



"Preserving the heritage of Ferndale for future generations"

The Crow's Nest

Newsletter of the Ferndale Historical Society

Winter 2007

October 29, 1929 and Beyond: Ferndale Faces the Depression

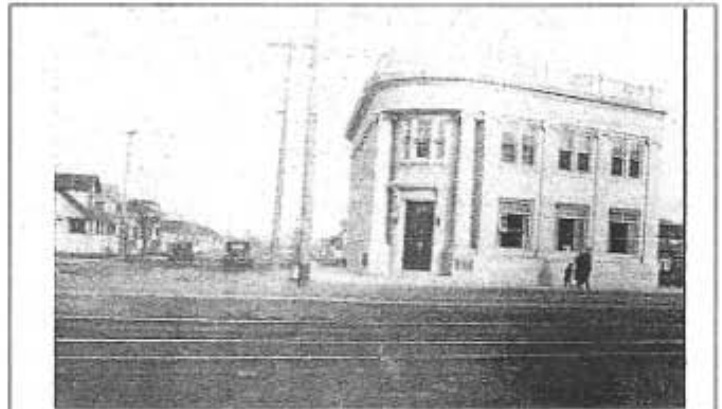
by Jean Spang

The aftermath of the 1929 stock market crash was a remarkable time in Ferndale history, as first-hand accounts attest. Even the weather initially was ominous recalled one resident: "The winter of 1929-30 proved to be colder and snowier than usual; the zoo had to use elephants to haul hay for the animals because trucks couldn't get through." For another resident, the keenest memory was of the sudden closure of Ferndale banks: She went to the American State Bank to deposit a check, the bank staff locked the door behind her as she left. None of the checks were honored. "They took our money knowing that a bank holiday had been declared by the government."

But for most residents, auto plant closures and bank failures were the most vivid memory. When the auto plants closed, thousands were put out of work. "The more people lost jobs, the fewer customers there were"--for anything. By 1932 some Ford workers were recalled for two days a week, earning 59 cents an hour for work formerly worth 92 cents an hour. And "many families lost everything when the banks finally opened and paid only 10 cents on \$100."

The resulting house foreclosures meant that many people banded together to rent houses or rooms. Cheap rents in Ferndale: On Stratford, "\$25/month for a house, with 2 bedrooms, no basement." By 1932-33, "rents dropped to \$10 or \$15 a month or what you could get." On E. Marshall, one fortunate family bought "a small 900 sq. ft. house on posts with a one-car garage made of corrugated metal from a box car, for \$1,000."

Bartering for goods and services became the order of the day--as did "creative" employment, such as painting decorative designs on powder puffs and handkerchiefs for sale, or selling garment remnants for quilts, rugs, and clothes. Vendors selling vegetables and fruit were familiar street sights, as were carts driven by men collecting rags



American State Bank (present Elks Club)
Corner of Woodward and Vester, 1923
Ferndale Historical Museum Collection

and unwanted articles for resale. Many people planted gardens: "In the springtime, a man from the north (around Nine Mile and Hilton) would arrive with a team of horses to plow gardens for planting," one resident recalled.

Ferndale churches or other organizations set up food co-ops. Congregations donated what they could to pay off church mortgages. The ladies of Campbell Memorial Methodist Church (on Goodrich) even sold doughnuts so their church could afford heat in the winter. Other local examples of civic teamwork: In November 1930, the new Ferndale Public Library opened in the old Central School, with 2,000 books, 200 of them loaned by the State. And, in 1934, Youth Incorporated formed, collected unpaid bank certificates, and ultimately bought a foreclosed house, 434 W. Nine Mile, which became the "Castle on the Nine," a landmark youth recreation center.

In spite of the hardships, Ferndale had seen "slow growth" during the 1930s. By 1940 the city was to have 17 industries, many related to rearmament for World War II. Residents and city had prevailed. The consensus among relieved

Depression survivors: The city had proven to be a thriving community of good neighbors, well able to meet the challenges of one of the most difficult periods in American history. As one resident said, "In those days we may not have had everything we wanted, but we had everything we needed"

Sources consulted: *Ferndale, 1927-1977, Golden Anniversary* [booklet] (information compiled from Golden Jubilee edition of the *Ferndale Gazette*

