



The Crow's Nest

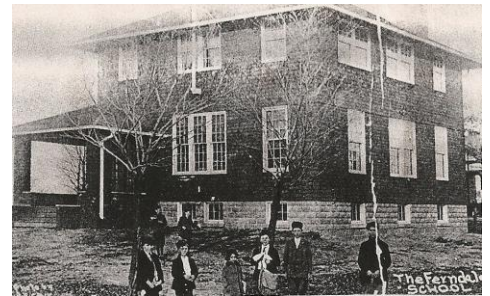
NEWSLETTER OF THE FERNDALE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Fall 2015

BRICKS, MORTAR, AND BEYOND: A STORY OF FERNDALE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Jean Spang

The Ferndale School District has had eighteen neighborhood schools in its history. The earliest school (no known name), designated on an 1857 County map as located at Ferndale's present Nine Mile/Allen corner, had an unknown fate. An 1872 County map marks Porter, a one-room frame building at the southeast Woodward/Nine corner, as the area's lone school. An oral history account later places a small school named Urbanrest (date of closure unknown) on the site of what in 1920 would become Harding School. (The Urbanrest School was then moved to nearby Inman street and remodeled as a private residence.) By 1913 the Ridge Road School was erected on the Ridge Road/Oakridge corner, and by 1920 was moved to the rear of the grounds (and later demolished) to accommodate the new Roosevelt School. In 1914 Ferndale School, a new building at the Woodward/Nine corner, meant to replace Porter, was completed but destroyed by fire before opening. Central School was then built on the same site in 1916. (Porter was subsequently moved as a "spare building" to what in 1921 would be the Lincoln High School (LHS) site, Nine/Livernois.) In 1917 Ridgewood School was built on Eight Mile near Stratford. Thus, by 1919, the Village of Ferndale had four known schools in operation: Central (by 1930 used as the public library), Ridge Road, Ridgewood, and Porter (which temporarily housed students after the Ferndale School fire).



Ferndale School destroyed by fire before opening, 1914. Photo: Museum Collection.

Henry Ford's offer of \$5/day to his Highland Park plant workers in 1914 soon inspired a population and housing boom in Ferndale and, by the 1920s, an urgent need for new local schools. In quick succession nine schools were built: Harding and Roosevelt, 1920; Lincoln High, 1921; Washington and Wilson, 1923; Coolidge and Jefferson, 1925; Grant, 1926; and, in 1928, Taft (to replace the Ridgewood School demolished to make way for a widened Eight Mile). Then, not until the 1950s, when Jackson School (now Jackson Center, CASA) was built in 1950, then Best (later named Kennedy, now part of CASA) in 1954, and last, in 1958, the new Ferndale High replaced Lincoln High, would Ferndale have three more new schools. (Coolidge and Harding were rebuilt in the 1990s.)



One of the shops in a Ferndale Junior High, ca. 1940s. Tractor was loaned by Henry Ford. Photo: Ferndale Schools, Museum Archives.

Ferndale's earliest schools, dating from the late 1800s through about 1919, had minimal staff and facilities—and teaching strictly focused on the 3R's with few frills. But by the 1920s an expanded educational framework was introduced and, in subsequent years, creatively refined: Socialization was emphasized for kindergarteners. Learning to read for the lower grades included handwriting for the first graders, manuscript forms through the second grade, and cursive writing for third graders. Arithmetic was stressed in the early grades, with an emphasis on the importance of math and its practical applications in life. Second and third graders focused on addition and subtraction. Fourth, fifth, and sixth graders concentrated on multiplication and division. High school students had academic choices among subject fields and opportunities for those not "academically" inclined. Manual training, typing, chemistry, and foreign languages (but no German in the '20s because of WWI) were offered.

Regardless of grade level in those early days, students learned through programs that included lessons and participation in shop, crafts, arts, physical education, music, spelling, science, health, safety, recreation, athletics, and field

trip activities, means that continue today. In 1929 five LHS students, inspired by teacher Rosemary Lawrence, painted the famous Lincoln Mural that was a landmark in the school's main hallway until the building was demolished in 1978. (This mural is now part of the Ferndale Historical Museum collection.) Noteworthy among practical learning projects of the 1930s was a one-story frame building constructed by 25 Coolidge boys behind their school, a project requiring lessons in math, geometry, wood-working, masonry use, and even spelling, penmanship, and other fields of knowledge—an endeavor supported by a School Board \$750 contribution.

