



"Preserving the heritage of Ferndale for future generations"

The Crow's Nest

Newsletter of the Ferndale Historical Society

Winter 2006

Solving A Ferndale Mystery: The Lincoln Mural



Photo: Victor Paul

One year ago a stranger appeared at the Ferndale Historical Museum door and handed a rolled-up canvas to a Museum volunteer. "It's from the old Lincoln High School," he said, and abruptly departed.

Since then, Museum volunteers have unraveled the story of what turned out to be the large mural honoring Abraham Lincoln which for almost 50 years was a familiar sight to students passing through the Lincoln High School hallway.

Our initial search for information involved contacting the school's former students and teachers, examining years of *The Log* (the Lincoln High yearbook), and consulting with arts professionals. Gary Meier, Superintendent of Ferndale Schools, and Tom Barwin, Ferndale City Manager, were also alerted to this unique donation to the Museum.

A particular type of casein paint (determined through paint chip analysis), and the configuration of Lincoln, the surrounding figures, and his Second Inaugural Address quotation, were common to works done by artists who worked on projects under the federal government's Works

Progress Administration during the Depression. Thus initially it was suggested that the mural was a WPA work. Definitive identification was impossible unless artist signatures along the mural's badly-frayed edge could be deciphered and compared to lists of known WPA artists.

But only one artist's name, among some five, was even partially legible: Horton or Norton. As

With malice toward none; with charity for all:
With firmness in the right as God gives us to
see the right:

Let us strive on to finish the work we are in.

*From Abraham Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address, 1865,
it appears on the Lincoln High School mural, 1929.*

a last resort this winter, a double-check of Museum records turned up a file of *The Lincolnian*, the school's newspaper, dating from the school's earliest days. A review of each issue resulted in the ultimate revelation: On June 14, 1929, *The Lincolnian* headlined, "Mural painting to be presented by Senior Class."

(cont'd. p. 2)

The article reported that "the painting depicts the life of Lincoln and has him as its central figure. On the left are pictured a log cabin and the slaves. At the right are the national capitol and the educated man."

The article also noted that, "The suggestion of the painting came from a desire of the Board of Education, but the idea was soon dropped because of financial standings. This year (1929) the idea was again brought up by the five Seniors, and through the Senior Class, it was financed."

As for origins: The work was done in the art room under the supervision of teacher, Rosemary Lawrence. Five seniors were the artists: Ivy Booth, Elsa Goodyear, Rosemary Wesley, John Norton, and Stuart Friedrich.

The discovery that the Lincoln mural was done by five Lincoln High School students, working under the supervision of a teacher who was expert in a medium which, according to today's arts professionals, was especially difficult for amateurs of the time to use, makes this gift an especially meaningful documentation of the history of Ferndale Public Schools.

And the long search to determine the origins of the Lincoln mural highlights the role played by the Ferndale Historical Museum as a significant research resource for local history.

Note: Means of restoring the Lincoln mural are being explored. Badly worn, with considerable surface damage, the mural, according to arts consultants, is well worth restoring—for display in a location where its place in Ferndale history can be appropriately honored.

THE QUESTION OF OPEN AIR DANCING

I wonder if anyone remembers the open air dance floors about 1926 that were between Academy and Ardmore Drive on Woodward, about across from the Methodist Church. There was nothing else to do, so these dances were family affairs. I remember I was about 10 years old and somehow Mr. (Alfred) Wiitanen, superintendent of the church, heard I was dancing, and chastised me because dancing wasn't too popular with Methodists then. But years later when he was principal of Taft School he approached me about buying a ticket for a PTA dance. How times change!

Elsie (Melville) Schade, Old Timers Tell It Like It Was, compiled by Ruth Rodgers Elmers, June Waugh Kotlarek, and Gerry Kulick (editor), (Ferndale Historical Society, Mich. 1987): p. 54.



THE BEGINNINGS . . .

