



"Preserving the heritage of Ferndale for future generations"

# The Crow's Nest

Newsletter of the Ferndale Historical Society

Summer 2007

## THE POTAWATOMI: THEIR ROLE IN FERNDALE HISTORY

Jean Spang

Some street names in Ferndale, like the name of the city itself, denote terrain characteristics of the area's early days: *Meadowdale, Flowerdale, Pinecrest, Oakridge*. Other streets names commemorate early pioneers (the *Sillman* family), pre-1920 All-American football heroes (*Mahan, Brickley, Coy, and Shevlin*), and, apparently, even "just folks" (*Marie, Bertha*). One street name honors a Native American tribe: *Huron*. But no street designation recalls the Potawatomi, early Native American settlers in southeastern Michigan whose eagerness to adopt new transportation means occurred long before Henry Ford ever thought of the Model T, the assembly line, or the need for a "bedroom community" like Ferndale.

Masters of the construction of birch bark canoes, their key means of transportation, the Potawatomi originally were dwellers of the upper Lakes Huron and Superior region. Part of the Algonquin Tribe, they had, by 1450, migrated to lower Michigan, attracted to its abundant game and natural resources.\* Unlike their closest neighbors, the Chippewa (Ojibway) and the Ottawa, many Potawatomi bands for the next 150 years settled down in southeastern Michigan to grow crops.\* They also became a favorite tribe of the French, settling nearby after the French built Fort Ponchartrain in Detroit in 1701.\*\* Yet, by 1763, the tribe had joined the Ottawa's Chief Pontiac and helped seize Fort Detroit, an alliance which later had to cede the Fort to the U.S. when defeated by "Mad" Anthony Wayne.\* (Yes, Wayne State University is named for him!)

Unique to the Potawatomi role in southeastern Michigan history, however, is their adoption of the horse as a means of transportation.\* They were aware that tribes of the Southeast and the West used horses, but the Potawatomi had no horses themselves until 1755 when, as allies of the French, they helped defeat the British General Edward Braddock, whose forces abandoned their mounts.\* Michigan's Potawatomi returned to their villages around Detroit with several hundred captured horses. A transportation revolution had begun: Within one generation, the Potawatomi, unlike the Chippewa and the Ottawa, gave up birch bark canoes as a major transportation means, finding horses were safer, usable at any time of year, less expensive, and could be used to transport goods.\* They used French and English style saddles, and some hitched horses to small French-style single axle high-wheeled carts.\*

By the early 1800s, the Saginaw Trail, once an Indian footpath, had become a major route from Detroit into Michigan's interior for sundry traders, settlers, and Native Americans alike. By the 1820s, traffic on the Trail through what was to become Ferndale had inspired Jabez White to open a tavern near the present Eight Mile/Pinecrest junction; by 1823 "Mother Handsome" had opened her legendary inn near Oakridge on Woodward. In the 1830s, the high-wheeled carts of the Potawatomi could still be seen in southeastern Michigan.\* But this was the era when many of Michigan's Native Americans were about to be "relocated" by the federal government.\* Soon few Potawatomi were left in the area.

(continued next page)

*There is properly no History only Biography.*  
Ralph Waldo Emerson *Essays, First Series*, 1841



(continued from p.1)

Yet this Native American tribe holds a special place in local history: In a region whose very future was to be shaped by the development of new transportation means, the Potawatomi were the first Native Americans in southeastern Michigan to enthusiastically adopt a new mode of transport—from the canoe, an ancient mode of transportation, to the horse. This shift provides a stark perspective on southeastern Michigan development: In less than 150 years after the “People of the Place of Fire,” the Potawatomi, first welcomed the horse, the automobile industry would appear in Detroit, changing the face of Ferndale, southeastern Michigan, and, ultimately, America itself.

