

# ❖ *Our Extended Family* ❖

## *The Librarians of the Grand Rapids Public Library's Local History and Special Collections Department*

*By Mary Rasch Alt*

Every genealogist treasures encountering a knowledgeable, cheerful and helpful librarian. Family Historians who research in Western Michigan get to work with some of the best. We are very fortunate to have such a talented staff working at Grand Rapids Public Library (GRPL). The fourth floor holds the Grand Rapids Local History and Special Collections Department (LHSCD). It is staffed by Department Supervisor Tim Gleisner, Archivist Rebecca Mayne, Librarian Christine Byron, Department Clerk Karolee Gillman and Library Assistants, Marcie Beck, Jen Morrison, and Ruth VanStee.

Any genealogical or historical question asked in person, on the telephone or by email is answered knowledgeably and politely by staff members. If the answer requires additional research, every librarian will look for that last unknown detail. Like every other Michigan library, the GRPL has had its funding cut, but the administration continues to work diligently to provide quality services to the public.

The Western Michigan Genealogical Society works closely with Department Supervisor Tim and other staff members of the LHSCD. The Society provides funding for research materials and several for-profit databases that are made available to patrons at no cost. Ancestry Library Edition, the New England Ancestors Genealogical Database from the New England Historic Genealogical Society, and Heritage Quest have received funding from the Society. Our Acquisition Chairperson, Lucy Read, works with library staff so that new family history books, compiled local genealogies are purchased by WMGS for researchers to use.



**From left; Ruth VanStee, Rebecca Mayne, Christine Byron, Tim Gleisner, Karolee Gillman, Jen Morrison and Marcie Beck.**

### *Tim Gleisner*

Born and raised in Milwaukee, Tim Gleisner earned his BA in History and Masters in Library Science at the University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee. Tim's first library job was at the New York Public Library. It provided him with "a wide variety of experience dabbling in everything."

When Tim's wife, Anjie, came to Michigan to work as a children's librarian at the Grand Rapids Public Library, he moved to the Herrick District Library in Holland where he ran the genealogical and local history room. Five years ago, Tim took a position at the Grand Rapids Library. For the past year and a half he has been the Supervisor of the Local History and Special Collections Department.

Researching his own family history as a "hobby genealogist", Tim found his great-great-great grandfather on Ancestry. "It was most fascinating. A new world opened up to me in New England during the 1680s. I had no clue before. German, Norwegian, English, Dutch and Welsh are my genealogical interests since that is where my different branches hail from." Tim enjoys dealing with the people who come in to research and hearing their family history stories.

Reading is one of Tim's interests, along with his wife and two-year-old son, Nathaniel. He enjoys watching BBC programming and participating in activities at his church.

### *Rebecca Mayne*

Since June 1998, Rebecca Mayne has served as the Archivist at the Grand Rapids Public Library. She has worked in libraries, local museums and archives since the 1970's, often in positions specializing in history or art and design. Born in Indiana to a newspaper editor father and a librarian mother, Rebecca has moved several times to experience a new and different job. This has taken her from Indiana, to Chicago, to the Avery Library at Columbia University in New York City, to Kent State as an Architecture Librarian in Ohio, to the Athenaeum of Philadelphia, and for over the past ten years to Grand Rapids.

Rebecca has three academic degrees and the equivalent in course hours for a fourth. She has specialized in child psychology (focusing on studies of children's use of space), library science, and art history / architecture / urban planning. Advertising art is one her of current current interests. She is a member of numerous professional organizations.

Rebecca feels GRPL's local history collection is one of the best in the country, and enjoys listening to and sharing in the fascinating stories of the people who have lived here. About fifty percent of the people who come

to the department are interested in genealogy; the others are looking for local historical information. A number are seeking details on the history of their own home, a business or specific building.

Rebecca suggests that those who are researching their family history to use the internet and go to the First-Search (vendor, available at the GRPL) website. This site contains the national library catalog, Worldcat. Worldcat provides a listing where genealogists can find additional titles and locations of other books, archives, or other sources, that may be related to their research.

