

Historical Society's First Years

By Betty Bradbury

The Orchard Lake Scenic and Historical Society was formed on January 26, 1974, to bring together people interested in preserving the scenic and historic values of the surrounding area.

Nine people were elected to the Board of Directors and officers were voted in at the organizing meeting at Abbott School. They were: the Rev. Walter J. Ziemba, president; Mel Rycus, vice president; Frances Gadd, secretary; Doris Bonneville, treasurer; General F. S. Strong, Jr., Rita Spiterey, Dr. Roger Garvelink, Agnes Patterson and 13-year-old Sam Stephen.

According to longtime member Doris Bonneville, activities of the first years are much like those of today with activities, acquisitions and fundraisers.

In summer 1974, the new group held its first Fourth of July picnic at Orchard Lake Schools. The first annual meeting was held at Orchard Lake Middle School on October 7, 1974, with historian Charles Martinez as speaker. For holiday giving, Society members reproduced an 1896 West Bloomfield Township map on parchment-like paper to sell for \$2 each.

At the November 4, 1974, meeting, the society members voted to increase the Board from nine to 15 people, and elected Evelyn Alix, Tom Jansen, Jessie McGhee, Doris Singelyn, Ann Sutschek and L. Sue Warner as new board members. The Society began receiving archival objects, with the largest number of 1975 gifts coming from the family of Bertha and Fred Wilkins.

On May 8, 1978, the society changed its name, but not its purpose, to the Greater West Bloomfield Historical Society to more closely identify to the four separate communities in the West Bloomfield area - Keego Harbor, Sylvan Lake, Orchard Lake and West Bloomfield Township.

Meetings were held in homes, schools, fire stations, area churches, the Sylvan Lake Community Center and at Orchard Lake Schools. In 1987, with the City of Orchard Lake offices moving to a new building, the Society was offered its present home, and museum, at the corner of Orchard Lake and Long Lake roads.