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A Genealogical Treasure The WWI Registration Cards of American Women

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Michigan Genealogical Council
Virtual Program

Upon the entry of the U.S. into World War I in April 1917, virtually overnight suffragists and other women leaders organized 17,000 local committees to aid the *Woman's Committee of the Council of National Defense (CND)*. Charged to enable home front projects overseeing the nation's wellbeing (food, health, women's safety in industry), the women's committees also undertook the largest census of American women ever conducted. Today, the jewel in the crown of Grand Rapids women's history collections is a new, fully searchable database featuring this source material collected over a century ago in the spring of 1918. The actual cards were rediscovered by women's historians in the 21st century, and their data is available thanks to years of data entry by volunteers, many from the Western Michigan Genealogical Society.

T	U	T	U	T	U	T	U	T	U	T	U	T	U	T	U	T	U
Agricultural	Clerical	Domestic	Industrial	Training	Professional	Student	Public Service	Social Service	Red X & Allied Relief	Miscellaneous	Contributions						
Woman's Committee of Council of National Defense. (Sign only one of these cards) Name in full <u>Burgess Ethel J. (Mrs. Theo. J.)</u> (Last Name) (First Name) Address <u>654 Sherman</u> Tel. <u>344</u> (City or town) (No. and street or R. D. No.) (No.) Age <u>40</u> Married or single <u>married</u> Color or race <u>white</u> Country of birth <u>U. S.</u> Citizen: By birth <u>U. S.</u> By naturalization _____ Persons dependent upon you, if any <u>2 for care</u> Service offered (specify whether volunteer, expenses only, or paid) <u>Volunteer</u> Time pledged for service <u>Three half days</u> If training is wanted, specify line _____ Tuition <u>paid or free</u>																	
Present occupation <u>Housewife</u> By whom employed _____ Where employed <u>own home</u> References <u>Kent Savings Bank</u> Education (graduate or length of time attended): Grammar _____ College (give name) _____ High or private <u>private</u> Specialized training <u>Kindergarten training</u> Emergency service (specify whether volunteer, expenses only, or paid) <u>Volunteer</u> Will you go anywhere? _____ Home town only? <u>Yes</u> In United States? _____ How soon can you start? _____																	
ENCIRCLE NUMBERS TO LEFT OF OCCUPATIONS IN WHICH YOU HAVE HAD EXPERIENCE OR TRAINING. UNDERLINE THOSE IN WHICH YOU WISH TO GIVE SERVICE.																	
I. Agricultural 1 Dairy 2 Farming 3 Fruit raising 4 Gardening 5 Poultry raising 6 Stock raising II. Clerical 10 Accountant 11 Bookkeeper 12 Cashier 13 Clerical work (gen.) 14 Filing 15 Office assistant 16 Office manager 17 Private secretary 18 Typewriter 19 Shipping clerk 20 Stenographer III. Domestic 30 Care of children. 31 Cleaning	32 Cooking 33 Housekeeping 34 Industries by home 35 Knitting employ't 36 Laundress 37 Practical nurse 38 Trained attendant 39 Seamstress 40 Waitress IV. Industrial 50 Baker 51 Boarding house 52 Buyer 53 Cook 54 Camp 55 Institutional 56 Dressmaker 57 Needle trades 58 Food trades 59 Leather trades 60 Hat trades 61 Metal trades	61 Factory—Cont'd 62 Munitions 63 Paper and printing 64 Wood trades 65 Textiles 66 Forewoman 67 Inspector 68 Janitress (cleaner) 69 Laundry operative 70 Manager 71 Manicure and haird'r 72 Messenger 73 Milliner 74 Retail dealer 75 Restaurant 76 Saleswoman 77 Waitress V. Professional 80 Actress 81 Architect 82 Artist 83 Author 84 Chemist	85 Dentist 86 Dietician 87 Draftsman 88 Engineer 89 Handicrafts: 90 Metals 91 Textiles 92 Journalist 93 Laboratory worker 94 Languages (foreign): Read well _____ Speak well _____ 95 Lawyer 96 Lecturer 97 Librarian 98 Musician 99 Osteopath 100 Pharmacist 101 Photographer 102 Physician	103 Publicity 104 Statistician 105 Surgeon 106 Teacher (subject): Of adults _____ Of children <u>A. Anderson</u> VI. Public Service 110 Inspector 111 Institutional mgr. 112 Mail carrier 113 Police patrol 114 Postmistress 115 Signaling 116 Telegraphy 117 Wireless 118 Telephone 119 Aviatix 120 Horse 121 Motor car 122 Motor cycle 123 Power boat 124 Railroad	VII. Social Service 130 Camp work 131 Charities—Which? 132 Club executive 133 District nursing 134 Hospital 135 Industrial welfare 136 Investigator 137 Playgrounds 138 Protective assoc'n 139 Recreational: 140 Dancing 140 Music 141 Reading aloud 142 Relief visiting 143 Settlement 144 Social clubs VIII. Red Cross & Allied Relief Instruction: 150 Surgical dressings 151 Dietetics 152 Elementary hyg.	Instruction—Cont'd 153 First Aid 154 Garments— Hospital Civilian IX. Miscellaneous 170 Unoccupied Woman 171 _____ X. Contributions A. Ambulance B. Driver for car. C. Duplicating mach. D. Funds E. Home for Conval- escent hospital F. Hospital G. Laboratory H. Motor boat or car I. Typewriter J. Share home with widow or children K. _____											

