A SHORT HISTORY OF CHELSEA

Original Manuscript by Sally Peiter, 1987
1st Revision by David Knisely, 1993
2nd Revision by David Knisely, 2000
3rd Revision by Janet Ogle-Mater, 2012
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INTRODUCTION

This **history** of Chelsea has been written for second graders. History tells the story of people and places from the past. We hope that this book gives you an idea of what life was like in Chelsea from the 1800’s to what we know now. There were many important events that took place in our nation’s history that impacted Chelsea and the making of our great city. The people that established Chelsea also played an important role in the development of our town. Some of the information is based on past memories of events and may not be entirely accurate. After reading this book, you will have a basic idea of our **community’s** past and the transformation into the city we have today.
BEFORE THE SETTLERS

Thousands of years before the discovery of America, Native Americans lived here. They formed trails to get from one place to another. The Great Sauk Trail was a famous Native American trail in Michigan. One end of the trail started in the eastern part of Michigan where Detroit is today. It went all the way to Illinois to where Chicago was built many years later. The Great Sauk Trail passed right by the area where Chelsea was later settled.

The trail was formed on land that was high and dry. The Great Sauk Trail probably followed the paths made by Native Americans, deer, and other wild animals. Today, the road we call Old U.S.-12 is where the Great Sauk Trail used to be. The trail was made by the Sauk Indians. Later, other tribes, like the Chippewa and Potawatomi also used this trail. If you have ever visited the Eddy Discovery Center you may have taken a walk on the Potawatomi Trail.

Another important Native American path was the St. Joseph Trail. It went across the state of Michigan. Later it was called Territorial Road.

1830 THROUGH 1860: EARLY SETTLERS

On October 18, 1830, Cyrus Beckwith came to the area we now call Chelsea. He was Sylvan Township’s first resident. In 1829, he bought 500 acres at $1.25 per acre from the U.S. Government. The area he purchased is in the present-day area of the fairgrounds. His house, the first house in Chelsea, was a log cabin built on the site of the Weinberg Dairy Farm.
In 1833, Cyrus built a new, larger home on his property. The log cabin was then used for his animals. It was common to first build a log cabin for shelter and then work on a permanent house for the family. A shelter is a place where people live. Cyrus also built a horse barn on the property which you can still see on Old U.S.-12 today.

Cyrus Beckwith log cabin and horse barn (Weinberg Dairy Farm)

After the land was first settled by Cyrus Beckwith, others came to buy land. Another early settler was Azel Backus. He bought land near where downtown Chelsea is today from the U.S. government in 1835. However, it was two sets of brothers that helped settle the Chelsea area between 1831-1834. They were Nathan and Darius Pierce, and Elisha, David, and James Congdon. Elisha and James Congdon stayed and built farms on both sides of what is now Main Street. Congdon Street in Chelsea is named after these brothers. Darius Pierce lived in the area that is now Veteran's Park, Weber Field, and Oak Grove Cemetery. His settlement was called Kedron. A settlement is a small community where people live or settle in a new region. Later, Elisha Congdon added this settlement to his and renamed it Chelsea. He liked the name Chelsea because he used to live in Chelsea, Connecticut. Nathan Pierce started a
community where Old U.S-12 and Main Street meet. He called his settlement Pierceville. The Chelsea Fairgrounds and hospital are there today.

Most people lived on farms. Farm houses had an open well with a roof. Each well had a wheel with a chain and two buckets. These buckets were used to get fresh water. The well was also used to keep food cool in the summer. A separate summer kitchen away from the house helped keep the house cool. Chickens would lay fresh eggs daily. Fresh milk came from the cows. People would heat soap stones and put them under their feet to keep warm during the cold winter nights. Horse wagons and buggies were used to get from one place to another. In the winter, bobsleds and cutters were used.

Men were kept busy on the farms. They plowed the fields, planted, and harvested the crops. They repaired farm equipment. The women took care of the children and spent many hours each day cooking. Food was made from
scratch since mixes were not sold in stores. Food had to be canned or stored for the next winter. Butter was churned and bread was baked. Children had the daily chores of getting water for cooking and laundry. They gathered kindling for the fire. They also gathered eggs, fed the animals, and helped watch younger brothers and sisters. Everyone was kept busy with chores. There was little or no time for play.

After the land was settled by the Congdon and Pierce brothers even more people came to these settlements in the next few years. Many of the earlier settlers came from the northeastern part of the United States. Their ancestors were from England. An ancestor is a person in your family that lived before you were born.
Other settlers came from Ireland and Germany. They were considered **immigrants**. An immigrant is a person who settles in a new country. Many of the German people settled south of town. Today, some of the roads between Chelsea and Manchester have German names.

