

An Open Letter to Montclair

The Montclair History Center is at a crossroads.



The 1896 Shultz House, photographed in 1910

Twenty years ago, we received a generous gift from Molly Shultz of the **Charles Shultz House** (Evergreens), at 30 North Mountain Avenue.

We love this house. It is a beautiful, intact snapshot of life in Montclair as it was transitioning from a farming community to one that would ultimately become a prosperous suburb.

Unfortunately, we have come to the difficult realization we can no longer continue be an effective steward of the property.

While the bequest included a donation that was used, along with grant monies, to stabilize the exterior of the Shultz House and carriage house and make the first floor of the Shultz House handicap accessible, no funds were provided for ongoing operation, maintenance, programming, or staffing. In 1999, it was estimated that an additional \$1 million would be needed to restore the house completely.

Despite our hopes, dreams, and efforts, we've never been able to realize that level of funding for the house.

The Shultz House now requires:

- **Extensive capital improvements** that have been long-deferred due to lack of funds (roof repair/replacement, porch stabilization, upgraded electric and plumbing, etc.), estimated at about \$1.0 to 1.5 million
- **Operating funds for the most basic maintenance** (snow removal, lawn cutting, insurance), which generally runs about \$26,000/year
- **A robust contingency fund for emergency repairs**, which in the past five years alone included furnace replacement, investigations and repair of underground water and gas leaks, hot water heater replacement, investigation and remediation of an oil spill from a leaking above-ground storage tank, roof patching, sidewalk replacement, and dead/diseased tree removals

In the last three years, maintenance and emergency repair costs at the Shultz property have consumed approximately 25-40% of our organization's total annual operating budget of \$200,000.

In 2015, we commissioned an in-depth feasibility study that concluded that maintaining two campuses (Orange Road and North Mountain Avenue), four acres of property, and six historic buildings (three of which are interpreted as historic museums) was not sustainable. It was strongly recommended we explore partnership with a third party or consider divesting the Shultz House from our collection to ensure the other three properties – the Crane House and Historic YWCA, the Clark House, and the Nathaniel Crane House – and our very organization, can endure.

Since then, we have been quietly and steadfastly exploring possibilities for the Shultz House's future. The Board of Trustees and Executive Director have spoken with township officials, myriad interested parties, and expert advisors to seek opinions, ideas, and connections to potential partners.

Now, we are scheduling **Community Conversations** to apprise the public of the situation with the Shultz House and our urgent need to find a viable path forward that is respectful of the house's history, the neighbors, and the community – whether it involves a source of substantial funding, a partner, a buyer, or a solution we have not considered yet.

The Community Conversations will take place at the Shultz House, 30 North Mountain Avenue, on Saturday, June 15 at 10 am and Monday, June 17 at 7 pm.

At these discussions, we will share the history of the house, offer a brief tour of the building, and then discuss its future. *Space is limited for the Community Conversations. Pre-registration is required by calling MHC at 973-744-1796 or sending a note to mail@montclairhistorical.org.*

There is no fee to attend this tour and conversation.

We look forward to having a productive dialogue with you about this remarkable property.

At this point, no decisions have been made about the house and property. Our goal is to find the best solution for its future. Please join us.

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