Emphasized in the Depression-era 1930s were youth activities dedicated to community involvement, patriotism, and history. In 1932, Ferndale's last Civil War veteran, Francis M. Sockman (1844-1938) addressed a Lincoln High history class. In 1934 LHS students presented the Gilbert and Sullivan opera *The Mikado*, and Latin Club Banquet attendees each had to wear a toga. Then, the school's Rifle Club won a trophy for perfect scores from the Century Club. Soon, local young people formed Youth Incorporated, a group that encouraged young people to participate in activities to benefit the city. As a result, Coolidge students gathered funds necessary to purchase bricks from the demolition of Detroit's main post office to be used in the construction of Ferndale's iconic Castle on the Nine, a community youth center for learning and recreation, which proved to be a vital city resource during the Depression and War years. The community's celebration of George Washington's 200th birthday in 1932 was centered in schools, as was the annual celebration of Armistice Day (World War I end, 1918).

After the 1941 declaration of World War II, bond drives, can collections, defense programs, and entertainment opportunities were a major focus for the community, schools, and students. Taft students even raised funds to buy a dog for a war veteran. A new Taft theater group, the Taft Players, presented plays for stressed students and the community alike. Emphasis on youth recreation, which had been a special focus in the 1930s, inspired major improvements in school gyms and playing fields in the postwar 1940s—with the complete support of school administrators and staff and all city officials.



The inside of a kindergarten classroom, ca. 1940. Photo: Ferndale Schools, Museum Archives.

The 1950s introduced controversy. The opening of Jackson School was initially suspect. It was a “progressive school” in which students were taught at their own pace rather than in a traditional group, and radio and film were key parts of the learning process. Also, to prevent tooth decay, fluorine treatments in school facilities were offered to students, an unheard-of concept for cautious parents (but ultimately accepted), and the first such program in Oakland County.

The *Detroit News* in 1960 awarded Ferndale Public Schools special recognition for nine of its schools having a perfect safety record. A new music room and special education classes were added at Roosevelt. The Ferndale Eagles won the 1963 State Class A Basketball Championship. From 1968 forward, plays at the high school, such as *Fiddler on the Roof*, *Oklahoma*, and *The Music Man* attracted large crowds. Community and school leaders debated the feasibility of a three-track curriculum in high school: academic, fine and practical arts, and basic. Controversy arose over discrimination in community clubs (fraternities, sororities) in the high school. The Federal government in the late 1960s charged Ferndale with segregation because Grant School, a neighborhood school, had a disproportionate number of black students, a case, first of its kind in the US, which was not settled until 1980. (But Federal oversight continued until the 1990s.

Forty-two local students, in the 1970s, won prizes from the Michigan Industrial Society for projects in categories of architecture, working drawings, models, vocational machine shop, welding, lithography, printing, and photography. The FHS Band won an All-City Band Festival prize. By 1971, petitions for strengthened weapons rules at the high school were presented. The School Board voted against requiring the Pledge of Allegiance to be said in classrooms. Anti-drug programs were introduced in the lower grades.

Computers, in the 1980s, were widely used in schools, high school and otherwise, to improve math and writing skills. New physical education means were adopted to aid physically challenged and overweight students. Anti-drug programs were now mandatory in K-12 grades. Diversity was celebrated: flags representing thirty-six countries hung in the FHS commons area, honoring the origins of the school's students, parents, and staff. High school students built an

alternative energy center in the school's three-acre courtyard, including two ponds, a stream and varieties of trees, a project which, by 1985, was recognized by the National Teachers Association for its outstanding science and weather programs. Grant Elementary featured an African dance troupe celebrating Black History month, 1987. In 1989 a special parenting class required high school students, in lieu of an exam, to "attentively" carry one uncooked egg (preferably in a box) with them everywhere for a week without breaking it. Ferndale High's exterior was now routinely patrolled for safety.

