



THE MICHIGAN HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
A CENTENNIAL REVIEW

MAY 2013





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On the occasion of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the creation of the Michigan Historical Commission, this booklet is presented to the people of Michigan to commemorate one hundred years of public investment in our state's matchless heritage.



MICHIGAN HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
AT NOTRE DAME UNIVERSITY

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*In October 1913, the commission met in Kalamazoo at the home of the Rev. Monsignor O'Brien, a fellow commissioner, and journeyed from there to visit the archives at Notre Dame University as the guests of the Rev. John Cavanaugh.*

All photographs courtesy Archives of Michigan



## THE MICHIGAN HISTORICAL COMMISSION

On Thursday, May 8, 1913, the average high temperature in Lansing was 66 degrees. The day would become more than seasonable, though, with a landmark action of Governor Woodbridge Nathan Ferris. With the stroke of a pen, he signed into law Public Act 271, a measure creating the Michigan Historical Commission. It was, in several ways, a historic event.

The impetus for the law arose two years earlier, when Governor Chase S. Osborn vetoed the annual appropriation for the Michigan Pioneer and Historical Society. Osborn's January 1911 State of the State Address called for "exercise of the closest economy in the management of the business of the State" because a "large deficit . . . probably amounting to at least a million dollars" required the elimination of earmarks (to use an equivalent modern term). He proposed that the State Librarian assume the society's role of collecting historical documentation, publishing the *Michigan Pioneer and Historical Collections* (<http://libguides.lib.msu.edu/MPHC>), and maintaining the history museum in the Capitol. Appropriation amounts had varied annually from \$500 to \$4,000.

Neither the society nor the legislature agreed that the vital function of preserving the state's history should be managed by the State Librarian. After months of discussion, House Bill 327 was introduced on February 10, 1913. The bill called for a new commission to manage the state's history affairs. It would be composed of six members, serving without compensation (expense reimbursement only), appointed by the Governor for six-year terms. The state's chief executive would serve as an *ex officio* member. With the groundwork laid for favorable reception, the measure quickly made its way through the legislative process. On April 19 the bill passed the House unanimously; five days later the same result occurred in the Senate. The bill had immediate effect. On May 8, less than 90 days after the introduction of the bill, the Michigan Historical Commission Act became law. Of particular note is this statement

in the commission's *Bulletin No. 1*, issued that September: "To Mrs. M. B. Ferrey [state museum curator] is due much credit for earnest work in behalf of this bill from its inception to its passage by the legislature."

Governor Ferris appointed the six members quickly, and the commission organized and gathered for its first meeting on Wednesday, May 28, in the Governor's office in the Capitol. Ferris acted as chair *pro tem* of the meeting. The commission got to work, accepting donated artifacts from the society, convening subsequent meetings in the office of the lieutenant governor, and collaborating with the Mackinac Island Park Commission (created in 1895). The society changed its name to the Historical Society of Michigan, and the society and the commission shared executive direction.

The commission continued the practice of issuing publications on historical subjects; the publishing function is one of the oldest state-supported activities. There is a continuous record of appropriations for historical publications since 1874, encompassing bulletins, guides to historic resources and attractions, student essays, and of course, the annual reports required by statute. In 2012, the commission published, in connection with its commemoration at the Antietam National Battlefield, the *Michigan at Antietam* booklet.

The 1915 Compiled Laws of Michigan located the Commission Act in Title VIII, Part 19, "Associations to Promote Art, Science, Literature and Music." Other similar statutes gathered here dealt with libraries, societies for the promotion of literary, scientific, artistic, and engineering activities, and musical groups.

In 1916, the commission found the need to make suggestions to amend its operating statute. Among the changes proposed was a \$15,000 annual funding appropriation.

During the next fifty years, the commission worked to expand the state museum and archives, published *Michigan History Magazine*, fulfilled a bequest from John M. Munson, President of Michigan State Normal College (now Eastern Michigan University), to issue a number of history publications from 1950 onward, created the Centennial Farm program, launched the State Register of Historic Sites, and administered the Michigan Historical Marker program enacted into law in 1955 by Act 10, effective October 14.

On October 22, 1963, the commission held its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary banquet in Lansing. Commissioners celebrated a state archives possessing almost 3,000 cubic feet of materials, 4,000 microfilm rolls of documents and images, more than 1,000 cartographic items and more than 63,000 photographs; a separate museum structure, the downtown Turner House; 160 historical markers; 1,800 Centennial Farms; and a significant number of written materials.

