

Stonewater - How We Got to Now?

Preface

In honor of Stonewater Homeowners Association's 20th anniversary, this historical account of "Stonewater - How We Got to Now?" was created to provide Stonewater residents insight into the origin of their community, how the land was transformed by its previous owners, and to develop a much deeper appreciation for the current Stonewater community.

Wilderness to Suburbia

In the 1820's, the land which Stonewater was built was originally part of Plymouth Township (split off into Northville Township in 1897) of the Northwest Territory. It was a lush, heavily wooded area rich, diversified soil and a number of swampy areas. The area was abundant in wildlife, which made for good hunting and fishing. Although Native Americans undoubtedly traveled through the area, there appeared to be no settlements or popular trails.

The first settlers to our area arrived in 1825. Coming before the railroads, most of the early settlers traveled from New York by steamship to Detroit or across land through Canada. As the land was heavily forested with many streams, hardy men toiled to create primitive roads and bridges to reach our area. It was a three-day wagon ride from Detroit, which often meant walking more than riding. There were many swampy areas where wagons traveled on logs, floated and rolled, in mud.

The early settlers came to stake a claim in the abundant farmland in the Northwest Territory; while others staked their claim as an investment for when the railroad would come. Many were farmers. Their primary settlement concerns were for themselves and their livestock, due to the severe winter weather and the bears and wolves in the area. Some feared the Native Americans, but they were few and relatively harmless. They first worked to clear the land and build a home; in the spring, they prepared for planting crops and erecting a barn. Once roads were cut, neighbors would come together, travelling up to eight miles, to assist new occupants with building cabins and raising barns.

It would take close to a decade before Northville began to take shape. By the late 1800's the land of the township was mostly utilized, predominately for farming, but some farmers did have allied businesses. For example, in 1873, B. A. Parmenters, used his civil war pension to open his cider mill and is one of the oldest businesses in Northville. Social activities included church functions and ice cream socials.

By the 1950's, area farms began to be replaced by subdivisions. The village of Northville became a chartered city in 1955, thus removing it from the township, and Northville Township later became a charter township in 1985. Today, Northville Township is largely residential and the major employers are research and development facilities of automotive suppliers. Modern development has replaced much of the area's rural and forested properties.

Starkweather Legacy

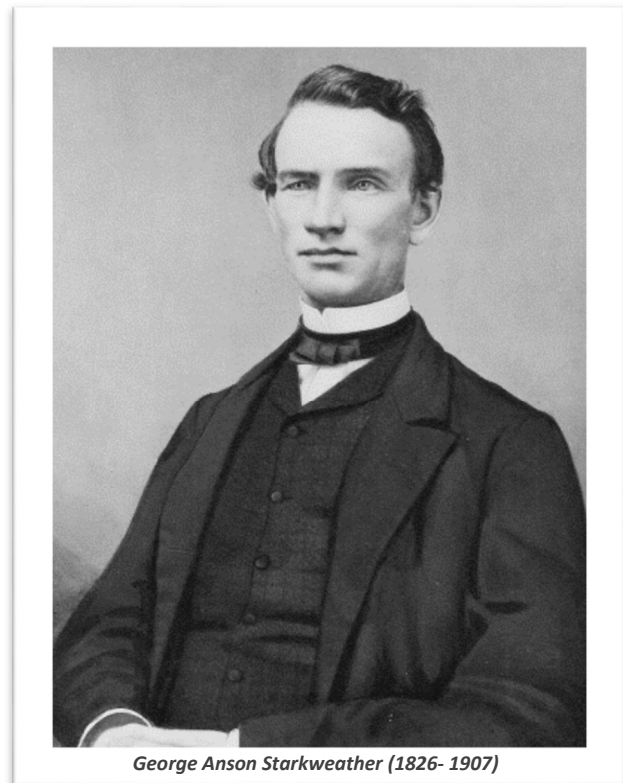
Two Starkweather Brothers would leave Preston, Connecticut to become pioneers in what was then Plymouth Township, Northwest Territory.

