

Michigan Historical Commission Meeting Minutes

November 9, 2023
Michigan History Center
Commission Room

Commissioners in attendance: Laura Ashlee, Joe Calvaruso, Tim Chester, Delia Fernandez-Jones, Tom Truscott, and Larry Wagenaar.

Excused Absence: Brian Egen, Eric Hemenway and Robin Terry.

Staff: Sandra Clark, Michelle Davis, and Andrew Oswald

Public: James McConnell (via Zoom, Livonia)

At 10:08 a.m. Vice-President Chester called the meeting to order.

Approval of Agenda: Wagenaar moved to approve the agenda as amended (moving “II A. Commissioner Tom Truscott’s Last Meeting” to the end of the meeting); the motion was seconded by Ashlee and was unanimously approved.

Approval of Meeting Minutes: Ashlee moved to approve the August 24, 2023, meeting minutes as amended; the motion was seconded by Calvaruso and was unanimously adopted.

Michigan Historical Marker Program

- **Public Comments on Marker Topics** – Clark reported there has been a lot of communication with James McConnell and his group. This resulted in additional information being provided that should make the Bentley High School marker application a more complete story, including the formation of a unified school district. McConnell thanked Clark and Davis for their continued support. The Bentley committee is dealing with some of the concerns expressed by the commission in August. The committee hopes to see a new text by February 2024 and a September 2024 dedication.
- **Approval of Marker Applications** – Written background information was provided for five new marker applications. (Appendix A)
 - ◆ **St. Mary Cathedral, Lansing, Ingham County**
 - ◆ **Discovery of Coal in Michigan, Jackson, Jackson County**
 - ◆ **Lakeside Cemetery “The Magic Graveyard,” Colon, St. Joseph County**
 - ◆ **Ann Arbor and Gay Rights, Ann Arbor, Washtenaw County**
 - ◆ **Martinsville Cemetery, Belleville, Wayne County**

Calvaruso moved to approve the St. Mary Cathedral marker application; the motion was seconded by Truscott and was unanimously approved.

Wagenaar moved to approve the Discovery of Coal in Michigan marker application; the motion was seconded by Fernandez-Jones and was unanimously approved.

Fernandez-Jones moved to approve the Lakeside Cemetery “The Magic Graveyard” marker application; the motion was seconded by Calvaruso and was unanimously approved.

Calvaruso moved to approve the Ann Arbor and Gay Rights marker application; the motion was seconded by Truscott and was unanimously approved.

The commission discussed its policy that states the names of living individuals should not be mentioned on a marker unless an exception is made noting a specific reason. It was determined that names could be included on this marker to “represent a class of people,” but the marker should not focus on the individuals themselves. The text should focus on the City of Ann Arbor passing the first Lesbian-Gay Pride Week Resolution and adopting the Human Rights Ordinance. It would be impossible to accurately and adequately relate the history without naming the individuals who ran and were elected.

Clark asked the commission to give some thought to an appropriate title for the marker. The commission suggested consulting experts on the best usage of terms, looking at other states, checking to see if the GLBT Historical Society has any information, and referring to the U.S. National Parks Service Stonewall National Monument website for guidance. Dr. Tim Retzloff wrote a 680-page dissertation on gay life in metro Detroit from 1945-85 and may be someone to consult with on this topic.

Wagenaar moved to decline the Martinsville Cemetery marker application noting it lacks a link to larger trends or stories; the motion was seconded by Ashlee and was unanimously approved.

- **Approval of Marker Texts** – Draft marker texts were provided for the following four markers:
 - ◆ **Rice Cemetery/Daniel McFall, Milan, Monroe County**

Fernandez-Jones moved to approve revisions to the commissions previously approved Rice Cemetery/Daniel McFall marker text; the motion was seconded by Truscott and was unanimously approved.

- **Relocation of State Historic Markers**
 - ◆ **Webster Township Hall, Washtenaw County, Webster Township, Site No. L1047**
 - ◆ **New Bethel Baptist Church, Wayne County, Detroit, Site No. L2356**

Wagenaar moved to approve the relocation of the Webster Township Hall historical marker noting the commission’s disappointment that the sponsor did not seek approval prior to moving the marker.

