

**Beating The Sesqui Drum
The New Lansing Center
MSU's Own Dr. Quincy**

WAVERLY PARK

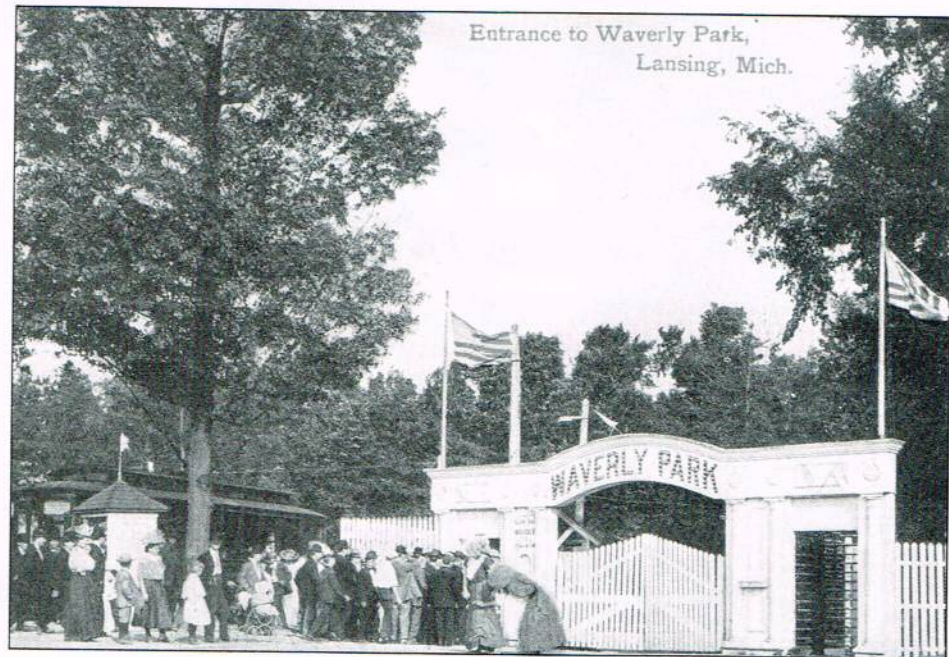
A Lost Pleasure Ground

By Manuel Castro

It was originally called Leadley Park and in the late nineteenth century and early 1900s it was Lansing's version of Disneyland. Once located on the east side of Waverly Road on the Grand River, the amusement center, later renamed Waverly Park, was a favorite picnic ground for Lansingites on Saturday and Sunday outings. It was a resort considered to be equal to any in the state boasting of everything from steamer trips on the river to a music pavillion and "commodious hotel."

During its heyday, the park had 10 minute streetcar service that ferried visitors three miles from the capital city to the turnstile at its entrance. For only 10 cents, guests not only received admission to the park, but also car service back home. Everyday of the week hundreds of gentlemen in fedoras and their elegant ladies wearing long dresses and fashionable hats enjoyed the Victorian pleasures that made the park a recreational center during the summer months.

It seems almost unbelievable that nothing remains of what was once one of Lansing's greatest attractions. There is now no trace of the grand hotel, the roller coaster or the merry-go-round that entertained residents during long lazy afternoons and evenings. Everything is gone—long ago replaced by housing developments. After years of success, the park closed around 1918, losing out to the attractions of Pine Lake (now Lake Lansing). Waverly



A 1909 postcard of the entrance to Waverly Park. Visitors are disembarking from streetcars that serviced the resort.

Lansing Public Library

Park's land was sold off piecemeal to contractors until not even a ghost of its former glory remained.

Although now only a memory, its influence on Lansing was extensive for more than two and a half decades. And if it had not been for the dreams of a German immigrant named Gottlieb Leadley, the park would have never existed and Lansing's history would have lost a colorful episode.

