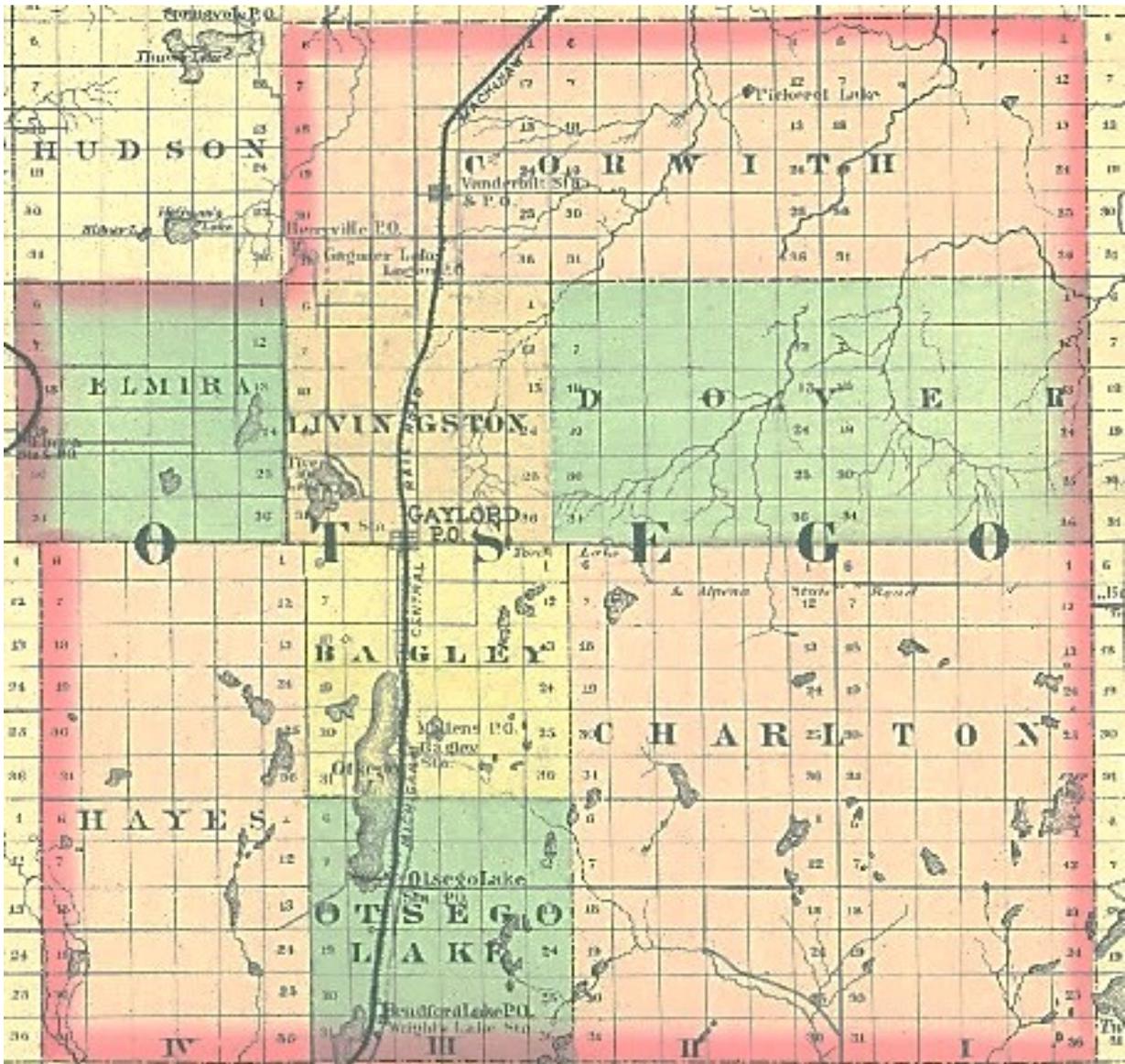


# Celebrating 150 Years



**OTSEGO COUNTY HISTORY  
1875 - 2025**

## Pre-1875

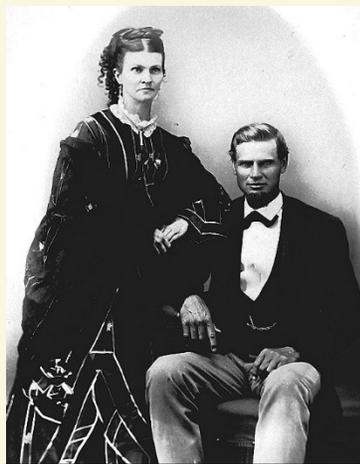
1840: The land which now encompasses Otsego County was given the name Okkuddo County. Okkuddo is believed to be a pseudo-Indian word meaning "sickly" or "stomach pains". It is unknown why this name was selected. There were no roads or permanent settlements in the area.

