and in the First-Floor Gallery:

Our Friends at Work & Play...
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Robots + Us

The Official Magazine of the Kalamazoo Valley Museum

Museography
March marks 5th anniversary of Kalamazoo’s Fretboard Festival

Luthiers, musicians, and music lovers have gathered at the Kalamazoo Valley Museum over the past four years to celebrate stringed music in Kalamazoo. This year marks the fifth anniversary of the Fretboard Festival.

The festival began in 2006 when Jay Gavan, the KVM’s coordinator of special events, had a vision to celebrate Kalamazoo’s musical heritage. Gavan enlisted sound engineer Ian Gorman to help put the pieces together.

“It seemed like there were many music festivals in Kalamazoo,” Gorman said, “but not really much that put a spotlight on the luthiers and guitar companies from the area. Jay wanted to bring together not just bands and music fans, but luthiers, historians and local retailers, the whole thing.”

The inaugural festival was a success with more than 800 visitors for the one-day event. Attendance more than doubled in 2007.

With its increasing size and popularity, the Fretboard Festival was extended to a two-day event in 2008, attracting nearly 2,400 visitors.

The fourth festival was extended once again by adding a play-in contest for local fretboard talent. The winner, Carmea, won the opportunity to perform during the festival and a spot in the Museum’s 2009 fall-concert schedule.

The 2009 festival also introduced Sunday as Family Day with performances, workshops and hands-on activities for children. The three-day event pulled 2,500 music lovers into the KVM.

The 2010 festival kicks off on March 5 at 6 p.m. with another play-in contest that will be part of that month’s Art Hop in downtown Kalamazoo. New friends gathered to jam in the hall. Photo courtesy Morgan Hoyt.

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FROM THE DIRECTOR

New Look in History Gallery to Tell Community’s Story

This spring “Renovation in Progress” signs will sprout at the entrances to the KVm’s second-floor history gallery. We are coming to the end of a five-year process that has seen the Museum’s public areas receive a fairly thorough updating. Last fall, we replaced our aging planetarium equipment with the state-of-the-art Bigstar 4 laser-projection system, the first in Michigan and the 12th in the world. We now can offer two daily shows and a Friday-evening laser light show to the music of U2. We’ve added a first-floor gallery for traveling exhibitions. “Peanuts at the Bat” from the Charles M. Schultz Museum opens there on March 1 and, on the second-floor landing near our Checker cab, we added “Kalamazoo Direct to You,” celebrating our community’s memorable name and the products and stories that have spread its fame around the world.

This spring we move into the final phase of the final renovation project: a new history gallery. Its working title is “Made in Kalamazoo.” It retells the story of Kalamazoo County with an emphasis on how Kalamazoo grew from a village on the Michigan frontier in the 1830s, to a city in the 1880s, and to a metropolitan area in the 1960s. The history gallery itself will be closed for renovation until the end of the year. The new entry will begin in “Kalamazoo Direct to You” and wind its way through the gallery eventually to the Bronson Park mural, turned inside out to be the last space before the exit.

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Settings will carry the story of Kalamazoo through time with 18 sections, large and small. Hands-on activities and short videos amid traditional casework, graphics, text panels and computers tell of the people and activities that shaped this place at a particular point in time. Old favorites such as the General Store, Douglass Community Center, and Todd Collection reappear in the renovation.

What we hope to achieve in retelling the story of Kalamazoo is a public sense of how it was able to grow because of its people and its location on the railroad midway between the two most dynamic cities of the 19th and 20th centuries: Chicago and Detroit. We look forward to sharing the story with you.

The KVm, portraits, and a friendship quilt

New look in history gallery

2009 DONORS TO THE COLLECTION

We thank the following donors who contributed to the Museum’s collection during 2009:

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cylinder record jukebox
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stereoview of Main Street
washstand set
friendship quilt

women’s clothing; dress patterns
steam radiator
K Wings jersey & hockey stick
woman’s hat
postcard of Burr Oak
electric baseball game; slide projector
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Odd Fellows hair comb
World’s Fair booklet
Tonka trucks; skateboard; Frisbee; record albums
camera shutter
hunting suit; local photographs
roller skates; woman’s dress
Checker Motors ID badge; postcards
car phone
drawings of local architecture

museography’s Fall 2009 issue, on page 24, we featured a quilt made by Marion Shaver Pomeroy of Schoolcraft. Our curators looked high and low for a photograph of her with no luck. Then, a week after the magazine was distributed, a photograph was found. Welcome to the world of print publishing and deadlines. Even though we wish Marion’s image could have accompanied the original article, we’re happy to share her photo with you now. It was taken about the time she was making the quilt in the late 1860s.

“Recent Acquisition” Update

2009 donors to the collection
NEW EXHIBITION FOCUSES ON HOW “ROBOTS ‘R’ US” IN...

Robots designed, created and programmed to be as human as possible and how humanity can use them to extend its capabilities—that’s the thrust of the next nationally touring exhibit at the Kalamazoo Valley Museum.

Robots + Us, fashioned by the Science Museum of Minnesota, opens on the third floor of the downtown-Kalamazoo museum on Feb. 13 and will be on display through May 9.

Blending robotics, computer science and biomedical engineering, the exhibit for visitors of all ages probes whether machines will ever be “alive,” whether they can be crafted to extend the competence and potential of humans, and whether today’s homo sapiens are—in fact—already some kind of a machine.

Through hands-on activities and games, “Robots + Us” examines the boundaries of humanity and the increasingly life-like machines that populate the world, and have been fantasized about in science fiction, movies and television for about a century. Some believe that the first attempt to create artificial life can be traced to the first puppet makers.

The exhibit’s topics are both machine-oriented and human in nature, based on the premise that this high level of technology can shed light on the potential of people and can change their daily existence.

In that regard, “Robots + Us” focuses on both the technical challenges of building life-like “things”—and on the attributes of living things to which the artificial systems are inevitably compared.

In addition to a welcoming area that sets up the exhibit’s themes, there are four sections—“Moving,” “Sensing,” “Thinking” and “Being”—that contain components and activities aimed at understanding human capabilities and the machines that would emulate them.