![Artist's Etching of the Way James Congdon's Farm May Have Looked in 1874](image)

The “Old Wagon Trail” was an important **transportation** route to and from Chelsea during the 1840’s. We now call it M-52 or Main Street. Transportation is a way of moving goods or people from place to place. In 1841, a second important transportation mode came through Chelsea. It was the railroad, which
ran from Detroit to Jackson. Since Chelsea was located where the railroad and wagon trail crossed, it was a good place to live. Settlers came along with supplies and goods to Chelsea. Goods are things that people make or grow. People in Chelsea used the railroad to send their farm products and goods to cities for others to buy or trade. Trade is to buy, sell, or exchange goods with another person.

A railroad station was built in 1848 at Davidson Station. This small settlement was two miles west of Chelsea near Cavanaugh Road. This freight station was destroyed in a fire and a new station would cost a lot of money. The Congdon brothers made a deal with the Michigan Central Railroad. The brothers would give the railroad company some free land if Chelsea could get the new station. Since the railroad company needed land, the offer sounded good. In 1850, a new passenger and freight depot was built near the tracks in Chelsea and the people did not have to pay for it.

This brought more people to Chelsea. As they came, stores and other businesses were opened. Elisha Congdon built the first store in the village in 1849. A hotel, blacksmith, and tin shop soon followed. Frank Staffan was a carpenter and cabinet maker who came to Chelsea in 1853. In 1862, he started the Staffan Funeral Home, which is now called the Staffan-Mitchell Funeral Home. The Staffan brothers also started the first grist mill in Chelsea in 1874. Farmers would take grain to the mill where it would be ground into flour. This mill helped the area to grow even more. There were 63 people living in Chelsea in 1850’s.
The wagon trail that went through the Main Street of Chelsea was a big problem. The soil was very sandy and the hill steep. Because the hill was sandy and steep, many wagons got stuck. As the wagons came into Chelsea from the north, they had to go up the hill. To get up it, wagon drivers would unload half of their wagons as they entered town. This made it easier to get up the sand hill. At the top of the hill and in the center of town, the drivers would unload their wagons. Then they would turn around, go back down the hill and load up the other half of their supplies. When they got back to the top of the hill, they would put the rest of the load back in their
wagons. After the horses had rested, the loaded wagons would go down the other side of the hill south out of town.

Over the years, Main Street was changed. The dirt at the top of the hill was pushed to the sides and down the slopes. This made the top of the hill larger, and not as steep. The top of the sand hill is where Chelsea’s McKune Memorial Library now stands. You can still see that a hill is in the area. As you head north out of town, over the railroad tracks and past the Clocktower, you will be traveling down the old sand hill.

There were only four streets named this early in Chelsea. They were named for their position to the railroad tracks - East, North, Middle, and South Streets. As the village grew, the streets were named after areas they represented, like Marsh Street, Orchard Street, and Summit Street. Finally, in the 1880’s, it was decided to name the streets after the Presidents of the United States. The first was named after President Benjamin Harrison, so we have Harrison Street. One street was first named Polk Street. The man who lived there did not like President Polk. He didn't want to live on a street named after President Polk. After McKinley was elected President, he renamed it McKinley Street.

**CHELSEA SCHOOLS**

The first school in Chelsea was built in 1854. It was at the corner of South and W. Middle Streets. Harriet Wines was the first spring and summer teacher. Most of the students in the spring and summer were girls. The boys did not come to school because they were busy on the farms. W.
F. Hatch was the first man teacher for the winter, because the boys were back at school. It was thought that a man teacher could better control the big boys. There were 21 children at this time. At least ten of them were from the Congdon families.

In 1860, Elisha Congdon gave money for a new school. It was built on the corner of East and Park Streets. Most of the schools during this time went from kindergarten through eighth grade. Each grade would sit in a separate row of desks. Sometimes there was only one person in a grade. Drinking water was brought from a well. The bathrooms were small outside buildings. The bigger boys took turns starting a fire in the stove each day.

Learning was different than it is today. Students had to memorize a lot of things. They would stand up by their desks when they answered questions.
There were no ballpoint pens. Straight pens were used. These had to be dipped in ink every few seconds. Each desk had a hole in the top to hold an ink bottle. This was called an inkwell. Some students caused trouble. They would dunk girls' braids in the inkwell.

During recess and noon time, students played games. Favorite games were London Bridge, Pompom Pullaway, King of the Mountain, and Annie Over. Other activities were jacks, marbles, and hide-and-seek.
Thirteen years later, the larger Union School was built to replace the first school at the corner of East and Park Streets. This building was used for nearly 100 years. In 1926, a big gymnasium was added onto the Union School. When digging ground to build the gym, the famous Painted Rock was found. It sat on the corner of East and Harrison Streets until it was moved to Pierce Park in 1989. The Union School was torn down in the 1970’s and the Schoolhouse Apartments were built there. The apartments remain today.

