

History Explorer

Historical Society of Greater Lansing

www.LansingHistory.org

March 2013

HSGL Spring English Inn Fundraiser

677 South Michigan Road (M-99), Eaton Rapids
Wednesday, May 15, 2013 - 6:00pm-8:00pm

HSGL is pleased to announce that we will be having an exclusive, behind the scenes tour of Meadowvue, today known as the English Inn, for our spring fundraiser. The event will take place from 6:00pm-8:00pm on Wednesday, May 15, and will include an in-depth, behind the scenes tour of the house and grounds, as well as delicious hors d'oeuvres and desserts. Tickets will be \$50 per person. Event sponsorships are also available. Please see the enclosed form to order tickets or help sponsor the event. You may also purchase tickets by calling (517)282-0671, e-mailing info@lansinghistory.org, or sending a request to HSGL P.O. Box 12095, Lansing, MI 48901.

Downtown Tours

HSGL will be offering three different downtown walking tours this summer, on June 15, July 20, and August 17. Tours include: *Lost Lansing: A Look at some of Lansing's Missing Historic Sites*, *Church & State: Capitol Square and its Surrounding Buildings*, and *Behind the Facades: The Stories Behind Downtown's Most Unique Building Facades*. Check back for more information soon!

Museum Update

The HSGL is pleased to announce that HSGL collections curator Adina Langer is busy setting up HSGL's very own collections storage system. Soon, our objects will be catalogued and will eventually be available online through our website for people to peruse and enjoy. The project, though, takes a lot of work. If you are interested in helping Adina with the cataloguing process, we'd love to hear from you! Please call Adina at (609)297-7023 or email her at artiflection@gmail.com to volunteer.

Upcoming Events

A History of Michigan's Grand Hotel
Thursday, March 21, 2013 - 7:00pm
Downtown Library - 401 S. Capitol Avenue

Mackinac Island Grand Hotel Historian Bob Tagatz will give a talk about the history of Mackinac Island's beautiful Grand Hotel, considered by many of be one of the nation's choice historic destinations.

Michigan School for the Blind Tour
Thursday, April 18, 2013 - 6:00pm (note time)
1141 North Pine Street, Lansing

HSGL President Valerie Marvin will lead a tour of the campus of the Michigan School for the Blind beginning at 6:00 pm. The tour will conclude with a light snack at Rizzi Designs, in the old School for the Blind Superintendent's Home.

Lansing Eats! Exhibit

The next HSGL exhibit will focus on Lansing's food culture. At present, we are looking for objects to be loaned or donated for the exhibit in the following areas:

- Menus, ephemera and objects related to Lansing-area restaurants and food purveyors;
- Ration books or anything related to victory gardening during WWII;
- Cooking-related appliances purchased in Lansing;
- Bottles or containers from Lansing-area food and beverage companies (like QD or Hi-Klas);
- Recipe-compilation books from Lansing-area religious and community organizations.

If you have something you would consider sharing with us, please contact Adina Langer at (609) 297-7023 or e-mail her at artiflection@gmail.com.

One of Lansing's Early Aeroplane Pilots
from World War I: Gordon Webster Cooper
by Jesse Lasorda

With the Historical Society of Greater Lansing's "School Days" Exhibit coming to an end, I thought it would be timely to reflect on one of Lansing High School's graduates of the Class of 1913, Mr. Gordon W. Copper.

Gordon W. Cooper was born in Lansing, Michigan on July 13, 1894. Gordon's parents Richard W. and Frances Cooper had English roots. Richard was born in England in 1867 as were his parents. Gordon's mother Frances was born in Michigan in 1866 and her parents were also born in England. Richard Cooper became a U.S. Citizen in 1915.

Richard Cooper came to America in about 1891. The family lived for many years at 128 Sparrow Ave. in Lansing which is close to Moores Park and St. Casimir Church on the city's Southside. The neighborhood at that time was just establishing itself and there were many immigrants from Poland who were instrumental in starting St Casimir Catholic Church as well as many other nationalities which included the Coopers.

