

# The Milford Historian

===== Newsletter of the Milford Historical Society =====

July 2002

*Mission Statement: We are organized exclusively for educational purposes. We bring together those people who are interested in history, especially the history of the Village of Milford and Milford Township.*

## Annual Picnic on the Public Square

### General Membership Meeting

Sunday, July 14th, 2002 @ High Noon

This year our historical society will hold its annual picnic at a very historic spot! The original Public Square, platted in 1836 will be our picnic location starting at noon and going until 5:00 p.m. The Public Square is, of course, also known as South Side Park on Huron Street next to the fire station. The replica log cabin will be open for our inspection and shelter if needed. Bring lawn chairs and a card table if you have them. Some picnic tables are in the park and we will have sawhorses and planks from Granny's Attic to supplement our fine array of dining room furniture.

Our general membership meetings are open to the public and **a** are invited. You don't have to be a member to enjoy this good time with people who like history!

Bring your own table service and a big dish to pass based on the first letter of your last name. There are grills in South Side Park if you want to make a charcoal fire to cook on.

### Milford Historical Society Picnic 12:00 p.m.

Sunday, July 14th, 2002

A-F Salad

G-Q Main Dish

R-Z Dessert

**A-Z Lawn chairs**

### From the President's desk:

You're never too old to celebrate! As we just finish celebrating the 4th of July, with all of the fanfare, parades, fireworks and gatherings of families and friends for cookouts and activities, I think about what we are celebrating. And in light of the events of September 11th, this year's celebration was even more meaningful than any other in recent history. But I wonder just how many of us pause to think about what we are celebrating..... what does Independence really mean. . . .We take for granted so many of the little things that happen day to day that other people around the world don't have the liberty to do. We can pick up a magazine or a book or newspaper and read about anything and everything. We can go where we please, at any time we please. And we can dress any way we like. We can express our opinions, in words and actions, individually and collectively, without fear of recourse. We can assemble in public places, for parades or political rallies, and we can go off on our own, in complete privacy. We can earn a good living, and spend our money freely on goods and services as we please.

Yet we take these things as a matter of course. Nothing special. I say we celebrate our independence each and every day. That we use our freedoms wisely and remember to protect them fiercely. Because that freedom and independence empowers us to do many things....  
Your President, Sue Fleming

## **Feature Story: Taking a Walk on Milford's Main Street.**

The year 2002 brings more construction activity on Milford's Main Street. This is the third year in a row that there's been some type of tear-up to our historic center of town. The big mess is yet to come when the road surface is removed and replaced. Main Street will then look like the famous -1910 photo of Michigan gubernatorial candidate Fred Warner delivering a campaign speech to a crowd that is standing on a Main Street made of dirt.

The most recent project now 99% complete is the replacement of the sidewalks on both the east and west sides of the street between Commerce and Liberty. Crews have been busy for the last two months removing the concrete and replacing it with very handsome paver stones. Center Street Park in front of the gazebo has also been redone with the same stone.

The replacement of our sidewalks may be insignificant at first glance, but sidewalks are an important part of any community and are worth noting here. We all use the sidewalks in our travels from store to store and they are a welcome place to park our feet while watching some of the four or five parades Milford seems to host each year.

Milford's Downtown Development Authority has orchestrated our current day sidewalk creation and construction. The new sidewalk paver stones are made by Unilock Corporation. The style is called Stonehenge and they were made in the towns of Pickering and Georgetown in Ontario, Canada. The contrasting border of charcoal colored paver stones were custom made for the Milford project and they give the sidewalks a striking appearance.

Sidewalks have been part of Milford's infrastructure challenge for over 130 years at least. A look back at the sidewalk issues of the 1870's in Milford is documented in old issues of the Milford Times. Thanks to the help of MHS member Barbara Young, some historic sidewalk facts are as follows.

Milford's sidewalks on Main Street in the 1870's were constructed of wood planking.

With water-powered sawmills in the area, sidewalks made of planks would be a cost-effective choice. Some of the news about sidewalks and their construction appeared in summary newspaper articles titled Common Council Proceedings. One such description in 1872 granted a petition to "build a walk six feet in width to be of two inch pine plank, laid crosswise". This sidewalk was along Commerce Street from Main Street going east to Mr. Fletcher's residence. [Editor's ***note: it was obvious to the readers of the paper in 1872 that Mr. Fletcher's residence made for a very descriptive and understandable geographical boundary location!***]

Other descriptions state widths at 5' 4" and as wide as eight feet depending on the location. An ordinance was created in 1877 specifically describes how sidewalks were to be made. Here, a width of ten feet is required with plank to be laid on four good pine or hard wood stringers, four by four inches and not less than twelve feet long. The ordinance goes on to state that the boards or planks shall not be less than six inches wide and shall be nailed on to the stringers or bed pieces with at least six twelve penny nails in each plank.

The responsibility of the building and maintaining of these wooden sidewalks fell upon the property owner. Those who did not comply with the requirement to install a sidewalk faced a tax lien against the property. At that time the village had an "Overseer of streets" to do the required construction and a "Marshal" who notified parties who were in non-compliance.

An excellent picture of Main Street and wooden sidewalks appears on page 66 of our history book Ten Minutes ahead of the Rest of the World. Also in the picture are cobblestone gutters and hitching posts for horses.

Milford's past with its plank sidewalks perhaps helps explain why an enterprising individual with a metal detector recently found old coins in the dirt beneath cement sidewalks. Gaps between the boards would allow an old coin to drop through and be lost until the next time that ancient dirt saw the light of day!

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