

2015 Annual Report

Submitted by the
Michigan Historical Commission
and the
Michigan Historical Center

History: It's About Michigan's Future

Michigan's history plays a vital role in reinventing Michigan. It gives neighborhoods, communities, regions and our state the sense of place essential to restoring our cities and protecting our cultural environment. It draws the tourists who stay longer, spend more, and are more likely to return.

Enhancing our national and international image starts at home with the sharing of diverse, inclusive stories that build pride and demonstrate our willingness to welcome all who want to contribute to our future.

The techniques of history—being curious, asking questions, researching answers, defending conclusions—are keys to revitalizing education. The more active-learning Michigan history we have in our museums and classrooms, the more we inspire our children to want to learn and to live and work in our state when they become adults.

Archival work with digital and paper records is essential to reinventing a government that is both transparent and accessible.

2015 in Review

In fiscal 2015, the Michigan Historical Commission (Commission) and the Michigan Historical Center (Center) moved forward on multiple fronts in support of the aligned goals of the Governor, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the Center.

The Commission devoted particular efforts to:

- Michigan Historical Markers
- The Heritage Leadership Council
- Capitol Park in Detroit
- The Sesquicentennial of the Civil War
- The Milliken/Adams/Kelley Award
- The Governor John B. Swainson Award
- Southeast Michigan Fresh Water project

The Center also worked to:

- Increase diversity and equity in its exhibits and programs
- Expand the reach of history in State Parks and on trails
- Serve family historians
- Expand the Governor's Decision Room program
- Establish heritage as a vital component in Michigan's trail system
- Preserve traditional and electronic records

In all of these efforts the Commission and the Center worked to meet the five evergreen goals around which this report is organized:

- Sharing the Real Stories of Michigan
- Diversity and Inclusiveness
- Public History and Outreach
- Educational Achievement
- Stewardship

Sharing the Real Stories of Michigan **Using Authentic Michigan Stories to Help People** **Connect to Their Past and to Michigan**

Michigan Historical Markers

The oldest program of the Commission and the Center is the Michigan Historical Marker Program. Most markers are sponsored by local individuals and communities, but the commitment to accurate, authentic history is the responsibility of the Commission and the Center. A partnership with Eastern Michigan University provides a graduate student fellowship to support much of the essential research and writing for the markers. The more than 1,700 markers put Michigan's history on the street where people encounter it every day.

In 2015 the Commission and the Center worked on improvements to the marker application and related processes. Work continued on the Conservation Marker Heritage Trail project. The Commission approved adjusted marker prices to accomplish the interlocking goals of encouraging two-sided markers, encouraging the replacement or repair of damaged markers, and providing pricing that encourages sustainability of the program but keeps costs to sponsors in line with other states. During the year, the Commission approved 17 new marker texts and continued the reviewing and approving of marker applications.

The Heritage Leadership Council and Trails

In 2013 the Commission joined the Center and the Historical Society of Michigan in convening leaders of statewide history organizations to respond to the recommendations of the Blue Ribbon Committee on State Parks and Outdoor Recreation. Calling themselves the Heritage Leadership Council, the group researched and discussed the intersection between history and the outdoors and decided to start with a pilot project to enhance trails with heritage. It selected the Kal-Haven Trail and has begun conversations with trail supporters and the Southwest Michigan Regional Prosperity Initiative. Work began in earnest with the addition of a Heritage Trail Coordinator to the staff of the Center.

The heritage trail coordinator made presentations to water- and land-trail support groups. A partnership with the National Park Service took shape around development of a Copper Heritage Trail on the Keweenaw Peninsula.

State Parks

The Center has provided history interpretation in seven State Parks since the 1970s. At the urging of the Commission, the Center is playing a leadership role in working with St. Ignace and Moran Township on Straits State Park and the Father Marquette National Memorial within the park. Steps to form a partnership with local entities are underway, supported by a grant from Enbridge.

