

ORION SINCE 1818

By

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In Honor of the American Revolution Bicentennial

1776 – 1976

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the following work, I have tried to portray a faithful chronicle of Orion's history as the facts presented themselves to me. Unfortunately, names and dates will have been omitted, and important facts will not have survived time; still I feel that a good sketch of the area's past has been rendered. I hope the reader will find this booklet entertaining as well as informative, and that those pieces of data held in a memory and jogged by this publication will be relayed to the author.

Now comes the part that every author of history must include, the thanks. First, special thanks go to two places: to Mary L. Basigkow, director of the Orion Township Libraries, whose second profession as a sounding board helped this booklet become real; and the Library Board, whose confidence allowed a 22-year-old person to realize an eight-year-old dream. Thanks also must go the following people, whose aid has been indispensable: Richard J. Hathaway of the Michigan State Library; the staff of the Burton Historical Collections, the staff at the archives of the Michigan History Division; Connie Lektizian, of the Oakland County Pioneer and Historical Society; the staff of the Michigan Historical Collections; and to Wayne McMeans, of the Northeast Oakland Historical Society.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this effort to Messrs. Jesse Decker and Needham Hemingway, and others, who plucked a jewel from the constellations, placed it in Oakland County, and called it Orion.

Paul M. Scott

Lake Orion
June 2, 1976

Upon arriving in north Oakland County in the early 1800's, the Michigan pioneer was greeted with a primeval beauty that was ample reward for his arduous trek through the wilderness and swamps north of Detroit. As early as 1822, the landscape was described as one "that occasioned an equal degree of surprise and pleasure."¹ These ancient forests, and their partner, the Indian, awaited the white man's arrival in Orion Township. And what follows is a comprehensive, though by no means conclusive, portrayal of the people and events that shaped the wilderness into a most pleasant rural community and one of the most popular resorts in lower Michigan.

When the migrating New Yorker and New Jerseyite finally settled in Orion Township, in 1819, little was left of the various Indian cultures. Sparse factual data exist even as to what tribes inhabited the area. Present theory suggests that settlers encountered remnants of the Chippewa and Pottawatomi nations, though the tribes probably never settled in Orion.

Part of the legendary Saginaw Trail passed through the township. What are now known as Joslyn and Orion roads were major branches of the Trail, and a minor extension followed an east-west path falling between Morgan and Judah roads.

The most mysterious leavings of our Indian heritage are the Indian burial mounds. Located near Bald Mountain State Recreation Area, they are of an undetermined number.

Burial mounds were first used prevalently by the Hopewell Indian culture (400 B.C. – 700 A.D.) of the upper Ohio River Valley and were often in animal forms. The Hopewells, one of the first "potter-making" cultures, buried many artifacts with their dead. Pieces of their pottery have been found at archaeological digs in Ohio and Grand Rapids mounds.

It is not presently known whether Orion's mounds are of Hopewellian descent, those of the Mississippian (700 – 1500 A.D.), or later Indian cultures who happened to adopt this burial technique.² The amount of research done so far has been limited to their probable identification by Wilbert B. Hinsdale, U of M archaeologist, in his Archaeological Atlas of Michigan (1931).³ Due to this lack of research data, questions have arisen as to the existence of the mounds at all. In any case, their presence gives Orion a strong link with Michigan's archaeological past.

The last section of our Indian legacy deals with three stories of slight importance to the Michigan scene, yet quite interesting. One of these tells of an epidemic striking a tribe during a southward migration on the Joslyn Road trail. As the story goes, the Indians were on their way to Canada to receive presents from the British for their loyalty when smallpox hit, leaving dead and dying along the route. Another tradition speaks of a line of fortifications extending eastward from the eastern end of Long Lake in Section 1,

formerly known as the Shick farm, now as Bunny Run. The evidence is vague, and twentieth century construction has prevented any chance for extensive exploration.

The last tale deals with the origin of the name “Mahopac” in Orion history. Mahopac, Indian for “pine forest,” was supposedly the name of a minor Indian chief (tribe unknown) who was buried along the shores of Mill Lake, in the western part of the township.⁴ It was an appropriate name, for that area of Orion was once covered with vast stands of Michigan white pine.

In 1818, Congress authorized the first sale of public lands in the Northwest Territory, called the “credit system.”⁵ Under this act, a U. S. Land Office was opened in Detroit, and one Moses Allen became the first man to purchase land in both Orion Township and Oakland County, on October 24, 1818. He had chosen a parcel in the southwest quarter of Section 32, near Gingellville. One provision of this system stated that although the deed was drawn up before the land was paid for, payment (\$2.00 an acre) must be received within a reasonable amount of time. Mr. Allen defaulted, leaving the honor of being the first settler to others.

Those others followed almost exactly one year later in October, 1819. They were Judah Church and John Wetmore, who also made the first entry in Southfield Township (May, 1821). They settled in Section 19, west of Mill Lake. Mr. Church’s name is familiar to twentieth century Orion, having been given to such sites as Judah Lake, Judah Road, and Mount Judah, a small elevation in Section 32.

The first actual settlement of people began in 1824-26 in Sections 24 and 25, near the intersection of Kern and Gunn roads. It was peopled by the Jesse Decker, Needham Hemingway, Moses Munson, and David Shadbolt families. They quickly set about clearing land and erecting crude log shanties. During this same time, Philip Bigler settled in the southeast part of Section 2, now the principal site of the Village of Lake Orion.

It was during this time that the Erie Canal was completed. It marked a great upsurge in the number of pioneer men and women settling in Michigan. Mostly from New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania, these people braved the trip across the often treacherous Lake Erie in small sailing craft and early (and sometimes dangerous) lake steamers.⁶

Improvements came as pioneers arrived from the East, a slow process for the isolated settlement. The first sawmill in the township was constructed here by Samuel Munson in 1825.⁷ Education consisted of children taking instruction in the living room of one Samuel Eaton, for whom a school was later named. In 1827, however, the “Decker Settlement” children attended a newly-built log schoolhouse in Section 29 of Oakland Township, just east of their homes.⁸ The “gospel” was preached in Orion as early as 1825 by Elders Earl (Protestant-Methodist), Norton (Baptist), and Warren

(Methodist). The pioneer missionaries were known as “circuit riders” and preached in available homes. They often had to cover 20 miles each Sunday on horseback.

