

# Michigan Political History Society NEWS

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## MEET THE PRESS! MPHS EXAMINES THE CAPITAL PRESS CORPS IN THE 70S AND 80S

By TOM MORRISEY

The Michigan Political History Society sponsored the second installment in its “The History of the Capital Press Corps” series on November 9, 2009 at the Michigan Chamber of Commerce. This panel focused on capital journalism in the 1970s and 80s, an era that moderator Roberta Stanley, a MPHS board member and former Gongwer reporter, called “a heyday in the prominence of the press corps.”

The panel featured journalists Bob Berg, UPI’s Lansing bureau chief and press secretary for Gov. William Milliken; Charlie Cain, Detroit News Lansing bureau chief; Walt Sorg, reporter for WJIM (now WLNS) and WILX television and press secretary for House Speaker Bobby Crim; Larry Lee, recently retired Gongwer News Service Vice President; and Joanna Firestone, state and federal political editor for the Detroit News.

Berg said that more open and friendly relationships between reporters and politicians existed at the time.

“You spent a lot of time after hours, as well. There was collegiality. There was a sense that there were people you could learn a lot from. You learned whom you should listen to and whom you shouldn’t listen to and who knew what was going on,” he said.

That collegiality extended across party lines and involved relationships based on trust – enough trust that Cain was able to socialize with the subjects of his stories.

“You’d be at a big table, and there’d be Republicans and Democrats and reporters and lobbyists, and I always had a rule – people would be afraid, but I’d always say, ‘I don’t quote out of bars, though I might run to the john and write a quick note.’”

According to Cain, members of the two parties were able to put aside their professional differences and maintain friendly relationships off the floor.

“They would fight like hell on the floor, then afterwards they’d go out and share a beer and talk about what they were going to do on the upcoming weekend, oh, and how’s your kid in school. That’s lost and I think public policy has paid a price for that,” he said.

The panel strongly criticized term limits as the cause of the change in the political dynamic in Michigan.

“I had great relationships with many of the people I covered because they were there



Front row: Panelists Larry Lee, Joanna Firestone, Charlie Cain, Walt Sorg, and Bob Berg. Back Row: MPHS President Dave Murley, History of the Capital Press Corps Moderator Roberta Stanley

for so long, and I was there for quite a while. Now, I have a hard time when I see a story about a legislator, knowing who the hell they are or where they’re from, because they’re here today and gone tomorrow,” said Sorg.

Lee agreed about the effects of the term limits, which were imposed through a constitutional amendment in 1992.

“Term limits, from a selfish perspective, are just terrible, because you miss those relationships. You had time to develop them, know who the characters were, break through their issues and know where they were coming from and how they were trying to change things,” he said.

Cain simply said that term limits are “the dumbest thing that Michigan voters ever foisted upon us.”

According to one panelist, there was also a shift in the nature of the press corps that helped damage the formerly collegial relationship.

“That sea change kind of started after Watergate. After Woodward and Bernstein, suddenly, people were saying ‘Hey, this was kind of cool, maybe I want to be a hotshot political reporter,’” said Firestone.

“So, you saw a lot of younger people

agitating and lobbying to get jobs in the state capital. It probably took 15 years, the change. It wasn’t as friendly, a little more adversarial, and you saw some people who saw some pretty big futures for themselves and really changed the nature of that press corps,” she said.

Another key difference the panelists discussed about the era was the sheer size of the pool of reporters covering state politics.

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# CAPITAL, FROM PAGE 1



Walt Sorg fields a question from the audience

“It was a highly competitive environment with all those bureaus. We would wake up in terror about what Hugh [McDiarmid, political columnist for the Detroit Free Press] was writing about,” Lee said. Firestone attributed some of the extra attention to what she called “the rise of the broadcasters,” such as Tom Green, Bob Pisor, Jim Harrington and Lou Gordon.

“[They were] excellent, excellent reporters and broadcasters. They probably would have been sniffed at by a lot of the print folks, but they were the guys to beat,” she said, noting that the print journalists were shaken when Pisor broke the story that Martha Griffiths had been chosen as then-candidate for Gov. James Blanchard’s running mate.

“Those guys were tough. They were really good competitors and I think that none of us are well served by the fact that virtually everybody has pulled out from the TV stations in Detroit – if it doesn’t bleed, it doesn’t lead,” said Firestone.

It was at the end of this era that more walls started to be thrown up between journalists and the subjects of their stories, according to the panelists. Cain recalled his surprise the first time he was diverted from directly quoting a politician.

“That was so foreign to me, the first time someone tried to put that idea into my head, that I had to quote a spokesperson for that person – that just wasn’t real, it didn’t feel right. The access and the way you conducted yourself around the capital was different in the 70s and 80s,” said Cain.

The panelists also mourned the loss of the pressroom in the capital building and its notorious “quote board,” which was mined for laughs by Johnny Carson at least twice. Berg cited Eddie Augenstein, who managed the room up through the 1970s, as a valuable source.

“He’d love to pull you off to the side of the room and whisper something to you,” he said.

Sorg said of the decision to close the pressroom, “The proximity was a threat.”

The discussion wasn’t completely dominated by criticism of how political journalism has degraded over the decades. The panelists also took time to share some of their wildest experiences from that era.

Sorg told what was perhaps the most unbelievable story, about how Tom Green “stole” the state budget before it was publicly released.

“I’m not sure the statute of limitations has expired on that one,” Sorg said. “He had a car that looked like an unmarked police car. He acted the part without saying he was. Just to verify he was legit, he had the person who was in charge of the printing office call the Governor’s office to get verification, and somehow I answered the phone.”

Cain recalled a time that the longtime “Godfather of the U.P.,” Rep. Dominic Jacobetti, pulled a prank on him at a fundraiser – rigging a raffle so that Cain won an enormous door prize and expressing mock outrage when Cain refused it out of ethical considerations.

Berg shared with the audience Gov. Milliken’s reaction to being called a word offense to both the governor and his mother by Detroit Mayor Coleman Young. According to Berg, the governor simply

deadpanned, “He shouldn’t have said that.”

