

The Sunday News

SUNDAY

MAGAZINE

DETROIT, MICHIGAN

MAY 19, 1974

**How Canfield's Citizens Are Fighting  
To Save a Street — And Maybe a City**

**ALSO INSIDE: Jon Voight's Older — And Glad**





# THE FIGHT FOR WEST CANFIELD

*How Some Individual Citizens Are Struggling to Save a Street, and Maybe a City*

News Photos by GARY PORTER





*Above is how West Canfield Street used to look — derelict old buildings filled with ghosts of both the past and the present. At left is how the street looks now. Behind the renaissance was a strong-willed woman, Beulah Groehn, seated below. She saw the treasure under the patina of dirt and ruin, and in 1965 she and her husband moved into the home they had rebuilt. Others followed their inspiration.*



By **WILLIAM T. NOBLE**  
Sunday Magazine Staff Writer

**T**HE HOUSES were so old and defiled even the ghosts that haunted them started to take flight through the holes in the roof, the paneless windows and the shattered doors. The little street was a disaster.

Prostitutes stared vacantly at the decay as they used the street as a corridor from one scene of action to another. When summer nights were still and muggy the odor of pot scented the air. Occasionally cries of the

victim of a bad trip, who lay huddled in the vacant room of an abandoned house, sent chills up the spines of an unwary passerby.

This was West Canfield.

Littered Third, a block west was and is like a harbor for hopeless derelicts, a hardening artery in the heart of a city. To the east, Second maintained a healthier pallor, but not significantly.

There were 16 houses on the block, on lots that were quite wide and deep. Most of the crumbling homes were red brick Victorian. The brick was encrusted, not with the soft patina of age,

but the grime of meanness. Forgotten and unloved. Like a senile, penniless relative the family keeps wishing would disappear.

Could no one remember how it used to be?

No one ... except Mrs. Beulah Groehn, a resident of suburban Franklin. And what she did is making history.

And making waves. For West Canfield has become a symbol in the struggle to revive the inner city. It represents the dreams and efforts of individual citizens, doing something on

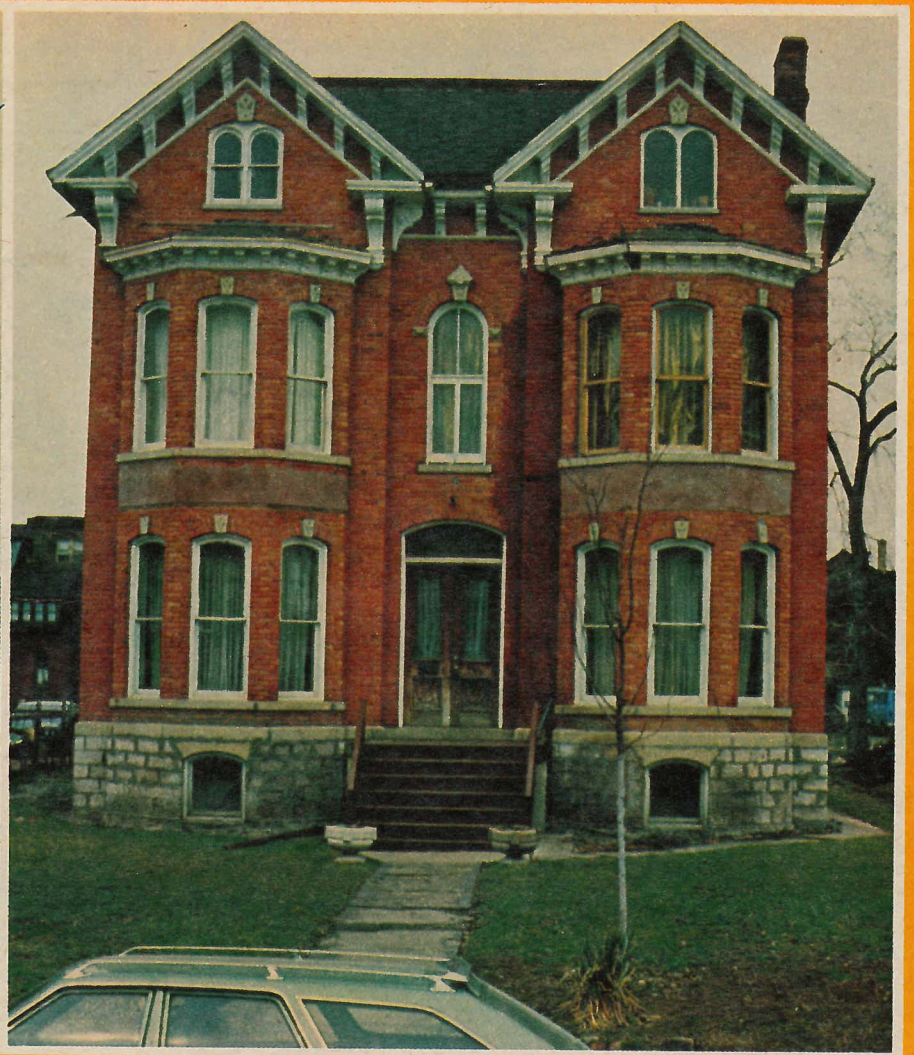
their own, compared to government or corporate bureaucracy, well-meaning but impersonal.

