



The Crow's Nest

"Preserving the heritage of Ferndale for future generations"

NEWSLETTER OF THE FERNDALE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SPRING 2010

WOODWARD AVENUE BEFORE FERNDALE

*By W.T. Miller, Justice Court, Ferndale, Michigan, 1934
[one decade after the widening of Woodward]**

Greater and wider Woodward Avenue as it enters Oakland County today is often classed as one of the greatest highways built by man. Today its wide lanes of traffic carry great streams of moving vehicles with perfect ease. Today the goods of the merchant and manufacturer move freely and at a rate of rapidity astonishing to all.

Yet everyone knows the above facts are the result of hardly a decade of actual construction. Prior to that time a narrower strip of road served Oakland County as its main artery of connection with Detroit. This narrow strip functioned as far back as the memory of living men can go. If Woodward Avenue today, as it enters Oakland County, serves as a main southern entrance, then the Saginaw Trail, before the present Woodward was laid out, served the county as its first southern gateway.

All of the main roads leading out of Detroit were laid out and constructed first as military roads. The work was generally in charge of troops stationed in Detroit and the roads were intended to connect the fort there with other outposts of the army. The present upper Woodward Avenue was largely opened as a result of this policy.

Colonel Leavenworth had taken charge of the troops in Detroit in the early fall of 1818. Shortly afterwards, the troops were engaged in further opening a route along a primitive trail and improving it about as far as the present Six Mile Rd. Later that year, Major Mack contracted with the Territorial Land Board to turnpike the road through Oakland County and beyond. By January 10, 1819 the troops had moved further north and west and attempted the construction of a causeway over a nearby swamp.

But in light of subsequent events—hardships of travel and the inability of anyone to build a direct route north because of the difficult terrain—it seems that early travelers and settlers had one idea of the place to travel while the surveyor and army engineers had another. So for a few years, until the road straight north was built on a firm foundation, the main line of travel north was along a much different course than the present Woodward.

Perhaps the first traveler of any note who attempted to push horses and supplies into the interior of Oakland County was Major Oliver Williams. He had been a merchant of some standing in Detroit and had previously carried on quite an extensive trade with eastern U.S. cities. But the misfortunes of the War of 1812 had considerably reduced his

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East Marshall looking South to Woodward Avenue, Ferndale, May 13th 1923

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business and property. In the early fall of 1818, Major Williams formed a party of explorers, resolving to learn more about the interior of Michigan and to prove in his own mind the advisability of establishing a trading post inland. Having supplied themselves with supplies sufficient for a few days, his party started up the road slowly being cut to the north and west by the military.

When the Major Williams party reached the end of the construction work done by the army they resolved to change their course. Their Indian guides knew of the Saginaw Trail north so along this route they decided to travel. This trail gradually swung more and more to the west, here and there twisting away from a bog hole or again threading the edge of a marsh, making travel a slow manner. For a space of some three miles this trail ran through the dim light of the heavy forest to shake itself free of the wilderness as it emerged upon the higher ridge just west of the present Pinecrest Drive in Ferndale.

By such a change of course Major Williams established a precedent and a trail that was to be followed by travelers north for several years afterward. The Williams party ultimately reached as far north as what is now Waterford and returned to Detroit with many specimens of shrubs, flowers, and much information of interest to prospective settlers.

Meanwhile, authorities continued their endeavors in establishing a straight route north, but long before they could finish their task, hundreds of settlers had followed the Saginaw Trail into and farther north through Oakland County. Although a few other explorers had come into the county via a trail through what is now Mt. Clemens at about the same time as the Williams party, the Saginaw Trail became at once the main artery for settlers of Oakland County. This trail, poor as it was, was no worse than the military road.

But once forests had been cleared inland and the Village of Pontiac established, the trail, by constant use, had begun to be increasingly difficult to travel. (By 1820 some 59 families, total population 330, had been established in Oakland County. Most of them had entered by the Saginaw Trail.) Eventually, therefore, the straight route of Woodward Avenue, improved by the military, then by the Territorial Government, and later by the State of Michigan was to become the Woodward of modern times.

