



Greater Grand Rapids Women's History Council

Winter 2017

Grand Rapids Women's History and the Tenth Annual History Detectives!

Saturday, January 28, 9:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

Grand Rapids Public Library, Main

Free programming and parking

Collaborating with area local history groups, the Grand Rapids Public Library will again sponsor an award-winning day of programming on January 28th. This year indulge your love of area women's history in two wonderful presentations. To start the day Janet Shaarda Sheeres will bring to life immigrant midwives among early Dutch colonists here. (See p. 4 about an expanded follow-up program.) After lunch at 1:00 pm you can learn how early botanist Emma Cole's West Michigan plant census from 1901 is the basis for a fascinating update on plants in the same areas now. For details about the rest of the day, keep reading and check our website: ggrwhc.org. You'll want to come early. Order lunch in advance (see p. 3).

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

9:30 a.m.

Present, But Not Counted: Dutch Immigrant Midwives in Grand Rapids

by Janet Sjaarda Sheeres

Sponsored by the Greater Grand Rapids Women's History Council

While the stories of male physicians are adequately represented in the medical histories of Michigan, accounts of female midwives have been woefully neglected. Janet Sjaarda Sheeres's presentation will focus on the work of several women midwives in



late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century Grand Rapids and will address why they chose work delivering babies; who their clients were; what hardships they faced; and why they are

not in our histories. Sheeres's research has primarily emphasized Dutch midwives, but her findings also shed light on midwives

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1:00 p.m.

Where Have All the Flowers Gone? Rediscovering Emma Cole's Nineteenth-Century Grand Rapids Flora

by Julie Stivers, Garrett E. Crow, and David P. Warners

Sponsored by Grand Rapids Public Museum



Valued among her peers nationally and internationally for her botanical research, Emma Cole left a legacy of scientific research that remains important to professional botanists, students, and researchers. Julie Stivers will reintroduce this Central High School teacher, who spent her summers and vacation time collecting and cataloging plant specimens.

Cole corresponded with botanists around the world, trading information and specimens to create an extensive herbarium. Upon her death in 1910, she left this herbarium to the Kent Scientific Institute's museum, where it was recorded as containing more than 4,000 mounted specimens. She is credited with describing new species, including a type of

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Sheeres Midwives, *continued*

serving other ethnic communities and why they have been sidelined in early historical records.

A volunteer in the Calvin College archives, associate editor of its magazine *Origins*, and a skilled independent scholar, Janet Sjaarda Sheeres has for years been researching Dutch women and their occupations in both the Netherlands and in their new homeland, the United States. The author of two books, she has also published dozens of articles on Dutch historical and genealogical topics and has served as president of the Association for the Advancement of Dutch American Studies.



10:30 a.m.

Selling Grand Rapids: Expositions in the Furniture City, 1878-1965 by Scott St. Louis

Sponsored by the Grand Rapids Historical Society

In order to encourage and expand the growing furniture industry, local leaders established semi-annual furniture expositions and collaborated to make Grand Rapids's name synonymous with excellent household furniture on an international scale. With the help of a supportive community, leaders resolved to prevent similar efforts in other cities from eclipsing their own. Their success transformed the physical and economic landscape of Grand Rapids.



Klingman-Waters Exhibition Building
(today, the Waters Building)



Emma Cole, *continued*

hawthorn named for her that still appears in botany textbooks.

In 1901 Emma Cole published *Grand Rapids Flora*, a 136-page catalog of 1260 plants growing without cultivation in the vicinity of Kent County. Enormous changes have taken place since those days, yet her book remains the most complete account of plants specific to our area.



Grand Rapids Flora book over and title page.
Grand Rapids Public Library archives

their work with students to rediscover Cole's haunts and assess their natural quality today. There will be surprises as we observe the changes over more than 100 years.

In 2007, the GGRWHC was successful in its nomination of Emma Cole to the Michigan Women's Hall of Fame.

11:30 a.m.

Making Waves: Michigan's Boat Building Industry, 1865-2000 by Scott M. Peters

Sponsored by the Grand Rapids Historical Commission

Michigan's late-nineteenth century emergence as the boat-building industry's hub drew together talented designers, builders, and engine makers to produce some of the fastest, most innovative boats ever created. Entrepreneurs like Christopher Columbus Smith, John L. Hacker, and Gar Wood established some of the nation's top brands and brought the prospect of boat ownership within reach for every American consumer.