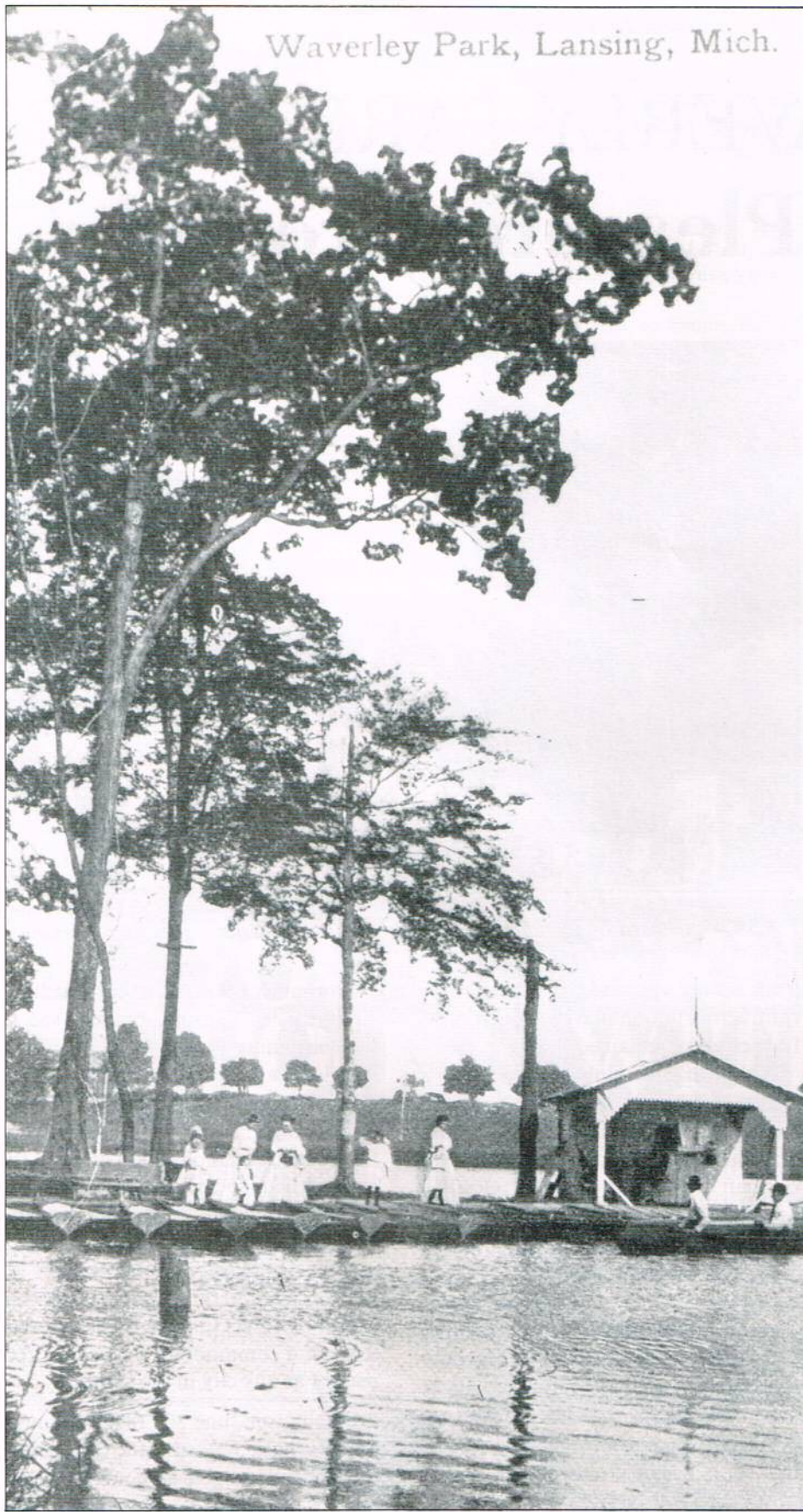
Leadley was born in Wurtemberg, Germany and came to the United States with his family when he was only 4-years-old. Originally settling at Silver Lake, Michigan, Leadley moved to DeWitt Township when he was only 16 and soon became one of the area's most successful farmers. It would have seemed that the rest of his life should have been spent in rural DeWitt, but for some reason in 1880, when he was 43-years-old, he pulled up stakes and moved to Lansing.

Not much is known about Leadley's first years in Lansing, but by 1885 he was beginning to buy large parcels of wooded land on the banks of the Grand River. Methodically, he was putting together the site of a new park. Obviously a man of great patience, the entrepreneur spent seven years improving the continually expanding property and visiting summer resorts throughout the United States. He wanted his Leadley Park to rank among the best in order to "(give) to the citizens as handsome and commodious a place for recreation as any city in the country . . ."

Finally, on June 30, 1892, although his new park was still not completed, he was ready to give area newspapers a preview of things to come. Leadley had scheduled his grand opening for the fourth of July holiday and he knew a favorable press would make the occasion a successful event.

A prominent newspaper of the day,
METROPOLITAN QUARTERLY/SUMMER 21

Waverley Park, Lansing, Mich.



Lansing Public Library

A stroll on the banks of the Grand River that bordered Waverly Park was one of the great pleasures of Victorian days. A reporter described the Park's grounds as "beautiful in the extreme."

The State Republican, was effusive in its praise of the capital city's new resort. "A pen picture of the place cannot reflect its beauties—a resort equal to any in the state."

