Great times on the GREAT LAKES

Inside: the dunes, resort history, Fourth of July celebrations—yes, summer is here!
New KVM gallery space to be unveiled this summer

A new gallery, designed to spotlight the Kalamazoo Valley Museum’s collection and those of its peers around the state and nation, is under construction on the first floor.

What had originally been the 1,000-square-foot Mercantile gift shop when the Museum opened in February of 1996 and more recently housed “A Legacy of Elegance” is being remodeled to host smaller exhibits.

“It’s part of the Museum’s goal to change some of its services. “Those who come for the movies or other entertainment venues on Saturday nights will be able to visit this gallery.”

It will debut on July 2 with “Welcome to Idlewild: The Black Eden of Michigan.” (See related story on page 5 of this issue.) The Michigan State University Museum traced the origins and development of the famous African-American summer resort through free-standing banners and quilts. It closes Nov. 6.

Next on the calendar will be another showcase created by the MSU Museum, “Immigration and Caricature: Ethnic Images from the Appel Collection.” It features print media, dating from the Civil War through World War II, that explore the role of caricature and stereotyping in print media, with a focus on the major ethnicities. Its booking is from Nov. 19 to April 2, 2006.

When the Museum celebrates the 125th anniversary of its establishment and the 100th birthday of the building, the first-floor gallery will be filled with a cross section of its historical collection. This is tentatively scheduled to open on April 22, 2006.

“Legacy of Elegance” was an exhibition of paintings, porcelain and pewter donated to the Museum by local philanthropists and collectors.

Learn more about life on and around the Great Lakes with performances by local musician and educator Benjamin Gauthier. The free concerts take place each week during the Museum’s Wednesday Hands-on programs this summer. Benjamin will share facts and folklore about Michigan’s Great Lakes, life under the water, Michigan resorts, lighthouses and more, then write songs with the audience and sing the songs in whatever musical genre the audience chooses! *Performance times are Wednesdays, June 22-Aug. 3 at 1:30, 2:30, and 3:30 p.m. More program information can be found on page 21.*
In 1995, when we were planning exhibits for what we were then calling “The New Museum,” we were selected to participate in a partnership with The Exploratorium, San Francisco’s innovative museum of science, art, and perception. Funded by the National Science Foundation, the partnership included an opportunity to purchase several Exploratorium exhibits for our own institution. Among the exhibits we selected are the interactive environmental sculptures by artist Ned Kahn, which are now located on the first floor at the entrance to the planetarium. Kahn calls his sculptures “turbulent landscapes.” They model the interaction of forces that shape the environment on a smaller scale.

We selected Kahn’s models of a tornado, of wind on the water, of sand in the water, and of sand moved by wind because each of these interactions is a familiar occurrence in Michigan. Tornados appear in our skies, sand dunes migrate along our lakeshore, waves ripple the water’s surface, and wave action carves the sand beneath our feet. These exhibits also sound a theme for this 12th issue of Museography, which explores our relationship to the environment through articles on the Great Lakes, lake resorts, the Kalamazoo River, sand dunes, and even tornadoes that have visited Southwest Michigan.

You will also read about the oldest photograph in our collection, the history of Alamo Township, how we celebrated the Fourth of July in bygone eras, and how we will mark it this year when a spacecraft launched last December meets up with the comet Tempel 1.

“The Great Lakes Story,” a traveling exhibition created by the Great Lakes Science Center in Cleveland, Ohio, in conjunction with the National Science Foundation, begins a six-month stay at the Museum in June. (Story begins on page 3.)

Our Summer Hands-on Happenings —free Wednesday-afternoon programs for children—are all about the Great Lakes. Films on Wednesday evenings and weekend afternoons, as well as offerings in the planetarium and the Challenger Learning Center, make up a full summer schedule of Museum events. (Calendar information begins on page 21.)

This summer also marks the retirement of a veteran museum staffer, our own Valerie Eisenberg, who has served as the museum’s director of visitor services for 19 years. Valerie is the organizing talent behind the museum’s Greeter Guides, our volunteer program, and our seasonal brochures and special events.

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History, science, nature & folklore combine in… The Story of the GREAT LAKES

Geological and glacial forces across eons fashioned Michigan into “The Water Wonderland.”

The question is: Will humanity’s industrial ingenuity crush and destroy in a few hundred years what it took nature thousands—even millions—to create? Or, can the Information Age and the Age of Advanced Technology undo the damages from industrialization and an expanding population?

These storylines will be addressed in the Kalamazoo Valley Museum’s next nationally touring exhibition, “The Great Lakes Story,” which will open on June 18 and run through Jan. 15, 2006.

Blessed with game, timber and mineral resources that were viewed to be limitless by its white settlers and entrepreneurs, Michigan has absorbed those assaults on its natural assets and, in many cases, rebounded. What may not as easily recuperate is the region’s most treasured possession—fresh water.

Cumulatively, the Great Lakes constitute the largest body of fresh water in the world. The 143,000-square-mile Caspian Sea is the largest inland body of water on the planet. Fed by seven rivers from its northern shore in the former Soviet Union to its southern boundary of Iran, it is, however, a saline lake.

Individually, Lake Superior ranks No. 2 in size at 31,700 square miles while lakes Huron and Michigan place fifth and sixth, respectively. The five Great Lakes hold 18 percent of the fresh water on Earth. Scientists say only 1 percent of that reservoir is being renewed annually, and hence the concern.

