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Support history through holiday gift-giving this year

RAHS releases new book, first calendar, mouse pad

By Mary Beth Almond
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ROCHESTER — The Rochester-Avon Historical Society is giving the community the chance to add a touch of history to their holiday gift lists this year, while supporting local historical efforts.

Just in time for the holidays, the society is offering its first calendar, a computer mouse pad and a new book — which will all be sold at Lytle Pharmacy or at www.rochesteravonhistoricalsociety.org. Proceeds from the items will support the efforts of the Rochester-Avon Historical Society.

“Every penny of the proceeds that the society gets is plowing right back into education programs and historic preservation work. ... It’s all about supporting the society and promoting its programs,” said Historical Society Research Committee Chair Deborah Larsen.

A historical Rochester calendar was created for the first time this year in response to a number of requests from community members, according RAHS member Rod Wilson. This year’s calendar features rare photos from postcards of the historic Rochester area — from Wilson and his wife Susan’s personal collection of more than 500 historical postcards.

“This particular calendar has postcards of historic buildings and locations in the Rochester area, from the 1900 to 1930 timeframe, that haven’t been shown a lot. All of them are not downtown; some of them are in Rochester Hills,” Wilson added.

The very first picture in the calendar is of a ski jump, which Wilson said was on the property behind Bill Fox Chevrolet, where the Bluffs Subdivision stands today.

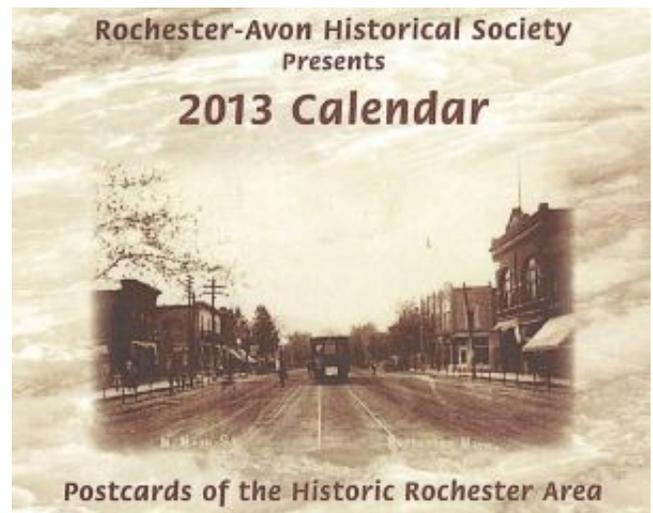


Photo provided

The Rochester-Avon Historical Society just came out with its first annual historical Rochester calendar this year.

“We had international ski jumps here in Rochester that they had to call out the state police to control the traffic because they had 4,000-5,000 people come out to watch these meets,” he said. “Rochester had the tallest ski jump in the Lower Peninsula. It opened up in 1926 and blew down in 1934 or 1938, and they re-built it and it blew down again in a cyclone, which we would refer to today as tornado-like winds.”

The calendar, which costs \$15, is the first of many to come, according to Wilson.

“Hopefully we will be doing a different calendar every year,” he said.

The society also decided to create a historical computer mouse pad, which will be sold for \$7, for the first time this year. This year’s mouse pad features an image of the old Detroit United Railway trestle, which Wilson said is where the South Hill Bridge is today.

“If those sell really well, our intent is to do more mouse pads with different pictures on them,” he added.

Also hot off the press is the second book in the “Remembering Rochester” series by Larsen, currently for sale for \$9. The 44-page book, called “Vanished Rochester,” highlights some of the area’s lost historic sites.

“This book is based on the series ‘Vanished Rochester’ that I do on my blog, which looks at places that are now gone from the landscape — some of them are more recently disappeared and some of them disappeared 100 years ago. With each story, there is a photo of the building that is now gone and the story of what it was, and where it was, and what replaced it. It’s kind of a look at how the community has changed over the last 100 years, and how we have evolved, and how we look different from the way that we were, and also looks at some things that we lost, that maybe we shouldn’t have,” Larsen said.

The Haven, a private psychiatric hospital formerly on Walton between Old Perch and Brewster, is one of the lost buildings featured in the book, according to Larsen. Built in 1926, the building first served as the private English Tudor mansion of industrialist Fred Schinnick.

“The idea of having a grand country estate was very appealing to people — it was the Roaring ‘20s and there was a lot of money around. Then the crash came, and the Schinnick’s turned their estate into a sanitarium called The Haven,” Larsen said.

The building continued on as a mental hospital until 1968, when it closed.

“It was boarded up for a number of years, and they had a lot of problems with vandalism and teens having parties there. ... Then in 1972, or 1973, it burned and was completely destroyed. After the fire happened, the property was redeveloped — they had 70 acres surrounding the house — and that became what we know today as the Grosse Pines Subdivision. If you go past the Grosse Pines Subdivision on Walton, you see they have a ledge rock stone wall that runs all along the front of the subdivision and that wall was actually the entrance to The Haven, and the photo that we show in the book shows that wall in front of the house, which is still there. It’s the only remnant that’s left of the mansion,” Larsen said.

The original “Remembering Rochester – Main Street Stories,” the “Home Town Rochester” hardcover book, some Cat’s Meow Buildings and various other Historical Society items will

continue to be available for purchase.

“These items bring a lot of enjoyment to people, especially if they have a long connection with Rochester. They really enjoy looking back at these stories, dredging up own memories and sharing them, looking at the photos,” Larsen said.

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