



"Preserving the heritage of Ferndale for future generations"

The Crow's Nest

Newletter of the Ferndale Historical Society

Fall 2007



The Badder Building, first two-story building constructed on the northwest corner, Woodward/Nine Mile, 1920.

FERNDALE'S FOUR-CORNER CENTER: WOODWARD AT NINE MILE

Jean Spang

"Ferndale" first appeared on a map in 1905. This official recognition of the area's existence was some 30 years after developers had purchased the 80-acre Albert Campbell farm on the northwest corner of present-day Hilton/Nine with plans, later abandoned, to create "Urbanrest"—a summer resort community for Detroit residents that would be served by the Grand Trunk Rail Road which intersected the property.

Ultimately, at the turn of the century, with the introduction of automobiles and the workers who built them into the region, the conjoining of major north/south (Woodward) and east/west (Nine Mile) transportation routes meant that the center of a new community, "Ferndale," would be the Woodward/Nine intersection. Investors who quickly purchased land on the four corners began to shape the Ferndale we know today with their property subdivisions: "Greenwood Park," on the southwest corner, 1910; "Little Farms" on the southeast corner, 1912; and in 1913, the largest, "Woodward Heights," on the northeast/northwest corners. From then on, businesses and residential areas began to thrive.

Albert Anderson, a County deputy sheriff, was the first to buy several of the northeast corner lots at Woodward/Nine. He initially built a home, then in 1915 built the city's first business building there, a frame structure, for a real estate office, soon expanded to include a grocery store. (Ironically, Deputy Anderson was killed in a shootout with a robber on this same corner in 1917.) By 1917, Wilford G. Ostrander and other investors had begun to construct buildings for commercial purposes along west Nine Mile, thus establishing the retail pattern of the street that continues today.

The first two-story building, the Badder Building, was constructed on the northwest corner, Woodward/Nine, 1920, and housed a real estate office as well as doctor, lawyer, and dentist offices. At the same time, the Aston-Wallace building was constructed on the southwest corner, to house Ferndale's first drugstore and the American State Bank. In 1922 Deputy Anderson's widow sold their northeast corner property to George V. Lux who built the Lux Building (now the site of Como's). In 1929 the C.H. Harrison Building (now the Ferndale Center Building) was built on the southeast corner, replacing the city park long situated in front of the Central School facing Woodward. (In 1924, to accommodate the widening of Woodward, the Badder and Aston-Wallace buildings were moved a number of feet; the Aston-Wallace Building still stands at the corner of Woodward/Troy.)

By the mid-1920s the Woodward/Nine intersection had developed into the commercial hub of the city, with business enterprises expanding on all four sides of the intersection. Ferndale by then had appeared in *Ripley's Believe It or Not* as unique for having a drugstore on each of its four main corners. On the east side of Woodward, the Ferndale Theater had opened in 1922; the Rialto restaurant, in 1926. By the mid-1930's, on the northwest corner, Federal's Department Store (replacing the Badder Building) had opened, followed by the Radio City Theater (1937) at Withington, and the White-Cruiser (late 1930s), Ferndale's first drive-in, at Breckenridge. By

(continued next page)

(continued from page 1)

the early 1940s, on Woodward's west side (near Breckenridge), Ferndale even had a "legitimate" theater, complete with stage and acting troupe. Thus, Ferndale had come of age as a thriving business and residential community.

The Woodward/Nine intersection has long afforded Ferndale residents a first-hand view of history, including the state's first memorial day parade (1927), a captured Japanese one-man submarine on display (World War II), VE- and VJ-Day celebrations (1945), and even visits by General Douglas MacArthur (1952) and President Dwight Eisenhower (1956). From that four-corner vantage point, they also witnessed the city's postwar boom of the 1950s, the leaner times of the 1960s through the 1980s, and the gradual revitalization of the city in the 1990s through today. A very different place than in 1905, and now graced with a replica of the Crow's Nest (the traffic signal that stood in the intersection, 1920-1924), the Woodward/Nine Mile corner remains the most recognized emblem of Ferndale past, present, and future.

Source consulted: Maurice F. Cole, *Ferndale of Yesteryear* (Ferndale Historical Society, 1971): passim.

THE RIALTO: FAMOUS RESTAURANT TO THE FOUR CORNERS

The Rialto Restaurant (Woodward near Nine) was opened in 1926 by two Greek immigrants . . . Alex Kelingos and Basil Theson. Originally, it had six tables and a counter, but when Zehnder's Department Store left, the men bought the building and expanded the restaurant. It was the only eating place on Woodward between Highland Park and Pontiac and quite the place to have dinner . . . Many of the town's doctors, dentists, and lawyers had their offices in the Harrison Building on the southwest corner of Nine Mile and Woodward and the Rialto served as a meeting place for the professional and business people.