Stonewater – How We Got to Now?

There are conflicted reports about who exactly was the very first settler in this area, as three separate families established homes on their land within a 10-day span. Those families were: John Tibbits, with his family, William Starkweather, and his family, and Walter McFarland, with his family. They purchased land under the Land Act of 1820 from the United States government on March 11, 1825, for \$1.25 per acre. The low price of land helped increase the population in the territory. However, the bargain price attracted more than average Americans, it also brought in wealthy investors. The first settlements were in the area south of Five Mile Road, as it was more easily accessible than the area north of Five Mile Road.

William Starkweather (1796-1844), settled in Section 26, which is now Plymouth, with his wife Keziah Benjamin (1798-1846) and their young son, Albert (1824-1844). Keziah was the first non-Native American woman that settled in Plymouth Township. William's second-born, George Anson Starkweather (1826-1907), was the first non-Native American born within the boundaries of what is now known as the city of Plymouth.

William died in at 48 years of age, from typhoid fever. Just 2 months after his father died, Albert also passed while a Sophomore at the newly formed University of Michigan. Keziah would follow two years later. George, at 22 years of age, took over their estate. (Note: William and Keziah's home in Old Village (circa 1835) is located at 557 North Mill Street, Plymouth, Michigan).



George Anson Starkweather (1826- 1907)

George also attended the University of Michigan, and later studied law in New York City, subsequently returning to his birthplace to become the village lawyer, a merchant, Mayor of Plymouth, Michigan State Representative, and also farmed a portion of the land his parents had left him.

William's older brother, Erastus Wolcott Starkweather (1788-1857), also settled in Plymouth Township during the same year. His initial land purchase was in Section 12, bounded by current day Six and Seven Mile Roads, and Haggerty west one mile. He was one of three township assessors who determined the value of taxable property, and was also a farmer and school teacher.

William and Erastus Wolcott Starkweather, both bought and sold parcels of land throughout the area for their various business pursuits. This included selling the same piece of land back and forth between each other at a profit. This may account for Erastus being reported as George Anson Starkweather's father in the 1890 book, "Chronography of Notable Events in the History of Northwest Territory and Wayne County". Erastus made his home in what is now Northville Township, while William settled in what is now Plymouth.

Stonewater – How We Got to Now?

Erastus's sons, Alfred Starkweather (1813 - 1880) and Samuel Starkweather (1816 - 1881) purchased land along Seven Mile Road between Beck and Ridge Roads, including parcels that now belong to Maybury State Park. Alfred married Electa Reece and had no known children.



Map of Wayne County, 1860, Library of Congress

Samuel owning the majority of the land that is currently Stonewater. Samuel married a local woman whose family came from New York state, Jane Northrop (1819 - 1912). They were farmers and members of the Baptist church. Their 600-acre cattle and horse farm, contained the family home, more than 6 large barns, tenant houses, and small buildings.

Samuel's eldest son, Irving Northrop Starkweather (1838 - 1912) married Rachel A. Barnhart (1841-?) of Northville, Michigan in 1861 and had no living adult sons. Irving purchased the adjacent land on the corner of Six Mile and Ridge Road.

Samuel's other son, Eugene King Starkweather (1842-1922) would ultimately inherit his father's and Irving's land. He served in the union army during the civil war as a private in Wagoner's Co. D, Regt. 5th, Michigan Cavalry and belonged to the lodge of the Grand Army of the Republic.

In 1867, King and married Martha Celia Brooks Starkweather (1843-1912) of Novi, Michigan. King was a farmer and buyer of wool.

Stonewater – How We Got to Now?

