



# the Moorings

GROSSE POINTE  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

established 1945

Summer 2015

Vol. 32 No. 2

## Resource Center

There are more than 400 monthly requests for information. Staff and volunteers log about 300 hours of research each month.

### Where is this place?

The Alfred B. and Ruth S. Moran Resource Center at 381 Kercheval is the hub of all this activity.

The requests include information about genealogy, real estate, historic buildings, events, people and more.

For 70 years, dedicated people have collected and protected thousands of documents and objects related to Grosse Pointe history.

"It's a staggering amount of work that the Grosse Pointe Historical Society accomplishes in a month's time," said Elizabeth Soby, president of the Grosse Pointe Historical Society.

With more than 3,500 blueprints, the Society is able to provide residents with the original plans for their homes and subsequent additions to them.

Family research and genealogical

Continued on page 3



## Some Enchanted Evening

Behind the large iron gates of the beautiful Palm-Beach style estate situated in the heart of Grosse Pointe Farms, a story can be told of a prominent Florida architect who designed the mansion in 1929 and the interesting people who have called it home throughout the years.

Walk through the iron gates. The lines and symmetry of the structure recall the timelessness of classic style. Stop at the foot of the marble entrance and listen for the gentle sounds of the front courtyard fountain. Walk through the glass and iron front door into an elegant foyer and receiving hall.

Walk through the carefully preserved and restored rooms that feature crystal chandeliers, the marble floors and fireplace surrounds, the wood paneling in the games room, the expanse of windows in each room, the design in the hardwood floors. The details in the design of columns, dental moldings, cornices, hardware and fabrics make the 2015 Summer Gala home a remarkable venue.

"The interior is truly breathtaking," said Nancy Pilorget, coordinator for *Some Enchanted Evening*.

The theme, *Some Enchanted Evening*, pays homage to the romance and history of the



Photos: Robin M Photography



home. On Thursday, June 18, from 7 p.m. to 10 p.m. experience a rarely-seen 1929 Grosse Pointe Farms estate. Guests will be treated to a strolling gourmet supper, a '40s and '50s style music, an automotive design that includes

Continued on page 2



Grosse Pointe Historical Society

381 Kercheval Avenue

Grosse Pointe Farms, MI 48236

(313) 884-7010 Phone

(313) 884-7699 Fax

## Richard Earl Exhibit

Richard Earl is an automotive historian. As the youngest grandson of Harley Earl, he has an intimate connection with one of America's greatest innovators; by inventing the American Automobile Design profession, Harley Earl revolutionized the auto industry and his iconic business practices helped shape capitalism as we know it.

Born in Detroit, Richard spent his twenties on Wall Street, returned to the Motor City in 1985 following a visit to the GM Technical Center in Warren, MI. While there, he was captivated by the ultra-futuristic clay model prototype cars and they ignited within him a desire not just to learn more about his family's 126-year auto legacy (his great grandfather was a 19th century coach builder), but about the rise of the automobile design profession at large. Nineteen years of scholarly research, ten of which he lived in Metro Detroit from 1996 to 2006, and hundreds of first-person interviews later, Richard is a leading expert in the field of American automotive history.

Currently living in West Palm Beach, FL, Richard is at work on a biography about the indomitable team of business players, including Harley, who all served at General Motors between the mid-1920s up to the end of the 1950s. In addition to editing the official [www.HarleyJEarl.com](http://www.HarleyJEarl.com) website, he speaks at automotive events, universities and keynote speeches across the country.

## Some Enchanted Evening

Continued from cover  
classic cars of the era.

Guests will meet Richard Earl, grandson of Harley Earl, who has brought displays and artifacts of his grandfather's work. Several cars will be on display in the motor court and garages that were created under the direction and influence of Harley Earl.

"We are so happy to host the Summer Gala fundraiser and share our home with others to help raise money for the Grosse Pointe Historical Society," said Jim Rahaim, current owner of the home.

All proceeds will benefit the Grosse Pointe Historical Society. Tickets can be purchased online at [www.gphistorical.org](http://www.gphistorical.org). Reservations are limited. RSVP by May 24.



Guests at *Some Enchanted Evening* receive valet parking, admission to party, with open bar, strolling supper, docent-guided tour of the public rooms and the carriage house featuring the Harley Earl automotive design exhibit, tented party on the grounds, entertainment, and complimentary portrait photograph.

A Sponsor Preview is hosted in the formal rooms of the home and begins at 6 p.m. Cocktails and appetizers will be served. The musical entertainments provided by Jeanne Bourget, vocalist with Jack McCormick at the Bechstein grand piano perform songs from the Great American Song Book.