Registration card for Ethel Burgess, Women's Committee of the Council of National Defense, 1918

Note: now at <https://grpl.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p16055coll5>, the digital collection, can also be located via the Grand Rapids Public Library's department page at <https://www.grpl.org/research/history/>, especially after all digital collections are soon migrated and addresses changed. The box labelled "Digital Collections" will note the change.

Buried Treasure: By featuring a unique local women's history collection from Kent County, Michigan, this presentation aims to send you digging in your own backyards. Over 900,000 cards were collected in Michigan alone (minus Detroit), and even most women's historians are unaware that during World War I over 4,000,000 American women registered for war service with the CND, sometimes from the midst of the 1918 pandemic. Participating in the most extensive census of American women ever undertaken, one thousand registrars in Grand Rapids alone collected data in roughly 150 fields for half the city's female adult population. Kent County overall registered around 23,000 women, and their cards have been miraculously saved, rediscovered, processed, and digitized. Although many cards nationwide have probably been destroyed, we have increasing evidence of women's history-in-hiding all over the nation.

Digging into Details: Of primary interest to genealogists, of course, will be the irresistible detail: for example, learning that great-grandma was willing to travel anywhere in the world for war work. Space on the backs of the cards was available for comment, and registrars frequently ignored instructions and added details about health (a limp caused by a lightning strike), general impressions ("not a very neat housekeeper"), desires (to be become an aviatrix), and abilities ("can use typewriter, has travelled all over the U.S."). Not only can genealogists' enhance their personal stories, they can research clusters of relatives and neighbors to find emerging patterns. *** Generally, the importance of the WWI cards can hardly be exaggerated. Accumulated data from one community's cards, as well as *en masse*, is of sociological, geographical, genealogical, and historical interest; and potential subjects for consideration include ethnic breakdowns, educational backgrounds, immigration history, and work experience, to name only a few.

Prospecting for Lost Cards: Audience and readers are encouraged to locate more card collections *and their contextual materials*--including correspondence, minutes, newspaper articles--in their respective locales. Individual names can be found scattered throughout all these documents, and genealogical clues in the materials often point toward other sources. Now that Kent County information is searchable online, other collections from archives and historical societies across the nation have begun to appear. The Greater Grand Rapids Women's History Council has begun a web page listing them: <https://www.ggrwhc.org/projects/wwi/> Each has different aspects and a different story. Women's cards from Flint, now housed at the state archive, were found in the city clerk's office. Township materials might be located in disparate closets and basements. Tips can sometimes be found in local newspapers. Please search the nooks and crannies of your home institutions for unrecognized WWI cards. Find your own ancestors and honor their four million sisters nationwide by bringing them into the light!

