

Michigan Historical Commission Meeting Minutes

September 3, 2020

Michigan History Center

Commissioners in attendance (all by Zoom): Laura Ashlee, Joe Calvaruso, Timothy Chester, Brian James Egen, Delia Fernandez, Eric Hemenway, Robin Terry, Tom Truscott and Larry Wagenaar.

Staff (all by Zoom): Sandra Clark, Michelle Davis, and Heather Lehman.

Guests (by Zoom): Nina Craig

President Egen called the meeting to order at 10:02 a.m. Commissioner Wagenaar hosted the meeting using the online facilities of the Historical Society of Michigan.

Egen welcomed newly appointed commissioner Robin Terry. Terry stated that she is excited to join the commission and to be a part of its mission. She noted her family's background in the history field, including her aunt Esther Gordy Edwards' service as a commissioner. Her current role in the family's foundation and the Motown Museum expansion project are preservation and history focused. Brief introductions were provided by each commissioner and staff member in attendance.

Approval of Agenda: Wagenaar moved to approve the agenda with two additions to Item IX Business Updates: Phil Porter Resolution and Lewis Cass Statue; the motion was seconded by Truscott and was unanimously adopted.

Approval of Meeting Minutes: Chester moved to approve the June 11, 2020, meeting minutes as amended; the motion was seconded by Truscott and was unanimously adopted.

Egen noted that several commissioners have expressed interest in becoming more involved with the marker committee. The suggestion was made to have the marker committee become a "committee of the whole." Marker committee members will research and discuss options, but all decisions will be made at a regular, public commission meeting.

Marker Project – Ashlee presented the proposed next steps for the marker project. The goal is to assemble sufficient representative information to demonstrate the need for the project and estimate the resources needed to complete it. She requested commissioner assistance in Kent county and Lansing to verify the physical location, assess the physical condition of the marker and take photographs. Center staff will do the same for Delta and Crawford Counties. All commissioners were invited to review the existing texts for these markers through a social justice lens and with an eye to the availability of new historical research and information. Wagenaar and Chester agreed to survey Kent County and Ashlee agreed to head up the Lansing effort and Truscott stated he would be willing to help. Staff will work out a process and procedure to move forward with these next steps. Wagenaar moved to adopt the proposed next steps; the motion was seconded by Chester and was unanimously adopted. (Appendix A)

Marker Program

- **Move to Artifact Status – Italian Hall, Houghton County, Calumet, Site No. L1337** – At the February 13, 2020, commission meeting, the artifact status request was tabled and the commission asked for more detail on how the old marker will be used to convey changes in historical research and knowledge over time, and the continuing controversy regarding the Italian Hall tragedy. The commission asked for a rough sketch of the proposed display of the marker showing the position of any labels and related images and artifacts, as well as the draft text for any labels. Additional information was submitted in July 2020. After discussion, Wagenaar moved to have Clark revise panel four to meet the concerns of the commission; the motion was seconded by Ashlee. After further discussion, Wagenaar withdrew his motion. Wagenaar then moved to have Clark work with the museum to ensure that the proposed display makes clear the changes that required the removal of the marker from its original site as defined in the policy to move a historical marker to artifact status; the motion was seconded by Ashlee and passed eight to one.
- **Move Request – Village of Warren, Macomb County, Warren, Site No. L833** – The marker has been refinished, and the sponsor requested permission to erect the refinished marker in a new location. The marker will remain near the intersection of Chicago and Mound Roads, but it will be placed in Beebee’s Corner Park with the GPS coordinates of latitude 42.528372 longitude -83.04815. Chester moved to approve the new location; the motion was seconded by Terry and was unanimously accepted.
- **Conservation Marker – Edith Munger, Muskegon County, Whitehall** – The City of Whitehall, Covell Park, was the agreed upon location for this marker. However, recent issues with high water and flooding have raised concerns with that location. The City of Whitehall recently provided two new location options for consideration by the commission. The commission agreed with the City of Whitehall’s preference for Option Two - Lion’s Park. This location has more trees and provides better exposure to bird populations. Ashlee moved approval of option two; the motion was seconded by Wagenaar and was unanimously accepted.
- **Delisting of State Historic Site** - Clark presented one site to be delisted from the State Register of Historic Sites. Wagenaar moved to approve delisting the site from the State Register of Historic Sites as presented; Ashlee seconded the motion and it was adopted unanimously: (Appendix B)
 - ◆ **Ironwood City Hall, Ironwood, Gogebic County, L399**
- **Approval of Marker Applications** – Written background information was provided for one new marker application. (Appendix C)
 - ◆ **Hezekiah Smith, Ferrysburg, Ottawa County**

