

# TIMELINE OF OTSEGO COUNTY HISTORY

2016 UPDATED VERSION

1837: Michigan became the 26<sup>th</sup> state in the Union on January 26.

1840: The land which now encompasses Otsego County was surveyed by the federal government and was given the name Okkuddo County. Okkuddo is an Indian word meaning "sickly" or "stomach pains". It is unknown why this name was selected. At that time there were no roads or permanent settlements in the area.

1843: The State Legislature changed the name of the county to Otsego; possibly for Otsego County New York which comes from the Iroquois language meaning "clear water", "rock", or "the meeting place".

1850: Witness Tree: "This red pine marked June 17, 1850 during the original land survey of Michigan. The tree's diameter was eight inches at that time. The surveyor was William Burt." This tree and interpretive sign stand near the Pigeon River County State Forest headquarters in Corwith Township. (note – Burt Lake in Cheboygan County was named for this surveyor)

1854: David Ward, a lumber scout from Saginaw, traveled to the Otsego Lake area and was amazed at the fine stands of cork pine. He selected 16,000 acres of pine in what is now Hayes and Otsego Lake Townships and registered his claim at the land office in Ionia.

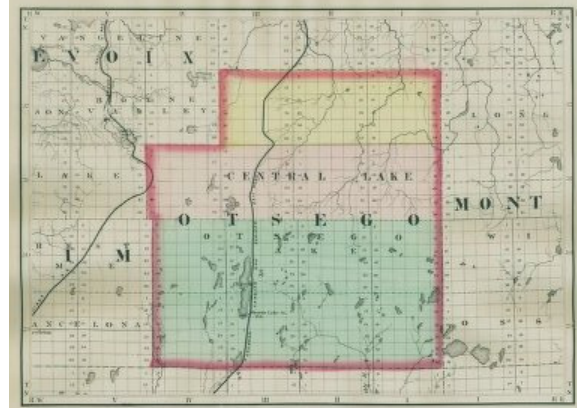
1861 -1865: Civil War. Even though the Civil War took place before anyone lived in Otsego County, it had an impact on the early development of our county. Many veterans of the Civil War were given federal government land in Otsego County in recognition of their military service. This reward encouraged people to move north and establish farms and communities.

1862: The Homestead Act was enacted which sold federal government land at low prices to people willing to clear and settle in wilderness areas such as Otsego County. A list of homestead patents granted to 140 pioneers is in the Otsego County centennial book.

1868: The first attempt at a settlement in Otsego County occurred along Crooked Lake (now known as Lake Manuka) by A. A. Dwight, a prominent Detroit lumberman.

1869: Charles Brink, a lumberman from Lapeer County, was hired by A.A. Dwight to lead a team of 14 men to clear land and set up a camp at the southeast corner of Otsego Lake. His wife, Jane, arrived later that year and is credited as being the first white female to take up residence in Otsego County. Charles Brink Road is named in his honor.

1869: Otsego County lost a portion of land before its first settlers arrived. Hudson Township, which made up the northwest corner of Otsego County, was removed and added to Charlevoix to give it enough land to establish its own county government.



1870: A. A. Dwight convinced the State Legislature to have the North Branch of the Au Sable River designated as a log driving stream and to have a state road built from Torch Lake to Otsego Lake. These accomplishments allowed the lumbering business to grow quickly.

1871: The Great Chicago Fire created a huge demand for lumber to rebuild the city. As a result, exploration for white pine in northern Michigan increased dramatically.

1872: Otsego Lake Village was established on the southeast corner of Otsego Lake by the lumbering firm of Smith, Kelley and Dwight. It was the first permanent settlement in the county. The village had several retail stores, a boarding house, an opera house, saloon, hotel, newspaper, post office, and school. Its population was 800 in 1884.

1872: The Mackinaw Branch of the Michigan Central Railroad (also known as the Jackson, Lansing & Saginaw Railroad) reached Otsego Lake Village which is located at what is now the intersection of Old 27 south and Mancelona Road.