Some of the businesses at this intersection included McMillan's, Cunningham's, Federal's, Zeff's, Schmidt's, the S and C Dining Car, Kresge's, and the Wabeek Bank . . .

Betty Kelingos, in *Old Timers Tell It Like It Was*, compiled by Ruth Rodgers Elmers, June Waugh Kotlarek, and Gerry Kulick, Editor, (Ferndale Historical Society, 1987): 158-9.

A MEMORY OF WOODWARD/NINE MILE: 1920s

. . . fun was to bicycle over to Woodward and Nine Mile and watch the man in the traffic tower turn the stop-go signal to control traffic. And a few years later to watch the large buildings at the corner being moved back to widen Woodward. A tethered horse would walk around in a circle turning a mechanism that would pull a building so slowly that you could barely see it move.

Joseph F. Lash, in *Old Timers Tell It Like It Was*, compiled by Ruth Rodgers Elmers, June Waugh Kotlarek, and Gerry Kulick (editor), (Ferndale Historical Society, 1987): 12.

**Ferndale's Nine Mile has had six names in its history:
Sycamore, Nine Mile Road, Little Farms Boulevard,
Elsinore, Ferndale Avenue, and Rockwell Avenue.**

ADDING TO THE MUSEUM'S EXTERIOR DECOR

To make the Museum more recognizable as a museum, up close and at a distance, three vintage wheels have been added to the Museum's landscaping. The largest wheel graces the north side, easily visible from Nine Mile, and two smaller wheels are placed in front of the building, one on either side of the entrance. The wheels are donations of **Phyllis Hill, Lynne Prudden, and Jean Spang**. (A heartfelt thank-you is due to **Lothar Spang** for installing them!)



ENTERTAINMENT AT THE FOUR CORNERS

The opening of Ferndale's movie houses, the Ferndale theater in 1922 , and the Radio City in 1937, meant that the city's Woodward/Nine area was ultimately to become an important entertainment destination. The heyday of "showing the best of Hollywood" (as claimed by a Ferndale Theater ad of the 1920s) lasted, for both theaters, until the 1970s. The Radio City was demolished in 1975. The Ferndale Theater, after several incarnations in entertainment focus and name (Studio North, Deja Vu), emerged in 1996 as the Magic Bag, a venue that today offers "indie" films and other entertainment forms. The following memory of a Hollywood star's behind-the-scenes visit to the Radio City in the 1960s is an example of Ferndale at its most star struck.

THE EYELASH, STEVE McQUEEN, AND THE RADIO CITY THEATER

Sharon Potrzuski

Fifteen days before my 16th birthday, I was just beginning my first job, part-time, working at the concession stand at the Radio City Theater (Woodward at Withington), then one of the region's most popular neighborhood theaters. I had convinced the theater manager that I was already 16. After all, I was enthusiastic, sophisticated, and fashionable, complete with my first pair of false eyelashes.

On that momentous day, Christmas Day 1968, I arrived at the theater well before it opened and was busily arranging the items in the display case. An unexpected knock at the theater's outside door brought the theater manager, Mr. Lieman, running into the lobby to open it. I looked up and, behold, there was Steve McQueen, the real movie star, standing in person right in front of me.

As part of a promotions tour preceding the release of his new movie, "The Reivers," he had agreed to meet with theater managers in the Detroit area, and there he was--in Ferndale--at the Radio City theater--on Christmas Day--right in front of my concession stand. He wore a black turtleneck, a green sports jacket; his blonde hair curled down over the top of his ears and his eyes were a steely blue. He was every inch the movie star.

Mr. Lieman, all aflutter at the honor of having the real Steve McQueen in the lobby, immediately motioned him over to the concession stand and said grandly to me: "Sharon, get Mr. McQueen some popcorn with extra butter."

Still stunned by seeing this famous personage in front of me, I automatically turned and scooped up a full carton. I then reached out to hand it to Mr. McQueen when suddenly, horrors!-- one of my false eyelashes dropped off, right into the real Steve McQueen's popcorn. I was speechless, but he calmly said hello (maybe he hadn't seen the disaster?), graciously took the carton, eyelash included, and casually walked away, talking to Mr. Lieman all the while. I remained dumbstruck for minutes.

"The Reivers" proved to be a good movie; even the critics said so. But meeting Steve McQueen in person and serving him that popcorn remains one of the indelible memories I have of "the movies," Hollywood, the Radio City, Ferndale, and growing up!

