

History Explorer

Historical Society of Greater Lansing

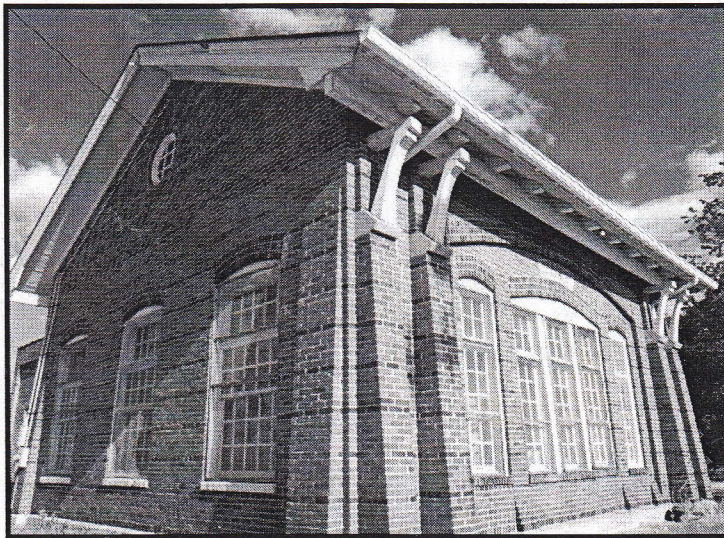
www.LansingHistory.org

February 2011

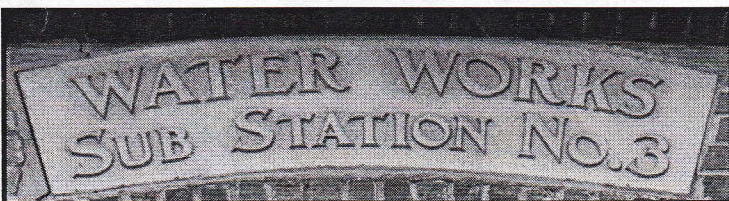
Judge Whitbeck's *To Account For Murder*

On Thursday evening, January 20, about 35 members of the Historical Society of Greater Lansing came out in the cold to hear Michigan Appeals Court Judge William Whitbeck speak on the research behind his new novel, *To Account For Murder*. The judge spoke at length on the slow deterioration of ethics in Michigan politics from the 1920s through the 1940s, which culminated in the 1945 murder of State Senator Warren Hooper. Among those involved in the following scandal and subsequent trial were future Michigan governor Kim Sigler, who would go on to clean up state government and reform the system of corruption that had choked Lansing for so many years.

Judge Whitbeck's talk was enthusiastically received by those who attended the event. If you missed the opportunity to attend this event but would like to know more about his book, you can find information on his website: www.williamcwhitbeck.com.



The Old Waterworks Building on South Pennsylvania Avenue. The building is on the east side of the road, just north of Potter Park.



Dark End of the Street

Excerpt From An Interview with Danielle McGuire

Danielle McGuire is a writer and Assistant Professor in the History Department at Wayne State University in Detroit. Since receiving her PhD from Rutgers in 2007, she won numerous teaching and research awards. Her new book, *Dark End of the Street*, tells the story of 24-year-old Recy Taylor, who in 1944 was raped by seven white men, armed with knives and shotguns. The president of the local NAACP branch office sent his best investigator and organizer. Her name was Rosa Parks. In taking on this case, Parks launched a movement that ultimately changed the world.

HSGL: When did you first come across this story (Recy Taylor)?

Prof. McGuire: I was reading black newspapers from the 1940s and early 1950s and saw the story on the front page of the *Chicago Defender*. The article referenced a letter-writing campaign to the Governor of Alabama. Since governors often save their papers, I thought there might be some information on Taylor's case in Governor Sparks' papers at the Alabama Department of Archives and History. I went to Montgomery, Alabama and found seven boxes full of petitions, postcards and news clippings on her case. Most importantly, I found a transcript of interviews with Taylor's assailants. It was a great find--and so fascinating.

HSGL: During your research, from where did you find the best resources?

