



# Museum Matters

*the Summer/Fall 2013 newsletter of the*

## Elk Rapids Area Historical Society

Exploring the past... Understanding the present... Envisioning the future

### **Katharine Dexter McCormick:**

#### ***The Lady Who Gave the World "The Pill" and Elk Rapids the "Island House Library"***

*Contributed by Dan LeBlond, President, Elk Rapids Area Historical Society*

*Primary Source (with permission): Public Broadcast System (PBS):  
[http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/pill/peopleevents/p\\_mccormick.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/pill/peopleevents/p_mccormick.html)*

*Pictures: Courtesy of Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Photo Archives and the Elk Rapids Area Historical Society Photo Archives*

**K**atharine Dexter McCormick (1875-1967), a pioneer of the women's suffrage and birth control movements, was also one of Massachusetts Institute of Technology's (MIT) most important and dedicated benefactors.

The daughter of liberal parents, her father, Wirt Dexter, was a prominent Chicago lawyer who had been active in the anti-slavery movement. Wirt was also a partner in forming Elk Rapids' Dexter-Noble Lumber Company and later, the Elk Rapids Iron Company. Katharine's mother, Josephine Moore Dexter, was a teacher from Springfield, Massachusetts.

As an advocate for women's rights, Katharine was imbued with concerns for social justice and encouraged from an early age to excel at her schoolwork. Her father's fatal heart attack when she was 14 and her brother's death from spinal meningitis when she was 19 inspired her to study biology at MIT. Because she needed several years as a part-time special student to ready herself for the Institute's entrance exams, she did not enroll until 1900 and received her degree in biology in 1904. While an undergraduate, Katharine crossed swords with the MIT administration by refusing to wear a hat (as required by MIT policy for the few women then in attendance). She successfully argued that the feathers posed a fire hazard when worn in laboratories.

Despite her education and interests, Katharine did what was expected of a woman of her class. After graduation, she married Stanley McCormick, the wealthy heir to the International Harvester Company fortune. Their storybook marriage, however, was soon crippled by tragedy. Two years into the marriage, her dashing young husband developed schizophrenia and was soon lost to dementia. It was widely believed that schizophrenia was hereditary. McCormick, loath to pass on



the terrible disease to her offspring, vowed never to have children.

For a woman once described as being "rich as Croesus," Katharine turned her attention to philanthropy and activism. An early feminist, she was deeply committed to winning women the vote and was a prominent member of the National American Woman Suffrage Association. She firmly believed that a woman's right to control her body was as important as her right to vote. It was during her suffragist days that she first crossed paths with legendary birth control activist Margaret Sanger.

*please turn to "McCormick" on page 3*



# 2013 ERAHS Monthly Programs

**September 19:**  
**7:00 PM**

(3rd Thursday of the Month) **"The History of Beer"** presented by Joe Short, founder and CEO of Short's Brewery.

**October 17:**  
**6:00 PM**

(3rd Thursday of the Month) - **"Annual Meeting / Potluck Dinner."** Dan LeBlond and Board Members conduct a "Business Program and Accomplishments" done in prior fiscal year. Location: Calvary Lutheran Church, 10180 Elk Lake Rd., Elk Rapids MI 49629 (at the blinker on US 31)

**November 8:**  
**5:00 PM - 7:00 PM**

(2nd Friday of the Month) - **Fundraising Event: "Fish and Wild Game Dinner"** at the AMVETS Hall in Elk Rapids. Tentative Ticket Price: \$25.00 per person

**November 21:**  
**7:00 PM**

(3rd Thursday of the Month) - Amanda Holmes (Fishtown Preservation Society Executive Director): **"Fishing on Lake Michigan."**

**December:**

"Christmas at the Island House" exhibit details to come.

## Mission Statement

The Elk Rapids Area Historical Society and Museum is a center that inspires people to explore the past, understand the present and envision the future.

We accomplish this by:

- Serving as the authority on regional history
- Preserving artifacts pertinent to the region
- Promoting, collaborating and supporting community activities
- Providing a center for community engagement and education
- Assisting with research and learning
- Ensuring history is an integral component of community development
- Sharing our past as the foundation for the future

