



The Crow's Nest

NEWSLETTER OF THE FERNDALE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Spring 2011

THE TWO DOLLAR ACT AND BEYOND: THE SHAPING OF FERNDALE

Jean Spang

Pinecrest, Woodward, and Nine Mile were key routes in the shaping of present-day Ferndale. Yet none of these roads developed as early surveyors and land speculators anticipated. In 1816, Lewis Cass, the Territorial governor, established "Oakland" as a county. In the same year, Colonel John Wampler, leader of the County's first survey crew, noted that the region immediately north of Base Line (Eight Mile Rd.) was "uninhabitable." Indeed, "Marsh" was the designation assigned to the area on cartographer Bela Hubbard's first map of Oakland County in 1822. But, inspired by the passage of the U.S. government's Two Dollar Act in 1818, which allowed for the selling of tracts of 160 acres for \$2 per acre, speculators were soon accumulating and selling acreage in Oakland County and further inland—especially so after the selling price was discounted in 1826 to \$1.25/acre.

The earliest settlers traveled into Michigan's interior along a branch of the ancient Saginaw Trail, most coming north from Detroit along what is now Livernois (then called Pontchartrain), then at Base Line turning a quarter mile west to follow the Trail's high sandy ridge through the marsh. This higher land was "Ridge Road," the present Pinecrest. By 1848, Woodward, a military road, was under construction to become the preferred route from Detroit northward. Nine Mile meanwhile was becoming an accepted east-west route for Oakland County. As these routes, Pinecrest, Woodward, and Nine Mile, became more heavily traveled, speculators began to visualize lucrative possibilities for the open land near each of the three roads—regardless of the inhospitable terrain. It was the some 2,000 residents of the resulting land subdivisions who in 1917 voted to incorporate the area as the Village of Ferndale.

Pinecrest, as the earliest main route north, was initially thought to be the most promising development site. The McKinstry brothers, Luther and David, in 1820, bought a quarter section near Base Line and Pinecrest which included part of both east and west sides of the Saginaw Trail. This tract already included Ferndale's first business: a tavern illegally constructed on the road's west side, probably in early 1820, by a squatter, Jabez White. In 1856 the Benjamin Parker family purchased an 80-acre parcel on the east side of Pinecrest (between Pearson and Leroy) and built the road's first farmhouse. By 1895 George Hendrie, developer of Huntington Woods and owner of the Oakland Railway Co. planned, but never built, a railway on Pinecrest which he foresaw as the main rail route between Wayne and Oakland counties. John Rich in 1898 began a grist mill at Base Line and Pinecrest that endured until 1916, the same year as the Ridge Road Estates were platted for a residential community on the street. As late as 1908, there were only two houses built north of Nine Mile on Pinecrest: the Anson farmhouse (near Nine Mile) and the Robinson house (present site of Drayton Avenue Presbyterian Church). Pinecrest, for its entire length, on both its east and west sides, remained mostly open land well into the 1920s.



View northwest across Pinecrest (Badder Gardens Subdivision) as seen from the southeast corner at Albany, 1926. The house across the field is on West Saratoga (Leggett Farms Subdivision). Original watercolor: Charles A Stuart, 1926.

As for Woodward, its west side developed first and slowly—because most settlers heading north entered the area by way of Pinecrest. In 1833, Mary Ann Chappell, known as "Mother Handsome," purchased a 40-acre parcel which was situated on both sides of Woodward, between present-day Oakridge and Drayton, and opened her legendary tavern on Woodward's west side. By 1837, George Heron had bought 80 acres east of Woodward at Base Line, a tract that included part of

(continued next page)

what is now the State Fairgrounds. William Fulton purchased a 80-acre parcel next to the Heron holdings in about 1840. By 1869 the Granger Saw Mill had opened on what is now the site of Machpelah Cemetery (which was established in 1912). Yet, by 1872 only two buildings stood on Woodward in the area: a tavern and the Virgil Rose property near Ten Mile. Then, in 1879, Charles H. Silman purchased 50 acres for a farm on Woodward, opposite the Granger Mill. Vigorous development of the immediate area remained negligible because of the open impassable surface of the road: Woodward was a planked toll road by 1848, then later a graveled road—a rough road to travel. But introduction of the interurban line along Woodward in the 1890s was to make this route an important center for future residential and business ventures in Ferndale. Soon after 1915 Woodward became a two-lane concrete highway—and real progress began.



View west, Nine Mile at Woodward, September 4, 1920. Rexall Drug Store at southwest corner; grocery store on northwest corner. Photo: E.A. Storey. Donor: Clawson Historical Society.

Nine Mile, until 1918, was platted for residential lots from Hilton to Pinecrest; no businesses were to be allowed on this road. The Porter farm, established in the 1870s, was one of the largest parcels on east Nine Mile. By 1919, residential subdivisions were becoming common on both sides and ends of Nine Mile. Woodward, however, was where businesses were locating.

