

# Michigan Historical Commission Meeting Minutes

April 25, 2025

Michigan History Center  
Board Room

**Commissioners in attendance:** Laura Ashlee, Tim Chester, Brian Egen, Delia Fernandez-Jones, Leslie Pielack, and Larry Wagenaar.

**Excused Absence:** Joe Calvaruso, and Eric Hemenway.

**Staff:** Stephanie Arwady, Sandra Clark, Michelle Davis, Steven Hilberg, and Tobi Voigt.

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

**Introductions:** Leslie Pielack, museum director at the Birmingham Museum, was recently appointed to the commission by the Senate Majority Leader. Pielack shared her experience in humanities, history, historic preservation, and museum work. She noted her familiarity with managing boards and commissions.

Ashlee asked about the legislative appointment process. Pielack said that Senator Mallory McMorrow's office communicated with her about the position opening and she submitted a letter of interest.

Commissioners and staff introduced themselves to Pielack.

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

**Approval of Meeting Minutes:** Chester moved to approve the February 27, 2025, meeting minutes as amended; the motion was seconded by Ashlee and was unanimously adopted.

## Local Historic District Committee Reports

### ➤ **Bearinger Building Historic District, Saginaw County, Saginaw**

Chester moved approval of the draft comments proposed by Ashlee for forwarding to the State Historic Preservation Office; the motion was seconded by Fernandez-Jones and was unanimously accepted.

## Joint Meeting/Programs with the Michigan History Foundation (foundation)

- **Updates** —The joint commission and foundation meeting is scheduled for Thursday, June 12, 2025. The commission will meet from 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. for its official business. The joint commission and foundation meeting will follow in one of the education rooms on the first floor. It will begin with a few staff presentations followed by discussion of development interests and ideas for the America250MI commemoration. Lunch and the Milliken, Adams, Austin, Kelley Award Ceremony will begin at 12:30 p.m. in the Morris Learning Center. The foundation business meeting will begin at 1:30 p.m.

**America250MI** —The center and the Historical Society of Michigan lead the committee for Michigan's Commemoration of the 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. The funds were appropriated as follows: \$3 million for local grants with \$1 million allocated to two legislatively designated projects; \$2 million for state programs with \$1 million of this designated to the center and the Archives of Michigan; \$150,000 may be used for administrative support. There were ninety-three applications received for the first round of grants to help local history organizations fund projects that will make a lasting impact and have long-term effects on a community. There will be a second round of grants in 2026. There is approximately \$700,000 that still needs to be designated for use toward state programs. A successful program might demonstrate the need to have permanent funding for history related grants in the state's future budgets.

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

Clark stated that Director of Archaeology Stacy Tchorzynski was unable to attend the meeting today as planned. Archaeology is helping with the northern Michigan ice storm situation by providing cultural reviews before ground-disturbing clearing happens in the state forests. Archaeology is also part of a large broadband network project that requires reviews before trenching. As a result of the cultural work for this project, a limited term archaeologist position will be funded. Archaeology is also working closely with tribal representatives on renovating the State Archaeology Collection storage room to provide a separate room for Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act materials.

Director of Museums Tobi Voigt stated that the Institute of Museum and Library Studies (IMLS) Sites of Conscience grant was terminated by the federal government. However, Fernandez and Voigt are moving forward with this project. Voigt also noted that the IMLS Michigan Woman's Hall of Fame Cataloging grant that funded a two-year limited term position was terminated. The center will continue to fund this position through at least the end of fiscal year 2025.

Clark shared that on April 17, 2025, construction began on the Gchi Mshiikenh Deh Minising/Heart of the Great Turtle Island project. The center is currently focused on finding ways to regain the loss of nearly \$450,000 in grant funds for this project that was a direct result of the National Endowment for the Humanities grant termination.

- **Grant House** —Tobi Voigt provided an update on the work that is being done with the Grant House. Originally the DNR was provided with an easement for the location where the house currently sits on property owned by the Eastern Market Development Corporation (EMDC). EMDC now wants to give a parcel of approximately .26 acres surrounding the house to the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). A standard property survey and an environmental assessment need to be conducted before the DNR is able to accept the property as a gift. Both are in the process of being contracted for work this spring.

Unanticipated issues have slowed the external rehabilitation project. During the move contractors added structural elements for stabilization that added 14 inches between the first and second floors when the house was put back together. This issue must be resolved

before rehabilitation work can continue. Structural engineers are currently working on a plan and drawings to remove the gap with minimal cost and disturbance.

The Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy notified us that the ground on which the house sits is known to be contaminated. This will be dealt with when the center re-grades the property behind the house to address issues with flooding in its crawl space. Much of the house rehabilitation, including waterproofing the crawl space, cannot be completed until re-grading and remediation is completed.

The center and the nonprofit Black Bottom Archives (BBA) are working on developing a partnership for the house's long-term use. BBA will use the renovated house to operate its mission-focused work and will partner with the center on developing an interpretive plan for the house.

### **Michigan Historical Marker Program**

- **Public Comments on Marker Topics** —No public comments were provided.
- **Delisting of State Register of Historic Sites**
  - ◆ **Sacred Heart Roman Catholic Church (marker title – Sacred Heart Church), L1354A, Macomb County, Roseville**
  - ◆ **Caro Nazarene Church (marker title – Trinity Episcopal Church), Tuscola County, Caro**
  - ◆ **Howarth School, L1059, Oakland County, Pontiac-Orion Township**  
Wagenaar moved to approve delisting the Sacred Heart Roman Catholic Church, Caro Nazarene Church, and Howarth School sites from the State Register of Historic Sites; the motion was seconded by Ashlee and was unanimously approved.
- **Artifact Status Plans**
  - ◆ **Willow Run (1941-1953)/Willow Run (1953-present), S509, Washtenaw County, Belleville**  
Wagenaar moved to approve artifact status for the Willow Run(1941-1953)/Willow Run (1953-present) marker; the motion was seconded by Fernandez-Jones and was unanimously approved.
- **Relocation Request**
  - ◆ **Pier Cove, L1628, Allegan County, Saugatuck**  
Chester moved to approve relocating the Pier Cove marker; the motion was seconded by Ashlee and was unanimously approved. The new location is a very short distance away from the original location.
- **Approval of Marker Applications** —Written background information was provided for three new marker applications. (Appendix A)
  - ◆ **Ironton Ferry, Charlevoix County, Charlevoix**
  - ◆ **Griffey Cottage, Oakland County, Rochester**
  - ◆ **The Great Wooden Railroad Trestle, Newaygo County, White Cloud**

Ashlee moved to approve the Ironton Ferry marker application; the motion was seconded by Fernandez-Jones and was unanimously approved.

Wagenaar moved to approve the Griffey Cottage marker application; the motion was seconded by Fernandez-Jones and was unanimously approved.

Ashlee moved to approve The Great Wooden Railroad Trestle marker application; the motion was seconded by Wagenaar and was unanimously approved. The commission recommended asking the sponsor to have a two-post marker with different text on each side.

- **Detroit Marker Project Update** —A written report was distributed prior to the meeting. Arwady stated that she is working on eleven of the sixteen proposed Detroit markers. One draft text is being presented for the commission’s approval, six have draft text ready for Clark’s review, two are close to being ready to present to the commission, and two are still in the research phase. Davis noted that the Blackburn Escape location was approved, and the marker has been ordered. Arwady reported that Clark and Davis met with the Detroit Parks Coalition (DPC) in February 2025, and the DPC agreed to act as the sponsor for four different markers that the center is hoping to place inside Detroit city parks. This is an important step since the center is unable to sign paperwork required by the City of Detroit. The DPC is made up of a number of community stewardship groups that each focus on a particular city park. The DPC connected Arwady with representatives from those groups who can serve as point people and text reviewers for the markers that will be placed in Clark Park, Bennett Park, and John R. Watson Park.

Clark stated that the William G. Pomeroy Foundation is funding all of these markers. She also noted that the Historic Fort Wayne Burial Mound ownership has been transferred to the Nottawaseppi Huron Band of the Potawatomi. Dr. Jeff Chivis, a staff member at the center, is a member of the tribe and has agreed to work on the marker text regarding this site. Egen shared that the City of Detroit asked the Historic Fort Wayne Coalition to exit the site.

Clark stated that one of the valuable lessons from the Detroit project is to have a confirmed location along with all of the necessary permissions before starting research and writing of the text.

