

History Explorer

Historical Society of Greater Lansing

www.LansingHistory.org

July 2013

HSGL Hosting Q&A with Local Restaurant Legend Ange Vlahakis of Jim's Tiffany Lounge

Local restaurateur Ange Vlahakis, former owner of Jim's Tiffany Lounge, will be sharing some of his experiences regarding owning a restaurant in the Lansing community on Saturday afternoon, July 6, at 2:00 pm at the Central Free Methodist Church. The Vlahakis family owned and managed restaurants in Lansing for over sixty years, including the Lansing Café, the Boston Café, Jim's Bar, Jim's Lounge, and Jim's Tiffany Lounge. Mr. Vlahakis will be answering questions at the event. To submit a question, please visit HSGL's facebook page. Please note that the Lansing Eats! exhibit will be open from 1:30pm-2:00pm and from 3:30pm-4:30pm, before and after the event.

Mr. Vlahakis will also be hosting an employee reunion for all former Jim's Tiffany Lounge employees from 1:00pm-5:00pm on Sunday, September 22 at Patriarche Park in East Lansing. For more information contact ptalbot@yahoo.com.

Summer Downtown Walking Tours

All tours meet in front of Lansing City Hall and will last approximately 90 minutes and cover 6-8 blocks. No charge, donations welcome.

Church and State

Saturday, July 20, 2013 - 10:00am

Learn the stories behind some of Lansing's most iconic churches and government buildings. Stops include St. Mary's Cathedral, St. Paul's Episcopal, Central United Methodist, the Capitol, the Romney Building (formerly the Hotel Olds) and the downtown post office.

Behind the Facades

Saturday, August 17, 2013 - 10:00am

Learn why Lansing's buildings look the way they do. We'll discuss a variety of architectural styles found in Lansing, ranging from Richardsonian Romanesque to Art Deco to Moderne. We'll also talk about some of the legendary businesses that have occupied these buildings over the years. Buildings include Comerica Bank, the Liebermann's building, the Knapp's building, the Arbaugh building, the Hollister building, and others.

Silent Auction Date Set

Saturday, October 5th 4:00 – 6:30 pm

Mark your calendars for October 5, HSGL's annual silent auction to benefit our museum fund. This year's auction is being hosted by the Lansing Board of Water and Light at the John Dye Water Conditioning Plant at 148 S. Cedar St. in Lansing. Sponsorships and donations of auction items are being sought. If you'd like to serve as a sponsor or a donor, please visit the website, www.lansinghistory.org, and fill out our donor form there.

Cemetery Tour August 18

On Sunday, August 18th at 2:00 pm HSGL will be touring the Gunnisonville Cemetery, located on the corner of Clark and Wood Roads. We'll be talking about some interesting gravestones, some early settlers, and more. Following the tour the Gunnisonville School and the Gunnisonville United Methodist Church will be open for visits.

Preservation Lansing Awards

Preservation Lansing is hosting its second round of awards for people who have completed work on the outside of their homes or business buildings that are older than 50 years. Nomination forms may be found at www.lansingcitypulse.com/lansing. The deadline to submit forms is August 1, 2013. For more information, contact Gretchen Cochran at cochranpr@acd.net or (517) 281-5919.

Lansing Eats! Exhibit Open

- *Sunday, July 7, 2013, 1:00 – 4:00 pm*
- *Sunday, August 4, 2013 1:00 – 4:00 pm*
- *Sunday, September 1, 2013 1:00- 4:00pm*
- *By Appointment by calling 517-282-0671 or emailing info@lansinghistory.org*

Creys Building - 831 North Washington Avenue

For those of you who haven't made it yet, we invite you to stop by and check it out. The exhibit includes over 100 years of food history including items from a number of local businesses and organizations, and a collection of locally produced cookbooks.

A Trail with a Tale: Following the Lansing River Trail from its Origins to the Present Day

