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PHOTOGRAPHED in her front parlor, Mrs. Beulah Groehn is surrounded by Victorian furniture, reminiscent of the original appearance of her home on West Canfield, just south of the New Center. — photo by W. L. Springer

## Rebirth of a Neighborhood

# The Woman Behind Canfield West

by Tina Noor

The ongoing flight to suburbia, with the attendant neglect and deterioration of inner-city housing has created a dilemma for many Detroiters. For those individuals who recognize and appreciate the social, educational, and cultural advantages of city-life, yet who need the freedom and privacy afforded through ownership of their own home, the problem is quite pronounced. There has been virtually nowhere to purchase a reasonably well-kept home close to the center of the city.

Thanks to the pioneering efforts of Beulah Groehn, the dilemma is moving toward solution. In 1965 Mrs. Groehn purchased her home on West Canfield. In 1969, Canfield West was historically designated (thereby preserving the homes). Presently, plans are underway for the formation of a coalition of all historically designated neighborhoods in Detroit. There has been the growing conviction that there are homes in the city worth saving, and that there are people willing to work to save them. Beulah Groehn is such a person.

With this article, the New Center News begins a series focusing on the men and women behind the neighborhoods, which, while being revitalized, are also becoming "neighborhoods" in the traditional sense of the word. Perhaps, as more people become aware of the numerous residents who consider Detroit a great place to live, a flight from suburbia will be engendered.

The story of Beulah Groehn, and the story of Canfield West are intertwined. It is not an exaggeration to say that she is responsible for the fact that the

street still exists today... Mrs. Groehn is an open, direct individual. She does not mask her sense of accomplishment, nor does she minimize the opposition she encountered.

Beulah Groehn, throughout her life, has continued to be responsive to community needs. As a young woman who worked as an executive secretary for the Chrysler Corporation, where she was elected to carry a letter from Chrysler in Detroit, to Rufus Dawes, the president of the fair. She also carried a letter from General Motors to the GM exhibit there.

After marrying Henry G. Groehn, a Detroit attorney, Beulah retired from Chrysler to attend Wayne State University, where she did work in the Special Education Department. The Groehns moved from Detroit, to Franklin Michigan, propelled by the need for a house — a home with living space.

Avidly interested in history, Beulah became an antique collector. Upon hearing of her inkwell collection, the curator of the Historical Museum enlisted her aid in cataloguing theirs. Thus began eight years of volunteer service at the museum, researching, writing, and doing sundry other available jobs. One of several citations she received for her work was a focus award from WJR for an Historical Bulletin article which she wrote on the Palmer Log Cabin in Palmer Park.

The Groehns' mutual interest in antiques is what led to the purchase of their home. Mr. Groehn had come into town for an antique garage sale at 627 W. Canfield. When Beulah accompanied him to pick up the

purchases, she immediately fell in love with the stately, Victorian home. Her characteristic reaction was, "Is it for sale? — Buy it!" They did. Beulah first saw the house on a Friday, and the purchase agreement was signed on Monday. Franklin was abandoned for Canfield. Now the battle began.

Today Beulah Groehn says that when she looks at an old home, she doesn't see what is, but what it can be. Her home in 1965 required a good deal of vision. The Groehns were lucky in that their home, unlike others on the block, had not been vandalized. It was, however, sadly neglected. From the five coats of paint peeling off the walls to the leaky roof, great repair was needed.

Repairs were begun on the outside first, in an effort to counteract "How can you LIVE down there?" reactions. "Down there" became an elegant, sturdy home. Inside, art nouveau work and handmade lace curtains were uncovered and restored. 627 Canfield today combines the finer aspects of modern and Victorian living. Beulah's own study is "scholarly modern", because she didn't want the entire home done in one period.

Just as the Groehn home was becoming comfortable, they received word that the two homes next to theirs were to be torn down to make way for an inexpensively constructed apartment complex. Beulah could not bear to see a street of graceful homes, each with its own identity and history, marred by such an edifice. It would then only be a matter of time until the others were destroyed for similar reasons. True, the homes were in

ramshackle condition, but they could be restored if only someone cared. Beulah cared, and she got involved. She contacted Dr. Henry D. Brown, of the Historical Museum, who suggested historical designation as the only alternative, the only way to

ensure that the houses would survive. In this way, through this one incident, the drive to save Canfield West was begun.

Next week: The fight for historical designation: what it means: its ultimate outcome.

## Fred Ehlers Elected Action Council President

Fred Ehlers, an Assistant Vice President with National Bank of Detroit, has been elected President of the New Center Area Action Council, Inc.

Mr. Ehlers takes on the new assignment after serving three years as the groups' Vice President.

The New Center Area Action

Council is a group of business owners, tenants, and businessmen who are concerned with the improvement and promotion of the New Center Area and are dedicated to making it a better place to work and live.

"We have several goals during the coming year," said Ehlers, "including a survey of the people who work in the New Center Area to determine their feelings of the Area as a place to live as well as to work. We are also going to begin a beautification program to help make the New Center a more attractive and enjoyable place. But the biggest goal for the year," Ehlers pointed out, "is to attract competent and imaginative developers who would come into the New Center Area and provide the housing that would make people WANT to live as well as work in the Area."

Ehlers, who has been with NBD for the past 27 years, is Account Service Manager for the Bank's Center City Regional Banking Center, headquartered in the General Motors Building.

He and his wife, Frances, live in Farmington Hills. They have four children, Sue and Fred, Jr., and Mrs. Linda Lorenz and Mrs. Teresa Cowen.



Mr. Fred Ehlers