

Defendant 'had right' to brandish handgun: jury

By Chris Rizk
staff writer

ELIZABETH ROSS was acquitted Sunday by a jury of her peers — more than 200. She was charged with illegal possession of a firearm. But her attorney, Randolph Tucker — played by Farmington Players member David McCabe — presented such a convincing defense, most jury members ignored appeals by the district attorney not to let her "hide behind the Second Amendment."

After the verdict was read, white-wigged, black-robed Grove County Judge Lemuel Lent, played by District Judge Michael Hand of Farmington, turned to the jury and said: "Normally, on a jury trial, the verdict must be unanimous. But this is kind of a unique situation."

He was talking about "The Right to Bear Arms and Go to Jail, The Trial of Elizabeth Ross," the community forum, commemorating the bicentennial of the U.S. Constitution, was hosted Sunday by local residents at Oakland Community College's Orchard Ridge Campus in Farmington Hills.

Organizers labeled the first of several such "We the People" forums an overwhelming success.

Jean Fox, who chairs the Farmington Area Committee on the Bicentennial of the U.S. Constitution, was pleasantly surprised by the "standing room only" turnout.

THE DRAMATIZATION, written by the American Bar Association, was designed to stimulate communi-

ty response to pressing social issues. Sunday's performance was intended to encourage discussion of the Bill of Rights' Second Amendment, which grants citizens the right to bear arms.

Ironically, some audience members carried a Detroit News article that addressed almost the same issue. The headline read: "Detroit woman not charged in death." It referred to a Detroit woman who shot and killed her assailant after he stole her purse Jan. 21.

At issue in the reenactment was whether the founding fathers intended the Second Amendment to include an individual's right to bear arms or whether it meant states had the right to recruit a militia through a collective right to bear arms.

"But aren't (citizens) restricted to bearing arms only for common defense?" asked prosecuting attorney Brad Fox, played by Don Millington, a Farmington Hills Historic District Commission member.

BECAUSE OF the "unusualness of the case," material witnesses in the trial turned out to be some of the original framers of the Constitution.

President James Madison, played by Farmington attorney Dennis Phenev, responded: "Our intent was that they have a right to bear arms, period."

Another Constitutional drafter, Alexander Hamilton, played by Farmington Hills attorney John Donohue, testified that the Second Amendment provided a collective right to bear arms.

"Oh, only a collective right," he told the jury. "There had to be a step to allowing such vigilante groups from creating havoc."

Ross is a fictional elderly woman attacked by two young men on a subway July 4, 1985. She was arrested by Grove County Police Officer Mary Motley, played by North Farmington High student Stacey Holley, 10 days later for holding one of the thieves at bay with her Saturday night special until police arrived. Ross, played by Farmington Historical Commission member Nancy Leonard, is silent in her defense.

The jury voted to decide whether Ross was innocent or guilty based on Constitutional principles.

It was no coincidence that the case bore a striking resemblance to the controversial Bernard Goetz subway shooting case in New York City.

"IT WAS absolutely intended to cause people to look at it from a different situation," said Dave Finney, jury foreman, chairman of North Farmington High's history department and part-time history instructor at OCC.

The jury was expected to examine the fact that the defendant was a little old lady, that she had been injured by one of her attackers July 4, and that she had tried to obtain a permit for her weapon but was informed by police that "no further permits" would be issued.

Audience members, playing the role of the jury, put forth both liberal and conservative interpretations of the Second Amendment.

"Any licensing does infringe upon our Constitutional rights," said an audience member.

Another said he could see where "it would be necessary to license ... but I think it would be against our rights to refuse to license weapons."

"It allowed people to think and contemplate the meaning of the amendment," Finney said. "We had many different interpretations presented tonight."

MICHIGAN HISTORICAL Commission member Jerry Roe reenacted the role of Samuel Adams, the Revolutionary War patriot and human rights champion, as a material witness for the trial. He said the commission hopes to have the same response to other issues raised "in all kinds of towns throughout the state."

"This is a very inflammatory issue," Roe said. "It provoked people to think."

The commission will address other issues, such as prayer in public schools, during other forums this year.

The Southwestern Oakland Cable Commission taped the event for telecasting on Metrovision of Oakland County's Channel 12.

The two-part program Sunday began with a seminar by three OCC history professors, who set the philosophical background for the oldest written constitution in the world.

On display from Washington, D.C., was "The Blessings of Liberty," an exhibit of pictures and documents relating to the U.S. Constitution and the Northwest Ordinance.

Visitors were able to sign a Farmington Hills Historical Commission-sponsored replica of the U.S. Constitution.



OCC history professor Curtie Anderson speaks on "The Founding Fathers and Slavery."



With a white wig and a black robe, Michael Hand of Farmington looked the part of fictional Grove County Judge Lemuel Lent, who Sunday presided at the "The Right to Bear Arms and Go to Jail, The Trial of Elizabeth Ross."



Nancy Leonard, Farmington Historical Commission member, played Elizabeth Ross, the woman on trial.



