



History Explorer

Historical Society of Greater Lansing

www.LansingHistory.org

April 2014

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, jointly 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.

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.

Michigan's Historic Railroad Stations

Thursday, April 10, 2014 - 7:00pm

LBWL Depot - REO Town, 1201 S. Washington St.

Michael Hodges of the Detroit News will give a talk on his book Michigan's Historical Railroad Stations in the beautifully restored Grand Truck Western Railroad Depot in Lansing's REO Town, now owned by the Lansing Board of Water & Light. Books will be available for purchase.

Lansing Votes Exhibit Brown Bag Series

Join HSGL on Wednesdays at 12:10pm in the Lansing City Hall atrium for a bite-sized talk about some of the votes featured in the Lansing Votes exhibit



currently on display there. Each brown bag event will feature a speaker who will present for approximately twenty minutes while you munch on your brown bag lunch, leaving plenty of time for you to ask a few questions and tour the exhibit before going back to work!

April 2, 2014 - 12:10pm - The Morlok Quads

presented by Karen Douglas

April 9, 2014 - 12:10pm - The Carnegie Library

presented by Valerie Marvin and Maureen Hirten

April 16, 2014 - 12:10pm - Saving GM

presented by David Hollister

April 23, 2014 - 12:10pm - Mayor Crego

presented by his daughter, Jo Crego Hacker

Up, Across, and Ultimately Down: A Brief Journey over Memory Lane with Lansing’s Skywalks

by Zig Olds

In the hustle and bustle of today’s commuter, it is all one can do to manage a breakfast sandwich in one hand, a cell phone trapped between the neck and shoulder, an eye on the clock, and any remaining appendages guiding the vehicle to “point b”. It is easy, almost automatic, to become numb to the surroundings if you beat the same path day after day, “focused” on getting to the destination. Sure, it’s easy to notice the detours for roadwork, a new business on the corner, and the eventual change in the seasons. However, there are even more subtle changes occurring to the community that could easily go unnoticed if one was not looking for them. A drive down either Grand River Avenue, Martin Luther King Boulevard, or South Cedar will reveal changes to the skyline that speak loudly to the state of Lansing. It is down these streets that work crews have dismantled pedestrian overpasses commonly referred to as skywalks.

Skywalks were erected to allow school children safer passage across busy streets impeding their walk to school. Currently, there are two large monoliths in front of the former Maplewood Elementary School that define where a skywalk once sat. This site is also one of two that bore witness to when school children and pedestrian overpasses made the news in an unfortunate way.

The date was April 29th, 1996. It was just after 3:00pm and Maplewood Elementary School was in the process of being dismissed for the day. Students that needed to cross South Cedar Street were eagerly approaching the skywalk that would safely get them up

and over the busy street 14’ 8” below. Also approaching the metal structure was a dump truck, recently emptied at a nearby jobsite, which had its hydraulic bed still in the raised position. The driver, unaware of his truck’s configuration, slammed into the skywalk, knocking it from its concrete supports thereby bringing the skywalk crashing down. The accident sent six children to the hospital, two of which were in critical condition. Although the scene was definitely tragic, had the collision occurred a few minutes later, during peak usage, the casualty count would have been significantly higher. This accident bore a striking resemblance to one that occurred nearly twenty years earlier on another congested Lansing street.



At different parts of the day, the intersection of Barnes and Logan (now MLK Boulevard) proved to be a very active corner. Logan was one (of many) major routes workers would travel to and from Oldsmobile. Barnes Avenue led steady streams of students to Barnes Elementary School. In 1965 tragedy occurred as a six-year-old Barnes student was struck and killed by a car at the busy intersection. The student was William J. McClintock, grandson of local Cadillac dealer Freeman McClintock. As a result of the accident, a skywalk was erected to prevent another potential tragedy from occurring. The McClintock family was largely responsible for making this safety improvement possible via a generous financial contribution.

