

History Explorer

Historical Society of Greater Lansing

www.LansingHistory.org

January 2014

Lansing Votes! Exhibit Grand Opening

Monday, February 3, 2014 - 5:00pm-7:00pm

Lansing City Hall, 124 North Michigan Avenue

HSGL's new exhibit, Lansing Votes! will be going up in the lobby of Lansing's City Hall soon! The exhibit looks at the effect that votes, taken at both the state and the local level, have had on our city. We'll be exploring six votes, and their effect on our city, starting with the state legislature's vote to make Lansing the new capital in 1847, and leading up through Mayor Hollister's efforts to retain General Motors in Lansing in the late 1990s. Other votes include the popular vote to accept money from Andrew Carnegie for Lansing first major public library in 1902, the 1931 vote to elect Carl Morlok (father of the famous Morlok Quadruplets, the first known identical quads to live) Lansing Constable, the creation of the River Trail, and the election of Mayor Ralph Crego, which led to the construction of the 'new' City Hall and the Civic Center.



The exhibit will be open for viewing anytime City Hall is open beginning in late January. The building can normally be accessed between 8:00am to 5:00pm weekdays, and Monday evenings until city council meetings end, often around 9:00pm.

Flashback Fridays

Starting in January, the Historical Society will be posting a fact about something that happened this week in Lansing history on our Facebook page and Twitter feed every Friday for #flashbackfridays. Stop by every week to see what we're remembering! Also, check out mlive.com every Thursday for a #throwbackthursday Lansing image from their Twitter feed.

The Lost Remains of America's World's Fairs by Professor Susan Bandes

Thursday, January 16, 2014 - 7:00pm

Downtown Library - 401 South Washington Avenue

Join HSGL for the chance to learn about some of the most famous remnants of America's World's Fairs. Thought the fairs were, by their very nature, temporary, some incredible remains survive, including the giant 8 story tire that sits alongside E I-94 in Allen Park that was once a Ferris wheel (New York – 1964), the Chicago Museum of Science and Industry (Chicago Columbian Exposition – 1893), the Seattle Space Needle (Seattle - 1962), the Carousel of Progress ride that's now at Disney World (New York – 1964), the furniture in the Governor of Michigan's Capitol Office (Philadelphia – 1876), and more! Souvenirs from the 1964 World's Fair will be available for viewing. Please feel free to bring any World's Fair stories and souvenirs that you might have with you for this great event! Learn more at www.lansinghistory.org.

Darius Moon Article

If you haven't already, be sure to check out the January-February Michigan History magazine for a short article on the work of Lansing's Darius Moon, the architect responsible for some of Lansing's most beautiful late-19th and early-20th Century buildings including the Olds Home, the Rogers-Carrier House, the Darius Moon House, as well as work on the Turner Dodge House. Copies are available at Schuler Books, Barnes and Noble, Meijer, or online at: <http://www.hsmichigan.org/store/back-issues>.

Lansing Votes for a Carnegie Library

By Valerie R. Marvin

Over the next several months, HSGL will host an exhibit entitled Lansing Votes! in the atrium of Lansing City Hall. This exhibit examines the significance of six votes on the city of Lansing. Some of the votes discussed will be those leading to the creation of highly valued public institutions that we still enjoy today, such as the Lansing River Trail, and the Lansing City Hall building. One vote examined in the exhibit is the vote Lansing residents took in 1902 to construct a Carnegie Library in our city. This building would be the first major library located in Lansing. It would be used as the main downtown library until 1964, when the present library on Capitol Avenue was constructed. This article chronicles the early history of our Carnegie Library, which is now owned and used by Lansing Community College.

Like many cities, Lansing owes its library system to the women of our community, who were concerned in Lansing's early days about a decided lack of access to reading material in the community. When Michigan declared itself a state in 1835, the state's original constitution called for the establishment of libraries – at least one in each township. Two years later, in 1837, a state law was passed allowing school districts to establish libraries with the understanding that access to books would improve Michigan's overall educational prospects.

