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Eastern Michigan University

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Building 278 at Detroit Metro Airport:
Empty and Waiting for One Student's Cause Celebré.

By John Bowyer

INTRODUCTION: As we have occasion to visit Metro Airport we are probably concerned with flight times or traffic congestion. News items about the airport generally announce the opening of more parking facilities or the planning of a new terminal complex. But as historic preservation students can also take note of a remarkable building that represents the history of the airport.

As commercial aviation became more important during the 1920s, Wayne County officials recognized the necessity of providing an airport for the area. In 1927 a one square mile site at Wick Road and Middlebelt Road in Romulus was developed for this purpose. Although portions of the original runways and a Works Progress Administration building also remain, the center piece of this early airport was the main hanger building, Building 278.

For the dedication of the hanger, county officials thought it would be nice to invite farmers back to see their former farmsteads - from the air! A Ford trimotor airplane was made available to the farmers for a free flight over the new hanger and airport.

ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE: The hanger represents historic period architecture and appears to be an example of Modernism. Both Moderne and Art Deco design elements can be seen in its construction. The facade features elements that are streamlined as well as zig zag, and chevron geometric patterns. Constructed of steel, concrete, and amber brick, the hanger is equipped with large sliding steel and glass doors on all four sides. The building, which is 3 stories high and measures 434' by 128', is topped at each end by steel and glass observation towers.

Although referred to as a hanger, Building 278 was much more. When the building opened on September 4, 1930 it was considered one of the best equipped structures of its kind in the country. Observation towers, offices, public lounge, pilot's room, parachute packing room, parachute drying shaft, locker rooms, showers, toilets, automatic elevators and machine shops were some of the conveniences built in.

For this writer, however, the most interesting feature can not even be seen unless you happen to be flying over the hanger. On the roof of the hanger between the 2 towers are horizontal 15' letters that spell "Wayne County Airport". These letters were constructed of laid in chrome, and bright yellow, glazed, vitreous tile. Used at one time to identify the airport, they were originally outlined in neon. They have now been dark for several decades.

EMPTY AND WAITING: Really the fact that the building still exists at all is amazing. The value of land at any major airport is at a premium. As the need for expansion to accommodate more air travelers has grown, airports have struggled to keep up, often demolishing early airport structures. Such structures as Building 278, that are only minimally altered and in good repair, are rarely found intact at major metropolitan airports.

As the airport has expanded to 6 times its original size, the hanger has served a variety of purposes. However, at this point in time it is vacant. Wayne County Executive Edward McNamara and Airport Director Robert Braun have both expressed interest in preserving the building. They have considered several uses including housing a collection of historical aircraft in the hanger. But for now the hanger waits.

So next time you visit the airport or as you pass it on I-94, enjoy the view of a real piece of aviation history.

John Bowyer is a graduate student in the historic preservation program at EMU and a 20 year employee of Wayne County.
YOU ARE INVITED TO -
AN END OF THE YEAR BASH - APRIL 29TH

Preservation Eastern and Janet Kreger are hosting a potluck party on Saturday, April 29th, to celebrate the end of the Winter Semester and the beginnings of the Spring and Summer Semesters. Janet Kreger has kindly offered the facilities at her condominium complex to host the party. Beer, wine, juice and soda will be provided, but we ask that everyone bring a dish to share for dinner. There will be food sign-up sheets on the Historic Preservation bulletin boards outside of Room 205 and Ted Ligibel's office, in order to prevent too many people from bringing stuffed cabbage. (Have you ever been to a Polish Potluck?) Invitations with a map will be prepared and distributed to all a couple of weeks before the party. Everyone is welcome and encouraged to come.

WHERE: Janet Kreger's Condominium Complex (Maps will be provided).
WHEN: Saturday, April 29th, 1995, 7:30 - 11:30 PM.
WHO: Faculty, Adjunct Faculty, Students, Alumni, Preservation Easterners, and families.
BRING: A dish to pass. (Sign-Up sheets are posted on the Historic Preservation Bulletin Boards.

We Are Looking for Speakers for Next Year.

Preservation Eastern would like to start lining up speakers for next fall and winter semester. We hope to set up a couple of speakers panels about current issues prevalent in the Michigan historic preservation community, such as - The Empowerment Issue in Detroit, African-Americans in Historic Preservation, Native-Americans in Historic Preservation, Downtown Development and Historic Preservation Planning in Michigan, Living History, Reenactment and Interpretation.

