



People and the History of the Rouge Green Corridor

The following is a timeline that describes places, people and events important to the history of the Rouge Green Corridor:

12,000 BC – Paleo-Indians arrive in Oakland County. The first small bands of nomadic people arrived in Oakland County following the retreat of the Wisconsin glacier. As Native American cultures developed, they used the Rouge River for drinking, bathing, a source of food, and as a transportation route.

1618 – Europeans Arrive. French explorer, Etienne Brule, landed at the narrows of Sault Ste. Marie, thought to be the first European to have reached Michigan. He found well established tribes of Native Americans. Trading posts were started along the Rouge.

July 24, 1701 – Detroit Begins. Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac, French commander of the Fort at Mackinac, landed in Detroit to establish a trading post called Fort Pontchartrain du Detroit.

1760 – French rule of Detroit ends and British begins.

1775 – Revolutionary War begins.

September 3, 1783 – Britain cedes Michigan to the United States. This occurred through the Treaty of Paris, which ended the Revolutionary War. However, it was legally recognized that the land that made up Michigan belonged to the native tribes until it was ceded to the United States by treaty.

November 17, 1807 – Treaty of Detroit. An area of land approximating the southeast quarter of the lower peninsula of Michigan was ceded to



the United States by the Ottawa, Chippewa, Wyandot, and Potawatomi nations for \$10,000 in money, goods, and domestic animals, as well as hunting rights on U.S. lands.

1807 – Tonquish and Seginsiwin Reservations established. In the Treaty of Detroit, Potawatomi negotiated reserving the main Native American villages in the Rouge Green Corridor, called Tonquish and Seginsiwin, for their own use. It is likely that the Seginsiwin village persisted, because the Potawatomi had an agricultural base, and this village was described as hilly to level with ash, sugar maple, oak and beech. However, the Tonquish village may have been abandoned, as it was described as brushy, wet, or swampy with stands of poor oak.

January 12, 1819 – Oakland County established. Governor Lewis Cass issued a proclamation that laid out the boundaries of the County, establishing Pontiac as the County seat in 1820.

1819 – Birmingham’s first permanent European resident. John West Hunter built the first log cabin in what would become Birmingham. Unlike nearby farming communities, Birmingham founders established a manufacturing-based economy with foundries, tanneries, blacksmith shops, and other businesses. By the 1860’s the industry was all but gone, but a quiet village had been established.

1820’s – Lumbering and Farming. The opening of lands to European settlement was greatly expanded through the efforts of General Lewis Cass, Governor of the Michigan Territory from 1813 – 1831. The main professions were lumbering and farming. Farms produced wheat, Indian corn, oats, and potatoes, as well as livestock products such as wool and butter. Sheep were washed in the Rouge before sheering.

1823 – Southfield’s first resident arrives. John Daniels settled in Southfield as a farmer. Subsequent settlers cleared areas near springs and tributaries of the Rouge. One such stream was called Plum Hollow because of the wild plums growing along its banks.



September 19, 1827 – Potawatomi removed. The remaining Native Americans in southern Michigan were re-located westward beyond the Mississippi River.

1829 – First sawmill built on the Rouge River in Southfield (now Beverly Hills) by Joshua Davis and Michael Beach. Water was diverted from the Rouge River into a mill pond to run the mill. The water was at times eight to ten feet deep. William Eryty began running the mill in 1855, and expanded its operations to include a grist mill, cider mill, vinegar factory, and a one-room school house. Later, a carding and fulling mill was built in a small building on the dam. In the same year, Moses Rodgers built the first public house, a log cabin, along the Rouge on what is now Shiawassee Road.

July 12, 1830 – Southfield splits from Bloomfield Township. When first established, the two southern townships were considered one and called Bloomfield Township. On this date, Southfield Township split from Bloomfield and became Ossewa Township. But seventeen days later, the citizens decided to change the name to Southfield because of its location in the “south fields” of Bloomfield.

1836 – Detroit authorizes its first sanitary sewer. Called the Grand Sewer, it enclosed Savoyard Creek which flowed from Cadillac Square directly to the Detroit River, and later into the Rouge River. It was thought that “dilution is the solution,” and that water was capable of purifying itself through the river’s current. Before sewers, people dealt with sanitary waste through cesspools, vaults, and privies.

