



# History Explorer

Historical Society of Greater Lansing

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

April 2019

## Upcoming Events

### The ABCs of DNA & Genealogy

by Jessica M. Trotter

Thursday, April 11, 2019 – 7:00 p.m.

Library of Michigan, 702 W. Kalamazoo

Everywhere I turn, I hear people discussing their DNA results. But what can DNA testing really tell you? Should you take a test? What tests should you take? What does it all mean? DNA testing can be a powerful tool. Trotter's presentation will offer a layman's overview on tests, testing companies, and how you can use your results, as well as some of the pitfalls to DNA testing.

Jessica Trotter is an Archivist with a Master of Science in Information, Archives and Records Management Specialization from the University of Michigan—but works for the Capital Area District Libraries in Collection Development by day. Trotter's background with DNA is as a genealogist and genealogy instructor. She first tested her own DNA in 2012 in response to students asking questions on DNA as testing prices came down, as well as out of curiosity. She hoped it might help with a hard-to-trace line of formerly enslaved African-Americans, but in retrospect it actually turned all of her research on that line upside down.

Her presentation on April 11 will look at the three major tests—Autosomal, Y-DNA, and Mitochondrial DNA. She'll discuss the major testing companies—including Ancestry, 23 and Me, and MyHeritage. And she'll walk the audience through what the results look like and what you can do with that information. DNA is now an integral tool in genealogical research but not one to be taken lightly. You have to know going in that you may find out secrets you didn't know about your family.

### Antiquarian Book & Paper Show

Sunday, April 28 – 9:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Causeway Bay Hotel & Conference Center,  
6820 S. Cedar Street, Lansing

The 69th Michigan Antiquarian Book and Paper Show is billed as "The Midwest's Largest Book and Paper Show."

Items for sale include: first editions, Americana, fine bindings, science fiction, postcards, autographs, prints and maps, sheet music, posters, magazines, Michigan history, children's books, ephemera, photographs, rare books and more. The show is sponsored by Curious Bookstore. Admission is \$5.00 and parking is free. For more information: [curiousbooks.com/shows.html](http://curiousbooks.com/shows.html) or call 517-332-0112.

### Downtown Lansing Walking Tour

Wednesday, May 1 – 6:00 p.m.

Begins/ends: Capitol Area District Library, 401 S. Capitol

The Office of Mayor Andy Schor, the Capitol Area District Library, and the Historical Society of Greater Lansing are joining hands to host the first walking tour of the season, focused on the south downtown area.

The tour will look at the former Arbaugh's Department Store; the Bus Depot; the Lansing Women's Clubhouse; the Midtown Apartments; and Reutter Park, Lansing's oldest park, named for Lansing mayor and businessman J. Gottlieb Reutter. Also included on the tour are some elegant Victorian-era homes of famous and infamous Lansing residents. The tour will feature the homes of William Kerns, owner of the Kerns Hotel; the founder of Lansing Capitol Savings and Loan Association; an early Lansing alderman and vice president of the original Lansing Brewing Co; and a prominent Lansing attorney who was disbarred for "fraud, deceit and malpractice."

In addition, a stop at the State Democratic Party office will reveal a controversy surrounding a potential error in the State Historical Marker that identifies Darius Moon as the architect. So who built the Victorian-era home and how was the error made? The first person on the tour to answer that question will receive the definitive guide to Moon's work, *Darius B. Moon: The History of a Michigan Architect 1880-1910* by CADL Librarian James MacLean.

## The Lansing Mineral and Magnetic Well

by Bob Mainfort

As recounted in the April 2018 issue of *The History Explorer*, the efforts of the Lansing Salt Manufacturing Company to drill a profitable brine well on the east side of the Red Cedar River, just south of its confluence with the Grand River, were not only unsuccessful, but also a financial disaster for the principals involved. The firm's last recorded financial transaction was dated July 5, 1865.

The owners of the property on which the failed well was located, William Woodhouse and C. W. Butler, were left in somewhat of a quandary about what to do with their white elephant. The 1400-foot well shaft produced a fair volume of water with a pronounced mineral taste, and apparently some local citizens collected and used the water for domestic purposes. It would take roughly four years, but the well would eventually prove to be profitable.

