

SPECIAL RECOGNITION AWARD  
From the Ypsilanti Heritage Foundation, (YHF)  
to  
Arthur John Harris (Jack)  
YHF newsletter, May 2002

The Heritage Foundation is pleased to be honoring Ypsilantian Arthur "Jack" Harris for his life-long commitment to historic preservation in this community. As a young boy growing up in an early-twentieth-century cottage in Lake Ann, Michigan, near Traverse City, Jack learned to appreciate old things.

His first documented act of historic preservation occurred during his first teaching job in Reed City, Michigan, when he was observed dragging an old abandoned sleigh home behind his car. His teaching colleagues immediately dubbed him the "Cutter Kid." Today an old sewing machine recently picked out of his neighbor's trash is on his front porch on Pearl Street, evidence that Jack is still collecting the past to inform the future. Jack refined his interest in historic buildings as a graduate student in England in the 1950s, when he lived in an English thatched cottage near Stratford that predated William Shakespeare. After teaching at CMU and the U-M, Jack found a permanent home at EMU in 1967. He moved to Ypsilanti in 1974, where he immediately wove himself into the fabric of the city by joining the Heritage Foundation. He became a charter member of the Historic District Commission in 1978 and served as Heritage Foundation president from 1982-1990 (only Jane Byrd Schmiedeke has served longer in that office). In 1977 Jack won a grant funded by both the Michigan Council for the Humanities and EMU to support a series of programs promoting the preservation of the Old City Hall, the Stacklewitz house, the Glover house, the Art Train building, and the Towner house, all of which were threatened by neglect. Every one of these buildings is now owned and cared for by a responsible preservation-minded owner. A second grant in 1983 allowed Jack to create a series of events to spark children's interest in history. Called "Windows of the Past," the series included an event where five young people portrayed members of the Tracy Towner family in the Towner House.

Both the city and Jack's neighborhood owe him thanks for purchasing and restoring the Gothic Revival cottage at 111 Perrin. Jack purchased the neglected architectural gem at a State of Michigan auction by paying back taxes on the property. The house was under

restoration for two years before Jack was able to rent it out. Several years later he put the house on the market. Today it is a single-family home. Jack has also had a permanent influence on the look of EMU through his dedicated promotion of preservation on its campus during the 1980s. He served as secretary of the One Room Schoolhouse Committee, which brought the schoolhouse to the middle of campus, where it is a powerful reminder that EMU has always specialized in education. Jack wrote letters to influential people and inspired EMU preservation students to act to save Welch Hall, which had been scheduled for demolition. The community of Ypsilanti has benefited immensely from Jack's passionate and energetic support of historic preservation. Jack has changed our world. We remain grateful for his continuing presence in our city.