

Detroit History

For hundreds of years, the area was so important to commerce between Native American tribes that only traders were allowed into the territory.

Detroit wouldn't begin to shape into its current form until roughly three centuries ago. That's when French explorer Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac landed on the banks of the Detroit River and established a fort in 1701. Nine years later he was removed from his post as outpost commander due to "ill conduct" (i.e. excessive lining of his own pockets).

Change would remain a constant throughout Detroit's first century. In 1760, French rule gave way to British. And in 1796 the United States took over Detroit as a result of Jay's Treaty.

Detroit was incorporated as a city in 1815 and spent the decades leading up to the Civil War as the final U.S. stop on the Underground Railroad. The area also was earning a reputation for, among other things, the manufacturing of cigars and kitchen ranges.

So why did Detroit become the Motor City instead of the stove-making capital of the world?

It's in large part due to the influence of a farmer's son named Henry Ford. In 1896, Ford built his first car in Detroit - not an entirely earth-shattering event since the automobile had already been around for a while. It was the method of building cars that he would later devise - the moving assembly line - that put the world on wheels.

During the early part of the 20th century, dozens of companies emerged in the area committed to finding success in the new industry. During World War II, the factories they built to produce cars were put to use churning out weapons for the Allied Powers. The production edge they provided helped to win the war.

Ironically, it was a former autoworker that led the way for Detroit's other famous 20th century contribution - Motown. Founded by Berry Gordy Jr. with just an \$800 family loan, the upstart record company introduced the world to Marvin Gaye, Stevie Wonder, Smokie Robinson, Michael Jackson, the Temptations, Diana Ross and others - all of whom either grew up or gained their first fame in Detroit.

At the start of the 21st century, metro Detroit is starting to reap the rewards of decades of work put into revitalization. We encourage you to come and examine our region's rich history, learn more about our bright future and enjoy our exciting present.

Dates in Detroit History

1701 Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac lands on what is now the location of the Civic Center in downtown Detroit and starts a fur trading center

1760 Britain gains control of Detroit as a result of the French and Indian War

1796 George Washington forces the British out of the city, and the American flag is raised over Fort Pontchartrain at Detroit

1805 A devastating fire sweeps through Detroit, destroying all 200 of its structures except a stone warehouse

1812 War of 1812. With the lessening threat of Indian attack, the development of the steamboat and the opening of the Erie Canal, Detroit begins to experience dramatic growth

1815 Detroit is incorporated as a city

1837 Michigan is admitted to the Union as the 26th state. Detroit becomes an important station on the Underground Railroad

1850 Stove and kitchen range manufacturing becomes Detroit's leading industry. Industrial Age Emergence of Vernors ginger ale, Stroh's beer, Sanders candy, cake and ice cream

1896 Henry Ford builds his first car in Detroit, and the world's first convention and visitors bureau — the Detroit Metro Convention & Visitors Bureau — is founded

1901 The world's first concrete road is built in Detroit

1903 Ford Motor Company is established

1913 Henry Ford introduces the assembly line, revolutionizing the auto industry

1920 The city's population multiplies rapidly, thanks to the auto industry. Detroit is now home to nearly two million foreign-born residents

1928 Tunnel and bridge access to Canada commences with the opening of the Detroit-Windsor Tunnel and the Ambassador Bridge

1931 Gar Wood wins the international prize for unlimited powerboat racing

1935 The Detroit Tigers capture their first World Series, and the Detroit Lions win their first National Football League championship

1936 Pro hockey's Red Wings win their first Stanley Cup Detroit truly is the "City of Champions"

1937 The Detroit Red Wings win another Stanley Cup, and Joe Louis Barrow — The Brown Bomber — wins the world's heavyweight boxing championship

1940 Detroit plays a key role in World War II victory as the nation's "Arsenal of Democracy"

1945 As WWII comes to an end, the Detroit Tigers win their second World Series

1950 Detroit begins constructing its massive system of freeways, as the city's population shifts to a metropolitan one

1951 The city celebrates its 250th anniversary in grand fashion

1954 The nation's first shopping mall opens in Southfield. Northland Mall becomes a harbinger of a new suburban lifestyle

1960 Cobo Hall, Detroit's major convention center, opens to rave reviews

1963 The Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. debuts his "I Have a Dream" speech in Detroit two months before its famous delivery in Washington, D.C.

1967 New Detroit is founded as the United States' first "urban coalition," organized to improve education, employment, housing and economic development in the city, following the city's major civil disturbance

1968 Helping to reunite the city, the Tigers win their third World Series in dramatic fashion over the St. Louis Cardinals, four games to three

1970 Detroit Renaissance, a group of business leaders, is founded to help formulate Detroit's future

1971 Henry Ford II, head of Detroit Renaissance, Inc., announces plans for the construction of the largest privately financed project in the world — the Renaissance Center

1974 Coleman Young takes office as Detroit's first African-American mayor

1977 The Renaissance Center opens as a symbol of Detroit's rebirth

1980 Detroit hosts the 32nd Republican National Convention at brand-new Joe Louis Arena

1982 The first Detroit Grand Prix is held on city streets, and Super Bowl XVI is held at the Pontiac Silverdome

1984 The Detroit Tigers claim a fourth World Series title

1985 The Millender Center and Greektown's Trappers Alley Festival Marketplace open

1987 The Detroit People Mover opens, providing a new source of downtown transportation

1989 Cobo Conference/Exhibition Center undergoes a \$225 million expansion and the Detroit Pistons win the NBA World Championship title