Visitors can discover:

• Why humans can recognize faces, but machines find it challenging.

• How simple rules govern the behavior of ants and how ant-like computer systems are utilized to solve difficult problems. “From the Minds of Ants” charts the movement of a colony of live ants as it searches for food, and how this is then related to the workings of the human brain and how robotics come into play.

• How cockroaches inspired the design of robots created to explore Mars and to search for earthquake victims on Earth.

• What biomechanics dynamics are involved in designing, assembling and modifying a “walking machine.”

• A grasp of the concept of artificial intelligence at the “Android Café,” which might enter the realm of reality when a person can no longer tell the difference between a conversation with another person and one with a machine.

• Comparing your limb’s speed, precision, versatility, and judgment with that of an industrial robot arm in the assembly of a simple puzzle.

• Gaining insights into the latest robotic technology that is being derived from some of the basics of biology.

• Screen-based simulations demonstrating the principles of locomotion. Participants can design their own robots and leave them behind as part of a digital zoo.

• Synthetic companionship and how easily a person can sense an emotional response to relatively simple mechanical “life forms” in “How much is that robotic dog in the window?”

• How digital electronics might lead to the restoration and repair of a person’s missing or damaged sensory apparatus. Designers of artificial-vision systems know that too much information can be as much of a problem as too little, a concept illustrated in “Change-Blindness.”

• The difficulties of producing life-like artificial speech, especially when played against the ambiguities inherent in the English language.

• How researchers are developing robots that can explore the oceans of the world in “Jeremiah.”

According to the Science Museum of Minnesota, the exhibit’s experiences are based on the application of technology, on human physiology, and on the questions posed by the prospect of living with ever-more-life-like machines.

Flashing back to science fiction’s accounts of “creating life,” such as “Frankenstein’s monster,” components use these legendary artifacts to flash forward to what might be in the future. There is just as much unfinished science and technology, as there is in what has been done and what is already known.

Robots + Us was produced by the Science Museum of Minnesota. The exhibit was made possible with funds provided by the National Science Foundation.
Kalamaoo County was once home to the second largest manufacturer of robots in the country.

Then known as PRAB Robots Inc., it was regarded as “the darling of Wall Street” during the heydays of the 1970s and ’80s before a decision to continue selling hydraulic-powered robots instead of the electric-command models took it down the wrong revenue road.

At first producing what were called “pick and place” robots of a comparatively simple nature and shipping its first units in 1969, PRAB evolved into marketing some monsters—those capable of picking and placing objects weighting up to three tons.

PRAB’s robots were used in a variety of industries, including one, according to current PRAB president and CEO Ned Thompson, that was used in the destruction and defusing of chemical-based bombs once part of the U. S. military’s arsenal of weapons. Thompson ought to know because his 30-year career at PRAB dates back to its robotics chapter.

The company was established in Detroit in 1950 as PRAB Conveyors. The founders were Peter Ruppe and Allen Bodcomb, with the name coming from the first letters in their names. It was acquired by Kalamazoo industrialist Jack Wallace in 1961 and moved to this part of the state the following year.

As a major supplier of conveyors and product-moving systems to the die-cast industry, PRAB positioned itself to enter robotics and by 1977 had acquired a name brand—the first of several purchases in the evolving field over the next decade.

The PRAB products were “simple” automation packages, and nothing like the Star Wars robots. PRAB produced a line of basic industrial robots that took orders. They were nothing like the androids of science fiction.

Rapid growth and marketing agreements with companies around the world soon cramped PRAB’s original headquarters on that was hydraulically powered, and not one controlled by electric motors, which, Thompson believes, was the main reason the air started to go out of PRAB’s balloon. Electric robots were destined to turn PRAB’s robots into something of a dinosaur.

However, PRAB did make a stab at the personal-robot market through a subsidiary—PRAB Command Inc. It produced a voice-activated, computer-programming package that could energize a workstation for paralyzed people or those with upper-body restrictions. It was good enough to win a National Product of the Year Award in 1988.

With the arrival of the 1990s, the robotic handwriting seemed to be scribbled on the wall. The brave new world of robots replacing humans never really materialized. Saddled with a heavy debt, PRAB started to swim in a sea of red ink as the publicly traded shares reached toward the territory of being penny stocks. It didn’t help that the company’s president was killed in a car crash in the summer of 1990.

“The decision was made,” Thompson said, “to go back to making conveyors and concentrate on conveyor-based, material-handling solutions. Those were our roots and we were successful at that. And we are once again. It was a tough financial move, but we made it.”

Now once again completely operating out of its Kilgore Road plant, PRAB phased out its robotics business over a decade. By the dawning of the new millennium, PRAB had liquidated any and all of its robot assets.

And a “Back to the Future” is not in its strategic plans.

The PRAB Robot, as it looked in 1976, was the workhorse of industrial robots. It increased profitability of production processes that were repetitive, hazardous, or laden with human error.

The robots could be fitted with various “end-of-arm” tools depending on the job required such as machining, stamping, or die-cutting (left). A special “end-of-arm” tool was made for gripping and disarming chemical-based bombs (above).
Robots

Playing roles in science fiction and science fact

What do you think of when you hear the word “robot”? A humanoid automaton? A machine that talks and performs functions we humans might consider unpleasant or even dangerous? Robots depicted in many books and movies are still far from being realized—in some cases, we may be thankful for that. Yet for a generation of humans, robots have been ever-present in real life. Some are giant arm-like machines that work in dangerous industries. Some are employed in warfare and espionage, such as drones, while others perform benign and menial tasks like vacuuming floors in our homes. Many have traveled billions of miles to places we are not prepared to go.

The idea of humanoid robots has been around for a while, and likewise the notion of biomimicry. We are familiar with the early attempts, such as that of Leonardo DaVinci, to build mechanical flying machines, an obvious attempt to mimic birds in flight. Not until 1920 was the word “robot” brought into the English language by Czech playwright Karel Capek in “R.U.R.” (Racism’s Universal Robots). The Slovakian word, robots, refers to serf labor. In the play, Capek has given robots the power to think, feel and rebel against their repressive humans.

