



History Explorer

Historical Society of Greater Lansing

www.LansingHistory.org

September-October 2019

Upcoming Events

Chapel Hill Cemetery Walking Tour

Thursday, September 12 – 7:00 p.m.

4444 W. Grand River Ave. (west of the airport)

Established in 1947, Chapel Hill Memorial Gardens is one of the major cemeteries in the Lansing area. The 22-acre Chapel Hill is filled, almost exclusively, with ground-level grave markers throughout its 17 sections, although there are also some large monuments. Join the HSGL for a walking tour that will begin at the Chapel, located in the southeastern corner of the cemetery at the corner of Grand River Avenue and Airport Road. The tour will include the famous Morlok quadruplets, MSU professor and dean Claude S. Bryan, local labor leader Ray W. Reed, Lansing businessman Donald Ruthruff, noted aviator Marion “Babe” Ruth, and local historian Ford Stevens Ceasar.

Jim Harrison Exhibit & Presentation

Saturday, October 5 – 1:00 p.m.

Library of Michigan, 702 W. Kalamazoo

The Library of Michigan and the Historical Society of Greater Lansing is hosting an exhibit and presentation on the life and work of celebrated author Jim Harrison, a graduate of Haslett High School and Michigan State University. Harrison is the author of more than 60 poetry collections, novellas, and fiction and non-fiction books. Several of his books have been made into movies, including *Legends of the Fall* starring Brad Pitt.

The exhibit, *Friends*, is built around 35 photographs of Harrison taken in 1969 by his close friend John “Bud” Schulz of St. Johns, Michigan. The photos present an intimate look at a young Harrison with family and friends. Mostly taken at the Harrison farm in Leland, one of the photographs of the writer posed against a horse is cited as helping create the author’s legend. Harrison was noted for writing that revolved around family, love, food, wine, raw human emotions, the environment, and the classic underdog. *The New Yorker* magazine once labeled him “Mozart of the Prairie.” In

addition to the photographs, the exhibit will showcase his broadsides, writing desk, examples of his early work, letters, artwork from his writing studio, and personal mementos from his life.

The exhibit opening will include presentations by his literary assistant Joyce Harrington Bahle, photographer Bud Schulz, and State Librarian Randy Riley. There will also will be a reading from his award-winning poetry. The exhibit runs through December 2019.

Michigan County Poor Farms

Thursday, October 17 – 7:00 p.m.

Library of Michigan, 702 W. Kalamazoo

Long before the advent of modern social welfare, county governments in Michigan maintained poorhouses or poor farms. Explore the early history of these facilities with librarian Adam Oster, of the Library of Michigan. Adam will discuss the poor farm’s attempts to become both self-sustaining entities and refuges for a county’s poor, elderly, and destitute. Discover the lives and stories of those who resided at these poor farms, including those in Ingham County. Learn about the poor farm’s transition to serving individuals with chronic illnesses, and what eventually led to many poor farms shutting down in the latter part of the 20th century.

Lansing’s Own Muckraker

Thursday, October 24 – 7:00 p.m.

Library of Michigan, 702 W. Kalamazoo

Bill Castanier will present a program on journalist, historian and biographer Ray Stannard Baker. Baker was one of the leading muckraking journalists working for publications such as *McClure’s* magazine and *The American Magazine*, primarily writing about social issues. His book on race relations, *Following the Color Line*, is considered one of the best books on race during his era.

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Growing up in Northern East Lansing, 1955-1969

by Ron Springer

When I was in second grade, our family moved in December 1955 from Haslett to 615 Gainsborough Drive. My dad had taken a job in Lansing Township as a school superintendent. This area was not in the city, and we had a well and septic system. Mom and Dad built a small 936-square-foot ranch house on Gainsborough Drive that within two years housed our six-person family. Gainsborough and other nearby roads were gravel when we moved in. They were paved sometime after the city annexed the area in 1959. (See Fig. 1: Looking northwest towards Harrison Road.)



Fig. 1

The Ryders lived next door to us. The sons, Lewy and Jimmy, were older than me by six and nine years, but they were so cool. Lewy had a Cushman scooter that I think we got six or eight people on once. It wouldn't start moving by itself but needed a push from those who didn't get on. We made it down the street, and I'm sure the engine hated us to the day it died. The Coopers lived at the corner of Gainsborough and the stub extension of Roxburgh. Their daughter, Sally, was our babysitter when we were young, and she was also so cool.

Elementary School

We walked to Glencairn Elementary School along Harrison Road, which was a two-lane paved road with a gravel shoulder. Harrison and Saginaw Street, then known as M-78, had a flashing signal, as I recall, and we had an adult crossing guard to stop traffic for us to cross. We seldom rode our bikes south of Saginaw (at least I never did), as it was too dangerous without a crossing guard. This was years before the pedestrian overpass was constructed. Cattle could be found grazing in the fields on the northwest corner of Harrison and M-78. The city annexed this area in 1961, and when Shaw Estates was developed in the mid 1960s the cattle were moved.

I went to school with sons and daughters of many prominent people in professional fields. My own class included the son of MSU President John Hannah (1941-1969), the daughter of the head project engineer for the cutting-edge 1965 Oldsmobile Toronado, the son of the faculty representative to the Big Ten, and numerous sons and daughters of MSU professors. Most of my classmates lived in the Glencairn area, and I knew the houses were bigger and nicer than mine. What I also knew was that I loved being on a street where it was a little more spread out, and we had seemingly endless large fields to play in.

