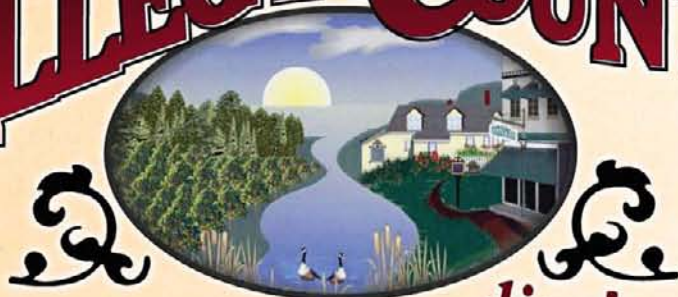


# ALLEGAN COUNTY



*History alive!*



# HERITAGE TRAIL TOUR



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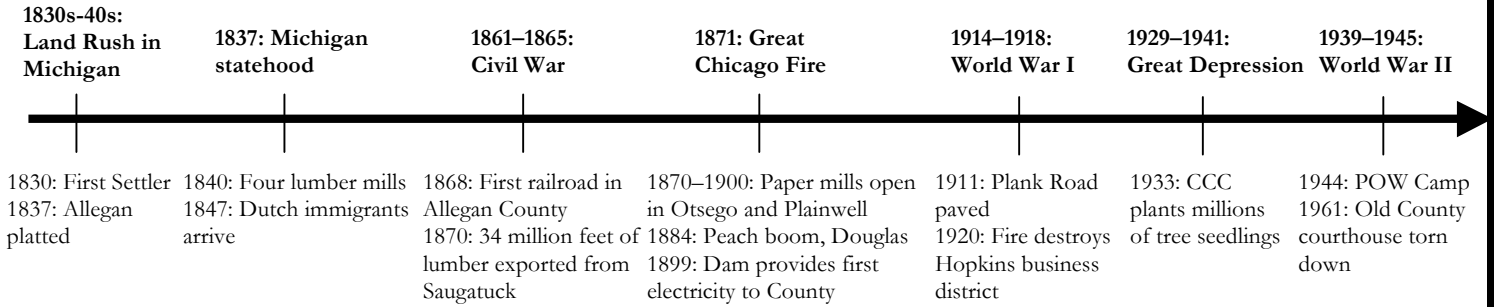
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# A Brief History of Allegan County



The first settler in Allegan County, William Butler, landed at the mouth of the Kalamazoo River with his wife in the spring of 1830 and settled in what is now downtown Saugatuck (Site No.18). The second and third groups of settlers arrived shortly thereafter but traveled further inland, settling near Pine Creek (Site No.2).

When the white settlers arrived, Allegan County was home to three Native American tribes—the Potawatomi, Odawa, and Ojibwa. They had several villages in the eastern part of the county and one in the Saugatuck area. Life in those first years, especially the winters, was very rough, and the early settlers depended on the Native Americans to supply them with game, berries, and other foodstuffs.

The earliest settlers were people who came to work and make their fortunes primarily from the area's natural resources—towering virgin white pine trees for lumber and shingles, hemlock trees to use in tanning hides, and land speculation. During the 1830s and 1840s, a number of lumber mills were set up in the county, but they suffered from a lack of customers. However, with the mid-century growth of Chicago and Milwaukee, the influx of Civil War veterans in the late 1860s, and especially the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, the demand for Allegan County's lumber exploded. Trees were cut literally 'round-the-clock at times, and lumber mills were operating full-blast to meet the demand.

A different kind of settler, however, came to the northwest corner of the county. There, Dutch immigrants, arriving in Holland, moved to the surrounding countryside as part of religious communities. In 1847, seventy immigrants from one town settled Graafschap. And in 1848, an entire religious community from another village settled the town of Overisel. These settlers, and many of those that followed, were conservative religious Separatists who were fleeing religious persecution, much like the Puritans.

The lumber boom, together with the construction of a plank road connecting Grand Rapids and Kalamazoo through the eastern part of Allegan County in 1854 and the arrival of several railroads around 1870, created a flurry of new settlements and population growth. The population grew from 5,125 in 1850 to just over 16,000 by 1860. It doubled again by 1870 and peaked at around 38,000 in 1880 where it remained till post WWII.

After the trees had all been clear-cut and the lumber boom ended, the land with good or passable soil was converted to farming. On the western side of the county, much of the land near Lake Mich-



igan was converted to fruit orchards. Indeed, the peaches grown in the Saugatuck-Douglas area were famous in the markets of Chicago where they were called “Michigan Gold.”

While agriculture has remained important in most parts of the county, the eastern and western portions of Allegan County developed somewhat differently during the 20th century. From the 1870s through the early 1900’s, numerous paper mills opened along the Kalamazoo River in Otsego (Site No.1) and Plainwell (Site No.28) and became an important part of the local economy for much of the 20th century. Today, all but two are closed, and both remain major employers in the area.

On the western side, the advent of the 20th century brought a different industry to the county’s Lake Michigan coastline, and especially Saugatuck—tourism. Large groups of cottagers and vacationers from Chicago and as far away as St. Louis came to this area of great natural beauty to “get back to nature” and escape the summer heat. Many also came by steamship just for the day to dance at the Big Pavilion in Saugatuck.

# Welcome to the Allegan County Heritage Trail!

Travel into the past... see historic villages and towns little touched by modern development. Experience the sights and sounds of the river and the railroads that were the engines of the country's westward expansion. View the bountiful farmlands and orchards that were and still are the backbone of this rural county. Discover the stories, some funny, some tragic, all entertaining, of Allegan County's history. This is the experience that awaits you along the Allegan County Heritage Trail!



## Where does the trail go?

To orient yourself, take a quick look at the route map located in this booklet. The tour is a loop that runs from Saugatuck east across the farmlands of northern Allegan County and on through the towns of Hopkins, Wayland and Martin down to Plainwell. From there, the trail heads back along the Kalamazoo River through Otsego and Allegan, then past Lake Allegan and through the Allegan State Game Area. The tour continues past orchards and vineyards in the Fennville area to Lake Michigan, and then up the lakefront back to Saugatuck and Douglas.

## How long is the trail?

That depends on how much time you have! The tour is designed so that you can take the whole tour loop or take your own shorter route! If you take the entire tour, figure on taking a full day if you stop to view the various sites and enjoy the experiences along the way. The entire loop is 122 miles and to drive it non-stop would take around 4-5 hours.

## How does the driving tour work?

You can start the tour from any location on the route. It's designed to be driven in a clockwise direction, which provides better scenic vistas. At each Heritage Trail Site along the route, a marker like the one at right will be posted along with the corresponding Site Number. Markers are generally posted in locations visible from the roadway.

At each turn in the route, you will also see a Heritage Trail directional marker like the one shown at the lower right. The arrow indicates the direction you will need to turn to continue along the trail. Please note that while you can follow the trail in either direction, Heritage Trail directional markers are only posted in the clockwise direction and some Heritage Trail Site markers may be oriented toward traffic coming from that direction.

You might want to read ahead in this guidebook to see what the next Site is so you will know what to watch for. Most of the Sites have opportunities for you to park your vehicle and explore a little. A few sites are just "drive-bys."

