



"Preserving the heritage of Ferndale for future generations"

The Crow's Nest

Newsletter of the Ferndale Historical Society

Fall 2006

Foot Trails to Mass Transit: Ferndale's Transportation Revolution

by Jean Spang

Traversing what is now Ferndale has always been an adventure. Residents have followed foot trails, ridden horseback, bounced in stagecoaches, swayed in interurbans, steered Model T's, navigated rowboats, and cruised in '57 Chevys. They have leaped aboard streetcars, clung to bus straps, and even, as train passengers, stoked wood into steam engines. Indeed, profound changes in transportation in the past 150 years shaped the Ferndale we know today.

The original Saginaw Trail (today's Pinecrest in Ferndale) was an Indian footpath, the only land route into Michigan's interior.¹ In 1820, Jabez White, Ferndale's first settler, built on the site of the present Ferndale High School a cabin that was to become a popular tavern on the trail. In the same year, lines for a military road (Woodward) had been laid to connect the fort in Detroit with a military post in Saginaw.

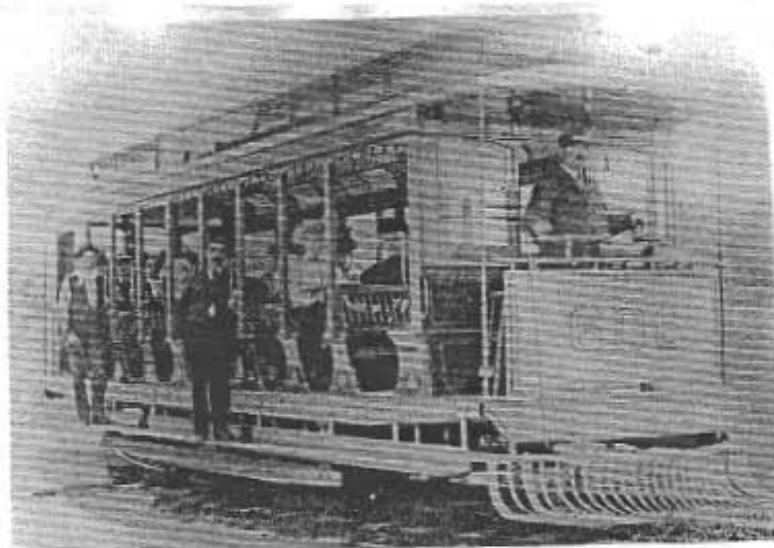
Then, "Mother Handsome," in 1823, one year after Oakland County's first map was drawn, established her legendary inn at the Saginaw Trail/Woodward intersection (near 10 Mile). Wooden planks were soon added to Woodward, making it the preferred route north. But sandy terrain meant that for years afterward, many roads in the region were virtually impassable for weeks at a time.

By 1838, the area was served by the Grand Trunk Western Railway, the first railroad in Michigan. Horses were used to pull the train's engine until 1877, when a steam engine powered by wood was introduced. Steam engines required both wood storage and passenger cooperation. Accordingly, the railroad woodshed serving the Ferndale area stretched from 2nd to 4th streets in Royal Oak, and

Detroit Urban Railway (DUR) streetcar, which traveled from Detroit along the Woodward line, 1897. Conductor is James Rodgers and motorman is Billie Wilson.

AND

Streetcar tickets, Department of Street Railways, City of Detroit, 1932.



Ruth Rodgers Elmers Collection, Ferndale Historical Museum

(Cont'd. on next page)

(from the front page)

all male train passengers were expected to help load the engine's tender.³

By 1890, train transportation had become so popular that a railroad company began to support the development of communities along its tracks, among them Urbanrest, a small settlement and depot (near Hilton/9) that was the beginning of what we know as Ferndale.

After 1890, Ferndale's development was spurred by transportation innovations in southeastern Michigan: the interurban system (ca. 1893); the first electric streetcar through Ferndale (1895); the fledgling model cars rolled out by Charles Brady King and Henry Ford in Detroit (1896); Ford's mass-production assembly line (1908); the paving of Woodward through Ferndale (ca. 1909; its widening, 1924); and the Detroit bus system reaching Ferndale (1920).

The village, incorporated as the City of Ferndale in 1928, had become a desirable "bedroom community," accessible by many transportation means.

But well into the early 1900s rowboats were used in Ferndale to navigate the marshes along Livernois and the city's western border. Oxen remained the only assured means of rescuing mud-stuck conveyances—even trains. Cinders were used as surfaces on many roads. Nine Mile was a formidable route because of open drains along its sides. Ferndale residents owning cars often left them near Woodward and walked home rather than driving through the muddy streets.

