

History Explorer

A publication of the Historical Society of Greater Lansing

March 2008

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Historical Society of Greater Lansing

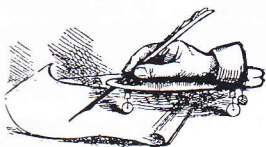
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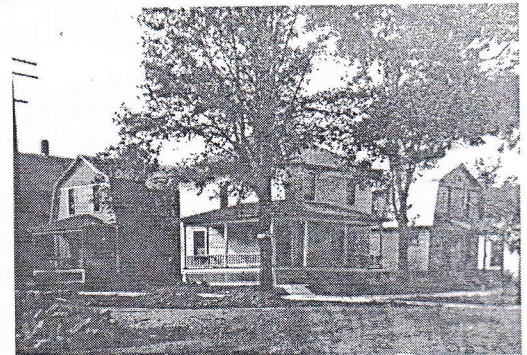
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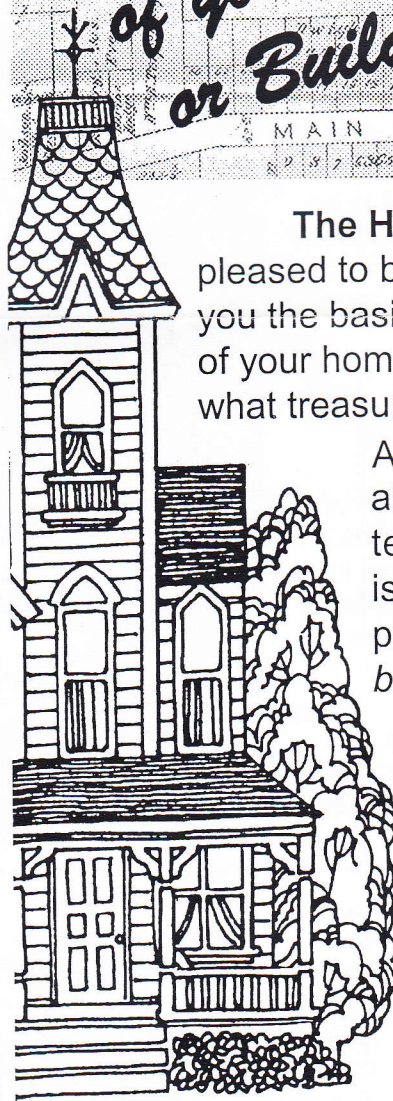
Historic Explorer is published during the months of September to May by the HSGL. Articles and news of historical interest are always welcome.

Get ready for Lansing's
150th Year by

Researching the
History
of your Home
or Building
A Workshop



Do you know what corner this is?
These homes are still standing. (The answer is inside)



The Historical Society of Greater Lansing is pleased to bring you a program which will provide you the basic steps to take in researching the history of your home. What to look for, where to look, and what treasures you might unearth in your search.

An informational packet featuring available resources, definitions, and other materials will be provided. This workshop is free of charge, but due to limited space pre-registration is required. (See details below).

Join Us. . .
Thursday,
March 20, 2008
7:00 P.M.

Forest Parke Memorial Archive & Library

Capital Area District Library, Lower Level, 401 S. Capitol, Lansing

This event is free of charge, but due to limited space pre-registration is required.
Please contact David Votta, Local History Reference Librarian at 517.334.1521

Spotlight on Lansing Pioneers - Van Rensalear W. Tooker

From the State Republican, March 23, 1901

Steuben County, New York, is a good old Dutch county and one of its natives for many years a resident of Lansing boasts a given name which also has the good old Knickerbocker flavor.

Van Rensalear W. Tooker was born in a village of that county, March 16, 1828. His father was one of interior Michigan's earliest settlers, coming to Ann Arbor when the country of the great lakes was a wild western frontier. This was in 1835, nearly two years before the admission of Michigan into the Union.

In Ann Arbor the subject of this sketch attended district school until 1840, when that family moved to Woodhull, Shiawassee County.


March 16, 1847, his 19th birthday, younger Tooker with his brother Smith who died here in 1889 — drove with two horses and a wagon to Lansing. They were unable to find lodging at North Lansing, and small wonder, for the only buildings there were a log house, a frame barn and a sawmill. Here they found a man named Page, who lived in the house, kept his horses in the barn, and earned his living with the sawmill. A slab school stood on the present site of the Cedar Street School. The Tooker boys finally found accommodation with the Delano family, who occupied a farm at the "deep cut," three miles northeastward. They soon drove back to Woodhull for a load of cedar lumber, with which they returned to build a shanty in the woods on the present location of G.W. Spoor's residence, 114 Wall st.

