



Greater Grand Rapids Women's History Council

Winter/Spring, 2016

Community Builders: Early African American Women in Grand Rapids

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*Dedicated to educating
the community and cele-
brating the legacies of
local women, preserving
knowledge of their past,
and inspiring visions for
their future.*

For over 25 years the Greater Grand Rapids Women's History Council has underwritten efforts to rediscover the rich past of area women, including the history of the 115-year-old Grand Rapids Study Club, the oldest African American women's club still in existence.

During the 1890s, local women's clubs proliferated so rapidly and organized women into such a social force that newspapers were compelled to create new sections featuring their plans and activities. What is revealed in these early accounts? That Grand Rapids women of various ethnic, religious, and neighborhood groups were gathering for self-education and charitable purposes, hosting state- and nation-wide gatherings and stepping up publicly to denounce racist articles as did the African American Married Ladies Nineteenth Century Club in 1898.

In 1907, five local African American women's groups, representing a minuscule percentage of the city's population, hosted the Michigan Federation of Colored Women's Clubs. Delegates were welcomed by the Grand Rapids mayor and treated to gracious receptions and trolley tours. Who were these hosts? They included leaders like Emma Ford and Mary Roberts Tate, individual African American women who began



Hattie Beverly



MRS. THEODORE BURGESS.

Ethel Beverly
Burgess

February 11, 2016, 7:00 p.m.
John F. Donnelly Conference Center
at Aquinas College, 157 Woodward Lane SE
Yvonne Sims, Grand Rapids Study Club
Jo Ellyn Clarey, Grand Rapids Study Club &
the Greater Grand Rapids Women's History
Council

Co-sponsored with the
Grand Rapids Historical Society

speaking their minds in public, on area stages and in newspapers.

Yvonne Sims and Jo Ellyn Clarey will tell a fascinating story that corrects errors and fills gaps in Grand Rapids history. For example, they will reintroduce the Beverly sisters, addressing misinformation about Hattie, the first African American teacher in the Grand Rapids Public Schools, and introduce her sister, Ethel, whose contributions to the community were even more extensive.

While women community builders, especially the African American, have often been forgotten locally, ignored statewide, and dismissed nationally, Grand Rapids women have been breaking down barriers impeding them from the very beginning. Only now are women's historians pulling out their stories and histories, which are challenging almost every generalization made about them since.

Gert, Grace, and the Berkey & Gay Girls: Women, War & Work in 1910s Grand Rapids

Kick off Women's History Month by celebrating the working women of Grand Rapids a hundred years ago. Using unique archival resources, Grand Rapids Public Library local history experts Julie Tabberer, Heather Edwards, and Drew Damron will highlight some of the city's women employed outside their homes. The last decade of the heady Progressive Era opened doors both personal and professional for these 11,000 women, and the disruptions of wartime provided opportunities in a working world previously off limits. On March 1st meet the girls of Berkey & Gay, an early woman cartoonist, and one of our first elected officials--as they remain alive in an employee-produced factory newsletter, census records, city directories, newspaper articles, and 20,000 extremely rare war registration cards surveying the skills of area women.

Pushing Boundaries in Factories: The Berkey & Gay Girls in Wartime

by Julie Tabberer

Among Grand Rapids furniture manufacturers retooling for

military work during World War I, Berkey & Gay was also among those employing women. Julie Tabberer's interest in the archive's Furniture Design Collection led her to use Berkey & Gay's employee-produced newsletter, *Shop Mark*, to illustrate the lives of girls and



The Berkey & Gay Red Cross Girls



women working there during World War I. Many had joined the early-twentieth-century migration of young women away from their

***Gert, Grace, and
the Berkey & Gay Girls***
Tuesday, March 1, 2016, 7:00 p.m.
Grand Rapids Public Library
Main Branch auditorium
111 Library NE
Free parking in the library's lot.

families to take jobs in the cities. As the war years progress, the *Shop Mark* newsletter charts the growing prominence of women within the Berkey & Gay company, both in the office and in the factory. Women employees registered for war work, volunteered for the Red Cross, formed a baseball team, and threw parties. Sadly, after the war, the newsletter documents their fading away, both from its pages and from the factory.

