

# Ludington, Michigan

## *History*

The Ludington area and Mason County remain rich with heritage because the residents—longtime and newly relocated—believe in honoring the community's roots.

It was a combination of natural resources that provided the impetus for the founding of Ludington & Mason County in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Ludington & Mason County were situated in the midst of one of the many vast forests of tall pine trees that covered Michigan, and on the shore of one of the major waterways in North America—Lake Michigan.

The area's earliest days are marked by the arrival of French missionary and explorer Father Jacques Marquette, who landed on the narrow peninsula dividing Pere Marquette Lake from Lake Michigan in the mid-1600s. Marquette journeyed to this region to further his knowledge and understanding of the area's first settlers—the Native Americans who knew the land as an abundant supplier of their needs. He died and was buried on the peninsula in 1675. A monument, the Father Marquette Shrine, now marks the site of his death on the south side of the channel.

Years later, in 1847, Burr Caswell settled at the mouth of the Pere Marquette River, beginning a small community known as Pere Marquette Village. Soon the first of many lumbering camps dotted the Ludington area. Lumber barons such as James Ludington built and settled into what are now impressive historic homes. By 1892, Ludington's lumber industry produced 162 million board feet and 52 million wood shingles. Cutting down, processing and transporting lumber throughout and beyond the area's borders created the county's first industrial boom, lasting 50 years.

As the waterfront grew after 1900, so did downtown businesses. With a variety of commerce occurring, transportation became critical, and Ludington became a major Great Lakes shipping port. Ludington's "million dollar harbor" was dedicated in 1914. The harbor has long served commercial and pleasure traffic.

A major development occurred in 1874 when Ludington became the western terminus of the Flint & Pere Marquette Railroad. In 1897, Pere Marquette Railroad built a fleet of railroad carferries to transport lumber and other commodities to markets on both sides of Lake Michigan. The ships linked Ludington to Wisconsin and Michigan ports, providing faster transportation to the lumber markets of Chicago and Milwaukee.

By the mid-1950s, Ludington was the largest carferry port in the world. The service continues today with the S.S. Badger, the last and largest coal-fired carferry ever built, now catering to leisure passengers and their vehicles rather than railroad freight.

As long ago as the 1890s Mason County has been a magnet for summer tourists. Today, thousands of vacationers visit the communities within the county each year, taking advantage of its natural resources including the miles of pristine beaches along our Lake Michigan coastline, Hamlin Lake and the Pere Marquette River along with dozens more inland lakes and streams, miles of national forest land, and the 5000 acre Ludington State Park.

Beautiful beaches, abundant natural resources, two historic lighthouses, world-class fishing, small-town charm, and living examples of a proud maritime heritage have made Ludington and the Mason County area a place where all who visit and live may enjoy the past, present and future.