

A History of Pontiac Guide 1818-Today

1818- The Pontiac Company was created in order to purchase a tract of land for locating a town. Members include William Woodbridge, Stephen Mack, Solomon Sibley, Austin E. Wing, David McKinstry, A.G. Whitney, Major General Alex Macomb, John T. Whiting, William Thompson, Benjamin Stead, and James Fulton.

1818- The first permanent settlers include Colonel Stephen Mack, Major Joseph Todd, William Lester, and Orison Allen.

1819-The Pontiac Company put up a saw mill at the foot of Lawrence Street by the Clinton River.

1819- Michigan Territory Governor Lewis Cass proclaimed Oakland the fourth county of the Michigan territory. It was preceded by Wayne, Monroe and Macomb Counties.

1820- Pontiac was proclaimed the seat of Oakland County and the first court at Oakland County was held in Pontiac on July 17, 1820.

1822- Early Pontiac settlers erected the first common school- a one story frame structure. Later as the settlement grew, two other schools were put up, both made of brick. One of the buildings was at the corner of Auburn Avenue and Parke Street and the other was at Williams and Pike.

1825- Elizabeth Denison became one of the first black landholders in Pontiac MI, when she was sold land from the Solomon Sibley family, although she never lived in Pontiac herself and instead leased the land to her brother.

1837- Two months after Michigan gained statehood, Pontiac was incorporated as a village by act of the Michigan Legislature. The first election was held in the same year and voters elected to be governed by a seven member board of trustees.

1840- The Great Fire of 1840 burns down many businesses along the downtown business and commercial area along Saginaw Street. Total damage was estimated to be \$29,500.00 and practically no buildings destroyed were insured.

1845- The first high school in Pontiac was a private subscription school conducted by J.W. Crain and S. Gale.

1861- The State of Michigan made the Village of Pontiac into the City of Pontiac. The City adopted the mayor-council form of government replacing the seven member village Board of Trustees.

1861- The first city mayor was Erastus Thatcher, who served two one-year terms.

1861- The Black citizens of Pontiac came together to form Pontiac's first Black church- the Newman African Methodist Episcopal Church, organized by Reverend Augustus R. Green.

1869- The first public high school in Pontiac was established on Pike street and called the Union School.

1871- Pontiac High School (later renamed Pontiac Central High School), begins its first year of operation, located at Huron and White Lake Streets (today known as Williams Street).

1886- Pontiac residents donated funds so Charles V. Taylor could secure a facility to make carriages in Pontiac. Taylor's carriages were sold all over the US. Growth in the carriage industry created an economic boom in Pontiac.

1900- Martin Halfpenny, who had been active in the buggy business, produced Pontiac's first version of the auto.

1901- Pontiac was selected the site for the Michigan State Fair, winning the honor over large competitors like Detroit, Grand Rapids, and Flint.

1904- The Welch Brothers moved to Pontiac to put together the city's first auto factory.

1909- William C. Durant, a wealthy carriage maker from Flint, and heir to William Howland Crapo's lumber fortune, bought up many of the automobile companies in Pontiac as a nucleus of his General Motors Company.

1910- Oakland County Hospital was opened due to efforts from an organization of Pontiac women who made up the Pontiac Hospital Association. It was gifted to the City of Pontiac in 1915 and renamed Pontiac City Hospital.

1911- A new charter, providing for a commission form of government was adopted. The new government consists of a mayor and two commissioners. Elected by the city at large on a non-partisan basis. The first mayor of this new system was A.J. Johnson.

1914- The old Pontiac High School building was torn down to make room for the new facility with more up-to-date accommodations.

1918- Trinity Baptist Church was founded.

1920- A branch of the N.A.A.C.P. was organized and Reverend J.A. Charleston was the first president.

1920- The citizens of Pontiac decide to change their form of government again. The new system is a commission-manager form of government. Seven commissioners are elected from the city on a non-partisan ballot and the commissioners elect one of the seven to act as mayor.

1922- Charles T. Fisher, of Fisher Body Corporation purchased the Oliver J. Beaudette Body Company at Wesson and Walnut Streets. Fisher Body constructed a new plant at Baldwin and Kennett Roads.

1923- R. L. Polk and Company of Detroit published a directory of Pontiac residents. Mansfield L. Spears, M.D. was listed in the 1923 directory, and longtime residents say he was Pontiac's first Black doctor.

1925- Ground was broken for a new hospital in the city, St. Joseph Mercy Hospital on Woodward Avenue. The hospital opened in 1927.

1925- GM bought controlling interest in Yellow Truck and Coach Company and moved its operation from Chicago to Pontiac, where it merged with GM Truck Company.

1926- Oliver Green, the first Black attorney came to practice law in Pontiac.

1926- A new automobile was built in Pontiac and a new plant constructed for its assembly, it was named "Pontiac."

1926- GM purchased interest in the Fisher Body Corporation and it became a division of GM.

1932- During the Great Depression Pontiac Trust Company failed, followed by Pontiac Commercial and Savings, First National, and People's State.

1933- Employment was one-third of its pre-crash level and 10,000 residents were on relief by 1934.

1936- A secret union organization drive was underway in the back of Simms Drugstore in downtown Pontiac with workers from Pontiac Motors, Fisher Body, and Yellow Truck and Coach.

1937- Union organizers with newly boosted membership formed Local 159 which helped provide for union representation and collective bargaining rights for the auto workers.

1940- Pontiac's first Black city commissioner, Dr. Howard McNeil was elected.

1941- Pontiac Motors received its first contract to make the Oerlikon anti-aircraft cannon for the Navy as part of the WWII efforts.

