

The Portage Historic District Commission is a City Council appointed group of up to nine Commissioners selected to review and respond to applications for appropriateness for District Properties and increase the awareness of the Historic District. The Commission is required to have at least one licensed architect and at least one Historic District property owner, both of which requirements are currently fulfilled. If you or someone you know has interest in being considered to be a Commissioner, please call the Portage City Clerk's office at 329-4511.

If you are interested in obtaining a Portage Historic District plaque customized for your historic home, please contact Mark Reile at (269) 327-5699 for more information.

It is our goal to display a plaque on every historic home in the district.

## PICKET FENCES

**Fall 2012**  
*Building History*

*Find out more about the Portage Historic District Commission by visiting [portagemi.gov](http://portagemi.gov), and selecting the Boards and Commissions tab.*

### HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION

MAIL TO:

Mark Reile	Chairperson
Katie vanLonkhuyzen	Commissioner/Newsletter Editor
Christine Broberg	Commissioner
Dorie Erhig	Commissioner
Hamilton Scharff	Commissioner
Allen VanKampen	Commissioner
Russ Randall	Commissioner
James Ebert	Commissioner
Suzanne Nemeth	Commissioner
Erica Eklov	City Liaison

PORTAGE HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION

# PICKET FENCES

FALL/WINTER 2012 VOLUME NINE NO. TWO

"DISCOVER AMERICA'S HIDDEN GEMS"  
NATIONAL TRUST FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION  
2012 THEME

Please join us in 2013 in celebrating the City of Portage's 50th Anniversary including a very special celebration Preservation Event in May!

## Defining Details set district properties apart

Historic buildings are often known for their defining details. Elaborate railings, windows, doors, and more define the style of a home and give the homeowner a look into the story behind the building.

Many times the importance of this detail is forgotten, and once it is removed, the history and character of the home is lost forever. When the Portage Historic District was first established, one of the primary considerations was whether the property was nearly original or if significant modifications have been made. When considering planning an exterior project, it is important to consider the importance of the small details that could easily be lost if extra precautions are not taken. Examples of this detail include:

- porches, railings, and stairs
- windows and doors
- casings, entablature, and siding
- chimney, foundation, and masonry



Two Greek Revival homes from the 1850's were joined together in the 1800's



Another look at the Greek Revival style at 5134 Oakland Drive



The house/office at 6869 Sprinkle features decorative shingle siding in the gables.



## THE HISTORY OF THE PORTAGE HISTORIC DISTRICT

During the 1980's, commercial development in Portage expanded at an explosive rate and extensive residential plats were built all over the city. As this expansion occurred, many old houses and structures of historic importance to Portage were either razed or moved to other locations. It was then that a new Portage resident, Kristina Moran, noticed houses being demolished. Having come from a city with a historic commission, Kristina attempted to contact Portage's historic commission for an explanation. She was surprised to find none existed, and began her own research in the basement archives of the library. She soon saw significance in many houses still standing and put out a call for the need to preserve them. Kristina and others like her were being heard in the community. (Kristina later served on our historic commission.) Concerned over this steady loss of Portage's history, in September 1988, the Portage City Council appointed a Historic District Study Committee made up of seven citizens. The committee was charged with

the responsibility to: 1. survey the City and identify structures of historic significance to Portage; and 2. prepare an ordinance that

identified these sites and established procedures for preserving the sites as part of a Historic District. In 1988, Portage was marking the 25th anniversary of the City and the 150th anniversary of the founding of Portage Township. The study committee was a natural way to honor those anniversaries. The initial survey identified 150 sites and structures for possible inclusion in the PHD. The committee focused on those from 1920 and earlier, being surprised that there were 65 built before 1900. After further research and several more site visits, 95 on the list were eliminated from further consideration. Many had been extensively altered or added-on too much from the original footprint. The final study report submitted to Council in December 1999 recommended 55 sites and structures for inclusion in the PHD. This is a good spot to address one of the most often asked questions about the PHD. Why isn't the district made up of contiguous houses or neighborhoods? Our historic homes were built when Portage was a rural, agricultural area, an early township. They were literally built tens or hundreds of acres apart, not clustered near a downtown, business or industry. The sites here are naturally scattered; however, their importance is not decreased because of distance.

2013 marks the City of Portage's 50th Anniversary as a City. Please join us in celebrating the history of our hometown!

Please call the Portage City Hall at (269) 329-4400 to apply for a Certificate of Appropriateness before starting any projects to your historic home.



3821 West Milham is a fine example of the Greek Revival style. It is also the first brick home in the City of Portage.



The heavy entablature (left) and covered front porch with columns (above) are typical of the Greek Revival style.

## PLANNING ON SELLING YOUR HISTORIC PROPERTY?

If you are considering marketing your Portage Historic District property it is important prospective buyers know it is in a historic district and what that means as an owner. Interested parties should be informed of the application process and Portage Historic District Commission approval required before making any modification to the exterior of any building on the property. Many prospective buyers also see District status as a strong advantage.

We encourage property owners and representing Realtors to include information about Portage Historic District status in a property's listing and marketing information.

We are also happy to provide a "marketing kit" for your property. We will include several copies of the newsletter, and the Portage Historic District book, *Where the Trails Crossed*. The book provides great information about each property included in the district, including style of the buildings, and the basic history and approximate age of the buildings. This would be a great way to share Portage Historic District status, and inform prospective buyers of the importance of the property to our community's history.

Please contact Portage City Hall at 329-4400 or email [eklove@portagemi.gov](mailto:eklove@portagemi.gov) to discuss any questions you may have about selling your property or to arrange to pick up or to request a marketing kit mailed.

Do you have a historic picture of your District Property? Please share it with us!

[eklove@portagemi.gov](mailto:eklove@portagemi.gov)

If you have ideas for Picket Fences or feedback for the commission, please contact Mark Reile, Chairperson, at (269) 327-5699.