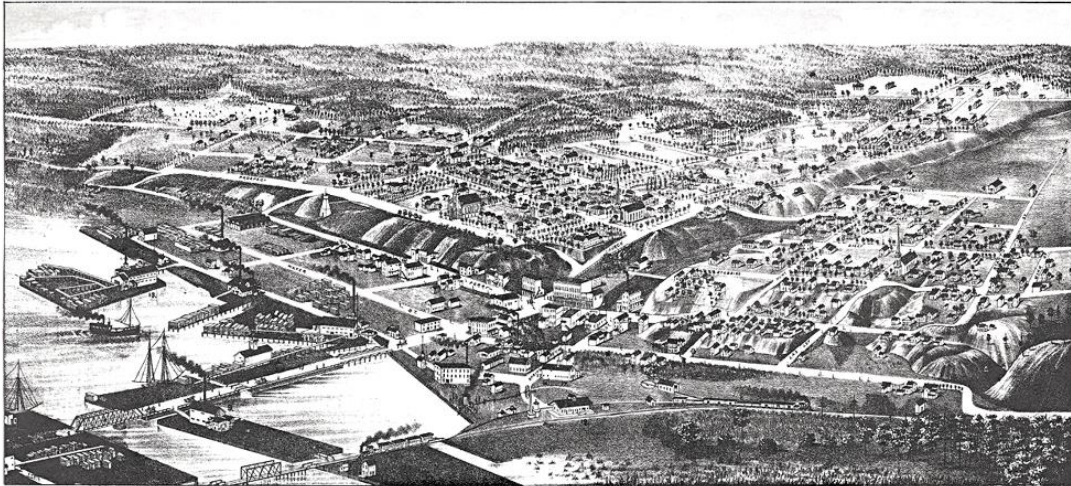


First Things First - In Montague

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Over the years there have been several lists of “Firsts” that have been printed. They all seem to cover the same time period and end about the same time. Some additional “Firsts” have been added to update the list. There are probably other things that could be added.

1837 – The first town in the area was at The Mouth, a collection of houses where the Old Channel reached Lake Michigan. It flourished on the lightering trade, tugs being required to take cargoes through the shallow channel from White Lake to Lake Michigan and vice versa. The Mouth died when the present channel was cut through in 1870.

1850 – The first mill at the Mouth of White Lake was built by Rev. William M. Ferry. Scott and Stebbins ran the mill and store until 1854.

1853 – White River Township was organized.

1853, May – The first organized religious meeting in the area was led by Deacon Abner Bennett at The Mouth.

1854 – The first post office was at The Mouth. Alfred A. Caine was appointed the Postmaster.

1855 – The first house and blacksmith shop in Montague was built by Nathan Sargent in the area of the former Iron Works.

1856 – The first doctor in the area was Dr. J. A. Wheeler, who lived at The Mouth until 1865, when he moved to Whitehall.

1861 – Montague was platted by Noah Ferry and George Dowling who named the town in honor of Rev. William Montague Ferry, one of the most prominent lumbermen and political personages in Western Michigan.

1864 – The first store in Montague was built by Andrus and Even Knudsen for Ferry, Dowling & Co. It was sold to S. H. Lasley & Co. in 1873.

1864 – The first bridge between Montague and Whitehall was built by W. H. Parks as a swing bridge to allow lumber schooners to pass.

1865 – The Montague Iron Works was established by Elmer C. Dicey and Joseph A. Lyttle on property they purchased from Nathan Sargent, who had a homestead nearby. Nathan's father, Job Sargent, had been given the land, which would become most of the City of Montague, for his service in the War of 1812. The Iron Works burned in 1868, was rebuilt, burned again in 1869, and was rebuilt again in 1870.

1867 – The first post office in Montague was established with O. R. Goodno as Postmaster for eight years. Harry B. Strong was his successor until 1877.

1867 – The first drug store was started by C. M. Palmer. It passed successively into the hands of Hood & Baxter, Hood & Malcom, J. A. Malcom, and lastly to L. G. Ripley.

1867, Apr 1 – Harriet Woodams was hired as a teacher for three months at \$52.00.

1867 – A new channel to Lake Michigan was cut through the dune and a substructure was constructed.

1870, September 5 – The White River Boom & Logging Company was organized. S. T. Cone was the first President, followed by C. H. Cook, Joseph Heald, and D. C. Bowen.

1871 – The new channel to Lake Michigan was completed.

1871, December – The first newspaper in town was the Montague Syndicate published by John G. Lee. It ceased printing in February 1873 following a fire. The Vidette ran from September to November 1874 with Robert Wilson as publisher. It was followed by the Lumberman in November 1873, published by H. C. Sholes & Co.

1872 – The first church built in town was the Methodist Episcopal Church on the corner of Meade and Church streets. The two-story wooden structure burned in September 1897 but was quickly rebuilt in 1898. An addition and basement were built in 1949. The tower was repaired in 1957, minus the bell and steeple. The Congregation moved out in 1969 and it became the Montague Museum.

1873, October – The first volunteer fire department was organized.

1873 – Construction on the Franklin House was begun by George Franklin and Henry P. Dowling. The official Grand Opening was held on 10 December 1874.

