

Family Tree

By Kit Almy

MARTY KAKUK has long known that her grandmother, Florence Allen Inch, was a remarkable woman. For the first 12 years of Marty's life, her grandmother lived with her family, so Marty was well aware of Florence's sense of humor, creativity, and love of culture.

However, it wasn't until much later that she began to realize the extent of her grandmother's accomplishments, including her place in the history of Kalamazoo as a physician and leader in the women's suffrage movement.

That both grandmother and granddaughter have a connection to Kalamazoo is sheer coincidence: Florence Inch lived here for the first quarter of the 20th century, but her family moved away in 1926. Marty grew up in East Lansing and moved to the Kalamazoo area in 1969, when her husband, Tom, took a job in scientific research with The Upjohn Company.

When Marty's mother—and Florence's daughter—Jane Inch Smith Elliott, died in 1987, Marty went through her mother's attic and filled 13 book boxes with photos and papers from her mother's and grandparents' lives. When she finally had time to start sorting them out in the late 1990s, she says, "I realized that my grandmother's material was quite extensive." Marty knew her grandfather's papers were important, too, but because he died shortly before her birth, she never knew him, so she decided to start with a thorough study of her grandmother. "She intrigued me the most," Marty says.

In going through her grandmother's papers, Marty rediscovered a memoir that Florence had written and dedicated to Marty and her two older brothers. It was about her childhood in Rochester, N.Y.

Marty cherishes this memoir, which provides a detailed view of late 19th century life for a middle-class child, but, she says, "It was just amazing to me that she didn't write anything about what she became or her contributions to the communities in which she lived."

So Marty began looking for more details about her grandmother's adult life. Florence had left journals and other writings in addition to her memoir, and Marty's mother's memoirs con-



Photo: Kit Almy

Marty Kakuk browses through two notebooks full of writings, photos, and news clippings she has collected about her grandmother, Florence Allen Inch. Behind her is a recent painting of Montague House, where Florence lived during part of her residency in Kalamazoo.

The contents page (page 7) shows Florence Inch with her grandchildren, Ben, Marty (Kakuk), and George Smith.

tributed more information.

Through extensive genealogy research, the notable life of Florence Inch takes shape.

Marty also looked to outside resources, including newspaper microfilms at the Kalamazoo Public Library and the Archives and Regional History Collection at Western Michigan University.

Of that research at WMU's archives, she says, "I was surprised to learn of her being the first woman to run for public office in Kalamazoo and of her active involvement with Western's Normal School and various other organizations."

Marty also had a "thrilling moment" when she was searching the Kalamazoo Public Library microfilm newspaper archives for indexed articles referring to Florence Inch. "I was done getting what I wanted from that, so then I was just scrolling down the newspaper just to look at other things, and all of a sudden there's a picture of her," Marty says. The item was a paid political advertisement for Florence's campaign for office and therefore had not been indexed. It proved to be very informative about Florence's activities in Kalamazoo. "I found it just by chance, and I wonder what else is there," Marty says,

After earning her medical degree in 1899, Dr. Florence Allen worked in the University of Michigan pathology laboratory of Dr. Aldred Scott Warthin.



Florence Inch, circa 1930s



Photos: Courtesy WMU Regional Archives

Marty is eager to share what she's discovered about her grandmother and other relatives. "I feel with all these writings that I have in my own archives, that something has to be done with them," she says. "I'm hoping to publish Florence's memoir for the people of Rochester, N.Y., and to add to it what we've discovered about her life as an adult," she says. She also hopes to publish the stories of her grandfather, George Inch, and her great aunt, Miranda May Allen, both of whom were accomplished physicians who made significant contributions to medicine during their careers.

* * *

Florence Elizabeth Allen was born in Rochester, N.Y., on January 31, 1875, to Anson Cornell Allen, a partner in the clothing business Allen, Strauss & Co., and Abigail May Alcott Allen, who was first cousin to author Louisa May Alcott.

In her memoir, Florence recalled visiting the Alcott family, including Louisa and her father, Amos Bronson Alcott, at their home in Massachusetts. Her practical-minded parents didn't think much of Bronson Alcott. Her father was not a believer in transcendentalism, and her mother recalled that when they were children, Louisa confided that she wished her own father would be more like Abigail's and make a living to support his family. The Allens did share some of the liberal and intellectual values of the Alcotts. They passed these values, along with a passion for participation in the community, on to Florence and her older sister, Miranda May.

Among other women's clubs, Abigail was actively involved with the Political Equality Club in Rochester, where she became acquainted with the club's founder, Mary Anthony, and her sister, Susan B. Anthony. Abigail and her daughters all worked with the Anthony sisters in support of women's suffrage.

Anson supported women's suffrage, too, and he was also an abolitionist, an agnostic, and an evolutionist who admired Charles Darwin and Thomas Henry Huxley and was friends with Robert Ingersoll. Florence inherited her father's interests in nature, poetry, and science. She recalled in her memoir that he was keenly interested in medicine and even had an actual "skeleton in the closet."

