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# ALUTE to '76



First Tri-County Historical Convention,  
June 22, 1974

ed Wardowski, Chairman  
ne G. Wanger, Vice Chairman  
eth DeLand, Member  
ard W. Brown, Member



Ford S. Ceasar, Member  
Manuel Delgado, Member  
Mary Jane McGuire, Member  
Richard L. Sode, Member

## INGHAM COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

P.O. BOX 319

MASON, MICHIGAN 48854

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### SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON COUNTY HISTORY

October 17, 1974

To: All Citizens and Historical Organizations of  
Ingham, Eaton and Clinton Counties:

Here are the proceedings of the first Tri-County Historical Convention held on June 22, together with a progress report of many outstanding historical developments in the region since that date.

We hope this information will stimulate and assist everyone in the Tri-County Area in planning appropriate and successful events, programs and projects in observance of our fast-approaching U.S. Bicentennial Year.

As the nationally recognized official Bicentennial organization for Ingham County we look forward with pleasure, not only to our own projects, but to offering practical cooperation and assistance to all other groups and citizens engaged in this exciting work.

Sincerely,

Alfred Wardowski

Alfred Wardowski  
Chairman

AW:W:mt

Alfred Wardowski  
Eugene G. Wanger  
Kenneth DeLand  
Richard W. Brown

## THE CONVENTION

The Ingham County Board of Commissioners' Special Committee on County History and the Historical Society of Greater Lansing, sponsored the first Tri-County Historical Convention, June 22, 1974, at the Wiskemann farm near Lansing.

The sound and sights of a festive day included a cannon salute, flag raising, drum flourishes, whistles from a popcorn machine, a band organ, an auction and a potluck supper.

The meeting was called to order by Eugene G. Wanger, vice chairman of the Ingham Committee and a past president of the Historical Society.

Howard Lancour, chairman of the Michigan Bicentennial Commission, presented a flag bearing the American Revolution Bicentennial logo to Alfred Wardowski, chairman of the special committee. In his remarks, Mr. Lancour said that the Bicentennial has become a people's program, that local projects have become more important in the celebration of the 200th anniversary of the birth of our country.

Historical highlights of the convention were reports by delegates from several history-related organizations. These included: Douglas Carpenter, Clinton County Historical Society; Janet Rohrabacher, Livingston County Historical Society; Ava Kroger, Vermontville Historical Society; Justin Kestenbaum, East Lansing Bicentennial Commission; Florence Hill, Friends of Historical Meridian; Faye Hanson, DeWitt Bicentennial Commission; Ralph Strobels, Saginaw Historical District; Mary McGuire, Alpha Kappa Alpha; Maria Thompson, Weavers Guild of Greater Lansing; Roberta Welfare, Daughters of the American Revolution and Daughters of American Colonists; and Hal Bergen, Operation Bootstrap.

Welcome was extended to all by George Wiskemann. The chairman introduced the following reports:

*Historical Society of Greater Lansing,  
Geneva Kebler Wiskemann, President:*

"The Historical Society of Greater Lansing is collecting funds and composing text for an official State of Michigan site marker honoring Joshua Simmons II, Continental soldier in the American War for Independence who is buried in Clinton County. The Society will continue occasional publication of the TOWN CRIER, a newsletter serving the tri-county area, and offer a calendar for 1975. Member contributions of energy and expertise are anticipated to grow throughout the Bicentennial Decade. Interested individuals are welcome to join in meetings and projects, September-June."



*George and Geneva K. Wiskemann welcome about three hundred participants.*

The Ingham County Board of Commissioners'  
Special Committee on County History,  
Alfred Wardowski, Chairman:

"The Ingham County Special Committee on County History was established in 1971 by appointment of the chairman of the Board of Commissioners, David V. Buhl. Our charge was to have the Ingham County Courthouse placed on the National Register of Historical Sites. Our goal was accomplished that year. In 1972, chairman of the board, Eugene G. Wanger, again appointed a committee to obtain a suitable marker for the Ingham County courthouse. Again, our goal was met. An historical marker was obtained and placed on the courthouse lawn.