We also would like to encourage faculty, alumni, students, local preservationists, state-wide preservationists and nation-wide preservationists to come in and share their experiences and research with Preservation Eastern.

If you are interested in, or know of anyone who may be interested in, talking to Preservation Eastern next fall or winter, please call Heather Richards at 434-9463. Also let us know if you would like to help coordinate one of the panels.

PRESERVATION EASTERN OFFICERS FOR 1995
Director - Heather Richards
Treasurer - Julie Letendre
Activities - Kirk Bunke and Laura Manker
Public Relations - Amy Arnold and Heather Aldridge
Newsletter Editor - Heather Richards
INTRODUCTION:
Perhaps what is most telling about the responses Preservation Eastern received for this newsletter supplement about the role of interpretation in historic preservation, is the fact that only those people whose field is "traditionally" linked with interpretation responded. Dr. Gabe Cherem and Lloyd Baldwin are both students and teachers of heritage interpretation. John Gibney and Mark St. John are both reenactors and living historians. Robert Burg, Heather Richards and Kerrington Adams all worked at one time for a history museum. Where are the so-called "non-traditional" interpretation fields? Where are the planners, the administrators, the fund-raisers, the bricks and mortar technologists? In a program of over eighty students, with the majority of the students studying historic preservation planning, I was very surprised to find that no planning students responded to this question. Is that due to time constraints? Or is it due to the fact that preservation planners believe that the question of interpretation and authenticity do not apply to them? In reality, the lack of planning responses is probably due to both reasons, however the more interesting reason to explore is the latter.

What is interpretation? As defined by the Webster's Dictionary it is "the act or result of explanation, meaning, translation, exposition, etc." Essentially it is education. Isn't education the ultimate goal of any historic preservationist's job? Why would we ever try to save buildings, landscapes, scenic vistas, historic communities, etc., if we weren't trying to save these resources for the enjoyment and benefit of the general public? And wouldn't part of that public enjoyment come from sort of educational device? Think about historical markers, house plaques, brochures, research papers, comprehensive plans, etc. These all involve some means of interpretation. How many times have we walked by a historical marker with a date on it that we knew was wrong - a Colonial Greek Revival house with a plaque proclaiming 1727 and no explanation of the architectural evolution of that house. I wholeheartedly believe, that we as historic preservationists, need to always be aware of the message we are giving to the general public, be it in the traditional manner of living history and museums, or in the much more subtle manner of historic preservation planning and community development.

THE CALL FOR PAPERS . . . .
This Preservation Eastern Newsletter supplement's call for papers read as follows: Tell us what your thoughts and opinions on the role of interpretation in historic preservation. Is this something that we need to concern ourselves with? If so, to what extent?

The question is deliberately vague so that you will think about your individual interests in historic administration, planning and heritage tourism - think about your experiences in living history, museums, planning, tours, surveys and writing, etc. Think about the dilemma of authenticity and education in terms of the audience.

TABLE OF CONTENTS:
Dr. Gabe Cherem .......... Page ii
Lloyd Baldwin .............. Page ii
John Gibney ................. Page iii
Mark St. John .............. Page v
Robert Burg ................. Page vi
Heather Richards .......... Page vii
Kerrington Adams .......... Page viii
Interpretation helps us to define these issues and place them in appropriate contexts. Interpretation gives us tools to explain the push-pull factors that created our built environment in ways that are accessible to a broad range of people, especially those who may not have displayed a professed interest in preservation or cultural history. Handled properly, the liveliness of interpretation can be an irresistible "hook" without the general stuffiness of the scholar or the hucksterism of the booster.

A very important - I would say critical - role that interpretation must play is in the challenge of community building. One element of this is in a form of heritage tourism for locals that takes heritage interpretation out of the museums and into the street. What I mean here is an approach to reintroduce, if not to introduce for the first time, residents to the place in which they reside. Through a variety of programs designed to reach defined groups (Target Guest Groups) we can make the community more accessible, more alive, more important. These programs would strive to celebrate the contributions of the various groups (ethnic, racial, political, religious, economic) of people, male and female, to the making of the community. This is what makes a community unique, this is what makes a place real. Through cultural education we can give people a richer understanding, and hence, attachment, to the places they reside, work, and play.

