

Manistee & Benzie

at a glance



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Oceana's Herald-Journal

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(231) 873-5602
(231) 873-4775 fax

White Lake Beacon

PO Box 98
Whitehall, MI 49461
(231) 894-5356
(231) 873-4775 fax

Interim Publisher:

Paul Heidbreder

Sales:

Shelley Kovar, Monica Evans

Graphics:

Judy Lytle, Julie Eilers,
Madelyn Kerbyson

News: Lois Tomaszewski,
Shanna Avery, Alexis Settler,
Cristina Juska, Sean Chase,
Larry Launstein Jr., Kate Babel

Circulation:

Jeriann Steiger

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Manistee & Benzie: At A Glance

Manistee and Benzie counties are defined by their connection to the Lake Michigan shoreline and the natural features that shape daily life across the region. Communities including Manistee, Frankfort, Beulah, Elberta and Honor reflect a blend of historic character, working waterfronts and evolving local economies rooted in both tradition and growth.

Along the Lake Michigan shoreline, Manistee and Frankfort serve as anchor communities, each offering a distinct lakeshore identity. Manistee's deep-water port, historic downtown architecture and active shipping industry reflect its legacy as a working waterfront, where freighters, marinas and river access remain part of everyday life. In contrast, Frankfort's harbor setting, walkable downtown and proximity to beaches and trails create a more recreation-centered atmosphere, where tourism and seasonal activity shape the rhythm of the community. Together, these towns illustrate the range of experiences found along the shoreline.

The region's landscape offers a wide range of recreational opportunities shaped by both water and forest. In addition to the Lake Michigan shoreline, inland destinations such as Crystal Lake and Manistee Lake provide accessible hubs for boating, fishing and waterfront living. The Betsie River, Manistee River and Platte River serve as key recreational corridors, supporting paddling, fishing and seasonal tourism. The Manistee National Forest and nearby dune and coastal systems, including Arcadia Dunes, anchor a large portion of the region's outdoor activity with trail systems, campgrounds and public lands that attract visitors year-round.

Tourism plays a central role in the regional economy, supported by seasonal visitors, second-home ownership and a steady calendar of events. Waterfront communities see increased activity during the summer months, with beaches, boating and downtown districts serving as focal points. Community traditions such as the Manistee

National Forest Festival, along with local farmers markets, art fairs and seasonal celebrations, contribute to a consistent flow of visitors and reinforce the region's identity as a destination along the Lake Michigan corridor.

Beyond tourism, both counties maintain a diverse and working economy. Agriculture remains a cornerstone in Benzie County, where orchards, vineyards and specialty crops contribute to both local markets and agritourism. In Manistee County, manufacturing, shipping and logistics—supported by port infrastructure—continue to provide employment and economic stability. Small businesses, trades, healthcare providers and educational institutions form the backbone of daily life, ensuring access to essential services while supporting long-term community sustainability.

Infrastructure and regional connectivity also play a role in shaping the area. Major transportation corridors, including U.S. 31 and M-22, link communities along the shoreline and provide access to surrounding regions. These routes support both commerce and tourism, connecting residents and visitors to neighboring counties and destinations throughout northwest Michigan.

Seasonal changes shape the rhythm of life across the region. Summer brings activity to beaches, rivers and downtowns, while fall highlights harvest season, farm markets and color tours that draw visitors inland. Winter offers a quieter pace with opportunities for snowshoeing, cross-country skiing and outdoor recreation, and spring marks a period of transition as communities prepare for another active season.

Throughout the following pages, readers will find expanded information on the communities, resources and opportunities that define Manistee and Benzie counties. Organized for quick reference, this at-a-glance format is designed to make it easy to locate key details, explore new areas and better understand the region—whether planning a visit, navigating daily life or discovering something new.



JEANNE BARBER PHOTO

Education Close to Home: What to Know About Schools in Manistee and Benzie Counties

Education in Manistee County

Education in Manistee County is built around four public school districts serving a combined enrollment of roughly 2,000 to 2,200 students. Spread across a largely rural landscape, these districts balance small-town familiarity with a growing focus on career readiness and postsecondary pathways.

The largest district, Manistee Area Public Schools, enrolls about 1,000 to 1,100 students, with graduation rates that have typically fallen in the mid-80% range. The district offers a full range of academic programs, athletics and extracurricular opportunities.

To the south and east, Kaleva Norman Dickson Schools serves approximately 450 to 500 students, with graduation rates that have typically fallen in the high-80% range. Along the Lake Michigan shoreline, Onekama Consolidated Schools enrolls roughly 300 to 350 students and has often reported graduation rates above 90%.

In the southern portion of the county, Bear Lake Schools serves about 150 to 200 students in a single Pre-K-12 campus and also educates students from Arcadia Township, which no longer

operates its own school.

Athletics are a central part of student life across all four districts. Students compete in sports sanctioned by the Michigan High School Athletic Association, including football, basketball, baseball, softball, volleyball, track and field, cross country and golf. Larger schools also offer soccer, wrestling, tennis and competitive cheer, while smaller districts often rely on cooperative agreements to maintain those programs.

Cooperative teams are especially important for sports that require larger rosters or specialized facilities. Wrestling, soccer and tennis are commonly shared between districts, and in some cases cross country or cheer programs may also operate as co-ops depending on participation levels. Ice hockey is typically offered through these agreements, with students from multiple districts joining regional teams that compete out of nearby communities with ice facilities.

Because of smaller enrollments, many students participate in multiple sports throughout the year, and games often serve as key gathering points for their communities.

Beyond athletics, schools continue to expand

hands-on and career-focused learning opportunities. Career and technical education programs, early college options and partnerships with local employers help connect classroom instruction to real-world skills.

All districts are supported by the Manistee Intermediate School District, which provides special education services, career and technical education programming and early childhood support. Students also have access to dual enrollment and workforce training through West Shore Community College.

Private school options in Manistee County have become more limited in recent years, and families seeking non-public education often look to neighboring counties or online programs.

Education in Benzie County

In Benzie County, education is centered around two primary districts serving approximately 1,600 to 1,800 students.

Benzie County Central Schools serves the majority of the county, with about 1,200 to 1,300 students across several elementary schools and a centralized middle and high school campus in Benzonia. Graduation rates have typically fallen in the mid-80% range, with continued efforts to improve student outcomes.

Along the Lake Michigan shoreline, Frankfort-Elberta Area Schools serves roughly 400 to 450 students and has often reported graduation rates near or above 90%. The district's size allows for close connections between students, staff and families.

Athletics are similarly woven into school life in Benzie County. Students participate in football, basketball, volleyball, baseball, softball, track and field, cross country and golf, with additional offerings such as soccer, wrestling and cheer depending on participation levels. As in Manistee County, cooperative agreements help sustain programs that might otherwise be limited by smaller enrollment, particu-

larly in sports requiring larger rosters or shared resources. Ice hockey, in particular, is typically offered through regional co-op teams that draw players from multiple districts and compete out of nearby rink facilities.

Sporting events across both districts serve as major community gatherings, particularly during the fall and winter seasons.