Created by the Great Lakes Science Center in Cleveland, Ohio, in conjunction with the National Science Foundation, “The Great Lakes Story” is packaged into several themes that are illustrated by 25 exhibits.

Beginning with a computer game that tests one’s knowledge about the Great Lakes and concluding with a walk-around model of this mammoth basin of fresh water, the 40 activity stations offer hands-on educational opportunities for all ages.

The Great Lakes first came into the recorded view of Europeans in the early 1600s. By 1800, 300,000 settlers had staked claims in the region. As they began to take advantage of the treasure of minerals, fertile farmland, timber, fishery and wildlife, each factor impacted on the fresh-water ecology. Today, the Great Lakes basin is home to nearly 40 million people.

Mankind’s pervasive influence has come in a variety of forms—the pollution of water quality by toxic contaminants stemming primarily from industrial practices, the destruction of the ecosystem by such invasive species as the zebra mussel and the spiny water flea, and the eradication of dunes and coastal wetlands.

Among the exhibit’s features are four sections, each with activities that illustrate the lakes’ physical characteristics, natural beauty, geography, geology, and delicately balanced ecosystem.
Museography

Great Lakes.

“Why the Great Lakes Are Great.”
“Great Lakes Natural Processes.”
“Changes and Threats to the Great Lakes.”
“Restoring the Great Lakes.”

“The goal of the exhibition,” said Val Davillier, the Cleveland center’s director of exhibits, “is to tell the story of how the Great Lakes were formed, how they have changed over the years, and how science and technology are being used to understand and remedy environmental problems that threaten to destroy these amazing and irreplaceable resources.”

One of the interactives probes the origins, distributions, effects and controls of aquatic species—from the lamprey eel to the zebra mussel—that have invaded the Great Lakes since the St. Lawrence Seaway brought ocean-going vessels into these fresh-water ports. Another illustrates how temperature may impact the Great Lakes region based on climate-change models that track the effects of global warming. Through computer connections, visitors can tap into Internet sites that feed the latest information about environmental threats, their remediation, and the attempts at the restoration of fragile ecosystems. These updates pick up the story since the debut of the exhibition last October at the science center in Cleveland.

According to historical estimates, some 15,000 vessels have encountered troubles in the waters of the 94,560-square-mile Great Lakes because of collisions or poor maritime communications. Of these, about 4,000 were sent to the bottom, ripped apart by monstrous seas said to be among the most perilous in the world. More than half of these shipwrecks have still not been located, although the Great Lakes historians know they are down there waiting to be found.

As commerce boomed in the 19th century in the Midwest, so did the use of the Great Lakes as the medium for transporting goods and services. Raw materials went one way and manufactured products came back the other aboard steamers, schooners and barges. As part of the exhibition, visitors can chart their own course along major shipping routes. They will also be able to cast votes about contemporary ecological questions. Aided by data collected via remote-sensing satellites, visitors will be introduced to a “Top 10” list of environmental concerns. They will be able to compare their votes to previous exhibit visitors.

For example, “When Bloom Is Doom” features an interactive computer program that examines how changing variables, such as phosphate levels from detergents, can damage a lake’s ecosystem.

“The Great Lakes continue to be subject to a range of environmental pollutants and ecosystem stresses,” Davillier said. “However, relatively low is the awareness of the general public of their unique value, the threats to the ecological balance, the implications of these threats, and the remediation and preservation under way. This exhibition seeks to fill that information gap and enhance public learning about the Great Lakes.

“Every area of the country is dealing with stress on natural resources,” he said. “We hope ‘The Great Lakes Story’ can be used as a model for environmental awareness.”

Great Lakes Ecosystem

Visitors study the impact of humans on the Great Lakes ecosystems.

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If you've never romped in the dunes along the shores of western Michigan, you've been missing out on a unique experience—unique because the dunes themselves are unlike any others in the world.

While there are other spectacular dunes around the planet, Michigan's 250,000 acres of coastal dunes have formations and microenvironments that create the most diverse ecosystem in the entire Great Lakes region.

In geologic terms, Lake Michigan dunes are recent formations—perhaps only about 3,000 to 4,000 years old. If you think that's not particularly recent, consider this: the Kalamazoo Valley Museum's mummy is about 2,300 years old, and some of the other Egyptian antiquities on exhibit here are 3,000 to 4,000 years old.

OK, so age is relative, but in geologic time, our dunes are young. Certainly, the dunes' formation began in the Ice Age—the Pleistocene era—more than one million years ago when glaciers repeatedly advanced and retreated across the continent.

With each successive advance and retreat, boulders, sand, clay and soil moved—and moved again—finally to be deposited as the last glacier melted away. These deposits are called glacial drift, or moraine. This is the source of the sand that forms our dunes.

Water and wind move the sand, and vegetation traps it, creating the typical formations of humic costal-region dunes. The dunes of Southwest Michigan are mostly parabolic dunes. Among the most dramatic-looking dunes, they are U-shaped and are found only in humid coastal areas.

They occur when the vegetation of a section of low-relief, linear dunes (which are formed parallel to the shoreline, mainly by water action) is destroyed, exposing sand to the wind. The dunes move slowly inland as winds continue to push sand over the crest to the lee side.

