

Unitarians given bicentennial tribute

By CORINNE ABATT

On seven acres of rolling land on Hatfield, north of Grand River, the Farmington Unitarian Universalist Church sits on a knoll looking like a New England postcard.

The building, one of the oldest churches in the area, was named recently as an historic site by the Historical Commission.

Never large or wealthy, the church has survived many changes, even a major move of the structure, to remain a graceful, well-preserved remembrance of the past, ready and open to the future.

Perry Jameson, Troy schoolteacher and fifth generation of his family to belong to the church, talks about the church.

My great, great-grandfather, Edward Steele, belonged to the Unitarian Society, the forerunner of this church in the early 1800s.

Now finishing his doctorate in history at Wayne, Jameson finds a special pleasure in reconstructing fact and legend about the old building and its congregation.

From its earliest days, Farmington has

been a church town. It was founded by Quakers who met regularly for services and built their first meeting house in 1822. The Presbyterians and Baptists organized in 1828 and the Methodists three years later.

Then in 1827 along came Sergius P. Lyon, a Universalist. Noting that some of these earlier denominations were fading, he formed the Union Society, welcoming all creeds. It flourished and by the early 1850s, a permanent meeting place was needed.

THE BUILDING project was begun in the spring of 1852 and the original Union Church, 20 by 30 feet, cost \$800. Located at the corner of Thomas and Warner, it was changed some over the years. The most extensive change was in 1881 when it was raised two feet from the old foundation. This rebuilt foundation plus a vestibule, new furnace, new pews, carpeting, repainting and work on the steeple and roof cost \$822.45.

In 1907 after several years of deliberation, members voted to move the building

to a new site—the seven acres on Hatfield. The congregation acquired the land from Harley and Ethel Gibson. It was part of their centennial farm which was broken up by the advent of the expressway. Payment to the Gibsons was minimal.

Mrs. Irma Braunstein recalls the moving day.

"It took all day. Weather conditions had to be perfect and we had postponed it several times because of bad weather. We all took off work and followed the truck. We had deliberated three or four years on whether to save the church."

"But, we love our chapel. I'm glad now we did. We lost the steeple. It was noted and not strong enough to move. Disconnecting all the wires that's what took the time."

A wing of offices and meeting rooms was added after the move was completed.

It is the legends and the link with history which the membership savors. Jameson speaks of the "freedom of the pulpit" and those who over the years have been "given the pulpit."

This in line with the stated aims and beliefs of the church. "The purpose of this society is to improve the quality of human life by maintaining a free church which seeks truth wherever it may be found. Our church is a forum for the free exchange of ideas."

"The abolitionists were here in the 1850s, now it's the Farm Workers," Jameson comments.

LEGEND, BUT NOT fact, has it that Sojourner Truth, the black woman who was a celebrated fugitive from slavery, once spoke from the pulpit of the Farmington church. By national policy the church opposed slavery and many individual churches participated in the abolitionist movement.

If the lady did indeed speak in the church, if abolitionist meetings were held there and if slaves seeking freedom were hidden in the cellar at some point, for obvious reasons, no records were made of these events.

In the 1930s Walter Reuther took the pulpit to speak about the Socialist party in Michigan. Now, representatives of the United Farm Workers appear several times a year.

Not only has the church traditionally been a forum for the exchange of ideas, it is an important part of the social lives of the membership.

Jameson says: "My mother, Mrs. Adeline Jameson of Farmington Hills, tells about her grandparents who used to come for Sunday morning service and conduct the whole day. There would be another service in the afternoon and then evening supper. Mother recalls her grandfather, Clara Steele Wyman, telling how the women



Perry Jameson is the fifth generation of his family to be active in the Farmington Unitarian Universalist Church (Staff photo by Harry Mauthe)



Mrs. Irma Braunstein likes a church where all members know each other (Staff photo by Harry Mauthe)

shucked shrimp preparing for the evening meal.

The church now is between transfers. Mrs. Braunstein says a search committee is looking for a new one. Meanwhile, since the church operates in a democratic fashion, members handle the business of the church and conduct the services.

Mrs. Braunstein and Jameson stand at the back of the chapel. It has an early New England look. The pews are white, walls and trim are a soft gold. It is a

simple, unadorned room with good lines and soft light, an atmosphere conducive to meditation and thought.

Mrs. Braunstein says: "I like this chapel and I like the feeling of knowing every body in the church."

Jameson says: "I feel a sense of history and pride when I am in this building."

The church members are designing a historical plaque to be placed on the building. With this, the sense of history and pride may extend to the wider community.



The Farmington Unitarian Universalist Church has been designated an historic site and will have a historic marker sometime this year. Now almost a quarter of the way into its second century, the building has undergone structure and site changes. (Staff photo by Harry Mauthe)

Area homeowners protest property assessment hikes

By LOUISE OKRUTSKY

The Oakland County homeowners' associations blame the inability of state administrators to spend within limits for the increase in the area's property tax assessment.

Representatives of homeowners' associations from Farmington Hills, Southfield, Lathrup Village, Birmingham and Bloomfield met Wednesday, Jan. 28 in Farmington's Harrison High School to voice opposition to the 1973 state law which increased property tax assessments.

