

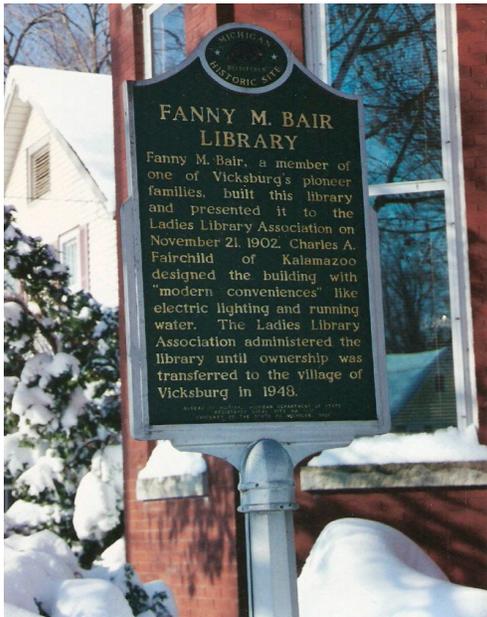
Plaques and Signs Mark Vicksburg's History

A recent "Trips With a Twist" article by Bill Truesdell reminded us that historical markers tell unique versions of Michigan history.

However, we seldom stop to think that all of us, just by living every day and doing something, are creating history within our families and community.

While few of us will ever have a plaque or marker erected to commemorate the events of our lives, Vicksburg is home to several such markers that help keep alive parts of our collective history, and here are a few you can visit right here at home.

Fanny M. Bair Library, Michigan State Historic Site, 1986



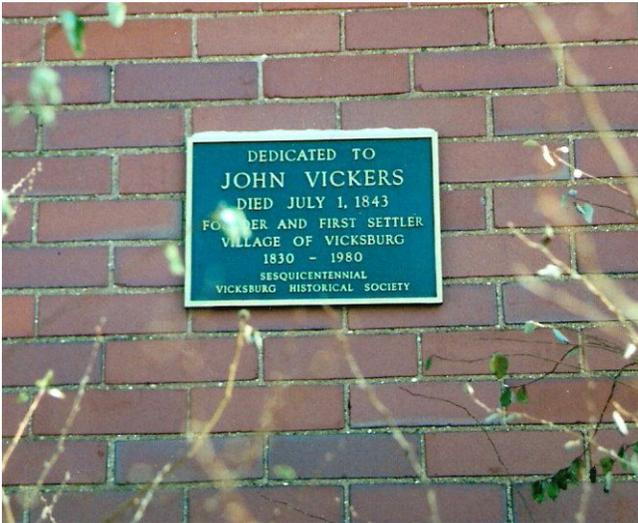
Mrs. Fanny Bair dreamed of the day when Vicksburg would have a permanent location for a library. As the Bair's had no children, after her husband's death she elected to use a substantial portion of her money to fulfill this dream by contracting for the construction of a stately, Romanesque style library building on Maple Street. It was Vicksburg's first building designed specifically as a library, and featured such "modern" conveniences as electric lights and running water, making it a wonderful showplace for the village. The building was designated a Michigan Historic Site in 1986 and a sign erected in front of the original entrance on Maple Street.



Lee Paper Company Plaque of Appreciation, 1955

This marker, in the possession of Vicksburg Historical Society, was originally presented by the Vicksburg Foundation to Lee Paper Company on the occasion of their 50th Anniversary in 1955. The Vicksburg Foundation was formed in 1948 with a \$19,500

donation from Lee Paper, and was originally intended to provide financial assistance to needy former Mill employees in the days before Social Security and pension plans. Its purpose later evolved into the support of efforts to enhance the quality of life throughout the entire community. The plaque, crafted by long-time VHS shop teacher Spencer VanValkenburgh, was a token of thanks and recognition for the Mill's part in forming the Vicksburg Foundation. It now hangs in the Vicksburg Depot Museum.



John Vickers Memorial Marker, 1980

Provided by Vicksburg Historical Society and dedicated during the 1980 Sesquicentennial celebration, this marker is located high on the exterior wall directly to the left of the front entrance to the Vicksburg Schools Administration Building on Kalamazoo Avenue. It commemorates the life of John Vickers, founder and first settler and builder of Vicker's Mill, around which grew the settlement named for him that later became the Village of Vicksburg.



Grand Army of the Republic Acker Post #220 Marker, 1893

Located in the north section of Vicksburg Cemetery, this monument was erected by Post #176 of the Women's Relief Corps, one of the GAR allied orders, and dedicated in 1893 to the memory of all who served their country during the Civil War. The Acker Post was named for Major George S. Acker of the First Regiment, Michigan Volunteer Cavalry. This regiment contained about 100 men from Kalamazoo County, including men from Brady, Schoolcraft and Pavilion townships.

Briggs Mill Marker, 1920

Located on the south side of Washington Avenue, east of the paper mill and across from Clark Park, this marker is a good example of how history can become a little muddled over time. The bronze plaque fixed to a millstone reads, “On this site stood Vicksburg’s First Mill, known as Briggs Mill, erected 1850 burned and rebuilt 1853, destroyed by fire 1885. This marker placed by Vicksburg Community Council, May 31, 1920.” Actually, John Vickers built the very first mill in 1831 in the general location of the present day corner of South Michigan and West Prairie Street, though the Briggs



family eventually became owners of the Vickers’ Mill site. Various family members were actively involved in both grist and lumber milling for many years, with A. V. Briggs Mill providing lumber for many Vicksburg homes.



Vickers’ Mill Site. 1999

The Vickers’ Mill site on Prairie Street was accepted by the State of Michigan as a State Historic Site, thanks to the research of the late Dr. Arle Schneider. Named after Mr. Vickers, the Village of Vicksburg developed around the site of this grist mill. The marker, located in Clark Park, can be viewed from West Prairie Street.



Ella Singleton Memorial Marker, Bronson Vicksburg Hospital

Like Fanny Bair, Ella Singleton had a dream. She had a dream that one day the residents of Vicksburg wouldn't have to travel all the way to Kalamazoo when they needed the services of a hospital. Because she believed so strongly that this need would eventually be filled, in 1907 she left a bequest in her will of \$1900 to be held in trust against the day when enough more money could be raised to establish a hospital right here at home. Fifteen years later, Mrs. Peter Franklin helped the dream become a reality when she willed her large brick home at 146 North Main Street to the village for use as a hospital. A plaque in honor of Ella Singleton and Mr. and Mrs. Franklin can be seen in the lobby of Bronson Vicksburg Hospital.

There are other historic sites around town - some with markers, some without - commemorating those individuals who have made a significant impact on our community.

The United Methodist Church has been designated a State Historic Site, though no marker has been erected.

A plaque, now lost, once hung in the Village offices honoring a much-beloved former Vicksburg police Chief, Jesse Bone.

A plaque honoring Susan B. Little once hung on the fence surrounding the old tennis courts at the Old El which were torn down to provide additional parking for the administration building. Miss Little's family provided funds for the construction of the courts. This plaque is now held by Vicksburg Historical Society.

A plaque affixed to the new athletic stadium at the high school honors George Canavan, a beloved school custodian after which the first athletic field at the "new" high school was named. The original Canavan Field sign is now in the possession of Vicksburg Historical Society.

We can't help but wonder how many more memorial plaques exist in the area as reminders of special places and special people whose lives have now become part of our history.

■ *By Maggie Snyder*
Adapted from a 1999 Commercial-Express article