

# Michigan Historical Commission Meeting Minutes

April 11, 2024

Michigan History Center  
Board Room

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

**Excused Absence:** Laura Ashlee

**Staff:** Sandra Clark, Michelle Davis, Andrew Oswald, and Shelby Laupp.

**Public:** Chris Fobbe (Owosso-via Zoom), Richard Bowman (Nature Conservancy, Director of Policy).

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

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

**Approval of Meeting Minutes:** Chester moved to approve the February 8, 2024, meeting minutes as presented; the motion was seconded by Calvaruso and was unanimously adopted.

**Introduction of New Staff** – Clark introduced Shelby Laupp, the center's new communications coordinator, who came to the center from the Historical Society of Michigan. Laupp will be doing the website, the monthly newsletter and managing the center's social media.

The center also welcomed three archaeology staff members: Dr. Jeff Chivis, Luke Pickrahn, and Christine Stephenson. Chivis obtained his PHD from Michigan State University and is a member of the Nottawaseppi Huron tribe. Pickrahn started out his career as an intern with the State Historic Preservation Office, earned his degree from Wayne State University, and returned to Michigan from Delaware. Stephenson came to us from the Michigan Department of Transportation. Clark will introduce them at a future meeting.

Clark also noted that Representative Brixie asked the center to testify at the appropriations subcommittee regarding how the money appropriated for archaeology and cultural management is being used. It went well.

## Local Historic District Committee Report

- **Eureka Fruit Farm, Rochester Hills Historic District, Oakland County**
- **Roethke Homes Historic District, Saginaw, Saginaw County**

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

## Michigan Historical Marker Program

- **Public Comments on Marker Topics** – no public comments were provided.

- **Update on Marker Process** – Clark recommended the following update to the historical marker application process (Attachment A):

Two marker evaluation periods per year beginning with October 15, 2024, and then May 15 and October 15 for each year thereafter.

Applications will be reviewed during the four weeks that follow each of those dates. For those applications that require additional information, they will be returned to the sponsor with an explanation of what is needed and will have one year to submit a completed application prior to one of the next two submission dates. For those applications not completed by the second date, the application fee will be refunded, and the file will be closed. Applications that are primarily complete will move to the next stage of the application process. A synopsis will be prepared in the 60 days following the evaluation period. The synopsis will be submitted to the Michigan Historical Commission for consideration of eligibility. The sponsor will receive a determination communication once the synopsis is reviewed by the commission.

A marker text will be drafted by Michigan History Center staff. Staff will consult with the applicant and seek review and approval prior to presentation to the Michigan Historical Commission.

Wagenaar moved to approve the internal marker evaluation process recommended by Clark; the motion was seconded by Calvaruso and was unanimously approved.

Wagenaar asked if this change will impact the business of the commission and could it result in fewer commission meetings needed each year. Clark did not think the changes would have a large impact on the commission's current role/involvement in the marker process. However, it may result in some meetings having more synopsis to review and other meetings having more marker texts to review. She indicated that streamlining the marker process may result in the commission having more time to focus on other advisory roles.

- **Possible Revision - Hull's Trace (S725), Wayne County, Brownstown Charter Township** – Clark stated that research done by the National Park Service at River Raisin National Battlefield Park has convincingly demonstrated that the site of corduroy road logs identified as the route used by Hull during the War of 1812 is the site of the relocation of the road called Hull's Trace around 1824. The relocation moved the new road about 300 feet west of the original one. There is a marker on the corduroy road site, and the site is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The site is still significant, but the marker text is inaccurate. Staff met with State Historic Preservation Office staff, who are planning to remove the National Register designation and hope to replace it with a larger one that would include the sites of both roads. Staff propose revising the marker text to reflect the new information and continue to tell the story of Hull's Trace in the War of 1812 and the evidence of the corduroy road. Wagenaar moved to use undesignated marker funds to cover the cost of the revised replacement marker; the motion was seconded by Calvaruso and was unanimously approved.

Clark asked if anyone has information regarding a ferry in the Monroe area that was used to assist with the Underground Railroad. Egen said that he would look into this.

- **Approval of Marker Applications** – Written background information was provided for four new marker applications. (Appendix B)
  - ◆ **First Universalist Church, Lansing, Ingham County**
  - ◆ **Bigler Cemetery, Oakland Township, Oakland County**
  - ◆ **Burton Mercy Hospital, Detroit, Wayne County**
  - ◆ **Sweet House, Grand Rapids, Kent County**

Wagenaar moved to approve the First Universalist Church marker application; the motion was seconded by Chester and was unanimously approved.

