

# Bridging Michigan

A Publication of the Michigan Humanities Council



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## MICHIGAN HUMANITIES COUNCIL CELEBRATES 40 YEARS OF HUMANITIES PROGRAMMING

By Kate Bartig, Communications Officer, Michigan Humanities Council

### WHAT ARE THE HUMANITIES?

For 40 years, the Michigan Humanities Council has supported exhibits, lectures, documentaries and family activities with a goal of strengthening humanities in Michigan, yet many still struggle to define this single word.

Over the next year, in celebration of MHC's 40th anniversary, we invite you to discover the humanities.

The humanities can be seen in the high school students opening their hearts in Poetry Out Loud; by the children who not only read with their parents, but

discuss literature in Prime Time Family Reading Time®; or by the senior couple who visit a Smithsonian exhibit in a rural community to share their story and ensure it lives on for future generations.

Throughout the next year, MHC will host events and produce a series of print and digital articles chronicling the first 40 years of an organization that supports nonprofits throughout the state. It may be hard to define the humanities, but there is a need for these programs now more than ever.

To better understand the humanities and mission of the Michigan Humanities Council, we'll start our story from the beginning.



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MHC CELEBRATES 40 YEARS (continued)

THE BEGINNING

The Michigan Humanities Council, or Michigan Council for the Humanities as it was first named, began serving its mission on Oct. 1, 1974, though its story begins long before that.

In 1965, the National Endowment for the Humanities was formed and began supporting programming for scholars and large institutions. Realizing that colleges and universities were unable to extend a statewide reach, NEH developed a federal/state partnership to fund “state humanities councils.”

These councils would create access to the humanities across each state through public humanities programming. In Michigan, a group of distinguished individuals, mostly from academic backgrounds, began building a humanities council and appointed Ron Means as the interim director (and eventual executive director).

“I started from the very beginning with a completely empty bag. There was no humanities council in place, but it was my job to go around the state and discuss the intent of NEH to begin a state program,” Means said. “Each state was expected to come up with a theme to guide development of programming

in the state, and (the NEH) was putting councils together sequentially.”

On May 28, 1974, Means and then-MHC chairman Dr. Raleigh Morgan, Jr., submitted a proposal to NEH for state-based programming in Michigan with the theme of “The Michigan Economy: A Humanistic Understanding of Production, Consumption, and Leisure.” On Oct. 1, 1974, MHC received its first funding from NEH and within days sent notice it would begin accepting grant proposals from “nonprofit institutions, organizations, and ad-hoc community committees for projects designed to bring about discussions of public policy issues between the out-of-school adult public and ‘academic humanists.’”

“By bringing people together to talk about certain issues of public concern, the humanities would be able to deepen the understanding of these issues so they would have a better job of resolving them,” Means said.

Over the past 40 years, programs have grown and audiences have changed, but MHC’s mission of creating statewide humanities discussion has remained strong. We hope you will join us in celebrating MHC’s past 40 years and the many yet to come.

MHC Logos Over the Years

 1976	 1980	 1984
 1989	 1991	 PRESENT

**ON THE COVER:**  
Members of Mosaic Youth Theatre of Detroit perform in the well-received play, Northern Lights, which re-enacts the 1966 student-led walkout that took place in Detroit at Northern High School. This play was funded in part by a 2010 major grant from MHC. Photo courtesy Mosaic Youth Theatre



Fred Amorose, a retired foreman at the Calcite plant, with producer and newly appointed MHC board member Anne Belanger of Presque Isle District Library in Rogers City. The library received an MHC major grant in 2012 to fund a documentary and public memorial celebrating the centennial anniversary of the Calcite Quarry. The documentary, *A Century in Stone*, won an Emmy Award for Best Writing. Photo ©Brian Belanger.

HUMANITIES: THE HEART OF THE MATTER

By Erik Nordberg, Executive Director, Michigan Humanities Council

The size and role of government in people’s lives has been a hot topic in recent weeks. Debate about the government shutdown, debt ceiling, defense spending, affordability of health care, and the state of our nation’s transportation and utility infrastructures is constantly before us. Divisions in perspective between our elected officials, even within our major political parties, have hampered any substantive discussion of these issues.