A very important - I would say critical - role that interpretation must play is in the challenge of community building. . . I firmly believe that the future health, economic and social, of a place is fastened to an appreciation for the heritage of the community and to a concerted attempt to preserve and utilize that heritage.

Standardization, an icon of the industrial age, has become an element in the contemporary landscape. The approach to just about any city or town is fast beginning to look like the approach to any other. Downtowns, in their struggle to compete with these fringe developments have attempted over the years to redefine their role and image, often with the notion that the bulldozer is a first step and standardized facelessness is desirable. In recent years many cities have sought to restore their older business sections, but often do so only to fill them with faceless enterprise following standardized marketing plans.

It isn't simple economics at play here. The myriad of planners have forgotten to look at and define the community heritage, those very elements that make a community unique, that make a community. Heritage Interpretation provides that link. Through interpretation the planner has a better sense of the integral themes of the place and can recognize the areas of continuity and divergence in the growth/decline cycles each community undergoes. For the resident-citizen, a grasp of community heritage act as an impetus for their involvement in directing the course the community will take. I firmly believe that the future health, economic and social, of a place is fastened to an appreciation for the heritage of the community and to a concerted attempt to preserve and utilize that heritage.

Change is inevitable, but change that is linked closely with the local heritage is less dislocating in the physical and psychological sense. It allows change to be tempered with an appreciation for those elements that created the basis for change in the first place. It also allows for creative solutions which can comfortably blend modern function within a physical and cultural framework that is already in place and which carries a strong cultural and ecological value.

JOHN GIBNEY

John Gibney is an adjunct instructor of living history in the EMU Historic Preservation program. He also teaches Civil War History at Washtenaw Community College. He has been a curriculum and enrichment consultant for both schools and historic sites, and in that capacity has presented several hundred living history educational programs. He has over thirty-five years of reenacting experience, and participated in the filming of both "Gettysburg" and "Glory". John Gibney is a graduate of the EMU Historic Preservation program, and has professional certification from the University of Michigan specializing in living history.

Can we justify wasting time and resources documenting structures that occupy space that might be better utilized for projects like low-income housing? Can we explain our opposition to a project by the LION KING of children's entertainment that would bring hundreds of jobs to depressed Virginia in the name of history? Can we justify preservation, let alone its interpretation?

This "art" is interpretation. It is the process of breathing life back into the artifacts and the spiritual illumination of the dark interiors behind the facades.
MARK ST. JOHN

Mark St. John is a second year graduate student in the Heritage Interpretation track of the Historic Preservation Program at EMU. He is an active Civil War Reenactor.

Some Musings on Clio’s Dress; or, Thoughts on Authenticity and Interpretation

If you ever have the urge to raise ire and promote discord, start talking about authenticity in the presence of Civil War Reenactors - or Living Historians in general. So much flies in the name of who's or what's authentic versus farby (inauthentic) that you'll swear that you're in the company of the largest assemblage of foolish "experts" ever assembled. Yet, of course, there is no way to ethically avoid the subject when discussing the fashion in which historic information is passed on to the public. The truth must be clearly depicted in every case, lest grave disservice be done to all assembled to listen. So then, if something is claimed to be true, it should be so, to the best (and well researched) knowledge of the interpreter. This, dear reader, is where a great deal of trouble arises.

Civil War (and most military) reenactors/living historians are largely amateur historians - they do it for the love of it, not for a living. So far, so noble. Many have had a smattering of historic study but are not keenly familiar with historiography. They may be inclined to mistake extrapolated knowledge, something that "sounds about right," for actual knowledge. This is then passed on to the public, with potentially disastrous results (from an historian's viewpoint). None regard spreading untruths as good.

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In the 1960's, during the Civil War Centennial, seeing Confederates wearing grey shirts from Sears and Yankees with blue jeans was not altogether unusual. Today that would not be a problem, as most groups tend to police uniform styling well. Rather, it is in the representation of accoutrements and daily life that today's reenactor will likely fall down. Many times these will seem to be small things, like the wrong canteen, or belt buckle, etc. More likely it will be incorrect depiction of camp settings - tent styles, arrangements, and the like. Modern things may intrude - water faucets, fences, or asphalt paths. A most important farbism is the depiction of "authentically" dressed civilians living in tent cities adjacent to the military camps. "Authentically" is in quotes because while the formal ball gown may be appropriate to 1863, the wearing of the same by people who would live near a military camp is not so. One may wonder also about the close proximity of Union and Confederate troops.

