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Raven Hill Discovery Center, incorporated in 1991, is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt corporation.

Mission: Raven Hill provides a place that enhances hands-on and lifelong learning for all ages by connecting science, history & the arts.

To: Friends and Family everywhere
 From: Cheri and Raven Hill
 Date: May 22, 2021
 Re: Weekly Update

Greetings Everyone!

It finally arrived! In August of 2020, Raven Hill was invited to share an artifact with magazine readers in an issue of **Michigan History** magazine! The Center was asked to write and submit a story about an interesting or obscure artifact with some kind of Michigan connection! It was fun to ponder over what to submit! With input from Emily Elliott, Special Sections Editor for the Historical Society of Michigan (HSM) and Cassi Jaskiewicz, Editorial Assistant for the Historical Society of Michigan, Raven Hill provided photos and background information for the “Facts & Finds” article. It’s about clamshell buttons made in Michigan and elsewhere. The article “Precious as a Pearl” recently appeared in the May/June issue of **Michigan History** magazine and features Raven Hill’s expansive collection of pearl buttons and the source shells from which they originated.



It was almost a year from invitation to final article in Michigan History magazine! What an experience! Look for Raven Hill’s pearl button exhibit next time you visit.

One of the new exhibits at Raven Hill is **Mother of Pearl Treasures**, which features buttons and more from the banks of the Mississippi to the oceans of the world. This story really begins more than 25 years ago. One summer day in the early 1990’s, Raven Hill received a mysterious package with no return address outside and no name inside the box. In the small package was a freshwater mussel shell from Lansing, Iowa. It had holes drilled in it. The box also contained a commercial button card with two pearl buttons attached. The slogan on the card read, “Lansing—a great name in buttons”. There were some loose pearl buttons and a handwritten note indicating that the button blank and buttons were from Lansing, Iowa, long known as one of the freshwater pearl button capitals of the world and named after Michigan’s state capital of Lansing. There was no signature on the note. Raven Hill staff is still waiting for some visitor to stop in one day & own up to the fact that they were the ones who sent the package!



(Left above) This short note written with beautiful handwriting leaves us all wondering, if the donor of this precious gift will ever be revealed.

(Left) After the button blanks were punched out, the remaining source shells were often called “holy” shells and were discarded. You can see both freshwater and ocean source shells at Raven Hill, including a beautiful green abalone “holy” shell.

Buttons have been made since prehistoric times, first as decoration and then as fasteners. Both freshwater and ocean mollusk shells were used. Wherever the source shells originated, the button production process was similar. The mussels were harvested from lakes, rivers or oceans and then boiled to soften the shell for drilling. Button blanks were drilled or punched out of the shells. The buttons blanks were then cleaned, embellished and used in combinations with other materials to create tiny works of art. Pearl buttons were especially popular from the late 1800's to the mid-1900's. The most common source shells included pearl oyster, abalone green and pink, Trochus and turbo green.



What fun it was to make connections between science, history and art, while putting this exhibit together for our visitors! After you see the magnificent pearl buttons from the past, you will appreciate the animals that supplied the shells and the art involved in the intricate creation of pearl buttons.



From the banks of the Mississippi to the oceans of the world, pearl buttons ranged from plain to fancy. Pearl buttons were often embellished or used in combination with other materials. Will you be able to choose a favorite button?

In addition to the source shells with the holes punched out, the Center's **Mother of Pearl Treasures** exhibit includes button displays, shell collections and other objects of interest that are "connected" to the science, history and art of pearl buttons—both before and after they became pearl buttons.

We continue to add names to our weekly update email lists. If you know someone who might like to receive Raven Hill's latest news, please send their email addresses to info@miravenhill.org and I will add their names to our list. Previous updates are all on our website—www.MiRavenHill.org

Despite the new mask mandates, Raven Hill will continue to ask visitors to mask indoors for the sake of our unvaccinated visitors. Better to be safe than sorry. We are also limiting the number of visitors indoors at the Center to one family group at a time as much as possible and we encourage you to call and make an appointment for your group or family. Current hours are noon to 4pm on Saturdays, 2pm to 4pm on Sundays and other times by appointment. Call us at 231.536.3369 or email info@miravenhill.org to make reservations. If you don't book in advance—no problem! You will be given a return time for museum and animals, if there is a group indoors. While waiting to explore inside, there's plenty to explore outdoors.

Take care!

Cheri