

## HISTORY OF THE “CITY OF FLAGS” DAVISON, MICHIGAN

When studying the history of the City of Davison, history buffs must first start with the history of Davison Township, and indeed Atlas Township as the city was linked to those areas for the first several years of its existence. It has long been known that an old Indian trail passed through what is now Davison Township. It went from Lake Copenenaconic through Atlas, then moved in a northeasterly direction to Potter Lake and Lake Nepessasing in Lapeer. One branch of this trail headed northwest to the Flint River. Early settlers' accounts of life in the Township make reference to the Indians passing through the area. There is no proven evidence of Indians living in the Davison area.

In June of 1831, Judge Norman Davison (and presumably his family) settled in the woods between Grand Blanc and the St. Clair River. He was purported to be the ONLY white settler in that area. He promptly christened the area “Davisonville” (now known as Atlas). Judge Davison was one of the original framers of the first Michigan Constitution as well as an early participant in the Michigan legislation.

In 1836, the first settlers to what is now Davison Township arrived from Charleston, Saratoga County, New York. The Seelye family was followed in 1837 by Christopher Miller. In about 1838, the Seelyes decided to build a general store and ashery on the Ridge Road, which connected Atlas to Lapeer. For the next several years, these businesses were known as Seelyeville, after their founders. It is not known precisely when Seelyeville was closed, however by 1873, State Road was through, and the 1889 Township map shows the Seelyeville section of the Ridge Road as closed.

By 1840, groups of early settlers in the area had grown large enough to present a petition to the State to make the area an official township. The petition requested that the township be called Middlebury but there was already a Middlebury Township in Shiawassee County, so the legislature settled on the name Davison Township in honor of Judge Davison. The first township meeting was held April 6, 1840, at Goodenough Townsend's home and he was elected the first township supervisor. He jokingly remarked later that everyone who attended the meeting was elected to an office.

Davison Township was originally attached to Lapeer County, but many early settlers had come from areas in Genesee County and their interests lay in that direction. They then petitioned Daniel Wakefield of Grand Blanc, representative from Genesee County, asking that the western tier of townships be attached to Genesee. There was one problem however. These new towns were decidedly Whig politically, and the county was predominantly Democratic. By adding these townships, Genesee County would undoubtedly become a Whig County. Mr. Wakefield, a Democrat, believed that if he argued in favor of the township, he would garner their votes for the Democrats, and the Flint Democrats concurred. The act to attach these townships to Genesee County was passed by the legislature March 8, 1843, over the objections of Lapeer County.

In the 1850's, another commercial area was beginning to develop while the store and ashery in Seelyeville was still in operation. Seth Wicker, Sr. had settled in Davison

Township in 1848 and later married Debby Sellye. She had previously purchased land from Judge Davison on the old Railroad (now Lapeer Road) and State Road. Chuck Rawson's Shell Station was located on this parcel of land. In 1852, the Wickers constructed a combination hotel/tavern on this site, just west of South State Road. This was the first hotel in Davison Township – a large white 2-story building with a long veranda running across the front. The hotel and tavern, known locally as Wicker's Corners, was known officially as the Davison Post Office and also served as the location for elections, meetings, or as a general gathering spot for community residents.

By 1865, Seth Wicker, Jr. had added a general store and livery stable to his business holdings on the property his mother, Debby, had purchased from Judge Davison. A stagecoach line was established from Flint to Lapeer via Lapeer Road (the old Railroad) in 1868 and the Wicker's Corners hotel, et al was used as a way station and horse transfer point. This had the added benefit of bringing the newspapers from Detroit (only a single day late) – for local residence to get news from outside the area.

In 1871, the railway, under construction for years, was finally completed and came to the area. The Davison Station was established one mile to the north of Wicker's Corners in what would later become the City of Davison. With the advent of the railroad, Wicker's Corners floundered and by 1890 the businesses had all closed and the buildings were soon thereafter abandoned.

As mentioned, the railway was under construction for years – 32 of them to be exact. As of 1869, all the land in what is known the City of Davison, was owned by three families – the William Hennings, the Eleazer Thurstons, and the George Burchs. In 1870, with the news of the impending completion of the railroad, a development group consisting of E.W. Rising and his partners, McQuigg and Hyatt, began buying up this land. Except for the coming railroad, these men could not have picked a poorer spot for a village. The land was low, poorly drained, and at least a mile off the beaten track. For some unknown reason, McQuigg and Hyatt gave up their interest in the development in the area surrounding the Davison Station about the time it was built, leaving E.W. Rising to go it alone, which he did in fine fashion, becoming a “founding father” of Davison's central business district as well as the namesake for the street in modern Davison's industrial park area. Settlements and improvements in the area were a bit slow comparatively, the village having 165 residents in 1880, but increasing to 582 by 1890. On May 20, 1889, in response to petitions by local residents, the Michigan State Legislature passed House Bill 263, which formally incorporated the Village of Davison, in the County of Genesee and Davison was officially “born”.