

# DETROIT HISTORICAL SOCIETY



*“No city is more the product of its history than Detroit.”*  
Mayor Mike Duggan

## **Mission and Purpose:**

There is nowhere else like Detroit. Our city has an inimitable character and a deep-rooted identity that was forged by our hardworking forbearers and is refined daily by the dedicated and creative people who fuel it and call it home today. For nearly a hundred years, the Detroit Historical Society has been preserving and sharing the city’s history, and illustrating how that history can form the bedrock of Detroit’s future. We know the importance of the people, places, and events that shaped—and continue to shape—what our city really is, and how Detroit is defined for residents and visitors alike.

The stories of Motor City music and arts and engineering, of immigrants’ hope and bankruptcy’s despair—have helped the people of Detroit create a unified understanding and deep sense of hometown pride. At the Detroit Historical Society, we nurture these narratives, sharing them and their importance with curious people interested in learning more about their place in the world. Detroit is a product of all the triumphs and tragedies, the great leaps forward and grave mistakes, that are found in its past. But, as the *New York Times* recently noted, “In Detroit, the future is still being written.”<sup>1</sup> By highlighting the significance of Detroit’s present-day revitalization in the context of a long history of hard work and continued rebirth, the Society serves a unique role in helping longtime residents, elected leaders, entrepreneurs and suburbanites keep the journey of where we have been alive so that we can move forward toward a more positive future.

As the operator of two museums dedicated to the history of Detroit and southeast Michigan, and the caretaker of the immense collection of artifacts that tell our city’s great stories, we proudly champion our city’s past, present, and future. Through the Detroit Historical Museum in Midtown and the Dossin Great Lakes Museum on Belle Isle, we preserve and promote the sense of place and shared values that characterize the people of the region. Not only do our museums make Detroit’s cultural district and its premier park more attractive places to visit, but they also help make the city of Detroit a better place to live, work and raise a family. They bolster the

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<sup>1</sup> From the November 20, 2017 *New York Times* cover story, “Detroit: the Most Exciting City in America,” by Reif Larsen.

civic infrastructure and help create the kind of stimulating communities that are intriguing places for people to live and desirable places for investors to do business.

As the Detroit Historical Society approaches its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary, we have made a passionate commitment to ensuring that Detroit's historical museums are reflective of the city as it is today, with exhibits and programming that tell *all* of Detroit's stories. We are dedicated to providing meaningful experiences that preserve and share the history of our region so that current and future generations can better understand the people, places and events that helped shape our lives.

It is only through sharing in our history that we truly know who we are, and so our mission is to work diligently every day to tell our city's stories and why they matter. We do this in the following ways:

- By **collecting, preserving, and sharing** the City of Detroit's collection of more than **250,000 historical artifacts**.
- By curating **award-winning exhibitions** chronicling the history of Detroit at the **Detroit Historical Museum** and the region's rich maritime heritage at the **Dossin Great Lakes Museum**.
- By **educating learners of all ages** in our region about Detroit's unique place in the past and its emerging role in the future, **through school tours, enrichment activities and community programming**.
- By serving as the **convener for inspiring conversations** and important explorations about Detroit's past, present, and future through a wide range of **community-based programming and outreach**.

### **We Collect:**

*"Objects tell stories [and] promote visceral, emotional responses: they can be a source of joy and wonder, but can also be the starting point for challenging conversations."*

National Museum Directors' Council

We stand as the guardian of a collection of over 250,000 artifacts that detail the history of Detroit from pre-colonial times to the present. The Detroit Historical Society's expert team of curators and conservation specialists works to accession, catalog and preserve several centuries of material culture that are housed at the Collections Resource Center, a 100,000 square-foot storage facility on the grounds of Historic Fort Wayne in southwest Detroit. The collection spans the gamut from 1000-year-old items used by the first people who settled the region to modern objects gathered during the construction of Little Caesars Arena and the Q-Line. A particular highlight is our automobile collection, a carefully curated assortment of over 60 unique cars ranging from a 1905 Cadillac Osceola to a vintage Ford Mustang prototype.

Knowing the nature, characteristics and storage location of artifacts is critical for the Society to utilize the collection to its full potential, and we continue to complete small-scale inventories of specific groups towards our goal of achieving a collection-wide inventory. In 2019, two such projects have already been funded. Although incredibly time-consuming and labor-intensive, a thorough collections inventory and digitization strategy is a fundamental and critical component of good collections care and stewardship, and the Society is committed to completing the work necessary to maximize the long-term preservation of the collection, and to provide valuable information that will enable the Society to better manage, protect, preserve and share these items with the public.

