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Football: The Exhibit ........................................... 3
Football in Southwest Michigan. ............................. 5
Pigskin Physics .................................................. 6
Don’t judge a book by its cover ............................... 9
A century in motion ............................................. 10
It’s spelled just like the song... ............................... 11
A presidential visit to Kalamazoo ......................... 13
The life expectancy of “things” .............................. 16
Early days of Austin Lake ................................. 18

Director’s column: The public museum ................... 2
Summer of Sports collaboration ............................. 4
Football activity page ......................................... 7
What is it? ....................................................... 8
History in the making: the Irish in Kalamazoo ........ 15
Volunteer profile: June Brown .............................. 19
Summer hands-on volunteers ............................... 19
Community adviser profile: James Melvin .............. 20
Calendar of events, happenings .......................... 21

ON THE COVER: KVM Greeter Guides hit the gridiron in preparation for A Summer of Sports at the museum this summer. Shown here (minus their helmets and clockwise from upper left) are: Nicholas Mahmat, Joshua Nowicki, Susan Bennett, Megan Kirkpatrick, and Mandana Nordbrock. For more information on the KVM volunteer team, see page 19 of this issue. And look for the * symbol throughout this magazine—you can see featured artifacts on display in the special Museography case located next to the reception desk on the main floor of the museum, or in other exhibit areas throughout the museum.
In the last issue of *Museography*, I traced the beginnings of contemporary museums back to the private, princely collections of *Renaissance Europe*, using as my example the Medici Palace in 15th-century Florence.

The first modern museums began when the heirs of private collections gave their cabinets of curiosities to the nation. The Ashmolean Museum at the University of Oxford was the first, established in 1683 from a bequest to the English people of an extensive cabinet assembled by John Tradescant. Because the Ashmolean Museum was opened to visitors, albeit grudgingly and at an admission fee of sixpence each, it is considered the first public museum.

Another cabinet of curiosities was the basis of the first national museum. At his request, his heirs sold Sir Hans Sloane’s collection to the English people for 40,000 pounds, one quarter of its value, and thus began the British Museum that opened in 1759.

Like the Ashmolean, visitors were not its top priority. It admitted no more than eight groups of visitors a day, no more than 15 visitors per group, and only by prior reservation. It was not until 1879 that the British Museum was open on a daily basis.

With the shift from private collections to public institutions came a shift in purpose, from the personal connoisseurship of the Renaissance collectors to scientific research. The charter of the Royal Society proclaimed the purpose of its collections as follows: “…that out of a sufficient number of sure experiments the way of nature in workeing [sic] may be discovered.”

The Repository of the Royal Society, the Ashmolean Museum, and the British Museum were products of the Enlightenment, the intellectual movement to explore, map, name, and thus comprehend the visible universe. They embodied Sir Isaac Newton’s hope that the world and everything in it could indeed be made measurable.

Because their ultimate goal was to catalog the works of God and nature, the focus of museum work became research and taxonomy: the classification and placement of individual specimens into logical and coherent systems. Art works began to be classified into schools and nationalities; specimens, into genus, phylum, specie.

The notion of a public museum opening princely and scholarly collections to the people at large was a product of Napoleonic France, which made over the Louvre collections into instruments of the democratic ideals through a new institution, the Musee Napoleon. The goal now was remaking serfs and subjects into free men and women. With the Musee Napoleon, the modern public museum had finally arrived.

In the process of reshaping human potential by exposing the public to great things, the Musee began behaving very much... continued on page 24
Duffy Daugherty, Michigan State University’s charismatic coach and king of one-liners, said it best: “Dancing is a contact sport; football is a collision sport.”

The physics of those collisions and the science behind why that funny-looking, elliptical spheroid takes those weird bounces will be sharing the spotlight with the gymnastics, acrobatics and grace of the game when Football: The Exhibit punts, passes and kicks its way to the Kalamazoo Valley Museum.

Created by the Museum of Discovery in Little Rock, Ark., the nationally touring exhibit interactively explores the science, mathematics and technology behind America’s fall gridiron passion and will kick off its stay at the downtown-Kalamazoo museum on Sunday, June 1. It will stick around until Super Bowl time in January.

Complementing that will be a locally created exhibition centered on what football has meant to Southwest Michigan at the college, high school, community and social levels. (See accompanying article on page 5.) On display will be photographs, uniforms, helmets and other football memorabilia unique to this part of the state.

Football: The Exhibit is part of the statewide A Summer of Sports extravaganza as seven major museums throughout Michigan offer exhibitions focusing on the roles athletics and recreational activities have played in the lives of people of this state.

The theme of the 3,000 square-foot, hands-on Football: The Exhibit is that the science in ordinary life can be revealed through football’s familiar aspects, such as passing, kicking, the action at the line of scrimmage, and even cheerleading.

Visitors will learn why the spiral stabilizes the flight of the football; how balance, angular momentum and center of gravity are key components of blocking, tackling and sacking the quarterback; and how the protective equipment has evolved over the years. continued next page…
In 1999, seven of Michigan’s largest public history museums decided to collaborate on a statewide exhibit to attract new audiences and to organize a project that was greater than the sum of the individual parts. With a theme of sports in Michigan, museums set to work, and this summer fans across the state can enjoy the results of their efforts.

The exhibits reflect the variety of sports that people in Michigan have played and watched for more than a century. From team sports to individual pursuits, from amateurs to professionals, from small towns to big cities, A Summer of Sports presents a panorama of sporting excitement.

The KVM offers visitors dual exhibits exploring both the science and history of football. (See related articles on pages 3–6 of this issue.) Why is a spiral pass more likely to reach the intended receiver? How can linemen use science to improve their blocking ability? For visitors interested in the scientific principles underlying the game, Football: The Exhibit demonstrates them in an exciting, hands-on format.

Those with more historical inclinations will enjoy the companion exhibit, Football in Southwest Michigan, which traces the story of college and high school play in this region. Both exhibits run from June 1 through Jan. 18, 2004.

Heading out across Michigan for summer trips and vacations, sports fans can learn the story of women’s baseball and the Negro Leagues in Grand Rapids. They can experience the passion of high school basketball in Lansing or discover the history of golf, tennis, boating and more at Mackinac Island. Hunting and fishing are featured in Flint, while Detroit offers a smorgasbord of all the sports available in Michigan’s metropolis. Finally, those who wish to play baseball the way it was played 150 years ago can stop off and join in the fun in Dearborn. (For a list of A Summer of Sports museums, see the front inside cover of this issue.)

A Summer of Sports offers even more. Visitors can pick up a passport that will be stamped at each museum. Those who have their passport stamped at four or more destinations will be eligible for a drawing that offers a range of prizes including tickets to sports events. This is the summer to travel Michigan and learn about all the sports we enjoy in the Great Lakes State!