Times and the city's Silver Anniversary Booklet). Memories of zoo elephants and Ford Motor Co, by Herbert Muller, in Sherry A. Wells, *Father, Ford and \$5 a Day* (Ferndale: Lawells Publishing, 2003): pp. 96-98. Chapters on the Depression, pp. 108-129, in *Old Timers Tell It Like It Was*, comp. by Gerry Kulick (ed.), June Kotlarek, and Ruth Rodgers Elmers (Ferndale Historical Society, 1987), including memories of Campbell Methodist Church (Couture); garment remnants (Feldman); junk men, powder puffs (McCalley); bank closure effects (Mills); E. Marshall House and gardens (Molinar); a retrospect (Saunders); American State Bank (Schnell), and rents,

Before the Fall: 1920s Ferndale

The 1929 stock market crash marks Ferndale's true coming of age, its transition from a city still "under construction" to a cohesive suburban community. A fledgling village of 1,600 residents, a "home in the country" for auto workers, with few businesses or industries in 1918, Ferndale had become by 1924 a thriving city: 2,924 houses, a post office, and concrete had been poured for Woodward's widening. The first black woman to graduate from Lincoln High School was a member of the Class of 1926. By 1927, Ferndale had a population of 14,000, 142 retail stores, 9 schools, 7 churches, 28 police officers, and 13 firefighters. In June 1929, one the city's first major pieces of public art had appeared: the Abraham Lincoln mural at Lincoln High School, a gift of the Senior Class, painted by five students. Thus, by October 1929, Ferndale, with its growing population, businesses, infrastructure, and amenities, seemed a city near realization of the American dream. The Depression was a severe test--for city and residents alike.

Source consulted: *Ferndale, 1927-1977, Golden Anniversary* [booklet], unpagged.

ADVICE FROM A TEACHER TO GRADUATING SENIORS, 1933, AT THE HEIGHT OF THE DEPRESSION*

You Seniors are leaving us to face a cold reception from those to whom you will apply for positions; you face an absurd situation--too much of everything--and we have poverty and want on every side. We used to think that crop failures were to be most dreaded, now we have found that even in the midst of plenty there can be widespread suffering.

This absurd situation is due to the fact that we have not learned to use wisely the things which nature has supplied in abundance. We have allowed a few to become extremely wealthy while a large portion of the population lives in need.

A remedy for this must be found, and it will be found if you refuse to accept the old order. You are starting out now to build your life--let your vision be broad and your ideals high. Find your place and when you do--make the most of it.

*Best Wishes,
C. E. Nelson*

* At Lincoln High School, Chester Nelson was Senior Counselor in 1933, and later became Assistant Principal. His "advice" appeared in a special senior edition of the school's newspaper, *The Lincolnian*, May 25, 1933 (p. 2).

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FERNDALE'S ONLY PUBLIC ART LEGACY FROM 1929: THE LINCOLN MURAL

The large mural honoring Abraham Lincoln, the namesake of Lincoln High School, was a familiar sight for almost 50 years to students passing through the school's hallway. Donated to the Ferndale Historical Museum two years ago, the mural, now in the possession of the Ferndale Public Schools, is scheduled for restoration and placement in a prominent location in Ferndale as a proud reminder of Ferndale's past. A gift to Lincoln High School by the Class of 1929, and painted by five members of the class, the Lincoln mural remains the only example of Ferndale public art from 1929.



FERNDALE STREET SCENE AND MORE: THE DEPRESSION

We had a junk man who came along and bought rags and bottles. The kids, of course, all saved these discards and perhaps got two cents for a bunch for nothing. The vegetable man would come along and holler out his wares. He had a wagon with a top and rolled up canvas along the sides so he could drop it down to protect the produce if there was a thunderstorm or the sun was too hot. Strawberries would be sold like 4 quarts for \$1, or sometimes 15 cents a quart. 15 cents would buy 6 cucumbers, tomatoes were 5 cents a lb.; bread 7 cents a loaf, then up to 10 cents; potatoes 50 cents a bushel. Gasoline was cheap . . . I remember in 1940 it was 10 cents a gallon. We filled the car up for \$1 and it took us all the way to Cincinnati.

Source: Vivian and Alonzo Virgil McCalley, in *Old Timers Tell Is Like It Was*, ed. Gerry Kulik, June Kotlarek, and Ruth Elmers (Ferndale Historical Society, 1987): 118.

