

Westphalia

In the fall of 1836 John Hanses, Joseph Platte, Anthony Cordes, William Thielman, and John Salter arrived in Detroit from Westphalia, Germany. They asked a local priest for advice as to where to purchase farm land. He suggested the Grand River area.

The men set out on foot from Detroit on the Northern Grand River Trail. Once they got to Clinton County, they took the Dexter Trail to Lyons. They bought almost a section of available government land and built log cabins for protection from the winter. Unlike other early towns in Clinton County, their land was not on a river.

Soon other German settlers arrived. They had very little money, but were hard workers. They cleared land, planted crops, and hunted game for food. The first years were very hard, but soon farmers were also able to raise cattle, cows, pigs, and chickens.

Father Anton Kopp joined the new settlement and began conducting mass in homes. A log cabin church was built in 1838.



First Log Church

Once the settlers were able, they built a larger wood frame building and named it St. Peter's in 1847. In 1869 an impressive brick church building renamed St. Mary's was constructed. It was destroyed by fire in 1959 and the current church was dedicated in 1962.

The first home in what would be the village of Westphalia was built by Anton Dunnebacke, a shoemaker. Before long more stores and homes were built. Westphalia officially became a village in 1882 and soon featured wooden sidewalks and electric lights.

Though hard work and thrifty living the settlement grew. Stores, homes, and barns were built.

The first sawmill opened in 1856 followed by a gristmill in 1858. This was followed by the Westphalia brick yard. Bricks from here were used to construct homes, church buildings, and stores - including the Snitgen brothers general store (now the Ark).

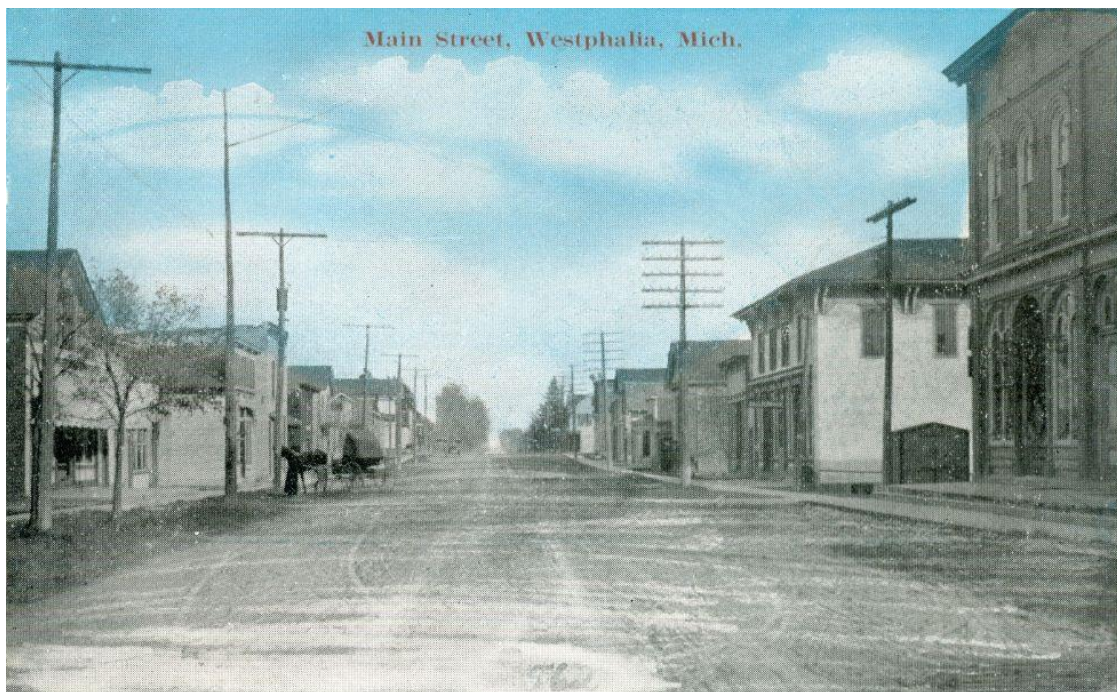


Snitgen Brothers General Store

Many people continued to speak German well into the 20th century.

