



The Baldwin-Buss House Foundation ❖ P. O. Box 1401 ❖ Hudson, OH 44236

New Foundation Seeks to Acquire, Restore Historic Hudson Home

June 3, 2019 -- Three years ago, Richard Merino, the owner of Hudson's second oldest house, died at the age of 95. Two years prior to that, he left Hudson to live with family in Connecticut. Since his departure from Hudson, his home has sat unoccupied and largely neglected.

For decades, the Baldwin-Buss House, popularly known as the Merino House, was hidden in plain sight on the Hudson Village Green at the northwest corner of state routes 91 and 303. Built in 1825, it is considered to be one of the most beautiful homes in Hudson. But today, its future is uncertain. A 2015 plan would have moved the house south and east from its original foundation to make room for a commercial development. And this is of great concern to the co-presidents of a new Hudson foundation, the Baldwin-Buss House Foundation.

Inga Walker and Donovan Husat, the co-presidents of the Foundation, feel a sense of extreme urgency with their mission to raise the funds necessary to purchase, rehabilitate and return the historic house to productive use. The house is for sale, along with two commercial buildings that are somewhat removed from the house, but on the same property. "Fortunately, that 2015 plan never materialized. Nevertheless, the possibility of commercial development still exists, adding urgency to our mission of acquiring, preserving and restoring this historic structure," Husat says. In fact, since its founding earlier this year, the Foundation has already become aware of new plans that would leave the house in place, but virtually surround it with three-story commercial and residential buildings.

"Development of the type proposed would drastically diminish the importance of the house and badly compromise the Village Green in that area," Walker says. "As it now sits, the house is the focal point of that part of the Green. To surround it with large buildings would be a totally inappropriate way to treat an historic house of such classic architecture."

The urgency that Walker and Husat feel, along with Foundation vice president and treasurer Kathy Russell, stems from an agreement reached with the current owner, a member of the Merino family living in Connecticut. The owner will withhold the house from the market through August 10 of this year while the Foundation seeks to raise the money necessary to purchase the entire property. To acquire the property and stabilize the house, the Foundation seeks to raise \$1.7 million. In addition to the house, the purchase also would include the adjacent brick office building on Route 303 and the former Merino beverage store. If acquired, the Foundation would then raise additional funds to restore the house to its original footprint and make it a

productive community asset, according to Russell. "Its prominence on the Village Green adds to its stature and increases its value as an historic asset," Russell says. She adds that in addition to private donations, the Foundation will seek grants from other foundations, corporations and from state and federal sources that promote historic preservation and education.

While considered by many to be a true Hudson architectural treasure, the Baldwin-Buss House has also enjoyed significant national recognition. It was designed by master builder and architect Lemuel Porter (1780-1829), who also designed and built the historic Congregational Church on Tallmadge Circle. He was in the process of designing the 1830 Presidents House on the Western Reserve Academy campus in Hudson when he died. His son Simeon completed that task and went on to build the school's Chapel in 1836.

Pictures of the house from its early years reveal that many of the home's significant architectural details have been obscured by what architects call "unsympathetic" additions. "Most notably," Walker says, "the beautiful front entrance and windows are hidden by a porch, added perhaps in the 1920s." Other additions on the back further detract from the classic high-style Federal architecture. The Baldwin-Buss House is one of only two Hudson buildings originally listed by the Historic American Building Survey conducted in 1934. The survey specifically calls out the builder's "unusual craftsmanship and understanding of design." In 1922, *House Beautiful* magazine called it "One of the most dignified houses in the town," noting its classic front, great ionic pilasters, its fanlight and the reeded doorway columns and unusual incised sunbursts. "The detail is excellent," the article concludes.

Walker also points out another interesting detail about the house. She, Husat and Russell originally thought that the south wing of the house was an addition, perhaps from more modern times. But close inspection by two preservation architects and a bit of research reveal that the "addition" may actually have been the original structure. There is evidence that it was used as a commercial building dating back to 1808. The house was subsequently added. In spite of the many exterior modifications, the ornate interior details of the house are largely in tact.

Remarkably, only three families have owned the Baldwin-Buss House. Augustus Baldwin was the original owner. Merchant, banker and justice of the peace John C. Buss purchased it from Baldwin's widow in 1856. In 1907, Italian immigrant Charles Merino acquired it from Buss' son Charles. Today, although for sale, a member of the Merino family still owns it. Rich Merino, legendary Hudson athlete and beverage store owner, lived his entire life in that house until he moved to Connecticut shortly before his death in 2016.

"Inga, Kathy and I know this fundraising goal is going to be a challenge," Husat says. "But we also know that the residents of Hudson are proud of their unique and beautiful community. The efforts that so many make to properly preserve their historic and architecturally significant homes demonstrate that. We have to believe that Hudsonites would likewise be supportive of restoring this gem. It truly is the cornerstone of Hudson's Village Green. But time is of the essence. We need to raise

\$1.7 million very quickly, or the house and the area surrounding it could be compromised by commercial development.”

Also at issue is that Hudson residents have expressed concern about further commercial development and the increased traffic it would bring. “Voters in May rejected a proposed addition to the First and Main development in an advisory election,” Russell says. Among the many concerns they expressed was the anticipated increase in traffic that further commercial development would bring. So whether or not residents would welcome development in the area of the Baldwin-Buss House is problematic.”

While fundraising is now underway, Russell stresses that no actual donations are being accepted at this time. Rather, commitments of support are being solicited to be payable at a later date. When sufficient funds have been promised, the money will be due and payable, and the property will be purchased. The owner has agreed to hold the property from the market through August 10 of this year to enable the funds to be raised. All donations will be tax-deductible and made through the Hudson Community Foundation for the benefit of the Baldwin-Buss House Foundation. Letters of commitment may be sent to The Baldwin-Buss House Foundation, P.O. Box 1401, Hudson, Ohio 44236. To download a commitment form or to learn more, visit www.bbhfoundation.org or email to info@bbhfoundation.org.

Media Contact

Donovan D. Husat
(330) 571-5927
dhusat46@gmail.com