



"Preserving the heritage of Ferndale for future generations"

The Crow's Nest

Newsletter of the Ferndale Historical Society

Summer 2006

The Dappers and the Real Dream Cruise

The Dipsey Doodle, the Totem Pole, Mavericks, Ted's, even the White Castle, are magic names to the "cruisers" of the late 1950s who made their Woodward Avenue odysseys between drive-in's, from 8 Mile Rd. to Square Lake Rd., into the dream now relived in southeastern Michigan every August by some 1.2 million people.

Music was essential to those late 1950s Woodward round-trips. One successful Ferndale singing group of the era, the Dappers, got their start in Woodward drive-in's. Ken Fraser, Austin Kollman, Bill Sheerhan, and Earl Swanson, all 1956/7 graduates of Ferndale's Lincoln High School, were students of Otto Brown, Lincoln's legendary music director. But it was at the Dipsey Doodle where, as dedicated cruisers, they would often meet by chance and end up singing together: Doo Wop, rock 'n' roll, rhythm and blues, any of the popular music of the day.

A Dappers vivid memory: "If you saw *American Graffiti*, *Rebel Without a Cause*, or movies like that . . . in the 1950s there were no drugs, no crime, Eisenhower was president, it was just as peaceful as it could be. You'd hear groups of people singing on street corners, in cars at the drive-in's. You either had a car or sang in a group. Or both. The White Castle, because it was made of tile, had the best acoustics for singing, but at the Dipsey Doodle, Ray, the cook, would let us sing, people would buy us hamburgers and cokes, and the waitresses on their roller skates would stop and listen to us. One day somebody said, 'You guys should make a record!' Someone else said, 'You sure look dapper!' So we soon got a manager, red dinner jackets, black pants, black clip-on ties, carnation boutonnieres, and became the Dappers."

And their career was launched: shows at local American Legion and VFW halls; teen club dances, including those at the Ferndale Community Center; a benefit at Ferndale's Radio City Theater with WXYZ's Ed McKenzie; even a performance on the roof of the Oak Drive-In Theater concession stand (in Royal Oak). Seventeen fan clubs emerged. And soon

Courtesy of the Dappers, Ferndale Historical Museum Collection



The Dappers

May 1958: front—Ken Fraser; left—Austin Kollman; rear—Earl Swanson; right—Bill Sheerhan.

the Dappers were appearing at major metro area venues such as the Gay Haven, Edgewater Inn, Elmwood Casino (Windsor), Club 509, and Walled Lake Casino—often on the same bill as stars of the day: the Shirelles, the Chantelles, the Spaniels, Roy Hamilton, the Clovers, and the Imperials.

Career milestones included selling over 700,000 records in the Chicago area alone; appearing on Dick's Clark's ABC-TV show, *American Bandstand*; performing at Clark's "Dance Party" shows in major cities in eastern states; and guesting on Soupy Sales and Johnny Ginger television shows in Detroit. Their most successful record: *We're in Love*, which they wrote.

The group sang together for four years, 1956-60, some 700 shows in all. Then each member, facing the

(Cont'd. on next page)

(from the front page)

draft, entered the military and the Dappers disbanded. Their 1950's "days of innocence"—Otto Brown's Lincoln High School choir, cruising Woodward, singing at the Dipsey, and a career begun in Ferndale—were over. A new era was beginning.

Yet, as the Dappers have said: "Life is memories. And songs recall life." Thus fond memories of the music, the '57 Chevys, the drive-in's, Woodward, and Ferndale at a magic time—that's the Dream Cruise 2006.

This article summarizes an oral history interview with three of the Dappers, Earl Swanson, Bill Sheerhan and Ken Fraser (Austin Kollman is deceased) at the Ferndale Historical Museum on May 6, 2006. Interviewer: Sherry Wells; Transcriber: Jean Spang.



A favorite 1950s drive-in for cruisers from Ferndale, this Dipsey Doodle, at 1528 S. Woodward, was just north of the Zoo in Royal Oak. Photo 1955.

