

The Florist Manor *by Weed's Creek*

Circa 1845

(Historically known as the Fernwood Resort)

An Informal History and Property Description

2488 Lakeshore Drive, Fennville Michigan 49408

Update: 7/01

This property and residence is a combination resort, museum, botanical garden, wild life preserve, archeological dig, and historic showcase with the atmosphere of a mini-state park. There are few privately owned properties with this combination of elements anywhere in the America. It is undisputedly one of the most unique, historic and attractive sites in Michigan.

The buildings nestle on a 7 acre site overlooking a 50-foot ravine and spring-fed stream -- the last parcel of an 87 acre site land granted by President Martin VanBuren to Horace and John Matthews in 1835*. For twelve years it was subjected to a series of sales by land speculators. In 1847, it was purchased by William Weed (b.1783). He gifted the property to his son Joshua (b.1817, as recorded in family documents, or 1818, as shown on his tombstone) and his pregnant wife, Rebecca, in 1848. Though no precise date has been determined, it is believed that William built the house as part of the gift (1847), or by Joshua (1848). There is some evidence that a primitive house may have existed on the property when purchased by William Weed. Some of the original foundation beams are hand hewn, suggesting that they were put in place prior to the first saw mill, which was built and operated by the Weed family.

**See Addendum Documents*

The Weeds were prominent ships' carpenters and millwrights. Timber was the major source of commerce in the area for many decades. They built the Pier Cove Methodist Episcopal

Church, the Newcomb House in Ganges, and were responsible for most of the construction of the buried town of Singapore, at the mouth of the Kalamazoo River.

The 150-year-old, 2-story, 23-room residence is among the oldest inhabited buildings in Michigan, and one of the nation's largest and best preserved examples of "balloon construction" (which originated in Chicago in the 1830s). The structure started out as an eight or nine room farmhouse somewhere between 1847 and 1850. It was built in the Greek Revival style (1825/1860) with decidedly "new" Italianate (1840/1880) features, such as the bay windows.

Sometime in the 1850s or 1860s, the home was moved from a location approximately 1500 feet to the east (original foundation remains) to the present site on Lakeshore Drive -- the main thoroughfare between Chicago and Grand Rapids. The first major expansion was the second floor portion now known as the south wing. Following the Civil War, the large dining room and most of the north wing was added. The front porch continued the Greek Revival theme with unfluted Roman Tuscan-style Doric columns (featured on approximately 40 percent of Greek Revival structures). Internally, the various additions are reflected in the variety of wooden molding styles and flooring.

The home remains amazingly in tact, with very few alterations since the 1870's. Known as the Fernwood Resort, it was one of the few man-made structures noted on historic atlases of the late 1800's. The inn continued to cater to travelers for more than a century.

The oldest portion of the structure is the southeast corner (approximately eight rooms). This area contains wide board floors and many original panes of glass. Today, this part of the home contains the music room, main parlor, library, small formal dining room and the original kitchen. The upstairs portion of the original home now serves as a master bedroom suite.

Caste iron wood burners in each room originally heated the home. In the late 1800s, a boiler/radiator system was installed. In the 1940s, a forced air, fuel oil system replaced the old coal boiler. At that time only 10 of the 23 rooms were heated in winter. In 1985, four propane gas furnaces (two in the attic and two in the basement) were installed, and the entire home was warm in the winter for the first time in 40 years. It was then that 61 storm windows were added and for the first time the home was fully insulated.

The original dwelling was without indoor plumbing, and the original three-seater outhouse remains well preserved on the property. The first "water closet" was just that. A toilet installed in the current guest closet under the main stairway in the front foyer.

The residence features two kitchens. The original farmhouse kitchen maintains much of its original cabinetry and wainscoting, and currently is used as a storage or "cold kitchen." An updated "country kitchen" was added in the 1960's. There also are two dining rooms. The largest is decorated in the tradition of a colonial pub. A pair of magnificent pocket doors adjoins it to the smaller dining room. The smaller dining room is more formal. Combined, the rooms can seat more than 65 diners.

