

Michigan Political History Society NEWS

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Michigan Political History Society • P.O. Box 4684 • East Lansing, MI 48826-4684

Fall 2001

MPHS Special Event Will Enlighten and Entertain

The Michigan Political History Society will present a special program on Saturday, October 20, 2001, titled **Mackinac Island: Crossroads of Michigan Politics**.

Guest speaker, Dr. David Armour, Assistant Director of the Mackinac Island State Historic Park and author of several island histories, will regale attendees with stories of the island's fascinating history. Attendees get an insider's look at Mackinac Island political history, including major political events for which the island served as backdrop.

The program includes a special MPHS cocktail party at the famed Grand Hotel on Mackinac Island. This event coincides with the hotel's annual Big Band Dance Weekend and promises an especially entertaining and educational weekend getaway for our members and their guests.

The cost is only \$25.00 per person plus your overnight accommodations. The Grand Hotel has set aside a block of rooms for this event at a special rate of \$164.00 per person (double occupancy) and \$263.00 per person (single occupancy). Rates include a full breakfast and five-course dinner each day, and of course, tipping is neither expected nor permitted. An 18%

added charge is applied to the room and meal rates, as is the 6% Michigan sales tax. There is also a one-time charge for round-trip baggage transfer from the docks to the hotel and return.

A special mailing including a reply card should reach members sometime soon. To register, simply fill out and return the card. For room reservations at the Grand Hotel or any other island hotel, please contact them directly. The Grand Hotel's phone number is (906) 847-3331.

Come join what promises to be a unique and interesting event.

(There are no home football games at either Michigan State University or the University of Michigan scheduled for October 20, making this an especially opportune time to enjoy Mackinac Island in all its scenic and political glory!) ■

JOIN US!

MPHS Special Program...

Mackinac Island: Crossroads of Michigan Politics

Saturday, October 20, 2001

Grand Hotel, Mackinac Island

Speechwriter Russel Nye Expressed His Own Views

By Maurice Hungville

When Russel Nye died in 1993 many newspapers mentioned his biography of George Bancroft, which won the Pulitzer prize in 1945, and his pioneering scholarship in the area of popular culture, *The Unembarrassed Muse* (1970). There was no mention, however, of Nye's political

activities as a speechwriter for Democratic politicians because he never publicized these services. Nye's modesty reveals his "passion for anonymity," the hallmark of a ghostwriter. Nye, who earned his Ph.D. from the University of

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Russel Nye *Continued from page 1*

Wisconsin, worked in the tradition of the “Wisconsin idea,” first promoted by University of Wisconsin president John Bascom to take advantage of the close proximity between the capitol and the campus in Madison. In Wisconsin there was little distinction between scholarship and public service. In Madison, professors

“ There can be for the good teacher no gap between the educative process and life itself. ”

moved from the campus to the capitol in a way that enriched both localities. In Lansing, however, an iron curtain of contempt and suspicion often seemed to divide the two cultures.

Speechwriting gave Nye a chance to express his views through public figures, an opportunity to advocate and

editorialize in a way that his standards of scholarship and teaching would not permit. To the politicians for whom he wrote, Professor Nye gave large slices of American history, providing insight about the origins of the Constitution, the ideals of Jefferson and Jackson, the development of hospitals in the colonies—whatever was appropriate to the occasion. He also gave them his great gift for language: vivid detail, balanced, emphatic sentences, and illuminating flashes of witty analogy.

Nye’s ghostwriting for Governor G.

Mennen “Soapy” Williams included a speech on education that Williams delivered at the University of Michigan convocation. In this speech Nye gave Williams a vision of the citizen scholar that had once flourished at the University of Wisconsin: “There can be for the good teacher no gap between the educative process and life itself—no gulf between him and the way people in our society work,



Photo courtesy of the author

Russel Nye

play, earn a living, think, worship, produce goods or buy them. The doors of the teacher’s life, like the doors of the school must be open to the free two-way traffic with the outside world.” Williams’s thank-you note, dated March 23, 1954, acknowledged that the speech was “99.44 percent yours.” It was, Williams added, “so well received that

I sometimes get a chuckle out of wondering how they would feel if they knew a Michigan State professor had done most of the work.”