Some 500 Roosevelt students, in a 1990s assignment, each wrote a story which was combined into a book that was widely discussed in classes and resulted in a play, considered an outstanding success for the district. Similar classes at Coolidge had students write a story about their grandparents' life, a sometimes humorous, sometimes disturbing lesson in how times change. By 1993 a stray cat, later named Warren (J. Harding), found in a snow drift by a student, was granted a permanent home at Harding School as the school's resident cat. In 1994, Harding's open classroom hosted Detroit Tigers pitcher Denny McLain jumping rope alongside TV announcer Eli Zaret to Jerry Lee Lewis's "Whole Lot of Shakin'" as part of an American Heart Association's school heart-health program. The high school's focus on diversity attracted ABC-TV's Peter Jennings to Ferndale in 1994 to host, for network broadcast, a student panel discussion on education and jobs. Women in world history was the subject of a 1994 FHS exhibit. Programs on AIDs awareness and drunken driving were introduced. And in 1995 a Federal judge, in the final step of ending the 1960s Ferndale School District desegregation case, lifted the oversight of Ferndale schools requirement. In 1996 an earthquake simulator was introduced to Taft's second-grade science class as a way of explaining earthquakes. Taft students, the same year, performed Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. A rebuilt Coolidge opened as a junior high in 1997, Harding was rebuilt in 1998 (later used as a School District administrative office), and Jefferson closed as a school in 1999. The Golden Eagles Marching Band won several state championships during the decade. Technology remained a key teaching focus in all schools.

By 2000 Washington School was closed. In 2001, an alternative adult learning program and later the new Digital Learning Center were both centered at Taft. Surveillance cameras were introduced into the high school in 2005. By 2015 the high school's Robotics Team (FIRST) participated in state competitions with robots they had built, indicating STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) programs promised to be a future education focus. The Digital Learning Center and the alternative adult education programs, both located at Jefferson, closed in 2015.

Plans today are that a thirteenth year at Ferndale High and University High schools will soon be introduced in connection with Baker College, offering a combination of high school and college classes leading to an Associates Degree in fields such as criminal justice, medical technology, computer programming, and business/marketing--at no cost to parents. A secondary honors program will be offered at the high school, and a middle-school Cambridge International Curriculum will be extended to K-8 grades. Taft, Wilson, and Jefferson schools are scheduled to be sold to housing developers. Remaining classes, preschool, elementary, middle school, high school, and an alternative education program will be consolidated into five buildings.

A district that once accommodated 7,000 students in eleven schools now has an enrollment of 3,000. Yes, Ferndale public schools have come a long way from the one-room frame building on a dusty road in the later 1800s. In each subsequent decade, the Ferndale School District, by creatively adapting to changes in population, industry, technology, economics, culture, Federal/State requirements, SAT/ACT/GED standards, and public expectations, has continued to develop innovative learning means and programs—all based on early 20th Century education maxims: "Learn to Live and Live to Learn" and "Learn to Do by Doing." And Denny McLain Tigers Superstar and Warren G. Harding the Cat helped!



Regardless of year or means, the three R's have been taught with emphasis in all Ferndale classrooms.
Photo: ca. 1940 Ferndale Schools, Museum Archives.

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

Ferndale's early schools section. Ruth Rodgers Elmers, June Waugh Kotlarek, Gerry Kulick (Ed.), *Old Timers Tell It Like It Was* (Ferndale Historical Society, 1987), various comments about local schools, *passim*. Ferndale Historical Museum Archives files for each school: Parent-Teacher Association bulletins; School Board releases; and various Ferndale Public School communications [especially booklet "Learn to Live and Live to Learn" which includes curriculum outlines and photos]; the Hunter Collection [Lincoln High information]. Various newspaper coverage, 1920s-2015, from newspapers: Detroit Free Press, Detroit News, Ferndale Gazette, Daily Tribune, Mirror, Woodward Talk. Walter Myhr, oral history/note: Urbanrest School, in Museum Archives.

LESSONS FROM TAFT SCHOOL, 1948-1977*

Sharon A. Kennedy

Taft School was built in 1928, the ninth neighborhood school erected in the Ferndale School District in the 1920s. In 2001 Taft became the Taft Education Center, an alternative adult education school. By 2012 it housed the Digital Learning Center, an alternative school for high school students, which closed in 2014. Soon, Taft will be no more. Plans in 2015 are that the building and/or its site will be used for residential housing.



Every day, morning, noon, and night, a safety patrol boy sees that the passage is made safe. Automobile drivers recognize these boys by the white belt and shoulder strap and stop when directed.

Safety Patrol, ca. 1940. Ferndale Schools, Museum Archives.

as was her service on the Inter-School Student Council, where every month, each of eight elementary schools would send students to a central meeting place to discuss district-wide issues. Meeting locations rotated among the schools. On one occasion, Sandra was responsible for hosting an ice skating party at the Taft designated ice rink, one of the Magic Square recreation areas sponsored by the City of Ferndale from the 1950s-1970s.

