Krider that the main boiler and the back-up boiler for the heating system at the Education and Research Center was

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<sup>67</sup> Sherda Williams, oral history interview.

<sup>68</sup> Craig Kenkel, oral history interview.



failing or had failed. According to Kenkel, it was winter, and he was informed by Krider that National First Ladies' Library, Inc. "needed an emergency funding to repair them."<sup>69</sup> Kenkel contacted the National Park Service Midwest Regional Office to get the funding to have the boiler system repaired as soon as possible.<sup>70</sup> Kenkel, who had served for many years as Chief of Cultural Resources for the National Park Service's Midwest Regional Office and was, therefore, particularly attuned to issues of maintenance and rehabilitation of historic buildings, said, "I was concerned. .... [I wondered] what's really happening down at First Ladies if...they cannot maintain the heating system...and they're one hundred percent responsible for operating and maintaining the site, what's happening overall?"<sup>71</sup> (Figure 33)



Figure 33: Craig Kenkel, former Cuyahoga Valley National Park Superintendent, 2022. Photograph by Deborah Harvey.



Figure 34: David Regula, member of National First Ladies' Library, Inc. Board of Directors. Photograph by Deborah Harvey.

At least one member of the National First Ladies' Library, Inc. Board of Directors was also becoming increasingly concerned about maintenance and management of the site. David Regula, son of Ralph and Mary Regula, could see that "maintenance and that type of thing...were falling by the wayside just because of the cost." (Figure 34)<sup>72</sup> His father had retired from Congress in 2008, which impacted his mother's fundraising efforts for the National First Ladies' Library. In addition, as David Regula said, "My mother was getting older," making

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid. See also David Regula, oral history interview, October 14, 2021. Regula recalled that it was Christmas Eve, "when you're paying triple time for something that should have been general maintenance."

<sup>70</sup> The boiler system seems to have fallen into a gray area for responsibility. The third cooperative agreement allotted major repairs and capital improvements to the National Park Service and day-to-day maintenance to National First Ladies' Library, Inc. Where the boiler system fell in this division of responsibility seems to have been a matter of interpretation.

<sup>71</sup> Craig Kenkel, oral history interview.

<sup>72</sup> David Regula, oral history interview.

fundraising more arduous.<sup>73</sup> Although limited records regarding annual independent fundraising by National First Ladies' Library, Inc. were available to review for this report, National First Ladies' Library, Inc. had apparently experienced a downturn in privately and corporately funded income between 2008 and 2015. Concerned about maintaining his mother's legacy at First Ladies National Historic Site, David Regula contacted Superintendent Kenkel, suggesting they meet to discuss maintenance issues at First Ladies NHS. According to Regula, Kenkel responded, "'We got to talk about this.' So, we sat down over coffee, and he said, 'We got to, kind of, restructure this whole thing.' And he asked me to help him, which I did.'" <sup>74</sup> Kenkel recalled this in much the same way: "He reached out to me and wanted to meet me and to have a quiet conversation about his concerns for First Ladies National Historic Site and for the Library as an organization." Kenkel described Regula's primary concern as being protecting his mother's legacy at the site so that his children and grandchildren could visit it and know that their grandmother had made the First Ladies NHS happen. Regula, he said, was concerned that the site was not being operated to his mother's standards as she had increasingly distanced herself from it due to deteriorating health. Specifically, Kenkel understood that Regula was worried that "they may not have been maintaining the physical elements of the site or providing the level of service to park visitors like they were when his mother was there."<sup>75</sup>

According to Kenkel, after meeting with David Regula, he met with Executive Director Pat Krider to find out how National First Ladies' Library, Inc. budgeted for and managed maintenance and custodial work. At that meeting, Kenkel learned what National First Ladies' Library, Inc. staffing levels for maintenance and custodial work were and that they were struggling to maintain the buildings, especially the six-story former bank building. He said, "they were just challenged with trying to preserve the windows, as an example, and with managing these mechanical systems and so forth. .... And it was very evident that they couldn't keep up with the buildings' maintenance needs." At that point, Kenkel said, "I just decided that the Park Service would take over maintaining the two historic buildings."<sup>76</sup>

The timing was propitious as the third cooperative agreement expired in May 2017, so negotiations for the next cooperative agreement were upcoming. However, it is fortunate that Kenkel and Regula started working on it approximately a year earlier than normal. Negotiations became contentious as the National Park Service sought to integrate the First Ladies National Historic Site into the normal orbit of NPS operations and National First Ladies' Library, Inc. endeavored to preserve the management status quo while ceding the maintenance and upkeep of the physical buildings to the National Park Service. David Regula and Craig Kenkel worked together to craft an agreement both organizations could accept. Regula described some initial discussions with Kenkel:

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Craig Kenkel, oral history interview.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

...we both sat down and just, kind of, talked about it. His thinking was – and I agreed with him – that, ‘we just can't hand you over this money because it comes through my budget, although it's supposed to go to the First Ladies...without some control of it.’ And I think his thinking was...and I, here, again, agreed with it – they'd have to have more influence as to how the money is spent....<sup>77</sup>

With Regula's help, Kenkel met with the NFLL Board of Directors President Bill Barr and a few of the other Board members and “began educating them on the formal partnership between NPS and the Library and each partner's roles, responsibilities, and authorities. I also described other types of park partnerships and their advantages and disadvantages, purposes etc.” to give the Board ideas about other ways it could be involved with management of First Ladies NHS besides being the operating partner. Kenkel explained, “I and this small group began preparing for a discussion at the Library's next board meeting.”<sup>78</sup>

With help from David Regula and Bill Barr, Kenkel addressed a special NFLL Board meeting on October 1, 2015, to inform them of developments. Ralph and Mary Regula attended. Mary Regula announced at the beginning of the meeting that she was retiring as president of National First Ladies' Library, Inc. Kenkel then introduced himself and announced that the National Park Service was going to be assuming more control of the site. In addition to assuming responsibility for maintenance and upkeep of the two buildings, Kenkel informed the Board that he would also start auditing the programs and services provided at First Ladies NHS by National First Ladies' Library, Inc. and, based on that audit, would determine if the National Park Service should begin having a larger role in those activities as well. With Mary Regula's retirement, Kenkel encouraged the Board to give serious consideration to what kind of a partnership organization they wanted to be with the National Park Service, and strongly recommended that they consider foregoing being a managing partner and transition to a Friends' Group or a cooperating association. Finally, he also requested that the Board hire a consultant to work with the Board and the staff to evaluate the work that they did for First Ladies NHS, consider what they do well compared to what the National Park Service does well, and think about their options for the future before making any decisions regarding upper-level management changes. He provided the Board with a list of possible consultants to undertake the evaluation and told them that federal funds could be used to pay for it.<sup>79</sup>

The arrangement that Kenkel and David Regula proposed to the National First Ladies' Library, Inc. Board of Directors represented a significant change in operations and responsibilities at First Ladies NHS. According to Kenkel, the National First Ladies' Library, Inc. Board members “thought they had complete autonomy and authority to manage First Ladies and its federal funding.” Kenkel's task was to inform them that, in the next cooperative agreement, the National Park Service would assume all responsibility for maintenance and

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<sup>77</sup> David Regula, oral history interview.

<sup>78</sup> Craig Kenkel, oral history interview.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

upkeep of the two site buildings owned by the National Park Service. This shift in responsibility meant that NPS would retain some of the monies appropriated by Congress for First Ladies NHS to pay for undertaking those responsibilities, funds which had been assigned to National First Ladies' Library, Inc. in the earlier cooperative agreements. Kenkel also informed them that he would be the one to determine how much the National Park Service would retain to cover additional staff and materials to do the work. In his opinion, the Board was relieved, although this was "the first indication they got that it wasn't going to be business as usual," because Kenkel was proposing to "pay attention to and question them on what they were doing."<sup>80</sup>

The National First Ladies' Library, Inc. Board took Craig Kenkel up on his offer to fund a consultant's evaluation of their operations. Shortly after the October meeting, they issued a request for proposals to evaluate "the current state of the National First Ladies' Library and provide recommendations to improve performance and effectiveness of the organization in achieving the mission, in partnership with the National Park Service, of First Ladies National Historic Site." At least four companies responded to the request for proposals, which were due to be submitted to National First Ladies' Library, Inc. Executive Director Patricia Krider by February 19, 2016.<sup>81</sup> The selected consultant was Judy Czamecki of Centripetal Strategies of Columbus, Ohio, who presented her report to the Board of Directors at their annual meeting on October 28, 2016. The report either preceded or was accompanied by a PowerPoint presentation highlighting the major findings and making recommendations with a timetable for future adjustments.<sup>82</sup> According to Jennifer Vasarhelyi, who attended the NFLL's executive board meetings regarding this report as a representative for the National Park Service, many of the findings revolved around the Board of Director's policies and procedures, but some of them addressed facets of site management at First Ladies NHS. In Vasarhelyi's opinion, "...it really did get people to start thinking differently. It really did stimulate them...to work on their policies and procedures through a board committee."<sup>83</sup>

During the special meeting of the National First Ladies' Library, Inc. Board of Directors on October 1, 2015, another problem facing the organization was addressed: the declining and sometimes negative revenues in the gift shop located on the second floor of the Saxton House. According to the report attached to the minutes of this meeting, one of the issues appears to have been that some vendors, to keep the wholesale prices lower, required NFLL to purchase larger batches of items than it could expect to sell in a reasonable amount of time. This was especially true of the porcelain pieces and books and resulted in an accumulation of excess inventory. The Board directed that, during 2016, many items be placed on sale at below-cost for three months, at

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> "National First Ladies' Library Board of Governance Assessment Request for Proposals," n.d. n.p. In Cuyahoga Valley National Park digital archives.

<sup>82</sup> "National First Ladies' Library Board of Director's Meeting, October 28, 2016, Agenda," n.p. In Cuyahoga Valley National Park digital archives. The PowerPoint slides for the presentation follow the end of the "Agenda," in the digital archives, but it is not clear that they were originally attached to the agenda. The complete report was unavailable for review for this Administrative History.

<sup>83</sup> Jennifer Vasarhelyi, oral history interview, October 15, 2021.

the end of which time remaining unsold inventory was to be either discarded, donated, or used as gifts to donors.<sup>84</sup> In 2016, as a result of the consultant's findings, the Board of Directors decided to close the gift shop in the Saxton House. As Gail Fahrney, former National First Ladies' Library, Inc. bookkeeper recalled, after the sale to reduce inventory, the gift shop on the second floor of the Saxton House was closed by the NFLL Board of Directors because it was not financially viable. The remaining inventory was moved to the Education and Research Center, where some of it was displayed for sale in the Visitor Contact area and the remainder stored for future use.<sup>85</sup> According to Carl Anthony, the position of head librarian was also eliminated in 2016, and, in 2017, Carl Anthony was informed that his writing services would no longer be required.<sup>86</sup> Patricia Krider resigned as National First Ladies' Library, Inc. Executive Director shortly thereafter, though she did not leave the organization.

In response to Mary Regula's retirement and Patricia Krider's resignation as Executive Director, National First Ladies' Library, Inc. formed a committee which embarked on a search for new leadership. Jennifer Highfield, then living in Columbus, Ohio, answered the job advertisement and was hired in October 2017. Ms. Highfield's background included work at the High Museum of Art in Atlanta, Georgia, the Indianapolis Museum of Art, and the Akron, Museum of Art. She began work as president and chief executive officer for National First Ladies' Library, Inc. in January 2018. Once Jennifer Highfield was hired, Krider transitioned to National First Ladies' Library, Inc.'s Director of Operations. The volunteer coordinator who was hired in approximately 2010 left National First Ladies' Library, Inc. in 2019 for reasons possibly related to the realignment of management responsibilities in the fourth cooperative agreement. Longtime bookkeeper Gail Fahrney retired on September 30, 2020, and National First Ladies' Library, Inc. hired another bookkeeper to replace her; Fahrney remained at NFLL through October to orient the new bookkeeper and to help conduct the annual audit.<sup>87</sup> It appears that many of these personnel changes were the result of the natural aging out of the longtime staff in addition to the changes in staffing needs precipitated by the reorganization in management strategy for First Ladies NHS as outlined in the fourth cooperative agreement.

Although the fourth cooperative agreement was ready for signatures by October 2018, it was not signed until March 2019. According to National Park Service Midwest Regional Partnership Program Manager Jennifer McMahon, the delay was due to a change in National Park Service procedure regarding the approval process for cooperative agreements. As she explained,

[I]t's in that timeframe when it had to be approved at the Department of Interior level. So, the time that it took to get an agreement approved, back, and ready to sign

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<sup>84</sup> "Board of Directors Meeting, October 1, 2015, Meeting Minutes," n.p. In Cuyahoga Valley National Park digital archives.

<sup>85</sup> Gail Fahrney, oral history interview.

<sup>86</sup> Carl S. Anthony, oral history interview.

<sup>87</sup> Gail Fahrney, oral history interview.

sometimes took six months. ...we had done everything we needed to do, both at the park and at the Region, but the agreement had to be approved at the Department level, so it took a really long time to get it back.<sup>88</sup>

President and Chief Executive Officer Jennifer Highfield signed for National First Ladies' Library, Inc., and Noël Miller signed as the Awarding Officer for the National Park Service. Jennifer A. McMahon served as the Agreement Technical Representative (ATR) for this cooperative agreement but did not sign it. The total amount of the annual award, including cost-sharing funds, was \$699, 243.66, of which \$400,000 were obligated federal funds for 2019 because the new cooperative agreement was not signed until more than four months into the fiscal year. The amount allocated to National First Ladies' Library, Inc. for the duration of this cooperative agreement was also significantly less than in earlier cooperative agreements to account for the anticipated increase in site management expenses. As with the third cooperative agreement, the fourth cooperative agreement was expected to be in force for approximately five years, from February 1, 2019, to September 30, 2024, without being subject to yearly renewal.<sup>89</sup>

The fourth cooperative agreement followed the template used by Sherda Williams in 2012 for the previous agreement. It first reviewed the general history of the development of the National First Ladies' Library and the legislative establishment of First Ladies National Historic Site. It delineated which properties within the First Ladies NHS were owned by the National Park Service and which were owned by National First Ladies' Library, Inc. It also reviewed language in the legislation establishing the Ohio & Erie Canalway National Heritage Area (the Canalway), within which First Ladies NHS lies, which allows the superintendent of Cuyahoga Valley National Park, also located within the Canalway, to "provide operational assistance to entities within the Canalway." A history of the management agreements between the National Park Service and National First Ladies' Library, Inc. described the period between 2001 and 2014, when National First Ladies' Library, Inc. held the sole responsibility for operating and maintaining the site with the support of federal funds as well as limited privately-raised funds, and explained that, in 2015, the superintendent of Cuyahoga Valley National Park was also designated superintendent of First Ladies National Historic Site. Thereafter, the National Park Service began working with National First Ladies' Library Inc. "on a transition plan for NPS to assume day-to-day operations and maintenance responsibilities" at First Ladies NHS and for NFLL to focus more on "philanthropy, new program development, and building community support...."<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Jennifer McMahon, oral history interview, October 15, 2021.

<sup>89</sup> "Cooperative Agreement P19AC00002 Between the United States Department of Interior National Park Service and National First Ladies' Library, February 1, 2019, 1, 10. In Cuyahoga Valley National Park digital archives, folder "NFLL Cooperative Agreements, Other Legal Documents," file P19AC00002 FILA NFLL\_Coop.Ag (2) – SIGNED.pdf.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 2-3.

Article I of the 2019 cooperative agreement expanded the definition of the National Park Service’s “substantial involvement” with regard to the park’s management as responsibility for management, maintenance, and capital improvements regardless of ownership of the various components of the site, operation of the Visitor Center functions of the site, which were generally housed in the first and basement levels of the Education and Research Center, and development of a Safety Plan for the site. The Safety Plan requirement had been a component of the third cooperative agreement, as had been responsibility for major maintenance and capital improvements, but the remaining elements of the “substantial involvement” were new to the agreement.

Article III of the cooperative agreement defined the roles and responsibilities of each partner, including facilities maintenance, visitor services, promotion and marketing, collections management, financial management, and site administration.<sup>91</sup> The National Park Service assumed much more responsibility for operation of the site in the fourth cooperative agreement than it had in the past, agreeing to be responsible for planning, funding, and performance of all custodial work, routine maintenance, and capital improvements at the portions of the site owned by NPS to support a year-round operation seven days a week, including holidays. The National Park Service also agreed to provide snow removal and groundskeeping, including tree-trimming, trash pickup, and maintenance of an in-ground sprinkler system for the entire site, regardless of ownership. National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. remained responsible for facilities and grounds maintenance. This included ensuring the exhibit spaces and display cases in the Saxton House and the display cases in the Education and Research Center were cleaned; maintaining the planters, flowerbeds, and landscaping on site property owned by NFLL; providing and displaying seasonal banners and any other outdoor displays in coordination with the National Park Service; and promptly notifying NPS of any unsatisfactory conditions or needed repairs at the site, regardless of which organization owned the affected property.<sup>92</sup> The scope of these responsibilities was substantially less than the complete management of the physical features of First Ladies NHS that characterized the requirements of the first two cooperative agreements or even the management of site custodial and daily maintenance responsibilities of the third cooperative agreement. As a result, National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. dispensed with most of its own maintenance staff.

The assignment of facilities management responsibilities to NPS also had an impact on the park’s collection management. Not mentioned in previous cooperative agreements, National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. was assigned responsibility in the fourth cooperative agreement for management of its own collection of artifacts and museum and historic house objects in the Saxton House and the Education and Research Center. National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. currently (2023) owns everything in the two buildings owned by the National Park Service except for the furniture in the offices used by the NPS-appointed site manager and the permanent

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

and seasonal interpreters at the Education and Research Center. The fourth cooperative agreement specified that National First Ladies' Library, Inc. must manage and preserve the collection (not including the office furnishings) to American Alliance of Museums (AAM) standards and to the standards of the *NPS Museum Handbook* and must make the collection available to the public "for the visitor experience, as appropriate and as mutually agreed with NPS." Environmental controls for the museum collection had been of ongoing concern since the first (and only) archivist was hired to manage the growing museum collection in 2005. Housed in the Education and Research Center when not in use as display items at the Saxton House, the collection consists of a great number of paper artifacts in addition to other artifacts of fragile materials, and the aged heating, ventilating, and air conditioning system (HVAC) was temperamental, difficult to control, and hard to repair, and did not provide reliable climate control for the artifacts. In addition to the climate control system, the National Park Service agreed to be responsible for management of the contracts for the fire suppression and security systems, through which maintenance and testing of those systems was accomplished.<sup>93</sup> On the interiors of the buildings, the National Park Service pledged also to manage and maintain the internal building environments for appropriate human comfort.

With regard to interpretation and promotion, the National Park Service pledged to work with National First Ladies' Library, Inc. to develop "programs and tours at the site," and to "develop working relationships with the downtown Canton community to elevate the Site as a robust downtown historic attraction for the city," even though the National First Ladies' Library, Inc. was already providing programs and tours and marketing the site to local and national audiences. National First Ladies' Library, Inc. and the National Park Service agreed to collaborate on developing "all types of interpretive media, including exhibits" through implementation of the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan*. This collaboration was to include planning the interpretive and educational strategy; determining the content and delivery of site tours; creating "effective and efficient...programming, marketing, and co-branding;" developing a digital communications strategy to define organizational roles on websites and social media; and implementing a media relations strategy in which the two organizations would cooperate.

To provide visitor services, National First Ladies' Library, Inc., agreed to continue, as they had been doing for twenty years, to provide staff and volunteers to "manage, operate, schedule, and conduct individual and group tours," but, in 2019, they were required to coordinate with the National Park Service about whatever they wanted to do to fulfill this requirement. As always, National First Ladies' Library, Inc. was allowed to charge fees for public programs such as tours and to retain the monies thus collected, but the cooperative agreement stipulated that such income "must be used to defray program costs, be deducted from government expenditures, be added to the award, or be refunded to the government," and the agreement provided a list of expenditures that were approved "program costs."<sup>94</sup> Of importance to the National Park Service

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<sup>93</sup> "Cooperative Agreement P19AC00002," 6.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-6.



management of the site, NPS pledged to provide visitor services staff at the Education and Research Center “as mutually agreed and scheduled.”<sup>95</sup> This last provision appears to have been the source of some future confusion and misunderstanding as will be discussed in Chapter Nine.

In addition, National First Ladies’ Library, Inc., which had operated a “gift shop” on the second floor of the Saxton House for many years, was required to sign a separate Cooperating Association Agreement with the National Park Service in order to continue to provide that service and to provide the house tours. By 2022, however, National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. was no longer either providing house tours or operating a “gift shop” on site, and its staff had declined from approximately twenty-four in 2019 to three in 2022, due, in large part, to the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic, which shut down all park operations for a lengthy period of time, making fulfillment of these responsibilities impossible. The National Park Service and National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. pledged to each collect data on visitor and other program attendance “according to mutually agreed upon guidelines,” and to each provide the data to the other organization “in order to meet one another’s reporting and grant application deadlines.”

National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. was to manage marketing and promotion of the First Ladies NHS operational schedule, programs, tours, and events. However, they were obliged to obtain approval of their marketing and promotional efforts from the NPS-appointed First Ladies NHS site manager and to use NPS-approved materials and the National Park Service “graphic identity,” meaning the approved colors, layout, text font, symbols such as the arrowhead, and other features of the NPS branding program developed in the NPS Washington D.C. office between 2002-2004. This requirement was intended to bring First Ladies NHS promotional materials in line with the standard appearance of marketing and promotional materials of the other units of the National Park System, which, heretofore, it had often not been.<sup>96</sup> The National Park Service also pledged to install, maintain, and repair or replace to NPS standards NPS signage located on NPS property, but declined to be responsible for signage located on National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. property or to engage in any ground-disturbing activities on property owned by the other organization.

National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. agreed to consult with the National Park Service when planning any fundraising or other donor activities and to obtain permission and a Special Use Permit if such events were to be held on site at First Ladies NHS or had “the potential to impact park operations, park resources, or visitor experience” beyond the normal scope of these concerns. They also agreed to consult with the National Park Service about development of appropriate fundraising agreements and donor or sponsor recognition plans before implementing them. National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. was required to “actively participate in and adopt” the site Safety Program (once developed) and to immediately notify the First Ladies NHS site manager and the Cuyahoga Valley National Park superintendent of any damage to the facilities,

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 5.

safety concerns, vandalism, and staff and visitor injuries. They also agreed to provide to the First Ladies NHS site manager and to the Cuyahoga Valley National Park superintendent copies annually of their financial audit report.<sup>97</sup>

The fourth cooperative agreement required that the National Park Service “establish a safety program and provide associated safety training for all...staff and volunteers” at First Ladies NHS. This mandate expands the responsibility for safety at the site and transfers it to the National Park Service. It appears to replace the previous requirement for National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. to establish SOPs for such events as evacuations due to fire, severe weather, or national emergencies, although those requirements may have already been fulfilled under the previous cooperative agreement. The National Park Service also agreed to provide technical expertise, training, and oversight in “administration, education, safety, interpretations, and museum collection management,” and providing reviews (and, not mentioned but implied, approval) of NFLL schedules and prices for tours and other guest services as well as events at First Ladies National Historic Site. The National Park Service pledged to respond “in a timely manner” to requests for approvals for events held at First Ladies NHS and for Special Use Permits required for those events as well as to complete all approvals of promotional materials proposed by National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. within five business days. Of significant importance to the finances of National First Ladies’ Library, Inc., the National Park Service, for the first time, assumed responsibility for paying for all utilities at the site.

The National Park Service had agreed to provide the technical expertise regarding universal accessibility in an early section of the fourth cooperative agreement, and the two organizations agreed to collaborate to develop and implement a universal accessibility standard for the site, ensuring that National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. remained in “compliance with all federal statutory requirements [and] the proper performance of the obligations...under this agreement.” In addition, National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. was required to manage and support its own network and information technology (IT) equipment separate from the network and IT equipment owned by the National Park Service.<sup>98</sup>

They agreed to work together on the site budget, to attend one another’s relevant meetings, to provide timely responses to one another when questions arose, especially if the response was required to be written, and to exchange information between staffs to enhance the quality of interpretive offerings and provide opportunities for development and training of both staffs. They also agreed to work together on planning interpretive and educational programs, to develop a volunteer program, and to set the operational schedule for the site. A major focus of these collaborative efforts was to develop and assign roles for each organization within the site management strategy. In short, National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. agreed to collaborate with the National Park Service on all facets of the management of First Ladies National Historic Site that

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

NFLL had previously been managing without help from the National Park Service.<sup>99</sup> For some National First Ladies' Library, Inc. staff, it was an unsettling and unwelcome development. For the National Park Service, it was a giant step toward normalizing the management strategy of a unit of the National Park System.

As with previous cooperative agreements, the National Park Service and National First Ladies' Library, Inc. agreed to work together to promote the purposes of First Ladies National Historic Site. The list of the ways in which the two organizations agreed to do this is lengthy and appears to indicate some of the difficulties encountered by the partnership in the past. They each agreed not to "authorize any use, alteration, or disturbance of property owned by the other party" for either their benefit or the benefit of another party without permission of the organization owning the property. They agreed to coordinate their activities relative to recruiting the involvement of other private, non-profit, or governmental groups or organizations in the management of the site, including working together to compete for outside funding. They agreed to collaborate with one another before making any policy changes in their own organization that would affect the other organization's management of the site and "to ensure policy decisions are in accordance with statutory requirements." They also agreed to communicate promptly with one another regarding congressional or media contacts and to ensure that they communicate and coordinate with one another if an outside party proposed to initiate a project at the site, and that each would participate in the planning, design, and implementation of such projects as needed. They agreed to a new key control system for the interchangeable core locks to be provided by the National Park Service at the site and to establish a level of building access chart for staffs of both organizations and for the City of Canton police and fire departments. The National Park Service and National First Ladies' Library, Inc. agreed to comply with the National Historic Preservation Act in maintenance of the site. They agreed to "a zero-tolerance policy regarding harassment...."<sup>100</sup>

No mention is made in the 2019 cooperative agreement of the possibility of acquiring Rotary Park or the parking lot to the north of it as was contemplated in the previous cooperative agreements. By this time, as explained by Craig Kenkel, the National Park Service had a policy that it would not purchase or accept as a donation "dirty land," which is land with contaminated soils. The Phase II Environmental Assessment had never been completed, so it was, and is, still unclear whether the soils of Rotary Park/First Ladies Garden are contaminated. However, knowing that the National Park Service would not accept donation of the land if it was contaminated, and fearing that National First Ladies' Library, Inc. would be responsible for removal of hazardous soils if they were identified by a Phase II Environmental Assessment, National First Ladies' Library, Inc. withdrew its offer to donate the park land to the National

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 8.