Constantly learning about new ideas, places and people is Rebecca's main interest. She also enjoys searching the web, gardening and her cats.

### *Christine Byron*

A life-long resident of Grand Rapids, Christine Byron is a graduate of Catholic Central High School, Aquinas College and earned her Masters of Library Science at Western Michigan University. Christine has worked at the library for 13 years. Previously, she was a bookseller for 22 years.

The history of tourism and vacationing in Michigan is a special interest of Christine and her husband, Tom Wilson. They have co-authored three books on the subject: *Vintage Views of the Mackinac Straits Region* (2007), *Vintage Views of the Charlevoix-Petoskey Region* (2005) and *Vintage Views of Leelanau County* (2002).

Christine is an avid collector of Michigan postcards, souvenirs and travel ephemera. She lent the Michigan Historical Museum hundreds of items from her personal collection for their current exhibit on Michigan's Roadside Attractions. In her spare time, Christine likes to read, play with her two dogs and vacation at her family's cottage on Glen Lake.

Christine enjoys helping patrons with their research and the detective work it involves. Her job as a local history librarian is truly a dream job.

When asked about her pet peeve about patrons, Christine answered that she would like people to come up to the desk, rather than yelling across the floor. After all, libraries are supposed to be a quiet place for research.

### *Marcie Beck*

A lifetime resident of Grand Rapids, Marcie Beck, noted that, "It really helps to be older when working in the Grand Rapids Public Library's local history department." She graduated from Ottawa Hills High and knows the history of the dime store block and the popularity of taking your car "Saturday Night Cruising" in downtown Grand Rapids.

Marcie has worked at the library since the fall of 2000. She previously taught history for 31 years at Forest Hills Central High School. "I wasn't ready to have seven Saturdays every week, so I started at the library part time."

She's found that one question from a researcher usually leads to another. "I learn something new every day and I like helping people."

Marcie wishes that everyone would write down their sources, author, title and call number of any book they find in their research. It's difficult for a librarian to find, "the red book that had great information in it," for anyone who comes back a second time for more information from that same book.

Women's history and old Grand Rapids Businesses are of special interest to Marcie. She also helped develop an architectural data base for patrons to use in their research..

Marcie enjoys reading all kinds of books. She has two grandchildren that she loves to take hiking, swimming and to museums in Northern Michigan.

### **Karolee Gillman**

Born in Ishpeming, Karolee Gillman moved first to Escanaba and then, to the Lower Peninsula where she graduated from Greenville High School. She attended Montcalm Community College and Eastern Michigan University. Karolee was hired at the GRPL in 1994.

Karolee enjoys doing a little of everything in her job. She is the staff member who scans original photos in the library's collection. Karolee also finds it frustrating to find a book when a patron didn't cite their source. She encourages us to write down the title and author of the great resource books we use and might want to find again.

Recently she worked with Turner Publishing on the book *Historic Photos of Grand Rapids* as Karolee Hazlewood.

She hasn't had time for an in-depth study, but has done a little work on her own family history. Karolee is researching the Hiett, Gundry and St. John surnames.

Camping and flea markets are among Karolee's interests, along with, "reading, of course."

### **Jen Morrison**

Jen Morrison's family has lived in Ludington for generations. She graduated from high school in England, while her step-father served in the Air Force there. Jen received her BA in Public History from Western Michigan University and her MA in Public History from Bowling Green State University in Ohio. She has worked at GRPL for 12 years.

Before her time in Grand Rapids, Jen worked in three other Michigan cities. In Hastings, Jen worked as the edu-

cation coordinator at Charlton Park and was responsible for public events. In Monroe, she was the archivist for the Monroe County Historical Museum. She found the Monroe Museum to be "historically, a very fun place". Before coming to the GRPL, Jen was the curator of the Benzie Area Historical Museum.

Jen "loves digging in to primary sources and working with patrons who get excited about the things they find. We have programs where we guide people through the research materials in the department. Our resources differ from other library resources so don't be afraid to ask when things don't make sense. There is some great stuff in the nooks and crannies here."

Jen interviewed her grandmother, the late Gladys Nerheim, on tape. She knows how very valuable this twenty-year-old tape is as she researches her own family's history.

