

# FREMONT

## CHRONOLOGICAL HISTORY to CURRENT INFORMATION

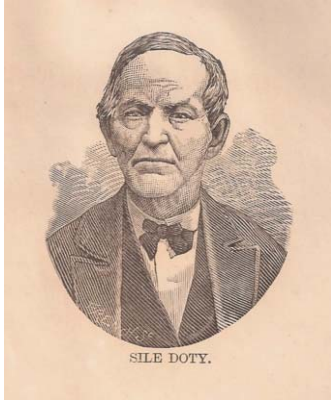
Fremont was first settled as “Willow Prairie” in 1834. The first entry for land was recorded for three parcels of 80 acres each on the south side of the site where this new “village” in northeast Indiana would be located. A plat was filed and the village name changed to *Brockville* in 1837. The name was changed to Fremont in 1850 in honor of **General John Charles Fremont** (*shown*), a distinguished military officer and explorer, known as “the Pathfinder”. Fremont was chosen by Jeremiah Tillotson, an early settler and ardent admirer of the General. Fremont was incorporated as a town in 1867.



Fremont was founded on the *Vistula Trail* (now Indiana State Road 120) which was originally an Indian trail that ran from Fort Duquesne (Pittsburg, PA) through South Bend and around the south shore of Lake Michigan to Green Bay. It was used extensively in the 1600s and 1700s by French missionaries and fur traders. The road gained its name from “*Vistula on the Maumee*” (now Toledo, Ohio), an important trading post at the mouth of the Maumee River on Lake Erie. For a short time in the early 1700s Spain claimed this area. In 1763 this oldest trail across the Northwest Territory frontier, fell under the authority of Great Britain. It remained under British control and was known as *Territorial Road* until the region was won by the Americans during the American Revolution and secured in the War of 1812. The road was established as a state road in 1833 by act of the Indiana Legislature, with final approval in 1835. The original road veered north at the west edge of the new “village” to pass around the northern end of the great Kankakee swamp which was impassible in the early days. It is a matter of local family history that Joseph Smith and his band of Mormon followers used the Vistula Trail on their migration west in the 1830s.



Northeast Indiana has a rich Native American history. The Miami Indians and their family tribes the Potawatomes, Shawnees, Delawares and others, all part of the Algonquin’s, had lived throughout the region surrounding the headwaters of the Maumee River, since at least the time of the early white settlements on the Atlantic coast. These great tribes were among the *western* Algonquin tribes who held the great basin east of the Mississippi River and the Miamis were everywhere between Detroit and the Ohio River in the region. The first white men would not visit the area until the migration of early French fishermen and trappers in the mid-1600s, still more than 100 years before the American Revolutionary War. They remained until most were forced west following the Indian wars and treaties of the mid-1800s. Among noted chiefs from the area were **Miami Chief Little Turtle** (*shown*) and Potawatomi Chiefs Leopold Pokagon and his son Simon, after whom Pokagon State Park was named.



## The Notorious Silas Doty (1830-1876):

According to his autobiography *Silas Doty* arrived with his family and rented a house near *Willow Prairie* (Fremont) in April, 1839. He soon purchased what was called the Stimson farm just north and west of the village and built a log house there in 1840. Throughout his life he was accustomed to “taking from the well-to-do and giving to the less fortunate”. For these deeds, he became known as the *Robin Hood of the Midwest*. The tales of his thievery and disreputable conduct became legendary and he may well have been the most accomplished thief that America ever produced.

Legend says he could “duplicate any key, ride any horse, swim any river, and steal any adjacent neighborhood starving, naked and blind in one night. He was always ready to steal a steed or to sell one; to crack a store or supply one with goods filched elsewhere; to nurse a pal or kill an enemy. Heaven or the ‘other place’ had given him a genius for getting in and out of every kind of building that the hands of man could construct. He was as agile as a serpent and strong as a bear. He was cross-eyed, and saw more with each of his optics than most men do with both of theirs. He stole none except the fastest horses, traveled only at night and was rarely overtaken. When jailed he could escape through holes that might crush any other man of his size.”

He was arrested for the murder of his farmhand in 1844 which then became the first murder trial held in Steuben County. He was found guilty and sentenced to prison but was granted a new trial. In 1846, while in the county jail in Angola awaiting his second trial for murder, he cut a hole through the floor of his cell, escaped and headed west. He was identified and arrested near Logansport, Indiana, and, during his return to Fort Wayne in a canal boat, he escaped once again only to be rearrested and returned to the same Angola jail from which he had escaped. He escaped again and decided to head south to take part in the Mexican War.

