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CHAPTER 8

Life of the Mind/Life of the House: "This Place Matters"

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“This Place Matters,” the slogan of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, proclaims the importance of a physical property to the understanding of history, traditions, and values (“This place matters,” 2013). “This Place” may be a single room, a building, a neighborhood, or an entire city. The National Collegiate Honors Council has long recognized the power of place by dedicating an extended session at its annual meetings to the exploration of the host city, its popular City as Text™ explorations. Although a community is ultimately defined by its people, the location and architecture contribute to a setting and a history that can either enhance or inhibit the achievements and creativity of those living and working there. The Heidelberg University Honors Program enjoys the distinction of a dedicated house, a feature not shared by many institutions of this size. This distinction is important to the honors program and to its students because they appreciate the

building and understand it within the context of its function, its surroundings, and its place in history.

The Honors Center is an Italianate brick structure at 67 Greenfield Street in Tiffin, Ohio. In 2007, the outgoing chairman of the Heidelberg University Board of Trustees, Gary Bryenton ('61), and his wife Barbara ('59) recognized the significance of this space and of the Heidelberg University Honors Program, and signed on as its major benefactors. According to the *Heidelberg University 2014–15 Undergraduate Catalog*, the house was re-dedicated as the Bryenton Honors Center that June (*Heidelberg Catalog*, 2014–15, p. 8). It is similar to dozens of two-story brick homes throughout Seneca County, yet this building assumes a stature and an importance that other brick structures throughout the area do not have, in part because of its placement in the center of the campus of Heidelberg University. Furthering its provenance is its history as the presidential residence for more than 100 years. The *Heidelberg University Catalog* states that it was added to the National Register of Historic Places by the U.S. Department of the Interior in 1979, along with nine other campus buildings (*Heidelberg Catalog*, 2014–15, p. 8).

HISTORY AT 67 GREENFIELD STREET

In his history of Heidelberg College, Philip B. Harner (2000) relates that the Heidelberg Honors Program was conceived in the early 1990s by the Dean of the College at the time, Kenneth Porada, to enhance the academic climate on campus (p. 92). The General Faculty officially established the program curriculum in 1993, with William R. Reyer, then Associate Professor of English, as its inaugural director (Harner, 2000, p. 92). The Heidelberg Registrar's Office reports that in 1994–1995, the first year of its existence, there were 20 students in the program and that the first four graduates completed their degrees in 1997. Amy Richards, writing for the student newspaper, the *Kilikilik*, described the new Honors Center, which was initially located in Williard Hall, a dormitory named for President George W. Williard. A suite of rooms housed a seminar room, a computer cluster, and offices for the Director and the Service Learning Coordinator (Richards, 1994, p. 1). The college's aspirations for

the honors program, however, were much more ambitious, and it grew rapidly. Ten years later there were 163 student members of the honors program, more than 15% of the student body. Dean Porada wanted to relocate the program to a larger, more central, and more visible site, one with gravitas that would symbolize excellence and scholarship. His choice was nothing less than the former presidential home, a structure built in 1868 by the same President Williard whose name graced the residence hall of the initial Honors Center. This two-story brick home, common to mid-nineteenth-century rural Ohio, was built more for function than show, although the rectangular home did feature some decorative detail, such as a front porch the full width of the house, latticework, scrolled brackets, and a widow's walk. In the history of the college commissioned for its 1950 centennial year, E.I.F. [Edward Irwin Franklin] Williams (1950) writes that the president himself had raised the money for the house, which cost \$4,250 to construct, and that the payment "was made without using a cent of endowment funds" (p. 137).

The last of the six presidents to reside at 67 Greenfield Street was W. Terry Wickham, president of Heidelberg College from 1948 to 1969, and the first who was not an ordained clergy member. His son, William (Bill) T. Wickham, now Professor Emeritus of Business Administration, Accounting, and Economics, reminisced about the house where he had lived while attending Heidelberg before his graduation in 1951. He recalled that the full-sized porch was removed in the late 1960s and replaced with a smaller porch accented with classic fluted Greek columns (Wickham, personal communication, April 13, 2013). Although the addition of classic pillars may have blurred the integrity of the other Victorian details, the Greek columns do lend dignity and formality and reference an age and place that celebrated education and free inquiry.