In the summer of 1869, a company sank a 200-foot well in St. Louis, Gratiot County, with hopes of establishing a salt works. The well delivered a respectable 300 gallons per minute, but the water was not saline, so the salt enterprise was abandoned. As the town council considered ways to use the well, someone discovered that his knife blade stuck to the iron tubing that projected above the ground, and from which water flowed. This caused some local excitement, and people flocked to magnetize their own knives and utensils. Affidavits were filed claiming that objects were magnetized merely by actions of the water alone. People who drank the water claimed to find relief from bladder and kidney disorders, and bathing in the water allegedly eased symptoms of rheumatism.

A new Michigan industry was born. Enterprising individuals throughout the state took note of the success

of the magnetic well operation in St. Louis, and by the summer of 1870 no less than 60 magnetic wells were open for business, with two dozen of these also advertised for the mineral qualities of their water. The claimed magnetic properties were soon dropped by most well operators.

Learning of the successful St. Louis well operation, Woodhouse and Butler sensed an opportunity to recoup their losses from the brine well debacle. Their first step was to re-tube the old well, which led to the discovery that, like the well pipe in St. Louis, the new pipe was magnetic. Accordingly, construction of a bath-house was begun, and in March 1870, the owners invited a chemist, Dr. Augustus F. Jennings (a graduate of the University of Michigan Medical School), to visit the Lansing well and to collect a sample of water for analysis. In early May, the good doctor sent the results of his analysis to Messers. Woodhouse & Butler, a portion of which follows:

	grains/gallon (original)	mg/liter (converted to modern)
Chloride of Sodium (salt)	320.224	5481.614
Bicarbonate of Lime	107.590	1841.732
Soda	112.081	1918.609
Magnesia	23.027	394.178
Iron	1.882	32.216
Sulphate of Potassium	14.940	255.744
Soda	30.065	30.065
Lime	none	none

What does this compositional analysis actually mean? Following Directive 2009/54/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2009 on the exploitation and marketing of natural mineral waters, the water produced by the Lansing Mineral Well far exceeded the lower limits for classifying it as "Water with sodium" (>200 mg/L), "Water with bicarbonate" (>600 mg/L), and "Water with sulphate" (>200 mg/L). The relevance of this will be discussed below, but first a bit more history.

Construction of the new bath-house, costing over \$4,000 including furnishings, proceeded apace, and the facility was opened to the public in late May 1870. By early July, the bath-house was "run daily to its full capacity, and many important cures are being effected."

Evidently the first year of operation was profitable, and Woodhouse and Butler decided to add a fashionable

### Historical Society of Greater Lansing

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hotel to their enterprise. The project would require far more expense—roughly \$12,000—than construction of the bath-house, so the owners entered into partnership with a Lansing banker, Eugene Angell, to shore up funding.

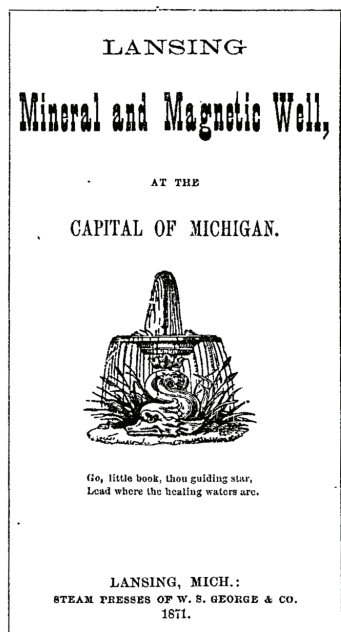


Fig. 1: Cover image of pamphlet.

To help promote their expanded facilities and the benefits to be gained from the artesian well water, the owners had a 24-page pamphlet printed (Fig. 1), probably to coincide with the opening of the new hotel. It is curious that the pamphlet provides more description of the bath-house than of the hotel:

“In close proximity to the Well, a large and commodious bath-house has been erected, 32x80 feet in size.... The bath-house has been very happily designed, with convenient reception and bath-rooms, entirely separate and distinct for each of the sexes, and indeed all the appointments, in reference to baths, are after the most approved and modern style, enabling persons to receive either hot, cold, vapor, or shower mineral baths, as the necessities of the case or pleasure may require. Added to

this, is a plunge bath in open air, forty feet square, one half four, and the other half six feet deep.”