Park Service, so that option was off the table when the 2019 cooperative agreement was crafted.<sup>101</sup>

The fourth cooperative agreement contained the standard instructions for obtaining funding from the federal government, though, by this time, the ASAP program was the established method, which National First Ladies' Library, Inc. had been using since its inauguration during the third cooperative agreement. In addition, National First Ladies' Library was required to maintain its registration with a new government-initiated verification program, System for Award Management (SAM), but the requirement to maintain registration with Dun & Bradstreet (a "DUNS" number) appears to have been dropped. New to this cooperative agreement was a section agreeing that National First Ladies' Library, Inc. was entitled to and would receive an award to cover allowable costs incurred between November 1, 2018, and signing of the fourth cooperative agreement. It appears the drafters of the agreement recognized that getting a signed document was going to be a lengthy process.<sup>102</sup>

The fourth cooperative agreement, like the third cooperative agreement, included several attachments. The first, Attachment A, was a "Detailed Budget Justification" provided by National First Ladies' Library, Inc., and the second, Attachment B, was the SF-434 "Application for Federal Assistance, also from NFLL, dated March 1, 2019. The SF-434 showed that National First Ladies' Library, Inc. anticipated total funding for the remainder of 2019 to be \$667,877.36, of which \$400,000 was expected to be drawn from the federal grant funds, and \$267,877.36 was expected to be raised by the non-profit for its own use. Part of the SF-424 was the "Budget Information – Non-Construction Programs" chart showing categories of anticipated spending for FY 19 by National First Ladies' Library, Inc. The chart format is identical to that of the third cooperative agreement, though the budgeted amounts differ.<sup>103</sup> Further attachments gave assurances to the federal government regarding how National First Ladies' Library, Inc. would manage the funds granted to it by the government, a disclosure of lobby activities form, which appears to reveal that no lobbying activities had been undertaken in the previous year(s) by National First Ladies' Library, Inc., a status report of the lands of First Ladies NHS with a map showing which organization owned which lands within the National Historic Site, a Standard Operating Procedure providing "park policy guidelines for employees and partners generating new projects outside of the park planning process (PMIS)," a sample "Park Pre-Planning document for park projects, the "NPS Standard Operating Procedure for DO #16-E – Anti-Harassment," and the "NFLL Anti-Harassment Policy."<sup>104</sup> The final attachment, Attachment J, provided a chart showing the "Assigned Facilities Fair Market Value" for the offices and storage spaces on the third through sixth floors of the Education and Research Center for use in

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 6. See also Craig Kenkel, oral history interview.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 10-34.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., Attachment B, 39-42.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 43-67 (Attachments D, E, F, G, H, and I).

computing what the National Park Service could charge National First Ladies' Library, Inc. or another non-profit organization for such spaces should they need to lease them.<sup>105</sup>

From 2002 until the present (2023), First Ladies National Historic Site has been managed based on four successive cooperative agreements between the National Park Service and its management partner, National First Ladies' Library, Inc. As discussed in this chapter, each of the four successive cooperative agreements increased the role played by NPS, from being primarily the bearer of technical expertise and the dispenser of funds in the early years to having a more direct role in the management of the site in the most recent agreement. While Mary Regula was in charge of National First Ladies' Library, Inc., at least, the National Park Service found it very difficult to have any kind of influence on NFLL's activities. The first two National Park Service managers for First Ladies NHS were not permitted office space on site and were required to make an appointment to visit it. According to the first site manager, Carol Spears, "...there was no welcome as to any participation in any kind of management or administration there."<sup>106</sup> The second site manager, later superintendent, Sherda Williams, concurred, saying, "I did expect that there would have been a more equitable relationship between me, as park Superintendent and...[Mary] Regula, and that did not happen at all."<sup>107</sup>

Sherda Williams created, perhaps, the first crack in the resistance when she sent seasonal interpreters to the site, and introduced National Park Service management of major maintenance activities when she negotiated the third cooperative agreement in 2011. Still, she recalled, the situation remained the same, as Mary Regula and National First Ladies' Library, Inc. continued to resist involvement of the National Park Service in any of the functions of managing the park beyond help with maintenance. However, during her interview for this report, Williams often commented on the strengths of the programs offered by National First Ladies' Library, Inc. at the site as well as their diligent adherence to what could often be confusing and frustrating changes to government accounting requirements. Her only real concerns were that the interpretive program was not as comprehensive as would be one directed by the National Park Service and that, although their janitorial service program was adequate, big-ticket maintenance items were likely to be beyond the capability of the NFLL fundraising capacity in the future.

During the later months of Williams' tenure, which ended in late 2014, Mary Regula began to experience health problems that resulted in less opportunity for her direct management of First Ladies National Historic Site.<sup>108</sup> When Craig Kenkel came on board as Cuyahoga Valley National Park superintendent in early 2015, he worked with David Regula, son of Ralph and Mary Regula and member of the National First Ladies' Library, Inc. Board of Directors, to steer management of the site toward more standard National Park Service management practices and involvement through the fourth cooperative agreement. This agreement removed most

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>106</sup> Carol Spears, oral history interview.

<sup>107</sup> Sherda K. Williams, oral history interview.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

management responsibilities from National First Ladies' Library, Inc. and bestowed them upon the National Park Service, a development which many at NFLL resisted. However, with David Regula siding with the National Park Service regarding the changes to management strategy, Superintendent Craig Kenkel and NPS eventually prevailed, and both parties signed a significantly modified cooperative agreement for management of the site in 2019. Shortly thereafter, Site Manager Chris Wilkinson came on duty as the first site manager solely dedicated to First Ladies NHS and located on site in an office in the Education and Resource Center. His assignment was to implement the changes agreed upon in the fourth Cooperative Agreement. That story continues in Chapter Nine.

The primary purpose of the successive cooperative agreements was to lend NPS support, both financial and technical, to NFLL for the interpretive and educational programming at First Ladies NHS. While the later cooperative agreements expanded the role of NPS with regard to the maintenance and upkeep of the park's two principal buildings and other aspects of the park's management, the structure of the agreements continued to focus on the provision of public services. How the park interpreted the important story of the First Ladies, and their role in America's political history, and how the interpretive process changed as NPS gained an increasing presence at the park, is recounted in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER SIX: Interpretation and Exhibits

National First Ladies' Library, Inc. assumed responsibility for interpreting the Saxton House and providing exhibits about the First Ladies' early in the life of the organization, before it became First Ladies National Historic Site. Mary Regula attended planning meetings regarding interpretation and exhibits at the Saxton House in 1993, after her husband, Congressman Ralph Regula, facilitated the purchase of the Saxton House by the federal government. The initial plan for exhibits in the house was to display memorabilia and artifacts associated with President William McKinley, but that plan expanded to include displays of memorabilia related to First Ladies, as well. As discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three: Legislative History, Mary Regula was asked by the Stark County Foundation committee considering the interior rehabilitation and use of the Saxton House to assemble a conceptual presentation on her vision for a First Ladies exhibit. Although this vision did not, ultimately, come to fruition, it was a starting point for thinking about providing exhibits and interpreting the Saxton House to the public.

### *Interpretation*

The first three cooperative agreements between National First Ladies' Library, Inc. and the National Park Service, signed between 2002 and 2012, as discussed in Chapter Five, assigned responsibility for interpretation and exhibits at First Ladies NHS to National First Ladies' Library, Inc. For its part, the National Park Service was tasked with providing technical expertise and training, and both organizations agreed to work together on these efforts. In actual practice, the National Park Service was not involved in interpretation or exhibits for First Ladies NHS before 2015.<sup>1</sup> Between 1998 and 2020, National First Ladies' Library, Inc. managed its responsibility to provide guided tours of the Saxton House and, eventually, the Education and Research Center, using volunteer docents. These women, generally recruited by Mary Regula and encouraged by the NFLL Director of Educational Programming, dressed in costumes to represent their favorite First Lady or another prominent woman in United States history while conducting the tours. According to Gail Fahrney, bookkeeper for National First Ladies' Library, Inc. through most of its history to date, they saw nothing incongruous with having Martha Washington or Eleanor Roosevelt conducting guided tours of one of Ida Saxton McKinley's homes, and NFLL staff believed that the visitors enjoyed it and were not confused by the "time warp" aspect. Each volunteer docent provided her own costume or costumes, but National First Ladies' Library, Inc. reimbursed each with a one-time grant of funds for the cost of the costume.

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<sup>1</sup> Jennifer Vasarhelyi oral history interview. Vasarhelyi came on board as Cuyahoga Valley National Park in 2000 as a Park Ranger but moved quickly through the ranks to become Chief of Interpretation, which put her in a position to be aware of the interpretation situation at First Ladies NHS almost from the beginning. Vasarhelyi is still on duty at Cuyahoga Valley National Park (2023).

The volunteers were given a script from which to provide explanations about what tour guests were seeing, which was modified as new information came to light. Volunteers were not required to follow the script exactly – it was intended as a template to guide them in their interactions with people taking the tours. In addition, a docent library was established in each building, and the volunteers were encouraged to check out books on First Ladies. When a new First Lady exhibit was introduced in the third-floor ballroom, volunteer docents were given training on how to interpret it to visitors. Tours were by reservation only, and the availability of a tour of either building depended greatly on the availability of an NFLL volunteer docent to conduct it.<sup>2</sup>

Until April 2003, National First Ladies' Library, Inc. staff only provided tours of the Saxton House on Wednesdays and Saturdays because the tours were disruptive to the work of the Stark County/Community Foundation, which leased the Saxton House and occupied offices on the first and second floors.<sup>3</sup> Despite this handicap, the National First Ladies' Library Association, precursor to National First Ladies' Library, Inc., tallied 3,300 visitors to the site in the ten months between June 1998 and March 1999.<sup>4</sup> After their lease was terminated in 2003, Stark Community Foundation moved its offices from the Saxton House to the Huntington Bank building on Market Avenue, SE. This allowed the National First Ladies' Library, Inc. volunteer costumed docents to offer tours whenever the site was open and someone was available to provide them.<sup>5</sup> During Spears' tenure beginning in 2002, the National Park Service funded one or two seasonal NPS interpreters that were intended to augment the work of the National First Ladies' Library, Inc. costumed interpreters, but that plan did not work out well. In Spears' opinion, Mary Regula "was not ready to have the NPS uniform" at First Ladies NHS because "they saw themselves as totally managing and owning the site."<sup>6</sup> The second site manager/superintendent, Sherda Williams, felt that she mitigated the resistance somewhat by sending National Park Service seasonal interpreters wearing the skirted NPS uniform instead of the one with slacks, but she, too, experienced resistance to NPS encroachment on the site management strategies of National First Ladies' Library, Inc.<sup>7</sup> Although the cooperative agreements required interpretive training to be provided by the National Park Service, efforts to provide such training proved to be difficult to implement, and National First Ladies' Library, Inc. resisted other efforts to imprint the management strategies of NPS on those of National First Ladies' Library, Inc. Spears recalled that, during her tenure, National First Ladies' Library, Inc. did not share their education or interpretation plans with the National Park Service and rarely accepted help or suggestions from NPS. The reluctance extended even to regularizing the

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<sup>2</sup> Gail Fahrney, oral history interview.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Memorandum, Superintendent, Cuyahoga Valley National Park to Regional Director, Midwest Regional Office, June 28, 2006.

<sup>5</sup> Gail Fahrney, oral history interview.

<sup>6</sup> Carol Spears, oral history interview.

<sup>7</sup> Sherda K. Williams, oral history interview.



operational hours and the tour schedules to accommodate visitors, a situation that continued for more than ten years after establishment of the site as a unit of the National Park Service.<sup>8</sup>

The National Park Service eventually began to regulate the hours the site was open and tours were offered. In 2011, Superintendent Sherda Williams issued a “Superintendent’s Compendium,” part of which designated the hours the site was to be open and tours available. Closed on Mondays, the site offered tours on Tuesday through Saturday twice in the morning and three times in the afternoon year-round. During the summer months only, when the park was also open on Sundays, tours were offered three times in the afternoon. Reservations for tours were recommended and required for groups of six or more.<sup>9</sup> By this time, having tours without reservations was possible because the National Park Service had assigned park rangers and park guides to First Ladies NHS to provide them when costumed docents were unavailable. Fees were collected for tours of the Saxton House and of the Education and Research Center. In 2011, they were set at \$7 for adults, \$6 for seniors, and \$5 for children under eighteen years old except for school groups, which were free.<sup>10</sup>

According to National Park Service Site Manager Carol Spears’ recollections, tours of the Saxton House always started at the back door because that was the accessible entrance.<sup>11</sup> Visitors were able to tour the rehabilitated formal parlor on the first floor, followed by Ida Saxton McKinley’s bedroom and sitting room on the second floor and the ballroom and William McKinley’s office on the third floor. Visitors then returned to the second floor to browse the two rooms that comprised the gift shop before departing. The costumed volunteer docents operated in two shifts, conducting tours in the morning and in the afternoon.<sup>12</sup> In 2001, National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. recorded that they had provided tours to 10,000 visitors from forty states and six countries since 1998.<sup>13</sup> The National Park Service claimed a total of 12,028 visitors for the years 2002 and 2003.<sup>14</sup> After the Education and Research Center (ERC) opened in 2003, costumed docents, augmented at times with seasonal interns hired by the National Park Service, also provided brief tours of the ERC building, including suggesting to visitors that they view the film about First Ladies in the basement theater before going to the Saxton House. Although the First Ladies National Historic Site was intended to represent all First Ladies, the volunteer costumed docents tended to focus on the story of Ida Saxton and William McKinley in the

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<sup>8</sup> Carol Spears, oral history interview.

<sup>9</sup> Sherda Williams, “Superintendent’s Compendium,” January 24, 2011, 4. In First Ladies NHS archives, Box 1, File: FILA.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>11</sup> Carol Spears, oral history interview.

<sup>12</sup> Gail Fahrney, oral history interview. See also National Park Service, Midwest Regional Office, “National First Ladies Library Special Resource Study, Canton, Ohio,” April 2000, 5-6, which states that a film was shown in the third-floor ballroom of the Saxton House.

<sup>13</sup> “National First Ladies’ Library Education and Research Center Operational Plan.”

<sup>14</sup> “Memorandum, Superintendent, Cuyahoga Valley National Park to Regional Director, Midwest Regional Office, DOI-OIG Case File No. OI-HQ-05-0635-R (First Ladies NHS), June 28, 2006. In Cuyahoga Valley National Park digital archives, folder “NFLC Cooperative Agreements, Other Legal Documents,” file 147b\_FILA Official Documents 1\_1991-2006.pdf.

Saxton House, referring to the other First Ladies only when the tour had ascended to the third-floor ballroom or when the tour was conducted in the Education and Research Center.<sup>15</sup>

Following the example of her predecessor, Superintendent Sherda Williams obtained funds to send one or two seasonal female park rangers to First Ladies NHS to help conduct tours and insert a National Park Service presence into the site. In her observation, the visitor orientation information presented by NFLL was not up to NPS standards, mostly because the volunteer docents were “still primarily focused on a historic house tour for Saxton-McKinley home as opposed to...what is the significance and legacy of the First Ladies.” First Ladies’ significance and legacy was well represented in exhibits and special programming, she said, but not well done in the daily tour information given to visitors.<sup>16</sup> As a result of observing this tendency, she said, “...we started, kind of, trying to insert some NPS interns....” Site Manager Carol Spears had sent a summer intern to First Ladies NHS for a few years before she retired, and Williams followed that effort by sending two interns to the site to help with visitor orientation each year between 2008 and 2011. One of the summer interns sent by Williams had previously worked at James A. Garfield NHS, so she had a better grasp of what the National Park Service expected in guided tours and interpretation. Williams felt that this intern was able to influence the National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. volunteer coordinator on how to manage and train new volunteers. Williams opined that, if she had more time at the site, real change in these areas could have been effected. However, Williams moved on to another park in 2015.<sup>17</sup> Even so, she may have been able to make one significant change: National First Ladies’ Library Bookkeeper Gail Fahrney recalled that, by sometime in 2015, the seasonal NPS interpreters were allowed an office on the sixth floor of the Education and Research Center building, though the NPS superintendent of the site was still not allowed one.<sup>18</sup> Unfortunately, when the COVID-19 pandemic struck in 2020 and 2021, the buildings of First Ladies NHS were temporarily closed to visitors, and many of the docents dropped out of the program because their age and pre-existing medical conditions made them vulnerable to the illness.<sup>19</sup> Although First Ladies NHS reopened in 2021 and has since resumed tours, the volunteer costumed docent program has not been re-activated as of 2023.<sup>20</sup>

In addition to the guided tours of the Saxton House and the Education and Research Center, National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. provided a film for viewing by visitors. Initially, it was a film about First Ladies borrowed from the Smithsonian Institution. The present research did not identify how long that film was used or what became of it. The basement theater of the Education and Research Center was used after 2003 to present a film (whether the Smithsonian film or a different film) about First Ladies as well as other films such as the one used for the

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<sup>15</sup> Sherda Williams, oral history interview.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Gail Fahrney to Deborah Harvey, email, July 16, 2022.

<sup>19</sup> Gail Fahrney, oral history interview.

<sup>20</sup> Christopher Wilkinson, oral history interview.

Roosevelt-Earhart Dinner special event (detailed in Chapter Seven – Education and Community Outreach), and a film is still (2022) available there as well as in the Visitor Contact area of the Education and Research Center.

### *Exhibits*

According to Carl Anthony, once the Saxton House became the First Ladies National Historic Site, Mary Regula's vision for using the house blossomed into a plan for interpreting the entire house. At first, the house itself was the exhibit to be interpreted, but National First Ladies' Library, Inc. soon came to the realization that more specific exhibits should be provided in the Saxton House and in the Education and Research Center. Craig Schermer, locally renowned for his costumed interpretations of Florence Harding and other First Ladies, possessed an enormous collection of photographs of First Ladies. Mary Regula, aware of this collection, decided to use the third-floor ballroom as the place to interpret them by arraying photographs of each First Lady on the walls of the room and assembling rotating displays on specific First Ladies within the room using his collection as the basic component for the exhibits.<sup>21</sup> After the three-quarters-scale First Ladies inaugural ballgowns on mannequins by Evyan Perfume were donated to National First Ladies' Library, Inc., Mary Regula commissioned a craftsman to construct the enormous Victorian-style cabinets that house the replica inauguration dresses currently displayed at the Education and Research Center (Figure 35). Not all the cabinets are in use; some remain, empty, in the third-floor ballroom of the Saxton House as of this writing (2023).<sup>22</sup>



Figure 35: Replica First Ladies Inaugural Ballgowns in lobby of Education and Research Center at First Ladies National Historic Site, 2023. Photograph courtesy of Site Manager Megan Parde.

<sup>21</sup> Carl S. Anthony, oral history interview. See also Gail Fahrney, oral history interview.

<sup>22</sup> Carl S. Anthony, oral history interview.

The National First Ladies' Library, Inc.'s current archivist was hired in October 2005 to manage their growing collection. She also was responsible for assembling the various exhibits in both buildings. Most of the exhibits are static and do not change significantly from year to year except for those in the basement exhibit area of the Education and Research Center, which are changed every few months, the exhibits on the first floor of the Education and Research Center, and the rotating First Ladies exhibit in the third-floor ballroom of the Saxton House, which changes, perhaps, once a year. Few records that shed light on the exhibits in the Saxton House and the Education and Resource Center were located for this study.<sup>23</sup> For instance, National First Ladies' Library, Inc. Board of Directors meeting minutes from 2015 to 2018 include a report on the archives which, in 2016, announced the donation by Evyan Perfume of replica First Ladies' inaugural dresses, the resulting exhibit including a list of which First Lady each dress represented.<sup>24</sup> In its abbreviated annual work plan for FY 2012, National First Ladies' Library, Inc. described an exhibit on First Ladies from Ohio that was scheduled to run for a year.<sup>25</sup> Superintendent Sherda K. Williams recalled an exhibit during her tenure on First Lady Michelle Obama's garden, using the book she wrote on the subject in presentations to school children.<sup>26</sup>

### *Signage*

National First Ladies' Library, Inc. installed signage at the Saxton House, likely before it became part of the First Ladies NHS, and at the Education and Research Center before it opened in 2003. At least some of the early signage was still in place in 2023. Carol Spears stated in her interview that, during her tenure, the only signage NPS was able to place at the site was outdoors. NPS installed a standard site identification sign outside the Saxton House and a directional sign at the rear of the house as one approached from the parking lot on the west (Figures 36 and 37).<sup>27</sup> The National Park Service identity sign outside the Education and Research Center was not installed until 2020.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> National First Ladies' Library, Inc. staff who might have shed light on this topic declined to be interviewed for this report. What information there is in this report has been gleaned from newspaper accounts, Superintendent's reports, and the National First Ladies' Library, Inc. Annual Workplan submitted to the First Ladies NHS Superintendent Sherda Williams for review.

<sup>24</sup> "National First Ladies' Library Board of Director's Meeting, October 28, 2016."

<sup>25</sup> "Cooperative Agreement No. P12AC100314 between The United States Department of Interior National Park Service and National First Ladies' Library, Inc." Attachment D, n.d., n.p. In First Ladies NHS archives, Box 1; Folder: FILA Cooperative Agreement; Subfolder: P12AC100314, May 15, 2012, to May 15, 2017.

<sup>26</sup> Sherda K. Williams, oral history interview. Williams recalled that these exhibits were not to National Park Service standards, but she praised the NFLL exhibits, nevertheless, and said the archivist was "really competent" and knew how to create displays.

<sup>27</sup> Carol Spears, oral history interview.

<sup>28</sup> Chris Wilkinson, oral history interview.



Figure 36: National Park Service Site Identity Sign, 2003. Photograph courtesy of Site Manager Megan Parde.



Figure 37: National Park Service Directional Sign at Parking Lot Behind Saxton House, 2023. Photograph courtesy of Site Manager Megan Parde.

National First Ladies' Library, Inc. owns and curates all materials in its archives and collection housed at the Education and Research Center at First Ladies NHS. Until the 2019 cooperative agreement, these materials were under the complete control of National First Ladies' Library, Inc., and the National Park Service made no mention of their acquisition, care, or deployment in the first three cooperative agreements except to say that NPS and NFLL would cooperate regarding acquisition. All previous superintendents and site managers for Cuyahoga Valley NP or First Ladies NHS who were interviewed for this report agreed that no interaction of any kind occurred between the National Park Service and National First Ladies' Library, Inc. regarding the archives except for concerns about whether the HVAC system was sufficient to provide a controlled and stable environment for the collections and for the National First Ladies Library.<sup>29</sup>

*Long-Range Interpretive Plan (2017)*

Superintendent Sherda Williams observed "...there's a real opportunity to talk about the advocacy of First Ladies in issues that they've chosen to emphasize...when you think about their influence on the political scene of Washington or the politics of the time. ...there was a lot of opportunity to really look at the contributions and significance of...the unofficial office." However, she did not feel that National First Ladies' Library, Inc. fulfilled that potential in their interpretive program, which included the guided tours, the films, and the speakers program, although she felt they were stronger in some areas than in others. She deftly summed up National First Ladies' Library, Inc.'s interpretive and educational programs:

They had a great research library and a lot of information online, so they were serving that mission in that way. And then, I would say that their special events and their small exhibits that they did around the building – down in the basement [of the Education and Research Center], they had an exhibit area, and then, in The exhibit...in the bank lobby, they were presenting information on the different First Ladies and, to a certain extent, some of the efforts that they made, advocacy ...that they did over the years....<sup>30</sup>

Williams recalled that the interpretation, exhibits, and programs offered by National First Ladies' Library, Inc. were complimented by local visitors and that they were meeting the needs of that constituency, local people and school groups, very well.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> The NFLL's long-time archivist was not available for an oral history interview for this project, and few references to the organization's archives were located during the current research.

<sup>30</sup> Sherda K. Williams, oral history interview.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.



After Craig Kenkel and David Regula met in 2015 to discuss reorganization of the management structure for First Ladies NHS to incorporate more National Park Service operational strategies, the NPS Midwest Regional Office and the Harpers Ferry Center Interpretive Planning Division began work preparing a Long-Range Interpretive Plan (LRIP) for the site.<sup>32</sup> Fortunately for them, starting this process did not take as long as it might have because Superintendent Sherda Williams had already requested funding for it before she left First Ladies NHS and James A. Garfield NHS.<sup>33</sup> A Long-Range Interpretive Plan is intended to provide direction for interpretation of the site for three to five years after it is finalized by recommending future “interpretive services, facilities, and media,” outlining educational opportunities for visitors to the site to develop “emotional connections” to the cultural resources available and promoting the site’s resources through “specially planned visitor experiences and excellence in interpretation.” The *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* for First Ladies NHS, according to its introduction, was “developed in concert with the site Annual Implementation Plan and Interpretive Database” and “completes the Comprehensive Interpretive Plan for the site as established in Director’s Orders 6.”<sup>34</sup>

The planning process kicked off within a year of Craig Kenkel becoming superintendent of Cuyahoga Valley National Park and shortly after he was also assigned superintendency of James A. Garfield NHS and First Ladies NHS. The planning team consisted of Cuyahoga Valley NP Chief of Interpretation, Education, and Visitor Services Jennifer Vasarhelyi, National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. Executive Director Patricia Krider, and two interpretive planners from NPS Harpers Ferry Center, Wyndeth Davis and Toni Dufficy.<sup>35</sup> Workshop attendees included National Park Service staff, National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. staff and volunteers, and community representatives. Planning workshops were held in August and December 2015 and in April 2016. The objectives of these workshops were to identify interpretive themes and visitor experience goals for the site and make recommendations for interpretive services and outreach actions to communicate those themes and goals and the significance of the site to the public.<sup>36</sup>

The *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* drew on a planning document begun at approximately the same time but finished earlier, the *Foundation Document Overview: First Ladies National Historic Site, Ohio*. Foundation Documents had been introduced as management guidelines for units of the National Park Service to replace General Management Plans. General Management plans were intended to guide management of a unit for the first fifteen to twenty years. The First Ladies NHS General Management Plan was completed in 2006, but Superintendent Kenkel’s plans for changes to the management strategy through revisions to the cooperative agreement

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<sup>32</sup> National Park Service, *Long-Range Interpretive Plan: First Ladies National Historical Site*, Department of the Interior, National Park Service: 2017, 3. In Cuyahoga Valley National Park digital archives.

<sup>33</sup> Sherda K. Williams, oral history interview. See also Jennifer Vasarhelyi, oral history interview.

<sup>34</sup> National Park Service, *Long-Range Interpretive Plan: First Ladies National Historical Site*, 3. Director’s Order #6 provides operational guidelines for the National Park Service’s Interpretation and Education programs.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

with National First Ladies' Library, Inc. indicated that a new management document should be produced. However, after consultation between Cuyahoga Valley National Park leadership staff and the Midwest Regional planning staff, the determination was to provide first a Foundation Overview instead of a full-fledged Foundation document "based on partner relations, park leadership, and other park priorities at the time." Regional Community Planner Sharon Miles led the planning team, and "Wendy Davis from Harper's Ferry Center" led the interpretation efforts. The team worked through 2015, finalizing their deliberations on December 9, 2015, and the final, four-page, *Foundation Overview* document was published in January 2016.<sup>37</sup> A full Foundation Document for First Ladies NHS has not yet (2023) been completed.

In the final report, the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* first iterated the three main items of site significance as identified in the 2016 *Foundation Document Overview: First Ladies National Historic Site, Ohio*: that First Ladies NHS was "the only place in the world dedicated to providing accurate, non-partisan information about...the First Ladies of the United States;" maintained the most comprehensive bibliography (although the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* specified electronic bibliography) of material about First Ladies in the nation; and is located in the only remaining private dwelling associated with First Lady Ida Saxton McKinley and her husband, President William McKinley.<sup>38</sup> It also reviewed the four interpretive themes established for the site in the *Foundation Document Overview*: the role of First Ladies, which has changed over time, reflecting the eras in which they served; the impact First Ladies have had on the "political and social history" of the United States; the interplay between the personal, private lives of First Ladies and their public roles; and the differences in family life among First Ladies, their husbands, children, parents, siblings, and other relatives over the centuries.<sup>39</sup>

To support these interpretive themes, the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* identified fifteen separate management goals for First Ladies NHS. They are summarized as: presenting a unified experience to visitors by establishing a "First Ladies NHS brand" and developing a marketing strategy around it; recruiting and training staff and volunteers to present a comprehensive and consistent interpretation of the site that includes all visitors, regardless of abilities; establishing connections to community civic leaders and philanthropic organizations to "reinforce the site's value" to the community and encourage investment in it; engaging children and young adults by improving the educational programming and providing programs that will interest community members of all age groups and "those living in diverse local communities;" finding innovative ways to include new technologies in the interpretive media; improving the physical accessibility

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<sup>37</sup> Associate Regional Director Facilities, Planning, and Infrastructure Tokey Boswell to Supervisory Program Manager for Interpretation, Education, and Visitor Services Jennifer Vasarhelyi, email, November 24, 2021.

<sup>38</sup> National Park Service, *Long-Range Interpretive Plan: First Ladies National Historical Site*, 6. Although the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* specified an electronic bibliography, it is, apparently, the most comprehensive bibliography of any kind, electronic or otherwise. However, the assertion that First Ladies NHS is the only place in the world dedicated to providing information on First Ladies is out of date. See Introduction to this Administrative History for further information. See also National Park Service, *Foundation Document Overview: First Ladies National Historic Site, Ohio*, National Park Service, Department of the Interior, January 2016, n.p.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.



of the site as well as the accessibility of the programs, including completion of “significant building infrastructure upgrades to create accessible, flexible program spaces; and emphasizing the experiences of Ida Saxton McKinley in her years as wife of William McKinley.”<sup>40</sup>

The *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* elucidated a number of visitor experience goals aimed at defining in what ways a visitor to the site could experience it, understand it, and connect with it. Crucially, potential visitors to the site would be able, according to the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan*, to easily access enough online information about the site to successfully plan a visit to it. Visitors would have the opportunity to meet docents dressed in period costumes representing First Ladies, the opportunity to post their photographs and comments on social media, and the opportunity to purchase educational and souvenir material to memorialize their visit. It was also planned that, at First Ladies NHS, visitors would be given information on other attractions in the Canton area, such as the William McKinley Presidential Library and Museum and the Pro Football Hall of Fame, both specifically mentioned, and, likely, some attractions further afield, such as the James A. Garfield NHS and Cuyahoga Valley National Park. Through First Ladies NHS, visitors would also be able to learn about other sites, such as other National Park Service sites and the Library of Congress, where information about other First Ladies is to be found. The *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* anticipated that visitors to First Ladies NHS would be able to view an informative film about First Ladies, use interactive media and original artifacts to learn about each of the First Ladies individually and all of them collectively, attend programs and special events about First Ladies, and take guided or self-guided tours of the Saxton House and the immediate neighborhood (by walking, biking, or automobile). During these activities, the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* expected that visitors would be able to move around the site easily and safely, with minimal assistance, regardless of physical impediments and would meet with friendly, knowledgeable staff and docents who would help visitors understand the significance of each First Lady, “the context of her personal history,” and the significance of the site in which they encountered this information.<sup>41</sup> These expectations were all listed in the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* as “Desired Visitor Experiences,” so these were the visitor experience goals for which the LRIP was aiming. Later in the document, specific goals for each were described.

