

"Preserving the Heritage of Ferndale for future generations"



The Crow's Nest

Newsletter of the Ferndale Historical Society

Spring 2007

FROM VILLAGE TO CITY IN 10 YEARS THE POLITICAL BEGINNINGS OF FERNDALE

Jean Spang

Airplane and subway visions, a barrel, loads of cinders, and a former candidate for U.S. president all played roles in Ferndale's evolution from a village of less than 2,000 dwellers in 1917 to a city of 14,407 residents in 1927.

The movement to incorporate Ferndale as a village dates to December 12, 1917, when a special election was held to name a 5-member charter commission. Five days later, this commission declared that a commission form of government would be established—a move applauded by all 17 people in attendance.

The commission crafted charter provisions addressing police and fire protection as well as at-large chickens, drunkenness, speed limits, and people living in garages (within 2 years a house was required). Provision was also made for "the establishment of airplane and subway stations when the time comes."* A public election to adopt the charter and choose the first village officers took place April 1, 1918.

The newly-elected First Commission had no permanent meeting place, moving from locations in schools to private residences and businesses. But minutes of all meetings were kept in one place: a barrel in the Badder Real Estate Building, Woodward at 9 Mile. (The *Tribune* correspondent covering the meetings complained that she wasn't tall enough to reach the bottom of the barrel.)

The First Commission's most pressing focus: impassable roads. Allotted \$1,500 for public improvements, this Commission voted to haul in loads of cinders for surfacing major streets. But residents loudly complained about the Commission's handling of continuing road and drainage problems during its entire 2-year tenure—even though the Commission's president, Lovell B. Turnbull, would later be credited with the idea of creating Woodward as the "world's first concrete surface superhighway."** (The major accomplishment of the First Commission: securing a reliable water supply from the Detroit Water Board.)

The Second Commission, elected in 1920, fared no better. Ferndale still had mostly impassable roads, open drainage ditches, no home mail delivery, and few sidewalks. Early on, one commissioner was dismissed for "an offense under a village ordinance."* And in 1921, William O. Simpson, a former Republican candidate for U.S. President, and applicant for the new village manager position, filed petitions for the recall of the whole commission, citing, among other charges, their "willful misconduct to injury of public service."* In the subsequent recall election, all incumbents were defeated. (continued on next page)



Building Ferndale: The Village's First Public Works Team, ca. 1926 (unidentified workers)
Ferndale Historical Museum Collection



Building Permit #36, February 15, 1927, two-story-flat, Lot 281, 319-321 Webster, between Woodward and Edgewood, Village of Ferndale. Ferndale Historical Museum Collection

FERNDALE'S
INCORPORATION
AS A VILLAGE
APRIL 1, 1918

FERNDALE'S
80TH
ANNIVERSARY AS A CITY
APRIL 4, 1927 - 2007

To complete the term, L.O. Berry, meat packer and retired wrestler, was elected president, then reelected for an additional term. The Berry administrations and the two succeeding Commissions oversaw the rapid development of the village's infrastructure--which defined the outlines of the Ferndale we know today. By March 1924 the first side street, Leroy, was paved; soon, 8 more side streets and Nine Mile. By August 1924, the first concrete had been poured for the widening of Woodward and a post office built. By 1925, under the Sixth Commission, gas mains and main sewer lines were installed. And in 1926, garbage collection was instituted and a site for the City yard/warehouse chosen.

In the year street lights were lit, 1927, a proposal was made to detach the village of Ferndale from the larger Royal Oak Township, making Ferndale a city. Voters passed this proposal on April 4th by a 20 to 1 majority.

The new charter of 1927 decreed 5 commission members chosen by the people and a mayor elected by the commission from among its own number; Guy W. Stark, banker and lawyer, was elected the first mayor of the City of Ferndale. By then, Ferndale had police and fire department headquarters, an ambitious public works program, 3 elementary schools and Lincoln High School, several main-line denomination churches, thriving businesses, a residential building boom, and a permanent "city hall" (the former Elmer Knowles farm house, 9 Mile at Bermuda).

Under the leadership of six Commissions in 10 years, Ferndale had become a significant urban presence in southeastern Michigan, far from the days of itinerant political administrations, minutes kept in a barrel, and cindered streets.