1873: The railroad extended north and the community of Barnes was established and named for Orlando M. Barnes of Lansing. A short time later, it was re-named Gaylord in honor of Augustine S. Gaylord of Saginaw who was an attorney with the railroad.

1873: The community of Bradford Lake was established and was given a post office in 1876. The town was renamed Waters in 1885.

1874: Berryville (3 ½ miles southwest of Vanderbilt) was established with the arrival of John G. and Mary (Elder) Berry and their four children from Detroit. The businessman built a school, store, water-powered grist mill, and sawmill.



1875: Otsego County was established on March 12 and Otsego Lake Village was designated the county seat. The first four townships were Otsego Lake, Charlton, Livingston and Elmira Townships.

1875: The “Otsego County Herald” began publication in Otsego Lake Village. Today, the newspaper is the “Gaylord Herald Times” and is published bi-weekly.

1877: Corwith and Hayes Townships were established.

1877: The county seat was moved from Otsego Lake Village to Gaylord.

1879: Dover Township was established. Originally, it was a double township.

1881: Gaylord was incorporated as a village. It became a city in 1922.

1881: The Jackson, Lansing & Saginaw Railroad (Mackinaw Division of the Michigan Central Railroad) was extended to Vanderbilt from Gaylord.

1882: Bagley Township was established.

1882: County Poor Farm was established and located at Meecher and Allis Roads in Livingston Township. The facility closed in 1952 after 70 years of service.

1883: The community of Elmira (originally named Windsor) was platted along the Grand Rapids & Indiana Railroad (later named the Penn Central Railroad) on the Antrim County line. The town is believed to have been named for Elmira, New York.

1884: The Gaylord Masonic Lodge was chartered. In the early days of Otsego County, the Masonic Lodges played a vital role in the social life of the community. Other lodges included Charity Lodge #403 in Elmira, Alpha Lodge in Johannesburg, Cyrene Lodge #352 in Vanderbilt.

1888: Chester Township was established.



1891: The brick courthouse (photo to the left) was built in downtown Gaylord. The land was donated by Orlando M. Barnes, secretary of the railroad company. However, if the property was no longer used for county purposes, it would revert to Mr. Barnes or his heirs. Seventy-six years later, the brick building was torn down and replaced in 1967 with the City/County Building.

1893: The Gaylord State Bank started - originally as the Gaylord State Savings Bank - it changed its name in 1948. It was sold to Old Kent in 1981 and is now 5/3 Bank.

1895: The Gaylord branch of Dayton Last Block Works (DLBW) opened. The enterprise consisted of 27 buildings and covered 14 ½ acres. At its peak, DLBW had 100 employees. This factory was once the largest of its kind in the world. DLBW Gaylord branch closed in 1931.

1901: Johannesburg was established by the Johannesburg Manufacturing Company, a large sawmill operation that specialized in hemlock and hardwood lumber. The community was named after Johanna Hanson Bay. Johanna's **brother**, (not husband) Rasmus Hanson, was the president of the Johannesburg Manufacturing Company.

1901: The Village of Vanderbilt was incorporated. The community was named for railroad executive Cornelius Vanderbilt of New York.

1901: St. Mary Catholic Church (second church building on that site) was completed and dedicated on the southwest corner of Otsego Avenue and Mitchell Street in Gaylord. Today, the red brick landmark is the Mt. Carmel Centre and is used for performing arts. A state historical marker was unveiled in 2005.

1904: The Boyne City, Gaylord & Alpena Railroad extended from Elmira to Gaylord. By 1918 it was completed and reached its destination of Alpena. This provided an important east-west transportation route and included stops at Hallock, Sparr, Gibbs, and Vienna.

1905: The cannon on the courthouse lawn was dedicated in a 4th of July ceremony in memory of the Civil War veterans. The battleship gun was one of 26 cannons used on Admiral Farragut's flagship "Hartford".



1910: Gaylord Motor Car Company was established and went bankrupt in 1913. Approximately 350 cars were manufactured during its four years of business. The only known Gaylord Car in existence is on display at the Gaylord Area County Chamber of Commerce Visitors' Center.