1874 - \$150,000 worth of new buildings were erected and \$600,000 worth of lumber were manufactured. The largest buildings were the Franklin House, by Dowling & Franklin, \$30,000; Temple & Co. Map and Curtain Roll Factory, \$20,000; the schoolhouse, \$18,000; opera house & stores, \$12,000;

First Presbyterian church and parsonage, \$14,000; German Lutheran church, \$6,000; G. E. Dowling's residence, \$8,000.

1875 – The climax in the number of saloons was reached: Montague had 13 saloons while Whitehall had 22.

1875 – St. James Catholic Church was built in Whitehall. During the winter, it was towed across White Lake on skids to the corner of Sheridan and Williams Street in Montague.

1875, September – The first major fire involved the Sorenson's Opera House, worth \$7,000. In addition, the following businesses, which were located on the ground floor of the building, were also consumer: Sorenson's & Co. meat market, Vanestra's boot shop, and J. G. Phelps harness shop. Turnbull & Rohaley's boiler shop adjoining was also lost.

1882 – The first bank in Montague was a private bank started by George E. Dowling, Charles H. Cook and Henry Terwilliger. The business was carried on in the store of Burrows and Jones until the bank building was erected in 1883 at the corner of Dowling and Ferry.

1886-1887 – The U.S. Lifesaving Station was built by the government on the north pier of the channel. Construction began in 1886. It was completed and opened March 7, 1887. It was closed in May 1946. In November 1946 it was put up for sale, sold, and moved in June 1947.

1896 - First telephone line came to Montague. The service was provided by the Oceana Telephone Company

1898 - Electric lights came to the area.

1901 – The fire department was officially organized with Charles A. Ohrenberger as its Chief, a position he held until 1940. Other officers then were: Assistant Chief, Bill Boardwell; Foreman, Glen Tallant; Foreman #1 Hose Cart, Tom Hawks; Foreman #2 Hose Cart, Paul Kling.

1901, April – The fire department received 500 feet of new hose to add to the existing 600 feet they currently had.

1901, June – The first automobile ever seen in Montague hailed from Muskegon and carried its owner Frank Smith, an insurance agent, and William Foster of Grand Rapids. The gentlemen took dinner at the Franklin House and while the horseless carriage remained outside the hotel, crowds gathered around to see the wonder of the age. The automobile was driven by steam power and ran as slick as grease. There was no mention, however, what the make or model was.

1901, September 2 – The first Rural Routes were established at the Montague Post Office.

1902 – The San Juan Association was formed by a group of people from St. Johns, Michigan. The area still exists today.

1904, June – The Beacon reported that F. W. Sadler was the first Montague resident to own an automobile. There was no mention, however, of what kind it was. Since it was the only one, everyone must have known what it was without being told in the paper.

1907 – The first woman elected County Superintendent of School for Muskegon County, a position she held from 1907 to 1935. She helped organize the Muskegon County PTA, also the Michigan Public School Employee Retirement Fund, and was a member of the Fund Board for many years. That person was Nellie B. Chisholm.

1908, May – There were two more automobiles in Montague which were owned by William. E. Osmun and George H. Mason. Osmun's machine was the largest and most expensive, while Mason's was a second hand one. Here again, no mention of the make of either of them.

1924 – The Montague Fire Department received a new fire truck valued at \$3,000. There have been several others purchased over the years.

1935 – Montague became a city. Whitehall became a city in 1943.

1941, November – Four new modern bowling alleys were installed in the basement of the Franklin Hotel by its new owners, Clarence and James Ford.

1951 – The first of three chemical companies came to the area, looking for and buying up property to build their facilities. Hooker Electrochemical Company built their facility and opened in March 1954. They were followed by Linde Air Products in 1955 and DuPont Neoprene Plant in 1956.

1955, October – Montague purchased a new fire truck and firefighting equipment in the amount of \$10,702. The equipment included 1,400 feet of 2 ½ inch hose; 600 feet of 1 ½ inch hose; 3 ladders: 14-, 24- and 45-foot extension.

1960, May – The recently completed Intermediate School Building was designated as the Nellie B. Chisholm school in honor of her dedication to education.

1960, September – Miss America for 1961, former Miss Michigan, Miss White Lake, and hometown girl Nancy Anne Fleming, was crowned in Atlantic City, New Jersey. A Homecoming Parade was organized and held on October 28. The parade started in Muskegon and went through Muskegon Heights, North Muskegon, and Whitehall, before regrouping at the high school and proceeding to Montague. WOOD-TV of Grand Rapids televised the event which was picked up nationally.

1971, February – The DuPont plant closed. The buildings were finally razed in 1998.

1980 – Construction was begun on the clay-lined Vault where 1 million cubic yards of contaminated materials from Hooker Chemical were buried.

1984, November – The "World's Largest Working Weathervane" - was built by Whitehall Metal Studio. It was erected on a peninsula in White Lake located behind what was then the City Hall. The structure is 48 feet tall with a 26-foot long directional arrow. It was named as one of the Top 10 historical tourist attraction in Michigan, made the Congressional Record, and the Guinness Book of World Records. It was moved in October 2001 to the corner of Water and Dowling streets in what is now called Ellenwood Park.

1996 – After about 42 years, Hooker Chemical Company dismantled the buildings on the property and 225-foot boiler stack.