

Couple restore old house as labor of love

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By David Litogot
special writer

footprints in history

In 1974, John Willyard traveled down 13 Mile Road and dreamed how nice it would be to live in that old house nestled among those large trees.

When that "old house" was, by golly, for sale.

John and his wife, Nancy, were looking for a residence to restore, to its original condition. This house would fit their passion. Six years ago, John and Nancy Willyard bought that old house.

Located on 13 Mile near Drake Road, the building shows signs of their continuing work. Several of the rooms display fresh insulation around the new windows; the walls in some rooms are down to the laths; some of the moulding is new; the floors show marks where walls used to be.

John felt that "fate" brought him to this house and that he is on a "mission" to restore it to its correct architectural design. After extensive research and the influence of local historian Lee Peel, Willyard got excited about his task.

Willyard knew that the floors sagged and that the plumbing and wiring were poor. He discovered, however, a few surprises.

HE FOUND that the doors were in fact, not original; that walls were moved from their original locations; a stone porch and fireplace were added by a previous owner and had to go; and the windows were not appropriate to the design.

He also discovered that a small job could entail months of related new

turned a stairway around, and enclosed some bark-covered beams.

Officially, the house is called the Cox-Willyard home even though recent evidence points to John Garfield as the builder and original owner.

Garfield built the house, according to Willyard, in 1831 or 1832. Since that time, the house has been occupied by no less than 14 owners. Such names as Halsted, McDole, Cox, Robertson, Warner, Tuttle, Robinson and Taylor are included in the list of occupants.

THE PROPERTY has seen orchards, migrant-worker-quarters, chicken coops, a windmill and an outhouse. There was also a little outbuilding called a Delco house, a structure that contained a gasoline-powered generator providing DC current to the house-hold.

The four-bedroom house will someday make John Garfield proud. There will be hand-made stair railings, hand-hewn siding, square-headed nails, few closets and authentic hardware and doors.

Such modern touches as insulation,

electrical appliances, a gas boiler, copper plumbing, AC wiring and storm windows make the house a home.

John and his wife are not sorry about the job that takes all of his spare time and close to \$20,000 of his money. Being president of the Farmington Historical Society and a father of two small boys add some distractions. Even though they admit it is "far easier to build new rather than restore old," this labor of love will be worth it.

March 26: The Farmington Historical Society will present "Farmington Athletics Back When and Last Week" by Jack Cotton, athletic director of Farmington Schools from 1956 to 1984, 8 p.m. at the Downtown Farmington Library in the basement meeting room.

Footnote to last month's article. The wealth of information printed in that article was obtained from the forthcoming book "More Than a Tavern: 150 Years of Botsford Inn" by Jean M. Fox.



RANDY BORST/retail photographer

Historic house owners Nancy and John Willyard of Farmington Hills.

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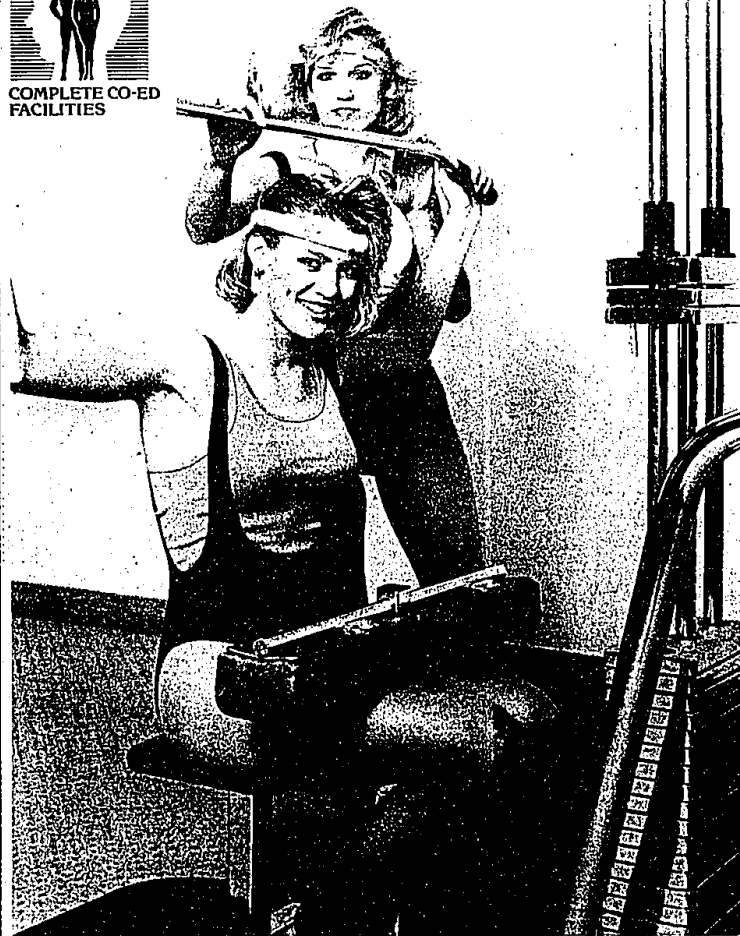
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