All State Parks have the potential to enhance the visitor experience with their "real history." Through an adjustment of staff assignments, the Center is working on interpretive plans for other State Parks. The first is for Ionia State Recreation Area. It focuses on the Sessions School House, an early New England-style stone one-room school that DNR has partially restored.

The Center provided exhibit development facilitation and guidance, as well as history information for the Outdoor Adventure Center (OAC) in Detroit. It also created the exhibit on shipbuilding that is in the OAC. It also began work with volunteers developing a new interpretive center for Pigeon River State Forest.

Exhibits

Much of the Center's effort in sharing stories focuses on exhibits in the American Alliance of Museums accredited Michigan Historical Museum System—the Michigan Historical Museum in Lansing and ten field museums across the state. The system welcomed more than 370,000 visitors over the last year.

Work in 2015 included completion of the US-12 exhibit in the Hewitt House at Walker Tavern, installation of new exhibits on the origins of Michigan Iron Mining at the Iron Industry Museum, near Negaunee, and new outdoor exhibit panels on sports at Fayette Historic Townsite. The special exhibit “Conceived in Liberty” opened at the Michigan Historical Museum on October 11, 2014. It supported the Civil War Sesquicentennial work of the Commission as well as the commitment to diversity.

New outdoor panels developed with the Saginaw Chippewa Tribe for the Sanilac Petroglyphs were completed and are ready for spring 2016 installation.

Diversity and Inclusiveness **Reflecting the Diversity of Michigianians** **in Program Materials, Exhibits, Staffing, and Governance**

W.K. Kellogg Foundation Grant

Based on the Center's past work and future plans, in June the W.K. Kellogg Foundation gave the Michigan History Foundation a grant of \$1 million over three years to refurbish the long-term exhibits of the Michigan Historical Center with a special focus on racial equity. The research that is part of this project will also be used in work on trails, state parks, and historical markers. The effort will be one not only of subject matter but also of presenting all Michigan's history in ways that encourage active learning and civic dialogue.

Conceived in Liberty Exhibit

The special “Conceived in Liberty” exhibit supported the Commission's work on the Sesquicentennial of the Civil War as it looked at Michiganders in the final years of the war, including the people of color and Native Americans who were allowed to serve after the Emancipation Proclamation. The exhibit extended the story twenty years beyond the war. It included the expansion of Michigan's economy from Vernor's Ginger Ale to mining, lumbering, cheese-making, and manufacturing. Then it turned to the proposition “that all men are created equal” with segments on Indian schools, Michigan's early law and court cases prohibiting segregation in schools and other examples of the places where equality was practiced or denied.

Public History and Outreach

Engaging in Meaningful Relationships with Adult Audiences as Information Seekers, Donors, Volunteers, and Cultural Tourists

Marker Dedications and Public Involvement

Commission participation in community marker dedications confirms the statewide importance of history. In 2015, commissioners participated in 24 marker dedications in 15 counties ranging from Mackinac to Berrien and Wayne. An additional notable event was attendance at the rededication of the Willow Run Bomber Plant marker in conjunction with the Ypsilanti community and the nonprofit organization seeking to create an expanded museum on the site. In conjunction with the Mackinac Island and Monroe meetings, the Commission and Center personnel had the privilege of participating in organized community heritage tours that demonstrated the power of collaboration among various public and private organizations. Commissioners and staff also championed our rich heritage through numerous radio, television, and speaking engagements at libraries, museums, and other public and private gatherings.

Capitol Park

The Commission continued its now eight-year-old partnership with the City of Detroit and stakeholders in the redevelopment of historic Capitol Park. The Commission continued to be represented in a workgroup of Historic District stakeholders to develop a long-term park improvement plan. The Downtown Detroit Partnership hired the Project for Public Spaces out of New York to assist with this effort. Acting on a recommendation by the Michigan History Foundation through its Director, the Capitol Park Fund was transferred to the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan under a signed agreement shared with the commissioners and the Center, where the corpus can grow and provide a lasting source of funding for the heritage aspects of the historic site.