“The next morning, the mayor called him up and explained that’s a word that can have different meanings based on how it’s said – it can be a term of endearment,” Berg said.

Also mentioned were a heated time during the marijuana legalization debate of 1979, when Rep. Rosetta Ferguson clubbed Rep. Perry Bullard over the head with a glass ashtray after he called her argument against legalization “ignorant,” and an incident where a streaker entered the house floor and was only caught because he waited around to be interviewed.

Finally, Lee shared an encounter on the floor between two legislators who were both World War II veterans – although from opposite sides of the conflict.

John McCauley, who Lee called “a great senator and great drinker, not necessarily in that order,” angrily accused onetime Luftwaffe pilot Richard Friske of having his arm, which he lost in the war.

“One night, McCauley’s feeling no pain in one of those late-night sessions. He comes into the house chamber, goes over to Friske, and says, ‘Friske, you s.o.b.’ He tears his prosthetic arm out of his sleeve, bangs it on the desk, and asks him, ‘What the hell did you guys do with my arm?’” Lee said.

Not every incident on the floor was so amusing – panelists also recalled the time that the Sergeant-at-Arms wrestled an intruder to the ground and suffered a fatal heart attack.

“Everything we did 40 years ago, working with these folks and with many of these people in the audience, really now all I’m doing is spitting back memories in the morning,” Sorg said.

Summing up all of his colleagues’ feelings about the era, Sorg said, “They were some amazing times. The journalism was beyond belief. Some of the characters we covered were beyond belief. It seems like now, the issues we covered at the time they seemed so serious – the state was going broke about every ten years, one way or another, but we’ve learned how to do that better now.”



Frank Kelley shares his thoughts with some of the panelists



## Think you remember Michigan politics in the 1980s?

Former Detroit Free Press Capital Bureau Chief Hugh McDiarmid produced this quiz to help get the panelists and audience members in the spirit of the evening. WARNING! SOME OF THE LANGUAGE BELOW MAY BE INAPPROPRIATE FOR POLITE SOCIETY. SUCH IS THE DANGER WHEN QUOTING CERTAIN OF OUR STATE'S ESTEEMED POLITICAL PERSONALITIES!

1. August, 1989 – Who, when asked if he'd be willing to be John Engler's running mate in 1990, responded: "I've heard the speculation and my response is that I would rather crawl across I-75 on my knees, on cut glass at rush-hour than run for lieutenant governor." A) Brooks Patterson, B) Peter Secchia, C) John Schwarz, D) Dan DeGrow
2. 1980 – Whose door sign read: "Get out, goddammit, I'm making six judges today?" A) Martha Griffiths', B) Bob Bergs', C) George Weeks', D) Joyce Braithwaite's'.
3. Nov. 1987 – Referring to Jesse Jackson, he told a Wayne State University audience that he "ain't never run nuthin' but his mouth". A) Coleman Young, B) Bill Lucas, C) John Kelley, D) Gil DiNello
4. Dec. 1981 – He said, referring to the upcoming 1982 election year, "I'm not ready to grovel around in a Republican primary with the rest of 'em – going to some GOP convention and having people blow smoke in your face and throw up on your jacket. I can't swallow that hypocrisy yet". Who was it? A) Jim Brickley, B) Dick Headlee, C) Brooks Patterson, D) Harry Gast.
5. 1985 – Name the Democratic state senator who referred to his fellow Democrat, House Speaker Gary Owen, as "an ignorant, ill-informed, half-baked hillbilly". A) Art Miller, B) John Kelley, C) George Hart, D) Burt Leland.
6. Dec. 1982 – Who said of just-defeated (by Blanchard) GOP gubernatorial candidate Dick Headlee, "There's nothing, really, that I could have done to save him from himself"? A) Joyce Braithwaite, B) Bill Milliken, C) Jim Brickley, D) Helen Milliken
7. Early 1983 – Who said, referring to Headlee, who'd railed in his 1982 campaign against Helen Milliken's outspoken support for the federal Equal Rights Amendment, "He puts me in mind of an ass"? A) Peter Fletcher, B) Jim Brickley, C) Helen Milliken, D) Bill Milliken
8. At the 1983 Jeff Jack dinner, Gov. Blanchard told the audience that one of the speakers had talked so long "That I had to (step out and) take a leak." Who was that speaker? A) John Dingell, B) Frank Kelley, C) Richard Austin, D) John Cherry.
9. 1986 – Who was this year's running-mate for GOP gubernatorial nominee Bill Lucas? A) Colleen Engler, B) Connie Binsfield, C) Ronna Romney, D) Paul Henry
10. Jan. 1988 – After making semi-ribald remarks to the Economic Club of Grand Rapids, he paused and said "It's after speeches like this that my mother hears about my comments in the paper and wishes she had remained a virgin". Who said this? A) Peter Fletcher, B) Peter Secchia, C) Jim Blanchard, D) Joe Schwartz.
11. 1989 – Who said, "Rome has been sacked by other barbarians and survived. I'm sure it will survive again", referring to the U.S. Senate's confirmation of Michigan GOP figure Peter Secchia as Ambassador to Italy? A) Peter Fletcher, B) Jim Blanchard, C) Joyce Braithwaite, D) Martha Griffiths.

# A Grand Time!

## MPHS GRAND HOTEL WEEKEND 2009

**MPHS—  
Grand Hotel  
Weekend  
2009**



The Michigan Political History Society visited the Grand Hotel over the July 24-26, 2009 Weekend. Members were greeted Friday afternoon with a reception at the Geranium Bar before dispersing to take advantage of the many activities Mackinac Island—and the Grand Hotel—has to offer.

The highlight of the weekend came the next day, Saturday, July 25. Members met in the lobby at 9:00 a.m. for a political history tour of the Grand Hotel. The tour, led by R. Dan Musser II, focused on the role politics has played in the history of the Hotel, from the Grand's early days to the political battle behind the Mackinac Bridge to the origins of today's major political conferences, such as the Detroit Regional Chamber Public Policy

Conference.

