

Harrison was straightened. On March 7, 1835, T2N/R12E was laid off as Jefferson Township, while Grange and Hickory townships were formed on March 11, 1837. On March 20, 1837, Lenox Township was established; seven days earlier the village of Mount Clemens was incorporated. An act approved on March 6, 1838, authorized the organization of Richmond Township, and under the authority of the same act the name Jefferson was abolished and changed to Sterling. On April 2, 1838, Sections 12, 13, 24, 25, and 36 of T1N/R13E were removed from Orange and added to Hickory; the name was also changed from Hickory to Aba.

Romeo was incorporated as a village on March 9, 1838, and the village of Utica received authority to organize. The act of March 26, 1839, changed the name of Aba to Warren. On February 16, 1842, Macomb Township lost its eastern half, which subsequently became known as Chesterfield. Section 36 of Warren was ceded to Orange, and by an act approved March 9, 1843, the name of Orange was changed to Erin (Leason 1882:2999-300).

## **3.2 ROMEO**

### **3.2.1 Early Settlement/Development (1821-1866)**

The first permanent settlers to the area that would eventually become the Village of Romeo arrived in 1821 (Wallace 1983:13; Romeo Historical Society [RHS] 1971; *Romeo Observer* 1981). Jeremiah Allen arrived that year from the Washington, Michigan, area, building himself a log house. Asahel Bailey arrived shortly thereafter, eventually moving his wife and cousin to the area in January 1822 (Wallace 1983:13; RHS 1971; *Romeo Observer* 1981). Bailey and his family reputedly moved to the area from Connecticut via New York on *Walk-in-the Water*, the first steamer to navigate the Great Lakes. Bailey, who would later become an important land benefactor, built a single log cabin near what is now the center of the village (McLaughlin 2004:7).

By the end of 1822, Allen and Bailey were joined by the Hoxie family of Vermont. Frederick Hoxie reputedly erected Romeo's second building downtown, a tavern. The tavern was located in the vicinity of Main Street, near the building currently located at 106 North Main Street

(McLaughlin 2004:7). The “Old Red Tavern” was the place in which early settlers gathered and from which news was disseminated (Wallace 1983:13). The building burned in 1848 (McLaughlin 2004:7).

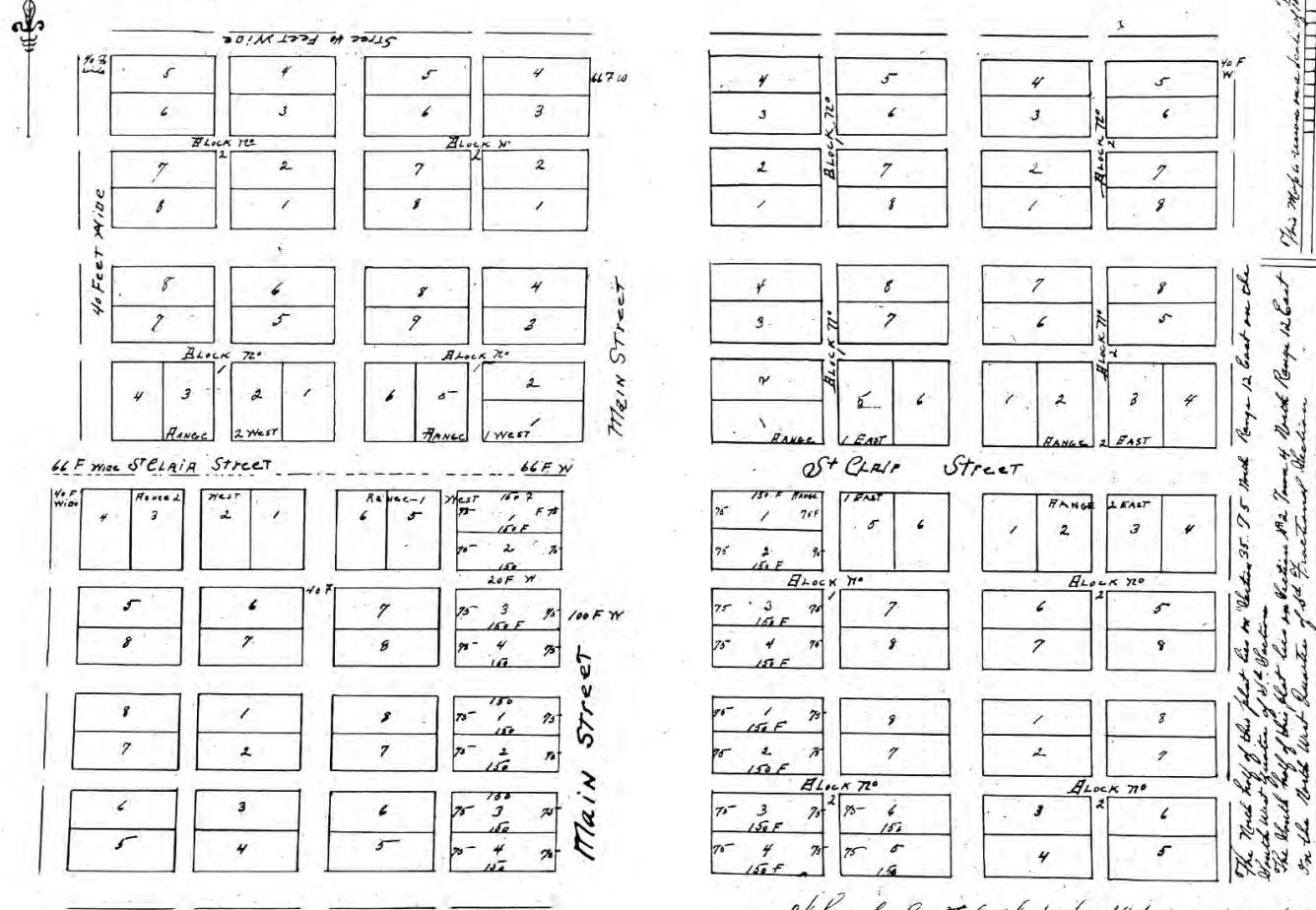
During the early 1820s, Romeo was known by several different names. A sectional map prepared in 1828 labeled the area “Hoxie’s Settlement;” however, the post office serving the area was known as Indian Village until 1826 (RHS 1971; *Romeo Observer* 1981). According to tradition, the Romeo area was the winter home of a band of Chippewa. One source described a ridge that formed a “natural highway” that, when the country was flooded, established a trail through the country (Eldredge 1905:682). The Chippewa returned to this location every winter after their summer wanderings.