Discussing the audiences that the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* anticipated First Ladies NHS would reach, the LRIP noted that the site did not have a formal method for tracking visitation, and suggested staff at the site develop a means of doing this. The *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* anecdotally described the typical visitors as being females, forty years old or older, and families on summer vacations. Although group tours visited, their experience was limited by the structure of the guided tours because larger groups must be split into smaller groups, which then must be timed and orchestrated to avoid bottleneck points within the Saxton House. As a result, large groups often only tour the exhibits in the Education and Research

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 9-10.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 11-12.

Center where there are fewer restrictions due to group size. For this same reason, school groups, also, were rarely afforded a tour of the Saxton House and were confined to interpretation at the Education and Research Center and the grounds, according to the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan*. After describing the ways in which various groups differ, therefore requiring different approaches to interpretation, the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* provided recommendations for tailoring interpretive presentations for groups of diverse backgrounds, experience, educational levels, and interests, specifically, educational groups, multi-generational families, local visitors, virtual audiences, youth, young adults, and general visitors to Canton (not necessarily for the purpose of visiting First Ladies NHS).<sup>42</sup>

After providing these recommendations, the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* identified and discussed some of the challenges to implementing them at First Ladies NHS. Notable was a lack of infrastructure to handle some types of technology, which would impact the ability to tell the stories of First Ladies using the newer technology. This included technology to enable outreach from First Ladies NHS to schools and groups that, due to distance or budget, could not come physically to the site. The *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* also explained that the site needed additional partners to successfully implement the interpretive recommendations, and that the existing partner, National First Ladies' Library, Inc. needed to be "strengthened and maintained." Targeting perhaps the most persistent problem facing the site, the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan*, while allowing that National First Ladies' Library, Inc. and the National Park Service "may work together, there is a consistent lack of collaboration, coordination, and connection between all of the sites designated within the site boundary." For instance, the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* described that there was "no comprehensive wayfinding system linking the sites together." In addition to lack of National Park Service "branded" interpretive media such as films, wayside exhibits, signage, and interpretive media, the site itself does not meet NPS standards for universal access. The *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* also noted "limited engagement between First Ladies NHS and the First Ladies themselves, as well as their families and descendants" and suggested formalizing relationships between living former and present First Ladies, descendants of First Ladies who have died, presidential libraries, and other presidential sites to strengthen the connection between First Ladies and the site which honors them. Recognizing that the amount of time visitors may have to spend visiting a site as well as the amount of funding available to maintain such a site and present it in a comprehensive way to visitors have both decreased over the years, the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* suggested exploring other options for presenting the site, such as consolidating events and activities to reduce the amount of time required to attend and staff them or initiating a fee requirement for other events or activities to keep them operational.<sup>43</sup>

In describing the site in 2016, the second year the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* was in development, the LRIP observed that "visitor flow is challenging," because the two buildings

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 13-14.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 15-16.

owned by the National Park Service are located on either end of two adjacent city blocks, separated by a small park and a surface parking lot owned by National First Ladies' Library, Inc., a city street, and a four-story parking deck not affiliated with either NPS or NFLL. The Saxton House is visible from the surface parking lot, but the view of the Education and Research Center from the parking lot is blocked by the parking deck. Therefore, although the interpretive experience is intended to begin at the Education and Research Center with an introductory film, the opportunity to purchase tickets for a scheduled tour of the Saxton House, and some exhibits, the tendency is for visitors to try to start at the Saxton House because they can see it from the surface parking lot. In addition, because of traffic on the street, which is controlled by an electric traffic signal, and traffic in and out of the parking deck, which is controlled by the electronic entry and exit gates of the deck at street level, visitors may not feel particularly safe attempting to move from the surface parking lot or the Saxton House to the Education and Research Center. The *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* recommended evaluating the feasibility of changing the "arrival experience" to begin at the surface parking lot, the adjacent garden, or the Saxton House instead of at the Education and Research Center.<sup>44</sup>

Of the Education and Research Center, the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* noted that an open stairway and a "slow" elevator provide unfettered access by visitors to all floors, including those reserved for National First Ladies' Library, Inc. and National Park Service offices, with no means of restricting access to those floors that are not open to the public. Only one wheelchair lift, located in an alleyway between the Education and Research Center and the parking deck to the south, provided accessible entrance from the exterior. Additionally, the ninety-eight-seat theater used "home-theater type-equipment" and the lighting, which was difficult to operate, was also inadequate for filming programs and events held in the theater. In the theater, "the seating, lighting, and audio-visual equipment are not arranged to provide flexible program or meeting space," but the third-floor conference room, which was sometimes used for programs, was "also not organized into a flexible meeting space." Although the Education and Research Center is intended to be, and is partially set up as, a library and research center, the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* noted that the online library resources were accessed much more frequently than the physical research facilities. The *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* projected that some spaces in the building would have to be modified to restrict public access to the upper floors of the building and to provide universal access to the lower floors and that the furniture and equipment, including lighting, would have to be upgraded to expand the program and exhibit spaces for maximal use.<sup>45</sup>

The *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* cited the lack of opportunity for self-guided tours for visitors unable to participate in the scheduled tours, which was partly a function of the lack of wayfinding signage in the landscape and National Park Service "branding" at the site in general.

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 17-18.

Former National First Ladies' Library, Inc. bookkeeper Gail Fahrney concurred with this assessment. She said,

I [walked] between the two buildings a lot, and I would always run into people in the parking lot. And they were, like, really confused as to where they were. Signs are always confusing. No matter who puts them up, they're all confusing. So, I was always directing people....<sup>46</sup>

According to the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan*, visitors found this confusing and frustrating due to not understanding the connection between the National First Ladies' Library, Inc. costumed docents who conducted the guided tours and the National Park Service uniformed park rangers whom visitors were expecting to encounter at the site.<sup>47</sup>

When the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* was written in 2016, the National First Ladies' Library, Inc. gift shop was still located on the second floor of the Saxton House and was opened for anyone who just wanted to shop and did not purchase a ticket for a scheduled tour. Due to its location, tour tickets could not be sold at the gift shop, and the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* found that the presence of shoppers not on the guided tours was disruptive and confusing to those taking the guided tours and to those conducting them. The gift shop location presented a security problem, as well, because, although the doors to the Saxton House were locked until just before a guided tour began, visitors wanting only to shop could press an intercom button near the entry door, state their name and purpose, and be admitted remotely to the building by gift shop staff on the second floor. This left visitors not accompanied by a tour guide walking around unattended and unsupervised inside the building. The *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* also described the types of materials sold at the gift shop as "books, logo items, NPS-branded items, Victoriana, and First Lady ornaments," but observed that the merchandise had, over the years, moved away from the mission of the site to educate visitors about the First Ladies.<sup>48</sup>

The *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* compared the two websites operating for First Ladies NHS, saying that the National Park Service website offered only minimal information about the site and directed visitors to the National First Ladies' Library Inc. website, which "offered a wealth of information...." However, the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* observed that visitors to the National Park Service website have complained about the lack of information at the NPS website even though they had been directed to the National First Ladies' Library, Inc. website, because they expected to get more information from the NPS website. Reliance on the National First Ladies' Library, Inc. website for information about an NPS site did not meet prospective visitors' expectations for what information they should be able to get from the National Park Service.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Gail Fahrney, oral history interview.

<sup>47</sup> National Park Service, *Long-Range Interpretive Plan: First Ladies National Historical Site*, 18-19.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

The LRIP noted that First Ladies NHS did have a standard unigrid brochure, described in Chapter Seven: Education and Community Outreach, and also that a planned project to install additional wayside exhibits on the landscape of First Ladies NHS had been placed on hold pending completion of the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan*. With reference to the museum exhibits displayed in the buildings under the charge of National First Ladies' Library, Inc. staff, the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* revealed that, until recently, the exhibits featured five to nine First Ladies in depth, not counting the pictures arrayed on the walls of the third-floor ballroom in the Saxton House. In 2016, although the stories of more First Ladies had been added, "the exhibit lack[s] a comprehensive interpretation of all First Ladies and does not address all interpretive themes." The lack of a site-specific educational film was also noted, though the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* explained that each exhibit included a fifteen-minute video "that visitors are encouraged to watch if they have time." In addition, the National First Ladies' Library, Inc. has a Facebook page and an Instagram account.<sup>50</sup>

The *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* addressed the personal services afforded visitors to First Ladies NHS in 2016 by the National First Ladies' Library, Inc. volunteer docents and the National Park Service summer interns, noting that "a variety of year-round, fee-based programing is offered including bus tours and living history programs," although lectures and book-signings were usually offered free of charge. That the guided tours were "sometimes" presented by costumed docents in period dress indicates that the NPS-uniformed summer intern park rangers were also participating in offering guided tours by this time rather than only populating the Visitor Contact Center station in the Education and Research Center to sell tickets and give directions as they had been doing since Carol Spears and Sherda Williams first assigned them duties at First Ladies NHS.<sup>51</sup> The *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* explained that, although up to fifty people can be accommodated in tours of the Education and Research Center, only ten people could be allowed on each tour of the Saxton House due to the small size of the rooms and the single elevator transporting tours between the first, second, and third floors. Even offering five or more tours per day meant that fewer than seventy-five people could tour the Saxton House in a day, eliminating tours completely for large groups. According to the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan*, the tours of the Saxton House focused on the life of Ida Saxton McKinley and her family rather than on all of the First Ladies. Respondents interviewed for this Administrative History concurred that this was the case, sometimes deliberately so. In the opinion of the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* team, a disconnect between the various period costumes of the docents and the Victorian home and lifestyle they were interpreting caused confusion among visitors, though this assertion was disputed by one of the National First Ladies' Library, Inc. staff who was interviewed for this Administrative History. According to Gail Farney, people visited the site especially to see the costumed docents. She said,

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 18-19.

<sup>51</sup> That this was happening was verified by Site Manager Christopher Wilkinson in his oral history interview for this report.

I know there was some concern about Martha Washington taking somebody through Ida's house, but people did like it. They did. It did not confuse the visitors, in my opinion, but that was a...concern and, maybe, rightfully so....<sup>52</sup>

No documentary evidence for either assertion was located for this report. The *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* also suggested that "three different living history programs" were labor intensive and unsustainable in the long term because the costumed docents were drawn from a labor pool of volunteers who could not always be available when called.<sup>53</sup>

Besides conducting the guided tours, the other two living history programs discussed by the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* were the fee-free programs offered to schools and held in the basement theater or in the third-floor conference room of the Education and Research Center and the speakers program offered to community organizations by request either at First Ladies NHS or in the location of the community-based organization's choosing. The *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* noted that providing programs to community organizations was "not actively pursued." Due to the sizes of these groups, especially the school groups, tours of the Saxton House were rarely part of the program offering. National First Ladies' Library, Inc. did have some programs for school children in third through fifth grades. Although few classroom programs were presented, the offered programs were constructed by educational professionals and met the state and national standards for education. In addition, curriculum guides for elementary, middle school, and high school grades addressing each First Lady were available free of charge through the National First Ladies' Library, Inc. website.<sup>54</sup>

The *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* discussed staffing in 2016, saying that the National First Ladies' Library, Inc. staff operates and manages the Saxton House and the Education and Research Center, relying heavily on their volunteer docents and on the National Park Service summer intern staff "to provide tours and support the operation." In 2016, docents were trained to give tours only in one location or the other, which limited staff scheduling flexibility. In the opinion of the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan*, "An evaluation of the existing program and more training is needed. The docent appreciation program is very generous and also very expensive."<sup>55</sup> According to the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan*, the paid staff felt overworked and "unable to meet all the demands of the site. This staff expressed concern about staffing gaps such as a paid historian, "the size and make-up of the visitor services team, and digital interpretation through social media." The *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* did not elucidate what the specific concerns in these areas were.<sup>56</sup>

Until 2015, the only partners with the National Park Service in managing First Ladies NHS was National First Ladies' Library, Inc. In 2016, the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan*

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<sup>52</sup> Gail Fahrney, oral history interview.

<sup>53</sup> National Park Service, *Long-Range Interpretive Plan: First Ladies National Historical Site*, 19.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

reported that another active partner, Visit Canton (formerly the Stark County Convention and Visitors Bureau) had been added. It also listed potential future partners, explaining that partnerships would be the backbone of the implementation of the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan*, as well as other activities associated with management and promotion of First Ladies NHS.<sup>57</sup>

Following this extensive discussion of the issues, problems, and impediments facing First Ladies NHS in fulfilling its mission, the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* offered six recommendations for remedying the situation, framed as Goals for Interpretation. The first was to address “physical and programmatic accessibility” in all interpretation. The second was to use, whenever possible, reproduced objects, documented personal stories, and other methods of interpretation to “bring the story alive for visitors.” The third recommendation was to partner with local institutions to develop programs and media and to share research findings and opportunities. The fourth was to participate in the National Park Service “branding” program, to “follow the standards of the National Park Service Graphic Identity Program” whenever signage and other interpretive media are upgraded. The fifth recommendation was to diversify, including “examples and perspectives from diverse points of view,” responding to diverse audiences with varying levels of interests. The last recommendation was to upgrade available technology to afford “virtual visitors” opportunities to see key park views and vistas and “access new research, studies, management plans, and historical information.”<sup>58</sup>

After providing general goals for interpretive management, the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* offered specific goals for each of the fifteen interpretation goals, discussed earlier in this section, to be implemented and maintained for the next three to five years from completion of the plan (2017 to 2020-2022). To “Present First Ladies NHS as a Unified, Single Destination and Visitor Experience,” the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* envisioned creation of a site plan designed to improve visitor flow through the site, with logical considerations for parking and reduction of “choke points” within the buildings and creation of an operational plan to define how visitors would experience the site, determine where arrival, orientation, interpretation, education, and other visitor services would occur and who would provide these services, as well as initiating a self-guided option for experiencing the site instead of relying only on scheduled tours. To “Improve the Arrival and Orientation Experience,” the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* recommended creating a new, interactive National Park Service website for the site using the information from the two competing websites to provide information to trip planners as well as “virtual visitors” who might never set foot on First Ladies NHS soil. It allowed that creation and maintenance of such a website would require an initially heavy commitment in human resources as well as an ongoing commitment for keeping the website current, especially since it proposed that the website contain links to new scholarship, publications, maps, images, and the like. The new National Park Service website as proposed by the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* would “prevent duplication of effort,” though the LRIP did not suggest that National First Ladies’

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 21.

Library, Inc. should abandon theirs. The plan suggested that the National Park Service link First Ladies NHS websites to other sites such as Trip Advisor and Yelp to give visitors an opportunity to rate their experiences with the site. Also included under “Improve the Arrival and Orientation Experience” was a discussion regarding establishing a seamless, NPS-branded system of signage to enable visitors to more easily locate First Ladies NHS in downtown Canton, Ohio, after first conducting an assessment of the existing wayfinding system. Proposed were a new map with site locations identified, detailed directional signage, outdoor exhibits, and bulletin boards with the suggestion that the local arts community might produce “murals or other artistic works” to integrated into the wayfinding system.<sup>59</sup>

Under “Establish a First Ladies NHS Brand and Develop a Marketing Strategy,” the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* advocated establishing marketing partnerships to develop and implement a marketing campaign to promote First Ladies NHS. The apparent first step was creation of a marketing plan. The *Long Range Interpretive Plan* emphasized that such a marketing strategy should “have a clear vision, identify measurable results, emphasize the site brand, integrate opportunities for feedback, and describe specific procedures and policies.” Much of this proposal involved placement of marketing materials such as rack cards, postcards, and temporary exhibits in local hotels and other attractions, providing short promotional videos to local cable television channels, and continuing to offer familiarization tours to travel agents and bus tour operators. Recommendations to “Develop New and Maintain Existing Interpretive and Educational Partnerships to Achieve Mutual Goals” followed from development of a marketing strategy with partners by identifying the core partner, National First Ladies’ Library, Inc., and potential interpretive and educational partners and urged First Ladies NHS staff to strengthen and maintain existing partnerships and pursue new ones with other attractions and local organizations based on mutual interests, complementary abilities, and similar needs. To “Expand and Improve the Cadre of Volunteers/Docents and Interns to Support the Site Mission and Goals, the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* observed that a “cohesive, consistent volunteer group is required” and could be built upon the successful volunteer docent program funded and run by National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. The *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* suggested that the program be expanded through contacts and partnerships with other groups, through a bulletin board or newsletter to include site needs for volunteers, and through establishment of a skills database to match skills and interests of volunteers with needs of First Ladies NHS, and that some thought be given to deploying the costumed docents to additional duties such as parking lot attendant, research assistant, or outdoor roving or stationary interpreters to give visitors more context on the landscape and surroundings of First Ladies NHS. The *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* noted that National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. had a Volunteer Coordinator on staff who could be helpful in organizing the expansion of this service.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 22-23.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 23-25.



To “Effectively Reach and Engage Youth and Young Adults to Cultivate the Next Generation of Stewards and Friends,” the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* noted that the majority of youth programming at First Ladies NHS centered around the junior ranger program and suggested expanding the pool of influence by partnering with youth-oriented organizations such as the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Boys and Girls Clubs and Teen Board to provide their members with opportunities for education and service. In addition, partnering with local libraries could provide costumed docents opportunities to read age-appropriate books to children while in costume or to lead book club discussions. Also suggested was offering free admission days to encourage families with children to visit. Under “Establish Site Programming and Engagement Opportunities for Neighbors and Local Communities,” the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* noted that “offering activities specifically designed for the local and surrounding communities is an opportunity to create goodwill with site neighbors and local residents.” Suggested were continuation of the “local discount,” presentation of “Night at the Site” events, and site staff participation in downtown area events as avenues for connecting with the local neighbors and community.

A section of the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* entitled “Identify Innovative Ways to Integrate Interpretive Media and Technology into the Visitor Experience” discussed deployment of wayfinding signs, outdoor interpretive exhibits, indoor museum exhibits, and digital media to address the needs of First Ladies NHS in educating its visitors about First Ladies. This section urged the completion of a wayfinding plan and an outdoor interpretive media (wayside exhibits) plan at the earliest possible convenience to mitigate the difficulties visitors encounter finding their way to and around the site. The section recommended placing temporary museum exhibits in locations such as local libraries or “nearby partner venue,” as well as development of a cell phone app to aid visitors and potential visitors in understanding the purpose of First Ladies NHS and what it has to offer them. A short guideline for exhibits was included in the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan*, and the plan suggested it would be imperative to include former First Ladies and their families and descendants in planning these exhibits, if possible, to ensure accuracy of information. Use of digital and social media platforms to disseminate information about First Ladies was also discussed in this section, with the caveat that this interpretive strategy would require staff time to create and manage. Under “Strengthen Existing Education Program, the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* did not provide particular recommendations other than initiating web-based distance learning options and admitted that, although this goal is important, it, too, will require a staff commitment.<sup>61</sup>

In “Diversify and Strengthen Programs and Services to Provide a Comprehensive Interpretation of All First Ladies,” the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* iterated its suggestion that First Ladies NHS staff establish interactive relationships with former First Ladies and their relatives and descendants for better interpretation and new perspectives as well as greater credibility and relevance. It should be remembered that First Lady Hillary Clinton was

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 25-27.

instrumental in helping Mary Regula launch the National First Ladies' Library that became First Ladies NHS through her contacts and influence. The *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* also encouraged staff of First Ladies NHS and National First Ladies' Library, Inc. to think outside the box, beyond the traditional venues and platforms for presenting historical information and beyond the normal means of presenting it by enlisting the help of local artists to create murals and outside works of art related to First Ladies, giving presentations about First Ladies in parking lots and along city streets to better engage the public where they are, and working with local garden clubs or theater groups to invent different ways of presenting information about the lives of First Ladies. Also encouraged was the use of more interactive media such as "traveling trunks" and "sticky boards" to engender conversations between visitors and staff or just among visitors and to give visitors the opportunity to provide feedback. Since Mary Regula stopped holding special events on Ida Saxton's birthday, the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* stated that few commemorative events have been held at the site and suggested that deficiency should be remedied. It also suggested that the National First Ladies' Library, Inc.'s speakers program be strengthened, which could promote First Ladies NHS to the greater national community. In "Emphasize the Experiences of Ida Saxton McKinley, the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* suggested interpretation place more emphasis on Ida Saxton McKinley because, it explained, her life addressed the main interpretive themes at First Ladies NHS: the individual role and the collective role of First Ladies in American life, the impact First Ladies have had on politics and policy, the tension between their private lives and their public lives, and the role of the family in their lives. The *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* suggested interpretive staff find ways to convey to visitors how Ida McKinley's life changed once her husband became President of the United States and use the period costume interpretive program already in place at the site to convey the experience of being First Lady.<sup>62</sup>

In the section entitled "Improve and Increase Physical and Programmatic Accessibility," the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* advocated making the buildings and associated sites fully accessible to visitors as a long-term goal for the site and suggested the use of portable devices to "allow all visitors access to content" in museum and outdoor exhibits and programs, including the "visual and auditory elements." The *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* urged that "Universal design principles should be embraced, and programmatic accessibility requirements should be applied to future digital media, websites, and social media." This recommendation was expanded in another section of the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan*, "Complete Significant Building Infrastructure Upgrades to Create Accessible, Flexible Program Spaces," which noted that the buildings have "numerous infrastructure issues that limit and severely restrict NFLL and NPS from implementing many of these recommendations," and advocated that those issues be resolved and new, state-of-the-art portable furniture and audio-visual equipment for the basement theater and third-floor conference room be installed to create more effective event spaces. The *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* also advocated for "Strengthen[ing] the Relationship and

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 27-28.

Interpretive Connections Between the NPS and NFLL” by having the National Park Service provide opportunities for the two to work and train together through annual or quarterly meetings and training sessions. Finally, the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* recommended that the National Park Service and National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. “Identify Research Needs, Establish Priorities, and Conduct Studies that will aid Staff and Partners in Accomplishing the Actions Outlined in this LRIP” to “provide insights and guide the development of future programs and services.”<sup>63</sup> The “Implementation Plan” for the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* was, essentially, a bullet-point list of actions to take to effectuate the recommendations just described. The document ended with several appendices: a list of planning team participants; guidelines for accessibility; and an interpretive theme matrix which presented the programmatic recommendations in chart form.

According to Jennifer Vasarhelyi, who was on the original team that crafted the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* (Figure 38), the consultations among the workshop attendees and team members creating the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* was “positive and collaborative,” and “the results were based on a shared understanding of the needed direction to improve interpretation and the visitor experience.”<sup>64</sup> The *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* was completed and signed in 2017. How has it fared in the intervening five years (2017 through 2022)? National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. and the National Park Service, represented by Vasarhelyi, have struggled over the meaning of some of the recommendations and especially over who is responsible for implementing them. However, progress has been made. For instance, staff from First Ladies NHS has begun to do more community networking by setting up a National Park Service booth at community-sponsored events such as a farmers’ market newly established in downtown Canton not far from the NPS site and at monthly First Friday events held in late spring, summer, and early fall. According to Site Manager Chris Wilkinson, First Ladies NHS staff has “made hundreds of contacts” this way. Although First Ladies NHS internet technology is maintained by IT technicians from Cuyahoga Valley, the park maintained its own website and social media presence in 2021 thanks to the talents of Park Ranger Rebekah Knaggs, who, according to Wilkinson, has improved accessibility on the First Ladies NHS sites, which, in turn, has increased the number of site “hits,” monitored on a monthly basis. Wilkinson reported



Figure 38: Jennifer Vasarhelyi, Cuyahoga Valley National Park Chief of Interpretation, Education, and Visitor Service, 2001. Photograph by Deborah Harvey.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 24, 28-29.

<sup>64</sup> Jennifer Vasarhelyi, comments on first draft of *A Place for the Ladies*, n.p.

in 2021, for instance, that the number of followers of the site's Instagram account had more than doubled since he became site manager in 2019.<sup>65</sup>

By 2021, the gift shop location on the second floor of the Saxton House had been moved to the Visitor Contact Station in the lobby of the Education and Research Center and the inventory has been temporarily reduced by eliminating non-mission-related or obsolete offerings. This reduced the financial drain on National First Ladies' Library, Inc. to keep the inventory current as well as the drain on personnel resources to staff the gift shop as it is now operated by the uniformed National Park Service staff at the Visitor Contact Station (Figure 39). The move also improves security at the Saxton House by eliminating the random shoppers roaming about the premises and getting in the way of scheduled tours. In addition, some wayfinding signage has been installed. During his interview for this Administrative History, Chris Wilkinson offered that the large National Park Service identity sign at the corner of Market Avenue SE and Third Street was installed in 2020, twenty years after First Ladies NHS was established as a unit of the National Park System.<sup>66</sup> However, identity signage for the buildings themselves seems to have remained the same. Identity signage in front of the Saxton House is still the National First Ladies' Library, Inc. signage, as is the bronze sign at the entrance to the Education and Research Center (Figures 40 and 41).



Figure 39: Visitor Contact Area in Lobby of Education and Research Center at First Ladies National Historic Site, 2023. Photograph courtesy of Site Manager Megan Parde.

<sup>65</sup> Christopher Wilkinson, oral history Interview.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.





Figure 40: Non-standard National First Ladies' Library, Inc. Site Identity Sign, 2023. Photograph courtesy of Site Manager Megan Parde.



Figure 41: National First Ladies' Library sign at Education and Research Center, 2023. Photograph courtesy of Site Manager Magan Parde.