Sources: \* James A. Clifton, George L. Cornell, & James M. McClurken, *People of the Three Fires: The Ottawa, Potawatomi, and Ojibway of Michigan* (Grand Rapids: The Michigan Indian Press, Grand Rapids Inter-Tribal Council, 1986: Chapter on the Potawatomi by James A. Clifton, *passim*.  
\*\*Websites, retrieved June 5, 2007: [Lee Sultzman] “Potawatomi,” [www.tolatsga.org/ota.html](http://www.tolatsga.org/ota.html); and “History of Detroit,” [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/history\\_of\\_Detroit%2cMichigan#19th\\_Cent](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/history_of_Detroit%2cMichigan#19th_Cent).

## THE BIG SURPRISE

*I remember . . . Lincoln High School Faculty playing a basketball game with an Indian team brought to Ferndale by Jim Thorpe [1912 Olympic Games winner, track and field; later professional football player]. The game was played at the Methodist Church gym, the only other gym in Ferndale. We all had to see that game to watch our heroes take that Indian team apart. We couldn't possibly lose with such faculty members playing--Paul Best, Fred Wall, Al Wiitenan, Bill Short, Bud Brown and others. These men were our ideals. Well, they lost and lost big. Jim Thorpe and his team won going away . . .*

Harry Fitch, in *Old Timers Tell It Like It Was*, compiled by Ruth Rodgers Elmers, June Waugh Kotlarek, and Gerry Kulick, Editor, (Ferndale Historical Society, 1987): 85.

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## FERNDALE CITY COUNCIL SUPPORT FOR PRESERVE AMERICA INITIATIVE

The Council at its May 29<sup>th</sup> meeting approved Ferndale's application for membership consideration in Preserve America, a White House initiative to assist local communities in efforts to preserve their historical heritage. Education, publicity, and opportunities to apply for grants aimed at preservation efforts are among the benefits of a successful bid for inclusion in the Preserve America program. The Ferndale Historical Society wrote a letter of support for this application-- which was completed by Isaac David Kremer, Ferndale resident, Society member, and advocate for the Preserve America initiative. To date, Michigan has six Preserve America communities: Alpena, Cadillac, Douglas, Grand Rapids, Menominee, and Saugatuck. Wyandotte has just submitted an application. If successful, Ferndale would be the first city in Oakland County to apply for and receive Preserve America designation.



### FERNDALE'S STREETS OF MANY NAMES\*

Nine Mile was once Rockwell Avenue, Eight Mile was Sherbourne Avenue, and Pinecrest has had seven successive names: Saginaw Trail, Pontiac Trail, Livernois, Mill Road, Ridge Road, Brock Avenue, and, finally, Pinecrest Drive.\*\* One reason for such name changes: Postal service in early Ferndale was handled through the Highland Park Post Office, later by the Detroit Post Office. Thus the Commission of the Village of Ferndale, on March 10, 1920, changed many street names to "facilitate mail delivery and avoid the duplication of said names in the Detroit Postal District." (In subsequent years many were changed again.) A select list of the 1920 changes:

<u>Old Name</u>	<u>New Name</u>	<u>Old Name</u>	<u>New Name</u>
Annabell	Birch	Leroy	Ames
Beaconsfield	Bennett W.	Lewiston	Lewiston W.
Blome	Albany	Little Farms	Rockwell E.
Breckenridge	Breckenridge W.	Livingston	Woodland E.
Bruce	Bennett E.	Maple	Sylvan
Cadillac	Chesterfield E.	Maplehurst	Maplehurst W.
Cambourne	Cambourne W.	Marian	Camden
Campbell	Hilton	Maribo	Lewiston E.
Center	Burdette	Oakdale	McDowell
Chesterfield	Chesterfield W.	Oakfield	Hazelhurst W.
Chestnut	Drayton E.	Plum	Cambourne E.
Clearfield E.	Marshall E.	Randers	Breckenridge E.
Clearfield W.	Marshall W.	Roberts	Maplehurst W.
Dorchester	Harris	Saratoga	Saratoga E.
Elsinore	Rockwell W.	School	Troy E.
Ferndale	Rockwell W.	Second	Goodrich
Fifth	Paxton	Sheridan	Bermuda
Fourth	Wolcott	Sterling	Enfield
Garfield	Logan	Troy	Troy W.
Goodwin	Jewell	Third	Grayson
Hazelhurst	Hazelhurst E.	Vine	Rosewood
Helen	Withington	Walnut	Lewiston E.
Highland	Champion	Wendover	Hazelhurst W.
Hudson	Oakridge E.	Woodland Blvd.	Woodland Ave. W.
Leland	Norton	Woodle	Saratoga W.