“Football: The Exhibit” is a traveling exhibit organized by the Arkansas Museum of Discovery.
On an autumn afternoon in 1916, an unsung freshman free-kicked a field goal against the Western State Normal School sealing the Hilltoppers’ defeat. That kick launched the fame of George Gipp, Notre Dame’s legendary “Gipper.”

The story of football in this region is not, however, about other schools’ gridiron greats. With traditional rivalries and outstanding players, Southwest Michigan itself played an important role in the development of high school and college football.

In 1892, the Kalamazoo College football club challenged a team from Olivet College in a game that marked the start of intercollegiate football in Southwest Michigan. Today, both schools are members of the Michigan Intercollegiate Athletic Association, the oldest college conference in the nation. The Hornets quickly became an MIAA power and the 1897 team, captained by Joseph B. Westnedge, won the conference championship.

Soon after its founding in 1903, Western State Normal School started a varsity football program, and during its first decades, boasted some of Western’s all-time great players. Quarterback Walt Olsen and running back Sam Dunlap set records that still stand. John Gill (who later served as football coach and athletic director) was a star punter as well as a great runner and receiver.

The team’s current nickname, the Broncos, was his suggestion.

Area high school football also has long traditions: the Kalamazoo Central/Battle Creek Central rivalry is the oldest in Michigan, dating back to 1893. Plainwell and Otsego, rivals since 1896, have played more games against each other than any other two high schools in the state. In fact, Plainwell played in, but lost, the first state high school championship game in 1899—the first such championship in the United States.

Football in Southwest Michigan explores the story of football in this region: its early dangerous years, our area’s high school and collegiate histories, star players, and the pride of its fans. It is part of Football: The Exhibit on display at the museum from June 1, 2003 through January 2004.
Football is not only a game of strength, speed, and skill—it’s also a game of applied physics. The branch of physics that shows up most often is called mechanics. The rules of mechanics, which govern how the players move, how the football moves, and what happens in bone-crunching moments, were described in works by Newton and the physicists who followed in his path.

Newton described three laws of motion that we can observe in the game:

The first law says that an object at rest will remain at rest, and an object in motion will remain in motion along a straight line, unless acted upon by an outside force. On a tee at the kicking team’s 30-yard line is the football which weighs just under a pound. It has inertia and will remain on that tee until the kicker plants his toe on the ball applying a force to get it moving.

The second law says that in order to change the momentum of an object’s motion an outside force must be applied, and the change in the motion will be proportional to the force applied and in the same direction as the force applied. Momentum is the mass of the object multiplied by its velocity. Our football, sitting on the tee, has a momentum of 0 ft lb/sec (mass 1 lb x velocity 0 ft/sec). As the force of the kicker’s toe is applied to the ball, the ball begins a flight of about 65 yards (200 feet) in about four seconds time. The momentum of the kicker’s foot transferred to the ball gives the ball a momentum of about 50 ft lb/sec. That momentum must come from the foot of the kicker.

The receiver runs to the point where the ball can be caught. He can predict the location of that point because of Newton’s first law—an object will continue moving in a straight line unless acted upon by an outside force. However, the path followed by the kicked ball is not exactly a straight line. It’s a ballistic path, a parabolic shape rising and falling along the straight line the ball follows down the field. Since the football falls back to the ground, some force must be acting on the football. The action of this force is continuous; it’s the pull of gravity.

Since gravity is constantly applied, the velocity of the ball constantly changes or accelerates. During the first part of the flight, while the ball is moving upward, the acceleration works against the ball’s momentum so the ball loses vertical velocity, until it no longer rises. The acceleration toward earth continues and the ball begins falling, gaining velocity until it falls into the receiver’s arms.

The third law states that when one body exerts a force on another, there is an equal and opposite reaction. The receiver’s foot pushes against the ground, and the ground pushes back against the receiver’s foot starting him into motion. The receiver runs up the field, picking up velocity and momentum with his first few steps. Coming from the other direction is a more massive player. The resulting collision of helmets, padding and soft tissues is inelastic so some energy is absorbed in the collision. The opposing momentums nearly cancel each other out, with the final resting point in the direction the player with the greatest momentum was traveling; in this case a tackle for the kicking team.

So just as in the opening kickoff and return, the laws of mechanics are already involved in the play of the game.

What happens in bone-crunching moments was described in works by Sir Issac Newton.

For more information on the physics and science behind the game of football, visit Football: The Exhibit at the Kalamazoo Valley Museum from June 1 through Jan. 18. These websites can also give you more information about Pigskin Physics:

Did you know that when you play football, you’re using physics?

Physics is the branch of science that deals with the physical world, including force, motion, mechanics and energy. The Kalamazoo Valley Museum’s new special exhibit is devoted to football and how the game and physics are related.

Knowing about the physics of football helps players improve their performance. Studying the physics of football leads to better and safer equipment. Below is a puzzle. See how many physics and football words you can find. (Answers can be found on page 22.)

Football Trivia

1. Which team won the NFL’s Super Bowl in 2003?
2. Who was named the Most Valuable Player in that game?
3. What is the name of Michigan’s NFL team?
4. What is another name for a football?
5. How many players are on the field during a game?
6. When and where was the first intercollegiate football game played?
7. Football is a combination of what two sports?
8. Name two pieces of equipment that a football player wears.
9. How long is a football field?
10. Where can you go to find out more about the sport of football?

(Answers on page 22.)

Your Favorite Team

Do you have a favorite football team? Many people do. What is the name of your team? In what state is your team located? What is the color of the uniform that your team wears? Who is the head coach of your team? Who is your favorite player on the team?
Make some guesses about these objects from the KVM collection. How old do you think they are? What were they used for? (Answers at the bottom of the page.)

#1 This is called “The Battle Ax”* and was used to cut a certain kind of plant material.

#2 No office, home or school should be without one of these.*

#3 Made from a conch shell, this had a very practical use.*

#4 It is what it looks like, only made of glass.*

Ask the KVM!

Have a question about a person, object, or artifact that relates to the history of the southwest Michigan area? Send your question to Tom Dietz, KVM curator of research (269/373-7984 or tdietz@kvcc.edu) and you may see it answered in a future issue of Museography.
One day the curator brought in a ragged looking wall-sized flipchart with a murky brown cover. It was obviously well used and about 100 years old. Its condition looked so fragile that I didn’t dare touch it. I wondered why we would want something in such poor condition. Then he began to flip the pages of the chart and—WOW!—my heart leapt into my throat! What beautiful charts! Each of the 20 charts was printed, front and back, with colorful and finely detailed drawings. I thought, “How could we not want this wonderful thing?” We didn’t have anything like it in our collection.

As I cataloged the chart I realized that this would have been used in a one-room schoolhouse. It covered basic instruction for a teacher with pupils from elementary to high school. The charts illustrate everything from simple language skills, penmanship, and basic American history, to accounting and business practices.

