

# History Explorer

A publication of the Historical Society of Greater Lansing

May 2005

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## Historical Society of Greater Lansing

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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

From the *Lansing Journal*, August 15, 1913

*Continued for our March Issue*

"About 30 rods farther on his track led to a clear space. I couldn't see him from the thicket so I stepped out into a clean spot and there he stood not over 15 feet away looking at me in wonderment. He stood stock still for an instant. Evidently it was the first time he had seen a nude hunter. As I raised my gun, however, he bounded across the space. I fired and he winced but kept on running with me in close pursuit. He ran out of sight behind a bush. I went around and saw he try to jump over a high log that stuck up in his path. He landed square on top of the log - dead. I was naked and had no knife so I had to go back to my canoe. I dressed myself and went back and dragged him to the river, got him into the canoe and brought him to town. I got that deer just north of where the School for the Blind is now located.



*Chief Okemos*

"The woods were full of them then. Deer, wild turkey, partridge, all kinds of game. I sometimes had as many as 28 deer ahead of me in a drove. The venison sold cheap then and there was little money to be made hunting. We hunted to live and for the sport we got out of it. Hunting and trapping were the popular pastimes in those days.

"I remember another time I shot a big buck deer down where the wheelbarrow factory now stands. We had some men working on a building at the time. I always took my rifle to

work with me so that I could bag some game if the chances were good. I also used to shoot black squirrels on the way to and from my work. Well the time I mention I was out hunting for squirrel not deer. It was all wood around here then. Suddenly I heard a loud splashing in the river. I

was near the edge of the bank and as I looked out into the bed of the stream I saw a buck, his graceful antlers sweeping the sky majestically, swimming down the stream directly toward me. I waited until he was within five rods of me and then fired. I missed and he swung quickly around and started fro the opposite bank. I was pretty mad for I thought I could put a black squirrel's eyes out at a distance. I got my gun loaded as quickly as possible and pulled as he was ready to take to the other shore. I fired again and he flatten out in the

water, his head on the bank of the river. I went over to him and discovered that the bullet had entered the butt of his ear. This is a fatal spot to aim at and I had hit it three times as far away as my first shot.

"Before I got to the deer though two dogs jumped out of the bushes and tried to haul him ashore. I drove the dogs away and swam with the deer in tow across the river. That is quite a little trick in itself. I wonder if there are many living in Lansing that have ever swam across a river towing a dead deer? Well I got across

*Continued on Page 2*

## Join Us...

**May 7, 2005: Ingham County Courthouse Centennial Celebration**

The David R. Caterino Collector's Showcase will be taking place in the Courthouse during the Celebration. Activities begin at 10AM with a Ceremony at 10:30 AM. **Don't Miss It!**



*"Do You Remember", continued...*

anyway and procured a wagon from an old man who was picking up wood. I carted the deer into my brother-in-law's place where I was then boarding. Two men were working for me at the time and we just started skinning the buck. I was just started on one leg when I looked up and saw an Indian skulking along the road. It was just about dusk. The Indian turned and came in through the gate. He saw us working away at the deer and approached. It was John Okemos, son of the old chief. When he reached us he said in broken English.

"Umph! Killum deer"

"Yes' I said 'John we kill deer. What of it?'"

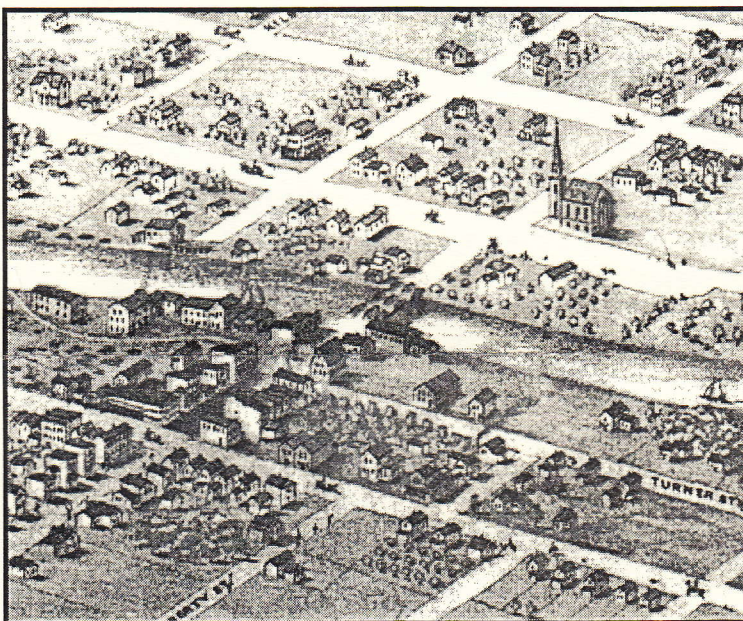
"Me shootem deer," answered John.

