

TAKING THE LEAD: WOMEN AND THE WHITE MOUNTAINS

- November 29, -0001

Taking the Lead: Women and the White Mountains

By Edith Tucker
The Berlin Daily Sun

PLYMOUTH — A new exhibit, "Taking the Lead: Women and the White Mountains," opened earlier this month at the free-to-the public Museum of the White Mountains at Plymouth State University. "This exhibit focuses on gender and place over time, guiding visitors from the early 1800s through the 21st century," explained PSU Professor of History and interim museum director Marcia Schmidt Blaine in a press release.

"The White Mountains have given women the opportunity to discover their own strengths," reads one of the introductory labels taken from the final paragraph of the handsome 64-page exhibit catalog (\$12). "Women have hiked through scrub, hauled timber, contemplated great heights, painted the valleys, sketched the flowers written of their mountain summers, camped on the ground and discovered immense joy in accomplishment. Women have taken the lead, making a welcome path for others to follow — and to take up the lead themselves."

Many of these early path-breaking women lived in or made summer visits to towns North of the Notches.

This reporter's grandmother, Mary Perkins Osgood of Salem, Mass., a summer resident of Randolph even before she married mapmaker Louis F. Cutter, spent time studying and sketching wildflowers. Between 1895 and 1900, Osgood filled five small sketchbooks with 244 watercolors, six pages of which were enlarged for display. Her trunk with her initials M.P.O. and two sketchbooks plus a photograph of her are also on exhibit.

An oil-on-board painting of the Dolloff Farm in Pinkham Notch, created in 1884 by Louise A. Morse, is also on display.

Its label points out: "Wealthy Americans and, over time, the middle class had the means to vacation in the White Mountains. They sought relief from the crowding, noise, and filth of the cities and expected to find clean air, clean houses, and lots of farm-fresh food. To accommodate them, farming families turned their farmhouses into boarding houses or inns, run largely by women and children while the men continued to bring in farming income."

A watercolor by Emily Selinger is also on exhibit. Selinger (1848-1927), an accomplished artist, author, poet and musician, and her artist husband Jean Paul Selinger (1850-1909) occupied a summer art studio from the mid-1880s until 1894 at the Glen House in Pinkham Notch. They moved to the former art studio of Frank H. Shapleigh on the grounds of the Crawford House for the 1894 summer tourist season, to a building that is now used as a hiker hostel at the Highland Center operated by the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC). Emily Selinger was the only female artist-in-residence at any of the Grand Hotels in the White Mountains.

Audio recordings allow visitors to hear some of the words written by some of the historical women featured in the exhibit, as read by PSU theatre students: Louisa May Alcott, before she published "Little Women;" Lucy Crawford, the first female historian of the White Mountains; renowned female mountaineer Miriam O'Brien Underhill, who set the "rules" for winter hiking in the Whites when she moved to Randolph with her husband Robert year-round; and Marian Pychowska and Isabella Stone, whose contributions and adventures were edited and published in 1995 as "Mountain Summers: Tales of hiking and exploration in the White Mountains from 1878 to 1886" by former Berlin city planner June Hammond Rowan and her husband Peter.

Recorded interviews with contemporary women, done by PSU history students, are available at a kiosk as well as online, including Judy Hudson of Pelham, Mass., and Randolph, author of "Peaks & Paths, A Century of the Randolph Mountain Club" (2010), Rebecca Oreskes of Milan, Dr. Rebecca More of Providence, R.I. and Lancaster, Mary Sloat of Hanover and Lancaster, Laura Waterman of East Corinth, Vt., Rep. Rebecca Brown of Sugar Hill, Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests president-forester Jane Difley of Concord, and Mariann Leberman of Meredith, U.S. Forest Service Recreation and Wilderness Program Leader for the White Mountain National Forest, who previously served as the only female snow ranger in Tuckerman and Huntington Ravines.

Replicas of hiking costumes, showing the heavy, restrictive layers women wore in the 19th and early 20th centuries, are also featured, plus photographs of post-Civil-War trampers loaned by Alan Lowe of Randolph, the Mount Washington Observatory Museum, and Appalachian Mountain Club.

Enlarged drawings of Grace Aznive and Ethel McKenna that were used to illustrate a November 1935 article in *Appalachia* — "Fashion on the Peaks" — are also on display.

Photographs, including some by Guy L. Shorey of Gorham, depict women mountaineers in the White Mountains.

Lesson plans are available for middle and high school social studies teachers that explore ways in which women of the White Mountains challenged and worked within gender norms, allowing them to "Take the Lead."

The exhibit will run through Oct. 7.

The museum is also offering a series of lectures. Two feature those with local ties: At 4 p.m. on Sept. 21, June Hammond Rowan, will talk about "Mountain Summers," and what four fascinating women did from 1878 to 1886 when they visited and explored the Whites, developing new trails, collecting plant specimens, and discovering new places, including mountain summits; and from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. on Sept. 28, sled dog owner Sally Manikian of Shelburne and independent historian and Chinook expert Bob Cottrell of Chocorua will discuss women and mushing in the past.

The New Hampshire Humanities, the Jocelyn F. Gutchess Fund of the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation, and the Museum of the White Mountains membership donations supported the exhibit.