*Sources consulted: *Maurice F. Cole, Ferndale of Yesteryear. Ferndale Historical Society, 1971: 50-56. **City of Ferndale, Ferndale 1927-77 [anniversary booklet, unpagged]. Jay F. Gibbs (Ferndale City Manager). "The Political History of Ferndale," Ferndale Gazette, (Sponsors of Ferndale: First History,*

December 1930): p. 8. L. G. Turnbull, (vice-chairman), "The First Commission," Ferndale Gazette (Sponsors of Ferndale: First History, December 1930): p. 12. Charles G. Richardson, "A Brief History of Ferndale" [manuscript copy of a speech given at dinner given by the Pennsylvania Club, October 9, 1961], in Ferndale Historical Museum Archives.

BIG EVENTS FOR SOUTHEASTERN MICHIGAN, 1927

General Motors stylist Harley Earl designed the Cadillac LaSalle.

(First example of auto industry emphasis on design.)

Detroit Institute of Arts moved to its present site on Woodward.

(Original location had been in a building on Jefferson Avenue, built in 1885.)

Cranbrook Educational Community opened its soon-to-be famous art school.

Chevrolet substantially outsold Ford, causing the Ford Motor Company, to shut down for six months to retool.

Source: Anthony Ambrogio and Sharon Luckerman for the Woodward Heritage Team, Images of America: Cruisin' the Original Woodward Avenue, (Arcadia Publishing, 2006): passim.

THE LINDBERGH SPECIAL, 1927

Lindberg flew the Atlantic in 1927 That's also the year Ray Croton, whose parents owned the confectionery across the Lincoln [High School, Nine Mile at Livernois] where I was a student, made us "Lindberg Specials." Ice cream sundaes with whipped cream, nuts, and a cherry on top--I think they were 35 cents.

Source: Muriel (Lumley) McCullough, quoted in Old Timers Tell It Like It Was, Comp. Ruth Rodgers Elmers, June Kotlarek, and Gerry Kulick (Ed.), Ferndale Historical Society, 1987: p. 105.

HONOR FLIGHT MICHIGAN

As a special tribute to WWII veterans, organizers of Honor Flight Michigan have planned to raise funds to send every WWII veteran in South Oakland County to the capitol to see the new WWII memorial. **Ray White**, Vice-President of the Historical Society, will be on the inaugural Honor Flight Michigan trip to Washington DC on April 21st. Ray was one of the Seabees, the Naval Construction Battalion instrumental in placing the landing approaches for the invasion of Normandy, June 6, 1944. For his efforts that day, he was awarded a Bronze Star. An active Museum volunteer, Ray says he's happy to be in good shape so he can help other vets on this special trip to Washington!

FERNDALE AS HOME

Six houses were built on Dover in 1927, the year that Ferndale was incorporated as a city. Since then, at least five successive families have lived in one of these homes. The following story of this one house reflects what life--and a neighborhood--has been like in Ferndale through the past eight decades.

OUR OLD HOUSE

Christine Kole

Ever since I was a little girl, I planned to someday live in an old-fashioned two-story home. I drew pictures of my "dream house," cozy fireplace and all. As newlyweds, my spouse and I rented a small place near Martin Road Park. When our second child was on the way, we realized we would soon feel cramped with two bedrooms and no basement. I bought a Christmas ornament that year that looked a bit like the home I envisioned we'd own someday.

After we brought our second little girl home from the hospital, her dad told me that he had spied a house for sale on the west side of Woodward. I drove over to see the house on Dover. There it was: the two story house with the red door! We were soon able to view the interior, complete with brick fireplace, dining room, high ceilings with plaster molding, archways and a basement for all the "stuff" a family collects! I instantly felt "at home." We quickly made a purchase offer. Moving day was in April. We were quickly welcomed by the neighbors, and our 1927 vintage abode was soon filled with laughter and love. We enjoyed the close proximity of downtown, the nearby playgrounds, St. James Parish, and, soon, the Ferndale schools.

Our neighbor was keeping company with a widower who had once lived in our home in the 1940s, so we invited them over for a holiday visit. It was fascinating to hear this gentleman talk about the days when his family had lived there. Smiling tearfully, he pointed to where the old radio had stood, in the days before the advent of television. The "den" off the living room had been their "sun parlor," where their piano was the focal point. Our home that day fairly radiated with happy memories of bygone times shared by former residents.