The Michigan Humanities Council receives an important portion of its annual operating revenues from the National Endowment for the Humanities. These funds directly support our six major statewide programs, as well as a series of granting programs which distribute funding to other nonprofits across the state for local cultural programming. These local agencies match these funds at a ratio greater than 1:3, meaning that federal humanities dollars leverage an additional \$1.4 million dollars in Michigan annually.

For some people, the question of whether government should support the humanities is a non-starter. With so many “far more important issues” at play, how can we even consider discussing funding for cultural projects?

In seeking a government that is smaller and more efficient, what few things are considered “need to have,” instead of simply “nice to have?” Prevailing wisdom places the humanities, history, literature, poetry and the creative arts in a lower tier as “non-essential” to American life.

How have we allowed this to happen? The humanities are the building blocks of thought, knowledge and identity. The humanities give us the tools to learn about the world around us. The humanities provide vehicles to develop our individual identity. The humanities define, contrast and connect our communities. The humanities create conversations about what makes us human.

The American Academy of Arts and Sciences recently published a call to action for the humanities, a volume entitled *The Heart of the Matter* (tinyurl.com/THOTM). I encourage you to read this document, become conversant with its contents and speak to everyone in your circle about it. At only 88 pages, this slim volume outlines the central and critical role played by the humanities in our society – and the woeful way we have neglected them in our nation.

The report provides a road map for improved support for the humanities in the United States. Not surprisingly, education is a key area for concern. Deficiencies exist across the board: from weak training for our K-12 history

teachers and decreased funding for research and discovery in the social sciences in our universities, to dwindling literature and language programs in our middle schools and poor support for college study-abroad programs.

Beyond formal education settings, *The Heart of the Matter* asks us to attend to other areas for learning and growing. The basic ability to read and comprehend written materials is at the core of our democratic ideal. As a result, reading, literacy and family reading initiatives (such as MHC’s current support for Prime Time Family Reading Time® and our signature program, the Great Michigan Read) have critical impact on the development of Michigan citizens.

Most importantly, the humanities occur at the grassroots level in Michigan. They are manifest in presentations given to elementary school students by a cultural tradition bearer from our Arts & Humanities Touring Directory. They are evident in the community conversation between an Arab American scholar and a small town library encouraged by our Bridging Cultures initiative. They are exercised through a grant-funded documentary about a city’s founding around a calcite quarry – and its endurance through a century of industrial boom and bust. They are shared through exhibits and web media supported by our major grant program which encourage Michigan communities to compare and contrast their own histories.

These are not esoteric or high-minded activities. These are the humanities.

Meanwhile, our federal government continues to reduce budget appropriations for the humanities. While the government shutdown received consistent media attention, few noticed the House Appropriations Committee’s suggested 49 percent cut in funding for the National Endowment for the Humanities. And this from a sequester-reduced total 2013 budget for NEH of only \$138 million dollars. Why do we discourage humanities funding in a \$3.8 trillion federal budget?

Humanities programming is not a luxury. It is time to take a stand.





# THE GREAT MICHIGAN READ: What it Means to our Communities

## CONNECTING A COMMUNITY TO ITS LIBRARY

By Susan Conklin, Assistant Director, Boyne District Library

The Great Michigan Read selection committee has once again chosen a remarkable book. *Annie's Ghosts* is a compelling story with many different themes to appeal to a wide variety of interests.

The Boyne District Library has participated in the Great Michigan Read in previous years and I've been impressed each time with the selection and the program in general. It gives our patrons and community the opportunity to share with residents around the state the experience of learning more about Michigan's history and culture through literary works.

This year we are expanding our involvement with the Great Michigan Read by choosing *Annie's Ghosts* for our biennial "One Book" event, which we call Boyne Reads. One Book events are perfect avenues for promoting reading and community interaction and connection, an ideal role for the library to play. By partnering with the Great Michigan Read, we have a ready-made One Book program for our own community, as well as participating in a statewide initiative. The Michigan Humanities Council selects an excellent book, and they provide high-quality materials such as reader's guides, as well as multiple copies of the book.

