

## Business ties with past still exist

# Would original trailblazers still recognize us?

By W.W. EDGAR

If the Indians and frontiersmen who blazed a trail through the Michigan wilderness had the chance to return, they'd be shocked to find the place cluttered with people, concrete highways weaving hither and yon, countless automobiles, shopping centers, malls and even airplanes flying overhead.

But here and there, along the line, they'd see what could be familiar sights. For instance, the trailblazers who opened the path along Grand River Avenue from the Detroit River would find that the old white building that was erected as a home in 1838 now is the Botsford Inn, one of Michigan's famous landmarks.

A bit further on they'd see that the Farmington Insurance Agency licensed in 1888 is still doing business in a bright new setting.

Those who helped blaze the trail from Detroit to Ann Arbor by going out what is now Plymouth Road, would find the old grocery store, erected on what was once known as "Rough and Ready" at Stark Road in Livonia, still doing business at the old stand. However, the original building was burned down in 1907 after having withstood the weather since the 1860s and Civil War days.

Further on they'd come to the Beyer Drug store at the corner of Main and Mill Streets in Plymouth that was started as an apothecary shop during the Civil War days in the early 1860s.

These are the old standbys the trailblazers might remember. But they also would cast an eye on several other ongoing businesses of long standing even if they didn't date back to the Civil War.

FOR INSTANCE, they'd spot the Wright Steel Fabricators plant on Telegraph Road that was started in Redford in 1944. It would be a strange sight to them, for steel fabricating wasn't even thought about when the trails were being blazed.

On the way westward, they'd come across Orin's Jewelers in Garden City, the "youngest" of the oldtimers since it was started by Orin Mazzoni in 1952. But they'd come across another oldtimer in Westland where the Feister Oil Co. has been doing business since 1888.

The one sight that would possibly astound them is the white frame building at what is now Grand River and Eight Mile—the Botsford Inn.

The glorious history of the building that was erected as a home is best told on the historical marker that graces the spacious lawn and reads:

"This historic inn, the oldest in Michigan still providing food and lodging, was built as a home in 1838 by Orrin Weston.

"In 1841 it was converted into a tavern by Stephen Jennings. Known as the Sixteen Mile House, it was the stage coach stop here in Clarencetown on the Grand River Plank Road which followed the Indian trail that went to Lake Michigan.

"Milton C. Botsford, in 1860, acquired the Inn. It became a popular meeting place for drivers, farmers, and travelers to and from Detroit. Henry Ford, who had first seen the Inn while courting his future wife, Clara, in a horse and buggy, purchased the Inn from the Botsfords in 1924 and restored it. The Fords operated the Inn until 1961.

"It later became the possession of the Anhut family, which also was among the automobile pioneers. Today, John Anhut, the son, operates it as the place where 'yesterday meets tomorrow.'"

Young John has retained all of the old atmosphere with the broad planked floors, the old-time player pianos and the steel records on the ancient phonograph. But, in enlarging the building because of its popularity, he added the modern dinner theater, one of the first in the area to sponsor the latest in dining and entertainment. It is still one of the great showplaces in the state.



JOHN ANHUT  
Botsford Inn Owner



Livonia's oldest ongoing business is Your Market at Stark and Plymouth Roads. In Civil War days, the location was known as "Rough and Ready." Presently the market is operated by Ron Miller (left) and Ray Ebach. (Staff photos by Art Emanuel)

A FEW CITY BLOCKS further out on Grand River, is the Farmington Insurance Agency in a brand new setting. The present owner, John Clappison, gladly traces the history of the firm back to its origin when it was the brainchild of a chap named Cobb, whose first name is lost in antiquity, and P. Dean Warner, a member of former governor Warner's family.

The firm, Clappison tells one, was first licensed by the Home Insurance Co. in 1868 and has been licensed ever since. In 1870, P. Dean Warner took over the business and ran it successfully for 32 years. Then in 1902, Clinton W. Wilbur took over and ran it until 1911, when A.A. Bruder headed the firm. Bruder passed it along to Edgar Pierce in 1914. After that it changed hands again until John Clappison took over on May 12, 1952.



JOHN CLAPPISON  
Firm Dates From 1868

Over the years the business has grown to the point where Bill Conroy has been taken in as a partner, along with Clappison's sons.

While the insurance company is in a modern, new home, it stands on the site of the famed Himmelsbach Restaurant that was razed by fire some years ago.