1912: Gaylord Municipal Building was built on Court Street to the immediate east of the County Courthouse. It housed city offices, library, police and fire departments, and an auditorium.

1913: The community of Sparr was established along the route of the Boyne City, Gaylord, and Alpena Railroad. The town was named for local minister and farmer, Philip Sparr.

1913: Gaylord's Main Street was paved.

1913: The first airplane flew into Otsego County.

1916: The world-famous bottle fence was built in Waters for Henry Stephens.

1917: Seven elk were transplanted near Wolverine in Cheboygan County and eventually migrated to the Pigeon River State Forest in northeast Otsego County.

1917: The Extension Service office was established in Otsego County. Its educational activities focused on agriculture, home economics, community development, and 4-H youth programs.

1917: Ray Muscott of Waters, Michigan received a US Patent on June 27 for a motor sleigh - the forerunner of today's snowmobile.

1918: The Farm Bureau in Otsego County was organized.

1919: George Doumas purchased The Sugar Bowl – a candy store -- in downtown Gaylord. It was later expanded into a full-service restaurant and is one of the oldest family-owned businesses in Otsego County.

1920: Otsego Lake State Park was established on the east side of Otsego Lake. The property was purchased from a lumber company by local business and community leaders.

1923: Sawyer Township was established. It was created from the eastern portion of Dover Township. Sawyer Township existed until 1934 when it consolidated with Charlton Township.

1926: The first golf course – Gaylord Country Club – opened in Otsego County and was located near the present day K-Mart shopping center. It moved to Elmira Township in 1971.

1927: Dr. Gordon McKillop opened a 12 bed hospital on the second floor of his home located in Gaylord on the northeast corner of Main and Oak Streets. The hospital closed in 1936.

1928: US 27 – the main north south highway - was paved.

1928: The Mackinac and Au Sable State Forests were created. These two state forests cover a total of several hundred acres in Charlton, Chester, Hayes and Otsego Lake Townships.

1929: The Great Depression began

1932: Dearborn Colony in Charlton Township was established with 8 families relocated from Dearborn Michigan to 140 acre farms in eastern Otsego County. This “back to the farm” experimental relief program by the Dearborn Welfare Department only lasted a short time.

1934: Gaylord Kiwanis Club was formed with 35 members and Frank Shipp its first president.

1936: The first ski hill to operate in Otsego County - The Vanderbilt Ski Club - began operation.

1936: The Gaylord High School gymnasium was built of field stone by the WPA and CCC. The building is located on South Center Street and is now the Otsego County Community Center.

1937: The Northern Michigan Tuberculosis Sanatorium opened its 128-bed facility in Livingston Township. The four-story Sanatorium and its five accessory buildings occupied the 160 acre complex located 1 mile north of Gaylord. It later became a State Hospital for the mentally handicapped and named the Alpine Center. It closed in 1980 which was a loss of 200 jobs. (See 1981 for an update on this facility)



1939: Rural Electric Association (REA) brought electricity to rural county residents.

1939: Otsego Ski Club opened. In 1955, Alan Gornick purchased the resort from the estate of Donald McLouth. Today, the 4000 acre resort has 105 guest rooms, 2 golf courses, ski hill, and restaurant. The resort was also known as Hidden Valley.

1940: Otsego County Chamber of Commerce was established.

1941 – 1945: World War II had a major impact on Otsego County. In 1942, Dr. Robert Oppenheimer met with summer resident Dr. Arthur Compton at the Otsego Lake State Park to secretly discuss their scientific research that was related to the atom bomb later used in WWII.

1941: Higgins Industries – now H&H Tube -- opened a manufacturing plant in Vanderbilt.

1945: Standard Products opened in Bagley Township.

1950: WATC, the county's first radio station, began broadcasting its AM station.

1951: Glen's Market opened its first store. C. Glen and Doris Catt founded the company that eventually expanded to 26 stores with 2500 associates. It was sold in 1998 to Spartan Foods and re-named Family Fare in 2013.

