

Bellevue's crown jewel nears revival



By SEAN KING Special to the Register, May 19, 2026

BELLEVUE - At the prominent corner of Main and Northwest streets in Bellevue stands a three-story brick testament to Ohio's endurance.

For 180 years, the Tremont House has stood as a steadfast witness to Bellevue's evolution, transforming from a rugged stagecoach stop at the edge of the Firelands into a bustling hub of commerce and industry. Now, following a massive, decades-long restoration effort driven by local residents, the building is preparing to open its doors and share those stories with a new generation.

The Bellevue Historical Society is entering the final, meticulous stretch of the project with a goal that has the community buzzing: opening the first-floor interior to the public by the end of this year. For the dedicated board members and local volunteers who have poured their lives into the building, this upcoming opening represents far more than the preservation of brick and mortar; it is a victory for the city's collective memory. "Once history is gone, it's gone," said Jeannie Gore, the society's president for the past nine years. "You can't just go and pick it back up out of a dumpster. That is why we are so excited when people bring us items and why it's so vital for a community like ours to actively preserve these stories."

The legacy of the 'unofficial historian'

To understand the heart of this project, one must understand the man who spent a lifetime ensuring Bellevue would never forget itself. Bill Oddo, a native son and the city's "unofficial historian," was the guiding light of the historical society from its inception. A founding member who served as president for many years, Oddo was a fixture in the community - not just as a local barber but as the primary keeper of Bellevue's records. He penned weekly articles for the Bellevue Gazette and published numerous books that contain a wealth of information about early Bellevue.

Oddo passed away in 2020. He was 88. "Bill was phenomenal. He was a barber here in town, and he knew everybody," Gore recalled. "He remembered stuff, and he documented it. Replacing him is impossible. There's nobody that can step up to replace him and carry that torch. But all the proceeds from his books go to the Historical Society as a means of raising funds for this restoration."

Mary Mitchell, the Society's treasurer since 2001 and a board member since the 1980s, shared that sentiment, noting it was an honor to listen to Oddo's vast knowledge. Mitchell worked alongside Oddo for years and saw his unwavering commitment to the Tremont House firsthand. "He was absolutely dedicated to the Tremont House project," Mitchell said. "It was an honor to know Bill and to listen to his vast knowledge of Bellevue's past. Preserving this history was his life's work."

A diamond in the rough

The Tremont House, which celebrates its 180th birthday this year, boasts a resume as colorful as the city itself. Originally built in 1846 as a hotel, it served as a vital layover for stagecoach travelers navigating the difficult terrain of northern Ohio. "West Street was the end of the Firelands area," Gore explained. "West of there was all what they called the 'corduroy road' because it was so bumpy."

Over the decades, the building wore many hats: from an elegant ballroom on the top floor to a variety of storefronts below, including grocery stores, shoe shops and the well-remembered Leonard's Pharmacy. When the society purchased the building in 2002, it uncovered an architectural time capsule.

"There is so much history in Bellevue that people often overlook," Mitchell said. "While the first floor still had its original 1846 woodwork intact, it was the third floor, which had been almost completely untouched for over a century, that truly convinced us we had to purchase and save this piece of our heritage."

The Florida connection, the 'Standard Oil' titans

While the Tremont House is a local treasure, its history has national implications. Long before Henry Flagler was building the Florida East Coast Railway or turning Palm Beach into a global destination, he was a Bellevue resident. "Everyone knows the Flagler Museum in Florida," Gore noted. "But he originated right here in Bellevue with the Standard Oil Co. He built the rail system down there using money from Bellevue families. We want people to know this history started on the very streets we walk today."

The historical society plans to showcase these "standard oil titans" alongside other local luminaries, including Bradbury Robinson - the Bellevue native credited with throwing the first forward pass in football history - and various military heroes.

Restoration through local resolve

The road from the 2002 purchase to today has been paved almost entirely by the hard work of local residents. This community-driven effort required massive amounts of physical labor, especially in the early stages. Gore recalls former board member Peggy Missler standing at the top of the stairs, physically rolling old tires down to volunteers waiting below to haul them away. That local effort has been bolstered by vital financial backing from regional partners.

Crucial safety and structural components were made possible through grants from the Sandusky County Communities Foundation, which funded the front entrance door; the Huron County Community Foundation, which provided the fire doors required for permits; and the Erie County Community Foundation, which funded exterior doors on the upper floors. An overall cost for the project is not known.

Crossing the finish line

The momentum is currently at an all-time high. A critical building-wide fire alarm inspection was scheduled for Monday. And once signed off, the system covering all three floors will go active. "We are in the final stages of painting and putting up trim," Gore said. "The interest has blossomed. It's like building a house; for a long time, the public couldn't see the work being done on the electric or the structural stability. "Now that the pillars are up and the balconies are uncovered, people are asking, 'Are you ever going to open?'" she continued. "The answer is a resounding 'yes.'"

Once the doors open, the first floor will serve as a rotating museum. The society's massive collection, ranging from vintage varsity jackets and Bellevue school yearbooks to industrial relics, will finally have a permanent home.

A call to action

Despite the progress, the society emphasizes that the Tremont House is a community project that requires ongoing support. Plans for the second and third floors, including the installation of an elevator for handicap accessibility, remain on the horizon. "We need more board members and younger backs to help carry this forward," Gore said.



A variety of fundraisers are planned throughout the summer to help the Bellevue Historical Society cross the finish line:

- On Thursday, local nutrition shop Balance Nutrition will host an event featuring a specialty Tremont drink with a portion of proceeds and an additional dollar per drink donated to the society.

- While specific dates are still being finalized, other summer highlights include a giving day at the local Bob Evans in June, where a percentage of sales will benefit the restoration.

- July will bring the annual Sunflower Sale held uptown, and the society continues to sell Bill Oddo's historical books as an ongoing fundraiser for the project.

For Mitchell, the goal remains simple: connecting people to their roots. "We often help people from across the country research their Bellevue ancestors," Mitchell said. "The Tremont House will be the heart of that research and our community's story." The society did not have a cost estimate for the project.

How to help

To donate, volunteer, or become a member, contact the Bellevue Historical Society at 567-228-0833 or email BellevueHistoricalSociety@yahoo.com. Memberships include a quarterly newsletter documenting local archives.

More information is available at bellevuehistoricalsociety.com.