Ashlee noted that the structure was moved from its original historic site to a historical village, which does not align with the commission’s policy that a historical structure should remain at its historic location to keep a historical marker. Ashlee proposed a friendly amendment to Wagenaar’s motion to address this.

Wagenaar made a revised motion to approve the relocation of the Webster Township Hall historical marker noting the commission’s disappointment that the sponsor did not seek

approval prior to moving the marker and the commission's decision to make an exception to its policy that a moved structure cannot keep its historical marker. The exception is based on the structure still maintaining a high level of historic integrity. The motion was seconded by Fernandez-Jones and was unanimously approved.

Calvaruso moved to approve the relocation of the New Bethel Baptist Church wall-mounted historical markers that have not yet been installed; the motion was seconded by Wagenaar and was unanimously approved.

➤ **Reports**

- ◆ The Marker Status report was distributed prior to the meeting.
- ◆ The Marker Fund report was distributed prior to the meeting.

Clark noted the issues surrounding delivery of the Finney Barn/William Dolarson revised replacement marker. Davis is working with the City of Detroit and the Downtown Detroit Partnership on resolving the issues. Ashlee noted that Ryan Schumaker, State Historic Preservation Officer, use to work for the City of Detroit and he might be able to connect us with the individuals who can help with this.

Chester and Egen reported on a contact made with someone from Olympia Development of Michigan who attended the Holcomb Beach marker dedication. It is in the early stages of setting up a meeting to discuss ideas and plans.

Clark noted that she spoke with Nancy Bryk from Eastern Michigan University about the possibility of hiring another graduate assistant to help with the Detroit Marker Project. Bryk was enthusiastic and looks forward to discussing this more in 2024.

Director's Report – The report was distributed prior to the meeting.

Clark reported that the restored Yankee locomotive is back at the Michigan Iron Industry Museum. It has been a long process, but the end result is a phenomenal restoration.

Clark noted that the center currently has four positions posted and it recently hired a general office assistant for the Museum Store. She also shared that Archives is closing on a position that is funded by other parts of state government and will fill a vacancy from a retirement. There are two other vacancies in the pipeline.

➤ **Black History Month and Markers**

Clark shared that the head of the Office of the State Employer was at Idlewild and noticed the historical markers and suggested to the DNR Director that we should focus on markers for Black History Month. Commissioners suggested making a regional focus each week, working with Michigan Radio on special broadcasts, posting social media, and a press release.

Business Updates

- Commission Meetings for 2024 – The commission meeting dates for 2024 were distributed. The next meeting is scheduled for February 8, 2024.

Public Comment – No public comments were given at this time.

Chester noted that this was Commissioner Truscott's last commission meeting and expressed sadness for that but also great fondness for Tom and gratitude for having the opportunity to work with him. Truscott joined the commission in 2001, and among his many contributions were his representation of the commission at countless marker dedications all across the state. To honor this occasion, a framed statement of appreciation printed on the image of a marker was read by Clark and presented to him. Truscott thanked the commissioners for their thoughtful gifts and expressed a special thank you to Davis and Ashlee for all of their help during his years on the commission.

Wagenaar moved to adjourn the meeting; the motion was seconded by Ashlee; and the meeting adjourned at 11:27 p.m.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sandra S. Clark". The signature is written in black ink on a white background.

Sandra S. Clark, Executive Secretary

Michigan Historical Marker Application Synopses
Michigan Historical Commission
November 9, 2023

St. Mary Cathedral

Applicant: Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception parish, Reverend Karl Pung

Contact Info: kpung@stmarylansing.org, 517-484-5331

Location Address: 219 Seymour Avenue, Lansing, MI, 48933, Ingham County.

Historic Resources: Historic Site.

Requested Marker Type: Large Marker, different text on each side.

Historical Summary:

Following the designation of Lansing as the state's capitol in 1847, the city and surrounding area population began to steadily increase. The Reverend Francis Krutil, a Redemptorist from St. Mary's in Detroit, began serving the area's Catholic population in January 1856. The Reverend Louis Van Driss oversaw the construction of St. Mary, the city's first Catholic church, in 1864. On August 4, 1866, St. Mary Church was officially constituted by the Bishop of Detroit with Fr. Van Driss appointed as the first pastor.

