

Fifty Years In Business Here--And Fifty Years Of Farmington History

Thursday, November eighth, marked the fiftieth anniversary of M. B. Pierce as a Farmington business-man. In honor of the occasion, N. H. Power wrote for the Enterprise an article so rich in historical material, so largely a history of the entire community, that it has been saved for this Fortieth Anniversary Edition.—The Editor

On November 8, 1878 Mr. M. B. Pierce opened a shop in Farmington and commenced his business career. He was in the full strength and vigor of youth with undimmed vision, steady nerves, good health and ambition to render a service to those who were near and dear to him. With a fidelity and zeal that never wavered he performed that service to the entire satisfaction of those concerned. Fifty years in one town in one business is an experience that comes to very few men. In that period of time, many changes have taken place. He has changed and the town itself has seen many changes in its business and in the personnel of its inhabitants. Mr. Pierce's first shop was in the rooms over the store now occupied by Fred Pauline. At this time, 1878, Farmington was recovering from the disastrous fire of October 9, 1872, a fire that swept the north side of Grand River avenue from the building now occupied by Schroeder's meat market to the alley east of where the Peoples State Bank now stands. The buildings now used by Ben Myers and L. C. Thayer had not been constructed and this ground was used by the farmers as a space to hitch their horses when they came to town to do their trading. At the corner of Grand River avenue and Farmington road stood the hotel conducted by L. D. Owen, a well-known and popular host with the traveling public. This ground is now covered by the Farmington State Savings Bank building. The south side of Grand River avenue from Farmington road west to the Nelson Sisters residence was vacant farm land and was used much of the time as a cow pasture by the owner, Mr. Constantine Collins.

The present town hall was erected in 1876 and at this time was the pride of the citizens of the town. In the Town Hall park the fine maple trees that now adorn its Grand River frontage, had been set out a few months previously by a man who owned the greater part of the land, Mr. Kynast. He had four boys and manufactured household furniture, mostly tables and chairs. His residence and shop stood near the center of the park. At the east end of the park near the Town Hall was located the wagon and blacksmith shop of John P. Eisenlord, whose son and grandson are now in the electrical business in our city.

On the north side of the park from Grand River avenue east to Farmington road there was only one small frame house. It was near the residence now occupied by G. H. Riddle. All of the rest of that area was vacant property. The land now occupied by the Grace House on Grand River



Enterprise Photo
M. B. PIERCE

east, was the site of a blacksmith shop owned by John Jackson, who for years did a flourishing business there at his trade.

The corner at Grand River and Warner street, now owned and occupied by Dr. Holcomb, was the site of a shop in which the then owner, Ira Tollman made and repaired farm vehicles, wagons, buggies, etc. Where now stands the Methodist Church stood the little old residence and shop of Jacob Drake, a well-known and somewhat eccentric character. Mr. Pierce at this time resided with his mother and sister on the north side of Thomas street, very near the land now occupied by the grade school. The school house at that time was a two-story frame building with its front facing School street and near the present High School. The superintendent of the school in 1878 was Carlton A. Beardsley, who died October 25, 1928, at his home in Detroit. I think the assistant teacher at that time was Nell McHugh whose maiden name was McDermott and who is still living at Fenton, Mich. Corporal punishment at that time was believed to be a very effective agency in aiding the acquisition of knowledge by the pupil and was in general use among the schools.

At this time there were three churches in town, Universalist, Baptist and Methodist. The latter society worshipped in the old church building, built in 1844, that stood on the ground now owned and occupied by Wells D. Butterfield as a residence. Squire Warren was the preacher. He was highly esteemed by the entire community. Homer Warren, the well-known real estate dealer of Detroit, was his son. The latter had a position in J. M. Arnold's book store of Detroit, and was a frequent visitor at the parental home. A. M. Soule preached in the Universalist Church. The building remains the same as it was when built in 1853, with the exception of the entrance room which is of later construction. Rev. A. M. Soule resided in the house now occupied by Mrs. Sarah Chamberlain on east Grand River avenue. He was a quiet, scholarly gentleman with many

friends among the townspeople. I am not positive but I think that Rev. Boyden ministered to the Baptist people at this time. He is still remembered for his deep spirituality, his cheerful personality and the excellence of his daily life. The Baptist Church building has been changed both in its interior and exterior since its dedication October 9, 1861.

