

Livonia's 146 Years of Growth!

From a Rural Township to a Sprawling City

(EDITOR'S NOTE: The following history of Livonia, from its first township days up to 1885, was researched, compiled and written by Dominic P. Paris, its history and an organizer of the Livonia Historical Society.)

The story of Livonia began about 1819 when Mr. A. C. Johns settled in what is now the Newburgh area and where he later became a storekeeper and postmaster.

At one time Livonia was part of Bucklin Township, established in 1827 and named after William Bucklin, a justice of the peace.

In 1829, Bucklin Township was divided into two townships, one of which was to be named Livonia and the other to be named Richmond. But those two names were felt unsatisfactory because of existing postoffice names elsewhere in the United States.

To find names that were not already being used, "Nankin" and "Pekin" were selected and the Bucklin

Township division was approved. By 1834, the population of Livonia had grown considerably and the residents petitioned for local government. The division from Nankin was approved on March 17, 1835, and the present boundaries of the city were set.

FIRST ELECTION
The first election was held on the first Monday of April in that year with A. Brigham being chosen supervisor; David French, clerk; and A. Brigham, treasurer. Also elected were Thomas Harper, and Silas Joslin, inspectors of election.

The first meeting of the board was held at the Tamarack School House on the farm of Silas Joslin at what is now the Board of Education School. Among the earliest settlers was J. Simmons, who settled near Northville in 1824. He was closely followed by John Welsh and William Smith who

moved here the next year. Others followed in rapid order so that by 1832 there were at least 26 farms residing in the northern half of Nankin Township.

These included Dexter Briggs and David French, who took up land on the township in 1825. Others were: Luther and Lewis Briggs of the James MacFarlane farm for whom the township station was later named and who also operated a steam sawmill; and John C. Leach, a physician and surgeon, who came to Livonia in 1842, settling in the Seven Mile-Inkster area.

GETS RUSSIAN NAME
Actually, "Livonia" was originally the name of the province in Western Russia where the hunting grounds of the famous Baron Munchausen were located.

Livonia was a relatively flat territory with few hills and many swamps. The native trees were hemlock, birch, oak, and elm. In many of the areas, the stands were quite heavy. Several of the early farms had large swamps and were a problem to drain, especially in the spring.

It is interesting to note that Bull Creek was named for A. B. Bell, the first settler of Redford Township who settled there in 1818.

The early crops here were wheat, corn, oats, hay and fruit. Large flocks of sheep were raised for both wool and meat until early in the 1870's. At that time, coyotes and dogs raised havoc with several flocks and the farmers killed the remaining sheep and took them to Detroit where they were sold for 75 cents a carcass. After the coyotes were gone, the farmers replaced them with cows.

With the coming of the railroad in 1870, milk became an important cash crop and most of the farmers bringing the milk to Detroit.

Others brought their milk to live cheese factories in the township. One of these cheese factories was at Elm, another at Newburgh and Eight Mile Rd. On the Power farm, a third was on the Kator farm at Seven Mile and Levan Rds., while still another was near Nine Mile and Farmington Rds. in what is now known as the Pierson district.

More than a million pounds of cheese were manufactured annually and sold in Detroit. The price was 7 cents per pound and the cheese was a pound retail. As more milk was needed in Detroit, the cheese factories here were closed and business elsewhere they could not compete with the dairies in the price paid for milk.

VILLAGES SPRING UP
Around these farms and villages along the main roads, the farms were named Elmwood, Livonia Center, Newburgh or Nankin and Livonia Station.

Livonia Center is located at Farmington and Five Mile Rds. in the exact geographical center of the area. Two churches, a school, a store, the Grange Hall, the own hall and several family residences were built there and a cemetery was started in 1833 and is still in use.

Newburgh was perhaps the first village in the township. It was there that most of the early settlers resided. It was first called Nankin, but was later named Newburgh in 1834. An account explains it, Anthony Wayne Paddock, who settled here in 1831, came from Newburgh, N.Y.

Another explanation was that it was so named because it was a "new burg." Besides the school built there about 1831, the township had the oldest church and the oldest cemetery in the township. The church was established in 1834. The church was established in 1834, and the cemetery had its first use in 1827.

