

Opinion

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Harger House: worth saving!

MORE THAN a drafty building would fall if the Harger House met the wrecker's ball.

One of the oldest direct links to the Farmington area's beginnings would be toppled, too.

John Harger, with help from relatives and friends, built the venerable stone house, hand hewn with a broad ax using rock on the property, in 1837 — the same year Michigan became a state. A century ago, the house was home to Oscar Harger, then Farmington Township supervisor.

Although tattered around the edges, the Harger House has withstood the rigorous test of time — a testament to its 18-inch-thick stone walls.

It would take a hardy band of volunteers to tackle restoration — estimates range from \$40,000 to \$150,000 — but the Harger House has the wherewithal to survive another 150 years.

PLACES LIKE the Harger House, with documented historical significance, should be honored — not shunned.

The timeless story the Harger House's Greek Revival architecture tells to young and old alike could never be duplicated.

Wisely, the Farmington Hills City Council has pledged to do all it can to save the weathered historical gem.

The Harger House's fate appears to lie with Farmington Hills Hunt Club's residents. The house is in the subdivision's commons area. A park-like plan for the area is being formulated.

Residents are expected to vote soon whether to demolish the house, use it as a subdivision meeting place or as the home for a groundskeeper, or sell it for office use.

SOME RESIDENTS obviously prefer demolition, which would provide a quick solution to the dispute. Others appear to be more open-minded, but understandably object to any use long on noise, lights and traffic.

Demolition certainly wouldn't address the house's intrinsic value to the community. Either of the other two options would save the house. But the question then becomes, "At who's cost?"

Given the interest in breathing new life into old houses, it shouldn't be impossible

to find a history buff who'd jump at the chance to turn the Harger House into an office.

It also would seem appropriate for the subdivision to donate or lease the house to Farmington Hills and its historical groups. They're in the best position to enlist restoration volunteers and determine a low-intensity, self-sustaining community use. A donation wouldn't have to be an outright gift; reasonable reimbursement would be in order.

THE HOUSE today is no picture-postcard setting. Overgrown weeds, a sagging rear staircase, a cracked stone base and a boarded-up door mark the site — atop a rise along Haled, near 1 1/2 Mile. In sharp contrast, expensive new homes stand just beyond the white-fenced former grazing area for the former family-run dairy farm.

Farmington Hills Historical Commission chairwoman Jean Fox aptly said of the Harger House, "It's a real treasure that's larger than just the subdivision. It's everybody's problem. The residents should have a wider perspective. It's a community thing. They should be proud to live nearby."

"The Harger House speaks of the courage of the people who carved this area out of the wilderness. It was the days of Indians, bears and wolves — and of a young man who came from Niagara, N. Y., and built the house out of square-cut stone the same year Michigan became a state. I'd hate to have it torn down so near to its sesquicentennial."

Well put, Madam Chairwoman.

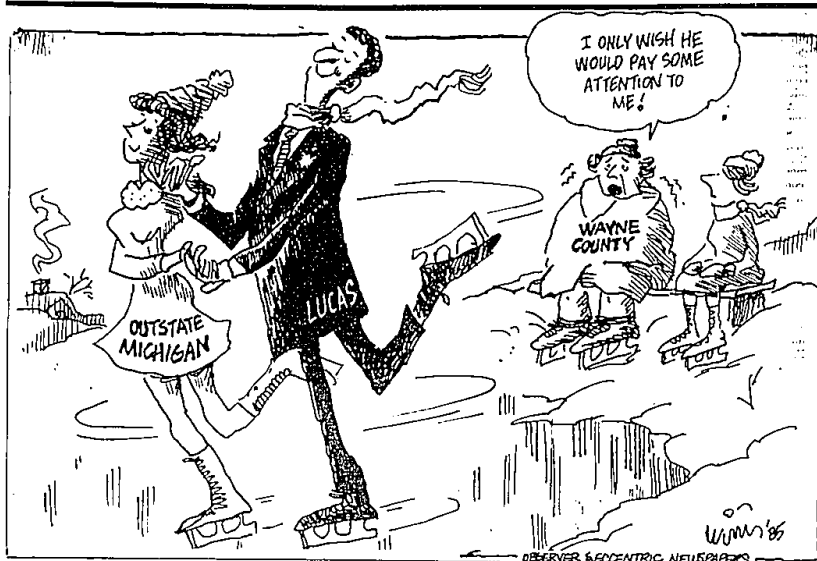
WITH RESTORATION and a suitable use, there's little doubt the Harger House would enhance, rather than detract from, the Farmington Hills Hunt Club.

