

# News topics span a century

**S**OME THINGS about community journalism haven't changed in 100 years. Things like the police news, updates on downtown businesses, and merchants using the newspaper as the most likely route to sell their wares are still with us today.

But in the late 1800s, it was "Piso's Cure for Consumption," "5-ton Wagon Scales" and treatment for drapery that were being sold.

Modern-day Observer editors did not reinvent the wheel — they still have the same "nose for news" and try to keep a grasp on what the community likes to read.

Despite similarities, there are differences in Enterprise content in the late 1800s compared to today's Observer.

Readers 100 years ago were treated to serialized novelettes, a jokes column, and news from across the state and overseas, in addition to an entertaining version of local happenings.

For many, the Enterprise was the only form of news, advertising and entertainment, which might account for the difference in content. Today, of course, there are television, radio and a multitude of vertical market publications from which the public can choose.

**THE LATE 1800s** was also the birth of the age of "yellow journalism" and sensational writing. William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer were battling it out in New York City, trying to top each other's coverage with splashy headlines, which set the trend for the style of news writing throughout the century.

Even newspapers that weren't "yellow" took on the tone with some editorializing in their news columns. This 1888 Enterprise column



**Case Hans**  
staff writer

details how reporters of the day collected police news: "Mrs. Amos Dewaters, of Nashville, Mich. about 6 o'clock Monday night placed a 38-caliber revolver over her right breast and fired. . . . At present the woman lies in a very critical condition. The cause was despondency and domestic troubles."

Then there was James Clark: "Clark, a river man from Ludington, while maddened by drink cut his mother's throat and she will probably die. It took two officers to arrest the desperate man. He is a quiet man when sober."

Not only was the tone of the police column different, but news items reflected the signs of the times.

A bit of traditional sentiment is voiced by a divorce item, published on the inside pages of the first issue of the Enterprise Nov. 2, 1888: "A Greenville, Mich. woman who asked for a divorce . . . told the court that a little, measly, one-armed cuss had licked her husband. 'My marriage contract calls for a lord and protector,' she said, 'but when a man is so easy to get away with he can't be much of a lord. . . .'"

The court allowed that she had all the logic on her side."

**OTHER COLUMNS** talked about the "yellow fever scourge" and the first "women's pages" detailed the

clothing trends of the day, which included the popular taffeta and velvet: "Notwithstanding the rage for elaborate decoration, there is no radical change this season in the style of making the tailor gown."

"Good taste is still shown in the construction of both skirt and bodice."

Not only were news columns different at the turn of the century,

but also the advertisements. Most were in-column ads, up and down the pages with the copy, and were probably read in conjunction with news items as the reader scanned the pages.

Public sales for animals, cultivators and road wagons were as common as ads for \$38 gold watches, yarns and notions, and French pattern hats.

Cures for malaria, sour stomach, the sniffles and a variety of other ailments were also touted throughout the paper, just as cures for baldness and fad diets are advertised today.

After 10 years of publication, the Enterprise was circulating to 22 different states and to "almost every county in the state of Michigan," according to an 1898 editor's column in a 10th Anniversary Edition.

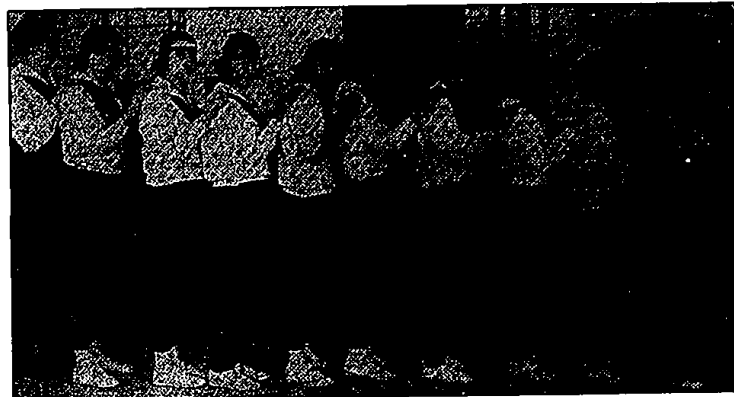


photo courtesy Farmington Community Library

Farmington High's 1921 girls basketball team. This picture was reprinted in the Observer in the 1960s. Shown from left, with a note about what they were doing at the time of reprint in the late '60s, were: coach Gladys Thornton; Ora Goers, a teacher; Marguerite Moore, a bank teller; Isabel Pauline Earl, wife of a businessman in Hinsdale, Ill.; Trena Catherman Quinn, city clerk; Edna Kreager Vivier, wife of a local businessman; Alice Priestly; Vi Hazelton; Loretta Waack Cox; Jeanette Hamilton Taylor, a registered nurse and wife of a Navy commander living in Columbus, Ohio.

## Test grades were the big news

### Student enrollment totaled 110

**E**DUCATION TRENDS were not big news in the late 1890s.

No one talked about curriculum, state-mandated testing, and certainly not about bus routes and high-tech computers.