The article's author was taken by everything he saw, including the 31 room hotel "... a magnificent three-story structure, with wide piazzas and broad porches..." In addition, he applauded the "commodious dance and banquet hall, also encircled with a wide porch that will be well ventilated and lighted in summer and heated in winter."

Although the hotel had not yet been furnished, it didn't dampen the journalist's spirits... Leadley showed him a plan of the proposed interior and the writer observed excitedly that it would provide "every convenience for the expected guests."

But in spite of the park's extensive improvements, the actual grounds captured the reporter's imagination above all else.

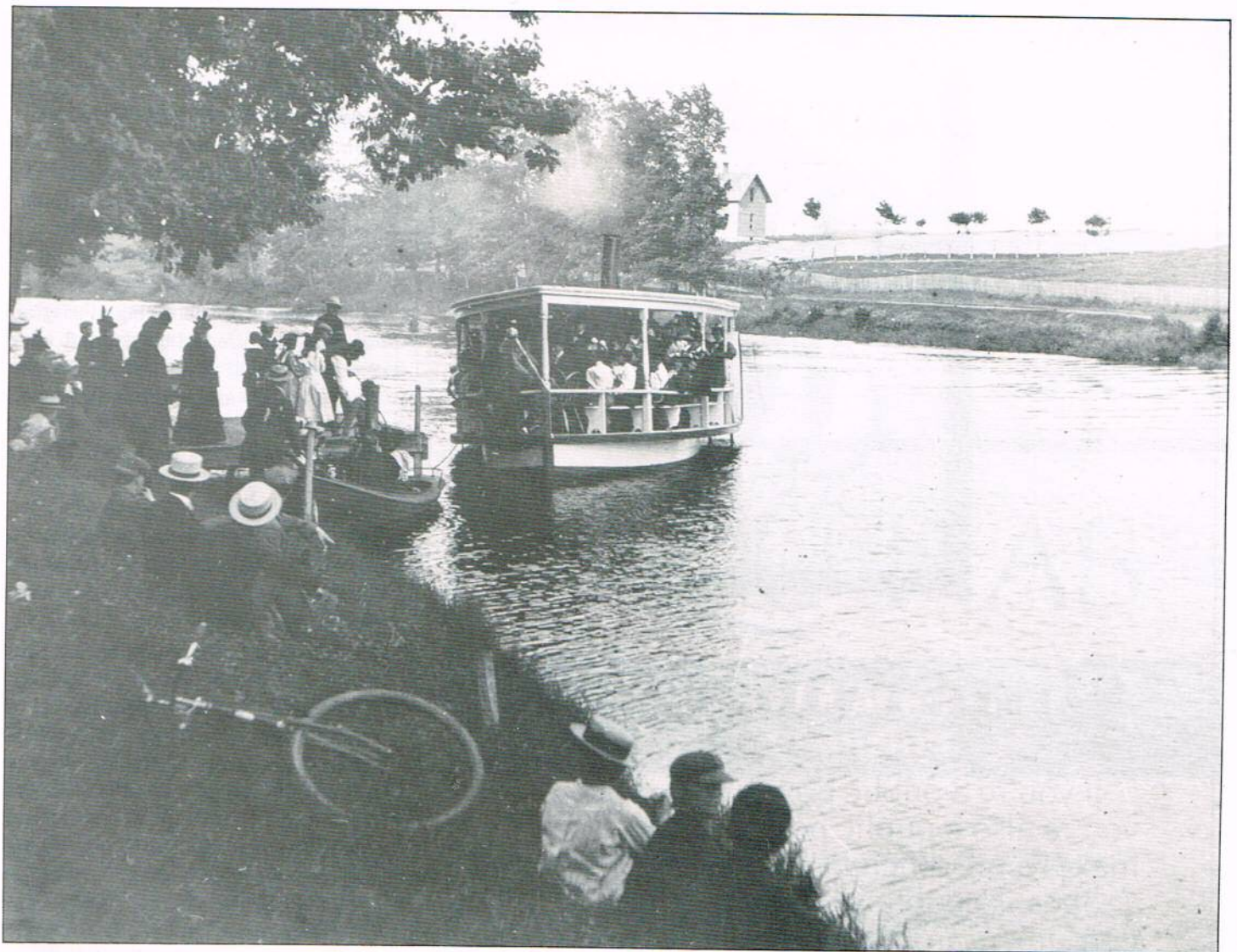
"Heavily wooded and sloping gradually to the broad river that runs along the south side, they are beautiful in the extreme," he observed. "Near the river and next to the road have been made two artificial lakes, one fed by springs and the other by artesian well."

