

Mark Rodman



Mark Rodman - Advocacy Day 2020 – Photo by Mallory Bower

Less than a year after Mark Rodman left MHPN as our Executive Director, he passed away. While his time with MHPN was brief, he was a remarkable leader, and will be greatly missed. For those of you who never got to know Mark very well, here is more about him, and his time at MHPN.

Mark relocated from Colorado to Michigan in April 2019 to serve as MHPN third executive director since we were established in 1981. He was a dynamo, working hard to move programs forward. Among his greatest efforts was his work to reinstate a preservation tax credit in Michigan. Mark

continued efforts begun by Nancy Finegood, and worked with staff, members, advocates, and most importantly legislators to get Senate Bill 54 approved, which happened on December 3, 2020. The Michigan House of Representatives followed suit and passed the bill on December 17, 2020. Unfortunately, the pandemic slowed progress of the credit's implementation, which occurred on June 15, 2022 (the day Mark passed away).

Mark worked with the Detroit Land Bank Authority, not only with plans to rehabilitate several houses in a Detroit neighborhood, but also to aid the Land Bank in their efforts to work with the City's historic district commission to plan good work and get it approved. Closer to home in Old Town, Lansing, Mark guided a major restoration project on the MHPN's office in the former interurban comfort station in Old Town Lansing. After decades of water infiltration behind the front wall of the building, the facing brick buckled, and the interior structural brick crumbled to sand with the steel supports eroded. The work was extensive, but now it is done, the changes are imperceptible.

As MHPN celebrated the 40th anniversary of its founding during 2021, Mark used his creativity in defining a brand for the year, getting the news out to our friends and partners, assuring that our regularly scheduled annual events were made tributes to the anniversary, creating an anniversary logo, and so much more. All this was done as the pandemic closed-in on all our activities. During this same time, Mark assisted efforts to launch the MHPN's "40th Anniversary Endowment Campaign for Operations" in December of 2019, not a good time to launch a fundraising effort. By the time of Mark's departure, however, the fund was approaching a quarter-million dollars. Other funds – a revolving loan fund, easement protection fund, and scholarship fund – were stewarded with care.

The pandemic also played havoc with the annual MHPN statewide preservation conference. With Mark's guidance, we were able to flip our 40th annual statewide preservation conference in 2020 from an in-person gathering to a virtual event in record-breaking time. Although working with a completely new platform, we lost few speakers and none of our donors. In 2021, we went directly to virtual for the conference. Rather than being hosted by a Michigan community, the event came "Virtually...from Michigan." Mark assured that everything was video-recorded so that it could go up on the MHPN's YouTube channel; before his departure from the MHPN, he assured we were on-board with live-streaming the 2022 conference.

Likewise, Mark was the inspiration behind many of the features of the 2020 Fall Benefit, another virtual event needed to be fun to draw an audience! The two-hour event was highly successful with videotaped welcomes as guests entered the portal, an auction during which guests could see who was bidding against them in real-time and make comments in the chat, real-time tours in different locations around the state from an archaeological site in Michigan's Thumb to a life-saving station in the Upper Peninsula, a preservation-themed trivia game with a winner every hour, and a vendors' showcase.

In addition to all the efforts Mark spent on our mission goals and programming, he kept MHPN offices and staff going forward during the height of the pandemic, having successfully secured two rounds of Paycheck Protection Program funding. He also transformed the MHPN's field-work program into on-line educational content including a webinar every month and virtual programs tailored to the specific preservation needs of different communities. Whenever there was a break in Covid-spikes, even a few in-person, hands-on workshops were quickly presented by tapping our

volunteer talent. Mark also transformed our bookkeeping system, got us through challenges to our easements, kept our audits free of “findings,” helped streamline our bylaws, organized both hardcopy and electronic files, and sent the next generation of records to the Bentley Historical Library at the University of Michigan where MHPN records have been held since our 25th anniversary. He skillfully worked with staff to establish program areas they could oversee and for which they could feel pride of ownership. He made many traditional Board tasks – i.e., membership, conference, website, etc. – into staff-driven tasks. He was a firm believer in his partnership with the Board, conferring and working with members regularly and in meaningful ways.

As you may have gathered, Mark was more than an Executive Director, he was fully committed to MHPN, our board and staff, and most importantly our mission. While he was committed to Michigan, he returned home to South Carolina to his family where he felt he could recover. That was not to be, and we miss him.