



History Explorer

Historical Society of Greater Lansing

www.LansingHistory.org

March-April 2020

Upcoming Events

Woman's Suffrage: The West Came First

Thursday, March 19 – 6:30 p.m.

*The Forum, Michigan Historical Center,
702 W. Kalamazoo*

Join Michigan Women Forward and the National Women's History Museum for a panel discussion about the woman's suffrage movement in the West (including the modern Midwest and Michigan). Panelists include Dr. Molly Rozum, Associate Professor and Director of Graduate Studies at The University of South Dakota; Dr. Lori Ann Lahlum, Professor, Department of History, Minnesota State University; and Dr. Virginia Caruso, Historian and Member, Board of Trustees, Historical Society of Michigan. Valerie Marvin, Capitol Historian, will be moderating.

The panel will discuss several facets of the decades-long woman suffrage movement, starting in the mid-19th century and finally ending in 1920. The discussion will address the circumstances that led Wyoming to become the first territory and state to grant suffrage; how discussions about voting rights for African Americans, Native Americans, and immigrants influenced the suffrage movement; and the relationship between woman's suffrage and both prohibition and university coeducation.

Anyone wishing to attend is asked to visit womenshistory.org/events/determined-rise and register using the event brite link for the March 19, 2020 event. Alternatively, anyone interested in attending can also call the Michigan Women Forward's Lansing Office at 517-853-5890. There is no charge.

A Fabulous '50s/Sensational '60s Sock Hop Experience

Saturday, March 21 – 3:00-5:00 p.m.

*Hannah Community Center, 819 Abbot Rd.,
East Lansing*

Where were you in '62? Probably hanging out on a weekend in the school gym listening and dancing to your favorite music. Come to the Hannah Community Center gym on March 21 for this re-creation of the music and memories from those simpler times. You may have been at a Sock Hop at the Community Center when it was East Lansing High School until the late '50s and then East Lansing Junior High School.

This is a free community event presented by the East Lansing Educational Foundation (ELEF) Punch and cookies will also be provided in the Prime Time space across from the gym. WFMK afternoon radio personality John Robinson will spin the hits we remember from the late '50s and into the mid '60s for your listening and dancing enjoyment. *The dress code is casual but neat!*

Special thanks to our main Sock Hop sponsor, Independence Village of East Lansing. Our honorary event chairpersons are Beth and Al Cafagna and Mary Anne and John Larzelere. For further details contact Gary Mescher at ELEF, 616-481-1273, or Gary.Mescher@elps.us.

A Woman's Place is Under the Dome: The Michigan State Capitol and the Woman's Suffrage Movement

Monday, April 6 – 2:00 p.m.

Michigan State Capitol Building

The Michigan State Capitol is pleased to offer a new special guided tour celebrating the 2020 Woman's

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A Biographical Sketch of Schuyler Fisk Seager

By Le Roy G. Barnett

When he died his death notice in the local newspaper took up nearly four full columns. Words of his passing were carried throughout the Great Lake State's press and in the dailies of Boston, Buffalo, Fort Wayne, Indianapolis, and Madison. His name was Schuyler Fisk Seager, and he was one of the best-known attorneys in Lansing, Michigan.

Seager's story began with his birth on 6 July 1842 in Lima, New York, son of Schuyler A. Seager (1807-1874) and Eliza S. Rogers Seager (1812-1852). His father "was a prominent divine" in the local Methodist Episcopal Church and, for a time, president of Lima College, where the subject of this essay was schooled as a teenager.

In 1858 Schuyler came to Lansing and took a position teaching math at the Michigan Female College, an institution founded and run by his unmarried aunts Abigail C. Rogers (1818-1869) and Delia Rogers (1822-1887). In 1860, while serving as an instructor at the school, Schuyler began studying law in the office of famous local attorney John Wesley Longyear (1820-1875).

On 24 July 1862 Schuyler enlisted at Lansing as a sergeant in Company A of the 20th Michigan Infantry. A little more than a month later he reentered the service as a second lieutenant in Company D of the Sixth Michigan Cavalry. He remained with this until his discharge on 1 June 1863.

After leaving the service, Schuyler returned to Lansing and his studies at the Longyear law office. This effort bore fruit on 28 October 1865, when he was admitted to the Michigan bar as an attorney. Very soon thereafter Schuyler formed a partnership with his

former preceptor, a relationship that continued until February of 1870, when Longyear was appointed to the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan at Detroit.

Schuyler did not go into the general practice of law; instead he specialized in corporate and real estate legal matters. He was particularly associated with railroads and mining interests, with some of his clients being the Michigan Slate Company; Marquette, Houghton & Ontonagon Railroad Company; Lake Superior Ship Canal, Railway & Iron Company; Michigan Central Railroad Company; and the Chicago and Northeastern Railroad Company.