One of Bill Wickham's most vivid memories was of the visit of General Dwight D. Eisenhower to Heidelberg College and to the Wickham home on December 18, 1950. While this historic home probably hosted many distinguished guests, it is doubtful that any were more significant than General Eisenhower. Jean Edward Smith (2012) notes that Eisenhower was then president of Columbia University in New York City, a post he had assumed in 1948 after his

successful tenure as Army Chief of Staff and Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces in Europe in World War II (p. 467). Serving as Associate Provost of Columbia was John Allen Krout, a native of Tiffin and son of Charles A. Krout, a former superintendent of Tiffin Public Schools for whom one of the elementary schools in Tiffin is named. According to historians Clifford Lord and Henry Graff (1963), the younger Krout had attended Heidelberg College for three years before graduating from the University of Michigan (p. xiii). The local newspaper reported that because of John Allen Krout, the Eisenhowers decided to visit Heidelberg on their way to Denver to visit Mamie's family during Christmas vacation in 1950. According to the (Tiffin) *Advertiser-Tribune*, Ike said, "I think it is worthwhile making a very long trip to see the kind of institution which can produce that kind of a teacher, philosopher, and friend" ("General Eisenhower's Visit," 1975, p. 12C). Eisenhower was to speak at the regular convocation service held twice weekly in Rickly Chapel in the University Building. Students were simply told that there would be a special guest, not that it would be the former Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces in Europe.

Bill Wickham recalled a reception at the president's home following the convocation, an event that established for this house a unique status (W. T. Wickham, personal communication, 2008). According to him, after Eisenhower's address, President Wickham led General Eisenhower and Associate Provost Krout down the sidewalk to the presidential home to greet the Heidelberg faculty and a few special guests. A receiving line formed inside the front door and wound into the parlor. Behind the door to the parlor stood the M.P., watchfully guarding the General (W. T. Wickham, personal communication, 2008). A photograph of Eisenhower, Krout, and President Wickham beside a distinctive recessed bookcase in what has become the Honors Seminar Room is on display in that room, visual evidence of his presence in this now-historic space.

In November 2011, the current Associate Dean for the honors program, Doug Collar, whose office occupies the front half of the former parlor, found a way to commemorate the 60th anniversary of that event. Using honors students in his freshman seminar

to portray the three principal figures, he directed a program that dramatized the visit (Collar, 2011). The reenactment was an opportunity to incorporate institutional history into the curriculum and raise awareness of this instance of history and tradition among current students, faculty, and community.

Use of the house as the official presidential residence ended in 1969. The late 1960s was an era of student unrest when many college presidents vacated their campus residences. In 1969, the college acquired a newer presidential home on a property nearly five miles from campus, and the house on Greenfield Street was appropriated for another administrative need, space for the Director of Development and associated staff. During that re-purposing, this stately home was converted into an efficient place of business. To that end, several expansive rooms were partitioned to create multiple offices. Floors throughout the house were covered with gray, low-pile, indoor-outdoor carpet. The walls were painted eggshell white, and the woodwork, battleship gray, which resulted in a cold, sterile look. Even the cherry wood railing of the spiral staircase in the foyer was covered with white paint.

After the house served the development staff well for 27 years, its central location and historic significance eventually led to a third transformation in order to meet the needs of students. According to the *Heidelberg University 2014–15 Undergraduate Catalog*, this house became the center for the fledgling honors program in 1996—this time serving the academic mission of Heidelberg College. Its central location symbolically underscores the centrality of academic affairs to the Heidelberg experience.