A few years ago we had just returned from the Ferndale Memorial Day Parade when we noticed several middle-aged folks with perhaps their parents standing on the sidewalk facing our home. Having learned a bit of our house history from the neighbors, I approached the "Mom." You're the . . . family, aren't you? I asked. She nodded, smiling with tears in her eyes. They had lived there in the 1960s and raised six children. We had seen their family initials in the concrete, found the hole their boys had cut in the garage roof, and discovered old baseball cards and toy remnants in the air ducts. We felt that we already knew this large family, and I invited them in. "I'm sorry," the matriarch said, "but you've made some nice changes, and I just prefer to remember it the way it was." Understanding her sentiments, I promised her that I would take really good care of "her" place. The family continued their walk down memory lane, through the old neighborhood.

Our house and our family have gone through many changes in the 29 years we have resided here. The red door and the old siding are gone, rooms have been remodeled several times, a little son was born, the girls have their own places now, but the old maple tree still keeps watch over the place. Children, families, and neighbors are always welcome here, and the walls often resound with kids' voices and music.

Ferndale is celebrating 80 years as a city this Spring, and our "Gingerbread House" will be 80 years old as well. Our family continues to enjoy all the good things our community has to offer, and the close proximity to other communities and events. Our ten-year-old son tells us that he plans to stay in our home after we "old folks" move on. We are hoping that we will still be here when this old house hits the centennial mark, and can celebrate along with the city.

CONSIDER THIS . . .

Number of telephones in the Village of Ferndale in 1918: 4.

Source: Charles G. Richardson, "A Brief History of Ferndale" (manuscript copy of a speech given at dinner given by the Pennsylvania Club, October 9, 1961, unpagged) in Ferndale Historical Archives

FERNDALE'S FIRST MAYOR

L.O. Berry retired from wrestling to become mayor of the Village of Ferndale around 1918. He ran a meat packing house on the corner of Nine Mile and Paxton and had 23 trucks for his many routes. He ran the smoke oven for ham, hot dogs and other smoked meats and around 1924 he brought three ladies over from Poland to make Polish sausage for the Hamtramck customers .

I was always trying to keep my black dog out of the place because the workers were always telling me they would put her through the meat grinder. She dearly loved the big barrels of bones . . .

 Mae (Lee) Perkins, quoted in *Old Timers Tell It Like It Was*, Comp. Ruth Rodgers Elmers, June Kotlarek, and Gerry Kulick (Ed.). Ferndale Historical Society, 1987: p. 91.

FERNDALE'S RESIDENTIAL BUILDING BOOM, 1927: NUMBER OF HOUSES BUILT (BY STREET)*

Academy	2	LaPrairie	5
Albany	7	Leroy	6
Alberta	4	Lewiston E.	4
Allen	1	Lewiston W.	3
Ardmore	3	Maplehurst E.	2
Beaufield	3	Maplehurst W.	1
Bennett E.	4	Marie	3
Bennett W.	2	Marshall E.	6
Bonner E.	1	Marshall W.	4
Cambourne E.	4	Martin Rd.	2
Cambourne W.	4	Northway	3
Camden	4	Oakridge E.	4
Central	3	Oakridge W.	7
Channing	6	Pearson	7
Chesterfield E.	5	Pinecrest	8
Chesterfield W.	9	Romeo	1
College	3	Saratoga E.	7
Dover	6	Saratoga W.	5
Drayton W.	4	Shasta Place	4
Emwell	2	Silman	4
Farmdale	1	Sonoma	1
Fielding	2	Spencer	2
Fox	3	St. Louis	3
Garfield	2	Symes	2
Goodrich	1	Troy W.	5
Grayson	1	University	5
Hazelhurst E.	4	Vester	5
Hazelhurst W.	6	Webster E.	5
Hilton	2	Withington W.	3
Horton	2	Wolcott	1
Hyland	2	Woodland E.	3
Jean	3	Woodland W.	11
Jewell	3	Wordsworth	10
Kensington	2	Wrenson	3

TOTAL: 256

-----*List prepared by Historical Society volunteer, **Diane O'Neill**, as part of her ongoing project to document the history of houses, business, civic buildings, schools and churches in Ferndale. Her extensive files are available in the Ferndale Historical Museum archives.

AN ADVENTURE ODYSSEY: MOSCOW → FERNDALE HISTORICAL MUSEUM

A familiar figure at the Museum, **Victor Paul** has served for seven years as key caretaker of Museum facilities and chief photographer for the *Crow's Nest* newsletter. What few museum visitors realize, however, is that his life has been an odyssey shaped by some of the most significant events of 20th Century history.