Pushed higher and higher, these giant dunes can reach upward of 300 feet, ranking among the biggest in the world. Other typical dune formations in Michigan are parabolic (relatively small dunes formed on top of glacial moraine) and transverse (created by glacial meltwater, deposited in shallow bays).

Birds and insects use the Lake Michigan dunes during migration, both for navigation and for safe haven. There are species of plants and animals, some endangered and rare, that thrive in the dunes' microenvironments.

Some dune ecosystems are harsh environments, with temperatures that can reach 180 degrees Fahrenheit in the summer and below freezing in the winter.

As every gardener knows, temperature extremes, coupled with low-nutrient soil that does not hold water, create conditions not conducive to most plant life. But the plants that do thrive there are able to compete handily with less hardy vegetation. Behind the dunes and in interdunal ponds, more delicate plant and animal life abounds. Lovely orchids, dwarf iris, the delicate emerald dragonfly, and the endangered piping plover are among many that find refuge in the dunes.

Now, if you're really, really lucky in your dunes exploration, you might come across a fulgerite. You wouldn't want to be present when a fulgerite is formed because you'd be risking your life standing on a sandy dune in a lightning storm. Fulgerites are formed when lightning strikes the sandy ground and fuses the sand into hollow tubes. The resulting glass-like formations look very similar to roots and branches of trees and shrubs desiccated by hot dry sand. They are easily overlooked, and quite fragile.

In the history of Michigan, the dunes have played a major role in the state's economic life. They are mined (for use in foundries), used for recreation, and are prime real estate both for private home owners and for national, state, and local parks.

West Michigan even has its own ghost town, buried for generations in the ever-shifting sands. In 1873, Singapore was a thriving lumber town located at the western end of the Kalamazoo River just below present-day Saugatuck.

The timber was brought downstream from inland places, and then shipped across Lake Michigan to Chicago. But by 1900 the timber was gone. With no work, people left, and gradually sand swept over the abandoned buildings and vegetation began stabilizing the resulting dunes.

There is something comforting, perhaps other-worldly, in the notion that even human activity, often so destructive, gives way to the forces of nature, leaving little trace of generations past.

That said, many are the environmental concerns resulting from human habitation and other land uses. Water pollution, erosion of beaches and dunes, and loss of wildlife habitat are among the consequences of human interactions with this land.

But the land is resilient, to a degree, and many of the areas protected by state legislation (about 70,000 acres of dunes) are a testament to eons of geological creation, and are prime real estate both for private home owners and for national, state, and local parks.

JEWISH RESORTS in South Haven

A hhhh. Lake Michigan...

“The Big Lake” has always been an important element in the lives of the people in Southwest Michigan. They go to relax on its beaches and get away from daily pressures. They go to swim, camp, fish, sail, or just listen to the waves and enjoy the view.

When “The Big Lake” decides to kick up its heels, the view—summer or winter—can be awesome.

In South Haven, a thriving tourist trade developed in the late 19th century, attracting travelers from Chicago, Detroit, and other Midwest cities.

In the 20th century, a specific type of resort played a key role in area tourism. These were resorts owned and operated by Jewish families and they catered to Jewish tourists, though not exclusively. In a way, it was South Haven’s version of Idlewild that was established for African Americans.

“At the time, there were just a few resorts and a couple of cottage complexes,” said Rosalyn Schwartz, whose father ran Roseline Cottages. “Most of them were restricted. They did not allow Jews. There were signs to that effect, as a matter of fact. That was one of the reasons my father was willing to and wanted to buy a property and do something about it. It made him very angry.”

Between the 1920s and 1960s, 55 Jewish resorts flourished in South Haven. Ninety were listed at one time as members of the Resort Association, but as Henry Greene of the Lorraine Resort once related, “Any home that had an extra room to rent billed itself as a resort.”

Whether they were beach resorts or farm resorts, large or small, most of the Jewish resorts of South Haven began with ethnic immigrants seeking a better life than they had in Europe or in large American cities.

Some of the rural resorts originated in the early 20th century when an organization called the Jewish Agricultural Society helped immigrants settle farms in Allegan and Van Buren counties. Most of the arrivals had to learn a new set of skills because they weren’t originally farmers.

Field help came in the form of relatives and friends who would flock from large cities, choosing the farm work for the country air, fresh-picked food, and camaraderie that accompanied that life style.

When they overflowed the farmhouses and barns, they helped construct summer housing, adding a little more each year. Soon the farm families began to charge a small fee for room and board. As amenities were added, the farms reshaped themselves into resorts.

When asked to describe what life was like during the heyday of the resorts, Greene laughed and said, “It was wild!”

“The only bad thing about the place is all the goodbyes.”

Running a resort was a family affair. Success depended on everyone pitching in, whether waiting tables, cooking, cleaning, or entertaining. Some of the children each summer moved from their rooms to tents so more space could be rented.

Gradually, the younger generations in the resort families went to college and pursued other careers. As car and air travel became accessible to more Americans, families struck out on their own to explore the country on vacations. Campgrounds and motel chains replaced the resorts.

Still, a revival of sorts may be taking place today in the form of small bed-and-breakfast outlets as vacationers seek a return to personal attention and a homey atmosphere that the resorts once offered.

On the Trail of History, gallery. Videotaped memories of the resort families, along with their photos, home movies, and artifacts are part of the exhibition.
Can you guess what these items from the Museum’s collection are?  
(Answers at the bottom of the page.)