St. Mary’s School was built on Congdon Street in 1906. By 1916, high school classes were added. A fire destroyed the building in 1925. Before the end of the year, a new school was built. Classes were held there until the school closed in 1968. St. Mary’s school is now used by the Chelsea Center for the Arts. They teach music and art there today.
Originally the St. Mary’s School, it is known today as the Chelsea Center for the Arts

1926 St. Mary’s Basketball Team
Prior to 1947, 28 one-room country schools were located near Chelsea. All of the one-room schoolhouses were closed by 1956. New schools were built in Chelsea during this time. These new schools were different from the one-room schoolhouses, because students were placed in separate rooms by grade. South Elementary School was built on Pierce Street. It opened in 1953. North Elementary School on McKinley Street was opened two years later. A new high school opened on Washington Street in 1959. We use it today as a community center and it is called the Washington Street Education Center. Beach Middle was finished in 1968. The pool was added a few years later. Pierce Lake Elementary School was built in 1997 on Freer Road. The following year, the newest Chelsea High School was finished. It is on the corner of Freer and Trinkle Roads.
Around the turn of the 21st century, our Chelsea schools experienced some more changes. Beach Middle and both of the two older elementary schools received major renovations. They were also given new names. North School is now North Creek Elementary School and South School is now South Meadows Elementary School. At this time, the elementary schools were separated by grades into three different buildings. Also, all-day every-other-day Kindergarten replaced the half-day curriculum. In 2008 that changed again. Now Kindergartens go all day, every day! Due to tough financial times, Pierce Lake Elementary was closed in 2010 to try to save money for the schools. Our Chelsea Schools serve about 2,300 in 2012.
1861 – 1865: CIVIL WAR

In 1861, people from the north and south of the United States were at war with each other. Slaves were used to work the large farms and cotton plantations in the south. Many people in the north did not believe people should be enslaved. They believed in freedom for all. They thought all men and women should be free to make their own choices. Because they thought differently, the two sections of our county separated. The great Civil War began. Abraham Lincoln was president at the time. He did not believe in slavery and wanted independence for all Americans. He gave a speech called the Emancipation Proclamation which freed all slaves.

Many men from Chelsea joined the Union Army of the north. They became members of several different troops. One was the mighty 24th Michigan Infantry. It was part of the bigger Iron Brigade. They fought bravely at the Battle of Gettysburg. Many soldiers died that day. Captain Negus, who owned the Chelsea cider mill, fought with General George Custer. They were part of the Michigan Brigade. In the Battle of Gettysburg, General Custer shouted; “Come on you Wolverines!” It helped the men fight harder.

A lot of Chelsea soldiers joined the 20th Michigan Infantry, Company K. Fredrick Lehman did. He wrote many letters back home to his parents in Chelsea. He wrote about long marches through Tennessee with Stonewall Jackson. George Glazier, Chelsea’s first banker, was a soldier with a Calvary. They rode horses in the war. His Calvary captured the South’s President Jefferson Davis.
During the war, Chelsea stopped growing. Many of the men were away at war. They could not help on the farms or in the stores. Stores were short on goods, too. Women and children worked harder. They did their chores and cared for farm animals, planted crops, and harvested in the fall. Thanksgiving Day became a national holiday during the Civil War. The tradition of spending the day with family eating a big meal did not happen for the soldiers. A tradition is the handing down of customs from generation to generation. But, the soldiers gave thanks for what they had at the time.

Civil War Memorial

At the end of the war in 1865, Chelsea soldiers came home. They were now called veterans, because they fought in a war. In 1889, Chelsea’s veterans met others in Detroit. Together, they paraded to Gettysburg to see the Michigan Day Monument dedicated. It was in honor of all the soldiers from Michigan who fought bravely at Gettysburg. Chelsea has its own monument to Civil War
veterans. It is in Oak Grove Cemetery. It has a soldier on top with two cannons resting on the ground. It was placed there in 1897.

**1870 – 1900: NEW FAMILY, GROWTH, AND FIRES**

A new family that played an important part in Chelsea's history moved to town in 1868. George Glazier helped start the first bank in Chelsea that year. George Glazier was also a pharmacist and operated a drugstore in the same building. He called the store the Bank Drugstore. It was located on the corner of Middle and Main Streets, where Zou’s Zou’s is today.