Nathaniel T. Taylor reached Romeo in 1829 (McLaughlin 2004:7). Taylor purchased a portion of the Hoxie farm (the area east of Main Street) from Asahel Bailey and built a store. Taylor became Romeo’s first merchant (his building was later replaced by a brick commercial block in 1863.) A Major Larned of Detroit purchased another Hoxie tract west of Main Street, and the balance of the corners belonged to Asahel Bailey (McLaughlin 2004:7).

The original plat of the present-day village was laid out in the spring of 1830 by Col. John B. Hollister. Hollister was hired by Nathaniel T. Taylor, Major Larned, and Asahel Bailey to do the survey. Hollister established Main Street as the main north-south thoroughfare and St. Clair Street as the main east-west thoroughfare (the center of the town is the location of the bisection of these two streets). Side streets were laid out at right angles (*Romeo Observer* 1981).

The “Original Town” included a 16-block area from Washington to Dickenson and Fremont to Harriet streets (*Romeo Observer* 1981). Figure 3.2.1-1 shows this original plat and later additions, ca. 1910. The original plat of the village was 600 feet each way from the center, inclusive of one 40-foot street and two 20-foot alleyways. Around the whole, a 40-foot street was laid out, making the size of the original plat 1,440 feet. The only streets open at this time were Main and St. Clair, an alley just west of the Ketchum brick shop running north into a

Map of the Village of Romeo  
 Received for Record the  
 Macomb County 1830.



This plat is received for record of 1830 to the date

The West half of the plat lies on Section 35, T. 5 N. R. 12 E. Cont. on the West of West Quarter of 1/4 Section 35. The South half of this plat lies on Section 36, T. 5 N. R. 12 E. Cont. on the North West Quarter of 1/4 Section 36.

I hereby certify that this plat is a correct copy of the plat show on record in the Register of Deeds office being made under the supervision of the Auditor General by tracing the Plat on record and affixing sheets a carefully compared copy of the certificate  
 Dated this 28<sup>th</sup> day of March, 1910  
 Signed Roy L. Wagner  
 Clerk Auditor General Mich.

Figure 3.2.1-1. Village of Romeo, Original Plat

Common, and a 40-foot street running west on the north side of the American Hotel to a foundry. The Common is today known as Village Park (the demand for parking facilities has since caused the loss of a sizeable amount of the circumference of the Common for parking places). Romeo's early businesses included the Old Red Tavern; a store kept by A.B. Rawles; a dry goods store kept by Linns & Gilbert; a cabinet shop occupied by Judge Giles; the Dyer & Shaw Dry Goods Store; and a tin shop and blacksmith shop (*Romeo Observer* 1888).