*Enjoy your journey on the Heritage Trail!*



*Example of a Heritage Trail Site marker.  
(C.Bessert)*



*Example of an information panel at a Heritage Trail site.*



*Example of a Heritage Trail route turn marker.  
(C.Bessert)*

## Site No.1: The City of Otsego

Otsego's early history is fascinating because it prospered from the presence of water in two very different and ultimately mutually exclusive ways.

Mineral springs were discovered in Otsego around 1850 and the town quickly became a spa resort, which by 1870 was attracting visitors from far and wide to "take the waters". Many hotels sprang up to support the industry and mineral water was shipped from here all over the state.



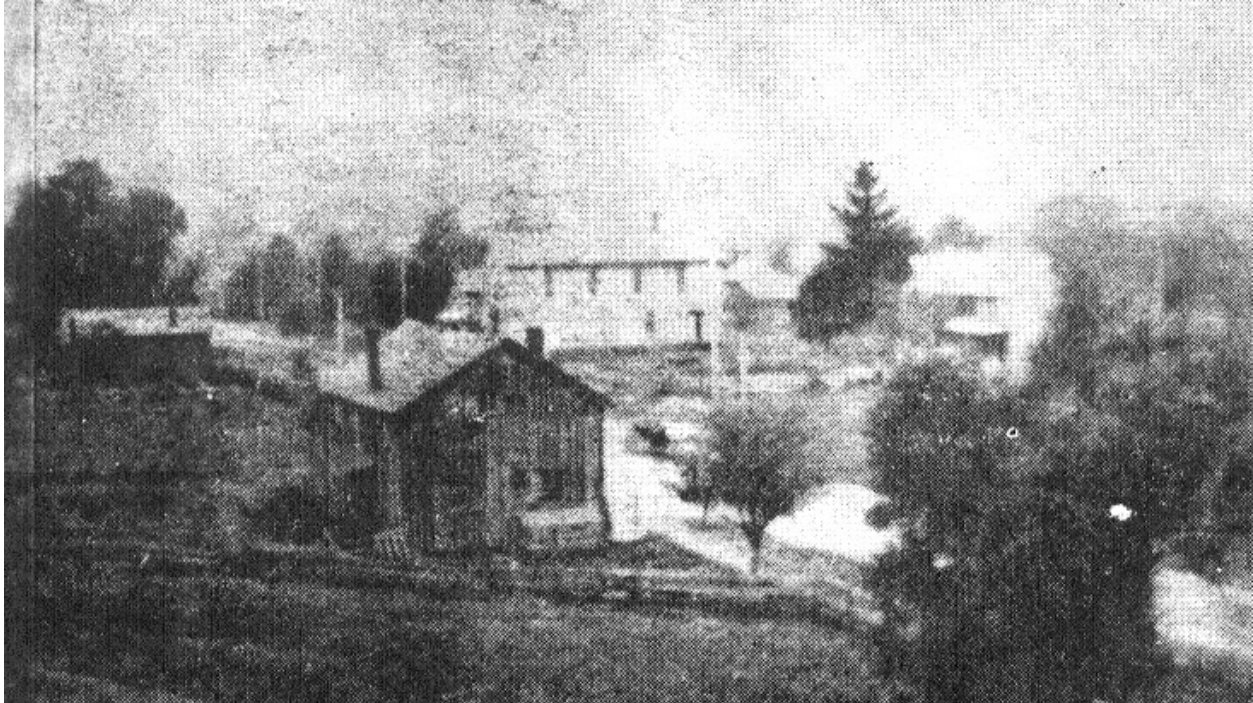
*The Otsego Mineral Springs. The sign on the building says, "Hot and cold baths for General Debility and all Chronic diseases treated successfully."*

Then in the late 1870's Otsego's location on the Kalamazoo River brought the first of several paper mills that would change Otsego forever. The first mill was the Bardeen Paper Mill. By 1887, 125 men were employed by the town's mills. Workers received \$7.00 a week for a ten-hour day, six days a week—good money at that time! Today, only one mill remains, but it is a major source of employment and prosperity for the town.

Take some time to explore the community and learn more about its history. A historic self-guiding walking tour pamphlet is available. Check with the Chamber of Commerce, the public library or the Otsego Area Historical Museum for a copy.

## Site No.2: Pine Creek Where did the town go?

Can you see it? Well, you'll have to use your imagination. From around 1830 until about 1900 this was the location of New Rochester (or sometimes called Pine Creek), a thriving town and an important stopover for westbound wagon trains. The town is gone now, but the story and memories remain.



*A glimpse of the ghost town. This photo was taken about 1900. In the foreground is the blacksmith shop of G.W. Morter. Only a few of the town's buildings are shown here. There were two sawmills, a gristmill, and a cider mill, besides stores, a school, a church and many residences.*

Under water! That's where the town would soon be! All of the land where this town stood would soon be under water due to the construction of the Pine Creek Dam in 1903. Before it was flooded, the village buildings were moved, some to Otsego, and some to other places to start anew.



## Site No.3: Pine Creek Dam

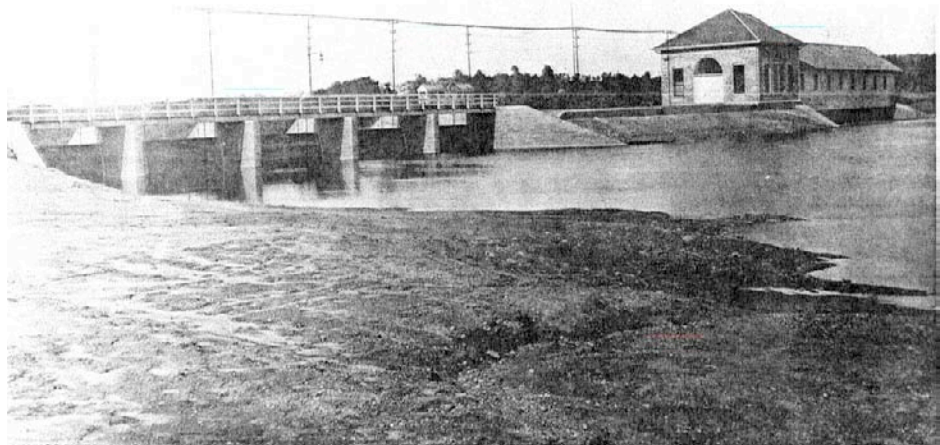
In the early days the Kalamazoo River was primarily important as a means of transportation and as a source of power to drive mills. By 1900, with the forests all logged and the advent of the railroad, the river was no longer important for transportation. But with new technology, it became an important source of electricity from water-powered turbines. This dam would provide some of the first generally available electricity in the county!



*Just think what it must have been like to construct the dam using horses and brute strength, rather than modern-day earthmovers and other large equipment!*

Indeed, Pine Creek's sister dam, the Trowbridge Dam just a few miles down stream, was Michigan's first large hydroelectric facility, designed by W. A. Foote, a pioneer in the production and transmission of electric power in Michigan. An earth embankment dam, it originally included three wooden radial or tainter gates. Steel tainter gates were installed in 1908. The original installation featured four pair of Leffel turbines connected in tandem to a single shaft.

