

# Michigan Historical Commission Meeting Minutes

February 8, 2024  
Michigan History Center  
Commission Room

**Commissioners in attendance:** Laura Ashlee, Joe Calvaruso, Tim Chester, Brian Egen, Delia Fernandez-Jones, Robin Terry, and Larry Wagenaar.

**Excused Absence:** Eric Hemenway.

**Staff:** Sandra Clark, Michelle Davis, Andrew Oswald, and Dan Spegel

**Public:** Keith Dyer (Birmingham, via Zoom); James McConnell; Steve Spreitzer.

At 10:00 a.m. Egen called the meeting to order.

**Approval of Agenda:** Wagenaar moved to approve the agenda; the motion was seconded by Ashlee and was unanimously approved.

**Approval of Meeting Minutes:** Ashlee moved to approve the November 9, 2023, meeting minutes as presented; the motion was seconded by Calvaruso and was unanimously adopted.

**Heritage Trails** – An update was distributed prior to the meeting. Dan Spegel, heritage trail coordinator for the center, spoke to the commission at its August 24, 2023, meeting and asked commissioners to consider creating a comprehensive Heritage Trail designation for Michigan. The commission moved to investigate creating such a program to validate, brand and designate heritage trails in Michigan. Spegel reported that no similar programs exist in the United States or the United Kingdom. Arizona and Arkansas use the term “heritage trails” to promote driving tours and dude ranches. Oklahoma has legislative authorization for a program focused on outdoor, non-motorized, linear, multi-use trails, and history that is part of broader legislation used to create a state trails system. Spegel found no designated trails online. He reached out to Oklahoma offices to gather information on the criteria they use, but has received no response.

The commission suggested looking at Canada for similar heritage trail programs. If someone has already created such a program, Michigan could benefit from that experience. Clark asked if it might be beneficial to use the term State Heritage Recreational Trail to avoid having it confused with other types of heritage programs, such as highways.

Ashlee asked Spegel if he wanted to have legislation created for this program and if so, what benefits would be gained from that. She also asked if it could continue the way it is. Spegel said that legislation would validate the significance of the program and verify the state’s involvement in assuring that a trail has met a certain standard, and the information is inclusive, accurate and authentic.

Wagenaar shared that the Centennial Farms Program, which was once a state managed program and now is handled by the Historical Society of Michigan, is a widely recognized program throughout Michigan. However, it is not part of legislation and still has specific criteria and its own unique signage.

Clark noted that she likes the idea of legislation, but that process requires the criteria to go through the rule making process which can be long. It may be more beneficial to get a program up and running and have criteria established and reviewed by the commission. Legislation could be sought later if needed. Calvaruso mentioned the possibility of getting a proclamation from the Governor's office.

Wagenaar moved to establish heritage recreational trails as a commission project; the motion was seconded by Calvaruso and was unanimously approved.

Speigel will see if Canada has comparable programs and will begin creating draft criteria for commission review at a future meeting.

**Commission/Michigan History Foundation Next Steps** – Clark shared that the foundation is discussing hiring a development staff person rather than an executive director. Clark is drafting a new Memorandum of Understanding between the center and the foundation based on conversations with the foundation's executive committee. It includes committing to creating an annual plan with commission involvement. This will allow everyone to be a part of the team and encourage a working relationship built on regular communication. Chester will share more details with Clark regarding his work with South Carolina and its foundation.

#### **Local Historic District Committee Report**

- **Good House Historic District, Birmingham, Oakland County**
- **Def Sound Studio House Historic District, Detroit, Wayne County**

Fernandez-Jones moved to forward the comments provided by Ashlee to the State Historic Preservation Office; the motion was seconded by Wagenaar and was unanimously accepted.

#### **Michigan Historical Marker Program**

- **Public Comments on Marker Topics** – James McConnell shared information regarding the application process for the Bentley High School historical marker. It took a community effort to make this happen, and he is very thankful for the support and help along the way. McConnell stated that he brought the funds with him and plans to pay for the marker immediately to keep things moving forward.
- **Marker Policies and Procedures** – Clark noted that through the years the commission has revised, added, and adopted various policies and procedures. Davis has recommended consolidating them into one document for adoption by the commission. Clark asked for one or two commissioners to help with this process. Ashlee volunteered.
- **Approval of Marker Applications** – Written background information was provided for one new marker application. (Appendix A)
  - ◆ **Macedonia Baptist Church, Detroit, Wayne County**

Chester moved to approve the Macedonia Baptist Church marker application; the motion was seconded by Fernandez-Jones and was unanimously approved.

