



# History Explorer

Historical Society of Greater Lansing

[www.LansingHistory.org](http://www.LansingHistory.org)

July 2017

## Upcoming Events

### **Moore's River Drive Home Tour**

*Sunday, September 17, 2017*

*Brunch 11:00 a.m - 1:00 p.m.,*

*Home Tour 1:00-5:00 p.m.*

Join HSGL for a peek into some of Lansing's grandest and most beautiful historic homes in the Moore's River Drive neighborhood on Sunday, September 17. The tour will include access into six beautiful homes, including the homes of Harry and Ragna Harper and Harriet and Wallace Olds (Ransom's brother). The group includes a variety of architectural styles, including Colonial Revival, Tudor Revival, and arguably Lansing's most stylish bungalow.

The day begins at 11:00 a.m. for brunch at the Country Club of Lansing, followed by the Home Tour, which starts at 1:00 p.m. and ends at 5:00 p.m.. Tickets for the tour only are \$20, and tickets for the brunch and the tour are \$50. Tour tickets are available for purchase at [www.lansinghistory.org](http://www.lansinghistory.org) or at the Country Club of Lansing the day of the event. Brunch tickets must be purchased by September 11 at [www.lansinghistory.org](http://www.lansinghistory.org) or by calling 517-282-0671.

This fundraiser for the Historical Society of Greater Lansing is being generously hosted by the Moore's River Drive Neighborhood Association and the Riverside Home Association. All proceeds benefit HSGL.

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## 2016 Summer Walking Tours

Thank you to everyone who came out to join us for our first two walking tours of the year, featuring the historic photographers of downtown Lansing and the homes of the Westside neighborhood! And thank you also to Jacob McCormick, Bill Castanier, Fran Russell, and Valerie Marvin for leading the tours. The summer is still young, and we still have four more great tours coming up. Here's a quick look at the July and August tours.

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### **Cherry Hill Neighborhood - A Forgotten Treasure**

*Thursday, July 13 - 7:00 p.m.*

*Tour meets at the old Cherry Street School, 520 Cherry St.*

Lansing's Cherry Hill neighborhood is nestled in the southeast corner of downtown, where it sits near the banks of the Grand River. Built between 1875 and 1915, Cherry Hill is one of Lansing's oldest surviving neighborhoods. It contains a number of architecturally unique and beautiful homes, including an elegant yellow brick Italianate, Colonial Revivals, houses influenced by the Stick Style and Dutch Colonial movement, and one spectacular Greek Revival. Practice your turn-of-the-century architectural styles and learn the stories of the men and women—including real estate developers, an insurance executive, and some hard-working women—who made this neighborhood home many years ago.

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### **Capitol Car City - Downtown Lansing**

*Saturday, July 29 - 10:00 a.m.*

*Tour meets at the Michigan State Capitol*

Celebrate Lansing's downtown auto heritage during this special tour during the Capitol City Car Show. The tour will feature a number of historic auto-related sites, including former dealerships, executive offices, and the many buildings—including the Romney Building and the Boji Tower—commissioned by the Olds family. The tour will also include the story of what might be Lansing's most famous auto stunt—the car that climbed the steps of the Capitol.

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### **Old East Campus - MSU Tour Series**

*Saturday, August 19 - 10:00 a.m.*

*Tour meets at the Student Services Building, 556 E. Circle Dr.*

The 2017 MSU campus tour will cover the history of MSU's old east campus, which is closely intertwined with the explosive growth of the campus before and after World War II, when President John Hannah found the resources to convert a small cow college into a major university. Highlights of the tour will include Berkey, the Student Services Building, the East Campus residence halls, the Natural Sciences Building, Giltner, and the Auditorium.

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## Flying Saucers Over Lansing!

by Mary L. Kwas

On June 24, 1947, businessman Kenneth Arnold, flying his small plane, reported seeing nine “saucer-like” objects flying in formation near Mt. Rainier in Washington state. Thus began the modern era of sightings of UFOs, or as they first came to be called from Arnold’s description, “flying saucers.” Almost immediately sightings of flying saucers poured in from all over the United States, including Michigan and the Lansing region.

Flying saucer sightings were big news across the country, and newspapers fanned the flames of interest. The *Lansing State Journal* carried stories of sightings from Michigan, and other states and countries, as well as articles citing expert opinions. The paper also duly reported local sightings and encouraged readers to contact them when anything was seen. While the focus of this article is on Lansing-area sightings, a few from farther afield will be included because of a local connection or to provide context.