*The newly-built Pine Creek Dam as it looked in 1903.*



## Site No.4: The City of Allegan

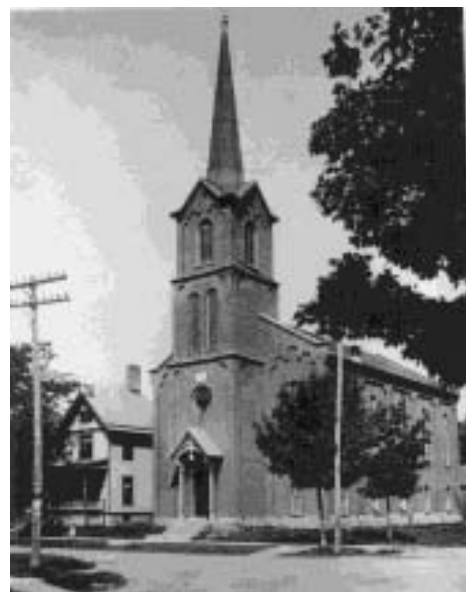
The Chippewa Indians called this area Allegan, meaning “the lake of the Algonquins,” but Allegan had other names, too. Its first name was Lyons in 1834. Later it was called Allegan Court House and was officially named Allegan in 1838 when it became a village and then a city in 1907.



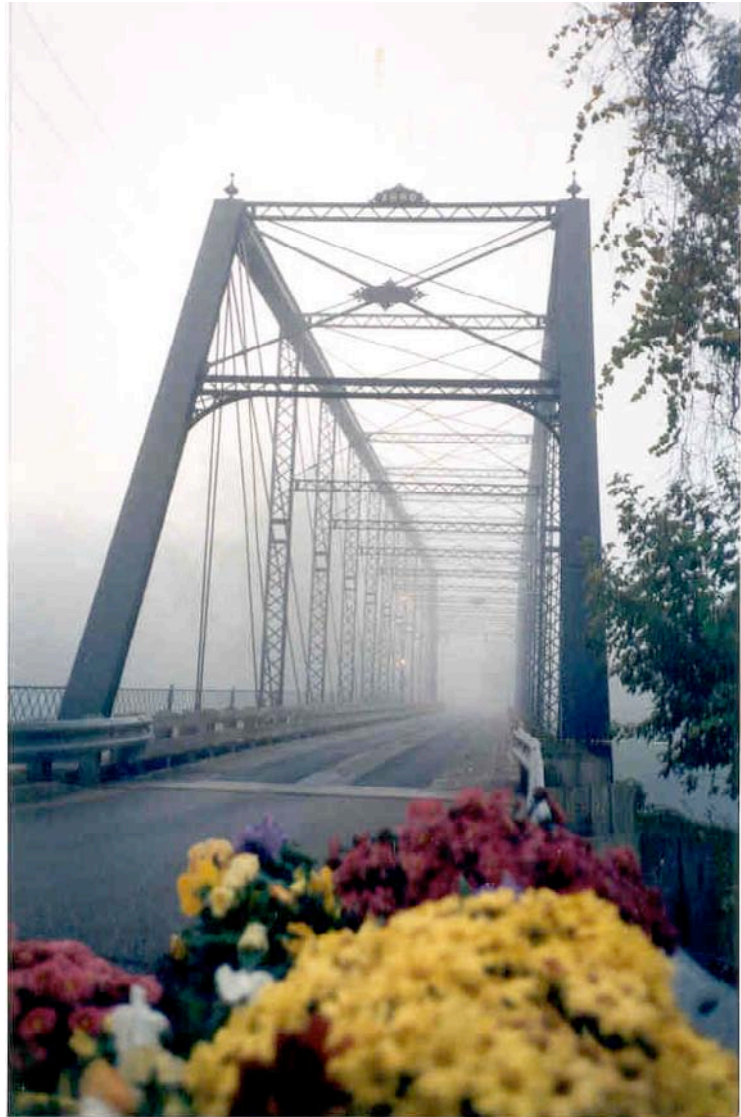
The Fire of 1884. Like most of the cities and towns you will visit on this tour, Allegan had its share of fires. By 1885, however, the entire business district had been rebuilt.

The best way to explore Allegan is on foot, so we recommend you take the self-guided walking tour available from the Allegan Public Library. It will guide you past more than 70 historic buildings and homes.

One of the churches you should see is the First Presbyterian Church on Cutler Street. The original building burned in 1838. After a temperance meeting held by the church ladies, the second one also burned in 1874. At the suggestion of Judge Williams, all of Allegan’s saloonkeepers donated to a new church, which is the one you see here today. (See photo at right.)



Another structure to see is the Second Street Bridge. This simply ornamented wrought iron bridge was built in 1886. It replaced an earlier wooden one that had begun to fall into disrepair. Designed by the King Iron Bridge & Manufacturing Company of Cleveland, Ohio, the double-intersection Pratt truss bridge was completed at a cost of \$7,532.25. Eighteen feet wide and spanning 225 feet of the Kalamazoo River, it is one of the largest extent bridges designed by the firm. Following a battle by city officials and local citizens to save the bridge from demolition, it was restored at a cost of \$552,000 in 1983. The bridge was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1980.



## Site No.5: Lake Allegan Overlook

Lake Allegan is one of the many outstanding lakes in the county. It is a man-made lake formed by the construction of the Calkins (Lake Allegan) Dam and the resulting impoundment. The driving tour takes you to the dam spillway as well (Site No.7).

This pull-off is a Michigan Department of Natural Resources Boating Access Site (boat launch) and a great place to stop, have a stretch, and watch for wildlife. If you brought your fishing gear (and license) you can drop your line here and try your angling skills.

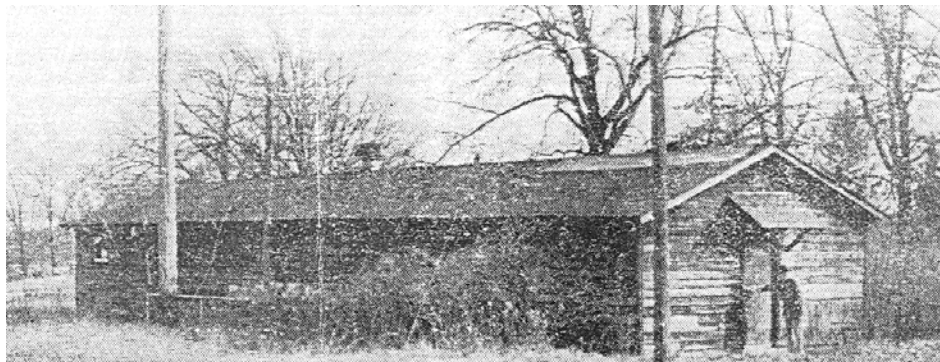
This is just one of several locations where you can see and enjoy the lake. If you're a bird watcher, come early for the geese, ducks, kingfishers, and great blue heron. They are just a few of the many birds you will see here, just by sitting and watching. In the spring, the dogwoods are spectacular here and throughout the Allegan State Game Area.



## Site No.6: WWII Prisoner of War Camp & Camp Lockwood Civilian Conservation Corp Camp

As you drive along this stretch of road you won't be able to see any remains (However, look for the interpretive sign!), but one of the most interesting chapters in Allegan's history occurred here. In 1944 five-thousand POWs (German and Italian soldiers taken prisoner during World War II) were sent to Michigan—250 to Allegan County—to assist farmers during the 1944 harvest as most of the men were away fighting the war in Europe and in the Pacific. They were held at Camp Lakewood, which was a Civilian Conservation Corp (CCC) camp built in 1936.