1843: The State Legislature changed the name of the county to Otsego; possibly for Otsego County New York which comes from the Iroquois language meaning "clear water", "rock", or "the meeting place".

1850: Witness Tree: A red pine marked during the 1850 land survey of Michigan. The tree and interpretive sign stand near the Pigeon River County State Forest headquarters.

1868: The first attempt at a settlement in Otsego County occurred along Crooked Lake (now known as Lake Manuka) by A. A. Dwight, a prominent Detroit lumberman.

1869: Otsego County lost a portion of land before its first settlers arrived. Hudson Township, in the northwest corner of Otsego County, was removed and added to Charlevoix County.



Charles and Jane Brink

1869: Charles Brink from Lapeer County led a team of 14 men to clear land and set up a camp at the southeast corner of Otsego Lake. His wife, Jane, arrived later that year and is credited as being the first white female to take up residence in Otsego County.

1872: Otsego Lake Village was established on the southeast corner of Otsego Lake by the lumbering firm of Smith, Kelley and Dwight. It was the first permanent settlement in the county.

1872: The Mackinaw Branch of the Michigan Central Railroad (also known as the Jackson, Lansing & Saginaw Railroad) reached Otsego Lake Village.

1873: The railroad extended north and the community of Barnes was established and named for Orlando M. Barnes of Lansing. A short time later, it was re-named Gaylord in honor of Augustine S. Gaylord of Saginaw who was an attorney with the railroad.

1873: The first recorded Polish immigrant to Otsego County – Michael Swantek

1873: The community of Bradford Lake was established and was given a post office in 1876. The town was renamed Waters in 1885.

1874: Berryville (3 ½ miles southwest of Vanderbilt) was established.

*\* Map on cover is by H. F. Walling and published in Tackabury's Atlas of Michigan in 1884*

# TIMELINE OF OTSEGO COUNTY HISTORY 1875 - 2025



**1875: Otsego County was established on March 12** and Otsego Lake Village was designated the temporary county seat. The first four townships were Otsego Lake, Charlton, Livingston and Elmira Townships.

1875: The "Otsego County Herald" began publication in Otsego Lake Village. Today, the newspaper is the "Gaylord Herald Times" and is published bi-weekly.

1877: Corwith and Hayes Townships were established.

1877: The county seat was moved from Otsego Lake Village to Gaylord.

1879: Dover Township was established. Originally, it was a double township.

**1880 Census: Otsego County Population 1,974**

1881: Gaylord was incorporated as a village. It became a city in 1922.

1881: The Jackson, Lansing & Saginaw Railroad (Mackinaw Division of the Michigan Central Railroad) was extended to Vanderbilt from Gaylord.

1882: Bagley Township was established.

1882: The County Poor Farm was established and located at Meecher and Allis Roads in Livingston Township. The facility closed in 1952 after 70 years of service.

1883: The community of Elmira (originally named Windsor) was platted along the Grand Rapids & Indiana Railroad (later named the Penn Central Railroad) on the Antrim County line. The town is believed to have been named for Elmira, New York.

1884: The Gaylord Masonic Lodge was chartered. In the early days of Otsego County, the Masonic Lodges played a vital role in the social life of the community. Other lodges included Charity Lodge #403 in Elmira, Alpha Lodge in Johannesburg, Cyrene Lodge #352 in Vanderbilt.

1888: Chester Township was established.

**1890 Census: Otsego County Population 4,272**



1891: The brick courthouse (photo to the left) was built in downtown Gaylord. The land was donated by Orlando M. Barnes, secretary of the railroad company. However, if the property was no longer used for county purposes, it would revert to Mr. Barnes or his heirs. Seventy-six years later, the brick building was torn down and replaced in 1967 with the City/County Building.

1893: The Gaylord State Bank started - originally as the Gaylord State Savings Bank - it changed its name in 1948. It was sold to Old Kent in 1981 and is now 5/3 Bank.

1894: St. Mary School opened in Gaylord. Mr. Kowalkowski was the teacher of the 50 pupils.