Having an expert guide like Mr. Musser—who began working at the Hotel in 1951—made the tour a delight. Augmenting our guide's expert commentary were the incredible pictures—hundreds and hundreds of them—which captured the political personalities and events which have been part of the Grand Hotel's history. Pictures of names from the past—John F. Kennedy, Earl Warren, George C. Marshall—hung next to more contemporary political figures, such as Jim Blanchard, Bill Clinton, and Al Gore.

After the tour, members went their own way. Some paid their respects to prominent political figures—including Glen Allen, Phil Hart, and Soapy Williams—at the Island's

cemeteries. Some visited historical Fort Mackinac, while others enjoyed a bike ride. Most all of the group made it back to the hotel in the late afternoon, to enjoy a sunny day and behold one of the most breathtaking views available—the view of the Mackinac Bridge from the porch of the Grand Hotel.

The weekend was a great success. Thank you to Mr. Musser and the Grand Hotel staff for making it possible. We also thank the members of the Michigan Political History Society who attended the event for their contribution in making the weekend so enjoyable.

PS—MPHS recently recorded a DVD interview with Dan Musser II regarding the political history of the Grand Hotel. Please see page 8 for more details.



**James Frego, Cliff Taylor, Annie Farrell, Dave Murley**

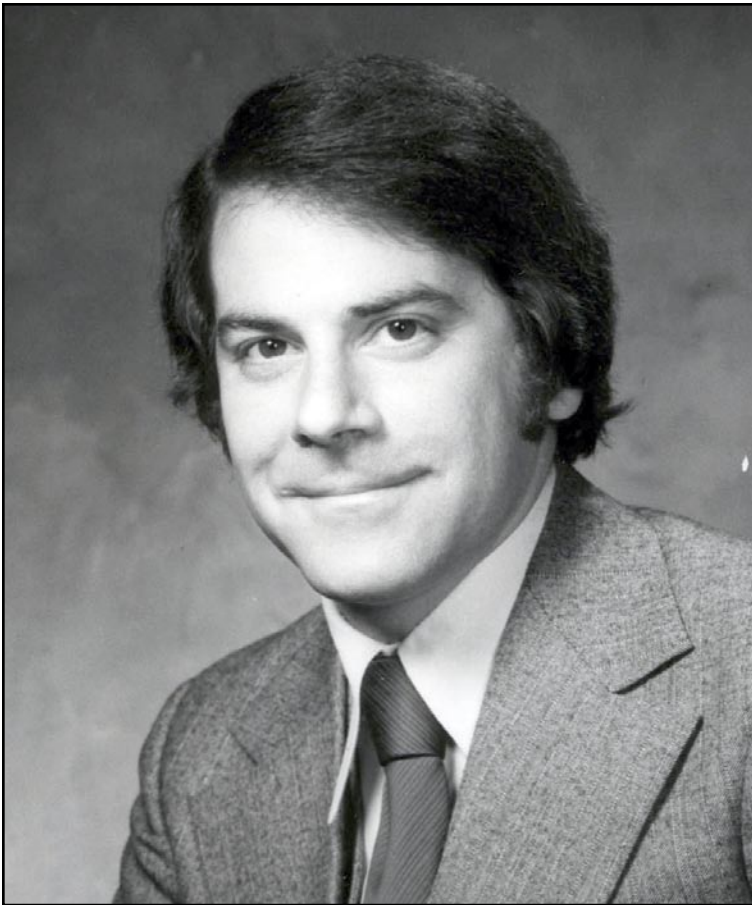


**Dan Musser II answers questions from the members**



# Catching up with . . .

# PAUL ROSENBAUM



State Representative Paul Rosenbaum  
(Photo courtesy of the State of Michigan Archives)

**BY TOM MORRISEY**

Former legislator Paul Rosenbaum has seen many changes in his life since he left elective politics in the late 1970s. After serving three terms in the Michigan House representing Battle Creek, Rosenbaum has experienced a move to Portland, Ore., stints in private legal practice and the chemical industry, and now running a heavily data-driven company, one with such an interesting business model that it merited a profile in *Forbes*. The change is nothing new for Rosenbaum, whose life seems centered around finding unexpected benefits in every new direction he has traveled in. As a young lawyer, Rosenbaum came to Michigan from his native New York City in 1969, then working for a subsidiary of the Peoples Home Life Insurance Company, without any designs on elected office.

"I was 28 years old and they offered me the job as general counsel of the holding companies in Battle Creek," Rosenbaum said.

Rosenbaum expected to return to New York in a couple years, but fell in love with the affordable housing market and what he saw as a better environment in which to raise his young son.

It wasn't long before frustration with some local laws pushed Rosenbaum towards politics.

At the time, local property taxes were calculated based on a home's purchase price. When Rosenbaum complained about the

practice, which he saw as biased towards longtime homeowners over newcomers to Battle Creek, he was told that he couldn't do anything about it.

"'Couldn't do anything about it' wasn't in my vocabulary," says Rosenbaum.

He then founded the Battle Creek Township Taxpayers' Association and got his first taste of political campaigning.

"I walked through the whole township and I got families to join it at \$5 a family," said Rosenbaum.

Two weeks after winter tax bills arrived, Rosenbaum scheduled his first meeting in a junior high school gymnasium that could fit about 200 people. About 7,000 people showed up, he said.

"The traffic jam was incredible," said Rosenbaum, who had to cancel and reschedule the meeting for the much larger W.K. Kellogg Auditorium. Nine thousand people arrived for the second meeting.

"I realized for the first time that 9,000 people were coming to hear me talk," said Rosenbaum.

The Taxpayer's Association quickly accomplished its goals. "We ended up reappraising every property in the township," said Rosenbaum, who parlayed his accomplishment into a run as a Democrat in a heavily Republican House district.

"No one gave me a snowball's chance in you-know-where," Rosenbaum said, but he narrowly won in 1972, beating six-term incumbent Gus Grote by fewer than 200 votes. During the campaign, property taxes continued to be a major issue for Rosenbaum, along with education and prison funding and reuse of the former Fort Custer, which is today used for recreation and as an industrial park.