Doty spent time with the forces of General Zachary Taylor near the Mexican city of Monterey. He joined as a cook but shortly resigned and did not stay with the troops as they left for Camargo. He lagged behind and found what he thought to be the best horse he had ever seen, stole it, and proceeded to ride it overnight through enemy controlled territory to Camargo where he presented it to General Winfield Scott as a gift. He stayed on in the good graces of Scott for whom he was constantly running errands. He went to Vera Cruz in September, 1847, caught a steamboat for New Orleans and another on to Louisville. He went to Frankfort, Kentucky, stole a fine horse and rode him to New York State where he traded him to his own father for a team of dapple grays. When he returned to Brockville (Fremont) with the team he declared they were brought back from Mexico. Throughout his life he was rarely challenged by the thought of earning an honest living.

He died in 1876 in nearby Reading, Michigan. This notice was published in the Angola Herald, March 15, 1876: “THE LAST OF SILE DOTY. DEATH OF A WONDERFUL MAN. - Silas Doty departed this life on last Sunday, at the residence of his son, at Reading, Michigan, at the advanced age of seventy-six years. Wonderful man! What an eventful life! Let one man write his eventful life, and what a lesson it will serve to others. He was well known as one of the earliest settlers of this county, settling at Jamestown, near the State Line.” His autobiography is chronicled in the rare book, *The Life of Sile Doty, the Most Noted Thief and Daring Burglar of His Time. The Leader of a Gang of Counterfeiters, Horse Thieves and Burglars of the New England, Middle and Western States. The Terror of Mexico During 1849*. Compiled by J.G.W. Colburn. Toledo, OH: Blade Printing & Paper Company, 1880.

**Enos Michael**, a *coverlet weaver* from Pennsylvania, settled in Brockville in 1848 and built a home just east of the center of town. Now known as the “Michael-Sullins House” (shown) on East Toledo Street, it was listed in the National Registry of Historic Places in 1982. His coverlets recorded the change of the town’s name from Brockville to Fremont in 1850, the only known instance in which a coverlet weaver was known to record such a change in a community’s history. His work is highlighted in the book “Indiana Coverlet Weavers and Their Coverlets.” Enos Michael’s father Philip, his brothers Joshua and Philip along with his brother-in-law Jacob Fox played an important role in the early growth and development of Fremont.



In 1850 *Brockville* became **FREMONT**, though post office records show the name changed in 1851. It was decided to change the name because there was a similar named community in Franklin County (southern Indiana) which caused many problems with mail delivery. There is now only one known Brockville in North America - in Ontario, Canada.

**Fremont’s churches** provide a strong foundation for the spiritual strength of the community. Fremont’s Methodist Church was founded in 1841 and its first building started in 1844 and completed in 1851. A foundation was not added until 1859 and, with no seating yet available, the congregation used the “sleepers” or support beams as seats for some time. This building was sold to the Evangelical Association in 1872 and moved to the east part of town. The Fremont Circuit of the Methodist Church was set off in 1872. The original brick Methodist Church was constructed on the site of the present church between 1880 and 1884. After the collapse of a store building in town, this building was torn down and a new frame building was built and used until it burned in March, 1930. The original part of the current United Methodist Church was dedicated September 12, 1930. It was fully remodeled with a large addition in the 1990s.



The Fremont Society of the Evangelical Association was organized by Rev. M. Alspach in 1856. Services were generally held in the home of Frederick Straw until the purchase of the Methodist Episcopal building. The Evangelical Church constructed a new church at the corner

of E. Toledo and Tillotson Streets in 1899. This building would become the home of the Fremont Zion Missionary Church until a new building was constructed on Ray Road - east side of Fremont - in the mid-1980s. The old 1899 building is gone, destroyed by fire in 1998.

Several churches representing many denominations are currently accessible within a few miles driving distance of Fremont.

**Daniel Schaeffer** came to Fremont from Dauphin County, Pennsylvania at age 19. He opened the first bakery in 1855. It was located on main street east of the center of town and included a brick oven covered with earth to retain the heat. He made candy and, in the summer, ice cream and became known as “Candy Dan”. Besides being a baker and confectioner, he was a Daguerrean and photo artist. Several descendents still reside in the Fremont area.

**Northeastern Lodge No. 210 Free & Accepted Masons** was organized January 16, 1856 and chartered by Indiana’s Grand Lodge on May 26, 1857. Still active, it is celebrating its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2007. The lodge still meets in their late 1800s downtown building but is constructing a new lodge just east of Fremont. The old Masonic Lodge building is shown ca. 1900. →



In 1869 a **railroad** from Fort Wayne north to Jackson and Saginaw, Michigan was established.

