

Detroit image woes rooted deep

David Litogot teaches elementary school history in the Farmington Public Schools. He is a member of the Farmington Historical Society.

By David Litogot
special writer

We have an image problem. By we, I mean the inhabitants of southeastern Michigan. As I travel around the country, I get strange looks from people when I admit that I live near Detroit.

They look closely for a dirty collar, a UAW button and a bullet-proof vest. We certainly do not have the history of the East, the climate of the South or the scenery of the West.

We can be proud of our fine educational facilities, our reasonable prices, and our manufacturing capabilities.

When tourists visit the area, they take in Greenfield Village, Cranbrook, Greentown, Ann Arbor and Plymouth. A tourist mecca, we are not.

This poor image is not new. It has been with us for most of our history.

Until 1796, there was the constant fear of Indians. The French traders and Indians made sure that the English were basically unwelcome here.

In that year of 1796, Irishman Isaac Weld visited Detroit and noted its French inhabitants, narrow, muddy streets, and "the numberless old

footprints in history

squaws leading about their daughters, ever ready to dispose of them, pro tempore, to the highest bidder."

In 1805, a fire nearly leveled the city. From 1805 to 1814, the Indians threatened and staged another uprising. Until 1818, it was not even possible to obtain legal title to any land in Michigan except around Detroit and Mackinac. There were reports from soldiers and surveyors on the condition of life here.

American General Duncan McArthur declared in 1814 that Michigan "appears to be not worth defending."

Edward Tiffin, surveyor-general of the United States, reported to President Madison in 1816 that Michigan consisted of swamps, lakes and poor sandy soil and was not worth the cost of surveying. (His surveyors visited the poorly drained Jackson County area during a wet fall.)

The Tiffin report supposedly kept many settlers out of the state until the late 1820s. Bad publicity was also a result of the spread of disease

among soldiers stationed here in 1813 and 1823.

In the East, the warning about unhealthy conditions in Michigan was put to rhyme:

Don't go to Michigan, that land of ill;
The word means ague, fever, and chills

IN THE early 1820s Territorial Governor Lewis Cass undid much of Michigan's bad reputation when he published the results of his expedition around the state. In 1818, steam navigation came to the Great Lakes and in 1825, the Erie Canal was completed. Michigan now became a "promised land" to many people from New England and New York.

Roads were built, forest cleared and thousands began to settle the territory.

When English author Harriet Martineau visited Detroit in the 1820s, she wrote of the rough stagecoach rides, the friendly backwoods settlers, the noble but poor Indians, the wild flowers, and the planks that passed for sidewalks.

She was not impressed with the city as a whole. "The streets are

wide and airy, but the houses, churches and stores are poor for a territorial capital. The accommodations are so insufficient for the influx of people."

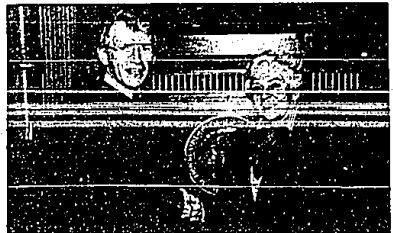
FRENCHMAN ALEXIS de Toqueville in 1841 described Detroit as the "limits of civilization." He called the area around the city a land of mosquitoes, farmers, fur traders, half-breed hunters, Indians and junkies.

Gustaf Vilhelm, a Swede, wrote home in 1841 that he was impressed with the "wide streets and avenues" of Detroit and the promise of the area.

Here was one traveler who found no negative impressions of the area. Rare indeed. Most travelers and visitors seem to dwell on the negative that can be found in any city or area.

With the help of the steam ship companies, land speculators and governments, advertising for Michigan appeared in Eastern papers, launching a "Michigan fever." Thousands came here to farm, to trade, to live. My own relatives came in the early 1800s. They overlooked the swamps, the poor roads, the dangers.

With the rise of the automobile industry, Detroit assumed a new image one of smokestacks, dirty snow and racial strife. Despite urban renewal, fine cultural advances, and renewed vigor, a poor image of Detroit still exists. It has been there a long time, through different eras, brought on by different circumstances.



Swearing in

New state Rep. Jan Dolan (right), R-Farmington Hills, is shown in a swearing-in ceremony with Michigan Supreme Court Justice James Brickley before the opening of the 85th legislative session Jan. 11. Dolan was elected last fall to replace W.V. Brotherton, who retired from his 69th state House district seat representing Farmington, Farmington Hills and Southfield Township.

Osteopathic chief named

William Stevenson has assumed the position of executive director of the Farmington-based Michigan Association of Osteopathic Physicians and Surgeons Inc. (MAOP&S).

The 2,500-member association supports and promotes the osteopathic profession in Michigan with services such as continuing medical education, administrative duties for member health care and legislative efforts in Lansing.

Stevenson had been affiliated with Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Michigan since 1962. Since 1985, he served as senior vice president of external affairs.

STEVENSON was a member of the senior management team that over the years guided the full spectrum of corporate activities, including marketing, corporate communications, community relations, claims administration, customer service and senior services.

Among his civic accomplishments, Stevenson has served as director of the Michigan State Chamber of Commerce, the Greater Detroit Chamber of Commerce, the Metropolitan Detroit Convention and Visitors Bureau, Civic Inc. and the Metropolitan Transit Committee.

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