



The Herstory Chronicles

Newsletter of the Women's History Project of Northwest Michigan

January 2012

Celebrating Women's History Month

By Martha Vreeland, Ashley Flees, and Shauna Quick

Students in the honor society of Phi Theta Kappa at Northwestern Michigan College will present a program for Women's History month on Saturday, March 10, at 12:30 PM at the Fine Arts building.



Phi Theta Kappa team.

The students are preparing entertainment based on tales and experiences of their grandmothers and their travels. The women of the group are interviewing their grandmothers—and great-grandmothers when possible—and discussing with them their experiences as a twenty-something-year-old, focusing on

(See Celebrating on p. 2)

Antarctica adventure is topic for "Souper Sunday"

Mary Murphy has an insatiable hunger to explore all places cold, be it with fluffy polar bears of the Arctic or adorable penguins of Antarctica. Be prepared to be swept away to the dramatic landscapes of chilly Antarctica by Mary, who will be our guest speaker at our 2012 Souper Sunday on February 5 from 2 to 4 PM at the History Center.

Mary has a love for cold places and she will narrate with outstanding slides from her "no turning back" trip to our planet's southernmost landmass. Mary loves telling about her travels as opportunities to share the awe of her experiences.

She retired as director of surgical services at Munson Medical Center to explore the world, and will bring her contagious enthusiasm for travel to us. *(Makes one wonder what her grandmothers would have thought of her travels... see article on Anne-Marie Oomen's October 2011 presentation.)*

The public is invited to this annual tradition that features a hearty lunch of soup, bread, and dessert. A donation of \$5 is suggested.

Please make a reservation so we don't run out of soup! Call or email Sandy: 421-3343; sansep19@earthlink.net.



Parka worn to Antarctica by Mary Murphy

Oral history update

A small team has been working on the WHP Oral Histories with a goal of making them more readily available to the public.

We now have posted the list of 65 completed interviews on the WHP website, with a brief description of each woman.

The archival staff at the History Center of Traverse City (where the transcripts are housed) has agreed to assist anyone who wishes to

(See Update on p. 4)

Excerpts of a wonderful program

At our annual meeting in October, Anne-Marie Oomen touched us all with her eloquent presentation, *Your American Map: How to Travel With All the Grandmothers Looking On*.

Anne-Marie spoke about the hearth, the heart of the home, in connection to her Grandmother Julia, the woman who lived her life in concentric circles within Oceana County. “From her I take those days when I want to be nowhere but here.”

Her Grandmother Josephine had insisted that her suitor acquire land before she sailed across the ocean to marry him, thinking that land would assure her the life she wanted. Instead, she stayed home to care for her physically challenged daughter, becoming bitter and judgmental. “She wanted to do more—be more, and she felt bound by the farm... my Grandmother Josephine thinks I shouldn’t go anywhere because she couldn’t.”

Oomen said she considers herself “the daughter of a double exposure. With my grandmothers looking on, I travel and long to come home; I am home and I long to travel.” She suspects her contradictory impulse is not unusual, that many women long for home and away.

She then told of reading travel stories that carried her on a sailing trip around the world, a hike across America, a flight into
(See Excerpts on p. 5)

New officers elected, Oomen spoke

Forty-seven registrants attended our 2011 Annual Meeting on Saturday, October 22, at the History Center.

Our Board of Directors recognized the committed work and input of retiring board members **Tina Tank** and **Shirley Murray**. Though they no longer will be ‘official’ leaders, the board hopes they will continue to share their wisdom and foresight in guiding our efforts, and providing delicious soup on Souper Sundays!

