



History Explorer

Historical Society of Greater Lansing

www.LansingHistory.org

November 2015

HSGL Auction Raises \$8,000

HSGL would like to thank everyone who supported our annual fall auction at Eastern High School. Thanks to your generous donations, ticket purchases, and bids, we raised another \$8,000 for HSGL's Museum Fund.

Don't Forget!

HSGL will not be publishing a newsletter in the month of December. We hope that you enjoy the holiday season.

Upcoming HSGL Events

The Evolution of News Photography

by David Olds

Saturday, November 14, 2015, 1:00 pm

Michigan Historical Center

702 W. Kalamazoo St., Lansing

Learn how news photography has adapted and changed from longtime Lansing photographer David Olds, who supplied many of the images in HSGL's current exhibit. Olds will focus specifically on the history of the news wire service and relate personal experiences about covering major news events in Michigan. Olds has worked for more than 40 years as a photo journalist for the Lansing State Journal, United Press International, and other companies.

Humanity in Photography of North American Indians

By Doug Price, Collector

Saturday, December 12, 2015, 1:00 pm

Michigan Historical Center

702 W. Kalamazoo St., Lansing

Collector Doug Price will show and discuss his extensive collection of Native American photographs including original images by Frank Rinehart, Edward Curtis, Karl Moon, and Michigan's Grace Chandler. Chandler photographed Michigan Native Americans in Harbor Springs performing Hiawatha pageants and everyday life scenes at the turn of the 20th century. Chandler's work was exhibited in 2003 at the Kellogg Art Museum and Nokomis Learning Center.

From Sepia to Selfies - 150 Years of Lansing Photography Guided Exhibit Tours

Saturday November 14 & December 12, 2015

10:30 am, 11:30 am, 2:30 pm

Library of Michigan, Fourth Floor

702 W. Kalamazoo St.

Learn the stories behind the images on a docent led tour of HSGL's current exhibit, *From Sepia to Selfies: 150 Years of Lansing Photography*. Reservations are not required.

Leavenworth Photography: Anything Photographed, Anywhere, Anytime.

By Bill Castanier

This article was written to coincide with HSGL's current exhibit, From Sepia to Selfies, at the Library of Michigan on the Fourth Floor. The exhibit, which is open Monday-Friday from 10:00 am to 5:00 pm and the second Saturday of the month from 10:00 am to 4:00 pm, closes December 30, 2015.

HSGL's current exhibit, *From Sepia to Selfies - 150 Years of Lansing Photography* contains more than 300 photographs representing Lansing history that are displayed alongside rare cameras and photographic equipment. The exhibit includes photographs from the Lansing State Journal, as well as many photos that were the work of both vernacular photographers and photography businesses, including the legendary Leavenworth studio.

Looking at Leavenworth's photos is like entering a time machine. The firm's archive documents everything from Lansing's early automotive industry to the city's transformation into a modern capital. R.C. Leavenworth, then living in Boyne City, was recruited by a group of powerful Lansing businessmen who summered in the Charlevoix and the Harbor Springs area (including Harry Harper, president of Motor Wheel) to move to Lansing in the early part of the last century. Their goal was to have a photographic history of industry and life in Lansing.

Prior to establishing a photographic studio in Boyne City which he maintained for 20 years, R.C. Leavenworth, born in 1880 in Fife, Michigan, had been "capturing the light" in Michigan's Upper Peninsula by shooting the timber and mining industry since founding his company in 1897.

Historical Society of Greater Lansing

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www.LansingHistory.org

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R.C. Leavenworth.

Photo courtesy of Archives of Michigan.

Moving to Lansing in 1919 and locating at 1315 W. Michigan Ave, Leavenworth Photography would begin a commitment to the city that continues to this day under the eyes of photographer Roger Boettcher, the company's current owner. Throughout its 96 years in Lansing, the firm has shot everything from country club dances to the Bath School Disaster and Ku Klux Klan cross burnings. Leavenworth's first clients in Lansing read like a local who's who including R.E.O., Oldsmobile, the Christman Company, and Motor Wheel Corporation. Most of the important photographs of these businesses and events are easily identified as being Leavenworth photos thanks to a hand lettered India ink numeric identification in the lower right hand corner.

