



Berkley History & Museum Happenings

September 2023



12-Mile at Griffith, SW Corner, 1920s

Berkley's Beginnings

Incorporating a Village or Making Sausage*?

by Don Callihan

Henry Ford

At the turn of the century, 19th to 20th, the area in Royal Oak Township that would become Berkley was a collection of rural family farms. Then, on September 27, 1908, the first Ford Model T left the Ford Piquette Avenue Plant in Detroit. It was the beginning of a revolution that would change the world and speed the development of the land on either side of Woodward Avenue from Detroit to Pontiac.

Soon, the demand for the Model T outstripped Ford's manufacturing capacity, and work began on a new manufacturing plant along Woodward in Highland Park, seven miles to the southeast of the area that would become Berkley. The first Model Ts rolled out of the plant on January 3, 1910. Three years later, on October 7, 1913, the first moving assembly line went into operation. Then, on January 5, 1914, Henry Ford stunned the world when he announced that his workers would be paid \$5 per day. These events attracted workers worldwide to Detroit, and many settled along the Woodward corridor. The Detroit Urban Railway ran along this corridor, and it was thus convenient to live within walking distance of Woodward. Housing demand in the Woodward vicinity increased dramatically.

Development Begins

Developers were soon purchasing the area's farms and turning them into subdivisions. In 1916, the area that would become Berkley had less than 50 inhabitants. By 1922, that number had swelled to more than 3,000 with more than 20 places of business.

Prospective buyers wanted modern homes with running water, flush toilets, electricity, and telephones. Utility companies provided electricity and telephones, but water systems and sewer lines were municipal services that an unevenly populated township was unlikely to offer. Some subdivision developers provided running water to each home through distribution systems from subdivision wells. Wells tended to be shallow and, thus, more susceptible to contamination. Distribution systems utilized small-diameter pipes that could not meet peak demands, especially when needed to fight a fire.

. continued on page 2



Upcoming Events

- Sept. 29, *The Berkley Theater at the Redford Theater*
- Sept 30, *Kit Home Tour*
- Oct 14, *Berkley Village & Fire Hall Historical Marker Unveiling*
- *Commemorate Your Berkley Home*

Scan Here for Events



In This Issue

- Berkley's Beginnings
- How Did Berkley Get Its Name?
- The Museum Gift Shop
- The Museum Corner Sign-Up

Berkley's Beginnings - continued from page 1

The Sausage Making* Process Begins

By 1920, the area's residents began discussing the possibility of village incorporation. Although Royal Oak had already been established as a village in 1891, it only occupied about 10 percent of its current area. The Twelve-Mile Community, which extended along 12-Mile Road on both sides of Woodward, was hesitant about Royal Oak annexation. There was a fear that any resulting increase in taxes in the annexed area would be used to improve the existing infrastructure of Royal Oak rather than making necessary improvements to the annexation.

When an area incorporates as a village, it remains within its respective township; however, it can create local regulations and provide essential services such as fire and police protection, sewer and water utilities, and public works. The township is still responsible for assessing property, collecting taxes for counties and school districts, and organizing county, state, and national elections.

The desire to incorporate, rather than be annexed, was stimulated on December 5, 1920, when the Royal Oak Tribune carried an article that began: "The question of whether Royal Oak, Ferndale, Pleasant Ridge and a large part of Royal Oak Township outside these municipalities shall incorporate into a single city is expected to come before the voters at the April election . . ." The Twelve-Mile Community, which included the future village of Berkley, was included in the proposed city, as was all of Royal Oak Township except Clawson, which was already a village within both Royal Oak and Troy townships.

Grinding it Out—The First Proposals

The first public meeting to consider incorporation for the future village of Berkley occurred on February 1, 1921, at Leone's Theatre on the south side of 12-Mile, just west of Robina. Approximately 500 residents attended. Joseph Herron was the chairman of the meeting. Those present selected a committee of twenty property owners to explore the steps necessary to move toward incorporation. A name for the future village was also voted on, and Berkley was the preference.