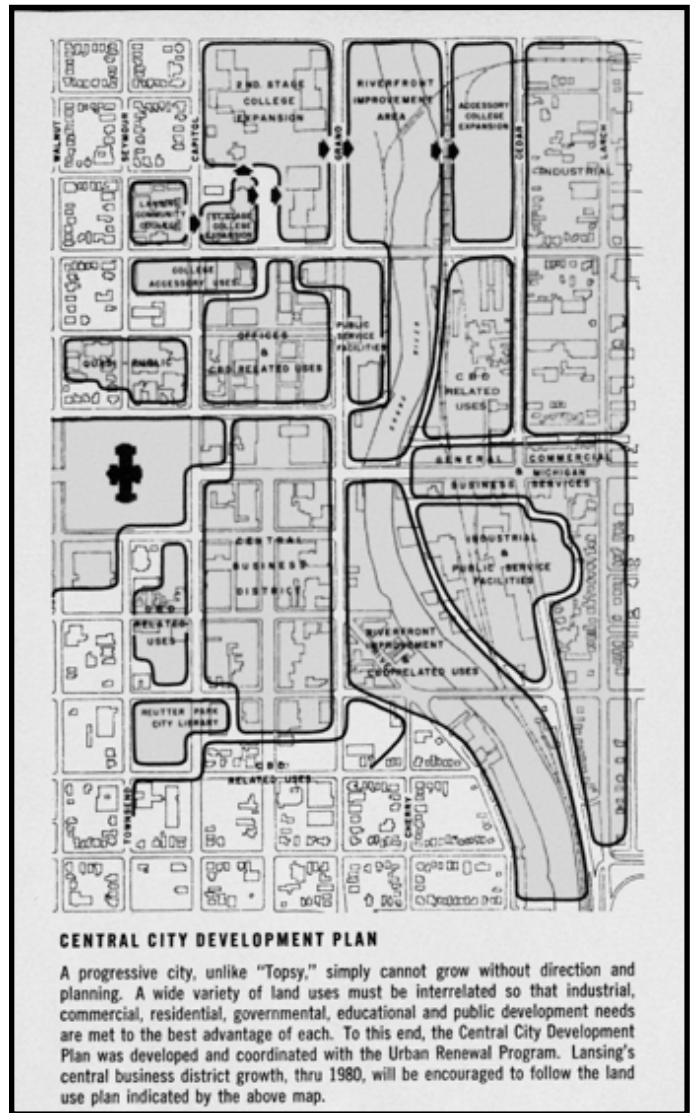
by Adina Langer

It's a hot summer day in 1967. Lansing, Michigan's capital, is 120 years old and starting to show her age. Her downtown is growing underutilized as businesses move out, seeking the convenience of the suburbs. All along the Grand and the Red Cedar, buildings turn their backs on the river, an artery pumping increasingly polluted water toward Lake Michigan. A century ago, Lansing was a small trading village that relied on her waterways for transportation and connection to other towns across the region. As the city evolved, industry became increasingly important to her economy. Auto plants located on the water's edge, drawing sustenance from this natural resource, but often depositing waste, ignored by citizens whose lives no longer revolved around the waterways. Segmented and developed without a holistic view of the river, the city grew up ignorant of the river's potential. But in 1967, this was about to change. Buoyed by a national tide toward environmental awareness, and enamored of the modern literature on urban planning and urban renewal, Lansing's officials began a journey that would lead to the creation of the 13-mile River Trail we know and love today.

Although this view did not dominate the city's plans for much of the first half of the 20th century, Lansing's rivers' potential was initially recognized in the 1922 *Lansing Plan*. Its authors asserted, "It is in the reservation of its river views for public use and in the linking up of these reservations by means of pleasure driveways that Lansing's greatest park opportunity lies...The tone and character which might have been given the city by large stream-side reservation is noticeably lacking. The belated establishment of control over riverbanks...would permit the city to redeem much of their lost attractiveness."¹

However, Lansing's riverside development remained isolated and fragmentary for four more decades after these aspirations were so eloquently articulated. In July 1969, riverfront development regained some traction as part of the Lansing Park Development plan. In this document, riverfront development was referenced in the context of urban renewal. In Lansing's central business district, between Saginaw and Michigan Ave, zones along the Grand were denoted riverfront improvement areas. Referencing an

urban renewal plan from 1966, the authors noted that "A progressive city, unlike 'Topsy,' simply cannot grow without direction and planning. A wide variety of land uses must be interrelated so that industrial, commercial, residential, governmental, educational and public development needs are met to the best advantage of each. To this end, the Central City Development Plan was developed and coordinated with the Urban Renewal Program. Lansing's central business district growth thru 1980 will be encouraged to follow the land use plan indicated by this map."²



Yet, a vague notion of riverfront improvement does not equal a comprehensive plan to build a holistic River Trail. A step toward that plan came with the 1974 Plan for the Development of Lansing's Waterfront. The plan stated that

"The waterfront of the City of Lansing will be developed in such a manner that will
 Make the City a better place in which to live
 Link the image of a well developed waterfront with the City of Lansing
 Promote people oriented land uses adjacent to the waterfront

