



WDCC Notables Members



Celebrate 70, our yearlong commemoration of WDCCs 70th anniversary, focuses this month on notable members from our past. We have had hundreds of accomplished women, past and present, in our ranks, but today I am going to talk about a few of the most noteworthy members who are no longer with us. As we developed this presentation, there was much discussion about how to choose which women to feature. You are all important and notable, of course, but we decided to limit our selection to members who have joined the ranks of **WDCC angels**.

Our Notable members are:

Marguerite Holcomb
Helen Jean Arntz
Waneta Lynn
Mary Lee Read
Margery Champine
Dora E. Peterson

Marguerite Holcomb

Muskegon's new mayor shifts city into fast lane

Donald E. Johnson, the only remaining member of Muskegon's old-shoe city commission, appeared slightly discomfited, as well he might: the occasion was the seating of a new, potentially hostile commission and the official transformation of Marguerite Holcomb into Madam Mayor.

The installation last week of the city's first woman mayor was marked by a procession of well-wishers (mostly from women's groups) bearing roses. Twenty minutes into the meeting Mayor Holcomb had collected so many roses that she might have been the Queen of Hearts — as benign as Lewis Carroll's queen was mad — about to suggest croquet.

The appearance was deceiving. It soon became evident that on its first outing the new city commission would not be playing games.

Heading the agenda was a list of objectives pertaining to financing, human rights, environment and land use, neighborhood improvement, personnel policies, possible consolidation of city departments, public participation, and charter revision.

Just so. Adoption of such a broad range of goals might have been considered a substantial first step for a fledgling governing body, especially one with three brand-new members. But they then proceeded, without pausing for discussion, to act on several of them.



Mayor Holcomb

Heethuis, and Walter M. Brooks.

The old commission had been overly maligned in recent years as being out of step with the new concerns: for affirmative action, for better representation of minorities, for greater participation in government by minorities and women.

But what they, and a couple of others among the old bunch, Marvin Gudelsky and

Little change expected in city action

By JAMES REINDL
Chronicle staff writer

Names and faces on the Muskegon City Commission have changed, but how it handles issues facing the city in the 1980s will be determined by a political lineup which may not be all that new.

Marguerite Holcomb, 66, began her second term as a city commissioner today by being named mayor at the commission's annual organizational meeting. Appointed vice-mayor by the other commissioners during her first term, Mrs. Holcomb becomes the first woman ever to serve as the city's mayor.

Three new faces also began their first terms as Muskegon City Commissioners. Richard M. Freye of 3171 Lakeshore Drive, Robert VanLente of 3001 Larkin and Elmer J. Walcott of 1147 Roberts all were elected last November.

They replace former mayor John Medendorp, who lost his bid for a fourth consecutive term on the commission, and retiring commissioners Bernard G. Heethuis and Walter M. Brooks.

They will work with Beverly Geyer, Donald E. Johnson and Terry MacAllister who all have two years remaining on their four-year commission terms.

Geyer was named to succeed Mrs. Holcomb as the city's vice mayor. She was nominated for the post by MacAllister, who declined a similar

there," said one outgoing commissioner.

"They may have a little different approach, but they will run into the same problems all the other commissions did — money," the former commissioner said.

How the commission solves whatever issues arise will depend on how it lines up politically.

Past commissions, particularly the most recent seven-member commission, have sometimes split along a three-to-three liberal/conservative axis, with another commissioner — usually Mrs. Holcomb — providing a swing vote. Most of the splits occurred during discussions at city work sessions where commissioners usually resolve their differences before voting in regular commission meetings.

The new commission can be expected to line up much the same way, and may even tip toward the liberal side. Several observers placed VanLente, Geyer, MacAllister and sometimes Johnson in the liberal line up.

Largely because they could not attach a particular ideology to the other untested commissioners, several sources marked Walcott and Freye as conservatives.

Most observers believed Mrs. Holcomb is the most likely to be independent and may provide the swing vote when issues split the



Marguerite Holcomb began her second term as a Muskegon



Marguerite Holcomb

Marguerite was 75 when she died in 1988. She was known as a tireless worker and a committed volunteer. I am going to share some of her accomplishments with you now, but visit the members only section of our web site where you can read more, and you'll also find a photo of each of our notable members:

1944 she was the first female Circuit Court reporter for Muskegon County

1951 she established Holcomb Reporting Service (the first woman to start such a business in Western Michigan)

1966 she was installed as the state president at the 48th convention of the Business and Professional Woman's Club held at the L. C. Walker Arena

1976 First woman to be elected to the City of Muskegon Board of Commissioners

1980 First woman to be voted mayor of the City of Muskegon

1984 Muskegon Entrepreneur of the Year, she had over 40 employees

1986-87 President of WDCC

1988 Michigan Woman Entrepreneur of the year

I was among her employees in the early 1980s when I was 20 years old. I worked as a home typist for a short time and more than once felt the sting of her infamous "red-ink" editorial comments on the manuscripts I prepared.