Unlike the development of Royal Oak, which was centered on the Grand Trunk railroad tracks, the intersection of Woodward and Nine Mile was ultimately to define the Ferndale community to come. This focus was dramatically influenced by the subdivision of Welcome Campbell's 750-acre farm that had been established in 1859 north of Nine Mile on what is now Hilton Road. In 1890 one of Welcome's sons sold his share of the farm to a Cincinnati syndicate for \$12,500—property that the Grand Trunk Railroad System soon purchased for development as an ideal summer home community. By 1899, it was realized that this was an unprofitable venture, and "Urbanrest" was further subdivided into residential lots, selling for \$17-26 per lot, plus 60 cents apiece for any fruit trees on the property. (Six hundred lots were sold in one day.) By 1918 Urbanrest was "incorporated" into the Village of Ferndale—and the

busy intersection of Woodward and Nine Mile was now a major focus of attention. Badder, Lux, Harrison, and Aston-Wallace are familiar names of buildings erected by entrepreneurs at the intersection of this time.

The widening of Woodward in 1924, however, was to forever change the idea that Woodward was to be the business street and Nine Mile was to be a street of homes. It was no longer feasible, for convenience and safety reasons, to expect shoppers in Ferndale to cross busy Woodward. Paved in 1923, Nine Mile, a narrower street with less congestion, thus became Ferndale's central business district. Pinecrest meanwhile became a focus of residential development, while other residential districts expanded from the Woodward/Nine Mile center. This configuration of the properties inspired by three roads thus explains the layout of present-day Ferndale.

Lore says that a lineman stringing wires on a pole in the early 1900s is responsible for the name of the area now bordered by Detroit, Hazel Park, Oak Park, and Pleasant Ridge: He looked down and seeing the wide expanse of ferns beneath him, wrote "fern dale" in his log book. The first mention of the area name in a newspaper was in a *Royal Oak Tribune* article in 1908. In 1917, residents of the many subdivisions inspired by Pinecrest, Woodward, and Nine Mile had voted to establish a village. The first president of the new Ferndale City Commission, Lovell Turnbull, who also admired the ferns characteristic of the area, officially designated "Ferndale" as the new village's name.

The names of early speculators, developers, and early settlers, long gone, appear on abstracts of deeds to the Ferndale lots upon which the city's current housing stock and business enterprises still stand. Many street names recognized the terrain of early pioneer days: Oakridge, Maplefield, Flowerdale, to name a few. Some subdivision names, like Pine-Crest, Ridgeway, and Little Farms, also reflect early terrain characteristics. Many subdivision designations still reflect the names of entrepreneurs of early times, such as Leggett, Badder, and Lux-Howey. Even Eight Mile in Ferndale until 1926 was named after an early developer, Sherborne, who purchased significant properties of the city's southwest border—another testament to the inspired activity that shaped the Ferndale of today.

All of this development traces back to \$2 per acre—later reduced to \$1.25. And it all began 193 years ago.



East side of Woodward, business district, trolley tracks in foreground, July 6, 1926. Original photographer unknown.

76 FERNDALE SUBDIVISIONS BY NAME; ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE ON LOCAL HISTORY*

Adolph Sloman's Woodward Blvd. Sub.	Gardendale Assessors Plat #1	Resub Ridge Road Estates
Anderson's Sub. of Ridge Heights	Greenwood Park	Ridge Heights
Anson Ridge	Harrington Woods	Ridgeway Park
Applebaum	Hawthorn Park	Sherborne Park
Assessors Plat #1	Hugo Scherer Sub.	Somerset
Aston's Sub. of Knowles Heights	Joseph Sowinski Ferndale Heights Sub.	Stephenson Super Highway #1
Badder Gardens	Kenilworth	Stephenson Super Highway #2
Badder Heights	Knowles Heights	Stormfeltz-Lovely Co. Woodward Avenue Sub.
Bermore	Leggett Farms	Ten Mile Park
Bermore Sub. #1	Little Farms	Tennyson Park
Bonnie Oaks	Lux-Howey Land Co., Ridge Road Sub.	Thomas Bros. Oakland Hills
Brucefield	Maple Heights	Thomas Oaks
C. W. Harrah's Ferndale Sub.	Maple Ridge	Thompson Park
Campbell Heights	Mapledale Sub. #1	Town Home Sub.
Clear Stream Development	Mapledale Sub. #2	Urbanrest
Drake	Mayfield Gardens	Watts Farm
East Urbanrest	Metropolitan Survey Inc.	Woodland Heights
Elsinore	Michaelson Woods	Woodland Park
Fern Oaks	Morningside	Woodland Park Resub.
Fern Ridge	Northern Michigan Sub.	Woodward Blvd. Sub.
First Addition, East Urbanrest	Oak Park Sub	Woodward Farms
Ford Heights	Oakland Co. Condo Plan	Woodward Grove
Ford Heights Add. Sub.	Oakridge	Woodward Heights #1
Fordmount Park	Pine-Crest	Woodward Heights #2
Frank Grix	Poad	Woodward Heights, Royal Oak Sub.
		Woodward Homes

