



History Explorer

Historical Society of Greater Lansing

www.LansingHistory.org

March 2014

The Secrets Behind LCC's Herrmann House

Tuesday, May 6, 2014 - 6:00pm
Herrmann House - LCC Campus
520 North Capitol Avenue
\$50 per person

Join HSGL for a behind the scenes look at the Herrmann House, home to LCC's first family, President Brent and Mrs. Rise Knight. Learn the history of the home, built in 1893 by John Herrmann. The Herrmann family operated an elegant store in Lansing specializing in bespoke men's suits for nearly 100 years. The evening includes hors d'oeuvres, a tour of the home, and a mini-exhibit of objects from the Herrmann family on display in the Rodgers Carrier home, also owned by LCC. Please see insert for information on tickets and sponsorships. All funds raised benefit the HSGL museum fund.

The Lansing State Journal Remembers

Thursday, March 20, 2014- 7:00pm
Downtown Library - 401 South Capitol Avenue

Join a panel of mostly-retired LSJ writers to hear their favorite memories of writing for Lansing's oldest newspaper. A short presentation about the history of the Lansing State Journal will be included, and some interesting historical papers, including a book of Journal bloopers, will be shown. Panelists will include Karen Douglas, Jim Hough, John Schneider, Mike Hughes, David Olds, Marcia Van Ness, and Kathleen Levy. We hope you can join us.

Restauranting in Lansing – Then and Now

Friday, March 28, 2014 - 7:00pm
Allen Market Place - 1619 East Kalamazoo Street

Learn about the evolving Lansing restaurant scene with a panel discussion featuring restaurateurs who worked the Lansing scene from the 1950s to the present day. Participants will include Mr. Ange Vlahakis, of Jim's Tiffany Restaurant, Nick Gavriledes, of the Soup Spoon Cafe, and others!

Leonard Jungwirth - the Man who Made The Spartan

Thursday, April 3, 2014 - 7:00pm
Lansing City Hall - 124 West Michigan Avenue
(Free parking available behind the Capitol)

Join HSGL for an evening celebrating the career of sculptor Leonard Jungwirth, an art professor at MSU in the mid 20th century. Jungwirth carved many important Lansing art icons, including the sculpture on the west façade of Lansing City Hall, and The Spartan on the campus of MSU. The evening will include a short talk on his career, as well as the very rare chance to see the original maquette (model) of The Spartan, which is owned by a private local collector and will be on display for only this one evening. During the program a one-of-a-kind replica of The Spartan will be created using 3D printer, ointly owned by Lansing Community College and the Lansing Economic Area Partnership. The Spartan prototype will then be given to the MSU Museum for its collection.

Lansing Votes Exhibit

Don't forget to stop by Lansing City Hall to check out the Lansing Votes exhibit on display now through April 30. Visit the exhibit on Wednesdays at noon for a free guided tour by an HSGL volunteer!



Chief Okemos
by *Bill Castanier*

When Lansing historian and collector Craig Whitford purchased an “original ID’ED Indian Chief Tin Type” on eBay several years ago he soon verified it was a photograph of local Indian Chief Okemos. The photograph is extremely rare and only one other is known to exist along with two etchings which were completed for publication. The history of Chief Okemos is as much a mystery as how the photograph ended up in California before being returned to Michigan.

The photograph which came in a case with the inscription “Okamus” was likely taken in 1857 or 1858 and is a partner to the photograph held by the Archives of Michigan. The two photographs are nearly identical having the same background, cane and clothing. There is only a slight difference in the position of the hands.

Since the age of Okemos was always mercurial (birth years range from 1739-1775) it is difficult to pinpoint the exact age of Okemos at the time, but it’s likely that the photos were taken a few years before his death in 1858 which would make him in his eighties at the time.

In the photo, the chief wears a turban-style headpiece typical of Indian dress at the time and a dark coat with a colored sash which was hand colored. He holds a cane in his right hand and his leather mittens are quite prominent.

At best, the history of Chief Okemos is murky. At the time of the purchase local genealogist Jim Lalone pointed out an 1856 deposition of Chief Okemos where the Chief said he was born near Pontiac in Oakland County. Previously, accounts had indicated that Okemos

was born in Shiawassee County anywhere from the 1850s to 1870s. In the deposition Okemos said he was 76 which would place his birth in 1780. To further complicate matters later in the deposition he says he was born in 1769.

Much of this confusion could be due to translation problems and also the general lack of written history about American Indians. Several accounts of his life have Okemos as the nephew of Pontiac and leading a mixed band of Ottawa, Chippewa and Potawatomi in battles in the 1790s and War of 1812. One account has him fighting at the Battle of Thames where Tecumseh was killed, but in the deposition Okemos said he did not fight at Thames. A State Historical Marker has him fighting in the Battle of Sandusky (Ohio) against an American force.