As we are preserving and caring for the existing collection, our curatorial team is also continually considering the kinds of items to collect. Last year, The Society accepted 252 new artifact donations adding 3,082 new objects to the collection, including items from everyday people to more unusual objects such as nautical china once used on Great Lakes ships, and a rare Clyde boat made of plywood and manufactured in Detroit between 1930 and 1950. Besides being displayed in our two facilities, objects in the collection are loaned to museums throughout North America, and new this year, installed in exhibitions at partner organizations around Detroit providing the public with even more access to the collection. In addition, we are continuing to digitize the collection, building an ever-growing public archive of information, artifacts, films and photographs that is accessible through our website. Over the past year, we added almost 5,000 records to our online database, and now have over 65,000 total records online that can be searched and viewed by the public. Images of artifacts in our collection are displayed and published around the world, and our staff makes meaning of the digital collection by providing historical context and interpretation through a collections blog that has been visited over 175,000 times. A new monthly members newsletter, debuting in late 2019, will provide members with even more access to this resource by providing members with a sneak peek at the newest items to enter the collection.

We also keep our collection relevant by carefully considering the kind of stories we collect and how we collect them. In 2015, as part of the large-scale community engagement project *Detroit 67: Looking Back to Move Forward*, we launched our first comprehensive Oral History Project (OHP). Our OHP team captured the voices of the individuals who participated in and were affected by the events of July 1967, and assembled a collection of over 500 oral histories that informed our museum exhibition and all accompanying programming. The resulting *Detroit 67* oral history archive -- which comprises the largest collection on this subject matter in the world -- has proven to be an invaluable research tool that is widely used to assist in storytelling in media outlets both locally and internationally. Because of the overwhelming success of the effort, we have expanded the initiative into a new oral history project entitled: *The Neighborhoods: Where Detroit Lives*, that focuses on chronicling life in Detroit's myriad of neighborhoods by interviewing the people that make life in them. The OHP team will conduct the *Neighborhoods* project over a four-year period, and expects to collect 1,200 oral histories by the Summer 2022. A project-specific archive will house the entire collection in one place to provide public accessibility to the saved and preserved stories.

## **We Present:**

*“History can have more impact when it connects the people, events, places, stories, and ideas of the past with the people, events, places, stories, and ideas that are important and meaningful to communities, people, and audiences today.”*  
History Relevance Project

The historically significant artifacts, data, images, film and audio in our collection tell our stories, and these stories are richly brought to life by the Detroit Historical Society’s skilled and engaged exhibitions staff. Visitors to our two museums can see a wide range of permanent and changing exhibitions on subject matters ranging from early Fort Detroit and the Motor City’s role in WWII at the Detroit Historical Museum, to Detroit River commerce and hydroplane racing at the Dossin Great Lakes Museum.

The Detroit Historical Museum, located in the city’s cultural center, features our signature exhibits including *Streets of Old Detroit* and *Frontiers to Factories: Detroiters at Work* combined with newer interactive core exhibits such as *Detroit: Arsenal of Democracy*; *Doorway to Freedom: Detroit and the Underground Railroad*; *Kid Rock Music Lab*; and others. In addition to the permanent core installations that showcase more than 300 years of the city’s abundant history, the Society opens seven to ten new temporary installations every year that attract new visitors, such as *The Year of the Tiger: 1968*, celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the World Series title; *Aretha*, a tribute exhibition telling the life story of the Queen of Soul; *The Great War*, commemorating the end of World War I; and *Lindell AC: America’s First Sports Bar*, chronicling Detroit’s original watering hole for athletes, entertainers, blue and white-collar workers alike.

Situated on Belle Isle’s riverfront, the Dossin Great Lakes Museum explores Detroit’s role in national and regional maritime history and features four core exhibits such as the award-winning *Built by the River* and *Outdoor Treasures* that features the bow anchor from the legendary Edmund Fitzgerald, and *Miss Pepsi*, the first hydroplane to qualify for a race at 100 mph. By the end of the year, the Detroit Historical Society will complete construction on the first phase of the \$4.9M Outdoor Enhancement Project at the Dossin, which will include a new kayak launch, seating areas, and central lawn and riverfront patio event spaces. For the first time in the museum’s 60-year history, the Detroit River will be accessible from the museum, providing opportunities to explicitly link the Society’s historical artifacts to the riverfront and instilling a deeper appreciation for the historical, cultural, ecological, and commercial value of the Detroit River into visitors’ Dossin experience.