Rosenbaum spoke highly of his three terms in the legislature, saying its working environment has changed for the worse.

"One of the things we had in the legislature in those days, which isn't present anywhere in the country now, is cordiality," he said.

"We fought, but were also close friends. After the close of session, we'd go out together," he said.

That spirit of camaraderie extended even to Rosenbaum's relationship with then-Governor William Milliken.

"He was a tough cookie. I liked the Governor very much. I only had one run-in with him, over the Michigan Single Business Tax," which Rosenbaum described as the "single worst act" of his time in the legislature.

Rosenbaum's suggestion for restoring that old bipartisan spirit? Eliminating term limits.

"If you wanted to be around there for 10 or 15 years and do a good job, you had other people who were also going to be around," he said.

Treating the legislature as a full time job, rather than just a springboard to something else, would force elected officials to work together out of sheer necessity, he said.

Rosenbaum's time in the House wasn't without controversy. In 1978, he sponsored the 650-Lifer laws, modeled on New York State's Rockefeller drug laws, which place a mandatory life sentence on those convicted of possessing more than 650 grams, or roughly a pound and a half, of controlled substances.

"What I didn't realize – and I learned a lesson from it – was that it was so onerous the local prosecutors had no ability to use

(See **Rosenbaum**, Page 6)

## ROSENBAUM, FROM PAGE 5

it,” Rosenbaum said.

Without the ability to strike plea bargains, most prosecutors had to choose between choosing not to pursue charges or passing the prosecution along to the federal government, he said.

“We did the best that we could. I spent literally thousands of hours on that bill. You can never fully understand the ramifications when you’re dealing with 10 million people,” he said. Rosenbaum said that he remained flexible on the issue of drug laws in Michigan, and that as a private citizen he voted to legalize marijuana ten years after his involvement with the 650-Lifer laws.

In 1978, Rosenbaum wanted to try something new and decided that he would leave the House, one way or another. He says that the desire to provide a better life for his family and move on to new things pushed him into a run for the United States Senate. In a six-candidate primary, he was defeated by the eventual general election winner, Sen. Carl Levin.

Rosenbaum said he had known that his candidacy was a long shot, but as he was going to leave the legislature either way, the run for the United States Senate was at least a fitting swan song for his career in elected politics.

Rosenbaum opened his own law firm right across the street from the Capitol in Lansing, but soon started searching around for new opportunities.

“After practicing law for about 10 or 12 years, I started getting restless,” he said. He spent several years in the specialty chemicals industry, founding SWR Corporation, which sells chemicals used to separate oil and water in a variety of applications.

In 2000, Rosenbaum took control of his current company, Rentrak, after “the nastiest proxy fight that you’ve ever seen in your life,” as he described it.

“It was a company that delivered 10,000 VHS and DVDs to Mom and Pop video stores,” Rosenbaum said.

As he delved deeper into the company, Rosenbaum realized that its true value was the information technology infrastructure it had developed as an afterthought. Rentrak’s systems were automatically tracking rentals at every video store they served at the checkout aisle – data that Rosenbaum quickly realized the company could profit from.

“I saw the potential was enormous,” he said.

Adding the ability to track movie theater ticket and video-on-demand purchases and live cable television watching dramatically increased the scope of Rentrak’s operation and made them an industry resource, as the detailed viewership figures are especially important in determining the value of advertising space sold within different programs.

“Every single studio in the country uses us. Every single studio executive is on their Blackberries starting 7 o’clock Friday” looking at Rentrak’s live figures, he said.

Rosenbaum said that his political experience in Michigan was important in his later business success.

“Bill Ryan, the former Speaker of the House, taught me a lot – here’s a guy with a high school diploma, and the best negotiator I ever saw.” Rosenbaum credited watching Ryan in action with developing his own negotiating abilities.

Since his takeover of Rentrak, the company’s share price has increased eightfold. Rosenbaum believes his success with Rentrak has a lesson for his former home state and shared some free advice for future Michigan entrepreneurs.

“It’s high-tech industry, especially in the data area. To look at data and aggregate it across platforms and across industries is what everyone’s going to be looking for,” Rosenbaum said, suggesting potential opportunities such as better systems for tracking patient medical records.



Paul Rosenbaum today

“Whoever owns the data owns the world,” he said.

Through a career that has seen stints in the law, politics and business management, Rosenbaum has never fully divorced himself from previous lives: he even remains involved politically, serving as a commissioner of the Port of Portland. Each transition presented him with unexpected opportunities that he quickly adapted to and took advantage of -- a life lesson that is perhaps especially relevant in today’s economic climate.





Dan Stevens  
(Photo courtesy of the  
State of Michigan Archives)

BY JACK JOHNSTON

It wouldn't be a stretch to say that George W. Bush's negative ratings or Barack Obama's heavy support were the biggest factors in determining the outcome of Michigan's 2008 elections. Focusing more on the high-profile national election than on local politics, voters drove out many sitting Republicans and favored Democrats in open seats by simply checking the straight-ticket Democrat box. Many Republicans never stood a chance.

The 2008 elections were reminiscent of the 1974 elections. Taking place just after the Watergate scandal and the fallout surrounding President Ford's pardon of Richard Nixon, the 1974 election saw Michigan Republicans lose a Congressional seat (in addition to the two they had lost earlier in the year), five state Senate seats, and six state House seats. Republicans lost every open competitive State House seat—except one.

Somehow, E. Dan Stevens, a 31-year old from Atlanta, Michigan managed to buck the trend. Running in Michigan's 106th District, which included Alpena and Montmorency and several other northern counties, Stevens defeated Fay Lee, a Democrat and established businesswoman, for the seat.

How did the political novice and North Carolina native manage to defeat a popular Democratic opponent twice his age in the face of a political landslide?

Stevens said it was a combination of "good politics" and being well connected in Northern Michigan.

Stevens' father, Ross Stevens,

## CATCHING UP WITH . . .

# E. Dan Stevens

grew up in Atlanta, Michigan, in rural Montmorency County. In 1952, when Dan was 9 years old, the family returned to Atlanta after Ross retired from his career as a wildlife management professor at North Carolina State University.