Ashlee moved to approve the Hezekiah Smith marker application as presented; the motion was seconded by Wagenaar and was unanimously approved.
- **Approval of Marker Text** – Four new marker texts were presented to the commission for review and approval.
 - ◆ **Warner Homestead, Brighton, Livingston County**

- ◆ **Biddle House/Agatha and Edward Biddle, Mackinac Island, Mackinac County**
- ◆ **Treaty of Washington of 1836/The Indian Agency, Mackinac Island, Mackinac County**
- ◆ **Grand Army of the Republic, Detroit, Wayne County**

Truscott moved to approve the Warner Homestead marker text as amended; the motion was seconded by Chester and was unanimously approved. Wagenaar moved to approve the Biddle House/Agatha and Edward Biddle marker text as amended; the motion was seconded by Truscott and was unanimously approved. Ashlee moved to approve the Treaty of Washington of 1836/The Indian Agency marker text as amended; the motion was seconded by Wagenaar and was unanimously approved. Wagenaar moved to approve the Grand Army of the Republic marker text as amended; the motion was seconded by Ashlee and was unanimously approved.

➤ **Marker Repair Proposal (Appendix D)**

The marker committee distributed the revised marker repair/correction policy prior to the meeting. At its June 11, 2020, meeting, the commission asked the marker committee to explore options that protect marker fund flexibility and allow some funding for general maintenance of existing markers. After discussion, Wagenaar moved to enact the following policy, which would have a start date of October 1 and sunset in three years: allocate 75 percent of the previous year's undesignated marker income plus \$5,000 or the amount in the undesignated portion of the marker fund in excess of \$20,000, whichever amount is smaller, to cover 60% of the repair cost of existing markers, with the understanding that the concerned parties will contribute the remaining 40% prior to submission of a repair order. The motion was seconded by Truscott and was unanimously approved.

➤ **Reports:**

- ◆ The Marker Status report was distributed prior to the meeting. Marker dedications have been postponed because of the coronavirus pandemic.
- ◆ The Marker Fund report was distributed prior to the meeting.

Awards Committee – Egen recommended disbanding the awards committee and suggested that he and staff prepare a summary evaluating past awards programs. The summary will be presented to the commission at a later time. The commission and the committee agreed with this recommendation.

Staff Reports

- **Director's Report** – Clark reported that the Center will not reopen prior to October 31, 2020. Staff continue to work from home with limited time allowed in the office. The center is currently focusing on virtual programming for students and teachers. Since some of the DNR State Parks are opened, the center was able to open the Fayette and Tawas Point stores, and they have started generating revenue.

Clark noted that 16,000 artifact records have been updated since teleworking began, and 1.3 million naturalization records imaged and indexed by Family Search have been prepared for uploading this winter.

The center continues to focus on inclusion and social justice. Clark thanked the commission for taking part in the diversity focus groups. The survey and focus group results were shared with commissioners earlier, and Clark invited anyone with comments or concerns to share them with her. The next step will be working with staff and the consultants on an action plan.

The Grant House has traveled from the former state fairgrounds to Eastern Market and is awaiting reunification of the first and second floors.

Local Historic District Study Committee Reports

The commission was provided two reports by the Local Historic District Study Committee:

- **Higginbotham School, Detroit**
- **Johnson Recreation Center and Joe Louis Playfield, Detroit**

Ashlee noted that Arnold did an excellent job on preparing these reports. Ashlee moved to accept the reports as written; the motion was seconded by Truscott and was unanimously approved.

