

2016 Annual Report

*The more you know about the past,
the better prepared you are for the future.*

--Theodore Roosevelt

Submitted by the
Michigan Historical Commission
and the
Michigan History Center
Department of Natural Resources

2016 in Review

In fiscal 2016, the Michigan Historical Commission (Commission) and the Michigan History 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.

A major joint effort was the initiation of legislation to update Michigan's fundamental history legislation, Act 271 of 1913, with 21st century bills. Acts 469 and 470 of 2016 will take effect on April 5, 2017.

The Commission devoted particular efforts to:

- Michigan Historical Markers
- The Sesquicentennial of the Civil War
- The Milliken/Adams/Kelley Award

The Center's major projects included:

- Refreshing its long-term museum exhibits on the pre-contact period of Michigan's history
- Establishing heritage as a vital component in Michigan's trail system
- Branding and marketing its services
- Serving family historians
- Preserving 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
- Inclusiveness and Diversity
- Outreach to Adult Audiences
- 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 first green and gold Michigan Historical Marker was erected in 1955. There are more than 1,700 today. Most markers are sponsored by local individuals and communities. A partnership with Eastern Michigan University provides a graduate student fellowship to support much of the essential research and writing for the markers.

In 2016 the Commission and the Center, with the help of the Department of Natural Resource's GIS unit, created an open-access GIS-based marker database that will be available to the public in 2017. Work continued on the Conservation Marker Heritage Trail project. During the year, the Commission received 18 marker applications, approved 24 new marker texts and participated in 19 community marker dedication events.



New Historical Marker at Walker Tavern in Brooklyn, MI

Exhibits for a New Century

The Center's Michigan History Museums—the Michigan History Museum in Lansing and ten field museums and sites across the state—welcomed some 400,000 visitors in 2016.

The major focus, funded by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, was re-envisioning the long-term Michigan History Museum exhibits associated with Michigan's First People. With part of the exhibit in place, the museum is continuing its work with tribal members to complete the gallery. The effort to expand Michigan's stories will then turn to the 19th century galleries. This work will also effect exhibits at Fort Wilkins, Fayette Historic Townsite and Hartwick Pines.



New 15-ft mural being installed in Lansing's Michigan History Museum (Rich Geer, artist)

The special exhibit “Inventing the Outdoors” celebrated Webster Marble in Lansing and then moved to the Michigan Iron Industry Museum in Negaunee, which is also updating its long-term exhibits. The current special exhibit, “Minds of Modernism,” focuses on architecture and design. Other interpretive work took place at the Sanilac Petroglyphs, Walker Tavern and Hartwick Pines.

Inclusiveness and Diversity

Reflecting the diversity of Michiganders in program materials, exhibits, staffing and governance

Expanded Programming

The Center’s work with Anishinaabe advisors added Native American demonstrations to its annual Statehood Day celebration, as well as a popular new fall series of programs called “Rock Your Mocs.” Programming associated with “Inventing the Outdoors” included a session on taking service and other animals on outdoor adventures.

Accessible Trail Interpretation

The Center’s Heritage Trail Program worked with community members along the Kal-Haven Trail to develop an interpretive plan that includes access to interpretation through smart phones and an application developed in cooperation with Michigan State University. The Natural Resources Trust Fund has recommended the implementation plan for funding in 2017, providing a model for making the outdoors more accessible to people with limited vision.

Collections

The Center is the steward of thousands of artifacts and documents donated by Michiganders and their descendants so that future generations can enjoy them and learn from them. An extraordinary addition to the Archives in 2016 was the legal document that granted Frank Demas his freedom from slavery. It was given to the people of Michigan by his great-great-great-grandson, Benjamin Hall of Eaton Rapids.



A guest presenter leads a smudging ceremony at a “Rock Your Mocs” program

Outreach to Adult Audiences

Engaging in meaningful relationships with adult audiences as information seekers, donors, volunteers and cultural tourists

Civil War Sesquicentennial

On July 9, the final Michigan celebration of the American Civil War commemorated the 150th anniversary of the return of the original Civil War battle flags to the state with flags, speeches, reenactors, including musicians, an information tent, and cannon on the Capitol lawn.

The Commission's final contribution to the celebration, still in progress, is a comprehensive list of the various Civil War related initiatives and events that took place throughout Michigan's Sesquicentennial commemoration. The Michigan Civil War Association also continued its work for the Michigan monument on the Antietam National Battlefield.



Michigan Civil War reenactors re-create the returning of the flags in front of the Capitol

Milliken/Adams/Kelley Award

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**” is given annually or as suitable candidates are identified.

The Commission made its second award of its signature recognition program for lengthy and visionary public service in the cause of Michigan's public history to Kerry Chartkoff, former 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. The celebration coincided with the 25th anniversary of the Save the Flags program.

In partnership with the Historical Society of Michigan, the Commission also successfully nominated Commissioner Adams to the Michigan Women's Hall of Fame.

Family History

The Archives launched a new partnership with FamilySearch.org to digitize our state's naturalization records. Family Search has created 150,000 images of these records of immigrants who became U.S. citizens. As digitization continues, on-line crowd-sourced indexing by family history researchers is beginning.

Attendance and participation in all Center programs expanded as the Center worked with a marketing firm to improve its social media presence and strengthen its brand.

Educational Achievement

Creating content and programs that inspire Michigan children to learn

School and Youth Programs

Lansing's Michigan History Center served more than 55,000 students visiting with their classrooms in 2016. Renovations were completed to create an additional learning lab for Center education programs and enhance other parts of the Learning Commons. Hartwick Pines and the Iron Industry Museum continued to expand their year-round school programs. A summer partnership with TinkrLAB provided monthly STEM/history based Saturday programs. In the fall the Center, in partnership with other area cultural organizations, began to provide regular programming for homeschool students.



A young visitor makes a magnetic sculpture at a STEM-themed Second Saturday program

The On-Line Learning Commons

In 2017 the Center will focus on providing on-line experiences that match and enhance on-site opportunities offered to children and adults, including break-out boxes that require participants to search for lock combinations and keys using historical materials.

Stewardship

Developing and maintaining financial, collections and human resources to ensure the long-term stability of collections, programs and facilities

Conservation Heritage Marker Trail

The Commission, in coordination with the DNR, continued its effort to develop Michigan Historical Markers that tell the stories of Michigan's past conservation efforts. The expanding marker trail will support the continued stewardship of Michigan's natural resources as the markers remind citizens of past preservation, restoration needs and successes.

Digital Record Preservation

The Archives of Michigan continued to work with state and local government agencies on Preservica, a preservation solution for digital records that meets international standards for security, migration and redundancy. In partnership with the state's Licensing and Regulation Corporations Division, it added 6 million Corporation Annual Reports to the system. The reports are not only preserved, they are also much easier to locate and access.

Branding and Marketing

Long-term stability depends on public support of the Center's work. In 2016, the Center expanded its use of social media and e-mailed newsletters, announcements and news releases that include photographs and video clips. Using the contracted services of a marketing firm for the first time, it also began work on clarifying its brand and expanded its paid media. The results included doubled attendance at many public programs.

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 will become stronger builders of place and tourism through the use of modern technology. They will also be enhanced by special attention to less-told stories whether of conservation or racial equity. 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.

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 fosters curiosity, enjoyment and inspiration as we build Michigan's future together.