The time period between 1826 and 1834 was relatively quiet, although a steady stream of settlers entered the township, especially from Pennsylvania. A blacksmith shop had opened in 1832 with Rufus Streater as “smithy,” and as early as 1830, Jesse Decker had kept a “public-house” or tavern. The township had become large enough for a post office to be established in 1832, with Cyrus Chipman as postmaster. The route was served by a Mr. Rose, who traveled on foot from Royal Oak.

The years 1834-37 were the most important to the formation of Orion Township. Until 1824, Orion had been part of Oakland Township, which comprised the upper three-fifths of the county. That year it was attached to Pontiac Township. In March of 1835, the state legislature approved the organization of Orion as a separate township. Jesse Decker, now known widely as “the leader of all the (Orion Township) pioneers,” was appointed as the first supervisor, with the first meeting held April 5 1835. At that meeting, his salary was set at two dollars per year. Mr. Decker was also required to file property claims in the new U. S. Land Office in Flint as part of the job, often traveling on foot.

The first store had been established by John Hankinson in 1834. He had erected a small, two-story frame building at the “Decker Settlement.” A check of one of his account books, now deposited in the Burton Historical Collections at the Detroit Public Library,⁹ shows that in 1836 business was conducted under the English system of money, that is, pounds as opposed to dollars. Orion’s first school had been built in 1834. It was a crude log structure erected on land donated by Elijah B. Clark, near the southeast corner of Scripps Road and Lapeer Road (M-24).

The township was now amply supplied with saw and grist mills. As well as Samuel Munson’s sawmill, three others had been constructed. Joseph Jackson built one in Section 12 across Paint Creek in 1825. Powell Carpenter purchased this property in 1835 and made substantial improvement, it later being well-known as Rudd’s Mill. In 1829, Needham Hemingway, Jesse Decker, and Philip Bigler built a sawmill across the beginning of Paint Creek, which eventually transformed six small lakes into the present Lake Orion. A log house built for the sawyer was later used as a tavern by Thomas Abernathy. The mill was burned by Indians in 1832 because the proprietor refused to give them whiskey.¹⁰ It was rebuilt by Hemingway soon afterwards, he now being the sole owner of the property.

In 1835, one of the first steam-powered mills in north Oakland County was constructed in Orion Township by Thomas Drake. It was located in the “Big Pinery”, Section 19, and possessed a large, wood-consuming engine. The fuel demands kept a team of horses and three men busy all day. The area around this mill grew and was first known as Steam Mill, later as Mahopac. It was granted a post office in 1847, and a school was opened soon afterward.¹¹

The grist- or flouring-mills had been erected. The first was associated with a sawmill and was built by Powell Carpenter near the Rudd's Mill site (Kern and East Clarkston roads.). It had the capacity to mill seventy-five thousand (75,000) bushels of wheat a year.

In 1837-38, a grist mill was built by Needham Hemingway, below the sawmill at Lake Orion. During the life of the mill, its dam gave way three times. The dam had been raised twelve feet to provide proper water power for the mill. During a stormy day, the water pressure on the dam was greatly increased, so that in some instances the dam had weakened or been destroyed. One such washout freed an immense body of water, which rushed down the narrow Paint Creek Valley causing widespread destruction. The valley residents, mindful of the previous floods, went to court seeking a restraining order against reconstruction of the dam, which they received. However, the time involved in getting the order caused the mill pond and some standing pools left from the flood to become stagnant. Fearing a general health hazard, the judge set aside that order, and area residents working together rebuilt the dam in one day.

It was during this period that the Village of Lake Orion was born. Activity had already begun with the construction of the mills, and the location of a few settlers near the lake, and now serious development came up for consideration.

A moment of humor and embarrassment interrupted this seriousness, though. In 1836, a traveling auctioneer from Detroit gave the village a most peculiar start. James Stillson (or Stilson), prominent in early Democratic politics in Detroit, purchased 40 acres of land in Section 2, an area roughly including land from Atwater Street south to Heights Road, and from the lake shore east to the section line. Mr. Stillson had been known for his "paper cities," and Orion Township was to be his next target. He is also known to have promoted a town called White Rock City, north of Port Huron.¹²

Stillson had a highly-colored pamphlet drawn up showing wharves, steamships, businesses, residences, and paved streets, dubbing it "Canandaigua City". Armed with these, he set out for the East Coast, where he peddled the lots at exorbitant prices. Upon his return to Detroit, he sold the rest at six cents each. On seeing that their purchases were nothing but swampland, the eastern parties left in disgust. No account was left as to the Detroiters' reactions. Curiously, New Canandaigua, as it came to be called, survived when the bulk of the "paper cities" died before they were ever born. In fact, when the plat for the Village of Orion was filed at Lansing by Needham Hemingway in 1838, New Canandaigua and Orion Village were rivals, within 500 feet of each other. The Hemingway plat, as seen by this author in 1975, also revealed that "Broadway," now Anderson, was the main entrance to the village from the south. Broadway, as residents know it today, was then called Market Street. By late 1838, John Perry platted a sixteen-block area east of Washington Street as an addition to the village, which he called Perrysburgh.

The early growth of the village was not remarkable but rather in response to the trade created in the surrounding area. The territorial road which led from Rochester, by now a thriving small village, probably helped accentuate this trade. Business started to locate in this promising area, the first being Robert Jarvis and Paul Rice, who opened their store in 1838. Simeon Andrews opened the second in 1842. The first physician, Dr. Smead, located here in 1837, the year of Michigan's statehood. One year later, he associated himself with Dr. Israel Bugbee. On September 19, 1839, a post office was opened in Mr. Jarvis's store under the name "New Canandaigua." Jarvis was the first postmaster, and the office received semi-weekly mail.