#1: This copper canister was kept hidden by its user. The shape is a clue to its use.

#2: It’s a musical instrument named for how it works.

#3: Early farmers with cattle or oxen found these to be invaluable.

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, (269/373-7984 or tdietz@kvcc.edu) and you may see your question answered in a future issue of Museography.

Who says history does not repeat itself?

Kalamazoo-area residents are marking the 25th anniversary of when the devil winds of a tornado hopped, skipped and jumped into downtown Kalamazoo on a late Tuesday afternoon—May 13, 1980.

Five people were killed, 79 injured and more than $50 million in damage was done to property by a natural force that had the power—as described in The Kalamazoo Gazette’s extra and the first it published since the end of World War II—to “pluck century-old trees out of the ground like so many green onions.”

Flash back to 1834 and an account published some 35 years later in a book chronicling the history of Kalamazoo County. The community was then the village of Bronson. The tornado “approached by way of the narrow valley of Arcadia Creek.” It “seemed to deploy, as it debouched upon the plain, like a charging column into line of battle, and swept with terrific violence over the frightened hamlet.”

The county history also contained these personal recollections:

“The western sky suddenly assumed a strange and awful appearance; a reddening shadow mantled the earth, a warm gust of wind swept over the valley, and then a peculiar whistling sound was heard, while above the contorted clouds put on more awful shapes.

“Presently, the moaning of the wind, the sudden shaking and swaying of the trees, the glinting of the leaves, abruptly smitten and upturned against the darkened sky in the narrow valley of the Arcadia west of the village, gave the first evidence of the wild rush of the swooping tornado.

“Down it swept across the plain, gathering strength and velocity as it sped onward. Its movement, swifter than the flight of the swiftest bird, was singular and hideously sportive of its character.

“Its width was hardly more than a hundred feet, yet it would rise and fall, now turn to the right, then to the left; here skimming over a house or tree, there swooping away impediments as though they were gossamer.”

A home at the corner of Burdick and Michigan today had its roof ripped off as a bed-ridden ill woman experienced that quick removal without being injured. After it steamrolled into a kitchen, left in the fury’s wake was only the oven with two loaves of dough about to become bread.

Chimneys were toppled, trees were toppled, and flying bricks injured some villagers. Parts of homes and personal possessions were found on the east side of the river.

Some 146 years later, the killer tornado of 1980 touched down at 4 p.m. west of the community and proceeded to make its up-and-down way along M-43, West Main Street, and through Bronson Park. One of the giant trees sucked out of the ground reportedly offered shade to Abraham Lincoln when he spoke at a Republican Party rally there in August of 1856.

After it rammed into the Comerica Building, the tornado bulldozed into Gilmore’s Department Store, continued on page 12
and basically, with a touchdown here and there, dissipated. It was all over in 25 minutes.

But it will never be over for those who experienced the 1980 twister. As with the Americans who can recall exactly where they were when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, when President Kennedy was assassinated, and when the airliners hit the towers in New York. Kalamazoans remember the details of May 13, 1980.

However, there is one major and highly unusual difference between Kalamazoo’s two “downtown tornados.” The 1834 visitor arrived on the afternoon of Oct. 18. Get this! A severe snowstorm hit the next day. Then, in a period from June through August, four hit in one year.

• Aug. 8, 1939—flattening 25 homes and four businesses in South Comstock but killing only two, a tornado, described as a huge barrel of black clouds, was labeled the most monstrous in the history of the county. Damage was placed at about $750,000. Some 40 were injured. In all, five tornados hit the state that day.

There had been a harbinger of things to come. Six days earlier, a major wind storm smashed into the Comstock area. Europe was on the brink of war, and residents of Comstock didn’t know they were on the eve of destruction. Similar to the storm that ripped through Schoolcraft and the Galesburg area a few years ago, it was not classified as a tornado.

• Early June of 1943—a record tornado wreaked havoc over a six-mile swath, taking out trees eight feet in circumference in such communities as Schoolcraft, Dowagiac and Marcellus.

• April 7, 1956—three funnels ripped through the Saugatuck, Bangor, Bloomingdale, and Allegan areas with one judged to have a greater destructive force than the tornado that devastated Flint three years earlier and killed 116 people. In Michigan on that day in 1953, 50 funnels were sighted. The 1956 tornado took the lives of 25 in West Michigan, including 17 in the Hudsonville area.

• The Palm Sunday tornado of April 11, 1965, part of a six-state barrage of twisters that killed 215, of 42 of them in Michigan. Cooper Township was the hardest hit in this part of the state.

• April 2, 1977—within seconds, homes in the Augusta and Galesburg areas were reduced to rubble. Looking like a bombed-out war zone, the village of Augusta was clobbered by nature’s back hand, leaving in its path on an early Saturday afternoon raw gasoline in the street flowing dangerously close to downed power lines. With concrete steps leading to nowhere, 40 dwellings were destroyed or damaged in the vicinity, but there were no deaths. Loss was estimated at $3.5 million.

Here are typical personal accounts of those who survive nature’s magnum force:

“I saw houses across the street just disappear. I never saw so many terrified and panic-stricken people. They laid right down on the ground and screamed.”

“The sky was sickly green. The neighbor’s TV antenna didn’t just wobble in the wind. It simply bent over.”

