

# Past is gone, but it's not forgotten

(Continued from page 20)

Members are appointed by the city council and act in an advisory capacity to the council. They meet in the library.

The commission members have authored two booklets dealing with the history of the community.

They would like to take over the Stewart house on Inlet Road to have a museum but funding at this time is not encouraging.

Students in Marshall Henry's Michigan studies class at Garden City West High School made a historical film of 10 of the city's oldest houses, which is available for interested groups.

## Livonia

LIVONIA, with its 35.86 square miles, is the third largest city (in area) in Michigan.

Before its rich soil attracted settlers from the eastern states, trappers discovered a wealth of fur-bearing animals in the area.

Originally part of Bucklin Township, it acquired its own identity March 17, 1835 when it became the township of Livonia. At that time, no new township could be incorporated in the United States if it had the same name as an existing township.

By choosing the name of a remote province in western Russia, those early residents were assured of no duplication.

Among the first arrivals was the Joshua Simmons family who came from Bristol, N.Y., in 1827. In 1828, the

Ryder family settled on the corner of what is now Levan and Schoolcraft roads, where the Observer & Eccentric Newspaper plant stands. Other old family names are Nathan B. Kingsley, and Judge Alexander Blue who was justice of the peace from 1842-71.

The Blue home still stands on Middlebelt, between Five Mile and Schoolcraft.

Small settlements like Rough and Ready at Stark and Plymouth Roads and the Village of Newburgh at Newburgh and Ann Arbor Trail flourished briefly and then forgotten. But Greenmead, on Eight Mile, the Simmons' homestead and outbuildings remain, much as they were in 1841.

The City of Livonia established a historical commission in 1970 to preserve and operate Greenmead as a museum. The 12 members are appointed by the mayor.

Shirley E. Bishop is president of the commission. Other members are Lillian McCann, vice president; Marie McGee, secretary; Mary Pulick, treasurer; Jesse Bennett, J. Kenneth Bourgon, Sue Daniel, Roy Gorman, Audrey Greenleaf, Daniel Kachowski, Mary Quigley and Edward Reid.

Greenmead is open to the public from 1:30 to 4:30 p.m. Wednesdays and Saturdays. It is probably the finest and best preserved early 19th century farmhouse in Wayne County.

Livonia's historical society, with Harriet Larson as president, predates the historical commission and has done much to preserve another landmark, Quaker Acres on Seven Mile.

The society suggested the formation

of a commission with funding to protect Greenmead, Quaker Acres (1846) and the old Shaw house (1843). It plans to move Quaker Acres and the Shaw house to the Greenmead property.

## Plymouth

PLYMOUTH was one of the nine original townships in Wayne County, created in 1827. It lost a slice for Northville Township in 1829 and another for Canton in 1834.

Plymouth Township now surrounds the City of Plymouth and although it shares the same school system, chamber of commerce, and historical society, each is an autonomous unit.

First homesteader in Plymouth was William Starkweather, who built a log cabin on the bank of Toniquish Creek, where the Mayflower Hotel now stands.

A year later, the Starkweather's son George was born and the Methodist Church was organized. The first township meeting was held in 1827 and, three years later, the first schoolhouse was built.

As with all pioneer communities, growth was recorded in a series of fires: 1827, first recorded plat laid out by Henry Holbrook; 1847, first fraternal society, the Oddfellows, organized; 1850, plank road to Detroit planned; 1860, first newspaper published; and

1867, the village of Plymouth was incorporated.

When the city celebrated its centennial in 1967, it sent off an invitation to city fathers of Plymouth, England, to join the festivities. They accepted and since then the two cities have enjoyed an exchange of visitors and friendship.

PLYMOUTH became a home rule city in 1932. It has an active historical society and a fine museum opened in 1976.

The Plymouth Historical Museum is housed in the Dunning Memorial building, a gift to the city from Margaret Dunning. Members of the society gave months of their time organizing the displays and creating a street of shops on the main level.

Clubs and individuals donated funding for each of the shops and the result is one of the finest small museums in the Midwest.

Among its prized exhibits is an Alter car, manufactured in Plymouth in the early 1900s. Plymouth was the home of the Daisy Air Rifle until 1938, when the company moved to Rogers, Ark. "The Daisy" took over one room and filled display cases with a collection of the world-famous air rifles. The archives are a resource center for students and historians.

It also has tapes of interviews with longtime residents who recall childhood memories of the area.

The museum is open to the public from 1-4 p.m. Thursdays, Saturdays and Sundays.

## Redford Township

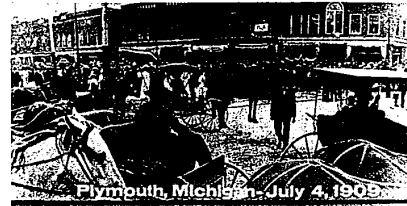
ISRAEL BELL, 19, and his 14-year-old wife were the first settlers of Redford Township. They arrived in 1818 and had few neighbors until 1825 when the Erie Canal was completed. Then more families from New York and the New England states began to filter in.

The area was part of Bucklin Township from 1827 until 1829 when it became part of Pekin Township.

In 1833 the name was changed to Redford, a derivation of Rouge Ford, a shallow spot in the river that was a favorite crossing of the Indians on their way to Fort Detroit.

Redford became a popular trade center for farmers from both Wayne and Oakland counties. Flour, grist and lumber mills were built along with chair, cheese and glue factories. The portion of the township containing these industries was annexed by Detroit in 1926. Eleven square miles remained in the township.

FRED DES AUTELS, Redford Township historian, has a fund of tales and historic facts about the first settlers.



Museums are great teaching resources. Marge Mitchell fascinates young audiences with her Grandmother's Trunk routine at the Plymouth Historical Museum. (Staff photo)

He has written books about its heritage and its history. The first was completed in time for the Bicentennial and he has added material to following publications.

The Redford Township Historical Society was formed in 1970. Aileen DesAutels was its first president. Dominic Paris now heads the society.

Members meet eight months of the year in Good Shepherd Lutheran Church.

"We have about 50 to 60 members, but usually 30 or so attend the meetings," said DesAutels.

They hope to someday have a museum. "In the meantime, it's in my basement," said the historian. "Everyone drops things off and that's where they stay."

## Westland

THE CITY OF Westland was the successor to Nankin Township after its 36 square miles had been whittled down to 20 by annexation and incorporation.

Garden City, Wayne and Inkster each had taken a bite out of the township before it became the City of West-

land in 1966.

Statistics of its early history are a repeat of Garden City's. The first purchase of land was in 1818 by a Dennisson Palmer. Early in 1819, William Woodbridge bought land in the township. Woodbridge went on to become governor of Michigan and a U.S. senator.

Actual settlement didn't get under way until 1825.

The Westland Historical Museum opened Oct. 20, 1974. The whole community had a hand in renovating the building and preparing it for occupancy. The museum is in an old house beside the Nankin Mills Nature Museum, a former grist mill. It is thought to have been built by Thomas Dean, the first owner of the mill, sometime between 1840-45.

The city has a 99-year lease on the house from the owner, Wayne County.

The Westland Historical Commission, with five members appointed by the mayor, is responsible for the operation of the museum. Because it is a volunteer group, the museum is open only from 1-3 p.m. Saturdays. There is no admission charge.

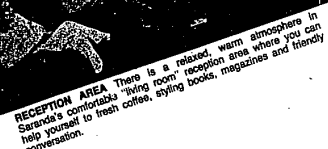


Museums depend on volunteers devoting hours of their time to make seasonal changes to exhibits. (Staff photo)

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