These matters may be overlooked however, if the public can accept that the limitations of the site may force such compromises. The public may also be able to refocus its view in regard to ball-gowned civilians by judging context on its own terms. As long as other educational activity is going on, with veracity, the public receives its due.

These things become farbisms when the living historians attempt to pass all things off as fact without prefacing the certain, necessary deviations. First person interpretation (adopting aod staying in character) will necessarily push off anything said as the truth; if you are portraying General R.E. Lee, what you say as him will likely be perceived as his viewpoint, even though it is undocumented as such.

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"So what?" the promoters say; as long as the public gets something it likes and buys all sorts of crap from the vendors...(who, as a side note, would not be found in the form they are anywhere near military camps). This is the ever-present danger with reenacting/living history. There are all sorts of ways to keep the public fat, dumb, and happy that do not involve spreading untruths. Cedar Point is a great daytime trip - and no one learns lies there. If the context of history is to be used, then history must be given. History is the assembly of facts (to the best of our knowledge) discussing past events; it then behooves us to stick to facts, and to delineate them from deviations.

Having said all this, do not despair for the poor world of living history. Most reenactors will amend inauthenticity when it is found or pointed out; most, in fact, care a great deal about what they are doing and are aware of their responsibility to the public. Most are participants because they love to learn and help others do as well. Looking up Clio's Dress will reveal that she is dressed appropriately - the secret's in letting the public know this.
I hope that I have explained this so that you are no longer confused about my view that interpretation is preservation and preservation is interpretation. The two are very important to someone working in the field of public history, because invariably, no matter what your expertise is, you will be involved with one or the other at some point in time.

HEATHER RICHARDS

Heather Richards is a first-year student in the Historic Preservation Program at EMU. She is interested in historic preservation planning and heritage interpretation. She transferred from the University of Oregon to pursue her interests at EMU.

The following is an excerpt of a paper that she wrote for a conference on interpretation in Oregon. Historic Deerfield is a colonial settlement in the Connecticut River Valley of Massachusetts that has essentially been preserved as a living history museum.

I'll never forget that day when Philip Zea demolished my romantic vision of Colonial interiors filled with lovely old wooden furniture, home-spun textiles, and numerous decorative accessories, such as looking glasses, candle holders, miniature storage chests, etc. I was interning at Historic Deerfield in Deerfield, Massachusetts helping Philip Zea, the Curator, furnish the North Parlor of a recently restored Federal-era house, the E.H. Williams House. I couldn't help but express my surprise at the final arrangement of the room. The chairs were lined up against the wall like soldiers standing at attention. The center of the room was empty. Accessories were minimal. Only the upholstered sofa, which also stood at attention against the wall, looked even remotely inviting. The room seemed empty, austere, stark and formal, not at all similar to the fancy parlors I remember seeing in other house museums, with numerous tables, upholstered chairs, ornate tea sets, and elaborate, heavy textiles. He explained to me that the historic house museums which I enjoyed visiting unfortunately misguided my vision of period rooms. In the past, curators designed period rooms with furniture that was historically associated with the architectural elements of the house, but with no regard to historical authenticity in terms of actual usage, consumption patterns and arrangement. Collectors exhibited their collections in a period setting but strictly as a visual display and not necessarily as an educational representation of daily life. The trend currently in historic house museums, Philip Zea explained to me, was to furnish a room as the inhabitants of the house would have furnished the room. Oftentimes this arrangement shocks the visitor who is accustomed to elaborately furnished rooms, since historically furniture was simply not as plentiful nor as affordable as is often depicted.

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The E.H. Williams House was an exciting project for Historic Deerfield, because the restoration and interpretation of the house was part of a new reinstallation plan adopted in 1985 that was a complete departure from the collections and connoisseurship mentality of the organization in the past. Historic Deerfield, Inc. voted to restore and interpret this house as authentically as possible, while supporting their interpretive decisions with exhaustive research.

