

The Crow's Nest

Newsletter of the Ferndale Historical Society

Spring 2009

LIFE WITHOUT A BAND-AID: MEDICAL CARE IN EARLY FERNDALE--AND AFTER

Jean Spang

Babies born at home, death by diphtheria, molasses as “tonic,” whooping cough, broken bone setting, iodine for sore throats and injuries--such were some of the medical concerns and cures for residents of the area that was to become Ferndale in the early 20th Century. Early on, as the local population increased, several doctors set up practices in the region, and pharmacist William Rodgers opened a drugstore on Woodward. But official concern for medical care access dates only to March 1920 (two years after Ferndale’s incorporation as a village in 1918), when the First Village Commission “considered” asking voters for a \$25,000 bond issue to build a hospital. Ultimately the Commission took no action--nor was architect Wilton A. Wooliever’s offer of his large house at 814 W. 9 Mile for use as a hospital accepted. Highland Park General Hospital, on Glendale in Highland Park, which had opened in 1918, remained the village’s closest major hospital.

By the later 1920s, two “hospitals” had opened in Ferndale in close proximity to each other: The Lilly Maternity and Emergency Hospital, founded by nurse Muriel M. Lilly, whose family lived upstairs at the 155 Vester site, began operation in 1927. And, on the north side of 9 Mile, next to the police station, Ferndale General Hospital, at 127 E. 9 Mile, located almost directly behind Lilly’s, opened about the same time, with Dr. A. A. Stuart “in charge” (as city directories indicate). During its busiest years, the Lilly Clinic welcomed many babies into the world (delivery cost: \$58) and, as evidenced by the Clinic’s meticulously kept records, complete with newspaper clippings covering their most notorious cases, repaired myriad injuries--many caused by Ferndale residents’ unfortunate encounters with cars (“laceration caused by car at Ridge Rd.--3 sutures, 3 clips: \$2”). No records remain of the specific cases treated at Ferndale General, but Dr. Stuart, along with other doctors in the village at the time, had a busy practice in the growing community. *[continued on Page 2]*



Ferndale General Hospital, late 1920s
127 E. Nine Mile, near Woodward
Museum Archives



First location of Ardmore Hospital, 1931
181 Ardmore
Museum Archive



“New” location of Ardmore Hospital, 1933
(former Nine Oaks Tea Room)
814 W. Nine Mile.....Museum Archives

[continued from Page 1]

Both Lilly Maternity and Emergency Hospital and Ferndale General Hospital were among the first casualties of the Depression: Lilly closed in 1929; Ferndale General, a few months later.

Local doctors, including Dr. Stuart, bartered for their services during the worst years of the Depression. One example: After the closure of Ferndale General, Dr. Stuart's relatives recall that his small frame house, Pinecrest at Albany, was enlarged and remodeled by patients who could afford medical care only by offering their skills--which varied considerably from patient to patient. The result, as the family fondly recalled, was "The House that Jack Built," walls out of alignment, doors installed backward, and, in one case, a window inserted upside-down. Still, thanks to his patients, the doctor was able to provide a house for several family members who moved back home to "wait out the Depression"--and his patients got needed medical care.

Concern for a local hospital continued until 1931 when Eva E. Clemenshaw, who had been a nurse in World War I, purchased a large residence, the home of former Village Commissioner Gordon Damon, at 181 Ardmore, and remodeled it into a hospital named "Ardmore." Space concerns soon required a move to new facilities, which oddly, turned out to be the Wooliever house, which, since rejection of Wooliever's original offer to the city, had been converted in a tea room, the Nine Oaks Inn. Renovated, the tea room opened as a hospital, Ardmore, on W. 9 Mile, in 1933, becoming the center for Ferndale medical care.