**Summarized and edited from a typescript manuscript by W.T. Miller, "First Gateway of Southern Oakland County," in the archives of the Ferndale Historical Museum. Miller's original article appeared by special permission in the Ferndale Enterprise in 1934.*



Woodward Avenue and Pearson, Ferndale, 1920s

PERSPECTIVES ON LOCAL HISTORY, 1701-1927*

- 1701 Detroit established as a fur-trading post by the French.
- 1785 Indians ceded to U.S. part of Ohio and strip (including Detroit) along west Lake Erie shore.
- 1807 More territory acquired from Indians-- became Wayne County
- 1812 Start of federal land surveys; veterans of War of 1812 got land grants. "Ferndale" described as a "cordon of tangled forests and dead morass."
- 1819 Oakland Co. still attached to Macomb Co. by Territorial Government.
- 1820 Oakland Co. became an independent County, with 60 families as settlers.
- 1822 Oakland Co. expanded as more territory added to its jurisdiction; Pontiac became jurisdiction seat.
- 1830 Indians had been dispersed from territory. Railroad built between Detroit and Pontiac.
- 1831 "Ferndale" described as "the bog between Highland Park and Royal Oak."
- 1836 Oakland Co. limits reduced to 907 square miles. (By 1838 area divided into 25 townships, including R.O.Twp.)
- 1837 Michigan became a state. Twenty hamlets in Oakland Co. had post offices, dozen other villages platted.
- 1839 First steam engine railroad line. It took five years to build track, Birmingham to Pontiac.
- 1840s Detroit's first industrial boom attracted workers.
- 1852 Steel rails introduced for railroad tracks.
- 1854 Woodward Avenue planked.
- 1864 Abraham Lincoln lost Oakland Co. by 100 votes. Civil War boosted local economy.
- 1870 Pontiac only large urban center in Oakland Co. due to its carriage-making industry.
- 1873 Panic of 1873 sent many Detroit industrial workers to farms. Oakland Co. was 88 percent rural.
- 1890 Suburban Home Syndicate of Cincinnati bought Albert Campbell farm (Hilton Rd. in "Ferndale") for a resort community for Detroit workers. Houses could be built on subdivision land for \$600.
- 1896 Electric rail service introduced in region.
- 1900+ Auto manufacturing attracted workers to Detroit area from all over the U.S.
- 1901 Detroit United Railway consolidated all trolley routes.
- 1909 First concrete highway in U.S. 6 Mile to 7 Mile, a project inspired by the League of American Wheelmen to improve route to the State Fairgrounds and promote tourism in state.
- 1916 Woodward Avenue traffic so heavy a second lane proposed.
- 1917 Residents of Urbanrest ("Ferndale") blocked Royal Oak move to be annexed to Detroit by incorporating as the Village of Ferndale (population: 2,000). (Royal Oak and other cities wanted annexation to obtain water and sewer service.)
- 1920s Oakland Co. attracted foreign-born residents: two-thirds from U.K. and Canada dispersed throughout county. The African American population was two percent of total, lived in the Wyoming-8 Mile district.
- 1924 Widening of Woodward Avenue. Ferndale population: 13,000.
- 1926 Oak Park unsuccessfully sought annexation to Pleasant Ridge, but refused annexation bid from Ferndale.
- 1927 Ferndale incorporated as the City of Ferndale. Population: 20,000+. (Southwestern portion Royal Oak Township, excluding the African American district at Wyoming-Eight Mile, was incorporated as the Village of Oak Park in the same year.)

**Summarized and edited from Oakland County Book of History, ed. Arthur A. Hagman and a staff of 100 Writers. (Oakland County Sesqui-Centennial Executive Committee publication): passim.*



Ferndale Park, 1918, before Washington School (Kulick Center) was built.

FERNDALE'S SEWER PONIES OF 1987: HOW URBAN LEGENDS BEGIN

Report, March 6, 1987, *Daily Tribune*, "Soundoff":

Somebody has to do something about the horses in the sewers in Ferndale. My kids were playing in the yard and one of these horses stuck its head out of the sewer, looked around and went back down. I don't need that in my neighborhood and the city should do something about the horses in the sewers.

Ferndale Resident

Response, March 13, 1987, *Daily Tribune*, "Soundoff":

I live in Clawson but grew up in Ferndale. I'm surprised everybody didn't know about the horses in the sewers. They've been there for as long as I can remember. When I was growing up, my friends and I used to go in the sewers and ride those ponies. My parents didn't love it because horses smell bad enough without adding the sewer odor on top of it.

