



RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Earlier this year, Farmington-area residents gathered to honor Gov. Fred Warner and to help contribute to the refurbished home which

now is an historical museum. Dressed in period costumes, many of the participants traveled to and fro in horsedrawn carriages.

Farmington's governor remembered as one of Michigan's best leaders

By Steve Barnaby
editor

For many Farmington-area residents, pride in the past means one thing — Gov. Fred Warner.

And this year, Farmington honored its

favorite son by throwing a gala ball at his home which now is the Farmington Historical Museum.

Warner, progressive Republican and the state's first three-term governor, is a constant source of pride in this community. Visitors at this week's festival can find his

home on the south side of Grand River, east of Grand River, west of Farmington Road, near Cass. It's tough to miss with its large porch surrounding the white residence.

The Warner Mansion is much more than one of this city's old homes. It represents the history of one of this state's truly great leaders.

Let's think back a minute to the beginning of this century.

Farmington residents jammed city streets in celebration.

Roman candles and skyrockets illuminated the night sky as marchers paraded down Grand River with torches in hand. American flags, Chinese lanterns and red, white and blue bunting lined the way.

It was July 1904. It also was one of Farmington's proudest moments.

WARNER, ON the verge of celebrating his 39th birthday, had just returned from the Republican state convention, where he had been nominated as the GOP gubernatorial candidate.

The following November he was to win handily the election. He was to be the youngest elected state chief executive up to that time.

Today, Warner's home stands as a proud beacon. Across the street, at the cemetery on Grand River and Shiawassee, Warner lies at rest in a modest grave unknown to the thousands of commuters who speed by each day.

The contrast between stately mansion and humble burial ground is exemplary of Warner's personality — an accomplished politician who personally was a gracious and unassuming person.

Although best known for his youth and long duration as governor, Warner was a Progressive in the tradition of his contemporary, President Theodore Roosevelt,

whom he knew and admired.

For most of his adult life he sported a Roosevelt-style mustache.

And while his personal modesty caused him to take a back seat in the history books to such notable Progressives as Michigan's Hazen Pingree and Wisconsin's Robert LaFollette, Warner mastered some of the best Progressive legislation in the country.

Warner was long on accomplishment and short on braggadocio. Unlike many of his Progressive contemporaries, he wasn't one for long-winded speeches and podium pounding.

HAVING SERVED as both a state senator and secretary of state, he was out to bust the unfair business cartels which made life so difficult for smaller, less affluent businessmen.

While himself successful, he saw that many others were getting a raw deal, and he was bound and determined to set things straight.

He did just that.

Under his administration, and with his backing, Warner fought the railroad interests. A railroad commission was established which set rates and schedules that previously had been determined by back-room deals between politicians and railroad executives with money passing under the table.

He fought hard for the primary election system and saw to it that U.S. senators were nominated by popular vote.

Warner also was a staunch supporter of a more active role for women in political life. And while women didn't receive nationwide voting rights until 1920, Warner pushed through the 1908 Michigan Constitutional Convention an article allowing limited voting rights for women in this state.



Fred Warner (left) often traveled to Washington, D.C., to visit with some of his Progressive colleagues. Here he sits with President William Howard Taft.