



History Explorer

Historical Society of Greater Lansing

www.LansingHistory.org

July 2018

Upcoming Events

HSGL Returning to Moores River Drive for New Home Tour!

Sunday, September 16, 2018

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

Home Tour 1:00 - 5:00 pm

HSGL is excited to announce that we are returning to Moores River Drive for a second tour featuring a new slate of homes this fall! Join us on Sunday, September 16 and visit some of Lansing's most beautiful homes, including the Potter House and a house designed by architect Ken Black. The homes range in style from Tudor Revivals to sophisticated Four Squares and a new retro Modern home with touches of Art Deco.

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 \$55. Tour tickets will be available for purchase at www.lansinghistory.org or at the Country Club of Lansing the day of the event. Brunch tickets must be purchased by September 12 at www.lansinghistory.org or by calling 517-282-0671.

HSGL is also hard at working soliciting sponsorships for the event, and selling advertisements that will be featured in the tour booklet. Would you like to contribute in this way? See the inside sponsorship and advertisement form or visit www.lansinghistory.org.

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

Michigan Ave. Eastside Walking Tour

Saturday, July 14, 2018 - 10:00 a.m.

*Tour meets at the corner of
Michigan Ave and Clemens St.*

Come stroll with HSGL through the historic 2000 block of Michigan Ave on Saturday July 14, at 10:00 a.m. The 2000 block has long been a focal point and anchor for the dynamic Eastside neighborhood.

Dave Muylle, a restoration specialist, builder and neighborhood resident, and Joan Nelson, Director of Allen Street Neighborhood Center, will conduct the tour.

The 2000 block has seen scores of businesses come and go as times and tastes changed, continuing to serve as an important retail and housing area for the neighborhood. It has seen numerous drug stores, apartments, butchers, grocery stores, bars, bakeries, restaurants and a hardware store since modern development began in the 1920s. When the block was first built up neighbors mostly walked to stores on the strip or took a trolley.

Muylle and Nelson will explore the transformation of the 2000 block during its 100 year history. Following the tour join Dave at the nearby cottage neighborhood he is constructing on Leslie St. to see how the neighborhood is on the move.

South Capitol Ave. Walking Tour

Saturday, July 28, 2018 - 10:00 a.m.

Tour meets on Capitol Square

Join HSGL for a walk down South Capitol Ave. where we'll be discussing architecture, people, and the growth of the city on Saturday, July 28. Once home to the wooden capitol

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Collecting Lansing History Three Feet at a Time

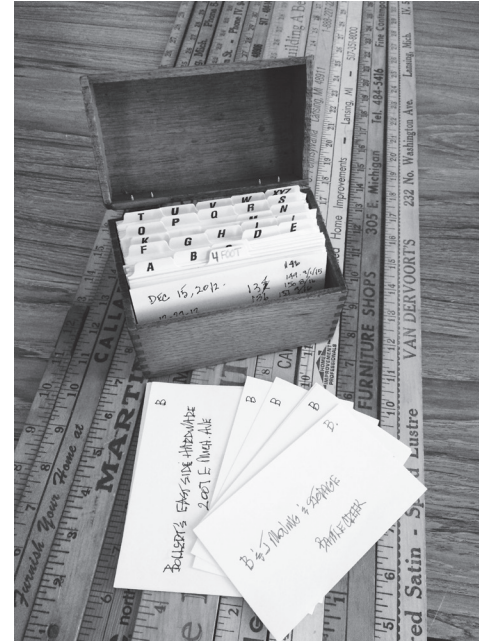
By Zig Olds

As the person responsible for the collections held by the HSGL, I have the privilege of pursuing, receiving, cataloging, and caring for some of Lansing's most interesting artifacts. Along with the items, I occasionally get the honor of meeting the donor. The stories that accompany the donation are oftentimes as intriguing as the items themselves. Common tales range from "We found this in a wall while doing some remodeling" to "This belonged to my great-grandmother." The Historical Society of Greater Lansing welcomes a wide variety of artifacts that have a direct connection to the Capital City. Don't let the word "artifact" fool you. We are not simply on the hunt for rare Lansingosaurus bones, or R.E. Olds' elusive bedroom slippers. One of the primary purposes for why we collect is to establish physical touchstones to Lansing's past. By preserving these tangible props, our ability to create rich, engaging programming is greatly enhanced. Seemingly everyday items can provide gravity to the dialogue, and the dialogue can provide context back to the items. As we continue to build our holdings, the greater our palette becomes from which we can connect people with places with *things*.

