

Center Page

Sims, Clarey To Tell Story Of Early African American Women In Grand Rapids

Open 1890s newspapers and you will find reports of diverse Grand Rapids women hosting state- and nation- wide gatherings, publishing denunciations of racist articles, and reporting on fascinating club activities.

Local women's clubs proliferated so rapidly and organized women into such a social force that newspapers were compelled to create new sections featuring their plans and activities.

What is revealed in these early accounts? That Grand Rapids Jewish women, Polish Catholic women, all women, were gathering for self- education and charitable purposes, hosting state- and nation- wide gatherings — and stepping up publicly to denounce racist articles as did the African American Married Ladies Nineteenth Century Club in 1898.

In 1907, five local African American women's groups, representing a miniscule percentage of the city's population, hosted the Michigan Federation of Colored Women's Clubs.

Delegates were welcomed by the Grand Rapids mayor and treated to gracious receptions and trolley tours. Who were these hosts? They included leaders like Emma Ford and Mary Roberts Tate, individual African American women who began speaking their minds in public, on area stages and in newspapers both.

For more 25 years the Greater Grand Rapids Women's History Council has underwritten efforts dedicated to rediscovering and crediting the rich past of area women, including the history of the 115 - year - old Grand Rapids Study Club, the oldest African American women's club still in existence.

On February 11th, As a



part of the Program Series of the Grand Rapids Historical Society, the Grand Rapids Study Club and the Greater Grand Rapids Women's History Council will co - sponsor "Community Builders: Early African American Women in Grand Rapids."

This event will begin at 7:00 pm at the John F. Donnelly Conference Center at Aquinas College, 157 Woodward Lane SE, Grand Rapids. The public

is invited to attend.

The presenters, Yvonne Sims and Jo Ellyn Clarey will tell a fascinating story that corrects errors and fills gaps in Grand Rapids history.

A native Grand Rapidian and retired Grand Rapids Public School teacher and administrator, Yvonne Sims has served as the President of the Grand Rapids Study Club, organized local discussions of the National Issues Forum and is currently

a Lifestyles columnist for The Grand Rapids Times.

Jo Ellyn Clarey has taught at a variety of academic institutions. A recipient of the 1999 Albert Baxter Award in local history, she has served on the boards of the Greater Grand Rapids Women's History Council, the GR Historical Society, the GR Historical Commission, and has organized women's history research and programming statewide and nationally.

History Maker, Mrs. Juanita Goodwin Celebrates 90th Birthday



By Rick Pulliam
The Grand Rapids Times

Retired educator and administrator from the Kalamazoo Public School system for 35 years, Mrs. Juanita E. Goodwin celebrated her 90th birthday along with friends and relatives at the

Western Michigan University Fetzer Center in Kalamazoo, Michigan on January 23rd.

Goodwin began her career at Kalamazoo Public Schools as a physical education teacher and retired a principal in 1992.

Mrs. Goodwin was born on January 19, 1926 to sergeant and Mrs. Granet Overby in Nogales, Arizona where her father was stationed as part of the all Black 25th Infantry. With the closing of Camp Harry J. Jones in 1933, Master Sergeant Garnett Overby, wife Juanita and their two children Garnet and Juanita were transferred to Fort Huachuca.

In 1943, Juanita moved to Kalamazoo, Michigan with her mother and attended Western Michigan College of Education.

She met her husband Robert (Al) Goodwin, while working at the Douglass Community Center in 1949. The couple wed on Saturday, July 19, 1950, at Allen Chapel African Methodist Episcopal (AME)

The couple tried to purchase a home for several years dur-

ing the 1950's but to no avail, because agents and brokers refused to sell homes to African Americans. Upon having a conversation with one of her colleagues, who suggested that the couple build their own home, the couple moved into their home at 124 Pratt Road in 1965.

Their first child Eve Adele, born March 10, 1966 adopted the Goodwin's as her parents in June, 1966. and Addison, born June 17, 1967, came into the family a year later.

Mrs. Goodwin majored in physical education at WMU, graduating in 1948 as a history maker. She took up golf in 1947, as a student and began competing in City tournaments in 1952.

She was also a varsity tennis player, played softball on a state championship team, field hockey and also played city league basketball. Mrs. Goodwin also trophied in table tennis, badminton and bowling. She later earned a Master's Degree in Counseling in 1957.

"In those days, women athletes were not recognized and did not receive "W" letters or get invitations to the annual varsity athletic banquet," she said.

At age 70, Juanita Goodwin was inducted into the Greater Kalamazoo Golf Hall of Fame in 1996. She won the Kalamazoo Women's Golf Association All-City Match Play Tournament in 1956 and 1957. In her 1956 victory, she triumphed with nine one - putt greens. She also teamed with Bill Hodge to win the Mixed Two - Ball Championship several times. In later years, she enjoyed victories in a number of Hoopster's Tournaments.

In 2004, Lady Bronco Juanita Goodwin was inducted into the Western Michigan University Department of Health, Physical Education and Recreation Outstanding Alumni Honors Academy.

The Western Michigan College of Education recently cited her as one of the school's graduates who have made significant contributions.