

The Crow's Nest

NEWSLETTER OF THE FERNDALÉ HISTORICAL SOCIETY

FALL 2010

FERNDALÉ—WAY BACK

Jean Spang

The corner of Nine/Woodward can suddenly provide a millisecond-microcosm perspective on southeastern Michigan history. Consider: The area encompassing the 3.9 square miles that is present-day Ferndale was once at the bottom of a vast sea. It took some 2,000 billion years of geologic evolution, from volcanic to glacial to simple erosion, to shape today's Michigan and make way for Ferndale's most recognizable man-made landmark, the Crow's Nest—which now stands on an ancient Indian trail.

Within these 2,000 billion years were many eras, some lasting hundreds of millions of years. Early on, the land was repeatedly submerged under water, then rose, and gradually the sea bottom was eroded. The climate during this primal time varied from warm to jungle-like tropical.

Then, some two million years ago, an ice sheet which, according to some experts, measured as much as 2 to 4 miles thick, appeared from the Arctic, covering the area that was to become Michigan four times and pushing any existing vegetation and animal life far south. Each time the ice receded the land surface was scoured to a deeper level. There still were no Great Lakes.

But some 35,000 years ago, as the last ice sheet slowly began to recede, the climate became more temperate, the melting glaciers gave way to rivers, and the land eroded to the point that, some 16,000 years ago, Lake Erie appeared and, soon, the other Great Lakes. The soil from the bottom of the old sea then became a receptive environment for plants, animals, forest, and fish—and, ultimately, Native Americans.

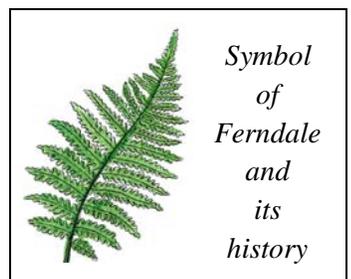
Some 12,000 years ago, as the glaciers melted gradually northward, small bands of nomads from the south, the Paleo-Indians, entered what is now Michigan and the 900-mile area that is the present Oakland County, a region that was still cold and damp, with thick forests of spruce and fir. These nomads, searching for food, were following the trail of mastodon and mammoths, caribou, deer, and elk, which they lured to bog areas and killed with rocks and spears tipped with fluted points.

For 2,000 years the Paleo-Indians remained in the area—until their principal food source, mastodons, began to move northward as the climate became more temperate; these Indians moved north with them. But one group of Indians, the Aqua Plano, stayed in the region, becoming accomplished game hunters and perfecting new types of hunting tools, principally unfluted projectile points, necessary to capture the changed food supply.

Another group of early Indians, the Archaic Indians, soon emerged in Oakland County as the climate grew ever more temperate, bringing a new environment that encouraged more varied plant and animal life. Deer, elk, bear, raccoon, and opossum were then hunted with spears with notched points. The many lakes meant fish for food, creative methods to catch them, and dugout canoes for transportation. The Archaic Indians prevailed for some 7,000 years. They lived in huts and fashioned hunting and carpentry tools from igneous stone. By 1,500 B.C. the Archaic Indians had begun firing clay for pottery.

A new group, the Hopewell Indians, known for building permanent settlements, farming techniques, and large burial mounds, had moved into southwestern Michigan by 100 B.C. and then into other parts of the Lower Peninsula. (Five of their burial mounds were found in Oakland County in 1937.) By 700 A.D. another group of Native Americans, called the Young Tradition Indians, had become residents; they were primarily farmers of corn, beans, and squash, had triangle-shaped arrowheads for hunting small game, and produced tools of flint.

By the time that French explorers and missionaries arrived in the area in 1607, the terrain of Oakland County was shaped much like it is today. But it was still a formidable area, mainly bogs and thick forests, with some 450 lakes (cont'd on page 2)



(an average of two for every two square miles of land). The entire area was criss-crossed with trails used by Native Americans: the Chippewa (Ojibwa), Pottawatomie, Ottawa, Miami, Sauk, Fox, and Mascoutah.

Oakland County was first explored by the white man for “business purposes” in 1818 when Major Oliver Williams led a party into the area to assess trading possibilities. “Ferndale” was still the “impassable bog” on Detroit’s northern border. But by 1820 shoemaker Jabez White, the first settler in what was to become Ferndale, had opened his tavern on a local branch of the Saginaw Trail (Pinecrest/Eight Mile). By the early 1830s most Indian tribes once living in the 900 miles of the county had moved or been relocated from the area. Then in succession: 1828, a railroad had been built from Detroit as far as Royal Oak; 1841, the main Saginaw Trail (Woodward) had been roughly cleared for northern travel from Detroit; 1859, Welcome Campbell had established a 750-acre farm on the present Hilton Road in Ferndale; 1898, street cars appeared on Woodward; 1908, Henry Ford offered \$5 a day to workers at his new plant in Highland Park; 1918, Ferndale was chartered as a village; early 1920s, traffic jams on Woodward required the building of the first Crow’s Nest traffic control tower at Nine/Woodward; 1928, Ferndale became a city.