But, science fiction aside, humans examine nature for its forms, processes and systems to solve a wide range of problems. One intriguing example is a new design for wind turbines that takes its cue from the design of the fins of humpback whales, thus increasing the turbines’ efficiency. (For more on this subject and other case studies, look at The Biomimicry Institute’s website: www.biomimicryinstitute.org.)

For nearly 30 years a giant robotic arm manufactured in Canada has been invaluable to the space shuttle program. Canadarm has six joints—two in its shoulder, one at its elbow and three in its wrist. It was originally intended to extract heavy payloads, such as satellites, from the shuttle cargo bay and release them in orbit. In space, this robot can lift 586,000 pounds, but on Earth, it can’t even support its own weight.

But this huge crane-like robot has proven to have many other uses and has saved the day more than a few times. When ice built up on a vent at the bottom of the shuttle, its crew decided to try using the robotic arm to knock it off—a light tap did the trick.

On another occasion a new satellite got stuck in a wrong orbit when its rockets didn’t fire after release. Canadarm was amended with tools on board the shuttle and was able to perform the delicate task of flipping a manual switch on the satellite’s rockets. When that didn’t work, Canadarm was used to capture the satellite so it could be repaired.

Some of the better-known robots have names like Mariner, Messenger, Viking Lander, Pioneer, and Galileo. Space probes are robots? Well, yes, by some definitions. While these and other probes, landers and rovers may not be anthropomorphic, they perform tasks that humans cannot, and in some cases are autonomous.

Many of the non-landing probes are launched on a trajectory to fly by certain planets or through an asteroid belt, and are programmed to collect data that is relayed back to Earth. Others, such as Spirit and Opportunity, the rovers currently exploring the surface of Mars, can sense and move around in their environment by what is called autonomous planetary mobility.

No one is manipulating a joystick to get the rovers over obstacles—their software programming helps them “think” through the problem.

They have been designed to mimic animals that can hop and climb and earth-bound engineers can manipulate to a degree the software that determines the robots’ future actions and send that information via satellite technology.

The Mars rovers are essentially mechanical geologists traversing the vast, inhospitable terrain that no human can yet explore in person. Cameras mounted about 5 feet from the surface of the planet give a view that we might experience ourselves were we able to stand on the red planet.

In true biomimicry fashion, the rovers have robotic arms—with elbows and wrists—capable of fairly fine movement and an ability to manipulate scientific instruments used to sample and analyze rocks and soil.

Try your hand at “driving” rovers Spirit and Opportunity to explore the surface of Mars online at www.nasa.gov/externalflash/m204/driverover/frameset.html.

While humans can still outperform most robots on earth, their use in space—where humans cannot function—has given us huge amounts of new knowledge. Come to the KVM to see “Robots + Us” to find out more about the many ways robots are changing our lives.

Above: Artist’s concept of Cassini spacecraft orbiting Saturn. Image courtesy NASA/JPL. Below: On Space Shuttle Mission STS-51D, April 1985, an improvised “fly swatter” is used by the Canadarm to activate the Syncom satellite. Photo courtesy NASA.

Above: Artist’s rendering of Mariner 2. Image credit: NASA/JPL. Below: On Jan. 12, 1990, after 5½ years orbiting Earth, the Long Duration Exposure Facility (LDEF) is retrieved by STS-32 crewmembers. Astronaut Bonnie J. Dunbar controlled the Canadarm in order to capture and bring LDEF back home for scientific study and observation. Photo courtesy NASA.
Good grief, Charlie Brown, you guys are awful!

While the 1962 New York Mets (40–120) and the 1996 Detroit Tigers (53–109) rate as two of the worst baseball teams in Major League history, the hands-down, no-doubter in that category is coming to the Kalamazoo Valley Museum.

It’s Charlie Brown’s “nine,” a bunch of hitless wonders, hands-of-stone fielders and throw-it-and-duck pitchers assembled by the general manag ership of legendary cartoonist Charles Schulz.

“Peanuts at Bat” will be playing its games of fun and frolic in the museum’s first-floor “stadium” from March 1 through May 1, just in time to welcome in the 2010 baseball season.

The Hall of Shame squad is comprised of a motley crew of uninspired ball players with a dog—Snoopy—as shortstop. Every year for nearly 50 years during baseball season, Schulz sent this hapless team out to lose game after outlandish game, and entertained millions of readers in the process.

The creation of the Charles M. Schulz Museum and Research Center in Santa Rosa, Calif., the Hall of Shame squad is comprised of a motley crew of uninspired ball players with a dog—Snoopy—as shortstop. Every year for nearly 50 years during baseball season, Schulz sent this hapless team out to lose game after outlandish game, and entertained millions of readers in the process.

The games, as reported in the cartoon strip, were based, to a large extent, on Schulz’s childhood experiences playing sandlot baseball. Baseball was Schulz’s favorite sport, even though he remembered losing a game once 40 to 0.

That particular game, he said, gave him the idea for Charlie Brown’s string of losses. Schulz’s passion for baseball continued into adulthood. He played pickup games as often as he could, on baseball diamonds he had built at his home and near his studio.

Schulz rabidly followed Major League Baseball and was a keen admirer of Willie Mays, regarded as the greatest all-around player in the history of the American pastime.

“Peanuts at Bat” showcases some of Schulz’s most memorable baseball-themed comic strips. Forty-three digital prints from the original Schulz drawings will be on display, taking the visitor through five decades of the cartoonist’s famed characters engaged in America’s game.

Included in the exhibition are vintage baseball memorabilia and such diamond trappings as bobble-head dolls, banners, and a board game.

Also on display are a Louisville Slugger Joe Shlabotnik bat and an oversized Snoopy doll decked out in his favorite team uniform. Shlabotnik is Charlie Brown’s favorite—underperforming—player, who’s never actually seen in the strip.

With the approach of each baseball season, “Peanuts” readers could look forward to no victories and tales of the game that were in turn whimsical, thoughtful, hilarious, and full of pathos.

The exhibition also features 47 high-resolution reproductions of Peanuts strips, three text panels that include photographs of Schulz, four large-size baseball quotes by Schulz, and one eight-foot-wide Peanuts strip mounted on Plexiglas.

