

# Time Travelers

Detroit History Tours presents an entertaining look at the city, including its legends, architecture, and food

By Dianna Stampfler



**Above:** The Detroit History Club recently transformed an old funeral home in Hamtramck into its new headquarters. **Opposite page:** Detroit History Tours guides often utilize a variety of archive materials, such as this early map of Detroit, with their guests during visits to noted points of interest around the city.

**D**etroit sports a rich and colorful heritage. The entertaining stories, spirited legends, and notorious characters of the Motor City's past are the foundation upon which Bailey Sisoy-Moore built Detroit History Tours in 2014, followed by the Detroit History Club (which boasts nearly 10,000 members) in 2016.

"I traveled a lot, and as a native Detroiter it bummed me out that I wasn't able to book tours in my hometown the way I was in many of the great cities around the world," Sisoy-Moore says. "I envisioned a company that offered a portfolio of tours available every weekend for visitors and locals alike, to celebrate the history of our city. Never in a million years did I imagine it would grow to become my full-time job."

Sisoy-Moore grew up in a family that loved visiting cemeteries, going to historic homes, and participating in cultural events. "One of my earliest memories is being at the Wiggle Club at the Detroit Institute of

Arts for their children's theater program. I remember spending a lot of middle school time at Greenfield Village and exploring local cemeteries with my mom. By high school, I was completely hooked on history," she recalls.

A graduate of the College for Creative Studies in Detroit, Sisoy-Moore went on to work as an automotive sculptor for General Motors. Although she enjoyed her job, the growing interest in her tours allowed her to retire in 2018 to dedicate herself full time to her historic endeavors. That year, she also published a children's book, "Rosie — A Detroit Herstory."

## Finding New Facts

"We work incredibly hard reading every journal article, every book, watching every documentary," Sisoy-Moore says, adding that she frequently explores the Burton Historical Collection at the Detroit Public Library, the Walter P. Reuther Library, and the Benson Ford Research Center in

Dearborn to gather information.

In doing so, she has also become an educator not only for tour participants, but for her staff of four full-time and 18 part-time employees who conduct the one- to four-hour walking, bus, boat, and food tours.

"It was becoming evident to me that history could be as interesting or as boring as a teacher made it," she admits. "I think in some little part of my mind, the company actually started all the way back in school. A great teacher and a great learning experience can stick with you for life."

The first Detroit History Tour offered was "Wild Women of Detroit Bus Tour" which highlights the contributions of Detroit's females — including music legends, Civil War spies, Rosie the Riveters, an all-female jury, and other saints and sinners. Last year, the most popular program was "Felonies and Misdemeanors; The Detroit Cops and Mobster Bus Tour," which sheds light on some of the world's most infamous criminals, gangsters, and mobsters, such as the Purple Gang and Detroit mob families.

Other well-attended tours included the "Meandering Meal, A Walking Progressive Dinner Tour of Hamtramck," "Bizarre Detroit Bus Tour," and "Historically Haunted Detroit," which is only offered in September and October (it was attended by more than 2,700 guests in 2022).

"Detroit History Tours guides have a genuine affection for local history, and it's contagious," says Annette Januszcak of Dearborn, who participated in three different tours during the fall of 2022. "You leave their events feeling wholly entertained, a little smarter, and much, much more appreciative of the richness of a history so long overlooked."

## What's On Tap

Two new themes this year are "Booze, Bank Robberies, and Baseball" and a return of the "Golden Age of the Automobile" tour.

In addition to the walking tours and bus trips (which include stops at two historic bars and are available only to those 21 or older), DHT offers a "History Under Sail" tall ship series, which cruises around the Detroit River covering topics such as history,





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stargazing, biology, and music.

The Detroit History Tours app was developed at the onset of the pandemic, allowing people to take personal walking, biking, or driving tours past historic sites throughout the city without having to commit to a larger group tour. There's also an option that enables those outside the geographic area to listen to audio and see featured images that tell a compelling story (and hopefully inspire a future in-person visit).

With the help of a bilingual staff and local interpreters, Detroit History Tours is able to offer tours in five languages in addition to English: Arabic, German, Russian, Spanish, and American Sign Language. More than 250 individual tours are offered in a normal year; since its founding, more than 208,000

people have collectively taken more than 3,700 tours.

Public tours are posted online and updated throughout the year. Ticket prices for public tours range from \$12 to \$90. There are also options for group tours, from bridal parties to corporate outings and everything in between. Sisoy-Moore advises guests to schedule these private tours four to six months in advance, to ensure the preferred date, time, and guides are available.

Sisoy-Moore says Detroit History Tours was named the Michigan Historical Society's 2021 Business of the Year. She's also proud to support several local charities. To date, she has donated more than \$38,000 to nearly 40 charities and a dozen worthy causes.

In between researching history, scheduling tours, and sharing stories, Sisoy-Moore recently completed the transformation of a 5,600-square-foot former funeral home at 3103 Commor St. in Hamtramck into the new headquarters for the Detroit History Club. The \$5-a-year, members-only club offers a variety of programs, tours, holiday events, dinners, and themed balls throughout the year. ≈

### PLAN IT!

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