

Government, railroads paved way for Gaylord's beginning

Following the Civil War, the United States government and the Jackson, Lansing and Saginaw railroads encouraged the war veterans to settle in the new country by offering tracts of land to be "proved up" by homesteading. The first settlers arrived in what is now the city of Gaylord in 1873.

A village was platted at the head of the grade by O.M. Barnes of Lansing. The area was renamed Gaylord in honor of the attorney Augustine Smith Gaylord, practicing law in Saginaw and attorney for the railroad. While Mr. Gaylord never lived here, the law firm of Gaylord and Hanchett received a patent from the United States Government, dated March 20, 1874, for 40 acres of land in what is now Hayes Township.

In the seven years from the date the railroad ended at Gaylord until it was extended to Mackinaw, the town grew from a population of thirteen families to a total of four hundred. Otsego Lake was

the county seat at first. However, as settlement developed to the north because of better farm land, it was voted to move the county seat to Gaylord.

The first organization was that of the Congregational Church in 1874. After a number of mission ministers had come and gone, the Rev. A. Van Auken, who came in 1876, selected the present site of the church and dedicated the building, part of which is still in use, in 1879.

The county newspaper office was moved to Gaylord in 1878 and Gaylord was incorporated as a village in 1881. It remained a village until January 1922 when, by a vote of 114 for and 93 against, it became a city, 4th class. John P. Hamilton, village president at the time of change of government status, became the first mayor of the city, April 1922.

In 1881, the first water system was installed with wooden mains. Some of these original mains were

used until 1966 when the last one was removed from along Main Street. That same year, 1881, the Otsego County Agricultural Society was organized; the first County Fair was held on the Court House Square, and the Gaylord Band was formed. In 1884 the first complete tax roll was made and the first recorded deed appeared in the records. Also, in 1884 St. Mary's Catholic Church was established with the Rev. Fr. Leopold Opyrchalski as the first resident priest.

During this period several lumber mills were established within or very near to the village limits. These were Humphrey Brothers, Jackcons-Wylie, Frank Buell, Dayton Last Block Works.

The first doctor to live in Gaylord was N.L. Parmater, M.D. He arrived in the county in 1873 and homesteaded in Livingston Township. In 1888 he moved to Gaylord. His daughter, Vievea, was the first child born in the county October 14, 1874, and her daughter, Violette

Shipp Butcher still lives in Gaylord.

A bank was established in 1889 by Cooper and Crain, attorneys and real estate salesmen. It operated until March 1893 when a group of local business men took over the assets, added capital and became chartered as state bank, known as the Gaylord State Savings Bank. The name was changed to Gaylord State Bank in 1948.

In 1891, the local paper stated that there were 1,000 inhabitants in Gaylord and 50 businesses. That year a new Court House was constructed of brick. This served, with some alterations over the years, until the present one was built as a City-County Building in 1967.

The first electric generator was installed in 1898 by Richard Hartnell, a lumberman who had a sawmill on the shores of Otsego Lake. He also built a large brick hotel on the corner of Main and Center Streets. This burned in January, 1907 with the loss of one

life.

Frank Calkins, manager of the coal kiln north of town, built the first telephone line in 1899.

The life of the village was not always a rosey one. But, in spite of adversity, life must go on and these hardy people managed to make and enjoy their own entertainment. Besides the Gaylord Bank, there was an Opera House where many home talent plays were presented. There were lodges, musical groups, the Study Club which started in 1896 and became a federated club in 1906. There duplicate Whist groups, sometimes a Chautauqua course, and one of the great social events of the year was the formal dance sponsored by the Knights of Pythias.

By 1900, new problems came to the little town of Gaylord. The lumbering industry was beginning to slacken, and agriculture had begun to play a roll in the economy. But was it enough?

The many lakes in the county had begun to attract

people from other communities who were looking for a pleasant vacation spot. A group of local residents built a combination recreation shelter and boathouse on the east shore of Otsego Lake. Others came to build cottages, camping the first summer while they were building. Thus the resort business began, first in a small way, and expanding into a major industry.

Business leaders began looking for opportunities to help the community prosper in ways that held the promise of permanence. Factories were encouraged to locate here, after they had been carefully investigated.

Local business men financed an automobile assembly plant which produced the Gaylord car. Unfortunately, the project failed financially after only a few cars had been produced.

Other ideas were more successful. Some local businessmen bought the land where the State Park

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