

# **History Spotlight**

## **Local Macomb History Publications**

There have been a few new books recently relating to the history of the Macomb County area. For additions, suggestions, referrals, or corrections, please e-mail

macombhistory@yahoo.com .

## **The Albert L. Lorenzo Cultural Center of Macomb County**

The history of the Albert Lorenzo Cultural Center begins with the success of the Macomb Community College of Macomb County, Michigan. The college started in 1954 and held classes in Lincoln High School of Warren, Michigan, until 1962 when voters authorized the creation of the Community College District of the County of Macomb. A one-mill property tax was approved by the voters to support the operation of the fledgling college. Land was purchased in Warren, Ray, and Clinton Townships for campus sites.

The Warren site, designated South Campus, opened in September 1965 with three classroom and administrative buildings. The Clinton Township land was called Center Campus and opened its first building, a classroom building called B Building, in September, 1968, on 220 acres of land that was originally describes as “desolate farmland.” In spring of 1969, A and C Buildings opened. In these early times for the campus, classes cost \$2 per credit, wayward farm animals would often wander over near the classrooms to graze, and Hall Road (M-59) was merely a two-lane road instead of the eight lane highway it is in the 21st century. The third campus site in Ray Township was sold to the Huron Clinton Metropolitan Authority and used as part of Wolcott Mill Metropark. In 1968, long-range plans for the college included building a 56,200 square foot student union on the Center Campus with plans to have it completed in September of 1971. However, construction did not begin until 1974 and was not completed until February 1976. The actual square footage when completed was 45,590. The architect was Wakely Kushner. This building became the “K Building” and was at first officially called the Center Campus Student Community Center. At this time, Macomb County Community College had the fourth largest enrollment in Michigan.



Amid all this growth, the college decided in 2001 that they needed a new building to replace K Building, which still housed the Student Services Department at the Center Campus. The new student center, that would replace the old one next to the Macomb Center for the Performing Arts, would take on the old name; that is, the new student center would now be called The John R. Dimitry Student Community Center. The old center had included a student bookstore, a cafeteria, and offices. The new center, located at the other end of the Center Campus, included all the amenities of the original student center. This left the choice of either repurposing the old building as something else, or demolition.

A study was conducted by a focus group to decide if the space should be re-purposed or if demolition would be better. It was decided that the space could best benefit the community by being repurposed as a cultural center, one that would encompass many types of exhibits, especially ones centering on history and science. The building was also designated as an area that could be used for meetings, conferences, and community non-profit events. Funding would be provided by corporate and local businesses.

The former student center at Macomb Community College was repurposed and refurbished to include two large spaces, one which can be converted to three smaller rooms using a portable wall. One of these rooms serves as the projection room where movies and videos can be viewed. Besides the larger spaces, there are two smaller rooms off the main exhibit area, an office area with three main office spaces, and a “Founder’s Room” which serves as a meeting area for committees and the Board of Trustees. Integrated Designs Solutions (IDS) were the architects and 5,705 square feet was added to the original total.

The center was officially designated the Cultural Center of Macomb County, and was launched on September 28, 2006. The inaugural program was titled Science and Space Exploration: Imagining the Future. John Glenn, the astronaut, made an appearance and discussed his first space flight and his shuttle flight undertaken at age 77.

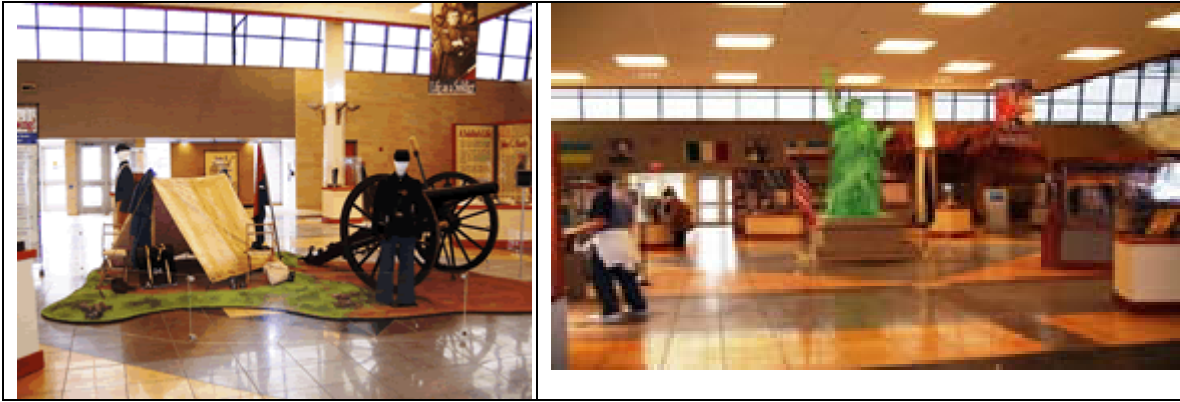
It was planned from the start that the center would provide a variety of perspectives and experiences and include hands-on activities, and that the main focuses would be on science and history. The first exhibit ran through December of 2006 and included programs that encompassed “serious” science as well as science fiction.