The need for a new, larger church became apparent as Lansing's population grew between the 1890s and 1920s, coinciding with Lansing becoming an agricultural manufacturing and processing center, and the emergence of the automotive industry. The parish's third pastor, Father Lafayette Isadore Brancheau, oversaw the purchase of the church's current site in 1900. A school and temporary church were constructed in 1902 and 1903, respectively. Construction of the present structure began in 1910, with the cornerstone placed on July 4, 1911. The building was consecrated on December 8, 1913.

Edwyn A. Bowd, a local architect, designed the Norman Gothic-inspired structure. While Bowd is known for his public and institutional buildings constructed in Lansing between the 1890s and 1920s, there are only three known churches designed by him. Bowd's work in the area includes multiple structures on Michigan State University's campus, the original 1923 Spartan Stadium, the Charles E. Chamberlain Federal Building & Post Office, and the Michigan School for the Blind. Close collaboration between Bowd, Fr. Brancheau, and the local Catholic community shaped the design of the church.

Pope Pius XI created the Diocese of Lansing on May 22, 1937. The diocese originally encompassed a fifteen-county area containing an estimated 68,000 Catholics. St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception was chosen as and remains the cathedral of the Lansing Diocese. Joseph H. Albers, formerly the Auxiliary Bishop of Cincinnati, was appointed as the first Bishop of Lansing. On January 10, 1938, a fire broke out in the rectory and chancery. It destroyed many early records of the parish. Albers, a veteran of WWI who was injured in a gas attack, was rendered unconscious by the smoke and subsequently rescued by firefighters. Albers oversaw the building of 38 parishes, 42 elementary schools, and two high schools during his episcopacy, earning him the nickname "the builder."

A Casavant, 40-stop organ was installed in 1958. The organ was relocated to the back balcony in 1968. In 1983 a small chapel and museum were built in the basement.

St. Mary Cathedral was entered into the National Register of Historic Places on November 2, 1990.

Summary of Integrity:

The exterior remains largely original. Oak doors, installed at the building's main entrance in the 1990s, were replaced with fiberglass units in 2021 that resemble the structure's original doors. Extensive renovations between 1967 and 1968 including installing a new altar, granite brick flooring in the sanctuary, and acoustic tiles, and painting the walls and ceiling. The renovations cost around \$600,000. The building retains its original Stations of the Cross and stained-glass windows. The stained-glass within the sanctuary was installed between the time of the building's construction and 1923.

Recommendation: Approval

Proposed Marker Location: North yard on W. Ionia Street





Discovery of Coal in Michigan

Applicant: Bennie See

Contact Info: bsee1@comcast.net, 713-416-1948

Location Address: 1960 O'Brien Road, Jackson, MI, 49201, Jackson County.

Historic Resources: Historic Event.

Requested Marker Type: Large Marker, different text on each side.

Historical Summary:

“In the bed and bank of the (Grand) River...at Jacksonburgh (Jackson), the sandstone is seen to embrace a bed of bituminous shale...intermixed with very thin layers of coal.” -Douglass Houghton, 1837.

Alexander Winchell reported that coal was discovered just west of the city of Jackson in 1835 during the digging of a foundation for a grist mill. Douglass Houghton, the first State Geologist of Michigan, made the 1837 report of the discovery but did not take borings to determine the extent of the coal. Two years later Houghton reported that roughly 1,500 bushels of coal had been raised and taken to local blacksmiths. This 1839 report is regarded as the first commercial use of coal in Michigan.

The need for Jackson's abundance of coal was not immediate; most trains that ran through the state burned wood throughout the 1840s and early 1850s. By 1856, much of Jackson's timber had been cut down. The Hayden & Reynolds Mine opened in 1860 at this location and operated until 1867. A boring made during this period to the north of the mine became an artesian well that flowed for more than 100 years. Coal mining eventually became the biggest industry in Jackson with more than 100 mines opening across the county. An 1877 report from the *Michigan State Gazetteer* found that Jackson mines supplied 98% of the coal mined in the state. Jackson's coal production and use as a hub for train transportation proved to be valuable during the Civil War. An estimated 3.1 million short tons of coal were recovered from Jackson mines before and after the war.

