

CALKINS LAW OFFICE

Host: Grand Rapids Public Museum

This gleaming white Greek Revival building, with its noble columns and classic symmetry, was built in 1863 and is the oldest surviving structure in the city. Originally located in the heart of Grand Rapids when it was still just a frontier town, it stood as a symbol of the bright future that would lie ahead.

Charles Philo Calkins purchased the building in 1837 and set up a law practice with his partner, John C. Holmes. The city was growing rapidly and Calkins' practice, dealing mostly with real estate law, prospered as well and it soon outgrew this tiny building. When streets needed to be widened downtown, this office was moved to the Belknap Park area, and over time it was forgotten and neglected. It was moved again to its current location where Jack Stiles, a local businessman, made it his mission to restore and preserve this important piece of local history. This responsibility was then taken over by the Grand Rapids Public Museum. The office was fully restored, and the dedication ceremony at the meeting point of State, Washington and Jefferson Streets was part of the national Bicentennial Celebration of 1976.

In 2009, two Boy Scouts of America from Faith Reformed Church's Troop 338 in Wyoming, Corey Alberta and Travis Lepsch, volunteered to help with the a second rehabilitation of the building as part of their community service project. They raised \$37,000 that included \$25,000 from the Grand Rapids Development Authority. The funds were used to replace the roof and deck and to pay for the professional restoration of the bust of Abraham Lincoln and for the landscaping of the park. It now stands as a symbol of the forward-looking spirit of the early pioneers of our city.