

Icon, mentor, friend

City says goodbye to Jack Wilcox

BY TONY BRUSCATO
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During his 83 years, Jack Wilcox made it a point to meet people and befriend many.

Following a distinguished Navy career and returning to his hometown of Plymouth, Wilcox made it his business to give a helping hand, especially to newcomers in town. His historical perspective and knowledge of the city were something he would pass down to those who wanted to listen.

"He was the first person to support me in my first try for the city commission in 1993," said Mayor Dave McDonald. "He certainly was a legend in the community. His wisdom and perspective will be greatly missed."

Former mayor and downtown businessman Dave Pugh appointed Wilcox to the city commission to fill an unexpired term in September 1985.

"I felt honored that I was able to do that, especially since Jack attended every one of our meetings," said Pugh. "He was like an eighth commissioner. I developed a friendship with Jack when we

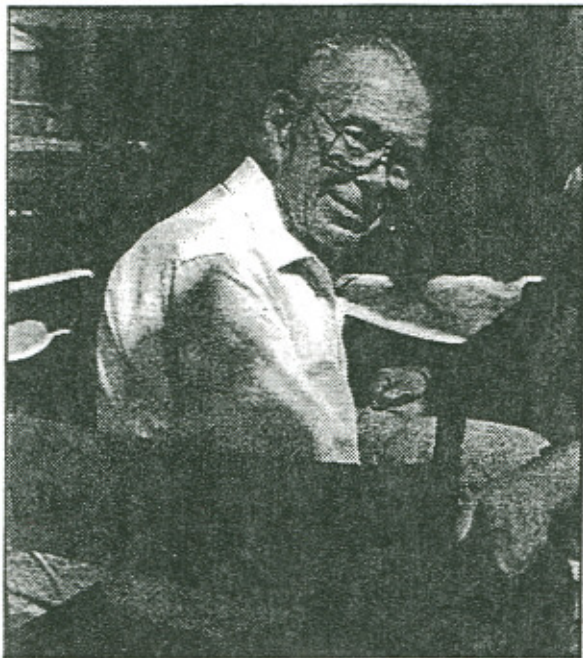


PHOTO COURTESY ALLEN O'DELL

Fond farewell: Friends paid their respects to the late Jack Wilcox at his funeral Thursday.

moved here in the '70s. He took me under his wing and became a good friend and mentor. He is a true Plymouth icon."

Margaret Dunning, 90, of Plymouth used to be best friends with Jack's older sisters, and remembers Jack as "the little brother."

"The girls would get to playing and we would tell him we didn't want him with playing with us," said Dunning with a smile. "But, he was always a pleasant guy."

spent 10 years covering Plymouth city politics for the Observer, remembers Wilcox at just about every meeting of the commission.

"I think he only missed a handful of meetings during that time, if that many," said Brown. "He was genuinely interested in what was going on in his town, and sometimes would stand and offer his opinion on matters. Jack had a respect for people, no matter who you were."

One of Jack's best friends, Allen Odell, lived for awhile in one of the apartments in the so-called Wilcox House in downtown Plymouth.

"Jack was a great inventor. He could take a piece of wire and an old clock motor and make something out of it," said Odell.

Odell also remembers the less-serious side of Wilcox.

"At the house during Halloween he would ring up the third step so when someone stepped on it a tape of a ferocious barking dog would start. He called the dog Alpo," said Odell of Jack's lighter side. "He and I used to sit and talk and discuss each other's problems. Most of all, he was a good friend."

Dunning and Wilcox were members of a delegation that went to visit the sister city of Plymouth, England, nearly 20 years ago.

"We had a great time visiting. Jack was a lot of fun to be with," said Dunning. "We were treated like royalty there."

Dunning called Wilcox "Mr. Plymouth" for all his interest and contributions to the city.

Plymouth Township administrative aide Kevin Brown, who

OBITUARIES

Johnston Wilcox, community leader

By Santiago Esparza
The Detroit News

PLYMOUTH — Johnston "Jack" Wilcox took his civic responsibilities seriously.

He served on the City Commission; attended most of the commission's meetings; wrote the by-laws and arranged for the city to maintain the grounds of the Plymouth Historical Society; and helped found the Plymouth Theater Guild. Those were just a few of his civic endeavors.

"I have never met a man who was such an incredibly active member of the community and was so widely respected," City Commission member Michelle Potter said.

Mr. Wilcox, 83, a retired Navy captain, died Friday, June 30, 2000, in the University of Michigan Hospital in Ann Arbor.

"It's a great loss for our city," Potter said.

"There will be a longstanding



Mr. Wilcox

sense of loss in the city."

Mr. Wilcox graduated from Plymouth High School in 1935 and the University of Michigan in 1939.

He was appointed to the Plymouth City Commission, and was a board of directors member of the Plymouth Community Counsel on Aging, Dunning-Hough Library and Riverside Cemetery.

In April he was inducted into the Plymouth Hall of Fame.

His death is a blow to the city, which seldom has seen a resident so committed to his civic duty. When Mr. Wilcox wasn't running or attending an official meeting, he seemed to be having an informal one going on his front porch.

Mr. Wilcox lived in a historic home with a porch facing Kellogg Park in downtown Plymouth. The home was built by Phillip Markham, the inventor of the air rifle.

It has been pictured on numerous postcards and depicted in several paintings. Last year, his home was featured on the poster for the Fall Festival.

The city officially honored Mr. Wilcox in 1999 when it named a Citizen of the Year award after him and made him its first recipient.

"He was a good man," Potter said. Survivors include his sister, Julia Sanderson, and several nieces and nephews.