Doctors most instrumental in the early success of Ardmore were Dr. Burdette O'Connor, who served in the British Army, World War I, who lived and had his office in the Badder Building (corner Woodward/9 Mile); Dr. Ralph Norris, who had an office on Vester; Dr. Charles A Mooney, who had come to Ferndale in 1920, was appointed as school physician in the fall of that year, and by 1922 was Village Health Officer; and Dr. H. Coleman Crissman, an obstetrician. Other doctors who soon arrived in the city and used Ardmore facilities included: Drs. Sol Lewis, Eugene Spoehr, and William F. Stanley. By the late 1930s, many doctors from surrounding communities, Hazel Park, Highland Park, Royal Oak, and even Clawson, used Ardmore facilities, making it an important regional medical care hospital.

Eva Clemenshaw died suddenly in 1944 at the age of 51. Her hospital was then purchased by Drs. Earl and John Flick, brothers. Upon Earl's death, Dr. John Flick made substantial additions to the building and operated the hospital as a private facility for some 20 years. By then, the hospital had a board of directors, appointed by Dr. Flick and family members, who sold the hospital to a non-profit corporation in the late 1960s. This was at the time when Blue Cross was forming--a large insurance company that was reluctant to admit participation in its programs by a privately owned hospital. As a result, Ardmore ultimately closed in 1976. The building was owned briefly by the Salvation Army, and in 1989 was torn down to make way for retail businesses. (CVS Pharmacy and adjoining mall now occupy the site.)

Today, Ferndale has some 40 doctors of varying specialties. Beaumont and Providence are the nearby hospitals of record. (Highland Park General closed in 1976, the same year as Ardmore.) And several local clinics provide ready medical care for area residents. (FernCare, the free medical clinic set to open soon on E, 9 Mile is the latest such facility.)

Gone are the days of "house calls," babies born at home, diphtheria worries, and a doctor "melting down" children's penny suckers on his basement stove, bottling the "syrup," and distributing it free of charge to his patients as "cough medicine." And rare indeed is the patient in Ferndale who can even think of bartering his services for medical care . . .

Sources: Early doctors and Ardmore Hospital information summarized from Maurice Cole, Ferndale of Yesteryear (Ferndale Historical Society, 1971), passim; Frank LaRock, Ferndale Yesterday and Today (unpublished manuscript), passim, in Museum Archives. Lilly Maternity and Emergency Hospital information: Lilly Maternity and Emergency Hospital records and family history (manuscript) in Museum Archives. Recollections of doctors' remedies, Dr. A. A. Stuart and Ferndale General Hospital, from his granddaughter, Jean Stuart, March 2009. FernCare information: Michael McConnell, "Free Medical Clinic Becoming a Reality," Daily Tribune, February 20, 2009: 1+. Current Ferndale doctors as listed at <http://www.findlocaldoctor.com> (retrieved March 8, 2009).



Ardmore Hospital, after renovations, 1950s



Demolition of Ardmore Hospital, 1989

FACING FERNDALE LIFE IN THE 1920s

Scarlet fever, pneumonia and diphtheria along with whooping cough were very real threats, but basically life was simple as were the pleasures and amusements.

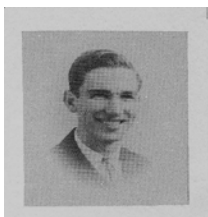
Source: Dorothy (Hausfeld) Vanderlist, in Ruth Rodgers Elmers, June Waugh Kotlarek, and Gerry Kulick (Ed.), *Old Timers Tell It Like It Was*, (Ferndale MI: Ferndale Historical Society, 1987): 60.

THE HOUSE CALL

Ferndale [in the late 1920s, early 1930s] had a number of doctors: Dr. Mooney, Dr. Spoehr, Dr. Huddle, Dr. Crissman and Dr. McGregor (dentist) for a few. In those days doctors came to the house, and most babies were born at home. A neighbor, Mrs. Olson, was expecting a baby and was in labor and Mr. Olson called me over. I had never seen a baby born before and was I ever grateful when Dr. Crissman walked in as I really didn't know what I was supposed to do.

