



# ImPrints

MPSI: Celebrating 100 Years of Child & Family Development in Detroit

## 100 Years of Women, Science, Children and Community

The 1920s roared for a reason. Ford's Model T cars lined the roads. Jazz music filled the air. Women could finally vote. American's first radio station went live. And the National Football League kicked off. Amidst the progress, chaos and cultural shifts, a school opened in Detroit, Michigan, dedicated to training young women in the skills required to be good mothers.

The Merrill Palmer School for Motherhood opened in 1920 to much fanfare and a bit of controversy. Funding for the school came from the will of Lizzie Merrill Palmer, heir to a fortune and widow of Senator Thomas Palmer. Lizzie gave \$3 million (more than \$70 million in today's dollars) to start the school with few details on how. Her heirs contested the award in court, but the judge ruled against them. Today's Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute, a



College interns in the 1940s observe Merrill-Palmer preschoolers enjoying snack time.

thriving research and education paragon at WSU credits a little luck, excellent timing and civic leader Tracy McGregor for laying the foundation for 100 years of challenges, successes and survival.

McGregor's job was to transform the money into a school. His secret weapon? Women. He wisely realized (spurred by pressure from women's groups) the value of enlisting a team of female experts to plan and run Merrill-Palmer (MP). These educa-

tors, scientists, and psychologists drew the blueprint for MP's training program, nursery school and scientific research. And that's just the beginning.

For the full story, visit our centennial exhibit at the Walter Reuther Library. Starting in mid-April, visitors can travel the high and lows, sacrifices and successes of our 100 years through historic photos, figures and displays. The exhibit's grand opening

see 100 YEARS page 2

**You're Invited to our 100th Birthday!**

Attend our once-in-a-century celebration

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## Alumni Share Memories



Suzanne (top middle) enjoys a casual moment with M-P classmates.

Clockwise from top left: Sheila Kayman, Debra Harris, Marilyn Makin and Barbara Adams.

*"I was a graduate student who worked from 1971-72 with Clark Moustakas and Cereta Perry. It was a year of challenges and growth. I lived on campus and I worked with teachers and students in a local elementary school. As a privileged suburbanite from California, everything about my stay at Merrill-Palmer was an education. Everything about that year is significant in my heart.*

*Living and working outside my comfort zone in an environment that promoted openness, compassion and honesty helped me grow and hopefully led me to promote those attributes in my own work. I am extremely grateful for my Merrill-Palmer experience and for all that M-P has contributed to the enrichment of children and the people who work with them."*

– Suzanne Toaspern-Holm, Chico, CA

## 100 Years from page 1

will be held May 20 from 6–7:30 pm with remarks by special guests, including WSU President M. Roy Wilson at 6:30. (Use front page QR code or search *Eventbrite Merrill-Palmer 100* to register.)

### Drama and Evolution

“The creation of Merrill-Palmer involved quite a bit of drama,” said John Hannigan, PhD, a member of the committee that created the exhibit. Dr. Hannigan is a MPSI faculty member who believes “everything is best understood in its historical perspective.” He uncovered drama in the court battle over Lizzie’s bequest, in the powerful women’s groups that demanded a voice in MP’s founding, and the strong, sometimes competing, personalities that guided MP’s growth.

“Plus the drama of how the school sometimes failed to respond to the needs of the community. We can’t celebrate the good without recognizing the bad,” Dr. Hannigan said. MP was slow to integrate, not enrolling its first student of color until 1938. “When it went bankrupt in the 1980s, the drama continued,” he said. “Without Wayne State’s intervention, it wouldn’t even be here.”

Hilary Ratner, PhD, agrees. “The exhibit does a good job of showing the evolution of Merrill-Palmer. It isn’t always flattering, but I think it’s a fair depiction.” She formed the centennial team because she’s felt connected to MP’s history from the beginning. As an assistant professor of psychology in the early 80s, she worked with MP Director Eli Saltz and Carolyn Shantz, editor of the

internationally recognized *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly* journal. Dr. Ratner was an MP faculty member until the early 1990s, leading several large grants, then left to become dean of the graduate school and ultimately WSU’s Vice President for Research in 2007. “I have fond memories of MP, working with interesting and bright people. Eli surrounded himself with unique characters. It was fun and exciting to be here.”

