

Fantasy highlights historical festival

By Craig Piechura
staff writer

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Featured guests at the 1870 Governor's Ball inaugurated the Farmington Historical Museum in appropriate historical fashion Saturday night.

They dressed in 19th-century attire and impersonated some of the town's most illustrious ancestors.

The event's co-chairman, Walt Konig, a member of the Farmington-8 Lions Club, played the role of Paschal D. Warner, state representative from Farmington in 1870. Konig, in his role as Warner, was the banquet's emcee.

Because the event was called the 1870 Governor's Ball, many guests erroneously assumed the benefit was in Governor Fred Warner's honor. Warner was only 5 years old in 1870, so the governor being impersonated was Governor Henry P. Baldwin, played by Fred Klingbell, Warner's great-grandson.

The other featured speaker at the banquet was Farmington Township Supervisor Elijah J. Wixom, played by Farmington Mayor Alton Bennett.

During the course of the evening other guests were given historical counterparts. For instance Richard Headlee, current candidate for governor, was identified as a candidate for the old school district.

When asked if they'd ever throw a governor's ball in his honor, Headlee said he hoped so.

"Obviously we as a company support the rehabilitation of the museum into an historical museum," said Headlee, president of Alexander Hamilton Life Insurance Co. of Farmington Hills. "It's a fine cultural addition to the community."

"THIS BANQUET is also a nice break from the campaigning of the day. I just got back from Traverse

City, Cadillac and Escanaba. I spoke this morning in Escanaba, went to Cadillac to meet the Lions Club for lunch and flew back just in time for this."

"Heritage is extremely important for people to be able to relive in their town in terms of roots."

The guest of honor as the fictional governor at the Governor's Ball, Klingbell got a big round of applause when he said in his mock inauguration speech that Michigan is "the most resourceful (state) in the nation."

He got the biggest laugh of the evening when he told the 19th-century on-lookers that "the credit of no state stands higher than Michigan."

Mayor Bennett obviously relished his chance at role playing.

Affecting an old-fashioned style of oratory, Bennett praised the museum in flowery prose.

"It is one of those bright oases in our

ordinary life which relieves us from business cares and affords us the opportunity to unbend and mingle in cheerful recreation with our esteemed friends."

HE BLUSTERED on calling the evening "a triumph of social enjoyment."

When Bennett finished his speech, it caused Konig to comment that "I thought the Warners were in the butter business, but he's warm enough to melt the cheese."

The costumes were a big hit among party goers, particularly the costumes that purportedly belonged to the Warner family.

Dresses worn by Margaret Walker, chairwoman of the Farmington Historical Commission, and her daughter Joan DiDia came from the collection of Mrs. Sloum, they said. And Jean Fox, chairman of the Farmington Historic District Commission, said her dress can be traced to Mrs. Sloum, who may have worn the white lawn dress to her father's inauguration party.



Mae Bennett and Richard Headlee teamed up for a dance at the Masonic Temple.



Nelson Davis, from the American Horse Drawn Vehicle Association, wheels into the driveway of the Warner Museum as he delivers a guest to the Governor's Ball.

Staff photos by Randy Borst



Music of the late 1800s filled Masonic Temple courtesy of the Michigan Qlde Ruffwater Band. Here, Celcilia Horodko plays the dulcimer.



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