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PINE KNOLL SHORES

Women's Club

By Michelle Powers

Despite the fact that the 1960s were known as the era of women's liberation, there were many women prior to that time who broke with the conventions of their times and engaged in unconventional pursuits. During the monthly meetings of the Pine Knoll Shores Women's Club, member Pauly Brown shares stories of some of these famous women who often defied the cultural mores of their times. Among those whose names we readily recognize are mystery writer Agatha Christie, World War I spy Mata Hari and our own Alice Hoffman, the "Queen of Bogue Banks."

Agatha Christie was born in Devon, England, in 1890; by the time of her death in 1976 at the age of 85 her works had been translated into more languages than any other individual writer. She is considered to be the best-selling author of all time, with sales worldwide of over four billion copies of her books. Only the Bible is known to have outstripped her sales. She began writing in 1920 after the end of the First World War. The hero of her first novel was a Belgian war refugee, Hercule Poirot, who was soon to become a famous fictional detective. World War I and its aftermath provided Christie with inspiration for many of her crime and romantic novels.

Mata Hari, an exotic dancer from the Netherlands, was born Margaretha Zelle in 1876. After living in Java with her Dutch officer husband for many years, she divorced him and returned to Paris in 1903 where she began working as a circus performer and exotic dancer, taking the name Mata Hari. Her relationships with powerful men across the continent, including the German Crown Prince, high ranking French military officers and wealthy businessmen, placed her in a unique position to gather important information during World War I. She traveled extensively during the war and was suspected by both the Germans and the French as being a spy for the other side. On flimsy evidence, she was eventually arrested for espionage and executed by a French firing squad. Thirty years after the trial it was admitted that the evidence against her was inconclusive.

Bogue Banks' most famous woman, Alice Hoffman, was also greatly influenced by the tumultuous events in Europe caused by World War I. Born in 1862, Hoffman led a life of privilege in New York and Paris, traveled widely to exotic locales and socialized with European heads of state, but in 1917 she decided to purchase a 2,000-acre parcel on remote Bogue Banks, a safe haven from war-torn Europe. In 1919 a post office was established on Bogue Banks in her home, with Hoffman as postmistress. In the 1920s she continued her travels to exotic locations around the world, engaged in risky investments and was involved in numerous ongoing lawsuits. By 1944 Hoffman's holdings on Bogue Banks were managed by the grandchildren of President Theodore Roosevelt under the aegis of the Roosevelt Trust. Hoffman died in 1953 on Bogue Banks at age 91, but her concern for the natural environment greatly influenced the future development of what today we know as Pine Knoll Shores.

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