

## **Manistee County (Images of America)**

Shannon McRae



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Between 1860 and 1900, some say, Michigan lumber made more fortunes than California gold. Many of those fortunes were made in Manistee. Home to hardworking, self-made millionaires, Manistee also became a thriving cultural center, with elegant architecture, theatrical performances, and intellectual societies that debated the issues of the day. Steamers and schooners brought tourists across Lake Michigan to stroll the grand streets, relax on the beaches of Onekama's Portage Point Inn, or attend the latest play at the Ramsdell Theater. Manistee County also offered opportunities for America's newest immigrants. Drawn by the promise of land and economic opportunity, the new arrivals established communities in the city and surrounding townships. For some of these settlers, such as the Finns who founded Kaleva or the small religious community of Brethren, Manistee County held the promise of utopia. When the lumber era ended, Manistee County reinvented itself, replacing sawmills and lumberyards with salt wells, hydroelectric dams, and power plants. As it continued to draw tourists from across the lake and along newly built roads, Manistee County entered the modern age with a vibrant future to match its fascinating history.



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