Michigan boat builders also left their mark on history—from developing the speedy runabouts favored by Prohibition-era rum-runners to creating the landing craft that carried Allied forces to Europe and the Pacific. "Making Waves" explores the intriguing story of people, processes, and products of an industry that evolved in Michigan but would change boating across the world.

continued on next page

Michigan and WWII WASPs

by Will Miner

Miner collected more examples of area women serving during WWII than could be fit in his hour-long Veterans Day program last November. We print the fascinating story of a Michigan woman, Nancy Harkness-Love, who served in the Army Air Corps.

Nancy Harkness-Love was born February 14, 1914 in Houghton, Michigan. Her father was a popular physician and was able to send Nancy to various prestigious schools on the East Coast and overseas. At age 13, she spent a year studying in Europe, and witnessed Charles Lindbergh's famous landing in Paris in 1927. Three years later she attended a barnstorming show in in-Houghton where she purchased a plane ride. Afterwards, she knew she wanted to fly. Her parents eventually agreed, and she earned her pilot's license later that year at age 16.



Nancy was known for having an eye for business and while attending Vassar she often rented a plane and charged students for rides. This business sense would help her later when family financial troubles forced her to drop out of college in 1934 and begin working for Inter-City Air Service, a Boston company that specialized in charter service, flight instruction, and selling aircraft. She married the owner of the company, Robert Love, and helped him run the business.

Her experience led to her approaching the Army Air Corps in 1940 with a plan for using women pilots to ferry aircraft from factories to air bases. The offer was initially refused but the entry of the U.S. into the war led her to form the WAFS (Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron). This group would later merge with Jacqueline Cochran's Women's Flying Training Detachment to form the WASP (Women's Army Service Pilots), a paramilitary organization of elite pilots.

Her contribution to the war effort and to the advancement of women's rights in the military cannot be overstated. Despite being objectified in the press for her beauty, Nancy was a courageous and skilled pilot able to use her business prowess to organize the first military organization of women pilots at a time when the U.S. public was skeptical and the U.S. Military was outright hostile to the idea. After the war she sought to obtain veteran status for her pilots, but she fell to cancer in 1976, one year before Congress voted in their favor.

12:15-1:00 p.m.

Lunch Break

For \$10, order a boxed lunch, choosing turkey, ham, or vegetarian sandwich (make any of these gluten-free) plus a fruit cup, pasta salad, cookie, condiments and bottled water.

Call 616.988.5492 or email rsvp@grpl.org by **5:00 PM on Monday, January 23**. Pay at the event.

2:00 p.m.

A Modern Vision Realized: The Mid-Century Park School Development Program by Pam Vanderploeg

Sponsored by the Grand Rapids City Archives

In 1951, a successful Grand Rapids Public Schools millage vote launched a twenty-year building program to solve the crisis of aging, overcrowded schools and the post-World War II baby boom. A collaboration between the schools, prominent West Michigan architects, and the Grand Rapids Park Department, led by landscape architect Fred See, created beautiful modern schools set in expansive parks in old and new neighborhoods. The story of how that nationally recognized project unfolded will be told through photos and images.



Riverside Elementary

3:00 p.m.

Reflections on the Gi-Gikinomaage-min (We Are All Teachers) Project by Belinda Bardwell

Sponsored by the Western Michigan Genealogical Society

Launched in November 2014, the Gi-gikinomaage-min (We are all Teachers) project aims to document the urban Native American experience in Grand Rapids. The local Native American community grew dramatically in the last half of the twentieth century as the result of a little-known federal program still impacting American Indian lives today. The Urban Relocation Program created one of the largest mass movements of Indians in American history. This talk invites you to learn more about the Gi-gikinomaage-min project, based in the Kutsche Office of Local History at Grand Valley State University.



Students lined up on the first day of school

Upcoming Events

Saturday, March 4

Find the Midwife! Discovering Midwives in Online Records and Other Sources

by Janet Sjaarda Sheeres

Monthly Meeting of the Western Michigan Genealogical Society

1:30 p.m.