Wagenaar moved to table the Bigler Cemetery marker application pending additional information that provides a story that meets the commission's focus on significance; the motion was seconded by Calvaruso and was unanimously approved. The commission recommended asking such questions as: Did it impact the local community? Why did it stop taking internments? Are there individuals buried here that contributed significantly to the community's or state's history?

Terry moved to approve the Burton Mercy Hospital marker application; the motion was seconded by Fernandez-Jones and was unanimously approved. The commission recommended asking the sponsor to include a photo of the original hospital on the marker.

Wagenaar moved to approve the Sweet House marker application; the motion was seconded by Calvaruso and was unanimously approved.

The commission recommended revising the Michigan historical marker application cemetery supplemental form and creating a form to assist sponsor's applying for markers related to a church. The intent of each form would be to ask specific questions that help a sponsor identify significant stories that link it to broader historical themes. Staff will work on the forms for review at a future commission meeting.

- **Approval of Marker Texts** – Draft marker texts were provided for the following four markers:
  - ◆ **Burnett's Post S234, St. Joseph, Berrien County**
  - ◆ **Union Depot L2141, Lansing, Ingham County**
  - ◆ **Holland Harbor/Holland Harbor Lighthouse L394, Holland, Ottawa County**
  - ◆ **Early Michigan Coal L1470, Caledonia Township, Shiawassee County**

Calvaruso moved to approve the Burnett's Post revised marker text as amended; the motion was seconded by Terry and was unanimously approved.

Chester moved to approve the Union Depot revised marker text as amended; the motion was seconded by Calvaruso and was unanimously approved.

Wagenaar moved to table the revised Holland Harbor/Holland Harbor Lighthouse marker to allow time to create a more comprehensive rewrite; the motion was seconded by Fernandez-Jones and was unanimously approved. Of concern was the lack of inclusion of the Native American story. Hemenway agreed to work with staff on the marker.

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

➤ **Reports**

- ◆ The Marker Status report was distributed prior to the meeting.
- ◆ The Marker Fund report was distributed prior to the meeting.

**Detroit Markers**

- **Review Project** – Clark stated the Detroit marker project has encountered an issue related to the signing of documents that the City of Detroit requires to place a marker in the parks it manages. Clark stated that according to the Michigan Constitution, the State of Michigan cannot indemnify another party. Terry agreed to provide a couple of names in City of Detroit government who might help with this.

Clark noted that because the community engagement manager position was not filled, additional help with the Detroit marker project is still pending. Clark intends to hire a one-year limited term person to help with the Detroit markers and to assist with history in parks.

- **Olympia Development of Michigan** – Clark stated that Olympia has issued a request for proposals to look at a designated area and recommend community heritage recognition, including markers.

**June joint meeting with the Michigan History Foundation – Agenda and Program Ideas –**

Clark indicated the meeting will include staff sharing ideas on future directions and invite commission and foundation participation in evaluating project ideas. This will help develop foundation and center Strategic planning. Clark noted that the Foundation has agreed to assist Archives with its needs, and she believes it is important to continue that relationship.

Chester reminded the commission that the Executive Director, Erin Burns, resigned in December 2023. The foundation evaluated the duties of that position and agreed to fill it as a part-time Development Director.

**Director's Report** – The report was distributed prior to the meeting.

- **Grant House** - Clark stated the request for bids for architectural work are out. The house is in poor condition, and it needs a great deal of work. Tobi Voigt continues to work with the Black Bottom Archives group. The center's next special exhibit will feature a portion of the Black Bottom Street View exhibit and other Michigan freeway projects that ran through Black neighborhoods.
- **Heart of the Great Turtle Island** – Clark noted that on April 29, 2024, there will be a blessing of the grounds. The sewage disposal portion of the project has started, and the bid documents will be released in May.

- The Capital Committee is proposing putting a park Allegan Street where there are currently state parking lots.
- The Nature Conservancy has facilitated the acquisition of a large piece of land on the Keweenaw Peninsula, some of which will be purchased by the DNR. The DNR is interested in creating a Copper Country National Heritage Area. Clark is working with other DNR staff on a feasibility study.