Try to Escape? There was one escape attempt when some German soldiers thought they would swim across Lake Michigan to Chicago where they thought German families might hide them. But they mistook Lake Allegan for Lake Michigan! After their long swim they were still in Michigan and were quickly captured.



*The former U.S. Officers' barracks for the POW camp.*

After the war was over and the prisoners returned home, many came back to Allegan County, having made friends with local families during their captivity. With Germany in ruins, they were welcomed back to begin new lives here in the County.



*Panorama of Civilian Conservation Corps Camp Lockwood, ca. 1936.*

## Site No.7: Calkins Dam (Lake Allegan Dam)

The Calkins (Lake Allegan) Dam and Spillway was and is the replacement dam for the dismantled Pine Creek Dam (Site No.3). This dam still provides electricity for the area, as well as flood control for the Kalamazoo River drainage basin, and recreational opportunities.



In the spring and fall, when the fish are spawning, this is a favorite spot for fishermen who come in large numbers to try their luck.



## Site No.8: Allegan State Game Area Headquarters

You are now at the center of the Allegan State Game Area, an incredibly beautiful, rich and varied area in which to both observe nature as well as hunt and fish (in season). The area is crisscrossed with marked hiking trails, snowmobile trails, and cross country skiing trails. It is also home to the 60-mile Allegan County Equestrian Trail System, which is managed by Allegan County Parks. It's a great place to get out of the car and stretch your legs, or make a note to come back here another time for an extended hike.

True or False? Much of the Allegan State Game Area was once at the bottom of Lake Michigan. TRUE! During the last glacial period, about 13,000 years ago, lake levels were about eighty feet higher than they are today. The sandy soils you'll find here are the result of lake deposits left during this period of higher lake levels.



If you have any questions about recreational activities here, stop in the main office. They will be happy to answer your questions and point you in the right direction. They can also be reached by phone at (269) 673-2430. If you have questions about the Allegan County Equestrian Trails System, contact Allegan County Parks at (269) 686-9088 or visit them on the Web at [www.allegancounty.org/parks](http://www.allegancounty.org/parks).

## Site No.9: The Tree Army – A Drive-By

Just to your right are the remnants of a pine plantation that has a story that will take us back in time to the 1930s. It was the Great Depression and President Franklin D. Roosevelt had plans to get people back to work. One of those programs was the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), which put young men to work on various conservation projects around the U.S. One of their jobs was to plant millions of trees, reforesting lands once cleared by the timber industry. The CCC was sometimes called “the Tree Army”.



In Michigan, tree planting was the major reforestation project. More than 485 million seedlings were planted. Fire fighting, timber stand improvement, disease and insect control, and the reintroduction of natural game such as deer and turkey were also major accomplishments. More than 102,000 men from the state were enrolled and more than 97,000 men served in Michigan. The projects they completed and structures they built still stand today.

The CCC provided an opportunity to work for millions of men. It was disbanded on June 30, 1942, as the men were needed elsewhere with the United States’ entry into the Second World War.



## Site No.10: The City of Fennville

According to legend the settlement of Fennville was established where two corduroy roads crossed in the swamp. Corduroy roads, from the French “corde du roi” because they were originally created in France for the king’s travel, were formed by logs placed transversely across the path. The fabric corduroy got its name because its undulations resemble that of the logs forming the road.

In the mid-1860s most of Fennville occupied the high ground. Later, as farmers drained the swamp, the main downtown area was developed. The photo below shows the main street of Fennville as it looked in the early 1900s.



Fennville was originally called Fenn’s Mills, named for Elam Fenn of New York who had come here in 1851 and erected a sawmill at the site of Fennville in 1860. But the first train conductors had trouble announcing the name and it slowly changed to Fennville. It was a railroad shipping center for a large fruit growing and mint production operation here in the 1920s—some of which you can still see in operation today.

## Site No.11: Hutchins Lake – A Drive-By

Hutchins Lake is one of the larger natural lakes in the county and has been developed over the years as a residential recreational site, with private homes located on or near the lakeshore. This stop is called a drive-by as there really isn't any place to stop except for a small parking area (photo below). But if there is space, and you want to stop for a look, please do. Otherwise enjoy the view of the lake and homes as you continue on to your next tour route stop.



*Postcard showing Hutchins Lake in the early 1900s.*



*Hutchins Lake public access parking area as seen today.*

## Site No.12: Orchards & Berries – A Drive-By

In this region of Allegan County you will see apples, peaches, cherries, grapes and berries being grown. As you drive through this area in the spring the orchards are full of blossoms and there is a wonderful sweet smell in the air.

Between the 1880s and the early 1900s, this was a major peach growing area, producing nearly a quarter of all the peaches grown in Michigan. The produce was shipped by rail from Fennville or by boat from Saugatuck to major cities like Chicago, where Michigan peaches were known as “Michigan Gold”.



There are several “U-pick” orchards in this area of the county as well as some “U-pick” berry farms as you head down towards Glenn (Site No.14). The season for picking depends on the type of fruit: peaches (August), apples (late September and early October), strawberries (June), and blueberries (July).

Wine country... Did you know that Michigan has some outstanding wineries? The route will take you past vineyards and a local award-winning winery.



## Site No.13: Hudson Heritage Farm Vista

This site is just a half-mile jog from the main route. It celebrates the farm heritage of the Hudson family, and includes an interpretive panel about the original log cabin where Herbert Hudson was born in 1861.

This is a Michigan Centennial Farm as well. A centennial farm is a working farm of ten or more acres that has been continuously owned by the same family for at least 100 years.



The sculpture was done by Babette Bloch of Redding, Connecticut and was dedicated May 26, 1996. This is a scenic viewpoint and heritage site you won't want to miss.

## Site No.14: The Community of Glenn

In the early 1860s Glenn, like many small towns in Allegan County, was growing. Sawmills were springing up everywhere as the settlers cleared the land. Almost everyone who lived on a creek had a sawmill! This created a need for a convenient way to get the huge piles of lumber to a market. With Lake Michigan being so close, shipping the lumber by boat was the perfect solution. Charles Hamlin built the first pier here in 1860. It was the first of many piers to be constructed over the next sixty years.



