

Wednesday, July 16, 1969

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**ROW, ROW YOUR BOAT** -- When the rains come down on Purdue St., homeowners are usually too busy pumping water out of their basements to notice the road swimming away outside. Cousins Construction Company reportedly upset the grading levels of the sewers when it dug culverts for the new homes -- and the drain sewer blocks up every time there's a good downpour. (M.S. Sanders photo)

by HOWARD KOHN

Judging from the number of angry complaints, Cousins Construction houses have advanced humpty-dumptyitis. None of the construction men want to put them together.

In a four-week investigation The Enterprise & Observer has documented a continuing list of protests against Cousins. (See box below.)

**THE COMPLAINTS** generally reflect disrespect for building codes and homeowner requests.

• Home facilities not finished or in immediate need of repair.

• Flooding problems exacerbated by slovenly landscaping and displaced culverts.

• Wood and cement debris left in yards or buried shallowly under lawns.

• Overall carelessness and disrepair.

Cousins, a two-year-old Detroit firm co-owned by Harvey Fink and Allen Zager, has built more than 50 homes in Farmington.

Priced between \$17,990 and \$23,490, most are clustered in an eight-block section west of Middle Belt between Grand River and Shiawassee.

The houses are straight-backed rectangles bunched along nar-

## Humpty-Dumpty Had A Great Fall

row, unpaved streets.

L. H. BECKER of 21963 Purdue was one of Cousins' early customers, buying his home in February 1968, after seeing a display model.

But when Becker compared his home to the model, he counted 23 discrepancies. Some were minor faults but others included a broken garbage disposal, a cracked wooden door, loose window frames, holes in the ceiling, warped walls and missing closet shelves.

Becker refused to accept the house. So Cousins installed a working garbage disposal and agreed to make the other changes. Becker signed the final papers and moved in.

"Cousins hasn't done a damn thing since," Becker grouches bitterly.

Becker took his cause to the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) which had inspected the house before okaying his mortgage. FHA asked him to fill out a form.

Becker says he did. FHA says it didn't receive the form. And without the formal form, FHA inspectors can't reinspect.

**RATHER THAN** argue or compile another form, Becker summoned Farmington Township inspectors to his house. They verified his complaints. And Paul Snover, building department supervisor, sent a letter (dated May 1, 1968) to Cousins listing eight repairs still to be made.

Snover put a two-month ultimatum on his order.

"I waited about six months," Becker says. "Then I did them myself." Snover says he doesn't remember the order. "We have so many, you know."

"As far as I'm concerned, the whole bunch of them -- Cousins, FHA and the township -- are bunglers," Becker growls. "You have to spend so much time arguing with them it isn't worth it."

Becker's ire was rekindled June 25, 1968, when a basement flood claimed \$5,000 in damages.

LOU TOMOVSKI, 21844 Purdue (Dec. '67): Warped roof shingles, cracked and uneven sidewalk, leaky basement. "They promised to come out and fix everything. My wife took two days off from work waiting for them -- they never showed up."

DONALD ELLIS, 22145 Purdue, (Oct. '68): No insulation between basement ceiling and ground floor, leaky basement. "I'm tired of the whole mess."

JACK CLEMENTS, 21876 Purdue, (Nov. '68): Wood and cement waste buried shallowly in lawn, killing grass, poorly graded yards, loose kitchen tile. "You don't have any luck chasing these guys down."

GERALD CHURCHILL, 22096 Purdue, (Oct. '68): Unsealed windows, uncovered basement beams, leaky basement. "All I've gotten is a lot of promises -- from everybody."

JOHN HOFFMAN, 22068 Albion (Nov. '68): Clogged drains crooked and cracked sidewalks faulty plumbing. "Even when they painted the kitchen walls they splashed paint all over the wooden cupboards... It's shoddy workmanship."

LARRY SOLOMAN, 21615 Colgate, (Jan. '69): Loose shutters, poorly-graded yards, debris in backyard. "It's taken a long time to get them to move."

The county blames Cousins' trucks and bulldozers for upsetting the grading levels of the sewers, thus bottling up their effectiveness.

County officials expect to store a drainage detente and widen Purdue yet this summer. They'll send a large percentage of the bill to Cousins.

Becker's flood loss, which only netted an income tax deduction, triggered psychological warfare. Lacking the funds for a lawsuit, Becker opted for harassment.