![George Glazier's Bank](image)

Many new buildings and businesses were started in town in the late 1800’s. Lewis Winans started a drug business that eventually became Winans Jewelry. The jewelry store closed only last year in 2011. The
Chelsea Herald, the first weekly newspaper in the village, began printing in 1871. The next year H.S. Holmes came to town to do business. His partnership eventually became known as the H.S. Holmes Mercantile Company. It was a general store, which sold mainly clothing. Later, it would become Vogel’s & Foster’s, and it remains today on Main Street. The brothers Charles and Rueben Kempf owned a hardware store, a lumber yard, and the first furniture store in Chelsea. In 1876, they opened a private bank. This bank would later become the Chelsea State Bank.

A huge fire destroyed part of the town in 1870. It destroyed many businesses on the west side of Main Street. A second large fire in 1876 destroyed buildings on the east side of Main Street. Most of these buildings were made of wood and they burned quickly. This was a great loss for Chelsea. The people in the area worked fast each time to rebuild the businesses that had been destroyed. When the buildings were rebuilt, they made them out of brick instead of wood.

Even though the new buildings were made of brick, Chelsea did not look like it does today. The town had dirt streets that were kept smooth by street sprinklers. Most of the well-used streets had sidewalks which were made of wood. Main Street had street lights which burned kerosene. Someone needed to light these street lamps every evening. Wooden hitching posts lined both sides of the street. When people came to town, they needed a place to "hitch" their horses. Once their horses were tied up, the people could buy what they needed in the stores. The people were proud of their town and kept it neat and clean.
Refrigerators had not been invented yet. This meant that there was no good way to store fresh food. That is why ice houses were a popular business. In the winter, tons of ice would be cut from the frozen lakes. The ice was put in special buildings covered with sawdust or marsh hay. This kept the ice from melting. In later years, people would buy blocks of ice from the ice houses and put them in ice boxes in their homes. These ice boxes helped keep food cold so it would last longer. New blocks of ice had to be put in the ice boxes every few days.

The Chelsea Fair has been a Chelsea custom for 140 years. A custom is a regular way of behaving or doing something. The first fair was planned by the Northwestern Farmer’s Club of Washtenaw County in 1872. It took place on the farm of Dr. Gates, where the high school athletic field is today. A popular event was horse racing. It was so popular it was a big part of each Chelsea Fair for years. There even was
a large horse racing arena kept on the grounds of the Methodist Home. This is where the fair took place for many years. The circus would set up there as well. It came to town by the railroad. In 1951, the fairgrounds you know at the corner of Old U.S.-12 and Old Manchester Road began to be used.

The first library in Chelsea opened in the basement of the Congregational Church. It was started by some women in 1877. The library had 100 books to lend. The library grew to over 500 books. It moved several times into different buildings on Main Street. The first librarian was hired in 1941. The library moved to the McKune house in 1958. The house was donated to the city by Catherine McKune. The building is one of the oldest buildings in town. It was built in 1860 by Elisha Congdon, Chelsea’s founder. He modeled it after a home he saw in Ann Arbor. Before Catherine McKune gave the house to be used as a library, it was an important hotel for many years. A major addition and renovation to the McKune Memorial Library was completed in 2006.
In 1875, the townspeople thought the old depot was just too small. The railroad company would not build a new one. So pranksters tied a strong cable around the old one. Then they tied the other end of the cable around the last car (caboose) of a train. When the train left Chelsea, the station tumbled down! (What do you think the talk was at supper that night?) So, in 1880 a new depot was built. It was built with two identical ends; one for the men, and the other for women and children to use. The ornate Victorian building stills stands on Jackson Street today. For many years after the depot was built, the railroad company took care of a park like area near the building. People riding on the passenger trains enjoyed the green grass and beautiful flower gardens. The Amtrak stopped passenger
service to Chelsea in 1982. A few years later, the Chelsea Depot Association was formed and saved the historic building from being demolished. Today, it is often used as a community space and rented for graduation, or other, parties.

In the late 1800’s, George Glazier’s son Frank Glazier started important businesses in town. The most successful was the Glazier Stove Works. This company made oil heaters and cooking stoves. They were sold under the **motto** "Brightest and Best". A motto is a word or saying that people or companies try to live by. Frank Glazier thought this was a good description of the stoves.
In 1894, three years after the stove company opened, there was another big fire. The town fire engines could not handle the fire, so the firemen telegraphed to Jackson for help. A train pulled the steam water pump to Chelsea from Jackson on a flat-car. Even so, the fire was too big to control. It destroyed the stove company and many other buildings on the block. It even burned the Congregational Church on Middle Street. The church was soon rebuilt at the same location. The fire did not stop Frank Glazier. The next year he bought a lot of land on the north side of the railroad tracks. New buildings went up.
Frank Glazier helped Chelsea get electric lights and its own waterworks by 1896. In town, children no longer had the chore of pumping water and they could read or do homework by electric light. The town was keeping up with even the larger cities in Michigan.

