



# WASHTENAW IMPRESSIONS

## PRESIDENT'S CORNER

It is too early to have any reports on how the campaign for funds for the museum is progressing. An exceptionally fine group of people have agreed to work on the project and we shall look forward to the results.

A start is being made to decide what type of active programs will be carried on in the museum and, therefore, what features the architect must plan for in the building.

A number of museum directors in this part of the state are being consulted and their advice sought on a potential director to help with the planning.

It is obvious that our museum committee is very active. *108 words*

—Leigh Anderson

## BOOTH HELPERS TO GET FREE PASSES, PARKING

Free passes and parking at the Ann Arbor Home and Leisure Living Show March 23-25 at the U-M Track and Tennis Building on the west side of Ferry Field are available to volunteers who help man the WCHS booth for a couple of hours or so.

If you can help please telephone Carol Freeman, booth chairman, at 662-1854. The show opens at 4 p.m. Friday, March 23, and runs through Sunday.

## CEMETERY DIRECTORY PUBLISHED BY GSWC

A 53-page *Directory of Cemeteries of Washtenaw County Michigan* has recently been published by The Genealogical Society of Washtenaw County. Harold A. Jones of Chelsea directed its preparation and took the photographs. It is available from the society at \$3.50. For more information call Carole Callard, 665-8783.

## DR. & MRS. ROSS MADE HONORARY WCHS MEMBERS

The resignation of Dr. C. Howard Ross following his recent illness and surgery has been rejected by the Washtenaw County Historical Society board of directors. Instead, Dr. Ross and his wife have been made honorary members in perpetuity in recognition of his many contributions to the Society as president, director, speaker and historiographer.

## HOME SHOW TO HELP WCHS THREE WAYS

WCHS stands to benefit from the local Home and Leisure Living Show March 23-25 in three ways, thanks to the show promoters Pat and John Danovich.

Opening gate receipts from 4 to 6 p.m. Friday the 23rd will be donated. Proceeds from a special auction beginning at 6 p.m. the 23rd will also be given as well as a free exhibit booth for the Society with free admission and parking passes for booth helpers.

The Danovich's are asking all 85 exhibitors at the show to donate something for the auction. Other donations are welcome too. Auctioneers Lloyd Braun and Jerry Helmer, who have raised \$250,000 for charity previously, are donating their services. Donations may be offered by telephoning 769-2084.

## SPEAKER TO DISCUSS CANADIAN RESEARCH

Floyd Walls of Ypsilanti, a Black fireman who has done considerable research in Canada, will talk about "Ancestors in Ontario" at the Genealogical Society of Washtenaw County meeting at 2:30 p.m. Sunday, March 25, at Washtenaw Community College. Help session at 1 p.m.

## TREASURE MART FOUNDER DEMARIS CASH TO SPEAK AT MARCH 22 MEETING

Demaris Cash, owner of an Ann Arbor institution, the Treasure Mart, will tell some of her adventures in business and collecting antiques at the WCHS meeting at 8 p.m. Thursday, March 22, at Great Lakes Federal Savings.

Her talk is titled "Treasure Tales." She plans to bring several items to exhibit.

A native of Pennsylvania, she graduated from Rollins College in Winter Park, Florida. Her varied career included stints as children's hostess at the Biltmore Hotel in Coral Gables, Florida, operator of a pre-school in Eldorado, Kansas, and country-wide travel with Field Enterprises, dealers in encyclopedias and children's books.

Unable to resume teaching because of illness in the family, she started the Treasure Mart, a re-sale consignment shop, on a shoestring and a prayer 19 years ago next month in a long-empty building on Detroit Street.

## TOUR LEADERS NEEDED

Interested in local history and architecture? The Ann Arbor Historic District Commission needs volunteers to lead walking tours during Preservation Week, May 6 and 12. A mass meeting is planned March 31. For more information telephone 761-4510 between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m.

## GERMAN SETTLEMENTS TO BE APRIL TOPIC

Charles H. Sawyer, retired from the U-M Museum of Art, who has done research on local German settlements, will discuss his findings at the April 26 WCHS meeting.

OWS DETERS "CONDO'S"

## PRESERVES "FRONT PORCH" WAY OF LIFE



By Milton Kemnitz

The normal expectation for a neighborhood of turn-of-the-century homes near downtown in a city the size of Ann Arbor is deterioration to slums and replacement by apartments.

This hasn't happened in Ann Arbor's near West Side. How a determined group of residents have apparently successfully fought off that fate was the topic of the February WCHS meeting.

As might be expected they organized. Martin Lee, past president and current board member of the Old West Side Association (OWS), a non-profit corporation, talked about their efforts and showed slides of what it was about the area they wished to preserve.

"It's certainly true if you know our area that even though we have some beautiful homes we are not by any stretch of the imagination *Le Vieux Carré* in New Orleans or a Georgetown.

