



# History Explorer

Historical Society of Greater Lansing

www.LansingHistory.org

October 2016

## Upcoming Events

### Trains, Planes & Automobiles

Transportation history will be the focus of three co-sponsored HSGL programs during October. Come join us for a look at Lansing's history of "Trains, Planes & Automobiles."

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### 1225: The Life and Times of a Steam Locomotive

Saturday, October 8 – 3:30 p.m.

Library of Michigan – 702 W. Kalamazoo, 4th Floor

Award-winning author Kevin P. Keefe will discuss the restoration of the steam locomotive 1225, which for decades was on display at Michigan State University. The famed engine, only two of its kind running today, is best known for its role in the 2004 movie *Polar Express* starring Tom Hanks. The engine was selected for the film because of its unique moniker displayed on the front. Restoration of the former freight engine began at MSU in the late 1960s; today the train is stationed in Owosso and runs numerous excursions for rail fans.

Keefe pulled together an inspirational story on the engine in *Twelve Twenty-Five: The Life and Times of a Steam Locomotive*. He will be one of the keynote speakers for the October 8 joint Library of Michigan and HSGL program on rail history. Guests can register for the day-long program featuring speakers on rail photography, Michigan's Interurban "boat trains," and restoration of historic railroad cars. For more information and to register for the program (all day including lunch: \$15) go to [http://www.michigan.gov/libraryofmichigan/0,2351,7-160-69951\\_69952-392213--,00.html](http://www.michigan.gov/libraryofmichigan/0,2351,7-160-69951_69952-392213--,00.html)

The Keefe program can be attended for free and is open to the public.

### Preston Tucker: His Battle to Build the Car of Tomorrow

Thursday, October 13 – 7:00 p.m.

REO Transportation Museum – 240 Museum Dr.

Award-winning writer Steve Lehto tells the fascinating story of one of the automotive industry's most creative and quirky design geniuses in his book *Preston Tucker and His Battle to Build the Car of Tomorrow*. Tucker designed and built a car that was way ahead of its time in 1948, but an SEC investigation and subsequent criminal charges brought him tumbling down, despite being found not guilty. Lehto tells the tragic story of former Ypsilanti car salesman Tucker's rise to the top and tragic fall. Today, only several dozen Tuckers survive, and the million-dollar collectible automobile is seldom seen outside museums. *The event is free.*

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### Babe Ruth: Airport Kid

Wednesday, October 26 – 6:30 p.m.

East Lansing Public Library – 950 Abbot Rd.

Lansing's own aviatrix, Marion "Babe" Ruth, will be the subject of a program by Lansing historian Craig Whitford. Ruth lived next to the Lansing airport and became fascinated with flying, taking her first flight in 1931 at age 13. She soloed in 1936, receiving her pilot's license the following year and her commercial license four years later. During WWII Ruth served as a flight instructor using a flight simulator. She has been inducted into both the Michigan Aviation Hall of Fame and Women's Hall of Fame. Presenter Craig Whitford has written *Airport Kid: Learning to Fly*, which details Ruth's early life in aviation. *The event is free.*

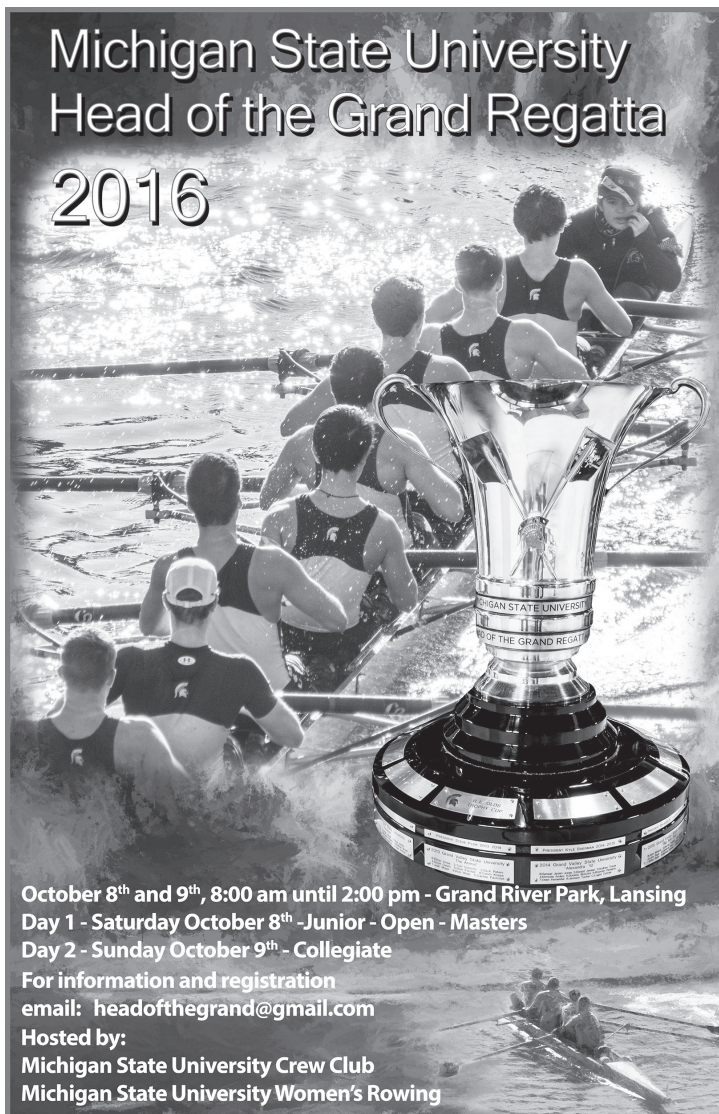
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## The Spirit of R. E. Olds Returns to Lansing!

by  
James C. Perkins

On the weekend of October 8-9, 2016, along the banks of the Grand River in Lansing, on land he once owned and gifted to the residents of the capital city, cheers will once again be offered up in the name of Lansing's favorite adopted son: R. E. Olds. This year's celebration will be in recognition of the high school and collegiate winners of the Head Of The Grand Regatta and the Lansing auto pioneer for whom their trophy cup will soon be named. Both the winning student athletes and the venerable legend of Lansing will no doubt be better off for their association with each other when the cheering is complete for another year.

