

GGRWHC SPRING 2005 Newsletter

President's Corner By Mary Seeger

As things wind down for the summer, the Greater Grand Rapids Women's History Council is thinking forward to next year. Several things will be happening during the next several months.

- The Board is currently accepting **board member nominations**. If you would like to become a board member, please call the office (616/234-3603) or email information@ggrwhc.org.
- The **Annual Meeting** is May 10 at the Gerald R. Ford Museum. New board members will be approved at this meeting. All members are invited to the Annual Meeting.
- The **Membership Campaign** will be held in June. If you know of someone who would like to become a member, please call or email us.
- The 2005-2006 year is a really big year for the History Council. **LEGACY 2006** will be held next March. If your organization would like to participate in LEGACY or, if you know of an organization that has been missed in the past, please call or email us.

We look forward to seeing you at the Annual Meeting. If not, have a great summer.

Mary Seeger Honored by Grand Valley State University

In March, the Grand Valley State University Women's Commission presented Mary Seeger with the Lifetime Achievement Award for her many years as an advocate for women's rights, according to the GVSU GVNOW website. "Dean Seeger has previously been presented with the Women and Gender Studies Barbara Jordan Award in 2001, and the Grand Valley Women's Commission Maxine Swanson Award in 1999", the story on the website continues.

After graduating from the University of Minnesota with a BA in German (magna cum laude), Mary's career started at Grand Valley State College in 1965 when she came to teach German. She completed her Ph.D. in Germanic Philology from the University of Wisconsin in 1970.

As Grand Valley changed and became a university, Mary's responsibilities changed as well. She is now an academic dean at a university of around 22,000 students. Although this is an awesome responsibility, she finds time to teach one course a semester either in German or her second love, detective fiction.

The Greater Grand Rapids Women's History Council has been fortunate to have Mary as a board member since 1999. She is currently serving as president. Thanks to her leadership, the board has kept on task with projects like Oral History, Fundraising and LEGACY 2003 and 2006.

In addition to GGRWHC, Mary is a life member of the Girl Scouts of Michigan Trails and has been President of the Council. She has also been a member of the Edelweiss Club of Grand Rapids, the League of Women Voters and the Swedish American Heritage Association of West Michigan.

Mary plans to retire at the end of June. She wants to return to "my too long-neglected research and writing and translation, to my music, to my gardening, to my cabin." (Husband Bill will be retiring in May.) She has also assured the History Council that she will continue to be involved.

Congratulations, Mary, on your many accomplishments!

In this issue you will find:

- An article about Margaret Walker
- Women's Equality Day and LEGACY, 2006 Kickoff Information
- National Association of Personal Historians Conference in November
- An article about the Ford Museum's new Director
- An Urgent Request for Oral History Interviewers
- Membership Information
- Great Lakes History Conference Call for Papers

Ford Museum Hires Director
By Barbara McGregor Packer

The new year brought a new director to the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library and Museum. Dr. Elaine K. Didier took the reins of both the Museum in Grand Rapids and Library in Ann Arbor on January 10, 2005. Dr. Didier is the fifth person, and first woman, to hold the position since the Library and Museum opened in 1981. President Ford said of Dr. Didier's selection, "I am tremendously pleased by the Archivist's decision to name Elaine Didier as the new Library Director. She has the energy, experience and enthusiasm to sustain and enhance the progress that's been made at the Library and Museum. I am particularly pleased by her interest in partnering with civic leaders and the academic communities in Ann Arbor, Grand Rapids and the region to provide new opportunities for educational programming."

Shortly after accepting the position, Dr. Didier commented, "I want to increase the library and museum's visibility because these are national treasures. We want people to know what we have and who we are, so they will appreciate the legacy of President Ford." Elaine brings a fresh vision and perspective, as well as contagious enthusiasm, to the Library and Museum. She is quickly moving forward with staff on a wide range of program, marketing, technology, and community outreach initiatives, including web site redesign, increased outreach to potential museum and library audiences, and renewed public programming at the Library in Ann Arbor.

Prior to accepting the position of Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library and Museum director, Dr. Didier was a professor and former dean of the Kresge Library at Oakland University in Rochester, Michigan. In addition to her work at Oakland University, Dr. Didier served in a number of positions at the University of Michigan from 1977–1999, including Interim Director of Academic Outreach, Associate Dean of the Rackham School of Graduate Studies, and Director of Information Resources at the School of Business Administration. She has also served as Adjunct Associate Professor for the School of Information and director of the Erasmus/Michigan Master of Business Informatics Program.