The family comfortably settled into the small, northern Michigan town. They farmed land Ross' father had owned, and operated a sawmill in what is now the "Elk Capital of Michigan." Ross reunited with old friends from the area and Dan fit right in as well. Before long, both father and son would embark on a political path.

Ross, as a member of Atlanta High School's first graduating class and a University of Michigan graduate, was already well-known and well-respected in the area before he returned home. He jumped into the political arena, filling a vacancy in what was then the House's Presque Isle District in 1960. He was elected twice more and served until 1964.

While his father worked in Lansing, Dan attended U of M. Dan would search for time to visit his father, even going as far as hitchhiking to the state capital. Sometimes Stevens attended meetings with his father, absorbing their nuances and details and befriending many of Ross's fellow legislators.

After graduating from U of M, Stevens enrolled in graduate school (in Ann Arbor), helped create the Summer Science Camp (located on Lake Michigan's Summer Island), returned to Lansing and got a job on a House Republican research staff, and eventually enrolled in the newly-formed Thomas M. Cooley Law School.

When incumbent Mark Thompson declined to seek re-election to the House's 106th District in 1974, Stevens saw an opportunity to indulge his passion for politics and to follow in his father's footsteps. When Dan ran, it was his father's reputation that helped make him a credible candidate. People banked on Stevens being a chip off the old block.

"I think in large part, my father's name was the difference in me getting elected."

Still, Stevens could not have won on reputation alone, not during the 1974 election. He also won because of a smart campaign that differed from others. For instance, during the primary, Stevens refused to renounce the party like many of his GOP counterparts.

"All my literature identified myself in some way as a Republican," Stevens said.

"I didn't disavow Nixon. At that time, the verdict was still out."

Nationally, the Watergate scandal was still shaking the political scene, but locally people weren't as concerned, Stevens said.

"Mostly people just shied away from the politics, except the Democrats who tried to bring it up a lot."

The self-described "Jerry Ford supporter" and "Barry Goldwater Republican" had to get through a brutal primary before even getting to the general election. His opponent, the chairman of the Alpena County Board of Commissioners, represented the most populated part of the district.

But the U of M graduate had made some important friends in Ann Arbor, Alpena natives who campaigned hard for him during the primary. Although Stevens still lost Alpena County, he stole some valuable votes from his opponent, which when combined with his success in the rest of the district carried him to victory.

Stevens said he thought the tough part was over. Unfortunately, President Nixon resigned shortly after the primary, and soon after President Ford pardoned Nixon, placing even more heat on Republicans. The general election was going to be a battle.

Still, Stevens stuck to his plan of focusing on issues relevant to his district, such as a revised school aid plan (to boost payments to low-income rural districts) and simplified estate administration procedures. This worked to take some of the pressure off him as a Republican, but was also useful because he knew that those issues were important to the people of Northern Michigan.

"They wanted their politicians interested in making things work," Stevens said. "That meant not being for your party, necessarily."

The strategies paid off and Stevens managed to win a nail-biter. When the votes were counted, Stevens had won by less than 1 percent of the roughly 30,000 votes cast.

Stevens served two terms in the Legislature. He became assistant floor leader, and served on the Joint Conflict of Interest Committee as well as the Labor Committee, where he worked

(See Stevens, Page 8)

# Blanchard Living Library of Michigan Political History

In October 2007, MPHS held a tribute to Governor James J. Blanchard. That event not only celebrated his tenure as Governor, but also led to the creation of the James J. Blanchard Living Library of Michigan Political History.

The purpose of the library is to record the stories of the men and women who shaped Michigan's political landscape and played a vital role in forming the policies of our state. The interviews, which are conducted by Lynn Jondahl and Bill Ballenger, are recorded on DVD by LTS Productions. These DVD interviews are then be sent

to the major university libraries, the State Library of Michigan and Michigan Government Television. Copies of particular interviews will also be made available to interested MPHS members or members of the public.

Recent additions to the Blanchard Library include interviews with:

- Congressman John Dingell
- Senate Majority Leader Bob VanderLaan
- Grand Hotel Chairman R.D. Musser II

For a complete list of our oral histories, please visit our Web site at [www.Miphs.com](http://www.Miphs.com)



**Congressman John Dingell**



**John Dingell and Lynn Jondahl**



**R.D. (Dan) Musser II**



**Bob VanderLaan**



**Bill Ballenger and Bob VanderLaan**

## STEVENS, FROM PAGE 7

with Republican floor leader Bill Bryant. He was a leader in the push to establish Michigan's Single Business Tax, and helped get more aid for some rural school districts in the state.

While in the House, Stevens also completed his law degree and in 1977 he became Michigan's first legislator to graduate from Cooley Law School.

But after only four years in office and a quick ascension, Stevens called the political game quits.

"It was very difficult on my family with me being down there and they being up here," Stevens said. "In the four years that I was in the Legislature I saw very little of them."

Stevens made the career switch, opening a law practice in Atlanta. Stevens moved to Florida in 1985, and shortly thereafter jumped back in the political game as the policy coordinator for then-Gov. Bob Martinez. Stevens' primary job was to help construct the governor's budget. Later, Stevens was appointed as the county attorney for Hendry County, Fla.

But eventually Stevens got a bit of the political bug back. In 1994, he came back to Michigan and ran for the state Senate. However, a lot had changed in his almost 20-year-long hiatus. He found it was necessary to appease single-issue interest groups if he was to win the primary. Only a couple of weeks into the campaign he realized he'd made a mistake. Stevens lost his taste for politics, came in second in the primary, and stepped off the political stage for good.