At a time when education was much simpler, this would have been a useful tool; the intense coloring and detailed drawings of the chart would have been a real eye-catcher at the front of the classroom. Today, it’s still an eye-catcher, with an additional lesson to teach… “Don’t judge a book by its cover.”

Paula Metzner
Assistant Director, Collection Services

FROM THE COLLECTION…

Don’t judge a book by its cover…

Does it belong in a museum?

Spring cleaning and garage sales are upon us. But before you toss it or sell it, ask yourself, “Does it belong in a museum?” The Kalamazoo Valley Museum collects objects that help tell the stories of people, businesses and events of Southwest Michigan. If you think you have something that belongs in a museum, please contact a member of our collections staff: Paula Metzner, assistant director of collections (269/373-7958 or pmetzner@kvcc.edu) or Tom Dietz, curator of research (269/373-7984 or tdietz@kvcc.edu).

KVM Wish List: Fallout Shelter Sign from the 1940s–1950s; Victory Garden, War Bond Campaign, and “E” Business posters and artifacts; Betsy Wetsy and Chatty Cathy dolls; Celery-growing artifacts and documents.
Historical coincidences not only intrigue us but can sometimes reveal how rapidly science and technology progress. Such is the case with the completion of the transcontinental railroad in the United States and the Apollo 11 landing on the moon.

On May 10, 1869, executives of the Central Pacific and Union Pacific railroads hammered a golden spike into place, linking east and west. The sweat and blood of tens of thousands of workers—many of them Chinese and Irish immigrants—accomplished a feat that 10 years earlier had seemed highly improbable.

Fast forward 100 years to July 16, 1969: Neil Armstrong and Edwin “Buzz” Aldrin successfully landed the Lunar Excursion Module, Eagle, on the moon. Eight years earlier, when President John F. Kennedy had set the goal of manned flight to the moon, his proposal seemed equally unattainable.

It is fascinating that two such milestones in transportation history should occur precisely 100 years apart. It is a mark of the pace of progress that the dream of linking California to the United States should, in the next century, have been replaced by the dream of putting men on the moon. Both achievements took inspiration, courage, hard work, and technological innovation.

The dream of a railroad across the United States dates to 1845 when merchant Asa Whitney sought a quicker route between New York and Asia and proposed a transcontinental railroad. After the United States acquired California from Mexico, the discovery of gold there led to statehood in 1850 and increased interest in a cross-country railroad. Government studies proposed various routes, but even after U.S. Sen. Stephen Douglas included a route from Sacramento to Omaha in the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, disputes over slavery blocked the project for another 10 years.

During the Civil War, however, Congress authorized the construction of the railroad and the five-year building project began. The Central Pacific, building east from Sacramento, crossed mountain ranges, pioneered the use of nitroglycerine to blast tunnels through mountains, and built bridges to span rivers and valleys. The Union Pacific, heading west from Omaha, crossed the Great Plains and the eastern ranges of the Rocky Mountains. At 2:30 p.m. EST, as a ceremonial golden spike linked the two railroads, the telegraph instantly spread the news across the nation, setting off exuberant demonstrations. Even the Liberty Bell rang to celebrate the accomplishment.

One hundred years later, millions of people watched as Neil Armstrong took a televised “giant step for mankind” and set foot on the moon. As with the transcontinental railroad, the dream of a lunar landing had a long history. French science-fiction writer Jules Verne raised the possibility of such a journey in From Earth to the Moon, published in 1865 just as construction crews were building the railroad.

In 1957, the Russian satellite Sputnik made the possibility of space travel real. The United States trailed Russia in the “space race” as one Russian success followed another. In response, President Kennedy proposed putting a man on the moon before the 1960s ended.

The challenge was great. Success would require new technologies—powerful rockets and spaceships capable of carrying astronauts safely to the moon, landing there, and then returning to the earth. Three astronauts died in the effort. But in 1969, the whole world cheered as the dream became a reality.
Glenn Miller’s ditty about goin’ to Michigan to make a bid for a freckle-faced kid probably did as much to put Kalamazoo on the national and global map in the 20th century as The Upjohn Co. and its cornucopia of products. That’s why Floyd “Bud” Parks, a Kalamazooan since enrolling at Western Michigan University in 1951, wants the legends surrounding the 1942 Academy Award-nominated tune and the community it made famous to become that “of story and song.”

Instead of a “cottage industry,” Parks has made the “I’ve Got a Gal in Kalamazoo” Miller standard something of a “cottage hobby,” having researched and studied the topic for many years.

He is still amazed that Kalamazoo has never taken advantage of the enormous popularity of the song to promote the community for economic-development purposes. Parks is also convinced that the true story behind “I’ve Got a Gal in Kalamazoo” and the myriad of legends about its origins have the makings of a Broadway-caliber musical, especially if intertwined with happenings on the local scene and with historic events. It could be the Southwest Michigan version of “The Unsinkable Molly Brown.”

Legends abound:

- Kalamazoo College co-ed Sara Woolley, daughter of a local clothier, inspired the song. The truth is she was chosen as “The Gal from Kalamazoo” in a campuswide election after the song made its debut in the 20th-Century Fox musical, “Orchestra Wives,” and reached “Hit Parade” status across the country. Parks likes to think that every female resident is “The Gal from Kalamazoo,” not just one particular person.

- As a child, composer Harry Warren was traveling with his father by train and the route took the duo through Kalamazoo. “There is no evidence that Warren ever was in Kalamazoo,” Parks said, “much less went through it aboard a train.”

- A former WMU baseball player was employed in a southern California bomber-manufacturing plant.

- Frequenting a watering hole in...
Mexico, he heard the song on a juke box and was told it was “written by a guy from Battle Creek.” These accounts are legion because of the thousands of men stationed at Fort Custer who took a break from their military duties to take a gander at the females who called Kalamazoo home.

The lyrics were written by a Kalamazoo sailor serving aboard the heavy cruiser USS Minnesota in the Pacific Theater. The paper on which he wrote the verses was reportedly stolen “by an entertainment type.”

Credited with creating the lyrics is famed songwriter Mack Gordon with whom Warren collaborated on many a tune. “Gordon was born in Poland,” Parks said about his research. “He was a comic in vaudeville and known as being quite the party guy. As far as I know, his days in vaudeville never brought him to Kalamazoo.”

The team blended talents on 20th-Century Fox’s 1941 production of “Sun Valley Serenade” that starred the Miller band in its first Hollywood film. The No. 1 song was “Chattanooga Choo Choo.” The Tennessee city responded by wining and dining Warren and Gordon, and making them honorary citizens.

The studio followed up with “Orchestra Wives” that was shot in Hollywood in March of 1942. The Miller band, featuring Tex Beneke & the Modernaires, recorded the Kalamazoo song on May 20 and it shot to the top of the charts.

