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**President's Message**  
**Mary A. Seeger**

Women's History Month 2007, featuring dozens of events community wide, has just ended. This year is the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Joint Congressional Resolution that expanded the celebration from one week (beginning in 1981) to one month. Your Greater Grand Rapids Women's History Council is about the same vintage, and our festivities are among the most numerous and most varied in the country.

The event that we co-sponsor with the Grand Rapids Historical Society each March was particularly intriguing this year. Rebecca Smith-

Hoffman spoke on the role of women in raising funds for such landmarks as the Ladies' Literary Club, St. Cecilia, the YWCA, and various



*House at 252 Dale NE*  
One of the Red Seal Electric Homes which Fannie Boylon designed.  
Courtesy of Marcella Beck

religious buildings, in the process educating themselves about contracts and building techniques.

Marcella Beck complemented that presentation by reporting on the remarkable work of designer Fannie Boylon. Self-taught, she designed some 1200 aesthetically distinctive and technologically advanced homes built in Grand Rapids between 1910 and 1930.

There is lots more women's history to be mined and publicized. I encourage you to join any or all of our projects. We welcome new workers on oral history, research and recognition, the bibliography...and our workshops can help you get started.

**The Greater Grand Rapids Women's History Council**  
**Annual Meeting**  
 Is  
**Tuesday, May 8, 4:00 p.m.**  
**Gerald R. Ford Museum**



### Have you purchased your pin yet?

Your purchase of this pin benefits the Greater Grand Rapids Women's History Council, an organization dedicated to celebrating the legacies of local women, preserving knowledge of their past, and inspiring visions for their future. Our projects include a bibliography of materials on local women, an extensive oral history project, LEGACY (a triennial celebration of Women's History Month) and support of other local history projects.

**We have several types of pins, including inspirational pins and house pins.**

No two pins are alike. The women portrayed on the pins are multi-cultural and represent a variety of activities. These very colorful pins are only \$15.00. To find out more about the pins, call the office at 616/234-3603 or Sandra Springer at 616/247-4845.

## Workshop to Train Volunteers in Research Techniques a Success

MargEd Kwapil

GGRWHC has launched a new history project and in partnership with the Grand Rapids Public Library is planning to rescue from obscurity dozens of Grand Rapids women of the past who did, indeed, *make a difference*.

The council is sponsoring a series of workshops to train volunteers in biography research techniques. The first workshop was January 20 and was a three-hour session acquainting participants with the many information resources at the Public Library. On March 24, a second workshop was expanded to six hours and included three hours of delving into library records and files and compiling information on assigned subjects. There will be follow-up workshops that will include writing biographies.

The workshop grew out of the council's project of many years standing of researching Grand Rapids women to nominate to the Michigan Women's Hall of Fame, a program of the Michigan Women's Studies Association.

It became clear to council members that the Grand Rapids area has in its past many more women who deserve documentation than would ever be accepted to be inducted into the Hall of Fame.

Because it seemed important to create a record of these women, council members decided to create a local archive that would preserve information about them and their many achievements. And because the candidates for research are numerous, the council is recruiting volunteers from the community who have an interest in local and women's history and are willing to donate their services to this project.

Among the subjects are lawyers, physicians, social activists, musicians, scientists, politicians, club women, artists, and writers. Many defied conventions of their time to go into male-dominated professions and to excel in their chosen fields. Others were on the cutting edge of social movements or assumed leadership roles in the community that were typically not considered "ladylike."

The workshops are led by council members and library staff. Persons who might be interested in volunteering for this project may write GGRWHC, 143 Bostwick NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49503, stating your interest, or call 616/234-3603, and leave a message or email us at [information@ggrwhc.org](mailto:information@ggrwhc.org). Please include your name, phone number, email and mailing addresses.

### Are you interested in Historical research?

Contact the History

Council at

616/234-3603

or email

[information@ggrwhc.org](mailto:information@ggrwhc.org)

## Report from a Workshop Graduate

Cindy Laug

After the January 20<sup>th</sup> pilot seminar, sponsored jointly by GGRWHC and the Grand Rapids Public Library, on doing biographical research on area women from the past, I felt the urge to move forward with my new skills but ultimately needed a 'victim.' Lo and behold, one week later in a dusty old notebook of news clippings at the Coopersville Historical Society I ran across not one but two articles about a local gal

by the name of Mary Hefferan. I had found my victim.