Here's a story that demonstrates Marguerite's no-nonsense approach. In 1979, a controversy in Muskegon was reported in newspapers across the country: City commissioners were pressured to drop the ordinance they had passed earlier limiting bench sitting time in the downtown Muskegon Mall to 20 minutes. Commissioner Holcomb, who opposed the limits from the start said, "I felt that the proposed cure was worse than the malady. Whereas a drunken person might offend a few people, limiting bench access would offend thousands."



Some of Marguerite's Accomplishments Include:

1944 First female Circuit Court reporter for Muskegon County

1951 Established Holcomb Reporting Service (the first woman to start such a business in Western Michigan)

1966 Installed as State President at the 48th convention of the Business and Professional Woman's Club was held at the L. C. Walker Arena. Over 700 were in attendance

1969 Michigan Small Businesswoman of the year

1970 Quadrangle Muskegon Businesswoman of the Year

1976 First woman to be elected to the City of Muskegon Board of Commissioners

1980 First woman to be voted mayor of the City of Muskegon

1984 Muskegon Entrepreneur of the Year (She had over 40 employees)

1986-87 President of WDCC

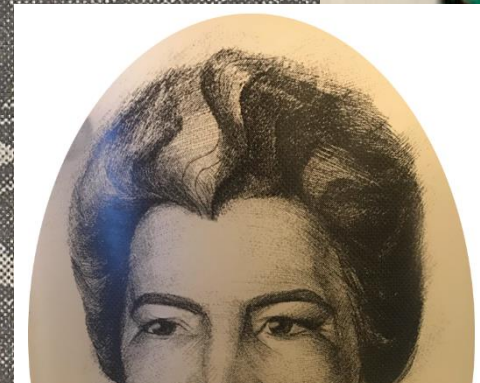
1988 Michigan Woman Entrepreneur of the year by Editors of Michigan Woman Magazine.

1988 Athena Award

Helen Jean Arntz



Helen Jean Arntz
And Duffy Arntz





Helen Jean Arntz

Helen Jean Arntz died in 2011 at the age of 93 and is buried in Lakeside Cemetery having lived her entire life in the area. She wrote in her own bio that she graduated from Muskegon High School in 1935 and went straight into the retail world, not being able to afford college. She worked at Hardy's Dept. store and then Grossman's where she quickly rose to the position of buyer and made many trips to Chicago, St. Louis and New York. During WWII, Muskegon was booming with the war industry and workers had spendable cash, Helen pointed out.

By 1951, she fulfilled a dream and bought a neighborhood store which she ran with her husband, Mr. Duffy Arntz, as she called him, for 27 years. She was the first woman to own and operate a local department store in the area and she had 15 employees that she considered family. It was not unheard of for a woman to operate a business during the 1950s but women more commonly owned dress shops and hat shops or perhaps a beauty salon.

In 1963 she received the "Businesswoman of the Year" award from the Quadrangle Club.

In 1969-70, she was president of WDCC.

In 1978 the store in Lakeside burned down, and Helen and Duffy decided not to rebuild. That was a great heartache for Helen.

In 2008, she was inducted into the Muskegon Chamber of Commerce Business Hall of Fame. The chamber gives this award to recognize businesses that stand out and help to move Muskegon, or the industry it represents, forward in some way. It is not awarded every year. Look for her photo next time you visit the chamber offices.

Helen was well known and loved in her community. She was described as vivacious and sparkling, always well dressed, and a savvy businesswoman ahead of her time. She was a long-time member of WDCC and presented the history of our club at the new member orientation for many years.

Waneta Lynn



Waneta Lynn



Waneta was born in Ohio and died in Muskegon in 1990 at the age of 72. By all accounts, a wonderful, sweet lady with many skills.

She served as the director of the Muskegon County Museum, as it was called then, in the mid-1970s. While not the first woman to lead the museum, it was still uncommon at that time for a woman to hold the top position.

She was appointed chairman of a committee to plan future Bicentennial projects for the Michigan Museum Association.

