

A County Is Proclaimed: The Founding of Wayne County and Grosse Pointe Township

by Clarence M. Burton

On August 15, 1796, only a month after the arrival of the first American troops in Detroit, Winthrop Sargent, secretary and acting governor of the Northwest Territory, issued a proclamation formally establishing Wayne County. Named in honor of General Anthony Wayne, the county included most of Michigan, and parts of present-day Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio. Two years later, on November 1, 1798, the county was divided into four townships, one of which was named Hamtramck. On April 1, 1848 Hamtramck Township was divided, and the Township of Grosse Pointe was formed.

Wayne County

THE FIRST MOVE to establish a county west of the Allegheny Mountains was made by the Virginia Legislature in October, 1778, when an act was passed creating Illinois County, which included all the region afterward embraced in the Northwest Territory. On June 16, 1792, four years before Detroit became an American possession, John Graves Simcoe, lieutenant-governor of Upper Canada, issued a proclamation establishing Kent County, which embraced all of the present State of Michigan and extended northward to the Hudson's Bay country. However, before the county was organized, that part of it west of Lake Huron became part of the United States and Simcoe's proclamation

was consequently ignored.

Wayne County was established August 15, 1796, by the following proclamation issued by Winthrop Sargent, secretary and acting governor of the Northwest Territory:

"To all persons to whom these presents shall come – Greeting:

"Whereas, by an ordinance of Congress of the thirteenth of July, one thousand seven hundred and eighty-seven, for the settlement of the Territory of the United States Northwest of the River Ohio, it is directed that for the due execution of process, civil and criminal, the Governors shall make proper Divisions of the said Territory and proceed from time to time, as circumstances may require, to lay out the same into Counties and Townships, and Whereas, it appearing to me expedient that a new county should immediately be erected to include the settlements at Detroit, lying and being within the following

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Boundaries, viz.: beginning

“At the mouth of the Cuyahoga River upon Lake Erie, and with the said river to the portage between it and the Tuscarawa branch of the Muskingum, thence down the said branch to the forks, at the carrying place above Fort Lawrence (Fort Laurens, near the present City of Canton, Ohio), thence by a west line to the eastern boundary of Hamilton County (which is a due north line from the lower Shawonese Town upon the Sciota River), thence by a line west-northerly to the southern part of the portage between the Miamis of the Ohio and the St. Mary’s River, thence by a line also west-northerly to the southwestern part of the portage between the Wabash and the Miamis of Lake Erie, where Fort Wayne now stands, thence by a line west-northerly to the most southern part of Lake Michigan, thence along the western shore of the same to the northwest part thereof (including the lands upon the streams emptying into the said Lake), thence by a due north line to the territorial Boundary in Lake Superior, and with the said Boundary through Lake Huron, St. Clair and Erie to the mouth of the Cuyahoga River, the place of beginning— which said county shall have and enjoy all and singular the Jurisdiction, Rights, Liberties, Privileges and Immunities whatsoever to a county appertaining, and which any other county that now is or hereafter may be erected and laid out shall or ought to enjoy, conformably to the ordinance of Congress before mentioned.

“In Testimony whereof I have hereunto set my hand and affixed the seal of the Territory, this fifteenth day of August, in the Twenty-first year of the Independence of the United States, A.D., one thousand seven hundred and ninety-six.

“Winthrop Sargent.”

The boundaries of Wayne County, as named in the original proclamation, were indeed far-reaching (See Fig. 1). The county included a large tract of country in northwestern Ohio (about one-fifth of the state); a strip



Figure 1

across the northern part of Indiana (all north of a line from Fort Wayne to the head of Lake Michigan); all the Lower Peninsula of Michigan; about three-fourths of the Upper Peninsula, and all that part of Wisconsin drained into Lake Michigan— nearly seventy-five thousand square miles.

The consensus of opinion among the citizens of Wayne County was that the new civil division should be named in honor of Gen. Anthony Wayne. The general, having been

officially informed of the tribute accorded him, replied as follows:

“To the Curé and Inhabitants of Detroit, and the Officers, Civil and Military, of the County of Wayne:

“Gentlemen—

“I have received with much pleasure your polite address of this date, which not only demands my grateful acknowledgment for the flattering testimonies it contains of your esteem, but affords me an opportunity to remark with what pleasure I have observed the general satisfaction which has appeared to reveal among the citizens of Detroit and its neighborhood upon the establishment of the Government of the United States, and the alacrity and laudable desire they have evinced to promote the due execution thereof; a conduct so wise, while it merits the warm regards of their fellow-citizens of the Union, must insure to themselves all the advantages which will flow from and be the natural effect of the administration of good laws, under so happy a government.

