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## **Finding aid for the Marty Arnold plank road collection Collection 327**

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Describing Archives: A Content Standard

Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special Collections  
Department

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Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503

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## Summary Information

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**Repository:** Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special Collections Department

**Title:** Marty Arnold plank road collection

**ID:** Collection 327

**Date:** 1840s-1980s

**Physical Description:** 1.5 Linear Feet Four boxes

**Language of the Material:** English

**Abstract:** This collection documents the Kalamazoo and Grand Rapids Plank Road, which was constructed in the 1850s and used through the 1860s. The road was important to the early development of Grand Rapids, Michigan. The material was collected by Marty (Martha) Arnold and includes research resources, photographs, published materials and a slide show with script. The material documents the road and depicts early settlements between Grand Rapids and Kalamazoo, with images from the 1850s-1870s and the 1980s.

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## Biographical / Historical

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During the 1850s, the state of Michigan and the nation experienced a plank road craze. As towns and cities grew and developed, so grew the necessity for reliable routes between commercial centers. In Michigan in the 1840s and 1850s, Governor Ransom believed that the development of plank roads could boost local labor markets and mend an economy that was ruined by the Panic of 1837. The state had been unable to provide an adequate system of roads as growing numbers of settlers arrived. Subsequently, the responsibility fell to private companies, and over 200 charters were granted in Michigan for the development of privately owned plank roads. Local farmers and manufacturers were eager to invest in these roads which would help them reach the state's commercial centers. Michigan was one of the first states to build plank roads, which aided greatly in the settlement and development of the state, and later the development of Michigan's highway system.

Plank roads were more advanced than the "corduroy" roads which preceded them, logs placed across swampy areas which usually "floated," and in which horses and coaches could easily get stuck. The plank road was an improvement as it was supposed to be sturdy, smooth and permanent. They were built of

planks of oak, elm or pine which were 8 to 16 feet long and 3 to 4 inches thick, nailed across "stringers" which ran parallel to the road.

In 1848 the State Legislature passed a general Plank Road Law which stated that a company no longer needed a special charter to build a road, only that they had to follow certain specifications in its construction. The state also regulated the tolls that a private road could charge. Initially they proved a great improvement from dirt roads, which could turn into "rivers of mud" and were impassable much of the year. Eventually however, the condition of plank roads dwindled, and as railroads came to completion in the 1870s, the cost of maintenance matched with the competition of the trains proved too much for the plank road companies. Many ceased operating the roads, some were covered with gravel.

In Grand Rapids there were seven companies that owned and operated toll roads. Alpine, Grandville, Plainfield, Reeds Lake, Bridge, Canal, Division and Walker streets were all once plank roads. The Grand Rapids and Kalamazoo Plank Road Company spent \$70,000 completing a road between the two commercial centers, and coaches began using it in 1855. It was \$2.50 for passengers to make the 48 mile coach trip, which began at the Eagle Tavern on Market Ave and took them through the wilderness all the way to Kalamazoo. The road followed modern day Division Avenue and "Old 131." Although at its dawn it was seen as a great improvement over the preceding dirt road, it was a joke by the 1860s. Planks were warped and pried up, making the journey extremely bumpy and hazardous for teams of horses or oxen. In 1870, the Grand Rapids and Indiana Rail Road completed their line, which also functioned to end the heyday of the plank road. But the rapid growth of Grand Rapids and local farming communities, many of which experienced great prosperity in a short number of years, can be attributed to this road.

In the early 1980s, Marty Arnold took an interest in the history of the plank road. Originally from Kalamazoo, she grew up hearing stories about it since both sets of her great great grandparents had been settlers along the plank. The Goodrich and Stoddard families were neighbors whose children eventually married. Arnold's great great grandfather, Asa Harding Stoddard wrote a well known poem called "Riding On the Plank." After moving to Grand Rapids, Arnold began researching plank road history and eventually published an article in the Grand Rapids Press "Wonderland" section in 1983. She also prepared a slide presentation for the Grand Rapids Historical Society, and took groups of history buffs on a bus tour along the Old Grand Rapids – Kalamazoo Plank Road. These as well as other items gathered and compiled during her research comprise this collection.

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## Scope and Contents

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This collection includes research done by Marty Arnold along with the results of that research – her Grand Rapids Press Wonderland article and the slide show presentation given to the Grand Rapids Historical Society are a reflection of a personal interest. Although a local history enthusiast, Arnold developed the plank road story because her great great grandparents were settlers along the plank road. Her research encompassed only the Grand Rapids - Kalamazoo Plank Road, and does not include information on any other of the 200 plank roads that once existed in Michigan. It depicts early settlements between Grand Rapids and Kalamazoo, and in many cases provides an image of a structure

or a town from the 1850s-1870s, accompanied by photos that Arnold took of the same places in the 1980s. The slide show is a compilation of photos that she took of the current route and the structures that still stand from the plank road era, mixed with copies of old images of towns and structures most likely taken from books.