**List based on Diane O'Neill Housing Resource Collection records, Ferndale Historical Museum Archives*

THE BORDERS OF FERNDALE-- AS ANNOUNCED IN THE ROYAL OAK TRIBUNE, FRIDAY JULY 27, 1917:

VILLAGE OF FERNDALE: PEOPLE IN THAT DISTRICT WILL VOTE ON THE QUESTION OF INCORPORATING

The boundaries of the proposed village are as follows: Commencing at a point east of the first tier of lots facing west on the Campbell road thence west on the 9 ½ road to about one-quarter mile west of Ridge road, thence south to the 9 mile road, thence east on the 9 mile road to the west line of the lots facing east on the Ridge road, thence south to the Detroit limits at the 8 mile road, thence east to the rear of the lots facing west on the Campbell road, thence north to the place of beginning. This territory includes about four square miles. The lots on either side of the Campbell road and Ridge road were included so these streets may be paved without first getting consent of the township board.

THE 1919 FERNDALE BUILDING BOOM*

Ferndale is having a big boom in buildings at the present time. Somewhere in the neighborhood of 150 homes are under construction. Too much credit cannot be given the enterprising firm who are putting up the fine homes in that part of the village on west Nine Mile road opposite the high school site [Lincoln High]. There will be thirty-five houses started on the east side of Woodward by this same concern. Keep up the good work.

** Source: Royal Oak Tribune, July 4, 1919 [clipping in the Ferndale Historical Museum archives]*

FERNDALE HEADLINES IN 1929

COP INJURED AS 'CYCLE EXPLODES

Sergeant Whitlow Reid of the Ferndale police department had a narrow escape from death at 11:30pm Friday when his Indian motorcycle exploded following a collision with an automobile at College and Woodward avenues. The motorcycle is badly damaged. Reid escaped with bruises and a burn on his ankle.

Reid was riding patrol on Woodward avenue when his machine collided with an automobile driven by Reuben Ferguson, 283 Albany avenue, Ferndale, going north on Woodward. The motorcycle was turned over and before Reid could get clear of it, the gasoline tank exploded and the machine caught fire.

Reid, with Lieut. Roy Butcher who answered his call to the accident, arrested Ferguson on charges of drunk driving. The man stood mute when arraigned before Justice Fred E. Gordon Saturday morning and was released under \$500 bond for examination at 1:30pm September 9.

--Ferndale Gazette, August 14, 1929

CHICKEN CHASE PROVES TOO ROUGH TO BE CONTINUED

Ferndale police stopped the advertising stunt started on West Nine Mile road Saturday afternoon when 50 chickens were to be turned loose for the crowd to chase. Police said the affair was getting too rough after it was found the chickens, which were thrown from the roof of a building, fell to the pavement below and were stunned.

Sergeant Joseph Mefford and Patrolman Peter Corda stopped the stunt on order of Capt. C.J. Bornett. The crowd chased the chickens and several of the fowls were torn apart when two or more persons each grabbed a part and pulled.

Patrolman Corda was the hero of the day, however. He stopped four fights which started when the ownership of chickens claimed by two or more persons was disputed.

--Royal Oak Tribune, November 25, 1929

MEMORIES: 1920s

WOODWARD AND ITS TWO RED LIGHTS, ca. 1928

There is a story about how the Fred Silber business at Marshall and Woodward got started. Woodward then was a one-sided road and one of the two red lights in the area was at Woodward and Marshall. Fred Silber Sr., the grandfather who started the business, began selling Miller peanuts to people from Detroit who were stopped by the red light on their way to the Zoo.

** Source: Robert L. Nicholson, in Ruth Rodgers Elmers, June Waugh Kotlark, and Gerry Kulick (Ed.), Old Timers Tell It Like It Was (Ferndale Historical Society, 1987): 91.*

PLAYING ON PINECREST AND THE WOODWARD & NINE MILE INTERSECTION, 1920s*

One of our fun stunts was to dig ruts in the tracks of the dirt road on Pinecrest. Then we would hide and watch cars hit the ruts and throw their rear seat cushions loose. Other fun was to bicycle over to Woodward and Nine Mile and watch the man in the traffic tower turn the stop-go signal to control traffic. And a few years later to watch the large buildings at that corner being moved back to widen Woodward. A tethered horse would walk around in a circle turning a mechanism that would pull a building so slowly that you could barely see it move.

A low area at Pinecrest and Pearson formed a sizeable pond that was good for skating in winter and for catching pollywogs and frogs in the summer . . .

