

Michilimackinac Historical Society



Telling Our Story

A campaign to preserve and protect our region's history





*“If history were taught in the form
of stories, it would never be forgotten.”*

(Rudyard Kipling, journalist and poet)



A Message from the Honorary Chairs

History is something that must be preserved thoughtfully and proactively. You can't go back in time later and say, "I wish we had saved this, or kept that." Once artifacts have been destroyed, it is too late to preserve them.

That's why we all treasure the work of the Michilimackinac Historical Society. They are doing important preservation work for all of us. Future generations will be able to look back and marvel at what life was like for the early people of this region. That is especially significant for those of us whose family roots go back deep and far in northern Michigan. Our knowledge of the past helps us be more informed citizens today and better caretakers of the future.

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We are honored to be part of this campaign, because we believe the treasured artifacts from our past deserve a safe, secure home. We want to keep engaging thousands of visitors each year in the fascinating stories of the “triangle of history” that is part of our cultural DNA. We know that people of all ages, and from all over this country, will engage with history through the unique and compelling exhibits the Historical Society can share.

Please join us in preserving this essential cultural gem and the artifacts that so vividly illustrate the richness and complexity of early life in Michigan.

Prentiss M. Brown, Jr.
Bev Swope
Clayton and Anna Timmons



We Are Storytellers

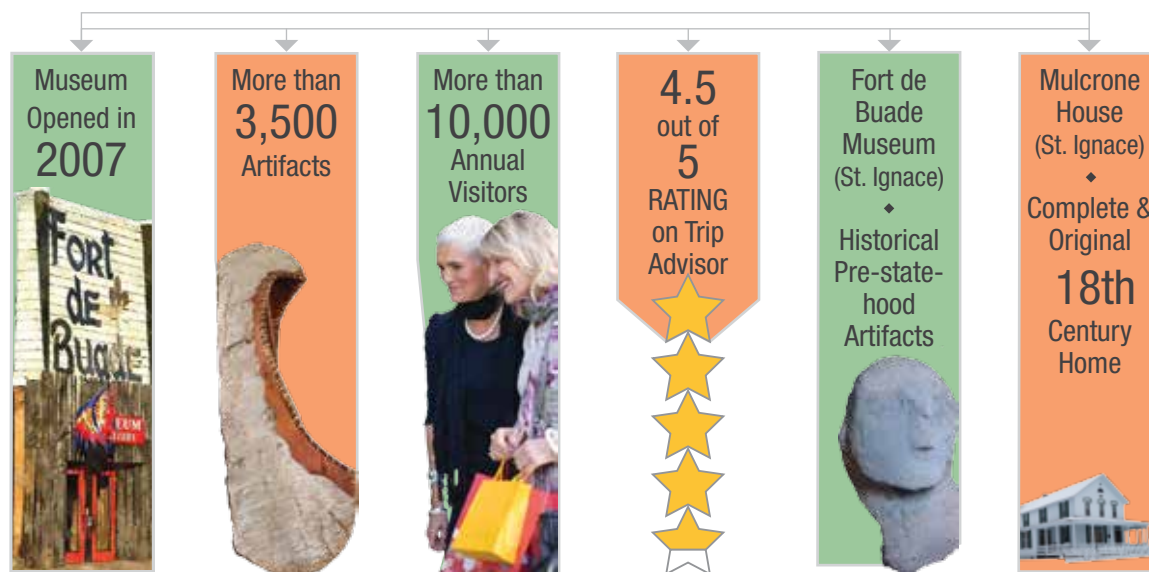
Museums are community storytellers. In that spirit, Michilimackinac Historical Society brings stories to life. We inform the community about the past while looking ahead to the future.

Through intriguing artifacts and one-of-a-kind exhibits, we engage thousands of visitors each year in the rich, multi-faceted history of this region.

- We **preserve** artifacts to intrigue and inspire people of all ages.
- We **connect** communities separated by distance and time.
- We **contextualize** history with geography to improve understanding.
- We **stimulate** economic development through destination tourism.

Our community's rich past is full of daring adventurers, savvy business owners, courageous homesteaders and strong civic leaders. We are preserving that history so that future generations can more deeply understand and appreciate the significant role the Michilimackinac region has played in the growth of our great state.

Facts at a Glance



Our community is richer and our future is brighter because we have this treasured collection linking us to our collective past.

