



Michigan Women's Historical Center and Hall of Fame

213 W. Main Street, Lansing, Michigan 48893

(517) 484-1880

www.michiganwomenshalloffame.org

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Contact: Patricia Majher, Assistant Director

pmajher@sbcglobal.net

Michigan's Female Lighthouse Keepers Recognized in Exhibit at Women's Historical Center

Museum Is First in the State to Cover the Topic

Lansing, MI — Lighthouse keeping in the 19th and early 20th centuries was a rugged life of long hours and hard work punctuated by periods of real peril. Not a profession for the fainthearted, it was thought to be unsuitable employment for the “fairer sex.” But at least 50 women in Michigan proved the naysayers wrong.

Acting as both assistants and full-fledged keepers, these women served the sailing community with distinction for more than 100 years—often juggling their official duties with the demands of raising their families. Two women even gave their lives while keeping.

Stirring stories of dedication and determination such as these may be found in a new exhibit, entitled “Ladies of the Lights: Michigan Women in the U.S. Lighthouse Service,” developed by the Michigan Women’s Historical Center and set to be displayed there January 14-June 27, 2008. “To our knowledge,” said Patricia Majher—the museum’s assistant director and curator of the exhibit—“this is the first time an exhibit has been dedicated to this subject in Michigan.”

A wide variety of information will be presented in this exhibit, from the unique challenges of women in this non-traditional field to such details as the daily and nightly tasks they performed, the clothing they wore, and the salaries they earned. A map of Michigan will highlight the many lighthouses at which women served and seven women will be recognized for their extraordinary accomplishments, including the first female keeper in Michigan (Catherine Shook at Pointe Aux Barques), the longest-serving keeper (Elizabeth Williams at Beaver Island Harbor and Little

Traverse), and a keeper who carried on valiantly during the Civil War after her husband went off to fight (Anastasia Truckey at Marquette Harbor).

Audio and video elements will enhance the visitor experience. Additionally, the exhibit will include hands-on elements for younger visitors, including a build-your-own-lighthouse station, a design-a-keeper's-uniform activity, and an opportunity to practice polishing brass hardware and lifting the weight of a full oil can. These elements—plus a teacher's activity book and bibliography—will be an integral part of education outreach to school and scout groups.

The Michigan Women's Historical Center was established in 1987 by the Michigan Women's Studies Association, which seeks to improve what is taught and thought about Michigan women in history. Inside the Historical Center are changing galleries highlighting women's history and art as well as the Michigan Women's Hall of Fame, commemorating more than 200 Michigan women past and present. Operating hours are from noon to 5:00 p.m. Wednesday through Friday, noon to 4:00 p.m. Saturday, and 2:00 to 4:00 p.m. Sunday. Photographs, biographical sketches, and lesson plans relating to the Hall of Fame honorees may also be viewed online at <http://hall.michiganwomenshalloffame.org>.

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