\* Note: Part I of this 1920 Village Council list of street name changes appeared in the Crow's Nest Spring 2004 issue. \*\* Source: Maurice Cole, *Ferndale of Yesteryear* (Ferndale Historical Society, 1971): 4-6 passim.

## HOW SOME EARLY STREETS WERE NAMED

*Much of the Campbell farm [northeast corner of Campbell Rd. (now Hilton) and Nine Mile Rd.] had been originally platted as a fruit orchard, and the orchard idea was carried over in naming some streets, as the original plat contained streets by the name of Plum, Cherry, and Orchard, Orchard Street still remaining. By a resolution adopted by the Ferndale Village Commission some years later, the names of many of the streets were changed to conform to the names of connecting streets in other subdivisions. Thus Plum Street became Cambourne Avenue East and Cherry Street became Breckenridge Avenue East.*

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Source: Maurice Cole, *Ferndale of Yesteryear* (Ferndale Historical Society, 1971): 39



In the orchards on Orchard Street - ca. 1918



Mr. & Mrs. Silman's farm at Woodward & Silman - ca.1910

## A FERNDALE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION GRANT TO THE MUSEUM

The Historical Society has received a \$1,000 grant from the Ferndale Community Foundation to implement Project Ferndale Architecture. This project, begun by Society volunteers two years ago, is designed to build a photographic archive to complete the ownership records of all structures in the city--houses, businesses, schools, and civic. Volunteer **Diane O'Neill** began documenting ownership records some 10 years ago, compiling an information repository that today is the Museum's most used resource. Photographs of each structure to complete this record promises to make this important repository even more useful to residents and scholars alike.

Thanks to a generous grant from the Foundation two years ago, the Museum was able to purchase a computer, scanner, and related supplies that are in use today in a large-scale, on-going digitization project which, with the able assistance of Wayne State University graduate students in the Library and Information Sciences program, will, when completed, have made the Museum's vast photo collection documenting Ferndale history available on line.

The Ferndale Community Foundation, therefore, has become an important support of Museum endeavors. Their interest in Society projects is deeply appreciated by all Ferndale residents as well as Society volunteers.

## WARREN G. HARDING, THE CAT

*In December 1992 Amy McNamara, a fifth grade student at Harding Elementary School found a kitten in a snowdrift near the school, took him to the Principal Ro Schilke, and pleaded that he be allowed to stay. Superintendent of Schools William Coyne gave permission for the school to keep "Warren"--named after President Warren G. Harding, the school's namesake. And so Warren became a fixture at Harding. He wore a bell, came when called, liked to sleep, but what he did best was to comfort students and "stressed-out teachers, too."*

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*Summarized from Shirley McLellan, "On the Prowl: Adopted Feline Finds Home at School," Daily Tribune, August 27, 1993.*

## DO YOU HAVE AN INTEREST IN FERNDALE HISTORY?

Stop by the Ferndale Historical Museum and check out the wonderful displays, pictures, and many other historical items. The Ferndale Historical Museum is open on **Saturdays from 2:00 - 4:00 p.m., or by calling for an appointment to (248) 545-7606.** We think you will be impressed by this wonderful museum!





