



# History Explorer

Historical Society of Greater Lansing

www.LansingHistory.org

May-June 2019

## Upcoming Events

### Changes to the Newsletter

Beginning with this issue *The History Explorer* will become a bimonthly publication and will be issued every other month or six times a year. The issues will be January/February, March/April, May/June, July/August, September/October, and November/December, with delivery planned to arrive early in the first month of each issue. The newsletter will continue to provide a list of upcoming events as well as an interesting article on local history. Authors are needed to submit articles for the newsletter. You do not have to be an experienced author. The editor is happy to work with you to produce an acceptable article. Please consider sharing a story about Lansing's past.

### Downtown Lansing Walking Tour

Wednesday, May 1 – 6:00 p.m.

Begins/ends: Capital Area District Libraries  
401 S. Capitol Ave.

The Office of Mayor Andy Schor, the Capital Area District Libraries, 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 Batman and the Ballerina

by Dean Feldpausch

Tuesday, May 14 – 6:00 p.m.

Delta Township District Library  
5130 Davenport Dr., Lansing

In his book, *The Batman and the Ballerina*, author Dean Feldpausch imagines a gravity-defying love story between the daredevil Clem Sohn and the ballerina Margot Fonteyn. Come to learn about the real-life people who inspired this story: Sohn, an air showman from Fowler, Mich., famous throughout the U.S. and Europe in the 1930s for his 20,000-foot glides on wings of his own design, and Fonteyn, one of Britain's most beloved classical ballerinas. *This program is sponsored by the Delta Township Historical Society.*

### Annual Meeting – Vote for Nominees

Wednesday, May 22 – 6:30 p.m.

Library of Michigan, 702 W. Kalamazoo

The HSGL Annual Meeting will be held a half-hour before the start of the "Guardians of Detroit"

*Continued on page 5 - Insert*

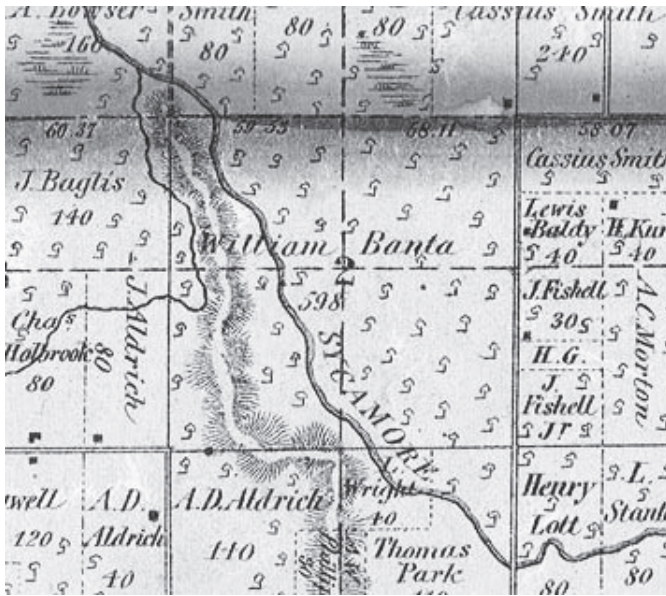
## Gravel, Garbage, and Games: The Evolution of Section 2 of Delhi Township

By Jacob McCormick

Section 2 in Delhi Township, which includes a portion of the noted Hogsback, Michigan’s largest glacial esker, has long served a variety of purposes in the community, each with a unique historical story to tell. Delhi Township was first settled in 1837 and was formally established in 1842. In the 1830s and

in 1895 and Mr. Banta died in 1896. The Bantas lived in Brooklyn, New York, and while it is not clear, it is likely that they purchased land in Michigan with the intention of settling in the new state but never moved from New York. William Banta’s last will and testament went through Ingham County’s probate court in 1896. William Banta bequeathed the land to his children, also residents of New York, who subsequently sold the 150 acres in Section 2.