An important aspect of our program is partnering with our public schools, which widens the scope of Boyne Reads and creates a strong connection between the library, the school and the community. The Great Michigan Read is designed for young adults to senior citizens, so *Annie's Ghosts*, like all past Great Michigan Read

selections, works perfectly for this type of collaboration. With the help of the teacher's guides, teachers can incorporate the book into their curriculum.

In November, we had the opportunity to host author Steve Luxenberg during a tour visit to Boyne City. He spoke to high school students at a school assembly and gave a community presentation at the high school Performing Arts Center in the evening. This was a wonderful opportunity for students and adults alike in our small, rural community to listen to an author of Luxenberg's caliber.

The reader's guides are full of additional information and resources, and delineate various themes, which help partners such as us to develop and customize programming for their communities. For this year's Boyne Reads/Great Michigan Read, we are highlighting the family history/genealogy theme in *Annie's Ghosts*, in part because we have a very strong relationship with our

local genealogical society. Another community may focus on a different theme, such as mental illness or immigration.

On Oct. 9 we held our open house kick-off event: "A Celebration of Family History." Among other activities, genealogical society members were on hand to help those attending with family trees, ancestor charts and other information. We are also working on a joint project with the schools to compile a Boyne City Family Recipe Cookbook, and students will use their school iPads to record oral histories of family members.

*Annie's Ghosts* has created a buzz in our community! I'm looking forward to our book discussions at the library and at the local book store, with the reader's guides providing direction. Local book clubs are also discussing *Annie's Ghosts* at their meetings.

We are pleased to be sharing *Annie's Ghosts* with our community, and honored to be a partner with the Great Michigan Read.



2013-14 Great Michigan Read author Steve Luxenberg talks with 300 students at the Boyne City Performing Arts Center at Boyne City High School on Nov. 13, 2013 as part of Boyne Reads / Great Michigan Read. From left, Camilla Zipp, Luxenberg, Elizabeth Mansfield and Kyra Brazell.

## A HIGH SCHOOL'S LITERARY JOURNEY

By Dianna E. Behl, New Tech Director/Assistant Principal, Pinckney Community Schools



Pinckney Community High School students visited the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History as part of the 2011-12 Great Michigan Read and an MHC quick grant. Photo courtesy Pinckney Community High School.

Several years ago, I was teaching *The Old Man in the Sea* by Ernest Hemingway to my 11th graders at Pinckney Community High School and was looking for supplemental reading material. After suggestions from colleagues and a Google search, I found myself at the Michigan Humanities Council website reading about the Great Michigan Read.

Reviewing the information, I learned I could apply for my school to be a partner and receive a set of books, bookmarks and other materials for FREE! As schools struggle to make ends meet, this was very much appreciated. With my principal's consent, I signed up for the program and had students use the supplemental resources to get more acquainted with Hemingway and his connection to Michigan while reading short stories in the book. The final literary analysis papers my students wrote for *The Old Man in the Sea* were the best I had ever received, and I know it was because we utilized the materials and support provided by the

Great Michigan Read. Consequently, seven years later, we are still using these class sets in our curriculum.

While my students and I had a great experience with our first involvement in the Great Michigan Read, it pales in comparison to our truly transformational time with the 2011-12 selection, *Arc of Justice* by Kevin Boyle. I was looking for an anchor text for our Senior English class that was rigorous, cross-curricular, and had a Michigan connection; my first stop was the MHC website for the newest selection.

We registered as a partner and I worked with a pilot group of students to create lessons and incorporate mini-reports on various aspects of the book. Students wrote chapter abstracts, argumentative papers, acted out the court scenes, and more to prepare for our culminating field trip to Detroit to visit Dr. Ossian Sweet's home and other sites outlined in the reader's guide. We raised money but risked canceling the trip until our VISTA coordinator found a special MHC

grant that would help offset costs of the field trip. To fill time between the site tour and opening of the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History, our "food" expert mini-report group found a restaurant in Detroit, Colors, that catered a lunch highlighting the food that Dr. Ossian Sweet would have eaten in 1920's Detroit. It still brings tears to my eyes and an amazing sense of joy when I reflect on the actual trip.