The Cooper family would grow to seven by 1910. Herbert was the first child born, then Gordon, Marion, and Edward. There was a fifth child that died early on.

Richard W. Cooper was employed as a clerk at the State Capitol for a number of years. He also worked as a Court Reporter at the State Supreme Court. He would go on to practice law by 1920 in Lansing. Newspaper accounts stated that Richard was a leading citizen in the capital city and was one of the members of the city's

school board. Richard also was the president of the Southside Real Estate Board.

After graduating from Lansing High School (Lansing Central) in 1913, Gordon Copper attended Michigan Agriculture College (M.A.C., now Michigan State University) from 1914 through 1917 where he was studying engineering.



Gordon was a member of Mt. Hope Ave. M.E. Church and was the president of the Epworth League at his church.

As World War I was raging on in Europe, the United States entered the war in 1917. Gordon enlisted in the Aviation Corps on November 14, 1917 and left Lansing on Christmas night of 1917. He entered the aviation ground school at the University of Texas and completed the eight-week course with honors.

By May of 1918 Gordon Copper was in the cockpit of a WWI Jenny biplane. Gordon's aptness as a flier and the skill he demonstrated in his early flights were the subject of positive comments by his flight instructors at Barron Field near Forth Worth, Texas where he was stationed.

Barron Field was one of three airfields in the U.S. during World War I that was used by the U.S. Army Signal Corps. Barron Field saw flight training and daredevil stunting and other pioneer barnstorming pilots. Initially, in November 1917 when the airfield was built, it was used by Canadian Cadets. From April of 1918 it was used only by U.S. pilots. The training facility closed shortly after the end of World War I in 1921. There is only a historical marker today where the old World War I airfield once stood.

Historical Society of Greater Lansing

P.O. Box 12095 ~ Lansing, MI 48901
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One has to remember these early planes were a handful to fly with their open cockpits. The pilots literally faced fuel and hot engine oil pelting their goggles – if not worse. Then there were the engine failures and the materials from which the frame of the planes were made. Yet through all of these obstacles, the early pilots would not have traded being in the open cockpit of these early planes for anything in the world.

On June 13, 1918 while in training exercises at Barron Field in Fort Worth, Texas, Gordon Cooper was flying at 2,500 feet when his plane went into a dive. At this point of Gordon's flight training he had a total of 20 hours and 19 minutes in the cockpit, which seems shamefully few. Unbelievably, with these few hours of flight time under his belt he was considered by flight training instructors to be at the "Advanced Solo Stage". Those that observed the fall stated that no better skill had ever been evidenced on Barron Field than the efforts of Cadet Cooper to right his machine. He had been making practice spirals and had gone into a tailspin. The observers said that twice, as he was falling, he almost righted his machine by rolling, but it seems that his rudder wires had broken and his efforts failed.

Regretfully, Gordon wasn't able to right his plane, so on that fateful day, June 13, 1918, Gordon nosedived to his death in his WWI Jenny biplane. He was only 24 years old.

His body was transported back for burial to Lansing by train on the Grand Truck railroad with a military escort. A cadet from the same training school camp accompanied the body back to Lansing along with Michigan State Troops. Burial services were held on Sunday June 16, 1918. In the Lansing High School newsletter *The Zodiac*, it was reported that many people of the city paid their last respects to cadet Cooper's

memory, for his genial and winning personality had been known and appreciated far and wide. Gordon Cooper was buried at Mount Hope Cemetery.

Gordon's mother Frances received a Gold Star from the U.S. Military for her son's death. Quite often the Gold Stars were hung in a prominent window in the soldier's or parent's home.