“ In a speech written for Democratic

State Chairman Neil Staebler, Nye’s contributions are evident. “On the Future of Party Politics in the United States” was a lively discussion of American political parties in the aftermath of John F. Kennedy’s election to the presidency in 1960. This speech sketched out recent American political history from Roosevelt to Kennedy and argued that victory on the national level

“ A party in power depends on its office-holders, and only a party out of power on its grassroots. ”

Publish in the Newsletter

The *MPHS Newsletter* invites writers to submit articles for publication. We are looking for well-researched political history pieces. Excerpts from book-length political histories or biographies you are writing are fine to submit. We also appreciate book reviews of newly published books on political history or past political personalities.

Publishing in the Newsletter is on an *a gratis* basis, but you will receive a by-line and your work will reach our very special audience. For detailed information on submissions, write for our guidelines. Send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to the editor, Delores Rauscher, 412 Marshall St, East Lansing MI 48823. If you prefer, send an e-mail to the editor at rausche5@msu.edu and she will send you the guidelines as an attachment.

often led to neglect on the grassroots, party-building level. "A party in power," Nye wrote, "depends on its office holders, and only a party out of power on its grassroots."

Because of Nye, Michigan Governor John Swainson was able to quote Jefferson on the Constitution's

“
We cannot protect
democracy by
giving it up.”
”

founding "not in the fears and follies of man, but on his reason, on his sense of right." The quotation from Jefferson was followed by a familiar insight from Nye stressing the uniqueness of the American experience: "Our American Constitution did not evolve out of long, slow trial and error, nor out of centuries of injustice and wrong; it was fashioned here in Philadelphia in a single moment of time as the self-willed act of dedicated men who met in peace, and whose resolutions were judged and approved in peace by those who were to be governed by them."

Nye's participation in public life, his connections to men of power, and his commitment to the Democratic party enabled him to carry the battle against McCarthy onto the national stage. Nye's extended comment on McCarthyism, written for Senator John Sparkman, Adlai Stevenson's running mate for the office of vice president, was, in the context of the times, a brave attack on a very dangerous man. On October 1, 1952, two days before the Republican candidate Dwight D.

Eisenhower would decline to criticize McCarthy in Milwaukee, and fifteen months before Edward R. Murrow would expose McCarthy to a national television audience, Senator Sparkman stood on the steps of Cornell University's student union and read the fiercest speech Nye ever wrote:

I don't intend to talk about Senator McCarthy—his record, sorry as it is, is well known, and I have confidence that the voters of Wisconsin will remove him shortly from public life. I want to talk instead about what he represents, about the thing he symbolizes. I want to talk about McCarthyism, that word that seems to be part of

our language, an ugly word that will remain in it—like Quisling and Lynch—long after the man and his aroma have departed. This is, as far as I can determine, McCarthy's only contribution to contemporary life; it is more, I suppose, than anything Dirkson or Jenner . . . have contributed, since they are not in the language yet. In some future dictionary, say twenty-five years hence, we may find under McCarthyism something like this—"McCarthyism—noun, obsolete; the use of public office and public trust to sow disharmony and suspicion; the creation of prejudice by deliberate

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MPHS Offers History Videos

A couple of the goals of the Michigan Political History Society are to study and document events, groups and persons notable in Michigan's political history and to share the experience and wisdom of the older generation with the younger generation. To help MPHS meet those goals, the organization has filmed several outstanding oral history videos. These videos are available to individuals and organizations. Listed below is a partial list of our holdings. To request a video, contact Joyce Crum at 336-5742.

- ***Lobbying - Its History & Impact on Policy Making***—Taped September 10, 1997
- ***An Evening with Milo Radulovich & Michael Ranvill***—Taped December 1, 1997
- ***The Story of U.S. Senator Patrick McNamara presented by Robert Perrin***—Taped March 4, 1998
- ***An Evening with Nancy Williams Gram***—Taped October 13, 1998
- ***The Romney Gubernatorial Years***—Taped June 24, 1999
- **Book Review: *Sharing the Balance of Power* (Dan Loepp)**—Taped September 28, 1999
- ***The MEA's Transformation During the '60s into a Labor Union with Political Clout***—Taped January 25, 2000

BOOK REVIEW

Ruin and Recovery: Michigan's Rise as a Conservation Leader By Dave Dempsey

Foreword by Former Governor William G. Milliken. University of Michigan Press, 2001. Pp. 368, 20 photographs. Cloth \$42.50, paper \$19.95.

Reviewed by Delores Rauscher.