The location of the railroad was not engineered to be where it was finally built. **Erastus Farnum**, who had built a large brick grain elevator and flour mill known as

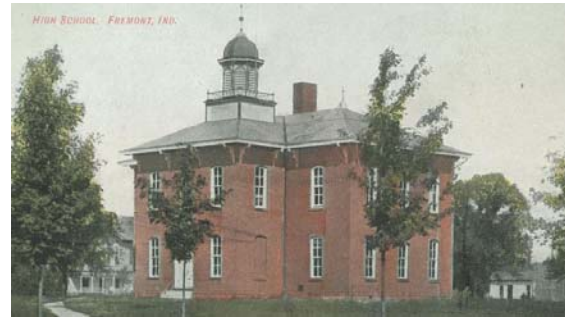
“Exchange Mills” on the south side of Fremont west of the current farm elevator and, being a man of some wealth, paid the railroad company by furnishing lumber for the depot to locate the new depot near his business for shipping convenience. The railroad and depot were used for many years for livestock and farm products with several cars shipping each Saturday. At one time Fremont boasted the service of six passenger and two freight trains a day. Carriage service was provided to and from the “Hilton House” and “American Hotel” and the depot. The hotels and passenger service disappeared long ago and the depot was raised in the late 1970’s but the railroad continues to provide valuable freight service to our present day Fremont industries.





The Erastus Farnum House has been restored and is owned by Mavis Church. It was reportedly one of Steuben County's stops on the Underground Railroad in the Civil War era.

The first school was a log house. In 1845 a two story frame building was constructed. A brick 1856 grade and high school building was destroyed by fire in 1877 and the same year, a new building (*shown*) was built at a total cost of \$6000. It stood where the current Brockville Commons senior apartments stand, one block north of Toledo Street ... more on schools later.



**General Lewis B. Hershey**, younger son of Latta and Rosetta Hershey, was born September 12, 1893. He grew up on a farm west of Fremont and attended Fremont High School, graduating in 1910 as class Valedictorian. He completed a 12-week course in education at Tri-State College in 1910, taught during the 1910-11 school year, then returned to Tri-State receiving a Bachelor of Science degree in 1912. He earned Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Pedagogy degrees in 1914. From 1914 to 1916, he was the principal of Steuben County's Flint High School.

He enjoyed an extraordinarily long and productive military career in the service of his country. He enlisted in the Indiana National Guard in 1911 as a private, was called to active duty in 1916 and served along the Mexican border during the Punitive Expedition and in France during WWI. He transferred to the Regular Army as a Captain in 1920, later attended the Command and General Staff School and was selected to attend the Army War College, graduating in 1934.

In 1936 he joined the War Department's general staff and the same year, as a major, he developed the plan for the first peacetime selective service draft in U.S. history. In October 1940, President Franklin Roosevelt appointed Hershey brigadier general and executive officer of the Selective Service System and Director in July, 1941. Roosevelt charged him with implementing the nation's first peacetime draft law. General Hershey's service as Director of the Selective Service System lasted until February, 1970. During his tenure, he supervised the enlistment of over 14.5 million men, many of whom served in World War II and the Korean and Vietnam Wars. In addition, he dealt with important changes concerning the military's treatment of blacks, women, and conscientious objectors. He was promoted to full General by President Nixon and served as Presidential Advisor on Manpower Mobilization in 1971-72. Hershey retired from military service on April 10, 1973, at age 79, the oldest man then on active service, having served six U. S. Presidents.

Hershey received many decorations and awards including Distinguished Service Medals from the Army and the Navy and American Legion, National Guard and Veterans Association honors. He received a Freedoms Foundation award, the Distinguished Service Award from The Military Order of the World Wars, the Boy Scouts of America Silver Buffalo Award and The Distinguished Service Medal of Indiana.

He was a nationally renowned speaker, known for bringing Hoosier wit and philosophy to his audiences. Eight universities awarded him an honorary doctorate, including Tri-State University, Columbia, Indiana and The Ohio State University. Tri-State's Hershey Hall athletic facility was named in his honor. General Hershey served as a member of Tri-State's Board of Trustees from January 1950 until his death. He was a lifelong member of Northeastern Lodge No. 210 F&AM, Fremont. He married Ellen Dygert of Angola and they raised four children. General Hershey died while visiting Steuben County, May 20, 1977, at age 80. He is buried in Arlington National Cemetery beside his wife Ellen.



Fremont's U. S. Census population in 1900 was 711.

In 1895 Fremont began the installation of **electric lights** which were turned on in 1897. The Light Plant was owned by the town and stood at the Piper Saw Mill at the south end of Mill Street. A second

plant was built on South Wayne Street which the town operated until it was sold to NIPSCO.