As more and more subdivisions sprout, what's left from the 1800s becomes even more historically valuable as hands-on reminders of this community's history and heritage.

Therein lies the real worth of the Harger House. It belongs on the state history registry, not bulldozed into oblivion.

Historical preservation and land development are compatible when the art of compromise becomes the guiding force.

— **BOB SKLAR**



Lucas rules from Midland

WILLIAM LUCAS, Wayne County's traveling executive, was back from touring the state briefly Tuesday. He acknowledged to a reporter that he was close to winding up a yearlong tour of the state, acting — as he and his aides have often explained — as Wayne County's "good will ambassador."

Wednesday he was scheduled to visit Midland and Isabella Counties, dispensing more good will.

It is only incidental, he explains, that the fact that his visits to almost every county, every major city and many hamlets have also served to make him better known in a state which he intends to govern starting January 1987.

Lucas, as we all now, is an all but announced candidate to become the Republican Party's gubernatorial nominee.

WAYNE COUNTY commissioners have been howling about Lucas' travels for a long time, but of late the baying has become deafening.

The commissioners have also yelped about the cost Lucas' public relations staff — eight persons — and protectionary staff — five Wayne County sheriff's deputies. The commission's ways and means committee recently voted to slash the p.r. staff by four and the bodyguard contingent by three.

Commissioner Kay Beard, a Democrat who represents Garden City, Wayne, Westland and Inkster, scoffs at the idea that Lucas is the county's good will am-



Bob Wisler

assador. "He's a good will ambassador for Bill Lucas, and that's it," she says.

The question really becomes: Is it proper for Wayne County's chief executive officer to be traveling all over the state on speaking engagements?

Does it really matter to the efficiency of Wayne County government that Lucas is frequently missing from the executive's office? Lucas seemingly contends that he can run the county government by telephone from the Upper Peninsula just as well as he can from his 7th floor office in the City-County Building.

THIS MAY be an important question, since next November we may well be deciding whether Lucas should be governor.

Would he be able to run the state as well from the state capital as he would from some telephone booth in Topeka, Kans.?

I believe that as far as the actual executive duties are concerned, the county executive, on most days, can do as well as from a Holiday Inn as he can from the City-County building.

In a well-organized administration, most duties are delegated, and the executive's key staff people have as much to do

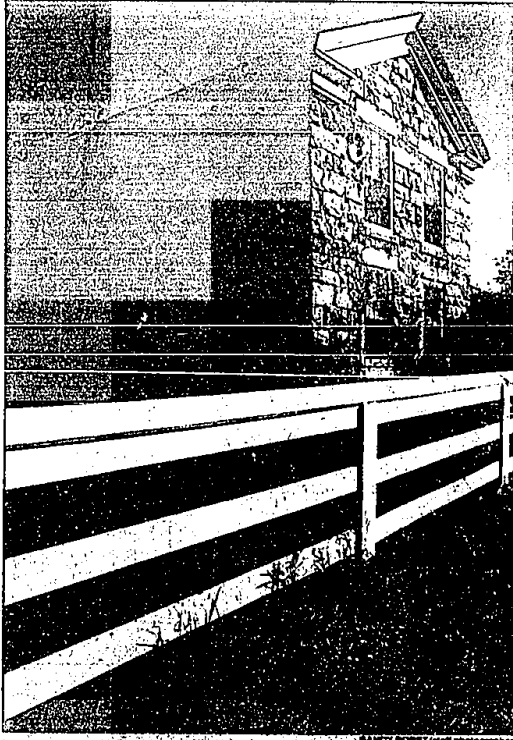
with running an administration as the executive. It really doesn't matter if the executive does more than give broad policy directions. He's there to make the top decisions.