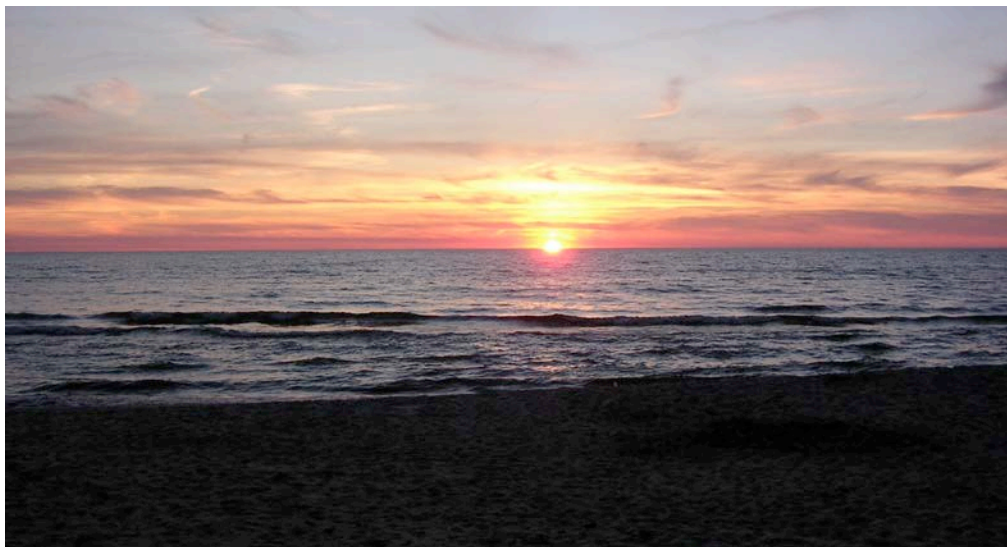
As the timber supply ran out, other businesses would replace it such as shipping agriculture produce, especially peaches, as the area around Glenn was excellent for growing peaches.

Like most small towns, prosperity would ebb and flow. Today a nice quiet town, there are many more stories about this once very important shipping port, and several books have been written about it that are still available locally. Take some time to walk around and explore Glenn. One of the historic structures there is the last one-room schoolhouse remaining in operation of the original 183 in the county.

## Site No.15: West Side County Park – Lake Michigan

Are you ready for a rest yet? If you have been driving from the Eastern part of the county you might be and this is a nice place to stop.

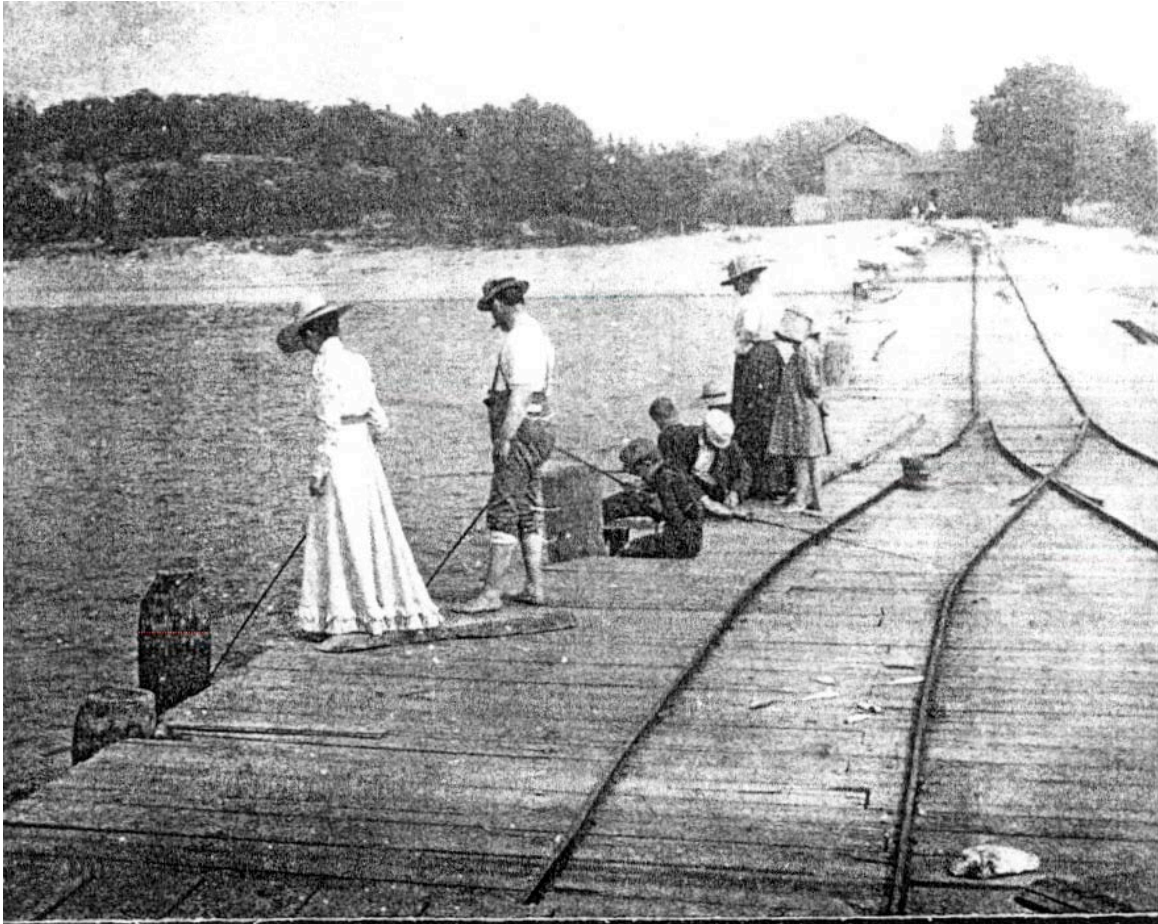
This site gives you a good access point to a Lake Michigan beach. There are several others as well on this tour including Pier Cove, just up the road, and Oval Beach in Saugatuck.



So if the weather is nice and you have the time, take a walk down to the lake and enjoy the view and sounds of the water lapping on the shoreline.

## Site No.16: Pier Cove

Surveyed in 1839, the village of Pier Cove was once hailed as “the busiest port between St. Joseph and Muskegon.” Before the Civil War, Pier Cove was a bustling community and a major point for lumber distribution, with ships departing daily carrying tanbark and cordwood to Chicago and Milwaukee.



*One of Pier Cove's piers in 1896. Note the railroad tracks for loading the produce from rail cars onto the waiting ships.*

By the 1860s the lumber was exhausted, but shipping commodities—mainly fruit—became Pier Cove's shipping mainstay. By 1917, most shipping had ceased and Pier Cove would soon fade away remembered mainly by photographs. Look for the historic marker by the parking area and Lake Michigan access.

## Site No.17: The City of the Village of Douglas



Douglas was settled in the 1850s as a lumber mill town. Although never as booming as Saugatuck, it was a thriving place. In 1871, a visitor to the area wrote, “In Douglas there are two stores, two sawmills, one grist mill, one tannery, one planing mill, carpenter shops, one wagon shop, one paint shop, two meat markets, three millinery and dressmaking shops, one church, one school and one hotel.”

Prior to the village being incorporated in 1870, there had been a little battle between two families over the name of the town. Half of the village had been platted by William F. Dutcher who named the plat Douglas after his son-in-law’s birthplace on the Isle of Man in the Irish Sea. The other half was platted by Jonathan Wade, who built the first sawmill in Singapore and the first house in the village. He named his plat Dudleyville in honor of his brother who had just moved here from Canada. But Douglas carried the day.

By the late 1870s most of the area’s white pines had been cut down, bringing the lumbering era to a close. At this point, Douglas, together with much of the surrounding land within several miles of Lake Michigan, became a major producer of peaches.

