

## Fairmont Pulls Itself Out of the Mud

According to the July 19, 1958, Centennial Edition of the *Sentinel*, Fairmont's streets were first paved in 1915. This was done after voters approved a bond issue of \$60,000.00 for "wood block paving." The city had a population of about 3,000 at the time,

The wood blocks were treated with creosote, but there were some drawbacks to this process. The blocks "heaved" every spring and had to be re-laid, and they also had to be "retreated" with creosote each year. This made for a rather messy situation of which housewives complained quite loudly. It seems that their floors were becoming rather dirty as a result of skirts dragging on the creosote, and shoes tracking it into their homes.

The first paving was eight blocks of North Avenue, after which other streets were paved. The *Sentinel* of that era commented on the improvement by stating, "Progress discredits the slanders that a dry town means decay and dullness." Fairmont and Martin County had voted to be dry the previous year, under the county option available at that time.

It appears that the exact cost of the project was a bit difficult to "nail down." Prior to the vote on the proposed improvement, the cost had been estimated at \$50,000.00. By the time of the vote, the estimate had gone up to \$60,000.00. Upon completion, it was listed as a \$70,000.00 improvement.

The work was done by a crew from Fielding & Shepley of St. Paul. The workers were paid the going rate at that time of \$3.00 per day for common labor. Horace "Bud" Day, the son of Frank Day, had the job of timekeeper, and was paid slightly better than the \$3.00 daily amount. During this paving operation by Fielding & Shepley, Fairmont experienced its first strike; however, it lasted no longer than part of an afternoon.

That year, 1915, was a significant year in the progress of Fairmont becoming a city. Improvements totaled \$487,000, including the Strand Theater and the Fairmont Telephone exchange building.

Regarding the paving of the streets in Fairmont, the question soon wasn't whether or not it should be done, but rather, should it be wood block or concrete. Those advocating wood block felt it was easier on the horses, suggesting that concrete was too hard for them which would in turn keep the

farmers from coming in to town. They also felt concrete would be too hard on the feet and legs of the people walking on it.

However, as times changed, progress was made in many areas. The farmers soon had automobiles and, as a result, there was no longer a concern about their horses and the concrete streets. With the advent of rubber soles for shoes, the argument of concrete being too hard to walk on by people was also quickly resolved. And, the ladies that complained about their skirts dragging over the freshly creosoted paving had also found a solution. Their answer was to shorten their skirts, and none of the men complained about that.

Fairmont tolerated the wood block paving for a number of years, however, it was doomed for two main reasons. One was the constant need for treating and repairs; and the other was that the contractors from out of town were not equipped to handle these issues. As a result, concrete paving eventually came to the forefront.

Visit the Pioneer Museum in Fairmont to find out more about the early history of Fairmont and Martin County.