

DE WITT BI-CENTENNIAL COMMISSION

De Witt, Michigan 48820

PRESS RELEASE

October 4, 1974

The oldest community in Mid-Michigan celebrated it's anniversary Friday, erecting huge colorful hand-carved, colonial city limit signs, honoring it's heritage. At the same time city fathers and townspeople joined with state officials in dedicating a new park and proclaiming De Witt as one of the most progressive areas of Mid-Michigan.

The village of De Witt was founded three years before the city of Lansing, and, as local historians recall, was the State Capitol for a day (as well as the Clinton County seat for thirty years).

Prior to the Civil War, when the Capitol was being moved from Detroit to a more centrally located area, De Witt was a serious contender for the honor. It was the generous offer by a land developer named John Lansing, that ultimately decided the location for the Capitol. De Witt thus lost the bid to it's neighbor to the south (6 miles), previously known as Biddle City.

Today, civic leaders marked the 141st anniversary of the city's founding by dedicating the first phase of West River Park (6 blocks west of traffic light, on Main Street), and receiving the first of several large hand-carved city limit signs welcoming people to "HISTORIC De WITT -- FOUNDED OCT. 4, 1833". The signs, donated by local businessmen, are hand-carved from redwood planks by local craftsman, Leon (Jake) Smeltzer.

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The signs are being erected at the three principal entrances to the city with the grounds of the Franciscan Retreat, the New England style Community Church and the new West River Park, serving as wooded settings for the red, white and blue antiqued city limit signs.

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In an era of building recession, high interest rates and slumping housing sales, the De Witt area is enjoying unprecedented growth. With the \$25 million Millbrook Meadows area continuing to expand in the city, and the burgeoning \$30 Million dollar Country Meadows development recently opened on the south city limits and the recently announced plans for Looking Glass (River) Meadows, the area is a bright spot in the otherwise quiet Mid-Michigan housing market.

While Mayor Murl Eastman was hosting the Founders' Day ceremonies, a few hundred yards away workmen were busy renovating one of the city's landmarks, the Theodore Schavey home. (see Historic De Witt brochure). Originally built in 1886, the stately brick farmhouse still has inside shutters at every window, several ornate chimneys and 12-foot-high ceilings.

The owner, Rick Cullen, is maintaining all of the original features of the home and hopes to occupy it well before the city's Bi-Centennial Celebration. (good visual possibility)

Across Main Street, from the new park, houses continue to go up in the Millbrook Meadows development. Built around thirty acres of parks or "commons" areas, the area allows only colonial type architecture, preferring brick and natural wood siding to the more modern materials. "Where else can you have a cornfield in your backyard and yet be only five blocks

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from downtown?", asks the developer, Ted Powell.

The small town is alive and well, unoppressed by many of the metropolitan problems. "We hope to have a fence for our new tennis courts this year and, with the help of the Lions Club and other civic groups, we will have benches and landscaping for the park next year. Rome wasn't built in a day," continued Mayor Murl Eastman, who is also pastor of the quaint Community Church, "and, our town plans to be ~~here~~ another 141 years!"