

Remember When, in the 1960's

The 1960's, an era many of us remember well. What happened locally during that time? Some businesses closed, some new businesses opened, and some expanded.

According to the December 29, 1961, edition of the *Sentinel*, one long time business to close during that time period was the White Feather Hatchery. Established in 1920 with offices at 900 North North Ave. and the brooder at 1105 North State St. in Fairmont, the hatchery provided seasonal employment to approximately 35 people. Owner Al Wilken cited two factors regarding his decision: The first was that he was not getting any younger, and the second involved the changes in the hatchery business.

An apparent controversial issue of that era involved the opening of a second municipal liquor store, an off-sale liquor store, to be located in downtown Fairmont. At that time, the municipal liquor store was located at 227 South State Street. According to an article in the August 3, 1962, edition of the *Sentinel*, the city council approved the new store in a 5-2 vote. However, the September 7, 1962, edition of the *Sentinel* stated the "The city council, under pressure of a delegation of Fairmont ministers and citizens that jammed the city hall council chamber, voted 4 to 3 Thursday night to rescind its action of Aug. 2 authorizing establishment of the store." The council chamber was filled to capacity before 7:30 p.m. Although additional chairs were brought in, many still had to stand.

"Youth Center Sets Open House Sunday," stated a headline in the September 15, 1961, edition of the *Sentinel*. The youth center was named after the mother of Harold Ward Pfiffner, who left \$48,000.00 to the city to establish a youth center. The youth center was housed in what was originally the Legion Hall located on east 1st street. The interior and exterior of the building was remodeled to prepare it for its new function. It had a main auditorium, a stage, and a game room for table tennis, pinball games, and other entertainment. In addition, there was a basement room available as a place to relax, read, or simply visit, and the kitchen was redone to provide refreshments and light lunches.

One pleasure most of us enjoy is eating. Fairmont had its share of well-known, well liked, and excellent eating establishments. One well-known supper club in Fairmont was "The Oaks Inn." The Oaks, located at the present site of the Oaks Townhomes on the corner of Albion Avenue and Lair Road, was famous for its steaks, which were aged approximately three weeks before being served. Jerry McShane, owner and operator of The Oaks was quoted in the February 2, 1963, edition of the *Sentinel*, as saying that "Without the aging process, even U.S. Prime or U. S. Choice will be somewhat more chewy." The Oaks was said to have a combination of good food, a cozy atmosphere, and friendly employees, all of which made it a very successful and popular supper club.

Laur-Els Truck Stop was another favorite of many travelers as well as local residents. It was located on the west side of Fairmont on what was then Highway 16. Laur-Els catered to the trucker trade, however, it was also considered a very good place to eat by local residents as well. They served the workingman at noon offering a different special daily, and Sunday was family day. Specialties included Laur-Els club steak served with

choice of salad, potatoes, and beverage for \$1.15. Another favorite was their whole cow hamburger, a full quarter pound of beef. Laur-Els was open every day of the year, and prided itself with its motto which was “We never shut up,” according to a *Sentinel* article on May 19, 1962.

Many of you may remember the neighborhood grocery stores that thrived in Fairmont in for many years. One such store was owned and operated by Mrs. Hilma Fossum, and was in business for thirty-six years before closing in 1965. Neighborhood grocery stores were just that, they served their neighborhood well, and the customers developed a great fondness for them. According to a *Sentinel* article from October 21, 1965, “She knew no closing hour, sometimes opening at 6:00 a.m. and not closing until midnight.” Fossum’s store was located at 801 E. 4th St. in Fairmont.

A *Sentinel* headline from May 8, 1965 stated, “Factory To Move To City.” This new factory was known as Aerospace, and was financed in part by Fairmont investors. Prior to coming to Fairmont, Aerospace Research Corporation was located in a leased building in Fridley. It experienced extensive damage from a tornado, which apparently hastened their relocation to Fairmont. According to Marshall Kriesel, president of Aerospace Research at that time, part of the Aerospace operation had previously been intended to be moved to Fairmont; however, the storm in Fridley resulted in it being brought here six weeks earlier than original projections.

“Fairmont Buys Day Farm For Junior College Site,” read the headline in the January 6, 1965, edition of the *Sentinel*. Mayor Lester Webb announced the 168 acre purchase in a special council meeting. Alderman James McNerney stated, “If we ever expect to obtain a junior college we have to provide a site.” The land was purchased from Mrs. Majel B. Habberstad of Minneapolis and Miss Doris Day of Los Angeles, two daughters of the late Burt Day. Mr. Day was a brother of *Sentinel* founder Frank A. Day. Their grandfather, Rueben Ward, homesteaded the farm. The Fairmont Junior College Action Committee at that time was hoping that the legislature would name Fairmont as one of an expanded eighteen state college system.