The first newspaper was published by Thomas Barnard but lasted only a short time. Warren Wells began publication of The Fremont Eagle on December 29, 1892. In 1899 he built a brick home and business on the corner of South Wayne and Albion Streets where the paper was published and printed for nearly 50 years. After Wells death in 1934, the Eagle continued under the ownership of his son, Henry F. Wells who published the paper until 1946 when it was sold to Howard Flaishans. It later sold it to Gar Lewis and publication ceased in 1976. Local weeklies, The New Fremont Eagle 1986-1990 and The Fremont News 1990-1992 followed.



Dr. Robert L. Wade opened the *first hospital in Steuben County* in 1914 (in what is now an apartment building on East Toledo St.). Fremont is privileged to have had and now continues to be served by excellent medical and dental practitioners.

The Fremont American Legion Cassel Post No. 257 was chartered on February 25, 1920. It was named in honor of Lt. (Dr.) Lee Stanley Cassel, a late casualty of WWI. The Legion met for many years on the 2nd floor of the old town hall building on Toledo Street. The site of the current Legion building on the corner of S. Wayne and Hardy Streets was bought in the early 1950's and the upper floor completed in 1957. The Legion building has been refurbished and a new south wing added in recent years. It continues as an active, community based organization.

Fremont and Steuben County (now known as the "Land of 101 Lakes") has been a popular lake resort destination since shortly after the railroad was built in the late 1800s. In 1923 Steuben County purchased 580 acres of land west of Fremont along the east shores of Lake James and



Snow Lake and gifted it to the Indiana Department of Conservation for a state park. In 1926 two more tracts of land were added with the state since buying more land to now total 1203 acres.

Conservation Commissioner Col. Richard Lieber suggested the names *Pokagon State Park* and *Potawatomi Inn* for the new park to honor the Potawatomi Indians, the last tribe to possess the area and "Pokagon" as a memorial to their last two "most notable" leaders Leopold and Simon Pokagon - father and son. The Inn was dedicated on June 17, 1927. During the 1930's a CCC camp was maintained on the premises and many of the first shelter houses and camp grounds were built. The Inn was expanded last in the mid-1990s and is now an award winning conference center and resort. (The "CCC Shelter" was listed in the National Registry of Historic Places in 1992 and the state park added as a National Historic Registry District in 1996.) Other Fremont area lakes are Clear

Lake, Lake George, Jimmerson Lake, Otter Lake, Fish Lake and Walters Lake.

Fremont's first pavement was laid in 1922, being a strip of concrete 20 feet wide and extended from the center of town: south to the railroad track, north three blocks, west four blocks and east to the railroad track. This pavement was considered one of the great improvements of the town.

**City water** was installed in Fremont in 1937. The water system has been well maintained and expanded over the years and now includes two modern towers and capacity to service current growth in the community. A new



wastewater treatment plant was completed and commenced operation in 1979. It has been continually upgraded and expanded over the years. In addition to Fremont, the plant also treats wastewater from the Town of Clear Lake to the east and North Snow Bay and the commercial developments surrounding the Toll Road and I-69 intersection west of Fremont.

The **Fremont Fire Department** has a long history of exemplary service to the community from the days of an old wooden tank that had to be pulled to a local fire by hand and then operated by eight men on a cradle pump to modern mechanization and technology. The first motorized piece of fire equipment, a Model T Ford truck with two chemical tanks, was

purchased for the volunteer fire department by the Fremont Town Board in 1914. In 1929 a Model A Ford was purchased through public subscription by local businessmen and farmers. Any farmer that donated money then received free fire protection, providing the beginning of fire protection for the rural areas around town. The Model A was replaced with a 1932 Chevrolet. When city water was installed in



1937, the department added a front end pumper and a 250 gallon water tank - replacing first chemical tank. The final one was replaced in 1939. (1940s Chevy shown above)

The Fremont Fire Department was incorporated in 1951. For many years fire fighting equipment was fabricated and maintained at the Higbee Welding shop with the Higbee family actively involved in the department. These units were used by Fremont and in several neighboring departments. The department erected a block and brick building followed by a large addition in 1979. The department continues to add and upgrade equipment and sustains an excellent maintenance program. They respond to medical requests and other emergency assistance calls in addition to fire calls. The fire department was municipalized into the Town of Fremont in 2004. Fremont continues to be proud of our dedicated, well trained, qualified and loyal volunteers and fire department. The Fire Chief is currently the department's only full-time town employee.