Another time we had to have a doctor when Bob was a little boy and he was sick. I could tell Bob was nervous and I tried to calm him and said, "Don't be afraid." The doctor turned the blankets down to examine my son and there lying quietly beside him under the blankets was our dog Buddy. I was so embarrassed and started to apologize, but the doctor just said, "Every boy has to have a dog," and proceeded to look into the dog's mouth and examine him as he examined Bob."

Source: Vivian and Alonzo Virgil McCalley, in Ruth Rodgers Elmers, June Waugh Kotlarek, and Gerry Kulick (Ed.), *Old Timers Tell It Like It Was*, (Ferndale MI: Ferndale Historical Society, 1987): 118-9.



FROM THE FILES*

Bill Sneed, Lincoln High School, Class of January 1941



Drawing by Bill Sneed

June 12, 1940

Dear Mrs. Mitchell [counselor, Lincoln High School],

Please excuse Bill's absence Thur. afternoon the 5th and 6th hr. He had to work until 2:15 P.M. and so he came the 7th but could not come the 5th and 6th.

Thank you,

[signed, parent]

Dear Mrs. Mitchell,

Please excuse Bill at 11:15 A.M. today as he has to go to work at 12 o'clock. If he did not go to work he would get fired and that would not be so good, or would it.

Thank you,

[signed, parent]

[Accompanying these two notes, which were written on one piece of lined paper, are eight pages of line drawings of what at the time were called "pin-up girls"--all meticulously drawn in pencil by Bill.]

* Source: "Collections: Bill Sneed," in the Archives of the Ferndale Historical Museum

**LINCOLN HIGH SCHOOL HOLDS MANY MEMORIES . . .
 QUOTES FROM *THE LINCOLNIAN*, SCHOOL NEWSPAPER,
 OCTOBER 29, 1954 (P. 8).**

In 1935 the hall guides were first organized. It was a dreary day back in '35 then, on November 12, students were placed at strategic points in the halls to snare any 'happy wanderers.'

Lincoln's first graduating class had a total membership of 1 pupil. The student was from the class of June 1921. The baccalaureate service was held at the Baptist Chapel of Ferndale [then located on the north side of 9 Mile, immediately west of Woodward] and the student's name was Miss Catherine Renton. The first class with more than 1 pupil was graduated in 1922.

Lincoln played all its home football games at Jefferson Field and there was always a large crowd on hand to watch us play Royal Oak. In 1935 we came out the victors, 21-0.

**LARGEST INDEPENDENTLY OWNED AND OPERATED
 GROCERY STORE IN MICHIGAN, 1951
 THE STATE SUPER MARKET, 430 W. 9 MILE, FERNDALE**

Rossen Market, owned by brothers William and Philip Rossen, opened at 258 W. Nine Mile, near Woodward, in 1929, in a 20-foot store space, beginning a presence in Ferndale that lasted some 30 years. To find more room over the years, the brothers moved the store to several successive locations further along 9 Mile and away from Woodward. By 1938 the store was known as the State Packing House Market and situated at 246 W. 9 Mile. The Rossens then built, and soon remodeled, the market at 280 W. 9 Mile, a site that later was to be occupied by Woolworth's. By 1951, the final location of the market, then known as the State Super Market, was at 430 W. 9 Mile, a site later occupied by Food Fair, Farmer Jack's, and, currently, Save-A-Lot.

William Rossen died in 1995 at age 98. He had begun his career in grocery stores at age 13--working in a grocery in Detroit's Broadway Market. After his discharge from the Army, World War I, he used his bonus discharge funds to buy a small store in Wyandotte. The move to Ferndale in 1929 meant an expansion of business that, ultimately, by 1959, would enable him to sell his store, still one of the largest independent food stores in the State, with an annual income of \$5 million, to Food Fair, a chain which at the time operated some 33 grocery stores in metropolitan Detroit.