**A** COLLECTOR of antiques, mainly ancient and unusual inkwells for which she became noted, Mrs. Groehn and her husband, Henry, an attorney, longed to return to the city. Mrs. Groehn usually accompanied her husband to his downtown Detroit office. She did volunteer work for the Detroit Historical Museum.

*Continued on Next Page*

Page Design by H. VAN FLETEREN





*Here, depicted in stark before-and-after contrast, is what can be done with an old house.*



*The Groehn home is redone inside, too...*



*They searched antique shops for items...*



*...to preserve the home's authentic decor.*



Many young couples followed the Groehns onto Canfield, like the one below posed like a modern-day Urban Gothic. They did their own sand-blasting, left, and roofing, right. From torn-up Renaissance Center streets they got old bricks to repave the street, and got city trees.



## West Canfield

*Continued from Preceding Page*

"The daily expressway drive was becoming a terrible chore," says Mrs. Groehn. "We started longing for a comfortable home back in the city. Franklin is lovely, peaceful, green and quiet. And we had a charming home we had built to our own plans. But our interests were in the city. We just had to come back."

They had moved out of the Elmwood area to Franklin 18 years before. Mrs. Groehn was born on Jos Campau. Mrs. Groehn came from Minnesota.

One afternoon Mr. and Mrs. Groehn

happened to drive down West Canfield.

"I saw this beautiful, neglected brick Victorian at the corner of West Canfield and Second," says Mrs. Groehn. "I decided this is the one I wanted."

It sat beside a busy gasoline station on the corner of Second and West Canfield. But Mrs. Groehn looked beyond dust and grime and saw the splendor of the past. Her vision of the 100-year-old house saw it as it was in the 1870s, the way it still could be.

The sordid street, the decaying neighborhood, she reasoned, could be

upgraded if someone had enough interest in the past to restore this architectural gem.

A street without pride, she thought, dies like an unwatered flower. Her job: to restore the house and revive West Canfield's pride.

It sounds easy. If you have some money, buy an old house and restore it. It isn't that easy. It takes nerve, stamina, patience.

"The project literally drained me," says Mrs. Groehn. "I would stay up half the night, I had to keep running to various city offices, make endless

phone calls, attend meetings. I was babysitting a block."

**A** WHOLE BLOCK, because the Groehn home became a showplace. They moved into it in 1965 after investing \$13,000 in repairs. It bloomed like a rose, and it inspired others who longed for a gracious home in the heart of the city to come to West Canfield. Many were young couples who do their own repair work.

*Continued on Page 22*



## West Canfield



*Mrs. Groehn, right center rear, carries her fight to Common Council.*

*Continued from Page 19*

It costs about \$3,000 to hire a commercial company to sandblast a brick building. Gary Porter, a young photographer who bought one of the homes on West Canfield, got some amateur help and did his own for about \$300.

The Ford Motor Co., General Motors (Argonaut Division) and other organizations have pledged help in restoring the street. Henry Ford II, acting on a personal appeal of Mrs. Groehn, contributed granite being ripped from Atwater Street to make room for the Renaissance Center. Volunteers from West Canfield hauled it away. Eventually it will be relaid in a pattern duplicating the original West Canfield design.

Today the short street is attracting national interest. It has been designated a national historic site.

"Groups from other cities have made special tours just to see what can be done," Mrs. Groehn says with pride.

"And," she adds, "we have never been robbed, threatened or in any way disturbed. Some people find that hard to believe, but it's a fact. We take evening walks and have no fear."