1942- The Pontiac Fisher Body plant was converted to produce defense works for the war.

1944- The Pontiac Challenger, the first Black newspaper published in Pontiac was founded. Its office was at 120 Bagley Street. The editor in chief was Rev. J. Allen Parker of Newman A.M.E. Church.

1946- Vivian Frazier and Carl Pettiford purchased the Motor Inn and constructed the Mellow Lane Night Club on the corner of Bagley and Hibbard Court.

1947- The Pontiac Commentator takes over as the main Black newspaper source after the Pontiac Challenger ends. It was owned and published by Thomas L. Campbell and located at 83 Bagley Street.

1947- The Cozy Corner restaurant was opened on South Boulevard at Bloomfield Avenue by Andrew (Pops) Culp and Marie Culp.

1948- Cooley General Store opened on the southeast corner of Bagley and Wesson.

1948- Miss Edna Ellison, Pontiac's first Black teacher was hired to teach English at Pontiac High School (Pontiac Central High School).

1950- Pontiac Osteopathic Hospital was founded on Perry Street just south of Huron.

1950- The Pontiac Urban League was founded to help families with urban problems including unemployment. Leaders included President Leon Hubbard, Mrs. Edwin Clark, T. Warren Fowler, William F. Davis, Harold J. Muldowney, and Rev. J. Allen Parker.

Pontiac Black History Facts 1969-Today

1969 - Elaine Eason received accreditation as a Medical Records Technician in Oakland County; and was hired as the first black supervisor of Medical Records at Pontiac General Hospital (currently known as North Oakland Medical Center).

1971 – The Fall of this year brought busing to integrate the Pontiac School District.

1971 – Anne D. Russell was appointed as the first black Assistant Principal at Pontiac Central High School.

1971 – R. Clayton Jones was appointed as the first black Executive Director of the Pontiac Housing Commissions.

1972 – Charlie Harrison Jr., Democrat, was elected as the first black State Representative for District 62.

1972 – Christopher Brown became the first black 50th District Court Judge. Judge Brown went on to be elected to six consecutive terms before retiring.

1974 – Gloria Hardiman Carlisle was elected as the first black President of the Pontiac School District Board

1975 – Anna Baker Lane was appointed as first black Acting Pontiac Librarian.

1977 – Dr. Odell Nails was appointed as the first black Superintendent of the Pontiac School District.

1978 – James Wright was named the first black President of Pontiac General Hospital (also known as North Oakland Medical Center).

1979 – Willie Redmond became first black Personnel Director of Clinton Valley.

1980 – Ernest Russell appointed as first black Principal of Pontiac Central High School.

1981 – Larry Lewis was hired as the first black City of Pontiac Planner.

1981 – Wilma Ray Bledsoe was named as the first black Vice President of Oakland University.

1981 – R. Clayton Jones was elected as the first black National President of the National Association of Housing.

1982 – Thomas Gracey appointed as the first black Deputy Pontiac Police Chief.

1982 – Clayton R. Jones became the first black Director of the Pontiac Stadium Authority.

1982 – Wallace E. Holland was elected as Pontiac’s first black full-time Mayor.

1983 – Elaine Eason became the first black Director of Medical Records at Clinton Valley Center.

1983 - Wilvem Charli Yarbrow not only became the first black female firefighter, but also the first female firefighter

1986 – Dr. Joanne Holbert was appointed as the first black female Deputy Mayor.

1988 – Dr. LaBarbara Gragg was hired as the first black female Superintendent of the Pontiac School District.

1990 – Joy Holland was appointed as the first black Director of Clinton Valley.

1990 – Gloria Hardiman Carlisle was the first black elected to Oakland County Intermediate School Board.

1991 – Henry Wallace was appointed as the first black Captain of the Oakland County Sheriff’s Department.

1994 – Jeffrey Hawkins was appointed as the first black Fire Chief.

1994 – Sandra Combs Birdiott became the first black Metro-Editor at the Oakland Press.

1994 – Kathy Kinnard was elected as the first black female to City Council in District One.

1996 – Jeremy Thomas Rawls, 12 years old, served as Student Ambassador to Hawaii.

1996 – Sandra C. Birdiott became the first black member of the Oakland Press Editorial Board

1997 – Alexandria Riley at the age of 11 years old served as Youth Anchor on Cable Channel 44, Inside Pontiac.

1998 – Pamela Chambers became the first black female Lieutenant of the Pontiac Police

Department.

1999 – Pamela Chambers became the first black female Captain of the Pontiac Police Department.

2000 - George Phifer became the first black male Lieutenant of the Pontiac Police Department

2001 - George Phifer became the first black male Captain of the Pontiac Police Department

2002– Captain George Phifer became the first black Director for City of Pontiac Homeland Security.

2003– Captain Pamela Chambers became the first female black Director for City of Pontiac Homeland Security.

2003 – Claude Billy Williams was named as the first black Director of the Pontiac Public Library.

2003 – Cynthia Thomas-Walker became not only the first black female 50th District Court Judge, but also the first female 50th District Court Judge.

2014 - Deirdre Waterman became not only the first black female Mayor of the City of Pontiac, but also the first female Mayor of Pontiac.

2014 - Patrice Waterman became not only the first black female President of the City Council, but also the first female President of the City Council

2018 - Deirdre Waterman became the first Pontiac Mayor to be re-elected to consecutive terms.

Sources

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Further Free Sources to Explore

Portraits and Biographies of the Governors of Michigan and of the Presidents of the United States.
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