



CREATING A LOCAL HISTORICAL BOOK:

FICTION AND NON-FICTION GENRES

TYLER R. TICHELAR

Modern History Press

Creating a Local Historical Book: Fiction and Non-Fiction Genres
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Cover photo: “Ridge and Blaker Streets, Marquette, MI circa 1910.”
Courtesy of Jack Deo, Superior View.

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Modern History Press
5145 Pontiac Trail
Ann Arbor, MI 48105
www.ModernHistoryPress.com
info@ModernHistoryPress.com

Fax 734-663-6861
Tollfree USA/CAN 888-761-6268
London, England: 44-20-331-81304

Contents

List of Pictures in this Book.....	ii
Creating a Local Historical Book	1
Writing Effective Regional Fiction.....	14
Understanding Regional Fiction.....	14
Finding a Readership for Regional Fiction	15
Personifying the Region as Protagonist	19
The Strength is in the Details	20
Write What You Know.....	24
Books Cited.....	25
About the Author	26

List of Pictures in this Book

Railroad trestle removal in downtown Marquette (1999-2000) Photo Credit: Sonny Longtine	8
Former Marquette County History Museum where Tyler did his research	8
Bavarian Inn - another local landmark which has disappeared	9
The 1949 Centennial Parade has become a touchstone for local families	17
Upper Harbor LS&I Ore Dock in winter Photo Credit: Sonny Longtine	20
Marquette County Courthouse - film location for <i>Anatomy of a Murder</i> Photo Credit: Sonny Longtine.....	22
Tyler gives the “Sidetracked Book Club” a Marquette history tour	27

Creating a Local Historical Book

The following article is based on a transcript of the February 2011 interview of Tyler R. Tichelaar on Authors Access podcast with hosts Victor R. Volkman and Irene Watson. Due to the intense public response to this broadcast, we have made it available in this form for your enjoyment. You can still listen to the original recording by visiting the archive page at

<http://www.authorsaccess.com/category/genres/historical-books>

Legend: Tyler Tichelaar (TT); Victor Volkman (VV); Irene Watson (IW)

IW: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to Authors Access, where authors get published and published authors get successful. Hi, I am Irene Watson and I am the managing editor of Reader Views.

VV: And I am Victor Volkman from Loving Healing Press in Ann Arbor, Michigan. I would like to welcome all our listeners to episode number 129 in our series. Tonight's topic will be *Creating a Local Historical Book* with special guest Tyler Tichelaar. You can learn more about our guest on the Authors Access website, which is: authorsaccess.com.

Tonight we are on the line with Tyler R. Tichelaar, a seventh generation Marquette, Michigan resident, who has written five novels with many more to come, all set in Upper Michigan, including: *The Marquette Trilogy*, the award-winning *Narrow Lives*, and the most recently published, a history of Marquette entitled *My Marquette: Explore the Queen City of the North, Its History, People, and Places*.

Tyler has a PhD in Literature from Western Michigan University and Bachelor and Master's degrees from Northern Michigan University. He has lectured in Writing and Literature at Clemson University, the University of Wisconsin, and the University of London. Tyler is also a regular guest-host on our show—which you know—and the President of the Upper Peninsula Publishers and Authors Association. He is the owner of Marquette Fiction and Superior Book Promotions—a professional book review and editing and proofreading service. Besides writing about Upper Michigan, he is interested in the Arthurian legends, and recently published *King Arthur's Children*, a study of treatments of King Arthur's children in literature from medieval times to twenty-first century novels. Tyler currently lives in Marquette, Michigan, where the roar of Lake Superior, mountains of snow, and sandstone architecture continue to inspire his writing. Good evening, Tyler!

TT: Hi, Victor and Irene, it's great to be here. It is different being on the other side, not being the host.