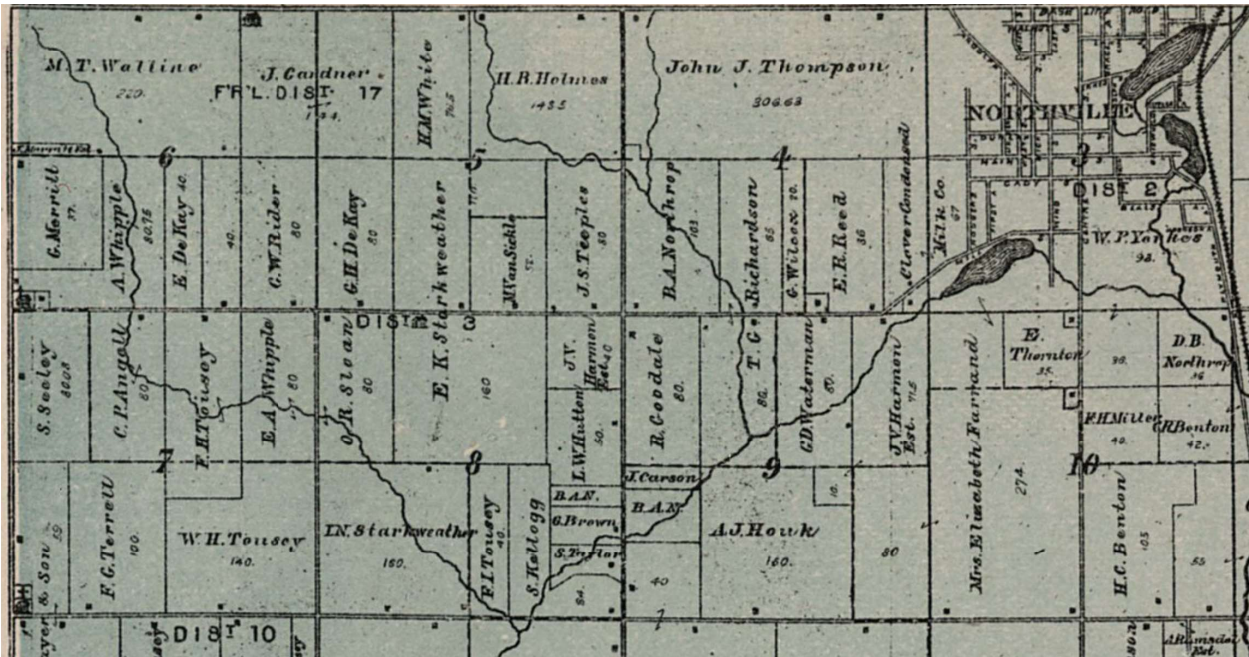


Eugene King Starkweather (1842-1922)

King's land was passed down to his son, Edwin (Ed) Morgan Starkweather (1868-1949). Ed married twice, first to a neighbor, Ida A. Tousey Starkweather (1871-1951) and Ruth D. Turner Starkweather (1894-1983) an English immigrant. (No record was found as whether the first marriage ended in divorce or annulment.)

Ed and Ruth had one child, Eugene K. Starkweather (1923-1944), who was killed in WWII. Ed was a well-known breeder of trotting horses. He died of a heart attack, 6 weeks after being honored by the Michigan Harness Horsemen's Association.

Ruth Starkweather, a widow with no surviving children, would live another 34 years. She would eventually determine the fate of the Starkweather's land.



Map of Wayne County, 1893, Library of Congress

The Underground Railroad

The Northwest Territory prohibition of slavery ordinance was the first of its kind in a U.S. state or territory, but a “fugitive slave clause” allowed slave owners in other states to reclaim runaway slaves. When Michigan became a state on January 26, 1837, the state constitution included a ban on slavery. In the 1850s and early 1860s, there were many people in the Plymouth area involved in the Underground Railroad. Three Underground Railroad barns were used in the area: Number 16 Barn (on the Starkweather farm), Number 15 Barn in Dixboro, and Number 17 Barn was around Haggerty Road and Pontiac Trail heading for Port Huron.

