

Monumental day for museum

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SANDUSKY - A famous old mansion that functions as a local history museum is sporting a fresh name and a new historical marker.

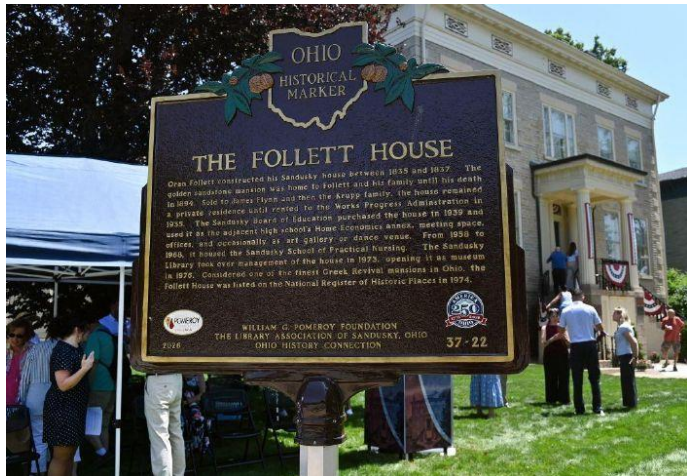
The Follett House, owned by the Sandusky Library and serving as a local history museum, is now known as Sandusky History Museum at the Follett House.

The new name for the period landmark, at 404 Wayne St. in Sandusky, emphasizes that the museum celebrates all of Sandusky's history and not just the house's famous owners, anti-slavery crusaders Oran and Eliza Follett.



Marking history - On Wednesday, as part of the yearlong America 250 celebration, officials unveiled a brand new state historical marker in front of the building. The new marker has different text on each side:

- One side tells the story of Follett House, built between 1835 and 1837 from Sandusky limestone. The house went through various owners and uses - at one time, it was a nursing school - before the library acquired it in 1973. The library opened it as a museum in 1976, so Wednesday's event honored the 50th anniversary as well as the nation's 250th birthday.



- The sign's other side tells the story of Oran and Eliza Follett, who sheltered slaves using the Underground Railroad to escape to Canada. Oran is perhaps best known as the publisher of a book reprinting the Lincoln-Douglas debates that helped make Abraham Lincoln a national figure.

The new historical marker, which replaces an older marker from the Erie County Historical Society, is one of Ohio's 1,850 historical markers across the state's 88 counties, said Kathy Dean-Dielman, a commissioner on the America

250-Ohio commission and co-chair of the group's Undertold Stories Committee.

Dean-Dielman helped William Rutger, who took over as the library's director last year, and other officials unveil the new marker. The number 37-22 at the bottom right of

the marker means that it's the 37th historical marker in Erie County, designated as the state's 22nd county. New York's William G. Pomeroy Foundation, generous in supporting local historical markers, provided a grant that paid for much of the marker's cost, which was about \$3,000. The Erie County Historical Society showed its support for the new marker by contributing \$100.

The unveiling emphasizes that while Cedar Point, boating and fishing are big draws to the area, people who enjoy history can spend hours in Erie and Ottawa counties, said Larry Fletcher, president of Shores & Islands Ohio, the region's tourism bureau. They can also visit Milan, the hometown of America's most famous inventor, Thomas Edison; journey to Put-in-Bay for the Perry's Victory & International Peace Memorial to celebrate the Battle of Lake Erie, a decisive War of 1812 naval battle; check out the Maritime Museum of Sandusky; and see many other points of interest in the local area, Fletcher said.

Heading inside - While Sandusky Library has done its best to keep the house looking much as it was, the crowd of about 40 who showed up for the unveiling in 95-degree heat seemed pleased to go inside for an open house and enjoy the inauthentic air conditioning.

Nestor Rave, Sandusky Library's special collections librarian, provided a tour of the museum. He pointed out that the downstairs has a parlor divided into two sections:

- The one facing the street was where men gathered on social occasions.
- The other room, used by the ladies, offered a view of a garden.

Rave noted that some of the museum's items draw visitors from across the country. Many people, typically ladies, come to the museum to view the Baltimore quilt, part of a famous set of quilts made in Baltimore in the 1840s.

Pointing to a display of old tools made by the Sandusky Tool Co., Nave said, "Six months ago, a guy came from California just to see this." He stayed for two days, looking at the tools and studying library documents on the tool company, Nave said.

The Sandusky Tool Co., at 146 Meigs St., closed in 1926, two years after it was devastated by a tornado. The library has a book on the company's history.

The yard in front of the museum also has a "coming soon" marker. It is one of several locations in Sandusky that will provide audio recordings telling the history of the Underground Railroad.

Tom Horsman, communications manager for the city, said that the new audio markers should be finished soon. "We are looking at later in the summer at this point. We hope to have an updated timeline soon," Horsman said.

Library staff welcomed people throughout the afternoon and early evening. They went on self-guided tours; received patriotic giveaways, such as taking home handheld flags; enjoyed activities, like a scavenger hunt; and viewed artwork as part of a special show inspired by the museum.

Want to go? - Throughout the summer, people can visit the Sandusky History Museum at the Follett House. It's home to an "outstanding local history collection, documenting the history of the city of Sandusky and Erie County," according to a library statement. "The mission of this branch of the library is to collect, preserve and share with citizens, scholars and researchers the special collections of artifacts for the interpretation of the history of the city of Sandusky and Erie County from its earliest times to the present."

Through Labor Day, it's open from 1-4 p.m. on Wednesdays through Saturdays. Following Labor Day, it'll remain open from 1-4 p.m. just on Saturdays. Admission is free. People can call 419-625-3834, email jangstadt@sanduskylib.org or use the library website's "contact us" at sanduskylib.org for questions or to schedule a group tour.