

LOCAL

Resort Township unveils new Pioneer Trails park

Resort Township

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PETOSKEY — It's been a project that's been in the works for a number of years.

On Wednesday, Resort Township supervisor Bob Wheaton and other township board members unveiled a new non-motorized trail system located at 6154 Resort Pike Road called Pioneer Trails. This 122-acre walking, hiking, biking, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing trail pays homage to area settlers of the late 1800s.

"It feels good to have it," Wheaton said moments after a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the trails attended by some 40 people. "We've been working on this for a few years."

Wheaton provided a brief history of the trail and the property during Wednesday's ribbon-cutting ceremony, which began in 1978 when Charles Black and his family donated 42 acres between Lake Grove and Resort Pike Road to the township.

"The Blacks left it for recreation use which was to be low-key," Wheaton said.

In 2010, Resort Township was approached by property owner Bob Beson about an opportunity to purchase 80 acres north of the Black property. Township officials applied for grant money from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources trust fund, but were denied in 2011.

The following year, the grant was re-submitted and approved. From 2013-15, the township put together a forestry management program to make the eventual plans for the two parcels of land.

In 2015, former township board member Judy Reynolds suggested the name Pioneer Trails for the park, and proposed naming several individual trails after pioneer families who settled in the peninsula part of Resort Township.

"During the summer of 2017 we had four teachers research possible families who came here in the 1870s and write the mini stories you see today on plaques," Wheaton said. "They chose five families who are featured throughout the trail."

The five families featured throughout the 4.7 mile trail system include the Folgelsonger, Couch, Bacon, McConnell and Wheaton families.

The Folgelsonger family, including Emanuel and Sarah Folgelsonger, moved to Petoskey in 1874, taking a boxcar loaded with livestock and their family goods. They were some of the first white settlers in Resort Township. Emanuel is believed to be the first person to have a cow in the township.

They lived at the southwest corner of School Street and Resort Pike on 80 acres, in the vicinity of a one-room schoolhouse named the Følgersonger School (later named the Morford School).

The Couch trail pays tribute to a family which came to the area in 1875, when Christopher and May Ann Couch and four sons claimed land in the peninsula. William Couch paid \$47.25 for 91.7 acres on the south end of Resort Pike and a portion of his property is the northern part of the trail system. At the current driveway to Pioneer Trail, one can find a slight depression in the earth where a cabin William built once sat.

The Bacon trail is in honor of the Bacon family which came to the area from Ontario in 1879 and owned 80 acres west of Resort Pike at the south end of the peninsula. The Bacon home was built at what is now 6678 Lake Grove Road, and a large barn was erected across the road. Nine children were raised at the home of Henry Bacon and his wife, Elizabeth Couch Bacon, before he eventually acquired 200 acres and divided the waterfront land for cottages.

Henry Bacon also started a small grocery store on the west side of Resort Pike and built a large dock which became known as Bacon's Landing to accommodate passengers who came by boat to the area.

The McConnell Trail pays homage to the McConnell family and John Henry McConnell, who purchased 1,000 acres from the Grand Rapids Railroad and divided the land between his sons, Joseph and Henry, to create lodging for guests.

Their first building in 1874 was named Pioneer Cabin, which became the center of social life for Native Americans and settlers. In 1888, Joseph opened the Bear Lake Inn — later named the Echo Beach Inn — while Henry opened the Melrose Hotel.

The Wheaton Trail honors the Wheaton family which has been in the township since 1879, as Mary Jane Wheaton and her son, Harlow, homesteaded 69 acres along the western shore of the north arm of Walloon Lake. History suggests the Wheatons may have lived in a sod hut their first years on the peninsula.

Today, Mary Jane's homestead is known as Recraft Point or Birch Point, and is generally located between 6273 and 6333 Indian Garden Road. Since 1879, there has been a Wheaton family living in Resort Township.