- **Approval of Marker Texts** – Draft marker texts were provided for the following three markers:

- ◆ **Michigan Coal, Jackson, Jackson County**
- ◆ **Ann Arbor and LGBTQ+ History, Ann Arbor, Washtenaw County**
- ◆ **Bentley High School, Livonia, Wayne County**

Calvaruso moved to approve the Michigan Coal marker text as amended; the motion was seconded by Chester and was unanimously approved.

Chester moved to approve the Ann Arbor and LGBTQ+ History marker text as amended; the motion was seconded by Terry and was unanimously approved.

Wagenaar moved to approve the Bentley High School marker text as amended; the motion was seconded by Ashlee and was unanimously approved.

➤ **Delisting of State Register of Historic Sites**

- ◆ **Old Agency House, Mackinac County, Mackinac Island, L3**
- ◆ **Indian Dormitory/Henry R. Schoolcraft, Mackinac County, Mackinac Island HB45**
- ◆ **Packard Motor Car Company, Wayne County, Detroit, S546 (and HB19)**

Chester moved to approve delisting the Old Agency House, Indian Dormitory/Henry R. Schoolcraft, and Packard Motor Car Company sites from the State Register of Historic Sites; the motion was seconded by Fernandez-Jones and was unanimously approved.

➤ **Artifact Status Request**

- ◆ **Skull Cave, Mackinac County, Mackinac Island, L4**
- ◆ **Old Agency House, Mackinac County, Mackinac, L3**

Steve Brisson, director of the Mackinac State Historic Parks, suggested that both markers be placed in the Mackinac State Historic Parks historical collection to preserve them as examples of commemoration on the island.

Ashlee moved to approve artifact status for the Skull Cave and Old Agency House markers as requested; the motion was seconded by Fernandez-Jones and was unanimously approved.

➤ **Relocation of State Historic Markers**

- ◆ **Fallasburg Covered Bridge, Kent County, Lowell, Site No. L197**

Wagenaar moved to approve the relocation of the Fallasburg Covered Bridge; the motion was seconded by Chester 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.

Davis thanked Wagenaar for volunteering to attend numerous upcoming dedications, and encouraged others to sign up for future dedications.

## **Detroit Markers**

- **Review Project** – Clark stated the project is on hold until the new community engagement manager position is filled. The intent is to have that individual finish up this project.
- **Olympia Development of Michigan** – Clark and Egen are working with a group that is advising Olympia Development of Michigan on commissioning a study that will research and document the history of “District Detroit” (this will include Brush Park, Black Bottom, Paradise Valley, Cass Corridor and Cass Park neighborhoods). They intend to gather information in a manner that will meet the needs to apply for historical markers.

**Director’s Report** – The report was distributed prior to the meeting. Clark stated the center is still adjusting to the move of Archives to the Department of Technology, Management and Budget. Clark and State Archivist Mark Harvey would like the Archives to continue working with the commission even though legislation does not require this to happen.

Clark noted that the center is renegotiating its relationship with the State Historic Preservation Office. Laura Ashlee and Dean Anderson were able to secure funding in the budget for an archaeology program in DNR. There will soon be a five-person archaeology staff at the center.

Clark said that the Heart of the Great Turtle Island project is moving forward now that funding has been secured. There is a lot of work to be done by staff and the various partners that are involved. Strong negotiating skills and open communications are essential to make sure all sides of the story are shared. Chester stated the Mellon funds can be used toward the National Endowment for the Humanities grant match.

Clark shared that Tobi Voigt is meeting with the Black Bottom Archives to work out joint use and management of the Grant House. The Black Bottom Archives will likely use the house as their headquarters.

Ashlee asked Clark if the recently released 2025 Governor’s Executive Recommendation includes Archaeology funding. Clark stated she has not seen a detailed budget to show the breakdown.

## **Business Updates**

- **Awards** – Clark stated that no nominations were received for the 2023 Swainson Award or the Milliken/Adams/Austin/Kelley Award. Therefore, no awards will be given.
- **Commission Appointments** – Egen stated that the terms of commissioners Chester, Terry and Wagenaar will expire on May 21, 2024. The process to apply is online now and takes some time to complete.

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

## **Commissioner Comments**

- Fernandez-Jones shared that she started a new position at Michigan State University as the Associate Dean of Equity, Justice, and Faculty Affairs for the College of Arts and Letters on January 1, 2024. She is very excited about this opportunity. She also noted that

she continues to work with center staff on the Institute of Museum and Library Services Sites of Conscience grant. The current focus is on a summer internship for two Chicano Latino Studies students. Fernandez-Jones continues to work on markers for three sites in Grand Rapids in partnership with grass-roots organizations that have gotten funding from the Michigan Humanities Council to make this a very comprehensive process that also addresses injustice, harm, and interracial tension that has emerged.

