

History Explorer

Historical Society of Greater Lansing

www.LansingHistory.org

January 2012

Museum Fundraiser at the Potter House

Please mark your calendars for HSGL's next museum fundraiser, a tour of the beautiful, historic Potter House, located in the Moores Neighborhood, on Friday evening, May 18th from 6:30pm – 8:00pm. The event will include a behind the scenes tour of the home given by retired architecture professor and HSGL member Jim Perkins, as well as refreshments and hors d'oeuvres. Tickets will be \$50 a person and will be available for purchase soon.

Sexton High School National Register Application

In November, about 100 members of the Lansing community, including many HSGL members, met together at Sexton High School for a tour of the building. At the time, there was some discussion about an attempt to list Sexton on the National Register of Historic Places. Deb Craddock, who is leading the effort, asked us to notify our members that volunteers interested in helping with the application process are being sought.

Particular needs include assistance with financing activities such as gathering photographic documentation of the outside and inside features of the building. Special memories or photographs are also needed.

If you have interest in contributing to this project, please contact Deb Craddock at 517-371-3785 or debcraddock@att.net. Thank you!

Wounded Warrior

Lawrence Glazer, author of *Wounded Warrior: The Rise and Fall of Michigan Governor John Swainson* will talk about his award winning biography of the governor on Thursday evening, January 19th, at 7:00 pm at the Capitol Area District Library. John Swainson,

Michigan's 42nd governor, was once a rising star in Michigan politics who served in the State Senate, the Governor's office, and on the Michigan Supreme Court. Yet Swainson was no stranger to tragedy. At the age of 19, while fighting in France during World War II, Swainson lost both legs in a land mine explosion. Perhaps the greatest tragedy of his life, though, happened many years later, when he was convicted of perjury, disbarred, and removed from the Michigan Supreme Court in 1975. Glazer charts the rise and fall of Governor Swainson in his book, revealing the truth behind Swainson's conviction.

Malcolm X and Black History

This January the downtown branch of the Capitol Area District Library will be hosting several events highlighting the contributions that African-American men and women have made to America, including Lansing's own Malcolm X, one of the country's most important and controversial civil rights figures.

Black History 101 Mobile Museum: *Necessary!*
This traveling exhibit focuses on the legacy of the revolutionary leader Malcolm X, featuring over 150 historical artifacts from his life and work, including rare photographs, magazine covers, and relics of racism from America's past.

Friday, Jan. 13, 10am–5 pm, Saturday Jan. 14, 9am–4pm

Malcolm X and Hip Hop

Hip hop legend Professor Griff of Public Enemy will speak about the importance of lost chapters of Malcolm X to the hip hop community.

Saturday, Jan. 14, 11am

Shabazz Academy African Dancers and Drum Group
Enjoy a student performance blending traditional West and East African dance and drumming traditions.

Saturday, Jan. 14, 1:30 pm

The First Man To Climb the Capitol's Dome

Michigan's present state capitol building opened to great acclaim on January 1, 1879. The day was blustery and cold, and the snow fell thick and fast. The building, which had already been in use for a few months, played host to thousands of visitors that day, who came to examine the new building and witness the inauguration of Governor Charles Croswell, who was taking the oath of office for the second time.

Visitors to the inauguration generally gave the building favorable reviews, marveling at the building's height, the elegant black and white tiled floors, and custom-made chandeliers that lined the corridors. Yet the building wasn't really finished. Indeed, the freshly plastered walls, the tin oculus suspended high above the glass floor, and even the exterior cast iron of the dome, were still all unpainted.

First on the priority list was the Capitol's exterior dome, which was made of cast and wrought iron by the Samuel J. Creswell Company of Philadelphia. The height of the top of the dome – 267 feet from the ground – was enough to make many painters squeamish, as whoever took the job would need to send up a man to attach the wires for the painters' harnesses, as no exterior scaffolding would be built around the dome. It took the bravery of one Lansing Civil War veteran, a man named Allen Shattuck, to make that first harrowing climb in 1880.

Allen Shattuck was born in the still-new State of Michigan in 1839, in Pittsfield Township, Washtenaw County. His parents, Asa, a native of New Hampshire,

and Adelaide, born in New York, married in 1835. They moved to Michigan three years later. The family would eventually grow to include six children. By 1850, the Shattucks had moved north to Lansing, where Asa worked as a mover of buildings.

In 1861, Allen became famous locally when he signed up to fight with the Third Michigan, joining Company G on May 10, 1861. During the war, Shattuck proved himself to be a risk taker. His bravery on the battlefield helped him win accolades at the First Battle of Bull Run. During a retreat, Shattuck noticed that the regiment's battle flag had been accidentally abandoned on a battery where it had earlier been planted. Ripping the flag from the staff, he turned and gestured rudely at the advancing Confederate soldiers. While he escaped unharmed that time, Shattuck would eventually suffer two significant wounds while fighting for the Union – a shattered leg bone, which gave him a lifelong limp, and a bullet in the elbow, which would lead to his discharge from the army in 1864.

Upon returning to Lansing, Shattuck took as his bride a young Englishwoman named Emma. The couple would have at least eight children, five girls and three boys. Though Shattuck would be listed in various censuses and records as having a variety of careers, including Lansing Postmaster and regimental historian for the Old Third Michigan, he mainly worked as a painter. Both the 1870 and 1880 censuses list him as a painter, and indeed, it was this career which added his name to Lansing history as the man who climbed the capitol's dome.

