



A PLACE MADE BY MUSIC



OLD TOWN • LANSING



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Turner St. late 1800's

Old Town History

Lansing, originally named Michigan, Michigan, began developing in the early 1800s along the Grand River and a major Native American trail that later became Grand River Avenue. The north Lansing area was the city's original downtown and an important hub for lumber, trade, and transportation. Goods and people moved through the area by riverboats, horse-drawn wagons, rail lines, and eventually streetcars, helping connect Lansing to surrounding communities. The neighborhood became known for its mills, warehouses, locally owned shops, and busy commercial streets lined with brick storefronts.

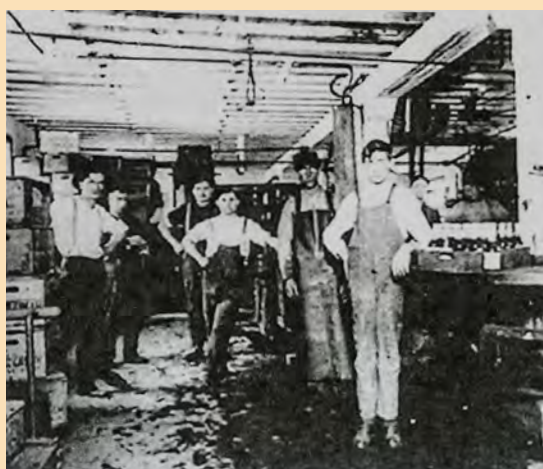
During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, immigrant and Hispanic families helped shape cultural identity and community life. By the mid-1900s, suburban expansion drew businesses away, though many of the historic buildings and character remained intact.



Victory Tavern 1217 Turner St. / Blue Star Tavern 1219 Turner St.



Dunham Hardware in 1921 on Turner St.



1301-1313 Turner St. Lansing Brewing Co.



"If these beautiful buildings in Old Town now are the brick — and they are — you got to have mortar though that holds up buildings. And I would argue that the mortar is actually people in place. And within that framework is art as well - the glue that keeps it all together." **Bob Trezise**, President/CEO, LEAP



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The Transformation of Old Town Through Art & Music

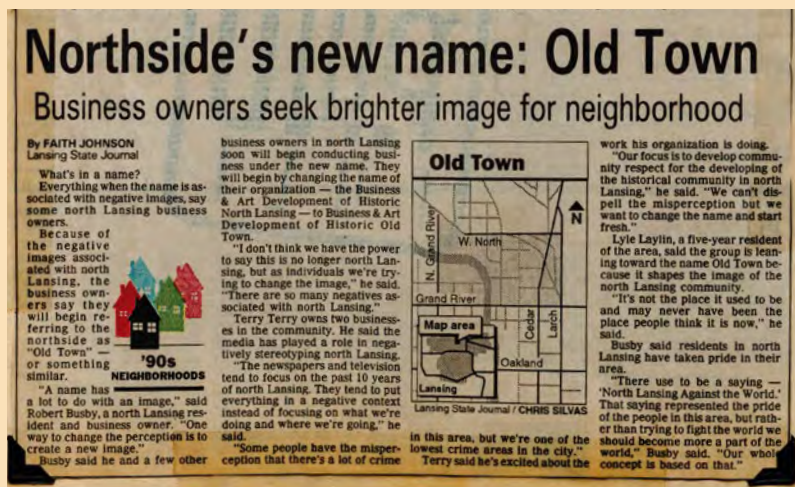
What is now known as Old Town Lansing was once a thriving historic district that fell into decline during the 1960s and 1970s as businesses closed and residents moved to the suburbs. In the early 1980s, artists and young entrepreneurs began restoring abandoned buildings, transforming empty storefronts into galleries, studios, performance spaces, and creative businesses. Through the leadership of Michigan Institute for Contemporary Art, the neighborhood embraced an arts-centered vision that sparked economic revitalization and community pride. Today, Old Town is recognized as one of Lansing's most vibrant cultural districts, where music festivals, public art, theatre, poetry, and local businesses continue to shape its identity.

Early Visioning & Community Revitalization

Between 1990 and 1993, community visioning charrettes brought together artists, residents, business owners, historians, universities, and civic leaders to imagine a new future for Old Town Lansing. Led by Terry Terry of MessageMakers and Susan Christian of the Local Initiatives Support Corporation, these collaborative planning sessions helped define the district's values and long-term goals.



The process emphasized creativity, historic preservation, walkability, and community engagement, ultimately laying the groundwork for Lansing's arts-driven revitalization model. The momentum generated by these meetings inspired new businesses, building restorations, and partnerships that helped Old Town become a statewide example of successful urban renewal, as it became a model for the State of Michigan's **Main Street** program.



