

Farmington in 1890: a 'bright future'

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By David L. Litogot
special writer

How times have changed. One hundred years ago we called them the "Gay Nineties." I wonder what the 1990s will be called? The decade when Farmington ran out of room? The era of unlimited expansion and "progress"?

2 volunteers honored for their service work

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul recently honored two of its volunteers from the Farmington Hills area for their charitable work.

Honored with the Frederic Ozanam Length of Service Medallion were Albert O'Connor for 70 years of service and Myron Durkee for 50 years of service as volunteers of the society.

Both have spent countless hours visiting people in need of food, clothes, housing and other types of emergency assistance.

The medallions were presented by

It was just 100 years ago that America was a country of 44 states. The Army put down the last Indian "rebellion" at Wounded Knee, South Dakota, and Navy beat Army in their first football classic. Indeed it was an end to one era and a beginning of a new age: one of industry, invention, and progress.

Michigan at the time was a leader in lumber, copper, salt, and iron. Fayette, a town of 500 in the Upper Peninsula, was a booming pig-iron producer. Heretofore Dow just founded the Dow chemical company. The land was stripped of the trees and

Ernest Onisko, who is president of the St. Fabian Conference for the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, where they are still active members.

The occasion for this award ceremony was the society's second annual award banquet, which drew 800 church volunteers and community leaders from across Southeast Michigan.

The medallion is named after the founder of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, who organized the first group of Vincentian volunteers to help the poor in Paris in the 1830s.

footprints in history

the passenger pigeon was quickly becoming extinct. These gentle birds were killed for food and their habitat was destroyed by lumbermen and forest fires.

Farming was Michigan's leading industry. The most reliable transportation was by water and by rail. The state had almost 7,000 miles of rail and no paved roads.

DETROIT'S LEADING INDUSTRIES were the manufacturing of railroad cars, boots, shoes, cigars, men's clothing, ships and stoves. Detroit had 200,000 people and was the 14th largest city in the United States. J.L. Hudson had a store in the Opera House on Campus Martius.

Gernhard Stroth owned a brewery. James Vernor had a drugstore where he produced a fine ginger ale.

Fred Sanders owned a confectionery store. Ira and Clayton Grinnell

opened a music store about this time. There was Mabley's department store, the Ferry Seed Company, and Parke-Davis.

There were no automobiles — just horses and bicycles. The street cars were pulled by horses. Electricity was available, which meant better lighting and refrigeration. The days of the ice box were numbered.

Farmington was a good one-day ride from downtown Detroit. The small village of 700 was a good place to stop on the way to and from Lansing, the state capital. The Botsford Inn near Clarenceville and the Owen House in downtown Farmington were good places to spend the night. For less than \$1, a traveler could enjoy dinner and a room.

THE BUSINESSES in downtown Farmington were growing along Grand River Avenue. The Woodman

Drug Store was also home to the local post office. The Warner store was thriving, being run by a 32-year-old Fred Warner. Locally, the Warner family was also involved in brick-making, banking and eventually cheese-making.

The Farmers nearby were prospering, too. Their large homes testified to the wealth of the land and orchards. The small village of North Farmington on 14 Mile existed in 1890.

There were 10 one-room school houses in the township. Only one exists today, the German school, on Middlebelt, south of 14 mile. There was also a new high school. In 1890, the Union School in downtown Farmington would graduate its first class — all three of them. Those three had to pay tuition to attend and graduated at the end of the 11th grade.

FARMINGTON IN 1890 had no

trains, no electricity, no telephones, and no more Quakers. The people lived with different smells and more dirt than we experience today. Life expectancy was shorter but the life itself might have been richer. The family and church were important. The foods were fresh. Well water had to be better. The future looked bright. New inventions were produced to make life of the average person better. Can we say that today?

With our splintered families, break-neck schedules, consumer-oriented economy, grid-locked roadways, and electric mania, can we really say that life in Farmington is better?

One hundred years from now — when every inch of Farmington is covered with condominiums, malls, and concrete — which year will man yearn for, 1990 or 1890?

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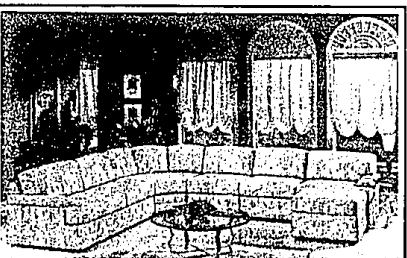
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