In other professional activities, she served as President of the Michigan Library Association and is currently serving as an elected member to the Executive Board of the Association of College and Research Libraries and represents the association on the American Library Association Council. Appointed by then-Governor Engler to the Library of Michigan Board in 2001, she was elected to chair the board for 2003–2004.

Dr. Didier earned B.A., A.M.L.S., and Ph.D. degrees from the University of Michigan and studied at Oxford. She lives in Plymouth, Michigan with her husband Gordon Didier, and splits her time each week between Ann Arbor and Grand Rapids.

Oral History Interviewers Needed

Are you interested in preparing oral histories, but don't know how to get started?

Would you like to do an oral history, but don't know who to interview?

Oral history is an important component of the Greater Grand Rapids Women's History Council.

We are desperately needing people who would like to learn how to interview so that our interviewing process can continue and be ongoing.

We will gladly train you as to the materials we use and on our equipment. If you are interested, please call Barbara Robinson at 616/949-4986.

Membership Campaign

Our membership campaign begins in June. If you know of someone who would like to become a member, please email their information to: information@ggrwhc.org.

Membership rates:

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

Margaret Sellers Walker By Mary McLoughlin

In 1980 when Margaret Sellers Walker was appointed head of personnel, she became the first woman and the first African American to head a major division of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR). At the time, the DNR oversaw hundreds of complex jobs—everything from forest fire fighting in Northern Michigan to garbage dumping in rural farming counties--and regulated everything from air and water pollution to fishing and hunting, from national parks and preserves to oil and gas extraction, from forestry to recreational boating. The DNR affected every citizen's life and had many critics. Compound that with the department's internal problems: it was about to be severely downsized. Employees already feeling unappreciated and defensive now were threatened with losing their jobs.

Walker's hiring was experienced by the predominantly white, male-dominated department as a further blow to their esteem. Glen Sheppard, editor of the North Woods Call, reported that she began her six-year tenure as the DNR's Director of Personnel with a work force who greeted her selection with smirks, racist remarks and almost universal contempt. Not only was the new director a black woman, she also came from Michigan's largest urban center: Detroit. Conventional wisdom in the DNR held that conservation was man's work—preferably white men, hunters, fishermen and non-Detroiters. Everybody (in the department, at least) knew that. But Sheppard claimed that Walker proved "everyone who knew that wrong."

She did a stellar job directing the traditional personnel and payroll activities for 2,200 full-time employees, but also oversaw, training, affirmative action, labor relations and managed the DNR Academy, a training academy for mid-level managers. She modernized and updated every aspect of the department. Eventually even the department's most cynical, hard-nosed veteran field men held her in higher esteem than they did any other division chief. They regarded her as an extremely competent, honest, courageous professional. They credited her with handling

all aspects of the job from the most mundane to the most complex problems of field personnel with fairness, integrity and intelligence. In the end, "the most crusty field bosses, men who earned their stripes and bars in the woods, in an all white world, regarded Sellers as their most reliable useful ally in Lansing."

Her dramatic accomplishment at the DNR served Walker well as she took on a series of progressively more demanding professional posts. She left the DNR for the City of Grand Rapids where she was Director of Human Resources. After a year she was promoted to Assistant City Manager for Administrative and Cultural Services. In that position, she provided executive direction for Human Resources, Labor Relations, Management Information Systems, Equal Opportunity, Building Operations, the City Clerk's Office, the Public Library and the Public Museum. According to the Grand Rapids Press, "Sellers transformed the office into an expanded Human Resources Department that merged the city's personnel, employee development and risk management departments. She also initiated the City's current Supervisors Training Program to help managers sharpen their skills and implemented the Employee Recognition Program to award outstanding job performance." After six years with the City of Grand Rapids, Walker became an assistant professor at Grand Valley State University in the School of Public and Nonprofit Administration, where she taught students what she had learned in government employment.

Mark Your Calendar and Save the Date!

Celebrate the 85th anniversary of full suffrage for women on **Women's Equality Day, August 26th**, at the Gerald R. Ford Museum. A consortium of local organizations will honor local voter education and registration efforts and **kick off LEGACY 2006** with the Greater Grand Rapids Women's History Council.

Details will be on the website, www.ggrwhc.org, as they become available.

