



History Explorer

Historical Society of Greater Lansing

www.LansingHistory.org

February 2015

*When Johnny Comes Marching Home:
A Celebration of Luther & Lafayette Baker, the Capture
of John Wilkes Booth, and the End of the Civil War*

The final days of April, 1865, were a dark time for our country, as Americans waited to hear if John Wilkes Booth, Lincoln's assassin, would be found and brought to justice. The manhunt for Booth was led by none other than Lansing's Luther Baker, cousin of Lafayette Baker, then head of the Secret Service. These two Lansing men would capture the spotlight in the waning days of April. This April HSGL will host a series of events marking the end of the Civil War and honoring the Baker family.

Thursday, April 9

The Mystery of Dr. Mudd & John Wilkes Booth
Presentation

Saturday, April 11

Civil War Love Letters Reading

Thursday, April 16

Collecting Lincoln Presentation

Friday, April 24

Capitol Grounds Civil War Monument Tour

Saturday, April 25

Mount Hope Cemetery Civil War Tour

Saturday, April 25

Luther Baker and the Capture of John Wilkes Booth
Presentation

Sunday, April 26

Civil War Foods of the North and South Presentation

Sunday, April 26

Michigan's Civil War Battle Flags

Lansing Goes to War Exhibit

HSGL is hard at work preparing our next exhibit, which will open on Thursday Evening, March 5th, Lansing Goes to War. The exhibit will look at the many wartime roles Lansing residents have played. Stories and objects for loan are being sought for the exhibit, which will include the War of 1812, the Civil War, the Spanish American War, World War I, World War II, Korea, Vietnam, and Desert Storm. The exhibit will examine the roles of both men and women during wartime, including home front life, wartime romance, medicine, wartime production, veterans organizations, anti-war protest movements, and more. If you have a story or an object that you'd like to share, please contact us at (517) 282-0671 or info@lansinghistory.org.

Upcoming HSGL Events

Chief Okemos, Man & Myth

By Jim Lalone

Thursday, February 5 - 7:00pm

Downtown Library - 401 S. Capitol Ave.

No other Lansing figure remains shrouded in myth like Chief Okemos, namesake of the City of Okemos. Historian and genealogist LaLone will attempt to provide some definitive answers to the many questions surrounding Okemos.

Michigan & the War of 1812

By Adam Franti

Thursday, February 19 - 7:00pm

Downtown Library - 401 S. Capitol Ave.

Just two months after the declaration of war, British and Indian forces seized control of Fort Mackinac and Fort Detroit with barely a shot fired. It was a disastrous beginning to the conflict, made worse months later by the River Raisin massacre. Learn more about how Michigan's role during the War of 1812.

**Vernon Duane Ebersole &
Margaret Leonore Goodell Ebersole**

by Jo E. Trumble

On October 28th, 1914, Ellis Duane Ebersole of Ohio and his Michigan born wife, Mabel Falconer Ebersole welcomed their first child, Vernon Duane Ebersole, the first of two sons born to this couple. Robert would be born in 1919. (Ellis was a stenographer for the railroad and later an IRS Collector.)

Vernon was educated in Cleveland and graduated from Baldwin-Wallace College where he earned a degree in music education. He also, later, would attend master's classes from both the University of Michigan and Michigan State University. In 1938, Vernon moved up to Lansing and started teaching at Lansing Central High School, later moving to the new J.W. Sexton High School. He started attending the Central United Methodist Church where he met a young lady with similar musical interests named Margaret Leonore Goodell. Margaret, born July 25, 1918, was the first of three girls born in Lansing to Ralph and Mabel Goodell. She was a Central High School and MSC grad. She and Vernon were married in 1941. While he taught in the schools, she gave private music lessons and accompanied the MSC College Chorus, the Over Forte Choir, and the Lansing Matinee Musicale Ensemble (for over 20 years).

Vernon interrupted his teaching to join the Navy in 1943. He was a commander of an anti-submarine warship and become a lieutenant junior grade before being honorably discharged in 1946.

By March 1946, he was back in the classroom teaching band and orchestra. This was short-lived as by June 1947, he resigned his position to join his father-in-law, Ralph Goodell, in the insurance business. He

became successful in this business and ended up opening his own Vernon Ebersole Insurance Agency in 1956 from which he retired in 1981.

