

HISTORY OF WALWORTH COUNTY

According to some of his diaries, Lieut. Jefferson Davis passed by Geneva Lake in 1830. In 1831 Mrs. Kinzie and her party were at Geneva Lake and she wrote an account of her stay. In 1832 Christopher Payne left Chicago to search for a mill site on Geneva Lake; he reached the Nippersink Valley in Bloomfield and then returned to Chicago.

In late 1835, the surveying team of John Brink and John Hodgson reached Geneva Lake and blazed a personal claim to the town site and water rights. In early 1836 Christopher Payne again set forth and found a mill site on Geneva Lake; he built a log cabin and dam...giving him the honor of being the county's first actual settler.

That year brought more people to the county. Palmer Gardner in Spring Prairie; Jesse Meacham and Adolphus Spoor in Troy; Asa Blood and a Mr. Roberts in East Troy; James Van Slyke in Walworth; Harry Kimball in Bloomfield; Col. Samuel Faulkner Phoenix first in Spring Prairie and then in Delavan; Isaiah Hamblin in LaFayette; and LeGrand Rockwell in Elkhorn.

By the end of 1837, every town had settlers, although neither the towns nor the county had been officially named.

Walworth County was created in 1838 and named in honor of Reuben Hyde Walworth, a New York judge who was President of the New York State Temperance Society. In 1838 there were five towns...Delavan in the southwest quarter, Elkhorn in the northwest quarter, Geneva in the southeast quarter and Spring Prairie and Troy were divided in the northeast quarter. By 1842 the five towns became nine...Richmond and Whitewater had been taken from Elkhorn; Darien and Walworth (the latter included what is now Sharon), from Delavan. In 1846, the towns were Bloomfield, Darien, Delavan, East Troy, Elkhorn, Geneva, Hudson (later to be called Lyons), LaFayette, LaGrange, Linn, Richmond, Sharon, Spring Prairie, Sugar Creek, Troy, Walworth and Whitewater.

The first county elections were held in 1838. Elected officers included: Sheriff-Sheldon Waling; Register of Deeds-LeGrand Rockwell; Treasurer- William Hollinshead; Surveyor-Edward Norris; Coroner-Hollis Latham; and County Commissioners-Benjamin Ball for 1 year; William Bowman for 2 years; and Nathaniel Bell for 3 years.

The county residents also voted in 1838 to make Elkhorn village the county seat. This was confirmed by the territorial legislature.

The county officials began their term of office and the county commissioners met to organize on January 7, 1839. The commissioners appointed V. A. McCracken as Clerk of the Board of Commissioners.

The greater part of the Board's duties were licensing taverns and stores, laying out roads and road districts, establishing school districts and appointing inspectors, making juror lists, naming election judges and designating polling places.

The first courthouse was originally built in 1839 for Mr. LeGrand Rockwell. It contained a courtroom, a meeting room for county commissioners and an office for the registry of deeds and mortgages. The second courthouse was dedicated on May 10, 1843; for some years it was considered one of the best courthouses in the state. On September 20, 1875 the next courthouse was dedicated; in 1905 another building was constructed adjacent to the courthouse for the register of deeds. On September 29, 1962, the fourth courthouse was dedicated which is now known as the Walworth County Government Center. The design of this courthouse received state and national recognition. On May 15, 2005, the new Judicial Center was dedicated. This structure, located on Highway NN east of Elkhorn and adjacent to the Sheriff's Office, houses the entire court system, Clerk of Courts, District Attorney, Child Support and Corporation Counsel.

The first jail was a 14' by 20' log structure built in 1840. The second jail was built in 1852 and was located on the northeast corner of Church and Court Streets. The third jail, a brick structure, was built in 1878 on the northwest corner of Church and Walworth. In 1915, the fourth jail was built on the same location. The fifth jail was part of the courthouse that was built 1962 which is now the Government Center. On November 1, 1995 the new Law Enforcement Center was dedicated which was renamed the Sheriff's Office in 2010. This structure, located on Highway NN east of Elkhorn, houses the sixth Walworth County jail.