Just a week and a half after Arnold’s sighting, the first reported flying saucer sighting in Michigan occurred on July 4, 1947, southwest of Port Huron. The objects were described as “flat translucent plates criss-crossing the sky” that had lights that blinked off. While one of the witnesses insisted the objects were not fireworks, the date of the observation certainly leaves that in doubt. (LSJ 7-5-47)

As soon as the report hit the paper, however, earlier unreported sightings came out of the woodwork. A man living on W. Michigan Ave. said that he and his landlady had observed “ball(s) of fire” over Lansing “jumping in and out among the clouds” about three weeks previously. (LSJ 7-6-47) This not only might qualify for the earliest sighting in Michigan, but may have predated Arnold’s sighting over Mt. Rainier.

Another earlier sighting, this one over downtown Lansing, occurred the evening of July 2, when a woman reported seeing a silver disc “darting in and out of the clouds” while she waited for a bus at the corner of W. Ionia and N. Capitol. Two days later, on July 4, a man saw a silver disc near Park Lake. (LSJ 7-7-47, 7-8-47)

Dr. William C. Behen, a prominent and world-traveling Lansing physician, reported seeing six “silver discs floating through the sky”



**An artist created this fanciful image of the Capitol being attacked by flying saucers in 1994. It remains a favorite of the Capitol’s staff. Copyright Asher-Holmes.**

on July 5 over the Michigan Central Railroad station in Detroit. The objects appeared and disappeared, “flying individually back and forth.” Dr. Behen’s dalliance with flying saucers led to his claim three years later of having taken some of the earliest photographs and motion films of flying saucers over San Jose Purua, Mexico. While still listed in the annals of UFO images, the films have mysteriously been lost. After that, Dr. Behen continued with his good works in the area of medicine and had no more reported close encounters. (LSJ 7-6-47, 3-20-50)

Sightings continued through July. A woman sitting on her front porch on N. Larch on July 16 observed a “white disc-shaped object moving slowly toward the northwestern part of the sky.” The center portion of the disc, she reported, “seemed feathery-looking and not solid.” Four people returning from Nashville to Lansing on July 22 spotted a couple of discs chasing each other across the sky. They watched the antics for about a half hour. (LSJ 7-17-47, 7-23-47)

After the rash of Lansing sightings in 1947, the following two years proved relatively quiet. Only a single sighting was reported over Lansing in 1948 and just three in 1949. A man saw a “comet-like saucer” on January 7, 1948, flying over the buildings in the “300 block of North Washington Avenue.” The red object had a “long tail streaking in its wake.” It was April 29, 1949, when another flying saucer was spotted one afternoon by a woman on Hillcrest road, two miles south of Lansing. The “flying disc” hovered in one spot several minutes before “suddenly zooming toward the north.” On July 16 a flying saucer was spotted flying over a small crowd at Kalamazoo and Hosmer streets. It was described as a circular silver object speeding through the sky in a southerly direction. (LSJ 1-9-48, 4-30-49, 7-18-49) Apparently it found nothing of interest, because there was a gap of eight months before the next sighting.

On March 20, 1950, a housewife was sitting in her living room on Hillcrest Ave. when “a noiseless object came into view hovering over (her) house. It was spinning around and going unbelievably

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### Historical Society of Greater Lansing

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fast." She watched it for "two minutes, and then it disappeared from sight." Two were spotted on May 1, 1950, over Garland St., crossing the sky at a "tremendous speed." They were described as being "flat and round on the ends." Two weeks later, on May 13, a group of neighbors on S. Homer St. saw a "silvery object jumping and diving in the sky in the general vicinity of Haslett." As the sun set, the object changed color, then suddenly disappeared. Near the end of August, five boys playing football in a lot on Vermont Ave. saw six saucers flying in "two perfect formations of three each, moving slowly from east to west." (LSJ 3-20-50, 5-1-50, 5-14-50, 9-5-50)

