History Matters

Vanderbilt
Elmira Gaylord
Johannesburg
OTSEGO COUNTY
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Waters

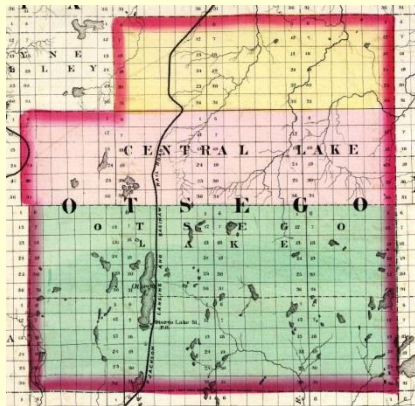**Update # 31**   **August 3, 2018**

I don't know about you, but I find maps fascinating. Especially maps of northern Michigan and Otsego County. Maps that display roads, rivers, and railroads show how our transportation routes connect us. Looking at maps published over time demonstrates how place names have changed, thriving communities later became ghost towns, and new highways brought about both challenges and opportunities.

Here's one of the earliest maps of our county with its original name Okkuddo in 1840. Notice the names of the surrounding counties – most also received new names three years later. *Click thumbnail for full size map*
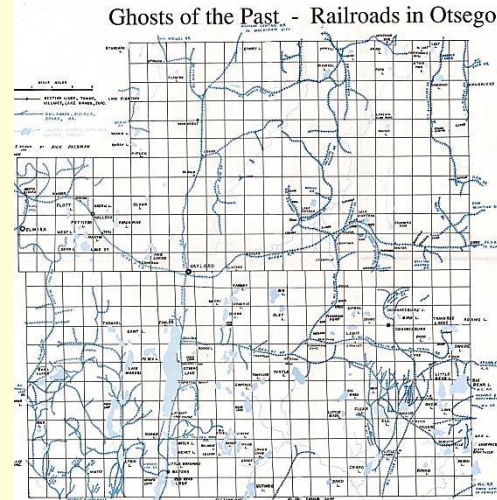
Even the shape of our county, with the upper left corner missing, tells a story. What is now Hudson Township was taken from Otsego County in 1869 and given to newly formed Charlevoix County.

This map from 1873 when we were still part of Antrim County shows 3 townships, a post office at Otsego Lake Village, and the Jackson, Lansing & Saginaw Railroad. Note: Gaylord had not yet been established. And it's a mystery why the railroad is shown so far north in 1873.

This map to the left is from 1884 and shows how much our county changed in 11 years. There were now eight post offices, five more townships, and two major roads going east and west. Chester Township had not yet been established. *Click thumbnail for full size map*

Ghosts of the Past - Railroads in Otsego

We are fortunate to have a detailed map of the many railroad spurs used during the lumbering era. "Ghosts of the Past Railroads in Otsego County", produced by Charlie Conn and Rick Packman is for sale at the Museum gift shop.

Township plat maps are also a great source of information. They list the owner and number of acres of each parcel. Some also include the location of one room schools, cemeteries, and unincorporated towns.

Gaylord, Waters, Johannesburg, and Logan are included in the Sanborn Fire Insurance maps in various years from 1898 to 1948. You can view and download these maps from the Library of Congress's web site. Here's the link

Otsego County was possibly the first in Michigan to promote tourism and recreation on a county-wide basis as indicated on this map from 1940. *Click thumbnail for full size map*