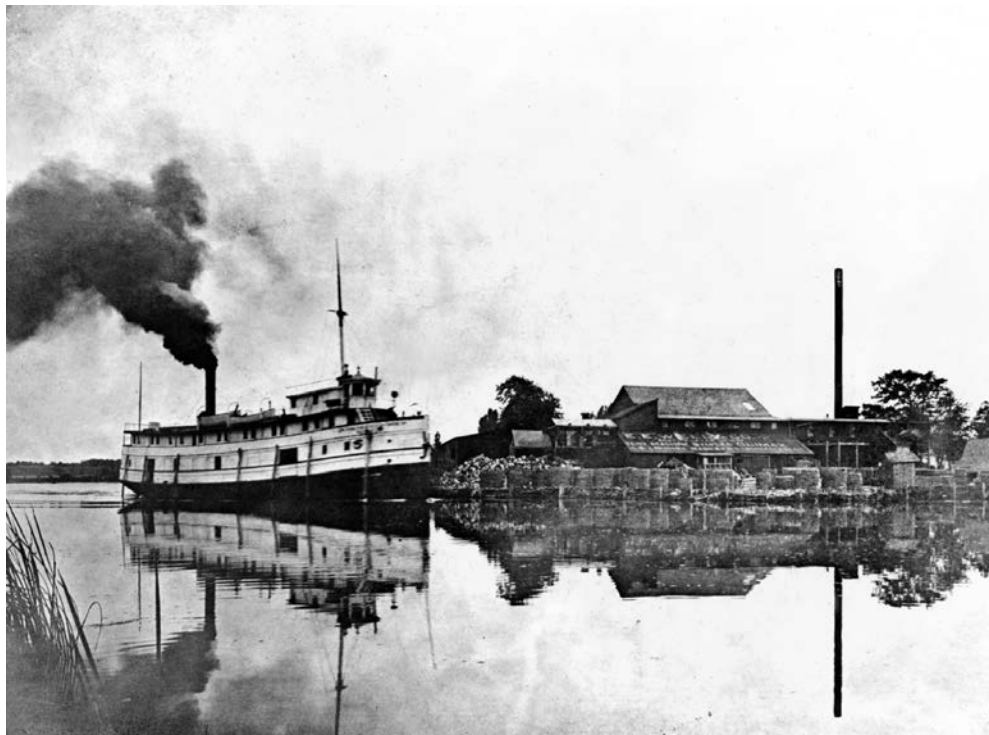
By 1884, there were 134,812 trees under cultivation in this area, producing nearly a quarter of all the peaches grown in Michigan. Michigan peaches were known as “Michigan Gold” in Chicago. But soon after the turn of the century, the peach business too was in decline.



At about the same time, wealthy families from Oak Park, Illinois and later St. Louis, Cincinnati, and other distant points discovered the beauty of the area's lakeshore. These new summer residents built both small and grand cottages on the Douglas lakeshore, most of which still exist today.

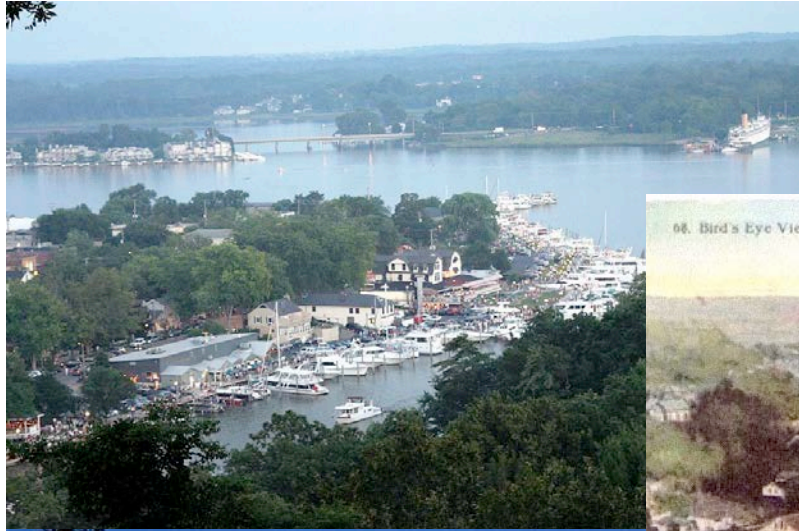
On December 13, 2004, residents voted to adopt a charter changing the status of the village into a city form of government. Under Michigan law, cities are independent entities whereas villages are part of the township. Because residents did not want to lose the goodwill of the Village of Douglas name, the decision was made to officially adopt the name the City of the Village of Douglas.

Today, the agricultural background of Douglas can still be felt as one walks around town. A number of barns remain, and many houses sit on large lots, one still on the entire square block that was the site of the town's first peach orchard. Indeed, the best way to experience Douglas and relive its history is on foot. So we recommend stopping and taking the self-guided walking tour that will lead you to many historic sites and homes within this charming community. A copy of the walking tour brochure can be found in the mailbox in front of Dutcher Lodge, which is also the City Hall. There are also interesting shops and restaurants in Douglas for you to enjoy.

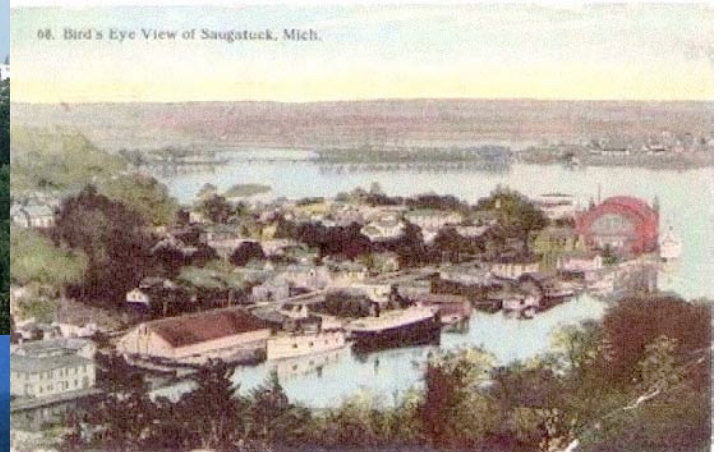


*The Charles McVea docked at the Douglas basket factory during the 1880's.*

## Site No.18: The City of Saugatuck



What's in a name? William Butler was the first settler here in 1830. Early maps of the town show it being called Kalamazoo. But the legislature gave that name to an-



other town, so the town was then called Newark. However, the postmaster had been calling the town Saugatuck since the post office opened in 1835! That was the name of his hometown in Connecticut, which happened to be appropriate because it's an Indian word meaning "mouth of the river". When the town was incorporated in 1868, the name Saugatuck became official.

Like many Michigan towns, Saugatuck started life based largely on the stands of virgin white pine, which covered the landscape. By the late 1860's, eight lumber mills were going full-blast shipping lumber to Chicago and other cities around the Great Lakes. Saugatuck lumber helped rebuild Chicago after the Great Fire of 1871. But by 1880, round-the-clock clear-cutting had finished off the area's white pines. Fruit growing then replaced lumber as the area's main resource. By 1884, it was a major producer of peaches, with many of them being traded and shipped through the Fruit Exchange in Saugatuck.