### **Business Updates**

- Mackinac Island Commission Meeting – The dates have been confirmed for August 21-24, 2024, with the meeting scheduled for Thursday, August 22, 2024. Commissioners should submit agenda ideas for the meeting to Davis.
- Nomination of Officers for June Meeting – Egen reminded the nominating committee that the election of officers will take place at the June meeting.

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

### **Commissioner Comments**

- Egen thanked Terry for her time serving on the commission. He also invited everyone to the River Raisin Legacy Outreach Premiere event scheduled for May 4, 2024, in Monroe.
- Terry expressed her appreciation for the opportunity to serve on this commission, which her grandmother, Esther Gordy Edwards, served on also. She thanked everyone and stated she will be happy to continue being a resource for the commission and the center.
- Wagenaar shared brochures for the Upper Peninsula History Conference, which will be held in Sault Ste. Marie, June 21-23, 2024. The Michigan in Perspective: Local History Conference, held in Detroit, had 650 people in attendance. Hemenway was the breakfast keynote speaker and had a sold-out session. Wagenaar said the America 250 MI committee is working in conjunction with the supporter of creating a park on Allegan Street. The part-time, limited-term position that is allocated to work on the American 250 MI project is being reconfigured. Wagenaar also noted that the Michigan Centennial Farm Association has merged with the HSM Centennial Farm program. HSM plans to relaunch the joint program to celebrate the cultural heritage of the farms that are already certified.
- Chester provided an update on the Fountain Street Church bell tower restoration project he has been coordinating. Approximately two-thirds of the funds have been raised. However, the city of Grand Rapids will not issue the necessary permits to move forward with the bell tower restoration until a separate construction project being done in the center of the city is completed. Chester noted the improved parking situation at the center, but added that the new electronic sign only mentions “library parking” and that seemed to confuse individuals looking for museum parking. He also noted there are a few parking signs blocking the view of the Polaris Ring sculpture.
- Fernandez-Jones shared that she is presenting at the Organization of American Historians 2024 Conference on American History in New Orleans.
- Hemenway said he has been busy doing a lot of public speaking. He remarked that he had a good experience at the Michigan in Perspective: Local History Conference in Detroit. He also reported that the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians were recently awarded a National Endowment for the Humanities grant to support the creation of a traveling educational exhibition on the history of Indian board schools.

Wagenaar apologized for not thinking about the more inclusive story related to the Holland Harbor Lighthouse marker. He also suggested that he and Hemenway should review the Waukazoo Woods historical marker to make sure it also tells an inclusive story as well. Davis will send the text to them for review.

Wagenaar moved to adjourn the meeting; the motion was seconded by Terry; and the meeting adjourned at 12:06 p.m.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sandra S. Clark". The signature is written in black ink on a white background.

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Sandra S. Clark, Executive Secretary

## Michigan Historical Marker Application Process

A few administrative changes are being implemented to streamline the historical marker process.

The first step was to revise the marker application and create a source retrieval workbook to guide individuals in locating sources. The revised application is now available to the public as a fillable PDF. The digital source retrieval workbook has been finalized and is pending production.

The next step is to modify the application process to better predict and manage the workflow. This is the process and language we are suggesting for your comments.

To be considered for the next marker evaluation period, please submit your application by:

October 15

May 15

Applications will be reviewed in the four weeks following the evaluation deadline date.

Applications requiring additional information will be returned to the sponsor with an explanation of what is needed. The sponsor will have one year to submit a complete application prior to one of the next two submission evaluation periods. If a complete application is not received by the second date, the application fee will be refunded, and the file will be closed.

Applications that are primarily complete will move to the next stage of the application process.

For primarily complete applications, a synopsis will be prepared in the 60 days following the evaluation period. The synopsis will be submitted to the Michigan Historical Commission for consideration of eligibility. The sponsor will receive a determination communication once the synopsis is reviewed by the commission.

A marker text will be drafted by Michigan History Center staff. Staff will consult with the applicant and seek review and approval prior to presentation to the Michigan Historical Commission, which makes the final determination of the wording.