Between Suffrage and Serving: Shaping the Civic Life of Grace Ames Van Hoesen

by Heather Edwards

In 1930 at age 60 Grace Ames Van Hoesen became the first woman elected to the Kent County Commission and served in elective office for eight years during the Depression. Using census records, city directories, and newspaper articles, Heather Edwards will consider Van Hoesen's development from her job as a bookkeeper in a factory to her role as a founder of the Grand Rapids League of Women Voters, focus-



Grace Ames Van Hoesen

ing on the wartime role she played as head of the industrial committee of the local Woman's Committee of the Council on National Defense. This group is responsible for assembling one of the crown jewels of the Grand Rapids Public Library archive: 20,000 extremely rare registration cards surveying the skills Grand Rapids women could contribute to the war effort. The story of Grace Ames Van Hoesen will also open the story of the cards.

***Setting Out in the Teens:
How Far Could Cartoonist Gert Go?***
by Drew Damron

A cartoonist himself, Drew Damron contributes to the history of the art form by unearthing the impressive work of Gertrude Van Houten. Probably the first female cartoonist in the nation drawing



specifically for a local audience, Gert's career began with the *Grand Rapids Press* in 1917. Gert quickly became a local celebrity, who was sent to draw on location



Gertrude Van Houten and a figurine of her signature icon that appeared in every cartoon, pictured below.



in wartime Washington D.C., designed the park's statue of John Ball, and worked successfully as a

commercial and fashion illustrator. Screening images of Gert's distinctive work, Drew Damron will illustrate the development of her art and report on the long life of this female contemporary of better-known Grand Rapids cartoonists, like Ray Barnes. Damron's new booklet on Gert will be available at the event.

Presenters

Librarian
Julie Tabberer
holds a Masters Degree in Library and Information Science from Wayne State



University. Enjoying all things related to local history, especially digging for clues to puzzles, Julie also appreciates graphic design and old books. Currently she is exploring the GRPL archive's Furniture Design Collection, one of the largest in the nation, and examining the role of women in the history of the Grand Rapids furniture industry.

Reinvesting her undergraduate work in history and literature,

Heather Edwards is a certified architectural historian with a Masters



Degree in Historic Preservation from Ball State University's College of Architecture and Planning. She has worked in Grand Rapids Public Library's History and Special Collections department since 2010 hosting House History classes, answering local history queries, indexing and inventorying archival materials.

Drew Damron is a library assistant in the Grand Rapids History and Special Collections department. He is a cartoonist and fledgling cartoon historian who recently



completed a short biography published by Issue Press: *Her Pichers: the Life and Work of Gert Van Houten*. Drew is also a graduate student at Wayne State University's School of Library and Information Science.

Annual Reception in Celebration of Women's History Month

Wednesday, March 30, 2016

5:00 - 7:00 p.m.

Program at 5:30 p.m., details below



Women's City Club (lower level auditorium)

254 East Fulton Street

Parking: on the west of the building

or in the lot on the east side of Lafayette SE, just south of Fulton Street

Free and open to the public

Complimentary hors-d'oeuvres

Wine: \$5/glass (A free glass of wine to new and renewing members)

Special Guest: Mayor Rosalynn Bliss

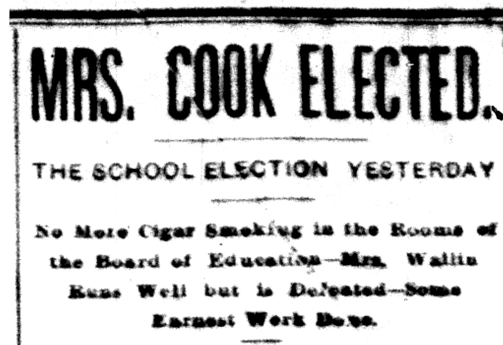
Reservations appreciated: Email info@ggrwhc.org or call 616-574-7307

Shattering Glass Ceilings

Women's Elective History in Grand Rapids, 1888-2015

presented by Deirdre Toeller-Novak

Between 1888 and 2015, Harriet Cook, Eva McCall Hamilton, Grace Ames Van Hoesen, Evangeline Lamberts, and Rosalynn Bliss each shattered another of the glass ceilings impeding the full participation of women in the process of governing our schools, the city, county, and the State of Michigan. Their stories are laced with perseverance in the face of scorn, personal sacrifice, fraud, and high adventure. On March 30, these women's stories will form the backdrop of a presentation that points to the importance of having an accurate record of women's elective history and how it has shaped our community in 2016. We will also look at its significance to women in their personal and professional lives.