As Vice President for Research, Dr.

Ratner worked to insure MP’s future. She was instrumental in recruiting Dr. Peter Lichtenberg in 2008 to execute his vision for growth as MPSI’s director. “I’ve been delighted to see such progress,” she said. “My personal role is a way of contributing to the Institute’s legacy. It’s like looking at a diamond from different facets. Who better to consolidate MP’s history than someone who has experienced it at every level?”

continued on next page, see “Ah-ha”



Understanding the science of child development, including maternal and child nutrition was core to Merrill-Palmer’s mission from its founding.

## Alumni Share Memories

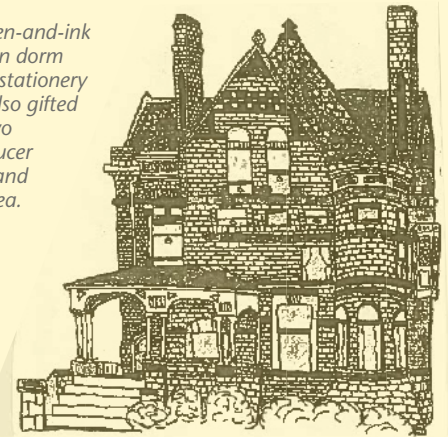
*“My years at Merrill-Palmer are remembered with great fondness!! I received a rich and enduring education from Clark Moustakas and Cereta Perry; two exceptional human beings and educators. Also, I enjoyed our very civilized school schedule, with Tea Time from 3:00 – 4:00 each day in the Freer House. And whenever we had guest speakers, they were hosted in the beautiful Peacock Room with champagne, appetizers and lots of good chats. I was privileged to be part of this wonderful ‘era’ in the life and history of the prestigious Merrill-Palmer Institute!!!”*

– Leigh Lucart, PhD Sedona, AZ

*“Congratulations on this amazing achievement. My son attended the Merrill-Palmer institute in the 90s and to this day we still appreciate what he learned. We remember it fondly, and he is still in contact with classmates. Great work, great institution.”*

– Alease Johnson

*Leigh created the lovely pen-and-ink drawings of MPI’s Victorian dorm houses found on Institute stationery in the 70s and 80s. She also gifted MPSI’s Centennial with two original china cup-and-saucer sets from which students and faculty sipped afternoon tea.*





## “Ah-Ha!” Moments

As they visited the Reuther archives, recorded oral histories, scoured attic files, and reviewed thousands of old photos, Drs. Ratner and Hannigan, and Dr. Tracy Neumann, director of the WSU Public History program, deepened their respect for MP’s achievements. “I was struck by its global impact,” Dr. Hannigan said. MP was one of the first schools in the nation to combine child development training with a nursery school and scientific research. The MP Scales of Mental Tests were translated into multiple languages. “Even the King of Siam had heard about us in 1928,” Dr. Hannigan said. “Our reputation was world-wide early on.”

When Dr. Neumann was approached

to join the team, she had no idea what to expect. She said she agreed because it was a good opportunity to involve history students in a real-world project. Eighteen months later, she lists the collaboration as one of her most rewarding professional experiences. “Drs. Ratner and Hannigan are pretty darn good historians,” she said. “I soon found myself surprisingly attached to MPSI and the stories of the women who founded it and built it into a major research center.”

Dr. Ratner was also impressed by the women. “They were visionaries, brave, inspired,” she said. Women’s opportunities were severely limited at the time. They’d only won the right to vote in 1919. “MP gave these women freedom to grow and achieve.” She appreciated the sacrifices

they made for their profession. Many never married or had families. “They created a new model,” she said. “And succeeded wildly.”

