

IMPRESSIONS

WASHTENAW COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER • MAY 2001

BY LOUIS WM. DOLL

The House At 411 N. State



Photo: Susan Wineberg

411 N. State, once the home of playwright Arthur Miller.

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the corner of Detroit and Kingsley Streets. She had just come from the farmer's market and had purchased a bushel of apples, which were drawn in a cart by a boy my own age. The apple cart had overturned at **Diroff's** (now the site of Zingerman's) just as I came along and she asked my name and if I wouldn't help the Tice boy who was pulling the cart. I discovered that she lived across the street in a decrepit old house at 418 N. State. She fascinated me right from the start! I visited her often to hear her tell of Ann Arbor and its history. I learned

about the houses she had owned and told the dates of construction. I was only a child and only remembered the date of our house since it was same year as my father's birth, 1877 [This is actually the date Miss Morse sold the house. It was probably built ca. 1860].

Not long after we moved in, we had three student rooms built in the large attic. In each room were two beds and we rented them for

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*Doll's family lived on North State in the 1920s-1950s. The famous playwright Arthur Miller lived in this house in 1936-38 while a student at UM. In his book **Tunebends**, Miller described the Dolls as "a family of giants, bending over to pass through the doorways of their tiny nineteenth-century Midwest house." Doll now lives in Bay City but keeps his avid interest in Ann Arbor and Washtenaw County alive!*

My family bought the house at 411 N. State and we moved there from Chelsea on July 5, 1922. I was not quite eleven. This was one of the houses purchased in the 1870s by Miss **Ellen Morse** for students. It had crudely been made over into four two-room light housekeeping apartments. There were several rooms left for the use of the family. It is an example of the housing shortage and crowded conditions in Ann Arbor at that date, that these accommodations were eagerly sought at \$10.00 a week, and there were no vacancies. There was a little stove for cooking and all occupants used the common icebox on the back porch. In the winter, the window box was used. There was only one complete bathroom on the second floor in the rear and a single toilet in a tiny closet under the front stairs.

I first met Miss Morse on an autumn day on

May Program

Our May Program is our Annual Meeting, Election of Officers and Potluck, to be held on Wednesday, May 16th at the Webster Church in Webster Township. Our speaker will be Willah Weddon, a former journalist and member of the Capitol Press Corps. Ms. Weddon has written about the First Ladies of Michigan and has published four books on the First Families of Michigan. She has won many awards for her publications. Please bring a dish to pass that will serve 8 people. We will supply plates and eating utensils of the plastic sort. If you want the good stuff, bring your own! Beverages will also be supplied.



Photo by Susan Wineberg
Board Member Carol Birch finds rotating the dome a snap.

prominent astronomers of the 19th century. In fact, it is here that 21 asteroids (minor planets) and two comets were discovered! The Observatory was also the home of the first scholarly journal published by the University (*Astronomical Notices* by Brunnow) and was the site where the longitude of Ann Arbor was first established in 1861. And, it is the repository of the oldest, large objective telescope lens made by Henry Fitz that has not been reground, as well as the home of the 1854 Pistor and Martins meridian circle telescope, the oldest intact instrument of its type in America.

The 1854 brick structure, built in the Greek Revival and Italianate styles, which was stuccoed and scored to resemble a stone Greek temple, was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1973. It is one of the most perfectly preserved scientific buildings of its era.

The Observatory will be open **Wednesdays May 2, 3-5 PM, May 23, 11 AM-2PM, and June 13, 3-5 PM.** It will also be open **Tuesday June 26, from 11 am-2 PM.** It is closed in July and August. Call (734) 763-2230 for more information.

House Update

Karen O'Neal is excited about the new outdoor lights recently installed along the fence on Main Street by **Teri Jefferson** and **Joe Majorana**. Come down and see for yourself. The house looks especially good at night when the lights are on.

Work is also proceeding on repairing our fence, getting new signs, and installing a French drain to take care of the perennial drainage problem. We also had to have a new sump pump installed when the electricians noticed the old one was smoking! Never a dull moment at MoMS!

Pat Thompson, our avid gardener, has been busy planting pansies around the trees in the extension. She recently won a grant of \$150 from the **Master Gardner Alumni Association**. It will be used to purchase historic looking plant ID tags. Pat hopes that our members will be able to donate 3 fern stands and some blue and white jardiniere (for 10" wide and 14" wide plants) to use for the houseplants. They look so much better in a proper container..