“I will with much pleasure communicate to the President the warm sentiments of zeal and attachment which you have expressed toward the Government of the United States; and I cannot permit myself to depart hence without assuring you that I shall always take a peculiar interest in whatever may contribute to promote the happiness and prosperity of this county, to which my name has the honor to be attached.

“I have the honor to be, gentlemen, with such esteem,

“Your most obedient and humble servant,

“Ant’y Wayne.

“Headquarters, Detroit, November 14, 1796.”

On May 7, 1800, President Adams approved an act of Congress creating the Territory of Indiana, leaving the Northwest Territory composed only of the State of Ohio and that part of Michigan east of a line drawn due north from Fort Recovery, which line practically divided the state longitudinally into equal parts. By this act the boundaries of Wayne County were changed so as to include only that part of the original county which lay in Ohio, the eastern half of the Lower Peninsula and a very small section of the eastern part of the Upper Peninsula of Michigan.

A further reduction of the area of Wayne County was made July 10, 1800, when Trumbull County, Ohio, was created by proclamation of Governor St. Clair. By this proclamation the eastern boundary of Wayne was fixed at a north and south line about five miles west of the City of Sandusky, Ohio, (See Fig. 2).

On November 23, 1801, the General Assembly of the Northwest Territory met at Chillicothe. This was the first session after the erection of Indiana Territory. Wayne County was represented by Charles F. Chabert Joncaire, George



Portrait of General Anthony Wayne.

General Wayne, for whom Wayne County is named, was commander-in-chief of the Legion of the United States (as the American Army was known in 1796). He arrived in Detroit on August 13, 1796 and established his headquarters in a house on Jefferson Avenue just east of Washington Boulevard. Wayne remained in Detroit until November 15. He then left for Philadelphia but became seriously ill on the way and died at present day Erie on December 15, 1796. Illustration courtesy of the Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library.

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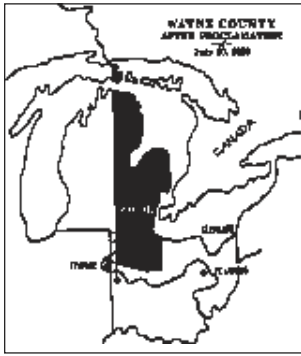


Figure 2



Figure 3

McDougall and Jonathan Schieffelin, the two last named having served as British soldiers under Henry Hamilton during the Revolution.

On April 30, 1802, President Jefferson approved the act of Congress providing for the admission of Ohio to statehood, but it was not formally admitted until February 19, 1803. Then that part of Wayne County lying west of Trumbull County, as erected by the proclamation of July 10, 1800, and south of the present boundary line of Michigan, was cut off and added to the new state (See Fig. 3).

The act of April 30, 1802, also increased the size of Indiana Territory to include the present states of Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin, and that portion of Minnesota lying east of the Mississippi River and a line drawn due north from the source of that stream to the international boundary.

With the admission of Ohio into the Union and the large addition to the Territory of Indiana came the necessity for a revision of the boundaries of Wayne County. Consequently, on January 14, 1803, Gen. William H. Harrison, governor of Indiana Territory, whose capital was at Vincennes, issued a proclamation, the part of which pertaining to Wayne County follows:

"I, William Henry Harrison, governor of Indiana Territory, by the authority vested in me by the ordinance for the government of the Territory, do ordain and declare that a county shall be formed in the northeastern part of the Territory, to be known and designated by the name and style of the County of Wayne. And the boundaries of said county shall be as follows, to wit:

"Beginning at a point where an east and west line, passing through the southern extreme of Lake Michigan, would intersect a north and south line, passing through the most westerly extreme of said lake and thence north along the last mentioned line to the territorial boundary of the United States; thence along the said boundary line to a point where an east and west line, passing through the southerly extreme of Lake Michigan,

would intersect the same; thence west along the last mentioned line to the place of beginning."

As defined in the above, the boundaries of Wayne County included all the Lower Peninsula of Michigan, all of the Upper Peninsula, a strip about ten miles wide across the northern part of the present State of Indiana, a small tract in Northwestern Ohio and the peninsula lying between the Green Bay and Lake Michigan in Wisconsin (See Fig. 4).

