



History Explorer

Historical Society of Greater Lansing

www.LansingHistory.org

February 2017

Upcoming Events

Images of the House of David

Thursday, February 2, 2017 – 6:30 p.m.

*Delta Township District Library, 5130 Davenport Dr.
(across from Sharp Park just off Elmwood Dr.)*

Wally Jung, aka “Postcard Wally,” will present a program about the House of David, a communal religious group that was founded in 1903 in Benton Harbor. The sect grew into a colony of 2,000 believers who followed the teachings of Benjamin Purnell. The group was mostly known for their highly competitive barnstorming and bearded baseball team, as well as their zoo and amusement park. They also gained notoriety for a highly publicized sex scandal trial and later schism.

Jung will tell the story of the House of David through the use of extensive postcards issued by the colony during their glory years of 1906-1928. Jung has more than 400 unique postcards in his collection featuring every aspect of the mysterious sect.

Postcard Wally also is hosting one of his periodic postcard shows and sales on Saturday, February 4, from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. at the Okemos Conference Center, 2187 University Park Drive, just off I-96 Exit 110, between the Comfort Inn and the Holiday Inn Express. The show has more than 10 dealers and is the largest in mid-Michigan. Admission is free.



Calling All Collectors

Saturday, March 18, 2017 - 11:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

Delta Township District Library - 5130 Davenport Dr.

This year HSGL will be co-sponsoring the 3rd Annual Collectors Showcase to be held March 18 from 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. at the Delta Township District Library. Collectors willing to display their collections and talk to the public about their passion are needed for this just-for-fun, no buying or selling event. Collections at past events have included both antique and contemporary collectibles, such as Pez dispensers, vintage hats, postcards, dolls, Dionne quintuplet memorabilia, Lansing dairy items, and salt and pepper shakers. All collections suitable for family viewing are welcome. One collection will receive the People’s Choice Award, chosen by visitors the day of the event.

In addition to HSGL, the Collectors Showcase is co-sponsored by the Delta Township Historical Society and the Delta Township District Library. The event will be held at the library, at 5130 Davenport Dr., located off Elmwood across from Sharp Park. For more information or to register as a collector, contact Thomas Moore, DTDL Adult Services Librarian, tmoore@dtdl.org, or 517-321-4014, or check the library website under Events at www.dtdl.org/collectors.

The Filth of Progress – Save the Date!

Saturday, March 11, 2017 – 1:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.

Library of Michigan – 702 W. Kalamazoo

Join HSGL and the Library of Michigan for a program by author Ryan Dearing on his book *The Filth of Progress: Immigrants, Americans, and the Building of Canals and Railroads in the West*. More information about the event will be coming in the March newsletter.

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THE VIROQUAS OF MICHIGAN AND BEYOND

by LeRoy Barnett

Indian women named Viroqua are not unknown in American literature and legend. For example, in 1848 Emma Carra authored a novel set in the Detroit area called *Viroqua: Or, the Flower of the Ottawas*. Thirty-two years later, the *Alpena Weekly Argus* published "A Legend of the Pictured Rocks," featuring the south shore of Lake Superior and starring an Iroquois Indian girl named Viroqua. And in 1919, the *La Crosse (WI) Tribune and Leader-Press* ran a story about how, at some forgotten time in the past, a cave under the town of Viroqua, Wisconsin, once "sheltered [a] Princess Viroqua [and members of her tribe] beneath [the] city of her name." While these references are fiction, there actually was an Indian Princess Viroqua and, like some of her imaginary sisters, she had a Michigan connection.

Margaret ("Maggie") Martin was born in 1838 on the Six Nations Indian Reservation (Grand River Reserve) near Brantford, Ontario. As a child she was first educated at the local Mohawk Institute or Industrial School, later graduating from Miss Gill's Seminary at the nearby town of Newport. Through instruction and natural talent, Margaret learned to speak English and became a skilled vocalist, organist and artist. At the age of twenty, Margaret eloped with a white man named Mr. Flanders. Thereafter, Margaret taught at Indian and white schools, honing her skills in the classroom as a lecturer. Around 1878 Mr. Flanders died, leaving his wife a childless widow needing some means of support.