Ah yes, the 1960’s too were a time of change. Neighborhood grocers, at one time a neighborhood fixture, began to gradually disappear. New factories emerged, future plans to help Fairmont grow and compete were in the works. Many more interesting and exciting events unfolded during that time which are too numerous to mention in one article. More on the exciting times of the 1960’s will continue at a later date.

The 1960’s was a time of change, rebellion, protests, war, flower children, and much more on the national scene. However, was it like that in Fairmont and Martin County? Perhaps to some extent, though, in reviewing newspaper articles from that era, things seemed to be somewhat more focused and less volatile locally than nationally. In part 2 of the 1960’s, the following are some additional examples of what took place locally during that period of time.

“North Shoreacres Joins Fairmont,” read a headline from the September 8, 1961, edition of the *Sentinel*. The article went on to state that more than half of Fairmont’s Shoreacres suburb, located on the west side of Budd Lake, is now officially part of the city.

The availability of a variety of restaurants has always been one of the positive aspects of Fairmont. One restaurant that was developed during the 1960’s was the Triangle Drive-In. It was owned by Lou Donnelly and opened in 1965. According to a *Sentinel* article of June 23, 1965, the Triangle Drive-In was named because of its location on a triangular parcel of land at the intersection Albion Avenue and South State Street. The Triangle Drive-In was a self-service restaurant without car hops. Menu items included hamburgers, cheeseburgers, tenderloin steak sandwiches, fish-wiches, shoe string potatoes, french fried onions, and soft drinks. The restaurant had ten employees, including three of Donnelly’s sons.

At opposite ends of Fairmont were two very popular restaurants of that period of time, Lake Aires and The Redwood. Lake Aires, located at 334 Lake Aires Road, was at one time known as the Amber Inn and actually began as a Pullman Car. It gradually evolved into what was considered by many in this area as an excellent supper club with numerous menu options.

The Redwood was located at 1315 North State Street in Fairmont. “The Colonial Room” menu consisted of many items including sea food, barbecue ribs, chicken, steaks, and a selection of sandwiches. From a Redwood menu available at the Pioneer Museum reflecting that approximate era, some of the menu items and prices included the following: The Redwood Burger was \$1.10, the filet mignon was \$2.95, Canadian Walleye Pike was \$1.75, lobster tails were \$3.25, and Hickory Bar-B-Q Ribs were \$2.95 for a double portion.

Business news from the October 3, 1968, edition of the *Sentinel* reported that a new pizza restaurant was to open in Fairmont. It was to be located originally at 106 S. Main Street in the former location of The Buffet Café. The name of the restaurant was “Jake’s Pizza,” and would be operated by Larry Jacobson. He was associated with his father who operated a similar business in Albert Lea. His restaurant served pizza, sandwiches, and was said to have hot delivery service with specially equipped vehicles with a delivery charge of twenty-five cents. Mark Jacobson eventually purchased the restaurant from his brother and moved it to its present location on Downtown Plaza in the mid-1970’s, and it is still known today as the very popular “Jake’s Pizza.”

In November of 1965 it was reported that the Minnesota State Commerce Commission approved the Northrop People’s State Bank move to Fairmont and the change of its name to State Bank of Fairmont. Although originally opposed by some existing Fairmont banks of that era, the move was approved by the Department of Commerce indicating that the change in location would not upset the existing service area.

The Fairmont City Council adopted a one-way downtown street plan for North Avenue in 1967. This would include parking meters limited to one hour with a charge of five-cents for the first thirty minutes.

In October of 1969, an article in the *Sentinel* stated that Fairmont Federal Savings and Loan plans to build a three story building and modernize its existing building. Construction was expected to start in the spring of 1970.

“Izen market ends 37 years service,” read an article headline in the December 30, 1969, edition of the *Sentinel*. The store was opened in 1932 by John P. Izen and was located at 101 North North Avenue. Izen was born in Mankato and was in the grocery business his entire life.

Additional newsworthy events of the 1960’s included plans for a new hospital, a new shopping center was in the works, I-90 completion was slated for 1971, a new Gibson’s Discount Center was being planned, and nine Fairmont doctors and four dentists joined together to consider creating a medical clinic. Many of those plans materialized and have had an impact on the Fairmont we know today.

Obviously, there more significant events that took place in the 1960’s, however, the preceding accounts for some of the noteworthy and interesting happenings locally during that time. The 1960’s, a very interesting and exciting time for those of us that remember and lived the era.