



History Explorer

Historical Society of Greater Lansing

www.LansingHistory.org

June 2018

Upcoming Events

1968: A Year in American History and Its Impact on the East Lansing Area

Wednesday, June 13, 2018 - 7:00 p.m.

*East Lansing High School Student Union -
509 Burcham Dr.*

The year 1968 brought more fighting in Vietnam, the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and Bobby Kennedy, and the Democratic Convention in Chicago. Locally in East Lansing there were issues like open housing and ending the ban on alcohol sales in East Lansing.

A panel of area residents, including Clarence Underwood, Sarah Fryer, and Nelson Brown will revisit this dramatic year and what it meant for the East Lansing area. Lynn Jondahl will moderate. The event is sponsored by the East Lansing Foundation and the Historical Society of Greater Lansing.



HSGL Annual Meeting, Cherry Hill Walking Tour

Thursday, June 14, 2018 - 6:30 p.m.

Cherry Hill Park - 515 River St.

On Thursday, June 14, HSGL members are asked to attend a very brief annual meeting, at

which we'll vote on next year's board and enjoy some ice cream! The proposed slate of officers for the 2018-2019 HSGL year is:

- President - Bill Castanier
- Vice President - Valerie Marvin
- Secretary - Ron Emery
- Treasurer - Tim Kaltenbach
- Trustee - Cathy Babcock
- Trustee - Helen Mickens
- Trustee - Zig Olds
- Trustee - Mary Kwas

An all-new tour of the Cherry Hill neighborhood will begin at 7:00 p.m. One of Lansing's last surviving late-19th century neighborhoods, Cherry Hill is full of architectural gems that were once home to some of the city's best-known business and civic leaders. Learn about the people who originally built Cherry Hill and the evolution of the neighborhood into a one-time home of the arts and business, while enjoying a pleasant evening walk.

Learn more about HSGL's July and August walking tours at www.lansinghistory.org.



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A History Of Prayer In The Michigan State Legislature

By Le Roy G. Barnett, Ph.D.

Currently, and for decades in the past, there has been a prayer given at the opening of each daily session in the Michigan House and Senate. Such has not always been the case. While the Territorial Legislature had an invocation nearly every day clergy were available, when Michigan declared itself a state in 1835 this tradition was abandoned. There were no prayers given in either chamber during the period 1835-37.

Prayers in the Legislature came back into vogue in 1838 and every year thereafter, but with varying degrees of enthusiasm. Beyond the 1830s, the fewest invocations per annual session occurred in the 1850s, 1860s and 1890s, with around 35, 42 and 38 prayers offered respectively in each chamber per year. At the other end of the continuum, the most religious entreaties offered were in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s when approximately 106, 130 and 108 prayers were respectively made in both chambers per annum.

While these differences are attributable in part to an inclination over the decades for the Legislature to be more prayerful, they are also subject to such variations as the availability of clergy (especially in our state's early period after the capital moved to Lansing), the number of days in session each year, whether or not there were extra sessions, and

which body is being tallied (on average, there were 10% fewer prayers in the Senate than in the House, perhaps due to the upper chamber meeting fewer times).

From the beginning, just local clergy were invited to give opening prayers for the Legislature. This meant that Detroiters provided the service until 1848, when the first session was held at the new Capitol in Lansing. Thereafter, only resident or vicinity pastors were invited to give invocations until 1903, when the Michigan House quietly adopted the practice of being more geographically diverse with its welcome. In 1905 the Senate formally extended an overture to ministers from "Lansing and other cities," thus opening the entire Legislature to clerics from different locations.

During the 19th century, evidence indicates that opening devotions took up "four and a half or five minutes" of the Legislature's business each day. However, in 1958, one clergyman "held forth on the Senate floor...for 12 minutes telling 'a bunch of dirty politicians' what he thought of them." To make sure that prayers rather than sermons were given—and to guard against pronouncements inappropriate for the occasion—rules were inaugurated that limited invocations to two minutes and required a copy of planned remarks to be submitted for approval "at least 24 hours in advance." This preview was in part designed to ensure that forthcoming comments were non-partisan, without divisive references, and in good taste.