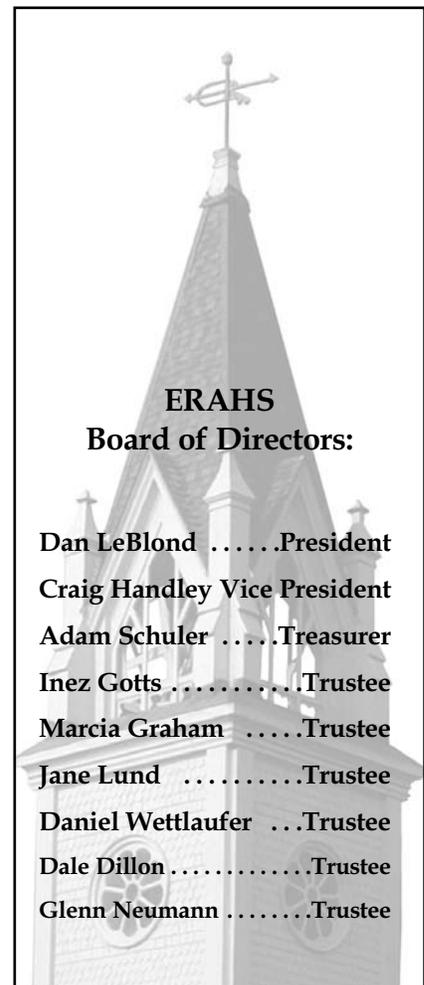


## We get letters

*The newsletter that I just recieved, with a brief history of the Elk Rapids Electrical System, was especially interesting to me as the very first poles for an electrical system in Kalkaska were installed by my husband's step-grandfather in 1903. His name was William Winters.*

*Thank you for an interesting article.*

*Phyllis Brothers*



### ERAHS Board of Directors:

Dan LeBlond .....President  
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 Marcia Graham .....Trustee  
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**email: [president@elkrapidshistory.org](mailto:president@elkrapidshistory.org)**  
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## President's Report:



School has begun, bringing an end to a busy Summer season. Many dedicated volunteers worked around the clock to ready the museum for vacationers and summer residents and their efforts were greatly appreciated by all who came in for a visit. We are grateful to Glenn Neumann and the entire Museum Committee for all their hard work. Photos of their efforts appear elsewhere in this issue. If you haven't stopped by to see our new exhibits and displays, please do so. We'd love to see you.

### IRA Charitable Distributions

IRA holders can still make charitable distributions to the Elk Rapids Area Historical Museum. The US Congress, in passing the tax bill at year-end, approved the continuation of the IRA charitable rollover option until December 31, 2013.

Museum members who are aged 70½ or older and have an IRA account are eligible to move up to \$100,000 from their IRAs directly to the Museum without having to pay income taxes on the money.

With the stock market strength in recent months, many donors may have gains in their IRA accounts. Qualified members can donate to the Museum without paying taxes on the gains—a "win-win" for the donor and the Museum!

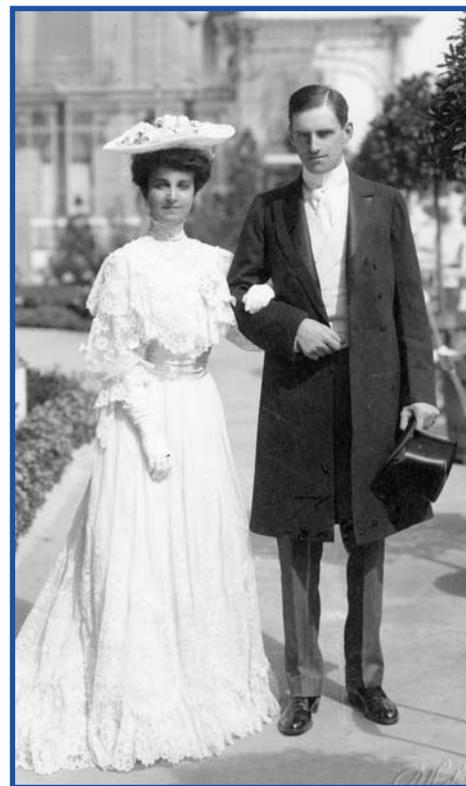
### Community Cash

September marks the beginning of the Village Market's "Community Cash" program. From now through Spring, shop at any Villiage Market location and save your receipts for the Elk Rapids Area Historical Society. Money received will help fund the Museum's activities for the upcoming year.

## McCormick

*continued from page 1*

The two activists met in 1917 when McCormick attended a lecture Sanger gave in Boston. Afterward, they kept in touch. McCormick was committed to Sanger's cause, and even helped out by smuggling diaphragms into the country for Sanger's birth control clinics during her trips abroad in the 1920s. Yet, despite her great wealth, she was not ready to provide substantial funding for birth control research. Enmeshed in a bitter battle with her husband's family over control of his wealth, McCormick chose to focus her philanthropy on family-approved areas such as schizophrenia research.