Students also benefit from regional services provided by Northwest Education Services, including career and technical education, special education and early childhood programs. Many take advantage of dual enrollment and postsecondary opportunities through Northwestern Michigan College and West Shore Community College.

Regional Trends

Across both counties, education reflects a collaborative, regional approach.

Graduation rates generally range from the mid-80% to low-90% range. Smaller school sizes allow for more personalized learning environments but can also lead to year-to-year variability in data. Career and technical education programs continue to expand, and dual enrollment and early college opportunities are increasingly common.

Athletics, including cooperative programs, remain a key part of both the student experience and community identity.



School District Contacts



Onekama Consolidated Schools
5016 Main St., Onekama
231-889-4251
onekama.k12.mi.us

Bear Lake Schools
7748 Main St., Bear Lake
231-864-3131
bearlakeschools.org

Manistee County

Manistee Area Public Schools
525 12th St., Manistee
231-723-3521
manisteeschools.org

Kaleva Norman Dickson Schools
4400 N. High Bridge Rd., Brethren
231-477-5353
kndschoools.org

Manistee Intermediate School District
772 E. Parkdale Ave., Manistee
231-723-6261
manisteeisid.org



Benzie County

Benzie County Central Schools
9300 Homestead Rd., Benzonia
231-882-9653
benzieschools.net

Frankfort-Elberta Area Schools
534 11th St., Frankfort
231-352-4781
frankfortschools.org

Northwest Education Services
1101 Red Dr., Traverse City
231-922-6200
nresd.org

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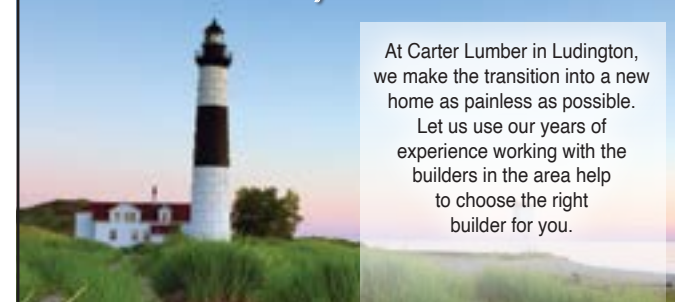
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More to Discover: Where Arts and Culture Come Alive in Benzie and Manistee Counties

Benzie County

Arts and culture in Benzie County are closely tied to the natural environment and community-centered spaces, where creative expression often blends with outdoor experiences and small-town gathering places.

One of the county's most distinctive destinations is Michigan Legacy Art Park, located on the grounds of Crystal Mountain. The park features an extensive collection of sculptures and installations set along wooded trails, offering an experience that combines art, history and recreation.

Benzie County's historical foundation is anchored by the Benzie Area Historical Museum in Benzonia. Housed in a restored 19th-century

church, the museum preserves the county's past through exhibits focused on early settlement, logging, agriculture and daily life.

Frankfort serves as a cultural hub, anchored by the Garden Theater. The historic theater remains fully operational and has evolved into a multi-use venue, hosting films, concerts and live performances throughout the year.

Beyond formal venues, visitors encounter arts and culture throughout Benzie County's public spaces. Galleries and cooperative art spaces in Frankfort and Beulah, along with seasonal exhibits and installations, contribute to a visible creative presence in downtown areas. Waterfront parks and community gathering spaces frequently host live music and informal performances during the summer months, reinforcing the county's accessible, outdoor-oriented arts



Onekama Fall Festival

JEANNE BARBER PHOTO

environment.

Benzie County's arts and cultural scene extends further through a strong calendar of festivals and community events. The Frankfort Art Fair draws regional artists and visitors each summer, while the Benzie County Fair highlights the county's agricultural heritage with exhibits, entertainment and midway attractions. The Frankfort-Elberta Fourth of July Celebration adds a large-scale lakeshore tradition featuring parades, concerts and fireworks.

Seasonal events continue into the fall and winter months. The Frankfort Fall Festival brings a major autumn celebration to the area, while winter programming such as Crystal Mountain WinterFest blends outdoor recreation with live entertainment. Year-round programming is further supported by the Oliver Art Center, which hosts exhibits, performances and workshops.

Seasonal entertainment is also reflected in venues like the Cherry Bowl Drive-In Theatre, which operates during the warmer months, and the COGNiTiON Science and Discovery Center, which provides year-round, hands-on programming for families.

The cultural landscape of Benzie County is also rooted in a longer history that includes Indigenous presence in the region. While there is not a single centralized tribal museum in the county, that history continues to influence contemporary cultural programming and interpretation across the area.

Overall, Benzie County's cultural identity is defined by its integration of art, environment and community participation across all seasons.

Manistee County

In Manistee County, arts and culture are shaped by a strong tradition of

historic preservation and established performance venues, reflecting the area's industrial and maritime past.

At the center of the county's performing arts scene is the Ramsdell Theatre. Built in 1903, the theater remains in active use and hosts plays, concerts and community productions throughout the year. Local performing arts groups and community theater organizations contribute to a steady schedule of productions, reinforcing the county's active creative community.

Nearby, the Vogue Theatre provides a complementary venue for film and special events, contributing to a vibrant downtown arts corridor.

Arts and culture are also visible throughout Manistee's public spaces. The downtown Riverwalk and surrounding areas frequently host concerts, art fairs and seasonal events, while local galleries and rotating exhibits add to the city's cultural presence beyond its primary venues.

The county's historical narrative is preserved at the Manistee County Historical Museum. Additional perspective is offered at the Old Kirke Museum, a preserved 19th-century Danish church that highlights the role of immigrant communities in shaping the region's cultural identity. Maritime heritage is further showcased aboard the S.S. City of Milwaukee, a preserved railroad car ferry open for tours.

Visual arts are represented by the Manistee Art Institute, which features rotating exhibits and supports regional artists.



Manistee County's cultural calendar is anchored by a series of long-running festivals and community events. The Manistee National Forest Festival remains the county's signature summer event, featuring parades, live music and waterfront activities. The Manistee County Fair highlights the region's agricultural roots with exhibits and entertainment, while additional arts and crafts fairs and concert series take place throughout the summer along the Riverwalk and in public spaces.



Seasonal programming continues into the fall with events such as the Manistee County Harvest Festival, which blends local art, crafts and harvest traditions. During the winter months, the Victorian Sleighbell Parade and Old Christmas Weekend transforms downtown into a historic-themed celebration featuring period costumes, music and holiday activities. Year-round cultural programming is further supported by the Ramsdell Regional Center for the Arts.

Indigenous history and culture also remain an important part of the region. The Little River Band of Ottawa Indians shares its heritage through cultural events, educational programming and public gatherings

such as powwows, offering a living connection to the area's earliest communities.

Taken together, Benzie and Manistee counties offer a complementary cultural experience shaped by both place and history. Benzie emphasizes art integrated with the natural landscape and community gathering spaces, while Manistee presents a more traditional structure of historic venues and organized performance. Across both counties, many arts programs, festivals and events are rooted in the region's logging, maritime and agricultural heritage, reflecting an ongoing connection between history and creative expression along the Lake Michigan shoreline.

