

JOIN US TODAY!

Mail membership form to: Southwest Michigan Black Heritage Society
2507 Parkview, Kalamazoo, MI 49008

As a member, you will receive advance notice of all programs and events, newsletters, discounted rates on workshops, seminars, official publications and more!

Please enroll me under the following category (annual rate):

Adult Membership: \$12.50 _____

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(Two adults and children under 18)

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Please indicate how you can help our efforts:

I have family documents and photographs you can scan to become part of the archives.

I would like to help with research.

I am a photographer or videographer and can help document some of the historic places and significant people in Southwest Michigan.

I can design a website

I can help organize the archives.

I am an artist and I can help design exhibits and displays.

I can donate computer equipment.

Other: _____

THE CONNECTION TO YESTERDAY...
Newsletter Summer 2007
A Family Affair



On May 19 descendents of early African American families of southwest Michigan gathered to display their history and treasures and to exchange family information. At the first ever "Family Affair," held at the Kalamazoo Public Library, it was evident that the hours and hours of sifting through old photographs, poring over genealogical records, and interviewing family members has been a labor of love for these families.

Representatives from the Kalamazoo Public Library, the Kalamazoo Valley Museum, the Western Michigan University Archives, and the Kalamazoo Genealogical Society took part in the program as well. Family members had the opportunity to ask questions, scan documents, and get advice on conservation and preservation. Fortitude, Inc, the graphics design firm of Sean Hollins, demonstrated restoration of photographs and ideas for family publications.

Valerie Osborne, Mary Mitchell, and Suzanne Davis proudly displayed research, photographs, and memorabilia representing the Hackley, Conner, Pompey, and King families of Kalamazoo County and Covert, Michigan. Information and history of their families can be traced back to the 1700s. These families, beginning with William Conner, play a major role in the narratives featured in A Stronger Kinship by Ana Lisa Cox, based on the story of the people of Covert, Michigan.

Bette Boulding represented the Jones family of Kent County. Bette's ancestors were free people of color from New York who established a farm in Byron Center, MI, near Grand Rapids, in the mid-1800s. A family member began doing family research at least twenty years ago, and Bette has come into possession of many of the family photographs and other memorabilia that she was able to share at the event.

Attendees were impressed by the display presented by Gwen Tulk and Charles Fulbright, representing the Staffords and Russells of Kalamazoo County. Designated the "custodian of family portraits" a number of years ago, Gwen began storing the family photographs in albums and caring for the family portraits for both the Stafford and Russell branches of the family. Research on these families goes back to the early 1800s.



Sherman Ampey and Darlene Wilson of Paw Paw, Ed and Joan Bradley of Kalamazoo, and George and Kathy Russell of Paw Paw wowed attendees with a treasure trove of research, photographs, and memorabilia of the Ampey and Goens families of Kalamazoo County and Paw Paw. Many years of dedicated research and hard work have yielded so many files on this family that Sherman Ampey has had to provide a separate structure to house it. This summer the Society begins a major project working with the Ampeys to transcribe and organize much of their rich history.

Finally, an impressive exhibit by Maurice Sanders chronicled the history of the Sanders and Allens of Cass County. (See page 2 interview with Maurice)

It was impossible to attend this program without becoming aware of how the history of these families and the many other black families not represented that day truly gives a picture of the African American experience in southwest Michigan.

Maurice Sanders Featured Historian



Our featured historian this month is Maurice W. Sanders. Cass County, Michigan, Potter Township, Calvin Center Area, that is the connection Maurice Sanders has with Southwest Michigan. He now resides in Novi, Michigan, near Detroit, but his passion for genealogy and recording his family history has not diminished. He can trace some of both the early Allens, the maternal side, and Sanders, the paternal side, back to about 1790. Solomon Sanders was born in 1786. Emory Arthur Allen was born in 1780. Much of what he has been able to unearth has come from the records kept by his maternal grandmother, Rosanna Allen Wilson (1880-1967). She compiled a lot of information and wrote in her journals after she would talk to some of the older people in the area. She kept a number of ledgers with the dates of death of family members, how old they were when they died, and where they were buried. She was also instrumental in the development of the Allen Family Reunion which started in about 1930. She had already done a family tree as early as 1924. Her records were quite detailed, sometimes going so far as to include who preached the funeral, who sang at the funeral, and what Bible verse was quoted in the sermon. Obituaries, letters, and artifacts were also part of what she collected. Maurice's mother also assisted his grandmother in compiling the history, which makes Maurice a third-generation genealogist.