Peanuts at Bat is organized by the Charles M. Schulz Museum, Santa Rosa, Calif. PEANUTS © United Feature Syndicate Inc.
A look back at...

The Good Ol’ Days of Baseball

With a pitch and a swing, America’s favorite pastime—baseball—has been played in some form in Southwest Michigan ever since the first pioneers arrived in the 1820s.

As James Earl Jones’ character said in the movie “Field of Dreams”: “…the one constant (in America) through all the years has been baseball… Baseball has marked the times… It reminds all of us of what was once good and what can be good again.”

Catch a glimpse of baseball’s good ol’ days with these photos from the Museum’s collection.

Above: It’s about 1915 and these Schoolcraft grammar-school children pose for a photo before making their way to the ball field.

Below: We know their names but little else about these two players. Neal Davis (right), a foundry worker, and Kenneth Bass are dressed in uniforms for the Kalamazoo A&Ls, believed to be a team organized by the local iron foundries in the 1920s.

During the 1930s, a day of baseball helped people forget the daily worries of the Great Depression. These three teammates played for the Shakespeare Co., that manufactured fishing tackle and other sporting goods.

Right: The women’s “Bloomer” league (named for the bloomer-style pants they wore) began in the 1890s and often included two or three men, disguised as women, to play on the team. This team, the Western Bloomers, was established in Waterlot in 1911. They played throughout the upper Midwest against men’s teams.

Below: One of Kalamazoo’s premier baseball stars, Lawrence “Pete” Neather (shown crouching, front right), played for American Railway Express, the 1927 city championship team. Neather also played for Western Normal School in the early 1920s. In 1924 he became director of the Kalamazoo Parks and Recreation Department, a position he held for 42 years until his retirement in May 1966.

Above: The Cabmen of Checker Motors won the city championship in 1930. Star pitcher and first baseman “Long” Tom Harrell, far right, was described by The Kalamazoo Gazette as “one of the most popular baseball players in Kalamazoo.” He continued to play in and manage local leagues through the late 1940s.

A friendly game of ball was called “A Great Battle” by The Kalamazoo Gazette on May 27, 1898, when it reported the 29-8 victory of the Kalamazoo House Knaves over the American House team. The teams played as a benefit for the Children’s Home and started off the day with a parade to the ball field at Recreation Park, today the county fairgrounds.

Left: Ball parks weren’t fancy in the good ol’ days but they still drew a crowd, as seen here in Bloomingdale at a game between the Kalamazoo Independents and Bloomingdale’s village team. Bloomingdale won, 2-0, on July 31, 1908.

www.kalamazoomuseum.org
While Charlie Brown’s love for baseball is well-known to all fans of Charles Schulz’s “Peanuts” comic strip, Kalamazoo’s fondness for the game, extending back to the middle of the 19th century, may be less familiar.

As early as 1859, The Kalamazoo Telegraph was urging young men to sign up and help organize teams for a “base ball” league. The next year, the Kalamazoo Champions played a team in Schoolcraft.

With the game itself still in its infancy, it should not be too surprising that Kalamazoo accused the Schoolcraft team of “lawless” play while Schoolcraft complained of the “impudent interference of outsiders with the duties of the judges.”

The game’s popularity was such that Kalamazoo Village President Latham Hull, when he saw some young men playing ball in Bronson Park, advised them to “go on and have a good time, boys, but don’t hurt the trees.”

Early baseball was not always respectable. One of the better-known Kalamazoo teams was the Unas. After a game in Grand Rapids in 1870, the Grand Rapids Morning Democrat claimed the Unas were “a set of roughs, whose dirty linen does not surpass their ungentlemanly and dirty practice of playing the national game.”

The paper also claimed the players were “gambling, insulting respectable people, getting drunk, running in the hall of a hotel naked, [and] visiting gambling houses and houses of prostitution.”

The decades of the 1860s saw a variety of semi-professional teams in Kalamazoo and surrounding towns. By the 1890s, professional minor league teams, some affiliated with major league organizations in larger cities, represented the town. Among the most interesting team nicknames were the Zooloos, the Celery Eaters, and the Celery Pickers.

When the Kalamazoo Celery Pickers joined the Michigan Ontario League, a professional minor league, in 1923, the featured speaker at the opening-day banquet was the commissioner of major league baseball, Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis. Minor league baseball appears to have ended in Kalamazoo in 1926.

But Kalamazoo was not without baseball. Many companies and businesses sponsored clubs during the first half of the 20th century and Kalamazoo had many such teams. The Shakespeare Co., makers of sporting goods, sponsored a team as did the Checker Cab Co, Gibson Guitar, the Kalamazoo Cornet Co., the Goodale Foundry, and the Kalamazoo Vegetable Parchment Co.

Perhaps the most prominent of these was sponsored by Sutherland Paper Co. That team twice won the World Amateur Baseball Championship, first in 1949 and then again in 1951 when Ron Jackson played first base. Jackson went on to play six years for the Chicago White Sox and one year with the Boston Red Sox.

The national baseball spotlight shone on the campus of Western Michigan College in 1947 and 1948. The first two College World Series championships were played at Hyames Field in those years. The losing team each year was Yale, defeated by the University of California and then by the University of Southern California. Yale’s first baseman was George H. W. Bush, later the 41st president of the United States.

The Kalamazoo area’s baseball history is rich and space doesn’t permit every story to be told, but no article about that history would be complete without a mention of the Kalamazoo Lassies.

The Lassies moved to Kalamazoo from Muskegon in mid-season in 1950. They were members of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League. The league had been organized by Chicago candy manufacturer Phillip Wrigley in 1943 to provide entertainment during the war years when many major league stars were serving in the military.

For four years, the Lassies called Kalamazoo home. The league declined in popularity after World War II, however, and the 1954 season was the final one. The Lassies made it memorable, however, by winning the last league championship.

Baseball remains popular today. Each summer, Kalamazoo hosts the Big League Softball World Series for young women. Since 2001, the Kalamazoo Kings of the Frontier League have played their games at Homer Stryker Field in Mayor’s Riverfront Park. And many fans follow Derek Jeter, the Kalamazoo Central High grad and star shortstop of the now-reigning World Series champions, the New York Yankees.