"No I says John, I guess not."

"Yes, me shootem. Big marsh. Me start him at sunrise."

"And John made a semi-circle with his arm indicating that he had trailed the buck the distance of more then four miles. John had traced the deer to me and said the deer was on his way back home. Then he stepped up to the deer and showed me where the hair and skin had been grazed on the deer's belly. The Indian's bullet hadn't injured the deer at all but the Indian and his dogs had followed the animal all day long. In those days the rule was that the man who drew first blood on any animal was entitled to one-fourth the venison and the hide in addition.

"Well if you help me skin him I'll make it right with you 'John.' He helped and I gave him his quarter of the venison, three shillings in money and invited him to supper. He had been hunting all day and a white man's meal appealed to his hungry soul. He accepted the invitation and ate more than any three men I ever saw. But he went away satisfied. I knew John well. He married into a Chippewa family and later had some matrimonial troubles. John was an Ottawa. The Okemos settlements were at Chumican, 20 miles from Lansing and at Okemos. Old Okemos was a bright Indian. Some say he was 105 years old but I think that is a mistake. I knew him well. He was a warrior all the way through. He was left twice on the battlefield for dead. Once he went with a party of 20 Indians to help the British under General Brock in their siege against Fort Croghan in the War of 1812. I have often heard my father tell of the chief. Fort Croghan was located where Fremont Ohio now is. The Indian party got in the woods near the fort when they saw a troop of American Cavalry coming. Okemos saw that the cavalry were too much for him and as he used to say himself when telling of the incident afterward, 'we hid up a heap quick.' The cavalry got partly past when one of the young braves fired a shot. That revealed the hiding place and the cavalry turned and charged into the brush. The Indians were all cut down. Okemos was wounded and lay quiet until darkness fell.



*North Lansing, c. 1866*

Then he gave an Indian signal an owl hoot, it was a signal for all those pretending to be dead to get up. His half brother was the only member of the band who was not dead. He was wounded but answered the call and together they crawled to the river where they washed their wounds and made their way back home to Chumican. He was there 14 months recovering from his wounds and then joined General Brock's army in Canada. He was in the battle of the Thames when General Harrison met and defeated the British and the Indians. On that occasion Okemos was again left on the battlefield for dead. He was as sly as he was tough.

"He returned to the settlement around Lansing and when he got well he went to Detroit to the commanding officer and said: 'Me fight heap nuff! Me fight Shemokeyman no more.' Shemokeyman was his word for American. Yes, Okemos was also a fine orator in his Indian tongue. He could make a great speech and held a position of influence. He made a speech at the treaty of Mackinaw that carried them all the way, both the Americans and the Indians. In his battles for home and country he displayed a patriotism that has always been admired. He was a small man 5 feet 6 inches in height bit well built. He was keenly sensitive as to his treatment by the whites. I've had my hand on his head lots of time and I can't compare the feeling to anything but the feeling of a rough iron-wood knot it was cut up so with many scars.