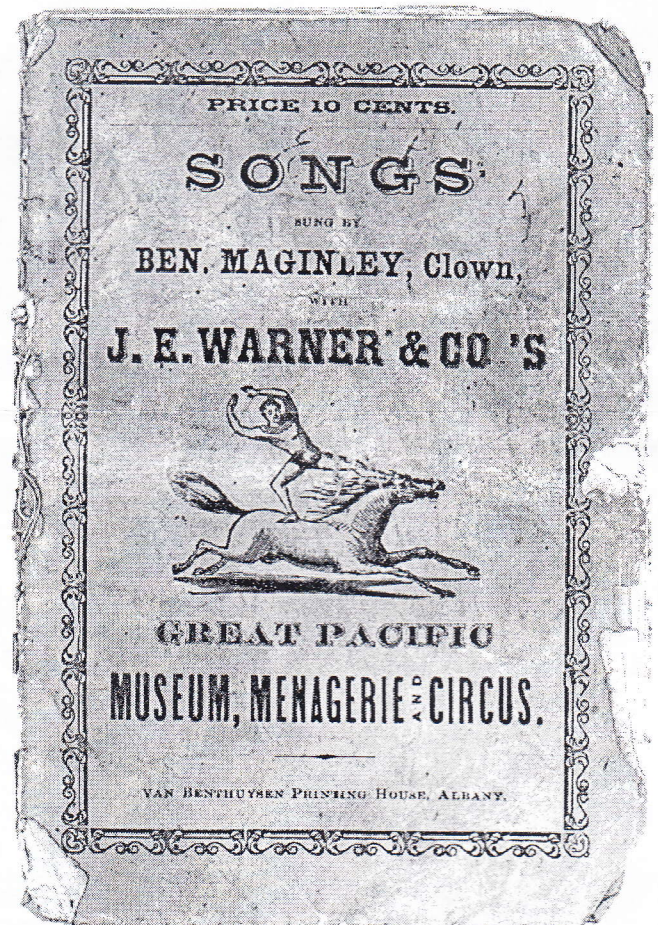
Van Rensalear's father now hired him out" at \$10 a month, for the summer, to a man who worked the Pine Lake farm. After earning his father \$50 he returned to his brother's house and entered school. In his class were Mrs. D.L. Case, Mrs. Delia Waldo, both of whom are now dead, and Nathaniel Glassbrook, who lives in Tennessee. In January, 1848 he left school to become porter at the Seymour — now Franklin House. This hotel was the winter home of the legislators, some of whom walked to and from the old capitol on the ice of the river, while some rode in Ingersoll's mud wagon.

One December morning during the early days of Lansing, Mr. Tooker started upon a hunting expedition. Near the pond back of the Industrial School for Boys he shot a fine doe, and after hanging her up, started for home near the Cedar Street School. Heavy woods grew between pond and river then, the air was thick with snow, and soon Mr. Tooker was completely turned around, and began to consider himself lost. This was during the building of the Seymour House, and he was finally guided to the right direction by the hammering of carpenters engaged upon the hotel.

As assistant to William Upton, lawyer and surveyor, Mr. Tooker helped to cut Michigan Avenue east through the forest to the old Grand River turnpike. He

was on of the party who found the curious rock split by a wild cherry tree, which stands by the roadside today.

Mr. Tooker sailed the great lakes for five years, returning to Lansing in 1855. Until 1862 he worked in various hotels, and was employed at the Michigan Agricultural College during the first years of its existence. With J.E. Warner he traveled with the old time Dan Rice circus, and was employed by a number of circus companies. He took the first circus through Missouri after the war, in 1865. Leaving the "show business" Mr. Tooker for a time lived upon a farm near Pine Lake. When D.L. Buck opened the opera house in 1872 he entered his employ, where he remained a portion of the time in company of C.J. Whitney of Detroit, until 1890. Since then Mr. Tooker has served in various capacities, spending from choice, a portion of these later years in quietness and leisure. 



The front cover of J.E. Warner & Co's Circus Song Booklet, c. 1874. Joseph E. Warner served as Lansing's Mayor in 1878.

