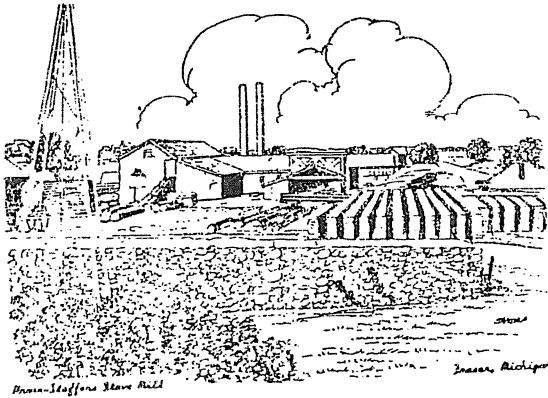


**HISTORY**



**OF**

**FRASER**



## HISTORY OF FRASER

The land which has become the City of Fraser has seen many travellers, settlers and governments. The Indians of the Chippewa and Wyandot tribes lived in this area when Europeans first came. It has been estimated that when the first explorers came there were only 15,000 Indians in all of what has become Michigan.

Since American history is usually described from the viewpoint of the thirteen New England Colonies, the early French explorations and settlements are often passed over. The early history of Michigan, in contrast to the experience of the Eastern Seaboard Colonies, is very much a chronicle of French activity. The motives and actions of French traders and missionaries influenced the development of Michigan and all their former colonies well into the nineteenth century.

When the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock in 1620, the French City of Quebec had been in existence for twelve years. From this settlement and others, French explorers, trappers and missionaries set out to traverse much of Michigan and nearby states in the 17th century. Etienne Brule was in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan in 1618-19, and he probably reached Lake Superior in 1622.

The activities of the French were centered in the Upper Peninsula for many years due to the opposition of the Iroquois in Ontario. In 1669, Adrien Jolliet with an Iroquois guide was apparently the first Frenchman to pass through the St. Clair River, Lake St. Clair and the Detroit River on his way to Montreal. The French were mainly interested in exploring

the country to further trade. They established posts and traded with the Indians for fur. There was little emigration of French families to settle in the new territories. The land still belonged to the Indians. The first fort in lower Michigan was built at St. Joseph on Lake Michigan by LaSalle in 1679. In 1701, the French signed a peace treaty with the Iroquois opening the Lower Peninsula to exploration and trade. In the same year Cadillac set out to establish a fort and trading post on the waterway between Lake Huron and Lake Erie. He selected the present site of Detroit for this outpost.

The conflicting claims of France and England to territory in the New World were one of the causes of their intermittent wars from 1689-1815 on the Continent and in the American wilderness. The various Indian tribes were sought as allies by both sides. The French were conclusively defeated in the French and Indian War. The Peace of Paris in 1763 included in its provisions the surrender of all French territory in the Northwest.

The British now owned the whole Great Lakes area. However, the few settlers in the area were French, and most of the Indian tribes had been allies of the French. To placate the fears of the Indians, the British government promulgated the Proclamation of 1763. This provided that American settlers should remain east of the Allegheny Mountains. The Great Lakes area was to be ruled by the military from forts; Michigan was to remain Indian territory. In 1774, the area of Michigan was made part of the territory of Quebec to provide civil government for the French settlers. The revolutionary War intervened and the plan was never fully realized.

The forts, Detroit and Michilimackinac, remained in British hands throughout the war. During this war, the first known settlers came to an area near Fraser. Moravian missionaries and some of their Delaware converts, seeking to avoid the war, built a community called New Gnadenbitten by the Clinton River outside what is now Mt. Clemens in 1782. Moravian Road follows part of their original route to Detroit. They remained there until 1786, and then moved to Canada. At the end of the war, Britain agreed to surrender this area to their former colonies in 1783. In fact, British troops occupied Michigan forts until 1796.

Once a part of the United States, Michigan was included in the Northwest Territory from 1796-1800. The Territory of Michigan was established in 1805. Due to the War of 1812 and many financial and administrative problems, the settlement and sale of land in Michigan did not really begin until after 1815. From 1815-1830 much of the state was surveyed and more land was obtained from the Indians by treaty.

The land which now comprises the City of Fraser and the nearby rivers and lakes have seen the movement of French trappers, English soldiers and Indians bearing furs to Detroit. With the exception of the Moravians, we have no record of specific settlers in the area. With the establishment of the Territorial Land Office in Detroit in 1818, the situation changes. We know at least who bought the land. Some of these people were speculators who never actually settled in the area. Fraser was quite a distance from Detroit and several miles from the lake; there is no record of land in the City of Fraser being sold until 1831. The present City of Fraser is comprised of Sections 30 and 31 of Clinton Township and Sections 5 and 6 of Erin Township (now Roseville). The

first recorded purchase was to James C. Chase. The last purchase of government owned land was made by Dennis Kelleher in April, 1836. All of the land was sold at \$1.25 per acre. Most of these early landowners were of English or Scottish descent. Until about mid-century, these names predominate on the land records. These early settlers were largely descendents of American colonists moving westward in search of more and better land. The immigrants from Europe were to come later.