The film had only a one-week local stay in September of 1942 at the old Capital Theater on East South Street, now the site of a parking ramp. Kalamazoo’s fathers did not follow the lead of their Chattanooga colleagues. They paid no special heed to the festive song championing their town’s name. But the Kalamazoo College student leaders did with their campus contest.

“The Kalamazoo song was the movie’s big production number,” Parks said. “It was a 10-minute segment at the end of an 97-minute movie. ‘Orchestra Wives’ and ‘Sun Valley Serenade’ both featured The Nicholas Brothers dancing to the two hit songs. The brothers’ performances were segmented at the end so their part could be cut from the films for showings in the segregated South.

“I don’t think the name of Kalamazoo had any significance to Gordon when he wrote the lyrics to fit Warren’s musical score,” Parks said. “The name intrigued him, much like Kokomo would, and it was easy for rhyming purposes. The real significance is the public’s overwhelming acceptance of the song.”

In his 1975 biography, Warren wrote: “The song about the gal in Kalamazoo caught the public fancy, even in England, where most people had no idea that a town with such a strange name even existed.” The composer based his score on some musical exercises he did when working on the scales, not on whizzing by a “Welcome to Kalamazoo” sign along the railroad tracks.

How popular was the song? It earned an Oscar nomination for the tandem in 1942 when Warren and Gordon learned once again that timing is everything. In that same field of nominees was “White Christmas,” which is heralded as one of the most popular songs of all time, even in Kalamazoo.

Parks said he first heard the song as a 9 year old living in Wisconsin, thanks to an older sister’s penchant for listening to “Hit Parade” tunes. “It never, ever entered my young mind that I would ever come to Kalamazoo, much less live here for most of my life.” And marry a gal in Kalamazoo, the former Phyllis Clearwater.

His quest to “get something started” has been assisted by Bill Pease, whose WMU Marching Band has added the tune to its half-time repertoire, and by Barry Ross, who crafted a symphonic arrangement for his Kalamazoo College and Community Orchestra.

From World War II well into the 1990s, local residents, when giving their mailing address to an out-of-towner, would say something like, “Well, it’s spelled just like the song… K-A-L-A-M-A-Z-O-Oh, I got a gal in Kalamazoo…”

“Bud” Parks would like that level of familiarity and recognition to last for another century or two.
A PRESIDENTIAL VISIT TO KALAMAZOO

As President William Howard Taft’s train sped on its way from a brief stop in Battle Creek to the day’s final destination of Kalamazoo, the president had time to contemplate events in the larger world.

The most pressing issue for Taft on that September day in 1911 was a vote in Canada to approve a reciprocity agreement to liberalize terms of trade between the United States and Canada. But while President Taft’s thoughts may have concentrated on international developments, the people of Kalamazoo were working diligently to provide him a gracious welcome. In 1911, lacking radio and television, few citizens would ever see their president “live” or hear his voice.

Even by rail, travel was measured in days and presidential excursions from Washington were taken more rarely than they are today. Kalamazoo’s citizens were determined to make this a notable day for themselves, the president, and posterity.

Kalamazoo hummed with activity in the days and hours before Taft’s visit. The chef at the Burdick Hotel had arranged rail delivery of “a quantity” of sea turtles, 200 lobsters, and 400 spring chickens to feed the dignitaries gathering for a banquet with the president.

One of those dignitaries was Dr. Dwight Waldo, president of a newly minted teachers’ college, Western State Normal School. Dr. Waldo was pleased, no doubt, to see President Taft’s itinerary included a visit to Western’s new building (later known as East Hall) sitting high above the city.

What a statement the fledgling institution had made by constructing the gleaming white colonnades visible from Kalamazoo’s central neighborhoods and business district; later it was said to be described by noted American humorist Will Rogers as the “Acropolis of Kalamazoo County.”

As the president’s train pulled into Kalamazoo, some 60,000 people had gathered. People from the region had been streaming into the city by horseback, buggy, and the occasional automobile. Whether Democrat, Republican, Socialist, or Progressive, no one wanted to miss the chance to see President Theodore Roosevelt’s successor—a man expected to stand for a second term in 1912.

A regulation-size electric flag in front of the Commonwealth Power Co. held the attention of onlookers, many of whom lived without electricity at home or in their work place. The Kalamazoo Telegraph further reported a smaller silk flag in the power company’s window, “constantly waving by the aid of an electric fan going at the rate of 1,600 revolutions a minute.”

President Taft, described by one biographer as the “first motorized president,” poured his 335-pound frame into a Pierce-Arrow touring car, loaned and driven by A. B. Connable, and began his motorcade around the city. Accompanied by dignitaries, (including military aide Major A. W. Butts who would perish seven months later on the Titanic), the president’s car proceeded to the newly constructed YMCA for the laying of a cornerstone. The new “Y” and Burdick Hotel were being rebuilt after devastating fires. Spectators gathered downtown and at the points chosen for speeches. Streets were decorated with red, white, and blue banners, and nearly 5,000 school children (the girls dressed in white), waved American flags as the president passed by.

Women were not allowed to attend President Taft’s banquet, although cards permitted them access to the public spaces of the Burdick Hotel. Many, according to The Kalamazoo Gazette, “took positions in the entranceway to the banquet hall and listened to the President’s address.” This card was made out by Mayor Charles Farrell for his wife.

continued next page…
Crowds surged around the president’s open touring car, but police, army infantry, and Secret Service agents kept a watchful eye. Few adults watching the spectacle could forget that President William McKinley had been fatally wounded by an assassin 10 years earlier to the month.

In all, President Taft delivered eight speeches in the late afternoon and early evening of his visit. The motorcade made stops for the dedication of the new YMCA building, a short address at Kalamazoo College, and speeches at Western State Normal School. That evening, Taft moved to the sumptuous banquet at the Burdick Hotel and a final, more substantive, speech to Kalamazoo’s civic leaders. With Western’s Waldo at a front row table, the president spoke on the topic of international peace through arbitration. Topics of law were favorites of Taft, who later served nine years as chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. It was a fitting end to a memorable visit.

—W. Wilson Woods

We thank Bill Woods, director of operations for WMU’s Office of International Affairs, for this contribution to Museography.

For 7-year-old Al Connable, 1911 was a memorable year—he met President William Howard Taft, the largest chief executive in the nation’s history, and became the youngest person to climb to the top of one of the nation’s tallest mountains.

Connable’s father, a prominent businessman, was serving as mayor of Kalamazoo when President Taft, who was sworn into office in March of 1909, came to Kalamazoo two years later to dedicate the new YMCA building at the corner of Michigan Avenue and Park Street. Mayor Connable, a fellow Republican, was Taft’s official host.