I grabbed my manual, met Jo Ellyn Clarey and Diana Barrett at the GRPL archive, and started on this new adventure. My skills were not honed, but my friends were there to assist and guide. Not all clues led somewhere, and patience and perseverance were needed. It has been a fun ride, though, one I'm still on. I have compiled

facts from her college records as well as hearsay from Eastmanville locals. Miss Mary's story is far from complete, but a few tidbits will illustrate her rich history, one relevant even 60 years later.

On March 24<sup>th</sup>, I testified to my story and Mary's at the second workshop at the GRPL. I encourage you to consider attending the

next one in November. If you already have research experience but no 'victim,' please contact the GGRWHC committee for the name of a local woman and start your search. It can be so rewarding piecing together the histories of women who helped to shape our community. Now, meet my subject.

See article below.

## Progress Report on the Search for Mary Hefferan

Cindy Laug

Mary Hefferan was born in 1873 and was raised with her two brothers on the banks of the Grand River in Eastmanville, Michigan. When her father, Thomas, earned his wealth in lumber, the family moved to Fountain Street in Grand Rapids where Thomas opened a bank.

After high school Mary attended Wellesley College in Boston, Massachusetts, and earned her bachelor's and master's degrees in 1896 and 1898. She continued her education at the University of Chicago where she earned her Ph.D. in 1903 with a dissertation on bacteriology. Mary then taught at the University

of Chicago for seven years and was acting editor of its *Botanical Gazette*. This was not a small feat for a woman in science in the early 1900s. The number of colleges allowing women into their masters programs, let alone the doctoral, was minute. (See: [www.eskimo.com/~shelby/maht/seaton.html](http://www.eskimo.com/~shelby/maht/seaton.html))

Acquiring housing for females at these few colleges was also challenging. Mary was fortunate to find lodging at Green Hall, whose own story includes interesting facts about how housing was funded during those early years. (See: [\[sopl/exct/donors1.html\]\(http://sopl/exct/donors1.html\)\)](http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/</a></p>
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Why Mary returned to Grand Rapids in 1910 is still a mystery. After teaching at the University of Chicago, did Mary turn away from what might have become a brilliant career in science to assume duties she felt more urgent back home? Did she experience frustration in her academic environment? Every day new information shifts the picture. It is a fact that her mother passed away in 1910; perhaps that event brought her home to assist with family matters. Within five years both her father and her brother George had also passed away. Mary seems to have

moved into George's home at 442 Fountain Street and taken over custody of her two nephews. And, although she never married, Mary soon adopted a son, Albert.

Perhaps it shouldn't surprise us that almost immediately upon returning to Grand Rapids, Mary had become involved in social service work. She contributed especially to the development of the D.A. Blodgett Home for Children. First elected to the board of directors in 1915, Mary remained with the

*Continued on page 6*

## Grand Rapids History: The Grand Rapids Historical Commission Online Archive

Diana Barrett



Picture taken from the Historical Commission website

If a picture is worth 1,000 words, imagine what you can do with thousands of pictures! It is the plan of the Grand Rapids Historical Commission at their new Online Archive, [www.historygrandrapids.org](http://www.historygrandrapids.org) in cooperation with the Grand Rapids Public Schools and the Grand Rapids Public Library, to collect images from local families, archives of public and private institutions and organizations, and other local sources that reflect and reveal family and community life and the ways in which Grand Rapids people worked, traveled, educated and enjoyed themselves from the mid-nineteenth through the twentieth centuries. This time of social, economic, environmental, and technological change will be documented through images that can be used to discover Grand Rapids' past and provide for the "history of the future."

Visit the past by exploring the photo essays in the Explore section. The subjects of our photo essays are determined by the photos and documents offered. Sometimes they are supplemented

with images from photo collections at the GR Public Library, the Public Museum of GR, and CARC (Community Archive and Research Center). The more images we have, the more photo essays we can build in the Explore section where social and historical themes about the people and the city of Grand Rapids can be investigated. We plan to add at least one new photo essay every month. Check the News section for new and coming attractions as well as local programs about Grand Rapids history.

At the end of a photo essay you can select "Learn More" if you want to continue your exploration. There is a bibliography of books available at the Grand Rapids Public Library and a list of related websites. Our intent is to entice students and other visitors to the website to learn more about Grand Rapids history by providing an introduction to a topic and resources for further investigation.

