

Book's new edition retells the tales of older homes

BY LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER

Ruth Roth Moehlman has always been interested in four walls and the roof, not to mention the truth.

Historic homes in the Farmington area shelter stories and family legacies, and offer tenable roots to an upscale suburban community.

Moehlman seeks to unearth those in the second edition of her book sponsored by the Farmington Hills Historical Commission.

"If Walls Could Talk: Heritage Homes of Farmington" is an updated version of a book first published in 1980. Moehlman said a few errors have been corrected, such as who gave Fred Warner away as an infant.

More so, though, a wealth of new information has been weaved in along with background on many historical homes in the Farmington area.

"It was worse doing a revision rather than writing a new book," said Moehlman, who is a former president of the Farmington Historical Society. "The material is not as new and quite as exciting as the first time."

"The new stuff is exciting, though."

What's new?

For instance, since the first edition was published (and sold out of all its 1,000 copies) Moehlman has added some background regarding architect Emily Butterfield.

Butterfield was the first registered female architect in the state. Along with her father, the first mayor of Farmington, Wells D. Butterfield, she specialized in designing churches.

Her knack for heavenly design can be seen in the First United Methodist Church on Grand River and Warner. Ironically, the Methodists chose the Butterfields' plan over one submitted by noted English revivalist architect Marcus Burrows, whose work is also well chronicled in the book.

Butterfield also had a hand in designing Glen Oaks Country Club on 13 Mile in Farmington Hills.

The book serves as an invaluable resource in that regard.

Tidbits added

Moehlman manages to illumi-



SHARON LEMIEUX/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Author and home: Author Ruth Roth Moehlman show off her recent book about historic homes in the Farmington area. In the background is a home designed by Emily Butterfield in the 1920s.

nate such facts, adding little known tidbits as well. She notes that Butterfield was also a gifted artist and a Girl Scout troop leader.

And, in the dawn of women's movement in the 1920s, Butterfield started a club for business women in Detroit.

"Such buds of information make 'Heritage Homes of Farmington' a garden romp."

"You have a lot of questions about what happened to these folks," she said.

"It's like walking out of the

20th century. It's weird when people tell you about these certain places."

Moehlman culls information from various sources. She looks up land deeds, which list such things as children's names and what was in the house when it was sold.

She also interviewed several people, including Nicholas Spicer, who provided insight into many of the estates in the area, such as the Botsford House and the Community House.

Few people approached her

bubbling over with information, though.

"This material, you sort of had to drag it out of people," Moehlman said. "They're wonderfully cooperative if you ask, but they're not going to volunteer the information unless there is a reference point."

History interpreted

Moehlman is a history buff. She's written articles for the Farmington Forum, which served as the genesis for the book.

She worked on the Ad Hoc

Committee, which created the historic district in Farmington Hills and was a curator at the Detroit Historical Museum.

History needs more than documentation, she believes. It needs to be interpreted.

"Though it was a farming community, the people had a deep respect for social issues," Moehlman said. "They were involved in the underground railroad early on."

The book, which costs \$14.95, is available at Books Abound and Farmington Book Center as well

as the Farmington Hills City Hall. All money from the sale goes into the historical commission's revolving fund, which pays for publications.

So far, the commission has published four hardback books and 10 paperbacks on Farmington area history. The release of "Heritage Homes of Farmington" augurs well for Farmington Hills' 20th anniversary.

"It was not done intentionally," Moehlman said. "It's when we were finally able to get it out."

Historical society awards students' local research

The Farmington Historical Society has announced the winners of the 1993 Lee S. Peel Historical Research Contest.

Titled in honor of Peel, a prominent local educator, historian and author, the contest encourages original research and writing on Farmington area history.

Because of the large numbers of excellent papers, the honorable mention awards, introduced in 1991, have been continued. The winners were announced at a special ceremony June 8 at the Farmington Historical Museum on Grand River.