President's Corner

by Craig A. Whitford

Welcome to our March 2008 edition of History Explorer. I hope that this issue finds each of you well and looking forward to a much anticipated spring. Our program this month will take place on Thursday, March 20 in the Forest Parke Memorial Archive and Library and is aimed at those wishing to do a little research on the history of their home. It's in the form of a workshop and pre-registration is required so we may have adequate space and materials for all that attend. Please contact David Votta at 334-1521 to reserve your place.

Sesquicentennial Planning

Your society board is hard at work on programming for the upcoming 2008-2009 program year. The celebration of Lansing's Sesquicentennial will be at the forefront. The Rotary Club is taking the lead role in organizing the event. Meetings are scheduled in order to plan the many activities that will take place. It is our hope, as Lansing's history organization, to provide monthly programs from the fall of 2008 through the end of 2009 which will enrich the lives of the residents and those with an interest in our past, present and future.

There is much to accomplish and we encourage your participation to assist us in making it all happen. Please feel free to contact us with your interest.

Forest Parke Memorial Archive & Library

The Forest Parke Memorial Archive & Library is open the first and third Saturday of each month from 10 AM to 2 PM. Volunteers are on hand to assist patrons with their questions and research as well as participate in cataloging the many collections housed in the archives. If you are interested in being a volunteer, please give Local History Reference Librarian David Votta a call at 334-1521.

Collector's Showcase 2008

On May 10, 2008 we will once again sponsor the David R. Caterino Collector's Showcase in the Lower Level Gallery of the Capital Area District Library - Main Library. If you would like to participate as an exhibitor, please give me a call at 695-0556 to reserve a table. There is no cost and the benefits of sharing your local history collection and material is priceless.

Thank You!

Finally, I would like to express my personal appreciation to all who volunteer in the Forest Parke Memorial Archive & Library. Without the dedication of the volunteers to assist patrons with their inquiries, catalog collections, scan photographs, prepare finding aids...and the list goes on, history would not be alive and well in our community. They make it all happen. The Capital Area District Library has a gem of a collection and a top-notch professional staff who understand the importance of making history accessible throughout the county. Our libraries are our most important asset. Thank you!

Blasts from the Past

This morning as one of Lansing's most prominent divines emerged from a Washington avenue store, his arms laden with packages of household necessities, he was accosted by a street urchin, who in all solemnity observed: "say, mister, you've dropped something." Turning quickly about to pick up the supposed lost package, the urchin gleefully remarked, "April fool." The divine "wasn't saying a word," but reaching into the depths of his pocket he brought forth a shining silver piece which he tossed to the boy and walked on, his face the color of scarlet and a smile o'erspreading his features. *State Republican, 4-1-1891*

A very attractive young lady of our city the other day kissed a slick looking horse that was hitched on the street, in presence of four or five young men. The thing was done with such affectionate gusto that the gentlemen turned away with the audible wish that they had been tied to the same hitching post. *Lansing Republican, 10-23-1884*

Barnum's bill boards for his "greatest show on earth" now loom forth conspicuously in various parts of the city. We understand that Mr. Forepaugh will be here in June with the "greatest show on earth." *Lansing Republican, 5-1-1884*

A Lansing man, "who knows how it is himself," dreamed of few nights since that the state fish commissioner held a grand reception and the only guests present were gentlemen who have been and still are fishing for office. A multitudinous assembly was present. *Lansing Republican, 1-22-1881*

In the kindly allusions to the Nautch dancing girls, who accompany Barnum's big show this season, made by our esteemed contemporaries we are pleased to observe that none of them have so far forgot themselves as to remark that the young ladies in question "are Nautchy but they're nice." *Lansing Republican, 8-26-1884*

A burglar climbed up to a window on the first floor of T.J. Charlesworth's residence on Cedar street last Wednesday night, cut the netting, and with a stick fished out some female apparel belonging to a nurse who was sleeping in the room. Not satisfied with results, he went fishing a second time, and accidentally tickled the lady's feet with his fish-pole. This raised a row, awoke all the inmates, and Mrs. Charlesworth appearing upon the scene, treated the retreating burglar to a salute from a revolver. If any one finds a dead burglar they need not advertise for an owner. Mr. Charlesworth was absent, but his plucky partner, though still an invalid, demonstrated her ability to repel ordinary ruffians. *Lansing Republican, 9-3-1881*

As spring turns into summer...

Old Swimming Holes in Lansing Recalled



The growth of a booming city has certain sad phases, it engulfs old haunts and ruthlessly obliterates old land marks until they become almost forgotten, being only recalled by reminiscent stories, commencing with, "Do you remember?"

