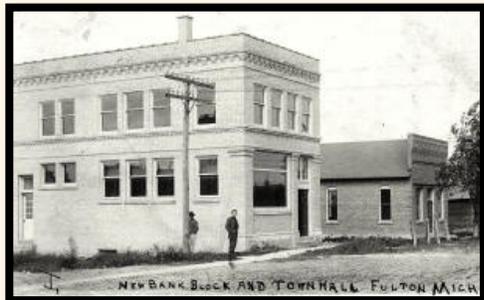


Vicksburg Historical Society

The Village of Fulton

If you wanted to plan a trip to a Michigan historical site, you probably wouldn't think of traveling to Wakeshma Township to visit the Village of Fulton. But, although there's not much town left anymore—just one little store, a tiny restaurant and the post office—Fulton does have a story to tell. Just like hundreds of little settlements throughout Michigan, Fulton has a history full of commerce, banking, agriculture and just plain living that you can't see by simply driving through the main four corners.



**Fulton Bank and Town Hall
in the 1960's**

The story of Fulton began with Jacob Gardner and the home he carved out of the wilderness, just one and one-quarter miles north of present-day Fulton. Gardner originally lived in Leonidis Township, having emigrated from the state of New York. One day he wandered quite a distance from home while tracking a deer and stumbled upon what he considered a likely spot to homestead. It was on this site in 1843 that Gardner built the first log house in Wakeshma Township.

In time other settlers followed, and a small community grew up at what eventually became known as Gardner's Corners. "The Corners" became home to a dry goods store, a cheese factory, two blacksmith shops, a harness and shoe shop, a grocery store and a school. When the school first opened, there were only three white pupils, the rest being children of the Pottawatomie Indians who had inhabited the area for generations.

Wakeshma Township was organized in 1846, the last township in Kalamazoo County to be settled and developed. The first township organizational meeting took place in the Gardner home. Nearly everyone attending the meeting came with a gun on his back—the woods held bear as well as deer and small game.

Those elected as the first township officers were: Jacob J. Gardner, Supervisor; Caleb Orcutt, Clerk; Asa Wixson, Treasurer; Elias Stilwell, Justice of the Peace; Matthew Cullen, Highway Commissioner; Joseph Heminway, School Inspector; John Stilwell, Director of the Poor; and Charles Carver, John Stilwell, and Matthew Cullen, Constables. After the meeting, Mrs. Gardner served the men a dinner of bear meat.

By the 1850's dissatisfaction with the location of Gardner's Corners led to the relocation of many of its buildings south to where the four corners of Wakeshma Township Sections 15, 16, 21, and 22 converged. Here, the site of present-day Fulton was where John Y. Lipe had purchased 80 acres, built a log home, and started a shingle manufacturing business.



**Post Office, W Avenue, east
of 42nd Street (on the north
side of the road.
Ben Weinberg (left) and
George Evans (right).**

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2002, 42nd Street looking west.

This new site, because it was exactly in the center of the township, became known for a short while as Wakeshma Centre. However, by 1867 "Fulton" was adopted as the village's name upon the request of then-Justice of the Peace John Codman, who had been born in Fulton County,

New York. Fulton soon became a bustling business center serving the thriving agricultural economy of Wakeshma Township. History of Kalamazoo County, Michigan, published in 1880, reported: "The hamlet, which in the business season has

quite an important trade, has two churches, a flourishing school, taught by Miss Minnie Pierce; two general stores, the proprietors of which are G. O. Byington and Messers. Culp and Bond; one hardware, boot and shoe store owned by O. G. Cook; a blacksmith shop kept by the Hakes Brothers; one harness shop owned by S. B. Lovin; a wagon shop, the proprietor of which is G. F. Wright; and a boot and shoe shop kept by C. Mullen. J. R. Mears carries on a general undertaking business. The place also boasts two physicians, Dr. G. P Pease, who represents the allopathic, and Dr. W. H. Haskins the homeopathic school of medicine."

In later years, Fulton could also boast of having a hotel, which still stands today as a residence on the northeast corner of the intersection of "W" Ave. and 42nd St. Fulton had its own bank, which stood on the northwest corner of the main four corners; a stock yards, feed mill, creamery, and their own telephone exchange, the Fulton Mutual Telephone Company. Formed in 1906, Mr. and Mrs. Henry Weaver operated the telephone system out of their home, day and night, for 27 years. In the early days customers were responsible for the maintenance of their own lines and poles, which resulted in many lines strung from trees and fence posts.

The school districts in the township were named in the rotation in which they were built, with District No. 1 being the old Gardner's Corners school. Schoolhouses followed the arrival of settlers, until in 1880 the township was well supplied with means of instruction with six whole and four fractional school districts. The entire number of pupils receiving instruction in 1880 was 463. They were taught by 10 male and 11 female teachers, and the total amount paid them in salaries for the year was \$1488.50. The Holcomb, Worden, Becket, Hull, Leggett, Culp and Berger school districts, among others, served the township well until consolidation with Vicksburg and Athens in the late 1940's.



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District No. 2 School

The first District No. 2 school was located one-half mile east of Fulton. When a new building was considered, it was decided to locate it in a more central location. Therefore, in 1881-1882, the "new" District No. 2 Fulton School was built by Arthur Longman and Daniel Bartshe at a cost of about \$1,100, which was raised by taxing residents of the school district. The rough lumber used in the building's construction was sawed from timber taken from wood lots within the township. That building, located just a short distance west of the downtown area, stands today used as a residence, complete with school bell still in the tower.

Three devastating fires eventually burned down much of the business district. Then there was the fact that Fulton was never able to attract a railroad, and the advent of the automobile enabling people to drive greater distances to work and shop. All these events, and many more, affected Fulton in the same way that hundreds of towns throughout Michigan and elsewhere were affected during the "changing times" following World War II. Fulton may no longer look like it did in the 1880's, but families have lived here for many generations, attending Fulton Schools, getting married in Fulton churches, raising their families in the Fulton community, working and shopping in Fulton stores, and farming Fulton's surrounding farmland.



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