



21st Century Photography Vol. 3

The Human Project

Mark S. Orr & Contributors

May 3, 2008, changed my life in a most profound way, when Senator Barack Obama, his wife, Michelle and their daughters Malia and Sasha visited his ancestral home, the Dunham House.

Without knowing the history of the home when I purchased it, I found it in deplorable condition and set a course to restore this great American farmhouse. Little did I know the family history that would lead to a part of the future First Family's history. The Dunham Family is President Obama's mother side, Stanley Ann Dunham, who was born in Kansas as well as her father.

However, before them, many generations have lived, were born, married and have been laid to rest here in the rich soil of Tipton County, Indiana.



Shawn Clements, owner of the Dunham House with then Senator Barack Obama. Photo courtesy of Dunham House Collection©

They were the first pioneer settlers to purchase the 120 acres from the government in 1849, when Zachary Taylor was President, which was formerly the Miami Indian reserve.

Who would have guessed that the first African American President would have had such deep roots in such a small farming community? But that is the American family story, it is what makes us, us. It is truly what makes everyone's history so unique yet ties us all together, not only as Americans but human beings. A sense of family, its history, its journey, and how it affects us and future generations.

Today the house is still undergoing restoration as many people are visiting and discussing the importance to future generations. I sometimes have to remind some people that it may not be the history they prefer but, it doesn't make it any less important. After all, if it is your family history you would think it would be very important. Someday, when I am much older and my hands are no longer able to do what they do now, I want to look at them and know that they helped discover, protect, and preserve a piece of Presidential history and I didn't let it slip through my fingers.

Somewhere down the line we are all related, one big family. It is my belief that if we remember that, we may resolve our issues, move forward, and leave for future generations a reminder of what is really important...family.

Shawn Christopher Clements - The Dunham House Owner
November 15, 2011



Senator Barack Obama and family visit the Obama ancestral home in Tipton County, Indiana in May of 2008.
Photograph by Bob Nichols©