Shattuck's famous climb was recorded in the *Pioneer History of Ingham County* published in 1923:

“Mr. Shattuck, who settled in Lansing April 1, 1850, took a contract to paint the dome of the Capitol as well as other exterior and interior parts. He fathered a force of seven men, among them being Captain Julius N. Baker, retired captain of the local fire department. The contract proceeded smoothly until the dome was reached, then Mr. Shattuck discovered that his painter force were land artists, not steeplejacks.



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“None of the men would volunteer to climb the dome and spread color... Mr. Shattuck, while on his way to his work one morning, got into a heated argument relative to the [presidential] campaign. Garfield, Republican, was running against Samuel *sic* Hancock, the only war veteran that the Dems ever attempted to run for President. Mr. Shattuck was a staunch Republican, and the Democratic arguments stirred his bile.

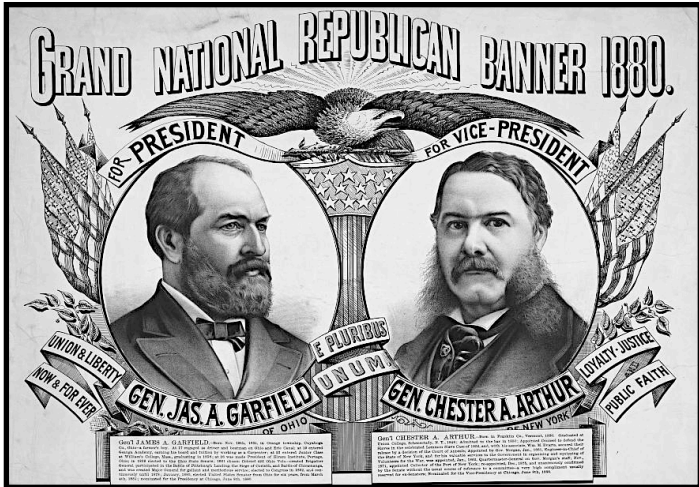


Image courtesy of the National Archives

“Mr. Shattuck...declared that if Garfield was elected he would place the American Flag right on the pinnacle of the Capitol dome so that the old Stars and Stripes would flaunt their principles of Republicanism right in the faces of Lansing Democrats.

“The count in November gave Garfield a substantial majority over General Hancock and there was general rejoicing among the Republicans all over the country. But Mr. Shattuck, while exulting in the victory of his party, was just ‘tickled to death’ personally with his obligation. He had won his bet, but also had to pay a paradox in local political history.

“We paraded and all that,’ said Mr. Shattuck in relating the incident, ‘and I cheered with the rest of ‘em, but that blamed Capitol dome and its dizzy height kept bobbing up in my mind and making me seasick. That’s the worst part of a man bragging, you know, it sometimes gets him into trouble.’

“So one day I got up spunk and looked the situation over. I announced when I would climb that dome and had a pretty fair crowd to watch me in case I fell. I got out a window, the highest one accessible by an inside ladder, and started my climb. And I was one

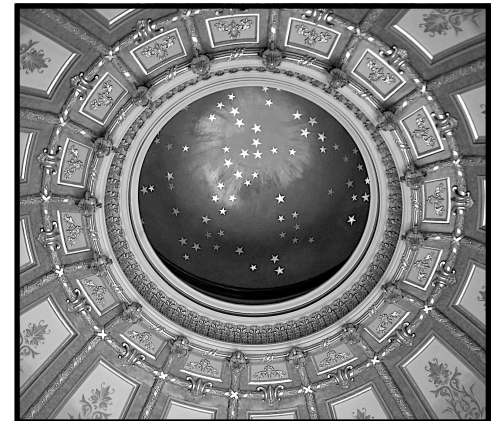
scared man. But the further I went up the calmer I became and I took no chances. I picked my way carefully and before I knew it was right on top of the big ball which caps the dome. This looks like an apple from below, but is really two feet through, I should think.’

“Just to show my defiance for my Democratic friend in the crowd who had come to see my downfall, I mounted the ball and stood upright. Here I fastened a good-sized American flag and unfurled it to the breeze. I accompanied the ceremony with several life-sized whoops for Garfield and the Republican party. Then I arranged a copper wire so that anybody from the lower windows could fasten a rope to it and draw the rope up thus making it possible for painters to fasten tackle conveniently and work to the pinnacle.’

“When I got to the ground I was more scared than when I was climbing. But that wire that I had rigged to the top of the dome had solved the problem of painting it as far as I was concerned.’”

Shattuck's amazing feat would be repeated in 1916, when Harry Gardiner, known as the Human Fly, came to Lansing to climb the Capitol building's entire exterior. Whether or not Mr. Shattuck came out to see the Fly's climb is not known, but he told a newspaper reporter just a few days before Gardiner's show that if he only still had good "wind" he would have duplicated the 1880 dome climb just for the fun of it.

During the 1880s, Shattuck also ventured to the highest point of the interior dome of the Capitol to paint the stars that still adorn the oculus to the present day.



Allen Shattuck died in Lansing at his home, 1117 Lee Street, on March 26, 1919. He was buried three days later in Mt. Hope Cemetery, in section C alongside his wife Emma, and his parents, Asa and Adelaide.



Historical Society of Greater Lansing
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Lansing, MI 48901

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