IW: [*laugh*]. Yes, I can well imagine this, and this is really interesting to be talking to you. You are a very diverse writer, from fiction to all of a sudden the *My Marquette* that you wrote, which is non-fiction. Although it is historical as your other three books were—*The Marquette Trilogy*—but this is really different because it is not fiction. Let me start off immediately just talking about what kind of different types of research did you have to do in comparison to doing the fiction, which was historical, to the non-fiction?

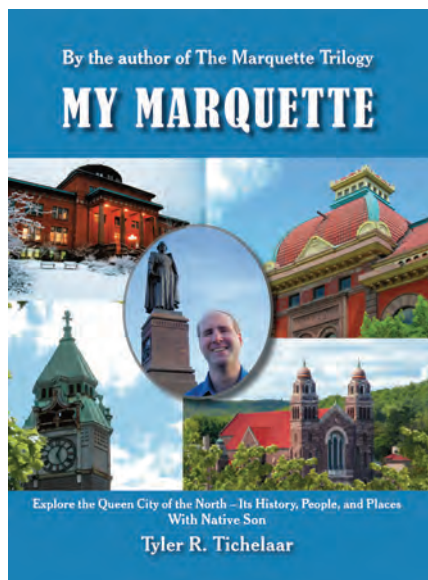
TT: OK, sure. In writing, a lot of it overlapped, and in writing the novels, I basically did almost all the research. I would say probably about 80 percent or so of the research into *My Marquette* also was used in my novels. The main difference, I think, is I did not have to be as specific in the novels; I did not have to pin down specific dates; I usually could link things, and just as long as I got the year, an event took place, that was close enough. Whereas with writing the non-fiction book, the thing that frustrated me the most was trying to pin down a specific date. I would read one source that would say, this happened on February 28th, and the next source would say February 25th, and the third source would say February 27th. I would have to dig back and figure out what their sources were and maybe look up the

actual newspapers that covered the event back in the day. I would sometimes spend hours just trying to check one little date, just to make sure that it would be accurate. That took a lot of time and because I was writing about real people—the actual historical people—I needed to do a lot more research into their backgrounds, especially since a whole section of my book is about historical homes in the area. There have been other Marquette history books, but none of them covered the historical residential district as thoroughly as mine has, and for me, that was the really exciting part of the book because I had always been fascinated by all these old Victorian homes and who would have lived in them.

In researching them, I discovered that almost everybody, who lived on those couple of streets in Marquette, were all related to each other in some way—either through blood or through marriage. So I spent all this time trying to sort out those family trees, to keep track of them. Then I made a genealogy chart, so people reading the book could follow who was who in the story, which was not something that I needed to do in my novels—the historical people just made cameo appearances as I referred to somebody. Basically, I guess for the non-fiction books, a lot more time was spent ironing out the little details.

IW: So, you were writing novels. Why did you decide to write a local history book?

TT: Well, I really was never interested in writing a history book, partly because it seemed sort of an overwhelming task to do. And there had already been a couple of history books written about the area in the past. I initially wanted to write novels just because I thought that the area deserved to be treated on a higher level. The significance of it through all of American history needed to be made apparent, and I felt like the American Dream was really played out right here in Upper Michigan. And I kind of wanted to memorialize that and honor that in



my novels. I thought I was doing something that was very unique for the area. The novels sold well enough, but the bookstores—when I brought the novels to them—they said, “What we really need is a history of Marquette; that’s what the tourists are asking for,” and the histories that had been written were basically out of print at that point.

I hemmed and hawed about it; I did not really want to do it. I had thought about writing a book explaining all sorts of my thoughts and the reasons behind the way I had written the novels. And people were asking me to give them tours of the city. I thought, not everybody will be able to come to Marquette and have me give him a walking tour, so maybe it would be better if I wrote a book that was laid out as a tour book. And so *My Marquette*, the history book, ended up being laid out like a tour book. Rather than telling the whole story chronologically, the book logically takes readers from place to place, so that you could walk around, and I would tell you the history of the building, or the house, park, whatever the case was. Once I did that, I felt more comfortable with it and I wanted to personalize it too, and say not just, “These are the events that happened,” but “This is why this place matters to me.” So I made it very personal, I talked about growing up in the area, I talked about things that my family had done: my grandpa building the post office, my ancestors—they helped to build up the Methodist Church, different things along those lines.