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Outdoors



Arcadia bike path

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Shoreline to forest: Manistee and Benzie counties offer layered outdoor experiences

From Lake Michigan beaches to inland rivers, trails and working natural resources, the region delivers year-round access to the outdoors

Manistee County blends shoreline access with developed recreation

MANISTEE — Along Michigan’s northwest coast, Manistee County’s outdoor landscape is defined by contrast — where Lake Michigan’s open shoreline meets forested river corridors and a network of parks designed for both access and exploration. From bluff-top vistas and sandy

beaches to inland lakes and trail systems, the county offers a range of recreation options that shift with the seasons but remain anchored in its natural setting.

Among the county’s most prominent destinations is Orchard Beach State Park, located on a bluff overlooking Lake Michigan. The park features a campground, picnic areas and a network of trails that wind through forested terrain while



Magoon creek trail

STEVE BEGNOCHE PHOTO

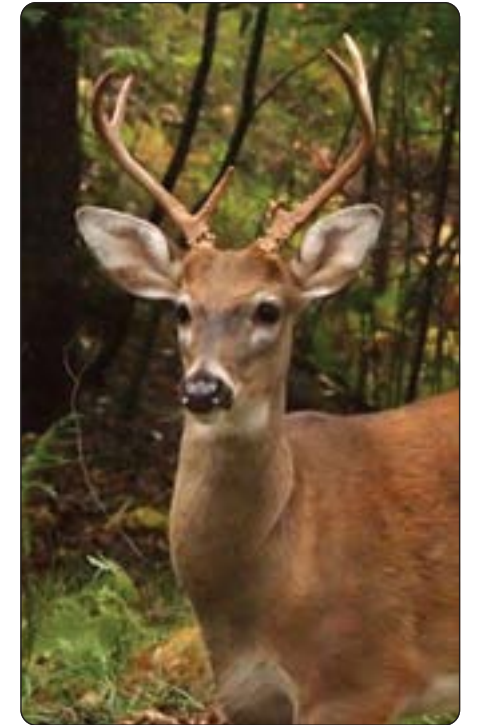
offering elevated views of the shoreline. Closer to the city center, the Manistee Riverwalk provides a walkable corridor along the Manistee River, connecting marinas, parks and downtown businesses. The riverwalk serves as both a recreational path and a focal point for community activity during warmer months.

Lake Michigan access is a defining feature of the county’s park system. First Street Beach is among the most developed public beaches, offering playgrounds, open space and seasonal events, while Magoon Creek Natural Area provides a quieter alternative with dune trails and a more natural setting.

Inland, parks such as Arcadia Lake and Douglas Park expand recreational options to include boating, fishing and paddling.

The county is also influenced by the Manistee National Forest, which provides extensive opportunities for hiking, camping and multi-use trails. The Manistee River Trail, a well-known hiking route that follows the river corridor, is accessible from areas within and near the county.

Inland along the Manistee River, the



JEANNE BARBER PHOTO

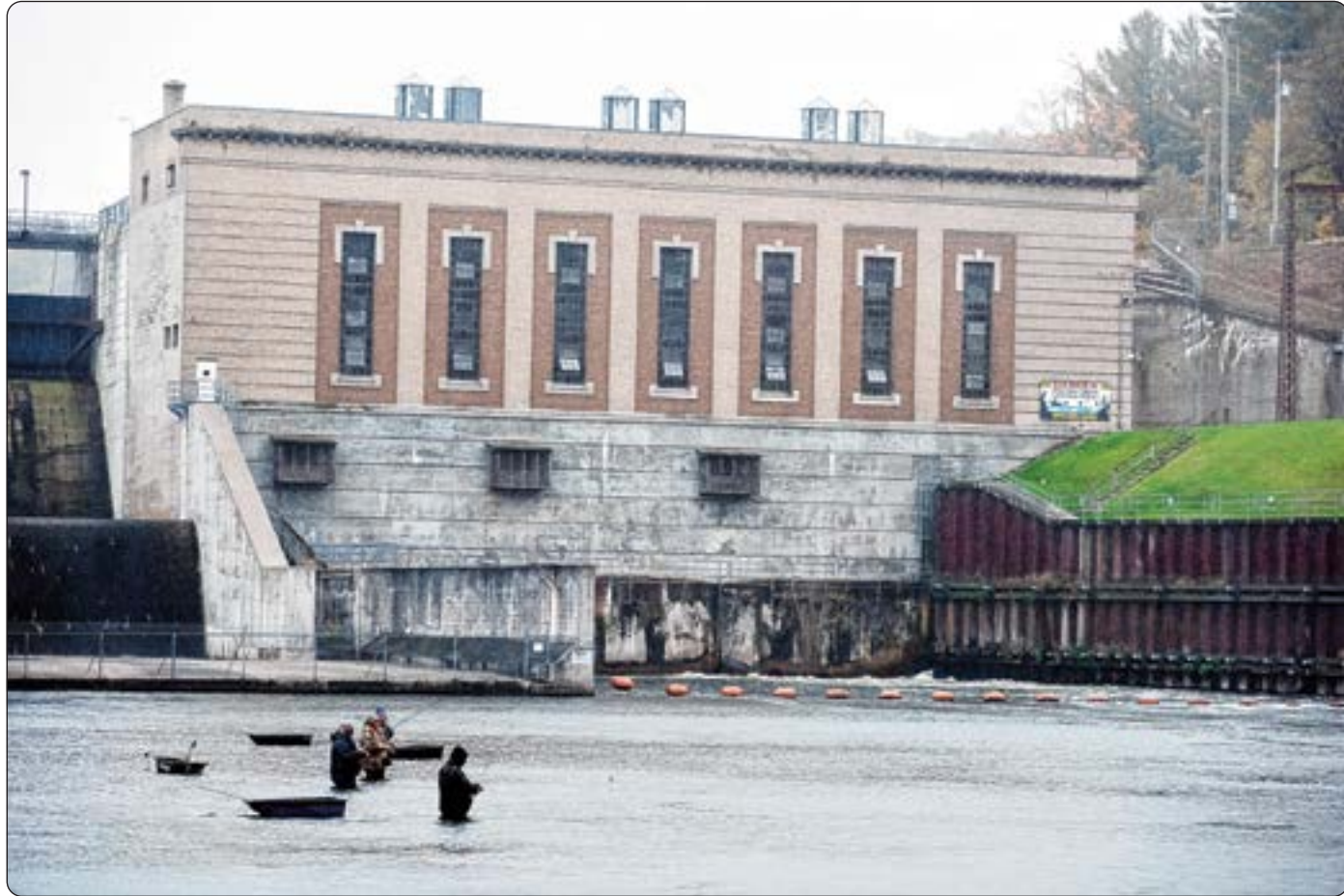
Big buck in Manistee



Lots of small boats on Manistee Lake

JEANNE BARBER PHOTO

Tippy Dam Recreation Area provides access to one of the region’s most active fishing and recreation corridors. Located near Wellston, the site is known for seasonal salmon and steelhead runs and offers river access, scenic overlooks and connections to nearby trail systems within the surrounding national forest.