For baseball fans, the Museum’s “Peanuts at the Bat” exhibit will whet their appetite for spring training just around the corner.
KALAMAZOO COMPANY PLOWED, SCRAPED ITS WAY TO THE TOP

When Newton Root hauled passengers over Kalamazoo’s streets in his omnibus, his daily chores would have been easier if the road equipment his son’s company began manufacturing some 40 years later had been available in the 1850s.

The Root Spring Scraper Co., located on Kalamazoo’s North Side, has been making road-maintenance and snow-removal equipment since 1891. The inventive genius of Newton Root’s son, Fred, provided the initial impetus for the enterprise.

By 1893, electric streetcars were replacing horse-drawn vehicles for public transportation. On occasion, people, much like deer in the headlights, froze on the tracks as these new-fangled vehicles raced toward them.

To save them from serious injury or death, Fred Root invented a basket—hidden under the front of the streetcar—that extended automatically if a sensor rod mounted on the front of the vehicle bumped a pedestrian. The basket caught the person, avoiding a collision.

Transit systems quickly adopted the device although its effectiveness was questionable. Fred was not content, however, and that same year he created a snow scraper to clear the tracks for trolleys. After improvements, Root’s snow scrapers became the basis of a growing company. He opened a new factory on North Street in 1910, where the company is still located today.

Root loved horseracing. Kalamazoo, long a hotbed of harness racing, had just begun hosting the Grand Circuit races at Recreation Park, now the county fairgrounds.

He noticed that the horses’ hooves tore up the track. The surface needed to be smoothed before the next heat or race. So he put his inventive mind to work and developed a scraper that effectively leveled the track. It was so efficient that it was quickly in demand by race tracks around the country.

Scrapers that smoothed race tracks could also be modified and used to improve roads, just as the popularity of the automobile created a demand for better roads. Root developed scrapers mounted on trucks. Once more, the Root Spring Scraper Co. had a new product that was popular across the country.

After Fred Root died in 1925, daughter Marie Root became president of the company. She was a business leader in a day when few women were executives. The company’s products, however, were in need of modernization.

Marie hired Ernest Weeks in 1927 and the two of them developed the idea of a hydraulic scraper rather than a spring-controlled one. This innovation kept the scraper in greater contact with the road, making the surface smoother. Marie Root described their invention, which they patented, as “the very best idea we ever had.”

Weeks, who became president after Marie’s death in 1935, added snowplows to the company’s product line in 1928. The company now had products for the summer road-construction season and for winter snow removal.

As the popularity of air travel soared in the 1950s and 1960s, Root Spring Scraper added yet another product—snowplows for airport runways. Today, the company is one of the country’s largest manufacturers of road and runway snowplows.

Ernest Weeks and his son, Dan, ran the company from 1935 until the early 1990s. When Dan Weeks retired, Fred and Bill Root, great-grandsons of the company’s founder, took over the management.

If you fly to or from an airport whose runways have been cleared after a snowstorm, or if you enjoyed a smooth drive, you might want to consider that your safe travel was made possible by a product that might have been made here in Kalamazoo. Newton Root’s omnibus passengers would have appreciated such comfortable travel.
The Edison Neighborhood

The second in a series of articles exploring the origins of the names of Kalamazoo and Kalamazoo County streets.

Streets in the heart of Kalamazoo are most often named after pioneers and early settlers. Moving from the downtown to such neighborhoods as Edison, more are named after prominent industrialists and manufacturers, local landmarks, or immigrant family names, and they, too, can reveal a lot about local history.

Some educated guesses can be made on the origin of other street names. Mill Street probably draws its name from the grain mills that were once located along Portage Creek and the millrace associated with it. Race Street’s name may refer either to that feature or to the race track at the National Driving Park.

Further south is Phillips Street on the east side of Portage, named for DeLius Phillips, an organ manufacturer who developed a small addition in the area. Luella Street is named for Phillips’ daughter who in 1889 married Hays.

Miller Road, the southern boundary of the Edison Neighborhood, appears on late 19th-century maps as Paddy Miller’s Road after the farmer whose property lay east of Portage Street.

Workers from the Bryant Paper Co. and other paper mills along Portage Creek found homes along the streets of the Edison neighborhood. Lumber baron and industrialist, Sen. Francis B. Stockbridge (right), converted the old National Driving Park into residential housing in the early 1900s.

Stockbridge Avenue takes its name from Francis B. Stockbridge, a lumber baron, manufacturer, and real estate investor. Stockbridge was later a U.S. senator from Michigan.

Stockbridge and his business partner, Lorenzo Egleston (Egleston Avenue), bought the National Driving Park, a former race track located east of Portage between Stockbridge and Reed streets. Together with prominent real estate developer, Charles B. Hays (Hays Park Avenue), they developed the Hays Park Addition in 1900.

The southern boundary of this addition, Reed Avenue, takes its name from DeWitt Clinton Reed, a 19th century landowner in that part of town. There is, of course, a Clinton Avenue, in the addition as well. Reed’s son, Heber, married Emma Cameron, daughter of politician and farmer Alexander Cameron (Cameron Street).

To the south in the South Park Addition are streets named for M. Henry Lane (Lane Boulevard), George T. Lay (Lay Boulevard), and Noah Bryant (Bryant Street). These men were all important late-19th-century industrialists.

Lane and Lay owned the Michigan Buggy Co., a manufacturer of wagons, carriages, and even automobiles. Bryant started the Bryant Paper Co. Financing for both companies was arranged by the prominent Hays.

For Whom the Bells Ring...

So what, you might ask, does a set of “Virginia” bells have to do with Kalamazoo? Plenty! Let’s start at the beginning.

The pleasant tinkling of these bells was used as a warning signal for oncoming traffic. They were worn by teams of wagon-pulling horses.

The noise they made could be heard by other travelers in the distance, and acted as an alert to make way for the approaching vehicle—a particularly important signal on the nearly impassable roads of early America.