The park also boasted of "... a handsome wooded island, that has been named Sycamore Island, and to which the steamer will make regular trips. For a pleasure trip, the boat will cruise around the island, giving a boat ride of two miles from the hotel and return."

After a rambling discourse on the endless virtues of Lansing's newest attraction, the thoroughly impressed *Republican* reporter described the park's general manager, one E. C. Beecher, as being "... affable and courteous, fat and jolly and in fact the ideal 'Mine host' and will no doubt become very popular with the patrons of the Leadley resort."

Summing up his exciting day at the park, the writer noted that "No liquors of any description will be served on the grounds, and brawlers and loafers will not be permitted the privileges of the park on any consideration."

And finally, E. C. Beecher had his say, reflecting an era when women had



Lansing Public Library

Steamers left the Logan Street dock every half hour loaded with fun seekers. The boats also made regular trips to Sycamore Island located near the Park.

to be protected from the realities of life. "We expect to run this place so that the finest people of the city can come and see us," he observed. "... and especial care will be taken that ladies may patronize the resort and feel free from insult and restraint."

Other local newspapers agreed with the *Republican* and on opening day throngs of visitors poured into the park. They stayed late into the night as hundreds of lanterns and gasoline lamps illuminated Lansing's new playground.

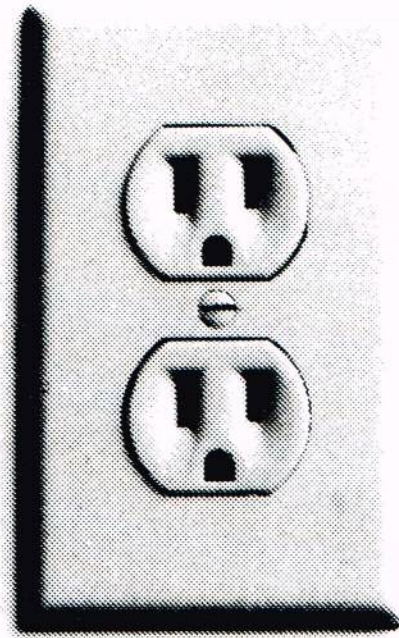
Through the years Leadley continued to add to his resort. He constructed a dam on the Grand River and started a steamer service from the Logan Street Bridge to the Park. Success followed success for the ambitious

entrepreneur as the first families of Lansing checked into his hotel. In 1894, for example, the prominent Roes, Bements and W. K. Prudden and his family spent a week at the hostelry. They were the cream of the city's society and where they went the lesser lights of the capital were sure to follow.

A freak accident took Leadley's life in 1897 when he fell from the top of a barn at the rear of his house. The city's newspapers mourned the death of one of Lansing's leading businessmen. The *Republican* paid tribute to his daring by noting: "At times people imagined Mr. Leadley was venturing into schemes that were visionary in the extreme, but his business judgement has been justified in every instance. His establishment of Leadley's Park and

building of the dam near the fair grounds, are instances in point. Lansing owes much to him in the way of improvements and the laborers of the city and surrounding country will remember him as a man who gave them a good deal of employment . . ."

However, even with its founder gone, Leadley park continued to thrive. On Decoration Day, 1898, the management featured everything from a balloon ascension to dancing into the late hours. Steamers left the Logan Street dock every half hour loaded with fun seekers. Strains of music from the Lansing City Band and Bristol's Band floated over the natural wonders of Leadley's resort as visitors enjoyed sumptuous meals at the hotel. It was a perfect day for happy Lansingites and a profitable one for the popular park.



Owner operated.

If you're a public power consumer, you're also a public power owner. This makes a big difference in rates and service.

Because public power is nonprofit, consumers and the community reap all the benefits.

Because it's community owned, we all have a say in how it serves us.

And because it's locally controlled, public power helps set — and achieve — the economic and environmental goals of our community.

When you're served by community owned public power, all of the benefits produced here, stay here — now and in the future. That's the best reason to plug into public power.

**Look at public power in a new light.
After all, it's yours.**



Lansing Board of Water & Light

Sometime around 1903, ownership of the park passed from the Leadley family to the Lansing & Suburban Traction Company. And in 1904, the company laid streetcar tracks to the park. That same year, without fanfare, the name was changed to Waverly Park and electric lights were installed.

The owners continued improving the park, purchasing new picnic tables and six steel boats. The spring 1905 grand opening featured a bigger and better Waverly Park with more attractions and a wide variety of diversions for adults and children. Fifteen carts drawn by donkeys provided rides for the younger set while the Waverly Park Band and Orchestra played all day long. The inevitable balloon ascension was also a highlight along with a baseball game at the recently constructed 5,000 seat baseball park.