"I loved the pioneer life. I was born a pioneer in Orleans county N.Y. on January 1, 1821. Western New York was a wild country then. We lived there until I was five years old

when my father concluded to come to Michigan. We landed in Detroit by way of the Erie Canal and Lake Erie in May 1826, 87 years ago. That seems a long time ago to you but it doesn't to me. Detroit then had about 1600 inhabitants. We lived there during the summer and then in October moved to Ypsilanti, which was a little cluster of groceries and wood shacks in the forest. Father built a log cabin on the banks of the river on the trail where the wild Indians use to pass. We lived in that neighborhood six years and then went back to New York. When I can again to the west it was to settle in Lansing just 66 years ago.

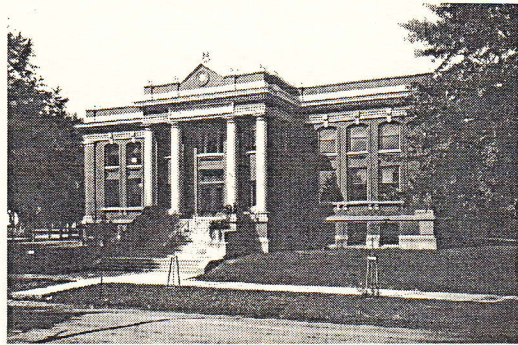
"It has all changed so since then, from a mass of wilderness to a city of civilization. It grew slow in the woods. The first year or two there were two or three log houses between Michigan and Franklin sts but the rest was all woods. We used to go from North Lansing to 'Middletown' to vote. There was always strife between the settlers of the different parts. I was brought up a wig. We used to hold caucuses when there wouldn't be more than a corporal's guard turning out to attend. The northsiders would come home from the polls swearing mad when things didn't go just the way

*Continued on Page 3*



Lansing's Carnegie Library, c. early 1900's

Lansing original public library was located in the High School building for twenty-two years, in 1897 the library was moved to the Old City Hall building, and thanks to the aid of the Ladies Library Association and the Young Men's Society the library's collection grew to 13,000 volumes. Later, the State Librarian Mrs. Mary C. Spencer corresponded with Andrew Carnegie and obtained the promise of \$35,000 for a new building provided the city would furnish a site and provide \$3,500 a year to maintain the library. The building, located at 310 W. Shiawassee, was constructed of red pressed brick with the accents being Amherst stone and had the capacity to house 20,000 volumes. The library opened in 1905 and served the needs of the community until 1964 when a new library was opened on S. Capitol Ave. Currently the building is owned by Lansing Community College and serves as an educational facility. The building is an outstanding example of the architectural style of that period. (FPML/CADL.)



*Proposed Bylaw Change*

The Historical Society of Greater Lansing Board is proposing a change in the number of Trustees beginning with the 2007 election cycle.

The proposed change affects Section III which states "eight trustees." The proposal is to change the number of trustees from eight to four.

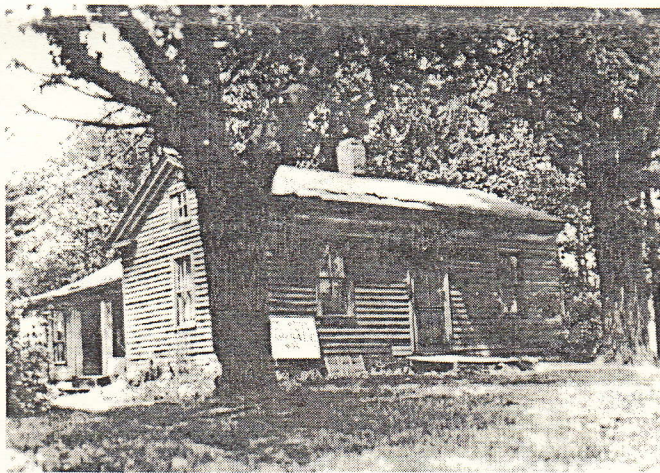
Beginning with the 2007 election only two trustees would be elected from the four open positions and in 2008 the final two trustees would be elected from the remaining four open positions. Thus preserving the two-year election cycle, and reducing the board to four trustees with the 2008 election.

Discussion and a vote by the membership will occur during our May 18, 2005 Annual Meeting.