The Starkweather’s hid runaway slaves in a barn used to quarter sheep at the bottom of the hill off of Seven Mile Road. There used to be a post stuck in the ground, within 10-15 feet where the original barn stood. Today, the location of Barn 15 is at the bottom of Stonewater Boulevard where the gazebo in Springhill Park is standing.



STARKWEATHER HOME, 1861. *The Starkweather home was located on Seven Mile Road between Beck and Ridge Roads. The 600-acre horse and cattle farm once stretched nearly a mile, from Seven Mile to Six Mile Roads, and contained more than a half dozen large barns, not including tenant houses and smaller buildings. The Starkweathers were part of the Underground Railroad network that housed runaway slaves fleeing north, many of whom were brought to Northville from Ypsilanti, and then moved on to Detroit. The Starkweathers hid runaway slaves in one of the barns used for quartering sheep. King Starkweather, son of Samuel Starkweather, the farm’s original owner, served in the Union Army. Pictured from left to right are Dell Starkweather; Jane Starkweather, wife of Samuel (1819–1912); Samuel Starkweather (1816–1881); Rachel Starkweather, wife of Irving (1841–1916); Irving Starkweather (1838–1912); a horse named Poll; Belle Starkweather; and Ella Thompson.*

The Wonderful Wizard of Oz

Ruth Starkweather kept a really little, itty bitty, small copper teapot in the top shelf of her China cabinet. Her brother made it for her out of a single penny. Her brother didn’t get much notoriety from making that teapot, but he made something that millions of people see and remember. He created the tin man’s costume for the classic 1939 movie, the Wizard of Oz and was handsomely paid \$300 for his craftsmanship. The costume was made at the Starkweather’s farm, in a barn where the Parkshore subdivision is built.

The classic film gives no explanation of how the Tin Man became the Tin Man. The only reference is the Tin Man’s remark “The tinsmith forgot to give me a heart”. There is no record whether or not a heart was created or left behind at Starkweather’s farm.

Today, unlike the costumes of the Scarecrow (saved by Ray Bolger and donated to the National Museum of American History) and Cowardly Lion (two sets in private hands), sadly, that of the Tin Man “was largely destroyed or thrown away.” So, maybe there is still a Tin Man’s heart, somewhere in Stonewater, just waiting to be found.

Fort Wayne Moraine

After James N. Thomson, had a stroke, his son, Arthur McKinley Thomson (1897-1969) had to quit school in the 6th grade and help his mother, Lydia, run the family 40-acre farm in Caledonia (south east of Grand Rapids). His father was in a vegetative state for 10 years before he died in 1921.

During this period, in 1913, Kent County was looking to purchase gravel. Arthur knew there might be some up in the woods on their property and it turned out to be a beautiful vein of gravel. Kent county purchased the land from his mother for \$4,200 and that gravel mine lasted for almost a year.

This is how Arthur realized there was money to be made in gravel. Arthur's son, Don Thomson, tells the story:

“His dad went to the Caledonia library and studied the glaciers and how the land was deposited two million years ago. He went twice a week for about a year and half. One day he found a book that told about the Fort Wayne Moraine, a vein of gravel that came from Fort Wayne, Indiana, into Michigan then turns and heads right for Oxford, Michigan. There's a quarry there that's been operating for 100 years and is one the largest deposits of gravel in the world. In 1912 he took that book that showed where the Fort Wayne Moraine was and marked every town it went through in Michigan.”

“Lo and behold in 1936, when he worked in the junkyard for 20 cents an hour or \$1.60 a day, he was getting ready to have his lunch. He looked in the corner of the place where everybody ate their lunch, and there was a tube about 3 feet long with two rubber bands around it. He looked at it, and it was a drilling report done by American Aggregates, which still operates in Michigan, Indiana, Ohio, Illinois, and Wisconsin. He saw a drilling report dated 1932 at the Starkweather farm. How it ended up there in a junkyard in Grand Rapids, he never found out. He asked the owner of the junkyard, Mr. Brody, if he could take it home and study it. He said he could keep it, as he didn't know how it got there.”