1951: Otsego County Memorial Hospital opened with 34 beds. There hadn't been a hospital in the county for the past 15 years since the McKillop Hospital closed in 1936.



1956: “Our Hometown”, Vanderbilt’s newspaper began its weekly publication.

1956: Gaylord Rotary Club was chartered.

1957: The Mackinac Bridge opened. It connects Michigan’s two peninsulas.

1958: The Gaylord Industrial Development Corporation was formed.

1960s: Michaywe’ land development was formed. The 2000 acre planned unit development (PUD) includes 750 homes, 2 golf courses, and a clubhouse.

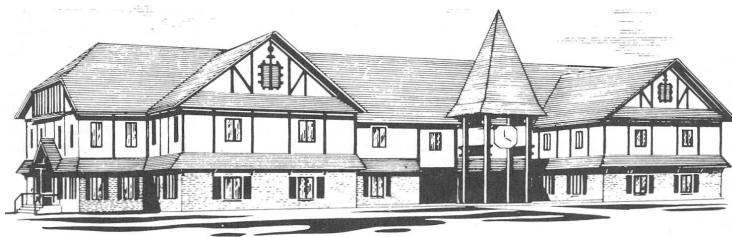
1962: The completion of I-75 through Otsego County contributed to the increase in tourism. Restaurants, gas stations, motels, resorts and recreation areas have benefited from being located on this new, major transportation route.

1963: The Otsego County Historical Society was established.

1964: Alpine Motif was introduced to downtown Gaylord by local businessman Gordon Everett.

1965: U.S. Plywood opened a manufacturing plant in Gaylord. The firm originally manufactured particle board under a Swiss patent. U.S. Plywood merged with Champion International in the 1970s and later became part of Georgia-Pacific Corporation (G-P). In late 2005, Koch Industries purchased G-P. The plant in Gaylord closed on March 6, 2006.

1965: The first Alpine Festival, later renamed Alpenfest, was held in Gaylord. This community celebration honors its sister city Pontrasina, Switzerland and provides a week long of entertainment for local residents as well as attracting thousands of visitors.



1965: Countywide zoning was enacted

1967: City / County Building was built in downtown Gaylord.

1968: Johannesburg School and Lewiston School consolidated to form the Johannesburg-Lewiston Area Schools. The elementary school is located in Lewiston and the high school is in Johannesburg. The district covers 291 square miles.

1971: The Gaylord Air Industrial Park west of I-75 on Dickerson Road was developed.

1971: Gaylord became the smallest diocese city in the United States. The Roman Catholic Diocese of Gaylord was created and includes 21 counties in the northern half of the Lower Peninsula. Edmund Szoka was its first bishop,.



1971: Big Lake School, the last of the more than 40 one-room schools in Otsego County, closed and consolidated with Gaylord Community Schools. The building was renovated and is now used as the Chester Township Hall.

1972: United Way was established in Otsego County.

1973: The Pigeon River County Advisory Council was created to help manage the large tract of state owned land located in Otsego, Cheboygan, and Montmorency Counties.

1974: McDonald's became the first fast food restaurant in Otsego County.

1975: Otsego County celebrated its centennial

1981: Alten Zimmer was built with 46 apartments for senior citizens and expanded to a total of 70 housing units in 1985.

1981: RSVP (Retired and Senior Volunteer Program) was established in Otsego County. Cynthia Sparks was the first executive director.

1981: The Alpine Center re-opened after renovating the former TB Sanatorium (see 1937). The 160 acre complex was later named in honor of long time County Commissioner, J. Richard Yuill of Corwith Township. Today the Center is the site of the Gaylord High School, The University Center Gaylord, M-TEC Kirtland – Gaylord, and various county, state, and federal agencies.

1981: The first “big box” chain store opened in Otsego County. K-Mart opened a retail store on South Otsego Avenue in Gaylord. It closed in 2013.

1982: The first officially designated centennial farm in Otsego County was the farm of Albert (Bob) and Anna Kassuba. The 3<sup>rd</sup> generation farm located in Bagley Township was established in 1882 by Al's grandfather, Frank Kassuba, Sr. who moved here from Germany.