"Of all the aspects of business," Mr. Rossen once said, "the large number of permanent customers is the most gratifying--customers like ours deserve the best service available." A fitting remembrance of an integral part of Ferndale retail history!

Source: Ferndale city directories; "Largest Independent Market Opens in Ferndale," Daily Tribune, August 22, 1951; "State Market Changes Hands," Daily Tribune, April 2, 1959.



Rossen's Market, 258 W. Nine Mile near Woodward....1929

3rd ANNIVERSARY SALE
FREE **FREE**
STATE PACKING HOUSE MARKET
 246 W. Nine Mile Rd. - Ferndale - Phone Royal Oak 1375
FRIDAY AND SATURDAY SPECIALS

Butter 19¢	CW Coffee 25¢
Philadelphia or Borden CREAM CHEESE 5¢ 1/2 lb	Lamb Breast 5¢ 1/2 lb
Fresh Ham 1 lb	Lamb Roast 1 lb
FRESH GROUND BEEF 7 1/2¢ 1 lb	Pot Roast 9 1/2¢ 1 lb
PURE PORK SAUSAGE 7 1/2¢ 1 lb	Pork Loin Roast 9 1/2¢ 1 lb
	Fresh Ham Lamb Chops 13 1/2¢ 1 lb

Monday Specials

Frankfurters 7¢ lb	
Fresh Pork Liver 3¢ lb	
Pork Hocks 4¢ lb	
Fresh Ground Beef 5¢ lb	

NOW

10¢ 1/2 lb
 12¢ 1/2 lb
 14¢ 1/2 lb
 16¢ 1/2 lb
 18¢ 1/2 lb
 20¢ 1/2 lb
 22¢ 1/2 lb
 24¢ 1/2 lb
 26¢ 1/2 lb
 28¢ 1/2 lb
 30¢ 1/2 lb
 32¢ 1/2 lb
 34¢ 1/2 lb
 36¢ 1/2 lb
 38¢ 1/2 lb
 40¢ 1/2 lb
 42¢ 1/2 lb
 44¢ 1/2 lb
 46¢ 1/2 lb
 48¢ 1/2 lb
 50¢ 1/2 lb

Advertisement from the Rossen's market... Courtesy Daily Tribune

VISITING THE PAST

The idea of a “museum” as a collection of items that present an organized, visible record of significant environmental artifacts, natural history specimens, or human accomplishments--open to the public for study and contemplation--has a short history, dating only to 17th Century Europe.

Not until 1984, some 99 years after the Detroit Institute of Arts began operations (1885), and 56 years after the Detroit Historical Museum opened (1928), did Ferndale have its own historical museum--a collection of items that tell the story of the city’s development from its earliest days. The first gift to the Museum: the building itself, donated to the City of Ferndale, by the Canadian Legion (1983), and rented by the Ferndale Historical Society from the City for \$1 per year. The first item recorded in the Museum’s accession book: Item #A, the display case originally used in Williams Dry Goods Store, 320 W. 9 Mile, donated by Charles Growe, same address, owner of the Fashion Center, the successor of Williams Dry Goods (now the site of Assaggi). A recent donation: a bumper sticker, “I Cruised Woodward, 1998,” from Society member Frank Flores.

Today the museum houses a collection of artifacts and written records that encompass over one hundred years of local history. A visitor entering the small building on Livernois is immediately met with photos arranged floor to ceiling that document the earliest farms, the primitive means of transportation along the Saginaw Trail (Woodward), the tools used by various businesses, the clothing worn by early residents, the city officials elected to nurture a village into a thriving city, and the rapid growth of modern Ferndale from the 1920s onward. Special collections included scrapbooks and yearbooks from the city’s public schools, microfilm files of the *Ferndale Gazette* (1927-79), housing ownership records of the city’s some 8,000 structures, and an archive file that traces Ferndale history in written memorabilia donated by residents and as written about in local newspapers dating to the 1920s. Official records contributed by various city officials outline the development of city government. And various displays of scale models of long-gone residences, advertising items from local businesses, church and public school efforts, police and fire department items, and examples of Ferndale’s dedicated participation in war efforts--all serve to illustrate the factors that, through time, came to define the city and its place in America history today.

