

Mimi Peterson Statement at Dawes news conf 5.22.08

Good Morning! THANK YOU FOR COMING!

My name is Mimi Peterson. I am speaking this morning for myself and for a group of dedicated citizens who have pledged to help General Dawes get his home back from Northwestern University for the Evanston History Center.

Did I say his “home?” I’m sorry. I meant to say “sink hole” as a Northwestern VP has said recently. Yes, my friends, you are looking at what Northwestern calls a “sinkhole,” not what the rest of the world considers a national landmark.

Funny thing – the university of Chicago owns the Robie House in Oak Park. They appreciate the value of a local history museum.

When General Dawes gave his home to the university it was for the specific purpose of housing the Evanston history museum. And ever since 1960, that has been the case. But Northwestern has suddenly closed the museum to the public saying it is unsafe.

Ladies and Gentlemen - we have obtained a copy of the Evanston Fire Department inspection report for the Dawes mansion and right now it is now up on our website. I encourage you to read it and decide for yourself if it was necessary for Northwestern to close the history center to the public based on that letter.

The people of Evanston and Northwestern have been at odds on many issues over the years. Town and gown have not gotten along well. And while the university has prevailed again and again in recent times – whether the cause was historic preservation or paying their fair share for city services - THIS time, however, they have gone one step too far. They have crossed the line. The future of 110-years of Evanston history is at stake.

The idea that Northwestern is considering selling the Dawes house for its own gain or using it for its own purposes is outrageous, and violates the agreement with the Dawes family.

We must stop them.

There are those who want to roll over for Northwestern. There are those who say the history center should pay for repairs in order to extend the lease to 2009. There are those who have conflicts of interest who are parties to current negotiations. We are here today to help stiffen their backbones.

Does Northwestern President Henry Bienen want to be remembered for stealing Evanston’s history? As he retires, does he want his legacy to be that he closed the history center to Evanston’s children and usurped a treasured city landmark? Does the leadership of a top ten university agree with their VP who has such a

way with words, who said “sometimes you have to put emotions and history aside?” Do these people have no shame?

Evanston residents are close to losing the home of arguably one of our city’s most famous residents – a World War I general, a re-builder of Europe, a Nobel Peace prize winner, a Vice-President of the United States, a song writer, and a man who loved this city deeply.

Those who will lose most if Northwestern grabs the Dawes home are the city’s children- the future of Evanston’s history. A month ago, out of nowhere, our children , tour groups and even mothers were suddenly denied access to their museum which was closed just prior to the annual Mothers Day event. And so, we echo the General in asking each of them to demand President Bienen fix the history center with the endowment funds left by Dawes and turn it over free and clear.

Please sign the sheets we have passed out and then join us after the rally in marching a half mile to bring them to Henry Bienen’s office.

Later this morning, General Dawes will meet with students who attend the school here in Evanston named after him to receive their letters of support.

Today is just the start of our efforts to hold Henry Bienen accountable ...for fixing the history center and turning over the deed. And in the end maybe he’ll protect his own legacy.

We ask all Evanston citizens to protest loudly and strongly, to unite with us to insist Northwestern honor its commitments.

We will take our fight directly to Henry Bienen – to his office, to his home, to his next board meeting, to graduation. Are you with us? Are you with us? Let’s march!!