

The historic home of David Johnston and his wife, Ruth Johnston, now in a new location in Farmington Hills, is the former Gravin house at Northwestern Highway and 13 Mile.

Something special

Farm house makes historic register

By Noreen Fleck
Staff writer

The gravel driveway leads to the farmhouse that sits alone, nestled among overgrown brush and untouched earth on the other side of the hill.

The spacious lot seems hidden from busy streets and loud cars — hidden from signs of city life.

On Aug. 1, the carefully restored 1845 Cornelius Davis House was added to the State Register of Historic Sites. The Michigan Historical Commission called it "a fine example of early rural Greek Revival architecture."

"It is a very simple home," said David McCall Johnston, co-owner. "That's what makes it so special."

The white house, in northern Farmington Hills, consists of a two-story temple form, constructed of hand-hewn post and beam. A two-story ell of balloon frame construction and porch were added about five years after the original construction.

The original owner, Cornelius Davis (1776-1869), a native of England, is said to have been a pioneer of the "English" settlement of Farmington Township. Davis was a town carpenter and cooper.

THE FARMHOUSE became Gravin's Drive-In, a small produce stand, in the 1930s and stood as a "country" landmark until 1985 when Joseph Gravin, son of Charles Gravin, decided to sell his home and property to Crystal Centre Associ-

people

ates because of declining business.

The current owners, David McCall Johnston, an internationally renowned artist, and his wife, Ruth Mossok Johnston, manager of The Johnston Collection, bought the house through the Farmington Hills Historic District Commission in 1985. Their purchase ended the possibility of demolition.

They've lived in the house, at a new location, since 1988 with their 7-year-old son, Jordan. "Jordan has a real respect for this house," Ruth Johnston said. "He loves and cares for these things because he has grown up with them."

The house survived a buzzsaw split in 1985 when the large structure was moved from Northwestern Highway and 13 Mile and reassembled six months later at a nearby 14-acre site in Farmington Hills, near the village of Franklin.

The move, assisted by architect Betty Lee Seydler-Sweatt, a historic restoration professor at Lawrence Technological University in Southfield, brought the house to a more secluded area, away from commercial development that previously surrounded the house on Northwest-ern.

A small barn and shed, both from the original site, also were moved.

THE DISTINCT Greek Revival features are displayed best in the front porch, which covers the main entrance of the house and is supported by solid wooden posts painted in dark green.

Inside, delicate remnants are carefully mixed with contemporary fixtures and designs. These mixes, brought together by the owners' individual tastes, seem to strip away the "museum look" and add a liveliness not found in most historical homes.

The American Indian-style dining room displays corn husk bags and a George Catlin print. An assembly of chairs dating back as far as 1790 and 1815 are arranged around a 20th century white table.

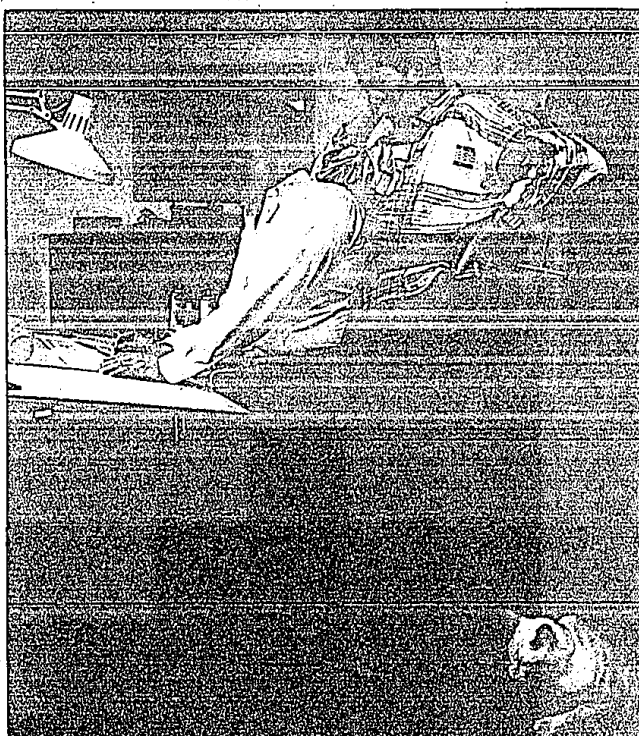
"This house is so much of who we are," Johnston said. "It displays a passion for everything we do."

The contemporary-revival mix extends to the kitchen. The black and white checkered tile covers a one-wooded floor that could not have held Johnston's six-ton industrial stove needed to prepare some of her favorite dishes. And the "ultra mod" Kovacs lighting appoints the kitchen as the "80s" room in the house.

Declining to reveal the amount spent on the restoration, Johnston said it was a "huge investment."

THE ARTIST'S work, The Johnston Collection, reveals another story.

