

History **GR** Detectives

Saturday, January 20, 2024

9:30am - 4:00pm

Grand Rapids Public Library

Ryerson Auditorium

historydetectivesgr.org



9:30am - 10:15am

Before Jerry & Betty, There was Another Prominent Ford Couple in Grand Rapids by *M. Christine Byron and Sophia Ward Brewer* Sponsored by: The Greater Grand Rapids Women's History Council, the Grand Rapids Historical Commission, and the Grand Rapids African American Museum and Archives

Joseph C. Ford, enslaved as a youth in Virginia, came to Grand Rapids about 1872 and soon became a porter for the Grand Rapids & Indiana Railroad. He also served as the keeper of the Michigan Senate cloakroom for many years, earning the nickname "Senator" Joe Ford. Joe met Emma S. Warren and they were married in 1881. Emma Ford was a trailblazing African-American woman who defied odds and emerged as a prominent leader, restaurateur, socialite, public servant, lecturer, wife and mother. Emma and Joe left lasting marks on both the local and national stages. Their achievements would be remarkable today; but considering the times in which they lived, their accomplishments are extraordinary.

10:30am - 11:15am

The Experiences of Women in Homes for Unmarried Mothers, 1945-1985 by *Hannah McBride and Nora Salas* Sponsored by: The Kutsche Office of Local History at Grand Valley State University and the Greater Grand Rapids Women's History Council

In the years between WWII and the 1973 Roe v. Wade decision, to become pregnant outside marriage was severely stigmatized. Many girls and women who became pregnant were left to choose between raising their babies with little support and much shame or to have their babies outside of public view and place them for adoption by a married couple. These mothers often gave birth at private, charitable organizations such as the Grand Rapids Salvation Army Evangeline Home and Hospital. This presentation will share what types of choices were available to unmarried pregnant women and girls, how they felt about their experiences at the Evangeline/Booth Home, and how attitudes towards "unwed mothers" changed over the 20th century.



11:30am - 12:15pm

The Republican Home Front vs Frank McKay by *Jon VanderPloeg* Sponsored by: The Grand Rapids Historical Commission and the Grand Rapids City Archives

Frank McKay's rise to power as Republican boss of Michigan and Grand Rapids started in the 1920's and continued into the 1950's. He mastered control of the Republican Party in Michigan by working from the ground up, using money, manipulation, threats and maybe murder to obtain his ends as a political puppet master. A group came together in 1942 calling themselves "The Republican Home Front." They were dedicated to exposing McKay's nefarious activities and attendant political corruption, with the goal of taking down McKay and his machine. The group included the Fords, father and son, and with wider community support they succeeded. McKay "fled" Grand Rapids to Miami. The McKay story tells us much about human nature, greed, and money's power to corrupt.

Lunch - Reserve by Thursday, January 11

Planning to stay the whole day? Bring your own lunch or order a boxed lunch from Schnitz Deli. Lunches must be reserved and paid for in advance; prices as stated upon check-out. Choose a turkey, ham, roast beef, or vegetarian sandwich. Also included in the lunches are potato salad, coleslaw, pickle spear, cookie, condiments, and utensils.

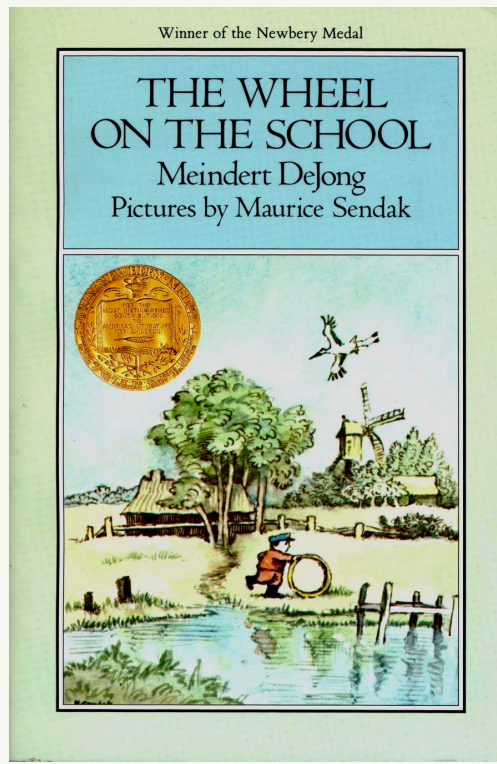
To reserve a lunch visit our website at historydetectivesgr.org