Historical Society of Greater Lansing
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Encourage use by the people of the City of Lansing as well as those of the surrounding region

Encourage the adjacent units of government to develop the waterfront within their jurisdiction and to coordinate that development with the City of Lansing as well as with other jurisdictions.”³

With these goals articulated, the River Trail as we know it got its start in 1975. Encouraged by realtor Roland Stebbins⁴ and other City Commissioners, the City hired Robert O’Boyle, Inc. to develop the area along the Grand from Michigan to Oakland and from Kalamazoo to Michigan between 1975 and 1976. This early part of the trail was known as the River Walk and was followed by a 1983 expansion by Lansing Parks and Recreation from Kalamazoo to 496 and a 1985 extension by Snell Environmental Group joining the Grand and the Red Cedar, just south of 496.

Linsemier and Associates dominated River Trail development from 1987 to 1990, growing the trail from 2.7 to 5.7 miles with development along Sycamore Creek and the Red Cedar north of Mount Hope, west to Pennsylvania, and east to Aurelius. Linsemier’s expansion culminated with the extension of the trail along the Red Cedar east to 496. In their Master Plan, the developers articulated an even more ambitious plan for the River Trail: “The existing trail is a valuable asset to the recreation activities available to Lansing’s citizens and visitors. The trail provides public access to the edge of the Grand and Red Cedar Rivers, and it also serves as a bicycle and pedestrian link to the various recreation opportunities available throughout the area. With the increased popularity of the River Trail, the need has become apparent for a pedestrian/bicycle link from Lansing’s downtown central business district to the city’s major park areas to the east: Potter Park Zoo, Shubel and Crego Parks, and beyond to East Lansing and Michigan State University.”⁵

The next phase of the River Trail expansion called on Michigan Department of Transportation to develop the trail along the Red Cedar from 496 to Kalamazoo. In 1992, the young Trail was completed with Capital Consultants, Inc. building out the trail north along the Grand from Turner Street almost to Lincoln Street.⁶

After an eight-year hiatus, Capital Consultants shepherded the River Trail through its most recent development phase, culminating in 2006. (In 2005, Capital Consultants merged with Design Works A/E to become

C2AE). This phase added almost 7 more miles to the system, linking the River Trail to Michigan State University in the east, Moores Park in the west, and Scott Woods and Hawk Island Park in the south.⁷

With each phase of development, planners surveyed Trail users to learn more about their desires and expectations. Today, the River Walk is frequented by walkers, runners, bikers and strollers. It offers users a journey through Lansing’s scenic parkland and industrial heritage skirting such notable sites as the Turner Dodge House, Brenke Fish Ladder, Lansing City Market, Impression 5 and the R.E. Olds museum, and Potter Park Zoo. The River Trail has effectively rejuvenated that tired city of Lansing that faced the hot summer of 1967, pumping life through her arterial system of waterways. And as we face another hot summer, this cool accomplishment of city planning and cooperation is worth celebrating.



1. Harland Bartholomew, City Plan Engineer, “The Lansing Plan” (Lansing City Council, 1922), 35.
2. Jean H. Nilsen and Susan Zerbst, “Lansing Area Park Development” (Michigan State University, July 1969), Lansing History Room, Capital Area District Library.
3. University Design Associates, *Lansing River Corridor: a Proposal for Development* (Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University and City of Lansing Planning Department, ca 1990).
4. Shirley Sliker, “RE: Lansing River Trail Question,” June 12, 2013.
5. Linsemier and Associates, P.C. Landscape Architects, with Fishbeck, Thompson, Carr & Huber, Consulting Engineers, *River Trail Master Plan*, Master Plan (Lansing, Michigan: City of Lansing Department of Parks and Recreation, August 1987), Oversized Reports, Michigan State University Library.
6. MSU Senior Practicum, *Lansing’s Riverwalk Trail: A Comprehensive Plan* (East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University Urban and Regional Planning Program & Landscape Architecture Program, 1994 1993), Michigan State University Library.
7. C2AE, “C2AE | Lansing River Trail,” accessed May 28, 2013, http://www.c2ae.com/who-we-serve/recreational/lansing_rivertrail.html.



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Historical Society of Greater Lansing - Membership Application

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- New Membership
- Renewal Membership
- Gift Membership

in the Historical Society of Greater Lansing

I have enclosed:

- \$20 Individual Membership
- \$30 Family Membership
- \$100 Business Membership
- \$_____ Additional Gift to HSGL

Member Name _____

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