WHAT THE FOUR-CORNER CENTER WAS LIKE . . .

Back in 1914, when our family moved to Ferndale, there. . . were muddy streets branching off a gravel road called "Woodward Avenue." There was Silman's farm home at the corner of Woodward and [what is now] Silman, Coleman's Confectionary on Nine Mile and Woodward, with George Badder's Real Estate office across the street--and very little else.

Sheldon Damon, *Old Timer's Tell It Like It Was*, compiled by Ruth Rodgers Elmers, June Waugh Kotlarek, and Gerry Kulick (editor), (Ferndale Historical Society, 1987): 62.

FERNDALE'S FIRST LEGITIMATE THEATER

The new Ringwald Theater, which just opened on the southeast side of Woodward near Nine Mile, is only the most recent of legitimate theaters in the city. According to extant records, most acting groups in Ferndale's earliest days were amateurs affiliated with schools or churches. But in the early 1940s, drama coach June Rilla Byers formed the Ferndale Miniature Theatre Group and opened a small theater on the northwest Woodward near Breckenridge (next door to the White Cruiser, Ferndale's first drive-in restaurant). The theater had a "modern small stage, and facilities for talking pictures." Ms. Byers was a cast member on the "Lone Ranger" radio program, broadcast in Detroit. She was also an early drama coach for Academy Award winning actor George C. Scott. Her professional theater in Ferndale operated for about a year before she moved on to other interests.

Source: Undated, unattributed newspaper clipping in Ferndale Historical Museum files.

The Crow's Nest, Fall 2007

Copyright and published quarterly by:
The Ferndale Historical Society
1651 Livernois
Ferndale, MI 48220 USA

Editor: Jean Spang
Graphics/Layout/Production: Lynne Prudden
Mailing: Various Volunteers (Thank you!)
Copying: Lenny's Copy Center

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	Carolyn Steger
Membership	Lynne Prudden
Communications/Publicity	Sherry Wells
Board of Directors:	David Lungu, Eleanor Mielke, Mary White
Trustees:	Frank Flores; Robert Bruner, City Manager

PROJECT FERNDALE ARCHITECTURE; PROGRESS REPORT

The photographing of Ferndale's some 8,000 structures--homes, businesses, churches, civic facilities, and schools--continues in earnest. As of September 1st, six volunteers were working on the project:

Lisa Breck (Ardmore/Academy)
Beth Breneau (Woodland, Maplehurst)
Karolyn Fuson (Drayton)

Lisa Harteau (Lewiston)
Leah McCullough (Marshall)
Lynne Prudden (Silman, Troy, Jewell)

New volunteers for this important project are welcome. Camera, film and supplies are furnished by, and complete instructions are available from, the Historical Society. Contact **Phyllis Hill**, 284-548-5914.



Welcome Campbell House, Hilton Rd., Lake 1800s



David Campbell House, Hilton Rd., once considered as a Museum, torn down 1970s



Silman House, late 1890s

HONORING OLD HOUSES

Ferndale's present housing stock, whether a modest frame structure dating from the city's early days or a more elaborate brick constructed in the housing booms of the 1920s or later, is a proud aspect of Ferndale history and contributes to the uniqueness of the city's appearance—an area in which street-by-street, one-of-a-kind structures, often representing different eras blend to make architecturally interesting neighborhoods and adding immeasurably to Ferndale's special character as a community.

Three of Ferndale's oldest houses no longer survive: The Welcome Campbell house, 2327 Hilton, the large frame farmhouse of one of Ferndale's earliest pioneers who owned some 80 acres near present-day Hilton and 10 Mile, survived until the early 1900s. (A model of it is on display at the Museum.) The Silman family home, a stately Victorian resident on the 50-acre farm of pioneer Charles A. Silman, built about 1870 on the east side of Woodward near present-day Marshall (Silman is named after this family), lasted into the 1920s. The large brick farmhouse owned by David Campbell, son of Welcome Campbell, located on Hilton, built in the late 1800s, survived well into the 1970s; it was once offered to the City of Ferndale as a museum, but due to restoration expenses was ultimately torn down.

BE PATIENT! THE PLANTS ARE COMING!

The seeds of plants native to Michigan that were provided by a grant from the Wildflower Association of Michigan have been duly planted around the Museum as a fitting memorial to long-time Society volunteer, the late Frank LaRock. **Sherry Wells** is in charge of this project; she has received gracious help from **Jean Davis** and **Anne Heler** in the planting. To make way for the plant beds, **Roger Schmidt** removed the grass, **Jeff Kroon** did the rototilling, and **Frank Flores** completed the yard work. **Cat Diehl** and various members of the Ferndale Fire Department have assisted in the watering of the plot. Each of these volunteers is due sincere thanks for their many efforts in this ambitious project.