In 1841, Loren L. Treat, first lawyer in the village, made an application to the state for a school in the village. The application was approved and in 1844, the same year Mr. Treat was admitted to the Oakland County Bar, the building opened, later being called "one of the best schools in the county."¹³ It was a small, two-story building in the Dutch colonial style of architecture, with a hip- or barn-style roof. It still stands today on the northeast corner of Church and Anderson streets and is now used as a residence. The first teacher was a Mr. Dalby, who, having no legs, propelled himself about by walking on his hands.

The first brick building in the area had been erected in 1842 by Enos Gage, "a mechanic of superior ability."¹⁴ It was a home built of bricks burned in Orion by Mathias Varhite. As his was the only brickyard in this section of the country at the time, people came from all over the surrounding area for chimney bricks. As far as can be determined, Mr. Varhite's brickyard was located in the Perrysburgh addition to the village. The Gage home, located on Lapeer Street, was razed to make way for the present Elizabeth Street School, built in 1927.

With the addition of three blacksmith shops and two hotels, the settlement on the shores of Canandaigua Lake was fast becoming the economic heart of Orion Township.¹⁵ The growth period which started in 1838, culminated in 1859 with the Needham Hemingway plat of the Village of Orion being chartered as a governmental unit. The village of New Canandaigua had now all but disappeared. The post office established there was moved to the new village in 1854, and the name changed to Orion.

The Masonic Lodge No. 46 established itself in New Canandaigua in 1851. It also soon relocated in Orion Village. Its sponsor was the Stoney Creek Lodge, one of the few to survive the "anti-Mason" period in Michigan.

Having established themselves in Orion Village in 1833, the Congregationalists erected the first church building here in 1854. Located on the northeast corner of North Broadway and Church Street, it still stands and is used as a village hall, police station, community center, and church. This building, a Union church,¹⁶ also served as a church for Orion's Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians. The Congregational Society, after its completion, offered to assume the \$250 debt on construction costs in return for being allowed to choose its meeting time first.

The Village's incorporation in 1859 capped off a 23-year period of steady though uneventful growth. Orion was well on its way to becoming a major economic force in north Oakland County . . . but disaster lurked around the corner . . .

Meanwhile, the preceding twenty years had seen the township also take great strides in its goal to civilize the Michigan wilderness, although 1837 proved not to be a good example. In that year, famine had the township in its grip. Judah Church started a trek for Detroit to procure food, while back home Asar Brown complained of flour milled so thin that it had no taste. Help finally arrived in the form of a Dr. Williams of Ohio, who entered the township with a wagonload of flour, pork and other provisions.

Times were not all bad though. There were now nine schools in the township, two built of logs and seven frame buildings. The township had been divided into eight full and five fractional school districts, each with its own school board and schoolhouse. The schools located in the area were as follows: Block*, Clark, Decker, Howarth*, Mahopac, Newman*, Proper, Shanghai*, and another on Waldon Road near Joslyn Road whose name is not known by this author.¹⁷ Each district could levy its own school tax for needed items, repairs and salaries. If something had to be repaired or bought, taxes were raised for one year, or until the need was met, and then lowered back to the rate which preceded the increase. There were fifteen female and six male teachers in the township, as well as twelve books in the Mahopac School library, by 1859.

A township library was organized early in 1859, but it was destroyed by fire in May of that same year. As far as records indicate, no attempt was made to rebuild it until 1926, when the Lake Orion Ladies Literary Association (Club), now the Lake Orion Women's Club, laid the foundation for the present library.

The township and the village were soon caught up in the turmoil surrounding a state preparing for a seemingly inevitable war with the Southern states one which would pit brother against brother; father against son. Long verbal debates raged in both Washington and Lansing over the need for such a war, with the position held by the "Radical" arm of the Michigan Republican Party, calling for an armed confrontation with the slave-holding states, prevailing. Financial preparations were being made statewide through appropriation of tax monies, as well as through donations, or subscriptions, from individuals. During the years from 1859 through 1865, as a measure for financing the war, care of the wounded, and other debts, some taxes increased as much as 135% in Orion Township alone!

In response to the Union's physical needs, the Orion Union Guard was formed. Under the command of Lieutenants Benjamin Redfield and Alva Collins, they entered Union service as Company C, Michigan Tenth Regiment Infantry, with Colonel Charles M. Lum, of Flint, commanding. They joined the Union Army on February 6, 1862, and

were mustered out at Jackson (Michigan) on August 1, 1865. The exact exploits of the Orion men have not been recorded, but it is known that the Tenth Regiment served with distinction at Nashville, the Chattanooga River, the siege of Corinth (Mississippi), and throughout General William T. Sherman's Georgia campaign, including his "March to the Sea." The flag presented to the Tenth Regiment by the people of Flint resides in the State Capitol rotunda in Lansing.

It was during the beginning of the "war years," 1862 to be exact, that the village of Orion was dealt a severe and most unfortunate blow. Almost the entire business district was flattened by fire, a fire so destructive that the village charter was revoked by the state. Immediate rebuilding started, though, and the village was reincorporated in 1869. Normalcy was beginning to return to both the village and the township, and the state was set for Orion's "coming of age."

The boom period began with the arrival of the "iron horse" in Orion in 1872. Thanks to the efforts of one of the directors of the Detroit and Bay City Railroad, the company's original plans to route tracks through Romeo and Fish Lake were changed, and Orion's importance grew. Charles K. Carpenter, an Orion resident and a prominent citizen, was that director, and his foresight was soon rewarded. Building a railroad through the village was not without its danger, though. E. R. Emmons, who owned a mill on the site of the present Secretary of State office (1976),¹⁸ was dead-set against a railroad passing in front of his business. To prove his point, he announced that the village cannon, a remnant of the Civil War, was now residing in a second-floor window of the mill and that anyone attempting to lay tracks within 100 feet of the building would wish he hadn't. The fact that the cannon had mysteriously vanished from its usual place of rest added to the buzzing of town residents.