CURRICULUM ON THE WALLS

Facility

Although not a residence hall, the honors house is accessible to honors students 24 hours a day. It currently includes offices for the Associate Dean for Honors, Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs, and a part-time student assistant. The honors seminar room is ideal for small seminars and meetings. A spacious reading room

opens onto a welcoming terrace and can serve as a reception area or venue for small gatherings. A five-unit computer lab with printer, office supplies, and reference materials is available to honors students at all hours of the day or night. A small kitchen features a dispenser of bottled water and a supply of pretzels, microwave popcorn, and coffee. (It has everything but a kitchen sink—something we intentionally excluded in order to prevent piles of dirty dishes from accumulating.) A comfortable lounge on the second floor invites quiet study and conversation, while an upstairs classroom, the “Map Room,” accommodates small classes, group projects, and meetings. During unscheduled hours its bright lighting and ample table space are ideal for assembling projects. A tabletop podium is useful for rehearsing speeches. A white board for notes is helpful for small meetings or small seminars. And the remote privacy of the room makes it a popular venue for private phone calls or Skyping.

The small office at the front of the house on the second floor, which is where President Wickham wrote his speeches, is a convenient space for storing honors program records and files (W.T. Wickham, personal communication, 2008). Of greater immediate interest to the students is the copier, which is available to them for making duplicates of honors-related work. Elsewhere, various closets and cupboards house honors portfolios, scrapbooks, and other supplies. As Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs, I happily occupy the former upstairs guest bedroom facing Greenfield Street and University Hall, positioned to communicate with the Associate Dean for Honors, honors students, and visiting prospective students on a regular basis, but with easy access to the administration building. Administrative support for the honors program is thus a tangible element of the Brynton Honors Center.

Honors Procedures and Processes

Students who enter the honors program are issued a key that they can use at any time to enter the building. They sign a House Privileges Agreement, which acknowledges that the space is only for the use of students in the honors program and that abuse of the facilities will result in disciplinary action (*Brynton Center for the*

Honors Program Handbook, 2014–15, p. 27). Although the space allows for interaction between students, and there are a variety of rooms in which students can gather to collaborate, the unquestionable advantage is the privacy and quiet that it provides. It is not unusual to observe several students with ear buds in the computer lab, listening to their own iPod and working in a world of their own. Honors students giving tours to prospective students and their families assure them that the house is quiet, even at night. Students may send out for a pizza or brew a pot of coffee to prolong their late-night studying, but they observe quiet hours if others are trying to work. Although students claim empty territory simply by occupying it, seniors often establish habits and preferences that others recognize and honor. The honors program has never had to develop a policy or procedure about the occupation of a room: the principle of squatters' rights operates effectively.

Any unlocked space is available to students who want to study or work. The favorite study spot is the Honors Seminar Room, which is on the first floor in the center of the house. It contains a 42-inch-screen television connected to a computer, so the room is ideal for rehearsing a PowerPoint presentation. This well-lit room has a large oval table and 15 straight-backed chairs that are functional but not particularly comfortable or conducive for napping.

Curriculum

The honors curriculum is explained in the annual Honors Program Handbook. At the core of "The Life of the Mind," is a series of interdisciplinary seminars in four categories: The Scholar, The Scientist, The Artist, and The Citizen. The categories are fixed, but their content changes as various faculty members develop courses that align with the expectations of each area, allowing them to explore topics they would not have the opportunity to teach in their own disciplines. In addition to these thematic seminars, honors students complete an introductory seminar as well as a 40-hour service-learning component, a senior honors project, and a reflective portfolio. The honors curriculum substitutes for the student's general education requirements. Students meet distribution requirements by

completing 10 courses taken in the disciplines of the Arts, Humanities, Natural Sciences, and Social Sciences (*Brynton Center for the Honors Program Handbook*, 2014–15, pp. 9–15). This regimen integrates honors students into general classes where they often initiate discussions and model scholarship.

When the honors program moved into 67 Greenfield Street, the space was more than sufficient but less than inspiring aesthetically. Jan Younger was appointed Associate Dean for the Honors Program the same year as the relocation. Now Professor Emeritus of Communication and former coach of the Heidelberg Speech Team, Younger had a research interest in presidential humor and had developed an honors seminar under the category of the Artist: “The Art of Humor as Contemporary Political, Social, and Cultural Commentary.” Since he was teaching his seminar on humor in the spring of 1998, he saw an opportunity to combine the honors curriculum with this new honors space. He invited a colleague, cartoonist Polly Keener, to sketch her concept of the Scholar, the Scientist, the Artist, and the Citizen on one of the walls in the student lounge upstairs.