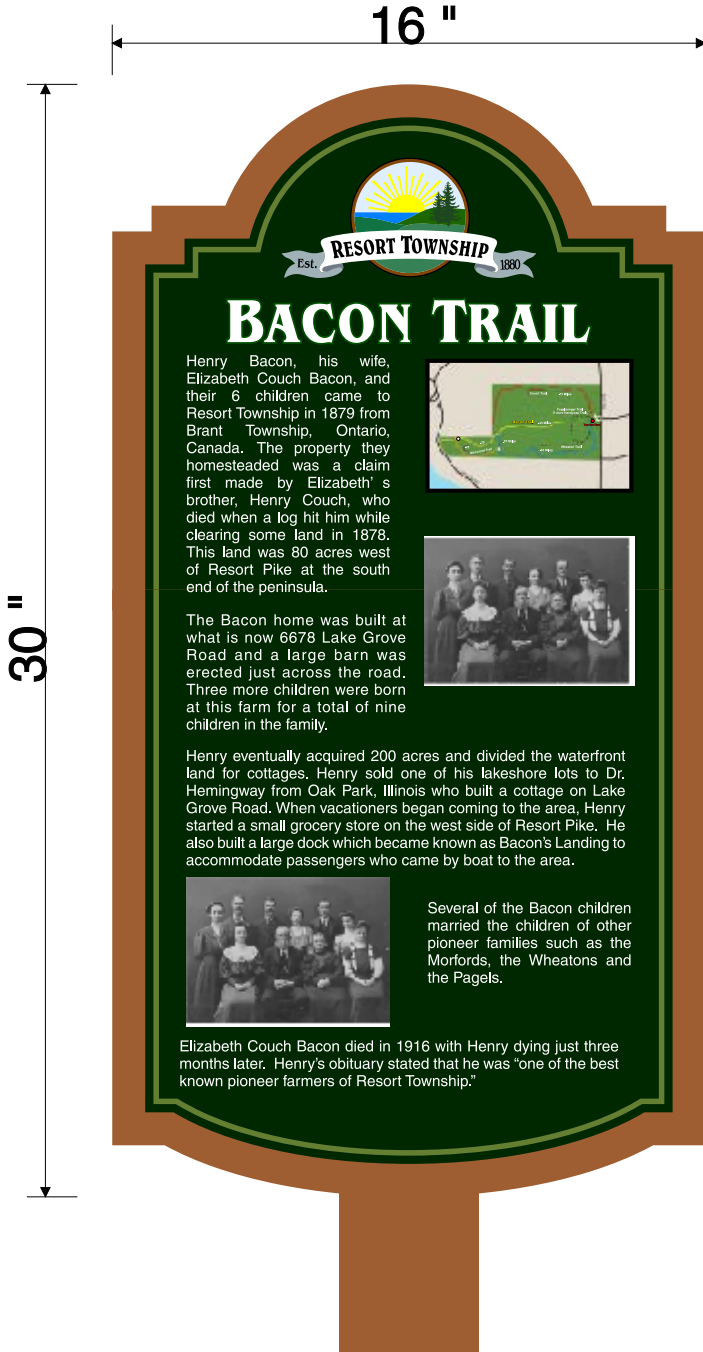
Bob Wheaton — who has family ties to the Wheatons recognized by the newly named trail — said there is more to each of the five families featured throughout the network, and users can read more at signs placed throughout the park.

“I have to thank Bob Beson, the owner of the property for his patience going through the grant process two times as well as the Michigan Department of Natural Resources trust fund and Randy Frykberg and Larry Houghton for support in doing the grant applications in 2011 and 2012,” Wheaton said. “Also to the four ladies who did all the research in the summer of 2017 in Jean Frentz, Laurie Lewis, Judy Reynolds and Jackie Wheaton. I can't forget the present and past township board members that have also been so supportive and the parks and rec committee who have put in a lot of time reviewing and re-reviewing this project.

“Some of them (parks and rec committee) for 15 years or more that started with a plan from only the Black property.”