This particular set of bells was worn on the team of horses bringing the families of Aaron Burson and John Brown to settle in Schoolcraft in 1830. The Browns and Bursons, pioneers from Virginia, had originally settled in Columbiana County, Ohio, but stayed only two years, having heard favorable stories about land in Michigan Territory.

According to the “1880 History of Kalamazoo County,” Burson, his four sons, and the family of John Brown “…packed up and started directly for Prairie Ronde…occupying three weeks, fording streams and wading swamps, and proceeding amid all the difficulties of an overland journey…”

Family oral tradition tells us they arrived on Christmas Eve 1830 but other reports claim October 1830. They settled in the northwest corner of Schoolcraft Township, naming the place Virginia Corners. Their trusty bells became known locally as the “Virginia” bells.

The name stuck through decades of use by the Browns and Bursons. No longer needed to warn oncoming travelers, they became a favorite part of sleigh rides, picnics, political rallies, and parades, and were worn by horses leading a campaign wagon carrying Sen. Julius C. Burrows of Kalamazoo on a speaking tour.

Legend also says they were used on a team of horses pulling a log-cabin float in local parades boosting the 1888 presidential campaign of Benjamin Harrison.

Harrison borrowed the log-cabin symbol used in the campaign of his grandfather, William Henry Harrison, in 1840. The horse-drawn log cabin, replete with tinkling bells, was part of torchlight parades in Kalamazoo and Marcellus.

The Virginia bells were last used to give a sleigh ride to school children on Feb. 8, 1934. They were handed down through the Brown family and eventually given to Roy Cobb of Schoolcraft, a family friend and neighbor.

Mrs. Roy (Florence) Cobb recognized the historic value of the bells when she donated them to the KVM in 1957 (above). The bells (top) were made in various sizes to create a melodic sound while jingling on top of the horses. Today they are on permanent display in the Museum’s Time Pianca exhibit.

Mrs. Roy (Florence) Cobb recognized the historic value of the bells when she donated them to the KVM in 1957 (above). The bells (top) were made in various sizes to create a melodic sound while jingling on top of the horses. Today they are on permanent display in the Museum’s Time Pianca exhibit.

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What is it?

Each of these tools has a mechanism common. Otherwise they have little in common. What are they used for?

(Answers below)

1. This is a common tool in certain kinds of shops. Today they are made of metal.

2. This mechanical kitchen gadget has a blade and was probably safer than using a knife.

3. The little bird below was a seamstress’ helper.

Have a question about a person, object, or artifact that relates to the history of Southwest Michigan?

Send your question to Tom Dietz, curator of research, [tdietz@kvc.edu or (269)373-7984] and you might see it answered in a future issue of Museography.

PEANUTS © United Feature Syndicate Inc.

Kalamazoo Valley Museum
Calendar of Events

The KVM is located at 230 N. Rose St. in downtown Kalamazoo.

FREE GENERAL ADMISSION • OPEN DAILY

HOURS: Mon.—Thurs. 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. • Fri. 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. • Sat. 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. • Sun. & Holidays 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. (Closed Easter)

March 13: Festival of Health (B)
12–4 p.m.
Learn more about getting and staying healthy with exercise, nutrition, and preventive-care tips from local health professionals; also relax with table and chair massages. Brownie Try-it: My Body

Spring Break Hands-on Happenings—Sports
Mon.—Fri., March 29–April 2
1–4 p.m. each day
Spring into sports! Create crafts that celebrate the fun and healthy benefits of athletics. See back cover for programs offered each day.

Hands-On Days Planetary Show: Secret of the Earth’s Moon
Fri., March 29
1:30 p.m.
Discover unique environments found at each side of our planet.

Hands-On Days

Reading Rainbow:
12:15 p.m. FREE
Come to the KVM before Hands-on Happenings to see...

Secret of the Earth’s Moon
March 29: Gregory, the Terrible Eater
March 30: Rummies Made in Egypt
March 31: Game Day
April 1: Sophie and Lou
April 2: Dive to the Coral Reefs
April 24: National Astronomy Day

10 a.m.–4 p.m.
The KVM and the Kalamazoo Astronomical Society celebrate the day with activities that include a special planetarium show about using star maps, hands-on activities related to stargazing, a dieselpunk telescope, astronomical photographs by KAS members, and the puppet show “Stargazers Apprentice.” Check the KVM website for a complete schedule of activities.

SPECIAL EXHIBITIONS

ROBOTS + US
Feb. 13–May 9
A playful look at how biology and engineering are coming together to close the gap between reality and our robot dreams.

PEANUTS at Bat
March 1–May 1
A celebration of baseball in the comic favorite Peanuts, including strip artwork, Peanuts memorabilia, large-baseball bat, quote, and photographs of the series’ creator Charles M. Schulz.

FEATURED PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

March 6: Joe Reilly
1 p.m. Family Performance $1/ticket
Singer/songwriter Reilly is also an environmental educator, sharing songs on Michigan’s lakes and natural places.

March 10: Rummies Made in Egypt
1–4 p.m.
Create traditional and contemporary valentines for students. Brownie Try-it: Glen & Shapes

FEATURING PROGRAMS

Peanuts at Bat
March 29: Me My Valentine (B)
1–4 p.m.
Discover how robots and humans move and interact through experiments and arts and crafts.

Brownie Try-it: My Body

Robots + Us was produced by the Science Museum of Minnesota. The exhibit was made possible with funds provided by the National Science Foundation.

PEANUTS © United Feature Syndicate Inc.

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**SPECIAL EVENTS**

**Burton Henry Upjohn: Children’s Landscape**

**Designed to introduce preschoolers and their parents to an interactive museum setting. Children’s Landscape offers hands-on activities, exhibits, and programs designed for children 5 and under. Older children may participate only if accompanying a preschooler, and their play must be appropriate to preschool surroundings. Free.**

**HOURS**

Mon.–Fri.: 9 a.m.–3 p.m.
Sat.: 9 a.m.–5 p.m.
Sun.: 1–5 p.m.
Feb./March – Counting 1, 2, 3

Have fun counting beads, blocks, lines, and toes.