DIPSEY DOODLE DRIVE-IN

1528 South Woodward Avenue
771 East Eight Mile Road
2004 Telegraph

Ferndale
Ferndale
Ferndale Township

From the Lincoln Log
(Lincoln High School
Yearbook), 1955

The Lincoln Mural Update--Help Us Find the Artists!

Restoration of the badly damaged Lincoln mural that once hung in the hallway of Lincoln High School is set to be a unique educational project for students from two high schools. The administrators and art teachers from Ferndale Public Schools and the Royal Public Schools have agreed to join forces to implement mural restoration projects in both districts.

Dayton Spence, nationally-known for his work on large mural restoration projects, will provide art students in the Ferndale-Royal Oak schools with a unique opportunity to learn professional methods of mural restoration, and students from other classes will have a rare chance to see such meticulous work in progress. Tentative plans call for the project to begin this summer.

Once completed, restoration of the Lincoln mural—painted in 1929 by five Lincoln High students and familiar to generations of Lincoln High School students—will be displayed prominently, probably at Ferndale High School, as a graphic reminder of Ferndale's and the nation's past.

Staffs of the Museum and the Ferndale Public Schools are trying to locate the five members of the Lincoln High School, Class of 1929, who painted the mural—or their descendants:

Ivy Booth, Elsa Goodyear, Rosemary Wesley, John Norton, Stuart Friedrich

If you can provide information on any of these five or their descendants, *please* call the Museum and leave a message (248-545-7606). Your assistance will be appreciated by many Ferndale residents.

The Crow's Nest, Summer 2006

Newsletter published quarterly by:
The Ferndale Historical Society
1651 Livernois
Ferndale MI 48220
USA

Editor: Jean Spang
Photographer: Victor Paul
Other contributors are noted.
Layout: Sherry A. Wells
Mailing: Various Volunteers--Thanks!

Officers of the Ferndale Historical Society

President	Roger Schmidt
Vice President	Ray White
Recording Secretary	Christine Kole
Treasurer	Phyllis Hill
Corresponding Secretary	Jean Spang
Historian	Diane O'Neill
Membership	Carolyn Steger
Communications/Publicity	Sherry A. Wells
Maintenance & Crew Chief	Victor Paul
Board of Directors	
Charles Beaudet	David Lungu
Eleanor Mielke	Mary White
Trustees: Tom Barwin	Frank Flores

The Crow's Nest Rises Again!

The world's first recorded pedestrian fatality caused by an automobile occurred in London, 1895—at an auto show at the famous Crystal Palace. Means to control traffic caused by the new horseless carriage became an immediate concern, especially in urban areas. The "crow's nest," a tower in which a police officer manually changed stop-and-go signals, was among the earliest means devised to direct traffic. Not until 1914, in Cleveland, was the first traffic light operated by electricity introduced.

Ferndale's Woodward/Nine Mile intersection in the early 1900s was too narrow for a police office to direct traffic at pavement center. So Ferndale's village commissioners, on April 26, 1920, passed a formal resolution to order a crow's nest from the City of Detroit, which had been experimenting with this signal means as the most effective traffic control method. The order took three weeks to fill; installation at the Woodward/Nine Mile intersection was completed two weeks later.

The Detroit United Railway operated its cars along the west side of Woodward and had a danger signal at the intersection, which meant that the installation of the crow's nest required the