The downstairs portion also features a main parlor (with fireplace), music room, library, game room, and informal family room. The upstairs contains nine bedrooms. One bedroom features a wall-sized double door that allows the room to be used as a suite or two separate bedrooms. In addition, a master bedroom suite was created, featuring a private bath, bedroom and sitting room with a fireplace. Plans call for the sitting room to open up to a small balcony overlooking the wooded ravine.

Each of the bedrooms is given a distinctive look. One features spoon-carved furniture, another a federalist brass motif, another a Victorian atmosphere. Perhaps most distinctive of all is the large "Lincoln Bedroom," reflecting Mr. Horist's lifelong admiration for the 16th president. The room features a pair of Ford's Theater chairs alongside a Civil War officer's shaving stand, an 1850's lawyer's desk of the type Lincoln used in Springfield, Illinois and a collection of Lincoln photographs and memorabilia.

The basement of the house also reflects various additions and improvements. The oldest foundation walls are made of beach stones presumably gathered on the property's shoreline. Some cement walls are in the slanted "Michigan basement" tradition. Major portions of the house are atop sandy crawl spaces -- some of which have protruding severed trunks of long gone trees. Hand hewn beams have been preserved and reinforced. Floor joists are from a collection of periods; the products of the first straight saw, then the circular saw, more modern cuts, and now some modern laminated beams.

Three out buildings date from the late 1800's. The property once featured a two-story octagonal wash house where servants would work during the day, then sleep on the second floor at night. The original barn was destroyed in a fire. The current barn (c1880) is an outstanding example of farm construction, and shows hand hewn beams in the vaulted ceiling. The lean-to portion of the barn was an early stable. The current stable was originally the cannery for jelly products. The current planter's shed served as a smokehouse. Even the outhouse (a three-seater) is original.

For many years the Weed family also developed orchards growing apples, peaches, grapes and berries. Unattended portions of the property occasionally produce wild ancestors of the original fruit stock. Blackberries and red raspberries around the stable and barn reappeared around 1985, and a field of berries re-emerged near the flagpole around 1993.

The Fernwood Resort was famous for its smoked white fish. The main dining room was a favorite local eatery, and was a regular stop for the church choir and the Rotary Club as late as the 1960's. Fishing boats would bring fresh catch to the inn's own dock at the foot of the path.

There are many anecdotal stories associated with the property. One of the most fascinating is the sighting and killing of a furry monster in the ravine.* The "monster" was shot by the home owner after a hunt lead by the local sheriff. The creature was placed on public display at the What Not Inn before being buried somewhere on the grounds. Debunkers of the "monster" theory suggest it was an escaped chimpanzee from a traveling circus.

**See newspaper article in addendum*

Local lore also has it that fleeing slaves headed toward the Upper Peninsula or Canada may have been housed on the property. While no documentation exists, the region was very anti-slavery, and was recognized as one of the routes of the "Underground Railroad" to Canada.

