



Southwest Michigan Black Heritage Society

Spring 2006 Newsletter



Stories of History Come Alive at Annual Book Fair

Fascinating tales of area African Americans and what they contribute to the communities of Southwest Michigan and the country, was the focus of the Southwest Michigan Black Heritage Society's 2nd Annual African American Book Fair on February 18, at the Douglass Community Center.

The theme of this year's fair, "Celebrating the African American Journey: Memoirs and Life Stories of Southwest Michigan," was shared through the stories from nationally-recognized authors, area veterans and students who have researched area history through the organization's History Detectives project.

Waldenbooks, the Kalamazoo Public Library Reading Together Program, the Lewis Walker Institute and various others helped sponsor this event where more than 300 area residents attended.

In conjunction with this year's Kalamazoo Public Library's Reading Together book, *The Things They Carried*, by Tim O'Brien, African American veterans Harold Bulger, Al Dixon and David Mims and Buddy Hannah, discussed their views on the subject, "Vietnam Memories: An African American Perspective."

Middle school students shared the African American history they have researched and displayed their works as History Detectives. This effort was sponsored by a grant from the Kalamazoo Community Foundation.

The book fair also included a Life Writing workshop with Bobbe Taber, genealogy arts and crafts projects for children, free children's books and African American family history planning guides. Local authors were on site to share their works.

This year's book fair was a success. Next year's fair promises to be even more exciting as we collaborate with more area organizations to share the importance of preserving our history.



Buddy Hannah speaks about his years in Vietnam during a panel discussion at the 2nd Annual African American Book Fair in February, held at Douglass Community Center.



Left: Author Anna-Lisa Cox, shared passages from her historical work, *A Stronger Kinship: One Town's Extraordinary Story of Hope and Faith*, based on the history of race relations in Covert, MI, from the 1860s into the 20th century. Right: Judge Curtis Bell presented the keynote address on the importance of history and preserving it for future generations.

FEATURED HISTORIANS

Photos from
Dorothy and
Michael Martich
Collection at
Willard Library
in Battle Creek.

FOR YEARS, HISTORIANS MICHAEL AND DOROTHY MARTICH COLLECTED NEWS AND PHOTOGRAPHS DEPICTING THE HISTORY OF AFRICAN AMERICANS IN BATTLE CREEK.

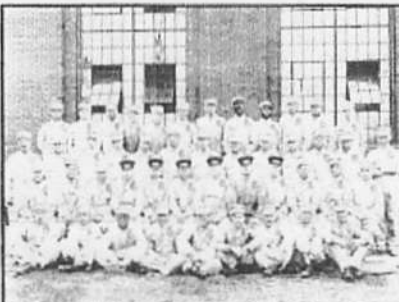
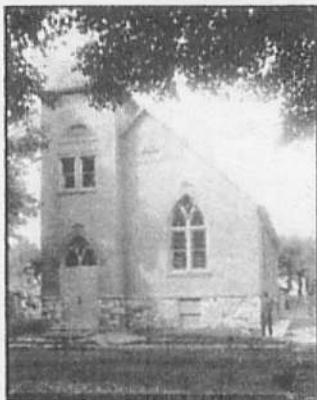
THEY PUT THOSE ITEMS INTO BLACK NOTE-BOOK BINDERS AND PLACED THEM FOR PUBLIC VIEWING AT WILLARD LIBRARY IN BATTLE CREEK. SOON, THEIR BINDERS SPREAD ACROSS SHELVES IN THE LIBRARY'S HISTORY ROOM.

THE INTEREST OF THE LOCALS IN VIEWING PHOTOS AND NEWS-OFTEN ABOUT THEIR OWN FAMILIES-BECAME SO POPULAR THAT THE LIBRARY SCANNED THE HUNDREDS OF PHOTOGRAPHS INTO THEIR LIBRARY DATA BASE.

TO VIEW THIS ASTOUNDING COLLECTION OF HISTORY CAUGHT ON CAMERA, VISIT WWW.WILLARD.LIB.MI.US.

WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF OUR HISTORY DETECTIVES, MEMBERS AND THE COMMUNITY, WE TOO ARE ASSEMBLING A SIMILAR COLLECTION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY IN SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN. THE PERMANENT DISPLAY IS LOCATED AT POWELL LIBRARY.

IF YOU HAVE PHOTOS WE CAN INCLUDE IN THIS PERMANENT COLLECTION, CALL US AT 269-873-2327.



Clockwise: A dance at Hamblin Community Center around 1945; members of the Elks basketball team mid-1900s; soldiers at Fort Custer during World War II; workers at Consumers Power, around 1950s; Mt. Zion A.M.E. Church on Van Buren St. in Battle Creek founded in 1855.

Upcoming Events of the Southwest Michigan Black Heritage Society

Membership Meetings:

Membership meetings are held from 5:30-7 p.m. at the Powell Library, 1000 W. Paterson St. The next meetings are:

July 15-Annual membership barbeque-Place TBA
Oct. 17-Learn about area African Americans whose courage and hard work laid the foundation for future generations.

*Each meeting will include hand-outs to help you in your research and projects.

For more information, call 269-873-2327.

Next Meeting

5:30 to 7 p.m.

April 19

"Where Do I Begin?"

**How to create a
family history with
photographs and documents.**

President's Message

It is the purpose of our Society to celebrate the richness of African American history and culture in our area. Rather than a dry listing of dates, it is the stories of families and individuals that illustrate for us the contributions that African Americans have made **against all odds**. These stories live on through photographs, documents, oral histories, news paper articles, and historical records.

We have made it our work to find those stories and share them with you. I've been sometimes asked why we want to dredge up the painful and humiliating history of blacks in America. The answer is summed up very nicely in lines from Maya Angelou's poem, "Still I Rise"

You may write me down in history/With your bitter, twisted lies,/You may trod me in the very dirt/But still, like dust, I'll rise. .../Did you want to see me broken?/Bowed head and lowered eyes?/Shoulders falling down like teardrops./Weakened by my soulful cries. .../You may shoot me with your words,/You may cut me with your eyes,/You may kill me with your hatefulness,/But still, like air, I'll rise. .../Out of the huts of history's shame/I rise/Up from a past that's rooted in pain/I rise .../Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,/I am the dream and the hope of the slave./I rise/I rise/I rise.

We don't look back and see the pain, the suffering, the degradation. We look back and see what we have overcome, our triumphs, and our courage. We rise!

Donna Odom, president SMBHS



First class of SMBHS History Detectives recognized for their research

Four area students helped us take a step in preserving our area history as History Detectives. Students Douglas Davidson, Jasmine Davidson, and Velzon Davidson, and Paxton Plum of Paramount Charter Academy spent 12 weeks researching history in Vandalia, Almena, and Battle Creek.

During their efforts they were assisted by historians Denise Miller and Michelle Johnson of the Michigan Underground Railroad Freedom Trails Commission, Sharon Carlson of the Western Michigan University Archives, and intern Christiana Hanson, a Kalamazoo College history major, and historians Michael and Dorothy Martich of Battle Creek.

The research of the students will become a part of the SMBHS collection at Powell Branch Library, and future presentations.

For information on how to get other students involved as History Detectives, call 269-873-2327.



History Detectives from left: Paxton Plum, Velzon, Douglas and Jasmine Davidson receive their program completion certificates from (back from left) Donna Odom, president-SMBHS, and Sharon Carlson, WMU Archives.