Keener, among the first women to matriculate at Princeton University and a graduate of that institution, had authored a book on *Cartooning* with a foreword by *Garfield* cartoonist Jim Davis (Keener, 1992). She spent three days on a ladder in the honors house during the first week of April in 1998, sketching her images and deftly outlining them with black acrylic paint. The mural depicts the four personae of the honors program. Students in the course observed her at work, making suggestions and enjoying the artistic process. (Keener solved the problem of an ill-placed fire extinguisher on the wall by incorporating a fire hydrant into the picture and adding an anxious dog. Student suggestions then prompted the addition of a cat, a mouse, and a block of Swiss cheese.) This mural brought character to the house and definition to the honors program. Keener generously granted Heidelberg permission to use the image in marketing, and it has become a signature representation of the honors program, appearing on honors brochures and T-shirts. It was prominently featured on the cover of the *National Honors Report*, a publication of the National Collegiate Honors Council, in spring 1999.

After the success of the initial mural, Younger invited additional cartoonists to create images that would portray the other aspects of the honors curriculum on the three remaining walls. In the spring of 2000, Dave Coverly, who draws the nationally syndicated cartoon "Speedbump," used Sharpies to depict his version of the Senior Honors Project, the final curricular hurdle on the way to graduation. This cartoon graced the cover of the *National Honors Report* in fall 2000 (National Collegiate Honors Council, 2000).

The third wall focused on service learning, with artwork by Chip Bok, cartoonist for the (Akron) *Beacon Journal*, who was a finalist for a Pulitzer Prize in 1997. Bok won the Berryman Award from the National Press Foundation in 1993 and the Fischetti Award in 1988. He has earned top cartoon honors from the National Cartoonists Society and the Associated Press of Ohio (Association of American Editorial Cartoonists, 2015). Bok depicted Heidelberg reaching out to the local community by incorporating the institution's service-learning mantra: "Stretch out of the comfort zone." The honors service-learning experience encourages students to reach beyond the familiarity of campus, friends, and faculty to try a different activity and interact with people of different socio-economic, racial, or cultural backgrounds as they volunteer 40 hours of service with a community organization. After completing his contracted portion of the mural, Bok asked for the remaining bit of wall to exercise his journalistic whims. On it he depicted four political figures who were newsmakers in the spring 2000 primary elections, all "stretching" in some manner: Hillary Clinton, stretching her residency to New York state in order to run for Congress; Al Gore, stretching his image to include earth tones and a beard and stretching his accomplishments about the creation of the Internet; George W. Bush, stretching his intellect to become a presidential candidate; and Bill Clinton, buffering the Monica Lewinsky scandal by stretching the truth. Not surprisingly, many of the prospective students who now tour the house (most were younger than age six in 2000) require some explanation of those images, but the wall remains a fine representation of the Citizen at work.

On the fourth wall, Don Lee of the *Sandusky Register* (Ohio) depicted a “thinker” reflecting on his portfolio of honors work. Lee also created an image of James Thurber, the Ohio humorist whose drawings on the wall of his attic originally inspired all of these cartoon murals. According to an Associated Press story, Thurber had occupied a house in Newtown, Connecticut, from 1931 to 1934 and, as was his custom, sketched several cartoons on the walls of his attic workspace. Years later, as the current owners were stripping wallpaper, they discovered these Thurber originals. Reported in newspapers, such as the *Tuscaloosa News* (Alabama), throughout the country, the story became national news. Recognizing their value, the owners of the house invited preservationists to cut the plaster sections from the walls and put them on display in the undergraduate library at Ohio State University, the institution Thurber had attended as a young man (“James Thurber sketches,” 1975). That exhibit inspired Younger’s vision of cartoons on the wall of the honors house. Juxtaposing honors programs, which often take themselves too seriously, and cartoons, which ridicule people and institutions that do, is unusual. Featuring the honors program curriculum in cartoons on its walls is certainly a rarity.