Recognizing the importance of hearing an ancestor's words in their own voice, Jen and her husband started their own business. They named this personal history enterprise, MI-stories.com. "We get hired to interview someone and we put the interview on an audio CD."

Jen is on the boards of the Grand Rapids Historical Society and the Womens History Council. "I do lots of local history things."

### **Ruth VanStee**

Ruth VanStee was born and raised in Grand Rapids. A graduate of Grand Rapids Central Christian High and Calvin College, she has worked at the Rapids Public Library for 17 years. Ruth enjoys conversing with people and answering email questions. For example, one email included a question about the sculpture of the Huntress Diana, created and sold here in Grand Rapids. The owner wanted to find out more about the artist. Another person had a keg from the Grand Rapids Brewing Co. and wanted information on the company.

When Ruth first started in the local history department, she created a guide to the local African American history resources available in the library. At Chris Byron's suggestion, Ruth placed copies of all the photographs in the archives relating to African Americans into a single binder. People pour over that binder.

Since then, she has been indexing the African American and women's clippings in the Carl Bajema Clipping Collection. The women's clippings peaked her interest in women who owned and operated businesses in Grand Rapids in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

This time of the year, Ruth enjoys her flowers, camping, bicycling and roller blading. She is a member of her church council and serves as Secretary and Newsletter Editor for the Grand Rapids Historical Society.





# Resources Available at the Grand Rapids Public Library

*By Bobbi Schirade*

The Grand Rapids Local History and Special Collections Department (LHSCD), forms one of the largest collections of local and family history material in the state of Michigan. The Department actively encourages and supports genealogists in their research.

The LHSCD has recently initiated periodic "Lock-Ins" for both beginners and advanced family historians. A Lock-In is an after-hours program just for genealogists. Individuals can learn how to use the microfilm reader/scanner/printer, save images to a flash drive, or take advantage of free copying and printing. Computers are available, or you can bring your own laptop. Watch for an announcement of the next Lock-In as registration is required.

The library includes more than 30,000 books and periodicals, plus holdings on microfilm. All materials are non-circulating.

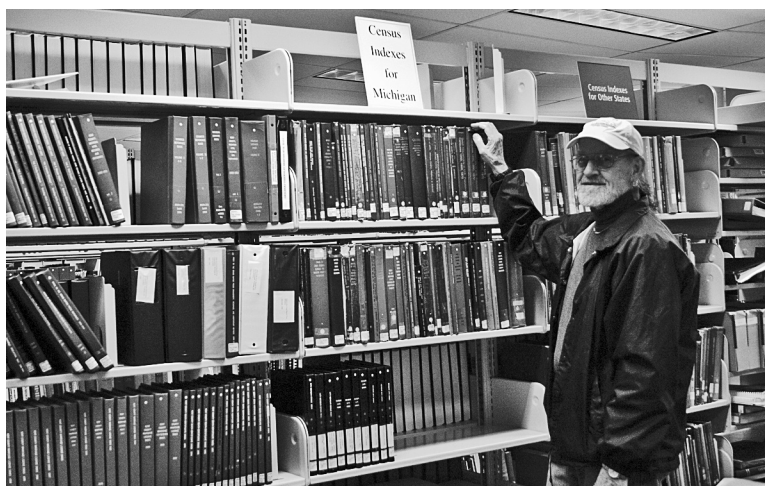
While the collection's emphasis is on the Grand Rapids and Kent County area, other resources are also available. There are additional resources on Western Michigan, other areas in Michigan, the Old Northwest and sources related to westward migration in America.

County and state histories, atlases and maps, family histories and biographical information, census data, city directories, local newspapers on microfilm, and vertical files are just some of the items to be found. Some specific resources include:

- **Grand Rapids City Directories** - the library holds a complete run of this important source back to the late 19th Century.
- **Maps** - Over 18,00 historical maps of Grand Rapids and the old Northwest Territory are available. Current and older plat maps are used by historians to locate early settlers and property holders.
- **Newspapers** - Microfilm of daily and weekly Grand Rapids Newspapers is available from 1841 to the present, including full runs of the city's two most prominent news-

papers, The *Grand Rapids Press* (1883 – present) and the *Grand Rapids Herald* (1891–1959).