- **Approval of Marker Texts** —Draft marker texts were provided for the following four markers:
  - ◆ **Martin Luther Sweet/The Sweet House, Kent County, Grand Rapids**
  - ◆ **Commerce Settlement/June Byers – Oakland County, Commerce Township**
  - ◆ **Burton Mercy Hospital/Dewitt T. Burton, M.D. – Wayne County, Detroit**
  - ◆ **Gotham Hotel – Wayne County, Gotham Hotel**

Ashlee moved to approve the Martin Luther Sweet/The Sweet House marker text as amended; the motion was seconded by Wagenaar and was unanimously approved.

After discussion, Wagenaar moved to table the Commerce Settlement/June Byers marker text to allow staff additional time for further research and revision; the motion was seconded by Pielack and was unanimously approved.

Wagenaar moved to approve the Burton Mercy Hospital/Dewitt T. Burton, M.D. marker text as amended; the motion was seconded by Chester and was unanimously approved.

Wagenaar moved to approve the Gotham Hotel marker text as amended; the motion was seconded by Fernandez-Jones 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.

**Public Comment** —No public comments were provided.

**Commissioner Comments** —No commissioner comments were provided.

Wagenaar moved to adjourn the meeting; the motion was seconded by Fernandez-Jones; and the meeting adjourned at 12:27 p.m.



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Sandra S. Clark, Executive Secretary

Michigan Historical Marker Application Synopses  
Michigan Historical Commission  
April 25, 2025

## Ironton Ferry

**Applicant:** Robert Goodenough | good4ins@aol.com

**Location Address:** 10122 Ferry Rd. Charlevoix, Charlevoix County

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

**Requested Marker Type:** Two-post marker with different text on each side.

### Criteria:

The Ironton Ferry is associated in a significant way with the establishment and growth of the community of Ironton, Michigan. As a more efficient route, the Ironton Ferry cut the travel distance between Ironton and Boyne City from twenty miles around the south arm of Lake Charlevoix to only 610 feet across the Ironton Narrows to Eveline Township.

### Historical Summary:

The narrows separating the west and south arms of Lake Charlevoix have been a site of crossing for more than 150 years. Accounts say that Odawa people once carried travelers across the narrows in canoes or on rafts. Longtime Charlevoix resident Mrs. Ross Alexander remembered that around 1876, Robert Bedwin, owner of the village store and post office, began to ferry passengers across the lake in a rowboat for five cents a person.

To encourage industry and commerce, the Army Corps of Engineers dredged a series of channels to connect Lake Michigan to Round Lake and Lake Charlevoix in 1872. The channels provided ships with access to industries along Lake Charlevoix. When construction of the Pine Lake Iron Company began in Ironton in the 1880s, Arden Sheldon built a scow to more easily carry goods and materials across the narrows to Ironton from Boyne City. Sheldon and his passengers operated the scow using a hand-powered windlass that dragged it along a half inch cable spanning across the narrows. In 1883 the Charlevoix County supervisors licensed and bonded Henry Sheldon to operate a toll ferry service. In 1885 the state authorized the supervisors to operate the ferry service toll free. The ferry service connected the county road between Ironton and Boyne City that was constructed in 1886.

In 1885 Robert Miller of Eveline Township became the first county-hired ferryman. In 1890 Sam Alexander was appointed highway commissioner of the township. In 1912, he replaced the hand-operated scow with a motorized ferry. Known as the *Eveline*, the new ferry used a two-cylinder steam engine for power as it crossed the narrows along the spanned cable. The arrival of tourists and automobiles in the 1920s resulted in the replacement of the *Eveline* with the present vessel, the *Charlevoix*, in 1926.

The *Charlevoix* is fifty feet long and thirty feet wide. It was built by the Johnson Brothers Inc. in Ferrysburg, Michigan. It is propelled by a two-cylinder diesel engine. The ferry is guided by

two large cables suspended twenty to forty feet underwater. This eliminates the need for a rudder or steering wheel. Over his forty-eight years as Captain, Sam Alexander traveled 30,000 miles within 1,000 feet of his home. He was noted in Ripley's *Believe it or Not* for this accomplishment in 1936.

Historic Integrity:

The 1926 vessel *Charlevoix* is still in use today at its original location. Its cab was rebuilt and moved in 2012.

**Recommendation:** Approval

**Proposed Marker Location:** Off M-66 along Ferry Road.



Figure 1. Location of the marker along Ferry Road.