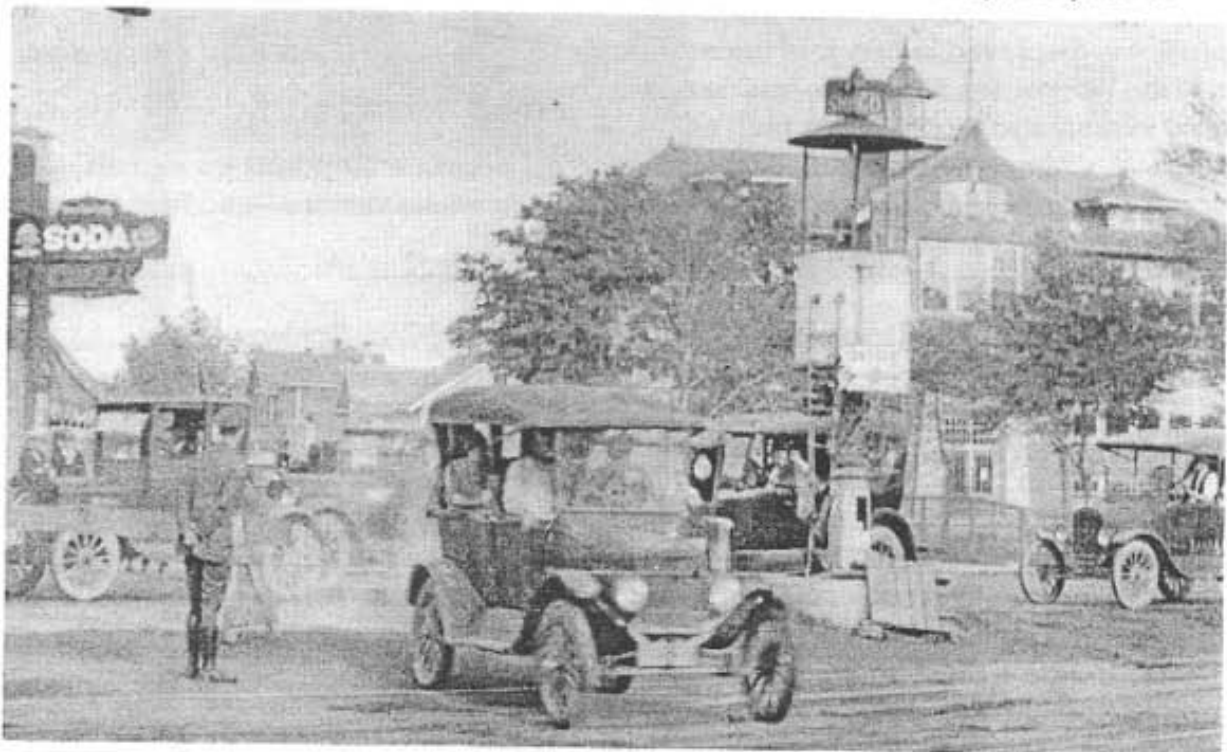
relocation of the train signal 8 feet from its original site. Once the nest was in place, the police officer from his perch above Woodward could control automobile and railway traffic at the intersection. The nest was removed less than a decade later (in 1924, according to some sources) when Woodward was widened and a traffic light was installed. The northbound strip of Woodward today covers the original location of the famous Ferndale landmark.

A 16-foot-tall metal sculpture replica of Ferndale's original crow's nest is now scheduled to be in place on the north median of the Woodward/Nine Mile intersection and dedicated on Friday, August 11 at 10 AM.

Shan Sutherland from the Cranbrook Academy of Art is the artist. Installation of this monument to Ferndale's past promises to make a crow's nest once again a familiar landmark in our city and the metro region.

Sources consulted:

Steven Anzovin and Janet Podell, Famous First Facts: International Edition (New York: H.W. Wilson Co., 2000): 48, 74. Maurice Cole, Ferndale of Yesteryear (Ferndale Historical Society, 1971): 66-7.



The Crow's Nest, Woodward at Nine Mile, 1921.

Officer Mike Burkart at left. The old Central High School (now 130 E. Nine Mile Rd.) in background at right.

Mike Burkart Collection, Ferndale Historical Museum

The Crow's Nest--The Historian's Record

I recall that a year or two after the installation of the Crow's Nest that some of the village officials would take turns in their off hours directing traffic from the tower. One of these officials was **Lorenzo Berry**, the village president, a rather portly gentleman, and he received considerable good-natured banter because of the difficulty he had in squeezing through the small entrance to the platform of the Crow's Nest.