Michigan Historical Marker Application Synopses  
Michigan Historical Commission  
April 11, 2024

## First Universalist Church

**Applicant:** Unitarian Universalist Church of Greater Lansing, Ed Busch

**Contact Info:** edbusch@gmail.com, 517-402-4828.

**Location Address:** 5509 S. Pennsylvania Ave. Lansing, 48911.

**Historic Resource(s):** Other: Organization

**Requested Marker Type:** Large, Different Text Each Side

### Historical Summary:

Missionary evangelist John H. Sanford came to Lansing in 1847, the year Lansing became the state capital, and began forming an informal church organization. The Universalist congregation organized on May 9, 1848, and incorporated as the First Universalist Church of Lansing on March 16, 1849. That same year, Sanford began printing a weekly newspaper, *The Primitive Expounder*, that ran through 1852. *The Primitive Expounder* predated *The Lansing State Journal* by six years. Beliefs of the Unitarian Universalist Church include the promotion of religious freedom and a welcoming stance towards diverse beliefs and identities. THE UUCGL is celebrating its 175th anniversary in 2024.

On December 7, 1864, the church ordained Augusta Chapin as their minister. She was the second woman to be ordained as a minister within the Universalist Church in the United States. Chapin was also the first woman to be conferred an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree from Lombard College in 1893.

The congregation initially held its services in the chambers of Lansing's first capital building and Lansing School House #4. Its first dedicated church opened in 1863 and was located at the corner of Allegan and Grand River. The structure housed the city's first pipe organ. The congregation was gifted a new church site in 1895 from Sarah Van Der Vort Emery, a suffragist, writer, and member of the church.

The Lansing Universalists and Unitarian Fellowship of East Lansing voted to merge in 1957, becoming the Universalist-Unitarian Church of Greater Lansing. The name was changed to the Unitarian Universalist Church of Greater Lansing (UUCGL) in 1961. The congregation purchased a former fraternity house in East Lansing in 1971. It worshiped out of this building until 2015, when the current building was purchased. The church dedicated the building on October 2, 2016.

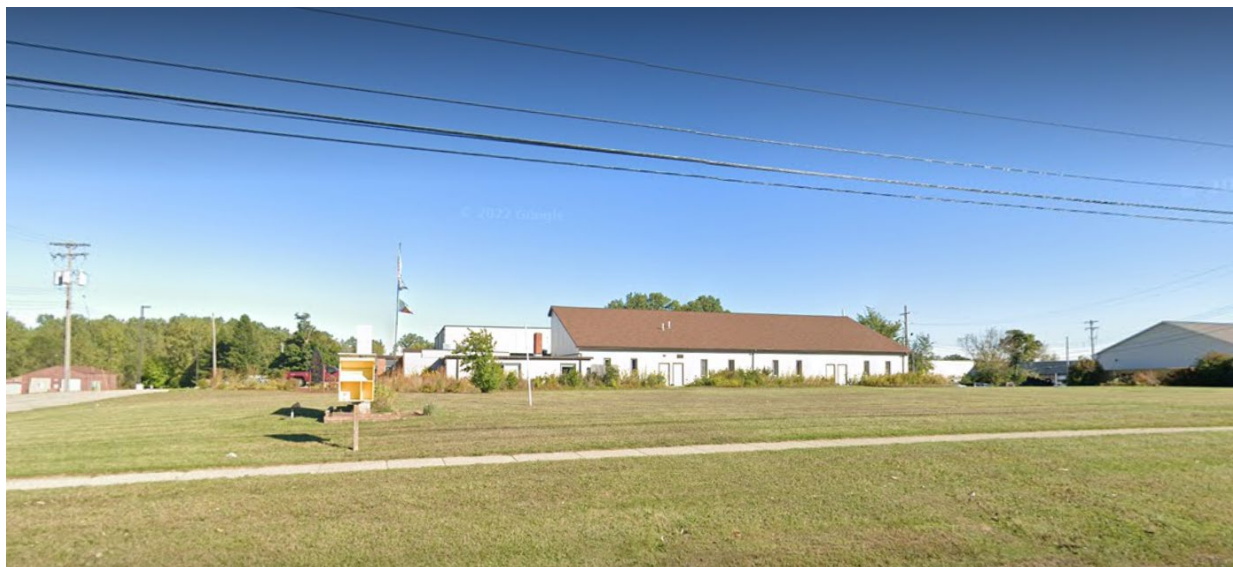
The Unitarian-Universalist Church of Greater Lansing has been a local social justice leader since its founding. The congregation supported anti-slavery work before the Civil War. In the 1960s, members aided in integrating Lansing's public schools. In the 1970s, the church hosted the Lansing Area AIDS Network and the Peace Education Center. In the 1990s and 2000s it was a part of the Lansing Area Rotating Shelter (LARS) that helped provide lodging for the homeless.

## Historic Integrity

This marker is about the congregation, not the structure it currently occupies.