Civil War Sesquicentennial

The Michigan Civil War Association secured an easement in 2014 on the Antietam National Battlefield for the first-ever Michigan monument there. Commissioners Dempsey and Egen co-authored a book titled "Michigan at Antietam: The Wolverine State's Sacrifice on America's Bloodiest Day," published by The History Press on August 31, 2015. All of the author proceeds are donated to the monument fundraising effort.

Plans continue to complete a comprehensive list of the various Civil War related initiatives and events that took place throughout Michigan's Sesquicentennial commemoration of the war. The information would be compiled into a report to be reviewed by the Commission with a target date of sometime in 2016. The report would then be submitted through the DNR to the Governor and Legislature.

The annual Civil War Remembrance at The Henry Ford during the Memorial Day weekend continued as an officially endorsed Commission program.

Commission and committee members continued to make presentations to communities and groups throughout Michigan and to work on initiatives to foster awareness of and pay tribute to Michigan's significant role and sacrifice during the Civil War.

MAK Award

On October 1, 2014, the Commission made its first award of this new signature recognition program for lengthy and visionary public service in the cause of Michigan's public history. Governor Rick Snyder presented the inaugural award to Mrs. Martha Firestone Ford honoring the late William Clay Ford at a celebration of Ford's life with his family, key business leaders, and historians at an event in the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn.

At its September 1, 2015, meeting, the Commission approved making the second award to Kerry Chartkoff, formerly State Capitol Historian and director of the State Capitol Tour and Information Service, Co-chair of the Save the Flags project, and current member of the Michigan State Capitol Commission.

Drawing on the distinguished careers of Governor William G. Milliken (longest serving governor), Michigan Historical Commissioner Elizabeth S. Adams (first female appointee and, at 54 years, longest serving member of any state board, commission, or committee), and Attorney General Frank J. Kelley (37-year career making him both the youngest and oldest Attorney General), the "Milliken/Adams/Kelley Award" will be given annually or as suitable candidates are identified.

Swainson Award

Thanks to increasing public communications about the Governor John B. Swainson Award via the DNR press and legislative offices, updated website, notification sent to various professional government groups across the state including the Michigan Municipal League, the Michigan Townships Association, and the Michigan Association of Counties, and other means, a strong field of 15 nominations was received. The Commission approved making the award to five recipients:

- ◆ Beth Anne Eckerle, Director of Communications for Emmet County, for her efforts in sharing the history of Emmet County through the *Essence of Emmet*.
- ◆ Karl Gorham, Superintendent of the Northville Township Water Department, for saving and relocating the stone pillars from the entrance gate to the Maybury Tuberculosis Sanatorium.
- ◆ Gerald Grieve, Land Use Forester with the Department of Natural Resources, for his efforts in identifying and marking Civil War veteran graves.
- ◆ LeighAnn Mikesell, Operations Engineer at Michigan Department of Transportation, for her efforts with the rehabilitation of Muskegon's Veterans Park.
- ◆ Susan Passamani, retired administrative assistant for the Iron County Board of Commissioners, for her role in creating a history room in the rehabilitated Iron County Courthouse.

The Swainson Award is presented by the Commission to state, county, municipal or township employees who have contributed to the preservation of Michigan history even though such activities are not part of their primary job responsibility.

Southeast Michigan Fresh Water project

Through an application by the Commission, the DNR was awarded a \$31,000 grant by the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan to create a general audience book manuscript about Detroit's role as the hub of the Great Lakes as part of a visionary effort to claim the region's place as a freshwater capital. The book project is underway.

Family History and Archival Collections

The Center continued to expand its services to people researching their family's history both on-line and in the Archives of Michigan. It provided on-line access to Michigan death records indexes from 1921 to 1952; to actual death certificates from 1921 to 1939, and to the *Detroit News* index. Its on-line historic map collection passed 1,000 maps. It also received the photograph and clipping files of the *Lansing State Journal* and opened them to the public.