The Society’s most noteworthy project over the past 24 months has been *Detroit 67: Looking Back to Move Forward*, an unprecedented community-wide effort commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the events of the summer of 1967 in Detroit. Centered on the innovative and interactive *Detroit 67: Perspectives* exhibition installed in 2017, the project earned multiple awards and national acclaim, including the Award of Merit from the American Association for State and Local History, and the 2018 the National Medal by the Institute for Museum and Library Services, the highest honor given to museums and libraries across the nation. The *Detroit Free Press* called the exhibition “illuminating” and “immersive” and the *Detroit News* christened it “an impressive, thoroughly engaging show.” The exhibition, as it is today, will close next spring, but

the importance of the subject matter and the relevance of the themes that are explored has compelled the Society to reimagine the temporary installation and create a brand-new interactive space in the Detroit Historical Museum that will house a permanent exhibit distilled from the original. This new permanent exhibit will enable the Society to launch new, targeted *Detroit 67* programming, and continue the outreach efforts that have successfully engaged diverse audiences and community partners in important discussions about race in America.

Other major endeavors in the coming year will be the refreshment and reinterpretation of the *Frontiers to Factories* exhibition at the Detroit Historical Museum, which covers Detroit's history prior to the advent of our automobile industry, and a new temporary exhibition designed to commemorate the Society's 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 2021 and yet to be named, that will explore Detroit's population explosion in the 1920's and tell an intentionally inclusive story of Detroiters in that era including the migrants who came here from the deep South and the immigrants who came from around the world. Using the model that we created with *Detroit 67: Perspectives*, we will look to engage the public in all facets of exhibition content and creation in order to present the most inclusive and responsible stories possible.

The Detroit Historical Society is actively working to increase and enhance accessibility for neuro-diverse individuals, and has consulted with partner organizations to refine our exhibition spaces and incorporate more sensory-friendly accommodations. We also have created specialized tours, and provided staff training to improve the museum experiences for people living with Alzheimer's disease, blind and low-vision individuals, and those on the autism spectrum. As we develop our new exhibitions, we will continue to seek ways to expand this important commitment to accessibility.

### **We Teach:**

*"If you don't know history, then you don't know anything.  
You are a leaf that doesn't know it is part of a tree."*  
Michael Crichton

There is no better teaching tool than the lived experience: interactive, immersive opportunities to explore new ideas and deepen understanding. The Detroit Historical Society's education and programs team has worked diligently to increase its capacity to serve learners of all ages, ensuring that they leave our facilities with fresh perspectives of Detroit and a renewed interest in the city's stories.

We proudly serve as a partner in the Detroit Public Schools Community District's Cultural Passport program, an effort that has brought thousands of elementary school students to the Detroit Historical Museum and the Dossin Great Lakes Museum, which along with free admission fees and educational materials to support the learning objectives of the field trips, helps to close achievement and equity gaps for students in the district. For the coming year, the Society will refresh and improve existing lesson plans and create new and modern lessons that connect students' hands-on museum experience to interdisciplinary curriculum in the classroom. The Society also will update its high school and middle school curriculum utilizing the *Detroit 67*

program content, providing teachers with resources and hands-on lessons to introduce their students to oral history, and increase their understanding of its importance to historical records.

The Detroit Historical Society's education and outreach team also has designed new experiences for youth outside of school, including a Pre-K Academy that will acquaint our youngest learners with basic concepts of community and civics, and workshops that engage middle and high school age youth in courses that expand their understanding of the present world around them and empower them to shape their future, all while introducing them to the historically relevant themes and threads that make the former possible. This brand-new programming will launch with the 2019-2020 school year, allowing preschoolers to share in the excitement of a new school year in the same way that their older siblings do.

Each year, the Society sponsors more than 100 lectures, workshops, storytelling programs, and tours that bring history into the community and deliver historical content in engaging and innovative ways. Public programs include *Behind the Scenes* tours, which provide attendees the chance to explore historic neighborhoods and structures throughout the region; the *Film Series*, which screens films that cover a range of Detroit history subjects; and our *Historic Houses of Worship Tours* that teach metro Detroiters about the contributions religious institutions have made in the development of our community. The Society also is working with a range of community partners to help them utilize the oral histories collected in their neighborhoods for exhibits and other programs at local community centers, schools and galleries.