At the end of the nineteenth century only a few people were buying automobiles. They were very expensive. Frank Glazier was one of the first people in Chelsea to own one. Cars soon became more dependable than horses and buggies. Cars were faster, too. By 1913, more people could afford to buy them.
Chelsea continued to add new buildings and businesses as the first decade of new century began. Around this same time, the United Methodist Church on Park Street was destroyed by fire. Frank Glazier and others helped pay for a new church. This great stone building is still used today.
George Glazier died in 1901. His son, Frank, built a new bank in his father’s honor. It is the beautiful stone building on the corner of Main and South Streets. Today, it is used by the 14th District Court.
Around 1903, Chelsea had its own automobile factory called the Chelsea Manufacturing Company. It was one of the first automobile makers in Washtenaw County. Welch automobiles were made there. The business lasted only one year because of money problems. The company was sold to General Motors and later began making Pontiac cars.

In 1907, Frank Glazier added many new buildings to Chelsea. The Chelsea Methodist Home was built at the end of W. Middle Street. It was a place for people to live after they had retired and did not want to keep up their own homes. Many buildings were added over the years to this place. The original Methodist Home is gone, but others remain. Today, it is called the Chelsea Retirement Community.
The Glazier Stove Company was very successful at the beginning of the 1900’s. Some believed it was the largest oil stove company in the world. The company made 600 heaters and stoves per day. They shipped them all over the world. With this success, Frank Glazier built three new brick buildings for his **factory** in 1906 and 1907. A factory is a building where people produce or process goods. One of these buildings is a Chelsea landmark today. It was the Clocktower, which was completed in 1907 and had a large mechanical clock. It originally held water to have water ready if any more fires started.
Glazier Stove Company

Another building was the Welfare Building. It was also completed in 1907. The stove company had 120 people working there. Many of these people lived in other towns, and stayed in Chelsea hotels during the week. To give them something to do, Frank Glazier built them a recreation building. It had a gymnasium, billiard room, and indoor swimming pool. This was the first recreation building used by a business in Michigan. A newspaper company called The Chelsea Standard used this same building for many years. Now, a variety of business owners use this attractive building for their offices.
The Welfare Building

The third building was constructed the year before in 1906. It is east of the Welfare Building. This was the steel range and warehouse building for the Glazier Stove Company. Many know it today as the Rockwell building. The Rockwell-Standard Corporation used the building for many years. The tracks and turntables used in assembly are intact in the Rockwell Building. When the buildings were unused during the 1920’s, the top floor would leak. Then it became the neighborhood ice skating rink. It closed in 1982. The building sits empty waiting for reuse today.

Chelsea had an electric trolley service that ran from Detroit to Jackson. Factory workers, along with townspeople, used the DUR, as it was called. DUR stood for Detroit United Railway. It served Chelsea from 1901-1929. Chelsea also had a streetcar from 1904-1909. It was electric and ran on a track. The streetcar ran through town on Middle Street. It ran from Wilkinson Street to Madison Street.
Dr. Chandler Lane opened his veterinary business in 1905. He had to go to the farms to treat the large animals. Traveling from one farm to another kept him busy. Dr. Wilfred Lane, his son, ran the Lane Animal Hospital for many years. Now his children continue the family business. It is located across from Veteran’s Park on Sibley Road.
In 1907, because of money problems, the Glazier Stove Works came to an end. Walter Flanders bought the buildings. He made motorcycles for a few years. By 1916, the Lewis Spring and Axle Company took over the Glazier Stove Works buildings. This new company made a car called the Hollier Eight. The town was excited that another auto factory was starting in Chelsea, but the business did not last long. More people bought the less expensive Fords.
The Merkel Furniture block was built between 1905-1908. It had many different businesses in its early years. There was an ice cream shop, meat market, hardware store, taxi service, and a funeral home. It also housed Chelsea’s first movie theatre. Warren Geddes started the Chicago Theatre around 1907. He later changed the name to the Princess Theatre. It was here that townspeople watched the silent films. They had captions to read instead of actors talking. A movie house would hire a piano player to provide music with the silent shows. The Princess Theatre started to run talking films in 1930, three years after the first talking movie was released in America. In 1939, a new theatre opened directly across the street. The Sylvan Theatre was modern with cushioned spring seats, quality sound, and air-conditioning. The Princess Theatre could not compete, and it closed that same year. Movies were shown at the Sylvan Theatre through the 1960’s. This building is still there. It has been remodeled, but is waiting for a new business.

Other new businesses started in the first decades of 20th century, too. Chelsea Elevator Company formed in 1908. It was renamed the Chelsea Lumber Company later on. It was downtown until 1983, when it moved to the south end of town near I-94.

Palmer Motor Sales started in 1910 by Leigh G. Palmer. He started selling Ford cars a year later. Palmer Ford, as it was best known, closed in 2010. At that time, it was the oldest Michigan Ford dealership in the state.

