

History Explorer

A publication of the Historical Society of Greater Lansing

Fall 2005

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Historic Explorer is published during the months of September to May by the HSGL. Articles and news of historical interest are always welcome.

Michigan Female College founded in Lansing by two Rogers Sisters in 1855

Lansing Capital News
J.P. Edmonds
Nov 24, 1928

During the period from 1850 to 1870 opportunities for acquiring a college education were few and far between, as compared to our day. This applied to the education of young women especially as at that time practically no college admitted women on the same basis as men. In fact, it was generally believed that young girls should receive an entirely different line of instruction than the boys.

Women had not yet entered the professions or the business field, consequently the ordinary college curriculum did not apply to them at all, even had they been allowed to enter. In order to supply adequate facilities for higher education of young women during this period, a large number of seminaries, academies and 'female' colleges were organized. Many of these were incorporated and the records of that time show that almost every town in southern Michigan was the home of an institution of this character.

One of them was organized in Lansing and named by its founders "The Michigan Female College."



Abigail C. Rogers

Continued on page 2

Join Us...

September 18, 2005: GHOSTWALK 2005 - Pioneers, Notables and Heros

On Sunday September 18th wear your comfortable shoes and spend the afternoon walking with us through Lansing's historic Mt. Hope Cemetery. The 2005 Walking Tour features short biographies of more than 20 Lansing Pioneers, Notables and Heros who shaped our Capital City as well as American History. We will tour, Rain or Shine, so please bring an umbrella with you. Our tour will take place within Section C of the cemetery. We look forward to seeing you there. **Our tour will begin at 2 P.M.**

Female College, continued...

Organize School

In the early part of the year 1855 there arrived in Lansing two women, both of whom were destined to pass the remainder of their lives here and leave a lasting impression of the minds and characters of more than 1000 girls and young women who at various times came under their instruction and influence. These two women were the Misses Abigail and Delia Rogers. They were born in Genesee county New York, and were well qualified in every way for the work in hand. Both of their parents were teachers and had long been identified with educational matters in their native state, so it was natural for the daughters to follow in the same vocation.

Very soon after arriving in town they organized their school and as their means were slender they could not build a building of their own, but were obliged to start in a rented location. About the only place that could be found was a two-story frame structure that stood on the south side of Washtenaw st. directly opposite the present building of the Lansing Capital News. This building was one of the first hotels erected in Lansing and was named the 'Ohio House,' but not proving profitable had been abandoned as a hotel and thus became available.

Land Donated

In this building the first modest start was made and in it the "College" was conducted for about three years. During this time they seem to have been successful and to have impressed their character and ability on some of the leading men of Lansing and also Detroit, because in 1858 they secured financial aid and backing enough to erect a suitable building for their work. A tract of land of about 20 acres was donated by James Turner, H.H. Smith and J.W. Collins, so it was only necessary for them to raise funds enough for the erection of a building. This land was located at the head of what was then Franklin st., now Grand River av., and is at present occupied by the Michigan School for the Blind.

The two sisters had some funds of their own, which with other money subscribed by Lansing citizens, and very substantial aid from the Hon. Zachariah Chandler and

Capt. Eber Ward of Detroit, enabled them to erect a 4-story brick building on the site.

The building was ready for occupancy in the autumn of 1858 and the "college" organized on a larger and more comprehensive basis. They could now take "boarding" as well as "day" students so the number of pupils increased very materially, many prominent families from all parts of the state sending their daughters for instruction. Capt. Ward, a wealthy ship owner and merchant of Detroit, seems to have taken a great interest in the institution, and not only made substantial gifts, but also entered several of his daughters and grand-daughters as students.

Elopes with Gypsy

One of these, Clara Ward, was the daughter of his eldest son John. She was a pupil for some years and after graduation attained a certain amount of fame or rather notoriety, by reason of her matrimonial adventures. She became a beautiful and brilliant woman, and going to Europe married a Belgian nobleman, the Prince DeChimay. This alliance did not long endure, and one day her relatives and friends were shocked to learn that she had left the Prince and eloped with a Gypsy musician named Rigo. On account of her social prominence and aristocratic connections this elopement created a tremendous sensation at the time.

For some years the school was conducted with considerable success, but in the days of our Civil War the financial burden evidently became somewhat onerous, as an effort was made to have the state take over the college and conduct it as a state institution. The proposition was urged at several secessions of the legislature, but received scant encouragement, probably on account of the exigencies arising by reason of the war.

After their request was finally rejected by the legislature, the two sisters continued as best they could and conducted the school until 1869. In that year the eldest, Miss Abigail, died, leaving the entire burden on the shoulders of her sister Delia. This proved too much for her to carry, so

Continued on page 3

Female College, continued...

in the same year the college was closed and the business discontinued.

Sold to State

For a year or so the property remained idle, but in 1871 was sold to the Michigan Grand Lodge of Odd Fellows, who intended to use it for a charitable and benevolent institution in connection with their order. They made some improvements and enlarged the building but for some reason the project was dropped and the property rented to the state. It was finally purchased in 1874 and developed by the state of Michigan into the institution we now know as the School for the Blind.