"We are pleased to announce a new category of participation "The Twenty-something Experience for those ages 29 and under," said Mary Shafer, co-chair of *Some Enchanted Evening*. These guests will experience the full Gala experience, at an affordable price.

During the evening, guests will enjoy music from the '40s and '50 in the garden as performed by Scott Gwinnell.

And the Enchantment continues as guests who have purchased After Party tickets will be admitted to the private quarters for a tour including master suite and marble-lined bathrooms, servants' quarters, and kitchen complex, ending in the exhibition Motor Court for a reception with Richard Earl, grandson of Harley Earl and more entertainment.



Photo: Robin M Photography

Harley Earl Exhibit



Photo: Robin M Photography

Harley Earl Exhibit

# Ribbon Farm Days 2015 Moorings

What did children do in the summer a hundred years ago? Did they read? What games did they play? Did they ride horses?

Elementary-age children, 7-10 years of age, have a unique opportunity to discover what children did for fun, when the Grosse Pointe Historical Society sponsors Ribbon Farm Days 2015 at the Provencal-Weir House.



**Birch Bark Canoes:** The birch bark was soaked over night in water to soften, then cut and sewn to make this wonderful canoe!

Ribbon Farm Days' "hands-on" approach enables children to experience summer in a different way that is both exciting and creative. They learn their local history while enjoying crafts, fun and games. There will be painting, sewing, pasting, gluing, drawing, building, clay modeling, and picnics with lots of outside play.

This program fosters decision making, develops visual-spatial skills, improves problem solving and encourages critical thinking. Instruction and supervision are provided by two experienced classroom teachers, with a student-teacher ratio of one to six.

RFD 2015 is divided into 4 sessions, each with its own theme. At the end of each session, children will leave with their "homemade" projects and with a sense of accomplishment, pride and satisfaction.

Each two-week session meets Tuesdays and Thursdays from 11 am-3 pm. Students bring their own lunches.

**Session I – June 23, 25, 30, July 2 – Gardens** – Investigate the ways in which families entertained in earlier times. Crafts focus on candle making, decoupage, batik and weaving.

**Session II – July 14, 16, 21, 23 – Grosse Pointe History** – Investigate life in Grosse Pointe when it was a forest and farm land inhabited by Native Americans, the French, the English and the Americans. Crafts focus on moccasin making, buffalo hide painting, bi-plane building and paper construction of a one room school house.

**Session III – July 28, 30, August 4, 6 – Life in Rural Grosse Pointe** – Investigate what children did on the farm at the turn of the last century. Crafts focus on making a barn to house the horses and riders they will create.

**Session IV – Aug. 11, 13, 18, 20 – Children's Stories** – Investigate the importance of stories that engage children's interest. Crafts focus on creating a fairy garden.

**Registrations begin May 1, 2015**

Tuition for Grosse Pointe Historical Society members is \$200 for one session; non-member tuition is \$250 per session.

**Information at: 313-884-7010 or [info@gphistorical.org](mailto:info@gphistorical.org)**



Crafts are inspired by the theme of the week. Last year the children created Peter Pan, Captain Hook, a crocodile, Tinkerbell and a pirate ship.

## Resource Center

Continued from cover  
information is also available from the Society's photograph collection, original documents and organization partners.



Research assistants are busy at work in the Alfred B. and Ruth S. Moran Resource Center.

The web site, [gphistorical.org](http://gphistorical.org), provides information on the various ways to access information. The site also explains the "benefit of membership" for those who are looking for information.

The Resource Center is open Tuesday and Wednesday from 10 am to 12:30 pm and 1:30 pm to 4pm.

**Information at [info@gphistorical.org](mailto:info@gphistorical.org) or 313-884-7010.**

## What would you like to see?

As we look at the 2016-17 program year, the Grosse Pointe Historical Society is seeking your suggestions about programs or events that you would like to have us present or sponsor.

Are you interests in preservation, history, performance, sports, maintenance of wood, fabrics or metals? Or something else?