When one considers the measurement of history, we often think of centuries, decades, and years. One donor has found a way to trace Lansing history right down to the inch. The story begins back in February of 2014, the HSGL's Valerie Marvin spoke to the Lansing Chapter of the State Employee Retirees Association (SERA). The talk covered the Society's current projects, and the quest to collect old Lansing items for exhibits (and eventually a museum). The lecture was followed by a brief synopsis in the Lansing SERA newsletter. This event captured the attention of one member in particular, as it was potentially a solution for where his collection might one day call home.

Enter last summer, when a brief message came in to the HSGL. James Wresinski, a longtime Lansing resident and retired State employee, had a collection that he would like to discuss donating to the Historical Society. From the time I have been involved with the Society's collecting effort, I have

seen individual items and groups of dissimilar items come through the door. Only on a few rare occasions have individuals offered a specifically curated collection that they themselves had assembled over time. Mr. Wresinski, HSGL President Bill Castanier, and I met to discuss the details of this mysterious collection and its destiny. Sometime in the mid-1980s, Mr. Wresinski came across a wooden yardstick, from a local business that no longer existed, and decided that it was an item worth keeping. Little did he know that this was the first step in a journey of over 150 yards.



Promotional yardsticks have been around seemingly forever. Though it is unclear when or where the phenomena started, newspaper advertisements splashed with "...be sure to get your FREE YARDSTICK!" began popping-up in the mid-1910s. Today the internet provides a whole host of promotional companies that offer custom-imprinted products for companies to give away as part of their brand marketing. Aakron Line (intentionally spelled with two A's) of Akron, New York claims to be the World's Leading manufacturer of wooden rulers and yardsticks. When attaching your business name to a give-away item, it helps that the item is useful and will be saved (and utilized) by the recipient over time. This is one of the characteristics that attracted Mr. Wresinski to yardsticks, and he's not the only one.

A quick internet search of DIY craft sites will reveal virtually 101 uses for yardsticks that have nothing to do with measuring things. Veneer for furniture, lampshades, coat hook backers, and planters are just a few of the products made via repurposing. Not only does this reduce the available herd of wayward yardsticks (as collectors and crafters fight over yard sale bounty), it also permanently diminishes the 'stick population due to the deconstructive nature of reconstruction.

It wasn't that long ago when the downtown streets were filled with mom-and-pop local stores. Regardless of what type of store it was, a free yardstick was a common gift to the customer. Grand openings, in particular, are great for yardstick giveaways. From Kopietz Hardware to Capitol Federal Savings Bank, each of these Lansing businesses are forever inscribed on a thin, narrow, useful plank. Knowing this, Mr. Wresinski saw an opportunity to remember many

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www.LansingHistory.org

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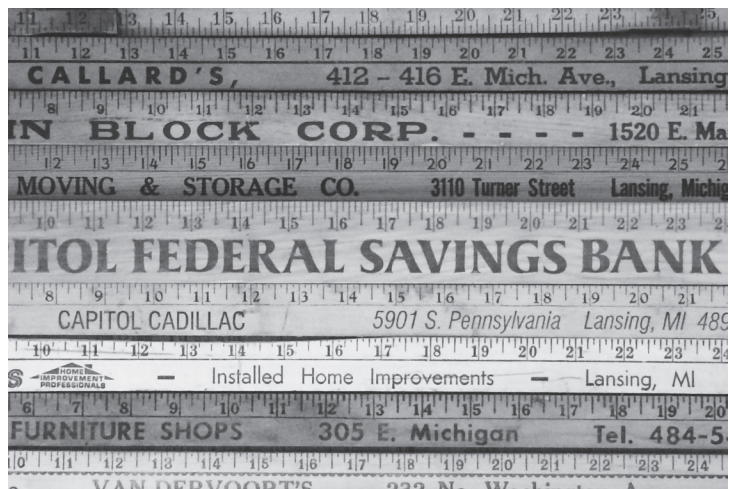
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of Lansing’s lost shops by collecting their wooden legacy. So, what started as an innocent pursuit, picking up sticks at yard sales and occasionally antique shops, slowly grew. Word got out, and soon friends and relatives started to present Mr. Wresinski with even more treasures. Like many collectors, Mr. Wresinski was also interested in maintaining the information that accompanied the piece. A wooden index box with a card for each yardstick (the company it represents, how much was paid for it, or who gave it to him) stands beside the barrel of wooden yards. Ten becomes twenty, twenty becomes forty, and the next thing you know you have a collection of well over one hundred sticks of wood (which fortunately store relatively easily when stacked on end...not end-to-end!).