Background reading about WWI Woman's Committee activities:

Ida Clyde Clarke's *American Women & the World War*

Caroline Bartlett Crane's *History of the Women's Committee, Michigan Division*

Report of the Woman's Section of the Indiana State Council of Defense

Places to visit:

Grand Rapids Public Library: the actual cards and other materials
Indiana State Archives: Extensive collection of materials from the Indiana Council
Indiana's Jasper County Historical Society Museum: cards and extensive local materials
Miami County Historical Museum & Pulaski County Public Library in Indiana

Creating *more* archival resources--local women's history groups:

The Greater Grand Rapids Women's History Council (GGRWHC) was formed in 1988 when local archives could suggest neither material nor ideas toward shaping a community women's history. Over thirty years later the group remains a pioneer in its efforts to illustrate how local material can change the national narrative of women's history. It models methods of collecting and proselytizes about how much women's history remains to be found, shaped, and used. The sheer presence of the GGRWHC has caused fresh looks at local resources, and its serious work has generated new collections. In particular, it has partnered with the Grand Rapids Public Library archive to recruit and train researchers, to encourage donations of archival materials, to publish bibliographies of holdings, and to digitize materials for broader dissemination.

Much work by genealogists, of course, has been bedrock material for women's historians. Now historians are returning the favor by creating new sources of data, like an *area suffrage history* listing many individual names. We found local leader Emily Burton Ketcham through national resources, located descendants, and ensured the donation of this state leader's scrapbook, giving us a start: <https://www.grpl.org/uploads/grhsc/293.pdf>
Now the GGRWHC has created a web landing page featuring a new digital exhibit highlighting the local and state movements' integration with the national: <https://ggrwhc.org/suffrage-home/>

The early GGRWHC published *Women in Grand Rapids History*, which became the model for updating archival holdings digitally (<https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/003582756>). Throughout the 1990s, it kept up pressure on other local organizations, like the Ladies Literary Club and St. Cecilia Music Society, to donate their archives to the GRPL. Finally, a major financial donation, which the GGRWHC helped guide to the GRPL, is seeing them digitized: <https://grpl.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15416coll3>

During the 1990s GGRWHC interviewers began a major *oral history collection*, now entirely digitized and undergoing more sophisticated processing: <https://www.ggrwhc.org/projects/oral-histories/> Not only are individual names named, the collection has linked up to more names by contributing to academic histories like Lisa Boehm's *Making a Way Out of No Way*, about domestic workers of the Second Great Migration, and Todd Robinson's book about the black freedom struggle in Grand Rapids, *City Within a City*.

The intersecting interests of the GRPL and GGRWHC have had consequences for genealogists, especially as the repository on women’s history has grown and evolved into the digital age. As the archive has attracted more donations on its own, local researchers have spent more time constructing resources like a *Grand Rapids women’s electoral history*. Efficiently organized data on public elections is difficult to locate, but we are managing to create a comprehensive electoral history for Grand Rapids women. We know of no other city’s attempts, making it virtually impossible to analyze more broadly this area of women’s political experience—or to name individual women who ran for public office elsewhere. (See sample spreadsheet below.)

Finished with the earliest years, our project has proven that Grand Rapids women have been breaking down barriers by running for elective office since 1887. Before the 19th Amendment granted them full suffrage in 1920 and decades before second-wave feminists in the 1970s thought they were running for the first time, 47 local women ran in 82 different campaigns between 1887 and 1920. See our new web page, *Women Who Ran*: ggrwhc.org/women-who-ran/ Soon, their names will join others on a national crowdsourcing website attempting to honor the earliest U.S. women’s electoral history: <http://www.herhatwasinthering.org/>. We hope cities across the nation will create their own women’s electoral histories and share the names of women who threw their hats in the ring.

Over the past thirty years GGRWHC researchers using GRPL materials have shaped material into articles for academic journals and inspired a ground-breaking dissertation on the women’s committees of the WWI CND.