With great pleasure the board announced three new members:

Dotty French, Carolyn

Micklatcher, and Sandra Seppala. Dotty French will bring to



New Directors Sandra Seppala, Carolyn Micklatcher, and Dotty French

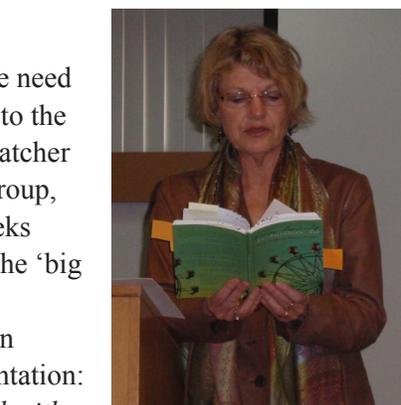
our leadership her love and knowledge of history of the area, particularly the Bohemian families (including her own), and previous experience on the board. Sandy Seppala was selected for her responsive energy, her talent and commitment to the

newsletter, and understanding of the need to provide information and interest to the community at large. Carolyn Micklatcher has been active in the WHP book group, works well with others, actively seeks learning, and has the ability to see the ‘big picture.’

Guest speaker Anne Marie Oomen captivated attendees with her presentation: *Your American Map: How to Travel with All the Grandmothers Looking On*. One attendee told her, “Your presentation touched on my life in so many, many ways.”



Jane Purkiss wearing her Mother’s apron to serve soup.



Anne Marie Oomen reads from her book

(See Annual Meeting on p. 5)

Oral History: Dorotha Pitcher

These are excerpts from an interview with Dorotha Pitcher in her home in Leland, Michigan, on February 15, 2010.

(My father's parents) were married in Maple City. My father's father, Edward Bixby, worked at the Oval Dish Company. He did work for D.H. Day too. In fact, he worked with Day's horses. And one of them kicked him and so he always had a bowed leg.

Well, my father was born in Glen Haven. That's why his name is Glen.

My mother was a nurse, and she took her training up here at Traverse City. I think she was sixteen when she went there. She was supposed to be eighteen, but she lied. Her family wasn't... she didn't have very good family, so she was anxious to go someplace where she could stay.

One thing she learned at the Traverse City Hospital was a fried egg on shredded wheat. You run shredded wheat under the water so it's kind of limp, and then fry it and put the egg on top. And nobody ever, that I have met, has ever done that. Our kids do that today.

She'd tell about a bunch of them going down to the water swimming when they got off work. It was a good time for her, I think. (She met my father); he was an orderly then.

I was born in '23. (I grew up in Grand Rapids because my father) was the Grand Rapids sales manager for A&P Company. And so when I was a kid, we always came up for the Cherry Festival. Yeah, I used to see the princess and I thought, oh, that would be wonderful to be a princess.

We stayed with my father's uncle, Leon Bixby, at his big cherry farm on Cherry Bend Road. We had good times there at the farm. That was my first job, picking cherries, and eating most of them. They were sweet cherries. I had three pails and I got seven cents a pail.

I remember when I was supposed to do some tap dancing in a show in elementary school and I was all excited. My mother made me a cute costume, satin pants, and top. And my grandmother wouldn't go because it was during the Lindbergh thing and she wanted to hear the radio, the latest of what they found out. I always thought that that was odd; she was more interested in that than her granddaughter performing. But that was the way she was.

That's what I remember.

Have you renewed yet?

By Etta Rajkovich, treasurer

Membership dues are the lifeblood of the Women's History Project, and your continuing membership is key to support for the oral history program, educational programming, and promoting women's history in the region.

Please consider paying your dues for 2012. Dues have not increased since WHPNM's beginning: \$10 for students and seniors, \$15 for other individuals, \$25 for businesses and organizations. Dues and contributions are tax-deductible.

A dues envelope is enclosed for your convenience if you have not yet paid your 2012 dues. Your membership expiration date is noted on the mailing label.



Update continued from p. 1

access them.

If you know a woman in our region whose history would be a valuable addition to the WHP collection, please send her name, background and contact information, to Karen Anderson: kanderson507@att.net

Researching history of local nurses

Women's History Project member **Gini LeClaire** is writing a history of the Traverse City State Hospital Training School for Nurses. The school opened in 1906 and graduated its last class of nurses in 1947.