Working through one evening, the railroad workers labored to lay rails out of range of the cannon. Several citizens, finding the "missing" cannon buried south of the mill, fired it off at 12:10 the following day, awakening Orion from its nineteenth century sleep. The supposed cannon turned out to be a old stovepipe painted red.

Another step out of the wilderness was taken when Orion's first newspaper started publication. It was printed semi-monthly under the name, Orion Good News, with Reverend James R. Cordon, pastor of the Methodist Church, as its editor and publisher. After completion of the new M. E. Church building in 1872,¹⁹ the Methodists in the community emerged as an extremely active force, with the newspaper being an extension of that. The announcement of the publication was followed by this statement from Reverend Cordon:

The Good News will be published Now and Then and distributed freely among the people, advertisements paying expenses. Persons wishing to advertise must apply to the editor.²⁰

Under the paper's banner was the declaration that it was dedicated to "Religion, Morality, Prohibition and Home News."²¹ The paper was published by the Reverend until September, 1876, when James W. Seeley purchased it and began publication under the name, Orion Weekly Times.²² It, too, was on the side of temperance, editorially. It lasted only a few years, though the exact date it suspended publication is not known to this author, and no copies are known to exist in the Orion area.

Eighteen hundred and seventy-four would prove to be another eventful year in our history. Again, as in 1862, almost the entire business district was wiped out by fire. This time, however, the charter was preserved, and since the railroad had entered town, materials for rebuilding were more readily available, allowing the village to recover after a short time.

This year would also see the formation of the Orion Park Association. Earlier in 1874, E. R. Emmons had developed a park on the northeast shore of the lake (now Green's Park) and had purchased a small steamer called the "Little Dick," after his son, Richard.²³ The boat carried people on excursions to the many islands that dot Lake Orion. The Park Association, formed by Charles K. Carpenter, Alanson Predmore, Robert Sims, Loren Treat, and others, soon purchased the "Little Dick" and Island Park (now Park Island), and the resort was born.

Immediate improvements followed, making "this place one of the finest in the country."²⁴ A one-hundred-foot long reception hall was built, topped with an eighty-foot-high observation tower which afforded a "magnificent view of the lake and the surrounding country."²⁵ West of the tower was a natural amphitheater to which a rostrum and seating were added. A new wharf had been built in Mr. Emmons' park, being close to both the railroad depot and the Orion House hotel. Many picnics were now being held in Orion, with free use of the island being granted to the resorters. Special trains brought thousands out from Detroit.

The "Spiritualists" were among those early excursionists, and they camped on the island every year. Big celebrations were held at the park, especially holidays such as the Fourth of July, Decoration Day, and Barbecue Day, when even the Governor was present. Summer cottages sprang up along the shore, with people like George Darling and C. Henri Leonard amongst the first resorters.

Area dairymen established themselves as major suppliers of the county's dairy needs with the formation of the Oakland County Butter and Cream Association in the village in 1877. A creamery was built, and David B. Swayze was installed as its first president.

The 1880's brought even greater activity to the entire Orion area. A second railroad was moving northward from Pontiac to Port Austin through the west side of the township (present Grand Truck R. R. tracks), and a prominent Orion resident, Charles A. Carpenter, was solely responsible for the acquisition of land along its route. Two flag-station post offices were established on the line, and a general store was doing good

business on Silverbell Road, being run by the Carpenter family and located on their farm.²⁶

During this same period, the present Masonic Hall was completed, having been built by the Belles Brothers as a general store, and the second floor was used as a dance hall. What is now (1976) the pool hall (formerly the Orion State Bank) was the post office in 1881; that and the present Guest House office (formerly Allen's Furniture Store) had just opened. In place of the building housing Faye's Fabrics (formerly Van Wagoner's Drug Store) was a wooden structure known as the Commercial Hotel. The building in which Ramona's Beauty Salon is presently located was the place of business of Isaiah Bradford, the first undertaker in Orion. He arrived in Orion in 1840, and his residence still stands on the northwest corner of Jackson street and North Broadway. The building known now as the Ver-Wood Bar and Hotel was called the Cataract House (1880-82), Swift House, and the Park Hotel at the turn of the century. It was built by Stephen Seeley in 1880. The village school was a one-story, one-room brick structure sitting on the hill where Elizabeth Street School now stands.

The Orion Weekly Review (now the Lake Orion Review), by far Orion's longest-running newspaper, began publishing under the directorship of John Neal, Joseph Patterson, and Frank Sutton in 1881. In its infancy, the paper was printed in Detroit, as the office did not as yet have the capital nor the machinery to publish in Orion. Many a Friday morning would find John Neal waiting for the 4:00 A.M. "flyer" to Detroit, copy in hand, to have the paper printed. Sutton and Patterson both sold their interest in the Review to Neal in 1882.²⁷

Orion's prominent position as a farming center was not diminished by its emergence as a resort. Figures for the week ending October 20, 1887, show that J. C. Predmore and Company shipped 5,700 bushels of potatoes and 1,000 bushels of rutabagas, requiring 14 freight cars. Ira Carpenter shipped 2,200 bushels of rutabagas during that same period.²⁸

Records show that the village council approved a request by the Bell Company to install a telephone line in the village in 1883. As early as 1882 a telephone line was established between the post office and Postmaster Lou Warner's home. In 1887, W. E. French and a Mr. Carpenter set up Orion's first telephone exchange, connecting many of the businesses in the downtown area.²⁹

In 1889, Orion became a haven for those afflicted with cancer. Doctors J. and Charles DeCou opened the DeCou Cancer Institute on Flint Street in what became known as the Arlington Hotel. Some residents may remember it as a rooming house that was torn down to make way for the new Community National Bank building in 1963-4. The doctors had developed a salve whose cure seemed highly effective, though its ingredients were not divulged.