Throughout the year, crowds kept coming, lured by a variety of special promotions. In June, McMahon, "the famous high diver" was featured with two performances a day. The stalwart McMahon jumped from a 125 foot tower to the applause of hundreds of amazed spectators. The visitors also enjoyed bowling, boating, baseball and dancing in the evening. Newspaper advertisements extolled the pleasures of the park, hawking the new electric launch *Margaret*, a 3,000 seat theater and the "elegant new commodious hotel with every modern convenience, including baths and electric lights."

Although the theater presented vaudeville shows that continued to draw crowds during the week, the streetcar company's new resort at Pine Lake was beginning to siphon off weekend revelers by 1907. The new park offered a large fresh water recreational lake and a casino with open air dancing. Much was also made of the promenade verandas where visitors enjoyed leisurely walks taking in nature's wonders.

As the years passed, Pine Lake continued to grow until it began to claim the title of being the Lansing area's principal playground. A reporter of the time noted that "In every direction one sees row boats, canoes, launches, sailboats and steam boats . . . many new cottages have been built and there has

been considerable activity in cottage lots."

Despite the fact that both resorts were owned by the same company, a competition raged between them. Waverly Park added a roller coaster, a hall of mirrors, a house of horror and a merry-go-round. But the Lansing facility continued to lose ground. There seemed to be no way to get around the fact that its rival had a natural lake as its chief attraction. The only solace for Waverly Park was that it remained a favorite picnic ground for many years.

The Masons and other groups regularly held their annual picnics at the Lansing park featuring such amusements as "... the three-legged and fat man's race to a baseball game." The streetcars ran a 15 minute service during the outings and were always crowded with "merry picnickers all day." And after each event the sponsors would proclaim the day "a grand success."

The handwriting was on the wall for Waverly Park by 1916 when the Michigan Railway Company, which now owned the resort, combined its advertisements with Pine Lake. Waverly Park gamely offered baseball, the now traditional balloon ascension and a round trip every 12 minutes to the facility. It only cost a visitor 10 cents to travel to the Lansing resort while a passenger paid 25 cents to enjoy the attractions of Pine Lake. Although Waverly was by far the best bargain, it seems it was too little too late.

Waverly Park's last gasp came on May 28, 1917 when an advertisement featured a small box announcing yet-another baseball game and balloon ascension. Most of the newspaper ad was taken up with the virtues of Pine Lake. And to add insult to injury, an article in the same newspaper praised the improvements recently completed at Pine Lake and emphasized its status as Lansing's leading resort.

The following year there was no mention of Gottlieb Leadley's legacy. It simply ceased to exist, without announcement or comment. Before long, what had once been Lansing's Xanadu was leveled, leaving no trace in the dust. New houses quickly covered the site and Waverly Park disappeared into Lansing's past.

MICHIGAN

For 150 years you've given our communities a place to grow.



AQUINAS

Master of Management in Lansing

- Designed for working adults who can attend college only part-time.
- Open to those who hold a bachelor's degree—regardless of undergraduate major.
- Meets the needs of people working in non-profit as well as profit-making organizations.
- Stresses the people side of management.

Classes held at Dwight Rich Middle School.

For further information contact the Graduate Management office at 1-800-541-5410, ext. 375 or return the form below.

Please send additional information to:

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____

Zip _____

Mail to: Graduate Management Program, Aquinas College, 1607 Robinson Road, S.E., Grand Rapids, Michigan 49506

AQUINAS
GRAND RAPIDS



COLLEGE
MICHIGAN

Approach to the Capitol

With all the recent improvements on Michigan Avenue and the approach to the Capitol, we thought it might be interesting to take a nostalgic look back in time. Always one of Lansing's main thoroughfares, the avenue has come a long way from the days when wagon wheels were frequently immobilized in seas of mud on its unpaved surface.

In 1871, when Mark Twain visited the capital city while on a lecture tour, he was moved to comment that Washington Avenue was "... the broadest and *deepest* street I have ever seen." Michigan Avenue was not in much better condition in those days although there is no record that the famous humorist made any observation about its many mud traps.

However, by the early 1900s, the approach to the Capitol began to take on a more familiar visage. The only unchanging element was the Capitol Building, which still serves as a link with our city's past.

The accompanying photographs, kindly provided by the Lansing Public Library, dramatically testify to the many changes that have taken place in the area over the years. And the current building boom in progress on Michigan will soon make the old avenue merely a memory tucked away in historical archives.

Perhaps it's fitting to pause and reflect on what once was before we rush headlong into the future. We hope you enjoy these images of yesterday.



1880



1890



1900



1910



1939



1987