

Creative Living

CLASSIFIED REAL ESTATE



Bob Sklar editor/591-2300

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Downtown series concludes

A DOWNTOWN is a lot like life. It slowly matures. Then it slowly slips away.

But downtowns don't have to die.

With the right combination of vision and vigor, aging downtowns can spring back to life, shedding the tired, old veneer and sporting a fresh, new look.

In today's third installment of a three-part series tracing downtown historic architecture in Farmington, the spotlight is on downtown Garden City.

Over its 159-year-old history, Garden City, part of what once was Nankin Township, grew from forest, to farms to cityhood.

The downtown area sprang up in the 1920s around the country crossroads of Ford Road and Middlebelt, then served only by two stores, a city hall and a 14-room schoolhouse.

Developer Arnold Folker provided a key spur when he built The Folker Building in 1928, the year after the city of 2,500 people incorporated.

That now-historic landmark, on the southeast corner of Ford and Middlebelt, housed the city hall until 1965.

The central business district fell on hard times in the 1970s. But emergence of a downtown development authority (DDA) in 1981

helped pave the way for its dramatic rebound.

Raising money through increased property values within the development district, the DDA has spent \$1.5 million on streetscape improvements. In 1987, it developed a commons area replete with a gazebo at the main intersection.

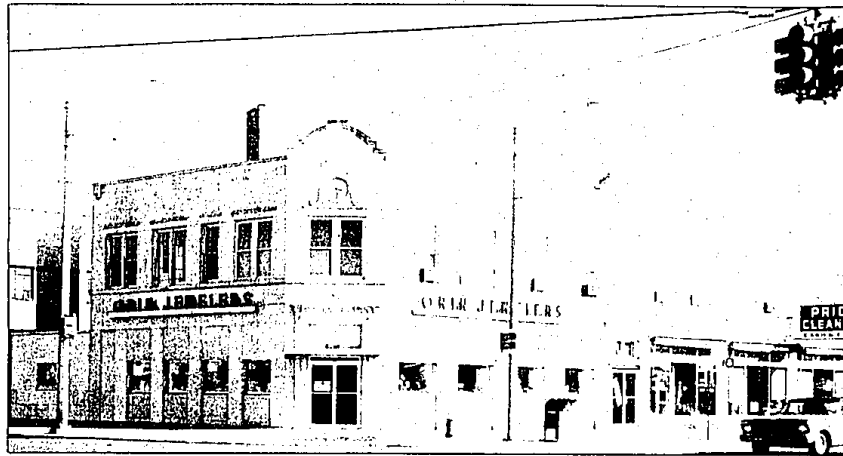
Meanwhile, the Kroger-anchored Town Center, opened last year, is a byproduct of the DDA's desire to inspire private investment through public redevelopment. The city's purchase of the old La Parisienne theater lot provided not only increased exposure but also increased parking for the planned new center.

Garden City leaders call a healthy downtown integral to the city's well being. The city has a tax base that's 85 percent residential, 12 percent commercial and 2 percent industrial.

"We hope to expand or, at the very least, maintain that commercial percentage so we can take those revenues and provide services to our residents without having to increase the residential tax burden," said Terry Carroll, community development director.

Historic downtown architecture in Farmington was profiled Dec. 20 and in Plymouth Nov. 8.

— Bob Sklar



Built in 1928, the Folker Building sports an architectural style called Classic Revival, architect Betty-lee Seydler-Sweatt said, "but it has been simplified. The way the building occupies

the corner identifies this as the center of the city. This is the way many bank buildings were built in the 1920s."



ART EMANUELE/staff photographer

Grand River and Farmington Road in this same manner, identifying it as the center of the city.

Joyce Pappas, whose father bought The Folker Building in 1964 to house a jewelry business, said her family has not changed the building in any way except to add a sign, which reads, Orin Jewelers, and awnings. They had the exterior stone cleaned.

"The building is a wood structure with a limestone face," said Joyce's brother, Orin Mazzoni Jr. He along with his brother, Michael, and sister, Joyce, operate Orin Jewelers, since their father retired.

FOUNDED IN 1840, the Garden City Presbyterian Church, after existing in two different timber structures, built "a new brick building 35-feet-by-60 feet for \$13,000."

The new Garden City Presbyterian Church grew at a quickening pace. Between 1923 and 1933, many small homes "were built on wood posts set into the ground and protruding a couple of feet above the surface."

Other Garden City residents built "garage homes on the backs of their lots" with the intention of building a "proper house" in front, at which time, the rear structure would revert to a garage.

In 1941, the Garden City Presbyterian Church began to build an addition to the church to accommodate its growing flock. Then the U.S. entered World War II. By 1943, the only portion completed was the "two-story manse" to house Pastor Robert Rives' family.