The “Gay Nineties” would find Orion’s potential come to full flower. It began with the purchase of Spencer’s (Bellevue) Island by the recently formed Orion Improvement Company, composed mostly of Detroiters. They proceeded to erect half of what was the Bellevue Hotel, as well as selling some lots and cottages. Until this time, Bellevue Island had been the site of an extensive peach orchard and the home of Mr. and Mrs. John Meyers.³⁰

Tragedy struck again in 1894 when another disastrous fire hit the small village. All of the buildings south of the present-day Ramona’s Beauty Salon were leveled, including the sites of Art’s Party Store, the Hobby Hut, and Lucky’s Produce. After the earlier fires, area citizens had asked the village fathers why they hadn’t purchased “one of the new-fangled, hydraulic squirt rams!”³¹ This was done and wells were sunk on Flint Street just east of the main corners so the fire crew did not have to depend on a bucket brigade from the lake or Paint Creek.

That same year the Lake Orion “dragon” made its entrance into Orion history. First seen by two ladies near the present Robert’s Rondevoo cove, the animal grew in length as the story grew in listeners. What had started out as an average-sized lake monster was claimed by some to be at least eighty feet long. Detroit and other newspapers joshingly suggested, upon hearing of the behemoth, that Orion residents should “drink more well water in the future.”³²

The Orion State Bank was organized in 1896, with Ira Carpenter, Joshua C. Predmore, Gleason Perry, and others comprising its first officers. In 1897, the village began replacing its old wooden walks with cement sidewalks, and by 1899 had laid one-and-a-half miles of cement walks.

Orion’s greatest strides towards becoming a resort were made in 1897. Reverend Gilbert Squires, a Methodist from Detroit, purchased Park Island for use as a permanent assembly ground. Reverend Seth Reed, one of Michigan’s most notable Methodists, was in charge of the program and brought speakers from across the country.

Noting the success of Squires’ endeavor the previous year, Reverends John Sweet and J. T. Haller, John Winter, and others set about organizing the Assembly Resort Association, which purchased Bellevue Island from the Orion Improvement Company, built a bridge to the island, constructed a road on its south side, and built an auditorium for 2,250 people. A canal was cut to the lagoon,³³ docks were built, and several naphtha launches were purchased. Within a year, one hundred cottages were erected.

Thousands soon visited Orion’s shores in search of the entertainment, education, and relaxation offered by the then-fabled “chautauqua,” and the advent of the interurban in 1900 made travel to this center of culture especially easy.³⁴ On these rails one could travel the length and breadth of southeastern Michigan, from Detroit to Flint. With Orion in the middle of the system, it became a natural resort spot for those wishing a week away from home. The doubledeck boat, “City of Orion,” formerly “Chautauqua,” was purchased and put on the lake in 1901, replete with bands and a dance floor on the upper

deck. Albert Bishop, an Orion resident today (1976), was one of the men who played in those bands.

In 1901, when E. R. Emmons' mill burned, John Winter and a Dr. O. Lau purchased the water power rights, erecting a small lighting plant to supply the assembly grounds. The Orion Light & Power Company, as it was called, also supplied some street lights to the village.

Swindlers again hit Orion in 1901. During the oil boom at the turn of the century, scores of "oil companies" were organized, including the Lake Orion Oil Company and the Hickey Oil Company. People such as Mr. E. J. Hickey would sell stock in a company for 2½ cents per share and then buy it back for twice the price, causing widespread speculation among potential local investors and heartbreak when the deceit was discovered. The money usually went into holes in the ground or into the pockets of the "company representative," with most of it going in the latter direction. A delegation from Orion did happen to visit one of the well sites near Leamington, Ontario, and saw mostly brine being pumped from the wells.³⁵

Aside from the swindlers, Orion was drawing resorters from all over, and with the completion of facilities on Bellevue and Park Islands, the village became known as "The Chautauqua of Lower Michigan."³⁶ Lake Orion, at present, is the only other site of a permanent Chautauqua in the state, the other being Bay View, northeast of Petoskey. And, like Bay View, Orion succeeded in drawing well-known speakers, including William Jennings Bryan, who favored the crowd with his "Cross of Gold" lecture. The Orion Chautauqua even offered the array of classes offered at Bay View, with courses such as dramatic speaking, theater, music and business. "Diplomas" were often granted to people who had completed the summer school programs sponsored by the Chautauqua.

The Methodist Church was on the move again in 1901, but this time it was a physical one. That year, after the Michigan Central Railroad depot was leveled by fire, and since the danger of fire presented itself to the wooden church every time a train passed, it was decided that the building would be moved to its present location, on the southwest corner of East Flint and Slater streets. A new Depot was built on the site, and a park laid out, complete with a bandstand for summer evening concerts.

In 1902, a fire destroyed the buildings which stood between what is now the Art Accents Center and the old Ver-Wood Bar, with the present home of Waltman's Bakery, Campbell's Jewelers, and the other store being constructed soon afterwards. The U. S. Post Office, in 1905, designated Lake Orion as the site of the first Marine Postal Service in the United States.³⁷ The chautauqua was sold to the Lake Orion Power & Improvement Association in 1906, but this company found, as did the Lake Orion Assembly Resort Company, that the financial commitments were too large, and the Association went into receivership in 1910.

In 1906, a new industry entered the Orion area. With the advent of the icebox, Messrs. Pittman and Dean opened an icehouse on Long Lake to cut ice out of the lake for

these early refrigerators. In 1911, the Hacker & Mackrohd Company of Detroit set up their ice operations near Pelton's Point. This proved to be a boon to the area, as its residents now had resort employment in the summer and work at the icehouses during the long, often dull, winters. Icehouses also sprang up on other township lakes, though their passing was not chronicled.

Fire again struck downtown in 1910 when the east side of Broadway, from Ramon's Beauty Salon north, was leveled, including the Commercial Hotel, Close's Barber Shop, and a store run by Henry Kessell. It was after this major fire that the first fire department in Orion Township was organized. A gasoline-powered engine was purchased, and the department's officers were: Chief, George Cole; Assistant Chief, Earl Speaker (Speaker & Son Hardware); and Assistant Engineer, C. L. Anderson.