Yet, the time had come for Mr. Wresinski to simplify his life. His family had encouraged a major downsizing campaign. Establishing contact with the HSGL fulfilled his intention to donate his lengthy collection to a public institution...almost. When asked if he felt his Lansing Collection was complete, Mr. Wresinski admitted that there was one yardstick he was never able to track down. From the collection’s early unintended inception Mr. Wresinski focused on lost Lansing businesses. A prominent business, which surely HAD to have had promotional yardsticks, was Vandervoort Hardware. Vandervoort’s was a downtown anchor, which intersected the lives of many in Lansing. In his 30+ years of searching Mr. Wresinski was unable to track-down a specimen from Lansing’s preeminent hardware store. But alas, it was time to free up space and move the Yardstick Collection to its new home.

Sword, retriever of items lost under the stove or behind the refrigerator, discipline tool, action figure diving board, shim stock, or window prop, yardsticks are a versatile staple of virtually every household. It is easy to overlook these common planks as also reminders of Lansing History. It is with great pride and sense of privilege that the Historical Society of Greater Lansing gets to house this special collection built 36 inches at a time...

...a collection that was by the owner’s admission one stick shy of being “complete.”



It was approximately one month after donating the yardstick collection that Mr. Wresinski contacted the Historical Society once more. He had run into an old friend that “has something for you.” To Mr. Wresinski’s pleasure, the friend presented him with a Vandervoort’s yardstick. The Holy Grail had been found...and had to be united with the rest of the herd! It is my pleasure to say that the Historical Society of Greater Lansing has a premiere collection of Lansing advertising in the form of marketing yardsticks—and we thank James Wresinski for this honor.

Upcoming Events - *Cont'd from page 1*

South Capitol Ave. Walking Tour...

building, beautiful brownstones, and elegant residences, South Capitol Ave has morphed into a place of business and civic pleasure with the construction of two Masonic Temples, the development and beautification of Reutter Park, and the creation of the downtown branch of the Capitol Area District Library. The tour will also wander by some properties west of Capitol Ave., including the Porter Apartment Building/Hotel and the old YMCA.



Congratulations to the 2018 Morris Peckham Award Winners!

Sgt. Justin Moore and Msgr. George Michalek J.C.L. were honored at the annual meeting of the Historical Society of Greater Lansing for their efforts to preserve Lansing history.

The Robert J. Morris and Linda R. Peckham Towering Achievement Award was presented by Linda Peckham, spouse of the late Robert Morris. The award was created by Peckham as a way to recognize individuals who have made significant contributions to the preservation of Lansing history.

Morris and Peckham were among the first to recognize the importance of preserving Lansing history and were also pioneers in adaptive reuse when they restored the St. Mary’s Convent and converted it into condominiums.

Moore was recognized for his efforts in leading the Lansing Police Department’s 125th Anniversary celebration and Michalek for his role in the establishment of the Diocese of Lansing Archive.

Each of the award winners received a personalized plaque illustrated with a stylized version of the Olds Tower made from a “found” printing plate from the 1930s.



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:

- \$25 Individual Membership
- \$35 Family Membership
- \$100 Business Membership
- \$_____ Additional Gift to HSGL

Member Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Telephone _____ Email Address _____

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.*