Two weeks later, on February 15, at a meeting held at Berkley School, the Committee of Twenty gave a progress report on the incorporation process. The boundaries for the area were established as 11-Mile to the south, 13-Mile to the north, the town line (which is now Greenfield) to the west, and Maxwell (now located in Royal Oak) north to Crooks Road and Crooks Road north to 13-Mile on the east - areas 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 on the map on the next page. (Note: 13-Mile did not run east of Woodward then, but the approximate northern boundary was close to its future location). Additionally, it was announced that a general community mass meeting would take place on February 28 at Leone's Theatre to further discuss the proposal.

A Fly in the Stuffing - Another Incorporation Proposal is Introduced

While the Committee of Twenty was working on their plan, residents in areas 1 and 2 were working to incorporate their own village known as Northwood, and they weren't wasting any time. The Royal Oak Tribune reported on February 28, 1921, that petitions had been signed and were ready to be submitted to the Oakland County Board of Supervisors, who would schedule an election to vote on the matter.

The Process Gets Easier—Royal Oak Proposal Defeated

The next significant event occurred on April 7 when the plan to merge Royal Oak, Ferndale, Pleasant Ridge, and a substantial portion of Royal Oak Township into a single city was defeated. The proposal needed to be passed by Royal Oak, Pleasant Ridge, and Ferndale voters, along with township voters outside of incorporated villages.. Only the Village of Royal Oak approved the proposal.

continued on page 3

* Making sausage can be a messy, unpleasant process.



How Did Berkley Get Its Name?

According to Shirley McClellan in her book *Briefly Berkley*, published in 1982:

It was hard to choose a name for the proposed village. Someone suggested "Windy Vale," the name of the DUR stop at Catalpa and Woodward. Also suggested was "North Star," and another offering was "Crescent Moon," in honor of all the little outhouses. Finally, the name "Berkley" was selected. The early meetings had been held at Berkley School, in turn, named for the old lane that had become Berkley Avenue. The subdivision developer had admired Berkeley, California and had so platted the street, but then when the maps were drawn up, someone left out the middle "e," and Berkeley became Berkley."



For more theories on how Berkley got its name, scan the QR code:

The Odd Fellows Role in Berkley's Incorporation

In *Briefly Berkley*, Shirley also expounds on the role of the Odd Fellows in Berkley's incorporation:

The leaders behind the village movement were the local Oddfellows. Subdivision baseball games and picnics had revealed a large number of members of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows had come to Berkley. In fact, all of the "leading citizens and businessmen" were members of this Order, and they provided the "know-how" in getting the papers drawn up to create a village. Even then, one faction (which included Odd Fellows, too) felt action was premature and attempted to block the village founding by legal action. The village founders were very determined and journeyed to the courthouse in Pontiac at early dawn, filing their papers of incorporation before the opposing faction arrived.

Berkley's Beginnings - continued from page 2

By early May, the Board of Supervisors had accepted the Northwood petition and scheduled an election for May 31, 1921. All voters within the township could vote except those already residing within an incorporated area. To approve the proposal, voters inside the proposed village and those within the township had to approve the measure separately.

The measure was approved in the proposed village, with the west Woodward side, Area 1, voting 97 “yes” and 11 “no.” Township voters outside the proposed village voted 223 “yes” and 429 “no.” Of the “no” votes, 351 came from precinct 7, which included the area from Woodward to the town line (Greenfield) and from 11-Mile to 14-Mile. Most of the population in this area was between 11-Mile and 13-Mile. Thus, the future Village of Berkley soundly defeated the Northwood Village proposal.

More Sausage Making—More Controversy

The Berkley Village Incorporation proposal was filed with the Board of Supervisors in the Fall of 1921, assuming it would come before voters at the April 1922 election. However, the petition was not filed the mandatory 30 days before the Board of Supervisors October session. It thus could not be acted upon until the April meeting, which was after the April election. Therefore, a special election covering only the Berkley incorporation question would be required. Surprisingly, the proposed village limits still included the area between 12 ½-Mile and 13-Mile. Residents in that area vehemently opposed inclusion at the February 28, 1921, meeting and continued to hold that position.