Clawson Resident

THE KIT HOME IN LOCAL HOUSING STOCK

Homes built in Ferndale during the 1920s and early 1930s remain characteristic of much of the city's housing stock today. Kit homes, purchased from sources such as Sears, Montgomery Ward, or Aladdin (based in Bay City), and ready for building, were popular with Ferndale residents intent on economically erecting their own dream house.

Sears, for example, could ship materials for an entire house in two box cars. An accompanying 15-page instruction manual described how to assemble the 30,000 pieces. For ease of assembly, each piece had a stamped number.

In the 1920s, depending on the house model ordered, prices ranged from \$495 to \$4,115. If necessary, an outhouse could also be ordered for \$23. Concrete blocks for a house foundation could be ordered separately, as could paint, various hardware, trim, and other construction items. Excavating the lot ready for building, usually with a team of horses, was the owner's responsibility. The Sears catalog said that the house could be built in 90 days.

The kit housing boom was hit hard by the Depression. Sears, which had begun marketing kit homes in 1908, published its last kit home catalog in 1940. But by then a number of such homes had been erected throughout the city.

Ferndale Historical Museum volunteers are still documenting Ferndale's housing stock for its O'Neill Housing Resource Collection. Kit homes in Ferndale remain an important reminder of a significant part of the city's history. If you have such a house or know of someone who has one, please contact the museum. Staff members will gladly add any information you have to the museum's housing archives.



Photo: Sears Catalog, Wendland article

Source consulted re Sears kit homes: Audrey Wendland, "Mail Me a House, Please," *Reminisce*, Aug./Sept. 2009, pp. 40-41. [Ms. Wendland refers to Rosemary Thornton, *The Houses That Sears Built—Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Sears Catalog Homes*, Alton: Gentle Beam Publications, 2002.]

FERNDALE'S EYEWITNESS TO 20TH CENTURY WORLD HISTORY: COLONEL EDWARD H. JACOBSEN



Acquaintance with some of the most famous people of the 20th Century marks Colonel Edward H. Jacobsen as one of Ferndale's most intriguing residents of the era. He and his wife Marie lived at 656 W. Drayton.

Colonel Jacobsen was born in Bethlehem PA in 1886. Early on, his family moved to Staten Island NY, home of a family friend who owned the docks where Admiral Dewey, hero of Manila Bay, anchored his ship *Olympia*. The young Jacobsen ultimately met Dewey, the first of many encounters with famous people, including Teddy Roosevelt, Lowell Thomas, Pope Pius, Admiral Byrd, Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, the King of Belgium, and even the submarine commander who sank the *Lusitania*.

In 1911 Jacobsen, a 1908 graduate of New York University (mechanical engineering) enlisted as a private in Troop F, New York Cavalry, soon becoming its commanding officer but resigning in 1915 after serving on the Mexican border. A friendship with Teddy Roosevelt began before World War I when both worked in the same New York office building where Roosevelt was writing for *Harper's Magazine*. While he was visiting Roosevelt's home one day, news of the sinking of the *Lusitania* came. After the war, at a reception held by his friend Lowell Thomas, Jacobsen met the commander responsible for the attack.

When War was declared on Germany in 1917, the Colonel was one of only 300 men selected by the Navy to become an officer in the new Naval Air Service. After the war he was immediately commissioned Captain of his old Troop F, which was soon named the best National Guard Troop in the service. He won many ribbons in national horse shows, and ultimately was appointed Deputy Commissioner of the Mounted Police in New York City by Mayor LaGuardia.

By the late 1920s, he and his wife had moved to Ferndale to start a "civilian" life. But as a result of the Depression, he lost his job with the electric sign company that had introduced neon signs to Detroit. He then organized a group of construction workers that built Wetmore's garage (Woodward at Drayton, Ferndale). During the 1930s he became Secretary-Treasurer of Vernor's (Detroit), which he said was "located in a beautiful building at the foot of Woodward at Jefferson and you could stop in for a glass of ginger ale—really tasted good on a hot summer day." He concurrently served as president of the Cavalry Club of Michigan, arranging horse shows, international polo games, and worked with the Detroit Mounted Police on shows and was an honorary member of their drill team.

