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# COMMUNITY

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**History making:** Norman and Mary Robison in front of their unique mid-1840s DeWitt home. The city is launching a special

DAVID OLDS/Lansing State Journal  
program to mark properties linked to community history. The Robisons have owned the Greek Revival style home for 30 years.

## DeWitt to mark historic sites

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By John B. Albright  
Lansing State Journal

DEWITT — Passing by Norman and Mary Robison's home on Shavay Road, you might not recognize it as one of the oldest and most architecturally precious houses here.

This city of 3,964 people on the shores of the Looking Glass River, eight commuting miles north of Lansing, has scores of distinguished homes that rose from woods and farmland over several generations.

DeWitt's history — marked by the Robison house and many other buildings and places — needs a little hype, Mayor Michael Towns said.

So city officials are preparing to post signs marking the historic nature of many of the community's residences.

That's a good idea, said the Robisons, who added that they will be happy to have a sign in their front yard to tell of the historic character of the house they bought 30 years ago for \$11,000.

## Signs of history

- Signs are to go up at historic public places in spring 1997.
- The city will send letters in March 1997 to owners of selected houses, then phone them for permission to put up signs.
- Signs will go up at homes in summer 1997.

"This house is by far one of the finest and best-preserved examples of Greek Revival style architecture in Clinton County," said Kenneth Coin, a DeWitt historian.

The Robison home was built by pioneer Charles Scott in the mid-1840s.

That was about the time the United States and Mexico were fighting over Texas — 1845 to 1848 — and as surveyors were marking out a wilderness south of here that was to become Michigan's capital city.

"I painted it about five times," Norman Robison said of his dwelling.

"The yellow and the white are the best colors we've had yet," he said.

"When you drive up, it just reaches out and says, 'Come on in.' It's a comfortable place to be."

In the past century, DeWitt has grown from a farmers' trading center to a bedroom town off U.S. 27 for people who have jobs in Lansing and a desire to live outside the metropolitan center's bustle.

Many new houses are rising in the DeWitt Township countryside that surrounds DeWitt, a 10-minute commute from Lansing.

DeWitt has perhaps 50 houses suited to designation under a city history program fostered by Towns, city Administrator Jason Eppler said.

With advice from Coin, city officials are writing short descriptions of the historical wow of selected houses and public places.

The city government's move to

make DeWitt's historic heritage more visible is home grown.

It isn't linked to more formal historic designations made by the Michigan Historical Commission or the National Register of Historic Places.

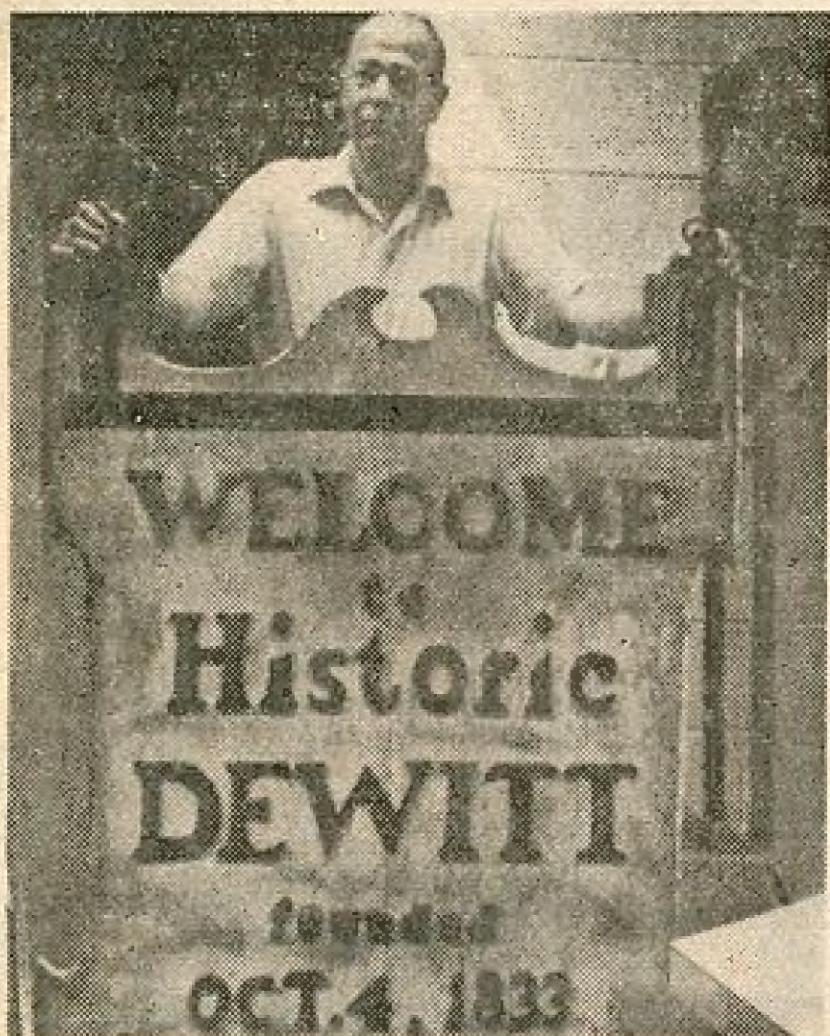
Owners of private properties selected for historic designations can accept or refuse the honor, Eppler said. Allowing a city sign to go up will not cut in on an owners' freedom to alter or sell the property, Eppler added.

Officials will reach into the city treasury to pay for each red, white and blue sign. Each costs, including the post, about \$100, Eppler said.

The designated houses and public sites will also be described on a pamphlet guiding walking tours.

Letters with proposed sign wordings may go to owners of historic homes by March 1997, Eppler said.

A settlement of 35 houses, two hotels and three stores in 1860, DeWitt became a village in 1929 and a city in 1965.



Frank Fowler and handiwork.

## *Government finds do-it-yourself way*

A few months ago DeWitt councilmen talked about replacing a road sign that had been vandalized last year.

It was one of four that local groups put up at the entrances of the city several years ago and replacement cost was put at \$600. The city didn't have the money.

Floyd Fowler, Department of Public Works superintendent, commented he had been thinking "about trying to build one." He had done a little woodworking and wanted to try. Councilmen authorized \$100 for materials and Fowler has spent his spare time ever since working on the sign which was unveiled and hung this week.

Councilmen were so impressed with his workmanship they placed another order. They want a sign for the front lawn of the Municipal Building — a "double header" that can be read from both directions.



# TOWN SQUARE

**By Sally Trout**

## **DeWITT**

### **Signs will tell city's history**

A buggy wash site from the 1800s will be marked by a historic marker as soon as next spring.

DeWitt is in the process of identifying city locations of historical significance. "So far we have identified some 70 locations or buildings of historic significance in the city," said Jason Eppler, city administrator.

The cost of providing a sign with pole and its installation is set at about \$130. Money which will come from the city's general fund and private donations.

Helping with the project are DeWitt history buffs Ken Coin and Kent Armstrong. The men are checking the sign information for accuracy. Once this is complete, manufacturing of the signs can begin with installation expected next spring.

"Eventually we would like to have signs throughout the city with maps and accompanying information provided so residents and visitors can take a historic walk through time," Eppler said.

The city hopes to have the project completed by the end of 1997.

## **WILLIAMSTON**