He and Margaret had four children: Barbara, Robert Bruce, Ralph, and Richard. Margaret and Vernon shared a commitment to the development and education of children. Margaret would spend many years working for the Lansing School District. She would become a secretary for the Wainwright and Pleasant View Elementary Schools until her retirement. Vernon took a different approach and became a Lansing School Board Member. He talked to Andrew Kleine in a 1986 interview for the book In Their Names and shared that he had a conversation with Dr. Dwight Rich, then the superintendent of the Lansing Schools. The 1955 conversation was remembered as: "We talked back and forth and he said, 'if you feel that way about education, why don't you run for the board of education the next time around.' And I, in a flippant way, said 'Ok, I will.' And that was the way it started out."

He was elected in 1955 and served as a member of the board for 30 years until his retirement in 1985. He was secretary once, treasurer for 11 terms, and president for 7. No one has served longer. He served during a time of major growth for the Lansing School District as the baby boom generation grew. He was instrumental in helping create many schools and programs including the Beekman Center, the modern Lansing Library, and numerous others. He was also there when the NAACP took on the district to desegregate. Due to this court case, several board members were asked to resign. He was one of four that remained.

In the 1960s the district determined that an outside learning site might be needed. In 1971, the board located a 158 acre site in Wayland, MI that would tug at Vernon's heart. It was purchased from Gladys Olds Anderson in 1972 for \$65,000 from the Molly Drew Butts Fund. A bond that passed in 1974 provided the funds to start building in 1976. The site, named the Lansing School District Environmental Education and Conference Center, opened in 1977. In 1981, the recession forced the district to reexamine the feasibility of the site. Mr. Ebersole stood beside the program saying it was too important to lose. On February 2, 1984 the district renamed the center the Vernon D. Ebersole

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Environmental Education and Conference Center in recognition of his dedication.



Mr. Ebersole also found other ways to keep busy in the community. He served on the Lansing Jaycee Board of Directors, member of the Ingham County Tax Allocation Board, was a member of the State Committee on Special Education, a member of the Lansing Exchange Club (in 1986 he received the Exchange Club Book of Golden Deeds), and he would become president of the Lansing Toast Master Club as well as Toast Master District Governor. Ebersole also assisted the Lansing YMCA and was president on their board of directors for one term as well as being a founder of Lansing Community College, and was very involved in the Central United Methodist Church.

He died on May 31, 1988 at the age of 73. Margaret would continue to be devoted to her family, church, and travel until her death on January 3, 2005 at the age of 86.

The Ebersole Environmental Education and Conference Center continued to be important to the couple throughout their lives. The site contains a fen, coniferous forests, deciduous forests, a prairie, a glacial kame, as well as the spring-fed Jackson Lake which feeds into Lake Michigan.

In its beginning, the Ebersole Center was headed by David Cross, a science and environmental education director given the task of creating the program while still developing the site. After the first reorganization in 1981, due to budget cuts by the district, the program was down-sized and turned over to E. James Kitson, the

director of food services. During his reign, he expanded the use by recruiting districts other than Lansing to come to camp. He also started weekend use as a conference center. This allowed the center to expand their offerings including barrier-free boardwalks and trails.

Ebersole Nature Center continued to be revamped and to adjust to changes throughout the years. In 1986, over 2 miles of trails were completed, a fishing dock was put in, a canoe dock was erected, and bird feeding stations were expanded. In 1991, a fourteen panel solar heating system was installed as an innovative renewable energy system. Ski trails were expanded and the prairie was revitalized. Most recently, the Ebersole Foundation was started in the early 2000s to purchase the farmland property adjacent. The farm purchase was finalized in 2009.

Ebersole, while specializing in environmental education, also offers outreach programs, team building, and conference facilities. Many Lansing students also remember visiting as a part of band camp.

The Lansing School District has continued to debate the financial feasibility of the Ebersole Center. Many have joined the fight to continue to fund this unique piece of property. Once you have been, you can see why Vernon and Margaret were proud to have the Ebersole name on its plaque.





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Lansing, MI 48901

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Historical Society of Greater Lansing - Membership Application

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in the Historical Society of Greater Lansing

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- \$20 Individual Membership
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