2005 Great Lakes History Conference Friday and Saturday, October 28-29, 2005

The Thirtieth Annual Great Lakes History Conference, sponsored by Grand Valley State University, will be held Friday and Saturday, October 28 and 29, 2005, at GVSU's Eberhard Center in downtown Grand Rapids. The conference features around forty panels on historical topics, with over one hundred and twenty presenters. In recent years, co-sponsored by the Grand Rapids Historical Commission, Grand Rapids Historical Society, and Greater Grand Rapids Women's History Council, the GLHC has provided unique opportunity for exchange between local and academic historians. Sessions last 90 minutes. Papers must take no longer than 30 minutes in a two-paper session or 20 minutes in three-paper sessions. If you are interested in presenting a paper on a Grand Rapids history topic or another subject, whether or not directly related to the conference theme, please send a query as soon as possible or a full description by **June 15, 2005**. Please include your address, email address and phone number.

2005 Conference Theme: World History in the Twenty-First Century

The two keynote speakers are leading specialists in world history: **Professor Jerry Bentley** from the University of Hawaii (formerly President of the World History Association and author of *Traditions and Encounters: A Global Perspective on the Past*), and **Professor David Christian** from San Diego State University (founder of 'big history' and author of *Maps of Time*). In addition to presenting lectures on issues in world history, Professors Bentley and Christian will also lead workshops and roundtable discussions where audience participants can discuss themes related to the scholarship and teaching of global history with these leading scholars.

Sample Grand Rapids History Panels from 2004

"When Grand Rapids Was the West" featured Father Dennis Morrow discussing the early Catholic history of West Michigan, Randal Jelks on Afro-Michiganders before the Civil War, and Gordon Olson on pathfinder John Ball. Christine Byron chaired a panel titled **"Crediting Women for the Built Environment: The Case of Grand Rapids."** Rebecca Smith-Hoffman spoke on the variety of women's contributions to Grand Rapids architecture; Marcella Beck, on the legacy of 1920s prolific home designer Fannie Boylon; and Rebecca Mayne, on the convergence of urban renewal, historic preservation, and public art in Grand Rapids, especially Nancy Mulnix and Vandenberg Plaza. **"The Private Lives and Public Faces of Nineteenth-Century Grand Rapids Women"** was chaired by Vernis Schad, with papers by Diana Barrett ("Follow the Money: The Story Behind the Brown Home for Aged Women") and Jo Ellyn Clarey ("The Colorful But Hidden Past of Elizabeth Eaglesfield, Grand Rapids' First Female Attorney [and Shipping Captain])."

Other 2004 conference panel topics included: Changing Borders in the Civil War; German-American Community Formation; African-Americans and Resistance to Slavery; The "No Child Left Behind" Act: History and Implications; Gender, Race, and the Reconstruction South; The Second Great Awakening and the Course of American Protestantism; War and Society in Early America, and more.

Please address all inquiries and proposals on *Grand Rapids history* to:

Christine Byron and Jo Ellyn Clarey
326 Norwood SE
Grand Rapids MI 49506-1717
Phone: 616/454-7457
Email: histms@yahoo.com

Please address all inquiries and proposals on *world history* to:

Dr. Craig Benjamin or Dr. Jason Crouthamel
Department of History, 1 Campus Drive, MAK 1060A
Grand Valley State University
Allendale, MI 49401

Phone: 616/331-3298 (department)
Fax: 616/331-3285
Email: benjamic@gvsu.edu or crouthaj@gvsu.edu

History in the Future (Calendar of Events)

May 10

4 pm GGRWHC Annual Meeting,
The Michigan Room, Gerald R. Ford
Museum

August 26

Women's Equality Day and LEGACY
2006 Kick off, Gerald R. Ford Museum
Check the web page for more information.

September 13

4 pm GGRWHC Board Meeting,
The Michigan Room, Gerald R. Ford
Museum

October 11

4 pm GGRWHC Board Meeting,
The Michigan Room, Gerald R. Ford
Museum

October 28 and 29

Great Lakes History Conference,
Eberhard Center, GVSU

November 8

4 pm GGRWHC Board Meeting,
The Michigan Room, Gerald R. Ford
Museum

December 13

4 pm GGRWHC Board Meeting,
The Michigan Room, Gerald R. Ford
Museum

Grand Rapids Historical Society Banquet and Annual Meeting At the Bluff on 28th St.

May 12, 2005

Guest Speaker: Tom Logan, author of
*Almost Lost: Building and Preserving
Heritage Hill, Grand Rapids, Michigan*

We almost lost it! In the late 1960s
and early 1970s, the Heritage Hill
neighborhood was in great danger of
being razed, piece-by-piece. Tom Logan
will illustrate some of the challenges faced
by the neighborhood in that period. He
will show how the neighborhood grew over
14 decades and tell the preservation story
from the late 1960s to the present. Along
the way, he will explain the geography,
topography and varied architecture of the
historical district.

Contact Ruth VanStee at the Grand
Rapids Public Library, 616/988-5402
ext.5497, for more details.