She led a search for the oldest living Muskegon County lumbering era citizen, bestowing the honor on the late Caroline A. Silbley, then 100 years old, in 1975.

Mary Lee Read



Mrs. Read

Mary Lee Read

The community Friday lost one of its most talented and respected artists in the death of Mary Lee Read, who for 11 years was director of the Hackley Art Museum. She was 72.

Her watercolor works, most of them nature-inspired and many of them depicting Muskegon scenes in the area she once described as "the most marvelous place to paint," were displayed in 20 one-artist shows and brought her national recognition.



Mrs. Read

She gave freely of her talents, critiquing and encouraging the work of other local artists, and enthusiastically promoted local art throughout the years — 1963-1974 — she served as director of the art museum. The museum itself, considered by some as "set in its ways" and "backward" when she arrived, grew and flourished under her direction, thriving on growing cultural interest she had a leading part in rekindling and sustaining.

Mrs. Read was born in River Falls, Wis., grew up in Florida and was an art major at the University of Minnesota, where she continued to study and to paint after graduation. She and her husband, Frederic, a former managing editor of *The Chronicle* and author of a history of Muskegon, maintained a summer home in Minnesota where she often returned to paint shoreline scenes. She received many art awards, and was appointed by the governor to serve on the state's Cultural Activities Commission.

Mary Lee Read was a gifted and very gracious lady, and richly deserves the thanks of us all for her dedicated service and valuable contributions to the cultural life of the community. We join with her many friends and associates in expressing to her husband and the surviving members of the family our sorrow and sense of loss at her death.

Mary Lee Read

Mary Lee Read died in 1981 at age 72. She was a talented and respected artist in the Muskegon community and beyond. Her husband, Frederick Read, was a managing editor of The Chronicle. She received many art awards and was appointed by the governor to serve on the state's Cultural Activities Commission. Her watercolor works, most of them nature-inspired and many of them depicting Muskegon scenes in the area she once described as "the most marvelous place to paint," were displayed in 20 one-artist shows and brought her national recognition.

From 1963 to 1974, she served as director of the then-called Hackley Art Museum.

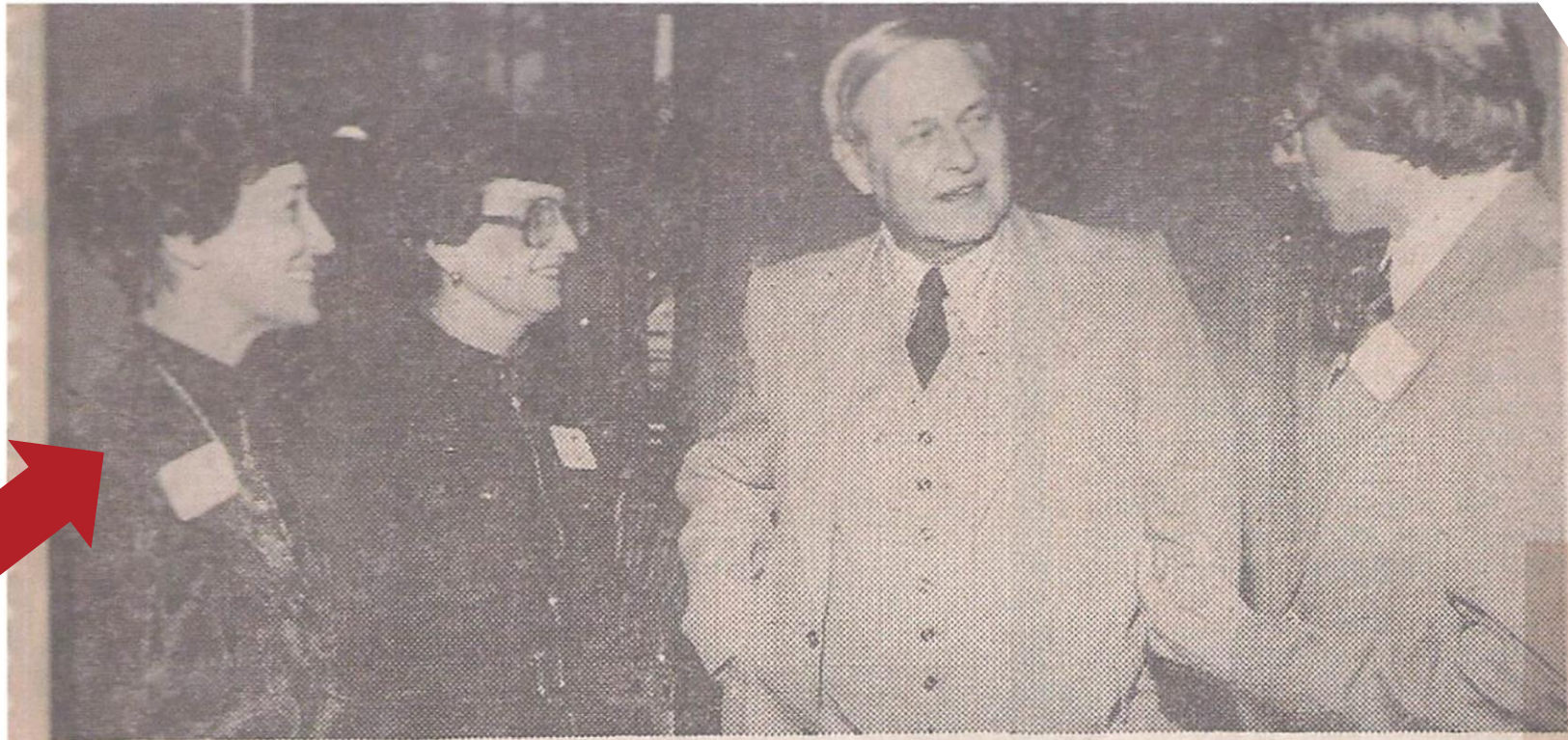
Her favorite exhibit was the annual regional show for West Michigan artists. She would close the gallery for a week to prepare and host a reception for 1000 guests.

