

Historic Hudson home has deep architectural significance

Throughout the federal period in early American history, master builders and carpenters worked to construct the homes and public buildings of the first settlers and pioneers.

In the early years of the Western Reserve, Lemuel Porter (1775-1829) was one of the most prominent of those residing in Summit County. He came to Tallmadge from Waterbury, Conn. with his family in 1818 and gained stature as a builder of residences and churches. His most enduring masterpiece is the historic Congregational Church on Tallmadge Circle, a structure so exemplary that its image graced the cover of Life Magazine in November, 1944.

Although best known for his architectural work, before moving to Ohio he manufactured chairs and clocks in Waterville, Conn. as an apprentice to Waterbury clockmaker, James Harrison. Many of his chairs are still in existence, with "L. Porter" branded on the underside. A cylinder top secretary of his resides in the Mattatuck Museum in Waterbury.

Porter's reputation and skill were well respected and the trustees of the newly founded Western Reserve College (now Western Reserve Academy) commissioned him to design and build the first structures on the campus. He completed the work on Middle College and South College (both demolished) and was in the process of finishing up the President's House on Brick Row when he died unexpectedly in the fall of 1829.

Other notable works of his, which still survive, are the Whedon Farwell House on Aurora Street and the Baldwin-Buss Merino house on the southwest corner of the Hudson Village Green. All are listed either individually or as contributing structures on the National Register of Historic Places.

His son, Simeon Porter, completed the work on the Brick Row over the next decade. Simeon Porter, in concert with Archibald Rice of Waterbury, Conn., worked together on the Nathan Seymour House on Prospect Street and the Athenaeum on the campus of WRA which recently underwent a multi-million-dollar renovation.

The original building by Porter and Rice was finished in 1843 and was the main classroom building for the next six decades. Simeon Porter designed many other Hudson houses before moving to Cleveland in 1848 where he partnered with Charles W. Heard on many of that city's most prominent structures including the Old Stone Church (1855) that still graces Cleveland's Public Square.

Why does this place matter?

People who come to Hudson either to visit or to live intuitively recognize Hudson's unique charm. They may not be able to define it, but they sense it. It is the absence of neon signs, big box stores, and fast food chains on every corner. It is the presence of our historic homes, neighborhoods and business district and village green that impart a sense of continuity and permanence in our lives.

In February, 2019 a group of concerned people set out to save the historic Baldwin-Buss Merino House from years of neglect and disrepair and formed the Baldwin-Buss House Foundation. Recognizing the significance of the house, both architecturally and culturally to Hudson, the group embarked on a mission to not only acquire the endangered house and property, but to protect the historic spatial and aesthetic relationships that exist in a blighted section of our historic village green.

Built in 1825 the house represents one of the oldest houses still surviving in our historic town of Hudson. Its architectural merits have been espoused over the years in architectural journals, books and magazines. In 1933, the nation's first federal preservation program began to document America's architectural heritage and put one thousand out-of-work architects back to work during the Great Depression.

This program, the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), chose the Baldwin-Buss Merino house as a significant historic structure. Its blueprints reside in the Library of Congress.

In addition to the known works of prominent master builders such as Lemuel Porter, many notable homes of the Western Reserve also included the work of a large, often selfeducated group of millwrights, joiners, wood workers and carpenter/ builders aided by pattern books and manuals. Where the work can be specifically attributed to a well-known master builder, its value and historic stature is elevated.

Such is the case with the Baldwin-Buss Merino House.

Sadly, the house has

fallen into disrepair. Additions made over the years mask its beauty and detract from its classical architectural form. The house and its location on the Village Green is a vital component of Hudson's heritage. The Baldwin- Buss house along with other iconic buildings such as the Brewster Store, the Clocktower, the Baldwin House, and the Western Reserve Academy Chapel define Hudson's architectural and cultural legacy and are part of the reasons why Hudson can boast three National Register Historic Districts.

Listing in the National Register serves to acknowledge and promote public awareness and respect of our historic past. It is the official list of properties recognized by the federal government as worthy of preservation for their local, state or national significance in American history, architecture and culture.

Hudson's first National Historic Register District was nominated in 1973 encompassing the historic core and business district.

The Baldwin-Buss house is listed as a contributing building in the survey.

In 1975 the historic district was expanded to include Western Reserve Academy's campus. Later, in 1989, the National Register Historic District boundaries were expanded a third time to include parts of Hudson, Aurora, Oviatt and Streetsboro Streets. The City of Hudson is currently studying the viability of expanding the historic district again to include Elm Street, Roslyn Avenue, Bradley Drive and a portion of E. Streetsboro Street.

Beginning with James Ellsworth, Hudson's prominent benefactor and preservationist in the early 1900's, residents and organizations have fought to protect what defines Hudson and what differentiates it from many neighboring communities.

Many battles have been won: The fight to prevent Darrow Road/Route 91 from becoming a four-lane highway; the outcry to prevent demolition of the Brewster Store on the corner of Aurora Street and Route 91; and the resistance to the demolition of the clocktower. Battles continue today and the effort to acquire and restore the Baldwin-Buss Merino property is of paramount importance to the Hudson community.

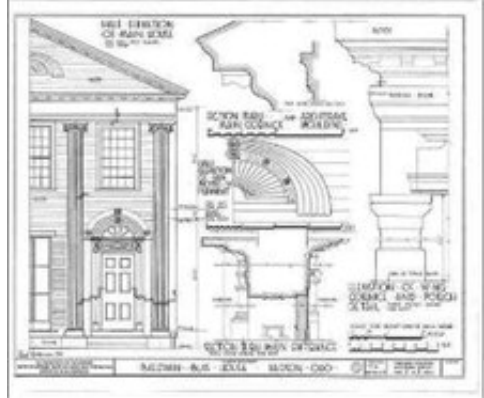
Hudson is not alone; people are fighting to protect and preserve places we can't live without around the

world. The National Trust for Historic Preservation initiated the “This Place Matters” campaign to encourage people to celebrate the places that are important to them and their communities. The Baldwin-Buss Merino Foundation joins the “This Place Matters” movement by highlighting the significance of this urgent preservation initiative.

The Baldwin-Buss House Foundation, with its new fundraising deadline of Jan. 7, 2020, hopes that others in the community will step forward and join the more than 325 individuals, businesses, and foundations who have made financial commitments before the opportunity is lost.

All new financial commitments are being matched 4:1 up to \$100,000 by a generous donor who believes in the foundation’s goal to acquire and restore this landmark property. If the Foundation is successful in raising an additional \$250,000 between now and Jan. 7, good things can happen. The foundation will have options available that will allow it to proceed with the purchase of the property and start making the dream a reality.

Donations can be made at BBHFoundation.org/donate or by writing to info@bbhfoundation.org.



An architectural drawing featuring some of the Baldwin-Buss House’s special features, also pictured here.

Submitted drawing and photos



