

52 Hills historic district sites are cataloged

By Bob Sklar
staff writer

History buffs, take note.

The Farmington Hills Historic District Commission has published a paperback book detailing its history and purpose and cataloging the city's 52 historic district sites.

The book includes a copy of a speech, "Historic Preservation: Its Importance in Planning," that Jean Fox, historical district chairwoman, delivered to the Michigan Society of Planning Officials Oct. 3 at Boyce Mountain.

"In a rapidly developing community, it's very difficult to keep some-

stances of the past," Fox said Monday in presenting a copy of the book to each Farmington Hills City Council member.

Copies of the book will be presented to board and commission members and department heads within the city. It will be available for public reading at the Farmington Com-

munity Library.

"It's really designed to be used in-house by the city to alert employees where historic district properties are," said Paul Blitman, historic district commissioner. "When they consider public improvements — sewers, roads — they'll be able to take a look at the impact on nearby historic structures."

and those who come after them to be able to see and grow up among the visual evidences of our early settlers, their hard work and noble aims," reads a passage from the book.

to older properties along what once were Farmington Township's section lines — today's mile roads.

"One of the provisions of our code is that historic district property on the mile roads may — without a change in zoning — remain residential yet still be approved for certain limited office use under strictly controlled conditions.

Airborne Floating weapons recounted

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By David Litopet
special writer

Last month's Footprints in History dealt with the Japanese attempt to launch bomb-laden, hydrogen-filled balloons during World War II. These FU-GO weapons were to float across the Pacific Ocean and descend on the North American continent and cause panic, havoc, fires and death.

Two such balloons did land — harmlessly — in Michigan in 1945. One was in Allegan County. The other landed right here in Farmington Hills (then Farmington Township), Michigan was the farthest east of any of the FU-GO weapons discovered during the war.

Ever since the Japanese began launching these balloons in November 1944, the U.S. government kept lid on their existence, any sightings and the damage done.

In June 1945, there was finally a national release of basic information on these balloons. (The Japanese cut the launchings in April 1945.) This prompted a flurry of activity — balloons were sighted everywhere. Planets, meteors, weather balloons even the moon was mistaken for those dreadful balloons during the summer of '45. (Was that a movie?)

One report was authentic. An incendiary canister landed in the field of Mari Westphal of 20907 Gill Road, on Sunday, March 25, 1945. A neighbor, Mrs. William Hoff, heard a "gumbot" and when she looked out her window, saw a fire in a nearby field. Her husband, a state trooper, thought it burned like a magnesium fire, but documented it as just a bonfire.

THE INCIDENT was forgotten until John Cook of 20911 Gill Road read about the FU-GO weapons in the newspaper. He then closely examined a tin can be found earlier that

Footprints in history

This landing prompted more publicity than the previous Allegan County sighting. The Detroit News ran an article on June 6 titled "State Warned Against Jap Balloon Plans." The Free Press followed on the next day with "Jap Bomb Balloon Lands in Michigan." A civil defense bulletin was written.

On Aug. 1, the Free Press published "Detroit Area Hit by Jap Bomb in May." But by the time Michiganians were aware of the balloons and their dangers, the enemy was no longer launching them.

Since the war, several papers have been written about articles published. If you would like to read more on the subject, the following articles are readily available in good libraries and archives: W.H. Wilber, "Those Japanese Balloons," Readers Digest, August 1950; Eric Sharp, "The Day Japan Bombed Michigan," Detroit Free Press, Feb. 17, 1979; Carmine Prioli, "The FuGo Project," American Heritage, April/May, 1974.

The "expert" in the field locally is a history bibliographer at the Michigan State University Libraries. His name is Michael E. Unsworth and he recently published a paper, "Floating Weapons: The Japanese Balloon Bomb Campaign in Michigan." He presented this paper at the annual meeting of the Historical Society of Michigan at the Boisfort Inn last October.

His talk and slide presentation aroused the interest in this writer to the point of further reading and investigation. Very few people who were adults during the war remember the "threat." Now, we all own a little bit of historical trivia that makes the study of history more interesting.

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