Send your suggestions to: [info@gphistorical.org](mailto:info@gphistorical.org) with the Subject Line: **New Programs.**

## Executive Board

Elizabeth Soby, President

Susan Hartz, Past President

John McCormick, Vice President-Administration

Stuart Grigg, Vice President-Development

Dr. Patricia O'Brien, Vice President-Education

Herman Mozer, Vice President-Preservation

Stephen Vella, Treasurer

Mary Stelmark, Secretary

## Board of Trustees

Alesia Bicknell

Susan Budrys

Kay Burt-Willson

James Conway

Valerie Dodenhoff

Emmajean Evans

Ted Everingham

Janie Fleckenstein

Susan Goulette

Marlene Harle

Susan Lewandowski

Nancy Pilorget

Jennifer Rice

Patricia Theros

Mary Shafer

Cathy Walker

## Honorary Trustees

Chip Berschback

Patricia R. Colett

Michael Farley

Lisa Mower Gandelot

Nancy Griffin

Stuart Grigg

Susan Hartz

Ronald C. Lamparter

Herman Mozer

Russell H. Peebles

Thomas E. Singelyn, DDS

Michael W. Skinner

Gail R. Stroh-Marentette

## Administration

Administrator

Helga Liedtke

Webmaster

Jay Hunter

Collections Manager/  
Director of Education

Isabelle Donnelly

Curator Emeritus

Jean Dodenhoff

## 1823 Society Members

Chip Berschback,  
Attorney At Law

Beline Obeid Realty

Breckels Massage  
Therapy Inc.

Cathy Champion,  
Realtor

Corbett Consulting

Edsel & Eleanor  
Ford House

James R. Fikany  
Real Estate Co.

Fortuna Piano

Grigg Graphic  
Services, Inc.

Grosse Pointe  
Florists, Inc.

Grosse Pointe Rotary

Grosse Pointe  
War Memorial

Higbie Maxon Agney  
Agency

KM Financial

Lakeland Manor

Ed Lazar Insurance  
Agency, Inc.

The Little Blue Book  
Pointe Magazine

Rose Pest Solutions

Cathy Walker,  
Interior Design

Wayne County Comm.  
College District

Windmill Pointe  
Brewing Co.

## Pointes of History

Michael Farley, Ben Gravel, Greg Jakub, John McCormick contributed to this article.

History lives and thrives in the Grosse Pointes. And the Grosse Pointe Historical Society honors the community's cultural legacy by identifying three properties that reflect the range of buildings in the area.

The individuals and organizations that have used their imagination and creativity to preserve – and even repurpose – these buildings will be recognized for their vision at a free program on Tuesday, May 12 at 7:30 p.m. at the Grosse Pointe War Memorial.



38 McKinley Place features Craftsman interiors.



"We acknowledge the contributions of residents, artists, and architects at the Pointes of History presentations," said Greg Jakub, chair of the Plaque Committee.

Three properties – Grosse Pointe Memorial Church, Services for Older Citizens and 38 McKinley Place – will receive plaques because they demonstrate preservation and adaptive reuse. All three are significant in Grosse Pointe history as an outstanding example of an architectural style, a person or a business that made a significant contribution to the community.

The program features photographs, information about the designer and current use.

At a reception following the program, property owners and presenters will be available to answer questions.

A slide show of all 87 historic landmarks that have received plaques in the past will be featured at the end of the presentation.

Grosse Pointe Memorial Church was organized as a non-denominational church in 1865. In 1920 the congregation was reorganized as a Presbyterian Church and celebrates its 150th anniversary this year.

The church's present home, at 16 Lakeshore Drive in Grosse Pointe Farms, is designed in the Neo-Gothic style, built of Ashlar limestone trimmed with smooth sandstone, and has a slate roof. It features stained-glass windows by the Willet Studios of Philadelphia, Pewabic tile from Detroit and wood carvings by the German carver Alois Lang. Its tower houses a working 47-bell carillon. The bells were temporarily removed last summer to be refurbished and retuned; a new 2,800-pound bell will be added.

The church added an educational wing in 1962. Renovations in 1997 included a new lakeside entry and reception area, and an enlarged chancel. In 2014, the stained glass windows were restored.

The second award is given to 158 Ridge Road. Originally built for Cottage Hospital as a Nurses' Residence in 1928, the building is currently the home of Services for Older Citizens (SOC).

The beautiful three-story residence was built the same year that Cottage Hospital (now Henry Ford Medical Center – Cottage) opened its building. Architect Raymond



Cottage Hospital as a Nurses' Residence in 1928.



Grosse Pointe Historical Society plaque

Call (313) 884-7010 to Volunteer.

Not Yet a Member? Want to donate?

Visit [www.gphistorical.org](http://www.gphistorical.org)

for a convenient way to do both. Select the link "Join & Support GPHS."