Tippy Dam

STEVE BEGNOCHE PHOTO

Trail opportunities extend beyond the forest. The Manistee River Trail offers longer-distance hiking, while the Manistee Riverwalk provides a paved, accessible route for walking and casual biking within the city. Additional trail experiences can be found at the Arcadia Marsh Nature Preserve, where boardwalks pass through wetland habitat, offering a quieter, nature-focused setting.

Together, the county's parks and trail systems reflect a balance between accessibility and natural beauty, with options ranging from short waterfront walks to more rugged forest hikes.

Benzie County emphasizes natural landscapes and working natural resources

BENZIE COUNTY — North of Man-

istee County, the outdoor experience shifts toward quieter landscapes and interconnected natural systems, where inland lakes, protected dunes and river corridors define recreation. In Benzie County, access to the outdoors is shaped as much by conservation and stewardship as it is by recreation, with fewer developed sites but a strong emphasis on natural settings.

At the heart of the county's recreation network is Crystal Lake, one of Michigan's largest inland lakes. Its clear water and multiple public access points make it a central destination for boating, swimming and shoreline recreation.

Along Lake Michigan, Frankfort Beach and Elberta Beach provide expansive shoreline access, while Platte Point Beach offers a distinct setting where the Platte River flows into Lake Michigan.

In addition to its natural landscapes, Benzie County is home to the Platte River State Fish Hatchery, operated by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. Located near Honor along the Platte River, the facility raises salmon and other species for stocking in Lake Michigan and plays a key role in supporting the region's recreational fishing industry. The hatchery is open to visitors seasonally and offers a close-up look at fish production and migration.

Trail systems are a defining feature of the county. The Betsie Valley Trail serves as a primary non-motorized corridor between Frankfort and Beulah, supporting biking and walking along a former rail line. Portions of Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore within the county include segments of the Sleeping Bear Heritage Trail, offering access to forest, river and dune landscapes near the Platte River area.



Frankfort beach

JEANNE BARBER PHOTO

For a more traditional hiking experience, the Lake Ann Pathway provides a loop trail system through state forest land, commonly used for both hiking and mountain biking. Smaller preserves, such as Lamb Road Natural Area and Railroad Point Natural Area, offer quieter walking environments focused on habitat protection.

The county also includes stretches of the Betsie River, protected under Michigan's Natural Rivers program and widely used for paddling and fishing.

While Benzie County offers fewer developed recreation sites than its southern neighbor, its emphasis on preserved landscapes, trail connectivity and working natural resource systems provides a distinctly immersive outdoor experience.

A shared shoreline, two distinct outdoor experiences

Across both counties, Lake Michigan serves as a unifying feature, shaping recreation and access to beaches,

dunes and water-based activities. However, the character of each county's park system differs.

Manistee County's network leans toward developed spaces and community-centered amenities, while Benzie County highlights conservation, trail connectivity and natural landscapes. Together, the two counties form a complementary regional destination for outdoor recreation along Michigan's northwest coast.



STEVE BEGNOCHE PHOTO



Orchard Beach view

STEVE BEGNOCHE PHOTO



Manistee sunset and waves

STEVE BEGNOCHE PHOTO

Outdoor recreation at a glance

Manistee and Benzie counties offer a range of year-round activities

Water-based recreation

- Boating and sailing — Lake Michigan harbors and inland lakes
- Fishing — Salmon and steelhead runs on the Manistee River and Betsie River, plus inland lakes
- Swimming and beach use — Lake Michigan shoreline and public beaches
- Paddling — Canoe and kayak access on rivers and lakes, including the Platte River corridor

Trail and land-based activities

- Hiking — Forest trails and natural areas, including routes within the Manistee National Forest and Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore
- Biking — Multi-use trails such as the Betsie Valley Trail and paved local pathways
- Wildlife viewing and birding — Wetlands, dunes and forest habitats
- Camping — Campgrounds in state parks, national forest lands and private facilities

Seasonal recreation

- Fall color tours — Scenic routes along M-22 and inland forest roads
- Winter sports — Cross-country skiing, snowshoeing and snowmobiling on designated trails
- Spring and fall fishing runs — Concentrated activity along river systems



Scenic and passive use

- Photography and sightseeing — Dune overlooks, shoreline vistas and river corridors
- Picnicking and day-use parks — Public parks and waterfront spaces
- Lighthouse and harbor visits — Coastal landmarks and marina areas

Top 10 ways to get outdoors

Manistee and Benzie counties

- Watch the sunset on Lake Michigan — From First Street Beach to Frankfort Beach
- Hike along the Manistee River — Manistee River Trail
- Bike the Betsie Valley Trail — Betsie Valley Trail
- Explore Crystal Lake — Crystal Lake
- Fish the region's rivers — Manistee River and Betsie River
- Visit the Platte River hatchery — Platte River State Fish Hatchery
- Walk the Manistee Riverwalk — Manistee Riverwalk
- Explore dunes and shoreline landscapes — Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore
- Paddle a river or inland lake — Platte and Betsie river corridors and inland lakes
- Cast a line at Tippy Dam — Tippy Dam Recreation Area



Manistee Fire Department

JEANNE BARBER PHOTO

Where You Live: Cities, Villages and Townships in Manistee and Benzie Counties

MANISTEE COUNTY

City of Manistee (County seat)

- Address: 70 Maple St., Manistee, MI 49660
- Phone: (231) 723-3511
- Website: www.manisteemi.gov
- Population: 6,259

VILLAGES

Village of Arcadia

- Address: 20873 Front St., Arcadia, MI 49613
- Phone: (231) 889-4254
- Population: 284

Village of Bear Lake

(also extends into Benzie County)

- Address: 11170 Main St., Bear Lake, MI 49614
- Phone: (231) 864-2514
- Population: 286

Village of Kaleva

- Address: 9208 Kauko St., Kaleva, MI 49645
- Phone: (231) 362-3101
- Population: 507

Village of Onekama

- Address: 5435 Main St., Onekama, MI 49675
- Phone: (231) 889-3171
- Website: www.onekama.info
- Population: 411

TOWNSHIPS

Arcadia Township

- Address: 3422 Lake St., Arcadia, MI 49613
- Phone: (231) 889-4463
- Website: www.townshipofarcadia.org
- Population: 813



JEANNE BARBER PHOTO

Quimby plaque, Arcadia

Bear Lake Township

- Address: 7771 Lake St., Bear Lake, MI 49614
- Phone: (231) 864-3620
- Website: www.bearlaketwp.com
- Population: 1,719

Brown Township

- Address: 8233 Coates Hwy., Manistee, MI 49660
- Phone: (231) 723-4481
- Population: 1,283



STEVE BEGNOCHE PHOTO

Dickson Township

- Address: 9607 Chief Rd., Brethren, MI 49619
- Phone: (231) 477-5353
- Population: 734

Filer Township

- Address: 2258 E. US-10, Manistee, MI 49660
- Phone: (231) 723-9275
- Website: www.filertownship.com
- Population: 2,826

Manistee Township

- Address: 313 Cleveland St., Manistee, MI 49660
- Phone: (231) 723-6501
- Population: 1,673

Maple Grove Township

- Address: 7890 Orchard Hwy., Kaleva, MI 49645
- Phone: (231) 362-3655
- Population: 1,314