"In 1973 and 1974, David C. Hollister, chairman of the board, appointed an expanded historical committee to include a cross section of all groups. The following individuals composed this committee: Al Wardowski, chairman; Eugene G. Wanger, vice chairman; Mary Jane McGuire, Lansing School System; Manuel Delgado, Ingham County Cooperative Extension Service; Ford Ceasar, retired teacher; Richard Brown, publisher of INGHAM COUNTY NEWS; Richard Sode, Ingham County drain commissioner; Janice Beckhorn, Indian Center in Lansing; Kenneth Delong, Indian Center in Lansing. Our charges were: (1) Study and recommend how the county may best participate in the coming U.S. Bicentennial celebration. (2) Try to arrange and promote the writing and publication of a new history of the county. (3) Make a special effort to include all pertinent minority contributions to county history. (4) Help get historic buildings and sites throughout the county properly identified and marked. (5) Recommend historic preservation legislation.

"The history book is progressing so it will be ready for the publisher early next year.

"In the field of legislation, we have asked that a present act allowing cities and villages to form historical commissions be amended so counties could be included. I am happy to report that this has passed the House without a dissenting vote. It is now in the Senate committee and expected to be reported out next week. With this vehicle a permanent commission could be established in the county.

"We are well along on having historical markers made so the buildings and sites can be properly marked.

"We are also working on an official flag for the county.

"Our committee has met regularly and I have never worked with a more dedicated hard-working one. We are sponsoring a booth at the Ingham County Fair which we hope will spark interest in history and promote the sale of the history book.

"Our purpose here is to try and get all interested historical groups together for an interchange of information. I wish to thank everyone on behalf of the Special Committee on County History and hope you have a memorable happy day."

Clinton County Historical Society,  
Douglas Carpenter, President:

"The Clinton County Historical Society, dormant since the turn of the century, has been reactivated. Organizational meetings are now in progress. Plans for the Bicentennial observance include reprinting of the HISTORY OF SHIAWASSEE AND CLINTON COUNTIES, Michigan,...Philadelphia: Ensign & Co., 1880, and area maps. Other activities are dependent on our membership growth."

Livingston County Historical Society,  
Janet Rohrabacher, reporting:

"The Livingston County Historical Society which has over 200 members supports a museum in Howell called the Depot Museum. It was featured recently in a national magazine where it was used for background in photographs of cars. We have several Bicentennial projects planned: (1) The identification and research on an area of historic old homes in Howell. They are to be marked. (2) Placing our county courthouse on Michigan's register of historic sites. (3) The republishing of the HISTORY OF LIVINGSTON COUNTY, published in 1880, and the indexing of this book.

"The Daughters of the American Revolution in this county will locate Revolutionary soldiers' graves.

"There is a Howell Bicentennial Committee. Their approved project is the Fifth Regimental Band. The 120 members wear Civil War period Union soldier costumes. Besides playing, they also march; and have a separate fife and drum corps, banjo section and pantomime dancers.

"Another historical society in our county is the Hartland Historical Society. Their project is to make the whole town of Harland a national historic village.

"We meet, usually at the Howell Township Hall, on the third Wednesday of each month at 7:30 p.m."

Vermontville Historical Society,  
Ada Kroger, reporting:

"The Vermontville Historical Society was organized in 1966 and our purpose is to preserve the historical heritage of our area. We meet six times a year and always have very interesting and appropriate programs. Our primary concern, however, is maintaining a museum which is located in the old Academy built in 1843. The museum is open by appointment and on Saturday afternoons during July and August.

"When the first settlers came in 1836, they chose a village square around which the town was built. The village square can never be used for any purpose except religious, educational or recreational reasons. This square contains the Academy (museum), Congregational Church, Methodist Church and Village Park.

"The Bicentennial Commission of Vermontville has chosen as its project the beautification of the grounds of the village square and the fringe areas. This involves purchase of some property, cleanup, tree planting and general renovation.

"One of the few old opera houses of Michigan is located in Vermontville and the Commission is promoting that restoration work be done to preserve the original flavor of the building.

"The Bicentennial Commission is also working to have some type of a pageant depicting the early settlement of the village.

"We have been recognized as a Michigan Bicentennial Community."

East Lansing Bicentennial Commission,  
Justin Kestenbaum, reporting:

"East Lansing has been designated a Bicentennial community. The Commission is at work on a history of East Lansing. In addition to the traditional narrative history, we plan to include photographic evidence and reminiscences gained through recordings of oral interviews. This project will be financed by the City and, hopefully, by the National Endowment for the Humanities."