# The Last Ribbon Farm

by Thomas G. Peck

## GROSSE POINTE HISTORICAL SOCIETY RESEARCH MONOGRAPH

*“Let us never forget that the cultivation of the earth is the most important labor of man. When tillage begins, other arts follow. The farmers, therefore, are the founders of civilization.”*

- Daniel Webster

I first heard of the Detroit region’s ribbon farms in grade school. The concept of dividing long, narrow strips of land for agriculture seemed quaint, and rather bizarre. For many years afterward, I assumed that all traces of these tracts had vanished in the expansion of the city and its suburbs.

In fact, the William Michaux Farm – the last farm in the Grosse Pointes that could trace its origins back to the earliest years of the French colonial administration – continued to operate into the 1980s, more than 200 years after the French flag last flew over the strait that gave its name to a city.

### HISTORY OF THE RIBBON FARMS

The history of the ribbon farms helps us view the heritage and eventual fate of the Michaux Farm with historical perspective.

When Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac and his party of 50 French soldiers, 50 *coureurs de bois* and 100 Indians established the settlement named Detroit in 1701,<sup>1</sup> Cadillac hoped to improve both France’s strategic position in North America and his own financial prospects.

With the construction of Fort Pontchartrain du Detroit on a narrow strait that controlled access to the upper Great Lakes, Cadillac intended to bar British

fur traders from operating in that region and thus maintain France’s dominance of the fur trade west of the Appalachians. He also planned to entice French and French-Canadian settlers to Detroit by establishing farms that would make the settlement self-sustaining.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to being commandant of the fort and holding the fur trade monopoly, Cadillac had even grander aspirations to become the *seigneur*, or feudal landowner, of the region. Such an appointment from King Louis XIV would entitle Cadillac to grant land tracts to recipients, who were called “habitants”, and to receive certain signs of fealty and homage from them. On a more practical level, he could charge the habitants rent, retain 1/14th of any grain they ground at his mill on the riverbank, and compel them to work a specified number of days each year on his own farm.<sup>3</sup>

Cadillac never received a *seigneurie*, but

Continued on page II

## Michaux Farm

by Kay Burt-Willson

*It was rather like a ghost, something that was there but can no longer be seen.*

That describes what once was the William Michaux farm.

One can drive on Vernier from Jefferson toward Mack and find Michaux Lane. Turning onto the lane, one sees lovely homes on what was the last working farm in all of the Pointes. Imagine the barn, horses, chickens, rows of corn, the large garden of raspberry plants, and the greenhouse. That is where William Michaux and his wife Mary (LeFevre) bought these four acres of land from a Frenchman. It had been carved out of what had been a ribbon farm of the original French *habitants* (farmers) of Grosse Pointe.

But for brothers Harold Jr. and Ken Michaux, who live in Grosse

Pointe, it is a memory, not a romantic story of the past. Their grandfather, William, had passed the farm to their father, Harold Sr. There, he and his wife Doris (Boetcher) raised their five children, all doing chores on the farm.

There were flats of pansies to be planted in the greenhouse. The raspberries and corn needed to be picked, and boxed. And of course, there was the delicious raspberry jam that both grandmother Mary and mother Doris canned in the Michaux farmhouse kitchen. The children would sell these items to eagerly

Continued on page II



*Cadillac intended to bar British fur traders from operating in that region and thus maintain France’s dominance of the fur trade west of the Appalachians.*

# The Last Ribbon Farm

## GROSSE POINTE HISTORICAL SOCIETY RESEARCH MONOGRAPH

### Michaux Farm

Continued from page I

waiting neighbors who appreciated the farm-fresh foods and flowers.

The family also sold produce and flowers at Eastern Market. Harold recalls the very early mornings when his Dad would wake him and take him to the Market. They had to be there by 3:00 AM to set up their stand.

The farm provided the family with newly laid eggs, freshly killed chicken, and enough tender sweet corn to make up an entire meal. But growing up on the farm was not all work. Ken remembered "...playing hide-and-seek in the tall rows of corn." Harold Jr. said, "The barn was a great place for kids to play. I could look across the field and see my friend and off I'd go."

Over breakfast, Harold Jr. and Ken reminisced with me about the farm. We discussed the picture of Harold Sr. plowing his field with his two large draft horses. In the background are Vernier Road and the modern houses that stand there today. He worked that farm into the 1980s, the last of an era, living out the end of the farming family of Grosse Pointe.

What was once a historic family farm is now a place where many families live in twenty-first century comfort.

Continued from page I

he was allowed to grant land along the Detroit River and to collect rent from the grantees. From 1707 to 1711, he transferred possession of 68 small lots within the boundaries of Fort Pontchartrain and an additional 75 larger land tracts outside the fort.