Wheaton also commended Level Ground excavating for graveling the Bacon Trail, and said future updates are already planned for the trails.

“We’ll be adding some benches and we’re looking for used benches,” Wheaton said.
“We’ll be putting in a couple of kids attractions in the future as well and we’re looking for folks to volunteer to work on the trail with trimming trees and trail maintenance.”



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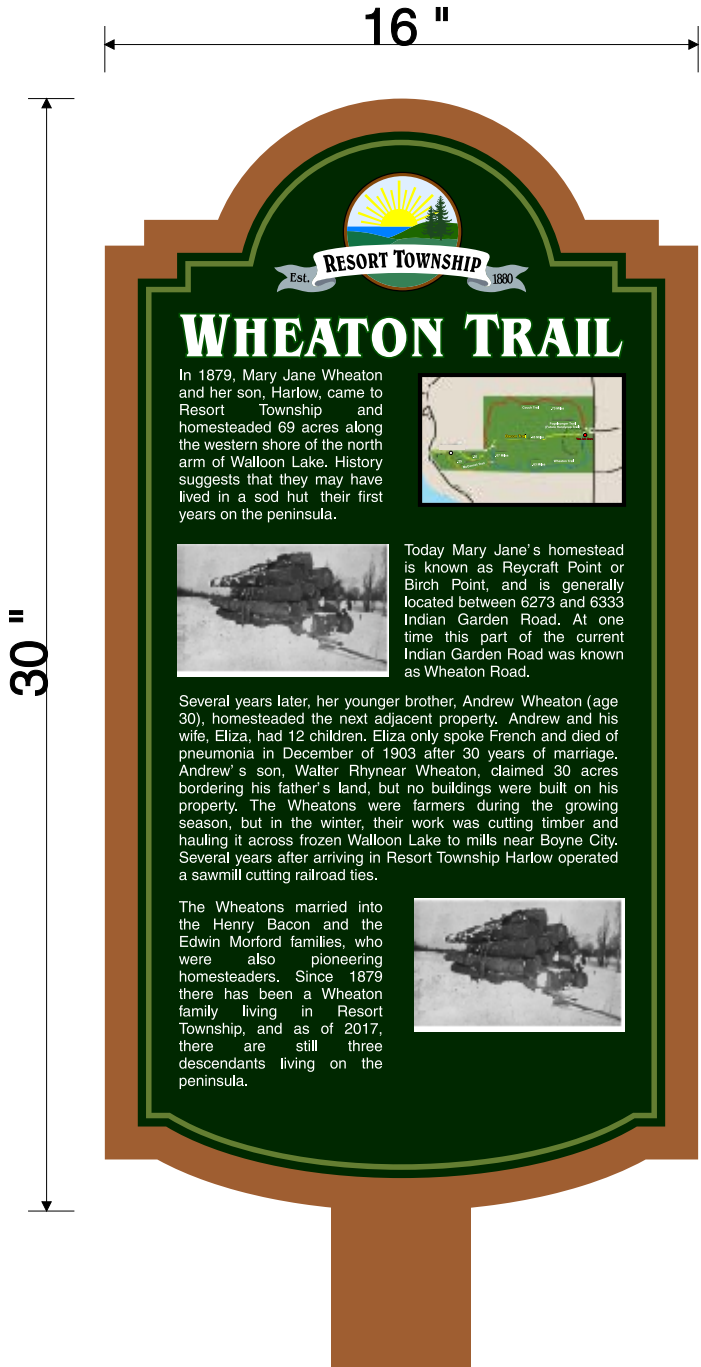
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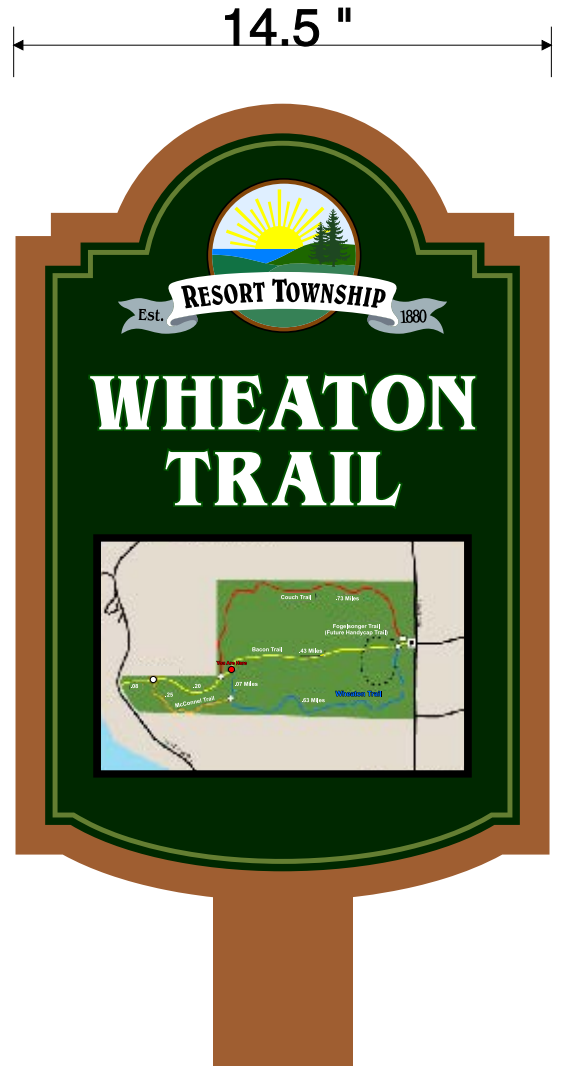