The Enterprise published bits and pieces about the education of Farmington's 110 registered students. Which books were being read, who received the highest grades, who had entered the rural school, and even who visited school was the news of the day.

In 1898, there were 35 high school students, 33 "intermediate" students and 42 elementary students.

"The scholars of the high school were pleased to have their old schoolmate, Johnie Lapham, with them Monday," said one typical entry from Nov. 4, 1898.

The small-town atmosphere of Farmington and its surrounding

township allowed the Enterprise to be more personal and detailed in its coverage.

**AND, LIKE** other coverage in the paper in those days, editorializing was common — and apparently expected — on the news pages: "A written review in physics was held Tuesday a.m., which resulted in standings ranging from 60 to 100. Less committing and more careful thinking is needed."

Instead of publishing school honor rolls, which are commonplace today, a list of 10 students with perfect attendance were listed in the paper.

And instead of features on individuals schools, teachers or students, one feature story in 1898 gave an overview of the entire district plus details about principal Harry N. McCracken — who was comparable in status to today's superintendent.

In 1898, McCracken was "re-

ected to that position by the unanimous vote of the board of Supervisors, with the exception of two who undoubtedly were not sufficiently informed on the subject," the story said.

**THE PHYSICAL** aspects of the district's school building were also reported.

In the late 1800s, the Farmington school building was "well lighted and ventilated and is heated by a hot air furnace," one account told readers. It was "situated in a pleasant part of the eastern portion of the town."

The building also had a reading room with magazines and papers, and a library with "several volumes." "Students have access to this constantly."

From 1888 to 1898, the Farmington school graduated 48 students, according to Enterprise accounts.

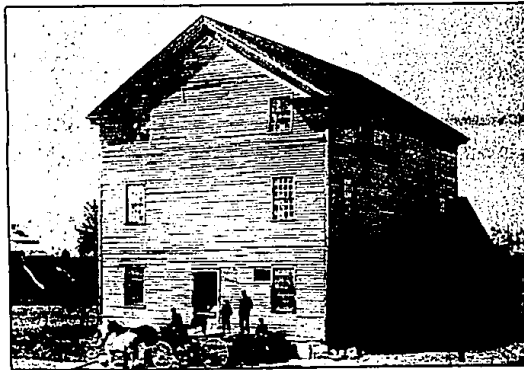


photo courtesy Farmington Community Library

The Power Mill, near the bridge on Power Road, north of Grand River, in Farmington before 1900.

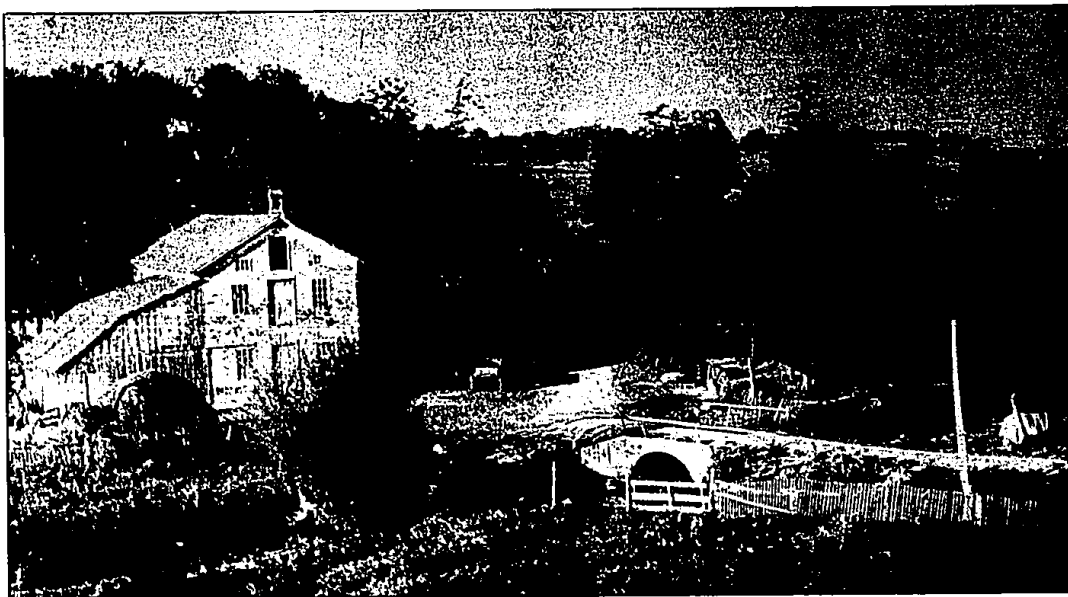


photo courtesy Farmington Community Library

A view of the Steele Mill, built in 1827 as the first grist mill in Farmington. It stood on Drake, near Howard, in an area of Farmington Township known as Sleepy Hollow. It was named after its first owner, Edward Steele. It was pulled down by its last owner, Frazer Wadenstorer, in 1936.

**'Residential subdivisions were popping up everywhere, and with them the need for zoning changes, drainage problems, water problems and kids, kids, and more kids.'**

— Mike Kiley  
former editor