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## Administrative Information

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### Publication Statement

Grand Rapids Public Library, Grand Rapids History and Special Collections Department

111 Library Street NE  
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503

[localhis@grpl.org](mailto:localhis@grpl.org)

URL: <http://www.grpl.org>

### Immediate Source of Acquisition

Marty Arnold, accession number 1997.033.

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## Related Materials

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### Related Materials

Coll. 254: "On the Michigan Stage" / by David & Marilyn Hanks, depicts early stage coach stops.

Article, "The Plank Road Craze: Background Reading" / Philip P. Mason, Wayne State University.

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## Controlled Access Headings

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- personal papers

- Kalamazoo (Mich.) -- History
- Plank roads -- Michigan
- Grand Rapids (Mich.) -- History

## Collection Inventory

### Series I. Publications and Programs from Arnold's Research.

Title/Description	Instances	
Biographical. "Next stop, Grand Rapids!' On the Old Plank Road" Grand Rapids Press. Wonderland section, May 16, 1982. In Plastic sheet protectors	Box 1	Folder 1
"Next Stop, Grand Rapids!' On the Old Plank Road" Grand Rapids Press. Wonderland Section, May 16, 1982. (10 Copies)	Box 1	Folder 2
Grand River Times. V. 7, no. 5, Apr. 1986. Arnold as Grand Rapids Historical Society annual meeting presenter.	Box 1	Folder 3
[Grand River Times, date unknown, ca. 1986?] Arnold giving Plank Road Tour.	Box 1	Folder 4
Old Plank Road Tour flyers & notes, plus schedule/highlights	Box 1	Folder 5
Mrs. M.G. Washburn Reminiscences. Apr. 18, 1946, as correspondence to Arnold. Found with folder 5. [Note, 2015: Washburn's granddaughter, Holly S. DeMaagd, says that this should be 1986. M.G. Washburn was born in 1904 and says in the letter that she is 82. She lived on Remembrance Rd.]	Box 1	Folder 6
"They Traveled the Old Plank Roads", Kalamazoo, Mi. June 1952, J.S. Hagle. "Stage Drivers & Proprietors" Typed carbon copy, found with folder 5.	Box 1	Folder 7

### Tour notes, including, from folder 5.

Title/Description	Instances	
2 Unidentified book pages	Box 1	Folder 8
2 scrap sheets	Box 1	Folder 8
"Garfield" by Carol M. Holt, 1915	Box 1	Folder 8
Greenfield Village flyer with notes	Box 1	Folder 8
Martin Michigan's Marigold Village flyer (tour rest stop?)	Box 1	Folder 8
Original tracing paper route map	Box 1	Folder 9
Colored pencil/crayon map. Grand Rapids ca. 1855 vs today. Michigan to Fulton, Grand River to Bostwick.	Box 1	Folder 10

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)**Series II. Research materials & clippings**

<b>Title/Description</b>	<b>Instances</b>	
Cutlerville, 1836-1976. Bicentennial Memorial Booklet. Ca. 1975? Has sections cut out.	Box 1	Folder 11

**Miscellaneous research items**

<b>Title/Description</b>	<b>Instances</b>	
Copy of Wonderland Article	Box 1	Folder 12
Envelope with notes scribbled	Box 1	Folder 12
Letter from Mrs. G. Dewitt, 1986	Box 1	Folder 12
Rough pencil drawn map with notes in blue pen	Box 1	Folder 12
Note cards ( for article?)	Box 1	Folder 12
Kalamazoo Gazette Clippings, 1950, 1966, 1974	Box 1	Folder 12
"They Traveled the Old Plank Roads" Article, 1962	Box 1	Folder 12
Kalamazoo Gazette Carbon of Article, 1852	Box 1	Folder 12
Letter from Jane Hagle	Box 1	Folder 12
Pen drawn map	Box 1	Folder 12
1846 Kalamazoo Telegraph	Box 1	Folder 12
The Delano Homestead: A Living History Farm. Pamphlet from the Kalamazoo Nature Center.	Box 1	Folder 13
"Stagecoach Follows A Trail into the Past" / Arn Shackelford. Article, 5-27-1976.	Box 1	Folder 14

**Article Clippings.**

<b>Title/Description</b>	<b>Instances</b>	
"Expressway Far Cry From Plank Road"	Box 1	Folder 15
"Trains End Brief History of Stagecoach"	Box 1	Folder 15
"Coffee and Conviviality: A diner Guide to Atmosphere" / Robert Moyer. About Martin, MI.	Box 1	Folder 15
"Salem and Bradley Indian Missions Preserve Native American Heritage" / Dawn Kemp. About Lewis Church.	Box 1	Folder 15
"The Way We Were". Photograph of Kalamazoo – Grand Rapids Stagecoach.	Box 1	Folder 15