These larger tracts were often called "ribbon farms" because of their long and narrow shape. They varied in length from 1½ to three miles, and in width from one arpent to five. (An arpent was a French unit of measurement equal to 192.5 feet.) The longest of the farms stretched back into the woods as far as what would later become Harper Avenue.<sup>4</sup>

*The names of original ribbon-farm grantees can be found today in many Detroit-area streets that run north and south, such as **Beaubien, Chene, Dequindre and St. Aubin.***<sup>6</sup>

Each of the ribbon farms had the Detroit River or Lake St. Clair as its southern boundary. Since there were virtually no roads in the region, the farmers required an accessible water route for transporting their produce to market at the fort in Detroit.<sup>5</sup>

The names of original ribbon-farm grantees can be found today in many Detroit-area streets that run north and south, such as Beaubien, Chene, Dequindre and St. Aubin.<sup>6</sup>

About 45 of the larger grants were situated northeast of the fort, extending past Isle Aux Cochons (Belle Isle) into the present-day Grosse Pointes. Additional tracts ran roughly three miles west of the fort along the river, stopping at the outskirts of a Potawatomi village near where Fort Wayne would later be constructed.

### FRANCE LOSES POWER

Cadillac was removed as commandant of Detroit in 1710 and appointed governor of Louisiana - a promotion with disastrous financial consequences, as Cadillac's successors made use of the real estate he owned without compensating him for it.

The death in 1715 of his powerful patron, King Louis XIV, was a heavy blow to Cadillac. The French Royal Council decreed that Cadillac had no right to the land in the Detroit region,<sup>7</sup> and in 1716 the administrators of New France cancelled all of his land grants.<sup>8</sup> The commanders who succeeded Cadillac

granted dozens of farmland tracts to French settlers along the Detroit River and the River Rouge.<sup>9</sup>

Detroit surrendered to the British in November of 1760, and - along with all of France's other territory in the New World - was ceded to England under the 1763 Treaty of Paris.

The British, who held possession of Detroit until 1796, did not recognize the legitimacy of land grants made during the region's six decades under the French crown. Further, since the Royal Proclamation of 1763 forbade establishing European settlements in the Great Lakes region, the military commanders at Detroit had no authority to convey land to any settlers for most of the period of British rule.<sup>10</sup>

### DETROIT AREA LAND CHANGES HANDS

The Detroit region's European population had increased steadily, from 450 in 1750 to 2,012 in 1782. Since



# The Last Ribbon Farm

## GROSSE POINTE HISTORICAL SOCIETY RESEARCH MONOGRAPH

only three percent of the residents were English, Irish or Scottish, most of that growth came within the ranks of the French settlers. Younger generations of habitants, seeking land on which to work and raise their own families, had bought small tracts from the Chippewa, Ottawa and Potawatomi tribes – transactions that were also not recognized by the British authorities.<sup>11</sup>

After the United States took possession of the Detroit region in 1796, all landholders were required to obtain legal status for their properties.

In 1808, the U.S. government deeded to Francois Bonhomme a parcel of realty that included a strip along the northern side of what is now Vernier Road in Grosse Pointe Shores. Bonhomme's claim apparently was based upon one of the original ribbon farms that extended 1½ miles inland from Lake St. Clair, but was only 830 feet wide along the shoreline.<sup>12</sup>

In 1871, the Michaux family apparently purchased a few lots from the Bonhomme claim.<sup>13</sup> However, in a 1978 newspaper article, William J. ("Bill") Michaux, the last of his family to farm the property, stated that his grandmother, a widow who emigrated from Belgium in 1858, bought the land from the Verniers.<sup>14</sup>

An 1876 "Map of Grosse Pointe Township", owned by the Grosse Pointe Historical Society, indicates the owner of the above real estate to be "R. Michaw". (For consistency and to avoid confusion, I will continue to refer to the family's surname as "Michaux".) This map also indicates that a "D. Vernier" owned the adjacent lot west of the Michaux tract,

plus a separate parcel to the east that ran all the way to Lake St. Clair. A small holding, whose owner was identified only as "M.M.", separated the Michaux parcel's eastern boundary from the "D. Vernier" lakefront property. West of the "D. Vernier" inland parcel was a farm owned by "L. Vanderbush" that, according to the map, was at least as large as the Michaux, "D. Vernier" and "M.M." lots combined.

### TURN OF THE CENTURY BRINGS CHANGE

By the turn of the 20th Century, the Michaux family had increased its holdings to nearly 12 acres. The surrounding area was farmland<sup>15</sup> that was gradually subdivided for homes, or sold for school property.