The honors lounge is a comfortable refuge for quiet study, texting, and an occasional nap and a favorite location to engage in lively conversation or Scrabble games. Because the lounge has also been transformed into a private art gallery, it is a source of pride among Heidelberg honors students, who work hard academically but understand the value of diverse interests, aesthetic inspiration, and a sense of humor. As Keener wrote in the dedication of her book to the class that had hosted her, “I wish you much Joy and lots of Laughter. . . . And remember, always keep smiling (It makes people wonder what you have been up to!)” (P. Keener, personal communication, April 3, 1998).

Aside from the cartoon lounge, wall space in the house is dedicated to images that will inspire students to travel and pursue education abroad at a variety of institutions. Posters and photographs depict sites from various points where Heidelberg students regularly study: Oxford University in England, with the Oxford

Study Abroad Programme; Universität Heidelberg in Germany, with the American Junior Year Abroad Program; the University of Glasgow in Scotland, with Principia Consortium; and Tianjin Normal University in China, with a faculty-student teaching team from Heidelberg University. A wall-sized map of the world covers the south wall in the upstairs classroom, putting Ohio and the United States in perspective. Perhaps the greatest inspiration for students is the larger-than-life poster of Albert Einstein with his quotation, "I have no special talents. I am only passionately curious." The poster encourages students to imagine themselves in positions that challenge their talents and inspire their creativity.

PRACTICAL AND LOGISTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The honors house offers an atmosphere unlike that of either a residence hall or an academic building. It is a home-like refuge for many an honors student seeking space to study and think, to exchange ideas with others, or to meet with friends. The building also offers commuter students a base on campus, which is especially helpful and convenient. Its central location allows students to stop there before an early class or between classes. The honors house encourages community regardless of a student's major or class level. Moreover, it offers the practical advantage of giving students access to non-residential honors house computers and printers throughout the night, while the campus computer center and library close by 11:00 p.m.

Furnishing an entire house can be a challenge, but rarely has this task involved a purchase. The house features a haphazard accumulation of furniture from various corners of the campus and beyond. The oak desk that had been used by the eleventh president of Heidelberg College, William C. Cassell, was plucked from the college warehouse for the Associate Dean for honors. A conference table from the Development House days remained in the house as a seminar table. Twenty-four oak chairs with square red fabric seats were claimed when Herbst Chapel acquired new furniture. These square seats function as chairs, footstools, and end tables throughout the house and add splashes of color against the

gray walls. Scavenging for serviceable, attractive, and often historically or personally meaningful furniture from campus buildings and faculty basements continues to this day.

Old houses can be charming, and for 10 years the honors program avoided significant outlays of capital. Old buildings, however, eventually require major maintenance: it cannot be deferred indefinitely or serious problems can arise. An invasion of squirrels led to the emergency repair of the soffits all around the house. Moisture has been an ongoing maintenance issue. The 140-year-old brick exterior was absorbing moisture, which then caused the plaster on the interior walls to bubble and become disfigured. Every year the maintenance department would have to sand, plaster, and re-paint the walls nearest the chimney on the northern side of the house, both upstairs and down. One benefit of the utility re-painting in 2010 was that funds were allotted to change the paint color—although only on the damaged walls. A rich yellow-ivory shade softened the severity of the ubiquitous gray and brought some warmth to the room that gray never could.

2012 RENOVATIONS FOR THE MILLENNIALS

In the midst of a building fervor on campus in 2011, the former Chair of the Board of Trustees, Gary Bryenton, announced a generous gift to the honors program that would provide for significant improvements to the Bryenton Honors Center. He envisioned a terrace and landscaping on the north side of the house, an area for honors students to study and relax. Before such new construction could begin in earnest in the spring of 2012, performing some much-needed maintenance seemed prudent. This renovation included treating all of the exterior brick, pointing and tucking the foundation, and replacing the disintegrating basement windows.