YOUR MARKET, Livonia's oldest ongoing business, is another with a glamorous background. No date could be found in the old records of when the market was built. It once was part of a block known throughout the area in the Civil War days as "Rough and Ready." It was on this corner of Stark and Plymouth roads that recruits went through training for the war.

According to the yellow pages of history, the building was built by David McFarlane and was known as the House of Seven Gables. It contained a tavern, a tap room, general store and several barns. It became a favorite resting place for drivers as it also was the location of the toll gate to the Plymouth Plank Road.

It was the only toll gate in the township and it became a favorite place for people to discuss the issues of the day, among them the slavery problem that had the country embroiled.

Through the years the store has had many names. It once was called the Red, White and Blue Market and according to some of the oldtimers, President Harding once spoke at the "Rough and Ready" corner.

Then, in 1907, the place burned. Out of the ashes the market was built again and finally came into possession of the McKinney family, one of the Livonia pioneer groups. At one time it was leased and operated by Clarence Hoffman, one of the original owners of Livonia Lanes, built in 1941.

At present, the market is leased by Don Ebach and for the past six years has been operated by his nephew, Ron

Miller. Despite its years, Your Market (no one recalls who named it) is doing a nice business and really is a reminder of the Livonia that used to be.

FURTHER OUT the Plank Road, the Indians and the trailblazers would come across Beyer's Drug store at the corner of Main and Mill streets in Plymouth. This is one of the few businesses that remained in the same family for more than 100 years.

On May 21, 1965, it was designated by the Plymouth Historical Society as the oldest, continuous local business in Plymouth.

The Beyer Pharmacy was founded during Civil War days by Dr. John Miller as an apothecary shop. He was succeeded in 1905 by Otto Beyer, a pharmacist, who later turned the business over to his son, Robert, who sold it only a few years ago to Arthur Harvey.

If the old trailblazers came to Michigan Avenue, they would feast their eyes on the Stein Greenhouses that have been there since 1922 when the Canton Township area was nothing but farmland.

The first greenhouse was opened by Howard Stein with one acre under glass. In 1925 a flower shop was added and today, with his son as a partner, the greenhouse has grown from its original 2,000 square feet to a complex of its features is the fact that, even though the business is almost 70 years old it has remained in the family since its inception.

WHEN SANFORD WRIGHT opened his steel fabricating plant on Telegraph Road in Redford in 1944, it was thought to be one of the residential section and due for the wide open spaces for a long time. But in the years that followed the township grew and grew until today it is the most heavily populated township in America.

And Wright saw the business grow, too. In fact, his son Richard and Richard Jr., are officially part of the firm that now does all sorts of welding. It

has become another landmark along one of the busiest highways in Michigan.

Another of the oldtimers with a fascinating background is the Feister Oil Co. in Westland. When asked how old the company was, Robert Feister recalled that it was founded back in the days when the oil man delivered kerosene oil to your home in five-gallon cans.

"We were just like the ice man," he said.

The records show that the company opened for business in 1938 when the tanks carried oil to homes. This was before the days of pressure tanks which allow the oil man just to stick the nozzle of the hose into a home tank and nozzle by until the order is filled.

Now 40 years since the formation of the company, it is another firm that has remained in the family and is still doing a thriving business.

THE YOUNGEST of the oldtimers along the western trail is Orin Jewelers, now doing business at the corner of Ford and Middle in Garden City.

Orin Mazzoni, the owner, once served on the city commission. He has as colorful a background as the building he occupies, which long will be remembered as the old city hall where Mayor James Tierney was shot during the heat of a commission meeting in 1897.

Mazzoni came to Garden City in 1952 to continue a career in jewelry that has now reached 26 years. He opened to the public on the northeast corner of the intersection. Then, 14 years ago, when the new city hall was built, he took over the former municipal headquarters.

Mazzoni started his career in Mingo Junction, Ohio, and moved about for a time until he came to Garden City from West Virginia.

All he would say was, "I've seen a lot of changes."

The Indians and the frontiersmen would say the same thing if they were able to come back and look around.



Howard Stein Sr. (right) opened his greenhouse on Michigan Avenue in Canton Township in 1922. Now the enterprise has 44,000 square feet and still is owned by the same family. That's Mrs. Stein at the left and their son, Howard Stein Jr., in the middle. (Staff photo)



Orin Mazzoni's jewelry store in Garden City is an oldtimer in the local marketplace, relatively speaking. His store occupies the city's former municipal headquarters. The original store was opened in 1952. (Staff photo)

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