The next-to-last farm in the area belonged to the Venderbushes, who sold their 30-acre property to the Grosse Pointe School system in the 1960s; it is the site of Grosse Pointe North High School.<sup>16</sup>

Bill Michaux was born in 1888 or 1889 in a farmhouse that still stands at 76 Vernier Road. The house was built by his parents, John Michaux and Alice Wedyke Michaux. John Michaux was employed for 21 years by a Mr. Lothrop, who owned one of the large estates in the Grosse Pointe area. Bill married Mary LeFevre, whose parents, like Bill's grandmother, had been born in the region of Belgium that is near France. Bill and Mary initially lived near Mack Avenue, in an area that became the Village of Lochmoor and is now part of the City of Grosse Pointe Woods. Bill was one of the

Continued on page IV



The Venderbush Farm, the site of Grosse Pointe North High School before it was built.



Beginning construction of Grosse Pointe North High School.

### NOTES

1 Bald, F. Clever, *Michigan In Four Centuries*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), p. 49.

2 Bald, pp. 47-48.

3 Bald, p. 53.

4 Bald, pp. 53-54.

5 Bald, p. 54.

6 Bald p. 54.

7 Bald p. 56.

8 Teasdale, Guillaume, PhD, "Contested Public Property in the Detroit River Region after the British Conquest: The French Commons", (2012 Canadian Historical Association Annual Meeting, Waterloo, Ontario); <http://www.uwindsor.ca/history/Guillaume.Teasdale>, p. 7.

9 Teasdale, p. 2.

10 Teasdale, p.4.

# The Last Ribbon Farm

## GROSSE POINTE HISTORICAL SOCIETY RESEARCH MONOGRAPH

Continued from page III

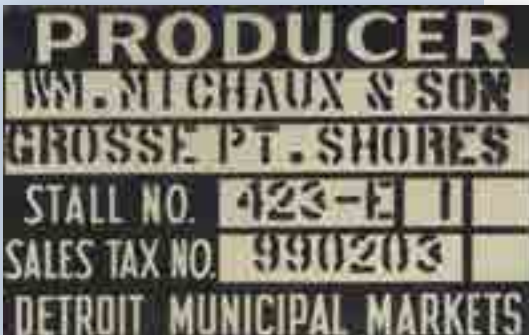
village founders, and served it as a councilman for eight years. He and Mary later moved into the Vernier Road farmhouse, where they raised their family.<sup>17</sup>

Bill and Mary's sons, Norman and Harold, worked on the farm with their parents, growing vegetables that they sold at the Detroit Municipal (Eastern) Market.<sup>18</sup> Their stall's sign, later donated to the Grosse Pointe Historical Society, identifies the produce vendor as "Wm. Michaux & Sons" of Grosse Pointe Shores.

Finding it difficult to hire laborers after Norman died of a heart attack at age 32, in 1957, Bill began selling off parcels of the property and winding down operations. By September 1970 the farm had only four acres, but it contained a well-maintained red barn, a chicken house, greenhouses and a vegetable patch. The family grew

The farm that they – and several previous generations of their family – lived and labored on for over a century has been swallowed up over the years by single-family homes, by the expansion of the Grosse Pointe Shores municipal buildings, and by adjoining recreational areas. Other than the farmhouse itself, the only physical reminders of the Michaux family on the land they once owned are Michaux Court and Michaux Lane, which are in a subdivision just north of Vernier Road and west of the Grosse Pointe Shores municipal offices.

Bill Michaux did not fit the stereotype of the farmer whose topics of conversation were limited to soil and weather conditions, or crop prices. Civic-minded and knowledgeable about local history, he also had a wry sense of humor, once telling a newspaper reporter that during his tenure as a village councilman he had



*By September 1970 the farm had only four acres, but it contained a well-maintained red barn, a chicken house, greenhouses and a vegetable patch.*

enough vegetables to feed its members, selling any surplus to longtime customers. Bill and Mary's surviving son, Harold, and three of his children helped work the farm.

Bill's wife, Mary, died in 1975 at age 85; Bill passed away the following year at 87.<sup>19</sup>

"conscientiously spent the taxpayers' money".<sup>20</sup> But he was passionate about the way he chose to make a living, according to a former neighbor, who recalled him describing the topsoil on his farm as the "good, black dirt".<sup>21</sup>

Daniel Webster surely would have understood.