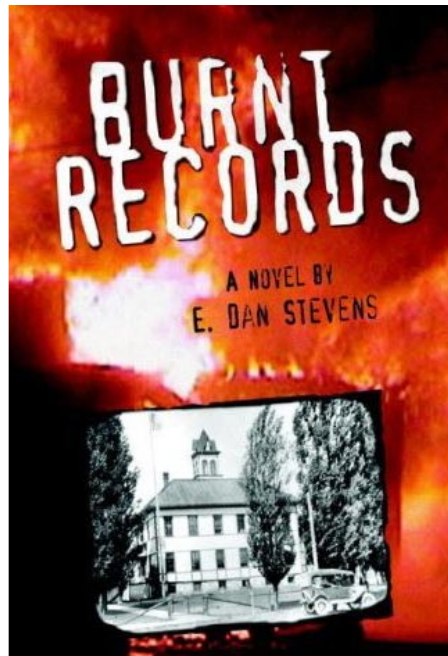
Stevens retired on his 60th birthday and now splits time between his home in Tallahassee, Fla. and Atlanta.

Stevens also wrote a book, "Burnt Records," a mystery/detective tale based

on a true story. During World War II, the Montmorency Court House, Montmorency Community Center (which held courthouse records) and the Montmorency Tribune all burned down under mysterious circumstances. Many land records were lost forever, and the person responsible for the fires, along with his or her motives, were never discovered. Stevens' book solves the mystery, with doses of romance, adventure, and intrigue thrown in for good measure.

He is now compiling a series of short stories for another book, stories that Stevens said he's been compiling for years.

And if fiction is ultimately a reflection of the author's own life, then Stevens is probably going to have some interesting tales to tell.



to the major university libraries, the State Library of Michigan and Michigan Government Television. Copies of particular interviews will also be made available to interested MPHS members or members of the public.



# Conventional Wisdom

2011 will mark the 50-year anniversary of the opening of Michigan's most recent constitutional convention. This is the first in a series of articles that will explore the experiences of some of the convention delegates.

By JACK JOHNSTON

In 1938, Anthony Chebatoris was hanged in Milan, Michigan, under federal law.

He was a convicted bank robber and murderer, and yet Gov. Frank Murphy vigorously opposed carrying out the sentence in Michigan. Since becoming a state in 1837, Michigan had never allowed the death penalty. It was the first English-speaking government to outlaw capital punishment in the world, and Murphy was proud of that. But federal authorities found a loophole in the law, and President Franklin D. Roosevelt would not allow the execution to be moved.

Since then, no person has been executed in the state. Capital punishment was officially eliminated by Michigan's 1963 Constitution thanks in large part to an energetic 28-year-old Republican from Lansing.

**Gil**

Eugene "Gil" Wanger was born in 1933 and grew up on the west side of Lansing. He attended Sexton High School, where he excelled as a state-champion debater and orator. He also became a magician, where he was paid to entertain at local PTA meetings, numerous banquets, and Boy and Girl Scout activities.

"I was known through my magician work," Wanger said. "There were several magicians in town, but I'm sure I got more engagements than just about anybody else."

After high school, Wanger attended Amherst College in Massachusetts. The Korean War was raging, and Wanger contributed during college vacations by acting as the master of ceremonies and a magician for Fred Waring's "The Kids from Home Show," a traveling entertainment group that visited U.S. military bases throughout the world. Later, Wanger moved back to Michigan and attended U of M Law School. He graduated, returned to Lansing, and began working for the Fraser Firm in 1958. But his career took an unexpected two-year-long hiatus in 1961, which would lead to one of his greatest accomplishments.

## Calling the Convention

"There was a major agreement throughout the state that Michigan's constitution had to be overhauled," Wanger said.

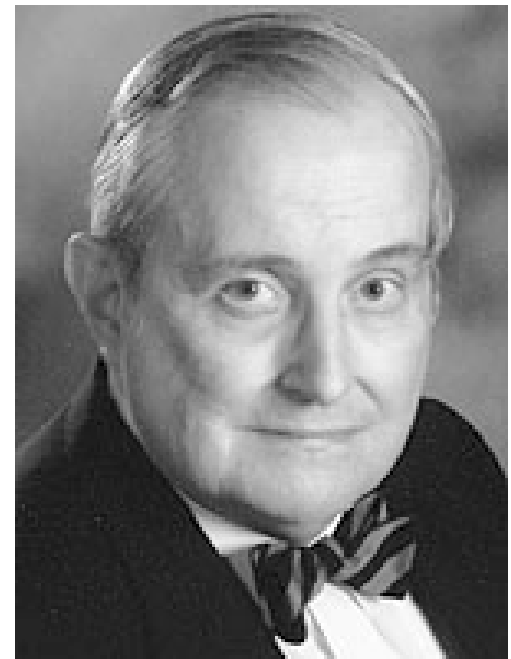
By the end of the 1950s, Michigan hadn't had a constitutional convention for half a century. Three Citizens' organizations—the League of Women Voters of Michigan, the Junior Chamber of Commerce of Michigan (which today is known as the Jaycees), and Citizens for Michigan (led by future Governor George Romney)—argued that the existing Constitution either missed important issues or had become outdated, and lobbied for a new constitution.

The question of whether to call a constitutional convention had been on the ballot in 1958, and had received more "yes" than "no" votes. But the 1908 Constitution required a majority of the total votes cast in the election for approval, and because so many voters simply did not vote on the constitutional convention question, the proposal went down to defeat.

Proponents of the convention were not



Constitutional Convention Delegate Eugene "Gil" Wanger



Eugene "Gil" Wanger today

## New Life Members

The Michigan Political History Society re-introduced its life membership plan in 2007. A life membership plan—which runs \$300 for an individual or family—relieves a person from ever again having to pay dues to MPHS. The life membership fee is invested in the MPHS Endowment, the interest from which helps to support MPHS's mission. Thus, when you join as a life member, your gift helps support MPHS today, and for many years in the future.

Interested in joining as a life member? Please contact Linda Cleary at Linda.Cleary@sbcglobal.net or (517) 333-7996. You may also purchase a life membership for another person, or join as a life member in honor of another person. A full list of our life members can be found at [www.miphs.com/lifetimemembership.doc](http://www.miphs.com/lifetimemembership.doc).

