



Insider's Look at Grand Canyon

Webisode #33 – Women's History Month Transcript

Emily: Welcome to a special Insider's Look at Grand Canyon. I'm Ranger Emily stepping in for Ranger Patrick today. Because it's March, we are celebrating Women's History Month across the country. The National Women's History Project States: a truly balanced and inclusive history recognizes how important women have always been in American society. Joining me today to help celebrate Women's History Month at the Grand Canyon is Park Ranger Maggi Daly. Maggi, welcome to Insider's Look and thanks for helping us make Grand Canyon's history truly balanced and inclusive. Now, I understand there are three women that you'd like to talk to us about today that helped make Grand Canyon's history so amazing.

Maggi: For me, the three women that really stand out are Mary Jane Colter, Nampeyo, and Polly Mead Patraw

Emily: So let's start by talking about Mary Colter since her works are still standing today.

Maggi: Right. Grand Canyon is the proud home for eight existing standing Mary Jane Colter structures. Mary Jane was influenced by Native American culture and really was the first woman architect to really set forth in that man's world.

Emily: So, Mary Colter was a female architect at a time when it was not generally accepted, so how did she come here to work at Grand Canyon?

Maggi: She had a friend that worked for Fred Harvey Company, and while traveling on vacation, she managed to get the phone number for Mr. Harvey and made one of those really bold phone calls and said, "Hey. I'm Mary Jane Colter and this is what I do. I'm an architect and you should hire me." And, he did. But he didn't hire her as an architect but to decorate the new hotel in Albuquerque, New Mexico that the Fred Harvey Company just launched and she was going to decorate. She began to paint and decorate with Indian rugs and baskets and pottery and really became the premier site for exposure to Native American art.

Emily: So Fred Harvey was so impressed by the work that she'd done in Albuquerque that he asked her to come back to Grand Canyon?

Maggi: Absolutely. The newly built El Tovar Hotel plans called for an Indian structure off the front of it. Mary Colter had studied a great deal of the Hopi culture and decided that the Hopi representation was the most important here at the time for Grand Canyon, and began the building of Hopi House, a two story structure replicating a traditional Hopi home.

Emily: So Mary Colter is hired by Fred Harvey, she comes in and she designs the Hopi House. What are some of the other buildings that she designed?

Maggi: She's also done Phantom Ranch and Hermit's Rest, Lookout Studio and, of course, her most famous structure here at Grand Canyon, the Watchtower. But the Watchtower is really the premier Mary Colter, based on some of the structures at Hovenweep, Mesa Verde, really took the time to study them and then hired Hopi artisans to build and decorate them in their traditional style.

Emily: And didn't she also at Hopi House have Hopi artisans come work and live here?

Maggi: That was the whole part of the plan that she would have them come in and in several months' time, and in fact, she's responsible for our next influence, a woman named Nampeyo. Nampeyo learned to be a potter from her mother. And studying as a Hopi potter, you're not going to school but you're learning by example. Mom doesn't give you directions, she doesn't criticize your work. She just sits you down with a lump of clay and you experiment and you go forward and that's how Nampeyo really kind of mastered her trade. And Nampeyo got here, got the appointment at Grand Canyon to work at Hopi House. She went to abandoned village sites and found shards of ancient pottery and used those styles to reflect in her more later works and really built a name as the premier Hopi Tewa pottery person. She returned to her home on First Mesa where she lived the rest of her life, although very short in time. But passed that trait on to her daughters, who after she lost her vision shortly before her death, had to paint the pots for her, so the tradition has carried on and she is still available and we can see her work in galleries and museums throughout the Southwest. Speaking of legacies, certainly for you and me, Ranger Emily, the most amazing legacy here is a young woman named Polly Mead Patraw.

Emily: One of my heroes when it comes to Grand Canyon.

Maggi: And mine too! You know, because I think without what she did, I don't know that either of us would be standing here today.

Emily: So, Polly Mead Patraw is so important to rangers like me and Maggi because she herself was a ranger and she was Grand Canyon's first female ranger naturalist.

Maggi: And the second female ranger naturalist in the National Park Service.

Emily: How did she come to work here at Grand Canyon?

Maggi: Well, she came here on a visit from school. She had a teacher who had this summer trip lined up to explore Zion and Yellowstone and the North Rim of the Grand Canyon. On that trip, she was really blown away by Zion, but she got here to Grand Canyon and thought that she could not be amazed any more, and of course, the Canyon worked its usual magic. And she figured out this was the place not only that she wanted to be, but had a vision of writing her Master's thesis based on what she saw here at Grand Canyon. It was her aunt who was not only her aunt but also her benefactor, who, upon graduation from her undergrad, offered her a trip to Europe- what would be expected of any girl of her age and upbringing- or a trip back to Grand Canyon. And, gee, there was really no doubt in Polly's mind, but the Grand Canyon was her destiny, and spent the next two summers working on research for her Master's thesis. But interesting, in her Master's thesis, her advisor was a geologist and a botanist. And he thought one influence couldn't exist without the other. So he kind of built in some extras to keep her at Grand Canyon, or kind of ground her here at Grand Canyon, that her Master's thesis had to include some of the geological influences. Not a geologist herself, she relied on the experts here at Grand Canyon and struck a deal with Eddie McKee, the South Rim biologist/geologist..or ranger-naturalist, rather, and well, decided that she was going to go meet with him face to face and took her first step into the Grand Canyon and hiked across. Boy, was she surprised at the length of Grand Canyon and said herself that basically you don't know Grand Canyon until you've seen it from the bottom up.

Emily: And I think as rangers, it's something that is expected of us. Polly Mead knew that. She knew to understand the Grand Canyon she had to experience as much of it as she possibly could. So Polly Mead's legacy, as far as I'm concerned, lives on through all of us female ranger-naturalists that have the opportunity to talk about the things that she talked about- botany, geology, everything that makes the Grand Canyon so special. So, Mary Colter, Nampeyo, and certainly Polly Mead Patraw are extraordinary women that have influenced the lives of so many visitors here to Grand Canyon

Maggi: And so many rangers!

Emily: I really think their efforts and love for the canyon have made it easier for all of us to embrace this remarkable place we call the Grand Canyon.

Maggi: Absolutely!

Emily: Thanks for celebrating Women's History Month, Maggi, with me here at the Grand Canyon.

Maggi: You bet!