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Women of the White Mountains on display in Plymouth



MARCIA SCHMIDT BLAINE, interim director of the Museum of the White Mountains, shows some of the garments on display in the "Taking the Lead: Women of the White Mountains" exhibit at the museum. (BOB MARTIN/CITIZEN)

By BOB MARTIN

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PLYMOUTH — Over the course of the last 200 years, women have had a profound impact on the White Mountain region, and the Museum of the White Mountains now has a free exhibit that is designed to be hands-on, fun and informative.

"Taking the Lead: Women and the White Mountains" opened on April 7, and Interim Director Marcia Schmidt Blaine said they have had a good reception. She said on opening night, there

were more than 100 people who stopped into the museum, and each day, there have been people who stop in to check out the art, clothing and writings about some of the key women in the region. This includes some dating back to the early parts of the 19th century.

Blaine said it is important to remember that they are an academic museum that is associated with Plymouth State University, and the goal for the exhibit is to educate the public in an interesting way. With this particular exhibit, one will see signs that say “please touch,” as they are encouraging people to touch some of the recreated garments that modeled the old days, as well as things like stereoscopic viewers, which takes two photographs and makes a 3-D image.

Blaine said a key part of the exhibit is thinking about the role of place and gender in the White Mountains.

“We are thinking about leadership in a very broad way, but a lot of women who got their start working for the Appalachian Mountain Club, hiking or just spending time in the mountains, are now today’s business women, teachers and more,” said Blaine. “It runs the gamut.”

Throughout the museum, there is clothing that was created this past year which is modeled after old clothing. She said people have had the opportunity to come in and try items on, and see how it was for the women of the 19th century.

“They can check out all the different layers,” said Blaine. “They are historically accurate, and we created them specifically so people can touch and try them on. We are hoping this will help to attract many people, particularly children who always like to touch and pick things up.”

One of the garments was one that Lucy Crawford would have worn, Blaine said. Crawford wrote the first “History of the White Mountains,” which is also on display at the museum. Crawford and her husband Ethan Allen Crawford ran an inn in the area, which later became Crawford Notch. She was one of the first inn keepers, and Blaine said without her, Ethan Allen would not have been nearly as successful.

Blaine told a story about the Crawfords, saying that the day she gave birth to her first child, her house burned down around her. She and the baby managed to get out, and Ethan wasn’t around.

“She was a very strong individual,” said Blaine. “She wrote down the history of the White Mountains using Ethan’s voice, but she included a lot of women’s stories in there. She had some great stories, and it is one of the reasons we knew who to research for this exhibit.”

Also throughout the museum are an array of 19th century paintings, with some showing women hiking throughout the mountains. Another was by John Casilear, who came to the White

Mountains and fell in love with a woman and decided to spend many summers there. In 1867, he created a beautiful painting of Howard Farm in Tamworth that is on display.

However, Blaine said there were also modern 21st century paintings that were created in the style of the 19th century, with one example being one by painter Lauren Sansaricq. There were also modern-style paintings relating to the White Mountains.

Also on display are garments created by Becky Fullerton, who is the archivist and librarian of the Appalachian Mountain Club. When one holds the jacket she created, they will see that it was very heavy and thick. She made the garments last year, and hiked the White Mountains with them.

“It’s a little bit of the past in the present,” said Fullerton.

Another woman that is highlighted in the exhibit is Emily Klug, who came to the United States in the early 20th century from Germany. Klug became a nurse in New York, but she would come to the White Mountains during the summer, and became very well known. The Appalachian Mountain Club officials loved her, and even said “she carried her own sunshine with her.”

Blaine pointed out that there are photographs of Klug wearing a skirt with all her belongings wrapped up in them. This was because there were times where she would need to be in a place to be proper.

“She was quite a story,” Blaine said.

Miriam O’Brien was one of the earliest rock climbers, and in 1925, she went on a trip with her brother and friends into the White Mountains. One of their friends got lost, and they went for a search. The person was found safe and sound, but during that time, O’Brien realized her love for the outdoors. She became passionate about mountains, learned about climbing and then went to the Alps.

“She was perturbed over there,” said Blaine. “She wasn’t able to take the lead and bring a group up through the Alps. She decided she would have to do it without men, and convinced another woman to climb with her. They climbed a mountain called “The Grepon,” and when they reached the top and came back down, a man later mourned, “The Grepon is no more.”

O’Brien and her husband ended up moving to Randolph, and were renowned for their climbing, as they were some of the first people to climb all the 4,000 footers, and even did it in the winter when she was 62 years old.

Other notable women in the exhibit are Lucia Pychowska and her daughter Miriam, who were trail architects, mountain map makers and artists who wrote for the Appalachian Mountain Club’s

journal Appalachia in the 1800s.

There are also a variety of watercolor journal entries on display by Mary Perkins Osgood, as well as a trunk of items that she would have with her.

In an effort to associate with the students, there are journal entries read by students that people can listen to in an interactive setting.

Some of the more modern women of the White Mountains that are highlighted include Olympic silver medal winning skier Penny Pitou, Barbara Wagner, who now runs an energy foundation in San Francisco and Laura Waterman, who Blaine described as the “foremost female climber in history.”

“We have a lot of things that connect what they did in the mountains in the past to what they are doing presently,” said Blaine.

Blaine said “taking the lead” is not to say that women are overtaking everyone, but rather that they have the opportunity to take the lead in something they are passionate about.

The exhibit is open through October 7, and the hours are Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Saturday from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. For more information, log onto <https://www.plymouth.edu/museum-of-the-white-mountains/>.

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