Up until now, most of the sightings over Lansing had occurred during the warmer months, either because the aliens didn't like Michigan winters or the natives spent less time out in them. So it was surprising when the next cluster of sightings occurred in January 1951. On January 12, three different groups of people spotted flying saucers in the Lansing area. The first, in the later afternoon, was spotted by a 14-year-old boy near Main and Cedar streets. He said it was almost "directly above the Olds Tower heading in an easterly direction." About 11:00 that evening, a saucer emitting an orange glow was spotted traveling west along the Howell-Mason road. Another group reported seeing the same object along the same road a few minutes later, but other observers discounted it as the setting new moon. The following day, on January 13, a couple on Rosewood Ave. in East Lansing saw five or six "silver oval shaped objects traveling kind of fast" over Lansing a little before 6 p.m. (LSJ 1-13-51, 1-14-51)

On March 9 four men observed two discs early in the morning east of Park Lake. The "discs resembled two saucers hanging in the sky on their edge." After a few minutes, the "saucers tipped over on their back and moved slowly off to the north, leaving a white vapor trail behind." Two other groups also observed the saucers, one from their home on W. Jolly Rd. and the other from Delta River Dr. Some months later, on September 29, a repairman working on the roof of a building at the Oldsmobile plant watched a disc-shaped object "go up and down, across and around and around over the plant, and then darted north with terrific speed." (LSJ 3-10-51, 3-17-51, 10-1-51)

Sightings continued in 1952. On June 16 a mother and her daughter watched a "moving spot[]drift in the sky" from Snyder Rd. in East Lansing. The following day, on June 17, there were two sightings. The first occurred in the early evening a few miles northeast of East Lansing. The object appeared to be circular, and "metallic gold" in color. The second sighting occurred about three hours later, about 10 miles east of Lansing on US-16. It "radiated a strange grey light." A few weeks later, early in the morning on July 4, a couple spotted two silver saucers when turning onto Marshall St. from Hayford Ave. (LSJ 6-19-52, 6-21-51, 7-4-52)

The rest of 1952 and all of 1953 produced no saucer sightings over Lansing, despite continued reports from other areas, and 1954 provided only two. On January 26, 1954, a woman spotted one in the middle of the night. The object was "flat and round" and gave off a

"bright multi-colored light." On March 15 another resident on W. Mount Hope between Lansing and Grand Ledge watched a saucer for six minutes, first stationary in the sky, then "it began to spin and to tilt" so the saucer shape could be seen. "Green, red and yellow lights flashed as it zoomed out of sight into the north." (LSJ 1-26-54, 3-15-54). And then that was it. The flying saucers flew away.

During the last half of the 1950s, despite no local sightings, interest in flying saucers remained high. The *Lansing State Journal* continued to run articles about sightings elsewhere or the growing assortment of films, lectures, books, and experts willing to expound on the mysterious saucers. One article in April 1957 reported that the Michigan Flying Saucer Association was holding a meeting to plan a statewide convention. A couple local people in attendance decided to organize the Lansing Flying Saucer Club. (LSJ 4-17-57, 4-28-57)

The biggest development was Project Blue Book, organized by the U.S. Air Force in 1952 to collect and study all the sightings of flying saucers. Over the nearly two decades of the project, over 12,000 sightings were compiled and most were explained as natural phenomena, technology, visual misinterpretations, etc. But six percent of the sightings remained "unidentified." It was also this project that in 1953 coined the term "unidentified flying object," or UFO. It took a few years for the new term to catch on, but by the time the next wave of flying saucer sightings visited the Lansing area in the 1960s, they would be known as UFOs.

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## Upcoming Events *Continued from page 1*

### **Beal Botanical Garden - A Historical Perspective**

*Thursday, August 24 - 6:30 p.m.*

*Tour meets at the W.J. Beal Botanical Garden, 40 W. Circle Dr.*

MSU's Beal Garden owes its existence and its name to Prof. William James Beal, who decided not long after arriving at Michigan State Agricultural College in 1871 that the school needed a campus botanic garden. Within a year this able and ambitious man established a nursery featuring plants from around the world, including England's Kew Garden. Over the next several years he worked across the campus cultivating trees, plants, and grasses in the area known as Sleepy Hollow and the arboretum. He worked tirelessly to grow these humble efforts throughout his career, and in 1924, following his death, the State Board of Agriculture named the botanic garden in his honor at the request of the Department of Botany. The tour will include stories of Beal's work, as well as the efforts of his successors who reimagined and redesigned the garden in the mid-20th century, inspiring the American Society of Horticultural Science in 1955 to pronounce the newly organized garden the finest teaching facility in the country.





Historical Society of Greater Lansing  
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