Small boys, whose scanty attire encroaches upon the rules of civilized propriety and whose howls of joy as they duck each other jars upon the ear of the heat-tortured pessimist, are once again driven from their present swimming holes to newer selections farther away from the prudish boundaries of the city.

Chief Behrendt's latest edict in regard to certain styles of bathing costumes and regulating the wearer to places farther upstream, brings to mind many of the "old swimmin' holes" prevailing along the rivers years ago, when the city had not assumed such metropolitan airs.

But a very few of these old places ever rose to the dignity of names: they were just "swimmin holes," though the older generation will remember "Dead Man's Valley," the "Stone Quarry," "Dolly Varden" and the "Grand Trunk Bridge," the latter on the cedar river. All of these places were "up town."

The north end also had a "Dead Man's Valley," near the School for the Blind. Boyish lore had it, that many years ago the Indians killed a white man there, and their weird tales of how this ghost used to caper at night, generally had the effect of freeing the swimming hole from the smaller bathers after the shade of night had fallen.

Below what is Piatt's dam was the other 'hole' with the same tradition, but in this "Dead Man's Valley" there was a large white stone plentifully sprinkled with bits of red formation. Many a larger boy, proud of his stone bruises and of his diving abilities, would explain at great length to his awe-stricken audience of youngsters who had just reached the "paddlin'" stage, the reasons of the red spots. They were suppose to be the blood of a white man who was taken by the heels by some unknown power and brained on the rock, and water was never able to completely obliterate the evidence of the awful crime.

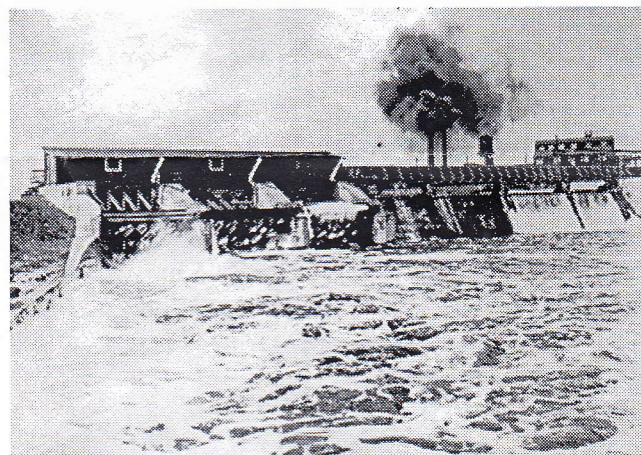
Between this swimming hole and the Piatt dam was another one, long popular, known as the "Archangel," though just why no one recalls.

At the north end there was a deep hole near the Warner farm, much frequented but unnamed. When Lansing was a town of about 8,000 inhabitants, the race offered the easiest and best facilities for a swim and was patronized by hundreds of heat stricken imps who came of the old Schofield saw mill, where they used to undress, arrayed in a variety of negligee and negligent bathing costume.

The race was the place where hundreds of the older generation learned to swim. It was ideal for this purpose, as it was so deep and swift and the splash of the divers from the two bridges that used to span it could be heard at all hours of the day, from the earliest spring to late in the fall.

Louis L. Sattler, now cashier of the north end branch of the States Savings bank, was then the "champeen' diver and long distance swimmer with many rivals.

No more can be heard the cries of delight or the calls of 'chaw raw beef' to some unlucky one untying knots in his apparel. An edict from the police department has left the race in undisputed procession of the muskrats.



Piatt's Dam. In 1898 Lansing City Council authorized A.A. Piatt to build a power generating plant near Moores Park. The Piatt brothers were allowed to sell the power they produced, but not lighting within the city limits because the brothers had recently sold the Lansing Electric Light and Power Company to the city. Later in 1898 the brothers built the steam and hydroelectric generating station at the present site of Moores Park Dam. After being acquired by the Michigan Power Company, the dam was sold in 1919 to the city of Lansing and the hydroelectric generating station became part of the Lansing Board of Water and Light system. The dam still produces hydroelectric to this day. (Caterino/CADL.)