I spoke with a gentleman, Rich Nelson, who as a High school senior in 1969, was hired by Mary Lee to be a student helper. He worked weekends and after school greeting people and sometimes helping hang art shows. Their relationship was long-lived as after her death, Fred invited him over and presented him with two of Mary Lee's watercolors. One he later donated to the permanent collection at the Muskegon Museum of Art and one still hangs in his home.

The Muskegon Museum of Art has 9 of her watercolors in their permanent collection.

Rich tells me that she had a reputation for being formal and strait laced and he wants us to know she had character beyond that. She had a wonderful sense of humor and outlook on life. You can read more about Mary Lee Read in the book about the Muskegon Museum of Art called "Pictures of the Best Kind."

Marge Champine



Chronicle photo

Anderson arrives

Jack Anderson, (center), syndicated columnist and leader of a 10-man team of investigative reporters, is greeted on arrival at Muskegon's Ramada Inn Tuesday by James Lilligan, chairman of the West Michigan Lec-

ture Series. Also on hand were Marge Champine (left) of radio station WQWQ, which hosted a news conference with Anderson before his lecture at Orchard View High, and lecture series coordinator Char Bennett.



Marge Champine

While not born or raised in Muskegon, she lived here for over 58 years. She worked as an accountant for Plumb's as well as a radio personality for WKBZ. She was very civic minded and served as Past President of Zonta, where she helped lead the effort for Seaway Drive beautification. If you noticed the daffodils recently along Seaway Drive, Zonta is the group that started that in the 1980s. She helped bring the luge Olympic training center to Muskegon and she also worked closely with the local Habitat for Humanity.

In 1973-74, she served as President of WDCC.

In 1976, she was privileged to interview President Gerald Ford for the radio station.

In 1986 the Muskegon Chamber of Commerce named her the recipient of the prestigious Athena award for her contributions to the community.

Dora E. Peterson



It is my pleasure to announce the expansion of women's banking services at Muskegon Bank and Trust Company. I urge all women to look to Muskegon Bank for their financial services.

Your needs will be taken care of promptly, courteously and confidentially, whether they are personal, for your home or your business.

Muskegon Bank has ONE standard of *Credit-ability* for everyone.

Dora E. Peterson, President
Coca-Cola Bottling Company
of Muskegon

Director, Muskegon Bank and
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Dora E. Peterson



Dora was born in Ravenna in 1904 and died in Muskegon in 2002 at age 98. She was a community leader who entered the business world out of necessity. She became president of the local Coca-Cola Bottling Company in 1943 after the death of her first husband, Paul Miller, and was affectionately known as “Boss Lady” as she managed the company until it was sold in 1984. Dora accomplished many “firsts” including the first woman elected to a local bank board at Muskegon Bank & Trust and the first female president of the Michigan Soft Drink Association.

In 2004, she was inducted into the Muskegon Business Hall of Fame. Her award hangs in the Chamber Office just down from Helen Jean’s. How many times have you walked by these photos and not known they were WDCC members?