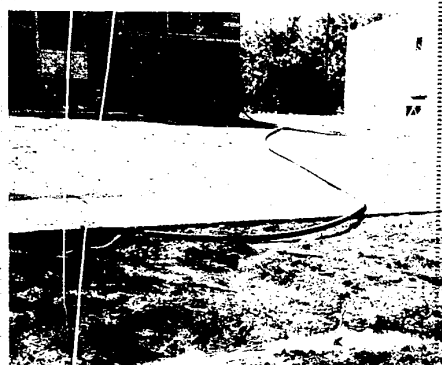
While Cousins workmen labored across the street, Becker planted a sign painted yellow and shaped like a lemon in front of his house.

Mrs. Becker says Zager, Cousins' co-owner who supervises construction, shouted obscenities and threatened her with a lawsuit.

"I wouldn't have kept the sign up if he hadn't called me names," she said.

It finally came down at the request of a neighbor who was trying to sell his house.

But Becker's hostility toward



**GLUMP, GLUMP WENT THE SUMP** -- Not every home comes equipped with a sump pump which empties water directly onto the street to maintain a steady supply of goosy mud. But Garry Hendrikson of 21609 Colgate has this added feature on his home from Cousins Construction Company -- which has been a little slow in digging a ditch. (Evert photo)

Cousins was not abated. When Zager and Snover asked to inspect his home last month, Becker ordered them off his lot. Zager and Snover were touring the subdivision after 35 homeowners, including Becker, signed a petition calling for an investigation of Cousins. (See page 1A.)

GARRY HENDRIKSON of 21609 Colgate circulated the petition in answer to Cousins' refusal of demands for 20 corrections in his home. Hendrikson bought his home in January, 1969.

Two soft-spoken to fit the cavalier image, Hendrikson nevertheless persisted where Becker gave up.

Instead of fixing his home to meet the salesman's standards, Hendrikson bothered Cousins with phone calls and letters. He wanted a new sump pump, a filter on his furnace, a porch, steps and reinforced joists.

When Cousins didn't respond,

he prevailed upon FHA twice to send inspectors out. Both times they presented a list to Cousins.

After a six-month ordeal, only two complaints remain unresolved -- (1) sump pump emptying into the street and (2) tree stump debris piled in the backyard.

But Hendrikson has carried his crusade beyond personal problems with Cousins.

Even if the number of complaints against Cousins is out of proportion, lax building practices apparently are in vogue. Snover says he didn't want to force the issue with Cousins because other contractors are doing the same.

Now, if I were the contractor I'd get those things fixed up," Snover insists. "But Cousins is just another violator. There are a dozen more where it came from."

**ONE OF THE** reasons for the "construction gap," of course, is

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L. H. BECKER



GARRY HENDRIKSON

## The Gripe Boycott

(Editor's note: The Enterprise & Observer interviewed more than 20 homeowners in its four-week investigation of Cousins Construction Company. All reported they'd made some of their own repairs after Cousins ignored complaints. But many homeowners still have complaints which are listed below. Date of purchase is in parentheses; asterisk denotes petition signers.)

**WILLIAM ABBOTT**, 22056 Purdue, (Oct. '68): Cracked basement walls, cracked kitchen tile, loose stepping stone on front porch, loose roof shingles, cement debris in yard and ditch. "It takes 25 calls to get one thing fixed. And the township inspectors don't care either -- they just give things the once-over."

**RONALD MANASIAN**, 22205 Tulane, (Oct. '68): Low backyard, unsealed sump pump, split plywood basement. "They just stall you around so you end up having to fix things yourself."

**THOMAS HEIN**, 21996 Purdue, (Oct. '68): Swelled doors, sump pump discharge on street, crumbling mortar around basement wall rod holes. "The girl at the office pacifies you as best she can when you call up. Even when you do get action, their workmen leave quite a mess."

**MICHAEL BISONKE**, 22024 Purdue (Oct. '68): Plugged basement drain, eroded sidewalk and side drive, rocking toilet. "It got so I couldn't stand the aggravation of getting them out here."

**RONALD POLEYN**, 21845 Purdue (Jan. '68): Leaky basement, uneven kitchen floor. "I signed for a new house, not a demonstration model. But before I moved in they went and

used my house for a model without asking me."

**LOU TOMOVSKI**, 21844 Purdue (Dec. '67): Warped roof shingles, cracked and uneven sidewalk, leaky basement.

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