

WILLIAM E. AND NINA DOWNEY SCRIPPS ESTATE MARKER DEDICATION REMARKS, MAY 16, 2009

JACK DEMPSEY, MICHIGAN HISTORICAL COMMISSION:

Good morning – it's certainly an honor and privilege to take part in this event.

In the half-century since the Legislature authorized the markers program, the Michigan Historical Commission has approved some 1500 State historical markers. Throughout these fifty years, people have gathered around new markers to celebrate their local history – part of our State's history as a community – at dedications like this one.

Today we celebrate an extraordinary place left to us by a man in many ways ahead of his time (perhaps ours as well). Will Scripps was the surviving son of the wealthy founder of the Detroit Evening News media empire. Given his station in life, he could have wasted it in self-absorption. Misbehavior might have made him a conspicuous media subject.

Instead, Will Scripps was a humanitarian, a citizen who cared deeply about his State. He initiated social and educational programs during the Great Depression, assisting people in need. He supported wildlife conservation, land reclamation, and respect for our State's precious natural resources. He was a mechanical and technological pioneer, and launched the first U.S. commercial radio station – WWJ – which broadcast the first Alcoholics Anonymous programming and helped expand it across the nation – how appropriate here at Guest House.

We've gathered on the grounds of Wildwood Farm, once a 3,800 acre estate that Will and wife Nina Downey Scripps – Will's childhood sweetheart – began accumulating in 1916. Big place, right? Yes, but more so, a place of big ideas.

Noted Jackson-born architect Clarence Day was engaged to design the mansion that might be considered the centerpiece of this property. A remarkable structure, rich with history, and we're fortunate it's remained largely unaltered after eight decades.

I want us, however, to focus today on the grounds and the gardens. The Scripps envisioned this place as a model for the use of sustainable, long-term, time-honored methods of soil conservation – and the Dust Bowl would soon show how important they were – and thus for restoring spent, nutrient-depleted farmland. Its livestock would enjoy the best of traditional practices for the animals' health and vitality – fresh air, hygiene, exercise, quality feed. Science would advance, not undermine, health. People from continents away came to be taught here, in Michigan, the best agriculture, livestock, land management practices.

Will Scripps was alarmed at the deterioration and loss of farm acreage. He wanted to do something visionary to correct it, and he did.

These grounds also served as a wildlife sanctuary for migratory birds. While Genevieve Gillette was scouting land, helping found the Michigan parks system, Will Scripps was creating a park right here.

Equally important, this place was designed as a sanctuary for people with 75 acres of beautiful gardens – the work of Bryant Fleming, a pioneer American landscape architect. This landscape was one of Fleming's most important commissions. Rolling hills, natural lakes, wetlands, wood lots, all joined with terraces, paths, water features, native plant material to form a unique place of natural beauty and graceful design. How appropriate this place remains a sanctuary.

This place – carrying on the legacy of its founder – still exudes historic integrity, concern for people, love of Michigan. We can learn much here.

On behalf of the Commission and the Michigan Historical Center, I salute the dedicated people who made this marker – commemorating the memory of a great Michigander and preserving a great Michigan place – a reality for all of us. Thank you.

DENNIS KING, CORPORATE PRESIDENT & CEO, HARLEY ELLIS DEVEREAUX ARCHITECTS
ADVISORY BOARD MEMBER, *FRIENDS OF THE WILLIAM E. SCRIPPS ESTATE.*

Thank you, and allow me to add my personal welcome to all of our guests assembled here today. I'd like to also recognize one of my Partners, Jon Block, who is attending today as well.

As both a Trustee of The Friends of the William E. Scripps Estate and as the Chairman and CEO of Harley Ellis Devereaux, Architects and Engineers, I have a unique perspective about the man whose design achievement we are recognizing today. For you see, Clarence Day, architect for the Scripps Estate, served as a key Principal of my own design firm, then known as Harley Ellington & Day, from the time following his design work on this fine home, until his retirement from architectural practice in 1959, some fifty years ago.

Last year, our firm celebrated it's Centennial, our 100th anniversary, and I'm pleased to say that Clarence Day's years dedicated to firm were critical to our success during that time. Born in Detroit in 1886, architect Clarence E. Day, Sr., graduated from Central High School. From there, he would say, his formal education "came from the school of hard knocks." After serving apprenticeships with several Detroit architects, Day launched his own firm in 1915. In that early practice, Day specialized in eclectic revival residential design work and is credited with creating some of the most impressive homes in the Detroit area. Working in many of the same upscale neighborhoods as our firm's founder, Alvin Harley, Clarence Day designed residences for Detroit's social elite. Among his clients were officers of Ford and General Motors, including Benson Ford, K.T. Keller and Meyer Prentis.

Day ultimately worked in a variety of design styles, traveling to study in Europe. He was licensed as an architect in Michigan in 1927, the same year he completed his most famous residential design - this crowning achievement we recognize today. Day often bragged that he received the Scripps commission after beating out renowned fellow architect, Albert Kahn, although it probably didn't hurt that Clarence was married to Nina Scripps' sister.

On the heels of this noteworthy design work for the Scripps Estate, and prior to the Depression, Clarence Day also designed several homes in nearby Lake Angelus. One of these was a country home for his own family, which he named, "Tarrycroft by the Lake."

During the Great Depression, however, the residential commissions upon which Day had built his practice began to evaporate. He closed his own office and worked out of his home until 1937, when he first collaborated with our firm, known as Harley and Ellington, at the time. By 1941, the firm then known as Harley Ellington and Day took a significant step into the public spotlight with our design for the Horace Rackham Educational Memorial Building, the third building in Detroit's cultural center, and the firm later was responsible for the south and north additions to the Detroit Institute of Arts. Clarence Day ultimately played an important and significant role in our firm's successful design of many notable Detroit civic structures.

So, with that entwined historic background, I am pleased to sustain our firm's commitment to help keep this beautiful home alive through my personal participation as a Trustee in the Friends organization, and to bring you my personal greetings and congratulations from the current 250 architects and engineers of Harley Ellis Devereaux who consider this great home an important part of our own legacy.

Thank you for the opportunity to share these thoughts with you on this occasion and our heartiest congratulations to the community. Thank you.