Another long-time business in Chelsea started in 1913 called the Chelsea Screw Works. It became known as Federal Screw Works ten years later. Because of its growing business, they built a new factory building on Main Street in 1917. It is located across from Van Buren Street where the Detroit Urban Railway station once was located. Federal Screw Works was a major employer in Chelsea for more than 90 years. It closed in 2005. The building remains empty.
1920 – 1960: BUSINESS BOOMS

Most of Chelsea's factories were busy during the 1920's. Some businesses were running day and night. More people had money to spend. New houses were being built. Street lamps were now run by electricity. There was a flag pole in the middle of Main and Middle Street crossing. Band concerts were sometimes held here. Traffic had to go around the pole. After a girl was injured in an accident there, the flag pole was removed.

In 1930, Lloyd Heydlauff started an electrical business. He started to sell appliances two years later. Then in 1944, he began a frozen storage business. It was called Frigid Products. Most people did not have freezers then. So they could pay to have food kept in huge freezers in this store. A big fire destroyed the Frigid Products stone building in 1970. The store was rebuilt and renamed Heydlauff’s. It is one of the oldest family-owned appliance stores in Washtenaw County. This business still sells appliances such as refrigerators, stoves, washers, and dryers.
The Chelsea Milling Company started as a flour mill in 1879. The Holmes family took over the business in 1905. It became Chelsea Milling Company in 1923. In 1930, they began making Jiffy Mix. Mabel Holmes wanted to create a mix that would make life easier for people in the kitchen. The name Jiffy came from Mabel Holmes’ childhood housekeeper who said, “Those good, hot biscuits will be ready in a jiffy.” Jiffy Mix soon became popular. It is still being sold in stores today. The huge grain storage towers stand near the place where the original flour mill was built. Chelsea Milling Company still buys, stores, and grinds their own grain. It is the only place where Jiffy Mix is made.
Like a lot of small towns across America, Chelsea had many people who fought in World War II. The United States entered WWII after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor in Hawaii in 1941. Over 300 men and women from Chelsea joined the U.S. Armed Services. While the soldiers were away fighting in the war, people here at home helped, too. Women worked in factories to do the jobs the men were doing. Children collected scrap metal and paper for the war
effort. American’s had to ration some goods, like sugar, coffee, gas, and shoes. They went without other goods, like pantyhose, so our factories could keep busy making war supplies. The Federal Screw Works expanded into every available building in Chelsea to make artillery shells and other weapons for the war. Some of Chelsea’s heroes did not come home from the war, but many returned. The war ended in 1945. Only a few of Chelsea’s WWII veterans are still alive today.

Main Street, 1940

America boomed after the war. When young soldiers returned home, they wanted to get married and buy homes. By 1950, many new houses were being built in Chelsea. It was getting hard to find any land to build on in the center of the Village of Chelsea. Many of the houses were built in the town's first subdivision. These houses are across from the fairgrounds on Old U.S.-12.
Stores that lined Main Street included Gambles, Chelsea Drug, Strieter’s Mens Wear, Daniels Motor Sales, and Grove’s 5c to $1.00 Store. Kantlehner Jewelers, which began in 1868, was Chelsea’s oldest mercantile business in 1959. Pierce Park and Veterans Park were developed in the 1950’s.

The Chrysler Proving Grounds was built south of Chelsea on M-52. As early as 1949, farmers were selling large section of land. By 1952, workers were reshaping that land as they made a test track for Chrysler cars. By the time it was finished, it was the largest private, earth-moving job in Michigan.

In 1959, Chelsea Lanes opened for business. It began with 12 lanes and a small snack bar. Ed and Kathy Greenleaf bought the business in 1962. They expanded the building by adding six more lanes, a lounge, and large rental space. The Greenleaf family continues to own Chelsea Lanes and the Chelsea Antique Mall, which opened in 2010 next door in the original rental space.

Chelsea honored its 125th Anniversary in 1959. Many residents dressed up in clothing from the early years of Chelsea. They formed the “Brothers of the Brush” and the “Belles” and held parties and a big parade to celebrate.

In 1960, a new interstate, I-94, was officially opened. It had a big influence on the growth of Chelsea south of downtown.

1970 – 2000: MORE GROWTH & CHANGES

Dr. Michael Papo and Dr. James Botsford started a medical clinic in 1958. In 1967, they expanded to the present location and soon a hospital was built next to the clinic. Emergency offices and other medical buildings were added.
This was the beginning of the Chelsea Community Hospital. It has been a major employer of Chelsea men and women since. It is now partnered with the large St. Joseph Mercy Health System. In 2011, the hospital began work on a large expansion.

