

History of the Canaan Township “House”

When the question of purchasing or erecting a township house in Denmark costing not more than \$500 was discussed on March 3, 1884, Andrew Slagle, George W. Kightlinger, and Thomas Price were trustees and Ross Brown was clerk. Later that year, Mr. Price was followed by Charles Carey and Mr. Brown was followed by TC McCollister.

The July 5, 1884, minutes state “They (Canaan Trustees) then authorized the clerk to write notices relating to sale of labor and material for Township House, and send to both county papers to be published twice.”

The July 26, 1884, minutes describe the following:

“The bids for building a Township House were opened and read:

GW Lowe	\$525.00
JK Hearth	\$466.00
Elias Shaffer	\$448.00
Hart Bros.	\$418.00

Hart Bros. bid being the lowest, the clerk was authorized to notify them to appear before him (clerk) and give bond for performance of work.”

The lease between Christian Gruber and the Canaan Trustees was filed at the Morrow County Court House and stated the price of the lease was \$1 for 99 years from the date of August 16, 1884, “on condition it is used for township house purposes, or so long as used for said purposes.” However, the minutes of August 30, 1884, show the approval of \$2 to C. Gruber “for lease of land for Township House.” Trustees in office at the time were Andrew Slagle, George W. Kightlinger, and Charles Carey. The clerk was then TC McCollister.

The lease was for only the ground the old township building (and the outhouse) occupied—approximately 20’ x 26’. No water was ever available, but electricity was connected in later years.

On November 29, 1884, the trustees approved the following expenses related to the township house:

\$34.50 to A. Slagle for furniture for township house

\$218.93 to Hart Bros. payable March 1, 1885

\$218.94 to Hart Bros. payable September 1, 1885

In December 1885, a payment to the Iden Bros. for the cleaning of the township house totaled \$1.50 and a load of coal for the township house was purchased for \$1.50.

During this time there were two meeting sites in Canaan—one was in Climax and, after 1884, the other was in the new township house in Denmark. It is not clear in what years the trustees started alternating meetings from Climax to Denmark, but it appears from the minutes that the alternation of meeting sites was the practice during this time period.

Over the years the County Road 28 Township House had served as a meetinghouse for the trustees and as the polling place for all Canaan residents. While the building was too small and parking was to be found only along the roadside, it was the only site used in the township for elections.

Remodeling of the township house was completed in the 1960's and resulted in a suspended ceiling, carpet, and paneling, but the cold air and "critters" still found a way into the building. More than one raccoon and groundhog found its way in from under the building or through the stovepipe. Heat was courtesy of a centrally located coal and, later, propane stove which was used only during meetings. The draftiness left the persons sitting more than 5 feet from the stove chilled and uncomfortable. Township records were exposed to all the extremes of temperature that nature could provide. Air conditioning in the summer was acquired by opening the door. Outside, a handicap ramp was installed as was later required by state law.

In 2001, after purchasing a new office building with funds accumulated from estate tax revenues saved over the previous 10 years, the Canaan Township Trustees moved into the new office building on SR95 just east of Denmark. One acre of land was purchased from Ken Comstock to accommodate the new facility.

The old township hall remained standing, however, and time took its toll on the building. The failing foundation allowed the building to settle and when the door was pushed opened the sawdust drifted down from the doorframe. Skeletons of birds were found behind the file cabinets when the furniture was moved out. The neighboring farmer reported several "very healthy" groundhogs living in the crawl space. When the building was still in use, mice would find their way into the building and the file drawers, chewing on the papers and township records to make a nest. A hole developed in the exterior siding after 2001 allowing weather to further assault the once sturdy structure. The paint was chipping off and the weeds took over the entrance. The storm door was caught in the wind and became permanently bent, so it wouldn't close properly. Cracks and holes appeared in the windows, while the window shades deteriorated so badly as to crumble at the slightest touch. The floor became suspiciously soft under the carpet inside the entry. Just entering the building seemed almost a risky venture.

The building was no longer needed for township use, and the maintenance of a deteriorating structure did not fit the definition of a proper use of township funds.

A former township resident, Dottie Gist, explored in 2001 the possibility of moving the building to another site for historical preservation. She contacted several people and groups to gather information on saving it. No group had the funds to pay the \$10-11 thousand dollars needed. It

was also determined that the building's condition was such it would not survive the process if it were attempted.

While the township officials valued highly the structure and history from the past, they had to make sound fiscal decisions that showed responsibility to the township residents.

Conversations became focused on the demolition of the building. The 25-year lease the Township had with Bill & Joyce Rausch required \$1 a year and continued maintenance of the building. Termination of the lease required the demolition of the building.

All antiques and furniture from the old building were moved to the current SR 95 facility. As required by state law, all records of the township were protected and moved to the current facility as well.

Township residents are able to enjoy the current office building as the trustees have adopted a policy whereby the residents can rent the SR 95 site for meetings and family reunions. The SR 95 facility has a large meeting area, two restrooms, two offices, a break room/kitchen, and an accommodating parking lot.

Since the Canaan Township Office Building is also the polling place for all Canaan residents, it provides a modern, comfortable environment for the voters as well as the poll workers.

It was sad to see the Canaan Township Hall on County Road 28 disappear. However, its demise did not take with it memories of past residents and events. We still have pictures and accounts to share. Moreover, we were spared the sadness of watching a once vital part of the Canaan community fail and become an eyesore.

For over one hundred fifteen years, the Canaan Township "House" served well the residents of the area, housing the government, the elections, and the community meetings.