Acquired by Historic Deerfield, Inc. in 1981, the E.H. Williams house had not yet been restored. (The Flynts, the founders of Historic Deerfield, often restored the interiors and exteriors of the houses propelled by their own interpretation of Colonial architecture, and many of the structural elements visible today are referred to as "Flynt Originals" by the curatorial staff.) William Flynt, Architectural Conservator at Historic Deerfield and grandson of the founders, painstakingly dissembled nineteenth and twentieth century alterations to the E.H. Williams House to discover clues about room configuration, missing architectural ornamentation, wallpaper and paint colors from E.H. Williams' occupation in the early-nineteenth century. Any necessary guesswork was thoroughly documented with historical research and evaluation. This same meticulous process was applied to furnishing the house.

In the 50s and 60s the trend was to show Colonial Deerfield's good taste and elegance with antiques and elaborate, over-decorated interiors. In the 80s and 90s, the trend is to show the process of restoration and interpretation.

Curator Phil Zea relied on an 1838 probate inventory taken shortly after Ebenezer's death to furnish the house. This inventory lists furnishings, textiles and decorative elements in each room as well as assessing monetary value to each piece. However the staff preferred not to
A History of the Straits of Mackinac by Bruce Lynn

The War of 1812 saw another power struggle for the Straits and its lucrative fur trade. The British were determined to regain the fort. They surprised the American garrison with one cannon shot (from behind the fort) and the American commander surrendered. A golden moment in American military history! The British retained control throughout the war only to lose the region after the Treaty of Ghent was signed, ending the hostilities.

The end of the War of 1812 marked the return of the fur trade to the Straits. John Jacob Astor became America's first millionaire as his Mackinac based American Fur Company flourished. It wasn't long though before the animals began to thin out and fishing became the vital industry. The 1830s saw Mackinac as the premier fishing and processing center of the upper Great Lakes.

After the Civil War, Mackinac's dependence on the fish trade gave way to tourism. Railroads and passenger ships were carrying hordes of invading travelers to sample the Island's charm, history and beauty. To compensate for this swell of tourists, the federal government created Mackinac National Park in 1875. The soldiers of the fort suddenly became caretakers of the United States's second national park! This scenario carried on for twenty years, when the fort was closed (military cutbacks) and the park was turned over to the state. The year was 1895 and Michigan had her first state park.

It has been one hundred years since this state park was created and in many ways Mackinac Island has not changed. A ban on automobiles in 1896 did much to retain the slower pace of this special island. Also not to be forgotten are the continuing efforts of the Mackinac State Historical Parks and its unbelievably talented staff. Many centennial celebration events are taking place this summer, so if you happen to get any free weekends this summer.....

Editor's Note: I first asked Bruce to write this article as a lead-in to a Preservation Eastern field trip we were planning for the first weekend in April to Mackinac Island. However, due to the timing in the semester, many people did not feel as though they could make the overnight trip in the midst of paper writing and preparing for finals. However, I decided to keep this article in the newsletter since it is the centennial of Mackinac Island as a park, and I encourage everyone to try and make the trip north some time in the upcoming year to visit the park.

A few weeks ago I was asked to contribute an article to the Preservation Eastern Newsletter that might give an "insiders" view to the administrative side of the Mackinac State Historic Parks. After having worked at Fort Mackinac as a historical interpreter for the last six summers, one might get the idea that I could do this with little or no problem, right? Well, let me put it this way, the fort guides were banished from the offices several years ago. Something about an alarming rate of coffee consumption. Perhaps a brief history of the Straits of Mackinac could serve as an introduction for the Preservation Eastern trip to this region in April.

"The home of the fish." This is what the Native Americans called the waterway that connected the upper Great Lakes. For centuries the Ojibwa (Chippewa) and the Odawa (Ottawa) thrived in the Straits of Mackinac. Of special fascination to these tribes was the hump-backed island that they came to call "Michilimackinac", Land of the Great Turtle. Mackinac Island to this day is a place of great spiritual importance to the Ojibwa and Odawa.

In 1634, a French explorer by the name of Jean Nicolet visited the straits while searching for a passage to China. Nicolet reported the vast numbers of animals in the area and triggered an extensive fur trade that would last for centuries.