Jackson's dominance as the state's center for coal production declined towards the end of the 19th century. Bay County and Saginaw County produced a higher quality product in greater quantities. By 1890 mining in Jackson only accounted for 3% of the state's coal production. A few smaller mines remained into the early 1900s, producing coal for local consumption.

Summary of Integrity:

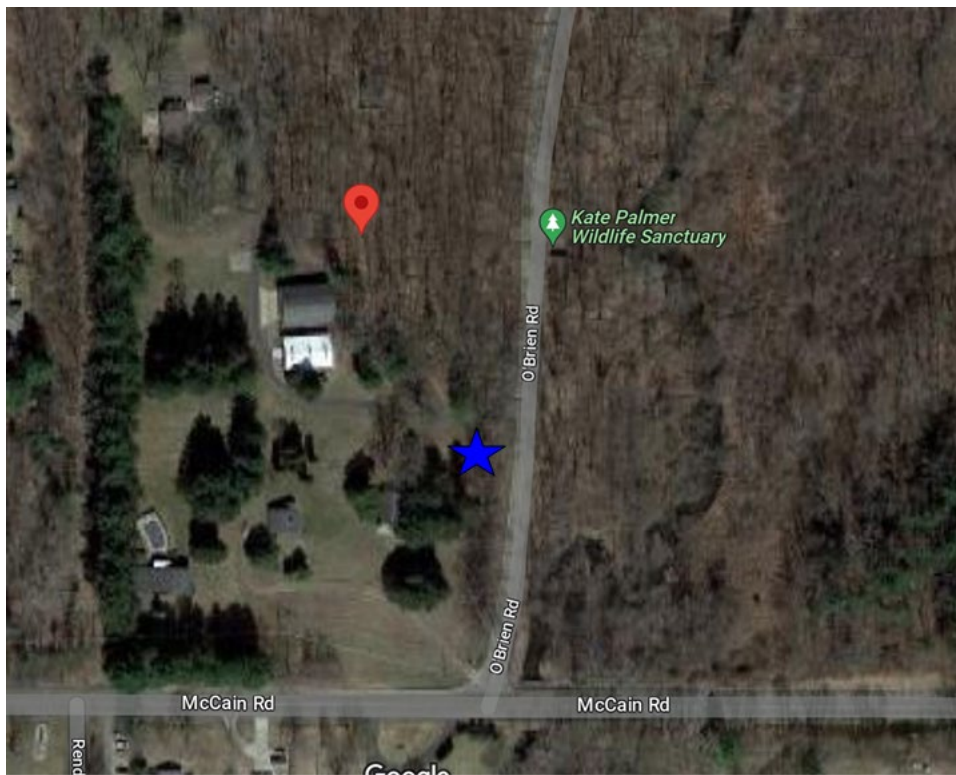
The property has no remaining structures. The site is currently part of the fifty-three-acre Kate Palmer Wildlife Sanctuary.

Recommendation: Approval

Proposed Marker Location: The entrance to the sanctuary.



Figure 7. Proposed Location for State Historical Marker.



Lakeside Cemetery “The Magic Graveyard”

Applicant: Colon Township, Ruth Cerny

Contact Info: rcpick022@gmail.com, 269-503-2832

Location Address: N. Farrand Road, Colon, MI, 49040, St. Joseph County.

Historic Resources: Historic Site, Cemetery.

Requested Marker Type: Small Marker, same text on each side.

Historical Summary:

Lakeside Cemetery was established on a one-acre parcel in 1832. Emily Noyes, an eight-year-old, was killed that same year and was the first person interred there. In 1838 the cemetery plots were laid out and additional acreage was purchased. It currently encompasses eight acres and stretches to the shores of Sturgeon Lake.

Lakeside Cemetery is better known as “The Magic Graveyard” as it is the final resting place of 47 magicians as of 2023. In 1942 Skippy LaMore, a Colon resident, was the first magician buried there. Initially, only residents of Colon could be buried at Lakeside. In 1969 Jack Gwynne was the first non-Colon resident magician buried there.

