

Digital Michigan Newspaper Grant

Digitizing Farmington and Farmington Hills, Michigan newspapers and making them freely available online will significantly benefit both the Farmington Community Library and the broader community by preserving the region's rich local history, expanding equitable access to information, and supporting education, research, and civic engagement.

The *Farmington Observer* and its predecessor publications are the main sources for the written history of Farmington and Farmington Hills. Their roots trace back to the late nineteenth century. These newspapers are closely tied to the community's development, which began as a Quaker settlement called "Quakertown" in 1824. Over time, this settlement became the distinct yet closely linked cities of Farmington and Farmington Hills.

The newspaper's lineage reflects this growth. First published in 1888 as the *Farmington Enterprise* by Edgar R. Bloomer, the paper later became the *Farmington Enterprise and Observer*, then the *Farmington Observer & Eccentric*, and eventually the *Farmington Observer*. For more than a century, these publications chronicled daily life in the community, including local government decisions, school news, business development, religious and civic activities, social events, and personal milestones. In December 2022, the publisher, Gannett, ceased printing the Farmington edition as part of the *Observer & Eccentric* chain, transitioning entirely to digital-only publication.

To meet the requirements of the Digital Michigan Newspaper Project Award Program, the Farmington Community Library requests digitization of the *Farmington Enterprise* for the following periods: November 2, 1888–October 8, 1909, and November 11, 1920–December 27, 1928. These years capture critical moments in local and state history, including early municipal development, population growth, the impact of industrialization, World War I and its aftermath, and the social changes that shaped southeastern Michigan communities.

The Farmington Community Library has compiled a complete inventory of Farmington-area newspapers, which have changed names throughout the years but remain the sole source of comprehensive local news coverage. Current holdings are divided between print and bound copies stored in an archive room, which presents an equity barrier as patrons must request access and use materials on-site. The Library's extensive microfilm collection also presents challenges for users who are unable to visit the Library in person or who lack familiarity with microfilm technology. Additionally, microfilm machines are increasingly difficult to maintain and replace, driving up costs. As more patrons rely on digital tools, these formats no longer meet community needs equitably.

These newspapers offer unique insight into the early history of the Farmington area by documenting how statewide and national events were experienced at the local level. They preserve voices that are often absent from broader historical narratives, including small

business owners, historians, local planners, educators, civic leaders, families, and community organizations—providing an irreplaceable record of everyday life.

Digitizing these newspapers strengthens the Farmington Community Library's role as a trusted steward of community knowledge. Free online access removes barriers related to cost, location, and physical ability, allowing seniors, individuals with disabilities, students, economically disadvantaged residents, and former residents to explore local history remotely.

Another significant benefit of digitization is full-text searchability. Researchers will be able to search by subject, date, and keyword, greatly improving access when only partial information is known. Because no print indexes were ever published, research using physical copies or microfilm is currently inefficient and time-consuming. Digitization will dramatically enhance discoverability and usability.

This project directly supports the Farmington Community Library's mission to engage our diverse community through resources and experiences that celebrate ideas, inspire creativity, and enrich lives. By removing access barriers and preserving local history through free online availability, the Library advances social equity for all. Partnering with The Clarke Historical Library at Central Michigan University ensures Farmington's historic newspapers are preserved and accessible through the Clarke Historical Library's Michigan Digital Newspapers Database for future generations.