What I think was probably my smartest move is I did some cross-selling in the book. I had quotes from all of my novels in the book for different places. For example, Doncker’s Candy Store that I mentioned, I would quote the passage from one of the novels where the characters go to Doncker’s. Same thing with the library, I write about the library, but I have the quote from one of my books about the characters at the library. So hopefully that would encourage people also to read my novels.

VV: Great, that is a unique approach of bringing a sense of place to history which can be hard nowadays to keep it consistent—the interest level, and this way people can browse. What are some other ways that your book is different from other typical local histories?

TT: The fact that *My Marquette* is laid out as a walking tour makes it very user-friendly. I put a lot of maps in the book, broken up by the different sections, so you do not just have a map of Marquette; you have a map specifically of the downtown, of the residential section, or

the harbor. Also, because I included a lot of genealogies of different families in Marquette history, that helps a lot with understanding the different families and the reasons they came here, which has mostly to do with the discovery of iron ore here, and also of the logging industry and a lot of the shipping that went on in the area. I included my own family trees, and fortunately for me, my family—part of the reason why I'm so interested in Marquette's history is that my family has been here since the town was founded in 1849, so I could connect myself to events that happened in a lot of places, to great-grandparents, great-great-grandparents.

The other thing is, a lot of books have lots of historical photos. I think that historical photos really, really, brought it to life and I tried to make a real effort to have pictures be very large and have pictures for every single section. A lot of history books tend to focus on just the past—the distant past—but I tried to have photos of current buildings and photos of buildings that are not there anymore, but were there within recent memory. The buildings that were there in the '80s and the '90s; even when I went to the historical society—anything that happened in Marquette after about 1950—they did not have much information on. It is because it was not really considered that historical yet at that point, so people did not preserve it. I tried to do as much as I could to work well on that, so that it would be a book that would be of interest to people who were alive now, who can remember a lot of the places and events that happened.

VV: Great. Given that you have such a huge scope of 150 years, and a couple of square miles, where do you draw the line about what is in bounds and what is out of bounds?

TT: That was a really difficult thing for me to do. What it basically came down to was, had those places already been mentioned in my novels, so that I could have quotes for each section, so I would have consistency. There are one or two exceptions in the book where I did not mention—on the places I mentioned in my book—in one of my novels before, but for the most part I did. Whether or not I felt I had something to say about the place and its significance to me, there were several places that I thought, “Well, this place is important, I should include it, but what do I really have to say about it that has not been said before?” So I did not necessarily mention those.

I do not think I missed too many places that people would consider major. I had one guy come up to me at a book signing and say, “Well, you did not include my high school in there. Shame on you!” and I [*laugh*]—I just—it never crossed my mind to include that school in the book, which is funny, because it is the school that my grandma graduated from. I should have thought of that, but I could not include everything; there is no way. The book was supposed to end up being about 250-300 pages, and it ended up being 448 pages. So there is no way that I could include everything. But I tried to divide the city up into sections and then tried to digest each section by mentioning what I thought were the highlights of the major places, as well as drawing in some interesting facts that I did not think most people would know.

IW: This is quite an undertaking job you took, Tyler. What is the population of Marquette?

TT: It is about 20,000.

IW: OK. Obviously, it is a fair-sized city. There are a lot of steps—historical steps—that you had to research on; what was the most difficult part for you in this whole process?