French Missionaries came to the region in the 1670s, with Jesuit Priest Jacques Marquette establishing the mission of St. Ignatius Loyola on Mackinac Island. One year later they moved the mission to the northern portion of the Straits where present day St. Ignace is situated.

In 1715, the French Missionaries, traders and soldiers moved to the south side of the Straits (Mackinac City) and built Fort Michilimackinac. The British took command of this post at the end of the Seven Years War which confused the local tribes and led to a great deal of tension. Within two years the Ojibwa, Sac and Fox tribes, angered by British disrespect, attacked the fort and massacred most of its tiny garrison. A year later the British returned and trade flourished until the beginning of the American Revolutionary War.

The Revolution had an extreme impact on the Straits. The British commander of Michilimackinac, a Scottish officer named Patrick Sinclair, felt that his forces would not be able to defend the tiny fort in the case of an American attack. His concerns led him to begin construction of another fort on the high bluffs of Mackinac Island. The winter of 1781 saw soldiers and civilians alike making the move across the frozen Straits to their new island home. Fort Mackinac was still under construction when the British learned of the American victory at Yorktown. The Treaty of Paris deeded the Straits of Mackinac to the United States and in 1796 the first American troops marched into Fort Mackinac.
Conferences:

**Michigan in Perspective, 37th Annual Conference on Local History, Friday, April 7, and Saturday, April 8** - Topics include, Archival Projects, Current Research in Regional History, Oral History, Publishing Local History, Folklore and Historical Archaeology. There is no registration fee for students. Held at the Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan.

**History in the Re-Making, Saturday, April 8** - A one day conference for historic re-enactors to redefine historic re-enacting in the Great Lakes area to be held at St. Clair Community College in Port Huron, Michigan. Conference Fee: $20.00. Please see Heather Richards or Mark St. John for details.

**Michigan Historic Preservation Network, Spring Conference, Friday, April 21, and Saturday, April 22** - Topics will include the impact of the Americans with Disabilities Act and other building codes on historic resources. To be held in the historic Frauenthal Theater in downtown Muskegon. Contact the Network for conference brochures and further information.

**Heritage Partnerships: The Concept & Tools to Make it Happen, Midwest Preservation Conference, May 9-12:** Fort Wayne, Indiana. Featured speakers include: Roger Kennedy, Director, National Park Service, Shelley Mastran, National Trust for Historic Preservation and Ted Ligible. Contact the Midwest National Trust Office at 312-939-5547 for details.

**Wisconsin Heritage Tourism Preservation Conference, May 11-13:** Hurley, Wisconsin. Contact Sharon Foley at 608-266-7299 for details.

**Michigan Preservation Week, May 14 - May 20** - The 1995 Michigan Preservation Week's theme will be "Real People, Real Places, Real History."


Alumni Notes:

**WHERE ARE YOU AND WHAT ARE YOU DOING?**

Preservation Eastern is in the process of establishing an Alumni database for several reasons: 1) To keep alumni informed about Preservation Eastern and the HP Program at EMU; 2) To keep Preservation Eastern and the HP Program at EMU informed about alumni; 3) To establish an alliance network that can be utilized by both alumni and graduating students.

We will be sending out surveys this summer to all alumni for whom we think we have current addresses. Unfortunately, we are rather dubious about the accuracy of our addresses and encourage any alumni to contact us with their current address.

**Going to the Chapel:** Preservation Eastern and the EMU Historic Preservation Program are proud to announce the engagement of recent graduate Kimber Vanity and Amy Gossow, who intend to wed in October in Missouri. Our hearty congratulations to them both!!!

Resume Boosters:

**National Register Nomination, Queen Anne in Chelsea** - Jacqueyn Frank would like a student to research and prepare a nomination of her ca. 1880 Queen Anne house for both the state register and the national register. They are also interested in a student researching period landscaping, and period furnishings, and developing a long-range plan for restoration and maintenance. She will pay for any expenses and actively network the southeastern Michigan region for you. See Heather Richards for details.

(Note: Although several people have inquired about this project, nobody has actively pursued it yet. It may make a wonderful summer project for anyone who is remaining in the area. Rob Burg, a student in the program, knows the house and the Franks very well, and encourages anybody to get involved with this project.)