The next month, voters approved a new Michigan Constitution with significant implications for the commission's work. State government was limited to twenty



*The commission held one of its 1963 meetings in Sault Ste. Marie. Pictured from left to right are Commissioners L. G. Vander Velde, Willard Wichers, Executive Secretary Lewis Beeson, and Commissioners Prentiss Brown, Willis Dunbar, and Elizabeth Adams.*

principal departments, rather than the proliferation of independent boards, agencies and commissions that had accreted over the prior decades. Jockeying began over the structure and form of the new government; commissioners lobbied for creation of a Department of History and Archives or one that combined the commission and the State Library. (The title page of *Bulletin No. 1* described the commission as “a State Department of History and Archives.”) Instead, the Executive Organization Act of 1965 placed the Michigan Historical Commission within the Department of State, designating the board as a Type II agency. Accordingly, its staff, finances, records, and property were transferred to the Secretary of State, who became the department head to whom the commission reported. A Division of History came into existence to carry on the work; the commission’s role became one largely of providing counsel and guidance to state government.

According to an article in the September/October 1988 edition of *Michigan History*, the commission on its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in the mid-1960s, had “faced an uncertain future as it looked to its second half-century.” The Historical Society of Michigan had established an independent office in 1948, though its members continued to receive *Michigan History Magazine* free of charge. Fitting into the Secretary of State’s operations presented a new challenge. The commissioners no longer had final say on matters of history. Still, the record shows they continued to carry on the work of preserving and promoting Michigan’s heritage.

As a case in point, the Commission launched a "Historymobile" in 1964. The 54-foot-long "museum on wheels" traveled to Michigan communities over the next decade, sparking interest in state and local history and promoting Michigan museums. Local historical society members often served as hosts, strengthening ties between agencies. Collaboration was key at many levels. In the first year, eleven Michigan businesses supported the venture, while fourteen Michigan museums contributed nineteen separate exhibits covering Michigan's history from pre-contact. The American Association for State and Local History, impressed by this moving museum and the cooperation involved, presented the commission with an Award of Merit in 1965. In its heyday, the Historymobile racked up an impressive number of miles. A 1967 Department of State publication noted that it visited 146 communities during its first three years.

On December 10, 1971, the commission adopted a "Bi-Centennial Resolution." Anticipating the commemoration of the nation's 200th birthday five years hence, the resolution called on the Governor, legislature, and people of Michigan to celebrate the event "by building a State Museum and History Building, thus leaving an appropriate and lasting memorial of this significant event in the history of our State and Nation." A decade and a half would pass before the goal of the resolution was achieved.

Between its 50<sup>th</sup> and 75<sup>th</sup> anniversaries, the commission continued in the tradition laid down over its past. Its advisory role increased as the Bureau of History took responsibility for the State Historic Preservation Office, Michigan Underwater Preserves and history in several Michigan State Parks. In 1970, Act 169 gave the commission a role in historic district designations. That same year, it assumed responsibility for the Michigan Historical Museum's first field site, the Mann House in Concord. In 1976, Act 69 authorized state acceptance of historic sites from local governments. In 1978 the commission launched Michigan Historical Commission Days, the most notable of which occurred in 1981, when former governors Van Wagoner, Williams, Swainson and Romney gathered for a public discussion with Governor Milliken on the role of the state's chief executive. In January 1983, the commission and the Historical Society of Michigan joined forces to recommend programs and legislation to commemorate Michigan's sesquicentennial of statehood.

On May 26, 1988, the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the commission was held at the Radisson Hotel in Lansing. Speakers included former Governor and Commission President John B. Swainson, Secretary of State Richard H. Austin, and Dr. Martha M. Bigelow, Director of the Bureau of History.

On March 7, 1989, a long-awaited dream of commissioners and Michigan history lovers came to fruition. The Michigan Library and Historical Center, located in Lansing a block west of the Capitol between Kalamazoo and Allegan Streets, was

dedicated. Built at a cost of \$36 million, the new 300,000 square foot structure was the first state building since the Capitol designed primarily for public use. Its main tenants were the Library of Michigan in the west wing and the Bureau of History, charged with building programs and alliances to preserve and interpret Michigan's past, in the east wing. The copper faced atrium surrounded a stately white pine, making the building a signature landmark.

In 1991, the Bureau of History and the Michigan Historical Commission sponsored publication of a guidebook covering the 1,200 Michigan Historical Markers that had been installed over the preceding 45 years. The decade brought a name change from the Bureau of History to the Michigan Historical Center and the growth of the Michigan History Foundation, established in 1989 to raise private funds to complete the exhibits in the new building, which were dedicated in 1995.