- Wagenaar said that the Michigan in Perspective Conference will be held on March 22-23, 2024, at Oakland University.
- Terry shared that the Motown Museum recently launched an official search for a chief executive officer. She will remain on the board.
- Ashlee suggested inviting Ryan Schumaker from the State Historic Preservation Office to a future commission meeting.
- Chester shared that he never expected to see an LGBTQ+ historical marker during his tenure with the commission. He is very pleased about the one just approved.
- Egen stated that the Jackson house and artifacts are here in Michigan with a potential opening in 2026. Egen is the co-creator and co-writer for a limited series regarding an undisclosed historic subject.

Clark thanked Chester for his help with the Mellon Grant for the Heart of the Great Turtle Island project.

Wagenaar moved to adjourn the meeting; the motion was seconded by Ashlee; and the meeting adjourned at 12:13 p.m.



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Sandra S. Clark, Executive Secretary

Michigan Historical Marker Application Synopses  
Michigan Historical Commission  
February 8, 2024

**Applicant:** Macedonia Baptist, Dorothy Stephens

**Contact Info:** [dotstep@sbcglobal.net](mailto:dotstep@sbcglobal.net), 313-835-6997

**Location Address:** 14221 Southfield Road, Detroit, MI, 48223.

**Historic Resources:** Historic Event.

**Requested Marker Type:** Large Marker, same text on each side.

## Macedonia Baptist Church

### Historical Summary:

The Reverend Forest D. Mills organized the Macedonia Baptist Church in Hamtramck on January 20, 1920. The congregation held its worship services in a small house before moving into its first church at 5100 Evaline Street in 1923. The church provided a sense of community for Black Americans who migrated to the north for work, primarily in the growing automotive industry. Like the area's larger congregations, Macedonia Baptist maintained a relationship with the Ford and Dodge Motor Companies and connected newly arrived Black Americans with their employment offices.

The congregation had outgrown its building by the late-1940s and began pursuing a new, larger site. It purchased two lots at the corner of Belmont and Buffalo for the expansion and broke ground for a new church on November 26, 1953. The congregation struggled with funding the construction, and much of the work was done by members. The Reverend Junius A. Watson set a goal for the new building to be occupied by September 29, 1974, the church's 54th anniversary. Work was completed on the Thursday before the 29th with the congregation's choir members and women laying the floor tiles while some of the men finished the heavier work. The congregation marched two blocks from its old church to the new one at 5080 Belmont Street for its dedication service. Remodeling, begun in 1981, added an additional 3,000 square feet to the structure and included central air conditioning, a dining room, kitchen, additional restrooms, and a nursery.

The congregation purchased its present church from the New St. Luke Missionary Baptist Church of Detroit in July 1997 and oversaw eight months of extensive renovations to the building. All costs were paid from tithes and offerings. A motorcade of 100 traveled from the Belmont location to the new church at 14221 Southfield Road on April 5, 1998. The congregation exceeded 700 members in 2002.

Macedonia Baptist's congregation continued to grow and in 2018 purchased the former Lutheran church at 14450 Ashton Street and converted it into its North Campus.

### Summary of Integrity:

The marker is for the congregation, not the building it currently uses.

**Recommendation:** Approval

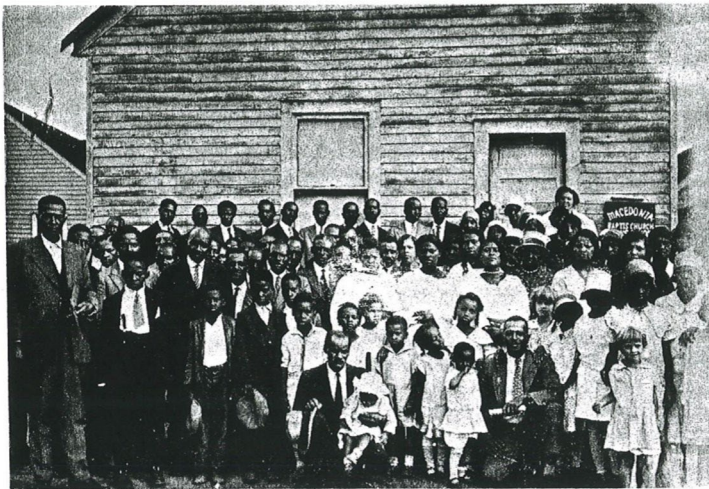
**Proposed Marker Location:** Near the cornerstone, from the Southfield Rd. entrance



The present structure at 14221 Southfield



The congregation's first church at 5100 Evaline, Hamtramck



**Rev. F. D. Mills and Congregation**

The original congregation