The law requires contractors to assess all types of property at 50 percent of their market value. The old law placed assessment rates at 44 to 50 percent of the property's market value.

The homeowners want to organize opposition and initiate change on the state level.

REPRESENTATIVES SAID they had to confer with their organizations before joining the protest.

Joe Alkateeb, chairman of the Farmington Hills homeowners' association, said the group may decide to seek an amendment to the state constitution which would put a ceiling on property tax assessments.

Gregory Kennedy, chairman of the Southfield Homeowners' Association, suggested school millage be decreased as the property tax increased, since part of the tax is used to fund the schools.

"There's a lot of waste," Kennedy told the representatives. "We don't have any voice in taxation. The schools are the only place we can scream. If they keep raising homes every year, they're going to have to cut the millage."

State inspectors found 25 safety violations at East Junior High School in Farmington, even though school funds had increased through a four mill tax, Alkateeb

said. A 13-year-old boy was electrocuted in the school recently when he tried to unlock a buffer in a shop class.

We all voted yes for Farmington kids—I'm beginning to wonder," he said.

State Rep. Sandy Brobertson (R-Farmington), whose district includes the area covered by the homeowners' groups, was present for about a half hour at the two-hour meeting.

"It would be nice if we could have a provision to the effect that if the assessment goes up, millage goes down. We can't say that," he said.

Brobertson said there is an eight percent factor applied to all property to bring its tax assessment up to what the cities believe is the current market value.

He said the idea of lowering the millage as the property tax increases wouldn't gain acceptance because the issue is a complicated one.

There are various provisions which compensate for any tax inequity, he continued. Senior citizens are taxed less for their residential properties, such as their homes, through a homestead provision which puts part of the tax burden on owners of luxury properties, such as hunting cabins.

In 1970, Brobertson said, "up to \$10,000, perhaps \$15,000 of the tax assessments will be repaid in a lot of people on typical incomes. I'll pay them back the property tax."

He suggested the group petition to have the tax changed.

Kennedy said he was told the cities were supposed to cut the millage but keep the percentage of tax which funded those institutions.

"They took a loaf of bread from us and gave us back one slice," he said.

Kennedy is afraid that if the property tax increases, some residents would have trouble keeping their homes.

Alkateeb said he didn't know of any area residents who had lost their homes to the property tax.

Representatives from several groups agreed that junkies by state administrators should appear on the budget submitted to the public. Hidden expenses are keeping up the cost of running the state, they said.

A representative from the Birmingham homeowners' association said: "Our taxes may be sufficient, they may not. Our school board may never know—the administration will never tell them."

Richard Magee, a Farmington Hills association member, said: "A budget is the proper approach. The school administrators gave a summary of expenses that told us rich."

ANOTHER HILLS resident said: "If you want to kill a tree, go right to the top root—the SCS." He estimated that between 1970 and 1980 property taxes would increase 400 percent.

He considered the 10 percent rate in the year's taxes and the 10 percent rate due for next year's as good.

"We're going to have taxes as long as we have a society. Let's keep the taxes within limits," he said.

He supported an amendment to the state constitution and suggested that a four percent tax cycling be placed on property taxes.

The group set Wednesday, Feb. 20 as a tentative date for their organizational meeting at the First Baptist Church in Birmingham.

"This is an election year and if we don't gain anything from these clowns up there in Lansing—God help us," Kennedy said.

Persons interested in lowering the tax assessment through the homeowners' group can call Joe Alkateeb at 477-6888 or Gregory Kennedy at 557-6883.



It's year-end report time

Farmington Public Safety Department dispatcher Leslie MacDonald reviews police and fire records in an effort to prepare the department's 1975 year-end operation report (Staff photo by Harry Grant Mauthe)

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HAVE YOUR BUDGET ANALYZED AT MALL

Want to know more about your budget? Take five minutes and get in touch with your financial picture.

From 2:00 to 8:00 p.m. on Thursday, February 5 and Friday February 6 and 12:00 noon to 5:00 p.m. on Saturday, February 7 at the Livonia Mall, you can watch a computer analyze your budget free of charge.

You simply fill out a short form answering questions such as amount of take-home pay, number of members in the family, estimated monthly cost of food, rent or house payments, etc. Your information is fed into a computer and within minutes you'll receive a personalized budget form.

You'll learn where your money is going and how much you have left over for extras. The computer will compare your budget with those of families similar to yours. You'll also receive suggestions for making adjustments to improve your budget.

This computer program, sponsored by the Cooperative Extension Service, is an easy and quick way to help families take a look at their spending," says John Criner, Extension Home Economist, Consumer Education Programs.

If you want to develop a complete yearly spending plan, you can enroll in our "Steps into Spending" program. It's conducted through the mall and is completely confidential. You can sign up for the "Steps into Spending" program when you visit the computer at the mall.

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The charter for a new Farmington Hills Junior Achievement company, Aero Trac Enterprises, is presented to club president Melissa Smith by William E. Garrett. Garrett is director of field operations for the Automobile Club of Michigan, the sponsoring group. Melissa, 16, a

sophomore at Harrison High School, is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. T.H. Smith of Farmington Hills. At right is Aero Trac treasurer Jeff Tottis, 17, Harrison senior and son of Mr. and Mrs. Peter Tottis of Farmington Hills. The new JA firm manufactures macramé products.