Operation Bootstrap,  
Hal Berjen, reporting:

"A behavioral modification program which provides people of all ages an opportunity to become actively involved in the restoration and preservation of our heritage is POPS - Preserve Our Parks. Each school adopts the neighboring park, woodlot, stream or lakeshore or even a country roadside within walking distance, to help maintain and to use for their outdoor study center. The upper elementary (4, 5 and 6) takes a field trip towards the end of the day once in the fall during week of early October - anniversary of MUCC and the Governor's "Pick Up Michigan" day and anniversary of the founding of Yellowstone - and in the spring on Earth Week to help get parks ready for opening. At the same time the lower elementary students will be picking up their schoolgrounds. Children whose homes are within a short walk from a park will form a club under the leadership of a teacher-parent sponsor, retired former teacher or conservationist. Knowledgeable and responsible teenagers in the neighborhood have and are making fine contributions not only as leaders but also as desirable images for younger children. It is proposed that we use a school gardening project as a nucleus for an all out beautification project for the Lansing Bicentennial, simulated by competition among neighborhood school districts."

Patriotic societies,  
Roberta Welfare, reporting:

"The major part of work of the Daughters of the American Revolution on local, state and national levels relates to education and the promotion of good citizenship. Our Michigan society is sponsoring a bus tour to our DAR schools in Alabama and South Carolina for the mountain children. We are thus increasing enthusiasm for and contributions to these scholarships---not written on medals but in the hearts of these deserving boys and girls."



"The Michigan Society Daughters of the American Colonists is small in numbers, about 150 members, but strong in purpose. Several of our active members are natives of Clinton County and/or descendants of its pioneers. For the Bicentennial we hope to erect a plaque inside the St. Johns courthouse in their honor and memory."

Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority,  
Mary Jane McGuire, President,  
Delta Tau Omega Chapter:

"Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, a national black service sorority, having a concern for the past omission of the minority races in historical data, has actively engaged in informing the public of the contributions of black Americans. Delta Tau Omega Chapter of the Greater Lansing area to further the efforts of this organization and to make certain that in the future, biographical material will be available for historical purposes in Ingham County is applying for funds to develop and publish a contemporary brochure/booklet for distribution in the community. It will be related to black civic and cultural contributions in Ingham County. The objectives are: (1) Provide for the inclusion of black Americans in Ingham County in the total historical perspective of the Bicentennial historical committee. (2) To research the community for prospective persons to be included. (3) To create an accurate and timely document for libraries and schools for use by 1976.

"The booklet will be available as a learning tool in the classroom and as an aid in the location and marking of historical sites of black Americans in the county."

The Individual and the Bicentennial,  
Marie Thompson, reporting:

"All Bicentennial projects need not be group efforts. Individuals or families may produce significant contributions. This is particularly true in the arts and crafts, for most such cultural undertakings are the result of individuals.

"In this respect the Bicentennial is arriving at a most opportune time for it coincides with a period of renaissance in handicrafts and folk arts -- needlepoint, tole painting,

"decoupage, quilting, rug hooking, wood and metal working, etc.

"An example is my own project, a Michigan quilt. Designed by my husband and me, it will consist of a map of Michigan, using a gradation of colors to show relief, surrounded by quilt squares with designs symbolic of the state. Instead of using all of the usual symbols, we will use some that have meaning to us - a Kirkland warbler instead of a robin, a sugar beet instead of an apple blossom, a Pere Marquette locomotive, a fire engine, and some others.

"The grandiose Bicentennial ideas at the national level for the most part seem to have vanished; the early involvements of some communities seem to have dissolved into political bickering. But the individual can create whatever he or she wants, answerable to no pressure group, supported by no public funds."

Friends of Historical Meridian,  
Florence Hill, reporting:

"This group has been formed and active about two years. Its largest project has been the securing of the Proctor Toll House (1850's) and the Grettenberger farmhouse (1860's), and their removal to the Village Green area at the Meridian Township offices, Marsh Road, Okemos. A restoration committee has been set up to carry out the work necessary to put these buildings in condition typical of their periods. Grants were received from Bicentennial funds to salvage these houses.

"A group of members worked in the old Okemos Cemetery, corner of Grand River and Hamilton Roads, Okemos, this May. They set out plants and cleared around the burial plots of old settlers.