Matt, Sandra's second child, attended Taft in the third grade through the sixth grade. His first memory of leadership was as president of his fourth-grade class, a responsibility that allowed him class time for business as well as lessons in the fiscal management of funds collected for the next season's camp. "It was a great lesson in civics and watered-down parliamentary procedure," he recalls. Matt outdid his mother in leadership roles by participating in the safety patrol squad, rising to the rank of captain. He, too, went to fifth-grade camp where he became a camp counselor. But it was in Mr. Felsenfelt's sixth-grade class where he most flourished—and found a life-long passion for history through Mr. F's accounts of his experiences as a World War II pilot.

Not all of Matt's memories of Taft are good ones. In the 1970s, teachers did not understand his disability: dyslexia. One of his teachers told him he was "slow" and humiliated him "often and openly," he says. He shut down, his school work suffered, and social workers came to the house to see if there were problems at home. His mother challenged the workers' assessments of her son's intelligence. He then was tested and found to have a high IQ and the vocabulary of a sixteen-year-old. His mom encouraged him to prove his teacher wrong. He did, deciding his teacher would neither define nor defeat him. Ironically, as a high school student, he was asked to tutor children with learning disabilities from the same teacher's class. A vindication for him and a victory for them!

Matt's one other vivid memory was his attendance at Taft at the time of the Federal Government's order to desegregate Ferndale's Grant School. Located in Royal Oak Township, in a predominately black neighborhood, Grant was an integral part of the School District; its students were to be relocated to other elementary schools. Tensions built before the new students arrived at Taft. Within a week of their presence, there was a fight. Matt recalls that the "toughest" white kid picked a fight with a black girl on the playground. "She handled him readily," he says. After that, there was mutual respect between all parties.

Robert Goralczyk, Taft science teacher and coach, remains a hero to three girls from the Class of 1961. At a time when girls' sports was considered an afterthought, he was responsible for ensuring that sports played an important part of their lives. On Wednesday nights, 6:30-8:30pm, he organized a gym time for girls' basketball. The game was limited to half court and two dribbles. But the players didn't care, they played anyway. "I give Mr. G so much credit for us being involved in sports," says Janet. She was captain of the Running Bears team and played guard. "I was a good guard. I was all over the place. I would have been a good athlete in a different time."

In mid-Twentieth Century, we lived one block away from Taft, an important part of my family history. It was not only a neighborhood learning center but a community center as well. My sister Sandy and I, and my friends Janet and Lynn, attended Taft when it was a K-8 school; my nephew Matt was a student there when it was K-6 only.

Sandra, Class of 1958, recalls that "teachers in the school were kind, caring, and knowledgeable. Student awards and team trophies were on display in a glass case by the gym; everyone got due acknowledgment for efforts." Fifth-grade camp, and service on the safety patrol squad where she assumed responsibility for the orderly conduct of other students, were especially memorable to her—

Lynn came to Taft in the fourth grade—with long braids and long dresses. This was how her English mother thought girls dressed. Lynn had a lot to overcome. But she soon got rid of the long dresses and took up sports, particularly basketball. Lynn agrees that Mr. G was awesome. “He worked us as hard as the boys and took a great interest in us as young athletes. He rode me hard because he knew I was obsessed with basketball, and he wanted me to succeed.” Lynn was amused one day years later when her daughter Jasmine came home from Taft to tell her that “Back in the ‘old days,’ girls could only play half court.”

Some nights we girls played volleyball. Other days, we organized our own softball teams. While other kids would leave school every day at 3:15 not to return until the last possible minute the next day, some of us would go home, eat, change clothes, and head back to Taft to play ball. The longest trek to those Taft playing fields was for girls, like Lynn, who lived near Woodward, walked west on Fielding, and often met fellow team members along the way. Other players would come from streets west of Taft: Meadowdale, Farmdale, Flowerdale, and Gardendale. Some of us had to be home when the streetlights came on. I broke the rules just once. But after seeing my mother in the distance purposely walking toward the field (and me) after the curfew, I never “strayed” again. The penalty was serious—no more baseball.