TT: I would have to say probably—and it sounds awful [*laugh*]—but probably for me, having not written a history book before, I felt like my role largely was just cutting and pasting things. I would research books—other history books—from the past and I had all these clippings from magazines and newspapers and information and I felt all I did was to gather information and put it together. I found myself kind of bored actually, just doing that. It was not creative, like in writing a novel. And I always felt, that I had—hanging over my shoulder—the people who were going to say, “Oh, you got that date wrong,” or, “That event, that detail is not accurate,” or something like that. So, double-checking all of those facts and making sure that they are correct was probably the most difficult part.

IW: But it must have been very rewarding in the end for you?

TT: Yes, I am very proud of the book. I am especially proud of how it looks. It ended up looking the way I imagined it to be, plus even better than that, and I think that helps a lot. The colors on the cover, and the layout of the book, of the photographs, and how they were laid out. I decided to make it quite large, 8.5 x 11; I wanted it to be a kind of coffee-table sort of a book. It really has resonated with people, they have given positive responses. I have gotten letters from people

and wonderful responses that really have made it all worthwhile in the end.

IW: I am sure it does. You use photographs; obviously you have to get a lot of permission to use a lot of them. What process did you have to go through to attain some of these photographs and actually be able to use them, or have permission to use them?

TT: Well, the photographs came from several different sources. First, a fellow local author, Sonny Longtine, who had previously written the book *Marquette, Then and Now*, which was out-of-print. People had been badgering him for years to reprint the book and he just did not want to do it, for whatever reason. I did not want to step on his toes by coming out with my book, so I talked to him about it. He said, "Oh, no, go ahead and write it and I have got all these photos from my book if you want to use them." He gave me several photos, most of them were photos that I could have taken myself, but there were some pictures of things, for example, the railroad trestle that used to be downtown; he had a picture of it when they took it down back in perhaps 1999 or 2000. I could never have taken a picture of it any longer, so he was a great resource that way and very generous about sharing his pictures.

Obvious places to get photos were the Historical Museum here in Marquette; I got lots of pictures from them. Also from Superior View, which is owned by Jack Deo. He has been a collector of old photographs for decades and has collections of people who were photographers in the Marquette area back in the 1800s. He has this huge collection of photographs and I got several from him.

In one case, I had to write to the Utah Historical Society for a picture of my great-great-grandpa's cousin because he happened to have moved out there and that was a certain place that I could find a photo of him.

The most frustrating part for me was not being able to get photos that I wanted. I was lucky, actually, in the end. The Marquette Mall used to have this wonderful fountain in it and I could not find a picture of this fountain. It had these colored lights in the water and the water would shoot up, so there were pink and green sprays of water. It was a gorgeous fountain; everybody loved it. It was a shame when they took it out. I could not find a picture of that fountain, and finally I went to the historical society. I was looking for something completely different



Railroad trestle removal in downtown Marquette (1999-2000)
Photo Credit: Sonny Longtine



Former Marquette County History Museum where Tyler did his research

and I happened to find a picture of the fountain. It was not at all a picture that was what I was expecting; it actually showed a bunch of Boy Scouts in a canoe in the fountain doing some sort of an exhibition. It was a kind of bizarre picture, but at least I got my picture of my fountain.

Another thing I wanted was a picture of the Bavarian Inn that had been torn down; nobody had one. I checked at the museums and the university archives, and it ended up my great-aunt had a photo of it. I wanted it specifically because my grandpa and my great-uncle had helped to build it. We had to dig through my great-uncle's photographs which took a couple of hours before we finally found the picture.

Marquette is well-known for having been the site of the filming of the movie *Anatomy of a Murder* (1959). It was based on Robert Traver's 1958 book about a murder that took place here. When they filmed the movie, all the Hollywood movie stars came to the area and they actually filmed it here: Jimmy Stewart, Lee Remick, Ben Gazzara, a whole bunch of stars from back in the '50s. I wanted a couple of pictures of when the movie stars were here. I went to the Northern Michigan University archive and they had photos, but they said, even if these photos were in the collection, they could not grant permission



Bavarian Inn - another local landmark which has disappeared