

Remember When, in the 1940's

The post-war era of the mid to late 1940's brought change to Fairmont's landscape. New businesses and factories were opening, and the outlook for the future was very bright. In fact, some of these new additions to the Fairmont economy are still present today.

One of those noteworthy new industries to locate here in the post-war 1940's was 3M. According to an article in the August 13, 1946, edition of the *Sentinel*, the new industry was planned to be in operation by September 3rd of that year, the "result of quick and businesslike action of the Fairmont Civic & Commerce Association." The new industry was originally located in the RECO K-F building just east of the Gilbert Hotel. The article further stated that the company will employ approximately 140 persons when in full production, 80 per cent of which will be women, will have an estimated quarter million dollar payroll, and will operate 24 hours a day. It was said to bring six to eight new families to Fairmont, and the remaining employees will be local people. A later article in the October 23, 1946, edition of the *Sentinel* stated that 3M now had three shifts steadily employed and had turned out 100,000 abrasive belts in thirty days. Due to the huge demand for sanding belts at that time, the Fairmont plant was making them exclusively. 3M remains today in Fairmont as one of the significant industries in the city and county.

Downtown Fairmont at one time had a Ben Franklin store, located at 212 North North Avenue, that was opened in the early 1940's by Vi and Emil Koenig. In 1947, they added Koenig's Luncheonette. According to the February 21, 1947, edition of the *Sentinel*, they gave away 165 dozen donuts and fifty-five gallons of ice cream the day they opened. They were open from 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. and featured home cooked pastries, complete noon meals, and short orders. Their grand opening luncheon special included a turkey dinner for fifty-cents. In addition to the Koenigs, the luncheonette had seventeen employees.

"Fairmont's New Shopping Center Grand Opening Friday, Saturday," was advertised in the November 3, 1946, edition of the *Sentinel*. This is what has been referred to as the "Tower Shopping Center," and is located near Fairmont's water tower. Originally known as Byers corner, it grew from what was once described as a weed patch to the then, new shopping center. Some of the stores included the O. P. Skagg System Super Market, Ken's Mens' Store, Turner Frozen Food Locker Co., Finley Piano Exchange, Martin County Appliance, Inc., Griffith's Bakery, Nelda's Beauty Shop, Meier's Lunch and Soda Fountain, John Odegaard's Barber Shop, Wash'n Shop Laundry, Weber's Standard Service, Adams Texaco Service and Feed Store, and Marvin Carlson Fyr-Fyter extinguishers.

Perhaps one of the businesses that best stood the test of time in the new shopping center of that era was the O. P. Skaggs store, which eventually evolved into Gunther's Foods. The grand opening of the Skaggs System Store was October 17, 1946. It was owned by the Van Eaton Company and was managed by resident partner Herbert Gunther, a former Van Eaton employee. According to a Van Eaton official in a *Sentinel* article from that

era, their grand opening saw 250 cars waiting for the 8:00 a.m. opening, they sold almost two tons of bananas by 9:30 a.m.; and they served an estimated 1,500-2,000 people by 10:00 a.m. Fairmont police and state highway patrolmen directed traffic.

What might have been the draw for the many people visiting the grand opening of the O. P. Skaggs store? Some examples of advertised products and prices are as follows: sardines in oil sold for eight cents a can, Hills Brothers coffee was thirty-nine cents a pound, tuna fish was thirty-three cents a can, tomato soup was twenty-three cents for two cans, apple cider sold for ninety-eight cents a gallon, oranges were nine cents a pound, Delicious apples sold for \$4.99 a box, California tomatoes were fifteen cents a pound, and household brooms sold for ninety-nine cents each.

Another new store to open its doors in Fairmont in 1947 was the Gamble Store. It was described as the most modern retail store in the entire Northwest, and it served as a testing center for similar stores being planned in the surrounding communities. It consisted of a \$300,000.00 investment occupying 18,000 square feet. Some of the departments included in the store were a juniors department, a remodeling and redecorating supplies department, a hobby man's shop, lawn and garden equipment, appliances, and a service department. The store was to have approximately thirty regular employees.

The post-war era of the late 1940's saw growth nationally as well as locally. In addition to the businesses mentioned above, there were many others that started locally at, or about that time. As with any business venture, some lasted for many years, and some but a few. In any event, many of these endeavors of that time had a lasting economic impact on this area and many area citizens. Furthermore, for some that remember those businesses of that era that no longer exist today, it brings back fond memories of a time gone by, but not forgotten.