Recent comments from visitors: “Visiting the Museum is like you were there in Ferndale history and lived it.” “There are spirits and ghosts of the past there.” “A quiet place to contemplate the past--most of all, it’s a record of what’s been lived through and achieved.” “Going out after a visit is like really entering into the present again.” And “Thanks for the memories!”

Please visit your Museum soon. No live ghosts . . . we promise!

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

AT THE MUSEUM

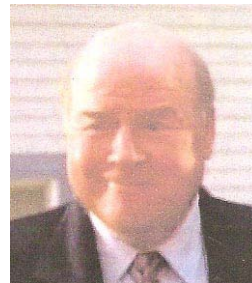
NO EXPERIENCE NECESSARY!

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Board of Directors: **Phyllis Hill, David Lungu, Eleanor Mielke, Mary White**

Trustees: **Ray White; Robert Bruner, City Manager**



FERNDALE'S FAMOUS: DANA ELCAR, ACTOR

Character actor Dana Elcar, best known as Peter Thornton on ABC-TV's *MacGyver*, 1985-92, was born in Ferndale, October 10, 1927--on what his "official" biographies say was the "family farm."

Local records indicate that in the 1920s the family lived on LaPrairie; by 1938, on E. Drayton; and in the 1940s, on E. Cambourne. Dana's parents were Danish immigrants: his father Joseph, a painter/meat cutter; his mother Hedwig, a nanny. Dana's sister, Marie, graduated from Lincoln High School, 1944; Dana does not appear on local graduation records.

Mimicking radio shows such as *Fibber McGee & Molly* in a makeshift theater in the "family barn" was Dana's first experience in "acting." But running away--unsuccessfully--from home at age 13 set him on course to becoming a professional actor, according to his son: "When [Dana] and a friend tried to hop a train to Detroit, he couldn't run fast enough and missed it. Stuck in a town far from home, he called his father and asked him to wire money so he could get back home. He had to spend the night in an all-night theater that was showing *Citizen Kane*. . . which he watched four or five times in one night."

From then on, he focused on acting. As a student in Ferndale public schools, he took part in many school plays. At 18, he entered the Navy; upon discharge he attended the University of Michigan, performing in many theatrical performances while a student there. In the early 1950s he went to New York City to study drama at the Neighborhood Playhouse, supporting himself as an ambulance/cab driver, and eventually appeared in many off-Broadway productions--including *Galileo*, *Inherit the Wind*, *Richard II*, and *The Skin of Our Teeth*. His big break in the movies came in 1964, when he appeared with Henry Fonda in *Fail Safe*. He later appeared in more than 40 movies, including *The Learning Tree* (1969), *The Sting* (1973), *2010* (1984), and *All of Me* (1984).

He began his TV career with guest roles on series such as *The Rockford Files*, *Hill Street Blues*, and *The Partridge Family*, and, early on, was a regular on daytime TV with roles on the *Guiding Light*, *The Edge of Night*, and *Dark Shadows*. Roles in series such as *Baretta* and *Baa Baa Black Sheep* led to his starring role in *MacGyver*.

By 1989 glaucoma caused him to face total blindness, a challenge which *MacGyver* producers wrote into his role as Peter Thornton. After *MacGyver* ended, he continued to appear in stage performances, including his favorite play, *Waiting for Godot*, long after he had become blind. Married and divorced three times, he had one son, three daughters, and one step-daughter. He died in Ventura, California, June 10, 2005, after an acting career spanning 50 years--a long way from *Fibber McGee* and the "family farm" on Ferndale's east side.