Being allowed to bless the proceedings of the Legislature was viewed as a privilege by most

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Prayer... - Cont'd

clergy, and some did so just for the prestige. Others were compensated for their efforts, as noted in the January 2018 issue of *History Explorer*. This practice came to an end in 1851, however, when the new Michigan Constitution of 1850 went into effect. This document changed things due to the addition of Article 4, Section 24, which said “The Legislature may authorize the employment of a Chaplain for the State Prison [in Jackson]; but no money shall be appropriated for the payment of any religious services in either house of the Legislature.” To this day, “the only reward tendered to those who offer the invocation is the honor” of the experience, though free parking for the guest speaker is commonly allowed as a perk.

To be clear, this new exclusionary provision in the constitution did not prevent clergy from performing devotional exercises in the Michigan Legislature, it simply said they would receive no public monies for doing so. Thus, it was not uncommon for some legislators to take up a collection among themselves, near the end of a year’s deliberations, to compensate ministers for their services.

Despite these donations, it was still felt that some token of appreciation for the clerics should come from the Legislature as a body and not just from its members. Toward this end, a concurrent resolution was passed in 1869 awarding to all officiating clergymen a gratis copy of the House and Senate daily journals for the session in which they served. Starting in 1895, a publication known today as the red-bound *Michigan Manual* was substituted for the journals. This practice, continuing biennially thereafter, was given the force of law in 1917 (Public Act 325), and remained a tradition until terminated by Public Act 46 of 1981.

In addition to these minor benefits, clergy giving invocations at daily sessions of the Legislature slowly got respect in the Journals of the House and Senate. In the beginning, the preacher doing the honors would be identified in the official proceedings of either chamber simply by his surname (as, say, “Rev. Jones”). By 1841, the forename of the individual started to appear in the text. In 1901 the pastor’s town of origin usually became a matter of note, and in 1905 the church affiliation was also sometimes included.

From 1921 to 1931, the House Journal usually provided verbatim the remarks of the clergyman each day, but this courtesy was not offered by the Senate’s proceedings. The reason as to why this practice was discontinued could not be ascertained, but it probably had something to do with economies inaugurated during the Great Depression. Starting on 1 April 1961, the Senate Journal commenced publishing in full the prayers offered by its various ecclesiastical participants. The House adopted this custom on a partial basis in 1965, and then proceeded in comprehensive fashion in 1967.

While gestures of thanks and other forms of recognition were greatly appreciated by the clergy, for a time they did have to suffer from some indignities. In 1878, for example, they complained that while giving their prayers some members of the Legislature were reading newspapers and sitting with their heels on their desks. Seven years later, in 1885, a Senator walked out in protest of a prayer given for the health of ailing former President Ulysses S. Grant.

By 1890 things had gotten so bad that during prayers people were walking about, smoking, laughing, talking, coming and going with heads unbowed. When this “barroom atmosphere” continued into the following year, the clergy

boycotted the Senate in protest. To resolve the matter, the Speaker agreed to henceforth enforce silence during invocations and have the Sergeant-at-Arms block all doorways to stop the disrespectful movements.

This rebellion by the clergy for proper decorum was due in part to a change in procedure. Previously, it was the responsibility of the Secretary of the Senate to arrange for a pastor to preside each day. In 1890 this duty was taken over by the Lansing Ministerial Association. It was through this body that the clergy found strength and unified against the offending behavior. The Ministerial Association continued its services into the early 20th century, when its coordinating duties were taken over by the Lansing Council of Churches until about 1975.