There was originally a long, arduous process that non-Colon residents had to go through in order to purchase a plot at Lakeside Cemetery. People had to apply to the city fathers, wait for a vote to be taken, and pay an additional fee before they could obtain a plot. It wasn't until 2000 that the city fathers agreed that non-resident magicians would not have to go through the process to be buried here.

Harry Blackstone, one of the most prominent magicians of the 20th century, was buried at Lakeview in 1965. It is estimated that he pulled some 80,000 rabbits out of his sleeves and hat throughout his career. Blackstone resided on an island near Colon and established the Blackstone Magic Company with Percy Abbott. The business folded in 18 months. Percy Abbott stayed in Colon and founded the Abbott Magic Company in 1933. The company still exists in Colon and gave the town recognition as “The Magic Capital.” The Abbott Magic Company was granted vital industry status during WWII and provided sleight of hand booklets to troops for recreation.

A section of 32 additional plots were set aside for magicians in June 2019.

Summary of Integrity:

The cemetery contains grave markers dating back to its 1832 founding. A small chapel and equipment shed are present, but their history is unknown.

Recommendation: Approval

Proposed Marker Location: At the main entrance, off of N. Farrand Road



-The equipment shed



Ann Arbor and Gay Rights

Applicant: City of Ann Arbor, City Clerk's Office; Jacqueline Beaudry

Contact Info: JBeaudry@a2gov.org, 734-794-6140 ext 41401

Location Address: 301 E. Huron Street, Ann Arbor, MI 48104, Washtenaw County.

Historic Resources: Historic Event

Requested Marker Type: Large Marker, different text on each side.

Historical Summary:

In 1973 Ann Arbor City Council members Nancy Wechsler (Ward 2) and Jerry DeGriek (Ward 1) came out as lesbian and gay respectively, making them the first members of a public office to come out publicly as LGBTQIA+. While in office they oversaw the passing of the Lesbian-Gay Pride Week Resolution (R-285-6-72); the first of its kind passed by any governing body in the United States. Ann Arbor's first Pride week was held June 19-25, 1972, roughly two months after the April 3, 1972 election of Wechsler and DeGriek.

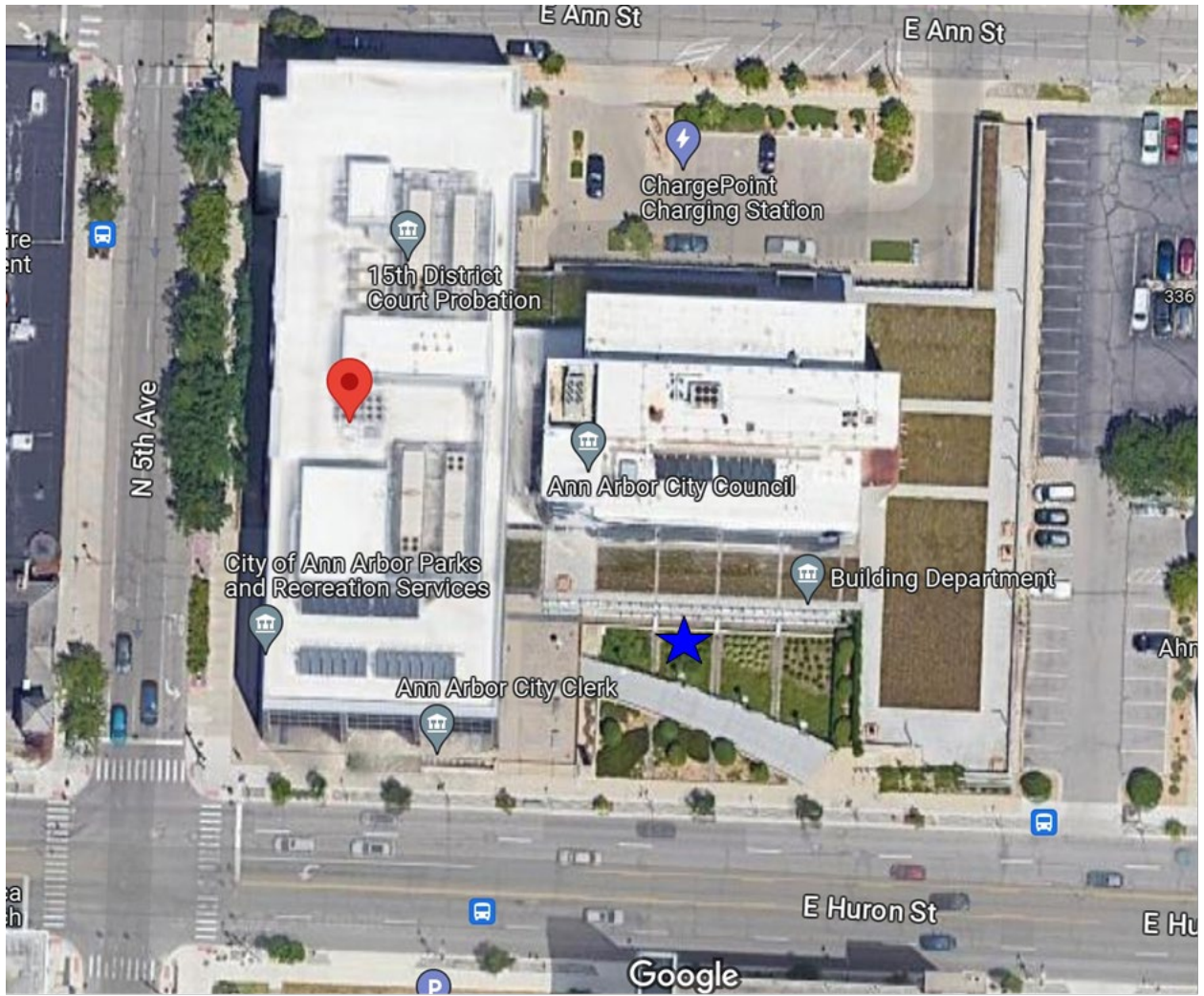
Under the Human Rights Ordinance passed on July 10, 1972, Ann Arbor became only the second city in the country to protect members of the LGBTQIA+ community from housing discrimination based on sexual preference. These protections were extended in December 1972 to include employment and other public accommodations.