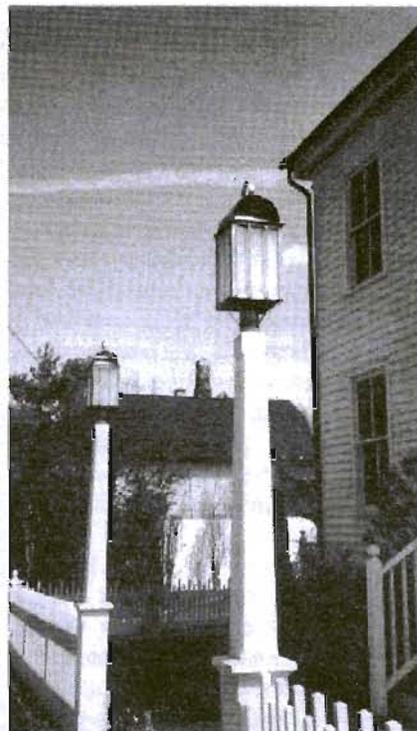


Photo by Susan Wineberg
New lights shine brightly at the Museum's entrance.

Historic Travel Has A Web Site

Looking for tips to guide you to historic places worldwide? Look no more. David Keene, an anthropologist and historic preservationist for 20 years, is president of **travelthepast.com**. With this website, you can search a database by theme, time period, and state. Tourists can read briefings on hundreds of historic places, including directions, fees and phone numbers. The site includes an affiliate section, bed and breakfasts, and lists of endangered landmarks. Later this year, the site will introduce a mapping and trip-planner section. They hope to encourage heritage tourism and stimulate local communities to preserve the treasures they have around them. Check it out!

We Are Winners!

On April 27th, the **Michigan Historic Preservation Network** presented the **WCHS** with a **2001 Community Award**. These awards are given at the Annual Meeting of the Network, which was held in Detroit. They recognize outstanding rehabilitation projects that have made a significant contribution to the preservation of Michigan's heritage. We are to be congratulated!

The award is the result of a nomination made by former board member **Caroline Mohai**. Immediate Past President (and your editor) **Susan Wineberg** will be accepted the award on behalf of the society. This award recognizes our nine years of hard work in moving and restoring the Kellogg-Warden House as a local historical museum.

Around The Area

Detroit is 300 years old this summer and many celebrations are planned. Look for the **Tall Ships** in July and many events at **Fort Wayne**. **Preservation Wayne** celebrates 300 years of Detroit every Saturday from **May 5th-October 27th** with walking tours of five historic districts. **Tours will be given of the Downtown, Eastern Market, Midtown, Auto Heritage (Model T Factory at Piquette) and New Center Areas.** Tickets are \$15/ person, with discounts for PW members and students. Tours are limited to 25 people. Call 313-577-3559 to make reservations or visit their website at preservationwayne.org.

Wayne State University's College of Urban Labor and Metro Affairs (CULMA) will explore the value of historic preservation through a series of lectures in May and June. The Van Dusen Urban Forum Lunch series will feature **Alexander Garvin** on Thursday, May 10th, **Donovan Rypkema** on Thursday May 24th, **Jane Brooks** on Thursday May 31st, and **Stanley Lowe** on Thursday June 7th. Call 313-577-5071.

The **Historic Indian Village 2001 Home and Garden Tour** returns this year on **Saturday June 2nd from 9-5**. Ten elegant homes will be featured that date from 1895-1929 and were designed by such architects as Albert Kahn and Louis Kamper, with contributions by Pewabic Pottery and Jens Jensen. Tickets are \$12 (advance) and \$15. Call 313-924-3891 for information.

The **15th Annual Corktown Historic Home and Garden Tour** will be held on **Sunday June 3rd**. It is a self-guided tour beginning at Holy Trinity Church at noon. It will be one of the largest ever held in this neighborhood. Tickets are \$10 (advance) and \$12.50. Call 313-962-5660.

The **8th Annual Mount Clemens Historical Homes Tour** will be held on **Saturday June 16th from 9:30-4PM**. The \$12 tickets are limited and are by advance sale only. Call 810-469-8666 to reserve your tickets.

The **Rochester Hills Museum at Van**

Hoosen Farm presents **Downtown Rochester Walking Tours—Just for Ewe!** The tour will include seeing the display of decorated fiberglass sheep. Tours are from 7-8:30 PM on **Thursday June 14th and August 16th**. Tickets are \$3. Call 248-608-8198 to make required reservations.

The **Troy Museum** continues its lecture series with **From Durant to Ford: Names and Faces in the Motor City** on Tuesday June 19th at 7:30 PM. Admission is free but donations are welcome. Call 248-524-3570 to make reservations.

Meadow Brook Hall Concours d'Elegance is scheduled for Sunday, **August 5th**. Seen as one of the world's most spectacular international celebrations of the automobile, it has attracted 20,000 people! There is a golf event, race and fashion show and art auction. Admission is \$20 for adults and \$10 for children. Call 248-370-3140 or visit their web page at www.mbhconcoors.org.