Headline from the *Telegram-Herald*,
September 4, 1888, page 3

Through years of effort on the part of the Greater Grand Rapids Women's History Council, Grand Rapids is one of a few, if not the only, American city to have a complete history of women running for and elected to office since the opportunity was first extended to them. This unique set of data proves that Grand Rapids women

ran for office beginning in 1888—much earlier than had been known, in fact, decades before second-wave feminists believed that they were running for the first



Grace Van Hoesen, the lone female, standing with 35 other Kent County Supervisors, in 1936

time. Women in the mid-to-late 19th century were among the earliest to vigorously push the national movements toward suffrage even while lobbying from outside of the established system for changes in education and government.



Eva McCall Hamilton

political arena which continues to be dominated by a struggle for justice between groups of disparate economic, social, and cultural backgrounds. Please join us on March 30.

Deirdre Toeller-Novak is proofing a compilation of Grand Rapids women's elective

elective process and consequent systemic change. Her professional career was directed by her early training in criminal justice and legal systems, including the leadership of municipal and non-profit organizations such as district court probation departments, the Grand Rapids Bar Association, and the Children's Assessment Center. In retirement she stretched her experience to include a master's degree in English Literature.

In her summary of the first 50 years of the League of Women Voters of Grand Rapids, Dorothy Leonard Judd wrote that in its beginning the League had "one immediate and overriding purpose: to awaken the nation's women to their new responsibilities as voting citizens and to their new opportunities to work for legislation on social problems proverbially neglected by men" (*The First Fifty Years*, League of Women Voters of Grand Rapids).

Through the stories of women who were first to be elected to



Mayor Rosalynn Bliss

their respective offices, we will examine the remarkable strategies and accomplishments of trailblazers whose work is far from complete. Their methodologies provide valuable tools in today's



Evangeline Lamberts
1961 Campaign Poster

history, in whose pages she can be found. Her election to the boards of the Grand Rapids Public Schools and Grand Rapids Community College in the 1980s places her in the line of women elected to local school boards begun in 1888. She will share data from the Greater Grand Rapids Women's History Council's unique electoral history and illustrate its importance in 2016. Deirdre's historical and political efforts overlap in work promoting involvement of women in the

One Hundred Years Ago

Twice a year, the Grand Rapids furniture industry organized a Furniture Market, when buyers, exhibitors, and designers from all over the country descended on this city for a few weeks. The newspapers in early January of 1916 covered the market, usually dedicating an entire section of the newspaper to this event with articles and numerous advertisements.

That year reporters for the *Herald* noticed there were two women at the market! Mrs. H. C. Fay was a buyer for the C.T. Sherer company in Worcester, Massachusetts. She started as a bookkeeper, moved into selling, became an assistant buyer and for the past year was put in charge of furniture buying.

Miss Elizabeth Lavie was in Grand Rapids as an exhibitor for the Continental Supply Company of Chicago. Lavie, too, was not new to the furniture business, but this was "the first time her company has placed the whole responsibility of showing in a great market upon a woman."

Who was Edith Dykema?

by Ruth Van Stee

Last summer one of the emails the Council sent out to members was one looking back 100 years to the summer of 1915, when the YMCA camp on Lake Michigan set aside two weeks for the Girls Scouts to enjoy the camping experience.

The newspaper reporter noted that it was Edith Dykema who was appointed director of this two week camp. A few people then wondered, who was this Edith Dykema,?

In 1883, she was born into the

She attended Central High School as it entered the 20th Century. Her name is mentioned in the social columns periodically, once reporting on a party that was also attended by none other than Viva Flaherty! (See the Historical Commissions' website at (<http://www.historygrandrapids.org/audio/4450/viva-flaherty>)

The 1903 high school yearbook notes that Edith, in the list of the graduates, participated in the Literary Society, as well as the basketball team and

Michigan Conference of Social Work met in Saginaw, Miss Dykema was secretary of that organization. And when the Conference met in Grand Rapids in October, 1934, she was serving as the general chairman.