Some recommendations of the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* have not worked out as envisioned. For instance, although the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* anticipated that the scheduled guided tours would be managed by the National First Ladies' Library, Inc. Volunteer Coordinator, the person in that position left the site in April 2021, and the position was not backfilled. By that time, the National Park Service had already become wholly responsible for conducting tours of the Saxton House and the Education and Research Center as well as for staffing the desk of the Visitor Contact Center.<sup>67</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021 facilitated this change because the site was closed to visitors for approximately a year beginning in early 2020. The National First Ladies' Library, Inc. docents, therefore, did not come to the site, and, although the site has reopened, their return is not currently anticipated.<sup>68</sup> Nevertheless, in 2021, First Ladies NHS staff, led by Park Ranger Lisa Meade, put together their first training program.<sup>69</sup> Designed to train incoming National Park Service staff, it contains basic information on the National Park Service, how the site is managed, the background history of the site, and how to interpret it. Also in 2021, Site Manager Chris Wilkinson and Park Ranger Lisa Meade began periodic audits of the tours to ensure they were being conducted according to plan. Due to the health concerns about COVID-19, the National Park Service reduced the number of people on each guided tour, reduced the number of tours per day to three, and revised the route of the tour to reduce the amount of time visitors spent in close proximity to one another in small spaces such as doorways, hallways, small rooms, or elevators. According to Wilkinson, when the

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. See also Gail Fahrney oral history interview.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

National Park Service first started conducting the tours, they only included the first floor of the Saxton House. By October 2021, the park rangers conducting tours were beginning to also include the second and third floors of the Saxton House as National First Ladies' Library, Inc. costumed docents had originally done. This change was made possible because the National Park Service initiated a mandatory mask requirement for all tour participants. Site Manager Chris Wilkinson also changed the operating schedule, reducing the number of days the site was open from six days per week, Tuesday through Sunday, to four days per week, Wednesday through Saturday, which is still (2023) the non-standard operating schedule for a National Park Service site.<sup>70</sup>

Other recommendations and suggestions from the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* are still under discussion. For instance, the recommendation to allow self-guided tours of the Saxton House and the Education and Research Center was not well-received or implemented by Site Manager Chris Wilkinson during his tenure. In his view, self-guided tours would require as much staff as the scheduled tours because “you would need just as many people up there [in the Saxton House] to guard everything” against theft or vandalism.<sup>71</sup> Some of the recommendations involve very long-term issues. What to do with the Education and Research Center building is one such issue. It is essentially a two-block walk from the Saxton House and out of view of visitor parking, which is one block south of it. Because visitor parking is within view of the Saxton House but not the Education and Research Center, managing visitor flow is difficult because visitors, after parking, tend to gravitate toward the Saxton House first and must be told to go to the Education and Research Center for tickets to tour the Saxton House. This complicated process makes problematic using the Education and Research Center as a Visitor Contact Center for the site. In addition, it is not sufficiently climate-controlled to be an appropriate place to house the collections, especially the papers.<sup>72</sup> Cuyahoga Valley National Park Chief of Interpretation Jennifer Vasarhelyi explained that the funds designated for creating the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* had not been fully expended when it was completed. Using the unspent funds, the team went on to produce a *Long-Range Interpretive Plan, Phase II* because *Phase I* revealed to the participants that “the site has serious facility issues. It had wayfinding issues. It had flow issues. And we wanted to start visioning around that.”<sup>73</sup> In Vasarhelyi's view, the first *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* was a successful effort to start a dialog about interpretation with National First Ladies' Library, Inc. She said,

I do feel like this was a kernel of...if we brought together the skill sets of both organizations, it could look differently. We could leverage the two organizations' capacity, not just one. ....I think the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* was a stimulus that helped people start to get their minds around the possibilit[ies]. .... I really do think I was seeing positive energy and a belief that the site had a lot of unmet

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Jennifer Vasarhelyi, oral history interview.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

potential, and we could meet it better together. ....my opinion of the plan is it, in itself, was a tweaking, not any kind of wholesale change...and that the value of it wasn't so much the outcome of the plan, but the fact that it got both organizations sitting, talking, thinking about the world differently.<sup>74</sup>

*The Design Minds, Inc. Interpretive Planning Report*

As a result of the first *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* and the discovery of a need for a Phase 2 *Long-Range Interpretive Plan*, National First Ladies' Library, Inc., with funds from the National Park Service, contracted with The Design Minds, Inc. from Fairfax, Virginia, to provide concept planning for integrating exhibits into the facilities at First Ladies NHS. The Design Mind's remit, upon beginning work in the spring of 2018, was "to provide interpretive planning services to develop a 'Visitor Experience Plan' that includes recommendations for space allocation and interpretive media" at the Saxton House, the Education and Research Center, and "outdoor spaces."<sup>75</sup> The final report was due in December 2018.<sup>76</sup>

The Design Minds, Inc. conducted a "Visitor Experience Charette" on June 20-21, 2018 in the third floor conference room of the Education and Research Center. In attendance were Design Minds, Inc. principal and interpretive planner Michael Lesperance with staff members, Associate Exhibit Designer Stephen LaBar and Senior Content Developer and Project Manager Jeremy King, National Park Service Midwest Regional Office Chief of Interpretation Tom Richter, Cuyahoga Valley National Park Superintendent Craig Kenkel, Cuyahoga Valley National Park Chief of Interpretation Jennifer Vasarhelyi, National First Ladies' Library, Inc. President and Chief Executive Officer Jennifer Highfield, National First Ladies' Library, Inc. Curator Michelle Gullion, and Visit Canton Executive Director Allyson Bussey, a new partner for First Ladies NHS. This group comprised the core team for planning. Also in attendance were National First Ladies' Library, Inc. Director of Operations Patricia Krider, the NFLL volunteer coordinator, an NFLL board member, the City of Canton director of planning, the vice president for community outreach of the Stark County District Library, and the executive director of ArtsinStark. After introductions and reviews of the overall project and the project goals and parameters, the team discussed with the planners the desired visitor experience, visitor flow, visitor orientation needs, and the probable levels of visitor knowledge of the stories of First Ladies. In the afternoon, the team was joined by National First Ladies' Library, Inc.'s gift shop staff and the NFLL Guest Services Director as well as maintenance staff attached to First Ladies NHS to take a complete tour of all site spaces, conducted as though they were visitors to the site.

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> "Design Minds Professional Services Agreement," May 30, 2018, 1. In Cuyahoga Valley National Park digital archives. See also Jennifer Vasarhelyi, oral history interview.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 2. See also Design Minds, Inc., Proposal for "First Ladies National Historic Site Development of Visitor Experience Plan," March 14, 2018, 2. In Cuyahoga Valley National Park digital archives.

Afterward, the group discussed current site conditions and limitations, reviewed existing drawings and site plans, and assessed the site's traffic flow.<sup>77</sup>

The morning of the second day of the charrette was spent in interpretive content discussions that involved reviewing the interpretive themes described in the 2017 *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* and brainstorming additional themes for the site if it was felt more were needed as well as exploring how the content assets support the themes, expected visitor outcomes, and the holistic interpretive experience. For this exercise, the core team was joined by a cadre of scholars and interpretation experts from the National Park Service, the McKinley Museum and the Rutherford B. Hays site as well as five participants associated with National First Ladies' Library, Inc., including the Director of Educational Programming. The core team met together after lunch to wrap up the charette with discussions on potential programs and techniques for exhibits, wayfinding, signage, programming, visitor services, and retail opportunities and to review the findings and decisions of the entire charrette.<sup>78</sup>

The planning document produced by Design Minds, Inc. went through several iterations of reviewed drafts. The final recommendations document was issued December 14, 2018. It included an "interpretive framework for telling the stories" of First Ladies, a phased approach to implementing the necessary "site modifications and enhancements, and specific recommendations for interpretive techniques" based on "best practices" of the National Park Service and the National Association for Interpretation (NAI). The goal of the document was stated as "to guide near-term implementation and influence long-term projects to keep the site's offerings fresh."<sup>79</sup>

The Design Minds, Inc. planning document outlined the main challenges to interpretation of First Ladies NHS resulting from the site's layout. These challenges were also identified in the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* completed in 2017. The document listed the location of the surface parking lot relative to the Education and Research Center, where tickets must be purchased for tours of the Saxton House; the need for "a clear wayfinding plan...to help visitors navigate the site;" the "underwhelming" nature of the current exhibit areas, which do not present enough information on all First Ladies; the inadequate current Visitor Contact station where the tickets are purchased; and the need for better universal access throughout the site "to make flow between and within the buildings easier for all visitors" as the primary physical impediments to successful site interpretation.<sup>80</sup>

The document began by orienting the reader to the buildings on the site using floor plans of the floors of the Saxton House and the Education and Research Center color-coded to indicate

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<sup>77</sup> "Visitor Experience Charette Kickoff Meeting Agenda: June 20-21, 2018," 1-2. In Cuyahoga Valley National Park digital archives.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-4.

<sup>79</sup> Design Minds, Inc., "First Ladies National Historic Site Final Recommendations Document," December 14, 2018, 2, 4. In Cuyahoga Valley National Park digital archives.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.



current use. The floors that are not visitor available, namely the top three floors of the Education and Research Center, which function primarily as National First Ladies' Library, Inc. office space, were not depicted. Immediately after these graphics, the planning document began with an argument in favor of changing the terminology of First Ladies NHS from First Ladies to First Spouses, noting that "current best practices stress the use of gender-neutral terminology."<sup>81</sup> Thereafter, the report used the term "First Spouses" whenever not specifically referring to First Ladies NHS. The planning document then proceeded to discuss several topics such as what the goals of interpretation at the site would be and who the audience for interpretation is expected to be, which included a summary of guest comments found on the TripAdvisor website plus a selection of the texts of actual comments.<sup>82</sup> The document then discussed what a "storyline" is and provided lists of tangible and intangible resources available at the site and the intellectual and emotional connections interpretation of the stories of First Ladies aimed to create there.<sup>83</sup> The planning document posited a "Central Theme," described as "the Big Idea," for interpreting the site, which was "First Spouses are individuals like you, who are thrust into the national spotlight and, through their actions, represent their times and influence their families and country." Sub-themes of this central theme were explained as: Role – how the role "evolves to reflect social expectations;" Impact – the impact of First Spouses on "the political, cultural, and social history of the nation, including a direct impact...on the role of the President of the United States;" Personal Life – how "First Spouses rely on their personal interests, abilities, and experiences to define their presence in the public forum as they strive to meet public expectations and maintain personal space;" and First Families – how the families of the First Spouses fit into the public and private lives of First Spouses.<sup>84</sup>

The Design Minds, Inc. interpretive planning document defined the planned overall visitor experience as feeling cohesive and contributing the unique qualities of the site. It would do this, according to the planning document, by creating new visitor experiences through better use of the existing exhibits, programs, operations, and facilities, ensuring "that visitors connect appropriately to the key messages and themes."<sup>85</sup> The planning document presented a "zoned plan" for achieving this goal and suggested a phased approach to implementing it. The interpretive zones were identified as: Zone 1 – Approach and Parking; Zone 2 – Education and Research Center; Zone 3 – Saxton McKinley House (now referenced as simply Saxton House); and Zone 4 – Connected Spaces (which consisted of the grounds of First Ladies Park).<sup>86</sup> Discussing first Zone 1, Approach and Parking, Design Minds, Inc. suggested, for the short term, establishing a staffed informational kiosk close to the existing surface parking to provide information and direct visitors to the various elements of First Ladies NHS. In a later map, the document placed this kiosk in First Ladies Park immediately behind the main entrance but also

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 13-16.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 17-21.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 22-23.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 25-26.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 27.

close to the park's side entrance from the surface parking lot. For the long-term, Design Minds, Inc. advocated that the National Park Service acquire the privately-owned, multi-story parking deck to the north of the surface parking lot, demolish it, and landscape the area to give the surface parking lot a clear view and path to the Education and Research Center. This long-term plan was also depicted on a later site map. The overall goal for Zone 1 was to make it clear to visitors that they should go first to the Education and Research Center for orientation and introduction to the site.

The Design Minds, Inc. plan presented two overall interpretive options. The first assumed removal of the multi-story parking deck. Descriptions of modifications in Zone 2, with associated floor plans of the Education and Research Center color-coded for use, oriented the main entrance of the building to the west, which is currently a small service cul-de-sac at the rear of the building, surrounded by the rear entrances of buildings facing Court Avenue and Second Street on that block. Removal of the parking deck opens the southern side of the Education and Research Center to the newly-created pedestrian parkway and provides access to this cul-de-sac. However, the interior changes to the building could be made even if the parking deck is not removed and the existing main entrance on Market Avenue remains the main entrance. On the main entrance floor, the plan moved the welcome desk and educational bookstore space, both enlarged, to the Market Street wall of the building and fills the remaining 2,300 square feet of space with introductory exhibits. It converted the theater at the south end of the building into two large restrooms and a small staff space (probably a maintenance closet), and proposed installation of an additional elevator extending to all floors. This elevator shaft would eliminate all the women's restrooms in the building and necessitate that the restrooms on the upper floors be designated "unisex." The current library on the second floor would be converted to another 2,033 square feet of exhibit space to "interpret the major themes and serve as the main exhibit space for the site," and the exhibits would also be expanded into the hallway and what is now the small reading room and the video library, leaving only the large reading room "to accommodate visitors who wish to explore the library's physical collections." This change anticipates removal of non-load-bearing walls in these areas. The current meeting room on the third floor, would, in this proposal, house "traveling" exhibits – those that are set up temporarily at First Ladies NHS from other sites with relative information about First Ladies, such as presidential libraries. Other spaces on the third floor, including the collections archival spaces, offices, and a staff kitchen, would remain essentially unchanged. No plans were made in this interpretive planning document for the fourth through sixth floors of the building, but the basement theater would be converted to a multi-purpose room where the introductory film could still be shown but that could also serve as a meeting and event room.<sup>87</sup>

Plans for interpretation of the Saxton House were also not dependent on removal of the existing multi-story parking deck and involved mostly small additions to the interpretive strategy except for the creation of an accessible entrance through the front door of the building and

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 29.

possible relocation of the elevator. The accessible entrance begins with the existing ramp at the back of the building, to be accessed from an expanded staff parking lot with accessible parking spaces at the rear of the Saxton House. This ramp currently leads to the north floor of the wrap-around porch and to the rear entrance door of the Saxton House. The Design Minds, Inc. plan is to add a smaller entrance stoop one step up from the existing porch with a ramp of eight or more feet in length, depending on the vertical distance between the porch floor and the entry vestibule floor, installed along the exterior east wall of the Saxton House. Design Minds, Inc. suggested that relocating the elevator and providing wheelchairs that would fit in the hallways and through doorways would create a more accessible path through the house. Together, these changes, according to Design Minds, Inc., would create a better visitor flow: front to back on the first floor and back to front on the second floor before ascending to the third floor to complete a self-guided tour. Design Minds, Inc. also suggested adding a mobile means of purchasing tickets at the Saxton House in addition to purchasing them at the Education and Research Center and, possibly, at the newly installed informational kiosk. This purchasing method seems to imply a cell phone app, as Design Minds, Inc. specifically rejected the notion of an additional ticket sales desk or kiosk at or in the Saxton House. This mobile app, it suggested, could also be used to provide the self-guided tour proposed in the first *Long-Range Interpretive Plan*.<sup>88</sup>

With the entrance relocated to the front foyer, Design Minds, Inc. envisioned the entire first floor of the Saxton House being used for interpretation, which entails eliminating a staff room located just behind the entrance foyer stairs at the current access point of the house. The plan suggested the placement of new signage to assist with wayfinding and a “flip book” located on the first floor to assist visitors who cannot physically access the upper floor of the house to explore it visually. Design Minds, Inc. advocated that as much of the house as possible be rehabilitated to reflect a High Victorian appearance and interpretive storytelling be expanded to encompass others who lived there, although Ida Saxton and William McKinley should be at the center of the story. To help to expand the story, Design Minds, Inc. suggested removing the men’s room on the second floor of the Saxton House and reinstating and interpreting the sewing room that once occupied that space. Also on the second floor, Design Minds, Inc. proposed that the staff room be eliminated and interpreted and that the two rooms of the former gift shop be used to showcase the lives of First Ladies from Ohio. The third floor would continue to interpret William McKinley’s study/office there, but the former ballroom would be used to interpret “Life in the Saxton McKinley House” rather than as a meeting room with pictures of First Ladies on the walls. The basement, which has been used for staff and mechanical equipment, would become a location for interpretation of the channeled basement floor, if it could be made accessible, and staff areas would be reduced in size and number, though men’s and women’s restrooms existing in the basement would be retained. Essentially, Design Minds, Inc. proposed that most staff move out of the Saxton House and it be given over to interpretation to visitors.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 32-34.

The biggest change to management of the Saxton House proposed by Design Minds, Inc. was to transition from guided tours to self-guided tours to “enable visitors to experience the house on their own time.” Earlier in the plan, Design Minds, Inc. recommended using reproduction artifacts instead of heirlooms to furnish the historic rooms, which would, to some degree, mitigate fears of theft and vandalism. Even so, Design Minds, Inc. projected that self-guided tours would result in a need for more staffing, with a Park Ranger or Guide stationed on each floor of the Saxton House to answer any additional questions, see to the needs of visitors, guard against property damage, and, perhaps most importantly, project a National Park Service presence at the site. For ease of reading, informational panels should, therefore, be located along travel pathways rather than tucked into recesses within the rooms, and benches should be provided to enable visitors to rest during their exploration of the four floors of the Saxton House.<sup>90</sup>

The preferred site plan proposed by Design Minds, Inc. not only demolished the multi-story parking garage, it eliminated First Ladies Park and that block of 3<sup>rd</sup> Street. It enlarged and moved the surface parking to the west side of the parking garage site with an access driveway to it from Market Avenue. The plan included new activity spaces for things like picnic areas and playgrounds, sinuous paved pathways to connect parking with the Saxton House and the Education and Research Center, new directional signage, lighting, and interpretive wayside panels, and a pathway to additional parking at the old Post Office building across 4<sup>th</sup> Street from the Saxton House. The Design Minds, Inc. plan did not address that the National Park Service does not own First Ladies Park or the surface parking lot, the “no digging” mandate communicated to NPS maintenance staff regarding the soils beneath those two areas, and the view of the backsides of the buildings on Court Avenue and 2<sup>nd</sup> Street that would confront First Ladies NHS visitors should the main entrance to the Education and Research Center be moved to the west side of the building.

The Design Minds, Inc. plan did, however, also include a site use plan taking into account that the multi-story parking deck might not be removed. This plan still proposed a new, accessible main entrance on the west side of the Education and Research Center, with new paving leading to it and new signage directing visitors there. It also proposed adding graphic site identification banners to the Market Street side of the parking deck and to the streetlights on the west side of Market Street along the blocks where the Saxton House and the Education and Research Center stand. To tie the two buildings together, Design Minds, Inc. recommended installing a walking surface matching the bricks of First Ladies Park across the eastern end of the surface parking lot from First Ladies Park to 3<sup>rd</sup> Street and, possibly, across 3<sup>rd</sup> Street to alert visitors to the location of the Education and Research Center. The plan also recommended installing a matching walking surface from the grounds of the Saxton House at the staff parking lot across 4<sup>th</sup> Street to optional parking at the old Post Office building to also tie that parking to the rest of the site in the minds of visitors. This proposed site plan was not accompanied by any

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 32.

explanatory text, indicating it was likely considered a temporary, Phase One-type solution to the site interpretation problem.<sup>91</sup>

The Design Minds, Inc. plan also considered the option of acquiring the old Post Office site on the south side of 4<sup>th</sup> Street, across from the Saxton House and moving all National Park Service operations to that location, either by retrofitting the Post Office building or by demolishing it and building a new Visitor Center. In that case, the surface parking lot on 3<sup>rd</sup> Street could be used to expand First Ladies Park for additional outdoor space and the special walking surface across 4<sup>th</sup> Street between the Saxton House and the old Post Office site would still be used. This option would also expand amount of parking available at First Ladies NHS.<sup>92</sup>

Lastly, Design Minds, Inc. discussed several interpretation techniques to reach the largest possible audience. These included the use of universal/accessible design to meet the needs and engage the interest of “visitors with a wide range of backgrounds, ages, levels of interest, and abilities,” brochures and other “ancillary materials,” interpretive graphic panels and other graphic materials, the use of artifacts, interpretive exhibits including films and interactive modules, different types and purposes of wayside exhibits and signage, the use of digital media, marketing, and programing for the expected audience. Design Minds, Inc. concluded that First Ladies NHS staff

should continue to provide programs and interpretation, including tours of the Saxton McKinley House, exhibits on First Ladies’ dresses, stories of each First Lady, examples of First Spouses’ impact on the role of the president, and Puppet shows on the First Pets. ...[and] should consider how to craft additional experiences....Currently, [First Ladies NHS] is a hidden gem in Canton, but additional signs, exterior exhibits, and outdoor components may help it stand out.<sup>93</sup>

Cuyahoga Valley National Park Chief of Interpretation, Education, and Visitor Services Jennifer Vasarhelyi, who was part of the core team working with Design Minds, Inc. on this Phase II *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* was pleased with the results. She explained,

[W]e thought that it was going to be a project focused on...improving existing conditions, addressing the need for a permanent exhibit that provides a holistic interpretation of First Ladies.... We also, through the process, started to really understand how the ERC is not the best building for that purpose, especially for something that needs to be artifact rich, where you need to have climate-controlled conditions. .... We dreamed, but realized it probably wasn’t possible, that the [parking] garage could go

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 48-56.

away and that we could have a connected site.... To fully fulfill the potential of the site, we need to do a real analysis of the alternatives for that future museum visitor center, where...making [the Education and Research Center] work better could be one alternative. A different existing building could be another alternative. New construction might be one. So, that idea is out there, waiting for exploration.<sup>94</sup>

By the time the Design Minds, Inc. interpretation planning document was finalized in December 2018, the National Park Service had hired Site Manager Christopher Wilkinson, who entered on duty in April 2019. According to Wilkinson, discussions are still ongoing about how to situate a Visitor Contact Center closer to the Saxton House. As a result of the Education and Research Center's problematic location and poor climate control, Wilkinson said, "There has been talk about, eventually, could we put a visitor center closer to the Saxton House and, maybe, take this building and lease it out for offices, event space. Maybe we could still have some offices here...." He added, however, that the National Park Service has been reluctant to build additional Visitor Centers because of life-cycle costs. He explained that, when someone from the Regional or Washington offices looks at the how much space is available in the seven floors of the Education and Research Center, it is difficult to make the argument that the park needs a new Visitor Center, despite the obvious imperfections of the existing building. However, in 2021, a project had been entered into the National Park Service's Project Management Information System, which is used to program project funding, for funds to conduct a Value Analysis to determine the advisability of establishing a Visitor Center for First Ladies NHS in a location more accessible to the Saxton House.<sup>95</sup>

Wilkinson saw one of his primary tasks as working to implement as many of the recommendations of the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan*, the Design Minds, Inc. report, and the fourth cooperative agreement between the National Park Service and National First Ladies' Library, Inc. as he could. In anticipation of the fourth cooperative agreement's requirements for more National Park Service involvement in interpretation at First Ladies NHS, NPS hired its first permanent interpretive Park Ranger, Lisa Meade, in October 2018. Unfortunately, a lengthy partial federal government shut-down between December 22, 2018 and January 25, 2019, due to the delay by United States President Donald J. Trump in signing the budget passed by Congress, limited her time at the site until the problem was resolved. She was assigned to the visitor contact station in the Education and Research Center, greeting visitors and directing them to the various features of First Ladies National Historic Site, as well as staffing the small educational bookstore located on the display shelves of the kiosk surrounding her station. Upon arriving at the park, First Ladies NHS Site Manager Chris Wilkinson found that Meade was the only National Park Service interpretive staff, but she was only part-time during the winter months. Feeling this was an inadequate response to the cooperative agreement's assertion that the National Park Service

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<sup>94</sup> Jennifer Vasarhelyi, oral history interview.

<sup>95</sup> Christopher Wilkinson, oral history interview.

would be responsible for “the front desk,” Wilkinson upgraded Meade’s status to permanent full-time year-round staff and hired a park guide for a four-year term to assist her.<sup>96</sup>

The 2019 cooperative agreement, which promised more involvement by the National Park Service, coming on the heels of the *Long Range Interpretive Plan* and the Design Minds, Inc. planning report, provides both the opportunity for growth and potential avenues for that growth to follow. The immense changes wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic, taking hold so soon after these opportunities were presented, has further shifted the landscape for the park’s interpretive program, leaving its future directions uncertain as this Administrative History is being completed. Despite this uncertainty, the park’s educational mission, to help the public understand the roles that the First Ladies have played in American history, remains intact. The following chapter explores additional ways that this mission has been manifested.

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: Education and Community Outreach

When first established, the focus of National First Ladies Library was education. Its aim was to provide to the public a comprehensive list of all print materials about First Ladies and how to access those materials. Mary Regula's original plan was to assemble a bibliography that could be mailed to anyone who requested it. However, the media of information was changed before National First Ladies' Library was officially established, from existing only in print to a digital source provided on the internet that could be reviewed by anyone in the world with access to a computer. This change in manner of conveying the information was a much more efficient and cost-effective method. After the bibliography was published online and a process for keeping it updated was established, National First Ladies' Library, Inc. devised other methods of educating the public about the First Ladies.

The National Park Service began providing NPS standard services to First Ladies National Historic Site soon after establishment in 2000. However, because Mary Regula and her supporters in the National First Ladies' Library felt that the signed cooperative agreements gave them a mandate to operate independently of NPS, there was often duplication of effort across the first two cooperative agreements. For instance, after 2004, the National Park Service created and managed a website for First Ladies NHS in the standard for National Park System websites, but National First Ladies' Library, Inc. had already set up the website for the bibliography, to which they added site information, and they continued to maintain and populate it in parallel with the NPS website.<sup>1</sup> Because the National First Ladies' Library, Inc. website was already set up when the National Park Service initiated the NPS website for First Ladies NHS, the National Park Service provided, and still provides, links from the NPS website to the NFLL website. Together, the two websites give the prospective visitor or interested web surfer a more comprehensive look at what First Ladies NHS has to offer.<sup>2</sup>

### *Celebrations, Special Programs, and Community Events*

Special programs and celebratory events have been a specialty of National First Ladies' Library, Inc. from the earliest days. Mary Regula especially enjoyed having special events for Ida Saxton McKinley's birthday in June, but other events were frequently scheduled. National First Ladies' Library, Inc. was particularly adept at putting on a good show, often as part of their fundraising efforts. The National First Ladies' Library Director of Educational Programming was

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Pat Doorley, oral history interview, September 8, 2022. See also Christopher Wilkinson, oral history interview.

<sup>2</sup> National First Ladies' Library website is: <https://firstladies.org>. National Park Service website for National First Ladies Historic Site is: <https://www.nps.gov/fila/index.htm>.



occasionally inspired to create a special program based on the costumes of First Ladies, and other famous women, the volunteer docents chose to wear to conduct the site tours. For instance, former National First Ladies' Library, Inc. bookkeeper Gail Fahrney recalled one program that involved a re-enactment of a meeting on April 20, 1933, between Eleanor Roosevelt and Amelia Earhart in which the two had dinner at the White House with some companions (Ms. Earhart's spouse and Mrs. Roosevelt's brother) and then took an impromptu airplane ride from Washington, D.C. to Baltimore, Maryland, and back, still wearing their dinner gowns and fur coats. In re-creation, guests to this special event at the First Ladies NHS first ate dinner in the Saxton House dining room (chicken instead of duck, with angel food cake topped by whipped cream served for dessert), then went to the basement theater for the "airplane ride," followed by a press conference in which the guests served as the press corps, asking Earhart and Roosevelt questions from cards provided by NFLL staff.<sup>3</sup>

Other types of special events were also organized and promoted by National First Ladies' Library, Inc. In early December 2003, after the Grand Opening celebration of the Education and Research Center, Second Lady and author Lynne Cheney, wife of Vice President Dick Cheney, held a book-signing at the Education and Research Center for her two children's books, *A is for Abigail* and *America*. Fahrney, who was on site for the event, commented that, "Every little girl named Abigail within a fifty-mile radius was here...." When the crowd first gathered, people were allowed to purchase as many books to be signed as they wanted for "the first couple hours," but, as time passed and the available books dwindled, the number of books one could purchase was eventually whittled to two per person. Fahrney recalled that the National First Ladies' Library, Inc. Director of Educational Programming, dressed as Dolly Madison, "was entertaining the crowd while they waited" to get books signed, and Mary Regula and NFLL Executive Director Patricia Krider assisted with photographing Cheney with her fans after she had signed their books.<sup>4</sup> On another occasion, author Carl S. Anthony organized a symposium on women's history which was held in the basement theater of the Education and Research Center building. Speakers and panel members included women's history professors, biographers of famous women, and Mary Hoyt, who had been First Lady Rosalynn Carter's press secretary. Anthony also gave a lecture and held a book signing at First Ladies' NHS after publication of his book on Ida McKinley in 2013. The book was a special request from Mary Regula, who asked him to write one in 2011 while Anthony was still working on updating the First Lady bibliographies for the National First Ladies' Library website and for the First Ladies display on the third floor of the Saxton House. Anthony recalled that, after some difficulty locating a willing publisher due to a perceived lack of commercial interest in such a topic, Mary Regula and Executive Officer Patricia Krider tapped their own networks and eventually persuaded Kent State Academic Press

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<sup>3</sup> Gail Fahrney, oral history interview.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

to publish. However, Kent State would not pay for the writing of the book, only agreeing to publish, so National First Ladies' Library, Inc. paid Anthony to write it.<sup>5</sup>

By 2012, National First Ladies' Library, Inc. was planning educational and interpretive events for First Ladies NHS. In its annual work plan for FY 2012, which covered only May through September 2012 due to the delay in getting the third cooperative agreement signed, National First Ladies' Library, Inc. detailed plans to host, in May of that year, school groups from the Canton Mayor's Literacy Council for an "educational living history school program" entitled "Lions, Tigers, and Bears, Oh! My!" According to the work plan, the NFLL intended to use the program to "educate school children about the lives of First Ladies." In addition, National First Ladies' Library, Inc. proposed a series of lunch programs featuring speakers from other National Historic Sites, presidential sites, museums, universities and historical societies presenting information on First Ladies and "notable women." The programs were planned for the benefit of First Ladies NHS volunteers and staff but were open to the public and presented free of charge. Attendees were expected to bring their own lunch. Speakers for the rest of the year were expected from the Rutherford B. Hays Presidential Center, the James A. Garfield National Historic Site, and the McKinley Presidential Library and Museum. A children's reading program was also planned to be offered for three days at the end of June, open to children ages kindergarten through fifth grade accompanied by an adult. The reading program offered insights through reading into the special causes of First Ladies such as Michelle Obama and "Lady Bird" Johnson and of the artist Georgia O'Keefe. Programs planned for adults, in addition to the "Legacy Lunch" speakers, included a bus trip to the Harding Home, an Ida McKinley tea, and a Nellie Taft tea. Planned special events for the last half of 2012 were a visit and tour of the site by a group of sixteen teachers from foreign countries sponsored by Kent State University; an "educational event" at the site sponsored by the Ohio Arts Council; and the Ida McKinley Birthday Celebration and Open House, when tours of the Saxton House and the Education and Research Center would be offered free of charge and the planned new exhibit would be opened. Also planned were two National Park Service events: Get Outdoors Day and Public Lands Day, when the site buildings would be open free of charge; and three seminars in June presented by the Lincoln Highway Association in the Education and Research Center theater "about First Ladies and Presidents along the Lincoln Highway."<sup>6</sup>

### *Education and Community Outreach*

In addition to conducting tours, the volunteer costumed docents were available in the early days of National First Ladies' Library, Inc. for speaking engagements and were in demand for gatherings such as meetings of women's groups, mother-daughter banquets, and the like.