“My father met President Taft at the railroad station,” Connable said in his biography. “Taft was an immense man. Some of his critics called him obese. We had a Pierce Arrow, the kind of car with headlights on the fender and very wide seats. Well, when my father brought him up to our house to give him a view of the city, President Taft took up the whole rear seat.

“Naturally,” Connable said, “we kids were awed by the visit and the fact that the president of the United States was in our house. From then on we all vied with each other as to who could sit in President Taft’s seat. Turns out we all could.”

Taft spent some of his time in Kalamazoo in the Connable family’s two-story, pillared home on Prospect Hill overlooking the community. At the time, that constituted an idyllic western part of Kalamazoo.

The area was still quasi-rural, beyond Kalamazoo College and the prestigious “new” neighborhood pioneered by U.S. Sen. Charles Stuart, a local host of Senate colleague Stephen Douglas of Illinois. Only a few years before Taft’s visit, a family cow, “Brown Betty,” grazed on the front lawn. She had three acres of grass to chew.

Connable’s memorable year included a three-week camping expedition to Yellowstone Park, which in 1911 was a remote, primitive area. In addition to camping out in the wild—exciting enough—the youngster stayed in a lodge operated by Buffalo Bill Cody’s sister.

But the big adventure came when he and his father climbed to the top of 14,000-foot Pikes Peak, a feat that made the 7-year-old Kalamazooan the youngest person at the time to get that view. It merited an Associated Press wire story, which The Kalamazoo Gazette published.

Connable—who followed in his father’s footsteps as an entrepreneur, community leader, and public official—died on Nov. 16, 1999, at the age of 95.
The Irish in Southwest Michigan

While the early history of the Irish in Southwest Michigan is less thoroughly documented than other groups, there certainly were Irish settlers in the region. The French army enlisted Irish mercenaries when Michigan was part of New France in the early 1700s. Obvious Irish surnames appear on the roster of soldiers garrisoned at Fort de Buade in St. Ignace. At the end of their service, some of these men became fur traders and roamed the Michigan woods.

Michigan became American territory at the end of the 18th century and was admitted to the Union in 1837. While the number of Irish in this area was smaller than in the southeast corner of the state, naturalization records from 1840–60 show Irish immigrants taking citizenship in Berrien County. Somewhat interestingly perhaps, these Irish listed Ulster as their birthplace and indicated they were Northern Irish Protestants. In Kalamazoo, George A. O’Brien appears among the founders of St. Luke’s Episcopal Church in 1837.

Fleeing the terrible potato famine, those Irish immigrants who made their way to Michigan usually were too poor to buy land and become farmers. Frequently, they worked as manual laborers in Detroit or Grand Rapids or as miners and lumberjacks in northern Michigan. Those who came to Southwest Michigan may well have worked as laborers building the Michigan Central Railroad in the 1840s and 1850s. The 1850 census recorded some 260 Irish residents of Kalamazoo County.

By the 1870s, the names of the pastors of St. Augustine Church indicate the growing presence of Irish Catholics in Kalamazoo. Among the priests who served between 1869 and 1883 were Fathers Quinn, Tierney, and Patrick B. Murray. The appointment of Father Frank A. O’Brien in 1883 brought an Irishman to Kalamazoo whose contributions benefited both the parish and the broader community.

In 1886, Father O’Brien raised the funds to purchase a house on Portage Street that became Borgess, the city’s first hospital. He also helped establish Nazareth Academy and Barbour Hall, two schools that provided education for generations of Catholic students.

As Kalamazoo’s Irish community grew, a banquet became the highlight of St. Patrick’s Day celebrations. In 1890, guests gathered at the American House hotel to mark the occasion. The banquet seems to have been an annual affair at least until 1916. The festivities were celebrated in the German A.U.V. Auditorium on Portage Street.

Cork Street was reportedly re-named after County Cork in Ireland because Irish immigrants—specifically the Fitzpatricks and Dennanys—had extensive land holdings along that street in the early 1900s. Today, of course, the Irish community is well-established in Kalamazoo. An Irish-American Club preserves Irish culture and sponsors an annual festival as well as a St. Patrick’s Day parade.

Monsignor Frank A. O’Brien, pastor of St. Augustine Catholic Church from 1883 to 1921, founded Kalamazoo’s first hospital, Borgess.

Tom Dietz, Curator of Research
The Life Expectancy of “Things”

During the rise of the Roman Empire 2,000 years ago, a person’s life expectancy was a mere 28 years. By 1900, an American’s average life span was 46 years. Today, it is between 74 and 79 years. As our lives get better, our lives get longer. We eat better, are better clothed, better housed, and we have better medical care. The same can be said about the lives of “things” around us. When “things” come to a museum, their life expectancies sky rocket!

Preserving “things” for the future is a goal of almost every museum. At the Kalamazoo Valley Museum, as in many museums, we are able to extend the life expectancy of objects by practicing something called preventive conservation. It’s a simple philosophy... basically, once a “thing” enters our collection, whether its value is $5 or $500, it receives all the care and attention that would be paid to a valuable painting. If that care is maintained, an object can survive not just for decades, but maybe even centuries.

Two major aspects of preventive conservation are:

• the control of relative humidity and temperature in storage and exhibit areas; and
• the use of archival and inert materials for exhibition and storage.

We also control light levels and intensity, we monitor for and eradicate pests and pollutants, and we follow established guidelines for handling objects. Since 1980, each and every one of the Museum’s 55,000 artifacts has undergone some aspect of preventive conservation.

A few dozen artifacts in the Museum’s collection have received the royal treatment, well beyond preventive conservation. These items have either been conserved or restored. Conservation is carried out by a trained professional — a conservator — with expertise in such areas as paper or wood, paintings or textiles. The conservator’s role is to stabilize an object while retaining its aesthetic characteristics and historical integrity. The visible changes made by a conservator are often very subtle.

A restorer, on the other hand, is usually a skilled artisan who brings an object as close to its original appearance as possible. Restored objects usually look brand new.
With each artifact designated for the royal treatment, museum curators have to decide how far to go. A lesson is learned from the story of the limousine in which President John Kennedy was assassinated.* Within a month after the 1963 tragedy, the White House and the Warren Commission agreed to have the car restored and armored for continued use as a presidential-parade vehicle. All traces of the assassination were removed. All of its history was obliterated.

A conservator’s and curator’s approach to preserving the vehicle and its history would have been to leave it intact — blood stains, bullet holes and all. The conservator might simply recommend how to keep the vehicle clean without removing the evidence of the event, but in 1963, conservation was probably not the politically correct choice for preserving the vehicle. This example of complete restoration has had historians and museum curators asking “When is it OK to restore — when is it better to leave it alone?”