STAGE-COACH STOP
Long before the coming of Levi B. Starr, the township was a small community at what is now called Stark Rd. This was the third toll gate of the Plymouth Plank Rd. and was also the location of MacFarlane's Tavern, a changing place and an overnight stop for stage coaches.

Because Zachary Taylor, a former president of the U.S. army, stopped there, the area became known as Rough and Ready Corners.

This tavern was also the local headquarters for election rallies and has been said that many an election was won and lost there. It was also a depot for the underground railroad and was also the place where the ground about 1910, it was the home of John Daugherty, an early settler, who, who died in 1842, was buried in the "Hot" with a broad smile.

He had reason to smile, too, for the pleasant efforts of long ago have paid off.

office and railroad depot were built in the new area and the plank road to be known as Stark or Livonia Station.

Elm was perhaps the best known of the villages. It was located about the year 1822 by 1875 boasted a school, a post-office, established before the Civil War, a cheese factory, a store and half a dozen houses, several of which are still standing.

RAILROAD CAUSES SHIFT
Elm had its start on Plymouth Rd., but with the coming of the railroad it moved north a half mile in order to be on the line to Detroit. About 1860, the post office was discontinued due to the establishment of rural delivery with all mail coming from Plymouth.

Looking at a map of the township as it was in 1876, it is strange to note that most of the first things that were built to construct one on the north corner of Wayne Rd. and Ann Arbor Trail.

The site of this building was 18' by 24'. It was built by tax under the territorial law of 1827, long before the area was divided into civil districts. The building was clappedboard on the outside with the inside finished to the height of the windows.

Up to the time of better cars and better roads, Livonia was made by fastening a board in an inclined position against the walls. The seat was made by driving legs into auger-holes in the side of soft wood slabs. These with a chain, pulley and a whip, constituted the entire furniture. The whip was sometimes quite conspicuous, for in many an instance the whip was of such length that the teacher could reach every part of the building with it.

The Columbia Encyclopedia, in its history of Livonia, states that the name chosen "was based primarily on the hope that it would not duplicate any existing Township names."

LIVONIA or LIVLAND, former Russian Baltic province between the Gulf of Riga and Lake Pelpus. After the World War, N. Livonia became part of Estonia and a minor part of Latvia (see VIDZEME). The early inhabitants of the region were Letts and Livs, who, about the 12th Cent., were conquered by the Teutonic Knights who spent nearly a century in Christianizing them. The Grand Master of the order was established at Cesis (Wenden), whence the Knights warred with Muscovites and Lithuanians. In the 13th Cent., the Livonians towns Riga, Dorpat, and Revel were members of the Hanseatic League. The power of the Knights was weakened by the Reformation and Ivan IV of Russia seized N. Livonia in 1558. Although Knights disbanded, they retained their estates. Livonia and Latgale were united with Lithuania in 1561, and later came under Polish rule when Livonia became a battleground between Sweden and Poland. In 1621 Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden acquired Livonia; he founded the University of Dorpat; the Swedes alienated the barons by making reforms benefiting the serfs. Peter the Great in the Great Northern War (1700-1721) added Livonia to Russia; in 1819 Alexander liberated the Serfs.

Books were almost unknown. The Bible was a standard text for reading, and such necessities as blackboards, chalk, pencils, ruled paper and erasers were unknown. Maps and charts were also few and far between. As there was no graded system, the scholars stayed in school until they felt they had learned all the teacher had to offer.

In 1831 and again six years later, Livonia was divided into school districts. Each district was composed of four sections with the school to be built somewhere in the center of the district so that no child would have more than two miles to walk.

Changes were made in the districts by transfer of certain farms to other districts for the convenience of the owners. The best example of these changes can be shown by the Clarenceville School District which takes in part of two counties and three townships. Roads were a problem in the 19th century as well as in the early portion of the present one. As most of Livonia is quite level, the building and maintenance of these roads presented a problem. Even with the rebuilding of Plymouth Rd. as a roadway in 1833, a trip to Detroit was a three-day affair.

Some of these roads were impassable a good part of the time and a map of the township in 1841 shows the condition of the roads as being anywhere from good to bad and impassable.