The 1930 census records show Edith and her mother living at 1409 Fisk Road, just a few doors away from the fairly new Ottawa Hills High School. Her occupation then was "Treasurer of Magazine Publication."

At first we could not find any record of her death in the newspapers, but noticed her name in the Birdsall Funeral Home Records in the Grand Rapids Public Library archives. There she is, Edith Dykema Clute, who died on October 9, 1935. In 1933, at age 50, she married William K. Clute and lived with him in East Grand Rapids, on Ogden Avenue.



Edith Dykema standing second from the right. Central High School Yearbook 1903

family of Kryn and Mary Dykema, and grew up in what could be consider an upper middle class family, her father owning the Dykema Grain and Fuel Company, and later working as an insurance agent.

After high school Edith attended Prince College in Boston. Upon returning to Grand Rapids, she lived in her parents' home at 245 Paris SE and began her career working in social welfare. In the 1918 Polk City directory, she lists her employment with the Social Welfare Association. By 1922, when the



Edith Dykema, graduation photograph, Central High School Yearbook 1903

High School Athletic Association, and served as the class secretary in her senior year.

The article in the *Grand Rapids Herald* about her death states that she was "instrumental in the establishment of the Women's City Club" and served on the board for several years. At one time, she was secretary of the "Hospital council" and at the time of her death was president of the League of Women Voters.

They overlooked her work with the Girl Scouts.

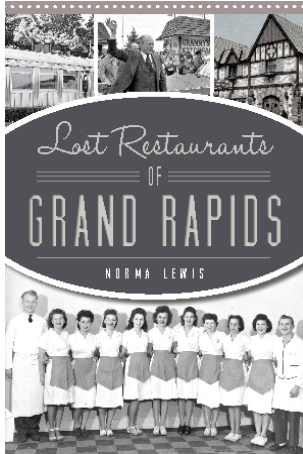
Meet Norma Lewis

author and member

by Mary Seeger

You've probably seen the wide array of local history books offered by Arcadia Publishing/History Press, whose publications number in the thousands. Among the dozen or so featuring West Michigan history are six authored or co-authored by our own member and supporter Norma Lewis.

All of her books listed on the right are well worth your attention, especially those in the *Images of America*



Lewis' latest book about famous restaurants and some less well known restaurants in Grand Rapids

series, providing readers with excellent collections of historical photos, gleaned from libraries, museums, and private collections. They are far more than photo albums, however: the brief but detailed captions are the results of much research.

In the American Palate volume, *Lost Restaurants of Grand Rapids*, the narratives complementing the photographs are much longer.

Norma Lewis began her career in business in the Chicago area, but always maintained her interest in writing. After her recovery from a serious illness, she decided it was time to devote herself to her writing. She has lived in West Michigan for some 25 years. We are fortunate that she writes about our

Grand Rapids: Furniture City
Images of America,
Acadia Press 2008

The Dutch Heritage in Kent and Ottawa Counties
Images of America,
Acadia Press 2009

Wyoming
Images of America,
Acadia Press 2010

Legendary Locals of Grand Rapids
Acadia Press, 2012

Grand River
Images of America,
Acadia Press 2015

Lost Restaurants of Grand Rapids
American Palate, 2015

local area, and happy to have her as one of our members.

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Greater Grand Rapids Women's History Council



Greater Grand Rapids



Greater Grand Rapids
Women's History Council

The Greater Grand Rapids Women's History Council was started in 1987 when founder Twink Frey was doing research for a paper on the role of women in the history of Grand Rapids. She found little or nothing, either at the local or state levels about the many women who had helped found and shape the city and its surrounding area. Knowing that women had played an enormous role in the development of the region, Frey began to contact others who had a similar interest in systematic research, documentation, and preservation of the lives and contributions of former Grand Rapids and West Michigan women.

In the ensuing 28 years many others joined Frey in this work. A great deal has been accomplished and many women continue to be discovered because they had played important roles in Grand Rapids history.

Visit our website: ggrwhc.org

The Greater Grand Rapids Women's History Council is dedicated to educating the community and celebrating the legacies of local women, preserving knowledge of their past and inspiring visions for their future.