The new millennium brought a sea change in state heritage policy. On May 29, 2001, Governor John M. Engler issued Executive Order 2001-1 reorganizing state government to create a Department of History, Arts and Culture. Some 40 years earlier, the commission had urged a similar step. The Governor's stated purposes for this action included:

- The founders of the United States believed it important that citizens have sufficient knowledge of history, the arts, and culture to exercise their right of self-government in an informed and responsible manner;
- Knowledge of history, the arts, and culture is fundamental to human enrichment and to a well-rounded education;
- Knowledge of and access to history, the arts, and culture promote civic awareness and mutual understanding among a diverse population;
- Michigan citizens can be justifiably proud of their storied past as well as the many important contributions the people of our state have made to the arts and culture;
- Encouraging the preservation of history, creation of art, and development of culture makes Michigan an even more interesting and desirable place in which to travel and live;
- Continuity of our civilization requires that knowledge and appreciation of our history, arts, and culture be transmitted to future generations;
- Good stewardship at the state level involves concern for the integrity of Michigan's many historic sites, archives, and other cultural resources and treasures;
- The status of the State of Michigan's history, arts, and culture programs - which are currently dispersed in a variety of agencies and departments throughout state government - can be raised if organized within one department of state government;

The legislature took up the Executive Order as an opportunity to place its stamp on modernizing the suite of history and cultural programs and agencies. Working with the administration, it enacted a 19-bill package later in 2001 that gave the new department the rubric of History, Arts and Libraries (HAL). According to the *Michigan Manual*, the reorganization sought:

to combine and coordinate state efforts to preserve, promote, and protect Michigan's heritage. Knowledge of history, the arts, and culture and access to information resources are vitally important in today's world, and the department's strong focus on state history, arts, culture, and library programs is designed to enhance the lives of Michigan citizens.

Similar to the legislative reception for the original Michigan Historical Commission bill, the HAL Act (House Bill 4944) was introduced on June 13, 2001, approved in the House 103-4 and in the Senate 31-0, and received final approval on July 12. The law, Public Act 66, took immediate effect on September 20. Executive Order 2001-1 was, accordingly, rescinded.

The Governor appointed William M. Anderson of Ludington as the first director of HAL. Senator William D. Schuette commented: "Bill Anderson is an exceptional choice to lead Michigan's newest department. He is a man of strong character and will bring a keen insight and marvelous perspective of the history of Michigan to the people of our great state." Senator Gary Peters also gave the action his plaudits. Craig Ruff, president of Public Sector Consultants, hailed the move for providing "a focus in state government that connects us to the past and future of who we are."

The act that created HAL altered the composition of the Michigan Historical Commission. Two additional members were appointed for a 2-year term by the Senate Majority Leader and the Speaker of the House of Representatives. Seven members were gubernatorial appointments, still for 6-year terms, with the additional seat to represent the Historical Society of Michigan. The director of the department would serve as an *ex officio* member of the commission, rather than the Governor. Because the 1963 Constitution provided that a change in the composition of an agency shortens the term of office to four years, confusion ensued over the length of appointments. In 2005, an Attorney General opinion confirmed the alteration to 4-year terms.

In late 2007, the commission and center began a multi-year effort to provide historical assistance to the City of Detroit as it rebuilt Capitol Park at Griswold and State Streets in the central business district. As the site of Michigan's only territorial capitol building, which was also its first State Capitol, the park possesses immeasurable historic value. It is also the site of the tomb of Michigan's first Governor, Stevens T. Mason. The park redesign emphasized its unique heritage thanks to the collaboration.

In December 2007, Governor Jennifer M. Granholm issued Executive Order 2007-52. Her action directed the commission to serve in a key role during the Michigan commemoration of the Civil War Sesquicentennial. Four other executive orders issued that same day confirmed the central place of public history in Michigan. Numbers 50 and 51 created the Idlewild Centennial Commission and the Michigan Commission on the Bicentennial of the War of 1812 within the Department of History, Arts and Libraries; Number 53 effectuated the “best interests of the State of Michigan to have a formally organized state historic preservation office, state historic preservation officer, and state historic preservation review board.” The final action, Executive Order 2007-54, created the State Historical Records Advisory Board. These five orders included statements supporting the principle that history plays “a vital role in our state's democracy,” seeking to “increase awareness of Michigan's cultural heritage and aid cultural economic development opportunities in this state,” and evoking the special places and unique legacy that characterize Michigan's history.

Just a year later, the course of Michigan history took a radically different tack. In her February 3, 2009, State of the State address and subsequent budget recommendation, Governor Granholm stated: “I will recommend eliminating the Department of History, Arts and Libraries and finding other means to support these important functions.” Following up on the speech and budget presentation, on July 13, 2009, the Governor issued Executive Order 2009-36. The decree abolished HAL; it had existed for only eight years. Erroneously, the Order represented that the HAL



*Throughout its history, the commission has helped communities celebrate their heritage whether with historical markers or projects such as the Capitol Park restoration.*

Act was passed “following an unsuccessful attempt to create a Department of History, Arts and Culture under Executive Order 2001-1.” Executive Directive No. 2009-5, issued by the Governor on August 26, 2009, contained various clarifications. Executive Order 2009-43, issued by the Governor on September 9, 2009, amended the previous order. The executive orders scattered HAL’s functions around State government:

- The Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs went to the Michigan Strategic Fund.
- The Library of Michigan and the State Librarian went to the Department of Education.
- Services for the visually impaired transferred to the Michigan Commission for the Blind in the Department of Energy, Labor, and Economic Growth.
- Census-related functions went to the Department of Information Technology.
- The state records management program, which became part of the Michigan Historical Center in 2002, returned to the Department of Management and Budget.
- The State Historic Preservation Office, the Office of the State Archaeologist, the Historic Preservation Review Board and the Idlewild Centennial Commission became part of the Michigan State Housing Development Authority.
- The Michigan Historical Commission, Michigan Historical Museum System, Archives of Michigan, Mackinac Island State Park Commission, Michigan Freedom Trail Commission, Michigan Commission on the Commemoration of the Bicentennial of the War of 1812, Michigan Iron Industry Museum Advisory Board, State Historical Records Advisory Board, and Michigan Heritage Water Trail Program went to the Department of Natural Resources.

The commission, whose input had not been sought, opposed the plan in a statement issued on March 5, 2009: “We urge the Governor not to break up the Historical Center. . . . We believe legitimate functions of government and the citizens of the State can be better and more economically served by keeping the Michigan Historical Program unified.” Commissioners testified in legislative hearings against the break-up. The Senate included language in its passage of SB 247 on April 1, 2009, stating:

Sec. 229. Based on the public testimony provided in hearings on the budget for the department, it is the intent of the legislature that in any proposed reorganization of the department the component programs currently within the library of Michigan shall be kept together in a state department and the

component programs currently within the Michigan historical programs shall be kept together in a state department.

The House expressed similar sentiment on April 2 in HB 4438. When a multi-bill package was introduced in the Senate to transfer the center intact to the Secretary of State, commissioners testified in support of these measures. The package, along with a rejection of E.O. 2009-36, passed the Senate in August but died in the House. On October 1, 2009, Michigan said farewell to the Department of History, Arts and Libraries.

The July 13, 2009, press release announcing EO 2009-36 also announced conceptual plans for a Michigan Center for Innovation and Reinvention (MCIR) that would occupy the Michigan Library and Historical Center building. The Executive Order created an MCIR Board and charged it with reviewing and evaluating the creation of such a center as a better use for the Michigan Library and Historical Center building. The Governor described an MCIR in downtown Lansing “that would help equip Michigan citizens for the knowledge-based economy through entrepreneurial and innovative programs.”

The MCIR Board’s June 2010 final report did not support the creation of such a center, finding its conceptual underpinnings “not realistic.” A summary of public input stated:

More than any other building, this is the people’s building where citizens have full access. The group participants stressed the purpose-built nature of the building and the importance of having a place that cares for and celebrates the state’s heritage. They linked keeping the building true to its original purpose to economic development, tourism, education, preserving and making accessible the record of the state’s past and present, and planning for Michigan’s future.

The MCIR Board recommended “that the Michigan Library and Historical Center remain what it was created to be—the people’s building.”

It should remain a place where the public is welcomed and given access to resources. It shelters and protects the heritage of our state—from rare books to Civil War flags, from our first constitution to twenty-first century legislative committee hearings. Its collections and programs do more than honor our past; they give us the base on which to build our collective future. Its programs and exhibits give our children and our citizens access to our collective knowledge, information and wisdom.

On October 8, 2009, Governor Granholm issued Executive Order 2009-45, creating a Department of Natural Resources and Environment (DNRE). The commission and the center were housed in the new DNRE. In his first executive order (No. 2011-1), Governor Rick Snyder abolished the DNRE and transferred its

functions into separate departments, one for Natural Resources (DNR) and the other for Environmental Quality. The commission and the center moved back to the DNR.

Throughout this period of administrative change, the commission and the center continued their work to preserve and share Michigan's history and to strengthen the state's history programs. Partnering with Eastern Michigan University and the Michigan History Foundation, the commission revitalized the Michigan Historical Marker program. As the archives and museum programs worked on saving the history of the Michigan State Fair, the commission created support for preserving the Detroit home of Ulysses S. Grant, which is housed on the fairgrounds. With the support of the Michigan History Foundation, the center created new education space and launched the Governor's Decision Room for high school students and the Story Circles program for pre-school children. The Iron Industry museum completed a new access road and interpretive trails.

Through March 2013, Governor Snyder made six appointments and reappointments to the commission. A typical press release stated: "Michigan's 175 years of history are a source of pride for citizens," said Snyder. "I am pleased that the expertise these individuals offer will contribute to preserving our state's fascinating history for the next generation."

