

The Naming of Superior Township

Why We Are What We Are, and Have Always Been - **SUPERIOR**

In 1881 the Charles C. Chapman Company of Chicago published the *History of Washtenaw County*.¹ This was the first comprehensive history of the county and remains even today the 'bible' of early Washtenaw County history. It was very well done and the errors are few. Regarding the organization of Superior Township, this is what Chapman had to say:

"In the history of Ypsilanti it will be shown that the district now known as Superior formed a portion of that township. On June 30, 1828, the Legislative Council enacted: "That from and after the passage of this act, all that part of the township of Ypsilanti laying north, including township numbered 1 and 2 south, range number 7 east, in the county of Washtenaw, be, and the same is, hereby set off as a township, by the name of Panama," This new division comprised the present townships of Salem and Superior. In 1831(sic), under authority given by act of the Legislative Council, the people of the southern part of Panama organized the township of Superior. Henry Kimmel gave it its present name."²

There was some information that never made it into the book, either because no one knew about it, or it was not considered significant. A review of this information will establish why we are, and always have been, **Superior**.

On Tuesday, December 12, 1826 in the first session of the 2nd Legislative Council, Mr. Moseley "presented a petition of sundry inhabitants of Township No.2 south, range 7 east of the county of Washtenaw, praying that said township may be incorporated and called '**Superior**.' Read and referred to the committee on Territorial Affairs."³

¹ Around this period histories of this nature were published for many of the then existing counties of Michigan, and not only by Chapman. This appears to have been a rather lucrative business. The histories sold to interested parties, but for a fee one could have one's picture included in the book. This fee system also was used in the production of county atlases which were also appearing at that time, the first atlas for Washtenaw County having appeared in 1856. These histories were compiled from whatever statistics were available from federal government agencies, county and township governments, and from the writings of local historians, most them being members of the Michigan Pioneer Society.

² Chapman, page 1062-63. This information was likely given to the Chapman researcher by Robert Geddes, an early settler of the area who was very active in the Michigan Pioneer Society.

³ Detroit Gazette, December 19, 1826 (page D-1986). The Detroit Gazette reported the minutes of the Legislative Council meetings. Extant copies of the Detroit Gazette, published between 1817 and 1831, were photocopied and reproduced by the University of Michigan in the 1920's. Each page of the reproduction is given a sequential "D" page number. A complete set of these reproductions is available at the William Clements library.

Tuesday, December 19, 1826. (Legislative Council) "Mr. Dale from the committee on Territorial Affairs, to whom was referred the petition of sundry inhabitants of the county of Washtenaw praying that certain townships be (illegible, crease in paper), reported that the petitioners had not given the legal notice of the intention to petition the Legislative Council, and that they therefore have leave to withdraw their petition. The report was concurred in."⁴

Although the petition was denied, the inhabitants of Superior Township were the first surveyed township in Washtenaw County to request recognition as a government unit, and even then it was with the name of **Superior**.

There are several reasons why this petition was not acted upon.

The Legislative Council was aware that Washtenaw County was growing rapidly and that being administrated by Wayne County, as it then was, would shortly have to change, and had already put legislation in place to do just that. On November 20, 1826 the Legislative Council passed an Act to provide for the organization of Washtenaw County, the Act to go into effect January 1, 1827. The passage of this Act may have prompted the above petition. Keep in mind that most of the new land owners in Superior Township, arrived from existing states which already had in place local government.

At that time the Legislative Council had not determined the law(s) under which townships were to be established and governed.⁵ The Legislative Council was working on these laws but they were bound by the Northwest Ordinance to enact laws of the existing states, and there was considerable discussion as to whether they should follow the township laws of New York, Ohio, or some other state. These laws were finally passed; *an Act relative to the Duties and Privileges of Townships*, approved March 30, 1827. This Act established how townships were to be created and governed in Michigan.

On April 12, 1827 the Council passed; *An Act to divide the several Counties in this Territory into Townships, and for other purposes*. This act created the townships of Ypsilanti, Ann Arbor, and Dexter in Washtenaw County.

At that time there were two areas of settlement in Town 2 East, Range 7 South (Superior Township); Dixboro, and what is referred to as Free Church, located at the intersection of the present Ford Road (M-153) and Gotfredson Roads. Free Church obtained its name with the establishment of the First Free Church of Michigan at that location in 1849. However, the settlement was quite likely called Superior before the establishment of the church. A post office established there in 1836 was called Superior post office but whether the name came from the name of the settlement, or from the name of the township, which by then had been established as Superior Township, is not clear. Robert Geddes attributes the name of Superior to Henry Kimmel, then a large landowner

⁴ Detroit Gazette, page D-1990.

⁵ Some townships had been established previously by proclamation of the Governor.

south of the Free Church settlement, but the name could have been suggested by Hiram.H. Tooker, John Brewer, Hiram Robinson, or Harvey Beers, all of whom owned land at the Ford Road - Gotfredson Road intersection, or anyone else living in the township. Quite likely it was Kimmel as Geddes suggests, but it could have been Tooker, who was a developer in addition to being a farmer, and would have been interested in giving a positive image to the area. Tooker later traded his remaining land, that not sold off in one acre parcels at the Free Church settlement, for land in Ypsilanti on which he built what became known as the Tooker Block.

Friday May 30, 1828. (Legislative Council) "Mr. Rumsey presented the petition of Isaac Pratt, and others, inhabitants of the township of Ypsilanti, in the county of Washtenaw, praying that said township may be divided, and that the new township may be called Dixborough. Read and laid on the table."