**Recommendation:** Approval

**Proposed Marker Location:** Near the main drive, along S. Pennsylvania Ave.



-The current structure



First church building 1859



Grove St Building

# Bigler Cemetery

**Applicant:** Barbara Barber

**Contact Info:** 248-608-6807, bbarber@oaklandtownship.org

**Location Address:** Corner of Kern and West Gunn Road, Oakland Township, Oakland Co., 48306.

**Historic Resource(s):** Historic Site/Cemetery

**Requested Marker Type:** Small marker with unspecified text on each side.

## Historical Summary:

Philip Bigler sectioned off a corner of his property as a burial ground in 1825. The first burial conducted was that of his own daughter, Rocksina Bigler, who was born on March 18, 1824 and died on July 29, 1825. Philip Bigler had arrived in Oakland Township in 1825 and purchased five land patents. Bigler served as supervisor, accessor, director of the poor, and director of highways for the county. In 1831 he brought a blooded horse to the township, bringing attention to superior breeding in livestock to the area.

Bigler Cemetery has 209 graves including those of three veterans of the War of 1812 and two veterans of the Civil War. The cemetery is also the final resting place of many of the earliest European settlers of Oakland County.

## Historic Integrity:

The cemetery is inactive and no longer accepting interments. The grounds are well maintained, and many original headstones and monuments remain.

**Recommendation:** Approval

**Proposed Marker Location:** At the front gate of the cemetery along W. Gunn Road.



# Burton Mercy Hospital

**Applicant:** Gail Burton Allen, A Roy Heron

**Contact Info:** royheronmd@heronmedspa.com, 703-629-8996

**Location Address:** 263 Eliot St. Detroit, 48201. Wayne County.

**Historic Resource(s):** Historic Site

**Requested Marker Type:** Large marker with different text on each side.

## Historical Summary:

“I want to give back to the community.” - Dr. DeWitt T. Burton

Black Americans coming to Detroit in search of jobs in the auto industry prior to the Civil Rights Movement were denied care in white hospitals. Dr. Dewitt T. Burton, one of Detroit’s pioneer Black doctors, partnered with Dr. Chester Ames and founded Wayne Diagnostic Hospital in 1939. Wayne Diagnostic, a 27-bed hospital based out of a former mansion, provided medical care for Black Detroiters, jobs for Black interns and physicians, and various training programs.

Following the death of Dr. Ames in 1942, Dr. Burton bought out his interest and acquired two adjacent houses on Eliot Street. Ames and his wife, Alice, expanded the operation to 96 beds and changed the name to Burton Mercy Hospital. The hospital gained full accreditation from the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Hospitals on July 2, 1956.

Outside of his work with Burton Mercy, Dr. Burton became the first Black man in Michigan to win a state-wide election when he was elected to serve on Wayne State University’s Board of Governors in 1959. He served on the board for ten years.

In February 1969, Burton Mercy merged with Boulevard General, Delray General, and Trumbull General to form the Southwest Hospital Corporation. Burton Mercy closed its maternity services on June 1, 1973, having delivered more than 25,000 babies since its opening.