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*Michigan Manual*

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State of Michigan website [<http://www.michigan.gov/som>]



## THE MICHIGAN HISTORICAL MARKER PROGRAM

Since 1955, Michigan has enjoyed an official, statewide commemorative marker program under rigorous scholarship open to all comers. Michigan Historical Markers tell the story of Michigan and the rich history of its people. They are a tribute to those who came before us, a legacy for future generations, and the thread that ties our state together. They are a tangible reminder of where we have come from and an inspiration for where we might go. The program helps Michiganders gain a sense of place everywhere the distinctive green-and-gold markers are found. Some 1,700 markers make up the program as of the commission's centennial. The roots of the program go back to the early part of the commission's existence.

After the Michigan Historical Commission's creation in 1913, the commission formed a partnership with the Mackinac Island State Park Commission that involved erection of several historical plaques celebrating the rich history of the island.

In 1917, the legislature authorized county boards of supervisors to appropriate money for the marking of historical places. The single-section law, approved May 10, 1917, on the eve of America's entrance into the First World War, was succinct:

The board of supervisors of any county in the state is hereby authorized to appropriate any sum not exceeding two hundred dollars in any one year, for the purpose of marking historical places in their respective counties and for the erection of monuments or other memorials in commemoration of notable events connected with such counties. Such money shall become a county expense and shall be included in the taxes of such county.

Act 279 of 1917 stayed on the books until repeal on September 27, 1957.

Act 254 of 1919 had a similar theme. The legislature authorized the county boards of commissioners "to raise and appropriate money for the purpose of fostering any activity or project which in the opinion of the board tends to advance the historical interests of the county." It became law on August 14 and remains in the Michigan



*Michigan's first historical marker is covered on the side of Beaumont Tower as MSU President John Hannah (left) listens to Commissioner Vander Velde speak.*

Compiled Laws to this day (MCL 46.231), having seen a number of amendments down through the years.

In 1941, again on the eve of American involvement in a world-wide conflict, the legislature authorized the commission to lead a historical marking program. According to the historians at the center, the program was abandoned when the United States entered the Second World War.

In 1953, a growing interest in historical marking in other states inspired Governor G. Mennen Williams to appoint a committee to study methods by which Michigan's historical resources could receive greater attention. The committee consisted of Willis F. Dunbar, professor at Western Michigan College (now University) and a commission member; Lewis Beeson, the commission secretary; and Arthur Wilcox, professor at Michigan State University and author of publications

such as *Michigan Scenic Sites: Preliminary Inventory*. Backed by the committee's research, the commission drew up a bill to again ask the legislature for authority to mark historic sites.

On October 14, 1955, the legislature responded positively. It enacted a bill that became Act 10, an act to provide for the registration of historic sites, providing:

Sec. 1. Any agency of the state of Michigan, or of any political subdivision thereof owning or in possession of any site of historic interest, or any person owning or in possession of such site, and any person having the consent of such owner or person in possession, may apply to the Michigan historical commission to have such site listed as a state historic site.

Sec. 2. If, in the judgment of the commission, such site is of sufficient general historical interest, it shall list the site in a register kept for that purpose and shall authorize to be displayed at the site a suitable numbered marker, approved by the commission as to text and construction, indicating that the site is a

registered state historic site. The marker shall not bear the name of any commissioner or state official. . . .

In the September 1955 issue of *Michigan History*, Commissioner Dunbar invoked the legislative action in an article entitled “Register Your Historic Sites Now.” He called on “history-minded citizens and local historical societies to effectuate the registration of all historic sites in Michigan having state-wide significance.” Markers would be installed where appropriate. He noted that if the site belonged to the state, “the erection of a marker is the responsibility of the state.”

On October 22, 1955, the first Michigan Historical Marker under the new program was dedicated. It was placed at Beaumont Tower on the campus of Michigan State University and commemorated the founding of the institution in 1855. The second marker, sponsored by the Cleveland-Cliffs Iron Company, marked the beginning of the Lake Superior iron mining industry and Jackson Mine in Negaunee. The Ford Motor Company sponsored the third marker, erected at the Highland Park Plant to commemorate the Model T.

The December 1956 edition of *Michigan History* contained an article by historian George S. May entitled “Michigan’s Historic Marking Program.” Positing that “systematic state-wide marking programs conducted by the state historical agency . . . are a relatively recent development,” May described the launch of the new program as



In 1958, Governor Williams joined Stewart Woodfill and the commission: (left to right) Elizabeth Adams, Lewis Vander Velde, Willard Wichers, Lewis Beeson, Prentiss Brown and Chester Ellison.



*School children have been part of many marker projects.*

a dream shared by men and women struggling to promote a wider understanding of Michigan's rich historical heritage has now become a reality." A number of markers were in place due to the "splendid cooperation of the state conservation and highway departments." At its inception, the seeds had been sewn for a program that benefitted and belonged "to all the people of Michigan."