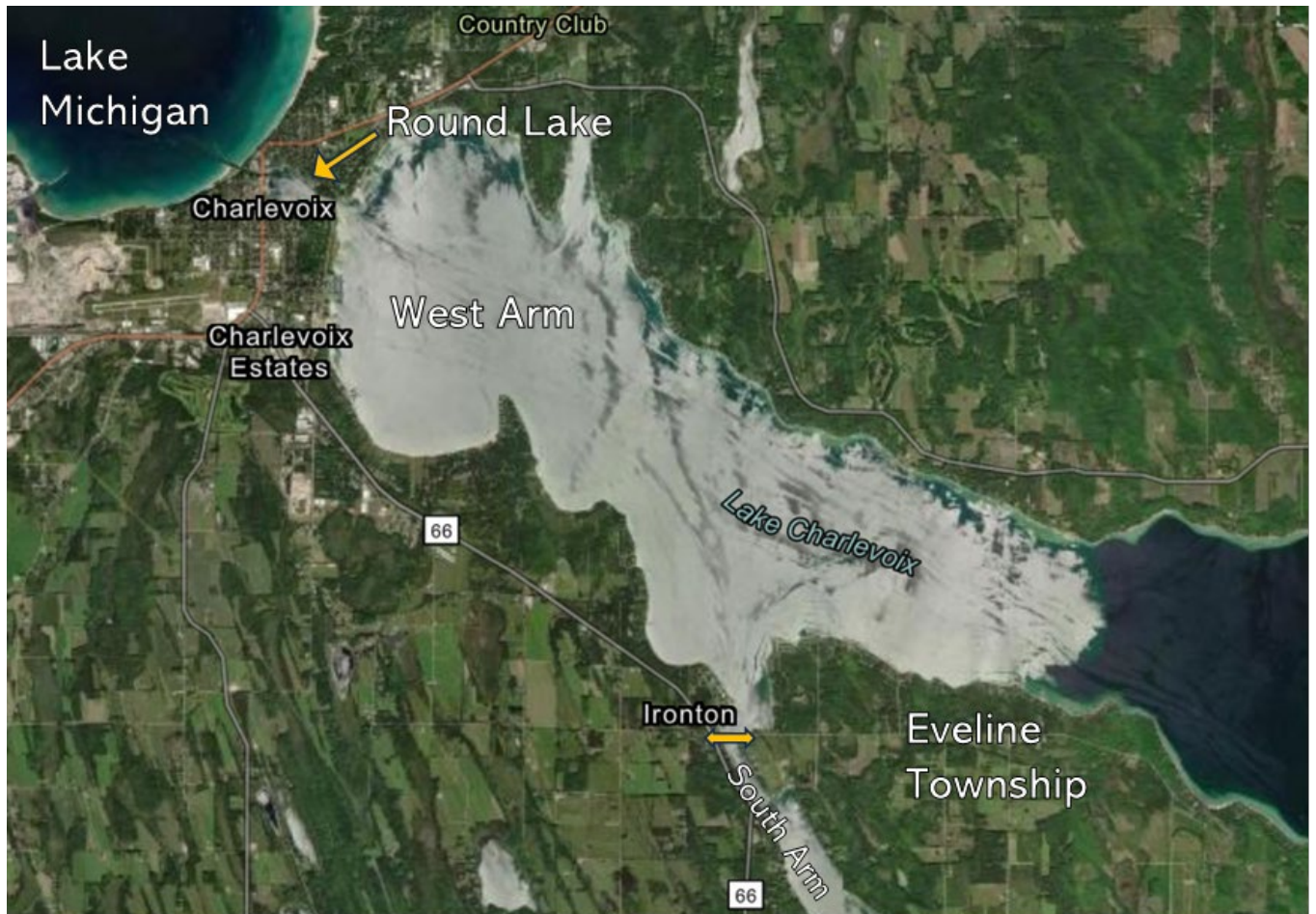


Figure 2. Map of the Lake Charlevoix region. Lake Michigan connects to the smaller Round Lake through the Pine River channel in Charlevoix. Round Lake then connects to the greater Lake Charlevoix. The crossing of the Ironton Ferry between Ironton and Eveline Township is marked.



Figure 3. Photo of Arden Sheldon's 1880 hand-powered scow.



Figure 4. Photo of the 1912 scow, known as *Eveline*.



Figure 5. Photo of the 1926 scow, known as *Charlevoix*, taken in 1938, two years after Capt. Alexander's feature in Ripley's *Believe it or Not*.