On January 11, 1805, President Jefferson approved the act of Congress erecting the Territory of Michigan, the western boundary of which was a north and south line passing through the center of Lake Michigan, striking the Upper Peninsula about half way between the present cities of Escanaba and Manistique, which line also formed the western boundary of Wayne County—the only county in the new territory. As constituted at this time Wayne County embraced the Lower Peninsula, the eastern half of the Upper Peninsula and the islands about the Straits of Mackinaw (See Fig. 5).

After the formation of Michigan Territory no change was made in the area and boundaries of Wayne County for more than ten years. On November 21, 1815, Gen. Lewis Cass, then governor of the territory, issued a proclamation which materially reduced the size of the county. By this proclamation the western boundary was represented by a line running due north from the mouth of the Great Auglaize River to a point due west of the outlet of Lake Huron. This point is almost on the northern boundary of the present County of Ingham, a short distance east of the City of Lansing. From there the boundary line of Wayne County ran in a northeasterly direction "to the White Rock in Lake Huron" (See Fig 6).

The latter line and the one forming the western boundary of the county represented the limits of the tract ceded to the United States by the Indians at Greenville, Ohio, August 3, 1795. Under the proclamation of 1815 Wayne County included the present counties of Lapeer, Lenawee, Livingston, Macomb, Monroe, Oakland, St. Clair, Sanilac, Washtenaw,

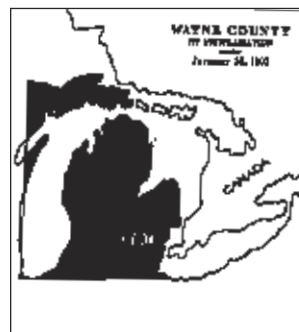


Figure 4



Figure 5

THE FOUNDING OF WAYNE COUNTY AND GROSE POINTE TOWNSHIP

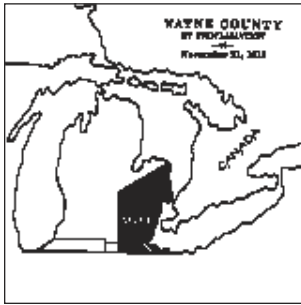


Figure 6

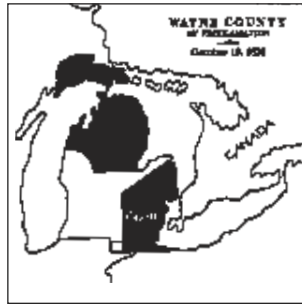


Figure 7

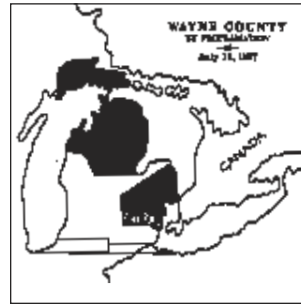


Figure 8

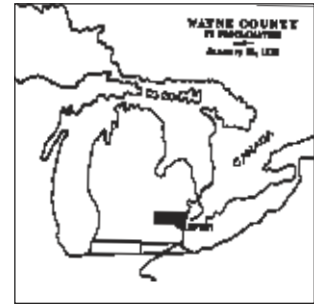


Figure 9

and Wayne; all of Genesee County except a small triangle in the northwest corner; and portions of Huron, Ingham, Jackson, Shiawassee, and Tuscola.

On October 18, 1816, Governor Cass issued another proclamation, adding to Wayne County the District of Mackinaw, which had been created on July 3, 1805, by proclamation of Gen. William Hull, the first territorial governor of Michigan, with the following boundaries:

“Beginning at the most western and southern point of the Bay of Saginaw; thence westwardly to the nearest part of the River Marquette; thence along the southern bank thereof to Lake Michigan; thence due west to the middle thereof; thence north, east and south with the lines of the Territory of Michigan and the United States to the center of Lake Huron; thence in a straight line to the place of beginning.”

Wayne County was now composed of two separate and distance parts (See Fig. 7). First, the county as established by Governor Cass’ proclamation of November 21, 1815, and, second, the District of Mackinaw. The latter included the counties of Alcona, Alpena, Antrim, Arenac, Benzie, Charlevoix, Cheboygan, Clare, Crawford, Emmet, Gladwin, Grand Traverse, Iosco, Kalkaska, Leelanau, Manistee, Missaukee, Montmorency, Ogemaw, Osceola, Oscoda, Otsego, Roscommon, Wexford, and parts of Bay, Isabella, Lake, Mecosta, and Midland in the Lower Peninsula, and the counties of Chippewa, Luce, Mackinac, and Schoolcraft in the Upper Peninsula.