Although the early plat was a success, it was altered in subsequent years. Early changes to the first plat resulted in the reduction of original lot size and changes in several of the street names. Further division of the property surrounding the village proper added to the size of the community. Eight additional plats were formally added to the original village plat between 1852 and 1870 (Eldredge 1905:685).

The national westward migration brought settlers to Romeo from the east, primarily from New England and Mid-Atlantic states. In fact, most of Romeo's early settlers came from this area. Among the early settlers originating from New England were Asahel Bailey, Haddam, Connecticut, 1822; Jonas Crisman, New Jersey, 1833; Aaron B. Rawles, Albany, New York, 1834; Nathan Dickinson, Amherst, Massachusetts, 1836; Samuel Ewell, Norwich, Massachusetts, 1836; Eli Mussey, Worcester County, New York, 1837; Carleton Newbury, Mansfield, Connecticut, 1840; Andrew Grover, Sussex County, New Jersey, 1840; Charlton B. Newberry, Amherst, Massachusetts, 1840; Charles F. Mallery, Albany, New York, 1843; John L. Benjamin, Saratoga County, New York, 1848 (Wallace 1983:13; *Romeo Observer* 1988a).

Although New Englanders and up-state New Yorkers established Romeo, a sizeable number of settlers came from Canada, Ireland, England, and Scotland. Many gained wealth through farming, land speculation, or lumbering, but merchandising seemed to offer the best opportunities (Daugherty 1970). The men brought with them a strong appreciation for education, cultural pursuits, and an orderly, attractive community. Romeo's first school opened in the 1830s. By the spring of 1837, the village boasted around 200 inhabitants, 34 dwellings, 7 barns, 5 shops, 5 stores, and 1 church (Mussey 1868).

A small-town, slow-growth pattern soon emerged for Romeo. Initially, the village was a small mercantile center serving the nearby farmers and lumbermen and growers of orchards. The settlement expanded, however, because of the richness of the soil and its role as the retail center for the surrounding farms. Industries were attracted to the new community and prospered. By June 1836, a cluster of nearly 60 buildings had been erected in Romeo. They included, among others, “30 frame houses, three log houses, 21 frame barns, one log barn, and a small congregational church” (RHS 1971).

One of the first major public endeavors of the village was the establishment of a cemetery in 1842. Up until this time, RHS records indicate that burials took place at a site along North Bailey Street. This site was located on land deeded to Samuel Ewell on the east side of North Bailey Street. (This would today be the northeast corner of North Bailey and Ewell streets.) The earliest burial in Romeo, however, according to RHS records, was that of Job Hoxie in 1827. Although the precise grave site is unconfirmed, local histories hint that it may be located in the vicinity of the present St. Clement of Rome Church at 343 South Main Street.

The clearing and expansion following the 1830 platting of the Village of Romeo identified high grounds along the western part of the town, just north of West St. Clair Street (the current location of the Romeo Cemetery). The Village of Romeo purchased 1.5 acres of this land from Jonas Crisman for the establishment of public burial grounds. The Romeo Cemetery was officially established in August 1842 (Figure 3.2.1-2) (*Romeo Observer* 1988a).

The original plat of the cemetery was essentially divided into four quadrants or sections. Within the cemetery, Hamilton Road bisected the property as a north-south route, and Smith Road ran east-west. The remains of those buried earlier along North Bailey Street were moved sometime in late 1842 (*Romeo Observer* 1988a). Cemetery records indicate that the relocation of Romeo’s original burying ground happened after the original platting of the village in 1830. Records held by the RHS and physical evidence provide the names of at least 24 burials that were moved to the Romeo Cemetery from North Bailey Street after August 1842 (*Romeo Observer* 1988a). The first burial moved to the new cemetery was that of Martha Giddings, wife of Edwin Giddings. She died June 16, 1841, at the age of 23.



Figure 3.2.1-2. Romeo Cemetery, Streetscape, 2008

Later additions increased the size of the Romeo Cemetery. At least 10 additional sections were platted in the following years. As a result of these additions a network of roads was established, named for Romeo's early settlers.