Maurice F. Cole, *Ferndale of Yesteryear* (Ferndale Historical Society, 1971): 66



Ferndale Historical Society in the Memorial Day Parade, 2006

Crow's Nest replica by Metal Artist, Larry Mills.

The Historical Society's role in the Memorial Day parade was enhanced this year by the addition of a replica of the Crow's Nest which was mounted on top of the Society's "official" car. This 2-foot high replica was displayed in honor of the new 16-foot model of the Crow's Nest which is soon to be installed at the Woodward/Nine Mile intersection.

Several months ago **Larry Mills** built and then donated to the Museum the 2-foot model, which can be used as a lamp. This model, complete with appropriate stop and go signals, and a small police motorcycle at its base, is a compelling reminder to museum visitors—and Ferndale residents—of the Ferndale of the 1920s.

Ballooning Over Ferndale--1920s Style

Before the post office at Woodward and Troy was built, that site was a vacant lot. One Saturday, a large crowd gathered there to watch a huge balloon being inflated by the hot air generated by burning wood in a large drum. It became apparent that the balloon's owner was to put on a show when he passed his hat to the adults for donations.

Excitement heightened as the balloon grew larger and those restraining it were having difficulty keeping it earth-bound. The performer then donned a parachute, grabbed a trapeze bar attached to the balloon, and on a signal to his assistants was turned loose. He quickly rose over Woodward Avenue heading east. He did a few spins from the suspended trapeze bar and before disappearing out of sight dropped from the bar and floated to earth by his parachute.

We found out later he landed in a tree on East Nine Mile Road. Pretty big stuff for Ferndale.

Ross D. Stevenson, in *Old Timers Tell It Like It Was*, compiled by Ruth Rodgers Elmers, June Waugh Kotlarek, and Gerry Kulick (Editor) (Ferndale, MI: Ferndale Historical Society, 1987): 102.

Have You Visited Lately?



The Museum has a new identifying sign on the outside of the building, thanks to **Kit Wrasse** of the Ferndale Department of Public Works, shown with the sign and Society vice-president, **Ray White**, May 2006.

AND a new sign in the median at the intersection of Livernois and 9 Mile Road.

AND **John Mielke** made a larger portable sign to be placed in front during hours the Museum is open.



How's this for a look into Ferndale's past? The Museum interior, main display area, May 2006. Something to fascinate everyone.

Next time you are in City Hall, be sure to see the display case at the front entrance. The display changes more or less monthly.

Some of the new additions to the Museum's collections, documenting a variety of events and times, include:

A photo of the 1937 St. James Football team.

A poster for a variety show at Radio City Theater, May 12, 1958, hosted by popular D. J. Ed McKenzie (WXYZ) and starring Ferndale's own singing group, The Dappers (Admission: \$1.25).

A 1950s Dictaphone, complete with recording supplies, was donated by the Drayton Avenue Presbyterian Church.

A "gold-plated" can commemorating Gage Products 85th Million Gallon of Purge Solvent Recycled in Ferndale, August 2004.

Photocopy of the 1920 Census for the Village of Ferndale.

Almost completed--a page for every house in Ferndale, including yours! Some information for you to learn, some for you to add.

Stop in! The Museum has records, artifacts, and memorabilia that define Ferndale life through more than a century. You will find something to amaze you about your past on every visit!

AND you may have items to add: Ferndale newspapers, abstracts of title, Lincoln High School yearbooks (we have some gaps in our collection).

Behind the Scenes in Your Museum

Museum volunteers have contributed many extra hours to promotional and fundraising efforts these past weeks. Special thanks are due to **Ray White** and **Frank Flores**, who make setting up and taking down our booth look like a precision drill team, for their work at the Trunk and Treasure Sale, held June 3 at the Ferndale Civic Center parking lot. Even the rain didn't dampen their enthusiasm!

Before the sale, **Phyllis Hill** and her crew assembled and organized the items to be sold, pricing and signage. Without her dedication, the success of the Society's participation would not have been possible.