1990 The Detroit Pistons capture their second consecutive NBA World Championship

1992 Detroit is chosen as a site for soccer's 1994 World Cup, and the Pontiac Silverdome is picked to host the first indoor soccer championship in World Cup history

1994 Detroit is one of only five U.S. cities designated a federal empowerment zone. The zone, which covers 18.35 square miles, receives \$100 million in federal aid to provide social services. Businesses in the zone become eligible for federal incentives

1996 Centennial celebration of the American automobile industry and the establishment of the world's first convention and visitors bureau, the Detroit Metro Convention & Visitor's Bureau; the International Association of Convention & Visitors Bureaus holds its annual meeting in Detroit, Detroit's Opera House debuts

1997 The Detroit Red Wings win the National Hockey League's Stanley Cup Championship, after a 42-year hiatus, opening of the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History, the largest museum of its kind in the world

1998 The Red Wings are back-to-back champions, again winning the Stanley Cup and bringing it home to Hockeytown

1999 The first two of three new casinos, MGM Grand Detroit and MotorCity Casino, open in downtown Detroit

2000 Greektown Casino opens in Detroit's historic Greektown section, while Comerica Park makes its debut in Foxtown

2001 Detroit celebrates its 300th anniversary in grand style, New Detroit Science Center opens after massive renovations

2002 Ford Field opens to national acclaim, Detroit Red Wings win their third Stanley Cup in six years, Coach Scotty Bowman retires

2003 The Detroit Shock win the WNBA World Championship as the Tigers narrowly escape title of worst team in major league baseball history with 119 losses, and Detroit hosts the AAU Junior Olympic Games

2004 Auto plant tours open to the public at the Ford Rouge Factory (starts and ends at The Henry Ford); The 35th Ryder Cup Matches are held at Oakland Hills Country Club in Bloomfield Hills; and the Detroit Pistons win the NBA World Championship title after a 14-year hiatus

2005 Detroit hosts the Major League Baseball All Star Game at Comerica Park

2006 Detroit hosts Super Bowl 40 at Ford Field; the Detroit Tigers win the 2006 American League Championship Series; and the Detroit Shock wins their second WNBA World Championship

2007 Detroit hosts Wrestlemania 23 at Ford Field in front of a record crowd

2008 Detroit hosts the AAU Junior Olympic Games.

2009 Detroit hosts the NCAA Division I Men's Basketball Championship at Ford Field in front of the largest crowd ever in NCAA history

2010 Detroit hosts the NCAA Division I Men's Ice Hockey Championship at Ford Field in front of the largest "hockey" crowd in NCAA history

Famous Detroiters

- Aaliyah, singer, actress
- Tim Allen, actor, comedian
- Anita Baker, singer
- Francis Ford Coppola, film director, producer
- Henry Ford, inventor
- Rosa Parks, activist
- Aretha Franklin, singer
- Thomas Hearns, boxer
- Casey Kasem, radio star
- Elmore "Dutch" Leonard, author
- Charles Lindbergh, pilot
- Lone Ranger, radio star who debuted on local WWJ Radio
- Joe Louis, boxer
- Madonna, actress, singer
- Ed McMahon, television host
- Smokey Robinson, singer, songwriter
- Diana Ross, actress, singer
- Tom Selleck, actor
- Blair Underwood, actor
- Robert Wagner, actor
- Robin Williams, actor, comedian
- Stevie Wonder, singer, songwriter
- Eminem (b. Marshall Mathers)
- Kid Rock (b. Robert James Ritchie)
- Bob Seger, singer
- Ted Nugent, singer
- Jack and Meg White (the White Stripes)

Fun Facts About Detroit

Detroit...

- is home to the Motown sound founded by Berry Gordy Jr. in 1957
- installed the first mile of paved concrete road, just north of the Model T plant, on Woodward Avenue between McNichols and 7 Mile Roads in 1909
- installed the country's first traffic light in 1915 in downtown Detroit
- built the nation's first urban freeway, the Davison, in 1942
- is home to the oldest state fair in the nation, first held in 1849
- is the potato chip capital of the world, based on consumption
- features the nation's oldest freshwater aquarium, located on Belle Isle Park
- has country's largest island park within a city – Belle Isle Park
- is home to the world's only floating post office, the J.W. Westcott II, can be found on the Detroit River
- is north of Canada
- is home to the largest flower-bedding market in the world – Eastern Market
- is second in the nation in fishing rod sales
- shares the world's first auto traffic tunnel between two nations – the Detroit/Windsor Tunnel
- is home to the second tallest hotel in North America – the Detroit Marriott Renaissance Center, at 73 stories
- is the true home of the "Boston Cooler"
- is also home to Vernors ginger ale, Sanders hot fudge, Better Made Potato Chips, Faygo soda pop, Stroh's Ice Cream
- receives freighters from over 100 world ports on the Detroit River
- has the most registered bowlers in the United States
- was the first city in the nation to assign individual telephone numbers in 1879
- founded the world's first convention bureau in 1896
- has more theater seats than any other city, east of the Mississippi River, outside New York City