1982: Green Timbers in Corwith Township was sold to the State of Michigan and added 6000 acres to the Pigeon River County State Forest.

1984: First special elk hunt since 1965 was conducted.

1985: The Otsego County Library moved from its location at the Courthouse to 700 W. Otsego Avenue in Gaylord. There are branch locations in Vanderbilt and Johannesburg.

1986: County voters defeated a zoning request for the proposed Borden chemical resin plant.



1986: Former-President Jimmy Carter shopped at the Alpine IGA for supplies during his hunting excursion to the Pigeon River Country State Forest.

1986: Gaylord Area Convention and Tourism Bureau was created. The bureau is funded by a room assessment fee paid by guests of area hotel, motels, and resorts.

1987: Otsego County celebrated Michigan's Sesquicentennial with a variety of events throughout the year. Interest in local history grew and resulted in reactivating the Historical Society.

1987: The Gaylord Golf Mecca was created by area golf courses.

1987: Project Nature opened near Vanderbilt on June 21. It went bankrupt in 1989 and was sold to Sylvan Resort in 1990.

1989: AREC (Alpine Regional Educational Center) was established as a consortium of colleges. It became the University Center at Gaylord in 2002.

1990: Wal-Mart opened in the White Pine Shopping Center located on M-32 West in Bagley Township.

1992: The Friendship Center began operation. The facility provides temporary housing for homeless people. Originally located at Otsego Memorial Hospital and then the Alpine Center (Christianson Building) it moved in 1997 to a former motel on Old 27 South across from the Otsego Lake State Park. The facility closed in 2013.

1992: The Otsego County Historical Museum opened on Main Street in downtown Gaylord.

1993: The "new" high school for Gaylord Community Schools was constructed at the Alpine Center in Livingston Township. The gymnasium was named in honor of long-time coach Jim Mongeau. The auditorium was named in honor of Alan Gornick.

1994: Bottle Cap Museum featuring Coca-Cola memorabilia opened in Sparr. It later moved to Grayling.

1995: The National Weather Service was built 2 miles northwest of Waters on Passenheim Road in Otsego Lake Township.

1996: The Otsego County Sportsplex opened. Located on Gornick Avenue, the recreation facility is funded by a county special millage and provides an indoor swimming pool and ice rink.

1997: The Volunteer Center of Otsego County was established.

1998: Winds exceeding 100 miles per hour caused \$10 million in damages. Portions of Otsego County were declared a disaster area.



2000: A statue of Claude E. Shannon was dedicated in downtown Gaylord. Shannon, a 1932 Gaylord graduate, had a distinguished career in electronic communications and is known as the father of the Information Theory.

2000: As the result of a Gaylord/Otsego County Chamber of Commerce Task Force investigation, the Otsego County Economic Alliance was established. Its first executive director, Jeff Ratcliffe, was hired in 2001.

2001: Pavilion on Court was constructed over Court Street between Main and First and used for special events such as the Farmers Market and seasonal festivals.

2002: The University Center at Gaylord and Kirtland M-TEC – Gaylord opened its classroom doors to students.

2004: “One County-One Vision” a year long community visioning process undertaken by community leaders to explore Otsego County’s future.

2004: The Edelweiss Village Shopping Center opened on Dickerson Road at the I-75 exit 282. Retail stores include Super Wal-Mart, Lowe’s, and Radio Shack.

2006: The roundabout on Old 27 North at the Alpine Center entrance was constructed

2007: Thunder Over Waters began its annual Labor Day weekend celebration.

2008 “Mistaken Identity” was published and gained national media attention. The book told the story of a traffic accident involving Gaylord native Whitney Cerak. Initially, it was believed that Whitney had been killed. However, five weeks later, it was discovered that she had been mistaken for another passenger, Laura Van Ryn.

2008: Gaylord built its new City Hall at 305 W. Main Street.

2010: War Memorial in downtown Johannesburg was unveiled.