Ridgewood School – ca. 1921



Lincoln High School built in 1921

#### WHAT'S IN A NAME?

#### DESIGNATIONS OF FERNDALE SCHOOLS

Ferndale's first schools in District Number 9, an area stretching from Wyoming to Dequindre and from 10 Mile to roughly Eight Mile, had no names and even today some of their exact locations remain a mystery. An 1857 Oakland County map shows a school located on the south side of Nine Mile, near present-day Allen. Another source indicates that a school, "the first in the school district," was built sometime "prior to 1880" on the corner of what is now Pinecrest and Maplehurst, and was later moved to the Allen site.\*

An 1872 map shows a school at the Woodward/Nine crossroads, but in 1873 this structure was destroyed by fire. Then, sometime in the mid-1870s Andrew Porter donated land on his farm at the southeast corner of the same intersection to rebuild the school, "tastefully embellished by the setting out of shade trees around its margins."\* This became Ferndale's first school with a name, the *Porter School*, a nod to the land donor. Thereafter the naming of public schools in early Ferndale followed a similar pattern to the naming of early streets: Terrain characteristics, a geographic location, or the names of local individuals or families were the norm—at first.

By 1905 in response to Ferndale's population increase, two new schools were built: *Ridge Road School* (present site of *Roosevelt Elementary School* on Pinecrest, the former Ridge Road, which followed the "ridge" of the Saginaw Trail); and the new *Ferndale School*, built on the site of the *Porter School* which was moved to the Nine Mile/Livernois site of what in 1921 would become *Lincoln High School*. In 1914 *Ferndale School* burned down (arson suspected), and by 1915 its replacement, later called *Central School*, meaning the "central" school of the area, was built at the same location. (The Central School building was later used as the Ferndale Public Library and is now privately owned).

By 1917, *Ridgewood School* had been built on the "ridge in the woods," Eight Mile/Stratford. This school was demolished when *Taft School* was built. (The *Ridgewood School* site now lies under the westbound strip of 8 mile.\*\*) A small frame school, *Urbanrest School* (Urbanrest was the original name of the Village of Ferndale), construction date presumed to be ca. 1918, was, according to at least one source, moved from the site where *Harding School* would be built in about 1920, and is now a private residence on Inman.\*\*\*

After 1920 and until 1954, all Ferndale public schools would be named or renamed for U.S. presidents. Ridge Road School, thus, became *Roosevelt Elementary School*. *Lincoln High School* was built in 1921. Soon after, *Wilson* and *Washington* schools were constructed, followed later by *Taft*, *Grant*, *Jefferson*, *Wilson*, *Coolidge*, and *Jackson*. Not until 1954, when *Best Junior High School*, honoring Paul L. Best, a former assistant superintendent, opened did this pattern change. But Best School was later renamed to honor President *John F. Kennedy*.

*Ferndale High School* remains the only public school in Ferndale without a president's name.

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Sources consulted: Maurice Cole, *Ferndale of Yesteryear* (Ferndale Historical Society, 1971): passim. \* Cited from Harold B. Wilcox, "History of Local Public Schools," in "Ferndale's First History," in the *Ferndale Gazette*, December 1930: 10. \*\* From Ebert's "History of Oakland County (1877)," quoted by David G. Penney, in "Schools of Old Ferndale," *The Mirror*, August 22, 1994. \*\*\*Handwritten recollections of a Private Resident (1997), in *Ferndale Historical Museum Collection: "Schools: Urbanrest."*

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#### HONORING TEDDY ROOSEVELT

On February 11, 1920 . . . a group of citizens of Pleasant Ridge, eight in number, petitioned the Board of Education for the erection of a new school house. . . . The petition was granted and a building committee appointed which recommended the construction of a one-story bungalow type school with as many rooms as possible. A bond issue to defray the cost of the new school was authorized and approved by the Board. The school was to be named by ballot of the parents of the children and the name Theodore Roosevelt School was adopted. One of the sons of Theodore Roosevelt was notified and he addressed a letter to the School Board acknowledging the honor, which letter is on display at the school.

Anonymous typescript, "History of School District No. 9: Ferndale School District", p. 4. Ferndale Historical Museum Collection.