After the Augusta tornado, the Gazette interviewed one of the affected residents, David Eldridge. It was his second such experience, having lived through the 1939 blaster as a 12 year old in the basement of a home on G Avenue.

“We sang a lot of hymns that day,” he said about the 1939 brush with death. “I have been watching the skies ever since. A tornado is the only thing I’m really afraid of.”

There is a kinder, gentler, compassionately conservative version of a tornado on the first floor of the Kalamazoo Valley Museum, compliments of a “hands-in” exhibit created by The Exploratorium in San Francisco.
**SUMMER FUN: LAKE RESORTS IN KALAMAZOO COUNTY**

For many families in Southwest Michigan, summer weekends often include a trip to the beach or a visit to an amusement park. These may seem modern escapes from the heat and the routine of daily life, but they were just as popular with area residents a century ago.

Everyone familiar with Kalamazoo County knows about the many opportunities for water and beach activities, perhaps none more inviting than Gull Lake.

Today most of the lakefront is private property but 100 years ago it was filled with resorts, dance halls, hotels, and vacation cottages for rent. Steamboats offered relaxing cruises, often with bands providing musical entertainment in the evening. Lover’s Lane, the southwest outlet of Gull Lake, provided opportunities for more secluded boating.

The first resort, located at the southern end of Gull Lake, may have been Hawks’ Landing. Opened in the 1880s by Elnathan Lorenzo Hawks, its attractions included 25-cent rides on the steamboat Crystal.

The rides proved popular and other resort operators were able imitators. The steamboats provided not only pleasure outings but also delivered groceries (from the Ideal Grocery Store in Yorkville) and the mail. They also transported vacationers who arrived on the interurban light-rail system from both Kalamazoo and Battle Creek.

By 1905, Hawks had been joined by more than a dozen other resorts lining Gull Lake. Some were public while others were private cottage associations offering summer homes and rentals.

Del Allen of Battle Creek built the Allendale Hotel and Resort that featured an interurban stop. The LaBelle Resort replaced Hawks’ Landing. A girls’ camp, Camp Willow Beach, Highland Park, and Wildwood Park.

The Crystal carried vacationers on cruises around Gull Lake.

Boy Scouts’ Camp Ben Johnson. Today the YMCA Outdoor Center is located there and the public-access site allows everyone an opportunity to enjoy the lake.

In southern Kalamazoo County, northeast of Vicksburg in Brady Township, Indian Lake was also the site of summer resorts. In the 1890s, Frank Lemon, the 26-year-old son of Jacob and Hannah Lemon, persuaded his parents that their property was ideal for a summer resort.

Located on the northwest shore of the lake, Lemon Park proved to be a popular and successful resort. In time, it had its own stop on the Chicago and Grand Trunk railroad.

Vacationers from as far as Chicago and as near as Vicksburg rented cottages for a summer stay or came out for a day or a weekend to take advantage of the beach and the dance hall. Vicksburg merchants sponsored an annual community picnic. Lemon Park remained popular until the 1940s.

Two other parks on Indian Lake, Adams Park and Munn’s Knoll, also opened in the early 20th century. In 1926, the Church of the Nazarene purchased most of Adams Park to serve as a church camp, which is still located there today.

Munn’s Knoll, like Lemon Park, eventually fell victim to the automobile age and the greater mobility that vacationers enjoyed because they were no longer restricted to resorts on railroad or interurban lines.

Within are now the city limits of Kalamazoo, Woods Lake offered summer recreation at Oakwood Park, a full amusement attraction with a roller coaster, skating rink, dance hall, penny arcade, concession stand, and band shell.

Originally known as Lake View, it was opened by George Wheeler on July 5, 1893, and for more than 30 years Oakwood Park was the “Coney Island” of Kalamazoo.

The Oakland Avenue streetcar line brought visitors to the entrance on Parkview Avenue. During the park’s heyday, streetcars arrived and departed every 10 minutes. Extra cars were added for special events.

Oakwood Park closed in 1925. As with other resorts and parks, automobiles and the end of the streetcar era spelled its demise. Some reports indicate that the rollercoaster cars were sunk to the bottom of Woods Lake and the lumber used to build a home in Oakwood.

So, as summer rolls around again and families flock to beaches and travel to amusement parks, it’s good to remember that a century ago, Kalamazoo residents were spending their summers the same way.
Kalamazoo derives its name from the river that flows through the northeast portion of the community on its way to Lake Michigan. The river provided more than an identity for the settlement that grew from village to city. It also provided food, drinking water, transportation, and water power. Not surprisingly, the pioneers clustered around the river near where the Arcadia and Portage creeks fed into it.

In 1821, the Pottawatomie agreed to consolidate their five reservations into a single large tract in what is now southern Kalamazoo and northern St. Joseph counties. The land along the Kalamazoo River became available to pioneers.

In the summer of 1829, Titus Bronson, then living in Ann Arbor, came to the region and decided the land just west of the river would be an ideal site for a town. After spending the winter at Bazel Harrison’s settlement on Prairie Ronde, Bronson returned the following year and, with his brother-in-law Stephen Richardson, filed a claim for the southwest quarter of section 15 in Township 2 South, Range 11 West. (This land is bounded by Kalamazoo Avenue, Westnedge Avenue, Lovell Street, and, approximately, Pitcher Street.) Without question, the proximity of this acreage to the river influenced Bronson’s decision.