"We are a bunch of modest homes, however, an extraordinarily large number remain intact. It's the total ambience of the area together with some of its physical features which we made the purpose of our efforts.

"That really is a fundamentally different way to approach preservation than many people in this country were used to doing."

OWS began when a group of residents, some of whom had lived in the area for fifty or sixty years, joined together in 1967 to defeat a 200-unit condominium project which would have eliminated a sizeable number of

the oldest homes.

Their activities led to the area being the first "historic living environment" of modest homes to be placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1972 by the United States government.

While some OWS members are long-time residents, Lee, himself, is a native of Britain who came to the United States in 1969 to do research in traffic safety.

As a geographer "close to" a doctoral degree in planning from the U-M, "I really have no connections in the housing area," he said, "but the whole issue of participation of the residents of the neighborhood in historic preservation is one that has fascinated me for a long time.

"In fact, I was marginally involved in a number of preservation efforts in two places I've lived in England. One is Bath in Somerset, one of the finest Georgian cities in Europe, and the other, Bromley in Kent where I grew up, where we had some significant local buildings threatened by the ever-growing road network in the London area."

He showed slides of the area starting with Milton Kemnitz's illustration for the Old West Side book. "He captures some of the groups of small houses that we're so fond of," Lee commented.

"Just what is the Old West Side? It certainly is streets of nature trees, which are a glorious sight in autumn. It's neighborhood parks from which one can sneak views of the city. It's the old

German church down on Jefferson. It's the Argus building now owned by the University. It's fine detail on houses large and small, it's individuality (a gaily painted fire hydrant), but above all it's people.

"The Old West Side is a community which we're delighted to say is becoming more aware of itself."

The approximate boundaries of the area are, on the east, the Ann Arbor Railroad and South Main Street to Pauline Boulevard; across Seventh Street and out Liberty to Crest, across some areas largely built up in the 1930's, to Huron Street on the north and back to the railroad.

A somewhat smaller area, excluding newer sections, was eventually adopted by Ann Arbor City Council on April 6, 1978, as a local historic district.

Back in the early days of Ann Arbor, the old west side was settled largely by German immigrants, beginning about 1829. Most of the buildings were built from about 1860 to the mid-1920's, he said. From an old plat map, he noted that Allen Creek is approximately where the railroad track is and close to the OWS boundary.

A recent aerial view illustrated the uniformity of roof height, traditional gridiron pattern of streets and tree cover.

"The features that set the Old West Side apart, he said, are the relatively generous lots on which the houses are generally narrow, maybe 20 to 25 feet wide and 30

to 40 feet deep. The effect is to give a very open streetscape and rather park-like appearance."

"Architecturally, the styles can best be described as eclectic revival. Although there's no real uniformity in style, there's a great deal of similarity in basic physical form—that is the size of house on the lot, the openness of the porches, the planting of trees and general orientation of the houses toward the street in sharp contrast to subdivisions built since the 1930's which focused more on the backyard.

"In the late 1960's we began to see flat-roofed apartment buildings cropping up between the frame houses. It began to destroy the streetscape. Much more critical was the proposal to demolish a whole square block and build condominiums."

The corporation was formed, initiating ten years or so of intense effort that culminated in adoption of the preservation ordinance.

After defeating the condominium project, they decided they must document the character of the area. They obtained a couple of grants from the National Trust for Historic Preservation plus assistance from U-M architectural people. With grant money they hired a nationally known consultant, Antoinette Downing, and by 1971 produced a book, *The Old West Side*.

"The book not only got us the credibility to be listed on the national register, but also, City Council received it as a sort of policy statement.

"National register status is not terribly powerful except for projects which involve federal licensing or funding—such as a six-lane freeway."

"We realized we should use the state historic district enabling act to have the area declared a local historic district by city council. That law requires a study committee involving the existing historic district commission, a preliminary report prepared stating



**PORCH SCENE, 1908**  
At 449 Fifth Street, Ann Arbor.

under what circumstances a historic district should be set up and guidelines that should be administered as a result. The report has to be reviewed by the local planning commission, a public hearing held and final report made.

"What we came up with was a set of standards all of which are very cut-and-dried. This is extremely important because I don't think there are more than three people in the whole area who could agree on what color houses should be painted, for example. Some new subdivisions do in fact do that. They have what amounts to vigilante groups which often get into some very nasty neighborhood politics.

"We say we are threatened by thoughtless redevelopment and expansion of houses that would tend to destroy the streetscape. Once you've said that, you have to admit that sometimes houses have



**HURON STREET HOME**  
Still stands across from Lurie Terrace  
Both photos, courtesy Michigan Historical Collections, Bentley Library, U-M

to come down, or be expanded. We are not just saying, 'no, no, no' but finding guidelines within which people can do reasonable things that people want to do with houses.

