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Marion Beam

Do you remember Main Street when it was a dirt road lined with hitching rails and dominated by pharmacies, small grocery stores, barber shops, harness shops and hotels?

Chances are you don't. But Marion beam does. And he is more than happy to share his recollections of Main Street as it has changed through the years, even though he doubts his qualifications to do so.

"I'm no historian. How come people ask a young upstart like me to talk about my recollections? There are a lot of people more qualified than me who should remember more," chuckled Beam, who admits to being 74-years-young.

Whether beam is old enough to be qualified or not, March 13, he spoke to members of the Milford Historical Society at St. Mary's Catholic Church about his recollections of Milford—from before World War I to the present.

As a youngster, Beam was what he termed "a Main Street brat," spending much of his free time "patrolling the street" from his headquarters in his father's barber shop, which was located on Main Street until 1952. He spent much of his time visiting the various business places on the street.

The look of the street was different, with the hitching rails and cobblestone curbing standing out in Beam's mind as the most noticeable changes. There was little lighting on the street or on the stores, and he remembers bats flying around the streetlights.

Beam listed the stores that were then in operation along Main Street and all the subsequent businesses at each location. From the time his family moved to Milford from Indiana before World War I, until today, beam remembers over 140 business places on Main Street.

The differences came in the types of shops open when he first patrolled the street. Blacksmith shops, harness shops, storage garages and variety shops, then fairly common, are today rare and are no longer present on Main Street.

"There are no pharmacies, no butcher shops, no garages, no hotels, blacksmith shops or harness shops. Those are businesses that completely disappeared. There is no need for them," said Beam.

It was a garage that provided one of the more memorable recollections of Beam's life on Main Street. Bill Fenningsdorf's 10-cent barn, located on the site where Osborn's Pontiac and Cadillac sales is presently located, was a place where cars and carriages could be stored for a cost of 10-cents per day.

On a summer day during the 20's, the men of the community were at the old high school, participating in a "womanless wedding" in which the men played all the roles during a marriage ceremony.

In the midst of the celebrating, a fire broke out at the 10-cent barn and the fire alarm brought volunteer firemen running from the 'wedding', many still dressed in women's clothing.

The fire was so severe, Beam recalled, that three trucks were summoned from Pontiac to help fight the blaze. The sight of the frilly dressed firemen was humorous enough to prompt newspaper notification, and the story, with pictures, reached newspapers as far away as Chicago.

Unfortunately, one community resident had just purchased a brand new V-8 Viking, a luxury car manufactured by Oldsmobile around that period, and was storing the car in the barn at the time of the fire. The brand new Viking was a total loss, Beam said.

Beam pointed out that many of the original families that owned businesses in Milford still live near or own businesses on Main Street, but only Arms Brothers Clothing is in the same location that it was when Beam first began his Main Street patrols.

Several original buildings still remain, but time, fires and a 1953 tornado have brought many of the buildings to the ground, only to be rebuilt again.

Beam has seen all the changes, but states, “it’s still the same Main Street—just modernized a little.”

It’s the activities that are a little different, he explained. Then, Main Street was the center of action.

“You never heard a kid say ‘what’s there to do.’ There was never enough time to do everything that was available,” explained Beam.

In addition to regular chores, Beam and his friends spent their growing up years swimming and hiking whenever possible, while visiting with merchants between times.

In the winter, they would ice skate or go sliding (sledding) down hills which were iced over for the winter. Bonfires were often built near the pond where much of the skating took place.

The “young upstart” beam and his wife spend much time now traveling around the world, finding adventure wherever they go. In a sense, you might say that “patrolman” Beam has just expanded his beat a little bit—from Main Street to the world.