"Indiana's Covered Bridges Provide Trip to the Past" / Gordon Beld.	Box 1	Folder 15
Cut and Pasted Typed Manuscript Pages for "Wonderland" Article.	Box 1	Folder 16
Four sheets stapled together of roughly drawn versions of Map.	Box 1	Folder 17
"Railways," Clipping.	Box 1	Folder 17
"the Days of Stages : Plank Roads," Clipping.	Box 1	Folder 17
"History of the City of Grand Rapids," Clipping.	Box 1	Folder 17
"Shelbyville Music Festival 'Superb'" / Richard DeVinney. Article about concerts at Shelbyville Art Emporium, an Old Plank Road Stop.	Box 1	Folder 18
Correspondence : Letter to Marty Arnold from W. Ward Christlieb.	Box 1	Folder 19
"Life of Kalamazoo's Plank Road System Short, Bumpy" : Kalamazoo Gazette Article, 1954. Also, loose leaf notes and Letter from Kathleen Tower, 1982.	Box 1	Folder 20
"Transportation Facilities Key to Wayland Success Then and Now" / Dennis Reno. Article from The Wayland Globe, 1963.	Box 1	Folder 21
Manuscript For Grand Rapids Press "Wonderland" Article.	Box 1	Folder 22
Marty Arnold Research Notes. Seven Loose hand written pages.	Box 1	Folder 23
Marty Arnold Research Notes. Four hand written pages.	Box 1	Folder 24
Albright Tavern. Photocopy.	Box 1	Folder 25
"The Homestead : Scene of Pioneer Efforts." Four pages about the Cutler Homestead, later the Pine Rest Visitor Center.	Box 1	Folder 26
Marty Arnold handwritten notes. 3 Pages.	Box 1	Folder 27
Notes from Interview with Jim Westra.	Box 1	Folder 28
"The Refuge". Photocopy of Article about James Lane Summer home at 92nd and Division Ave.	Box 1	Folder 29

## Various Notes and Articles

Title/Description	Instances	
"Lovely Weather For a hayride Together"	Box 1	Folder 30
Letter to Marty Arnold From C. Pridsma of Pine Rest Christian Hospital concerning her research of the Cutler Farm House.	Box 1	Folder 30
Photocopy of 'Residence of J.B. Breed of Almena Twp.	Box 1	Folder 30
"A Little Post Office Like That in Bradley, It's Still a Small World". Article from G.R. Press, 1981.	Box 1	Folder 30
Letter from Marian Hudson	Box 1	Folder 30



Clipping about Thomas Monteith	Box 1	Folder 30
"the Story of the Red Brick House", on back of menu from the Red Brick Inn Resaurant	Box 1	Folder 30
Several Pages of handwritten notes	Box 1	Folder 30
Moline: 1872-1972 Souvenir Booklet / Mathilda Faber. Ed.	Box 1	Folder 31
Roughly drawn map and notes.	Box 1	Folder 32
"Wayland Men Recreate 'Our Grandfather's Farm'" / Neil Munro. Copy of Article from 1966. Also in folder, various notes and photocopies of maps.	Box 1	Folder 33

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## Series III. Images

### Photographs

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March 1982 color photos. (11)	Box 2	Folder 1
March 1982 color photos on note cards with descriptions. (14)	Box 2	Folder 2
Black and White Grand Rapids Press photos by Marvin Laninga. (29)	Box 2	Folder 3
Color photo of (Eli) Hart Inn Barn, in sleeve with hand drawn map.	Box 2	Folder 4
Black and White Grand Rapids Press photo by Marvin Laninga of marker of 'Old Toll Gate' built in 1852.	Box 2	Folder 5

### Six sleeves containing photos and clippings

Title/Description	Instances	
Color photo of Mrs. Ruby Smith, author of History of Wayland	Box 2	Folder 6
Color photo of Plank Road toll house in Wayland	Box 2	Folder 6
Photo of Marilyn Caulkins Smith showing mantle made of Plank Road timber	Box 2	Folder 6
Clippings of Cutlerville by Goldie Snow	Box 2	Folder 6
Image of mural in Old Pantlind Hotel : "This is one of the Old Kalamazoo Coaches" (no longer there)	Box 2	Folder 6
Photo of interior of carriage stop in Martin, photo of grave of Wayland's first pioneer	Box 2	Folder 6
Photo of grave of Asa Harding Stoddard	Box 2	Folder 6
Artists renderings of Old Plank Road	Box 2	Folder 6

Black and White Grand Rapids Press photos by Marvin Laninga. (5)	Box 2	Folder 7
Negatives	Box 2	Folder 8
Printed copy of Appendix, with slide list from presentation, script from presentation, and duplicate / unused slide list.	Box 2	Folder 9

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### Extra Slides not used in Presentation

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Slide 8: barn across field	Box 4	Folder 4
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