1895: The Gaylord branch of Dayton Last Block Works (DLBW) opened. The enterprise consisted of 27 buildings and covered 14 ½ acres. At its peak, DLBW had 100 employees. This factory was once the largest of its kind in the world. DLBW Gaylord branch closed in 1931.

### 1900 Census: Otsego County Population 6,175

1901: Johannesburg was established by the Johannesburg Manufacturing Company, a large sawmill operation that specialized in hemlock and hardwood lumber. The community was named after Johanna Hanson Bay. Johanna's **brother**, (not husband) Rasmus Hanson, was the president of the Johannesburg Manufacturing Company.

1901: The Village of Vanderbilt was incorporated. The community was named in honor of the Vanderbilt family of New York who owned the Michigan Central Railroad.

1901: St. Mary Catholic Church (second church building on that site) was completed and dedicated on the southwest corner of Otsego Avenue and Mitchell Street in Gaylord. Today, the red brick landmark is the Mt. Carmel Centre and is used for performing arts. A state historical marker was unveiled in 2005.

1904: The Boyne City, Gaylord & Alpena Railroad extended from Elmira to Gaylord. By 1918 it was completed and reached its destination of Alpena. This provided an important east-west transportation route and included stops at Hallock, Sparr, Gibbs, and Vienna. It went bankrupt and out of business by 1935.

1905: The cannon on the courthouse lawn was dedicated in a 4th of July ceremony in memory of the Civil War veterans. The battleship gun was one of 26 cannons used on Admiral Farragut's flagship "Hartford".

1906: The community of Hallock in Elmira Township was plotted and named for Benjamin Hallock.

## 1910 Census: Otsego County Population 6,552



1910: Gaylord Motor Car Company was established and went bankrupt in 1913. Approximately 350 cars were manufactured during its four years of business. The only known Gaylord Car in existence is on display at the Gaylord Area Chamber of Commerce Visitors Center.

1912: Gaylord Municipal Building was built on Court Street to the immediate east of the County Courthouse. It housed city offices, library, police and fire departments, and an auditorium.

1913: The community of Sparr was established along the route of the Boyne City, Gaylord, and Alpena Railroad. The town was named for Philip Sparr.

1913: Gaylord's Main Street was paved.

1913: The first airplane flew into Otsego County as a special attraction at the county fair.

1916: The world-famous bottle fence was built in Waters for Henry Stephens.

1917: The Extension Service office was established in Otsego County. Its educational activities focused on agriculture, home economics, community development, and 4-H youth programs.

1917: Ray Muscott of Waters, Michigan received US Patent 1,188,981 on June 27 for a motor sleigh - the forerunner of today's snowmobile.

1918: Seven elk were transplanted near Wolverine in Cheboygan County and eventually migrated to the Pigeon River State Forest in northeast Otsego County.

1919: George Doumas purchased The Sugar Bowl – a candy store -- in downtown Gaylord from the Gocha brothers. It was later expanded into a full-service restaurant and was one of the oldest family-owned businesses in Otsego County until it was sold in 2016 and is now El Patron.

## 1920 Census: Otsego County Population 6,043

1920: Otsego Lake State Park was established on the east side of Otsego Lake. The property was purchased from a lumber company by local business and community leaders.

1923: Sawyer Township was established. It was created from the eastern portion of Dover Township. Sawyer Township existed until 1934 when it consolidated with Charlton Township.

1923: Top of Michigan Potato Show was established. The regional event was held in Gaylord for the next 12 years.

1926: The first golf course – Gaylord Country Club – opened in Otsego County and was located near the present-day Jay’s Sporting Goods on South Otsego Avenue. It moved to Elmira Township in 1971.

1927: Dr. Gordon McKillop opened a 12 bed hospital on the second floor of his home located in Gaylord on the northeast corner of Main and Oak Streets. The hospital closed in 1936.

1928: US 27 – the main north south highway - was paved.

1928: The Mackinac and Au Sable State Forests were created. These two state forests cover a total of several hundred acres in Charlton, Chester, Hayes and Otsego Lake Townships.

1929: The Great Depression began and caused the population of Otsego County to decline.

### **1930 Census: Otsego County Population 5,554**

1930: Otsego County Pioneer Society was organized to work in conjunction with the Gaylord Study Club. Initial officers were Frank Shipp, S. J. Lewis, Cora Moore, and Cora Long.

1932: Dearborn Colony in Charlton Township was established with 8 families relocated from Dearborn Michigan to 140 acre farms in eastern Otsego County. This “back to the farm” experimental relief program by the Dearborn Welfare Department only lasted a short time.