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**THE MYSTERY FIRE**

*Just how the old school [Ferndale School] burned down was . . . something of a mystery. . . . At first, the cause of the fire seemed pretty clear. A Jan. 1, 1915 article in the Tribune said: "The school house at the Nine Mile road burned Saturday morning. Christmas exercises were held in the building the night before and it was a severely cold night and as a hot fire was required to make the room comfortable, it is believed the fire was caused by overheating the furnace" But within days, another school building burned to the ground, this one just east of the former village of Royal Oak. A Jan. 15, 1915 story reported, "It was a new building, built last spring. Origin of the fire is unknown . . . ." On January 29, 1915, it was reported that the sheriff had "locked up a Detroit man on suspicion of knowing something about the (Royal Oak) fire" . . . Apparently he was never charged . . . . A Feb. 2, 1915 story noted that the Ferndale folks voted overwhelmingly to rebuild their lost school house at a cost of \$20,000.*

[No author listed], "Dear Ma, Our School Burned Down," *Daily Tribune*, August 20, 1983, unpagged  
[Clipping in Ferndale Historical Museum collection]

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**A PORTER SCHOOL MEMORY**

*The Porter School faced Woodward. It was a frame structure, with an attractive belfry on top which was added after 1896. This housed the school bell. There were two entrances, one for boys and one for girls. There were outhouses at the rear, and a woodshed at the northeast corner of the building. There was also a well, the pump of which was the subject of repairs at annual meetings.*

David G. Penney, "Schools of Old Ferndale," *The Mirror*, August 22, 1994.

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**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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**FERNDALE'S 80<sup>TH</sup> BIRTHDAY PARTY**

All three local newspapers had front-page color photos of the party, held April 28<sup>th</sup> at Martin Road Park. The event featured three-legged races, nickel hot dogs, and penny candy. Coordinators were Society volunteer **Sherry A. Wells**, who again learned much from Marsha Mellert and Mike Jenkins of the Ferndale Recreation Department.

Helping the Society finance the party were the Masonic Lodge, Ferndale Rotary, and the Ferndale Chamber of Commerce. Candy and kite materials were provided at cost by Funhouse Candy and Scheer's Ace Hardware.

Thanks to volunteers: Al Scoppa and Don Nichols, for bringing their Model A and Model T antique autos; American Legion hot dog cooks, Terri Zack and Debbie Bunning; Marti and Dennis Hoepfner; and teens, Tyesha, Jessica, Ashley, and Kat. Staffing the Society table were **Ray White, Mary White, Frank Flores, and Roger Schmidt**.

Mayor Robert Porter cut the birthday cake with help from "our future," represented by 7-year-olds Addison Romzek and Sydnie Thompson.

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## WHAT IS YOUR VISION FOR FERNDALE'S FUTURE?

The City of Ferndale Plan Commission is updating the Master Plan, the guidebook for development of our City: downtown--industry--transit--parking.

Meetings will be held in the coming weeks.  
Watch for notices of locations and schedules.

## YOUR INPUT WILL SHAPE THE FUTURE OF 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).

### Fern Garden Planted at the Museum

*Volunteers Sherry Wells, Jean Davis, Ann Heler, and Kat Diehl began planting the LaRock Memorial Garden June 18<sup>th</sup>. Watch the growth!*



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**Please Look Inside!**

- Page 1 The Potawatomi  
 Page 2 The Big Surprise; City Council Support  
 Page 3 Ferndale's Streets of Many Names  
 Page 4 Early Streets; Museum Grant  
 Page 5 What's in a Name  
 Page 6 The Mystery Fire; Honoring Teddy Roosevelt  
 Page 7 Ferndale's 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday Party
- 


**COMING EVENTS:**

- Saturday, August 18      Dream Cruise. Watch for the Ferndale Historical Society Booth. The Henry Ford (Museum/Greenfield Village) will also have a booth.
- 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!
- July and August      No Ferndale Historical Society Board meetings will be held.
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**Ferndale Historical Society**  
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