Business Updates

- **DNR Public Art Proposal** – A written request was received seeking the commission’s opinion on placing a bronze sculpture of a 19th century woman along the Border-to-Border Trail on the eastern shore of Green Lake, within the Waterloo Recreation area. Chester noted that it is difficult to evaluate this request without knowing whether or not the DNR has a policy related to placing public art on state property. Clark stated that no such policy exists. The commission agreed to take no position on the statue, but to recommend that DNR adopt a policy to establish specific standards on how a work of public art may be commissioned. The policy should allow artists across the state to have an opportunity to submit a proposal and then have the selection made by a committee of art and cultural experts and community members. Discussion also noted the difficulty with the proposed name and the suggestion that a single figure could represent both Native and Euro-American people.
- **Phil Porter – Retirement** – Egen recommended that the commission prepare a resolution or tribute of some type for the upcoming retirement of Phil Porter from the Mackinac Island State Parks. Chester moved to have Clark prepare and circulate a resolution for Phil Porter’s retirement; the motion was seconded by Calvaruso and was unanimously approved.
- **Lewis Cass Statue** – The commission received a copy of a letter addressed to Governor Whitmer from Ted Roll, Battlefield Foundation Board of Directors Executive Committee and Tribal Relations Chair, Wyandotte Nation – National Park Compact Project Director, and Grand Chief of the Wyandot of Anderdon Nation. The letter asks that if the state decides to remove either of the Lewis Cass statues that are currently located in the Michigan State Capital and the Washington D.C. National Capital, that consideration be given to relocating one of them in the River Raisin National Battlefield Park Education Center that is scheduled to open in Monroe in late fall 2020, where a Native perspective on Cass could be part of the interpretation. Clark responded to Mr. Roll, that she was not

aware of any plans to remove either Cass statue, but would share his information should she hear of anything.

Public Comments

- Nina Craig – Craig shared that her heritage is Ojibwa, Odawa, Scottish and Swedish. Her family has resided in the Petoskey/Grand Traverse area, as well as parts of the Upper Peninsula. She is researching genealogy and her family history. She would like the commission to consider a historical marker in Nahma, Delta County, recognizing the Native logging community her great grandfather, Peter Moses, operated with his family. The U.S. Forest Service has placed some interpretive signs there. There is an old Indian cemetery still in the area, and this may be a good location for a marker.
- Craig has begun developing relationships in that area and will continue to work with them. Ashlee stated that if there is enough interest in the community for a marker, the next step would be to gather proper documentation, fill out a marker application and find funding for the marker. Clark and Craig noted the research already compiled by the Forest Service. Craig also suggested that the commission have a representative from the Upper Peninsula and encouraged the commission to develop a tribal partnership as well as a relationship with the Michigan Department of Transportation. Egen thanked Craig for her comments.

Commissioner Comments

- Wagenaar reported that the Historical Society of Michigan is preparing to execute its first completely virtual conference. The society continues to push forward while dealing with the budget impacts of the pandemic.
- Hemenway stated that Davis may share his contact information with Nina Craig. He also noted that the current situation is providing more opportunities to impact the community with virtual information.
- Chester commented that he is excited about the marker project and all of the participation from the commission and staff.
- Ashlee, Fernandez, Truscott all shared that they were happy to see everyone and look forward to the exciting things happening with the commission.

On behalf of the commission, Egen thanked Heather Lehman for all of her work with the marker program and wishes her all the best as she moves on to the next stage of her career. Clark stated that Heather has done a phenomenal job and will be missed. This means the search is on to find the next Eastern Michigan University Graduate Intern. Heather leaves behind some big shoes to fill.

Truscott moved to adjourn the meeting; Ashlee seconded the motion and the meeting adjourned at 12:59 p.m.



Sandra S. Clark, Executive Secretary

Michigan Historical Marker Project Proposed Next Steps

We have a good start on the project with the audit of the Mackinac Island and Great Lakes markers, the replacement of one of the island markers, and texts underway for several others.