*Practice counting, sorting and putting puzzles together as you count the pieces.*

**April/May: Dinosaurs**

Let your imagination take you back to the time of the dinosaurs. Dress like a dinosaur, play with dinosaurs, put together puzzles, and much more.

**Circle Time Programs**

These 20-minute programs of stories, musical activities, games, and art projects are offered FREE to families and preschool groups. Programs take place Monday through Friday and begin at 10 a.m. and 1 p.m. Saturdays at 11 a.m. Programs are designed for preschool children age 3–5.

**Sunday History Series**

**Feb. 28: Poetry Artifact VI**

Join the Friends for Poetry for a mix of poems and history. Local poets will read poems focused on local places, events, people, or objects. Tom Dietz will then give brief insights into the history behind these subjects.

**March 14: Kalamazoo’s Arguments—The Lure of California Gold in 1850**

The hope of finding riches led scores of Kalamazoo County men to make the arduous cross-country journey to the gold fields of northern California. Trace the stories of some local men overcome by “Gold Fever” in 1850.

**March 28: The Ladies Library Association**

Dr. Sharon Carlson, director of the Western Michigan University Archives and Regional History Collections, discusses the history of the women’s organization that operated the first library in Kalamazoo and contributed to the intellectual life of the early village of Kalamazoo.

**CHALLENGER LEARNING CENTER**

**IN MEMORY OF ALVIN H. & EMILY T. LITTLE**

The Challenger Learning Center is an innovative educational facility—complete with Space Station and Mission Control—that takes thousands of visitors each year on simulated space missions. Public and special group missions are available. Call (269) 373-7965 for more details and to make reservations.

**GROUP JUNIOR MISSIONS**

Specially designed 90-minute missions for ages 5 and up. Pre-flight activities prepare junior astronauts for an exciting flight in our spacecraft simulator. An excellent program for school or community groups with pre- and post-mission activities and a full two-hour space flight simulation. For details, call or visit our website at www.kalamazoomuseum.org.

**CORPORATE TRAINING MISSIONS**

Three-hour hands-on team-building experiences for corporate groups with pre- and post-mission activities and a full two-hour space flight simulation. For details, call or visit our website at www.kalamazoomuseum.org.

**APRIL EVENTS**

**April 11: Play Ball! — Baseball in Kalamazoo**

With the KVM exhibition “Peanuts at the Bat,” this program celebrates the national pastime just in time for Opening Day with stories of baseball in Kalamazoo.

**April 25: Kalamazoo’s Musical Heritage**

Celebrating the opening of the Gilmore International Keyboard Festival, this program features stories of music and musicians in early Kalamazoo.

**ACCESSIBILITY SERVICES**

The Museum is barrier-free. Sign language interpreters may be scheduled for programs with a minimum of two weeks notice. Assisted-listening devices are available for use in the planetarium. Our TDD number is (269) 373-7902.

**GROUP ACTIVITIES**

The KVM is a great destination for partner and group activities. Attend concerts, planetarium shows, Challenger Learning Center missions, classes or hands-on programs! Call the reservation coordinator at (269) 373-7965 for more information on programs available to groups of all ages.

**VOLUNTEER ALERT!**

Call (269) 373-1900 to learn about the benefits of volunteering at the Kalamazoo Valley Museum.

**PLANETARIUM**

Spectacular sights and sounds guide your imagination through our amazing universe. Come enjoy our new Digital 4 Laser state-of-the-art, full-dome system! $5/person

**Daily at 3 p.m.**

**Invasion of Mars** (through April 2)

While the red planet Mars lights the evening sky, learn about space-age discoveries made by a fleet of robotic probes from Earth that give us a new view of a world that may become our next step into the universe.

Grade 5 and up—running time 35 minutes.

Beginning April 3: **Secrets of the Sun**

**Weekdays at 11 a.m., Saturdays at 1 p.m., Sundays at 2 p.m.**

**Sky Legends of the Three Fires**

Native American storyteller Larry Plamondon presents stories about the night sky from Potawatomee, Ojibwa and Odowa traditions.

All ages—running time 30 minutes.

Beginning April 3: **Bear Tales**

**Saturdays at 2 p.m.**

**Winter Nights** (through March 27)

A guided tour of the night sky showing you how to find bright stars, constellations and planets plus tips on finding star clusters, nebulae and galaxies with binoculars.

Grade 5 and up—running time 45 minutes.

Beginning April 3: **A New KVM Summer Star-Gazing Show**

**Fridays at 8:30 p.m.**

U2 (through March 24)

The first ever full-dome production featuring U2’s timeless classics and modern hits.

Adult audiences—running time 45 minutes.

Beginning April 2: **Pink Floyd**

Visit us on the web at www.kalamazoomuseum.org for complete descriptions of shows.

**TOM DRIETZ, Curator of Research**

**With the KVM exhibition “Peanuts at the Bat,” this program celebrates the national pastime just in time for Opening Day with stories of baseball in Kalamazoo.**

**February 14: William G. Dewing—From Calcutta to Kalamazoo**

William Goss Dewing came to Kalamazoo in the mid-1840s and became a major manufacturer of doors, sashes, and window frames. Before that, however, he worked for 10 years for the English East India Company, rising to the rank of first officer. Using the ship’s log he kept, this program explores Dewing’s life from Calcutta to Kalamazoo.

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Gently used boys' toys aren't easy to come by, but that's just what the Museum got when Russ Schipper of Kalamazoo donated his childhood Tonka trucks from the 1950s.

But these aren't just ordinary trucks. They also reveal a little about 1950s American history.

President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed the National Defense and Interstate Highway Act in June 1956. The federal government believed the nation needed a modern highway system to promote commerce and to facilitate military transport across the country.

With the stroke of his pen, President Eisenhower set in motion the biggest public-works program in American history—the building of its highway system.

Today, the interstate network is virtually complete and only road maintenance and expansion create traffic bottlenecks. In the 1960s, though, travelers could only travel short sections of the highways until the next section was completed. Large construction equipment and road-closed signs were part of the travel experience.

Michigan claimed to be the first state to have a complete border-to-border interstate highway when the final segment of I-94 opened in 1960. The state had something of a head start because many segments had already been built as part of an ongoing expansion of the old U.S. 12 into a divided, four-lane highway that had begun years earlier.