Marilla Township

- Address: 9991 Marilla Rd., Copemish, MI 49625
- Phone: (231) 362-3555
- Population: 985

Norman Township

- Address: 16869 Tippy Dam Rd., Wellston, MI 49689
- Phone: (231) 848-4884
- Population: 1,124

Onekama Township

- Address: 5283 Main St., Onekama, MI 49675
- Phone: (231) 889-3308
- Population: 1,318

Pleasanton Township

- Address: 8958 Lumley Rd., Bear Lake, MI 49614
- Phone: (231) 864-2584
- Website: www.pleasantontownship.org
- Population: 1,349

Springdale Township

- Address: 14992 Glovers Lake Rd., Bear Lake, MI 49614
- Phone: (231) 383-1405
- Website: springdaletownship.org
- Population: 752

Stronach Township

- Address: 2471 Main St., Manistee, MI 49660
- Phone: (231) 723-7983
- Website: stronachtownship.net
- Population: 1,008



BENZIE COUNTY

Village of Beulah (County seat)

- Address: 6948 Commercial St., Beulah, MI 49617
- Phone: (231) 882-7201
- Website: www.villageofbeulah.org
- Population: 342

City of Frankfort

- Address: 412 Main St., Frankfort, MI 49635
- Phone: (231) 352-7117
- Website: www.frankfortmichigan.com
- Population: 1,286

VILLAGES

Village of Benzonia

- Address: 1020 Michigan Ave., Benzonia, MI 49616
- Phone: (231) 882-9981
- Population: 497

Village of Elberta

- Address: 401 First St., Elberta, MI 49628
- Phone: (231) 352-7201
- Website: www.villageofelberta.com
- Population: 372

Village of Honor

- Address: 10922 Main St., Honor, MI 49640
- Phone: (231) 325-8432
- Population: 328



Frankfort downtown park

JEANNE BARBER PHOTO

Village of Lake Ann

- Address: 9639 Maple St., Lake Ann, MI 49650
- Phone: (231) 275-5267
- Population: 268

Village of Thompsonville

- Address: 14714 Lincoln Ave., Thompsonville, MI 49683
- Phone: (231) 378-2560
- Population: 441

TOWNSHIPS

Almira Township

- Address: 7276 Ole White Dr., Lake Ann, MI 49650
- Phone: (231) 275-5862
- Website: www.almiratownship.org
- Population: 3,013

Benzonia Township

- Address: 1020 Michigan Ave., Benzonia, MI 49616
- Phone: (231) 882-4411
- Website: www.benzoniatwp.org
- Population: 2,383

Blaine Township (uses Arcadia mailing address; located in Benzie County)

- Address: 4760 Herring Grove Rd., Arcadia, MI 49613
- Population: 681

Colfax Township

- Address: 7607 Michigan Ave., Thompsonville, MI 49683
- Phone: (231) 378-2144
- Website: www.colfaxtownship.org
- Population: 640

Crystal Lake Township

- Address: 1651 Frankfort Hwy., Frankfort, MI 49635
- Phone: (231) 352-9791
- Website: www.crystallaketwp.org
- Population: 2,518

Gilmore Township

- Address: 401 First St., Elberta, MI 49628
- Phone: (231) 352-5047
- Population: 1,085



JEANNE BARBER PHOTO

Homestead Township

- Address: 11508 Honor Hwy., Honor, MI 49640
- Phone: (231) 325-6772
- Population: 1,115

Inland Township

- Address: 19668 US 31, Interlochen, MI 49643
- Phone: (231) 275-6568
- Population: 1,846

Joyfield Township

- Address: 5490 Benzie Hwy., Benzonia, MI 49616
- Phone: (231) 882-0133
- Population: 642

Lake Township

- Address: 5153 Scenic Hwy., Honor, MI 49640
- Phone: (231) 325-5202
- Population: 1,027

Platte Township

- Address: 11935 Fowler Rd., Honor, MI 49640
- Phone: (231) 325-2459
- Population: 1,354

Weldon Township

- Address: 14731 Thompson Ave., Thompsonville, MI 49683
- Phone: (231) 378-2477
- Population: 1,326

Some communities use mailing addresses that differ from their county jurisdiction. For example, Blaine Township is located in Benzie County but uses an Arcadia mailing address. The Village of Bear Lake spans both Manistee and Benzie counties.



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Benzie County: From Working Waterfront to Weekend Destination

BENZIE COUNTY — Unlike neighboring counties defined by large-scale industry, Benzie County's history is best understood through the places that remain. Its National Register of Historic Places listings reflect a community shaped by Lake Michigan, connected by transportation and sustained by agriculture and tourism.

From lighthouse beacons and rail ferries to resort communities and civic buildings, these sites provide a clear narrative of how the county developed—from a lumber-era shoreline to a modern destination rooted in natural beauty

Maritime roots along Lake Michigan

The shoreline of Lake Michigan has long been central to Benzie County's development.

The Point Betsie Light Station, constructed in the 19th century, stands as one of the region's most recognizable landmarks. Positioned along a busy stretch of shoreline, the lighthouse guided ships navigating the often unpredictable waters of Lake Michigan and into the harbor at nearby Frankfort.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE BENZIE AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

That harbor served as a critical link between Benzie County and broader Great Lakes commerce, particularly during the late 1800s lumber era, when timber harvested inland was shipped to growing Midwestern cities.

A Great Lakes transportation link

By the early 20th century, Benzie County evolved into a transportation hub connecting rail and water routes.

Railcar ferries operated by the Ann Arbor Railroad regularly departed from Frankfort, carrying entire railcars across Lake Michigan to Wisconsin. This system allowed freight to bypass longer overland routes around the lake,

reinforcing Frankfort's role as a regional gateway.

The SS City of Milwaukee, now preserved as a museum ship in Manistee, reflects this era. While no longer located in Benzie County, the vessel is directly tied to the period when ferries operated from Frankfort, linking the county to broader transportation and shipping networks.

Building communities

As industry and transportation brought people to the region, civic institutions followed.

The Benzie County Courthouse represents the formal organization of county government after Benzie County was

established in 1863. Its presence in Beulah reflects the transition from frontier settlement to structured civic life.

Nearby in Benzonia, the Mills Community House became a center for education, culture and public gatherings, highlighting the importance of shared community spaces in a rural county.

Residential landmarks, including the Frankfort Land Company House, point to early development efforts that helped establish permanent communities along the Lake Michigan shoreline.

From timber to tourism

Following the decline of the lumber industry, Benzie County transitioned toward agriculture and tourism.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE BENZIE AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The Watervale Historic District captures that shift. The district preserves a planned resort community dating to the early 20th century, when visitors began arriving to experience the area's lake-shore, dunes and inland waterways.

At the same time, agriculture—particularly fruit orchards—expanded across the county, with cherries and apples becoming long-standing staples of the local economy.

Small resorts, cottages and seasonal homes gradually replaced the industrial infrastructure of the lumber era, establishing a pattern that continues today.

A distinct regional identity

Benzie County's historic sites collectively reflect:

- A reliance on Lake Michigan for commerce and travel

- A transportation network linking rail and water routes
- The development of stable civic institutions
- A long-term shift toward tourism and agriculture

Unlike Manistee County, where large industrial employers played a defining role, Benzie County developed through smaller, interconnected activities shaped by its natural environment.



