

Leta Schoenhals: Nonretiring Spirit

If you wish to know about the life of a retired professional woman, then read no farther and certainly do not ask Leta Schoenhals. She doesn't know what the phrase means, and has neither the time nor the inclination to find out!

Leta began her life as Leta Cole in Jackson, Michigan, but, when she was a small child, her family moved close to the Kalamazoo area. During that period, Paw Paw, Portage, and Richland were satellite schools of the Campus School that was part of Western State Teachers College; most folks think that this was physically found only in East Hall, but Leta knows better. The teachers in these "outside" locations were considered to be regular faculty members of the College, and were expected to perform the other non-instructional duties of a faculty member. As a result, Leta, as well as those who came to campus, was a part of the laboratory school of this institution although she officially graduated from the Paw Paw High School.

Having been exposed to the Western philosophy during her school years, and because she saw teaching as a likely career, Leta did not leave the Kalamazoo community to attend college; she enrolled as a freshman at WSTC, and selected an English and Speech major. While a senior in high school, she first met an Ann Arbor student, Neil Schoenhals, at a debate tournament, and she continued to see him during her first two years at Western. In Leta's junior year, 1941, she married him although such actions were not especially encouraged—there were only four other women students who were married and enrolled in the College. Neil went on to a distinguished teaching career at Western, and served for 30 years—many remember him for his leadership as the Director of the Educational Resources Center—a nationally recognized, multi-media-based support center for educational programs at the University.

While Neil was engaged in his teaching during the 1940s, Leta, who had completed her undergraduate degree, interrupted her plans for a career to raise their two children. Her daughter Carol, who holds degrees from the University of Michigan and Case Western Reserve University, teaches pediatrics at the Grand Rapids Junior College. She, in turn, has two sons, Andy, who graduated from WMU in 1993 prepared for a career in construction management, and Jeff, who is currently a middle school education major at the University. Leta notes, with considerable pride, that he will receive his



President Leta Schoenhals, Friends

diploma, magna cum laude, at the April 1995 commencement.

The Schoenhals son, Marvin, universally known as "Skip" to his friends and colleagues, has also been a source of pride. He obtained his degree from the University of Michigan and then attended the Wharton School of Business at the University of Pennsylvania. He is CEO and president of a major bank in Delaware, and is devoted to his stepdaughter, Allison, a 9th grade student. There is little doubt that Neil and Leta were successful in their parenting careers.

As her children grew older, Leta was able to return to her own professional interests, and eventually earned her master's degree in junior high education with a counseling emphasis followed by a Specialist in Education degree, also in counseling. From there, it was a short step to a position as counselor in the Portage high schools. She needed all the skills that she had, not only to deal with her formal position, but also to assist her own family through a period of crisis. Her two grandsons had to cope with a divorce and the loss of three grandparents within a two-year period. Leta stepped in to provide stability and to help in dealing with the loss of immediate family. Prior to his death, she and Neil had explored much of the United States in their travel trailer; at this point, she traded it in for a self-contained motor home. Then, she and her grandsons spent most of their summers visiting dozens of locations in both the United States and Canada. As she recalls, "We had a ball!"

Travel may not be a career, but it comes close to being a vocation and is certainly a passionate interest. As noted, the

first journeys were largely within the continental U.S and Canada, but she soon became a world-wide enthusiast with Europe and the Middle East as opening steps followed by additional trips farther afield. Among her memorable visits was one with Kalamazoo's sister city, Numazu, visited with several other Kalamazoo as well as University friends such as Marguerite Baechtold and Eleanor McKinney, emeriti faculty from the University's library school. She has been to Malaysia, Bangkok, Thailand, and Hong Kong—twice; spent six weeks in the South Pacific; enjoyed a week in the remote jungles of New Guinea; and braved the continent of Africa twice—once to see the antiquities in Egypt and once on an animal safari by hot air balloon across the Serengeti Plain. She reluctantly admits that South America has not yet been on her itinerary, but that oversight will soon be remedied!

Two rather special interests have grown out of her travel. Leta has honed her photography skills; she is, indeed, a superior photographer and has both the pictures and photography prizes to prove her mastery of the field. And, along the way, she also developed a somewhat unique collector's interest in an unusual object—not art objects or jewelry or antiques, but teapots—most, of course, carried carefully home from one of her far-flung visits around the world.

Articles such as this always have space limitations, and one serious problem with describing Leta Schoenhals is attempting to encompass at least a degree of what has been important in her life. One finally

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The Draper Manuscripts: Frontier Lives

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other Ohio Valley tribes; and Richard Butler, Indian Commissioner, provide contemporary material on cultural thought and attitudes, tribal history, traditions, and legends.

Both the Central Reference Department in Waldo Library and the Regional History Collections in East Hall have a copy of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin's *Guide to the Draper Manuscripts* (Madison: 1983) which details the 50 series into which the 500 volume collection is divided; Appendix III of the *Guide* is devoted exclusively to the hundreds of maps found in the collection. Another aid to researchers is the calendars which list, in chronological order, material contained in eleven of the series; these are on microfiche in the Regional History Collections.

Because Lyman Copeland Draper, over a century ago, sought and collected virtually untapped manuscript and oral sources, and because he preserved whatever he collected, historians and scholars today are fortunate to have material avail-

able that is truly unique and significant. Through the legacy of the Charles R. Starring Endowment Fund, the University Archives and Regional History Collections is able to provide this amazing resource to our University community as well as to the larger community of historical researchers in Michigan.

S.H.

The Check's in the Mail

Occasionally, each of us forgets something important. Right now, we want to remind you that we need your renewal for 1995—or, if you have not been a member before, your membership application. As President Leta Schoenhals noted in the Fall issue of *Gatherings*, becoming a member of the Friends of the University Libraries of Western Michigan University gives us "a common ground from which we can grow together;...you do make a difference." Please complete the form below and return it to Bettina Meyer, Waldo Library, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, MI 49008. We want your involvement in our efforts to strengthen and support the activities of the University Libraries.

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ends up with a list—not complete, but at least a sense of what she does: (1) Member of the Board and President of the Kalamazoo Association of Retired School Personnel; (2) Member of the Evaluation Board of the Visiting Nurse Association of Southwest Michigan; (3) Co-organizer of a program at the Kalamazoo County Juvenile Home that provides readers for the children before they go to bed; (4) Teacher of "55 Alive" for the American Association of Retired People—a program that helps senior automobile drivers cope with aging changes; she has also taught others to teach the course; (5) Chair of the Administrative Council, the governing body of the First United Methodist Church of Kalamazoo; and (6) President of the Friends of the University Libraries, Western Michigan University. Probably, one should also mention that she spends a considerable amount of time cheering on Bronco sports teams including football and basketball.

And there we are, friends: Leta Schoenhals doesn't know a thing about retirement. G.E.

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