Plymouth, Six Mile and Seven Mile Rds. were in good condition most of the year while Five Mile and Scheraga were poor and scarcely usable. Six Mile Rd. later became a plank road.

What is now Plymouth Rd. was on the direct coach route to Chicago. By 1832 there were three coaches weekly to Ypsilanti, all of which passed through Plymouth. In 1837, the service was extended to Chicago. The trip took over four hours and a half days. This service was terminated in 1873. The trip to Ypsilanti in 1840 took two days.

PLANK ROADS ARRIVE
Plank roads became popular in Michigan in the 1840's. The most famous of these was Grand River which cuts through the northeast corner of an account of the building of the Plymouth Plank Rd. makes interesting reading. This road was incorporated in 1850 with the right to lay-out and construct a plank road from Livonia and Greenfield until it intersected Grand River.

By the Plank Road Act of 1848 there was a toll gate every five miles. The first gate west of Grand River and Plymouth was at Wyoming and Chicago Blvd.

The second gate was at Conon's Tavern at River Rouge Park. The third gate was at the southeast corner of Stark and Plymouth Roads at MacFarlane's Tavern. The fourth gate was at the intersection of Plymouth Rd. and Mill St in Livonia.

The original road planks were 16 feet long by 12 inches wide and three inches thick. An excavation four inches by six inches was made in the road-bed. Stringers were laid and then the three-inch oak planks were laid on top. After several years many of the stringers or planks decayed and the open spaces filled up with mud and water. Some of the roads were 10 feet wide while others were 12 feet. Running parallel to some of the 10 foot roads was a gravel road which was used by the empty wagons returning from Detroit.

As the planks rotted and the holes filled with water, it became the custom to fill these with gravel. It soon became apparent that gravel was doing a better job and the maintenance of them was much cheaper. In 1873 the legislature granted the plank roads the right to sell and released them from all obligations with respect to gravel.

Before the coming of the plank roads and also during the greatest popularity, there were three railroads being built in the state, but none touched Livonia until the late 1860's. The railroad runs between Schoolcraft and Plymouth Rds. At it runs on the half section line, most of the land in the Township was donated by farmers living on the right of way.

The Detroit Union Railways also built a branch line serving the northwest section of the country. This line ran from Redford to Farmington, to Newburgh and Eight Mile Rds., then into Northville, Plymouth, Newburgh, Wayne and back to Detroit. This line was called the Hawk Line but ceased operating about 1925.

For the newcomers to Livonia, a listing of historic sites might be in order. Perhaps the most interesting is the Newburgh Methodist Church, located at Newburgh and Ann Arbor Trail. This building was constructed in 1834 and stood opposite the cemetery. It was sold to the Methodists in 1833 and moved to its present location in 1915 where it has been used as a place of worship until recently. This appears to be the oldest place of worship in the Detroit area as possible.

FIRST BURIAL IN 1827
About a half mile east of the old Livonia church, the Newburgh Cemetery where the first burial took place in 1827. Here can be found the G.A.R. monument and burial plot named after John and Alfred Ryder, two local boys who lost their lives at Gettysburg. Also located

here are the graves of at least three Revolutionary War veterans. Back to Newburgh Rd. and north to the small plank dam built by Ford in the late twenties. This used to be the site of a cider mill owned by Nicholas Boyce. The mill burned about 1875. The area around it was known as Vinegar Hill because of the odor from decomposing apples.

At Newburgh Rd. and Six Mile is the oldest school building in Livonia. The Briggs School was built shortly after consolidation of the school districts in Livonia in 1844. A short distance north is the home of Miss Caroline Riddle, a granddaughter of William Riddle, who settled here in 1830. This farm has been in possession of the family since that time and in recognition of this was granted a plaque by the Michigan Historical Commission.

Near Farmington Rd. on Seven Mile is an old Quaker meeting house built in 1848. It was so used until 1860 when it became a private home, chased by Mr. and Mrs. Lloyd Guillen in the 1940's; it has been restored to as much of the original as possible.

And last but not least is the old Livonia courthouse located on Middlebury Rd. north of Schoolcraft. It was here that Dan Blue held court as Justice of the Peace for 28 years.

The old and the new blend nicely in Livonia on this vital occasion, the City's 10th birthday. At Gettysburg. Also located

day.