Mrs. & Mr. Stanley McCormick

In 1947 Katharine's husband died, and everything changed. She was awarded full control of his estate, placing \$15 million at her disposal. At age 75, she was finally free to pursue her personal ambitions. McCormick turned her attention to birth control.

As soon as Margaret Sanger told her about her vision of a pill as easy to take as an aspirin, McCormick was hooked on the project. She too believed in the importance of female-controlled contraception. This was the age of the polio vaccine and other miracle drugs, and McCormick, educated as a scientist, placed great faith in biochemistry. At first Sanger tried to convince McCormick to spread out her donations and fund research at various universities in the U.S. and abroad. But McCormick had little confidence in the academic approach. She wanted results, not pure research, and she wanted it fast. She was determined to see an oral contraceptive in her lifetime.

In the 1950s, when the United States government, medical institutions and the pharmaceutical industry wanted nothing to do with contraceptive research, funding for the development of the Pill came from a very unlikely source -- a single benefactor. Katharine Dexter McCormick provided almost every single dollar necessary to develop the oral contraceptive. However, McCormick's willingness to fund such a controversial project, at a time when 30 states still had laws on the books restricting the sale and use of contraceptives, was a bold move. But McCormick was not a typical society matron.

On June 8, 1953, Margaret Sanger took McCormick to a small lab on the outskirts of Worcester, Massachusetts. They met with a scientist Sanger thought capable of developing her pill. At the end of their first meeting, McCormick took out her checkbook and wrote Gregory Pincus a check for \$40,000, a small fortune at the time.

*continued next page*

It would be the first of many checks she would write over the course of the research.

Not content to be a silent donor, McCormick moved east from Santa Barbara to actively monitor the development of the birth control pill. She followed every stage of the project and constantly urged the researchers to move faster with the drug trials. The nearly six-foot-tall McCormick was described by Dr. Pincus' wife as a warrior: "she carried herself like a ramrod. Little old woman she was not. She was a grenadier."

When the Pill came on the market in 1960, the scientists and doctors involved in developing the Pill were thrust in the national spotlight for their contribution to science. McCormick's remarkable contribution was soon forgotten. Her death on December 28, 1967, at the age of 92, did not even merit an obituary in any of the major papers. She named MIT the sole residual beneficiary of her will, leaving it over \$25,000,000! Although few recalled Katharine Dexter McCormick's role in the development of the Pill at the time, in recent years, historians have recognized her contribution.

## The "Island House"

*The following are excerpts from "Bay Breezes" edited by local historian Glenn Neumann. Bay Breezes is a compilation of "The Progress" newspaper articles. The bolded date is the edition date.*

### **Jan. 08, 1948: Elk Rapids May Have New Library And Community Center.**

Many folks were all a dither and much excited this week on Wednesday when word was circulated that there was a possibility that the "Island Home" would be given to the Village to be used for a library and community center.

The owner, a Mrs. [Katherine Dexter] McCormick; we are told, was represented here Wednesday by her attorney, who is none other than the son of Mr. and Mrs. Gil Daane. He met with members of the library board in the afternoon.

In the evening, on Wednesday, he met in special session with our Village Council members. Certain financial requirements must be met to assure the upkeep of the building and grounds. The property contains over four acres, and is the most ideal spot around; and, certainly would meet a great need in our community. As we go to press certain negotiations are being carried on, and the outlook looks very favorable. We trust that we may have good news for our readers next week as well as more details.

### **Apr. 01, 1948: Gift of Island Property Presented To Village by Mrs. McCormick.**

The following telegram was received Wednesday from the law firm in Cleveland, Ohio, who represents Mrs. Stanley McCormick and her interests. The telegram was sent to Mrs. Margaret Williams in care of the Village President, by Warren Daane of that firm:

*R.B. Zupin, Village President,*

*Mrs. Stanley McCormick will present to the Village of Elk Rapids property known as "The Island" as a gift for Library, Park and Community Center, furnishings of the house and all other buildings included. No maintenance comes with this gift.*

*In legal transfer there will be certain restrictions which have already been somewhat discussed and agreed upon by the Village Council, Township Board and representation from the Library Board.*

*Action on this by the Village Council was necessary as soon as possible to either adopt or reject by Resolution, and copy of the resolution transmitted to the law firm in Cleveland.*

President Zupin called a special meeting of the council at 7:00 p.m. Wednesday evening to act on this important matter, and the Resolution was unanimously adopted by the council. A copy of the Resolution was sent to Mr. Warren Daane of the law firm in Cleveland this morning (Thursday) by Air Mail. This will be the go signal to proceed with the deed and abstract in favor of the Village of Elk Rapids.

