

THE EARLY HISTORY OF BERKLEY

By Shirley Culver Dell McLellan

During the First World War, Detroit like so many other big cities found itself swamped with the rising cost of living. Most of the families of average circumstances found it almost impossible to maintain a home and raise a family with the costs steadily rising. The Piper Realty Company advertised in Detroit Newspapers to the effect they would give to any person who bought a lot in the City of Berkley, a “tent 12 x 16 and 25 leghorn chickens.” This added inducement brought many of the earlier settlers to Berkley.

In the latter part of 1919 the town pump became the meeting place for the men of the town to gather and get acquainted. Upon their getting acquainted these men found that there were several Oddfellows in their midst and so in 1920 these Oddfellows began meeting in the tar-paper shacks and petitioned for a charter. These meetings continued and on November 20, 1920, a Charter was granted and the Lodge was instituted in Berkley.

Desiring to obtain improvements for their homes these men formed an incorporation committee. This committee was composed of five men: George Gasco, Chairman; Tom Weston, Sec.; Fred Beneway, Treasurer; Don Fraser, Trustee; and Mr. Erles Kresgre. The primary purpose of this committee was to negotiate to form the Village. The first step of incorporation consisted of having Mr. Edwin Pate and Mr. Cole draw up a description of the proposed incorporated area.

December 2, 1922 saw Fred Beneway and George Gasco filing a petition for incorporation with the County Clerk in Pontiac. Due to regulations it was impossible to take this matter up at a regular session and they were informed that if any action on the petition was desired that a special session of the Board of Supervisors would have to be called. The cost for the calling of the meeting amounted to \$200.00 and only 24 hours was allotted to the obtaining of this amount. Meanwhile our neighbors, Royal Oak had a petition to annex Campbell Road and were in the same predicament as Berkley. Royal Oak agreed to pay \$100.00 toward the calling of the special session and Lou Bessinger, Martin Loftus, Walter Holland, Mr. Leone and Harry Martin and several others gathered up the additional \$100.00.

The session was called but the opposition was busy at work maintaining that the majority did not want incorporation. A lawyer was hired to take up the cause of the opposition and on the day of the session Fred Beneway, Earl Phelps, Don Fraser, Thomas Weston, and George Gasco were on hand to see that their \$100.00 was well spent. The incorporation committee demanded a roll call and remained in the Assembly room of the Board of Supervisors. A vote was taken and the vote was unanimous to place this question before the people for a popular vote at the election in April.

The committee was informed that a majority in the township as well as in the proposed area was necessary. Several public meetings were held in Leone’s theatre prior to the election. The results were as follows: in the township – 96 majority, and 196 majority in the proposed area.