

MISC.

HISTORY – ALBION, MICHIGAN

It was the summer of 1821 when fifty-five Potawatomi Chiefs gathered to sign the Treaty of Chicago which granted the part of the country that included what was to become southern Michigan, to the United States. The first recorded history of Albion began with the signing of this treaty.

In the spring of 1833, Paul Tenney Peabody and his wife, Eleanor, brought their family from New York and erected a simple log shack thatched with marsh grass near the confluence, or forks, of the north and south branches of Kalamazoo River. Since that time, the area has been commonly known as The Forks, and the name was eventually attached to the annual city-wide street festival for which the town has become famous. The river provided power for mills, and Albion quickly became a mill town (flour and wood) as well as an agricultural market. A railroad line arrived in 1852, fostering the development of other industries. Albion incorporated as a village in 1855 and as a city in 1885.

The Albion Malleable Iron Company, a vibrant locally owned and controlled factory which was in existence from 1888 until 1967, was the major economic factor in Albion's history in the early 20th century because it brought hundreds of residents to the town and formed the basis of Albion's diverse population. Folks originally from Italy, Poland, Holland, Mexico, and many other countries came to work and settle in Albion, as did a large African-American population from the South.

The presence of several other major manufacturers since the 19th century gave Albion the reputation of a factory town. This has changed with the closure of several manufacturers, and Albion's culture is changing to that of a college town with a strong interest in technology and sustainability issues.

The Festival of the Forks is a celebration of Albion's historic heritage and rich ethnic diversity, traditionally featuring culinary, musical and visual arts. Each year showcases different musical performers and special events such as pet shows, parades and art exhibits. Under the auspices of the Greater Albion Chamber of Commerce, the Festival of the Forks is an annual reunion of current and former residents of the greater Albion area in celebration of the creativity and diversity of its people.

The Albion Historical Society was founded in 1955 to preserve and display the heritage of this small community with a very rich history. The first Mother's Day is believed to have originated in Albion in the late 1800's, the Purple Gang of Detroit operated here during Prohibition, and The Sweetheart of Sigma Chi - the most beloved and popular of college fraternity songs – was penned on the Albion College campus in 1911. It is the birthplace of food writer, MLK Fisher, and the burial place of legendary World War II-era journalist Gwen Dew. At least one station of the Underground Railroad operated in Albion prior to the Civil War.

The Society operates the Gardner House Museum, a Victorian house built around 1875 and filled with antique tools, artifacts, pictures and furniture. The Albion Historical Society transferred its photograph

archives to the Albion District Library's Local History Room in 1997. The collection includes many rare late 19th and early 20th century photographs of local families, businesses and organizations.

Albion's home-grown historian, Frank Passic, writes books and on-line articles about the city's vibrant past, and also leads an annual historical tour of the city-owned Riverside Cemetery.

A downtown Albion architectural landmark, the Bohm Theater, was originally built to present movies and vaudeville shows, and opened its doors on Christmas day 1929. Closed for a number of years, and badly deteriorated, the theater is being restored, thanks to a number of grants. One, a \$25,000 grant from the State Farm Neighborhood Assist campaign, was determined through an online voting contest through Facebook. A wonderful example of Albion's community spirit, the Bohm Theatre project received more than 69,000 votes in the State Farm contest to finish fourth among 200 entries from the United States and Canada.

Albion's history is that of a city that forged both metal and minds, creating a dynamic community of hardworking people from all backgrounds and ethnicities.

Albion District Library – Local History Room

501 S. Superior St., Albion MI 49224 517-629-3993

<http://www.albionlibrary.org/>

Albion Historical Society

509 S. Superior Street, Albion, MI 49224 517-629-5100

<http://www.albionhistoricalsociety.org/>

Frank Passic, Historian

<http://www.albionmich.com/history/>

Read more about Albion in the following books, available in the Library's Local History Room:

History of Calhoun County, Michigan, 1830-1877 (1877)

Portrait and Biographical Review of Calhoun County, Michigan (1891)

History of Calhoun County, Michigan by Washington Gardner (1913)

Albion's Milestones and Memories, compiled by Miriam E. Krenerick (1932)

Albion College, 1835-1960: A History by Robert Gildart (1961)

A Young Man in Albion Village, transcribed by Audrey K. Wilder (1975)

An Ethnic History of Albion by Judy Powell (1978)

The Albion College Sesquicentennial History, 1835-1985
by Keith J. Fennimore (1985)

A Michigan Childhood: The Diaries of Madelon Louisa Stockwell
edited by Leslie Dick (1988)

A Short History of Albion, Michigan by Mary Reed Bobbitt (1990)

History of Albion, Michigan: From the Archives by Frank Passic (1991)

A History of the Albion Public Schools by Frank Passic (1991)