Bronson platted a village to which he gave his name in 1831. In April of that year Michigan’s territorial governor, Lewis Cass, designated the village of Bronson as the county seat. A town, renamed Kalamazoo in 1836, developed westward from the river along Main Street (now Michigan Avenue). To facilitate traffic, Nathan Harrison operated a ferry where East Michigan Avenue now crosses the river until 1835 when the first bridge at the location was built.

The Kalamazoo River and its tributaries were important sources of power for the fledgling settlement. In late 1831, Bronson built a sawmill on the Portage Creek. Several years later, in 1835, the first of what would eventually be several grain mills was built on that creek.

The river and its main creeks continued to play an important role in the economic development of the region for many years. The Kalamazoo Paper Co. built the first paper mill on Portage Creek in 1866 and over the years other factories, foundries, and mills located along the river for its water and energy resources.

To provide further water power, a millrace was dug across what was then a large bend in the Kalamazoo River. A millrace is a narrow channel through which part of a river is directed to increase the speed of the river’s flow and generate greater power. Over time, the bend has disappeared and the river’s course follows the millrace.

Exploiting the energy of the river and the tributary streams and creeks that flowed into it throughout Kalamazoo County was not limited to Bronson’s town. Comstock, Augusta, and Galesburg also took advantage of this natural source of power. In 1874, despite the advent of steam power, there were still 13 flour mills and nine sawmills operating on water power in Kalamazoo County. Several of these in the southern part of the county were on streams flowing into the St. Joseph River system.

The Kalamazoo River was never a major artery for freight transportation for the early merchants and pioneers. It had been quite useful to the Native Americans and the fur traders in their lighter canoes. Several efforts were made in the late 1830s and again in the 1840s to ship produce from Kalamazoo to Lake Michigan and from there by lake boat around the Lower Peninsula to Detroit.

In 1836, prominent businessmen Lucius Lyon, Thomas C. Sheldon, and Justus Burdick, among others, built a large flatboat to carry cargo on the river. A first trip was successful but on its second voyage the barge was wrecked at the mouth of the river.

David Walbridge, an established grain dealer from Buffalo who settled in Kalamazoo in 1842, mounted a more successful effort. Walbridge built several flat boats to transport grain, flour, and other produce. It took three days to float a fully loaded vessel to Lake Michigan and seven days to return. He operated this fleet until 1846 when the railroad finally reached Kalamazoo, providing a more reliable and economical means of transportation.

The river and its oxbows continued to provide a more reliable and economical means of transportation. The Kalamazoo River will again play an equally important but very different role in the life of the region, as it did for the Pottawatomi and the early settlers.
It might seem more likely that a township named Alamo would be found in the southwest United States rather than in Southwest Michigan. The naming of Alamo Township, however, reflects the impact of national events on Kalamazoo County.

The township in the far northwest corner of Kalamazoo County was organized on March 6, 1838, two years to the day after the fall of that fabled fortress in San Antonio, Texas. In 1830, Robert Clark Jr. completed the official survey of Township 1 South, Range 12 West, as Alamo is designated on the grid created by the Michigan land survey. That designation indicates the township is the first one south of the Base Line and the 12th west of the Michigan Meridian. Alamo’s distinguishing geographical feature was swampy lowland that sliced across the township diagonally from southwest to northeast.

The terrain discouraged early settlers but did not prevent speculators from buying the land in hopes of future profit. The 1838 tax rolls show that non-resident landowners outnumbered resident landowners by more than two to one. Alamo’s first permanent settlers arrived in May 1835. They were William Finch, his son, and his five daughters with their husbands and families. The Finch Settlement, as it was known, was in Section 1 in the far northeastern corner of the township. Finch, an elderly pioneer, died four months after he arrived. His was the first recorded death in the township.

Other early settlers included Julius and Dorothy Fox Hackley, who also arrived in 1835. Hackley became a successful farmer and land speculator, accumulating at least twenty 80-acre tracts that he sold profitably. The population of the township grew steadily and, in 1838, Alamo gained self-government. The first township meeting was in Seth G. Whillock’s home.

Several factors contributed to Alamo’s development during the 19th century. A small village, Alamo Center, developed at what is now the intersection of D Avenue and 6th Street. The first settler was James G. Tarbell in 1841. He became the postmaster in 1850 and a small business district developed.

The growth of Alamo Center was further assisted in 1870 when the Kalamazoo and South Haven Railroad arrived, crossing 6th Street about a half mile south of the village center. By the 1890s, Alamo Center boasted a creamery, a cooper shop, several blacksmiths, two sawmills, a peppermint distillery, cider mills, a general store, and, in time, a pickle-salting station.

Other townships grew rapidly in their first decades and then declined by the end of the century. Alamo’s population, by contrast, climbed steadily until it reached 1,161 in 1904. It reported 3,820 residents in the 2000 census.

Julius and Dorothy Fox Hackley were prosperous early settlers of Alamo Township.

Fred and Ethel Wilson originally built this general store in Alamo Center circa 1896. It remained a store until the 1990s. Today it is an apartment building.