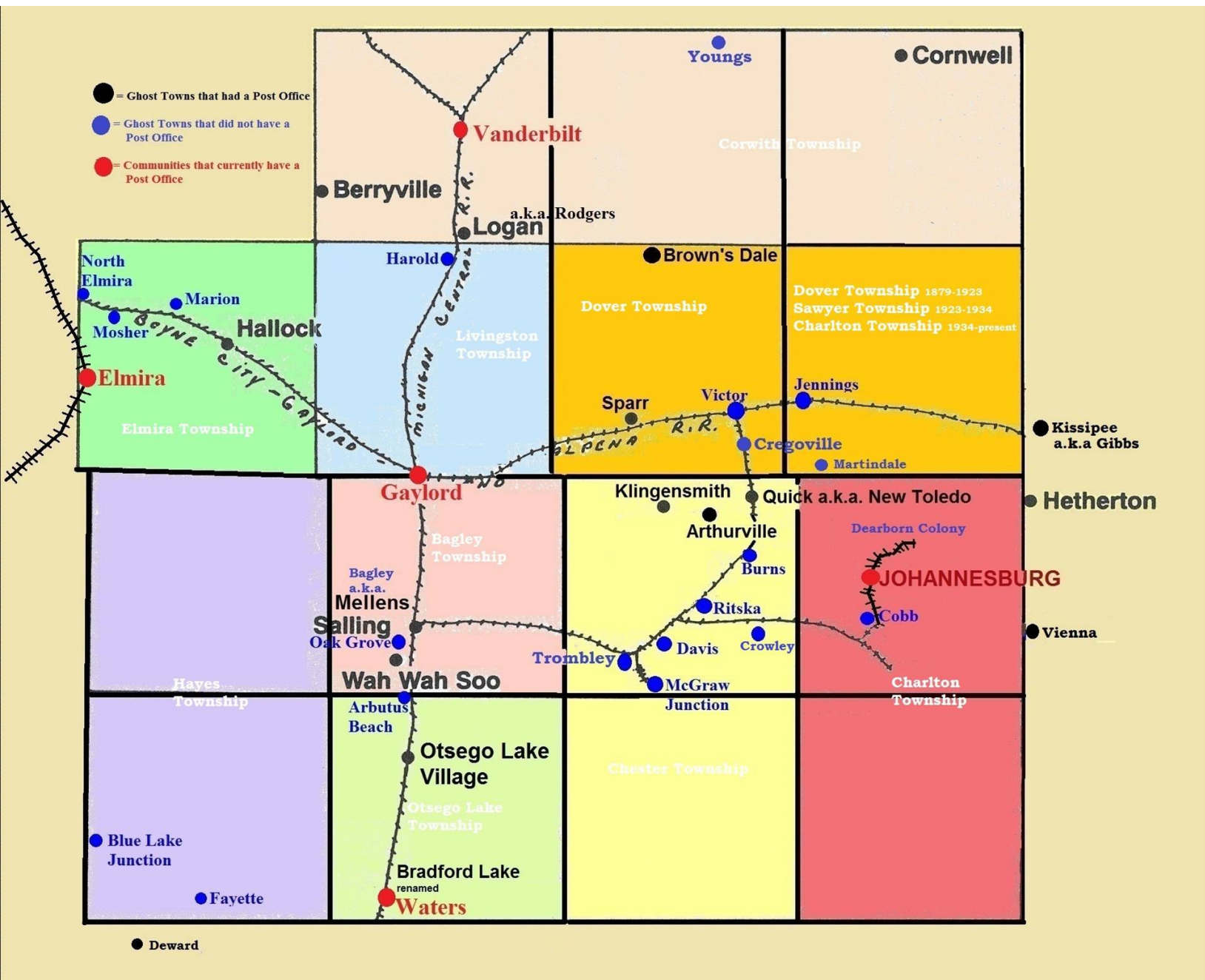
2010: Bay Mills Indian Community opened a 34-slot machine casino in Vanderbilt.

2012: The Otsego County Louis M. Groen Nature Preserve opened in Charlton Township. The 764 acre property was once the site of the Johannesburg Manufacturing Company and later Echo Valley Resort.



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