The surrender of these responsibilities by the Council of Churches around the time of our nation's bicentennial had an interesting impact on the nature of those giving the invocations. Thereafter nearly every year, in both chambers of the Legislature, those individuals seeking blessings on the proceedings at the start of each daily session were most often members of the House and Senate rather than members of the clergy.

Today, any pastor wishing to give an opening invocation at a daily session of the Legislature must first be recommended or invited by a member of our state's deliberative body. Such clerical guests are required to be "an ordained minister, chaplain, or other religious" leader, and they may be "asked to provide their professional credentials" to show they are qualified to discharge such a responsible and solemn task. The prayers offered by those who qualify are usually spoken, though some people have elected to sing their supplications. In the latter cases, the words, but not the music, appear in the official proceedings.

In addition to modifying how invocations are given, another change occurred in the Legislature during the latter half of the 20th century. Compared to earlier times, in the modern era there has been much more emphasis on issues relating to religion. It all seems to have started in the 1950s and has continued to the present day. Whereas prior to the Korean War there might be one religious-related resolution or bill from the Legislature every other year, after that Asian conflict there was an average of two per year.

While space does not allow for a complete inventory of these bills and resolutions, suffice it to say that about a quarter deal with allowing organized prayer in the public schools. In descending order from that issue, the top concerns are keeping "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance, calling for a National Day of Prayer, teaching creationism along with evolution, allowing health care facilities (or their staff) to opt out of medical procedures or activities to which they have moral or religious objections, and permitting the display of the Ten Commandments in public buildings.

The role and nature of prayer (and even religion) in the Michigan Legislature has been evolving now for over 180 years (almost 200 years if the Territorial Legislative Council is included). After many decades of experimentation with a variety of approaches to the issue, a system has been established that meets the needs of our times. However, if the past is any guide to the future in this matter, it is that such ceremonies or observances will almost certainly extend their transformation into the coming decades as Michigan's citizens—and those who represent them—continue to change their views of the way faith should be expressed in governmental affairs.



Upcoming Events - Cont'd

Modern as Tomorrow: Mid-Century Modern Architecture Along the Michigan Roadside

*by Christine Byron & Tom Wilson
Thursday, June 21, 2018 - 7:00 p.m.
Library of Michigan 702 W. Kalamazoo*

The Michigan roadside landscape changed dramatically after WWII with the rise of “mid-century modern” architecture. Sometimes referred to as “googie,” “jetset,” “space-age,” “Jetsons,” or “populuxe,” this style of architecture is characterized by flat planes, geometric angles, large glass windows, 1950’s colors, and oftentimes flat roofs. Although Michigan produced a wealth of well-known architects, such as Alden B. Dow and Eero Saarinen, most of the motels, restaurants, and gas stations in this presentation were not created by such well-known figures. And unlike the buildings by these famous architects, most of the roadside mid-century modern buildings have been razed, significantly changed, or “remuddled.” Through their postcard and ephemera collection, Byron and Wilson have tried to document this architectural period that was once seen on every major highway in Michigan.

Christine and Tom share a love of Michigan and a fascination with its history. They are co-authors of the five books in the *Vintage Views* series. The pictorial histories, illustrated with vintage images and ephemera, explore the development of tourism in Michigan. They also have a regular column in *Michigan Blue* magazine. They live in Grand Rapids.



Lansing Police Department 125th Anniversary Exhibit

*Starts Saturday, June 2, 2018
Lansing City Hall*

Stop by Lansing City Hall anytime during normal business hours (Monday-Friday 8:00 a.m.-5:30 p.m.) to see HSGL’s 2018 summer exhibit celebrating the 125th anniversary of the Lansing Police Department. The exhibit chronicles the evolution of the police department from its official founding in 1893 to the present day through dozens of photographs, unique artifacts (like an old blue call box), police-related equipment, educational puppets, uniforms, and memorabilia from the old charity Bull Bowls, better known as *Pigs vs. Freaks*. Special thanks to LPD for partnering with HSGL for this one-of-a-kind anniversary celebration.



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