Drs. Ratner and Hannigan agree that MP’s fortunes were undeniably tied to the community; failure loomed when MP lost sight of that. “The exhibit represents the evolution of that connection and how MP is inextricably intertwined with Detroit,” Dr. Ratner said. Today MPSI’s mission is to live that lesson. “We’ve worked to listen to the community, to be adaptable to changing needs and maintain a dialogue,” Dr. Hannigan said.

Has MPSI’s past prepared it for the challenges of the next 100 years?

Come see for yourself.



An M-P student tape records puppet play with a preschooler in the 1970s.



Children at the Merrill-Palmer Nursery School played outdoors regardless of weather: Note the live pet rat in our cyclist’s pocket.

## Alumni Share Memories

*“In 1948, I spent my fall semester at Merrill-Palmer. I was a senior from Penn State in the Home Economics Department. I lived in a house across the street from the Freer House. I believe Miss Saunders was the house mother. At MP, I worked with children in a Detroit Settlement House.*

*Many years ago on a field trip, I sat next to a new member of our weaver’s guild. She mentioned she had gone to a small school at one point ‘that you never would have heard of.’ When she said, ‘Merrill-Palmer’ it immediately cemented our friendship. I treasure her as one of my best ‘young’ friends” (see right).*

*– Dorothy Parks Szymanski, 92*

*“As a senior studying at Iowa State College (now University), I spent the spring semester of 1959 at Merrill-Palmer. It was a privileged opportunity. My experiences were centered on the study of family issues. I interviewed parents who were observing their children in the nursery school and also several families in their homes. I remember the awe and embarrassment in a class session when Margaret Mead stepped into the classroom and asked what we would like to ask her. Regrettably we were tongue-tied and speechless!*

*In 1971, I had the pleasure of learning to weave. This led to the joy of friendship with Dorothy (Szymanski, left). The months at Merrill-Palmer were brief in my lifetime, but the lessons and inspiration have served me, my family and surrounding community in marvelous and useful ways. It is rewarding to be able to contribute to the lives of others. Thank you Merrill-Palmer!”*

*– Barbara Blumenschein Stam, 81, Fallston, MD*



The historic 1892 Freer House has proudly served as home to Merrill-Palmer faculty, administrative offices and meeting rooms since 1921.

## Remembering a “Force of Nature”



Phebe Vandervort Goldstein (1930-2020)

together they helped to secure \$2.5 million for renovations and a preservation architect to insure it was done right.

Phebe loved the arts and architecture. Her children Carolyn and David spoke of trips with their mom to see special buildings she loved. “She had an eye for beauty,” Carolyn said. She wanted to celebrate and preserve the creativity of others and share those experiences.

A serious and committed board member to MPSI since 1996, Phebe advocated for a quality education for all children from preschool onward. She began her career as a kindergarten teacher, though she never went to kindergarten herself. “I went to preschool for three years and then right to first grade,” she said, attesting to the value of a quality preschool education.

As MPSI’s director, Dr. Lichtenberg had the pleasure of working with Phebe for a decade. “She was a force of nature,” he said. “Her intelligence, desire for progress, expectation of excellence and attention to detail could be intimidating. But she exuded such warmth, graciousness and charm that we felt extra special to be involved in her noble undertakings.”

Myriad tributes highlighted Phebe’s long life of meaning and purpose – she will be deeply missed. “The best advice I can offer is to keep smiling and remember to help other people,” she said at her recognition luncheon a few years ago. “Be good helpers in the world and the world will be better for it.”

*The family has kindly requested that gifts in Phebe’s memory go to the Freer House.*

Phebe Goldstein passed away peacefully on January 4, a few days after she and husband Sidney returned from an extended family holiday in New York. She co-founded the Friends of Freer House and was an avid champion and board member of the Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute.

She first learned about the Institute from her mother, who spent a semester training at Merrill-Palmer in 1925, while a senior at Cornell University. Phebe also attended Cornell, spending a senior semester at Merrill-Palmer Institute in 1951.