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<sup>5</sup> Carl Anthony, oral history interview.

<sup>6</sup> "Cooperative Agreement No. P12AC100314 between The United States Department of Interior National Park Service and National First Ladies' Library, Inc." Attachment D, n.d., n.p. In First Ladies NHS archives, Box 1; Folder: FILA Cooperative Agreement; Subfolder: P12AC100314, May 15, 2012, to May 15, 2017.

They were in such high demand that it became difficult to maintain volunteer staff to provide tours at First Ladies NHS. As a result, the speakers' corps was eventually discontinued.<sup>7</sup> In the opinion of Superintendent Sherda Williams, between 2008 and 2015, at least, the outreach program of National First Ladies' Library, Inc. was "pretty aggressive, and they did a pretty good job of those." The costumed volunteers went to the schools to present programs as well as meeting busloads of school children at First Ladies NHS for tours. They did not engage in any of the computer-based distance learning strategies that had come into vogue within the National Park Service after 2005, and the National Park Service also did not pursue this educational method due to the lack of the technological systems and expertise necessary to implement it within the school system.<sup>8</sup> National First Ladies' Library, Inc. also did not engage in National Park Service events at First Ladies NHS. For instance, in 2009, although James A. Garfield NHS participated, First Ladies NHS did not have a Parks as Classrooms program.<sup>9</sup>

The annual work plan for 2012 provides significant insight into the programs and activities of National First Ladies' Library, Inc. in support of the mission of First Ladies NHS. It included information on projects and activities planned for the balance of 2012 through the middle of 2013. In addition to the planned celebrations, special events, bus tours, guest speakers, book signings, and children's programs already described, National First Ladies' Library Inc. conducted outreach through their internet presence. The annual work plan for FY 2012 indicated it was in the process of updating the online biographies of the First Ladies. Carl Sferrazza Anthony, who created the original bibliography for National First Ladies' Library, Inc. led this effort.<sup>10</sup> According to Anthony, the biographies were begun by First Ladies enthusiast Craig Schermer, who had been hired by National First Ladies' Library, Inc. as a consultant on First Ladies' history when First Ladies NHS was established in 2000. After Schermer left in 2006, Mary Regula asked Anthony to rework and complete the biographies. However, she had her own rules for them that she wanted him to follow. As he recalled,

I said, 'You know, they're going to be scholarly. They're going to be –'  
And she said, 'No footnotes. I don't want any footnotes cluttering it up.'  
.... Mary specifically ordered that online biographies not have 'little numbers  
all over it,' meaning footnotes.<sup>11</sup>

Anthony explained that the revisions to the online biographies were slowed by a request from Mary Regula "two years after I started in 2006" that he include additional details on the parents, siblings, and education of all the First Ladies. In addition to reworking the biographies, Mary Regula bestowed the Historian title, formerly designated for Craig Schermer, on Anthony. With it came the responsibility to respond to questions posed by the press, the media, government

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<sup>7</sup> Gail Fahrney, oral history interview.

<sup>8</sup> Sherda K. Williams, oral history interview.

<sup>9</sup> "FY 09 Parks as Classrooms – Midwest Region," n.d. In First Ladies NHS archives, Box 1, Folder, FILA.

<sup>10</sup> "Cooperative Agreement No. P12AC100314 between The United States Department of Interior National Park Service and National First Ladies' Library, Inc." Attachment D.

<sup>11</sup> Carl S. Anthony, oral history interview.

officials, and the general public regarding First Ladies, a task that Anthony shared with the National First Ladies' Library, Inc. archivist. By 2011, he was still working on the biographies and also writing the book on Ida Saxton McKinley described earlier in this section.<sup>12</sup>

Since completion of the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* in 2017, National Park Service staff have been more active in bringing information about First Ladies and the First Ladies NHS to the Canton community, including bringing NPS educational programming to the local schools. To make contacts in the community, Site Manager Christopher Wilkinson and staff from First Ladies NHS have also set up informational booths at the downtown farmers' market and other local events. Wilkinson enthusiastically reported that they have "made hundreds of contacts" in this way. The staff has also successfully added social media to its outreach efforts, which significantly enlarges the "community" they are able to reach.<sup>13</sup>

### *First Ladies NHS Site Brochure*

One standard National Park Service piece of interpretive material is the unigrid brochure intended to be available to all visitors to a park to introduce them to the site and provide basic information about it, including a map. Another example of duplication of effort occurred in relation to an informational brochure for First Ladies NHS. Although National First Ladies' Library, Inc. already had a brochure for the site, the National Park Service embarked on creation of its own informational brochure for the site very soon after First Ladies NHS was established in October 2000. Discussions regarding the brochure began in Spring of 2001 when Cuyahoga Valley Chief of Interpretation Jennifer Vasarhelyi contacted the Harpers Ferry Center's Associate Manager for Publications Melissa Cronyn about creating a site brochure for First Ladies NHS using the unigrid style. Cronyn reported to Cuyahoga Valley Superintendent John Debo that, although Harpers Ferry would welcome the opportunity to create the brochure, they were experiencing a backlog of commitments for publications that would prevent Harpers Ferry from starting such a project until 2003. Vasarhelyi had apparently communicated to Cronyn a strong sense of urgency to get the brochure for this new unit of the National Park Service completed quickly. Harpers Ferry publications department could not accommodate that urgency, so Cronyn suggested alternate means of creating an interim brochure including hiring an outside contractor. Instead, First Ladies NHS Site Manager Carol Spears was tapped to lead the design project, working with Connie Potratz-Watson, a Midwest Regional Office graphic artist.<sup>14</sup> According to Spears, she was excited to be involved in creation of the brochure because interpretation was her specialty. Spears "took on the role of creating the text...." She researched

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Christopher Wilkinson, oral history.

<sup>14</sup> Memorandum, Associate Manager, Harpers Ferry-Publications to Superintendent, Cuyahoga Valley National Park, "Unigrid Brochure for First Ladies National Historic Site," May 18, 2001. In Cuyahoga Valley National Park digital archives, folder "Brochure," file 402\_FILA Brochure Drafts 2001-2003.pdf. See also Carol Spears, oral history interview.

the lives of all the First Ladies because the brochure was intended to be about more than just the First Ladies National Historic Site. During her research, she used Carl Anthony's book on First Ladies, which she found to be a very useful resource. She "created the draft text, [and] Connie, working of course with Harpers Ferry Design Center also, created the graphics, adhering to the new standards."<sup>15</sup>

The site brochure took more than a year to complete, passing through several iterations of drafts and mark-ups as well as reviews by National First Ladies' Library, Inc.'s Executive Director Patricia Krider. Krider gave Spears permission to use the map of the general area of downtown Canton created by National First Ladies' Library, Inc.'s own advertising agency for their brochure as well as a selection of photographs also used on the NFLL brochure, assuring Spears there would be no copyright concerns.<sup>16</sup> On June 11-12, 2002, Spears, Krider, and Potratz-Watson met at the site for two days of planning meetings. During the meetings, in addition to discussing layout and graphics for the brochure, the logistics of creating a new brochure using National Park Service standards while also allowing National First Ladies' Library, Inc. to retain and use their own existing brochure for promotional and fundraising purposes were discussed based on a similar situation from James A. Garfield NHS. Krider referred Spears and Potratz-Watson to Craig Schermer, the National First Ladies' Library, Inc. in-house historian and owner of a large collection of First Lady photographs and to author Carl S. Anthony for books he had written on various First Ladies. Spears and Potratz-Watson also met with the National First Ladies' Library, Inc. publishing company to arrange to purchase the rights to use the map and some of the images from the NFLL's brochure.<sup>17</sup> Although the first version of the brochure included a list of every First Lady from Martha Washington, the final iteration eliminated that feature. The final version included quotes from Dolly Madison, Grace Coolidge, Betty Ford, Eleanor Roosevelt (and, somewhat incongruously, Harry S Truman), photographs of Madison, Coolidge, Roosevelt, Abigail Adams, Lou Hoover, Lucy Hays, and Ida McKinley, and brief descriptions of the various roles First Ladies play in the lives of their husbands and the nation: director of social affairs, presidential liaison, policy advocate, political reformer, and "keeper of the people's house," to name five. The final brochure also briefly described the partnership between National First Ladies' Library, Inc. and the National Park Service to support, maintain, and promote First Ladies National Historic Site and provided a map of the site and information on how to contact each managing organization.<sup>18</sup> The brochure was finalized and printed for use in 2003.

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<sup>15</sup> Carol Spears, oral history interview.

<sup>16</sup> Pat Krider to Carol Spears, email "Re: brochure questions," March 22, 2002. In Cuyahoga Valley National Park digital archives.

<sup>17</sup> "First Ladies National Historic Site NPS Unigrid Brochure Planning Meeting," June 11-12, 2002, n.p. In Cuyahoga Valley National Park digital archives, folder "Brochure," file 402\_FILA Brochure Drafts 2001-2003.pdf.

<sup>18</sup> National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, "First Ladies National Historic Site, Ohio," Images of four brochures with hand-written comments and mark-ups in Cuyahoga Valley National Park digital archives.

Of the fifteen management goals proposed by the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* issued in 2017, National First Ladies' Library, Inc. and the National Park Service have worked during the past six years at addressing the majority of them. Earlier in this chapter, those objectives were summarized as: presenting a unified experience to visitors by establishing a "First Ladies NHS brand" and developing a marketing strategy around it; recruiting and training staff and volunteers to present a comprehensive and consistent interpretation of the site that includes all visitors, regardless of abilities; establishing connections to community civic leaders and philanthropic organizations to "reinforce the site's value" to the community and encourage investment in it; and engaging children and young adults by improving the educational programming; and providing programs that would interest community members of all age groups and "those living in diverse local communities." The remaining management goals were summarized as finding innovative ways to include new technologies in the interpretive media; improving the physical accessibility of the site as well as the accessibility of the programs, include completion of "significant building infrastructure upgrades to create accessible, flexible program spaces; and emphasizing the experiences of Ida Saxton McKinley in her years as wife of William McKinley.<sup>19</sup>

The last, emphasizing the experience of Ida Saxton McKinley, was easy because that is what National First Ladies' Library, Inc. staff had been doing from the beginning. The first one, developing a "First Ladies NHS brand," and creating a marketing strategy around it, was much harder because the two organizations had trouble coming to agreement about what such a branding effort would entail. The early creation of the site brochure and the recent addition of NPS-designed signage helped, but resistance by NFLL to have uniformed NPS personnel onsite has only recently relaxed. In 2019, Site Manager Chris Wilkinson was allowed to have his office on site, and he added uniformed NPS staff to assist with interpretation of the site to visitors, although the physical arrangement of the site and its buildings still presents a challenge to interpreting it to visitors of differing abilities. Wilkinson also expanded the NPS use of social media to reach an interested audience located outside an easy drive to the center of Canton, Ohio, to bring the story of First Ladies to them. National First Ladies' Library, Inc. had a vibrant outreach program to school groups and local civic organizations as well as conducting special on-site programs for the general public before the COVID-19 pandemic hit and shut down the site and their programs for about a year, but, after the site reopened, these programs appear to have lapsed. Revitalizing these programs presents to National First Ladies' Library, Inc. and the National Park Service opportunities to serve the surrounding communities in new ways, both as outlined in the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* and as discovered since the plan was completed. As well, some of the other objectives, such as finding ways to engage more diverse communities, including modification to the physical campus to accommodate the differently-abled are still to be addressed. However, the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan*, The Design Minds, Inc. planning document, and the Fourth Cooperative Agreement provide interesting and innovative ways to

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<sup>19</sup> National Park Service, *Long-Range Interpretive Plan: First Ladies National Historic Site*, Department of the Interior, National Park Service: 2017, 9-10.

address these questions, and the impending Fifth Cooperative Agreement, due in 2024, should be able to incorporate those ideas that are currently feasible into the management strategy for First Ladies National Historic Site.

In the more than twenty years that First Ladies NHS has been open to the public, National First Ladies' Library, Inc. and the National Park Service staff at First Ladies NHS and Cuyahoga Valley NP have separately and jointly improved and expanded the educational and community outreach opportunities available to an interested public. Beginning with "a room with a computer" and a dream to provide scholars and hobbyists information simply on how to find out about First Ladies, they now reach the world with the information itself through the internet. Like the proverbial pebble dropped in a pool, the ripples of knowledge and information spread in ever-widening circles as First Ladies NHS finds new ways to reach its audiences.

As part of the plan to continue to update its programs and reach new audiences, National First Ladies' Library, Inc., in late 2023, changed the name of the institution to National First Ladies Library and Museum and adopted a new logo. The name change is intended to emphasize the role of the organization as a museum as well as a research library. According to the new president and CEO of the organization, Patty Dowd Schmitz, the intent was to "broaden our reach by rebranding" to reflect that, in addition to an extensive research library of more than 1,000 books and other scholarly resources focused on First Ladies, they "offer numerous robust exhibits of our extraordinary collection of artifacts" available to visitors at the site to help in understanding and appreciating the lives of the First Ladies. The new logo is a trio of cameo silhouettes of three women intended to represent First Ladies from the early days of the republic, the late nineteenth, and the early twenty-first centuries. According to Dowd Schmitz, the new logo is a recognition of "our nation's past while also pointing toward the future," indicative, also, of the direction which National First Ladies' Library and Museum intends to take moving forward in its new management relationship with the National Park Service.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> "National First Ladies Library has new name and logo," *Canton Repository*, November 11, 2023, online at <https://www.cantonrep.com>. Accessed November 11, 2023.

## CHAPTER EIGHT: Cultural Resources

### *Introduction*

The cultural resources associated with First Ladies National Historic Site are the buildings and grounds of the Saxton House, sometimes referenced as the Saxton-McKinley House, at 333 Market Avenue South and the Education and Research Center, formerly the City National Bank Building, at 205 Market Avenue South in Canton, Ohio, both of which are owned by the National Park Service. Between these two structures and also part of First Ladies National Historic Site are a small park, formerly Rotary Park and currently called First Ladies Park, and a small surface parking lot to the north of the First Ladies Park, both owned by National First Ladies' Library, Inc. The detailed history of the Saxton House, the Education and Research Center, and the grounds between them are found in Chapters Two and Three of this Administrative History. This chapter chronicles the evolution of responsibility for these features of First Ladies NHS from 1991, when the federal government first acquired the Saxton House to the present.

Congressman Ralph Regula, who initiated and facilitated the purchase of the Saxton House in 1991 by the federal government as described in Chapter Three, asserted at the time and for several years afterward that no further public monies would be spent on the property. When the government purchased the house, the exterior had been recently restored to its original appearance by Marshall B. Belden, a descendant of the original builders and owners. The interior had been seriously compromised by its twentieth-century owners to convert it from residential to commercial use, and Belden did not restore it, instead expecting the commercial tenants for the building to decorate to their own tastes and needs. In fact, Cuyahoga Valley National Park Superintendent John Debo, describing his first encounter with the interior of the Saxton House in 1992, after the federal government had purchased it, said,

[W]hen you opened the door to the building, it was completely empty other Than steel girders supporting the upper floors of the building. .... All the historic Fabric was gone on the first floor in this building. There was nothing. .... With The exception of a stairway to the second floor, it was a big, giant, empty space. ....When you got to the second floor, there was more historic fabric, and the Third floor was, as I recall, quite intact. But the first floor was gone. So, on the first floor there was needed a huge amount of speculative restoration.<sup>1</sup>

Belden had made some restorative efforts such as installing a replica of the original main staircase from the first to the second floor and replicas of most of the original mantelpieces (one original mantelpiece was located and reinstalled in place). Belden's work on the exterior and

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<sup>1</sup> John Debo, oral history interview.



interior of the Saxton House is described in Chapter Three of this document. When the federal government purchased the building, Ralph Regula needed to follow through on his assertion that no further federal funds would be spent on the Saxton House. This required finding a tenant for the building that would undertake the interior restoration, including funding it. As discussed in Chapter Three, he was able to find a not-for profit organizations to lease space in the building, the Stark County Foundation, now known as the Stark Community Foundation, which agreed to fund and complete the interior restoration. Ultimately, the Stark County Foundation sub-contracted the interior restoration to National First Ladies' Library, Inc., to which Stark County Foundation sub-leased office space in the Saxton House in 1994.

### *Saxton House*

Interior restoration of the Saxton House began in 1994. Because the interior was to be mostly used as office space, National First Ladies' Library, Inc. originally planned to restore only the front parlor for visitors.<sup>2</sup> This formal front parlor initially housed the small collection of books that comprised the organization's library, although the original intention was to have a virtual library rather than a physical library. Led by Dr. Sheila Fisher, one of the women recruited by Mary Regula to help with establishing the National First Ladies' Library, Regula and her small staff took on the challenge of restoring the building's interior. Fisher, a retired clinical psychologist, had a deep interest in the Victorian Age and had previously decorated her own home in high-Victorian style. According to Fisher, several members of the group suggested she oversee the high-Victorian re-creation effort, a task which Fisher enthusiastically adopted with a view to making the Saxton House an elegant backdrop for the work of the National First Ladies' Library.<sup>3</sup> Because the rear portion of the Saxton House had been Ida Saxton's home for many years, and the front portion had been constructed by her father before Ida married William McKinley Jr., Fisher researched Ida's background, including "her upbringing, her personality, her husband, her health, and her role as First Lady."<sup>4</sup> However, the National First Ladies Library Association, later, National First Ladies' Library, Inc., committee members decided to date the interior re-creation to the 1870s and 1880s, the period when the McKinleys lived, first, in their house on North Market Street, and then, after a stint living in a suite of rooms in the Saxton House, in a suite of hotel rooms in Washington, D.C., staying at the Saxton House only during congressional recesses. As discussed in Chapter Three, the McKinleys lived in the Saxton House full time for a total of about seven years during the more than thirty years they were married. The choice of period of significance is appropriate to the house, since the three-story front part was constructed sometime between 1865 and 1875, most likely about 1870. Since Ida Saxton McKinley did not own the house, but merely lived there with her husband on several occasions,

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<sup>2</sup> Fisher in Anthony, 33.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 33.

the task of decorating and furnishing the Saxton House originally was the purview of three women: Ida Saxton's grandmother, Christiana Herter DeWalt, who lived in the original house from 1841, when it was built, until she died in 1869; Ida Saxton's mother, Katherine DeWalt Saxton, who lived there from approximately 1851 until she died in 1873; and Ida Saxton's sister, Mary Saxton Barber, who lived in the house her entire life until her death in 1917. However, since Ida Saxton McKinley was raised within the family unit, except for stints in boarding schools, she likely shared many of the tastes of her mother and sister, and the supposition that the home would have contained inherited pieces from the Herters, DeWalts and earlier Saxtons, possibly even from Marshall C. Barber's family, in addition to new furniture, is likely correct.<sup>5</sup>

Although familiar with Victorian style from decorating and furnishing her own home, Fisher conducted further extensive research into high-Victorian decorative styles and materials, contacting the Victorian Society of America and the National Trust for Historic Preservation for suggestions and sources and purchasing "dozens of books on Victorian furniture and interiors."<sup>6</sup> She drew upon her own network of merchants of historic wallpaper, furniture, carpeting, light fixtures, and hardware and enlarged it as the planning and work progressed. Fisher haunted antique stores for appropriate furnishings and polled members of the DeWalt, Saxton, Barber, and Belden families, as well as the rest of the community, to find furniture and artifacts from the era that they would donate to give the house authenticity. A member of the Saxton family donated one of the original fireplace pieces, which was reinstalled in place. Ida McKinley's piano was also donated, and the Ohio Historical Society furnished a portrait of Ida as a young woman. The McKinley Museum loaned National First Ladies' Library, Inc. "several items associated with the families."<sup>7</sup>

After completing the front parlor, National First Ladies' Library, Inc. also undertook recreation of other rooms in the Saxton House, including the front entrance hall on the first floor, Ida McKinley's bedroom and sitting room on the second floor, and William McKinley's office on the third floor, all completed by June 1998, in time for the official dedication of the National First Ladies' Library. Fisher explained that the entrance hall was evocative of the period rather than being a restoration because they found no photographs of the original. For the office and the sitting room, however, Fisher acquired photographs for reference – black-and-white and only – one for each of the rooms, which she translated into re-creations (although the colors are somewhat speculative) of the original rooms, including replicas of William McKinley's study bookshelves, crafted and donated by Schrock Cabinets, an Amish company from Sugarcreek, Ohio. The bookshelves were too large to fit into the elevator and had to be hand-carried up the winding staircase to the third floor for installation.<sup>8</sup> They were able to enlarge the photograph of

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 33-34.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 34-35. See also Kerry Clawson, Russ Musarra, and Janet Frankston, "At the opening – Book shelves are meant for high places," *Akron Beacon Journal*, June 9, 1998, A-6. In Historic Resource File – National Parks, General, held at Cuyahoga Valley National Park archives.

the study to establish the content of the framed photographs on the wall, but the photograph was too dark to determine the exact pattern of the wallpaper. Settling on a “Japonesque” style wallpaper, as close a pattern as could be determined from the photograph and a popular theme in the high-Victorian period, they added a rose-print wallpaper border at the ceiling because it was evident in the photograph. The photograph also provided an image of McKinley’s roll-top desk, used when he was a congressman, and Fisher and her cohorts were able to locate a similar one for the “re-created” office.<sup>9</sup>

A postcard of Ida Saxton McKinley in a sitting room connected to her bedroom, although not identified as being her room at the Saxton House, served as the template for the re-creation of her sitting room and bedroom on the second floor. Unable to identify the precise wallpaper pattern in the postcard, Fisher eventually had it reproduced “from scratch,” starting with hand drawings of the pattern by Scalomandre Company, the fabric and wallpaper company which “had provided First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy with the silk wallcoverings in the restored staterooms of the White House.” Because the postcard was in black and white, the coloring is speculative based on what was known of Ida McKinley’s color preferences. Fisher was also able to obtain a brass twin bed nearly identical to the one shown in the postcard to furnish the “re-creation” of Ida McKinley’s bedroom.<sup>10</sup>

After the official dedication in 1998 of the Saxton House (then called the Saxton-McKinley House) as headquarters for the National First Ladies’ Library, Fisher and her colleagues continued to work on restoration and rehabilitation of other rooms of the building. When the Saxton House became First Ladies NHS in 2000, therefore, the entire exterior of the house and several rooms on the interior had been restored and rehabilitated. This relieved NPS of the cost and responsibility of doing the work as well as the time it would have taken to complete restorations and made the interior of the Saxton House immediately available to be at least partly opened to the public for interpretation. By 2001, plans were in the works to rehabilitate the majority of the first-floor space, which was occupied by the Stark County Foundation, scheduled to vacate their offices in 2003. According to Fisher, “We plan to create a family parlor, a library alcove, a dining room, a breakfast room, and a kitchen.” National First Ladies’ Library, Inc., she continued, had a hand-drawn sketch of the layout of these rooms created by a

descendant of the Barbers, from her memories of being in the house as a young girl. We have some limitations, such as the elevator and back staircase, which were added in the early 1990s and which cut into this space, but we plan to locate these rooms as closely as possible to the floor plan sketch.”<sup>11</sup>

This comment indicates that the work did not consist simply of decorating and furnishing the rooms but also of constructing them, installing walls, doors, and woodwork.

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<sup>9</sup> Fisher in Anthony, 34-35.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 36-37.

<sup>11</sup> Fisher in Anthony, 37.

In Site Manager Carol Spears' recollection, when she first saw the Saxton House in 2001, the rehabilitation of the third-floor ballroom had been completed, and, as she described it, the carpeting was new and "the portraits of all the First Ladies [were] along the wall...." The room also housed a conference table used for meetings. On the first floor, Stark County Foundation had vacated some of their office space in the rear of the building, and rehabilitation of the kitchen and dining room they formerly occupied was complete.<sup>12</sup> Fisher described the work on the dining room as "working outward from the wallpaper," which is a Scalomandre reproduction of wallpaper "made expressly for Mrs. McKinley" for use in the White House in a pattern called "Forget Me Not Blue."<sup>13</sup> Spears recalled the "book sales area was on the second floor, across from the elevator," but did not recall if it had been rehabilitated or was still finished as office space. She did recall that four staff members of National First Ladies' Library, Inc. had offices on the second floor of the Saxton House: Founder and President Mary Regula, Vice President Dr. Sheila Fisher, Executive Director Patricia Krider, and the Director of Educational Programming.<sup>14</sup> Stark County Foundation still had two offices on the second floor, one of which was used by their accountant.<sup>15</sup> By April 2003, the Stark County Foundation had vacated all of its offices in the Saxton House, and National First Ladies' Library, Inc. began work on restoring the family parlor, for which a photograph had been recently located.<sup>16</sup> Although the Saxton House had been designated a National Historic Site and belonged to the National Park Service, the cooperative agreement signed between the National Park Service and National First Ladies' Library, Inc. in 2002 allowed NFLL free rein to continue decorating. In late 2003, National First Ladies' Library, Inc. moved most of its offices out of the Saxton House and into the Education and Research Center and thereafter completed the rehabilitation of the remaining rooms of the building. By the time Sherda Williams became site manager in 2008, National First Ladies' Library, Inc. had completed its rehabilitation of the Saxton House.<sup>17</sup>

National First Ladies' Library, Inc. remained responsible for all repairs, rehabilitation, and maintenance of the Saxton House until 2012, when the third cooperative agreement was signed. By that time, both buildings had been rehabilitated for at least a decade previously and were starting to show signs of wear. Future big-ticket expenses such as repointing and repainting the exteriors and interiors, restoring windows, and replacing roofs could be foreseen. A leak in the basement of the Education and Research Center would require repair. By that time, also, Ralph Regula had retired, so First Ladies NHS had lost its most enthusiastic advocate in Congress and, as a result, some of its political luster that had prompted the politically astute to align with it. It had become apparent that National First Ladies' Library, Inc. would likely not be able to afford the foreseeable cyclic and rehabilitative maintenance required for the site.<sup>18</sup> To

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<sup>12</sup> Carol Spears, oral history interview.

<sup>13</sup> Fisher in Anthony, 37-38.

<sup>14</sup> Carol Spears, oral history interview.

<sup>15</sup> Gail Fahrney, oral history interview.

<sup>16</sup> Fisher in Anthony, 37.

<sup>17</sup> Sherda Williams, oral history interview.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

ensure the continued viability of the site structures and features, the National Park Service assumed responsibility for capital repairs and improvements, and National First Ladies' Library, Inc. retained responsibility for janitorial service of the building in the third cooperative agreement. The fourth cooperative agreement, signed in 2019, assigned all facility maintenance responsibilities to the National Park Service.

*Education and Research Center (former City National Bank Building)*

Executive Director Patricia Krider asserted that, by 1998, the National First Ladies' Library was already outgrowing the available space the organization leased in the Saxton House due to the accumulation of "dozens and dozens of donated and acquired books...related to First Ladies [which] were gathering in nooks and closets and offices in the Saxton-McKinley house."<sup>19</sup> Gail Fahrney, who was hired as bookkeeper for National First Ladies' Library, Inc. in 1999, recalled that the books were mostly housed in the formal parlor at the front of the house. "When you walked into the front parlor and looked to your left, there were a couple bookshelves there, and they were full of books. So that's where the first 'library' was housed, such as it was."<sup>20</sup> Certainly, the fact that NFLL persisted in redecorating the interior of the Saxton House for visitor tours, thereby reducing the amount of space available for offices and storage, did not help the situation. Fortunately, Mary Regula's donor network came through for her again. The City National Bank Building, built in 1895, was donated in 1998 to National First Ladies' Library, Inc. by the Marshall Belden Sr. family. Another Victorian-era building, this meant that, in addition to the rehabilitation of the Saxton House, National First Ladies' Library, Inc. also undertook the rehabilitation of the six-story stone bank building on the next block of Market Street north of the Saxton House for use as their Education and Research Center and NFLL office space. Sheila Fisher led this effort, as well, with assistance from Krider. Including the basement level, the building has seven floors, with a total of 20,000 square feet of usable space.<sup>21</sup> Mary Regula named each of the seven levels for a First Lady who was either born or lived in Ohio or whose husband lived in Ohio when elected President of the United States. They were: Anna Harrison (Mrs. William Henry Harrison), Lucy Hayes (Mrs. Rutherford B. Hayes), Lucretia Garfield (Mrs. James A. Garfield), Caroline Harrison (Mrs. Benjamin Harrison), Ida McKinley (Mrs. William McKinley Jr.), Nellie Taft (Mrs. William Howard Taft), and Florence Harding (Mrs. Warren G. Harding).<sup>22</sup> Designed as a bank building but also used as office space and for commercial purposes including a restaurant, a barbershop, and public baths over the years, the building was, nevertheless, in fairly good condition due primarily to its stone façade.