SMBHS WELCOMES SUMMER INTERN



Our student intern for the summer is Keyontah Humphries, a junior from Kalamazoo College. Keyontah is a native of Farmington Hills, MI and is majoring in Anthropology with a minor in Political Science. She has had previous internship experiences with Vanguard Community Development Corporation in Detroit, a management consulting firm in Southfield, VOTPAC in Detroit, and with several political campaigns, including the Committee to elect Alexander Lipsey to the State Senate in 2006. She has received a number of scholarships. During her six weeks with us this summer, Keyontah will be assisting in our strategic planning activities and conducting research. In her own words, this is why Keyontah wanted to work with our organization and what she feels she will get from her experience:

"Because of my undergraduate studies Kalamazoo and its surrounding communities has been home for me for the last three years, and as my fourth year draws near I felt it important to learn more about the people, especially the Black people, who contribute to the richness of this area. I was interested in working for the Society because I felt it was a great opportunity to learn about Black History in a way that is usually not discussed or documented. I was thrilled to have the chance to work with the organization - the board and all its member, who are in the midst of re-focusing and strategizing. But the thing that most moved me about the internship was the opportunity to interact with families in Southwest Michigan that have been blessed with stories, photographs, documents, and a plethora of family heirlooms that mark the Emancipation of African Americans in this country.

I believe the time shared with the Southwest Michigan Black Heritage Society is beneficial to my personal and professional development. I have learned a great deal about preservation, oral history, and genealogy. More than ever, I now look forward to spending time with the elders of my family and absorbing all they have to give. Because of my background in Anthropology and Sociology I am definite that the skills learned and the knowledge imparted from the SMBHS and all the wonderful families I've met will follow me into my profession."

We look forward to a productive and exciting summer with Keyontah!

INTERVIEW WITH HOWIE PEAK

Head chef at R. Stanley's Diner, Chef of the Year, and SMBHS Board Member



Q: Howie, were you born and raised in Kalamazoo?

A: No, I was born in Honolulu, Hawaii. My father was a career Marine. He was born in Kalamazoo.

Q: When did the family return to Kalamazoo?

A: In 1960.

Q: Where did you go to school?

A: Roosevelt Elementary for K-6, Northeastern Junior High. I remember Gwen Tulk who was the librarian there. I also remember Alma Powell who was at East Branch Library at that time. That may be where my interest in books and reading came from. I went to high school at Loy Norrix.

Q: When did you first develop an interest in cooking?

A: My father was a Marine Corps mess sergeant, and I remember spending a lot of time in the mess hall and the officers' club. My dad would set up a field kitchen when we went camping. He'd take a plywood box, put it on a stand and set up a table. He'd cook on a Coleman camp stove. He made the best soups, always from scratch. He retired from the Marine Corps after 20 years and 2 months at the age of 42. When we came back to Michigan, he went over to the V.A. Hospital in Battle Creek and was chief supervisor of dietetics. Maybe that's a fancy way of saying head chef.

Q: When do you remember first trying your hand at cooking?

A: My first experiment with making stew was a disaster. I was making it with a ketchup base, but it just

didn't come out right. But I learned from that experience and I never made the same mistakes again.

Holidays for us involved three days of preparation. We had two peach trees in our garden, and apples from our neighbor's tree would fall in our yard. My dad canned fruit, made sauerkraut, all that.

My first job was at Schensul's Café in the early 70s. It was where Epic Bistro is located now. I was a bus boy. After that job, I did a lot of other things and didn't work in a kitchen again until I went to the Radisson in 2001. I had been in the automobile industry and had gotten downsized out. I was separated, not yet divorced. I started out as adishwasher and did that for a month. The chef from Webster's would come through the kitchen and one day he asked me for a Bain Marie [a kind of double boiler]. I didn't know what that was, so I said, "What's that?" I started going to the library after that and started reading up on stuff, so when he would come through, I always knew what he was talking about and he started calling on me.

A new head chef for all the Radisson restaurants came on and he needed some Woks cleaned up. I offered to do it and he was going to give me a tip, but I wanted a nametag like everybody else had, so I told him to give me that instead. I wanted it to say "Howie Peak. Bonjour." That was a great way to meet the ladies as I walked through the hotel. He was pretty impressed with my

knowledge of French culinary terms, so he started sending me to Webster's a couple of nights a week as a prep cook. Pretty soon after that I was hired on as a full-time cook.

After four years, I left there to help open Fandango's. That was around the time I saw the article in the paper about the Black Heritage Society and came over to the Museum to ask you about it.

Q: What are the awards you've won since being at R. Stanley's?

A: In 2006 we won first place in all categories at the March of Dimes Signature Chef Auction. Then I won chef of the year for the American Culinary Federation of Kalamazoo/Battle Creek. Ralph [Ralph Humes, co-owner of R. Stanley's] won Iron Chef.

Q: Now you have folks working for you, right?

A: Right, I have two sous chefs. One young lady who previously worked at the Black Swan just joined us and another who was a sous chef at a hotel in Madison, Wisconsin.

Well congratulations on all the well-deserved recognition and thank you for the interview.

Ever since Chef Howie saw the Gazette article about SMBHS back in 2004 he has been an enthusiastic and valuable member of the organization. Besides his culinary talents, he is an authority on Motown and will be taking the lead in planning for our 2009 year-long tribute to Motown and the southwest Michigan connection. More information on that coming soon!