

History Explorer

Historical Society of Greater Lansing

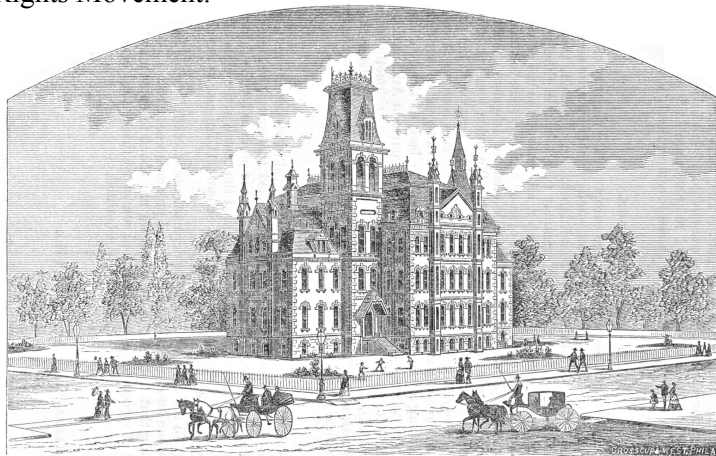
www.LansingHistory.org

January 2011

Upcoming Events

Our next meeting will take place on Thursday, January 20 at 7:00 pm at the downtown branch of the Capitol Area District Library. Michigan Appeals Court Judge William C. Whitbeck will speak on the research he conducted for his new novel, *An Account for Murder*. The novel is based on the killing of Michigan State Senator Warren Hooper and subsequent murder trial. Copies of his book will be available for purchase and signing at the meeting's conclusion.

Please mark your calendars for Saturday, February 26, 2011, when the Historical Society of Greater Lansing and the Capitol Area District Library will co-host the annual African-American History Showcase. Wayne State University Assistant Professor of History Danielle McGuire will speak on the experience of African-American women during the Civil Rights Movement.



LANSING HIGH SCHOOL.

Old Prints & Photos

If you have an old print, postcard, or photo of a historic Lansing building or event and a story to go along with it, we'd love to feature it in a future edition of The History Explorer. You may email your image and story to Valerie Marvin at vrmarvin@sbcglobal.net. If you need an image scanned, we can do that also (we promise to take good care of your print).

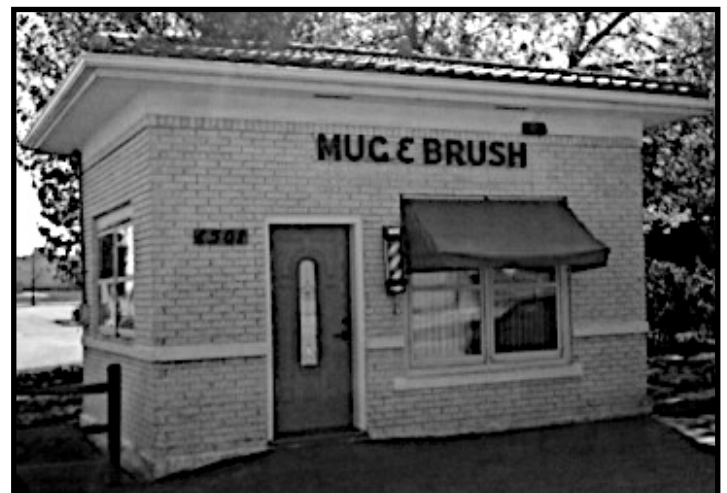
This month we have a print of the old Lansing High School that was demolished a few years ago to make way for a new building at Lansing Community College. This sketch from 1875 is one of the few that does not also include the Carnegie Library that was built next to it later.

Mug and Brush

The following Lansing landmark profile is an excerpt from the upcoming publication by Lansing artist Vic Nelhiebel in partnership with the Historical Society of Greater Lansing.

Like many historic structures, Lansing's Mug and Brush Barbershop did not begin its life with the same use that it has today. Built in the 1924, the building originally served as a Standard Oil Filling Station. By 1937, the station was purchased by a local resident, Lawrence O. Keyser, who ran the business under his own name. Its small rectangular footprint was common for early 20th century gas stations, many of which offered little more to customers than just gas and a few spare car parts. Today the building still boasts many original features, including a painted brick façade and a red terra cotta tiled roof. Originally seen in the west on old Spanish missions, the tiled roofs became popular through the country during the early 20th century as a part of the Spanish Colonial Revival architectural movement. Many surviving filling stations, such as the Mug and Brush, still bear them today.

