

West Michigan Tourist Association History 1917 - 2008

When civic leaders from West Michigan resort areas gathered at the Pantlind Hotel in Grand Rapids on May 7-8, 1917, they knew why they were there.

They had been invited to organize the Michigan Tourist & Resort Association by Lee Bierce, secretary of the Grand Rapids Association of Commerce, and John Gibson, secretary of the West Michigan Development Bureau.

Chairman Carroll Sweet lost no time adopting a resolution to incorporate as a non-profit association. Temporary officers were appointed: President - J.H.P. Hughart, GR&I Railway; Vice President - David Day, Glen Haven; Treasurer - Sweet; and Secretary - Hugh Grey, Pere Marquette Railway.

If a "father" of the association were to be named, it likely would be Arthur W. Stace, managing editor of *The Grand Rapids Press*.

Stace observed a promotion program that successfully lured thousands of tourists to Colorado during a business trip he made there in 1916. He returned to Grand Rapids to write a series of articles in November, 1916, urging Michigan business leaders to form a cooperative tourist bureau to promote travel in this state.

The leaders listened. Thus was born the first grass roots tourist association in the nation.



West Michigan Tourist Association Historical Timeline

- May 7-8, 1917 Michigan Tourist & Resort Association (MTRA) was formed.
- 1921 MTRA's first 24-page travel guide was published, with a 15,000 circulation.
- 1929 MTRA opened a Chicago office.
- 1931 The slogan, "West Michigan...The Playground of the Nation," was introduced.
- 1934 MTRA changed its name to West Michigan Tourist & Resort Association (WMTRA)
- 1935 WMTRA opened offices in Detroit, Cincinnati, Cleveland and St. Louis.
- 1961 WMTRA changed its name to West Michigan Tourist Association (WMTA)
- 2007 WMTA celebrates its 90th anniversary as the "Oldest Continually-Operating Regional Tourist Association in the Country."



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West Michigan Tourist Association Leaders: 1917 - 2008

Hugh J. Grey
1917-1944

"Father of Michigan's Tourism Industry"

William Palmer
1944-1947

Chester C. Wells
1948-1956

Aurey D. Strohpel
1957-1969

Wesley B. Tebeau
1970-1987

Gary C. Fischer
1988-1994

William (Bill) DeHaan
1995-1997

Linda Singer
1997-2003

Richard (Rick) Hert
2004-Present