AT A GLANCE

Established: 1863
County seat: Beulah
National Register listings: 9

Key sites:

- Point Betsie Light Station
- SS City of Milwaukee (now located in Manistee)
- Benzie County Courthouse
- Watervale Historic District

Historic themes:

- Maritime navigation • Transportation
 • Civic development • Tourism

TIMELINE

- Pre-1600s:** Ojibwe and Odawa peoples inhabit the region
- 1600s-1700s:** French exploration and fur trade activity
- 1863:** Benzie County established
- Late 1800s:** Lumber industry drives settlement and growth
- Early 1900s:** Railcar ferry system operates from Frankfort
- Early 1900s:** Tourism and resort communities begin to develop
- Present:** Economy centered on tourism, agriculture and small business

Takeaway:

Benzie County's history is written in its landscape. From lighthouse to harbor, courthouse to resort, its historic sites reveal a community shaped not by a single industry, but by its connection to Lake Michigan and the people who adapted to its changing economy.

history Manistee County



Grainers in operation, Douglas & Douglass Salt Plant, Manistee, Mich.

PHOTO PROVIDED BY JAMES CABOT

Manistee County:

Built on Salt

MANISTEE — Long before its Victorian homes and Lake Michigan shoreline became defining features, Manistee County built its identity on a resource hidden deep beneath the ground: salt.

While the county's early growth in the mid-19th century was fueled by lumber, it was the discovery of underground salt deposits in the early 1880s that allowed the community to extend its economic life and emerge as a major industrial center.

Manistee County, established in 1855, quickly became part of Michigan's lumber boom due to its dense forests and access to the Manistee River. By the 1870s, however, concerns about the long-term sustainability of timber resources prompted local investors to explore new opportunities.

That search led underground.

After years of speculation by geologists, drilling efforts in 1880 and 1881 confirmed the

presence of significant salt deposits roughly 2,000 feet below the surface. The discovery marked a turning point for the region, drawing investment from lumber operators and entrepreneurs eager to diversify beyond timber.

Salt production in Manistee relied on a brine extraction process. Water was pumped deep into underground salt formations, where it dissolved the deposits and created brine. The brine was then brought back to the surface and heated using steam-powered boilers, leaving behind crystallized salt.

The process was closely tied to the existing lumber industry. Waste wood from sawmills provided a ready fuel source for the boilers, allowing the two industries to operate efficiently alongside one another.

By the late 19th century, salt production had expanded rapidly across the county. Manistee earned the nickname "Salt City of the Inland

Seas," and annual production reached more than 1 million barrels at its peak.

The growth of the industry contributed to population increases, expanded rail connections and the development of supporting manufacturing. Companies such as the Manistee Iron Works produced machinery used in salt processing, helping establish the city as a center of industrial innovation.

Advancements in technology further strengthened the industry. The adoption of vacuum pan evaporation systems improved efficiency and allowed for higher-quality salt production, positioning

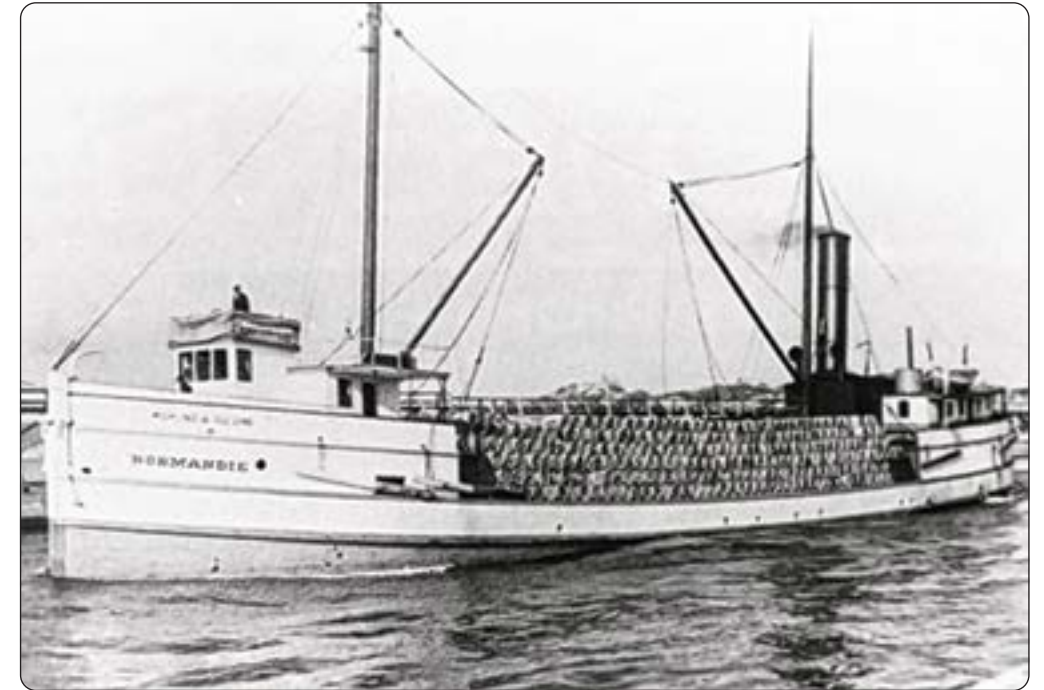


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Manistee among the leading salt-producing regions in Michigan.

As the lumber industry declined in the late 1800s, salt production helped stabilize the local economy. The industry provided jobs in drilling, processing and transportation, while also supporting related businesses and infrastructure.

Salt's influence extended beyond industry. Mineral bathhouses emerged in Manistee, promoting the use of saltwater for therapeutic purposes and drawing visitors to the area.

By the early 20th century, however, the industry began to face challenges. Rising production costs, increased competition and changing industrial practices contributed to a gradual decline in large-scale salt production.

