

Group signs deal for Underground Railroad stop

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Members of the Friends of the Dr. Richard Eells House this week signed a lease with an option to buy the historic Underground Railroad hideout at 415 Jersey.

George Irwin, representing the group, announced the signing during Thursday's preservation dinner at the Quincy Holiday Inn.

The signing, he said, clears the way for the Friends group to complete its fund-raising campaign and proceed with long-range dreams of restoring the Eells home — a documented stop on the Underground Railroad in the 1840s.

Irwin said the purchase price will be \$43,250. The amount was established last October when the Friends group submitted the winning bid during a silent auction supervised by State Street Bank, co-trustee of the estate of Harry Klene, the home's last owner.

The house has been tied up in a complicated estate since Klene's death about 10 years ago.

The Friends group launched efforts to save the building more than a year ago, fearing the dilapidated, boarded-up structure faced imminent demolition.

Irwin said most of the money needed to buy the building has been pledged by donors, but

more support will be sought in a fund drive and membership campaign later this year.

Irwin said the group hopes to turn the property over to the state eventually for restoration. One estimate placed restoration costs at about \$500,000.

Until the sale is completed, the Friends group will lease the building for \$210 a month from the estate, Irwin said.

The Quincy City Council gave first reading Monday to an ordinance designating the Eells house a city landmark. "Its designation should be completed within the next couple of weeks," said Jack Varnier, chairman of the

Quincy Preservation Commission and co-host of Thursday's dinner.

The house was built in 1833 by Dr. Eells, one of Quincy's first physicians and a committed abolitionist. Dr. Eells secretly opened his home to slaves fleeing to freedom along the Underground Railroad.

Historians regard the Eells' house as significant because it's one of only a few documented stops on the famed escape route. The house received notoriety when Eells was arrested, tried and convicted in 1842 for helping a man escape from a Lewis County, Mo., slave owner.