Staff photos
by
Thomas Arnett

Tracy Conroy — 'the end of an era'

By Casey Hans
staff writer

A close friend of many years called Tracy Conroy's death the "end of an era."

The former Farmington councilman, city charter commissioner and lifelong resident is remembered for the meat market he operated in downtown Farmington for 28 years.

A friend to many, the 66-year-old died Jan. 22, leaving behind his son, Bill, an insurance executive in Farmington, five grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

He also left a lifetime full of memories for his many friends.

"I knew some of his joys and some of his sorrows," said the Rev. Carl Schultz, longtime friend, who officiated at the Tuesday funeral service. "It is sort of the end of an era. He was a friend, a good friend, a close friend, and I appreciated him."

Conroy devoted his life to the Farmington

area, his son said, and was a member of the Farmington Kiwanis Club, past president of the Farmington Exchange Club and a life member of the Farmington Lodge 151 F & AM. He was asked to serve on an advisory panel for the National Bank of Detroit.

He also served four terms on the Farmington City Council and was a member of the Farmington Charter Commission, which formulated the city manager form of government used today.

"HE WAS one of the founding fathers of that era," said Bill Conroy. "My dad was a very strong character and a very gracious man. He just loved Farmington. He was a prime example of a self-made man."

Conroy was born and raised in the Farmington area on a family farm at 10 Mile near Orchard Lake Road. Years ago, that stretch of 10 Mile was known as "Conroy Road," and is even

listed that way in a 1920 county almanac, his son said. He never graduated from high school but "could put a lot of high school and college graduates to shame."

Conroy opened his first market at Grand River and Seven Mile in 1928, and opened his Farmington shop in the spot that is now Center Tire, a Firestone tire dealership, in 1939. In both cases, he was forced to leave his home for the sake of his business, but was able to keep things going.

Son Bill recalls the days when some 200 deer were piled outside the family business, because his father had opened one of the first meat locker plants in the state.

In December 1941, Conroy had saved enough to buy another house, in which Bill Conroy and his family live today. They moved in six years ago to be closer to the older Conroy.

THE REV. Schultz recalls many hunting and fishing trips and rounds of golf over the years.

Hunting was one of Tracy Conroy's pleasures, his son said.

Most recently, Conroy was remembered for the daily pool games he organized after closing up shop in 1967, where many old-timers gathered five days a week "just to have fun," Bill Conroy said. "There were always more than four, and they would rotate and take their turns."

Services for Tracy Conroy were held Tuesday at the Thayer-Rock Funeral Home, Farmington. Burial was at Oakwood Cemetery, Farmington. He is survived by his son, Bill, his grandchildren, Rex Conroy, Bruce Conroy, Thomas Conroy, Beth Tashjian and Vivian Kerpel, and five great-grandchildren.

He was married to Bessie Conroy, now deceased.

The family asks that tributes in his name be given to the Farmington Community Library or the First United Methodist Church of Farmington.



William Conroy
'a self-made man'

Farmington downtown work draws many bids

It appears Farmington's downtown development project will finally begin in the next construction season.

Seven general contractors and eight landscape contractors have bid to do work on the first phase of downtown Farmington's streetscape and rejuvenation project.

Plans for the first phase include installation of pedestrian lighting, new sidewalks and new trees and plants along the main corridors of the downtown.

Bids were opened Jan. 22 at

Farmington City Hall, according to information from the Downtown Development Authority, which is coordinating the project.

General contract bids ranged from \$273,000 to \$456,640, with the apparent low bidder being Concord Come at Co., Inc., of Farmington Hills.

Landscape contract bids ranged from \$24,675 to \$52,700 with the apparent low bidder being 2001 Nursery and Garden Center, Inc., of Flat Rock.

City planner Chris Wazany is evalu-

ating the bids, and is expected to bring a recommendation to the DDA board either Tuesday or at a special meeting Feb. 12, when the DDA board is expected to award the bids.

Most of the bids were within range of each other, with the exception of the highest bids in each area, said Wendy Strup Siltamer, DDA executive director.

The project was bid out last year, when the first phase of the \$1.4 million project was scheduled to begin. The DDA received only one bid, and decided to delay the project's start.

Planners approve garage

A garage to store vehicles, tools and other items of a downtown business owner was approved Jan. 11 by the Farmington Planning Commission.

The approval was in the form of site plan addition already approved

by the commission for owner Walter Sundquist. Sundquist's plans drew criticism from neighbors last year, when he received permission to level a house on Oakland Street and expand his parking lot. The lot is master planned for parking.

The approved, aluminum-sided garage will sit on this lot.

The planning commission was very specific, requiring Sundquist to make the brick wall surrounding the parking lot continuous, so the view by neighbors would be pleasant.

road watch

These major road projects are planned to ease congestion, create a better traffic flow and improve road safety in the community.

- 13 Mile between Halsted and Haggerty is now open to through traffic.
- Drake Road between 13 and 14

Mile is now open to through traffic.

- Truck Road between Eight Mile and Folsom is now open to through traffic.