"It comes down to a few precious individuals who have something very different, in some kind of pioneer spirit, to be honest, and an enormous amount of risk taking. They believe in something deeper than the rest of us could have." **Bob Trezise**, President/CEO, LEAP



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JazzFest
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Since 1995, **JazzFest Michigan** has transformed Turner Street in Old Town Lansing into one of Michigan’s premier celebrations of jazz music. The festival features multiple indoor and outdoor stages showcasing nationally recognized artists alongside regional talent, drawing thousands of attendees each summer.

Working with JAMM: Jazz Association of Mid Michigan and School of Rock, JazzFest includes workshops, youth programming, vendors, and community spaces that celebrate jazz as both an art form and a cultural connector. Its diverse lineup and welcoming atmosphere have helped establish Old Town as a destination for live music and creative expression.



"We make beauty out of whatever is available to us, and it's kind of the definition of this neighborhood — and how it's grown and how we have come together to make it work.." **Rina "RiRi" Risper**, artist / community member



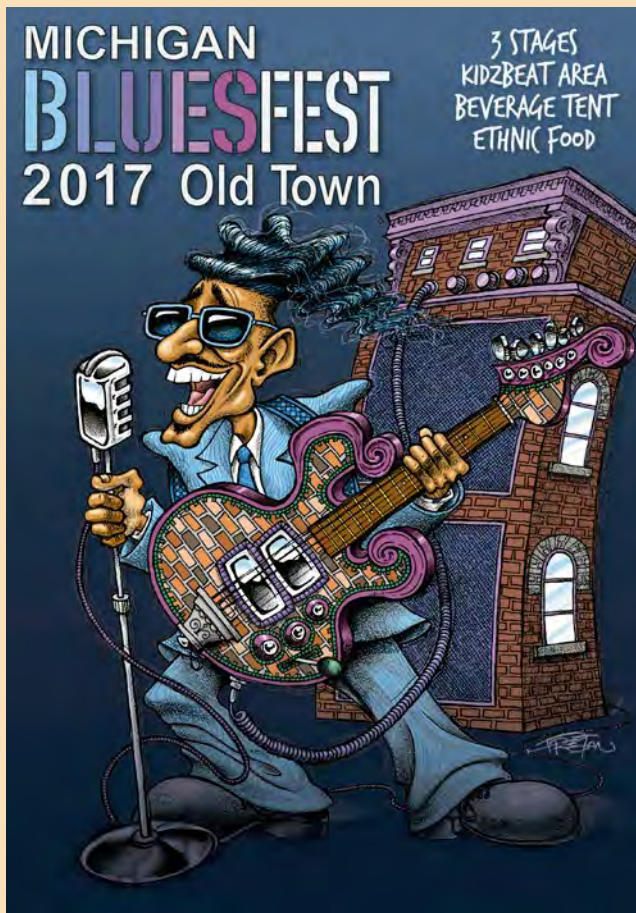
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MICHIGAN BLUESFEST



Each September, **Michigan BluesFest** fills Old Town with the soulful sound of blues music, attracting audiences from across the region. Produced with support from the **Capitol Area Blues Society**, the festival features multiple stages, vendors, workshops, and performances by acclaimed blues artists from across the country.

Known for its energetic atmosphere and strong sense of community, BluesFest has become one of Michigan's longest-running outdoor blues festivals. The event continues to celebrate the emotional storytelling and musical traditions of the blues while contributing to Old Town's cultural vibrancy.



"All the work that I've done — whether MessageMakers, MICA, or UrbanBeat — involves creating spaces where people can come together, make new friends and meet old friends, to explore how we can make our community better." **Terry Terry**, President, MICA / Community Activist



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MICHIGAN **FunkFest**



Michigan FunkFest brings the groove and energy of funk music to Old Town Lansing each summer with live music, dancing, food, and community celebration. Produced by MiCA, the festival takes place behind UrbanBeat along the Grand River and inside UrbanBeat, creating a unique riverside atmosphere that blends music, art, and community. Showcasing artists rooted in funk, soul, jazz, and R&B, FunkFest has become a staple of Lansing's summer music scene and a reflection of Old Town's creative spirit.



"When people find joy in a place, then they think differently about that place. And they're more likely to do other things that are connected to that place — even beyond the events festivals."

Kwesi Brookins, Vice Provost, Community Outreach & Engagment / Michigan State University



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Turner Park Place



BEFORE



AFTER

Turner Park Place stands as one of the most important redevelopment projects in the history of Old Town Lansing. In the mid-1990s, three abandoned and boarded-up buildings on Turner Street were restored through an initiative by former mayor David Hollister involving **MICA**, historic tax credits, **LISC**, the **City of Lansing**, **MSHDA**, and several community development organizations. The project created affordable loft apartments, nonprofit offices, and business incubator spaces (startups Arialink and CityPulse) that helped attract new energy and investment into the district. Today, Turner Park Place remains home to arts organizations, startups, creative businesses, residential lofts, and a community space that continues to support Old Town's growth and revitalization.



