

Madison County

The First 100 Years

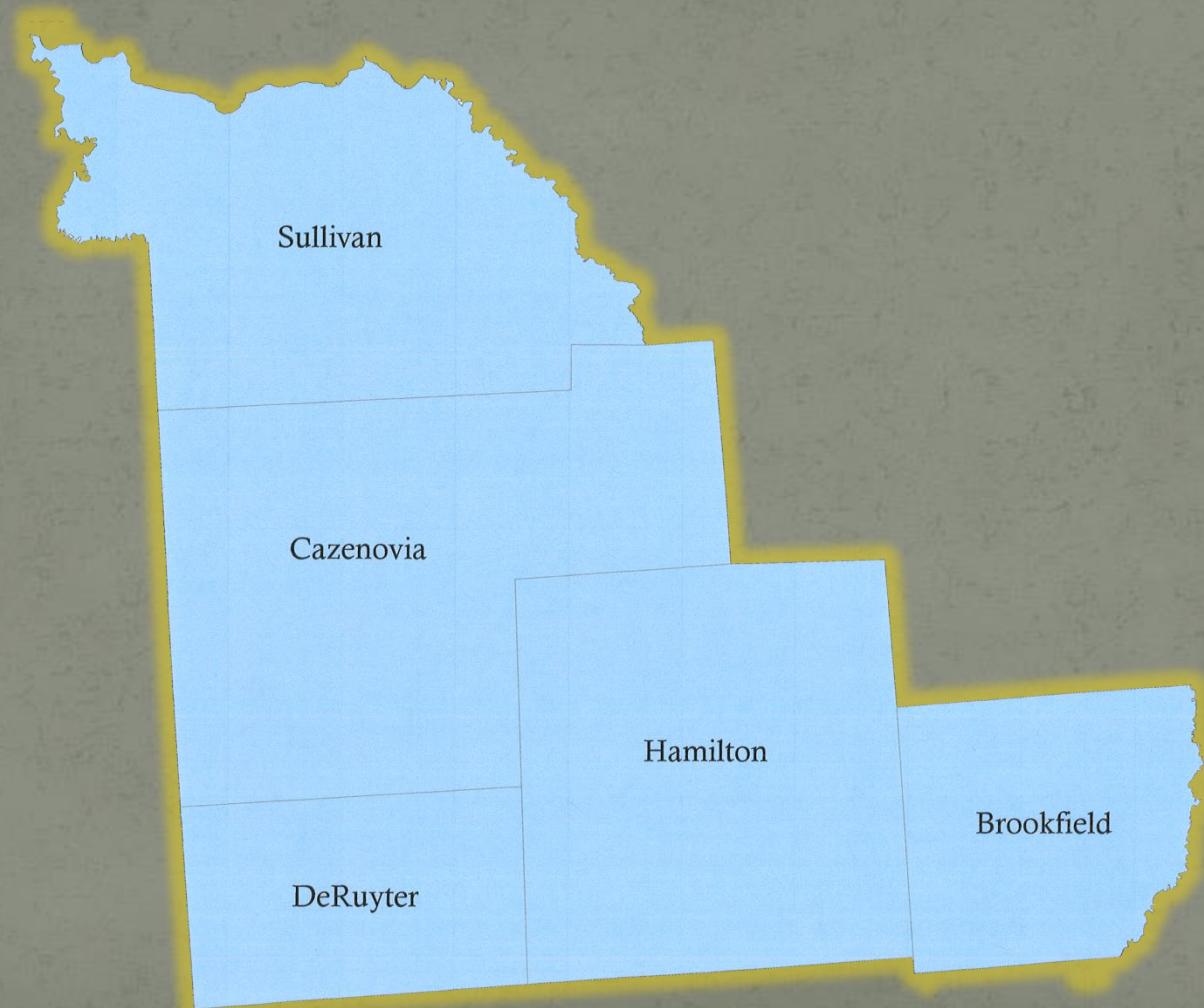
Beginnings

- Madison County was created on March 21, 1806 through an act of the 29th session of the New York State Legislature.
- Chapter LXX defines the southern boundary of the new county taken from Chenango County.
 - “beginning at the south-east corner of the town of Brookfield, to the east line of the town of Sherburne; thence north to the south-east corner of the town of Hamilton, to the east line of the town of DeRuyter, to the west on the division line between the sixth and seventh townships, in the said town of DeRuyter, to the east line of the county of Onondaga...”