In 1974 the old filling station, now closed, was purchased and remodeled to serve as a barber shop by Roy Grubb. His barbershop, called the Mug and Brush, opened in 1977. At first, many of his customers worked at Diamond Reo, a landmark Lansing auto and truck maker founded in 1904 that was located across Baker Street from the Mug and Brush. Today the still popular business is patronized largely by neighbors who enjoy the old time feel the Mug and Brush offers to its customers.



The President's Corner

I want to begin my first letter of 2011 by wishing you a wonderful and very happy new year. I am very excited by several of the projects that we are working on right now as the Historical Society of Greater Lansing, and I think that this could turn out to be one of our very best years.

At present we have approximately half of our programs for the year already scheduled. In addition to some of our traditional events, such as the African American History Showcase in February and the David Caterino Collector's Showcase in May, we have some interesting new programs planned. In March, Michigan State Professor David Stowe and some of his students will present information of the history of Lansing's Old Town. The April program also promises to be interesting, as we will learn about the history of the old Lansing Jackson Interurban line from Norm Krentel, a member of the Illinois Railway Museum in Union, Illinois.

Another topic that we plan to highlight over the next four years is the roll played by the State of Michigan and the City of Lansing in America's greatest conflict – the Civil War. Lansing was still a young city when the war began, yet she sent many of her young men into battle. Each year for the next four years, as our nation commemorates the 150th anniversary of this bloody conflict, the HSGL will feature at least one Civil War oriented program. This fall we will host our first Civil War speaker, Marilyn Culpepper, who will speak about the letters sent and received by women during the Civil War.

HSGL's board members are also hard at work on another new project that we hope to have available for purchase this coming summer. Several months ago, Lansing area artist Vic Nelhiebel approached the board about working together on a collection of sketches of some of Lansing's most notable landmarks. The board was very excited by the project, and committed to help Vic write and edit an accompanying history of each landmark. Among those sites included in the collection are multiple Board of Water and Light Buildings, Potter Park Zoo, the Michigan State Capitol, the Turner Dodge House, and Central United Methodist Church.

Best –

Valerie Marwin

President, Historical Society of Greater Lansing

Historical Society of Greater Lansing

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www.LansingHistory.org

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**Diary Kept by Myron Green
Tells Many Interesting Events of the Last Half Century**

Evening Press - August 28, 1913

*Came Here in 1854 and Remembers Many Real Estate Deals
in Which Profits at the Time Looked Fabulous*

One of the oldest residents of the city and the pioneer in the real estate business in Lansing is Myron Green, who has been actively engaged in business in the city for 59 years. Mr. Green was born in the town of Brighton, one mile south of Rochester, New York, March 20, 1831. He remained in his native town attending public school and clerking in a store until he was of age, and then left with is brother Aaron to seek his fortune in the West. The two brothers drove to Buffalo, and then took one of the early lake boats to Toledo. From there the resumed their journey and drove to Thompkins township in Jackson county.

In Thompkins township Mr. Green purchased a farm of 160 acres of timbered land, and spent the first year making clearings and planting crops. During the year he was married to a neighbor's daughter, Martha A. Houghton in 1853.

In September of 1854, Mr. Green came to Lansing, having sold his farm to his brother. Since that time he has been almost constantly engaged in business in the city, and has always been prominent in the city affairs. He has been elected to numerous public offices in the city and in Lansing township as tributes of the esteem in which he was held by his fellow citizens, including two terms as city treasure of Lansing. He was also a member of the committee which arranged for the first county fair, and was instrumental in bringing the first one about.

The name of Mr. Green will always be associated with the real estate business of the city, for he has been almost continuously engaged in the work for sixty years. He was also the proprietor of one of the first groceries of Lansing.

Ever since coming to Lansing, nearly sixty years ago, Mr. Green has kept a diary of the important events, and by referring to it he can tell even the weather of fifty years ago. He also processes a copy of the old State Republican dated September 11, 1855. It was published every Tuesday by Hosmer and Fitch, with Herman E. Has[sall] as editor. The copy is No. 2 of Volume 1.

Mr. Green has caused over 400 acres of timbered land to be cleared within four miles of the city of Lansing.

The following article describing the early life in Lansing was written by Mr. Green expressly for the homecoming edition of the Evening Press.

“I have been a resident of the town and city of Lansing 59 years next month (September), and certainly none of the citizens of today have be[e]n so actively connected with the

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building of the city through so long a period. In the county of Ingham and chiefly in the city of Lansing I have erected 18 stone buildings, 62 dwellings, besides many others, such as barns and sheds, beginning in 1855 with a residence on the northwest corner of Hillsdale and Cherry street. This was the first wood dwelling on that block. The only other house on the block at that time was a log house. I paid \$100 for the lot, with payments of \$25 and interest yearly for three years.