Marshall, Michigan has already announced the date of its **38th Annual Historic Home Tour**. It will be **Saturday and Sunday September 8th and 9th** and will include 15 structures including eight private houses, dating from 1844-1920. Advance tickets may be purchased from the historical society by calling 616-781-5163.

Tecumseh, in Lenawee County, presents its **26th Annual Home Tour and Promenade Tecumseh on Saturday and Sunday May 19th and 20th**. The tour will feature six houses and a designer house. Tickets are \$10 (advance) and \$12. Call 517-423-3740. Tecumseh is also displaying a **Smithsonian Institute Traveling Exhibit** entitled "*Yesterdays Tomorrows: Past Visions of an American Future.*" You can take a virtual tour at www.historictecumseh.com. It is a fantastic website which I highly recommend.

Future Programs

**Saturday • June 2nd
8:30 AM-5:00 PM**

Our **Annual Bus Tour** will visit **Cranbrook** including **Saarinen House** and the **Art Museum**. The cost will be \$60.00 and will cover the bus, the tour and a lunch. Reservations must be made by May 28th. Some walking will be required.

**Sunday • September 16th
2:00 PM**

Louisa Pieper has been busy! We are already confirmed for this date for a tour of the **Rentschler Farm in Saline**. **Wayne Clements** will be the speaker.

Louisa is planning future programs based on the theme "**Focus on the County.**" We hope to go to the **Hack House in Milan**, **The Dexter Train Museum**, and the restored buildings in **Webster Township**. Louisa will report on this at the Annual Meeting.

Help Park Cars During Art Fair

TCF Bank is once again loaning us their parking lot during **Art Fair** so that we can raise money by parking cars after banking hours: 5:30 to 8:30 PM; Saturday 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM. **We need YOU** to help park cars **July 18-21**. Call Pauline at 734-662-9092 to sign up. Work with a buddy. You do not have to drive the cars, just collect the money as they pull into "our" lot!

Still More On John Geddes

Denise Frederick, the Washtenaw County GenWeb webmaster who published John Geddes' diary on the Internet, came to visit Ann Arbor in early April. She was feted by Connie Dunlap (thank you Connie!) at a lovely dinner party attended by Russell Bidlack, myself and WCHS officers, and for lunch by the board of the Washtenaw County Historical Society. A good time was had by all. The biggest mystery of all, however, was NOT solved. No one knows where the original diary of John Geddes resides. We only have a copy which Denise received from Timothy Kreh of Washington DC by e-mail in April of 2000.

Denise is a native of Ann Arbor and has ancestors from Dexter, but she now resides in Petoskey where she is the advertising representative for four local newspapers. She has a husband and two kids and a full-time job, yet still feeds her passion for genealogy by volunteering to adopt a county for GenWeb. She proves the adage that if you want something done, give it to a busy person!



Photo by Susan Wineberg

Denise Frederick and Pauline Walters smile about John Geddes.

PRESIDENT PAULINE WALTERS ASKS

"Do You Have A Few Hours To Spare?"

Drop by the Museum and LET'S TALK or call 662-9092

The Society, now that the Museum on Main Street is "up and running" needs volunteers to help us run more smoothly. We are seeking persons with varied talents and skills for some occasional and some on-going tasks. They are:

MEMBERSHIP CHAIR: during the membership drive month would take three or four hours for a couple of weeks and a few hours during the mailing week the rest of the months.

FUNDRAISING CHAIR: during the membership drive, in mid-summer, or-

ganize the lists and direct the mailing of letters and the fundraising token.

MAINTENANCE CHAIR: develop a team to do minor repairs, minor painting and general maintenance.

OFFICE ORGANIZER: someone that likes and is good at sorting out the volume of paper and items that are accumulating. After the initial "shake down" of decision-making it could be a couple of hours weekly task.

EXHIBIT PREPARATION HELPERS: in June the new exhibit, Delivery Days, will be gathered and made ready for exhibition. Scott and Judy would welcome willing hands to help mount the exhibit.

Board Member Resigns

Board Member Nancy Bryk, Curator at the Henry Ford Museum, has resigned. She has an extremely demanding schedule and can rarely make meetings. She has offered us her consulting talents, which we hope to put to good use in the future since she is an expert on Mission Statements. We are sorry to lose Nancy and thank her for all the hard work she has done on behalf of the society for the last four years. We are especially grateful for her help with the opening of MOMS, with the Pancake Supper and for recently writing a grant proposal for us. Thanks Nancy. We will miss you!