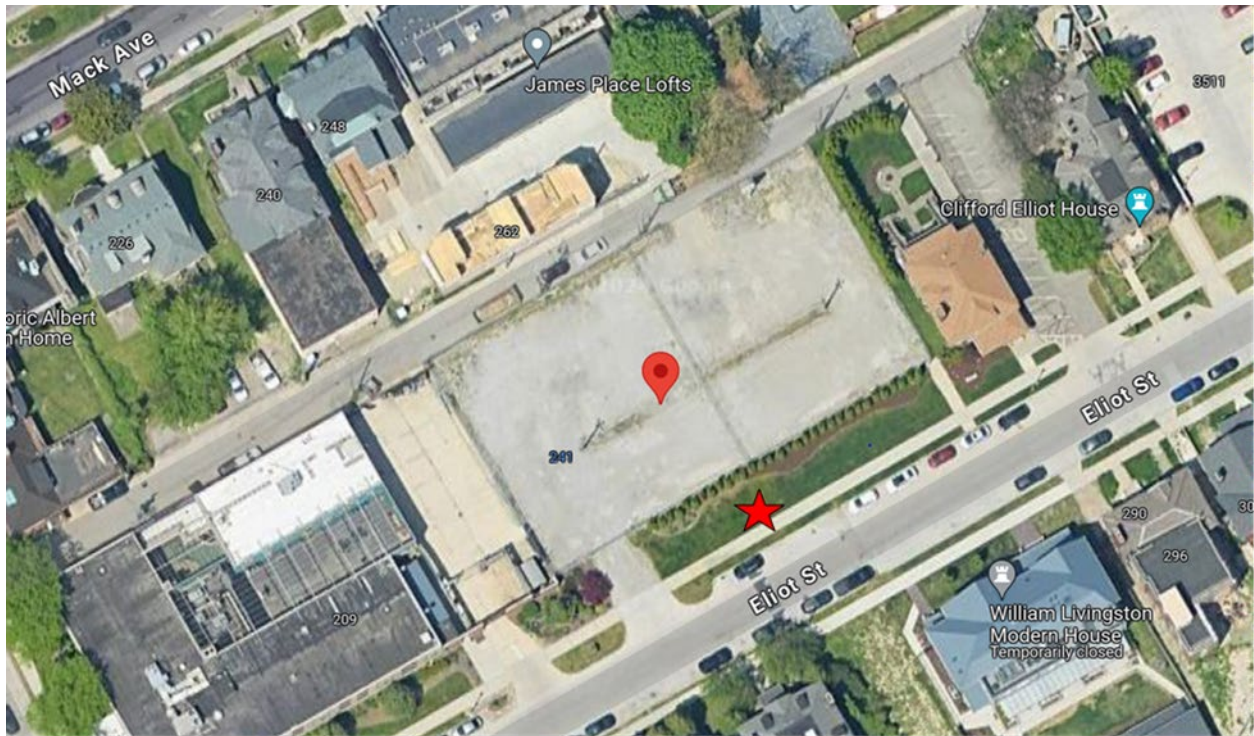
Dr. Burton died on February 16, 1970, and Alice Burton assumed the lead as administrator. The hospital closed its doors in 1974, following the 1973 completion of the 246-bed Southwest Detroit Hospital.

## Historic Integrity:

The structure is no longer standing. This marker is about the story of the hospital and its founders, not the structure.

**Recommendation:** Approval

**Proposed Marker Location:** Adjacent to the parking lot of off Five Mile



Proposed marker location



The former Burton Mercy Hospital

# Sweet House

**Applicant:** The Sweet House Foundation; Sue Pemberton

**Contact Info:** sweethousegr@gmail.com, 616-459-5484

**Location Address:** 254 Fulton St. E, Grand Rapids, MI 49503

**Historic Resources:** Historic Person, Historic Building

**Requested Marker Type:** Small Marker, unspecified text on each side.

## Historical Summary:

This Italianate house was constructed in the early 1860s by local builder Reuben Wheeler for Martin Sweet, his wife Desdemona, and their three children. Sweet came to Grand Rapids in 1846 and purchased a flour mill, becoming one of the area's prominent merchants. Sweet was active in local government, serving on multiple boards, commissions, and councils. He was elected as mayor of Grand Rapids in 1860 and served for one year.

Sweet purchased the failing Daniel Ball Bank in 1861, a decision spurred by the arrival of the railroad in Grand Rapids and the war economy of the Civil War. He was able to turn the bank around with himself acting as president. Sweet funded the construction of the four-story Sweet's Hotel in 1868. He also became an expert in cattle breeding, importing Holstein Fresian cattle from the Netherlands. Sweet died in his home in 1905 on his 86th birthday.

Martin Sweet willed the house to his second wife, Emma, who gave it to her children in 1913. The house was sold to the Baptist Church Society in 1917. Frank and Clara Davis leased the house from 1911-1919. Clara, one of the founders of the St. Cecilia Society, arranged to have concert pianist and director Ottokar Malek run the Malek School of Music out of the house from 1914-1919. In 1920 Malek became the first director of the Grand Rapids Civic Orchestra, which is now the Grand Rapids Symphony.

In 1927 the Women's City Club of Grand Rapids purchased the house for use as its clubhouse. They made extensive renovations, including the addition of an auditorium and a large dining room. The period between the house's use as the Malek School of Music and its 1927 purchase is not well documented. It is likely that it served as a boarding house during this time and fell into disrepair.

The Sweet House is presently operated by the Sweet House Foundation, a non-profit established by the Women's City Club in 2005. It is used as an event venue for weddings, parties, corporate events, and meetings.

**Recommendation:** Approval

**Proposed Marker Location:** The front lawn of the house