“In September, 1854, I came to Lansing with my wife and embarked in my first business venture, a grocery store which was located in the front of a small wooden building on Washington avenue south, near Allegan street. We lived in the rear rooms of the store. The site is now occupied by a shoe store, and is owned by Mr. Lott.

“One year later I sold my stock of goods and leased the store to George Grove for the consideration of about \$500. I then took up the building business and real estate, which has been my business during the succeeding years, excepting two years when I was again in the grocery business, occupying a store on the site of the City National bank building. The nature of my business has been the cause of frequent change of residence because of many excellent opportunities that I have had for disposing of the business houses in which I have lived. I resided at 421 Capitol avenue south from 1902 until 1911 and since that time have been at 119 Kalamazoo street west.

“During the intervening time many changes were made in the south part of the city. Though I lived for 12 years on the Jessop farm one mile south of the city, many of my deals were in real estate which is now well in the city, but which at that time was well covered with Timber. I hired wood choppers to clear 80 acres on Saginaw street which touched the school section on the west. The land was owned by H.H. Smith. I also hired the timber cut and removed from the land where the first St. Mary’s church was built.

“As might be imagined, values have changed remarkably since I first engaged in the real estate business. I sold to Mrs. Cornell the present property at 312 Grand street south for \$1,200 in 1861. It is now valued at \$7,000. The corner lot where the opera house now stands I brought for \$1300, although the present site, if vacant, would be worth ten times as much. In 1864 I brought a 4 x 10 lot north of the Hotel Butler for \$750. I expended \$800 for building and three years later sold it for \$45000. Today if unoccupied the property would bring at least \$21,000. I paid \$1,000 for the 4 x 10 lot north of the Commercial hotel in 1865, which I sold afterwards for \$2,000. It would now be worth, if vacant, \$20,000.

“One unfortunate although amusing venture of money was an attempt to make a little money as a side issue. My partner was John Darling, proprietor of the Columbus hotel, now called the Hudson House. The 4th of July 1855 was marked by a public celebration in Lansing and the impromptu firm of Green and Darling set some tables on the grounds of the old

state house to feed the hungry throng at 50 cents per feed. The bill of fare of roast turkey, oranges and other delicacies was too elaborate. But the fatal move was feeding the Indians free of charge, for Chief Okemos, and his tribe of braves, squaws and papooses swept down like a flight of locusts and when the day’s business was figured up we were \$100 on the wrong side of the books.

“With my team of horses I took many a gay load of young people to the dances in the old days. We went to all the neighboring towns – Williamston, Mason, Okemos, Windsor, Octagon Hotel and the little saw mill town called Sevastopol. Sevastopol was started in 1857, was forsaken in 1864, after the railroad was built, and today is erased entirely from the map.

“My name has been attached to various official papers issued from various public offices. Between the years 1856-61, I was constable, while from 1867 I acted as deputy sheriff under Fred Moody. I was township treasurer two terms. Lansing deputy treasurer two terms and city treasurer two terms.”

Wounded Warrior Book Review
by David Marvin

Lawrence Glazer’s *Wounded Warrior: The Rise and Fall of Michigan Governor John Swainson*, published by Michigan State University Press in 2010, casts an interesting light on the life of former Governor and Michigan Supreme Court Justice John Swainson. The book’s 274 pages, not including the endnotes, chronicles the life of Swainson from his childhood in Port Huron to his service during World War II and on into his active role in Michigan politics through most of the second half of the 20th Century.

While I knew some of the details of Swainson before reading *Wounded Warrior*, I had not placed them in the context of the other influential Michiganders with whom he worked during his years of service until reading this book. Names like Martha Griffiths, Coleman Young, Frank Kelley, and Soapy Williams keep repeating themselves throughout Swainson’s life and political career. This book helped me take the John Swainson image that I have of a young governor defeated before he had the chance to shine and built upon it with many interesting facts about his rise and subsequent tragic fall.

Written by a former judge, *Wounded Warrior* focuses on some of the minutiae of the case against Swainson, but not so much that a layman cannot keep up with the story. The author also included in an appendix at the end of the book with an explanation of the history and duties of a grand jury, as this application of American jurisprudence plays a key part in Swainson’s legal issues. The book was a quick read and I would have liked a little more detail about Swainson’s years in the Senate and the governor’s office to balance out the more in depth retelling of his legal woes in the 1970s. However, it is a welcome addition to the pantheon of Michigan gubernatorial biographies that exist today.



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