- **Family Histories** - The department collects and maintains a large number of family histories, ranging from bound books to single page family tree charts.
- **Books** - Researchers will find more than 5,000 genealogy books ranging from basic instructional guides to standard references.
- **Local and State Governmental Documents.**
- **Biography and Portrait Files** - Cabinets in the department containing hundreds of files on the area's most notable men and women.
- **Pamphlet & Article Files** - Cabinets containing a wealth of information on hundreds of local subjects.
- **Women's History Clippings** - Covering a time period from the 1840s to Early 1930s, these clippings document the history of women during that time period in the West Michigan area.
- **Lyden's File Index** - An index to the research done by local historian Z.Z. Lydens. Covers Historical topics on Grand Rapids for a majority of the 20th century.
- **African American Newspaper Clippings** - Covering a time period from 1830 to 1935, from various Michigan newspapers,



WMGS Past-President, Bill Simmons, stands in front of well-stocked shelves that hold state and national census indices. If you are unable to locate a person in an online index, a printed index provides an alternative resource. After all, every index depends on how the person reading the entry interprets the census takers penmanship.



**The fourth floor Grand Rapids History and Special Collections Department offers a spacious and well-equipped location for family historians to work on their research. All of the computers on this floor are dedicated to genealogical and historical research. Since computer access is sometimes in short supply on other floors, this a wonderful boon for researchers.**

these clippings document the history of African Americans in the West Michigan area.

- ***The Muriel Link Obituary File*** - Index cards filed alphabetically that include obituaries from Grand Rapids and smaller local newspapers..

### Online Resources

Several subscription databases are accessible to patrons in the library.

***The Ancestry Library Edition*** genealogical database of over two billion names. It includes access to passenger lists from all major U.S. ports including New York, San Francisco, Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and New Orleans; naturalization records ranging from 1700 to 1900; U.S. birth, marriage and death records including the Social Security Death Index; and U.S. Census 1790-1930 images and indexes.

***New England Ancestors Genealogical Database*** is compiled by the New England Historic Genealogical Society, the country's oldest genealogical organization. Enter an ancestor's name to search the New England Historical and Genealogical Register, cemetery records, court and probate records, census lists, and much more.

***HeritageQuest Online*** is an online resource for census data, family records and local histories. The collection assembles every extant US federal census, banking and military records, genealogies, local histories, the PERSI, primary source materials, and genealogical and local history serials.

***The Biography and Genealogy Master Index (Infotrac)***

### ***GRPL Grand Rapids magazine Index (1964-1996)***

Grand Rapids Homes and Architects - The ***GRHSC Architectural Database*** contains information on over 2800 properties in the metropolitan area. It spans the years 1907 to 1942 and includes a wide variety of residential, commercial and institutional locations.

Some of the online resources mentioned above are available for home access by Grand Rapids Public Library cardholders. Check online at: <[www.grpl.org/localhistory](http://www.grpl.org/localhistory)>

The Western Michigan Genealogical Society's own ***Newspaper Index*** is also available for researchers to use for free, either in the library or at home. Go to: <[www.wmgs.org](http://www.wmgs.org)> and click on "databases." This is an index to the Death Notices and Obituaries published in the Grand Rapids Press and Grand Rapids Herald from 1910 to today. It includes the listings of Engagements, Weddings and Anniversaries from the Saturday papers from today, going back in time to 1970.



**The Archives has its own temperature and humidity controlled section. Over 350 separate collections are housed in acid free archival containers. Above, Librarian Christine Byron looks for information requested by a patron.**



## The Archives

The (LHSCD), the Furniture Design Collection and the library's Archives occupy the entire fourth floor of the GRPL. The Archives contain over 350 collections, including more than a million photographs and negatives, as well as original letters, business documents, videos, oral histories, postcards, sheet music, manuscripts, scrapbooks, ephemera and other types of data related to area families, businesses and organizations. The Archival Collections are secured in a temperature and humidity controlled storage area.