With his parents, Victor escaped from Moscow in 1918 to avoid the Russian Revolution. The family settled in Riga, Latvia, where Victor attended mariners school; later he was employed aboard vessels sailing to European, Scandinavian, and African ports.

In 1939 Victor was drafted by the Latvian Navy, which was soon overtaken by the Russian Army. In the subsequent Russian retreat, Latvia was "accepted" by the Germans, so Victor ended up in the German Navy. After his ship, a mine sweeper, was sunk by one of its own mines, he was transferred to an artillery division on the eastern front. In 1945, at Germany's capitulation, he was registered by the Americans and sent to a displaced persons camp.

Thanks to the International Red Cross, Victor located an uncle, a Chrysler employee in Detroit, who agreed to sponsor him for immigration to the U.S. So on December 24, 1949, Victor arrived in Detroit, "his best Christmas present ever." Six months later he became a tool and die maker at Chrysler's, retiring in 1985. Since then he has been enjoying his family, reading all things scientific (especially in physics and astronomy), and doing volunteer work at his church and at the Museum.

At 88, Victor has now decided to take it easy for awhile. Museum staff and visitors already miss his handy-man skills and, most of all, his amazing eye-witness accounts of world history as it happened. Thank you, Victor, for your dedication to the Ferndale Historical Museum--and for your priceless stories-- all of these years!



**Victor Paul, long-time Museum Volunteer,
"taking a rest"**

SETTLING IN FERNDALE, 1927

[The family] moved to Ferndale in 1927. When they settled on Elza (now Jewell) there were only five houses and four huts. . . There were no sidewalks and the roads were muddy and everyone had outhouses. . . When it rained or snowed {my dad} parked his car two blocks from Eight Mile and either rowed a boat or waded home.

Susanna Ravenscroft, quoted in *Old Timers Tell It Like It Was*, Comp. Ruth Rogers Elmers, June Kotlarek, and Gerry Kulick (Ed.), Ferndale Historical Society, 1987; pp. 19-20.

JOB OPENING FOR HANDY-MAN/WOMAN

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).

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THE MUSEUM AT WORK: A THANK-YOU TO VOLUNTEERS

The continued presence and services of the Museum require the ongoing efforts of a number of dedicated volunteers. The activities required include maintaining exhibits, cataloging acquisitions, answering queries from visitors, researching special aspects of local history, photographing subjects of historical interest, organizing information resources, updating files, and performing the myriad clerical tasks necessary to keep the Museum running in an efficient manner. Special recognition is due to the following volunteers who, in the past year, have devoted many hours of their time to ensure a smooth Museum operation: **Betty Blank, Beth Breneau, Frank Flores, Phyllis Hill, Marian Kangas, Diane O'Neill, Victor Paul, Lynne Prudden, Carol Schmidt, Debra Schmidt, Roger Schmidt, Jean Spang, Carolyn Steger, Sherry Wells, Mary White, and Ray White.**

**WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY GRADUATE STUDENTS:
DIGITIZING THE MUSEUM'S PHOTO ARCHIVES**

Four graduate students in the Library and Information Sciences Program at Wayne State are carrying on the important work of digitizing the Museum's collection of vintage photographs. This endeavor, begun almost two years ago under the supervision of WSU graduate student **Miriam Kellman**, now the Director of Computer Sciences, Baker College, was implemented under the able direction of WSU graduate student **Vladimir Shutov**, who has since moved to Washington DC. **Maureen Simari, Karly Szczepkowski, Megan Rehahn, and Jennifer Sherwood**, all currently enrolled in WSU's Library and Information Sciences Program, continue working diligently on this project, which promises one day to allow the Museum to have its large photo collection available online—a service vital for researchers and local residents alike.

THE FRANK LaROCK MEMORIAL FERN AND FLORA GARDEN

Thanks to volunteer **Sherry Wells** and her grant-writing talents, the LaRock Memorial Garden will soon be a reality. The **Wildflower Association of Michigan** has awarded the Ferndale Historical Society a \$750 WAM/Glassen Education Grant, which will allow for the planting of native specie wildflowers and ferns in front and on the north side of the Museum this spring. The inspiration for a fern garden as a fitting emblem of Ferndale was the idea of the late **Frank LaRock**. The planting of such a garden was one of the suggestions found on a list of possible Ferndale Historical Society projects that Frank had left among his personal papers. This garden, therefore, will also be a fitting memorial to his abiding interest in Ferndale history.