We began the adventure with a school bus of extremely nervous students, chaperones, and bus driver (almost all had never been to Detroit). We did a think/pair/share on the bus where everyone shared hopes and fears about this trip; the mood was apprehensive to say the least. As the trip played out, I watched once-hesitant students become exuberant and excited about seeing things they had read about in the *Arc of Justice* or researched for their reports.

When we reluctantly loaded back onto the bus, I asked students to pair up again and share their experience relating to original hopes and fears. The bus buzzed with comments ranging from "Oh my gosh, I can't wait to bring my parents here!", "I learned SO MUCH at the African American History Museum that I had no clue about!", and "I was kind of racist before I came here, but now I'm feeling really different about all this stuff."

Working with the Great Michigan Read and the supportive staff at the Michigan Humanities Council has afforded me with one of the most meaningful teaching experiences of my career. I highly recommend you take advantage of this amazing gift they have to offer to citizens, educators, and students!





WHY I GIVE:  
A DONOR PERSPECTIVE

Richard Wiener is the Founding Member of Wiener Associates, a Lansing-based governmental affairs law firm. He is the former Chief of Staff to Michigan Governor Jennifer Granholm and current president of the Historical Society of Michigan. He is a longtime supporter of the Michigan Humanities Council, making his first contribution in 2005.

WHY ARE THE HUMANITIES IMPORTANT IN YOUR LIFE?

Do you remember the line from the movie “Jerry McGuire,” when Renee Zellwenger said to Tom Cruise, “You complete me?” That’s why the humanities are important to me, and to a lot of us. It completes us, and rounds out the immediate aspects of our life with a broader cultural and societal vision.

WHAT DOES THE MHC DO THAT ENCOURAGES YOU TO SUPPORT IT FINANCIALLY?

First, it asks for my support. There is no substitute for asking. I hope that its asking capacity can increase so that it can maintain its mission.

I particularly like the Great Michigan Read. This year’s selection, *Annie’s Ghosts: A Journey into a Family Secret* is superb, and so was *Arc of Justice: A Saga of Race, Civil Rights, and Murder in the Jazz Age*. The books were deep and thought-provoking, yet flowed easily. Both have Michigan settings yet contain universal themes.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE MICHIGAN PLACE?

The Cultural Center in Detroit, plus Orchestra Hall and the Michigan Opera Theater, are my favorite places to haunt. I enjoy spending time at the exhibits and performances, and sometimes just walking around them. As a student at Wayne State University, I often took my books and studied either at the Detroit Institute of Arts or at the Detroit Historical Museum, even when I wasn’t studying history (I never did study art or music). I’ve been hooked ever since.

WHAT DO YOU APPRECIATE MOST ABOUT MICHIGAN?

It has everything I need and want in life: wonderful people, beautiful scenic beauty, and a strong cultural



Courtesy Richard Wiener

heritage. Its citizens have a growing appreciation for its historical and cultural past, and understanding the need to preserve and expand the ability for all to benefit from cultural and educational programs.

Because of governmental financial restraint, however, I believe that cultural organizations and institutions like the Michigan Humanities Council will continue to need a hand. That’s where people like Raj Wiener, my wife, and I can help. We are far from wealthy, but have some discretionary income, support the humanities, and have a charitable purpose in our life. There are a lot of Michiganians like us. They have the capacity to support the Michigan Humanities Council but need to be found.



POETRY OUT LOUD - PROOF THAT ‘POETRY IS NOT DEAD’

By Judith Dworkin, Program Officer, Michigan Humanities Council

To see a high school student stand on stage and recite a poem from memory – that is an opportunity not to be missed. This past year I had the opportunity to watch Poetry Out Loud at the state and national level; the poems came from every genre and time period, from Emily Dickinson to Emily Brontë. Sitting in the audience and hearing poem after poem for a full day is a real treat. This is Poetry Out Loud.