FERNDALE BECOMES A PRESERVE AMERICA CITY

The City of Ferndale has been accepted as a part of Preserve America, the White House initiative aimed at assisting local communities in efforts to preserve their historical heritage. Education, publicity, and opportunities to apply for grants to aid preservation efforts are among the benefits of inclusion in the Preserve America program. Ferndale now joins six other Preserve America communities in Michigan: Alpena, Cadillac, Douglas, Grand Rapids, Menominee, and Saugatuck. Wyandotte has submitted an application. Ferndale now is the first city in Oakland County to apply for and receive Preserve America designation. Society volunteer **Isaac David Kremer** was instrumental in coordinating the City of Ferndale's application for Preserve America inclusion.

JOB OPENING FOR HANDY-MAN/WOMAN: IDEAL FOR RETIREE

The Ferndale Historical Society is looking for a talented person to serve as the Museum's caretaker, maintenance guru, and jack-of-all trades. This is a volunteer position that affords flexible hours, intriguing projects, and opportunities to use power tools and be creative—while performing an invaluable community service. Please contact **Phyllis Hill** at the Museum (248-545-7606; leave a message, if necessary).

VINTAGE HOUSES (1900-1910) STILL STANDING IN FERNDALE TODAY*

<u>Street</u>	<u>Year Built</u>	<u>Number of Houses</u>
Academy	1910	1
Ardmore	1901	1
	1905	1
	1910	1
Bennett, E.	1910	1
Bennett, W.	1910	1
Breckenridge	1905	1
Catalpa Ct.	1901	1
Chesterfield, E.	1903	1
Drayton, W.	1907	1
Hazelhurst, W.	1904	1
Hyland	1905	1
Kensington	1901	1
Livernois	1904	1
Marshall, W.	1907	1
Pinecrest	1910	1
Planavon	1905	1
Romeo	1904	1
	1905	1
Saratoga, E.	1910	2
Vester	1905	1
Wordsworth	1903	1

- Table compiled from research on Ferndale's housing stock by Museum Volunteer, **Diane O'Neill**.

THE UNVEILING OF THE LINCOLN MURAL

A reception to unveil the restored Lincoln Mural will be held at Ferndale High School, Commons Area, date to be announced, 6pm. (Tickets: \$20 each.)

A familiar sight to generations of students passing through the halls of Lincoln High School, the mural, painted by five of the school's art students, was a gift of the Senior Class of 1929. It disappeared in the 1970s when the school was torn down, but reappeared as a rolled-up canvas left at the Ferndale Historical Museum in 2005. Museum and Public School officials contacted Dayton Spence, a nationally-known expert in mural restoration, who has now completed the meticulous work required to refurbish the Lincoln Mural in preparation for its installation as a permanent work of art at Ferndale High School--of interest to students, art lovers, and city residents alike.

SEARCHING FOR PHOTOS OF FERNDALE HISTORY: 1960s-PRESENT

The present is the past. Some of us think of the 1960s as only yesterday; others view that decade as ancient history. In any case, it's history, and Ferndale Historical Museum volunteers are looking to build a photographic record of the 1960s and even more recent decades.

Prior to the 1960s there were three professional photographers in Ferndale: Herman Barth, Jack Richards, and Bob Thomas. Each had his own studio; all gave freely of their time, recorded much of Ferndale history, and, combined, they left a photographic record that today remains a key resource in the documentation of Ferndale history pre-1960s.

Since then, few original photographs of the 1960-present era have been added to the Museum's collection. The Museum staff, therefore, is asking for donations of photos that show the people, places, and events of the past 40+ years.

Please search your memories, scrapbooks, and photo albums. If you can help to document, in photographs, aspects of this recent Ferndale history, you will have added immeasurably to the building of an important Ferndale information resource.

THE DREAM CRUISE, THE WOODWARD BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION, AND THE POWER OF CANDY

The Society's booth at the Dream Cruise, August 18, and then at the Woodward Birthday, August 19, had many visitors--a number of them initially attracted by the free samples of candy available on the Society's display table: "root beer barrels," popular in the 1920s, and "butter scotch" hard candy, a favorite in the 1940s. (The candy was supplied by the Fun House Candy Store on Hilton.)

