Eula Pray (1911 - 2010)

When Eula Pray moved away from the Rochester area in 1945, she left behind the most detailed history of Avon Township that had been written up to that point. Although it would take another 40 years for her words to be published, her research would become a trusted resource for those learning the history of the greater Rochester area.

Originally from Mable, Michigan, Eula Pray came to Rochester in 1934, where she began working at Rochester Junior High School. For eleven years, she taught geography and history in the school district. As a 1945 Rochester Era newspaper article explained, Miss Pray “endeared herself with hundreds of young people, both in school and out.” Outside of the classroom, she directed many productions put on by the schools and the First Congregational Church.

While in the Rochester area, Eula was working towards a Master’s Degree from the Colorado State College of Education. For her thesis, she chose to explore the history of Avon Township (Rochester Hills). During her research, Eula interviewed and corresponded with many local residents, businesses and organizations to ensure she captured the most accurate information. The thesis covers an array of topics on our local community from public improvements to cultural developments to health and public welfare. When it was complete, Eula came to an agreement with the owner of the Rochester Era newspaper to publish her history serially in the newspaper. A dispute with one of the competing local newspapers halted the project in 1944.

Forty years later, the Avon Historical Preservation Committee formed with the intention to preserve local records and make them accessible to the public. At this time, Sally Cieslik, a local genealogist, uncovered Eula Pray’s thesis. With funding from the Rochester Hills Economic Development Corporation, the Preservation Committee was able to publish her thesis as A History of Avon Township 1820-1940. On October 23, 1986, a book debut gala was held at Meadow Brook Hall with Eula Pray in attendance.

Looking towards the future, Eula’s greatest hope was that someone would “complete her work so that the history of the Avon Township area will be preserved forever.”

Rochester Hills Museum at Van Hoosen Farm
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Online Resources

NOTE: If the below links do not take you directly to the photo or document, click on “Open Document File” under the Links section.

- Correspondence from the Eula Pray Collection, which features letters to and from prominent community members, such as Sarah Van Hoosen Jones and Matilda Dodge Wilson, as well as research notes from her Avon Township history thesis:
  http://www.oaklandcountyhistory.org/awweb/awarchive?item=211596

- Newspaper article from the June 14, 1945 issue of the Rochester Era about Eula Pray leaving Rochester schools (see first page on the right):
  http://www.oaklandcountyhistory.org/awweb/awarchive?item=206289

- Program for A History of Avon Township Gala Book Debut in 1986:
  http://www.oaklandcountyhistory.org/awweb/awarchive?item=211717