In Lansing, however, no legal provision was made for a public library until 1861, when the Board of Education was given the power to establish a school library and appoint a librarian. This does not mean, however, that Lansing was without a library system. Indeed, our city already had two libraries, of sorts. First, Lansing's position as the state capital meant that it was home to the State Library, then located in the wooden Capitol building. This library was not intended for the casual reader, being home mostly to legal books and statistical reports. Sensing this need, the women of Lansing organized the "Ladies' Library and Literary Association", for the purpose of establishing and maintaining a library to benefit their members.

Though we do not know the names of each woman that participated in this effort, we can trust that they were educated women that believed learning should never cease,

despite one's age or position in life. Beginning with capital stock of \$1,000, they procured space downtown and set about soliciting donations of furniture and books for the library. Memberships were sold for \$2 each and stock selling for \$5 a share. A librarian, Mrs. T.W. Westcott was appointed to staff the library, which was open on Saturdays from 2:00pm-9:30pm.

Today, the thought of a membership only library sounds rather elitist to us. Yet it must be remembered that, in the 19th Century, books were, in places like Lansing, largely rare and treasured commodities. Before the popularization of the paperback, books were expensive. Many families only owned one or two – the ubiquitous family Bible and perhaps a grammar or a school reader. Literacy, in general, was increasing, yet many in our country could only read and write a little, their education limited to the crude local schools or, where there were none, to the efforts of their parents.

As educational opportunities grew libraries grew with them. In the 1880s, the Ladies' Library and Literary Association donated its books to the Lansing High School, constructed in the 1870s and designed by Elijah Myers, the architect of our state Capitol. Also contributing money to the endeavor was the Young Men's Society, which pledged \$1,500 to the library with the understanding that the community would match this gift. This new library, open to students and members of the public alike, proved to be very popular.

So popular was the library, in fact, that the collection soon grew to be too large for the space provided. When Lansing constructed its new city hall, which opened in 1897, part of the library was moved into the building. Now the library would be open all day, making it more accessible to the 1,000 people going in and out of it weekly. Yet this was not the solution to the library problem either, as the library was located next to the police courts in the building, and it is said that many of the young people coming to make use of the library's services were often distracted by the entertainment provided by the public courts next door.

In 1902, Mrs. Mary Spencer, the State of Michigan Librarian, announced that she had a solution to the problem. Mr. Andrew Carnegie was willing to provide \$35,000 for the construction of a new Lansing Public Library, under the condition that the community would pledge \$3,500 a year for the library's support. The news was announced in the local papers in bold print on the front page.

A solution had been reached – of sorts. Yet some in the city balked. Could the city afford to support such an endeavor? Was it necessary to build right now? "Yes," the women of the city cried, "yes!" They had, after all, been laboring for nearly 40 years to see this very thing happen. Eventually it was decided that the matter should be put to a vote. All local taxpayers would vote – including the women

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Officers & Board Members

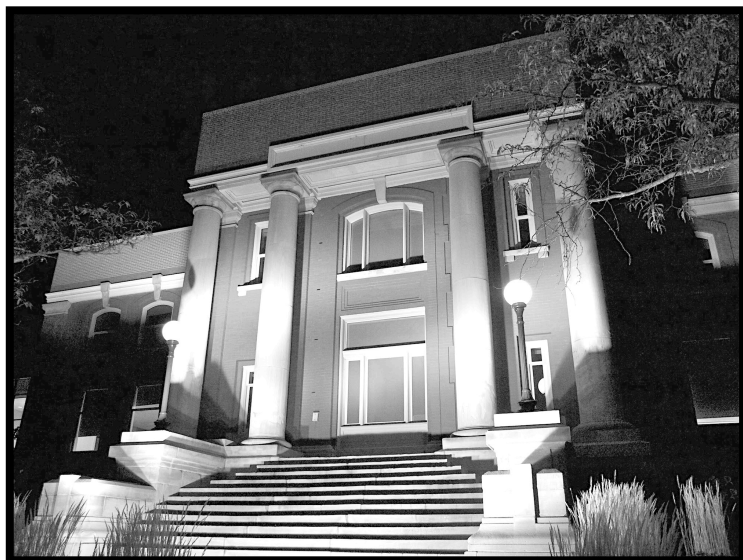
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on the tax roles. Other women who did not own property were relegated to lobbying their male friends and family members for their cause.