We would like to thank the following persons for joining as life members in 2010:

Roman and Lee Gribbs • Phil Hoffman

Lynn Jondahl • Michael Nye

John Cherry • Brian Whiston • Thomas Guastello

deterred, and set about collecting signatures for a ballot question, one which would require a constitutional convention if a majority of those electors who voted on the question supported it. The amendment, known as the "Gateway Amendment," passed in November 1960. The vote on the constitutional convention question occurred in April 1961, and was approved by the electorate by a mere 23,000 votes.

In 1961, 144 delegates (one for each of Michigan's 110 House and 34 Senate seats) met in Lansing and began work on what became Michigan's newest constitution. Of

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# WISDOM, FROM PAGE 9

the delegates, two-thirds were Republicans and one-third Democrats. The youngest Republican at the convention was a green 28 years old. Like everyone else, they called him "Gil".

## A Lasting Document

Even though he was a lawyer by trade, Wanger had a passion for government. He had only practiced law for a couple years before talk of the convention began.

"I really wanted to do it because of my background in political science as a college major," Wanger said.

After being elected, Wanger took his duties seriously. He kept every piece of paper he ever received from the convention, and attended every single meeting he could.

Wanger said one of the most impressive things about the convention was the bi-partisanship. Democrats and Republicans worked together very well, especially in the early stages of the convention.

"It wasn't factionalized a whole lot, except of course that there were two political parties," Wanger said.

Still, there were clear differences of opinion within the GOP Caucus. Wanger was one of about 30 Republicans labeled "liberal" by their party peers. At one point in the convention, those members were given badges with the term "Young, radical Republican" on it. Wanger said the joke was well-humored, and despite the label, the party was very much unified.

In the latter stages of the convention, partisan political strife began to surface. Rumors that George Romney, seen by many as the driving force behind the convention, would run for Governor on the Republican ticket alienated Democrats. Gov. John Swainson, a Democrat, began urging rejection of the proposed Constitution, and labor groups in the state followed suit. The U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Baker v. Carr* regarding judicial involvement in legislative reapportionment placed even more stress on the bi-partisan relationship.

The people finally voted on the proposed Constitution in April, 1963. The vote was so close that the *Detroit Free Press* and the *State News* printed stories saying it failed.

The constitution passed by a tiny margin in the state vote, about 7,500, and even survived a recount. Since then, the option to call another convention has been rejected twice by voters.

Convention President Stephen Nisbet, Edward Hutchinson, James Pollock and D. Hale Brake were among the most influential Republicans at the convention, according to Wanger. Brake was also named the most influential by much of the media.

"People listened to him," Wanger said. "He was very highly thought of by everybody."

Tom Downs, who became close friends with Wanger, was a prominent Democrat and was named Third Vice President of the Convention.

Wanger said the quality of the current constitution has much to do with the bi-partisanship exhibited in the convention.

"If the Democrats hadn't been there, the constitution that we came

up with would not have been as good."

## An End to the Death Penalty

When the convention began, few Republicans made proposals. In fact, the majority of proposals at the onset were made by the Democratic minority. It was a wake-up call for all Republicans, including Wanger.

He began work on his most famous contribution to the constitution.

"I thought we've been without the death penalty historically for so long that it's about time we put it in the constitution," he said.

Well, as Anthony Chebatoris discovered, that was almost true. Chebatoris had been found guilty in a federal court for the crime of murder, committed during a bank robbery. Criminals sentenced to death by the federal government could only be executed in states that allowed the death penalty, and most assumed that Michigan prohibited the death penalty. It did, except in cases of treason. Although the treason exception had never been used in Michigan, it permitted the federal government to execute Chebatoris in Michigan.

With so many conservative Republicans in the convention, Wanger said he was concerned that there might be a contentious debate about the issue, and had researched the topic feverishly. Wanger found new literature on the subject by world-renowned criminologist Thorsten Sellin from the University of Pennsylvania, and brought it to the attention of the delegates.

The resolution Wanger introduced was simple: "No law shall be enacted providing for the penalty of death."

The proposal passed almost unanimously. Of the 144 delegates, there were only three dissenting votes. Michigan officially became death penalty free.

## Repeating History?

Today, Wanger is one of the few convention members still around to tell its story. Wanger accumulated 48 foot square boxes in a Michigan constitutional history collection, which includes many things from the convention. He donated the collection to the state archives and a historical bibliography is being published.

In November, voters will be able to choose if they want to host another constitutional convention. The issue, which is voted on every 16 years, has gained some momentum throughout the state, and another convention is a possibility, according to Wanger.

"I'm not promoting or opposing it," Wanger said. "I want to see how the campaign works out. I think it'll be pretty expensive. But if we do have it, there are a number of things I think we ought to do."

Wanger said those things include adjusting term limitations on Michigan legislators, clarifying the state Auditor General's powers, and removing the Supreme Court from apportionment.

"If we do have one, I think I might run," Wanger said, with a smile. "I'm the only one around here that could put "re-elect" on their campaign literature."

*What to do with your political memorabilia collection?*  
**Michigan State University is interested!**

By VAL ROY BERRYMAN, CURATOR HISTORY, MSU MUSEUM

The Michigan State University Museum has a nice collection of political memorabilia including some Lincoln tintype pins and Lincoln campaign ribbons. The collection also includes other pins, ribbons, posters, election tickets, paper ephemera, voting machines, parade lanterns and various campaign giveaways both local and national. In 2008 the MSU Museum created two exhibitions based on private political collections in Michigan, followed up in 2009 by an exhibition of Lincoln prints and memorabilia from the museum's collection. The collections are also available for use by researchers.

We are lacking in some of the more recent campaign and political materials. We welcome donations that will enhance or fill in some of the gaps in our collections. The donor will receive a letter of acknowledgement and a gift form. Any items accepted as donations to the MSU Museum will be tax deductible. We would especially welcome volunteer assistance from knowledgeable collectors in helping us assess the highlights and the needs of the collections. Curator of History, Val Roy Berryman can be contacted by phone at 517-355-0322, by e-mail at berryma2@msu.edu or by mail at MSU Museum, East Lansing, MI 48824.