One of the character-defining features of the Romeo Cemetery is the Soldiers Monument, dedicated on May 30, 1900 (McLaughlin 2004:18) (Figure 3.2.1-3). The statue was erected "in memory of those who served in the Civil War...under the auspices of the Grand Army Republic (G.A.R.) and Women's Relief Corp (W.R.C.)" (McLaughlin 2004:18). The dedication of the stature was celebrated with a Memorial Day procession that traveled up West St. Clair Street and included a marching band, members of the fire department, and local politicians (Figure 3.2.1-4) (McLaughlin 2004:18). The cannons on either side of the monument are authentic artifacts from the Civil War and were presented to Romeo by the United States government (McLaughlin 2004:19).

In 1856, a fire in the downtown destroyed a few of Romeo's earliest commercial buildings, built of frame; the majority of buildings built after this date were of brick construction. Romeo's first generation of brick commercial block construction occurred in the 1850s. The 1857 block at 209-213 North Main Street, although not the first, is one of the earliest commercial blocks in Romeo (the earlier structures here were destroyed by fire in 1856). The re-built block, known as the North Brick Block/Ayres Block, has historically housed commercial stores on the lower levels (Village of Romeo Historical Collection [VRHC] n.d.) (Figure 3.2.1-5). Romeo Masons once used the upper floors as meeting space. Constructed by a Mr. J. Van Curen, the block, at the time of its construction, was said to be "one of the finest in this part of the state and by far the most beautiful and expensive in this part of the country" (*Romeo Argus* 1857). A hoop-skirt factory was established in 1867 on the third floor by Thomas H. Bottomley. Ben Cuyler, a local Romeo photographer, held a studio there from 1870 to 1884 (VRHC n.d.).

Romeo's growth during the mid-nineteenth century was reflected in the construction of other commercial-related buildings, including the American Hotel and the Romeo Savings Bank. Once located at the corner of South Main Street and West Lafayette Street, the construction of

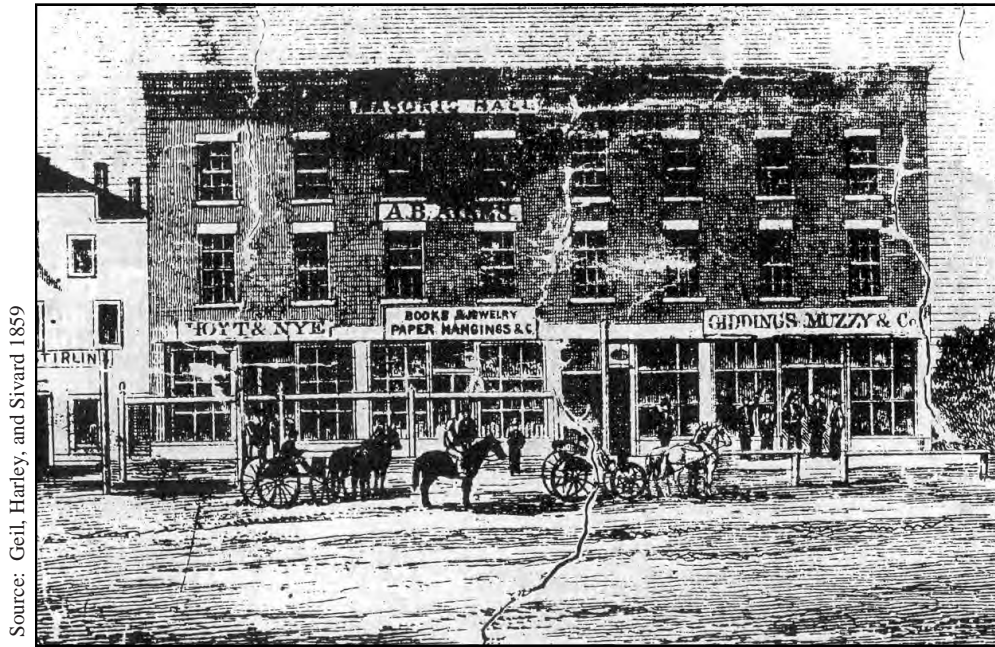


Figure 3.2.1-3. Soldier's Monument, Romeo Cemetery, n.d. (courtesy RHS)





Figure 3.2.1-4. Memorial Day Procession, May 30, 1900 (courtesy RHS)



Source: Geil, Harley, and Sivard 1859

Figure 3.2.1-5. North Brick Block, 1859

the brick American Hotel in the early 1860s signaled the growing prosperity of Romeo (Figure 3.2.1-6). Although the hotel changed ownership through the years and underwent several name changes (North American Hotel, Dewey Hotel, and Golling Hotel), it remained *the* village hotel for many years. The well-remembered hotel was last known as the Romeo Hotel when it was demolished in 1960 (McLaughlin 2004:17).