During this same period, boat building became a major industry, with more than 200 vessels being built between 1880 and 1910. But by the early part of the 20th century, both the boat building and fruit growing booms were over, and a new type of industry started to emerge ... tourism. The area's natural beauty provided an escape for Chicago and other Midwestern big-city residents. Enticing more tourists to come, even just for the day, was The Big Pavilion, which was built in 1909. Billed as the second largest dance floor in America, the Pavilion catered to as many as a thousand people a day during its heyday. Also emerging at this time was Saugatuck's reputation as an artist colony when

a group of Chicago artists established the Summer School of Painting at the Ox-Bow lagoon. The Ox-Bow School still exists and is now formally part of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

The best way to explore Saugatuck is on foot where you will find that it is a town rich with historical architecture and character, as well as good shopping and restaurants. The Saugatuck-Douglas Historical Society's award-winning self-guided Walking Tour is available at the Information Booth downtown, across from City Hall. Also, each year, the Society's award-winning museum, which has been called "the best little museum in Michigan", mounts an exhibit on some aspect of local history and culture.



## Site No.19: River Bluff Park

For a short walk/hike through a wooden ravine that leads to a scenic view of the Kalamazoo River, stop here and enjoy a nature break.

Look at the historic site marker by the road and you will see that you are driving on Old Allegan Road. When Allegan County was organized in 1835, the only road from the interior to Lake Michigan followed an Indian trail along the Kalamazoo River. In 1838, Ralph Mann of Connecticut was supervising improvements at the short-lived town of Richmond. He and two men widened the trail eight miles from Richmond toward Allegan. Beginning in the 1840s stagecoaches traveled this road used by settlers, traders, and trappers. The Allegan Road provided an important link between the county seat and the lake.



## Site No.20: New Richmond and the Swing Bridge

As you descend into the valley created by the Kalamazoo River you will find yourself in New Richmond, a true river flats town surrounded by water. This little community was created when the Chicago & West Michigan Railroad came through and was chosen as a station because of its easy access by river from Saugatuck. In 1868 a sawmill was built to supply logs and timbers for the railroad track base and the construction of railroad bridges in the area.

New Richmond remained a key transportation point, with its passenger and freight station providing access to distant places for people and goods from all over the county, until the Interurban Train began service between Holland and Saugatuck. With the loss of the Saugatuck passengers, and other transportation options becoming available on the eastern side of the county, the New Richmond depot fell into disuse.



*New Richmond train station. (date unknown)*

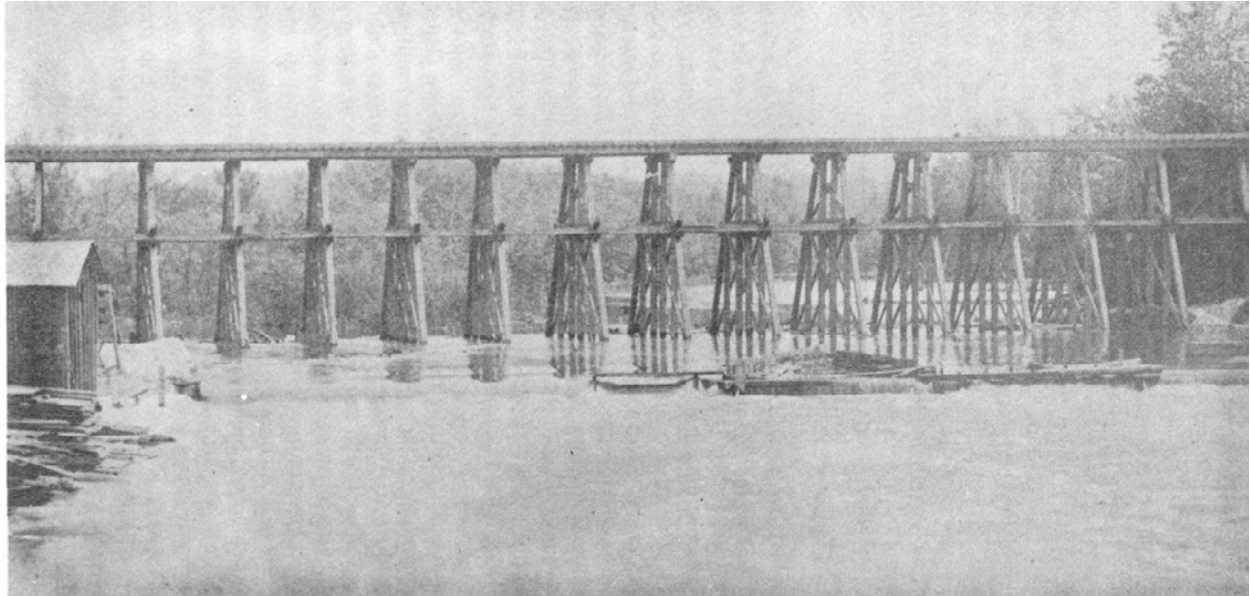
The Swing Bridge. Built in 1879, this is the oldest remaining vehicular swing bridge of its kind in the United States and is on the National Register of Historic Places. The bridge was designed so that the center span could swing open with a hand crank to allow boat traffic up and down the Kalamazoo River. It was completely restored in 2004 and is now open to pedestrian traffic only. It is the centerpiece of New Richmond Bridge County Park.

The photo on the left is how the swing bridge looked ca. 1915 and the photo on the right is how it appears today.



## Site No.21: Wooden Trestle in Hamilton

As you approach Hamilton Township Park, you'll be surprised by the unexpected appearance of a very rare wooden railroad trestle bridge. When you drive down into the park and arrive at the river's edge and look up... there it is, towering above you. Just like something out of an old Western movie. The bridge is still being used today, and there is nothing like watching a train rumble over it!



*Above:* A photo of the bridge shortly after it was constructed ca. 1900.

*Below:* It really hasn't changed much since then! (Photo by Ron Reeves)



## Site No.22: Commercial Flower Farms

Where do flowers come from? You are now in the midst of a huge flower farm, surrounded by hundreds of acres planted in a variety of blooming perennials. Throughout most of the growing season, the area is ablaze with color from the many different flowers that are grown here.

This land is leased from local farmers by a commercial flower farm that produces live perennial plants that are sent to commercial greenhouses all over the country.

As this is a commercial farm they have no shops or visitor services for retail sales. But they don't mind if you stop and smell the flowers and enjoy the view!



## Site No.23: Dutch Heritage Farms & Homes – A Drive-By

The northern section of the tour will take you through mile after mile of beautiful rolling farmland, dotted with picturesque historic barns and homes. But when the Dutch settlers first came here in the mid-1800s, this land was densely forested with beech and maple trees. These early farmers had to clear the land of all the trees, and their stumps, before they could start farming.



As you are driving, be on the lookout for the different looking Veneklasen brick farmhouses. Veneklasen was a Dutch brick maker. Because of the different types of soil he worked with, he produced both a red and a yellow color brick. Typically, the yellow brick was used for decorative work around the windows and under the eaves. An especially beautiful example of this type of brickwork is pictured above.

The Dutch immigrants who settled the northwest corner of Allegan County were different from the other early settlers of the county in two ways. They were immigrants from a foreign country, not merely resettling from somewhere else in the United States. More importantly, they came as part of religious communities.

In 1847, seventy Dutch-speaking German Calvinists from a small village on the Netherlands/German border left their home village and migrated to the United States, settling the town of Graafschap. And in 1848, an entire religious community left the Village of Hellendoorn, in the province of Overijssel in the Netherlands and settled the town of Overisel. Other groups followed. These settlers were conservative religious Separatists who were fleeing persecution, much like the Puritans who founded Massachusetts, as well as seeking a better economic life. They were drawn here by the



Dutch religious community in Holland as well as the fertile clay soil in this part of the county and an ample and cheap supply of lumber for shelter and fuel.

