



Montague's 150th Year

Montague is a unique community. While many of us have lived elsewhere, Montague has had the image of home, a special place, a sense of community and the feeling of a good place to be. With these Montague thoughts, the following questions arise: How did the town get here? Why was it created here? Who made it happen? How did it last so long?

Where towns and cities are located is the first question. After LOCATION is the historic influences that created this place. So with HISTORY, we have the people and the influences that created the place. How the place survived leads to the continuing influences of CHANGE and its effect on the community.

LOCATION: Montague is located at the mouth of the White River where it enters White Lake. Native Americans and later early European explorers had three ways of getting places – walking, horseback riding or using waterways. Settlement activities often occurred where rivers met lakes or where one could cross the obstacles of a waterway. Natural elements such as woods, open lands, meadows, marshes, and topography such as valleys and creeks were also influential. Montague was fortunate to have an early transportation network with its collections of water routes and trails. Early settlers here also had the benefits of a good climate orientation. Most of Montague faces the morning sun or has a southern exposure, which were attractive influences for early settlement patterns.

Take a look at the 1867 Village of Montague map and you'll notice the street patterns often follow the contours of the landscape. This makes Montague different from most towns that follow the more traditional North, South, East, West street grid system. Later built Montague subdivision patterns do usually follow this more traditional grid layout.

To better understand the locational elements discussed here, take a walk or bike ride from the downtown Ferry and Dowling Street corner on down to the waterfront bike trail and then up to Old Channel Trail. Cross the Coon Creek Bridge and follow Old Channel Trail back on down to the Ferry and Dowling Street corner. You'll notice along this walk the many scenic natural elements that embellish the street and landscape scene. You'll also notice that there is a distinct



separation of Montague's residential development up on the hill and the confinement of commercial development near the lower river, down the hill closer to the lake waterfront lands.

HISTORY: Who did create the early Montague settlement patterns? The Native Americans had inhabited these lands forever. They lived very lightly on the land and left few traces of their being here. Changes came with the early European explorers. French explorers passed by White Lake and named it La Rivierre Blanche (White River) on a 1755 map. Along with the early explorers and fur traders came their crosses, guns and rifles. In 1821, the Native Americans surrendered their lands south of the Grand River to the United States. In 1836, they surrendered their lands north of the Grand River.

The wooded lands of Western Michigan were now ripe for economic development by these pioneer residents. Grand Haven was founded in 1834 by the Reverend William Montague Ferry. Charles Mears built his water powered sawmill in Whitehall in 1837, the same year, Michigan became a state.

The Reverend Ferry was head of the family that was most influential in the development of early Montague and White Lake's north shore. They built their first White Lake sawmill at the Old Channel Mouth in 1850 and platted it as Ferrysville in 1860. They had already platted Ferrysburg across from Grand Haven in 1857. Reverend Ferry's son, Noah, was in charge of the White Lake saw mills. Noah started platting the Village of Montague in 1861, the same year he took the White River Guard to fight in the Civil War. Major Noah Ferry was killed at the battle of Gettysburg on July 3, 1863, at the age of 32.

In 1867, the Village of Montague map was created and signed by Even and Anders Knudsen and William Montague Ferry. You'll notice that many of the streets are named for Civil War Union generals - Custer, Meade, Grant, Hancock and others. For more information on the lumbering history of Montague and White Lake, read *Logging the White Lake-The White Lake Lumber Industry, 1837 to 1900* by Dan Yakes and Steve Demos. Also visit the Montague Museum for more information on Montague's historical leaders.

CHANGE: Following Montague's interesting waterfront location and the influences of its early historical leaders comes the continuing results of change. How does the community adapt to change? One important transportation change was the connection of Montague to Whitehall with a roadway, bridge and later a railroad. Another would be the movement of the saw mills to the upper northern end of White Lake. The great influences guiding and directing changes on an area



are the economic forces. Jobs and employment opportunities are always a strong influence in stimulating or guiding where growth occurs.

Following the end of the lumbering era, which had created the new shipping channel connecting White Lake to Lake Michigan, the recreational tourist industry emerged. Scenic amenities including sandy beaches, wooded lands, nearby farm products and a pleasant summer climate resulted in the building of summer cottages along the lake shores. The Goodrich steamship lines connecting White Lake to Chicago brought in the summer tourist trade and dollars.

Montague has always had an interesting collection of land use activities. Industrial uses, farming, retail and hospitality businesses, boating and recreational activities have always been present. Montague has been a year-round community and not just a seasonal summer place. Nearby Muskegon has always offered employment opportunities.

Great change came to Montague in the 1950s with the development of the chemical industries. Hooker, DuPont and Union Carbide located plants in the townships just outside Montague's city limits. There's a favorite quote of that era from Adolph Anderson, president of the Montague Bank, who said, "50 years of lumbering, 50 years of slumbering, and now the awakening." The chemical era, which did create many jobs, ended in the 1990s. Industrial pollution cleanup concerns from these industries are still being closely monitored and corrected.