However, it starts well before the state competition, held every year in the spring. In more than 50 high schools across Michigan, teachers incorporate Poetry Out Loud curriculum into their classrooms from September through January and teach students about present-day and historical poets by having them memorize and recite poetry in front of their class or club.

Students immerse themselves in poetry and it becomes a part of their

very fabric, imprinted forever in their minds. Thanks to the hard work of the teachers in the field, we estimate that Poetry Out Loud touches more than 20,000 Michigan students each year. In January, a school champion emerges and represents their school at the state competition. This is where the best and brightest in poetry

recitation come together.

Poetry Out Loud nurtures the creative minds and the effects of that kind of gift expand far beyond competition.

–Harron Atkins, 2011 State Champion from Cass Technical High School (Detroit)

rounds, students from the very tip of the Upper Peninsula to the southeastern region will compete for the chance to be named the Michigan Poetry Out Loud Champion. All students recite their first two poems and then four top students will be selected for the third round. From the four, a champion is named. It is a full day of intense competition but also friendly support as students get



to know each other around a shared passion – poetry.

To add to the festivities, the students, teachers and audience will get the chance to see Kinetic Affect on stage. The group is a Kalamazoo-based poetry duo who wows audiences with a Latino and hip-hop influence that collide on-stage with a Native American heritage and academic nature in a way never seen before. The duo’s personal background breathes life to the poetry they perform with passion and energy.

Poetry Out Loud convinces us that poetry is not dead. It comes alive on stage by the most unlikely group – young adults. For an age group that may get stereotyped into being more interested in cell phones, parties and football games, it is a refreshing surprise to see them perform so eloquently on a subject that may be losing its place in our school system – the art of poetry.

For a complete schedule and for more information please visit <http://www.michiganhumanities.org/programs/poetry/> or call (517) 372-7770.



Top: A student performs at the Michigan State Competition in March 2013 in East Lansing. Left: The 2013 Michigan finalists, from left third runner-up Josef Fielder of Bradford Academy High School; second runner-up Cameron Snyder-Pitts of Roosevelt High School; State Champion Richard Wu of Forest Hills Central High School; and first runner-up Malcolm Harris of Cass Technical High School. Photos © Dave Trumple.

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Become a Humanities Supporter

Are you interested in supporting the humanities and making a difference in your community? Donations to the Michigan Humanities Council are tax-deductible and can be made online at [michiganhumanities.org](http://michiganhumanities.org), or by simply cutting out this donor card and mailing it with your contribution to Michigan Humanities Council, 119 Pere Marquette Drive Suite 3B, Lansing MI 48912.

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## Mark Your Calendars

### **Journey Stories Traveling Exhibit**

Through Jan. 24 in Curtis  
Venue: Erickson Center for the Arts  
Region: *Upper Peninsula*

Feb. 3 – March 21 in Charlevoix  
Venue: Charlevoix Public Library  
Region: *Northwest*

### **Great Michigan Read Author Tour**

Jan. 28 in Saginaw  
Venue: Swan Valley High School (9 a.m.), Castle Museum (noon)

Jan. 28 in Midland  
Venue: Grace A. Dow Memorial Library (7 p.m.)

Jan. 29 in Mt. Pleasant  
Venue: TBD  
Region: *East Central*

### **Poetry Out Loud State Competition**

March 14 in East Lansing  
Venue: East Lansing Hannah Community Center  
Region: *Southeast*

### **Turning Point: The War of 1812 from the Native American Perspective**

Through May in Harbor Springs  
Venue: Harbor Springs Area Historical Museum  
Region: *Northwest*

For more details on these events and many more,  
visit [www.michiganhumanities.org](http://www.michiganhumanities.org).



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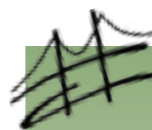
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## Michigan Humanities Council

The Michigan Humanities Council, founded in 1974 as an affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities, encourages and supports a variety of activities that bring communities, students and scholars together to reflect and learn from our rich cultural heritage; cultivate a shared understanding and appreciation of each other, as well as current issues and events; and build stronger, more thoughtful communities for the future.

Contact us at (517) 372-7770 or visit [michiganhumanities.org](http://michiganhumanities.org).