"People are not likely to voluntarily invite some group to dump restrictions on their property, so we had the job of not just notifying and explaining but giving the community opportunity to change the recommendations.

"We had 900 properties involved. We split the neighborhood into 11 zones, appointed zone captains and had those persons shanghai one to four persons into having block-level coffees. In about three weeks we held about 23. To get people to attend we had a veritable army of volunteers out there beating on doors. Through sheer perseverance we were able to look 75 percent of the property owners eyeball-to-eyeball in the campaign."

By the time of the public hearing there was little left to cover and not much opposition, he said. One person was pretty hostile against the proposal. Others wanted to go a step further and prohibit chainlink fences in the front yard, which was done. One was hostile because the National Register did not include his block!

The standards adopted limit height to three stories, require roof pitch of at least 5:12 or 20 percent (no flat roofs) and require expansion to be mainly at the back to preserve wide side yards at least part way back. (It would cost \$150,000 to build up the buildable area left, he said.)

Driveway width is limited. Enclosure of most front porches was already prohibited because they are in the front yard setback area. In repairing a porch, an attempt must be made to match the original material though it doesn't have to be replicated. Wrought iron metalwork is

explicitly prohibited as inappropriate.

Aluminum or vinyl siding, if used, must be no more than one inch wider than the original narrow clapboard and must not obscure certain details. Front yard trees more than 10 inches in diameter may not be removed without permission of the city forester. If removal is allowed, the tree must be replaced with an appropriate kind of young tree.

The ordinance also recommends, though it does not require, preservation of some decorative details and use of the association's free design advisory service if changes are planned. It discourages metal awnings on the street side and metal color aluminum storms and screens.

A photographic register of significant details has been placed on file with the city.

The ordinance was written so it can be administered simply in the process of obtaining a building permit from the city's building and safety department.

"This means there are no nasty vigilante group of neighbors going around."

#### FOR MORE INFORMATION SEE 'WEST SIDE' BOOK

*The Old West Side*, an 85 page report on the environmental survey of the neighborhood, is available by mail for \$3.70. The address is "Old West Side," Attention: Betsy Dugan, P.O. Box 7405, Ann Arbor, MI 48107. Pamphlet material is also available.

## HISTORICAL HAPPENINGS

**Chelsea Historical Society** — 8 p.m. second Monday of month at McKune Memorial Library.

Two U-M architecture students did an architectural survey of Chelsea last summer for a master's thesis. They photographed home and business structures and recorded details about them.

**Dexter Historical Society** — The museum will open again on a regular basis Tuesday April 3 after winter closing. It will be open every Tuesday and the second and

## MEMBERSHIP DUES

WCHS membership dues may be sent directly to Treasurer Patricia Austin, 1931 Coronada Drive, Ann Arbor, MI 48103 instead of P.O. Box 8006, Ann Arbor, MI 48107 which is the WCHS general address now being used for the capital fund drive.

The 1979 dues are \$5, individual, and \$9 for a couple; \$4 and \$7 respectively for seniors. Deduct \$1 if already a member of a local society in the county. Life membership is \$100, \$150 for a couple. Commercial memberships are Patron, \$100; Sponsor, \$75; Donor, \$50; and Friend, \$25.

For more information please telephone Mrs. Austin, 663-5281.

## COBBLESTONE ON TOUR

Cobblestone Farm will be included in the Ann Arbor Women's City Club spring house tour 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Friday, April 27.

fourth Saturdays of each month from 1-3 p.m. until December.

A special display of quilts and spinning wheels on loan from community residents will be shown through June as well as the permanent displays including a school scene, dental office and farm exhibit.

**Manchester Historical Society** — 8 p.m. Monday, March 26, at Emanuel Church. Herbert Bartlett of Saline will talk on "Area Indian Trails," drawing on his own research plus that of the late Jane Palmer, long-time Manchester librarian.

**Milan Historical Society** — 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, March 21, at Milan Community House.

**Saline Historical Society** — 8 p.m. Tuesday, March 20, in Saline High School Library.

**Ypsilanti Historical Society** — Easter egg decorating demonstration for all ages, 2-4 p.m. Sunday, March 25, at the museum, by Esther Ensign, Jane Salcau and Jane Bird.

General meeting 3-5 p.m. Sunday, March 18, at the museum, "Sweet Adeline" singing group will sing early American songs and lead a sing-along.

## CAN YOU DATE THESE?

Can you date these headlines which appeared in a Washtenaw County newspaper four years apart?

"CASTRO SPURNS AMERICA"  
"COCAINE GRIPS U.S. ARMY"  
Answer in next issue.

### WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY MEETING

8:00 p.m. THURSDAY

MARCH 22, 1979  
Liberty Hall

Great Lakes Federal Savings  
Liberty at Division  
Ann Arbor, Michigan

Non-Profit Org.  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Permit No. 96  
Ann Arbor, Mich.