

# History Explorer

Historical Society of Greater Lansing

www.LansingHistory.org

April 2011

## Upcoming Events

In April the Historical Society of Greater Lansing will host a talk by railroad enthusiast Norm Kessler on the history of the old Lansing-Jackson Interurban Line, which was part of the Michigan United Railway. Norm is an active volunteer for the Illinois Railway Museum, located in Union, Illinois, where he spends a great deal of time restoring old electric railroad cars. Norm will speak on Thursday evening, April 21, at 7:00 pm at the downtown branch of the Capitol Area District Library.

On May 19 retired Michigan State Capitol Historian Kerry Chartkoff will speak on the career and private life of Governor Austin Blair. Best known as the Civil War Governor of Michigan (and as the only man with his own statue on Capitol Square!), Blair's political rise and fall was marked by huge success and terrible failure. A founder of the anti-slavery Republican Party, Blair was a radical who decried the death penalty, and fought for decades for women's suffrage. A fascinating, and sometimes enigmatic figure, Blair has been lost to historians for so long, until Chartkoff undertook the task of rediscovering his greatness. Kerry will speak on Blair at the Capitol Area District Library's downtown branch at 7:00 pm on Thursday, May 19.

Mark your calendars now for HSGL's cemetery tour, which will take place at 2:00 pm on Sunday, August 21. This year's walk will be held at St. Joseph Catholic Cemetery, on Lansing's west side. More information will be coming soon on this event.

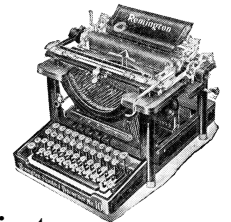
The HSGL annual meeting will take place June 16. See page 2 for more detailed information on this event.

## Specters of Old Town

On Thursday evening, March 17, about 50 people attended *Specters of Old Town*, a program by Michigan State University professors David Stowe and Ann Larabee and some of their graduate students. The evening began with a screening of the documentary *Specters of Old Town* which explored the development and change in Old Town that's taken place in the last several decades. The documentary consisted largely of interviews with some of Old Town's long-time residents and business owners.

After the film, the audience enjoyed a rousing question and answer session with the professors and students. Many people shared their own memories of growing up and living in the Old Town area, including memorable trips to some of the bars! Both the audience and the students were very enthusiastic about the topic, and a good time was had by all. Thanks to those of you who turned out!

## Pages from the Past Excerpts from Bygone Local News Stories



### Finding of a Skull Mystifies Police Dog Was Playing With Gruesome Object Ancient Murder Stories Revived

Residents on Barnes Avenue Are Excited Over Discovery Made Tuesday Morning.

The police are investigating the finding of a human skull in the rear of 117 Barnes [A]venue. Rumors of a mysterious murder years ago are rife, and the authorities and residents in the vicinity are considerably excited over the discovery.

*Continued on Page 2*

*Pages from the Past - Continued from Page 1*

While attending to their duties as drivers for “Eddie” Richards, Frank Price and Arthur Shafer were horrified Tuesday morning to discover a dog playing with a human skull near the barn owned by their employer. They at once secured possession of the skull and notified the police. Patrolman Hill was detailed upon the case, and the skull is now in the hands of City Physician Jones. After a hasty examination, Dr. Jones pronounced the skull to have been that of an old person, and because of its size, may have been that of a female.

The flesh dried upon the bones indicates that the skull had been buried for several years, although it is believed that under favorable environments the present condition may have been caused in a few months.

Where the skull came from is a mystery. It may have been excavated by laborers digging a cellar in the vicinity, or the canine may have found it many miles away from Barnes [A]venue. Unless more information is unearthed by the police within a few hours, it is probably that the mystery will never be solved. (*Lansing Journal, February 22, 1910*)

**Mystery Still Unsolved**

**Police Have Been Unable to Discover Where Skull Came From.**

The police have been unable to learn any new developments regarding the human skull which was found Tuesday at 117 Barnes [A]venue where dogs were playing with it about the yard. It is the opinion of those living in the vicinity of Barnes [A]venue that the skull had been dug up while excavating for a cellar and was the remains of [someone] who had been buried in that vicinity when Lansing was in its pioneer stage. (*Lansing Journal, February 23, 1910*)

*Despite searching the newspaper for months after, no word on the origin of the skull surfaced.*

**Historical Society of Greater Lansing**

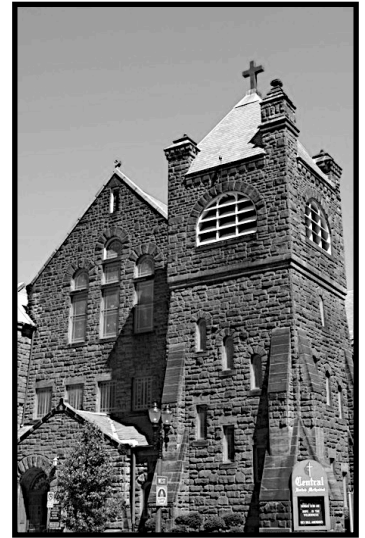
P.O. Box 12095 ~ Lansing, MI 48901  
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*Officers & Board Members*