In the 1970's, many businesses started along M-52 in the south part of Chelsea. Thompson Pizzeria opened on W. Old U.S.-12 in 1970. Polly’s Country Market opened in the old Stop-N-Shop building where the U.S. Post Office is today. Big Boy and McDonald's were two of the first fast food restaurants built near the expressway. Now, we have number of choices like Taco Bell, KFC, Wendy’s, and Coney Island.

The Chelsea Area Historical Society was founded in 1974. Some area women and men thought it important to collect and preserve our area history. They still do. The Chelsea Area Historical Society Museum first opened in the Chelsea Depot. Then it temporarily moved to Main Street in 2007. Today, you can explore Chelsea history on W. Old U.S.-12. The museum moved there in 2010.
The Chelsea State Bank built a large, modern bank in 1980 south of town. It is located on the corner of S. Main Street and Old U.S.-12. However, it started long ago from two other banks in Chelsea. Those banks joined together and formed the Chelsea State Bank in 1934. It had always been downtown, until the new bank was built in 1980. They still do business from the bank south of downtown today.

In 1984, Chelsea’s last downtown hotel, the Sylvan Hotel, was destroyed by fire. It was next to the Chelsea Village Hardware. The Sylvan Building was rebuilt. It now has professional offices and the Uptown Antiques located there.

More building growth continued south of town. The Chelsea Shopping Center was built in the late 1980’s. Stores like Chelsea Pharmacy, Gemini Salon, and Pamida were some of the first businesses. Gemini Salon, which moved to the shopping center in 1989 from downtown, remains there today.
The Village Plaza was built across the road from the Chelsea Shopping Center. Professional buildings also sprung up further down S. Main Street. These buildings have businesses like doctor offices, dentists, and realtors.

Dancer's clothing store closed on Main Street. Then the building was made into a restaurant in 1991. It is named The Common Grill. Craig Common is the owner of The Common Grill.
Also in 1991, the Purple Rose Theatre opened. In 1989, the building was purchased and renovated by Jeff Daniels. His grandfather had owned the building. It had been used as a car and bus garage then. Jeff Daniels is a famous actor who was raised and continues to live in Chelsea. The theater was completely remodeled in 2000.

Main Street got a new look by 1992. New brick sidewalks, street lights, benches, and trees were added. It made the downtown area more pleasant. Many storefronts were remodeled to look like they did when they were first built.

Vogel's & Foster's clothing store was selling clothing for more than 100 years.
It was one of Chelsea's oldest businesses. A new owner bought the store after the death of long-time owner, Helen Vogel. Schneider's Grocery was also sold. It had been in business for more than 70 years. The New Chelsea Market now has a store there.

![Timber Town](image)

**Timber Town**

Pierce Lake Golf Course is a popular attraction. It opened in 1995 just south of the Village Plaza on S. Main Street. Another outdoor attraction was started the following year. It was at the opposite end of the village. Timber Town is a huge playground next to Weber Field on Sibley Road. Residents worked for over a year to plan it. Hundreds of people helped build it in the summer of 1997. Some people sawed wood and pounded nails. Others cooked meals for these workers. Families worked hard, but they had fun building Timber Town. It took only one week to build this play area that displays many of Chelsea’s landmarks. In 2007, residents gathered again to work on Timber Town. They sanded and painted the structure, and replaced mulch. A wooden fire truck and
police car were also added to the play structure. These were in honor of two of Chelsea’s heroes. Our Fire Captain and Police Chief died in the line of duty in a helicopter accident in 2006.

The old water tower near the center of town was built in 1927. It could not handle all of the water needs of the people living in the village anymore. A new tower was built in the south part of town. It began operating in 1995. It is decorated with the name of our town as well as a picture of the Clocktower. The historic water tower was removed from downtown in 1997.

Zou’s Zou’s opened in 1998 at the corner of Main and Middle Streets. It is in the same building that Glazier’s Bank Drugstore was once in.

For a while, Chelsea had two supermarkets. Polly’s at the corner of S. Main Street and Old U.S.-12 and a Farmer Jack. Farmer Jack built a new building near I-94. It opened at the end of 1999. However, they closed about seven years later. Polly’s moved from their location of 35 years into the newer building. Polly’s County Market is Chelsea’s only supermarket again.
People continued to move to the Chelsea area. New houses were built. Some families moved into the Village Park Condominiums across from Pierce Park. Others lived in Pierce Lake Village on E. Old U.S.-12 by Pierce Lake. In the summer of 2000, another housing development was started down the road from Pierce Lake Village. It is called Chelsea Fairways and is at the corner of E. Old U.S.-12 and Freer Road.

People visiting Chelsea needed a place to stay. A Holiday Inn Express near 1-94 in Commerce Park was opened by the end of the 20th century. A Comfort Inn opened in the same area shortly after.