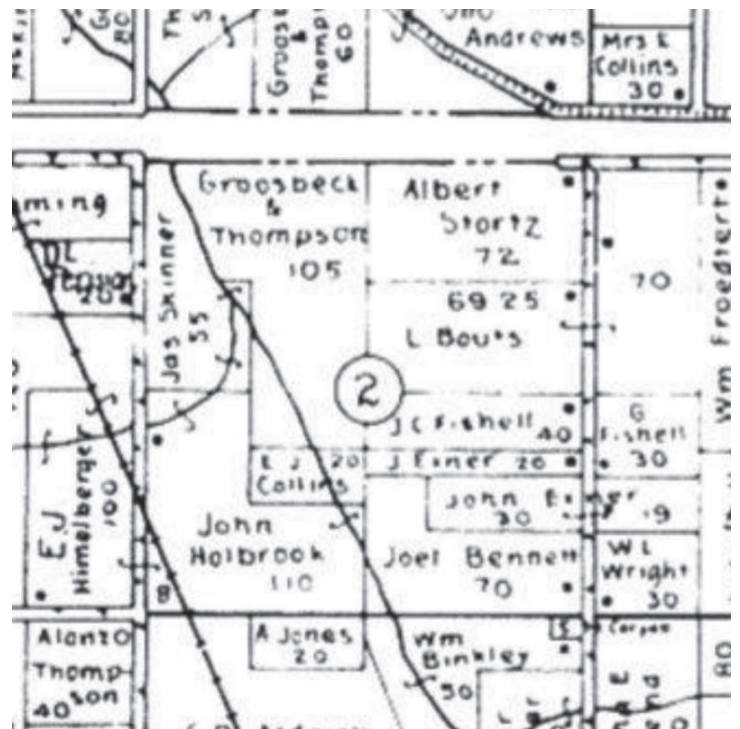
The next known owner of the land was John Holbrook, a then-aged, wealthy, and politically influential man who served in elected and appointed office at the township, county, and state levels. He took ownership of this land near the time of his retirement from public office. It was long thought that the Hogsback land was worthless. In the early 20th century, however, it was discovered that it was plentiful in turning out useful sand and gravel. Around 1909, Mr. Holbrook turned a portion of his land into a gravel pit on a whim, the first to do so on the Hogsback. The Delhi gravel quickly



**Fig. 1: Section 2, 1859**

1840s, thousands of acres of land were purchased from the federal government throughout Ingham County. The earliest known owner of Section 2 of Delhi Township, south of Lansing, was William Banta, appearing on the 1859 map of the county. William Banta owned the entirety of Section 2 of Delhi Township for many years.

By 1895 Banta owned just 150 acres in the southwestern quarter of the section. Mrs. Banta died



**Fig. 2: Section 2, 1914**

### Historical Society of Greater Lansing

P.O. Box 12095 ~ Lansing, MI 48901

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

#### Officers & Board Members

Bill Castanier – President	Mary Kwas – Trustee
Valerie Marvin – Vice President	Jacob McCormick – Trustee
Ron Emery – Secretary	Helen Mickens – Trustee
Tim Kaltenbach – Treasurer	Zig Olds – Trustee
Cathy Babcock – Trustee	Bob Rose – Trustee
Joan Bauer – Trustee	Anne Wilson – Trustee



became a highly desired commodity. By 1912, 640 railcar loads of gravel departed Section 2 of Delhi Township via the Michigan Central Railroad, the tracks for which passed through the Holbrook land. In cities where major concrete work was done, Delhi gravel was highly desired. About a quarter of the carloads of gravel from Delhi in 1912 went to Lansing. In 1913 the Holbrook Pit was operating with two huge gasoline engine shovels and had sent out 2,000 carloads of gravel to date. Lansing companies used Holbrook gravel in the construction of the chimney at the Ottawa Street Plant, Olds Motor Works buildings, General Motors buildings, and the paving of city streets.