The lumberjack Paul Bunyan with Babe his Blue Ox have long excited the American imagination. A timber god of sorts, this legendary, witty woodsman chopped, hewed, and sawed his way across the American

landscape, felling trees by the thousands. In the American imagination, Paul Bunyan stands a hero. And yet, in Dave Dempsey's book we find heroes standing in stark opposition to Bunyan. While Dempsey believes that the "color and drama of the lumberjack era deserve recognition," he offers his audience a true tale instead of a tall tale. His book's heroes are the many public servants, activists, scholars, and average

citizens who have striven to end the indiscriminate plunder and consumption of Michigan resources.

Dempsey's thorough archival research is stunning. The book gives a full recounting of political actions and reactions, from the nineteenth-century game laws to the 1995 repeal of the "polluter pay" law. This intriguing story of Michigan's ruin

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Russel Nye *Continued from page 3*

distortion and falsification, in an attempt to make political profit."

This speech offered a scathing rebuke of the Republican Party for its responsibility for McCarthyism; it also offered a spirited defense of the Democratic record. While Sparkman recognized the danger of communism abroad and at home, he insisted that the Democratic programs were best suited to defeat a totalitarian system that "breeds on breadlines." Effective anti-communism required responsible investigation by qualified and legitimate agencies. McCarthy's noisy efforts had produced no results, not a single convicted communist. Indeed, his irresponsible allegations were, in Nye's analogy, "a great deal like helping the fire department by turning in false alarms every ten minutes." Ironically, the danger of communism had been increased by McCarthyism, because McCarthyism disarmed America of "the real secret

weapon of democracy . . . , the ability to shape policy by free debate, free speech, free discussion." Nye's conclusion gave Senator Sparkman a graceful tribute to his Cornell University audience:

I don't think it is necessary for me, standing in the shadow of a great university, to emphasize the necessity of keeping open those channels of free thought and free discussion that are the basis of our life—the tradition of Andrew Dickson White, Lane Cooper and Carl Becker is too strong here to make it needful for me to say more than I have. My point is simply this—we cannot protect democracy by giving it up. The First Amendment will not live in cold storage. We shall never defeat communism by accepting its methods. To preserve human rights we must fight communism abroad

and McCarthyism at home. The one is as dangerous and as un-American as the other.

These were Nye's values and Nye's words; they were, in the largest sense, public service.

This article is from Maurice Hungville's latest book Making a Career out of Curiosity: Russel Nye and the Rise of Popular Culture, a biography of Nye to be published in 2002 by MSU Press. Parts of this article were published in the Academe, the bulletin of the American Association of University Professors, June, 1995. Maurice Hungville is Professor Emeritus, Department of American Thought and Language, Michigan State University. He is also author of a history of Michigan State University, From a Single Window: Michigan State University and its Press, 1947-1997, published in 1998. ■

Ruin and Recovery Continued from page 4

and recovery is laced with numerous primary source quotes and eye-opening anecdotes, with supporting facts and figures.

The author lays out evidence of a once pristine Michigan where walnut trees grew ten-foot in diameter and where game was so abundant that sportsmen might fire guns “into groups of birds and kill a dozen with one shot.” And yet a few furious decades at the end of the nineteenth century was all it took to “consume the vast majority of the state’s forests, wipe out several abundant or exquisite fish and wildlife species . . . and forever alter the ecology of the Great Lakes.” Too-slow state action resulted in polluted surface and underground water. Fights broke out among the

Photo courtesy of State Archives of Michigan



Governor Romney helps stock a lake with kokanee salmon, 1965.

“Public shame and indignation’ positively influenced Michigan’s recovery.”

environmentalists, conservationists, politicians, and industrialists. And state enforcement of standards was often lax.

What surfaces throughout the book are the intricate difficulties of pitting what

is good for the natural environment and for the future economy of Michigan against the immediate economic interests of industry and labor and the demands of a consuming public. Most of us enjoy our charcoal briquettes (sulfites), clean clothes (phosphates), and spotless fruit (residual pesticides), and yet we want a safe environment. In order to protect resources as well as allow for usage, the state has to find balance between two extremes. At one extreme are those who believe that if you can’t “cut it or kill it or cook it” it has no benefit and who believe that a picnic table in the back yard serves as well as a state park. And at the other extreme are those who hold forest vigils and pray to trees.