A glowing description of the hotel and grounds was included (Fig. 2), however, in a single-page flyer entitled *Lansing Mineral and Magnetic Well*, probably published in early 1873, with Woodhouse listed as the sole owner:

“The Hotel is a large and commodious building, pleasantly situated upon a slight eminence, commanding from its spacious verandas a beautiful landscape, threaded by the two rivers, and sufficiently variegated with forest, field, and bluff to render the view quite delightful.

“...the House is supplied with a pleasant Billiard-room, the Parlor with Piano and Melodeon, and outside may be found a Gymnasium, Swings, Croquet Ground, and also a little fleet of rowing boats...”

“For room, board, and treatment, ten to twelve dollars per week, according to size and location of room. This covers all necessary expenses save manipulation, which, when required, will involve an additional expense of twenty-five cents, and for this purpose experienced manipulators are in attendance.”

Easy access to the hotel and bath-house was provided by the River Street bridge, which in the 1870s also was known as the Mineral Well bridge. More adventurous visitors could utilize a “line of little steamers” that had a dock on the east bank of the Grand River just north of the hotel, with service typically running every half hour between the hotel and North Lansing (Fig. 3). There also was a small railroad station adjacent to the property.

Bottled water from the well also was available for purchase on the premises. A case of 12-quart bottles was priced at \$2.50, and a gross of at \$25.00 (Fig. 4). Barrels and half-barrels also could be obtained. The pamphlet provides directions for the “proper” use of water from the well, noting that the “distinctive influences of this water upon the system are Alterative, Cathartic, Diuretic, Sedative, and Tonic. With the majority of those who drink the water, it has a gently laxative effect, while some of it is quite cathartic, and with all strongly diuretic.... To realize the most decided effect from drinking, two or three goblets should be taken before breakfast, and then occasionally through the day before eating. If too laxative, drink immediately after meals, or more sparingly between them.”



Fig. 2: Lansing Mineral Well Hotel, view to SE. River St. runs in front of building.

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## The Lansing Mineral and Magnetic Well...

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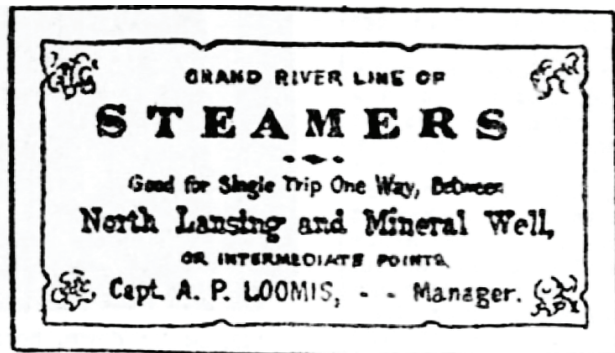


Fig. 3: Ticket for a single one-way trip.

Further, “The large amount of Chloride of Sodium [i.e., salt] held in solution is exceedingly useful in purifying the human system, in removing diseases of the skin and scrofulous taints [inflammation of the throat lymph glands, often accompanied by various skin disorders] and in giving a healthful tone to the digestive organs. And this, in combination with the Iron, affords an excellent tonic, the effects of which has been happily proven on a large number of dyspeptics, and worn-out organisms.”

“There are actual living witnesses to the cure of the following diseases, or so far relieved as to give promise of a final cure: Rheumatism [pain in joints], Paralysis, Dyspepsia [indigestion], Scrofula, Erysipelas [intense red local inflammation of the skin caused by *Streptococcus* bacterium], Gravel [kidney stones], Diabetes, Piles, Catarrh [nose and throat discharge from cold or allergy], Liver Complaint, Kidney Complaint, Eruptions of the Skin, Weak Lungs, Inflamed Eyes, Bronchitis, Salt Rheum [eczema], Neuralgia [pain in a sensory nerve], Chronic Diarrhea, and other affections of the mucous membrane.”