As a member of the Army Reserves he was called into service for World War II, and put into command of a Cavalry Unit of 1,500 men at Ft. Riley KS which was soon disbanded. The unit then became an infantry unit. He spent the rest of the war serving on the General Staff in Italy. After the war he taught riding, horsemanship, and mounted precision drills to senior Girl Scouts in Ferndale. By 1978, Colonel Jacobsen was 92. He and his wife had lived in Ferndale for over 50 years.

Reporter Virginia Lee Clark (*Ferndale Gazette*) said that one anecdote sums up the casualness of his relationships with world leaders: "On a trip to the Vatican during World War II, only Colonel Jake would have Pope Pius lean over and ask him, 'Have they widened Woodward Avenue yet?'"

*Source (summarized and edited for space): Virginia Lee Clark, "Colonel Relives the 'Good Old Days'." *Ferndale Gazette*, Thursday, March 30, 1978, p. 2. Photo: Ferndale Gazette.



Leasia Motor Sales Co. advertisement, *Ferndale Saturday Star*, September 17, 1921 (newspaper price: 2 cents).

THE HOOLIGAN, OFFICER BURKART, AND JUDGE HOOLEY, SEPTEMBER 17, 1921*

A citizen well lit up with booze hoorayed his way through Ferndale the other night but was cut short by the well aimed shot of Private Mike Burkart, whose every shot made a dent in Mr. Speedster's gas tank. Mr. Speeder was not so speedy when he appeared before Judge Hooley the following morning.

**Reported in the Ferndale Saturday Star, September 17, 1921, p. 1.*



Officer Mike Burkart

Ferndale Police Department, 1900s



Frank Hooley

First Justice of the Peace, Village of Ferndale, 1919

Photos: Ferndale Historical Museum archives, early 1900s.

Officers of the Ferndale Historical Society: 2010

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<i>Communications/Publicity</i>	Garry Andrews		

From our Director

Dear Society Member,

*I thank my volunteers for their continued participation in the running of the Museum. In the past year we have surpassed our usual hours of volunteer work, having now accumulated 5,110 hours of work. I thank **Lynne Prudden** for her work on the membership rosters and Housing Collection indexing; **David Lungu**, for his dedication to our website; **Jean Spang**, for her continued efforts in helping me with research/genealogical work and continued production of our newsletter; and **Frank Flores** for his upkeep of the Museum. I also thank **Phyllis Hill** and **Theresa Schwartz** for their continued work. All of these volunteer efforts ensured a smooth operation of our services. Society members are invited to join the WPIA (Woodland Park Improvement Association) for their annual community yard sale: 8-5 on Friday, May 7; and 8-5, Saturday, May 8. For further information please contact WPIA committee organizers Tiffani Gagne (248-542-8555) or Garry Andrews (248-545-6590). Please check that your membership is up to date! Thank you for your continued support. Regards, Garry Andrews, Museum Director*

LIFE IN FERNDALE, 1917+

By Lewis Bossory*

Nearly a century after the land was purchased from the U.S. government my family settled on Emwell. Records show that in 1820 L. Luther and D. McKinstry purchased 100 acres in this area which included our land from the federal government. My parents purchased a home here in 1917.

At that time the house faced Emwell (869 Emwell). Having no basement, the house was turned to face Livernois a few years later. The land was wooded and covered about half an acre between Emwell and Marshfield on Livernois.

Ferndale was country, full of ferns and oak trees. Livernois was a dirt road. There was a creek running across Livernois into a pond about 200 feet south of Marshfield. Cars would splash through to get to Eight Mile Road.

We had a potbellied stove that burned coal and wood in our living room. We had no electricity, using kerosene lanterns. The lavatory was an outhouse. My parents owned chickens, ducks and pigs. We also had a milking cow which was taken out to pasture near Pinecrest and Eight Mile Road.

Large maple trees grew on both sides of Pinecrest from Eight to Nine Mile and the dirt road looked like a tunnel.

**Source [summarized and edited for space]: Lewis Bossory, in Old Timers Tell It Like It Was (Ferndale Historical Society, 1987): 68-69.*



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Calendar of Events:

- Thursday, April 22, 2010 6 pm Board Meeting, Historical Society, held at the Museum, public is welcome
Thursday, May 27, 2010 6 pm Board Meeting, Historical Society, held at the Museum, public is welcome

The Crow's Nest, Spring 2010

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