Initial Preservation and Restoration

When Floyd Andre, Dean of Agriculture and the last resident of the Farm House, moved out of the home in July 1970, there were no immediate plans for the building’s future. Water damage to the structure had made it unappealing as a private residence, and there was talk of bulldozing the historic home and replacing it with a classroom building. The Farm House was saved from demolition when university officials accepted a proposal by Dean Andre and Helen LeBaron, dean of the College of Home Economics, to restore the home and utilize it as an educational “heritage house.” The restoration committee, which first met on April 1, 1971, was led by Carl Hamilton, vice president of Information and Development for the University, and included Neva Petersen, professor of Applied Art, Wesley Shank and Lawton Patten, professors of Architecture, and Robert Harvey, professor of Landscape Architecture.

Rather than focusing on any one time period, the committee intended the restored Farm House to “reflect the living conditions and life style that prevailed throughout the total occupation from 1860 to 1970.” In 1972, Hamilton received word that the home’s status as a National Historic Landmark qualified the restoration effort to receive federal funds. In the grant proposal to receive those funds, the committee’s preservation plan included such projects as removing the 1926 garage, replacing the roof, shoring up sagging floors, and adding modern fire alarms and a security system. The projected cost of the plan totaled $34,870, and in 1973 the U.S. Department of the Interior approved a grant for half the budget.

After nearly six years of working to preserve and restore the house, collect donated antique objects, and build public support, the committee officially opened the Farm House as a museum on the nation’s bicentennial, July 4, 1976. As Hamilton directed, it operated “essentially as an adjunct of the Brunnier Gallery,” now the Brunnier Art Museum. Neva Petersen posted an American flag on the home’s front porch on opening day, both in honor of the bicentennial and to draw attention to the new museum, starting a tradition that continues today. The cost of the restoration totaled $120,414. Funding included the federal grant from the U.S. Department of the Interior, public donations, and donations from several ISU alumni classes.
Subsequent Preservation and Restoration Projects

In 1991, the Farm House Museum underwent another major restoration effort: reinforcing the floor supports to accommodate the unexpectedly high number of museum visitors. During excavations in preparation for the project, archaeologists from the ISU Archaeological Laboratory uncovered numerous significant artifacts, including a cylindrical dry-cell battery with a patent date of 1893, and segments of a previous brick foundation that do not correspond to any of the historical or present walls of the Farm House. These foundation segments still cannot be explained.  

Work began again in 1999 to preserve and restore the porches and replace the gray stucco covering the exterior surface of the building. While removing stucco from the west wall of the house, workers uncovered the original bricked-up doorway where students in the 1870s had entered the Farm House to receive their field assignments. This project exposed the exterior of the home and its original soft, red brick façade, before once again covering the walls with the protective stucco.  

Another recent project included the installation of a place-holding fireplace in Dean of Agriculture Charles F. Curtiss’s first-floor library. Documents indicated a fireplace was installed around 1912, and removed in a 1940s remodeling. In 2006, University Museums and ISU’s Facilities Planning & Management Department, with Wesley Shank advising, confirmed the location of the fireplace. As most structural details about the fireplace are unknown, a shallow mock fireplace was installed to demonstrate its position.  

1. Floyd Andre and Helen LeBaron to John Pace and William Whitman, 14 May, 1970, University Museums, Iowa State University.  
2. Mary E. Atherly, Farm House: College Farm to University Museum (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1995), 60.  
3. Carl Hamilton to All Parties Interested in or Concerned with the Farm House, 28 Jun 1976, University Museums, Iowa State University.  
4. Carl Hamilton to Dr. Adrian D. Anderson, 17 Oct 1979, University Museums, Iowa State University.