It was obligatory for champions of the curative powers of mineral waters to present testimonials from users of the waters, and the pamphlet for the Lansing Mineral and Magnetic Well includes nine detailed, notarized accounts of miraculous cures allegedly brought about by consuming the waters. Interestingly, several of the testimonials pre-date completion of the bath house (April 13 and April 20, 1870), and five were notarized on a single day (June 6, 1870) by the same Notary Public. Certainly nothing suspicious about that!

Grandiose claims and questionable testimonials aside, many individuals probably did benefit from

ingesting and bathing in the waters. During the last half of the 19th century, the typical middle- and upper-class American diet was heavy, with an emphasis on various meats and potatoes, much of which was fried in butter, lard, and bacon grease. In cities, increasing numbers of businessmen, clerks, and laborers had their noon meal at a restaurant or saloon, gulping down large meat and cheese sandwiches with such rapidity that foreign visitors were disgusted by American eating habits. Small wonder that “dyspepsia,” or indigestion, was the most universal complaint of the 19th century.

The bicarbonates in water from the mineral well probably had positive effects on the digestive tract, as bicarbonates can neutralize stomach acid and accelerate gastric emptying. The sulphates in the water (especially sodium sulphate) were effective for relieving constipation symptoms and promoted overall bowel health.

Iron bicarbonates have demonstrated therapeutic effects on chronic inflammation of the lungs. Immersion in the highly saline waters at the bath house would aid in removing excess mucus from the nasal cavity and may have been beneficial in treating some eye conditions (e.g., those caused by allergies). The water’s natural buoyancy would have provided some short-term relief from individuals suffering from joint issues. The high saline content of the mineral well waters, however, would militate against consuming large quantities over an extended period.

What of the alleged magnetic properties? Many commercial mineral wells of the late 19th century also were touted as being “magnetic wells,” and claimed that the magnetism imbued the water itself. The promotional pamphlet for the Lansing well, however, soft peddles the “magnetic influence” of water from the well, saying only that “our pipes are strongly magnetized.” This leaves it to an uneducated and gullible public to infer that the water had “magnetic” properties and



Fig. 4

that this must be a fine, healthful thing. In fact, it was utter nonsense.

At the time of the mineral and magnetic well fad, it was well known to deep well drillers that the casings of deep borings are more or less magnetic, and that small pieces of iron (e.g., nails) would adhere to the pipes. This magnetism decreases over time, and in many wells disappears after a few years. In the early 1900s, members of the U.S. Geological Survey visited multiple “magnetic” springs in the upper Midwest and tested the waters for magnetism after removing the water at distances from 5 to 150 feet from the well. No traces of magnetism were found in any of the tested samples.

In 1873, as Michigan and the country as a whole were caught up in one of the periodic financial panics, Woodhouse and Angell sold the entire Lansing Mineral Well operation to Lansing businessmen C. Y. and Daniel Edwards, who, in the summer of 1874, built an addition across the rear of the hotel, installed gas fixtures, and made other upgrades at a “cost of about \$3,000 to \$4,000.” The hotel was a popular lodging spot for state legislators, and the mineral well attracted patrons from as far away as Chicago and New York (Fig. 5).

On the afternoon of February 5, 1876, smoke was seen rising from the roof of the Mineral Well Hotel. Within ten minutes of the initial alarm being raised, the fire department was on the scene with their Silsby fire engine, which took in water from the river. Despite the abundance of water, the efforts of the firemen proved in vain, and after about three hours the building began to collapse. As the flames began to fully consume the hotel, the entire area was illuminated “as with the splendor of day,” as a large crowd looked on. As reported by the *Lansing Journal*, “On Sunday morning there was only a charred heap where the evening before had stood the Mineral Well hotel.” The hotel was insured for much less than its value and was not rebuilt.

