

Historic Lewiston Time Line

The events that shaped Lewiston in the 19th Century

In 1835, Josiah Tryon, moved to Lewiston from Connecticut and set up a tailor shop on Center Street and a home on Plain Street. Soon after arriving, he began to lead a secret life as a volunteer and organized local efforts to help fugitive slaves from the South gain freedom in Canada on what was called the Underground Railroad. Despite breaking the law, Josiah and his fellow volunteers helped hundreds escape to Canada during the 1840s and 1850s. No known photograph exists of this humble and religious man. He is recognized as Lewiston's greatest citizen of all time. Lewiston's new Freedom Crossing Monument will be unveiled in 2009, to honor his memory and cause.



The Frontier House was built in 1824-5 by Joshua Fairbanks, Benjamin Barton and his son, Samuel. It was recognized as the finest hotel in the United States, west of Albany, and is Lewiston's premier historic landmark. Stage coaches once thundered up to its doors when Lewiston was the center of the "Great Overland Route Across the Continent." In those early days, Lewiston's population was more than Buffalo's. The Frontier House is constructed of 30 inch walls of stone from the Bay of Quinte at the Northeastern end of Lake Ontario.

The First Presbyterian Church was organized in 1817 and the cornerstone was laid in 1830. It was used to secretly harbor slaves seeking freedom in Canada.



Fugitive slaves escaping to Canada



The steamship, Cibola, caught fire in 1895 at the Lewiston dock and in turn, burned the American Hotel to the ground. The owner, Nelson Cornell (cousin to the University founder) rebuilt and called his replacement hotel the Cornell House (no longer standing) which stood just south of the Silo. The broken anchor sits in front of the Lewiston Museum on Plain St.



The Red Brick School on North 4th St. was built in 1901. It was rebuilt in 1905 after a fire in the front section. A gymnasium was added in 1927.



President William McKinley visited Lewiston on September 6, 1901. Later that afternoon, he was shot at the Pan American Exposition in Buffalo. He died 8 days later.

Overall, Lewiston was Western New York's boom town from 1815 until 1825, when the Erie Canal opened and shifted commerce to Buffalo. However, agriculture and passenger steamships, carrying 10-15,000 people a day to and from Canada, were the driving forces in Lewiston's 19th Century economy.

In 1851, the longest suspension bridge in the world opens and connects Lewiston with Queenston. It is eventually destroyed by a wind storm in 1864. A second suspension bridge was constructed in 1901 and remained in service until 1962.



After being completely destroyed by the British and their Mohawk Indian allies in December 1813, Lewiston began to rebuild.

1813

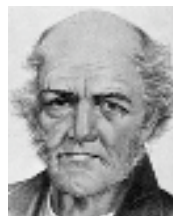


James Monroe was the first sitting president to visit Lewiston on August 9, 1817, on his way from Fort Niagara to Niagara Falls.

The Lewiston Academy was built in 1824 and became the foremost high school in Western New York. The Academy prospered until the Canadian students withdrew during the 1837-38 MacKenzie Rebellion. It was demolished in the 1930s, and was located at 9th and Center St., on property now known as Academy Park. The cornerstone is still there.



In 1826, William Morgan, the Masonic traitor, was kidnapped in Batavia and brought to the Frontier House on his way to Fort Niagara where he was never heard from again. The Morgan Affair caused a national uproar and had major political consequences. The original stage coach he arrived in remained behind the Frontier House for years because people feared to move it, afraid they would be implicated in the abduction plot.



1850

1900



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Historic Lewiston placemats written and designed by Historic Association volunteer, Lee Simonson

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