The lobby of the now Boji Tower, originally the Olds Tower, is tastefully decorated with some of Leavenworth's images of the construction of the building from 1929-1931 including the iconic photo of R.E. Olds riding a steel girder. Leavenworth also signed a contract with the Lansing State Journal in 1922 as the newspaper's official photographer, a role the firm continued well into the 1950s. The immensity of the photographic records, including hundreds of thousands of negatives, makes it one of the premier photographic histories of a single city in the 20th century.

The Historical Society of Greater Lansing's exhibit *From Sepia to Selfies* has a dedicated vitrine showcasing the Leavenworth company and a rather early selfie of Mr. Leavenworth, who is seen standing in the front of his

Boyne City business. The image clearly shows a string running from the photographer to an unseen camera. The exhibit case also holds a rare camera used by Leavenworth to shoot panoramic photographs of everything from graduations to building construction. Boettcher also loaned a sign from the company that was once located on West St. Joseph St., but was demolished as part of the I-496 construction.

Numerous other photographs from Leavenworth are also included in the exhibit including the rare 1924 photograph of a Ku Klux Klan cross burning in Lansing. The photograph is on loan from local collector Craig Whitford and was identified by stage advertisements for two Lansing companies. The 8 x 10 photo, damaged by what appears to be, ironically, a fire, shows three crosses burning while robed KKK members look on. One lone woman is turned toward the camera.

There is a strong belief that the photograph was one of those scheduled to illustrate a September 1, 1924, Lansing State Journal article about a massive march down Michigan Avenue on Labor Day. That particular newspaper has disappeared with no known copies available leading to speculation of why the newspaper was destroyed. One theory has it that a famous Lansing resident may have been pictured at the rally. This theory remains unproven.

Leavenworth Photography has been owned by three individuals: R.C. Leavenworth, Hiram Marple, his son-in-law, and current owner Roger Boettcher. Boettcher began his career with Leavenworth in the mid-1950s after learning basic photography skills while still in high school in Holt. He polished these skills with the U.S. Marine Corps during the Korean War. Among other assignments Boettcher remembers is photographing M.S.U.'s 1956 Rose Bowl appearance.

The modern Leavenworth Collection is somewhat comparable to that of Ann Arbor collector David V. Tinder, which was acquired by the Clements Library of the University of Michigan in a unique deal which involved a third party purchase and donation. The Tinder collection is comprised of more than 100,000 photographs taken by more than 8,000 Michigan photographers, including approximately 130 Lansing photographers from between 1840 and 1930, including Leavenworth.

The Tinder collection includes a daguerreotype photograph that is a selfle by the earliest Lansing photographer, John W. Hoag. It is the earliest known



Michigan Governors

Front Row L to R: Governor G. Mennen Williams,
Murray Van Wagoner, John Swainson
Back Row: George Romney, William Milliken.

Photo courtesy of David Olds.

portrait of a Michigan photographer. In the photograph Hoag holds a sign advertising his business.

Part of the Leavenworth Collection currently resides in the Archives of Michigan which is raising money to purchase the rights and to preserve the collection. In addition to a large number of negatives, which already have gone to the Archives, Boettcher has retained ownership of file cabinet after file cabinet of negatives which he is interested in selling. See one of the images at <https://michpics.wordpress.com/page/109/?order=ASC>.

Since most of the Leavenworth negatives are nitrate and are extremely volatile the Archives has used a cold storage process to preserve them from the degradation caused by humidity and moisture. To date the Archives of Michigan has focused on negatives for Oldsmobile, R.E.O. Motor Car Company and the Lansing Board of Water & Light.

At one point, the Archives estimated that to purchase and preserve those 200,000 negatives it would need approximately \$170,000, but to date a little more than \$100,000 has been raised. The Archives is actively fundraising to raise the additional funds to purchase and preserve other photographic negatives owned by Leavenworth. For more information on how to contribute to the Archives' fundraising efforts visit <http://www.michigan.gov/mhc/0,4726,7-282-61083-136497--,00.html>.



Historical Society of Greater Lansing
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I have enclosed:

- \$20 Individual Membership
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