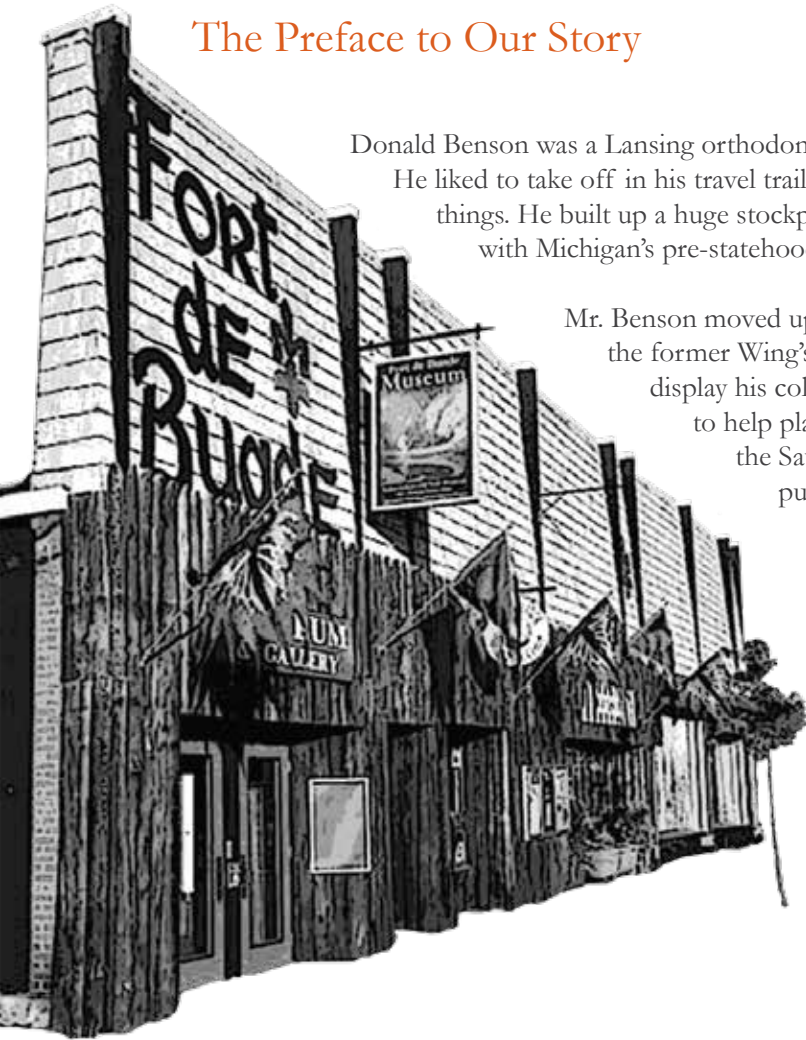


The Preface to Our Story

Donald Benson was a Lansing orthodontist with a passion for history and a penchant for collecting. He liked to take off in his travel trailer during the summer, and fill it with interesting or unique things. He built up a huge stockpile of high-quality artifacts in his travels. Most of them dealt with Michigan's pre-statehood history and the Native Americans who lived here.

Mr. Benson moved up to St. Ignace with his family and his treasures. He purchased the former Wing's Garage, renaming it Fort de Buade, and used it to store and display his collection. Upon his death in 2005, a citizen's group got together to help plan the next steps for this valuable collection. They approached the Sault Ste. Marie tribe of Chippewa Indians with the idea of purchasing the collection. The Sault tribe did, in fact, purchase the collection. Then they gifted it to the City of St. Ignace.

The City, in turn, conveyed stewardship of the entire collection to the Michilimackinac Historical Society in 2007. Eventually, they gifted it to MHS outright. And thus the fun began! Society members sorted, dusted, researched, curated and coaxed the many treasures into order. They remodeled vignettes, arranged items in chronological order and created displays to better tell the story of the Michilimackinac area.



Our Central Plot: the 'Triangle of History

Water, language, customs and war historically connected the people of Mackinac Island, Mackinaw City and St. Ignace. Today, we can step back and peer through the lens of time to both contextualize and understand the history that is so integral to this region. Our collection helps visitors gain this perspective.



In addition to the antique firearms, arrowheads, Jesuit relics, colonial uniforms (French and British) and tools from centuries ago, our collection also contains two particular items that attract throngs of history buffs every year.



complete collections of digital copies on display in the entire country.