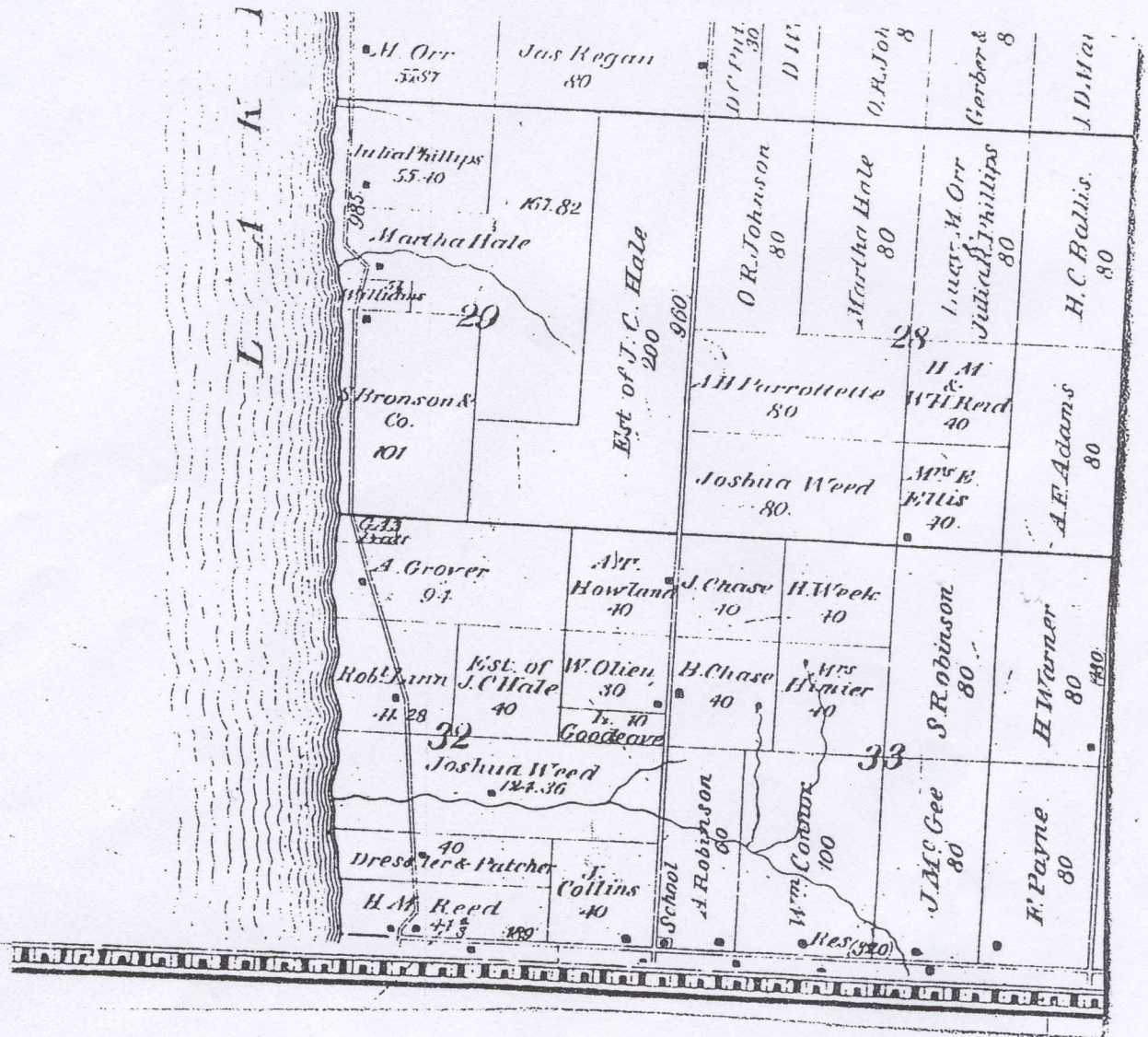
The stream and wooded ravine have naturally evolved. Smelt, and occasionally salmon, run the stream. This pristine lake shore sanctuary is protected land, and features such endangered species as Trillium, Jack-in-the-Pulpit and "snake grass", a small woody bamboo-like growth that is unchanged from prehistoric times. It is a natural haven for wildlife. Deer families, woodchucks, possum, chipmunks, ground hogs, moles, rare black squirrels, large snapping turtles and frogs are frequent guests, with rare appearances by skunks and red foxes. The property includes such unusual features as the "lover trees" (on the north side of the south driveway entrance) which were featured in Ripley's "Believe It or Not", a stand of giant black walnuts, century-old white oaks, and one of the finest and largest mulberry trees in America (on the north side of the north driveway). In an annual ritual, birds and mammals assemble at the mulberry tree to enjoy the fermenting berries. Their intoxicated cacophony can be heard for two or three days -- and occasionally an intoxicated squirrel will tumble from a branch and scamper unharmed back up the trunk.

The shoreline is a treasure trove of colorful rocks, and fossils, including beautiful Petoskey stones. On rare occasions, the Great Lake surrenders relics believed to be from a 19th century shipwreck between Saugatuck and Pier Cove. Based on departure time from Holland, the ship would have been just to the south of the Horist beach at the time the storm struck.