“My dad looked at his papers from 1912 and found that Northville was in the Fort Wayne Moraine. The vein was as wide as five miles wide and as skinny as 50 yards wide in some areas. Gerald Taft, which Taft Road was named after, had a deposit of gravel at 8 Mile and Taft Road. He had good gravel in front of the barn but it was solid clay 20 feet down in back of the barn. He went over to Ridge Road. If you go to Ridge south of 7 Mile there's a little subdivision in there. This is where Bill Taft's dad, Gerald, came over with a crane and dug test holes and hit clay 20 ft. down. He missed the Fort Wayne Moraine by less than 50 ft. If he had drilled 50 ft. to the southeast, the whole Thomson family probably wouldn't be here. But because of the vein and the Fort Wayne Moraine, that's the way it happened. My dad hit the jackpot.”

Thomson Sand and Gravel

In 1936, Northville Sand and Gravel, owned by John Waskins, was the area's largest mining operation and was located on Beck Road near Seven Mile. Mining was done on the east side first (now Elizabeth Lake) and then the larger operation on the west side (now Blue Heron Point Lake).

Arthur set his sights on the Starkweather farm in the 1930's and made a deal to buy the land from Ed Starkweather for \$50 an acre in 1936. Because Ed owned frontage on practically all four roads in Section 8, Mr. Starkweather said he could start buying land anywhere he wanted.

Stonewater – How We Got to Now?

Since Northville Sand and Gravel was bordered by Starkweather's farm on the west and south sides, Arthur immediately started buying land that was adjacent to the Northville Sand and Gravel quarry. His strategy was, in a year or two, he might be able to buy enough land that Northville Sand and Gravel would have to come to him when their quarry ran out of gravel. 10 years later, Northville Sand and Gravel closed and their former west side operation is now the Blue Heron condominium complex.

Up until the early 40's, Arthur did not have enough money to go into the gravel business. He would leave his home in Grand Rapids on Monday to farm his land and help Ed farm his land. Then he would travel back home every Saturday to spend time with his family.

During the fire of 1943, several of the Starkweather barns burned down near 7 Mile Road. The local fire department didn't have much water and it was a windy day. Arthur and a neighbor focused on protecting the Starkweather's house. They pumped the water out of the farm's horse trough and threw it on the back of house until 3:00 a.m. Eventually the Starkweather's house was saved and Ed and Ruth were forever grateful.

Ed died in the first week of February in 1949. Ruth called Arthur, who was at home in Grand Rapids, and asked him to come to her house in the morning. Harry Pickett, a very wealthy gentleman from Allegan, Michigan, wanted to buy every acre she had left. Arthur knew he could probably pay a lot more than his \$50 an acre. She asked Arthur to arrive early, so she wouldn't have to be alone with him.

As the story was told to Don Thomson, Mrs. Starkweather asked Arthur if he would take care of her now that her husband's gone and she had no family left. Arthur agreed. When Mr. Pickett arrived, Ruth thanked him for coming all the way from Allegan, but Arthur had saved her home from the fire. She trusted him with the rest of her land.

Arthur moved his family to the farm and ended his long treks back and forth to Grand Rapids. Arthur's wife, Helen, and Ruth Starkweather became close friends. Arthur took care of Mrs. Starkweather for the rest of her life. The farm land was slowly converted into a mining operation and the natural springs converted the quarries into lakes.

Arthur's son, Don Thomson went into the Marine Corps right after his high school graduation and then worked for his father in 1955. Don would go on to open a local car wash and serve as the Northville Township Supervisor, 1978 – 1980. After Arthur passed away in 1969, his youngest daughter, Alta Thomson Sorensen and her husband Charlie, ran the business.