**Source: Joseph S. Lash, in Ruth Rodgers Elmers, June Waugh Kotlarek, and Gerry Kulick (Ed.), Old Timers Tell It Like It Was (Ferndale Historical Society, 1987): 12.*

THE DEMISE OF TWO LOCAL LANDMARKS: WOODWARD, EAST SIDE, 1979



Before

Federal Department Store (opened late 1930s)



After

Radio City Theater (opened 1937),

The block between Nine Mile and Withington.

Photos: Margene Johnstone, Ferndale Gazette

THE END OF LINCOLN HIGH SCHOOL, 1978



Before

Lincoln High School (built 1921)



After

Demolished December 5, 1978

Nine Mile near Livernois.

Photographers unknown, Demolition photo: Ferndale Gazette

EVERY SCHOOL HAS THEM



Cartoon, from *The Lincolnian* [Lincoln High School newspaper], October 13, 1938, p.14

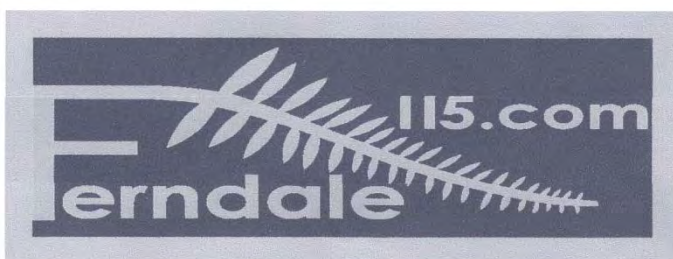
TO THE RESCUE: FERNDALE DRUGSTORE FIRE QUICKLY QUELLED, FEBRUARY 1926*

The Maplehurst drug store, 25233 Woodward avenue, Ferndale, caught fire at 4:45 yesterday afternoon, causing \$1000 damage. The fire, believed to have originated by spontaneous combustion, started in the basement and \$500 worth of Christmas goods stored there was burned. The balance of the lost was caused by damage to stock by smoke and water, the building itself being unharmed The Ferndale fire department arrived on the scene at 4:45, and quickly quenched the flames by use of both hose and chemicals.

*Source: *Royal Oak Tribune*, February 23, 1926.

CONGRATULATIONS:

To the **FERNDALE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE** for **75 years** of service to the community, and to **COMO'S RESTAURANT** for **50 years** of service to Ferndale and its residents!



ONLINE community news.
Go to www.ferndale115.com
to print out your own
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at editor@ferndale115.com

From our Director

Hello Fellow Members,

The Historical Society has added another tool to its long list of services. This past year our website has been flooded with inquiries requesting information on Ferndale family members of the past. So much so that we have now joined Ancestry.com to aid in responding to these queries. Although still operating as a Historical Museum we, on a daily basis, have turned into a research data base facility, answering questions from all over the world—and a genealogical resource center for inquiries about the past and those who lived it here in Ferndale. Without the aid of Ancestry.com, this service would be nearly impossible for us to provide.

Please check to see that your membership is up to date so there will be no interruption in the mailing of your newsletter. Donations are always welcome and are 100% tax deductible. Be sure to visit our website at www.ferndalehistoricalsociety.org.

I wish you all a Bright and Happy Spring. Remember, there are no senior citizens—just “Seasoned” Citizens!

*Onward,
Garry Andrews
Museum Director*

HISTORICAL BOOKS FOR SALE AT THE MUSEUM

FERNDALE OF YESTERYEAR <i>By Maurice F. Cole</i>	\$25.00
OLD TIMERS TELL IT LIKE IT WAS <i>By Ruth Rogers Elmers, June Waugh Kotlarek, Gerry Kulick</i>	\$15.00
TOUGH AS NAILS: A HISTORY OF THE FERNDALE FIRE DEPT. <i>By Chief Roger Schmidt</i>	\$36.00

These items may be purchased at the Historical Museum in person or requested by mail for small shipping & handling fee of \$5.00. Checks should be made out to: Ferndale Historical Society 1651 Livernois, Ferndale, MI 48220



**Ferndale Historical Society
Operators of the Ferndale Historical Museum**

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Individual \$ 10.00
Family \$ 25.00
Lifetime \$100.00

Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Return to: Ferndale Historical Society
1651 Livernois
Ferndale, MI 48220

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Calendar of Events:

Thursday, March 24	6 pm	Board Meeting, Historical Society, held at the Museum, public is welcome
Thursday, April 21	6 pm	Board Meeting, Historical Society, held at the Museum, public is welcome
Thursday, May 26	6pm	Board Meeting, Historical Society, held at the Museum, public is welcome
Thursday, June 23	6pm	Board Meeting, Historical Society, held at the Museum, public is welcome

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“Preserving the Heritage of Ferndale for Future Generations”