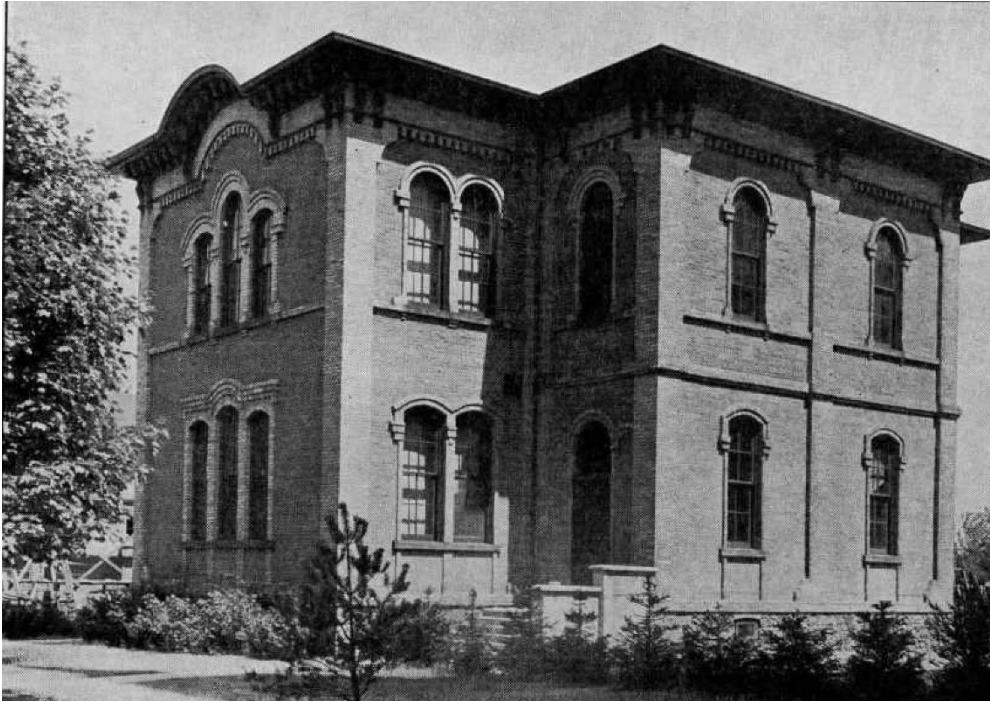


Westphalia from the top of St. Mary's Church



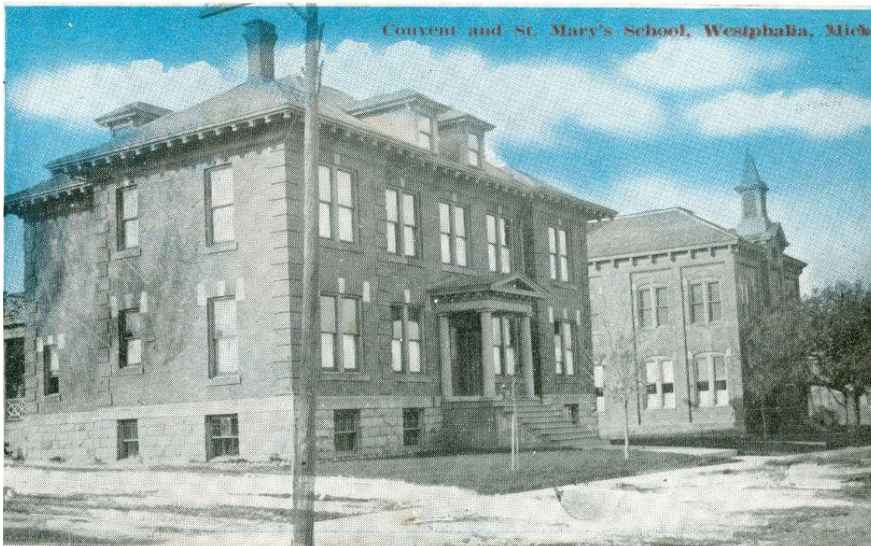
The first school was in the old log cabin church in 1846. English lessons were taught in one room and German ones in the other.

In 1859 a schoolhouse was built across from the current St. Mary's School. In 1870 the school moved into the old St. Peter's Church building while the Eastside School was being built. It opened in 1873 and the Sisters of Christian Charity began teaching there in 1874.



East Side School

In 1875 another schoolhouse was built on Ash Street and used for 7th and 8th grades and later high school. That building closed in 1949 and was converted into a house.



Convent and Westside School

A new convent was built in 1904 and the old one was used as a boarding house for children living in the rural areas. While the younger children would attend the local one-room school, older ones boarded during the week in Westphalia.

In 1936 high school grades were added and in 1949 the high school became St. Mary's High School.

A kindergarten building opened in 1955 (now the Growing Patch). This was the first time kindergarten was taught in Westphalia.

Westphalia joined with Pewamo and closed their high school in 1961. In 1966 the new St. Mary's School for grades 1-8 opened. They dropped grades 7 and 8 in 1969 sending their students to the public school. St. Mary's added kindergarten for the first time in 2014.

Other Resources:

How did they really get to Westphalia? ([Clinton County Trails Vol 33 No. 3](#))

[St. Mary's Centennial 1836-1936](#)

Of Pilgrimage, Prayer and Promise: A Story of St. Mary's Westphalia 1836-1986

[Westphalia Historical Society](#)