### EDITOR'S NOTE:

The stories on these pages are tangible evidence of the depth and scope of the archives at The Alfred B. and Ruth S. Moran Resource Center. The Grosse Pointe Historical Society's mission is to preserve the stories of our past. We can help you continue the tapestry of your family's story.

Contact us at: [gphistorical.org](http://gphistorical.org) and begin to uncover the treasure of your legacy.

11 Teasdale, p. 4.

12 Eckman, Beverly, "Grosse Pointe's last farmer holds firm to the land", Detroit, The Detroit News, September 29, 1970.

13 Eckman.

14 Spilos, Steve, "Grosse Pointe Farmhouse Sustains Bill's Memory", Grosse Pointe, Grosse Pointe Herald, September 14, 1978.

15 Eckman.

16 Eckman.

17 Spilos.

18 Eckman.

19 Spilos

20 Spilos.

21 Eckman.



Continued from page 4

Carey designed the building.

The Hospital's founder, Mrs. John S. Newberry, developed the original concept of a residence for nurses. Her husband provided funds to build it as a Christmas gift for her. The building has been preserved and repurposed throughout its life.

The third award-winner, 38 McKinley Place in Grosse Pointe Farms, has been a family home for 50 years.

This home was built in 1914 and designed by renowned architect C. Howard Crane. It is in the Arts and Craft style, and has been restored with utmost respect for its original architectural elements such as the interior paneling, wooden floors, original light fixtures, pocket doors, and many other features.

Properties for consideration are suggested to the Grosse Pointe Historical Society by Trustees, Society members, and the community at large. A list is compiled and the committee then vets each nominated property.

The proposed sites are evaluated on three general criteria. Is it an historical landmark? Is the property or one of its former residents associated with events that made a contribution to the history of the community? Does the property represent the work of an important architect and have artistic value?

The bronze historic plaque markers bear the image of the logo of the Grosse Pointe Historical Society – a French windmill that once stood on the shore of Lake St. Clair in the 1700s.

When a plaque is awarded, a member of the committee meets with the property owner and the plaque is mounted on the building. The plaque then becomes part of the property and remains with it as part of its historic legacy.



Cottage Hospital as a Nurses' Residence in 1966.



Grosse Pointe Memorial Church



The first Grosse Pointe Memorial Church.

## Search and Research...

The Grosse Pointe area is a microcosm of the social, political and economic history of Southeastern Michigan. There are stories still to be shared about the people who have been part of this legacy.

The Grosse Pointe Historical Society is looking for those stories. We have begun a research project that will collect information about folks who have settled here – Native Americans, African Americans, Western

Europeans, Latinos (including South Americans, Mexicans, Cubans, Central Americans), Middle Easterners, Eastern Europeans, Asians.

Provide us with contact information and we will do the rest.

Send your contact information to: [info@gphistorical.org](mailto:info@gphistorical.org) with the subject line: Research.

### Kroger Rewards Program

Help GPHS every time you shop at Kroger. Visit [www.gphistorical.org](http://www.gphistorical.org) for details.



### [www.Smile.Amazon.com](http://www.Smile.Amazon.com)

The next time you shop at amazon.com, key in [www.smile.amazon.com](http://www.smile.amazon.com) You will be directed to select your organization. Complete your order as usual and a portion of your sale will be **donated to the Grosse Pointe Historical Society.**



Come enjoy a TCBY yogurt treat and help us raise money for Grosse Pointe Historical Society 10% of sales will be donated.

**TUESDAY, JUNE 2 7P.M. TO 10 P.M.**

**TCBY 17045 Kercheval (in the Village)**

**313.885.0384**

[www.tcb.com/inthevillage](http://www.tcb.com/inthevillage)

## Some Enchanted Evening: The Home



Industrialist John B. Ford, Jr., built the home. The automotive designer Harley Earl and businessman-philanthropist Lester Ruwe were subsequent owners.

August Geiger was commissioned by Mr. Ford in 1929 to design a home in Grosse Pointe similar to the home that Geiger had built for Mr. Ford in Florida. Geiger, a noted designer in south Florida, had created hundreds of buildings there – resorts, hotels, schools, hospitals, court houses, private homes – in a distinctive architectural style that evoked the palaces and seaside villas of the Mediterranean.

The home features a rectangular floor plan, with a classical, symmetrical façade, arched windows, dramatic ornamentation and beautiful gardens. Each first-floor room opens onto a terrace; each terrace echoes the design and ornamentation of the room to which it is attached. Fountains and garden statuary give added visual interest to a classical landscape.