### **We Convene:**

*“Museums allow everybody to enter another world, think of another world, see the world from somewhere else, reimagine their own world, reimagine themselves. The point of the museum is to allow a citizen to become a better citizen.”*

Neil MacGregor

Cultural institutions like the Detroit Historical Society have the power to “nurture creativity and imagination” and inspire “the communal expression that allows us to reach for a better tomorrow,” according to a report from Stanford University. As such, we have the potential to “drive a shift in the values, stories, and traditions to which we hold our institutions and ourselves accountable.”<sup>2</sup> By serving as the convener for important conversations about history and current events in Detroit, the Society has been able to bridge people, communities, and different social sectors in a commitment to positive inquiry into the urgent questions of our time.

The *Detroit 67: Looking Back to Move Forward* project began an evolution in the way the Detroit Historical Society serves its community. To connect the history of the events of July 1967 to today's conversations about racial equality, gentrification, economic disparity, and demographic change taking place in Detroit and throughout the country, the Society employed a broad community engagement strategy and learned to reach out to the community itself, gathering their stories to inform our process and our programs. We also have learned the value of cultural

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<sup>2</sup> “Civic Engagement: Why Cultural Institutions Must Lead the Way” by Deborah Cullinan from *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, March 2017.

institutions as safe spaces for difficult conversations on controversial topics, and continue to position our museums as important destinations in the region and beyond for authentic and diverse community engagement, collaboration and learning.

Four years into the five-year *Detroit 67* project, the Society's focus has shifted from "Looking Back" to "Moving Forward" as we move past the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemoration and implement programs and activities that continue to transform the Detroit Historical Society, while focusing on what we can learn from the past and how to build a positive future for our city and the region. Our efforts to engage the community in this process speak to a sustained shift in the way the Society approaches the ways in which it interprets history, and the importance of examining context through multi-voice perspectives. We are working diligently to build new connections and partnerships and to maintain the authentic relationships we have built, and are utilizing these important community resources to guide our work in the next year. By providing a consistent and ongoing platform for conversation, inspiring thousands of museum visitors into action, and responsibly evaluating and reporting our progress, the Detroit Historical Society can continue our efforts to propel our community forward with an engine of history and reflection.

DETROIT HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
(A Michigan Non-Profit Corporation)

**STATEMENTS OF FINANCIAL POSITION**

**June 30, 2019 and 2018**

	<u>2019</u>	<u>2018</u>
<b>ASSETS</b>		
Cash and cash equivalents	\$ 1,755,152	\$ 322,678
Investments, at fair value (Notes A and G)	3,213,758	5,181,952
Contributions and accounts receivable (net of allowance for doubtful contributions) (Note D)	1,242,642	998,498
Inventories (Note A)	61,724	67,426
Property and equipment (net of accumulated depreciation) (Note E)	3,537,042	3,924,015
Prepaid expenses	7,713	17,207
	<u>                    </u>	<u>                    </u>
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b><u>\$ 9,818,031</u></b>	<b><u>\$ 10,511,776</u></b>
<b>LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS</b>		
<b>Liabilities:</b>		
Accounts payable and accrued expenses	\$ 212,149	\$ 83,041
Deferred revenue (Note A)	55,645	99,195
Lease payable (Note F)	8,765	11,979
	<u>                    </u>	<u>                    </u>
<b>Total Liabilities</b>	<b><u>276,559</u></b>	<b><u>194,215</u></b>
<b>Net Assets:</b>		
Net assets without donor restrictions	7,158,005	8,402,883
Net assets with donor restrictions (Note B)	2,383,467	1,914,678
	<u>                    </u>	<u>                    </u>
<b>Total Net Assets</b>	<b><u>9,541,472</u></b>	<b><u>10,317,561</u></b>
	<u>                    </u>	<u>                    </u>
<b>Total Liabilities and Net Assets</b>	<b><u>\$ 9,818,031</u></b>	<b><u>\$ 10,511,776</u></b>

See notes to financial statements.



