

Dear Members of the Award Committee:

In the year the Fourth Michigan Cavalry captured Jefferson Davis, an intrepid pioneer, Elvin L. Sprague, began publishing the *Elk Rapids Eagle*, the first newspaper in Antrim County, Michigan (March 1865). Sprague had migrated to Elk Rapids in 1853, one year after the village was laid out. In 1872, he began publishing the *Traverse Bay Progress* monthly, which became a weekly newspaper in 1873. The Elk Rapids Area Historical Society is requesting an award for digitizing the period 1872-1891, most of which was preserved on microfilm through the efforts of local historian and author Glenn Neumann.

This pioneer journalism, along with its advertising and graphic art, its gossip and poetry, its humor, ironic wit, and moralizing commentary all chronicle in rare and revealing detail the early history of the region, specifically the growth of Elk Rapids from an obscure lumbering village into a commercial and industrial powerhouse.

Herein are recorded the rise of the Dexter-Noble "principate," which oversaw lumbering, iron works, chemical works, a flour mill, general store, and housing for many of its employees. Recorded, too, is the acrimonious competition between Elk Rapids and Keno (Bellaire) over which community deserved the honor of presiding as Antrim's county seat. Meanwhile, competition for a railroad was heating up between Elk Rapids and another bustling village, Spencer Creek (Alden), involving political shenanigans and recriminations from both sides, told in that swaggering editorial timbre so common in American journalism of the time.

Other local news offers intriguing socio-cultural insights: Did Mrs. Brown really spend the evening at the Crawfords, though Mrs. Crawford was known to be out of town visiting her sister? *Readers of this newspaper beware: such scandalous behavior, if detected, shall not escape publicized notice.*

Add to this journalism that documents the development of 19th century institutions of law, medicine, and education on the American frontier, entailed by Elk Rapids' meteoric rise to commercial success. Stories of the first schoolhouse (1853) and subsequent efforts to construct facilities to keep up with population growth, the establishment of the first County Court House (1866), and the first hospital (1897) await the curious researcher's discovery.

Important, too, is the historical goldmine digitization makes available for those interested in the complex relations between white settlers and indigenous peoples, attitudes that ran the gamut from raw cruelty to manifold shades of compassion.

Beyond the value of offering the *Progress* as a window to the past, digitization will immeasurably improve the scope and quality of the services our small, resource-limited museum could offer, especially regarding the popular subjects of genealogy, house and business research, shipwrecks, and a host of other idiosyncratic, region-specific questions historical societies get asked all the time.

Our museum has been able to assist authors, historians, researchers and students on a limited basis using a rough analog indexing system, tirelessly assembled by the aforementioned Glenn Neuman, one of our society's founding archivists, who at the dawn of the Internet dreamed of having the *Progress* digitized. Indeed, if our application is approved, instead of pointing out crumbling newspapers stored in our archives room or ransacking subject indexes, we could offer curious visitors practically instantaneous information and insights into countless local subjects and people.

Digitization of the *Progress* will also allow our small museum to improve the quality of our exhibits themselves, especially with respect to our mission of

providing relevant context and nuanced presentations. It will strengthen as well educational ties between our schools and libraries.

Moreover, one may reasonably hope that, once people experience the ease and usefulness of a digitized *Progress*, our historical society will have little trouble raising enough money to have everything else within public domain digitized and published as well.

Finally, on behalf of the Elk Rapids Area Historical Society, I thank you not just for considering our application but for your beneficial work of digital preservation in general that affords such exciting opportunities, especially for smaller organizations like ours. Contemporary voices of local journalism are disappearing in our country as “news deserts” gain more and more ground year after year. Perhaps more access to decades of historically significant, vigorous frontier journalism will inspire greater appreciation of what remains to us today.