In 1911, John Winter, now head of the recently formed Lake Orion Summer Homes Company, purchased the bankrupt Power and Improvement Association, and Park Island was revamped as a light amusement center with a dance hall and some rides, including a roller coaster. Area churches were granted free use of the Bellevue Island auditorium starting in 1913, when Winter's company purchased it from the Assembly Resort interests. A big Chautauqua was held in 1914 and signaled Winter's success in consolidating the bankrupt or faltering firms into his new resort company. Again, excellent boat service was a key to the company's success. Subdivisions began to spring up along all shores of the lake, mainly composed of resort cottages.

Detroit Edison entered Orion's utility picture in 1912 by purchasing the old Orion Light & Power Company, still on the site of the Emmons mill. A substation was built on the northwest corner of Washington and Church streets in 1926, and it still remains as one of the most attractive of Orion's early twentieth century buildings. The village adopted another utility soon afterwards. Previous to 1915, Orion had never had any type of water system, but with the laying of pipes and the sinking of the wells, this feat was accomplished in that year.

The first movie was brought to the Orion area by Jerry Bartholomew in 1913 to the Lincoln Theater, now the site of Lindner's Colorland TV store. According to Elmer Bartholomew, his son, many Westerns were shown at the Lincoln, with the William Tell Overture constituting background music for these early silent films. The Lincoln was built by Albert Ostrum.

A meeting in 1914 in the home of Mrs. Roy (Minnie) Haven led to the formation of what is now the Lake Orion Women's Club. A group of Orion ladies, meeting at the Haven home and later at the home of Mrs. George Bannister, organized the Lake Orion Ladies Literary Association (Club). Mrs. Sanford Westcott was elected its first president, and during her term, membership was increased to sixty women. The advent of World War I decreased membership though as many ladies left to do work for the Red Cross. Through the efforts of the club, a memorial to the "Heroes of the World War (I)" was placed in Eastlawn Cemetery (purchased by the village in 1921).

The ladies also set up a course of studies, with Mrs. George Crawford as instructor. By 1924, the ladies had joined the State and County Federation of Women's Clubs and changed their name to the Lake Orion Women's Club. In 1926, the women busied themselves with setting up what would eventually become the Orion Township Library.

Lapeer Road became a state trunkline in 1916 and was graveled. However, the conditions of the road in spring and winter soon made it almost impossible, and the decision to pave it was reached in 1929. Until that time, the main road had always passed through the town on Broadway, exiting on Elizabeth Street for its northward path to Oxford. In 1929, M-24 was rerouted around the village, by-passing the business district and effectively cutting the old Emmons (Green's) Park and Lakeside Hotel property in half. Broadway was first paved in 1919, and Flint Street in 1926. Adams and Indianwood roads were paved along with M-24 in 1929.

Wildwood Farms, the rural home of William Scripps, founder of the Detroit News, was completed in 1921. Located in the rolling and beautifully wooded center of the township, it is on Scripps Road near Joslyn. The Tudor-style home is now used by Guest House.

The Franklin Settlement Camp, part of the Franklin-Wright organization of Detroit, was opened in 1922. The camp offers a rural atmosphere for under-privileged children from the city and is located on the south side of Long Lake in the village.

Two subdivisions were developed in 1924 that would change the resort and population image of Orion Township. The Jacob Shick farm was sold to the newly formed Bunny Run Country Club and was developed as a residential area, at the east end of Long Lake, with cottages, a club, and beach, as well as a private golf course. The Indianwood Golf and Country Club was also established in 1924 and started developing homes as well as a fine golf course. The Western Open was held at Indianwood in 1930, as well as the Michigan P.G.A. Open for many years.

In 1926, as mentioned earlier, what became known as the Orion Township Public Library had its beginning. The Lake Orion Women's Club, under the direction of President Nora Lessiter, set up a library committee consisting of Mrs. A. L. Griggs (chairman), Mrs. Lillian Lessiter, Mrs. H. B. Flumerfelt, Mrs. Esther Meade, and Mrs. Marion Kelley. Although the club had maintained a club library since 1915,³⁸ a donation of at least 500 fiction and reference books by Mrs. Osceola Pooler caused the collection to be moved from one of the member's homes to a room in the village hall. The first library board, serving from May 1, 1929, had as members Mrs. H. B. (Leah) Flumerfelt, Mrs. A. L. (Mabel) Griggs, Mrs. Nora Lessiter, Mrs. Morgan (Bernice) Siple, Jesse Griffin, and Dr. Henry Powers. In the spring of 1928 township residents voted to tax themselves for library support, to take effect in 1929. In 1940, the library board approved the purchase of the old Max Wichman home on the northwest corner of West Flint and Lapeer Streets. The house was one hundred years old at the time. The Lake Orion Lion's Club decorated and furnished the children's room in 1948 with expansion causing

the Women's Club to vacate its quarters in the library and move next door to the old Vincent Brown home, which the club had purchased from the Methodist Church. In 1963, the Lapeer Street property was sold to the Community National Bank, and ground was broken in 1964 for the present library on M-24. Since 1965, when the new building opened, the library staff has constantly met the demands of a diverse public, culminating in the opening of a branch in Gingellville in 1973. With circulation approaching 70,000 annually and a wide array of services offered through the Wayne-Oakland Federated Library System (member since 1967), the Orion Township Library stands as one of the finest township libraries in north Oakland County.

Orion's heyday as a resort town came to a dramatic close with the beginning of the Depression years, 1929-30. Although the amusement rides and facilities still existed on Park Island, the Chautauqua was gone from Orion's shores. The American public had fallen in love with two inventions that spelled the end of Orion's boom period, which had lasted fifty years! The automobile gave people mobility unmatched, since it only depended on a cowpath of a road, and the interurban fell upon hard times, finally being discontinued in the early 1940's. Since the interurban route had been a main source of vacationers for the small resort, and the car allowed people to travel further north than the electric rails could carry them, Orion's summer population dropped steadily.