I had a paper route for about two years when in 8th and 9th grades. My service area was bounded by Abbot Road on the east and Colorado Drive on the west and the connecting streets of Loree Drive and Bessemaur Drive and Columbine. I also had two houses on the west side of Abbot between Loree and M-78 and five houses along M-78 just west of the Michigan State Medical Society building that was built in 1960. Decades later, Rollie Ledebuhr, a prominent East Lansing realtor who lived at the corner of Loree and Colorado, would occasionally say in his deep booming voice, "Ron Springer was the best paperboy we ever had." You could not receive a finer compliment.

Where We Played

From our front yard we could see the traffic moving on Lake Lansing Road across the field to the north. The trees had not yet grown high enough to obscure the road. The area where Cricket Lane and Tamarisk subdivision are located, east of Harrison and south of Lake Lansing Road, was just a large field of mostly grasses and scrub bushes. Grass fires occurred occasionally in this area and in the fields to the east and south of us. The fire department would come out to put them out. (See Fig. 2: Looking east from backyard of 615 Gainsborough Drive.)

From our backyard looking south was a low area where the current junction of Roxburgh Avenue and Bainbridge meet. My dad said that when Hickory Hills Condominiums and the surrounding houses on Roxburgh Avenue and Bainbridge were



Fig. 2

Historical Society of Greater Lansing

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www.LansingHistory.org

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Bill Castanier – President	Mary Kwas – Trustee
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constructed in the early 1970s, he could hear the water draining for months into the drain southwest of our backyard. The ranch house style of the 1950s allowed a mother to look out the front picture window or kitchen window on the rear to watch her children playing.

At the southwest corner of Lake Lansing and Coolidge was the Bi-Rite Grocery store. That was the northwestern edge of my universe. Compared to today's business world, it was smaller than a Quality Dairy, but on a hot summer day you could get three or four of your friends to ride with you over to Coolidge on Wolf Court and then up to the store. We would then ride on the gravel shoulder of the two-lane Coolidge Road, as there were no sidewalks. A cold bottle of Coke or grape soda awaited us.

Along the north side of Lake Lansing Road, where Harrison Road ends, was Hales Forge. The owner's daughter was in my sister's class. They had horses out back, and I recall riding horses one summer day.

Seasonal Fun

What we called the "Big Ditch" is the north-south drain just west of Colorado Drive that is officially known as the Sanderson Drain, part of the Ingham County drainage network. In the summer we would walk along the edge exploring. One summer we found a large, dead snapping turtle caught in a fallen wire fence behind what is now 1503 Colorado. The shell was easily as large as a dinner plate. This area was a mecca for young boys.

My brother Don was the kind of boy who loved spiders and snakes (much to the dismay of my sister Barb, who most certainly did *not*). Don would follow the "Big Ditch" as it went north of Lake Lansing Road and find eastern massasauga rattlesnakes and sell them to MSU herpetology professors for \$25.00 each. Now remember, in 1965 I got paid 50 cents an hour for part-time jobs. One snake equaled a week of *full-time* employment.

In the autumn we enjoyed special treats. The Hill family lived on the stub extension of Roxburgh, just north of Gainsborough. Mr. Hill would hitch a wagon filled with hay to his tractor and take the neighborhood kids on a hayride on a brisk fall evening near Halloween.

Most of the families in our neighborhood west and east of Harrison Road had three or more children. What this meant was that on Halloween you could fill your pillowcase in short order just by canvassing your immediate two or three streets. It was a great time to be a kid with a sweet tooth!

In winter, when the water froze, the "Big Ditch" was long enough to skate on. We also built huge snow forts on the steep embankments. Around the years 1962-1965 or so, the city put in a skating rink at the area where 607 Gainsborough and the pedestrian sidewalk cut through from Gainsborough to Roxburgh Avenue. There was a light on the adjacent telephone pole, and it was almost magical at night where we could skate

literally next door to our house, playing games such as "crack the whip," hoping that the cute girl would be skating that night. (See Fig. 3: Looking east towards Colorado Drive, 1965.)

Today

The large area that runs east-west along a line south of Woodingham from Coolidge to Abbot Road on the south, and north to the county line, was annexed in 1959. A year or two after the annexation, Gainsborough Drive was paved, and a culvert put in over the Sanderson Drain to the east that connected Gainsborough Drive to Colorado Drive.

In 1969 I entered the Army, and aside from living at home for about two or three weeks when I returned from Vietnam in the spring of 1971, my days in the now-Northern Meadows Neighborhood ended until 2001, when my wife and I moved back onto Roxburgh Avenue to be near my aging parents.

My parents lived at the same house until 2009 when my father died; my Mother having passed in 2004. It was strange moving back into the neighborhood and passing my old house almost any time we went for a walk or bike ride. I have many fond memories of growing up in northern East Lansing.



Fig. 3

Upcoming Events - *Cont'd from page 1*

Lansing's Own Muckraker...

Born in 1870 in Lansing, Baker graduated from Michigan Agricultural College in 1889 and then started his career as a reporter at the *Chicago News-Record*. While at the paper, Baker covered the Pullman strike and the 1893 march on Washington by jobless men, known as Coxey's Army. In 1896 Baker married Jessie Beal, the daughter of Professor William Beal, and the couple had four children. Active in the progressive movement, Baker worked for Woodrow Wilson as his press secretary after WWI and during the Paris Peace Conference. He wrote a three-volume set on the conference and the role of the president. He also wrote an eight-volume biography of Wilson for which he won the Pulitzer Prize in 1940.



Historical Society of Greater Lansing
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ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

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

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