“It is remarkable that the home is virtually the same as when it was built. We are grateful that subsequent owners were such careful stewards of this incredible art,” said Stuart Grigg, co-chair of *Some Enchanted Evening*.

About the architect: Born in 1887 in New Haven, Connecticut, Geiger completed his formal education at Boardman’s Manual Training School, where he mastered skills in drafting, mechanics, woodworking and metalworking. He took a position with a New Haven firm to study architecture. In 1905, Geiger moved to Miami and worked for a local architect until 1915, when he opened his own practice in Palm Beach.



Photos: Robin M Photography

The original owner: John B. Ford, Jr., of the Ford Glass Family, was a respected industrialist and businessman. The grandson of Captain John Ford, founder of Pittsburgh Plate Glass, and son of Edward Ford, of Toledo Glass, John Ford, Jr. was president of Michigan Alkali for 50 years; founded Portland Cement; served as a director in the Libbey-Owens-Ford Co. and had interests in coal and shipping companies. Mr. Ford was responsible for building Wyandotte General Hospital, funding the Detroit Symphony and donating generously to the Community Fund. The Ford family lived at 217 Touraine until his death in 1941.





The next owners of the home, **Mrs. and Mrs. Harley Earl**, were responsible for the name by which it is known today in Grosse Pointe, "**The Harley Earl House.**" Mr. Earl's contributions to the automobile industry and automotive design set him apart as an innovator and creator. As an industrial designer and first director of styling in the automobile industry, Mr. Earl originated clay modeling of automotive designs, the wrap-

around windshield, the hardtop sedan, factory two-tone paint, the concept car, the prototype for the Corvette, and tail-fins. Some of these innovations were scrutinized and first displayed in the motor court, carriage house and garages at 217 Touraine.

Third owners: Ruth E. and Lester F. Ruwe were notable for their work for the Republican Party. Their home was a backdrop for their extensive collections



of Russian art, *objets de vertu*, European furniture and decorative arts, American and European paintings, silver, porcelain, rugs and carpets.

The current owners, **James and Nicole Rahaim**, have preserved and restored the home to curatorial standards, while maintaining the tradition of a grand family home which is exceptionally welcoming to guests and events.

## THANK YOU – Dishwasher Donation

The KitchenAid dishwasher was on its last cycle. In its 40 or so years of service, it had washed, scrubbed and cleaned hundreds of pieces of china, silver and glassware.

In the last two issues of Moorings, the Society noted that we were in need of a replacement for the tired dishwasher.

Last month, three members of the Optimist Club of Grosse Pointe, Don Beardsley, Dave Hohlfeldt and John Koski, arranged for a new dishwasher to be installed in the Provencal-Weir House.

Thank you to Don, Dave and John for this generous donation.

## Grosse Pointe Historical Society

381 Kercheval Avenue  
Grosse Pointe Farms, MI 48236

(313) 884-7010 **Phone**

(313) 884-7699 **Fax**

Non Profit Org  
U.S. Postage  
**PAID**  
Detroit, MI  
Permit No. 41

**E-MAIL:** [info@gphistorical.org](mailto:info@gphistorical.org)

**HOURS:** Tues. & Wed.: 10:00 a.m.– 12:30 p.m.  
1:30 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

**WEB SITE:** [www.gphistorical.org](http://www.gphistorical.org)

## Warren Scripps Wilkinson will be remembered



**Warren Scripps Wilkinson**

February 2, 1920 –  
May 17, 2015

***Visionary  
Philanthropist  
Historian  
Friend***

Warren Scripps Wilkinson was a friend, supporter of the Grosse Pointe Historical Society, his influence and vision for us resonates through our mission and work.

Warren was knowledgeable about “what matters” to preserving and promoting local history and understood the importance of making the Archives accessible. When we offered him projects, he gravitated to digitizing our resources, and supported this work for several years. It led to nice discoveries in the collection, which managers of the project would share with him, when he stopped by the Resource Center, which he did periodically.

Warren and Mereille were supportive, permission-giving, and engaged in the Summer Gala that they hosted on our behalf.

They were the first homeowners to allow us to publicly promote the gala, thereby putting us on the path to raising more money.. and increasing the overall activities and budget for the Society.

Attuned to the details of the built environment, Warren was instrumental in efforts to maintain Woodland Place as a brick-paved street. And when we approached him about support for the Grosse Pointe City Survey, a project to inventory the buildings in Grosse Pointe City, Warren was immediately responsive, and a major supporter of that project.

Warren will be remembered as a friend always eager to learn more and because he could, share it with others.

Warren, died May 17, 2015, at his Grosse Pointe home at age 95.