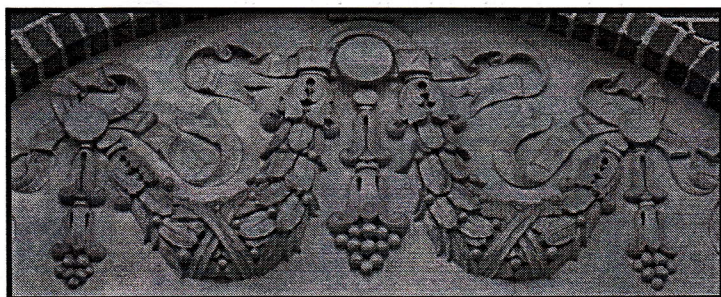
Prof. McGuire: All over really. Black newspapers were often the first place I looked. Then I followed up in local archives, courthouses, and with oral histories. The biggest single discovery was in the Alabama Department of Archives and History in Montgomery. That's where I found concrete evidence connecting Rosa Parks and Recy Taylor, and showing that the Committee for Equal Justice for Mrs. Recy Taylor in 1944 was the kernel that eleven years later became the Montgomery Improvement Association, launched the bus boycott and lifted Martin Luther King, Jr. to world-historical status. I was completely shocked to find Parks's petitions and postcards demanding justice for Taylor, because it had never been part of the story. It made me rethink what I thought I knew about Rosa Parks and helped me begin to think about the bus boycott in a new way.

To read the complete interview visit our website, www.lansinghistory.org.

Upcoming Events

Please mark your calendars for Saturday, February 26, 2011, when the Historical Society of Greater Lansing and the Capitol Area District Library will co-host the annual African-American History Showcase, which will run from 11 am to 3 pm in the library's basement. At 1:00 pm Wayne State University Assistant Professor of History Danielle McGuire will speak on the experience of African-American women during the Civil Rights Movement.

On Thursday, March 17 at 7:00 pm the Historical Society of Greater Lansing will welcome MSU Professor David Stowe and some of his students, who will present a documentary they wrote and produced titled *The Specter of Old Town*. The film covers such issues as the history of Old Town, as well as its modern development as an artists neighborhood and the increasing gentrification of the area.



Detail over the entrance to the Michigan School for Blind.

Other Historical Happenings

The East Lansing Historical Society meeting on Sunday, March 6 will be "The Northern Territories," about the development of neighborhood properties in East Lansing north of Saginaw Street. It is part of a 2011 series on East Lansing neighborhoods. The meeting will be at 2 p.m. at the East Lansing Hannah Community Center.

The Lansing and Sunfield Sons of Union Veterans Camp #17 will host a talk titled, "Austin Blair, Michigan's Civil War Governor", by historian Kerry Chartkoff on Tuesday night, February 22 at 7:00pm at the Sunfield United Brethren Church on West M-43 in Sunfield. Blair served as Michigan's governor from 1861-1864, during which time he oversaw the mobilization of Michigan's 90,000 soldiers that fought in the Civil War. The event is free and open to the public.

Historical Society of Greater Lansing

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www.LansingHistory.org

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The President's Corner

For many of us who live in Michigan, February is the dullest, coldest, and most depressing month of the year. The skies are gray and the snow just keeps coming, with no sign of spring in site. Yet in truth, February should be a rather exciting month for history lovers, as the month includes celebrations of several significant figures in American history.

The birthday of President Abraham Lincoln on February 12 is the first holiday on the February calendar. Though not recognized as a national holiday, the day has been marked since 1874 when it was started by a Buffalo, New York druggist Julius Francis. Today multiple state governments, including those of Illinois, Connecticut, New York, and Missouri, recognize the day as a holiday. Ceremonies honoring President Lincoln are also held in Washington D.C. at the Lincoln Memorial and at the Abraham Lincoln Birthplace National Historic Site in Hodgenville, Kentucky.

The second great American to have his own February holiday is President George Washington. The Federal government first recognized President Washington's February 22 birthday as a holiday in 1880, when it closed all government offices in the District of Columbia to mark the day. This date was celebrated until 1971, when the Uniform Monday Holiday Act was passed by Congress. This new law mandated that Washington's Birthday, Memorial Day, Columbus Day, and Veterans Day were to be observed on Mondays, regardless of the day upon which the actual holiday fell. (The mandate was later appealed to exclude Veterans' Day which is celebrated on November 11, the day the Armistice was signed for World War I.) Officially, the day known to most Americans as Presidents' Day is still considered to be Washington's Birthday by the national government. The Presidents' Day is still, in fact, only a colloquial term.

The third major celebration honoring Americans that takes place throughout February is the celebration of Black History Month. This tradition was founded in the early 20th century by NAACP leader and historian Carter G. Woodson, who began marking Negro History Week in 1926. The purpose of this week was to highlight the historic contributions of black Americans to American culture as a whole. Woodson placed in the holiday week in February, as it is the month in which two great slavery opponents – President Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglas – were born. In 1976, Negro History Week was expanded and renamed Black History Month.

I hope that you will join us in beating the winter doldrums and celebrating Black History Month on Saturday, February 26 when the Historical Society of Greater Lansing will host its annual African-American history showcase. (For more information about it, see the Upcoming Events section.)