Each primary source image is accompanied by a record that provides basic information such as

the date, place, creator (photographer, engraver or other source), notes and subject(s). This information allows you to search for images in many different ways using the GRHC database. Just as you might use your library online catalog to search for a book, video or other item, you can use the GRHC online catalog to locate an image, view that image and the information related to it.

The multi-level search engine for the image database allows basic searches by keyword, subject, or date; refined searches where you set the criteria; and the Browse by Subject section where you can browse images in the same or related categories.

The Classroom section encourages skills of observation, analysis and critical thinking for students through areas such as Primary Sources, Citation Styles, and Resources. As the site grows, lesson plans and classroom activities connecting the images and Grand Rapids history will be included.

*Continued on page 6*

Visit the past by exploring the Photo Essays in the Explore section.

## You can Participate in the Great Lakes History Conference

Diana Barrett

Are you interested in the history of Grand Rapids? Have you always wanted to know more about some aspect of the city's history? Do you need a reason to get started? For example, what types of crime were prevalent in the city during the 1800s? For many years local residents interested in knowing more about Grand Rapids history have presented their findings at the Great Lakes History Conference held annually at GVSU's Eberhard Center in downtown Grand Rapids. The 2007 conference will be held October 26-27, with local presenters featured on Saturday the 27<sup>th</sup>.

Some topics researched by local presenters in the past have included:

**Women's contributions:** Uncovering women in elected positions—much earlier than anyone suspected, or discovering the earliest active woman lawyer—1878—not the 1940s. Emily Clark, an active philanthropist in many

areas who also founded Clark Home, was rescued from obscurity by a local researcher.

**Ethnic research:** A study of Dutch immigration during the 1953-1956 Refugee Relief Act was presented last year. Other topics might include the Underground Railroad—did it really exist in Grand Rapids?

**Untapped resources:** Last year those interested in Grand Rapids history learned about local archival collections related to the Civil War, women's wartime contributions, and European visual art from World War I.

**Where would your interests lead you?**

The theme of this year's conference is *The History of Racism, Slavery and Its Aftermath: Recognizing the 200th Anniversary of the Abolition of the Atlantic Slave Trade*. However, papers on local history need not directly link to the official conference topic. Panels have a congenial, relaxed atmosphere and are well

attended by fellow local historians eager to hear your research. Presentations run between 15 and 20 minutes, and lengths typically break down to between 8 and 10 typed, double-spaced pages of text. Some presenters use Power Point or other audio-visual media but they are not required.

We invite you to submit proposals on local history topics for presentation at the Great Lakes History Conference, Saturday, October 27, 2007. If you choose not to present a paper this year, please mark your calendars and come to the conference to get a taste of local history. Perhaps it will entice you to participate in the future.

**Contact Information:**

Matthew Daley, Department of History, GVSU, daleym@gvsu.edu 616/331-8701 or go to <http://www.gvsu.edu/history>.

## Digging for Details: Why Bother?

Jo Ellyn Clarey

GGRWHC workshop participant Cindy Laug testifies directly (see page 3) about her urge to delve into records of the past. Her subsequent report on Mary Hefferan illustrates not only Laug's delight in retrieving women models from oblivion, but how easy it is to lose them in the first place and why the search is worth our efforts. Even nationally known women whose names we recognize often have become abstractions: How much detail can you actually provide about Susan B. Anthony's life and pursuits? (How did she come to

the universal suffrage movement and how long did she labor, for two simple questions? From the abolitionist movement in the 1840s and for over 55 years.) In Grand Rapids we have women who in fact were also known nationally in their fields. At the Grand Rapids Historical Society's annual banquet on May 10th (see page 8) Julie Stivers will tell the story of one example, Emma Cole, who was probably Mary Hefferan's botany teacher at Central High School in the late 1880s. Hefferan herself went on to earn a Ph.D. in hard science in 1903—but, you say, women couldn't do that then.

They could and they did. It wasn't easy, but it was sometimes easier during the Progressive Era than it was in the 1950s after a long backlash period. The story of women's achievements is not a tale of linear progression. Because becoming a woman physician was hard in the 1950s does not automatically mean it was harder in the 1880s. Sometimes "tradition" shouldn't command our respect; it hasn't "always been done that way." You, too, can help in the effort to rescue individuals from obscurity at the same time you unearth women's cultural legacy.

