



WELCOME TO FENNVILLE

Site #10

The early settlement that eventually became Fennville was established where two log roads crossed at a low place along the town line road between Manlius and Clyde Townships. Early maps show a church and sawmill on the high ground to the west of the swamp and a post office and hotel to the east. What is now the downtown area was not developed until the coming of the railroad in 1871, after farmers had drained the swamp and much of the surrounding farmland.

Elam Fenn moved to this area in 1852 from New York City. In 1863 he, along with his partner Levi Loomis, erected a sawmill just west of what is now known as South Street. When the first post office was granted in February of 1868, the settlement was given the name Fenn's Mills. However, railroad conductors found the name difficult to call out, so when the new railroad schedules were printed, the railroad changed the name to Fennsville, a change accepted by the post office. The name changed to Fennville later in 1871 when the town was officially platted.

In October of 1871 a large blaze swept through the town on the same day as the great Chicago fire, leaving only the Methodist church on the east and a partially constructed hotel on the west. With the local sawmills running 24 hours a day to supply lumber for the rebuilding of Chicago (and Fennville and nearby Holland!), the settlers rapidly replaced the destroyed buildings. It has been said that the excess sawdust from this lumber processing was used as fill to build up the low lying land area in what is now the downtown business district.

Fennville became a village in 1889, and voted to become a city in 1960 under a new law lowering the population required to become a city, when the proposed city boundaries included land in two different townships, Manlius and Clyde.

In the early days Fennville served as a major shipping area for fruit, milled wheat, and the mint oil that was distilled on nearby farms. In 1906 a factory (still in operation) was built adjacent to the tracks for the canning of fruit. In 2000, Fennville had a population of 1,459 residents, and a land area of 1.1 square miles.

Please enjoy a short walking tour of historic downtown Fennville sites still standing today (see map below). Beginning east of the post office on Maple and Main is (1) the Dickinson Opera House, built in 1902; (2) the Oddfellows Hall and (3) the Masonic Lodge, both located above Main St. businesses. Continuing east across the tracks is (4) the J.G. Lamoreaux home, built in 1882 and later purchased by the Woman's Club of Fennville to serve as a clubhouse and library. Crossing East Main Street and west beside the tracks is (5) the Stevens Hotel, built in 1910 to replace the wooden building that survived the 1871 fire.

Across the tracks and south are (6) the twin silos of the old Fennville Milling Co. The commercial block of East Main (7) between Fennville and Maple contains a number of historic structures built in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. On the corner of Maple and Main is the (8) Old State Bank building, founded in 1899. Other structures of note in the historic residential area on West Main are the (9) Kingsley House, a Victorian-style residence built in 1886 and (10) the J. Edward Hutchinson home at 58th Street and West Main. Hutchinson held political office in the state and nation from 1946 to 1976, and was the ranking member of the Judiciary Committee when impeachment hearings began against President Nixon in 1974.

THANK YOU FOR VISITING HISTORIC FENNVILLE!



#1 - The Dickinson Opera House built in 1902



#2 & #3 - North Side of Main Street
The Oddfellows Hall (upper left)



#4 - The J.G. Lamoreaux Home
(Woman's Club & Library)



#5 - The Stevens Hotel built in 1910



#6 - Train Depot, Fennville Milling Company Silos and Fennville Fruit Exchange



#7 - South Block of Main Street



#8 - Fennville Goose Festival 1990
with Old State Bank in background

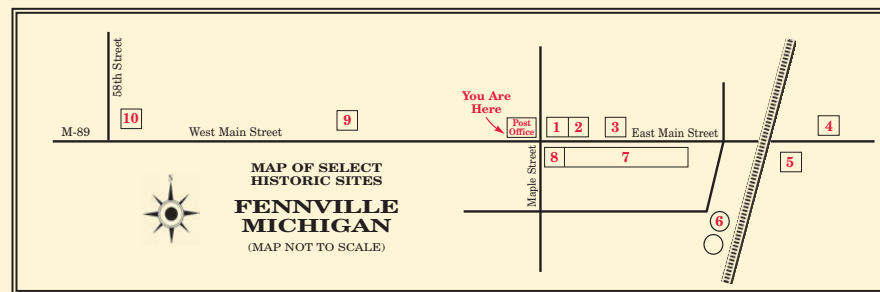


#9 - The Kingsley House



#10 - The J. Edward Hutchinson Home

The history of a
place is like an
endless road...



...with an origin
far proceeding the
memory of mankind,

...it winds through ever changing scenes!



- MAIN STREET THROUGH THE YEARS -