Each October the MSU Men's Crew Club and the MSU Women's Crew Team co-host their largest rowing invitational, the Head Of The Grand Regatta, for high school and college crew teams from across Michigan and the midwest. With students, coaches, parents, and spectators looking on, this year's presentation of the winners' medallions and awarding of the symbolic silver trophy cup will take on a new and historic meaning. The sparkling hardware known as "The Regatta Cup" will be dedicated by descendants of the Olds family and will be christened with the name of industrialist, philanthropist, and boat lover Ransom Eli Olds. This year, when the students pose for pictures with the antique silver cup—and pass the regatta's symbol



**Michigan State University  
Head of the Grand Regatta  
2016**

October 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>, 8:00 am until 2:00 pm - Grand River Park, Lansing  
 Day 1 - Saturday October 8<sup>th</sup> - Junior - Open - Masters  
 Day 2 - Sunday October 9<sup>th</sup> - Collegiate

For information and registration  
 email: [headofthegrand@gmail.com](mailto:headofthegrand@gmail.com)  
 Hosted by:  
 Michigan State University Crew Club  
 Michigan State University Women's Rowing

around for a smooch—they will be linking their names with history. The best Freshman 8 boats plus their navigator (the coxswain), in both men's and woman's divisions and in both high school and college categories, will receive the 36 medallions to be awarded. They will also have their names carved on plaques for posterity to see. All will be forever linked with the name of R. E. Olds.

*"It Takes A Neighborhood"*

In mid-Michigan it's not at all difficult to find a lot of Spartan fans. They come in all shapes and sizes with banners, flags, and bumper stickers. Each season brings renewed support for the football and basketball teams and scores of other team and club

### Historical Society of Greater Lansing

P.O. Box 12095 ~ Lansing, MI 48901  
[www.LansingHistory.org](http://www.LansingHistory.org)

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sports. What makes the fall regatta season unique, especially along the banks of the Grand River, is the support which has grown for the MSU men's crew club and the MSU women's crew team by the neighbors along the south shore of the Grand River. Both programs, which occupy their own respective boathouses on the north shore of the Grand River, are supported by a half-dozen neighborhoods and hundreds of residents who line the south shore of the Grand River. If you ask the rowers, the coaches, and many of the neighbors who live between Waverly Road and MLK Boulevard, they will tell you that what makes this fan base so different is that both sides of the river seem to have adopted the other as their own. They have been cheering each other on for more than half a century.

Recent events, such as the creation and awarding of the regatta cup by the neighbors, and the recent arrival of a new catamaran-style, coach's launch for the men's Crew Club illustrate this important bond. When the dedication of the new launch takes place later this year, it has been decided that it will be christened with the names of two neighbors and friends who are now gone, but are not at all forgotten—Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Culpepper. Marilyn Culpepper, who passed away in the spring of 2016, was a writer, activist, philanthropist, and professor at Michigan State University for more than 50 years. Marilyn and Tom Culpepper were also Lansing residents who lived along Moores River Drive within view of the Grand River for more than 80 years.

The ties between the Crews, the neighbors and the history of Lansing are strong and date back more than a century. In the words of the men's rowing head coach, Bryan Pape: "Just as the MSU Crew Club boathouse is built on Olds family land, the river we row on is shared with our south-shore neighbors. We have a special bond with these neighbors that has grown closer every season; we attend each other's social events, celebrate shared victories, and mourn shared losses. Our neighbors' generosity continues to open new doors for the club, and through access

to ever newer and better equipment will be crucial to pushing the club to new heights."

So the next time you are in need of some Lansing history, drive over and watch the long boats practicing along the majestic Grand River. You can find them there just about any early morning or late evening around twilight. Take a few minutes to just watch and enjoy, as do the residents of the south shore just about every day. The rowers would not mind; they enjoy the attention. Remember as you stand on the shore that now you too are a part of this unique chapter in Lansing history. Listen closely for the bark of the commands being shouted by a coach or a coxswain, and enjoy for a moment the majesty of it all. Think of how fortunate we are that this is part of our city and its rich history. Of course feel free to take a selfie with the boats in the background or to shout encouragement as they pass. It's almost impossible not to offer up some kind of encouragement.

And if by chance you should glance up and see a man with a neatly trimmed mustache, waving his bowler hat as the boats pass by, don't be startled. Just smile, join him in a cheer, and maybe just tell him "Thanks, Mr. Olds!"

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## Upcoming Events *Continued from page 1*

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### And Back to the 19th Century

#### Civil War in Michigan

*Thursday, October 27 – 7:00 p.m.*

*CADL-Downtown Branch – 401 S. Capitol Ave.*

Staff from the MSU Archives will discuss their Civil War online website and some of the more interesting documents in the collections. The MSU Civil War website was created during the Sesquicentennial of the Civil War and features diaries, letters, and photographs from this period of American history.



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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