After the college was discontinued, the surviving sister, Miss Delia, remained and honored and loved citizen of Lansing for many years, finally passing away on 1886 at the home of her niece, Mrs. S.L. Smith.

I am greatly indebted to Mr. James Seager and Mrs. Schuyler S. Olds, nephew and niece of the information from which this the Misses Rogers, for much of the article is written.



Adelia Rogers

Clara Ward (1873-1917), Princess Caraman-Chimay.

Born in Detroit on 17 June 1873, the daughter of a millionaire and attended the Michigan Female College in Lansing Michigan. She was married to Prince Joseph de Caraman-Chimay, fifteen years her senior, when in 1896 she was dining in a restaurant and fell in love with the Hungarian violinist Rigo Janczi. They traveled through Europe together before visiting his parents in Hungary. But Princess Clara divorced her husband and Rigo divorced his wife. The couple settled in a castle in Egypt where she taught him to read and write, but on a visit to Paris she deserted Rigo. In the end, she married an Italian, Ricciardi, who was a stationmaster on the Vesuvian Railway. She died in Padova in 1917.

At some point in her relationship with Rigo, Clara supplemented their income by exhibiting her shapely figure in Paris. The following is an extract from *Elegant*



Clara Ward

Continued on page 4.

Clara Ward, continued...

Wits and Grand Horizontals by Cornelia Otis Skinner: *The midnight resort par excellence for the Horizontals was, of course, Maxim's.... Few society ladies would have dared to be seen within the art nouveau interior of that naughty place, with some emancipated exceptions such as Princess Caraman-Chimay, née Clara Ward from Detroit, Michigan, who eventually ran away with the violinist Rigo and appeared at the Folies Bergères in pink tights and a series of 'Plastic Poses' [Skinner 1962, page 219].*

Although disinherited by her mother Mrs. Catherine Ward-Morrow, Clara Ward died on December 18, 1916 and left an estate valued at \$1,124,935 to her children

Join Us..

September 18, 2005

Ghost Walk 2005

Lansing Pioneers, Notables & Heros

with David Votta and many others

Learn about the Pioneers, Notables & Heroes who helped to shape the Capital City.

Mt. Hope Cemetery - 2:00 P.M.

Corner of Mt. Hope and Aurelius Rd. Follow the signs to Section C. Rain or Shine. All new program.

October 19, 2005

Ellen Thackery Michigan Historic Preservation Network

Join us for a workshop and presentation on Historic Preservation. It is an evening you won't want to miss.

Friends Auditorium, Lower Level - 7 P.M.

Capital Area District Library, 401 S. Capitol, Lansing

Another "Do You Remember" and Home-Coming Interview

August 26, 1913

Probably no woman living in Lansing at the present time saw Lansing at as early a date as Mrs. Phoebe Lott Murphy, 89 years of age, who lived at DeWitt for years but who for the past three years has lived with her daughter at 946 Center st. When Mrs. Murphy as a small girl passed through Lansing on her way to DeWitt with her parents, Lansing was mostly a collection of rude dwellings and the roads were mere trails.

Mrs. Murphy was born August 25, 1824 in Hamilton, Canada. When she was a small girl her parents decided to come to Michigan. They arrived from Hamilton in Detroit by a long and tedious route. At that time there was but one railroad out of Detroit, a small line that ran to Ypsilanti. After a week's rest in Detroit the family started for DeWitt where the father had taken up land. The route lay through this city and according to Mrs. Murphy Lansing was just beginning to appear on the map.

At DeWitt there was one log house. When the first frame house was built the settlers celebrated the event by a dance and the house was "warmed" to the tune of a fiddle and the clatter of home-made shoes. With her parents she came frequently to Lansing to trade and has seen the place grow from a collection of log houses to a modern city. She says that the only road was a sort of trail from Delta to Detroit that was much frequented by both whites and the Indians. Mrs. Murphy's husband at one time carried the mail, what little there was, to the DeWitt settlement and one winter was treed by the wolves before he could make the settlement.

Although within a year of being 90 years old, Mrs. Murphy is quite active.

The Gift Depot

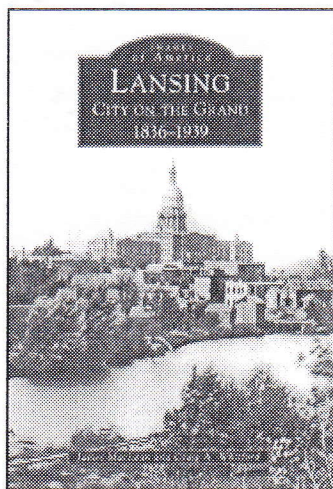
The following gifts will be available for purchase during our Local History programs and at local bookstores

1 Give the Gift of History with a membership in the Historical Society of Greater Lansing

Individual Memberships: \$15/year
Family Memberships: \$25/year

2 Lansing: City On The Grand, 1836-1939

By James MacLean & Craig A. Whitford



Lansing's history as the capital of Michigan began with a legislative mandate in the 1835 State Constitution, which required that the seat of government be moved from Detroit in 1847. The result – the emergence of a new capital city on the banks of the majestic Grand River – allowed Lansing to cultivate a world-class community based in government, education, the automotive industry and entrepreneurial achievements. This book features more than 200 historic photographs that document the dynamic capital city during its pivotal first century, from the pioneer era to the inception of the Olds Motor Vehicle Company and through the eve of World War II.