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<sup>19</sup> Patricia A. Krider, "The Education and Research Center," in Carl Sferrazza Anthony, ed. *This Elevated Position: A Catalog and Guide to the National First Ladies' Library and the Importance of First Lady History* (Canton, OH: National First Ladies' Library, 2003), 43.

<sup>20</sup> Gail Fahrney, oral history interview.

<sup>21</sup> Krider in Anthony., 43-44.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 46.

National First Ladies' Library, Inc. had the skylight over the main banking room on the first floor and the translucent glass block floor just beneath it restored. They converted the commercial space in the basement of the building to a ninety-seat Victorian theater, complete with antique brass entrance doors. The theater accommodates visitor attendance at "films, documentaries, author lectures, symposiums, first-person performances and other educational presentations." Outside the entrance to the theater in the basement, they created a faux "streetscape," with brick pavers and storefront displays which provide opportunities for educational exhibits.<sup>23</sup>

On the first floor, in addition to the rehabilitation of the skylight and glass block floor, National First Ladies' Library, Inc. installed a small library room intended as a re-creation of the library room in the White House assembled by Abigail Fillmore between 1850 and 1853. This library room was the brainchild of a bibliographical society interested in re-creating Abigail Fillmore's White House library which visited First Ladies National Historic Site. Mary Regula seized on the idea and ran with it. According to Carl S. Anthony,

I was, like, 'How are you going to -?' Mary's like, 'Oh, well, they [the Bibliographic society] have the titles [of the books in Abigail Fillmore's library].' Mary gave permission, and they made that room [on the main floor toward the back of the Education and Research Center building] a library, where they created this library where they...put in bookshelves....<sup>24</sup>

In addition to the Abigail Fillmore library re-creation, Mary Regula raised money from private donors for other features of the Education and Research Center. She had the slate treads of the main stairway from the first to the second floor inscribed with the names of donors, and she named rooms after the people who donated the funds to rehabilitate them. The main library was established on the second floor of the Education and Research Center by removing most of the interior walls of the old bank offices, though the transom windows over the former doorways in these walls were retained to show where the walls were originally located. On the third floor, a large conference room was created, along with small, private rooms for researchers. Library staff was assigned to rooms on the fourth floor, and space on the upper two floors was allotted for the collections, along with other offices, classrooms, and smaller conference rooms. Although the building underwent significant electrical intervention to accommodate modern office needs such as computers, Dr. Sheila Fisher ensured that period-appropriate lighting, either from the Victorian period or recreations, were installed. Custom-designed library furniture was manufactured for the Education and Research Center in Massachusetts, Colorado, and Ohio and incorporated "some of the architectural details of the building such as the egg and dart pattern of the crown molding and the fleur de lis and rosettes found on the monumental staircase."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>24</sup> Carl Anthony, oral history interview.

<sup>25</sup> Krider in Anthony, 44.

When rehabilitation of the Education and Resource Center was completed in 2003, National First Ladies' Library, Inc. held a Grand Opening. First Lady Laura Bush was the featured speaker and cut the ribbon. Afterward, NFLL staff moved from the Saxton House to the Education and Research Center. Executive Director Patricia Krider, bookkeeper Gail Fahrney, and the Facility Manager had offices on the fourth floor. The maintenance worker and the custodian had offices on the fifth floor. Founder and President Mary Regula, Vice President Dr. Sheila Fisher, and the Director of Educational Programming had offices on the sixth floor. Only the office on the second floor for the manager of the gift shop and house tours remained in the Saxton House.<sup>26</sup> No office accommodations were made in the Education and Research Center by National First Ladies' Library, Inc. for staff from the National Park Service from 2003 until 2018.

As with the Saxton House, National First Ladies' Library, Inc. remained responsible for all repairs, rehabilitation, and maintenance of the Education and Research Center until 2012, when the third Cooperative Agreement was signed. At that time, the National Park Service assumed responsibility for capital repairs and improvements, and National First Ladies' Library, Inc. retained responsibility for janitorial service of the building. The fourth Cooperative Agreement, signed in 2019, assigned all facility maintenance responsibilities to the National Park Service.

### *Rotary Park/First Ladies Park and Parking*

Before 2003, Rotary Park was paved with light red, smooth brick pavers, some of which were engraved with names of people who had donated money to create the park. The park featured rose bushes planted and tended by women from a local garden club. In 2003, National First Ladies' Library, Inc., in preparation for the Grand Opening of the rehabilitated Education and Research Center, renamed the park First Ladies Garden and had the smooth brick pavers removed and replaced because they were slippery when wet. The bricks with donor and memorial names which originally paved the park were used to create columns for a new entranceway from Market Street to the park, and the park was re-paved with rougher light-red bricks (Figure 42). The landscapers lined the sidewalk between the Saxton House and the Education and Research Center with chrysanthemums in new, rectangular terra cotta planters (since removed because they were an impediment to foot traffic on the sidewalk).<sup>27</sup> The new version of the park was dedicated in September 2003 along with the opening of the rehabilitated Education and Resource Center and the re-established family parlor, dining room, and kitchen in the Saxton House. Maintenance of this park falls in the latest Cooperative Agreement to the National Park Service, but National First Ladies' Library, Inc. is responsible for any major repairs to the park and the adjacent surface parking lot since they are the owners of the plots.

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<sup>26</sup> Gail Fahrney, oral history interview.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.



Figure 42: Entrance to First Ladies Garden, 2021. Photograph by Deborah Harvey.

### *National Register of Historic Places*

A requirement of being part of a unit of the National Park System is being listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The National Register of Historic Places, authorized by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, is the official list of places in the United States deemed by the United States government, represented in this case by the National Park Service, worthy of recognition and preservation. It is part of an effort to “identify, evaluate, and protect America’s historic and archeological resources.”<sup>28</sup> Listing in the National Register of Historic Places protects the listed property from actions of the federal government and from actions by others undertaking projects using funds, permits, or licenses from the federal government that could negatively affect the protected property. It does not protect the property from actions of its owners if they are not using federal funds for their projects. As previously described, the Saxton House and the City National Bank Building, later to become the National First Ladies’ Library, Inc.’s Education and Research Center, were both listed in the National Register of Historic Places at the behest of their owner, Marshall B. Belden, before either building became part of First Ladies NHS.<sup>29</sup>

The Saxton House National Register of Historic Places nomination, completed as part of a State of Ohio Historic Preservation Office (OHPO) Ohio historic inventory project begun in April 1976, was prepared by David A. Simmons of the OHPO in Columbus, Ohio, on November

<sup>28</sup> National Park Service, Department of the Interior, “National Register Database and Research,” online at [www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister/database-research.htm](http://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister/database-research.htm). Reviewed October 9, 2023.

<sup>29</sup> Simmons, *National Register of Historic Places Nomination for Saxton House, Canton, Ohio*. See also, Reeb, *National Register of Historic Places Inventory Nomination of City National Bank Building*.



30, 1978. Upon approval of the nomination by the OHPO Advisory Board, it was forwarded to the Keeper of the National Register of Historic Places in Washington, D.C., who approved it on April 26, 1979. The document provided a description of the physical appearance of the building located at 331 Market Avenue South. in Canton, Ohio, at the time of the nomination, which occurred before Marshall B. Belden, who owned it, made any restorative efforts to return it to its original, historic appearance. That is probably the reason why the statement of significance found the property significant in the area of politics and government but did not find it significant in the area of architecture. The nomination included what was believed at the time to be the construction history of the building, including the three major changes to the exterior of the building and some of the interior alterations over its life as well as the history of its connection to President William McKinley and his wife, Ida Saxton McKinley. In addition, the McKinley's occupied a suite of rooms in the home off and on during their married lives, which made the building "significant as the only residence with direct historical ties to William McKinley remaining in his hometown of Canton," the home that the McKinley's owned in Canton having been demolished. As a result, the period of significance for the building is selected as being 1800-1899, which comports with the McKinleys' last probable year of any residency of the house, 1897. The nomination provided a brief history of McKinley's married life and presidency as well as a description of proposed rehabilitation and future use of the building. It assessed the building as being in fair, but altered and deteriorated, condition, on its original site, which is described as "the eastern halves of lots 56 and 57 in the City of Canton and measur[ing] approximately 66' by 110'." The nomination included a copy of a portion of a USGS topographical map to show the location of the property, photographs of the original and present exterior appearances of the building, and sketches of the proposed, restored appearance. The State Historic Preservation Officer certified the property as being of state significance on March 8, 1979, which decision had repercussions later for its acquisition by the federal government as described in Chapter Three.<sup>30</sup>

The National Register of Historic Places nomination of the City National Bank Building, later to become the First Ladies NHS Education and Research Center as well as its NPS headquarters, was prepared by Dr. Mary L. Reeb from Cleveland Heights, Ohio, and signed by State Historic Preservation Officer W. Ray Luce on June 15, 1982. It was forwarded on June 16, 1982, to the United States Department of the Interior's Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service along with sixteen other nominations approved by the Ohio State Historic Preservation Officer and was received on June 18, 1982. The City National Bank Building was listed in the National Register of Historic Places by Keeper of the Register Delores Byers on July 15, 1982, at a local level of significance. Like the Saxton House, this building was also part of the 1976 Ohio Historic Inventory. The nomination provided a physical description of the building, designated as a privately-owned, occupied, commercial structure located at 205 Market Avenue S. in Canton, Ohio, which, it said, was in excellent but altered condition on its original site. The nomination

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<sup>30</sup> Simmons, *National Register of Historic Places Nomination for Saxton House, Canton, Ohio*, n.p.

assessed the period of significance to be 1800 to 1899 due to the date of construction of the building in 1895. The building was nominated for its significance in the area of architecture because it was (and is) the “only remaining example of 19<sup>th</sup> century Romanesque architecture in downtown Canton” and in the area of commerce because it “is the only bank building of its era still standing in Canton’s 19-block commercial center, and is the last of its type—a representative of the period between 1880 and 1920 when Canton saw a phenomenal growth in banking activity....” The “Statement of Significance” portion of the nomination provided an abbreviated history of the development of banking in Canton and the place of City National Bank in that development. Although the nomination provided the parcel and lot numbers for building, it did not provide a narrative description of the lot or a defense of why (or even whether) that lot should be the boundary of the nominated area. The nomination included contemporary photographs of the building and the usual USGS topographical map showing its location but no copies of historic photographs.<sup>31</sup>

When it became a unit of the National Park System in 2000, First Ladies National Historic Site was automatically listed in the National Register of Historic Places on the date of its authorization by Congress. At the time, it included only the Saxton House. Preparation of a new, parkwide nomination is now required.<sup>32</sup>

### *List of Classified Structures and Cultural Landscapes Inventory*

First Ladies National Historic Site features only two buildings, both of which are identified and described in the National Park Service’s List of Classified Structures. Listing documents for both buildings include an identification number, a recent photograph (as of the last condition assessment), locational information, management and use information, a description of significance which includes a history of the building, a physical description, general treatment information, and assessment of condition, along with the dates of the previous assessments and the expected date of the next assessment. The Saxton House, ID #529794, is assessed every six years and has been identified in all assessments between 2006 and 2018 as being in Good condition, with a Low level of visitation despite that it is designated a primary structural resource for the site. The List of Classified Structures notes that management is conducted under a cooperative agreement with National First Ladies’ Library, Inc. for operation and daily maintenance, but that the National Park Service is responsible for ultimate treatment, which is preservation. Due to the 2019 changes to the cooperative agreement with National First Ladies’ Library, Inc., this portion of the assessment will likely be modified in 2024 when the next assessment is completed. The building functions as a house museum and contains historic artifacts. The List of Classified Structures records that the Saxton House was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on April 26, 1979, and gives as its short description of

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<sup>31</sup> Reeb, *National Register of Historic Places Inventory Nomination of City National Bank Building*.

<sup>32</sup> Regional Historian Ron Cockrell in comments on draft of this Administrative History, September 18, 2023.

significance that it is the last remaining residence of President William McKinley and his wife, Ida Saxton McKinley in Canton, Ohio.<sup>33</sup> Because the history and physical description of the Saxton House was covered earlier in this chapter and in Chapter Two, the information contained in the List of Classified Structures is not iterated here.

The First Ladies Research and Education Center (sic), formerly the City National Bank Building, ID #989465, is assessed every five years and has been identified in assessments in 2013 and 2019 as being in Good condition, with a Low level of visitation despite that it is designated a primary structural resource for the site. The List of Classified Structures does not mention the cooperative agreement with National First Ladies' Library, Inc. for operation and daily maintenance, possibly reflecting the changes made to that agreement in early 2019, but, unlike the documentation for the Saxton House, it also does not designate any entity responsible for treatment and maintenance, merely stating that the building is part of the First Ladies National Historic Site. The List of Classified Structures records that the Education and Research Center was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on July 15, 1982, and gives as its short description of significance that it is significant under Criterion A for being representative of the broad pattern of commerce in American history and under Criterion C for its architecture.<sup>34</sup> Because the history and physical description of the Education and Research Center was covered earlier in this chapter and in Chapter Two, the information contained in the List of Classified Structures is not iterated here.

Currently (2023) there is no Cultural Landscapes Inventory (CLI) or any funding requests in PMIS to fund a Cultural Landscapes Report (CLR) for First Ladies NHS due to the paucity of cultural landscape areas other than sidewalks and parking at the site (Rotary Park/First Ladies' Garden is not owned by the National Park Service).<sup>35</sup>

### *Collections*

National First Ladies' Library, Inc. did not initially intend to assemble a collection. Mary Regula originally envisioned the physical aspects of the Library as "one room with a computer and perhaps a bookcase...."<sup>36</sup> Office space in the Saxton House, however, was quickly outgrown as the physical collection of books, articles, other ephemera and material relics about First Ladies began to accumulate to the care of National First Ladies' Library, Inc. In September 2003, those materials not used for interpretation at the Saxton House were moved to the Education and

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<sup>33</sup> National Park Service, "Cultural Resource Information System – Historic Structures (CRIS-HS) Single Record Report," for the Saxton House, August 2018, 1-7, provided to author by Midwest Regional Historian Ron Cockrell March 23, 2023.

<sup>34</sup> National Park Service, "Cultural Resource Information System – Historic Structures (CRIS-HS) Single Record Report," for the First Ladies Research and Education Center (sic), September 2019, 1-6, provided to author by Midwest Regional Historian Ron Cockrell March 23, 2023.

<sup>35</sup> Regional Historian Ron Cockrell, information provided to author on review of draft of this report, March 23, 2023.

<sup>36</sup> Regula in Anthony, 25.

Research Center. Some of them were incorporated into the various library rooms in the Center, and others were stored. By May 2005, Mary Regula had contracted for the materials to be organized, cataloged, and prepared for archival storage. On October 1, 2005, the contractor undertaking this work was hired as the full-time archivist for National First Ladies' Library, Inc., a position she still holds (2022). In 2012, the NFLL's annual work plan reported that she was still engaged in organizing the artifacts and collections.<sup>37</sup> Although every cooperative agreement signed since 2002 stated that the National Park Service would work together with National First Ladies' Library, Inc. to select and acquire artifacts for the collection, that did not happen. National First Ladies' Library, Inc. did not allocate any of their budget to acquiring more artifacts but relied primarily on donations and on small purchases from estate sales and auctions for the collection. These acquisitions included the research papers donated to the archives by Carl S. Anthony and Redonia "Donnie" Radcliffe in 2006, described in Chapter Four.<sup>38</sup> In 2007, NFLL acquired at auction twelve of fifteen lots of letters from First Ladies such as Dolley Madison, Louisa Adams, Anna Harrison, Abigail Fillmore, Mamie Eisenhower, Jackie Kennedy, and Barbara Bush. National First Ladies' Library, Inc. usually has on display at the Education and Research Center at least part of the collection of approximately "twenty half-sized reproductions" of First Ladies' inaugural gowns donated by a Evyan Perfume company in 2016.<sup>39</sup> As a result of the lack of involvement by the National Park Service in acquisitions for the collections, little information, outside of the occasional newspaper article, was available during research for this Administrative History. The cultural resources of First Ladies NHS with which the National Park Service has been most involved for the past twenty-two years have been the two buildings, the Saxton House and the Education and Research Center, and this involvement has focused on maintenance and repair of the resources.

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<sup>37</sup> "Cooperative Agreement No. P12AC100314 between The United States Department of Interior National Park Service and National First Ladies' Library, Inc." Attachment D. Unfortunately, the archivist declined to be interviewed for this Administrative History, so little is known about the establishment, growth, organization, and activities related to management of the collection, which remains the property of National First Ladies' Library, Inc.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Katie Byard, "First Ladies' letters spice up collection – National First Ladies Library in Canton tries to buy documents that reveal more about wives of presidents," *Akron Beacon Journal*, February 19, 2007, B-1, B-3. In Historic Resource File: National Parks: Presidents Wives National Library (Canton, Ohio), General, in Cuyahoga Valley National Park archives.

## CHAPTER NINE: Administration

### *Staff*

National First Ladies' Library, Inc. staff for First Ladies NHS has been discussed previously in Chapter Four, as far as it is known. Because few former or current employees of National First Ladies' Library, Inc. were willing to discuss the history of their daily operations at First Ladies National Historic Site, the full picture is unclear, and information regarding staff on site during the entirety of their administration is likely incomplete. This chapter deals, instead, primarily with National Park Service administration of the site.

Upon establishment of the First Ladies National Historic Site in October 2000, responsibility for the site was passed from the Department of the Interior to the National Park Service which, in turn, delegated authority for it to the Midwest Regional Office in Omaha, Nebraska. The Midwest Regional Director designated management authority for First Ladies NHS to John Debo, superintendent of Cuyahoga Valley National Park, Ohio. Debo recruited and hired Carol Spears to be site manager for First Ladies NHS and for James A. Garfield NHS. Spears entered on duty at James A. Garfield NHS in July 2001, before the first cooperative agreement with National First Ladies' Library, Inc. was signed and was a signatory to that document. Spears was assigned as National Park Service site manager to First Ladies NHS as well. Spears worked from her office at James A. Garfield NHS, as specified in the first cooperative agreement. Her main task was to review and approve the requests for grant monies submitted by National First Ladies' Library, Inc. to fund the day-to-day operations management of First Ladies NHS. Though Spears made efforts to be involved at First Ladies NHS, her overtures were rebuffed. Her primary recollection of successful interaction with National First Ladies' Library, Inc. was that, at their request, she helped them select "bird barriers" for installation on the Education and Research Center to deter pigeons from perching on the window ledges and parapet of the building. During her tenure there, she also helped to create the site's "unigrid" brochure in concert with Midwest Regional Office graphic artist Connie Potratz-Watson. Spears was the "local liaison" for production of the General Management Plan, though the planning team was led by Sandra Washington of the Midwest Regional Office. After the General Management Plan was completed, Spears was able to get funding during the last two summers of her tenure to send a seasonal intern to First Ladies NHS to assist with interpretation, but that does not appear to have been a successful move. Spears observed that "Mary was not ready to have the NPS uniform" at First Ladies NHS. Also during her tenure, the National Park Service installed a standard NPS site identification sign between the Saxton House and the Education and Research Center and a wayside exhibit at the rear of the house. Spears reported to Cuyahoga Valley NP Deputy Superintendents Bill Carroll,

first, and, second, to Paul Stoehr, but she never had her own permanent staff assigned to the First Ladies National Historic Site.<sup>1</sup>

Site Manager Carol Spears was followed by Sherda Williams, who assumed Spears' position as site manager of James A. Garfield NHS and First Ladies NHS when Spears retired on October 31, 2008. Williams' title was subsequently upgraded to superintendent. She experienced the same resistance to National Park Service involvement at First Ladies NHS as had Spears but was somewhat more successful at inserting an NPS presence at the site. She, too, was able to get funds to send seasonal interns to the site to assist with interpretation during the summer— this time, two of them each year. Williams was also on hand to negotiate the 2012 cooperative agreement with National First Ladies' Library, Inc. and managed to persuade NFLL to agree in that document to cede meeting the larger maintenance needs, such as maintenance of the HVAC system, to the National Park Service, opening the door for a greater NPS presence at the site. Even so, maintenance work for First Ladies NHS was undertaken by staff from Cuyahoga Valley National Park. No permanent staff was assigned to First Ladies NHS, and the National Park Service did not have an office at the site.

The first organizational chart created by the National Park Service for First Ladies NHS, according to Cuyahoga Valley National Park (NPS) Administrative Office Mary Pat Doorley, was made in 2016, after newly-appointed Cuyahoga Valley NP Superintendent Craig Kenkel realized he would need to have permanent maintenance personnel stationed at First Ladies NHS. Doorley described her dilemma:

I asked for the staff member to provide me the staffing that was at First Ladies. ...we got to get a position there. We don't have a position, so we Have to add it to an org chart. We don't have an org chart...because – well, we didn't have anybody there, right?<sup>2</sup>

A maintenance worker was the first person added to the National Park Service's first organizational chart for First Ladies NHS. Because Cuyahoga Valley NP Superintendent Craig Kenkel had been designated superintendent of First Ladies NHS when Sherda Williams left that position, this organizational chart was created as a subset within the Cuyahoga Valley National Park organizational chart.

The next decision was to determine who would supervise the maintenance worker duty-stationed in Canton. The eventual decision was to put Toby Matney, from the Cuyahoga Valley National Park buildings and utilities shop located in Brecksville, in charge of the maintenance worker in Canton. Creating a position at First Ladies NHS and a supervisor for that position required paying those two people from the funds allocated by

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<sup>1</sup> Carol Spears, oral history interview.

<sup>2</sup> Mary Pat Doorley, oral history interview.

Congress in the budget for First Ladies NHS because Cuyahoga Valley NP did not have budget for paying maintenance personnel for another park. Doorley explained,

So, that means we can't give [National First Ladies' Library] as much money.... Okay, well, how much money are we going to give them?  
...you can't just put a position without stuff. They're going to need stuff.  
So, then, we had to transition supplies and materials over....<sup>3</sup>

The “chain of command” developed for the new maintenance position at First Ladies NHS in 2016 was Cuyahoga Valley NP Chief of Maintenance Eric Semple supervising Cuyahoga Valley NP Deputy Chief of Maintenance Tom Toledo supervising Cuyahoga Valley NP buildings and utilities head Toby Matney supervising a permanent maintenance person at First Ladies NHS. Because three of those four people would be spending part of their time in supervision of personnel at a park other than Cuyahoga Valley NP, it was necessary to determine how much of their time would be spent doing that so it could be decided how much of the First Ladies NHS budget should be retained by Cuyahoga Valley National Park to cover those costs. The entire cost of the last person in this “chain of command” plus the equipment needed to accomplish his or her tasks also had to be determined and withheld from the funds allocated to National First Ladies' Library, Inc. for daily operations management at First Ladies NHS. From the amount remaining, National First Ladies' Library, Inc. would have to pay their own janitorial person.<sup>4</sup> However, National First Ladies' Library, Inc. let their maintenance person go in October 2016, eliminating that cost from their budget.<sup>5</sup>

Because the primary maintenance concern at the time was the HVAC system in the Education and Research Center, given its impact on climate control for the archives housed there, the National Park Service advertised for and hired an HVAC maintenance mechanic who entered on duty January 10, 2016. However, he left the position on March 2, 2017. For the next seven months, the staff at Cuyahoga Valley NP coped with whatever maintenance was required at First Ladies NHS. One of the Cuyahoga Valley NP maintenance staff, Charles “Buzz” Markovich, was assigned to keep an eye on the maintenance situation at First Ladies NHS. Markovich was a Cuyahoga Valley NP employee but not a skilled HVAC maintenance mechanic, which was the position for First Ladies NHS that Craig Kenkel and his staff were hoping to fill. On October 1, 2017, the National Park Service hired another maintenance person for First Ladies NHS, but his tenure was also short. Jennifer McMahon, the National Park Service Midwest Regional Partnership Program Manager, duty-stationed at Cuyahoga Valley NP, moved into the unofficial position of acting site manager for First Ladies NHS in October 2018 (Figure

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Eric Semple to Deborah Harvey, email, September 3, 2022.

43).<sup>6</sup> This move proved to be a break-through in relations with National First Ladies' Library, Inc. as McMahon was the first National Park Service leadership employee granted an office at the site. Her office was located in the Education and Research Center building alongside the offices of National First Ladies Library, Inc.

On September 30, 2018, the National Park Service hired Erik St. Clair as the permanent maintenance staff for First Ladies NHS. St. Clair had worked as a seasonal maintenance worker for Cuyahoga Valley National Park earlier in the year. Although not well-versed in HVAC maintenance, he was eager to learn that skill, and he had a skill that had been somewhat lacking in the first two maintenance mechanics hired for First Ladies NHS: he was a good communicator. St. Clair's primary function is ongoing evaluation of the buildings of the First Ladies NHS site for preventive maintenance needs and assembling maintenance and rehabilitation project packages in the National Park Service Project Management Information System (PMIS) for funding in the future. In addition to maintenance work, St. Clair serves as the contracting officer's representative (COR) for projects at First Ladies NHS.

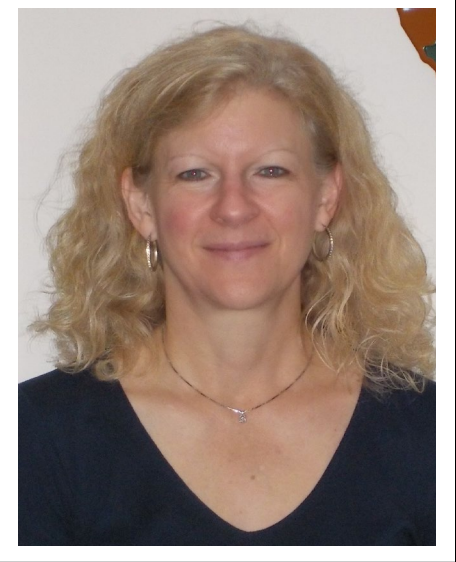


Figure 43: Jennifer McMahon, Midwest Regional Partnership Program Manager, 2021. Photograph by Deborah Harvey.

The search for a new site manager for First Ladies NHS began in 2016 and finally came to an end in late April 2019. Todd Arrington, who had transferred from Homestead National Monument of America (now Homestead National Historical Park) to James A. Garfield NHS as Chief of Interpretation in 2009, had been named site manager at James A. Garfield NHS in 2015, so the search was only for someone to manage First Ladies NHS. The search team included Cuyahoga Valley NP Superintendent Craig Kenkel, Jennifer McMahon, who was, at the time, serving as acting site manager for First Ladies NHS, Cuyahoga Valley NP Chief of Interpretation, Education, and Visitor Services Jennifer Vasarhelyi, and at least one member of the National First Ladies' Library, Inc. Executive Board and one member of its staff.<sup>7</sup> Vasarhelyi managed the selection process, including handling the paperwork and scheduling the interviews, although Kenkel made the ultimate decision.<sup>8</sup> On February 14, 2019, the First Ladies NHS site manager search team for the National Park Service interviewed and hired Chris Wilkinson to be site manager for First

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<sup>6</sup> Mary Pat Doorley, oral history interview. See also Jennifer McMahon, oral history interview. According to McMahon, she was not officially titled Acting Site Manager; she located to First Ladies NHS in advance of hiring Site Manager Christopher Wilkinson in order to be able to understand and relay to him what the needs of the site were when whomever was hired came on duty.

<sup>7</sup> Craig Kenkel, oral history interview. See also Jennifer Vasarhelyi, oral history interview.

<sup>8</sup> Jennifer Vasarhelyi, oral history interview.





Figure 44: Christopher Wilkinson, former First Ladies National Historic Site Superintendent, 2021. Photograph by Deborah Harvey.

Ladies NHS (Figure 44). Wilkinson entered on duty in April 2019.<sup>9</sup> Although not an HVAC maintenance mechanic, Wilkinson, it was felt, had the experience to understand how maintenance was supposed to work.