What one generation does to the natural environment for economic reasons often creates problems for a later generation. For example, in the 1870s the White River Log and Booming Company straightened out the lower reaches of the White River above the bridge to make it more functional for sorting logs marked for various saw mills around the lake. The results of those actions, which changed the river flow, now create expensive dredging costs for the Ellenwood marina.

Montague's population within the city limits has not increased significantly, but the adjoining townships of White River and Montague have grown. Changes will continue to be a major influence in guiding Montague's future. What happens will always be a concern and topic for Montague residents. We all hope that it will continue to be an interesting, scenic, pleasant, unique place for future residents in the next 150 years.

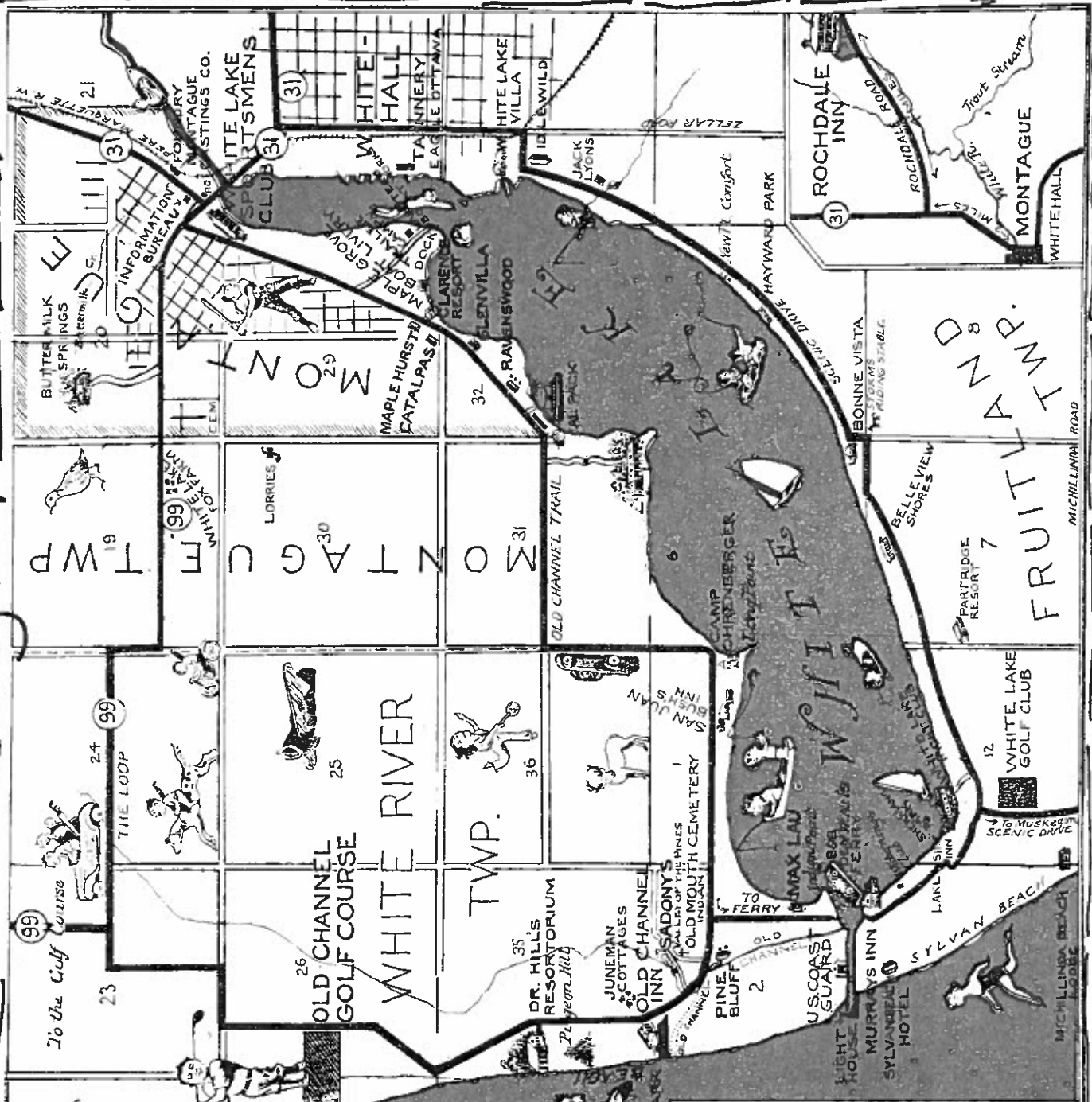
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THE MEDBERY MAP

MAP OF
WHITE LAKE
 VICINITY
 PUBLISHED BY
MONTAGUE
 CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
 MICH.

Showing location
WHITE LAKE MICH

MILES	0
CHICAGO	50
MICHIGAN	50
ST. JOE	95
SAUGATUCK	145
HOLLAND	158
MUSKEGON	192
WHITE HALL	206
MONTAGUE	206
WHITE LAKE	206



Paul Medbery = Montague City Clerk - Medbery Park