Grand Rapids Public Library auditorium

So far Janet Sjaarda Sheeres has uncovered over forty Dutch immigrant midwives, heretofore forgotten despite their important service in Dutch colonies across the United States. Her findings are also pertinent to locating the stories of immigrant midwives from other ethnic communities. Using a case study in this WMGS session, Janet will share practical research tips on overcoming the difficulties locating women who served their ethnic colonies but were often sidelined in early historical and census records.



In 2012 Janet presented her research on other invisible Dutch women, single women who immigrated alone between 1880 and 1900, in a

program for the Greater Grand Rapids Women's History Council. She will represent the GGRWHC at History Detectives with "Present, But Not Counted: Dutch Immigrant Midwives in Grand Rapids." (see p. 1)

Wednesday, March 29

Greater Grand Rapids Women's History Council Annual Reception and Program

ICCF Assembly Hall

Third Floor of the Inner City Christian Federation
920 Cherry Street SE, Grand Rapids, west of Diamond

5:00 pm - Complimentary hors d'oeuvres;

maybe complimentary wine. Stay tuned!

5:30 pm - Brief annual meeting and celebratory program

We will honor the nineteenth-century women's organizations that created and managed the children's programs necessitating construction in 1908 of the Blodgett Home for Children--now the ICCF, our host for the day. Guided by GVSU's Cindy Laug, we will see how those programs proliferated in the twentieth century and led to Mary Free Bed taking over the building for rehabilitation projects. Appropriately, our event on March 29th will offer an opportunity to visit a building itself beautifully rehabilitated. Join us to toast the recent 125th anniversary of the Mary Free Bed Guild, whose members in 2016 were inducted into the Michigan Women's Hall of Fame.



Free admission and free parking.
Please join us, but please reserve:
616-574-7307 or info@ggrwhc.org.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS FOR JUNE 7 - 10!

The **Midwestern History Association** conference will return to Grand Rapids on June 7th, courtesy of GVSU Hauenstein Center sponsorship. The third meeting of this new organization will overlap the national meeting here from June 8th to 10th of a much older group, the **Agricultural History Society**, prompting important focus on the agricultural and rural history of the American Midwest.

As the MHA encourages increased attention to midwestern subjects among academic historians, local historians across the region continue to tend the flame—as we hope will be demonstrated once again by a panel from the Greater Grand

Rapids Women's History Council. Our panel would engage the AHS's question "Who is a farmer?" using specific examples of rural and urban midwestern women organized during wartime by the 1917 Woman's Committee of the U.S. Council of National Defense, its state and local representatives. We would provide an overview of national wartime food programs run by women as well as fascinating detail in on-the-ground reports featuring urban Grand Rapids and rural Jasper County, Indiana.

In Memoriam

Two women who were an important part of Grand Rapids history died recently: labor activist Dorothy Newman and affordable housing advocate Betty Ladd-Andre. Twenty years ago in the mid-1990s, the Greater Grand Rapids Women's History Council recognized their relevance, recorded and preserved the stories of their lives and work. Their oral histories are in our collection in the Grand Rapids Public Library archives.

Dorothy Newman (August 5, 1925 - November 30, 2016) came to Grand Rapids as the war bride of Henry A. Newman and starting working at McInerney Spring in 1948. She quit when she had a child and returned to



work in 1954 at General Motors and joined the UAW. Believing that it was important that there be women representatives in the union, she was often the first

woman to serve and, at times, the only woman serving on a particular UAW committee or the executive board. In



Newman, far left, with service volunteers

her oral history she says, *"I just kept working away and winning elections. I think it was because I was a pest. I was persistent and consistent. We [the women] were doing the work, but for years never got top spots. We wanted to be treated as equals."*

Her work extended beyond labor unions to activities in the Democratic political party organization and community services.

After her death local labor historian Michael Johnston commented on Newman's life and work:

"Dorothy's dedication to the cause of organized labor and bettering the lives of working people is legendary and goes way back. Her achievements within the UAW, AFL-CIO, and the United Way Community Services are too lengthy to list here. Outspoken, with a tart tongue, she had little use for talkers and not doers. She was tough, wise, energetic, and often shared a bawdy sense of humor. I came to admire her grit and gumption as a young labor activist. Yet she never expected of others what she didn't do herself. She single-handedly sold more fundraising bricks to raise money for the \$1.3 million "Spirit of Solidarity" memorial sculpture than anyone else, and fund-raised for so many more causes. Nothing was too small for her enormous organizing talents and drive.