During the War of 1812 Okemos received severe wounds to his face and shoulder most likely during the 1813 battle for Fort Meigs in northwestern Ohio. Some later histories claim he would let people see the wounds and touch the scars.

On March 5, 1859 the Illustrated London News wrote a brief feature on Okemos’ life and included a dispatch from then editor of the Lansing State Republican Rufus Hosmer.

Hosmer wrote: “Okemos fought at For Meigs and there received wounds in the head which, if had been a white man, would’ve made his obituary an old story forty-five years ago, but being an Indian they simply left holes in his skull, into which we have placed three of our fingers.”

Because of heroism it was said that Okemos was elevated to chief of the Saginaw Chippewas. It is known he was a signatory to the 1819 Treaty of Saginaw which transferred 6 million acres of land to the federal government.

According to Hosmer Chief Okemos was well-known in his later years. “Okemos was familiarly known to most of the Lansing people, young and old and was wont to pay this place more or less visits every season.” Hosmer also wrote “Indeed, during the years 1847, ’48 and ’49 he for the most part kept his wigwam near the

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village to the eastward, during which he was in our streets almost daily.”

It is also documented that Chief Okemos regularly visited Marion Turner Reasoner (of Turner Dodge House fame) who wrote an account of Okemos in the November 30, 1889 edition of the Lansing State Republican. Since Turner was not born until 1846 her account is most likely about the Chief’s later years.

“When I was a young girl,” she wrote, “Old Okemos, the chief of the Saginaw Chippewa, was a frequent visitor at our house. I remember that we looked upon him as a great chief and were much interested in hearing him talk of the terrible battles he had fought. We gazed upon the scars on his head and face with awe and decided he must have been one of the greatest warriors.”

“As he grew older his visits became less frequent and he was almost blind. He came to us one night quite late in summer, he put his pony in a field near the house and mother prepared a bed for him on the floor by the kitchen fire. He was astir very early in the morning. A cousin, (who was visiting with me) and I hastily dressed and after filling our pockets with doughnuts, followed him out,” Turner wrote.

Liz Homer, former curator of the Turner Dodge House, writes in her soon to be released book, “Pioneers, Informers & Millionaires” a generational saga of the Turner family, about the family’s close relationship with the Chief.

Turner continued “We soon discovered that his pony was missing and as he was too blind to follow it, we took compassion on his helplessness and tracked the pony west on the plank road, then north, then east finding it near Jones Lake. The old veteran seemed delighted with our success, kissed us both, then mounted and rode away, leaving us alone.”

Of the chief’s final years, Hosmer wrote: “Okemos was inoffensive and honest; sober as Indians generally are, and always affable and willing to communicate the result of his recollections, which were much more vivid the farther back he went. Of late years the favourite weapons of the old chief were the knife and fork.”



Following Okemos’ death in 1858 and his burial in what is now the modern-day Portland area the city of Hamilton, Michigan was renamed Okemos in his honor.

“Not being troubled with large earthly possessions,” Hosmer wrote, “Okemos left no will, and it is doubtful if the very numerous heirs will take out letters of administration. He owed only one debt-that of nature- which he was rather slow about, and took his own time, but paid at last.”

In addition to the known photographs of Chief Okemos four paintings show him in varying regalia and at different ages.

A mural-style oil painting in the dome area of the Ingham County Courthouse shows Okemos trading with pioneers. There is also a painting in the state historical museum and local artist John DeMartelly, now deceased, depicted Chief Okemos as a proud and vibrant young warrior in his 1976 painting which now hangs in the Nokomis Center in Meridian Township. A final painting is held by the Clarke Historical Library at Central Michigan University. It shows the Chief sitting on a log with a dog at his feet. Only the painting by DeMartelly can be traced to an artist.

For more information on Chief Okemos and to view more images of him visit:

http://www.chiefokemos.com/okemos_pics.asp.



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

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Historical Society of Greater Lansing - Membership Application

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in the Historical Society of Greater Lansing

I have enclosed:

- \$20 Individual Membership
- \$30 Family Membership
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*The Historical Society of Greater Lansing is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit corporation.
Thank you for your support of our programs and activities.*

Historical Society of Greater Lansing Herrmann House Fundraiser

Tuesday, May 6, 2014 - 6:00pm-8:00pm

Herrmann House, LCC Campus - 520 North Capitol Avenue, Downtown Lansing

Number of tickets _____ Total enclosed \$ _____ (\$50.00 per person)
See Reverse for Sponsorship Opportunities

Name _____

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**Historical Society of Greater Lansing Herrmann House Fundraiser
Event Sponsorship Opportunities**

_____ \$100 Additional Gift – Copper - ¼ page advertisement

_____ \$250 Additional Gift – Silver- ½ page advertisement

_____ \$500 Additional Gift – Gold - full page advertisement

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