The legislature appropriated \$25,000 for the erection of markers in 1956 and in 1957. By the end of 1966, public appropriations had funded 91 markers, and private sources had funded 112.

In 2002, the legislature revised the Markers Act, formalizing aspects that had been agency policy. The act made official the state's ownership of all markers, safeguarded the green-and-gold wolverine-emblazoned image, and established penalties for vandalism and theft.

On February 15, 2007, the senate proclaimed May 23, 2007, "Michigan Historical Marker Awareness Day," noting that

"under full sail." The process involved two phases: first, the registration of a historic site, defined as "one where a definite event or series of events occurred;" then, "At each of the registered sites a historical marker will be erected." The commission "planned to give Michigan a system of historic markers equal to the best that may be found elsewhere in the country."

In the June 1957 issue of *Michigan History*, May summarized the early status of the program.

"What was for many long years only



*The 1977 dedication of the Elmwood Cemetery marker included William Schindler, Henry Ledyard, Mayor Colman Young, Barbara Wrigley, Secretary of State Richard Austin, and Councilman Ernest Browne.*

some 1,500 marker locations and more than 2,800 sites in the State Register of Historic Sites had been commemorated.

In April 2009, during the state's budget debates, consideration was given to privatizing the marker program. The commission reaffirmed "the essential public purpose of the Michigan Historical Marker Program" and called for "its preservation as a public, professional and official function of the state." The program remained with the state and, through April 2013, encompassed more than 1,700 marker locations in 81 of 83 of Michigan's counties, as well as in Indiana, Kentucky, Maryland, Tennessee and France.

Four publications have centered on Michigan historical markers. The first, entitled "Historical Markers and Memorials in Michigan" was published as Volume XV of *Michigan History Magazine*, Spring, 1931. It began:

The growth of interest in historical events and in marking historic and legendary spots has been rapid within recent years. The interest aroused has resulted in the erection of numerous markers by various patriotic, state, and civic bodies, business organizations, clubs, and individuals throughout the State, and in order to determine what has already been done in the different counties, the Historical Commission conducted this preliminary survey. . . .

It is the hope of the Commission that this survey may not only be of use in the schools and to the residents of Michigan, but that it may serve as an incentive to other communities in the State to preserve the memory of historic events and notable persons in their vicinity.

The next 200 pages listed markers erected by various entities throughout Michigan, organized by county, with sixty-two counties listed. It did not contain an index.

In 1967, using the John M. Munson Michigan History Fund, the commission published a stand-alone paperbound guide entitled *Michigan Historical Markers*. Edited by Commissioner Dunbar, the 200-page volume described 205 "official" historical markers. The index was arranged by county. A companion *Guide to Michigan's Historical Attractions* provided a map showing the location of all the markers.

In 1991, the Bureau of History and the commission published *Traveling Through Time: A Guide to Michigan's Historical Markers*. Edited by Laura R. Ashlee, coordinator of the State Historical Marker program, the volume contained locations, descriptions, and (for the first time) images and photographs relating to the sites. The preface stated: "Over two thousand sites have been listed in the state register and at least half display markers." It was arranged by county, with an index arranged by marker title.

A revised edition of the guidebook, was published in 2005 by the University of Michigan Press, again edited by Ms. Ashlee. Now mushroomed from 300 to 500 pages, the guidebook for the first time contained an index that included some subject matter headings.

At its centennial, the commission is working with the Michigan Historical Center to undertake a comprehensive reinvention of the marker program. Originally created in 1955 to promote heritage tourism, the program has taken on additional roles of education and place-making. As part of its work on a larger vision for Michigan history, the commission expects the next years of the program to be marked by greater public access to information on the markers and the sites they represent.



## THE CIVIL WAR SESQUICENTENNIAL

Executive Order 2007-52, issued December 27, 2007, charged the commission with leading Michigan's commemoration of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the American Civil War. Because the order did not set any inclusive dates, programs began before 2011 and are expected to extend beyond 2015. The order stated, "it is in the best interests of the State of Michigan to provide for appropriate commemorative activities recognizing the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Civil War; recognizing the sesquicentennial of the Civil War will increase awareness of Michigan's cultural heritage and assist cultural economic development in this state."

The commission discussed implementation strategies and formed a committee to help develop a plan during its meetings early in 2008. Several commissioners, along with the leadership of the Michigan Historical Center, participated in drafting a work plan that was approved for presentation to the public on September 17, 2008. Public hearings were held and comments received on the work plan on

- March 28, 2009, at the Detroit Historical Museum, Detroit;
- April 7, 2009, at the Michigan Historical Center, Lansing;
- May 6, 2009, at Grand Valley State University, Grand Rapids;
- May 30, 2009, at the Michigan Iron Industry Museum, Negaunee.