As the institution contemplated whether to repaint or replace the standing seam metal roof, the current Associate Dean for honors, Doug Collar, found an archival photograph of the old presidential residence that revealed a slate roof topped with a widow's walk, which had long ago disappeared. He made the case for a more historic renovation, citing the building's inclusion on the National

Register of Historic Places. Slate would have been a considerably greater investment than a new metal roof, but when the roofing company offered to donate the used slate that they had removed from an area schoolhouse, it became a plausible option ("Bryenton Center Returns," 2013, p. 13). The renovation was substantial both inside and out, returning this important icon to its former classic distinction.

The spacious terrace was completed in September 2013; it features a surface of pavers, low seating around the perimeter wall, ample decorative lighting, and an access ramp that now makes the house handicap-accessible. The focal point is a gracious pergola over the French doors and Greek columns echoing those on the front porch, with extensive plantings that enhance the beautiful addition. Even without outdoor furniture, it has been the site of several informal gatherings. The donor's vision was to create a space where honors students will be able to study or gather outside, a space to enjoy for academic and social purposes. Exterior lighting not only illuminates the terrace for evening use, but serves as a beacon in the center of campus. For the careful preservation and renovation of this historic property, Mary Ann Kromer reported that the Tiffin Historic Trust presented Heidelberg University with the Nevin E. B. Martin Award for 2013 (2013, p. A3). A permanent marker acknowledging this recognition has been affixed to the front of the house.

IMPACT OF BRYENTON HONORS CENTER

The Bryenton Honors Center at Heidelberg University has been a welcome sanctuary for current students and an attractive benefit for talented prospective students. On a campus with 34 buildings, including University Hall with its grand Victorian architecture, five massive Gothic structures from the 1910s and 1920s that incorporate area limestone and red clay tile roofs, and several modern buildings that carefully combine those traditions with contemporary styles, the honors house is perhaps the smallest structure on campus. Without the history and without the location, it would be a lovely, although not extraordinary, century-old brick house. But its provenance and its placement at the crossroads of Heidelberg's

campus command dignity and respect. Its position in both time and space afford it a much greater degree of importance. Designating this space—the Brynton Honors Center—for the honors program, which emphasizes both scholarship and citizenship, seems an appropriate tribute to its former presidential residents.

That several of the presidents who occupied 67 Greenfield Street were quite forward thinking must not be forgotten, and while respectful of tradition, they recognized the wisdom of looking to the future. Thanks to the generosity of the Bryntons, the exterior and interior of the house have been restored to reflect the stature of its presidential past. Gary Brynton stated:

Our thinking was that it would materially transform this part of campus and the Honors Program to restore this iconic landmark to its former state of importance, reminiscent of the home of Heidelberg's former presidents, and as a tribute to the future leaders it will inspire. ("Brynton Center Returns," p. 13)

Extending the honors footprint to include the adjoining green area makes the honors program and its students even more visible and central to the life of Heidelberg University. The Brynton Honors Center stands as a constant reminder and affirmation for the students and the faculty who are dedicated to "The Life of the Mind" that "This Place Matters."

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APPENDIX

Occupants of 67 Greenfield Street

1850	Heidelberg College was established. The fourth president of Heidelberg College, George W. Williard, took office in 1866 and built a brick home for the president at 67 Greenfield St., where he resided for the rest of his tenure as president.
1868–90	President George W. Williard, D.D., LL.D.
1890–1901	President John A. Peters, D.D., LL.D.
1902–37	President Charles E. Miller, D.D., LL.D.
1937–45	President Clarence E. Josephson, S.T.M., D.D.
1945–47	President Nevin C. Harner, S.T.M., Ph.D., D.D., LL.D.
1948–69	President W. Terry Wickham, A.M., Ped.D., LL.D.
1969–97	67 Greenfield St. was modified for use by the Development Staff.
1997–present	67 Greenfield St. became the home for the Heidelberg Honors Program. The Development Staff was moved to another house farther south on Greenfield St.