But some of Dempsey’s anecdotes shake our confidence that we can find safe ground between consumption and conservation. For example, in 1981 the city of Charlevoix found the chemical trichloroethylene (TCE), an

“The political ax has replaced the woodsman’s.”

equipment degreasing agent, in its drinking water. A suspected carcinogen, TCE need be present in only small amounts to be dangerous. In fact, a mere 16 gallons “rendered unfit for human consumption an aquifer containing 393

million gallons of groundwater.” The source of Charlevoix’s TCE contamination was traced back to the 1950s at Charlevoix Middle School where a janitor had dumped a single drum of waste chemical. That alone may have caused the contamination.

And even when we try to do right we sometimes do wrong. In 1995, in Kingsford, a town near the Menominee River, a man removing clothes from his basement dryer generated enough static electricity to ignite a massive buildup of methane that had permeated the soil around his basement. Some thirty years earlier, Ford Company carbonization and distillation plants had manufac-

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Damon Keith Keynotes October History Conference

In contribution to Detroit's 300th birthday celebration, the Historical Society of Michigan will hold a special conference on Detroit's history titled **Detroit's Story: 300 Years of Opportunity, Diversity, and Success**. The event is scheduled for Friday, October 5 through Sunday, October 7 at the Holiday Inn Fairlane-Dearborn at Ford Road and Southfield in Detroit.

The conference features noted scholars, including the Honorable Damon J. Keith, U.S. 6th Circuit Court of Appeals, and Dr. Philip Mason, History Professor at Wayne State University, founding Director of the Reuther Library, and a past president of the Historical Society of Michigan.

The three-stranded program highlights the themes of *Opportunity*, *Diversity*, and *Success*. Topics of discussion include the following: Black and Legal Political Experiences, Auto Industrial Heritage, Women in Detroit, Detroit Family Memories, The Immigrant Experience, Detroit Transitions, Labor in Detroit, The Underground Railroad, and The Role of Religion. Other featured speakers are Judy Cantor, Sue Carter, William R. Chapin, Nate Conyers, Michael W. R. Davis, DeWitt Dykes, Esther Gordy Edwards, Doug Fraser, Peter Gavrilovich, Arthur Johnson, Bill McGraw, Elizabeth Reuther, Mary Ellen Riordan, Mike Smith, Gene Stroebel, Richard Thomas, Tom Turner, JoEllen Vinyard, Art Woodford, and others.

On Friday, October 5 and Sunday, October 7 tours will bring participants to specific sites associated with

the city's development. In addition, special programs will be held at the Detroit Historical Museum, the Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, and the Dr. Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History. Washington Productions will present an exciting journey on the Underground Railroad, "Seven Steps to Freedom." Tours of Historic Detroit, the Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village, and the

Holocaust Memorial Center also will be offered.

The Detroit Historical Society, Detroit 300, Inc., Preservation Wayne, and the Michigan Humanities Council are key co-sponsors of this special program celebrating Detroit's fascinating past. Members of local historical societies, genealogical societies, educators, and the community at large are invited to participate. ■

Ruin and Recovery Continued from page 5

tured charcoal briquettes and wood-derived chemicals at the site. Ford wanted to reduce wood waste (an admirable goal) by turning scrap wood leftover from its car manufacture into useful products. But the disposal practices left "a waste far more dangerous than scrap wood."

Out of Dempsey's analysis and observations come some proposals. For one, the public must stay aware. History shows that an apathetic and uninformed public contributed to Michigan's ruin. On the other hand, "public shame and indignation" positively influenced Michigan's recovery. The public must therefore be informed and educated about the ill effects of overuse and abuse, and citizens should keep watch over Michigan's landscapes and waterways.

In addition, conservationists and environmentalists must mend old rifts and work together as once before, and they should steer clear of political entanglements. Early conservationists such as James Oliver

Curwood aimed to pull conservation away from politics. Such must be the case again today if recovery is to continue. "It is clearly wrong to turn to elected officials for conservation leadership," writes Dempsey. "The political ax has replaced the woodsman's." ■



The logo for the Michigan Political History Society's newsletter, "NEWS". The word "NEWS" is in large, bold, serif capital letters. Above it, "Michigan Political History Society" is written in a smaller, decorative font. There are small floral or leaf-like motifs on either side of the word "NEWS".