1934: Gaylord Kiwanis Club was formed with 35 members and Frank Shipp its first president.

1934: Coldest temperature recorded in Michigan was 51 degrees below zero on February 9 in Vanderbilt.

1936: The first ski hill in Otsego County - The Vanderbilt Ski Club - began operation. It relocated east of Gaylord in 1939 and was renamed Hidden Valley – Otsego Ski Club.

1936: The Gaylord High School gymnasium was built of field stone by the WPA and CCC. The building is located on South Center Street and is now the Otsego County Community Center.

1937: The Northern Michigan Tuberculosis Sanatorium opened its 128-bed facility in Livingston Township. The four-story Sanatorium and its five accessory buildings occupied the 160 acre complex located one mile north of Gaylord. It later became a State Hospital for the mentally handicapped and named the Alpine Center. It closed in 1981 which was a loss of 200 jobs. (See 1984 for an update on this facility)



1939: Rural Electric Association (REA) brought electricity to rural county residents.

1939: Otsego Ski Club opened east of the Gaylord city limits. In 1955, Alan Gornick purchased the resort from the estate of Donald McLouth. Today, the 4000 acre resort has 105 guest rooms, two golf courses, ski hill, and restaurant. The resort was also known as Hidden Valley. It was renamed Otsego Resort in 2018.

### 1940 Census: Otsego County Population 5,827

1940: Otsego County Chamber of Commerce was established.

1941 – 1945: World War II had a major impact on Otsego County. In 1942, Dr. Robert Oppenheimer met with summer resident Dr. Arthur Compton at the Otsego Lake State Park to secretly discuss their scientific research that was related to the atom bomb later used in WWII.

1941: Higgins Industries – now H&H Tube -- opened a manufacturing plant in Vanderbilt.

1942: M-32 was paved in Otsego County.

1945: Standard Products opened in Bagley Township.

### 1950 Census: Otsego County Population 6,435

1950: WATC, the county's first radio station, began broadcasting its AM station.

1951: Glen's Market opened its first store. C. Glen and Doris Catt founded the company that eventually expanded to 26 stores with 2500 associates. It was sold in 1998 to Spartan Foods and re-named Family Fare in 2013.

1951: Otsego County Memorial Hospital opened with 34 beds. There hadn't been a hospital in the county for the past 15 years since the McKillop Hospital closed in 1936. OMH merged with Munson in 2018.



1956: "Our Hometown", Vanderbilt's newspaper began its weekly publication.

1956: Gaylord Rotary Club was chartered.

1957: The Mackinac Bridge opened. It connects Michigan's two peninsulas.

1958: The Gaylord Industrial Development Corporation was formed. One of its major accomplishments was recruiting US Plywood to build a factory in Gaylord.

## 1960 Census: Otsego County Population 7,545

1960s: Gaylord and Otsego County were promoted as the Ski Capital of the Midwest.

1960s: Michaywe' land development was formed. The 2000 acre planned unit development (PUD) includes 750 homes, 2 golf courses, and a clubhouse. The word Michaywe' is said to mean "land of the elk".

1962: The completion of I-75 through Otsego County contributed to the increase in tourism. Restaurants, gas stations, motels, resorts and recreation areas have benefited from being located on this new, major transportation route.



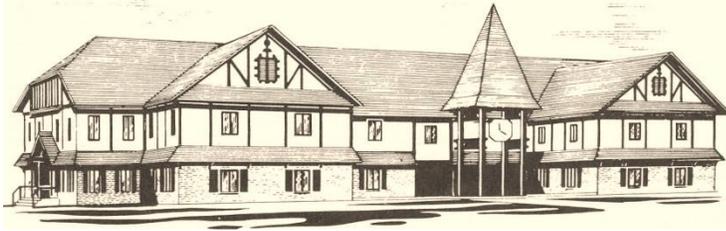
1963: The Otsego County Historical Society was established.

1963: The largest beef cattle sale east of the Mississippi River was held on October 10 by the Northern Michigan Beef Breeders Association. The auction was held in Gaylord.

1964: Alpine Motif was introduced to downtown Gaylord by local businessman Gordon Everett.

1965: U.S. Plywood opened a manufacturing plant in Gaylord. The firm originally manufactured particle board under a Swiss patent. U.S. Plywood merged with Champion International in the 1970s and later became part of Georgia-Pacific Corporation (G-P). In late 2005, Koch Industries purchased G-P. The plant in Gaylord closed on March 6, 2006 and was demolished in the Spring of 2013.