Figure 6. Photo of the vessel *Charlevoix* today. It features a rebuilt cab but retains its original 1926 hull.

# Griffey Cottage

**Applicant:** Julia Johnson | johnsonjulia11@gmail.com

**Location Address:** 529 Madison Avenue, Rochester, MI, Oakland County

**Historic Resource(s):** Historic Building/Person

**Requested Marker Type:** Small one post marker with different text on each side.

## Criteria:

The Griffey Cottage is associated in a significant way with the establishment and growth of the community, state, or nation through its connection to Michigan politician Clinton George Griffey. Clinton Griffey is significant to state history as a newspaper publisher, member of the Michigan House of Representatives, and the Michigan Senate. He advocated for the economic development of the Upper Peninsula and later moved to Rochester, Michigan.

## Historical Summary:

Clinton George Griffey (1841-1937) was born in Erie County, Pennsylvania. At age nineteen, Griffey became the publisher of the *Girard Union* newspaper in Girard, Pennsylvania. In 1862, he enlisted in the 15<sup>th</sup> infantry regiment of the Pennsylvania Militia. He married Fannie Maria Palmer that year. In 1864, returning from the war, Griffey sold the *Girard Union* and began working at smaller publications before settling in Negaunee, Michigan.

In 1873, he founded and began publishing the *Negaunee Iron Herald*, one of the earliest weekly newspapers in the Upper Peninsula. He was elected to the Michigan House of Representatives (1879-1880) and the Michigan Senate in (1889-1890). While in the legislature, Griffey represented Marquette County and served on committees concerned with printing and railroads. He supported the development of railroads between Mackinac and Marquette and the electrification of Marquette. He was appointed as the Postmaster of Negaunee by President Grover Cleveland in 1889.

In 1903, Griffey visited his son, Charles Hunt Griffey, in Rochester, Michigan. Surprised by the town, he decided to sell the *Negaunee Iron Herald* and move to Rochester. This is the first of four total buildings that Griffey designed and built on the outskirts of Rochester between 1903 and 1906. He went on to build two cottages on North Pine Street in 1904 before building his own brick residence in 1906. This site marks the starting point of Griffey's life in Rochester.

## Historic Integrity:

The house retains most of its original building materials, including a stone foundation. In 1910, the family built an addition.

**Recommendation:** Approval

**Proposed Marker Location:** In front of the house on Madison Ave.

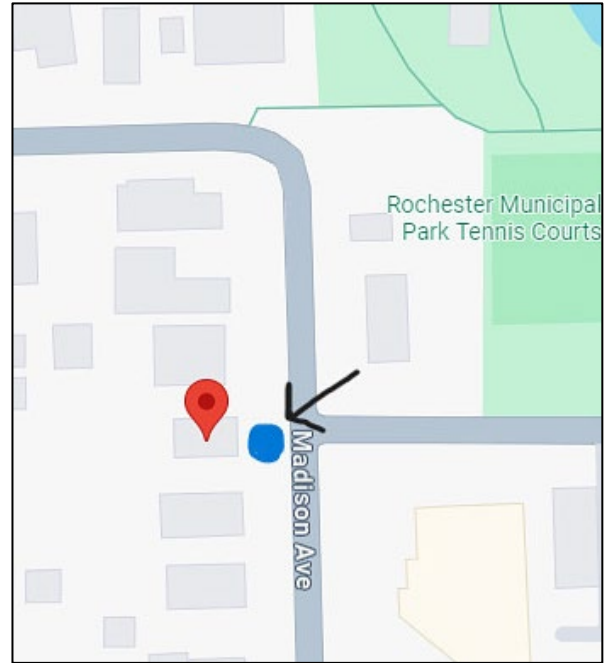


Figure 1. Location of the marker at the intersection of 6<sup>th</sup> Street and Madison Avenue.