Most items in our collection don’t carry the historical weight of President Kennedy’s car, nor do they require conservation or restoration. But when that possibility is raised, we do have to consider how far to go. In most cases we have opted for the subtler treatment of conservation, but occasionally restoration has been the answer. Either way, whether objects in the museum’s collection undergo routine preventive conservation, plus conservation or restoration, each one is cared for with the ultimate goal of increasing its life expectancy for the future enjoyment of our visitors.

*The presidential limousine is on display at the Henry Ford Museum & Greenfield Village in Dearborn, Mich.

**The presidential limousine is on display at the Henry Ford Museum & Greenfield Village in Dearborn, Mich.**

*Expert restoration work can be seen in the case of this 1910 Gibson harp guitar. Working sometimes with only pieces of the original, the craftsmanship of a professional restoration can result in an object restored to nearly an identical state as when it was new. (Collection of the Kalamazoo Valley Museum)*

*At left and below: the badly damaged gilded ornamentation of this 19th century table can be seen before conservation. After its skilled “royal treatment” in 1995, the table can continue to amaze visitors for years to come. (Collection of the Kalamazoo Valley Museum)*
While out enjoying a beautiful warm spring day, I took a drive around Austin Lake, the second largest lake in Kalamazoo County. Admiring the homes that line the lakeshore, I began to wonder about the history of this area. Who was the first pioneer family to make its home along these banks?

In the 1830s, Moses Austin, sheriff of Genesee County in New York, was convinced by his former neighbor, Ruel Starr (an early settler), to follow him to Kalamazoo. Intrigued, Austin purchased a segment of section 24 in Kalamazoo County, and hired a guide named Charles Swan to escort him and his son Benjamin to their newly acquired property.

Leaving from Dunkirk, N.Y., they took the steamer “Sheldon Thompson” to Detroit, where they departed with a team of horses and fearfully negotiated their way though the wilderness and muddy trails of southern Michigan. They finally reached the small village of Kalamazoo on May 7 of 1833, Benjamin’s 14th birthday.

Within a few days after restocking in Kalamazoo, they arrived at the north shore of the lake that would later bear the Austin family name. The father and son quickly built a temporary shanty against a large tree they cut down, and set to work erecting a building of hewed logs that would later serve as a tavern. A few months later, the rest of the Austin family arrived, including wife Sarah, son William, and a niece. Because the tavern had not been completed before their arrival they, too, had to dwell in the shanty for a short time.

The tavern, which was later fitted with a dance hall, was host to a variety of fun-filled, eventful gatherings. In 1836, the townships of Pavilion and Portage were cut out of Brady Township and organized under the name of Pavilion. Austin’s tavern was the site of the first township meeting. Portage became a separate entity in 1838. In 1837, Moses was elected supervisor of Pavilion Township as well as justice of the peace as a member of the Whig Party.

The Austins continued to live at the lake until the 1850s when they moved into Kalamazoo. Austin died in 1859 and his wife in 1862. Son William studied law in Kalamazoo and served as county clerk until his death in 1844. Benjamin also moved to Kalamazoo after several years of living by the lake. He worked as a copper- and tinsmith, a watchmaker, in the dry goods trade, and eventually started a very successful wagon-manufacturing business. He eventually became one of the wealthiest men in Kalamazoo.

—Joshua Nowicki
KVM Greeter Guide
Driving an ambulance as an emergency medical technician in Rupert, Idaho, may sound more exciting than steering kids through hands-on activities at the Kalamazoo Valley Museum, but not to June Brown.

Brown, who also lived and worked in Roswell, N.M.—the UFO Capitol of the World—loves the give-and-take of that kind of learning experience. And not just because she is the consummate community volunteer, having donated hundreds of hours to Senior Services, foster homes for mentally and physically challenged children, to the Kalamazoo Public Schools, the Ready to Read program, the Kalamazoo Nature Center, Ministry with Community, and the Festival of Trees since taking up residence in Kalamazoo in 1981.

The 1950 graduate of Jackson High School, who went on to two years of nurses training, has logged some miles in her lifetime, thanks to the outdoors-loving fellow she married as she signed on with the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Soil Conservation Service.

That took Brown to the states of Washington and Idaho, plus Cheboygan in northern Michigan, and a 12-year stay in the Three Rivers area where her three children were raised.

During the Idaho assignment, Brown was widowed at age 46. While her immediate family, which now includes five grandchildren, had sunk roots in Southwest Michigan, she chose to re-adjust to her new single status in life by staying out West.

Initially supporting herself while working in a hospital, Brown relocated to southeast New Mexico, where she volunteered for community agencies that improved the lives of mentally and physically challenged children. Her special place to serve was at Roswell’s version of MRC Industries Inc. in Kalamazoo.

“I loved being in that workshop environment,” she said, “and when I decided it was time to be closer to my family, I followed up on that interest. I became involved in both foster care and fostering independent living. That’s how I supported myself until I decided it was time to retire. I frequently see people who were clients riding a bus and heading home after shopping.”

Once she had “adjusted to retirement,” Brown realized that her life was pegged to being active. “I had visited the museum and was impressed,” she said. “I knew that I did not want to stay home. I want to be able to touch people’s lives.”

Brown began doing just that—again—during the summer of 2002 as a museum volunteer, helping children take part in the weekly programs of hands-on activities on Wednesdays. “That’s what was needed,” she said, “so that’s what I did. I’ve always liked working with children.

“There are lots of special things about this community,” she said, “and the Kalamazoo Valley Museum is at the top of the list.”
James “Jamie” Melvin gives some of his free time to the Kalamazoo Valley Museum because, when a father wants to spend time with his kids, the museum is there almost all of the time as a fun place to go.

Melvin, president of Connable Associates in downtown Kalamazoo, joined the museum’s Community Advisory Committee shortly after the new building began welcoming its first visitors in February of 1996. Having been raised in the Gull Lake area where he graduated from high school in 1982, Melvin has a good grasp of this community’s cultural and educational resources. More perspective came living four years in Europe. That played a major role in the decision of the 39-year-old Melvin and his wife, the former Amy Douglass who is a graduate of Loy Norrix High School, to return to Kalamazoo after their diploma-earning days at the University of Michigan ended.

Melvin’s father, William, managed a production facility for The Upjohn Co. in Brussels, Belgium, where “Jamie” marked early-teen birthdays and polished his hockey skills. Once back in Michigan, he was good enough to spend two weeks at the U. S. Olympic Center in Colorado Springs trying out as a defenseman for the 1984 Olympic team. Those were pretty exciting days because the nation was still reverberating from “The Miracle on Ice” when the Americans beat the Russians in 1980 Olympics.

Melvin enjoyed just as much success on the baseball field, earning all-conference honors as a shortstop, but when he trekked off to Ann Arbor, he kicked off his spikes and skates with the intention of following in his dad’s footsteps. He did that, earning a degree in industrial engineering in 1986 before heading into uncharted territory.