The McKenney & Hall Collection

A large number of Native American delegations visited Washington DC from 1820-1840 to negotiate land and trade treaties. Thomas McKenney, Superintendent of Indian Affairs, initiated a plan to commission portraits of these visitors. We have one of the only

The Newberry Tablet

The original tablet, discovered by Michigan woodsmen, was 19” by 26” with 140 squares. Each one contained a hieroglyph, or letter, from an unknown alphabet. The original tablet deteriorated after being ignored by the historians of the late 19th century. All that remains are photographs of the tablet, a few small pieces...and ongoing speculation about its story.

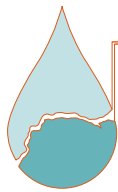


“What an unexpected delight! We were all amazed by this wonderful gem of a museum.”

(TripAdvisor review)

The Plot Thickens

Our collection has been favorably compared to those that can be found in esteemed museums such as the Smithsonian. Many of our artifacts are literally one of a kind. Long-term preservation of these treasures requires the right environment. Unfortunately, the Fort de Buade Museum building in St. Ignace does not meet this need.



Water Damage

Our building leaks regularly and floods occasionally. The entire collection is at risk with every rain or heavy snow.

St. Ignace receives 29” of rain and 89” of snow on average per year. The building floods with 2” or more of water inside at least once per year.



Temperature Control

We have no heat and no air conditioning. Extreme temperature and humidity fluctuations cause catastrophic damage to paintings, fabrics, wood and more. The lack of climate control also precludes use of the building for eight months of the year.

Too much humidity

Encourages mold growth

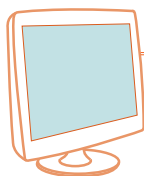
Too little humidity

Makes objects brittle

The ideal humidity level for preserving museum artifacts

Between 44%–55%

Unless we place dehumidifiers throughout the building, our summer humidity levels can reach up to 70 percent and drop to the 20s during the winter.



Display and Programming

Digital tools can bring stories to life, engaging participants to dig more deeply into what interests them. Our current space does not have the capacity to incorporate technology into visitor experiences. We also lack the space to display artifacts in the most interesting and engaging ways.

Immersive experiences

Interactive displays

Sensory exhibits

These are some of the most popular ways to help museum-goers experience collections more fully.

“The best use of digital is to not make you aware of the technology, but to make you aware of the art.”

(Jane Alexander, Chief Information Officer, Cleveland Museum)

Writing the Next Chapter: the *Telling Our Story* Campaign

The Scene: St. Ignace

Many of the oldest buildings in St. Ignace have been destroyed. However, at least one jewel remains: the Walker Furniture building. Built in 1970, this iconic landmark housed the last decades of retail activity for Walker Furniture. Now its timeless elegance and historic charm will be preserved as the Michilimackinac Historical Society renovates and renews it. This will be the new home for the collection currently housed in the Fort de Buade Museum.

We have purchased this historic building so that its story will live on through our story. It provides a perfect venue for showcasing the treasures of our past and engaging both residents and visitors in a love of history.

What will this do for our community?

- Revitalize a historic downtown landmark that has been closed since 2013.
- Provide a climate-controlled and flood-free environment to preserve the precious collection that has been entrusted to our care.
- Expand display space to 7,000 square feet so that we can feature more interactive and contemporary displays.
- Expand our season in spring and fall, with the addition of heat and air-conditioning.
- Spur destination tourism for history buffs that will shop, dine and stay in St. Ignace.
- Create a community space for school trips, events and facility rentals.





“Tourism is an essential economic driver for this town. The new museum will provide a compelling reason for visitors to extend their stay in northern Michigan. We’re intensely proud of our history as told through this fabulous collection. We can’t wait to showcase it in a way that fully honors the subject matter and the people represented.”

(Connie Litzner, Mayor, City of St. Ignace)

Lead Gifts

A project like this relies on the generous and enthusiastic support of donors. We express deep appreciation to those who have already committed gifts totaling \$2.8 million* to the campaign.

* as of February 2019

One-Time Gifts

Contributions to the campaign can be made in the form of a one-time gift of cash, or a gift of appreciated assets such as stocks or securities.

Pledges

For your convenience, pledges will be accepted for up to a three-year period.

Commemorative Opportunities

We are pleased to offer permanent recognition of substantial gifts. We invite you to commemorate a family, loved one or business by naming a space in the new home of the Historical Society.

Michilimackinac Historical Society is a 501(c)(3) organization, and gifts meet charitable deduction guidelines.





"A people without the knowledge of their past history, origin and culture is like a tree without roots."

– Marcus Garvey



Image courtesy of St. Ignace News

Michilimackinac Historical Society

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