Visitors then examined a 18-inch metal replica of the Woodward/Nine 1920s Crow's Nest traffic signal; a menu from the White Cruiser (hamburgers: 5 cents), the second oldest drive-in on Woodward (Ted's, at Square Lake, was the first); and vintage photos of Ferndale history. Among the photos displayed were those of the 1850s Halfway House Tavern, Saginaw Trail/10 Mile; local 1890s interurban and trolley cars; various Woodward/Nine intersection perspectives through the years; the Radio City Theatre (1937); and even a view of Spaulding and Sons Funeral Home's hearse/ambulance, a 1939 LaSalle.

Copies of these photos were for sale, along with Society T-shirts, stationery, post-cards, to-be-assembled classic cars ("Build Your Own Classic Car: \$2), various books about Ferndale history; the "Ferndale" afghan, and house plaques.

For Society volunteers, one of the most rewarding aspects of the events spanning two days was the number of visitors who, seeing the Society's displays, were suddenly inspired to relate their own stories about Ferndale's past and even plan a visit to the Ferndale Historical Museum.

What memories a "root beer barrel" can evoke!

Volunteers who graciously volunteered at the Society's display booth included: **Cat Diehl, Frank Flores, Elaine Hynes, Tom Jaksa, Diane O'Neill, Roger Schmidt, Jean Spang, Lothar Spang, Sherry Wells, Mary White, and Ray White.**

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES AT THE MUSEUM

Maintaining a local history museum as a viable community resource for residents, the public, and researchers alike requires the talents and interests of many people. Do you have **clerical skills, computer expertise? Woodworking skills?** How about interests in **historical research projects, including oral history?** Are you a **photographer?**

By volunteering only a few hours a week or a month, you can help to provide a responsive information resource for the preservation of Ferndale history. For further information please visit the museum Saturdays 2-4pm or call 1-248-545-7606 Mondays 10am-2pm (or leave a message at other times and staff will return your call later).

HONOR FLIGHT MICHIGAN

Ray White, Vice-President of the Society, was on the first Honor Flight from our area, the trip to Washington DC that honored World War II veterans by providing an all-expenses paid visit to the new World War II memorial. Honor Flight Michigan founder David Cameron made sure that 60 veterans, ages 80 and up, from our region made this first trip which took place on April 12, 2007.

On D-Day 1944, as an 18-year-old Seabee, Ray helped to place the landing approaches on the Normandy beaches. Of his Honor Flight experience, Ray relates:

We left Royal Oak at 3:00am, a bus full of veterans and 15 guardians, with police escort to the airport. At the airport, National Coney Island donated breakfast, which was delivered to the gate. Boarding the plane, we received rounds of applause from bystanders. We then flew to Baltimore MD (deboarding the plane we received more rounds of applause), and took a bus to the monument. We all posed in front of the Michigan pillar.

Afterward, we boarded the bus to go to the Arlington National Cemetery. I had the privilege of placing our wreath on the Tomb of the Unknowns, a supremely emotional experience for me. We had arrived just in time to perform this honor. (The soldiers on honor duty at this tomb operate on a strict to-the-minute schedule.) Former U.S. Senator Bob Dole then spoke to us briefly.

We returned to Royal Oak at 10pm that same evening, a momentous day and a once-in-a-lifetime memory.

Please Look Inside!

- Page 1 Ferndale's Four-Corner Center
- Page 2 The Rialto; A Memory
- Page 3 Entertainment at the Four Corners
- Page 4 Ferndale's First Legitimate Theater
- Page 5 Honoring Old Houses
- Page 6 Vintage Houses
- Page 7 The Dream Cruise; Honor Flight Michigan

CALENDAR

- | | |
|------------------------------|---|
| October Date to be Announced | Reception and unveiling of the restored Lincoln Mural [the gift of the Lincoln High School Class of 1929]. Ferndale High School, Commons area. Tickets: \$20. |
| Thursday, October 25, 6pm | Historical Society Annual Meeting and Board Meeting, Kulick center. |
| Thursday, November 15, 7pm | Preview, Friends of the Ferndale Public Library Book Sale, Public Library. |
| Saturday, November 17, 9-3 | Arts and Crafts Show, Kulick Center. |
| Saturday, November 17, 9-5 | Friends of the Ferndale Public Library Book Sale, Library. |
| Thursday, November 22, 6pm | Historical Society Board Meeting, Kulick Center. |
| Thursday, December 20, 6pm | Historical Society Board Meeting, Kulick Center. |
-



Ferndale Historical Society
1651 Livernois
Ferndale, MI 48220
(248) 545-7606
ferndalehistory@tm.net

**First
Class
Mail**