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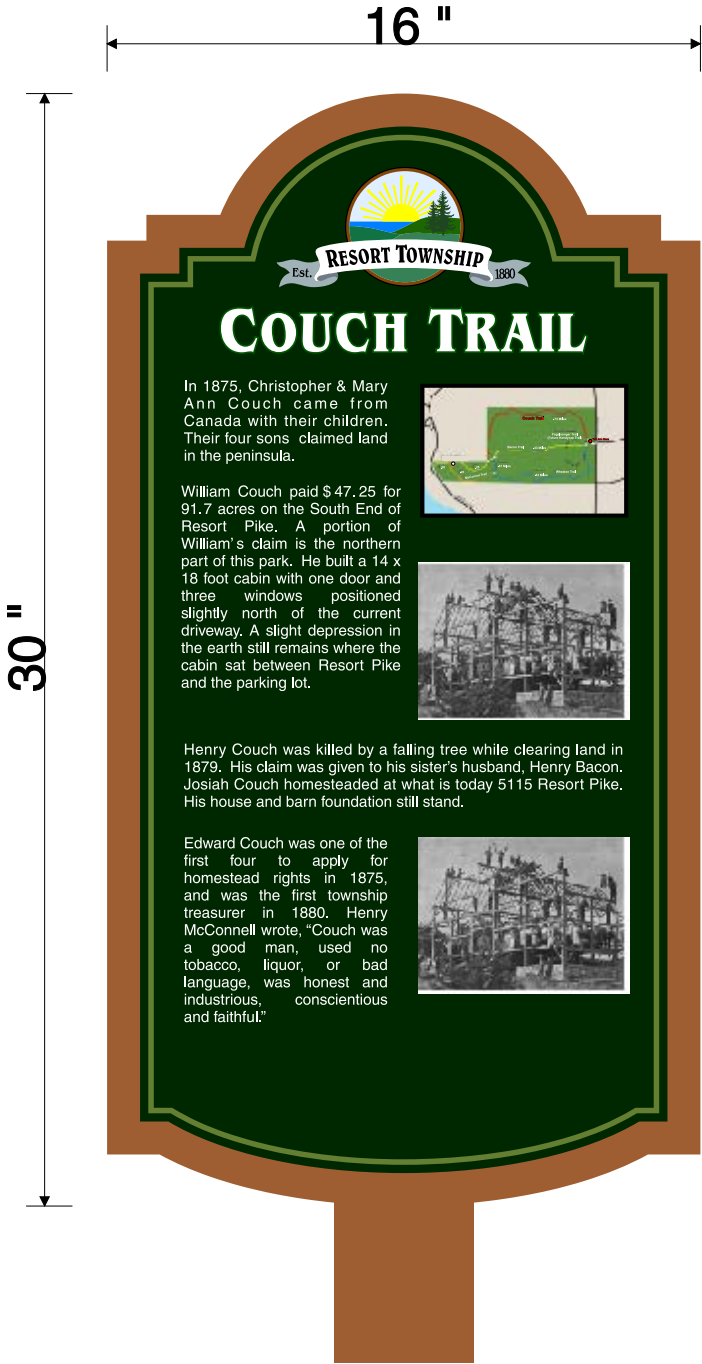
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