The amount of traffic on Logan necessitated an expansion of lanes to accommodate commuters. This expansion would create a multi-lane boulevard divided by medians of greenspace. The project would eliminate numerous homes and business on the west side of Logan, but would create a second bridge over the Grand River and Oldsmobile operations. By the mid-seventies the expansion plan was in full production. The new, much

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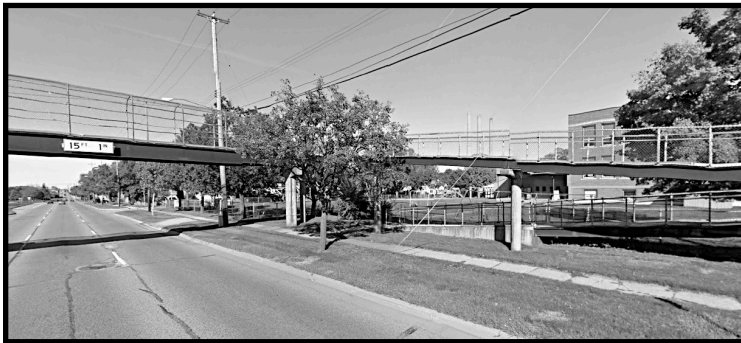
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wider thoroughfare required a new pedestrian overpass to again protect the students of Barnes Elementary and for anyone else who needed to cross the road safely. The new skywalk was designed with accessibility in mind. Features included much longer egresses to allow a more subtle ascent and descent and the elimination of steps. This allowed the new bridge to be used by persons using bicycles or wheelchairs. The structure would fully enclose its passengers with a metal mesh floor and a "tunnel" of cyclone-style fencing. The overpass would be finished just days ahead of the start of the 1977-78 school year.

It was a Friday morning and students were making their way to Barnes School to finish out the week, and get to the coved weekend. Simultaneously, a steady stream of motorized commuters were also finding their way to daily destinations. Things would abruptly change for everyone at the intersection of Barnes and



Logan at 8:30am, September 16, 1977. A southbound flatbed semi-truck, loaded with an excavation backhoe, was attempting to pass under the skywalk. With its boom lowered as low as possible, the truck failed to clear the first support girder. The collision twisted the northern girder into the other support structure thereby breaching the full containment of the metal tube. Six children, ranging in age from nine to eleven years of age, were tossed nearly fifteen feet to the ground below. Lansing Fire Department paramedics initially treated and stabilized the injured until they could be transported to St. Lawrence and Sparrow Hospitals. From lacerations and broken bones to skull fractures and damaged vertebrae, the injuries sustained were quite serious. For many more students, who had survived a near miss, the psychological damage would also require proper treatment and recovery. James Hengstebeck, Barnes' principle at the time of the accident, was instrumental in alleviating the mental trauma by involving psychiatrists

from Michigan State University. In time, the children would recover from both the mental and physical injuries, and the bridge would be repaired and remains in service to this day.



The City of Lansing inspects its bridges (automotive and pedestrian) once every two years. As these concrete and metal structures continue to survive four seasons of abuse, occasional unintended damage, and fatigue from normal patronage, it increases the need for greater maintenance. The argument to keep these foot bridges safe and operational becomes much harder when the city's budget becomes more restrictive and the primary school for which the skywalk was intended to serve has since been closed. These innocuous sky blue or dove gray structures have helped generations of school children get from home to school safely, have also provided safe passage for non-student walkers, and have provided prime locations for hanging banners promoting upcoming civic events. They have been erected in times of fantastic growth, and dismantled as their need has been retired. Kids crossing busy streets speaks volumes to the health and prosperity of a community. Maybe the true tragic event of the skywalks of Lansing is their demise, and the fact that our beloved city cannot support the weight of them any longer.





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Lansing, MI 48901

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in the Historical Society of Greater Lansing

I have enclosed:

- \$20 Individual Membership
- \$30 Family Membership
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