

# Homearama site boasts historical background

By Susan Buck  
staff writer

Although the latest in residential building, home products and design are the focus of Homearama Dec. 6-22 at the Riverbridge Subdivision in Novi, the newness of the development need not overshadow its history.

This area was once called home by the William Chase family, which operated a farm on the property.

William Chase was an industrialist. His second wife, Georgianna, overtook the property when he died in 1885.

Their house still stands on the Northville (south) side of Eight Mile at Griswold, said Diane Rockall, researcher for the Novi Historical Society. The 65-year-old house is now owned by the Larry Bennett family, she said.

The Homearama site was sold two years ago.

"Chase made his money by inventing shatterproof glass," Rockall said.

Georgianna Chase, a docent for the Northville Historical Society, briefly recalls time spent on the area now known as the Riverbridge subdivision: "We used to shoot pheasant on the farm and do trap shooting. Bill did not work the farm."

CHASE is reputed to have been an excellent marksman, said Joan Day, a former Northville Record editor and Georgianna Chase's daughter-in-law.

"He was a very traveled man," Day said. "He went to Norway to fish. He also was a connoisseur of



The Aspen II is one of the 13 houses that will be open for tours during the Builders Association of Southeastern Michigan's Homearama Dec. 6-22. The Tudor house is priced from \$195,000 to \$234,000. Builder is Cohen Associates, West Bloomfield; architect Lubin/Tringoli & Associates. Interior design is by Englander's; landscaper is Great Oaks Landscaping. The three-bedroom, 2 1/2-bath house has 2,100 square feet.

He used to boast that his wine cellar was second only to Henry Ford II's. He would go to France and sample the wine at the vineyards."

JACK HOFFMAN, a former Northville Record editor who now owns a newspaper in Indian River,

"The (Riverbridge) area is surrounded by water. It's almost like an island in a sense, sort of like a peninsula," said Lawson, who serves on the Homearama planning committee.

THE Area is bounded on one side by the Thornton Creek and on another by a middle branch of the Rouge River. Some of the Homearama houses back up to the river, Lawson said.

"There's a feeling of going back in time. There's an up-North feeling," Lawson said. "It sets the tone for the subdivision."

The river is tree-lined. "Property deeds west of this property date back to the days of John (Quincy) Adams," said Lee Mamola, a member of the Novi Historical District Study Committee.

"MOST SETTLERS came to this area from 1824 to 1830," Rockall said. "Most land grants were for 160 acres and had J.Q.'s signature on them."

Riverbridge subdivision was originally contained in one land grant. That portion of Eight Mile from which Riverbridge subdivision can be entered is "the only place in the state" where Eight Mile is entirely in Oakland County. Until the 1960s, Eight Mile did not go through there, Rockall said.

IN OTHER areas of metropolitan Detroit, Eight Mile serves as the dividing line for two counties, Rockall said.

The Chase farm actually extended to Baseline Road, hence much of the

area's history is centered in Northville, the hub of activity for years, said Kathy Mutch, president of the Novi Historical Society.

Even when Eight Mile (Baseline Road) was a one-lane dirt road, it was a main road for Northville, Mutch said. "Farmers as far north as 13 Mile always gravitated toward Northville."

RESIDENTS OF Riverbridge subdivision will carry on that tradition. They are within walking distance of downtown Northville, Lawson said.

Recreation needs also will be met at Riverbridge. "Last year, I donated 42 acres of property on the other side of Thornton Creek for a passive park there," Lawson said.

That donated portion is "not developable," said Brandon Rogers, Novi's planning consultant, because it's a drainage area with wetlands.

The park separates Riverbridge subdivision on the west side and the Chase Farms subdivision on the east side. Within two years the park will feature jogging trails and exercise stations, Rogers said.

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