Florence and her sister delighted in playing with "Napoleon Bonyparte," which was a gift from their father's doctor friend. Florence referred to her father's influence on her career in this way: "... He shaped the course of my life not alone by his example and his teachings but by the more active direction of my choice of a career and his encouragement and sympathy with my ambitions."

In Florence's daughter Jane's memoir, she states that Anson Allen "was determined that his two daughters would not lack the opportunities for which he so longed. He had wanted to be a scientist, a physician; his daughters must be."

After graduating from high school in Rochester, Florence attended Cornell University for two years and in 1895 passed her examinations in the Medical Preparatory Course. She then went on to the University of Michigan, accompanied by her sister. The sisters lived in the chapter house of the Alpha Phi sorority, into



Photo and caption: Courtesy WMU Regional Archives

The Montague House, now owned by WMU, where Florence and her family resided from 1916 to 1926. About it she wrote, "It was really a charming place—brick painted gray—all white woodwork inside with light gray walls & mulberry rugs and furniture. There were ever so many fine trees about it and large grounds and lilac bushes & hedges and other flowering shrubs."

which Florence had been initiated at Cornell. Both young women received M.D. degrees in 1899.

Upon graduating, Florence worked for University of Michigan pathologist Dr. Aldred Scott Warthin. She intended to pursue pathology research and had been accepted at Johns Hopkins College of Medicine to do so, but due to a downturn in business, her father could not afford to send her. According to Jane, "He must have been deeply worried and was unable to tell her until the night before she was to leave. ... She told me that she never forgave him ... for not preparing her long before."

Instead, Florence went to work at the Michigan Asylum for the Insane at Kalamazoo (later named the Kalamazoo State Hospital) as an assistant physician, where she continued to do medical research. In 1901 she presented a paper at the annual meeting of the American Medico-Psychological Association, entitled: "Examination of the Stomach Contents in the Insane," outlining cases in which treating a patient's stomach disorders, either through medication or a change in diet, caused improvements in the patient's mental state as well as physical health.

Florence worked at the Michigan Asylum until September 30, 1902. A Board of Trustees report states: "Dr. Florence E. Allen resigned from the medical staff ... to enter private practice." In 1903 she obtained a medical license in the State of New York, but it is unknown whether she ever practiced there.

On April 28, 1904, Florence married a Michigan Asylum colleague and fellow University of Michigan graduate, Dr. George Franklin Inch of New Brunswick, Canada. Guests at the wedding in the Allen's home in Rochester included then current governor of Michigan, Aaron Thomas Bliss, and his wife, Alleseba, a cousin of Florence's mother. At the reception, Susan B. Anthony gave the couple a hand-inscribed copy of the four-volume "History of Woman Suffrage," which she co-edited.

After a European honeymoon aboard the steamship St. Louis, the Inches returned to Kalamazoo where George Inch was assistant physician at the Michigan Asylum. Jane believed that it was tradition, rather than chauvinism, that ended her mother's professional career. "My father was almost without bias against women in any kind of a career and I cannot imagine him asking Mother to stop her work for him," she wrote.

Throughout their stay in Kalamazoo, the Inches lived on the hospital campus, initially in an apartment over the offices of the Male Department where Jane was born in 1911. Later they moved into a house called Oak View, and when George Inch was promoted to assistant medical superintendent in 1916, the family

moved into the larger Montague House on Oakland Drive, now owned by Western Michigan University.

While living in Oak View, Florence kept a journal that displayed the love of nature she shared with her father, as well as her sense of humor. For example, she wrote of workmen catching and killing

a rabbit: "It went into a pie. I hope there will others come (sic) and they'll not go into pies while we are there but may nibble our vegetables to their hearts content." Florence also wrote that their neighbor, Mr. Kleinstueck, shared her interest in nature and gave her three wren houses he made out of coconut shells.

Florence was not an idle wife and mother. As a woman of many intellectual and social interests, she was busy outside the home with many community activities and continued to be interested in medicine. She participated in the organization of a society of women physicians in Kalamazoo in

Find It Through the WMU Archives and Regional History Collections

THE BASEMENT of Western Michigan University's East Hall holds a swimming pool full of historical documents. It's empty of water, of course, but between seemingly endless shelves you can still see the drains in the floor. All told, the Archives and Regional History Collections, stored in Western's original physical education wing, hold 28,000 cubic feet of documents, according to Sharon Carlson, the collections' director.

The archives are a treasure trove of manuscripts, books, magazines and newspapers, photographs, maps, oral histories, and the public records of 12 southwestern Michigan counties. The collections include the records of many companies, organizations, and individuals, as well as university records, scrapbooks, and athletic films. Notable holdings include Civil

War diaries, the records of the Kalamazoo paper industry, and the papers of Caroline Bartlett Crane.

Carlson has degrees in history and library science and did a doctoral dissertation on the Kalamazoo Ladies Library Association, the records of which are also included in the collections. "We are the place where the historical records of the community meet with the university community and the greater Kalamazoo community," she says.

Many people don't realize that the archives are open to members of the public, as well as to WMU students and faculty, explains Carlson.

Interest in the collections is not only regional. They serve researchers from farther afield, including other states and countries due to broader holdings, such as



a collection of microfilmed French documents about the history of European settlement in the Great Lakes and North America.