In 1817 the work of dismembering this imperial county was begun. By a proclamation issued on July 14th of that year, Governor Cass cut off Monroe County from the southern part of Wayne, the new county including the present counties of Monroe and Lenawee (See Fig. 8).

On January 15, 1818, another proclamation of Governor Cass provided for the organization of Macomb County, in which proclamation the base line of the United States survey in Michigan was made the northern boundary of Wayne County, which then included the present counties of Wayne and Washtenaw, and a strip six miles wide across the eastern

part of Jackson County (See Fig. 9).

Washtenaw County was set off from Wayne by proclamation of Governor Cass September 10, 1822. As erected by this proclamation, Washtenaw included the present county of that name, the southern half of Livingston, the eastern tier of Congressional townships in Jackson, and the four townships in the southeast corner of Ingham. It was attached to Wayne for revenue, election, and judicial purposes until such time as its organization as a separate and independent country should be completed (See Fig. 10). This complete organization occurred by legislative enactment November 20, 1826, since which time there have been no changes in the boundaries or area (626 square miles) of Wayne County (See Fig. 11).

Grose Pointe Township

THE EARLY SETTLERS of New England adopted the township as the unit of local government, while in Virginia and some of the other southern colonies the county was made the unit. In the New England states the town meeting is still the popular medium for the expression of opinion on all matters touching the public welfare. Thomas



Figure 10



Figure 11

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Jefferson stated:

“Those wards, called townships in New England, are the vital principle of their governments and have proved themselves the wisest invention ever devised by the wit of man for the perfect exercise of self-government, and for its preservation.”

A little later, when Mr. Jefferson was President of the United States, he learned the power of the New England township, when town meetings were held in all the New England states to protest against the enforcement of the Embargo Act of 1807, and by their concerted action defeated the purpose of Congress in the passage of that measure.

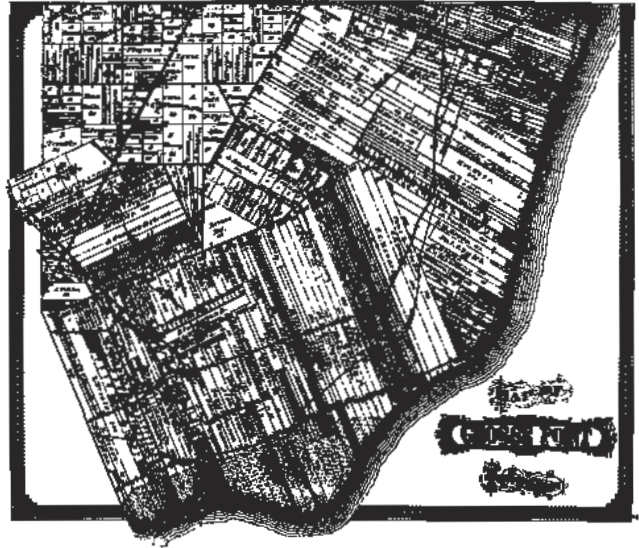
In the states erected out of the Northwest Territory—Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin—the county and township systems are combined in such a manner as to leave the latter free to exercise authority in all matters pertaining to local affairs, and yet remain tributary to the county in matters affecting the larger territory. In some of these states the affairs of the township are looked after by an official known as a trustee, and the county business is administered by a board of county commissioners, usually consisting of three members. In other states the most important officer in the township is the supervisor, the supervisors of the several townships constituting a board for the review of and final action on the county business, such as tax levies and appropriations.

Michigan followed the former plan until 1827, when the office of county commissioner was abolished by an act of the Legislature. It was revised by law in 1838 and was again abolished in 1842, when the board of supervisors was established.

An act of the Legislature of the Northwest Territory, approved by Governor St. Clair on November 6, 1790, authorized the Court of Quarter Sessions of the Peace to divide the counties into townships.

Wayne County was not established until August 15, 1796. On November 1, 1798, the Court of Quarter Sessions of the Peace divided the county into four townships, namely: Detroit, Hamtramck, Mackinaw and Sargent. At that time the county embraced all the present State of Michigan except the western extremity of the Upper Peninsula, a strip across Northern Indiana and Northwestern Ohio, a little of Northeastern Illinois, including the site of the present City of Chicago, and the eastern part of Wisconsin. Hence, each of these first townships was considerably larger than any of the counties of today.