First Name	Middle Name	Maiden Name	Last Name	Birth Date	Death Date	General Occupation	Social Reform Affiliation	Marital Status
Frances	S.	Van Vechten	Hillyer	09/03/1846	10/26/24	Physician	Suffrage, Education, Temperance, Women's Clubs, Other (medicine, hospitals)	Widowed
Margaret	A.		Edison					
Melissa	E.	Smith	Holden	00/00/1832	09/23/15	Teacher	Women's Clubs, Education	Married
Harriet	A.		Cook	00/00/1849		Dressmaker	Suffrage, Women's Clubs	Married
Hannah		Chadbourne	Wallin	02/14/1846	06/14/14		Suffrage	Married
Lydia		De Camp	Goodrich	08/13/1840	03/20/25		Women's Clubs, Education,	Married
Emma		McDonald	Coppens	03/10/1849	07/25/30	Artist, Art Instructor	Suffrage, Education (Froebel Club)	Married
Margaret	M.		Parsons	00/00/1856			Suffrage, Women's Clubs	Single
Nancy	Louisa		Andrus	07/00/1850		Physician	Women's Clubs, Education	Married
Lydia		De Camp	Goodrich	08/13/1840	03/20/25		Suffrage, Women's Clubs,	Married
Emma	M.	McDonald	Coppens	03/10/1849	07/25/30	Artist	Suffrage, Education (Froebel Club)	Married
H. Margaret			Downs	00/00/1865			Suffrage, Civic Reform, Women's Clubs	Married
Effie			Van Valkenberg	00/00/1862	00/00/1928	Music Teacher	Women's Clubs	Single
Margaret			Andrew	09/00/1844	02/13/15		Suffrage, Educator, Women's	Married
Mary	M.		Bryant	06/00/1844			Temperance, Women's Clubs, Suffrage	Married
Lydia		Turner	Harrington	04/30/1838	02/20/26			Married
Nancy	Louisa		Andrus	07/00/1850		Physician	Women's Clubs, Education	Married
Margaret			Andrew	09/00/1844	02/13/15		Suffrage, Educator, Women's	Married
Nancy	Louisa		Andrus	07/00/1850		Physician	Women's Clubs, Education	Married
Josephine		Ahnefeldt	Goss	04/10/1859	11/21/38	Educator	Suffrage, Education, Temperance	Married
Frances		Bailey	Turner	08/05/1854	07/27/46		Women's Clubs, Suffrage,	Widowed
Nancy	Louisa		Andrus	07/00/1850		Physician	Women's Clubs, Education	Married
Josephine	C.	Ahnefeldt	Goss	04/10/1859	11/21/38	Educator	Suffrage, Education, Temperance	Married
Frances		Bailey	Turner	08/05/1854	07/27/46	Suffrage	Women's Clubs, Suffrage,	Widowed

Sample biographical information from the Grand Rapids women's electoral history spreadsheet

More on Finding Ancestors in Archives:

Because researching women is generally difficult, the following offers fuller information about searching them out in lesser known places. *Courtesy of Julie Tabberer, Head of Grand Rapids History & Special Collections, Grand Rapids Public Library*

Why unusual archival resources can be helpful in researching women: Genealogists know that historical women are hard to find because of name changes, laws about owning property, conventions about using men's names in city directories and newspapers--and, assuming their unimportance, that women's personal and organizational records have simply not been collected. Don't give up on finding a female ancestor: go beyond the standard genealogical sources!

A progression of sources for genealogists using more typical archival resources:

School yearbooks: When you know your ancestor's educational background, check on school activities in yearbooks from local high schools. Specific interests and clubs (ie, the 1899 Junior Suffrage Club in Grand Rapids) might provide clues as to where to look for her later.

Women's club minutes and membership lists: Women were at the center of nineteenth-century reform groups, whose records can often be found in local repositories. For one example, the GRPL has an excellent collection from the Women's Christian Temperance Union, whose members were often engaged in other women's organizations and reform groups and whose names might also be found on local suffrage honor rolls.

Society pages in period newspapers: Women's pages began during the 1880s and were full of information about women and what they were doing. Their club meetings were reported on in detail and often listed members' names. Don't assume that these pages dealt only with high society. A range of clubs were covered, and in 1890s Grand Rapids, African American women's clubs also reported on their activities for the pages. Generally not indexed, these are worth scanning.

Check for women's presence in unique collections: Large companies often published employee *newsletters*, such as the Berkey & Gay furniture factory's *Shop Mark*, which lists many names and includes birth and death announcements, weddings, and promotions, as well as gossip. Grand Rapids has also benefitted from the peculiar generosity of a pre-Google news clipper and the donor of an extremely large photograph collection. ***The Carl Bajema clippings collection*** includes an enormous offering of news articles, fully indexed, on women's history before 1930. See whether your library still keeps clippings files. Finally, ***The Robinson Studio photo collection*** has roughly 950,000 negatives and many surprises.

And, circling back! Don't forget the possibilities of ***World War I card collections*** and contextual materials. Cards were collected for women across all boundaries of race, religion, education, ethnicity, and class. Keep looking!