By 1910, most marshy areas in Ferndale had been drained. In 1919, a village ordinance prohibited the tying up of horses in front of Central High School (Woodward/9 Mile). Nine

Mile was paved in 1924, soon followed by the paving of other local streets.

With improvements in roads and automotive technology, the car, by the 1950s, had become the region's preferred transportation means, a change starkly indicated in 1955 when Detroit sold its streetcars to Mexico City—and a transition emphasized by massive freeway construction in the late 1950s and again in the 1990s.

Ferndale prevailed by adapting to all of these transportation challenges and changes. Today, freight trains abide, but Ferndale's passenger train and its station are gone. Horses, oxen, or rowboats are nowhere in sight. The grassy median on Woodward Avenue covers the streetcar rails that once extended northward from Detroit.

Buses—now equipped with bike racks—still ply Woodward and Nine Mile. Bike paths are in place along Hilton and Pinecrest. And some 25,000 cars now pass the Woodward/Nine Mile intersection on an average day.

Yet . . . riding a bicycle on Pinecrest in the silences of a Sunday morning dawn, is it still possible to hear the faint echo of an early traveler's moccasin step on the Saginaw Trail heading north?

Sources: Maurice F. Cole, *Ferndale of Yesteryear* (Ferndale Historical Society, 1971); Henry Dahlheimer, *Public Transportation in Detroit* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1951); Sidney Glazer, *Detroit: A Study in Urban Development* (New York: Bookman, 1965); Almon Ernest Parkins, *Historical Geography of Detroit* (Lansing: Michigan Historical Commission, 1918). David Lee Poremba, *Detroit: A Motor City History* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia, 2001); and Frank B. Woodford and Arthur M. Woodford, *All Our Yesterdays: A Brief History of Detroit* (Detroit: WSU Press, 1969). ¹ Cole, p. 4. ² Cole, p. 25.

The Crow's Nest, Fall, 2006

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2 Mailing: Various Volunteers—Thanks!

Officers of the Ferndale Historical Society

President	Roger Schmidt
Vice President	Ray White
Recording Secretary	Christine Kole
Treasurer	Phyllis Hill
Corresponding Secretary	Jean Spang
Historian	Diane O'Neill
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WAITING FOR THE BUS . . .

Catching the Detroit bus at Ferndale's most popular bus stop, the southwest corner of Nine Mile at Woodward, in the 1950s.

A Memory

"Do you remember how excited we were when we learned we were going to have a Federal Department Store in town? I watched some of my first TV shows on the sets in Federal's window as I waited for the Greyhound bus that made a trip about once an hour in a round-about way through west Ferndale."

Ruth Webb, in *Old Timers tell it like it was*, compiled by Ruth Rodgers Elmers, June Waugh Kotlarek, and Gerry Kulick (editor) (Ferndale, MI: Ferndale Historical Society, 1987): 237.



Jack M. Richards, Photographer

FERNDALE FACT

HEmlock was Ferndale's telephone exchange in 1914.

HOMELAND SECURITY, 1942-1945

Carl Forsythe was Mayor and Civil Defense Warden in Ferndale, 1940-45. His son* writes of his father's responsibilities as protector of Ferndale during the war years:

He often said, with a bemused twinkle in his eye, that his main duty as civil defense warden was to make sure the air raid siren sounded off at noon every day. And he always chuckled a lot when he told the story about the rest of his air raid duty.

He and my mother lived on East Drayton Avenue at the time. The civil defense authorities wanted him to be part of the effort to deal with a bomb attack on Reichold Chemical plant, which made high explosives and which was very close to his house. They didn't know that the Germans didn't have a bomber that could make it to Detroit so they were concerned. I think they were also concerned about sabotage.

To accomplish this task of dealing with bombs hitting a high explosive factory right next to his house, he was equipped with a bucket of sand and a bucket for water. He always said that if they attacked and bombed, he wouldn't have had to worry about deploying his buckets. Still, somehow I don't think he was so bemused at the time . . .

* Gregory H. Forsythe, letter to the Ferndale Historical Society, May 17, 2006.

