



The Crow's Nest

"Preserving the heritage of Ferndale for future generations"

NEWSLETTER OF THE FERNDALE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

WINTER 2010

HOUSES AS HISTORY: MARKING FERNDALE'S VINTAGE HOMES

Garry Andrews, Theresa Schwartz, and Jean Spang

Houses provide a unique perspective on the history of a community. Location, architectural details, and the construction date of particular homes reveal important aspects of a city's development. Documenting such information has been a long-time project of the Ferndale Historical Museum staff, an endeavor which is now of particular interest to the City of Ferndale and its residents.

Preserve America is a federal government project of which the City of Ferndale, in cooperation with the Ferndale Historical Society and the Lakota Group (a preservation/interpretive signage organization), is a participant. The aim is to designate selected structures, houses included, which reflect Ferndale's evolution as a key Detroit suburb.

Among houses selected for marking is one of the earliest still-standing homes from Ferndale's pre-village days. The deed/conveyance records trace the property of what is now 250 Kensington (near Eight Mile) to June 6, 1820, the date when the U.S. government sold a quarter section of land to L. Luther and D.C. McKinstry, among the earliest of land speculators in the region. (This quarter section included the site of the tavern [present Pinecrest/Eight Mile] operated by Jabez White, a "squatter" recognized as one of the first settlers in the area that was to become Ferndale.) By the late 1800s, the Luther-McKinstry quarter section had been divided, ready for development. Official records state that the present house was built in 1901, but an early owner claimed that the actual building date was around 1895. The 627-square-foot house is much like it was, according to the present owner, William Carter: The house has been sided over the years, and a new heating system has replaced the original kerosene stove, but the hardwood floors remain and the home has no closets. This house represents one of the few existing local homes dating to the turn of the 20th Century.

Proximity to the train tracks along Hilton Rd., on Ferndale's east side, was the impetus for the erection in 1910 of a house at 542 E. Saratoga. According to its present owner, Julie Farr, who gleaned the information from a long-time neighborhood resident, the house was part of tract housing built for railroad workers. The original house was like a bunk house with no plumbing, and was built on piers. A utility room was constructed in back on a dirt base. Today, new windows, roof, and siding have been added. But remnants of another age remain: There is an old chimney on the house with no connection on the inside. An attic above the present kitchen, dining, and bedroom areas (the original house) holds items, including a chair, that are visible but inaccessible because of the small ceiling opening. Consequently, the present owners have been unable to discover who the rightful owners are of any of these items from the past.

Many of Ferndale's original farm homes, noteworthy examples of Ferndale's earliest dwellings, have long been demolished, including the 19th-Century homes of Welcome Campbell and his son David, both on Hilton, and the ornate Silman home (present Silman/Woodward area). But the 14-room home of the Willis Hough family (Nine Mile/Pinecrest), built in 1910, still stands, much altered, but its outlines give a hint of the grandeur of what was once Ferndale's only "country estate."

The home at 270 W. Saratoga (Greenwood Subdivision), built in 1913, commemorates the beginning of Ferndale government. One of the first large homes, other than farm houses, erected in Ferndale, it was the home of Lovell Turnbull who in 1918 was elected the first President of the Village of Ferndale's first Commission. It was in his garage that the village's first fire-fighting equipment was stored until a permanent fire department facility could be built.



Lovell Turnbull home, 270 W. Saratoga,
President of the first Village Commission



Lovell Turnbull garage, 270 W. Saratoga,
where Village's first fire-fighting equipment was stored

Examples of other Ferndale houses to be designated with a plaque as historically significant are selected “kit houses”—those homes ordered ready-to-be-built on-site from such companies as Sears, Wards, and Aladdin. A number of kit homes remain today as landmarks in Ferndale neighborhoods. (One such house, the “Glen Falls,” is located at 1906 Pinecrest.) Such houses, most dating to the 1920s, are outstanding examples of a community beginning to hit its stride as a viable village, home to workers attracted to the area because of the Ford Motor Co. promise of \$5-a-day wages.