The story should end here, but it doesn’t quite. In fact, water from the Lansing mineral well continued to be sold commercially for about 30 more years. A major purchaser was the Michigan House of Representatives, whose members found it necessary to be provisioned with a daily supply of “Lansing mineral water” from 1877 until at least 1889. During some, if not all, of this period,

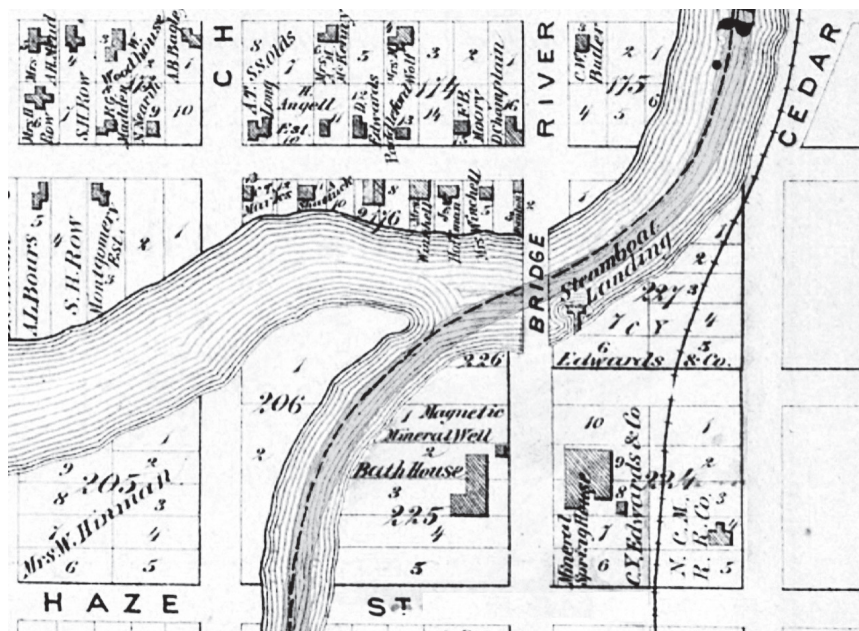


Fig. 5: 1874 Beers Map of Lansing Mineral Well area.

the mineral well operation was known as the Michigan Congress Water Company, “Congress” being an allusion to one of the most famous springs at Saratoga, New York. Around 1903, Sullivan & Company, a Lansing bottler of soft drinks, acquired the well and sold the water until at least 1906. By that year the Jarvis Engine and Machine Works Company had begun moving some of its operations to the former location of the Mineral Well Hotel, and it seems likely that the brothers Jarvis purchased the entire area, including the well itself. A search of various State of Michigan Geological Survey publications from 1904 to 1915 revealed no listing for the Lansing mineral well (under any name), but in the 1917 edition (for 1916) of *Mineral Resources of Michigan* is a listing for the Jarvis Mineral Water Co., 901 River Street, Lansing. There is no listing for the following year or subsequent years, suggesting that the Jarvis brothers’ short-lived venture represents the last use of the Lansing mineral well for commercial purposes.

*Acknowledgments & Photo Credits:* Jacob McCormick and Timothy Bowman generously provided several photographs and newspaper clippings.

Fig. 1: Cover image of *Lansing Mineral and Magnetic Well, at the Capital of Michigan*. Steam Presses of W. S. George & Co., Lansing, 1871. Original pamphlet shown here is housed in the collections of the University of Wisconsin-Madison library.

Fig. 2: Photograph of the Lansing Mineral Well Hotel. [www.mgrow.org/wp-content/uploads/Heritage\\_MineralSpringHouse\\_JQ02j013.jpg](http://www.mgrow.org/wp-content/uploads/Heritage_MineralSpringHouse_JQ02j013.jpg)

Fig. 3: Ticket for a “Single Trip One Way, Between North Lansing and Mineral Well.” *Lansing State Journal*, 1 January 1930, p. 34.

Fig. 4: Bottle “From the Lansing Mineral & Magnetic Well, the Capital of Michigan.” Image courtesy of Jacob McCormick.

Fig. 5: Lansing Mineral Well area. From *County Atlas of Ingham, Michigan*, p. 36. F. W. Beers (1874).



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