Farmington Was Prosperous Until City Slickers Came

The Farmington area's early history was a rural one, destined to be so by the farming influence of the Quakers.

The first portion cleared in Farmington was 160 acres bounded by Farmington Township Hall on the northwest, Powers Rd. on the west, 11 Mile on the north, Orchard Lake on the east, and a southerly border just below 10 Mile.

The original village was located north of Grand River, approximately between Gill Rd. extended and the Farmington City Park on Shiawassee.

THE FARMERS divided up the vacant land surrounding the village, and laid out large tracts of land to till and feed cattle and other livestock.

As other settlers arrived, other churches were founded. The first Presbyterian Church was started in 1826 in the home of Amos Mead and Seth Warner was a charter member. The church was built on the southeast corner of Halstead and 11 Mile in 1833.

Samuel Mead was instrumental in organizing a Baptist Church in 1826. The Baptist built a church in 1835 at the corner of 12 Mile and Halstead, the site of the present West Farmington Cemetery.

The Methodists organized in 1827 and built their first church that year at the corner of Shiawassee and Warner, a site which contains the residence of Margaret Miller, woman's editor of Observer Newspapers.

The Universalist Church was built in 1853 on the old Warner St., near the present Farmington Junior High.

THE SEED for organized government was provided by the meetings of the Quakers when business could be discussed on a monthly basis.

But, in May of 1827, a township form of government had already been organized. The first slate of township officers were: Amos Mead, supervisor; Robert Wixom, clerk; William Yerkes, Phillip Marlatt, and Samuel Mead, assessors; and Warham Lee, John Gould, and John Power, highway commissioners.

After the Civil War, the village of Farmington was organized. It included a territory of one square mile extending from the intersection of Grand River and Farmington Rds. The first village council session was held May 9, 1867. The village became the City of Farmington in 1926.

IN THE EARLY DAYS there were lumber and grain mills in Farmington and cheese factories to make use of the surplus milk.

An apple and small-fruit orchard belt once existed in the northern and western portions of Farmington Township. A number of farmers raised vegetables to truck to the Eastern Market in Detroit to sell.

IN 1870, according to the Ninth U.S. Census, Farmington has 16,514 acres of farmland, 796 unimproved acres, and 5,813 acres of woodland.

The value of the farms totaled $1.4 million, farm machinery was valued at $43,900, and wages totaled $36,720. There were 642 horses, 1,117 cows, 22 oxen, 5,378 sheep, 1,060 pigs for a total livestock value of $186,880.

That year, Farmington farmers harvested 1,442 bushels of spring wheat, 42,201 bushels of winter wheat, 38,175 bushels of Indian corn, 39,127 bushels of oats, 36,780 bushels of potatoes, produced 75,775 pounds of butter, and had an orchard produce worth $16,880.

Prosperous farmers in Farmington in 1890 included: Nelson Coleman, 190 acres; Horace Green, 290 acres; Addis Green, 120 acres; H.V. Nichols, 120 acres; C. J. Sprague, 160 acres; William Sprague, 97 acres; and Joseph L. Lamb, 53 acres.

THE FARMING era came to an end after World War II. Land had become too valuable in Farmington, and taxes too high. The large farms were sold to developers who subdivided the tracts into smaller parcels to build homes.

These subdivisions were occupied by Detroiters, for the most part, who had fled the big city for a "rural setting."

These subdivisions thrived through the 1950's until the mid sixties when multiple developments first began to appear, the largest being the Independence Green complex at Halstead and Grand River.

The subdivision dwellers sounded the alarm in the late sixties and early seventies and warned that apartments would ruin the fine "rural atmosphere" enjoyed by subdivision dwellers in such fine places as Chatham Hills, Canterbury Commons, Westwood Commons, Independence Commons, Quaker Valley, and the Franklins.

The pressures of land developers in the 1970s is the same vice which gripped the farmers earlier and forced them to sell the family homestead when the city slickers began the 'westward ho' movement.

Farmington has changed from its Quaker days, and from its farming era. It is changing now because the community is still alive. There may be controversy, but the plant is sending forth new shoots, and is still growing.