## The direct route to Kodak processing.

The shortest distance between Kodak and your pictures is a Kodak mailer.

Wherever you are when you finish your roll of Kodak color film, you can mail it direct to Kodak in a Kodak mailer. And we'll mail your finished prints, slides or movies direct to you.

To pick up some Kodak mailers, just make a straight line for your photo dealer's.

**Kodak mailers.**





"Police protection has been good. The police seem to take an added interest. And the Wayne State University police force is excellent. But strangely, as soon as we started fixing up the homes, restoring the street, the rougher element who used to parade up and down vanished. Before work was started on many of the homes vandals had fun. Unexplained fires, broken windows and such. But that is ending. It was mainly juvenile actions."

**MORE FRUSTRATING** than the struggle with vandalism have been the battles with bureaucracy. The latest and most serious battle is one over the building of a high-rise, low rent apartment complex on six acres of vacant land at the west end of West Canfield across from Third and near the Lodge Freeway.

"Since this is a national historic site," says Mrs. Groehn, "under section 106 of the National Preservation Act of 1966 only buildings that comply with the original character of the buildings on the site are permitted.

In spite of this, the City Plan Commission voted to permit building of the apartment."

The vote staggered Mrs. Groehn and other owners of West Canfield houses. Many, including Mrs. Groehn, talked of selling.

"It is not that we object to low income neighbors," says Mrs. Groehn. "It is just a fact that such housing developments have a poor record. Many became vice centers and later are dynamited down as the only way to stop the menace. It is not in character with what we are trying to do with this area of the inner city."

Mrs. Groehn and the others on the block hope it will not mean a repetition of the sleepless nights it took to get where they are now.

"To remove dope dens from the vacant buildings," says Mrs. Groehn, "we had to get license plate numbers of the cars stopping at the houses, and give them to the police. And then descriptions of the people coming and going. Sometimes I had to get up in the middle of the night to get the numbers. But it worked. We got rid of the dens."

One absentee owner of a home on the

block was so angry with the West Canfield Street Association's efforts that he threatened to turn his place into a house of prostitution. The association had blocked his attempt to turn the house into a multiple dwelling.

**IN RESTORING** their home, the Groehns preserved as much of the original decor as possible; they searched antique shops for furniture and lamps to match the era. Inside and out, it is a masterpiece of bygone elegance.

The home was built in 1874 and owned by Colin Fox, superintendent of Western Telegraph. Later it was bought by Alexander McVittie, president of the Detroit Shipbuilding Co. and grandfather of Mrs. Stanley S. Kresge. The McVittie children kept a pony in the carriage house standing in back of the home, but occasionally led the pony through the house to their upstairs playroom.

"Some of the pony's hoof marks could still be seen on the staircase," says Mrs. Groehn.

Each house on West Canfield has its own fascinating history, she says.

In the old days the 100-foot-wide, tree-lined street, cluttered with the sound of grand carriages pulled by blooded horses, and children played hopscotch or run sheepy run.

Then the horse and carriage were replaced by Pierce Arrows, Marmons and Packards. Affluent residents bought ponies for their children.

The area was called "Piety Hill." And with good reason. Virtually every resident represented the moral, religious, civic and business conscience of the burgeoning city. They were social register people, as solid as their brick homes.

It was their own consuming ambition, power and foresight that eventually doomed "Piety Hill." The industrial revolution caught up with them.

Then, as now, the prosperous folk, equipped with cars and a passion for fresher air, and even more living space, started moving away. Many headed east to the lake or toward the Detroit River. A number moved just a few blocks north to the Boston and Chicago boulevard area.

Continued on Page 28

## 2 EXTRAORDINARY STEREO VALUES at BUDGET PRICES

### 100 WATT IPP TOTAL STEREO SYSTEM

BY

**LLOYD'S**



#### INCLUDED FREE:

- Deluxe Roll-About Sturdy Stand
- Padded Stereo Headphones for Private listening

#### STEREO SYSTEM FEATURES:

- FM/AM-FM MULTIPLEX RECEIVER
- DeLUXE Full Size BSR CHANGER
- BUILT-IN EIGHT TRACK PLAYER
- TWIN AIR SUSPENSION HORN STEREO SPEAKERS