PHOTOS PROVIDED BY JAMES CABOT



Sands sawmill and salt block at Manistee, 1909 postcard

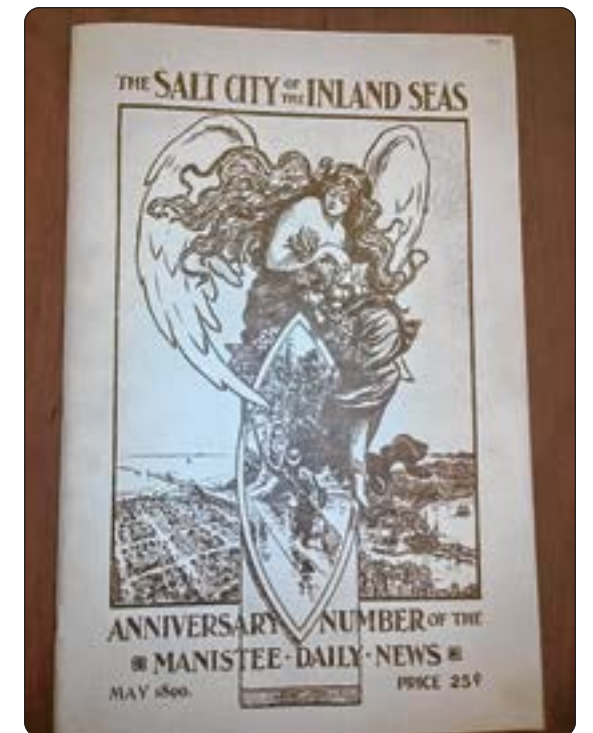
PHOTOS PROVIDED BY JAMES CABOT

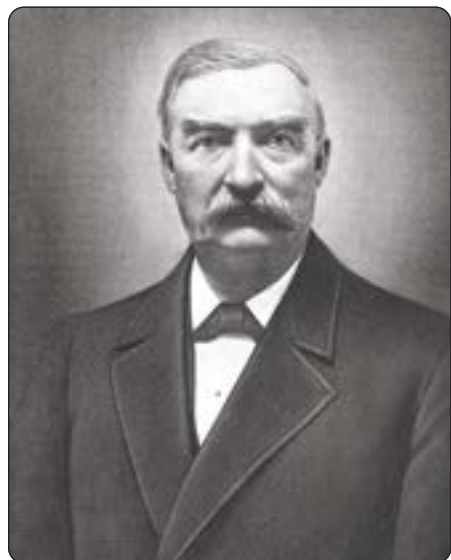
Despite that decline, salt production never fully disappeared from Manistee County. Operations have continued into the modern era, and the industry remains part of the region's economic and environmental landscape.

Today, remnants of the salt industry can still be seen in active facilities, historical sites and ongoing monitoring efforts tied to past production.

Though often overshadowed by its lumber heritage, salt played a critical role in shaping Manistee County's development — bridging the gap between boom and transition, and helping define the community that exists today.

Cover of 'The Salt City of the Inland Seas' (1899)





Edward Buckley

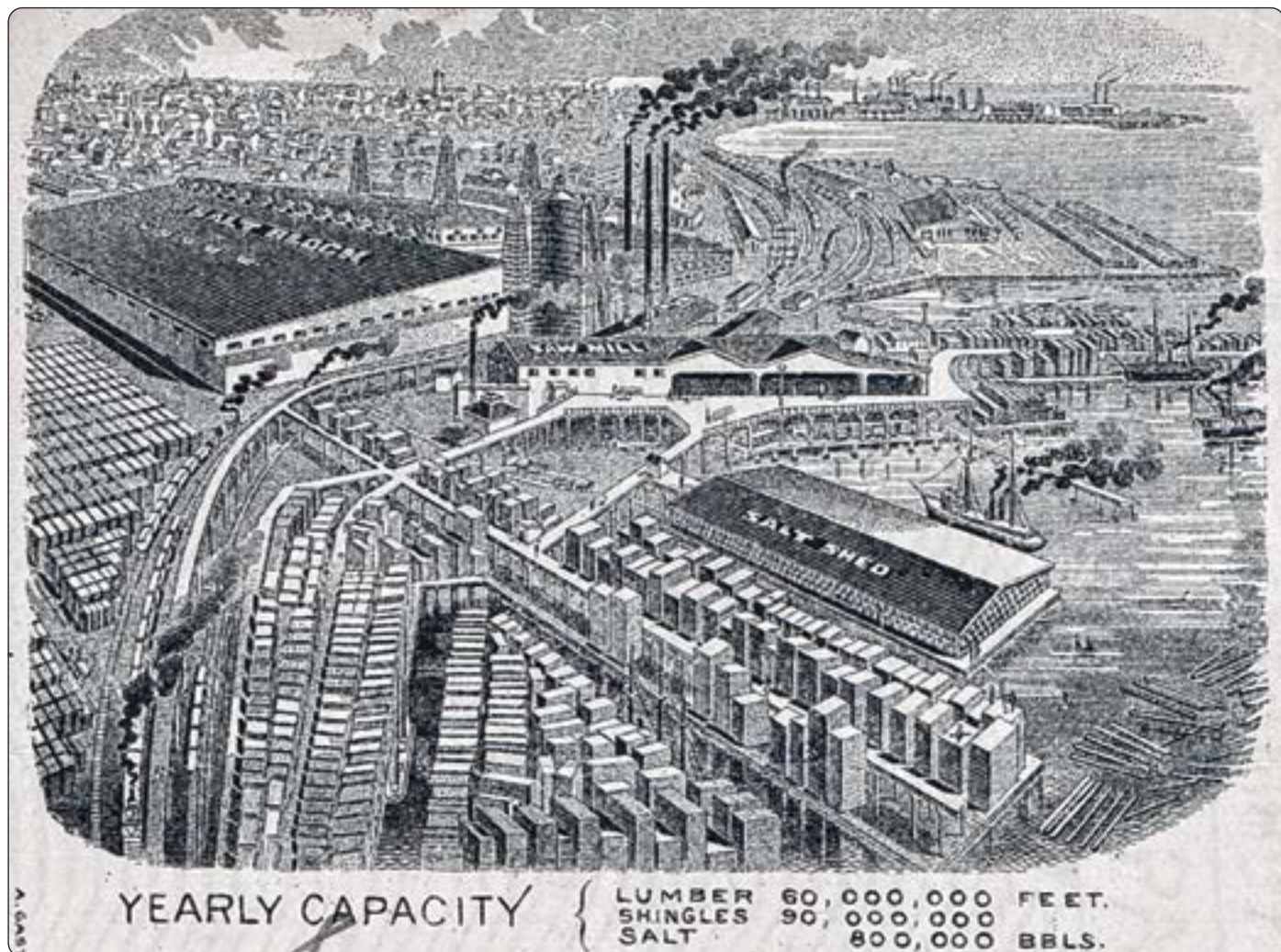


John H. Rademaker



Charles Rietz

PHOTOS PROVIDED BY JAMES CABOT



Buckley & Douglas Lumber Company woodcut on their checks from First National Bank of Manistee



R.G. Peters

Richard G. Peters,
1890 engraving,
and Louis Sands,
1882 engraving



Louis Sands

PHOTOS PROVIDED BY JAMES CABOT

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Morton Salt Company (formerly Ruggles & Rademaker) plant in Manistee, 1937 postcard



Hardy Salt plant in Manistee

PHOTOS PROVIDED BY JAMES CABOT

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calendar



JEANNE BARBER PHOTO

APRIL 2026

APRIL 25

- **CROWNS AND CAPES**, 1 - 3 p.m., Ramsdell Regional Center for the Arts, 101 Maple St., Manistee
- **TIGHT LINES FOR** Troops 5K Run/Walk, 8:30 a.m., 53 S. Lakeshore Dr., Manistee

MAY 2026

MAY 2

- **SMALL BOAT BIG** Fish Tournament, 6:30 a.m. - 12 p.m., Lions Pavilion, 1st Street Beach, Manistee
- **9TH ANNUAL HATS** and Horses Derby Party, 3 - 8 p.m., Iron Fish Distillery, 14234 Dzuibanek Rd., Thompsonville

