

History Explorer

A publication of the Historical Society of Greater Lansing

November 2003

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Season's Greetings



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Historic Explorer is published during the months of September to May by the HSGL. Articles and news of historical interest are always welcome.

"Do You Remember" & "Home-Coming" Interviews Lansing's Fire Department

From the *Lansing State Journal* - August 18, 1913

"Lansing's first fire department was a bucket brigade," said Gottlieb Berner whose reading of The State Journal's recent account of the fire department inspired a reminiscent mood. "During the early fifties the only bell was in Middle Town," as the present city was then called, "on the Presbyterian church on North Washington ave. This served as a fire alarm for the village."

"I remember an early fire, which broke out across the road from what was then known as the state house block" continued Mr. Berner. "It started in George Grove's hardware store. I heard the fire bell and ran from my home in the fourth ward, along with other residents, all of whom carried pails. A bucket brigade was formed and after a short fight the fire was extinguished."

Lynching Threatened

"A little later there was a fire, which started in a marble shop conducted by Charles Butler, where the Hotel Downey now stands. After the fire was put out by the bucket brigade an investigation was made and people said 'we've got fire bugs in Lansing.'

"Shortly after this a villager living at Teetertown, west of this city, caught a man running from a barn which had just been set afire. It developed that he was the same man who started the Lansing fires. The man was brought to Lansing and a crowd rapidly gathered. When they were in front of the state house somebody cried: 'Hang him!' A large flag pole stood nearby and he was taken to this and a rope tied around his neck, and the crowd started to pull him up.

"Dr. Shank who had heard the noise from his office an Allegan Street, ran across to the square and seeing the situation pushed through the crowd. He jumped onto the rope, and pulled the man down. Turning to the crowd he shouted: "Hold on men; do you know what you are doing? Give him to me, I'll take care of him.' The doctor was one of the prominent citizens of the town and the crowd obeyed him. They took the fellow off the rope and carried him to the doctor's office where I saw him laying on the lounge. The man was prosecuted and sent to Jackson for a term of years. It developed that he was a bad man and wanted in several parts of the state.



Dr. Hulbert Barton Shank, c. 1864
Born: May 31, 1820 - Springport, NY
Died: April 24, 1889 - Lansing, MI

At the age of 21 H.B. Shank began his study of medicine with Dr. Wertz at Waterloo, NY. He graduated in 1846 from Geneva Medical College and began his practice of medicine at Aurelius, NY. On December 22, 1847 he married Frances Phoebe Johnson. Dr. Shank accompanied his father-in-law to Lansing in the fall of 1848. He cleared the land where he built his home and office, residing there until his death in 1889. He was a member of the Michigan Legislature, 1861; Ingham County Republican Convention, 1861; Delegate to the Republican National Convention, 1856; member of the Reform School Board, President of the State Medical Society as well as one of Lansing's Fire Chiefs.

During the Civil War he served as Surgeon for the 8th Michigan Infantry from August 19, 1861 until his resignation on January 1, 1862. He was examiner for the 3rd Michigan District, stationed at Jackson, until the end of the war.

Lansing's Fire Department, continued..

Barn First Engine House

"Along about 1854 people began talking about getting a fire engine and they finally bought the one which is now on exhibition at No. 1 station. The hand engine was first placed in Lerue's livery barn, until an engine house was provided for it. The livery barn was on East Washtenaw st. and across the street from the old stage barn. An engine company was organized with Mr. Larue as chief. When a fire station was provided, Mr. Wescott was made chief and served for a number of years.

"In the meantime North Lansing was without fire protection of its own until after the burning of the Hart flour mill which also took Parmalee's woolen mill in 1876. No. 1 engine company came down to this fire, but the men neglected to put a basket over the suction and a stick of wood was drawn into the hose putting the engine out of commission. Nobody thought to dislodge the wood or investigate the trouble, but left the engine and devoted themselves to carrying wool out of the Parmalee mill across the river.