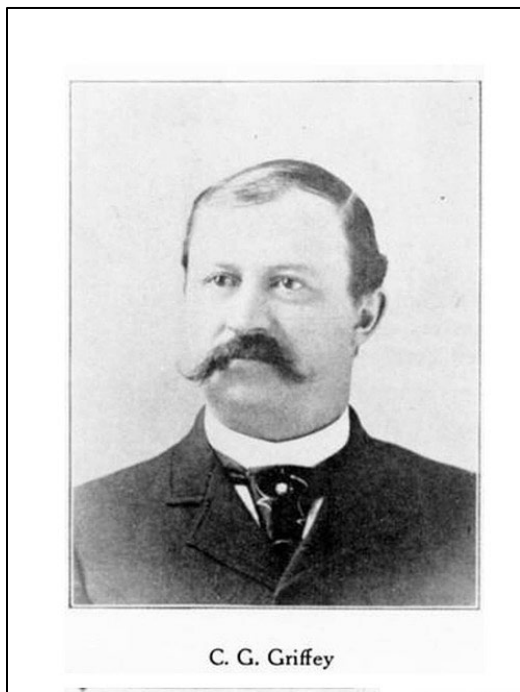


Figure 2. Photo of Clinton G. Griffey, 1907.

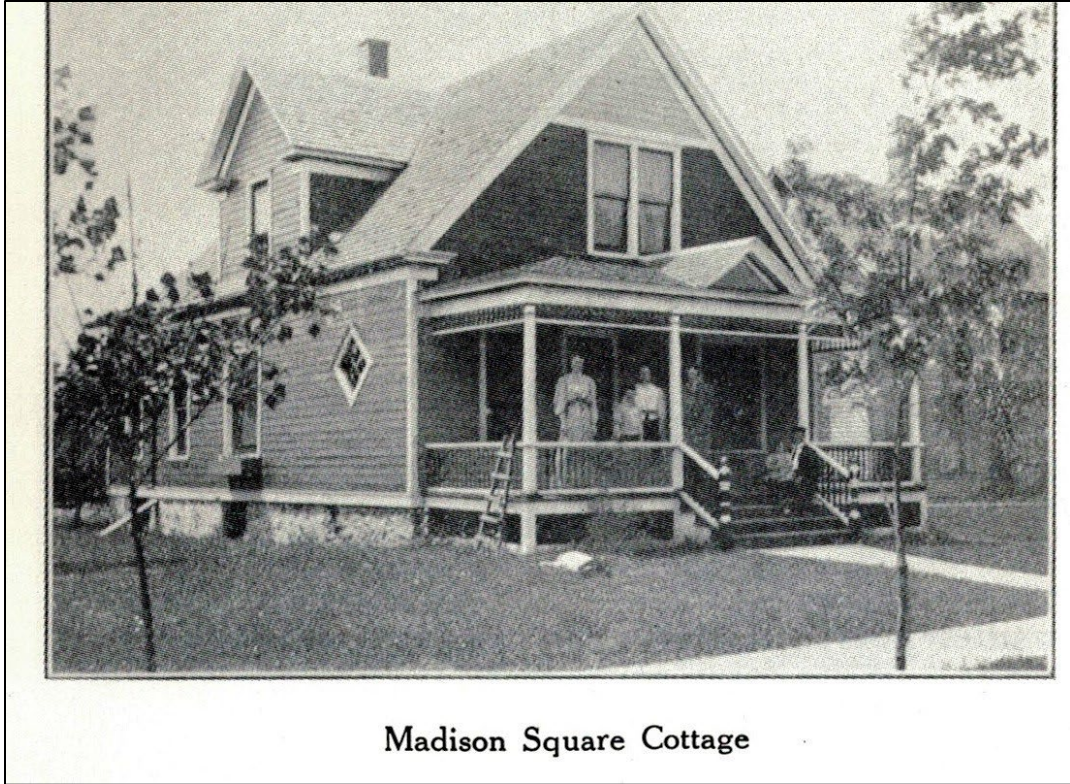


Figure 3. Photo of Griffey Cottage, called Madison Square Cottage after the former Madison Square Avenue, with the family of Charles Griffey on its porch in 1907.



Figure 4. Photo of Griffey Cottage in 2024.



Figure 5. Photo of the 1910 rear addition to Griffey Cottage, 2024.

# The Great Wooden Railroad Trestle

**Applicant:** Amy Stockwell

**Location Address:** 65-15-05-400-03, White Cloud, MI, 49349, Newaygo County

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

**Requested Marker Type:** Large two post marker with same text on each side.

## Criteria:

The Great Wooden Railroad Trestle is associated in a significant way with the growth of Newaygo County and Grand Rapids. It is also associated with a specific style of railroad crossing construction, the wooden trestle style.