Joshua Weed's descendants owned and operated the resort home until the late 1960's. Guest books and farm records (maintained on-hand in excellent condition) chronicle the comings and goings of guests, and the purchases and sales of supplies and produce.

Upon the death of Mildred Weed in the late 1960's, the property was sold to the William Doucett family. In 1984, the property was purchased by the Horist family -- only the third family to occupy the house in more than 150 years. As stewards of the property, Larry and Jill Horist are meticulously and painstakingly restoring each of the buildings to their original Nineteenth Century magnificence.

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The original site of the Joshua Weed Home is seen on this Civil War era atlas. The structure was subsequently moved to its present site on Lake Shore Drive, and enlarged to become the Fernwood resort

-89-

The United States of America

By the President: Martin Van Buren

By: Martin Van Buren, Jr., Sec'y.

to

Patent

Dated May 1, 1839

Recorded September 2, 1960

Liber 627 Records, page 512

Horace Matthews and John C.
Matthews, as tenants in common
and not as joint tenants,
of Ashtabula County, Ohio

The Southwest Fractional Quarter of Section 32, Township 3
North of Range 16 West in the District of Lands, subject to
sale at Bronson, Michigan, containing 87 acres and 36/100ths
of an acre, according to the Official Plat of the survey of
the said Lands returned to the General Land Office by the
Surveyor General.

THIS ABSTRACT CONSISTS OF 4 SHEETS NUMBERED 1, 2, 3 & 4					Page Cont.			DESCRIPTIONS AND REMARKS	
No.	GRANTOR	GRANTEE	Instrument	Date of Instrument	Date of Identification	Page	Cont.		
1	Horace & John C. Matthews	(See entry #89 for Patent)	Located	Nov 18/56				N 1/2 S 7 E 1/4 Sec 32 T 3 N R 16 W	
2	United States	Robert C. Wood & Charles							
3	Horace & John C. Matthews	Charles R. Butler	Patent	Feb 7/60	Nov 4/62	52	716	N 1/2 S 7 E 1/4 Sec 32 T 3 N R 16 W	
4	Charles Butler	John B. Jones, Donick, Dexter, Edward A. & C. E. Phillips	ns.	June 7/66	June 2/66	1	101	Same land as in #1	
5	Charles Butler, Edward A. Phillips, John B. Jones, Donick, Dexter, Franklin Dexter	Trustees of American Land Co.	ns.	Apr 28/40	Apr 20/40	3	419	Same land as in #1 & 2	
6	Charles Butler, Edward A. Phillips, John B. Jones, Donick, Dexter, Franklin Dexter	Trustees of American Land Co.	ns.	Oct 20/42	Nov 17/42	4	220	Same land as in #4	
7	James P. Hoile & wife	ns.	ns.	Oct 20/42	Nov 17/42	4	220	Same land as in #4	
8	James P. Hoile & wife	ns.	ns.	Oct 20/42	Nov 17/42	4	220	Same land as in #4	
9	James P. Hoile & wife	ns.	ns.	Oct 20/42	Nov 17/42	4	220	Same land as in #4	
10	James P. Hoile & wife	ns.	ns.	Oct 20/42	Nov 17/42	4	220	Same land as in #4	
11	James P. Hoile & wife	ns.	ns.	Oct 20/42	Nov 17/42	4	220	Same land as in #4	
12	James P. Hoile & wife	ns.	ns.	Oct 20/42	Nov 17/42	4	220	Same land as in #4	
13	James P. Hoile & wife	ns.	ns.	Oct 20/42	Nov 17/42	4	220	Same land as in #4	

Photo copy of the original hand written abstract from 1836, at the time that President Martin Van Buren grant the land that became the Fernwood resort to Horace and John C. Matthews. The property of Horist Manor by Weeds Creek is that last remaining parcel that directly descended from the original land grant. The photo copy is approximately one-fourth the size of the original, which part of the historic collection acquired and preserved by the current owners.