QUAKER ACRES is destined, someday, to be historical monuments. Built in 1847, it served as a Quaker meeting house and contains many replicas of the mid-nineteenth century. It continues to

be privately occupied and is maintained by the Livonia Historical Society, which has a continuing interest in it. The old house is located on Seven Mile, west of Farmington Road.

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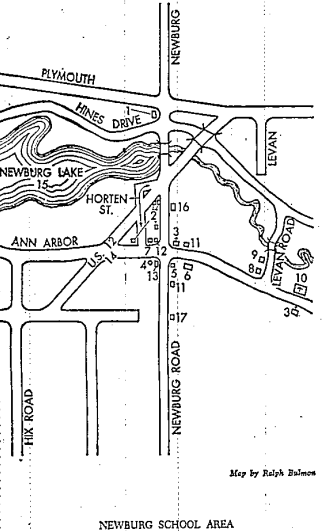
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THIS MAP OF the Livonia School Area shows one of the original crossroads of the Township of Livonia. Many of the 19th century landmarks are listed. This map appears in the booklet "Our City—Livonia, Mich.", which is published by the Livonia Public Schools.

Lanes Also In 25th

(Continued from Inside Cover)

The first ad, in the September 11th issue, read: "The Bowling Alley of Tomorrow League Bowling Starts—Seven Leagues in Weekly Playoff St. Michaels League Now Forming M A R E BOWLING A BEAUTIFUL HARRY Free instruction by Mr. Shoemith."

These two young upstairs—Livonia Lanes and the Livonian—survived the wars and the depression and the hills and valleys of the economy and now, arm in arm, are celebrating their 25th anniversary.

And as you look back, many changes have been made along the way.

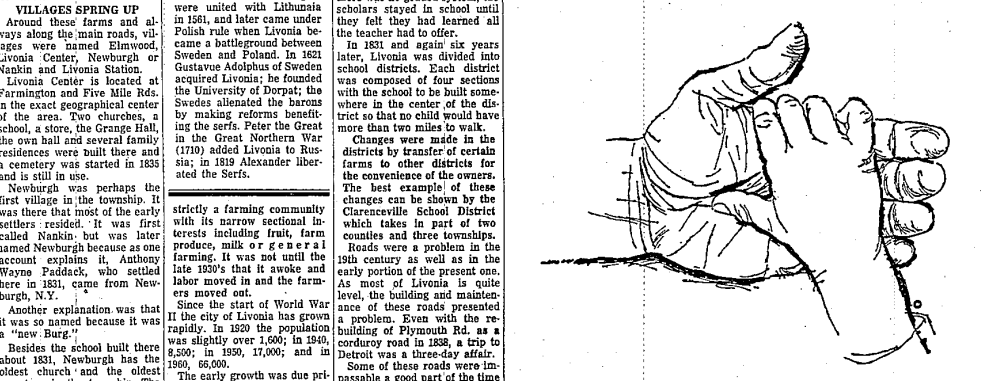
The sprawling, rural country side of those days, is now an incorporated city, a population of more than 80,000, and considered one of the fastest growing cities in America. And in the transition, we now boast such things as the Ford and General Motors plants, one of the biggest race tracks in the country, two high schools, and Junior high schools and elementary school buildings that go with them.

With them came a hospital, two colleges and the vast shopping centers—Wonderland and Livonia Mall—and other things that go to make up a big city.

The two pioneers in business have grown, too. The Livonian, which was just a small publication, has blossomed into the Livonia Observer and the major link in a chain covering the suburban area.

OBSERVER NEWSPAPERS

Our Infant Hand Is Out to You



Congratulations on an outstanding record of Community Service and Public Conscience during your first quarter century.

Though only 10 months old, we too are looking forward to fulfilling the needs of our community through continued expansion of the Hamilton Plan of Protection, Investment and Savings.

PLYMOUTH REGIONAL OFFICE
PAUL HAMILTON, Director
823 PENNIMAN
453-7600

LIVONIA REGIONAL OFFICE
GORDON PRIEST, Director
25321 FIVE MILE ROAD
531-5593

Alexander Hamilton Life INSURANCE COMPANY

843 PENNIMAN AVENUE, PLYMOUTH, MICHIGAN