



The Lakewood Historical Society

established 1952

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MOVING THE OLDEST STONE HOUSE

By Mazie Adams

"My hopes have centered around a house, the second oldest in Lakewood, made entirely of stone and located at St. Charles and Detroit... One of our forthright citizens and a leading merchant in Lakewood, Mr. Stephen Babin, who owns the little stone house, has just informed me that I may have the house as a gift if I can find means and a place to move it before October 15th, at which time he must lay the foundation for a storage vault on the site. He is willing to give up the house at a loss to him of at least \$2,000. This is his pledge of faith in our community, where he has raised his family and earns his livelihood, and because he believes with many of us, that some of our old landmarks should be preserved."

So wrote Margaret Manor Butler in a letter to Lakewood City Council on July 29, 1952. John Honam built the house she writes of (now the Oldest Stone House) in 1838, on Detroit near Warren, the center of the growing community of East Rockport. For 114 years, the house stood on or near this site. Then Mr. Babin offered the home to Mrs. Butler, who had been searching for a permanent space to deposit her growing collection of artifacts from early settlers.

Margaret Manor Butler and the newly formed Lakewood Historical Society mobilized to bring this project to fruition. Efforts were made to encourage the City of Lakewood to help with moving costs and to approve the development of a new museum.

The project initially received mixed reviews. Mayor Amos I. Kauffman stated, "I think the house would fall apart if moved...besides, it is much too small for a museum." Although residents in the area of Lakewood Park opposed the idea for fear that their properties would depreciate, most Lakewoodites supported the idea of moving the house. A September 1952 Sun Post article enthused "Certainly we think Lakewood will profit and, certainly, the

whole idea is worthy...The going may be slow but the start is sound."

But support grew. "The fact that the small pioneer stone house which stood for more than a century near Cook and Detroit now reposes in Lakewood Park represents tangible tribute to the determination and force of Margaret Manor Butler..." "We have not the slightest idea how much Mayor Amos Kauffman and Lakewood Council were impressed by her early requests for aid in the moving of the ancient stone house. But we do know they long ago became convinced that the project was highly worthwhile. And there were others in the community whose early support might have been called lukewarm but who are now thoroughly interested in the complete realization of Mrs. Butler's dream." (Sun Post 11/28/52)

A special meeting of the Lakewood City Council was held on October 23, 1952 with the mayor, Director of Law, Director of Finance, City Engineer, and Mrs. Butler and Mrs. Bachman present. An emergency resolution by City Council dated 10/23/52 called the mayor "to advertise for bids for moving the one and one-half story stone building located at 1396 St. Charles Avenue to the Wilson School site on Warren Road". Two other sites, the Hall property (present site of YMCA) and Lakewood Park were considered. Two legal documents grew out of this meeting—the transfer of the property's title to the City of Lakewood and the creation of an agreement between the LHS and the City of Lakewood outlining the duties and responsibilities of the LHS in the operation of the stone house. Council finally agreed to appropriate up to \$10,000 to move the house. Mural & Son, Inc., whose motto was "houses moved quickly and safely on rubber tires," presented an estimate of \$13,530. Although Mrs. Butler promised to raise the balance, council initially refused the bid.

Luckily, Mr. Babin extended his deadline to November 12 to give Margaret and the Lakewood Historical Society time to resolve the city's issues with the project. After much work by the Society, the Council agreed to accept the revised bid, if the Lakewood Historical Society can raise the \$3680 balance in three days. With only the weekend and Monday to work, Mrs. Butler accumulated the required finances through friends and her own savings. Council also accepted the Planning Commission's suggestions that the site for the Stone House be changed to the "southwest section of Lakewood Park, near the shelter house, where it will be easily accessible and will not obstruct any Lake Avenue property owner's view."

On November 16, 1952 the Stone House was moved to Lakewood Park, to land originally owned by John Honam. A Plain Dealer article explained "yesterday morning pneumatic hammers and big chisels and sledges started knocking holes in the old foundation. I-beams, weighing a ton each, were inserted under the still-solid 12 by 12 inch oaken floor beams...The house, measuring 27 by 37 feet, probably weighs more than 150 tons. The job of moving it has been given to Mural & Son of Cleveland...[They] anticipate little trouble in moving the house and expect to have it at its new site by Thursday afternoon. Two main "runners" and nine cross beams will make up the grid on which the house will be moved." Nickel Plate Railroad officials held up trains for ten minutes so the old Honam house could clear the tracks and the move was completed in three days.

Mural and Sons bid included \$4250 to move, lower and level the floor, \$2400 to cut and replace overhead wires, and \$600 to trim and dress trees. They also repaired the windows, fixed the sidewalks and the fence at the Babin property.

Months of feverish activity prepared the house for its new role. Restoration involved removing layers of paint, pulling out 100s of nails, leveling and sanding floors, replacing existing hardware and exterior doors with authentic fixtures characteristic of the period of the house, replacing the roof and installing a fireplace. The formal dedication occurred on April 25, 1953 as the final event of Lakewood's weeklong celebration of Ohio's Sesquicentennial. On August 11, 1954, members previewed the house and finally, on September 12, 1954, the Oldest Stone House officially opened as a museum with a ribbon-cutting ceremony. On December 5, 1953 the mortgage was ceremoniously burned. The community's

response was enthusiastic. Twelve hundred people went through the house during the first seven weeks.

After years of collecting artifacts and information on Lakewood's history, Margaret Manor Butler finally had a home for her growing collection. Her unflinching dedication created a wonderful organization that has preserved Lakewood's heritage for fifty years.