In the end, their efforts paid off and, in 1902, 1,519 people voted in support of the library with only 382 no votes. Lansing voted to meet Mr. Carnegie's conditions, thus opening the doors for the construction of a new Lansing Public Library.

When Andrew Carnegie offered his financial gift to the City of Lansing, he made very clear that there were certain conditions to be met. First, the city must promise to support the library's operating costs. Carnegie believed that libraries must be supported by the community as a whole. He did not support the then popular endowment system, where control of an institution rested in the hands of a few. Secondly, a site for the building must be donated. Several parcels were discussed, before it was decided that the vacant land next to Lansing High School would be best.

Despite these stipulations, communities across the English-speaking world responded to his requirements enthusiastically. Over 2,500 Carnegie Libraries were built from 1883 to 1929. Their locations stretch across the English-speaking world, from America to Fuji, England, Ireland, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the Caribbean, Wales, and Carnegie's birthplace, Scotland. Libraries were also built in several war torn European cities following WWI in France, Serbia, and Belgium. A total of 61 Carnegie libraries were built in Michigan. Of those, 50 still stand. Twenty-eight are still libraries and the remaining 22 serve other purposes.



The Carnegie libraries that survive are often easy to identify. Most were built in a highly visible location on a main street of the city. Many were designed by locally prominent architects. Though diverse in their stylings (Carnegie libraries have been built in every style from Romanesque Revival to Art Deco, Spanish Revival, and Classical Revival), all of the buildings share basic features,

as mandated by Mr. Carnegie himself. For example, the exterior of the building was to contain an elevated entrance, approached by a set of steps. This entrance was to be grand and distinct. This represents that the library patron is choosing to elevate himself or herself to a higher level by reaching out to access the knowledge held within. Also, the entrance to a Carnegie library is often marked with lampposts. These lamps represent the light of knowledge.

His requirements included certain features inside the building, as well. Upon entering a Carnegie library, an early patron might have been surprised to see that he or she could circulate amongst the books themselves, making their selection as they wished. Traditionally, library patrons were required to make their selection from a card catalogue and then present the title to the librarian, who would retrieve it from a system of closed stacks. Carnegie, however, mandated that his libraries have open stacks, where patrons could make their own selections and then take them to the reading room for closer examination. This follows the tradition of his own experience as a youth. Carnegie always intended his buildings to be available to anyone who wished to better himself through education.

The cornerstone for the Lansing Carnegie Library was laid on November 5, 1903. The items of significance included in the cornerstone were:

- Copy of letter from Andrew Carnegie
- Circular "Washington's Birthday will be Library Day for the City of Lansing"
- Copy of special invitation sent to officials
- Program of corner stone exercises
- Copy of Judge Cahill's Address
- Public Library Catalogs and supplements
- Samples of library supplies
- First printed report of the library
- Michigan Agricultural College Catalogue
- Roster of Board of Education
- Roster of city officers
- Roster of senior class
- Manual of Lansing city schools
- Lansing high school Oracle, class of 1902
- Copies of the last number of multiple local papers, including the State Republican, Lansing Journal, Capital City Democrat, and Michigan Staats Zeitung
- Latest report of city officials

Exactly three years after Lansing citizens voted to accept Mr. Carnegie's gifts and conditions, the library opened with a grand evening gala on February 21, 1905. An article detailing the plans for the opening that ran in the *State Republican* describes the library as being decorated with potted plants and palms, pictures loaned by the state librarian, Mrs. Mary Spencer, and flags on loan from the Capitol and the Jewett and Knapp Company. Musical performances were anticipated, as well as an address by Rev. H.B. Bard, and a recitation by Mrs. J. Edward Roe. The paper then noted proudly that, "The library will be open for business at 8 o'clock Monday morning."



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