## Progress Report on the Search for Mary Hefferan Continued from Page 3

*Have you researched and written about a local woman? If so, submit your article for consideration by the GGRWHC panel for publication in a future newsletter. The article should be no longer than 800 words and written in Microsoft Word. Submit to information@ggrwhc.org.*

agency for many years to come. She was the inspiration for and impetus behind hiring its first social worker and moving its children out of the institution and into foster care programs. Working with the Federation for Social Agencies, which later became the Community Chest, Mary used her professional expertise to improve child welfare and general health services in Grand Rapids. In 1942, the Fifth Annual Community Chest Award was given to Mary for 25 years of dedicated service. She was the first woman to have been awarded this honor.

Although she invited committees into her home while they spent many long hours laboring over the financial decisions involved in running social agencies, Mary was not only involved in child care reform. A dedicated and willing worker, she held many other positions

over the years. Among them, she served on the Woman's Committee of the Council of National Defense in 1918 and later held office in the Grand Rapids Historical Society. Mary characterized herself "as a perennial in the garden of voluntary social work."

This language points to the other half of her life spent at the family home in Eastmanville. Mary nurtured her love of botany, gardening, and farming during the months between April and Thanksgiving, after which she returned to Grand Rapids to her organizational endeavors. All summer long, though, her efforts and pleasures as an enthusiastic flower lover went into the land. Mary boasted a plentiful vegetable garden and in later years harvested and canned for others. In one article Mary claims she is a good husker of corn and milker of Jersey

cows.

Her love of gardening was evident in her involvement in the Kent Garden Club, but especially in the Wayside Garden Club in Coopersville in the summers. Mary helped establish an "Herb Kitchen" for the Wayside club and, combining her particular skills and knowledge, presented lectures such as one on "Medicinal Weeds and Herbs."

Mary died of a heart attack at her home in Eastmanville on March 20, 1948. As her story continues to unfold and its pieces fall into place, I feel like I have brought her back to life. By gathering its parts together we reconstruct a history worthy of our reflection and remembrance.

(with contributions by Michelle Potgeter)

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## Grand Rapids History: The Grand Rapids Historical Commission Online Archive Continued from Page 4

If you or your organization would like more information about how to contribute copies of your collection to the project, please contact us via the Contact Page on the website [www.historygrandrapids.org](http://www.historygrandrapids.org).

## Council Preparing for the Membership Campaign

The new year for the History Council begins on July 1. Around that time you will receive membership information in the mail.

Payments received prior to July 1 will be credited toward the next fiscal year and it will save the Council sending you a renewal application.

If your address label has an \* on it, you are not currently a member. Consider joining today.

To join or renew early, send a check made payable to GGRWHC to GGRWHC, 143 Bostwick NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49503. We are a nonprofit organization and your membership is tax deductible.

### Membership Rates

Sponsor	\$100.00
Contributor	\$50.00
Basic	\$25.00
Student	\$10.00

**Is your name listed below? If not, or if you have an asterisk behind your name, you are not currently a member of GGRWHC.**

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*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.*

## **Trains, Boats, Buggies & Mules: Grand Rapids Botanist Emma J. Cole's Nineteenth-Century Quest for Plants** **Julie Christianson Stivers, Public Museum of Grand Rapids**

For twenty-six school years from 1881 to 1907, the devoted and demure Emma J. Cole taught botany at Grand Rapids' Central High School. Come summer, she turned into Indiana Jane, a pioneer naturalist known far and wide for, reputedly, the largest private herbarium in Michigan (3581 specimens), her comprehensive book on Grand Rapids

plants (still the only one; it actually covers 600 square miles), her world-wide collecting trips and subsequent work with famous universities and scholars. A Progressive Era member of the Kent Scientific Institute, Cole remains the most notable female governor of this precursor to the Public Museum of Grand Rapids.

Julie Christianson Stivers will present her research on Cole at the May banquet for the Grand Rapids Historical Society which is open to members and their guests.

Contact Ruth VanStee at [rvanstee@aol.com](mailto:rvanstee@aol.com) or call 616/988-5402 ext. 5497 for more information.

**Phone Number 616/234-3603**  
**Website [www.ggrwhc.org](http://www.ggrwhc.org)**

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