"More information on this matter will be given as soon as the legal papers are arranged and received by the Council," President Zupin has stated.

### **June 10, 1948: Regular Meeting of Common Council May 17, 1948**

Mr. Walter Daane, Attorney for Mrs. Katherine Dexter McCormick appeared before the Council and presented the Abstract of Title and Warranty Deed to The Island property, to President Zupin.

The following resolutions were presented by Trustee Ladd supported by Grace:

*Whereas: Mrs. Katherine Dexter McCormick has presented to the Village of Elk Rapids, as a gift in memory of her father, Wirt Dexter, a deed of the property known as "The Island", dated April 29, 1948, and has also presented to the village the tangible personal property belonging to her in the Island house; and*

*Whereas, said deed contains restrictions and covenants that the property is to be used as a library, park, place of assembly, village hall, or community center, that in no event shall the premises be used as a hospital, nursing home, convalescent home, or for any similar institutions or purposes, and*

that the property shall be known as "The Elk Rapids Library"; and

Whereas, the Council heretofore on March 31, 1948, voted to accept the gift by Mrs. McCormick of "The Island",

Resolved, that the Village of Elk Rapids hereby accepts the deed by Mrs. Katherine Dexter McCormick of the Island property, dated April 29, 1948, subject to the restrictions and covenants therein contained.

Resolved, that R.B. Zupin, President, is hereby authorized to execute the deed on behalf of the Village of Elk Rapids.

Resolved, that the property so deeded to the Village of Elk Rapids, shall hereafter be known as "The Elk Rapids Library."

Resolved, that the Village Elk Rapids hereby accepts the gift by Mrs. McCormick of the tangible personal property belonging to her in the Island house.

Resolved, that the Council, on behalf of the Village of Elk Rapids, hereby extends its sincerest thanks to Mrs. Katherine Dexter McCormick for her generous gifts of the Island property and its contents, and instructs the Clerk to send a copy of this resolution to Mr. McCormick.

The Resolution was passed by a unanimous vote of the Trustees.

## July 22, 1948:

The following is an excerpt from a letter received July 20, 1948 from Mrs. Stanley McCormick and will be of interest to the Village of Elk Rapids:

*Two years ago there came into my possession five stalwart oaken side chairs originally made for my father and used by him in his Chicago home when I was a child.*

*I have had these chairs put into good condition with leatheroid seats as I thought they would be useful in the Island Home. If the Elk Rapids Library feels that these chairs would be useful there now I will have them shipped all charges prepaid to the Library.*

*Sincerely yours,*

Mrs. Stanley McCormick

Village President R.B. Zupin advised The Progress that a letter of acceptance has been sent to Mrs. McCormick.

## Didjano?

In 1922, the Village Council accepted the offer from the Elk Rapids Iron Company for park land on the bay and river, that would be known as Dexter Park. The gift also included five acres at Chippewa and Dixie Highway to be used as a public camp ground.

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# In Memoriam



Claude Meacham Watson, of Lansing, Michigan passed away on August 26, 2013 following complications due to major surgery. Claude was born July 30, 1922 in Whitewater Township, Michigan, to Ben Adrian Watson and Mabelle Juliette Corey, on the family farm his great-grandfather had settled in 1852. His family moved to Elk Rapids when he was five and he graduated from Elk Rapids high school in 1939.

Claude enlisted in the US Army air Corps on March 7, 1941 and served through January 8, 1946. Trained in radio operation and maintenance, he spent most of the war in training bases. He was stationed with the 538 Training Squadron at Williams Field near Chandler, Arizona when Pearl Harbor was bombed. On April 16, 1945 he left for China where he served with the 91st Fighter Squadron of the 81st Fighter Group, the only P-47 fighter squadron in the flying Tigers.

While attending Michigan State College, he met Ann Sinclair Terry at Canterbury Club and the two married in June 1954. After completing his Master's degree in physics in 1958, he was

hired to teach physics and electronics at Lansing Community College in its second year of operation. He became interested in computers, transferred from the science department to the math department and ended his 35 year career as the Arts and Science Divisional Coordinator for instructional computing. When he retired at age 72, he was LCC's senior employee.

Scouting was important to Claude. As a boy he became a Lone Scout, persuaded his dad to be a scoutmaster, and eventually earned the rank of Life Scout. He was an active scoutmaster for 25 years with Troop 297 in Lansing, producing 26 Eagle Scouts, including his three sons. With his wife he advised Explorer Post 297 for several years. Claude was awarded the Silver Beaver in recognition of his service.