More “biographies” of homes, written by present and past owners, are invited by the Museum staff. The Museum’s Housing Resource Collection, the result of 10 years work by volunteer researcher Diane O’Neill, includes many intriguing stories about Ferndale homes and is the city’s primary resource for information on home ownership records, building dates, and other relevant facts—many of them supplemented by information supplied by interested Ferndale residents. The photographing of all 8,000 structures in the city—civic, business, educational, church, and private homes—is an on-going project. Adding new primary information about the city’s housing stock provides, therefore, an invaluable dimension to the historical records of Oakland County and southeastern Michigan as well as to City of Ferndale resources.

Sources: Maurice Cole, Ferndale of Yesteryear (Ferndale Historical Society, 1971), passim. Telephone and/or in-person interviews with residents Julie Farr and William Carter by Garry Andrews and Theresa Schwartz, December 2009. “Glen Falls,” Order No. P3245, House at 1906 Pinecrest: Sears, Roebuck Catalog of Houses, 1926 (unabridged reprint), Joint Publication of the Athenaeum of Philadelphia and Dover Publications Inc., NY, 1991, p. 42. O’Neill Housing Resource Collection, Ferndale Historical Museum (records by street).



Example of a kit home, 1906 Pinecrest.
The Glen Falls, #P3245, in *Sears Catalog of Houses*, 1926, page 42.

Officers of the Ferndale Historical Society: 2010

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From our Director

Happy New Year to our readership as well as our members!

It is that time of year again when I am afforded the opportunity to say thank you for all of your continued support this past year. Hard to believe we are at the beginning of a new decade and our membership holds strong. There are many exciting projects we are working on this coming year. For example, we are researching as well as documenting the oldest homes still standing in Ferndale. Look for further details in upcoming issues of our Newsletter. If it were not for you and your generosity we could not do what we do. The staff and I here at the Museum wish you all a healthy, fun-filled and prosperous 2010.

*Thank you and warm regards,
Garry Andrews, Museum Director*

ALBERT BATES: A LOCAL TWENTIETH-CENTURY ARTIST'S STORY



A 17" x 21" painting of Lincoln High School (later a junior high), displayed on the north wall of the Ferndale Historical Museum, attracts the attention of many museum visitors who fondly remember the school, built in 1921 and demolished in 1978. Besides capturing the details of the school's front exterior as it appeared on a peaceful spring day, the painting, done in 1956, evokes Ferndale's early development and maturity: from the days when Village of Ferndale streets were unpaved, and electricity, sewers, and gas lines were not yet available, to the city's heyday of the Radio City and Ferndale theaters, Federal's Department Store, Thom McCann Shoes, Cunningham's Drug Store, and Sander's hot fudge cream puffs.

But the story of Albert Bates, the artist who painted the Lincoln High School "portrait," adds another dimension to the importance of his painting in the documentation of Ferndale history: From 1954 to 1972, he was a custodian in the Ferndale School District, serving at Lincoln, 1956-68, and at Washington Elementary, 1969 until his retirement in 1972. Recalled by the principal of Washington as "a quiet man, energetic, and a pleasure to work with," Bates was also known for his masterful calligraphy in producing any signs that were needed around the building.

Born in Birmingham, England, January 24, 1903, Bates first worked in Britain's fur trade, served in the British Army during World War II, and later traveled throughout Europe--visiting opera houses (*La Boheme* was his favorite opera) and sketching buildings and landscape scenes. In the early 1950s he and his family moved to 1666 Albany, Ferndale. Renderings in crayon, pencil, and watercolor of homes and buildings, including his favorite European churches and cathedrals, remained a focus throughout his life in Ferndale. Bates became a U.S. citizen in 1960. Upon his retirement in 1972, he and his wife returned to Staffordshire, England, to live. He passed away April 28, 1986.

In the late 1950s his work was displayed in Lincoln High School. His painting of Notre Dame, Paris, still remains a prized possession of the Robert Gray family, former Ferndale residents. The Bates rendering of Lincoln High School is the sole original painting of a local school in the Museum's collection—and possibly in the city.