“To round myself out and open more career doors,” Melvin said, “I enrolled in the graduate school for business. In the process, I took the business-law test. Why not do them together? So I did. When Bo Schembechler (football coach and athletic director) retired from the University of Michigan in 1990, so did I.”

Melvin spent the first 18 months of his law career doing corporate mergers and acquisitions in the Kalamazoo office of Miller Canfield Paddock and Stone before being recruited by Connable Associates as an attorney for its office.

“Amy and I came back,” he said, “because Kalamazoo is a great place to raise kids, and the museum is a great place to take them. It is completely dedicated to serving children and families, and it’s open when a father with young children is looking for a place to go and to enjoy.”

Their three—J. D., 12; Stewart, 9; and Abby, 7—attend The Gagie School.

“The museum is such a valuable asset to downtown Kalamazoo,” he said. “I guess I wanted to be a part of it and watch it continue to grow.”

“What the staff is doing will make it an even more valued resource to the community,” Melvin said. “The best is yet to come.”
SPECIAL EXHIBITIONS

FOOTBALL: THE EXHIBIT
June 1 through January 2004
Understand the science behind football in this action-packed exhibit featuring hands-on activities and insights into the community-building spirit of the game. **FREE**

FOOTBALL IN SW MICHIGAN
June 1 through January 2004
A companion exhibit traces the history of high school and collegiate football activity in the Southwest Michigan region with photographs and artifacts. **FREE**

Football: The Exhibit is a traveling exhibit organized by the Arkansas Museum of Discovery.

COMING IN 2004:

LATIN JAZZ
February through May 2004
This bilingual exhibition explores the history, cultural context, musicians, places, instruments, and dance behind the development of this musical genre. **FREE**

FEATURED PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

Join us for a series of hands-on activities this summer. Visitors can drop in anytime during the hours indicated for hands-on programs.

SUMMER SMORGASBORD
From June 16 through August 8, join us for fun science and history demonstrations Mon., Tues., Thur., and Fri. at 1:30 and 2:30 p.m. in the Curiosity Center. **FREE**

JAM SESSION
Sundays: June 1, July 6, Aug. 3, & Sept. 7 —2 – 5 p.m.
Listen to K'zoo Folklife Organization music. **FREE**

SUMMER HANDS-ON HAPPENINGS

CELEBRATING MICHIGAN’S SUMMER OF SPORTS
Wednesdays from 1 – 4 p.m. **FREE!**
On your mark... get set—go! This summer’s hands-on programs will focus on a wide variety of sports. Whether you’re into extreme sports, team games, or your own exercise program, this summer you’ll be introduced to lots of ways to stay fit. Dress for your favorite sport and enter the weekly drawings. Each week meet professional players, learn about each sport, and create a variety of related crafts. It’s time to join the game!

JUNE 18: TAKE IT TO THE EXTREME
Do you like riding on the edge, taking the dive, or climbing cliffs? Come see members of the Kazoo Skate Zoo perform stunts on their skateboards, skates, and bikes. Learn about mountain climbing courtesy of Climb Kalamazoo and meet Todd Currier, professional race-car driver. Make your own parachute and take it to the extreme.

JUNE 25: BE A TEAM PLAYER
Show off your team spirit. Wear your uniform, meet players from local teams, try out some new crafts as you join the team.

JULY 9: WATER PLAY
It’s time to get wet! Have fun fishing with magnets, creating boats and surfboards. Meet members of local swimming teams.

JULY 16: DANCING FEET
Come tap your feet; the music’s about to start! Learn how to line-dance from Lisa Bredahl of LaPique Dance Studio. Learn to cheer and make your own pom-poms.

JULY 23: FOR YOUR HEALTH
How do you stay fit? Do you enjoy running,
JULY 30: WINTER FUN
Find out more about hockey, ice skating, skiing, snow boarding, snowmobiling and more. Meet hockey players and design your own pair of miniature skates.

AUGUST 6: ON MY OWN
Some sports you can practice on your own. Does anyone play tennis, golf, pool, or do archery? Discover a variety of sports designed for one or more. Meet tennis players and coaches. Try your hand at archery with experts. String a miniature tennis racket and take a swing.

Experience a journey into space with state-of-the-art technology providing spectacular sights and sounds to guide your imagination to locations and events throughout our amazing universe. **All programs $3/person.**

**TERRI & HER TELESCOPE**
Saturday & Sunday; 1:30 p.m. May 3 through August 31
Wednesday; 1:30 p.m. June 18 through August 6
Terri’s wish for a birthday telescope comes true, but once it’s together, how can she use it and what is there to see? Terri visits an observatory to learn the tricks of exploring the night sky with a telescope.

**TREASURES OF THE MILKY WAY**
Wednesday, Saturday & Sunday; 4 p.m. May 3 through August 31
The pirate Beardless Red shows aspiring astronomers how to find their way around the night sky with a treasure map of star clusters and nebulae. Other treasures buried along the Milky Way include meteor showers and auroras. Learn how to gather up these treasures for yourself.

**UNIVERSE THEATRE & PLANETARIUM**

Experience a journey into space with state-of-the-art technology providing spectacular sights and sounds to guide your imagination to locations and events throughout our amazing universe. **All programs $3/person.**

Football Trivia Answers
1. The Tampa Bay Buccaneers defeated the Oakland Raiders, 48–21, in Super Bowl XXXVII (37).
2. Dexter Jackson, Tampa Bay’s No. 34, was only the third defensive back in Super Bowl history to receive the MVP award.
3. The Detroit Lions
4. A football is often referred to as a pigskin.
5. Each team may only have 11 players on the field at a time, for a total of 22 on the field for each play.
6. On Nov. 6, 1869 (more than 130 years ago), Rutgers defeated Princeton in a football game played in New Brunswick, New Jersey.
7. Soccer and rugby.
8. Players wear a helmet with a face guard, neck roll, shoulder pads, elbow pads, thigh pads, knee pads, an athletic supporter (cup), and special shoes called cleats. Some players also wear gloves and sometimes a mouth guard.
9. The playing field measures 100 yards long. The end zone is 10 yards deep and is located at each end of the field.
10. To The Kalamazoo Valley Museum’s Football: The Exhibit! Also check out this website www.playfootball.com

**Word Search Solution**

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K C A B R E T R A U Q N X O V
C L M O N T U M O B C I K
O O L U I N E R T I A P R S
L M P A Z R P J T A C K L E E
B P A V B H S A S E L C S U M
W U B C Y T R E H R O S H L U
T N I S H E O S P E E D G C O
T T I S L I H O X Y E Z R X F
I C J E W Y K F H A S L V O
S T C K C I K T N S W K Y R
M C J D Q A M S S A M W V Z C
A S Z X O B C K P N V M X T E
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**Summer Camps at the KVM**
Still looking for a summer camp? Call 373-7965 to receive full descriptions and find out if spaces are available in the following camps:

- **E-Mission (ages 11 – 14)**
  June 16 – 20; 8:30 – 2:00
- **Space Explorers (ages 9 – 11)**
  June 23 – 27; 8:30 – noon
- **Freedom Camp (ages 9 –12)**
  July 7 – 11; 8:30 – 2:00
- **Museum Detectives (ages 6 – 8)**
  July 21 – 25; 8:30 – noon

**Themed Birthday Parties at the Museum**
Have your next birthday party at the KVM—four different parties offer something for everyone. For more information, visit www.kalamazoomuseum.org/special_events.htm

**Handicap-Access**
The museum is handicapped accessible. Sign language interpreters may be scheduled for programs with a minimum of two weeks notice. Assisted listening devices are also available in the planetarium. Our TDD number is 269/373-7982.

