



Southwest Michigan Black Heritage Society

WINTER 2007 Newsletter



"FIRST FAMILIES" SHARE THEIR STORIES AT PORTAGE LIBRARY

An enthusiastic gathering of over 80 historians, area residents, and members of early African American families attended the "First Families: Area African Americans who Blazed the Trail" program held November 12, at the Portage District Library.

The program, a joint effort between SMBHS and Portage library, allowed descendents of some of the early African American settlers to share their stories, photographs, and other memorabilia. Some attendees made new contacts and others were thrilled to meet unknown relatives for the first time.

The event was so successful that, at the suggestion of several who attended, the SMBHS is planning a future program that will allow families to network and to bring and share their memorabilia and research. CONT. PAGE 2



More than 80 people from Portage and Kalamazoo area attend the event at the Portage Library to learn of the interesting history of "First Families," co-sponsored by SMBHS and Portage Library. Clockwise: Dr. Von Washington attends the event to learn of unique Underground Railroad experiences. Historian Sandra Williams, right, talks with couple about local history. Family historians Gwen Tulk, left and Valerie Osborne, discuss their family history.

FEATURED AREA HISTORIANS OF 'FIRST FAMILIES'

'FIRST FAMILIES' CONT.

Those who were featured in the Portage Library program included:

Valerie Hackley Osborne, born in Kalamazoo, spoke about the Kings of Paw Paw, the Hackleys of Lawton and Kalamazoo, and the Pompeys and Conners of Covert. Valerie has been collecting family photographs and history for more than 30 years.

Bette Boulding was among the fifth generation of her family to grow up on the first black farm in Michigan. Her ancestors, free people of color from New York, established the farm in Byron Center near Grand Rapids, in the mid-1800s. Because of the many unique qualities of her family history, it has always been a fascinating subject for her.

Ernestine Carter Taitt is a native of Chicago, Ill. where she owns her own business. She discussed the Tyler family of Covert. She began taking an interest in her family's history after hearing stories passed down by the elders. She regularly attends family reunions and has obtained much of her information from those gatherings.

Gwen Tulk is her family's custodian of family portraits and has collaborated with a cousin to video tape and digitize much of their family information. Gwen spoke of the Stafford and Russell families of Almena and Kalamazoo.

If you have family history you would like to share, you are encouraged to contact SMBHS to be included in future events. Call 383-8388 for more information.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

3RD ANNUAL AFRICAN
AMERICAN BOOK FAIR
FEBRUARY 17, 2007
NOON TO 3 P.M.
DOUGLASS COMMUNITY
CENTER
1000 W. PATERSON ST.
KALAMAZOO, MI 49007

President's Message



Happy New Year! The Southwest Michigan Black Heritage Society looks forward to a year of presenting exciting events, forming new alliances, and uncovering more of the rich and inspiring history of southwest Michigan's African American people. As we look back at 2006, we are pleased to report an even more successful book fair. One of the highlights of that event was the panel of distinguished Viet Nam veterans who shared the African American perspective on that controversial war. Southwest Michigan families were impressed with our guest speaker, author of *A Stronger Kinship*, the story of Covert Michigan's rise above the usual racial conflicts. The book has landed on the list of Michigan's most notable books of the year. Congratulations to Anna-Lisa Cox and thank you for being a part of our event!

Our annual barbecue also saw a larger number of participants and we welcome again those new members who joined at that time and at the book fair and encourage you to take an active role in Society activities. We love seeing new faces!



The First Families event was the surprise success of the year. Over 80 people attended and it was wonderful to see the pride in the faces of family members as their histories were shared. A very special thanks to the Portage District Library for co-sponsoring the program and working hard to make it what it was. We look forward to repeating the program next year with other family histories. Will yours be one of them? Just let us know if you'd like to be included.

Plans are now underway for the 2007 book fair. The Kalamazoo Public Library Reading Together program will partner with us again this year, and in keeping with the theme of this year's book, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime*, our program will center on African American Families Under Stress and feature a panel discussion which will include a single parent, parents of a child with autism, and a mixed race couple. Our featured speaker will be Dr. Heidi Ardizzone of Notre Dame University, author of *Love on Trial*.

**DONNA
ODOM,
PRESIDENT**

Mark your calendar also for the next quarterly meeting of SMBHS scheduled for January 17. The subject of the program will be "Doing African American Genealogy." Come out and bring a friend!

African American Women's Writing Group

The SMBHS and the Kalamazoo Public Library are collaborating in a program for African American women that will explore the tradition of autobiographical storytelling. Women who have dreamed of putting their stories on paper will participate in a group that will meet bi-monthly through May at the KPL. The meetings will alternate with speakers once a month and a working session once a month.

Speakers who will share their expertise and experiences include Arlene Washington, editor of *Community Voices*, Sonya Bernard-Hollins, author of *Here I Stand: A Musical History of African Americans in Battle Creek, Michigan*, Gail Griffin, writer and English professor at Kalamazoo College, and Sharon Carlson, director of the WMU Archives and Regional History Center.

If you are interested in participating in a possible future group beginning in September 2007, please contact Linda at KPL, 553-7880, lindacw@kpl.gov; or Michael at michaelh@kpl.gov.

QUARTERLY MEETING/ ELECTIONS

The quarterly meeting of the Society will be held at 5:30 p.m. January, 17, 2007, at the downtown branch of the Kalamazoo Public Library, Van Deusen Room. The program will feature a presentation on African American Genealogy presented by Kris Rzepczynski, Michigan/Genealogy coordinator at the Library of Michigan. Kris has presented for genealogical societies, conferences, and seminars on a number of genealogy topics including Michigan genealogical resources, Michigan vital records, and ethnic genealogy.

The Society's regular business meeting will follow. The major item of business will be election of officers. Nominations are still open. To submit your own or someone else's name for nomination, call 383-8388.

Following are the offices of the board and those who have consented to run:

President: Donna Odom

Secretary: Sonya Bernard-Hollins

Treasurer: Patricia Bell Phillips, Howie Peak

*You must be a member in good standing to vote and to run for office.