

Historic Greek Revival home awaits move

By Louise Okrusky
staff writer

Farmington Hills Historic District Commission chairwoman Jean Fox is looking forward to adding the Harger House to the list of 18 Greek Revival farmhouses already in the city's historic district.

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Although formal agreements have yet to be signed, they're expected to be completed soon. There remain a few points of negotiation between the purchasers, Donald and Lynn McCluskey of Farmington Hills, and Standard Federal Bank of Troy. The bank is majority owner of the Farmington Hills Hunt Club. The 150-year-old house stands in the subdivision's commons area.

The McCluskeys will move their new acquisition next door to the Pettibone House, 36400 12 Mile, which they own and have restored. Like Pettibone House, Harger House will be converted to single use.

Detroit has only one example of Greek Revival, Farmington has five and Northville hasn't any, according to Fox. For Fox, it provides another example that the settlers who arrived in this area during the 1830s "were not without money, but without taste."

Built in 1837, the year Michigan

became a state, the house was designed and built by John Dallas Harger. Reflecting the popular architectural style of the day, the house stands as a monument to the man's determination. The house is constructed of cut-stone granite, gneiss and limestone blocks found on the property and fashioned by axe, according to Fox.

WHEN HARGER completed the house, he surrounded it with hickory trees. When the last hickory was planted, family and friends raised a toast to President Andrew Jackson, nicknamed Old Hickory.

However, its architectural value goes beyond the significance of the building material.

"There are quoins, such as one seen in English and Scottish cathedrals, lintels over and under the windows and string-courses (rows of smaller matched cut stones) such as are found in the Italian villas of the

Medicis in Florence, Italy," Fox said. The basement has seven 12-foot-by-12-foot hand-hewn beams, according to Fox. There is an eight-foot such beam on the second floor. It was probably used as a block and tackle during the construction of the house, she said.

On a more mundane level, the building is insulated by interior 2 by 4s, packed with insulation, air space and stone.

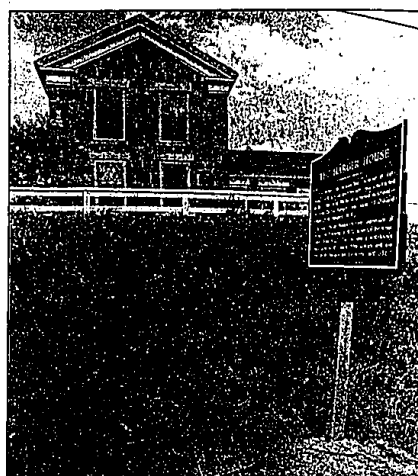
Harger's son, Oscar, was Farmington Township supervisor in 1871. The 200-acre dairy farm remained in the Harger family until 1952 when it was sold and turned into rental property.

"Considering what's happened to that house, it's in good shape," Fox said. "There was very little modernization done to the house."

INITIALLY, THE McCluskeys were unsure if a stone building could be moved. Masons and carpenters will carefully dismantle the house this winter. Each stone making up the house's 28-inch-thick walls will be numbered so that it can be painstakingly reassembled at the 12 Mile site.

A replica of the original frame will be built on the new site. The original frame will be destroyed and the basement filled in.

Interior woodwork — including from windows and window seats fashioned into the stone walls as the axe-hewn beams of the foundation — will be removed. They will be refinished and returned to the relocated house. Woodwork found to be beyond repair will be replaced with matching wood.



The Harger House is on the east side of Halsted, south of 11 Mile.

The fascia boards, the wide white returns that mark the truncated triangles significant of Greek Revival homes will be moved, too. It's expected the it will take until May 1 to remove Harger House from the subdivision commons. McCluskey expects the entire project to take from 18 months to two years to complete.

Road meeting today

The planned reconstruction and widening of Orchard Lake Road from Grand River in Farmington to 11 Mile in Farmington Hills will be discussed during an informational meeting today.

The meeting — hosted by the Oakland County Road Commission and the cities of Farmington and Farmington Hills — will be 3-6:30 p.m. in the Farmington Hills City Hall Council Chambers, 31555 11 Mile.

Road commission staff members will be there with project drawings for the public to view and ask questions.

The tentative project schedule calls for final construction plans by October 1987 and the work to be done in several segments over a three-year period beginning in 1988.

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