January 26, 1837 – Michigan is admitted to the Union as the 26th State. During the next half-century, railroads, roads, and canals were built to support lumbering and farming. Immigrants continued to arrive, primarily from Germany, Ireland, and Holland.



1837 – First gristmill built in Southfield along the Rouge. This business was built at 10–1/2 Mile Road (Civic Center Drive) east of the Rouge. Along with a blacksmith shop, tavern (which became the Southfield Hotel), store and post office, they created the economic hub known as Southfield Centre or “The Bergh.” The Southfield Hotel served fish from the Rouge as their specialty. This building is preserved in Greenfield Village.

Mid 1800’s – Rouge River used as a path for the Underground Railroad. At this time, Oakland County is home to approximately 30,000 people.

April 12, 1861 – Civil War begins. Michigan contributed 90,000 troops to the Union side of the war.

1876 – Louis Pasteur and Robert Koch developed the germ theory of disease.

August 10, 1889 – Simonson vs. Ery – William Ery, a successful Southfield businessman, sunk a six–inch well on his property and let it run into the Rouge River (probably to supplement the flow during dry seasons for his mills). Mr. Simonson sued Ery, claiming that Ery’s well reduced the flow from his own well. It was shown that both wells were fed from the same aquifer. Even so, Mr. Simonson had to pay court costs, and the jury decided that no action was to be taken against Mr. Ery.

1900’s – Connection made between sanitary discharge in rivers and water–borne disease. With the practice of discharging sanitary sewerage into rivers, water–borne disease, such as typhoid, became a serious problem as populations along the Rouge and Detroit Rivers rose. Oakland County’s population has risen to approximately 50,000 by this time.

1933 – Birmingham incorporates as a City.



1940 – Detroit begins treating sanitary sewerage. For years, the idea of treating sewerage was rejected because it was deemed too expensive. However, the typhoid epidemics of the early 1900's convinced City officials that they had no choice. The first Detroit Wastewater Treatment Plant served the City and eleven outlying suburbs, including Southfield Township.

1950 – Oakland County's population increased to 400,000 (eight times greater than 1900 population). During the 50's and 60's, over 40,000 acres were platted in Oakland County.

September 23, 1957 – Village of Westwood is incorporated. The community was chartered as the Village of Beverly Hills in 1959.

April 21, 1958 – Southfield residents vote to incorporate the Township as a city.

1964 – Detroit becomes provider of wastewater treatment for the six-county metropolitan area.

1972 – Federal Water Pollution Control Act. This act required all municipal wastewater treatment facilities to provide primary and secondary treatment of plant discharges. After being amended in 1977, it became known as the Clean Water Act. It protects waters from pollutants as well as sets water quality standards.

1977 – U.S. EPA filed a lawsuit to stop pollution at the Detroit Water and Sewerage Plant. By 1983, Detroit had spent \$500 million to fix the problems in sewerage discharges.

1983 – Judge John Feikens begins watershed approach to cleaning up the Rouge. Communities realized that in addition to pollution from combined sewer overflows, a major source of pollution to the Rouge River was stormwater runoff from rapidly developing areas. Judge John Feikens, a Federal District Judge in Detroit, used the EPA's 1977 lawsuit



to begin a series of formal orders and regular hearings to bring together three counties and 48 communities to cooperate on a plan to restore the 126 miles of the Rouge River.

1989 – 1994 Rouge River Remedial Action Plan (RAP) drafted and amended. A 136–page report (RAP) was created to outline the considerable progress that had been made in addressing water pollution sources in the Rouge, and outlined additional steps needed to restore uses, such as fishing and swimming, that were still impaired by pollution.

Late 1990’s – Rouge River Subwatersheds begin planning. Communities within the Rouge River watershed organized themselves into subwatershed groups to address water quality issues. One of these groups, the Rouge River Main 1–2 Subwatershed Advisory Group, formed to coordinate the protection and restoration of this subwatershed. The Rouge Green Corridor is part of the Main 1–2 Subwatershed.

2000 – Oakland County’s population is almost 1.2 million people.

2001 – Main 1–2 Rouge River Subwatershed Management Plan completed. A major goal of this plan is to involve the public in reducing the amount of pollutants that reach the river.

2004 – Main 1–2 Rouge River Remedial Action Plan (RAP) amended. The Rouge RAP was amended to summarize existing watershed conditions, as well as current restoration and protection efforts.

2005 and Beyond – Residents adopt the Rouge Green Corridor and protect it for future generations.