

The Founding of Napoleon

Pioneers began to arrive in the area in the 1830's. Mr. Charles Blackman bought government land in the area, but Lenawee County became his home. Mr. A. B. Goodwin became the first settler in the Village area. He was an Indian trader. As there were still some Indians in the area, he set up his business and moved his wife and adopted daughter to Napoleon. Abram Bolton, a military man and an Indian agent, settled in Coldwater, but when traveling to this area, he saw sandstone cropping out of the ground and recognized it for its building value. He moved back here with his wife in August of 1832. Mrs. Bolton then gave birth to their daughter, Caroline (Helen) in November of 1832. She was the first white person born in the village. Mr. Bolton, who was an admirer of Napoleon Bonaparte, suggested the name of Napoleon for the area. Several other settlers arrived during 1832 and 1833; Chauncey Hawley and brother Lyman Hawley, Samuel Quigley, Harvey Austin, Morgan Case, Rockwell Rexford, Calvin and Louisa Swain, the Squires, Fords, Hunts, Deans, and many others. On March 29, 1833, an act of the Legislative Counsel of the Territory of Michigan approved the 4 square miles in the Southeast corner of Jackson County as Napoleon Township.

The first Township meeting was held in the home of A. B. Goodwin. Harvey Austin was chosen Napoleon's first Supervisor. The Township Board had a wide range of responsibilities. Three members served as overseers for establishing and operating the schools, three served as Road Commissioners, and three as overseers of the poor, along with a Clerk, Treasurer and Tax Collector doing their usual duties. Calvin Swain was a Baptist minister from New York State. Several members of his congregation followed him to Napoleon. He started the Napoleon Baptist Church and the Village of Swainsville, (today's Brooklyn). His wife, Louisa was the first schoolteacher. She taught in the home of Sam Quigley. A school was built in 1835.

Abram Bolton and Roswell Rexford were delegates to the Constitutional Convention held in 1836, which created the Constitution of the State of Michigan in 1837. There were also several Township boundary changes between 1836 and 1839, leaving Napoleon with a west line just one mile west of the Village of Napoleon, but including the Villages of Brooklyn and Norvell.