Radio, an infant growing daily in popularity, replaced one of the best-loved portions of the Chautauqua programs. Since its beginning in the 1870's, one of the most popular features of the Chautauqua was bringing classical music ensembles to rural and small-town American. Outside of the local bandstand-type bands, the farmer or outstate residents often had no chance to hear such formal music. But the advance of technology, and the increasingly common use of electricity, made radio an earlier form of entertainment because it was available in the home.

This sudden blow to Orion's summer-based economy, coupled with the depression, caused a decided shift in the direction of the area's growth. Another victim of the previously mentioned shift to electrical power turned out to be Lake Orion's icehouses, since the invention of the refrigerator sharply reduced the need for winter ice. This further limited Orion's already serious job shortage. This period also saw the failure of some Orion businesses, though evidence of an upturn in agricultural production was noted.

The depression also made for a shift in the employment of many Orion residents, turning the area into a satellite, or so-called "bedroom" community, of Pontiac. With sharp decreases in both the winter and summer related jobs, Orionites were forced to look to other communities for employment, with the automobile and associated factories in Pontiac being a logical choice.

The area still needed service-oriented businesses, though, and many new ones entered the Orion economy. Chains such as A & P and Kroger opened outlets in the

village, which also boasted three car dealerships: Lee C. Anderson (Chevrolet and Buick), E. R. Milliman (Ford), and Orion Auto Sales (Dodge). Although the village was still the economic center of the township, other businesses began to spring up in the young community of Gingellville. Started by Frank Gingell in 1927 as the Gingellmont Subdivision, after some homes and businesses were built it took the name of Gingellville, from the Gingell family who have inhabited the area for over a century.

An attempt to revive the resort was made in the mid-thirties with the establishment of the Michigan Inland Lakes Festival at Lake Orion. A very ambitious celebration was planned for the summer of 1940, including barbecues, speeches, and even a visit by then-Governor Luren Dickinson. The festival was short-lived, though, lasting only a few years. The year 1940 also saw the area hosting the Oakland County Agricultural Fair.

The Forties also witnessed the continuous building of homes, reflecting the desire of people to become permanent residents of Orion, many being former resorters and others being the sons and daughters of former Chautauqua-goers. The St. Joseph Catholic Church was completed in 1940, with the aim of consolidating the parishes of St. Thomas (Lake Orion), St. Elizabeth's (Oxford), and St. Anne (Ortonville). Ortonville was later added to a different parish. The St. Joseph School was started in 1952, and both the church and school are located on beautiful acreage north of the village on M-24.

When tragedy struck the country in December of 1941, and the United States was drawn into World War II, many Pontiac factories shifted more production aid in the war effort, and many Orion residents were employed by area munitions plants, as well as war production by Pontiac Motor and General Motors Truck and Coach.

What the Forties accomplished in Orion Township was the finishing of the process that had begun in the 1930's. The transition from the resort and agricultural status of the area to a suburban community had been completed, although small farms whose produce for roadside stands and private consumption were still in existence, as they are today. Two events worth noting from the decade were the opening of the new Anderson Chevrolet-Buick-Pontiac dealership on M-24 (1948), now Hanoute Chevrolet-Buick, and a visit by the General Motors "Trains of Tomorrow," featuring many of the modern home and transportation conveniences of the day. It stopped on Orion's New York Central Railroad tracks across from the Anderson (now Hanoute) dealership.

Bald Mountain State Recreation Area began operation in 1947. Located in that area originally known as the "Decker Settlement," it retains much of the natural beauty and hazards that confronted the pioneer. The park has grown from 2,400 acres in 1947 to 3,000 acres in 1976, with William Rathburg acting as the present park director.

The 1950's found Pontiac booming with a tremendous increase in the production of buses, cars and trucks. Orion had become a focal point for people moving northward into the rural atmosphere, in such areas as the Perry Acres and Judah Lake subdivisions. Another change taking place in this decade was the gradual shift from a Republican to a

Democratic influence in the direction of township government. Throughout most of the twentieth century and almost all of the nineteenth century, politics in Orion Township had been aligned with the Republican Party, but John Lessiter's election as township supervisor was the signal for a shift in the township government that would culminate in 1964, when President Johnson would be swept into office on a Democratic tide.

The Fifties also witnessed the consolidation of the schools in the township into one unit, to be known as the Lake Orion Community Schools. This task was undertaken in 1952, with schools such as Howarth and Eaton combining, with others following soon afterwards. The Lake Orion Community High School was dedicated in 1957. And to round off the decade, the Village of Lake Orion celebrated its centennial and entered its second century.

The 1960's found the Orion area molding its direction for the future. The advent of the Hi-Hill and Keatington subdivisions have stimulated an even greater influx of people into the township than ever before. By 1965, Park Island had been sold and became the site of a housing tract, featuring large, expensive lakefront homes. These developments also stirred a commercial surge with more businesses locating in Orion, such as L-S Foodland, a member of the Spartan Stores chain; and the Keatington Antique Village, a collection of unique stores housed in the tenant homes and farm out-buildings of the Scripps estate and home of the Lake Orion Jaycee's "Donut Festival."

A Lake Orion firm got into the space business in 1968 by supplying parts for NASA's Apollo program. The M. C. Division of Kelsey-Hayes, Inc., formerly M. C. Manufacturing, was a manufacturer of parts used in all of the Apollo flights. Orion entered the space field in a humorous way when Santa Claus arrived at the L-S Foodland parking lot by helicopter in 1965.

In addition to the library dedication in 1965, the Lake Orion Junior High (East) was completed and dedicated in 1965. And the Friends of the Orion Township Library held their first meeting in 1965.

Orion, after 155 years, has grown from an area supporting about twenty families in the 1820's to the home of at least 18,000 people in 1976. With the northward movement of the metropolitan area of Detroit, the Seventies have presented new challenges to Orion residents. Factions of the community are locked in a confrontation between the extensive development of the township and the wishes of many residents to preserve its environmental assets and agricultural heritage. Major land purchases have taken place between 1970 and 1975, including those by the Chrysler Realty Corporation (a subsidiary of Chrysler Corporation). These acquisitions have caused a major shift in ideas for the future development of the community, while compromises reached in the

past year seem to point in the direction of an area planning in the present for future needs and services.