- |                               |                         |
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**Annual Meeting**

Thursday evening, June 16 is the date of this year's annual meeting, which will consist of a walking tour of four of downtown Lansing's most beautiful and historical churches, followed by a dinner and short meeting. The churches featured on the tour are: Christ Community (the old First Baptist Church), Central United Methodist Church, St. Paul's Episcopal Church, and St. Mary's Catholic Cathedral.



The event will begin at 5:30 pm sharp at St. Paul's Episcopal Church. All those participating will meet in the Merrifield Room. Parking will be available at the Roosevelt Parking Ramp located on the corner of Ionia and Seymour streets downtown. From there a historical society board will direct you into St. Paul's Merrifield Room. We'll then split into smaller groups, for ease of traveling, and each group will tour all four churches.

Upon completing the tour, we'll all reconvene at St. Paul's Merrifield Room, where we will enjoy a wonderful dinner from A Catered Affair. The menu will consist of three meal choices – beef (top round steak with mushroom sauce) chicken (Michigan cherry chicken), and a vegetarian option (fettuccine with mushrooms and asparagus spears). You'll need to let us know which option you prefer when you purchase your tickets.

The cost of the tour is \$20 per person for historical society members, and \$25 for non-members. Tickets can be purchased by filling out the form enclosed with this newsletter and sending it to P.O. Box 12095, Lansing, MI 48901. You may also bring this form to either the April or May meetings and give it to either Valerie Marvin or Bill Atkinson then. If you have any questions about the dinner or the event, feel free to contact Valerie at [vrmarvin@sbcglobal.net](mailto:vrmarvin@sbcglobal.net) or by calling 517-282-0671.

## The President's Corner

As spring arrives every year, the historical society begins to look forward to some of our traditional annual events. The first of these will be our annual meeting, scheduled for Thursday evening, June 16. The society bylaws state that this the time for us to conduct basic business. At this meeting we'll be voting on some amendments to the bylaws, which will include, among other things, a revamped mission statement. The board has been working hard on this, and we're excited to present it to the membership as a whole. You'll be able to read the new proposed mission statement and our rationale behind it in our May newsletter.

Our second annual event will occur in August, when we'll travel out to St. Joseph Cemetery for a walking tour. HSGL has long enjoyed annual cemetery tours, and we are excited to visit a new-to-us cemetery this year.

The third annual event that we plan to institute this coming fall will be a fundraiser. In 1947 the Historical Society of Greater Lansing was formed to promote Lansing's history through educational programming and to collect historical items that would someday be exhibited in a local history museum. As the years passed, our mission changed, and our vision for establishing a local history museum faded. In the last couple of years, the board decided to reclaim this original goal. Establishing a museum will, of course, require much more money than the society now has at its disposal, necessitating some fund raising. This fall's fundraiser, a silent auction, will set a precedent for future fundraising efforts for the society. All funds raised through the event will go into a special account set aside for museum purposes.

In order to make this event a success, we will need the help of ALL of our members. In the coming weeks and months, board members will be soliciting our members and community businesses for donations of items to be auctioned. Items that society members could donate might include: tickets to an event, concert, or game, services such as food preparation or photo scanning, historical collectibles like rare photos, books, or memorabilia, and handicrafts, such as quilts.

Another way to help the society out would be to agree to serve as a financial sponsor of the event. Sponsorships will be available at the following levels: \$5,000 Platinum, \$1,000 Gold, \$500 Silver, \$250 Bronze, \$100 Copper.

If you would be willing to donate an item, or would like to serve as an event sponsor, please contact us by calling 517-282-0671 or e-mailing to [vmarvin@sbcglobal.net](mailto:vmarvin@sbcglobal.net).

More information on the fall fundraiser will be coming soon. Please check upcoming newsletters for more details!

Best –

*Valerie Maruin*

President, Historical Society of Greater Lansing



*Ottawa Power Plant Smoke Stack Removal - December 2007  
The Newly Renovated Building Recently Reopened As The  
Headquarters Of The Accident Fund*



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

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

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Historical Society of Greater Lansing - Membership Application

Please accept my application for:

- New Membership
- Renewal Membership
- Gift Membership

in the Historical Society of Greater Lansing

I have enclosed:

- \$15 Individual Membership
- \$25 Family Membership
- \$150 Life Membership
- \$\_\_\_\_\_ Additional Gift to HSGL

Member Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_ Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

Make Checks Payable to  
**Historical Society of Greater Lansing**

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Thank you for your support of our programs and activities.*