The draft work plan was also posted on the Commission's website so that the public could tender written comments. After considering the public input, the commission approved the plan at its November 19, 2009, meeting. It adopted seven goals to guide its Civil War efforts:

- To fully implement E.O. 2007-52 via an innovative, creative, appropriate, vigorous multi-year commemoration carrying beyond 2015;
- To create a lasting legacy focused on increasing the public's understanding of Michigan's outstanding role in helping save the Union and eliminate

American slavery, making the commemoration relevant to all ethnicities as part of a discussion on equal rights for all citizens;

- To ensure an accurate recounting of events and issues;
- To involve the widest conceivable audience, incorporating plans of the center and other state agencies;
- To broadly publicize all work, using public forums and active linking to groups and individuals who are especially interested in Michigan history and, in particular, the Civil War;
- To foster the widest possible participation; and
- To provide an impetus for the creation of preservation/tourism opportunities and activities that will yield commensurate respect and veneration for this State and foster a greater sense of community and pride.

The work plan is not a static document or fixed effort. As ideas and opportunities present themselves for an appropriate and authentic commemoration, the commission and the center have incorporated them and will continue to do so.

With the support of its Civil War History Partners—Civil War reenactment groups, round tables and fraternal organizations—as well as private citizens, businesses, nonprofit organizations and governmental entities, the commission is fostering observances that are authentic and inclusive. It also serves as Michigan's link to national and international activities commemorating the sesquicentennial and provides a clearinghouse for information about sesquicentennial plans, events, programs, observances and services.

Between 2009 and 2013, the commission helped organize the first Civil War Sesquicentennial event in the nation, a March 2009 conference centered on the historic 1859 meeting in Detroit of John Brown, Frederick Douglass, and black Detroit civic leaders. It worked with Grand Valley State University on a conference on civil wars with speakers Eric Foner and Brooks Simpson, and supported the Michigan Historical Museum's exhibit on the coming of the war, "Plowshares into Swords," as well as the Archives of Michigan's placement of all of its Civil War materials and a Civil War Sesquicentennial calendar on its web site [www.MiCivilWar.org](http://www.MiCivilWar.org). It formed a strong alliance with the Civil War History Partners, and worked with them on a number of ideas and plans. In August 2012 the Commission accepted the invitation of the National Park Service to conduct a "Michigan Day at Antietam" commemorating Michiganders' contributions to the Union victory that preceded the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation. The remaining years of the sesquicentennial promise similar landmark events.

In 2011, *Michigan History* magazine helped commemorate the first year of the Civil War by devoting two articles in each of its six issues to Michigan stories about the conflict.

Funding for the Commission's Civil War initiatives depends not on public appropriations but on private donations. Two publications have helped: the travel guide *Glory, Valor & Sacrifice: Michigan Sites Significant to the Civil War*, co-authored by David Ingall and Karin Risko, and *Michigan and the Civil War: A Great and Bloody Sacrifice*, written by Jack Dempsey, contribute portions of their proceeds to support Michigan's Sesquicentennial commemoration.

## THE COMMISSIONERS

The individuals appointed to the Michigan Historical Commission over its first century have run the gamut of expertise and passion, state government tenure and ecclesiastical experience. A former governor, judges of the state court system, academic historians, authors, collectors and private citizens have all served on the commission. Elizabeth Adams – appointed on the eve of World War II – likely holds the record for the longest serving state appointee. All have served as unpaid volunteers. In recent years, they have voluntarily served even without expense reimbursement. They are listed here in the order of their appointment and succession.

Clarence M. Burton	1913-1931
George B. Catlin	1931-1934
Thomas A.E. Weadock	1934-1936
Emanuel M. Clark	1936-1941
Elizabeth S. Adams	1941-1995
Keith E. Molin	1996-2005*
Judith L. Tappero	2007-2009
Michael W. Ranville	2009-2013
<b>Joan Frear Capuano</b>	<b>2013-</b>

Lawton T. Hemans	1913-1916
Augustus C. Carton	1916-1938
Charles A. Weissert	1938-1946
James O. Knauss	1948-1950
Lewis G. Vander Velde	1950-1974
Charles V. Hagler	1974-1985
John B. Swainson	1985-1998
Robert J. Danhof	1998-2004
Debra K. Knooihuisen	2005-2008*
L. William Conner, Jr.	2008-2012
<b>Margaret M. Cunningham</b>	<b>2012-</b>

William L. Jenks	1913-1938
R. Clyde Ford	1938-1951
Willard C. Wichers	1951-1987
Esther Gordy Edwards	1988-1994
Samuel Logan, Jr.	1995-2011
<b>Richard G. Micka</b>	<b>2012-</b>