The watercolor of Lincoln High School was a gift to the Museum from Leonard Popa whose father Felix, boiler operator at Ferndale High School, had once been Bates's colleague. Originally the painting was a gift from Bates to his friend Felix and for years had hung in Felix's office. Ultimately, Leonard felt that the painting "belonged to the residents of Ferndale" as a reminder of an iconic school in the city--and as a fitting tribute to a respected local artist unfamiliar to most people today, but one who profoundly captured the essence of a special time in Ferndale history.

Sources: "Custodial Staff," *Lincoln Legend*, No. 1, 1958-59 [typescript manuscript]: 11. Photo of Albert Bates: *Lincoln Log*, 1956. *Polk's City Directories* (Ferndale), 1950s. Researcher Sharon Kaiser's phone and e-mail discussions, with Bob Gray, November 2009, and Dr. Lawrence Sophia (former principal, Washington Elementary), December 2009.



Lincoln High School, watercolor, 1956. Artist: Albert Bates

THE LAST HORSE AND CHICKENS IN FERNDALE

[On September 19, 1944] the Council denies a request by 3 residents to keep chickens and another request by a Woodward Heights resident to keep a saddle horse.

Source: "Our World: South Oakland Timeline Celebrates a Century of Growth," [special supplement], *Daily Tribune*, February 24, 2000: 27.

FERNDALE'S HOWARD J. TRUMBO: WORLD'S FIRST RADIO DISC JOCKEY

Howard J. Trumbo, in 1920, was the manager of the Edison Phonograph Shop, Detroit. His friends, Elton Plant and Frank Edward, were working on a transmitter for the Evening News Association, parent company of *The Detroit News* and WWJ, which had a license to put a station on the air. Experimenting with means to get voices and music into a transmitter, they asked for the assistance of Mr. Trumbo, who devised a cardboard cone that would come out of an Edison phonograph speaker and into the mouthpiece of the transmitter. Thus was the beginning of radio station WWJ in Detroit.

On August 20, 1920, the station went on the air with regularly scheduled news, music, and weather broadcasts, the first such scheduled radio programs in the world. Mr. Trumbo was responsible for playing the music, earning him the reputation as the "world's first disc jockey."

He later worked for the Faygo Beverage Co. (home of the famous "red pop"), Detroit, retiring in 1968 as plant manager. By the 1950s, he and his wife Byrd were residents of 224 E. Maplehurst, Ferndale.

Mr. Trumbo was born November 23, 1893 in Albion, Indiana. In 1980 he died at age 87, fondly remembered for his active affiliations with two famous Detroit institutions: WWJ and Faygo.

Source summarized: "'World's first radio disc jockey' dies at age 87" [obit.] *Daily Tribune*, n.d. 1980. Trumbo address: *Polk Ferndale City Directory*, 1959, p. 604.

FINDING THE WAY: VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE LOCAL HISTORY

The marking of significant structures in a city's history is a current focus of *Preserve America*, a federal government project of which the City of Ferndale, in cooperation with the Ferndale Historical Society and the Lakota Group (a preservation endeavor), is a participant. Possible Ferndale locations to be designated with a plaque and interpretive signage include:

American State Bank (now Elks Lodge), built 1923, 22856 Woodward, first bank in Ferndale.

Central School (now Foley-Mansfield Law offices), built 1915, 130 E. Nine Mile, used as school, later as the public library and Bd. of Ed. Offices.

Dime Stores: Neisner's, Kresge's, Woolworth's (now occupied by other businesses), built late 1930s+, at 200, 231, and 234-36 W. Nine Mile, Ferndale's famous "5 and 10" stores.

Evangelical United Brethren Church (now privately owned), present building erected 1921, 165 E. Nine Mile, first church in the Village of Ferndale.

Ferndale State Bank (Wabeek, now vacant), built 1924, 141 W. Nine Mile, second bank in village.

Pioneer and Merriam Apartments, built 1924/25, at 195 and 249-263 W. Nine Mile, first apartments in Ferndale.