# In Memory

**Bill Hettiger**—Bill, originally a Democrat, served as Deputy Secretary of State under Jim Hare. He then joined the Milliken administration as Director of the Department of Administration before serving as Milliken's Chief of Staff. After leaving public service, he worked as a health care consultant and lobbyist.

**Gloria Schermesser**—A Democrat from Lincoln Park, Gloria served on the city council for two terms before she won two elections in November, 1996—one to complete the term of the late Rep. Robert DeMars, and another for a full term in the House. She was subsequently re-elected in 1998 and 2000.

**Mike Simpson**—Mike was a former member of the Michigan National Guard, former Congressional candidate, and a pizzeria owner when he ran for the House in the Jackson area in 2004. He lost, but ran a very close campaign. He ran again in 2006 in one of the most expensive House races in Michigan history and won, thereby helping the Democrats to gain control of the House of Representatives.

**B. Dale Ball**—Dale was an All-American wrestler at Michigan State in the 1930s. He served as the Director of the Michigan Department of Agriculture from 1966-1980 and attained national prominence during the PBB crisis in the 1970s.

**Ralph Ostling**—Ralph, a World War II Navy veteran, served as Roscommon Township Clerk for 17 years before he was elected to the House of Representatives in 1972. He served twenty years in the House, eventually becoming the Vice Chair of the Appropriations Committee.

**Jim Connors**—Jim was born in Matchwood, Michigan in 1935 and, after service in the U.S. Army, entered the insurance business. He was elected to the House in 1984, representing Delta, Dickinson, and Menominee Counties. He served two terms in the House.

**Richard Allen**—Dick, a Caro product, served in both the U.S. Marine Corps and the U.S. Air Force before embarking on a career as a newspaper reporter and editor. He was elected to the House in 1982 and served until 1994.

**H. James "Jim" Starr**—Jim, a Lansing native and an Army veteran, was serving as an Assistant Attorney General under Frank Kelley when he was elected to the State House of Representatives in 1964, the year the Democrats re-took the State House. He was defeated for re-election in 1966, when the House shifted back to Republican control. After his legislative service, Jim served as a Special Assistant Attorney General, a lobbyist, and an attorney.

**Richard "Dick" Young**—Dick served his Dearborn Heights constituents in the House for an incredible 30 years, from 1965 until 1994. An Air Force veteran and an attorney, he eventually became chair of the House Appropriations Committee.

**David Machtel**—Dave, an Air Force and Naval Reserve veteran, served as a news anchor at WJIM/ TV 6 before serving as Press Secretary for the Michigan House GOP. Dave later served as Executive Director of the Floral Trade Council.

**Frank Garrison**—His full name was Franklin Delano Garrison, so there should be no doubt where he stood on political questions. A long-time labor activist, Frank rose to head the UAW's Community Action Program before taking over the Michigan AFL-CIO, a position he served for 13 years.

**Jackie Currie**—A life-long political activist, Jackie served as a Wayne County Commissioner before being elected Detroit City Clerk in 1993. She served twelve years, many of them in the midst of controversy, before losing re-election in 2005.

**Jack Gingrass**—Jack, a Democrat from Iron Mountain, served in the Army Air Corps during World War II and owned a printing business. He was elected to the House in the 1966 election and served one term before losing his seat. Jack was elected again in 1972 and served 12 more years in the House. He also served on the Transportation Commission Board and the Lake Superior State University Board.

**Bob Davis**—Bob was born in Marquette but later settled in Gaylord, where he worked as a funeral director. He was elected to the State House in 1966 and the State Senate in 1970. He was re-elected in 1974 and served as Republican Leader from 1975-1978. In 1978, he was elected to Congress, where he served for 14 years.

**Lorabeth Moore Fitzgerald**—Lorabeth, a William and Mary graduate and proud member of MPHS, was very active in civic affairs, especially in Grand Ledge and on Mackinac Island. She was predeceased by her husband, the late Chief Justice John Fitzgerald, and her son, the late Representative Frank Fitzgerald.

**Carl Pursell**—Carl was born in Imlay City, served in the U.S. Army, and graduated from Eastern Michigan University before working as a teacher and in business. He was elected to the Michigan Senate in 1970, and served there until 1976, when he ran for Congress. He served 16 years in Washington, eventually becoming the ranking Republican on the House Education Appropriations Subcommittee. After leaving Congress, he served on the Eastern Michigan Board of Regents.

**Kenneth Sanders**—Ken, a World War II veteran, served on the Aleutian Islands and won a Bronze Star. A long-time legislative employee, he began his service with the Legislative Service Bureau in 1955. He served with LSB until 1975, and part of this time he was Supervisor of the Legal Division, before serving as legal counsel to the Joint Committee of Administrative Rules for nine years.

**Justine Barns**—Justine served on the Westland City Council and on the Wayne County Charter Commission before her election to the House in 1982. She served in the House for 6 terms, and eventually chaired the Senior Citizens Committee.

**Kelvin W. Scott**—Governor Granholm appointed Kelvin, an attorney, to serve as Chair of the Civil Rights Commission before later appointing him Director of the Michigan Department of Civil Rights. He died in February, at the age of 47.

**Roy Spencer**—Roy, a lifelong resident of Lapeer County, received a Bronze Star for his bravery during the Battle of the Bulge. He was elected to the House in 1960 (as a Republican) and served eight terms. After concluding his legislative service, Roy served on the Tax Tribunal until 1985.

**Tom Kelly**—Tom served as the Library Director for Wayne-Westland Schools and spent 12 years as a Wayne City Councilman before his election to the House in 1994. He was re-elected twice before retiring in 2000.

**Jerald terHorst**—A U.S.M.C. veteran of World War II and Korea, Jerry worked for the *Grand Rapids Press* and, later, the *Detroit News*, where he served as city and state political writer, Washington correspondent, and Washington Bureau Chief. President Ford chose him to serve as his Press Secretary, but terHorst resigned one month later, the President pardoned Richard Nixon. He later served as a *Detroit News* Columnist and Public Affairs Director for Ford Motor Company.