National Association of Personal Historians Fall, 2005 Conference

The Association of Personal Historians was founded ten years ago as a part of a growing interest in memoirs, ethical wills and life story preservation. The APH is an organization of 450 professionals and hobbyists throughout the United States and Canada who help others to record their personal and family legacies. These professionals create products in a variety of formats, ranging from books to multimedia documentaries to heirloom artwork.

The organization's 2005 annual conference is scheduled for Grand Rapids, Michigan. Jennifer and John Morrison of AfterWord Professional Historians LLC, a local personal historian business, will serve as hosts for the conference. The conference will take place at the Amway Grand Plaza Hotel November 2-6, 2005. A Saturday evening banquet will be held at the Public Museum of Grand Rapids.

The conference is an effort of the APH to provide educational and training opportunities for its members and other attendees. This year's theme is *Furnishing Your Business With the Tools for Success* and sessions will focus on practical and tangible help in performing the work of the personal historian. A complete schedule of events will be available by July 1.

For more information on the Association of Personal Historians, go to www.personalhistorians.org. or contact Jennifer or John Morrison, AfterWord Professional Historians LLC, 616/248-2706, after_word@earthlink.net.

Woman Pins®

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.



Three new types of Woman Pins®, Golf pins, Red Hat pins and pins representing people in the medical field, are now available.

Like all other 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 \$14.00. Pins may be purchased at Betsy Ratzsch's Pottery, 584 Ada Drive, in Ada or at the Women's Resource Center, 678 Front St NW, Grand Rapids. Or you can call the office 616/234-3603 for more information

Meet Our Members

Allen County Library
Ethel Ackerson
Eva Aguirre Cooper
Vernell Allen
Barbara Amberg
Melissa Anderson
Leann Arkema
June Atsma
Claudia Bajema
Lori Baker
Mary Barnum
Gladys Beckwith
Peggy Bendroth
Dr. Dorothy Berg
Carla Blinkhorn
Frank Boring
Sharon Caldwell-Newton
Sister Michael Ellen Carling
Cecile Cave Fehsenfeld
Alex Chess
Marti Childs
Jo Ellyn Clarey
Michelle Condon
Margaret Cook
Bonnie Cowles
Candace Cowling
Christina deGroot
Gail DeYoung
Jane Dickie
Mary Jane Dockeray
Rose Doering
Nancy Douglas
Gretchen Dziadosz
Jeanne Englehart
Hanni Epp
Barbara Fisk
Nancy Flumerfelt
Twink Frey & Jim McKay
Barbara Friend
Nelle Frisch
Laurie Gardner
Joan Garety
Falinda Geerling
Robert Goodrich
Patricia Gunn
June Hamersma
Terri Handlin
Sandra Hansen
Susan Haworth Hoepfner
Todd & Hester Hendricks
Karen Henry
Bluma Herman
Jeannie Hosey
Charlotte Howell-Partee
Kyle Irwin
Rosemary Johnsen
J. Jorgenson
Mary Jane Keeler
Helen Kinsworthy
Helga Kleinschmidt
Marlene Kowalski-Braun
Sylvia Krissoff
Marge Kuipers
Marg Ed Kwapil
Terri Lynn Land

Marlene Leistico
Sue Levy
Anita List
Sally Littlefair
Judy Lloyd
Ruth Ann Lomas
Teri Losey
Sharon Mack
Anne Magoun
Merry Malfroid
Edna Martin
Marilyn Martin
Eugenia Marve
Susan McCarthy
Kate McGarry
Barbara McGregor-Packer
Jennifer Metz
Bonnie Miller
Jennifer Morrison
Nancy Mueller
Kathleen Muir
Debra Muller
Lillian Nebbeling
Dorothy Newman
Doug Nyman
Gordon Olson
Lorena Palm
Nancy Parramore
Fran Pepper
Sallee Prieto
Joann Reeves
Kim Ridings
Barbara Robinson
Susan Roeder
Stella & Charles Royce
Lois Santalo
Vernis Schad
Fred Sebulske
Mary Seeger
Cynthia Singleton
Gloria Slykhouse
Rebecca Smith-Hoffman
Sandra Springer
Alice St. Clair
Rosalie Stein
Wendy Stock
Ruth Stubbs
Judy Subar
Ruth Tardy
Dr. Jackie Taylor
JoAnn Thome
Linda Thompson
Kathleen Underwood
Marge VanderPloeg
Ruth VanStee
B Margaret Voss
Maribeth Wardrop
Elizabeth White
Mary Alice Williams
Geneva Wiskemann
Colleen Wolfe
Sandra Wright