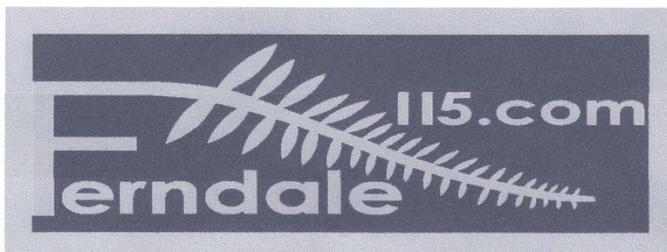
Fast forward a few seconds to 2010, at Nine/Woodward, and there stands today’s re-creation of the original Crow’s Nest, a stalwart reminder of billions of years of history necessary to create Ferndale—each era built upon what had gone before.

Astounding?

Sources consulted: [Note: Dates cited in this article are approximate—as are those which appear in the following sources that outline the development of early Michigan and Oakland County.] Geologic History: Constance Kingman Crossman, Royal Oak, Our Living Legend, Royal Oak, Michigan: School District, 1974. Native American History: Arthur A. Hagman (ed.), Oakland County Book of History [Sesqui-Centennial Celebration], Pontiac, Michigan: Oakland County Board of Commissioners, 1970. Overview: M.M. Quaife and Sidney Glazer, Michigan: From Wilderness to Industrial Commonwealth, New York: Prentice-Hall, 1948.

Officers of the Ferndale Historical Society: 2010

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BORDER WARS: FERNDALE vs. PLEASANT RIDGE

The dead-ending of Livernois at Oak Ridge in Ferndale caused dissension that ultimately set the border between Ferndale and Pleasant Ridge. The controversy began in 1935 and required settlement by the State legislature. Pleasant Ridge residents had resisted the opening of Livernois, still a dirt road, through Pleasant Ridge to connect Livernois to Royal Oak's Main St., M-150, and onward into Michigan's thumb. State Highway officials backed the move and were supported by Ferndale Commissioner Sidney G. Hill, who saw the opening as a means of reducing the increasing traffic problems in Ferndale's northwest quadrant.

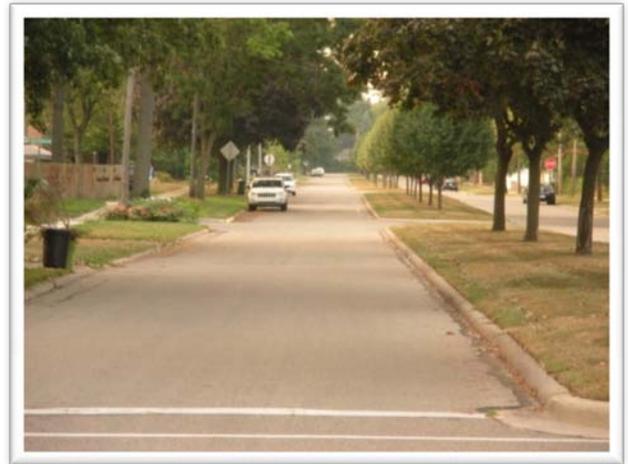
But Pleasant Ridge residents rose up en masse at this plan, as it would require "slashing through four blocks of one of South Oakland's most beautiful residential areas." Pleasant Ridge prevailed. The dead-end at Oakridge marked the Ferndale end of Livernois.

The irony is that, in 1950, Ferndale moved to block Livernois at Nine Mile—to curb cross-traffic to Woodward and Pincrest. Thus Livernois, as a through street in Ferndale, ultimately ended at Nine Mile.

Source summarized: Richard D. Raddant, "Livernois Closing Plea Recalls 1935 Dispute," Daily Tribune, August 5, 1950



Livernois Dead-end at Oakridge, set in the 1930s as it is today



Livernois between 9 Mile and Oakridge today



Livernois Dead-end at 9 Mile, set in the 1950s as it is today

RAY WHITE; 1925-2010

The present Crow's Nest presiding over the Woodward/Nine Mile intersection is a re-creation of the site's original traffic control tower from the 1920s. Ray White, long-time member of the Ferndale Historical Society, along with other Society volunteers, was the inspiration behind the building of this monument to Ferndale's former days. Dedicated on August 11, 2006, this landmark is also a reminder of Ray's dedication to Ferndale.

