

Suburban Life

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(F38)

The Botsford

Reminiscing through the history of a treasured landmark

By Loraine McClish
staff writer

The selling point was that you could make it from Farmington to Lansing in 12 hours.

In about 1860, when huge herds of sheep passed on their way toward the Detroit market, the drovers could stop at the inn for dinner, lodg-

ing and breakfast for 75 cents. And they would be assured that their herds would be well cared for in the Botsford corrals.

When Henry Ford bought the Botsford Inn the first improvement he made was to double the size of the

ballroom. He installed rubber gaskets under the maple flooring because square dancers needed a floor with a good bounce.

There are no ghosts who ever lodged at the Botsford and there were no presidents who ever slept in

the Botsford, but once the Michigan Capitol building opened in 1847, there was a steady stream of politicians who stopped at the inn, on their way to or from Lansing.

The inn was built in 1836 by a land developer who also owned a stage coach, and needed a few places along the way for his drivers to stop. It was a time when it took a day and a half to get from here to Ann Arbor along an old Indian trail, sometimes known as the Mud Trail, and after that The Old Plank Road, which was similar to a board walk, and after that called Grand River.

THE ANECDOTES come from historian Jean Fox who told sometimes humorous and sometimes poignant tales to an audience that filled Botsford Inn's ballroom Friday afternoon, the same room where Henry Ford met his wife. A view from the second floor showed the area where Clara Ford designed the inn's first rose garden.

Fox collected her tales over a two-year period of research for "More Than a Tavern: 150 Years of Botsford Inn," which chronicles the decades of Michigan's oldest operating lodging facility. The book was published by Charlotte Ellison of Grand Rapids and sells for \$20.75.

Other celebrated names in the anniversary book are those of Thomas Edison and Harvey Firestone, but Fox stuck pretty close to stories of the inn's proprietors during the author's tea party.

As the name of the avenue now called Grand River changed over the years, so did the name of the inn, which generally took on the name of

its owner, though at one time it was called The Plank Road House. At another time it was known as 16 Mile House, designating it as a 16-mile landmark in the wilderness from Detroit for the U.S. Mail stage coaches and the large wagon trains on their way north and west.

It has been known as Botsford Inn since 1860 when Milton Botsford took over as innkeeper and was a temperance inn throughout the time it was owned by Henry Ford.

The author's tea party was hosted by innkeeper John Anhut, in celebration of the anniversary book, during Founders Festival, and was but one of dozens of celebrations planned for the inn's 150th birthday year.

FOX IS A Farmington Hills resident who has dedicated numerous years to community service and historical preservation.

As a member of Botsford's 150th Anniversary Celebration committee, she said the book stemmed from the numerous ideas the committee came up with that all had to do with remembrances, reminiscing.

She called the search for facts, before the inn became Anhut's property in 1950, something akin to "an archaeological dig."

In her talk she referred to the inn "as a reminder of our pioneering past" and "a treasured landmark most fortunate in its proprietors."

Fox is also the author of "Farmington's Centennial Families" and "A Farmington Childhood: The Watercolors of Lillian Drake Avery."

She is working on a biography of former Michigan governor Fred Warner.



RANDY BORN/Staff photographer

Jean Fox was kept at the podium answering questions about the history of Botsford Inn by her audience during the author's tea party, when she shared stories she found while doing re-

search for her latest book. Fox authored "More Than a Tavern: 150 Years of Botsford Inn" in celebration of the inn's sesquicentennial anniversary.

Potpourri

Founders Fest: mixed bag of activities

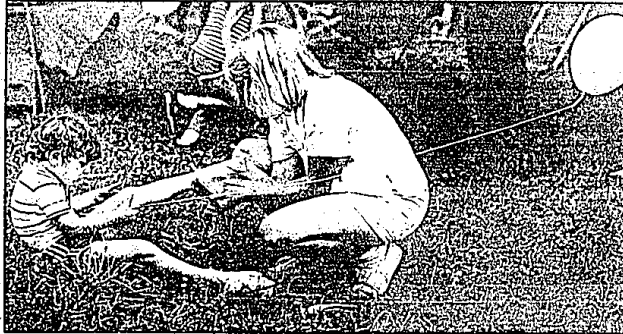
Despite last week's record heat, festival-goers meandered around town snatching up craft bargains, stepping into shops for respite from the 90-degree plus temperatures and just generally enjoyed themselves.

And there was something for everyone.

From Monday's Miss Farmington Scholarship Pageant, to Tuesday's Kids Day in the Park, to the maze of activities downtown, the 22nd annual Founders Festival drew people from throughout the surrounding areas.

The newly crowned Melanie Churella and her Miss Farmington Court spent the week visiting various exhibits and activities before her ride down Grand River in Saturday's parade.

Festival organizers were busy keeping everything operating and watching those tending booths for signs of heat stroke and health complications.



Susan Maas of Farmington Hills helps her 3-year-old son with his shoes during Kids Day in the Park.



Karen Tindell of Davisburg spruces up a goose she was selling at a craft booth.



Tricia Yvette Alexander participates in the swimsuit competition during the Miss Farmington Scholarship Pageant.



AT RIGHT: Sharon Wilson of Farmington rehearses her singing act at the Downtown Farmington Center Showmobile, which provided a stage for entertainers. Entertainment ran from Wednesday through Saturday and included a host of different acts. Music ranged from soloists George House and Sharon Wilson to the Sweet Adelines to the Legal Tender rock band.



Michelle Willett, a 12-year-old student at Dunckel Middle School in Farmington Hills, has her face painted at Kids Day in the Park.

Staff photos
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