"Research is being done in various ways: interviewing long-time residents, reading old newspapers and records, and collecting old photographs from family collections and clippings. Mrs. Lamb is gathering material on Chief Okemos, who lived in this area.

"Members of the organization are working on the Bicentennial Committee, chaired by Meridian Township Supervisor Richard Conti. At this time they are not group representatives, but are working as interested individuals.

"It is anticipated that other projects may arise as people are drawn into the activities of the society."



Howard Lescout, Chairman of the Michigan American Revolution Bicentennial Commission presents official flag to Al Wardowski (see right) Chairman of the Ingham County Board of Commissioners' Special Committee on County History.

DeWitt Bicentennial Commission,  
Eggs Hanson, Chairman:

"A seven-member DeWitt Bicentennial Commission was appointed June 1, 1974, to serve through 1976. Projects are still in the stage of suggestion, but we will give priority to restoration of historic sites, marking all sites and development of a two-year program of activities culminating in July of '76.

"Ours is believed to be the oldest community in the county. The first county jail still stands. A mill wheel waits for restoration and the marker to our first settlers, placed years ago, cries for re-establishment. The spirit and opportunity for a successful commemoration is everywhere and before we are through we intend to have every man, woman and child involved."

*Ralph Strobel* brought greetings from *Saginaw* and reported briefly on their historic district. This concluded the reports of delegates.

## UPDATE ON PROJECTS

Enthusiastic activity devoted to the Bicentennial started before the months from the Convention's bonfire had cooled. The Historical Society of Greater Lansing's marker honoring Joshua Simmons II, Revolutionary War soldier, was dedicated at Eagle, Clinton County, on October 5, 1974. More than two hundred guests enjoyed the country-style lunch that followed the ceremonies.

During the summer months the Society prepared and staffed a booth in cooperation with the Ingham County Special Committee on County History at the fair in Mason, aided in the preview exhibit of "Michigan's World of Wings" at the Lansing Public Library, and created a film presentation on the Turner-Dodge House and properties. The calendar for 1975 is being printed. And plans are in motion for a threadcraft fair next spring.

The Ingham County Board of Commissioners secured legislation to authorize counties to establish official historical commissions, and has adopted an ordinance to establish the first county historical commission in Michigan.

A Bicentennial Commission has been appointed in Eaton County and organizational meetings have begun. A plan to preserve and use the courthouse in Charlotte appears to be the major project. Recruitment for workers and execution of many suggested projects continues.

New communities can match DeWitt for effectiveness in these few months. Citizen involvement is credited as the catalyst which has created a new tennis court, a park on the west side of town and erected "Welcome to Historic DeWitt" signs. Much more is planned.

The Clinton County Historical Society will soon offer a reprint of the 1859 history of Clinton and Shiawassee counties, together with indexes, for sale. A detailed map of land ownership in 1859 is available now. Restoration of the original one-room school is being considered.

Delta Charter Township's commission is newly organized. Suggestions for projects involving educational, recreational and historical themes are being invited.

Each has launched environmental improvement by creation of a downtown park, and included young people by sponsoring an essay contest in schools.

Markers, ordinances for protection of historic properties, teaching materials, and a grand Fourth of July celebration have been initiated in Eaton Rapids.

Nearly every major community in the area is currently planning gardens, building restorations, festivals and publications. Olivet College has offered to publish a newsletter concerning such activities in Eaton County. Watch for THE PLANK ROAD for news.

Ever increasing interest is noted in programs offered by senior citizen groups, antique study classes and civic clubs. Home buyers are increasingly attracted to houses worthy of renovation, businessmen are splashing paint to brighten the face of Bridge Street and craft shops are flourishing.

## NEXT STEP

The need for a Tri-County Bicentennial council or forum has been the result of recent discussions. The purpose of the council would be to facilitate the interrelations of the various historical and Bicentennial groups throughout the area in: (1) establishing communications, (2) coordinating the efforts of groups, (3) assisting in the sharing of any expertise of one group with others, and (4) communicating with the public.

Lansing Community College reminds us that 22 months remain before America celebrates its 200th birthday, and invites participation in a meeting to establish a clearing-house for ideas and efforts.

Lansing, Michigan  
October 14, 1974

CREDITS

This report is prepared by Eugene G. Wanger, vice chairman of the Ingham County Board of Commissioners Special Committee on County History, and Geneva K. Wiskemann, president of the Historical Society of Greater Lansing.

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