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Today, the architectural detail of a single row of dentils above the main entrance to Orin Jewelers lurks beneath the Keepsake sign. The renaissance detail at the top (the clock) remains, as does the Folker Building name carved into the stone. A limestone face covers the building's wood frame.

fired by the dream of Ebenezer Howard's ideal living environment "Garden City."

Earlier, Howard published "Tomorrow, a Peaceful Path to Reform," later titled "Garden Cities of Tomorrow." In 1902, he founded the Garden City and Townplanning Association on the outskirts of London, England.

BUT IT was not until Ebenezer Howard built the first of his "Garden Cities" in Letchworth in 1902 and Welwyn in 1919 that he drew the attention of American architects and planners.

They became interested in Howard's ideal community set amidst wide open spaces upon learning that the community was economically self-sufficient. Howard's "Garden City" in order

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Garden City — built on dreams of country living

By Linda Ann Chomlin special writer

ARCHITECTURE MIRRORS the time period or era of a civilization, revealing beliefs, principles and dreams held and cherished by a society of people or its ruling government.

The turn of the century brought a cry for relief from the industrial way of life. Forced to work hours upon hours in dark factories at repetitive jobs, the masses, in the beginning of the 20th century, sought a return to the land, where sunlight, fresh air, and green living things abounded.

Across the waters in 1898 England, Ebenezer Howard proposed the idea for the creation of a "Garden City." Located outside a metropolis, Howard sketched a cluster of homes and gardens, planned around a central park.

In the mid-1920s, Nankin Township farms, of which part was later incorporated in 1927 as the village of Garden City, were subdivided and platted for sale as private "farmsites" by land speculators and real estate developers making Ebenezer Howard's dream a reality.

In October 1923, a roadside sign read "40 foot lots, \$1 a week." An ad for The Folker Co., which called itself the "developers of Garden City," referred to Garden City as the "Sun Parlor" of Detroit. Arnold Folker offered buyers with the sale of a "square half acre of Garden City, the opportunity to live much better for less cash outlay."

THE AMERICAN dream slowly began to evolve: to own a little house in the country with enough land for a garden. When World War I ended in 1918, the dream became reality. A revolution in transportation hastened the death of a day-to-day life of drudgery in the dismal and stifling industrial surroundings.

American cities and architecture would never be the same after the privately owned automobile became affordable.

Henry Ford revolutionized the automobile industry and, in turn, American architecture with his invention of the assembly line. The technological discovery of the line, coupled with the creation of the standardized model of automobile, Ford's black Model T, brought prices of mass produced transportation within the range of the working man.

"The automobile brought freedom, and that freedom brought the longing for space, wide open spaces," said architect Betty-lee Seydler-Sweatt.



Downtown HERITAGE

Seydler-Sweatt is an associate professor of architecture at Lawrence Technological Institute in Southfield, where she teaches two different courses in historic preservation. She also operates Preservation Planning Inc. in Franklin.

The automobile connected large industrialized cities with the space of the suburbs. Within these wide open spaces, soon filled with tracts of homes, came the need for downtown commercial architecture.

IN 1928, Arnold Folker built The Folker Building on the southeast corner of Ford Road and Middlebelt. "The architecture is in the style of Classic Revival, but it's been simplified," Seydler-Sweatt said. "It has renaissance detail (the clock) at the top."

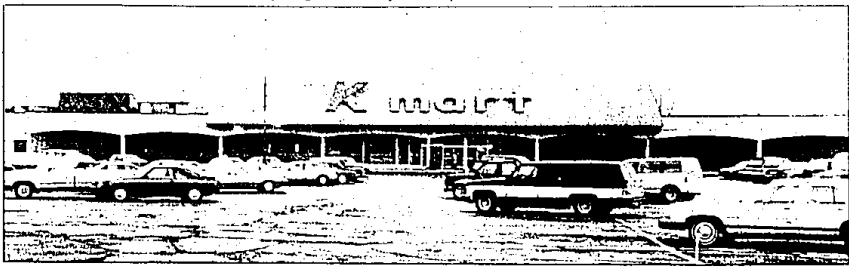
A parapet where the facade continues up, beyond the edge of the roof, marks the corner facade as does a single row of dentils above the main entrance. "The way the architecture occupies the corner identifies this as the center of the city," Seydler-Sweatt said. "The architecture is talking this way."

"This is the way, many banks were built in the 1920s," she added. The massive architecture of the Farmington State Savings Bank, built in 1922, occupies the corner of



photo courtesy Kmart Corp.

Kmart Corp. opened this contemporary store, the first Kmart in the nation, in 1962. Architect Betty-lee Seydler-Sweatt refers to the style, lightheartedly, "as strip suburban."



ART EMANUELE/staff photographer

Left: Today, the architecture of the facade of Kmart's Garden City store boasts a parapet continuing above the roof line that's typical of the Second Empire style of roof.