“My favorite memory of momma was that she was always raising lots of money for important projects,” Phebe said in a 2016 interview. “She was helpful and friendly to everybody. I try to follow in those footsteps.”

The more than 150 relatives, friends, colleagues, volunteers and community activists who attended Phebe’s memorial at the Freer House, attested to Phebe’s legacy of generosity and tenacity. Freer House Director William Colburn recalled how in the 1990s, Phebe “saw how badly the Freer House, like many historic landmarks in Detroit, had deteriorated. She was moved to take action.” She teamed with Detroit historian Dr. Thomas W. Brunk and



L-R: Sarah Burger, DIA; Alicia McCullough, DIA; Barbara Heller, DIA; Doug Peters, Freer House member; Davin Brainard, DIA; Steve Shaw, DIA.

### Whistler Painting Replica Installed

A full-scale *giclee* reproduction of artist James McNeill Whistler’s famous painting, *The Princess from the Land of Porcelain*, has been beautifully installed in its original location in the former Peacock Room. The original painting was purchased by Freer in 1903 and hangs today in the Peacock Room at the Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian. The replica is made possible by a generous contribution from Freer House member Dr. David Weinberg, with in-kind support from Doug Peters and permission from the Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian. The DIA generously provided the services of its expert art installation team, led by Davin Brainard, to properly secure the large work to the wall.

For more information and history of the Peacock Room, visit: [www.peacockroom.wayne.edu](http://www.peacockroom.wayne.edu)



Phebe reviews technical renderings of original furnishings and house blueprints. Her keen eye and high standards helped drive the renovations that restored Freer House to its present stature.



# Stigma and Migraines: Don't Add Blame to the Pain

Julie Wargo Aikins gets a migraine headache several times a month. The pain is often paralyzing and can include numbness in her hands and feet as well as vomiting. Despite the excruciating pain, she once had an ER doctor tell her dismissively, "It wasn't like you had a brain tumor." By minimizing her suffering, he only added to it.

Twelve percent of Americans suffer from migraine disorder, an ailment that significantly increases health care costs and decreases work productivity. Yet few of these people receive a professional diagnosis or appropriate medical care. Dr. Wargo Aikins, an associate professor in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Neurosciences, jointly appointed to MPSI, wants to know why.

For years Dr. Wargo Aikins has been studying the effects of military deployment on family members. How do the stresses of a divided family and a parent working in a dangerous occupation affect children's development and mental health? She brings a research perspective to much of what she encounters.

Last year, she and her 16-year-old son (who also suffers from migraines) attended Headache on the Hill in Washington, DC, to ask senators and congressmen for more funding for migraine research. Part of that advocacy involves overcoming the stigma that migraine pain is not legitimate or credible. Like that ER doctor years earlier, many people view migraines with suspicion. "They'll say, 'it's just a bad headache; take an aspirin' or that we aren't really ill but just looking for a day off," Dr. Wargo Aikins said. "The disorder is invisible. So people question its existence."

As she thought more about stigma and heard people's stories, she did what any good researcher would do. She searched the scientific literature for studies to help her understand whether migraine stigma existed and how it impacted people's lives. She paused, recalling that period, still surprised at what she found. "There were almost no studies on migraines and stigma. I searched globally. Nothing."

Stigma matters. Groups that feel stigmatized report more depression, low self-esteem and anxiety. Stigma also inhibits people from seeking help, and can create a downward spiral of pain, depression and isolation. No one is immune. Kristen Chenoweth and NFL Hall-of-Famer Terrell Davis

“



*This isn't just a headache. I'm vomiting and seeing auras."*

in the workplace or school setting because the impact of migraine makes it harder for them to function."

Dr. Wargo Aikins wrote a blog post about her personal migraine experience; readers' comments have been eye-opening. One woman said she doesn't bother going to the doctor anymore because he thinks she is drug-seeking. Others said that people don't understand the amount of pain they endure. This isn't just a headache

– "I'm vomiting and seeing auras."

