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## **MetroParks to tear down prison home**



Register photo/MEREDITH BRUNER

The farm house that sits near the Frost Center at Osborn Park was the old prison warden's house.

**By TOM JACKSON**

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## Unused office building was warden's home when Osborn Park was prison farm

**HURON TWP.**

Before it became the most popular park in the Erie MetroParks system, Osborn Park was a state prison farm.

A portion of that history is about to disappear when park officials dismantle the former warden's house.

Stephen Dice, director-secretary of Erie MetroParks, was given the OK to get rid of the Southwoods Office during Wednesday's park board meeting. Dice convinced commissioners that fixing up the vacant building to make it useful would cost too much.

The Southwoods Office is a white building near the Frost Center in Osborn Park. It hasn't been used by Erie MetroParks employees since 2006.

Dice, who said the removal will take five or six months, doubts the house has much historical or architectural interest, as it has been modified many times. Still, he said he'll proceed at a deliberate pace to give others a chance to voice an opinion.

Dice said he has written letters twice to the Ohio Historic Preservation Office — on Feb. 7 and June 2 — to ask about the building. To date, the state agency has not replied.

The director said he's also verified the house is not on the National Register of Historic Places.

"We still need to hear from the state and see if there is anyone else out there who is interested," Dice said.

The house will be offered for sale and removal, Dice said.

If there are no takers, the parks system likely will allow the Huron Township Fire Department to burn it down for firefighting practice, Dice said.

Ed Boose, a retired math teacher who lives next to Osborn Park, has studied the history of the park. He said he'll be sorry to see the prison warden's house go, but won't make a big deal of the matter.

"I kind of wish that they could find some way to utilize it," he said. "It's been remodeled, revised. It's not like it's necessarily an antique."

Osborn Park was once the land of early settler Arah Osborn, who bought the property in 1836, when Erie County was still part of Huron County. Arah Osborn's grandson, Myron Osborn (1842-1932) lived in the house.

Myron Osborn had no children and left the farm to the State of Ohio, along with \$10,000, a sizeable amount of money in those days, Boose said.

In the late 1930s, the state opened a prison farm on the property, using trustees from the state prison in Mansfield. For decades, about 40 to 70 prisoners lived on the property, depending upon the time of year and what kind of work needed to be done. The prison farm was dogged by bad publicity in 1950s and the 1960s when escaped inmates took local families hostage, and the state closed the prison farm in the early 1970s, Boose said.

The portion of Osborn's will leaving the farm to the state suggests he was a conservationist, Boose said.

"The timber of said farm shall not be cut or removed from there except where as is necessarily required for general farm purposes, it being my object to conserve and preserve the timber of said farm as much as is consistent with the use to which it was put," Osborn wrote.

Boose believes Osborn would have been pleased the land is now a park.

"I'm sure he is more pleased than when it was a (prison) camp," he said.