For kids of the 1950s and '60s, having a set of road-building trucks was the closest they could get to the real experience of history that was going on all around them. The Tonka brand brought that experience to many backyard sandboxes.

The Mound Metalcraft Co., a Minnesota-based maker of garden tools, also made toy trucks. By 1955, the trucks were so popular that the company changed its name to Tonka Toys.

Russ Schipper's 1956 road-building set is a little piece of one person's childhood but also a piece of America's road-building history.
## New Events!!

### Friday Night Highlights

Every Friday, the KVM is open until 10 p.m. Come see movies, concerts, and special events in the theater, or the U2 laser light show in our new, state-of-the-art planetarium. Movies and laser shows are $3 per person; concerts in the theater are $5 per person.

**U2** — Friday, 8:30 p.m.

The first-ever full-dome production featuring U2’s timeless classics and modern hits. Adult audiences — 35 min. Showing through March 26; Pink Floyd begins April 2.

**Jeff Dwarsuihs in Concert**

Feb. 5, 6–8 p.m., FREE (Art Hop Night)

Classical Guitar

**An Evening of Chocolate**

Feb. 12, 6 p.m., $15/ticket; in advance only

Enjoy a chocolate demonstration and watch the movie Chocolat. For more information, contact the KVM.

**Chocolat** (2000). The townspeople are shocked when Vianne leaves her chocolate shop open during Lent, but her confessions are too tempting for them to resist. PG-13, 121 min.

In Concert — TBA

Feb. 19, 7:30 p.m

Transformers (2007)

Feb. 26, 7:30 p.m., $3/ticket

When Autobots and Decepticons wage war, they choose Earth as their battleground. A show is on the way as the machines change shape between cars, trucks, planes and other technological creations. PG-13, 143 min.

**2010 Fretboard Contest**

March 5, 6 p.m., FREE (Art Hop Night)

Local fretboard talents compete for a chance to play during the festival and in the Museum’s fall concert line-up.

**Snow Falling on Cedars** (1999)

March 12, 7:30 p.m., $3/ticket

This “Reading Together” film tells the haunting tale of love undone by societal pressures and familial customs explores truth, justice and the vagaries of the human heart. Based on the book by David Guterson. PG-13, 126 min.

**Fretboard Festival Kickoff Concert**

March 19, 7:30 p.m., Free

Star Trek Generations (1994)

March 26, 7:30 p.m., $3/ticket

Captain Jean-Luc Picard is at the helm of the most famous spacecraft this side of the universe and once again the fate of humanity lies in his hands. PG, 118 min.


April 2, 7:30 p.m., $3/ticket

In 2029, rulers of this planet devised a plan to reshape the future by changing the past. The plan required something that felt no pity, pain or fear — The Terminator. R, 108 min.

**Embarr in Concert**

April 9, 7:30 p.m., $5/ticket (Celtic)

**We Know Jackson in Concert**

April 16, 7:30 p.m., $5/ticket (Pop/Rock)

**Rob Vischer in Concert**

April 23, 7:30 p.m., $5/ticket (Pop/California Pop)

**Waverland in Concert**

April 30, 7:30 p.m., $5/ticket (Topical/Acoustic/Alternative)

**Battlestar Galactica (1979)**

May 7, 7:30 p.m., $3/ticket

A spaceship crew flees the destruction of the human race by the Cylons in a desperate attempt to reach Earth—a place that holds their only hope of survival. PG, 125 min.

**Branden Mann & The Reprimand in Concert**

May 14, 7:30 p.m., $5/ticket (Rock/Blues/Indie)

**Ghostbusters (1984)**

May 21, 7:30 p.m., $3/ticket

Unemployed parapsychologists set themselves up to rid New York of evil monstrous appariotions. PG, 105 min.

**Just Panda in Concert**

May 28, 7:30 p.m., $5/ticket (Improv)

**4th Annual Night at the Museum**

June 4, 6 p.m., FREE (Art Hop Night)

Kick off summer with a party for all ages including magic, face painting, and balloon animals. Contact the Museum for more details.

### Weekend Special Events

**Feb. 20: Black History Documentaries**

1 p.m. *The Murder of Emmett Till; Free*

The sadistic murder of 14-year-old Emmett Till was a powerful catalyst for the Civil Rights Movement; three months after Till’s body was found, the Montgomery Bus Boycott began.

3:30 p.m. *Scottsboro; Free*

Shocking accusations against nine black teenagers in 1931 led to one of the 20th century’s fiercest legal battles that helped give birth to the Civil Rights Movement.

March 27: Fretboard Fest Documentary

1 p.m. *The Rhythm of My Soul; Free*

This story of country, gospel, mountain, bluegrass, and Kentucky roots music features rare and historic film clips of Bill Monroe, Loretta Lynn and Ricky Skaggs, featured picking a mandolin at eight years old.

**April 17 Holocaust Remembrance Films**

1 p.m. *Paper Clips; Free*

Inspired by the example of the Norwegians during World War II who invented the paper clip and used it as a symbol of soli-
SPRING BREAK HANDS-ON HAPPENINGS

SPORTS

Spring into sports! Create crafts that celebrate the fun and healthy benefits of athletics.

March 29: For Your Health
Health and fitness get you on the right track.

March 30: Take It to the Extreme
Challenge yourself to learn about extreme sports.

March 31: Be a Team Player
Explore sports you play on a team.

April 1: On My Own
Find out about athletics you play by yourself.

April 2: Water Play
Get ready for summer, from fishing to surfing.

Plus: Planetarium & Reading Rainbow Shows

See page 21 for more information.

Kalamazoo Valley Museum
230 N. Rose Street • Downtown Kalamazoo
FREE General Admission—Open Daily
HOURS: Monday – Thursday: 9 A.M. – 5 P.M.
Friday: 9 A.M. – 10 P.M.
Saturday: 9 A.M. – 5 P.M.
Sunday & Holidays – 1 to 5 P.M.
(closed Easter)
(269)373-7990 • (800)772-3370
www.kalamazoomuseum.org