Medical Practice Begins

Margaret's mother had been a "natural healer" who passed her traditional Native American medical skills to her daughter. To make a living, Margaret decided to adopt the professional name of "Princess Viroqua" and derive her livelihood by practicing her mother's teachings in Indian herbal medicine. While the chronological record of Princess Viroqua is difficult to determine, it appears that in 1879-1881 she confined her therapeutic skills to her home province of Ontario. Then in 1882-1883 she is found treating patients in New York State, and by 1884-1885 she was an itinerant "doctress" working in Indiana. About October 1885 the path of Princess Viroqua led to Allegan, Michigan. For the next year or so this town became her base of operations, as she saw patients at this locality and from this site distributed her magic elixir.

Princess Viroqua reportedly compounded her own medicine, which was extracted from roots, herbs, berries, barks, and gums, thus deriving her ingredients from Mother Nature. The all-vegetable liquid

was packaged in six-ounce bottles, which sold for \$2 each. People could buy this concoction directly from the doctress or have the product sent to them by COD mail. According to her advertising, Princess Viroqua's botanical nostrum could treat consumption (tuberculosis), scrofula (another form of tuberculosis), rheumatism, dyspepsia, constipation, deafness, catarrh (inflammation of the nose and throat), cancer, and cholera along with ailments of the liver, skin, eye, ear, and all diseases of women.

In selling this cure-all, Princess Viroqua visited many towns surrounding her base of operations. To ensure a good turnout, she usually rented a hall and held a musical for the community. With some of her relatives from the Ontario reservation, operating as the Royal Indian Concert Company, the group first entertained those in attendance by singing Native American songs. This performance was followed by a Princess Viroqua lecture on good health and the benefits of her restorative product. The show ended with free consultations for any suffering souls, with the diagnoses inevitably requiring a bottle or more of the Indian herbal medicine that was on sale.

Trouble With Michigan Authorities

Though Princess Viroqua never attended college, in some of her ads she would pad her resume by putting M.D. after her name. This violated Michigan Public Act 167 of 1883 involving the registration of physicians and surgeons. In 1886 she was fined by Allegan County authorities for practicing medicine without a license. Angered by this action, she left the county for Petoskey where she treated those with hay fever symptoms during August and September. During the time she spent in Allegan, Princess Viroqua said she treated 597 patients and earned \$5,000. With the end of the 1886 hay fever season around Little Traverse Bay, Princess Viroqua departed Petoskey and set up shop in Kalamazoo. From this location she visited communities

PRINCESS VIROQUA, M. D.

Endorses Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound After Following Its Record For Years.

"DEAR MRS. PINKHAM:—Health is the greatest boon bestowed on humanity and therefore anything that can restore lost health is a blessing. I consider Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound as a blessing to State and Nation. It cures her mothers and daughters and makes them well and strong.



PRINCESS VIROQUA, Practicing Physician and Lecturer.

"For fifteen years I have noted the effect of your Vegetable Compound in curing special diseases of women. "I know of nothing superior for ovarian trouble, barrenness, and it has prevented hundreds of dangerous operations where physicians claimed it was the only chance to get well. Ulceration and inflammation of the womb has been cured in two or three weeks through its use, and as I find it purely an herbal remedy, I unhesitatingly give it my highest endorsement. —Fraternally yours, DR. P. VIROQUA, Lansing, Mich."—\$5000 forfeit if above testimonial is not genuine.

Lansing State Journal, November 29, 1901:7.

Historical Society of Greater Lansing
 P.O. Box 12095 ~ Lansing, MI 48901
 www.LansingHistory.org

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throughout Michiana, practicing her craft and making a name for herself in the region. During August and September of 1887, she again went to Petoskey to treat people with allergies, then with the onset of autumn returned to her base in Kalamazoo.