In 1913 the **Fremont School** building underwent extensive remodeling, followed in 1921 by the addition of two new wings and the first gymnasium, allowing Fremont to host its first high school basketball game December 16, 1921. With local support and WPA monies, a new gymnasium and classroom addition was completed in 1939 (shown).



Fremont high school began its first football season in 1963 and by 1969 won the N.E.C.C. Conference Championship.

Fremont's Elementary School on W. Toledo Street opened for students in 1959. To this building several additions, upgrades and improvements have been made.

A new Fremont Junior-Senior High School (adjacent to the elementary school) was opened in the fall of 1980. The school's central offices remained in the old building on Coffin St. until a new administrative office building was built in the 1990s. That facility is shared with area Head Start and Vistula Pre-School administrative offices.

The new Fremont Middle School (across West Street from the high school) opened to students in grades six through eight in 1997. This allowed the school system to reorganize the elementary building into grades K-4, the high school building with grades 9-12 and incorporate curriculum changes at all levels.



A new Max Mitchell Athletic Complex building which includes an auxiliary gymnasium and related facilities was completed in the fall of 2006.

The *Sorosis Library* was opened on the second floor of the old bank building in March, 1910. It was open to members of the Sorosis and others who paid \$1 per year to help support it. It was understood that all books donated to the Sorosis Library would be transferred to the Fremont Library when that was formed. The ***Fremont Public Library*** was legally organized in 1919 and the Library Board accepted transfer of bound volumes, pamphlets, bulletins and equipment from the Sorosis Library.



The former Congregational Church building on the corner of Albion and Pleasant Streets was purchased for use as the library. It remained there until 1982 when the Fremont Public Library moved from downtown to space vacated in the

former high school building on the corner of North and Coffin Streets. Following great public support from Fremont area residents, the Fremont Public Library moved into a beautiful new building on W. Toledo Street in 2003 (*shown above*). The library serves residents in Fremont, Clear Lake and Jamestown Townships in a state of the art facility.

After yet another community wide initiative, **Little Lambs Day Care** consolidated their licensed services into one well equipped new building in 2006 and has room to expand.

The first industrial project in Fremont was the construction of a small plant funded by local merchants which, with additions, is owned and operated by LaGrange Products. **Industrial development** for the purpose of attracting small industries started in the mid-1950s. A group of concerned community leaders felt Fremont would be perceived as an active and progressive community if a strong base of small industries could be attracted. They felt this would strengthen the school system, allow expansion of retail, create jobs and keep Fremont's young people interested in the community, expand home construction and add to the tax base. Their diligence soon brought Fremont Manufacturing (now Metaldyne) to the community.



This successful initiative continued under a committee of local leaders for several years. Since the late 1950s Fremont has experienced steady, positive industrial growth, with more than thirty small industries now located in the community. Sewer and water system improvements were constructed to accommodate additional growth. Fremont's location near the intersection of the Indiana Toll Road (I-80) and Interstate I-69 has proven very advantageous as have recent upgrades to Indiana State Roads 120 and 827. Fremont now cooperates in the Steuben County Economic Development Corporation, a joint effort of the county and local municipalities

**Fremont's Loyal Order of Moose Lodge No. 2387** was organized in 1992 and the original part of the lodge building constructed in 1994. The lodge and its large membership are active in their support of community events and projects. Monies raised through various fund raisers such as downtown chicken barbeques during the summer tourism months have benefited Fremont through sponsorship of the Youth Skateboard Park and the great fireworks display during the Fremont Chamber's Music Fest held each July.

The **Fremont Housing Authority** was formed March 10, 1980 by action of the Fremont Town Board. October 23, 1982, marked the groundbreaking for the 40 unit *Brockville Commons* housing facility on Spring Street and construction was completed in August, 1983. This active senior living facility continues to serve the housing needs of older citizens in the community.

**Fremont's municipal offices** are located in the new Fremont Town Hall on North Tolford Street. The town hall houses the Clerk-Treasurer, Town Court, Town Manager, and Police Department offices and includes Town Council and community meeting rooms. The basement of the building serves as a community storm shelter. The town is responsible for the operation the water and waste water utilities and street, police, court, fire and park departments. It oversees comprehensive planning, zoning, business development and contracts for necessary municipal services on behalf of the community.



Fremont was incorporated in 1867. It was governed by "trustees" and a three member town "board" for many years and now by a five member town "council" elected by town residents. The current council members along with the clerk-treasurer and judge are elected to four year terms. Fremont's population now exceeds 1700. The **Town of Fremont** was awarded the 2006 Community Achievement

Award for communities in Indiana under 5000 population by the *Indiana Association of Cities and Towns*.