

Village of Benzonia

FOUNDED 1858

INCORPORATED 1891

BENZONIA, MICHIGAN 49616

November 14, 1986

Leslie Elizondo
% Mr. Ratliff, Room 204
Fountain Elementary School
16850 Wellington
Roseville, MI

Dear Leslie,

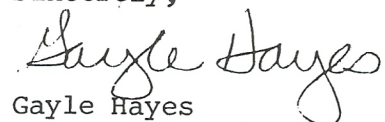
Our Village President, Mr. Milliron, gave me your letter and asked me to tell you how ^{the village} it got its name. I love living here, so I'm glad to tell you about it. Benzonia, by the way, is a tiny town of 462 people with just one block of "downtown" but we have a pretty neat history.

Benzonia was the home of the first college in northern Michigan: the Grand Traverse College. One building is still standing and that's now our library. The village was founded in 1858 by a group of Congregationalists who came here from Ohio and were friends with the people who founded Albion College, which you may have heard of. In 1891 the village was incorporated. The Village of Benzonia is in the Township of Benzonia, in the County of Benzie on the Betsie River, so you see the name is all around us. The name of the river comes from the French settlers, who named it after a certain kind of duck they knew from their homes in Europe: the Bec Scies. That got sort of changed and shortened into Betsie. According to Pulitzer Prize winning Civil War historian Bruce Catton (who grew up in Benzonia and wrote a book about our town called Waiting for the Morning Train) the name Benzonia came from those Latin-educated forefathers of ours who founded the College. The first part "Ben" stands for "good" and the "zonias" part means "air", so I guess they thought the climate and atmosphere here pleasing!

One other story about Benzonia. Just a few years after it was founded the citizens, who wanted very much to ship the fruit crops they grew to Chicago, thought they would open a channel for large boats through the Betsie River from Lake Michigan into our Crystal Lake. Unfortunately, nobody checked the levels of the lakes and most of Crystal Lake went roaring into Lake Michigan when the channel was opened. They closed the outlet as quick as they could and the lake filled back up from underground springs, but not quite as high as before. Now there was beach and good bog for crops, and also space for our next door neighbor, the Village of Beulah!

Have fun studying about Michigan for the Sesquicentennial. I hope this information will be of interest to you.

Sincerely,



Gayle Hayes
Village Clerk