"I love living in repurposed historic buildings. Once a building is destroyed, its history is gone. But here, that legacy lives on by connecting younger generations with those who actually experienced it."

Daphne Whitfield, Old Town supporter

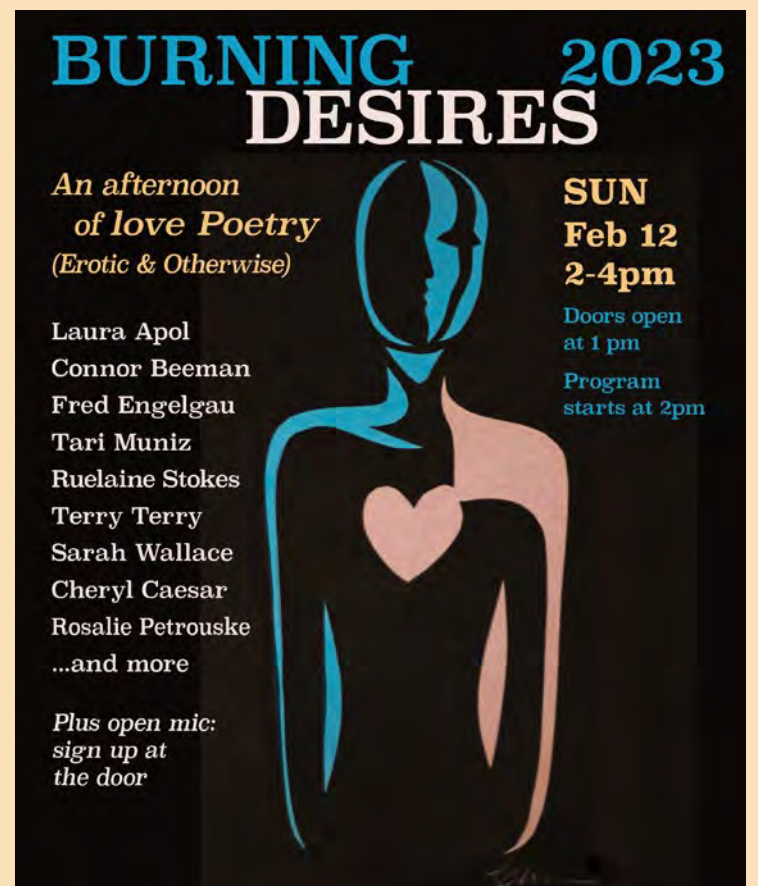


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The performing arts have long played a major role in shaping the creative identity of Old Town Lansing. Organizations such as the **Lansing Poetry Club**, **Renegade Theatre Festival**, **DANCE Lansing**, and **Capital Ballet Theatre** regularly use MICA spaces to present poetry readings, original plays, dance showcases, and educational workshops. Annual events like **Burning Desires: An Afternoon of Love Poetry** combine literature, music, and theatrical performance to bring people together through shared artistic experiences. These collaborations help make Old Town a year-round hub for creative expression and community engagement.



"Old Town is what it is because of the people that live here and work here — the people that volunteer their extra hours and their time here. It's a community that's built with heart, and not so much money driven. I think it's really heart and soul of the people that are here, more than anything, really." **Lori Lanspeary**, Old Town community member



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From **Two Doors Down Gallery** and **OtherWise Art Gallery** to **Banyan Gallery**, **Studio 1210**, and today's **MICA Art Gallery**, creative spaces helped shape the artistic identity of Old Town Lansing.

In the 1980s and early 1990s, artists turned neglected buildings into galleries, studios, and performance spaces that sparked the neighborhood's revival. More than just places to display art, they've become gathering spaces for music, poetry, theatre, and community connection, helping establish Old Town as one of Michigan's most vibrant arts districts.



"Art gives spirit to a city." **Sophia Cheng, PhD, JD, Business & Property Owner**



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Michigan Institute for Contemporary Art has received numerous awards recognizing its impact on arts, culture, and community revitalization in Old Town Lansing. Over the years, MICA has earned honors including **Addy Awards**, the **Creative Community Award**, the **Governor's ArtServe Award**, the **national Mainstreet designation**, the **Michigan Association for Art Agencies Award**, and multiple **Michigan Festivals and Events Association Awards**. These recognitions reflect MICA's longstanding commitment to producing music festivals, supporting artists, preserving historic spaces, and serving as a catalyst for community transformation.



MICA Board at Gala receiving Governor's ArtServe Award



BackStage Pass: a live music television series created through a partnership between WKAR-TV and Michigan Institute for Contemporary Art. The program has featured live performances and artist interviews, giving musicians a platform to share the inspiration behind their music while highlighting the arts and music culture connected to Old Town Lansing. The program has been broadcast on 100 Public TV stations across the US and has helped bring Michigan musicians to a national stage.

"Every gender, every race, every age just fit in here. It's a really good feeling down here for everybody. All people." **Twyla Birdsong**, Singer



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