*"Do You Remember", continued..*

they desired. Then they would call an indignation meeting and make speeches against Middletown and Uppertown saying they haven't been given a fair show and so on. The uprising would invariable subside and everything would quiet down until the next election.

"The town grew slowly. Vast places were then contracted to be cleared and for two or three years the cleared places grew up in fireweeds and thistles as high as a man's head. Then came the Civil War. Several hundred volunteers went away from Lansing and the surrounding country. Lansing grew by stages but its great development has been in the last 10 years. In the early days I was a hunter and a trapper on the shores of Ontario, Erie and Superior, in the woods with the whites and the Indians. For the last three or four years I have been canvassing for books. It is a slightly different life, isn't it. I'll take the woods for mine. I am 92 years eight months old and have spent most of my time in the woods. Everything was cheap. Two dollars a day was big pay. The woods were full of game. Eggs were six and seven cents a dozen, butter sold at twelve cents a pound. I once bought 300 hogs at 20 shillings a hundred. There was better cooking. The housewives of today can't compete with the cooking of our mothers and grandmothers. We had plenty of time to eat and sleep and hunt. Land! We could hunt all day long, year in and year out, and never kill one-tenth of the game that roamed the woods and ravines.



The home of James Turner in North Lansing

with its vari-colored foliage at autumn time I seem to see the shades of those old warriors resting there in the quiet and solitude of their surroundings.

"In the wild woods in the midst of solitude and silence. I've been lost in the woods many times but I always found my way out. I was never lonesome there with the tall trees for company. I enjoyed it all. Give me my rifle and hand-axe and the woods and I'll be happy. I enjoyed camping out. In the coldest of winters we could fix a comfortable sleeping place in less than 30 minutes. My greatest desire now is to go up north and hunt. All is confusion now, with factory whistles screaming the blatant calls to work, and people, people everywhere.

"I still have my muzzle-loader as you see and my powder-horn and bullet poach which my father made more than 100 years ago. Sometime ago I took them down off the wall just to try myself out for I expect to take a hunting trip this fall. I paced off 15 yards from a piece of paper two inches square. The first shot cut the corner of the target and the second struck just off the edge of the paper. Both shots would have killed a black squirrel."

The old pioneer hunter bowed his head and was lost in thought for a moment. "Yes give me back my woods." He murmured. "I can hear the tall hemlocks calling and I can't find them there. Give me back the woods." **RE**

*Who was John N. Bush?*

John N. Bush settled in Lansing in 1847 and resided in the city until his death at 95 in June of 1916. He was a member of the First Baptist Church, an alderman and supervisor for the Fourth Ward, a member of the Republican Central Committee in 1888 and 1890 and was a friend of the Ottawa Indians who lived in central Michigan. He was married to Miss Ann E. Powell in September of 1849, who taught in Lansing's first school. They were blessed with seven children, of which only one survived John Bush.

"I have been in five different political campaigns during my time. The republican committee hired me to stump the state. I have made speeches from Lake Erie to Superior as a laboring man. But give me the beauty of the forest at autumn time when the leaves are bronzed and the whole scene reeks with splendor. Old Okemos use to tell me a story when I was a boy about a fierce battle the Indians had when every brave was slain. Every time I see the forest



# R. E. Olds in Bronze

by Mia B. Tioli

In January of 2005 an event of great historic importance took place in Lansing, Michigan. Of course, the impact will not be truly known for years to come, so think of it as history in the making. It was then that a group of concerned citizens took initiative, and formed a committee with one purpose in mind - a life sized bronze sculpture of Ransom Eli Olds, of portrait quality.

If you are reading this article, you are interested in Lansing history. Therefore, it should not be necessary to recount all of the reasons that this tribute is an absolute must, or that it is long overdue. Mr. Olds, inventor and industrialist, was a great benefactor of the greater Lansing area. His automotive pioneering changed the face of Michigan, and the world, and with development of two auto factories here, he certainly changed the face of Lansing. His tower defines our city skyline. R. E. Olds called Lansing home - and we are calling him ours.