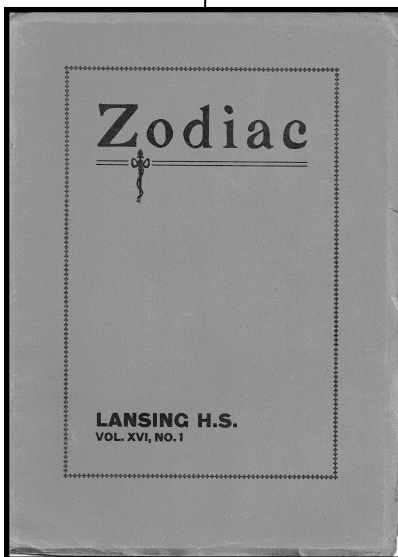
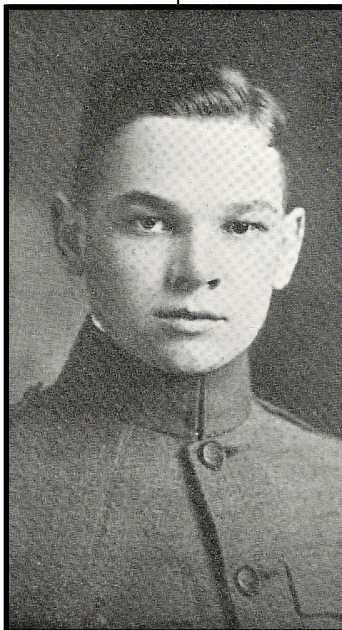
An interesting side note: at Mount Hope Cemetery in the Veterans Section "C" there are five World War I veterans buried who died in the 1950s but never received headstones when they passed. In 2009, all five were honored with military headstones thanks in large part to the efforts of the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War from Sunfield, Michigan.

Gordon's older brother Lieutenant Herbert G. Cooper also served during World War I with the American Expeditionary Forces. Herbert also attended M.A.C where he graduated with the class of 1916. Herbert was in basic training in Texas as well, and the two brothers met on a number of occasions before Herbert was shipped overseas with his field artillery unit.

Richard Cooper passed in 1933 in Lansing at the age of 66 years old and his wife Frances passed in 1937. Both are buried at Mount Hope Cemetery.

If Gordon W. Cooper had survived the war he was on schedule to graduate from Michigan Agriculture College with the June class of 1918.

With the centennial of World War I coming up in 2018, one should not forget those that gave their life for their country. There are hundreds of World War I veterans who are buried in Lansing's three city cemeteries, Mount Hope, Evergreen (Little Arlington), and North. To this day each year at Memorial Day, flags are placed next to each gravesite to honor those who served.





Historical Society of Greater Lansing
P.O. Box 12095
Lansing, MI 48901

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Historical Society of Greater Lansing - Membership Application

Please accept my application for:

- New Membership
- Renewal Membership
- Gift Membership

in the Historical Society of Greater Lansing

I have enclosed:

- \$20 Individual Membership
- \$30 Family Membership
- \$100 Business Membership
- \$_____ Additional Gift to HSGL

Member Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

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Please Send The Newsletter
Via Email

Make Checks Payable to
Historical Society of Greater Lansing

*The Historical Society of Greater Lansing is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit corporation.
Thank you for your support of our programs and activities.*

Historical Society of Greater Lansing English Inn Fundraiser

Wednesday, May 15, 2013 - 6:00pm-8:00pm

English Inn - 677 South Michigan Road (M-99) - Eaton Rapids

Number of tickets _____ Total enclosed \$ _____ (\$50.00 per person)
See Reverse for Sponsorship Opportunities

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ E-mail _____

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Make checks payable to the **Historical Society of Greater Lansing**. Mail to P.O. Box 12095, Lansing, MI 48901

**Historical Society of Greater Lansing English Inn Fundraiser
Event Sponsorship Opportunities**

_____ \$100 Additional Gift – Copper - ¼ page advertisement

_____ \$250 Additional Gift – Silver- ½ page advertisement

_____ \$500 Additional Gift – Gold - full page advertisement

We will contact you about artwork for your advertisement.

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