

TRACING THE HISTORY OF STATE HISTORY: CHANGING NARRATIVES IN THE
MICHIGAN HISTORICAL MARKER PROGRAM

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ABSTRACT

Monument landscapes have long been a subject of interest to cultural and historical geographers. Studying places of public memory on the landscape in the form of monuments can reveal much about political identifications and core values regarding interpretations of the past. The Michigan Historical Marker program is a particularly interesting example of a monument landscape due to both the interplay between local-level initiative and state-level supervision seen in producing an historical marker and the relatively large scale of the program. This study examines how the program's presentations of history through marker texts have changed over time since the program's genesis in 1955. This is done by analyzing the historical progression of commemoration of the most commonly mentioned topics in the historical markers, both in how they are presented and where they are concentrated in the state. The 60 years of the program's existence have seen marked changes in what is commemorated and how certain topics or groups are portrayed in the marker texts. This study serves as an example of how monument landscapes can change over time in their presentations of public history.