**SECOND IN A SERIES**

**The Townships of Kalamazoo County: Alamo**

*Images from top: an artist’s rendering shows the impact of the probe into the comet. Above left: the Deep Impact spacecraft launches from Cape Canaveral, Florida, (Kennedy Space Center/Elizabeth Warner). Above right: assembling the Impactor spacecraft (Ball Aerospace and Technologies Corp.). All images courtesy NASA.*
The Oldest Views of Kalamazoo

At a recent meeting of local historians, I challenged them to identify the oldest image of Kalamazoo. We examined early photographs from the collections of the Museum, Kalamazoo Public Library and Western Michigan University Archives. The oldest published photo was taken in 1861 and shows Main Street between Portage and Rose. But is it the earliest? I wondered if an ambrotype in the Museum’s collection could be earlier.

Dating the ambrotype presented a difficult challenge. Ambrotypes, which are early photographs on glass, are known for their low quality, and this one is dark and cracked. I had scanned and enhanced to make out some of the details that could help date the buildings and businesses.

We had the following clues:
1. A sign for “BALDWIN’S DAGUERREAN ROOMS” on the building owned by Woodbury and Parsons. Schuyler Baldwin, Kalamazoo’s first professional photographer, opened for business at that location in November 1851. That gave us the earliest possible date for the image.
2. Further down the block is the Cosmopolitan House (later the Burck House with the cupola on top). Construction began in 1850 and was completed in 1854. The hotel appears to be complete and open for business which(0,0),(996,993)

HIDDEN TREASURE

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2. Further down the block is the Cosmopolitan House (later the Burck House with the cupola on top). Construction began in 1850 and was completed in 1854. The hotel appears to be complete and open for business which would date the image no earlier than 1854.
3. The Woodbury & Parsons sign, on the second building to the right, actually confuses the issue. The dry goods firm, Woodbury and Parsons, closed in 1850, but Parsons stayed in business there until 1857. He probably didn’t repaint the sign until after 1854 (if we believe the earliest date of 1856). This clue supports an early date of 1856.
4. The ambrotype probably dates to no later than 1857.
5. From an ambrotype. North side of Main Street looking west from Portage Street, circa 1856–57. Collection, Kalamazoo Valley Museum.*

No single clue definitively dates this image of Kalamazoo, but each one helps to confirm a time period. The ambrotype probably dates to no later than 1857.

—Paula Metzner, curator of collections

The Great Lakes Story

June 18 – Jan. 15, 2006

Explore the Great Lakes!

The Great Lakes Story is a hands-on exhibit that celebrates the human and economic importance of the Great Lakes region, inviting visitors of all ages to investigate ways in which this ecosystem of both national and global importance is being restored.

The Great Lakes Story features a large walk-around map of the Great Lakes basin, touch-screen video presentations including the Louis Lomory Show, songs and stories of the Great Lakes, environmental Karaoke, a Great Lakes Food Web puzzle, and many other enticing activities guaranteed to provide entertainment and education for everyone.

A traveling exhibit created by the Great Lakes Science Center in Cleveland, Ohio, in conjunction with the National Science Foundation.
**PROGRAMS**

**CHALLENGER LEARNING CENTER**

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

The Kalamazoo Valley Museum’s Challenger Learning Center is an innovative educational facility complete with a Space Station and Mission Control and serves thousands of students each year in simulated space missions. A special group mission for kids is described below. Call (269) 373-7965 to register and for details about other programs for groups.

**JUNIOR 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. An excellent program for scouts and other clubs. Ages 8 & up; minimum of 8, maximum of 14 participants. Registration is required at least two weeks prior to mission date; $10/person.

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A simple swivel or pull was all it took to reveal the hidden advertisement in 14 unique postcards* that Jean Hamill of Plymouth, Mich. donated in 2004.

The postcards were printed by Livermore & Knight Co. of Providence, R.I., a company renowned for its innovative and creative advertising cards.

At first glance, it looked as though whomever was able to afford these unique advertising mailers surely had to be doing quite well in business.

Then we swiveled, pulled, or opened each card to reveal that these were advertisements for Sam Folz Clothing Store of Kalamazoo. They had a local connection and for our collection, that’s important.

The cards were mailed to the Frank Frobenius family of Kalamazoo between 1892 and 1904.

The postcards are a real prize for the Museum’s collection because they connect to a lucrative and well-known local clothing store in a whimsical and humorous way, and because some of them reveal commonplace racial stereotyping of the time. These are truly little treasures.

Samuel Folz opened his clothing store in 1884 and developed a reputation as an upstanding citizen and successful businessman.

On Dec. 11, 1887, The Kalamazoo Gazette reported that Folz “owes his success to judicious advertising and doing just what he advertised to do.”

In 1888 the Gazette told its readers that “fair profits and the one price system has landed him on the tower of prosperity.” His reputation for “fair-and-square dealing” was known throughout Southwest Michigan. Customers would travel as far as 40 miles to get his good clothing at a fair price.

His store, shown in this photograph from around 1900, was located at the southeast corner of Michigan and Portage streets in downtown Kalamazoo, continued to thrive for many years after his death in 1924.

Today it’s the site of the Olde Peninsula Brewpub.

What are we looking for?

The kinds of things museums look for might surprise you. It isn’t always a great work of art or a piece of fancy furniture... more often it’s the stuff of daily life. Today the Kalamazoo Valley Museum is collecting for the 20th century. If it was used between 1900 and 1999, and can help tell the story of Southwest Michigan, it may be just what we’re looking for. If you have something you think belongs in a museum, please contact Tom Dietz, curator of research, at (269)373-7984 or tdietz@kvcc.edu.