He was a member of all Saints Episcopal Church in Mason, a ham radio operator, a Spartan sports fan and enjoyed duplicate bridge, chess, sailing, music, genealogy, and his family. A very congenial soul, he kept his sense of humor until the end.

He is survived by his wife and a 59 years; daughter Christine Watson; sons Claude (Julie) Watson, Gordon (Marianne) Watson and Garth Watson; grandchildren, Nicole Curtin, Andrew Curtin, Connor Watson, Helen Watson, and Amelia Watson, along with several nieces and nephews.

# ***ERAHS Honor Roll***

The following people have generously donated to The Elk Rapids Area Historical Society:

Catherine Allegrina  
Clifford Birge  
Roger Birks  
Phyllis Brothers  
Byrdie Butka  
Kathleen Carpenter  
Dale Claudepierre  
Gordon Converse  
Larry DeVergilio  
Dale Dillon  
Harold Dombrowski  
K. Dukyea  
John Edick  
Marcia Endo  
Dan Ernst  
Donald Fedrigo, Jr.  
Mary Fierle  
Joseph Fisher  
David Fox  
Marcia Graham  
John Grossa  
Bob & Susan Hall  
Craig Handley

Jessica Hatch  
Bud Hatch  
Stanley Holzhauser  
Keith Hubbell  
Pat Jackson  
Jerry Jackson  
Katie King  
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Stuart Merillat  
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Violet Patchen  
Paul Patchen  
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Harriet Pellow  
Scott Perron, DDS  
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John Peterson  
Richard & Susan Pixley  
Greg Reisig  
Ken Rudisel  
Louis Sanford  
Adam Schuler  
Carol Smith  
Estate of George Stocking  
John Taylor  
Pauline Truesdell  
Rick Young  
Claude & Ann Watson  
Mary Wescott  
Daniel Wettlaufer  
Florence Wettlaufer  
Dr. & Mrs. Burt Weyhing  
Frank Wilhelme  
Cheryl Worth

(as of 9/3/2013)

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## ***Yes! I want to support The Elk Rapids Historical Museum!***

Gift Amount:  \$50  \$100  \$200  \$500  \$1,000  \$2,500  Other

I have enclosed a check payable to ERAHS

Please print clearly:

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Summer address \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

Winter address (if different) \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail \_\_\_\_\_

I wish to be recognized for this donation  Yes  No

If yes, please list my/our name(s) as \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to give my gift  in Honor of  in Memory of

Name \_\_\_\_\_

(please include a note with acknowledgement information)

I would like to volunteer for the following:

- Development
- Programs & Events
- Finance
- Technology
- Assist Archivist
- Greeter

*The Elk Rapids Area Historical Society is a 501C (3) non-profit corporation. Contributions are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.*

*Thank you for your support!*  
[www.elkrapidshistory.org](http://www.elkrapidshistory.org)

**Mail to: ERAHS, P.O. Box 2, Elk Rapids MI 49629-0002**

## *Welcome New Members!*

**Alex Mills**  
Brighton MI

**Bobbie Patterson**  
Eastport MI

**Dale Schaaf**  
Greentown IN

**Peg Graham**  
Kewadin MI

**Ann Medford**  
Elk Rapids MI

**Cathy Stathakis**  
Williamsburg MI

**Ed Gabrys**  
Northville MI

**Rich Gaugler**  
Kewadin MI

**Bill & Lucille Chrisman**  
Kewadin MI

**Connie Misico**  
Elk Rapids MI

**Jim & Debbie Norling**  
Paradise Valley AZ

**Craig Handley**  
Rapid City MI

**Luanne Fisher**  
Northville MI

(as of 9/3/2013)

## *Up and Running*

*Much has been done at the museum to tell the story of the area's history. The photos below don't really do the Museum justice. You have to walk through the exhibits to really experience our heritage.*



1. Local artist Joanie Braun paints a mural that enhances the Museum's theme of people and water.
2. The Museum opened Memorial Day weekend with a special exhibit of military uniforms through the decades.
3. Historic Elk Rapids in miniature.
4. "Dale's Jail" Dale Dillion installed the 1883 jail door into a cove in the Museum basement. Is there anyone inside? Come by and find out!



# Elk Rapids Area Historical Society

Post Office Box 2, Elk Rapids, Michigan 49629-0002

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*Deliver to:*



*Here is a 1921 Post Card showing a familiar sight. Buildings may come and go, but whitecaps on the bay remain a constant from one generation to the next.*

**Visit us online at [www.elkrapidshistory.org](http://www.elkrapidshistory.org) and “like” us on facebook.**