Accessibility

The Commission continued its practice of meeting around the state, convening in Grand Rapids, Lansing, Mackinac Island, and Monroe. A total of seven meetings were convened, in addition to committee and workgroup sessions.

Legislation

In June, the Commission received a presentation on how the DNR was working with the Governor's Office and component boards and commissions on legislation needed to bring compiled law into alignment with various other laws, Executive Orders, and long-time appropriations boilerplate. This included the Michigan Historical Commission Act (Public Act 271 of 1913). During the remainder of the year, the Commission and the DNR Executive Office engaged in communications regarding this effort in the hope that legislation could be enacted in 2016.

Educational Achievement

Creating Content and Programs that Inspire Michigan Children to Learn

School and Youth Programs

The Lansing facility served more than 55,000 students visiting with their classroom in 2015. It added backpacks to its school programming for families. Renovations began to create an additional learning lab for Center education programs and enhance other parts of the Learning Commons. The Michigan Iron Industry Museum expanded its fall Civil War program to include two days for school visits.

Governor's Decision Room

Work on the new module focused on the decisions made by government, business and labor during the 1937 Flint Sit-Down Strike was completed. The original program expanded to Detroit with an agreement to use space in Cadillac Place.

Stewardship

Developing and Maintaining Financial, Collections and Human Resources to Ensure the Long-Term Stability of Collections, Programs and Facilities

Ulysses and Julia Grant Home

The Commission and the Center continued their efforts to preserve this historic house, the 3rd oldest in Detroit. A kick-off meeting was held early in the year at the Detroit Edison Public School Academy with the architectural firm selected via competitive bidding for the move of the House. Subsequently, a preliminary review of moving the House was completed by the architect. Meetings were held to finalize an agreement with the Academy. Next steps include working with DTMB on the building mover contract

Conservation Heritage Marker Trail

The Commission, in coordination with the DNR, continued its effort to secure Michigan Historical Markers that tell the stories of Michigan's past conservation efforts and to provide information on such markers via mobile technology. When completed, the marker trail will support the continued stewardship of Michigan's natural resources as they remind citizens of past preservation and restoration needs and successes.

Digital Record Preservation

The Archives of Michigan worked with the State Court Administrator on using Preservica a preservation solution for digital records that meets international standards for security, migration, and redundancy for born-digital court filings.

Collections Stewardship

The Michigan Historical Museum completed a Collections Conservation Assessment, added a space-saver system donated by the *Detroit News*, and reconfigured some of its collections storage space. It converted first floor lighting to LED lamps that have no UV rays. The upgrade of the ARGUS collections software was completed.

Field site work included a grant to advance conservation and planning at Sanilac Petroglyphs, completion of the Historic Structures Report for the Copper Harbor Range Light and an archaeological survey of the grounds around it, window re-glazing at Hartwick Pines, rewiring of the Hewitt House at Walker Tavern and adding ventilation to several buildings at Fayette Historic Townsite.

The Archives of Michigan reconciled its public records space with computer records, audited its donor records, prepared the Yamasaki collection for public use, and continued to lead on-going environmental monitoring for all collections areas.

Looking Ahead

The Commission and the Center are not just collectors and preservers of history. Because we understand the power of history to change communities and lives, our focus is on sharing Michigan's stories as broadly as possible, through markers and exhibits, on trails and in State Parks, in printed materials and on line.

The work ahead is as much about using existing resources well as it is about creating new programs or resources. The 1,700 Michigan Historical Markers can become stronger builders of place and tourism through the use of modern technology. But they can also be enhanced by special attention to less-told stories whether of conservation or racial equity. Once the Grant House is moved, it will need programming and use. Refreshing exhibits in Lansing and Negaunee will involve rethinking existing materials to make them more likely to foster active learning and dialogue, as well as adding new stories. Education programs and ideas need to be translated into on-line materials that reach beyond the museum's walls.

Every new story we discover can become part of a marker, an exhibit, an educational experience, a trail sign, or an on-line resource that helps someone discover, enjoy, and find inspiration in their heritage as we build Michigan's future together.