AFTER ALL, the U.S.A. has had as its top executive officer a guy who falls asleep at cabinet meetings and much of the time runs the country from a California ranch or a helicopter somewhere in time.

And it's not unusual for a person in government to hold one job while campaigning for another. Lucas, in fact, was Wayne County sheriff while he was running for county executive. Gov. Blanchard was a U.S. representative while he was campaigning for governor. Dan Murphy is Oakland County executive while campaigning for governor. The list could go on ad nauseum.

But, in fact, there is no doubt that the focus of a person engaged in pursuit of a higher officer tends more and more to be on the campaign rather than the existing job. The only people who can campaign without decreasing time on the job are Wayne County commissioners, whose time requirements total a few hours a week — for \$30,000 per year.

So, yes, Bill Lucas has not been the same county executive this year as he was his first two and he will be less an executive next year than he was this year. Whether this will make him a bad choice for governor is up to the populace.



The Harger House on Haled Road: It's an invaluable legacy.

Our metro image is suffering

OUR NATIONAL embarrassment began again last Wednesday in the parking lot of a shiny new suburban hotel. A visitor's car had been vandalized, the radio and tape deck stolen. Like a neon sign, the expressions on his face flickered between dismay and rage.

I felt like walking over and apologizing but knew better. He would drive home to Ohio that night with only a tale of rage to tell his friends. He wouldn't be interested in hearing all the good things about suburban Detroit. After all, he knew the facts first hand.

He had been robbed and cheated. Nothing else mattered.

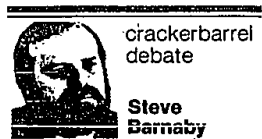
METROPOLITAN Detroit's reputation is tough to live down. We lacked a World Series this year so we turned to Devil's Night.

We really must fight back. All of us are in this embarrassing situation together. We must work together to defeat it. Otherwise we will be consumed by our reputation.

Unfortunately, too many are willing only to play Pontius Pilate, washing their hands and blaming someone else.

But the decision makers in New York, Boston and Chicago don't care. They don't know the difference between Detroit, West Bloomfield, Rochester, Redford Township or any other number of suburban communities.

It's all "Detroit" to them when it comes



Steve Barnaby

crackerbarrel debate

to making a decision on whether to move their business here.

They only know that in one suburban city on that Wednesday evening vandals put the torch to a barn, a shed and several dumpsters.

"THE SHAME is that every one of these fires is costly to the community. Maybe it's time people became aware of that," said the local fire chief.

He's right. We must start listening. Another man in that same community was arrested and charged with possession of a Molotov cocktail on Devil's Night. Two homes were fire-bombed that night.

Those far-away corporate executives also know that while this community fought arson, a family in another Oakland County community was robbed in its home, tied up by the intruders and locked in the bathroom.

They also know that in a Wayne County suburb a Molotov cocktail was used to ignite a blaze in a school building.

TO POWER brokers who forge the economic decisions of a nation, the fine housing stock, the beautiful lakes and the great restaurants mean nothing when compared to the reputation of their corporate ciphers.

They don't want their corporate name associated with an area that appears to the rest of the nation to be out of control.

Sure, the film on national television showed all the dramatic fires happening in a ravaged, impoverished and struggling central city.

But to the man from Ohio and the suburban residents who were victimized that evening, the newsreels meant nothing. They had their own stories to tell.

Michigan 150 years old

THE GREAT Lakes Lighthouse Keepers Association (GLLKA) is working on "Living at a Lighthouse: Oral Histories from the Great Lakes." The work is funded by a \$1,000 grant.

Interviews will be deposited with the Wayne State University Folklore Archives and the Dossin Great Lakes Museum. To suggest people for the project, contact LuAnne Gaykowiak Kozma, GLLKA, P.O. Box 2597 Southfield 48037.

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