Visitation will be from 5-8 p.m. today in the Schrader-Howell Funeral Home, 280 S. Main, in Plymouth.

Funeral services will be 11 a.m. Thursday in the funeral home. Burial will follow in the Riverside Cemetery in Plymouth.

Plymouth loses an icon

BY TONY BRUSCATO
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Scores of people paid their respects to long-time Plymouth resident Johnston "Jack" Wilcox today during services at the Schrader-Howell Funeral Home for the 83-year-old man known to many as the "icon of the city."

Friends remember Jack, A4

Wilcox, who took a keen interest in municipal affairs and lived in the heart of the city, died Friday, June 30, from congenital heart failure after contracting pneumonia, according to longtime friend Allen Odell.

Burial was in Riverside Cemetery.

Wilcox, who has been called a friend, mentor, and Mr. Plymouth by some, was probably best known for becoming a city commission watchdog in 1955. He attended just about every meeting of the commission until most recently when he became too ill to attend.

One of the highlights of his prominent life in Plymouth came April 18 when he was inducted to the Plymouth Hall of Fame. Last year he was given the city's first Citizen of the Year award.

Please see **WILCOX, A6**



STAFF PHOTO BY PAUL HURSCHEMANN

Gone, but not forgotten: Jack Wilcox stands in front of his home at the corner of Union and Ann Arbor Trail in this February 28, 1999, file photo.

Wilcox

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and subsequently had the award named after him.

Wilcox was a retired U.S. Navy captain who came back to Plymouth, the city he grew up in. He was a graduate of Plymouth High School, where he was senior class president in 1935, and graduated from the University of Michigan four years later.

Among his civic contributions was an appointment to the Plymouth city commission to fill an unexpired term in 1985. At various times he was also a member of the Plymouth Historical Society, the Plymouth Theatre Guild, the Plymouth Community Council on Aging, the Plymouth Economic Development Corporation, the Dunning-Hough Library Board of Directors, the Riverside Cemetery Board and the Plymouth Historic District Commission.

Wilcox was also the manager of

the Plymouth Chamber of Commerce in 1957-58. He also hosted "Profiles in Plymouth" on local cable television.

The Plymouth native was among the contingent of local citizens who made an official visit to the sister city of Plymouth, England, nearly 20 years ago. He was also among the first to visit China when direct travel became possible, visiting the Great Wall and the Forbidden City.

But, while he liked to travel, it was Plymouth where Wilcox spent most of his time and put most of his efforts and energy. It wasn't surprising to see him walking in Kellogg Park during most of the city's festivals, considering he lived across the street from the events. All he ever asked of the city was that the events end early enough so his tenants could get to sleep without the loud noise from the park.

He favored helping the youth gain access to downtown, often backing efforts by youth groups to organize concerts in Kellogg Park and offering his property to them for fun and games.

Wilcox lived in the home on Penniman Avenue since the early 1900s when his family bought the property built by Philip Markham, inventor and owner of the Daisy Rifle Company.

Wilcox is survived by his sister, Julia Sanderson, a former Plymouth resident who now resides in Stockbridge, Mass.; nieces Harriet Kurtz of Avon, N.Y. and Katherine Zwick of London, England; nephews John Sanderson of Stockbridge, Mass., George Thompson of Atlanta, Ga. and Roger Thompson of Princeton, N.J.

He is also survived by several great nieces and great nephews.

Final farewell

Friends say goodbye to Jack Wilcox

BY TONY BRUSCATO
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Eyebrows went up during funeral services Thursday morning for Plymouth icon Jack Wilcox when Wilcox himself spoke to the gathering of nearly 150 mourners at the Schrader-Howell Funeral Home.

"I have had an enjoyable and rich life," said Wilcox. "Everyone ... starts out as a potential friend. I hope I have always done my part."

Heads turned as Wilcox spoke for about 10 minutes in a prepared speech recorded before he died.

"I tried to live as a good citizen in my world, country, state and community," added Wilcox. "I hope my life has been an influence for good."

The chapel was crowded as many of his friends joined family members for the hour-long service.

"Jack was a very remarkable man. His light shined in so many ways in our city," said Sanford Burr in his eulogy.

Burr said Wilcox wanted people to remember



STAFF PHOTO BY PAUL HURSCHMANN

Words of remembrance: Sanford Burr delivers the eulogy for Jack Wilcox at the Schrader-Howell Funeral Home in Plymouth Thursday. Friends, family members and city commissioners paid their respects

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what he accomplished during his lifetime: five years working as a guide at Greenfield Village; 10 years with the Lincoln-Mercury division of Ford Motor Company; retiring as a Navy captain in 1973; his service to the city of Plymouth as a commissioner and a member of several boards and commissions; being inducted into the Plymouth Hall of Fame as well as named the city's first Citizen of the Year, with the award being named after him.

"We would be here all day if we listed all the things he had done," said Burr.

"Jack treasured friends and friendship above anything else," added Scott Dodge. "Jack lived a frugal lifestyle ... he scrimped and saved and put away everything for

somebody else."

Dodge mentioned, but did not give details of, a contract Wilcox signed shortly before his death, for plans concerning the Wilcox House on Penniman Avenue.

"Jack had a plan put in place in 1980. Everything Jack acquired, except for what goes to his family, will be put into a trust for the Plymouth community," Dodge told the gathering. "Jack wants to shine long after he is gone."

Wilcox, 83, died June 30 from congenital heart failure.

He was buried at Riverside Cemetery in Plymouth in his Navy uniform, with military honors by a Navy honor guard.