Beginnings

- In 1806 Madison County consisted of five towns
 - Brookfield (originally formed 3/5/1795)
 - Cazenovia (originally formed 3/5/1795)
 - Hamilton (originally formed 3/5/1795)
 - DeRuyter (originally formed 3/5/1798)
 - Sullivan (originally formed 2/22/1803)
- (Onondaga County was formed in 1794 and Oneida County in 1798.)

Map of Madison County Showing Towns As They Appeared in 1806



Beginnings

Reshaping the County

- Over the next 90 years the county would be reshaped as follows:
 - Nelson -- March 13, 1807 set off from Cazenovia
 - Smithfield -- March 13, 1807 set off from Cazenovia
 - Lebanon -- February 6, 1807 set off from Hamilton
 - Madison -- February 7, 1807 set off from Hamilton
 - Eaton -- February 8, 1807 set off from Hamilton
 - Lenox -- March 3, 1809 set off from Sullivan
 - Georgetown -- April 7, 1815 set off from DeRuyter
 - Fenner -- April 22, 1823 set off from Smithfield
 - Stockbridge -- May 20, 1836 set off from Smithfield
 - Lincoln -- April 21, 1896 set off from Lenox
 - Oneida -- April 21, 1896 set off from Lenox

Madison County Today



Map: Kevin Orr

Beginnings

Reshaping the County

- In 1836 when the town of Stockbridge was formed, Madison County gained land from Oneida County (part of the Town of Augusta).
- Madison County has never lost land to another county.

Beginnings

- Brookfield is the only town whose borders have remained unchanged since the formation of Madison County. It has not been subdivided into other towns.
- No part of Oneida Lake lies inside the borders of Madison County. The lake is divided evenly between Oswego and Oneida counties.

The County Government

- Initially the local government was appointed by the governor – judges, justices, county clerk, inspectors, commissioners, etc.
- Elections would come much later.



The County Seat

- The new county government was slow to act in choosing a location for the county seat.
- Eventually, in 1810, Cazenovia was selected.
- It would be another three years before a courthouse was built.
- In the intervening years court proceedings were held in schoolhouses, barns, etc.

The County Seat The First Courthouse

- The courthouse in Cazenovia was completed in 1813. (Now part of Cazenovia College.)



Photo: Kevin Orr

The County Seat

The First Courthouse

- The courthouse was in use for just two years when the county seat moved to...

Morrisville

- On March 17, 1815 the county seat was relocated to Morrisville, considered to be a more favorable site due to its central location in the county.

The Courthouse in Morrisville

- The courthouse in Morrisville is famous for having been the site of more than one Loomis Gang trial and having been set ablaze during one of those trials.
- It is alleged that the fire was set by one or more members of the Loomis Gang, but arson charges were never filed against them.

The Rebuilt Courthouse in Morrisville



Photo: Kevin Orr

What's Wrong With This Picture?



Photo: Kevin Orr

The County Seat Moves Again

- As time passed the population of the county grew especially in the northern towns.
- The lack of rail transportation to Morrisville made it increasingly difficult for the public to conduct necessary legal transactions such as recording deeds and mortgages or to attend trials.