If you know of anyone who attended the school or have any memorabilia, such as photographs, please contact Gini at 941-8440 or ginintc@charter.net.

Annual Meeting continued from p. 3

The theme of Anne Marie's presentation was carried through with room decorations of traveling vehicles and garb, map doilies on tabletops, and an interactive map for attendees to label the origin of their grandmothers' traveling.

Noted grandmothers traveled from: Alden, Edgewater, Lakeside, Pigeon, and Whitehall, Mich.; Augsburg; Chatsworth, Ontario; Copenhagen, Denmark; Cornwall, England; County Cork, Ireland; Bohemia; Edinburgh, Scotland; Germany; England; Illinois, Indiana, and Virginia; Istanbul, Turkey; Krispole, Yugoslavia; Manitoulin Island, Ontario; Montreal; Omaha, Nebraska; Ottawa and Toronto, Canada; Minnesota; Sheboygen, Wisconsin; Sweden; Toledo, Ohio; Whitefalls, Montana; and Württemberg (formerly Wurttemberg), Germany.

Excerpts continued from p. 3

the African bush, and a bride's internal journey in the isolation of Isle Royal. [See inset for the books Anne-Marie read.] "The beauty of her story* haunted me, the going away, the making of home in that isolated cabin, the satisfaction of being alone even though she was married to and in love with this ambitious surveyor. She was a figure I felt held that double exposure intact."

"(My grandmothers) would have expressed wide-eyed outrage of my reading... Over the years I have felt them at my shoulder, nodding, shuddering, tisking and praying for me..."

Anne-Marie described a peak in the jungle of Puerto Rico as the first place of which she wrote deeply. "It was there I began to see that travel is something like my Grandmother Julia's circles of home-wardness." That jungle peak "created a place within the place that gave me a link to my passion for going away, and for finding there a newer home..."

That place inside a larger place, in that heightened state of awareness you experience when you travel, is a different kind of hearth, one I could carry inside of me. It was a way to unlock the double exposure."

"We travel to discover, to learn, to adventure, to heighten, to get away, to go toward, to know ourselves, to scare ourselves, find the place within the place. To find who we are in our world. My advice: Take your notebook and your grandmothers with you. Make them come along. They won't admit it right away, but they have all the maps."

- *Travels with Charlie* by John Steinbeck
- *Dove* by Robin Lee Graham
- *Blue Highways* by Wm. Least Heat Moon
- *On the Road* by Jack Kerouac
- *Walk Across America* by Peter Jenkins
- *Into the Wild* by Jon Krakauer
- *Out of Africa* by Isak Dineson
- *West with the Night* by Beryl Markham
- *A Voyager Out* by Mary Kingsley
- **Time By Moments Steals Away: The 1848 Journal of Ruth Douglass* edited by Robert Root

WHPNM Mission

To preserve and recognize the contributions of women to their families and communities in northwest lower Michigan.

Calendar

*All meetings are held at the History Center
unless designated otherwise.*

January

27 Book Group. Friday, noon. *A Stronger Kinship: One Town's Extraordinary Tale of Hope and Faith* by Anna-Lisa Cox

February

5 Souper Sunday. 2–4 PM. \$5 donation suggested.

13 Board Meeting. Mon., 2 PM.

23 Film: *Miss Representation.* Thurs., 6 PM. Sponsored by AAUW.

March—Women's History Month

10 Women's History Month presentation. Sat. 12:30 PM. *NMC Fine Arts Bldg.*

12 Board Meeting. Mon., 2 PM.

22 Film: *Babes & Banners.* Thurs., 6 PM. Sponsored by AAUW.

April

9 Board Meeting. Mon., 2 PM.

27 Book Group. Friday, NOON. *Yellow Raft in Blue Water* by Michael Dorris

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Thank you for your support!



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