Farmington has always been fortunate in possessing capable and successful physicians. Dr. Woodman, Dr. Moore, and Dr. Root were in active practice at this time in Farmington. The former was the first of the three to open an office in town. He owned and operated the first up-to-date drug store which was located where the Peoples Bank now stands. He had a lucrative practice, was a democrat of the Andrew Jackson type, and for his fidelity and zeal to the principles of his party was made postmaster July 17, 1885. He served four years and died at his home on Shiawassee street November 20, 1892. Dr. Moore was in active practice for many years in the town. Those that were numbered among his patients still remember him for his unflagging interest and skill in the successful combat with disease. He built the house now occupied by Amos Otis, and resided there for nearly a score of years. He died December 28, 1909. Dr. Root remained in Farmington for a limited number of years. He married for the second time while here. He was a homeopath with a good practice. We little know what the physician of 50 years ago had to contend with. They were ready to answer calls at any time of day or night. Hospitals were few and remote. Life and death were in their hands and depended almost entirely on their skill and judgment.

The country roads were unpaved and except for a brief period in the summer season were either rough and rutty or quagmires of bottomless mud.

Grand River avenue at that time for the greater part of the distance between Farmington and Detroit was laid with oak plank the width of one driveway. Detroit-bound traffic had the right-of-way. When first laid and for a brief period after, these planks made a good sort of road, but very soon they would become misplaced, water would get under them and farmers especially with their loads of produce, would be subjected to great inconvenience and loss of time in going to market.

It was a toll road. There were four toll gates between Farmington and Detroit. One at the town line between Farmington and Redford, one at Mill road, one near Monnier road and one at Warren ave. I think the charge was two cents a mile for any vehicle drawn by two horses. From four to six hours was required to make the trip with a load of produce. A single buggy with a good driving horse would do it in about three hours.

Detroit city limits at that time were near Monnier road. All merchandise sold in the stores in Farmington was hauled from Detroit in wagons. Samuel Blanchard made it his job. He had a fine pair of horses and a good, substantial wagon. He usually made two trips a week, a trip consuming two full days. The merchants paid him for this serv-

ice and it was considered desirable work for a man with the proper equipment.

Farmington received its mail for years by the stage from Detroit, but when the stage line was discontinued a route was established from Beech, Mich., which supplied Bell Branch, Redford, Clarenceville, and Farmington. Mail for these offices would come by train to Beech. There it was picked up by the carrier and delivered to the offices mentioned. A small horse-drawn wagon gave ample space for the mail.

For a number of years a well-known citizen of Farmington, Orville Botsford, had this contract. He was an uncle of Mr. M. B. Pierce. He left Farmington at about 7 a. m. with the outgoing mail, stopping at the offices on his route, collecting what mail they had and delivering it, with the Farmington mail, to the postal clerk in the town train at Beech, where the mail for the offices named was waiting. This mail was delivered on his return trip. He arrived with the Farmington mail about noon. For years the town was satisfied with one mail a day. Later a route was established between Farmington and Stark giving an additional service at 6:30 p. m. There was no parcel post. The bulk of the mail consisted of weekly papers and circulars. Less than a dozen daily papers were taken by citizens of Farmington and they were received with the regular mail at about noon.

At this time, as for many years before and since the Republican party had a large majority of the resident voters. The Democratic party, though in the minority, under the capable and aggressive leadership of men like C. W. Botsford, Ben Grace, and his brother, Theodore, were able year after year to elect some of the Township officers. This in the face of a Republican majority of over 100. Ben Grace was elected supervisor for seven years beginning in 1876 and defeating some of the most prominent Republicans in the town.

At that time the Democrats had a large majority in the County and it was a rare occasion when a Republican was elected to a county office. Men like P. D. Warner, John Collins, Jack Wixom, A. B. Beach and "Belee" Webster were earnest and active in the support of the Republican party and its principles. It was the days of torch-light processions, pole-raising, and rousing campaign meetings. Party enthusiasm waxed strong and political arguments were frequent and often physical encounters were narrowly averted.

The large farming community around the village did most of their buying of household supplies from the local merchants. Theodore Grace, John Collins and P. D. Warner were the leading merchants. Sabin Brown ran the hardware store and tin shop. Dr. Woodman sold drugs and Ebenezer Stevens made and sold shoes. "Loat" Smith was the dentist with a reputation for wit and a fondness for amateur theatricals. "Belee" Webster made and sold harness that had a reputation for durability the country round. His unflagging zeal and devotion to the Republican party, coupled with a general genial and sociable

(Continued on next page)