The County Seat Moves Again

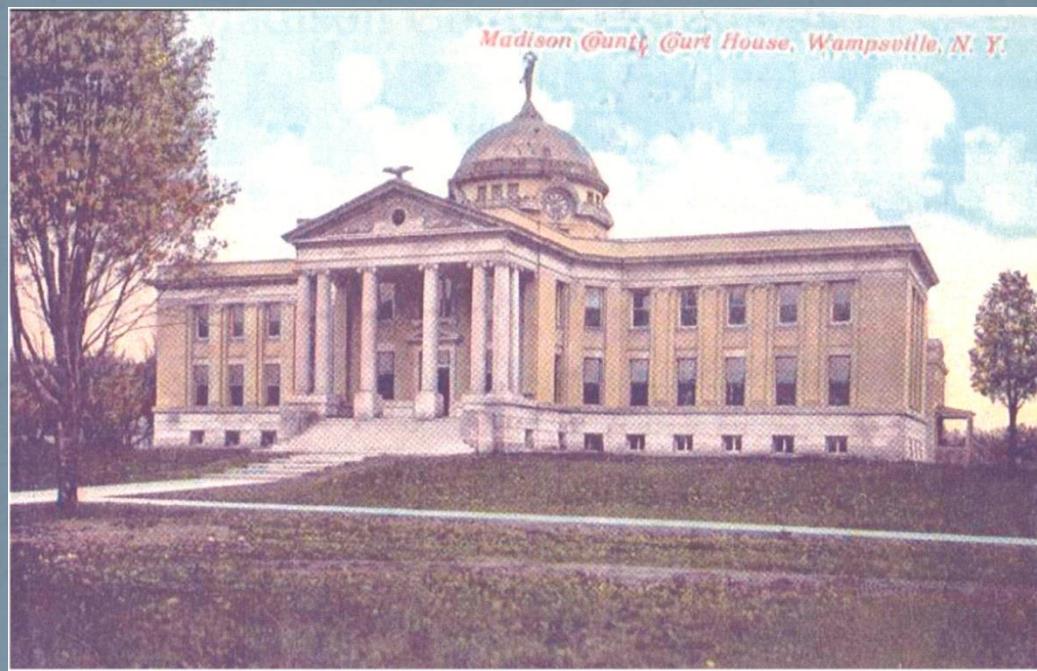
- Depending on location and weather conditions it could take two to three days to travel to Morrisville by foot, horse, or wagon.
- At the turn of the twentieth century complaints arose and a battle for relocation of the county seat began for a second time.
- Oneida, Wampsville, Canastota, and Earlville all rallied for removal of the county seat to their village.

The County Seat Moves Again

- In 1907 the Board of Supervisors voted in favor of Wampserville.
- Wampserville is located approximately midway between Oneida and Canastota.

A New Courthouse

- In 1909 the new courthouse was completed.



Postcard of Madison County Courthouse circa 1909

A New Courthouse

- The front of the building faces north. Why?
- To greet passengers from the former West Shore RR that ran along West Elm Street.
- So as not to face either Oneida or Canastota.

July 25/53

Now We Know Why Court House Faces Direction It Does

The long standing mystery as to why the Madison County courthouse at Wampsville faces the New York Central railroad tracks instead of Court Street was brought to light last night by Mrs. Maude Parkhurst in her paper on "The History of Wampsville", presented at the Madison County Historical Society dinner meeting in the village hall.

At the time the courthouse was built, she said, the electrified West Shore cars were the principal mode of travel to Wampsville. The speaker said that in the fight before Oneida and Canastota over the location of the new courthouse, Wampsville was the compromise site. But the Oneida contingent said they were not going to ride the third rail cars and have to look into the rear of the county buildings, while the Canastota group had a nice front lawn view every time they rode into Wampsville.

So the courthouse was built facing the railroad. The passing of time, Mrs. Parkhurst said, has proven this a wise move in spite of the original reason; for off-street parking of cars visiting the county seat is effectively provided for.

Mrs. Parkhurst's paper started with the French explorer Frontenac and his battle with the Indians at Cowaselon Creek.

