

The Rochester Era

June/July

The Rochester-Avon Historical Society Newsletter

2007

A Sneak Preview of Our New History Book

The following is a brief excerpt from a new community history of Rochester and Avon Township/Rochester Hills now being written by Society member Deborah Larsen. We hope to have this book ready to go to press in the fall, and are pleased to offer you this small "sneak preview"!

ROCHESTER AND AVON IN WORLD WAR II

BY DEBORAH J. LARSEN

The second World War was fought on several fronts by the people of Rochester and Avon. The nation required large numbers for military service, and 1,150 residents (or 10 percent of the total population of Rochester and Avon) served in the armed forces during the war years. Among them were approximately three dozen women, as World War II was the first American conflict in which significant numbers of women served in uniform.

Lieutenant Priscilla Joy Tripp (1915-2003) was one of Rochester's daughters who ventured into harm's way during the war. A member of the U.S. Army Nurse Corps, she sailed for overseas duty in February 1943, and first served with the American forces in Casablanca following the invasion of North Africa. She was later stationed with the 15th Evacuation Hospital on the Anzio beachhead in Italy. In a letter home from Anzio in March 1944, Lt. Tripp told her parents that she thought her unit would be stationed at Anzio long enough to grow some vegetables, which were sorely lacking in their diet at that time. She asked her mother to send her some vegetable seeds, which were promptly furnished by Avon's own Ferry-Morse Seed Farm.

Eight months after Lt. Tripp's par-

ents, Harry R. and Fael Springsted Tripp, received their daughter's letter from Anzio, they were notified that their son, 2nd Lt. Harry S. Tripp (1918-1944) had been killed in action in Germany while fighting with the U.S. Army. He was laid to rest in an American battlefield cemetery in Belgium, and a marker was also placed in his memory at Mount Avon Cemetery.

Roderick F. Arnold (1917-1998) of Rochester had a special rendezvous with history and took part in a mission that helped bring the war to a close. As a U.S. Army Air Force technical sergeant, he served as flight engineer aboard the B-29 *Great Artiste*, which flew as an observer aircraft on the atomic bomb strike mission against Nagasaki, Japan. While Rod was busy training on the B-29, his brother, Max C. Arnold, also in the Army Air Force, flew 138 combat missions in the P-47 Thunderbolt, earning the Distinguished Flying Cross and the Air Medal.



At home in Rochester, the civilian members of the community were hard at work in industries that supported the war effort. Most auto-related industry in southeastern Michigan converted to production of war materiel, giving Detroit the well-deserved nickname "Arsenal of Democracy," and Rochester's factories also did their part to rally in defense of the nation. In 1942, the vacant knitting mills building at Fourth and Water streets became the new

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From the President ...

Greg Doyle



Rochester College Barn...

As many of you will remember, a few years ago Rochester College petitioned the City of Rochester Hills to allow the demolition of the historic barn. The Society notified its members who showed their support for preservation of the Barn. Through several public hearings and Council meetings, member after member stood up and spoke out. The result was a compromise which allowed the College to expand its capacity while maintaining their historic farmstead. Now, after many years of neglect, the Barn has received some needed attention and sports a new silo roof as well as a fresh coat of paint. There are still repairs needed to the Barn to keep it structurally sound, but the first steps show that the College is taking notice and pride in preserving a bit of their past.

This is a wonderful example of how your Society, through your support, is helping to preserve and protect the historic resources of the greater Rochester area.



Upcoming City Elections

This August the City of Rochester will hold a primary election for City Council. (Rochester Hills will hold their Primary Election in September.)

As you all know, over the past several years the City has undergone considerable changes. Although change is a necessary part of maintaining a viable community, we believe that the historical character of the Community is important as well.

This year, 12 candidates will vie for 8 spots on the ballot. I urge all of our members who are City of Rochester residents to read up on your

choices and make a well informed vote. A non-partisan Voter Guide will be available at www.lwvoa.org after July 10.

There are some familiar names along with the many new names on the ballot this year. Councilman David Becker has been a long time member of our Society. Mr. Becker continues to be a strong supporter of historic preservation and of the maintenance of the character of Rochester.

One of the new names running for Council is Mr. Jeff Matis. Matis is currently a member of the Rochester Historical Commission. He has a strong interest in maintaining the historical character of the City as well.

As the election moves closer we will be learning more about all of the candidates. Pay close attention to the candidates positions and make sure to vote!