North Lansing then brought a fire engine and organized an engine company. I was a charter member of the company and at the first election was made second assistant foreman and in less than two months was made first assistant to succeed Mr. Cline who was advanced to foreman. At the next election I was elected foreman and remained in that position for several years.

Fighting was Infrequent

"I do not recall a fight that ever occurred between the 'Dutch' as they called us at the north end and the Middle Town company at a fire or on parade," said Mr. Berner in refutation of a recent interview. "On the other hand I've always noticed that when they had a big fire in the Middle Town, Chief Wescott was always glad to see Gottlieb Brenner and his 'Dutch' firemen.

"I remember a fire which occurred behind where the present Bijou stands. We went to the fire and had the first stream on the fire before No. 1 which had only to come from Allegan st. arrived and then No. 1's engine was out of order.

"The nearest we ever come to having a real fight between the two companies was at a fire which broke out in the basement of the Cedar st. school one Sunday. I had just come home from church and was at dinner when the bell rang. We ran to the engine house got out the engine and dragged it to the fire.

"The only water available was from Bryce's creek where we had dug a dam to hold the water and had the fire well under control when No. 1 arrived. Chief Wescott ordered No. 2 to take off their pipe line and attach to the box of No. 1.

"I stationed Cole, an assistant foreman beside No. 1 with a trumpet to let us know when they were ready. The signal was given and we went to work. Before long No. 1 engine was rocking and jumping the men from the men from the ground at every stroke, while the water, which overflowed from the pumps, drenched the men, who had to leave the engine.

"No. 1 boys were mad, but we walked up and laughed at them. There was no fight. I told Wescott never to order No. 2 to play in No. 1 engine if it was not necessary for we would wash them every time. We said that if there was a fire where it was

necessary to put the two engines together we would give them only as much water as they could discharge. We parted friends.

Lansing Buys Steamers

"Lansing at large felt the need of steamers and two were brought here for trial. They were Silsbee engines and we tried them out on the ice below Michigan ave. bridge. Jim Mitien, an alderman from the first ward, came to me on the ice and asked: 'Gottlieb,

which would you have?' I said, 'If you buy any buy both, for if you buy a steamer for Middle town, you can't expect us to drag an engine through the mud following a horse-drawn engine to a fire.

"The next morning I got word to get my team and hitch onto Capt. Jones engine and take it to the North Lansing Station. After a little trial and exhibition at the north end, the steamer was placed in the engine house. Until the purchase of a team by the city, I always hitched my own team onto the engine whenever a fire broke out.

Strategy Wins Contest

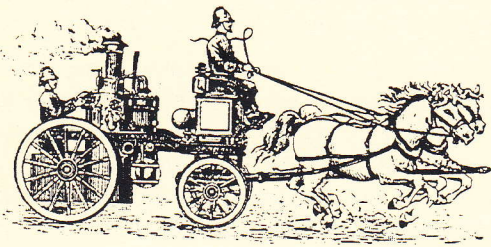
"It was proposed that the engineers had to practice, so we came up every Saturday afternoon for exhibitions on the ice at Kalamazoo st. No. 2 had a man named Rogers for engineman and he knew his business well: No. 1's engine was operated by a Mr. Berner, who was a tinsmith. It was frequently observed that No. 2 engine frequently threw water higher than No. 1 so John Robson ordered that at the next test both engines should have just 60 pounds of steam and than an accurate test of the two machines could be made.

"Next Saturday when we started to pump water I held the nozzle for we had no hose men. The pressure was so great that the hose squired and dragged me about the ice so that I dropped it. A crowd of school boys standing nearby took hold of it and had great fun. It was observed that the No. 2 engine was throwing water from 50 to 60 feet higher than No.1.



Lansing Fire Department Station No. 1, March 27, 1904.

Horse-drawn chemical apparatus was usually the first line of defense for the community until the steamer was ready for pumping water. In the 1904 photograph of L.F.D. Station No. 1, Chemical Co. No. 1 is on the left, and Hose Co. No. 1 is on the right. Prior to the organization of the Lansing Fire Department in 1857, the only protection against fire was a volunteer ladder and bucket brigade.