New additions to the list of volunteers published in the last issue, who have helped immeasurably with other projects at the Museum have included (in no particular order): **Eleanor Mielke, Judy Salerno, Lynne Prudden, Elizabeth Colombo, Jessica Dennis, Colene Romanieck, Charles Beaudet, Carol Sontag, and Frank LaRock**. We thank them all!

We greatly regret the recent passing of a dedicated volunteer, long-time resident, **Georgette Yezbick Daly**.

Here's Your Chance !

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
- * bookkeeping
- * computer expertise

Are you a professional or amateur:

- * woodworker
- * photographer
- * photo restorer

Would you like to do

- * historical research projects
- * oral histories

Did any of your ancestors come to the Detroit area as a result of Henry Ford's \$5 Day announcement in 1914 (and over the next 15 years)? The Mullers book--see page 7--was about a family that came to Ferndale in 1923 and are still here. The author/publisher are looking for more such stories for the series. Call (248) 543-5297.

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.



In particular: we are photographing every house and business in the city and although hundreds have been done, we have more to do. You might be able to take just one block (maybe even yours) and help us further that project. Our residential looseleaves are the most used resource we have.

AND, due to our limited space, we are exploring ways to better display our growing collections and accommodate more research facilities. Creative woodworking ideas and skills would be "priceless."

Some of these projects can be family affairs or earn Scout badges.

To examine the possibilities, visit the museum on Saturdays 2 - 4 p.m. or call 1-248-545-7606 Mondays 10 a.m.- 2 p.m. (or leave a message other times and staff will return your call later).

Does anyone know why Hilton Rd. is named Hilton?

 A model of the Campbell house, after the family for whom Campbell Rd. was named, is in the Museum. Campbell Rd. once extended from 8 Mile Rd. to 10 Mile. When street names in the area were changed in 1920 to accommodate mail delivery (avoiding duplicate street names) in the Detroit Postal District, Campbell became Hilton. Please let the Museum staff know if you know the origins of the name "Hilton" in our city. 

Look inside!

- Page 1 -- The Dappers and the Real Dream Cruise
Page 2 -- The Lincoln Mural Update--Help Us Find the Artists!
Page 3 -- Have You Visited Lately?
Page 4 -- The Crow's Nest Rises Again!
Page 5 -- The Crow's Nest--The Historian's Record
The Crow's Nest--Replica in the Memorial Day Parade
Ballooning Over Ferndale--1920s Style
Page 6 -- Behind the Scenes in Your Museum
Here's *Your* Chance!
Does anyone know why Hilton Rd. is named Hilton?
Page 7 -- Memories for Sale
Membership / renewal form just for you!



Coming events:

ALERT! *The Crow's Nest replica will be dedicated at 10 AM on Friday, August 11!*
Come to the Woodward / Nine Mile intersection; adjourn afterwards to Como's.

August 18-20--Woodward Dream Cruise. See the Classic Cars at our booth!

October 6 - 7--Hometown Days. Co-sponsors: Recreation Dept., Community Foundation, and Hist. Society. Come play the games kids and adults played long ago, *and more!*

October 26--Thursday evening. 5:30 to 8 p.m. Brief annual meeting. More importantly: a family event with affordable dinner, skits, mock assembly line for kids to "work" on, flea market of surplus mementos, as well as selections from our Museum Gift Shop.

Free! Bring your copy of the *Old Timers* book and get a business index to go with it.

Current Museum Hours: Saturdays (some Sundays) 2 - 4 PM or by appointment.

New longer hours! As soon as you call to offer 2 hours every other month.

No experience necessary! Learn your way around from our experts.

Call Sherry to schedule yourself in: (248) 543-5297--day, evening, machine.



Ferndale Historical Society
1651 Livernois
Ferndale, Michigan 48220
(248) 545-7606

**FIRST
CLASS
MAIL**

"Preserving the heritage of Ferndale for future generations"

