

**Michigan Every Day**  
**By Patrick Sullivan and Carole Eberly**  
*Nov. 15, 1883*  
*Michigan town makes reputation with corsets*

The Warren Featherbone Company may not be well-known today but in its heyday it was a household name. Behind the company was Edward K. Warren, a dry goods store owner who spent several years looking for a substitute material to make corsets. Whalebone was the most common product used to make corsets firm and flexible but it was getting more expensive as whales were becoming scarce. Warren happened upon an idea – quills from turkey feathers could be processed as a less expensive replacement. He could use cheap quills discarded by feather duster companies in Chicago as his raw material. He patented the concept and opened a factory to produce his product on Nov. 15, 1883. Eight workers were employed by the Three Oaks-based manufacturer. It took years to develop a product that was considered suitable by dressmakers. Warren hired women to travel the country and to Europe to promote the product and gradually made inroads. Warren, who was raised in Three Oaks, soon became a wealthy man and his product put the Berrien County town on the map. Warren's company was able to adapt his product as fashion changed in the decades between the 1880s and the 1920s. The company, which sold corsets worldwide, survived for more than 120 years. Today, Warren probably is better known for conservation than for corsets. Warren purchased 300 acres of virgin beech and maple forest in Berrien County to preserve it from development. The land is known today as Warren Woods. He also bought for preservation a section of Lake Michigan Dunes, land that was at the time thought to be worthless. It later became the Warren Dunes State Park. After his death, the fashion world revolted against the corset as women wanted naturally fitting and more comfortable clothes. The company gradually put less emphasis on featherbone and invested in synthetic materials, selling diapers called Feathertex baby pants in the 1930s and supplying raincoats for the war effort in the 1940s. The company moved to Georgia in 1956 and concentrated on producing clothes for children.