1:00pm - 1:45pm

The Legacy of Captain Charles E. Belknap: 100 Years after The Yesterdays of Grand Rapids by Colleen Alles Sponsored by: The Grand Rapids Historical Society and the Grand Rapids Public Library

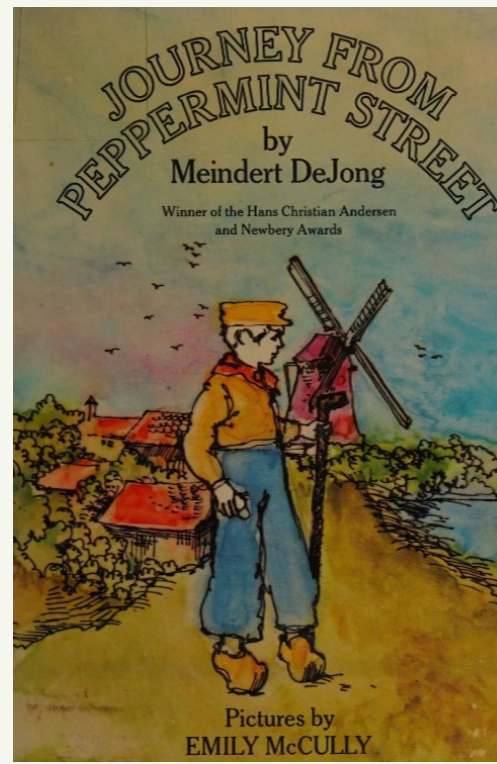
Captain Charles E. Belknap (1846 – 1929) is a familiar figure to Grand Rapids. He has his own neighborhood, a bronze statue downtown, a colorful mural on I-196, and a charming book of vignettes to his name. Yet there is so much more to discover about his extraordinary life. In his eighty-two years, this Civil War veteran was mayor of Grand Rapids, a Republican congressman, founder of the successful Belknap Wagon and Sleigh Company, and instrumental in the development of both the fire service and the young Boy Scouts of the city. Among his many accomplishments, Charles Belknap was also a gifted writer. A century after his local history columns were collected and published by Dean-Hicks as the well-thumbed local history book, *The Yesterdays of Grand Rapids*, it's time to take a closer look at his writings and his contributions to West Michigan.



2:00pm - 2:45pm

Return to Peppermint Street: The Life and Works of Grand Rapids Author Meindert DeJong by Adam Oster Sponsored by: The Western Michigan Genealogical Society, the Library of Michigan, and the Grand Rapids Public Library

Throughout the mid-20th century, Grand Rapids author Meindert DeJong was a prolific author of nearly 30 books and the recipient of almost every major award for children's and juvenile literature offered in the United States, save the Laura Ingalls Wilder Award. He was also the first American to win the international Hans Christian Andersen Award. Come discover the life behind this largely private author. Learn about DeJong's experiences as a young immigrant in Grand Rapids, his service during World War II, and the many other life events that influenced and shaped his writing.



3:00pm - 3:45pm

Coldbrook Creek: Rediscovering a Hidden Urban Stream by Peter and Mary Lewandoski Sponsored by: The Grand Rapids City Archives

Coldbrook Creek was once a visibly vital feature of the Grand Rapids area landscape, winding its way from Reeds Lake to the Grand River. Native Americans almost certainly recognized what it had to offer, and shortly after European settlement it became an integral part of the growing city's infrastructure. Coldbrook Creek also played a role in the daily lives of neighborhood residents. Over the decades, though, the creek slowly faded from view as a large percentage of it was incrementally diverted into underground culverts. Though mostly hidden now, Coldbrook Creek continues to play a role in the unfolding history of the Grand Rapids area and is worth a closer look.

****Some local authors will sell Grand Rapids-related books at the event**.**

History Detectives 2024 Sponsors



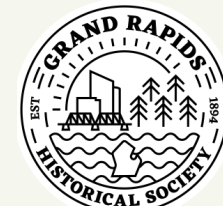
Grand Rapids Historical Commission



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