DETROIT HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
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**STATEMENTS OF ACTIVITIES**

**For the Years Ended June 30, 2019 and 2018**

	<u>2019</u>	<u>2018</u>
<b>Changes in Net Assets without Donor Restrictions:</b>		
<b>Revenue:</b>		
Contributions and grants	\$ 2,260,657	\$ 2,170,832
Museum operation revenue	698,796	835,109
Income on long-term investments	150,319	172,505
	<u>3,109,772</u>	<u>3,178,446</u>
Total Revenue without Donor Restrictions	3,109,772	3,178,446
Net assets released from restrictions (Note B)	<u>233,862</u>	<u>887,968</u>
	<u>3,343,634</u>	<u>4,066,414</u>
<b>Total Revenue and Other Support without Donor Restrictions</b>		
<b>Expenses (Note J):</b>		
Program services:		
Programs and exhibits	916,280	1,295,965
Museum operations	1,276,968	1,328,650
Program marketing	197,638	562,584
Education and curators	571,212	745,390
Volunteers	58,045	46,296
	<u>3,020,143</u>	<u>3,978,885</u>
Total Program Services	3,020,143	3,978,885
Supporting services:		
Development	787,941	743,894
General and administrative	824,654	545,666
	<u>1,612,595</u>	<u>1,289,560</u>
Total Supporting Services	1,612,595	1,289,560
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<u><b>4,632,738</b></u>	<u><b>5,268,445</b></u>
<b>Change in Net Assets without Donor Restrictions Before Gains and Losses</b>	<u><b>(1,289,104)</b></u>	<u><b>(1,202,031)</b></u>
<b>Gains and losses:</b>		
Net realized and unrealized gains on investments	<u>44,226</u>	<u>258,404</u>
<b>Change in Net Assets without Donor Restrictions</b>	<u><b>\$ (1,244,878)</b></u>	<u><b>\$ (943,627)</b></u>

See notes to financial statements.

DETROIT HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
(A Michigan Non-Profit Corporation)

**STATEMENTS OF ACTIVITIES (CONTINUED)**

**For the Years Ended June 30, 2019 and 2018**

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	<u>2019</u>	<u>2018</u>
<b>Changes in Net Assets with Donor Restrictions:</b>		
Contributions	\$ 702,651	\$ 900,743
Net assets released from restrictions (Note B)	<u>(233,862)</u>	<u>(887,968)</u>
<b>Change in Net Assets with Donor Restrictions</b>	<b><u>468,789</u></b>	<b><u>12,775</u></b>
<b>Change in Net Assets</b>	<b>(776,089)</b>	<b>(930,852)</b>
Net Assets, Beginning of Year	<u>10,317,561</u>	<u>11,248,413</u>
<b>Net Assets, End of Year</b>	<b><u>\$ 9,541,472</u></b>	<b><u>\$ 10,317,561</u></b>

See notes to financial statements.

DETROIT HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
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**STATEMENTS OF CASH FLOWS**

**For the Years Ended June 30, 2019 and 2018**

	<u>2019</u>	<u>2018</u>
<b>Cash Flows from Operating Activities:</b>		
Change in net assets	\$ (776,089)	\$ (930,852)
Adjustments to reconcile change in net assets to net cash flows from operating activities:		
Depreciation	480,218	463,210
Net realized and unrealized gains on investments	(44,226)	(258,404)
Donated securities	(108,300)	(9,722)
Changes in:		
Contributions and accounts receivable	(244,144)	501,754
Inventories	5,702	18,508
Prepaid expenses	9,494	(16,757)
Accounts payable and accrued expenses	129,108	(729,480)
Deferred revenue	(43,550)	(15,367)
	<u>(591,787)</u>	<u>(977,110)</u>
<b>Net Cash Flows from Operating Activities</b>	<b>(591,787)</b>	<b>(977,110)</b>
<b>Cash Flows from Investing Activities:</b>		
Acquisition of property and equipment	(93,245)	(54,094)
Acquisition of investments	(170,232)	(202,419)
Proceeds from sales of investments	2,290,952	33,067
	<u>2,027,475</u>	<u>(223,446)</u>
<b>Net Cash Flows from Investing Activities</b>	<b>2,027,475</b>	<b>(223,446)</b>
<b>Cash Flows from Financing Activities:</b>		
Payments on lease payable	(3,214)	(3,798)
	<u>(3,214)</u>	<u>(3,798)</u>
<b>Net Cash Flows from Financing Activities</b>	<b>(3,214)</b>	<b>(3,798)</b>
<b>Change in Cash and Cash Equivalents</b>	<b>1,432,474</b>	<b>(1,204,354)</b>
Cash and Cash Equivalents, Beginning of Year	322,678	1,527,032
	<u>322,678</u>	<u>1,527,032</u>
<b>Cash and Cash Equivalents, End of Year</b>	<b>\$ 1,755,152</b>	<b>\$ 322,678</b>

See notes to financial statements.