MAY 9

- **MJ LIVE**, 9 p.m., Little River Casino Resort, 2700 Orchard Hwy., Manistee
- **MANISTEE RATS AND** Rods Car Party, 9 a.m. - 3 p.m., 1211 28th St., Manistee
- **CRYSTAL RUSH MOUNTAIN** Bike Race, 9:30 a.m., 12425 Crystal Mountain Dr., Thompsonville

MAY 13

- **DR. BRIAN ALLEN** Guided Bird Walk, 8 a.m., North Point Park, 8799 Greenway St., Onokama

MAY 16

- **RRCA ANNUAL GALA**, 5 p.m., Ramsdell Regional Center for the Arts, 101 Maple St., Manistee

MAY 23

- **MICHIGAN BEER AND** Brat Festival, 3 - 8 p.m., 12500 Crystal Mountain Dr., Thompsonville
- **TRINITY LUTHERAN SCHOOL** 5K Color Run, 8 a.m., 420 Oak St., Manistee

MAY 27

- **FUN FISH**, 6 - 9 p.m., Manistee Lake

MAY 29

- **THE MAD ANGLER** Trio, 7:30 - 9:30 p.m., Ramsdell Regional Center for the Arts, 101 Maple St., Manistee

MAY 30

- **BIKE BENZIE TOUR**, Crystal Mountain Resort, 12500 Crystal Mountain Dr., Thompsonville

JUNE 2026

JUNE 3

- **FUN FISH**, 6 - 9 p.m., Bear Lake

JUNE 5

- **SPECTRAL SILHOUETTE RADIO** Show, 7:30 - 9:30 p.m., Ramsdell Regional Center for the Arts, 101 Maple St., Manistee

JUNE 6

- **NORTH MITTEN HALF** Marathon, 10K, and 5K, 7 a.m. - 12 p.m., Crystal Mountain Resort, 12500 Crystal Mountain Dr., Thompsonville

JUNE 10

- **FUN FISH**, 6 - 9 p.m., Portage Lake

JUNE 13

- **13TH ANNUAL BLESSING** of the Bugs VW Car Show and Beach Cruise, 10 a.m., Manistee Moose Lodge 1128, 1010 Robinson St., Manistee

JUNE 17

- **FUN FISH**, 6 - 9 p.m., Manistee Lake

JUNE 20

- **DUNE JAM**, 12 - 11:30 p.m., 1st Street Beach, Manistee
- **FRANKFORT CRAFT FAIR**, 10 a.m. - 3 p.m., Downtown Frankfort
- **SPIRIT OF THE** Woods Folk Festival, noon - 8 p.m., Dickson Township Park, 14279 Coates Hwy, Brethren

JUNE 24

- **KID'S FISH DAY**, 9 a.m., Manistee's Man Made Lake

- **FUN FISH "ONE** Bait Wednesday", 6 - 9 p.m., Bear Lake

JUNE 25

- **MANISTEE COMMUNITY MUSIC** - Patriotic Pops, 7 p.m., First Street Beach, Manistee

JULY 2026

JULY 1

- **FUN FISH**, 6 - 9 p.m., Portage Lake



JEANNE BARBER PHOTO

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JULY 1 - 5

- **90TH MANISTEE NATIONAL Forest Festival**, Manistee

JULY 4

- **INDEPENDENCE DAY PARADE**, 10 a.m. - 12 p.m., Division St. and River St., Manistee
- **FOURTH OF JULY 5K Fun Run**, 9 a.m., Crystal Mountain Resort, 12500 Crystal Mountain Dr., Thompsonville
- **FOURTH OF JULY Parade**, 10 a.m., Main Street, Downtown Frankfort
- **4TH OF JULY activities**, Downtown Beulah

JULY 8

- **FUN FISH, 6 - 9 p.m.**, Manistee Lake

JULY 10 - 12

- **BEAR LAKE DAYS**, Bear Lake

JULY 11

- **BEULAH ART FAIR**, 10 a.m. - 5 p.m., Beulah Park, 7122 Prospect Ave., Beulah

JULY 15

- **FUN FISH, 6 - 9 p.m.**, Bear Lake

JULY 24 - 26

- **ARCADIA DAZE, ARCADIA**

JULY 25

- **RUN THE PIER Summer Running Festival**, 6 a.m., Duffy Park, 248 Duffy Park Dr., Manistee

JULY 28 - AUGUST 1

- **MANISTEE COUNTY FAIR**, 7587 1st St., Onekama

JULY 30

- **MANISTEE COMMUNITY MUSIC** – Community Band Classics, 7 p.m., Manistee High School, 525 12th St., Manistee

AUGUST 2026

AUGUST 6 - 10

- **ONEKAMA DAYS, ONEKAMA**

AUGUST 8

- **SIDEWALK SALES**, 9 a.m. - 6 p.m., downtown Manistee
- **ONEKAMA DAYS CAR Show**, 9 a.m. - 2:30 p.m., Onekama Village Park, M22 & Portage St., Onekama

AUGUST 9

- **SIDEWALK SALES**, 9 a.m. - 6 p.m., downtown Manistee

AUGUST 14

- **GREGGIE AND THE Jets** – A Tribute to Elton John, 7:30 - 9:30 p.m., Ramsdell Regional Center for the Arts, 101 Maple St., Manistee

- **FRANKFORT ART FAIR**, 1 p.m., Market Square Park, 415 Crystal Ave., Frankfort

AUGUST 15

- **FLO RIDA WITH Special Guest Cooper Alan**, 7 p.m., Little River Casino Resort, 2700 Orchard Hwy., Manistee
- **FRANKFORT ART FAIR**, 10 a.m., Market Square Park, 415 Crystal Ave., Frankfort

SEPTEMBER 2026

SEPTEMBER 20

- **IRONMAN 70.3, FRANKFORT**

OCTOBER 2026

OCTOBER 3

- **BEULAH FALL FESTIVAL**, 10 a.m., Downtown Beulah

OCTOBER 10

- **FALL FESTIVAL CRAFT Fair**, 10 a.m., Open Space Park, 800 Main St., Frankfort

OCTOBER 17

- **PEAK2PEAK MOUNTAIN BIKE Classic**, 9:30 a.m. - 4 p.m., Crystal Mountain Resort, 12500 Crystal Mountain Dr., Thompsonville

OCTOBER 31



STEVE BEGNOCHE PHOTO

- **MANISTEE FALL FESTIVAL**, Manistee

NOVEMBER 2026

NOVEMBER 28

- **HOLLY BERRY ARTS and Crafts Fair**, 9 a.m., Frankfort-Elberta High School, 534 11th St., Frankfort

DECEMBER 2026

DECEMBER 5

- **37TH ANNUAL VICTORIAN Sleighbell Parade**, 5:30 - 6:30 p.m., Manistee

DECEMBER 12

- **CHRISTMAS MAGIC**, 10 a.m. - 7 p.m., Downtown Beulah

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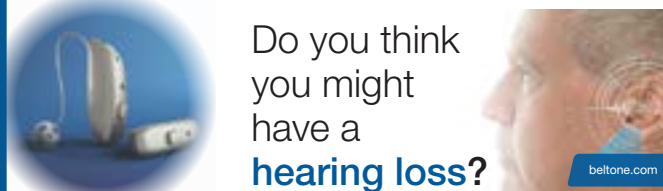
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