There is little mention of this area in the first half of the 19th century. Macomb County was growing; Mt. Clemens, Romeo and Utica had been established. To make travel easier, the Detroit Erin Plank Road Company began to build Utica Plank Road (Utica Road) in 1851 from the Gratiot Turnpike to the City of Utica. This is really the beginning of the crossroads community which became Fraser. In 1858, the Chicago, Detroit and Canada Grand Trunk Junction Railroad Company purchased their right-of-way through Fraser, and a depot was later built on what is still called Depot Road. These two factors, the Utica Road and the Railway Depot, created a crossroads community which grew into a village and center for commerce in the immediate area.

Drawn by the commercial prospects of the area, a Detroit lawyer, Alexander J. Frazer, came to this area in 1857 or 1858. His father, also a lawyer, was a prominent figure in Detroit. He purchased land in Fraser in 1858 near the Grand Trunk right-of-way. He plotted a subdivision and may have built some houses. It is also possible he built and, perhaps, operated a hotel near the depot. Between 1860-1870 various pieces of this property were sold. After 1870, he apparently no longer lived in the

village. He was drowned in 1871 in Detroit. The village was named after him.

A community cannot be created without people. In the early 1850's many German immigrants were coming to the United States seeking land and political freedom. These settlers were, on the whole, more prosperous than many of the other immigrants. They were able to move across the continent to settle in the newer territories. Many of these people came to Michigan and to Macomb County. Some of the first German settlers were George Fleischut, John Oehmke, Justus Wormsbacher, Christopher and Sophia Arnes, Henry and Theodore Rattman and Fred Eberlein. A blacksmith shop was established by this Fred Eberlein in 1856; it was the first business in Fraser.

A barrel stave mill was built by Fred Eberlein in 1865. The mill passed through various hands. In the 1870's it was owned by Charles Knorr and Charles Steffens. A Macomb County history written in 1882 credits the Knorr and Steffens Mill with being one of the finest wood-working mills in Southern Michigan.

The first postmaster of Frazer, Leonard Scott, was appointed in 1860. Later in the same year, David McPherson, was appointed to this post and the town's name was changed to McPhersonville. In 1863, the settlement's name was changed back to Frazer. During the later half of the last century the town grew slowly. It was largely a German farming community. It had an industry, a railroad station and a busy road.

It also had churches and schools. The Germans who settled in the area were Lutheran. Actually as early as 1852, a minister, Reverend John Winkler, received land for a church, school, parsonage and cemetery.

This is the present site of St. John's Lutheran Church. The property was not used for the purpose immediately. There was a Lutheran Church at Utica and Fifteen Mile Road called the Buffalo Church after the synod of that name. In 1864, some members of that church established the present St. John's Church. In 1884, the present church building was constructed.

In 1894, the Village of Frazer was incorporated by an act of the State Legislature. The first officers of the village were Charles Steffens, president; George Steffens, clerk; Henry Dostzer, treasurer; Leonard Schneider, assessor; Charles Klein, Fred Duchlow, Fred Toella and Fred Eberlein, councilmen. The new village had a population of 230. According to the 1895 Macomb County Atlas, Frazer had several stores, a post office, town hall, a blacksmith shop, a hotel, the stave mill, a cigar manufacturing company, a church and school and the railroad depot.

In 1905, a fire started at Fourteen Mile and Utica Road, destroying several stores and buildings in the area. The State Bank of Fraser was established in 1910. Charles Berg, George Steffens and Henry Bohn were early presidents of the bank. In 1930, the present building was erected at Utica Road and Fourteen Mile.

There was some confusion about the spelling of the village's name. When the village was incorporated, the name was listed as Frazer. In 1928, the residents voted to legally change the spelling to Fraser.

The village grew slowly during the first part of the century. The new residents of Frazer in the 1920's were largely of Belgian descent, moving out of Detroit to find more land for truck gardening. The Van Marcke's and Van Thomme's were among those coming to Fraser at this time.

In 1928, Walter C. Steffens, Village President and member of the

County Plat Board, suggested and promoted the construction of Groesbeck Highway, named after Alex J. Groesbeck, then State Governor. This has been an important factor in the growth of Fraser.

In 1929, a new charter was adopted by the voters of this village providing for a commission form of government. Walter C. Steffens was the first president.

In 1940, the population of Fraser had only grown to 747. During this year, the village obtained the land at Garfield and Fourteen Mile which is now the Municipal Park.

In 1956, the population of the village had grown to 3,363. The village could now become a city. In the spring of that year, one square mile of the former Erin Township and one and three-quarters square miles of Clinton Township were annexed to make the present size of the City of Fraser - four square miles. In December of 1956, a new City Charter was approved, and in January of 1957, Fraser became a city. The property which was annexed includes many manufacturing shops and companies along Groesbeck Highway.

Especially during the 1960's, the population of Fraser grew rapidly. Many new homes and businesses were built. The population grew by 68% in the decade between 1960-1970. After nearly a century of slow growth, Fraser's people and industry have combined to create a rapidly growing, balanced community.

Compiled by

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