Steam Fire Engines

by Dave Pfaff

Did you ever wonder why a smoke belching, horse pulled machine is shown careening toward a burning building in illustrations from the turn of the twentieth century? That smoking machine was actually going to help put out the fire, not contribute to it! It was the “high tech” fire engine of the time, actually a mobile water pump. It belched smoke because it was a wood or coal burning steam engine specially built to power a water pump, either rotary or inline piston design. Note: A steam engine is a machine that uses high pressure steam to power a piston or pistons to do work; i.e. pump water, run an electrical generator, power farm equipment or pull a train. The steam is produced in a boiler by burning fuel, wood, coal, gas, etc. The steam powered fire engine was a portable steam engine to drive a water pump with its own boiler and fuel supply on board, pulled by horses to the site of the fire. The belching smoke was enhanced by the exhaust of the steam cylinder being vented into the boiler smoke stack to aid the draft of the fire. Steam locomotives used the same system.

The following is an excerpt from *The New Catechism of The Steam Engine* by N. Hawkins, M.E., published in 1897. The fireman of that time needed an entirely different store of knowledge from the fireman of today.

Instructions for the Care and Management of Steam Fire Engines

1st. When standing in the engine house, keep the water so as to show in the glass gauge.

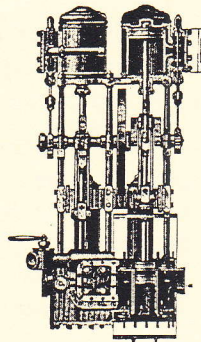
2nd. Keep the furnace charged with shavings and kindling wood, coal in tender, and all things ready to start at a moment's warning.

3rd. In case quick steam is required, draw the water down to the second cock, located at rear of boiler to right of tender.

4th. If quickest possible steam is required, draw the water down to the second cock, which is located on the engineer's side, just under the tool box.

Author's note: The fastest heating of the water to make steam was with the lowest level of water in the boiler.

5th. Let the proximity of the fire determine how soon steam is wanted. In many cases steam can be generated by starting with water in glass gauge, as quickly as hose can be laid and water called for. By carrying out these directions, the amount of water to be heated is proportioned to the time steam is required, and the peculiar construction of the boiler admits of this being done with perfect safety.



Piston Pump

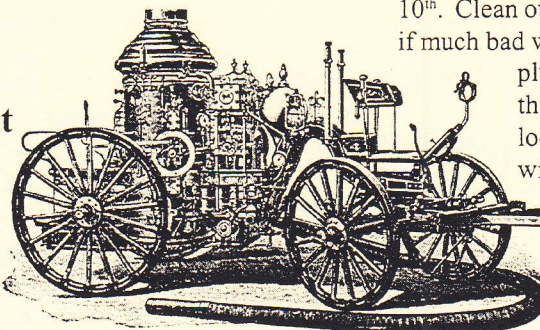
6th. Start soon as you have forty to sixty pounds of steam, and as fast as possible feed the boiler until you have from two to four inches in the glass gauge. Keep the water at this point as uniformly as possible. A little practice will enable you to regulate the feed so as to keep it nearly stationary.

7th. Do not depend too much on the glass gauge; use the “try-cocks” frequently.

8th. Should your feed-pump get out of order or your water get too low while running, feed from “main way”. In such case, should water pressure happen to be less than the steam pressure, shut down the outlet valves until the water pressure is sufficient to feed.

9th. If you are using bad water, and your boiler shows signs of “foaming,” use the surface-blower freely.

10th. Clean out boiler once or twice a year, or oftener, if much bad water is used. To do this remove the mud plugs at bottom of boiler and those above the crown-sheet, insert a stiff wire and loosen the sediment; then rinse thoroughly with water through upper holes.



11th. If you desire to keep your machine clean, and looking well, wipe it thoroughly soon as you get in, and while hot. Polish the nickel with compound of Vienna lime, or whiting and spirits, and a little ammonia.