John Holbrook also oversaw a 110-acre farm on his Section 2 land. The soil on the Hogsback had been found to be useful for growing fruit. Holbrook's farm grew thousands of fruit trees, the fruit from which was also distributed locally. Later in the mid-1910s, Holbrook partnered with James M. Skinner, his stepson and neighboring landowner, in the gravel pit operation, which they continued for several years. In addition to the farm and gravel pit, the land saw other uses, such as for

a shooting range in the 1920s used by the REO National Rifle Club. Holbrook retired by the early 1920s and removed to Florida. Skinner operated the gravel pit after Holbrook's retirement. Skinner was a successful Lansing businessman who, at one point, served as Michigan's superintendent of construction. Gravel was but one of his numerous enterprises. Skinner died in 1936 and Holbrook died in 1937. It is noteworthy that neither Banta, Holbrook, nor Skinner ever lived on the land. Both Holbrook and Skinner had stately homes on Ottawa Street in downtown Lansing.

Shortly after the partners' deaths, the land was in new hands. By the late-1930s, the land was purchased by Claude Ludwig, the owner of Lansing's Wilson Building and a longtime leader on Lansing's Real Estate Board. It is probable that Ludwig purchased the land as a real estate investment with the potential of development. No development or activity, however, occurred on the land in the 1940s. There is little record of what Ludwig did with the property, but by the early 1950s a whole new operation would take shape on the historic land.



**Fig. 3: John Holbrook**



**Fig. 4: James Skinner**

In 1953 the city of Lansing acquired the land for use as a sanitary landfill dump, also known as the Aurelius Landfill. The new city dump opened at the end of March 1953. The city advertised that this landfill was for “commercial haulers of rubbish.” Brush and tree trimmings were not permitted, rather the former Paulson Street dump was to be henceforth used for brush and small amounts of garbage. In October 1960 Lansing annexed the land which housed the landfill. A state statute allowed the annexation as the city owned and operated the dump that was located on the land. In 1968 the State Highway Department sold land just east of the landfill to Lansing, and the new 44 acres were promptly annexed into the city, stirring conflict between Lansing and Delhi Township.

The Aurelius Landfill remained open for two decades. Lansing was forced to close the landfill in 1973 because it was very nearly polluting Sycamore Creek. A replacement landfill proposal on nearby Delhi Township property was killed because of its proximity to two nearby drinking wells. Lansing moved the operation elsewhere to replace their longtime public dump.

The land then sat unused for decades. It was often deemed a public eyesore. In 1993 the Ingham County Parks Board dreamed up a use for the longtime brownfield. Not until 1998 would the new use for the acreage start to become a reality. The city presented a plan to utilize the former dumping ground for a community soccer complex, cleaning up the brownfield for the new development and costing \$2.7 million. For new community use, the two-foot cement cap over the landfill was restored, clean soil added, and a new gas and waste venting system was installed under the complex.

The city’s new soccer complex, which opened in 2000, was named for Kenneth A. Hope. Hope was a leader in Ingham County government for 50



**Fig. 5: Kenneth Hope**

years. The lifelong owner of Holt’s Lumbertown, he held numerous elected positions including Delhi Township Trustee, Ingham County Commissioner and chairman of the Board of Commissioners, chairman of the Ingham County Road Commission, president of the Capital Region Airport Authority, and the one-time director of the board of Dart Bank. Hope, who died in 2007, was present for the soccer complex’s dedication in his name.

A piece of property can serve a plethora of uses over the course of its history. Often land sits idly by as new owners put their mark on it. In the case of Delhi Township’s Section 2, a rich story with extensive public use makes for a fascinating tale that ought to be remembered by its community. What was once untouched wilderness with a winding creek and a once-grand glacial esker, which then had been mined for sand and gravel and filled with the city’s garbage, is now a community gathering place where children play soccer atop a hidden past.