Best –

Valerie Marvin

President, Historical Society of Greater Lansing

Historic Preservation Options in Greater Lansing

By Nathalie Winans
Board Member, HSGL

At-Large Member, Lansing Historic District Commission

There are many historic buildings in Lansing, but relatively few enjoy historic designation or protection. If you live in a historic home or neighborhood and are interested in protecting it for posterity or just recognizing its historic character, this article may be of interest to you. Several different approaches are available to draw attention to the distinctive features of a historic property or district and contribute to—or ensure—their protection.

National Register Nomination. The National Register of Historic Places is a list of places that have been officially recognized for their historical importance or features. To be listed, a property or district must meet at least one of the National Register Criteria for Evaluation. These include age (usually at least 50 years), integrity of architectural features, association with important historical figures or events, or the potential to reveal important archeological information.

In Michigan, all National Register nominations for non-federally owned properties are submitted by the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). Nominations are first reviewed by the State Historic Preservation Review Board, which advises the State Historic Preservation Officer to accept or reject the nomination. The board notifies property owners and local officials prior to the meeting in order to allow for their comment on the listing. If the nomination is accepted by SHPO and a majority of property owners do not protest the listing, the nomination is forwarded to the National Park Service, which provides the final decision on the property's entry in the National Register.

National Register status has several advantages, including potential access to federal and state historic rehabilitation tax credits and grants, recognition of the property's historic value by a nationally recognized authority, and more. On the other hand, National Register listing provides no legal protection over listed properties except in cases where a federal agency project has the potential to disrupt a National Register property.

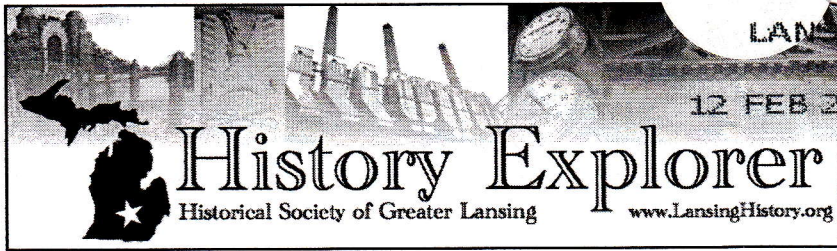
Michigan Historical Marker Program. The Michigan Historical Marker Program, operated by the Michigan Historical Commission and housed in the Michigan DNR, highlights the historical significance of buildings and sites throughout the state. Interested parties must submit an application to the Michigan Historical Commission. Once accepted, applicants must purchase the marker at a price range of \$425 to \$3,425. As with

National Register nomination, Michigan Historical Markers and State Register designation provide only symbolic protection of properties but could contribute to their protection by imparting information and recognition of their importance.

Local Historic District Designation. Local historic district designation is one of the most powerful forms of protection of historic properties in Michigan. Exterior modifications to buildings in local historic districts are regulated by a local historic district commission, which is authorized by the local unit of government to review proposed alterations to the exterior of buildings in the district, determine whether they are in keeping with the Standards and Guidelines for Rehabilitation of the Secretary of the Interior, and approve or deny the alterations. To establish a historic district, the commission must complete a historic district study committee report, which provides information to justify why the local historic district should be created. Next, a public hearing is held; a final report is submitted by the historic district commission; and the local unit of government votes to approve or deny the establishment of the district. Local historic districts can consist of multiple properties or a single historic resource. In addition, it is possible to “gerrymander” a district to exclude properties that have lost too much of their historic integrity or whose owners oppose the designation.

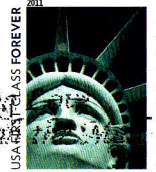
Unlike federal and state historic designations, local historic district designation regulates exterior modifications to structures in the historic district. Demolition and the use of historically inappropriate exterior retrofits—such as vinyl siding or replacement windows—are likely to be rejected unless the property owner provides compelling reasons why they are justified. While this undoubtedly results in the protection of historic resources, homeowners may find it difficult and costly to comply. However, the commission may be able to provide guidance regarding cost-effective renovation options that will not damage historical integrity. Like National Register designation, local district designation may make the property owner eligible for historic rehabilitation tax credits or grants.

Recognition without Designation. The simplest option is to spread the word unofficially regarding the importance of historic preservation and stewardship through word of mouth or written documentation. This could include letters, flyers, neighborhood meetings, home tours, online blogs or social media, letters to the editor, news editorials, and more. A request for a story on the topic by a local publication could generate attention and dialogue. With enough persistence, it may be possible to build a critical mass of support for pursuing one or more of the avenues of official recognition discussed above.



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Historical Society of Greater Lansing - Membership Application

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