He calls his early works "fantasy" drawings, which have been used as illustrations in children's



David Johnston (left) and his wife, Ruth Johnston, in his art studio. The cat in the lower right corner is named Geppotto.

books and for commercial projects with companies such as the Franklin Mint and Steuben Glass.

Leading away from commercial art and into the fine arts, Johnston said his more recent folk art pieces are styled in "Americana History," with the originals priced between \$4,000 and \$20,000 apiece.

His intricately detailed paintings are arranged throughout the house. Johnston has lived in four other historical homes, all of which he said

have inspired his work.

Selected prints can be bought at Knollwood Art Frames & Gallery in West Bloomfield.

Johnston's paintings hang from New York to Natick, France, in many galleries and locations.

His works have been featured in many publications. The December 1989 cover of "Country Home Magazine" will feature the 1845 Cornelius Davis House in Johnston's painting, "Returning Home."

Locally, originals from The Johnston Collection will be displayed at the Elizabeth Stone Gallery opening in Birmingham this fall.

The Davis House is Johnston's fifth historical home, the second of which he shared with Ruth Johnston.

Her search to buy a historical home led her to Franklin 10 years ago. She met David outside his former home, which he shared with his three children from a previous marriage.

Shot narrowly misses 2 asleep in apartment

A gunshot fired from the unit above narrowly missed a couple asleep in a bedroom at Farmington Manor Apartments, Nine Mile and Tuck, early Wednesday.

"The bullet probably missed them by a couple of feet," said Detective Daniel Krause of the Farmington Hills Police Department.

"Fortunately, the gun, when fired, was pointed at the floor on an angle. If it had been pointed straight down, it could've hit either person in bed."

Charges are pending against the 43-year-old man who rents the apartment above and the 31-year-old Southfield man who actually fired the gun.

POLICE GAVE this account of what happened:

After returning from a nearby bar, the Farmington Hills man took out a .44-caliber revolver to show his friend. Two rounds were in the chamber; the hammer

and cylinder were positioned so a pull of the trigger would fall on an empty chamber.

But the Farmington Hills man cocked the gun before handing it to his friend, unfamiliar with guns. So when the friend pointed the gun at the floor, he pulled the trigger instead of lowering the hammer and sent a round into the floor.

The bullet went through the ceiling of the unit below, just above the bed. It hit a stereo speaker.

A man who had been asleep told police he could feel the bullet whiz by. He then heard voices from the unit above and heard someone say, "I'm sorry."

In the unit above, police found the gun in a drawer, fired and unfired cartridges beneath a mattress and a spent round in the floor.

Needless to say, the couple, in their 20s, "had a hard time going back to sleep," Krause said.

Detroit pitcher Hudson breaks legs in accident

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has asked that everybody keep him in their prayers."

Hudson, alone in a 1985 Mercury Cougar, was going south on Northwestern Highway at Wellington, just west of Inkster Road, at 2:10 a.m. when he passed another car, cut back in, then lost control.

His car skidded sideways into a utility pole on the south side of the road, hitting the pole and shearing his car in half at the firewall. The road was dry, investigators said.

THE ENGINE compartment was lodged against a Detroit Edison pole. The passenger compartment came

to a stop 10 feet away, against a 10-foot-tall pine tree.

It took firefighters, using a Jaws of Life and other extrication tools, 45 minutes to free Hudson, whose right leg was pinned.

"He's one lucky person," said Al Ellis, the first firefighter on the scene. "He was conscious and talking to us, although he didn't remember exactly what had happened."

Hudson spent two hours in orthopedic surgery at Providence Hospital.

It's not known if alcohol or other drugs were a factor, said Lt. Jack Brown of the Farmington Hills Police Department.

Traffic investigators will subpoena Hudson's hospital records if they determine there's a probable cause that alcohol or other drugs played a role in the accident, police said.

Hudson was not wearing a seat belt. Police weren't sure how fast he was going in the 50-mph zone. No tickets were issued pending completion of the investigation, Brown said.

Hudson is out for the rest of the baseball season.

Before this season, Hudson was traded from the New York Yankees to the Tigers for Tom Brookens. This season, Hudson had a 1-5 won-lost record in 17 appearances. His earned run average is 6.38.

Mediator expected in teacher talks

A state mediator is expected to oversee negotiations Tuesday between the Farmington school board and the 748-member teachers union.

Downplaying the mediator's presence, Susan Zurvalce, education relations director for the 10,700-student district, said Farmington Public Schools wants to "look at every alternative possible to try to reach

an agreement" before school begins next week.

Already the district and the Farmington Education Association have come to a tentative agreement in which teachers would report to work on Aug. 29, opening day of classes. They would also report the previous day to prepare for the start of the new academic year, Zurvalce said.

Union representatives couldn't be reached for comment.

"We're optimistic," said Zurvalce, who declined to name major bargaining issues.

Since June 14, the teachers' union, part of the Michigan Education Association, and district representatives have met for 45 hours in 13 meetings.

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