The Royal Oak Tribune, which was then a weekly newspaper, in a mid-1908 issue [June 12] tells the story of a snake having been found by three local boys "around and near 9 Mile road known as Ferndale," one of the earliest references in print made to Ferndale.

Maurice Cole, in Ferndale of Yesteryear, (Ferndale, MI: Emefcee Publications, 1971), p. 42.

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ATTENTION! U.S. VETERANS AND CIVILIAN PERSONNEL INVOLVED IN ALL WARS: WORLD WAR II, KOREA, VIETNAM, THE PERSIAN GULF, AFGHANISTAN, IRAQ

The Veterans History Project of the American Folklife Center of the Library of Congress is looking for first-hand accounts from U.S. veterans and civilians, such as USO workers, flight instructors, industry workers, medical volunteers, etc., who were actively involved in a war effort.

In addition to verbal or written accounts, the Veterans History Project is interested in photographs and mementos related to the war. (Do not send by regular mail. Use FedEx or UPS only.) Those who would like to contribute their recollections should call 1-888-371-5848 or access the Web site at www.loc.gov/vets.

The World War II Memorial in Washington D.C. has a Web site at www.wwiimemorial.com, where one can memorialize World War II vets by registering.

THE HISTORIC CARD CATALOG

The Museum has acquired a section of the Public Library's old card catalog, the ultimate indication that Ferndale has fully entered the Information Age. Once the sole key to the library's collection, the catalog allowed users to locate items by subject, author, or title.

Two computers that provided new access to the library's collection were added in 1995—for library staff use only. By 2000, thanks to a grant from the Gates Foundation, the library had acquired, for public use, four computers with online catalog and Internet capabilities, which provided ready access to information throughout the world.

For many library patrons, the card catalog still remained the preferred portal to the library's 98,000 items. But due to high maintenance costs, space considerations, and limited information capabilities, the card catalog, with its 185 drawers in neat wood cabinets, familiar to generations of Ferndale Public Library users, was eliminated at the end of 2005.



Library board members (left to right): Jeannette Grow, Bess Tewksbury and Ann Dawson in front of the card catalog, in 1954, the year the library opened. The catalog had 40 drawers; by 2005, it had 185.

Thus the card catalog passes into history—and into the Ferndale Historical Museum, where a portion of it is now on proud display as an official reminder of Ferndale's earliest gateway to information, a monument to a bygone era.

Support the Ferndale Historical Society and get the quarterly newsletter.

Learn what's happened in the past and what's coming up to honor it in our town.

Tax deductible dues are a mere \$5 a year; only \$50 for life (save your bookkeeping and ours!)

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[Our mailing list is not available for non-Historical Society purposes.]

Look inside!

Page 1 -- Solving A Ferndale Mystery: The Lincoln Mural

Page 2 -- The Question of Open Air Dancing; The Beginnings...

Insert -- Our new catalog sheet of Memories for Sale

Page 3 -- Attention! U.S. Veterans and Civilian Personnel Involved in All Wars

Page 3 -- The Historic Card Catalog

Page 3 -- Membership savings

Coming events:

Saturday, March 25, 1:00 to 2:00 sharp! Board Meeting

Sunday, March 26, 2:00. Make and Fly An Old-Fashioned Kite

For kids of all ages--at Martin Road Park.

We bring the supplies, you bring the breeze.

Prizes for the oldest, youngest, and more!

Saturday, April 22, 1:00 to 2:00 sharp! Board Meeting.

Monday, May 29, Memorial Day Parade, Program, Museum Open House.

See what's new. Visit the Museum Shop. Renew your membership.

Saturday, June 3, 9:00 - 3:00, Trunk and Treasure Sale. Help staff our booth!



Current Museum Hours: Saturdays 2:00-4:00 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.

Your interests and skills are valuable, too. Clerical, computer, photography, research, interviewing for oral histories. Visit the museum or call: (248) 545-7606.



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1651 Livernois

Ferndale, Michigan 48220

(248) 545-7606

FIRST
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