

Milford Moments in Time

By Joyce M. Clark

According to the trade magazine *Park World*, 16.6 million people visited Walt Disney's Magic Kingdom in 2006 making it the world's number one vacation spot. And the first attraction each one of the 16.6 million visitors experienced upon entering the park was Main Street U.S.A. Main Street U.S.A., just like Milford's Main Street, is a place where people gather to walk, shop, eat, visit with friends, and watch parades.

Mary Lou Fawcett-Gharrity first experienced Milford's Main Street when her family moved to Milford in 1935 when she was in second grade. Her parents (Howard and Bernice Fawcett) bought Hotel Central and renamed it Ye Olde Hotel. The hotel was located in what is now the parking lot of Milford Auto Supply and included the Sweet Retreats building. The family lived in the hotel and owned it until 1948.

During that time, Main Street was a bustling hub for not only Milford, but local communities such as Walled Lake, Wixom, Highland, White Lake, and New Hudson whose residents came to spend their money and their time. According to Mary Lou, folks would come from miles around on Saturday to shop along Main Street and visit with friends and family. As a child, the thing to do on Saturday evenings was to walk up and down Main Street and watch all the people interact. On Sunday, people from Detroit would drive out to the country for a meal at Ye Olde Hotel's dining room and then drive back to the city.

One of Mary Lou's favorite hang outs as a child was Charlie Price's Harness Shop and Shoe Repair which was located in what is now Dick's Barber Shop. Farmers came from miles around to have their horse's harnesses repaired, and to purchase bridles and reins. The agricultural industry wasn't completely automated yet, and local farmers still relied on their horses to help work the land.

The Harness Shop was a place where older gentlemen came to spend some time telling their stories to local farmers and kids while waiting to have their horse equipment repaired. Charlie was a warm, grandfather figure that welcomed the activity. It was in those days that Mary Lou learned from Charlie how to put heels on shoes and sew on the soles. At the time, the building was a bit weathered and Mary Lou remembers the wavy, rickety wooden floor creaking as people walked through the small building.

As Mary Lou grew up, she helped her parents run Ye Olde Hotel. She remembers when Ford Motor Company was building their plant in the area, and every so often the Ford leadership and construction engineers would come into their hotel to eat lunch. Back then, the hotel's dining room included fine white table clothes and napkins. Sometimes the Ford team would stay beyond the lunch hour and conduct an impromptu business meeting.

It was during one of these meetings that one of the hotel tablecloths became an engineer's blue print. During the meeting, the men sketched out revisions for the plant design. After the meeting, one of the men had to ask Mary Lou's mother if they could buy the table cloth as it contained their updated construction diagrams. One of the construction engineers from Ford Motor Company during those days was the brother of Irene Dunn, a

popular screen heroine in the 1930's and 1940's who starred in movies with such actors as Fred Astaire and Cary Grant.

Ye Olde Hotel became a home for some folks who worked in the area. People like Jack Goodrum, a Ford Powerhouse maintenance man, lived at the hotel for a few years until he married. A salesman from the Toledo Mercantile, a paper wholesaler, would often stay in the hotel while conducting business in the area. During his frequent visits, he helped Milford establish a Barber Shop Quartet.

In the early 1940's, Mary Lou remembers seeing military tanks and DUKW vehicles (popularly pronounced *DUCK*) traveling down Main Street from Pontiac to the GM Proving Ground for testing. The DUKW was a six-wheel-drive amphibious truck designed during World War II for transporting goods and troops over land and water, and for use approaching and crossing beaches in amphibious attacks.

At the other end of Main Street, usually around Halloween, local folks might come across a farmer's outhouse plunked under the traffic signal at the corner of Commerce and Main Street. Rumor has it that the local high school student's took care of this activity. In 1948, Mary Lou's family bought and ran the Milford Theater on Main Street which resided next to Ye Olde Hotel. In the early 1950's, Mary Lou and her mother sold the theater. Around that time, they also sold the property behind their establishments to the General Telephone Company. General Telephone built and resided in the building that now houses the Huron Valley Chamber of Commerce.

Besides living and working on Main Street, Mary Lou met and fell in love with her husband. In the early 1950's, Mary Lou went to work at a bank on Main Street. A young, handsome owner of the Milford Times (located on Main Street right next to the bank) named Robert Gharrity often came in to do his banking. Mary Lou and Robert married in 1952. They owned the Milford Times, working together on Main Street until 1975

Mary Lou still enjoys walking up and down Milford's Main Street, shopping and eating in the local establishments and sharing a little bit of history with the current owners. *2007 is the 175th Anniversary of Milford and in celebration of this major milestone, we are asking you to share some of your stories with the rest of the community. If you have a little Milford history to pass along, please contact Sue Bullard, Milford Historical Society President, 248.685.7308 or milfordhistory@yahoo.com. The Milford Historical Society is happy to document your story and share it with others.*