THIS WEEK

**159<sup>95</sup>**

OPEN A CREDIT ACCOUNT

### SOUNDESIGN

#### CHROME and GLASS ETAGERE

FM/AM-FM Stereo  
Built-In 8 Track

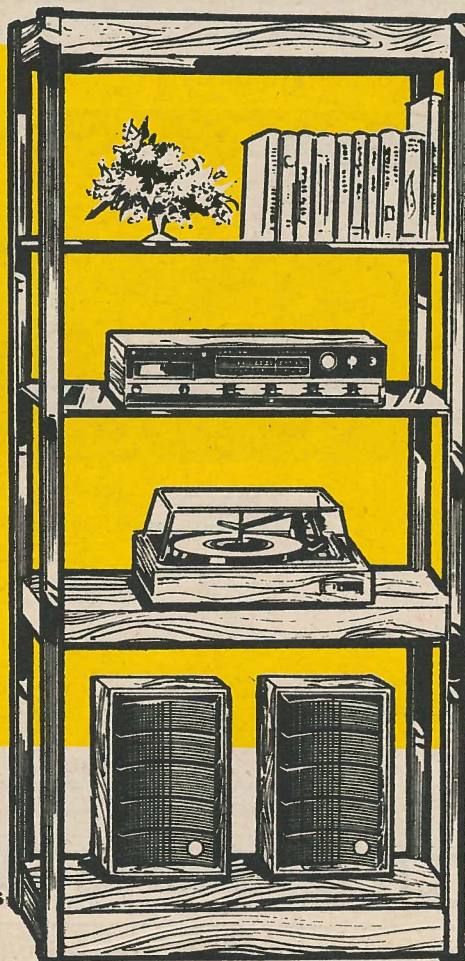
Complete Outfit . . .

**\$199<sup>95</sup>**

TERMS ARRANGED

#### SYSTEM FEATURES:

- FM/AM-FM Stereo Receiver
- Built-In 8 Track Stereo Player
- Full Size Record Changer with Wooden base
- Two Air Suspension Speakers 8" High
- Functional Chrome and Glass Etagerie



5 WAYS TO BUY

- SHIFRIN WILLENS CHARGE • MASTER CHARGE
- YOUNG ADULT CREDIT PLANS • BANKAMERICARD
- MOST MAJOR BANK CARDS ACCEPTED

**Shifrin Willens**  
FINE JEWELERS SINCE 1926

#### NOW 21 CONVENIENT LOCATIONS TO SERVE YOU BETTER

##### DETROIT

1425 Woodward, Downtown  
6534 Woodward at Grand Blvd.  
14319 Mack at Chalmers  
15536 Grand River at Greenfield  
Dequindre at 8-Mile, Belmont Center

##### SUBURBAN

HIGHLAND PARK  
DEARBORN  
TAYLORTOWN  
LINCOLN PARK  
OAK PARK  
ANN ARBOR

##### PONTIAC

Glenwood Plaza  
Miracle Mile Center  
ROSEVILLE  
ROYAL OAK  
TROY (Open Sunday 12-5)

##### MT. CLEMENS

WAYNE  
HAMTRAMCK  
OUTSTATE  
KALAMAZOO  
JACKSON

THE SUNDAY NEWS MAGAZINE

MAY 19, 1974

23



# Los Senioritas

Finished in Antique White with yellow trim

Over 20 pieces to choose from, including Bunk and Trundle beds.  
Choose from the most complete selection of Bunk & Trundle beds in Michigan



WAREHOUSE CLEARANCE SALE

12700 E. 8 MILE RD.  
Between Hoover & Schoenherr  
Daily 10-9 — Sunday 12-5  
Phone 526-4588

Salem Wood Products  
BUNK & BEDROOM CENTER

44495 VAN DYKE, UTICA  
Just South of 21 Mile Rd.  
Daily 10-9 — Sunday 12-5  
Phone 799-1160

## STERLING SILVER SALE

SAVE up to 40%

- Wallace 40%
- Towle 40%
- International 40% place settings only
- Gorham 40%
- Reed & Barton 40%
- Lunt 40%
- Heirloom 40%

Mail and phone orders accepted



Save also on Diamonds,  
14K Jewelry, Stainless,  
Silverplate & Gift Items

## NORTHWOOD JEWELERS

2602 North Woodward at 12½ Mile Rd., Royal Oak  
Hours: Mon., Tues., Wed. 10-6  
Thurs. & Fri. 10-9, Sat. 10-6  
LI 9-1885

## ATTENTION MEN! UNDER 5'7"

The Barn is ready with a great Spring-Summer collection of fine suits and sportcoats. Our clothing is popular priced and includes items from Haspel, Stanley Blacker, Cricketeer, Clubman, Greif and many other fine makers.