That is how we came to name our project "A City's Ransom in Bronze". Our first item of business was to solicit requests from Michigan artists who wanted to be considered for the job. We asked that they have plenty of experience, and a foundry based in Michigan. Once we had the portfolios of those artists, we had our hardest assignment - choose the best one. We selected a local sculptor, Nancy Leiserowitz of Mason, Michigan.

Once we had commissioned our sculptor, we set about establishing our budget, and fund raising for the project. The entire sculpture, with design fees, installation, and a maintenance endowment brings our cap to \$75,000.00. There are hundreds of locations in the greater Lansing area where

installation would be appropriate for Mr. Olds tribute. We have decided that the best place for this art to be exhibited would be at the R. E. Olds Transportation Museum, and they will be the custodians through time. It will be public art.

How can my fellow Historical Society members be of help? As of this writing, we have collected \$30,660.00 of our \$75 thousand needed. Not even halfway there yet. The plan was to unveil the sculpture in summer of 2005. As you can see, we will have to delay that celebration. I am hopeful that many of you will see the need for this overdue tribute, and you will help us reach our goal. We must stem the tide of forgetfulness that is overtaking the memory of our Ransom.

Our committee remains: "Bunny" Olds Roe Smith, Honorary Chair; Mia Tioli, Chair; Deborah Horstik, Vice-Chair; Sue Mills, Treasurer; Lori McSweeney, Secretary; Members-Catherine Babcock, Sue Cantlon, Lori Lanspeary, Harold Leeman Jr., Dan Shafarman, Erik Larson, and Dave Violetta. Our project counsel is James R. Neal, Atty.

This sculpture will be accompanied through history with an acknowledgment board, and I would really like to see the Historical Society of Greater Lansing named on that board. Of course, if you are a member of the society, I would like to see your name on that board also! If you have questions about the project or would like to receive a donation form, please call me (517) 887-2089, or call the R. E. Olds Transportation Museum at (517) 372-0529. Our committee is "ad hoc" under the auspices of the museum, so all of your donations are tax deductible. 



*Please Join Us.....*

**Ingham County Courthouse  
Centennial Celebration**

**1905 2005**



**May 7, 2005  
Mason, Michigan**

**Events Begin at 10:00am  
on the Courthouse Square**

County-wide Historical Society Displays,  
Courthouse Tours, Music, Activities,  
Refreshments & Food,  
Centennial Ceremony & 21st Century Time  
Capsule Dedication, Celebrity Ice Cream  
Social & Birthday Cake,  
and Much, Much More!

**Ingham County Historical Commission, 517.676.7213; www.ingham.org**



## The Gift Depot

The following gifts will be available for purchase from the Historical Society of Greater Lansing.

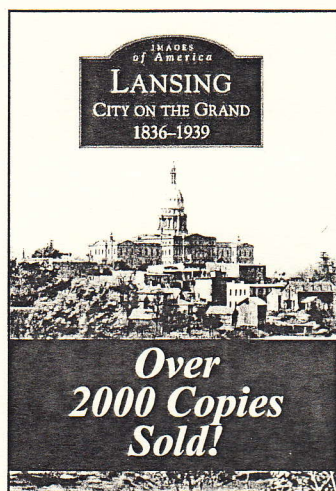
### 1 Give the Gift of History with a membership in the Historical Society of Greater Lansing

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.



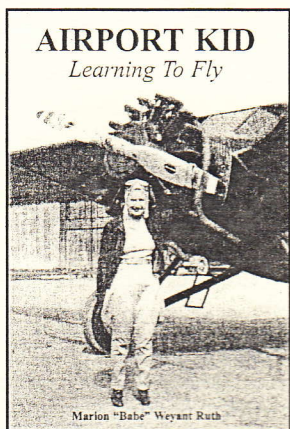
**\$19.99** (plus tax)

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

### 3 AIRPORT KID - Learning To Fly

By Marion "Babe" Weyant Ruth and Craig A. Whitford

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.