12th. To examine the pump valves, unscrew the lids with the wrench supplied for the purpose; simply loosen the nuts on stud bolts which run between the lids, and lift the lids off.

13th. When running, keep the engine and pump, and all other bearings, well oiled. Oil the engine frequently by means of the oil-pump.

14th. Use the best quality lard oil in summer and machine sperm oil in summer. *Author's note: Sperm oil came from sperm whales.*

15th. After running, remove or take up the suction; open all the small petcocks, (*valves*) and close the valves to the outlets; start engine again and pump up about five pounds of air pressure; this will blow out all the water. After the pipes are drained, open one of the outlets and feed four or five cups of oil into the pump. This will

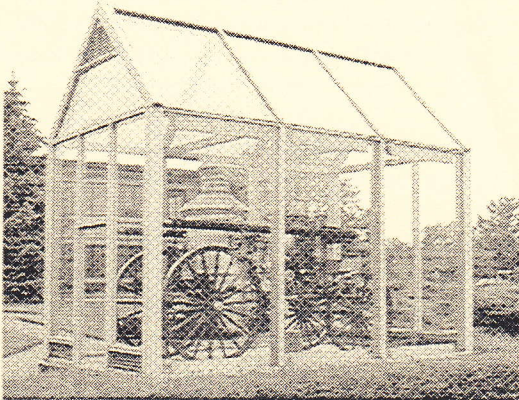
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Steam Fire Engines, continued..

distribute oil thoroughly over the pump surfaces, and prevent rusting while standing in the house. Also, oil the engine last thing before shutting down.

16th. If your engine is of the rotary type, turn the engine several times around with a spanner once or twice a week to prevent the cams remaining too long in one position. This should not be neglected.

There are several terms and phrases in the above that were probably common knowledge of firemen of the time or perhaps they were explained in the "owner's manual", but don't mean anything to most people at this time..



American Fire Engine Co, steam fire engine on display in front of Michigan Millers Insurance Co., 2425 E. Grand River Avenue in Lansing.

Traverse City was known as the "Queen City of the North" The "Queen City" fire engine has a two cylinder piston pump.

A beautiful example of a steam fire engine is on display at the Sloan Museum in Flint, Michigan. The term "beautiful" is used as the engine is also an expression of the machine builder's art. The engine is polished and the components are gracefully and artistically made. This is a common trait for machines of this era. **RE**

A nice example of a steam fire engine is on display in front of Michigan Millers Insurance Company at 2425 East Grand River Avenue in Lansing. This particular machine was built by the American Fire Engine Company, of Cincinnati, Ohio in 1895 and was used by Traverse City, Michigan until 1917 when it was replaced by a gasoline engine powered fire truck.

Michigan Miller's Insurance Company was founded in 1881 by flour mill owners from ten mid-Michigan communities to insure their mills.. By 1900 it was offering other types of insurance as well.

Lansing's Fire Department, continued from Page 2

"I went to No. 2 engine and saw the steam gauge registered just 60 pounds pressure. I said to Rogers: 'You can't fool me any longer, you've got more than 60 pounds.' He said: 'We've got nearer to 120.' I said: 'She'll blow up' but Rogers assured me that he knew the Capt. Jones. Robson came up and said he was satisfied with the tests, that we need not come up any more.

Still Has Old Trophy

"A trumpet, which I have won by No. 2 company in a tournament between Ann Arbor and Ionia and the two Lansing companies. Dr. Shank was chief at that time. I suggested that the tests be made in North Lansing at Franklin ave and Cedar st. where was a large self-filling reservoir, and an intersection of streets which permitted water to be thrown in any direction, according to the wind.

"Each company was given 15 minutes in which to lay their pipe line, set their engine and play a stream of water. Ionia and the visiting companies were first. When No. 2's time came their engine was set and as soon as the water turned on a hose burst. Another was substituted and the pressure blew the nozzle off. Meanwhile Ionia company was shouting encouragement and we had seven minutes remaining of our time. A third time we made ready and threw a stream 25 feet farther than any competition.

