

# *A Condensed History of Lapeer County*



Lapeer County was once part of the Northwest Territory. By an ordinance of the Congress of the United States, passed July 13, 1787, the whole of the territory of the United States, lying northwest of the Ohio River, though still occupied by the British, was organized as the Northwest Territory.

The County of Wayne, named in the honor of General Anthony Wayne, was formed from a portion of the Northwest Territory, August 11, 1796. It included all of the lower peninsula, portions of Northern Ohio and Indiana and also part of Illinois and Wisconsin.

On May 7, 1800, the Territory of Indiana was formed and included all of the lower peninsula of Michigan. After Ohio and Indiana became states, the Territory of Michigan was formed. Wayne County was recognized by Governor Hull, of the Michigan Territory. Monroe County was established in 1817, Macomb, Mackinac, Brown and Crawford counties in 1818. (The last two now being part of Wisconsin.) On October 9, 1819, Col. Lewis Cass was appointed Territorial Governor.

In January, 1820, the County of Oakland was formed. On September 18, 1822, Governor Cass set Lapeer County's boundaries, although it remained part of Oakland County until it was organized. Lapeer County officially became a county on February 2, 1835. The first recorded elections for county officers, with 520 people voting, was in 1837.

How come the name "Lapeer"? Early tradition gives, as the actual source of the naming of this city and county, the following: The south branch of the Flint River, which has its rise in Lapeer County, flows northwestward and throughout quite a distance of its course, flows over rocky bed. It is supposed that this suggested to the French and Indian traders, who frequently passed over this section, the name of stone or flint. "The Stone" in French is "LePierre," but the English translation of the Canadian French accent of this word is "Lapeer". Hence, Governor Cass chose "Lapeer" as the name of the county.

The first settler in Lapeer was Alvin N. Hart, who was born in Cornwall, Connecticut on February 11, 1804. He came to Lapeer in 1831 and platted the Village of Lapeer on November 8, 1833. The plat was registered in Pontiac, December 14, 1833, in Associate Judge Bagley's Court, County of Oakland.

Alvin Hart became a state senator in 1843, representing Lapeer, Oakland, Genesee, Shiawassee, Tuscola, Saginaw counties and the entire Upper Peninsula. He was instrumental in having the state capitol moved from Detroit to Lansing. His death occurred on August 22, 1874. He is buried in Lapeer. Mrs. Kate Rhead is a great-great-granddaughter.

Jonathon R. White, the second settler in Lapeer, was born in South Hadley, Mass., in 1806. He also settled in Lapeer in 1831.

Being of pioneer stock, Hart and White each wanted to start their own town; Hart forming what was known as Lapeer, and White platting what was known as Whitesville. Whitesville was located on what is now South Main Street in Lapeer, from the railroad tracks to DeMill Road.

Lapeer County's first courthouse was built by White and his friends in 1839 on the site of the school administration building. White got the job after Hart ran into legal problems related to his original courthouse building. Court was first held in a Lapeer County courthouse on July 7, 1840. Hart built the present courthouse in 1846. He rented it to the county for one dollar, and court was first held there in April, 1847. In 1852, White's courthouse was used again. Then in 1853, the county bought Hart's courthouse for \$3,000. It became county property in 1858. White's courthouse building eventually became a school.

The White family built a large impressive building, which was called White's Opera House. It was located where Bishop Kelley School is at the present time. Business apparently was not good enough because in 1879, the building was moved piece by piece to its present location at the southeast corner of Court and Nepessing Streets. The building is now commonly known as the White Block.

Lumber was the principal industry from the 1830's until 1870, but with the removal of the forests, Lapeer became an agricultural county. Through the efforts of Governor John T. Rich, from Elba Township, the Lapeer State Home & Training School was established in 1894, with a capacity of 200 patients.

Besides Rich, prominent Lapeer County residents included Governor Moses Wisner, State Supreme Court Chief Justice Joseph B. Moore, Congressman Louis C. Cramton, and author Marguerite deAngeli.

Today, Lapeer County is a well-balanced community of farms, small industry, and urban residents, serving the heavy industry of Genesee and Oakland counties.

Lapeer County consists of 18 townships, 7 villages, 2 cities and has approximately 666 square miles.

This condensed history was compiled by Lyle F. Stewart, former Lapeer County Clerk. The Directory was compiled by the County Clerk's Office and can be obtained from this office by request.

***MARLENE M. BRUNS, County Clerk***