

## Bike MS Ride, West Michigan Riding In Historical Allegan County

The Michigan Chapter of the National MS Society would like to extend our gratitude to the Steering Committee for the West Michigan Bike MS Ride and especially to member, Rick Lanting, who made this information available.

We would also like to thank Jan Cushman of the Allegan County Tourist Council for providing the materials that allowed us to compile this information.

<http://www.visitallegancounty.com>

Most of our route on Saturday will take place in Allegan County. We created this information to give our riders a taste of the history behind some of the areas they will be riding in. The Allegan County Tourist Council has created a 122 mile "Allegan County Heritage Trail." This trail covers much of the county, passing many historically interesting spots. More information on the trail can be found here.

<http://www.allegancounty.org/heritagetrail/>

Prior to the first white settlers, Allegan was populated by three Native American Tribes. These were the Odawa, Ojibwa, and Potawatomi. The first white settlers arrived in by boat in 1830, and settled in what is now know as Saugatuck. Dutch immigrants began to arrive in the late 1840's in the Holland area. After the big lumbering boom, much of the county was converted to agricultural use. In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, tourism became popular along the Lake Michigan coast. Our ride will pass thru mostly agricultural areas. But occasionally we will come across places that were, or still are, those favorite spots for the tourists.

We sincerely hope that you enjoy learning the history of the area and that it makes your ride more enjoyable!

1. Veneklasen Brick - Before you even throw a leg over your top tube, you will want to take a look at our accommodations for Saturday night. Here on the Hope College campus we have two Halls built of Veneklasen brick. Van Vleck (1858) & Voorhees Halls (1907) were built using locally made bricks. Jan Venklasen immigrated to the Holland area in 1847. As an experienced brick maker, he began to make bricks from the local clay pits around 1850. Veneklasen brick structures are usually identified by their mix of red and yellow brickwork, with the more expensive yellow being used in the decorative trim. Most were built prior to 1930. Many of these structures can still be found in Allegan, Ottawa, and Kent Counties. Many have been lost though as the area continues to transition from agricultural, to residential.



2. Saugatuck started out as “Kalamazoo.” When the State gave that name to another town, this town became “Newark.” That name didn’t stick though, and when the town was incorporated, it became Saugatuck. At that time Saugatuck was a lumber town. Lumber from the area was used to help rebuild Chicago after the Great Fire of 1871. By the mid 1880’s the lumber was gone. Fruit growing and ship building became the major industries. This is the same time that the area became known as a tourist destination and artist colony. While riding in Saugatuck, you will come across the “Saugatuck Chain Ferry.” This hand cranked chain ferry was established in 1838 and allows pedestrians (and bicycles) to get to the other side of the Kalamazoo River.

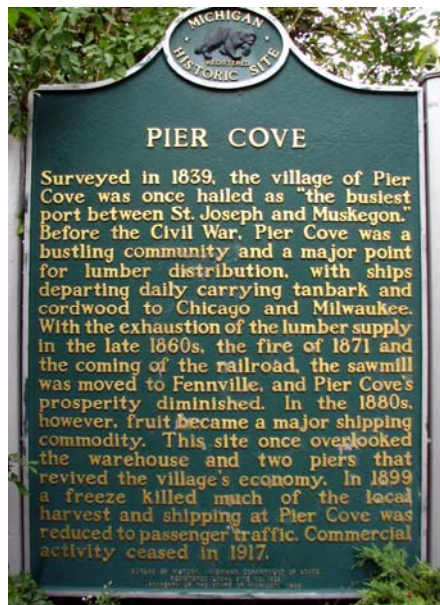


3. When leaving Saugatuck you will see a large ship on your right. That’s the Steamship Keewatin. She was built in Scotland in 1907, cut into two sections to get thru the Welland Canal, and then reunited in Buffalo, NY. She was built to transport rail cars across the Georgian Bay, to railheads on Lake Superior. She was retired from service in 1965 and arrived in Saugatuck-Douglas in 1967. She is the last of the Classic Great Lakes Steamships still afloat, and can be toured during the summer months.





4. Our next point of historic interest can be found as you catch your second glimpse of Lake Michigan. You will see a historic marker for the village of Pier Cove, and a few cottages. A large pier was built into Lake Michigan in the 1840's. Lumber products were the primary cargo at that time. Later, that changed to locally grown fruit, and passenger traffic. Business became so good that a second pier, and warehouse, were built for this bustling community. By the 1880's the area started to die out as people began to use railroads, instead of ships, to move products. In 1917 the last ship sailed from the Pier Cove piers.



5. The town of Glenn was another busy Lake Michigan shipping port in the late 1800's. Today, several of the buildings from that era are still in use. You will pass the Glenn Schoolhouse, which was built in 1880. It is no longer a one room school house, but is still holding classes.



Nearby is the Glenn Methodist Episcopal Church. Construction was completed in February of 1901 for a cost just over \$3700. The church is still in use today.



You can see the Gerstner Hardware building on the south side of 114<sup>th</sup>, with the old blacksmith's shop across the street. Glenn became nationally know in December 1937 when a major snowstorm raged for three days. 100 cars, 60 trucks, and over 200 motorists found themselves stranded in town. A recent delivery of pancake flour had arrived just prior to the storm. With milk from the local cows, pancakes soon became the only item left on the menu. The next year a "pancake festival" was held to commemorate the storm. Like other festivals of that time, a queen was chosen, parades were held, games and contests were played, and many were entertained. This annual festival was held until WWII, and sporadically after.



6. One of your rest stops will be at the Fenn Valley Winery. This winery is family owned and was established in 1973. Since then they have created many award winning wines from locally grow grapes. A stop in their tasting room, either during your ride, or after the event, is a must. I would recommend stopping after the ride so that you can carry the bottles you are certainly going to want to buy.





7. Soon after leaving the winery, you will ride around the south shore of Hutchins Lake. This shallow lake was well known for its bass fishing. In the 1920's, the area was plotted for cottages. Many were built for people living in Chicago, who wished to escape the city in the summer. These cottages were small, and crude by today's standards.



8. Our next point of interest is the town of New Richmond. This town was started in 1868 on the site of a former town. It was called "New" Richmond because "Richmond" had been founded on the north side of the Kalamazoo River in 1836. Richmond never really got established due to the financial scare of 1837. The yellow building on the right side of the road is The New Richmond Hotel. It was established in 1913. There are a few other buildings from the era still standing.



Crossing the Kalamazoo River and connecting the two towns are two bridges. The western bridge is for the railroad and was built in 1871. We will be crossing the other bridge on our bikes. Built in 1879, this is the oldest remaining vehicular swing bridge in the United States. If you look closely at the picture, you can see the pivot point that the bridge would "swing" on. This would allow ships to pass as they traveled up and down the river. The bridge has been restored in recent years and now only bicycles and foot traffic are allowed. On special occasions the bridge can still be opened using a special hand crank.