\$19.99 (plus tax)

Published by Arcadia,
An Imprint of Tempus Publishing, Inc.

3 AIRPORT KID - Learning To Fly

By Marion "Babe" Weyant Ruth and Craig A. Whitford



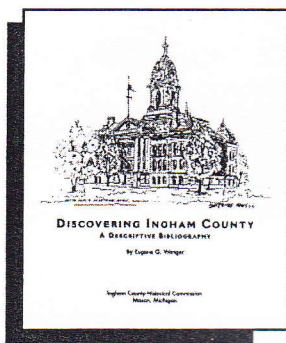
The true account of Lansing's most famous aviatrix - Marion "Babe" Weyant, a teenage girl with a passion for aviation and a desire to take flight. Originally written by Babe in 1936, the story traces her adventure from 1931 until soloing at the age of 18 in 1936. Over 150 photographs and vintage news clippings are featured in 96 pages, capturing the excitement of her journey, the pilots she encountered and her interest in aviation which she continues to share.

\$20.00 (plus tax)

Published by
Michigan Historical Press, Lansing

4 Discovering Ingham County A Descriptive Bibliography

By Eugene G. Wanger



This 100+ page edition is a sequel to Mr. Wanger's *INGHAM COUNTY HISTORIES: An Annotated Bibliography for Students, Buffs and Collectors...* "an interesting and useful guide for discovering the history and historical resources of Ingham County, The Capital County of Michigan..." Published by the Ingham County Historical Commission.

\$15.00 (plus tax)

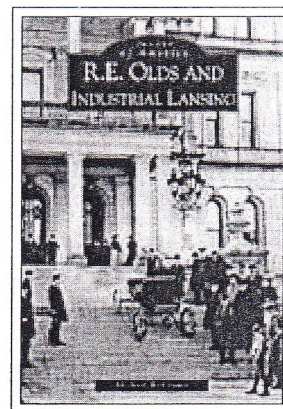
Published by the
Ingham County Historical Commission

Now available at local boostores Two new books on Lansing History

R.E. Olds and Industrial Lansing

By Michael Rodriguez

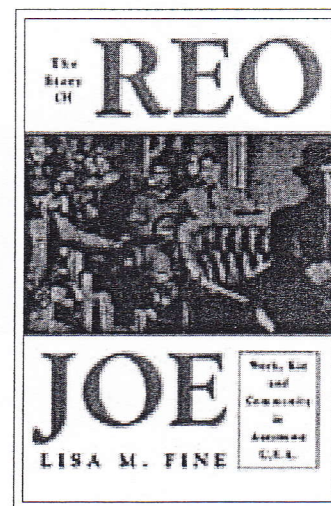
Upon the dedication of a new Capitol building in 1879, the city of Lansing was just beginning to emerge from the swampy wilderness of its recent past. As industry began to take root along the banks of the Grand River, Ransom Eli Olds brought his father's motor shop to national prominence with advancements in gasoline and steam engines, and then horseless carriages. By the early 20th century, Oldsmobile became the world's first mass producer of automobiles and Olds had moved on to found a second car company, making Lansing the first Auto City. Through these efforts, Olds rose to become one of the nation's greatest industrialists and entrepreneurs. Using primary documents and historical images, this book traces the industrial history of the Capital City within the context of one of the 20th century's greatest entrepreneurs, R.E. Olds. Michael Rodriguez is a Humanities Librarian at Michigan State University and a resident of REO Town. He is the author of Detroit's Belle Isle: Island Park Gem, also published by Arcadia.



The Story of REO JOE

By Lisa M. Fine

Lisa M. Fine tells the Reo story from the workers' perspective on the vast social, economic, and political changes that took place in the first three quarters of the twentieth century. She explores their understanding of the city where they lived, the industry that employed them, and the ideas about work, manhood, race, and family that shaped their identities. The Story of Reo Joe is, then, a book about historical memory; it challenges us to reconsider what we think we know about corporate welfare, unionization, de-industrialization, and working-class leisure.



Give the Gift of History

In 2005 Give the Gift of History! Give a Gift Membership in the Historical Society of Greater Lansing.

As a member of the Historical Society of Greater Lansing, you are entitled to give a gift membership in the Society to a friend for only \$15! Help the Society to grow.

Don't Delay!!!!

Membership Application 2005-2006

Annual Renewals are due October 1, 2005 for the 2005-2006 program year.

Please accept my New Renewal membership in the Historical Society of Greater Lansing. I have enclosed:
 \$15 Individual \$25 Family \$150 Life \$ ___ Gift

Name: _____

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*Historical Society
of Greater Lansing*

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