**Audio Tours**
Learn more at your next KVM visit! Audio tours are now available at the museum’s front desk. Tour cost is $3 each.
Challenger Learning Center (CLC) is an innovative educational facility complete with a Space Station and Mission Control. Mini-missions are hands-on, fun learning experiences. Age restrictions are imposed for safety reasons, as well as for the enjoyment of the program by all participants. The Challenger Learning Center will be closed for maintenance August 11 – 29.

VOYAGE TO MARS: MINI-MISSION
Sat. & Sun. at 3 p.m. (June 7 – August 10)
Wed. at 3 p.m. (June 18 – August 6)
Live out your space-age fantasies with this exciting space adventure. You will be on the first Mars-Earth Transport Vehicle preparing to land on Mars. Your mission, should you accept it, is to help create a control base at Chryse Station, located at the site of the first Viking landing. Tickets available on a first-come, first-serve basis on the day of the mini-mission. **Ages 6 & up, $3/person. Each child ages 6 to 11 must be accompanied by a partner 12 years or older.**

SPECIAL GROUP MISSIONS
Attention scouts, clubs, and businesses! Looking for something out of this world to do with your group? Call 373-7965 for details on junior and corporate missions.

JUNIOR GROUP MISSIONS
This is a specially designed 90-minute mission for children ages 8 and up. Pre-flight hands-on activities prepare the junior astronauts for their exciting flight in the Challenger Learning Center’s spacecraft simulator. Successful crews will receive certificates and mission memorabilia. **Ages 8 & up, 8–14 participants. Registration is required at least two weeks prior to mission date; $10/person; one chaperone required.**

CORPORATE TRAINING MISSIONS
Could your organization benefit from a hands-on experience that will graphically show the productiveness of teamwork and communication? If so, this three-hour experience consisting of one hour of pre- and post-mission activities and a full two-hour simulation is the opportunity for you. The CLC staff utilizes state-of-the-art equipment and hands-on activities to build teamwork and leadership skills tailored to the needs of your group. **15–34 participants; $25 per person**

CHILDREN’S LANDSCAPE

SUMMER HOURS
JUNE 1 – AUGUST 24
Mon., Tues., Thurs., Fri. • 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Wed. • 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Sat. • 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Sun. • 1 to 5 p.m.
Closed for maintenance August 25–29

Children’s Landscape is designed to introduce preschoolers and their parents to an interactive museum setting. Hands-on activities, exhibits, and programs are designed for children five and under. Children older than five may participate only if accompanying a preschool buddy, with the expectation that their play be appropriate to preschool surroundings. **Free**

TEACHER-LED PROGRAMS
Twenty-minute programs are offered Monday through Friday at 10 a.m. through August 24 and are available to families and preschool groups:

**MONDAY:** Toddler Time (2 year olds)
**TUESDAY:** Preschool Science (ages 3–5)
**WEDNESDAY:** Preschool Stories (ages 3–5)
**THURSDAY:** Preschool Music (ages 3–5)
**FRIDAY:** Preschool Art (ages 3–5)

JUNE – JULY: PLAY BALL
Enjoy a variety of sports, games, and fun all designed for little ones.

AUGUST – SEPTEMBER: IN MY BACKYARD
It’s time to explore your backyard. Learn about animals, seasons, and stars.

www.kalamazoomuseum.org
like today’s art museum: explanatory labels were hung with art works; classes were held in galleries; gallery guides were published for visitors. The Museum’s revolutionary accessibility drew visitors from around Europe; temporary exhibitions were organized for special occasions.

The museum was now being viewed less as a research collection and more as a social instrument, as a civilizing influence on its visitors by breaking the chains of ignorance and tyranny through access to its collections. Rather than a repository, it had become a reforming force in remaking society by instilling civic virtue, a sense of beauty, and historical perspective.

Napoleon’s victories were defended as the march of the democratic ideal. As his armies crossed Europe, Napoleon brought a curator to survey private collections and confiscate the best as war reparations for France. After Napoleon’s acquisitions were returned to their original owners with the Peace of Paris, his example of a national museum was not lost on Europe.

In the following decades national museums were established in Berlin, Munich, Brussels, Vienna, and Warsaw. Almost all grew out of princely private collections and all shifted emphasis from the classification of materials toward the diffusion of knowledge. A dominant role of museums now was to influence their visitors’ sense of themselves. Their galleries displayed examples of heroism and other civic virtues to foster national identity and to refine the great mass into citizens of the nation-state. This tradition persists in the Smithsonian museums that populate our nation’s capital city.

All three of the European museum models—the cabinet of curiosities, the research collection, the public destination—have been transplanted to the New World, and flourished in their new soil, but with this difference: American museums were born democratic and they have remained true to the ideal that interacting with visitors is an important part of their reason for being. Even among the nation’s largest and most dignified museums, the enduring personality of the American museum expresses a compromise between collecting and research, on the one hand, and public education and entertainment, on the other.

Where to draw a line separating the professional, curatorial perspective from public or visitor perspective still frames the discussion of what museums ought to be about. From period to period, museum to museum, each of these perspectives has tended to dominate. Still, the history of American museums can be seen as a dialogue between the professional interest in discovery and research and the visitor interest in educational entertainment.

A competition between a curatorial and a public point of view is probably inherent in the nature of museum work because it developed from the collector’s point of view: first came the object and interest in its acquisition, care, and meaning. Only then came the visitor and a desire to share and signify what the collection means.

To the Renaissance prince or prelate, collections meant a microcosm of a world wherein manna and mummies and gold crucifixes coexisted. To the gentlemen scholars of the Royal Society, collections could be classified into, as Louis Agassiz, put it, “a library of the works of God.” In the modern view, collections became ways to see the world through other perspectives, doors of perception that open to a better understanding of ourselves and our culture, as one museum historian put it, “…of worlds discovered by scientists, imagined by artists, transformed by technological innovation, and lived in by earlier generations whose ways of life were different from our own.”