In recent years, the Internet has made the archives even more accessible. Catalogs of the holdings are all online. "We're still interested in preservation and curating the

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1910, and later that year she gave a talk on food and digestion to a women's society at the People's Church.

Around 1912 Florence co-founded the city's first garden club, the Club of Little Gardens, whose members included prominent citizens of Kalamazoo, among them Dr. William Upjohn.




Photos: Kit Almy

Sharon Carlson, left, director of WMU's Archives, pulls out a large bound book of public records. Shown above, the WMU archives reading room displays diagrams of the proposed future home of the archives.

collections, but I think it's really broadened more to introducing a variety of users to primary sources and then acquiring some primary source materials that are available online," Carlson says.

The archives were first established in 1956 and were housed in Waldo library until 1990 when they moved to East Hall, into an area that seemed quite spacious at the time. The collections are always growing. "It's amazing how much (space) we've managed to occupy," says Carlson.

The university is currently raising funds to build a new state-of-the-art facility to house the archives. The estimated \$12 million project, which will feature greatly improved climate control and more space for the collections, as well as classrooms and offices, will be privately funded, and building is still several years away, Carlson says. The most likely site will be on former state hospital grounds on Oakland Drive near the College of Health and Human Services, but other locations are being considered.

For more information about the Archives and Regional History Collections, call 387-8490. 

She also belonged to the Every Friday Club, the Art Club, and the Current Events Club.

Western State Normal School was right next door to the hospital, and Jane Inch was a pupil at the college's training school. Florence served on the PTA there and was elected president of the association in 1919. As a member of the Woman's League, she gave a talk on etiquette to Western State women in 1925.

Florence was active in politics as well. In 1909, she worked with Caroline Bartlett Crane to lead the local effort of a national campaign to gather one million signatures in support of equal suffrage. They were able to submit 2,013 signatures (from both men and women) to the national committee in New York.

In 1919, just after the state of Michigan granted full suffrage to women,

Florence became the first woman to run for city office in Kalamazoo. According to a Kalamazoo Gazette article of the time: “Mrs. Inch has been prevailed upon by friends, who deem her peculiarly well fitted for such a position, to enter the race.”

The political advertisement that Marty fortuitously discovered stated that she was “recognized as a leader by those who know her best,” and cited her various memberships and leadership positions in the community. Though her bid for one of seven seats on the city commission was unsuccessful, she did receive 211 first-choice votes.

In 1926 the Inches moved away from Kalamazoo when George Inch was hired as the medical superintendent of the Traverse City State Hospital. In 1931 they moved again when he was appointed the first medical superintendent of the new State Hospital in Ypsilanti. Florence continued to be very active, entertaining

large numbers of guests as was required of the wife of a medical superintendent. She was also involved with many organizations through the years, including the Daughters of the American Revolution, the Traverse City Women’s Club, and the Alpha Phi sorority.

Florence had a love of literature, art, and music, and was a creative person herself. In addition to her memoir and journals, she wrote poetry and song lyrics. She also painted, and she wrote and illustrated a humorous children’s book entitled “Insect Life, A Manual for the Not-Too-Young.”

After George Inch died in November of 1938, Florence moved to East Lansing to be closer to her daughter Jane and her family. Because Jane’s husband, Robert Smith, had fallen ill, Florence used the inheritance from her husband’s death to buy a large house near the campus of what was then the Michigan Agricultural

College. She lived there with the Smith family for several years.

Marty Kakuk has many fond memories of her grandmother with whom she shared a love of books, poetry, and ballet. Florence had a wonderful sense of fun, which involved, among other things, setting a dummy in a chair at the dining table every April Fool’s Day. “She just had us laughing all the time,” Marty remembers. “She felt it was important to laugh. Her sense of humor kept us doing that quite a lot of the time, even during meals. Our friends loved visiting our home when she was there.”

Florence loved word play, and her wit and love of literature combined in even her names for her pets. She raised Scottish terriers, and Robert Burns was one of her favorite poets. Marty remembers one dog named Dinna Care, undoubtedly from a line in Burns’ poem “Philly and Willy,” which reads, “I dinna care a single flie.” Another dog was named Havers, the Scottish word for “nonsense.”

In failing health, Florence returned to Ypsilanti in 1951 to stay at the State Hospital there under the invitation of the director, Dr. Orus R. Yoder, a practice which was extended to other former hospital staff and university professors in those days. She died in Ypsilanti on February 6, 1954.

On learning of Florence’s passing, her friend, Irene Kleinstueck from Kalamazoo, wrote to Jane: “It would be quite futile for me to try to tell you even a part of all that your dear mother has meant to us over the years. She was a unique and brilliant personality, and there are none just like her. What a true friend.”

Story author Kit Almy, a Kalamazoo College graduate who has used her English degree to pursue a career in public relations and writing, is married to Marty Kakuk’s son, Rob, who is employed at Western Michigan University. Marty and husband Tom Kakuk live in Texas Township where they raised three children and are now retired. In addition to actively pursuing genealogy, Marty is a longtime member of the Kalamazoo Symphony Orchestra League and the Kalamazoo Art League. 📖

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