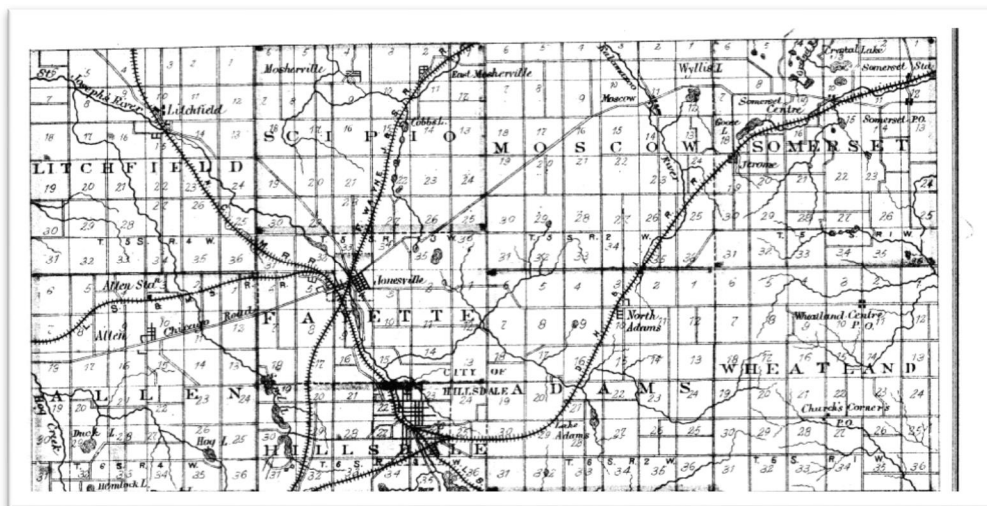


The Rail Road

Lake Shore and Michigan Southern Railway History₁

In the 1830's the Michigan Territorial Council authorized 18 rail routes in the territory. Of those authorized, they eventually supported the construction of 5 railroads. This was controversial because the Council financially backed these endeavors. Later that action was eventually overturned in the courts, causing the railroad to be sold to investors. In addition, the State constitution incorporated the prohibition for the State to fund such investments in the future.

The Lake Shore and Southern Michigan Railroad Company was established in 1835. The intended to service was a charter to provide a route from Toledo, Ohio to Adrian, Michigan and further westward eventually to the Lake Shore and Chicago. The rail spur from Ypsilanti, through Woodstock (now Cement City), Somerset, and Jerome on its way to Hillsdale. In 1854, it was completed to Hillsdale, Michigan₂. It passed from Somerset Center rail stop, now located at the bottom of our lake. This is the route through Hillsdale County as illustrated in the late 1800's as seen in the county map below.



In the Somerset Township portion of the county, the rail ran along Goose Creek, through what is now Lake Somerset. Near Somerset village the route of the rail passed slightly south of McCourtie Park, crossing Chicago Drive (US Highway 12). Goose Creek, which supplies fresh water to Lake Somerset, exits McCourtie Park on its eastward journey. The rail ran next to that stream. There are remnants of the rail bed which have been taken over as home access roadways and utility routes for electrical supply lines. The rail ran through our entire lakes' length of

Note that this map is approximate in nature, not to scale.

the track route. The route exited the lake on the north-east end of the lake where the dam is now located. It continued east through the marshy area to the east of the dam, crossing Highway 127, over a trestle and on towards Cement City. It appears the railway section which passed through Lake Somerset was active up until about the 1940-50's. In 1877, the Lake Shore and Michigan Southern Railway was acquired by Cornelius Vanderbilt's New York Central Railroad.

Accounts of the railroad stop are that two trains per day would stop in Somerset Center.³ Residents would meet passengers and merchants where they would off load their supplies from the train, take on passengers, livestock, and grain during those stops. This was a hub of the area in the mid to late 1800's before improved roads appeared in the area. It was the only quick means of travel to and from major cities such as Detroit and Chicago. Most of the roads were just overland pathways and wagon routes. During the latter half of the 1800's, the stagecoach did stop in Somerset village at the hotel on the corner of what are now US 12 and Somerset Road on the southeast corner of that intersection.

Before the lake was constructed, Somerset Road crossed Goose Creek. Somerset Center rail stop was located in the middle of the lake where the road crossed the track. There was a depot, grain elevator and stockyard at the stop. The old bridge where Somerset Road crossed Goose Creek is still at the bottom of the lake as well. Below is a picture Somerset Center rail stop road circa 1920's as it appeared before the dam and flooding of the lake. The foundations were left when the lake was flooded but the structures were razed.



Picture Courtesy of Fred and Claire Halliwill

The approximate route of the rail and Somerset Road are illustrated below. The rail stop was near the crossing point of Somerset Road nearing in the center of the lakes north east quadrant.



Source -- Google Maps with approximate location of the road and railroad

Somerset Road continued south, curving to a cut back in order to traverse the bluff on the south side of the lake where Limerick Lane is now located. It connected to Somerset Road at or near Limerick Lane.

The current road system around the lake did not exist until the 1960's as the development was built. US 127 were rerouted sometime before the development was built. The original area surveys illustrate the road system for US 127 running north and south with no curves. The curve heading north from the cross roads of US 12 and US 127 did not exist in the 1800's. Before the lake development, US 127 actually ran straight south from Harper Road to US 12, through the boggy, marsh area to the west of the current roadway. The old US 127 narrow dirt roadway remnants can be seen passing through the trees southeast of New Jerusalem Church. There is an old faded traffic sign south of the church lot along those trees. The intersection appears to be about one-quarter mile west of the current intersection. The homes, 4 of them, were noted in the 1870 survey northeast of the old intersection. Most of those homes are still standing on the north side of US 12. Here is a picture of a survey currently displayed in the Hillsdale County Courthouse detailing the roads, lakes and rivers according to the 1857 survey map.