## Historical Summary:

The amount of furniture manufacturing companies in Grand Rapids increased from nine to nineteen between 1881 and 1884. The growth of this industry was due in part to the expansion of rail lines south to the city. Recognizing the need for more rapid means of transportation of lumber from Newaygo County to Grand Rapids, David P. Clay (1883-1911) and businessmen from Newaygo formed the Grand Rapids, Newaygo, and Lake Shore Railroad. Construction of a rail line heading north from Grand Rapids began that year. Survey crews laid out the route, followed by a crew removing trees. Another crew constructed grades or removed hills and laid rails. The final crew constructed bridges as needed, including the wooden trestle in White Cloud.

In September 1872, the first train reached Newaygo. Continuing the route north required crossings over the Muskegon and White Rivers. The 178-foot "Great Wooden Railroad Trestle" was constructed over the White River in 1875. It features seventy-eight upright supports tied together with cross beams. The line from Grand Rapids to White Cloud was completed on September 24, 1875. The trestle is still in use by the Chesapeake and Ohio railroad. It is accessible by a trail that leads to the White River from Evergreen Dr. (M-37).

## Historic Integrity:

The trestle features original materials and has not been moved from its original location.

**Recommendation:** Approval

**Proposed Marker Location:** Pull-off along S Evergreen Dr. (trail leads down to river).

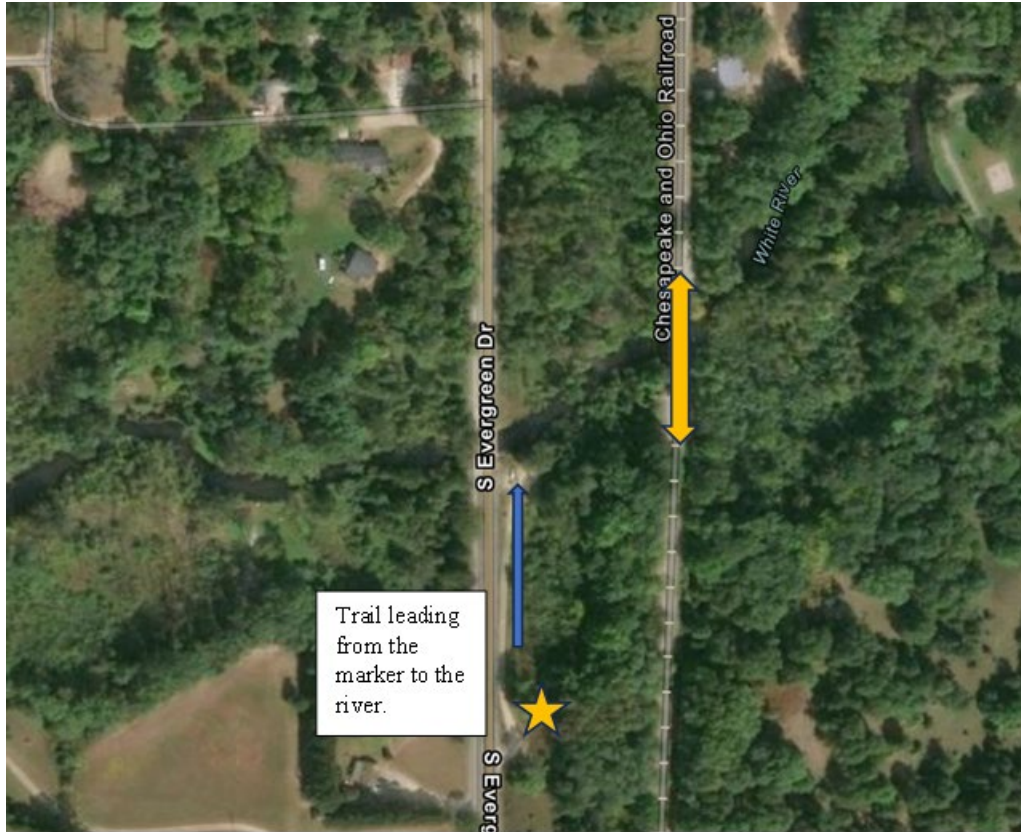


Figure 1. Location of marker along pull-off of M-37.



Figure 2. Image of proposed marker location.



Figure 3. Postcard with the first photograph of the wooden trestle, 1902.



Figure 4. Postcard of passenger train crossing the wooden trestle, n.d. We believe that this image should be included on the marker.



Figure 5. Photograph of the wooden trestle from the access trail, 1999.



Figure 6. View of the wooden trestle from South Evergreen Drive, July 2024.