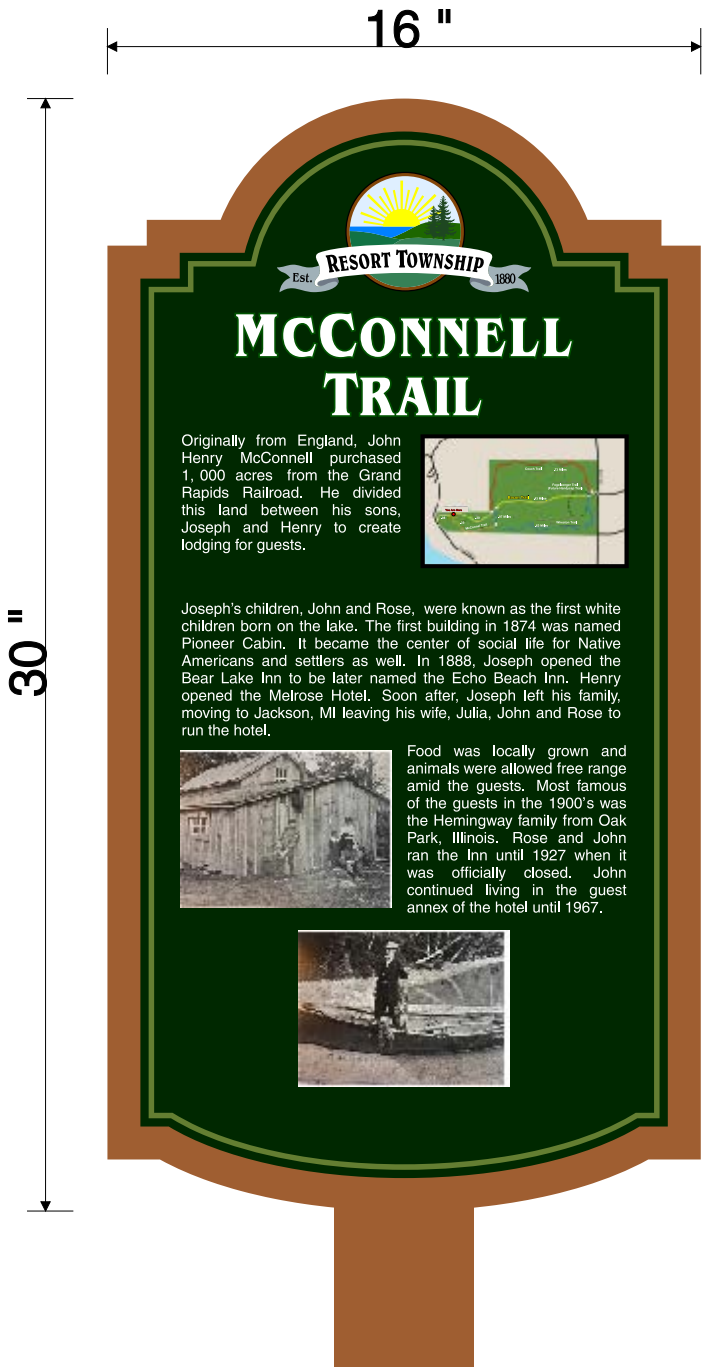
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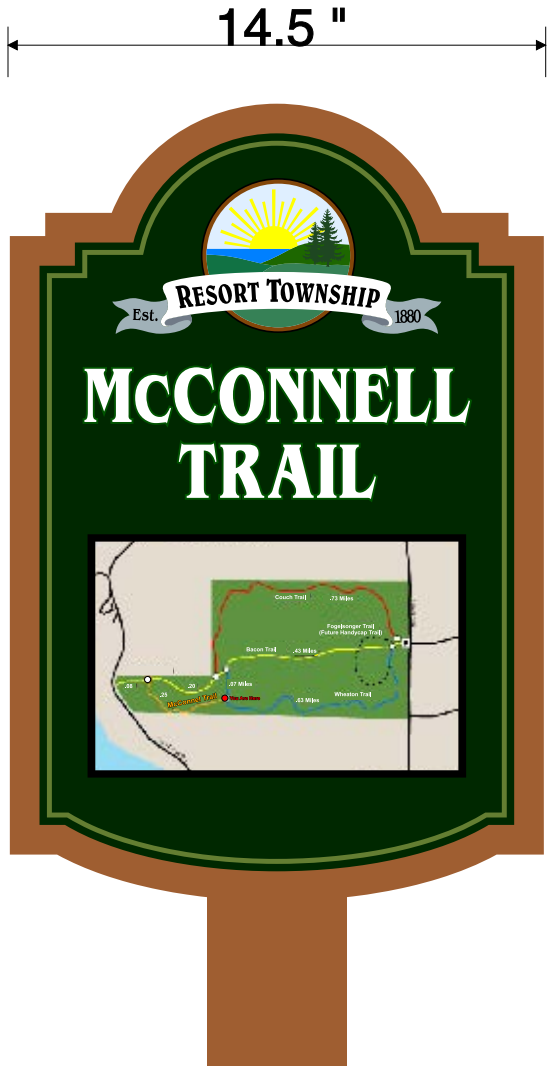