OFFICERS	
President.....	Greg Doyle 248.651.3468
Vice-President... Maria-Teresa Cozzolino	248.608.1162
Treasurer.....	Mary Howarth 248.375.0206
Recording Secretary.....	Kay Johnson 248-651-0402
Corresponding Secretary...	Tammy Byers 248.651.8214
Member-at-Large.....	Brian Dunphy 248.656.5968
Member-at-Large.....	Janet Potton 248.652.7296
Rochester Hills Museum...	Patrick McKay 248.656.4663
Administrative Assistant.....	Rod Wilson 248.651.6178
COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSONS	
Historian.....	Gail Kemler 248.651.0907
Membership.....	Carole Fischer 248.85.0118
ERA.....	Mary Howarth 248.375.0206
Program.....	Marilyn Brooks 248.651.6624
Publicity.....	Liz Golding 248.656.1125

LIZ'S LINES



The summer is going so fast as it always does. We had a great picnic and good entertainment. Now, we can look forward to great entertainment in summer activities. I hope you are enjoying these beautiful days and cool nights.

This is time to celebrate our heritage. As you renew your membership, please take a moment to reflect on our responsibility as Historical Society members to salute our future, but persevere in preserving our past. Our predecessors came here looking at the green, lush area that we call the Greater Rochester area. It was full of possibilities for their purposes. We now look at our area with pride. Our history can still be alive if we choose to be caretakers. Many historical sites are in danger of becoming distant dreams that will only be remembered in pictures. You can make a difference by letting those, who would forget our heritage by trivializing their contributions, know that we honor our history and we are intent on preserving it. We are a strong presence in this community and we can be stronger if our voices are heard.

Think about your place in this community. You are important.

Enjoy your summer and we will see you at our meetings beginning in September.

Included in this issue are
The 2007-2008
Calendar and Program Schedule.
Please keep them for future
Reference.

A thank you received

From a card received from Joyce Aris. Joyce is a long time resident of Rochester and her parents owned Aris 5 & 10 store on Main Street.

June 19, 2007

Dear Members

Many thanks to the Historical Society for the recognition given to the Eagle Scouts with the hanging of plaques on the lofty pine trees in Rochester Park. Scouting was very important to my brothers Maynard and Bill Aris, and they often said that their Eagle Scout status in later years led to opportunities that they might not have had otherwise. They would have been very pleased with this honor. I will inform their sons and other family members of the honor, and will be very proud when I pass the trees on my frequent walks in our beautiful park.

History Walks With Rod

Rod Wilson will be taking his popular Downtown Rochester Walking Tours on the following dates:

Friday, July 20	7:00 PM
Thursday, August 16	7:00 PM
Saturday, September 16	1:00 PM
Sunday, October 14	1:00 PM

All tours begin at the Western Knitting Mills, on the northeast corner of the building. They are free for members, \$5 for all others.

RAIN DEVASTATES CHAPMAN POND – DAM BREAKS!!!

Liz Golding

An article about Rochester's past.

We have had a strange spring and beginning of summer. There have been very cool and rainy periods and then "August Hot" in June. We have seen a dry stretch these past few weeks. It has been good for outdoor activities, but the lush green is becoming brown. This is more likely the way citizens of Rochester and Avon Township felt in June of 1946. The many farms in the area at that time had newly planted crops. The town was at last coming back to life after the devastating war and life was becoming good again. That is, until the Big Rain!

Going back to old Rochester, let me share with you the enormous size of Chapman Pond. This 12-acre body of water stretched from the Grain Elevator and the Western Knitting Mills Beer Company on Water Street to Paul's Restaurant and beyond. The Post Office, Rochester Hills Library and Sunrise Terrace were not even dreams in our city.

Lucille Moore, a native of Rochester, told me that in the middle of this vast pond was an island. It was out to this island that the Boy Scouts would boat and hold jamborees. Gail Kemler, another longtime resident, said it was rumored that a shoeless old man wearing a top hat had taken up residence on this large tree-filled island. This report was probably folklore, but fascinating. Gail also told me Mr. C. S. Chapman, whose home was just beyond Paul's, would row to the Western Knitting Mills, which he owned.

The Chapman Dam was about 30 feet from the railroad trestle just southeast of Sunrise Terrace. It was formidable dam that carried water from Paint Creek toward the Clinton River.

As I searched through files of the Rochester Era

in the library, I found tragic articles of the devastation wrought by the flood of 1946. It rained for many days, but on Sunday afternoon, June 18, a deluge of rains poured and by midnight of Monday, June 19, four additional inches fell. This forced the swollen Paint Creek to overflow its banks to the Pond whose banks were already strained. Water poured over all the banks and the Chapman Dam, already weakened by adventurous youngsters who had made tunnels under the sand of the dam, could hold no more. With tremendous force the dam broke and walls of water rushed all over the area, flooding East Third Street, destroying houses there. The water rose so rapidly that the New York Central rail track caved in beside the Grain Elevator and water rose all the way to the bottom level of the Knitting Mills where sheep were brought for shearing.

On that horrific night when people tried to escape, two women, Mrs. Roland Garnett and Miss Marie Lord tried to climb down from their porch at 306 East Third Street and go to higher ground. Miss Lord was able to grasp a child's swing until rescued, but Mrs. Garnett was swept away and washed across the Clinton River into swampy flats near McAleer Metallic Metal Plant. It was there her battered body was found late Tuesday morning.