Spaulding and Curtin Funeral Home, built present location 1939, 500 W. Nine Mile, oldest extant funeral home in city.

Theaters: Ferndale Theater (now Magic Bag), built 1927, 22918 Woodward, first theater in Ferndale; Radio City (demolished), built 1937, 22857 Woodward, landmark theater of Woodward Ave. in Ferndale.

U.S. Post Office, built 1937, 22681 Woodward, first permanent post office site in the city.

Wetmore's Safety Service and Packard Dealership, 1928, 23455-23459 Woodward, home of the landmark "car with the wobbly wheels."

A NOTE FROM A VOLUNTEER

You know that the Ferndale Historical Museum is open Mondays and Wednesdays, 10am-2pm, and Saturdays, 1pm-4pm. But do you know what we volunteers do during these hours--and many extra hours besides? In addition to welcoming visitors and answering their questions during business hours and other times, we also, thanks to our website, field inquiries about Ferndale from all over the world. The archives necessary to answer such queries, via e-mail, phone, and in person, requires extensive maintenance. Locating new information sources and cataloging them, arranging special displays at the museum and city hall, logging in new artifact donations, and working with students to find information for class projects also remain important duties for the whole staff.

Adding new information and photographs to the Diane O'Neill Housing Resource Collection, a compilation of information on Ferndale's 8,000 structures, business, private, civic, and school, in the city is an ongoing project that documents ownership records, some dating to the turn of the 20th Century.

We dust, vacuum, clean out the bathroom, and tend to the landscaping. **Frank Flores**, a long-time volunteer, even does carpentry work in the museum. **Garry Andrews**, our director, and volunteers **Lynne Prudden**, **Theresa Schwartz**, **Jean Spang**, and I, show up most regularly; **David Lungu**, **Dan Harteau**, and **Lisa Harteau** appear whenever their busy work schedules allow. Other volunteers who served at the Museum, October 2008 through December 2009: **Cecilia Belemonti**, **Betty Blank**, **Charles Goode**, **Danielle Harteau**, **Sharon Kaiser**, **Eleanor Mielke**, **Nancy McChesney**, **Diane O'Neill**, **Carol Schmidt**, **Roger Schmidt**, **Lothar Spang**, and **Ray White**. As you can see, operation of the Museum is dependent upon such dedicated volunteers. Financial support is maintained through Society memberships and sales of items such as T-shirts, books on Ferndale history, and related items. We receive no financial support from the city.

Do you have the time, desire, and interest in sharing your talents with us as a volunteer at the Museum? New volunteers are needed to ensure that the Museum continues as a viable information resource of Ferndale. Please call Garry Andrews, 248-545-7606, if you would like to join us. I think you'd enjoy it—and would learn lots about your city in the process. I have—for the past 10 years!

Phyllis Hill

Volunteer, Ferndale Historical Museum

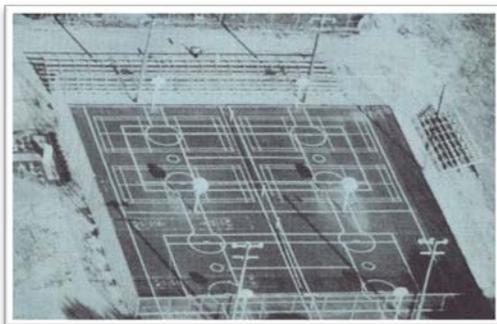
THE ROBERT CHAMBERS JR. MAGIC SQUARE MEMORIAL, GEARY PARK: UPDATE

The original memorial plaque, dedicated to Robert Chambers Jr., the boy who was killed in a tragic accident while workmen were paving Ferndale's first Magic Square play area in Roosevelt Park (now Geary Park), was dedicated in the park on September 20, 1955. (The fall 2009 issue of the *Crow's Nest* documented the Magic Square playground initiatives in the 1950s.) According to Byron Photiades of Ferndale's Department of Public Works, this original memorial was vandalized in 1977 and never replaced.

