

Historical Society reveals history of Centennial Farm

By Gerry Macks
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HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Centennial Farm Adult Community is a 320-unit co-operative complex located on the west side of Rushton Road at Ten Mile Road. In the early 1980s Centaur Contractors, owned by James Pelky, began the first of two phases. Work extended into the early 1990s.

This attractive community is built on land that had been farmed by the same family for more than 100 years, thus the name, Centennial Farm. The old farmhouse, now occupied by the Russell LaLonde family, is the beautiful Greek Revival home immediately south of the entrance to the complex.

Now comes the rest of the story. Beginning in the 1830s there was a rush of farmers, tradesman, and others from the East to the Michigan Territory. They came, encouraged by the U.S. government, looking mostly for good farm-land.

One of these settlers was the Rev. Ira Olds who came from New York to be the first preacher of the

frontier Presbyterian Church in South Lyon. With him came his son, Alonzo W. Olds, who later brought a large tract of land in Green Oak's Section 26, along what is now Rushton Road. He built a sawmill, and in 1847, the home now designated the Olds-Read Historic District.

Alonzo sold all of this property and moved to Section 11, the Green Oak Station area, where he also acquired a large amount of land. He built the home that still stands on the west side of Rushton Road at Silver Lake Road.

In 1852, William and Mary Read and their eight children arrived in the U.S. from Kingswood, England. After a decade in Washtenaw County, where three more children were born, the family came to Green Oak. They bought 240 acres of farmland, including a beautiful farmhouse. Thus began the Read Centennial Farm.

William and Mary Read had nine sons, of whom Jacob, Richard and Albert took up farming in Green Oak. Joseph died in the Civil War. William Read died in 1888, leaving the farm to his wife Mary. After her death in 1900, Albert and his wife, Addie Borden Read, purchased the

farm from the other heirs.

Albert was a general farmer, grain and stock grower, with orchards. The Reads mined lime on Lime Kiln Lake. Albert would dig it by hand and haul it by horse and wagon. They made bricks from the marl found in the marshes. Albert served Green Oak at various times as justice of the peace, constable and on the Board of Review.

After the death of Albert and Addie, Albert Jr. (Allie) took over the farm. He married Harriet Driver, one of 10 children from the next farm south on Rushton Road. Harriet was a beautiful and talented young woman, who played piano by ear, composed music and songs, loved to sing, and published in later life two books of poetry - even though she did not have the opportunity to attend high school. (Many farm children did not get to high school in the early 1900s).

Harriet also served on the Editorial Committee that was responsible for "Yesteryears of Green Oak, 1830-1930," an excellent local history published by the Green Oak Township Historical Society in 1981. The book is out-of-print, but is available at local libraries. Hopefully, it will be

reprinted soon.

Harriet and Allie had three children, Loren, Lois and Leslie. Lois Read Smith lives with her husband, Chuck, in Greenock Hills subdivision on land that was part of her parents' farm and earlier was the Border farm where Lois' grandmother, Addie Borden Read, grew up.

The Smith children grew-up in the home on Ten Mile Road that is now the LaLonde - DuRussell office site.

Loren now retired in Florida, married Helen Ault, and lived with their children in the house across the road from the family home. Helen was a secretary for the South Lyon School system for many years, while Loren operated a popular party store at Ten Mile and Rushton Roads, where the Mobil Station is now located. Leslie managed the family hog-farm for more than 20 years under his father's tutelage.

This included raising corn and other farm crops. After the farm was sold, Leslie and his wife Lois Pichler Read and children continued farming in Michigan's thumb area.

Harriet loved the Olds-Read

Have historical information?

"A brief history of Green Oak's Centennial Farm Adult Community" is the first in a series of articles co-ordinated by the Green Oak Township Historical Society. Various authors will share with readers what is known about the history of individual subdivisions or other specific sites in Green Oak. The primary focus will be on the history of the land before each subdivision was developed. Each author will research the topic as thoroughly as possible. Hopefully, however, there are

readers who can add to the stories from personal remembrance, or other photos, or other documentation. There may be readers who have conflicting information, and perhaps, some who would like to author or help research one of the subdivision histories. If so, please contact the Society at (248)486-9113.

Information about the Green Oak Township Historical Society is available at (248) 486-3578 or by writing to the Society at P.O. Box 84, Brighton, MI 4816-0084.

house for all of the 68 years she lived there. And, she loved the land. In 1985 Harriet wrote "My eyes behold this same area where bull-dozers had covered most of it with a sandy loam and strange eyes now survey this changed, though still lovely scene from their charming condominium homes. They love it the same as I once did."

The land seems to bring together the way we were and the way we are. Small children now play under the trees in the Olds-Read yard just as in earlier times.

Harriet Read survived her husband by 17 years. She died Nov. 29, 1992, at the age of 89. All of the deceased Reads rest in the South Lyon Cemetery.

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