In Wilkinson's view, "the new cooperative agreement was vague – I'm told, in some ways, deliberately vague, and I found that the stuff that the Park Service said we were going to do...had not been fleshed out." It was up to Wilkinson to put flesh on those bones. He began by adding permanent interpretive staff at the site (see Chapter Six for details) to enhance coverage of, especially, the Visitor Contact Station in the Education and Research Center. However, in his view, the confusion over roles and responsibilities centered on the National Park Service's expectation that, after signing of the fourth cooperative agreement, NFLL would transition to a philanthropic organization dedicated to raising money

and providing support for First Ladies NHS.<sup>10</sup> This kind of organization is usually known as a Friends Group, and National Park Service staff involved in creation of the fourth cooperative agreement had an excellent model for that kind of arrangement in the Cuyahoga Valley National Park Friends Group. Unfortunately, National First Ladies' Library, Inc. apparently did not share that vision for their future, according to Wilkinson. This difference of opinion appears to have caused a lot of confusion, dissension, and hurt feelings over the life of the current cooperative agreement. After signing of the fourth cooperative agreement, Cuyahoga Valley NP Chief of Interpretation, Education, and Visitor Services Jennifer Vasarhelyi worked with National First Ladies' Library, Inc. President and Chief Executive Officer Jennifer Highfield to resolve the differences, but Highfield left the employ of NFLL in December 2022, so those negotiations have stopped as of this writing (2023).<sup>11</sup>

Wilkinson did not handle such administrative tasks for First Ladies NHS as accounting or hiring. As site manager, he was involved in formulating the annual budget and making recommendations for budget and staffing allocations, although final decisions regarding budget and staffing for First Ladies NHS are made by the superintendent at Cuyahoga Valley National Park. Before he arrived on site, the East Business Management Group, led by Mary Pat Doorley, had been formed to address administrative needs for a

<sup>9</sup> Chris Wilkinson, oral history interview.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

group of National Park System units in the Midwest Region. In addition to Cuyahoga Valley National Park, this group handles administrative tasks for First Ladies NHS, James A. Garfield NHS, Charles Young Buffalo Soldiers National Monument, and Perry's Victory and International Peace Memorial, all of which are located in Ohio. Each site contributes part of its operating budget to fund the work of the East Business Management Group. This arrangement, which is ultimately more time- and cost-effective than having each site support its own administrative staff, leaves site managers and superintendents free to focus on the day-to-day operations of their sites. According to Wilkinson, this strategy of grouping parks to allow them to share administrative resources is spreading within the National Park Service. The Midwest Regional Office also has a West Business Management Group headquartered at Indiana Dunes National Park, Indiana.<sup>12</sup>

Wilkinson's plans for overhauling the management strategies at First Ladies NHS were significantly hampered by the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, which shut down much of the country beginning in March 2020. National Park System units closed Visitor Centers, which eliminated the need for guided tours and sent National First Ladies' Library, Inc.'s costumed interpreters home for the duration. By October 2021, the site had re-opened to indoor visitation, but the costumed interpreters have not returned (2023), and all tours are now managed by National Park Service interpretive staff. During his tenure, Wilkinson oversaw several maintenance projects at the Education and Research Center building, including installation of safety anchors on the roof and replacement of the historic metal stairs from the basement to the first floor. In addition, Wilkinson helped the First Ladies NHS maintenance division to formulate the first ever five-year Cyclic Maintenance Plan for the site.<sup>13</sup> Wilkinson managed the Park Ranger staff and the maintenance staff until he transferred to Cuyahoga Valley National Park on September 26, 2022, and Dan Jackson, most recently the Section 106 Coordinator for Rocky Mountain National Park, Colorado, was appointed acting site manager on November 3, 2022, for a ninety-day detail.<sup>14</sup> In June 2023, a new site manager, Megan Parde, was hired for First Ladies NHS. Coming from Tonto National Monument in Roosevelt, Arizona, where she served as the Interpretation Program Manager, Parde entered on duty at First Ladies NHS on July 2, 2023.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Regional Historian Ron Cockrell to Deborah Harvey, email, November 4, 2022.

<sup>15</sup> Rachel Daniels, MWR Communications, "Omaha Regional Office News Release – Megan Parde selected as site manager of First Ladies, National Historic Site," emailed electronic announcement forwarded to author by Regional Historian Ron Cockrell. June 15, 2023, and Megan Parde to Deborah Harvey, email, August 11, 2023.

## *Budget*

The first cooperative agreement, signed in February 2003, allocated \$600,000 to National First Ladies' Library, Inc. for operation of the First Ladies National Historic Site. At least in theory, this would not be NFLL's total budget because the non-profit was expected to also raise funds for its own maintenance. However, documents relating to that fundraising in the first year of operating the First Ladies NHS under the cooperative agreement with the National Park Service have not been located for this Administrative History, so it is unknown what the actual budget for 2003 was. There is documentation that, in 2002, NFLL raised \$18,787 in fees charged for guided tours of the Saxton House, and that amount rose to \$24,245 in 2003.<sup>16</sup> By April 2003, National First Ladies' Library, Inc. and the National Park Service had negotiated an increase in annual funds from NPS to \$700,000 per annum because NFLL was assuming responsibility for maintenance and repairs to the Saxton House formerly underwritten by the Stark County Foundation, which had recently terminated its lease of the property from the National Park Service.<sup>17</sup> In FY 04, the funding amount passed to National First Ladies' Library, Inc. from NPS was \$752,620, but it appears that the additional \$52,620 came from other funds such as project funds, as the cooperative agreement still only allotted \$700,000 for NFLL's site operations in FY 04 and FY 05.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, the amount passed to National First Ladies' Library, Inc. in FY 05 was \$960,418.<sup>19</sup> It is unclear from what NPS program the additional funds came or to what use they were put. National First Ladies' Library, Inc. reported raising \$27,402 in tour fees in FY 04 and \$39,713 in FY 05.<sup>20</sup> In December 2005, the funding amount for FY 06 was raised to \$1,100,000 yearly. However, due to needed replacement of three heat pumps and interior painting at the Saxton House, an additional \$19,000 was added to that total.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Patty Rooney, NPS Midwest Regional Office, email to First Ladies NHS Site Manager Carol Spears, Chart, "National First Ladies' Library – Income Other Than Federal," attached to proposed NPS response to Mr. Jeff Ruch, Executive Director, PEER FOIA Request, May 24, 2005. In Cuyahoga Valley National Park Archives.

<sup>17</sup> "Memorandum, Superintendent, Cuyahoga Valley National Park to Regional Director, Midwest Regional Office, "Attachment B - National Park Service Midwest Regional Office, Cooperative Agreement between the National Park Service and National First Ladies Library, Inc. regarding the Cooperative Management of the First Ladies National Historic Site" (H6160020002), 2001, (Modification No. 0005). In Cuyahoga Valley National Park archives.

<sup>18</sup> Superintendent, Cuyahoga Valley National Park to Regional Director, Midwest Regional Office, "Memorandum," "Attachment B - National Park Service Midwest Regional Office, Cooperative Agreement between the National Park Service and National First Ladies Library, Inc. regarding the Cooperative Management of the First Ladies National Historic Site" (H6160020002), 2001, (Modification Nos. 0009 and 0010). In Cuyahoga Valley National Park archives.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., n.p. (Modification Nos. 0014 and 0015).

<sup>20</sup> Superintendent, Cuyahoga Valley National Park to Regional Director, Midwest Regional Office, "Memorandum," relating to Department of Interior Office of Inspector General Case File No. OI-HQ-05-0635-R (First Ladies NHS), June 28, 2006. In Cuyahoga Valley National Park archives.

<sup>21</sup> Superintendent, Cuyahoga Valley National Park to Regional Director, Midwest Regional Office, "Memorandum," "Attachment B - National Park Service Midwest Regional Office, Cooperative Agreement between the National Park Service and National First Ladies Library, Inc. regarding the Cooperative Management of the First Ladies

The second cooperative agreement between NPS and NFLL was signed in August 2006 and went into effect on October 1, 2006. The annual funding in this cooperative agreement, starting in FY 07, was not to exceed \$1.5 million.<sup>22</sup> This limit included the amounts the National Park Service retained from the total each year to fund its own operations related to First Ladies NHS, such as salaries for the site manager and seasonal park rangers and vehicle expenses for travel between the two sites managed by the designated site manager, First Ladies NHS and James A. Garfield NHS. A budget breakdown for FY 09 indicates that, of the \$1,009,800 allocated to National First Ladies' Library, Inc. in Operation of the National Park System (ONPS) funds, NPS retained \$106,540, approximately 10.5 percent of the total, to cover its own expenses.<sup>23</sup> In FY 10, NPS reduced the retained amount to \$103,412. This is likely indicative of the amounts retained in the years for which no documentation of such retention has been located for this report. Essentially, approximately ninety percent of the funds appropriated for operation and maintenance of the First Ladies National Historic Site was forwarded to National First Ladies' Library, Inc. for that purpose. By the end of FY 09, the total of the funds allotted to operate First Ladies NHS under the second Cooperative Agreement amounted to \$3,017,065.45, approximately \$1 million per year.<sup>24</sup> The budget for FY 09 was \$1,009,800, and, for FY 10, it was set at \$1,010,790 of which NPS retained \$103,412. These amounts also included the money held out each year to fund a Phase II environmental study of Rotary Park should the National Park Service decide to accept it as a donation from National First Ladies' Library, Inc.<sup>25</sup> In FY 10, the amount held was reduced from \$20,000 to \$15,000. The FY 10 annual budget allotted an additional \$18,587 in project funding for paving the parking lot and for other purposes not described.<sup>26</sup> Funds for specific projects such as this are provided through a funding mechanism separate from the ONPS funding (PMIS No. 152703) and are not considered operating funds.<sup>27</sup> In this case, the park used Cyclic Maintenance funds to pave the parking lot behind the Saxton House. The allotted \$18,587 proved insufficient and the Midwest Regional Office provided additional funding, bringing the total to \$25,000. The project was completed in January 2011.<sup>28</sup>

On June 15, 2011, the Department of Interior released its funding authorizations for units of the National Park System for the next budget cycle. After several months of wrangling the

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National Historic Site" (H6160020002), 2001, (Modification Nos. 0017 and 0018). In Cuyahoga Valley National Park archives.

<sup>22</sup> National Park Service Midwest Regional Office, "Cooperative Agreement between the National Park Service and National First Ladies' Library, Inc. regarding the Cooperative Management of the First Ladies National Historic Site (H6160070001)," signed July and August 2006, 1-3, in First Ladies NHS archives, Box 1, Folder: Budget.

<sup>23</sup> Sherda K. Williams to Sheba I. Harris, email, April 29, 2009.

<sup>24</sup> Sherda K. Williams to Patricia Krider, email, September 23, 2009. In First Ladies NHS archives, Box 1, Folder, Budget.

<sup>25</sup> Sherda K. Williams to Sheba I. Harris, email, April 29, 2009.

<sup>26</sup> Sherda K. Williams, "FILA Budget, FY2010," May 11, 2010, attachment to email from Williams to Sheba Harris, email, July 14, 2010. In First Ladies NHS archives, Box 1, Folder, Budget.

<sup>27</sup> Sherda K. Williams, "FILA Budget, FY2010," December 4, 2009. In First Ladies NHS archives, Box 1, Folder, Budget.

<sup>28</sup> Regional Historian Ron Cockrell, information provided to author on review of draft of this report, March 23, 2023.

numbers for all National Park System units, the amount authorized for First Ladies NHS was \$983,324 in ONPS funds, unchanged from the previous year, plus \$1,828 in VIP program funds and \$15,000 for the Phase II Rotary Park environmental assessment study.<sup>29</sup> First Ladies NHS was not alone in being asked to operate at the same funding level in 2012 as they did in 2011. Of all the units of the National Park System assigned for management to the Midwest Regional Office, only one, Indiana Dunes National Park, got a raise that year of \$500.<sup>30</sup>

Because the third cooperative agreement for First Ladies National Historic Site was not signed until well into 2012, there was no formal agreement for a grant of funds for the park. For 2012, NPS significantly reduced the budget for NFLL to account for funding only four months of the fiscal year. National First Ladies' Library, Inc., in their SF-424 budget estimate attached to the third Cooperative Agreement, anticipated receiving \$88,583 from the National Park Service for the remainder of FY 12, but, after the cooperative agreement was signed, funding for NFLL to manage First Ladies NHS was set at \$86,413 for the rest of the year. National First Ladies' Library, Inc. had also predicted raising \$17,717 from private sources in 2012. The slight shortfall of funds from NPS meant that they would either have to cut back on something in the budget or raise extra private funds to cover their expenses. Funding for the First Ladies NHS under the third cooperative agreement was set at \$1.5 million for the first full fiscal year (2013).<sup>31</sup>

The annual allocation for First Ladies NHS was set in February 2019 in the fourth Cooperative Agreement at just shy of \$700,000. The total amount of the annual award, including cost-sharing funds, was \$699,243.66. Beginning in 2019, only \$400,000 were allocated to National First Ladies' Library, Inc. for their use as a line-item in the overall allocation from Congress due to the significant changes in management responsibilities, which shifted the day-to-day management and the maintenance responsibilities from NFLL to the National Park Service. The amount allocated to NFLL yearly has been reduced since that time, although the overall allocation for the site remains approximately the same, up to approximately \$1 million.<sup>32</sup> It is, perhaps, ironic that the annual budget for this site in 2023 is about the same as or less than it was in 2003, when First Ladies NHS was a "start-up" park. In his interview for this Administrative History, Christopher Wilkinson referred to First Ladies NHS as a "start-up" park when he came on duty in 2019. He felt that he had been tasked with "standing up" the park, which is a term used internally by National Park Service staff to describe getting a newly-designated park up and running. He explained that, because NPS had so recently at this park taken on the customary responsibilities for a unit of the National Park System, it felt to him like a start-up park as he and his staff, new to the site, learned to navigate its management needs. The

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<sup>29</sup> "United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Parks/Regional Funding Authorization," February 3, 2011, through June 13, 2011. In First Ladies NHS archives, Box: 1, Folder: Budget, Subfolder: BE Documents.

<sup>30</sup> "United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Parks/Regional Funding Authorization," June 15, 2011. In First Ladies NHS archives, Box 1, Folder, Budget.

<sup>31</sup> "Cooperative Agreement No. P12AC100314," 11-12 and Attachment E, n.p.

<sup>32</sup> "Cooperative Agreement P19AC00002," 1. See also comments from Cuyahoga Valley National Park Superintendent Lisa Petit on review of draft final of this report, received March 23, 2023.

fourth cooperative agreement, signed in 2019, created the feeling that First Ladies NHS was at a new beginning.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Christopher Wilkinson, oral history interview.

## **CHAPTER TEN: Summary and Conclusion**

Mary Regula started with a simple idea: create a bibliography about the name, author, and location of books, articles, and other ephemera regarding the lives of First Ladies of the United States. Her plan was to make this bibliography available for others to use, operating from a small office with a computer in space leased from a local non-profit organization in Canton, Ohio. As with many really good ideas, it began moving in a series of unanticipated directions. Before long, her idea evolved into an organization that she founded: National First Ladies' Library, Inc., which consisted of about a dozen of her own personal friends and relatives but quickly grew to include many of the important people in or associated with Washington, D.C., where her husband, Representative Ralph Regula, was Chair of the House Appropriations Committee. The new organization even gained the enthusiastic support of a sitting First Lady, Hillary Rodham Clinton, who recommended author Carl S. Anthony to create the online bibliography. Hiring Anthony to do the work required raising funds and some sharing of responsibility for how those funds were spent. A Board of Directors was formed, and meetings were held. Mary Regula's initial interest had been in Mary Todd Lincoln, wife of President Abraham Lincoln. Because the office they leased from the Stark County Community Foundation was in the Saxton House, the childhood home of Ida Saxton McKinley, wife of President William McKinley, National First Ladies' Library, Inc. staff acquired an affinity for this First Lady that transcended that of the others. They agreed to rehabilitate rooms in the house to the Victorian period, mostly the 1880s and 1890s when the McKinley's were occasionally in residence there, so that exhibits about the McKinleys could be displayed and the house opened for public tours. This plan required that more money be raised. National First Ladies' Library, Inc. decided to conduct the tours using a cadre of volunteer docents dressed in costumes representative of First Ladies from every period of United States history; the provision of tours for an admission fee then required hiring a bookkeeper and a tour coordinator. People began to donate books and other materials about First Ladies to the National First Ladies' Library, which necessitated not only finding a place to keep the materials but also cataloging what they had, so someone was hired to do that. To help with the space problem, a local philanthropist, Marshall B. Belden, donated to National First Ladies' Library, Inc. in 1998 the City National Bank Building on the next block north from the Saxton House. The building required more rehabilitation and more fundraising to make it a suitable repository for the physical library and the archival materials and collections National First Ladies' Library, Inc. had already accumulated. This building became National First Ladies' Library, Inc.'s Education and Research Center. In addition, a small park and parking lot located between the two buildings had been donated to National First Ladies' Library, Inc. All this property needed management, maintenance, and cleaning, and staff grew along with the many activities undertaken by National First Ladies' Library, Inc. to help Mary Regula realize her simple dream of compiling information about First Ladies and providing it to others.

Realizing that things were, perhaps, getting beyond their own management and funding capabilities and also wanting to preserve what Mary Regula and her group had created for future generations, Ralph Regula turned to the idea of having the federal government be responsible for, at minimum, funding the endeavor. He then worked to have the Saxton House, where the National First Ladies' Library and offices were, designated a unit of the National Park Service. Regula was successful, and President William Jefferson Clinton signed Public Law 106-291 on October 11, 2000, which established the First Ladies National Historic Site at the Saxton House in Canton, Ohio.

The designation appeared to be a win-win situation for both organizations involved. National First Ladies' Library, Inc. solved its funding difficulties, although it was still required to raise funds privately for its own organization's activities. The National Park Service acquired a new unit of the National Park System that required no investment of funds in rehabilitation of the historic building and grounds since an earlier owner, Marshall B. Belden, and the current occupants, National First Ladies' Library, Inc., had already done that work, including upgrading building infrastructure. Perhaps more importantly, the National Park Service did not have to invest personnel in "standing up" the park because it was already under the management regime of the National First Ladies' Library, Inc., and NFLL wanted it to stay that way. Association with the National Park Service did come with additional complications, however, as National First Ladies' Library had to learn how to navigate and meet the requirements for a private, not-for-profit organization accepting funds from the federal government. Although the National Park Service ostensibly planned to incorporate NPS means and methods for interpretation and management into the site, National First Ladies' Library, Inc. firmly and successfully rejected all efforts to make the site a standard unit of the National Park Service. National Park Service site managers were not allowed by Mary Regula to have an office on-site and were obliged to make an appointment and drive the seventy miles from their offices at James A. Garfield NHS for interactions with National First Ladies' Library, Inc. staff. As a result, most interactions were conducted by email rather than in person.<sup>1</sup> Most efforts at inserting a National Park Service presence at First Ladies NHS were not well received. National First Ladies' Library, Inc. simply wanted the National Park Service to provide funding and let them continue to fulfill their mission, which is to promote an understanding of the history of the First Ladies, as they had before, though now on behalf of the National Park Service.

The NFLL received federal funds and operated the First Ladies NHS under a series of cooperative agreements with the National Park Service, each one re-negotiated at the end of a five-year term. The NFLL's relative independence from NPS control continued for about twelve years until it came time to negotiate the third of these cooperative agreements. At that time, immediate infrastructure needs such as an upgraded HVAC system at the Education and

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<sup>1</sup> This turned out to be a good thing, as it documented the early development of the relationship between the National Park Service and National First Ladies' Library, Inc. for this Administrative History much better than would have in-person encounters not documented by meeting minutes.



Research Center and apprehension of other infrastructure and maintenance needs in the future caused the National Park Service to assume, through the medium of a new cooperative agreement, responsibility for this facet of site management. Although National First Ladies' Library, Inc. was grateful for the assistance, they were unwilling to surrender any other management responsibilities to the National Park Service at that time.

However, by 2017, both Mary and Ralph Regula had retired and retreated from direct involvement in National First Ladies' Library, Inc., and their son, David Regula, sat on the Board of Directors. David Regula was very interested in having the National Park Service become more involved with management and maintenance of the First Ladies NHS. He worked with Cuyahoga Valley National Park Superintendent Craig Kenkel to effect the changes they both desired. The cooperative agreement between the National Park Service and National First Ladies' Library, Inc. signed in 2019 required a much more robust role for NPS in management of the site. The National Park Service staff, based mostly at Cuyahoga Valley National Park, threw themselves into their new role with gusto, funding several studies to improve and expand site interpretation, conducting educational programs for local schools, assigning permanent maintenance and interpretive staff to the site, furnishing office space in the Education and Research Center, and establishing means for reaching out to the surrounding community to promote First Ladies NHS. Kenkel and his staff recruited a new site manager, Christopher Wilkinson, whose sole responsibility was to bring First Ladies NHS up to National Park Service standards.

Between 2016 and 2022, several long-time National First Ladies' Library, Inc. staffers retired or went elsewhere. Their positions were not backfilled, which reduced the number of National First Ladies' Library, Inc. staff from a high of twenty-four in 2017 to three in 2022. The COVID-19 pandemic contributed to this exodus in 2020 and 2021 because age and pre-existing medical conditions made several of the costumed docents susceptible to the disease, and they left the site to avoid it. After discontinuing for about a year tours of the Saxton House and the Education and Research Center, the National Park Service began providing the guided tours using masked NPS personnel dressed in NPS uniforms as well as providing uniformed park rangers and park guides to staff the Visitor Contact Center in the Education and Research Center, sell tour tickets, and direct visitors to the various attractions of the site and of Canton, Ohio, in general. This continues to be the management arrangement at First Ladies National Historic Site in 2023.

The current cooperative agreement between the National Park Service and National First Ladies' Library, Inc. expires in 2024. Negotiations for the new agreement are underway. The new cooperative agreement will likely complete the transition of First Ladies NHS management from the simple idea begun by Mary Regula to a fully-integrated unit of the National Park System. The National Park Service advocates that National First Ladies' Library, Inc. reconfigure its relationship with First Ladies NHS to one of mainly philanthropic support, a Friends Group similar to the one that operates superbly at Cuyahoga Valley National Park.

However, in addition to its long-time role as a cooperating association, the fourth cooperative agreement proposed that NFLL provide programs and exhibits to help fulfill the purpose of the site. This suggested involvement is especially appropriate because National First Ladies' Library, Inc. is the owner of nearly all material artifacts contained within the Saxton House and the Education and Research Center buildings owned by the National Park Service. Blueprints for achieving this goal for the site and for both organizations have been prepared and may be found in the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan*, The Design Minds, Inc. planning report, and the fourth cooperative agreement.

The fourth cooperative agreement began in earnest the discussion of how to transition First Ladies NHS from a partner-run site to a standard National Park Service site by re-assigning responsibilities between the two organizations to take better advantage of the strengths of each. Jennifer Vasarhelyi explained that the objective of the National Park Service in this reassignment was not to eliminate National First Ladies' Library, Inc. staff from the site but to

promote growth of the site by positioning the partner focus on roles including philanthropy, re-visioned sales, and new programming. .... It wasn't just about moving roles from one organization to another, but looking for ways to increase the overall capacity of the site through changing partner roles.<sup>2</sup>

The Design Minds, Inc. document offered a series of recommendations for re-imagining the physical elements of the site as well as the management elements. Although some of the recommendations may have been at the time, and may still be today, hard to envision becoming reality, they offer an aspirational framework within which the two organizations might work together to make what might have once seemed impossible a reality. Similarly, the *Long-Range Interpretive Plan* outlined notions of interpretation and the means of achieving them that, at the time, seemed to some to be unachievable or unwieldy solutions to interpretation problems. However, with advances in technology and changes in interpretive methodology, the ideas put forward by the *LRIP* could provide a solid base for creating innovative programs of interpretation of which the National Park Service and National First Ladies' Library, Inc. can both be proud.

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<sup>2</sup> Jennifer Vasarhelyi, "Review Comments" on draft of "A Place for the Ladies – Administrative History of National First Ladies' Historic Site, Ohio," 2, received by author March 23, 2023.

# Bibliography

## *Notes on Sources*

This Administrative History of First Ladies National Historic Site relied primarily upon records located at the National Park Service Administrative Offices of Cuyahoga Valley National Park, James A. Garfield National Historic Site, and First Ladies National Historic Site. Because the National Park Service did not have a permanent administrative presence onsite at First Ladies NHS until 2019, only a small collection of documents, mostly those from Sherda Williams' time as superintendent of First Ladies NHS and James A. Garfield NHS between 2008 and 2015, were available for research during site trips undertaken to conduct research. These documents were found in two document boxes in the First Ladies NHS site manager's office in the Education and Research Center. The author reviewed, scanned, and organized into labeled folders all pertinent documents found in those boxes, and returned them to the office in which they were located. They are referenced as being in First Ladies NHS archives. Also reviewed and copied by the author was a collection of newspaper clippings provided by the Cuyahoga Valley NP archives. The remaining documents were located at the other two related sites – James A. Garfield NHS and Cuyahoga Valley NP – by Cuyahoga Valley NP Secretary for the Superintendent Karen Kopchak at the direction of Cuyahoga Valley National Park Superintendent Lisa Petit. The author is greatly indebted to Petit, Kopchak, and their colleagues for scanning the documents they located and making them available in digital form. Records forwarded by Kopchak are indicated as being in the Cuyahoga Valley National Park digital archives.

In addition to records located at the three National Park System sites, the Ralph Regula Papers at Ohio State University, Columbus, were consulted for information regarding Congressman Regula's involvement in the site from his initial efforts to have the federal government purchase the Saxton House to passage of the enabling legislation establishing First Ladies NHS in October, 2000. These documents are cited as the Ralph Regula papers.

Because National First Ladies' Library, Inc. internal documents were unavailable for research for this Administrative History, oral histories proved invaluable for learning something of the early years of the site, despite that several of the proposed respondents declined to be interviewed. Fortunately, those that did agree were on site at critical times and could supply information about how National First Ladies' Library, Inc. operated in the early days. These interviews also provided insights as the changing nature of the partnership with the National Park Service, from NPS being almost completely uninvolved in management decisions through 2012, gradually assuming more responsibility, to NPS being very involved in management, at least according to the cooperative agreement, after 2019. Former and current National First Ladies' Library, Inc. staff, a board member, and a community associate also were able to provide some of the background thinking that drove NFLL's reaction to National Park Service management initiatives.

Several websites provided excellent contextual information, notably *Ancestry.com* for sorting out the family relationships among the early settlers of Canton, Ohio, and their later descendants through their online census and grave records, and the development of Market Street through the Canton city directories, also online. The Library of Congress website, [www.loc.gov](http://www.loc.gov) provided images of the *Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps from Canton, Ohio*, and the congressional website, [www.congress.gov](http://www.congress.gov) gave details on the legislative maneuvers that resulted in First Ladies National Historic Site. *Ohiohistory.org* gave information on the early history of Ohio that enlarged understanding of the development of Canton and the state as a whole.

The following secondary sources and reports provided additional background and context for discussion of the history of First Ladies National Historic Site:

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#### *Reports and Studies*

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*Foundation Document Overview, First Ladies National Historic Site, Ohio*. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2016.

*Long-Range Interpretive Plan: First Ladies National Historic Site*. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2017.

“National First Ladies Library Special Resource Study, Canton, Ohio.” Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 2000.

“Record of Decision: First Ladies National Historic Site General Management Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement; First Ladies National Historic Site, Ohio. Department of the Interior, National Park Service,” May 22, 2006.

### *Oral Histories*

Note: One informant associated with National First Ladies’ Library, Inc., President and Chief Executive Officer Jennifer Highfield, agreed to be interviewed but declined to sign the Gift Conveyance Record until she had reviewed the transcript. After review and editing of the transcript had been completed, she declined to sign and return the Gift Conveyance Record, so her interview could not be used for this Administrative History. Transcripts of each of the following oral history interviews are located in the National Park Service Midwest Regional Office, Regions, 3, 4, and 5 Cultural Resources Division files. All interviews conducted by author, Deborah E. Harvey.

Anthony, Carl Sferrazza. In person, June 17, 2022.

Debo, John. In person, October 13, 2021.

Doorley, Mary Pat. Via Zoom, September 8, 2022.

Fahrney, Gail. In person, October 9, 2021.

Hamm, Dennis. In person, October 15, 2021.

Holland, Mark. In person, October 13, 2021.

Kenkel, Craig. In person, June 20, 2022.

McMahon, Jennifer. In person, October 15, 2021.

Regula, David. In person, October 14, 2021.

Semple, Eric. Via Teams, September 9, 2022.

Spears, Carol. Via Zoom, October 21, 2021.

Vasarhelyi, Jennifer. In person, October 15, 2021.

Wilkinson, Chris. In person, October 9, 2021.

Williams, Sherda. In person, August 30, 2021.

## **Appendix A: Legislation**

PUBLIC LAW 106-291—OCT. 11, 2000

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR AND  
RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT,  
2001



or grow the seeds or seedlings and are available without fiscal year limitation.

SEC. 143. Public Law 105-83 (111 Stat. 1556) is amended as follows: Under the heading "Operation of Indian Programs" in the Bureau of Indian Affairs strike "non-Federal" in the last proviso and insert in lieu thereof "non-Department of the Interior".

SEC. 144. (a) Notwithstanding any other provision of law, and subject to subsections (b) and (c), all conveyances to the city of Valley City, a municipal corporation of Barnes County, North Dakota, of lands described in subsection (b), heretofore or hereafter made directly by The Burlington Northern and Santa Fe Railway Company or its successors, are hereby validated to the extent that the conveyances would be legal and valid if all right, title, and interest of the United States, except minerals, were held by The Burlington Northern and Santa Fe Railway Company.