"The first prize a \$50 trumpet was awarded to No. 2 company. When the company disbanded I was presented with the trumpet, which I still have. At my death I have arranged that the trophy shall be given to the Lansing fire department as a relic. **RE**

Thank you!

The Historical Society of Greater Lansing takes this opportunity to salute the men and women of the Lansing Fire Department and surrounding fire departments for their service to our community.

R.E. Olds

-The Man-

His Enterprises, Philanthropy, and Diversions



A Publication in Conjunction with the REO Centennial 1904-2004

Researched and Compiled by Dave Pfaff

R.E. Olds -The Man-

A new 36 page booklet is now available on the many facets of R.E. Olds, beyond the well known founding of Oldsmobile and REO. Sections of the booklet include: R.E. Olds Businesses (19 items); Sites and Charities (12 plus items); The Olds Family Homes; Metta Woodward Olds; Oldsmar, Florida; Charities; The Olds' Yachts; and The Olds Family Travels. Also included are 22 R.E. Olds related illustrations.

This is the only publication that puts all this information on R.E. Olds in one place and is the most comprehensive listing available.

The booklet is published in conjunction with the REO Centennial being celebrated in 2004, in Lansing, Michigan. Proceeds will go to the REO Centennial Committee and the R.E. Olds Transportation Museum.

To receive your copy, send a check or money order for \$5.00 which includes U.S. postage to:

David R. Pfaff, 12167 Airport Road, DeWitt, Michigan 48820



The Gift Shop

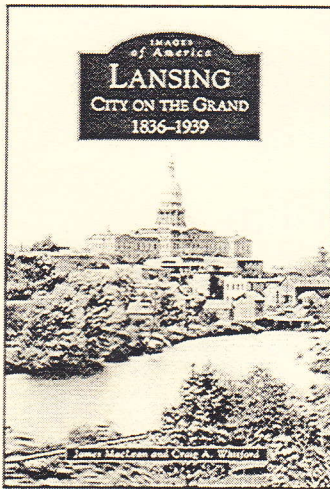
A few suggestions for those local historians on your shopping list

The following gifts will be available for purchase during our November 19th meeting.

- 1 Give the Gift of History with a membership in the Historical Society of Greater Lansing

Individual Memberships: \$15/year
Family Memberships: \$25/year

- 2 Lansing: City On The Grand, 1836-1939



By James MacLean & Craig A. Whitford

Lansing's history as the capital of Michigan began with a legislative mandate in the 1835 State Constitution, which required that the seat of government be moved from Detroit in 1847. The result – the emergence of a new capital city on the banks of the majestic Grand River – allowed Lansing to cultivate a world-class community based in government, education, the automotive industry and entrepreneurial achievements. This book features more than 200 historic photographs that document the dynamic capital city during its pivotal first century, from the pioneer era to the inception of the Olds Motor Vehicle Company and through the eve of World War II.

\$19.99 (plus tax)

Published by Arcadia,
An Imprint of Tempus Publishing, Inc.

- 3 AIRPORT KID - Learning To Fly



By Marion "Babe" Weyant Ruth

The true account of Lansing's most famous aviatrix - Marion "Babe" Weyant, a teenage girl with a passion for aviation and a desire to take flight. Originally written by Babe in 1936, the story traces her adventure from 1931 until soloing at the age of 18 in 1936. Over 150 photographs and vintage news clippings are featured in 96 pages, capturing the excitement of her journey, the pilots she encountered and her interest in aviation which she continues to share.

\$20.00 (plus tax)

Published by
Michigan Historical Press, Lansing

- 4 Discovering Ingham County

A Descriptive Bibliography

By Eugene G. Wanger

This 100+ page edition is a sequel to Mr. Wanger's *INGHAM COUNTY HISTORIES: An Annotated Bibliography for Students, Buffs and Collectors...* "an interesting and useful guide for discovering the history and historical resources of Ingham County, The Capital County of Michigan..." Published by the Ingham County Historical Commission.