Rt. Rev. Mgr. Frank A. O'Brien	1913-1921
Most Rev. William F. Murphy	1921-1950
Willis F. Dunbar	1950-1970
John Chavis	1971-1972
Jerry D. Roe	1972-1993
Susanne M. Janis	1993-1997
Mark A. Murray	1997-2001
Thomas R. Truscott	2001-2005
Thomas M. Farrell	2005-2011*
<b>Kimberly S. Johnson</b>	<b>2012-</b>

Claude H. Van Tyne	1913-1930
Lew Allen Chase	1930-1942
Chester W. Ellison	1942-1960
Charles E. Feinberg	1960-1967
Clint Dunathan	1967-1971
Ann O. Pratt	1971-1975
Alexis A. Praus	1975-1984
Donald M.D. Thurber	1984-1987
Donald F. Wall	1987-1996
William C. Whitbeck	1996-2002
Douglas B. Roberts	2002-2006*
<b>John M. Dempsey</b>	<b>2007-</b>

Edwin O. Wood	1913-1916
William L. Clements	1916-1934
Charles A. Sink	1934-1948
Prentiss M. Brown	1948-1965
Hudson Mead	1965-1978
John J. Collins	1978-1991
Ann Preston Koeze	1991-1999
Marge M. Greiner	1999-2003
Steven K. Hamp	2003-2007*
James A. McConnell	2007-2011
<b>Brian James Egen</b>	<b>2011-</b>

<b>Historical Society of Michigan</b>	
Edward D. Surovell	2005-2012*
<b>Larry J. Wagenaar</b>	<b>2012 -</b>

**Senate Majority Leader**

Michael W. Ranville	2005-2008
<b>Thomas R. Truscott</b>	<b>2009-</b>

**Speaker of the House**

Thomas R. Truscott	2005-2008
Lamont Corbin	2009-2011
<b>Joseph S. Calvaruso</b>	<b>2011-</b>

\*Attorney General Opinion No. 7178, issued on August 2, 2005, determined that the length of gubernatorial commission terms became four years after passage of 2001 PA 66. Until this determination, appointments were made with some uncertainty (e.g., the initial appointment letter of Edward D. Surovell was “for a term commencing January 12, 2005. In the event it is determined that Michigan law authorizes Mr. Surovell to serve a four-year term, he is appointed for a term expiring on May 21, 2008. In the event it is determined that Michigan law authorizes Mr. Surovell to serve a six-year term, he is appointed for a term expiring on May 21, 2010.”)

## A HUNDRED YEARS AGO

- January:** The Holly Hotel fire ~ Post Office begins parcel post deliveries ~ Richard Milhous Nixon is born ~ Delta Sigma Theta, the world's largest Black Women's Sorority, is formed ~ National Woman's Party forms
- February:** 16<sup>th</sup> Amendment authorizing the federal income tax is ratified ~ First prize inserted into a Cracker Jack box ~ James Riddle ("Jimmy") Hoffa is born ~ New York's Grand Central Terminal opens ~ N.Y. Giants football team signs Jim Thorpe
- March:** Woodrow Wilson inaugurated as 28<sup>th</sup> President of the United States ~ Araminta Harriet Ross ("Harriet Tubman") dies ~ John Pierpont ("J.P.") Morgan dies ~ Quebec Bulldogs defeat Sydney Millionaires for the Stanley Cup
- April:** 17<sup>th</sup> Amendment, requiring direct election of U.S. senators, is ratified ~ Gideon Sundback of Sweden patents the zipper ~ McKinley Morganfield ("Muddy Waters") and Oleg Cassini are born
- May:** Michigan Historical Commission created by Public Act 271 ~ State accepts 14,000 acres to found Camp Grayling ~ British House of Commons rejects women's right to vote ~ Pierino Roland Como ("Perry Como") is born
- June:** American Civil War veterans begin arriving at the Great Gettysburg Reunion ~ Vincent Thomas ("Vince") Lombardi and Babe Didrikson are born
- July:** United States beats British Isles to take 12<sup>th</sup> Davis Cup ~ Gerald Rudolph ("Jerry") Ford and Richard Bernard ("Red") Skelton are born
- August:** Michigan legislature enacts standards of purity for food and drugs ~ Harry Brearley invents stainless steel ~ Menachem Begin and Walt Kelly are born
- September:** Lincoln Highway opens as first paved coast-to-coast highway ~ Paul William ("Bear") Bryant is born ~ The Association for Study of Negro Life & History organizes
- October:** Federal Income Tax Act signed into law (at 1%) ~ Atlantic and Pacific waters mix, completing the Panama Canal
- November:** Storm sinks dozens of ships, 8 ore carriers, on the Great Lakes ~ Albert Camus is born
- December:** 73 people die at the Italian Hall in Calumet during copper strike ~ Ford Motor Company institutes continuous moving assembly line ~ First drive-up gasoline station opens ~ Aaron Montgomery Ward dies