*"Her years of activism included promoting women's rights in organized labor. Her UAW Local 167 Women's Committee was the envy of UAW Locals across the country. She was a strong supporter of the national Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW). [Johnston has written a chapter on Newman in his upcoming book, *Grand Rapids Rebels, Rubes, Rogues, and Radicals.*]*

"Godspeed, 'Mother Jones' of working folk in West Michigan. Your tenacity, insights, and perseverance will be sorely missed by working folk and all those who care about economic and social justice."

Betty Ladd-Andre, April 10, 1918 - August 20, 2016, was born Mary Elizabeth Collings in the Detroit area and spent her childhood there. At one point in her young life, after the untimely death of her mother, the family lost their home. Betty and her father boarded for three years with another

family. This experience may have inspired her activities as an adult.

After attending Wayne State University and marrying Everett Ladd, she moved first to Torch Lake and then to Grand Rapids, where she partnered with her husband in raising two children and building affordable houses beginning in the 1950s. From her 1996 oral history:

"I loved to sell. We built as many as 50 houses a year that I was selling. And I was doing the book work. Everett did all the designing, drew the layouts, and worked with the engineers.



He was the dreamer. I would have all the models furnished . . . curtains and everything and all on time. Besides selling, I went through every mortgage application with every buyer and attended every closing. A lot of it was low-cost housing and more than once I went to a boss to get a raise for the employee so they could afford the monthly payment. I look back and wonder how I did it all."

Her interest in low-cost housing extended beyond their business and led to her support of local housing services:

"I've been on the Dwelling Place board for the last five years. Our last project was the Herkimer Hotel. It's a beautiful old building—all those old buildings on South Division are beautiful inside. Now we are doing some new housing by New Hope [Baptist] Church, with about 25 units for low income. I worked with the architect on floor plans. I'm still at it."

In the 1975 she received the prestigious and well-deserved Woman of the Year award for the Midwest from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

What's New on Local Women's History in the Library Archives

The archives at the Grand Rapids Public Library are constantly evolving, with new collections and material being made available. Below are some recent additions either about women or donated by a Grand Rapids woman.

You can view material by visiting the Grand Rapids History & Special Collections department on the fourth floor of the main library. You don't need an appointment, but are welcome to call ahead (especially if you're traveling to visit).

You can find out more about each of these collections, and keep up with new ones, on the library's website - http://grplpedia.grpl.org/wiki/index.php/Finding_Aids

Finding aids are the guides that show you what is in a collection. They describe material at a very broad level and the records are not indexed. For example, a finding aid might refer to "Meeting minutes, 1930-1965" but would not tell you what those meetings were about or who is mentioned in the minutes. You would need to look through the records to learn that.

If you have any questions, contact the library archives at 616-988-5402 x5497 or localhistory@grpl.org.

Collection 453: St. Cecilia Music Society records

St. Cecilia Music Society was founded in 1883 by nine women. In 1894, the Society constructed its own building, which in 1899 hosted the national suffrage movement's annual conference. It was the first in the United States to be built, financed, and operated entirely by the women of a musical society. Many local and nationally recognized artists and musicians have performed in the acoustically perfect performance hall, and today the Grand Rapids Symphony, Civic Theater, and Opera can trace their origins back to St. Cecilia. The Music Society documents tell the history of the organization. Included are newspaper clippings, concert programs, season program books, yearbooks, brochures, promotional materials, histories,



newsletters, information about performers and more.

Collection 454: Women's City Club records

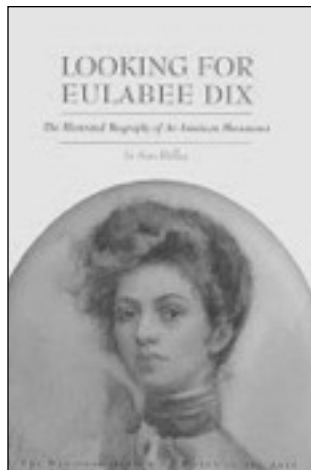
The Women's City Club was founded January 4th, 1924, by the presidents of various women's organizations of Grand Rapids. After the first meeting in November of 1923 the Women's City Club became a private social club where women could meet socially and enjoy the companionship of others with common interests. The records of the organization include newsletters, minutes, reports, photographs, histories and scrapbooks with newspaper clippings and photographs.