His vivid memories of growing up in the city and his Lincoln High School days (Class of 1943), his spirited recollections of his 30 years at General Motors, and his proud service as a SeaBee who was among the first to arrive on the Normandy Beach on D-Day 1944—all earned him profound respect at the Museum and in the community.

He was a familiar figure at the Museum. Whether serving as the Society's president, a volunteer answering questions for Museum visitors, or himself a Museum visitor, Ray was a memorable man. He worked diligently on Museum projects, graciously represented the Society in various civic endeavors, and treated everyone with grace, dignity, and an ever-present smile.

Will we ever hear the phrase "Did you hear the one about . . ." without recalling Ray, walking through the Museum door, ready with a new or old joke? His sudden absence is an eloquent reminder to all of us that we were, and are, indeed privileged to have known him.

Drive Carefully and Walk Right the sign read on the Crow's Nest of the 1920s—and says today, 2010. What better phrase sums up Ray, the proud GM retiree, dedicated civic activist, soldier, and friend? Drive carefully and walk right!



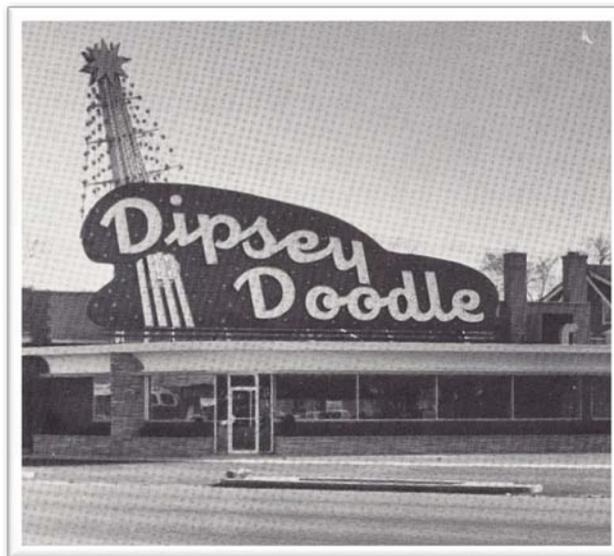
Ray White
A Familiar Face in Ferndale and Oak Park

FROM TED'S TO THE TOTEM POLE . . .

Hunter Morley

Once upon a starry night
When we were young and bold
We cruised the drive-ins on the strip
From Ted's to the Totem Pole
With flashing fins and smoking tires
In chrome machines we rolled
We were the Lords of Woodward nights
When we were young and bold
In cars of steel and chrome made in the U.S.A.
We never thought that we'd be bought
That our dreams would fade away
But then from all the mile road lights
Along the Woodward strip
With pedals floored the big eights roared
And they were hard to whip
Never blinking, never thinking
That we'd soon grow old
With blue jean queens in our dream machines
We squealed and peeled and rolled
The cars like stars that gleamed at night
Mean and fast and strong
Rock and roll was in our soul
And we could do no wrong
For we were the Lords of Woodward nights
When we were young and bold.

Source: Quoted from "Born to Cruise Woodward," the 1999 Calendar of the Ferndale Historical Society. Royal Oak, MI: Historical Hang-ups, 1999.



The Dipsey Doodle Drive-in, 1528 S. Woodward, 1950s
Photo: Courtesy the *Lincoln Log* (yearbook of Lincoln High School), 1955

THE NAVAHO BLANKET: A LEGACY TO FERNDALE FROM THE FAMILY OF FERNDALE POLICE OFFICER MICHAEL BURKART

The Mounted Division of the Ferndale Police Department lasted only a short time in the early 1920s. Its Sergeant-in-Charge, Michael Burkart, who later became a Patrolman on the Force, remains a memorable figure in the development of the Police Department.

Born in Lake Linden, MI in 1884, he joined the U.S. Cavalry in 1902 and was assigned to "H" troop of the 5th Cavalry stationed at Ft. Wingate, New Mexico. By 1920 he had returned to Michigan and, after a stint with the Detroit Police Department, joined the fledgling Ferndale Police force. Officer Burkart's career in Ferndale spanned 25 years: from the days when horses were still a major means of transportation, through the introduction of cars and traffic jams, from chasing speeders to tracking down members of the infamous Purple Gang, from the vicissitudes of the Depression to the dire days of World War II. He retired from the Department in 1943 and passed away two years later.