2000 – PRESENT: BECOMING A CITY

A skating and hockey arena opened in Chelsea in 2000. The Arctic Coliseum is located near the expressway off Old Manchester Road. Home games of the
Chelsea High School Hockey team are played there. It added the Breakaway restaurant upstairs in 2009.

In March of 2004, the Village of Chelsea became a city. Even though we are now a city, we are still a **rural community**. A rural community is an area with small communities and open space for forests and farm lands.

The Clocktower and stove factory buildings have been part of Chelsea for more than 100 years. McKinley Properties bought the factory buildings. In 2006, many of these buildings reopened after restoration. The Iron Foundry was demolished and the Brass Foundry collapsed in the same year, but others remain. Today, they are occupied by the Chelsea Teddy Bear Factory, outpatient health services, Las Fuentes restaurant, and other businesses.
A favorite play spot for Chelsea kids opened in the renovated Clocktower factory in 2006. The Chelsea Treehouse is a big indoor play structure. It moved to a larger space south of town in 2011.

There was a big fire in the Chelsea Shopping Center in 2008. Many businesses were destroyed. The Chelsea Grill and Pamida were rebuilt. But the Pamida closed at the end of 2010. The Chelsea Pharmacy decided to move across the street to another shopping mall. The Chelsea Grill remains in the shopping center.

In 2009, Chelsea celebrated its 175th Anniversary. The city held a big parade, a special fair, and fireworks.

The U.S. Post Office moved to the corner of S. Main Street and Old U.S.-12 in 2009. The old P.O., which remains empty downtown, was used for 72 years. It was built during the Great Depression as part of President Roosevelt’s New Deal program. He wanted to help Americans find jobs during the Depression. The program also put artists to work by having them paint great murals in public buildings, like the one in the Chelsea P.O. It was painted in 1938, then
carefully removed and replaced at our new P.O. The mural is called “Way of Life” and shows a young family enjoying the fruits of their hard work. It was painted by George Fisher. Prior to 1937, the post office was generally located within another business in the village. The first postmaster in Chelsea was Elisha Congdon who kept the mail in his general store. Chelsea got rural delivery to outlying farms and homesteads in 1901. Prior to this, everyone had to come to the village and see the postmaster to get their mail. The old P.O. building at the corner of Main and South Street remains empty.

"Way of Life" mural from the original Chelsea U.S. Post Office

Chelsea’s police are getting a new building in 2012. They are currently working on the construction of a new City Hall. The building is on S. Main Street between Orchard and Summit Street. The police have used the old Municipal Building on E. Middle Street since 1950’s.
Chelsea Police Station near completion in 2012

Today, newer downtown stores include the River Gallery, Mule Skinner Boots, The Garden Mill, La Jolla Jeweler, The Village Shoppe, Back to Roots, Glee Cakes, The Potting Shed, Bumbles, and Gigi’s Flowers. Older businesses include Vogel’s & Foster’s, Heydlauff’s, Chelsea Village Hardware, Chelsea Print & Graphics, Jack & Son Barber Shop, and Westside Gym.

LOOKING AHEAD

What is in the future for Chelsea? Many cars travel through town every day. At times, the traffic moves slowly, but this Main Street traffic is what helps to keep downtown businesses open. Some talk of a road that bypasses downtown to help with traffic flow. Others talk of returning railway service to Chelsea. What do you think will be different in Chelsea in 10 years? Or in a 100 years?

Many things have happened in Chelsea since the early pioneers helped
settle it. Chelsea became an important town because of the north-south road and because of the east-west railroad. But, it was the people that made Chelsea grow. Today, it is still the people that make Chelsea a wonderful place to live.
Glossary:

1. **Ancestor** - is a person in your family that lived before you were born.
2. **Community** - a place that is made up of many neighborhoods.
3. **Custom** – is a regular way of behaving or doing something.
4. **Freedom** - every citizen’s right to make choices.
5. **Goods** – are things that people make or grow.
6. **History** - tells the story of people and places from the past.
7. **Immigrant** - is a person who settles in a new country.
8. **Invention** - something new that someone makes or thinks of.
9. **Monument** - a building or statute that honors a person or event.
10. **Motto** – is a word or saying that people or companies try to live by.
11. **President** - the elected leader of our country.
12. **Rural community** - is an area with small communities and open space for forests and farm lands.
13. **Shelter** – is a place where people live.
14. **Settlement** - is a small community where people live or settle in a new region.
15. **Transportation** – is a way of moving goods or people from place to place.
16. **Trade** - is to buy, sell, or exchange goods with another person.
17. **Tradition** – is the handing down of beliefs from generation to generation.
18. **Urban** - an area that has a large city.

19. **Veteran** - someone who has served time in the United States military.
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