

## The 1970s

Remember the 1970s . . .Leisure suits, bellbottoms, platform shoes, and hot pants were some the fashions, the Vikings Superbowl losses, disco, pet rocks, Kent State, Watergate, Nixon resigns, Elvis dies, inflation, the energy crisis, the Bicentennial, *All in The Family* & Archie Bunker, Vietnam, and much, much more. According to the website, *1970s Flashback.com*<sup>1</sup>, during the '70's decade, the Dow ranged from 669 to 1,071, unemployment ranged from 3.5% to 8.5%, the median household income ranged from \$8,734 in 1970 to \$16, 461 in 1979, the cost of a new home ranged from \$26,600 in 1970 to \$71,800 in 1979, a gallon of gas was \$0.36 in 1970 and \$0.86 per gallon by 1979, the cost of a stamp went from \$0.06 to \$0.15 by 1979, and inflation ranged from 6.5% to 14.1% during the decade.

What was happening locally during the tumultuous '70's? As always, some businesses expanded while others closed their doors. In randomly reviewing *Sentinel* newspapers from that decade, and other resources, the following are a few examples of local events during the 1970's.

In April of 1970, J. C. Penney's, including their auto center, opened in what was then the Fair Mall. Madsen's Super Value was also scheduled to open in April. Other stores to open included the Singer Sewing Machine and Fabric store, State Bank of Fairmont, Gallankamp's Footwear, Stevenson's Women's clothing store, and Fair Mall Walgreen Drug. In addition, plans were in the works for the inclusion of a hardware store, a gift store, a beauty shop, and more. Also, in April of 1970, ground was broken for Friendship Village, Fairmont's \$1,370,000 low rent housing complex.

In May of 1970, plans to construct a new \$600,000.00 medical clinic adjacent to the planned 3.9 million dollar Fairmont Community Hospital were being considered. Armour planned to expand, the Crystal Bottling Company was torn down to make room for off street parking, Summit Vue Apartments opened in 1970, and the Quick-Stop Drive-In celebrated its one year anniversary in December of 1970.

In 1971, Ross Sheppard purchased Reipke Motors, John's Corner Lounge opened, a new law enforcement center at a cost approaching \$500,000.00 was being discussed, and the Fair Mall Cinema opened.

In 1972, the Fairmont National Bank remodeled and expanded into space formerly occupied by Gardner Pharmacy. The Bell Motel added a swimming pool, Fairmont Federal Savings and Loan opened in its new building in February, and Wick Building Systems planned to open a home manufacturing plant in Fairmont. The Fairmont school district put the old athletic field up for bids, but had no takers. The Fairmont High-School split shift ended with the completion of a new high-school, and groundbreaking took place for the Fairmont Square Apartments.

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<sup>1</sup> Taken from <http://www.1970sflashback.com/1970/Economy.asp>

In 1973 the old Martin County jail was demolished and the new security building took shape. What was the old jail like? According a *Sentinel* Article from June of 1973, it was obviously outdated. The sheriff's department had a "modern teletype system" that had to be kept in a washroom; the women's cellblock consisted of one cell; and there were only two small rooms for the sheriff's department. That same year, 1973, also saw a number of community leadership positions changing which will be covered in a future article.

In 1974 it seems that after a fifteen year struggle, the proposed Fairlakes Community College had slipped into obscurity. That year also saw Fairmont's City Council passing a morality code by a 6-2 margin in January, and on June 26<sup>th</sup>, after being put to a public vote, a *Sentinel* headline read "*Morality Ordinance Passes by One-Half Per-Cent.*" This issue would take two more years to be finally settled. Local entertainment in 1974 included Jim Hardt appearing at the Redwood.

The "Storm of The Century" took place in 1975. A fierce blizzard struck the area from Friday, January 10<sup>th</sup> through Sunday. There were many stories and accounts of stranded motorists, livestock losses, school closings, and numerous rescues as a result of the storm. In June of 1975, the well known "Fred's Place" on West 1<sup>st</sup> Street had a new owner. Fred Dieckmann, who had owned and operated the tavern and deli, retired to his farm outside of town. The establishment was noted for "Fred's hot beef sandwiches."

The controversial topic involving the Safari Lounge, located at the present site of the BowlMor, and their employment of both male and female nude dancers again surfaced and would finally be settled. According to *Martin County Judges, Law & Lawyers* by Elton Kuderer, "In 1976, Fairmont became the battleground testing the freedoms set forth in the First Amendment of the Constitution." The Fairmont city nudity ordinance was challenged by the owner of the Safari Lounge. The District Court Judge ruled that Fairmont's ordinance had to be redrafted because it was, in fact, unconstitutional. The city council did redraft the ordinance and, consequently, nude dancing in Fairmont became history. Also in 1976, Jim Mitchell became the new Superintendent of Schools in Fairmont succeeding Dave Wettergren.

In August of 1977, an estimated 10,000 spectators witnessed the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Rock Spectacular sponsored by Mr. C's promotions at The Fairmont Speedway. Some of the entertainment included the musical groups Judd, Jesse Brady, Headstone, Brownsville Station, Head East, and Black Oak Arkansas. Regarding other local entertainment, *Rocky* was showing at the Family Drive-In Theater, *Walking Tall* was showing at the Lake Theater, *The Sting* was showing at the Nicholas Theater, and *Star Wars* was featured at the Fair Mall Cinema.

In January of 1978, the First National Bank named Esther Edman as the first woman to serve on its board of directors. A new shopping center was being considered for southeast Fairmont, the Red Owl store announced it was closing, and construction began on a Mr. Steak restaurant. On a somber note, the city of Fairmont was shocked and

saddened by the sudden death of its admired and highly respected City Administrator, LeRoy Schultze. He was forty-four years old at the time of his death.

In 1979, Fairmont Railway Motors, Inc., agreed to merge with Harsco Corporation. The “Motors,” at that time, employed 600 people locally with sales totaling \$31 million. August of 1979 saw the wettest month in Fairmont since 1887. The lakes were rising, sewers were full, and streets and basements were flooded.

The 1970’s was a decade of change, challenge, and excitement, both nationally and locally. It was an era that will be fondly remembered by those of us that experienced that period of time in history.

For more information on local happenings of the 1970’s, visit the Pioneer Museum in Fairmont or [www.co.martin.mn.us/mchs](http://www.co.martin.mn.us/mchs)