

St. Clair goes modern, built

By BOB PEMBERTON
Times Herald Reporter

ST. CLAIR — What can be said about one of the oldest communities in Michigan, yet one which boasts a modern downtown business development?

The City of St. Clair is a one of the earliest settlements in Michigan. Its first name was Fort Sinclair, and archaeological students still search occasionally for remains of the old fort.

In Michigan's infant days, St. Clair was one of the first platted communities and was known as the Village of Palmer. It was the first seat of St. Clair County.

The county seat later was wrenched away by the City of Port Huron. Current population of St. Clair is about 4,800.

Nowadays, St. Clair's largest industry, Diamond Crystal Salt Company, bespeaks of the labors of early settlers.

"Salt was produced as a result of the lumber industry," said Franklin H. Moore, chairman of the board of directors of The Commercial and Savings Bank of St. Clair County and a director of Diamond Crystal Salt Company.

"The lumber barons had to do something with the 'slabs' left from lumber production. So they burned them under a large vat of brine to produce salt," he said.

In the early days, pine forests surrounded the community and stretched outward. Moore said old documents refer to the community as "the Pinery."

When the lumber industry died, shipbuilding came to the fore.

Later, other industry, business and building came along such as the world-famous Oakland Hotel and Mineral Springs, the Sommerville Hotel, the two large Victorian brick homes on the top of the hill on the north side of town, and the St. Clair Inn.

While many prominent state, national and world personalities are known to have visited St. Clair and their visits are lost in antiquity. Moore recalled two.

They are William Jennings Bryans and James A. Farley. Bryans is known for his advocacy for a silver monetary standard. Farley was campaign manager for Democratic President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

St. Clair has seen many local men rise to prominence.

Col. Justin Whiting was a Democratic congressman. Moore's father and grandfather, both named Franklin and both Republicans, served in the state legislature.

Frank D. Beadle and Lyman A. Holmes were Republican state senators, and Theodore J. Ruff, was a Democratic senator.

Creighton D. Holden, owner of St. Clair Inn, is a national committeeman of the Republican Party and is prominent nationally in the hotel industry.

"Through all the long history of the community one thing stands out — love of the community and service to the community," said Moore.

"Take Arthur Maw," he said. "He was an immigrant. He worked most of his life in the bank.

"He left his lifesavings to the community, because, he said, he loved the community. With Maw's money, the St. Clair Foundation was formed with the president of the bank and the mayor of St. Clair as ex officio trustees together with three other trustees named for life. The foundation has done much for the community.

"It wasn't a lot of money and funds are dwindling," Moore said. "But, we, as trustees, are sure others who feel the same as Maw will soon add funds to the foundation."

Moore said people in the community have responded to public subscriptions. Through the subscriptions, the St. Clair Inn was built, as well as the community swimming pool, the "magic circle" playground, the baseball diamond at the high school, and the old First Baptist Church was purchased for a community center. The city had one of the first hospitals in the area, another result of public subscription, he said.

"Dr. Frank V. Carney, opposed staunchly by Republicans in this tradi-

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tionally Republican community, served the city well as Democratic mayor for many years," Moore said. "He often spent about half of his day working in city hall."

Moore, a Republican, thinks politics in St. Clair are unique.

"We had a handful of young people crash the Democratic caucus after World War II," he said. "They

nominated someone else for mayor to oust Dr. Carney.

"I didn't think that was right, and even though we opposed Dr. Carney, we thought he was deserving of an opportunity to have the people decide whether they still wanted him as mayor."



Franklin H. Moore

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"So, at the Republican caucus, we nominated Dr. Carney to run on the Republican ticket. He accepted, and was re-elected."

Moore also said contrary to national trends the Republicans in St. Clair have supported spending federal money while the Democrats have opposed it.

"We believe that once the money has been allocated, we should get our share of it," Moore said. "That doesn't necessarily mean we approve of it, just that we believe we should get our share once it is appropriated."

"We have held these ideas over the years. So did Dr. Carney, and he was instrumental in bringing much federal money into the community for various projects."

Moore said it was Republicans who were instrumental in getting several million dollars in federal funds for the urban renewal project in the late 1960s. Under the project the whole old downtown business district was razed and then rebuilt. This gave the city the most modern business district in the area.

Another movement stretching across party lines in the community currently is underway, Moores said. It is the formation of a concerned citizens group. "They want to get involved with the future of St. Clair," he said.

"People, all the people of the community, have done and continue to do things because St. Clair is a good place to live," Moore said.

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— Franklin H. Moore,
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"Based on its history, St. Clair can do nothing but follow a path of continued progress," he said. One path sure to be followed in the upcoming year is the bicentennial observance.

While not all plans are firm, the bicentennial committee reports the following to be underway:

- An ecumenical church observance during Lent.
- A costume ball in March by the St. Clair Art Club with a bicentennial theme.
- A Flag Day parade June 13, 1976.
- An art fair at the end of June with a bicentennial theme.
- Boat and land parades during July and August.
- A large fireworks display.
- Streets lined with flags all year long, with flags being available to residents.

