

During the past few decades the University of Michigan Club of Manistee has heard stories about how it is one of the oldest Clubs in the University's Alumni organization. Recently the Club was able to research and document the long history of its existence.

In May 2006 the Club invited Mr. Steve Harold, Director and Curator of the Manistee County Museum to present an oral history on the Club's presence in the Manistee area. His information provided insight on a Michigan Club in Manistee that has existed in some form for over 100 years. Harold documents Manistee's historical news and events and currently writes a column in the local paper. Our search began with the presentation and then continued with the resources at the Manistee County Museum.

Establishing an exact date in which 'the first' meeting of Michigan Alumni occurred, proved to be daunting. Yet much data was available that attested to the presence of a group of Alumni in Manistee as early as 1890, and potentially even earlier. By 1890, Manistee's population included a number of professionals with credentials from the 'Michigan University'. In the late 1800's the University was often referred to as the 'State University', apparently because it was the first, and for some time, the only university in the State of Michigan.

The Law Department at the University was organized in 1859 and one, Byron M. Cutcheon, a Michigan graduate with a degree awarded in 1861, obtained a law degree in 1866. Cutcheon was an amazing person who, among his other accomplishments, authored a history of the State of Michigan and also of Manistee. Included in the history of Manistee was a detailed account of what was a sensational murder in 1869 and his involvement in the outcome. At the time Cutcheon had been practicing in the Manistee area for about 2 years having arrived in Manistee in July of 1867. Shortly before Cutcheon's arrival E.E. Benedict, an 1863 graduate of the University, is known to have come to Manistee for the purpose of practicing law in May of the same year. In 1871, A. J. Dovel located to Manistee, also for the purpose of practicing law.

With the documentation of Cutcheon and Benedict, two Michigan graduates, we see that there were in fact Alumni in the area by the late 1860's. Further research indicates that in Manistee on June 19, 1891 "the school (high school) exercises for the closing term" were held. The event featured a lecture by a Professor Harrington of Ann Arbor instead of essays by the graduates. "The alumni and students of the State University living in this city gave Professor Harrington a reception and banquet at the Dunham House" following the exercises at the hall.

"The menu was very elaborate, the toasts and responses were appropriate to the occasion, and the College songs sung with a 'go' that only College songs can inspire." At this gathering, Toastmaster McAlvay appointed M.J. Gregory, Fred Ramsdell and Professor Jennings a committee for the permanent organization of a University Club.

Those Michigan graduates listed as being in attendance at that particular occasion were:
E.E. Benedict, class of 1863
A.V. McAlvay, class of 1868
B.M. Cutcheon, class of 1861, 1866

Attendees also included:

Albert Jennings, a. 1865, l. 1868.

Delbert Edgar Robinson, M.D., m. 1878.

James Asahel King, m. 1884. He served as Major and Surgeon, 34th Michigan Infantry, 1898, during the Spanish-American War. The record also shows that he served as the mayor of Manistee from 1899-1900.

Louis Edward Morris, l. 1874.

John Henry Grant, a. 1882, l. 1883. Grant also served on the Board of Regents from 1909 to 1913. He was elected by popular vote.

John David Henry Wallace, a. 1881-83. Records mention he worked in real estate and insurance in Manistee, MI.

Louis Briggs Lee, a. 1884-88.

Wilbur James Gregory, a. 1886. Records mention that he worked as a banker in Manistee, MI.

Frederic Winthrop Ramsdell, a. 1884-85.

Max Hartranft Cutcheon, a. 1890-94. Records mention he worked as an administrative clerk in the Bureau of War Risk Ins., in Washington, D.C.

Elbert King Benedict, a. 1888-92.

Andrew Jackson Dovel, l. 1871.

Herbert Lincoln Harley, l. 1892. Records mention that Harley served during the First World War on the legal advisory board, district 16, Chicago, Ill. He was also a teacher and secretary of the American Judicature Society in Chicago, Ill.

Edward Charles Higgins, l. 1888.

(The above list was researched by the staff at the Bentley Museum at the University. The "a." before a date means the person studied in the Department of Literature, Science, and the Arts. An "l." means they attended the Law Department. An "m." indicates they attended the Department of Medicine and Surgery. A single date indicates they graduated, a range of dates means they attended but did not graduate. All of the information is from the University of Michigan Catalogue of Graduates, Non-Graduates, Officers, and Members of the Faculties, 1837-1921 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1923).

?Oscar Luman Ramsdell, who graduated from the Homeopathic Medical School in 1893

A second unrelated article dated the week of September 22, 1890 revealed the names of students attending the 'Michigan University' from the Manistee area. The list included Elbert Benedict, Max Cutcheon, George Ray, Herbert Harley, Will Hubbell AND Miss Lillie Engelmann!

*Excerpts from '100 Years Ago' articles by Steve Harold,
June, 1990 and September, 1990*

Yet another (University of) Michigan and Manistee connection appears to be that of 'visiting' professors to the area. Early 1900 documentation from local papers indicates that when the Carnegie Library, now the Manistee County Library, was dedicated, Dr James B. Angell¹ was present and a reception was held by a group of the local Michigan students and alumni. Another Michigan professor of importance to Manistee was William LeBaron Jenney. His professional contributions included chairing the architecture school at the University part time during the late 1870s, and also designing several buildings which still remain, one in Ann Arbor and **two** in Manistee.

Further research shows a much more organized effort at creating an Alumni group or club that occurred between the mid-1920's through the 1940's. Various written communications between T. Hawley Tapping, Field Secretary of The Alumni Association and a number of Michigan Alumni in the Manistee area indicate a concerted effort at establishing a Club.

Unfortunately a February 29, 1924 letter from R.M. Overpack to Hawley describes, "an alumni association here some years ago, and but two or three meetings were held with very little interest being shown." Further he writes, "I do not think that it would be wise to attempt anything in this line here."

In written communication beginning in 1939 and continuing through 1940 yet another attempt is made at formally organizing a Club in Manistee through the encouragement of the Association in Ann Arbor. The first 'authorized' UofM Club in the Manistee area appeared to be forming under the leadership of Dr. Ernest C. Hansen, Mr. John E. Campbell, Miss Elizabeth Thomas, Mr. Lester C. Bendle, Mr. Joseph Piekarski, Mr. Alois Golemb, and Mr. Danny Smick.

As in any alumni organization, the University of Michigan will always have their leaders and best gathering for social camaraderie and like interests. Such is the case with the group in Manistee. During the past 60 years it appears that there has always been a group of Wolverine supporters meeting for various reasons and/or causes. A core group of Michigan supporters that included: Liz Miller, John and Carol Messer, David and Betty Kitson, Tom and Lois Culbert, William Kelly, Nate and Pat Williams, Ken and Lois Rosenow, Ford Stone, Duncan and Kay Erley, carried on the tradition from the 1960's through the 1990's.

Under the reorganization of the Alumni Association in the mid-1990's the Manistee Alumni group was recognized as the University of Michigan Club of the Greater Manistee Area. Membership now includes alumni from Manistee, Mason, and parts of Benzie, Oceana, and Lake Counties.

In 2003 and again in 2006, the Manistee Club received one of the Alumni Association's "Outstanding Club" awards.