Collection 421: Dix family papers

Samuel M. Dix (1916-2006) was an industrial engineer/consultant and a community activist in Grand Rapids, Michigan. While this collection

reflects his interests, it also holds material on another family member, the nationally known miniaturist painter Eulabee Dix. You will find photographs of her works and ephemera from museum exhibits, and

author Jo Ann Ridley's proposal for a biography, copies of which are available in the Grand Rapids Public Library (*Looking for Eulabee Dix : The Illustrated Biography of an*



American Miniaturist, 1997, Washington D.C.) Of great interest is an unpublished memoir written by her daughter, Joan Gaines, titled "Exhuming Eulabee."

Collection 422: Bertha Buchanan Fulbright scrapbooks

This collection contains six scrapbooks compiled by Bertha Buchanan (later Bertha Fulbright) pertaining to the Powers Opera House and theater productions in the early 20th century. Bertha's interest appears to stem from her involvement with The Moonlight Literary Club and Lady Harmony Lodge No. 88. The scrapbooks contain large photographs of famous actors, actresses, playwrights, and producers of the time. Also included are clippings related to plays and occasional photographs of actors and actresses involved and ticket stubs.

Collection 430: Sorosis Club

The Sorosis Club was a literary society made up of female students who achieved high academic standing in English at Grand Rapids Central High School. The club was formed in 1909, and after women graduated they joined the Alumnae Sorosis of Central High School. The latter group continued to meet through 1979. Meeting minutes make up the bulk of the material in this collection. There is also some correspondence of club members.

Collection 423: Nellie Fuller Rice Boer Roberts collection

Nellie Fuller Rice Boer Roberts was born on December 24, 1877, in Coopersville, Michigan. A graduate of the University of Michigan, she married John L. Boer, who was city clerk from 1903 to 1909. Nellie and John divorced by 1920, and she later married Dr. Mortimer E. Roberts who was at one point the city bacteriologist. Nellie Rice Roberts passed away in February 1979 at the age of 101. This collection consists of information on Grace Episcopal Church, the Boer family, John L. Boer as the City Clerk, and many other photos and postcards of West Michigan.

Collection 436: The Sara Kinglsey Smith and Isaac Platt Powell collection

This collection is made up primarily of the personal papers and photographs of Sara Kinglsey Smith (1872-1963), daughter of former Grand Rapids Mayor Henry S. Smith. Most notably the collection contains a photo album dating back to 1880 of Sara and her family, as well as pictures of Charles Garfield and his wife and the D.A.



Album page with photo of Sara's sister Mary Smith

Blodgett family. It also includes documents and photographs belonging to the Reverend Isaac Platt Powell (1838-1903), who became Sara's step-father, spanning the years from 1884-1935.

Collection 447: Alice Loomis papers

Alice L. (Pat) Loomis (1908-1990) was a prominent woman in mid-20th century Grand Rapids. Mrs. Loomis was active in the Kent County Republican Committee and the National Young Republicans. She was also an employee of the *Grand Rapids Herald* and seems to have been involved in the printing department. Within this collection are many small publications regarding the printing industry of West Michigan at the time, the American Newspaper Guild, and various banquets and Republican Conventions.



Program for the State CIO convention, held here in 1944

Collection 448: Vivian Brecken Ellis collection

Vivian Brecken Ellis was a Grand Rapids area business woman. She was a graduate of Creston High School and Grand Rapids Junior College. She remained in Grand Rapids her entire life and was a co-founder of Distributors Inc. This collection includes documents from the life of Brecken Ellis and family, including items from her mother Jennie Brecken and father Clarence Brecken. Items are mainly related to education including items relating to Creston High School from 1935 to 1938 and the 50th class reunion of the class of 1938.

Collection 449: Gertrude P. Weaver collection

Gertrude P. Weaver and her husband, Clarence Weaver, were involved in the Grand Rapids poetry group "The Bards," and they both wrote for the poetry magazine *Bardic Echoes*. Gertrude was also involved in a large number of poetry societies across the state and nation. The collection contains sixteen scripts of original plays written by Weaver. These sixteen scripts vary from the brief skit "Children's Day Program" to "The Kings English" and "The Gift."

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Greater Grand Rapids
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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 who played important roles in Grand Rapids history continue to be discovered.

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.

