

History of Pinckney

The first settler in Livingston County was Colonel Solomon Peterson of New York State who obtained land from the government on May 13, 1828. His 160 acres were in section 26 of Putman Township (the name was later changed to Putnam) near the intersection of two Indian trails.

The population of the Township grew slowly at first, increasing by only a handful of families during the next dozen of years. By 1836, the slow trickle of settler had turned into a steady stream and in May of that year, the Township had 367 inhabitants. It was about that time when William Kirkland, principal of a girl's school in Detroit, was caught up in the land speculation fever.

William Kirkland dreamed of starting a new town in the wilds of Michigan to serve the needs of the ever-increasing population. Such dreams were not uncommon during this time. The price of land was relatively cheap and prospects for considerable profits were good if the land was improved and resold. Kirkland journeyed to Putnam and purchased land from Colonel Peterson and others, for starting a new village.

With the financial backing of his father and of his wife's family, he was able to purchase about 1,400 acres around his proposed village site. The first order of business was to provide for the needs of commerce in the rapidly growing farming community. An earthen dam across Portage Creek and a millrace, which would serve a gristmill, were constructed. The millpond stretched west of the dam for about a mile to what is now Cedar Lake Road.

The Village of Pinckney was platted in August 1837 around a central Township square north of the mill and on the main trail. In spite of the lack of rail transportation and periodic economic ills, the town continued to grow. By 1859, most of the businesses were located along either side of Main and Howell Streets. By 1860, the rush to settle southern Michigan subsided and life settled down to that of a rural agricultural community. Continuing attempts to secure a railroad finally succeeded when the Grand Trunk came through in 1883. This resulted in a minor business boom for Pinckney and spelled disaster for the other small towns, which were passed by. Unadilla, Pettysville, and Plainfield were among these. A much needed grain elevator and lumberyard near the new railroad were built. On Main Street, the old wooden buildings succumbed to the onslaught of repeated fires. The new ones which, replaced them, were built of brick. Between 1890 and 1910, the community experienced periods of economic stress but times were generally good and the Village reached its zenith of economic prosperity and growth and development. The 1920's were another decade of change for the community as fire once again raged and destroyed much of the business district. The most exciting news of the decade was that Henry Ford proposed to build a small factory in Pinckney as part of his village industries program. Ford did purchase the mill, the dam, and quite a bit of land and continued to buy flowage rights even up to 1940. The old mill was torn down, the level of the millpond lowered, but the plant was never built much to the dismay of many citizens and the Board of Commerce. Other improvements did take place; Main Street was paved by the state and redesignated as M-36.

By the 1940's it was apparent that farming was declining as a major economic force in the area. Already, many farms were sold to residents of adjoining urban areas for summer homes. Much of the land around the lakes was sold for camps or cottage sites. The state bought land for public recreation and hunting areas. The closing of the local creamery and the pickle stations insured that farming would play an ever more marginal role in the local economy.

Village residents began to look farther and farther from home for jobs. This trend began in the 1940's and continues to the present day. With the ever expanding urban areas to the east and with the construction of better roads and the expressways more people moved to the countryside and continued to work in or near the urban areas.

The middle sixties to late seventies was a time of tremendous growth in the village and township not unlike those early settlement days. Old school buildings were torn down or remodeled and new modern schools were built to accommodate the flood of new students. A long needed public sewage disposal system was built in the village as the new houses crowded closer together. The Grand Trunk Railroad closed the railroad line and the right-of-way was purchased by the state. In the early 1970, the economic changes on the national scene were felt in Pinckney as the price of gasoline soared and the automobile industry reeled. As the nation headed for recession, the local building and real estate boom fizzled and interest rates rose. The old Main Street business

section suffered signs of decay as stores began to close. At the same time, the population doubled due to the interest in living in a rural, small community.

As the nation slipped out of recession in the mid-1980's, the local economy recovered quickly and development began to boom in southeast Michigan. Livingston County, particularly the southeast portion, became one of the fastest growing areas in the state. The rapid growth in the Pinckney area has spurred the local economy and brought many opportunities to Pinckney residents and business owners. However, this growth is not without cost. The added population has put added stress on the local infrastructure, overburdened the school systems, caused traffic congestion, and has diminished the rural character of the surrounding area.

Residents of Pinckney currently enjoy a good balance between a high quality of life associated with the small village atmosphere and the economic benefits that come with rapid growth over the last two decades