First prize was awarded to Jennifer Daniels, an O.E. Dunckel Middle School student, for her paper "Farmington History in the Making 1988-1990."

Jennifer's paper covers the concept, design, construction and set-up of the Hillside Elementary School. Every phase of construction and first uses are covered in detail and illustrated with a series of fine color photographs. The paper shows how a new school required the building of both a structure and an educational team to be successful.

Also covered are initial reactions to the new school from teachers and students and details about the school's dedication and mission.

Daniel's sources were architectural publications, school publications and newspaper articles as well as private family photographs of the building during construction.

Second prize was given to Meg Wolff of O.E. Dunckel Middle School, for her paper "The History of the Colony Park subdivision, Farmington Hills, MI." She received an award certificate and a check for \$50.

This paper details the history of the land and its ownership as well as describing the origins of the subdivisions development and the development stages.

A brief history of former landowners is given including a history of the subdivision's developer including his goals and visions.

The paper also gives details from the original home sale bro-

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chures and discusses an incident which almost resulted in the building of cluster homes within the subdivision.

The history of the homeowners' association is also included. Wolff's sources for this paper include interviews, newspaper articles and reference maps, documents and papers, many currently on file in the Farmington community Library History Room.

One "Best in Age Category" certificate, and \$25 prize was awarded to Todd Afterbaugh, Power Middle School, for his paper "Almost a Century at 31505 Grand River Avenue" which gives the history of the building first used as the power generating station for the DUE Interurban light rail system of the 1890s.

Todd's paper describes the initial use by the DUE, then the change of usage to Detroit Edison and then to the La Salle Winery and Champagne company.

The current usage is a sort of shopping center. Material for this paper was taken from magazine and newspaper articles as well as locally produced books on Farmington history.

Nineteen "Honorable Mention" certificates and prizes of \$10 each were awarded as follows:

■ Tracey Gies, Power Middle School, for her paper "Community Contributions: Our City Parks."

■ Kevin Hall for his paper "The Competitive Marching Bands in Farmington."

■ Parini Doshi, O.E. Dunckel Middle School, for the paper "The Farmington Community Library."

■ Juliet Petrus for her paper "The Farmington Founders Festival."

■ Marchelle D'Anna for her paper

"Farmington Women's Club."

■ Krissy Rehn for her paper "First United Methodist Church of Farmington."

■ Elizabeth Lamping for her paper "Farmington's History."

■ Becky Naglik, O.E. Dunckel Middle School, for her paper "The History of the Butterfields."

■ Jeff Kotrba for his paper "History of Grand River Road."

■ Lauren Jones for her paper "A History of the Local View of National Historical Events as presented by The Farmington Enterprise/Observer from 1941 to 1959."

■ Kirstin Porter for the paper "The Jones of Farmington Hills."

■ Maureen Carolan for her paper "One Ringy-Dingy, Two Ringy-Dingy."

■ Shamita Shah, Power Middle School, for her paper "Power Middle School from the Past to the Future."

Linda Louise Lacin for her paper "The Warner House."

■ Heather Murray for her paper "The West Farmington Cemetery."

■ David Zorn for his paper "The West Farmington Cemetery."

■ Kelly Wachberg for the paper "Warren 'Rex' Cawley."

■ Rob Gingerich for his paper "Wrestling in Farmington."

Copies of these papers, along with the previous years' award winning entries will be preserved in the Farmington Library History Room.

Peel, namesake of the contest, taught English and Journalism at Farmington High School for 30 years, retiring in 1980.

During his tenure, he taught an advanced English class during the decade from 1959-69.

One of the writing options assigned in this class was an original research historically-oriented paper similar to the requirements of this contest.

Peel is a past president of the Farmington Historical Society and remains active in the Society.

He has also authored a book, "Farmington, a Pictorial History," originally published in 1970, which was the first major work on this topic. He has just published an update of the book.

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