(b) LANDS DESCRIBED.—The lands referred to in subsection (a) are the land that formed part of the railroad right-of-way granted to the Northern Pacific Railroad Company, a predecessor to The Burlington Northern and Santa Fe Railway Company, by an Act of Congress on July 2, 1864, specifically a 400-foot wide right-of-way, being 200 feet wide on each side of the centerline of the rail track as originally located and constructed between milepost 69.05 and milepost 61.10 within Barnes County, North Dakota, as shown and described on the map entitled "City of Valley City—Railroad Parcels" dated September 1, 2000. Such map shall be placed on file and available for inspection in the offices of the Director of the Bureau of Land Management.

(c) ACCESS AND MINERAL RIGHTS.—

(1) PRESERVATION OF RIGHTS OF ACCESS.—Nothing in this section shall impair any rights of access in favor of the public or any owner of adjacent lands over, under, or across the lands described in section 2.

(2) MINERALS.—The United States reserves any federally owned mineral rights in the lands described in subsection (b), except that the United States disclaims any and all right of surface entry to the mineral estate of such lands.

SEC. 145. (a) SHORT TITLE.—This section may be cited as the "First Ladies National Historic Site Act of 2000".

(b) FIRST LADIES NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE.—

(1) FINDINGS.—The Congress finds the following:

(A) Throughout the history of the United States, First Ladies have had an important impact on our Nation's history.

(B) Little attention has been paid to the role of First Ladies and their impact on our Nation's history.

(C) Establishment of the First Ladies National Historic Site will provide unique opportunities for education and study into the impact of First Ladies on our history.

(2) PURPOSES.—The purposes of this section are the following:

(A) To preserve and interpret the role and history of First Ladies for the benefit, inspiration, and education of the people of the United States.

(B) To interpret the impact of First Ladies on the history of the United States.

(C) To provide to school children and scholars access to information about the contributions of First Ladies

First Ladies  
National Historic  
Site Act of 2000.  
16 USC 461 note.

through both a physical educational facility and an electronic virtual library.

(D) To establish the First Ladies National Historic Site in Canton, Ohio, the home of First Lady Ida Saxton McKinley.

(E) To create a public-private partnership between the National Park Service and the National First Ladies Library.

(3) ESTABLISHMENT OF FIRST LADIES NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE.—

(A) ESTABLISHMENT.—There is established in Canton, Ohio, the First Ladies National Historic Site.

(B) DESCRIPTION.—The historic site shall consist of—

(i) the land and improvements comprising the National Park Service property located at 331 Market Avenue South in Canton, Ohio, known as the Ida Saxton McKinley House; and

(ii) if acquired under subsection (b)(4), National Park Service property located at 205 Market Avenue South in Canton, Ohio, known as the City National Bank Building.

(4) ACQUISITION OF CITY NATIONAL BANK BUILDING.—The Secretary may acquire by donation, for inclusion in the historic site, the property located at 205 Market Avenue South in Canton, Ohio, known as the City National Bank Building.

(5) ADMINISTRATION OF THE HISTORIC SITE.—

(A) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall administer the historic site in accordance with this section and the provisions of law generally applicable to units of the National Park System, including the Act entitled "An Act to establish a National Park Service, and for other purposes", approved August 25, 1916 (16 U.S.C. 1 et seq.), and the Act of August 21, 1935 (49 Stat. 666, chapter 593; 16 U.S.C. 461 et seq.).

(B) COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS.—

(i) To further the purposes of this section, the Secretary may enter into a cooperative agreement with the National First Ladies Library (a nonprofit corporation established under the laws of the District of Columbia) under which the National First Ladies Library may operate and maintain the site.

(ii) To further the purposes of this section, the Secretary may enter into cooperative agreements with other public and private organizations.

(C) ASSISTANCE.—The Secretary may provide to the National First Ladies Library—

(i) technical assistance for the preservation of historic structures of, the maintenance of the cultural landscape of, and local preservation planning for, the historic site; and

(ii) subject to the availability of appropriations, financial assistance for the operation and maintenance of the historic site.

(D) ADMISSION FEES.—The Secretary may authorize the National First Ladies Library to—

(i) charge fees for admission to the historic site; and

(ii) retain and use for the historic site amounts paid as such fees.

(E) MANAGEMENT OF PROPERTY.—The Secretary may authorize the National First Ladies Library—

(i) to manage any property within the historic site;

(ii) to lease to other public or private entities any property managed under subparagraph (i) by the National First Ladies Library; and

(iii) to retain and use for the historic site amounts received under such leases.

(6) GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN.—

Deadline.

(A) IN GENERAL.—Not later than the last day of the third full fiscal year beginning after the date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall, in consultation with the officials described in paragraph (B), prepare a general management plan for the historic site.

(B) CONSULTATION.—In preparing the general management plan, the Secretary shall consult with an appropriate official of—

(i) the National First Ladies Library; and

(ii) appropriate political subdivisions of the State of Ohio that have jurisdiction over the area where the historic site is located.

(C) SUBMISSION OF PLAN TO CONGRESS.—Upon the completion of the general management plan, the Secretary shall submit a copy of the plan to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources of the Senate and the Committee on Resources of the House of Representatives.

(7) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

(A) HISTORIC SITE.—The term “historic site” means the First Ladies National Historic Site established by subsection (b)(3).

(B) SECRETARY.—The term “Secretary” means the Secretary of the Interior.

SEC. 146. (a) CONTRIBUTIONS TOWARD ESTABLISHMENT OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN INTERPRETIVE CENTER.—

(1) GRANTS AUTHORIZED.—Subject to subsections (a)(2) and (a)(3), the Secretary of the Interior shall make grants to contribute funds for the establishment in Springfield, Illinois, of an interpretive center to preserve and make available to the public materials related to the life of President Abraham Lincoln and to provide interpretive and educational services which communicate the meaning of the life of Abraham Lincoln.

(2) PLAN AND DESIGN.—

Deadline.

(A) SUBMISSION.—Not later than 18 months after the date of the enactment of this Act, the entity selected by the Secretary of the Interior to receive grants under subsection (a)(1) shall submit to the Secretary a plan and design for the interpretive center, including a description of the following:

(i) The design of the facility and site.

(ii) The method of acquisition.

(iii) The estimated cost of acquisition, construction, operation, and maintenance.

(ii) retain and use for the historic site amounts paid as such fees.

(E) MANAGEMENT OF PROPERTY.—The Secretary may authorize the National First Ladies Library—

(i) to manage any property within the historic site;

(ii) to lease to other public or private entities any property managed under subparagraph (i) by the National First Ladies Library; and

(iii) to retain and use for the historic site amounts received under such leases.

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Deadline.

(A) IN GENERAL.—Not later than the last day of the third full fiscal year beginning after the date of enactment of this Act, the Secretary shall, in consultation with the officials described in paragraph (B), prepare a general management plan for the historic site.

(B) CONSULTATION.—In preparing the general management plan, the Secretary shall consult with an appropriate official of—

(i) the National First Ladies Library; and

(ii) appropriate political subdivisions of the State of Ohio that have jurisdiction over the area where the historic site is located.

(C) SUBMISSION OF PLAN TO CONGRESS.—Upon the completion of the general management plan, the Secretary shall submit a copy of the plan to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources of the Senate and the Committee on Resources of the House of Representatives.

(7) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

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(2) PLAN AND DESIGN.—

Deadline.

(A) SUBMISSION.—Not later than 18 months after the date of the enactment of this Act, the entity selected by the Secretary of the Interior to receive grants under subsection (a)(1) shall submit to the Secretary a plan and design for the interpretive center, including a description of the following:

(i) The design of the facility and site.

(ii) The method of acquisition.

(iii) The estimated cost of acquisition, construction, operation, and maintenance.

the accounts described in (E)(v)–(E)(ix), with the exception of Urban and Community Forestry as described in (E)(ix), or portions thereof.

“(H) The term ‘Urban and Historic Preservation sub-category’ means discretionary appropriations for activities in the accounts described in (E)(ix)–(E)(xii), with the exception of Forest Legacy and Smart Growth Partnerships as described in (E)(ix), or portions thereof.

“(I) The term ‘Payments in Lieu of Taxes sub-category’ means discretionary appropriations for activities in the account described in (E)(xiii) or portions thereof.

“(J) The term ‘Federal Deferred Maintenance sub-category’ means discretionary appropriations for activities in the account described in (E)(xiv) or portions thereof.

“(K) The term ‘Coastal Assistance sub-category’ means discretionary appropriations for activities in the accounts described in (E)(xv)–(E)(xvii) or portions thereof.”

#### TITLE IX

#### DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY

#### BUREAU OF THE PUBLIC DEBT

#### GIFTS TO THE UNITED STATES FOR REDUCTION OF THE PUBLIC DEBT

For deposit of an additional amount into the account established under section 3113(d) of title 31, United States Code, to reduce the public debt, \$5,000,000,000.

This Act may be cited as the “Department of the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2001”.

Approved October 11, 2000.

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#### LEGISLATIVE HISTORY—H.R. 4578:

HOUSE REPORTS: No. 106-646 (Comm. on Appropriations) and No. 106-914 (Comm. of Conference).

SENATE REPORTS: No. 106-312 (Comm. on Appropriations).

CONGRESSIONAL RECORD, Vol. 146 (2000):

June 13–15, considered and passed House.

July 10, 12, 17, 18, considered and passed Senate, amended.

Oct. 3, House agreed to conference report.

Oct. 3–5, Senate agreed to conference report.

WEEKLY COMPILATION OF PRESIDENTIAL DOCUMENTS, Vol. 36 (2000):

Oct. 11, Presidential statement and remarks.

○



## **Appendix B: Budgets, Staff, and Visitation**

*First Ladies National Historic Site: Budgets*

Note: Fiscal Years begin October 1 of the previous year, e.g. Fiscal Year 2012 begins October 1, 2011.

<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>ONPS Budget Amount</b>	<b>Notes</b>
2002	\$600,000	
2003	\$700,000	
2004	\$789,000	
2005	\$1,007,000	
2006	\$1,005,000	
2007	\$1,005,000	
2008	\$1,022,000	
2009	\$1,020,000	
2010	\$1,021,000	
2011	\$1,019,000	
2012	\$997,000 <sup>1</sup>	
2013	\$927,630	
2014	\$977,130	
2015	\$977,130	
2016	\$1,027,745	
2017	\$1,000,456	
2018	\$980,245	
2019	\$800,100	
2020	\$984,567	
2021	\$1,007,924	
2022	\$1,098,093	

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<sup>1</sup> “FILA Briefing Statement – June 21, 2013,” n.p. In Cuyahoga Valley digital archives. This document may have been compiled by First Ladies NHS Superintendent Sherda K. Williams.



2023	\$1,018,115 <sup>2</sup>
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<sup>2</sup> Regional Historian Ron Cockrell, information provided to author on review of draft of this report, March 23, 2023.

### *First Ladies National Historic Site: Staffing*

Note: National First Ladies' Library, Inc. provided all of the onsite staff for First Ladies National Historic Site from its inception in October 2000 until National Park Service Site Manager Christopher Wilkinson came on duty in April 2019, though some seasonal staff had been assigned to the site by earlier First Ladies NHS site managers. This list represents permanent National Park Service staff only and does not include seasonal staff or student employees.

<b><u>Name</u></b>	<b><u>Dates of Service</u></b>
<b>Interim Superintendent</b>	
John Debo (superintendent at Cuyahoga Valley NP)	October 11, 2000 – July 2001
<b>Site Managers/Superintendents</b>	
Carol Spears (with James A. Garfield NHS)	July 2001 – Oct. 31, 2008
Sherda Williams (with James A Garfield NHS) 2015	Nov. 1, 2008 – January
Craig Kenkel (superintendent at Cuyahoga Valley NP)	2015 – October 2018
Jennifer McMahon (acting)	October 2018 – April 2019
Christopher Wilkinson 2022	April 2019 – Sep. 26,
Megan Parde	July 2, 2023 – Present (2023)
<b>Park Rangers</b>	
Lisa Meade	October 2018 – Present (2023)
Rebekah Knaggs (2023)	September 2020 – Present
<b>Maintenance Division</b>	
Tony Weston	Jan. 10, 2016 – Mar. 2, 2017
David Rogers	Oct. 1, 2017 – Mar. 16, 2018
Erik St. Clair (maintenance lead)	Sep. 30, 2018 – June 2023

*First Ladies National Historic Site: Visitation*

**Year                      Visitation Numbers**

NPS Visitation Records by Fiscal Year (FY)

2002	5, 321
2003	6,707
2004	9,351
2005	9,788 <sup>3</sup>
2006	11,219
2007	10,881
2008	9,770
2009	10,466
2010	8,766
2011	8,254
2012	9,903
2013	10,068
2014	15,326
2015	12,897
2016	13,378
2017	13,085
2018	11,447
2019	10,913
2020	2,406
2021	6,565
2022	7,146 <sup>4</sup>

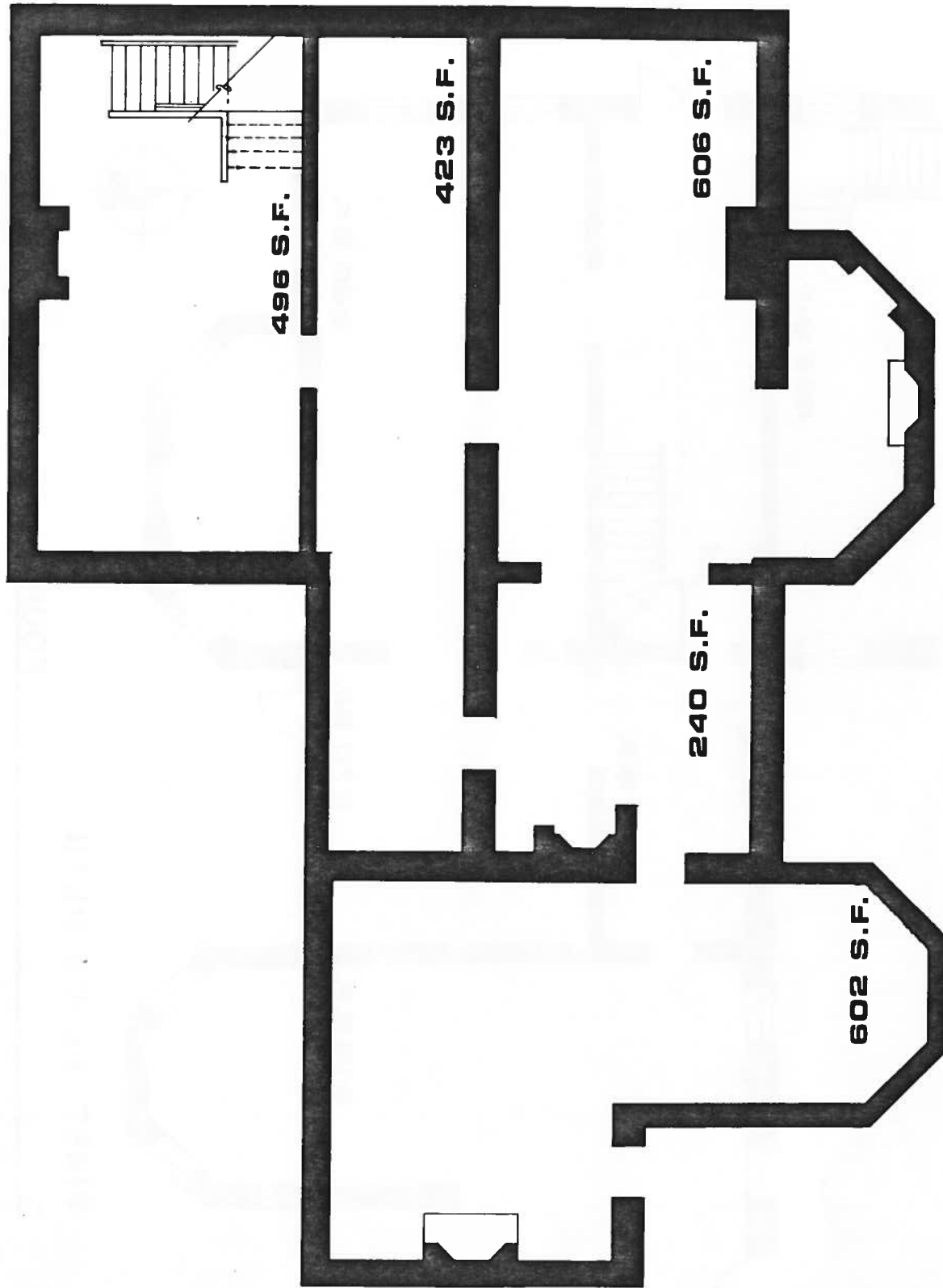
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<sup>3</sup> “Memorandum,” Superintendent, Cuyahoga Valley National Park to Regional Director, Midwest Regional Office, DOI-OIG Case File No. OI-HQ-05-0635-R (First Ladies NHS).

<sup>4</sup> “First Ladies’ NHS” from *Annual Park Recreation Visitation (1904 to Last Calendar Year)*, 2023, copy of online page provided to author by National Park Service staff, March 23, 2023. Note that the COVID-19 pandemic impacted visitation because the buildings were closed to visitors in 2020. Although the buildings reopened, recovery of normal visitation volume is still ongoing in 2023.



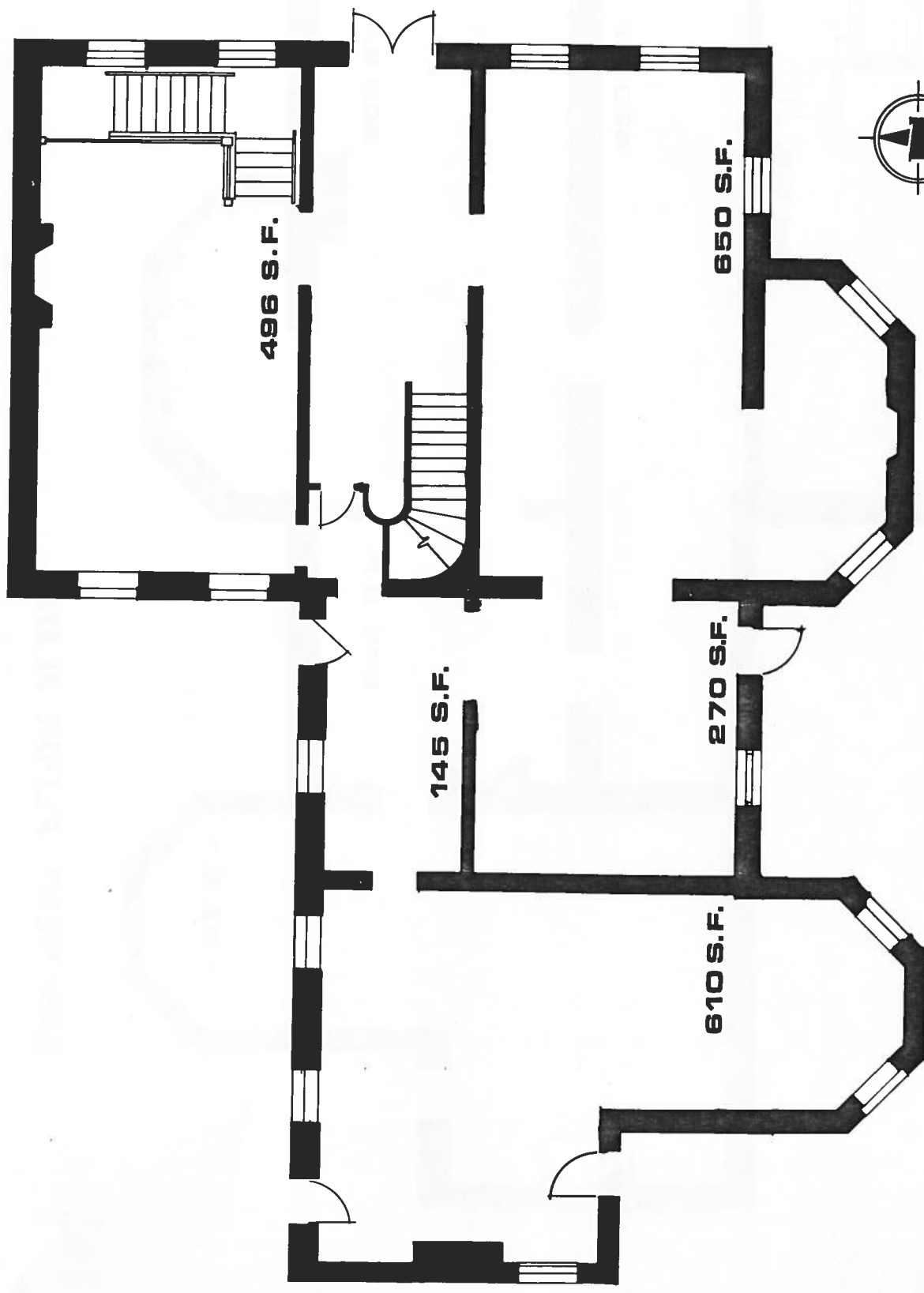
## **Appendix C: Saxton House Floor Plans**



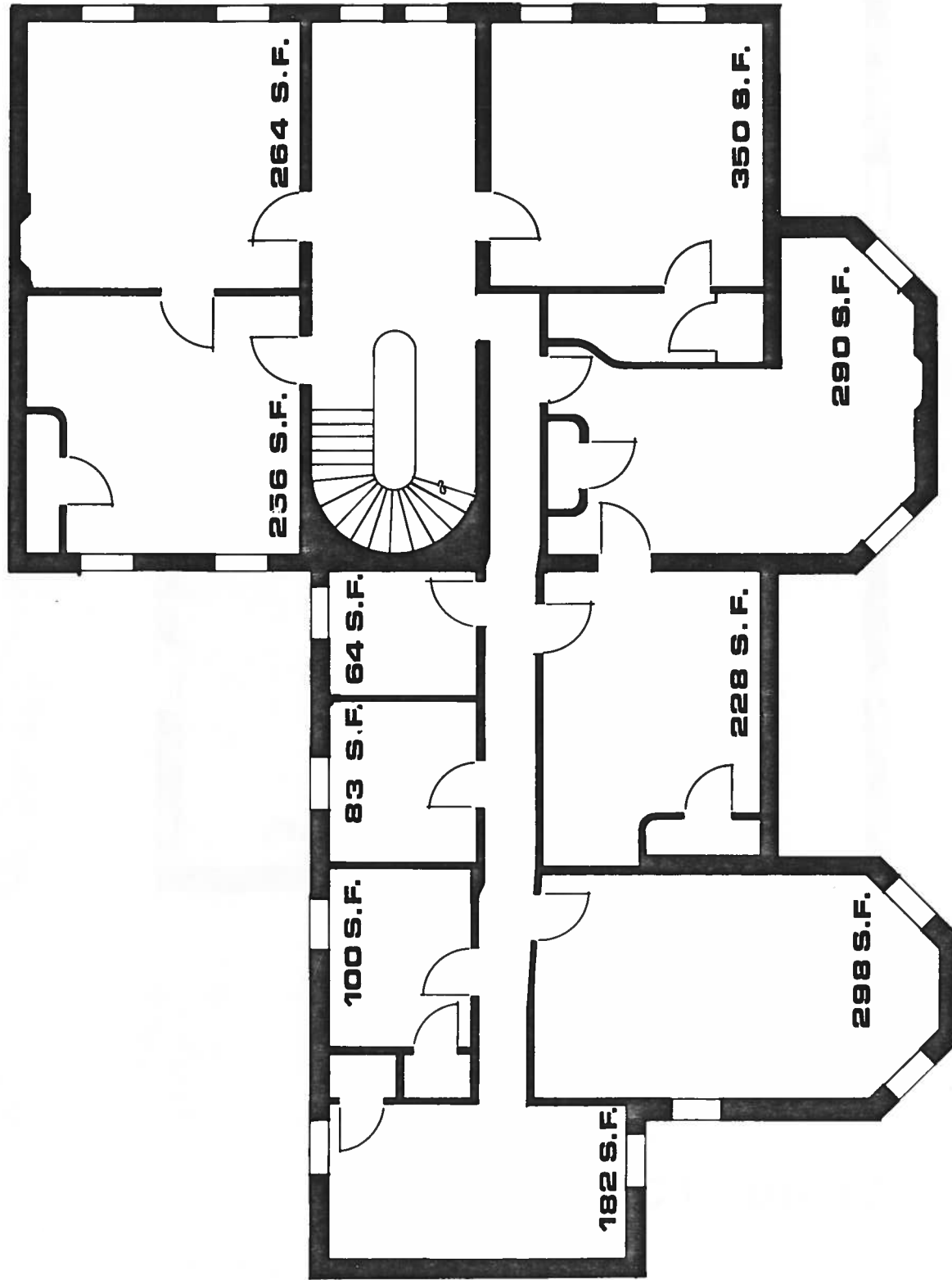
**BASEMENT FLOOR PLAN**

FIRST FLOOR PLAN

FOURTH ST.

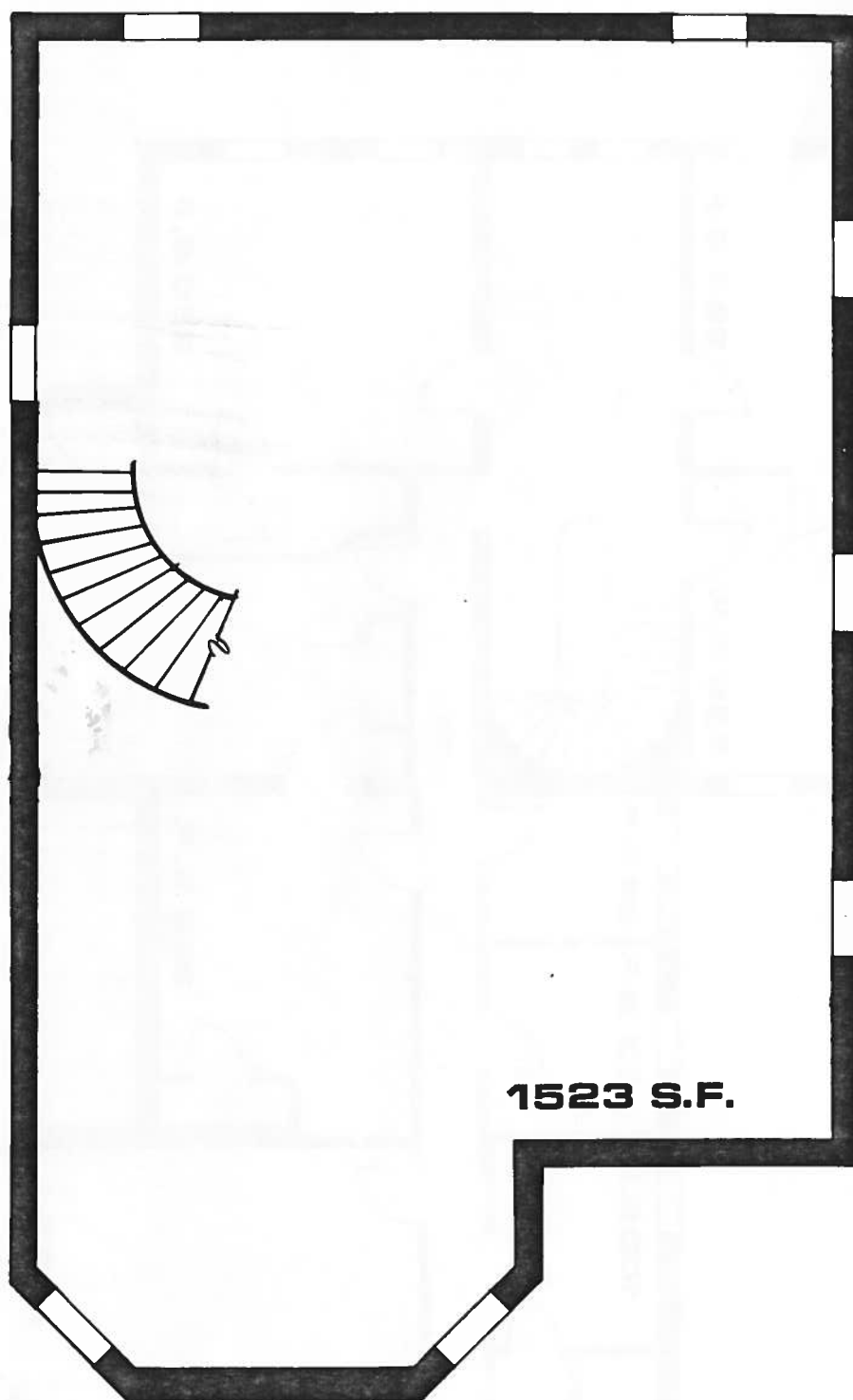


MARKET AVE.



**SECOND FLOOR PLAN**





**1523 S.F.**

**THIRD FLOOR PLAN**



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