FERNDALE'S FOOTBALL FOUR: STREETS NAMED FOR FOOTBALL HEROES

City officials, searching for street names in Ferndale's building boom in the 1920s, named the four streets immediately south of 10 Mile Rd., east and west of Hilton, for four football All-Americans, pre-1920: **Mahan, Brickley, Coy, and Shevlin.**

Edward W. Mahan and Charles E. Brickley were All-Americans from Harvard (Mahan, 1915; Brickley, 1912 and 1913). Edward H. (Ted) Coy

and Tom Shevlin were All-Americans from Yale (Coy, 1909; Shevlin, 1905). Brickley was the only one of the four to turn pro; ultimately he formed his own team in New York.

A special thank-you to Joe Mahan, Ferndale High School sports announcer extraordinaire for alerting us to this fact.

CROW'S NEST DEDICATION, 9 MILE AT WOODWARD, August 11, 2006

Summary of Remarks by Ray White, Vice-President, Ferndale Historical Society

The Ferndale Historical Museum has had many visitors over the past 16 years who remarked that they were pleasantly surprised at our vast collection of memorabilia. However, time and again they would call one of our volunteers aside and ask if they could have a copy of our picture of the original Crow's Nest that stood at Woodward and 9 Mile Rd.

This interest led us to believe that perhaps we actually could reproduce the Crow's Nest. One Society member was so enthusiastic that she donated \$500 to get the project off the ground!

I related these happenings to our former city manager, Tom Barwin, and asked if we could, with help from the City, erect a Crow's Nest replica on the Woodward/9 Mile corner. He immediately liked the idea and suggested that a federal grant be written. Some six weeks later the grant was approved.

So Fabulous Ferndale does it again. I say "again" because 'way back when Detroit was the fourth largest city in America, our guiding fathers erected a huge sign at 8 Mile Road which said FERNDALE, NEXT TO THE FOURTH LARGEST CITY IN AMERICA.

As the manufacturing of automobiles began in earnest in the early 20th century, and Woodward Avenue became a crowded place, some kind of traffic control was required due to the fact that cars were traveling 18 to 24 miles per hour. Woodward was narrow, leaving little room for a policeman to direct traffic. Electric stop-and-go lights had not yet been invented.

The mayor and city commission got their heads together and decided that a Crow's Nest was the answer, so in 1920 one was built at Woodward and 9, thus protecting the policemen.

Ferndale police officer Mike Burkart was one of the first to direct traffic from the Nest, turning the sign on top from Stop to Go. Other village officials took turns manning the station. One, Lorenzo Berry, a rather portly gentleman, received considerable good-natured banter because of the difficulty he had squeezing through the small entrance to the platform.

Today, through the efforts of many people, including Congressman Sander Levin, Tom Barwin, and others, this replica of the Crow's Nest is in place, just a few feet from where the original stood. It can now be viewed by some 25,000 drivers a day.

Fabulous Ferndale becomes more fabulous today as it dedicates this historical monument!



FERNDALE'S FIRST CANINE CORPS

Dogs were an important part of the Ferndale Police Department even before Ferndale was formally chartered as a city. In 1926, the department had two dogs who worked with Officers Reginald Lemkie and Mike Burkart. In a letter to the Ferndale Historical Society, dated July 18, 2006, Officer Burkart's son, Mark Burkhart, recalled:

My father's dog was called "Fritz." He loved children. He was my pet and constant companion when he wasn't working. I loved him. On Sunday mornings he would pounce on my bed with a box of "Cracker Jacks" in his mouth. He was almost human.

I remember a trick my dad used to pull to show how well Fritz was trained. He would tell him to jump on our dining room table with all the china in place and not touch one of them.

He was trained by a nice friendly young German man with an accent. I remember going with my dad [when Fritz was being trained] but I had to keep my distance so as to not distract the dog.

Mr. Lemkie's dog was trained by the same man on different days. The dogs were kept apart except when working. I can't recall the name of Mr. Lemkie's dog. Both dogs were trained to disarm a man and hold him until the officer arrived.



"Fritz," Official member, First Canine Team, Ferndale Police Department, 1926. Officer Mike Burkart Collection, Ferndale Historical Museum

CONSIDER THIS . . .

In 1926, a Ford Model T automobile could be bought for \$260.

FERNDALE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OFFICERS, 2006-7: PROPOSED SLATE

Society members will vote for next year's board from this nominee list and any nominations made from the floor, at the Annual Meeting of the Society, Thursday, October 26, 2006, 5pm, Kulick Community Center:

President	Roger Schmidt
Vice-President	Ray White
Recording Secretary	Christine Kole
Corresponding Secretary	Jean Spang
Treasurer	Frank J. LaRock
Historian	Carolyn Steger
Directors: David Lungu	Eleanor Mielke
Mary White	Sherry A. Wells

We thank Charles Beaudet for his many years of service on the board and for his continuing interest in the Society and the Museum.