*RECENT ACQUISITION
Movies at the Museum

All films will screen Saturdays and Sundays at 3 pm except where noted (*). Certain films will also screen Wednesday nights at 7 pm where noted. $3/person.

Blue Dahlia presents Buster Keaton’s The General (live music performance with film)
Sunday, June 12—3 pm
Wednesday, June 15—8 pm

E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial
Saturday, June 18—3 pm
Sunday, June 19—3 pm

The War of the Worlds (original version 1953)
Wednesday, June 22—7 pm
Saturday, June 25—3 pm
Sunday, June 26—3 pm

Raiders of the Lost Ark
Wednesday, June 29—7 pm
Saturday, July 2—3 pm
Sunday, July 3—3 pm

Goldfinger
Wednesday, July 6—7 pm
Saturday, July 9—3 pm
Sunday, July 10—3 pm

Roman Holiday
Saturday, July 16—3 pm
Sunday, July 17—3 pm

American Graffiti
Wednesday, July 20—7 pm
Saturday, July 23—3 pm
Sunday, July 24—3 pm

Jaws
Wednesday, July 27—7 pm
Saturday, July 30—3 pm
Sunday, July 31—3 pm

Monty Python’s Meaning of Life
Wednesday, Aug. 3—7 pm
Saturday, Aug. 6—3 pm
Sunday, Aug. 7—3 pm

Blue Hawaii (Elvis Presley)
Saturday, Aug. 13—3 pm
Sunday, Aug. 14—3 pm

Music at the Museum

Live music performances by local acts. 7 p.m.
Wednesday, June 15, July 13, and Aug. 10.
Check our website for more information on performers and times.

Saturday Free Documentary Series

Saturdays at 1 p.m. Runtime 60 min. FREE

Life Beyond Earth: This PBS series explores questions related to the possibility of life existing elsewhere in the universe. Hosted by Timothy Ferris.
June 11: Part 1: Are We Alone?
June 18: Part 2: Is Anybody Listening?

Ocean Wilds: In this original PBS series, Feodor Pitcairm’s images and personal observations offer a fresh vision of life as it transpires daily in the sea.
June 25: Realm of the Killer Whales
July 2: Sperm Whale Oasis

Stephen Hawking’s Universe: This incredible 6-part series by renowned cosmologist Stephen Hawking presents an intergalactic detective story, rich with mystery, unexpected twists and astonishing revelations.
July 9: Episode 1: Seeing is Believing
July 16: Episode 2: The Big Bang
July 23: Episode 3: Cosmic Alchemy
July 30: Episode 4: On the Dark Side
Aug. 6: Episode 5: Black Holes and Beyond
Aug. 13: Episode 6: The Answer to Everything

Sunday Free Documentary Series

Sundays at 1 p.m. Runtime 50 min. FREE

Connections I: An Alternative View of Change; host James Burke.
The original season of the award-winning 1978 BBC series.
June 12: Episode 1: The Trigger Effect
June 19: Episode 2: Death in the Morning
June 26: Episode 3: Distant Voices
July 3: Episode 4: Faith in Numbers
July 10: Episode 5: The Wheel of Fortune
July 17: Episode 6: Thunder in the Skies
July 24: Episode 7: The Long Chain
July 31: Episode 8: Eat, Drink, and Be Merry
Aug. 7: Episode 9: Countdown
Aug. 14: Episode 10: Yesterday, Tomorrow, and You

Tickets for free events can be reserved by calling 269/373-7990 or 800/772-3370 on the day before he event, beginning at 9 a.m. Free tickets are limited to 4 per household or group. Seats that are not occupied ten (10) minutes before show time will be released to other guests.
**JUNE 22: THE GREAT LAKES**
Learn what is unique about Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie and Superior, and why some call the "mitten" their home.

**JUNE 29: LAND HO!**
Discover the land that surrounds the Great Lakes and learn how they were formed. Create "geological art," like sand pictures.

**JULY 6: GO FISH!**
Learn more about the Great Lakes fish and animals through rubbings, fish prints and fishing lures.

**JULY 13: HOME SWEET HOME**
Get to know the people and the places of the Great Lakes, including the Michigan Native American tribes and others who have called this place home.

**JULY 20: WORKIN’ IT OUT!**
Do you know that you can get from any of the Great Lakes to the Atlantic Ocean? Explore the forms of transportation using this system, and the industries that have used (and sometimes abused) the water.

**JULY 27: LET’S PLAY!**
People travel to Michigan to play! Create art and learn about water sports, like swimming, boating, skiing, and surfing.

**AUG. 3: LEGENDS AND LORE**
Enjoy Great Lakes stories about sunken ships, lost treasure, and more folklore.

**…AND OUR SUMMER SMORGASBORD!**
From June 16 through Aug. 6, join us for fun, free science and history demonstrations Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays at 1:30 and 2:30 p.m. in the Curiosity Center.

**Wednesdays June 22–Aug. 3, from 1 to 4 p.m.**
Join us for a summer full of water, sun, sand, people, places and fish! Learn more about our own Great Lakes each week as you create 10 different arts and craft projects highlighting their stories and ecology. Plus local musician and historian Benjamin Gauthier will engage families with music, dance, and songs focused on each weekly theme.