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## Upcoming Events - *Cont'd from page 1*

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### Annual Meeting – Vote...

program. Executive Board Members up for re-election are: Bill Castanier for President, Valerie Marvin for Vice President, Tim Kaltenbach for Treasurer, and Ron Emery for Secretary. Trustees up for re-election are: Joan Bauer, Jacob McCormick, Bob Rose, and Anne Wilson. Nominations can also be taken from the floor. Please come cast your vote.

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### Guardians of Detroit

*by Jeff Morrison*

*Wednesday, May 22 – 7:00 p.m.*

*Library of Michigan, 702 W. Kalamazoo*

Gargoyles, griffins, lions and bears, cherubs, eagles and praying monks—oh my! All these and uncountable more decorative figures adorn the buildings of Detroit, but until Oxford Michigan photographer and writer Jeff Morrison decided to photograph these incredible adornments they were undocumented and often overlooked.

Morrison, in his new book *Guardians of Detroit: Architectural Sculpture in the Motor City*, gives readers a close-up view of these incredible, sometimes monstrous, figures with more than 770 photographs gracing the 350-page book published by Wayne State University Press.

Morrison attributes the large number of public adornments on Detroit buildings to “deep pockets, big egos and men who wanted to build monuments to themselves” and sought out artists to complete the dream. Detroit certainly had its giants of industry, and the names on the buildings often tell the tale: Kresge, Fisher, Book, Buhl and Whitney.

If you are interested in photography, architecture, Detroit or the artists who created these decorative figures, you will want to join HSGL as Jeff Morrison shows photographs from and discusses his new book.

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### Lansing Juneteenth Celebration

*Thursday, June 13-Saturday, June 15*

*Various locations, see below*

HSGL is participating in the 26th annual Juneteenth Celebration. Juneteenth commemorates the end of slavery

in the United States. The three-day celebration includes a Thursday kick-off at Lansing City Hall where HSGL will present its annual history award to two individuals who have significantly contributed to the preservation of Lansing’s history during the last year.

In addition, under the auspices of *Pave the Way: The I-496 Project*, HSGL will be gathering stories from neighborhood residents whose lives were disrupted and forever changed by the construction of I-496. *Pave the Way* is a joint project of HSGL, the City of Lansing and the National Parks Service.

Juneteenth events include:

Opening Ceremony: Thursday, June 13, 5:30-7:30 p.m.,  
Lobby of City Hall;

Commemorative Negro League Baseball Game and  
entertainment: Friday, June 14, 3 p.m.,  
St. Joseph Park;

Parade, festivities, food and merchant vendors,  
health fair, music and exhibits: Saturday,  
June 15, with parade beginning at 10:00 a.m. at Letts  
Community Center and marching to St. Joseph Park  
on Lansing’s Westside.

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### MSU’s Sorority Row

**A Walk Through Women’s Greek History at MSU**

*Thursday, June 27 – 7:00 p.m.*

*Tour Starts at the Corner of M.A.C. Ave and Burcham  
East Lansing*

In 1870 the State Agricultural College officially opened its doors to female students. In the years since, the MSU campus and East Lansing have been home to increasing numbers of female students who’ve studied everything from domestic science to music, engineering, and agriculture.

As the decades have passed, MSU women have found community, support, and sisterhood through the Greek Sorority system. HSGL will go walking down M.A.C.—known to many as Sorority Row—where we will discuss women’s history, traditions, scholarship, service, and architecture. Among the sororities we’ll be featuring are Alpha Chi Omega, Zeta Tau Alpha, Kappa Kappa Gamma, Alpha Phi, Kappa Delta, and Sigma Kappa.



Historical Society of Greater Lansing  
P.O. Box 12095  
Lansing, MI 48901

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

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## MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Historical Society of Greater Lansing, P.O. Box 12095 Lansing MI 48901

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.*