Before we start seeking funding for the full statewide project, we need to do a broader assessment of the current situation. The goal of our proposed action steps is to identify the scope of the work to be done, find illustrations of the work, and estimate the time it will take to do the work. To accomplish that, we propose doing an audit of the markers in the following locations:

- Kent County: an urban Lower Peninsula county (Commissioner Chester has volunteered to lead this)
- Lansing: one of the four Michigan cities in which the W.K. Kellogg Foundation is funding “Truth and Racial Healing” projects (Lansing staff have some connections with people involved in the Kellogg project)
- Crawford County: a rural northern Lower Peninsula county where the center has one staff member
- Delta County: a rural Upper Peninsula county where the center has area staff not too far away and some other connections

Combined with the Mackinac Island audit this formative evaluation information will allow us to “size the box”—describe what and how big the challenge is and what it will take to meet it. It will also give us some specific examples.

The audit will include the following steps. We hope it can be completed over the next three months.

- Michelle—provide commissioners with lists of markers with their location and text.
- Individuals visit and verify the physical location, assess the physical condition of the marker, and take pictures of the marker.
- Multiple commissioners assess the content of the text for
 - Places where new research and knowledge has changed or enlarged the story
 - Inclusion and equity
 - Outdated language
- Check with local historians if known
- Preliminary gap analysis of what stories are missing from the area’s outdoor public history (a community may have its own markers, for example, that cover some topics well)

The envisioned community work will not be done until the funded phase.

Some other information: Of the approximately 1,700 Michigan Historical Markers in the state, 79 have been tagged as telling African American stories and 45 as associated with Native American stories.

Possible steps toward successful fundraising include looking at IMLS and NEH opportunities for public programming in the humanities, seeking Michigan Humanities Council support, reconnecting with the Michigan Council of Foundations, and connecting with the Kutsche Center at Grand Valley and the SE Michigan Community Foundation.

Delisting Items from the State Register of Historic Sites

The Michigan Historical Commission is charged with maintaining the State Register of Historic Sites. When a historic structure is destroyed or so altered as to remove its historic significance, we require, by law, that the marker be removed. In most cases, the State Register listing should also be removed at that time.

At this time, we propose that the following site(s) be delisted from the State Register of Historic Sites:

Site No.	Date Listed	Name	Location	Reason for Delisting
L399	1975	Ironwood City Hall	Ironwood, Gogebic County	Structure demolished; marker needs to be salvaged.

Hezekiah Smith

Applicant: Rebecca Hopp

Location Address: 168 Avenue and West Spring Lake Rd, Ferrysburg, Ottawa.

Requested Marker Type: Small, different text on either side

Hezekiah G. Smith was a successful Black Michigan farmer. He was born in Steubenville, Ohio, in 1816. He and his wife, Lucinda, moved to Spring Lake Township, Michigan, in the 1840s. Hezekiah began purchasing land along Spring Lake in 1849, and by 1884 he had amassed more than five hundred acres. The area became known as Smith's Bayou during this time and has retained the name ever since. Hezekiah owned more than twenty acres of apple and peach orchards on his property by 1866. Michigan's State Board of Agriculture and Horticultural Society praised his well-known fruit business.

Hezekiah was a civic leader at both state and local levels. In 1860 he was president of the Colored People's Convention of Muskegon and Ottawa Counties. He was elected as a delegate to the 1860 state Colored Convention and "pledged himself to do all in his power to secure for them the right of suffrage." He was also part of a delegation to an equal rights convention in Grand Rapids in 1894. Hezekiah died in 1896.

Recommendation: Approval

Proposed Marker Location: 



Michigan Historical Marker Repair/Correction Program

NEED FOR REPAIR ASSISTANCE

Michigan Historical Markers belong to the State of Michigan, but currently, the state leaves it up to the public to shoulder the costs of repairing the markers and/or revising outdated or erroneous content. This is awkward from a public relations angle, and it appears to constitute poor stewardship of state-owned property. In the case of many historical markers, organizations and individuals raised the necessary funds long ago to make the initial donation of the application fee and the cost of the marker with additional fees paid at the time the marker is ordered. Often these groups banded together specifically for the sole purpose to erect a marker but disbanded once the cost goal had been raised and the State of Michigan ordered the marker. No funds have, therefore, been reserved locally for marker repair and/or alterations.

In the belief that the state should take some responsibility for the property it owns when it is approached by citizen groups requesting refurbishment, change and/or an update or revision in content, this proposed policy attempts to bridge the gap between limited existing resources and requests for financial assistance by the public. It provides a procedure for responding to public requests for assistance, and a mechanism for providing partial financial aid while maintaining a healthy balance in the Marker Fund for emergencies or special projects.