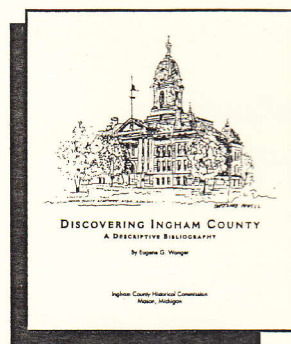
**\$20.00** (plus tax)

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

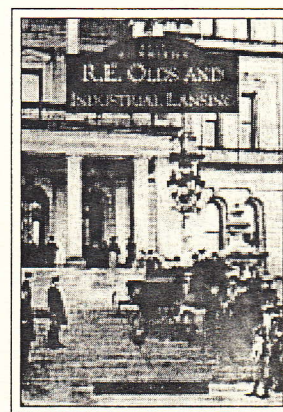
## Now available at local boostores Two new books on Lansing History

### R.E. Olds and Industrial Lansing

By Michael Rodriguez

Upon the dedication of a new Capitol building in 1879, the city of Lansing was just beginning to emerge from the swampy wilderness of its recent past.

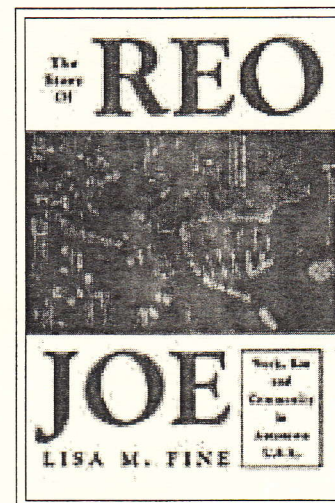
As industry began to take root along the banks of the Grand River, Ransom Eli Olds brought his father's motor shop to national prominence with advancements in gasoline and steam engines, and then horseless carriages. By the early 20th century, Oldsmobile became the world's first mass producer of automobiles and Olds had moved on to found a second car company, making Lansing the first Auto City. Through these efforts, Olds rose to become one of the nation's greatest industrialists and entrepreneurs. Using primary documents and historical images, this book traces the industrial history of the Capital City within the context of one of the 20th century's greatest entrepreneurs, R.E. Olds. Michael Rodriguez is a Humanities Librarian at Michigan State University and a resident of REO Town. He is the author of Detroit's Belle Isle: Island Park Gem, also published by Arcadia.



### The Story of REO JOE

By Lisa M. Fine

Lisa M. Fine tells the Reo story from the workers' perspective on the vast social, economic, and political changes that took place in the first three quarters of the twentieth century. She explores their understanding of the city where they lived, the industry that employed them, and the ideas about work, manhood, race, and family that shaped their identities. The Story of Reo Joe is, then, a book about historical memory; it challenges us to reconsider what we think we know about corporate welfare, unionization, de-industrialization, and working-class leisure.





A Capital Area District Library Program

# Reo Joe: Work, Kin & Community in Autotown U. S. A.

"The Reo Motor Car Company operated in Lansing, Michigan, for seventy years, and encouraged its thousands of workers to think of themselves as part of a factory family. Reo workers, most typically white, rural, native-born Protestant men, were dubbed Reo Joes. These ordinary fellows had ordinary aspirations: job security, decent working conditions, and sufficient pay to support a family. They treasured leisure time for family activities (many sponsored by the company), hunting, and their fraternal organizations. Even after joining a union, Reo Joes remained loyal to the company and proud of the community built around it.

**Lisa M. Fine** tells the Reo story from the workers' perspective on the vast social, economic, and political changes that took place in the first three quarters of the twentieth century. Lisa Fine explores their understanding of the city where they lived, the industry that employed them, and the ideas about work, manhood, race, and family that shaped their identities. *The Story of Reo Joe* is, then, a book about historical memory; it challenges us to reconsider what we think we know about corporate welfare, unionization, de-industrialization, and working-class leisure."

with author

**Lisa M. Fine,**  
Associate Professor of History,  
Michigan State University

*Copies will be available for sale and signing following the program.*

*Monday,*  
*May 23, 2005*  
*7:00-8:00 P.M.*

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

04/05  
Bill & Judy Atkinson

*Please RSVP to:*

Change Service Requested

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