\$15.00 (plus tax)

Published by the
Ingham County
Historical Commission

HSGL 2003-2004 Calendar

Reserve these historic dates now!

November 19, 2003

Lansing, City On The Grand, 1836-1939
with James MacLean & Craig A. Whitford

Book signing & presentation of historic Lansing photographs.

Friend's Auditorium - 7:00 P.M.

Capital Area District Library, 401 S. Capitol, Lansing

January 21, 2004

Reo Joe: Work, Kin & Community

with Lisa M. Fine, Associate Professor of History, MSU

A REO Centennial Program exploring the workers and families of the REO Motor Car Company.

Friend's Auditorium - 7:00 P.M.

Capital Area District Library, 401 S. Capitol, Lansing

March 17, 2004

History of Your Home II: Construction Clues

with Robert "Rock" Hudson

Learn about the history of your home from the foundation up with this informative presentation.

Friend's Auditorium - 7:00 P.M.

Capital Area District Library, 401 S. Capitol, Lansing

March 20, 2004

The David R. Caterino Collector's Showcase

Collectors from throughout Ingham County gather to share their collections of photographs, memorabilia and more. There is no charge for displaying your collection of local history artifacts.

Library Galleries, Lower Level - 10 A.M.-4 P.M.

Capital Area District Library, 401 S. Capitol, Lansing

May 19, 2004

125th Anniversary of the State Capitol
Annual Membership Dinner & Election
State Capitol, Lansing

Reservations are required for this evening filled with the history of our State Capitol. Enjoy fellowship with area historians and history buffs, as well as a tour of the Capitol building during its 125th Anniversary celebration.

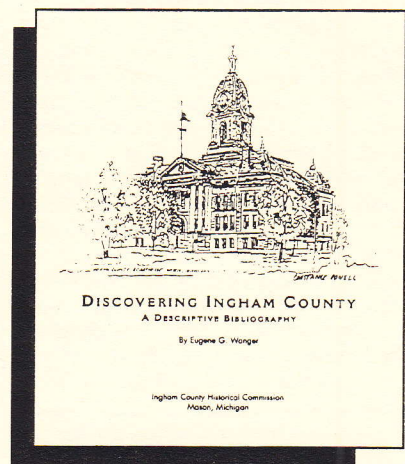


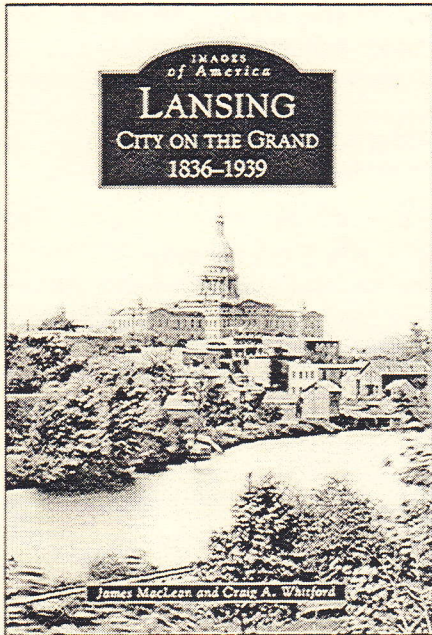
Photo Presentation & Book Signing with the authors

Lansing:

City On The Grand, 1836-1939

with authors James MacLean & Craig A. Whitford

Jim and Craig will share with us their favorite photographs featured in *Lansing: City On The Grand, 1836-1939*, along with their experiences in selecting images for the latest pictorial history on our Capital City. A book signing will follow the program. Bring your copy or purchase one from the Historical Society of Greater Lansing.



Published by Arcadia, An Imprint of Tempus Publishing, Inc.

Join Us... **Wednesday,**
November 19, 2003
7:00 P.M.

Friend's Auditorium
Main Library - Capital Area District Library
401 S. Capitol, Lansing



Season's Greetings

Please RSVP to:

Change Service Requested

Historical Society
of Greater Lansing
P.O. Box 12095 Lansing, MI 48901