In 1993, Robert's mother inquired about the plaque. The city subsequently ordered two plaques, one small and one large, as replacements: the smaller to be on the fencing that surrounded the Magic Square, which by the 1990s had been converted into tennis courts; the larger to be placed on a boulder on the north side of the courts. For an unknown reason, neither plaque was installed.

But in late November 2009 the smaller plaque was given to the Ferndale Historical Museum where it is now on display. Plans at the DPW are that the larger plaque will be installed on a boulder north of Geary Park's present roller rink in 2010.

Sources: (Researcher Sharon Kaiser); *City of Ferndale, This is Ferndale, pamphlet, 1950s: 9.*



The "Magic Squares" were 120' x 120' fenced, hard surface areas. Ten activities were conducted on them, providing year-round use for recreational activities. The picture on the right shows a "Magic Square" flooded for ice skating.

HONORING FERNDALE VETERANS ON ACTIVE DUTY, 1960s-1970s: SPECIAL ASSIGNMENTS, VOLUNTEER AND OTHERWISE

FERNDALE HIGH SCHOOL GRAD DATES TRICIA NIXON, APRIL 1969

A/Lc Kerry Crockett, a member of the U.S. Air Force and a graduate of Ferndale High School (Class of 1967) was one of four Air Force members chosen to represent their branch of service in celebration of the 28th anniversary celebration of the USO in Washington DC. As a bonus, Crockett had a dinner date with President Nixon's daughter, Tricia.

An administrative clerk, stationed at Lakeland TX and Kessler MS, Crockett was later to head for Korea. His family lived at 616 Academy; his mother was a sixth grade teacher at Coolidge School.

Of his date with Tricia, he said: "She's quiet but very nice."

Source summarized: "With the Colors," *Ferndale-Gazette-Times*, April 17, 1969, p. 10.

LOCAL SAILOR SERVES APOLLO 10, MAY 1969

[A local man is a member] of the Apollo Recovery Force. Serving aboard the helicopter assault carrier USS Princeton is Seaman John G. Hutton, USN, son of Mrs. Wanda Yearkey, 1558 LeRoy, Ferndale The USS Princeton was with the prime recovery force for the Apollo 10 moonshot.

The 364-foot, 3,100-ton Saturn Five launch vehicle successfully carried astronauts Thomas P. Stafford, Eugene Cernan and John Young into space on a scheduled eight-day lunar flight.

The Apollo 10 mission is one of the final steps before reaching the ultimate goal of the Apollo program, to land men on the moon for limited observation and exploration and assure their safe recovery upon return to earth.

Source summarized: "Local Sailors Serve Apollo 10," *Ferndale-Gazette-Times*, May 29, 1969, p. 1.

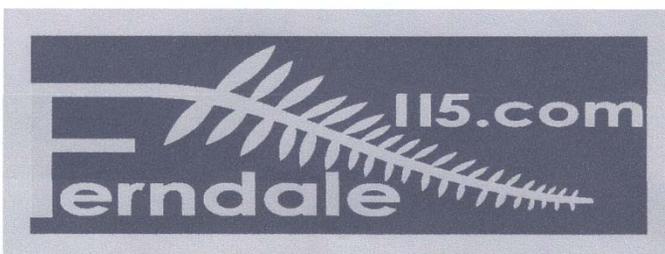
FERNDALE RESPONDS TO APPEAL FROM VIETNAM, 1970

A request from Lt. Robert Codney sent through his Chaplain, for aid in supporting the Vinh Long Catholic Orphanage in Vietnam had terrific response from the community.

As Bob is a member of the First Methodist church, Ferndale, a letter was sent to all the church school teachers asking children to bring clothing and toys. A notice was placed in the church bulletin listing other things needed, vitamins and money. The project was also presented to the student body at Ferndale High School as Codney is an alumni graduate.

The Ferndale First Methodist congregation sent 360 lbs. of clothing and medicines and over \$200 cash for the project. More than a dozen plastic bags of clothing were contributed from Wilson school whose principal is also a member of the church. Students at Ferndale High School contributed \$160.