The finest selection of short sized clothing in Michigan, with suits from \$90.00 and sportcoats from \$65.00



Store Hours:  
Tues. thru Fri. 10:00-9:00  
Mon. & Sat. 10:00-6:00

**THE BARN**

BankAmericard & Master Charge

BIRMINGHAM  
685 S. Adams  
Adams Square Shopping Center  
642-5262

## West Canfield

*'We aren't just bluehaired old ladies.'*

Continued from Page 23

The two-story brick and frame houses of West Canfield became boarding houses for the influx of workers flooding the city to man the machines.

The quality shops on Second and Third gave way to stores featuring the basic staples of boarding house operators. By 1920 hearty immigrants from all parts of Europe peopled West Canfield, saving their money to bring relatives over to share in the riches of America. Eventually they married, raised families and built their own more modest homes in other sections of the city.

From that time on the cobblestone and brick street with its shade trees and gingerbread houses aged gracefully. As the roofs started leaking, wooden verandas collapsed with rot and children zeroed in with stones at the windows, absentee owners started picking up the tarnished gems as random investments.

The once stately trees died. The street commenced looking like an open sewer. Rooms were rented to anyone with a few dollars. A number of tenants started ripping up the hand-carved paneling for firewood. The street was virtually dismissed by everyone. No one mourned it.

Until Mrs. Groehn came along, and inspired others.

THE GROEHNS also have been involved in other projects of preservation.

The Canfield association was instrumental in getting the Boston-Edison area comprising several hundred houses listed in the national register of historic sites. Groehn is even trying to save the rickety old Detroit Stove now hoisted on a crumbling base at the State Fairgrounds. They also want to save the Farwell Building.

"But we aren't just a group of bluehaired old ladies in tennis shoes," says Mrs. Groehn, "arbitrarily trying to preserve the past just because it's the past."

"In the case of the Farwell Building we surveyed the possibility of getting businesses into the building, such as boutiques or other small enterprises, so the building can pay its way and do some good."

"In preserving the old houses of West Canfield, gracious homes are created for comfortable living in the city close to all the action."

The new battle, she admits, will take up most of her time now. Other projects may have to lay on a back burner.



## Double Door CURIO

Pecan finish, glass shelves with lighted mirror back.  
25"W x 72"H x 11"D.

\$109

Large selection in all finishes.

Master Charge BankAmericard DECC

**EDER**

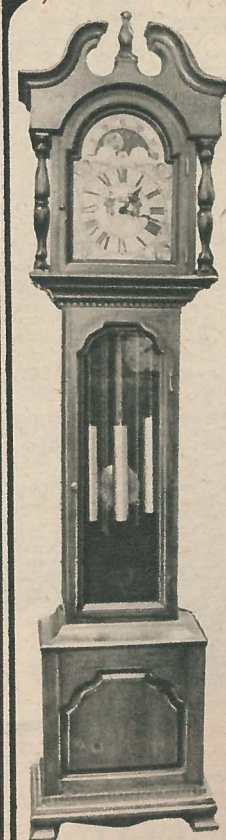
FURNITURE CO.

1751 Fort St., near Southfield  
Mon. & Fri. 'til 8:30 DU 1-1940

## The Time Shop

of Birmingham

The home of the clock doctors



MODEL 3070 by "Colonial" of Zeeland, Mich.

Full Westminster chimes  
Moon-phase dial

Special At

\$495.00  
(Regular \$400.00)

- Immediate Delivery
- Free set-up
- 2 yr. warranty
- Charge it

SEAN C. MONK  
(Owner)

Certified Master Watchmaker U.I.A.  
Internationally known author & lecturer on "clocks & clock repairing."

## The Time Shop

NEW LOCATION

161 Townsend Birmingham  
646-7377

## Looking to increase sales?

You're on the right trail.

An ad in The News Sunday Magazine will reach 1.8 million adults.

Call Bob Switzer at 222-2384. He'll help you find more business.

**The Detroit News**

Largest evening newspaper circulation in America.

H&H S  
H&H S