Driving along this part of the tour route, you will pass several good examples of Dutch barns, one of which is shown below. The long sloping roofs are very distinctive.



## Site No.24: The Village of Hopkins

Hopkins is one of many towns that were devastated by fires in the days before electricity. Hopkins was first settled in 1870 when the K A & G R Railroad came through the area. The name Hopkins was chosen to honor Stephen Hopkins, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, who was an ancestor of R.C. Round, the first settler in the Township.



As the above photo shows, Hopkins in 1888 was a thriving little town. This is Water Street. From right to left: the drug store, post office, Andrew Bee Tin Shop, Watkins Store, bank, Orrie Gordon (dry goods), Dendel Store, Millinery Shop, the Hopkins Hotel, and a mill (far left that burned down later).

But on July 25, 1920 the town experienced a traumatic event when the Hopkins business district was destroyed by fire. Within forty-five minutes of its discovery, both sides of the town were a roaring blaze.

## Site No.25: The City of Wayland

The City of Wayland was first settled by Nelson Chambers in 1838. Then it was known as Chamber's Corners. Chambers built a small cabin at the southeast corner of what is now Main Street and Superior Street. This was added on to and became Wayland's first hotel called the Wayland House.

Like most of the towns on this tour, Wayland was also visited by fire. The 1902 fire destroyed the southwest block of Main and Superior Streets. One building was left standing—the little red barn you can see today behind Wayland Hardware is that building.



*Wayland—The morning after the 1902 Fire.*

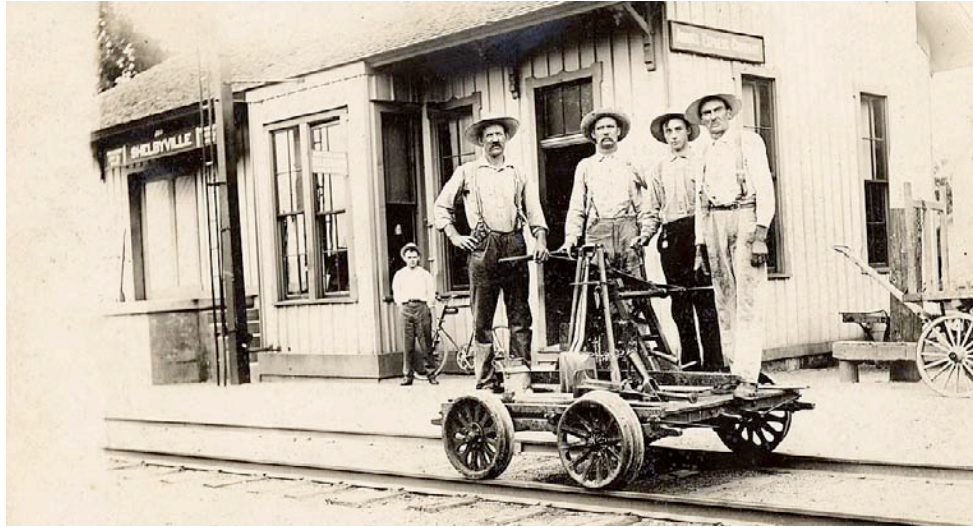
Why so many fires? Remember that most of the buildings were made of wood, and all cooking and heating before the advent of electricity and gas was done with wood burning stoves or fireplaces. Fires were a common occurrence in towns in the 1800's and early 1900's. Take some time to walk around the town, and see if you can find the little red barn.



## Site No.26: Shelbyville and Gun Lake

Shelbyville, a station on the Grand Rapids & Indiana Railroad in 1870, was a typical railroad town. It was named after Mr. Shelby who was the first train station agent there. The settlement's name was originally Shelby, but there was already a town in Michigan by that name so they added the "ville".

Some wanted to call the town Meredith after another resident. But Mr. Meredith didn't like the idea of the train conductor calling out his name every time the train went through town and nixed the idea.



*The Shelbyville train depot, ca. 1900.*

If you are looking for a great place to relax, enjoy a picnic lunch, or go for a refreshing swim, Gun Lake is just three short miles from Shelbyville. To get there, head east on 124th Avenue and follow it until it ends at Gun Lake.

*The beach at Gun Lake County Park.*



## Site No.27: The Village of Martin

Martin, which was named for President Martin Van Buren, had its beginning in 1836 when Mumford Eldred purchased forty acres of land and built his cabin in the township. Martin became part of the transportation link between Grand Rapids and Kalamazoo in 1855 when a plank road was completed between the two cities. The construction of the Grand Rapids and Indiana Railroad in 1870 helped to make the village an area trade center.



Voters and candidates in Martin after the results of the 1896 presidential and local elections were in. It was the custom for losers to push winners in wheelbarrows!



Local man becomes national Civil War hero! On May 10, 1865, Jefferson Davis, the President of the Confederate States, was captured. Being guarded by federal troops, Davis made an attempt to escape. The men who foiled this escape became national heroes. One of those men was Andrew Bee, a former Martin resident. He was buried in the Martin cemetery along with other Civil War veterans.

## Site No.28: The City of Plainwell

The first settler in Plainwell was Henry Wellever, who was attracted to the area because of the construction of a new plank road. Most of the towns on this tour have in common the fact that their original reason for existing was location, location, location ... whether on the river, a railroad stop, or, in the case of Plainwell, at an important intersection of the new road. Easy access to transportation was critical to a town's development.



*Main Street in Plainwell looking south ca. Late 1800's. This view looks pretty much the same today, minus the horse and buggies!*

In the early 1850s, the old rutted (and when it rained, muddy) dirt road between Grand Rapids and Kalamazoo, and between here and Allegan, was replaced by a new plank road. The sawn planks were made out of oak or walnut and were 8' long and 2" thick. This pioneer version of a paved highway was a huge improvement... having a relatively smooth surface that would not be impacted much by the weather.

When the plank road was completed in 1854, the result was a considerable amount of traffic and the area,





simply referred to as “The Junction” at that time, started to grow into a town. The town was surveyed and platted in April 1863 and was given the name Plainwell. The plank road remained in operation until the early 1900’s, when the current paved 10th Street between Wayland and Plainwell, which uses the same roadbed, replaced it.

Without a doubt, there is a lot to see and do in Plainwell, and it’s a good place to stop for lunch or dinner. So stop and have a look around. You are surrounded by history here.

Traveling to and from Plainwell must have been a treat with the stagecoach running over the plank road instead of the dirt road it replaced.

*An elephant in your basement? When this building on the corner of South Main and West Bridge Streets was being constructed in 1916, a circus came to town. One of the elephants got loose and wandered around town, eventually walking into this building and crashing through the ground level floor into the basement! Don’t worry, they got it out.*



*This is a photo of the original Soule Memorial Fountain, which was built in 1907. Inside it had four fountains with drinking places on the outside for dogs and horses. It was destroyed by an auto accident in 1953 and was replaced by a new one in 1970. Because materials from the original fountain were hard to duplicate, the newer version was much simpler than the original.*