Not all of us were great players; most of us were just average. But we wanted to play—for difference reasons. For most girls of the Class of 1961, playing sports served two important purposes. First, they gained confidence in themselves. Second, they learned the value of physical fitness. But some saw playing ball after school as a “saving grace, a way not be home.” For a few, sports deflected from a troublesome home environment, allowing them to learn that if an environment cannot be changed, they could change their position, or walk away if necessary. They learned survival. Taft, for them, was a safe haven.

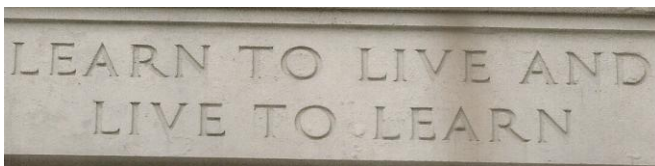
Significant recollections of Taft in the 1948-1977 period include the inscriptions etched over the school’s two entrance doors: “Learn to Live and Live to Learn” on the Allen side, and John Dewey’s famous “Learn to Do by Doing” on the Fielding side. As students, we did not understand that our life experiences would give these words profound meaning. For Sandra, it was lessons in leadership. For Matt, it was learning to overcome obstacles and not allow bitterness and anger to defeat him, a lesson for lifetime.

Indeed, each of us at Taft was learning to live!

**Contributors include current Michigan residents Sandra Kennedy Strain, Matthew Strain, and Janet Stinsio Townley. Lynn Hanley Thompson resides in the State of Washington.*



Taft School Entrance on Fielding. Photo Garry Taylor, 2015



Taft School entrance on Allen. Photo: Garry Taylor 2015.

TAFT SCHOOL, FERNDALE, MI. Photo: Garry Taylor 2015.



WHAT DIDN'T YOU KNOW ABOUT M1 (WOODWARD)?

First ticket ever written in the U.S. for street racing was in Detroit on March 17, **1895** when two unidentified motorized vehicles sped up Woodward just before dawn. (According to *HotRodNetwork.com*, retrieved 9-22-2015)

The first concrete road in the world was built in **1909** on Woodward between Six and Seven Mile in Detroit. It was a 24-foot wide stretch with a thickness of a six and half inches. Cost \$13,500. (*Dominique King, "Woodward Avenue Is First in Innovation, Tribune, August 16, 2007: 17.*)

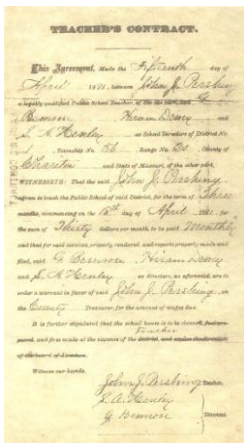
The first manually operated traffic light tower appeared at the Woodward/Michigan Ave in October **1920**. Detroit Police officer William L. Potts, inspired by electric railroad signals, made an arrangement of red, amber, and green lights for about \$37.00 worth of wire and electrical controls to create **the world's first tri-colored traffic light**. (*King, cited above.*)

One of the nation's first cageless zoos with expansive areas for animals to roam opened on Woodward/Ten Mile on the former Hendrie farm site in **1928**. (*King, cited above.*)

Roseland Park Cemetery, opened in 1910, Woodward/Twelve Mile. Its five ornately-sculptured columns were carved from 250 tons of white Barre Granite. The columns and gates are a design replica of the main entrance to Benito Mussolini's palace in Italy. **Roseland Park's Rose Chapel Mausoleum was the largest public mausoleum in the U.S.** when it was opened October 18, **1914**. Arthur Godfrey, prior to becoming a nationally-known radio and TV entertainer in the 1940s-50s was a sales person for Roseland Park and Woodland cemeteries. (*Fred Wm. Cooper, Guardians of History: Roseland Park Cemetery, manuscript in Ferndale Historical Museum Archives.*)

National Shrine of the Little Flower, established in **1925**, was **one of the first churches in the world dedicated to honor St. Therese**. (*King, cited above.*)

Michigan's first traffic fatality happened on Woodward in **1908**. (*History of Woodward Corridor, brochure.*)



Examples: 1862 teacher's contract for a period of one year; 1872 rules. Knox County Retired Teachers Assoc.