The Process Stalls

With the measure languishing until after the April election and the opposition of the 13-Mile area, the petition was withdrawn. Nothing more happened until a new committee was formed in the fall of 1922. George Shank called the meeting to establish the committee. George Gasco was chosen chairman. The committee acted quickly and collected the required signatures to submit a petition to the Board of Supervisors. This time, the 13-Mile area was not included.

A technicality prevented the petition from coming before the Board of Supervisors at their January meeting, and a special Board of Supervisors’ meeting was set for Monday, February 5. At the meeting, the Board approved Berkley’s incorporation proposal for the April 2 ballot.

The Sausage is Ready for Packaging—Voters Approve the Incorporation Proposal

On April 2, the voters of the proposed Village of Berkley approved the incorporation proposal (360 to 165). They also elected five commissioners whose job would be to draft a charter for approval by Michigan’s governor and the voters. The township also approved the proposal (579 to 489). Without township approval, the measure would not have passed.

After numerous iterations, the charter commission approved the proposed charter on July 24, 1923, and sent it off to Governor Alex J. Groesbeck for his approval. The governor approved the charter on August 8, 1923.

On Saturday, August 25, 1923, a primary election was held to identify candidates for village president, clerk, treasurer, and six commission seats. Then, on Friday, September 28, 1923, voters went to the polls, approved the charter, and elected a full slate of officers.

The Sausage is Shipped—Berkley Gets Down to Business

Even with the charter approved and officers elected, the village could only conduct official business after the officers were sworn in. The Berkley Tribune reported, “The new village of Berkley formally got into operation Monday evening (October 8) when the recently elected officers were sworn in and made their bow to the public at the installation ceremony in the Berkley theatre (formerly Leone’s Theatre).” The officers could now conduct business in the name of the Village of Berkley and did so at their first official meeting on Friday, October 12, 1923, at the Berkley School.

Berkley was now an official operating village. The sausage-making process had been completed, and the first page in the village’s centennial history book was about to be written.



Areas	Description
1 & 2	Proposed Village of Northwood
1, 2, 3, 4 & 5	Original Proposed Village of Berkley
1, 3, 4 & 5	Reduced Proposed Village of Berkley
1, 4 & 5	Final Proposed Village of Berkley
<i>(Created using Google Maps 2023)</i>	

The Museum Gift Shop

The museum gift shop has the perfect gift for that person with a Berkley connection. Selections include books about Berkley history, posters, banners, post cards and our Berkley Map prints

Coffee Mugs

Don't forget our coffee mug featuring the bygone restaurants of Berkley, including Sila's.. Restaurant mugs are available at the Museum, the City Hall and the Library for \$15 each.



Business Card-Sized Magnets

Our refrigerator magnets are \$1 each, or get all 6 for \$5. Available at the Museum, the City Hall and the Library

Visit Us

Berkley Historical Museum
3338 Coolidge Highway
Berkley, MI 48072
248-658-3335
museum@berkleymich.net

Hours: Wed: 10 AM till 1 PM
Sun: 2 PM till 4 PM

Group tours by appointment.

Visit us on the web at
www.berkleyhistory.org

Facebook: Berkley Historical
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Donate Items of Historical Interest

If you have artifacts or historical photos that you wish to donate, stop by the museum or email: museum@berkleymich.net. Items should be clean and in restorable condition.

Become a Member

Do you enjoy history and/or the preservation of historical artifacts? If so, we have a place for you on the Berkley Historical Committee. We are an official committee of the City of Berkley dedicated to preserving and promoting its history. We educate and engage the public in our efforts through the administration and management of the Berkley Historical Museum. If you wish to become an active member of this committee, send an email to museum@berkleymich.net indicating your interest, or call 248-658-3335 and leave a message.

Photo and Text Credits

Photos courtesy of The Berkley Historical Museum and Google Maps. Historical references include *The Daily Tribune*, *Briefly Berkley*, and State of Michigan—*Charter Commissioners Handbook: Structure of Local Government*

The mission of the Berkley Historical Committee is to preserve and promote the history of the City of Berkley, Michigan, and to engage the public through the administration and management of the Berkley Historical Museum.