"I met a woman who had a clerical job and daily non-remittant migraines," Dr. Wargo Aikins said. "The only way she could get through each work day was to nap in her car. Regardless of weather, she was sleeping in her car. She had to keep her boss happy and not take days off for doctor's visits, so she wouldn't be fired."

(both migraine sufferers) spoke at the 2019 Migraine World Summit. They admitted they were nervous that "coming out" as migraine sufferers would damage their careers. "Who wants to hire an actress who'll be too sick to come on set?" Dr. Wargo Aikins said. "Or a football player who has to sit on the bench?"

Dr. Wargo Aikins now heads a pilot study investigating the relationship between stigma and migraine disorder. She enlisted MPSI Fellow Sydney O'Shay-Wallace, a graduate student in communications who has done extensive research into addiction and stigma. "My son is helping, too. He has a vested interest," Dr. Wargo Aikins said.

About 130 people, many Wayne State students and staff, have taken the online survey so far, a mix of ages that includes more episodic than chronic migraine sufferers. "This is not surprising, since episodic migraine might only occur a few times a month or year," Dr. Wargo Aikins said. "You can still work and go to school. Chronic migraines occur 15 days or more a month. It's harder to find those individuals

That's the kind of stigma Dr. Wargo Aikins hopes to define and dispel. As the pilot study advances, she and her team will prepare a grant for a larger investigation. Ultimately she wants to translate the scientific findings into prevention, action and intervention. "No one should be made to feel bad about having this disorder. No one should avoid seeking help because of a doctor's attitude. Migraines are hard enough," she said. "At least we can get rid of the shame and blame."

**Are you at least 18 years old, suffer from migraines, especially chronic migraines, and would like to help Dr. Wargo Aikins with her study?**

Please scan this QR code using the QR code setting on your smartphone, or email [julie.wargo.aikins@wayne.edu](mailto:julie.wargo.aikins@wayne.edu) for a link to participate in this anonymous 30-40 minute survey.



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NEWSLETTER



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**FREER  
HOUSE  
EVENT**

*The below event has  
been canceled.*

If you'd like to learn more about  
the freer house, contact  
William Colburn at:  
[william.colburn@wayne.edu](mailto:william.colburn@wayne.edu)

**Mad About Painting: Hokusai & Freer  
Lecture, Reception, Tours & Exhibit**

**SUNDAY, MAY 3**

**2:00 pm**

lecture at the Detroit  
Institute of Arts, Danto Lecture Hall

**3:30-5:30 pm**

Reception, tours & Hokusai exhibit  
at the Freer House,  
71 E. Ferry (one block north of the DIA)

**Reception**

\$5 for Freer House members  
\$10 public  
RSVP recommended

## Mad About Painting: Hokusai and Freer

Frequently referred to as the best known Japanese artist outside of Japan, Hokusai was a favorite of Charles Lang Freer, who amassed the largest collection of Hokusai's paintings in the world.

The Freer House, in partnership with the DIA, will present an exciting program about the works of this iconic and internationally renowned artist. Dr. Frank Felten, assistant curator of Japanese art, Freer and Sackler Galleries, Smithsonian, will speak about Freer's collection of Hokusai paintings, now on exhibit at the Freer Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, and how Hokusai came to symbolize the richness of Japanese art and culture across the globe.

"To think that Mr. Freer collected all of these works more than a century ago!" said Shinsuke J. Sugiyama, Japanese ambassador to the U.S.. "All these years later,



*Katsushika Hokusai, Boy Viewing Mount Fuji, 1839, hanging scroll; ink and color on silk. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution: Gift of Charles Lang Freer.*

I'm amazed at his foresight and his desire to understand a part of the world that was so different from his, and his deep appreciation of art that was non-Western."

Dr. Felten's lecture at the DIA will be followed by a reception at the Freer House featuring a one-time exhibit in the former Peacock Room of several rare and original Hokusai prints, on loan from a private collection.