The current board puts forth the following names for appointed positions:
Board of Trustees: Frank Flores and City Manager, ex-officio (currently vacant)
Membership Lynne Prudden
Maintenance/Crew Chief Victor Paul
Crow's Nest (newsletter):
Editor Jean Spang
Graphics/Production Sherry A. Wells

Memories for Sale

At the Museum
or our frequent booths



Plaque with your date \$85.00
Cast aluminum, 12" x 12"



T-shirts \$ 10.00
1921 Photo / Hist.Soc.Logo



Calendars \$10.00
2006 /Seabee's D-Day

Crow's Nest!



Note Cards \$5.00
Set of 12



Postcards \$.75 each
1921, c.1930, 1947, 1973

BOOKS



Old Timers Tell it Like it Was
compiled and edited by
Ferndale Historical Society
\$15.00



Father, Ford, \$5 a Day series
The Mullers from Missouri
by Sherry A. Wells \$15.00



Ferndale of Yesteryear
Maurice Cole, 1971
\$25.00

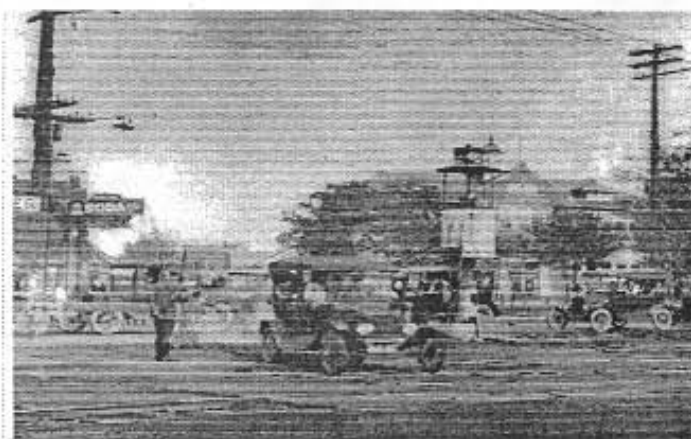


Tough as Nails: A History of the Ferndale Fire Dept.
by Chief Roger Schmidt
Color Photos, 448 p. \$45.00

NEW!!

Photographs of the early days reproduced on high quality photograph paper, suitable for framing. Collect them all! \$10.00 each.

Example at right is the 9 Mile/Woodward intersection, complete with Crow's Nest and Ferndale's finest.



Look Inside

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Page 6 -- Museum Wants You !...and Your Table *and a historic house or buildings*
More Crow's Nest Dedication Photos

Page 7 -- Memories for Sale; NEW! Old photos of the Crow's Nest and the Dipsey Doodle

MISSING PERSONS !

URGENT!

The Museum and the Ferndale Public Schools are trying to learn more about the members of the Lincoln High School Class of 1929, who painted the Lincoln mural. We need their descendants or friends of the families to call *immediately* (248-543-5297) with any leads about:

Ivey Booth, Elsa Goodyear, Rosemary Wesley, John Norton, Stuart Friedrich

Coming Events

October is Family History Month

October 6 *Hometown Days*, put on by the Recreation and Seniors Depts., Community Foundation.

Come see our booth at the Community Yard Sale, 10-5, Martin Rd. Park Activities Bldg.

October 11 *Lincoln Mural Restoration Fundraiser*, Susanne Hilbery Gallery, 700 Livernois, 7 p.m.

Wine-tasting and hors d'oeuvres. \$35.00 (tax deductible!) donation.

October 12 *Climbing Your Family Tree*, Beginning Genealogy, Frank La Rock, 7 p.m., Public Library

October 26 Thursday evening. 5:30 to 8 p.m. Brief annual meeting. More importantly:

Family Fun and Food! Skits, mock assembly line for kids to "work" on, flea market of surplus mementos, selections from our Museum Gift Shop. Dinner: \$10 adults; \$5 kids; under 3 free.

Free! Bring your copy of the *Old Timers* book and get a business index to go with it.

Current Museum Hours: Saturdays (some Sundays) 2 - 4 PM or by appointment.

New longer hours! As soon as you call to offer 2 hours every other month.

No experience necessary! Learn your way around from our experts.

Call Sherry to schedule yourself in: (248) 543-5297--day, evening, machine.



Ferndale Historical Society

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**FIRST
CLASS
MAIL**

"Preserving the heritage of Ferndale for future generations"