Given the nature of his work, Schuyler spent most of his professional time in courts of the federal government. On at least a score of occasions, however, he did appear on behalf of clients before the Michigan Supreme Court. Regardless of venue, most of his legal engagements were for the benefit of Upper Peninsula concerns.

On Christmas day 1868, Schuyler F. Seager married Emily "Alice" Berry (1844-1879), the daughter of former Michigan Auditor General Langford Greene Berry (1812-1878). Alice was a graduate of the Michigan Female College in Lansing, and it is possible the couple met when Schuyler taught at that institution. This union produced three children: James Berry Seager (1868-1922, general manager, Seager Engine Works), Henry Rogers Seager (1870-1930, Ph.D., University of Pennsylvania), and Schuyler Fisk Seager Jr. (1879-1934, director, Lansing Manufacturers Railroad). Alice died of pneumonia on 27 September 1879 and was buried in Lansing's Mount Hope Cemetery.

Not long after Alice's passing, her half-sister Gertrude Margaret Berry (1855-1935) became a resident of the Seager household in order "to oversee the raising of her three nephews." Over time she apparently also raised the interest of Schuyler, for in September of 1881 he made Gertrude his wife. From the wedding of this couple there came one child named Richard Berry Seager (1882-1925, classical archaeologist). When Schuyler passed away, his son Richard inherited a trust fund that left him "financially independent." His mother, Gertrude, remained a

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Seager's home at 827 N. Washington Ave.

widow until 10 July 1889, when she married Thomas Tomkin McCabe (1856-1891, professor) in Washtenaw County, where he taught at the University of Michigan.

Schuyler was not just generous to his children, he was also magnanimous to members of the community. It was said that he secretly supported “many families” in town who were in need of financial assistance. People describing his character referred to him as “kind,” “charitable,” “philanthropic,” and being someone who had a big heart and whose hand was always open to others.

Schuyler's wealth stemmed from the fact that he was “one of the leading lawyers” in our state. He frequently “had connection with cases of very great magnitude” that involved millions of dollars, and he usually “carried them to a successful conclusion.” His income from these lawsuits enabled him to own “one of the most elegant homes” in the city, a stately residence at 817 (later 827) North Washington Avenue.

Because he was so successful and highly respected, Schuyler was at various times encouraged to run for mayor of the Capital City and as U.S. senator from our state. Though he was aligned with the Republican Party, Schuyler turned down the aforesaid races and, instead, successfully ran for a non-partisan post on the Lansing Board of Education. There, “he devoted considerable time and a good deal of means on his own part” to creating the public library system as it existed in the 1880s.

Schuyler's pro bono efforts to further his bibliothecarial goals were cut short by his untimely death due to typhoid fever on 6 November 1883 at the age of 41. Upon news of his passing the following

day, the United States District Court in Detroit adjourned at noon out of respect, as did the Ingham County Circuit Court. The funeral was held at the residence of the deceased, with the president of the nearby Agricultural College—Theophilus Capen Abbot (1826-1892)—presiding. Among those attending were “the entire bar,” the Lansing Board of Education as a body, and “a delegation of prominent attorneys from Detroit.”

When the services were over, a procession of carriages accompanied Schuyler's body to Mount Hope Cemetery, where he was laid to rest beside his first wife. He reposes there today, all but forgotten as one of the legal luminaries of the post-Civil War era who once practiced their craft in Lansing. He should be remembered as a highly skilled attorney who did much to support the state's business community and the city in which he resided.

Upcoming Events - *Cont'd from page 1*

A Woman's Place is Under the Dome...

Suffrage Centennial. The tour will focus on Michigan's three Capitols as the settings for some of the most important moments in the 75-year battle for equal suffrage in our state. Participants will also have a unique opportunity to view rare state suffrage ephemera from the Library of Michigan's collection. Additional tours will be held June 12, September 12, and December 5. The tour will last approximately 90 minutes. Please email your reservation request to capitoltourguides@legislature.mi.gov.

Grand Opening of “Pave the Way” Exhibit and Preview of Documentary

*Thursday April 16, 5:30-8:30 p.m.
Library of Michigan, 702 West Kalamazoo*

The co-sponsors of the “Pave the Way” project—the Historical Society of Greater Lansing, the City of Lansing, and the National Parks Service—invite you to the Grand Opening of the “Pave the Way” exhibit and to a preview of the documentary film *We Lost a Way of Life*, which details the destruction of an African American neighborhood for the construction of I-496. Join us at the Library of Michigan for this reception. Admission and parking is free. Light hors d'oeuvres will be served.



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