In the early 1860s the First National Bank (today known as the Romeo Savings Bank), was established at 100 South Main Street in what was originally known as the Benjamin Block (constructed ca. 1860s). The First National Bank was organized March 30, 1864, with Neil Gray as its first president. In 1914, the small brick building housing the bank was replaced with a new Beaux Arts structure designed by the Albert Kahn & Associates firm of Detroit (VRHC n.d.). The design presented the village with a bank designed with a solid limestone block exterior, said to be “an improvement to the downtown landscape” (McLaughlin 2004:15, 29). Just 14 years later, in 1928, the present bank was remodeled (Figure 3.2.1-7). Designed by the Bond & Hubbard Company (a firm that built many banks in the Detroit area), it was designed in the same style as the 1914 structure but was twice the size (VRHC n.d.). Part of the re-design included engulfing a portion of the block to the south, at 102 South Main Street. The newer building featured “crafted moldings and marble top counters, an updated security vault for safe deposit boxes, and upstairs offices with a balcony that had a perfect view of Main Street” (McLaughlin 2004:42-43).

Early commercial leaders of the period included Andrew Grover, Charles F. Mallary, and Horace Bogart. Andrew Grover (1810-1880) arrived in Romeo in 1840 and served as one of the directors of Romeo’s First National Bank. Grover lived in the 1856 Greek Revival house at 233 West St. Clair Street (Figure 3.2.1-8) (*Romeo Observer* 1880). Charles F. Mallary (1811-1890) arrived in Romeo in 1843 and became one of the most successful hardware merchants in town. At one point in time, most of the stoves in Romeo came from his store, as did much of the cast-iron garden furniture. Mallary served as justice of the peace, and as a state legislator (1863-1865) backed the “railroad bill” for Romeo. During the 1870s, Mallary was the Greenback Party’s nominee for Congress, “polling more votes than was generally expected” but going down



Figure 3.2.1-6. American Hotel, ca. 1860s (courtesy RHS)



a



b

Figure 3.2.1-7. Romeo Savings Bank, 100 South Main Street, ca. 1914 (a) and ca. 1948 (b) (courtesy RHS)





Figure 3.2.1-8. Andrew Grover Residence, 233 West St. Clair Street,  
North and East Elevations

to defeat. Mallery lived in the Greek Revival residence at 221 West St. Clair Street (Figure 3.2.1-9) (*Romeo Observer* 1870a, 1871b, 1872, 1890a). Horace Bogart (1813-1886) was the owner of the Old Reliable Carriage Factory at 117-121 West St. Clair Street. He lived in the Greek Revival house at 241 West St. Clair Street (Figure 3.2.1-10) (Leason 1882:670).

The 1859 *Wall Map of Macomb County* (Geil, Harley and Siverd 1859) shows the extent of early development in Romeo (Figure 3.2.1-11). The area located within the original plat of 1830 is clearly depicted as developed, with most commercial development occurring along Main and St. Clair streets, surrounded by divided residential lots. Larger residential lots are indicated to the east, west, north, and south of the area incorporating the original 1830 plat. Sketches of several Romeo properties appear on the map, some of which have since been demolished (like the American Hotel), but the 1857 North Brick Block (209-213 North Main Street), the ca. 1852 George Chandler Residence (253 West Chandler Street) (Figure 3.2.1-12), and the 1856 Alvin B. Ayer Residence (419 North Main Street) (Figure 3.2.1-13) remain extant.

### **3.2.2 Commerce/Industry**

The Village of Romeo was officially incorporated on March 9, 1838, the same year Michigan became a state. There is some debate as to how the name “Romeo” was chosen for the community, but it is generally accepted that it was coined by Mrs. Laura Taylor (wife of Nathaniel), who suggested the name because it was “short, musical, classical and uncommon.” Officers were elected that May, and by June a set of bylaws had been adopted (*Romeo Observer* 1981).

By 1866 the commercial section of the village had grown tremendously. Residents could buy nearly everything they needed without ever leaving Romeo. There were at least three shoe stores (McGill and Verdries Store, and the stores of M.R. Sutton and George Washer), two clothing stores (Loud & Newbury and John W. Dyar’s Carpet Emporium), four dry goods stores (E.W. Giddings, Brown Ready-Pay Store, N.J. Gray, T.A. Smith & Company), two grocery stores (Price & Smith and Price & Nye), a sash, blinds and door shop (Kennedy & Weller), carriage