1965: The first Alpine Festival, later renamed Alpenfest, was held in Gaylord. This community celebration honors its sister city Pontresina, Switzerland and provides a week-long of entertainment for local residents as well as attracting thousands of visitors.



1965: Countywide zoning was enacted.

1967: City / County Building was built in downtown Gaylord.

1968: Johannesburg School and Lewiston School consolidated to form the Johannesburg-Lewiston Area Schools. A kindergarten through high school is in Johannesburg. An elementary school is also located in Lewiston. The district covers 310 square miles.

### **1970 Census: Otsego County Population 10,422**

1971: The Gaylord Air Industrial Park west of I-75 on Dickerson Road was developed.

1971: Gaylord became the smallest Roman Catholic diocese city in the United States.

1971: Don and Phyllis Boughner opened the Sparr Grocery that later became the Sparr Mall.

1971: Big Lake School, the last one-room school in Otsego County, closed and consolidated with Gaylord Community Schools. The building is now the Chester Township Hall.

1972: United Way was established in Otsego County.

1973: The Pigeon River Country Advisory Council was created to help manage the large tract of state owned land located in Otsego, Cheboygan, and Montmorency Counties.

1973: McDonald's became the first fast food restaurant in Otsego County.

1975: Otsego County celebrated its centennial.

1976: World renowned oil & gas fire fighter, Red Adair, came to Otsego County to extinguish an out of control well fire near Waters. The event made national news.

1979. Gaylord Girls' Softball Team won the World Series in Waco, Texas.

### **1980 Census: Otsego County Population 14,993**

1981: Alten Zimmer was built with 46 apartments for senior citizens and expanded to a total of 70 housing units in 1985.

1981: RSVP (Retired and Senior Volunteer Program) was established in Otsego County. Cynthia Sparks was the first executive director.

1981: The first “big box” chain store opened in Otsego County. K-Mart opened a retail store on South Otsego Avenue in Gaylord. It closed in 2013.

1982: The first officially designated centennial farm in Otsego County was the farm of Albert (Bob) and Anna Kassuba. The 3<sup>rd</sup> generation farm located in Bagley Township was established in 1882 by Al’s grandfather, Frank Kassuba, Sr. who moved here from Germany. As of 2025, there are now 9 designated centennial farms in Otsego County: Kassuba (1982), Latuszek (2006), Fleming (2007), Koronka ((2008), Estelle (2008), Kobylinski, (2008) Gapinski (2015), Prusakiewicz (2017), and Gingell (2018).



1982: 6000 acres was added to the Pigeon River County State Forest in Corwith Township.

1984: The Alpine Center re-opened after renovating the former TB Sanatorium / State Hospital (see 1937). The 160 acre complex was named in honor of long time County Commissioner, J. Richard Yuill of Corwith Township in 1992. Today the Center is the site of the Gaylord High School, The University Center Gaylord, M-TEC Kirtland – Gaylord, and various county, state, and federal agencies.

1985: The Otsego County Library moved from its location at the Courthouse to 700 S. Otsego Avenue in Gaylord. There are branch locations in Vanderbilt and Johannesburg.

1986: Former-President Jimmy Carter shopped at the Alpine IGA for groceries during his bird hunting excursion to the Pigeon River Country State Forest. He purchased his hunting license from Fred Snook at the Alphorn Shop.

1986: The Jerry Tobias murder in December resulted in a series of trials and appeals that continued until 2002 at an estimated cost of between \$4 and \$7 million.

1987: Otsego County celebrated Michigan’s Sesquicentennial with events throughout the year. Interest in local history grew and resulted in reactivating the Historical Society.

1987: The Gaylord Golf Mecca was created by the Gaylord Area Convention & Tourism Bureau and seven local golf course operators.

1987: Project Nature opened near Vanderbilt on June 21. It went bankrupt in 1989 and was sold to Sylvan Resort in 1990.

**1990 Census: Otsego County Population 17,957**

1990: Wal-Mart opened in the White Pine Shopping Center located on M-32 West in Bagley Township. It relocated to the Edelweiss Shopping Center in 2004.

1992: The Otsego County Historical Museum opened on Main Street in downtown Gaylord.

1994: The "new" high school for Gaylord Community Schools was constructed at the Alpine Center. The gymnasium was named in honor of long-time coach Jim Mongeau. The auditorium was named in honor of local businessman and philanthropist Alan Gornick.