The Michigan Historical Commission's ad-hoc marker committee recognizes that this proposal is a stop-gap measure that solely addresses consideration of financial aid when the need is documented and requested by citizen groups. It does not and cannot cover the larger costs of the proactive work that will be generated by the Michigan Historical Commission's more comprehensive marker review project initiated in 2019. Those funds will need to be generated through a development campaign and other fund raising.

As of June 11, 2020, the Marker Fund contained undesignated funds totaling \$75,982.60. The commission draws upon this balance for special projects or needs as they arise. For instance, it has recently approved the allocation of \$10,000 for "research to locate nontraditional sources for church history" and up to \$4,000 for Heather's summer salary. That leaves a balance of approximately \$60,000 in undesignated marker funds.

The average annual income in the Marker Fund 2017-2019 was \$11,622 in undesignated funds.

PROPOSAL

At the June 11, 2020, meeting the marker committee proposed that the commission annually set aside some funds for refinishing of deteriorated markers and/or adjusting and updating content based upon new research as requested by citizen groups. The committee initially recommended that \$15,000 from the Marker Fund be set aside to pay for the full cost of maintenance or replacement upon request by the public. Concerned about the rapid depletion of the Marker Fund, the commission asked the marker committee to explore other options and propose a plan that would liberally protect marker fund flexibility and solvency while allowing some funds to be used annually for general maintenance or content revision of existing markers when generated by public request.

MARKER FUND INCOME

The marker fund's incoming revenue is generated from application fees of \$250 paid by each applicant as well as "mark-up" fees above base costs that are paid when an applicant submits their fee to pay for a marker. These revenues range from \$190 added to the price of a small wall-mounted marker to \$780 added to the price of a small marker with the same text on both sides. Applicants pay on average \$750 in fees and costs above the base price of the marker.

RECOMMENDED FORMULA FOR AN ANNUAL SET ASIDE

Following the close of each fiscal year, the Michigan Historical Commission will review the previous year's financial accounts for the Marker Fund, recording the new income total in undesignated funds. The marker committee proposes the following:

Allocate 75 percent of the previous year's income plus \$5,000 or the amount in excess of \$20,000, whichever amount is smaller

The attached table and the examples below illustrate how the formula would work.

Scenario 1

Previous year's revenue = \$10,000

Balance in Marker Fund \$60,000

Amount exceeding \$20,000 = \$40,000

75 percent allocation = \$7,500

Additional allocation = \$5,000 (\$5,000 is less than the amount exceeding \$20,000)

Total allocation for repairs: \$7,500 + \$5,000 = \$12,500

Scenario 2

Previous year's revenue = \$10,000

Balance in Marker Fund \$22,000

Amount exceeding \$20,000 = \$2,000

75 percent allocation = \$7,500

Additional allocation = \$2,500 (The amount exceeding \$20,000 is less than \$5,000)

Total allocation for repairs: \$7,500 + \$2,500 = \$9,500

Scenario 3

Previous year's revenue = \$10,000
Balance in Marker Fund = \$18,000
Amount exceeding \$20,000 = \$0
75 percent allocation = \$7,500
Additional allocation = \$0
Total allocation for repairs: \$7,500

The marker committee does not recommend setting this allocation up as a separate account within the existing account, so that "repair" funds accumulate if not spent. The funds will not disappear, and the life of the effort will be extended.

USE OF FUNDS

The marker committee recommends that the Commission partially support public requests for assistance, while asking the property owner or concerned citizens or organization to donate the remainder. The cost would be paid to the state thus enabling the interested parties to donate the funds with available tax benefits applying.

The marker committee proposes that the Center use the annual allocation to pay 60 percent of the cost and that the concerned parties donate 40 percent of the cost. The Center contributing slightly more than the public acknowledges the state's ownership of the markers.

Example:

Refinishing of a large marker and the purchase of two replacement posts = \$1,980.
State's share = \$1,188
Public share = \$792

The marker committee unanimously supports this proposal and seeks the commission's adoption of it as policy.