The environment of Lake Orion has been improved with the recent completion of the sewer system, so much so that the red tinge (caused by minerals) that gave Paint Creek its name has returned.

Orion's present is one of waiting, planning and coping with and for the inevitable changes of the future, much as Jesse Decker and Needham Hemingway did 150 years earlier. All in all, the old saw is true; history does repeat itself – only the names change. And to that end, Orion seems to be waiting . . . for its second boom . . . for its second “coming of age.”

GHOST OFFICES

besides the abandoned post offices mentioned in the earlier part of this booklet (Decker, New Canandaigua and Mahopac), three other offices existed in Orion Township. None are around today, and they, with the others, have become “ghost” offices.

The first of these, located in western Orion Township, was the Jersey P. O., named for New Jersey, where most of the area settlers were from. It was housed at the Lessiter farm on Baldwin Road and served as a general store as well. It operated from 1847 through 1887, with William Kile as the first postmaster. (It is interesting to note that many post offices were established on the Pontiac-to-Lapeer stage route, now known as Baldwin Road, in 1847. Besides Mahopac and Jersey in Orion Township, the Brandon-Oxford township line possessed two, the Brandon P. O. and Oakwood P. O., as well as others in Lapeer County).

The Cole P. O., established on December 23, 1884, was a flag station on the Pontiac, Oxford and Port Austin Railroad (aka Pontiac, Oxford and Northern R. R.) The station was located on West Clarkston Road across from the Porritt Dairy building, with Erastus T. Cole as first postmaster. The station's name was changed to Randall Beach and the office was closed July 15, 1907. It is now a residential area.

Eames was also a flag station (1874) and post office on the P., O., and P.A. Railroad. Its postmaster, Charles A. Carpenter, was one of the largest land owners in Orion Township and had, at one time, considered building a canal from Judah Lake to Voorheis Lake. The office was established November 15, 1883, although no closing date is mentioned. The building, on Silverbell Road near the Joslyn Road intersection, also served as a general store, having burned to the ground in the summer of 1975. A creamery and slaughterhouse were also built near the station.

FOOTNOTES

1. Lillian Drake Avery, ed., Historic Michigan: Oakland County, vol. 3, (----, 1924), P. 18.
2. More information on the mound-building cultures is contained in Indian Heritage of America, Alvin M. Joseph, Jr., (New York: Knopf, 1968).
3. Wilbert B. Hinsdale, Archaeological Atlas of Michigan, (Ann Arbor, 1931).
4. Walter Romig, Michigan Place Names, (By the author: Grosse Pointe, Michigan, n.d.), P. 345. See also Paul M. Scott, "Mahopac: Orion's Ghost Town," Lake Orion Review, July 31, 1975, P. 12.
5. Thaddeus Seeley, ed., History of Oakland County, Michigan (Chicago, 1912), p.31.
6. The wood-burning boilers of the early steamers sometimes sent a shower of sparks out through the smokestack, often causing fires on the ships, some of which burned them to the waterline and caused many deaths.
7. Samuel Durant, ed., History of Oakland County, Michigan, 1817-1877, (Philadelphia, 1877), p. 256.
8. Ibid., p. 252.
9. Burton Historical Collections, Detroit Public Library, MS/ Hankinson Papers (John,-), 1836, February 14-November 12, (Daybook).
10. Durant, op. cit., p. 256.\
11. Scott, "Mahopac," op. cit., p. 12. See also Romig, op. cit., p. 345.
12. General Friend Palmer, Early Days in Detroit, (Detroit, 1906), p. 721. For more information on White Rock City, see Romig, Michigan Place Names, p. 601.
13. Durant, op. cit., p. 258.
14. Ibid.,
15. Lake Orion was known as Canandaigua Lake from the time of Stillson's paper city in 1835, up to and including the Oakland County Atlas of 1872.
16. Donalda Lessiter and Helen Chapin, "History of the United Methodist Church in Lake Orion," Mimeo.; 8pps., (Lake Orion, 1972), p. 1.
17. The asterisk following a school name denotes a building still standing.
18. Soon after this booklet was written, the Secretary of State office was closed. A record shop now occupies the site (6-2-1976).
19. Durant, op. cit., p. 258. See also Lessiter and Chapin, op. cit., p.2. This building has the only Michigan Historical Commission plaque in Orion Township (6-2-1976).
20. "Orion's First Newspaper Started by Red. Cordon," Orion Weekly Review, December 18, 1931. p. 9.
21. Orion Good News, June 15, 1874.

22. Durant, op. cit., p. 58.
23. "Lake Orion Grows Out of the Wilderness into Modern City," Orion Weekly Review, December 18, 1931, p. 10.
24. Durant, op. cit., p. 259.
25. Ibid.
26. See "Ghost" Offices, page 27.
27. A Fourth newspaper, the Orion Wave, was established at the turn of the century and was published by the lake and assembly interests. It is not known when it suspended publication, but it did not appear in the 1903 Michigan Manual list of newspapers.
28. "Lake Orion Grows," op. cit., p. 10.
29. "W.E. French Responsible for Early Telephones," Orion Weekly Review, December 18, 1931, p. 14.
30. "Lake Orion of 50 Years Ago, As the Village Appeared in 1881," Orion Weekly Review, December 18, 1931, p. 9.
31. "Lodges, Societies and Clubs-Fire Department," Orion Weekly Review, December 18, 1931, p.14.
32. "Believe It or Not," Orion Weekly Review, December 18, 1931, p. 13.
33. "Lake Orion Grows," op. cit., p. 10.
34. Ibid.
35. "When Orion Dreamed of Wealth in Oil," Orion Weekly Review, December 18, 1931, p. 13.
36. "Lake Orion Grows," op. cit., p. 10.
37. "Lake Orion Grows," op. cit., p. 11.
38. In 1915, the Lake Orion Ladies Literary Club library was registered with the Michigan State Library at Lansing.

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