

CHAT ROOM



Linda Enberg

Parents need to consider all facts about senior trip

Spring? That's six months away! But for many parents of high school seniors, it is a hot topic of conversation NOW. Why? Many seniors are asking, arguing, alas, pleading to go on that infamous "senior trip." For seniors, spring marks the end of their high school career and is an exciting time. But activities over spring break will undoubtedly cause more arguments than any other issue that year.

I am a wife and mother of two boys who have recently graduated from Farmington schools in 1994 and 1997. And I'm very active in Farmington Families In Action (FIFA). FIFA has some thoughts for parents to consider when making this important decision with your senior.

Seduced by nostalgia

Many parents fondly remember some sort of "senior trip." Trips to Washington, D.C., Chicago or similar destinations were common in the 1960s and early 1970s. They were all sponsored by the schools and chaperoned by teachers and parents. Curfews, bed checks, and other controls were a well-understood part of the trip. There were a few problems with inappropriate behavior, but mild by today's standards.

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A hint of royalty in old Farmington

■ A young girl with a trunk full of gold, a duke from Italy, a family slated to sail on the ill-fated Titanic ... the lore lives on.

By RUTH MOFFULMAN
SPECIAL WRITER



A long-lost princess or an exiled noble brings a little romance even in a democratic America. Farmington with its diverse population has its share of royalty. The best stories, of course, are the ones you really can't prove.

Eleanore Conroy was reputed to be an Irish noblewoman. She and her husband, Dennis, came to the United States in 1834. They lived in New York until 1849 when they came to Michigan.

At one time, they owned a whole mile of land. They had 14 children and each of their sons was given a house and land.

The Conroy farmhouse is on Power Road and is part of the Farmington Hills Historic District. The houses built for the Conroy sons are on 10 Mile.

According to stories told by descendants of the Conroys, Eleanore was a young girl who fell in love with the coachman.

This was apparently not looked upon with favor by the family. The girl in this romance was only 12 or 13 years old, according to the story. Juliet of Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet" was about the same age.

The Irish family in this romantic tale shipped the young lovers off to the U.S. The girl still had her dolls which she carried with her. There was also a trunk reputed to have been filled with gold.

The Conroys fit right in on the Michigan frontier. They were known for their cordility. The children married into pioneer Farmington families.



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL TRELSER

Conroy farmhouse: Now part of the Historical District, once home to young Eleanore Conroy.

Where's the gold?

No one knows what happened to the trunk of gold.

The other royal couple was the Sarmientos. Francis J. Sarmiento was said to be a duke of Italian origin. He owned 100 acres on Farmington Road north of 11 Mile.

There they built a house and various outbuildings. There were some animals on the property and some farming was done. The original house was probably not the Mediterranean style villa it is now.

The house was most likely a Swiss or English design. Joan Withers of

Berkley was looking for Brookhurst Farm of Farmington where the Withers family lived in 1917.

There her father-in-law laid out the gardens on the estate of Duke Sarmiento. Joan has been pursuing her family's genealogy. The Withers family had some adventures of their own.

Charles and Lillian Withers and family were slated to sail on the Titanic. Because of some problem in selling his business, a greenhouse in England, the Withers had to take a later ship, the S.S. Ausonia.

Their family back in England didn't know about the change in ships and

assumed the family was dead.

The Witherses landed safely in Portland, Maine. They went to Brantford, Ontario, and then entered the U.S. again through the Windsor/Detroit border.

Charles Withers went to work for Count Sarmiento as a gardener and groundskeeper.

The count built a smaller house, a copy of his own, for the Witherses.

In 1919, Withers got a job with Ford Motor Co. He may have continued to do garden work for the count. The family moved to Highland Park and later to Dearborn. They returned often to

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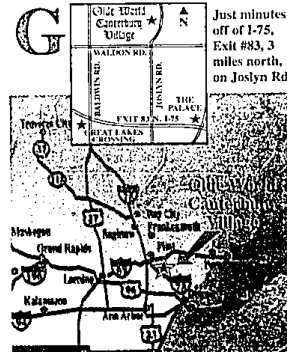
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