

FAIRMONT, BEFORE THERE WERE CARS. . . .

“Thanks for the buggy ride!” read the headlines of the November 19, 1926 *Martin County Sentinel*. The equine era of our local history provided one of the most popular and thriving businesses in Fairmont’s past, referred to by many as the magnificent Allison “*Horse Parlors*.” In 1898, John Allison built the “*Horse Parlors*” which was located on North Main St. just east of the where the old Armory once stood. The November 19, 1926, edition of the *Sentinel*, reported the following: “When John Allison, who just retired and gone south and west to winter with the robins and millionaires, built these magnificent horse parlors he provided an institution that put Fairmont in the front row.” The article goes on to further state that the city had the absolute best accommodations for the farmers’ horses in all the surrounding area. This in turn brought many people to Fairmont, and the city profited greatly from the increased trade which resulted from Mr. Allison’s business.

The building itself was a large structure that could accommodate up to 250 teams of horses with facilities for feeding, watering, and bedding them for the night. The stalls were arranged so that the horses faced the outside walls, and the center had another section with alleys wide enough for farmers to drive in with their teams and unhitch them out of the cold. When the stalls were filled, as was the case nearly every day, the wagons and buggies formed outside in double rows up and down the street.

The cost for use of the stable was \$0.25 cents per team, or \$0.15 cents, if you went home right after the saloons closed at 11:00 p.m. This price included hay, oats, and water. Thrifty farmers of that time were known to bring their own oats as they could then park their horses there all day for a dime. Mr. Allison would “throw in” the hay and water.

The barn was a popular spot, especially during the winter months, as it provided an enclosed area for public auctions of household goods, and in later years, farm machinery. In addition, it served as a gathering place for farmers, the scene of many an argument on every subject known, and a checkerboard was always present as quite a number of checker champions were developed in the feed stable office.

Mr. Allison was envied by the public as most felt that he had developed a “gold mine” business. The business appeared to be at its height only a few

months before the internal combustion gasoline engine made the automobile a common sight on our streets. Whether it was shrewdness or luck on Mr. Allison's part, it was at just that point in time, shortly before the advent of the automobile eventually put the Horse Parlor out to pasture, that he sold his business and eventually moved on to warmer climates. As horses gradually vanished from the field of transportation, the building was used for storage for many years. The huge barn, once a Fairmont showplace and one of the busiest business establishments in the area, was leveled by fire in the mid 1940's. Some of the storage items lost in the fire included music boxes, pinball machines, trucks, and automobiles. The building, which had obviously evolved from a prominent Fairmont business establishment of the turn of the century, had become a shell of storage for items more suited to modern day Fairmont of the 1940's era.

For more information about Allison's Horse Parlors, visit the Pioneer Museum in Fairmont.

By
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