



The Milton House Museum

Establishing the Milton House as the premier experiential historical site for Civil Rights education in Wisconsin

Our Vision and Case for Support

Imagine.....

- **telling the story of our community with a unique Underground Railroad site as the backdrop;**
- **offering teachers throughout Wisconsin a teaching tool that is a unique virtual experiential learning experience to school aged children;**
- **offering a series of lectures for adults that they can use as they discuss Civil Rights and how the past informs the present;**
- **partnering with organizations in all parts of Wisconsin and the nation.**

An Exciting Vision

The Milton House, the only recognized Underground Railroad site in Wisconsin that is open to the public, is establishing itself as the premier experiential historical site for Civil Rights education in Wisconsin. This will preserve and disseminate Milton's history while serving as a vehicle to educate on how our understanding of history informs how we view our nation today.

With our current model, people must come to us to experience and learn. The visionary model expands that but also makes what we have to offer available to everyone virtually. We are embarking on a plan to secure our long-term future, including an expansion of the services we offer and our geographic range.

These plans include several elements; each will be tested through a proof-of-concept pilot program in Fall 2023:

- provide the opportunity for more people to visit the museum including additional trained docents and a self-guided tour that allows visitors to view the museum at their own pace
- develop a series of high-quality digital experiences to allow people to learn about The Milton House no matter where they are located geographically. One series will be developed to enhance the 4th grade curriculum in schools; another will promote discussion on social justice and Civil Rights topics for adults.
- develop new and exciting partnerships and collaboration ideas that push the envelope on museum interpretation and broaden the horizon of the way people think about history.

The Milton House is financially strong and has a committed group of staff and volunteers.

We will seek additional funding to produce the best quality educational experiences for marketing throughout the state, to maintain and enhance our buildings, and to build our endowment fund to sustain our work.

Our History

The Milton House Inn was built by Joseph Goodrich, who is also credited as the founder of Milton, WI. Goodrich first came to the area in 1838, then returned to Alfred, NY to sell his land and businesses, and collect his family. At that time, Milton was known as Prairie Du Lac; its name was changed to Milton as a condition of gaining its own Post Office.

After Joseph Goodrich, his family, and 9 other settlers arrived in the area in 1839, Goodrich operated an inn and store from two frame buildings and a log cabin on the Milton House site before building the inn structure in 1844. The inn structure included both the hexagonal inn and an apartment-business block. Joseph himself named the building The Milton House. Not only was Goodrich integral to the development of the community of Milton, but he was also a leader in the Underground Railroad movement.

The Underground Railroad was a loose network of people and places that aided formerly enslaved people on their journey to freedom prior to the passage of the 13th amendment, which ended slavery in the United States. Run predominantly by other Blacks, the Underground Railroad was a vital tool in Blacks' resistance to their enslavement. The Underground Railroad Station in Milton was operated by Joseph Goodrich, a white man, with the assistance of others sympathetic to the plight of Freedom Seekers in the Milton community.

One of the three outbuildings built by Joseph Goodrich prior to the construction of the Milton House hid a secret tunnel. The tunnel runs approximately 45 feet in length and connects the cellar of the one room cabin to the cellar of the Milton House. The cabin, Milton House and tunnel still exist on our site to this day.

The Milton House is certified as an Underground Railroad site by the National Parks Service, Network to Freedom program, and in 1998 was granted the designation of a National Historic Landmark due to its documented role on the Underground Railroad. Currently, the Milton House Museum is the only certified Underground Railroad site in Wisconsin that is open to the public.

In 1948, after years of neglect, a significant portion of the apartment-business block collapsed. To save the rest of the building, the Milton Historical Society purchased the building from the Goodrich family for \$1. It would take 6 years, extensive renovation, and the commitment of many dedicated volunteers and community members, but the Society was able to stabilize and save the hexagon, and the first block of the original structure. In 1954, the Milton House Museum was opened to much fanfare. From 1954 to 2006, the Milton House Museum consisted only of the hexagon, the first block, the original pioneer cabin located out back, and a late 1800s addition to the building that survived the collapse.

In the early 2000s, the Milton Historical Society conducted a significant capital campaign to replace the portion of the building that collapsed in 1948. The addition allowed for improved collection storage, increased exhibit space, a community room and office. And, for the first time, electricity was installed in the building, which allowed year-round operation of the museum.

Our Impact

Today the Milton Historical Society is proud to preserve and disseminate the history of Milton House, the Freedom Seekers who sought shelter here, and of Milton and surrounding communities. We take pride in our participation in the Network to Freedom program, and to being a National Historic Landmark. Museum staff and volunteers take great pride in our story and enjoy sharing it with the thousands of guests who visit the museum each year.

We currently offer a variety of exciting ways to engage with the public, but we are always looking for ways to improve and expand our offerings. For example, in 2018 we commissioned a three story, immersive mural to be painted in the museum. The mural was completed by a local artist, Larry Schultz in 2019. It depicts the journey of a Freedom Seeker to the Milton House. In 2020, the museum received a grant from the Network to Freedom program that allowed us to completely rethink our tour narrative. This update included refreshed language and perspective, along with updated graphics and collection exhibits.

The Milton House will continue to shape people's understanding of history, enrich communities, generate dialogue, enhance education, and contribute to a more informed and inclusive society.

We are excited about our plans and the impact they will have throughout Wisconsin.

We hope you will join us in making them a reality.