Sources: Elcar family history: Ferndale City Directories, 1928, 1938, 1940. Early career information: Son quoted in Valerie J. Nelson, "Dana Elcar, 77: Veteran Actor Lost His Sight But Kept His Focus on Performing," Los Angeles Times, June 10, 2005, in print edition B-11 (<http://articles.latimes.com/2005/jun/10/local/me-elcar 10> [retrieved 2-26-09]). Filmography and TV record, summarized from MacGyverOnline: <http://www.macgyveronlin.com/pages/97.html> [retrieved 2-26-09].

**VOLUNTEERS NEEDED
AT THE MUSEUM
NO EXPERIENCE NECESSARY!**

THE LINCOLN MURAL FINDS A PERMANENT HOME

The 4 ft. x 9 ft. Lincoln mural, commemorating Abraham Lincoln and the Emancipation Proclamation, which graced the main hallway of Lincoln High School, 1929-1959, has been donated by Ferndale Public Schools to the Ferndale Historical Museum for permanent display. Formal transfer was made at a special ceremony held at the School Board Meeting, February 23rd, 2009: President Roger Schmidt and Trustee Ray White, representing the Society, accepted the gift from Chuck Moeser, Ferndale School Board President.

A familiar sight to generations of Lincoln High School students, the mural was painted by five LHS students. Rendered in a unique type of casein paint and in a pattern and style common to Works Progress Administration artists during the Depression, the mural was a gift to the school by the Class of 1929.

In 2005, almost 50 years after Lincoln High became a memory, an anonymous donor left the frayed, rolled-up canvas at the Museum. Staff soon transferred it to the Ferndale Public Schools as the rightful owner--who then raised funds to restore the badly damaged piece. Students, under the direction of internationally-known mural restorer/preservationist Dayton Spence, painstakingly helped to restore the Lincoln mural--which now has an honored place in the Museum as an important icon of Ferndale history.

A heartfelt thank-you to Ferndale Public Schools for this addition to Museum collections. And, from the Ferndale Historical Museum staff, a special welcome to Lincoln High School students who want to revisit a unique reminder of their high school's hallway.



The Lincoln Mural, main hallway, Lincoln High School, 1929-59. Gift, Lincoln High School, Class of 1929. LHS Artists: Ivy Booth, Elsa Goodyear, Rosemary Wesley, John Norton, and Stuart Friedrich. Teacher: Rosemary Lawrence.Credit: Ferndale Historical Museum Archives

THE FERNDALE HISTORICAL MUSEUM ALWAYS WELCOMES NEW VOLUNTEERS!

PLEASE CONTACT THE MUSEUM FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ON HOW YOU CAN HELP TO PRESERVE FERNDALE HISTORY FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS.

MUSEUM ARCHIVES: LOOKING FOR NAMES OF FERNDALE RESIDENTS WHO HAVE SERVED OR ARE SERVING IN IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN

Museum files already list names of Ferndale's World War II veterans, but a complete listing of World War I, Korea, and Vietnam military personnel from Ferndale is still in progress. Staff is now beginning a list of veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan. Please contact the Museum if you can provide names (and a short biography) of any of these veterans. By doing so, you will have helped immeasurably to document an important record of Ferndale military personnel.

(Phone: 248-545-7606; e-mail: www.ferndalehistoricalsociety.org)

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CALENDAR

Thursday, April 23rd, 6pm Board Meeting, Historical Society, held at the Museum
Thursday, May 28th, 6pm Board Meeting, Historical Society, held at the Museum
Thursday, June 25th, 6pm Board Meeting, Historical Society, held at the Museum

**MUSEUM
WISH LIST**

Volunteers
Donations
Saturday Workers
Photographers
Biographies
Big Building
Tall Bookcase
8 Boxwood Shrubs
Note Book Binders

The Crow's Nest, Spring 2009

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