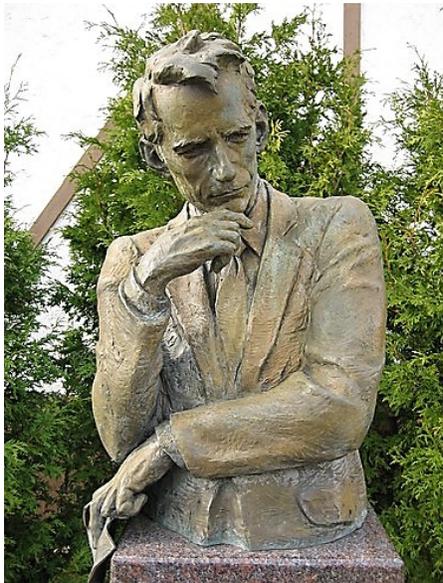
1995: The National Weather Service was built two miles northwest of Waters.

1996: The Otsego County Sportsplex opened. The recreation facility includes an indoor swimming pool, ice rink, and outdoor Energy Park. Tennis courts were added in 2018.

1998: Winds exceeding 100 miles per hour caused \$10 million in damages. Portions of Otsego County were declared a disaster area.

1999: Otsego County Animal Shelter became the first No Kill municipal shelter in Michigan.

## 2000 Census: Otsego County Population 23,301



2000: A statue of Claude E. Shannon was dedicated in downtown Gaylord. Shannon, a 1932 Gaylord High School graduate, is known as the father of the Information Theory which is the basis for the digital age.

2002: Pavilion on Court was constructed over Court Avenue between Main Street and First Street and used for special events such as the Farmers Market and seasonal festivals.

2002: Kirtland M-TEC – Gaylord and the University Center at Gaylord opened its classroom doors to students.

2004: The Edelweiss Village Shopping Center opened on Dickerson Road at the I-75 exit 282. Retail stores included Super Wal-Mart, Lowe's, and Radio Shack.

2006: The roundabout at the Alpine Center entrance on Old 27 North and Livingston Boulevard was constructed.

2007: Thunder Over Waters began its annual one day festival.

2008: “Mistaken Identity” was published and gained national media attention. The book described the traffic accident involving Gaylord native Whitney Cerak. Initially, it was believed that Whitney had been killed. However, 5 weeks later, it was discovered that she had been mistaken for another passenger, Laura Van Ryn.

2008: Gaylord built its new City Hall at 305 W. Main Street.

2010: The War Memorial in downtown Johannesburg was unveiled.

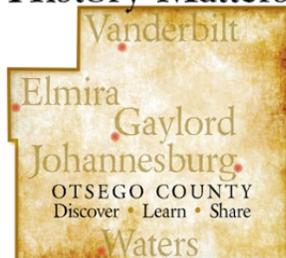
## 2010 Census: Otsego County Population 24,164

2010: Wings Over Gaylord air show debuts at the Gaylord Regional Airport. Seven years later it grew into Wings Over Northern Michigan Air Show. 2018 was the event’s final year.

2010: Bay Mills Indian Community opened a 34-slot machine casino in Vanderbilt.

2012: The Otsego County Louis M. Groen Nature Preserve opened in Charlton Township. The 764 acre property was once the site of the Johannesburg Manufacturing Company.

### History Matters



2017: The History Matters program was established in collaboration with the Otsego County Historical Society, Otsego County Library, Otsego County Commission on Aging, University Center Gaylord, and Gaylord Community Schools. Later, the City of Gaylord, RSVP, Otsego Community Foundation. The group of volunteers published a series of books to commemorate the county’s sesquicentennial in 2025. History Matters also produced this Timeline of Otsego County History.

2018: The Pigeon River Country Discovery Center opened in Corwith Township.

2019: The Iron Belle Trail was officially opened in Otsego County.

## 2020 Census: Otsego County Population 25,091

2020: Covid-19 pandemic began. It killed more than 100 people in Otsego County.

2020: Gaylord Community Schools received the first fully electric bus in the state of Michigan.

2022: Otsego County’s first marijuana retail store opened.

2022: An EF3 tornado devastated parts of Otsego County on May 20 and killing two people.

2022: Gaylord celebrated its 100<sup>th</sup> year of being a city. Time capsule to be opened in 2072.

**2025: Otsego County celebrates its Sesquicentennial. Happy 150th Birthday!**