**Finding Aids** - A finding aid is a description of an archival collection, usually containing a history of the person or organization that produced the collection and an inventory of its contents. Many finding aids are available online.

**Photographs** - Over a million local photographic images document pivotal events and daily life in West Michigan during the past one hundred fifty years. A partial index is available.

**Photo Essays** - These are a series of photos highlighting items from our collection. Many have been exhibited in the Department and kept intact for posterity.

**The Robinson Photo Collection** - The Robinson Studio Collection (#125) is the largest archival collection in the Archives. It contains more than 950,000 black & white negatives, with some accompanying photographic prints, containing Grand Rapids views, news, businesses and people from the 1930s to the 1960s. Some indexing of this collection is available. A sampling of this collection may be seen in our Online Photo Collection.

**Real Estate Listing Cards** - These cards contain images and listing information on many properties in Grand Rapids from 1955 to 1995.

**Diaries** - The Richmond Family Diaries and those of Dora Spring are invaluable resources for those who seek first person accounts of life in Kent County during the previous century.

### **The Furniture Design Collection**

This collection is one of the premier collections of its kind in the United States. Researchers can cover the history of furniture design with over 4,000 books, trade periodicals, photographs and catalogs. Many individuals from all over the world either come to explore these resources in person or make specific research requests of the staff.

The core of collection was acquired in 1904 when the Library purchased every furniture title available from the French Book Trade Exhibit at the St. Louis World's Fair. Since then, hundreds of important volumes have been added, making the collection local, national and international in scope.

Especially valuable are several hundred volumes of furniture trade periodicals dating from the 1890s to the 1950s. There are a number of catalogs produced by local furniture companies available.

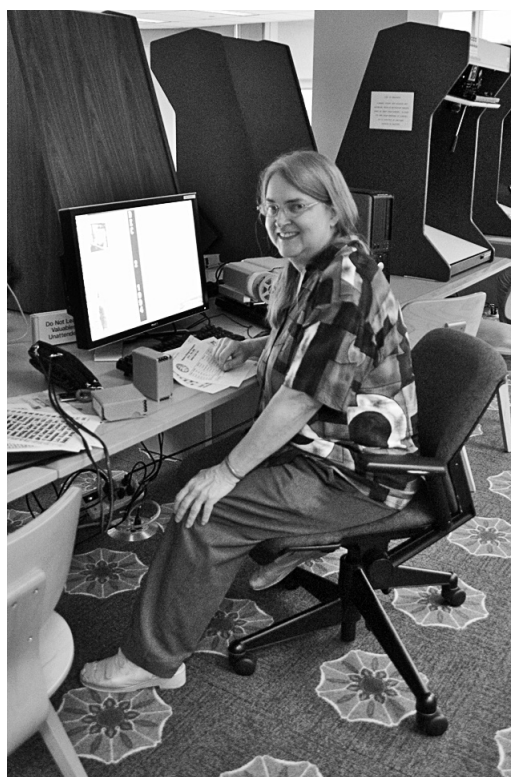
The Furniture and Business Periodical Index Search (1883-1949) is an index of Furniture manufacturers or artisans featured in the periodicals the *Grand Rapids Furniture Record*, *Michigan Artisan*, or the *Michigan Tradesman*.

## Research Requests

Family history queries are answered by the Western Michigan Genealogical Society research committee for a fee of \$15.00 per hour of research.

Michigan and Grand Rapids history research questions are answered by the Local History Department staff at a rate of \$30.00 per hour. Copying charges are extra. Indexed obituaries are charged as follows: no charge for the first requested obituary, with any request beyond one obituary to be charged based on the library's research rate of \$30.00 per hour. Non-indexed obituaries are charged at the hourly research rate. The Local History Department may be reached by phone at 616-988-5400.

Due to the time and staff resources involved in researching answers to local history, genealogy or furniture questions, some additional fees may apply to certain types of requests.



**WMGS member, Claudia Day, reads microfilm while indexing early 1900s obituaries in the Grand Rapids History and Special Collections Department.**