THE COCKREL CONNECTION

The name Cockrel has been synonymous with Detroit politics for two generations: the late Kenneth Cockrel served on the Detroit Common Council, 1977-81; his widow, Sheila, currently serves on the Council; and his son, Kenneth Jr., is now President of the Council. The Cockrel legacy, however, dates to Ferndale and Royal Oak Township, well before these two generations. Cynthia Jones (married name Cockrel), mother of Kenneth Cockrel, was the first black woman to graduate from Lincoln High School. A member of the Class of 1926, Cynthia was born in Mississippi in 1907; as a child, she came to Royal Oak Township with her family. Unable to attend college because of financial (continued on the next page)



*Cynthia Jones Cockrell
First black woman to graduate from
Lincoln High School, class of 1926*

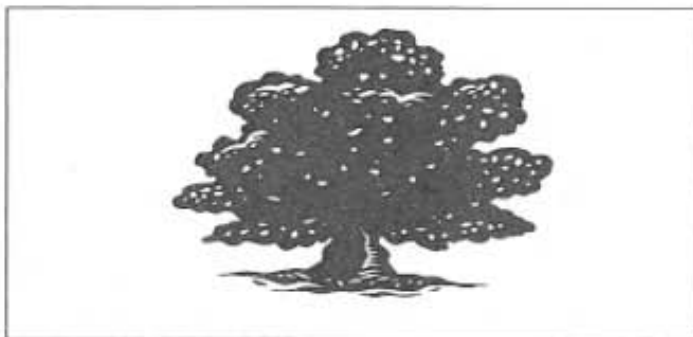
difficulties, she later married Sy Cockrel, a worker at the Ford plant in Highland Park who also had been born in Mississippi. She focused on raising a family. In 1952, she and Sy, still living in Royal Oak Township, died within a month of each other due to chronic illnesses. They left five children. All of Cynthia and Sy's children, three boys and two girls, went on to professional careers, a testament to two parents who, as the *Detroit News* (February 24, 1986) said, were "committed to keeping their family while coming to terms with an extraordinary set of political and economic conditions."

Sources consulted: Kenneth V. Cockrel, "Unsung Heroes," *Detroit News*, February 24, 1986. Betty DeRamus, "Cockrel death leaves big void in mayoral race," *Detroit News*, May 4, 1989. And M.L. Elrick "WSU to keep Cockrel legacy alive[column], *Detroit Free Press*, May 7, 1999.

CHIEF PONTIAC'S TREE NOW A MEMORY

A landmark oak tree in the 200 block of W. Maplehurst is no more. The tree, which was at least 250 years old and at one time had as many as seven trunks, had to be cut down in December because its continuing deterioration posed a safety hazard. According to local legend, Pontiac, warrior chief of the Ottawa Indians, met with leaders of other Indian tribes under this tree in the 1760s. Located near footpaths (now present-day Pinecrest and Woodward) that ultimately converged to form the Saginaw Trail, this tree, therefore, had a significant place in the history of southeastern Michigan—and in the development of the region that was to become Ferndale.

Source consulted: "Landmark Lost," *Daily Tribune*, December 5, 2006, p. 3.



LOOKING WAY BACK: WHY IS FERNDALE HERE?

The growth of Detroit itself in some measure reflected the development of its hinterland. From 1818 to 1820 Detroit grew from 1110 to 1422 in population. In 1817 this had increased to 2152, while the 1830 census placed it at 2222. Detroit had started on the way towards the more stable prosperity so ardently desired.

Thus, after the War of 1812 certain factors had operated to spur the settlement of Oakland County: notably the completion of the land survey and opening of the land sale, the location of the Saginaw Trail, the new land law of 1820, the improvement of transportation from the East; also conditions in Oakland County which would attract emigrants such as the easily planted oak openings, abundant water power, scenic splendors of the lakes, fine timber; and lastly, but not to be overlooked, the efforts of Detroiters and other forward looking men in accelerating the development of Pontiac and other areas.

Source: Quoted from Edward W. Hoot, *The Early History of Southeastern Oakland County, with Emphasis on Its Agricultural Development to 1855*, Master's thesis (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University, 1947): 31-32. [Included are references to R. E. Roberts, "Detroit," *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Society, Collections* (1881), IV, 466; "Census Schedule of the Whole Number of Persons in the District Allotted B.F.H. Witherell," *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Society, Collections* (1887), XII, 462 1/2; and George N. Fuller, "Economic and Social Beginnings" (p. 204), in *Historic Michigan*, III (Oakland Co.), ed. Lillian D. Avery (Lansing, MI: Michigan Pioneer and Historical Society), n.d.]