After the flood, unsuccessful attempts were made to force Paint Creek back into its old channel. Filling of the site was done in that summer of 1946. After 75 years of showing the enormous pond on Rochester maps, it was no more. The peaceful beauty, soft breezes across the water, and summer picnics on the banks of Chapman Pond became a memory to reflect on a gentler time. Chapman Pond disappeared. The broken concrete and stone of the dam is all that remains of a painful and frightening period in Rochester.



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home of the McAleer Manufacturing Company, which had been making automotive waxes and polishes in Detroit before the war. Once hostilities began, McAleer won lucrative defense contracts for the production of flares and photoflash bombs. The company constructed bunkers on South Street, where work could be somewhat isolated from the downtown area, for the dangerous mixing of explosives and powdered metals. Despite the precautions, several explosions did occur during the war years, resulting in the deaths and injury of several McAleer workers and the complete destruction of at least one of the bunkers.

Just after the surrender of Japan, a McAleer employee named Olga Zacharuk was surprised to receive a letter from a group of airmen stationed in Guam. Signed by a dozen men and dated August 16, 1945, the letter read in part:

My Dear Miss Zacharuk:

On behalf of myself and several of the fellows, we would like you to know that you packed the last photoflash bomb to fall on Tokyo. We found your address in the bomb crate when we loaded it on the last B-29 to make a mission over Japan.

In all, McAleer had manufactured and shipped from Rochester 50,000 of the M46 photoflash bombs, which stood four feet high and were ten inches in diameter.

Another major industry relocating from Detroit was National Twist Drill & Tool Company, which built a small facility in Avon Township at the corner of Tienken and Rochester roads in 1940. Twist Drill made drills, reamers and specialized cutting tools, and was therefore a critical defense industry. As wartime demands for product increased, the factory in Avon Township expanded, as did the payroll. Twist Drill was destined to become in future years the community's top employer, at its peak providing jobs for 1,800 people.



MATILDA'S 8 DOOR WOODY STARS AT CONCOURS

More than 250 of the most exotic and valuable vintage automobiles in the world will be set out like jewels on the grounds of historic Meadow Brook Hall on Sunday, August 5 from 10 am to 4 pm.

Although the feature marquee is the beloved Italian masterpiece Alfa Romeo, two cars of great interest to the Rochester area will be an eight door woody station wagon as well as a vehicle Horace Dodge, Sr. purchased from an auto show display.

In 1940, Matilda Wilson asked some of her friends at Cadillac to build a station for her to carry her help back to Detroit on their day off (Wednesday or Thursday). Matilda was always know to be thrifty, and this vehicle saved her having two cars and two drivers. She loved having company visit, and she used the car to take her guests around the estate. Also, she could put Richard's whole football team inn it to go to games.

The woody was custom built by the Meteor Company from a production LaSalle. This was the largest wagon built on a non-truck chassis and is the only eight door wagon to known to exist. Interestingly, LaSalle ceased production in the same year ...1940.

In the 1950's, the wagon was donated to the Pontiac Boys Club. It is currently being restored to its original 1940's condition by Jim Zanardi of Las Gatos, California.

Horace's 1921 Hispano Suiza H6B Chavet Torpedo will also be on display. It is a 7-passenger tourer by Chavet, a French coach builder of the 1920's. The car is original and in an unrestored state. It had not run in over forty years and was up on blocks in a barn where it was the home for generations of raccoons and other barn critters.

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Concours continued from Page 5

Once the 40-year old gasoline was purged from the tank and new added, the motor turned freely and the car is now running again. Todd Nagle of Rochester will be showing this rare car.

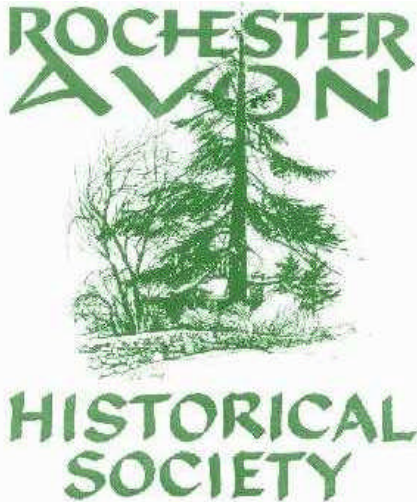
In addition to these two special cars, a selection of forty historic motorcycles, dubbed "Forty fours" will be featured at the show.



1938 Indian 4-Cylinder. It is one of the 40 4-cylinder motorcycles that will be displayed at the Meadow Brook Concours d'Elegance on Sunday, August 5.



Eagle Scout tree plaque
In Rochester Municipal Park
Honoring Floyd Cross.



Rochester Avon Historical Society
P O Box 80783
Rochester, MI 48309-0783

Pride in
Preserving
the Past