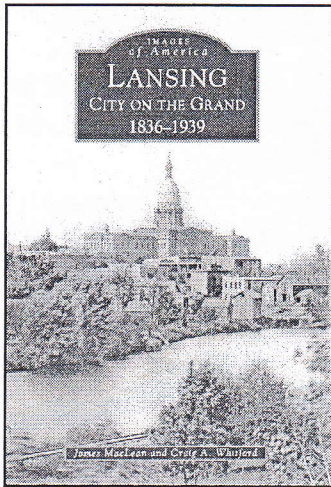
The Gift Depot

The following gifts are available for purchase

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



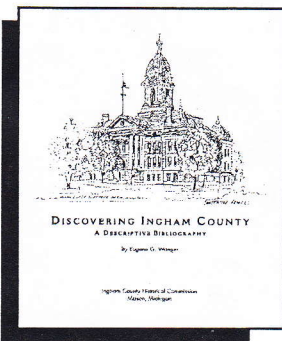
By Marion "Babe" Weyant Ruth and Craig A. Whitford

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

HSGL 2008 Calendar

Reserve these historic dates now!

March 19, 2008

Ladies of the Highs
CANCELLED
Wednesday, March 19, 2008 - 7:00 P.M.

March 20, 2008

Researching the History of Your Home Workshop
Thursday, March 20, 2008 - 7:00 P.M.

This "hands-on" workshop will provide you with the basic steps to take in researching the history of your home. What to look for, where to look, and what treasures you might unearth in your search. An information packet featuring available resources, definitions and other materials will be provided to participants

This workshop is free of charge, but due to limited space pre-registration is required. Please contact David Votta, Local History Reference Librarian at 517.334.1521.

May 2008

The David R. Caterino Collector's Showcase
Saturday, May 10, 2008 - 10 A.M. - 4 P.M.

Collectors from throughout Ingham County gather to share their collections of photographs, memorabilia and more. There is no charge for displaying your collection of local history artifacts.

Library Galleries, Lower Level
Capital Area District Library, 401 S. Capitol, Lansing

Membership Application

Please accept my New Renewal membership in the *Historical Society of Greater Lansing*. I have enclosed:

\$15 Individual \$25 Family
 \$150 Life or \$_____ Gift

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State: _____ Zip: _____

Tel: _____

Email: _____

*Historical Society
of Greater Lansing*

P.O. Box 12095, Lansing, MI 48901

The Historical Society of Greater Lansing is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit corporation.

Thank you for your support of our programs and activities.



Images from Yesterday

Do you know what corner this is?



The unsigned contemporary message on the back of the card states, "This is the corner we bought and built up. It was a deep hole, old broken boardwalks and every thing looked badly. We paid \$600 for the corner. It belonged to heirs and was sold in court is the reason we got it so cheap. It is one block from Michigan

Ave., one from a large school and two from a large church. We sold the one to the right for \$1900; the corner one for \$2000; the next to the left for \$2100, and the next one for \$2777 with furnace and Automobile barn. He has put up two to the right in the same block for another man. So you see it is Zion's corner."

The image is of the southwest corner of **Eureka and Jones, c. 1908**. [Real photo postcard by F.N. Bovee, Ingersoll Blk., Lansing, Mich.] 

Old Swimming Holes recalled, continued...

Farther up the river near the wagon works, was another unnamed 'hole.' There was one near the wheelbarrow works also the Canfield saw mill being located there at that time, and when Lansing was much younger then she is now, Town Marshal Baker saved many blushes by shaking his club at shameless little bathers who reluctantly left their pleasures for more clothes.

Near Bement's plant on the opposite side of the river, was a small grove of oak trees and a deep swimming hole. It was much frequented and often called the "Big Trees."

Years and years ago, at the foot of South St, was an ideal hole for bathers, and William Hinman, who was the "champeen" swimmer at that time, was there, stirring up the mud of the bottom, diving for white stones, when news of the Lincoln assassination reached the town.


At the Grand Trunk Bridge on the Cedar, which was a wooden one then, the boys found a haunt away from police jurisdiction. A peculiar feature about the temperature of the river at this hole was the alternating currents of warm and cold water, caused by springs undoubtedly. Many bad cases of cramps and one of drowning gave this "hole" a bad reputation.

The "Dolly Varden" and "Dead Man's Valley," on the Grand, were "swimming holes" that swarmed

with tanned and carefree imps during the hot months in days gone past and one case of drowning occurred there.