"The above petition was laid on the table on the suggestion of Mr. Rumsey, who said that the petitioners had not stated, with sufficient accuracy, the boundaries of the contemplated township."⁶

Wednesday, June 11, 1828. (Legislative Council). "Mr. McDonell presented the petition of A. Case, and others, inhabitants of Ypsilanti, praying that the north half of said township may be set off and be made a separate township by the name of '**Superior.**' Referred to the committee on Territorial Affairs."⁷

Thursday, June 12, 1828. (Legislative Council) "Mr. Drake presented the petition of M. Speers and others, of Ypsilanti, praying for a new township to be set of(sic) from that of Ypsilanti. Referred to the committee of territorial affairs."⁸

Friday, June 13, 1828. (Legislative Council). "Mr. McDonell presented the petition of H. Burnham, and others, respecting the setting off a new township from Ypsilanti."⁹

Friday, June 13, 1828. (Legislative Council). "Mr. McDonell from the same committee (Territorial Affairs), reported a bill to set off a new township in Ypsilanti. Read twice."¹⁰

Monday, June 16, 1828. (Legislative Council). "....., the bill relative to the new township from Ypsilanti;....., were severally taken up and again laid on the table."¹¹

As of this time the Legislative Council had several petitions before it to create a new township from Ypsilanti Township. The Detroit Gazette did not report the details of

⁶ Detroit Gazette, Thursday, June 5, 1828, (page D-2293).

⁷ Detroit Gazette, Thursday, June 19, 1828, (page D-2304)

⁸ Detroit Gazette, Thursday, June 19, 1828, (page D-2305)

⁹ The Detroit Gazette, Thursday, June 19, 1828, (page D-2305)

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

the various petitions nor did it report what transpired in the Committee for Territorial Affairs. The Committee evidently reached some consensus regarding the petitions and submitted the following bill. How they arrived at the name Chigome is unknown, but the Mr. Schoolcraft, mentioned in the Legislative Council proceedings, is the Henry R. Schoolcraft who was very much involved in Indian affairs and a proponent for using Indian names. Schoolcraft was a representative of the "upper counties" of Michigan.

Friday, June 20, 1828. (Legislative Council). "The bill to set off and organize the township of Chigome, in the county of Washtenaw, was taken up in committee."

"Mr. Rumsey stated that he was certain that the name which had been given to the new township, would not be satisfactory to the people; and moved that it be stricken out. Agreed to."

"Mr. R. then moved to insert the name St. Helena."

"This name was objected to by gentlemen, as there were several Post towns by that name in the Union, and therefore it would be contrary to the statute of the Territory, relative to the naming of new townships; and Mr. R. withdrew his motion."

"Mr. R. then moved to insert 'Warsaw'."

"Mr. Schoolcraft remarked, that he thought there was nearly a hundred 'Warsaws' in the United States."

"The motion was withdrawn"

"Mr. Schoolcraft then moved that the new town be called "(no name inserted¹²)", and the motion having been supported,"

"Mr. Rumsey hoped the council would not impose a name on the people of the town which he was sure they would not like."

"Mr. S. then withdrew his motion."

"And, on motion of Mr. R. the name of 'Panama' was inserted; and after an amendment, fixing the first township meeting at the house of Wm. McCormick; the bill was ordered to a third reading on Monday next."¹³

Monday, June 23, 1828.¹⁴ (Legislative Council). "The engrossed bill to set off and organize the township of Panama, was read the third time and passed."¹⁵

And so Panama we became. I suppose it was better than Chigome, or St. Helena, or Warsaw, or Arrowfield.

¹² In a correction published by the Detroit Gazette of Thursday, July 3, it is indicated that here Mr. Schoolcraft offered the name 'Arrowfield'. (page D-2315)

¹³ The Detroit Gazette, June 26, 1828, (page D-2309).

¹⁴ The Detroit Gazette here has a typographical error showing the date as Monday, June 9.

¹⁵ The Detroit Gazette, June 26, 1828, (page D-2309). The actual approval date was May 30, 1828 when a number of bills which had been read for the third time and passed, were approved that day. This bill, after passage, had to be amended by an Act passed July 3 to change the name of Wm. McCormick to John McCormick, both of whom were residents of Panama Township. Reported in the Detroit Gazette of July 31, 1828, page D-2323

But nothing lasts forever and a few years later the township of Panama split in two, becoming the current Salem and Superior Townships.

"An Act to organize the township of Salem, county of Washtenaw, approved March 18, 1833. Be it enacted by the Legislative Council of the Territory of Michigan, That all that part of the township of Panama, in the county of Washtenaw, comprised in surveyed township number one south, in range seven east, be a township by the name of Salem, and the first township meeting shall be holden (sic) at the school house, near Jacob E. Bullock's, in said township.

Sec. 2. That this act shall take effect and be in force on and after the first Monday in April next."¹⁶

"An Act to alter the names of certain townships, approved March 21, 1833. Be it enacted by the Legislative Council of the Territory of Michigan, That the name of the township of Panama, in the county of Washtenaw, shall hereafter be called the township of Superior,; any law to the contrary not withstanding."¹⁷

Although we didn't become **Superior Township** until 1833, we had been seeking that name since 1826. We could have remained Panama or taken some other name, but we were **Superior**, and we knew it.

Karl Williams
March 2009

¹⁶ Laws of the Territory of Michigan, W.S. George & Co., Lansing, 1874, volume 3, page 986.

¹⁷ Laws of the Territory of Michigan, W.S. George & Co., Lansing, 1874, volume 3, page 991.