

(from *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Society Collections* Volume 31 (1901) pages 98-101)

HISTORY OF BENZIE COUNTY BY HISTORIANS OF EACH TOWNSHIP
(Prepared for the Benzie County Pioneer Society in August, 1897.)
BY N. A. PARKER

Benzie county, as it is now constituted, is bounded on the north by Leelanau county, on the east by Grand Traverse, on the south by Manistee and on the west by Lake Michigan; and is composed of twelve (12) townships, viz. Almira, Benzonia, Blaine, Crystal Lake, Colfax, Gilmore, Homestead, Inland, Lake, Platte, and Weldon.

Before the defining of the boundaries of Benzie as a county by the state legislature in 1863, by an act entitled, "An act to organize the county of Leelanau and to define the (boundaries of the) county of Benzie" (see Act No. 48 of the Session Laws of 1863 page 58), the territory embraced within its present limits formed a part of Leelanau county. By section seven of that act which is as follows:

"All that part of the county of Leelanau which is south of the south line of the township twenty-eight (28) north, shall be and remain the county of Benzie, and the several townships thereof shall be attached for civil and municipal purposes to the county of Grand Traverse," it appears that the county of Benzie had in fact, no existence as a county except in name and defined territory, but in reality was by that act made a part of Grand Traverse county. After that act went into effect the supervisors of Crystal Lake (that being the only organized township in Benzie at first) met and sat with the board of supervisors of Grand Traverse county; inspectors of the election board made their returns to said county; all deeds and conveyances of land in Benzie county were recorded with the register of deeds for Grand Traverse county, and the township treasurer returned the taxes collected for the state and county to the treasurer of Grand Traverse county until 1869, when by Act No. 385 of the Session Laws of that year (see Vol. 3 page 1083) entitled "An act to organize the county of Benzie," the legislature declared in section one (1) of said act, that "The people of the state of Michigan enact, that the county of Benzie, consisting of the territory embraced by the present county of Benzie, be and the same is hereby organized into a separate county by the name of Benzie; and the inhabitants thereof shall be entitled to all the privileges, powers and immunities to which by the laws, the inhabitants of other organized counties in the state are entitled."

The other seven sections of the act provide for the election of county officers, fixing a time and place of holding the same, the canvass of the votes and making return thereof; and of an election to determine the location for the county seat; designating Frankfort, Benzonia, and the S. E. 1/4 of N. E. 1/4 of Sec. 28, town 26 N., R. 14 West (that site being in what is now Homestead township) as three sites to be voted for; the site receiving a majority of all votes cast to be declared the county seat; but in event neither place received a majority, then a second election was to be held, and only the two places receiving the largest number of votes at such first election to be voted for.

The first election to vote upon that question was held July 1, 1869, which did not result in a selection, and as the place designated by the supervisors by the subdivision of a section (Homestead) received the least number of votes, at the second election held by the provisions of that act, on the first Monday of October following, only the names of

Frankfort and Benzonia appeared upon the ballots, and the result of this second election was favorable to Frankfort.

The first county officers were elected by authority of Section 2, of said Act No. 385 at the spring election in April, 1869-and were as follows:

Sheriff, Addison P. Wheelock, of Almira, who appointed John H. King, his deputy; Clerk and Register, Theodore C. Walker of Benzonia, who appointed Eugene B. Frost of Frankfort, deputy clerk; and N. Augustus Parker, Attorney-at-Law (who came from Ann Arbor that spring with his family and settled in and has since resided in Frankfort) deputy register of deeds; Rowland O. Crispin of Gilmore, treasurer, who failed to qualify, and in October following the board of supervisors declared the office vacant and elected Jacob E. Voorheis of Frankfort, to fill the unexpired term.

James B. Delbrige, prosecuting attorney and circuit court commissioner, who, it was afterward discovered, was not admitted to practice law in this state, and the said office was declared vacant and N. West Nelson, attorney at Frankfort, appointed to fill the unexpired term; Digby B. Butler, judge of probate; George E. Steele, surveyor; and Dr. Alonzo J. Slyfield of Frankfort and Lysander Kinney of Inland, coroners.

The first board of supervisors were also elected that spring and held their first meeting in the school house in Benzonia, on the 22d of April, electing Silas F. Judson of Benzonia, as chairman; the other nine supervisors, as then there were only ten townships in the county, were as follows:

Almira, M. D. Campbell; Crystal Lake, Henry Woodward; Gilmore, Benjamin Hopkins; Homestead, William Palmer; Inland, Nathan Jaquish; Joyfield, George Dair; Platte, A. B. Crittenden; Weldon, Arthur T. Case.

They elected the following as the first board of superintendents of the poor: Albert Kent of Inland, William Steele of Homestead, and Smith E. Crandall of Gilmore.

The second meeting of the board, held after the county seat had been fixed at Frankfort, convened on the 11th of October and held its first session in Victory Saterlee's hotel (a two story frame building on corner Third and Main St. where the "National Hotel" now is) and afterwards adjourned to the two story frame building designated and prepared for county purposes, situate on the corner of Main and Second St., the same that was erected by the Doaby Bros. in 1858, which is still standing and occupied as a tenement house and at this date is known as the "Old Court House building."

In this building the first term of circuit court for the county was held in November, 1869, presiding judge, Hon. Jonathan G. Ramsdall, who still resides in Traverse City.

At the annual township meeting in 1872, the electors were given another opportunity to vote upon a proposition, submitted to them by the board of supervisors, to remove the county seat from Frankfort to Benzonia.

The result of the election was largely in favor of Frankfort if the entire vote cast in the several townships had been counted and declared by the county board of canvassers; but by reason of a claim by a majority of the members of the board of some irregularities in election proceedings in Crystal Lake township, the entire vote of that town was thrown out, or not counted, by the canvassing board; and the result was the county seat was declared removed to Benzonia. This action or determination by the canvassing board was for a time contested in the courts, but finally acquiesced in, and the county seat remained undisturbed in Benzonia until 1895, when the question of removal from Benzonia to

Frankfort was again submitted to the people, and at the annual township meeting in April of that year, the vote taken upon that proposition which again resulted favorably to Frankfort; and without opposition on the 4th of June following, the county offices, records and property were removed to Frankfort, where they remain in commodious buildings and on grounds prepared and contributed to the county for that purpose, by the township of Crystal Lake.

Benzie with Leelenau and Grand Traverse counties constitute a district for the election of a representative to the state legislature; and is also one of the counties of the 27th senatorial district; and a part of the 11th congressional, and of the 28th judicial district of this state.

By the census returns of 1894, the population of the county was 8,063, 4,461 males, 3,602 females; 6,471 are native born, and 4,242 of these were born in Michigan; there are no Indians and only 77 colored people in the county. The estimated population of the county at this date (1897) is 9,500, as near as may be.