THANK YOU

Vladimir Shutov, a native of Russia who graduated from Wayne State University with his master's degree in Library and Information Sciences, May 2005, gave a least 76 hours volunteering in the Museum's ongoing photograph preservation project.

He assisted in establishing the requirements, the details, and the format of the project, and helped recruit and train other volunteers who worked with him.

Without his regular attendance and organizing skills, the project would never have gotten off the ground. Before moving to Washington DC in October, he recruited and trained yet another group of WSU students to carry on what he had helped to establish.

Vladimir's contributions to preserving our picture collection and preparing them for eventual availability on our still-in-the-future web site has been invaluable. We shall miss him and his "people skills" in addition to his computer knowledge and his patience and reliability. A well-deserved thank-you to him from all of us.



MEMORIES FOR SALE AT THE FERNDALE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

<u>Afghans</u> (with scenes of Ferndale)	\$45.00
<u>Books</u>	
<i>Ferndale of Yesteryear</i> , by Maurice Cole	\$25.00
<i>Old Timers Tell It Like It Was</i> , compiled and edited by the Ferndale Historical Society	\$15.00
<i>Father, Ford, \$5 a Day: The Muellers from Missouri</i> , by Sherry A. Wells	\$15.00
<i>Tough as Nails: A History of the Ferndale Fire Department</i> , by Captain Roger Schmidt	\$45.00
<u>Calendars 2007</u>	\$10.00
Seabee's D-Day Calendar	\$10.00
<u>Note Cards</u> , view of Crow's Nest (per set of 12)	\$ 5.00
<u>Plaques</u> , with date a structure was built	\$85.00
<u>Postcards</u> , 4 different views of Ferndale, each	\$.75
<u>T-shirts</u>	
Ferndale in 1945	\$10.00
Ferndale Historical Society logo	\$10.00
1924 Crow's Nest	\$10.00

All of these items are for sale at the Ferndale Historical Museum, 1651 Livernois, Ferndale, MI 48220. For information on ordering by mail, please contact the Ferndale Historical Society, 1-248-545-7606.

NEEDED: PHOTOGRAPHERS

The Museum is looking for volunteers to continue the photographing of Ferndale homes, businesses, and public buildings for its archives. Camera and film are supplied. A chance to get some exercise, learn about your city, and provide an invaluable service in preserving Ferndale history! Stop in at the Museum or call for further information.

SPECIAL NEWS NOTES FROM SHERRY WELLS

The Store

The 2007 Historical Hangup Calendars are in.

Afghan throws are again available. (These feature a dozen memorable landmarks of Ferndale in navy or hunter green on an antique beige background—great for snuggling under and reading *Old Timers Tell It Like It Was*.)

The supply of large sizes of T-shirts with the Ferndale logo or 1924 Crow's Nest has been replenished.

Publicity and Promotions

Did you see our ice sculpture in January? A frozen see-through replica of the Crow's Nest basked in the sun on the Livernois median for at least a couple of days—until the sun won.

And did you also see the amazing front cover and three full pages about the Ferndale Historical Museum in *Ferndale Friends*?

And WFRN? Delmar Schmidt did his usual magnificent work on our annual dinner meeting, interspersing wonderful shots of the museum and its artifacts and memorabilia.

Kids

Our Society board secretary, Christine Kole, is a daycare mother. Her charges, who enjoy visiting the museum, posed for the cover of *Ferndale Friends*.

"Young" old timers, including Owen Carroll, "Kat" Diehl, Madeleine Keller, and Shane Lesser, performed skits based on our *Old Timers* and the Mullers books, at the Society's annual dinner meeting in October. These young actors were or are students from Kennedy Elementary School.

Facilities

The Museum is being reorganized to take advantage of all possible space. In preparation for new storage means, Victor Paul single-handedly removed the heavy glass and battered frames from the high school graduation composite photographs dating back to the 1920s; these photos were etching onto the glass and took up an inordinate amount of storage space. Roger Schmidt used his expert firefighting skills for the "constructive destruction" of huge shelves built for housing the old picture frames. Sherry Wells scrubbed. And Frank Flores, in addition to various other duties, painted, carpeted, and built shelves. To date, a new administrative office and a work area have been created, and the collections and research resources are in the process of rearranged. Please come and see the work in progress.