On April 2, 1974, Kathleen Kozachenko, an openly lesbian woman, was elected to the Ann Arbor City Council. She was the first openly LGBTQIA+ candidate elected to a public office in the United States. Kozachenko replaced Nancy Wechsler (who did not seek reelection) as the council member for Ward 2.

Jerry DeGriek currently serves as a public health manager and policy advisor in Seattle, Washington. Nancy Wechsler is an activist and writer. Kathleen Kozachenko served for two years before largely retreating from the public eye. A statue of Kozachenko will be erected in front of the Ann Arbor City Hall Building.

Recommendation: All three of these individuals are alive: need to discuss

Proposed Marker Location: At the front of the City Hall Building





-Jerry DeGriek and Nancy Wechsler



-Kathy Kozachenko

Martinsville Cemetery

Applicant: Sumpter Township; Karen Armatis

Contact Info: karenarmatis@sumptertwp.org, 734-256-4406

Location Address: 43057 Willis Court, Belleville, MI, 48111, Wayne County.

Historic Resources: Historic Building or Site

Requested Marker Type: Small Marker, same text on each side.

Historical Summary:

Martinsville, an unincorporated community, lies within Sumpter Township which was organized on April 6, 1840.

The Township Board of Health passed a resolution on March 27, 1855 to purchase a plot of land to be used as a cemetery. Plots in Martinsville Cemetery were originally set to not exceed one dollar in cost. Harris Shay was hired by the township to dig all of the graves. The cemetery's plots were laid out by Amos Martin and D.E. Morey, who drove wooden stakes into the ground to mark the sections. These wooden stakes were later replaced with stones.

A June 25, 1866 resolution saw the expansion of the cemetery into its present dimensions and the closure of the section of Territorial Road that divided the property. Adjacent property was purchased from John Spence for the expansion. A new road, now Willis Court, was contracted on January 25, 1868 to replace the portion of Territorial Road that was removed during the expansion. The work was completed at a cost of \$59.

Martinsville Cemetery is the final resting place of 21 Civil War veterans.

Summary of Integrity:

The cemetery is largely unchanged. A chain link fence replaced the original wooden fence.

Recommendation: Denial- Lack of links to larger trends or stories- Discuss
Proposed Marker Location: By the entry gates