By 1888 Princess Viroqua's renown had grown, enabling her to meet President Cleveland and his wife at the White House. About the same time she announced a desire to establish an Indian University in the suburbs of Washington, D.C., to be staffed with Native American professors. This institution, estimated to cost \$3,000,000, would allow First Peoples to receive a higher education in industrial, scientific, classical, and theological studies. To fulfill this dream, Princess Viroqua began touring the northeastern United States to raise money for her dream college. In 1889 Princess Viroqua left Kalamazoo and took up residence in Utica, New York. There, in addition to fundraising, she was active as a suffragist, a member of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, the International Order of Good Templars Lodge, the Independent Order of Foresters, and King's Daughters.

Unable to raise the sum required to create an advanced Indian school, Princess Viroqua left Utica in May of 1892 and moved to New York City. She remained there through 1898, doing missionary work as an Episcopalian/Anglican in the slum areas, aiding the needy, and engaging in "social purity" work with young women. In 1899 Princess Viroqua was once again selling vegetable-based remedies and was operating the Princess Viroqua Medicine Company of Lansing, Michigan (also cited as the Viroqua Medicine Company). The last mention of this firm and her connection with Lansing was in 1906.

About 1903, prior to dissolving her relationship with the Lansing business, Princess Viroqua moved to Chicago. For some years, she worked at the Armitage Avenue Settlement House (also known as the Esther Falkenstein House after its founder). The social workers lived at the settlement house with members of the close-knit community, offering services to the needy and improving the neighborhood through education. About 1910 Princess Viroqua left Chicago and returned to the vicinity of her birth in Brant County, Ontario. After a lengthy illness Margaret Flanders, aka Princess Viroqua, died there on 27 January 1913.

Upcoming Events *Continued from page 1*

Viewing of 1937 Film *Black Legion*

Thursday, February 23 – 5:30 p.m.

*Lansing Community College, Dart Auditorium,
500 N. Capitol Ave.*

The Historical Society of Greater Lansing and Lansing Community College are co-hosting a showing of the Michigan-based movie *Black Legion*. The event is free.

By the mid-1930s the white hoods of the Klan gave way to the black hoods of another hate-mongering group called the Black Legion. The membership, which espoused white supremacist and nativist ideas, was centered in Detroit, Pontiac, and other large Michigan cities. Catholics, Jews, blacks and Communists felt the brunt of the group's numerous beatings, bombings and other brutish crimes, including the murder in 1936 of a Detroitier employed by the WPA. The murder would garner national attention when one of the murderers decided to talk to the police. More than 50 Legion members were charged with crimes ranging from murder to arson. Ultimately, 46 were convicted of crimes including murder.

Newspapers across the country covered the murder and trial with two-inch headlines. The coverage got the attention of Hollywood, and in January 1937 *Black Legion* was released. The film starred Humphrey Bogart as the murderer. Movie posters were illustrated with a black-hooded man holding a whip and the sub-head "Death to Squealers." In Lansing the movie was shown at the Capitol Theatre. The film is

considered a classic noir crime movie. Bogart would become a major star in 1941 in the movie *High Sierra*.

The movie is part of a year-long commemoration of the tumultuous year 1937 in Michigan and across the nation and world. The year saw spectacular events like the Hindenburg disaster, the Spanish Civil War, the loss of Amelia Earhart, the elections of Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Michigan Governor Frank Murphy, who would go on to become U.S. Supreme Court Justice. Major events in Michigan in 1937 included the Flint Sit-Down Strike, the REO Sit-Down Strike, and the Battle of the Overpass, among other monumental Labor events.

The inspiration for the in-depth look at the historical figures and events of 1937 was Lansing's city-wide "Labor Holiday," held on June 7, 1937. Thousands of union members streamed into the streets, virtually shutting down the city. The catalyst for the Holiday was the arrest of several union members for labor activities, including picketing the Capitol City Wrecking Company. In addition to hosting several lectures on the year 1937, the HSGL also will launch the exhibit "The Year: 1937," examining influences on Lansingites during that tumultuous year.

Following the 1-hour 23-minute movie, LCC history professor David Siwik will facilitate a discussion on hate groups throughout history. It is still believed by many in Lansing that the death of Earl Little, Malcolm X's father, in 1931, was at the hands of the Black Legion. It is well accepted that the family's first home on Lansing's northwest side was torched at the hands of the Legion.



Historical Society of Greater Lansing
P.O. Box 12095
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