The gravel quarry was eventually exhausted and in its place 6 spring fed lakes were created. This made the land very desirable for residential development. The Thomson family decided to sell the land in 1989, to two developers, but they went bankrupt. Alexander Hamilton was the backer who got the land back and then sold it to two other developers who ultimately built Stonewater.

Stonewater

Moceri and Trinty Land Development formed a partnership, Stonewater L.L.C., to develop the 366 acres into Stonewater. In 1999, the nonprofit Corporation for the Stonewater Homeowners Association was formed. Domenic Moceri (1931-2018), a hall of fame builder and developer for southeast Michigan, was made the resident agent.

Stonewater – How We Got to Now?

The development started with 120 lots in its first phase stretching from Manorwood to Stonewater Boulevard connecting the only bordering paved roads at the time (Beck Road and Seven Mile Road). This premier luxury home community lured prospective buyers in, with its dramatic waterfalls, stone monument walls, and lush landscaped private parks that completed the transformation from commercial gravel pits to the prestigious community of Stonewater. Planning stages began in 1997 through 1999 with the following phases:

- Subdivision No. 1: Peninsula and Boulders East
- Subdivision No. 2: Boulders West
- Subdivision No. 3: Shorebrook and Parkshore East
- Subdivision No. 4: Parkshore West
- Subdivision No. 5: Mystic Cove and the Ridge

Stonewater would go on to be recognized as the Building Industry Association of Southeast Michigan's "Development of the Year," and set a new standard for community development and land use.

One of the unique offerings in this community is the trout stream. It was faithfully restored to enable the native fish to reestablish their natural habitat. In 1995, as a part of this restoration work, the Developer entered into the "Drainage Systems Agreement" to settle civil actions with the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) and Northville Township. This and other agreements also include associated interconnections between lakes and our storm water treatment systems. Stonewater Homeowners' Association is still subject to maintaining this restoration work as detailed in Stonewater's Declaration and is intended to help protect the community's most valuable bodies of water.

Management

Stonewater L.L.C. was the Declarant, having control over the Association, until 95% of the Declarant's lots had their title conveyed. The Declarant formed a Board of Directors, with Dominic's son, Mario Mocerì, and 2 community members to review budgets and homeowner issues.

By 2005, it was apparent that having the Declarant in Auburn Hills, Michigan was just too far away to handle local issues and AMP (Lora Wright) was contracted as the managing agent.

In 2007, it was determined by the Board of Directors (Mario Mocerì, Rob David, and Chuck Gaidica) that the Association was ready to be turned over to the membership.

The first Annual Meeting was held on September 12, 2007 and the first elected Board of Directors were: Jim Evangelista (President), Derek Albert (Vice-President), Pat Fehring (Treasurer), Rob David (Secretary), and Andrew Vassallo.

Community

Today, Stonewater is still considered one of the most prestigious subdivisions in Northville with 6 pristine lakes, ideal for swimming, sailing or fishing, and private parks with waterfalls, meandering trout stream, scenic pedestrian paths and bridges, and a stunning hilltop pergola. Stonewater's prime location near local freeways, restaurants, shopping and the towns of Northville and Plymouth are also great conveniences. This is what makes the Stonewater lifestyle such a unique experience.

Stonewater has always been home to many relocated and expatriate executives in the metro Detroit area. Over the years, people have come from all over America and the world: Canada, China, Germany,

Stonewater – How We Got to Now?

India, Japan, South Korea and the Middle East to name a few. These diverse cultures, results in a more positive, open, and friendly community.

Many residents feel fortunate to live in this special place, to have watched their children grow up here and welcomed their grandchildren too! While, some may have been here only for a few years, everyone who lives here, knows that Stonewater is like no other place in southeast Michigan.

Since the time of the first settlers here to the twenty-first century residents, the land on which Stonewater has been built is an American melting pot of international cultures.

Sources

The historical information and stories provided in this document were primarily gathered and compiled from internet and book resources referenced below. Most notable were the Voices of Northville interviews with Don Thomson and Michael Green for their personal recollections.

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