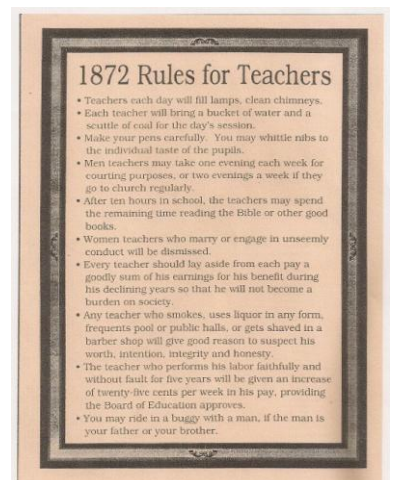


Ferndale Michigan's one- room Porter School, 1872 Photo: Museum Archives

A TEACHER CONTRACT FOR A ONE-ROOM SCHOOL: A GLIMPSE OF THE OLD DAYS

Teacher contracts outlined a strict set of rules at the turn of the 20th Century, especially when the one-room schoolhouse was common. Dismissal was immediate if disobedience was discovered. The classroom responsibilities of teachers, male or female, were explicitly enumerated in each contract—as were guidelines for their personal behavior in and out of the school. Such strict rules were

designed to insure that students had the best education locally available. Classes were generally taught by women who had learned the 3R's basics. But after World War I many soldiers and retired veterans, whose background included only the ability to read and write, were hired as teachers. All teachers, regardless of sex, were charged with faithful obedience to the rules as set forth in the contract they signed.



Note from the Director

Dear Members,

Your summer was an enjoyable one, I hope. We had many Museum visitors in person or via e-mail/phone these past few months. The housing resource collection, documenting the 8,000+ structures in the city, continues to be our most-used archive. Tracing the history of old buildings seems a preoccupation for many Museum visitors. Questions about the famous Jaeger car, built by a Ferndale resident, often recur, as does curiosity about the plane crash in Geary Park (1940s) and the Nike base in Harding (decommissioned, 1960s). Tracing ancestors who lived in Ferndale is one of the most-asked research queries. Kids are spellbound by the Museum collections of farm implements and war items. High School yearbooks, dating from 1921 to the present, are in constant use by Lincoln and Ferndale High grads. Our research team welcomes all such reference searches and is fascinated by how much visitors questions reveal about local history.

We are proud to say that during this past year, October 2014-October 2015, four volunteers logged in over 2,431.25 hours at the Museum. This does not include off-site work, such as the road trips or working at home projects necessary to keep our Archives up-to-date.

You may have noticed in the Summer 2015 issue that you were asked to solve a quiz. We purposely skewed a few of the photos so you would have to think extra hard to figure out the historical significance of each item displayed. From time to time we will continue to pose questions to stump you. That way you, we, and our computers are kept at top performance on the particulars of Ferndale's past.

The holidays are fast approaching. The Museum has a number of items for sale that you might find of interest gifts for family or friends during the season. Please check our website for the full array offered.

This being October many Historical Society dues need renewal; check your membership, please, so you don't miss any upcoming issues.

Regards,
Garry CM Taylor

**DO YOU NEED A UNIQUE CHRISTMAS GIFT?
HOW ABOUT A "HOUSE PLAQUE"
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(FOR FERNDALE RESIDENTS ONLY)
AVAILABLE AT THE MUSEUM OR ON OUR WEBSITE**

Please Look Inside!

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Calendar of Events:

- Thursday, October 22, 2015 6 pm Board Meeting, Historical Society, held at the Museum, public is welcome
- Thursday, December 3, 2015 6 pm Board Meeting, Historical Society, held at the Museum, public is welcome
- Thursday, January 28, 2016 6 pm Board Meeting, Historical Society, held at the Museum, public is welcome

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Copyrighted and published quarterly by: Ferndale Historical Society 1651 Livernois Ferndale, MI 48220 USA www.ferndalehistoricalsociety.org	<table style="width: 100%; border: none;"><tr><td style="padding-right: 20px;"><i>Editor:</i></td><td>Jean Spang</td></tr><tr><td><i>Graphics/Layout/Production:</i></td><td>Garry Taylor</td></tr><tr><td><i>Mailing:</i></td><td>Various Volunteers</td></tr><tr><td><i>Copying:</i></td><td>Maple Press (Madison Hgts.)</td></tr></table>	<i>Editor:</i>	Jean Spang	<i>Graphics/Layout/Production:</i>	Garry Taylor	<i>Mailing:</i>	Various Volunteers	<i>Copying:</i>	Maple Press (Madison Hgts.)
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FIRST
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“Preserving the Heritage of Ferndale for Future Generations”