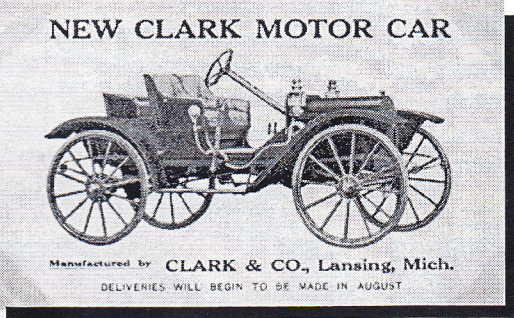
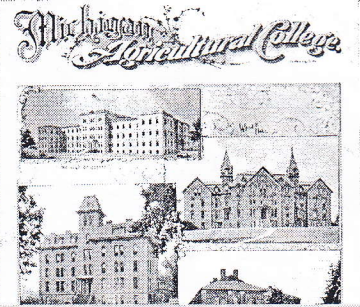
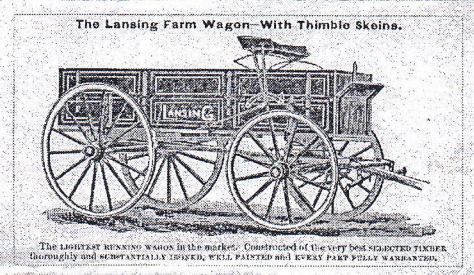
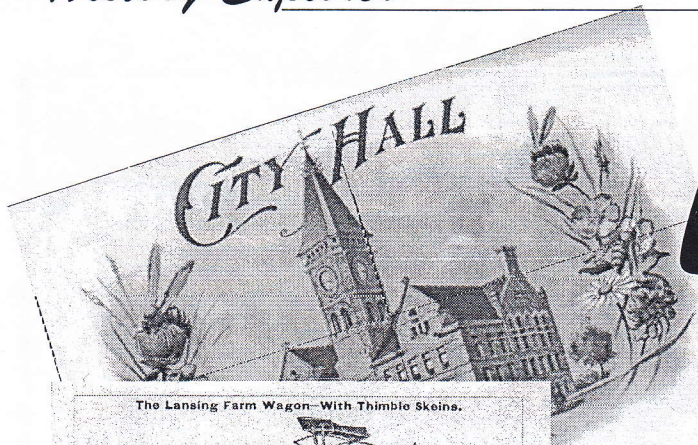
There were many other swimming holes, but the ones mentioned received the greater portion of patronage. They are now things of the past, and new places farther away from the spreading boundaries of the fast growing city, must be sought by youngsters today.

The encroachments of progress and growth was being discussed with a retired merchant, who spent his boyhood days in Lansing and who deplored the fact that boys today were not like the chums he played with. He said reminiscently: "The old fashioned boy delighted in his swimming hole, and in the study of animals and nature. He loved pets, and a dog was absolutely necessary. He was a hunter, a born fisherman. His equipment was small and his clothes few. Certain subjects must not be broached to him or his fist was doubled in a jiffy. No tree was too tall for him to climb and no road too rough for his bare feet.

"Boys nowadays," he continued, "don't seem the same. They wear glasses at eight years of age and have seen shows on the country at ten. About the only real violent exercise they take is going without a hat and eating cough lozenges." [State Republican 7/9/1907] 

The David R. Caterino Collector's Showcase

May 10, 2008



LANSING area authors, collectors, historical & genealogical societies will be displaying a variety of Lansing, Ingham & Eaton County history from their collections including Photographs, Postal History, Books, Bottles, Antique Firearms, Railroads & Interurbans, Post Cards, Lansing Advertising & Cigar Boxes, Olds & REO Memorabilia, LFD & LPD History, MAC/MSC/MSU items; Manufacturing. . .and Much More!

Join Us. . .

May 10, 2008

10:00 AM to 4:00 PM

Lower Galleries
Capital Area District Library
401 S. Capitol, Lansing

You are invited to bring items to share or ask questions about.

*Sponsored by the
Historical Society of Greater Lansing
and the Capital Area District Library*

For more information or if you would like to exhibit please contact: Craig A. Whitford, 694.0556 or Email: cawhitford@aol.com

Historical Society of Greater Lansing



Researching the History
of your House
A "Hands-on" Workshop

Thursday,
March 20, 2008

7:00 P.M.

Forest Parke Memorial Archive & Library
Capital Area District Library
401 S. Capitol, Lansing, Mich.

This workshop is free of charge, but due to limited space pre-registration is required.
Please contact David Votta, Local History Reference Librarian at 517.334.1521



Please RUSH to:
Beth + Dicky Atkinson

Change Service Requested

P.O. Box 12095 Lansing, MI 48901

Historical Society
of Greater Lansing

