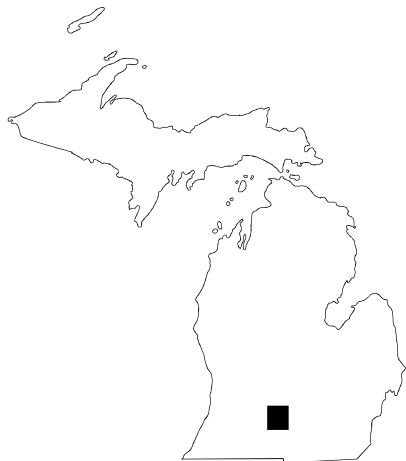


The History of Calhoun County



It was the summer of 1821 when fifty-five Potawatomi Chiefs gathered to sign the treaty of Chicago which granted this part of the country to the United States. The first recorded history of Calhoun County began with the signing of this treaty.

Would you believe the Michigan Territory was described as “unfit for habitation, made up of poor, barren and sandy land in the intermediate spaces between swamps and lakes, on which scarcely any vegetation grows...” in a federal survey published after the Revolutionary War. In the early 1800’s, newspapers and Morse’s geography marked Michigan as an “interminable swamp”. Therefore, settlers did not venture to the Michigan Territory.

Henry R. Schoolcraft and his crew of surveyors provided a more accurate description of the land west of Detroit. By 1825, the Michigan Territory was described as “fertile lands.” Territorial Governor Lewis Cass and Michigan’s territorial representative to Congress, Father Gabriel Richard, worked together to get assistance in opening up the interior lands of Michigan for settlers. In the fall of 1829, Congress authorized the Territorial Road and surveying began in January of 1830.

Traveling by way of the Territorial Road, which really was a trail at the time, settlers began to arrive from the East Coast and Europe. On their way west these settlers left Detroit on the Chicago Road. Near Ypsilanti, they continued west on Territorial Road which went directly through the counties we know as Wayne, Washtenaw, Jackson, Calhoun, Kalamazoo, VanBuren and Berrien.

Calhoun County was named in honor of John C. Calhoun on October 29, 1829, when the legislative council of the territory met to assign boundaries to the county. At the time, John C. Calhoun was a member of President Jackson’s cabinet and also served as a senator from South Carolina.

In 1830, Calhoun County’s first recorded entry of land was made by Ephraim Harrison in Albion. The Peabody’s were the first settlers to arrive in Albion. Dr. Foster and Issac Tolland were the first settlers on the present site of the City of Battle Creek. George Ketchum and his party were the first settlers on the Marshall Village site in April 1830. The Ketchum party built a cabin and sawmill on Rice Creek, and then built a grist mill.

In the early summer of 1830, New Yorker Sidney Ketchum rode along Territorial Road until he reached the community we now know as Marshall. Sidney acquired land claims in the area and returned to Upstate New York and New England to recruit settlers. He recruited merchants, doctors, lawyers, ministers and other professionals for his new settlement. In 1832, a schoolhouse was built, since most of the first settlers came from educated communities. Before the village had even a dozen children of school age, a Miss Brown was summoned from Ann Arbor to teach.

Oshea Wilder originally settled in Marshall and then located in lower Eckford Township. It’s claimed that he originated the idea of a canal connection between Lake Erie and Lake Michigan. Many of the early village plats in the country were surveyed and plated by Oshea Wilder. Another prominent citizen, Ezra Convis, settled near the Battle Creek Village site and became the county’s first state legislative representative in 1836-1837.

“We are not yet in the Union but shall be on Monday or Tuesday of next week!” Serving as Michigan’s liaison to the US House of Representatives, Issac E. Cray wrote the words on January 19, 1837, from Washington D.C. Cray was right and Michigan became a state on January 26, 1837. Michigan was supposed to have become a state exactly two years earlier on January 26, 1835. Who kept Michigan out of the Union? A boundary dispute called the “Great Toledo War.” The dispute ended with Michigan giving up the so-called “Toledo Strip” to Ohio for the western half of the Upper Peninsula.

By 1835, the Village of Marshall had a population of 30, the village was the center of a rapidly growing agriculture area and midpoint on the Territorial Road for settlers coming to Michigan. Many settlers were traveling through the village and public houses were over crowded. Colonel Andrew Man of Connecticut recognized the great need for accommodating travelers and built what we know as the National House Inn. The Inn began operating in the fall of 1835, and was the first brick building in Calhoun County. It’s interesting to note that the first log cabin in the community was built just five years earlier. The Inn soon became

the economic, social and political center of Marshall, serving as headquarters for the county courts until 1838.

The cornerstone of the first county courthouse was laid on October 22, 1837. The building was completed in 1838, at a cost of over \$25,000 and included a jail in the basement. In 1850, a jail break occurred when nine prisoners managed to heat an iron at the stove. They escaped by burning off the lock fastenings. A jail separate from the courthouse was built in 1869 for housing around thirty prisoners. During 1875, a new courthouse costing just under \$55,000 was completed. The new courthouse replaced the original courthouse which had become structurally unsafe.

Calhoun County continued to grow during the early 1900’s with the Industrial revolution. During World War I, the cities of Albion, Battle Creek and Marshall emerged as industrial centers, and are all currently home to industrial parks. Today, there are numerous industries in the county including the Kellogg Company, Denso Manufacturing Michigan, Inc., Post Division of Kraft Foods, Inc., Hayes-Albion, Inc., Decker Manufacturing, Albion Industries, Team One Plastics, Eaton Corporation, Walker Manufacturing and Lear Corporation. Battle Creek is known throughout the world, it serves as headquarters for the DLIS program in conjunction with the Department of Defense in Washington. Also, Battle Creek is known as the Cereal City and is home of the international W.K. Kellogg Foundation. Dairy farming accounts for over one-third of the county’s total agricultural income today. The principal crops raised in the county are corn, hay and wheat.

Calhoun County has 500 miles of streams and 138 inland lakes for recreation. There are twenty-two major parks in the county for citizens to enjoy and fifteen public sites for fishing. The Kingman Museum of Natural History has more than 125,000 specimens of wildlife, minerals, and prehistoric mammal exhibits available for viewing.

The governmental units of the county are made of nineteen townships, four villages, four cities and fourteen school districts. The Board of Commissioners has seven members, representing equal population districts. The county continues to grow with the efforts of the present generation. The Calhoun County Building is located at 315 West Green Street, Marshall, Michigan 49068. It was built in 1955, at a cost of \$1,550,000.