A FAREWELL TO A FRIEND

The Ferndale Historical Society and the Museum—and the residents of Ferndale—have lost a good friend. Frank La Rock, one of Ferndale's most avid historians, died suddenly, October 29, 2006. He was one of the signers of the Articles of Incorporation that established the Ferndale Historical Society in 1983.

A generous contributor of many vintage photos of early Ferndale to Museum collections, he had recently begun the task of photographing all of the buildings on both sides of Woodward in Ferndale, from Eight Mile Rd. northward. This effort was part of the Museum's ongoing project of building a photo archive of all houses, businesses, and industries, and public buildings in the city.

His knowledge of Ferndale history has been invaluable in identifying mystery photos in the Museum archives—and in recording little-known facts about Ferndale's past. His contributions to the documentation of Ferndale history is a legacy that will last for generations to come. **He is indeed missed!**



Photo by Victor Paul (Frank is lower left with striped shirt)

THE FRANK La ROCK MEMORIAL FERN AND FLORA GARDEN

As a fitting commemoration of Frank La Rock's many contributions to the preservation of Ferndale history, the Society has plans to incorporate a native fern garden in the Museum's landscaping. The idea for a fern garden was among a list of a dozen ideas on possible future Museum projects that Frank had left in a neatly typewritten note.

In the course of researching ferns native to Oakland County, Sherry Wells found invaluable information supplied on the Wildflower Association of Michigan website—including a number of available grants for native fern preservation. So, with the cooperation of Byron Photiades and "Shaun" of the City of Ferndale Department of Public Works, and letters of support from the Community Development and Recreation Departments (thank you, Marsha Scheer and Marsha Mellert), Sherry Wells has applied for a Harold and Jean Glassen Education Grant to create such a garden around the Museum building. Volunteers are needed—and welcome—to participate in this innovative project. Please call if you can help.

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 message other times and staff will return your call later).

Believe It or Not!

Ferndale was mentioned in two *Ripley's Believe It or not!* Newspaper features in the 1920s or 1930s. Do you have a copy of either or both of these? The Museum needs a copy for its files. Please call if you can help us.

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

The museum is on the City website: www.Ferndale-mi.com/Community/Historical Museum.htm

The Society has an email address: ferndalehistory@tm.net

For an appointment, call Sherry A. Wells, (248) 543-5297

CONSIDER THIS

The 1930 national census revealed that Ferndale had a 687.7 percent increase in population since 1920. Floyd Gibbons, radio announcer and war correspondent, emphasized on a June 1930 broadcast that this phenomenal population growth was unprecedented in the whole of the United States for that time period.

Source: "Ferndale, Our 'City'," (leaflet), prepared by the City of Ferndale, n.d.

Please Look Inside!

Page 1	October 29, 1920 and Beyond: Ferndale Faces the Depression
Page 2	Before the Fall; Advice from a Teacher
Page 3	Art Legacy; Ferndale Street Scene; The Cockrel Connection
Page 4	Chief Pontiac's Tree; Looking Back
Page 5	Special Thanks to Valdimir
Page 6	Notes from Sherry A. Wells; Farewell to a Friend
Page 7	La Rock Garden

Coming Events

January 25	Thursday, 6pm. Ferndale Historical Society Board Meeting (North Wall Mural discussion)
February 22	Thursday, 6pm. Ferndale Historical Society Board Meeting (Native Ferns and Flora Garden Planning)
February 27	and after See conservator Dayton Spence working on the Lincoln Mural. Call Ferndale Public Schools, 248-586-8651 for more information
March 8	Thursday, 7pm. Lecture, Hank Berry, Huntington Woods Historic District Commissioner, <i>Everything You Wanted to Know about an Historic District</i>
March 10	Saturday, 10am-2pm. Recreation Department Open House, Kulick Center, Livernois at Pearson
March 22	Thursday, 6pm. Ferndale Historical Society Board Meeting (Museum expansion planning)
April 26	Thursday, 6pm. Ferndale Historical Society Board Meeting (Issue TBA)
April 28	Saturday, 10am-2pm. Heritage Day, co-sponsored with Recreation Department. kids of all ages: Make your own kite; old-fashioned games; skits; Historical Museum Flea Market; and birthday cake to celebrate Ferndale's 80th year as a city! Hot dog lunch: \$3 Bring your copy of <i>Old Timers Tell It Like It Was</i> and get a free business index to go with it.



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**FIRST
CLASS
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