One of the most intriguing stories of his life dated to his service as a Cavalry Officer. As reported in an undated article in the *Ferndale Gazette*, printed at the beginning of World War II, and now in the Museum archives:

Mike was stationed in Arizona as a member of the Fifth Cavalry. Some Navajo Indians went on a rampage [in 1906] and Mike was in the detail of the Fifth that went 90 miles out into the desert to round them up.

There was some shooting and some killing; then the remainder of the rebels began their long walk back across the desert, in irons.

Behind them trailed some squaws, including a young woman, wife of one of the renegades. On her back, on a board, she carried their baby.

Mike couldn't quite stand the sight of her slogging step by step across that blazing desert. He swung the baby aboard his horse, and for four days he carried that wee son of a man who, no matter how wrong . . . , had fought for his freedom. Then Mike turned the baby back to his mother and forgot the incident.

A year later, Mike was called one day to the Orderly Room. There stood an Indian, one of the rebels, released that day from jail. With him was a squaw. And with them, a sharp-eyed baby boy.

Without a word, but with a smile, the woman stepped forward and handed Mike a striking [brown and white Navajo blanket. A thanks-gift from a mother to a man.

The blanket, with its ancient symbol of hope, is now in the possession of the Ferndale Historical Museum, a gift from Mike's son, Walter Burkart.



Left: Mike Burkart Exhibit, Ferndale Historical Museum



Right: Navaho presenting blanket to Sgt. Burkart, Ft. Wingate, New Mexico, ca. 1907

Navaho blanket given to Officer Michael Burkart, 1907. The ancient symbol of hope seen here (arms in counter clockwise direction) was later adapted (arms in clockwise direction) as the official emblem, the swastika, of the Nazi party and the Third Reich.

From our Director

I would like to thank you for your continued support of the Museum, and am pleased to announce that we have several new displays at the Museum for your enjoyment. In addition to our regular in-house displays we now offer a display on Michael Burkhart, Ferndale's first police officer, and his illustrious career.

We also have a display on the Old Grand Trunk Railroad station, which has the original blue-prints for its construction in the 1930s. We are also featuring a permanent display of the work of Albert Bates, a one-time resident of Ferndale, a former custodian at Lincoln High School, and an accomplished artist.

I am hoping that this newsletter will find one of our members in possession of a hat and boots or a baton used and worn by Ferndale's Lincoln High School Drum Majorettes in 1940s. We do have a uniform but are in search of the accessories. If you are in possession of one or more of these items, know where they might be found, and would be interested in donating them to the Museum, we would be most appreciative and interested in hearing from you.

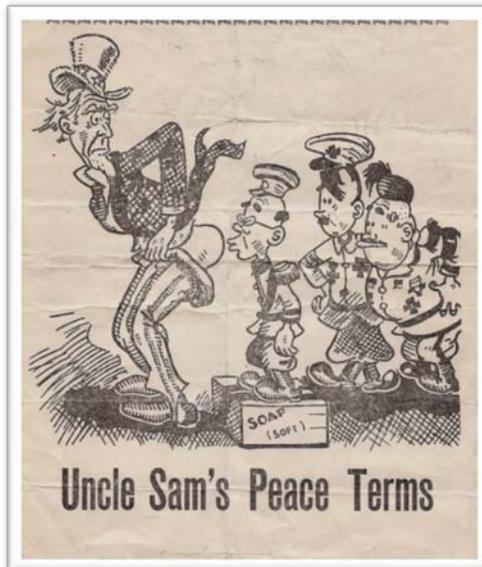
We at the Museum and members of the Society are wishing you all the best, for the upcoming Holiday season.

*Thank you and warm regards,
Garry Andrews
Museum Director*

THE FARMERS ALMANAC PREDICTION, 2011

It'll be colder than normal for much of the country, the almanac says, and New England will get a "cold slap in the face" after missing last winter's misery. Finally, residents of the upper Midwest and Great Lakes are expected to get the piles of snow that'll be lacking elsewhere.

THE END OF WORLD WAR II*



*Unattributed flyer donated by a Ferndale resident, in the Museum archives

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Calendar of Events:

Thursday, September 23 rd , 6 pm	Board Meeting, Historical Society, held at the Museum, public is welcome
Thursday, October 28 th , 6 pm	Board Meeting, Historical Society, held at the Museum, public is welcome
Thursday, November 18 th , 6 pm	Board Meeting, Historical Society, held at the Museum, public is welcome
December – No meeting	

The Crow's Nest, Fall 2010

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