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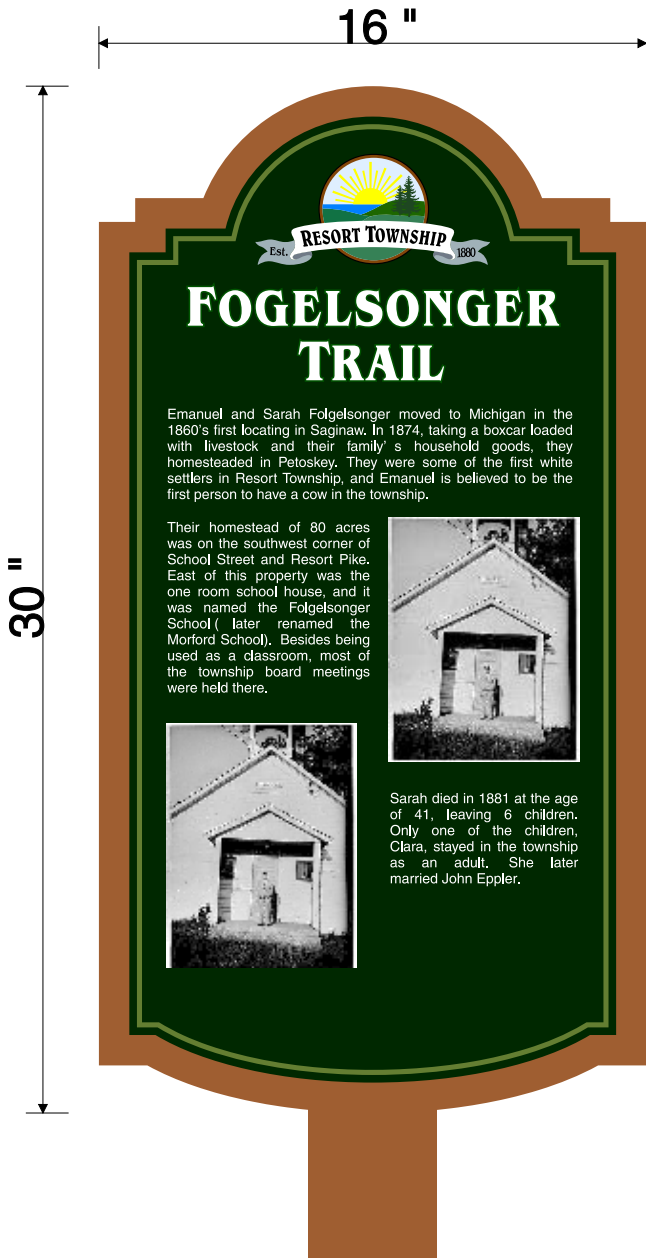
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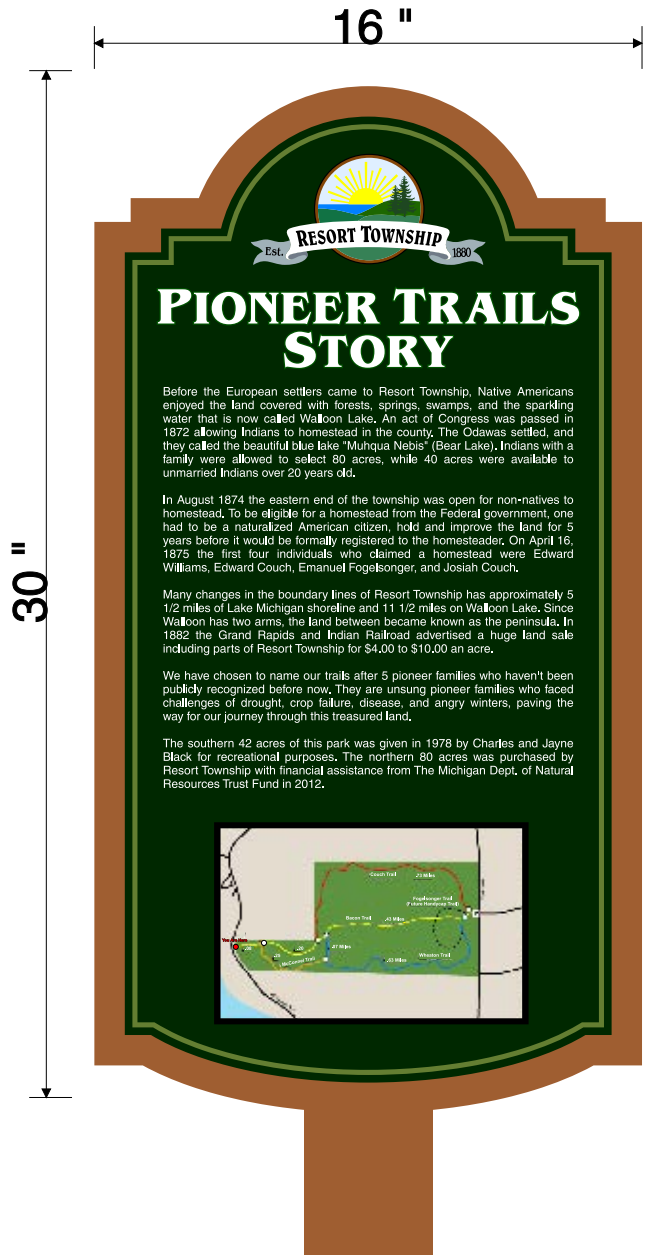
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