By the proclamation of January 15, 1818, Governor Cass erected the townships of Hamtramck, Huron, Monguagon, St. Clair and Springwells, within the present limits of Wayne County. The western boundary of these townships was the line of the private claims farthest from the Detroit River. No further change was made until after Wayne County was



Map of Grosse Pointe Township - 1876.

reduced to its present dimensions.

On April 12, 1827, the day Governor Cass approved the act abolishing the board of county commissioners, the county was divided into nine townships, to wit: Brownstown, Bucklin, Detroit, Ecorse, Hamtramck, Huron, Monguagon, Plymouth, and Springwells. Numerous changes have been made since 1827 by the erection of new townships and the alteration of boundary lines.

The territory comprising the Township of Grosse Pointe was originally included in Hamtramck Township. It was set off as a separate township on April 1, 1848, and was named Grosse Pointe from the point of land projecting into the water at the foot of Lake St. Clair. As then erected, Grosse Pointe was bounded “on the north by Macomb County; on the east and south by Lake St. Clair and the Detroit River; on the west by the section line two miles west of the line dividing ranges 11 and 12 east, the north line of Private Claim No. 394 and Connor’s Creek, the line between sections 22 and 23, township No. 1 south, range 12 east, and the west line of Private Claim No. 725.” It was divided in May, 1895, and the western and northern part were erected into the Township of Gratiot.

The first Settlers in this township were French, some of whom were descendants of those who came with Cadillac to Detroit in 1701. Here lived the Beaufaits, St. Aubins, Rivards, Gouins, the De Lorme family and others who were prominent in the early history of Wayne County. In 1764 Charles Chovin located near where the Detroit waterworks are now situated and built a rather unsubstantial cabin, in which he lived for about five years. He then bought the claim of Thomas Stewart and Jean Simare on the “Grand

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Marais," just west of Connor's Creek, and moved into the log house they had erected. In October, 1796, his son, Jean Baptiste Chovin, sold the property to William Park and George Meldrum, who a few years later conveyed it to William Macomb. Macomb died in April, 1796. Peter Van Avery purchased this place in 1816, re-modeled and enlarged the house, which in 1875 was said to have been the oldest house in Michigan.

The Grand Marais, or big marsh, is laid down on the old maps as forming the larger portion of the present Grosse Pointe Township. This marsh was waste land covered by water and flags. Some years ago a large tract, covering several thousand acres, was reclaimed by Thomas W. Corby, who built a dyke along the lake and river front and pumped the water from the land.

At the head of the St. Clair River was a favorite crossing place for the Indians in their journeys to and from Canada. Frequently they came in large numbers and freely helped themselves to the property of the settlers, sometimes driving off whole herds of cattle.

Grosse Pointe is distinctly a district of pretentious and costly homes. The residential portion of the township is divided into Grosse Pointe Park, Grosse Pointe, Grosse Pointe Farms, and Grosse Pointe Shores. Upon entering Grosse Pointe Farms, at the terminus of city service of the Detroit Street Railways, Jefferson Avenue becomes Lake Shore Road, which winds its picturesque course along the shores of Lake St. Clair.

work at the law firm of Ward & Palmer where he stayed until 1891, when he started the Burton Abstract Company. Taking the advice of a college professor that every young man should have a hobby, Burton decided that his hobby would be the history of Detroit. By 1914 his private collection threatened to overtake both his home on Brainard Street, and his wife. He then agreed to give the house and the collection to the Detroit Public Library. When the new library building was completed in 1923, the collection was moved to the fourth floor and the house was returned to Burton in exchange for a substantial cash gift. Much of what Burton uncovered of Detroit's past, he published in an endless stream of books and pamphlets. Clarence M. Burton died in Detroit in 1932.

EDITOR'S NOTE: In 1907, 1917, 1918, and 1926, portions of Grosse Pointe Township were annexed to the City of Detroit. In 1927 the Village of Lochmoor was incorporated, becoming the City of Grosse Pointe Woods in 1950. Today, all that remains of Grosse Pointe Township is the area comprised of the Village of Grosse Pointe Shores.

SOURCE: History of Wayne County and the City of Detroit, Michigan (Chicago-Detroit: S.J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1930).

Clarence Monroe Burton was born in 1853 in a log cabin near the mining town of Whiskey Diggings, California. His family later settled in Hastings, Michigan, where Burton grew up. After graduating from the University of Michigan in 1874 with a law degree, he moved to Detroit. Burton went to