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The AFL-CIO Plans a Special History Event

The Michigan AFL-CIO is planning a special event titled **AFL-CIO—Where It Came From and Its Impact on Michigan**, commemorating the history of the organization. The October 4 event features Mark Gaffney, President of the Michigan AFL-CIO, as the main speaker. Entertainment plans include Mark Gaffney role-playing the

AFL-CIO EVENT

AFL-CIO—Where It Came From
and Its Impact on Michigan

Thursday, October 4, 2001

UAW 652 Hall, Lansing

president of the Local Union. A 5:30 p.m. reception precedes the 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. program.

The dinner menu is still in the planning stages and, therefore, so is the attendance fee, but estimates indicate a likely fee of \$20 - \$25.00. The event will take place at the UAW 652 Hall, 426 Clare, Lansing.

Please watch for a mid-September mailing detailing final arrangements.

Mark Your Calendars for Booksigning

This is an event you won't want to miss! On Tuesday, September 18, 2001, the MPHS will host a booksigning at the Michigan Chamber of Commerce. Douglas L. Koopman will be offering signed copies of his book *Serving the Claims of Justice; The Thoughts of Paul B. Henry*, an edited compilation.

Former Representative Paul B. Henry gave much insight and thought to politics over countless years of public service. He died in August of 1993 after a nine-month battle with brain cancer. Henry served six years in the Michigan legislature and nearly nine years in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Douglas Koopman is Associate Professor of Political Science at Calvin College and Program Director of the Paul B. Henry Institute for the Study of Christianity and Politics. He was also aide to Henry and had opportunity to work very closely with the representative.

We encourage all members to take the opportunity to meet Douglas L. Koopman, who knew personally the remarkable person and engaging personality of Paul B. Henry. The event begins at 5:30 p.m.

KOOPMAN BOOKSIGNING

MPHS Event—Douglas L. Koopman offering signed copies of *Serving the Claims of Justice; The Thoughts of Paul B. Henry*

Tuesday, September 18, 2001

Michigan Chamber of
Commerce, Lansing, 5:30 p.m.

For more information please contact Kevin A. Kelly and Joyce C. Crum, at (517) 336-5742 or via e-mail at kkelly@msms.org.

If you plan to attend this event please R.S.V.P by faxing your name, address, e-mail, fax and phone numbers to Kevin A. Kelly at (517) 337-2490 or via e-mail at the above address. You may also contact Joyce Crum.

Coming in Future Issues

Watch for the next *MPHS Newsletter* scheduled for publication at the end of 2001. The coming edition will feature an enlightening article by Bob LaBrant covering the **"History of Redistricting in Michigan**

Before "APOL," 1837 – 1980."

This timely, apropos article covers the disputes and debates over apportionment issues during those forty-three years.

Later in 2002, look for Barbara Sawyer-Koch's article covering the

adventures of the Ingalls/Sawyer family of the Upper Peninsula. Few families can boast of so many members devoting their lives to public service.

See page 2 for information on publishing in the Newsletter.

MPHS Remembers Richard Austin

Upon the recent death of Richard Austin, Governor John Engler offered these words: "Michigan lost a man who was a political institution . . . an outstanding public servant and a dignified and distinguished gentleman." He was, said Governor Engler, "a true leader."

A man of firsts, Austin showed leadership by breaking through barriers, by promoting government reform, and by serving the people so well that they elected him secretary of state five times.

His work for Michigan began in 1941 when he became the state's first African American public accountant. In 1969 he ran for mayor of Detroit, the first African American to do so, although he lost. But in 1970 he won his bid for

secretary of state, thereby becoming the first African American to hold a statewide office in Michigan. He was also Michigan's longest-serving secretary, holding the office for twenty-four years.

During his years as secretary of state, Austin worked to increase the services of his office by making voter registration one of his office's duties. Citizens could conveniently register to vote through the same office where they applied for driver's licenses and registrations. He promoted public safety by pushing legislation instituting mandatory seatbelts, child restraints, and motorcycle helmets. In

addition, he supported the efforts of Jim Wresinski and Martha Bigelow in securing a new state history museum. The historical museum, library and archives came together in 1989 as the Michigan Library and Historical Center (see Martha Bigelow's article in *Michigan History*, May/June 2001).

Michigan owes this "dignified and distinguished gentleman" many thanks. ■

Photo courtesy of State Archives of Michigan



Richard Austin (center) with Carl Levin (left) and Coleman Young.

Michigan Political History
Society

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East Lansing, MI 48826-4684

RETURN SERVICE
REQUESTED

PRESORTED
FIRST CLASS