The second exhibit at the center, *A Legacy of Service and Courage: the World War II Generation* was very popular, winning three state history awards from the Historical Society of Michigan and the Michigan Museums Association. Attendance was over 13,000. Some of the programs included the Tuskegee Airmen, the nurses of World War II, a re-enactor of General George Patton, a “Road Show” type of evaluation of World War artifacts that people brought in, a program on collecting World War II artifacts with displays featuring shell casings, a World War II jeep, parachutes, and maps, a program about nearby Selfridge Air Base, and soldier’s personal accounts of D-Day, the Battle of the Bulge, Iwo Jima, and the B-17 Flying Fortresses. A flyover of an authentic B-17 concluded this program. Michigan women of the armed forces was the focus of one program, and women who had “Rosie the Riveter” types of defense work in Macomb County were featured in another program. There was a program about the war journalist Ernie Pyle, as well as one given by a pilot who was shot down in a B-29 over Japan and spent time in a Japanese POW camp. One program recreated a USO dance, complete with a swing band and period costumes. World War II era films were screened, including *To Be or Not to Be*, with Jack Benny and Carole Lombard, and *Casablanca*, with Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman. Pulitzer Prize-winning author Doris Kearns Goodwin presented a program on presidents during time of war with an emphasis on the World War II president Franklin Roosevelt.

The next program of the Macomb Cultural Center was one based on the Great Lakes. It was titled *Great Lakes, Great Stories: Michigan’s Maritime Heritage* and ran from October 6 to December 2, 2007. This program included the history of the Great Lakes as a “maritime superhighway,” as it was referred to in the publicity. It also featured programs on the lighthouses of the Great Lakes, shipwrecks, and ecology and preservation.

In November, 2007, the Board of Trustees acted to change the Macomb County Cultural Center’s name to the Albert L. Lorenzo Macomb County Cultural Center, to honor Lorenzo’s years of service as Macomb Community College president and his role in establishing Macomb Community College as a nationally recognized academic institution.

The next major exhibit for the Cultural Center was *Michigan’s Fight for Freedom: The Civil War Era*. It ran from February 27 to May 4, 2008. Highlighted themes included the Political Prelude to War, the Underground Railroad, Economic Divergence of the North and South, Life as a Civil War Soldier, and Life on the Home Front with an emphasis on Michigan men and women. One salient fact about the Civil War that was brought out was that 50% of the military-age male population in Michigan—over 90,000 men—served in the Civil War. Wartime manufacturing in Michigan centered on the iron mines in the Upper Peninsula. The mines set production records which fueled the industrial growth of the North to meet expanded wartime manufacturing.



First picture-Civil War Exhibit; Second Picture-Immigration exhibit.

The most recent major exhibit was titled A Journey of Hope: Michigan's Immigrant Experience. This program was held September 27 to November 23, 2008. The exhibit was a multifaceted perspective of the challenges, experiences, and dreams of the pioneers who immigrated to Michigan over the years. Many local people of Macomb County gave presentations on their own experiences as immigrants, or accounts of their family experiences.

The next major exhibition is The Sixties: a Decade that Defined a Generation, will be held from February 28 until May 16 in 2009. Some of the exhibits planned include the Vietnam Moving Wall and a wall such as the one used on the Rowan and Martin Laugh-In Show of the 1960s.

Following the Sixties exhibit will be one about Michigan sports titled More than a Game: How Sports Shape our Culture which will be held in the autumn of 2009. Be sure to go and visit sometime! The Cultural Center is located at 44575 Garfield Road, Clinton Township, MI (cross street is Hall Road, M-59) on the Center Campus of Macomb Community College, next door to the Macomb Center for the Performing Arts. Their phone number is (586) 445.7348 and their website is: <http://www.lorenzoculturalcenter.com/>, their E-mail address is [culturalcenter@macomb.edu](mailto:culturalcenter@macomb.edu).