Sources summarized: "Community Responds to Viet Appeal," *Ferndale-Gazette-Times*, February 26, 1970 (p. 9), and October 1, 1970 (p. 10).



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FERNDALE'S AMERICAN LEGION POST 330: ITS LAST STAND

Frank Flores, President, Memorial Home Assn., and former Commander, Post 330 (1982-3)

Chartered April 5, 1935, with an initial membership of sixteen, the Ferndale American Legion Post 330 conducted its first meeting in the Higgins Pontiac building, 22925 Woodward (at Lewiston). The Auxiliary Unit 330 was established the same year. The Post and Unit held meetings at various sites until the Ferndale American Legion Memorial Home Association, a non-profit corporation, formed to find a permanent home for the organization--a goal achieved December 1947 with dedication of the memorial hall, at 1741 Livernois, which remained the Legion's home until December 31, 2009.

Through the past 74 years at the same location, the Post and Unit faithfully fulfilled their common commitment: To honor and expand the rights and privileges of all American veterans and, as well, to work in behalf of the betterment of the community. Active involvement in the annual Memorial Day Parade, Flag Day, and Veterans Day Open House activities are examples of the Legion's dedication to Ferndale--as was the organization's sponsorship of the local American Legion Baseball State Champions in 1988, the last team to be recognized at the historic Tiger Stadium in 1989.



Other noteworthy events in local Legion history: In June 1988, the Ferndale post and its building was renamed for a legendary Legion member and life-long Ferndale resident, George W. Danuk. The post also had the honor to be the "home" of two past Ferndale mayors: Past Commander Bernie Lennon, and Albert Gertley, life-long Ferndale resident. Current city councilman Michael Lennon is a member of the Sons of the American Legion.

Today the building at 1741 Livernois stands quiet and still. The flag out front has been lowered for the last time; the building's doors are closed. A landmark in Ferndale history has come to an end--a victim of changing times and decreasing membership. But its remaining members still embody the same pride, dedication, and patriotism which are the unchanging hallmarks of the American Legion.

[Photo is from American Legion 18th District, 1983-7, Baseball Champions, commemorative booklet, 1987, unpagged.]

WHO CARES ABOUT LOCAL HISTORY?

"I've only lived in Ferndale two years. Why should I care anything about Ferndale history?" A legitimate question. Newer residents tend to be preoccupied with the present and future. The past seems remote, uninteresting, and decidedly unimportant. Yet an acquaintance with the city's past can explain why Ferndale remains the still thriving "small town" it is today. As a community the city prevails thanks to its key location on Woodward, its constructive responses to the challenges of changing times, and the dedicated commitment of its residents—a tradition of which newcomers, whether they are aware of it or not, are an integral part.

The Ferndale Historical Society Museum is an information resource supported solely by membership dues, book and memorabilia sales, and an occasional grant. The museum maintains the city's only repository of Ferndale history, a vital link in the preservation of the record of southeastern Michigan's past. Examples of the museum's resources of special interest to Ferndale residents:

Assorted abstracts of Ferndale properties, some dating to the 1820s
Farm implements (Grix farm), various tools dating to 1900
Local school histories, including sports, scrapbooks, yearbooks
Housing/building records, street by street, dating to 1901
Local veterans' records, memorabilia, photos
Ferndale Gazette (local newspaper, 1929-1979) digital files
Political history, from early Village days to present day
Photo files of people, buildings, events, dating from Village days to present

Clipping files, dating to the early village to present day
Residents' biographies and obituaries
Police and Fire records, memorabilia, and photos
Selected local business histories
Service clubs and organizations records
Church histories
Written memoirs by Ferndale residents
Models of significant local buildings

Please visit soon, newcomer or long-time resident, to discover your place in Ferndale history. Welcome to your museum!

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Please Look Inside!

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Calendar of Events:

Thursday, January 28 6 pm Board Meeting, Historical Society, held at the Museum, public is welcome

Thursday, February 25 6 pm Board Meeting, Historical Society, held at the Museum, public is welcome

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