



Birth: 1927

Death: N/A

Father: Winfield Dockeray

Mother: Mary

At three-months-old, Mary Jane was adopted by Winfield and Mary Dockeray. She grew up on their poultry farm on the Northwest side of Grand Rapids. Their farm was near the present-day Blandford Nature Center on West Leonard.

As a child Mary Jane was active in 4H, in particular, raising rabbits and tending gardens. After a conversation with her aunt about a quartz rock that she had picked up on her gravel-covered Collindale Street, Mary Jane decided at the tender age of 5 to become a geologist. That was in 1932, and in 1949, she did indeed graduate from Michigan State University with a bachelor's degree in Geology. Later, in 1973, she earned her doctorate. Her dissertation documented the initial development of the Blandford Nature Center, a successful project in which she was instrumental.

Immediately upon her graduation in 1949, the then director of the Grand Rapids Public Museum, Frank DuMond, a friend of the family, hired her as a "nature lecturer." In this role for the next 19 years, Mary Jane presented programs on natural history in the Grand Rapids Public Schools. By the end of her tenure in this position, Mary Jane had a selection of 100 programs from which teachers could choose. During this time, as an outgrowth of her presentations, Mary Jane would take classes on nature field trips to "Collins Woods," which was near her home on West Leonard.

In 1964 Mary Jane discovered that Collins Woods belonged to Victor Blandford. Frank DuMond and Mary Jane approached him to ask whether he would donate 10 acres to the city. They told him that the city would then use and maintain the land as a park and nature center. Blandford liked the plan and had it legalized. In 1968 a bond issue for parks and recreation was passed by the State of Michigan legislature. The Grand Rapids Public Museum eventually received \$200,000 of this funding and used it to acquire another 143 acres, which surrounded the original 10 acres. Still there was no building for the nature center. However in the fall 1968 a building was opened. With the leadership of Dick Damstra, a museum board member, it was built by

West Michigan Contractors and Supplies Association for \$60,000. It was built with a lot of free supplies and labor as the building plans had called for an investment of \$150,000.

In the fall 1973 Mary Jane started the Blandford Environmental Education Program (the students were called BEEPS). A 20-year reunion was held in 1993. During the summers, Mary Jane also worked for the National Audubon Society. She would travel to camps in Maine or Wisconsin. In addition, she produced a 16 mm. feature-length film and lecture as part of a wildlife series. From 1963 to 1968, Mary Jane traveled with this film.

In 1989 a small working farm, which was on 24 acres of the park and nature center from the beginning, closed. It could no longer support itself. At the same time, the new museum director, Tim Chester, tried to close the nature center and force Mary Jane into retirement. This move caused a lot of turmoil within the community, especially among the center's volunteers.

Although she resisted the pressure of the museum director, the next year, 1990, Mary Jane chose to retire from the nature center. Yet she continued to work as a free lance consultant, lecturer, and tour leader for the National and Michigan Audubon Societies and Grand Rapids Community Education.

Although initially she never thought her geological career would lead to so much public speaking, upon reflection, Mary Jane offered this comment about her lifelong work: "That's why I say you should never underestimate what you're saying, where it's going to go. The big thing is that these people are closer to the earth now, and this is what counted."

Other Resources

<http://hall.michiganwomen.org>