Water hole between Allen & La Parrie, East of Taft school, May 3, 1929-----Ferndale Historical Museum Collection



Moving operation for wider Woodward , 1924. The Aston-Wallace Building (which still stands today at the corner of Troy and Woodward) was moved west and south from Nine Mile Road. ----- Ferndale Historical Museum Collection

HISTORIC DISTRICTS IN FERNDALE

Hank Berry, Historic District Liaison, City of Huntington Woods, presented "Historic District Experiences: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly," a part of the Ferndale Public Library Lecture Series, on March 8, 2007. Described were the experiences of Huntington Woods residents in establishing the city's Hill Historic District, an area of 108 vintage houses which includes those built by architects such as Eliel Saarinen, Albert Kahn, and Minoru Yamasaki; also discussed were the ongoing efforts to preserve the Rackham Golf Course.

Emphasized were the benefits of historic district designation: neighborhood stability, potential for revitalization of neighborhoods, property value increases, state and federal tax credits, and availability of grants for preservation efforts.

Mr. Berry noted that Ferndale has outstanding examples of religious architecture, commercial buildings with original facades, classic residential structures, even a unique railroad yard--all of which represent a significant part of the history of this region, well worthy of preservation.

"To understand how things are, we must understand how things were . . . Architecture is a record of social and cultural history," he says.

Preservation efforts are, therefore, a topic that merits serious consideration in Ferndale?

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 immeasurably 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).

NEEDED! PHOTOGRAPHERS FOR PROJECT FERNDALE ARCHITECTURE

The Museum is looking for volunteers to continue the photographing of Ferndale homes, businesses, and public buildings for its archives. Camera and film are supplied. A chance to get some exercise, learn about the city, and provide an invaluable service in preserving Ferndale history! Stop in at the Museum or call for further information.

THE MUSEUM RECONFIGURED

Volunteers have been busy rearranging the entire Museum for the past two months. To make the most of the limited space available, displays have been moved, archives cabinets have been relocated, and new work areas have been created.

Roger Schmidt, Debra Schmidt, Frank Flores, and Sherry Wells have done most of the "heavy lifting." Please stop in soon and see the "new" museum!



The Museum's redesigned main display area.

Please Look Inside!

Page 1 From Village to City in 10 Years

Page 2 Big Events in 1927; Lindbergh Special

Page 3 Our Old House

Page 4 Ferndale's First Mayor; Ferndale's Building Boom in 1927

Page 5 An Adventure Odyssey; Job Opening at Museum; Settling in Ferndale ca. 1927

Page 6 Museum at Work; The La Rock Garden

Page 7 Historic Districts in Ferndale

COMING EVENTS!

March 3 - June 16

"Mothers, Daughters, and Leaders of Oakland County," a showcase of the "extraordinary women from our community," includes a tribute to Gerry Kulick, Civic & Community Leader in Ferndale, at the Rochester Hills Museum.

April 26, Thursday, 6pm

Ferndale Historical Society Board Meeting (topic: museum expansion).

April 28, Saturday, 10-2

Ferndale's 80th Birthday Party! Martin Road Park. For kids of ALL ages. Old fashioned games, skits, see a Model T and Model A auto, barbershop quartet and more!! Hot dog lunch. Free Birthday cake courtesy of Mayor Porter. Bring your copy of *Old Timers Tell It Like It Was* and get a free business index to go with it. Historical Society flea Market and gift shop.

(Co-sponsors: Historical Society and Recreation Dept ; Seeking more information: Call Sherry, 248/543-5297)

Month of May

Michigan weather permitting - we'll be digging and planting the Ferns and Flora Garden. Call Sherry to volunteer your green thumbs.

Tuesday, May 8, City Election

On ballot: Ferndale Public Library millage.

Saturday, June 2

Trunk and Treasure Sale, City Hall Parking Lot. The Ferndale Historical Society gift shop and special sale will be there.

Sunday, August 19

(Dream Cruise Weekend)

"Hands Across Woodward," a celebration of Woodward's 200th Anniversary. Trying for a world hand-holding record: People are needed to join in hands from the Detroit River to Pontiac!



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**FIRST
CLASS
MAIL**